



THE WOMEN WHO STAND TOGETHER: EXAMINING THE PERSPECTIVE OF CITIZENS IN TERMS OF THE IMPACT OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA*

Adrian-Gabriel Corpădean–Ana Gabriela Pantea¹

Introduction and theoretical background

The economic and societal conditions of the former member states of the Soviet Union have been severely deteriorating since its collapse in 1991, with the Republic of Moldova not deviating from this prevailing pattern. However, in the last decade, the nation has commenced to implement several reforms meant to address such issues as gender inequality, demographic shortage, mass migration, poverty, corruption, etc. As a result, since 2022, the Republic of Moldova has been one of the candidate countries for accession to the European Union, thus shifting to a more inclusive societal model.

Despite the timely recognition of the danger on its external border and support for democratic forces, the socio-political situation in the Republic of Moldova remains fragile due to the military threat in Ukraine, persistent separatist tendencies in Transnistria and Găgăuzia, labor force migration (Herța–Serpi 2022) and deep cleavages based on gender discrimination, ethnicity, rural-urban divisions, and divergent ideologies.

We intend to analyze women's empowerment in the Republic of Moldova the Soviet legacy, the post-communist context, and the recent challenges that have occurred through the incipient phase of the EU accession process. Regardless of the reforms that have emerged in gender equality policies, Moldovan women continue to hold more domestic responsibilities in the households, working sometimes more than their male counterparts, and being subjected to domestic violence or discrimination. Although women have started obtaining leadership positions in the public sphere, men are still dominant in power structures and less likely to perform



domestic duties; as such, women often face a double burden, which nuances the discussion on women's empowerment. (Sharaunga, Mudhara and Bolgale 2018) In addition, a deeply rooted patriarchal value system still marks gender norms among Moldovans, one that shares similarities with other post-Soviet states in Eastern Europe (Vullnetari 2012; Caro–Bailey–VanWissen 2012). Nevertheless, societal change occurs due to juridical alterations, the inspiring presence of role models in the public sphere, and the main actors involved in civil society.

The empowerment of women is a crucial goal in international development and EU integration; nevertheless, the meanings, terminologies, and interpretations vary. Methods for measuring and tracking changes in empowerment levels remain problematic, despite a consistent theoretical effort. Our article discusses key issues of women's empowerment in the Republic of Moldova, by highlighting the progress made and challenges that remain. In the recent decade, women's empowerment has emerged as a significant component of social, political, and economic progress in the Republic of Moldova. Similar to other Eastern European states (Rios et al. 2023; Balasubramanian et al. 2024), the Republic of Moldova has encountered substantial obstacles as a result of its shift from a Soviet state to a sovereign democracy. (Tudoroiu 2015, Nilsson–Silander 2016) Gender and economic inequality, as well as the underrepresentation of women in decision-making processes, have been significant pressing concerns. Nevertheless, the country has made significant progress in tackling these issues in recent years, frequently with the assistance of international organizations, government programs, and local civil society efforts.

The present study is based on the social constructionist theory applied to civil society organizations (Davies 2019), which acknowledges the significant changes in perceptions around masculinity, femininity, assigned roles for women and men, the mechanism for shifting from prescribed gender roles through non-governmental organizations and the inspiring message transmitted by role models. Therefore, the main objective of this study was to acquire an understanding of the socio-cultural, interpersonal, and individual elements that drive civil society organizations to empower women from the Republic of Moldova, as well as the perception of such efforts.

Given that gender roles are typically mutually agreed upon and reciprocated, any endeavors meant to modify attitudes, motivation, or behavioral patterns require external factors. The comprehensive understanding of the civil society actors involved directly or implicitly in the gender dynamic, considering the viewpoints of both women and men in the Republic of Moldova, is, therefore, crucial for the effectiveness of targeting gender relations in specific areas.

The extended research topic that has been addressed is the following: What is the correlation between the perception of gender empowerment and civil society organizations? In particular, the study is centered on four primary subjects: (1) the way in which gender roles are perceived in societal contexts (in domains such as the economy, politics, and civil society); (2) the perception of gender-based



violence; (3) the influence of role models in the empowerment processes; (4) the perceptions of the transition from the traditional Soviet gender paradigm to a contemporary one. As such, the study intends to map these domains and rank the triggers that might shift from a conservative to a democratic gender regime. As the article extends the research by elucidating patterns among the gender regimes that occur in the Republic of Moldova, the four subdomains are correlated with the impact of civil society organizations regarding prescribed gender roles.

Research Design

Numerous studies (Narayan 2005; Mahajan 2012) have identified obstacles to circumscribing women's empowerment. Crucial challenges encompass the multifaceted nature of empowerment, the necessity to implement the concept at different levels and geographical areas (Malhotra, Schuler, and Boender 2002) and in diverse settings, the rarity of "strategic life choices" that are part of the fundamental definition of empowerment (Kabeer 1999), and the inherent complexities in life stories and micro-events that influence the broader perspective of this process. Additional methodological concerns include the choice of empowerment criteria, such as whether to assess intrinsic or social factors, context-specific or universal, individual or collective, consider psychological determinants, determine the suitable unit of analysis, address causality concerns, and collect quantitative or qualitative data (Narayan 2005).

Based on the literature (Sharaunga, Mudhara, and Bolgale 2018), the empowerment of women is a multidimensional process involving social, civic, and economic dimensions, with other sub-dimensions like physical, informational, and moral issues. Resources are the most important aspect, but women also need agency to use resources independently. Women's capabilities, combined with resources and agency, are suitable indicators of empowerment. However, household institutional settings and socio-cultural norms can determine women's powerlessness, and such women's resources should focus on their access to and control over institutional and family resources. Following the selection of this large range of methods, the present study uses a qualitative data collection method, focusing on the four pillars of the empowerment process mentioned above.

The qualitative study was conducted in three target communities in Chişinău, Bălţi, and Cahul. The study involved 15 key informant interviews with stakeholders from all three communities, including community leaders, such as entrepreneurs, educators, and health promoters. (Striepe 2021) The focus was on four main issues: perceptions of the political and religious representations of gender roles, perceptions of gender-based violence, perceptions of role models in the empowerment mechanisms, and perceptions of the shift from the traditional Soviet gender model to a more inclusive, European one.



The four issues were addressed in correlation with civil society organizations that promote empowerment, directly or in an implicit manner. The interviews were conducted by the authors of the study in Romanian. The data was audio-taped, transcribed verbatim, and translated. A qualitative thematic analysis was conducted using the four areas covered in the interviews as broad thematic areas within which emerging themes, sub-themes, and nuances were generated.

Walby's foundational writings (Walby 2003) on gender regimes have stimulated extensive research on the subject. However, recent analyses of the post-Soviet states show that these regimes fundamentally differ from those of the Global North. As such, the present study extends the research focusing on the case of the Republic of Moldova, showing its particularities related to gender regime and the perceptions at a societal level. European financial support or economic difficulties, separatist tendencies, or geopolitical actors, as well as former USSR administrative structures, represent transnational or local triggers in national gender structures within countries such as the Republic of Moldova.

Gender equality in the juridical framework

Since 2017, the Republic of Moldova has made commitments to fulfill its international responsibilities in implementing the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda (United Nations Development Programme, 2019). The principle of equality and non-discrimination is guaranteed in the Republic of Moldova (Constitution of the Republic of Moldova 2017) and the state is also committed to implementing the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Council of Europe, 2011). The Equality Council and Ombudsman are strengthening their mandates to foster gender equality, thus acknowledging that ensuring security and equal access to justice is crucial for disadvantaged groups, as gender is a significant factor in societal inequality.

The Strategy for Ensuring Gender Equality in Moldova (HGM 259/2017) has aimed to promote gender equality since 2017 and includes fostering women's participation in decision-making, strengthening institutional mechanisms, combating stereotypes, and promoting non-violent communication. The strategy also focuses on guaranteeing women's access to managerial and executive positions and mainstreaming gender in public and private administration. In March 2021, the Republic of Moldova formulated its inaugural National Programme for the Effective Implementation of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security for the period of 2018-2021. This programme highlighted two significant issues: (1) the inadequate presence of women in the sector, and (2) the lack of inclusivity within the sector. The second program, launched in 2023, covered the years 2023–2027.

The Ministry of the Interior drafted Government Decision 223/2023 to improve the response to sexual violence cases. The document aimed to establish a methodology and working instructions for intervention teams, involving all relevant actors



in preventing and combating violence, and creating a mechanism for protecting victims and assisting them in an integrated, complex, and comprehensive manner.

The National Programme on the Implementation of Resolution 1325 in Moldova (Government of the Republic of Moldova, 2024) is aimed at reducing gender stereotypes, developing an inclusive human resources management system, and strengthening civil society involvement in the decision-making process. In addition, the program focuses on prevention, addressing human rights issues, and combating abuse and discrimination in the country. It further acknowledges that without state action, progress on impact outcomes will be uneven, leading to wider inequalities and new gaps in gender mainstreaming at a societal level.

Due to the joint effort of international organizations, the Republic of Moldova is engaged in prioritizing the improvement of gender equality by enacting appropriate legislation, implementing further measures to eradicate gender-based violence, and executing the new National Programme on Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence and Violence Against Women for 2023–2027, as well as the new National Programme on Accelerating Gender Equality for 2023–2027, together with the accompanying Action Plan (European Commission, 2023). The recommendation of the Commission stated the continuation of cooperation with civil society in the implementation of Resolution 1325. As such, we can conclude that the juridical framework has been, since 2017, appropriate to overcome gender injustice and move forward in the empowerment process at a societal level.

Between traditional gender roles and empowerment

From a broader perspective, empowerment (Narayan 2005) can be analyzed through four key features. First, there is empowerment as a relational concept that emphasizes the rights, regulations, and resources, together with the standards and procedures that control the relationships between women and power structures. This interaction unfolds at several levels, ranging from the global scale to the levels of state, community, home, civil society, and the market. Second, the assets and capacities of women are often seen as individual characteristics. Yet, the combined abilities and organized efforts of women are often crucial in enabling them to overcome the limitations of powerlessness and voicelessness. Third, empowering women requires both top-down and bottom-up changes in institutions, organizations, networks, and individual assets. Furthermore, intervention points vary based on constraints, feasibility, and desired development outcomes, and may change over time. (Malhotra–Schuler–Boender 2002).

Nevertheless, empowerment remains a political concept seen as a process that shifts social power in three critical ways: (a) by challenging the ideologies (such as gender) that justify and sustain social inequalities; (b) by changing existing patterns of access and control over economic, natural, and intellectual resources; and (c) by transforming institutional structures that reinforce and sustain existing power



inequalities such as the family, state, and market, to cite a few (Batliwala 2007: 560). Despite modernization and economic advantages, Moldovan women still face significant disparities in access to resources, living standards, and personal freedom. Men dominate economic decision-making bodies, while women are often excluded.

In the interviews conducted for the present article, the key informants acknowledged the widespread existence of traditional gender roles, where the main expectation is for women to maintain submissiveness towards their husbands, while men are supposed to assume the role of decision-makers. Interestingly, this perception does not vary in correlation to the education level or income of the women. For many women, it is expected that they assume responsibilities of both managing the household and being engaged in the labor market.

As stated by the key informants:

Men perceive themselves as superior and believe that women must conform to their statements, regardless of their accuracy (Ludmila, 57).

or

Males are expected to provide for the family; it is our designated responsibility... As a male, it is incumbent upon you to ensure the provision for your family after you have started one (Ivana, 45).

Participants believed that gender roles were undergoing a transformation, as a significant number of women were employed and played crucial political or economic positions to become primary providers in the household. Hence, women imposed greater authority. Furthermore, there was a simultaneous occurrence of elevated levels of male unemployment and the erosion of their position as primary earners.

The scene is undergoing somewhat of a transformation... You will observe that women are beginning to proactively organize themselves in order to challenge the existing state of affairs... The number of female household leaders exceeds that of males... In many instances, it is observed that women are the primary earners. (Manuela, 45)

In a household where the male is not employed, the female assumes the role of decision-maker. Without financial resources, the male is compelled to adhere to the rules set by the female. Not only does the woman possess wealth, but she also demonstrates to the male that he is insignificant. (Ivana, 45)

or

There is a saying in Moldova: the best son you can have is a girl. What does it mean? Girls are the future, especially if they stand together. (Elena, 54)

Contributing to a prevailing social pattern in the Republic of Moldova, politicians and stakeholders frequently make significant efforts to refrain from using terms like LGBTQ+ or gay in their public declarations, opting instead to maintain silence on matters of prejudice against the LGBTQ+ population.



These are matters that can be easily manipulated due to our highly conservative society. We have concerns about discussing topics related to gender, sex, and LGBT issues... Although some NGOs have tried to address both perspectives, the public has ceased to explicitly discuss the topic. (Ecaterina, 51)

Gender equality standards that challenge conventional gender dynamics create an arena for power play among various political and civil society actors. (Nagel 1998) The dichotomy of what is considered “natural” or “that of God” by portraying heterosexual relations or same-sex relationships as “unnatural” demonstrates the manifestation of gender as a factor in challenging societal norms.

Gender-based violence

Recent research in Eastern Europe (Krause 2015) suggests that gender relations in post-communist countries reveal vulnerabilities due to gendered power structures, ineffective law enforcement, and traumatic events from the recent shared history. This highlights the need to expand the continuum concept to encompass all forms of violence. Jacqui True's (2012) work suggests that capitalist political and economic structures make women more vulnerable to violence. As such, True suggests that violence against women cannot be understood independently of state economic policies and gendered division of labor.

Our interviewees unanimously acknowledged that gender-based violence was a significant issue in their communities. Men were predominantly perceived as responsible for perpetrating such violence, while women, families, and children were seen as the victims.

Men can be identified as the primary perpetrators... I would argue that many individuals involved are male, as they generally resist achieving gender equality with women (Ion, 61).

or

I believe that violence becomes an integral aspect of one's identity... (Larisa, 54).

Participants identified a range of elements that they believed were implied in gender-based violence. First and foremost, they perceived women's empowerment and the dismantling of conventional gender roles, along with elevated levels of female employment, as resulting in a decline in men's self-respect and, therefore, male aggression against women and children. The power imbalance, where men desire to be perceived as the dominant authority, is linked to the issue of a growing number of financially independent women, which exacerbates the occurrence of instances where men mistreat women.

In certain instances, I am not employed while my wife is working, resulting in the wife contributing the income to the household. A confrontation arises, and we easily engage in physical altercations (Simion, 59).



Nevertheless, several interviewees believed that the conventional gender norms emphasizing male dominance over women were the root cause of men feeling justified in physically assaulting women. These attitudes were tacitly accepted in the Soviet era as well, and dominate the general perception today. The interviewees mentioned that patriarchal religious beliefs promoted by several Orthodox hierarchies played a significant role in upholding these convictions.

The power of role models

Women in the Republic of Moldova continue to be disproportionately represented in political and decision-making positions, although there have been significant improvements. For instance, women have started to occupy significant administrative roles, including the Presidency. In recent years, the legal framework in the Republic of Moldova incorporates quotas that aim to achieve gender balance in electoral procedures.

Maia Sandu was elected as the President of the Republic of Moldova in November 2020, making her the first woman to take over this position. Her election was a notable advancement for women in positions of authority. Throughout her 2020 and 2024 presidential election campaigns, Maia Sandu has persistently advocated for anti-corruption reforms, gender equality, and a bottom-up approach to the latter. The Harvard-educated former World Bank advisor appears to have embraced popularity through moral persuasion, assuming the role of a reformer in all fields.

She is portrayed in the interviews as such:

Sandu is the bravest person I know. She fights corruption and inspires us, women and men, to be brave. (Olesa, 46)

or

I appreciate her, but she can't work alone. Those who surround her, are not so hard-working. You can be the best manager, but if you have a team that doesn't support you, then you can't do anything. (Dima, 30)

NGOs use grassroots pressure to strengthen the European gender equality standards and value system. The most proactive civil society organizations that support the EU framework and implicitly the policies of Maia Sandu have promoted pro-European norms by increasing awareness of gender equality and role models and actively engaging in policy-making processes.

Women entrepreneurs are increasing in number globally, including in the Republic of Moldova. (Nazier–Ramadan 2018; Bingham 2016) Historically, entrepreneurship was a male-dominated area, but as the number of women entrepreneurs increases, studies on their characteristics in business, such as motivation, skills, and management style, are also growing. The Association of Women Entrepreneurs from Moldova gathers role models from the business sector such as Diana Găină, Daniela Dohotaru, Ludmila Furtuna, etc.



The association “Women like You” [led by Dr. Ludmila Furtuna] has changed the perception of female entrepreneurship in Moldova. Even though she is not like us, she convinces the public that we can be like her. I try to follow her recommendations to open my own IT company. (Ionela, 30)

or

I have been working with Angelina Zaporozjan-Pîrgari, the founder of “Life without Family Violence”, for many years now. The legislation is effective in Moldova, but in rural areas, domestic violence is still accepted, and people believe that the association is just a Western agent. (Ecaterina, 51)

The influence of the institutionalized or societal post-Soviet heritage still shapes public perceptions of NGOs or role models. During the Soviet era, role models were part of the political establishment and NGOs were not regarded as significant entities due to the prevailing belief that the Party, alone, rendered decisions without considering the values or interests of any external groups. (Bingham 2016)

Our fieldwork reveals that role models and interest groups have significant influence on a societal level and in the policy process within the Republic of Moldova, particularly in the areas of violence against women and entrepreneurship. Prominent figures like Maia Sandu, Ludmila Furtuna, Lilia Burunciuc, Olga Țurcan, etc. and the organizations they are affiliated with are like magnets for many other women in their effort to overcome domestic violence or poverty. However, a parallel discourse coexists at the national level, the traditionalist, pro-Orthodox one, which scrutinizes such figures with skepticism or sharp criticism. This duality might persist in the Moldovan society in the following decade, as the roots of these opposed perspectives are generationally linked.

Conclusion

Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, there has been a notable increase in the number of women NGOs, which have played a crucial role in shaping policy processes, private initiatives, or societal change in the Republic of Moldova. Financial support from international organizations has enabled them to maintain their autonomy from state collaboration and establish more cooperative connections on shared concerns, therefore enhancing their potential to exert influence and pressure. These NGOs have exerted influence on the public discourse on violence against women, quota policies, and entrepreneurial initiatives made for or by women whilst presenting these matters in relation to global norms and guidelines from the European Union. Nevertheless, such NGOs are perceived by the public with a dose of reluctance.

Although there has been progress in women’s empowerment in the Republic of Moldova, there are still substantial obstacles to overcome. Sustained efforts are required in crucial domains such as public representation, economic opportunities,



education, and the eradication of gender-based violence. Initiatives implemented at both the national and international levels, in conjunction with grassroots advocacy, are catalyzing beneficial transformations.

Institutional discourses shape gender hegemony, stereotypes, or roles by promoting specific practices and behavioral norms. Ideologies that can be considered the background of the institutional discourses are structured around shared principles, some of which pertain to the privilege and supremacy of certain groups to the detriment of others. The political, social, economic, and sexual subordination of women can be defined as normative conflict (Hansen 2020). Often, systems of domination and subordination remain, despite the detriment to both women and men, since those who architect and govern the political framework that oppresses women are those who collect the greatest rewards from this control. The case of the Republic of Moldova shows that the political actors and the juridical system can reshape the existing patriarchal norms shifting towards a more egalitarian model. In the last decade, the political elite has challenged traditional gender roles by obtaining high-ranked positions and active participation of women in politics, education, and civil society. Battlefield-related gender roles remain vivid as the conservative players would advocate for traditional gender roles - as a trans-party phenomenon, but more present among the socialists -, while the progressive members of the political spectrum are much more willing to bring reform in place.

The so-called post-Sovietness (Baltag, Burmester 2021) has undermined the process of norm internalization, and the Republic of Moldova continues to be one of the regimes that have fulfilled certain democratic requirements in terms of procedures but lacks democratic essence at a societal level. A characteristic of post-Soviet governance is the procedural implementation of democratic instruments for acquiring public trust, combined with the lack of internalization. The enactment of such reforms is reinforced at the societal level by the coexistence of individuals who were raised in communism and the subsequent generations residing in a post-communist context. The experience of the former has a hindering impact on civic engagement, perceptions of gender roles, and the functioning of the gender-balanced economy. The progress related to women's empowerment remains an important objective to be achieved through the natural generational replacement process.

Bibliography

- Alsop, R.–Bertelsen M.–Holland, J. (2006): *Empowerment in Practice: From Analysis to Implementation*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.
- Alsop, R.–Heinsohn N. (2005): *Measuring Empowerment in Practice: Structuring Analysis and Framing Indicators*. *Policy Research Working Paper*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.



- Balasubramanian, P.–Ibanez, M.–Khan, S.–Sahoo, S. (2024): Does women's economic empowerment promote human development in low- and middle-income countries? A meta-analysis. *World Development*, DOI:10.1016/j.worlddev.2024.106588.
- Baltag, D.–Burmester, I. (2021): Quo vadis, Moldova? The role of social and political elites in the norm internalization process. *Democratization*, 29., (3.), pp. 487–506. DOI:10.1080/13510347.2021.1963237
- Batliwala, S. (2007): Taking the power out of empowerment - An experiential account. *Development in Practice*, 17., pp. 557–565. 10.1080/09614520701469559.
- Bingham, N. (2016): Fighting for Our Cause: The Impact of Women's NGOs on Gender Policy Adoption in Four Former Soviet Republics. *Politics & Policy*, 44., (2.), pp. 294–318. DOI:10.1111/polp.12155
- Caro, E., Bailey, A., Bailey, Wissen, L. (2012): Negotiating between patriarchy and emancipation: Rural-to-urban migrant women in Albania. *Gender Place and Culture*, 19., (4.), pp. pp. 472–493. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369x.2011.610096>
- Constitution of the Republic of Moldova (2017): *Official Monitor of the Republic of Moldova*. No.78/140 of 29.03.2016 (with subsequent amendments and additions made by Law No. 256 of 25.11.2016 and Law No. 70 of 13.04.2017). Available: https://www.const-court.md/public/files/file/Actele%20Curtii/acte_en/MDA_Constitution_EN.pdf [accessed: 16/09/2024]
- Council of Europe (2011): *CET 201 – The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)*. CETS No. 210/11.05.2011. Available: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/gender-matters/council-of-europe-convention-on-preventing-and-combating-violence-against-women-and-domestic-violence> [accessed: 16/09/2024]
- Council of Europe (2017): *Council of Europe Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2017–2020. Office of the Directorate General for, GR-DEM at its meeting on 17 January 2017*. Available: <https://rm.coe.int/16806cd3a5> [accessed: 16. 09. 2024.]
- Davies, T. (2019): *Routledge Handbook of NGOs and International Relations (1st ed.)*. Routledge. DOI:10.4324/978131526892
- European Commission (2023): *Commission Staff Working Document Republic of Moldova*. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/72feeeaf-7eee-11ee-99ba-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>
- European Commission (2023): *Commission Staff Working Document. Republic of Moldova 2023. Report Accompanying the document Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions 2023 Communication on EU Enlargement policy*. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/72feeeaf-7eee-11ee-99ba-01aa75ed71a1/language-en> [11. 07. 2024]
- Government of the Republic of Moldova (2024): *Hotărâre pentru aprobarea Programului național de implementare a Rezoluției 1325 a Consiliului de Securitate al ONU privind femeile, pacea și securitatea pentru anii 2023–2027*. Available: <https://gov.md/en/content/national-action-plan-accession-republic-moldova-european-union-years-2024–2027> [Accessed: 16. 09. 2024.]
- Hansen, L. (2020): Are 'core' feminist critiques of securitization theory racist? A reply to Alison Howell–Melanie Richter-Montpetit. *Security Dialogue*, 51., (4.), pp. 378–385. DOI:10.1177/0967010620907198.



- Herța, L., Șerpi, V. (2022): In Search of Economic Security and Societal Security. The Experience of Economic Migrants from Transnistria and Gagauzia. *Wydawnictwo*, 16., pp. 181–201. DOI: 10.4467/20827695WSC.22.013.16762
- Kabeer, N. (1999): Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment. *Development and Change*, 30., (3.), pp. 435–464.
- Krause, U. (2015): A Continuum of Violence? Linking Sexual and Gender-Based Violence during Conflict, Flight, and Encampment. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 34., (4.), pp. 1–19. DOI: 10.1093/rsq/hdv014
- Mahajan, V. (2012): Women Empowerment and Social Justice: A Socialist Feminist Social Work Approach. *IPEDR* 34, pp. 69–73.
- Malhotra, A., S. R.–Schuler, Boender, C. (2002): Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development. Background Paper Prepared for the World Bank Workshop on Poverty and Gender. *New Perspectives*. Final Version: June 28, 2002 [Accessed: 16. 09. 2024.]
- Nagel, J. (1998): Masculinity and Nationalism: Gender and Sexuality in the Making of Nations. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 21., (2.), pp. 242–269. DOI:10.1080/014198798330007
- Narayan, D. (2005): Conceptual Framework and Methodological Challenges. Measuring Empowerment. Narayan Deepa (Ed.): *Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*. pp. 3–38. Washington: The World Bank.
- Nazier, H.–Ramadan, R. (2018): What Empowers Egyptian Women: Resources versus Social Constrains? *Review of Economics and Political Science*, 3., pp. 153–175. <https://doi.org/10.1108/REPS-10-2018-015>
- Nilsson, M.–Silander, D. (2016): Democracy and Security in the EU's Eastern Neighborhood? Assessing the ENP in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. *Democracy and Security*, 12., pp. 44–61. 10.1080/17419166.2015.1135744.
- Ríos, V.–Beltrán-Esteve, M.–Gianmoena, L.–Peiró-Palomino, J.–Picazo-Tadeo, A. (2023): Quality of government and women's political empowerment: Evidence from European regions. *Papers in Regional Science*, 102., (6.), pp. 1067–1097. DOI:10.1111/pirs.12761.
- Security Sector Governance (2019): *Security Sector Reform and Gender. Gender and Security Toolkit*. Geneva: DCAF, OSCE/ODIHR, UN Women.
- Sharaunga, S.–Mudhara, M.–Bogale, A. (2018): Conceptualisation and Measurement of Women's Empowerment Revisited. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, pp. 1–25. DOI:10.1080/19452829.2018.1546280
- Striepe, M. (2021): Combining concept mapping with semi-structured interviews: adding another dimension to the research process. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 44., (5.), pp. 519–532. DOI: 10.1080/1743727X.2020.1841746
- The Strategy for Ensuring Gender Equality in Moldova (2017): *Official Monitor. HGM259/2017*, pp. 171–180 /art. 410, 02-06-2017. Available: https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=99875&lang=ro [accessed: 16/09/2024]
- True, J. (2012): *The Political Economy of VAW*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tudoroiu, T. (2015): Democracy and state capture in Moldova. *Democratization*, 22., (4.), pp. 655–678. DOI:10.1080/13510347.2013.868438
- United Nations Development Programme (2019): *Women, Peace, and Security Agenda*, Oslo: Oslo Governance Centre, Norway.
- United Nations Security Council (2000): *Resolution 1325/2000*. Adopted by the Security Council at its 4213th meeting, on 31 October 2000. S/RES/1325 (2000) Available: <https://dppa.un.org/en/women-peace-and-security> [Accessed: 16. 09. 2024.]



- Vullnetari, J. (2012): Albania on the Move : Links between Internal and International Migration. *International Migration*, 5., (25.), pp. 25–36. 10.1515/9789048514939.
- Walby, S. (2003): *Gender Transformations (3rd ed.)*. London: Routledge.
- Walby, S. (2023): What is femicide? The United Nations and the measurement of progress in complex epistemic systems. *Current Sociology*, 71., (1.), pp. 10–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00113921221084357>

Note

1 This study was supported by the European Union within the Erasmus+ programme, project 101085517-DREMS ERASMUS-JMO-2022-HEI-TCH-RSCH. The article reflects exclusively the opinions and points of view of the authors, the Commission not being responsible for any form of use of the information. The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Appendix I. Interview Questions

1. Based on your family/work experience, how would you characterise the social role of women during the USSR?
2. During that period, had women been a source of resistance to the Soviet regime?
3. Do things differ from how they are today? What was the trigger for any change (if any)?
4. What do “traditional values” mean to you?
5. What are the main roles of women today? The discussion led to the selection of two dominant roles.
6. What does it mean to be a “good wife/mother” in Moldova today? The interviewee should select their preferred role for discussion.
7. To what extent does the church influence these perceptions?
8. Migration of women outside of Moldova. How do you see this phenomenon?
9. How many women do you know in management positions? How are they doing?
10. What is their strength and weakness?
11. Can you give me an example of how their approach differs?
12. Do you know of any instances of domestic violence? What attitudes are “considered”?
13. Is Maia Sandu a model? What message does it transmit to society? Is this case atypical?
14. Do you think her voters are mostly women or men? What makes you think this?
15. Are there any female entrepreneurs in the Republic of Moldova? How successful are they? What criticism is brought to them?
16. Is the academic environment more open to gender equality? Why? How?
17. Is there feminist activism after the COVID pandemic?

Appendix 2 – List of interviewees

No.	Initials	Gender	Age	Residence	Profession	Civil Society Organization
1.	Dima A.	Man	30	Cahul	IT specialist	Business association
2.	Elena C.	Woman	54	Bălți	factory worker	Christian Orthodox Church
3.	Anatol M.	Man	48	Chișinău	manager	Christian Orthodox Church
4.	Olesea B.	Woman	46	Chișinău	teacher	Business association
5.	Larisa A.	Woman	54	Bălți	public sector employee	Christian Orthodox Church
6.	Simion M.	Man	59	Bălți	truck driver	Christian Orthodox Church
7.	Ion C.	Man	61	Chișinău	painter	Christian Orthodox Church
8.	Ludmila A.	Woman	57	Chișinău	manager	Business association
9.	Ion A.	Man	20	Chișinău	carpenter	Animal rights association
10.	Maria B.	Woman	45	Cahul	factory worker	Christian Orthodox Church
11.	Camil C.	Man	37	Chișinău	plumber	Christian Orthodox Church
12.	Ivana D.	Woman	45	Cahul	accountant	Business association
13.	Maninela V.	Woman	40	Bălți	factory worker	Christian Orthodox Church
14.	Ecaterina M.	Woman	51	Bălți	lawyer	Human rights association
15.	Ionela T.	Woman	30	Chișinău	engineer	Christian Orthodox Church