

# 15 STORIES OF CHANGE

Human impact stories from EU 4 Gender Equality:  
Together against gender stereotypes and  
gender-based violence programme



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**TOGETHER AGAINST  
GENDER STEREOTYPES AND  
GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**  
#eu4genderequality

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# BACKGROUND OF THE PROGRAMME

The three-year regional programme 'EU 4 Gender Equality: Together against gender stereotypes and gender-based violence' (EU4GE), funded by the European Union and implemented jointly by UN Women and UNFPA, strengthens women's and men's equal rights and opportunities by shifting social perceptions, challenging gender stereotypes and increasing men's participation in unpaid domestic and care work. From March 2020 - June 2023 the programme was active in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

The programme provided a unique opportunity to change the social discourse, perceptions and harmful practices related to gender equality in the region and to empower women and girls to fully access their rights and develop their potential.

Here are 15 stories of women and men, boys and girls from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine who became gender equality advocates and whose lives have improved through the new experiences and knowledge they have acquired thanks to EU4GE Programme.

# CHALLENGING GENDER STEREOTYPES WITHIN THE ROLES OF WOMEN AND MEN IN THE SOCIETY



## Ukraine

# YOUNG MOTHER EMBARKS ON NEW IT CAREER AFTER FLEEING WAR IN UKRAINE



Nina Cherlenuk was a participant of the EU4GE programme, which supported Ukrainian women to get jobs in the IT and creative industries.  
© Mihonova Iryna, courtesy of Nina Cherlenuk

“When the war started, a missile destroyed our house,” said Nina Cherlenuk, 25, from Irpin, a city 25 km west of the capital, Kyiv, in northern Ukraine. “So, together with my daughter, I fled.”

She had graduated from Kyiv Medical University with a major in radiology just a few years before the war. Together with her husband and daughter, Cherlenuk lived in Irpin, which became a battlefield during the Kyiv offensive.

She is one of the millions of Ukrainians who have been forced to leave their homes since the beginning of the war in February 2022. More than 5.23 million refugees, primarily women and children, have fled to neighbouring countries while over 7 million people have been displaced internally within Ukraine.

For women, a new city or country often means career changes – a new workplace, a new company, or an entirely new profession. However, in the context of war, the transition tends to be more complex.

"I was thinking about leaving the country, but I realized that I would need at least one year to get my documents in order, get my medical diploma validated and learn a new language," says Cherlenuk, who was displaced to a small village in the western part of Ukraine. "After experiencing the initial shock, I understood that I needed to do something and started to look for new opportunities. That was when I found out about [Будь/BE](#)."

BE platform was created within the EU4GE programme in partnership with the NGO INSCIENCE to help displaced Ukrainian women get jobs in IT and creative industries. Mentors and experts from both Ukrainian and international companies supported women in their job search in tech, design, programming, software development and testing. They helped participants set their goals and guided them towards achieving them. The mentors also gave feedback and support and shared knowledge about searching for jobs and employee onboarding.

"Shortly before the war, I gave birth to my daughter and took maternity leave. I wasn't expecting that I would never go back to my workplace because of the war. This platform was exactly what I needed in this situation," said Cherlenuk.

Right after she completed the initial course, Nina found a remote-work job as a data researcher in an IT company.

"There was a moment when I lost all hope and confidence," she said. "I thought that IT was not for me. I wanted to quit. But my mentor told me that I have the power to do anything. She believed in me more than I believed in myself. Just one week after this conversation, I received my job offer. Now, I work as a data researcher in an IT company with a focus on medical software. It is very important for me to work remotely so that I can spend more time with my daughter."

According to Olena Skyrt, INSCIENCE co-founder and partner, approximately 500 women have participated in the mentorship programme so far, while the educational course has reached more than 100,000 people.



© Mihnova Iryna, courtesy of Nina Cherlenuk.

“For some Ukrainian women, the platform has become a reliable compass to navigate tech and creative industries. For others, it is a powerful support in career growth and job search during the war,” explains Skyrta. “By the end of the course, some participants have already found new jobs. These stories are incredibly inspiring to us.”

Olga Osaulenko, EU4GE Programme Manager, added that the platform is designed for women who lost their jobs and want to learn a new profession, women abroad who are searching for work, and those who have moved to another Ukrainian city and are looking for an online job.

“It helps women to gain financial independence regardless of age, experience, or temporary location due to the war,” says Osaulenko.

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## Armenia

# ELISA MELKONYAN: I REALISED THAT NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR ME



Elisa Melkonyan is an Assistant Teacher at the Independent Life Resource Centre in Gyumri, Armenia. © Agate NGO/ Lena Hovhannisyian

Elisa Melkonyan, 40, is a woman living with cerebral palsy (a motor disability causing muscle weakness), from Gyumri, a city in northwestern Armenia. A beneficiary of the Agate NGO for nearly 15 years, she was among the 32 women and girls with disabilities who took part in a handicraft training offered by the NGO under the EU4GE programme in December 2020. Following the training, Elisa sold some of her crafts online. Agate also offered Elisa a job as an assistant teacher at its Independent Living Resource Centre, which provides informal education opportunities for children with disabilities.

“Women with disabilities in Armenia face many problems. I want to mention education first. Education is not accessible for us due to many difficulties, from mobility barriers to programme inclusivity and lack of finance. Another big problem is unemployment. And a big challenge is that we have difficulty finding jobs, as a result of which we are not financially independent and often isolated. I knocked on many doors, but they remained closed.



[I took the training because] I wanted to be more confident and financially independent. It is necessary to empower people with disabilities so that they start to trust their abilities and discover their strengths and talents. That is exactly what happened to me during the training.

[Now] I work with the teacher equally and help students with life skills and literacy. On the first day, I was afraid I might be unable to work. But then I remembered the conversations about self-belief during the training, and I quickly overcame that concern. When I think about my ability to educate kids and my courage to become independent, I realize how happy I am.

It was the same thing with knitting. I tried several times. I was taking the wool apart and putting it back together again and again. I was afraid I might be unable to knit because of my disability. You have no idea how excited I was when I saw the result. It was a real victory for me. When I sold my work for the first time, I was as happy as a child.

Women with disabilities should be supported first in getting an education and a profession. This will help them to find jobs more efficiently and be independent. These people must also receive psychological help, to be encouraged to try various ways to find the best course of living and be self-supported.

I call on all my friends and people like me to never be discouraged by difficulties. Success does not come easily to us, but that does not mean we should not try. You should treat everything with love, not give up."

**“It is necessary to empower people with disabilities so that they start to trust their abilities and discover their strengths and talents.”**



© Agate NGO/Lena Hovhannisyan

## Azerbaijan

# EU SUPPORTS ADOLESCENTS AS AGENTS OF CHANGE FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN AZERBAIJAN



The participants of the education project implemented within the EU4GE programme in Azerbaijan. © UNFPA Azerbaijan

“My mother was not allowed to study,” said fourteen-year-old Aytan Fatullayeva, from Lerik, in south-east Azerbaijan. “If she had, things would have been very different for my family.”

Aytan grew up in a conservative part of Azerbaijan. “If a girl wanted to become an architect, for example, typically, her parents would say that it’s a ‘man’s job’ and they would not let her go for it,” she said.

Aytan is one of an increasing number of girls who have set their sights on change – girls who don’t put up with the limitations and discrimination imposed on them just because of their gender. According to Aytan, education is the engine of that change. “Many of my classmates accept whatever they are told,” said Aytan, “because they have no information about their rights or the protection mechanisms available to them.”

In 2021, UNFPA partnered with two local NGOs (Azerbaijani Women in Science and Support for the Growth of Modern Youth Development) as part of the EU4GE programme to implement

the Fantastic 4 Educational partnership. This partnership raises awareness about the importance of education by training adolescent schoolgirls and their parents in four regions of Azerbaijan.

As part of this partnership, more than 500 girls attended 27 training sessions in marketing, engineering, project development, start-up businesses and innovation. As a result, 17 teams of girls were formed. Each team is currently developing social entrepreneurship ideas linked to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Under the EU4GE programme, Aytan plans to develop a social platform that brings together women and girls who have been affected by early marriage. She hopes girls like her will have more opportunities than her mother's generation to become agents of change and to ensure gender equality in Azerbaijan. "I am not going to stop with my nine teammates," said Aytan. "I want to see all girls educated, made aware of their rights and empowered to choose their own future. Women and men have equal rights!" exclaimed Aytan. "Education can empower and shape our future."

“

**I want to see all girls educated, made aware of their rights and empowered to choose their own future.**

FANTASTİK DÖRDLÜK  
TƏHSİL PROQRAMI  
BİLƏSUVAR - LERİK - MASALLI - LƏNKƏRAN  
MENTORLAR VƏ TƏŞKİLATLAR - VALİDEYNLƏR VƏ QIZLAR



## Moldova

# YOUNG PEOPLE IN MOLDOVA TACKLE GENDER STEREOTYPES THROUGH THEATRE



Younger people put on a theatrical performance to promote gender equality and reconfirm the role of young people in changing stereotypes about the role of women and men at home and in society.  
© EU4GE/Diana Raileanu

"Change starts with us and everyone's impact matters," said Vadim Saviuc, 18, an amateur actor, from Falesti, in north-western Moldova.

Mr. Saviuc is one of a troupe of 30 young actors who performed in a theatre play, "Gift for you", throughout Moldova in 2021 and 2022 to help change attitudes about gender roles and stereotypes. The aim is to combine performance with a desire to deliver a positive message about gender to society.

"The goal of the performance is to send a message that things can be different without stereotypes, stigma or discrimination," said Olesia Vladica, Project Manager at the Institutum Virtutes Civilis Public Association.

The play tackles stereotypes of men and women in society. The main character, Anna, is a young woman fighting expectations about how she should dress, conduct herself and what job she should do.

"Everyone is free and has the power to make changes," said Ms. Vladica. "Boys and girls, women and men are different, but they are equal. We are all equal in rights, obligations, responsibilities and choices and a person's gender does not have to play a role in this."

As of August 2023, the theatre troupe had held 12 performances in 12 communities in the districts of Straseni, Falesti, Ialoveni, and Rezina, to over 2,000 people. Every performance was followed by a discussion with the audience about the harm of gender stereotypes.

"I certainly feel the influence of gender stereotypes in my life," said Catalina Botnar, 17, from Straseni. "Stereotypes have a negative impact on me at school and in the home environment, where my parents educate me according to stereotypical social codes."

"The EU4GE programme seeks innovative ways to promote gender equality in the six Eastern Partnership countries, and social theatre is a great tool to inspire social change," said Dilara Buyuktas, EU4GE programme manager, a.i. "This is especially empowering for youth, as thinking creatively is in their nature."

**Change starts with us and everyone's impact matters.**



Moldova

## MEET VIORICA SILI, A WOMAN WITH A DISABILITY WHO BECAME A CHANGE-MAKER IN HER COMMUNITY



Viorica with her sister. Viorica works with women with disabilities in her community. © UNFPA Moldova/Constantin Topala

"I am now a more confident and stronger person," said Viorica Sili, 45, from Micleușeni village in Moldova. Viorica is one of the 42 women with disabilities from Moldova who became empowered and gained knowledge and skills to become human rights advocates during the "Accept disability, not violence" training conducted within the EU4GE programme.

In Moldova and around the globe, women and girls with disabilities experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. One of the common challenges is difficulty with physical access to health services. As a result of the training, Viorica started to work with women with disabilities in her community to address these challenges, and she has made great strides over two years. As a result of Viorica's advocacy, women and girls with disabilities in her community are able to receive medical care at home.

"Society considers people with disabilities a burden. Some people do not accept people with special needs," Viorica said.

Like many other women with disabilities, Viorica felt invisible and marginalized, but now she feels confident to talk openly about topics she was not comfortable addressing before.

"I learned a lot of useful information. We met people who guided us on some paths that we did not know about. I learned how to correctly write a petition, a request, or a complaint and which authorities to write to. After these training sessions, I became stronger emotionally," she added.

Negative attitudes and beliefs about disability also lead to violence. Women and girls with disabilities face disproportionately high rates of gender-based violence.

"They are beaten, mistreated. And not just physically, but also psychologically. Many women marry young, have children and depend on men's money," said Viorica about women with disabilities, who face different forms of violence.

According to Viorica, trainings and meetings with other women in her community help them share information about available services for gender-based violence survivors and break the cycle of violence.

"These women need to know that there are people capable of protecting them, and they have places to go," said Viorica.

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**Society considers people with disabilities a burden. Some people do not accept people with special needs.**



© UNFPA Moldova/Constantin Topala

Georgia

## ANNA DATIASHVILI: “THE ICE OF GENDER STEREOTYPES IS STARTING TO MELT”



Anna Datiashvili, a young gender equality advocate from Georgia.  
© Dina Oganiva/UNFPA Georgia

Anna Datiashvili, 23, is head of the “Youth for Zestafoni” group in the small village of Zestafoni in Georgia. Together with friends, she founded the youth group to promote gender equality and address the needs of young women and men in her community. Anna is one of the 226 young girls and boys who participated in the UN Women and UNFPA-led “Youth for Social Change” initiative, aimed at promoting gender equality and eliminating gender stereotypes in Georgia as part of the EU4GE programme.

“I am the Chair of the initiative group, which is a very big responsibility. Leadership is not easy. You must give everyone some knowledge, motivation, manage processes and be involved in all events – but that is my calling. At this stage, we are mainly focused on educational projects, because what young people need most is education.

I believe that our activism will help to attract people and keep them from leaving the region, will create a lot of jobs and interesting projects, and will involve youth. If you support young people with information, teach them how to solve problems diplomatically, without violence,



and motivate them, you will get good results. Youth is power.

Young people will create families, become employed in serious positions, and raise children very soon. It is important to create an environment free from stereotypes for them. It will help to eliminate violence, discrimination, and disrespect in their families and workplaces.

We have one important goal - the elimination of gender inequality. That this is our starting point. Education, raising awareness and creating new opportunities will increase the nation's progress towards gender (and general) equality.

We have just started our work, but we have already done a lot. Through advocacy, and with the support of the City Hall of Zestafoni Municipality, we found a space where we hold movie screenings with follow-up discussions, workshops and training on gender equality. As of now, around 30 students attend the Sunday School every week. The ice of gender stereotypes is starting to melt after every meeting.

Harmful gender stereotypes persist in Zestafoni. We should address the root causes of these stereotypes. That is why education is important. That is why I decided to professionally equip myself to make changes in the education system - I enrolled in a programme on higher education leadership and management at a state university. I think I will be able to make a lot of positive changes.

The main challenge for us is the widespread misunderstanding of gender equality and gender in general. That's why we try to provide information to young people in a way they can better understand. For example, we held a theatre forum "Early marriage," where we showed the importance of gender equality.

I would recommend to young people in my community to never to be afraid to face new challenges. Every experience is one step taken toward your future success because you are developing skills."



© Dina Ogantva/UNFPA Georgia

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## CHANGING ATTITUDES ABOUT WOMEN'S AND MEN'S ROLES IN THE FAMILY AND IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE



More than

**41 Million**

people heard persuasive messages on promoting gender equality, eliminating harmful gender stereotypes in all public spheres, preventing violence against women and girls, and increasing men's involvement in fatherhood.



The Programme awarded

**29**

small grants to civil society organizations (CSOs), enabling them to implement projects in all six Eastern Partnership countries. The small grant projects used a variety of activities and applied varying strategies to address harmful social norms and gender stereotypes.

# ENGAGING MEN IN ACTIVE FATHERHOOD AND SHARING CHORES



Moldova

# FATHER SCHOOLS PROMOTE GOOD PARENTING IN EASTERN EUROPE



Painting workshop in Moldova. © UNFPA Moldova/Ion Buga

“At Father School, we learn what responsible parenting is,” said Ionat Chintea. “How to educate our children, and how we can combat gender stereotypes that ultimately can lead to violence.”

Mr. Chintea is one of over 2,000 men from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine who have already benefited from attending the schools that encourage men to become more involved in childcare.

“I already know what kind of father I want to be,” said Mr. Chintea, a student in Moldova. “I will be kind and I will tell my children that I love them. The role of the father in a child's life is crucial. Children who have a father involved in their life have better results in school and easier lives.”

Close to 20 Father Schools have been established so far under the EU4GE programme. The schools promote an active role for fathers from pregnancy to parenthood by helping men build stronger relationships with their children and become more engaged in the caretaking process.

In Europe and Central Asia, women spend on average 2.5 times more time on unpaid care work than men. The COVID-19 pandemic only increased the burden on women. For many women, childcare pressure forced them to leave the workforce altogether or to reduce their working hours. As a result, it is estimated that over 2 million mothers left the labour force in 2020. These changes could have a severe impact on the earning potential of women.

However, multiple studies show that when fathers are actively involved in the upbringing of their children, it not only has a positive effect on their child's development but it encourages women to rejoin the workforce. Furthermore, being a more engaged father is also good for the father as they "live longer, have fewer mental and physical health problems, are less likely to abuse drugs, are more productive at work, and report being happier than men who do not have this strong connection [to their children]."

While the benefits of being a good father may be obvious, deeply embedded gender stereotypes can make it challenging for men to take an active part in care work. These stereotypes prevent men from accepting the idea that being a caring, considerate husband and father is as valuable as being successful or recognized at work.

"Women shouldn't be the only ones who are involved in care work," said Stanislav Grugov, who attended a Father School in Moldova. "Men need to be equally involved. Both should take care of their child's education and share house chores."

**“  
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be the only ones  
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© UNFPA Moldova/Ion Buga

## Ukraine

# HOW FATHERS' CLUBS ENCOURAGE MEN TO BECOME BETTER PARENTS, STORY OF YEVHEN FROM KHERSON



Father Day in Kyiv. © UNFPA Ukraine/Andrii Kriepkyh

"Father Club has become a magic kick in the rear to make me pay more attention to my own children," said Yevhen, 32, from Kherson, Ukraine. "Involved fatherhood leads to better and friendlier relationships with kids. When you pay more attention to the kids, you become more responsible and careful. You care about the interests and needs of your child. This kind of relationship gives a child the feeling of a father's support," he added.

Father Clubs, also known in Ukraine as TatoHubs, are a network that encourages men to become more involved in childcare and unleash their power to be equal partners. With the support of the EU4GE programme, 18 Fathers' Clubs were established across the region.

"I came to the club because they organize really cool leisure activities, which I would hardly do in my everyday life," said Yevhen.

According to Yevhen, the dads' club in Kherson of Ukraine had regular meetings every two weeks. Together with other dads, Yevhen discussed the organization of activities for children

and parents that could be useful for both children and adults. Yevhen also mentioned that a great benefit of participating in the club activities is the exchange of experiences with other dads: "You see how other parents treat their children, you borrow something from them, you also prompt some things to others. I would suggest all the fathers participate in the fathers' clubs" he said.

The war disrupted the usual pace of family life. Yevhen recalls that on the morning of 24 February 2022 when the war started, he had no idea of what to do next. Having analyzed the circumstances and made a stock of food and fuel, the family decided to stay in their native Kherson. Yevhen's family stayed in the occupied city for 52 days.

"My son and daughter know that this is a war. But they may not fully understand what it means," Yevhen shared.

A few months after the beginning of the war, the family made a difficult decision, left their hometown, and moved to the city of Ternopil in the west of Ukraine. According to Yevhen, the children easily adapted to the changes with the support of their parents, who tried to adjust their whole life in a new place to old habits.

Although the war has become a major disruption to the TatoHub network in Ukraine, most of them continue to operate today. Many have expanded their area of activity and are now helping families, distributing humanitarian aid. TatoHub psychologists provide consultations for both men and women. A great emphasis today is placed on therapeutic games with children, especially those who have seen the horrors of war. For example, TatoHubs continue to work in the occupied Kherson and Nova Kakhovka. In Kramatorsk, the hub joined the local association "Everything will be fine" and actively helps responding to the humanitarian crisis. However, the hub in Rubizhne, which also covered Severodonetsk, is currently closed. TatoHubs in Odessa, Vinnytsia and many other cities work with pregnant women, providing them with hygiene kits and the help of psychologists.

**Involved fatherhood leads to better and friendlier relationships with kids.**



© UNFPA Ukraine/Andrii Kriepkyh

## Belarus

# "IT IS THE GREATEST PLEASURE TO HEAR 'I LOVE YOU' FROM MY SON" – A FATHER FROM BELARUS ABOUT RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD



Vadim Glushachenko with his son Fedya  
© UNFPA Belarus/Dina Ermolenko

Vadim Glushachenko was the father of two children: Fedya (a four-year-old boy) and Varya (a one-and-a-half-year-old girl). Vadim is one of the fathers portrayed in the EU4GE online photo exhibition dedicated to Father's Day in Belarus. The exhibition included fathers' thoughts about their parenting experiences, including all the joy and difficulties, the value of time spent with their family and the lessons their children taught them.

"Fedya was born loud, noisy and demanding. He did not let us relax. He slept little and shouted loudly. We were exhausted and overwhelmed by a tsunami of new experiences. You think you can prepare yourself for this, but you can never get totally ready. It was difficult! In the first three months, Anya (my wife) and I felt like we were going uphill without stopping," said Vadim.

When his wife Anya was about to give birth, Vadim took leave from work to be around at childbirth and then at home. After the leave was over, Anya burst into tears for the first time during her motherhood journey because now she had to stay with Fedya alone for the whole day."



"She can do anything, but it's hard to control yourself when your inner resources have been exhausted," continued Vadim.

Their second child, Varya, turned out to be softer, warmer and more delicate. It was easier with her; her parents knew more, worried less and more often relied on personal experience.

Vadim added, "Through parenting, I've learned to eat, play and work at the same time. We've got eyes in the backs of our heads, and we've learned to catch a child falling from anywhere. We boost our patience and respect for small ones (and each other) and express kindness and empathy. We also nurture ingenuity. It's clearly easier for Anya to come up with fun games and activities than for me. Luckily, there are many activities that Fedya almost always agrees to: take a walk, ride a bike, go to the aviation museum or simply throw stones into the water."

Vadim stated that the greatest pleasure for him comes at the end of the day, when he sees his son to bed and hears, "Dad, I love you. You're the best dad in the world," as Varya gently coos in the background.

**You think you can  
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get totally ready.  
It was difficult!**



© UNFPA Belarus/Julia Baidak

## Azerbaijan

# “I WANT MY KIDS TO HAVE LASTING MEMORIES OF OUR HAPPY TIMES TOGETHER”: THE STORY OF ELVIN FROM AZERBAIJAN



Elvin Hasilov with his wife and two children.  
© UNFPA Azerbaijan

“Papa School helped me to realize that fatherhood is way more about spending more time with your children than contributing to the financial well-being of the family. I want my kids to have lasting memories of our happy times together,” said Elvin Hasilov, facilitator of the Papa School in Gakh city, Azerbaijan.

Father Clubs, also known as Papa Schools in Azerbaijan, are a network that encourages men to become more involved in childcare and unleash their power to be equal partners. With the support of the EU4GE programme, 49 Father Clubs were established across the region.

“Parenting brings happiness, but it’s also hard work to ensure the physical and mental health and well-being of a child. And one of the necessary preconditions to do this effectively is to be able to embrace change by learning new skills and knowledge to become a better version of one’s self,” Elvin said.

Various studies show that fathers' involvement in childcare is crucial for children to reach their full potential. However, deeply rooted gender stereotypes cast a shadow on many men's parenthood experiences in Azerbaijan. From early years on, men are forced to adhere to rigid notions of masculinity that perpetuate gender inequalities in families.

"My life was not different from a traditional father's life in our country: running from home to work in the mornings, and back home late in the evenings. Although I was spending some time with my family too, it wasn't as planned and structured," he said.

After participating in the campaign "My Father Loves Me" campaign back in 2020, he was determined to support his wife to develop her career. He assumed a sizable proportion of household chores and childcare so she could prepare for the secondary school teacher recruitment exams.

"Needless to say that she scored 54 out of a total of 60 points and received the job she wanted," Elvin said.

Elvin stated with pride that his kids enjoyed the meals he made, and this has been a great source of motivation for him to cook more often ever since. Alongside this, he is also determined to continue equally sharing all household chores, as this is highly likely to enable his wife to grow professionally and their family well-being improve so that they can invest more into the quality education and development of their children.

**Papa School helped me realize that fatherhood is way more about spending more time with your children, than contributing to the financial well-being of the family. I want my kids to have lasting memories of our happy times together.**



## Belarus

# LOCAL BUSINESS IN BELARUS IMPLEMENTED FAMILY FRIENDLY POLICIES WITH THE EU SUPPORT



In partnership with the EU4GE programme, an international business company in Belarus supports family-friendly policies to encourage responsible fatherhood. © Stocksy

Investing in family-friendly policies is good for individuals, businesses, and economies. Policies that support a flexible work environment with paid parental leave, breastfeeding breaks, childcare and child grants can help women and men to take care of children and loved ones and lead well-balanced lives.

In Belarus, women take 96% of parental leave, while men take no more than 4%. At the same time, more than 89% of women who care for children under the age of three do not work. In the long term, this may negatively affect women's ability to compete in the labour market.

To change this statistic and support family-friendly policies in Belarus, the EU4GE programme provided constant support to SoftTeco, an international company, through expert help on corporate policy development, facilitation of the parents clubs, and meetings with psychologists. At the time of writing, more than 300 employees of SoftTeco had already benefited from the policies and events developed in partnership with EU4GE.

"At SoftTeco, one of the key values is the family of the employees. The 'parent-friendly companies' concept fits perfectly into our corporate culture. Thanks to our partnership with the "EU 4 Gender Equality" in Belarus, we have deepened our knowledge on this topic and understood how to structure, develop, and systematically support activities that aid employees with children," said Elena Bobrova, lead of software development department at SoftTeco.

SoftTeco's senior leadership team has stuck to the concept of parent-friendly companies in its work since the founding of the business. The partnership with EU4GE only strengthens this approach. The company introduced to its employers flexible work schedules throughout the day, the option to choose a comfortable workload volume, the possibility to work remotely, support programmes for the employees who use paternity leave, and a dedicated room for children on its office premises.


"I am glad that I did not have to make a tough choice between family or career. I am happy that I was able to combine being a working mother and a department manager in the company," Elena added.

As part of the EU4GE collaboration, all interested SoftTeco employees could join supportive meetings with psychologists to discuss relationships in the family, emotional burnout, and unpaid domestic work management.

The company welcomes and supports men who want to be involved in childcare and spend more time with their children. According to SoftTeco management, these efforts increased the interest of men employees in responsible fatherhood.

"Since the company was founded, one of our key values has been to support families and assist employees in fulfilling not only their work duties but also their family responsibilities. It is a very important direction in our corporate policy," said Victor Petrov, Chief Operation Officer at SoftTeco.

In addition to that, SoftTeco implements a support programme for employees who have decided to take a three-year parental leave. Employees receive newsletters, holiday greetings, and invitations to corporate events from the HR department to ensure they stay in touch with the office.



**Thanks to our partnership with the "EU 4 Gender Equality" in Belarus, we have deepened our knowledge on this topic and understood how to structure, develop, and systematically support activities that aid employees with children.**

## ENGAGING MEN TO FULLY PARTICIPATE IN CHILDCARE AND UNPAID DOMESTIC WORK



More than

**3,846**

men from the Eastern Partnership countries benefited from attending

**49**

Fathers' Schools that encourage men to become more involved in childcare.



**19,7 Million**

people in the six programme countries were reached with the message about involved fatherhood and the importance of men's caretaking responsibilities.



**1,014**

health professionals and family centre specialists learned about the importance of engaging men during pregnancy and childbirth and on promoting active fatherhood.

# ELIMINATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN



ახადგაზრდობის  
საერთაშორისო  
დღე



Georgia

# IN GEORGIA, POLICE TRAINING IMPROVES RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN



Gvantsa Gogava investigates domestic violence cases in Georgia.  
© Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia

Detective Gvantsa Gogava, who investigates domestic violence against juveniles in Georgia, recalled that during an interview with a 17-year-old girl, the girl sat in an armchair and didn't make eye contact with anyone.

"When she talked about the perpetrator, who was a family member, she did not use a word for a human being; rather, she used a word for a soulless creature," recounted Gogava. An experienced investigator, Gogava was used to talking to women and girls suffering from violence. She knew that gaining the girl's trust was essential.

"I told her, 'We believe you.' That was a milestone that made her feel free," said Gogava. "Once she felt she could trust us, her body language changed; she finally made eye contact."

For a decade, the teenage girl had been raped by a family member. She'd decided to report him because her little sister was approaching the age she had been when the rape and sexual assault had begun.



Preventing and stopping violence, rape and other crimes against women was one of the goals of the Empowering Community for Gender Equality project being implemented by the Network of Centers for Civic Engagement (NCCE) within the EU4GE programme.

In spring 2021, 74 police officers (52 men and 22 women) from the Tbilisi, Guria and Imereti regions of Georgia received EU4GE-supported NCCE training. Participants increased their understanding of gender-based and domestic violence and the importance of supporting victims and ensuring that due diligence practices are followed. After improving their knowledge of legislation and its effective use, the police officers now have the ability and knowledge to substantiate their actions with arguments and case law. The trainings also covered the protocols for securing restraining orders and the judicial decisions that impact casework related to gender-based violence.

“The trainings that we delivered increased the awareness, sensitivity and professionalism of police officers working in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and those responsible for preventing and responding to domestic violence,” said Nina Khatiskatsi, Executive Director of the NCCE. “During the trainings, police officers and investigators had the chance to discuss the practical difficulties associated with gathering evidence and to talk about the importance of community support in reporting domestic violence. It is very important that the government and civil society work together to end gender-based and domestic violence.”

The police trainings stemmed from a partnership with Georgia’s Ministry of Internal Affairs’ Department of Human Rights Protection and Investigation Quality Monitoring, which monitors the performance of police officers and investigators.

“The pandemic has not affected the quality of our work related to combating domestic violence and violence against women. In partnership with the United Nations and international donors, the Ministry of Internal Affairs is offering us



© Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia

different trainings to enhance our qualifications to better serve the community," said Gogava.

In addition to the police trainings, EU4GE rolled out additional projects, such as behaviour-correction programmes for perpetrators of violence in Georgia.

Because they are often the first people to learn about domestic violence cases, the police are uniquely placed at the frontlines to counter crime and correct harmful social norms.

In the case of the raped teenage girl, "the girl was blaming herself," said Gogava. "She'd always worried about what other people would think."

"It makes me happy when someone is safe - and saved," said Gogava. "I have a 13-year-old daughter. I want girls to be safe from fear and violence and have a happy life."

“

**I told her, 'We believe you.' That was a milestone that made her feel free.**

## Armenia

# RELIGIOUS LEADERS PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY IN ARMENIA



Father Abel Kartashyan at an International Men's Day celebration event organized by the EU4GE programme, Ijevan. © UNFPA Armenia/Mari Mkhitarian

To recognize and fight domestic violence in local communities across Armenia, as well as to engage men in prenatal and postnatal care and responsible fatherhood, a series of trainings educated and empowered priests and social workers of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church.

“Often, men become more aggressive and resort to violence due to social problems. Through the knowledge we gained via the training, we can address these problems more delicately and deliver the proper approach when counselling families by focusing on men’s engagement in the family and childcare,” says Fr. Mambre Voskanyan, a priest from the Lori region of Armenia.

He is one of the 27 priests and 10 social workers from Armenia’s Shirak, Lori and Tavush regions who improved their knowledge and skills in promoting gender equality, responsible fatherhood and preventing gender-based violence through a two-day training entitled “The Church combating domestic violence and promoting men’s engagement” organized by the EU4GE programme.

“We work with families closely to promote gender equality and men’s engagement in care work. At our sociocultural centre, we try to touch on these topics to form the right perception from childhood with children through art. That’s how we can prepare the ground for preventing violence and help families overcome problems and crises in the very early stages,” said Meri Arakelyan, a social worker from the Tavush region of Armenia, who works in cooperation with the priests.

Social workers are the first recourse for families who experience conflicts. If the problems can’t be solved at their level, they redirect families to church priests. In a critical situation that involves violence, social workers may also refer families to state structures and support centres.

“We have had successful cases. In one of the families, the man had alcohol abuse disorder. We convinced him to undergo treatment. He has since returned to his family, and their life has changed dramatically. Now, everyone in the family is living peacefully. In such cases, we keep an eye on them to ensure the neutralization of possible dangers,” added Arakelyan.

Both priests and social workers who participated in the EU4GE trainings highlighted the importance of men’s engagement in family care and the equal distribution of domestic responsibilities for preventing domestic violence.

“We persist in addressing men’s involvement in fatherhood and the equal dissemination of the care work in our daily service,” said Fr. Abel Kartashyan, a priest from the Tavush region of Armenia.

“Training sessions for priests and social workers of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church are part of our efforts to engage men for promoting gender equality, fighting gender-based violence, encouraging men to become more involved in childcare and to unleash their power to be equal partners. This partnership allows us to include violence prevention in various areas of religious activities in Armenia and contribute to strengthening of gender equality,” explained Dilara Buyuktas, EU4GE Programme Manager, a.i.



**Through the knowledge we gained via the training, we can address these problems more delicately and deliver the proper approach.**



## Regional

# EU SUPPORTED PROGRAMME FIGHTS GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE WITH COMPREHENSIVE PERPETRATORS INITIATIVES

Violence prevention programmes targeting perpetrators of domestic violence prevents and combats violence against women. © Priscilla Du Preez

Violence against women and girls is one of the world's most prevalent human rights violations, taking place every day, many times over, in every corner of the globe. Almost one in three women in the world has been subjected to physical or sexual violence. Most violence against women is perpetrated by current or former husbands or intimate partners.<sup>1</sup>

Based on the [Article 16](#) of the Istanbul Convention<sup>2</sup> and to serve as a basis to develop a domestic violence rehabilitation programme for abusers in the region, EU4GE programme developed the "[Regional Guidance on working with perpetrators of domestic violence and early intervention](#)". The guidance provides a research-based analysis of perpetrator


1. World Health Organization, on behalf of the United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on Violence Against Women Estimation and Data (2021). [Violence against women prevalence estimates, 2018. Global, regional and national prevalence estimates for intimate partner violence against women and global and regional prevalence estimates for non-partner sexual violence against women.](#)
2. <https://edoc.coe.int/en/violence-against-women/7144-domestic-and-sexual-violence-perpetrator-programmes-article-16-of-the-istanbul-convention.html>

programmes and recommendations for the development of perpetrator programmes, focused on ensuring the safety of survivors, through working with perpetrators of violence and holding them accountable for their violent acts, and for changing their behaviour.

To stop and prevent violence, EU4GE supported the establishment and improvement of evidence-based, comprehensive violence prevention programmes targeting perpetrators of domestic violence in Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine. The programmes are focused on ensuring the safety of survivors, by working with perpetrators of violence and holding them accountable.

Operating in the countries of the Eastern Partnership, EU4GE developed a comprehensive “Assessment of the National perpetrators response mechanism” in Ukraine and trained 87 multidisciplinary team members on how to provide a common response to violence cases in Moldova.

“We regard perpetrator programmes as a very important element of an integrated and comprehensive approach to preventing and combating violence against women. This intervention is part of the Moldova comprehensive strategy in the field of EVAW as well as our country’s commitment under the Istanbul Convention. We believe that perpetrator programmes are crucial to overcoming belief systems that tolerate, justify or outright condone violence against women,” said Violeta Terguta, Programme Analyst on gender-based violence, UNFPA Moldova.



**Behaviour correction programmes for perpetrators can significantly contribute to breaking the cycle of violence.**

At the time of writing, since launching the programme in Georgia, 236 probationers and 37 convicts had completed the behaviour correction programmes for perpetrators, and 30 facilitators – psychologists and social workers from the probation and penitentiary systems – had undergone comprehensive training on a perpetrator behaviour correction programme.

“Behaviour correction programmes for perpetrators can significantly contribute to breaking the cycle of violence and to overcoming belief systems that tolerate or condone violence against women. Such programmes are considered to be important elements for preventing and combating violence against women in Georgia,” said Lika Sidamonidze, Project Analyst, UN Women Georgia.

To improve evidence based work with perpetrators of gender based violence, 11 stakeholders from EaP countries benefited from a study tour and learned from the Caledonian Model in Scotland, one of most successful interventions tackling domestic abuse.

“The Caledonian model is truly inspirational because it shows what can happen if women’s safety is really at the center of the work of all institutions involved in the response to domestic violence. It gives me hope for a future without violence,” said Alessandra Pauncz, Executive Director of the European Network for the Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence, who participated in the tour.

Moldova

# I'M NOT AFRAID OF HIM ANY MORE" - 30 YEARS STOLEN BY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Ioana speaks up about violence in her life.  
© EU4GE/Tatiana Beghiu

The first blow came when she was pregnant. The second a week later. Many more followed.

She didn't keep track of them during the 30 years she lived with an abuser. "I spent half of my life not knowing that I had the right to be happy," said Ioana (not her real name).

Ioana was 18 years old. She dreamed of moving to the city, to study and build her life on her own. Then she met the quiet and solitary boy who was following her everywhere, telling her he loved her. "I was happy and in love. That's why I got married. Too soon, I was a child..." she admitted.

The first slap slammed her into a wall. It had only been a few months after the wedding and she was pregnant. She didn't understand how you could hit a person that you love. In her family,

the discussions were calm and her parents respected each other, which she did not see in her husband's family, with whom they moved in as soon as they got married. She wanted to leave, but he apologized. He said that he had lost control. "When we move to our own house, we won't get angry anymore. We'll be happy, we just have to be patient," he would tell her after each slap.

Ioana wasn't allowed to wear make-up or dress as she liked. She wasn't allowed to visit her parents and tell them about her husband's outbursts. She would cover her bruises with toothpaste. "I was ashamed that this was happening to me," she confessed.

She was a survivor of physical, psychological and sexual violence from her husband. "If you don't want me, I want you. You are my woman and you must do as I say!" He was forcing me to sleep with him... The love was gone very quickly. Because of this violence I started to hate him," she said.

One morning, she took her child and ran to her parents. "My mother told me never to go back to him, that he won't get better... But I didn't listen to her," said Ioana. She returned to the husband who made her startle every time he entered the house. She called the police several times. He was fined and then released.

The beatings became even more brutal. "My husband blamed me for everything. I was guilty of provoking him to hit me. I was guilty of running away from home. I was guilty of calling the police and embarrassing him in front of the people from the village, where almost every second woman was beaten," Ioana remembers. Her mother-in-law was also telling her it was her fault. The woman bragged that she was beaten daily by her husband, but did not complain. "He beat me, but I didn't die. So don't be the smartest one here," the woman scolded Ioana.

Years passed, but Ioana did not have the courage to leave her home. Where would she go with her children? Who would host her? Even the police couldn't help her. Her husband used to hit her in a way that wouldn't leave any marks so she could not report him to the police. They needed clear evidence.

One day, her youngest daughter managed to record him punching her mother. Within hours, a ten-day restraining order was issued against the man. "But he didn't go anywhere. The law didn't mean anything to him," said Ioana. The man was fined and the restraining order was extended by three months. "Then I remembered what it's like to live in peace," Ioana confessed.

Police advised her to contact the Women's Law Centre. The specialists there counselled her and helped her initiate the divorce process.

"When I saw the divorce certificate, I couldn't believe it... I regret not leaving sooner. I didn't even realise that 30 years had passed with me enduring this silently..." stated Ioana.

It's now been two years since Ioana found peace. She moved to the city, rented an apartment, and found a job.

At the age of 50, she went to a beauty salon for the first time. She put on make-up, got a manicure and also got tattoos to cover the scars left by her ex-husband. "I'm not afraid of him anymore. I am strong and I know he can't do me any harm," she said.

Ioana urges survivors of domestic violence to contact NGOs and support centres. "I tell them to leave the aggressor right after the first slap. People who beat women are cowards and we shouldn't allow them to ruin our lives," added Ioana.



She enjoys the moments she spends with her children, whom she was able to protect. Every day, Ioana learns to be strong and dream with her eyes open, as she hasn't done since she was 18.

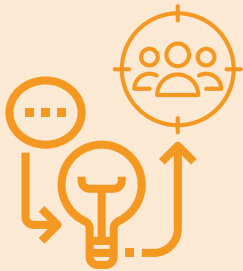
Violence against women and girls is one of the most systematic and widespread violation of human rights in Moldova and throughout the world. Women are the victims of domestic violence more frequently. The results of a regional study on gender norms and stereotypes carried out in the countries of the Eastern Partnership show that in the Republic of Moldova, 23% of women and

18% of men saw their mother being hit by their partner in childhood.

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**I tell them to leave the aggressor right after the first slap. People who beat women are cowards and we shouldn't allow them to ruin our lives.**

# PREVENTING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE BY INITIATING OR IMPROVING EVIDENCE-BASED VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAMMES TARGETING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PERPETRATORS



In Moldova,

**87**

multidisciplinary team members received training on domestic violence response, including representatives from the programme's target regions. The participants were trained as trainers, which will further strengthen the skills of local multidisciplinary team members to provide a common response to domestic violence cases. This exceeds the programme target of 40 trained individuals from Moldova.



**11**

change leaders from Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine participated in the Study tour of the Caledonian System, a programme for tackling domestic abuse in Scotland. The study tour will guide future implementation of the gender-based violence prevention initiatives in the Eastern Partnership countries.



Ukraine developed a comprehensive [‘Assessment of the National Perpetrators’ Response Mechanism’](#).

This assessment will inform the development of regional guidance because the Response Mechanism provides deep insights and analysis of existing perpetrators programmes in Ukraine. The Response Mechanism also makes recommendations regarding which services/programmes for violent perpetrators are the most feasible and cost-effective in the Ukrainian context.

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