

Webinar Report: Regulating Maternity and Paternity Leave – Influence on Costs and Changing Gender Norms

On 10 March 2023 the Gender Budget Watchdog Network organized a webinar on the topic of **Regulating Maternity and Paternity Leave – Influence on Costs and Changing Gender Norms**. As of 2 August 2022, the EU countries started applying the **Directive (EU) 2019/1158 on work-life balance for parents and carers which stipulates provisions on the parental and carer's leave**. In some of the Western Balkan countries, as well as Moldova, there are ongoing debates on reforming national labor codes that will attempt to align national legislation with the EU one. The aims of the webinar included the following:

- **raising awareness** on the EU Directive on work-life balance for parents and carers and what is the status of its implementation in Western Balkans and Moldova and
- **discussing the costs and benefits** including the change of gender norms that can result from the alignment of national legislation with the EU directive.

More than 80 participants from various backgrounds, including civil society organizations (CSOs), government representatives, and experts in the field, followed the webinar which was organized in synergy between the two projects “Strengthening Transparency and Accountability for Gender Equality in Western Balkans and Moldova”, supported by the Austrian Development Agency and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency and the project “Through gender Lenses appraising budgets and policies; watch-dogging local action plans for gender equality implementation” funded by the European Union.

The speakers at the webinar were **Jelena Peranić Attenelle** from the European Commission Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, specifically Unit D3 Gender Equality. Jelena talked about the EU Directive and explained the implementation, tracking, but also provided an input on how this particular Directive was developed; **Marija Risteska**, the Executive director of CRPM and the regional director of the Gender Budget Watchdog Network. Marija presented the Macedonian case along with the costs of its reform; **Slavica Striković**, the Executive Director of our Montenegrin hub Ženska akcija, spoke on the topic of paternity leave in Montenegro, i.e., whether it delivered results or not. Following the Montenegrin case, we heard more about the legislative changes in Moldova and current challenges from **Alina Andronache** from the Center Partnership for Development (CPD), after which **Amina Dizdar** from the Sarajevo Open Centre presented the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the findings of a report on the paternity leave, while **Dita Dobranja** talked about expanding choices through family-friendly policies and the costing leaves in Kosovo. Finally, we heard from Jano Puškar, a father from Serbia who utilized his right to parental leave and who shared his experience with us.

The **key conclusions and recommendations** from the webinar include the following:

- CSOs should play a more active role in monitoring the implementation of the maternity/paternity/parental leave regulations and advocate for changes when needed (includes raising awareness among fathers about their paternity leave entitlement, ensure access, etc.);
- governments in the region should continue to align their legislation with the EU directive from 2019 and provide more generous benefits for parents and carers in order to help create a more family-friendly work environment and promote gender equality in the workplace and at home;
- there is a strong need for greater multistakeholder collaboration on these issues (CSOs, governments, and other stakeholders in the region);
- when developing legislative acts, the transfer of parental leave should be taken into consideration as paternity leave is often recognized as parental leave which is not in line with the EU standards.