



IMPACT STORY



WOMEN MAYORS FROM RURAL MOLDOVA SPEAK ABOUT HOW THEY GAINED THE TRUST OF THEIR CITIZENS

Photo: Courtesy of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Protection of Moldova

Women's leadership and gender-responsive governance are essential to reducing gender inequalities and achieving women's empowerment. Although their participation in political and public life brings diverse perspectives, broader solutions and inclusive policy approaches, women are still held back from key leadership roles. UN Women spoke with three women mayors from rural Moldova who broke gender stereotypes pertaining to women's leadership, mobilized their communities for prevention and protection against COVID-19 and brought significant changes to the lives of their fellow citizens. They all participated in UN Women programmes aimed at strengthening women's participation and leadership in decision-making at the local level.

"Initially, many locals were skeptical about a woman mayor, but now most have radically changed their minds. If more women are in leadership positions our country will be prosperous," said **Elena Neaga**, mayor of the Balasesti community in the Singerei district, located about 100 km from Chisinau, Moldova. Elena, who was 30 when she was elected in 2019, is not only the first female mayor in Balasesti since the country's independence, but also the youngest.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic brought many unexpected challenges, still in just one year as mayor Elena managed to address specific issues related to her community's wellbeing and safety. For example, she responded to women's safety

Photo above: Before becoming a mayor, Elena Neaga worked for 5 years as a family doctor in her village.

needs by installing street lighting in high-risk areas and prioritized the reparations of a kindergarten to ensure uninterrupted access to pre-school education. Also, with the support of the community and her team, she improved the waste management system by eliminating a dump and bringing in a tractor to collect solid waste.

In addition, Elena's background as a physician helped her mobilize her community to quickly respond to the urgent needs caused by the spread of the virus. With the support

PARTNERS FOR CHANGE

Elena, Tatiana and Maria took part in different UN Women programmes on women's leadership, organized with funding from the **Embassy of Sweden** during 2014-2020 under the joint **UN Women-UNDP Women in Politics Programme**. This work was possible through the **Women's Network of the Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova**, which currently includes **194** women mayors and representatives. The network was established in 2011 under the **Joint Integrated Local Development Programme** led by UN Women and UNDP.

UN Women's advocacy work on women's leadership and political participation in Moldova is also made possible through **regular resources**.

of a local family, she was able to acquire an ambulance that now serves seven villages and over 10,000 people.

“If more women are in leadership positions, our country will be prosperous.”

—ELENA NEAGA, *Mayor of the Balasesti community, Singerei District, Moldova*

Tatiana Galateanu, now serving on her third mandate as mayor of the Giurgiulesti port village in southern Moldova, is proof that dedication and transparency build trust among the citizens.

When she ran for mayor the first time, Tatiana experienced first-hand the gender stereotypes that were engrained in Moldovan communities. For example, many were skeptical about a woman running for mayorship, but over time the community became increasingly convinced that women are capable leaders.

In her 9 years of mayorship, Tatiana has improved local infrastructure and services by reconstructing kindergartens, investing in the community lyceum and rebuilding a public park. Other major undertakings included the rehabilitation of the health center, which proved to be timely during the pandemic.

“I would like to see more women becoming mayors, local councillors, and being in leadership roles in other fields. The stereotypes that a woman should stay in the kitchen are disappearing,” she emphasized. Tatiana is also actively engaged in opening a museum that will promote Moldovan cultural heritage.

Maria Galit is the mayor of Sarata Veche, a rural community in the Falesti district, located 125 km from Chisinau and known for its women leaders. She is on her fourth mandate and is the third consecutive woman mayor in this community.

Maria has introduced consultations and the active participation of citizens in finding solutions to local problems. Through participatory governance, inhabitants have gained a better understanding of how local public administration works and can participate in trainings and dialogues, leading to, for example, solving problems with solid waste management and water supply, and even opening a new kindergarten. “At the beginning, people were more skeptical about open participatory governance, but now they are willing to talk about the problems of the locality,” shared Maria.

WOMEN IN POLITICS

Joint UNDP-UN Women programme






UN Women, in partnership with UNDP under the **Women in Politics Programme** and the **Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova**, is strengthening the capacities of women mayors and councillors to serve as effective legislators while changing perceptions about women in leadership positions.

- From 2016 to 2020, around **400** women mayors, including local councillors received training on gender equality and local public administration.
- In 2020, **194** women mayors, including **85** women mayors in their first mandate, shared their challenges and best practices, including in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Following a four-day training organized for the Women’s Network of the Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova, a more gender-sensitive **Strategic Plan** for the next five years (**2021-2026**) is on the works.

Recently, Maria hosted one of the virtual study visits for women mayors in their first mandates, in a series that was organized by UN Women Moldova in partnership with the Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova and funded by Sweden. These study visits aimed to share best practices in building resilience in communities led by women, including in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Women in leadership, women mayors, are successfully defying stereotypes and serving as excellent leaders in their communities. They involve women and men in decision-making by voicing the problems and priorities and by engaging them to find solutions, which then result to be durable and sustainable,” said Dominika Stojanoska, UN Women Country Representative in Moldova.

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