Capitolul 7. ANALIZA PRIVIND POSIBILA INTRODUCERE A ZILELOR-PUNTE ÎN REPUBLICA MOLDOVA

Chapter 7. ANALYSIS ON THE POTENTIAL INTRODUCTION OF BRIDGE DAYS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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Abstract

This paper conducts an analysis on the potential introduction of bridge days in the Republic of Moldova. While Moldova's Labour Code offers a generous 28-day annual leave provision, it lacks any legal recognition of bridge days – working days between public holidays and weekends – creating uncertainty and missed socio-economic opportunities. Using a mixed-method approach, the analysis combines a review of Moldova's legal framework, labour market data from the National Bureau of Statistics, and a calendar-based identification of potential bridge days for 2025–2026. Comparative international case studies (Germany, France, USA, Japan, Sweden, Brazil) provide contextual models ranging from statutory to cultural and hybrid systems. Key findings suggest that Moldova's service-oriented economy, rising domestic tourism, and uneven vacation access make bridge days a valuable but currently untapped policy tool. The paper proposes a three-phase policy roadmap: (1) government-led pilot programs for public sector bridge days; (2) legal recognition of bridge days for private-sector negotiation; and (3) consideration of a permanent statutory bridge day. The study concludes that a phased, hybrid model offers the most adaptive and economically efficient path, aligning labour flexibility with Moldova's regional development and well-being goals. The paper was developed within the framework of Subprogram 030101 „Strengthening the resilience, competitiveness, and sustainability of the economy of the Republic of Moldova in the context of the accession process to the European Union", institutional funding.

Keywords: *bridge days, Moldova, policy, labour law*

JEL: *H75, J22, J28*

Introduction

Bridge days, working days that fall between a public holiday and a weekend, are a common feature of modern labour calendars. In many countries, they are used strategically to create extended weekends, often boosting domestic tourism, retail activity, and employee well-being. While approaches vary, ranging from informal use of vacation time to formal public decrees, bridge days have increasingly become tools of both labour policy and economic planning. In the Republic of Moldova, however, the concept remains legally undefined. Despite offering a generous statutory minimum of 28 days of annual leave, the Labour Code does not regulate bridge days, leaving workers and employers to manage them informally. This legislative gap introduces uncertainty and overlooks their potential as a mechanism for economic stimulus and social benefit. This paper explores the case for integrating bridge days into Moldova's legal framework. It draws on comparative international practices, a calendar analysis for 2025–2026, and an assessment of socioeconomic impacts. The paper proposes a phased, hybrid policy model, beginning with public-sector pilot programs and potentially evolving into formal legislative recognition, designed to balance economic efficiency, labour flexibility, and regional development objectives.

Literature review

Recent research on vacations and holidays offers compelling insights into the potential benefits of bridge days – unofficial days off that extend weekends around public holidays. These short breaks are increasingly seen as a valuable tool for improving employee well-being and

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organizational performance, despite concerns about short-term economic impact. One of the most influential studies in this area, conducted by Nawijn et al. (2010), found that the mere anticipation of a vacation significantly boosts happiness. In their survey of over 1500 Dutch individuals, vacationers reported higher levels of pre-trip happiness than non-vacationers, with this boost lasting up to eight weeks before the trip. However, the study also emphasized the importance of the quality of the break, only those who experienced a very relaxing vacation reported significantly higher post-trip happiness. This highlights the unique value of bridge days, which can offer restorative time without the stress of long-distance travel or intensive planning. Adding to this, De Bloom et al. (2014) demonstrated that vacations can enhance cognitive flexibility and originality – key ingredients for workplace creativity and problem-solving. In a complementary study, Haraldsson & Kellam (2021) reported that a large-scale trial in Iceland, which reduced the workweek without reducing pay, led to maintained productivity, lower stress, and improved well-being. The parallels between these findings and the structure of bridge days suggest that even short breaks from work can be rejuvenating and ultimately beneficial for performance. Physiological and behavioural benefits have also been noted. Ferguson, Curtis, Fraysse et al. (2023) has shown that an extra day of rest, such as during a long weekend, can increase sleep duration by 21 minutes per night and encourage more physical activity. These shifts contribute to healthier overall lifestyles, which in turn support better functioning in the workplace. From an economic standpoint, bridge days are not without trade-offs. Rosso & Wagner (2021), in a global analysis of over 200 countries, found that each additional holiday is associated with a proportional GDP reduction of about 20%, especially in manufacturing sectors. However, the study also noted a decrease in workplace accidents and a measurable increase in short-term happiness, suggesting that some of the costs may be offset by gains in well-being and safety. Organizational practices, particularly in countries like Germany, reflect an understanding of these trade-offs. Many research institutes and companies intentionally schedule closures on bridge days to reduce operational costs like heating and cleaning. These practices are supported by legal frameworks that allow employers to mandate vacation on such days, known as *Betriebsferien* (company vacation or collective leave) or *Schließtage* (closure days). While some employees appreciate the extended downtime, others, especially those working in labs or team-dependent roles, report frustration when they're unable to work due to safety or policy constraints. When comparing bridge days to longer vacations, literature suggests that short, frequent breaks can be especially effective for stress recovery. Short vacations are often less stressful to plan and recover from, and may lead to higher rates of returning to work feeling refreshed and motivated. In summary, the literature presents a clear case for the strategic use of bridge days. While they may involve a short-term dip in economic output, the long-term benefits, enhanced employee well-being, creativity, and potentially sustained productivity, suggest that bridge days could be a valuable part of modern work-life design. Future research could offer even deeper insights by focusing specifically on the unique effects of bridge days within different industries and cultures.

International experience in application of bridge days

Non-working bridge days are implemented across the world in varying ways, reflecting different legal, cultural, and institutional traditions. In many European countries, such as France, Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands, bridge days are not regulated by law but are widely practiced. In France, the concept of *faire le pont* ("making the bridge") is culturally ingrained, with many employees using vacation days to create long weekends, especially when holidays fall on Tuesdays or Thursdays (CleFrance, 2025) (Lawless French, 2025). Similarly, in Germany, workers strategically use leave days to extend time off, guided by employer discretion or collective agreements. These practices are common but not mandatory, offering flexibility but limited predictability. Sweden offers a more formalized yet flexible model. Though bridge days (*klämdagar*) are not universally regulated, many are recognized through collective bargaining, especially in academia and public institutions (Uppsala University, 2025) (Alexapp, 2024). Employees asked to work on these days are often entitled to overtime pay. This model balances employee rights with employer flexibility through social dialogue. In Brazil, bridge days (*pontes or feriadões*) are declared in the public sector when holidays fall near weekends (Skuad, 2025). While not binding on private companies, these declarations often set a national tone, encouraging widespread observance and influencing private sector behaviour through indirect pressure and logistical coordination. Japan stands out for its formalized legal recognition of bridge days. Under the "*Citizen's Holiday*" law, any weekday falling between two public holidays automatically becomes a holiday (Work in Japan, 2021). This creates synchronized national breaks, such as the extended "*Golden Week*", but offers no discretion for businesses or workers. The United States represents the most decentralized approach. There are no legal mandates for paid holidays, and bridge days, like the day after Thanksgiving, emerge from employer practices rather than legislation. While common, these are driven by business interests and employee expectations rather than public policy. Globally, the idea of bridge days appears under various names: *klämdag (Sweden), brugdag (Belgium), yom gesher (Israel), and beyn-ot-ta'tileyn (Iran).* While terminology and formality differ, the underlying purpose, improving work-life balance through extended rest periods, is widely recognized. Though formal research on bridge days is limited, broader studies on work-life balance suggest such practices can enhance productivity, employee satisfaction, and retention. However, there is a lack of robust, cross-cultural empirical research specifically evaluating the economic and organizational impacts of bridge days. International models of bridge days range from cultural norms and negotiated agreements to statutory mandates. Each approach reflects national values around flexibility, coordination, and worker rights. For Moldova, these diverse experiences offer a menu of policy options, from pilot initiatives in the public sector to formal legal recognition, tailored to its social, economic, and institutional context.

Bridge days in Moldova

The Labour Code of the Republic of Moldova provides a solid foundation for employee rights regarding rest and leave, reflecting a commitment to workforce protection and social policy alignment with European standards (Brain Source, 2025) (Animus.md, 2025). Employees are entitled to a minimum of 28 calendar days of paid annual leave, one of the most generous minimums in the region. This leave may be split into parts, but one portion must consist of at least 14 uninterrupted calendar days, promoting extended rest but offering less flexibility for shorter, more frequent breaks. In addition to annual leave, Moldova observes between 12 and 14 public holidays each year, depending on the calendar and official decrees. These include a combination of religious observances (e.g., Old Style Christmas and Orthodox Easter), national holidays (e.g., Independence Day), and internationally recognized events (e.g., International Women's Day). Employees are legally entitled to a day off on these dates. If required to work, they must receive either double pay or a compensatory day off, in accordance with the Labour Code. Despite this strong legal framework for holidays and rest, Moldovan labour legislation does not address "bridge days" (*zile-punte* or *zile de legătură*). There is no legal mechanism for the government to declare such days non-working, either permanently or on a discretionary basis. As a result, decisions about whether to take these days off are left entirely to individual employers and employees, with the only formal option being the use of vacation days. This fragmented and individualized approach undermines the potential for synchronized national rest periods that could yield broader economic and social benefits. A review of the 2025 and 2026 public holiday calendars reveals several natural opportunities for bridge days. In 2025, New Year's Day (Wednesday, January 1) could be extended into a six-day holiday if Monday and Tuesday (December 30–31, 2024) and Thursday and Friday (January 2–3) are treated as bridge days. Old Style Christmas (January 7–8, Tuesday–Wednesday) could form a five-day break if Monday, January 6 is added. Similarly, Labour Day (Thursday, May 1) aligns well with a potential bridge day on Friday, May 2. Independence Day (Wednesday, August 27) offers multiple scenarios, allowing for 5- or even 9-day breaks by adding adjacent days. New Style Christmas (Thursday, December 25) is another textbook case where Friday, December 26 could serve as a bridge day. In 2026, January 1 falls on a Thursday, allowing a four-day weekend with Friday, January 2 off. Old Style Christmas again spans two midweek days (Wednesday-Thursday), with Friday, January 9 as a potential bridge. Other opportunities arise around Independence Day and Easter holidays, depending on yearly religious calendars. These dates show that Moldova, like many other countries, experiences recurring calendar configurations where bridge days can create predictable long weekends. However, the current absence of formal policy turns these into lost opportunities – for both economic stimulation and enhanced employee well-being. The potential benefits of implementing a structured bridge day policy are closely tied to the structure of Moldova's labour market and economic landscape. According to the data of National Bureau Statistics of Moldova (NBS, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c), as of 1st quarter of 2025, Moldova's economically active population (aged 15 and older) was around 807.9 thousands, with 772.7 thousands employed. However, the participation rate remains low at 40.9%, primarily due to long-term emigration, demographic aging, and temporary migration abroad. The average age of the workforce is 44 years, and many sectors face growing recruitment challenges (Logos Press, 2025). Moldova's economy is dominated by the service sector, which employs 64.2% of the workforce, followed by agriculture (16.3%) and industry (13.1%). The service orientation of the economy is significant: sectors like retail, hospitality, and tourism are better positioned to benefit from increased consumer activity during extended weekends, making bridge days a potentially valuable economic lever. Nonetheless, important challenges exist. Informal employment remains high, with 16.6% of the labour force working without formal contracts. This share rises dramatically in agriculture (64.4%) and construction (53.8%), making any labour reform – including bridge days – applicable primarily to those in the formal economy. This risks reinforcing disparities unless broader formalization efforts accompany policy changes. Moreover, financial capacity is a critical limiting factor. The average gross monthly wage in the 1st quarter of 2025 was 14567.5 MDL (approximately €736), but there is substantial income inequality. While IT and telecommunications workers can earn nearly 33818.7 MDL/month (approximately €1708), many employees in healthcare, agriculture, and the arts earn as little as 9244.3-10830.0 MDL/month (approximately €467-547). Surveys indicate that many households consider 20000-30000 MDL/month (approximately €1010-1515) necessary to meet basic needs, suggesting that travel and leisure spending is out of reach for much of the population. Despite these constraints, Moldova's consumer spending indicates untapped demand for domestic tourism, particularly during affordable, short holidays such as bridge-day weekends. While Moldova offers generous leave provisions and a solid holiday structure, the lack of formal recognition for bridge days represents a policy blind spot. Strategic designation of such days – initially for public-sector workers – could enhance work-life balance, stimulate local economies, and foster a more coordinated national rhythm of rest and productivity. Recognizing the constraints posed by informality and wage disparities, any reform should be phased, data-driven, and responsive to Moldova's unique social and economic realities.

This consolidated analysis offers a clear picture of Moldova's labour and economic context. A bridge day policy would affect primarily the formal workforce – 673.8 thousands people – many of whom lack the financial means to fully benefit from additional leisure time. While the dominance of the service sector suggests economic potential, the large informal economy introduces significant uncertainty.

Moldova's Labour Code offers 28 days of annual leave, but the mandatory 14-day block and absence of bridge days limit flexibility (Rivermate, 2025). A bridge day policy wouldn't increase leave but would allow smarter, more adaptive use of existing time off – better aligned with domestic tourism and modern work-life needs. A new legal benefit would only apply to formal workers, risking deeper inequality. To be effective, a bridge day policy should be linked to broader efforts to promote formal employment. With the average wage (14567.5 MDL (approximately €736)) falling below perceived minimum living needs (20000-30000 MDL (approximately €1010-1515)), many workers may lack resources for travel or leisure. A successful policy would require complementary measures, like low-cost tourism incentives, to ensure equitable access to benefits. International models offer important lessons. The Japanese system ensures full predictability but lacks flexibility. In contrast, the French and U.S. models prioritize employer discretion but offer little national coordination. Sweden and Brazil provide middle-ground approaches, balancing flexibility with structured implementation. The Brazilian model is especially relevant for Moldova. Rather than legislating bridge days for all, the government leverages its role as a major employer – declaring bridge days for the public sector, which indirectly influences the private sector. This "market-maker" role allows for low-cost, low-risk experimentation and data collection, offering a practical and phased path for Moldova.

Introducing a formal bridge day policy – whether statutory or discretionary – would have significant economic and social implications. On the cost side, a paid day off for Moldova's 772.7 thousands formally employed workers, with an average monthly salary of 14567.5 MDL, would result in an estimated 536 million MDL (approximately €27 million) in lost output per bridge day. This cost would primarily affect the industrial sector (13.1% of employment), where production halts could disrupt operations and supply chains. However, productivity losses may be offset by improved employee well-being and efficiency. In the service sector (64.2% of employment), tasks can often be rescheduled, and longer weekends may reduce burnout, absenteeism, and turnover. For sectors requiring continuous operation – like logistics or IT – a flexible or discretionary approach would allow better staffing while maintaining services. On the benefit side, bridge days could serve as a targeted economic stimulus, particularly for domestic tourism and retail. Moldova's growing tourist and agrotourist pensions' sector has seen a 12.0% increase in tourist accommodations in 1st quarter of 2025, with activity peaking during holiday periods. Predictable long weekends would enhance this trend, benefiting guesthouses, wineries, and cultural sites. Retail sales also rise during holiday periods, with long weekends prompting spending on food, leisure, and travel-related goods – supporting small and large businesses alike. Beyond economics, bridge days promote employee well-being, reinforcing Moldova's constitutional right to rest. They enable meaningful breaks, family visits, and community participation, contributing to social cohesion. Politically, bridge days could be a low-cost, popular policy, offering tangible quality-of-life improvements without direct spending. Benefits are concentrated in service and tourism sectors, while costs are borne by production-heavy industries. This supports a flexible or hybrid policy, not a rigid statutory model like Japan's. Long weekends encourage urban-to-rural travel, helping shift economic activity from Chișinău to the countryside. This aligns with national development goals and can support more balanced territorial growth. In sum, while bridge days carry real costs, their well-targeted implementation – especially through a phased or public-sector-first model – can deliver measurable economic, social, and political returns.

Having analyzed the Moldovan context, international models, and potential impacts, the final step is to define clear, actionable policy options. We can outline three distinct legislative pathways – inaction, a discretionary framework, and a limited statutory framework – before presenting a recommended phased, hybrid model tailored specifically for the Republic of Moldova.

Option 1 – Maintaining the status quo. The first and simplest option is to make no legislative changes. Under this scenario, the management of bridge days would continue as it does now: an informal and unregulated process left to the discretion of individual employees and employers. Employees would continue to use their annual leave allowance to create long weekends. This approach causes no disruption to existing business operations, imposes no new direct costs on employers, and maintains maximum flexibility for all parties. It requires no political capital or legislative effort. The primary drawback of inaction is the significant opportunity cost. It forgoes the chance to use bridge days as a strategic tool to stimulate the domestic tourism and retail sectors. It perpetuates uncertainty for both employees and businesses, making long-term planning difficult. It also fails to formally address employee well-being and can lead to inconsistent and inequitable treatment of workers across different companies and sectors.

Option 2 – A discretionary framework. This option involves a legislative amendment to create a formal framework for bridge days without mandating them as paid holidays. This "German-style" approach would involve amending the Moldovan Labour Code to formally recognize the concept of a "bridge day." The law would explicitly state that a bridge day can be declared a non-working day through a collective bargaining agreement or by the unilateral policy of an individual employer. The law would *not* grant an automatic right to the day off for all employees. This option provides essential legal clarity and establishes a formal framework for negotiation between social partners. It empowers unions and employers to find solutions that work for their specific industries while maintaining a high degree of flexibility for businesses not covered by such agreements. Its impact may be limited in sectors that lack strong unions or widespread collective agreements. It does not guarantee the coordinated, nationwide breaks that are necessary to maximize the potential impact on the national tourism industry. Furthermore, it would have no effect on the large informal sector of the economy.

Option 3 – A limited statutory framework by designating specific bridge days. This option involves a more interventionist approach, where the state mandates specific bridge days as holidays. This "Swedish/Japanese-like" model would empower the Government, through an amendment to the law on public holidays, to designate one or two specific, high-potential bridge days as official, paid, non-working public holidays each year. For example, the Government could decree that when Christmas falls on a Thursday, the following Friday is a public holiday. This model creates absolute certainty for the designated days, allowing for coordinated national planning by tourism operators, retailers, and citizens. It would maximize the potential economic boost for those specific weekends. It significantly reduces flexibility for businesses, imposing a direct wage cost and forcing a shutdown that may be disruptive for some industries. The process of selecting which days to grant could also become politicized.

The recommended path forward – a phased, hybrid Moldovan model. In light of Moldova's economic structure, legal framework, and the comparative experiences of other countries, a rigid statutory solution or continued inaction on bridge days would both be suboptimal. Instead, the most balanced and effective path forward is a phased, hybrid model, designed to be adaptive, evidence-based, and aligned with Moldova's unique context. The first phase should draw inspiration from Brazil's approach, where the government acts as a "market-maker". Over the course of Years 1–2, the Government of Moldova could begin by declaring certain high-potential bridge days – such as Friday, December 26, 2025 – as official non-working days for the public and budgetary sectors only. This would require no legislative amendments, as such decisions can be made via government decree. By giving a significant portion of the workforce a long weekend, this pilot would create a de facto national holiday, prompting voluntary adaptation by private sector actors and triggering measurable shifts in consumer behaviour. This stage would serve as a controlled experiment, generating important data on tourism activity, retail spending, and economic mobility. The National Bureau of Statistics could be tasked with collecting and analyzing this data to inform future decisions. To maximize impact, this policy should be accompanied by a national awareness campaign led by the Invest Moldova Agency and tourism promotion bodies, encouraging Moldovans to take advantage of long weekends to travel domestically and support local businesses. Based on the results of this pilot, the second phase – implemented in Year 3 – would involve formalizing bridge days in the Labour Code. Rather than mandating them, the government would introduce legal recognition of the concept, allowing bridge days to be granted through collective agreements or internal company policies. This approach empowers employers and unions to negotiate flexible solutions that best fit the operational realities of their sectors, without imposing a one-size-fits-all mandate. By institutionalizing a practice already tested in Phase 1, this step brings clarity and legitimacy to a previously informal arrangement. If, after several years, the collected data shows consistently positive economic and social outcomes, a third and final phase could be considered. From Year 5 onward, the government might choose to designate one specific, high-impact bridge day as a permanent public holiday – mirroring the approach used in Sweden. For instance, a Friday that reliably follows a Thursday holiday such as Christmas could be institutionalized into the national calendar. This would offer maximum predictability for employers, workers, and the tourism industry, solidifying the gains identified during earlier phases. This step, however, should be taken with caution and only when supported by robust evidence. By then, policymakers would have a solid foundation of data showing which bridge day delivers the greatest benefit with minimal disruption. Altogether, this phased and hybrid approach offers Moldova a low-risk, high-reward strategy. It avoids the downsides of abrupt legislative mandates while moving beyond the current legal vacuum that leaves bridge day management to chance. Gradual implementation, guided by measurable outcomes, would allow the country to harness the economic and social benefits of coordinated long weekends while maintaining the flexibility needed to accommodate diverse sectors and worker realities.

Conclusion

The Republic of Moldova currently stands at a crossroads regarding its management of work and rest with regard to bridge days. Its legislative framework, while generous in its allocation of annual leave, suffers from a rigidity that is out of step with modern work-life needs and represents a missed opportunity for economic development. The legislative void concerning bridge days leaves a valuable policy tool untapped, relegating the creation of productivity-enhancing and economy-stimulating long weekends to an uncoordinated, ad-hoc process. This analysis has demonstrated that inaction is not a neutral stance; it is an active choice to forgo the potential benefits that a strategic bridge day policy could bring to domestic tourism, regional development, and retail consumption. It has also shown that a one-size-fits-all statutory mandate, while simple, would be a blunt instrument for Moldova's diverse economy, potentially harming key sectors while benefiting others.

The recommended path – a phased, hybrid model – offers a sophisticated and tailored solution. By first using the government's role as a major employer to act as a 'market-maker', Moldova can test the real-world impacts of coordinated long weekends without imposing immediate costs or disruptions on the private sector. This data-driven pilot program provides the foundation for a subsequent, more formal legislative framework that empowers negotiation and flexibility. Ultimately, formalizing bridge days is not merely about granting more holidays. It is about transforming the calendar from a static schedule into a dynamic instrument of economic and social policy. It is about providing predictable periods of rest that enhance well-being, strengthening family and community bonds, and strategically channeling consumer spending to support local businesses and drive regional growth. By adopting the proposed phased approach, Moldova can bridge the current gap in its legislation and, in doing so, unlock significant benefits for its economy and its citizens.

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