

Filipina Migrant Women in Kosovo: Navigating the challenges of dual discrimination

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Abstract

This article sheds light on the experiences of women from the Philippines working in Kosovo, focusing on the dual discrimination they face as both migrants and women. It explores the concept of gendered invisibility in the context of migrant domestic workers, the prolonged working hours of migrant workers within households, where there is often a blurred boundary between their private lives and employment relationships. The paper examines the specific challenges that these women face in integrating into Kosovo's culture and labor conditions, including the social, economic, and cultural challenges that ensue upon their integration into a new society. In addition to examining their integration challenges in Kosovo, the paper situates these women's experiences within the wider context of international labor migration in the care sector. The research utilized a qualitative approach, specifically conducting eight in-depth interviews with Filipina women with a semi-structured questionnaire.

Keywords: Filipina women; Kosovo, care sector, dual discrimination, labor.

Introduction

In the context of globalization and the restructuring of labor markets, female international labor migration from the Global South in the care sector has become a global yet complex phenomenon. Over the past few years, Kosovo has joined the global trend, with an increasing number of migrant women coming from the Philippines, choosing the country as a working destination, primarily in the area of domestic care work.

This paper explores the experiences of Filipina migrant women workers in Kosovo's care sector, focusing on the intersection of migration and gender as structural axes of discrimination. These women find themselves in highly privatized workspaces – homes – where boundaries between labor and life become blurred, rendering their work socially invisible and legally vulnerable. Based on the problems and complexities of women's migration in Kosovo's care sector, this article poses some core questions that guide the analysis: How do Filipina migrant women perceive care work in Kosovo's context? Do they experience discrimination in the workplace or in their everyday lives, and if so, what forms does this discrimination take? In what ways do their past experiences, such as histories of marginalization or abuse, shape their perspective on current challenges? How do they understand and compare labor conditions in Kosovo with those they have previously encountered? These questions steer the paper in an attempt to bring into view the challenges, risks, and environmental determinants that contribute to the invisibility and precarity of these Filipina migrant women.

Given that until now Kosovo has been a country that produced migrants¹, the presence of foreign migrants in Kosovo represents a relatively new phenomenon and, as such, has received little to no scholarly attention. Currently, most of the public and scholarly debate in Kosovo is concerned with the increasing problem of Kosovar citizens migrating to the Western world. But so far, very little has been discussed publicly about the increasing number of immigrants who are beginning to view Kosovo as a possible destination for employment and residence. As no research of this type has been conducted in Kosovo yet, we discover this research to be highly significant from a scientific point and highly beneficial from a social point, by contributing to a democratic and comprehensive society, and a political point by helping government institutions to draft better migration policies. This renders the article original not only in its articulation of the problem, but also in its methodological approach to studying it.

This article is structured into four sections. The first section, *On the margins of the global care chain*, situates the study within the broader global and regional context of the feminization of labor migration in the care sector. The second section, *Why Kosovo: Europe as a lure and other pull factors*, explores the push factors that influenced the migration of Filipina women and led to their settlement in Kosovo as labor migrants. The third section, *Between gender invisibility and legal boundaries on migrants' employment*, outlines the legal context of migrant workers' rights in Kosovo, focusing on the case of Filipina migrants and the gendered politics of invisibility in domestic care labor. The fourth section, *Networking as a strategy for survival and integration*, presents the empirical findings on the lived experiences of migrant women in Kosovo, focusing on the survival strategies that they adopt, including the use of networking among Filipinas and with the local community. Finally, the article concludes with theoretical and pragmatic reflections on the position and rights of migrant women in Kosovo's care economy.

¹For further insights into the phases of Albanian migration from Kosovo during the 20th century, see Islami, Hivzi. 2008. *Studime demografike: 100 vjet të zhvillimit demografik të Kosovës*, edited by Ekrem Murtezai. Prishtinë: Akademia e Shkencave dhe e Arteve e Kosovës, 255–343, 407–439; Schmitt, Oliver Jens. 2012. *Kosova: Histori e shkurtër e një treve qendrore ballkanike*. Prishtinë: Koha; and Malcolm, Noel. 2011. *Kosovo: A short history (Kosova: Një histori e shkurtër)*. Prishtinë: Koha. Additionally, certain aspects of the diaspora's interaction with their place of origin are explored by Kadriu, Lumniye. 2017. *Pushimet, familja, vendlindja në praktikën e diasporës shqiptare të Kosovës*. Prishtinë: Instituti Albanologjik.

Methodology

For this research, we utilized the theme-guided, open in-depth, semi-structured interview method as our qualitative methodology. We conducted eight in-depth interviews with Filipina women. Four of them were carried out in January 2024 by students² of the Department of Sociology as part of a seminar exercise in the Empirical Research Methods course, supervised by teaching assistant Artan Krasniqi, co-author of this article. The remaining four were carried out in September 2024 by the authors of this article.

In selecting the respondents, we considered the duration of their stay in Kosovo as the primary selection criterion, setting a minimum period of six months as appropriate for the interviews. As such a migration flow to Kosovo is quite new, we were compelled to include members within the lower boundary of adaptation phases, given the relevant research on this topic³. Yet, the majority of the interviewees had remained for more than a period of one year, and this justifies the assertion that we were able to garner information not only on their first-hand experience concerning arrival woes and *culture shock* but also to gather deeper insight as far as their *structural, social, and cultural integration is concerned*. As Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas argue, integration can be understood as a multidimensional process encompassing the legal-political, the socio-economic, and the cultural-religious spheres, and these dimensions help to understand not only the actions of migrants but also how they are positioned and accepted by the host society.⁴ Of the three aforementioned dimensions of integration, in the case of Filipino women working in Kosovo, integration occurs more at the socio-economic level, but it is fragmented and unstable. However, their continued presence in Kosovo is important for future research to see their level of integration in the other two dimensions as well. All the interviewees are employed in the private sector, mostly in the care sector, which, as discussed previously, is one of the primary reasons bringing them to Kosovo. Anonymized data of the respondents are presented as follows: the coding is to facilitate quick orientation to country of origin, “F” = Filipina; gender, “W” = Woman, age during interviews, and duration of stay in Kosovo in years (numerical value with a slash separating them). The interviews were presented anonymously at the respondents' request. The age of the interviewees ranged between 35 and 55 years. One of the pre-recruitment methods as a means of encouraging women to participate in the interviews was through the utilization of a Facebook closed group titled “*Filipina Migrant Workers in Kosovo*”. Interviews were conducted in English and were recorded with their prior permission.

On the margins of the global care chain

One of the defining features of modern global mobility is the feminization of labor migration. As Castles and Miller observe, women now play an increasing role in all forms and routes of migration, reversing past trends in which labor and refugee migration were predominantly male.

² Albiona Dushica, Egzona Haxholli, Qëndresa Deda, Veriona Beqiraj.

³ Oberg, Kalervo. 1960. Cultural shock: Adjustment to new cultural environments. *Practical Anthropology* 7(4), 177–182. Berry, John W. 1997. Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology* 46, 5–34. Portes, Alejandro, and Ruben G. Rumbaut. 2005. Introduction: The second generation and the children of immigrant's longitudinal study. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28(6), 983–999. Bloch, Alice. 2008. Refugees in the UK labour market: The conflict between economic integration and policy-led labour market restriction. *Journal of Social Policy* 37(1), 21–36. Castles, Stephen, and Mark J. Miller. 1998. *The age of migration: International population movements in the modern world*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd.

⁴ Penninx, Rinus, and Blanca Garcés-Mascareñas. 2016. *The concept of integration as an analytical tool and as a policy concept*, in *Integration processes and policies in Europe: Contexts, levels and actors*, edited by Garcés-Mascareñas, Blanca, and Rinus Penninx. Cham: Springer, 11–29.

They argue that since the 1960s, women have transitioned from being categorized primarily under family reunification to becoming central figures in labor migration flows. Today, they constitute the majority in many transnational migration patterns, such as Cape Verdeans to Italy, Filipinas to the Middle East, and Thai women to Japan.⁵

Such global change is embedded firmly in broader processes of globalization. Sassen emphasizes that while globalization has created new circuits of labor in which women play critical roles, the dominant economic discourse continues to portray these changes as gender-neutral. She argues that this set of dynamics can be found in the alternative cross-border circuits described above in which the role of women, and especially the condition of being a migrant woman, is critical.⁶ She highlights how migrant women are often incorporated into the global economy in invisible ways, especially in global cities:

These cities are also sites for the incorporation of large numbers of women and immigrants in activities that service strategic sectors in both shadow and formal economic activities. This is a type of incorporation that renders invisible the fact that these workers are part of the global information economy [...] In this sense, women and immigrants emerge as the systemic equivalent of the offshore proletariat.⁷

Even though these frameworks offer valuable wisdom on the global trends of care migration, this paper aims to evaluate their relevance in Kosovo's context, which is relatively new and lacks a comprehensive study. Rather than applying these theories uncritically, we draw upon them as a starting point to understand the lived realities of Filipina care workers and explore how these phenomena shape and transform in smaller economies. However, while Sassen's formulation helps highlight structural invisibilities, it risks overshadowing the personal agency and negotiated relationships that migrant women sometimes build with employers, especially in less formal labor markets like Kosovo.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) report, written by Marie-José Tayah states that the increasing demand for migrant domestic workers in Europe is driven by five intersecting factors: the growing participation of women in the labour market, the ageing of European societies (fewer adults to look after the sick and the elderly), the longevity revolution characterized by the creation of a fourth generation, and the downsizing of the welfare system conjointly with the commodification and marketization of care work.⁸ Migrant women from the Global South are positioned at the heart of this care economy, often working long hours for low pay under informal or non-binding agreements.

Despite earning more abroad than in their home countries, migrant workers often face wage discrimination in host societies. According to Cheng, Wilson, and Portes explain through the dual labor market theory that migrants are not hired for their skills but for their vulnerability, making them easily exploitable; Cheng explains that this wage differentiation also makes migrant workers appear cheap, and this perceived cheapness lies at the heart of the societal

⁵ Castles and Miller, *The age of migration: International population movements in the modern world*, 9.

⁶ Sassen, Saskia. 2000. Women's burden: Counter-geographies of globalization and the feminization of survival. *Journal of International Affairs* 54, 503–524.

⁷ Sassen, *Women's burden*, 507.

⁸ Tayah, Marie-José. 2016. *Decent work for migrant domestic workers: Moving the agenda forward*. Geneva: International Labour Organization, 37.

discrimination they face.⁹ This observation resonates in Kosovo, where Filipina women even with professional qualifications, often enter the domestic sector. They typically enter through informal networks that value availability and submissiveness more than formal credentials. Some of the Filipina domestic workers in Kosovo describe similarly contradictory experiences, earning more than they would at home, while taking on roles that do not reflect their education or past employment. Filipina domestic workers are emblematic of this contradictory experience. As Parreñas notes, these women experience both upward and downward mobility:

They earn more than they ever would have if they had stayed as professional women in the Philippines. Yet, at the same time, they experience a sharp decline in occupational status and face a discrepancy between their current occupation and actual training.¹⁰

While literature on migration of women and care work has largely focused on industrialized countries¹¹, Kosovo represents an underexplored case within the Southeast European regional context. As a post-conflict country with a developing economy, Kosovo is a new destination for migrant women, especially from the Philippines, employed in the domestic and care sector. This means that it is important to take into account that Kosovo, as a country, has some of its own characteristics that may not fully fit into existing models. Haxhikadrija and Mustafa state that, based on the information provided by private employment agencies, live-in employment is the most common form of arrangement for these workers.¹² This migration pattern reflects a subtle yet important shift in the geography of reproductive labor, reaching beyond traditional destinations in Western Europe to include transition countries experiencing change in family forms and middle-class expansion. Kosovo's entry into the migration chain, even if peripheral in comparison to larger economies, demonstrates how demand for low-wage care labor is no longer limited to more prosperous states. Kosovo's role in this evolving landscape is shaped by global economic dynamics that render the gendered nature of migration invisible. The incorporation of migrant women into the informal and private spheres of work as part of what Sassen terms the "offshore proletariat"¹³ highlights their structural vulnerability and the invisibility of their contributions to both the household and the economy.

Why Kosovo: Europe as a lure and other pull factors

The absence of official diplomatic relations between the Republic of Kosovo and the Philippines adds a twist to the increasing number of Filipina migrant workers in Kosovo. Even though there is no bilateral agreements or official channels for labor migration, more and more women from the Philippines are making their way into Kosovo's care sector. Based on the Law on Foreigners, all foreigners who are citizens of a country for which a visa is required for entry into the Republic

⁹ Cheng, Isabelle. 2020. We want productive workers, not fertile women: The expediency of employing Southeast Asian caregivers in Taiwan. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 61, 453–465.

¹⁰ Parreñas, Rhacel Salazar. 2000. Migrant Filipina domestic workers and the international division of reproductive labor. *Gender & Society* 14, 560–580.

¹¹ Parreñas, Rhacel Salazar. 2005. *The care crisis in the Philippines: Children and transnational families in the new global economy*, in *Global woman: Nannies, maids, and sex workers in the new economy*, edited by Ehrenreich, Barbara and Arlie Russell Hochschild. New York: Metropolitan Books, 39–54; Lutz, Helma. (ed.). 2008. *Migration and domestic work: A European perspective on a global theme*. Aldershot: Ashgate; Anderson, Bridget. 2000. *Doing the dirty work? The global politics of domestic labour*. London: Zed Books.

¹² Haxhikadrija, Amir, and Artan Mustafa. 2024. Access for domestic workers to labour and social protection: The case of Kosovo. *SEER Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe*, 181–205.

¹³ Sassen, *Women's burden*, 510.

of Kosovo are obliged to obtain a visa, or rather what is called an entry visa, prior to entry through an application process.¹⁴ This law also regulates the issue of registering the entry of foreigners into the territory of the Republic of Kosovo, as well as obtaining residence and work permits based on the rules and criteria set forth in the law. According to the official data from the Kosovo's Ministry of Internal Affairs, currently there are a total of 96 citizens from Philippines residing in the country, with 75 females and 21 males. Of these, there are 93 individuals which have entered for employment purposes, while three have migrated for family reunification.¹⁵

Aside from seeing Kosovo as merely a work destination, normally accessed through recruitment agencies or personal agents (which may be licensed recruitment agencies from Philippine institutions and/or informal or unregistered intermediaries), a lot of pull factors behind the migration of Filipina women to Kosovo are geographical in nature. One such driver, as highlighted by some of the interviewees, is the geographical location of the country. For many, Kosovo represents Europe. Even though, as will later be demonstrated throughout this article, Kosovo, as the newest of European states, still faces incredible difficulties with maintaining standards in advanced social equality principles. One participant reflected: "I moved to Europe for the first time when I came to Kosovo, after 15 years of working abroad in the Middle East."¹⁶ Another respondent admitted that she had only discovered Kosovo shortly before she decided to move here. As she explained, "Kosovo was unfamiliar to my family and me. When I decided to move here, my family asked, 'Where is Kosovo?' I said, 'It's part of Europe.'"¹⁷ There were also respondents who had higher expectations for Kosovo, considering the highly developed countries where they had previously worked, as one noted:

It was very different when I arrived here. In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), everything is developed – big buildings, infrastructure. When I came to Kosovo, I thought, 'This country is not very developed; it's still in a developing phase.' It's very different from the Middle East.¹⁸

Many of the women migrating to Kosovo are part of what is described in migration theory as *chain migration*.¹⁹ Women tend to invite other women, friends, or relatives to join and become part of the emerging Filipina community in Kosovo. One woman explained: "I heard about Kosovo from a friend who was working in North Macedonia. I sent her my CV, and she passed it along to her agent, who then found this job for me. I was interviewed via video call and hired."²⁰ Also, another respondent shared a similar story: "Before coming here, I worked in Hong Kong, China, for five months, but I was uncomfortable with my employer. A friend recommended I come to Kosovo instead. Now I have a very good employer – a Kosovar family."²¹ At this stage, it is

¹⁴ Republic of Kosovo. 2013. Law No. 04/L-219 on Foreigners. Official Gazette of the Republic of Kosovo, 8 August 2014, Article 11.

¹⁵ Kosovo's Ministry of Internal Affairs, Media Department. Internal memo. Data received in response to an official data request, 17 October, 2025.

¹⁶ Interview with FW41/5, conducted by Agnesa Haxhiu, Prishtina, 4 September 2024.

¹⁷ Interview with FW36/1, conducted by Egzona Haxholli, Prishtina, 10 January 2024.

¹⁸ Interview with FW40/2, conducted by Artan Krasniqi, Prishtina, 5 September 2024.

¹⁹ Massey, Douglas S. / Arango, Joaquin / Hugo, Graeme / Kouaouci, Ali / Pellegrino, Adela, and Taylor, Edward J. 1993. Theories of international migration: A review and appraisal. *Population and Development Review* 19(3), 431–466. King, Russell. 2012. *Theories and typologies of migration: An overview and a primer*.

²⁰ Interview with FW41/5, conducted by Agnesa Haxhiu, Prishtina, 4 September 2024.

²¹ Interview with FW36/1, conducted by Egzona Haxholli, Prishtina, 10 January 2024.

worth noting that several women expressed a sense of freedom in Kosovo, emphasizing general satisfaction with their working conditions, their employers, and the welcoming nature of Kosovar society:

This country is very nice, and I feel free here. I used to work in Hong Kong, Kuwait, Abu Dhabi, etc., and those places were very different. When I arrived in Kosovo, I felt genuinely welcomed. I thought, 'Maybe I'll stay here longer.' In the Middle East, I was abused by the families I worked for – one family even locked me in my room. I was scared and couldn't continue working there. The working conditions were awful. Here, I work for a Kosovan family, and I love them. They are open-minded and kind. I'm grateful I found them.²²

Yet, as shall be discussed further in this article, though these women enjoy a sense of relative liberty, particularly when compared to previous abusive work situations, that sense of freedom is not necessarily one in which they entirely enjoy labor rights set out by international human rights and labor norms. Their testimonies are ones of resilience and accommodation, and not necessarily of the complete realization of rights. The type of work that Filipina women do is a significant factor in determining why they chose Kosovo as their migration destination. Despite the widespread public belief that the majority of Filipina migrants are employed primarily as caregivers or domestic workers, empirical data indicate that this phenomenon does not always apply in the context of Kosovo. In actuality, three out of eight Filipinas who were interviewed worked in occupations other than housework, such as waitressing, teaching, and embassy work. One of them was employed at a foreign embassy in Kosovo as a staff member, and another was a teacher at an international school in Prishtina, the capital city of Kosovo. As for the waitress, she described her circumstances as follows: "As a migrant, I worked as an accountant in another country, but I was unable to continue in that career when I moved to Kosovo due to a language barrier – I don't speak Albanian well enough to work as an accountant."²³

In the case of Kosovo, this development is especially noteworthy because it represents a fundamental change in public opinion. It dispels preconceived notions about immigrant women and emphasizes the variety of occupations they hold in the local workforce. At the same time, the ability to work outside the domestic sphere often hinges on factors such as English or Albanian proficiency, employer networks, and urban location.

Between gender invisibility and legal boundaries on migrants' employment

The working conditions of migrant domestic workers, most of whom are women, are intrinsically tied to labor rights and gender equality. Legislation on minimum wage, working hours, and maternity protection is essential to ensure fair treatment. This is particularly relevant given that domestic work is often perceived as "unskilled" and "undeserving" of proper financial compensation.²⁴ As Tayah argues, bringing domestic work under labor legislation is not only a legal imperative but also a matter of gender justice.²⁵

As is generally well known, the labor contract is the focal legal contract governing employer-employee relations. Interviews with Filipina women who work in Kosovo reveal a consistent

²² Interview with FW35/1, conducted by Qendresa Deda, Prishtina, 10 January 2024.

²³ Interview with FW55/1, conducted by Albiona Dushica, Prishtina, 8 January 2024.

²⁴ Tayah, *Decent work for migrant domestic workers*, 52.

²⁵ Tayah, *Decent work for migrant domestic workers*, 52.

pattern: the overwhelming majority of the women signed official contracts via the recruitment agency with which they worked. These types of contracts, in theory, are in line with Kosovo's current labor law that has been significantly shaped by international support and informed by European best practice across the state's post-independence development. Nevertheless, although they may officially exist, this type of contract is frequently not implemented. It must be mentioned that this is widespread practice across Kosovo's labor market, even when the employees themselves are local. Supporting this, a report from Kosovo Women's Network states that "An estimated 42 % of Kosovars were engaged in informal work in 2022. Women were almost twice as likely as men to engage in informality, comprising 65 % of informal workers."²⁶ This highlights broader systemic issues that Kosovo is attempting to address through its ongoing alignment with European Union (EU) labor standards. Kosovo, not being an EU member state but aiming to be one, is significantly affected by the EU integration processes, particularly with harmonizing its labor law and human rights standards. It is thus committed to aligning its legislation with the *acquis communautaire*, such as the protection of the rights of migrant workers, anti-discrimination, and gender equality in the labor market. The European Commission's 2023 report noted:

The legal framework is largely in line with the EU *acquis*. Steps should be undertaken to further align legislation, including the Law on foreigners, with the EU *acquis* and international standards. It is recommended that Kosovo align legislation with Directive 2008/115/EC (the Return Directive), include a humanitarian protection category, and extend the voluntary return period.²⁷

These findings underscore that, while the legal system of Kosovo, on paper, seems to be in line with EU standards, key safeguards, particularly those concerning women migrants in precarious or informal work, are undernourished or lacking in actuality. Tayah notes that written contracts cannot substitute for access to justice or labor law protections, particularly when there is an inherent power imbalance between employer and employee, as is the case when workers' visas and residence depend on the employer. She argues:

Contracts are based on the assumption that the two contractual parties have similar power whereas, in reality, access to remedy in case of breach of these contracts could be very limited for migrant domestic workers where they are in irregular situation, where their visa and work permits are tied to their employers, and where they live and work in the household of the employer with limited access to the world outside without prior knowledge and approval by their employer.²⁸

A majority of the women interviewees revealed that they possessed limited information about their workers' rights under Kosovo's labor legislation. A few confessed that the work they are supposed to perform exceeds what was outlined in their labor contracts. However, they tend to tolerate such added workload, primarily due to the economic benefits, i.e., bonuses that the employers offer. The most significant violation of labor rights that this research uncovered pertains to working extra hours. According to Kosovo's Labor Law, working hours are defined as the period during which the employee performs duties or services for the employer, with a

²⁶ Kosovo Women's Network. *In the shadows: Report on informal work in Kosovo* (accessed: 15 November 2025), 12.

²⁷ European Commission. 2023. *Enlargement package – Report on Kosovo*. SWD(2023) 692 final, 8 November 2023. 52.

²⁸ Tayah, *Decent work for migrant domestic workers*, 52.

standard limit of 40 hours per week.²⁹ In exceptional circumstances, such as increased workload or operational necessity, employees may be required to work up to an additional eight hours per week, but only for a limited time and with proper justification.³⁰

A 39-year-old Filipina woman who has been living in Kosovo for two years noted that, despite the time she has spent in the country, she and her peers know little about the labor law for migrants, as well as about the basic salaries here in Kosovo:

We just know that in Kosovo, the European labor law is applicable, and initially, there are eight working hours per day, but other than that, we do not know. We have heard that the law allows just five working days, and we did not know about that. Because you know, there are women who are working more than eight hours and have just one day off.³¹

Another interviewee elaborated on the nature of contract negotiations:

The agency negotiated the contract with my employer. In the initial contract, it was defined that the lowest salary would be € 500, with free accommodation, free food, eight working hours per day, and 21 days of annual leave. But the implementation of the contract depends on the employer. Some employers do not follow the contract.³²

This imbalance between contract terms and their implementation reflects the gap between Kosovo's legal framework and the reality on the ground. While this fact was not mentioned by our interviewees, Hoxha, an official from the local NGO Kosovar Stability Initiative (KSI)³³ that monitors the working conditions of Filipina women in Kosovo publicly claimed that: “When they arrive here and are given a job, their identification documents are taken away from them, which is a violation of human rights, and their fate will be in the hands of the employers.”³⁴ A similar situation has been documented in Albania, which has recently experienced a large influx of workers from the Philippines. An investigation conducted by BIRN Albania into allegations of labor rights violations revealed that three Filipino women employed at a local restaurant had their passports confiscated by their employer. The employer reportedly refused to return them without paying a penalty in exchange for their return, effectively restricting the workers' freedom of movement and raising serious concerns about potential exploitation. As BIRN reports, many migrant workers in Albania experience “fraudulent recruitment practices, unfair labor practices, and being forced to perform jobs other than those for which they were recruited, abuses that are facilitated by the lack of action by police and immigration authorities.”³⁵ This pattern of vulnerability is evident in other countries across Southern Europe as well. For instance, Lazaridis notes that domestic workers are amongst the most exploited groups in a society like Greece, which is marked by inequality.³⁶ Filipina workers cannot enter the country legally unless

²⁹ Republic of Kosovo. 2010. *Law No. 03/L-212 on Labour*. Official Gazette of the Republic of Kosovo, 1 November 2010, Article 20.

³⁰ Republic of Kosovo, *Law No. 03/L-212 on Labour*, Article 30, 9.

³¹ Interview with FW39/2, conducted by Artan Krasniqi, Prishtina, 9 September 2024.

³² Interview with FW40/2, conducted by Artan Krasniqi, Prishtina, 5 September 2024.

³³ The NGO KSI has not yet published any report regarding this monitoring process.

³⁴ KTV – Kohavision. *Shkelja e të drejtave të punëtorëve në Kosovë. Brikena Hoxha – “60 Minuta”*. Youtube (accessed: 22 May 2025).

³⁵ Reporter.al. 2025. *Shqipëria hap dyert e ‘skllavërisë moderne’ për punëtorët e huaj*. Reporter.al, 21 July 2025.

³⁶ Lazaridis, Gabriella. 2000. *Filipino and Albanian women migrant workers in Greece: Multiple layers of oppression*, in *Gender and migration in Southern Europe: Women on the move*, edited by Anthias, Floya, and Gabriella Lazaridis. Oxford: Berg, 49–79.

they have a visa and have obtained a contract of employment through an agency bureau, which charges a high fee for the service it provides: “This ensures the worker's vulnerability, in that if she chooses to break the contract and leave the job or if she gets fired, she has to leave the country. Others decide to overstay.”³⁷

Lack of Philippine diplomatic ties with Kosovo is envisioned as an issue by several participants, with the assumption that having a possible diplomatic presence of their nation in Kosovo would provide them with a safer contact point. Still, some mentioned that they have been promised support and care for Filipina laborers, like anywhere else in the world, through online engagement with the government: “The state officials have given us their word that they will take care of our well-being and that we can always report any form of exploitation.”³⁸

Despite the above deviations in the application of contracts, several Filipina women working in Kosovo expressed relative satisfaction with the conditions they work in. This is mainly due to the relatively higher salaries they earn, typically ranging from € 500 to € 700. While this range is above the minimum wage and approaches or exceeds the national average wage in some cases, the minimum wage in Kosovo is currently € 350 gross per month, according to a decision of the Government of Kosovo³⁹, meanwhile, the average gross wage is € 639 per month according to the Kosovo Agency of Statistics⁴⁰. Furthermore, since many reside in the houses they work at, their rent is also not required. Similarly, meals are usually provided by their employers, saving them their living expenses. These working arrangements, while cost-effective for the workers, are advantageous to the employers as well. By providing shelter and food, sometimes coupled with reward incentives based on performance, the employers can guarantee the continuous presence and accessibility of domestic workers in their workplaces. However, financial satisfaction has another side that needs to be interpreted with caution. The financial benefits may come at the cost of legal protections, personal autonomy, or emotional well-being. The empirical findings presented in this chapter resonate with, but also complicate the concept of gendered invisibility in the context of migrant domestic workers, which refers to the structural and symbolic erasure of women's labor, particularly in the realm of reproductive and care work. Parreñas argues that migrant women replace the unpaid labor of local women, becoming institutionally invisible. Their position in the global division of reproductive labor reflects and reproduces gendered inequalities, both in sending and receiving countries.⁴¹ Yet empirical evidence from this study is more mixed and frequently contradictory. In the Kosovar context, some women describe a feeling of belonging, protection, and even affection from their employers. This suggests that forms of care and exploitation may exist together in complex ways. One participant shared the following experience:

I have a contract and insurance, but for me it is different. I am the nanny of the family's baby, and sometimes I work 20 hours. But sometimes they give me extra money and extra days off. They also take me on vacation when they travel with the baby, and I'm happy about that because I get to see new countries. I didn't have to ask for a salary

³⁷ Lazaridis, *Filipino and Albanian women migrant workers in Greece*, 50.

³⁸ Interview with FW55/1, conducted by Albiona Dushica, Prishtina 8 January 2024.

³⁹ Government of the Republic of Kosovo. 2024. *Vendimet e Qeverisë*. *Gazeta Zytare e Republikës së Kosovës*, 29 August 2024.

⁴⁰ Kosovo Agency of Statistics. *Level of wages in Kosovo, 2024* (accessed: 11 October 2025).

⁴¹ Parreñas, *Migrant Filipina domestic workers and the international division of reproductive labor*, 569.

increase – they just did it. They even sent me to a private hospital when I had health problems.⁴²

The lives of migrant women are not only characterized by exploitation, but can instead contain instances of recognition, care, privilege, and the emotional attachments that often develop between nannies and children, though sometimes still rooted in unequal power dynamics. Since many of the Filipino women work as nannies in Kosovar families, the relationships between these women and children are still in their early stages. It is likely that strong emotional bonds will develop over time, as suggested by Anderson, who argues that employers often rely on the fiction of labor power to frame care as commodified and thus emotionally neutral. The reality is that care work frequently involves the whole person. For domestic workers, particularly those deprived of their own children, emotional investment in the children they care for can become deeply personal and intense.⁴³

In the context of Kosovo, the evolution of these bonds will be an important subject for future research, particularly when more empirical evidence based on this relationship can be generated. Instead of reinforcing a singular narrative of exploitation, the interviews indicate that migrant domestic work in Kosovo is influenced by various elements, including the employer's nationality, the nature of the contract, and the relationship between the worker and employer.

In the meantime, the majority of the Filipina domestic workers live with their employers within the family home, labor longer hours in the home, blurring the line between their private lives and their working lives, and isolating them from society as a whole. Isolation makes their work less visible and their working conditions harder to monitor, strengthening their social invisibility. This construction, while socially helpful to host societies, operates to hide the exploitative relations behind migrant women's living and work arrangements. By living and working in a private sphere of dwelling, their labor becomes institutionally and socially invisible. Despite having workers not reside full-time with their employer's household, the employer normally maintains control over the conclusion of the workday. In all the interviews conducted, the employer offered meals and housing.

During the interview with my employer, I asked her how many hours I would have to work because it was not specified in the contract. She said it would be 10 or 11 hours a day, and I agreed. I don't live in their house, but they respect our agreement. Every time my shift ends, my employer tells me it's time to go. They cover all my expenses – apartment, food, and bills.⁴⁴

Unlike in high-income destinations, where migrant care work is often formal, the informal and flexible job arrangements in Kosovo create unique patterns of negotiation and dependency. Of note here is the observation that not all employers violate the conditions of the contract. A woman employed in non-domestic service described how the conditions of her work are fully in accordance with the law of contract: "I work 8 hours per day, and they follow the contract I signed. I do not stay in their house, but they pay for my apartment, food, and the bills."⁴⁵ Despite

⁴² Interview with FW41/5, conducted by Agnesa Haxhiu, Prishtina, 4 September 2024.

⁴³ Anderson, Bridget. 2006. *Doing the dirty work? The global politics of domestic labour*, in *Global dimensions of gender and carework*, edited by Zimmerman, Mary K. / Litt, Jacquelyn S., and Christine E. Bose. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 226–237.

⁴⁴ Interview with FW35/1, conducted by Qendresa Deda, Prishtina, 10 January 2024.

⁴⁵ Interview with FW36/1, conducted by Egzona Haxholli, Prishtina, 10 January 2024.

these exceptions, the systemic structure remains problematic because it does not eliminate the burden of reproductive labor; it merely transfers it from one group of women to another, typically poorer and more marginalized.

Networking as a strategy for survival and integration

The creation of migrant networks is a well-documented practice across all diasporas. Individuals who share common ethnic backgrounds often engage in associations that serve a variety of functions, ranging from addressing personal challenges to organizing collective social and political activities. Social networking platforms such as Facebook also play an instrumental role in the formation and maintenance of these migrant networks. Turnbull, Ching, & Yu note that:

Short-term work contracts and the maintenance of strong links with families, as well as the replication of social networks in host destinations, are factors that provide great support but may also limit an individual's acculturation over time.⁴⁶

In our research context, for example, private Facebook groups facilitated access to migrant women in Kosovo, easing the identification and recruitment of interview participants. Digital platforms have become a space of emotional and practical support. In this regard, Umel explores how Filipina migrants use Facebook to negotiate diasporic chronotopes, spatiotemporal constructions of identity that link memories of the homeland with experiences in the host country.⁴⁷ Similarly, Navalta investigates how Filipina women in Japan have appropriated Facebook groups to build alternative spaces for connection, mutual aid, and the articulation of shared concerns.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, Filipinas in Kosovo have gone beyond virtual networking. Although Kosovo is a relatively new destination for this community, migrant women have spoken of the necessity to establish a formal association, reflecting a proactive effort to institutionalize their presence and support networks on the ground. On 4 February 2023, they established the association, which is not registered in Kosovo, but it is recognized by the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW) in the Philippines.

The association has 46 members; some Filipina women living here still don't know about our organization. We wanted to have someone to have our back because we are in a foreign country, so we have our organization – at least we have someone who can help us. And now, we have some partners.⁴⁹

The fact that Filipina women in Kosovo are organizing at the grassroots level suggests active engagement to integration and mutual support, even in a context where migration infrastructures are not highly developed. In addition to internal cohesion, all interviewees have expressed a need to form strategic partnerships with local structures and stakeholders. These partnerships are perceived as vital for achieving greater visibility and for advancing migrant rights agenda in Kosovo. A respondent explained: "That's why we want to build a community here and to create partnerships with organizations who can support us and talk about our rights as migrants."⁵⁰ Most of the interviewees generally have positive experiences with the host

⁴⁶ Turnbull, Margo / Ching, Tiffany, and Carol Yu. 2023. Perceptions of health and coping strategies among temporary migrant workers in East and Southeast Asia: A systematic review. *International Journal for Equity in Health* 22, 1–17.

⁴⁷ Umel, Audris. 2022. Filipina migrants in Germany and their diasporic (irony) chronotopes on Facebook. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 26(6), 768–784.

⁴⁸ Navalta, Razel Andrea D. 2023. Sis, mamsh, kasodan: Belonging and solidarity on Facebook groups among Filipina women migrants in Japan. *Plaridel* 20(2), 31–58.

⁴⁹ Interview with FW40/2, conducted by Artan Krasniqi, Prishtina, 5 September 2024.

⁵⁰ Interview with FW40/1, conducted by Veriona Beqiraj, Prishtina, 10 January 2024.

society. They describe Kosovars as friendly, welcoming, and open to cultural exchange. One of the interviewees mentioned being invited to a family celebration, which she understood as a key gesture of acceptance: “It is not hard to make local friends because they are very friendly. As soon as I meet local people, they invite me for a coffee. It is very easy to adapt.”⁵¹ While some of the interviewees may see their incorporation into local families positively, this experience can also be read through Anderson’s critique of how domestic workers are symbolically incorporated into the “family”. She warns:

For the employer, there are clear advantages to the obfuscation of the employment relationship, since it seriously weakens the worker's negotiating position in terms of wages and conditions. Any attempt to improve these is an insult to the "family" and evidence of the worker's money-grubbing attitude. The worker risks forfeiting "good" relations with her employers by making too many demands.⁵²

This sense of cultural compatibility was echoed by others, who noted the shared openness and lifestyle similarities between the two cultures: “It is not so hard for us to cope with culture here, because it is very alike with our culture, your openness of mind, clubbing, it is not a big adjustment for us to cope with your culture.”⁵³ Food is a central area of cultural adaptation and exchange. Not only do some Filipina migrant women transfer their native recipes to the local families, but they also learn with great enthusiasm how to make Kosovar food and perceive this gastronomic learning process as an act of integration and respect for each other. As one participant described the process of learning to cook:

I have learned to cook all the traditional foods here, and I know how to cook pasul, flija, llokuma, gullash, pite me mish [sic. – She pronounced these Albanian dish names. And I learned all of that from the mother of my boss; she came to help me learn to cook the traditional food. I also learned to cook international food from a chef at one of the hotels in Prishtina – my boss hired him to teach me. I am so lucky to have this opportunity to know how to cook so many meals.⁵⁴

Although they acknowledge a few differences in food culture, particularly the prevalence of rice in the Filipina diet, many expressed a high level of adaptability and curiosity regarding Kosovar food traditions: While one interviewee stated, “regarding the food, there are a lot of differences, but Filipina meals are all about rice for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. But it is not hard to adjust to the food here,”⁵⁵ another noted, “I like to eat pasul because we have something that is the same as pasul, but it cooks differently.”⁵⁶ Other than creating networks with each other and being incorporated into Kosovar society, most of the participants appear to be adapting very well to host country life. Talking of plans for the future, most confirm that they do not feel discriminated against within the Kosovar context. What they describe is a general sense of stability, satisfaction with their conditions of work, and a desire to continue their lives in Kosovo. One interviewee shared: “For now, I can say my life is good here, and I am working with the association. I would like to contribute there. I cannot say I will move from Kosovo in the near

⁵¹ Interview with FW36/2, conducted by Agnesa Haxhiu, Prishtina, 10 September 2024.

⁵² Anderson, *Doing the dirty work?*, 234.

⁵³ Interview with FW40/2, conducted by Artan Krasniqi, Prishtina, 5 September 2024.

⁵⁴ Interview with FW41/5, conducted by Agnesa Haxhiu, Prishtina, 4 September 2024.

⁵⁵ Interview with FW40/2, conducted by Artan Krasniqi, Prishtina, 5 September 2024.

⁵⁶ Interview with FW35/1, conducted by Qendresa Deda, Prishtina, 10 January 2024.

future; I do not have the plan yet.”⁵⁷ Another echoed this sentiment, saying: “So far, my life is good here, so I do not know what I will do in the near future.”⁵⁸ These responses suggest that some Filipina women perceive Kosovo as a viable and even desirable space for mid to long-term residence, particularly when their employment remains stable. However, for some, the decision to stay is conditional upon job security. One woman noted:

It depends on the employer. If they say ‘we do not need you anymore,’ I can find something else to work and move from Kosovo. But if they say that I can stay longer, I will stay – because I have children in high school now, and soon they will go to college. I need to earn more for them to finish their studies.⁵⁹

Only one respondent explicitly mentioned the plan to leave Kosovo. Her reasoning was personal and long-term, centered around retirement and family reunification: “I am planning to move from Kosovo to the Philippines after five years and to retire, because then my children will graduate, and I would like to spend time with them.”⁶⁰ The narratives of stability and future planning shared by many interviewees suggest that maybe Kosovo is not merely a temporary stop, but a potential long-term destination. This contradicts the dominant assumptions that migrant domestic workers in less developed countries remain transient or marginal. However, these positive experiences shared by research participants should not be interpreted as universally representative of all migrant care workers in Kosovo. The women interviewed in this research reflect a specific subgroup, those who were accessible and willing to share their stories. This does not mean that other migrant women share the same experiences, many of whom may face less favorable conditions, including isolation, exploitation, or strained relationships with employers, which may not be expressed or documented.

Conclusions

Based on the empirical findings, the placement of Filipina women as workers in Kosovo, as a new phenomenon for a country that has so far produced migrants towards Western countries, can be seen from at least two perspectives. From Kosovo’s local perspective, this can be perceived as an expansion towards the global labor market, which could be interpreted as an index of development. From the perspective of Filipina women, who have traditionally migrated to Western and Gulf countries, Kosovo, perceived as a European country, represents an additional opportunity. It provides them relatively stable employment with an average income and, as they say, a certain kind of freedom that they had not experienced before.

As it is stated, they come from deeply discriminatory and abusive experiences, where some subjects have even shown that they have been physically exploited and psychologically abused in the countries where they worked before. Thus, life in the Kosovar context does not seem discriminatory to them at all, not because it is not but because they do not perceive it as such. In this case, we cannot dispute the truthfulness of their statements, just as we cannot rule out the possibility that they did not feel free and unafraid to express all their experiences about work and life in Kosovo. They did not state that they have experienced any form of violence from their employers in Kosovo. However, as we have seen, they work long hours, with relatively low wages compared to the working hours, often in contradiction with the initial contracts agreed by their

⁵⁷ Interview with FW40/2, conducted by Artan Krasniqi, Prishtina, 5 September 2024.

⁵⁸ Interview with FW36/1, conducted by Egzona Haxholli, Prishtina, 10 January 2024.

⁵⁹ Interview with FW35/1, conducted by Qendresa Deda, Prishtina, 10 January 2024.

⁶⁰ Interview with FW41/5, conducted by Agnesa Haxhiu, Prishtina, 4 September 2024.

employment agency with the employer, and in an informational vacuum in relation to the rights guaranteed to them by domestic and international legislation.

Viewing the issue through a relative lens, and in light of transnational path dependencies, contributes to the invisibility of these ongoing abuses, long working hours, low pay, and violation of employment contracts within Kosovo's context. The shared experiences of Filipina migrant workers in Kosovo highlight the dual discrimination they face as a function of both their gender and migrant status. The overlapping challenges posed by precarious working conditions and systemic discrimination necessitate comprehensive strategies to address their unique vulnerabilities. The legal and institutional framework in Kosovo, largely in line with the EU *acquis*, often fails to protect migrant workers in practice. Contracts are inconsistently enforced, migrant women lack knowledge of Kosovo's labor laws and working conditions, particularly long hours and dependence on employers, reveal a significant gap between legal protections on paper and actual experiences. Migrant women often perform work beyond what is stipulated in their contracts, while their residency and legal status are often tied to their employers, exacerbating their structural vulnerability.

The lack of diplomatic relations not only questions the process of their migration but also places such workers in a more susceptible position regarding the protection of their labor rights. Without a formal institutional structure of diplomatic oversight or consular support, the Filipina migrant workers in Kosovo would be left more vulnerable to exploitation, with no legal recourse, and with little institutional back-up on cases of abuse or violations of rights. Their status thus highlights the vulnerability of labor conditions among migrant workers where state-level cooperation is lacking. It should be emphasized that these women are often educated and qualified for certain jobs, but due to the language barriers or other factors, they are forced to accept jobs related to domestic care.

Networking among themselves and with the locals is explained as a strategy of both survival and social integration. Survival in the sense that they are living in a country far from their homeland, not only geographically but above all socially and culturally. Under these conditions, networking on social media within their community through closed groups on the one hand, and on the other hand, their participation in support groups and various local organizations that aim to advocate for their rights, as well as socializing with the locals, creates opportunities for paths towards their visibility and integration into the social context of Kosovo.

Given the qualitative nature and limited scale of this study, further research is needed to explore the full range of migrant care workers' experiences in Kosovo, particularly those that may involve discrimination, conflict, or invisible forms of exploitation. Future research and advocacy efforts must continue to unpack these layered experiences to promote their rights and overall well-being in the context of labor migration.

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