

RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Filipino Migrant Women in Domestic Work: A Comparative Evaluation Among Türkiye, East Asian, and Middle Eastern Countries

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### Abstract

This study examines the work experiences of female Filipino domestic workers in some countries and presents comparative evaluations between Türkiye and selected countries in the Middle East and East Asia. From this point of view, the data used in the study were collected from different country cases, including Türkiye and selected countries in East Asia and the Middle East. The evaluations were revealed through descriptive analysis with comparison. Several studies, reports, and news about female Filipino domestic workers from these countries were reviewed throughout this research. By comparing the working conditions and their experiences in said countries, it is understood that workers are alone in bearing the consequences of the lack of protection between the walls of private homes. Therefore, this study stresses that immigrant workers' rights are violated at domestic-related work in many ways. They face severe abuses and human rights violations in some regions where slave-like conditions still exist. As a result, reviewing the existing migration and labour laws should be the first step to be taken by the host countries. As such, sustainable policies should be introduced immediately to reduce the vulnerability of migrant domestic workers and provide adequate protection.

### Keywords

Migrant Workers, Domestic Work, Filipino Workers, Working Conditions, Türkiye

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## Introduction

Women can find overseas jobs easier than their male counterparts can in domestic work due to traditional gender perspectives in society. This situation creates millions of women working abroad taking care of the other families' households. Additionally, in line with globalization, more women have started to work in the service sector, and many jobs have been transformed by the characteristics of traditional gender roles. Again, more jobs are pointed as women's job due to increasing and deepening of gender segregation. According to traditional roles, women's employment in jobs seen as an extension or similar to their "duties" at home brings about the perception that their economic contribution is temporary and marginal (Yalçın, 2015).

As underlined in previous research, domestic work is, by its nature, work where the worker's bargaining power is low. In addition, domestic work does not have clear boundaries in terms of a job description and working hours. Workers provide many services such as babysitting, elderly care, cleaning, shopping, and cooking. In 2019, the ILO estimated that at least 75.6 million people are employed in households, but only two out of every ten domestic workers enjoyed legal coverage. Therefore, millions of workers have to work and live without labour laws or social protection. Because of this, in many countries, domestic workers are vulnerable in difficult situations both inside and outside the household (ILO, 2021). The International Domestic Workers Federation reports that, in the worst cases, domestic workers in private homes suffer from physical abuse, starvation, being housebound, rape, and death. The IDWF also argues that, in the lives of domestic workers, violence, harassment, and assault are all too common forms of abuse in many countries (IDWF, 2020).

One of the specific migrant groups that are discussed when it comes to domestic workers is female Filipinos. The economic crisis in the Philippines and its consequences like unemployment and low wages are the main factors in women's decision to migrate (Loh & Estrellado, 2016; Nadeau, 2007). Additionally, the wages in the Philippines are insufficient to provide for the family's livelihood, the education of children, and to make any savings for the future (Agunias & Ruiz, 2007; Sayres, 2007). Moreover, government policies also support this migration movement. Furthermore, women are seen as the nation's heroes, by contributing to the economy by working overseas (Deniz, 2018; Gürson, 2021). Therefore, thousands of women in the Philippines leave

their homes, families, and children and migrate overseas to work and earn a better income every year (ILO, 2021).

This study presents a comparison of the experiences of female Filipino domestic workers in Türkiye and selected countries in the Middle East and East Asia. There are also a significant number of female Filipino domestic workers living in Europe and America, but they are not included in this study. The results of many previous field studies were used in the analysis. However, much of the research shows that countries have recorded high numbers of abused employees in some regions. This is the reason behind the selecting of the countries that are the subject of this study. The chosen countries, except for Türkiye, show a high frequency of exploitation in terms of ill working conditions or abuse. However, there are also a significant number of the migrant population in these countries whose working environment or employers are decent. As a result, the evaluation may not be generalized to a specific nation or country.

### **Characteristics of Domestic Work**

The live-in work agreements or paid domestic work do not have clear boundaries regarding what to do or not to do. It also does not have a clear definition that can be set by sharp boundaries. While other types of work have clear definitions of responsibility and working hours, paid domestic work does not have a clear definition that sets boundaries with working schedule and rest time. By tradition, domestic work is always thought to be part of meeting families' physical and emotional needs. These responsibilities were not accepted as paid jobs by society for a long time. Thus, this point of view often causes women that work in domestic services to be seen more as helpers than workers (Cheng, 1996). However, today, domestic work is usually transferred to temporary foreign helpers in many newly industrialized countries, and it is seen as a pattern of new industrialization. In addition, these new emerging forms of migration are becoming more common in some developed countries due to demographic changes in their labour market and the increasing need for domestic helpers as more local women enter the workforce (Cortés & Pan, 2013). As this situation turns into a necessity, new national and international regulations are also needed. In this context, the International Labour Organization has adopted the ILO Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers, "*Convention No.*

*189 or (C189)*” for short, which is an important regulation regarding domestic workers. At the ILO meeting held in Geneva in 2011, it was decided to adopt proposals for decent work for domestic workers. The relevant suggestions turned into a form of a Convention which was accepted as international legislation later on (ILO, 2011). More than ten years have passed since the C189 was accepted. However, the working conditions of workers still have not been improved. They earn lower wages with fewer benefits. In addition, the majority of them work without employment contracts compared to other wage workers. In fact, it is seen that domestic workers are still excluded from labour laws and social security protection in many countries (WEIGO, 2022).

### **Historical Background of Philippines Migration Policies**

The Philippines’ migration history is traced back to their time of colonial period. The country was under Spanish colonial rule for more than three centuries. After a war between Spain and American forces, a treaty was signed, and this time, the Philippines became a US colony for nearly five decades. However, the Philippines became independent after World War II in 1946. With these historical links, Filipinos being migrants meant going to the US and its territories until the government migration programs started in the 1960s and 1970s officially. Many Filipino workers went to the US and its territories like Hawaii to work in agricultural zones or low-paid service jobs in the 1900s. This labour movement was considered an internal migration because of the colonial period. Today, under government supervision and migration policies, the country has become one of the top ten countries whose citizens work as overseas foreign workers (OFWs) globally (Asis, 2006).

In the Philippines, moving abroad for work or better life opportunities is a common choice for locals. Filipinos have left their homes and moved to another country for permanent or temporary jobs over the years. In addition, in 1970, the Philippines Government launched and promoted an overseas employment program that attracted many Filipinos who wanted to provide better opportunities for their families and themselves. In addition to this program, Marcos’s Government implemented the Philippines’ new Labour Code in 1974. This migration program introduced labour-short countries such as the Middle East with the local workforce. As time passed, the destination countries varied and increased, and the number of Filipino workers that participated in the overseas

labour market rose accordingly. This labour migration also became successful in terms of labour import. In particular, the government has benefited greatly from this labour migration because Filipinos who work in foreign countries transfer their earnings back home. These steady and also growing remittances have become a significant contribution to the Philippines' economy since then (Asis, 2017). The World Bank reports stated that the Philippines remains the fourth remittance recipient after India, China, and Mexico. As of 2020, Filipino workers had sent approximately 35 million US Dollars to their home country (The World Bank, 2021).

Indeed, the government promoted overseas work and migration programs as temporary solutions for economic problems back then. During this time, demand for labour increased in the Middle Eastern countries, but East and Southeast Asia also required eligible foreign workers that could meet their labour market's needs. However, today, unstable economic conjuncture, increasing unemployment, low wages, and political and social uncertainties have made more Filipinos continue to look for overseas opportunities (Asis, 2017). While the Philippines-based private agencies are permitted to issue licenses for workers who want to work overseas, the government also established its administrative unit named the "*Philippines Overseas Employment Administration (POEA)*" to supply labour directly to third parties or governments. In addition, the employment contract is an obligation under Philippine laws, and according to these laws, workers and recruiters must sign a contract, whether recruiting via POEA or privately (O'Neil, 2004). Since the 2000s, the country's development plans have emphasised promoting bilateral and multilateral labour agreements for overseas works. Some examples of the Government's policy regimes for promoting and regulating labour migration are (GOVPH, 2022):

- Establishing an information system for overseas employment program
- Improving the supportive programs to maintain reintegration of overseas workers in their home country
- Providing efficient overseas assistance during recruitment and placement
- Establishing a legal environment for overseas employment programs that build legitimate and responsible private sector participation

- Protecting overseas Filipinos and their families' rights and improving their wellbeing abroad and within the home country.

According to the Philippines' statistics authorities collected data based on 2019, the total number of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs)<sup>1</sup> was estimated at 2.2 million. Most of these workers are contracted workers. While 96.8% of the workers are bound by employment contracts, 3.2% of them work without any contract (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2022). However, in 2020, the number of OFWs from April to September 2020 was estimated at 1.77 million. Below, *Table 1* shows the distribution of overseas Filipinos according to their work region in 2019 and 2020.

Table 1

*Distribution of Overseas Filipino Workers by Place of Work and Sex: 2019 and 2020*

Place of Work	2019			2020		
	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female
	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate	Estimate
<b>Philippines</b>						
Number (In thousands)	<b>2.177,08</b>	<b>970,62</b>	<b>1.206,47</b>	<b>1.771,46</b>	<b>716,16</b>	<b>1.055,30</b>
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0
Africa	1,0	1,9	0,3	1,1	2,2	0,4
Asia	81,0	68,6	90,9	83,6	72,1	91,4
East Asia	21,7	21,2	22,2	17,7	18,9	17,0
Hong Kong	7,4	1,0	12,5	6,3	1,3	9,7
Japan	3,9	5,9	2,3	3,5	6,6	1,4
Taiwan	6,8	8,3	5,6	4,8	5,7	4,1
Other Countries in East Asia (including China, North and South Korea)	3,7	6,0	1,8	3,1	5,2	1,8
Southeast and South Central Asia	8,0	7,0	8,8	8,3	6,9	9,3
Malaysia	2,1	1,7	2,3	1,5	1,2	1,7
Singapore	4,1	3,0	5,0	5,3	4,5	5,9
Other Countries in Southeast and South Central Asia (including Brunei, Cambodia, and Indonesia)	1,8	2,3	1,4	1,5	1,2	1,7
Western Asia	51,2	40,4	60,0	57,5	46,3	65,1
Kuwait	6,1	2,0	9,4	6,4	1,3	9,9
Qatar	5,6	5,6	5,7	5,4	4,7	5,9
Saudi Arabia	22,3	22,0	22,6	26,6	25,7	27,2
United Arab Emirates	13,3	9,3	16,5	14,6	12,0	16,4
Other Countries in Western Asia (Bahrain, Israel, Lebanon and Jordan)	3,9	1,5	5,8	4,4	2,6	5,7
Australia	2,1	3,6	1,0	3,4	6,3	1,5
Europe	7,7	12,7	3,6	6,7	11,5	3,5
North and South America	8,2	13,1	4,2	5,2	7,9	3,4

**Source:** Philippine Statistics Authority (2022), 2019 and 2020 Survey on Overseas Filipinos, Statistical Tables (3), <https://psa.gov.ph/statistics/survey/labor-and-employment/survey-overseas-Filipinos>. 15.03.2022.

The greatest shares of Filipino workers are still found in Western Asia and East Asia, as the above-mentioned *Table 1* indicates. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, migrant Filipino workers account for up to 17.7 percent in East Asia. 6.3 percent of Filipino workers work in Hong Kong, and 4.8

<sup>1</sup> It is the term officially used by the Philippine government for its citizens working abroad.

percent of them work in Taiwan while the rest work in other East Asian countries. On the other hand, Western Asia employs millions of (up to 57.5 percent of the total) Filipino migrant workers. In 2020, these migrant workers accounted for up to 26.6 percent in Saudi Arabia alone.

### **Filipino Domestic Workers in East Asia and the Middle East**

The ILO underlines that Asia and the Pacific have a greater number of employers in terms of domestic workers worldwide. The region employs 50.6% of domestic workers by itself. Estimations show that almost 24.7% of domestic workers are migrants in South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific (ILO, 2021). Additionally, three countries show the highest proportion of female Filipino domestic workers in the East Asia region. The country with the highest shares is Hong Kong, representing about 9.7% of the total. Taiwan comes in second with a share of 4.1%, followed by Japan with 1.4% (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2022).

In the early 1970s, Hong Kong accepted legislation that offered foreign workers to be a part of the local society as domestic helpers. Since then, foreign domestic helpers (FDHs)<sup>2</sup> have become an essential part of daily life, which can release local females from housework. Therefore, local females have participated in the job market and contribute to Hong Kong's economy ever since. Hong Kong's demand met with the Philippines' policy adaptation that allowed the country's citizens to work overseas during the economic crisis of the 1970s. This win-win situation also allowed Filipino domestic workers to send their remittances to their families and provide a steady income during economically rough times. In the beginning, the arrival of domestic workers was quite moderate. However, over the years, the numbers have increased enormously. This increase is also related to Hong Kong's rapid economic development. As the economic development continued, more local women participated in the labour market. As a result, more foreign helpers are needed for domestic work (Research Office LC Secretariat, 2017). Although domestic workers are protected within the framework of labour laws in Hong Kong, it has been observed that housework is still not perceived as a job or work by society. With the effect of this perception, people who are paid for domestic work are not generally treated as workers (Cheng, 1996).

2 Hong Kong Government uses the term *Foreign Domestic Helpers (FDHs)* instead of foreign domestic workers under the labour laws.

Today Hong Kong's population is about 7,481,800, predominantly of Han Chinese ethnicity, with 373,884 FDHs. The two largest groups of foreign workers are from the Philippines (207,402) and Indonesia (157,802). In 2019, the labour force comprised about 3,888,200 people, and the labour force participation rate was 59.6 percent. This also shows that 9.61 percent of the overall workforce are FDHs (GovHK, 2021). Today, statistics show that 339,451 people are employed as foreign domestic workers in Hong Kong. In particular, 191,783 foreign domestic helpers come from the Philippines with 56.5 percent of the total (GovHK, 2022b). As seen in Table 2, numbers had been increasing each year until 2020. However, due to the Covid-19 Pandemic travel restrictions, 2020 and 2021 show a visible decrease in Filipino domestic helpers in Hong Kong.

Table 2  
*The Number of Filipino Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong (2016-2021)*

As at the end of the Year	The Number of FDHs
2016	189,105
2017	201,090
2018	210,897
2019	219,073
2020	207,402
2021	191,783

Source: GovHK, 2022, <https://data.gov.hk/en-data/dataset/hk-imm-d-set4-statistics-fdh/resource/b983aa1d-2617-4051-9ec1-dc5ca281b117>, 29.03.2022.

Like Hong Kong, the changes started in Taiwan's economy in the 1980s made the country one of the popular destinations for migrant workers who were seeking better work and life opportunities in that region. Taiwan also opened up its labour market to foreign domestic workers during the 1990s. Since then, a lot of research on the increasing needs within the country's workforce and working conditions of the domestic workers has been conducted by scholars as well (Lan, 2000; Lin, 1999; Pascual, 2017). Today, Taiwan is one of the main destinations for migrant domestic workers in Asia. According to the report presented by The Five Corridors Project, the number of Filipino workers in Taiwan's job market achieved nearly 150,000. The vast majority (60%) of work is in manufacturing, and 36% is in domestic work and caregiving (Fivecorridorsproject.org, 2021). In the meantime, Taiwan's Ministry of Labour states that Taiwan is home for 661,882 foreign workers as of February 2022. Filipinos have become the second biggest foreign workforce in Taiwan following workers from Indonesia (Taiwan Ministry of Labour, 2022).



In the 1970s, many countries in the Middle East industrialized due to increasing oil prices. However, they did not have enough human resources to meet the need of developing industries, so they looked overseas and asked for help to fill in the available positions with foreign workers. As a result of the implementation of the Overseas Employment Program in the Philippines, a significant number of male workers from the country migrated to the Middle Eastern countries to work in the construction industry. After the demand for construction industries met with its supply during the 1980s, Filipino women started to migrate to these countries for domestic work. (Nadeau, 2007). Many Filipino women start working in the Middle Eastern countries as domestic workers in the beginning because of the fewer restrictions on their migration policies. Even though they are aware of the low wages in the Middle East, they take this opportunity as a stepping stone to save money and migrate to Western countries (Paul, 2011). As shown in Table 1, the largest share of Filipino domestic workers is in the Middle East. As the statistics given by the Philippine authorities show, approximately 1.77 million Filipino workers (both female and male) worked overseas in 2020. Additionally, almost 65% of the total number of female Filipino domestic workers were employed in the Middle East. In this region, Saudi Arabia has the biggest share with 27.2% of the total, followed by UAE at 16.4%, Kuwait at 9.9%, and Qatar at 5.9% (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2022).

In the Middle East, migrant residency and employment relations are regulated through the Kafala (sponsorship) system in almost every country. This system emerged in the 1960s and 1970s to manage employer-migrant worker relationships, which obliges the migrant to only work with their employer (sponsor). Under the Kafala system, an employer (kafeel) or local company must sponsor foreign workers, which bounds the worker's migration status and residency to them legally until the end of the contract (Al-Ghanim, 2015; Khan & Harroff-Tavel, 2011; MFA, 2012). Today, critical debates continue over the Kafala system, which violates human rights and international labour standards in many ways. As stressed by the ITUC, the system leads to the increase in exploitation and abuse (ITUC, 2017). Thus, some countries have made changes to the system or abolished it completely. For example, Qatar recently made significant changes to its employment system. Adopting equitable minimum wage and the removal of some problematical requirements and the employer's permission documents to change jobs were the start of a new era for the Qatari

labour market that has been seen as a sign of dismantling the Kafala system (ILO, 2020). Nevertheless, some countries still keep the Kafala system and enhance the poor employment practices such as exploitation or abuse of migrant workers through this administration (Human Rights Watch, 2018; migrant-rights.org, 2022). As highlighted by Aboueldahab, the main problem relies on the employers who neglect their obligations toward their employees. Moreover, due to the lack of enforcement of legal and social protection measures, more migrant workers suffer across the Gulf region each year (Aboueldahab, 2021).

### **Filipino Domestic Workers in Turkiye**

In Turkiye, household services are considered to be limited a job that do not require high qualifications. Household jobs such as cleaning, cooking, and child care fall within the scope of the Turkish Code of Obligations instead of Labour Law. Like in many countries, domestic workers are completely excluded from labour laws. Only qualified jobs such as child education or nursing at home are exceptions and not considered as domestic work. The provisions of the Labour Law are applied to the employment relations of those who provide these services in Turkiye. On the other hand, foreign workers who work or want to work in Turkiye and employers who employ foreigners or apply for employment are within the scope of Act No. 6735 on the International Labour Force. Article 6 of Law No. 6735 stated that it is prohibited for foreigners to work or be employed without a work permit within the scope of this law (Kökkılınç, 2019).

Turkiye became a transit corridor for Filipinos trying to go to other countries during the Gulf War. However, some Filipino migrants who were on the wait to move to Europe settled in Turkiye when they had an opportunity to work in the country. Even though regular residence status is known to be hard to obtain, Turkiye became another destination where Filipino migrants have sought employment opportunities ever since. Nowadays, after the first migrants, others have followed them, and a small Filipino community has emerged in Istanbul (Akalin, 2016). Again, Turkiye's geographical location makes it unique, especially for Filipinos who want to move to Europe countries through Turkiye. On the other hand, being in a modern Muslim country, Filipinos feels safer than in Gulf Arab countries. In addition, better working conditions and salaries make Turkiye favourable for Filipino domestic workers compared to countries

in the Middle East (Çelik, 2005; Deniz, Kaluç, & Uysal, 2020; Paul, 2011). In Türkiye, many migrant women who work as domestic workers mostly come from former Soviet Union countries. However, Filipino women constitute an exclusive example of the supply and demand, preferred by the high-income group within Türkiye's domestic and care services sector. Because Filipino women who come to Türkiye to provide a better future for their own families are educated and speak English well, this is the fundamental point of the preference for families who want to give their children an English education from an early age. Therefore, Filipino women constitute a more prestigious group in the sector than other migrant workers in domestic and care work (Deniz, Kaluç, & Uysal, 2020). According to the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services data, in 2011, there were 182 female Filipino employees in Türkiye. This number increased to 872 in 2015 and 1467 in 2020 (ÇSGB, 2022). However, due to unregistered migrants, the exact number of Filipino immigrant women working in Türkiye is expected to be higher than the official numbers. Table 1 indicates an increasing number of work permits granted to Filipino workers in Türkiye.

Table 3  
*The Number of Work Permits Granted To Filipino Workers in Türkiye (2011-2020)*

Year	Female	Male	Total
2011	182	28	210
2012	324	45	369
2013	487	81	568
2014	572	218	790
2015	872	177	1,049
2016	1,348	144	1,492
2017	1,837	122	1,959
2018	1,958	118	2,076
2019	1,773	144	1,917
2020	1,467	136	1,603

Source: ÇSGB, 2022, <https://www.csgb.gov.tr/cgm/istatistikler/calisma-hayati-istatistikleri-kitabi/>, 31.03.2022.

Although employing a carer or domestic helper in Türkiye seems to be a new trend, in fact, the tradition of getting help with housework goes back to old times. In the past, it was also common for some wealthy and large families to live with helpers. These helpers sometimes came from among the relatives, mainly from the employer's hometown, and used to live and work in the house. Akalın narrates that migrant domestic work has recently gained an important

place in Türkiye's service sector. Also, it is added that, since the second half of the 1990s, there have been significant changes in the profiles and workplaces of migrant women who have come to Türkiye as foreign workers. On the whole, there are three types of services offered by migrants in Turkish households: childcare, care for the elderly and the sick, and housekeeping, and it has also been seen that employers' demand for foreign workers has increased recently (Akalin, 2016).

In the meantime, the increasing demand for Filipino domestic workers in Türkiye has created a network of agent firms to meet this need. New female migrants have been introduced into employment by international intermediary collaborations or references. In addition, the individual caregiver demands of the company owners affected the emergence of large companies which arrange for Filipino babysitters. In particular, the company owners' needs motivated them to open their own agencies. This motivation has increased the number of women as employers in the sector. Therefore, a sub-sector dominated by women (from employers to workers) has also emerged (Deniz, 2018).

Zailon and Mandıraçoğlu stated that the majority of Filipino women work in Istanbul. In addition, women who migrated from the Philippines have their own organization named the Filipino Community Türkiye (FCT). According to the records of this organization, approximately 1200 Filipino women are working in domestic work in Istanbul (Zailon II & Mandıraçoğlu, 2022). For this reason, almost all of the leading agencies are located in Istanbul. In addition, those agencies whose customers come from the middle-upper or upper class established their offices in more prestigious districts in the city due to the high profiles of their customers. However, these companies' field of activity is not limited to only İstanbul, and their service involves other cities, too. Evidently, caregiver demands from economically advanced cities also have increased recently (Deniz, 2018).

### **The Comparison of Working Conditions of Filipino Domestic Workers Among Türkiye, East Asia, and the Middle East**

Several pieces of research have been conducted that reveal Filipino domestic workers' working conditions and employers' abusive behaviours towards them in the Middle East for many years (International Human Rights Clinic, 2013; Nadeau, 2007; Naufal & Malit, Jr., 2018). One of these studies was led by Acosta and Acosta that revealed Filipino domestic workers' living and working

experiences in Doha, Qatar. The data in their research was gathered from interviews with domestic workers who escaped from abusive employers and received protection in a shelter. The research underlined that many victims faced or lived with different forms of abuse that affected their physical health, mental health, and social well-being (Acosta & Acosta, 2013).

Unfortunately, when it comes to the working conditions for domestic foreign workers, the biggest issue in Middle Eastern countries is the Kafala system, in which domestic workers are bound to their employers legally. As Parrena stated, due to Kafala system issues, domestic workers do not have employment flexibility and work in slave-like conditions. Some employers even deny giving a day off to their workers and do not see this issue as a violation of human rights. Unfortunately, many countries in the Middle East implemented a law of “one day off per week” for domestic workers very recently. For example, Saudi Arabia was the first to grant domestic workers “a weekly rest day” by law in 2013. Kuwait implemented the “one day off per week” rule in 2015, and Qatar and the UAE adopted the regulation in 2017 (Parrenas, 2019). Nadeau conducted an in-depth interview with one Filipino domestic worker named Delia (pseudonym), who lived and worked in Kuwait. The author has represented the slave-like conditions of this woman in the research and mentioned that Delia worked long hours (till 4 am to midnight) and earned less money than the actual wages stated in her contract. In addition, she was housebound, not allowed to use phones, had to pay for broken items, and lost weight due to difficulties in adjusting to new eating habits (Nadeau, 2007). Filipino women in Saudi Arabia, analysed by Johnson, still encounter critical legal problems as domestic workers. Many women live and work illegally (on the run or as escapees) in household work while their work visa remains tied to their original sponsor. In the same way, some have to live and work without legal documents such as passports and identity cards because their documents are still kept by their previous employer. In this case, of course, not all of them live and work under poor conditions. Some employers treat their workers well. They pay on time and respect agreed working hours as stated in the contract. However, a considerable number of foreign domestic workers still engage with abusive employers both morally and physically (Johnson, 2010).

In terms of wages, the Middle Eastern countries’ employers pay relatively lower fees than many other countries because employers support the migration

cost of their domestic workers in this region. For example, in the UAE, employers pay a recruitment agency which includes the government fee and insurances. In addition, they cover most of the migration expenses such as travel, training, and the vetting of the domestic worker. Because of that, domestic workers in the UAE get lower wages than in many other countries (Silvey & Parreñas, 2020). On the other hand, due to their English language proficiency and good education, Filipino workers are also preferred by middle-upper and upper-class families in Türkiye. They earn higher wages than other Filipino domestic workers employed in some countries. The salaries are generally around 800 to 1000 USD (Deniz, 2018; Deniz et al., 2020; Zailon II, 2018). In her interviews with Filipino domestic workers, Gürson notes that wages change from 800 to 1200 USD depending on experience and legal status. The interviewees in her research also added that, in the Middle East, they earned less than half of what they are earning in Türkiye (Gürson, 2021). However, some countries set the minimum wages for domestic workers in East Asia. For example, in Hong Kong, the minimum allowable wage is currently set at HK\$4,630 per month while housekeepers' monthly salaries range from 156,000 to 178,000 yen in Japan (GovHK, 2022a; POLO TOKYO, 2022).

Countries like Kuwait, Bahrain, and UAE introduced compulsory standard form employment contracts for foreign domestic workers in the mid-2000s, yet some countries still do not have compulsory ones. Instead, they have formed several agreements with sending countries, like Saudi Arabia. However, almost all of them still apply the restrictive Kafala migration regime and exclude these workers from the scope of labour laws (ITUC, 2017). In Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Türkiye, employment contracts are mandatory, but there are still significant numbers of Filipino workers who have verbal contracts and are excluded from the scope of the law exist in Türkiye (Gürson, 2021; Pascual, 2017). On the other hand, the contractual situation of migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong is quite different from domestic workers in other countries. Hong Kong defines housework as “work” and requires migrant workers and employers to sign an employment contract. Due to this employment contract, the migrant worker must live in the employer's home, but it is difficult for workers to change their employers without returning to their home country after the contract is signed. The government and employers argue that it is possible for domestic workers to terminate their employment contracts with employers. However, in practice, regulations allegedly designed to protect the rights of both employees

and employers are generally believed to be in the employer's favour (Constable, 2007; McKay, 2020).

In Türkiye, intermediary companies have important roles in the employment process of domestic workers. These organizations recruit eligible candidates via agencies from the Philippines directly or other international recruitment agencies. Additionally, they regulate the relations between foreign workers and employers until the contract ends. Employers' satisfaction is important as they build a network of relationships with new employers with the advice of current ones. Thus, reputation is important for these organizations to enrich their client portfolios. During the recruitment process, no additional costs are charged to the workers. On the contrary, commissions and expenses of the worker (such as commission fees, travel expenses, and insurance) are covered by the employer. In addition, domestic workers and employers can get assistance for the problems they experience. Especially in cases where the worker is ill-treated, the employer/home is changed, and there is an attempt to eliminate the workers' concerns without becoming unemployed (Deniz, 2018).

Filipino domestic workers complain about working more in some research. In addition, they also state that Turkish employers are relatively demanding (what to do or not do tasks in childcare or chores) compared to foreign employers. Still, employers' family-like approaches make these women more satisfied and motivated in their workplace. When they compare the work environment with their previous job (like in Hong Kong or somewhere in the Middle East) where physical and verbal abuse is involved, they underlined that even if they get exhausted due to chores, the Turkish employers' attitudes make them keep going. Some commented on working conditions and employers, such as "Türkiye is better than Hong Kong or the Middle East. Hong Kong is very strict" (Çeltikçi, 2019; Gürson, 2021). There are also differences between the expectations of Filipino domestic workers and their employers. In general, Turkish employers prefer someone who will manage the house just like a mother rather than an employee who will do the housework professionally. For this reason, many Filipino domestic workers prefer to work for foreigners residing in Türkiye rather than Turkish employers. Additionally, they state that foreign employers appreciate their language skills and work ethic more and pay more attention to limits on issues such as working hours and extra services (Akalin, 2016).



Filipino women are mostly preferred as baby-sitters (nannies) or housekeepers in Türkiye (Çelik, 2005). Regardless of working conditions, the experiences of female Filipino employees in Türkiye differ from those in the said countries. In this sense, Zailon and Mandıracıoğlu conducted one of the most significant field studies regarding this point. According to their research, 30.5% of these women who work in domestic work stated that they undertake only one task at home, such as taking care of children or cleaning. Others expressed that they have multiple jobs such as cooking, shopping, child/elderly care, house cleaning, laundry, and taking children to school. Researchers described that 72.3 % of Filipino domestic workers live in the same household with their employer. In addition, 99.5 % have their own room, and 81.5 % are provided with food. It is seen that employers also meet the most basic needs such as bathroom materials as well as food, beverage, and shelter. 77.7 % of the participants informed the researchers that they work 9-24 hours a day. 93.2 % of them have rest time, and 85.3% of them take one day off a week. 76.4% of women remarked that they want to continue working in housework in the future. In the end, the employers of 88.7 % of the participants behaved well, and only 32.9 % of them reported that they were abused. The type of abuse they experienced (Zailon II, 2018; Zailon II & Mandıracıoğlu, 2022);

- Delay in payment (25%)
- Scolding (13%)
- Not allowed to use a day off (8.6%)
- Deduction of the salary (7.5%)
- Forced to work while sick (6.8%)
- Physical and sexual abuse: beating (2.1%) and sexual abuse (0.7%)

On the other hand, Mission for Migrant Workers also elaborates serious abuses and ill-treatment cases reported by domestic workers (91% of the complainants are from Filipinos) in Hong Kong. The report detailed that seven out of every ten had reported experiencing ill-treatment, and one out of every five experienced physical abuse. In addition, three out of every fifty experienced rape or sexual harassment. It is also stated that these numbers had increased by 4% compared to previous years. Again, nine out of every ten complain of



long work hours while one out of every two reported having to work on their rest day (Mission For Migrant Workers, 2021). Moreover, numerous physical and sexual cases of abuses are still recorded in East Asia, countries like Taiwan and Hong Kong (BBC News, 2017; Everington, 2019; Macairan, 2002; Pan & Yang, 2011).

Unfortunately, the Middle East cannot give better scenarios. Many female Filipino domestic workers arrive at their destinations and find themselves trapped with abusive employers where they are forced to work in slave-like conditions. They work excessive working hours, are not even paid full salaries (or at all), have no room to rest, and even have no proper food to eat. In addition, many serious cases of abuse have been reported in the Middle Eastern countries over the years. These severe abuse and victimhood cases put pressure on state institutions and have imposed a partial restriction on the migration of women domestic workers for a while. In one example, in February 2018, Manila issued a previous ban on workers going to Kuwait after the body of Filipino domestic worker Joanna Demafelis, 29, was found in a freezer (BBC News, 2018; Everington, 2019; Moors & Regt, 2008; Pleasance, 2018). Another ban was imposed on Kuwait in January 2020 after Filipino domestic worker Jeanelyn Villavende, 26, was found dead from severe injuries at her employer's home in December 2019 (CNN Philippines, 2020; Hosoda, 2020). Furthermore, employment agencies also determine destinations in the Middle East and create more vulnerable environment for domestic workers. Many candidates indicate the country of their choice in their application. However, they land in a different country where they know nothing about the place. Consequently, they have to cope with difficulties regarding work conditions and integrate into a foreign country without any social networks (Silvey & Parreñas, 2020).

In another example, Filipino women who had resided in Türkiye for a long time were the subject of Maconocido's research. Notably, almost all of them had a history of marriage to a Turkish citizen for real or for the purpose of obtaining citizenship/ residency. Among the women participating in the research, most of them worked as maids or nannies in Turkish households. Generally, they expressed their relationship with their employers as well-mannered. They remarked that salaries are clearly high due to their English language proficiency. Almost all commented on finding economic and financial advantages in working in Türkiye by earning a salary in dollars. Thus, by spending less and saving

more in a country where the dollar is valuable as a different currency, they were able to support their families. Some even pointed out that they bought land or renovated their houses in the Philippines by saving money in Türkiye (Maconocido, 2021).

On the other hand, many studies show that migrant domestic workers mostly suffer from social exclusion. They are isolated from society, being housebound or not allowed to go outside alone without their employers. Nevertheless, the confiscation of passports is a common issue in said countries. Many domestic workers' passports are kept by their employers as soon as they are employed (Acosta & Acosta, 2013; Constable, 2007; Gürson, 2021; Parrenas, 2019). In addition, they have to face different types of discrimination related to their age, religion, the colour of their skin, or even their eating habits. It has been seen that in many countries, migrant workers are invisible in society, and those mentioned problems are just the tip of the iceberg. Furthermore, Menagatti argues through a report that many domestic workers do not have access to health care or social security that protects them from the social risks such as unemployment, maternity, accidents at work, occupational diseases, etc. Again, these workers work physically strenuous jobs with long hours without proper rest in the household (Menegatti, 2016). Halls and his friend found out through research that fatigue, worrying too much, and a depressed mood are the most common symptoms of foreign domestic workers, which is relevant to physically demanding jobs with long work hours with no off days (Garabiles, Lao, Xiong, & Hall, 2019).

In Türkiye, as in other countries, Filipino migrant workers provide many services in households. However, the employer profile of these workers differs from employers in other countries because Filipino domestic workers are preferred by a more distinguished employer community, primarily due to their knowledge of the English language. Thus, they are particularly preferred by diplomats, expatriates, or Turkish employers with higher financial income (Gürson, 2021). Foreign employers in this group mainly want to employ Filipino domestic workers as nannies/babysitters. Similarly, Turkish employers want to give their children an English education from an early age (Çeltikçi, 2019; G. Deniz et al., 2020), but some complaints are common in all countries. For example, female Filipino domestic workers also complain about excessive working hours and the higher expectations of Turkish employers. Although these problems seem in the general character of housework and are seen

elsewhere globally, the opportunities offered are still more attractive to these workers. On the whole, female Filipino domestic workers earn relatively higher wages with arrangements like weekly rest days, separate rooms, accommodation, and food in Türkiye. Additionally, the freedom of communication is not precluded by employers. These employees have no restrictions on their communication outside of working hours and also have strong interactions with each other through social networks. In addition, employees who can obtain their days off on Sundays can get together with others and socialize at church (Akalin, 2016; Zailon II, 2018). Finally, they may even terminate their contracts or request a change of employer by contacting their intermediary firm in case of abuse or exploitation. Additionally, it is easier to reach legal authorities in Türkiye. For this reason, among the complaints of Filipino domestic workers working in Türkiye, home confinement and physical torture were not discovered, and the reported cases of sexual abuse are very few (A. Deniz, 2018; Zailon II & Mandiracıoğlu, 2022).

### **Conclusion**

The number of migrant domestic workers is increasing globally. This increase has significant effects on both the economy of home country and the host country. As in the case of the Philippines, countries have noticed the economic contribution of migrant workers who send their earnings to their home countries in a foreign currency. In the following years, it has been observed that these origin countries support labour migration with their public and private institutions to make this contribution sustainable with the migration policies. From the point of destination countries, the local women's employment and their contribution to the economy have increased each year with the help of temporary migrant workers from lower-income countries to whom they transfer their household duties. However, domestic workers are not always protected within the scope of national labour laws in many countries. Due to exclusion from labour laws or failure to implement existing laws, workers experienced more poor working conditions and work-related injustices. Clearly, it is a more common feature that immigrants are either excluded from the scope of legislation or face difficulties in accessing legal authorities in case of abuse or exploitation.

As a country with a long history and experience in migration, studies in this field are numerous and varied in Türkiye. However, it seems that studies focused

on Filipino migrant workers or domestic workers specifically have only been carried out since 2010s. These studies indicate a growing and strengthening community and workforce. Filipino migrant women, who were preferred as nannies by expats or diplomats before, seem to be preferred by high-income families due to childcare or housework nowadays. In reality, it is known that Filipino women have migrated in need of financial concerns from the beginning, and they have mostly established their plans on returning to the Philippines. With a high salary and having safe and better work conditions, it is believed that many of them meet their expectations and tend to stay in Türkiye for a much longer period. However, in some Middle Eastern countries where even permission for a day of rest is a problem, it is seen that Filipino female migrants live and work under problematic conditions. With the Kafala System, which is common in these countries, a foreign worker cannot change jobs without an employer's consent and cannot leave the country because their passport is confiscated by their employer. Additionally, it has been emphasized many times in the study that foreign workers who could not change jobs and leave the country due to the Kafala System, lost their lives either due to bad working conditions or by being exposed to abuse.

Domestic workers are an essential part of the local economies in East Asia, such as Hong Kong and Taiwan, as stated in studies. They clean, cook, shop, and care for the elderly and children. Filipino workers constitute one of the largest groups of migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong and Taiwan. However, the working and living conditions of these migrant workers involve serious violations of human rights and labour laws. The majority of women working in domestic services are underpaid and overworked. Many research revealed that domestic workers in these countries work six days a week, cannot get full rest, and have to work before leaving home on rest days or after returning to their employer's home. Overall, domestic workers are extremely vulnerable to physical, emotional, and sexual abuse as they are employed on a short-term contract basis and under live-in conditions with their employer.

In addition, live-in rules make migrant workers more vulnerable where they are obliged to live and work with employers in most countries. Further, domestic work differs from other types of paid work with physically demanding tasks involving long working hours and without proper rest day/time. The uncertainty of working hours due to the nature of housework also creates a situation where

workers are constantly on standby to carry out their employers' orders. Since chores at home are not limited to a single task, workers undertake various tasks from night and day. Moreover, they do not even get proper food or a place to sleep most of the time. Thus, they have to bear the consequences of poor working conditions and the excessive workload. However, the real problems start at the point when they experience verbal, physical, or sexual abuse by their employers. Throughout many studies, lawsuits, and complaints among migrant domestic workers, it has been discovered that some employers forced them to sleep on the ground, fed them with leftovers, and did not allow them to take days off.

Moreover, they are paid incompletely or not paid at all, are isolated and housebound, and are subjected to violence with various objects or tools. They were insulted, pushed, kicked, punched, bitten, squeezed, scalded, burned, stabbed, restrained, and suffocated. It is known that some countries take actions within their legal framework and try to protect their migrant workers from poor employment practices. However, these initiatives cannot get successful outcomes without the cooperation of the government of the host countries where the foreign workers migrate. Furthermore, migrant domestic workers do not file complaints against their abusive employers because they fear job loss. Even if they find the courage to expose them, they encounter serious obstacles in reaching the complaint mechanisms in the host countries. That means the legal authorities should review the existing laws first. Additionally, the problems of migrant domestic workers should not just be handled by unions or non-governmental organizations. Instead of ineffective bans to stop migration to the country where domestic women workers face abuses, official authorities such as the ministry of labour or higher government authorities should take serious initiatives to the destination country. In conclusion, this paper suggests that governments should implement sustainable policies to provide effective protection and reduce the vulnerability of migrant domestic workers.

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