

Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW EXTRACT

[The in-depth oral history interview with the narrator was conducted on May 22, 2021 in Pristina. Due to the narrator's request for anonymity, we have concealed the identity.]

Interviewer: When did you start working?

Narrator: I first started working in 2007 and never stopped. But I started working only once a week.

Interviewer: What did you do, what kind of job?

Narrator: I worked as a housekeeper because I had no other choice, my children were little, actually my husband worked, but not too much.

Interviewer: What does he do?

Narrator: He works at an insurance company, at Hortikulturë. But back then, they had very low wages, when we moved to live in our own house, he got 80 deutsche marks, marks were still being used, 80 marks monthly salary. My uncle's daughter got me my first job.

Interviewer: Tell us how.

Narrator: She worked there herself. We met at my brother's, it was his children's birthday, their first birthday, he had twins, he still does. And she was working there and she got engaged and her husband didn't want her to [work]. "We don't need it, you don't need to work." She told me, "Will you go work there, why don't you work?" "Yes," I said, "I don't know where and it's difficult to start out alone." "No," she said, "I'll call where I work and we'll see, and then you can go." She [the employer] immediately said, "Yes, she can come." She took me there, I went there once a week for one month, I didn't tell anyone that I was working.

Interviewer: What was it like to go to someone you didn't know before?

Narrator: It was difficult, very difficult. I don't know how to explain it, when you go somewhere for the first time, like [going to] a foreign country. I don't know, because I've never been abroad, but it's the same as going abroad where you neither know the environment nor... starting [to work] here, starting from zero is quite difficult. But looking around, asking, "Where, how? Do you like it here or there?" The first day, when I went the next week, I started working a little every... it's not that I didn't know things, but in someone else's house you don't know where everything goes, but she was satisfied with me. And I started helping at home with that salary, not that it was much, but it was quite good for me because I was at home all week, except the one day I was working. When you know how to manage it, you have to, it takes some effort, but it can be done.

Interviewer: What were your tasks, what did you have to do?

Narrator: What were my tasks, everything that I saw, from...

Interviewer: [Describe it] a little...

Narrator: Starting from the windows, doors, floor. Everything that was in the kitchen, all there was. Except for the food, I never cooked but I did everything else. I had to iron... all the housework there was, there was also a small yard, I had to go outside and clean it, but I didn't mind, I just wanted her to be satisfied. And I wanted the money to be, as they say, as halal as possible because I had to raise and feed my children with that money.

A friend of hers came, she was German and she saw me working and liked my work, she said, it was around November, she said, "I'm going to Germany during the holidays, end-of-year holidays, but when I come back, could you also come to my place?" She said, "You have to come twice a week." I said, "I will try." I felt sorry for my three-year-old daughter, for leaving her. You know, I could hardly wait to finish the work and go home to my daughter, because I was still feeding her.

And she came back and called me, and I went to work at her house twice a week. One day from 9 AM to 4 PM, the other day from 12 PM to 4 PM, but she paid me very well. And she was very satisfied and her children were the same age as mine and she was very nice. Her daughter was as old as mine, she would buy my daughter whatever she bought hers.

I didn't mind working, I did everything. She would say, "I've only seen Albanians clean the windows weekly, on the inside, fine, but don't clean them outside because the rain leaves spots anyway." I worked there for two years, almost three, and she had to leave. And she said, "I feel so bad that I'm

leaving you unemployed, there are people who aren't hard-working and have jobs. While you work this hard and will become unemployed."

She said, "I'll give your phone number to UNDP, I have a friend there," she said, "at first I think they will call you only when they need a substitute." Trust me, I didn't believe her, I thought she's done with her work and is going to leave, and no one will think of me. But fortunately she was very nice and they called me once, as a substitute for a month. The pay was very good at UNDP.

I worked for a month, until the woman who was on her leave came back, she came back to her job, they liked my work there a lot. Many people said, "Will you come [work]?" But the week only had seven days, not more. It's a very tiring job, it isn't easy, there are all kinds of experiences. There are some very nice people, then there are, so to say, bad people, they are, it's hard to say, but there are also people like that. Maybe it isn't easy for them either to welcome strangers into the house, it isn't easy for them either, but it still is harder for us to go to a stranger's house.

For around three or four months, I don't exactly know how long, but it feels like [I worked for] a long time, I worked at a house in Velania, I won't mention their name, who they were, their daughter-in-law hired me, she was very nice, but she had a very rude mother-in-law. She liked my work, she'd say "You work very well, but too slowly." But, you can't have it both quickly and well. I had to work from 9:00 to 13:00, you can't finish all the housework from 9 AM to 1 PM and leave, I wanted to do everything well and I stayed longer, a little longer.

But I didn't mind the salary, I just wanted them to be satisfied. The wife would tell me, "I don't know what I would do if it weren't for you, you are doing such a good job." I couldn't wait to find something else and quit, trust me I was very reluctant to go there. There are many places where I work now, I go there as if I were going to a friend, or to my sister or... I'm that comfortable. I have the key, I go inside, I work, I leave. Even if I don't finish [everything], it doesn't matter.

"You put stuff in order, do whatever you want." They're very nice. But I went there very... I was so happy when they called me at UNDP as a substitute. I felt so bad to tell their daughter-in-law, tell her, "I can't come anymore." I was happy that UNDP called me, and I quit and didn't go there anymore. It's a very, it's not a very good job because there's no insurance, no pension. If you quit tomorrow, you're left with nothing, it doesn't show anywhere...

Interviewer: That you worked.

Narrator: That I worked. And now...

Interviewer: Until now, you've never had a contract?

Narrator: Back at UNDP, yes.

Interviewer: Yes, what about the others?

Narrator: At the others, no.