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**Who Cares about Au Pairs?
A Study on the Work and Social Protection Experiences
of Filipina Au Pairs in the Netherlands**

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Disclaimer:

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List of Acronyms

CMA	Center for Migrant Advocacy
CFO	Commission on Filipino Overseas
CFS	Country Familiarization Seminar
DFA	Department of Foreign Affairs
FNV	<i>Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging</i> (Netherlands Trade Union Confederation)
IND	<i>Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst</i> (Immigration and Naturalisation Service)
ISS	International Institute of Social Studies
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
ILO	International Labour Organization

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Abstract

Contemporary discourse recognizes the au pair scheme as cultural exchange programme for young women who aspire to travel and experience a foreign culture. On the contrary, the programme is also criticized for being a cheap source of domestic labour of the host families consequently resulting to vulnerability of the au pairs. Yet, in these opposing perspectives, it is apparent that the voice of the au pairs as the participants of the cultural exchange programme appears to be missing. This research unveils the missing voice and perspective of the au pairs from existing literature by showcasing and focusing on the au pair's own experiences as they share their stories from their own lens. The research examines the work and social protection experiences of the au pairs by analyzing and contextualizing it through the frameworks of human capital, wasted precarity, and assemblages of informal and transnational social protection. The conducted qualitative interviews with the current Filipina au pairs in the Netherlands showed that their work experiences can be akin to a spectrum. On one end, the au pairs asserted to have positive work experiences attributed to experiencing a foreign culture, feeling of being part of the family, learning new knowledge and skills, achieving personal growth, and attaining a stepping-stone beneficial for their future career plans. On the other end of the spectrum, the au pairs' negative experiences reaffirmed their condition as precarious migrants in the host country. I discuss how the au pairs' immigration status, involvement in insecure domestic work sector, ambiguous positionality in their host family, and "marginal social identities" produce their precariousness. Furthermore, the au pairs' experiences of social protection reveal how strategically they have assembled social protection from their established social networks and state-driven provisions to secure themselves from imminent social risk and protect their rights as citizens of the Philippines and as temporary migrants in the Netherlands.

Relevance to Development Studies

The cultural, work, migration, gender, and social protection elements of the au pair scheme are crucial aspects of development studies. By putting the au pairs' actual voices and experiences at the centre of this research, it exposes the actual realities of the au pairs in their participated cultural exchange, thus challenging the existing discourse on the au pair scheme. More so, in acknowledging the upsides and drawbacks of the au pairs' work and social protection experiences, the produced knowledge of this study has the potential to inform critical social policy discussions in the evaluation of au pair scheme. Hence, this makes it relevant for the host country (Netherlands) and sending country (Philippines) since the au pair scheme has its embedded migration dynamics. Furthermore, not only that this research provides new insights on the social protection mechanisms experienced by the au pairs, it also broadens the understanding of precariousness, insecurity, and marginalization of the au pairs as young migrant women from the Global South.

Keywords

Au pair, cultural exchange, migrants, social protection, human capital, precarity, domestic work, Philippines, The Netherlands

Chapter 1 | Why Care about the Au Pairs?

1.1 Missing Voice of the Au Pairs

“I start my day by waking up at 7:30 in the morning. My host family is taking care of a lot of animals such as dog, cat, goat, duck, chicken and horse. So, my morning starts by picking up the dog’s poop and feeding the chicken and other animals. Then, I will start to vacuum, clean their rooms and the living room. I also need to cook the family’s meals for the entire day. And if I have free time, I will play with the kid. Before, my work is finished at 10 in the evening but now, I am done at 8.”

This is how Angel, one of my interviewed au pairs, narrated her busy daily schedule as an au pair living in one of the suburbs in Netherlands. Au pair is a French term which means “on par” or “on equal footing” (Commission on Filipino Overseas (CFO) 2020; Francisco 2014; Oosterberk-Latoza 2007: 193). The history of the “au pairing” started back in pre-war Europe as a form of informal exchange where the daughters of middle-class families from different countries swap places to improve their language skills and learn about household skills before getting married (Cox 2015a: 3). The context of au pair scheme is originally hinged under the notion of mutual exchange—the au pair becomes equal and temporary member of family while learning housekeeping skills and providing an extra pair of hands to the host family (Anderson 2009; Cox 2015a; Cox 2015b). However, the context of mutual exchange did not fully materialize. For instance, United Kingdom hosted more au pairs than it had sent abroad (Cox 2015b: 264-265). At present, the participants of au pair scheme are mostly women from the Global South migrating to Global North and outnumbering other youth from the European countries (Aslaug Kjaer 2013; Stenum 2011). The current dynamics of the au pair scheme has been “unidirectional transfer of care through the nodes of a care chain” as the women from the South sell their caregiving labour to families in the North (Bikova 2015: 89).

The Netherlands is one of the European countries hosting au pairs under the context of cultural exchange and most of it originated from the Global South (*See Figure 1*). It is also clear that there have been opposing perception of the au pair scheme in the Netherlands. Government-led research portrays au pair scheme as a cultural exchange programme, where the au pairs became students of a foreign culture and considering their overall experience as positive both for the au pairs and host families (*see Schans et al. 2014*). On contrary, the au pairs’ vulnerability, exploitation, and being unprotected workers was put forwarded by the Dutch trade union and local NGOs. Yet, the au pair’s actual voice and personal perspective appear to be missing in the existing literature. Current studies on the au pair scheme focused on the following and not on the actual voice of the au pairs: rules and regulations for au pairing (Anving and Eldén 2016); challenges to safe migration and decent work (Aslaug Kjaer 2013); au pair arrangements in six EU countries (Stenum 2011); migration trajectories of au pairs (Dalgas 2018); gender equality dimension of the au pair scheme (Eldén and Anving 2016); limitation of au pair scheme as career strategy (Ellis 2017); vulnerability to exploitation of the au pairs (Hess and Puckhaber 2004); au pairs strategies of self-positioning (Rohde-Abuba and Tkach 2018); immigration control and subjectivities of au pairs (Anderson 2009); au pairs motivation and incentive for migration (Seeberg and Sollund 2010); portrayal of au pairs in documentaries (Stubberud 2015); invisibility of the work of au pairs (Cox 2018); and au pairs and host families experiences in the United Kingdom (Cox and Busch 2018).

This research intends to provide the missing voice and perspective of the au pairs from the literatures of the au pair scheme. This research showcases and focuses on the au pair’s own perspectives and experiences as they share their stories from their own lens or vantage

point. This paper highlights how do the au pairs themselves perceive the au pair scheme by examining their work and social protection experiences. The aspect of social protection is also explored in this research in response to the reported cases of abuse or maltreatment of the au pairs. Building on the identified knowledge gap, this research is guided by these two main research questions:

- 1) *What are the work experiences of au pairs in the cultural exchange programme?*
- 2) *How do au pairs experience social protection in practice?*

This research analyses the au pairs work experiences and their access to social protection by employing three conceptual frameworks. First, as the main purpose of the au pairs stay in the host country is under the context of cultural exchange, the personal development aspect of the au pair scheme is examined by applying the human capital theory by Gary Becker (1962). Second, the work being performed by the au pairs is examined from the facet of vulnerability by using the concept of wasted precarity by Mojca Pajnik (2016). The concept of wasted precarity provides pessimistic assessment of the au pairs' precarious and vulnerable situation; while the human capital theory accounts the optimistic evaluation of the au pairs participation in the cultural exchange as a form of investment in their skills. Last, Başak Bilecen and Karolina Bargłowski (2014) concept on assemblages of informal and formal transnational social protection is utilized to analyze the au pairs' experiences of the social protection in the Netherlands.

Focusing on the experiences of Filipina au pairs in the Netherlands, the findings of this research address the need for an updated information about the Filipina au pairs in the Netherlands. Almost a decade has passed since last studies were carried out about the Filipina au pairs in the Netherlands (*see Villareal 1994; Oosterberk-Latoza 2007; Rago 2011*). In addition, it is timely to investigate the changes in the conditions of the Filipina au pair, almost eight years after the government of the Philippines lifted in 2012 the ban of entry of au pairs in the Netherlands. Moreover, the finding of this study has the potential to inform policy discussions on the evaluation of the au pair policy.

This research is composed of six chapters. The initial chapter of this study discusses the objective and significance of this research as well as the discourses on the opposing perspectives of the au pair scheme in the Netherlands. The second chapter scrutinizes the three conceptual frameworks that are utilized in analysing the experiences of the au pairs. The third chapter describes the research methodological journey of this study. The fourth chapter serves as a response to the first research question by deliberating and analysing the work experiences of the au pairs. The fifth chapter then answers the second research question by examining the access to social protection by the au pairs. The last chapter concludes the research by providing summary, reflection, and policy recommendations.

1.2 Opposing Perspectives on Au Pair Scheme in the Netherlands

There are diverse perceptions on the role being performed by au pairs in the Netherlands. From the standpoint of the Dutch government, the arrival of au pairs in the Netherlands is under the context of cultural exchange programme or voluntary work as part of the European Solidarity Corps (IND 2020: 1). For the government of the Philippines, the au pairs are "intended to become a member of the family in the host country for cultural exchange to improve their linguistic and cultural knowledge which they can obtain better in the country where they are received" (CFO 2020: n.p.). While from the perceptions of the Netherlands Trade Union Confederation (*Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging – FNV*), and non-

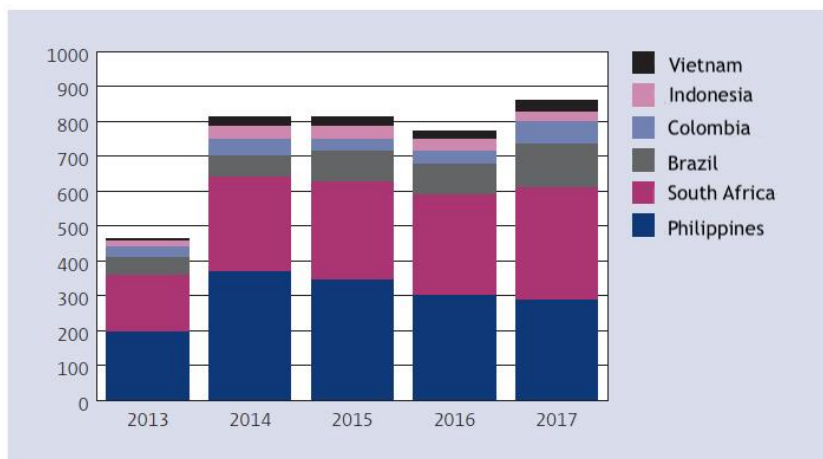
governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Bayanihan Foundation and FairWork, the au pair scheme must be improved as it resulted to cases of labour exploitation (Volder 2016; Stenum 2011; Waard 2004; Oosterberk-Latoza 2007).

The Dutch Au Pair Scheme

The government of the Netherlands recognizes the au pair scheme as a form of cultural exchange where a foreign national stays in the Dutch household for maximum of 12 months (IND 2020). According to the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND)’s (n.d.a) established eligibility criteria, the au pairs must be from 18 to 31 years old and must apply to its accredited au pair agencies. The Dutch host family is responsible in covering the transportation cost going to the Netherlands, securing the au pair’s health insurance, providing food and accommodation, and paying €340 pocket money per month. While being acquainted with Dutch society’s culture and language, the au pairs in return are expected to perform light domestic work (including taking care of children of the host family) for a maximum of 30 hours per week, with two days off for the week (IND n.d.b).

Since 2014, the Netherlands has been processing an average of 1000 residence permits applications per year for the purpose of being an au pair (Lodder 2019: 61). Philippines ranked first in the list of countries that has the highest number of au pairs in the Netherlands (See Figure 1). Most of the issued residence permits for the purpose of being an au pair originated from Southeast Asia, Latin America, and South Africa. From the period of 2012 to 2018, the Commission on Filipino Overseas (CFO) accounted a total of 1,891 registered Filipina au pairs in the Netherlands (CFO 2018). It was pointed out that Filipina au pairs are preferred in the Netherlands because they are seen to be modest, serious, speak good English, affectionate with children, and hardworking even for less pay (Oosterberk-Latoza 2007: 196).

Figure 1. Top 6 Country of Origin of Au Pairs in the Netherlands (2013 – 2017)



Source: Lodder 2019: 61

The Netherlands did not ratify the 1969 Treaty of Strasbourg or the European Agreement on Au Pair Placement as initiated by the member states of the Council of Europe (Stenum 2011: 93; Oosterberk-Latoza 2007: 194). The regulations of the Dutch cultural exchange programme are stipulated in the IND’s au pair policy. The guidelines stated in the Dutch au pair policy include: the main purpose of the cultural exchange programme, au pair’s service in return and compensation, and actions to be done in case of “untenable situation in a host family” (IND n.d.c). The au pair policy also emphasized that work permit is not required for the au pairs and that they must only carry out light domestic work. In 2013, the Modern Migration Policy Act (MOMi) introduced change to the au pair policy which aimed

to “prevent abuses” of the au pairs (IND 2011: n.p). The legislation against malpractice suggested the abuses and exploitation happening in the au pair scheme. Furthermore, the enacted MOMi enforced the au pair agencies to become the “sponsor of an au pair or the youth exchange participant [hence making] the host family no longer the (informal) sponsor” (Zeldin 2013: 4). The law also made the au pair agencies accountable if there will be any infringements to the contract or if the au pair is exploited by the host family (Aslaug Kjaer 2013: 23). IND currently has 23 accredited au pair agencies that serve as the “cultural exchange organisations” and responsible in ensuring that the au pairs are given sufficient time to learn the Dutch culture and society (Lodder 2019: 59; IND 2020: 6).

The Dutch government has devised mechanisms to protect the au pairs in case of abuse of host family or when the au pair agencies do not follow the implemented rules. In 2004, IND started the temporary *meldpunt* (hotline) and this initiative is considered to “give more insight on the violation of au pair regulations so that a better supervision can be made” (Oosterberk-Latoza 2007: 198). IND advises that the set-up “special reporting point” can only be used when the issue is not resolved within the au pair and host family, or when the au pair agency is hesitant to help (IND 2020: 11). Aside from the IND hotline, the au pairs are also encouraged to call the Dutch Aliens Police in case of abuse or exploitation (Ibid.). Since 2000, the au pairs are also helped by IND in case of “malpractice” or “irregularities” by allowing them to transfer them to another host family or even to another au pair agency (IND 2020; Miedema et al. 2003). Moreover, as mandated by the Social Insurance Bank (*Sociale Verzekeringsbank* – SVB) the health conditions of the au pairs are safeguarded as they are covered by a Dutch health insurance company (Au Pair Nederland n.d.).

The Philippine Government and the Filipina Au Pairs

Philippines has been participating in the au pair scheme since 1969 (Retulin 2015). However, in 1998, the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) imposed a ban¹ on the employment of Filipino migrant workers under the au pair programme for the entire Europe (Øien 2009: 74; Stenum 2011: 34). The media exposed several cases of exploitation, abuse, and discrimination of Filipina au pairs particularly in the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries. The Philippines’ Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) described the au pair scheme as “isolated cases of abuse of the system by some unscrupulous elements” (Esplanada 2012; Official Gazette 2012). Similarly, the Philippine Embassy in the Hague, Netherlands reported that “concomitant irregularities and complaints have come about, such as under-compensation, excessive hours, over-work, culture shock, [and] there have been reported cases of abuse, discrimination, runaways and even prostitution” (Anderson as quoted in Stenum 2011: 34). In the case of the Netherlands, the banning of the entry of Filipina au pairs in the country did not stop the abuse but rather instigated the au pair agencies to create ways on how the Filipina au pairs can still come to the country (e.g. by bribing the Filipino migration officers in the airport) (Oosterberk-Latoza 2007: 200). The au pairs were still able to enter the Netherlands because they enter as tourists and the Dutch government still issued them visa as long as they meet all the requirements (Ibid.).

The 14-year ban was lifted in 2012 by the government of the Philippines and the au pairs are now allowed again to enter Europe. The ban was eventually lifted as bilateral agreements between Philippines and Denmark, Norway, and the Netherlands were established (Aslaug Kjaer 2013: 13). The bilateral agreement paved way for the government of the Philippines’ creation of ‘*Guidelines on the Departure of Au Pairs to Europe*’ where “the new guidelines [facilitate] the departure of Filipino au pairs and provide them with safety

¹ This was enacted under DFA Circular Note No. 981289 dated 20 April 1998 (Øien 2009: 74).

nets for their protection without restricting their rights to self-improvement” (CMA 2014: 7). The rationale for lifting the ban was “to reduce the opportunities to exploit au pair migrants (through bribes) and will further ease the accessibility to a safe migration route for au pair emigrants leaving the Philippines and strengthen their access to protection by Philippine authorities when abroad” (Aslaug Kjaer 2013: 13).

The NGOs and Dutch Trade Union Advocacies for Au Pairs

FNV has been taking actions to protect the rights of au pairs in the Netherlands. The Dutch trade union responded to the cases of exploitation by taking legal actions against the host families who abused the au pairs. FNV, in cooperation with Bayanihan Foundation, filed lawsuits against the host families of Filipina, Bulgarian, and Polish au pairs (Oosterberk-Latoza 2007: 197). For instance, FNV assisted a Polish au pair in filing a lawsuit as the au pair became a cheap construction worker who renovated the house and rental apartments of the host family (Telegraaf 2002). FNV further criticized the au pair scheme and argued that it became the “*cheap source of nursemaid or household help*” and “*turn out to be modern slavery [where au pairs] put to work for a pittance*”² (Trouw 1998: n.p.; NU 2009: n.p.). The Dutch trade union also recommended for a creation of regulation that enable au pairs to become official employees because this will ensure their rights of protection (NU 2009).

Bayanihan³ Foundation - Centre for Filipino Women in the Netherlands is a self-help women organization that has been helping Filipina au pairs since 1993 (Oosterberk-Latoza 2007: 192; Bayanihan Foundation, n.d.). The NGO argued that au pairs’ vulnerability stem from the following factors: “they are generally not well informed about the regulations of the au pair programme; ignorance of their rights and welfare; ‘invisibility’ when they enter the country; prey to the exploitative practices of au pair agencies; and inability of the Dutch institutions to give them immediate protection” (Oosterberk-Latoza 2007: 192). Bayanihan Foundation was able to: bring into the Dutch public and politics the exploitation and abuse experienced by the au pairs, and lobby for their protection of rights and welfare (Oosterberk-Latoza 2007: 202).

With the overarching goal of supporting the victims of labour exploitation and human trafficking in the Netherlands, FairWork, a Dutch NGO based in Amsterdam has also been extending assistance to au pairs. While ensuring confidentiality and offering free of charge support, the local NGO provides assistance to au pair by raising their awareness on their legal rights (e.g. publishing info materials in various languages) (FairWork n.d.). In an interview, FairWork affirms that the au pair policy is “prone to abuse [as] there have been many reported cases of au pairs being in an actual employment relationship with their host family, while not being paid as such, leading to (potentially) exploitative practices” (as quoted in Volder 2016: 7).

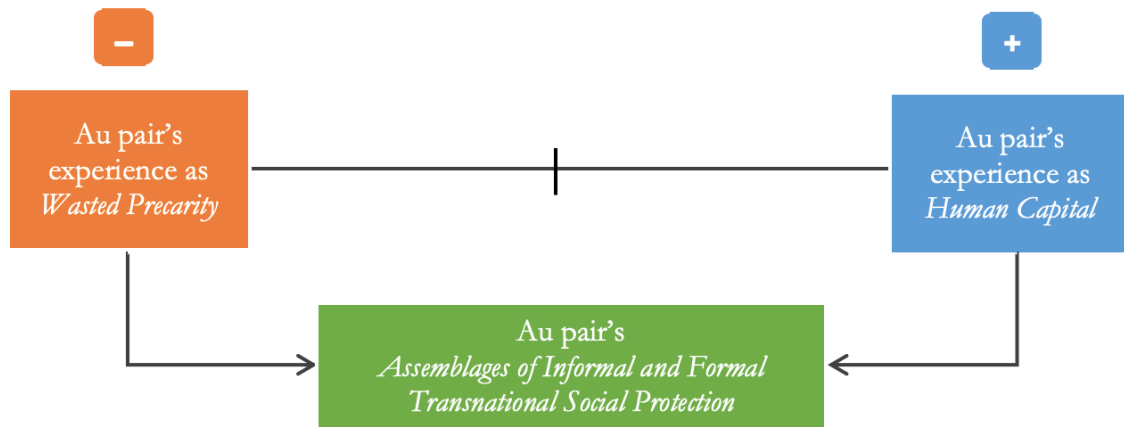
² The original statement was in Dutch and translated into English using Google Translate.

³ *Bayanihan* is a Filipino term that means “neighbourly help or reciprocal help [and] it springs from the idea that many hands make for light work” (Bayanihan Foundation n.d.).

Chapter 2 | Conceptualizing the Experiences of Au Pairs

This research utilized three conceptual frameworks to investigate the work and social protection experiences of the au pairs. The first part of this chapter explores the human capital theory as coined by Becker (1962). The second part discusses the concept of wasted precariat as formulated by Pajnik (2016). The human capital theory serves as a framework in analyzing the positive experiences of the au pair as they consider their au pair experience as investment. On the other hand, the negative experiences and the vulnerability of the au pairs is construed in employing the concept of wasted precariat. The last part of this chapter examines Bilecen and Bargłowski's (2014) assemblages of informal and formal transnational social protection that is used to scrutinize the social protection experiences of the au pairs being migrants in the Netherlands.

Figure 2. Conceptual Frameworks



Source: Author's Illustration

2.1 Experience as Human Capital

The economist Gary Becker (1964) is the founder of the human capital theory. Becker described human capital as the individual's investments on education, health, or training that results to higher wage in the labour market. According to Becker (n.d.), it was labelled human capital because "people cannot be separated from their knowledge, skills, health, or values in the way they can be separated from their financial and physical assets". Human capital theory assumed that education is a form of investment and as a result it increases the productivity and earnings of individuals that is pertinent to the economic growth of a country (Tan 2014: 412). The theory of human capital explained that "[younger] people are more likely to invest in human capital than older people because they have a longer remaining work life to benefit from their investment and their foregone wages—and so costs of investing are lower" (McKernan and Ratcliffe 2002: 5). Put simply, human capital theory means "that investments in education and experience increase productivity, [that] translates both into higher employability and higher wages, [and] these in turn enable further investments in human capital, setting in motion a virtuous circle" (Siegmann 2019: Slide 8).

Figure 3. Basic Dynamics of Human Capital Theory



Source: Siegmann (2019: Slide 8)

The human capital theory is relevant in analysing the au pair scheme. A study on Turkish au pairs in the United States utilized the human capital theory to analyse its effect on the “upward mobility” of the au pairs (Ellis 2017). The research findings showed that the au pair scheme resulted to an “upgrade [in] their education capital” and it served as a “stepping-stone” to a more fulfilling career upon their return in Turkey (Ibid. 2017: 856). As human capital is the individual’s investment to their increased productivity and earnings, a former au pair in Norway attested to this and stated that the au pair scheme is an investment in education and professional growth (Tkach 2014: 146). Similarly, an au pair in UK considered her experience as an investment for the future because of her improved English skills (Cox and Busch 2018: 156). Furthermore, the study conducted by Williams and Baláž (2005: 458) that used the concept of human capital claimed that au pairs can achieve “significant gains” in their short-term mobility (i.e. “specific professional expertise they had acquired abroad”).

2.2 Work as ‘Wasted Precariat’

Inspired by Bauman’s (2004) concept of “wasted humans”, Pajnik coined the term “wasted precariat” to pertain to the precariousness and subordination of “third country migrants” in Europe (2016: 159). She argued that wasted precarity transpires during “the intersection of migrant workers’ immigration status, the governance of immigration and labour relations as well as features of the industries that employ migrant workers” (Ibid.: 160). She further characterized the precarious “third country migrants” as low-skilled workers that fills the gap of the European labour market by performing the “3D” jobs (dangerous, demanding, and dirty)—the jobs that are not performed by the country’s national (Ibid.). Pajnik’s conceptualization of wasted precariat is to complement Rodgers’ (1989) originally identified four dimensions precariousness. Rodgers described the elements of precarious work as: a) short-term, b) irregular, c) has low level of social protection, and d) has low income that results to poverty and social insecurity (as cited in Pajnik 2016: 160). For Pajnik, the features of Rodger’s four dimensions of precarious work must be supplemented to include the case

of migrant workers whose precariousness are dependent on their residence status, nationality, and work permit.

Pajnik identified four factors that “produce” the precariousness of a typical migrant worker (*See Figure 3*). These factors are also applicable in analysing the situation of the au pairs. First, she argued that the immigration status of “third country migrants” has an effect to their precariousness. In the case of the au pairs, IND issued them a temporary residence permit for the purpose of the cultural exchange. This entails that the au pairs are only allowed to stay in the Netherlands for a maximum of one year.

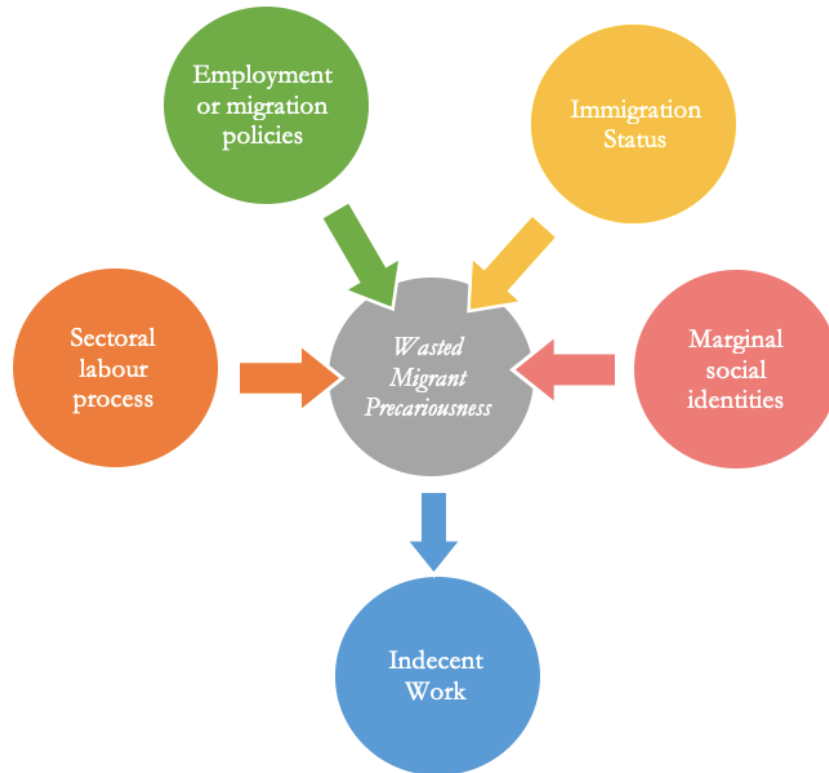
Second, she stated that the employment or migration policies which refers to the labour market policies like the work permit or entry policies have an impact to the precarious situation of the migrants. The same factor can also be used to study the situation of the au pairs whose entry in the Netherlands is legitimized through the au pair agencies accredited by the IND. Pajnik (2016: 164) called this as “sponsor mechanism” which means that the migrant’s entry to the country is only permitted because of the need of the employer (or by the host family in the case of the au pairs).

Third, she cited sectoral labour process or specific industries such as construction, agriculture, cleaning and care work that “employ the largest share of precarious migrant workers” (Ibid.: 161). She posited that domestic and care work “as industries offering most precarious jobs for women migrants” (Ibid.: 168). The same notion can be inferred to the situation of the au pairs. The au pairs’ domestic work in private home inevitably denied her from public form of social protection since the state is hesitant to intervene and regulate private relations.

Fourth, the marginal social identities signify the tenet of intersectionality that results to migrant workers’ marginalization because of the “racialized, ethnicized, and gendered terms” of their work. The marginalization caused by social identities is the same with the experiences of au pairs. Eldén and Anving (2016: 9) argued that hosting an au pair reproduces “new inequalities at the heart of family practices” which is related to race, class and ethnicity, and it happens since care work was done by the considered “others”. In the au pair scheme, racial and ethnic differences played key roles in rationalising and naturalising the role of employer and employee as dark skins are associated with dirt while white skins are linked with purity (Cox and Busch 2018). Furthermore, the “gendering of domestic labour” of the au pairs and perception of women’s responsibility towards domestic work is a manifestation of denial of the value of reproductive work (Cox and Busch 2018: 66).

In effect, Pajnik argued that these four factors result to indecent work as there is “[denial] of migrants agency and [breach of] dignity-related aspects of work” that is stipulated in International Labour Organization (ILO)’s standards of “decent work” (2016: 161). As precariousness equates to multidimensional insecurity, it is imperative to examine the social protection available for the precarious workers.

Figure 4. The ‘Production’ of Migrant Precariousness



Source: Pajnik (2016: 161)

2.3 Social Protection as Assemblages and Transnational

Bilecen and Bargłowski (2014) introduced the concept of assemblages of informal and formal transnational social protection. They described social protection as assemblages of informal and formal elements because there is interconnectedness in social protection since this is being provided by: a) “interpersonal networks” that represents the informal social protection, and b) “state and organizations” that pertains to the formal social protection (Ibid.: 203). In other words, informal and formal social protection are “assembled” based on its availability and evaluation of social risk. Bilecen and Bargłowski defined formal and informal social protection as follows:

Formal social protection is generally considered to involve publicly funded formal state regulations that are reinforced by laws, statutes, and regulations, institutionalised in policy and legislation, and conveyed in the form of (supra) national frames and eligibility criteria. By contrast, informal social protection is referred to as being provided by social networks based on collective norms such as community solidarity, reciprocity, altruism, and obligations. (Ibid.: 207)

Due to the increasing mobility of people across the globe, they argued that transnational lens is crucial in examining social protection in the context of migration. They asserted that transnational angle of social protection is vital as it allows us “to consider social and symbolic attachments to more than one nation-state” and it also examines how the non-migrants or the significant others of the migrants “[strategize] to outplay social risks” (Ibid.: 204). Faist (2013) also stated that “overall, the assemblages for social protection not only criss-cross national borders but also intermingle state and non-state arrangements’ (as quoted in Bilecen and Bargłowski 2014: 207). They further recommended that to be able to understand the

social protection strategies of the migrants, it is significant to examine the flow of resources in the informal networks as well as in the formal structures and not to assume the superiority of formal over informal social protection including the varying form of transnational engagement (Ibid.: 212).

This research uses the concept of assemblages of informal and formal transnational social protection to investigate the au pairs' experience of social protection. This is applicable in the case of the au pairs because they are in a transnational setting as they are migrants in the host country who participated in the cultural exchange programme. On the other hand, it was argued that the au pair scheme has been lacking social protection (Liarou 2015 as cited in Cox and Busch 2018: 56). This contradicts the purpose of the 1969 European Agreement on Au Pair Placement which aims "to give au pairs adequate social protection inspired by the principles laid down in the European Social Charter" (Cox 2015a: 21). In this research, I explore how au pairs are entitled to social protection because of their nationality as Filipinos, as legal and temporary residents in the Netherlands, and their identity as an au pair.

Chapter 3 | Qualitative Interviews with the Au Pairs

Interview is the most often used tool for qualitative migration research (Yalaz and Zapata-Barrero 2017). Interview has also been the primary methodology in studying the “individuals with liminal legal status, or undocumented migrants” (Fedyuk and Zentai 2018: 175). This research adopted the same approach and reached out to the au pairs by conducting qualitative semi-structured interviews. This chapter describes the methodological journey of this research, the practiced ethical considerations, and my positionality as the researcher.

3.1 Research Methodological Journey

Qualitative interview is used to reach out to migrant women population who are in the private sphere of home and doing care work accentuating the “love and caring mix with power and agency in the labour-for-money exchange” (Ibid.). This reflects the situation of the au pairs who are: a) temporary migrants in the host country staying under the context of cultural exchange; and b) performing domestic work in the household of their host families. Semi-structured interview is the selected format of interview because this permits the participants to respond to open-ended questions and its flexibility allow probing questions (McIntosh and Morse 2015). Doing semi-structured interview is appropriate because it makes the study “more exploratory in nature and cooperative in terms of knowledge production” that can highlight the perspective of the au pairs (Fedyuk and Zentai 2018: 173). In addition, utilizing semi-structured interview enable comparison of responses during analysis (McIntosh and Morse 2015) that corresponds to the identified framework of this study.

Reaching out to the Au Pairs

Snowball sampling technique is primarily used to gain access to the participants of the study. Since January, I collaborated with FairWork and communicated with the Philippine Embassy in The Hague, Bayanihan Foundation, and anonymous au pair agencies. I asked for their assistance to provide me initial contacts to the au pairs who are currently in the Netherlands. Once I have established contact to an au pair, I asked them to refer me to their au pair friends that will be willing to participate in the study.

This research organized a total of 20 semi-structured interviews from 24 July to 8 August 2020 to au pairs located in various areas in the Netherlands (*See Table 1*). The respondents are all Filipina au pairs with experiences ranging from 4 to 11 months. The age of the au pairs is between 23 and 31 years old, who are mostly single, except for one who have children and was previously married but now separated. Majority of the interviewed au pairs are college graduates, while the rest are undergraduates, took vocational courses, or finished high school. The previous occupations of the au pairs were diverse. Some of them were former au pairs (either in Denmark and/or Norway)⁴, domestic helpers in Hong Kong and Singapore, teacher, nurse, caregiver, secretary, bank teller, call center representative, among others.

⁴ Some of the au pairs are on their 5th year of being au pair since they became au pairs both in Norway and Denmark. The au pair contract in these two Nordic countries last for two years.

Table 1. Profile of the Interviewed Au Pairs

Pseudonym	Age	Educational Background	Previous Occupation	Months of Being Au Pair	Date of Interview
Anna	27	College	Supply chain/logistics staff	11	24-Jul-20
Fe	23	College	Pre-school teacher, guidance counsellor	11	24-Jul-20
Maria	26	College	Sales representative, HR assistant	11	27-Jul-20
Nina	23	College	Call center representative	6	30-Jul-20
Nicole	31	College	Sales clerk, encoder, domestic helper, au pair	7	30-Jul-20
Grace	24	College	Elementary teacher	6	30-Jul-20
Luz	25	College	Administrative assistant	7	30-Jul-20
Ruth	30	Undergraduate	Domestic helper	10	31-Jul-20
Jessa	27	Undergraduate	Call center representative, au pair	3	31-Jul-20
Mae	27	College	Bank teller	9	31-Jul-20
Cheska	24	College	Management trainee	9	31-Jul-20
Bianca	28	College	Elementary teacher	10	2-Aug-20
Issa	28	High School	Domestic helper	6	2-Aug-20
Sheila	28	College	HR process owner	7	3-Aug-20
Angel	31	College	Domestic helper, call center representative	8	4-Aug-20
Amy	29	Undergraduate	Caregiver, au pair	4	4-Aug-20
Irish	30	Vocational	Secretary, au pair	8	5-Aug-20
Jen	30	College	Nurse, domestic helper, au pair	11	7-Aug-20
Leah	27	College	Hotel staff, au pair	9	7-Aug-20
Rose	26	College	Newswriter, call center representative, au pair	11	8-Aug-20

Interview in time of COVID-19 Pandemic

Conducting face-to-face interviews to personally meet the au pairs was the initial plan for this study. Yet, doing a research in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic required necessary changes. I was able to conduct my first two interviews personally. However, as I did not feel well after those interviews, I have decided to continue instead through Zoom (through a mixture of audio and video calls depending on the au pair's preference). This decision came about not only to protect myself but also the au pairs from possible risks and also considering the increasing cases of COVID-19 in the Netherlands during that time. Utilizing my created interview guide⁵, the interview typically lasted from 30 minutes to 1 hour. I practiced flexibility during the interviews and allowed the au pairs "to lead the interaction in unanticipated directions" (King et al. 2019: 63). Also, the language used is Tagalog or *Taglish*⁶ to ensure that the au pairs can freely express themselves. The interviews were scheduled during their free time, of which some were conducted as late as 10 in the evening, when the au pairs are finished with household tasks. Furthermore, I have expected that some au pairs might have negative experiences. For these cases, I refer them to FairWork for further assistance, particularly if they have decided to file labour complaints for their experienced abuse.

⁵ See Appendix 1 to check the used interview guide

⁶ *Taglish* means code-switching between the use of Tagalog and English

Focusing on Current Filipina Au Pairs

The experiences of the current Filipina au pairs in the Netherlands is the focus of this research. This study only reached out to the Filipinas who have become au pairs from 2019 to 2020 and are still under their signed one-year contract. Former au pairs who finished their one-year contract and have become undocumented migrants are not included in the research population. Recognizing the study's limitation, employing the snowball sampling technique inevitably led to a "form of bias" since the au pairs could have introduced me to someone who has the same view about the research topic (King et al. 2019: 62). Since this research applied "purposeful sampling", it also resulted to "point of redundancy" of the responses which is addressed by concluding the sampling when no new information is gathered, and not "overgeneralizing" the gathered data but rather taking in-depth scrutiny on "information-rich cases" (Patton 1990: 186). Furthermore, as majority of the interviews were online, I failed to witness firsthand the "visual cues" of the interviewees (Mirick and Wladkoski 2019: 3066) and encountered challenges in establishing trust and rapport to the reserved interviewees (Deakin and Wakefield 2014).

Analysing the Voice of the Au Pairs

This research analyzed the gathered data by employing thematic analysis and grounded theory. The analysis of the findings is based on the recorded interviews that were partially transcribed. The lifted quotations from interviews were the au pairs' actual statements and translated into English. Guided by the identified conceptual frameworks of this research, the themes are generated from the au pairs' responses by examining the "abstract similarities and differences" (Ryan and Bernard 2003: 91). The developed themes later guided the structure of the entire research paper. Moreover, analyzing the gathered data is also inspired by the grounded theory. As my research aims to highlight the voices, experiences, and perspectives of the au pairs, it is likely that their ideas might not fall under the framework of *wasted precarity* or *human capital*. As put forwarded by Charmaz (2006: 2), using the grounded theory enabled me to analyze data in "fresh ways", create "original analysis" and "bring surprises, spark ideas".

3.2 "Ethics of Care"

Ethical considerations are highly observed in conducting the entire research process. This research practiced the of "ethics of care" as introduced in migration studies, which means being accountable and responsible to the research by considering the consequences of the study to the researched subject or group, particularly to migrants who are disposed to discrimination and racism (Leurs and Prabhakar 2018: 261). Personal data privacy was taken up seriously by taking explicit consent from the interviewees. Informed consent was also sought before they voluntarily participate in the research. The participants were also informed of the purpose of the research and their right to withdraw their participation at any point of the research. To further ensure their protection, the identities of the participants are also anonymized by using pseudonyms and treated with high confidentiality.

3.3 Where I am coming from?

In writing this research paper, I am positioning myself as a supporter of the experienced learning opportunities and personal growth of the Filipina au pairs who participated in the cultural exchange programme. At the same time, I also situate myself as supporter of the improvement of au pair scheme due to reported cases of exploitation and abuse. My aspiration for selecting a topic that deals with migrants is rooted from the fact that the Philippines is a “labour exporting economy” (Aslaug Kjaer 2013: 8) and has been known as a migrant-sending country. My previous working experience for a migration-related international organization also sparked my interest to study the au pair scheme and its pertinent migration dynamics. Moreover, it also fascinating to study the experiences of au pairs considering our similarities. Like the au pairs, I am a temporary migrant woman in the Netherlands, exposed to a new culture and fascinated on the Dutch way of living, and also falls under the age bracket of being an au pair. This resemblance often results to me being mistaken as an au pair. This also made me personally experience the stereotype that Filipino woman of my age are au pairs. Despite my shared similarities with the au pairs, my position in the research is still as an outsider collaborating with insiders (the au pairs) to further know their experiences. In the end, as this study is being conducted in partnership with FairWork, my positionality for the organization is also as an outsider. As I carry out the research with them, the findings of my research might not necessarily represent the organization’s view. Though there might be a potential conflict of interest between me and FairWork, the results of this study remain as independent and neutral as possible.

Chapter 4 | “Work” Experiences of the Filipina Au Pairs

IND’s au pair policy states that au pairs are expected to perform “light domestic work” for maximum 30 hours per week in exchange for the facilities and €340 pocket money provided by their host family. Though the au pair’s entry in the Netherlands is not under a work visa, the domestic work that they are doing for their host family corresponds to ILO’s definition of work described as “any activity performed by persons of any sex and age to produce goods or to provide services for use by others or for own use” (n.d.: 20). As this research intends to highlight the missing voice of the au pairs, this chapter discusses the domestic “work” experiences of the au pairs from their perspectives. This chapter examines the work experiences of the au pairs by scrutinizing: their motivation for participating in the cultural exchange programme, daily life experiences, positionality in their host family, relationship with their au pair agencies, their experienced abuse and maltreatment, and their future career plans.

4.1 Why Become an Au Pair?

The au pairs’ participation in the cultural exchange programme are motivated by their aspirations of travelling and living abroad, learning foreign culture, and attaining personal development goals. For someone who have no migration history like Anna, Grace, Mae, Fe, and Cheska, being in the Netherlands as an au pair is a dream come true as they have been musing to live abroad since childhood. Grace said, *“Since I was a child, my dream is to really work and live abroad.”* Most of the au pairs cited that they become an au pair because they want to experience and learn new culture. They wanted to explore and compare how the Dutch or European culture is different to the Filipino’s way of living. The au pairs wished to learn how to socialize in a foreign culture, and to be exposed to foreign beliefs, traditions, and even food. For Luz, being an au pair gave her *“...the opportunity to travel to other places, to know foreign culture, other language, to learn new things.”* It also shows that the all-expenses-paid characteristic of the au pair scheme made the au pairs recognized that it is the right programme for them to know a foreign culture. *“Everything is paid for. I cannot afford to save up something like this easily so I really pushed for this,”* Issa said.

I argue that the young age of the au pairs also determined their motivation of attaining personal development while becoming an au pair. This reflects the notion of human capital where the personal growth, which the young au pairs experience during the cultural exchange programme, will later on increase their productivity and increase their earnings (Tan 2014). For the au pairs, their experiences enabled them to prioritize and discover themselves, to develop their characters, to go “out of [their] comfort zones”, and to gain a “stepping-stone”. They “grab the opportunity” of being au pair while they are still young and since it only lasts for a year. More so, their au pair experience becomes their “road to independence” and a way of breaking the norm, since this is the first time for some of them to be abroad or be living away from their family. Mae asserted, *“In the Filipino culture, you are expected to leave the house once you get married. I am still single and I have been living with my family ever since. Being an au pair is my much needed time alone away from my family so I can be independent.”*

It is worth emphasizing that the majority of the au pairs revealed that their motivation for being an au pair is not financially driven. This argument upholds Cox (2015a) argument that the au pairs’ participation in the programme is not motivated by the monetary compensation. Mae said, *“I already knew that I will only receive allowance and not salary. I knew that it is only enough for myself. I talked to my family before I left that I cannot send money back home.”* For Leah, her au pair agency even discouraged the au pairs to send remittance back home. Some

of the au pairs are also not obliged by their families to help out because they are the youngest. Moreover, most chose being an au pair even if their salary in their former job pays more, which is another evidence of their non-economic motivation. This is apparent in the case of Maria (a former sales agent in the Philippines), and Angel (a former domestic helper in Hong Kong). Maria said, *“This is really a big opportunity for someone like me because it is so difficult to enter Europe. For me, the wage doesn’t matter, what is important is I was able to experience the culture and socialize with other people and learn from their culture.”* Nevertheless, there are still au pairs who are saving their allowance so they can send money back home, particularly for the au pairs that are the family’s eldest or breadwinner.

4.2 A Day in a Life of An Au Pair

Performing Domestic Work on Weekdays

“I wake up at 7 in the morning. I cook breakfast for the family and prepare the lunch box of the kids. After that, I will bring the kids to school and later pick them up. I will then tidy up their rooms, then wash and fold the clothes when the kids and my host parents leave. In the evening, I will prepare the dining table and sometimes cook for them.” – Luz

Being an au pair denotes that they signed up for doing light domestic work for their host families, in return for their accommodation and monthly allowance. This is evident on how my interviewed au pairs described their typical weekday, which are all almost similar with how Luz’ day goes by. They start their day early in the morning to cook breakfast, prepare the lunch box of the kids, and send the kids to school. Once the host parents and the kids have left the house for work and school, they will start cleaning the house or washing the clothes. In the afternoon, they will pick up the kids from school. In the evening, they will help in cooking the family’s dinner. Yet, there are some au pairs whose only household task is babysitting especially if the host family has a baby. Some of the au pairs are focused in helping the host mother in taking care of their 1 to 2-year-old babies. Many of the au pairs stated that the household tasks that they are performing is light because of the machines that they are using (e.g. vacuum, dishwashing, and washing machines) and the family’s hired regular cleaner who thoroughly cleans the house.

Experiencing the Dutch Culture on Weekends

The main purpose of au pair scheme is its cultural exchange component (IND n.d.). Based on my interviewed au pairs, they mostly experience the Dutch culture during their off days in the weekend, since they are busy doing domestic work during weekdays. The au pairs attributed their knowledge on Dutch society and culture from their host families, au pair friends, and au pair agencies. They shared that their host families were the ones who mainly introduced them to Dutch culture, manners, and food⁷. Anna recalled, *“My host family made me try Dutch food like herring and stroopwafel.”* Grace also said, *“My host family provided me tips on the Dutch culture saying that they are very direct.”* Together with their host families and au pair friends, the au pairs further familiarized themselves on the Dutch culture by visiting museums, tourist areas, forests, and parks. *“I went to Zaandam with my host family. I saw wooden shoes, the chocolate factory, and a lot of cheese. During the weekends, I travel with my au pair friends. We visited museums, windmills, or even travelled to Groningen or Maastricht,”* Maria said. Most of the au

⁷ Some of the au pairs did not learn the Dutch culture through their host families because their host parents are expats in the Netherlands. See Table 3 to check the profile of the host families.

pairs acknowledged that they were able to explore a lot of places in the Netherlands during their off days because of the “free weekend train ticket” that they purchased or sometimes paid by their host family. The au pairs cited too that their agencies organized activities for them to know more about the Dutch culture but most were postponed due to the ban in gatherings as precaution to the COVID-19 pandemic. Luz sadly said, “*Our au pair agency scheduled a visit to Keukenhof and a gathering on King’s Day, but it did not happen because of COVID. I was not able to experience various events because of COVID.*”⁸

Learning the Dutch language is also one of their ways of knowing the culture. Some of the au pairs have learned the Dutch language through language classes subsidized by their host families. But for Nina, she learned the Dutch language through her host kids. “*The kids are teaching me how to speak Dutch while I am teaching them how to speak English,*” Nina said. However, there are some au pairs who refused to learn the Dutch language because the kids can speak and understand English; they cannot see its use since they will only stay in the Netherlands for one year.

4.3 Older Sister, Domestic Worker or Guest of the Host Family?

The relationship of the au pair to her host family plays a key role on the overall working experience of the au pairs (See Table 2). The interviewed au pairs variedly positioned themselves in their host family. Majority of the au pairs enthusiastically shared that their host family made them feel that they are part of the family. “*I feel like I am their first child. I am like the older sister of the kids of my host family*” Anna said. Rose’s closeness to her host family is evident when she shared that, “*My host mom even hugged me if they can sense that I am getting tired. I wholeheartedly felt that I am part of the family.*” The au pairs felt the sense of belonging to their host family because of the following: they are welcomed to join family meals; they are invited to the family activities or parties; their birthdays are celebrated; their opinions are considered in decision making; their privacy is being respected; and they are not feeling the superiority of their host parents. Sheila even complimented her host family’s parenting style. She shared that she is introduced to the kids as *au pair* not as “*oppas*”; and she is considered as one of the adults in the family that must be followed by the kids. Yet, the au pairs being treated as family members has another implication, as it “disguised the working relationship by using the discourse of the moral economy emphasizing cooperation and mutual responsibility” for being “one of the family” (Hess and Puckhaber 2004: 73).

Conversely, there are au pairs who positioned themselves as domestic workers. Bianca explained why she felt like being the domestic worker of the host family. She said, “*They treat me as ‘katulong’⁹. They treat me so differently. It feels like that I have a boss and I don’t have freedom. It seems like I am under them and I am not allowed to do things. For my host family, it seems like one mistake will kill you. They are perfectionists.*” Likewise, Ruth shared the same sentiment and said, “*I feel like I am an employee. I am eating in my room.*” Angel also felt being the host family’s domestic worker because she deemed that her “usefulness” to the family is dependent on the tasks that she has done for them, and also because the kids treat her as the “maid” of the family.

⁸ Most of the interviewed au pairs are partly sad that they were not able to fully experience the Dutch culture because of the restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁹ Dutch term for babysitter or nanny

¹⁰ Tagalog term for domestic helper

Table 2. Profile of the Host Families (N=20)

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Nationality		
Dutch	14	70%
Non-Dutch/Expatriate	6	30%
Number of Children		
Two (2)	10	50%
Three (3)	6	30%
Four (4)	4	20%
History of Hosting Au Pair		
Have been hosting au pair	16	80%
First time to host au pair	4	20%

There are also au pairs who believe that they are guests. For Issa and Jessa, they refused being attached to the host family because they knew that they will eventually leave them after a year. Their previous experience as an au pair and domestic helper have taught them that being attached to family will only make it difficult for them to leave. Issa mentioned, *“I feel like I am a guest. Since this is my third host family, I have already conditioned myself not to be so attached to the family because I knew that there will be a lot of crying when I leave.”*

I argue that the obscure positionality of the au pairs in their host family has an impact on their perspectives on how they see themselves in their host family. The au pair’s positionality in the society is considered ambiguous since they are treated as: a) students getting acquainted in a foreign culture, b) members of host families, and c) “de facto workers” (Dalgas 2018: 201). The au pairs are not considered workers despite their actual employment relationship with their host family (de Volder 2017). The au pairs’ work in the private household are not officially recognized as proper work or as a category for immigration (Oosterberk-Latoza 2007). Moreover, the au pairs’ presence in the private homes of their host family while performing the expected domestic work also put them in a precarious condition. This was affirmed by Pajnik when she cited that “domestic and care work” are the specific industries or the sectoral labour industries that employs precarious migrant workers. Reflecting on the conditions of the au pairs who are stay-in migrants and doing domestic work for their host families, it can be inferred that they are under the gendered industry of domestic work, thus making it the “most precarious jobs for women migrants” (Pajnik 2016: 166). I contend that despite the different positionality the au pairs take in their host family (either as older sister, domestic worker or guest), they are still precarious migrants because of their mere involvement in conducting domestic work for their host family.

4.4 Au Pair Agencies as the “Sponsor”

The au pair’s entry into the Netherlands is only feasible via an accredited au pair agency that is recognized by the IND as the official sponsor of the au pair (IND 2020: 1). The au pairs shared that they were like applying for a job when they express their interest to become an au pair to their agencies. Though the application process varies in every au pair agency, they are initially interviewed by the agency. If they pass the screening, their profile will be posted and they will be interviewed by the host family to assess if they are good match to them.

Some au pairs later on attended orientation on Dutch culture and what to expect for being an au pair; while the other au pairs have only become aware of their duties upon signing the contract. Other au pairs also recalled that they must go through a week-long training where they are taught housekeeping and even biking skills.

I postulate that the overall experience of the au pairs are dependent on the level of involvement of the au pair agencies to the au pair scheme. There are some au pairs who had valuable experience because of their au pair agencies. For Maria, her au pair agency's treatment to her as a relative made her experience the expected entitlements of being a part of the family. She said, *"Our agency is very kind and accommodating. They treat us as their nieces"*. The au pairs commended their agencies for organizing activities that enable them to: a) know the culture by visiting tourist attractions in the Netherlands; b) meet other au pairs through gatherings (e.g. Christmas party, BBQ event); and c) acquire new knowledge through conducted trainings (e.g. on mental health and first aid) or online classes (English and Dutch lessons). They appreciated their the au pair agencies' reminders, surveys, video, or phone calls to ask their current condition particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. *"They send masks to the au pairs. They send out online activities so the au pair will still learn the Dutch culture,"* Leah recalled. For the au pairs, aside from helping them to smoothly process the needed documentations for visa purposes, the au pair agency has served as the "bridge between them and the host family".

Conversely, there are au pairs who had unfortunate experiences due to how their au pair agencies managed their encountered issues with their host family. Bianca, who needed to change her au pair agency and eventually transferred to another host family said: *"They need to balance the story of the host family and the au pair. In my previous agency, they are siding to the story of my host family. They need to check the situation of the au pair, the relationship between the host family and au pair. I realized that this agency is just about money."* Similarly, Ruth who has the same resentment said, *"The au pair agency has to be fair and just. They should also listen to the au pair not only to the host family. Not because the host family paid something, should mean that they will only listen to them."* Likewise, Angel who requested to break her contract because of overwork, was even reprimanded. *"The au pair agency told me that I don't have self-respect and that I am not considerate of my host family that is their big client. This is even without asking me the reason behind my request,"* she narrated. The au pairs, whose voices would like to be heard, insist that the au pair agencies must: a) protect the au pairs especially when they made aware that the au pairs are being exploited, and b) ensure that the host family is following the rules and regulations of the au pair scheme.

The au pairs arrival in the Netherlands through the au pair agencies illustrates Pajnik's concept of "sponsor mechanism". As stipulated in the Netherland's au pair policy, the au pair agencies serve as the "sponsor" of the au pairs. The au pair agencies are implementing the "permit or entry policies" or the migration policies as identified by Pajnik. The au pairs—even with the positive or negative experience from their agencies—are becoming precarious migrants because the "systems of permit" results to "irregular migration, informal labour and migrant workers' vulnerability, placing them in a weaker position in the labour market and society more generally" (Pajnik 2016: 164). The au pair agencies' indifference also stresses the unsuitability of these agencies to become responsible for the au pairs, because of "conflict of interest" (Padilla 2010 as cited in Stenum 2011: 102). The business nature of the au pair agencies can result to contradiction on their expected role of protecting the au pairs.

4.5 Overworked and Abused Au Pairs

“What is really happening is cheap labour for the lack of better term. They disguise it as cultural exchange, but it is really cheap labour even to the point of exploitation.”
 – Sheila

More than half of the interviewed au pairs stated that they are only doing the expected light domestic work, working for 30 hours a week, and sometimes even having almost 2.5 to 3 days off in a week (See Table 3). Whereas, the other au pairs are performing heavy domestic work, working beyond 30 hours a week, and only having 1 day off in a week. The overworked au pairs confessed that their working hours for the entire week ranges from 40 to 50 hours. Issa shared, *“My day starts at 6:30 in the morning. I am working for approximately 50 hours a week.”* The heavy domestic tasks that they are doing during these extra hours include thorough house cleaning, cleaning the windows (inside and outside), cleaning the toilets, extra babysitting, and taking care of a child with special needs¹¹.

Table 3. Summary of Domestic Work of the Au Pairs (N=20)

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Type of Performed Domestic Work		
Light domestic work	12	60%
Heavy domestic work	8	40%
Weekly Working Hours		
Within 30 hours	12	60%
31 – 40 hours	6	30%
41 – 50 hours	2	10%
Number of Day Off in a Week		
1 day	2	10%
2 days	13	65%
2.5 – 3 days	5	25%

Yet, it is important to highlight that there are two kinds of au pairs that are working for excessive hours and doing heavy domestic work. First, there are some au pairs who have entered an agreement¹² with their host family to work for extra hours while earning extra payment¹³. According to these au pairs, they have agreed to perform the extra work because extra income means additional remittance back home, and additional resources to use when they are exploring the Netherlands or other European countries. For Irish, she accepted the extra work even if her au pair agency doesn’t allow it and said, *“I have nothing else to do and I am enjoying it.”* Second, there are au pairs who are doing heavy household tasks and working for excessive hours without any extra payment. Issa confided the reason for doing so and

¹¹ These tasks are considered heavy domestic work based on one au pair agency’s contract (Sunshine Au Pair 2019: 6-7). See Appendix 2 to see a sample of au pair contract.

¹² The au pairs shared that their host family offered them the extra work because they are aware that their monthly allowance is too small that they might need extra source of income.

¹³ There are some au pairs who earn: double (€780) her monthly allowance, €120 by thorough cleaning the house twice a month, €50 by working extra day on a weekend, €500 for a week when the host parents are not around, or €4 to 20 per hour for extra hours of babysitting.

said, *“I am just giving it from the bottom of my heart. I am afraid that if they will give me extra payment, they will ask me to do more tasks because they are paying for it.”* For Mae, although she is aware that she is doing a lot of work if compared to other au pairs, she still works for extra hours as self-initiative because she felt that she is part of the family. However, with both types, these ad hoc arrangements can easily fall into abuse and exploitation.

Taking into account the background of the au pairs, it is significant to point out that the migration history and former occupation of the au pairs are common characteristics among au pairs who are working for excessive hours and performing heavy work. Upon scrutinizing the au pair’s migration history, those who are doing heavy work load have left the Philippines to work abroad even before being an au pair in the Netherlands. It was not the first time for these au pairs to travel outside the Philippines as they have been an Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW). They were former domestic helper or caregiver in Hong Kong or Singapore, and former au pair in Denmark or Norway. Pertinent to this, it is also observable that overworked au pairs have former occupation that is related to care or domestic work. It can be surmised that their point of comparison can be based from these previous work experiences. Ruth, a former domestic helper in Hong Kong and who experienced abuse from her host family, said: *“If I compare it, my situation with my host family is even worse than my situation as domestic helper in Hong Kong.”*

Au Pair’s on Feeling like a Slave

“I didn’t feel that I am an au pair. I felt that I am abused and this is slavery.”
– Bianca

Aside from Bianca, some interviewed au pairs also disclosed the feeling of being like a slave of the host family instead of being the au pair. The au pairs recognize that they are abused because of the following: a) excessive working hours, b) made to perform heavy domestic work, c) demanding and perfectionist host family, d) lack of privacy, e) denied off days (even on holidays), f) prohibited to meet other people, and f) experienced verbal and physical abuse. Ruth, who worked for more than the required 30 hours a week, shared her encountered struggle:

“I am just an au pair, but I feel like a slave because I don’t have privacy. When I sleepover to my friend’s house, they need to get my friend’s number, name, and address. It’s the same when I am meeting someone. They also need to get the name of the person. I feel like I am choking. I multitask like taking care of the child while at the same time cleaning the house. They were demanding too much like the house must be cleaned thoroughly. Also, during my off days in the weekend, I need to go home early because I need to babysit.”

In the case of Bianca, her experience involved verbal abuse as she endured being constantly shouted and rudely treated by the kids. Bianca, a former primary school teacher, admitted that she was culture shocked on the kids’ behavior and was further distressed on the experienced physical abuse of the kids. Bianca narrated:

“I just didn’t like how the kids treat me. They spat on me, shouted at me. Sometimes, they even suspected me that I stole their laptop because they couldn’t see it. If the kid was not on the mood, the kid blamed it on me. The second kid was a sadist. If he did not like something, he will kick me, slap me, and spit on me. He spat on me twice. The host parents will get mad at the kids when these things happened. However, I discovered that they were also talking behind my back.”

Ruth and Bianca eventually left their first host families and are now living in their second host families. In the case of Bianca, she resorted to her “last choice” in order to leave the family. She narrated, *“I ran away from them. I brought a small bag with me and left my host family without them knowing.”* Both of them are also now under the management of new au pair agencies because their previous au pair agencies took the side of the host family. However, unlike the case of Ruth and Bianca, there is also an au pair who endured the maltreatment of host family and chose to stay. Angel, a former domestic helper, said, *“If I will based it on the rights of the au pair, I really feel that I am abused. This is not what I signed up for. But for me, I just didn’t make it a big deal because my contract is about to end. I am thinking that this is my way of helping the host family and the kids.”*

The au pairs’ experienced overwork and feeling like a slave can be analyzed as the result of intersection of “marginal social identities” that is cited by Panik as one of the factors that shaped migrant precariousness. The au pairs’ characteristics as young, migrant, female, dark skinned, and possibly less educated (compared to their host parents) have resulted to increased level of their precariousness (Pajnik 2016: 161). The au pairs being considered the “other” in the household of the host family (Eldén and Anving 2016) consequently resulting to them having no power to challenge their host parents, thus generating a “master-slave relationship” (Moss 2015). Also, the Filipina au pairs doing the domestic work or the “2D jobs” (demanding and dirty) for their Dutch host families stressed the “racialized” and “ethnicized” dimension of their work as it “rationalized and naturalized” that dark skins are associated with dirt while white skins are linked to purity (Pajnik 2016; Cox and Busch 2018). Furthermore, the marginal social identity of the au pairs as women exacerbated their precarious condition. Pajnik referred to this as the “gendered” terms of their work that results to their performed domestic work being unvalued and invisible because of society’s underlying assumption that household chores and childcare in the private homes are “natural activities” of women making it informal, and unproductive work (Cox 2018: 3; Gheasi et al. 2014).

Referring also to the discussion in previous sections, it can be inferred that au pairs embodied the wasted migrant precariousness (Pajnik 2016). Their characteristics and working status correspond to Pajnik’s identified factors that produce migrant precariousness. The au pairs are immigrants in the Netherlands and their entry in the Netherlands is legitimized through the au pair agency that serves as their sponsor. The domestic work that au pairs performed for their host families also refers to a specific industry that mostly employs precarious migrant workers. In addition, the intersection of the marginal social identities of the au pairs as young, migrant women, and dark-skinned Filipina, resulted to racialized, ethnicized, and gendered terms of their work. Thus, as Pajnik puts it, the au pairs’ performed work is “indecent work” and not congruent to ILO’s guidelines (*See Figure 5*).

Figure 5. The ‘Production’ of Au Pair Precariousness



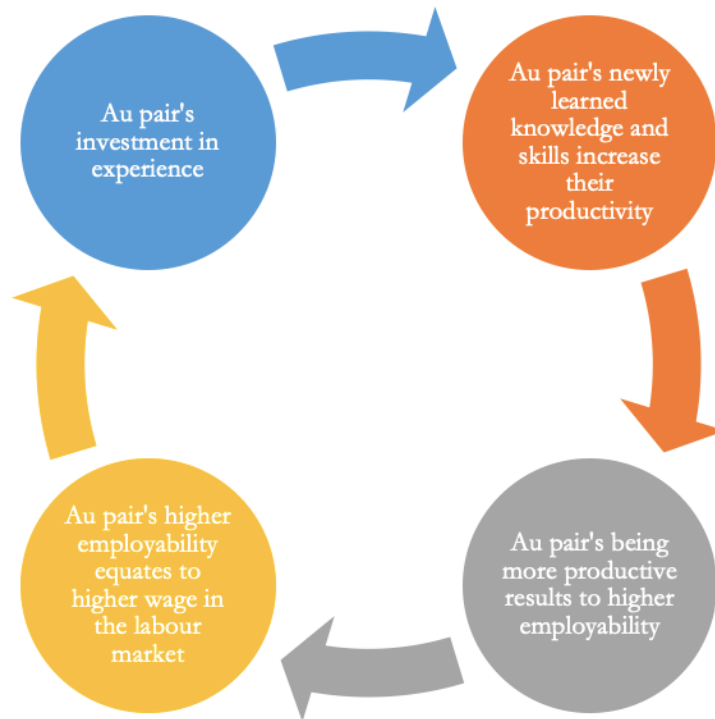
Source: Author's Illustration based on Pajnik (2016)

4.6 Where to Next? Au Pairs' Future Plans

“Being an au pair is a stepping-stone. I know that better things will happen after I become an au pair here in the Netherlands.” – Angel

If the young au pairs' future are assessed, it can be implied that their participation in the cultural exchange programme is a form of human capital. All of the au pairs that I have met asserted that au pairing for them is an investment. They substantiated this by pointing out that the knowledge, “life” and work-related skills that they have acquired in the cultural exchange experience will be highly useful to their future careers. The au pairs argued that what they have learned as an au pair did not only impart them life lessons, but also advantageous as they navigate to their projected career paths or the next jobs (See Table 3). In effect, this reflects the “virtuous circle” of human capital theory. When the au pairs participated in the cultural exchange programme, they have invested for the experience, where the knowledge and skills they gained can be used to increase their productivity. Hence, resulting to higher employability in the labour market and higher wages from future employers (See Figure 6).

Figure 6. Au Pair Experience as Human Capital



Source: Author's Illustration based on Siegmann (2019)

Beneficial for Future Career

The au pairs indicated that the care work that they have performed for their host families enhanced and supplemented the skills needed when they return to their previous professions. For former primary school teachers like Fe, Grace, and Bianca, they claimed that the childcare skills that they have learned while babysitting will be helpful when they come back to teaching. Grace said, *"I can put this experience on my resume. I will ask for an au pair certificate from my au pair agency as a proof that I became an au pair. I can use it as childcare experience because I am a teacher."* Fe explained that since she is now exposed in taking care of kids with foreign nationality, she will be now more eligible to teach in an international or multi-cultural school. Similarly, for Mae who is a former caregiver, and for Ruth and Jen who have a background on nursing, they are convinced that their au pair experience indeed improved their skills particularly on taking care of kids. In the case of Mae, she believed that her au pair experience made her more ready since she is intending to become a caregiver in Canada in the future.

The au pairs also contended that the household work they performed for their host families equipped them the skills needed for their next job (which is I observed are still mostly in the sector of domestic or cleaning work). This is apparent to more than half of the interviewed au pairs who will continue being an au pair to another European country. The au pairs shared that they want to become an au pair again in countries like Belgium, Luxembourg, France, Denmark or Norway. For these au pairs, having an au pair background makes them more eligible for their prospect host families. Au pairing in Denmark or Norway is the most common choice for their next destination, where the contract lasts for two years and the monthly allowance is bigger compared to what they are receiving in the

Netherlands¹⁴. Likewise, similar to the tasks that they are doing as an au pair, some au pairs intend to apply as domestic helper in Spain, hotel housekeeper in Malta or France, and babysitter or cleaner in Finland.

For some au pairs, their experience is absolutely an investment as it improved their communication skills and enabled them to save up. For Rose and Issa, they noticed that the way they speak English and their communication skills have improved while being an au pair. Issa said, *“I am only a high school graduate and my communication skills is not so good. Through this, my knowledge in English language has improved because I have been using it every day. I can use it once I apply for being a call center agent back in the Philippines. That’s the kind of work that I intend to do afterwards because the salary is bigger.”* Moreover, for Rose, her au pair experience gave her the opportunity to save up. *“I am saving up so I can open up a business in the Philippines.”* said Rose. On the other hand, there are au pairs who will continue staying in the Netherlands as they have now Dutch partners. They envisaged that their little knowledge on the Dutch language and au pair background will lead them to other relevant work opportunities.

Table 4. Summary of the Next Steps of Filipina Au Pairs (N=21)¹⁵

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Being an au pair again in Europe	12	57%
Domestic helper in Spain	2	10%
Hotel housekeeper in Malta	2	10%
Cleaner or babysitter in Finland	1	5%
Staying in the Netherlands with Dutch partner	2	10%
Returning to the Philippines	2	10%

Being exposed to a new culture, new people, and new experience, the au pairs perceived that their au pair experience did not only improve their work-related skills but also developed their personal character. Mae said, *“Of course you will not learn theories while being an au pair. But you will learn a lot when it comes to your attitude towards hardship, struggle, handling, or interacting with people. You will learn life lessons. Also, discovering myself as a person, my capabilities (the things that I can do or cannot do) in this au pair experience is an investment for me.”* The au pairs further contemplated that their au pair experience taught them how to socialize and live with other people, and to be more patient, brave, open-minded, helpful, independent, and have more confidence on themselves. Anna also shared that she had learned a lot from how her host parents balance their work and family. She said, *“I learned from the work ethics of my host parents. I want to be like them because they are very professional in work and very involved with the kids.”* In addition, Bianca mentioned that being an au pair had a big impact on her as it taught her to be not be silent and be courageous in voicing out her rights as an au pair.

¹⁴ Nicole shared that her monthly allowance as former au pair in Norway is 5,900 NOK (€528) and in Denmark is 4,500 DKK (€605).

¹⁵ Included the count the au pair’s back up plan

Au Pairing as “Vacation”

“Honestly, I can say that I just took a one-year vacation in this au pair experience. That’s what I felt.” – Anna

As the analysis of this study is also inspired by the grounded theory, this research also aims to showcase the peculiar perspective of the au pair in her au pair scheme. Unlike the typical responses that I got, Anna, who is now back in the Philippines, is the only au pair that considered her au pair experience as “vacation”. It was her first time to live abroad and be away from her family for too long. Anna, a 27-year-old young professional in the Philippines, considered her au pair experience as a vacation because she planned to return in the Philippines after the expiration of her one-year contract. For Anna, her au pair experience is her method of taking a “break” from her work and giving time for herself. She said, *“I consider it as my big break because after my graduation I already started working.”* Anna’s plan of returning to the Philippines is inconsistent to the projected next steps of other au pairs who planned to stay further in Europe by being an au pair or to work in related jobs. Anna, who has a college degree in industrial engineering and has established her career in the Philippines in the field of logistics or supply chain, did not consider her au pair acquired skills relevant to her next career step. Instead, while being an au pair in the Netherlands, she studied courses or other skills that can be useful in her next job. For Anna, *“Since it is a vacation for me, I enrolled in a lot of online classes because I still want to stimulate my brain because I am returning to the Philippines. I applied for scholarship for that online courses in Coursera.”* Her free time enabled her to study a lot of online courses.

To sum up, it can be posited that the work experiences of the au pairs can be akin to a spectrum (See Figure 2). On one side, they have positive experiences attributed to the: thrill of experiencing a foreign culture and the opportunity of travelling; harmonious and family-like relationship they have established with their host families and au pair agency; and provocation that their au pair experience is an investment and a “stepping-stone” that increase their productivity, employability, and wages in the future. However, on the other side of the spectrum, my dialogue with the au pairs also put into limelight their negative experiences and the persisting issue of abuse and maltreatment from their host family. This are evident in their overworked condition, feeling like a domestic worker or slave resentment, and even on their experienced physical and verbal abuse. Given the distinct experience of the au pairs experiences, it is significant to examine the au pairs’ access or assemblage of social protection to guarantee their rights and protect themselves from risks.

Chapter 5 | Social Protection Experiences of the Au Pairs

The 1969 European Agreement on Au Pair Placement highlighted the responsibility of the member states to “[acknowledge] more particularly the need to give persons placed [as] “au pair” adequate social protection inspired by the principles laid down in the European Social Charter” (Council of Europe 1969: 1). Yet, it was argued that the au pair scheme has been lacking social protection (Liarou 2015). This chapter investigates this claim further and discusses the interviewed au pairs’ experiences of social protection. From the varied work experiences of the au pairs presented in the previous chapter, the central theme of this chapter revolves around their access and assemblage of social protection to ensure their rights and to protect themselves from any risk. This chapter opens up by narrating the personal stories of two au pairs on how they assembled social protection to leave their abusive host families. The succeeding parts of this chapter analyze the social protection experiences of the au pairs from the facet of their nationality as Filipinos and as temporary migrant residents of the Netherlands.

5.1 Au Pair’s “Assemblages” of Social Protection

The au pairs’ concept of social protection only commences when they start asking for “support” for their encountered issues with their host family. This resulted to majority of them saying that they “never tried” seeking for any kind of support during their entire au pair experience. In my interviews with the au pairs, I found out that only few of them have actual experience of seeking for social protection. This is specifically for the au pairs who have experienced abuse from their host families. However, for this research, when I am using the term social protection, I mean “all [the] tangible and intangible resources against social risks that might impede the realisation of life chances” (Bilecen and Barglowski 2014: 204). The succeeding personal stories recount how the au pairs have “assembled” or put together the available “tangible and intangible resources” in order to free themselves from their experienced “social risk”.

“I ran away.” – Bianca

Before coming to the Netherlands, Bianca, a former primary school teacher, is already aware that she will be working six days a week instead of the typical five-day work week. Motivated by the extra payment that she will receive, she immediately accepted her host family’s offer of €500 monthly allowance for this work arrangement. However, upon arriving in the Netherlands she was shocked that the extra payment she agreed upon did not only equate having one day off for the week but also meant working for longer hours. She said, “*When I arrived here, my work started at 7:30 in the morning and finished at 10:30 in the evening or 12 midnight.*” Bianca have worked for almost 10 to 12 hours a day beyond the prescribed 8 hours a day, and thus exceeding the 30-hour expected weekly working hours. Blaming herself on her experienced abuse, Bianca said, “*Maybe it was my fault because I didn’t ask during the interview how long I should work, I immediately agreed on six days a week.*” Bianca’s plight with her host family did not end in working for long extra hours. She also shared experiencing physical and verbal abuse from the host kids and dealing with controlling host parents. Bianca also confided being denied of taking off days even during public holidays, having a 6:00 PM curfew during her only day off, being prevented from meeting other people, and having no health insurance and no bank account.

For 10 months, Bianca endured the abusive treatment of her first host family. She recalled the emotional trauma that she experienced and said, *“I felt so depressed. I am always crying”*. Bianca felt more hopeless when she felt being unheard by her host family when she tried to discuss the issue with them, and when her au pair agency took the host family’s side and *“didn’t balance the story”*. However, Bianca found a glimpse of hope when she talked to her au pair friend who had the same experience. She eventually left her first host family when her au pair friend advised her to run away and to transfer to another host family. Bianca said, *“I ran away. My last choice was to run away. My friend pushed me to run away because my host family is not listening to me.”* Upon heeding her au pair friend’s advice, Bianca made up her mind, packed her bag, and bravely left her first host family.

During the interview, it was noticeable that Bianca is currently feeling secure, content, and happy. She attributed this to her second host family who have also helped her in leaving her abusive first host family. Before leaving her first host family, Bianca was able to look for another host family that was familiar with her situation and was willing to help her. She shared, *“My second host family advised me to talk first to my first host family and not just ran away. However, I fear that even if I talked to them, they would not allow me to leave or worst they’ll locked me inside the house. So, I decided to run away as long as my next host family will pick me up. They picked me up in a nearby place.”* Bianca valued all the support that her second host family provided her. She further said that her second host family helped her in securing healthcare insurance and opening a bank account. In her 10 months of being an au pair in her first host family, Bianca stayed in the Netherlands without any healthcare insurance and bank account since her monthly allowance was always given in cash. Furthermore, her second host family was the one who called her first au pair agency to inform them that she had left her first host family. She said, *“My second host mom called the owner of my former au pair agency. The agency is so mad because I ran away. My host mom also got mad on how my former au pair agency treated me.”* Bianca’s second host mother also initiated in contacting the IND and the local municipality for administrative purposes, and to also notify them that she had now transferred to another host family.

“They told me to leave and that I should not be afraid.” – Ruth

Ruth decided to be an au pair in the Netherlands with the optimism that she will only do lighter domestic work compared to what she was doing as a former domestic helper in Hong Kong. She also thought that her au pair experience will make her *“feel refresh”* and be able to escape the chaos that is happening to Hong Kong during that time. However, her expectations of having *“a change of environment and time for [herself]”* did not happen because of the abuse she experienced from her host family. Ruth confessed that she *“felt like the slave”* of her host family because of excessive working hours, multitasking, lack of privacy, and being denied taking her day off fully. She further stressed that her host family was so demanding. *“I felt like I am choking,”* Ruth said. She attempted to talk to her host family to address these issues. Yet, she said, *“I talked to my host family in a nice way for two nights, but nothing happened in the discussion.”*

Distressed on her encountered maltreatment by her host family, Ruth eventually devised ways on how she can leave her first host family and transfer to another host family. Ruth affirmed that her au pair friend’s advice paved the way for her to plan her next steps during this transition. *“I talked to a friend with almost the same experience. She also transferred to another host family and she advised me the rules of IND,”* Ruth said. She then familiarized herself with the IND’s rule by researching in the internet and further said, *“According to IND’s rules, the host family cannot keep the au pair if she wants to leave and if she is not happy with the family. She can move anytime. If the host family keeps her, the au pair can call the police. And if the au pair left the family, the au pair has one month to look for another host family. They cannot immediately ask the au pair to return home.”*

After familiarizing herself with her rights as au pair, Ruth reached out to another au pair agency. *“I talked to the [new] agency. They told me to leave and that I should not be afraid. They advised me to leave my host family if the discussion didn’t go well. I shared to them what I am going through. They uplifted me and helped me,”* Ruth said. She decided to ask for support from another au pair agency because she knew that her first au pair agency will be biased, since her former host family is closely related to the owner of the agency. Ruth met her second host family not through her new au pair agency. Despite this, she is grateful that her new agency even visited the second host family’s house to check if she has a room and to ensure that everything is okay. And while she settled with her second host family, her new au pair agency also assisted her in getting a new healthcare insurance, which her former host family failed to secure.

Assembled Social Protection

Hearing the au pairs’ stories of abuse, it is evident that they have initially sought protection from their social network in the Netherlands—their au pair friends. Due to similarities of experience, the au pairs reached out first to other au pairs as they might possibly have encountered the same dilemma and considering that their au pair friends may empathize more to their experienced abuse. Thus, it can be inferred that for the au pairs, informal social protection is more accessible when they encounter problem with their host family. Bilecen and Bargłowski (2014: 205) described informal social protection as “being provided by social networks based on collective norms such as community solidarity, reciprocity, altruism, and obligations”. Put succinctly, informal social protection pertains to the social protection extended by the “family and friendship ties” that the au pairs might have. It also apparent that the au pairs also asked for assistance from another social network that can be also categorized as providing informal social protection—their second/new host families.

Echoing the arguments of Bilecen and Bargłowski (2014) and basing it on the experience of social protection of the abused au pairs, it cannot be assumed that formal social protection is “superior” over the informal social protection. As characterized by Bilecen and Bargłowski (2014), formal social protection pertains to the “state-driven” provisions. In more exact terms, formal social protection “is generally considered to involve publicly funded formal state regulations that are reinforced by laws, statutes, and regulations, institutionalised in policy and legislation, and conveyed in the form of (supra) national frames and eligibility criteria” (Ibid. 2014: 207). In the case of my interviewed au pairs, seeking support from formal social protection has become secondary. This refers to when: a) Ruth asked for help from another IND accredited au pair agency; and b) the second host mother of Bianca requested for help from IND and municipality because she transferred to another host family. I would argue that the au pairs’ experience of social protection is indeed “assemblages of informal and formal transnational social protection”. They were able to manage their encountered risk by carefully strategizing, mobilizing, and assembling the available social protection mechanisms in network. Furthermore, the assemblages of social protection reflect on the au pairs’ “informal ways of protection not only fill in the ‘gaps’ in formal protection but, for various reasons, may also be perceived as more viable” (Faist 2013 as cited in Bilecen and Bargłowski 2014: 204).

5.2 Au Pairs as Philippine Citizen

In my quest of inquiring on social protection experiences of the au pairs, I also intently asked the au pairs if they have requested or received any kind of support from any Philippine government agency. Not only because it is “state-driven” and falls as “formal social protection” (Bilecen and Bargłowski 2014), the au pairs as transnational migrants also deserve “citizenship-based entitlements” (Chhachhi 2009). Hence, I examine in this research

the au pairs' experience of social protection for simply being citizen of the Philippines. I interrogated for the support that they received from Commission on Filipino Overseas (CFO) and Philippine Embassy for being Filipinos.

The Filipina au pairs shared that they went to CFO before leaving for the Netherlands as part of pre-departure requirements. When the 14-year entry ban of au pairs to Europe was lifted in 2012, the government of the Philippines introduced administrative changes such as the CFO having overall responsibility on the au pair scheme in the country (Cox 2015a; CMA 2014). CFO required the Filipina au pairs to attend the Country Familiarization Seminar (CFS) before leaving the Philippines. CFO (n.d.) stressed the significance of the seminar to “equip them with adequate information on topics such as settlement concerns, values, cultural and social realities in the host countries, health and safety issues, airport and travel procedures and support networks.” The interviewed au pairs confirmed this as most of them recounted the CFS that they have attended. They said that the CFS was helpful with what to expect when they arrive in the Netherlands. They further recalled that through the CFS, they became aware of the history of the au pair ban in Europe. Luz also recalled that the seminar informed her of the hotlines that she can contact in case she encounters any problems.

The au pairs also instantly recognized the Philippine Embassy in the Hague as one of the institutions that they can go to in case they need social protection. Fe said, *“I knew that I can immediately contact the embassy. But I have no experience yet that requires me to call them.”* Furthermore, the ‘Guidelines on the Departure of Filipino Au Pairs to Europe’ states that “upon arrival in the specific European country of destination, au pairs shall register themselves at the relevant Philippine Embassy/Consulate” (Embassy of Philippines in the Netherlands 2012). This is enforced by the Embassy to maintain a database that monitor the au pairs that are under their jurisdiction. However, among the 20 au pairs that I have interviewed, I found out that only one au pair went to the Philippine Embassy to register and she has done it as advised by her au pair agency. This implies that the Philippine Embassy might not have complete data of the au pairs that are in the Netherlands. Nonetheless, upon further enquiry on the support that they receive from the Philippine Embassy, the au pairs who are under the same agency also recalled attending a seminar on mental health. Fe shared, *“The Philippine Embassy in the Hague conducted seminar for the au pairs. It is about adjustment. Mental health to be exact. The Dutch speaker talked about what is happening in Holland during a particular season. They encouraged us to be prepared and to do certain things. It was in partnership with the agency as they were there during the seminar.”*

5.3 Au Pairs as Holder of Netherland’s Residence Permit

The au pairs, as legal temporary migrants and holder of valid residence permits in the Netherlands for a year, are indeed entitled for social protection. This research acknowledges the “transnational perspective” of social protection of the au pairs as it identifies the “social and symbolic attachments to more than one nation-state... [of] many individuals... over their life course” (Bilecen and Bargłowski 2014: 204). During my interviews, I recognized that another source of formal protection for Filipina au pairs are the Dutch government mechanisms to protect their welfare. IND’s goal of protecting the au pairs are manifested in: requiring them to have healthcare insurance, establishing a special hotline, and putting them under the administration of au pair agencies.

The au pairs are required by the IND to secure basic healthcare insurance (*zorgverzekering*) within four months after arrival in the country (IND 2020: 11). Majority of the interviewed au pairs shared that their host family has paid for their health insurance. However, there are au pairs who regularly pay their health insurance and later on will be receiving reimbursement. Ruth said, *“I am paying €89 monthly for my health insurance. It is*

automatically deducted in my bank account. But it is okay because it will be reimbursed.” Apparently, the au pairs in the Netherlands are entitled to healthcare allowance (*zorgtoeslag*) that explains the reimbursement that they will receive after paying the premium of their healthcare insurance (JoHo Insurances 2019). The au pairs are also eligible to receive healthcare insurance because of their low income (Ibid.). Most of the interviewed au pairs shared that they have not used their health insurance yet. However, for Anna and Maria, their health insurance was useful especially when they consulted the doctors on their medical conditions.

IND has also implemented measures to protect the au pairs in case of abuse or exploitation. Aside from contacting the Dutch Aliens Police, IND also encouraged the au pairs to call the “special reporting point for au pairs”¹⁶ (IND 2020: 7). In this research, I discovered that only one of the interviewed au pairs have tried calling so far the IND’s special hotline. Irish said she called the IND not to report for abuse but to ask for an au pair friend’s concern. *“I tried calling them when my au pair friend’s mother died. I asked the IND what are the necessary papers for her to go back to the Philippines and return here to the Netherlands without any hassle,”* Irish said. She was then advised of the required documents and was ensured that her au pair friend can still return to the Netherlands. I discovered that majority of the au pairs are familiar with the special IND hotline for the au pairs. The welcome brochure/kit from their au pair agencies made them familiar with the emergency contact numbers that includes the IND’s hotline. However, there are some au pairs who are not aware of the IND hotline and it is their first time hearing about this¹⁷.

The IND’s accredited au pair agencies are also expected to perform “duty of care” to the au pairs (IND 2020: 6). In the case of Issa, she shared that her au pair agency was helpful in informing her host family of her experienced excessive working hours. *“I asked for my au pair agency’s help to remind my host family that I only need to work for 30 hours a week. It has been difficult for me to stop my working hours, but through my agency, I was able to cut it,”* Issa said. Furthermore, for Bianca and Ruth (who transferred to another host family), their new/second au pair agency have been so helpful during the transition. Ruth is also grateful for her second au pair agency that helped her in getting healthcare insurance, which she did not have from her previous host family.

It is worth mentioning that the au pairs have not experienced asking any type of support from the local NGOs or from the Dutch trade union. It can be inferred that the au pairs, being temporary migrants, lack familiarity on the relevant organizations or have not yet established a network that can lead them to the local NGOs or the trade union. Nevertheless, for Leah who became familiar with FairWork—by attending its event last February on raising awareness on au pair’s legal rights—she considered reaching out to them in case she will encounter any kind of problem. It is noteworthy that FairWork assisted my interviewed au pairs who encountered abuse and then decided to file labour complaints against their host family or au pair agency.

Overall, it can be said that the au pairs’ experience of social protection is arrangement or “assemblages” of informal and formal social protection. For the au pairs who have encountered abuse, informal social protection has become more accessible. It is salient when they sought help first from their social network (i.e. au pair friends and second host family) then followed by formal type of social protection (i.e. their second au pair agency). Yet, this research did not limit its findings on the social protection experiences of au pairs who experienced abuse. It also examines the social protection available to all au pairs based on their nationality as Filipinos and as legal migrant residents of the Netherlands. The au pairs’

¹⁶ The IND’s hotline for the au pairs is 06 10 82 35 94.

¹⁷ In this circumstance, I informed the au pairs about the IND’s special reporting hotline and the rationale behind the establishment of this.

experienced “citizenship-based entitlements” for being Philippine citizen pertains to their attended country familiarization seminar from CFO; while for some au pairs, the mental health seminar from the Philippine Embassy. On the other hand, the au pairs’ as legal residents of the Netherlands receive social protection from IND by mandating that they have healthcare insurance, by establishing the special reporting line, and by the expected “duty of care” from accredited au pair agencies. In the end, I argue that the au pair scheme is not lacking social protection. However, this research highlights the more viability of informal social protection. Based on the au pair experiences, it is evident that informal type of social protection is more viable—particularly for the au pairs who are still navigating and getting familiar in the host country, while trying to protect themselves from encountered “social risk”.

Chapter 6 | Conclusion

As I reach the end of writing my research paper, two distinct statements of the au pairs resonated to me. It was when Sheila said that, *“What is really happening is cheap labour for the lack of better term. They disguise it as cultural exchange, but it is really cheap labour to the point of even exploitation.”* It was also when Angel stated that, *“Being an au pair is a stepping-stone. I know that better things will happen after I become an au pair here in the Netherlands.”* For me, these two statements summarize the contradictory perceptions of the au pair scheme in the Netherlands that became my point of departure in writing this research.

The main intent of this research is to provide the missing voice of the au pairs in the existing literature by highlighting their experiences from their own viewpoints. In order to examine their experiences, I posed these two central questions at the beginning: a) What are the work experiences of au pairs in the cultural exchange programme? and b) How do au pairs experience social protection in practice? I contextualized the shared experiences of my interviewed au pairs by analyzing it through the frameworks of human capital, wasted precarity, and assemblages of informal and formal transnational social protection.

As it turns out, my research revealed that the work experiences of the Filipina au pairs in the Netherlands cannot be generalized as either positive or negative experience. I argue that their work experiences can be comparable to a spectrum. On one side, to different degrees, the au pairs have positive work experiences for being exposed to a foreign culture, feeling like part of the host family, learning new knowledge and skills, attaining personal growth, and gaining a stepping-stone that is advantageous for their future career plans. Yet, on the other side, again to different degrees, the au pairs have negative work experiences resulting to them feeling like a slave, experiencing abuse and exploitation, and becoming precarious migrants. I explored how the au pairs’ immigration status, involvement in insecure domestic work sector, ambiguous positionality in their host family, and “marginal social identities” have shaped their precariousness.

My dialogue with the Filipina au pairs further show that their experiences of social protection is “assemblages” of informal and formal social protection. It shows that the protection provided by the social network of the au pairs—such as their au pair friends and second host families (or the informal type of social protection)—is more accessible. This is particularly true for the au pairs who experienced abuse and got transferred to another host family. Reaching out to the formal type of social protection or the state-driven mechanisms became secondary in the experience of the abused au pairs. This upholds that the formal type of social protection is not superior over the informal ones. Nonetheless, are interconnected mechanisms for the au pairs to protect themselves from imminent social risk. On the other hand, the au pairs’ experience of social protection is not only limited to those who experienced abuse. Albeit being rarely used by the au pairs, this research also revealed that there are formal type of social protection measures available for the au pairs devised by the Philippine and Dutch government as part of their entitlements as Philippine citizens and as temporary legal migrants in the Netherlands.

So, did the situation of the Filipina au pairs improve after eight years since the government of the Philippines lifted the ban of their entry in Europe in 2012? Based on the findings of this study, I contend that indeed the lifting of the ban has resulted to safe and legitimized migration of the au pairs in the Netherlands, through CFO’s administration and IND’s accreditation of the au pair agencies as the sponsor. However, if the work experiences of the Filipina au pairs are taken into account, I argue that the lifted ban did not end the

cases of exploitation and abuse of the au pairs. Though I recognize that there are au pairs who indeed benefitted and have positive experiences in the cultural exchange context of the au pair scheme, I also acknowledge that there are still au pairs who are overworked and maltreated by their host families. My research reveals that almost half of my interviewed au pairs are performing heavy domestic work and working beyond the prescribed 30 hours per week. There are still persisting cases of au pairs' who encountered insecurity, exploitation, and physical and verbal abuse, and even experiencing being the slave of the host family.

As I reflect on the findings of my research, I consider the small sample size and the focus given only to the experiences of Filipina au pairs as the main limitations of my study. I understand that this sample size might not fully represent the missing voice of the au pairs and is not sufficient to generalize the overall work and social protection experiences of the au pairs. For future research, I suggest for a quantitative study with a larger sample size and having au pairs with different nationalities to ensure full representation of their experiences. In addition, future studies on the work and social protection experiences of former au pairs who became undocumented is another interesting topic that can be explored. Furthermore, it is fascinating to research the career of the au pairs years later after their participation in the cultural exchange programme. It is intriguing to know if the former au pairs attained "upward mobility" or if they are still involved in precarious work.

After immersing myself to the situation of the au pairs, I would like to propose policy recommendations that might result to enhanced work and social protection experiences of the au pairs. First, I suggest for stricter reinforcement of post-arrival registration of the au pairs in the Philippine Embassy. This is to ensure that the Embassy will have an updated and more accurate database of the au pairs that are under its jurisdiction and protection. As I found out that only one of my interviewed au pairs have registered, I deem that a complete record will be beneficial not only for the Embassy but also for the au pairs. Their participation in the events or seminars hosted by the Embassy will increase their awareness on the host country and their rights as au pairs. This will later equip them against any probable social risks that they might encounter. Second, I propose for a neutral and non-government entity that can serve as mediator between the au pair, host family, and au pair agency, particularly if the au pair experiences abuse. As my interviewees shared that the au pair agency has the tendency to side to the host family, a neutral entity can balance the story of all the involved parties. Thus, this can result to a smoother transition of the au pairs to a new host family. Last, I suggest for a more intensive and exhaustive study that focuses on the overworked conditions of the au pairs of different nationalities. The findings of this study can pave the way for improved work measures that can inform policy discussions on labour laws and regulations. In the end, I contend that the overall work and social protection experiences of the au pairs depends on the interplay of various actors—the au pairs themselves, au pair agencies, host families, and governments (both Philippines and the Netherlands).

Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview Guide

<i>Research Questions</i>	<i>Interview Questions</i>
<p>What are the work experiences of au pairs in the cultural exchange programme?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you share your personal journey towards becoming an au pair? • How will you describe your overall working experience as an au pair? • In your opinion, what do you think are the roles of the au pair agencies in the au pair scheme? • How do you position yourself in your host family? • What activities have you done to familiarize yourself on the Dutch society and culture? • How did you cope up when the government of Netherlands imposed restrictive measures on COVID-19 pandemic? • Do you consider your au pair experience as an investment for your future career? Why? • What are your plans after your contract ends as an au pair here in the Netherlands?
<p>How do au pairs experience social protection in practice?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In your stay here in the Netherlands as an au pair, have you asked for any support from the Philippine Embassy in the Hague, IND, union, NGO or any other network/contact? Please cite concrete examples.

Appendix 2. Sample Au Pair and Host Family Contract (Page 1/5)

Au Pair-Host Family Contract
(2013 Edition)

This Au Pair-Host Family Contract, hereinafter referred to as "the Contract", is concluded between the following Parties:

1. _____, Filipino citizen, born on _____,
(Name of Au Pair, Family Name, First Name) (Day, Month, Year)
hereinafter referred to as "the au pair",
and
2. The family providing free board and lodging to the au pair, represented by family member _____, born on _____,
(Family Name, First Name) (Day, Month, Year)
residing at _____,
to be reached at telephone number _____, with _____ members
(number)
of family, consisting of _____ adults and _____ children with ages (_____),
(number) (number) (ages)
hereinafter referred to as "the host family".

This Contract was facilitated by Sponsor Au Pair Agency _____, with business address at _____ and telephone number _____.

Considering that:

The Parties have exchanged information during the past period. The au pair has stated that he/she wishes to become acquainted with Dutch society and culture during a period of one year, and to realize this by staying with a Dutch host family as an au pair. The family has declared that it will provide facilities to the au pair, in return for which the au pair will carry out light domestic work to assist the host family, in accordance with the regulations and guidelines of both the Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Government of the Republic of the Philippines.

The au pair and the host family therefore agree as follows:

Source: Embassy of the Philippines in The Hague (2014)

Sample Au Pair and Host Family Contract (Page 2/5)

Article 1 - Weekly Schedule

In exchange for board, lodging, and pocket money, the au pair may not work more than eight (8) hours a day, with a maximum of thirty (30) hours a week. The au pair is entitled to at least two twenty-four hours' periods of free time, and, in addition to this, to two evenings of free time a week. The au pair may only be asked to perform light domestic work. Examples are cleaning up the nursery, doing the laundry of the children's clothes, preparing light meals, babysitting, and doing some shopping now and then. The Parties undertake to comply with these stipulations. For this purpose, the Parties have filled in the table in Article 2 (weekly schedule and alternative), in mutual consultation.

Article 2 - Alternative

The au pair will function as an equal member of the family. This means that the au pair is not allowed to perform any work for which he or she is indispensable. The host family promises that the au pair will not be solely responsible for any light domestic work or otherwise, or for the care of the children, and that (if the au pair is absent) there will always be an alternative help or babysitter present or this alternative help or babysitter will be arranged. The host family will state in the table below (weekly schedule and alternative) which family member will function or may function as the alternative for the au pair.

Weekly Schedule and Alternative					
Day	Activities	Light Domestic work (Enter the number of hours)	Taking care of children (Enter the number of hours)	Free time (Tick the day/s that apply to the au pair)	Stand-in (Enter the name of the family member who will act as a stand-in)
Monday					
Tuesday					
Wednesday					
Thursday					
Friday					
Saturday					
Sunday					

Source: Embassy of the Philippines in The Hague (2014)

Sample Au Pair and Host Family Contract (Page 3/5)

Article 3 - Cultural Exchange

The au pair program is aimed at cultural exchange. This means that the au pair is to participate in a number of leisure activities. These activities may include attending a course; learning a language; joining the host family on their outings; and participating in an organized trip (whether or not with other au pairs).

The au pair and the host family undertake to comply at least with the following activities:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Article 4 - Pocket Money

The au pair is entitled to receive a remuneration for the work performed in the family by the au pair. This remuneration will be made in the form of pocket money and will not be paid as wages, because the au pair is not permitted to perform work within the meaning of the Netherlands' Labour Act for Foreign Nationals. Under this contract, the host family undertakes to pay the au pair an amount of €_____ a month.

Article 5—Travel Costs

The host family shall shoulder the following travel costs of the au pair: fees for the notarization/legalization of this contract, cost of visa, registration fee for the Country Familiarization Seminar (CFS) conducted by the Commission on Filipinos Overseas, and roundtrip airfare.

Article 6: Insurance and Repatriation

The host family shall cover all costs of insurance for the au pair, which includes health care.

In the event of death of the au pair during the term of his/her contract, the repatriation of his/her remains and transport of his/her personal belongings and all costs attendant thereto shall be shouldered by the host family. The host family may secure repatriation insurance for this purpose.

Sample Au Pair and Host Family Contract (Page 4/5)

In case the repatriation of remains is not possible, the same may be disposed of upon prior approval of the au pair's next of kin.

In the event that the au pair becomes ill or injured to the extent that he/she can no longer fulfil his/her contract and after proper medical assistance have been provided him/her, the cost of his/her repatriation to the Philippines and all costs attendant thereto shall be at the expense of the host family. The host family may secure repatriation insurance for this purpose.

Article 7 - Validity

This contract enters into force upon its signature by both Parties and will continue to be valid until the date that the period of validity of the residence permit of the au pair expires.

Article 8: Termination/Resignation

The contract may be terminated by either Party with at least one month's notice. The period of notice is reckoned from the date on which the other Party receives notice. Notice of termination must be in writing. The Host Family cannot dismiss the au pair except on reasonable grounds. If the au pair so requests, the Host Family shall state the grounds for termination in writing. The au pair is not required to provide grounds for termination.

Either Party may terminate the contract with immediate effect if the other Party is in serious breach of the contractual obligations, or is otherwise in material breach of this contract.

Article 9: Reporting at the Philippine Embassy in The Hague

Upon arrival in the Netherlands, the au pair shall register himself/herself at the Philippine Embassy in The Hague with address at Laan Copes van Cattenburch 125, 2585 EZ, The Hague. The telephone number of the Embassy is +31-70-360-4820.

Article 10 – Dutch Au Pair Information Line

The au pair has the possibility to report any complaints about his or her stay in the Netherlands at the Au Pair Information Line. Depending on the type of complaint, it will

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Source: Embassy of the Philippines in The Hague (2014)

Sample Au Pair and Host Family Contract (Page 5/5)

be passed on to the police or the labour inspection or to both institutions. The Information Line is not available for reports about physical and/or psychological abuse. The host family also has the possibility to contact the Information Line.

For the time being, the Information Line has been incorporated with the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) of the Dutch Government. The telephone number of the Information Line is: +31 (0)70 779 48 88.

Article 11 - Disputes

This Agreement is subject to Dutch law. Any dispute about the interpretation of this Agreement will be settled by the competent court in the Netherlands.

Signature and name of Au Pair

Signature and name of the member
of the Host Family

City/Town and date

City/Town and date

Passport Number
(copy attached)

National ID Number/Passport Number
(copy of ID/Passport attached)

Sponsoring Au Pair agency and
license number

Signature of the authorized
representative of the agency

City/Town and date

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