FEMIG WORKSHOP REPORT: ALBANIA

Building Feminist Migration Policy for Gender Equality from Grassroots to Global

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INTRODUCTION AND WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

FeMig (Building a Feminist Migration Policy for Gender Equality, from Grassroots to Global) is an initiative led by the Gender+Migration Hub at the International Migration Research Centre, Wilfrid Laurier University, in partnership with the Women in Migration Network and the International Detention Coalition (IDC) and funded by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

The FeMig initiative responds to the reality that migration, when shaped by structural inequality, gendered labor markets, racial hierarchies, and restrictive governance regimes, does not automatically lead to empowerment or gender equality. Instead, women, gender-diverse, and racialized migrants, particularly those concentrated in feminized, undervalued, and informal sectors such as domestic and care work, are systematically exposed to precarity, violence, and rights violations across the migration cycle. These harms are not incidental, but are produced through policy choices, labor recruitment systems, border regimes, and social norms that devalue women's labor and constrain their mobility.

FeMig seeks to disrupt these dynamics by grounding migration governance in feminist, rights-based, and intersectional approaches developed from the lived experiences, organizing practices, and policy expertise of grassroots civil society organizations (CSOs). Central to FeMig is the recognition that civil society actors are not merely service providers or policy stakeholders, but key agents of migration governance. Working directly with migrant communities, CSOs document gender-based violence (GBV), labor exploitation, and systemic exclusion; provide legal, psychosocial, and humanitarian support; and advance advocacy and accountability efforts at local, national, regional, and global levels.

As part of this initiative, participatory workshops are being conducted in multiple countries, including Thailand, Mexico, Ethiopia, Colombia, Ecuador, Nepal and Albania.

A two-day FeMig workshop was held in Tirana, Albania, on May 14th and 15th, 2026, in partnership with Institute for Activism and Social Change (IANS, Tirana, Albania), a leading organization working on women's labour migration and rights, with a mission for a more inclusive, empathetic and resilient society that can fight growing mistrust and social polarization, bring equality and respect for diversities

The workshop brought together various stakeholders, including: academia, mostly professors working on human rights, laws on migration, gender equality, etc; local and central government representatives who are part of the state structures covering migration issues; civil society organizations working on issues affecting Albanian women migrant workers across the migration cycle from pre-departure and recruitment, to employment abroad, diaspora return, and reintegration. The workshop aimed to create a collaborative space for dialogue between civil society organizations and academic researchers, using focus groups to elicit detailed responses.

The overall objective of the Albania workshop was to:

- Identify and connect CSOs working with women in migration contexts in Albania;
- Create a safe, feminist, and participatory space for shared reflection and learning;
- Generate grounded analysis and policy recommendations for feminist migration governance;
- Contribute Albania-specific insights to the global FeMig process, including surveys, indicators, and advocacy outputs.

COUNTRY CONTEXT: GENDER AND MIGRATION

In Albania, migration is complex due to its socio-political culture and historical development. Since the collapse of communism in the early 1990s, Albania has experienced large-scale emigration, with women increasingly participating in migration flows through family reunification, labour migration, and independent mobility. Furthermore, the influx of 444,600 Albanians from Kosovo who were expelled or fled in the late 1990s to Northern Albania, particularly Kukës and Morini, which had a population of 28,000, posed a task for which Albania lacked the infrastructure.[1] Although the Albanian state has adopted migration, gender equality, and anti-trafficking policies in line with European Union and international standards, significant gaps remain in the protection of women migrants. Economic insecurity, limited employment opportunities, and persistent gender inequalities continue to shape women's migration decisions, while many women remain vulnerable to exploitation both during migration and in destination countries.

Women who migrate through informal networks or irregular channels often face heightened risks of labour exploitation, trafficking, wage theft, and gender-based violence. Those employed in domestic work, caregiving, agriculture, or low-wage service sectors may experience precarious working conditions, social isolation, and limited access to legal protections. Irregular migration status can further restrict access to healthcare, social services, labour rights, and consular assistance, making it difficult for women to seek justice when abuses occur. As a result, many experiences of exploitation and violence remain underreported and insufficiently addressed by state institutions.

Gender-based violence is a significant, though often overlooked, dimension of Albanian women's migration experiences. Violence may occur within households, workplaces, recruitment processes, and migration journeys, but it can also be reproduced through structural inequalities that limit women's economic opportunities, enabling economic dependence and decision-making

[1] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Kosovo: One Last Chance: The Race against Winter, Yet Another Exodus, Refugees 3, no. 116 (1999), https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/3c6914bc5.pdf.

power. Emigration becomes a pathway of emancipation and protection; the failure of the state to protect women from gender-based violence results in women opting to emigrate as a means of survival. While Albania has strengthened its legal and institutional frameworks to combat trafficking and promote gender equality, implementation challenges, limited resources, and weak cross-border accountability mechanisms continue to affect the protection of migrant women.

Civil society organizations have played an important role in addressing these issues by providing legal assistance, psychosocial support, advocacy, and services for survivors of trafficking and gender-based violence. These organizations argue that improving labour protections, expanding safe migration pathways, and strengthening support systems for migrant and returnee women are essential for ensuring that migration contributes to women's empowerment rather than increasing their vulnerability.

The growing attention to women's migration in Albania has increasingly intersected with broader efforts to address gender-based violence, trafficking, and women's economic empowerment. Civil society organizations working with migrant women, returnees, and survivors of trafficking have sought to situate migration within wider debates about gender equality and social justice, emphasizing that women's experiences of migration cannot be separated and siloed from the structural inequalities that shape their lives before, during, and after migration. Events, advocacy campaigns, and policy dialogues have highlighted the links between migration, labour exploitation, trafficking, and gender-based harm, drawing attention to the need for more gender-responsive migration policies.

Many civil society groups operate within constrained financial and institutional environments while simultaneously providing direct services to survivors of

violence, supporting trafficking victims, advocating for policy reform, and raising public awareness. The overlap between anti-violence campaigns and migration advocacy underscores the reality that organizations are often required to balance immediate crisis response with long-term efforts to address the social, economic, and political conditions that contribute to women's vulnerability. In this context, migration governance, gender equality, and the prevention of gender-based violence are increasingly understood as interconnected issues that require coordinated action by state institutions, civil society, and international partners.

Despite the push by civil society organizations focused on participatory migration governance and gender equality, progress in strengthening women's rights has been limited. Grassroots mobilization has also led to the development of a substantive legal and policy framework in Albania addressing migration, crisis response, and gender equality, including:

Law No. 45/2019 on Civil Protection explicitly guarantees protection to all citizens, local or foreign, affected by a disaster.

The updated 2021 Contingency Plan for a Possible Massive Influx of Migrants and Asylum-Seekers strengthens capacities for identification, processing, and service provision.[2]

Law No. 10/2021 on Asylum in the Republic of Albania provides temporary protection to individuals fleeing war or violence.

The National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021–2030, developed with technical support from UN Women, aims to promote dignified work and labour market access for all women, including migrant women.

[2] International Organization for Migration (IOM), Migration Governance Indicators: Second Profile 2023—Republic of Albania (Geneva: IOM, 2023), https://albania.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl1401/files/documents/2023-09/pub2023-084-el-mgi-albania-second-profile-1.pdf.

Law No. 9970 on Gender Equality in Society in 2008 and the recently adopted Law No. 64/2025 on Gender Equality in 2025 update and strengthen existing legislation to eliminate gender-based discrimination. It seeks to guarantee, protect, and promote gender equality as a fundamental democratic value by aligning the national legal framework with the EU gender equality acquis. However, the law is still not gender-responsive, as it mentions only two genders, and lawmakers rejected the inclusion of terms such as "gender diversity," "gender identity," and "gender expression," for instance.

Despite progress made, we are in an era of gender and migration backsliding. Even with legal and policy frameworks that have created a facade of addressing vulnerabilities. The frameworks are robust on paper; however, their provisions in practice, particularly at the intersection of governance, migration and gender, reveal a gap between the legal mechanisms enacted and policy implementation through state actors, which further entrenches vulnerability within the structures that impact the everyday lives of women and gender-diverse people, both citizens and non-citizens.[3] Grassroots organizations are often the first responders in these contexts, and their operational knowledge is essential to evaluating implementation gaps and identifying scalable best practices. Despite the positive ability of CSOs to contribute to the policy agenda, the policy cycle remains virtually unattainable and continues to be subject to conditionalities imposed on the government.

[3] UN Women and United Nations Albania, Albania Country Gender Equality Profile 2025 (Tirana: UN Women Albania, 2025), https://albania.un.org/sites/default/files/2025-12/cgep_web_final.pdf.

WORKSHOP DESIGN AND PARTICIPANTS

Participants

The workshop brought together 30 participants from a diverse range of civil society organizations working directly or indirectly on women's migration, labour rights, gender-based violence, legal aid, psychosocial support, advocacy, and research. Participants included grassroots NGOs, NGOs with extensive experience supporting migrant women and returnees, LGBT representatives, academics, and representatives of central and local government. The diversity of participants enabled rich, intersectional discussions that reflected varied organizational viewpoints, regional experiences, and forms of engagement from service provision and survivor support to policy advocacy and movement-building.

Workshop Design & Process

The FeMig Albania workshop, held over two days on 14–15 May 2026, was organized as a participatory process that progressed from initial grounding discussions and interactive knowledge-sharing exercises to deeper collective reflection, creative feminist engagement, and policy-focused recommendation building. The agenda was deliberately structured to embody feminist principles of inclusivity, co-production of knowledge, care, and valuing diverse forms of expertise, bringing together representatives from public, local, and central bodies, civil society organizations, and academic participants to collaboratively explore and strengthen gender-responsive approaches to migration governance in Albania.

Registration & Informal Networking

The day began with participant registration, followed by informal networking over coffee and tea. Attendees were provided with workshop materials, including the agenda, instructions for completing the FeMig Global CSO Survey (via a QR code and in paper format), and instructions for the participatory arts activity. This initial stage helped create a welcoming environment and fostered a

sense of trust, openness, and collaborative engagement among participants.

Welcome, Opening Remarks & Grounding
The workshop officially began with opening remarks from the FeMig team and Prof. Jenna Hennebry, during which the broader FeMig initiative was presented, including its global reach and the workshop's specific aims in Albania. Then, I briefed the participants on the activities to follow. This process emphasized creating a safe, respectful, and inclusive space while acknowledging power dynamics, lived experiences, and the emotional complexities inherent in migration-related work.

FeMig Global CSO Survey – Albania Session
Participants engaged in a one-hour guided session to complete the FeMig Global CSO Survey. The survey data contribute to the development of global feminist migration policy, report cards, and indicators. This session ensured that Albania-based civil society perspectives are directly embedded in global advocacy and knowledge-production processes.

Context Setting: Issues Facing Albanian Women Migrant Workers
An interactive context-setting session combined facilitated discussions and participatory exercises to explore the key challenges and opportunities shaping migration governance from a gender perspective in Albania. Drawing on the experiences of civil society organizations and academic participants, discussions focused on:

- The gendered dimensions of migration and mobility in Albania;
- Barriers and vulnerabilities faced by migrant and returnee women;
- Risks related to labour exploitation, trafficking, and gender-based violence;
- Gaps in migration policies and support mechanisms for women migrants;
- The role of civil society in advocating for migrant rights and gender equality;

- Barriers for civil society organizations;
- Migration governance and EU accession;
- Opportunities for strengthening gender-responsive migration governance and policy development.

Through focus group discussions and collaborative activities, participants collectively identified priority issues and emerging challenges affecting migrant women in Albania. These reflections provided the foundation for subsequent sessions focused on generating new ideas, developing recommendations, and envisioning feminist approaches to migration policy and practice for Albania and beyond.

Participatory Arts Session: Imagining Feminist Migration Futures
A central feature of the workshop was the artistic activity titled "Drawing what does feminist migration look like?", supported by the presentation of examples from previous workshops to inspire reflection and engagement. Participants were invited to visually express their ideas and understandings of feminist migration through drawing, using creativity as a method for knowledge generation and collective imagination. The activity encouraged reflection on themes such as gender equality, migrant women's experiences, safety, dignity, rights, and inclusion within migration processes in Albania.

Working individually and in groups, participants used visual representations to translate complex social and policy issues into accessible, symbolic forms of expression. The session created space for alternative ways of knowing beyond formal discussion, allowing participants to articulate experiences, challenges, and aspirations related to migration governance. The outcomes of the drawings were later shared and discussed collectively, contributing to broader reflections on how feminist perspectives can inform more inclusive and gender-responsive migration policies.

Presentation, Representative from GIZ
Mr. Ened Janina of GIZ Albania addressed the workshop. He focused on the interventions and programs currently being implemented by the GIZ/MIG program in the country, reflecting on the limited engagement of civil society in development programs.

Presentation of the National Diaspora Agency
Mrs. Iris Hoxha, representative of the NDA- leading actor in monitoring and implementation of diaspora policies in Albania- emphasized the importance of the engagement of civil society in shaping the upcoming National strategy.

Navigating the United Nations for CSOs held by Paola Cyment (WIMN)
Mrs. Cyment shared WIMN's work and engagement in lobbying and advocacy efforts that help civil society actors become a single voice for feminist policies.

Artistic Activity
An installation (rug/carpet) 'Girls and Walls': one story read from the book that is available on YouTube, and you can scan the book's QR code for participants (10 women - 10 stories). The artistic activity led by Egla Mitre, titled 'Girls and Walls', formed a powerful creative complement to the workshop's feminist migration theme. Through an installation in the form of a rug/carpet and the sharing of one story from the *Girls and Walls* collection (a compilation of 10 women's stories accessible via a book and QR code, including on YouTube), the activity translated women's lived experiences into a sensory and visual medium.

This installation (a rug woven by women) created a reflective space where participants could engage with narratives of women's struggles, resilience, and everyday negotiations with structural and social "walls" such as gender inequality, violence, and restricted mobility. In relation to the workshop theme,

it reinforced the idea that migration is not only a policy or economic issue, but also deeply rooted in gendered life experiences, emotions, and forms of resistance. By combining storytelling, visual art, and digital access, the activity encouraged participants to connect feminist migration governance with lived realities, highlighting the importance of centring women's voices in both policy and public imagination.

KEY FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The focus group session on “Challenges and Opportunities for a Migration Policy with a Gender Perspective” was particularly significant for the Albanian context. It provided an opportunity for participants to critically examine existing migration governance frameworks and consider how they might better address issues such as gender-based violence, labour rights, access to services, trafficking risks, and social protection for migrant women. The subsequent activities aimed at generating pathways to enhance migration policies and strengthen gender perspectives further translated these discussions into practical recommendations.

The workshop also contributed to capacity building by strengthening collaboration between academia and civil society, facilitating the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and best practices. The workshop helped build a stronger evidence base for feminist migration governance and encouraged the development of more inclusive and gender-responsive policy solutions.

Participants highlighted several challenges (lack of coordination, focus, and profiled advocacy; misperceptions and lack of services) that also reflect broader conditions faced by feminist and migrant-rights organizations in Albania, as well as a lack of funding. While interest in participation was high, actual attendance was limited by the sector's heavy workload and capacity constraints. The challenges were not viewed as isolated organizational difficulties, but rather as reflective of a wider structural reality in which civil society organizations working on gender-based violence, trafficking, migration, and social protection operate under persistent resource and capacity constraints. Participants emphasized that CSOs are often required to balance urgent frontline service delivery with longer-term advocacy, policy engagement, and coordination with national and international stakeholders, frequently with limited financial and institutional support. In this sense, the workshop also functioned as a space for reflection, exchange, and solidarity among actors navigating these pressures.

There remains a persistent issue of agenda-driven civil society organizations, in which organizations have broad mandates they must cover to secure funding, resulting in limited representation of migrant civil society organizations. Most organizations that seek funding from the Government of Albania face risks, including the risk of not being able to report findings directly without interference. Furthermore, most civil societies lack mobolization, with an inability to fund themselves through domestic government; civil society must rely on the EU, state development agencies such as GIZ or international government organizations such as the IOM, UN Women; however, in an era of reduced funding in the area of migration and gender, this pathway becomes more competitive and less realistic for CSOs.[4]

Despite these constraints, participants described the workshop as a valuable and productive space for dialogue and collaboration. The participatory and feminist approach facilitated meaningful engagement across sectors, encouraged knowledge-sharing between civil society and academia, and supported the identification of shared priorities for more gender-responsive migration governance in Albania. This reaffirmed the importance of creating dedicated spaces that enable collective reflection, feminist analysis, and coordinated action within the field of migration and gender equality.

The FeMig Albania workshop reaffirmed the essential role of feminist civil society organizations and academic actors in shaping more inclusive, rights-based, and gender-responsive migration governance. By centring the lived experiences, professional expertise, and frontline knowledge of those working directly with migrant women, returnees, and vulnerable groups, the workshop helped strengthen national-level reflection on migration and gender equality in Albania. At the same time, it fed into broader efforts to advance feminist approaches to migration governance grounded in grassroots realities and informed by cross-sector collaboration among civil society, local and central

[4] Jenna Hennebry, Varinia Salazar-Barrientos, Paola Cyment, and Carolina Gottardo, "Hold the Line: Countering Backsliding on Gender Ahead of the 2026 International Migration Review Forum and Beyond," Migration Policy Practice 15, no. 1 (2026): 12–16, https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/pub2026-006-el-mpp-vol_xv_no1_0.pdf.

government, and academia.

Presentation, Representative from GIZ

Mr. Ened Janina of GIZ Albania addressed the workshop. He focused on the programs currently being implemented by GIZ Albania, in particular as the avusor of the "Shaping Development-oriented Migration" (MEG) program in the country. He reflected on the limited engagement of civil society in development programs, but, in parallel, local organizations felt that the development office was also engaged only to a limited extent, resulting in a lack of civil society mobolization.

Presentation of the National Diaspora Agency

Mrs. Iris Hoxha, representative of the NDA- leading actor in monitoring and implementation of diaspora policies in Albania- emphasized the importance of the engagement of civil society in shaping the upcoming National strategy for diaspora. The representative also highlighted the importance of migration and diaspora, and the workshop's role in bringing a feminist lens, and, in particular, a further discussion on how these workshops globally and the development of gender indicator guidance notes may be applied in Albania.

[4] Jenna Hennebry, Varinia Salazar-Barrientos, Paola Cyment, and Carolina Gottardo, "Hold the Line: Countering Backsliding on Gender Ahead of the 2026 International Migration Review Forum and Beyond," Migration Policy Practice 15, no. 1 (2026): 12–16, https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/pub2026-006-el-mpp-vol_xv_no1_0.pdf.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To achieve a Feminist Migration Policy, the following recommendations were made:

- **Migration Governance and Gender Inequality**
  - Strengthen gender-responsive migration governance that addresses the structural drivers of women's migration, including economic insecurity, unemployment, and persistent gender inequalities in Albania.
  - Move beyond fragmented policy approaches by integrating migration, gender equality, and social protection frameworks.
- **Protection, Rights, and Institutional Gaps**
  - Improve access to protection and services for migrant and returnee women, particularly in cases of irregular migration.
  - Ensure effective access to legal aid, healthcare, social assistance, and consular protection, regardless of migration status.
- **Trafficking, Exploitation, and Gender-Based Violence**
  - Strengthen prevention and response systems addressing trafficking, labour exploitation, and gender-based violence affecting Albanian women migrants.
  - Enhance survivor-centred mechanisms that provide timely support, justice, and long-term reintegration assistance.
- **Labour Conditions and Migration Pathways**
  - Expand safe, regular, and rights-based migration channels to reduce reliance on informal networks and reduce vulnerability to exploitation.
  - Improve monitoring of labour conditions in feminized sectors such as domestic work, care work, agriculture, and low-paid service employment.
- **Accountability and Cross-Border Protection**
  - Strengthen accountability mechanisms for recruitment agencies, employers, and intermediaries involved in transnational labour mobility.
  - Improve cross-border cooperation to ensure the protection of Albanian women migrants in destination countries.

- Strengthen local coordination mechanisms within civil society to enable anti-discrimination advocacy and the proposal of policies to address existing legal gaps.

- **Feminist Migration Governance and Evidence**
  - Develop gender-sensitive migration indicators that capture not only economic outcomes but also safety, rights protection, dignity, and reintegration experiences of women migrants.
  - Institutionalize the role of civil society organizations in shaping, monitoring, and evaluating migration and gender equality policies.
- **Linking Albania to the Global FeMig Process**
  - The knowledge generated through the Albania workshop, including survey data, collective analyses, artistic outputs, and policy priorities, will feed directly into global FeMig outputs.

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