

## Same but different: Polish and Norwegian parents' work–family adaptations in Norway

Margunn Bjørnholt and Kari Stefansen

### Abstract

This article explores how families with young children arrive at and live with different work–family adaptations within a welfare state that strongly supports the dual earner/dual carer model—that of Norway. It draws on a qualitative study among Norwegian-born and Polish-born parents, representing respectively 'insider' and 'outsider' views on this model. The analysis aims at capturing the dynamic interplay between structures and policies, and everyday practices. We found that both Norwegian and Polish parents embraced the cultural ideal of the dual earner/dual carer model, but that their perceived scope of action differed. Within the Norwegian group there were differences related to class, however. Among middle-class Norwegian parents, the model was internalised as a moral obligation and part of identity, making it difficult to voice and cope with work–family conflict. Working-class parents in this group, varied more in their identification with this model. Across class, Polish parents, in contrast, used welfare state entitlements eclectically to shape new and more gender equal family practices in Norway, and to adjust to changing circumstances. The article illustrates how enabling structures may represent both opportunities for and limitation to individual agency, undermining the assumption of a simple 'fit' between work–family policies, work–family adaptations and gender equality in the family.

### Keywords

work–family policies, work–family adaptations, gender equality, Nordic welfare state, dual earner/dual carer model, Norway, Polish migration, social class

### Introduction

Discussions about immigration and the sustainability of welfare states have evolved around immigrants' use of welfare benefits. Family immigration in particular, raises

new issues, and there has been a concern that immigrants may not share the same values and may prefer different and more traditional family models than the population in the host country, leading to an increased polarization between the majority population and immigrant groups and possibly undermining the development towards a more egalitarian society (Eggebo, 2010, Lister, 2009, Siim, 2007, Siim and Skjeie, 2008). Immigrants' use of benefits targeted at families are problematised, 'because such benefits embody certain normative tensions that other social policies do not' (Grødem, 2017:77). In particular, immigrants' use of welfare state entitlements to bolster traditional family models may challenge the legitimacy of these benefits in the majority population as well as the norm of gender equality, which has become a defining element of citizenship and integration in the Nordic context, possibly undermining the gender equalising policies of the welfare state.

However, recent studies challenge this problematizing focus on immigration with regard to gender equality and family norms, as well as with regard to the legitimacy and sustainability of the welfare state. Drawing on a cross-country study of 30 countries, Breidahl and Larsen (2016) conclude that, rather than clinging to traditional roles, immigrants in general adapt to the prevailing gender norms in the host country at a high pace. There may, however, be variation in cultural adaptation between different groups of immigrants. Kavli (2015) found examples of cultural persistence as well as adaptation among immigrants to Norway from Asian and Mid-East countries, with country of origin as a strong predictor of attitudes to mothers' employment.

The impact of immigrants' use of welfare benefits on policies is also not as straightforward as has previously been assumed. In a study of migration and family policy change in the Scandinavian countries, Grødem (2017), found that the link between immigration and policy change is complex, and, in contrast to what is often assumed, immigrants' use of particular work–family entitlements is not directly used as arguments in debates leading to policy change.

Studying migrants in terms of their adaptations or their lack thereof to the institutions, norms and values in the host country, implicitly constructs immigrants as the 'other', and also implicitly leaves the structures and norms, as well as the assumed majority unproblematised. The same logic has been identified in family research, often pertaining to working-class parents who fail to live up to middle-classed norms of work-family arrangements (Stefansen and Farstad, 2010).

This article aims at elucidating such blind angles, bringing together migration and work-family studies, using a comparative approach to the use of welfare state entitlements for working parents in a welfare state with a high level of support for working mothers and a dual earner/dual carer model, by parents who are new to this context and parents who are 'insiders'. Research in Norway has shown classed patterns in parents 'care strategies' (Stefansen and Farstad, 2010). The analysis here therefore includes a class perspective on work-family adaptations. The article aims at moving beyond studying immigrant populations' cultural adaptations (or the lack of adaptation) to the given norms and practices in the host country, to studying the adaptations of immigrants as well as the majority population to given structures,

thus providing new perspectives. More specifically the article draws on an interview study among two groups of parents: Norwegian parents and Polish-born migrant parents living in Norway. Both samples are mixed in terms of social class. The choice of Polish migrant families as the group of comparison to Norwegian families, is related to the large influx of this group to Norway following the EU accession in 2004. The Polish has become the largest immigrant group in Norway and to day counts 96 000 persons (Østby, 2016).

### Comparing Norwegian and Polish families

Norway is an interesting case for the study of the interrelations between family policies and practices, due to its comprehensive institutional support of the dual earner/dual carer model. Further, like many other European countries, Norway has also had a large post EU-accession immigration from Eastern and Central Europe, in particular from Poland. The immigration of a large new group, who live, work and have a family in Norway, provides a unique opportunity for enriching and broadening the study of ongoing contemporary processes of transitions and adaptations of work and family arrangements—which is the aim of this article.

Wigfall et al. (2013) in their study of fatherhood in Britain similarly included Polish and Irish fathers, along with ethnic British fathers. Taking into consideration that migration has become a normal feature of European societies, adding migrants to the study of contemporary family practices and work–family adaptations may add new perspectives to studies of work and family.

The two groups of informants in our study to some extent represent an 'insider' and 'outsider' view on the Norwegian dual earner/dual carer model. Norwegian parents today live in the aftermath of changes in gender relations, ideologies and structures for work–family arrangements, which have been produced by previous generations, and which they have inherited as a material and ideological reality (Bjørnholt, 2014). Hence, the policies that support the dual earner/dual carer model are embedded in a culture that takes gender equality for granted.

The Polish parents, in contrast, immigrated to Norway as adults, and grew up under a different work and family policy regime (Edlund and Öhn, 2016; Pustułka et al., 2015), which today could be understood as partial or ambivalent in its support for the dual earner/dual carer model (Bjørnholt and Stefansen, 2017). On the one hand, it has developed towards the norm of the dual-earner/dual carer model, by introducing a paternal leave measure as part of an expansion of parental leave. On the other hand, there is a substantial care gap due to the lack of formal childcare for the youngest children, making mothers' work engagement after parental leave difficult. The policy package could be characterized as sending 'a mixed bag of institutional signals' (Goerres and Tepe, 2011: 2). Further, while there is general support in the public as well as among the political elite of the aim of gender equality in the family in Norway, in Poland, more traditional attitudes to gender roles prevail (Edlund and Öhn, 2016). In sum, the concept of gender equality is controversial and there are ongoing political struggles over family values and women's rights. Hence, as Polish families settle with their families in Norway, they will have to adapt, not only to a different welfare state regime but also to a different gender regime.

The article contributes to a growing research interest in exploring from an everyday perspective, how people shape their lives within or resist the current work–family model, with different foci, among them social class (Stefansen and Farstad, 2010), generation (Bjørnholt, 2010; 2014), profession (Halrynjo and Lyng, 2009), ethnicity (Heggem, 2013; Hoel, 2013; Kvande and Brandth, 2013; Mulinari et al., 2009; Nadim, 2014) and in the context of migration (Bjørnholt and Stefansen, forthcoming). The particular contribution of this article is to broaden the understanding of work–family adaptations within a particular welfare state and gender regime, by using migration as a lens.

### **The current Norwegian family policy regime**

Norwegian family policies today strongly support the dual earner/dual carer model through a package of ‘gender equalising family policies’ (Rønsen and Kitterød, 2015). The two core elements of the current family policy package are the parental leave scheme, including a paternal quota, and the legal right to formal childcare from the age of one year. The system is based on a two-track model for gender equality—facilitating the mothers’ paid employment (dual earner) and the fathers’ caring role (dual carer) (Bjørnholt, 2012). Reconciliation of work and care is also facilitated by relatively short working hours,<sup>1</sup> rights to part-time work and fully compensated leave of absence to care for sick children.

The institutional support for the dual earner/dual carer model has been strengthened in a series of reforms during the 2000s, including prolongation of the parental leave period and expansion of the paternal quota and of childcare facilities.

Today parents are entitled to 49 weeks of fully compensated parental leave of which both parents are granted a 10-week non-transferable quota. The introduction of the paternal quota in 1993 is regarded as a very successful policy intervention. Within a few years, fathers' uptake of parental leave rose from close to zero to 85 per cent, and it has remained high (NAV, 2016).

The normalisation of institutional childcare from one year of age is a more recent phenomenon (Ellingæter, Kitterød and Lyngstad, 2016; Stefansen and Skogen, 2010). In the 1980s and 1990s there was a substantial 'childcare gap' (Ellingsæter and Gulbrandsen, 2007). The rapid expansion of childcare facilities during the 2000s resulted in a marked change in the organisation of care for young children from informal to institutionalised care, combined with high maternal employment. In 2014, 80 per cent of children aged 1–2 years and 97 per cent of children aged 3–5 years attended formal childcare (Statistics Norway, 2015). As shown by Ellingsæter et al. (2016) these take-up patterns are mirrored in marked attitudinal changes among mothers after the introduction of the legal right to childcare. This change has happened across the class-spectrum, with the more pronounced change among mothers with lower education.

Parents of children below the age of two years, who do not use publicly sponsored childcare are entitled to a cash-for-care benefit. This benefit was widely used following its introduction in 1999. Today it plays a minor role in the overall pattern of work-family adaptations in Norway (Egge-Hoveid, 2014). This corresponds with Ellingsæter et al.'s (2016) conclusion that formal childcare is the desired form of childcare among mothers in Norway. However, the use of the cash-for-care benefit

differs between the majority population and migrant families; 16 per cent of children below the age of two years of Norwegian origin received the benefit in 2015, compared to 45 per cent of children of migrant origin (Hamre, 2016).

Comparative studies of family policies typically focus on the extent to which policies promote mothers' paid work, the outsourcing of childcare and fathers' share of childcare (Eydal et al., 2015; Eydal and Rostgaard, 2015; Gornick and Meyers, 2008; Lammi-Taskula, 2006). Parents' use of formal childcare (Ellingsæter and Gulbrandsen, 2007) and fathers' use of parental leave (Brandth and Kvande, 2003, 2013; Eydal and Rostgaard, 2015; Lammi-Taskula, 2006) are examples of policies that are taken to represent progress towards gender equality. Mothers' use of parental leave, on the other hand, is seen as more ambivalent: while allowing women to combine paid work and care, women's longer absence from paid work compared to men, may also lead to disadvantages in the labour market (Danielsen, 2002; Halrynjo and Lyng, 2009). The cash-for-care scheme has been seen as a traditionalist element, disincentivising mothers' paid work, and a sign of the ambivalence (Leira, 1992) and the hybrid character of Norwegian family policy (Ellingsæter, 2006). Recent developments have in our view, however, pushed Norwegian family policies towards a more coherent support for the dual earner/dual carer model (see also Syltevik, 2017). As commented by Ellingsæter (2016), this development is related to an emerging consensus among parties across the political spectrum, reflecting that family policies have lost attraction as an ideological line of division. On this background, there is a need to study not only how parents adapt to the available structures, but also how parents live with their own adaptations to the new norms and structures of opportunity for working parents.



## Methods and data

The article is informed by data from a Polish–Norwegian research project on family policy schemes, work–life regulations and work–life balance (the xxx project). The data used in this article consists of interviews with parents representing 22 Norwegian and 22 Polish families living in Norway, carried out 2013/2014, primarily in the Oslo area. The participants were working parents in heterosexual couple relations with young children below school age. The number of children in each family varied, but most had one or two children.

The Norwegian parents were interviewed in groups of 2–5 persons, while the Polish parents<sup>2</sup> were interviewed as couples and a minority in small groups of 2–5 persons or individually, due to difficulties with accessing the Polish group, an experience we share with other researchers (Wigfall et al., 2013). The variation in interview setting and group composition is a limitation, and should be taken into consideration.

However, the authors consider that in terms of the topics covered, as well as the dynamics in the interviews, the impact on the data of differences in the composition of interview groups is negligible.

The authors and three research assistants<sup>3</sup> conducted the interviews, sometimes individually, sometimes in pairs. The interviews were semi-structured and followed an interview guide with main themes, including type of work and caring responsibilities, work–family adaptations and perceptions of work–life balance.

The Polish interviews were conducted either in Norwegian, English, Polish or a combination of languages. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews in Polish were simultaneously transcribed and translated to Norwegian by Polish-speaking research assistants who conducted these interviews. This procedure may imply a heightened risk of misinterpretations and loss of nuances, which has to be taken into consideration.

The Norwegian parents were recruited from work places and fall within two main groups, a middle-class group who worked with research and higher-level academic work, and an intermediate / working-class group of service and health workers. The Polish informants were recruited through different access points and in this group, approximately one quarter are academics, while the rest represent a variety of occupations and class positions. Both within the Norwegian and the Polish group there is one group of highly educated academics in relatively flexible work situations, and one group in occupations that demand medium to lower education, and whose work situations are less flexible. In the Norwegian group, the latter group consisted of service- and health workers; while in the Polish group, there were in addition also some manual workers in the less flexible group. In both samples, there is thus a variety in terms of work-place flexibility, educations and occupations. As our aim was not a detailed comparison, but rather to analyse variations in contemporary practices of combining paid work and parenting in Norway, we argue that the two groups may be compared. The interviews covered a wide range of topics and gave rich data on parents' practices as well as their reflections and thoughts regarding their work–family adaptations. Consequently, despite the limitations we have

mentioned, we consider the interviews to represent ‘good enough’ data for our purposes here (Bjørnholt and Farstad, 2012).

### **Analysis**

The analysis developed here resonates with the abductive approach (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012). It proceeded in a stepwise and circular process of moving between the interview transcripts, constructing empirical categories in a bottom-up, grounded way, and theoretical interpretations. The first phase involved reading and re-reading the interview transcripts with a particular focus on how families adapted their paid work to the challenge of caring for young children. The interviews were read systematically to identify and label different combinations of his and her adaptations of their paid work to caring responsibilities.

The interviews were then re-read to identify how families within both the Norwegian and Polish groups and within each category talked about, legitimised and problematised their (practical) work–family adaptations. Focusing on how parents felt and talked about their work–family adaptations revealed greater differences between the Norwegian and Polish samples.

#### **The general pattern of work–family adaptations**

Among both the Norwegian and the Polish families, and across social class, the general pattern of work–family adaptations mirrored the dual earner/dual carer model, meaning that both parents worked and shared the responsibility for childcare. The convergence towards the dual earner/dual carer model, illustrates a standardisation of work–family adaptations and a cultural move across different social segments, towards a norm of shared breadwinning and care in line with

Norwegian family policies and the observed shift in attitudes towards a dual earner/dual carer model found in recent cross-national studies (Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser, 2014). Within this general frame, we identified four different work–family adaptations.

The two most common adaptations in both groups were a *gender symmetrical* model in which both parents made adaptations and shared paid work and care, and a *neo-traditional model*, meaning that the mother adjusted her working time and engagement (slightly) more to family obligations than the father. In a minority, a *reversed gender model* was identified, in which the father was predominantly responsible for the adaptation of work and family and an even smaller minority lived in (temporary) *male breadwinner* arrangements. Within these broad categories there were some variations, also illustrating the complexities of allocating families to categories.

It is important to note that the described patterns are based on snapshot pictures of work–family adaptations. The interviews revealed that arrangements changed over time, and were shaped by constraints related to work and entitlements, previous experiences, career moves and other changes in circumstances, and that they were the subject of reflection, renegotiation and open to possible changes in the future.

While the arrangements of paid work and care converged around a dual earner/dual carer model in both groups, a closer study of work–family talk revealed differences between the Norwegian and Polish parents, which we detail below, starting with a the Norwegian group. In the following, we describe general patterns, which are supported by examples. The examples are not exhaustive, but have rather been

selected as illustrative cases, representing the different work–family models identified in the analysis, and different issues that were raised in the interviews. We have been mindful also of illuminating within-group differences.

### **Norwegian families: Adapting and coping within the normative earner/dual carer model**

Among the highly educated Norwegian parents, the dual earner/dual carer model was taken for granted as a tacit and normative new order, and their everyday adaptations were directed towards combining paid work and care within the structures available to working parents. Some succeeded in pursuing dual careers and sharing childcare and household responsibilities equally, like Markus and Nina. They were both very absorbed in their jobs and also had a high mutual tolerance for working during evenings and weekends. A fulfilling working life for both parents was seen as non-negotiable and very important for both, as expressed by Markus: ‘we are both interested in working, and at the same time we are also equally interested in spending time with the children. So it felt natural to share equally.’

Nevertheless, although they shared parental leave equally, and he took slightly more ‘perhaps 55 per cent’, she took care of the child full-time during her share of parental leave, while he took flexible leave over a longer time. This allowed him to continue working during the leave. Such differences might have gendered career implications, making him visible to his employer even during parental leave, and making it easier for him to return to work.

Several of the parents were not able to use the paternal quota of parental leave:

**Gunnhild:** No, because my husband is self employed, so he does not get, or he could get daddy leave, but then he would have to replace, hire someone who can do his job. And then get only one-third of what he earns and this would not go around.

**Interviewer:** Then the total leave for you two was shorter?

**Gunnhild:** Well, then he did not get any leave at all. We lost all of that, I just got mine.

The solution in this case was to use her holiday, and some additional help from grandparents to bridge the gap, before the children entered daycare at a younger age than most children in Norway (ten and a half and eleven and a half months). This solution was not what she would have preferred:

**Gunhild:** We had no choice for either one or the other. I would love to have stayed at home somewhat longer without pay, I would love to have a longer leave and I would have had that dad, my husband would have had daddy leave. And I would like to have let my kids start in daycare a little later, but .. yes.

Nevertheless, Gunnhild thought it had worked out fine and had no regrets. Others expressed feelings of ambivalences and strain, like in Camilla's case. At the time of the interview, Camilla and her husband Dag, who are academics, both worked full-time and their son had a full-time place in daycare. They were dissatisfied with the daycare and planned to change to another daycare—a common solution among the Norwegian parents who worried about the quality of daycare. Due to work–family stress, Camilla had reduced her working hours as a researcher (to 80 per cent) for a short period. This did not work out as planned, as she felt that she worked full-time but for lesser pay. They now managed because she split her working day into segments and worked weekends and evenings, while Dag made only moderate adjustments, such as taking turns working late and going home early to pick the child up from daycare. Camilla expressed ambiguity: she felt that she (or, ideally they)

should work less in order to have more time with the child. But she also felt that she should work much more in order to achieve fully in her job.

According to Camilla, her husband Dag did not share her view. He did not see it as demanding to combine work and parenting like she did; he was against her reducing her working time and she thought that he would not be willing to reduce his working hours. Referring to the period of working part-time, she expressed a feeling of shame:

**Camilla:** I did reduce, but I felt a little ashamed that I did it. Because I was a woman and did it, and not man and did it. It's not quite the way it should be. I think it was a little embarrassing to tell. I do.

Camilla's expression of shame and her explicit reference to 'being a woman and not a man' reducing work hours, is a strong indication of the cultural shift that has taken place, towards a full-time worker norm for mothers, at least among highly educated Norwegian academics, to which Camilla belongs. Further, she seemed to think it would not have been shameful for a man to work part-time, indicating how the egalitarian pattern, and even that of a reversed gender pattern, has become the ideal, and the corresponding lack of legitimacy of a traditional pattern.

On the other hand, the ambivalence expressed by the more than equally sharing middle-class men, indicates that a reversed pattern is not fully acceptable, even for equality oriented Norwegian men. In Erik and Julia's case, he took a larger responsibility for everyday adaptations of his work to their caring responsibilities due to her inflexible job. The reversed gender pattern was thus the result of a structural constraint and not a deliberate choice. He was not fully comfortable with

this adaptation, as expressed (with a smile) in the following quote: 'I sometimes have to remind her that I have a job, too.'

Camilla's strong emotional response to her very slight deviation from the dual earner norm and Erik's and other more than equally sharing men's ambivalence towards a slight deviance from the dual carer norm (the men taking slightly more responsibility for adapting their work to care), indicate that the perceived room for manoeuvre within the new normative order of dual earning and caring is rather limited for the group who identify with this model. Among the Norwegian parents, the ideas of what constitutes a good family life differed in line with the classed patterns of parenting and family ideals in Norway observed by Stefansen and Farstad (2010). They found middle-class parents to organise work and care as a 'tidy trajectory' following the script defined by the current family policy measure, while working-class parents, in contrast, saw it as more important to establish a 'sheltered space' for care when the child was young, and allowing for more home- and family time.

We found a similar tendency among working-class parents in our study as illustrated by the two examples below.

Gunhild is a shift worker and works full time, but this is not her primary preference:

I would, the ideal situation (...) or ideal life would be that I worked 60 percent. Because, I feel that the hours do not extend around the clock. So if I could have chosen I would have worked 60 percent and my husband would have done what he does today, we would have got on very well.

Ivar a mechanic, illustrates the same orientation. He explained that his and his wife's work-life balance relies on his wife's reduced and flexible position. She also took extended unpaid leave with the first child:



we found out that starting in daycare right after the ordinary parental leave was over; he did not accept it, the little one. So it ended after a few weeks with her taking unpaid leave (...) for another six months. Because, obviously he was not ready to be there (laughs).

Feelings of worry about children's well-being and the quality of daycares were frequently expressed, across the class divide, following a gendered pattern, as illustrated in the following excerpt from one of the focus groups:

**Christian:** At least among us there is one [partner] who feels more... I mean, when I'm at work then I'm at work, and then I know when I'll get to daycare, but I think [partner] feels more and thinks a lot more that [our daughter] is small and goes to daycare, and if it goes well. She probably worries a bit to a greater extent than I do.

Later in the interview, Berit picks up on Christian's comment:

**Berit:** I've been sitting, feeling, what you said before, that her head is on what might happen in the daycare. I think I feel; kids can be there from half past seven to five, at daycare or after-school, and I struggle with it when it drags towards five o'clock when we've delivered them around half past seven – seven forty-five. I think that's a long day, it is! But it is by no means what is normal, but when it happens I think it's 'Oh, poor kids, how long should they be at this place!' But then I think [my husband] is colder, thinking that they have an absolutely super nice time there, really. The pace calms down in the afternoon anyway, so it's sort of like 'how bad is it if they are there or at home. What is the difference somehow?'

A gendered pattern of worry for the children's well-being in daycare emerged, but men, too, felt stressed, as voiced by Anders below:

**Anders:** Yes, I think a little alike. But at the same time I see that the times I'll get her when she is the last to be picked up, that I do not like. I do not think it's any fun to be the last man out the door. They [staff] stand there and look a bit at their watch and are ready to go. I don't think it is a good feeling. It is stressful when I know (...) I will just reach the daycare before it closes, it is the

worst thing I know. I get that kind of inner stress that just builds up. I am simply driving aggressively and yes, that's the worst.

Despite widespread worries, the Norwegian parents did not seem to see any alternatives to sending the children to daycare, but timing to some extent followed the classed patterns observed by Stefansen and Farstad (2010), with some working class parents postponing or wanting to postpone daycare till the child was a little older, typically one and a half year instead of starting directly after parental leave at the age of one year which was the middle-class norm. On the other hand, some of the working-class parents in the present study were not able to use the paternal quota of parental leave, and as a consequence, the children started earlier in daycare, despite the parents' preference. However, the support of daycare as an important, even mandatory part of children's lives and of work-family arrangements was widely shared. Staying home on unpaid leave using the cash-for-care benefit was only an option as a way of bridging short care gaps between parental leave and daycare. Dissatisfaction with the daycare was contained as feelings of emotional distress, or choosing exit strategies, such as moving their child to another daycare.

Norwegian parents to a larger extent raised issues of perceived constraint: for the highly educated parents, living up to the norm of the dual earner/dual carer model was a primary issue, and failure to do so led to ambiguity and in some cases feelings of shame and personal failure. For the Norwegian working-class parents, the main problem was the misfit between the structures available and what they ideally wanted for their family.

### Polish families: Fast change within new and enabling structures

Among the Polish parents the authors were struck by the agency with which the informants made use of the new structures, materials and ideologies, which had become available to them as working parents in Norway, employing them to actively shape their lives, including renegotiating gender roles in the family. The Polish parents seemed to be drawing on a wider repertoire of morally justifiable work–family adaptations compared to the Norwegian parents, and especially Norwegian middle-class parents.

Olek and Tomina very aptly illustrate this agency and fluidity. Despite a gendered arrangement for several years, with him as a main breadwinner in a manual profession in Norway and her combining paid work in the service sector with taking care of their children on her own in Poland, they now had a fairly egalitarian work–family arrangement. Both worked and they shared childcare and household work equally. This example illustrates the plasticity of work–family arrangements over time and space, and in response to shifting circumstances. In this family, a neo-traditional adaptation, with her work slightly reduced (80 per cent), was seen as unproblematic and fully compatible with a happy gender equal family life. This was also the case in other Polish families, including the middle-class group.

Augustyn and Beata are an example of a couple shifting arrangements in the opposite direction. They both had a high education and they had both been successful professionally in Norway. After living as a full-time dual earner/dual carer couple in Norway for several years, however, they now opted for a neo-traditional arrangement in Poland in the immediate future—they would be leaving for Poland

three weeks after the interview. According to Augustyn this was a financial and practical matter: 'If I work full-time, she can work much much less, or almost not at all, and we can still afford all we need.' Beata saw this as a compensation for the short parental leaves she had had with her two eldest children in Norway:

**Beata:** When I gave birth to the children, I finished (parental leave) after eight months and returned to work, so I did not get so much time to stay home with the children, so this is the last chance, with the third (child).

Miro and Anna, also academics, represent a couple on the fast track towards changing gender relations, actively using, and according to Anna enjoying, the entitlements for working parents in Norway as well as drawing on the Norwegian gender equality discourse:

**Anna:** We enjoy the gender equality in Norway. (...) This is why we decided to share the (parental) leave, that we must use the opportunity, that the father is also at home with the child and that he (the child) does not only know his mother.

The design of the Norwegian parental leave scheme, supporting fathers' caring and the norm of involved fatherhood, as well as the way Anna interpreted her colleagues' talk of the dangers of a long parental leave, had led them to pursue a reversed gender pattern of shift parenting and part-time work, as she worked more and he took a larger share of parental leave. In the beginning of their stay in Norway, they prioritised her career in higher education, and although they had the same academic education, he took an unskilled job, taking the main responsibility for breadwinning. Anna explains: 'he thought that he was a man so he would have to take it (the breadwinning responsibility) (...) and work and earn the money', while she started as a research assistant. One could say that her professional success relied

on his male breadwinner masculinity, while on the other hand they drew on Norwegian structures of opportunity as well as the Norwegian discourse on gender equality to actively create a 'modern' egalitarian family. However, she thought that the child missed her when she was at work, and their current adaptation thus had emotional costs. Among the other parents who had more children, some adjusted their ideals and practices when they had a second or third child.

Even Polish couples in more traditional work–family adaptations, saw themselves as engaged in changing gender relations in the family. Sylwia, who at the time of the interview was a full time home-maker in a male breadwinner arrangement, nevertheless thought that living in Norway had led to changes towards a more egalitarian family arrangement:

**Sylwia:** Yes, I think it has a great influence that we are here in Norway. Because my partner has learned to take more responsibility for children and housework, and that it is completely normal that a man takes responsibility for childcare, that he picks up the children from daycare and he does it with pleasure.

The Polish parents used the available structures in an eclectic way, as illustrated by Klaudia and Filip, a highly educated couple in academic professions, the parents of one child. They spent the paternal quota of parental leave together, visiting family in Poland. After ten months of parental leave, she stayed home for another twelve months on unpaid leave, claiming the cash–for–care benefit before the child entered daycare and she returned to full-time work. Grandmothers played a more important role in Polish parents' work–family adaptation and in some cases grandmothers stayed with the family during the paternal quota of parental leave, like in Maja and

Marek's case. Marek took the full paternal quota of parental leave, but he was very pleased with the help he received: 'My mother-in-law had full control' (see Bjørnholt and Stefansen, forthcoming, for further details).

The Polish parents were in general very positive towards Norwegian work–family entitlements, including daycares, although critique was also voiced against some aspects of Norwegian daycares, in particular the lack of hot meals. In contrast to Norwegian parents, who worried silently or chose exit, many of the Polish parents expressed their concern and adopted modifying strategies such as sending hot food in thermos containers or persuading the staff to heat food for their children (Bjørnholt and Stefansen, forthcoming).

## Discussion

This article took as its starting point the strong support for the gender symmetrical dual earner/dual carer model in Norway, exploring how parents of Norwegian and Polish origin negotiated and adapted to the prevailing structures and ideologies of parenting in Norway today i.e. the current gender equalising family policy regime.

We found that both groups of parents embraced the welfare state entitlements in Norway that support the dual earner/dual carer model. At the same time, we found differences in how Norwegian and Polish parents lived with the work–family adaptations they chose, and their expressed scope of agency when faced with work–family strain or changing circumstances. Below we discuss how these differences can be interpreted.

Our analysis sheds light on how parents' work–family adaptations within the same structure of opportunity and within the same new normal, nevertheless might differ

—not so much in terms of actual adaptations, but in the ways in which the same structures are perceived as constraining and enabling by different groups.

For the Norwegian parents, the existing benefits and entitlements for working parents were part of a taken for granted structure and a new normative order, leading to new and different challenges. For the Norwegian parents, and especially so for the middle-class parents, traversing the institutional and normative ‘terrain’ (see McKie et al. 2002) of care and work involved moving along a relatively narrow path, surrounded by fixed structures and expectations, a set and largely internalised script allowing little room for deviation or improvisation. These findings resonate with Farstad and Stefansen’s (2015) study from Iceland—where fathers have an individual right to a third of the parental leave—on middle-class fathering. Some of the middle-class fathers they interviewed found it emotionally difficult to accept that they were not able to share the parental leave period equally with their partner and expressed feelings of fear that they would not connect with their child because of this.

The Norwegian parents to a larger extent expressed work–family strain—working-class parents were frustrated by how the available entitlements did not fit their family ideals and needs, while middle-class parents saw few morally acceptable alternatives to the earner/dual carer model. Their commitment to the dual earner/dual carer model as a moral norm seemed to limit their moral scope of agency. This can be seen as an illustration of how changes in structures and ideals when they have ‘hardened’ into taken for granted material and moral order, constrains individual agency. Such processes could be interpreted as an effect of

'regime socialisation' (Goerres and Tepe, 2011), of how growing up in a particular institutional landscape shapes attitudes and ensuing practices. The classed patterns we and others identify nevertheless suggest that policy regimes intersect with other structures. Taking gender equality for granted as something that has happened may represent a kind of social closure (Bjørnholt, 2014), which makes it more difficult to express and openly challenge in negotiations the remaining subtler differences in emotional strain and parental responsibility. Failing to live up to the new norm(al) of equally sharing, equally responsible parents may thus lead to a privatisation of emotional strain, resulting in feelings of gender shame and self-blame, like in Camilla's case.

For the Polish parents, in contrast, the structures were perceived as providing new opportunities, despite the fact that some of the Polish informants had experiences of discrimination in the labour market and thus, objectively, may have had less scope for manoeuvre than the Norwegian parents. Nevertheless, the Polish informants of different class backgrounds predominantly spoke of the general conditions in the labour market, the entitlements for working parents and the ideas of work, care and gender equality as enabling structures, allowing them to create better lives in Norway than in Poland. The Polish parents navigated within a wider 'terrain' in which memories and transnational comparison with their country of origin, as well as their general positive orientation towards a better future in Norway, formed their perceptions of the institutional structures for combining work and care in Norway as well as their perceived room of manoeuvre. They were on a fast track of change and active agents of change, using the structures and discourses available to them in Norway in a pragmatic and eclectic way, and sometimes with a twist, as part of



shaping their new lives in Norway, including renegotiating gender relations and parenting practices. As illustrated above, such individual adaptations could involve adding the grandmother to the daddy leave, or using a male breadwinner arrangement as a stepping-stone for egalitarian gender roles in the family. Compared to their peers among the Norwegian parents, the academic middle class Polish parents did not seem to have internalised the same moral duty to be egalitarian in a particular way, and their identity as an egalitarian couple did not depend on a particular work–family adaptation. There was subsequently more room for individual adaptation and improvisation.

## Conclusion

This article sheds light on the micropractices of work–family adaptations involved in immigrants’ cultural adaptations in a new country. It further provides a new perspective on the adaptations to the norms and structures among the majority population, highlighting what could be understood as a paradox: that enabling structures for gender equality may lead to new forms of strain and give rise to new gendered patterns for the group who most strongly identify with the family model these structures support. Adding migrants to the analysis of contemporary family adaptations, contrasting the taken for granted insider perspective of the majority population with the outsider perspective of those who are new to the Norwegian institutional context, made it possible to highlight these at the same time liberating and restraining aspects of the Norwegian institutional support systems and norms for working parents, as well as the still unfinished business of changing deep rooted gendered responsibilities.

## Acknowledgements

### Funding

The EFFECT study was carried out in cooperation between Norwegian Social Research at Oslo and Akershus University College (Oslo, Norway), Policy and Social Research AS (Oslo, Norway), and the Department of Health and Work Psychology at the Nofer Institute of Occupational Medicine (Łódź, Poland). It was funded by the [Polish–Norwegian Research Programme](#) under the [Norway Grants funding scheme](#). Grant number EOG78

The authors are indebted to Øystein Lund Johannessen, Centre for Intercultural Communication (SIK), Stavanger, Norway, for comprehensive comments on a previous draft, as well as to Dorota Merez and the other members of the Polish research team in the EFFECT study, numerous commentators in the Polish–Norwegian research network in Norway, and in conferences and colleagues at NOVA/HIOA for comments on the draft article in several stages.

### Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> The formal working hours in Norway are 40 hours per week, but due to collective agreements, the majority of Norwegian employees work 37.5 hours.

<sup>2</sup> Due to a collaborative agreement with another Norway Grants project, the XXX project, we were granted access to four anonymous interviews with Polish families that included information on our topic of study. These interviews are part of our sample of Polish families in Norway and add to the variation in work–family adaptation, but we have not used them directly in the analysis presented here.

<sup>3</sup> Maria Holter recruited and interviewed part of the Norwegian sample. Monika Kochowicz acted as an interpreter during some of the interviews with Polish informants, and also transcribed and translated one interview. Anna Sitarz conducted four interviews, which she also transcribed and translated.

## References

- Bjørnholt, M (2010) Like Father, Like Son? The Transmission of Values, Family Practices and Work-Family Adaptations to Sons of Work-Sharing Men. *Fathering: A Journal of Theory, Research and Practice about Men as Fathers*. 8(3): 276–299.
- Bjørnholt, M (2012) From Work-Sharing Couples to Equal Parents. Changing Perspectives of Men and Gender Equality. In Maria Jansdotter Samuelsson, Clary Krekula, Magnus Åberg (eds), *Gender and Change. Power, Politics and Everyday Practices* (pp.53–72). Karlstad: Karlstad University Press.
- Bjørnholt, M and Farstad, G R (2012) 'Am I rambling?' On the advantages of interviewing couples together. *Qualitative Research*. 14(1): 3–19. Published online ahead of print 28 September 2012.
- Bjørnholt, M (2014) Changing men, changing times; fathers and sons from an experimental gender equality study. *The Sociological Review*. 62(2): 295–315.
- Bjørnholt, M, Stefansen, K, Węzyk, A and Merez-Kot, D (2017) The role of family policy regimes in work–family adaptations: Polish parents in Norway and Poland. *Central and Eastern European Migration Review*. Published online ahead of print. doi: 10.17467/ceemr.2017.12.
- Bjørnholt, M and Stefansen, K (forthcoming) On the move: Transnational family practices among Polish parents working and caring in Norway. In K Slany, E Guribye, P Pustulka and M Ślusarczyk (eds), *Transnational Polish families in Norway: Social Capital, Integration, Institutions and Care*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- Brandth B and Kvande E (2003) *Fleksible fedre: maskulinitet, arbeid, velferdsstat*. [Flexible fathers: masculinity, work and welfare state.] Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Brandth B and Kvande E (2013) *Fedrekvoten og den farsvennlige velferdsstaten*. [The paternal quota and the father friendly welfare state.] Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Breidahl, KN & Larsen, CA (2016). The myth of unadaptable gender roles: Attitudes towards women's paid work among immigrants across 30 European countries. *Journal of European Social Policy*. 26(5): 387 – 401.
- Danielsen H (2002) Den kjønnskonservative velferdsstaten. Feministiske perspektiv på omsorgsordningar for småbarn. [The gender conservative welfare state. Feminist perspectives on care arrangements for small children.] In C Holst (ed) *Kjønnsrettferdighet. Utfordringer for feministisk politikk*. [Gender equity. Challenges for feminist politics.] Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk, pp.89–122.
- Edlund J and Öhn I (2016) Who should work and who should care? Attitudes towards the desirable division of labour between mothers and fathers in five European countries. *Acta Sociologica* 59(2):151–169.

- Eggebø, H (2010) The problem of dependency: Immigration, gender, and the welfare state. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*. 17(3): 295-322.
- Egge-Hoveid K (2014) Kontantstøtte blant innvandrere 2013 Kontantstøtte – lite endring tross høyere sats. [Cash for care among immigrants 2013. Cash for care – little change despite higher amount.] *Samfunnsspeilet*, (4). Oslo: Statistics Norway.
- Ellingsæter AL (2016) Kampen om familiepolitikken: Farvel til hybridregimet? [The struggle over family policy: Good bye to the hybrid regime?] *Tidsskrift for samfunnsforskning*. 57(03): 227– 256.
- Ellingsæter AL (2006) The Norwegian childcare regime and its paradoxes. In AL Ellingsæter and Leira A (eds) *Politicising Parenthood in Scandinavia: Gender Relations in Welfare States*. Bristol: The Policy Press, pp.121–144.
- Ellingsæter AL and Gulbrandsen L (2007) Closing the childcare gap: The interaction of childcare provision and mothers' agency in Norway. *Journal of Social Policy*. 36(4): 649–669.
- Ellingsæter, AL, Kitterød RH and Lyngstad, J (2017) Universalising childcare, changing mothers' attitudes: Policy feedback in Norway. *Journal of Social Policy*. 46(1): 149–173.
- Eydal GB and Rostgaard T (eds) (2015) *Fatherhood in the Nordic Welfare States: Comparing Care Policies and Practice*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Eydal GB, Gíslason IV, Rostgaard T, Brandth B, Duvander A-Z and Lammi-Taskula J (2015) Trends in parental leave in the Nordic countries: Has the forward march of gender equality halted? *Community, Work & Family*. 18(2): 167–181.
- Ferragina E and Seeleib-Kaiser M (2015) Determinants of a silent (r)evolution: Understanding the expansion of family policy in rich OECD countries. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*. 22(1): 1–37.
- Goerres A and Tepe M (2012). Doing it for the kids? The determinants of attitudes towards public childcare in unified Germany. *Journal of Social Policy*. 41(2): 349–372.
- Gornick JC and Meyers MK (2008) Creating gender egalitarian societies: An agenda for reform. *Politics & Society* 36(3): 313–349.
- Grødem, AS (2017) Family-oriented policies in Scandinavia and the challenge of immigration. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 27(1) 77 –89.
- Halrynjo S and Lyng ST (2009) Preferences, constraints or schemas of devotion? Exploring Norwegian mothers' withdrawals from high- commitment careers. *The British Journal of Sociology* 60(2): 321–343.
- Hamre K (2016) Kontantstøtte blant innvandrere, 2015 Økte forskjeller i kontantstøttebruk. [Cash for care among immigrants. Increased differences in use of cash for care.] Statistics Norway.

- Heggem GF (2013) Fedre fra liberale velferdsstater møter norsk familiepolitikk. In B Brandth and Kvande E (eds) *Fedrekvoten og den farsvennlige velferdsstaten*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Hoel A (2013) Fedrekvoten i et kulturelt komplekst Norge. In B Brandth and Kvande E (eds) *Fedrekvoten og den farsvennlige velferdsstaten*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, pp.106–120.
- Kavli HC (2015) 'Adapting to the Dual Earner Family Norm? The Case of Immigrants and Immigrant Descendants in Norway', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. 41(5): 835–56.
- Kvande E and Brandth B (2013) Haha, skal du ta maternita? Fedre mellom to velferdsregimer. In B Brandth and Kvande E (eds) *Fedrekvoten og den farsvennlige velferdsstaten*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Lammi-Taskula J (2006) Nordic men on parental leave: Can the welfare state change gender relations. In AL Ellingsæter and Leira A (eds) *Politicising Parenthood in Scandinavia: Gender Relations in Welfare States*. Bristol: The Policy Press, pp.79–99.
- Leira A (1992) *Welfare States and Working Mothers. The Scandinavian Experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lister, R (2009). A Nordic nirvana? Gender, citizenship, and social justice in the Nordic welfare states. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*. 16(2): 242-278.
- McKie, L, Gregory, S, & Bowlby, S (2002). Shadow times: the temporal and spatial frameworks and experiences of caring and working. *Sociology*. 36(4): 897-924.
- Mulinari D, Touri S, Keskinen S and Irni S (2009) Introduction: Postcolonialism and the Nordic models of welfare and gender. *Complying with Colonialism: Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Nordic Region*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- NAV (2016) Foreldrepenger: Fedre tar ut færre dager. Oslo: *Arbeids- og velferdsdirektoratet*. <https://www.nav.no/no/NAV+og+samfunn/Statistikk/Familie+-+statistikk/Nyheter/foreldrepenger>. Accessed 29 September 2016.
- Nadim M (2014) Reinterpreting the relation between motherhood and paid work: Second generation immigrant women in Norway. *The Sociological Review* 62(3): 494–511.
- Pustułka P, Struzik J and Ślusarczyk M (2015) Caught between breadwinning and emotional provisions: The case of polish migrant fathers in Norway. *Studia Humanistyczne AGH* 14(2): 117–140.
- Rønsen M and Kitterød RH (2015) Gender-equalizing family policies and mothers' entry into paid work: Recent evidence from Norway. *Feminist Economics* 21(1): 59–89.
- Siim, B (2007) The challenge of recognizing diversity from the perspective of gender equality: dilemmas in Danish citizenship. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 10(4): 491-511.
- Siim, B., & Skjeie, H. (2008). Tracks, intersections and dead ends: State feminism and multicultural retreats in Denmark and Norway. *Ethnicities* 8(3): 2322-344.

- Statistics Norway (2015) *Barnehager, 2014, endelige tall. [Daycares 2014. Final numbers]*. Oslo: Statistics Norway.
- Stefansen, K and Farstad G (2010) Classed parental practices in a modern welfare state. Caring for the under threes in Norway. *Critical Social Policy*, 30(1): 120-141.
- Stefansen, Kari and Ketil Skogen (2010): Selective identification, quiet distancing: Understanding the working-class response to the Nordic daycare model. *The Sociological Review*, 58(4): 587-603.
- Syltevik, LJ (2017) A Sociological Perspective on Changes in the Family in Norway. In T Tilden and Wampold, B (eds) *Routine Outcome Monitoring in Couple and Family Therapy. The Empirically Informed Therapist*. Springer.
- Timmermans S and Tavory I (2012) Theory construction in qualitative research from grounded theory to abductive analysis. *Sociological Theory* 30(3): 167–186.
- Wigfall VG, Brannen J, Mooney A and Parutis V (2013) Finding the right man: Recruiting fathers in inter-generational families across ethnic groups. *Qualitative Research* 13(5): 591–607.
- Østby, L (2016) Stadig mest innvandring fra Polen. [Still the largest immigration from Poland] *Samfunnsspeilet 1*. Oslo: Statistics Norway. <http://www.ssb.no/sosiale-forhold-og-kriminalitet/artikler-og-publikasjoner/stadig-mest-innvandring-fra-polen> Accessed 29 September 2016