

# The Role of Family Policy Regimes in Work–Family Adaptations: Polish Parents in Norway and Poland

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*The aim of this article is to examine how family policies contribute to changes in family practices and towards gender equality in families. Empirically we draw on interviews with two groups of Polish-born parents: Polish parents who have migrated to Norway and Polish parents living in Poland. Norway and Poland are relevant cases for our exploration because they represent different types of welfare states, which have followed different paths towards their current family policy package. In our analysis of actual work–family adaptations we found a convergence towards gender-equal dual-earner/dual-carer arrangements in both groups, although there were differences in the level of agency. Polish parents in Poland felt less entitled to use the measures available to them, and sometimes refrained from using them, compared to Polish parents in Norway who expressed a strong sense of agency in using family policy measures to create a good life in Norway and as part of a project of change towards more gender-equal sharing of work and care responsibilities. The analysis confirms the strong link between family practices and family policies, but also illustrates how the effect of policies on practices may be hampered or boosted by the wider historical-cultural context of the society in question. In conclusion, in analyses of the link between policy and practice it may be fruitful to distinguish between family policy packages – the concrete set of entitlements for working parents – and family policy regimes, meaning policies in their wider context, including migrancy as a mediating factor.*

*Keywords: dual-earner/dual-carer model; family practices; work–family adaptations; gender equality; family policy*

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## Introduction

This article grapples with the intertwinement of family policies, family practices and gender equality – a key issue in sociological family research and for modern welfare states. We explore this issue using qualitative interviews with two groups of Polish-born working parents with young children. At the time of the interview, one group lived in Poland, the other in Norway. Our informants thus share the same cultural background and socialisation in the broad sense, but are living their everyday lives in different cultural and family policy landscapes. Using a comparative lens we study how the two groups of parents make sense of and use the set of welfare state entitlements that are available to them – what we will refer to as *work–family adaptations*, a concept that is used by family researchers but is not explicitly defined (for example, Halrynjo and Lyng 2009; Bjørnholt 2010). In this article the concept of work–family adaptations refers to both the practical arrangements of paid work and care and the processual character of arriving at particular adaptations between paid work and caring obligations in the family, as well as the emotional work involved in legitimising and contesting particular adaptations. The latter is important in order to understand work–family adaptations as culturally informed processes and not merely reflections of the more or less successful implementation of state policies.

We see Norway and Poland as interesting and contrasting contexts for our exploration because of the different historical routes they have taken towards the present policy package offered to working parents and the different cultural climates in relation to gender equality they represent today. Comparing parents of Polish origin in these two different welfare state contexts may shed light on how families' everyday work–family adaptations relate not only to the concrete and present family policy package, which is the focus of most research on the link between family policies and family practices (e.g. Eydal and Rostgaard 2015), but also to historical paths in policy development and ideas of gender and gender relations in the respective contexts of study. This is what we aim to do in this article.

The article is written as part of a Polish–Norwegian research project<sup>1</sup> that has as its background the recent and large Polish migration to Norway following Poland's accession to the EU in 2004. Within a few years, almost 100 000 Poles migrated to Norway, and in 2017 the registered Polish immigrant population was 97 200 (Statistics Norway 2017b). Migration patterns have shifted during this period, from temporary work migration among men in the early years, to include family migration and settlement in later years (Friberg 2012). This has led to an increased research interest in how Polish families adapt to Norwegian society and its welfare system (Slany and Pustulka 2016; Ślusarczyk and Pustulka 2016; Wærdahl 2016; Bjørnholt, Stefansen, Gashi and Seeberg 2017) as well as studies of the transnational practices of Polish migrants to Norway (Bell and Erdal 2015; Bjørnholt and Stefansen 2017). Research on Polish migration to Norway mirrors and to some extent expands on the research on Polish migration to the UK and the ways in which Polish migrants change and bring about change in the process of coming to terms with their new situation, observing, acquiring and resisting the novelties they meet in the UK, among them new ideals of family life and gender equality in the family (Ryan 2011; Siara 2013; Grabowska, Garapich, Jaźwińska and Radziwinowiczówna 2017). This article contributes to this growing field of research. Its main aim, however, relates to the broader scholarly discussion on how policies affect family practices. It can be read as a call to take a broader view of how policies work than is generally employed in empirical research on parents' uptake of family policy measures and work engagement. It argues that one way forward is to distinguish analytically between the concepts of 'policy packages' and 'policy regimes'.

### Key concepts: Policy packages and policy regimes

The concept of ‘policy packages’, coined by Bradshaw, Ditch, Holmes and Whiteford (1993) is central to our analysis: family policy packages can be seen as ‘structures of opportunities’ for (Ellingsæter 2006: 122) and constraints on work–family adaptations. Policy researchers often understand such packages as representing family policy regimes, with specific claims about the roles of mothers and fathers in provision and care, and the proper division of labour between the family, the state and the market (Ellingsæter 2006; Ellingsæter and Leira 2006). Our aim here is to study how Polish parents engage with two different family policy packages. We make a point of differentiating between family policy packages and family policy regimes and suggest that policy regimes should be understood more broadly, as family policies in context, drawing on an understanding of policy regimes ‘as a lens for considering the interplay of ideas, interests, and institutional arrangements’ (May and Jochim 2013: 427). This opens up a more dynamic understanding of the meaning and effect of concrete policies as situated in their respective wider historical frames and policy development paths.

**Table 1. Core entitlements for working parents**

	Poland	Norway
Maternity leave	20 weeks, 100 per cent compensation (extra weeks for each child if twins, triplets, etc.) Can start until 6 weeks before expected delivery 6 weeks of additional maternity leave, 100 per cent compensation	None
Paid parental leave	26 weeks, 60 per cent compensation (extra weeks for each child if twins, triplets, etc.) Introduced in 2013 Can be used flexibly	49 weeks, 100 per cent compensation (or 59 weeks, 80 per cent) Can be used flexibly Mothers must start 3 weeks before and take the first 6 weeks after birth
Quotas	14 weeks of maternity leave reserved for the mother Paid paternity leave 2 weeks, must be taken within the first year	Mothers and fathers each have a non-transferable share of 10 weeks of parental leave
Additional unpaid leave	36 months, 1 month reserved for the other parent	Fathers: 2 weeks at birth unpaid but most get paid by employers 12 months unpaid leave per parent
Formal childcare	0 to 3-year-olds, low but increasing: 3.8 per cent in 2012; 4.8 per cent in 2013; 5.9 per cent in 2014 3 to 5-year-olds: 79 per cent in 2014	Legal right to childcare from 1 year. 80 per cent of 1 to 2-year-olds and 97 per cent of 3 to 5-year-olds (2014)
Working parents’ rights	2 days to look after children (fully paid) 60 days per year with 80 per cent compensation to look after sick child	Leave (fully paid) to attend a sick child: 10 days/year per parent for 1 child (20 per family); 15/30 if more than one child) (lone parents 20/30 days) Reduced working hours

Sources: Local Data Bank – Central Statistical Office in Poland, Statistics Norway, the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration.

Our theoretical point of departure is Messner's (2016) idea of the 'historical gender formation' as a conceptualisation of how gender relations are organised and institutionalised in society at a structural level, at a particular time and place. The concept assumes that having been formed and transformed by past events and struggles, the existing gender formation in a particular society represents new opportunities and constraints for agency and change at the individual as well as the institutional level. In the Nordic countries, as well as in the Western world in general, more than a century of feminist struggles have played an important part in the past transformations of ideas and institutions that have led to, and are now underpinning, the current gender formation.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, in Poland policies have shifted sharply over time, and via top-down, state-driven processes (Heinen and Wator 2006) and, over recent years, there has been a marked cultural backlash regarding women's rights and gender equality (Nowicka 2007). How these different historical paths and developments play into work–family adaptations today is what we explore and discuss in this article. As a background to the empirical analysis of work–family adaptations, the next section gives a brief description of the family policy packages offered to parents in our two contexts of study, Norway and Poland. Details of the different elements are provided in Table 1.

### **Family policy in Norway and Poland**

Using typologies that are based on arrangements for work and care, Norway today can be categorised as promoting a weak male-breadwinner regime (Lewis 1992) and even a universal carer model, meaning a model that facilitates carer roles for both women and men (Fraser 1994). In terms of family policy, working parents today have access to a series of entitlements that make a complete care chain possible: a fairly long and fully compensated parental leave, which includes a use-or-lose paternal quota, is followed by universally available and affordable childcare facilities for children aged 1–6, allowing mothers of young children and parents in general to retain their labour market participation after the birth of a child.

The current Norwegian family policy package has been characterised as ambivalent (Sainsbury 2001) and hybrid (Ellingsæter 2006) because of the seemingly contradictory support for both women's role in informal care (the long parental leave and a cash-for-care scheme available for parents *not* using formal childcare) and for women's work–life participation (the legal right to formal childcare from year 1 and the use-or-lose fathers' quota of parental leave). Our interpretation, however, is that the package increasingly supports a dual-earner/dual-carer model (Bjørnholt 2012; Bjørnholt and Stefansen, forthcoming). For example, the age until which a cash-for-care benefit for parents not using kindergarten is available has been reduced from three to two.

The family policy package in Poland is both similar to and different from the Norwegian policy package. Szelewa and Polakowski's (2008) typology of welfare state clusters based on gender arrangements and childcare is instructive. They identified four different clusters of welfare states characterised by explicit familialism, implicit familialism, female mobilising and comprehensive support. Szelewa (2012) found that Poland today shares traits with the implicit familialism cluster in that it has a fairly generous parental leave system for when the child is small, consisting of an assemblage of leave entitlements, but it makes no provision for paid childcare, disincentivising women from returning to work after childbirth. The policy package offered to Polish parents could thus be characterised as partial or residual when compared to the complete chain of entitlements offered to working parents in Norway. It could be regarded as ambivalent in that it grants women the right to return to work following parental leave, but does not fully support formal care and, hence, makes it difficult for women to use this right. The policy package has been developed over recent years with a substantial extension of leave for parents; a mother who takes a whole year's leave in one go (26 weeks of fully paid maternity leave followed by 26 weeks' parental leave at 60 per cent compensation) effectively receives 80 per cent of her salary for that year. Paternity leave was introduced in 2010, which may be seen as an incentive for

fathers to become more directly involved in the care of their children and a symbolic move towards shifting childcare obligations from women to men.

Poland still has the lowest level of formal childcare enrolment in the EU and only a small number of children below the age of three attend formal childcare (EIGE 2015). In comparison, the level of enrolment in formal childcare in Norway is high. In 2015, 82 per cent of 1 to 2-year-olds and 97 per cent of 3 to 5-year-olds were enrolled in formal childcare (Statistics Norway 2017a). However, in recent years the Polish government has taken steps towards improving support for working parents, and a funding programme has been implemented aimed at increasing the number of childcare places, capping the fee for formal childcare, and legalising and formalising the employment of nannies (EU 2016). However, the Polish policy package remains partial and does not fully support a dual-earner/dual-carer model.

### Method, empirical data and analysis

This paper is informed by data from a larger Polish–Norwegian research project on family policy, work–life regulations and work–life balance. As part of the project, qualitative interviews were conducted 2014–2015 with three groups of working parents with children below school age: Norwegian and Polish parents living in Norway and Polish parents living in Poland. In this paper, we draw on the interviews with Polish parents living in Norway and those living in Poland.

In both countries, parents were strategically recruited with the aim of accessing two-income families with different working conditions: parents in academic or other highly skilled work who enjoyed a high degree of independence and flexibility; and parents with lower-skilled jobs and/or less flexible working hours, such as healthcare work and other types of shift-based work. The original plan for the recruitment of Polish parents living in Norway was to use workplaces as sites of recruitment. This proved difficult, and we therefore used a number of access points (networks, workplaces, meeting places for Polish migrants) and snowballing. This sample is therefore more varied than originally planned for, as we detail below. In total, we interviewed 28 parents in Norway, representing 21 families. In Poland, recruitment from workplaces was successful, and the parents in the sample were recruited primarily from research and teaching institutes (academics, high flexibility), and hospitals (nurses, low flexibility). In total, 31 parents representing 30 families were accessed. Table 2 below provides an overview of the sample and type of interview in each country.

**Table 2. Type of interview, number of interviews and number of families**

	Individual interviews	Couple interviews	Group interviews	Number of interviews	Number of families
In Norway	7	8	3	18	21
In Poland	6	–	7	13	30
Total	13	8	10	31	51

The proportion of men and women was similar in both samples: 8 men and 20 women in Norway; 7 men and 24 women in Poland. Both samples were varied in terms of the interviewees' level of education and occupation. The majority of participants in the Norwegian sample of Polish parents had a medium or high level of education, and about a quarter were academics. With one exception all were employed, but their professional success varied. In the Polish sample most of the interviewees had a high level of education, only two had just secondary education. Most of the participants were permanently employed (usually in full-time work), one participant was contracted by a university, and one had a doctoral scholarship. Due to difficulties in accessing Polish

parents in Norway the two samples are not perfectly matched. However, both samples represent parents working in regulated sectors who have access to work-related benefits and the protection of laws and regulations on working time, salaries, sick leave and so on. It is for this group of parents that the study can draw conclusions. Hence, it has little to offer to the understanding of how policies and practices related to work, care and gender are linked for, for instance, the precariat.

The interviews in Norway and Poland were conducted using the same interview guide. The interviews were semi-structured and allowed for some flexibility in the wording and ordering of themes and questions. Key themes were: type of work and caring responsibilities; work–family adaptations at the time of the interview and before (including use of family policy entitlements); perceptions of work–life balance; and parenting ideals and practices. The Polish parents in Norway were also asked about their migration process.

In Norway, the interviews were conducted in Polish, English or Norwegian, or in a combination of languages depending on the informants' language skills and preferences. The interviews were conducted either by the two first authors, by one of two Polish-speaking research assistants,<sup>3</sup> or a combination. Conducting interviews in second languages raises issues related to interpretation: it may be more difficult to understand what the informants are trying to convey than with interviews in first languages. The reader should bear this in mind. In Poland, the third and the last author and one of the research assistants conducted the interviews.<sup>4</sup> All interviews in both countries were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews in Norway were transcribed in Norwegian, and the Polish interviews conducted in Poland were transcribed in Polish and later translated into English.

The interviews, especially those in Norway, were varied in terms of length and depth, and not all aspects were covered in all interviews. Nevertheless, we believe that taken together, the subsamples from each country allow for analysis of variation in work–family adaptations and in parents' ideas about mothers' and fathers' responsibilities for the balancing of work and care, and the role of formal care in the families' overall 'care project' (Stefansen and Farstad 2010).

Cross-national and comparative research is challenging at many levels and the same question or the same topic may not have the same meaning in different national contexts. Thus, there are ample opportunities for 'getting lost in translation', an issue that has to be taken into account. In this project, the Norwegian and Polish research teams worked together in different phases with the aim of ensuring a joint understanding of key concepts and to ensure that interpretations of practices and links between policies and practices were grounded in the empirical realities of the informants.

### **Analytical approach**

The analysis developed here draws on the abductive approach suggested by Tavory and Timmermans (2009) and Timmermans and Tavory (2012), which was developed from a critique of grounded theory and grounded-theory method. Thus the analysis proceeded through a circular process of moving between the interview transcripts, suggestions for empirical categories and theoretical interpretation, resulting in what Creswell (2007: 150) calls 'custom-built' analysis, specifically designed for the aim of this article. The first phase of the analysis involved reading and re-reading the interview transcripts with a particular focus on how families adapted to the challenge of combining paid employment with caring for young children. The interviews were read systematically to identify different combinations of the father's and the mother's work-related adaptations. We first identified different work–family adaptations among our informants in Norway and Poland and then compared the two samples, looking for similarities and differences in their reports of their everyday adaptations.

The data analysis proceeded in two steps. The Norwegian and Polish team worked separately during the first step, constructing mini-portraits of approximately 300 words for each family. The portraits contained

information about the work and care situation of the family and the mother's and father's adaptations to combine work and care. These portraits were used to identify the range of work–family adaptations in each subsample and to construct different categories of work–family adaptations. In some cases the Norwegian and the Polish team arrived at diverging categorisations, which may be a reminder of the wider implications in terms of frames of reference and interpretation of the different national contexts (including the national gender formations, of which researchers are also a part). These discrepancies led to stimulating and mutually clarifying exchanges. As the second step of analysis we searched the interviews and the portraits for expressions of cultural meaning – implicit and underlying assumptions that could help place the observed practices in context and relate them to the cultural and institutional support systems in both countries.

### **Work–family adaptations: general patterns**

In the Polish Norwegian sample we identified a reversed-gender model, a gender-symmetrical model, a neo-traditional model (including some who received help from 'flying grandmothers'), a (more marginal) male-breadwinner model, and a single-mother model. These categories were constructed on the basis of how the informants shared the responsibilities of breadwinning and care and, in particular, how they shared the responsibilities of adapting paid work to caring responsibilities. In the Polish sample the same main work–family adaptations emerged, with some slight variations. The main difference from the Norwegian sample was a substantial everyday grandmother involvement.

### **Polish parents in Norway: rapid change within new and enabling structures**

In their work–family adaptations, the Polish parents living in Norway were, broadly speaking, similar to the majority population in Norway, embracing the dual-earner/dual-carer model, as well as using the entitlements for working parents in Norway, such as parental leave, including paternity leave, and kindergarten. Compared to the ethnic Norwegian sample in Norway (Bjørnholt and Stefansen, forthcoming), the Polish parents engaged with the structures available to them in Norway in a pragmatic and eclectic way, negotiating them with voice and agency. The way the Polish parents in Norway actively embraced the opportunities for working parents in Norway must be understood also in the context of migrancy. As other studies of Polish migration to Norway have found (see for instance Bygnes and Erdal 2016), many of our informants mentioned the short working hours, the positive attitudes of employers in Norway towards working parents, the opportunity to have time with the family, the public support systems for combining work and family, and the gender-equality policies and ideas in Norway that allowed them to lead better and more egalitarian lives than they would have had in Poland.

It is important to note that the patterns described were based on snapshot pictures of work–family adaptations. In some cases particular families' work–family adaptation was difficult to categorise. The interviews revealed that work–family adaptations changed over time and that they were shaped not only by constraints related to work and to family policy entitlements, but also by previous experiences, career moves and other changes in circumstances. They were also the subject of reflection and re-negotiation and were open to possible changes in the future. For the Polish parents in Norway, work/family arrangements were, on one hand, determined by limiting factors, such as lack of language skills and job opportunities, which some saw as discrimination in the labour market. On the other hand, the Polish parents in general saw the Norwegian opportunities to combine paid work and parenting as enabling structures.

To shed light on some of the differences that seem to operate below the surface level of the 'new norm' of work–family adaptations in Norway, below we detail the dynamics of the three most common models of work–

–family adaptation among the Polish families in that country. The cases discussed are particularly illustrative of each model.

### **The gender-symmetrical model**

Two different adaptations are included in the gender-symmetrical model. In the first adaptation both partners make changes. After the parental leave period both partners worked full time and used flexi-time options to rearrange their hours of work, organising schedules around the children's needs, day-care opening hours and their respective work obligations. In the other adaptation, both partners work full time and the interviews did not reveal any particular adjustments. This could, however, be a reflection of the lack of detail in some of the interviews.

Augustyn and Beata are an example of a dual-earner couple, both of whom worked full time without any particular changes to their working arrangements. Both had higher education and they had been in Norway for a decade. They had just had their third child and were about to return to Poland. Returning to Poland had been their plan from the outset but they had remained in Norway much longer than they had intended. When they arrived in Norway Beata found relevant work very quickly, whereas Augustyn worked as a cleaner for two years while he learnt the language before acquiring a new job that better corresponded to his education. They have both been in full-time work and have been professionally successful. Beata took most of the parental leave and Augustyn took the paternity leave allowance. Both children started kindergarten at 11 months and both parents commuted long distances to work and kindergarten. In retrospect, Beata felt her parental leave was too short, and she plans to stay home for longer, on unpaid leave, to look after all the children when they return to Poland. The family recently moved to the city to foster her career and earning potential, and Augustyn established a consultancy, mainly serving the Polish diaspora in Norway. He will continue to run this business from Poland. Although Beata had been professionally successful in Norway, she planned to make a career change, but it was not quite clear what she would do in the future. They thought that she might work less in the future than she did in Norway because living costs are lower in Poland and they would be relatively well off with his Norwegian earnings. They could also buy a nice flat without borrowing money due to a profitable investment in Norway. Their eldest child would be starting school and this was also a part of their thought process, as they were critical of Norwegian kindergartens and schools – they thought the Polish school system was better. Finally, they looked forward to living closer to friends and family and expected them to help out with the children, thus allowing them to occasionally go to the theatre and to have more time for themselves.

### *Interpretation*

Augustyn and Beata are an example of a successful dual-earner couple in Norway, returning to Poland and shifting from a gender-symmetrical arrangement (within which her career had taken priority at times) to a neo-traditional arrangement, where he works more than her, or even to a temporary male-breadwinner arrangement. They seemed to take the dual-earner/dual-carer model for granted in a matter-of-fact way as a lived reality but, nevertheless, after living as a full dual-earner/dual-carer couple in Norway for several years, they were now opting for a neo-traditional arrangement in Poland. Beata saw this solution as her decision, and as a conscious, pragmatic choice that was available to them because of their favourable financial situation. This couple illustrates the fluidity of work–family arrangements and their complex relation to policy packages and institutional contexts. They also illustrate how migration and return migration may open up new opportunities for post-migration transnational lives and work–family adaptations, combining elements from both, such as well-paid work in Norway with the perceived advantages of living in Poland, which included housing, education system, friends

and family. Finally, this case illustrates how gender equality in the family may not be understood simply as a once-and-for-all given equivalent to a particular work–family arrangement.

### **The neo-traditional model**

The neo-traditional category included couples in which the woman worked slightly reduced hours. However, this category also included dual-earner couples who were both fully employed and who shared household tasks, although the woman was mainly responsible for adapting her paid work to care, for example, by redistributing working time. It should be noted that for at least one of the couples the woman's reduction in working hours was not an adaptation to family responsibilities but, rather, the involuntary result of not finding relevant work.

Olek and Tomina are an example of the first variation of the neo-traditional model. At the time of the interview Olek worked full time and Tomina worked slightly reduced hours (80 per cent). They had three children (aged 7, 13 and 18). Olek had come to Norway first to work and Tomina had remained in Poland with the children, taking sole responsibility for them. They were living apart for several years, planning a future in Poland, and, as part of that, Olek had built them a house in Poland. However, they missed each other and wanted to be together as a family, so six years ago they eventually decided to move the whole family. Both are engaged in further education in addition to their paid work. Olek first took a job in a different vocation from the one he was originally trained for. He then underwent training for this job, gaining a Norwegian apprenticeship certificate. After losing his job Olek returned to his original vocation and was about to complete the Norwegian apprenticeship certificate in that vocation as well. Tomina worked as a cleaner while learning Norwegian, but she was now employed as a clerk and was also studying to become a business accountant. The couple came to Norway when their youngest child was almost a year old and they were not eligible for Norwegian parental leave. They received the cash-for-care benefit for 8 months for the youngest child until they found a place in kindergarten when the child was 18 months old. The other two children went to school. Their children were active in sports, and both parents and children have many Norwegian friends. They recently bought a house that they have fully refurbished. This couple has been able to pursue a dual-earner/dual-carer model that includes upwards and sideways mobility. Formal childcare and children's leisure activities were part of their life in Norway and they claimed to share childcare and household chores equally. They were optimistic and satisfied with their life in Norway, including the shorter working hours.

### *Interpretation*

The authors were struck by the agency with which many of the Polish informants in Norway grasped and made use of the new structures and ideologies that had become available to them as working parents in Norway, employing them to actively shape their lives, including renegotiating gender roles in the family. Compared to the Norwegian parents, the Polish parents seemed to be drawing on a wider repertoire of possible work–family adaptations over time (Bjørnholt and Stefansen, forthcoming).

Olek and Tomina illustrate this agency and fluidity well. Despite a highly gendered arrangement for several years when the children were small, with Olek the main breadwinner in Norway while Tomina combined paid work with looking after the children on her own in Poland, they now had a fairly egalitarian work–family arrangement. They were both employed, they were both engaged in further education, and they shared childcare and household work equally. This example also illustrates the dynamics and plasticity of work–family arrangements over time and space and in response to shifting circumstances.

### **The reversed-gender model**

The reversed-gender model potentially represents a more radical adaptation, a shift of gender arrangements that goes beyond merely fulfilling the norm of equal sharing. It is useful to look at one example of this model even though only a few of the Polish parents in Norway came into this category.

Miro and Anna both hold master's degrees and came to Norway together three years ago. At the time of interview they had a 4-month-old baby. When they came to Norway they decided that Miro would take paid work and provide for them both, whereas Anna would try to find a job that was relevant to her education and ambitions. Her explanation was that working and providing for the family and earning money was important for him as a Polish man. As a result she was able to take an unpaid internship, which eventually led to employment in her current position. She was now on a career track and he still held an unskilled service job. She noted that colleagues in her workplace who were returning from parental leave had lost focus and forgotten all they knew, and consequently she was afraid of falling behind in her career, so she continued to work during parental leave. They shared the parental leave between them, with Miro taking 60 per cent and Anna 40 per cent, splitting the week between them. He had little experience of running a home and at first he did not do any domestic work, he simply looked after the child. However, Anna became very tired and asked him to do more around the home. He was willing to learn and asked her to teach him how to cook and do other household chores. He was doing more now, but she still claimed to be doing the lion's share of the domestic work. Although she thought he was a good father she also said that the child missed her and would not sleep when she was away.

### *Interpretation*

Miro and Anna are a couple on the fast track towards changing gender relations, actively using the entitlements for working parents in Norway as well as drawing on the Norwegian gender-equality discourse. The Norwegian parental leave scheme, designed to actively support fathers' caring and the norm of involved fatherhood, as well as the way Anna interpreted her colleagues' experience of the dangers of a long parental leave, had led them to pursue a reversed-gender pattern of shifting parenting and part-time work, within which she worked more and he took a larger share of parental leave. In prioritising her academic career, while Miro took the main responsibility for breadwinning, one could also say that her professional success relied on his male-breadwinner masculinity. However, they are also drawing on Norwegian opportunity structures and gender-equality discourses to actively create a 'modern' egalitarian family. In taking literally and acting on 'office talk' of the dangers of parental leave, we also see that Anna reveals a lack of feeling of entitlement. Such an approach was uncommon among other Polish parents in Norway who fully enjoyed their entitlements without expressing any fear of negative consequences, just like the Norwegian parents (Bjørnholt and Stefansen, forthcoming). Finally, their current work-family adaptation had emotional costs for both her and the child. Some of the most ideologically convinced Norwegian equal sharers adjusted their ideals and practices when they had a second child (Bjørnholt and Stefansen, forthcoming), and we cannot know what kind of work-family arrangement Miro and Anna will choose if they have more children in the future. This particular adaptation illustrates the complex, multi-layered interactions of identities, structures of opportunity and the wider gender-formation interpretation that contribute to the shaping of agency.

### **Parents in Poland: coping, adapting and changing within partial structures**

The parents in Poland also clustered around the dual-earner/dual-carer model and, like the Polish parents in Norway, the majority were categorised as either gender symmetrical or neo-traditional, with fairly equal shares of each arrangement. Among the Polish parents, balancing paid work and care takes the form of everyday coping, relying on individual and private solutions. In the following section we present examples of the two most common models and, for the purposes of comparison, we also illustrate the gender-reversed model as it has emerged in the Polish context.

#### **The gender-symmetrical model + grandmother**

Alan, Agnieszka and their three-and-a-half-year-old daughter exemplify the ‘Polish version’ of the gender-symmetrical model. Alan had a permanent position as an IT specialist and manager, Alan working, more or less, from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. each day (8 hours a day). He occasionally went on business trips but rarely worked overtime. Agnieszka had regular working hours from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day. Every 2 to 3 months she went away for a two- or three-day-long course. Being a supervisor and a parent, Alan knew how important it was for managers to set an example to employees and he understood that it was sometimes necessary to leave work early, for example, to go to the doctor. Nevertheless, it was rare to do so officially, although it was accepted to some extent in his company. According to Alan, his company neither made parents’ lives more difficult, nor facilitated them to any extent. At the same time, he felt safe in the company where he worked (‘it is invaluable for a parent’) because he felt that the law was respected there. For example, he could take leave to look after a sick child and his employer would not refuse this. The feeling of safety was also related to being employed in a public institution on a permanent contract, which meant he could not be dismissed without a serious reason. Agnieszka, in contrast, found it difficult to take time off because of her manager’s attitude. Alan and Agnieszka shared their household duties quite strictly, such as cleaning and other work at home. In the case of childcare, they shared the chores equally, and normally spent the afternoon together with the child. They received help from their child’s grandmother who picked up their daughter from the kindergarten in the afternoon, and occasionally from the grandfather if the grandmother needed to go somewhere.

#### *Interpretation*

This case illustrates how this couple – like a large proportion of the other informants in the Polish sample – relied on help from grandmothers on an everyday basis to bridge care gaps. It also elucidates the importance of the wider context, such as job security. The case further illustrates a lack of shared feelings of legal entitlement to benefits for working parents and the importance of local company culture. Alan refers to the fact that using his legal entitlements would not cost him his job because he is in the public sector. Pointing this out indicates that there is no shared feeling of entitlement, despite the existence of legal rights, and the fact that he is grateful that his employer respects the law implies that this is not the norm and that using entitlements in other workplaces might be risky due to company practices and cultures that do not condone their use.

#### **The neo-traditional model**

Peter and Paula exemplify the neo-traditional model. Peter has been working in the science and education sector for 16 years. He worked in two institutions in two different cities about 200 km apart – one full-time and one part-time (50 per cent) position. He worked in more than one place because he was committed to

ensuring a good standard of living. He had quite flexible working hours and worked 30–60 hours each week depending on the needs of the jobs. Both jobs entailed similar tasks – research, publishing and giving lectures to students. He worked on various projects and often had business trips both in Poland and abroad (e.g. to conferences and project meetings). His job gave him a high degree of satisfaction. He also highlighted that in his jobs he had quite long periods of leave and he was able to adjust his working time to meet family obligations.

Peter was married with three children (5, 6 and 8 years). The grandparents lived some distance away and were not available to look after the grandchildren on a daily basis. Peter had employed a woman to occasionally collect the children from the nursery, kindergarten and school when he and his wife were both working. Paula is a university graduate. She worked part time, around 20 hours a week in a psycho-pedagogical facility. The facility was 50 km from their home and she commuted daily. Paula took maternity leave after each birth and unpaid parental leave totalling four years. They were able to access some discounts because of their entitlement to the Big Family Card.<sup>5</sup>

Peter was often away from home because of his two jobs, but tried to compensate for his absence, and considered himself to be a modern and egalitarian man, sharing household and childcare duties, unlike many other Polish men. He also declared that he tried to separate his work life from his family life. He earned much more than Paula, so he took the greater responsibility for the financial provision for the family, whereas his wife took more responsibility for taking care of the home. However, because he had more flexible working hours, if necessary, he was able to take the children to see the doctor during the working day or in the evening. Peter did not use any legal entitlements related to childcare (e.g., a childcare day). If necessary, he negotiated his workload and business trips with his teams at both jobs so that he could stay at home when there were problems. Nevertheless, if any of the children were ill it was Paula who took leave to look after them.

### *Interpretation*

This case neatly illustrates how the neo-traditional family model is a hybrid model and how a main male-breadwinner arrangement may go together with changes in the sharing of family responsibilities. Peter positions himself as an egalitarian-minded husband and an involved father. He shares domestic tasks and childcare within a dual-earner model, but with gendered arrangements of work and care, within which he has the main breadwinning responsibility and his wife works reduced hours and takes the main responsibility for the children. The provider perspective is pre-eminent in his reflections regarding parenting (i.e., the cost of leisure activities) and, despite claiming to share childcare tasks and obligations, he remains oblivious to the details and existing benefits available for working parents. His wife is the one who takes the main responsibility for the children and who makes the actual adaptations in respect of work and care, using entitlements for working parents. Nevertheless, compared with other men in Poland, Peter considers himself a modern man with respect to the performance of domestic tasks in the home. At the same time, paid work and his provider role take precedence, as illustrated by the fact that for financial reasons he is holding down two different jobs.

### **The reversed-gender model**

Diana and Jakub exemplify the gender-reversed model of work–family adaptation. They lived in a multi-family house with their son and his parents. Diana is a full-time researcher and PhD student, formally not employed but funded by a doctoral scholarship. She usually worked between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. each day. She occasionally spent a few days away from home because of business trips (e.g., to conferences). Jakub was a translator and

editor, employed part time, also working freelance mainly from home and sometimes going away on business trips for a day or two.

Diana could count on informal support from her manager, who had a positive attitude to the needs of working parents. Diana was sometimes allowed to work from home. However, her job flexibility was generally not very high as she was not replaceable in some of her duties (e.g., delivering lectures). Hence, she could not take leave, for example, when her child was sick. When this happened she had to share the childcare obligations with her husband. However, being a graduate student, Diana was not entitled to parental leave, maternity allowance or maternity leave. She felt discriminated against when she tried to enrol her child in kindergarten. As a PhD student she was not treated equally with mothers who worked full time, even though her son was eventually allowed to attend kindergarten. Diana was responsible for most of the household duties, such as cleaning and cooking (she declared that her husband did about 30 per cent), whereas they shared childcare more equally. Jakub used the 'leave on request' system twice (one-day leaves); he took two days' leave to which he was entitled after the birth of their daughter, and he also took two weeks of paternity leave. He was also the person that would take sick leave when their daughter was ill. In emergencies grandparents helped out (but this only happened occasionally).

### *Interpretation*

This case has been categorised as an example of a gender-reversed model. Diana has a full-time position, whereas Jakub works part time and is self-employed. However, despite this difference in working times, she shoulders the main responsibility for household work and with regard to domestic responsibilities this is a rather traditional pattern. He probably earns more in his part-time position than she does as a PhD student, a position that is not very well paid in Poland. On the other hand, Jakub has taken some steps towards adapting his paid work to caring responsibilities, such as working part time and taking leave when the child is ill. Compared to the majority of the Polish fathers in this study who worked full time or more, never used any entitlements for working parents, and who also more or less excluded the possibility of using them (even claiming to be oblivious of such entitlements), this case might be taken to indicate a slight change towards more equal responsibilities for the reconciliation of paid work and care.

### **Discussion**

We set out to explore the dynamics of work–family adaptations and policies, taking into consideration the everyday practices within policies and populations that are shaped over time by historical events and generations (Bjørnholt 2014a). We found that on the surface, the work–family adaptations of the two groups of Polish parents were quite similar and were shaped by the family policy measures available to them. When we compare them, however, we can see that the Polish parents in Poland and the Polish parents in Norway shaped their work–family adaptations within different categories of reference.

Using the entitlements available in Norway as part of a project of change towards the Norwegian norm, Polish Norwegian parents compared themselves to Norwegian parents and what they perceived to be the norm in Norway. They also contrasted their own practices in the Norwegian setting to the more traditional practices that they observed among friends and family when visiting Poland, and to some extent to other Poles in Norway. Our informants thus to some extent correspond to the group of Polish immigrants to Norway that Pawlak (2015a, 2015b) has referred to as the 'cosmopolitans', although not all fit neatly within Pawlak's dichotomy between (mainly middle-class, highly educated) 'cosmopolitans' and (manual, working-class) 'Poles', *Po-lakkene* in Norwegian, a derogatory term for manual workers in the building industry or in seasonal work. In

Pawlak's study, the dichotomy arose from the positioning of 'cosmopolitans' as against the 'Poles' based on cultural, class-related distinctions. Although some of our informants positioned themselves against other Poles on some issues, such as other Poles' fear of the Norwegian child protection agency, in general, class-based positioning against other Poles was not very widespread. In our sample we also had working-class immigrants who embraced the Norwegian way of life, and in particular the opportunities it provides for changing gender relations in the family, very much in the same way as middle-class informants. In general we found the Polish Norwegian parents expressed a strong sense of agency in their use of the Norwegian policy package for working parents. They felt entitled to the different measures, and free to use them to accommodate the needs of their family.

The Polish parents talked about their practices in relation to Polish families in general, sometimes positioning themselves as more modern and different from the general and gendered norm of work–family adaptations. They also used available measures, but not in the same entitled way as the Polish Norwegian parents, and bridged the care gaps they experienced by drawing on informal help from relatives, in particular grandmothers. Importantly the group of Polish parents in Poland not only had access to fewer entitlements after parental leave compared to the Polish informants in Norway; they also, to a greater extent, referred to *not using* legal entitlements and if they did use them they were careful to point out that they did not *misuse* them and only used them if they really needed to. The weaker feeling of entitlement they expressed meant that even the benefits that were legally available were not necessarily fully available to them as a real option. Our interpretation is that the link between policies and practices is less direct or mechanical in the Polish context compared to the Norwegian context. In order to better substantiate and contextualise these patterns and interpretations, we will refer in brief to the different historical origins of the respective welfare state regimes of Norway and Poland.

Family policies in Norway have followed what can be understood as a path-dependent development, beginning with changes in the early 1900s introducing social rights for mothers and reforms of family law (Melby, Pylkkänen, Rosenbeck and Wetterberg 2006). The right to paid work for married women has been an important issue for the women's movement since the 1930s, and mothers' paid work and fathers' family role was put on the agenda in early family research in the 1950s and 1960s. The issue of gender equality gained a new momentum in research and policymaking in the 1970s (Bjørnholt 2014b). Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the idea of promoting gender equality through family policies was pre-eminent in the women's movement, as well as in family policy documents, including a White Paper on family policy in the 1970s and a commission on men's roles in 1988. By the end of the 1980s, Norway had long been considered a laggard in the Nordic context, due to its shorter parental leave and a persistent shortage of childcare facilities (Ellingsæter and Gulbrandsen 2007). In 1993, the extension of parental leave to 47 weeks, of which 4 weeks were reserved for the father, was thus long overdue, which may explain why the paternal quota became a success within a very short time. Within three years, the vast majority of fathers took parental leave, which was a rapid increase from a very low level before the introduction of the quota. Similarly, the rapid increase in child care facilities and the introduction in 2008 of a guaranteed place in kindergarten from the age of one was also long overdue and led to a rapid change in child care arrangements for the youngest children (Kitterød, Nymoen and Lyngstad 2012), including among those groups that had previously been opposed to institutional care for young children (Stefansen and Farstad 2010; Stefansen and Skogen 2010).

Our study suggests that Polish post-accession immigrants to Norway experienced these entitlements as part of a taken-for-granted and deeply rooted institutional and ideological order, which they embraced as a set of enabling structures that allowed them to actively reshape their lives, including combining paid work and care as well as renegotiating gender relations in the family. The Polish immigrants to Norway in this study embraced these entitlements and used them, with a feeling of entitlement and without fear (with the exception of one

case), like ethnic Norwegians (e.g. Bjørnholt and Stefansen, forthcoming). However, compared to Norwegian parents, the Polish parents expressed a stronger sense of agency, using and combining different family policy measures in a more pragmatic way. Bjørnholt and Stefansen (forthcoming) argue that the Polish parents' position as migrants to Norway allowed them to use and combine a wider repertoire of available entitlements to shape gender-equal lives than did the Norwegian parents in the study, for whom gender equality was taken for granted, and who had internalised the underlying moral imperative of being equal in a particular way and the script of using particular entitlements in particular ways.

What about the Polish Polish group? How can we understand the weaker feeling of entitlement that they expressed towards available measures? Compared to Norway the development of the current policy family policy package in Poland can be described as 'disjointed', shaped by different and conflicting aims and actors. As described by Heinen (2002), during Communism a dual-earner model was taken for granted, but gender roles in the family did not change. Women carried a double burden, and the view of women's role in the economy was ambivalent. First, there was a mobilisation of women as workers in the immediate post-WWII years that emphasised the duty of all citizens to contribute to reconstruction, and the emancipatory role of paid work for women was supported by the expansion of child care facilities. Later, due to economic stagnation: 'Women were no longer regarded as 'worker-mothers' but as "mother-workers", or simply "mothers"', according to Heinen and Wator (2006: 192). In addition, rights such as formal gender equality and the right to abortion and institutional childcare that were fought for and won after long struggles by the women's movement in other countries were 'granted' by the Polish state. Family policies and women's emancipation were therefore not linked. On the same note, Velluti (2014) has argued that gender equality under Communism constituted an imposition by an authoritarian regime rather than the achievement of emancipatory social movements. Hence the historical legacy of gender-equalising policies is more ambivalent in Poland than in Norway.

Adding to this, after the fall of Communism in the 1990s the institutional support for working mothers deteriorated further as public nurseries and other public services were closed due to neo-liberal shock therapy imposed by the International Monetary Fund. Growing economic inequality in society also led to greater economic inequality between men and women (Heinen 2002; Heinen and Wator 2006). Under the growing influence of the Catholic church (Korkut and Eslen-Ziya 2011; Paternotte 2014), and as the state retreated from the social field, the participation of women in politics declined and family values were increasingly considered to be in conflict with women's paid work. The transition also led to dramatic setbacks for women's social and reproductive rights (Nowicka 2007).

At the same time, as part of the preparations for accession to the EU in 2004, Poland adopted a more egalitarian legal framework and became subject to EU processes, legislation and policies which included the promotion of gender equality and the harmonisation of work and family life (EIGE 2015). How this affects gender relations is unclear. On the level of gender attitudes, researchers point to change (Fuszara 2005, after White 2016b). More couples share cooking, everyday shopping and childcare (Hipsz 2013, after White 2016b). Such changes are reflected in our study as well. However, in a recent comparative study Poland still stands out as having strong support for the male-breadwinner model and corresponding negative attitudes towards working mothers (Edlund and Öun 2016), and the authors conclude that the dual-earner/dual-carer model has not entered the collective consciousness in Poland. Poland also still lacks a strong and autonomous women's movement, which was found in a cross-national study to be the single strongest predictor of policy measures to address gender inequality as well as of family policies that facilitated women's paid work and personal autonomy (Weldon 2011).<sup>6</sup> Finally, politically, Poland is currently moving in an increasingly traditional direction. Gender and gender equality are highly contested concepts, and further restrictions on women's already limited reproductive rights are being discussed. Gender equality and family policies are thus contested areas. Hence, in Poland, working parents will have to adapt within structures of opportunity that do not support a full

care chain and mothers' paid work, and within a contemporary gender formation that has only to a very limited extent been transformed by past struggles for gender equality. Our suggestion is that the patterns we have described here, particularly as regards parents' sense of entitlement to available measures, relate to this wider cultural and historical context.

### **Concluding remarks**

Many of the Polish parents in Norway invoked the Norwegian gender-equality model as a resource for changing gender relations in the private sphere. In so doing, their personal project of change resonates with the country's wider historical development towards changing gender relations and with current hegemonic ideas in Norwegian society.

At the level of generation and family, the parents in Poland, in contrast, positioned themselves in relation to a more traditional past. Some also referred to the international context and to the work–family frameworks in other countries of which they had knowledge through friends and colleagues, illustrating how migration has opened up a transnational space of opportunities and comparison, which is also present in the everyday reflections on what constitutes a liveable life among those who stay. The changes in Poland towards more egalitarian family practices may also partly be an effect of migrants' transnational practices, increasingly recognised as an important factor in changing normative structures and practices in the sending country. Several contemporary Polish studies find that migration from Poland has led to social change in Poland, and more egalitarian gender attitudes may be seen as one form of 'social remittance' in Poland (Grabowska and Engbersen 2016; White 2016a, 2016b; Grabowska *et al.* 2017). At the couple level among the Polish parents in this study, there were indications of (minor) changes in gender relations, mainly in the form of an individualised project of sharing more equally within the couple. However, in contrast to Norway, this change at couple level does not resonate with a wider project of gender equality at the societal level. The individualist framing of the work–family issue, and the emphasis on self-sufficiency and private, individual solutions, rather than making use of legal entitlements, may be due to a higher degree of job insecurity, as well as the weaker legitimacy of using legal entitlements. At a cultural level, it may also to some extent be part of the post-communist legacy, implicitly rejecting the cultural and collective frames of the common communist past.

In conclusion, the analysis illustrates that practices do not necessarily follow directly from policies and available policy packages, but that the influence of policies on practices needs to be understood in the wider historical-cultural context of the particular policy regime, as well as the particular situation of different groups of the population. Our study of Polish parents in Norway and Poland also illustrates how the migrancy context may also mediate the actual adaptation and the use of different elements of the policy package offered to working parents within the policy regime in the country of destination, as well as opening a space of comparison and reflection among parents in the country of origin, against which they can measure the policy package on offer.

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## Conflict of interest statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Enhancing the Effectiveness of Work–Life Balance Initiatives Use (EFFECT)*.

<sup>2</sup> Generally, it should be noted, however, that other factors, including masculinist counter-movements, have influenced family law in recent decades (Fineman 1995; Bjørnholt 2007; Halperin-Kaddari and Freeman 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Monika Kochowicz acted as an interpreter during some of the interviews in Norway and she also transcribed and translated one interview. Anna Sitarz conducted four interviews in Polish in Norway, which she also transcribed and translated.

<sup>4</sup> Aleksandra Jacukowicz, Agnieszka Mościcka-Teske, Aleksander Stańczak and Agata Wężyk conducted, transcribed and translated the interviews in Poland.

<sup>5</sup> The Big Family Card is a government assistance programme for multi-children families, introduced in 2014. It gives access to discounts for entrance charges for institutions controlled by the ministries, e.g., some museums, exhibition institutions, national parks, nature reserves, as well as recreation and sports facilities as well as a number of private companies in Poland. Due to a collaborative agreement with another Norway Grants project, the TRANSFAM 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>6</sup> It remains to be seen whether the mass demonstrations in autumn 2016 against a proposed new law further restricting abortion represents a general strengthening of the women’s movement.

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