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## Work-life balance in the Polish migrant families settled in Norway

The paper discusses the notions of maintaining work-life balance (WLB) as evidenced in the interviews with Polish family migrants in Norway. After presenting an overview of the WLB scholarship, we analyse the empirical material collected for the *Transfam* project. By looking at the migrants' narratives on striking the right balance between work and family in the mobility context, we use the intersections of gender, welfare and care as paramount for explain how the Polish couples in Norway discuss the reduced demands of paid employment for the sake of childcare and time for a family at home.

**Key words:** work-life balance, childcare, gender, migrant workers, Norway, Poland

### 1. Introduction

There is little doubt that work-life balance (WLB) and its opposite – the employment and home imbalance – have a cardinal meaning for the lives of men and women, especially those with families and children (e.g. Perrons 2003; Milkie, Peltola 1999; Tausig, Fenwick 2001; Emslie, Hunt 2009; Halford, Savage, Witz 1997; Becker, Moen 1998; Aryee, Srinivas, Tan 2005; Clark 2000). Referring to the non-family and non-work spheres of social participation and leisure, the WLB research generally encompasses balancing private life and work life more broadly, moving beyond the tensions that are simply located in families. In this paper, however, we tackle a specific environment of negotiating balance in which working people with children engage in international migration, thus becoming subjected to the unfamiliar WLB's meanings, pressures and choices.

The landscape of the family, organizational and economic research is marked by the growing interest in the WLB. The shift towards seeking the right combi-

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nation between work and home has been largely necessitated by the profound changes in the labour market. The conditions of the new economies under the neoliberal capitalism initially encompassed the consequences of the increased proportion of the women in paid employment, yet were followed by more universal changes linked to globalization. Those included a tendency to work longer, having less predictable schedules, experiencing altered employee-employer relations and exploitation, as well as operating under the prerequisite of constant flexibility (Sennet 1998; Beck 2000; Standing 2011; Burawoy 2008). In brief, global markets and modern technology lead to a multi-spherical social deregulation; the '24/7 society' is plagued by a proliferation of new forms of work (non-standard contracts/schedules, telework, part-time work; see e.g. Perrons 2003; Castells 2001; Brough *et al.* 2008: 262). There are also concurrent transformations within gender orders. The prevalence of new family types (i.e. higher number of single-parent households and 'non-traditional' families; see e.g. Tausig, Fenwick 2001: 114; Beck 2000) elicits revised configurations of masculinities and femininities. In this paper, we add transnational families to a repertoire of the new and atypical families. We argue that family migrants experience specific challenges when seeking to manage their private (family) and work lives in a transnational reality.

Various studies have contextualized the determinants of the work-life balance and imbalance on the axis of a type of welfare state regime in a given locale, which is inherently tied to the WLB policies and provisions in the place (see e.g. Esping Andersen 1989, 1996; Korpi 2000). Fewer studies, however, have investigated the WLB among migrants, especially those moving between different social contexts, dissimilar levels of welfare provisions, and alternative socio-cultural and institutional conceptualizations of support for families. This paper seeks to contribute to this knowledge gap by presenting data from a study within the *Transfam*<sup>3</sup> project, which focused on the Polish migrants in Norway.

We anchor our discussion in the exploration of Hochschild's notion of a 'time bind' and Clark's boundary theory, seeking to examine if and how they are applicable and useful for the study of WLB among migrants. Further, we summarize the theoretical debates with a brief methodological note. In the main part of the paper we undertake an analysis of the Poland-to-Norway mobility as an example enabling a discussion of the changes in the realm of the WLB, following a transition between distinct socio-cultural contexts. By focusing on families with children, we demonstrate how relocating to a different welfare and work macro-regime impacts the micro social sphere of decisions within a family. We foreground the WLB practices in the matrix of gender and family roles.

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## 2. Work-life balance, welfare and migration

### Two sides of the coin: the WLB and the 'time bind'

Leading scholars have put forward the claims on the consequences of the changing economy and the very nature of work 'in flux'. The concerns over growing insecurity and inequality of the current employment landscape were raised by Beck (2000), while their gendered nature was further pinpointed by Castells (2001). Fragmented work and flexibility mean that values associated with successful family life and stable employment are now incompatible, thus leading to the 'corrosion of character', which, according to Sennett (1998), happens as the professional identity occupies the entirety of one's life and slowly brings on detrimental and destructive changes in the workplace. All in all, numerous scholars underscored that the new economy exerts pressure on social sustainability, social cohesion and individual choices, thus making the work-life balance less and less attainable (see e.g. Reich 2001; Perrons 2003; Standing 2011).

In her seminal work, Hochschild refers to the experienced and perceived incapacity of handling the demands of work and the requirements of the family and personal life. She calls this imbalance the 'time bind' (1997) and applies it to the situation in which people's desires to restructure the allocation of work and personal/family time occur simultaneously to the inability to fulfil these wishes. According to Tausig and Fenwick, "the time bind represents a complex phenomenon reflected in the simultaneous time and energy demands of family life and the workplace" (2001: 101) and takes a form of a subjective feeling of inadequate capacity of balancing two spheres that both seem to demand of an individual a due time investment, as an employee and a family member (see also Jacobs, Gerson 2001). In other words, the significance of family and work makes them 'greedy institutions' which, in the social sense, leave people with no room for activities beyond them (Cosser 1974; Hochschild 1997). In addition, family and work are individually positioned in the emotional realms linked to satisfaction, commitment and love, thus becoming impossible to delegate (Milkie, Peltola 1999: 477). In this context, the sense of the work-life balance is an opposition of the time bind (Tausig, Fenwick 2001: 103).

What is important is that the topic of tensions between the conflicting demands of work and family/personal life has formerly existed under different research headings alluding to the same phenomenon, e.g. 'role conflict', 'role strain', 'work-home conflict' and 'work-family conflict' (Gregory, Milner 2009). These notions had spearheaded valuable arguments until the most recent term of work-family balance (WLB) has taken over as an overreaching conceptualization. In her work introducing a boundary theory, Clark has defined work-life balance as "satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home, with a minimum of role conflict" (2000: 751). In other words, the attainment of WLB means that a completion of goals in various areas of life is possible (Chirkowska-Smolak 2008: 236). The novel

conceptualizations underscore that the two spheres of 'work' and 'home' are no longer set apart as autonomous, but always mutually implicated in one another, resulting in, for instance, the spillover effects when organizational/work identities transgress into the home domain, and vice versa (Emslie, Hunt 2009: 151–152; Halford, Savage, Witz 1997).

### WLB, boundary and a gender lens

Employing a metaphor that is particularly apt for our research, Clark's analysis (2000) of work and family domains in the work-life conflict area relies on the notion of a 'processual boundary'. She dynamically focuses on how people 'manage and negotiate the work and family spheres and the borders between them in order to attain balance' (Clark 2000: 750). The author sees people moving between family and employment as border-crossers similar to those encountering different countries with contrasting cultures. Emslie and Hunt (2009: 151) find Clark's metaphor fitting with regard to permeability (i.e. a degree to which one can bring work home and home to work) and flexibility (i.e. how much one can shift the borders with regard to work location, family-friendly schedules, etc.), though they also urge for an addition of a gender perspective to this application (Emslie, Hunt 2009: 152).

The results pertaining to the importance of a gender lens have initially been mixed, as Hochschild's original time bind study on the corporate America (1997) indicated a convergence between male and female views on work and family life. Reeves interpreted this finding as a sign of an evolution of work and family demands characteristic for the career-oriented parents. He claimed that the post-industrial work is in fact unmatched by the home-life, which has a continuously industrial nature (2001: 128). According to this stance, those who appreciate the attractiveness of modern workplaces can be inclined to feel resentful towards dull, routine, conflict-ridden and low-skill duties, as well as childcare obligations required by the everyday family life. On the contrary, Tausig and Fenwick argue that paying due attention to the actual work conditions and social positions of those performing the bulk of care and domestic tasks cannot be overlooked (2001). It is quite characteristic that the initial WLB and family friendly policies were primarily addressed to the valued female employees that needed to be retained in spite of having children (Milkie, Peltola 1999). This translates to the assumption that the very idea of reconciling life and work was (and often still is) a predominantly female concern. Reinforcing this point, Connell (2005) emphasizes the cultural notions of femininity which ensure that women are, across the life-course, seen as the ones responsible for the ideally imperceptible operations of work and family life. She further draws attention to the heterogeneity, impact and variety of time bind consequences for men and women. In essence, while they constitute two negatives of a time bind, the women's 'double shift' (at work and at home) and the men's career-driven stress of constant competition are not alike (Milkie, Pel-

tola 1999; Becker, Moen 1998; Connell 2005). For that reason, employing gender perspective requires a recognition that “employed women and men have different role qualities – actual and felt expectations and demands – and that women’s demands are higher overall. Additionally, women’s location in the social structure affords them less power and control in work and family spheres and likely contributes to a greater total workload, more sacrifices, and difficulties in balancing work and family” (Milkie, Peltola 1999: 476).

Reiterating this point, the social development within the new forms of families and partnerships did not seem to alleviate the gendered divisions of labour and a burden of care and home-life being primarily bestowed on women (e.g. Gattrell 2005; Chambers 2012). One of the resulting problems is focusing the research on WLB on the employed mothers of young children (e.g. Allen 2003; Kamerman 2000), though the lack of WLB actually affects parents of both genders and remains crucial irrespective of the children’s age (Emslie, Hunt 2009: 166). However, the evidence of the reported WLB and the lack of it in quantitative studies has been inconclusive and country-specific. While some authors suggest that women experience harsher consequences of the time bind (e.g. Lundberg, Mårdberg, Frankenhaeuser 1994), others found no gender discrepancies (Emslie, Hunt, Macintyre 2004). While investigations of parenting further suggest growing gender convergence, they do not support the thesis of gender equity. In addition, Milkie and Peltola break down the complexity of the WLB issues, stating that harmony and accord may be a function of beliefs about the proper balance and what is ‘considered fair’ rather than the balance itself (Milkie, Peltola 1999: 477). This paradox has become known as the myth of equality (Knudson-Martin, Mahoney 1998, 2009) and was studied among presumably egalitarian couples who believed in having a balanced gender division of work in order to avoid confrontations.

Nevertheless, other studies highlight the importance of gender for the WLB throughout the life-course (Emslie, Hunt 2009) and propose that the “changes in gender consciousness are the «final frontier» in the quest for greater gender equality in work–family linkages” (Loscocco 1997: 223), as well as urge a recognition that the WLB trade-offs “are gendered in the sense that they include objective elements, as well as gendered expectations” (Milkie, Peltola 1999: 487). Additionally, gender equality is being stressed as a mediating factor in the achievement of work-life balance in the present structural and cultural conditions (Slany, Krzaklewska, Warat 2015). The discriminatory macro features of the labour markets may reinforce the already tense relations of gendered inequality in households. In Poland most couples suffer from both the time-based and strain-based conflicts that make balancing work and family nearly impossible due to stress and fatigue. This led researchers to conceptualization of the tensions as gender-inequality-based conflicts (Slany, Krzaklewska, Warat 2015).

### Societal approach to WLB between Poland and Norway

Following the proposal put forward by Crompton and Lyonette (2006), who draw on earlier works by Maurice, Sellier, Silvestre (1986) and Gallie (2003), we recognize the relevance of societal and contextual approach for a cross-country comparative analysis. Therefore, we note that the “levels of work-life conflict will vary with national, individual and family circumstances” (Crompton, Lyonette 2006: 380). Rather than adopting an assumption of the WLB issues, we rather see them as prompted and differentiated by “cultural values and policies that are specific to particular societies” (Gallie 2003: 61). This approach has been proven in the European context of regimes that present stark differences between governmental and workplace-led support of WLB (Den Dulk, Van Doorne-Huiskes 2007). Abendroth and Den Dulk’s research shows how the line is often drawn between the Scandinavian countries, while “in other European countries work-life balance support is seen as a private responsibility, with people depending mainly on help from relatives or friends” (2011: 235). The latter is clearly the case in Poland (Sadowska-Snarska 2008; Płomień 2009).

Scholars also argues that work-life imbalance and the time bind can have detrimental effects on organizational productivity, as well as personal relations, particularly having a negative influence on the quality of coupledom, parent-child relationships and even lowering the outcomes in terms of children’s health and development (Russell, O’Connell, McGinnity 2009: 73; Gornick, Meyers 2003; Moss, Melhuish 1991). Therefore, both the governmental and organizational initiatives across different countries were tasked with spearheading the recognition of caregiving demands faced by many employees, and introducing more policies that somewhat abandon the care angle, and instead simply arguing for the importance of balance in general (Brough *et al.* 2008: 262–263). Four major areas that promote WLB have been listed as:

- flexible/alternative work arrangements (e.g. part-time work),
- availability of leaves under social protections (maternity/paternity, etc.),
- subsidized care services (childcare or elderly care),
- access to further WLB-relevant information on health services and similar (e.g. on handling stress, professional burnout and mental health).

Identified by Brough and colleagues (2008: 262–263), these four aspects are closely linked with the policy level and the models of responsibility anchored in the dynamics between public and private. They further account for differences between ‘collective’ and ‘individual’ society models (see e.g. Spector *et al.* 2007). Before we briefly discuss the Norwegian context, it needs to be noted that reflections on part-time work schedules are again twofold. While some proposed them as means of improving WLB (Gornick, Meyers 2003) through ‘scaling back’ (Becker, Moen 1999), others retained the view that part-time schedules nevertheless decrease income and eventually lead to partners’ imbalance, with women usually being pushed out from the labour market and having lower pension or retirement

in the future. This research strand additionally pointed to work-life conflicts being attributed to spousal income discrepancies in the long run (Glass, Camarigg 1992; Tausig, Fenwick 2001).

The 'societal' effect concerning the quality of working life and WLB has been demonstrated in the case of Nordic welfare states by Gallie (2003). In Korpi's terms (2000), the Scandinavian region qualifies as 'encompassing' welfare regimes, offering a substantial support and benefits to all inhabitants. They promote a 'dual-earner – dual-carer' partnership model through the availability and affordability of public care providers (nurseries, kindergartens, elderly care facilities), as well as generous parental leave schemes (Brough *et al.* 2008; Gauthier, Hatzius 1997; Esping-Andersen 1989; Żadkowska, Kosakowska-Berezecka, Ryndyk 2016). According to Gornick and Meyers, the impact of the welfare policies was positive when measured across the indicators like the high rate of female participation in the labour market and very low poverty rates among families with children (2003: 66–74).

To sum up the main differences between Poland and Norway, one can note the opposite tendencies with regard to how the distinct welfare systems contribute to either familisation or defamilisation processes (Esping-Andersen 1989; Korpi 2000). Referring to Żadkowska's, Kosakowska-Berezecka's and Ryndyk's (2016) reading of Korpi's (2000) and Bühlmann and colleagues' (2010) works, we reiterate that the Norwegian social democratic model moved away from the promotion of 'traditional' family values. On the contrary, the Polish post-communist welfare in transition seems to be based on the two non-compliant norms: an economic necessity for dual-earner model, and a cultural superiority of traditional gender roles. In essence, "[p]ost-communist states encourage dual careers but give families scant support" (Żadkowska, Kosakowska-Berezecka, Ryndyk 2016).

### WLB and migration

Finally, the analyses dedicated to WLB in the migrant families can be split into the categories of separated (parent-away) families and the entire couples or families living together abroad. The research is clearly dominated by the first subtype and concentrates on the organization of care for left-behind children (Danilewicz 2011, Moj 2015). Migrants are said to have limited resources – especially with regard to time – meaning that a parent staying in the country of origin most probably struggles to have any WLB, especially in the countries where public institutions or their own participation in social life are considered (Wall, José 2004). This situation, however, is also dependent on the gender of a migrating parent. For men's migration, the bulk of attention is centred on how absent fathers are often excused from care as long as they meet the breadwinning standards (Parreñas 2005: 68; Slany, Ślusarczyk, Krzyżowski 2014; Moj 2015). The WLB of a non-migrant parent does not seem to pose a concern, being understood as secondary to the men's economic role. Essentially, the search for WLB in separated couples is fruitless due to geographic, temporal and gendered separation of the work and family spheres. The mother-away

families differ in a sense that women engage in alternative forms of motherhood and seek to achieve some kind of balance between the demands of work (physical separation) and the obligations resulting from having a family (Parreñas 2005), understood primarily as being a mother, to a lesser degree being preoccupied with a role of a wife or partner. The works dedicated to the issue of how parents reconcile work and family from afar, emphasize the care from distance, often with the support of kin members and new technologies – the finding that has also been confirmed in the studies on Polish migrants and families (Parreñas 2005: 103; Hochschild 2002; Urbańska 2011; Danilewicz 2010).

Studying Polish people in Norway brings in the elements described above into a novel discussion, since gender equality is invariably linked to external nationally-conceived and structural solutions for families that are different across borders. In Norway, it implies high engagement of a father in the family realm, as well as a value of both women and men in families, and at work. The separation that families undergo due to the migration, before they become reunified again, may in turn reinforce the habitual and structural lack of WLB desires on the part of Polish men, thus posing gender-role-invoked challenges abroad.

### 3. Methodological approach and data

The arguments presented in this chapter stem from a thematic analysis of the empirical material collected for the international *Transfam* project (*Doing Family in Transnational Context. Demographic Choices, Welfare Adaptations, School Integration and Every-day Life of Polish Families Living in Polish-Norwegian Transnationality*, 2013–2016). More specifically, the qualitative research aiming at the exploration of *Migrant families in Norway / structure of power relations and negotiating values and norms in transnational families*<sup>4</sup> was conducted with the use of a combination of biographic and semi-structured interview techniques.

The fieldwork of this study was conducted in Oslo and the surrounding areas in the early 2014 and encompassed thirty households of Polish migrants settled and employed in Norway. Mothers, fathers and couples in the age range between 29 and 54 (average 37.5 years) were interviewed in this study. Ten interviews were completed with couples, three with fathers, and the remaining seventeen with mothers. All the respondents had children (between 1 and 5 years of age) of varying ages ranging from infancy to early adulthood. Close to 25% of the respondents' children were below the age of 5, and an average age for children was also rather low, falling just below 9 years. We have collected stories from people representing diverse family forms – from married couples (24) to those in informal partnerships (3) and divorced (3). Inter-ethnic (mixed) couples were represented

<sup>4</sup> WP2, *Migrant families in Norway / structure of power relations and negotiating values and norms in transnational families*, Magdalena Ślusarczyk (WP Leader), Paula Pustułka (Co-researcher), Anna Bednarczyk, Inga Hajdarowicz (field research assistants).



(5 cases), though the dominant household pattern included the Polish-Polish relationships. The respondents spent a minimum of six months in Norway, though an average length of stay in Norway was eight and a half years.

Following Emslie and Hunt's conclusions (2009) that the work-life balance issues are neither restricted to one gender, nor encompass solely one age-group (i.e. the assumption that mostly parents of young children experience time bind), we resumed a broad approach to the data analysis. The data analysis proceeded in three phases beginning with a thematic categorization followed by open coding. This led to a detailed examination of the selected cases in the final step. The empirical material was investigated with regard to tracking work-family tensions in the migrants' accounts, particularly looking at the answers to the questions about the migration-driven changes to family life, the evaluation of the Norwegian labour market and working conditions, as well as their meaning for family life. We also reviewed answers to the questions about daily lives, gendered divisions of labour and leisure time, as well as recoded scattered, yet strongly emergent, data pattern pertinent to the feelings of safety, stability, security, as well as financial and resource capacity of a family.

## 4. Findings

### a. Narrating Norwegian workplaces

Opening the discussion, it is important to take a second look at the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, particularly with regard to the labour market trajectory and status versus the educational attainment and the held qualifications (Charts 1 & 2).

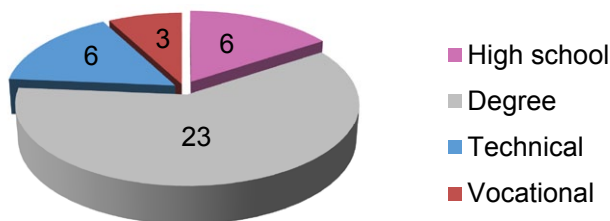


Chart 1. Educational level (in numbers)

Source: Own analysis, WP2 *Transfam* project data.

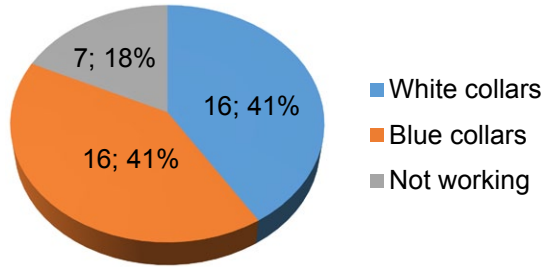


Chart 2. Occupational status (in numbers)<sup>5</sup>

Source: Own analysis, WP2 *Transfam* project data.

The data indicates an undeniable discrepancy, showing that the participants of the study have either used to or continue to work below their qualifications level (see also Huang, Krzaklewska, Pustułka 2016). However, the subjective evaluations of one's work situation provided by the respondents were definitely positive. The explanation of the discrepancy between the objective outcomes and personal opinions could largely be attributed to the fact that the interviewees compared their status as significantly changed, having navigated from Polish (worse) to Norwegian (improved) context. Rather than simply drawing on the categorical professional identification as a type of work and occupation that corresponds (or fails to match) their educational qualifications, the respondents were prone to reflect on the broader meanings of work for their life trajectory.

The majority of the interviewees referred to the Polish reality, their previous circumstances and earlier experiences. On this comparative axis, the main dichotomy resonated the employment's 'stability-instability' shift:

[Here] before the 1<sup>st</sup> of every month the money is always in. The wage is on time – Cyryl, one child, thirteen years in Norway.

Reflecting on the financial predictability was very common among the respondents in Norway. They often called their situation abroad 'normal', much in the spirit of migration being a quest for a 'normal life' recalled by the researchers examining the trajectories of the Polish migrants in the UK (White 2011: 62–66; Galasińska, Kozłowska 2009; Botterill 2011: 58–60; Ryan 2010; Rabikowska 2010). This dualism between 'here' and 'there' inherently creates a stark opposition between the appreciated 'now' and the left-behind 'abnormality' of the place of origin. Moving to a generous welfare state translates into a new set of existential possibilities in the realm of work. Financial stability, in turn, takes the pressure off these people who formerly constantly needed to worry about making ends meet. As a result, the very first prerequisite for striving for a work-life balance is met.

<sup>5</sup> Note that the 'Not working' category encompassed broad experiences of not being in employment, i.e. unemployed searching for work, those on parental or health leaves, etc.

Cyryl's short narrative below does not exhaust the topic of work, since the money-oriented understanding of employment that generates sufficient and timely income should be paired with further characteristics of 'working hours' and 'employer-employee relations'. Agnieszka, for instance, has underscored how every employee in Norway is consulted, valued and asked about their satisfaction. That gives people an aid that supports the navigation between work and home life:

I think that it looks different here, in Poland everything and yourself – all has to be tip-top, I mean here also, five minutes early you are at your post, and five minutes after it's done you leave, right? As long as the work is done. In Poland, you know, well, everything is in a hurry, a rat race, here it isn't so (...) Certainly as at every job there are some days that we work, we all work and we are working very diligently, but sometimes we just fool around – pretend that we are working (...). I suspect that it is so in every area of work, right? (...) Here (in Norway) they talk to you more, even the bosses, whenever there is a problem, "Look, listen, perhaps you'd solve it like this?" and there are even annual meetings with the manager, my husband has those, so [there they ask] things like "Who do you like to work with? (...) What is an acceptable distance to commute to work? Would going away for [business for] two-weeks be possible for you? They talk about having a kindergarten (...) and so it is that they have these meetings once a year; it is very telling" – Agnieszka, two children, three years in Norway.

Many Poles are surprised by this sort of dialogue between employers and employees across various labour market sectors, being used to receiving commands. The consultations gives an impression of being more empowered at work, and thus, having a good enough position for starting negotiations. In essence, the Norwegian workplaces do not exhibit as many features of greedy institutions [in Coser's (1974) and Hochschild's (1997) terms] as their Polish counterparts. While this area may appear gender-blind, it clarifies how Norwegian policies empower both men and women. Crucially, even the women who stayed home with children, experienced the spilling-over of the WLB policies, as their husbands worked less and asked about the family needs, which limited the periods of being away. For working women, workplace observations not only elicited renegotiations at home, but also eradicated the dilemma of whether it makes sense for them to work at all. This pertains to the common situation when the entire mother's salary was spent on childcare in Poland, thus rendering being at work, away from a child, questionable. On the contrary, valued and well-paid in Norway, women felt freer to develop their professional careers.

Another clear trait of the Norwegian labour market that the respondents notices was a safeguarded and respected "right to free time and leisure". What in Poland would be unheard of, the right to vacation or breaks, comes first before a company's income. Agata described how the business model of ski rental service reflected these priorities:

People came and went, they wanted to get skis and there were none because it was vacation time [for employees]. In Poland this would never happen. [In Norway] things are more relaxed and people do their work with a smile on their face, unlike in Poland when you hear “deadline, deadline, due then, due at this time”. And then people do overtime (...) here it is very rare and one gets solid compensation for this. There is no pressure like in Poland that everything has to be absolutely [perfect]. (...) No fear of being fired over speaking up – Agata, one child, three years in Norway.

Agata’s story addresses a new quality of a fearless work life. This can be attributed to a considerably low risk of losing a job suddenly, thanks to social and legal protections<sup>6</sup>, but also sheds light on dealing with earlier experiences of mobbing and exploitation in Poland (Pustułka 2015). They seem to coincide with the deregulation, 24/7 availability, flexibility and high uncertainty that make the workplace changes observable at the neoliberal capitalist workplaces (Sennet 1998; Beck 2000; Standing 2011; Burawoy 2008; Perrons 2003; Castells 2001; Brough *et al.* 2008), undeniably characteristic for the post-1989 Poland. What the Poles abroad often reflect on is the invaluable clarity and stability of workplace rules (see also Pustułka 2015), especially with regard to respect that is paid to one’s free time. Consequently, the work-life balance becomes easier to attempt and retain, which confirms the paramount societal effect of the welfare regime (Crompton, Lyonette 2006; Gallie 2003; Den Dulk, Van Doorne-Huiskes 2007; Abendroth, Den Dulk’s 2011).

#### b. WLB, parenting and family

The key issue that emerged from almost all interviews<sup>7</sup> was the fact that the meaning of money has changed. Employment in Norway was seen as something that sufficiently secures a change of ‘supporting one’s family without particular sacrifices’, a finding that directly translated to a fulfilment of family plans with regard to procreation (see also Pustułka, Krzaklewska, Huang, forthcoming). According to Magda and Michał, for instance, staying in Poland would have hindered their desire to have more children. They evaluate their past work in Poland as enabling only ‘vegetating’:

[In Norway] we can support our child and ourselves. We can live a normal life, not like in Poland (...). In Poland it was mostly just work and for this reason the

<sup>6</sup> Note that we hear talk primarily about the Poles in legal employment. While it is not the topic of this article, it can be inferred that the situation of migrants in undocumented sectors and grey zones does not boast the same chances for social protections.

<sup>7</sup> Different trajectories that did not comply with this pattern pertain to the exception of Poles recruited and arriving in Norway as expats/expatriates. For their life and employment trajectories, it was less the matter of money (which they already seem to have had enough of in Poland), and more the question of the improved (sometimes ‘more modern’/technologically advanced) working conditions and a chance for professional development.

life we had was very hard. One had rather fought for survival than thought about how to make the life for oneself nicer. Or for example think about wanting to show children the world, it was more about things, like “Damn, we have no money for diapers” (...). Once our child was born it became impossible for me to get any job whatsoever, even in a supermarket, this was impossible because I already had a child... And anyhow, there was no work, even if my mum had agreed to take care of the child, then it was still not happening, I had no chance of getting a job – Magda and Michał, two children, six and seven years in Norway.

This excerpt demonstrated the weak position and discrimination against working mothers on the Polish labour market (see also Płomień 2009; Pustułka 2015). A similar trajectory of lack of perspectives and financial hardships that translated to a husband's or a father's migration, stable income and ultimately a family reunification has framed the story of Przemek and Beata. They resumed procreation after the relocation and now have five children:

It has to be underlined that I work alone for the whole family, I mean professional work, and we manage, right? In Poland it would certainly be difficult, I suppose, if not very, very hard (...). [Thanks to migration] we are richer in some experiences – good or bad – that only time will tell, however, I have to repeat that having five children and somehow, let's say, not worry about having enough money for food. (...) Last year I also took out a mortgage for a flat in Poland, and I also have been slowly paying that off – Beata and Przemek, five children, six and seven years in Norway.

What has to be clarified, however, is that also a less optimistic picture of recent times has been painted by Przemek, who acknowledges that the change from having three to having five children has tremendously hindered his ability to work only in one place, be back home around 3 or 4 p.m., and still boast a comfortable financial standing. While earlier Przemek was able to live on one salary only, he has now founded his own business to supplement the income and a real-estate in Poland. Nevertheless, the situation in Norway, as compared to the one in Poland, is tremendously different, allowing the father to spend time with his family and rarely work at weekends. It is worth mentioning that these stories have a practical daily dimension, but also extent to the long-term planning and general attitudes. One example is that the Polish respondents became quite adamant about benefiting from their employee rights with regard to leisure time, as exemplified in the quotation from Andrzej:

An employer is not to dictate me when should I be able to take my leave – Andrzej, one child, one year in Norway.

Further unveiling of the primary importance of migration with regard to having children, the migrants – especially women – have often recounted the Norwegian welfare state's guarantees of support for parents:

I work in a profession [kindergarten teacher] where a decision [to have a child] is not at all problematic. It is mostly women working in this area and most of them have children, they know how it is, so it is easy... there is no problem that one is pregnant. In fact, I have started a new job when I was pregnant and it felt strange but it was not a problem (...). The maternity benefit/leave is very long, and one can share it with a father, so the dad had also been able to stay at home with them – Emilia, two children, eleven years in Norway.

The women were quite unanimous in stating that becoming a parent in Norway is – unlike in Poland – not frowned upon at the workplace. A special emphasis was also put on how the promotion of the dual earner dual career model alters the gender relations in many couples, since the men utilized the ‘father quota’ of the leave (see also Pustułka, Struzik, Ślusarczyk 2015, Żadkowska, Kosakowska-Bezecka, Ryndyk 2016). Consequently, a former solely female strain connected with motherhood and maternity can be alleviated and elicits re-negotiations of the traditionally gendered work-life imbalance and conflicts. It essentially assigns men a dedicated time ‘away from work’ and, simultaneously, induces women to work regardless of their parenting duties. At the same time, however, we have not noticed that there is a convergence of male and female perceptions of work, as argued by Hochschild (1997) and Reeves (2001). While the WLB concerns both men and women, the gender orders remain somewhat stable in exerting different types of pressure. Among the Polish migrants, the time bind on the whole still makes the work that needs to be done for the WLB a primarily women’s issue (Milkie, Peltola 1999; Chambers 2012; Gattrell 2005).

The support for family time and the balance between private and work lives does not finish with the generous leaves for young children carers, but comprises also convenient working hours and a predictable schedule which guarantees a certain quality of life. The relatively high wages allow more people to decide to work part-time, while the increasing flexibility of devising schedules helps keeping the work and family balance alive in the long-term perspective for parents of older children (see also Emslie, Hunt 2009). The respondents are very much aware of how beneficial the limited commuting and reasonable time of getting back home are for their experiences at home:

We are lucky to be working till 4 p.m., both of us. We work in the same town we live in and have everything close by. It is enough to have one car to take care of everything – Daria and Adam, two children, seven years in Norway.

Michał comes home at 3:30 and then we can plan the rest of the day together. If we go to a shop, then we all go. We drive together, go for walks together – Magda and Michał, two children, six and seven years in Norway.

Norwegian working hours differ starkly from the memories and imbalanced private/work spheres that the respondents experienced back in Poland. There, the reality of insecurity (for those who struggle, lower-educated, new graduates) or

a neoliberal rat race (for the more established, professionals) meant that having small children posed substantial risks concerning a family's financial stability, partners' career paths, and, most importantly the quality of family relations in a coupledom and between parents and children. Many respondents reminisced that men's breadwinning obligations in the end caused the husbands' permanent absence from home, childcare, and leisure.

It was very hard because I wasn't working and he was working all the time. We also still lived with the in-laws, so everything was not as it should be for me (...). We later planned to go abroad (...) but it has turned out that I was pregnant with our son, so we again stayed in this [miserable] Poland (...). So my husband worked and worked, while I just sat at home and raised the kids – Agnieszka, two children, three years in Norway.

It was quite common for the women not to have a chance of negotiating anything resembling balance. The 'time bind' remained extremely strong and tied with the cultural constructions of femininity (Connell 2005) in Poland, thus negatively affecting the health and the well-being of all family members. Beata recalls her life prior to migration, after the birth of her first child:

It was just the dull everyday life and nagging, arguments, I was tired [from taking caring of a newborn], weighing less and less, my weight was dropping day and night, and Przemek was working a three-shift-job and went to university, so the exhaustion, no, really, we did not enjoy each other, nor the baby. One only understands it after some time, actually even after several years (...). I have then realized that [Przemek] was coming back from work and I was only hoping to be able to put [our son] into his arms 'Take care of him, daddy, it's not only mum but also dad that a baby need'. And Przemek was all like 'what does she want from me? I have to get some sleep to get up for work'. So really we had hit those very low points – Beata, five children, six years in Norway.

The interesting finding here is that Polish families in Norway may not necessarily openly re-negotiate gender contracts, but the shift towards more WLB for both men and women nevertheless occurs in their households. This is because the 'transformations of family roles' are happening in a particular twofold manner. Firstly, they are preconditioned by the external factors and the societal effect of the policies in a destination country's welfare state (Gallie 2003). They are further reinforced by the comparisons made with the Polish post-communist system that does virtually nothing to promote WLB (Sadowska-Snarska 2008, 2011; Płomień 2009). Secondly, the main transformative power seems to lie in the parent-child relations of care. Open renegotiations of gendered division of productive and reproductive labour seem to remain challenging in the Polish cultural setting of traditional values that many migrant couples live in. However, the major gender effect can be seen in the alleviated burdens of mothers and the possibility and the cultural appropriateness of engagement of fathers (see also Pustułka, Struzik, Ślusarczyk 2015).

Summing up, the top-down shift (rather than the inner bottom-up transformation of values) in the family roles and practices is mostly narrated as a chance for both parents to take part in childrearing and care. The institutional promotion of the ‘dual carer – dual earner’ model in Norway, with the mechanisms like ‘father quota’, has been offered in Poland, but the solutions are new and so far failed to be incorporated to the parenting and child-raising cultures. Again, the societal effect of culture and welfare (Gallie 2003; Crompton, Lyonette 2006) predominantly embeds caring and parenting roles in the private sphere, making it an intra-family concern in Poland. It is assumed that any problems with support will be solved by kinship networks, especially grandparents (Abendroth, Den Dulk 2011; Slany, Ślusarczyk, Krzyżowski 2014). The respondents at first appear surprised and find it hard to believe that the Norwegian employer approve of caring duties, parental leaves, as well as broader long-run WLB assistance, yet with time they also begin to consider it obvious, as well as legally and culturally supported. To illustrate this point, among those quoted in the article, both Michał (Magda’s husband) and Emilia’s life-partner took extended leaves, while Cyryl, who is sharing the custody over his son after a divorce, described receiving a considerable aid from his workplace, even though he performs a low-level skilled job. These are the extract from the interviews:

– So have you indeed shared the leave?

– Yes, we did. He took his six – I am not sure how many – I think even more – ten weeks for [our daughter]. For [our son] he had a bit less [of an allowance] – Emilia, two children, eleven years in Norway.

– Michał took it [the leave]. He took care of our [younger daughter] for three months.

– I had a twelve weeks paternity leave [tacierzyńskiego], as they call it – Magda and Michał, two children, six and seven years in Norway.

It’s the law here. So sometimes it happened that I have just come to work and my ex-[wife] would have called me and said that [our son] was sick and needed to be taken home from the kindergarten. This was never a problem – I would just call in and said I needed to finish work and go, someone would be called in to fill my spot [for the day]. The law here says that one cannot be fired for something like that. In Poland, however, well, I have friends who just had a baby and the wife, she has just broken her leg. He worked for, I am not sure, one and a half or maybe two years in one company (...) and took a leave. He took one week, it is normal, a broken leg will not heal in a day, that’s clear. Then he took one more week and instantaneously got fired. They told him that one should work and not sit around at home. I’d say that [having a family] is normal [here] but in Poland it’s crazy, it’s not like it should be – Cyryl, one child, thirteen years in Norway.

Summing up, the sentiments and critiques perspiring from the respondents’ WLB narratives are similar.



## 5. Conclusions

To sum up our discussions, it has to be said that the Polish migrant couples with children who settled and found an occupation in Norway, interviewed for the *Transfam*'s WP2 study, have evaluated the ability to achieve and maintain the work-life balance in their new foreign surroundings very positively. The decisions' to move abroad were very much affected by the bottom-down spill-over of the macro social consequences of the welfare systems they found themselves in. A change from the Polish to the Norwegian system means tremendously effective family and work re-configurations, and is conducive to potential outcomes for the WLB. This applied to how broadly the people revised the meaning of work in their life, and the intra-family modification of choices concerning parenting, care and the quality of leisure.

The WLB logic of an international move from Poland to Norway can be explained with the welfare state regimes' terminology (Esping-Andersen 1989; Korpi 2000; Bühlmann, Elcheroth, Tettamanti 2010). First, it signifies leaving behind the post-communist regime, which glues together the remainders of the past socialist state and welfare support provisions with the hectically created neoliberal and family-oriented 'rolling out the state' (Sadowska-Snarska 2008, 2011). We concur with Płomiń that Poles inherently turn towards the implicitly present 'familialism' (2009). As the kin networks cease to be sufficient, they suffer under the residual nature of care and employment policies, as well as a diminishing support for working mothers, which altogether make any proposals in the WLB area 'miss the point' (Płomiń 2009: 147). Secondly, a transition is an encounter and an eventual submergence in the Norwegian socio-democracy, marked by generous, 'defamilialized' and 'rolling back to the state' type of a welfare regime. The new lives abroad operate under the main macro social and political assumption that the state is responsible for how society and families are able to function as its basic institutions. A state's institutional system reflects this care by offering support to citizens and residents, especially families with children.

The positive consequences of the Norwegian WLB-promoting policies are multifaceted. It appears from the interviews with the Polish migrants that they primarily pertain to developing stronger bonds between parents and children, a better quality of life, a better health and well-being, less fatigue, self-confidence and self-esteem, as well as an often underscored new finding that there is more to life than just work (see also Pustułka 2015). On the contrary, we have not found the WLB to be particularly de-gendering in the Polish context (see also Sadowska-Snarska 2008), considering how time bind and greediness of work and a family as an all-embracing institution need to be navigated, negotiated and established primarily by women. Caring duties, as well as the need to keep a family together by shared practices and the organization of leisure time, appear to be considered a female task (Slany, Ślusarczyk, Krzyżowski 2014; Slany, Krzaklewska, Warat 2015).

At the same time, one has to be cautious to acknowledge that the majority of migrants have not been staying in Norway for more than a decade, and the

inflow to this country is rather new. Therefore, it is difficult to predict how, with the passing of time, some of the gender equality-focused mechanisms (e.g. 'father quote') might in the future alter the WLB in its more gendered sense in the Polish households abroad. Additionally, in support of this claim there are the socio-demographic characteristics of the migrants, which now point to a number of people experiencing deskilling and a considerable proportion of people not in the workforce (Huang, Krzaklewska, Pustułka 2016). The pattern particularly applies to women and might be somehow explained by the population's demographic structure, with women being in the reproductive age and having children. Being outside of the labour market is dictated by a family's current needs and the postponing of the procreative plans, yet it is possible that it also distorts the WLB perspective and evaluation that may change after this phase of the family cycle is completed. When Polish women seek to go back to work, we observe both those who experience certain challenges, and some that are able to progress quickly through ranks and secure demanding, top-level managerial positions (Huang, Krzaklewska, Pustułka 2016). The fact that they perceive Norway as conducive to completing their professional goals should be noted.

It has to be seen, however, how both men and women are affected by the increasing global flexibility demands, further changes in the landscape of work, and the length of their settlement abroad, which may all warrant a renegotiation of the WLB contracts in the Polish couples and families. This paper demonstrated the general outcomes of the WLB for the entire families (including children) and expanded the basic understanding of professional work and family/housework by acknowledging the significance of a family leisure. At this point, a somewhat 'genderless' yet enthusiastic implementation of the Norwegian institutional mechanisms seems to suffice the couples' needs, as they commonly reflected on experiencing a possibility of having a balance for the first time in their adult life. Nevertheless, while the WLB improves on the surface, thanks to the prominent structural solutions and regime's characteristics, there is still room for more gender-centred and progressive modifications of the migrants' worldviews about masculinities and femininities in the WLB reality.

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