

Cecilie Øien

On equal terms?

An evaluation of the Norwegian au pair scheme



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Oslo, August 2009
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Sammendrag

Denne rapporten er resultatet av en evaluering av den norske au pair-ordningen gjort på oppdrag for Utlendingsdirektoratet (heretter UDI), etter et initiativ fra Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet. Målsetningen med studien har vært å gi en helhetlig evaluering av au pair-ordningen, og å vurdere om (og om ja, hvordan) de opprinnelige formålene med ordningen, som de er definert i den europeiske avtalen om ansettelse av «au pair» av 1969, kan opprettholdes. Videre hadde evalueringen til hensikt å vurdere om endringene som ble innført 15. oktober 2007 har vært vellykkede. Evalueringen innbefatter også en kortfattet sammenligning mellom reguleringen av den norske au pair ordningen og ordningene i Storbritannia, Danmark og Polen.

Au pair plassering ble formalisert i 1969, da Europarådet opprettet den europeiske avtalen om ansettelse av «au pair». I avtalen er au pair-ordningen definert som kulturutveksling, hvorved en ung voksen får muligheten til å lære et annet språk og en annen kultur gjennom å bli inkludert som et familiemedlem i en familie i vertslandet. Som godtgjørelse skal hun eller han gjøre lettere husarbeid og hjelpe til med barnepass. Au paires får også en begrenset lønn, samt kost og losji. Norge har signert den europeiske avtalen, og UDI er ansvarlig for å administrere ordningen.

Denne evalueringen er en kvalitativ studie som har til hensikt å kartlegge au pairers og familiers strategier og motivasjoner, for å se om disse er i overensstemmelse med de opprinnelige formålene og reguleringen av ordningen. Totalt ble det foretatt 69 intervjuer, av disse var 21 med au pairer, 20 med vertsfamilier, 15 med representanter fra UDI, politiet og ulike organisasjoner. I tillegg ble det foretatt 3 intervjuer med relevante respondenter i Polen.

Funnene i evalueringen er ikke entydige når det gjelder spørsmålet om au pairer bruker ordningen innenfor rammen for dens opprinnelige formål eller om de bruker den til å arbeide. I årene mellom 2000 og 2008 økte antallet fra 691 til 2860, hvorpå filippinere nå representerer den største gruppen.

En au pair og en vertsfamilie vil ofte finne hverandre gjennom sosiale nettverk og kjedereferanser. Andre foretrekker å bruke nasjonale byråer fordi de opplever dette som tryggere. Ytterligere andre bruker utenlandske byråer eller internettbaserte byråer.

Evalueringen har konstatert at opprettelsen av bedre kontrollmekanismer enn hva som er tilgjengelig i dag, for å håndtere problemer som potensielle problemer som kan oppstå når au pairer allerede er kommet til Norge, er viktigere enn å ta sikte på å kontrollere hvordan au pairer og vertsfamilier møtes og oppretter en forbindelse.

Fraværet av støttemekanismer utover UDI og politiet er særdeles merkbar for au pairer, de som er i kontakt med dem i yrkesmessig kapasitet, så vel som vertsfamilier som har ansatt au pairer som allerede er i Norge, men som har blitt utnyttet eller oppsagt på en uhederlig måte.

Au pairer kommer til Norge med svært forskjellige forventninger. For noen er muligheten til å lære et språk og til å bli kjent med en annen kultur meget viktig, for andre så er det en spennende anledning til å møte nye venner eller muligens en partner. Med økningen i antallet au pairer og endringer i hvilke som er de viktigste opphavslandene, så har imidlertid au pairers motivasjoner og strategier blitt mer varierte. Uavhengig av deres opprinnelige ambisjoner og forventninger så kan au pairers erfaringer avvike fra hva de hadde forestilt seg på forhånd. Alle av både de nåværende og tidligere au pairene som ble intervjuet hevdet at de ikke ville gitt avkall på deres opplevelser med å være au pair. Selv om de nødvendigvis ikke ivret etter å gjøre det om igjen, så følte majoriteten at de hadde tilegnet seg verdifulle erfaringer som au pairer til tross for det faktum at flere av dem hadde opplevd varierende grad av konflikt med vertene sine.

Det er viktig å anerkjenne det faktum at det vil være uoverensstemmelse mellom au pairers og vertsfamiliers syn på hva au pair plassering burde være og hva slags type relasjon de står i, hvis man ønsker å forbedre ordningen.

Hovedårsaken til at norske foreldre ønsker en au pair i sitt hushold er for å få bedre kontroll over sine hverdagsliv og å oppnå mer fleksibilitet i hvordan de ivaretar balansen mellom arbeids- og familieliv. Au pairens funksjon i husholdet er således å skape fleksibilitet i foreldres hverdagsliv og å redusere det som i norsk offentlighet har blitt kjent som *tidsklemma*.

Fleksibilitet for familiene kan innebære det motsatte for au pairer, som kanskje må jobbe på ubeleilige tidspunkter slik at vertene kan få den fleksibiliteten de opplever nødvendig. For de au pairene jeg har intervjuet så ble det ikke nødvendigvis oppfattet som problematisk å bidra til at vertenes fikk en opplevelse av fleksibilitet i hverdagen. Problemer oppstår imidlertid når fleksibilitet innebærer plutselige endringer i au pairenes rutiner, når de må oppgi avtaler eller aktiviteter på grunn av uforutsette endringer i familiens planer, og når vertsfamilier ikke tilbyr au pairen fleksibilitet til gjengjeld.

Det er sider ved forholdet mellom au pair og vertsfamilie som ikke nødvendigvis kan foregripes eller kontrolleres gjennom et juridisk rammeverk. Au pairer så vel som vertsfamilier anerkjente at deres relasjon til syvende og sist også handler om «kjemi»: av og til kan årsaken til at en au pair bytter familie forklares gjennom mangelen på forbindelse eller kontakt, eller au pairens opplevelse av å være «på siden» av familiefellesskapet, uten at noen kan sies å være ansvarlige for situasjonen. Det opprinnelige formålet med au pair plassering, at au pairen og vertsfamilien skal være på «like fot», er rimeligvis mer å anse som et ideal enn en refleksjon av virkeligheten bak ordningen.

Au pair-ordningen er i dag formelt definert gjennom au pairers rett til å erfare kulturell utveksling. Vertsfamiliens behov er ikke tatt hensyn til i forskriftene, noe som skaper en situasjon hvor deres motivasjoner og strategier ikke regnes som viktige i forhold til ordningens formål. Dette gir et feil inntrykk av den virkeligheten au pairer så vel som vertsfamilier opplever, hvor au pair-vertsfamilie relasjoner i mange henseender blir definert gjennom behovene til ulike familiemedlemmer. Hva denne definisjonen av au pair plassering ikke anerkjenner er at det ikke ville være en au pair-ordning uten familier med behov for hjelp med barneomsorg eller husarbeid.

Dette betyr ikke uten videre at vertsfamilier er uinteresserte i kulturutveksling eller at de nødvendigvis er negative til å inkludere au pairen i deres familieliv under den perioden de har en ung utenlandsk gjest boende i hjemmet sitt. For verter er kulturutveksling eller potensielle vennskap imidlertid tilleggsgevinster ved ordningen og sjelden grunnen til at folk velger å skaffe seg en au pair. Det er høyst usannsynlig at de ville ha hatt en au pair hvis de ikke trengte hjelp med barneomsorg eller husarbeid. Dette vitner om at au pair plassering i praksis behandles og betraktes som arbeid av vertsfamilier.

Oppsvinget i antall au pairer må sees som bevis for den økende etterspørselen etter mer profesjonelle utenlandske hushjelpere som har mer erfaring enn det au pairer tradisjonelt har hatt. Forventningen til au pairer har dermed endret seg, og det er kanskje ingen tilfeldighet at filippinere er på toppen av den norske au pair statistikken. Filipinere har et rykte verden over for å være profesjonelle, hardt arbeidende hushjelpere og er i dette nye klimaet populære som au pairer. Andre nasjonaliteter er ettertraktet av de samme årsakene, og trender i au pair plassering endres over tid. I dag er det en økende etterspørsel etter hus- og omsorgsarbeid både i Norge og internasjonalt, noe som innebærer at om man ekskluderer en gruppe fra ordningen så vil dette bare medføre en tilvekst av andre nasjonaliteter. Bakenfor den rammen for tilbud og etterspørsel av au pairer og vertsfamilier representerer, er det også en videre kontekst av internasjonale agenter og byråer som er sensitive for behovene i markedet for hus- og omsorgstjenester i ulike land.

Funnene viser at det er rimelig å anta at en større andel av filippinske au pairer bruker au pair ordningen som en strategi for å skaffe seg en inntekt, og ikke primært som en mulighet til å oppleve kulturutveksling. Men, som evalueringen viser, dette utelukker ikke at det å lære norsk og å leve med en norsk familie ansees som en viktig del av deres au pair erfaring. Å utestenge deres mulighet til å delta i ordningen ville være å overse den kjensgjerning at filippinske au pairer er del av en komplisert dynamikk mellom tilbud og etterspørsel delvis drevet av ønsket til en økende antall norske familier om å ansette filippinske au pairer. Uten etterspørselen for den type au pair filippinere representerer for norske familier, så er det tvilsomt om denne veksten ville funnet sted.

Utviklingen som beskrives her antyder at au pair-rollen er i ferd med å bli stadig mer definert, konstruert i henhold til nye ideer om hva au pair plassering burde inne-

bære. Denne utviklingen kan kanskje beskrives som negativ, men den kan også tilby myndighetene en mulighet til å forstå au pair plassering som del av en bredere sektor for hushjelp- og omsorgstjenester, og følgelig en anledning til å forbedre forholdene for både migranter og ikke-migranter som utfører denne type arbeid i private hjem. Til syvende og sist er ikke au pair plassering en jobbeskrivelse: au pair praksis er forbundet med omsorgs- og husarbeid, men oppgavene dette innebærer er ikke definert gjennom betegnelsen som sådan.

I dag har arbeidsmigranternes deltakelse og betydning i sektoren for husholdstjenester blitt en betydelig faktor i de økonomiske vurderingene arbeidsgivere og migranter gjør seg. Sett i lys av nåtidige migrasjonstrender og forvaltning, så framstår au pair plassering som en potensiell forlengelse av arbeidsmarkedet for husholdstjenester utført av migranter. Det er klart at det er en stor etterspørsel for både formelle og uformelle omsorgs- og husholdstjenester i Norge i dag. Au pair plassering er del av den formelle sektoren, bortsett fra at denne ordningen ikke offisielt er definert som arbeid. Å plassere au pair plassering i denne sammenhengen er særdeles viktig hvis man ønsker å forstå potensialet for utilbørlig utnyttelse av ordningen.

Jeg anbefaler at au pair-ordningen omdefineres gjennom et begrepsapparat som beskriver au pairers aktiviteter i husholdet som arbeid. Tiltak som betegner au pair plassering som arbeid, og som heller enn å definere au pairers forhold til vertsfamilien som et mellom slektninger beskriver det som et arbeidstaker-arbeidsgiver forhold, ville bidra til å modernisere ordningen. Det ville også tilby en mer korrekt beskrivelse av forholdene og arbeidet som er involvert i au pair plassering i dag. Formålet med en slik tilnærming til ordningen ville være å utvikle ytterligere tiltak for å beskytte au pairer fra mulig utnyttelse knyttet til det å ha private hjem som arbeidsplass.

Det finnes i dag ikke et uavhengig organ med særlig ansvar for å beskytte au pairer, for å hjelpe dem gjennom norsk byråkrati, og for å tilby informasjon om og kontakt med ulike offentlige tjenester. Det anbefales at et slikt uavhengig organ opprettes. Mens det er tilrådelig at au pair plassering også i fremtiden reguleres av myndighetene, viser forskningsfunnene at ansvaret for å beskytte og å informere au pairer verken utelukkende kan overlates til vertsfamilier, individer eller byråer, ei heller er UDI eller politiet opplevd som ideelle steder å henvende seg til for hjelp av au pairer som trenger bistand med å håndtere sin situasjon.

Endringene som ble innført i 2007 har hatt positiv effekt, men som konklusjonene i denne evalueringen viser, så bør ikke disse endringene på tilstrekkelige tiltak for å takle de grunnleggende utfordringene i ordningen. Tvetydighetene i definisjonen av au pair plassering og begrepsapparatet brukt til å beskrive den krever endringer i det strukturelle rammeverket, ikke bare i individuelle aspekter ved det.

De alternativene for endring i ordningens strukturelle rammeverk som foreslås i evalueringen gir en mulighet til å omdefinere hva au pair plassering innebærer. Dette vil muligens innebære at man må oppgi prinsippene i den europeiske avtalen om anset-

telse av «au pair». En endring av ordningen og en redefinering av au pair-plassering er en mulighet til å modernisere det strukturelle rammeverket, i overensstemmelse med samtidige samfunnsmessige forhold og slik at det bedre kan reflektere hvordan au pairer og vertsfamilier praktiserer ordningen.

Det å stille seg kritisk til anordningene for vilkårene for au pair-plassering som definert i den europeiske avtalen og bestemme seg for å legge ned ordningen er ikke ensbetydende med at au pair plassering eller det arbeidet de utfører vil forsvinne fra markedet. «Au pair» er en veletablert kategori verden over, innenfor utlendingsforvaltningen i mange land så vel som i offentlighetens fantasi i avsender- og mottakerland. Gjennom et nytt strukturelt rammeverk for au pair plassering kan man ta kategoriens innhold på alvor for således å lage nye retningslinjer for denne type arbeid.

Endringene som diskuteres i evalueringen er angitt i detalj i kapittel 8. Her presenterer jeg utelukkende en oppsummering av anbefalingene.

Tre ulike modeller for forvaltningen av au pair-plassering foreslås. Disse kan også kombineres:

- Alternativ A: En videreutvikling av dagens ordning.
- Alternativ B: En ungdomsmobilitetsordning med muligheter for au pair plassering, arbeid og studier i Norge for personer mellom 18 og 30 år for en periode på 2 år.
- Alternativ C: En tilleggsordning arbeidsmigranter innenfor omsorgs- og husarbeidssektoren.

Uavhengig av det alternativer eller de alternativene som velges, kan au pairers rettigheter styrkes gjennom en revidering av det strukturelle rammeverket ved å:

- Modernisere ordningens begrepsapparat.
- Etablere et uavhengig organ eller en ombudsman som har ansvar for å ivareta rettighetene til de som har fått innvilget arbeids- og/eller oppholdstillatelse innenfor den valgte ordningen. Organet kan potensielt også ha ansvar for å utføre kvalitetssikring av byrået.
- Lansere en døgnåpen informasjonstelefon for au pairer.
- Innvilge au pairer en toårig arbeids- og oppholdstillatelse ved førstegangssøknad.
- Gjøre au pair-tillatelsen uavhengig av forholdet til en vertsfamilie.
- Gi au pairer mulighet til å velge om de vil bo med vertsfamilien eller om de ønsker å bo utenfor husholdet.
- Tilby informasjonsmøter for nyankomne au pairer opp til fire ganger i året i Oslo og andre steder hvor det er mange au pairer.

- Gjøre au pairers tilgang til språkkurs et delt ansvar mellom vertsfamilier og kommuner.
- Gjøre vertsfamilien ansvarlig for å dekke au pairers reise til og fra Norge.
- Gjøre vertsfamilien ansvarlig for å dekke reiseutgifter knyttet til språkkurs.
- Håndheve kravet om å fylle inn punktet i kontrakten som beskriver au pairers ansvar.
- Gå i dialog med filippinske myndigheter for å utforske muligheten for å få til en bilateral avtale for filippinere som ønsker å komme til Norge som au pairer.
- Forenkle skattereglene for au pairer og lage standard retningslinjer for hele landet.

Det er videre anbefalt at:

- Bortsett fra at man følger de vanlige reglene for utlendingsforvaltningen, så foreslås det at man ikke innfører ytterligere begrensninger i forhold til hvilke nasjonaliteter som kan benytte seg av au pair-ordningen.
- Aldersgrensen (18–30) bør forbli den samme.
- Au pairers lønn bør reguleres i henhold til om hun eller han bor sammen med vertsfamilien eller ikke, og ut i fra den spesifikke ordningen de har valgt for perioden (alternativ A, B or C). For Alternativ A kan lønnen forbli den samme som i dag, men det er anbefalt at alternative B og C følger fastsatt minstelønn.
- Det innføres en maksimumsgrense for saksbehandlingstid.

Andre aspekter av ordningen som ikke diskuteres her kan forbli som de er i dag.

Executive summary

This report is the outcome of an evaluation of the Norwegian au pair scheme commissioned by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (hereafter UDI or the Directorate), based on an initiative by the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion. The main objective has been to give a comprehensive analysis of the au pair scheme, and to assess if (and if yes, how) the original intentions of the scheme, as stated in the European Agreement of “au pair” Placement of 1969, can be maintained. Also, the evaluation was intended to assess if the changes to the scheme introduced 15 October 2007 have been successful. The evaluation furthermore includes a brief comparison between the regulations of au pairing in Norway and the UK, Denmark and Poland.

Au pairing was formalised in 1969, when the Council of Europe instituted the European Agreement on “au pair” Placement. Au pair placement is defined in the agreement as cultural exchange, whereby a young adult gets the opportunity to learn another language and culture through being included as a member of the family in the host country. In compensation she or he is expected to do light housework and help with childcare. The au pair also receives a monthly pay, in addition to food and lodging. Norway has signed the European Agreement, and UDI is responsible for managing the scheme.

The present evaluation is thus a qualitative study aiming to map the strategies and motivations of au pairs and families and to see if these concur with the original intentions and regulations of the scheme. A total of 69 interviews were undertaken, including 21 with current and former au pairs, 20 with host families, and 15 with representatives of UDI, the police and different organisations. In addition, 3 interviews were undertaken with relevant respondents in Poland.

The findings of the evaluation are not conclusive in regard to whether au pairs use the scheme within the scope of its original intentions or if they use it as work. In the years between 2000 and 2008, the number of au pairs in Norway has increased from 691 to 2860, with Filipinos now representing the largest group.

Often an au pair and a host family find each other through social networks and chain referral; others prefer to use national agencies because they find it safer; yet others use agencies abroad or online au pair agencies.

The evaluation has found that more important than aiming to control how au pairs and families meet and establish a relationship would be the establishment of better mechanisms than what is available for them today, for dealing with the problems that

can potentially arise when au pairs have already arrived in Norway. The absence of any support mechanisms beyond UDI and the police is strongly felt among au pairs, those who are professionally in contact with them, as well as host families who have employed au pairs who were already in Norway, but who had been exploited or dismissed in a dishonest way.

Au pairs come to Norway with expectations and strategies that vary greatly. For some the opportunity to learn a language and get to know another culture is very important; for others it is an exciting opportunity to meet new friends or possibly a partner. However, with the increase in the number of au pairs and the changes in the most important countries of origin, the motivations and strategies have also become more diversified. Whatever their initial aspirations and expectations, au pairs' experiences can differ from what they had imagined au pair placement would be like. Both the current and former au pairs interviewed, all claimed they would not have relinquished their experiences of being an au pair. Not necessarily keen on doing it all over again, the majority felt they had attained valuable experience as au pairs despite the fact that several of them had experienced varying degrees of conflict with their hosts.

Acknowledging the fact that there is a discrepancy between the views of au pairs and host families about what au pairing should be and the nature of their relationship is important if one wants to improve the scheme.

The primary reason Norwegian parents want an au pair in their household is to get better control over their everyday life and more flexibility in how they manage the work life/family balance. The function of the au pair in the household is thus to create flexibility in the everyday life of parents and to reduce what in Norwegian public discourse has become known as *tidsklemma* or time squeeze.

Flexibility for the families can entail the opposite for au pairs, who may have to work inconvenient hours so that the hosts can get the flexibility they feel necessary. For the au pairs I have interviewed contributing to their hosts' sense of a flexible daily life was not necessarily experienced as negative. Problems arise when flexibility implies sudden changes in au pairs' routines, when they have to abandon appointments or activities because of unexpected alterations in the family's plans and when host families do not offer the au pair flexibility in return.

There are aspects of the relationship between the au pair and the host family that cannot necessarily be anticipated or controlled through a judicial framework. Au pairs acknowledged, as did host families, that ultimately the relationship is also about 'chemistry': sometimes the reason for changing families will be explained by lack of connection or the au pair feeling as 'matter out of place' without anyone being to blame for the situation. The original intention of au pair placement, that the au pair and host family should be on equal terms, may be an ideal more than a reflection of the reality of the scheme.

Today the au pair scheme is formally defined through the rights of au pairs to experience cultural exchange. The needs of host families are not taken into account in the regulations, something which creates a situation where their motivations and strategies are not considered important to the intentions of the scheme. This gives a wrong impression of the lived reality of au pairs as well as host families, in which au pair-host family relationships in most cases are very much defined by the needs of the different members of the host families. What this definition of au pairing fails to recognise is that there would not be an au pair scheme without families in need of childcare or help with domestic work.

This is not to say that host families are disinterested in cultural exchange or necessarily are negative to include the au pair in their family life during the period they have a young foreigner living in their household. However, cultural exchange and potential friendships are additional benefits of the arrangement and seldom the fundamental reason why people choose to get an au pair. It is highly unlikely that they would have had an au pair if they did not need help with childcare or domestic work. This indicates that in practice au pair placement is treated and regarded as work by host families.

The boost in numbers of au pairs must be seen as evidence for the increasing demand for more professional migrant domestic workers who are more experienced than au pairs traditionally have been. The expectations of au pairs have thus changed, and it may not be a coincidence that Filipinos are on top of the Norwegian au pair statistics: Filipinos have a reputation worldwide for being professional, hard-working domestics and are in this new climate popular as au pairs. Other nationalities are also sought for the same reasons and trends in au pairing change with time. In the current climate there is an increased demand for domestic work both in Norway and internationally, meaning that excluding one group from the scheme may just cause an increase in au pairs of other nationalities. Beyond the supply and demand situation au pairs and host families represent, there is also a broader context of international agents and agencies that are sensitive to the needs of the domestic work market in various countries.

The findings show that it is reasonable to assume that a fair amount of Filipino au pairs use the au pair scheme as a livelihood strategy, and not primarily as an opportunity to experience cultural exchange. Yet, as the evaluation shows, this does not exclude that learning Norwegian and living in a Norwegian family are seen as an important part of their au pairing experience. Closing their opportunities for participating in the scheme would be ignoring the fact that the increase of Filipino au pairs is part of a complicated dynamic between supply and demand partly driven by the wish of a rising number of Norwegian families to employ Filipino au pairs. Without the demand for the kind of au pair Filipinos represent in the mind of many Norwegian families, it is doubtful this growth would have taken place.

The development described here suggests that the au pair role is becoming increasingly more defined, constructed according to new ideas about what au pairing should

be. This development could perhaps be described as negative, but it may also offer authorities a chance to look at au pairing as part of the wider domestic work sector and consequently improve the conditions for both migrants and non-migrants who perform this kind of work within private homes. “Au pair” is not a job description as such: it is associated with domestic work, but the tasks involved are not defined by the term itself.

Today migrant domestic work has become a significant factor in economic calculations of both migrants and employers. Seen in light of current migration trends and regimes, au pair placement emerges as a potential extension of the labour market for migrant domestic work. It is clear that there is a large demand for both informal and formal domestic work in Norway today. Au pairing is part of the formal sector, apart from the fact that it is not officially defined as work. Placing au pairing in this context is fundamental to understand the potential for unacceptable exploitation of the scheme.

I recommend that au pair placement is redefined through a vocabulary of work. The step(s) to labelling au pairing as work, and rather than framing the au pair’s relationship with the host family as that of relatives defined it as one between employee and employer, would modernise the scheme. It would also offer a more correct description of the relationships and work involved in au pair placement today. The aim of such an approach to the scheme would be to develop further measures to protect au pairs from possible exploitation related to the private household as a worksite.

Today there is no designated body with the specific responsibility to protect au pairs, for guiding them through the Norwegian bureaucracy, and aiding them with information about and contact with different public services. It is recommended that such an independent body is established. Whereas it is advisable that au pairing in the future should also be regulated by the authorities, the research findings demonstrate that the responsibility to protect and inform au pairs can neither be left exclusively to host families, individuals or agencies, nor are UDI or the police perceived of as ideal places to turn to by au pairs who need help with how to deal with their situation.

In general the 2007 changes have had a positive effect. However, as the conclusions of the current evaluation indicate, these changes did not offer sufficient measures to tackle the fundamental challenges of the scheme. The ambiguities in the definition of au pair placement and the terminology describing it demand changes to the structural framework, not only of individual aspects of it.

The alternatives for changes to the structural framework of the scheme given in the evaluation offer an opportunity to redefine what au pair placement is. Yet, but it may involve leaving the principles of the European Agreement on “au pair” Placement behind. Modifying the scheme and redefining the conditions of au pairing is an opportunity to bring the structural framework up-to-date, according to contemporary

societal conditions and to better reflect how au pairs and families actually practise the scheme.

Questioning the provisions for au pair placement as defined in the European Agreement and deciding to abolish it does not imply that au pairing will disappear. Au pairing is an established category worldwide, within immigration management in many countries as well as in the public imagination in sending and receiving countries. A new structural framework for au pairing take the connotations to this category seriously by creating new principles for the regulation of this kind of work.

The changes discussed in the evaluation are specified in detail in Chapter 8, here I only present a summary of the main policy recommendations.

Three different models for the regulation of au pair placement are suggested. These can also be combined:

- Alternative A: Redesign of the current scheme.
- Alternative B: A Youth Mobility Scheme with opportunities for au pairing, working and studying in Norway for persons between 18 and 30 years of age during a period of 2 years.
- Alternative C: An additional scheme for migrant domestic workers.

Regardless of the alternative(s) chosen, au pairs' rights could be strengthened through a revision of the structural framework by:

- Modernizing the terminology of the scheme.
- Establishing an independent regulator or ombudsman with the responsibility for ensuring the rights of the permit holders within the chosen scheme(s), and potentially also with the responsibility for executing quality assurance of agencies.
- Launching a 24-hour helpline for au pairs.
- Granting au pairs a two-year work permits upon first-time application.
- Making the au pair permit independent of the relationship with a host family.
- Give au pairs the opportunity to choose between live-in or live-out arrangements.
- Offering information meetings for newly arrived au pairs up to four times a year in Oslo and in other locations around the country where there are many au pairs.
- Making au pairs' access to language courses a shared responsibility between host families and municipalities.
- Making it obligatory for the host family to pay the au pair's travel to and from Norway.

- Making it the responsibility of the host family to cover travel costs to language classes.
- Enforcing the requirement to fill in the point about the au pair's responsibilities in the contract.
- Engaging in a dialogue with Philippine authorities to explore the possibilities of creating a bilateral agreement for Filipinos who wish to come to Norway as au pairs.
- Simplifying the tax rules for au pairs and applying one standard to the whole country.

It is further recommended that:

- Apart from following the normal immigration regulations, it is suggested that no further restrictions on nationalities should be defined in relation to au pair permits.
- The age limit (18-30) should remain the same.
- The payment for au pairs needs to be regulated according to whether he or she live in or live out, and according to the specific arrangement they have chosen for their placement period (alternatives A, B or C). For Alternative A it should remain the same as today, but it is suggested that a Youth Mobility Scheme and a potential Migrant Domestic Worker Scheme follow the minimum national wage regulations.
- There could be a maximum limit for case-processing time.

Other aspects of the regulations of the scheme not discussed in the evaluation could remain the same as today.

1 Introduction

This report is the outcome of an evaluation of the Norwegian au pair scheme commissioned by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (hereafter UDI or the Directorate). Au pair is French and means ‘on par’ or ‘on equal terms’. Au pair placement is intended to be a cultural exchange scheme whereby young adults get the opportunity to travel abroad to experience another culture and to learn a new language. The au pair is to live with a host family who is expected to include them in their daily life and treat them as a family member. In return for food, lodging and a monthly pay of NOK 4000, the au pair is required to do light domestic work and/or help with childcare. In the past, the majority of au pairs were young Western European or American women who spent a year or two abroad as a ‘gap year’ after high school. It was an interlude between adolescence and young adulthood, between secondary and higher education, or between living with one’s parents or moving out to become independent and perhaps establishing a family of one’s own.

Au pairing was formalised in 1969, when the Council of Europe instituted the European Agreement on “au pair” Placement.¹ Norway has signed this agreement, and UDI is responsible for managing the scheme. UDI is placed under the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion and is responsible for implementing the government’s immigration policies. It is also involved in the development of such policies. The decisions of the Directorate, whether it involves work and residence permits or protection, are made in agreement with the Immigration Act and the Immigrant Regulations.

It is this formal scheme that is the point of departure for the evaluation, and the main objectives have been to give an overall analysis of the au pair scheme, the changes to the scheme introduced 15 October 2007, and further to assess if (and if yes, how) the original intentions of the scheme, as stated in the European Agreement of “au pair” Placement of 1969, can be maintained. It is a qualitative study aiming to map the strategies and motivations of au pairs and families and to see if these concur with the intentions and regulations of the scheme.

¹The treaty can be found in full on: <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/068.htm>

1.1 Au pair placement in Norway today

There has been a large increase in the au pair permits issued in Norway in the years between 2000 and 2008. In 2000, 691 au pair permits were granted, and by 2008 the number had risen to 2860 (see Table 1). The statistics from this period give an impression of the consequences on the au pair scheme of the enlargement of the European Union (EU). Formerly the Baltic countries, Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria were important nationalities in the au pair statistics (cf. Table 2). Since their inclusion into the EU, the number of au pairs from these countries has decreased considerably. Whereas au pair placement earlier was an attractive means for entry, work and higher education in Norway for these nationalities, citizens from the new member states now have other options and strategies for achieving the same goals. Another change is that they do not have to register as an au pair, as they have a broader spectrum of opportunities for movement between EU and European Economic Area (EEA) countries. The changes in the composition of au pair applicants and the changing possibilities for mobility

Table 1 Au pair permits granted in the period 2000-2008 (first-time permits and renewals)

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	Total
New permits	462	698	757	962	1041	1281	1242	1755	1625	9823
Renewals	229	306	416	552	590	754	947	896	1235	5925
Renewals, per cent of total	49.5	43.8	55.9	57.4	56.7	58.9	76.25	51	76	58
Total number of permits issued	691	1004	1173	1514	1631	2035	2189	2651	2860	15748

Source: Statistics provided by UDI.

Table 2 Au pair permits granted in the period 2000-2008 to citizens of countries that became EU member states 1 May 2004 or later.* The table shows both first-time permits and renewals.

Country	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Bulgaria	13	15	29	41	50	39	19	9	4
Czech Rep	18	23	19	36	29	25	8	4	2
Estonia	47	94	93	68	35	28	19	5	4
Latvia	73	98	90	95	58	46	19	8	2
Lithuania	77	166	217	208	149	67	37	20	3
Poland	58	123	167	167	138	110	70	54	23
Romania	45	61	83	138	161	154	105	56	14
Slovakia	33	42	36	24	14	6	8	7	0
Total	364	622	734	777	634	475	285	163	52

* No permits were granted to citizens of Cyprus or Malta.

Source: Statistics provided by UDI.

for different categories of migrants can also indicate a shift in attitude towards au pair placement, from a focus on cultural exchange to work.

Furthermore, while EU enlargement meant increased opportunities for mobility for EU and EEA nationals (i.e. nationals of the 27 Member States of the European Union plus Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein), the increased control of the outer borders of the Union has equally meant reduced opportunities for entry into European countries for third country nationals, meaning non-EU/EEA migrants. Today third country nationals are at the top of Norwegian au pair statistics. The large growth is in permits issued to Filipino au pairs - from 78 in 2000 to 2090 in 2008.

Table 3. Au pair permits granted 2000-2008 to 22 nationalities, showing first-time (new) permits and renewals. These represent the largest number of applicants as well as some that illustrate changes over time and possible emerging trends. The table has the nationality which had the highest number of au pairs in 2008 on top.

Country	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Philippines	78	89	107	213	344	663	959	1588	2090
Ukraine	20	28	42	81	132	252	291	229	157
Thailand	7	9	17	28	29	42	53	91	97
Russia	76	76	59	84	95	147	148	131	74
Peru	5	11	15	15	25	50	49	47	50
Indonesia	3	5	7	8	11	16	28	42	41
Brazil	5	5	4	10	23	32	35	49	38
Vietnam	1	1	1	6	8	7	15	18	29
China	8	13	7	14	16	18	16	22	28
Poland	58	123	167	167	138	110	70	54	23
USA	12	7	9	22	24	18	13	15	16
Romania	45	61	83	138	161	154	105	56	14
Former Serbia and Montenegro	4	8	12	12	16	20	18	14	13
Belarus	6	9	17	36	53	59	31	20	12
Bulgaria	13	15	29	41	50	39	19	9	4
Estonia	47	94	93	68	35	28	19	5	4
Lithuania	77	166	217	208	149	67	37	20	3
Czech Rep	18	23	19	36	29	25	8	4	2
Latvia	73	98	90	95	58	46	19	8	2
Sri Lanka	27	24	29	34	44	45	37	14	1
Slovakia	33	42	36	24	14	6	8	7	0
Other countries	73	90	106	157	166	179	194	186	143
Total	691	1004	1173	1514	1631	2035	2189	2651	2860

Source: Statistics provided by UDI.

Statistics conceal as well as reveal information: applicants are registered according to their nationality and not the country the person has applied from. Filipino au pairs arrive directly from the Philippines, but also from Singapore, Hong Kong, Denmark and the Netherlands. Similarly au pairs from Ukraine and Russia may have several periods as au pairs in different countries.

Thus, the statistics are important in that they show changing trends in the composition of au pair applicants, as is apparent in Table 3.

They can also provide some insight into the relationship and differences between au pairs and migrant domestic workers as categories in the wider national immigration system. I return to this issue below.

The majority of au pairs are female, and only a small proportion of applicants are men. In the period 2000-2008, 98% of the applicants were women. In 2008, 38 men were granted first-time au pair permits, compared to 1588 women.² This illustrates that au pairing is a form of female-dominated employment involving what has traditionally been the responsibility of women within the household, namely housework and care work (DeVault 1994; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Skilbrei 2005; Sogner and Telste 2005; Parreñas 2001a, 2008).

1.2 Au pairing in public opinion

The au pair scheme has been hotly debated in the Norwegian media over the last few years, and this evaluation was undertaken in a period where the legitimacy of the scheme has been both stridently attacked and defended. Spring 2009 has seen an intense debate on a broad set of issues related to au pair placement, initiated on 23 March with a front-page article in the newspaper *Dagsavisen* (“Wants to ban au pairs”/ “Vil forby au pairer”), which revealed that the *Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions* (LO) had sent a letter to the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion demanding substantial changes to the scheme. LO claimed that the au pair scheme has become a way to achieve cheap domestic workers for Norwegian families, and this situation results in an exploitation of au pairs. Without serious changes and greater control, they argued, the only solution would be to abolish the scheme.

The debate went on for a few days, and then in April it was resuscitated with a *Dagsavisen* front page. On April 14th, it was argued that “Norwegian au pair practice creates corruption” (“Norsk au pair-praksis skaper korrupsjon”). The article referred to the ban that the Philippine government put in place in the end of the 1990s to pre-

² Twenty-two of these 38 men were from the Philippines. The next group on the list is Ukrainians, with three male au pairs.

vent its citizens from going abroad as au pairs. As the Philippines have an emigration control, many Filipino au pairs today claim that they pay bribes to be able to leave the country to work abroad as au pairs. It was argued that by accepting the applications from Filipinos who want to travel directly from the Philippines to Norway, the Norwegian government is not respecting the decision of the Philippine state to prevent their citizens from becoming au pairs. Two days later, on 16 April, *Dagbladet* reported that representatives of the Labour Party (*Arbeiderpartiet*) and the Socialist Left Party (*Sosialistisk venstreparti*) were quoted as demanding that the Norwegian state respect the ban, at least until this evaluation was finished (“Wants to stop au pairs from the Philippines” / “Vil stoppe au pairer fra Filippinene”).

At the same time, there were those who argued that the above-mentioned views were to one-sidedly focused on the negative aspects of the scheme, and that this did not reflect the experiences of the majority of au pairs. In an article with the headline “The au pairs are satisfied” (“Au parene er fornøyde”) researcher Ragnhild Sollund and Leonor Vintervoll, leader of the *Philippine Women's Organization* in Norway, were interviewed in *Klassekampen* emphasising how the majority of au pairs experience their placement period in Norway as positive. Based on her research on au pairs, Sollund (2008, 2009a, 2009b) has actively participated in the debate, insisting that au pairs' rights should be improved, but that media treatment of the au pair scheme has often been excessively focussed on cases of exploitation. She has called for a more nuanced approach to the au pair scheme.

Leonor Vintervoll, argued in the interview that the majority of Filipino au pairs are happy with the way the scheme works, and that instead of preventing them from using the opportunity to come to Norway as au pairs, Norwegian authorities should rather work to create a bilateral agreement with the Philippine government to protect them. Vintervoll is also of the opinion that the cultural exchange aspects of the scheme should be strengthened, and that a strong message should be sent to both au pairs and host families that it is not a domestic worker programme.

The evaluation sees the scheme as a whole and is not concerned solely with Filipino au pairs. However, I return to the question of Filipino au pairs in later chapters as the great increase in Filipino au pairs justifies paying special attention to this group, also since the focus on their situation has caused great moral and political concern.

1.3 The objectives of the evaluation

The main objectives of the evaluation have been, as outlined above, to evaluate if the scheme is practised according to its original intentions and whether the changes in 2007 had generated the desired effects. The concrete changes introduced were:

- An increase in au pairs' monthly pay from NOK 3 000 to NOK 4 000;
- A requirement that the host families pay for language tuition up to NOK 6 000 per year;
- A standard contract for au pair employment and a circular³ stating the rights and obligations of the au pair and the host family were made mandatory parts of the application in addition to the work permit; and
- The period of notice was raised from 14 days to 1 month.

Furthermore, by making it mandatory to hand in three documents: a work permit application, a letter signed by both parties entitled Important information on rights and obligations for au pairs and their host families, and also the standardised contract from UDI; one endeavoured to make the regulations both clearer and more available to users of the scheme. The hope was that by making changes to the structural framework of the scheme, au pairs' rights would be improved and that such a revision of the application process would further limit potential abuse by prompting applicants and host families to take more consideration of the intentions and regulations of the scheme.

It has also been in the scope of this present evaluation, which was commissioned by UDI based on an initiative by the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, to see whether further changes are needed other than those already put in place in 2007. To consider this question it was UDI's preference/desire that, besides interviews with au pairs, host families and others who are involved with the scheme in different ways, the project should also include a comparison of the Norwegian case with how au pair placement is administered in three other European countries.

The basic objective of the evaluation is thus to give a comprehensive assessment of the au pair scheme: does it work according to its purpose, namely to offer young people the opportunity to experience cultural exchange by living in a family and potentially learning a language? What is working and what is not working within the framework of the scheme? What are the strategies of host families and au pairs? What happens in cases where there are conflicts between au pairs and host families? Another important set of questions is related to how contact is established between au pairs and host families: is it established through agencies, the Internet or personal networks?

There are many ambiguities associated with au pair placement today, both nationally and internationally. These are primarily related to the question of whether au pairing should be considered work or cultural exchange.

³This document is known as a circular or rundskriv. However, this is first and foremost a term used internally in UDI. Although intended as a technical term, I use it here to simplify the text by using it as a reference to the document entitled "Important information for au pairs and their host families", which au pairs and host families have to sign as of 2007.

Another relevant question is whether more control of this group of migrants will protect the original intentions of the agreement, or whether it is the intentions of au pair placement as defined in the European Agreement on “au pair” Placement that may need to be reconsidered. Finally, it is worth considering whether an exclusion of specific nationalities from the scheme or an abandonment of the formal scheme altogether will have the effect of solving the problems inherent in au pair placement today, or if this instead will only give rise to an unregulated market for care and domestic work.

The evaluation offers concrete suggestions for changes to the scheme, all related to the questions raised in this section and the coming chapters. While policy recommendations can be found in the Executive Summary and Chapter 8, the other chapters empirically substantiate the suggestions given.

1.4 Methodology and empirical data

Knowledge about how the scheme is practised in everyday life is necessary if one wants to uncover whether the au pair placement is practised according to its original intentions. This has implications for the methodology, and this evaluation was therefore designed as an interview-based qualitative study as this is the most suitable approach to identifying the motivations, strategies and experiences of au pairs and host families. During the course of the research 69 interviews were undertaken, and these include 21 interviews with au pairs, 20 with host families and 15 with representatives of UDI, the police and different organisations. In addition the immigration services in the UK, Denmark and Poland were contacted for the comparisons between schemes in Chapter 7. Because of the situation in Poland, where there is no formal scheme for au pairing, three interviews were undertaken in Warsaw: one with a researcher, another with a representative of an agency, and finally also an interview with Paweł Michniewicz, the Head of the Unit for Migration Policy in the Department of Migration of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

While I was interviewing people for the evaluation it became increasingly evident that one can pose the same question to an au pair, a host family or a case worker at UDI – but the answers will be very different. This might sound banal, but it brings to bear one of the greatest tensions in the scheme: Who is it for, only the au pairs or also the host families? For the practices of UDI it is the well-being and interest of the au pair that carry most importance, as the au pairs are the applicants and therefore the ones they relate to. The scheme is there to give young adults the opportunity to learn another language and culture. The needs of the host family are per se not of interest to the Directorate, whose responsibility is first and foremost to secure an efficient immigration management. Still, to be able to answer the question of whether the scheme

is practised according to its intentions, different categories of respondents had to be consulted. The host families are very important in this respect, as are other people who meet or come into contact with au pairs in their everyday lives.

In order to establish the motivations, strategies and experiences of au pairs, I have interviewed 21 current and former au pairs, all face to face either at Fafo, in cafés or other places chosen by the au pairs themselves. Contact was established through agencies, personal networks and the snowball method. They majority lived or had lived with families in Oslo, or Asker and Bærum. An au pair may stay with two or three different families during their two-year period in Norway, and three had also lived in smaller towns in the Oslo Fjord region. One had later moved to the West Coast to stay with a family there. Fifteen of them were currently working as au pairs, whereas six had previously been au pairs and were now working or studying in Norway. All of the latter were fluent and on an advance level in their knowledge of Norwegian. Only one of the au pairs interviewed was a man. He is now settled in Oslo, and although fluent in Norwegian, he preferred to speak English in the interview. One of the current au pairs did the interview in Norwegian (after six months here), and six others could speak with the children in the host family in Norwegian, but wanted to do the interview in English. Of the women working as au pairs at the time of the interview, one was interviewed with an interpreter as she preferred to speak Polish. Of those interviewed, five had been in Norway for one to two years, but found it difficult to learn the language. In two cases, former au pairs were identified by host families who still kept in touch with them. This method was not used with current au pairs, as it could create situations in which conducting the interview could have repercussions for them. The downside to this restriction is that it is not possible to see the interaction between the au pair and members of the host family, and the chance to compare the different experiences of au pairs and their hosts is lost.

To explore whether au pair placement is used according to its intentions, I also interviewed host families who were contacted through agencies and the snow-ball method. All in all there were 20 families. One person contacted me after she had heard Fafo was undertaking the evaluation. The locations of host families were more varied than with the au pairs, although half were living in Oslo, and Asker and Bærum. The Vestfold region is also well represented. Of the host families, 15 of the families had had two or more au pairs, but for five this was their first au pair. Of 20 respondents from the host families, five were men, two of whom were single fathers with full-time custody of their children, and a third man was divorced. Of the female respondents, two women were divorced. The rest of the respondents in this group were either married or cohabitants. Two of the host families had one parent who at one point had immigrated to Norway, and one family consisted of a couple who were married before their arrival here over 10 years ago. Only eight of 20 host families were interviewed face to face at Fafo, in their homes, at work or in cafés; the rest were interviewed over the phone. The reason for

this was that they either lived far away from Oslo or that they preferred to conduct the interview over the phone after work hours, and when their children had gone to bed. This affects the data, but since the aim of the research was more to understand how different respondents practise and experience the scheme rather than understanding the relationship between specific sets of au pairs and families, this weakness has been compensated for by comparing the data with background knowledge.

For both groups the limitation of the methods used is that it is difficult to access those who are using the scheme in a way that is not in accordance with the regulations. Minor breaches were reported by many respondents (such as working outside the family, paying the au pair extra to get more flexibility or to reward them extra for their efforts), but it is doubtful that those who seriously abuse or exploit au pairs – or au pairs who only use the au pair permit to enter the country – can be reached without having more time to actively pursue and contact respondents who fall into these categories. This was outside the scope, time frame and ethical framework of this specific evaluation.

In order to capture the opinions and experiences of the more professional segment of au pair agencies, and people working in the three most important national agencies, representatives from Atlantis Youth Exchange, Energy Au Pair and AURORA Norway were interviewed. In addition seven case workers and advisors at UDI, three police officers working directly with au pair cases in Oslo, and in Asker and Bærum, and three representatives of cultural or religious organisations were also interviewed. These interviews have served as complementary sources of information to the stories of au pairs and host families. Finally, in Chapter 7 I attempt a comparison between the au pair schemes in Norway, Denmark, Poland and the UK.

I have chosen to use longer narratives or extracts of interviews throughout the text as a means to highlight the complexities of the individual cases as well as discussing the issues they present in a more general manner. Quotes from interviews with host families and other Norwegian respondents have been translated from Norwegian to English, whereas most interviews with au pairs were done in English. Extracts are therefore direct quotes from transcripts.

The greatest challenge in writing this evaluation report has been both to make space for these different voices and at the same time keep the more overarching issues, brought up in public debates throughout the duration of the research, in mind. It is not given that everyone who has been interviewed will feel their views are fairly represented. This is because it has been my responsibility to analyse and generalise the empirical data, and although I use extracts of interviews to punctuate and highlight the issues raised in the evaluation, in the end the conclusions are necessarily based on an overall juxtaposition and blending together of a variety of empirical material.

In this qualitative evaluation generalisations have been made by looking for patterns in respondents' stories and analysing empirical data in relation to academic and public discourses on au pair placement, domestic work and migration. The comparison

between how different countries define and manage au pairing and domestic work furthermore sheds light on the role of au pair placement within the wider context of domestic work, and also gives some suggestions for how Norwegian authorities can improve the structural framework of au pairing.

1.5 A note on anonymity and sensitive data

It has been important to offer all respondents in the research anonymity, although they might find this unimportant themselves. To achieve this I have: a) changed the respondents names, b) avoided revealing the name and only established the region (in cases where there are very few au pairs each year from a given country), and c) avoided exposing where a person lives in Norway (if details of their story combined with the location could expose them).

While avoiding using names would be one strategy to preserve the anonymity of respondents, I have rather chosen to use names so that readers will find it easier to keep the different stories separate and to make the text more vivid.

These steps have been necessary to make sure that respondents can be certain they cannot be identified. Furthermore, I have chosen to write about certain themes in a very general way, e.g. the description of cultural brokers and individual agents, see Chapter 2. It is important to give insight into how the contact between au pairs and families are established without revealing the identity of those who work as intermediaries or, as I also have chosen to call them (in want of a better word), cultural brokers. That is because their activities are sometimes in a grey zone, where their activities most of the time are quite non-dramatic, but in some circumstances could be defined as exploitation. The realisation that respondents are involved in potentially criminal activities is in itself not reason enough to offer such individuals extra protection. Taking special care in hiding their identities is more about protecting those who have had their placement arranged by the cultural brokers as well as protecting other people in their network.

1.6 Structure of the report

In the next chapter, Chapter 2, I introduce the structural framework of the Norwegian au pair scheme. I discuss the changes of 2007 and what is experienced as problematic by au pairs, host families, UDI, police and agencies. In Chapter 3 I explore the different actors involved in creating a relationship between au pairs and host families, whereas Chapter 4 seeks to give insights into the scheme as au pairs experience it. Here both

benefits and negative aspects of au pair placement are examined. The case of Filipino au pairs is discussed separately in Chapter 5. The host families are the focus of Chapter 6, looking at the dynamics of why they want to have au pairs, what they expect and what they think about the scheme as cultural exchange. Chapter 7 makes a comparison between au pairs schemes in Norway, Denmark, Poland and the UK. In Chapter 8 I summarise the findings of the evaluation and give policy recommendations for how the scheme can be improved. The conclusion draws the arguments of the evaluation together in the final analysis.

2 The Norwegian au pair scheme: Framework and practices

“Au pair is a work arrangement that allows young people to increase their language ability and gain greater knowledge of Norway and Norwegian culture by living with a Norwegian family. In return, the au pairs carry out tasks such as housework and childminding for their host family.

The aim of the au pair arrangement is to facilitate cultural exchange.”

UDI web information (2009)⁴

An important question to be answered by the evaluation is whether or not public administration (from UDI to the police, the tax authority, etc.), au pairs and host families come into contact with, is experienced as fragmented and incoherent in their administration of the scheme. Another question is whether the changes introduced in 2007 had any effect. To answer these questions, and moreover to fully evaluate the au pair scheme, it is necessary to define and critically assess the structural framework it is based on. In this chapter I give an introduction to the regulations and thus the framework within which the au pair scheme is practised today in Norway. The original intentions of the European Agreement on “au pair” Placement are part of this framework, and these will be explained below.

2.1 The European Agreement on “au pair” Placement

“Au pair” placement is the temporary reception by families, in exchange for certain services, of young foreigners who come to improve their linguistic and possibly professional knowledge as well as their general culture by acquiring a better knowledge of the country where they are received.

Extract from Article 2 (1) of the European Agreement on “au pair” Placement

⁴Quote is from: <http://www.udi.no/templates/Tema.aspx?id=4661>. Page consulted 25 May 2009.

Norway has signed the European Agreement on “au pair” Placement which was ratified by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg in 1969. The purpose of the agreement was to attempt “to settle a problem of ever-increasing magnitude, as the number of young persons going abroad to improve their knowledge of languages has risen constantly since the end of the Second World War”.⁵ Au pair placement is defined in the agreement as cultural exchange, whereby a young adult gets the opportunity to learn another language and culture through being included as a member of the family in the host country. In compensation she or he is expected to do light housework and help with childcare.

In the aftermath of the Second World War both the immobility and mobility of youth was thus defined as a social problem demanding international regulation, and au pair placement was thought of as one possible remedy. Young people had little money and by living in someone else’s household as a family member, they would be able to live abroad without large investments. It was believed that living with a family would offer protection for young people living away from their parents. ‘Au pair’ literally means “equal to” or “on a par” and was to indicate that the au pair should not be treated as a domestic worker, but as a family member.

Furthermore, an inherent principle in the agreement is that cultural exchange can prevent intolerance between European citizens: as early as 1969 it was acknowledged that “au pair placement’ constitutes in the Member States an important social problem with legal, moral, cultural and economic implications, which transcends national boundaries and thereby takes on a European complexion”. It was also recognised at the time that au pair placement would need regulation in a way that only national authorities could offer. It thus appears that the agreement was intended to regulate the situation of young adults who did domestic work so that they could benefit from their period of placement.

The current character of youth migration in Western Europe has radically changed the context for the au pair placement, relative to that which was sought to be regulated by the agreement. In the 40 years that have passed, much has changed in European societies in terms of gender roles and equality, regulation of labour and not least when it comes to (inter)national migration flows. Family structure and the ethnic composition of European countries have changed radically, but the European Agreement on “au pair” Placement, however, has not been substantially amended to incorporate the reality of the societal changes that have taken place since 1969. An important change that has occurred since 1969 is the transformations of patterns of youth mobility – whether it is in the form of travel for leisure, or migration for work, education or as a consequence of transnational relationships. Au pair placement was regulated according

⁵ As earlier noted, all quotes from the European Agreement are taken from: <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/068.htm>.

to the conditions governing youth's opportunities for physical and socio-economic mobility in the period after World War II. Since then European youth and young adults have experienced changing conditions for their mobility, depending on the region they were living in.

The 2004 expansion of the EU is a good example of how increased mobility for some groups (like Polish and Romanian nationals) means that barriers are raised for other groups. The current immigration control of the external borders of the EU/EEA area produces "involuntary immobility" (cf. Carling 2002) for migrants who come from third or non-EU/EEA countries, but who would like to live and work in Europe. The au pair scheme has become one of the few possibilities that, for instance, Ukrainians, Russians and Filipinos have for entering Norway. The gendered nature of the scheme, as by and large a migration pathway for young women, also demonstrates how men and women have dissimilar opportunities for migration. They therefore have to use different strategies to succeed if they want to move to Norway. For Eastern European men, work in construction has been one of few opportunities to obtain work in other countries, for female migrants from third countries domestic and care work have become important niches in the global labour market (cf. Anderson 2000; Cox 2006; Gavanas 2006; Isaksen 2001; Parreñas 2001a).

Researchers, activists and politicians today are questioning whether the original intentions of the agreement have any relevance or can even be defended in a time when migrant domestic workers – legal or undocumented, au pairs or otherwise – have come to represent a new global underclass who have few or no rights in host countries (Anderson 2006; Hess and Puckhaber 2004; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007; Parreñas 2008; Sollund 2009b). The last few years have seen a significant increase in au pairs and migrant domestic workers in many European countries, and au pair placement is at present enmeshed in global discourses on immigration, and domestic and care work.

2.2 The legal framework of the Norwegian au pair scheme

The European Agreement on "au pair" Placement was ratified by the Norwegian state 29 April 1971. Today a person wanting to become an au pair in Norway has to be between 18 and 30 years of age. As long as the application has been submitted before the person has turned 30, a work permit can be granted for up to two consecutive years. The application should be submitted to the Norwegian embassy or appropriate foreign mission office in the applicant's home country or current country of residence. Today the application consists of three different mandatory forms: an application for work permit, a standard employment contract for au pairs, and the circular. The two latter

forms became compulsory as a consequence of the evaluation of the au pair scheme undertaken by UDI that preceded the 2007 changes and have to be signed by both the host families and the au pair.

Most importantly, the basis for the au pair work permit is what UDI calls a “concrete offer of employment” from a host family. Hosts can be married couples, cohabitants or partners with or without children, or single fathers or mothers with children. A single-person household cannot have an au pair. One of the hosts might be a foreign national, but then the other should/must have been born and raised in Norway. It is illegal to stay with relatives as an au pair, and it is a general rule that the au pair cannot be of the same nationality as anyone in their host family. An exception to this rule can be made if the family member of the same nationality has lived in Norway for ten years or more. The reason for this is that Norwegian should be the language spoken by the family in everyday life so that the au pair can learn the language as part of their interaction with their hosts. It is believed that 10 years is a reasonable period of time for foreigners to be able to pass on knowledge about Norwegian culture and society to others. Thus, hosts are not required to be Norwegian, however it must be possible for the au pair to acquire good knowledge of the Norwegian language and daily life by living with the host family.

Host families are not allowed to have more than one au pair at the time, and they must spend time with the au pair in daily life (sharing meals, doing activities together, etc.) According to how UDI interprets and implements the regulations, the work the au pair does should be secondary to the purpose of facilitating cultural exchange. The au pair is to have a separate room in the house or apartment, but should not live separately from the family (in a different building or address). She or he must live with the host family for the entire period of the contract. As the scheme is today the au pair is not allowed to live-out while on an au pair permit. The au pair’s monthly pay is set to minimum NOK 4 000, and in addition she or he is entitled to free board and lodging. They pay tax for the payment they receive, and also for the free board and lodging. During their employment period they are covered by the Norwegian national health insurance.

The tasks or responsibilities of the au pair are so-called “light domestic work”, childcare and also pet care. The au pair cannot work for more than one host family at a time and is not allowed to do other work, paid or not. His or her normal working hours must not exceed five hours per day, and maximum of 30 hours per week; thirty hours is the absolute limit whether or not they are offered extra pay. The pay is not in fact supposed to be dependent on the hours the au pair works – whether it is 1 or 30

hours. NOK 4000 is the minimum monthly pay, and host families are free to pay au pairs more, but it does not entitle them to ask or demand that the au pair works more than 30 hours per week.

Each week the au pair is entitled to a minimum of 48 hours of leisure time. This free period should never be less than 24 hours, but as a general rule it should be continuous. Au pairs have, as other employees in Norway, the right to 25 days of holiday per year.

Au pairs are obliged to pay taxes, and there are two ways in which this can be done: either the au pair pays it herself or himself, or the host family deducts the expected amount of tax from his or her income and submits it to the tax authorities. This is practised differently depending on the municipality the au pair is living in, and most host families emphasised that they found it quite easy to find a way to deal with this.

The host family has to provide the au pair with the opportunity to take part in Norwegian language tuition and leisure activities. This was also recommended before the changes in 2007, but following these UDI made it mandatory for the host families to pay up to NOK 6000 per year for language courses.

The formal application process takes place after the au pair and host family have established contact. In this process the two parties potentially negotiate the tasks of the au pair in the household and fill in and sign the documents that officially govern the relationship between the au pair, the family and Norwegian authorities. I will shortly describe the different documents involved, namely the application for work permit, the standardised au pair contract, and the circular.

Even before the changes to the au pair scheme of October 2007, UDI had developed a standardised contract for au pairs, but it was not compulsory to use it. Agencies would have their own contracts, often more specific than the UDI version. However, one of the changes in 2007 was that UDI made a new standardised contract which is mandatory for everyone to use, and it is illegal to make any amendments or additions to this contract that are in conflict with the au pair regulations. Any additional contracts between the host family and au pair cannot breach any of the rules laid down by UDI.

In addition, au pairs applying through the Norwegian embassy in the Philippines have to fill in a form called the "General questionnaire". This document is bilingual in English and Tagalog.⁶ Applicants from China (and a few other countries) are interviewed by embassy staff members who then write a summary of their impression of the applicants to attach to the application papers sent to UDI.

Officially there are no restrictions on which countries applicants may come from (as is the case in the UK, for example), but there are separate rules for applicants from

⁶The embassy used to verify birth and baptism certificates as well as proof of education as part of the application process. However, this was very time-consuming, and in addition, the number of forgeries dropped off after some time, so they have discontinued this procedure.

EU/EEA countries. They are not registered through the official scheme any longer, but they still have to apply for a work permit. For third country nationals, the granting and rejection of au pair work permits follow the general immigration policy of UDI. The conditions of return are considered in the processing of all applications that do not constitute grounds for permanent residence; this also includes au pair permits. It is in fact a requirement for obtaining a work permit as an au pair that he or she will return to the country of origin when their permit has come to an end, and “the conditions for a return must be in place” at the time of the application. The issue of return is thus a decision based on the probability of return of specific nationalities as well as a consideration of the individual circumstances of each applicant. In addition, the most common reasons for rejections are that: a) the host family has given information in the contract that demonstrates that they do not intend to abide by the intentions of the scheme or that they have not properly understood the rules; b) the (au pair) applicant himself or herself will seemingly use the scheme for other purposes than working as an au pair or if there is suspicion that the au pair stands the chance of being ‘imported’ for working illegally in Norway; c) one or both of the host families have the same nationality or originally come from the same country as the applicant; or d) the host family withdraws the offer of employment because they feel the application process has taken too long, and they have found another au pair who can start sooner or another childcare alternative.

This part has been about the legal and structural framework of the au pair scheme. In the next sections areas for possible improvements of the scheme are discussed. These considerations are based on interviews with au pairs, host families and the other respondents.

UDI’s information services

UDI has an extensive information service. The UDI home pages provide applicants and host families with information about the au pair scheme in Norwegian and English, where all the documents necessary in the application process have been made available. The Information Service and Employer Service (often used by host families) are available both by telephone and e-mail. While one on the web resource is warned about long waiting times for the phone services, it is assured that e-mail enquiries will be answered within three working days. In addition, there is the service centre in UDI’s premises in Oslo where people can seek advice by appearing in person.

All respondents were asked if they had ever used the UDI information pages or contacted UDI information services by phone; if yes, at what stage in the process they had consulted these services, and whether or not they had found the information helpful or confusing. Very few answered they had not utilised these resources at all, but some of the host families who had used agencies had received information through the

information they received from these organisations when registering, looking for an au pair, or during the application process. The agencies help host families and au pairs with paperwork and can thus advise them if documents have been filled in incorrectly.

For agency users UDI may not be their preferred source of information, but applicants and host families will often be dependent on contacting UDI if they have questions about the application process. Acquiring information about the rights and obligations of au pairs and host families, and the regulation of the scheme, was in the respondents' experience relatively straightforward. Getting information about one's own application and the case-processing time of specific cases can be a very different experience.

When problems occur

The absence of any support mechanisms beyond UDI and the police is strongly felt among au pairs, those who are professionally in contact with them, as well as host families who have employed au pairs who were already in Norway, but who had been exploited or dismissed in a dishonest way. It is a major step for au pairs to seek help from the police or to contact UDI when an emergency arises or when their relationship with the host family has become problematic.

To establish whether au pairs are using UDI's Information Service for this purpose and to get an idea of the nature and extent of the enquiries received, it was decided for the purposes of the evaluation to register all calls to the Information Service over a period of three weeks in March 2009 (see Table 4 for details, overleaf). The registration revealed that most enquiries dealt with specific questions about visa status, au pairs who are in Denmark (but who want to come to Norway), and au pairs' rights.

For the au pairs interviewed, UDI was not the first place they would turn (to) when they had questions or were considering changing families because of the way they were treated by the host family. Since UDI manages their work permits it can be difficult to trust contacting them about the work situation. For an au pair, contacting the police will similarly only be seen as an option when they experience serious exploitation.

Thus, UDI as an organisation might have good intentions in wanting to provide information for this group, but this is not a guarantee that au pairs will see this as a de facto resource. It is also questionable whether it should be UDI's role to advise au pairs beyond concrete questions about regulations.

However, there are many cases where there is no emergency, but where the au pair simply would like to get advice or talk to someone outside the host family and their social network. Today au pairs can use religious communities or national (migrant) organisations, but there is not anyone with the specific responsibility for guiding them through Norwegian bureaucracy, helping them to get in touch with different

Table 4 The number of e-mail and phone enquiries related to au pairs answered by employees at UDI's Information Service during the period of registration.*

REGISTRATION OF INFORMATION SERVICE ENQUIRIES – AU PAIR CASES				
TYPE OF CASE	Applicant (the au pair)	Host family	Acquaintances/ Relatives/ Friends	Au pair agency
Enquiries related to the au pair's situation				
Questions about the au pair's rights	13	9	2	3
Change of family	4	13	2	0
Questions about visa status (both first-time application and renewal)	28	63	11	33
Eviction by host family	0	2	0	0
Abuse / exploitation	0	0	1	0
Questions made by host families	4	11	0	0
Application for new residence or work permit on different grounds	11	6	2	0
Au pairs from Denmark who want to come to Norway	9	13	1	0
Miscellaneous	5	24	6	1
Total number of enquiries = 272	74	141	22	35

* The numbers do not include enquiries made to the UDI Employer Service, to whom most host families call when they have questions.

services, and reporting back to the police and UDI about particular concerns related to the au pair scheme.

Comments to the mandatory application documents

The changes made to the scheme in 2007 were outlined above. Here I discuss one of the most important steps taken at the time, namely to change the application process by introducing a compulsory circular and a standardised employment contract for au pairs in addition to the work permit application. This has imposed an extra reminder for au pairs and host families about the content of the regulations, in other words their rights and obligations. This was necessary and seems to work to the satisfaction of both parties. Both the work-permit application and the au pair contract today are bilingual documents, but although the circular exists in separate English and Norwegian versions, the two languages have not been merged into one document. This has resulted

in some situations where the host families have filled in the Norwegian circular. The au pair hands in the application at the Norwegian embassy in his or her home country, then signs a document he or she (potentially) does not understand.

One could argue that it is their individual responsibility to understand what they sign, but this is nevertheless an area for possible improvement. Also, the process of getting the application to the embassy is in itself time-consuming. Au pairs may not want to delay the process, as asking to make changes to the documents at this point may entail having to send papers back and forth between the au pair and the host family before a new application can be submitted again.

At the top of the compulsory employment contract for au pairs it is written that “the application must be filled in clearly and in full”. It is nevertheless the case that many host families fill in the contract in a rudimentary way. According to UDI case workers it is not uncommon for point 5 (*Arbeidsoppgaver*/responsibilities) to be left blank. This is also the case for point 14 of the contract, which gives the host family an opportunity to provide additional information, and whether they will pay the travel to and from the au pair’s home country. Thus, a significant proportion of au pair contracts lack a description of what the responsibilities of the au pair will be, and whether or not the host family will contribute towards his or her travel to and from Norway.

Renewal of permit and changing families

A problematic aspect of the scheme relating to the application process, but which neither was discussed nor changed in 2007, is the issue of permit renewal and applications for changing families. The au pair permit is given for one year at a time, with the opportunity to renew the permit to stay with the same family or apply for a work permit to stay with another family. In Fig 1 (see Introduction) one can see how many permits issued each year are renewals, the average is 58%. When it is a renewal for working with the same family, the au pair can continue working with the family on the condition that the application is delivered to the nearest police station one month before the previous permit expires. In this case the au pair can continue working with the host family without having to wait for approval of the application from the authorities. The police will handle the application, but if they have doubts about the applicant, host family or other issues, it is forwarded to UDI. The process can be more cumbersome and problematic when an au pair wants to change from one family to another, because when they stop working for the first family they are not allowed to start working for someone else before a new work permit has been issued. Renewals or applications for changing families may take shorter or longer time than the first-time application, but in the worst cases au pairs have waited for five months or more. Although there are statistics for the average time spent on applications received by UDI, these are not applicable to renewals since many of these applications are administered

by the police. While it might have felt like a long period of time to wait for a first-time application to be processed, now the au pair is in a situation where he or she is already in Norway and might not have any funds to get them through the waiting period. The case-processing time for a temporary work permit can also take a long time and is therefore not a functional alternative as it stands today.

During the period they are 'between' families they cannot work for anyone, and although new host families can offer au pairs to stay with them as a guest, they are not allowed to ask them to start working or to pay them before the permit has been granted. A different but even more stressful situation is if the au pair does not immediately find a new host family after having been dismissed. They have a window of three to four weeks from when notice has been given until they have to find a new family. When the application has been handed in, there is no problem in terms of residency. They are allowed to stay while the application is being processed, and most often permits are renewed. However, although UDI stresses in their public information that au pairs will not be expelled from the country in such situations, and that they will be given time to find another family, I have spoken to au pairs who had not understood this and who had been afraid to contact UDI or the police in a difficult situation as they thought it would have implications for their permit. This accentuates a challenging aspect of the au pair scheme: the permit is individual (as it is given to the au pair), but it is dependent on an employer. This creates an unequal power-balance in the relationship between au pairs and host families that is not in harmony with the notion of being 'on equal terms'. If a conflict arises during the period the au pair is in-between families, she or he can experience being at the mercy of the host family. Apart from UDI and the police he or she may have few places to turn for support.

Should it be compulsory to use an au pair agency?

An issue that was considered in the internal UDI evaluation preceding the 2007 changes was the question of whether (or not) it should be compulsory for au pairs and host families to use au pair agencies, as a way to control their relationship and protect the former. This could be an alternative to the current situation where au pairs have few opportunities to complain about the host family, but as was pointed out at the time, this would demand that the agencies be controlled by a form of external quality assurance. Who should be responsible for this and what would the criteria for the agencies be?

Presently, less than 20% of au pairs use national agencies and even fewer use Internet agencies. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, agencies in Norway do not charge au pairs for using their services – rather it is the families who have to pay for finding an au pair. They are dependent on giving the families good service to keep them as clients, and although they generally seem to offer good service for au pairs too, it is ultimately the families who are their source of income.

Protection and support mechanisms beyond UDI and the police are lacking, but it is not certain that agencies can fulfil this responsibility in all its aspects.

The terminology of au pair placement

An issue that was not considered in relation to the 2007 changes was whether au pairing is still to be considered cultural exchange or if it should be considered work. The definitions and terminology of au pair placement are ambiguous on this point. The question of whether au pairing should be defined as work or as cultural exchange represents a controversy in discussions on au pair placement and also in how au pairs and host families practise the scheme. This uncertainty is partly due to how au pairing is defined in the European Agreement, but is further emphasised by the terminology used by UDI.

Both the information about the au pair scheme and the descriptions of the relationship between au pairs and host families authored by UDI endorse a double message about what au pairing is. It is not work but cultural exchange, yet au pairs apply for a work permit, sign an employment contract, have to pay taxes, and have the right to a holiday in accordance with national labour laws. Furthermore, on the Directorate web pages, au pairs can read that “you may not work for other employers than your host family, and you may not combine work as an au pair with other work”. That is, the term “work” is used for the arrangement and the host family is labelled “employer” rather than using terms that are in accordance with the current intention of the scheme, i.e. that au pair placement is something other than work. The responsibilities of the au pair are described as work, and the relationship they have to their hosts is defined as employment. In the contract the au pair’s monthly allowance is furthermore defined as “pocket money/ pay” (this is point 3 in the contract). In the proposition for the new Immigration Act, it is suggested that au pair placement should no longer be defined as work. The question is whether this is a step in the right direction or it will only enhance the inherent ambiguities of the scheme.

The language of the mandatory documents used in the applications process reflects the ambivalence of definitions also inherent in the structural framework of the scheme. This is a problematic aspect of the current scheme as the application process and language of the compulsory documents inform the practice of au pairs and host families. It is therefore important to establish what problems the legal framework itself represents before suggesting solutions for improving the scheme.

2.3 Conclusion

The Norwegian au pair scheme is regulated according to the European Agreement for “au pair” Placement, but is practised according to a specific national framework that has been described and discussed in this chapter. In the next chapters, I explore the practical and empirical implications of the scheme, first looking at how relationships are established between au pairs and host families, before examining the experiences of people within these two categories in the three subsequent chapters.

3 Global connections: The role of agencies, individual agents and social networks in au pair placement

One of the questions this evaluation has sought to explore is how au pairs and host families establish a relationship. Is it through agencies, individual agents, cultural brokers or social networks? What are the motivations and benefits of being an intermediary? Few host families use agencies based in Norway, only about 20 per cent of the au pairs have found their host families in this way. International web-based au pair agencies are gaining popularity.

Other ways of finding an au pair were to either using an agency based in Norway, but some had also met their au pair on holiday or in the homes of friends and family. Some host families had contacted agencies in other countries directly. Some reported having paid a considerable sum (compared to their monthly salary) to an agent or an agency in the country they applied from. Others had paid individuals they had encountered (whom I here choose to call cultural brokers), who possessed the contacts they needed. Family and friends, or social networks, are becoming increasingly important as recruiters of au pairs.

Beyond the supply and demand situation au pairs and host families represent, there is also a broader context of international agents and agencies that are sensitive to the needs of the domestic work market in various countries. Below I discuss these different strategies and actors within the field of au pair placement.

3.1 National au pair agencies

Today there are few professional au pair agencies in Norway, and a handful of smaller, registered actors in the field. Professional agencies are well organised with two to three employees or more, while smaller agencies generally are one-person businesses. The latter category tends to focus on promoting specific nationalities, either Ukrainian, Russian or Filipino au pairs. A consequence of the 2007 changes seems to have been that at least two such smaller agencies have disappeared from the market, as the bureaucracy has become more demanding for them, and thus the income does not match

the work they have to do. Four small agencies were contacted by phone and e-mail on several occasions, without success. Representatives of three professional agencies were interviewed: Atlantis Youth Exchange, Energy Au Pair and AURORA Norway. Of the three, only Atlantis is a member of the *International Au Pair Association* (IAPA).⁷

Professional as well as smaller agencies have a network of agencies in other countries. This network is important to the agencies, because they see it as crucial to be able to verify the persons who seek to become au pairs. In addition, the three professional agencies interviewed all think this contact is very important so that they can be assured the au pair does not pay a large amount of money to the agency in their home country. The income of professional agencies in Norway comes from the host families, while the au pairs normally spend a smaller sum to cover the administration costs of the agency in the country they apply from. This also applies when au pairs are already in Norway and contact an agency because they want to change families: it is the families who pay the costs for establishing a relationship with an au pair.

The au pairs interviewed who had come through an agency were generally more satisfied with the cultural exchange part of the au pair experience. There is also reason to believe that they have a better safety net than those who come individually or through social networks, as agencies claim they will negotiate between the au pair and the family in cases of conflict. They are also familiar with what can be seen as inherent tension in the relationship between au pairs and hosts. Agencies argue that many host families, in particular the first time they have an au pair, often naively imagine everything will run smoothly from day one. They have not taken into consideration that the person who has just arrived might be used to very different relationships within the family, ways of looking after children or cleaning the house – and might also feel very homesick. Communication problems can occur frequently in the first period as not all hosts speak English fluently, and many are surprised when the au pair's English skills are limited.

If communication and language become a great challenge in the relationship between host family and au pair, the policy of the agencies towards both parties is to suggest different ways of dealing with the problems that have surfaced. If this does not work out, they will find a new au pair for the family and a new family for the au pair. Sometimes the lack of personal chemistry is the reason people do not fit together, but agencies, au pairs and host families pointed to stories of abuse and exploitation by hosts, violation of contract and placement rules on both sides, and irresponsible behaviour in relation to children by au pairs. However, according to the agencies these stories are the exception rather than the rule. If there is an indication that an au pair has acted

⁷ See: <http://www.iapa.org/>. On their home page one can read that IAPA is “the global trade association for qualified au pair agencies and companies, actively engaged in the au pair industry. [...] IAPA does NOT arrange au pair placements - IAPA members do!” Page consulted 1 June 2009.

recklessly or has been gravely negligent, takes no interest in the responsibilities he or she is supposed fulfil, or shows little knowledge of childcare, the agency might decide that it would be irresponsible of them to send this au pair to another family. Similarly, if they find that a host family breaks the regulations of the scheme or abuses the au pair, they might avoid doing business with this family again.

In serious cases of misconduct (also when not reported to the police) they will try to prevent them from getting an au pair from the agency in the future.⁸ Are agencies based in Norway necessarily a guarantor of au pairs' safety? As one woman working in an agency stated, "I doubt the most abusive families would use an agency". Her comment points to the role agencies play in offering a much needed minimum degree of control of the relationship between host families and au pairs.

Those au pairs interviewed who had experienced abuse and traumatic relationships with host families had been socially isolated and left to their own devices to deal with their problems. In their experience, there was no one they could turn to for support or help. One of the positive aspects of agencies' practice is that they offer a hotline (*vakttelefon*) au pairs can use 24 hours a day. This provides those au pairs who use agencies with access to support that those who arrived in Norway by other means do not have.

3.2 International web-based companies

Organised by a similar principle as national agencies, web-based companies are somewhat different than their local counterparts. It is becoming increasingly popular to register with international web-based au pair agencies. Among the respondents there were six who had used such agencies, but neither these nor other interviewees had stories about people who had had negative experiences with Internet agencies.

Those who had not used them were asked if they considered this solution, but most had not as they perceived it as risky. This was more a matter of general distrust than actual experience, and the respondents who had not used online agencies did not have detailed information about how such agencies worked.

In two cases host families, who had contacted agencies in other countries directly, had experienced that the au pair they received had been a different person than the one they had spoken with on the phone. In the talks they had with them before signing the contract, they had spoken to au pairs with a medium level of English. When the au

⁸ UDI is not allowed to register information about host families because of restrictions of the Data Personality Act (*personopplysningsloven*). Also, since it is the au pair who is the applicant, information about families are only available through the files of the applicants.

pair arrived, however, they realised she or he could not communicate in English and in both cases the host family believed that a representative of the agency had posed as the au pair.

This stands in contrast to the experiences of families who had used the one of larger web-based companies. Rather surprisingly, the most popular online agencies seem to offer as good a service as other channels for recruitment of au pairs.

3.3 Cultural brokers, individual agents and social networks

Another category of people involved in recruiting au pairs or offering access to host families are individual agents as well as brokers who act as mediators between networks of au pairs and host families. To start with the simplest way this works: a woman or a man has been working as an au pair in a family in Norway, and when their period is close to expiring either the family asks if they know someone who could fill their place, or they have friends or acquaintances in their home country who ask if there would be a possibility they could put in a good word for them so they could replace their friend. This is very common. It also happens, and this was particularly widespread in the case of Filipino au pairs, that a relative who has settled in Norway is approached by colleagues, neighbours, friends or family saying they need an au pair and asking if they know someone suitable. Or, an aunt, sister or cousin approach different people in their network to try to help their relatives get the opportunity to come to Norway as an au pair. Sometimes the relation between the future au pair and the person who is establishing a connection with a host family is less intimate, a friend of a friend or someone she or he has met accidentally in Singapore or Hong Kong.

One au pair that I have had contact with over a longer period of time, Claudia, told me after a few meetings that a friend of hers had become involved in a very difficult situation as she had paid a person who was already working as an au pair in Norway (and that she did not know well in advance) NOK 10,000 to have access to the family she was now with. She was struggling to pay off her debts to this other au pair and was afraid to tell anyone. I told Claudia that what she described was illegal and that she should tell her friend to go to the police. She explained that her friend was afraid of ruining her relationship to the host family and for the consequences this would have for herself. Both her hosts were lawyers as were the other woman's. Snitching on the person who had received the money for finding her work would thus put her own situation at risk, as she presumed as lawyers her hosts would not want her in the household any longer if she told them what she had done.

The underlying issue of this story is also that au pairs whose networks mainly consist of persons from their home country may worry about the repercussions and gossip they might experience within their families and in the community if they snitch on someone else who is breaking the law (cf. Rafael 1997; Guy 2005). Because their networks are crucial in their access to mobility, migration and work, it can have serious consequences to break with the loyalty one is supposed to exhibit to other Filipinos. This is not to say, however, that this is common to the experience of all au pairs from the Philippines, but it is necessary to acknowledge the power kin and social networks have on their migration – for good and bad. It is reasonable to ask whether social and kin networks are mainly a positive factor in the life of au pairs, or whether networks for some also can cause risky situations.

Moreover, it is not only for au pairs that networks play a key role. Many host families also rely on their friends and family for establishing connections with au pairs, and for both groups information about what an au pair and a host family should be or do often comes from people in their networks rather than UDI's information services. It is important to separate between host families who live in areas with a high density of au pairs, or whose socio-economic position will make them more likely to consider an au pair, and those who do not have access to the same kind of knowledge from their networks. Some of the host families interviewed did not know anyone else who had an au pair. Similarly, there are many au pairs who only get to know other au pairs and people from their home country after they have been in Norway for a while. Those who come with a wish or intention to stay in Norway after the au pair period is finished, either to study or work, might not seek such contact as they invest more in learning Norwegian since they see this as the key to their future opportunities. However, contact with other nationals did not seem to impact their will or ability to learn Norwegian among current and former au pairs from the Balkans or Eastern Europe. Of those interviewed from these regions, a handful had previous knowledge of Norwegian before arriving in the country, because they had studied Scandinavian languages before their arrival. Becoming an au pair was thus part of their strategy to practise Norwegian and get to know the culture in a different way than the majority in the group. For this category, it was often university staff at home with connections to Norway who had suggested possible host families for them.

Individuals who establish contact between Norwegian families and potential au pairs are in many ways cultural brokers. The cultural broker thus acts as an intermediary and is normally a well-connected individual. These are often individuals who were born and raised in Norway, but who have one or both parents who were not; or they are persons born abroad who have lived for a long time in Norway. Common to these persons is that they are well integrated into Norwegian society and well connected to Filipino or Eastern European transnational communities. Some do it for free, and others who have registered their activity might take a fee just to cover the costs of phone

calls, for example, and the time they have spent on the process. Host families might feel that this makes the selection process 'safer', as they then get someone their contact knows – or at least in this way can get some information about the au pair via their networks. Another possibility is that the intermediary uses an agent in Asia to find au pairs and in this way makes sure that the families get a person with good references from former employers in Hong Kong or Singapore.

3.4 Conclusion

Matching au pairs and families can happen in a number of ways. Often an au pair and a host family find each other through social networks and chain referral; others prefer to use agencies because they find it safer. Also, national agencies assist (primarily) host families with completing paperwork and often also work as a bridge to UDI for the families and applicants.

It is more complicated to get reliable information about online and international agencies and the persons I have chosen to call (by lack of a better words) cultural brokers and individual agents. Although some meet by accident, the majority of au pairs and host families meet through their social networks, and increasingly through cultural brokers and individual agents. Taken as a whole, au pairs' and hosts' social networks seem to offer the most popular sites for establishing contact. However, social networks do not always work to protect au pairs, and it should be kept in mind that relatives and individuals in the au pairs' extended social networks can be more concerned with their own profits rather than the welfare of the people they are matching.

There are also individuals, in Norway or in other countries, who make a business out of establishing contact between au pairs and host families. Au pairs may pay a considerable sum to them for the contacts they possess, and in extreme cases, this can be characterized as exploitation.

Apart from this latter category where one can find individuals who may straddle a grey area between legal and illegal activities, it is difficult to draw conclusions about which recruitment method is best or that offers most protection for au pairs and host families. An au pair who met his or her host family at a beach in Thailand might be very happy about her situation, and another person who found their hosts through a national agency might experience exploitation.

More important than aiming to control how au pairs and families meet and establish a relationship would be the establishment of better mechanisms than what is available for them today, for dealing with the problems that can potentially arise when au pairs have already arrived in Norway.

4 Au pairs

Au pairing is a little bit like hitch-hiking; it's risky business.

Host Mikael

Au pairs come to Norway with expectations and strategies that vary greatly. For some the opportunity to learn a language and get to know another culture is very important; for others it is an exciting opportunity to meet new friends or possibly a partner. Young men and women chose this kind of placement for different reasons: as a gap year or “sabbatical” period to get a break from life in their home country, a way to learn language so that one can apply for a job or continue studying in Norway or at home at a later stage. There are also those for whom the au pair period is an opportunity to work abroad, and finally there are those who in a long-term perspective would like to settle in Norway. The latter group might be health professionals or have other kinds of qualifications they wish to get recognition of, or they are looking for a life partner. With the increase in the number of au pairs and the changes in the most important countries of origin, the motivations and strategies have also become more diversified.

Whatever their initial aspirations and expectations, au pairs' experiences can differ from what they had imagined au pair placement would be like. This is not to say that this difference between imagination and reality is always negative: a person who has worked as a maid in Hong Kong, who has been used to long working hours, harsh employers and who had expected the same situation working as an au pair in Norway, can become positively surprised about the relationship to the host family. Yet, another person who has worked in Singapore as a nanny, but who had a good relationship with her employers, might be very disappointed about how the host family treats her in Norway. Finally, both Eastern European and Asian au pairs who arrive in Norway with higher education, who are looking forward to their au pair period as a time when they can reorient themselves as to what they want to do in the future, or come to learn a Scandinavian language they can use in their professional careers later, might feel they are being treated as a domestic worker and thus become dissatisfied with their situation.

I have chosen these examples to give a preliminary introduction to some of the variety in experiences found among au pairs. In this chapter I will further introduce empirical data focussing on the experiences of au pairs. Below I will explore au pairs' strategies, positive and negative experiences with host families, and exemplify au pairs' perspectives through longer narratives.

4.1 What is a good host family?

An important question for understanding au pairs' experiences is to look at what they expect from their host families. What is a good host family? Are there any common attributes of what characterises good host families? I return below to au pairs' expectations of what au pairing will be like.

A good relationship between the au pair and the host family seen from the former's view starts with good communication, meaning that all aspects of their relationship can be discussed and defined in a way that make au pairs feel they have an influence on their everyday life and leisure time. If their situation is defined by clear communication and an atmosphere where they feel they can openly discuss challenges they have with work or in any of their relationships with the members of the family, they will have a very different experience than au pairs who are being given orders and (in)discreetly are being told or shown that their presence is unwanted in family contexts when they are not working. The majority of both present and former au pairs stressed that they had had expectations of being included by their hosts as a family member. This would entail being asked and included in the planning of family gatherings, having the choice of whether to attend family events or not, and feeling generally welcomed in such settings.

More importantly, it is central for au pairs not to feel that they are treated as a servant, maid or nanny. Au pairs used these terms to describe situations where they had felt excluded from the family, or where there was nothing more to their relationship with the host than the housework they performed. There were au pairs who never acquired more than one or two friends or acquaintances outside the context of the host family, but many prefer to use their time with people from their home country or other au pairs.

In the analysis of interviews with both au pairs and hosts, the period before the contract is signed, when the au pair and the family are discussing responsibilities and defining their relationship formally, emerged as very important for establishing a good relationship between them. To have defined tasks well and also having discussed expectations, rights and duties seen together in advance of signing the contract seems like a good indicator of how their relationship and the communication between them will develop when the au pair arrives. An issue none of the au pairs reported having discussed with the host families, however, was the level of intimacy or familiarity they wanted and also could expect in their relationship with the host family. Both work and intimacy are aspects of their relationship where conflicts may emerge during the time they live together, but that seldom is considered before signing a contract.

4.2 Au pair strategies

Au pairs arrive in Norway with very different backgrounds and previous experiences. Yet, in terms of how they view what au pair placement is ‘really’ about, I found that in terms of motivations and strategies there were two main categories of respondents: those who chose it because they consciously wanted to experience cultural exchange and those who see au pairing as work. Both groups might additionally think of au pairing either as a ‘gap year’ where they can get a break from their lives in their home country or as a way to improve their educational or work opportunities in the future. I would be careful to point out however that although a person has chosen to come as an au pair and describes himself or herself as a domestic worker, the importance of being accepted and being treated as a family member may still be of high importance to them. There is not necessarily a conflict between seeing au pairing as work and wanting to participate in the daily life of the host family. For au pairs who define it as work, there can be expectations that this form of employment will involve a different kind of relationship to the employer than if they, for example, were domestic workers.

For those who have experience working as a nanny or domestic worker in Hong Kong or Singapore, seeking placement in Norway might be a way to escape being treated like a servant. Two of the Filipino au pairs I have interviewed told me that while working as domestics in Hong Kong they had shared a bed with their employers’ children. The opportunity to make food on their own and enjoying a night watching television or surfing the Internet in a room of their own was therefore experienced as something precious and invaluable. These two women did not find seeking privacy after they had done their daily tasks in opposition to wanting to be part of the family. However, if an au pair does not find the food the family makes to her liking, or if she or he has to clear the table and clean up after having eaten with the family, then it might not feel like they are being included in the family on equal terms as the other family members. Under such circumstances, au pairs may experience that their wishes and needs are not taken into account when decisions are made.

In some interviews, host families expressed a frustration that their au pair did not want to spend their free time with the family or come with them on the trips in the weekends. When talking to au pairs, this was contrasted with the fact that au pairs are at an age during which the same age cohort of young adults in Norway, who do not yet have a family of their own or a partner, seek the company of peers. Also, many au pairs want to experience new things, but not necessarily together with the host family. Rosa, a 28-year-old Filipino woman with a child back home, was half way through her two-year period in Norway and described her time here indirectly as a gap year. She explained that she felt her Norwegian ‘employers’ were good to her and that she never worked more than 30 hours a week, maybe less. For her it was a whole new experience to be treated with respect from someone she considered her employer and also have

time off to spend with friends. “What do you feel you are learning being an au pair?” I asked. “In the Philippines I was always very close to my mother. I never did anything without asking her. Here I learn to live with others, be on my own and make my own decisions”, she replied. For her learning to become independent had been the most important experience of her stay. Being an au pair was thus a break from life home in the Philippines, and spending time with her au pair friends in her free time was an important part of this experience.

Several of the other au pairs noted that in the families they stayed with everything was done by the book, but that they were bored because of the location where they lived or the way the family lived. “It’s so quiet in the house”, one woman complained. She had a good relationship with the family, but came from a large and noisy family herself. She felt nothing ever happened in the household she was staying in. Finding friends outside the family can therefore be an important strategy to keep a good relationship with the hosts, and also for creating a network that can be useful if he or she would like to stay on in Norway.

Drawing on her research on care work migrants, Ragnhild Sollund (2009a) recently argued in an article in *Dagsavisen* that most of the au pairs she has interviewed have a good relationship to their host families and that they generally are satisfied with their situation in Norway. However, she also acknowledges that the au pair scheme does provide room for potential exploitation. Gavanas (2006:333) maintains that even when au pairs are content with their host families, they are aware of the disadvantages of au pair placement and also others’ negative experiences.

Although host families may frame their act of employing an au pair as a way to help a young person who has limited opportunities in life, au pairs did not express gratefulness directed towards a specific host family for giving them an opportunity to come to Norway as an au pair. This is a point that reveals a considerable discrepancy between employers’ and au pairs’ respective perspectives about their relationship (Gavanas 2006:321).

Au pairs’ motivations for coming to Norway are diverse, as are their strategies for managing life in the country. The way they deal with and experience their situation is also strongly influenced by the expectations they had before departing to come here.

4.3 When expectations are not met

Many au pairs have high expectations to what the placement period will bring them. If we take away cases of abuse and exploitation, and concentrate more on the general situation of au pairs, the findings indicate that the most important challenge for the scheme is to deal with the disparity between au pairs’ expectations before coming to

Norway and their actual experiences of working and living as an au pair. It is particularly expectations related to au pairs' desires to experience cultural exchange and to be included as part of another family that are disappointing in their everyday lives. Nina, a Filipino woman, indirectly made this point when she said she had not thought much about what working as an au pair would entail before she came to Norway: "I didn't know much about it, because Filipino girls become mostly domestic helpers in Singapore and [the] Middle East. We expect to work a lot in the evenings when you are a domestic worker, because you sign a contract. But here it's different because you are not supposed to work more than 30 hours, and [yet] the host sometimes expects you to work 24/7".

This example stresses how expectations and dreams related to becoming an au pair only partly are individual. As discussed earlier, the words used by the authorities to present the scheme and to describe the relationship between the au pair and the family construct a specific image of au pair placement. The framework of au pair placement as defined in the European Agreement together with the national definition of au pairing are therefore important to how people imagine what being an au pair will be like. Whereas Nina expected Asian employers to be harsh, she had the impression her situation would be very different when she came to Norway. Gavanas (2006) contends that Swedish employers tend to offer justification for why they are paying for domestic work. It is "un-Swedish" to employ others for doing such services, and people who have au pairs thus depart from dominant moral discourses on equality, class and domestic work. In Sweden employers prefer to focus on the equality in their relationship to those they employ, but at the same time it is necessary for the employees to be subordinate enough that it does not become tricky to give orders (Gavanas 2006:323). She emphasises how respondents wanted their au pairs or domestic workers to be discreet or 'invisible' as well as to have a harmonious relationship with them. Nina's experience furthermore brings in what in the Swedish and Norwegian context is a touchy question, namely the class issue. For many Norwegians the prevalent ideology of equality matches poorly with having a domestic worker who does one's "dirty laundry". Certain aspects of paying for domestic services that have to do with the moral universe Norwegian host families are part of are therefore seldom discussed overtly.

Au pairs discuss and compare families with friends and others in a similar situation to themselves. In this way, they get information about how others are treated by their hosts, how other host families organise the work of the au pair, and if they pay more salary and their au pair's ticket. They will also get feedback on their own situation. The comparison of families can be a good support for au pairs if they consider changing families, but it can also provide them with a good starting point to negotiate better conditions with their host family.

Kitty from Thailand saw cultural exchange as a crucial component of the au pair programme. I asked her what had made her want to become an au pair. She had studied

abroad and during this period she decided she wanted to experience living in more countries:

“I think when being an au pair [...] you are a person coming from your country to exchange your culture, learn the country, learn the culture, the language...the people, and lifestyle of the country where you came to be an au pair. That’s why I wanted to be [an au pair]. Actually being a student you can work, but I wanted to learn the Norwegian lifestyle”.

Like many au pairs, Kitty had arrived in Norway with high expectations of what being an au pair would be like. She was looking after three children, with a pair of twins as her main responsibility. The twins were one and a half years old. She enjoyed playing with the children and after only a few months in Norway she had completed three language courses and was now at an advanced level. The family was following the rules and also took it upon themselves to explain Christmas traditions and other things she wanted to know about. However, did she feel she was part of the family, as is one of the intentions behind the programme? “Yes, [but] this thing for me, it’s 80%, it’s not 100%. In 20% I can feel that I’m an au pair, I’m not their sister, [but] their cousin”.

This bothered her and I asked whether she thought it would be possible to feel 100% a part of the family? She saw no reason why this should not be possible. Kitty compared it to the student exchange programme she knew from Thailand, where several of her friends had experienced just this situation, being part of their host family. By comparing how being an au pair with how she imagined being an exchange student would be like, and also her own situation with that of her au pair friends, she was not convinced about the underlying aim of the scheme about the au pair being like a family member.

Au pairs may end up being disappointed with the au pair scheme when their expectations are not met. Kitty was in a situation where she was neither exploited nor abused. Her hosts even fulfilled their obligations. Still, what Kitty missed was a sense of belonging to the family, and she felt that her relationship with her hosts was not satisfactory compared to the expectations she had of it. In her mind, au pairing should have been different. Another au pair, Anna from Russia, stayed with a family with three children between three and ten years old. She explained how she had thought it would be more of a cultural exchange, “but now I feel more that I am just a cheap employee” she declared. She was disappointed with the family, as they seemed to prefer going away at weekends and holidays without her. Compared to her other au pair friends, she felt like she was excluded from the family and mostly she did housework. Hess and Puckhaber (2004:77) argue that the au pairs they interviewed in Germany had expectations of the placement period that anticipated “a level of family integration rarely achieved”.

Hence, the most common aspects of au pairs' expectations also seem to be the most frequent sources of disappointment and disillusionment with the scheme:

- They expect to experience cultural exchange (e.g. by living with a Norwegian family, learning the language), but feel unwelcome to participate in the host family's social life.
- They expect to work a maximum of 30 hours per week, and mostly spend this time looking after children during the daytime. Instead they do all the housework in the household by tidying, cleaning, washing and ironing clothes. Some also prepare all the meals for the family and look after the pet(s).
- They expect to be treated as a family member, but realise they are treated like a stranger and that the hosts are not really interested in getting to know them.

All three points are directly related to how au pair placement is defined in legislative terms. As discussed earlier in the evaluation, the language and concepts used to describe the scheme affects how people define and practise these relationships.

4.4 Au pairing “by the book”

In an evaluation like this, where the ultimate goal is to give policy recommendations, it is necessary to identify the problems and challenges of the au pair scheme. Legislation and preventive measures aim to anticipate and provide for the ‘worst case scenario’ by defining the relationships, rights and obligations involved. Yet, such an approach can give the impression that all au pairs experience the placement period beset with troubles. This would be misleading, as many will have enjoyed it or found it a useful experience. On the other hand, legislation imparts an ideal image of what au pairing should be – it cannot reveal the experiences or practices of the social actors. In this section the focus is on au pairs who have been in situations where regulations were followed both by themselves and the host families.

Tatiana worked in a family with two children in Oslo. She would start work at 8 and finish by 9.30 and have time off until she had to pick the children up from kindergarten and school at 14.30. She would then be responsible for making dinner for everybody. Thursdays she would vacuum-clean the house, and Fridays she cleaned the floors. Tatiana said she worked less than 30 hours and had also attended several language courses. After one year in Norway, she preferred doing the interview in Norwegian rather than English. Before coming to Norway she had worked a few years, and as she was now applying to get recognition for her vocational education so that she could continue working here when her period as an au pair came to an end.

Karin, a 20-year-old Northern European au pair, felt very welcome in the host family. In her eyes, she and the mother in the host family were friends more than anything else, and she also got along well with the other family members. Still, she did not want to be an au pair for more than a year, after that she planned to return to her home country to study. Karin counted herself lucky as she compared her own situation with the stories of two Filipinos she had met at her language course, who were working long days cleaning for the host family. Tatiana, like Karin, was also in a situation where both she and the host family were following the contract and the rules, and she was always invited by the family to join them when they went out or had guests. Nonetheless, although she respected the intentions of the scheme, she did not regard the relationship between au pair and host family as a “proper family relationship”. Tatiana had come to this conclusion based on what she and her friends had experienced, combined with hearsay about other less fortunate au pairs.

Au pairs, especially those who go through national or Internet agencies, can be attracted to the idea of being part of the host family. The structural framework of the au pair scheme also endorses and emphasises the integration of the au pair into the hosts’ family (cf. Newcombe 2004). Cox and Narula (2003:336) claim that:

“The au pair scheme is one of the most pronounced examples of this official sanctioning of false kin relations, with its emphasis on au pairs being treated as family members and its negotiation of their status as workers. Equality with employers, inclusion in their lives, and affective relations within the household are meant to define au pairing.”

This definition of the scheme is reflected in au pairs’ expectations, but Tatiana differed from the majority of respondents, however, in that she did not express a strong wish to be treated as a family member. She liked being included and often participated when offered to hang out with the family, but she had a broad social network she spent time with outside the family. There is an important difference between how Tatiana and Kitty experienced their situation: while Kitty missed feeling part of the family, this was not important to Tatiana. Her hosts treated her well and she was at ease in her relationship with her family – beyond that she did not want or expect the relationship with them to offer more intimacy.

Carmen had been an au pair for two years in the US before coming here. She had a higher level of education, but did not want to stay in her country of origin. She found a host family on an Internet website and stayed with them for a year. She enjoyed living with them as they led an exciting life, in her opinion, often travelling abroad. Her only responsibility was a boy who was one-year-old when she started, but as the child’s mother was a housewife, Carmen did not have to do a lot of work. They had discussed what her tasks in the household would be in advance of signing the contract, and apart from cleaning up after the boy, they agreed she would not do other kinds

of housework. They also paid her NOK 6000, which at the time was double the minimum salary. When the boy turned two, they decided to send him to kindergarten, and Carmen found another family to work with. For her the period as an au pair was a good experience: she was included in the family and also had the opportunity to have new experiences. She was very fond of her first host family, but also argued that her own insistence before signing the contract on discussing all aspects of work and the relationship with the family had been important to ensure good communication between them. In this way misunderstandings and arguments about tasks and obligations for both Carmen and the family were kept to a minimum.

For au pairs like Karin, Tatiana and Carmen, the scheme works according to its intentions. Open communication and thorough discussion of the contractual terms before signing the contract had been essential for all three of them.

4.5 Performing “light domestic work”

The definition of what “light domestic work” entails within the framework of the scheme varies according to whom one asks. Carmen only had to clean up after the little child she was looking after, while Kelly had to clean a 400-square-metre house twice a week. A host might see vacuuming and cleaning the house twice a week, washing, handling and ironing clothes in addition to making breakfast and dinner five days a week as light housework. If you ask an au pair, however, it is questionable if she or he feels the same way. In the beginning the au pair might do more than expected, or suggest things to do as a way to become accepted by the host family. Several described how it was difficult to change the standards later as the host family had become accustomed to a certain way of doing things or had started to take some of the tasks the au pair did for granted. One au pair, who had a very good relationship with his hosts, explained how he one day had suggested to help his host family with clearing gutters and doing other menial jobs around the house instead of them paying someone else to do it. From that day on it was just expected that he was responsible for this, and because they still ask him if he can help them, he has continued these tasks even after he moved out. Of the au pairs and host families interviewed, only two or three reported that domestic work was taken care of by cleaners who would come on a regular basis. However, according to a handful of au pairs – those who felt they experienced cultural exchange – they had not been responsible for doing (all the) domestic work themselves as the members of their host families also took their turn in keeping the house tidy.

Neither the maximum 30 work hours per week nor tasks defined as light domestic work can serve alone as a good measure for judging the work situation of an au pair. It is necessary to look at their situation as a whole and individually to fully understand

the workload. An important point highlighted in many au pairs' stories is how many small tasks, which separately can be defined as light domestic work, together are experienced as quite heavy work.

4.6 Ethnic stereotypes of national groups of au pairs

The amount of work an au pair does and the expectations directed at the au pair's role in the household is related to the host families' ideas about the intention of the scheme, but also to their conceptions of specific nationalities. Lise Widding Isaksen (2007a) has herself done research on domestic work and wrote a commentary in *Bergens Tidende*, where she claimed that an emerging middle class are "choosing global servants from the top shelf from the perception that ethnic origin has something to say for the servants' willingness to perform the job in a correct way" (my translation) (see also Isaksen 2007b). This is an argument put forward in much of the research on au pair placement and migrant domestic work (e.g. Gavanas 2006). Such racialised and gendered stereotypes are evident in my material, exemplified by one host, who when asked why he had chosen an au pair from Central Europe answered that, "if you chose a Filipino you'd get a great cleaner, if you chose an Eastern European au pair you'd get a person who would know how to look after your child properly".

The shifts in trends of the au pair applicants may also be an effect of the cultural stereotyping described above although the EU expansion in 2004 also undoubtedly plays a part.

Firstly, the evaluation has shown that while for some host families the background of the au pair is not that important, many do choose Filipinos as they are believed to be obedient, humble, hard-working and discreet.

Secondly, Philippine migration is in many ways chain migration where relatives and social networks are very important for access to jobs. An au pair who ends her placement period will refer another person to the host family, and the new au pair may also have a sister, cousin or friend who wants a job, so the neighbour who needs help with childcare can then easily obtain references for a person who is interested in being their au pair. These networks both between Filipino au pairs, and between host families who suggest au pairs for each other, furthermore stretch between Norway and Denmark. Thus, social networks are as important for host families as they are for the au pairs.

Thirdly, but not least, is the issue of getting an au pair who will stay for a longer period of time. Scandinavian and Northern European youth have the reputation among host families of not staying for as long a time as au pairs. Agencies can also confirm that for these nationalities cultural exchange was quickly over and done with, and they often prefer to live separately from the host family. They do not need long before they

have the necessary knowledge to have access to better paid jobs, and compared to third country citizens they are free to move around without a work permit or visa.

A woman, who was an experienced host with a large family, said that “It’s maybe not what a family needs; I mean a girl that suddenly decides that she can’t be bothered to work any more and goes home. If you have a Filipino or Asian au pair there is a better chance they will stay for two years. Because it is a hassle to apply very quickly again to get someone who can replace [the au pair]. And they have the motivation that the monthly pay is very good compared to a salary in the Philippines”. It has been common in certain areas of greater Oslo and other towns to have a mother’s helper (*praktikant*) from Denmark or Sweden. *Praktikant* is a term that some people use for their au pair even today, although in UDI’s legal framework *praktikant* is only used about vocational trainees. I asked Camilla, who had had three au pairs, if she understood why the situation has changed in the networks she knew. She knew 12 families who had au pairs, and most of them had gone from having a Swedish *praktikant* to Filipino au pairs. She could not give a specific reason, but said that suddenly ‘everybody’ she knew including other people in her area, seemed to have Filipino au pairs.

The importance of both the au pairs’ and the host families’ networks thus emerges as crucial for the recruitment of au pairs. Filipino au pairs as well as Filipinos living permanently in Norway are instrumental in helping friends and family with the opportunity to work in Norway as au pairs. Together the different factors mentioned in this section consolidate the trend where Filipinos representing the largest group of au pairs, and the quickly increasing total amount of au pairs since 2000. Such trends may change in the future, but the current growth and preferences for specific nationalities are an expression of the changing expectations and strategies of both au pairs and host families. The role of the au pair seems to remain the same, however, as they perform tasks in the household that free the hosts from some of their practical responsibilities in daily life and replaces it with flexibility.

4.7 Flexibility from the au pair’s point of view

In Chapter 6 I will describe how host families want to have au pairs because they need flexibility in their daily lives. Flexibility for the families can entail the opposite for au pairs, who may have to work inconvenient hours so that the hosts can get the flexibility they feel necessary. For the au pairs I have interviewed contributing to their hosts’ sense of a flexible daily life was not necessarily experienced as negative. Problems arise when flexibility implies sudden changes in au pairs’ routines, and when they have to abandon appointments or activities because of unexpected alterations in the family’s plans. If hosts do not reciprocate and are inflexible when the au pair asks for favours,

au pairs are reminded that theirs is an employer/employee relationship – not one where they are on equal terms.

Marina had stayed with a family that paid her more than the minimum salary, but after only a few weeks she realised this made it difficult to say no when the host family kept changing the plans they had agreed on. She regularly experienced that the hosts called her when she was on her way to meet friends in her free time, to ask if she could come back home to be with the children because they needed to go out or work longer. She stayed with them almost a year, until they said they would not need her for three months in the summer as they were going to live abroad during this period. They would not be able to pay her for these three months, but they had stressed that they would like her to come back after the summer. Marina decided to find a new family. She argued she would have accepted some flexibility, but not when it meant she suffered both economically and socially from it. For Marina, the au pair period was an important period in terms of meeting new people and getting to know Norway, but during the year she was living with this family she had to put her own life on hold.

Flexibility is not only important in regard to au pairs' work day. Several of the hosts interviewed mentioned that they thought the au pair staying with them used his or her free time in the "wrong" way. Instead of spending it with friends from their home country, they were disappointed because the au pair did not engage in cultural exchange in the manner they thought most appropriate (namely spending time with them or with Norwegians). Hosts' attitudes to how the au pair uses his or her free time can also be an important factor in building a good relationship: it can be as essential to be allowed to spend it with the host family as it is to enjoy being with friends or participating in leisure activities.

Living with a family that accepts a certain degree of flexibility in the au pair's routines, and in their work-free time balance, can be beneficial for him or her, and create a situation where both parties feel it is a win-win situation. The question of flexibility does, however, demonstrate the inequalities in power in the relationship between the au pair and the host family.

4.8 Exploitative relations: The problematic domestic sphere

The domestic sphere can be an ambiguous place to work. As the host quoted in the beginning of this chapter stressed, au pairing is in many ways risky business. I asked him why he thought this was so. He then compared situations in which au pairs are exploited with domestic violence and child abuse – that which goes on within the walls of private homes is very difficult to control or see for those outside the household. This

is similar to the views and experiences of many researchers on domestic work (see e.g. Anderson 2006; Cox 2006; and Stenum 2008). It is also here the ambivalences in the au pair institute becomes most visible: au pairs do domestic work and look after children, yet their efforts and daily activities are regarded as part of the family's reproductive labour rather than as the work of an outsider. Moreover, it also suggests that the relationship between au pair and hosts are of an intimate kind, something which is also underpinned by the living arrangement. Sørhaug (1995:23) argues that "the home is organized on the basis of a labour-contract which by no means can be fully articulated in the language of love". This point is clear in Norwegian matrimonial law, he points out, where it is settled that partners are duty-bound to contribute to the reproduction of the family through both economic and other means (Sørhaug 1995:23).

The use of kinship terms to define the relationship between au pair and family reinforces a view of care work as a gift one gives to family members. Care work is thus indirectly defined in the European agreement and in Norwegian legislation as 'the labour of love' (cf. Borchgrevink and Holter 1995). In this sense, au pairs do what they are expected to do as a member of the family (depending on the gender), because their food and lodging have been provided for. Hess and Puckhaber (2004:74) think the "big sister' image" of au pairs in fact "promises a more malleable domestic servant because being seen as a member of the family allows employers to use the logic of the moral economy to expect more than they could from a paid employee". While this can enable hosts to expect the au pair to put in extra hours or demand a greater degree of flexibility than they otherwise would have done, au pairs exchange their service "for gratitude and kindness" (Hess and Puckhaber 2004:74).

In the cases where the au pair feels the placement is working to her or his advantage, or where there are no conflicts with the host family, this exchange is experienced as fair. However, the fact that the au pair works within a family home can worsen their situation in the cases where the au pair wants to be treated as a member of the family but is not; wants to experience what she or he had imagined as cultural exchange, but realises the family just wants a nanny or a maid; where the placement period started out well with a good relationship with the family, but where relatively small misunderstandings became large problems; or where the host family's need for flexibility creates a situation where an au pair works from early morning to late at night. All categories of respondents could relate abusive situations where work hours had been breached or the au pair's responsibilities had not been well defined from the start, and where the host families ended up adding more and more duties to the au pair's list. These stories are reflected in hearsay as well as in the personal experiences of au pairs, host families, police or others who have been in direct contact with cases where au pairs have been wronged or abused.

Hard work and isolation

Stella came to Norway from Singapore. She had worked there as a domestic and nanny for several years. When she first arrived here she was in a family with three children and had a long way to take them to kindergarten and school. Finding it difficult to communicate with the children who did not listen to her, she found the work challenging. Also, the house was large and cleaning took a lot of time. She stayed only for a few months with the family, as her hosts split up. While waiting for her new work-permit application to be processed she found work with a cleaning company. After a couple of months she moved in with her new host family, although the permit had not been granted yet. She had given them power of attorney, and she trusted them to deal with the application process for her. It turned out however that they did not send the papers before she had stayed with them for a while. It was now December, and they told her that because the application papers were not complete, everything had been dragged out. She ended up having to go and hand in the application at the police station herself. The hosts were surprised that she was granted the visa, and Stella took this as proof that they had abused her situation. During this period she had worked for board and lodging alone. Things got worse over the winter and early spring. Stella had been under a lot of pressure and worked far more than had been agreed in the contract. She was regularly babysitting at night and worked extra when one of the hosts was travelling. Most nights she got up to comfort the youngest child as his parents did not respond to him crying. Stella could not stand the child being left on his own, although she felt it should not be her responsibility to take care of him at night.

In the end she felt tired all the time and she explained she could barely stand on her feet. Stella chose to go to emergency ward (Legevakten). She had no permit to show for her, and when the doctor asked her who her GP was, she could not answer. Neither did she dare give her address as she knew she was working illegally while her application was being processed. The doctor left her as he went to discuss her case with other people. She was afraid as she thought they would call the police. When he came back he told her she was seriously ill, and that she needed to go to hospital immediately – he had called the ward and told them she would be coming. Stella discussed her worries with him over her work and that she had nothing with her. He repeated that she needed to go at once, but instead Stella went home to digest the news about her health. The doctor called her several times to check on her and the day after she went to the hospital. Her ‘employers’ did not bring her to the hospital, because they had planned a trip to their cabin that weekend. She stayed in hospital several days, and then with a friend for another few days. Her host family expected her to go straight back to work when she returned, although it was a Saturday. Stella reminded them she was supposed to have Saturdays off and went to a friend as she needed the rest. When she arrived back at night she could not open the door with her keys. The security chain was on. She rang the door bell, and they still did not open. When they finally did, they told her

they had agreed she had to find another family. They wanted her to get all her things there and then. She had a friend in the neighbourhood and tried to call her while her host was screaming at her. She gathered the stuff she could and ordered a taxi. When the taxi driver arrived he asked her what had happened, did she want him to take her to the police? Stella was afraid as she still had not received her permit, so she said no. He told her whatever situation she was in, she should seek help. The morning of the day after she received an SMS from her female host explaining that she needed to come and pick up the rest of her things as soon as possible. They had put everything outside the house.

I met Stella on several occasions, and in our conversations she repeatedly expressed how afraid she had been. The worst part was that she did not have anyone to turn to: she did not consider going to the police or UDI, and she was also afraid medical staff would turn her in. Since all of the services available to her in one way or another were connected to the authorities, she was uncomfortable with contacting them. However, Stella's story did not end there. She stayed on in Norway six months following her conflict with the family, surviving first by doing domestic work for another a person in her community who offered her food and lodging for her services, later by cleaning shops and by staying with different friends. Because of the situation she was in, Stella was dependent on her social networks. She told me she was worried about gossip, and that she tried to manage on her own as much as she could. She told of situations where social control and sanctions connected to behaving in a morally proper way were exercised among the migrants she knew in Norway. It is particular in relation to sexuality and money these issues emerge, and Stella thought it necessary to protect herself from such sanctions. Two of the women who had offered to help her were other female migrants married to Norwegian men, but in the end she felt they took advantage of her circumstances. Stella explained: "the people who helped me here didn't do it for free, they were using me also". In the end she was able to return to her home country, where she applied for a visa to go Denmark as an au pair.

Stella did not want to report the host family to the police, but other au pairs told of situations where they had gone to the police to file formal complaints against their host families and had been told that there was little chance they would get anywhere as it was a word-against-word situation. Instead they were encouraged to change families. As far as issues and conflicts related to the domestic sphere are concerned, they can be easily dismissed as difficult to prove. Often it will only be the au pair and host family who know what has been going on. Those who come with an agency, might get support to find a solution with the host(s) or to change families altogether. However, since the majority of au pairs come without an agency, this is not an option – nor do they feel it is safe to contact the police or UDI. Au pairs and hosts both have to give one month's notification, and au pairs have approximately the same time for finding a new host

family after their contract has expired. Regardless of this, many au pairs are afraid that they will lose their right to stay in Norway immediately after a contract is ended.

The dependency on the family to keep the permit is thus another indicator of the uneven power balance between au pairs and hosts. This dependency may result where au pairs avoid “raising issues that might result in a disagreement” (Hess and Puckhaber 2004:73). It creates a situation in which some hosts also abuse their position. Miriam was one of the au pairs who had tried to file a formal complaint against her host family, without any success.

Nursing the host and heavy-duty cleaning

Miriam was in her early twenties and from an EU country. She had been working as an au pair for two years in the UK where she had enjoyed the experience. She stayed with the same family for the whole period and felt she they treated her as an equal. They did not have a lot of space, only a small apartment. Miriam had not had much privacy during her time as an au pair in the UK, however, she felt the living arrangement had worked well because she had been incorporated into the family. Most important for her was that she improved her English language skills. Before going to the UK she had studied one year at a university in her hometown, but had felt pressure from her parents to study subjects /a subject she did not care for. Miriam herself wanted to become a nurse, and she liked being an au pair as it gave her experience in childcare. She had friends living in Norway and after visiting them she made the decision to move here when her period in the UK was over. She found the first family through a Norwegian agency, but it did not take long before she realised the host family had not been honest about her responsibilities. Instead of looking after the children, she had to nurse the female host who was seriously ill with cancer. One night they woke her around midnight, telling her to change the mother’s bed. The woman was very sick, but when Miriam asked the husband to help her lift his wife he refused to help, leaving her to do the work on her own. In addition, she did heavier kinds of housework such as cleaning windows, too. She knew for sure that other au pairs did not perform the same tasks as her.

When she went to the police to report the family they were unable to help her because she did not have a contract. Because Miriam was from an EU country, she had not needed to apply for a work permit or visa. There was thus no proof that she had been employed to be their au pair. Also, the host family was still registered with their former au pair. This now became a problem by way of not providing her with any protection. Seeing that she would not get any help from the police, she went back to the family telling them that she would not work as a nurse anymore. The same night, they told her she should leave the following day as they had found another au pair. Miriam was shocked, but remembered having seen an ad at a cultural centre from a family that

needed a baby sitter. They gave her work and a place to stay until she found a new host family. The Norwegian agency she had used to find this family in the first place told her they could not help her, she claimed. Despite her troubles, she wanted to stay longer in Norway, and she decided to change agencies. They quickly found her a new family, and her advantage was that the new family did not have to wait for her. Since she did not need to apply for a work permit through UDI, she could move in with them immediately, after she signed a contract with them. As for her relationship to the new host family, she described them as being OK, “But it wasn’t an au pair they were looking for”. “It was a domestic worker?” I asked. “Yes, because it is not light housework I have to do. It’s actually to clean the whole house, to do laundry and ironing, and if I don’t do it I’m in trouble”. As several other au pairs had told me, Miriam also had the responsibility of looking after the family’s pet and because that cat had been ill over Christmas, she had to stay at home in the days around New Year’s to look after it as the family had been travelling. Miriam had decided that when her time in this family was over she would not work as an au pair anymore, but she would like to take the Bergen’s test⁹ to continue working and living in Norway, but in some other context.

4.9 Split households and divorcee families

In the regulations of the scheme it is stated that the au pair can only live with/work for one family at a time. If UDI or the police suspect at any point in the application process that the hosts have split up and are living on separate addresses while equally sharing custody of the children, they try to check how the living arrangements and division of care between the parents affect the situation of the au pair. These rules are non-negotiable and breaching them can mean that the work permit is revoked. Similarly, if it is discovered that an au pair is intended to work for two families or will not be living with the family during his or her stay, the family is given an opportunity to elaborate on how the au pair’s work will be organised and how much she or he is expected to do every week. Suspicion of such intended misuse of the scheme can result in rejection of the application, as a step to protect the future au pair from abusive situations. Au pairs can end up in situations where they are punished for the breaches host families commit concerning the regulations of the scheme.

⁹The Bergen’s test is an advanced-level Norwegian language test in Norwegian recognised by every higher education institution in Norway. The test is used as a standard for evaluating the level of proficiency in Norwegian as a second language of foreign citizens who wish to apply to Norwegian universities. It is also used by companies that require a certificate indicating an advanced level of proficiency in Norwegian from their employees.

Despite the regulations, au pairs and host families can relate situations where the au pair worked for two host families or where the composition of the family would change according to the week. Although the most common for 'divorcee host families' is the single-parent households where the children go to the other parent every second weekend, there were cases where the au pair or hosts swapped households every second week. For those au pairs who regard their placement as work and talk about them as an employer rather than a host family, this might be seen as unproblematic: it is part of their work agreement. An au pair from Western Europe during her interview had agreed to working in both hosts' homes as they were living quite close to each other. She found it unproblematic as they agreed on how things were to be done, both in regard to childcare and how many hours she should spend in each household. One week she lived in the children's mother's house, and the other in children's father's house. For some au pairs this kind of arrangement might work fine, especially if the families are well off and the au pair would have good conditions in both households. However, for others the shifting composition of the family from week to week might prove a strain.

Driver, maid and available 24/7

Chrissie is an Asian au pair who had been living with a family in Greater Oslo for half a year when I met her. She had decided to change hosts because she felt they were using her as a domestic worker. Chrissie had an undergraduate degree from her home country and described having come to experience Norwegian culture and to possibly learn to speak the language. She did not have a room in the large house of the family, but lived in a separate building on the property that she had all to herself. She did not eat with the family, but she told me she liked being able to retreat from their presence. The family had proved large and demanding. Her hosts had previously been married and had children from those relationships, and both had shared custody with their former partners. There were six children altogether in the household, but they only lived there every second week. During those weeks Chrissie worked from 7 o'clock in the morning to 10 in the evening. The weeks the children were not around, she still needed to keep the house clean, polish the silver cutlery and crystal glasses, prepare for dinner parties and be the hosts' driver to and from social events. Their argument for her working long hours the weeks the children were there was that she did not work 'full time' when the children were away. They seemed to have forgotten that an au pair is not on a regular work contract, and that the 30 hours is the maximum and not the minimum time an au pair should work per week. Chrissie found it difficult to discuss these issues with them in the beginning as they also paid her more than the minimum salary stated in the contract. In addition she had access to a car and a large space to live in. This, in the end, meant nothing to her as the workload became intolerable. Her case demonstrates

how written work schedules can turn into possible shadow contracts when they are too elaborate and violate the principles of the au pair contract. Chrissie showed me the different schedules, notes and messages from the hosts, detailing the work down to how she should clean the crystal wine glasses before and after a reception they were having. Also, the schedules were so packed that it would be impossible to do them on a regular work week (37.5 hours) let alone on an au pair's 30-hour week.

Her situation had gradually changed as weeks went by, and what she had accepted to do in the beginning, e.g. driving the host family to the airport over an hour away or to parties and then pick them up late at night, were examples of duties that started out as one-time events but that quickly were incorporated into the ever increasing list of demands from the host family. It developed into an unbearable situation around Christmas time. She already knew she would move to another family in January, and the host family had already applied for another au pair. Chrissie therefore decided to confront the family with the way they were treating her. It was two days before Christmas, and she had picked them up after midnight. Realising this would happen more times during the holidays she told them when they arrived home that she would not accept being their driver again. Their response was to tell her she was to move out the day after. The final straw was that they reminded her that it was Christmas, and could she please clean their 400-square-metre house before she moved to her friend?

Chrissie went to the police where she lived to file a complaint against the family. Despite having documentation of the family's breach of contract, she was told that the ultimate result would be that the case would be dropped since it would be too difficult to prove that the host family had disregarded the regulations. An individual au pair today needs luck as much as proof of breach of contract and regulations to get anywhere with their claims. For Chrissie it was as important that this family was prevented from treating other au pairs the way they had treated her as it was to get justice for herself.

The au pairs have to report the family to the police district where they and the *family* lived at the time of the alleged misconduct. Chrissie moved to a different municipality immediately after the conflict with the family. She thus moved from one police district, where she had been told she would not get any help with her case, to another municipality where there is a group within the police specifically concerned with au pair cases. In one place she was told it would be word-against-word, in the other they would have done a home visit and also looked into the possibility of filing charges against the family. Hence, there are great differences in the way au pairs' complaints to the police are treated, depending on the area where they live. What is more, is that it is surprising to see how seldom cases are reported to the police compared to the number of au pairs who seem to experience problems during their placement, ranging from breach of contract to exploitation. This is confirmed by the different categories of respondents, as well as in other research (e.g. Hovdan 2005; Gavanas 2006; Bertelsen

2007; Bikova 2008). The lack of places to turn to becomes glaringly noticeable in cases where au pairs or others are concerned about their situation and would like someone to discuss their concrete questions with.

4.10 A future in Norway after au pair placement

Au pairs are meant to return to their home country after their period in Norway is finished, but this is not compulsory as in some other countries like the UK. An au pair permit does not constitute grounds for a settlement permit in the country after the placement period is finished, but au pairs can apply for other permits. If they have resided legally in Norway the last nine months, they can apply for other permits while still in the country on an au pair permit. Three immigration paths are open to them: 1) they can continue to work and live in Norway, provided they fall into the category of skilled workers; 2) they can potentially start studying here provided they are accepted at an educational institution, or 3) they can apply for family reunification by marrying a Norwegian or foreign national resident in the country.

In 2008 2,860 persons were granted an au pair permit. In the same year 173 persons with a history of working as au pairs were granted a permit for family reunification (in order to marry a Norwegian);¹⁰ 141 of these applied while they still had an au pair permit. For the remaining 32 the au pair permit dated back in time. Three nationalities stand out in the statistics: of 173 applicants 91 were from the Philippines, 15 from Ukraine and 10 were from Thailand. As for the 134 who were granted a work permit in 2008, following their au pair placement, 72 applied while still in Norway on an au pair permit with the following nationalities represented: 31 Romanians, 30 Poles, 13 Lithuanians, 9 Latvians, 9 Filipinos, 9 Ukrainians and 8 Bulgarians.

This is still only a small proportion of the total number of au pairs, but what is significant is that the difference in nationalities in these statistics on applications for family reunification versus applications for work permits gives an indication of how migrants' strategies are shaped by the structural conditions of the immigration system. For some former au pairs attaining a work permit after the placement period is nearly impossible, and marriage migration may be the only way they can stay on in Norway. An au pair, who has met a partner in Norway, may therefore have to marry him or her and end up in a situation of economic dependency on the partner (cf. Tyldum and Tveit 2008). Thus, if they had the opportunity to get a work permit instead, the statistics on family reunification might have looked different.

¹⁰The statistics on family reunification, work and study permits used here refer to granted applications. Source: UDI statistics.

The final migration path chosen by au pairs who want to continue living in Norway is to apply for a study permit. In 2008, 30 persons moved from an au pair to a study permit. Of these, 25 were going to study in a *folkehøgskole* (i.e. folk high school), of which 19 were from the Philippines. There are 77 folk high schools in Norway, and these are one-year Christian or liberal boarding schools without exams, offering specialised curricula on specific subjects (e.g. theatre, music, bible studies or handicrafts). Foreign students can use this year to learn Norwegian.

In 2008 only five persons applied to study at universities, and all of these were from Russia or Eastern Europe. For au pairs who use the period to learn Norwegian, and as a step in their educational plans, the strategy might also be to stay in Norway and continue studying here. Earlier, au pairs could get a loan from the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund (*Statens lånekasse for utdanning*) after they finished their placement period. Most students in Norway are dependent on such loans and stipends, as living expenses are high and part-time work often is not enough to cover their costs. There are no school fees in Norwegian universities, just a registration fee to be paid every semester. What the students need is money for board, lodging and other expenses they might have. Because the opportunity for a state educational loan now has become much more restricted, au pairs who want to continue living and studying in Norway are not eligible automatically. They will therefore need to work to sustain their studies. Again, networks of friends and also former host families can come in handy when entering the labour market – and language skills seem to be critical to be successful.

The opportunities for foreigners to obtain educational loans are limited. Foreign nationals are eligible if they are political refugees, asylum seekers, foreign nationals married to Norwegian citizens; persons who have been granted a work or residence permit due to family reunification with a Norwegian or foreign citizen who herself/himself has a residence permit not based on studies; or if they have studied full-time for three years or part-time equivalent to three years. Earlier au pairs were also eligible to receive loans, but to be entitled today the foreign national needs to have had full-time employment in Norway, without interruption, for a minimum of 24 months immediately prior to becoming a student. During this time he or she must have had a work permit and have paid taxes. Au pair work experience no longer qualifies a person for economic support from the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund after their au pair contract is completed, because au pairing is not considered full-time employment. In many ways it is tempting to define those who choose to stay after the au pair period is over as an indication of successful cultural exchange. Some might have wanted this to be the final outcome of their au pair experiences; others will have developed relationships that made them want to stay or found Norway a place they would like to settle down in for a longer period of time. Whatever their strategy, the au pair period will have offered them the opportunity to learn the language and a basic understanding

of Norwegian society. This is in accordance with the original intentions of the au pair scheme.

4.11 Conclusion

Au pairs come to Norway with very different expectations and motivations for what the placement period will offer them. Of the 21 current and former au pairs interviewed, all claimed they would not have relinquished their experiences of being an au pair, although several of them had experienced varying degrees of conflict with their hosts. Not necessarily keen on doing it all over again, the majority felt they had attained valuable experience as au pairs.

Acknowledging the fact that there is a discrepancy between the views of au pairs and host families about what au pairing should be and the nature of their relationship is important if one wants to improve the scheme. Au pairs reflect about their situation, and they also compare their own situation with that of others. The treatment and situation of Filipino au pairs were themes used by other au pairs to discuss potential downsides to the scheme. In the next chapter, I consider some issues related to Filipino au pairs.

5 Filipino au pairs

Conditions concerning au pairs from the Philippines

Philippine authorities don't acknowledge the au pair arrangement and don't want their citizen[s] [sic] to be granted work permit[s] to go to Norway as au pairs. Norwegian immigration authorities have to comply with Norwegian law and cannot reject or refuse to process cases for work permits as au pairs based on the laws in other countries.

This means that Philippine nationals may be denied permit[s] to leave their home country even if they have been granted a work permit as au pair in Norway. Norwegian authorities are unable to assist in such case[s].

UDI web information, direct quotes, (26 May2009)

The continuously growing number of au pairs from the Philippines draws attention to an increasing trend among au pairs to focus on au pairing as work. It would be easy to dismiss this tendency by defining au pairing as regular work migration, as the au pair scheme does seem to hold a different promise for this group than working as a domestic worker or nanny would. What they bring with them are not only different strategies and motivations compared to the expectations of European youth which the scheme was originally intended for; they also arrive with a different concept of what the relationship between au pair and employer should be. As far as they are concerned, they have applied for a work permit and signed contract of employment. The host family is thus perceived of as an employer. Cultural exchange and being treated like a family member in this picture are added bonuses to the job they have come to do.

I interviewed five Filipino au pairs. However, the empirical data on Filipino au pairs is more profound than this, as many of the other respondents (i.e. au pairs, host families and UDI employees) provided information about cases they knew of; 50% of the host families interviewed had au pairs from the Philippines. In addition, a lot of the public debate about the au pair scheme has centred on Filipino au pairs.

The evaluation was never intended to exclusively be a study of Filipino au pairs. It has been important to confront issues that are fundamental to the scheme as a whole, but these do of course concern this group as well. It is an uncomfortable task to single out one specific group of migrants, when aiming to establish the general situation for

the au pair scheme as a whole. However, it would be a mistake not to acknowledge the impact this large group of au pairs has on the scheme, as their motivations and strategies partly differ from the original intentions of the au pair scheme. That having been said, I would emphasise that also non-Filipino au pairs may have the same motivations and strategies as this group, and that host families may also conceptualise other nationalities in a similar way as they define Filipino au pairs as hard-working and discreet. Yet, it is doubtful that this increase is a matter of coincidence. Below I discuss issues relating to the specific case of Filipino au pairs that have emerged in these debates as well as in the empirical data of the evaluation.

5.1 The reputation of and demand for Filipino au pairs

It would give an unbalanced picture, however, if one were to look at the increase in Filipino au pairs only as a result of their migration strategies. What the increase demonstrates more than anything is the interconnections between supply and demand: without the demand for the kind of au pair Filipinos represent in the mind of many Norwegian families, it is doubtful this growth would have taken place.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Filipinos have a reputation of being hard-working, discreet and pleasant. Host families might think that for them being an au pair in Norway is “like a holiday” with “easy money”, as one woman stated. However, Filipinos are, as some of the stories in this chapter show, not only concerned with the salary. They also want a good relationship with their host families and an opportunity for skills and relationships that will last beyond the placement period.

Among respondents only the Thai and Filipino au pairs reported remitting money to their families. Money is remitted to support ageing parents, siblings’ education, or to invest in land or property. For the majority of Filipino au pairs this is a way of helping their family back home in the Philippines, but it also a strategy for investing in their future. As such, au pair placement offers an opportunity to work less for more money than they could earn as domestic workers in other countries. The Filipinos come with an idea that the salary is very good compared to what they could achieve in Asia, but soon realise how expensive it is to live in Norway. Often they spend very little of the money they earn on themselves, and host families who had experience with having a Filipino au pair said that on occasions they had offered to buy winter clothes and other necessities for them because they realised how important it was for him or her to be able to give economic support to their relatives at home.

To meet the obligations to their relatives or to achieve their goals of making investments for the future, some take on extra paid work. Some au pairs have agreements with the host families they are living with about working for others, as well as with another

family. This will then be an agreement between two families and the au pair. One female host explained that she did not need the au pair for a full week, and thought it was reasonable that her Filipino au pair could work at a friend's house one or two days instead. She had helped the au pair negotiate a reasonable price for her work. Some host families find it unreasonable for au pairs not to be able to work more than 30 hours or for more than one family. They therefore help facilitate opportunities for the au pairs. This is often the result (and an indicator) of very good relations between hosts and au pairs, where the host families see this as a way of helping the au pairs create a better future for themselves and in some cases for their family as well.

In other cases, however, host families take advantage of the fact that Filipino au pairs have a professional attitude to au pairing and may be dependent on spending their pay on remittances. In that Filipino au pairs often expect an employer-employee relationship, there is the opportunity for hosts to establish a more hierarchical relationship with their au pairs than they would with au pairs with a different nationality.

The growth in Filipino au pairs thus gives a good indication that what many host families look for are full-time care-givers and domestic workers who have a professional attitude to au pairing. Host families may want a domestic worker or nanny rather than a young person who is living away from his or her family for the first time – and who has little knowledge of what to do in the household.

While au pairs and host families both individually and through networks create a supply and demand for Filipino au pairs, it is also relevant to look at the culture of migration that exists in the Philippines. There is a high level of out-migration from the country which is reinforced both by the needs of Filipinos to create a livelihood, and which is also reinforced by public policies that aim to improve the economic situation in the Philippines.

5.2 The Philippine ban on workers under the au pair programme

The Republic of the Philippines actively promotes migration and has an outspoken governmental strategy to raise the emigration level to 1 million per year. Over the last three decades, a “culture of migration” has emerged, with as many as 1 in 5 Filipinos expressing a desire to work abroad, aided by successive governments facilitating, promoting and regulating migration (also through recruitment agencies) (cf. Asis 1992, 2006). The state has ensured measures to protect the rights of its migrant workers as remittances sent back to the Philippines have become an invaluable part of the national economy (ibid.) The three most important institutions that monitor and control emigration are the *Philippine Overseas Employment Administration Department* (POEA)

(a part of the Department of Labour and Employment), the *Commission on Filipinos Overseas* (CFO) and the *Overseas Workers Welfare Administration* (OWWA). These are government agencies that regulate and inform Philippine citizens about migration and migrants rights. In the case of the Philippine state, work migration is a conscious national strategy to secure its citizens a livelihood. Remittances are a significant factor in the Philippine economy, making emigration big business. By identifying certain niches in the global labour market and creating educational opportunities that suit these, the Philippine state has been successful in making its citizens its most valuable export commodity.¹¹

In 1997 the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) imposed a ban on the deployment of Filipino migrant workers under the au pair programme. This ban was enforced 5 November 1997 (DFA Circular Note Number 981289 dated 20 April 1998). The prohibition came as a reaction to stories about Filipino au pairs who had been exploited and abused while working as au pairs in Europe, and as maids in Singapore, Hong Kong and the Gulf States. I argue that the efforts of the Philippine authorities to promote emigration and to ensure the rights of its overseas workers have to be taken into account when evaluating the au pair ban and its consequences. The intention of the ban was to protect Filipino migrant workers from exploitation and abuse. By implementing the ban the Philippine government wanted to secure safe conditions and a reasonable pay for the work performed by their citizens. They have put in place agreements with various nation states to regulate their migrant domestic workers' conditions. Through their embassy in Norway, the Philippine state has also attempted to create a bilateral agreement on domestic work, but thus far their efforts have been unsuccessful.

The statistics of UDI are in themselves a proof that the ban does not hinder Filipinos from emigrating to work as au pairs. The ban is ineffective in preventing au pair migration. Instead it creates a situation in which these migrants have to bribe officials to exit the country. This situation is supported by the testimonies of au pairs as well as others who know the situation in the Philippines well. How then does this happen on a practical level? While all airports around the world check travellers' passports and other necessary documents upon departure, most countries invest more in immigration than emigration control. This is different in the Philippines where the mobility of citizens is effectively controlled at the airport. Nationals who leave the country get their work permits, visas and documents checked. In this way all au pairs leaving from the Philippines have to show their work permit where it is stated that the purpose of their stay is to work as an au pair. This is where they potentially should have been stopped from departing, but "everyone knows" that au pairs pay to leave the country

¹¹ For more on the socio-economic aspects of Filipino migration, see Jackson 1990; Rodriguez 1996, 1998, 2002; Rafael 1997; Lindio-McGovern 2003; Guy 2005; McKay 2007.

(although not all airports seem to have the same level of control). The amount differs in each case. One respondent reportedly paid 6000 pesos or NOK 1000 to get through the check at the airport, but claimed that this was little as some of her friends had paid as much as 15,000 to 20,000 pesos.

Above I have quoted the official Norwegian policy on the Philippine ban, which all potential au pairs who apply from Manila are informed about through the Royal Norwegian Embassy. This embassy is also responsible for accepting work-permit applications for the Danish state, as Denmark does not have an embassy in the Philippines.¹² On their website one can furthermore read that “the Embassy is encouraging you to inform your prospective employer of the above-mentioned facts”.¹³ This is an official position that gives potential au pairs the choice to decide for themselves if they take the risk of leaving the country to be an au pair, and individualising the responsibility for dealing with the ban rather than seeing it as the role of the Norwegian state to endorse the public policies of the Philippine authorities. Denmark has a similar policy towards Filipino au pairs and has also seen an increase in au pairs from this country.

5.3 Movement between Denmark and Norway

Another issue that is striking at present is the migration of Filipino au pairs between Norway and Denmark. It is popular for persons who have been au pairs in Denmark to apply to Norway when their period there is over, or au pairs seek placement in Denmark after they have been in Norway for one or two years. These are two obvious explanations for this: firstly, there are a limited number of countries accepting Filipino au pairs, either because of immigration or au pair regulations or because of the different attitudes displayed by European states regarding the Philippine ban. Sweden and Finland are examples of countries that do not accept Filipino au pairs who come directly from the Philippines, but who accept them if they apply from other countries. Secondly, there is the question of the relatively easy access to host families through social networks. This is driven by supply and demand from both au pairs and host families.

There are those who argue the Scandinavian countries are too similar culturally for au pairs moving between the countries to get an experience of different cultures by changing, e.g. from Denmark to Norway. Several host families took this as an indication that the au pairs were ‘abusing’ the scheme for work instead of abiding by its original intentions. This lively exchange of au pairs between Denmark and Norway also gives

¹² It is the opposite way around in Singapore, from where some of the applications of Filipino au pairs arrive.

¹³ Quote from: <http://www.norway.ph/info/Aupair/aupair.htm>. Page consulted 25 June 2009.

an indication of the preferences of host families: it is popular with au pairs who have experience with domestic work and childcare, but also with a Scandinavian country. Seen from the host families' perspective, getting an au pair who arrives directly from the Philippines can be more challenging for the household than if they have already become accustomed to living in a Scandinavian country. This reveals that host families increasingly seek au pairs who are more experienced than au pairs traditionally have been. The expectations of au pairs have thus changed, and it may not be a coincidence that Filipinos are on top of the Norwegian au pair statistics: they have a reputation for being experienced and conscientious domestics.

5.4 Au pair and mother

A final issue often associated with Filipino au pairs concern young mothers who leave their children in the care of relatives while they go abroad. Norway accepts applicants who have children, but Sweden has prohibited au pairs with children from applying. The fact that mothers from the Philippines decide to go abroad to work as au pairs generated quite mixed emotions and responses. It is regarded as worse for women more than for men to (have to) leave children behind, and it is often seen as an expression of the care drain produced by global market for migrant domestic workers (Anderson 2000; Isaksen 2001; Parreñas 2001a; Cox 2006). The question remains of whether or not this constitutes a serious moral problem for Northern Europeans more than it represents a relational and emotional problem for migrants and their families. The ideologies of parenthood in Norway and the Philippines differ, as do the choices available in terms of livelihood. Regardless of one's position in this matter, it is essential to ask whether prohibiting people who are parents from becoming au pairs will have the wanted effect or whether it only will lead to au pairs hiding the fact that they have children when applying for a permit.

Rosa was in her late twenties when she applied to come to Norway as an au pair from the Philippines. She was a high school graduate with no further education. She had one child living with her mother back home and said she feels the child is in safe hands. She had never worked as a domestic or as a nanny before coming to Norway, but had been employed in a local business in her hometown. While she was pregnant her husband died, and she decided she had to take some measures to secure her own and her child's future. Rosa's sister had migrated to Norway as an au pair before her, with the help of a Norwegian friend, and she had later helped Rosa find her first host family. Rosa had enjoyed the few months she stayed with the family, but then they decided to move abroad because of job opportunities. Rosa put up flyers and soon found another family, with whom she was staying at the time of the interview. I asked

her if she sent money home. Yes, she remitted money and out of her salary of NOK 4000 she had started sending as much as could each month. Some months she would send 2000 and other months 3000. After a while she felt she was sending too much money and had settled at 1000. She explained that she needs some money for her life here, too. After only a year, it seemed that the life she had in Norway had become increasingly important to her.

I was interested to know what her future plans were as she was approaching 30 and soon would be too old to keep working as an au pair. Did she want to go back to her old job in the Philippines? She told me that it would be difficult for her to go back as women over 25 and 30 who had no higher education had few opportunities in the labour market. She would rather try to stay in Norway. Since she was an unskilled worker she knew it would be difficult and realised that learning Norwegian would be crucial if she were to stand a chance of getting a work contract. She had completed one course and was planning to start another shortly. What she did not talk about was the only other opportunity she would have to get a renewal of her visa would be to marry a Norwegian. This would give her the chance to apply for family reunification. When I met her she had almost one year left of her work permit and was unsure of what to do. "But I will have to make a decision soon", she said. In the meantime she was very happy her hosts had paid for a return ticket to the Philippines so that Rosa could take a holiday to visit her son.

A woman, Maria, who herself had had several au pairs from the Philippines, started crying during the interview when she told me about a friend's au pair who missed her child badly. The three of them had been sitting in Maria's garden when the au pair asked Maria if she could hold her baby. This had been an emotional moment for the au pair, and Maria was of the opinion that women with children back at home should not be able to come as au pairs. She saw it as a crime towards the children that this was an opportunity for their mothers.

The emotional responses to stories about au pair mothers who have left their children with others to look after them in the Philippines begs the question of who should have the right to decide how motherhood should be lived. The proponents of the care drain perspective (Parreñas 2001b, 2003, 2005; Ehrenreich and Rochschild 2003), that argue that mothers' transnational migration for work is damaging for the relationship between parents and children, but also to children's development have been critiqued as not taking into consideration socio-cultural differences in the constitution of families and child-rearing practices (cf. McKay 2007). This stands in contrast to other approaches to transnational families (e.g. Bryceson and Vuorela 2002), that rather look at the migrant families and households as dynamic units where care responsibilities are shared between relatives. Child circulation, different forms of adoption, fosterage by kin and shared parenthood are phenomena that have been widely studied within anthropology (cf. Goody 1982; Fonseca 1986, 2003, 2004; Bowie 2004). Such studies

highlight the variety in family forms and child-rearing across the world and challenge the notion that children are always better off growing up with their parents.

Whether one believes it is best for children to grow up with their parents or regard this as a question that should be left to the individual migrant to decide, it is still useful to consider the possibility that people should not be excluded because from the au pair scheme on the basis of having children as they may want this opportunity as much as persons without children. Should the choices of Filipinos who travel abroad to work as domestics be disregarded in discussions of 'the best interest of the child'? Do we, by defining them as victims of globalisation, frame them as persons without opportunities for making qualified decisions on behalf of themselves, their children and families?

5.5 Conclusion

The question of au pairs who are mothers with children staying with their father or relatives in other countries raises the interesting issue of au pairing as a more general survival strategy or source of income for the au pair as well as their families. The findings show that it is reasonable to assume that a fair amount of Filipino au pairs use the au pair scheme as a livelihood strategy, and not primarily as an opportunity to experience cultural exchange. Yet, as the evaluation shows, this does not exclude that learning Norwegian and living in a Norwegian family are seen as an important part of their au pairing experience.

The research demonstrates the complexity in the situation, and it cannot therefore be deduced in a straightforward manner that Filipino au pairs are abusing the au pair scheme to come to Norway as domestic workers. Many of them seek au pair placement for work, but they might well see their period as au pairs as a time when they can achieve language skills as well as have experiences they otherwise would not have had.

Closing their opportunities for participating in the scheme would be ignoring the fact that the increase of Filipino au pairs is part of a complicated dynamic between supply and demand partly driven by the wish of a rising number of Norwegian families to employ Filipino au pairs.

6 Host families

Host Mette: In our network we are the only ones who have an au pair. [...] I barely dare to tell people we have an au pair because of what has been written in the newspaper.

Cecilie: You read the newspapers this weekend?

Host Mette: Yes, and it wasn't particularly nice. [After that] you don't want to tell people really.

While the Norwegian state increasingly has invested in public childcare alternatives and education, host families described a situation where kindergartens, schools and public after-school activities (*skolefritidsordning/SFO*) were experienced as insufficient in covering their need for childcare. It is not my concern here to judge whether or not this is a 'real' or an 'imagined' need, rather I focus on the explanations and strategies host families used when talking about having an au pair and the role this person performs in their households.

Parents may want an au pair to deliver and pick up the children from kindergarten, school or leisure-time activities – or they prefer the au pair to do domestic work so that they can free time in their schedule that can rather be used with their children. Other host families may have children with special needs who need more attention and care than their siblings, or it may be that one of the hosts has an illness or condition making them unable to carry out domestic work themselves.

The strategies and needs of the host families are less diverse than those of au pairs. The primary reason Norwegian parents want an au pair in their household is to get better control over their everyday life and more flexibility in how they manage the work life/family balance. In this chapter the focus is on the motivations for host families to have an au pair and concerns they might have in relation to their au pairs.

6.1 Family concerns: Time squeeze and quality time

Generally, the strategies of host families are based on resolving what they as parents experience as a conflict between their work life, their own needs and the needs of their

families. Many want an au pair to take the responsibility for taking and picking up children from kindergarten, school or after-school activities. Alternatively they want someone who can do (parts of the) domestic work so that they can spend more of their free time with their children. The function of the au pair in the household is thus to create flexibility in the everyday life of parents and to reduce what in Norwegian public discourse has become known as *tidsklemma* or time squeeze.

Tidsklemma is suggestive of more than a time squeeze, as it also points to the gender inequality regarding the work within the home necessary for the social reproduction of the family. One woman said that an au pair can help the parents' romantic relationship by way of transferring the responsibility of the domestic work and certain parts of childcare to a third party. The conflicts couples experience in everyday life as a consequence of both having a career at the same time as they have to cater for the needs of an active family with two or more children can thus be avoided, she claimed. In this way, the conjugal couple can thus balance their responsibilities to assist the upkeep of the family and household (cf. Sørhaug 1995:23) while they also free time to spend with each other. This is of course how au pair placement is imagined, and how hosts define the role of the au pair in the ideal situation. Not all relationships between au pairs and hosts run this smoothly from the moment the au pair arrives.

6.2 The arrival of the au pair and initial challenges

The arrival of the au pair can prove a challenge in the life of host families, in particular the first time they have someone staying with them. Respondents described how the first few weeks may prove a challenge. In this period the expectations of the host families are tested against the presence of the au pair in the household. It may come as a surprise that communication with the au pair is more difficult than expected because of possible language barriers between them, or that it takes time to adjust to having a 'stranger' living within one's intimate sphere. Hosts may realise that au pairs are uncertain of what to do, either in terms of keeping the house clean or in looking after the children. Host families themselves may also be uncertain about how to perform their obligations towards the au pair, especially if communication is difficult.

Others reported that the initial phase had run more smoothly than they had expected. This might be related to a certain openness in the expectations of the hosts towards what they demand from the au pair.

6.3 What is a good au pair?

All host families were asked what they thought made a good au pair. From their perspective what is necessary for the relationship between themselves and the au pair to work? Gro, a female host whose family had had six different au pairs, pinpointed the opinion of many host families when she explained that an au pair should be independent and able to see what needs to be done. Randi thought an au pair should have drive and be in good spirits, and be willing “to integrate into the family [...] and willing to contribute in a way so we don’t have to walk around telling her ‘can you do this’ and ‘can you do that’ all the time”. Hosts value not having to give instructions and describe minute details about how to do things. A good au pair is thus expected to possess a sense of how to do things and when.

Anne explained that she had lot of confidence in the au pairs, but that this was quite demanding on them. What she meant by this was that she did not explain everything she expected from them, but gave them space to shape the au pair role to fit their personal preferences. This worked in her eyes, as long as they managed the responsibility she expected them to assume. She also gave examples of the opposite of what she expected from an accomplished au pair:

It is not easy to have a new person in the house. You have to be very flexible yourself and also very definite. [...]. The last [au pair] I had did not have a sense of responsibility. She made some decisions on her own without consulting me although I had been clear she should call me before she did. She was in a new country, and I tried to explain it would take some time before she understood how things work here. But then she started making decisions on her own, like leaving the dog alone for more than 24 hours when we were away. I guess she thought the dog didn’t need to go out to pee more than once a day. I was out travelling and the children were at their dad’s. In the end one of my neighbours had to break in to get the dog out. It was howling, because it wasn’t used to being on its own.

On several other occasions the au pair forgot to pick up one of the children after school or their leisure-time activities, and Anne realised she was not able to communicate with this au pair and ended the contract after just a couple of months. Of the three previous au pairs who had stayed with her, she had developed friendships with two of them.

For Anne a good au pair was not only a person who could do the task she had set for them or who knew how to assume the responsibility of an adult caretaker for her children, but she also preferred that the au pairs were ambitious in learning the language as well as using the placement period to create opportunities for the period after au pairing. She encouraged them to continue their education and also helped them with references when they applied for jobs. One of the former au pairs who had stayed with the family for a year had spent most of her time on Internet dating agen-

cies trying to find a Norwegian partner. Anne was angry with her because the au pair would let her children watch television and offer them sweets not to disturb her while she was on the Internet. Anne strongly disapproved with her being so disengaged with the children and had confronted her with this. The au pair explained that she did not care much for children, but that she did not mind taking care of the family's clothes and keeping the house clean and tidy. They thus agreed that she would do this and have less responsibility for looking after the children.

It is important to hosts that the au pair gets along well with their children. Some are surprised to find out that the au pair is not interested in children at all, or that he or she may not have the experience of being around children. For them this is why the au pair is there, in addition to doing a varying amount of domestic work.

6.4 Work, cultural exchange or both?

All hosts admitted they had au pairs because they needed them to perform domestic and/or care work in the home, but whether or not they accepted the basic premise of the scheme primarily to be an opportunity for cultural exchange for the au pair varied greatly. Several of the women interviewed had been au pairs themselves when they were younger. Those who had this experience claimed that it gave them a tool to better understand what the challenges of being an au pair are, how important it is to have a good communication with them and also how to make the au pair feel welcome by the family.

For others, the au pairs perform work, and they therefore prefer a person who is willing to offer the family flexibility and who carries out his or her responsibilities in an effective and independent way. Below I give examples of different approaches to what cultural exchange means to host families and how they 'solve' their responsibilities in this regard. Gunnar, who was a single father in his early forties, had himself had two au pairs from Eastern Europe. Eighty per cent of families with children in his network had au pairs, and he claimed that all of them were frustrated by the 'paper mill' and the time the application process takes. He had one child for whom he had sole custody.

Cecilie: The au pair scheme is defined as cultural exchange; what do you think about that?

Host Gunnar: No, that's silly. It's not cultural exchange at all. Of course it is an opportunity to experience living in another country, but it's really a job and it entails childcare and some other responsibilities. To experience another country provides new opportunities, and I have let the two au pairs I have had come with

us in many situations. But it isn't about experiencing a lot of culture; there is a job to be done.

Later in the interview with Gunnar the question of how to define au pairing surfaced again, when he described his own and others' frustration with the short period the au pair can stay. Two years, he argued, was only enough to get used to the other person and for the au pair to get used to the particularities of their family. Therefore, in his view, when the au pair can finally speak Norwegian and knows how the host(s) like to have things done, then they have to leave the household and often also the country.

Host Gunnar: My sister has had two au pairs from Eastern Europe. The first one spent one year learning Norwegian and worked well around the house. She did everything she could [to stay], but then she wasn't able to renew her residence visa and she was thrown out. And now my sister is getting a new au pair who cannot speak Norwegian -- the same thing all over again. This one wants to stay in Norway and continue working for the family. It's insane [...] The host families pay taxes, bills and everything necessary. And a lot of the money the au pairs get is used here and in that way it goes back to our society. There's not a lot of money going out of the country; it is rather an investment. I guess one can live with the paper mill in other respects, but the worst thing is that they are thrown out of the country as soon as they learn Norwegian and really can make themselves useful. They represent no societal harm. It's OK that you need a work contract, you have to have a host family, but [when you do] then you do have a job. So why aren't they allowed to stay for more than two years?

Reminding him the au pair scheme is intended as a cultural exchange scheme rather than a work scheme, he dismissed the idea by saying that:

But it isn't cultural exchange. It is a job, and nobody sees it as anything else [...] They have never asked what kind of culture they [the au pairs] are getting, that has to be language then. But are we supposed to do charity work by saying we are doing cultural exchange? They [au pairs] are here to get a break from their own situation. They should be able to stay as long as they wish. They are no burden for society [even] if it is cultural exchange for two, five or ten years. [...] If you have a host family who is willing to pay for you, it is OK.

Gunnar was not alone in his frustration with the intentions of the scheme, seeing that these did not match the needs he had for a stable situation in his household. One aspect of his and other hosts' irritation with the formal requirements and definition of the scheme was related to having to go through the application process every year or two, or even more often if they or the au pairs for various reasons wanted to end their contract before time. However, with his views on the basic intention of au pair placement Gunnar articulated the ambiguous nature of the scheme, both in terms of

whether or not it is work and the fact that while its purpose is to secure the au pair's rights, the host families' needs are not equally acknowledged as fundamental to the lived reality of au pairing.

Host families may not per definition be disinterested in cultural exchange although they have an au pair for other reasons. A majority of the hosts interviewed wanted the au pair to experience Norwegian culture and thought this could be achieved by taking them on skiing holidays, to their summer house, or introducing them to their relatives. In stories about au pairs not showing an interest in what the family had to offer, it was normally explained by the disinterest of the au pair to 'integrate' into the family or take an interest in things Norwegian. Few questioned whether the lack of interest had to do with the au pair not wanting to come with them on the family holidays because they saw this as times when they would feel they had to work more than at home, or that the au pair just did not like the activities of the family. A handful of respondents took this as an indication of the au pair abusing the scheme to come to Norway to work. While this may be the case, it could also be that they interpreted the au pair's avoidance of spending time with them as a rejection of the intentions of the scheme.

Hosts may consider the au pair placement as a reverse form of cultural exchange. They may have a special connection with the home country of the au pair and see the scheme as a means to introduce their children to other cultures. Several mentioned that this was an opportunity for their children to experience getting to know people from places very different from Norway, which they otherwise would know nothing about. As parents, several of the hosts interviewed valued the cultural exchange their children could experience at home because they had an au pair. Older children can practise speaking English with the au pair, and host families may enjoy the cuisine the au pairs bring to the household. For hosts, there can thus be other benefits of having an au pair, beyond the main reasons they had for doing so. However, this is an additional benefit of the arrangement and seldom the fundamental reason why people choose to get an au pair.

6.5 Flexibility from the host family's point of view

More importantly, flexibility in daily life is a key reason for why host families choose to have an au pair. Gunnar had found the two au pairs he has had through one of the well-known international websites and had looked for active, sporty au pairs as this was crucial in his eyes if the person were to fit into his family. She would also need to have a driving licence. It was important that she could keep the house clean, but this was much less important than an au pair's ability to look after children. This was why he found it important for his child to have an au pair who was interested in taking part

in the various sporting activities they themselves did. As is evident from the extracts from the interview, he defined au pairing as work and nothing else. He offers the au pairs somewhat more than the minimum salary or pocket money as defined in the UDI rules: the au pair gets her own car, goes skiing with the family every weekend in winter and to the summer house when they spend their free time there. He would pay their expenses for the activities they did together with the family, and if they wanted extra courses (in addition to the language courses); he declared he was willing to pay for that, too. For him, however, the most crucial aspect of having an au pair was the flexibility he thus achieved in his everyday life:

I have been generous with them and in return I have received a great deal of flexibility back from them. I haven't used UDI's suggestion for a standard contract, where one is supposed to have set work routines. I haven't done that at all. I have said: this is the responsibilities you have. In addition to childcare, they have to keep the house clean and make dinner when I want them to do so. [...] I have provided them with a car and what they needed.

This host sidelined his offering of flexibility with the flexibility he expected from the au pair. He, as other host families, offered more pay, travels and access to a car to increase the level of flexibility he could demand from the au pair. Although this may be unproblematic for the au pair, it can also pose a potential conflict with their own needs for leisure time and activities outside the context of the host family.

For some, what they needed was someone to be available for their children at times when public childcare and schools were closed. Gro had her own business and her husband had a job that demanded he often had to work overtime. For both of them, it was difficult to plan when overtime was necessary, and the au pair thus had to be flexible so there was somebody who could be with the children in the evening. Ole, a single father with two sons, worked night shifts and was dependent on an au pair who was willing to take full responsibility when he was away. This required that the au pair had to have a driving licence and that she was able to take on responsibility as if she was an intimate member of the family. For these host families, flexibility through childcare was *the* reason they wanted an au pair. For this flexibility to be realised, the au pair had to take the role as a family member in terms of the expectations directed to him or her. As a relative living in the household, they would not have been able to refuse the request for help, as it implicitly would have been regarded as a natural responsibility.

6.6 Just another member of the family?

Inherent in the definition of au pair placement is the idea that the au pair should be a part of the family. This is often a bone of contention between au pairs and host families (see also Cox and Narula 2003; Hess and Puckhaber 2004; and Bikova 2008), as I also discussed in the chapter about au pairs. In interviews with hosts there were both explicit and implicit references to the au pair's role as a family member. Gunnar said that he had tried to treat the two au pairs he had had as 'big sisters' to his son. Yet, in describing why he had au pairs he also indirectly described how they filled the function a wife or cohabitant would have had in the household. Both he and other hosts, like Gro above, described how they needed a breather or *avlastning* in their daily lives. When parents work at night, or are not able to bring the child to leisure activities, the au pair can replace them.

Whether hosts who are dependent on au pairs in the way Ole and Gunnar were are aware of the intimate roles they ascribe to the au pair is not given. They might disagree with such an analysis altogether. What concerns me here is how such relationships may feel distressing to the au pairs. In the previous chapters I gave examples of au pairs who were disappointed that they had not been included as a member of the family. Live-in arrangements can also be quite complicated for au pairs, as it does not give them enough room to define the boundaries of their own private lives. According to host families, however, some au pairs are more concerned with their own lives than in the job they are supposed to do.

6.7 Stories of au pairs who "abuse" the scheme

In the media discussions tend to centre on the situation and exploitation of au pairs. When interviewing host families, there were also many stories about au pairs who abuse the scheme. These were stories about au pairs who were not interested in the family and working as an au pair, but instead spent most of their time on Internet dating agencies trying to find a partner. Two of the respondents had experienced that their au pairs quickly found boyfriends and moved out as soon as possible. Some families demonstrate a relatively high acceptance for the choices of the au pairs, but there was also a high level of frustration among host families who had experienced that their au pairs had chosen to change families because they had found someone who offered better pay than the minimum monthly salary. "But it is not supposed to be work!" Maria complained. "If people pay a much higher sum than the minimum, it creates an impossible situation for those of us who can't afford to pay them extra. The consequence is that the knowledge about families who pay extra and give fringe

benefits travel in their networks. It gives potential au pairs unrealistic expectations to what they can achieve as au pairs". Here, the difference in perspectives between host families and au pairs is made painfully evident: host families' need is to get child care and domestic work for a price they can afford – or are willing to pay. While asking for a pay rise may reflect the work the au pair does, au pairs who try to negotiate the price for their work obviously challenge some of the underlying intentions of the scheme. This was described by several of the interviewed hosts as abuse of the system for work. At the same time they seldom questioned their own use of the au pairs services as a possible abuse of the system.

It is difficult to know how to classify some of the stories about au pairs who "abuse the system", but also here we can see that very little information about such cases is reported back to the police or UDI. Stories about au pairs who work extra to save up for remitting home, or investing for a future in Norway, upset some host families but is endorsed by others. A large proportion of the host families seem to see the au pair placement period as an opportunity for au pairs to improve their lives. Others think of these "extra-curricular" activities as creating an unwanted competition for the work capacity of au pairs.

6.8 Conclusion

Host families need au pairs to cope with the logistics of everyday life. There is little evidence that they consider the cultural exchange as an important aspect of au pair placement. However, I described in the case of au pairs, they are split when it comes to defining au pairing either as work, cultural exchange or a mix of the two.

Today the au pair scheme is formally defined through the rights of au pairs to experience cultural exchange. The needs of host families are not taken into account in the regulations, something which creates a situation where their motivations and strategies are not considered important to the intentions of the scheme. This gives a wrong impression of the lived reality of au pairs as well as host families, in which au pair-host family relationships in most cases are very much defined by the needs of the different members of the host families. An au pair offers relief from what may be experienced as a time squeeze in the hosts' daily life, and furthermore frees the hosts from the gender imbalance in the responsibilities for children and domestic work.

The lack of recognition of host families' needs as fundamental for au pair placement in the structural framework of the scheme is furthermore in agreement with a definition of au pairing as essentially being about cultural exchange. This definition fails to acknowledge the uneven balance that exists between the rights and obligations of au pairs and host families respectively, but also that their entry into au pairing and

cultural exchange may differ substantially. These challenges in the structural framework of the scheme are not only limited to the Norwegian context, but is related to how au pairing is defined in the European Agreement. In the next chapter I consider the regulations for au pairing and domestic work in three other countries to demonstrate the difference in structural conditions.

7 Au pair placement in the United Kingdom, Denmark and Poland

In a press release from February 2009 (American Institute For Foreign Study 2009), *Au Pair in America*, the U.S. state Department au pair programme and the largest of its kind in the country, could report that they were experiencing a great increase in au pairs from Europe, explaining it with the deepening recession in the European Union. In a year, from February 2008 till 2009, the numbers of what they coin “qualified au pairs” from France and the UK had risen with 200%, Swedish au pairs saw an increase of 86%, while the amount of German au pairs rose with 53%. The Wall Street Journal (29 April 2009) picked up on the theme, claiming that the origin of au pairs can be regarded as a barometer of the labour market. Whereas the number of European au pairs had decreased dramatically in the 1990s and onwards, it now seems that what for a while had been a “less desirable as a profession for young women” suddenly had become desirable again in face of the economic recession.

Au pair in America describes itself as “a customer-driven, Web-based matching process, [and an] extensive orientation programme for au pairs and families” (American Institute For Foreign Study 2009). Au pairing is furthermore described as a form of child care employment on their Internet pages. This differs greatly from how au pair placement is framed in national schemes in Europe. It demonstrates that immigration authorities in different countries have various measures to define and control au pair placement. In the UK and Finland, for example, Filipinos cannot enter as au pairs, and moreover, in European countries today visas for au pairs are granted according to the management of particular nationalities in the current immigration practices.

In this part I compare the Norwegian framework and experiences with the au pair scheme with other countries’ experiences of the implementation of au pair placement. The United Kingdom (UK), Denmark, and Poland have been chosen for comparison, and below I present a brief introduction to the management of au pair placement in the three countries. The UK was chosen because it has a long history of au pair placement and is an interesting comparison since it has recently redesigned the study and work aspects of its immigration system. Denmark has an au pair scheme similar to Norway, but with some minor differences. It is an especially interesting case because of the movement of au pairs between Norway and Denmark. Both the UK and Denmark have signed the European Agreement on au pair Placement. This is not the case with Poland, which does not have a formal au pair scheme. The reason Poland is interesting

in this context is because between 1989 and 2004 Poland was an important sending country of au pairs to other countries. Furthermore, there is a large influx to Poland of Ukrainian domestic workers, making au pairs superfluous within this work sector.

7.1 Au pair placement in the UK

As of November 2008, the UK no longer accepts the entry of third country nationals for au pair placements. The former au pair scheme has been replaced by a youth mobility scheme, a change that is part of a complete restructuring of immigration into the UK. This was done to simplify immigration rules and regulations, and today there is a points-based system with five tiers or paths of entry into the country. On the UK Border Agency's web pages, it is explained that:

The points-based system is the biggest shake-up of the immigration system for 45 years. The system will replace over 80 existing routes to work and study in the United Kingdom with five tiers. The system allows British businesses to recruit the skills they need from abroad while providing assurances to the British public that only those migrants we need will be able to come to the United Kingdom.¹⁴

Applicants to the Youth Mobility Scheme must be 18 years old or older at the time of entry, and under 31 years when applying. An applicant needs to have a minimum of £1,600 in available funds when they apply. Within the youth mobility scheme, entry can be given for a period of a maximum of 24 months. It is only possible to apply for entry through the scheme once, and persons who have visited the UK through the "working holiday maker" scheme are not eligible to apply. This is also valid for persons who have children less than 18 years old living with them or for whom they are financially responsible.

Currently few countries participate in the scheme: Australia, Canada, Japan, and New Zealand.¹⁵ It is also possible for British citizens overseas, British citizens in overseas territories, and British nationals overseas to apply under the youth mobility scheme. Whereas other nationals need a sponsor (in this case, their national governments), the latter groups do not. There is furthermore a quota for each group of nationals, and on the web page of the UK border agency it reads that "we have now reached this quota for Japanese nationals for the period ending 31 December 2009, and with immediate

¹⁴This quote was taken from: <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/employers/points/whatisthepoints-basedsystem/> Page consulted on 1 July 2009.

¹⁵European Economic Area nationals can work in the UK in any capacity, including as au pairs.

effect we will no longer be accepting new applications from Japanese nationals for this year. Japanese applicants who would like to apply may do so from 1 January 2010.”

Applicants in the new tier-based system must score a given minimum of points. The number of points the migrant needs and the way the points are awarded depends on the tier they are applying under. For the Youth Mobility Scheme points are given according to the migrant’s ability, experience and age.¹⁶ To be eligible for this scheme, applicants must have 50 points according to the system rules, where 30 points are scored for nationality; age and maintenance each counts for 10 points. In other words, it limits the applicants to persons in the above-mentioned categories of nationalities, to persons between 18-30 years of age who can demonstrate they have £1,600 in maintenance when they apply.

During their stay in the UK under the youth mobility scheme permit holders can do any work they like without the approval of the Border Agency, including au pair placements, voluntary work and privately funded study. Yet, there are some restrictions. The person may not be employed as a doctor in training or as a professional athlete. Permit holders under Tier 5 can also be self-employed as long as they do not own permanent premises from which they run their business; the total value of the equipment that they use in their business does not exceed £5,000; and they do not have employees. When permit holders follow the rules and the above-mentioned conditions are met, they are allowed to rent business premises, as well as setting up a company and holding shares in a company.

The Youth Mobility Scheme thus allows most kinds of work, including au pairing, but has no specific terms in relation to such work. For example, students may also work as an au pair as long as the specific requirements of their visa category are met.

Au pairs’ work is included in the terms of the National Minimum Wage (NMW) exemption for people living and working in the context of a family. This exemption involves no specific restriction on hours to be worked by au pairs, and no limit to how much (or little) money an au pair may receive. The Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) is responsible for NMW legislation.

Since the Border Agency no longer issues permits within the framework of an au pair scheme, the British Au Pair Agencies Association (BAPAA) is now the most important source for information on au pair opportunities and issues in the UK. The agencies are in turn the responsibility of the Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate at BERR. This Inspectorate was designed to protect agency users, and it is responsible for issues relating to agencies and the minimum standards of conduct established under the

¹⁶“The level of need within the sector the migrant will be working” can also be taken into account. Tier 3, which covers “low skilled workers filling specific temporary labour shortages”, has been suspended. The points-based system was introduced in 2008. It is therefore reasonable to believe that this suspension was done to not make the situation worse for unemployed, unskilled workers already in the UK, as the suspension in effect means a stop to the influx of migrant workers.

Employment Agencies Act. Finally, the Home Office Revenue and Customs Office¹⁷ has a helpline for advice on national minimum wage issues.

Conclusion

The new system is based on quotas and points that offer the Border Agency a controlled number of applications each year and clear criteria for which nationalities can apply. Normal UK legislation applies for these work-permit holders, as there are no separate rules for this tier. Third country nationals can no longer gain entry as au pairs, limiting the opportunities for au pair placement to EU/EEA citizens, as well as the nationalities mentioned above.

Hence, in this new system au pairing is thus defined as work, but is no longer regulated according to the European Agreement on “au pair” Placement. This can on the one hand be seen as a positive change, but it has not equally been followed up by protecting the rights of au pairs to receive a decent pay for their work. The British case is nevertheless interesting as a comparison to the Norwegian case and the situation in Denmark and Poland in that it, despite a firmer control concerning skilled and unskilled workers for third country nationals, also denounces control over au pairing and domestic work performed by foreigners who have the right of entry into the UK based on the principal of free movement.

7.2 Au pair placement in Denmark

In Denmark au pairs can be between 17 and 29 years old. According to the Danish regulations an au pair may not be married, as this is seen as incompatible with the purpose of au pair placement. Au pairs are not allowed to bring with them children under the age of 18. It is demanded that they have completed the equivalent of nine years of schooling, and applicants must have a functional level of Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, German or English.

An au pair’s residence permit may be granted for up to 18 months, but only in exceptional cases can the stay be prolonged by an additional six months: “Exceptional cases could be if the host family’s child suffers from serious illness or a serious condi-

¹⁷ See www.tiger.gov.uk for more information. “TIGER” is an acronym for Tailored Interactive Guidance on Employment Rights.

tion or otherwise needs special care, and if the child has a special attachment to you.”¹⁸ Hosts’ illnesses are not considered ‘exceptional cases.’

The regulations in Denmark differ from Norway in that an au pair should normally not have had two or more periods as an au pair in other Western European countries. Applicants who have held a Danish residence permit previously are excluded from the scheme. Nordic and EU/EEA citizens are free to reside, study and work in Denmark, also as au pairs. For third country nationals separate rules apply. The Immigration Service has a mandatory au pair contract which is part of the application form, and that has to be filled in by both the au pair and the host family. Au pairs have the right to a minimum monthly allowance of DKK 2,500 from the host family in addition to free food and lodging. The au pair is also entitled to a room of their own in the family’s home.

In Denmark au pair placement is, as in Norway, not regarded as work and au pairs are granted a residence permit. This differs from current Norwegian practice where au pairs apply for a work permit. Au pairs are not allowed to take on paid or unpaid work for the host family or others, they may not work more than 30 hours and are not to carry out tasks other than household chores. As for permit renewals or situations in which the au pair wants to change families, the same rules apply as in Norway. He or she can continue as an au pair while their application for renewal to stay with the same family is processed. When changing to a different family, the au pair may not do so before a new residence permit has been granted.

Beyond these aspects of the regulation of au pairs’ responsibilities and with whom they can work, the Immigration Service states that “the relationship between you and your host family is regarded as an employer/employee relationship and as such is subject to Danish laws regarding vacation and taxation”. The system is thus a little different from the Norwegian scheme, but there is a slightly dissimilar way of framing the au pair permit within the wider immigration system.

In Denmark host families are obligated to pay the au pair’s travel home if she or he is a third country national. It is also their responsibility to provide the au pair with appropriate care in case of illness. Au pairs are covered by the Danish national health insurance, entitling them to free medical care. While the au pair is responsible for obtaining insurance that covers their free time, the host family is obligated to insure her or him against ‘industrial injuries’.

On the web page of the Danish Immigration service, one can read that “the purpose is for the au pair to improve language and/or professional skills as well as broaden his/her cultural horizon by becoming more acquainted with Denmark.” He or she is

¹⁸ All quotes in the part about the Danish au pair scheme are from the Internet resource of the Danish Immigration Service: http://www.nyidanmark.dk/en-us/coming_to_dk/au_pairs/au_pairs.htm Page consulted 1 July 2009.

expected to assume a role as a member of the family, contributing to the household by carrying out tasks related to the family's daily life, such as babysitting, washing clothes, and cleaning. They have to carry out tasks on a daily basis for three to five hours per day, six days per week, meaning between 18 to 30 hours per week. The au pair will not be granted a residence permit if a host family has stated in the contract that the au pair will work more than six hours every day and instead as compensation will have the weekend off. Au pairs have the right to one full day off every week, and the host family is also responsible for giving the au pair sufficient time off to attend language courses and pursue cultural, religious and professional interests.

The contract may be terminated with a two weeks' notice, but both the au pair and the host family can end the contract with immediate effect in cases of serious violation of the contract by the other party, or if any other serious circumstances necessitate such a step. However, the au pair contract cannot be changed to the au pair's disadvantage without the Immigration Service having given a written consent for such a move.

The host family must be comprised of at least one parent and one child under the age of 18 who is living at home. As a general rule the child should be registered at the family's address. The Danish Immigration Services allows for families with shared custody to share an au pair, and where the children are not registered at the host family's address. For such sharing to be accepted, each host has to complete and sign a separate au pair contract. In addition, both parents need to meet the conditions for being a host family "as the au pair will follow the children". Host families cannot have more than one au pair at a time.

Apart from cases where one or both of the hosts are EU citizens residing in Denmark, at least one parent must be a Danish citizen to aid the au pair's introduction to the Danish language and culture. Foreign nationals who have lived in Denmark a long time and who have a strong attachment to Denmark can nevertheless be considered.

There is an interesting difference between how the Danish Immigration Services inform the au pair about consequences of abusing the au pair scheme for both themselves and the host family. It is explained that if the au pair works illegally in Denmark, they risk deportation while their employers can be fined or imprisoned.

Host families also risk a penalty period for abusing the au pair scheme, and during this period they will not be able to have an au pair. In case of violence or exploitation of an au pair hosts can be punished with a ten-year penalty period, or they can receive a five-year penalty for illegal employment of an au pair. Breach of contract and general abuse of the scheme can result in a two-year penalty period. This includes disregard for the restrictions regarding an au pair's tasks and duties, maximum work hours, minimum allowance and accommodation. Furthermore the Danish Immigration Service states that:

Your host family may not have been given a penalty period as a result of previous abuse of the au pair scheme. All adult members of your host family must declare that they have not been convicted of violence or similar against an au pair in the last ten years, and that they have not been convicted of illegal employment of an au pair in the last five years. Your host family declares this by signing a statement in the application form. Furthermore, your host family may not have been registered by the Immigration Service in a special 'Au pair register' as a result of other abuse of the au pair scheme (disregarding the limitations regarding an au pair's tasks and duties, maximum work hours, accommodation, minimum allowance, etc.).

As this quote describes, the Danish Immigration Service can register host families who break the regulations of the scheme or the terms of the contract they have with the au pair. Whether this effectively offers the au pair a sense of being protected by the regulations, and hence is followed up by a support system, is a different matter. In addition, it is explained in the quote that even though a host family has breached the rules before, they may not be in the register of the Immigration Service.

In Denmark as in Norway there are at present practically no opportunities to complain about the employment situation or places to turn for au pairs who experience conflicts with their host families (cf. Stenum 2008:57). Regulating and informing people of their rights and obligations is not in itself enough if these in practice have no practical implications for those who misuse the scheme.

Conclusion

In 2008 Helle Stenum wrote a report on au pair placement in Denmark, with a special focus on Filipino migrants. The enquiry was commissioned by FOA – Trade and Labour, which is the third largest labour union in Denmark. The report was published in relation to a hearing organised by the Danish *Folketing* or parliament on the 22nd of October 2008. There are currently attempts to improve the support network for au pairs and also a process by some organisations to have the au pairs' work recognised. In a press release dated 2 March 2009, FOA states that:

The au pair scheme in Denmark has developed into a migrant scheme for female domestic workers from countries in the third world that host families abuse as cheap labour. Now the Danish Labour Movement, in cooperation with international federations, is working for minimum rights for female domestic workers. This will happen through the UN labour rights agency, ILO.¹⁹

¹⁹This is my translation of an extract of the press release. Here they describe the ILO as the UN's labour rights agency. The International Labour Organization (ILO) is, however, a 'tripartite' United Nations agency that brings together representatives of workers, employers, and governments to jointly shape policies and programmes. Extract is taken from: <http://www.foa.dk/sw485945.asp>. Page consulted 1 July 2009.

There is thus political pressure in Denmark to change the conditions for au pairs. Based on Stenum's report measures to offer au pairs a place to come when they have problems, and also where they can complain about their employment situation, have been called for.

Because of the movement of au pairs between Norway and Denmark, changes in either country's au pair scheme will affect this flux. At the moment these two schemes are quite similar, but it remains to be seen how the situation will develop within the next couple of years. The dynamics of au pair placement is influenced by changes in regulations in other countries. Norway, Britain and Denmark have long traditions for a formal au pair schemes, but with the expansion of the EU, one sees a changing market for domestic services.

7.3 Au pair placement in Poland

In the years between 1989 until 2004 Poland was an important sending country for au pairs. After their entry into the EU, Polish citizens have found other means of mobility and in Norway, for example, the majority of female Polish migrants work in the informal domestic work sector (cf. Friberg and Tyldum).

According to the leader of an au pair agency interviewed in Poland (29 April 2009), the number of Polish au pairs they helped search for work abroad two to three years ago was up to 1000 per year. In 2008 the numbers had decreased to 200. She described this change as a consequence of the EU expansion. Marcin Kulinicz, who currently is the head of the Department of Migration Policy at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, argued that the EU entry gave Polish migrants' access to new labour markets. It changed their opportunities "quite substantially, lifting [our] transitional barrier".²⁰ As for au pair placement, Kulinicz explained that:

It is a fairly unregulated scheme in Poland. There are doubts if an au pair is an employee, a domestic worker, or if it is a kind of programme with a donation in exchange for some services. Is it social sphere or labour sphere and should it be called work? And if there are foreigners, is the person providing paid labour, or is the person a part of the household? [...] We have two extreme categories. One is when we accept someone to live with us and share our resources with him/her and treat the person as a family member. And the other is a contradiction to the first one, there is a contract, a salary according to labour law or civil law, but it is paid. The labour law in Poland rather treats that kind of work as work, especially

²⁰ Interview undertaken in the premises of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in Warsaw, 30 April 2009.

if it meets different migration criteria. It is because of the salary aspect, but also [because] providing food and lodging to someone has a certain market value, which can be assessed.

In the au pair agency they state that they also do recruitment for childcare for Warsaw families. Only occasionally have they arranged au pairs, and then normally for foreigners living in Poland or for families in Warsaw who wanted a foreigner to live with them. The agency leader explained that childcare workers, whether defined as nannies, baby sitters or childminders, are paid as regular workers:

The families know they have to pay like [they would] for normal work, not some pocket money. So this is a normal market situation [...] Some families like the idea that such a nanny lives with them, goes out with them, travels with them, but they know that there is no 'package price' for this like a few hundred Euros, like in other countries. They know the rates.

Still, both this woman and Kulinicz in the Ministry admitted that childcare and domestic work in Poland often happen within an informal framework. The bureaucracy to employ a domestic worker is immense, whether the employee is Polish or a foreigner from neighbouring countries. Therefore people often choose to employ people informally. Kulinicz described how people save on taxes and social security expenses by choosing this option,

There is also a grey sphere, I wouldn't say a black market, but a grey sphere, where a person is paid officially the minimum and the real wages under the table. [According to Polish labour law] as an employer you are obligated to keep your employees documentation for 50 years. Everyone tries to avoid such duties.

With the barrier to the EU lifted for Polish citizens, the country's borders now became the outer frontier of the Union and had to introduce a new level of entry control for nationals from neighbouring countries than it previously had had. Migration to Poland was and is very popular for citizens from Russia, Belarus, Moldova, and in particular Ukraine. The new restriction has been hardest on this group of migrants. Earlier it was easier for them to get a tourist visa than a work permit, but after the new border control was put in place it is close to impossible for Ukrainians to enter Poland as tourists. Today an important permit category is that of seasonal worker, which Kulinicz describes as an easy start for migrant workers into the Polish labour market in terms of bureaucratic demands. As of 1 February 2009, these workers are exempt from the so-called labour market test. This test involved the employer having to prove that he or she could not find local workers through the employment office. This hurdle has now been removed. A seasonal worker can stay in Poland six (out) of twelve months per year, and the statistics of the Ministry show that in 2008 80,000 were issued of which 40,000 are expected to be Ukrainian women working as domestic workers in Poland.

The Polish case demonstrates how au pairs often are perceived of as domestic workers, and that within the wider context of this work sector in Poland au pairs represent an insignificant and unregulated category. Moreover, the implications of changing borders have also impacted the Polish citizens' access to work outside their home country. The attraction of becoming an au pair has decreased as their possibilities for mobility has increased. Yet, it is also the case that the reason for this changed pattern of work mobility for Polish nationals -- EU expansion -- makes Poland an increasingly interesting work market for citizens from neighbouring countries. Gaining entry into Poland means they have traversed the border to the Schengen area and can more easily move to other countries in Europe.

7.4 Conclusion

A comparison between how au pairing is regulated in different countries is an interesting exercise because it gives insight into national concerns in relation to au pairing, the strategies of au pairs and host families, and the dynamics between immigration control and migrants' mobility prospects. The regulations of au pairing in all three countries demonstrate, as is also evident in the Norwegian case, that au pairing is part of the domestic work sector. This is a field that has not been regulated as other sectors in the labour market, because it is a kind of work that happens within the private sphere of society (cf. Isaksen 2001; Anderson 2006; Cox 2006; Gavanas 2006; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007; Stenum 2008).

The new points-based system in the UK could potentially free the au pair scheme of some of the ambiguities described for the Norwegian case in other parts of the evaluation. Au pairing is now described as work in the British system, but since employers are exempt from paying the minimum national salary, au pairing remains an ambiguous category. This exemption highlights how domestic work is not acknowledged as "proper" work, but is defined as a contribution to the social reproduction of the host family. The Tier system has only been in operation less than a year, and it will take some time before one sees the consequences of the new changes. Similarly, the situation in Denmark might undergo changes due to Stenum's report and FOA's ongoing engagement in having au pairing defined as work to secure their rights as migrant workers. What is clear is that there is a dynamic between Denmark and Norway because of the flux of au pairs between the two countries. This dynamic is brought about:

- By au pairs seeking to come either to Norway or Denmark after they have been au pairs in the other first, using their social networks to find a new family.

- Because it is easier for au pairs staying in either country to contact and find potential families because they are already in Scandinavia. Some also use the opportunity to travel to meet potential families.
- Because host families who find it advantageous that the au pair they retain already has knowledge of a Scandinavian country and possibly language, as this also makes it easier for them to check references. Host families in Norway and Denmark may contact each other and exchange information about au pairs.

Bringing together the current divergent situation for Polish and Ukrainian migrants with Norwegian statistics on au pair permits, it is evident that becoming an au pair is still attractive to Ukrainians and other third country nationals. Maybe the Polish case is a good illustration of why coming to Norway as an au pair is no longer as attractive as it used to be to Polish citizens, but still is a meaningful scheme for Ukrainians: for third country citizens au pair schemes offer much needed opportunities for mobility and work. The current economic recession may also impact on the trends in au pairing, changing the attitude young people have to au pair placement. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, au pair placement can be experienced as a job opportunity in child care when the labour market hits a crisis.

8 Final considerations and policy recommendations

One of the main objectives of this evaluation has been to assess whether the official Norwegian au pair scheme is practised according to its original intentions as defined in the European Agreement on “au pair” Placement. The research offered an equivocal picture of how the scheme is practised, but also of the strategies and motivations of au pairs and host families. Here I first summarise the main issues that have been discussed in the evaluation, and the areas within the scheme that have been assessed. Three alternatives to the current scheme are then presented, before more specific and detailed policy recommendations are given.

According to the original intentions of the scheme, the purpose of au pair placement is first and foremost to serve the interests of the au pair. An important difference in au pair placement from 1969 when the European Agreement was ratified and until today is that citizens from non-EU or EEA countries, e.g. Philippines and Ukraine, now represent the largest groups of au pairs. The dominant nationalities in au pair statistics have thus changed, and au pairs now often come from countries with high out-migration and poverty. For many of them au pairing may be considered as work and for a limited period of time offers a much needed source of income both for themselves and their families back home.

This does not mean that they are disinterested in cultural exchange and only use the scheme to achieve work in Norway. Persons who save their salary from his or her work as an au pair and remit money home might still wish to be included as a family member and experience a different culture during their placement period. The main aim of the au pair scheme is defined in the European Agreement and by Norwegian authorities as cultural exchange for the au pair – by providing the opportunity to ‘be part of’ another family, learn a new language and culture. What this definition of au pairing fails to recognise is that there would not be an au pair scheme without families in need of childcare or help with domestic work. For the large majority of families the au pair represents an extra pair of hands about the house. The au pair scheme is thus part of a “supply and demand” situation between au pairs and host families. Au pairs today are a supplement to public childcare services for an increasing, yet relatively limited, number of families in Norway who experience a friction between work and family life.

None of the host families interviewed for this evaluation had chosen to have an au pair primarily because they wanted the experience of having a young foreigner living with them. This is not to say that they are disinterested in cultural exchange or necessarily are negative to include the au pair in their family life during the period they have a young foreigner living in their household. However, it is highly unlikely that they would have had an au pair if they did not need help with childcare or domestic work. This indicates that in practice au pair placement is treated and regarded as work by host families.

I propose that the needs and strategies of the host families are not acknowledged in the structural framework of au pair placement, but that these are both an essential factor in the au pair scheme as it is practised today and as a framework when interpreting au pairs' situations. The empirical data give ample examples of both au pairs for whom the scheme really is about cultural exchange and whose host families follow the regulations and of au pairs and host families who see it as a scheme for nannies and domestic workers.

Not only have the composition and number of applicants to the scheme changed significantly. The use of the scheme has unquestionably also changed, in terms of the motivations of both au pairs and host families. I suggest that the steep increase in the number of au pair applications and permits from 2000 to 2008 and also the changing distribution in which nationalities dominate the statistics partly give an indication of possible changes in attitudes towards what role au pair placement plays in the lives of the majority of au pairs and host families. Many current and former au pairs have experienced their placement period in positive terms. Yet, even though half of the au pairs interviewed described their relationship with (former) hosts as good, only two respondents (out) of 21 could identify with the idea that au pair placement offers an opportunity to be "on equal terms" with the host family.

If this is a matter of the original intentions of au pair placement becoming obsolete with time, or if the idea that au pairs and host families can be on equal terms through a living arrangement where the au pair is included in the family's daily life has been illusory from the outset, is difficult to say. What is clear is that this original intention of the scheme cannot be seen independently from the dramatic changes in patterns of migration internationally since 1969.

Today migrant domestic work has become a significant factor in economic calculations of both migrants and employers. Seen in light of current migration trends and regimes, au pair placement emerges as a potential extension of the labour market for migrant domestic work. If the latter form of employment often is badly regulated in terms of pay, it is still cheaper for the host families to engage an au pair than it would be to pay a domestic worker 30 hours per week. Placing au pairing in this context is fundamental to understand the potential for unacceptable exploitation of the scheme.

8.1 Au pairing in practice

The scope of the evaluation has been to assess the formal au pair scheme per se and not the potential market for migrant domestic workers (both cleaning and childcare). However, despite the limited scope of the evaluation I found that in practice au pairing is not as easily separated from domestic work as it first may appear.

Based on the research for this evaluation and also drawing of the research done by colleagues at Fafo within this field (e.g. Friberg and Tyldum 2007), it is clear that there is a large demand for both informal and formal domestic work in Norway today. Au pairing is part of the formal sector, apart from the fact that it is not officially defined as work.

It is thus possible to argue that if au pair placement were to become defined as work, this would create better protection and conditions for au pairs than is the case today. This demands that other measures are taken to ensure the pay and rights of au pairs, because as one sees in the new UK Youth Mobility Scheme, it is possible to transfer the ambiguities of the European Agreement, and the current Norwegian au pair scheme may be transferred into a new scheme. Because employers are granted an exemption from paying the minimum national salary, au pairing remains an ambiguous category in the UK. This exemption highlights how domestic work is not acknowledged as “proper” work, but is seen as part of the social reproduction within the host family.

As previously mentioned, with the entry of Poland, Romania, Bulgaria and the Baltic countries into the EU, the number of au pairs from these countries decreased rapidly as they, as EEA and EU citizens, suddenly had other opportunities to migrate. Until the current financial crisis hit, there was a steady increase in the number of Polish workers to Norway that has been well documented (cf. Friberg and Tyldum 2007). The labour market for migrants has proven to be highly gendered, with women often performing domestic work. Now there are fewer Polish women who choose to come as au pairs, but instead they have entered the statistics in large numbers as work migrants or through family reunification. Whether they work in the formal or informal economy they are able to earn more than an au pair and have better control over their own time, but the majority still perform domestic work. For some categories of migrants, au pairing may be regarded as poorly paid work which gives them little control over their own time and work.

This issue may be subordinate to others, who may consider the placement period as an opportunity to obtain language skills and competence about Norwegian society, knowledge that can create an opening to access higher education, continue working or in other ways be able to stay in the country after they finish their two years of au pairing.

The critical question is thus whether the original intentions of au pair placement – as a cultural exchange scheme whereby the au pair can learn a language and another culture

by living and contributing to the household through childcare and light housework – can be upheld today as so many host families and au pairs associate it with domestic work? The au pair scheme has never been a student exchange programme, and in contrast to student exchange, there is a historical precedence for associating au pairing with work which in fact is born of the legal documents defining and regulating it.

8.2 Redefining the au pair scheme to match contemporary societal concerns and current practice

Au pair placement is currently an ambiguous category within immigration administration in that it is neither defined as a student exchange programme nor as a work programme. This ambivalence is reproduced in the application process through the mandatory documents for au pairs and host families. The language and terminology in application documents, UDI's written presentation of the scheme and the undecided legislative position of au pair placement, together reinforce an image of au pairing as work. On the other hand, it is promoted as non-work and cultural exchange. Judging from the language used, it is a very mixed message of what the scheme is really about that the potential au pairs and host families are faced with.

At an information meeting held by UDI about the au pair scheme in May 2009 (the first of its kind), a Directorate employee said that some people think of the scheme as a work permit and others like a study scheme, but in reality it is something in between. The question is whether or not one can afford to keep this ambiguity in the definition of what au pairing is and in the structural framework intended to regulate it as it influences how people interpret the regulations and practise being and having an au pair.

The context of au pairs' work is the domestic sphere. Work within this sphere of society is highly gendered and furthermore naturalised as something family members just do for each other out of love or duty. It could therefore be argued that the au pair's contribution in the current scheme is defined as an act of reciprocity answering to the responsibility of an intimate relative. Describing the economic compensation they receive as pocket money furthermore puts the au pair in a position of a child in relation to the hosts. By using expressions associated with kin relations one has aimed to create an atmosphere of equality between the au pair and the host family, but instead the authority of the host family over the relationship is reinforced. This furthermore hides the fact that the reality of what an au pair does within the household is work.

The question of whether light domestic work and childcare within the domestic sphere should be regarded as work or not is a structural issue and a matter of principle that needs political consideration. It cannot solely be determined by how hosts or au pairs explicitly define the latter's responsibilities.

All the alternatives for changes to the structural framework of the scheme to be outlined below offer an opportunity to redefine what au pair placement is. Yet, but it may involve leaving the principles of the European Agreement on “au pair” Placement behind. I suggest that modifying the scheme and redefining the conditions of au pairing is an opportunity to bring the structural framework up-to-date, according to contemporary societal conditions and to better reflect how au pairs and families actually practise the scheme.

8.3 Modernising the terminology of au pair placement

The terminology used to describe (the intentions of) au pair placement in the original European Agreement of 1969, the Norwegian legislative framework and in the information channels available to au pairs and host families produces a problematic ambiguity that affects how people practise the scheme. The two areas concerned are the relationship between cultural exchange and work, and the description of the relationship between au pair and host family in kinship terms.

The kinship vocabulary is reproduced in the “Standard employment contract for au pairs”. Under point 9 the status of the au pair within the family is defined in the following way: “The au pair shall be treated as a member of the family and shall be given an opportunity to participate actively in family life”. Point 10 describes the host family. Here the hosts are defined as host mother and host father. As mentioned previously, the economic compensation the au pair receives (see point 3) is described as “pocket money/pay” defining the au pair as a child in relation to the hosts.

The supposition of the au pair being included as a family member will generate a situation where the au pair and the host family are on equal terms is an interpretation of familial relationships that overlooks the household as a place where conflicts associated with both biological and social reproduction occur. Implicit in this view of the family is the assumption that family members are on equal terms, even though there arguably are hierarchical differences within the family, both formally in terms of the generation where adults have formal power over children, and informally in terms of gender differences in tasks and status of family members, among others.

The current language of au pair placement masks this reality as it gives an idealised view of the family. It also conceals the ambiguities between work and cultural exchange inherent in the scheme which potentially creates a situation where the au pair is not offered a real opportunity to be on equal terms with the host family.

Accordingly, I recommend that au pair placement is redefined through a vocabulary of work. The step(s) to labelling au pairing as work rather than framing the au pair’s relationship with the host family as that of relatives would modernise the scheme. It

would also offer a more correct description of the relationships and work involved in au pair placement today.

Au pairs sign an employment contract and their contributions to the household in which they live should hence be defined as work. I thus suggest that accepting what the au pairs do as work and keeping the terminology of au pair placement consistent in this regard can be combined with the original purpose of offering young adults an opportunity to experience cultural exchange. This would be in accordance with the wider immigration administration framework where work is believed to be crucial to integration and to language learning.

The question that needs to be resolved before the direction of the changes can be/is decided entails whether it is possible to define au pairing as work and cultural exchange. This is not in conflict with the European Agreement per se, as it states that “considering that persons placed as “au pair[s]” belong neither to the student category nor to the worker category but to a special category which has features of both, and that therefore it is useful to make appropriate arrangements for them”.²¹ The host families can still be expected to include the au pair in family life and be responsible for accommodating her or his participation in language courses, even if au pairing became defined as work.

If, however, the authorities choose to go in the opposite direction and extract all traces of “work” from the scheme, it is necessary to carefully consider the implications this would have for au pairs, and if this would be in accordance with how the majority of host families actually define the role of the au pair in relation to their household. Such a move would also have to be strict in terms of the terminology. For example, today host families are offered assistance and information through UDI’s Employer Service. If the language of the visa application, contract and circular changes to define the au pair as a non-worker, the name of this service also needs to change name.

8.4 New strategies for protecting and informing au pairs

It is recommended that the mechanisms for protecting and providing information about the au pair scheme are improved.

Protection of au pairs was defined as vital in the statutes of the European Agreement. The agreement was based on the observation that “in Europe more and more young persons, especially girls, are going abroad to be placed as an “au pair”. It was aimed at regulating what it described as a widespread practice. The agreement took considera-

²¹ Direct quote from: <http://conventions.coe.int/treaty/en/treaties/html/068.htm>. Page consulted 1 February 2009.

tion of the fact that “many of these persons are minors deprived for a long period of the support of their families, and that as such they should receive special protection relating to the material or moral conditions found in the receiving country”. The European Agreement states that only “public authorities can fully ensure and supervise the implementation of these principles”.²²

Au pairs are young adults in a foreign country and need, as stated in the European Agreement, protection. None of the au pairs coming to Norway today are minors, as the lower age limit is set at 18 years. The majority are in their early or mid-twenties and hence they are young adults who are seeking work and/or new opportunities. The receiving families are their hosts, but should not be defined as host *parents* in relation to the au pair.

Thus, instead of thinking that the host family will offer protection for the au pairs from exploitative situations and relations, it is possible to imagine that further measures could be developed to protect au pairs from possible exploitation related to the private household as a worksite. This also applies to situations where au pairs, because of their limited opportunities for complaining about the employment relationship, suffer the consequences when the host family disrespects the regulations. Anderson (2006:33) argues that “written contracts for paid domestic workers are important and require special arrangements for monitoring and enforcement given that the worksite is a private household”. Contracts are undoubtedly important in regulating the relationship between au pairs and host families. However, a contract is not a guarantee that people follow the regulations of the au pair scheme.

Today there are few consequences for host families who disregard their obligations. The Labour Inspection Authority (*Arbeidstilsynet*) and the police could in the future become more involved in ensuring the rights of au pairs. Judging by the results of qualitative studies of au pairs and domestic workers in Norway, Sweden and Denmark (Bertelsen 2007; Bikova 2008; Gavanas 2006; Hovdan 2005; Isaksen 2001; Stenum 2008) problems between them and their employers seem to be underreported compared to how au pairs conceptualise and describe these relationships.

As Stenum (2008:57) points out in relation to the Danish au pair scheme, au pairs practically have no other place to turn than the Danish Immigration Service if they want to complain about their employment. This is also descriptive of the situation in Norway. Here neither the police nor UDI have the necessary authority or obligation to intervene apart from situations of serious misconduct.

²² Again, all quotes from the European Agreement in this chapter are taken from: <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/068.htm>

An independent regulator for the au pair scheme

Today there is no designated body with the specific responsibility for guiding au pairs through the Norwegian bureaucracy, aiding them with information about and contact with different public services. It is recommended that such an independent body is established.

Whereas I see it as advisable that au pairing in the future should also be regulated by the authorities, the research findings demonstrate that the responsibility to protect and inform au pairs can neither be left exclusively to host families, individuals or agencies, nor are UDI or the police perceived of as ideal places to turn to by au pairs who need help with how to deal with their situation.

If there was an independent regulator accountable for the au pair scheme, this body could take a proactive role in ensuring au pairs' rights. It could also be responsible for regulating the agencies. The employees of such an independent regulator need to be individuals who are very familiar with the regulations of UDI and the scheme, and would also have the power to intervene in cases where agencies or others involved in the au pair field are not working according to the intentions of the scheme. To perform such tasks it is preferable that the independent regulator is created as an ombudsman or a type of organisation that have the legal privileges to perform such interventions.

The independent au pair regulator would be responsible for a *24-hour au pair hotline*, but also for organising *information meetings* for au pairs at least four times a year. This will offer the au pair information early on in their stay and introduce him or her to an organisation that can be contacted or a place to visit when they have questions about their situation. See the specific recommendations below for details of how this can be solved.

An example from the Netherlands illustrates how a helpline can be established. In 2004 the Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) started a hotline for au pairs. According to their website, the aim of the hotline was "to obtain a better insight into any improper use of the au pair arrangement, to allow better supervision."²³ However, this helpline is not for reporting exploitations or other worries of the au pair. It only serves to ensure that the au pair scheme is not abused through offering information.

For the future IND wishes that "the hotline will be accommodated with the au pair sector organisation that is yet to be established". It is such a sector organisation I suggest here, and not a branch organisation for au pair agencies.

Au pair agencies, and religious, cultural and political organisations that offer support and advice to au pairs, could be consulted on a regular basis as they also possess

²³ Quote is taken from IND's home page: <http://www.ind.nl/en/inbedrijf/actueel/meldpunt.asp>. Page consulted 19 July 2009.

valuable knowledge of what is going on in the social networks discussed in other chapters of the evaluation.

UDI information services

The information services offered by UDI in relation to the au pair scheme have also been assessed. Those respondents who had consulted the web resources of UDI or called the Directorate were in general satisfied with the clarity of the information. Respondents were also satisfied overall with the compulsory application documents and the information provided by UDI.

On 11 May 2009 the first ever information meeting about the au pair scheme was held by UDI at their premises in Oslo. During the meeting, representatives from UDI, the police and the tax office offered advice to the people present. The meeting was a success in terms of turnout; 80 people were present including au pairs, host families and representatives from agencies and organisations. Employees of UDI explained the structural framework of the scheme and two representatives of the tax authorities were there to give advice about the tax rules for au pairs and host families respectively.

The meeting was held in Norwegian. Many of the au pairs seemed not to understand what was being said, and some of the people who asked questions reacted and spoke English. For many newly arrived au pairs, or even those who have been here a year or more, it can be demanding, if not impossible, to take in information about the rules of the scheme and tax rules in Norwegian.

Reviewing the information meeting I conclude that it was a step in the right direction for UDI to provide better services for the scheme. However, I would recommend that future meetings (regardless of who organises them) need to be more attuned to the needs of au pairs, as the large turnout of au pairs gave an indication that such services are in demand. Information meetings for host families and organisations could possibly be arranged separately.

In one way, it is good to create a context where different groups involved with the scheme can meet and discuss issues, but what is really needed are opportunities for au pairs to have a contact point in Norway where they also can discuss issues that concern them. A systematic support and feedback system are lacking today, and information meetings for au pairs should be part of the responsibilities of the independent regulator.

Host families today receive assistance and information through UDI's Employer Service, and this is an arrangement that could continue, even if au pairs had an independent organisation responsible for protecting their rights.

Case-processing time and renewal of work permits

Case-processing time and information about the process emerged as a problematic aspect of the relationship between applicants, host families and UDI. Respondents wanted better information about case-processing time and called for a set time frame for case processing. Waiting for a work permit or an au pair's arrival for months was described by some as frustrating in itself, but more incomprehensible than the long waiting time is that the Directorate cannot give a time frame for how long it will take to process the application when au pairs, host families or agencies call.

Vague and extensive case-processing time does not take into consideration how host families make use of the au pair arrangement. For them, it provides a tool to make their everyday lives more predictable and flexible. Making host families wait for several months, and not giving them information about how long the process will take, assumes a situation where they do not really need an au pair. As I have shown, such an attitude to au pair placement ignores the crucial role of the host family in the current scheme.

The Danish Immigration Service's "customer service goals for maximum processing time" could serve as a good example. For residence permits for au pairs, they state that "A complete application for a residence permit for an au pair will be processed in no more than two months".²⁴ Some au pairs and families I interviewed had to wait for five months, and the case-processing time can be even higher for a proportion of the applicants who change to new families. Considering that a renewal of a permit for an au pair who changes family often can take several months (5-7 months in the worst cases), this must be considered an unacceptable aspect of the scheme as it is practised today. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the case processing of temporary work permits can also be long and applying for such a permit is thus not a useful alternative while waiting for an au pair permit.

The evaluation has uncovered that this creates situations in which au pairs can become vulnerable to exploitation because they might seek work within the informal sector or that they become dependent on the goodwill of (former/future) host families or other social networks. In such situations au pairs are in a relationship of dependency to their networks and/or the host family. Yet, it is important to note that this intermediate phase can be complicated for both the au pair and hosts: the au pair cannot afford not to work and the host families who let au pairs work for them in this period are per definition also breaking the law. It is recommended that the regulations be changed so that when the au pair hands in a new application at a local police station, and the application has been approved as complete and correct, he or she should be given the right to work for the new family while the application is in process.

²⁴ See http://www.nydanmark.dk/en-us/authorities/the_danish_immigration_service/customer_service_goals_2005.htm

Analysing the data, renewals and applications for work permits to stay with new families was the one aspect of the scheme that most respondents – whether they were au pairs, host families, representatives of agencies, organisations, the police or UDI – agreed caused problems for both au pairs and host families. Apart from cases of breaches of work regulations, this is also an aspect of the scheme police reported produced most examples of violations of the law. Permit renewal is the area where one sees the largest discrepancy between regulation and actual practice. Measures could be taken to make au pairs less dependent on the host families, for instance by giving an au pair who has handed in an application for a work permit for another family the opportunity to start working immediately. Such measures would offer them better protection and reduce the pressures on actors on both sides of the contract.

8.5 Recommendations for the structural framework of the scheme

Above I have summarised the main issues raised in the evaluation. Below I propose different alternatives for how to change the general structure of the scheme according to the arguments I have put forward in my analysis of the au pair scheme.

In general the 2007 changes have had a positive effect, as has been discussed in relation to the legal and structural framework in Chapter 2. However, as the conclusions of the current evaluation indicate, these changes did not offer sufficient measures to tackle the fundamental challenges of the scheme. The ambiguities in the definition of au pair placement and the terminology describing it demand changes to the structural framework, not only of individual aspects of it.

The main conclusion is furthermore that the basic intention of au pair placement is, and should continue to be, an opportunity for young people between 18 and 30 to experience a different culture and learn a new language. However, it is recommended that the scheme is redesigned, and that in so doing, the authorities may want to depart from the European Agreement to create a scheme that is more in line with contemporary societal conditions and concerns.

There is a momentum at present both in Norway and other countries to change the circumstances of au pairs. The changed scheme in the UK and the current engagement of the Danish labour union *FOA -Trade and Labour* in bettering the conditions for au pairs – and not least the initiative of the *Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions* (LO) mentioned in the introduction – are examples of the interest organisations and authorities are taking in au pairing at present.

This attention to au pair placement indicates that it may be time to consider whether the European Agreement needs revision or whether it has become obsolete. Question-

ing the provisions for au pair placement as defined in the European Agreement and deciding to abolish it does not imply that au pairing will disappear. Au pairing is an established category worldwide, within immigration management in many countries as well as in the public imagination in sending and receiving countries. In light of this, it may be that a new structural framework for au pairing could redefine it and create new principles for its regulation.

I have chosen to outline different alternatives rather than give one single set of recommendations, because I believe the choice between the different models remains a political question. Whether au pairing remains a separate scheme or is included in a wider scheme for work and study is dependent on the alternative(s) chosen.

Three alternatives are proposed, and combinations of these could also be envisioned. The changes discussed above and specified in detail below apply to all three alternatives:

- Alternative A: Redesign of the current scheme.
- Alternative B: A Youth Mobility Scheme with opportunities for au pairing, working and studying in Norway for persons between 18 and 30 years of age during a period of 2 years.
- Alternative C: An additional scheme for migrant domestic workers.

Whereas alternatives A (a redesign of the current scheme) and B (a Youth Mobility Scheme with opportunities for au pairing, working and studying) both would be a continuation, yet a redesign of the current scheme; Alternative (C) is an additional suggestion aiming to offer protection and regulation of the wider migrant domestic work context that I have argued au pairing is part of.

If Alternative A is chosen, and the other two are dismissed, it is exclusively the educational and cultural exchange aspects of the scheme that will be strengthened and enhanced. It would make the scheme less work-focussed and may be less attractive to host families.

If Alternative B is chosen, Alternative A could be one of the options permit holders had either by developing the cultural exchange aspects of the scheme and/or by redefining its aim to be a youth mobility programme where the main objective is to allow these young adults to gain skills beneficial to their participation in the labour market (language and work practice). The scheme would be distinguished from other kinds of work migration as the time permit holders would be able to stay in Norway is very restricted.

Alternative C is not in itself an alternative to the current scheme. It is rather a supplement to an au pair or youth mobility scheme. The research has established that au pairing is, whether or not au pairs and host families emphasise cultural exchange

as important, a complementary solution for host families to meet the needs of the members of their household in terms of domestic and care work.

The link between au pairing and other kinds of migrant domestic work is that the persons involved may or may not be unskilled, and they may work in either the formal or informal sector. While participants in the formal Norwegian au pair scheme are registered, EU and EEA nationals are free to take on the same kind of work without registering as an au pair. While they may need a work permit to work in Norway, they are free to move between countries in the Schengen area. Despite having achieved higher mobility, access to jobs in the formal sector may still be inaccessible to them. For women from these countries domestic work is a kind of employment that can be more easily achieved than work in the formal labour market. Alternative C would aim to offer this group an easier entry into the formal market, by aiding their access to different services and helping them to register.

In more detail the three different alternatives could be described as:

A) A continuation of the current au pair scheme, but with an increased focus on cultural exchange.

This alternative is basically a continuation of the current au pair scheme, but aims to make cultural exchange a more prominent aspect of the scheme than it is today. This alternative would mean that:

- The au pair works less (maximum 20 hours), a maximum of 7.5 hours per day and a maximum of five days a week. This will enable them to study part-time, or spend more time than today in language classes or other activities that will contribute to familiarising themselves with Norwegian culture and society,
- Au pair placement becomes an opportunity for the au pair to sponsor part-time study during his or her stay in Norway.
- Language courses become obligatory for the au pairs.
- The same rights in terms of holidays, pay and free board and lodging as today will be maintained.

The model for this alternative could be the programme currently being created in the UK, *Educare*, which is coordinated by the *British Association of Au Pair Agencies* (BAPAA). On the BAPAA home page it states that “the aim of this programme will be to help international students in Britain find a host family where they can ‘earn & learn’ during their studies in the UK. This programme will offer international students the

opportunity to work part-time, as in a live-in childcare role or as a companion, whilst studying at the nearby University or Language Course.”²⁵

B) A Youth Mobility Scheme

Drawing on the recent changes to the au pair scheme in the UK, this alternative would be a redefinition of the au pair placement within a broader range of opportunities for work and study mobility for international migrants. In a youth mobility scheme work practice would be defined as a launch pad to acquire skilled work or access to further education in Norway at a later stage. The Youth Mobility Scheme would be inspired by the new UK Scheme, and it would:

- Offer EU, EEA, and third country nationals opportunities to work or study in Norway for a two-year period. During this time they would be free to take any work as long as it is in keeping with Norwegian labour laws.
- Be open for youth between 18 and 30 years of age.
- Let it be up to the permit holder to decide if she or he prefer to live-in or live-out
- Not enable permit holders to receive any kind of benefits during the two-year period.

The implementation of the Youth Mobility Scheme in the UK was part of a broader restructuring and simplification process of the administration of work and study permits. In effect, it meant that au pair placement ceased to exist as a separate scheme. It is still possible (for a very limited group of nationalities) to come to the UK as an au pair, but the new Youth Mobility Scheme – at least in theory – avoids the ambiguities inherent in the European Agreement.

If the Norwegian au pair scheme were to be changed in a similar way, I suggest that the potentiality for both positive and negative consequences in the new UK situation should be taken into account as part of the restructuring. The UK scheme is very limited in scope as very few nationalities can access it. It is furthermore problematic that it makes no provisions for minimum pay. If a similar scheme were to become a reality in Norway, there should be a set minimum wage for workers within this scheme, ensuring that they receive decent treatment by their employers according to contractual agreements.

A Norwegian Youth Mobility Scheme could keep some of the aspects of the current au pair scheme, such as the relative openness in who can apply. In addition, by defining au pairing as work, it will be easier for labour unions and authorities to offer support and protection to au pairs.

²⁵ Quote taken from: <http://www.bapaa.org.uk/displaypage.asp?page=33>. Page consulted 19 July 2009.

C) An additional migrant domestic worker programme

The final alternative is the establishment of a migrant domestic worker scheme, aimed at offering this group of workers support and opportunities for regulating their work. A lot of attention has been given to prevent social and wage dumping of Eastern European construction workers in both the informal and formal sectors. The situation of female domestic workers in the informal sector has not received the same interest.

Considering that nationals who used to be prominent in au pair statistics today perform this kind of work, and often do so in private homes without being registered, it is relevant to consider whether the time has come to tackle the issue of au pairing and migrant domestic work in relation to each other. The amplification in au pairs over the last few years may indicate that Norwegian families increasingly are seeing the potential for employing people, and mostly foreigners, to do odd jobs as well as domestic and care work in their households. Making it easier for migrant domestic workers to register themselves as self-employed businessmen and businesswomen would give them the opportunity to protect their rights and ensure them entitlements in the National Insurance Scheme according to their contributions.

A migrant domestic worker scheme would:

- Make it easier for these workers already residing and working in the informal sector in Norway to register with the necessary authorities
- Ensure their rights according to Norwegian labour law
- Give them an opportunity to participate in the National Insurance Scheme
- Offer them an opportunity to participate in Norwegian society, and through their contribution, prevent their exclusion from health care and other social entitlements in the long run.

The effects of this scheme are dependent on the domestic worker registering, but as Friberg and Tyldum (2007:98-99) have shown, there can be bureaucratic hurdles that keep people in the informal sector when they would rather prefer to be legalised. Entering the formal sector may be attractive for migrant domestic workers, in particular for those who have settled with their families in Norway, but experience shows that there is a lack of full-time employment in domestic work and professional cleaning, a requirement for attaining an ordinary work permit.²⁶

²⁶ The lack of full-time jobs with contractual wages within domestic work and cleaning is a problem for Norwegian nationals, too.

8.6 Summary of policy recommendations

Regardless of the alternative(s) chosen, au pairs' rights could be strengthened through a revision of the structural framework by:

Modernizing the terminology of the scheme.

This concerns the definition of the intentions of the scheme, the description of the scheme in all information describing it, as well as the language of the compulsory documents. The correspondence between the terminology defining and regulating the scheme and current practice therefore needs revision to make the structural premises for au pair placement clearer and less ambiguous. This includes defining au pairing as work.

Making the au pair permit independent of the relationship with a host family.

- As mentioned in Chapter 2, the au pair's work permit is individual and issued to the au pair, but is dependent on having an established relationship with an employer. This creates an unequal relationship between au pairs and host families that is not compatible with the idea of the au pair being 'on equal terms' with the hosts.
- Establishing an independent regulator or ombudsman with the responsibility for ensuring the rights of the permit holders within the chosen scheme(s), and potentially also with the responsibility for executing quality assurance of agencies.
- This independent regulator would be an investment in ensuring the situation of au pairs and also endorsing the intentions of the scheme. If the Youth Mobility Scheme alternative were to be developed, it could combine services for foreign students and migrant workers as well as for au pairs.
- The regulator would have statutory rights to protect au pairs and their rights, according to the legislation as defined by the government and/or international agreements in place at any given time. The expertise of the regulator should be consulted if changes are to be made to the scheme.

Launching a 24-hour helpline for au pairs.

The helpline could be run by the independent regulator or alternatively an NGO who already has such a service for other migrants.

Granting au pairs a two-year work permit upon first-time application.

It is recommended that the work permit is made independent on a specific host family. It could still be requirement that the au pair hand in the same documents that they do today upon first-time application for a work permit. Further it could be obligatory to hand in any contracts to the police when a change of employer takes place.

- This would remove one of the most challenging aspects of the current scheme. It would make it easier for au pairs to change families and for host families to employ au pairs who are already in Norway, as long as this is within the time scope of his or her stay.
- It would also imply less pressure on the bureaucracy, as au pairs then would only send one application for the whole placement period. Successive contracts for new employers would then be controlled by police, but this would still entail less resources than the current work-permit process.
- Alternatively, if the rules for a work permit are not changed, it could become legal for au pairs to start working with a new host family as soon as they have handed in their application for a new permit.

This would be possible because at the submission of the work-permit application, the au pair and the host family have already signed a contract. The contract can thus be regarded as valid from the moment the au pair has handed in the application at a local police station, and the application has been approved as complete and correct.

- The applicant must be informed of the fact, that although they are allowed to start working for the new host family, this does not mean their application has been automatically approved. Rather, this would be an arrangement that would allow them a provisional permit while the application was in process.

Offering information meetings for newly arrived au pairs up to four times a year in Oslo and in other locations around the country where there are many au pairs.

It could be the role of the independent regulator to organise such meetings.

Making au pairs' access to language courses a shared responsibility between host families and municipalities.

- Au pairs and host families seem satisfied with the new rules for language courses introduced in 2007. Today it is voluntary for au pairs to attend language tuition, but if alternative A is chosen, it could be considered whether or not attending language classes should be obligatory for au pairs. It is questionable under such circumstances whether it should be the sole responsibility of the host families to accommodate the participation of au pairs in such courses. It would be advisable if municipalities had alternatives, and it should be obligatory for them to offer courses if there are no alternatives available. The responsibility to sponsor the courses should still be with the host families, but it is suggested that provisions are made so that au pairs are able to access courses hosted by local municipalities. However, the full implications of such a move would need to be considered further before any decision is made.

Making it obligatory for the host family to pay the au pair's travel to and from Norway.

This point could be redefined in the contract, making it obligatory for the host family to explain how they plan to cover the travel expenses of the au pair.

How this is to be regulated needs to be assessed separately, but one possible way to arrange it is that the host family pays the travel to Norway, and that the family with which the au pair stays when departing from Norway is obligated to pay the return ticket. If the au pair leaves the country because she or he has been dismissed, the host family will have to argue for why the dismissal was reasonable if they are to be freed from the responsibility of paying the return ticket.

- An au pair who is fired because the host family does not need an au pair anymore or whose hosts cannot demonstrate misconduct on the part of the au pair may not have sufficient funds to buy a return ticket. Making it the obligation of the host family to pay for the ticket would therefore ensure their return to the home country. It is crucial that this is solved in a way so that the au pair does not feel she or he has to stay with the family to get the return ticket.

Making it the responsibility of the host family to cover travel costs to language classes

In some areas travelling locally is necessary for the au pair to attend language courses, but can be expensive for the au pair.

Enforcing the requirement to fill in the point about the au pair's responsibilities in the contract.

- UDI could be stricter in enforcing that point 5 in the contract, about the au pair's responsibilities, is filled in. It is recommended that it is made obligatory for families to fill in this point, changing the practice so that applications that do not specify the responsibilities of the au pair in the household during the placement period can be refused.
- It is important that host families and au pairs have agreed beforehand on what the tasks of the au pair will be. This is not to say that anything not defined in the contract should be considered illegal, but it will make sure that host families have a realistic expectation of what the au pair's workload can be. The au pair will then also be better prepared for what he or she has to do on an everyday basis.
- A note should also be added under this particular point in the contract, stating that any shadow contract or schedules that imply that the au pair will work more than the maximum amount of hours (including having the responsibility of sleeping children which must be regarded as work), or performing tasks not suitable for au pairs, is a serious breach of the regulations and is grounds for reporting the host

family to the authorities. This is already mentioned in the circular, but it could also be included in the contract to emphasise this point further.

- A list of tasks au pairs can do could be supplied on the information pages, together with a list of activities that an au pair should not be expected to perform. Alternatively, a weekly schedule could be included in the contract so that the host family could explain how they envisage the workload of the au pair.²⁷ This gives the au pairs space for negotiation when they experience conflict with their hosts over their workload. Taking such measures will in itself not prevent host families from exploiting au pairs, but it is nevertheless a crucial point in any employment contract. Ultimately the term “au pair” is not a job description, and it is good for both parties to be able to have documentation of what has been agreed upon.

Engaging in a dialogue with Philippine authorities to explore the possibilities of creating a bilateral agreement for Filipinos who wish to come to Norway as au pairs.

- In regards to the Philippine ban on au pair placement it is recommended that the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion seeks to create a bilateral cultural agreement that can ensure that au pairs from the Philippines also have the opportunity to come as au pairs.
- A question in relation to the Philippine ban is whether Norwegian authorities should aim to protect the rights of individual migrants or accept the Philippine state's efforts to control the migration of its citizens.
- As an alternative to analysing this situation through the actions of individual actors (airport officials and au pairs), I propose to recognize that the current situation is created by the conflicting political discourses, state practices and moral values guiding the attitude of two nation-states to au pairing and migrant domestic work. In the Norwegian context, au pairing is officially not defined as work (although this is an ambiguous category in legal terms). The Philippine state, on the other hand, would rather define au pairing as domestic work and make sure au pairs are paid and treated accordingly.
- The conflict between these different approaches to au pairing and migrant domestic work could possibly be resolved by a dialogue, but it might also be that the political differences between the two countries in regards to domestic work are too considerable to be reconciled. A bilateral agreement may offer a solution to the ban and help improve the legal status and civic rights Filipino au pairs in Norway have vis-à-vis the Philippine state.

²⁷ See Stenum (2008:20) for how this is done in the Danish contract.

Simplifying the tax rules for au pairs and applying one standard to the whole country.

There seems to be considerable confusion concerning whether or not the au pair should be receive holiday pay (*feriepenger*)²⁸ or the regular salary during the 25 days of holiday they are entitled to. Furthermore, au pairs who stay in Norway for two years will often have to hand in their income tax return (*selvangivelse*) for three years, and if they are unlucky, they will have moved abroad before the tax return is paid back, or they will not receive notice about owing tax.

It is further recommended that:

- The age limit (18-30) should remain the same.
- The payment for au pairs needs to be regulated according to whether he or she live in or live out, and according to the specific arrangement they have chosen for their placement period (alternatives A, B or C). For Alternative A it should remain the same as today, but it is suggested that a Youth Mobility Scheme and a potential Migrant Domestic Worker Scheme follow the minimum national wage regulations.
- It needs to be stated more clearly in the contract that the monthly pay of NOK 4000 is not tied to the amount of hours the au pair works. It is the set minimum pay regardless of whether the au pair works one or the maximum amount of hours.
- Apart from following the normal immigration regulations, it is suggested that no further restrictions on nationalities should be defined in relation to au pair permits.
- The circular needs to be made bilingual as soon as possible. It would also be an advantage if the rights and obligations of au pairs and host families were made available in the languages of the main group of applicants (e.g. Tagalog, Ukrainian or Russian, Thai, Spanish and Portuguese). In addition, they should receive an info sheet or business card with contact details for places where they can receive help and support if they need it.
- There could be a maximum limit for case-processing time.
- The responsibility for informing host families and au pairs about the visa application process should remain with UDI, but that the independent organisation could provide information and advice on all other aspects of the au pair scheme.

Other aspects of the regulations of the scheme not discussed here could remain the same as today.

²⁸ In Norway employees are paid a regular salary 11 months per year, but each month employers deduct a percentage of the salary to be paid in the holiday month (normally 10.2%).

9 Conclusion

Au pairing has always been and continues to be, a kind of placement and experience mostly sought out by women. There are several reasons for this, but the most significant is that au pairs' responsibility within the household in which they live entails domestic work and childcare. The majority of host families are most comfortable with assigning such tasks to females while potential male au pairs may have trouble finding families that will take them in. The fact remains that au pair placement is a migration option preferred by women, but it is also the case that au pairing is a form for service where women are preferred.

The question whether au pairs come for work or for cultural exchange does not, as I have shown in this evaluation, have a straightforward answer. However, it is fair to say that for the Norwegian context the au pair scheme is becoming increasingly professionalised and the demand for au pairs is also on the rise. Whether or not this an indication that the practice of au pairing has changed since the original intentions of the scheme were defined in 1969, is difficult to say. While the general impression people have of au pair placement at present seem to be that the focus of au pairs and host families has moved from au pairing as cultural exchange to au pairing as work; this may in fact be an interpretation of past practice as identical with the vision of au pairing as stated in the European Agreement rather than a real reflection of how au pairs and families have used the scheme.

Host families choose to have au pairs to aid the time squeeze and pressures they experience between their family and professional lives. Are they abusing the scheme by making sure the au pair works 30 hours? Or because their main reason for having an au pair is so that they can make their daily lives more flexible than it would have been if they had to do everything themselves?

Given the current ambiguous status and description of au pairing, a situation is created where host families' significance to how the scheme is practised is ignored. Hence, I suggest that the boost in numbers of au pairs must be seen as evidence for the increasing demand for more professional migrant domestic workers who are more experienced than au pairs traditionally have been. Filipinos have a reputation worldwide for being professional, hard-working domestics and are in this new climate popular as au pairs.

This may result in the au pair role becoming increasingly more defined, constructed according to new ideas about what au pairing should be. This development could perhaps be described as negative, but it may also offer authorities a chance to look at

au pairing as part of the wider domestic work sector and consequently improve the conditions for both migrants and non-migrants who perform this kind of work within private homes. “Au pair” is not a job description as such: it is associated with domestic work, but the tasks involved are not defined by the term itself.

To define au pairing as work would be to acknowledge that domestic and care work is not to be naturalised and mistaken as a kind of “labour of love” (cf. Borchgrevink and Holter 1995, and Sørhaug 1995). Au pairs who have worked as domestic workers or nannies elsewhere before arriving in Norway have a professional attitude to the tasks they are expected to perform for the host family. For a host family to employ an au pair may be less problematic than if he or she was defined as a domestic worker. By keeping au pairing “in the family”, so to speak, one can avoid thinking of and labelling the au pair as a servant. Servants perform the same services, but as waged work. The image of the servant is moreover associated with hierarchical relations defined according to social class. It matches poorly with the notion of the au pair being on equal terms with the hosts.

I am not suggesting here that au pairs per se are servants or that host families necessarily treat them as such. Nonetheless, in the course of the research, stories about exploitation of au pairs stressed the importance of recognising their contribution to the household as work as a step to ensure their position vis-à-vis the host family.

The original intention of au pair placement, that the au pair and host family should be on equal terms, may be an ideal more than a reflection of the reality of the scheme. There are aspects of the relationship between the au pair and the host family that cannot necessarily be anticipated or controlled through a judicial framework. Au pairs acknowledged, as did host families, that ultimately the relationship is also about ‘chemistry’: sometimes the reason for changing families will be explained by lack of connection or the au pair feeling as ‘matter out of place’ without anyone being to blame for the situation.

The evaluation has suggested major changes to the structural framework regulating au pair placement in Norway. It may also be that the time has come to reconsider the intentions of au pairing as stated in the European Agreement on “au pair” Placement altogether. Yet, a continued focus on equality within the au pair scheme could be encouraged both in terms of national and international regulations in this field; as an ideal for the interpersonal relationships involved and by defining what au pairs do for the host families as work.

This would be a reinterpretation of the most significant of the original intentions of the European Agreement on “au pair” Placement, namely the idea that au pairs and host families should be on equal terms. This reinterpretation would, however, entail that “being on equal terms” is not primarily defined as a relational issue between au pair and host family, but rather is understood as an acknowledgement of the value of the au pair’s contribution to the reproduction of the household and the broader economy.

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On equal terms?

This report is the outcome of an evaluation of the Norwegian au pair scheme. The main objectives of the evaluation have been to uncover whether (or not) the scheme is practised according to its original intentions, and whether the changes introduced to the scheme in 2007 have generated the desired effects. The basic aim of the evaluation has thus been to give a comprehensive assessment of the au pair scheme, and furthermore to see whether additional changes are needed other than those already put in place in 2007. The report describes the strategies and motivations of au pairs and host families, and discusses how contact is established between them. There has been a considerable increase in the number of au pairs in Norway, from 691 in 2000 to 2860 in 2008, with Filipinos representing the largest group. The majority of au pairs are female, and only a small proportion of applicants are men, making au pairing a form of female-dominated employment involving what has traditionally been the responsibility of women within the household, namely housework and care work. The report examines the increase in numbers and the fact that third country nationals today dominate the scheme. It also debates whether au pairs and host families see au pair placement as a cultural exchange scheme in accordance with the original intentions, or as a form of employment. In addition, the report offers a brief description of the conditions for au pair placement in the UK, Denmark and Poland as a comparison to the situation in Norway. In light of these various issues, the evaluation offers policy recommendations for improvements and changes to the structural framework of au pair placement.



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