**Childcare arrangements in the context of migration – case study of Czech families in Iceland[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**DRAFT, please do not quote!**

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**Abstract**

We discuss childcare arrangements in context of migration as negotiated position between different cultural models of care and welfare provision. Our argument builds on an empirical case study among families from a Central Eastern European Country (CEEC) – the Czech Republic – living in a country with a Nordic welfare model – Iceland. Immigration to Iceland has recently undergone a shift in terms of numbers and composition, with over 50% of immigrants coming from CEECs, counties with different family policy models and related culturally anchored ideals of care. Whereas Nordic countries support a dual earner/dual caregiver model based on egalitarian family policies (Eydal, Rostgaard 2018), CEECs tend to be representatives of re-familialization and support full-time motherhood (Formánková et al. 2016). The analysis stems from (a) comparative study of leave policies and take up, (b) statistical analysis of the value survey on gender roles and care (ISSP 2012 - Family and Changing Gender Roles IV), and (c) interviews with mothers of children under 10 who came to Iceland from the Czech Republic as adults. The results show that the pre-migrant ideals of care play an important role in care arrangements for under-school-age children. Dominant discourses of ‘good parenting’ in the country of destination, which are supported, reinforced and eventually changed through specific policy design, are not always accepted by migrant parents. However, some migrant families adjust better to the local (Icelandic) model of childcare the longer they stay. Besides the cultural models of appropriate care, including the policy and practice in the country of origin and the country of destination, other factors influence parents’ care choices, particularly the family’s socio-economic situation and the labour market conditions in the country of destination (Iceland). These factors contribute to the fluidity of the childcare choices, which change over time and with each child.

**INTRODUCTION**

International migration, a key result of globalisation, represents one of this century’s most prominent phenomena (Castles et al. 2014). The support of spatial mobility by the European Commission, motivated by an attempt to support the economy by supplementing the specific needs of European labour markets, has increased migrant inflows during the 21st century, bringing into European countries not only unskilled as well as highly qualified workers but also asylum seekers, family-reunion migrants and illegal migrants (Eurofound 2014). Currently, most migrants in the European Union (EU) are non-EU nationals (Eurostat 2017). Members of this group of migrants often work in low-skill jobs, face unfavourable working conditions and have limited access to social welfare (OECD 2015).

Work–life reconciliation strategies in research on migrant populations are largely neglected phenomena (Williams 2012). In researching work–life reconciliation strategies. In the analysis we draw from a body of literature that locates citizenship at the intersection of welfare regimes, the labour market and gender (Lewis 1992). We transpose this framework to the study of migrants’ care arrangements, adding the dimension of migration regime[[2]](#footnote-2) (Williams 2012; Lutz and Palenga-Möllenbeck, 2012). Especially considering the family policy take up in migrant families, recent studies suggest that policy design may play a leading role in comparison to the norms of appropriate care (Mussiono, Tevola & Duvander, 2018). However, it is important to acknowledge that migrant families may adopt a variety of care arrangements over time (Kilkey & Merla, 2014) and factors such as the family composition and socio-economic position of the family may influence parents’ care decisions as well (Wall & José, 2004 ).

To enhance our understanding of the family life of European Union (EU) migrants, we conducted a study on the work - family reconciliation strategies of migrants from a Central Eastern European (CEE) country - the Czech Republic - living in a Nordic country - Iceland. We aim to answer the following research questions: *How do mothers and fathers of preschool children from a CEE country (the Czech Republic) decide on the take-up of parental leave and institutional childcare while living in Iceland?*

The analysis stems from (a) comparative study of leave policies and take up, (b) statistical analysis of the value survey on gender roles and care (ISSP 2012 - Family and Changing Gender Roles IV), and (c) interviews with mothers of children under 10 who came to Iceland from the Czech Republic as adults.

The findings provide insights into the complex dynamics of the decision-making by comparing parental choices of care in families from the Czech Republic raising children in Iceland and Icelandic families. The analysis places a focus on individual work–life reconciliation strategies in the context of different family policies in Iceland and the Czech Republic and the prevalent values regarding gender roles and care in both countries. Our results outline a typology of care arrangements for the Czech families living in Iceland as negotiated positions between the policy designs, normative assumptions on appropriate care, and individual family contexts.

**THEORETICAL FRAMING**

In the context of migrant families, a growing number of researchers conceptualise migrants and their kin as transnational families (e.g. Baldassar and Merla, 2014). Using this concept, a series of recent studies has focused on the role that state policies and international regulations play in facilitating or hindering family solidarity across borders (e.g. Kilkey and Merla 2013). In the case of migrant families, it is important to note that women (and men) act not only with reference to the norms and values to which they adhere, but also to the institutional environment of their everyday lives (Krueger and Levi, 2001). Therefore, the legislative framing of care policies in the receiving society must also be acknowledged.

To conceptualize care arrangements, we use holistic definition of “care arrangements” by Birgit Pfau-Effinger. She theoretically frames the in the seminal work as “an interrelation between the cultural values about care, the relevant sense-constructions in a given society surrounding informal and formal care, and the way institutions like the welfare state, the family, the labour market and the non-profit sector as well as social structures frame informal and formal care (Pfau-Effinger, 2005, s. 326). In context of migrant families, both the legislative framing of care policies in both the sending and receiving country, along with the dominant gendered values of appropriate care, labour market, migration policy and family relations, play an important role in the decision making process of parents (e.g. Lutz & Palenga-Möllenbeck, 2012). Kilkey and Merla (2014) distinguish between two dimensions situating care-giving arrangements in the transnational context. The first relates to the institutional setting of care and the second to the spaces in and through which the institutions are configured in relation to both the sending and receiving societies. Transnational families, in this context, also transfer values and expectations regarding institutions and its functioning influences the everyday decisions about combining family and working lives in migrant families. Moreover, the transnational context of care is present in the mobile family members mainly grandparents as care providers, and mobility represents part of the strategy to combine daycare in country of origin and country of destination.

**METHODOLOGY**

The analysis stems from (a) comparative study of leave policies and take up, (b) statistical analysis of the value survey on gender roles and care (ISSP 2012 - Family and Changing Gender Roles IV), and (c) interviews with mothers of children under 10 who came to Iceland from the Czech Republic as adults. The sample consists of nine interviews with parents collected by one of the authors between August and December 2018. All together two fathers and seven mothers who had at least one child under the age of 10 were interviewed, but in only one case did the data collection reach the parental couple. Their age varied between 29 and 45 years, five families had only one child, three hat three children and one family in our sample of Czech parents had two children. The age of the children varied greatly, however the youngest child was always younger than ten. All parents in the Czech sample had university education (master or doctoral degree equivalent) and professional position except of one, who was unemployed. All interviews were digitally recorded with the consent of participants (the sample details in attachment).

The analytical steps were integrated and the inferences were drawn in the steps describe in the figure 1 bellow.

**Figure 1: Institutional, structural and individual level analysis**



## **POLICY ANALYSIS ON CARE POLICIES**

Policies providing both mothers and fathers with the opportunity to work and care characterise the Nordic welfare model to which Iceland belongs (Eydal et al., 2015). In order to encourage fathers to take parental leave, a quota for fathers, based on a use-it-or-lose-it principle, was first introduced in Norway in 1993 (Brandth & Kvande, 2009). Other Nordic countries followed Norway’s example and in the year 2000, Iceland enacted a law providing each parent a three month quota and additional three months of leave which parents could divide as they chose. The leave could be used over an 18 month period following childbirth. Parents can take part-time leave, divide the leave into shorter intervals and both parents can take parental leave at the same time if they wish (Act on Maternity/Paternity and Parental Leave no. 95/2000). A special parental leave fund was established which receives its income from a part of the insurance levy paid by all employers and from state contributions. At the time, this was a radical law as it provided fathers in Iceland the longest father’s quota in the world (Moss, 2013).

When the law came into force, all working parents were entitled to 80% of their salary while on leave, with no ceiling, and a fixed amount was paid to full time students and those working less than 25%. In 2004 a ceiling was placed on the amount working parents received. The ceiling was relatively high, as only 3% of fathers and 1% of mothers had salaried earnings above it and thus, the great majority continued to receive 80% of their salary while on leave (Eydal & Gíslason, 2008).

**Table 1: Family policy measures**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Iceland | Czech Republic |
| Leave policies |
| 9 months paid parental leave 80% of salary | 28/37 weeks of maternity leave; 5 days of paternity leave, 70% of salary |
| 3 months fathers’ and mothers’ quotas 30% of days taken by fathers | parental leave up to 3 years of the child, less than 2% taken by fathers |
| Day care: |
| 7 % of children under 1 year 1-2 year old 85% in day care | 0-2 year old 5,6 % in formal childcare / 36% informal care, about 8 hours a week |
| 3-5 year old 96% | 3-5 year old 82% |
| Short opening hours- during day time only | Short opening hours- during day time only |

Even if Iceland is in the forefront by providing a long father’s quota, Iceland lags behind the other Nordic countries in regards to the length of paid leave. Iceland also differs in that it has not enacted legislation on children’s right to day-care following the end of the parental leave period. In Iceland it is most common for children to start preschool around the age of two. In the year 2014, 41% of one-year-old children were enrolled in preschools, while 95% of children were enrolled at the age of two (Statistics Iceland, n.d.). Hence, a ‘care-gap’ exists between the nine months of paid parental leave until children start preschool. Parents use a variety of solutions to bridge this gap, for example by using family day care, situated in a child-minders home (Eydal, 2008). Despite a subsidy from the municipalities, family day care is more expensive than preschools and although it is under regulation, child-minders decide which children they accept into care. Furthermore, the supply for family day care is less than the demand. Another way to bridge the care gap is to extend the parental leave period by being on part-time leave. As this flexibility is more often used by mothers than fathers (Eydal, 2008; Farstad, 2014; Ingólfsdóttir & Gíslason, 2016) it has been argued that the care gap ‘undermines the gender equality ambitions of the parental leave system’ (Gíslason, 2012: 34).

One important characteristic of the post-communist countries, in comparison with the old EU member states, is the long tradition of the relatively high participation of women in the formal labour market (for example, Pollert, 2003). Although also true in the Czech Republic, we can observe the significant impact of motherhood on female employment as the effect of certain cultural and institutional pressures (Hamplová, 2003; Tomešová-Bartáková, 2009; Saxonberg and Sirovátka, 2006; Křížková and Vohlídalová 2009; Formánková, 2010). The impact of motherhood on female employment in the Czech Republic is one of the highest among the EU countries. This is mainly due to the ideal of full-time mother care influencing the design of family policy measures, which support two to three years out of the labour market in the form of parental leave (for example, Formánková and Dobrotič, 2011).

Maternity leave and related benefit is provided for 28 to 37 weeks with 70%of the replacement of the previous salary. Maternity benefit is calculated on the basis of prior income but as the increase is progressively decreased as income rises the de-familizing effect of the benefit is weaker for those women with higher incomes (ibid). After maternity leave, parental leave legislation allows a parent to be on a leave until the child is three years (or for four years with the employer’s explicit permission), which makes the Czech Republic a country with one of the longest leave policies in Europe. During this period, the parent on leave has a secured position with their previous employer. However, some employers are obviously able to avoid this commitment because a lot of mothers experience difficulties when returning to work after parental leave due to the employers’ approach (for example, Kuchařová et al., 2006, Křížková 2007 and so on).

Since 2008 the parental allowance scheme has been changed several times. The main purpose of these changes was to make parental leave more flexible. A three-track system of parental leave and allowance was introduced as the first important change in 2008. The amount of the monthly allowance indirectly correlated with the length of the parental leave and how it was to be paid out: either through the fast standard or slow drawdown option. From 2012 a parental allowance up to a total amount of CZK220,000 (€8,550) is provided for all parents.

Until legislation on parental leave was passed in 2001 fathers were not equally involved in care duties. It was not until 2007 that parental leave taken by fathers was counted as a period insured for the purpose of pension insurance under the same conditions as that of mothers. However, the low parental allowance provided little incentive for fathers to take leave, and thus parental leave did not directly support the ideal of sharing parental duties. In 2009 men also become eligible for maternity benefits: men could take paid leave for seven weeks after the birth of a child (Act No. 187/2006 Coll., on Sickness Insurance). This was an important step, as maternity benefit is usually higher than the parental allowance. Since 2017, paternity benefit is provided to fathers for five working days until the child reaches six weeks of age (with benefit replacing up to 70% of the previous salary, insurance based, same as maternity benefit).

The low replacement rate of parental benefit and the absence of paternity leave have resulted in less than two per cent of fathers taking parental leave. The lack of childcare provision outside the family for children up to three years old appears to be another crucial factor influencing the women’s careers. For this reason, actual as well as potential motherhood very negatively influences the character of the economic activity of women. Even though the parental allowance was designed to be universal and not income-related (the official reason for this system was to provide more choice), parents with low incomes and those who were unemployed were restricted to only one option. During the leave the parents are allowed to work without any restriction; however, they could only use childcare facilities for children older than two for a maximum of 46 hours a month otherwise, they would lose their right to the allowance (before 1 January 2012 only children older than three were allowed to spend a maximum of four hours a day in childcare).

There is a relatively dense network of kindergartens. As is evident from the relevant statistics, the majority of children from aged three to school age (six years old in the Czech Republic) attend public kindergartens. However, the insufficient places at kindergartens reduced the options for parents to choose between home-based care and professional childcare, thus encouraging full-time motherhood of mothers with children under three.

**POLICY IMPACT ON EMPLOYMENT**

The above-described policies have impact on the employment of men and women in the compared countries. However both Iceland and Czech republic long tradition of the relatively high participation of women in the formal labour market, Czech women face one of the highest impacts of motherhood on female employment as effect of cultural and institutional pressures (Formánková & Dobrotič, 2011). Figure 1 presents a comparison of the labour market participation of men and women of over the life-course in Iceland and the Czech Republic. As the gender gap in employment in the age group 30 to 35 reaches over thirty percent points in the Czech Republic, it is only above ten percent in the same age group in Iceland, indicating how motherhood has a greater impact on employment in the Czech Republic than in Iceland.

**Figure 1. Employment to population ratios for Iceland and the Czech Republic (OECD)**

**GENDERED CARE CULTURES**

As already noted, when discussing how parents arrange care, it is not only important to take into consideration how the state operates with its policies aimed at families, but also to acknowledge dominant gendered values of appropriate care. Table 2 presents findings from an international survey on the family and changing gender roles (ISSP, 2012). A comparison of survey findings between Iceland and the Czech Republic revealed that respondents from the two countries differ in their values towards what is the appropriate form of care for children. While the majority of Czech respondents felt that mothers should use the entire paid leave, the majority of respondents in Iceland felt that the father should at least use some part of the leave. The emphasis on mother's’ care in the Czech Republic is also reflected in participants’ responses to questions on whether mothers of under school aged children should work and who should be the main provider of care for the children.

**Table 2. Attitudes towards the family and gender roles in Iceland and the Czech Republic**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |   | Iceland | Czech Republic |
| *Should women work, child under school age?* |
|   | Work full time | 37% | 16% |
|   | Work part time | 59% | 44% |
|   | Stay at home | 7% | 40% |
| *Child under school age: Best provider of childcare* |
|   | Family members | 6% | 55% |
|   | Government agencies | 77% | 39% |
|   | Non-profit organizations | 0% | 2% |
|   | Private childcare providers | 15% | 3% |
|   | Employers | 1% | 1% |
| *Paid leave, how to divide between parents* |
|   | Mother entire, father not any | 3% | 69% |
|   | Mother most, father some | 50% | 22% |
|   | Mother and father half | 47% | 9% |
|   | Father most, mother some | 0% | 1% |
|   | Father entire, mother not any | 0% | 0% |
| Source: ISSP, 2012 |   |   |

**CARE ARRANGEMENTS AMONG CZECH AND ICELANDIC PARENTS**

**Strategy ‘Almost Czech way’**

The Czech parents in our sample have chosen between three distinguish childcare care arrangements. First group aimed to provide the care in a manner very close to the childcare arrangements typical for the Czech Republic. We have decided to call this strategy ‘Almost Czech way’. In this strategy, mother provides the care at home as long as possible regardless the lack of financial benefits until at least to age two of the child. Mother, as a primary caregiver remains either unemployed or working only part-time. Fathers, on the contrary, do not take an active role in the caregiving; opt out from the possibility to use their parental leave entitlement and take over the breadwinning

Eva, mother of three, reflects her approach to Icelandic childcare model by the time she first arrived to Iceland, married to an Icelander, father of her first child: *When I came here, I felt that society was expecting me to put my child in childcare and start working … but I think nine months is terribly early. You need to breastfeed. So I made an agreement with my husband, that if we have money to cover the rent and food, I will stay at home, so my first child went to kindergarten at age of two* (Eva, 42, 3 children, 17 years in Iceland). The vaulue of breastfeeding is mentioned not only by Eva but in the other accounts as well to reason for prolongation of the intensive mother care until the children reach between one and half and two years and are primarily fed by other means.

Hana, who has as well a child with an Icelandic partner, stayed as a main caregiver at home until the child reached two years. She provides a critical reflection of the Icelandic system of childcare provided by nannies (dagmamma): *A dag mama is not necessarily a bad arrangement, but it would betray my maternal instinct. I don’t really know what would have to happen for me to give my child to another woman.* (Hana, 35, 1 child, 7 years in Iceland).

Zdena, having Icelandic husband, have decided to stay home until children reached age of two and went to kindergarten, using similar reasoning: *I have always thought it is rather suspicious practice to put your six months old baby to a strange woman while I would be elsewhere. I understand some people have to do it (from economic reasons) but I was lucky I did not have to…was afraid what will she do with my little baby….additionally you are still breastfeeding, and I have heard monster stories about not so nice nannies.* (Zdena, 45, 2 children, 16 years in Iceland).

Hana, who also had a child with an Icelandic partner, also was the full-time mother until the child reached two years. She stresses the importance of being the main caregiver for her child in her critical reflection of the Icelandic system of the childminders in family day-care: *A dagmamma is not necessarily a bad arrangement, but it would betray my maternal instinct. I don’t really know what would have to happen for me to give my child to another woman.* (Hana, 35, 1 child, 7 years in Iceland). Hana even decided to postpone the full time attendance of her child until age of three, as she believes children of this age should not stay in childcare for the entire working day:…*Regular child at the age of two should not spend nine hours in childcare institution, six hours is ideal. I believe the kindergartens should have shorter hours for this group of children.* (Hana, 35, 1 child, 7 years in Iceland).

Her account reflects the general distrust to care provided by nannies, however institutionalized (see ISSP). One of the reasons may be lack of experience with similar childcare service in the Czech Republic, which leads to distrust to professional abilities of dagmammas and consequently questioning the quality of such care provided. The care by mother, seen in this context as the best provider for the well-being of the child, stands in sharp contrast and only economic deprivation of the family is seen as providing sufficient reasoning for such decision (of using family day care). Hana even decided to postpone the full time preschool attendance of her child until age of there, as she believes children should not stay in childcare for the entire working day

The parental choices “Almost Czech way” aim to provide care arrangements for preschool children as similar as possible to the country of origin – the Czech Republic. The interviewed mothers justified their decision by providing rather critical accounts on the length of the parental leave, which they find too short. In addition, they did not believe involving fathers in the active childcare role would be as beneficial as their role as breadwinner. What received an occasional criticism is the age when the children start the preschool. In the same time though, even the mothers preferred to do it the most Czech way, they understood the leave system in the Czech Republic as too long. This goes in line with findings on preferences by Kuchařová and Peychlová (2016) who show that two years of age represent a crucial moment for Czech parents. Until than the exclusive mother-care provided in household is mostly decided for. After this period, we can see more frequently a shift in the ideal of parenting to day care and to combining parenting with a kindergarten or by a nanny. This is accompanied by an idea of a (gradual) mother's return to work.

**Strategy ‘Negotiated in-between’**

The present childcare arrangement within the Czech families we interviewed was looking for a strategy or a way ‘Negotiated in-between’. In this type, the parental leave was usually stresses so the parents could stay with the child until it was one years old or older. Czech fathers in our sample have taken at least some share of the parental leave, or, in one case, the father took the majority of the leave. Before the children entered kindergartens at about one and half, the child was taken care of by one of the parents, not dagmamma. One or both parents slightly shortened the working hours in the office or started to work part-time.

The dilemma of having someone outside the family taking care of the child is reflected by Petr. He took the main caregiving role and stayed with the child at home as a main care provider while working part-time and taking night shifts: *We waited until she was at least a year and a half to send her to kindergarten. Most of the people from Bohemia and our parents thought it was terribly early, and it was too late for Icelandic conditions.* (Petr, 29, 1 child, 3 years in Iceland). Thus, Petr was in conflict with the Icelandic policy design that provides only nine months of paid parental leave, if it is used full-time, and points out that starting preschool at the age of one and a half was not well-received by his friends and family in the Czech republic. His wife, Alena, however pointed out that the Icelandic family policy design enables, much better than the Czech model, to combine an academic career with care for small children*: We have chosen Iceland. As we knew, it is possible here - having a family and doing a doctorate. It is very difficult in the Czech Republic, as there are no nurseries.* (Alena, 30, 1 child, 3 years in Iceland). As a result of luck of childcare institutions in the Czech Republic nearly 30% women of two years old children and 60% of three years old children lose job after terminating parental leave (Bičáková & Kalíšková, 2015).

The strategy ‘negotiated in-between’ strategy was justified by stressing the need to provide secure environment and parental care for children under two. The importance of involving fathers in care was also well recognized in the analysed accounts, for two main reasons. Firstly, take of at least some share of the fathers quota leads to strengthening the father-child relationship. Secondly, the understanding between parents on the care demands is increasing. In line with stressing the importance of the parental care, institute of dagmamma was still perceived rather critically, as not valuable alternative, as it is a strange women and therefore not trustworthy. Seeking childcare out of the parental household was framed as mostly a strategy enforced by economic needs of the family. Therefore, similarly to the parents from the “Almost Czech way” the accounts are framing dagmamma as the last option to opt out for economic reasons in case of other possibilities are exhausted. On the other hand, all the parents again provided very positive reflections on the quality of kindergartens and regarded them as much better in comparison to Czech preschool system. In the quality of the service provided for small children (number of the members of the staff, activities) same as the flexibility to attend part-time or shorter hours.

**Strategy ‘Icelandic way’**

The parents, who opted for care arrangements the most similar to Icelandic parents in our sample. The mothers of our sample always opted for stretching the leave by taking lover level of the benefit. At the same time, fathers have always used at least a part if not full share of the daddy quota. Children than either entered kindergarten at about age of one, in care the places were available, or had dagmamma before receiving a place in kindergarten. They all have perceived the Icelandic system of family policy very positively, serving both the needs of children, by providing high quality of childcare in kindergartens, and fro parents by providing enough means to combine family and working life for both mother and farther. Critical accounts were expressed regarding the length of the leave, which should be stressed to at least one year and the level of the benefit, which is too low to motive the high income parent, usually father, to take up the full share entitlement to the leave. Involvement of fathers is seen as natural of Martin, who has three children with his Icelandic wife: *I took the leave shorter and left the six for my wife. I would however be stupid not to use the entitlement and loose it. When we were in Czechia nobody told me directly, you were home with children, you are not a real man. I would kick their asses.* (Martin 42, 3 children,11 years in Iceland).

Similarly, Petra, have stressed the importance of involving father in the childcare and taking up part of the leave also because of the consequence the intensive mothering has on well.-being of mothers. She was facing emotional problems and said the leave is too long, whereas the involvement of fathers beings long term effect on the child-parents relationship, which reminds in the future.

The children in the Czech families who did it the “Icelandic way” either entered preschool at about the age of one, when such places were available, or were placed in the family day care before receiving a place in preschool. The return to work, which was recognized in the narratives as early, was compensated by obtaining part-time until the child was one and half or two. The family day care (dagmammas) were used in two of four families. Jana, who has one child with an Icelandic partner, stressed the need to adopt to the local norm. In addition, she has recognized family day care as sufficient childcare service: *I did not have the Czech need to stay home for three years, I felt it natural to adopt to local norms. Therefore, we found dagmamma. She was kind of grandma to me.* (Jana, 40, 1 child, 15 years in Iceland). Comparing the daycare provider to family members (grandma) serves here as a justification of the reliability of the caregiver and quality of care provided. The parents perceived the Icelandic system of family policy positively, serving both the needs of children, by providing high quality of childcare in preschools, and for parents by providing enough means to combine family and working life for both the mother and farther.

**CONCLUSION**

In this paper, we discussed parents’ decisions on early childcare in national and transnational context. The concept of care arrangements (Pfau-Effinger, 2005) was adopted to capture the unique combination of individual family situations, the nature of state support for non-familial care and provision for taking care leaves, as well as dominant discourses on what constitutes appropriate care.

When comparing the native born and migrant parents, we have focused on the importance of care cultures in the transnational family context. In interviews with the migrant parents, the policy design was interrelated with the normative assumptions on appropriate care, as a pre-migration gendered cultural framework influences parents’ decisions even in the country of destination. The transnational aspect of the family situation involves two aspects. Firstly, in the narratives, the policy measures were always compared to the Czech system and evaluated according the normative assumptions of appropriate care in the Czech Republic, and the most opposed forms of care were the ones ‘unknown’ in the country of origin. Secondly, the absence of other family members providing care, mainly grandmas on the mothers’ side, were mentioned as one of the major obstacle in achieving work-family balance. The care arrangements thus reflect the parents’ values regarding appropriate care in the context of the available institutional setting and the lack of transnational family ties.

However, other factors than cultural models of appropriate care, based on the policy and practice in the country of origin and the country of destination, influence care choices of migrant parents. The family’s socio-economic situation and the labour market conditions in the country of destination (Iceland) also shape parents’ decisions. These factors contribute to the fluidity of the childcare choices. Similar socio-economic factors influenced the way Czech parents arrange care. For the interviewed families who had their children after the economic and monetary crisis, the decisive factor in parental leave use was a) the parents’ employment status and their fear of losing their position and b) the discrepancy between parents’ income and the maximum monthly parental leave benefit. The gender dynamics are however prevalent in such decision making. Simultaneously, the types of reconciliation strategies identified in the narratives cannot be seen as finite. Choices on childcare changed over time and parents did not necessarily choose the same arrangement for all their children. We could identify the tendency, among migrant parents, to adjust to the local (Icelandic) model of childcare, at least in some aspects, the longer they stay. This relates to adapting to the local values, but also to being more accustomed and so trusting to the local family policy measures.

We can conclude that for the migrant parents we interviewed, the pre-migrant ideals of care played an important role in deciding on care arrangements for under school-age children. Even though families’ choices have strong links to public discourses of ‘good parenting’, which are supported, reinforced and eventually changed through specific policy designs but are not always accepted by migrant parents.

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Table of interviews:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Nick for mother | Nick for farther | Years in Iceland | Age | No. of children/age | Education | Profession/job | Second parent/partnership status |
| Hana |  | 7 | 32 | one child; 6 years  | tertial | currently unemployed/services | Icelandic/ separated since 2014 |
| Jana |  | 15 | 40 | one child; 9 years  | tertial | academia, PhD student | Icelandic/ separated since 2012 |
| Eva |  | 18 | 42 | three children; 18, 11, 7 years | tertial | professional working for government | Icelandic/Other nationality/ divorced twice (second 2015) |
| Alena |  | 3 | 30 | one child; 2 years old | tertial | academia, PhD student | Czech/married |
|  | Martin | 11 | 45 | three children; 9, 8, 6 years | tertial | professional in construction company | Icelandic/married |
| Petra |  | 19 | 43 | three children; 11, 9, 4 years | tertial | professional in construction company | Icelandic/married |
| Zdena |  | 16 | 45 | two children; 11, 6 years | tertial | professional working in tourism | Icelandic/married |
|  | Petr | 3 | 29 | one child; 2 years | tertial | mutual jobs - mostly unqualified in services | Czech/married |

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2. Migration regime is system of laws, both national and international, as well as regulations and policies that have an impact on the lives of migrants. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)