




**Norwegian People's Aid**

# AU PAIR IN NORWAY

A guide for au pairs and host families



**ON EQUAL TERMS**

A close-up photograph of two young women. The woman in the foreground is on the right, shown in profile, wearing a green knitted scarf and smiling. The woman in the background is on the left, wearing a blue hooded jacket and a white knit hat, also smiling. The background is blurred, suggesting an outdoor winter setting.

***"It's relaxing to be at the cafe! I can't relax in my room in the house."***



**Au pair in Norway**

# **ON EQUAL TERMS**

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# Contents

## Introduction

Foreword	6
Background and reader guidance	9
Au Pair Center/On Equal Terms	10
The au pair scheme	12
First time au pair application	16

## Part I

The au pair contract – a standard contract from UDI	23
<b>Accommodation</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Wages/pocket money to the au pair</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Tax – what are the rules for au pairs and host families?</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Norwegian language course</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Working hours and work duties</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>The au pair's leisure time</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Holidays and holiday pay</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>What happens if the au pair becomes ill?</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Au pair pregnancy – the way forward</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Host family's obligation to take out insurance</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Termination and dismissal</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Who pays for the return home ...?</b>	<b>51</b>
Breach of the au pair contract	52

## Part II

Take cultural differences into account	57
Children and au pairs:	
What is it like for the children to have an au pair?	59
Tips to au pairs and host families	66
Take home ideas about equality and the welfare state	73
Au pairs from the Schengen/EEA area	75

## Part III

Learn more about being an au pair!	77
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Coming to Norway as an au pair can be both exciting and educational. At the same time, you are particularly at risk of winding up in difficult situations since you live with those you 'work' for and no-one has the responsibility of following you up.

Those of you who are host families assume an especial responsibility by having a young person living in your home. Many host families are insufficiently well prepared for what it means to have an au pair and how this will affect the family situation.

If you should find yourselves in situations of conflict, we want to give you a tool for achieving the best possible solutions. Knowledge and understanding of the rights you have and what is expected of you is important. A greater flow of information prevents exploitation of the au pair scheme and of those who come here as au pairs.

Discussions concerning the extent to which the au pair scheme is veiled work or cultural exchange have been going on for a long time. We do not take any particular view of this in this book. We are nevertheless aware that the legislation gives a certain amount of contradictory signals. The contract between an au pair and host family clearly states that it is cultural exchange. At the same time, some of your duties as an au pair are defined as work by the Tax Office, and you are obliged to pay tax. As an au pair, you are also subject to the Annual Holidays Act. How you, as au pairs and/or host families may deal with these and other challenges is discussed in this handbook.

We hope the knowledge and personal accounts collected here will give you, the au pair, the security needed to claim your rights, and you, the host family, a clearer understanding of what it means to have an au pair living in your home. Lastly, a big thank you to Linn Stalsberg, who wrote and compiled this handbook.

With best wishes



Liv Tørres  
*Secretary General*  
*Norwegian People's Aid*



Mette Nord  
*Leader*  
*Norwegian Union of Municipal*  
*and General Employees*



*- I get support and more confidence to speak with the host family if I have problems.*

*Au Pair Center/ On Equal Terms*



# Background and reader guidance

## *Target group*

This guidebook is primarily aimed at host families and au pairs but we hope that it may also prove useful to others who wish to increase their knowledge and understanding of the scheme whether they are, for example, police or health-service personnel, caseworkers for NAV or simply people who care about the situation of au pairs.

**Au Pair means  
“on equal  
terms”**

The guide is divided into three main sections: The first concentrates on the contract and regulations; the second looks at some more general considerations and gives advice and tips; and the third contains interviews with au pairs, host families and researchers.

## Icons used in this book



Au pair



Host family



Remember/ Attention/ NB

**Do you wonder what  
is happening on  
the Au Pair Center?  
Check the Facebook  
page or our website.**

## Au Pair Center/On Equal Terms

The Au Pair Center is an independent advice centre for au pairs and host families that is run by Norwegian People's Aid and the Norwegian Union of Municipal and General Employees (*Fagforbundet*). The centre has been up and running since 2012 and has seen that the need for information and advice to both au pairs and host families in Norway is great indeed.

The Au Pair Center staff includes a general manager and a lawyer as well as an activities manager who is responsible for all the activities at the centre. Both consultation and activities are free of charge.

### **Services available to au pairs and host families:**

- Information meetings
- Conflict resolution
- General guidance concerning the au pair scheme and regulations, and understanding thereof.

In addition to being an advice centre for both parties, we provide activities and other services aimed specifically at au pairs.

### **Activities and services available to au pairs:**

- Legal advice, particularly where money matters are concerned.
- Sunday café which, in addition to being an ordinary café, arranges trips to museums, walks, bowling, cinema visits and seasonal outdoor pursuits.
- Women Can Do It courses for au pairs which, in addition

to focusing on women's participation in society and public debate, also teach au pairs negotiating techniques in relation to their host families.

- Information meetings about the regulations concerning the au pair scheme. These take place both in Oslo and in other towns and regions that the Au Pair Center visits.
- Self-defence courses
- Reproductive health awareness courses

All our activities and courses are continuously posted on our Facebook pages.



## The au pair scheme



*The current au pair scheme is based upon the 1969 European Agreement on “au pair” Placement.<sup>1</sup> Under the European Agreement, au pair placement was to function as a form of cultural exchange, the au pair was to be between the ages of 18 to 30 and the maximum term of placement as an au pair in one country was set at two years.*


In Norway, there is now a separate government circular concerning au pairs, which builds upon the provisions of the European au pair agreement.<sup>2</sup> The au pair is to live with the host family, she or he is not normally to work more than five hours per day, and she or he has the right to paid wages (pocket money).

When the au pair scheme was first introduced, it generally concerned young European women, usually in their early twenties, who stayed in another European country as an au

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1 European Agreement on “au pair” Placement, Strasbourg, 24. Nov. 1969

2 Utlendingsdirektoratet (rundskriv) RS 2012-015 (2012)



pair for one to two years. This has gradually changed as the world has developed and we now see that a large number of the au pairs currently in Norway come from so-called third-world countries, such as the Philippines, Ukraine and Thailand. Moreover, there has been considerable development in agreements for workers within Europe since the time when the au pair agreement was originally drawn up. The consequence of this is that women and men who come to Norway today from countries within the EU/Schengen area are not registered as au pairs but as ordinary workers. How this affects host families and au pairs from this area is a separate point we will return to later in the guide.

The rules concerning residence permits and visum applications will generally be relevant for au pairs who come from countries outside the EU/Schengen area, the so-called third-world countries.

The rules concerning the au pair contract will be relevant for all au pairs and host families in Norway who have signed the agreement, irrespective of the au pair's country of origin.

# Au pair-visum requirements to the au pair and host family



## **In order to be an au pair in Norway, you must:**

- Have legal residence status in Norway, through applying for a temporary residence permit from the Directorate of Immigration (UDI), or through the EEA agreement.
- Be a woman or a man and between the ages of 18 and 29 when applying for the first time. (The renewal of an au pair visum in order to stay with a new host family within the two-years the visum is valid may also be done after the person concerned has turned 30 years of age.)
- Not have your own children in your home country
- Not be related to members of the host family

All applicants wishing to come to Norway as an au pair from countries outside the EEA must undergo a so-called *return assessment* by UDI. UDI must consider it likely that the au pair will actually return home after the au pair period has expired and does not plan to settle here. One of the preconditions to obtaining a residence permit, therefore, is that the applicant is positive about returning home once the au pair stay is over. UDI further considers the motivation the au pair may have for returning home. This encompasses such aspects as family in the au pair's home country, employment possibilities etc.

Should the au pair not travel home again following the expiry of her or his residence permit, this is regarded as a breach of the Immigration Act. This may affect one's opportunities to apply for residence in Norway at a later date, either as an au pair or on any other grounds.

### **In order to be a host family in Norway, you must:**

- be a couple of the same or opposite sexes, married or cohabitants with children
- be a couple of the same or opposite sexes, married or cohabitants without children
- be a single parent with at least 50% of the daily care and control of the child/children
- speak Norwegian with the au pair
- not, as a general rule, come from the same country as the au pair
- provide the au pair her or his own room in the host family's home
- only have one au pair at a time
- pay for the au pair to attend Norwegian language tuition



**A single person with no children cannot become a host family to an au pair in Norway.**

## First time au pair application

To become an au pair, the applicant must apply for a residence permit from UDI. Beyond this, the au pair may give a written authorisation to the host family or others to take responsibility for filling out applications or undertaking other practical issues to do with the application process.<sup>3</sup> The Directorate of Immigration has drawn up a separate authorisation form for use in such cases. The form, which is available in both Norwegian and English, may be found at <http://www.udi.no/>.

The au pair must deliver the application for a residence permit as an au pair to the Norwegian embassy in her/his country of origin or to the Norwegian foreign service mission in the country where the she/he is living at the time the application is made. This presupposes that the au pair has legal residence status in the country from which she/he makes the application.

Remember to check with the UDI's website when it comes to the regulations and the application process.


The following documents must be submitted:

- Documentation of first time application
- Passport and photocopies of all used pages therein
- Signed accompanying letter from UDI's Application Portal (or application form)
- Two recent passport photographs taken against a white background

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<sup>3</sup> Utlendingsforskriften § 17-1



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- UDI's contract concerning cultural exchange between the au pair and host family, signed by the au pair and host family
  - Documentation of the host family's citizenship (a copy of their passports, for example)
  - UDI's checklist, filled out and signed

Additional documentation where appropriate:

- If the host family consists of only one parent, documentation of his/her percentage share of the daily care and control of the child/children must be provided.
- If the host family already has an au pair: The host family has to confirm when the previous au pair will leave the family.

If the au pair applies for a residence permit from her/his home country, and the permit is granted, the au pair may enter Norway. Following arrival, the au pair must contact the police in order to get the permit effectuated and to be issued with a residence card. Some police stations in Norway have considerable waiting times. This means that the au pair may have to wait up to 4 to 8 weeks after she/he has arrived in Norway before being given an appointment with the police and being able to obtain her/his papers. If an au pair is dismissed by her/his host family during this period, i.e. before she/he has received the au pair visum, this can create great difficulties. According to the au pair contract it is one month notice period. Host families are encouraged not to contact the police before the notice period has expired.

In addition, the au pair must also contact her/his local tax office in order to obtain an ID number. This provides the au pair with social security rights in Norway, such as in relation to health care, for example. Remember to bring your passport or other ID document, your residence permit from UDI and the au pair contract, signed by both the au pair and the host family.

You cannot enter Norway and start as an au pair before your residence permit has been granted. This condition applies even if you only wish to spend a holiday here or get to know your host family before the au pair placement starts.

### **Change of host family – renewal of residence permit**

Sometimes an au pair and her/his host family simply do not get on. It is not uncommon for an au pair to change host family whilst in Norway. The au pair residence permit can thus be renewed but the permit will nevertheless not extend beyond the maximum two years. It is not always easy to find a new host family and the au pair and the original host family really should attempt to arrive at a solution before the au pair takes steps towards a change.

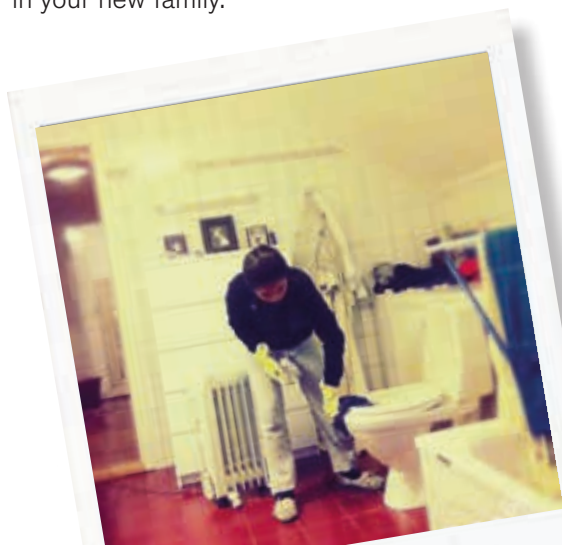
### ***Termination of contract by the au pair***

Contact the Au Pair Center for a chat if you are unsure whether or not you should change host family.

If, as an au pair, you have decided to find a new host family, the following rules apply:

1. You must notify the first host family in accordance with the rules for termination of contract, see page 48.
2. You must find a new host family and then apply for a new residence permit in Norway.
3. You may apply for a new residence permit while still in Norway. You must apply through the UDI website and make an appointment with the police to submit your papers. If your new host family agrees, you may move into their home and live there as a guest until your visum is approved. UDI regards such time as part of your maximum two-year period.
4. You must still fulfil the applicable criteria for being an au pair in Norway.

As soon as the above is in order and you have submitted all your papers, including the new au pair contract with the new host family, at the local police station, you can begin as an au pair in your new family.



### *Termination of contract by the host family*

Some au pairs experience having their contract terminated by their host family. In such cases, the au pair and host family must notify the local police district or UDI that the contract has been terminated. There is to be a one month period of notice. Notice is not to be given to the authorities before the period of notice has expired.

- For au pairs who have been in Norway sufficiently long to have obtained their visum papers, there will now be a 'waiting period' in most cases. UDI or the police will then notify the au pair that revocation of the permit is being assessed and that the au pair will be given the opportunity to make a statement concerning the situation. In this period, the au pair has the opportunity of finding a new host family and applying for a renewal of the residence permit on the basis of placement with the new family.
- Au pairs who are dismissed by their host family before obtaining their visum papers may, in certain circumstances, apply for a new first-time residence permit while still in Norway. This is the case for women and men who hold a Bachelor's degree from their home country and who may be regarded as skilled workers. The person concerned must nevertheless have legal residence status in Norway at the time of application.<sup>4</sup>

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4 Utlendingsforskriften FOR-2009-10-15-1286, § 10-1 a)



## **Can an au pair's residence permit in Norway be taken away?**

The residence permit applies until its expiry date or, in certain cases, until such time when the au pair is notified by UDI that the residence permit has been revoked. The au pair will usually receive prior notification from UDI if revocation of the permit is being considered before it expires. The au pair has the right to appeal a revocation decision.

On what grounds may a residence permit be revoked?  
The most common reason for revocation is that the au pair relationship has ended and The UDI has received notification of this. Another reason may be if the au pair has given incorrect information as to why she/he is here or held back important information about her/his background.

A residence permit may also be revoked if the host family has broken the most important provisions of the contract, for example, if the au pair does not have her/his own room, does not receive paid wages, is asked to work for others or works too much.

If you are in such a situation and need advice, contact the Au Pair Center.



*"I think it's nice to meet people at the Au Pair Center who has the same experience as me."*

## The au pair contract – a standard contract from UDI

*All au pairs and host families in Norway must sign UDI's standard contract concerning cultural exchange between the au pair and host family.<sup>5</sup> This is readily available on UDI's website as well as at most Norwegian embassies abroad. This is the only legal au pair contract that the parties can enter into.*

### **Accommodation**

The au pair is to live with the host family in their house or flat. It is important that the au pair has her/his own room in the home so that they have the opportunity to have a little private life. Having the au pair live permanently outside the family home, in an external flatlet or the like, is not an option. The reason for this is that the purpose of the au pair scheme is cultural exchange, the idea being that the au pair experiences life in a Norwegian family.


### **Wages/pocket money to the au pair**

The right to pocket money is regulated in the au pair contract, point 8. It is called pocket money in the contract but, in a number of other places, in relation to tax, for example, it is referred to as wages. As far as the au pair and host family are concerned, the terms wages and pocket money will mean the same in practice.

An au pair in Norway receives free food and lodging from the host family. In addition to this, the au pair has the right

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5 <http://www.udi.no/globalassets/global/skjemaer/kontrakt-au-pair-contract-au-pair-be.pdf>



to pocket money/wages each month. How much an au pair is to receive in pocket money/wages is adjusted annually. The amount given on UDI's website is the minimum rate. This means that a host family is not allowed to give the au pair less than UDI's minimum rate at any time. Under the contract, the au pair is to be paid at least the applicable minimum rate at all times. This means that the au pair's pocket money/wages are to be increased once a year in line with UDI regulations. This applies to all au pairs. From 1st October 2014, all au pairs in Norway are to receive at least 5400 kroner per month in pocket money/wages before tax.<sup>6</sup>

! Pocket money /wages is/are subject to tax.

### ***Money – a difficult issue***

Talking about money is difficult, so it is no surprise that au pairs and host families may find this challenging. One au pair from China, for example, says she suspects her host family finds having an au pair more expensive than they thought, and that she feels she has to beg to be repaid the money she has forwarded for food or petrol:

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6 <http://www.udi.no/viktige-meldinger/okte-minimumssatser-for-lommpenger-og-norskkurs-for-au-pairer/>





***“Sometimes I pay for food or other small things during the course of the day, making sure I always keep the receipts. But I never get the money back. And if I ask for it several times, it’s suddenly a big deal. That makes me feel small because I don’t want to be begging for money either. Host families must remember that we actually have very little money and that small sums for them can be a lot to us.”***



## **Tax – what are the rules for au pairs and host families?**

Au pairs who come directly from other European countries have often experienced that they do not need to pay tax there and are surprised to find they need to do so in Norway. Au pairs in Norway also pay tax on the value of their board and lodging. Tax is one of the areas au pairs discuss most amongst themselves, saying among other things:

***“A big problem is this thing about tax. It seems like nobody completely understands how it works, neither the au pair nor the host family nor organisations. Everyone is scared about paying the wrong tax.”***

***“I don’t see why our pocket money should be taxed. And why is the tax different from au pair to au pair?”***

***“I have problems understanding this thing about tax in Norway because we have almost no rights as employees.”***

### **For the host family**

You are considered to be an employer when you pay a person pocket money/wages to carry out various tasks in your home. Free board and lodging is a taxable benefit to the au pair in the same way as pocket money/wages. The value of free food and lodging must therefore be included in the tax settlement. For calculating the relevant taxable benefits, see the rates for food and lodging.<sup>7</sup>

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7 <http://www.skatteetaten.no/no/Tabeller-og-satser/Kost-og-losji/> 2014



## Rates for taxable benefits in kind etc.

<b>Free board and lodging</b>	<b>Daily rates</b>
Free placement – board and lodging	114 kr
Free board – all meals	82 kr
Free board - two meals	64 kr
Free board – one meal	42 kr
Free lodging – one or shared room	32 kr

Rates as of 15.10.2014

Although you are regarded as the au pair's employer for tax purposes, you do not pay employer's tax.<sup>8</sup>

### *Means of tax settlement*

As a host family/employer, you must obtain the au pair's tax card by electronic means. The rate for tax deductions on the tax card is fixed on the basis of information concerning how much the au pair expects to earn and how long the au pair will be resident in Norway in the income year concerned. Holiday pay is also taxable income. Tax deductions shall be fixed in the same way as for salaried workers.

As a host family/employer, you must choose between two means of settling the au pair's tax deductions. You must adhere to whichever means you choose throughout the year concerned.

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8 <http://www.skatteetaten.no/no/Bedrift-og-organisasjon/Drive-bedrift/Arbeidsgiver/Utenlandsk-arbeidskraft/Au-pair-i-huset/>

## 1. Simplified means of tax settlement

Every time you pay the au pair her/his pocket money/wages, you fill out the “Settlement Form for Private Employers” (RF-1049).<sup>9</sup> This can be done electronically and then sent to *Skatteetaten* (the Tax Office). You will automatically receive a customer identification number (KID) and account number for tax payments (advance tax deductions). This information will be sent to the Tax Collection Office in your local authority area and your personal identity number will be used as your employer’s identity number in this context.

As a host family/employer, you are obliged to calculate the advance tax deductions and send the tax settlement to the Tax Collection Office in your local authority area. You do this at the same time you pay out the au pair’s wages.

How much you are to deduct is given on the au pair’s tax card. If you do not get the tax card, you must deduct 50 % tax. Remember to include the value of free board and lodging. In order to work out the taxable income, you must multiply the daily rate for board and lodging by the number of days the au pair has received free board and lodging. You must give the au pair a print-out of the electronic settlement form or a copy of the paper form to function as her/his wage slip.

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9 <http://www.skatteetaten.no/no/Skjemaer/Oppgjorsblankett-for-private-arbeidsgivere/>



## 2. The alternative means of tax settlement

The alternative means entails sending one combined wage and tax deductions form (RF-1015) in January the following year. The advance deductions are deposited in a separate bank account until such time as you pay the Tax Collection Office in your local authority area.

**For more information about tax, see the Tax Office brochure: “Tax rules for childcare for parents, child-minders and interns/au pairs.”<sup>10</sup>**

### *Au pair*


After you have applied and been granted a residence permit by UDI and had your permit registered (effectuated) at a police station by attending in person, you must meet up at the tax office to notify them of your move to Norway. To be able to give notification of your move, you must have a residence permit for 6 months or more. You will then receive a personal identity number.



When staying in Norway and receiving pocket money from your host family, you must have a tax card. You can apply for this at the same time you give notification of your move to Norway. If your residence permit is for less than six months, you are not to give notification of moving to Norway but must nevertheless apply for the tax card. You will then be given a so-called D-number. ).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.skatteetaten.no/no/Person/Selvangivelse/Veiledning-til-selvangivelsen/Skatte regler-ved-barnepass/Informasjon-for-foreldre/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.skatteetaten.no/no/Person/Skatte kort-og-forskuddsskatt/Utenlandsk-arbeidstaker/Au-pair-i-Norge/>




You will receive either a tax card, where you deduct a *certain percentage* of your income, or a card with a tax table, where you deduct a *specific amount* on the basis of the paid wage you receive. This depends on the regime of the local tax office and, in the final analysis, makes very little difference. As an au pair in Norway you must also pay tax on the value of the free board and lodging you receive from your host family. Read more about this at page 31.

After you have received your tax card, your host family must download it electronically from [skatteetaten.no](http://skatteetaten.no).

It is your responsibility to make sure your tax is paid. Remember to ask your host family for a signed wage slip each month that confirms your tax has been paid. Look after these carefully.

Your host family is your 'employer' and must actually pay tax from what they pay out to you each month. If your host family is unsure as to how to make the tax deductions for you, you may together contact the Tax Office or the Au Pair Center for guidance.

- The au pair is not to pay tax on the money the host family pays for the au pair's Norwegian language course. This is considered to be part of the cultural exchange.
- If the tax authorities calculate that you have paid too much tax at the end of the year, you will get the excess back. If you have paid too little, you will receive a tax demand requiring that you pay what you owe to the local tax office. This is called '*restskatt*', which means remaining unpaid taxes.

- 
- If you are not working throughout the entire year, it is important that you make this clear when providing the information necessary to work out your tax card.
  - Make sure you get a receipt each month from your host family to show that your tax has been paid. Take good care of all such receipts while you are in Norway to show that you have done all you can to make sure your tax has been paid. If you do not do this, you could wind up in a difficult situation if it turns out that your host family has not been paying your tax.
  - As a foreign worker in Norway, you are entitled to a standard tax discount of 10 % on your gross earned income. This should be entered under the heading '*Andre avslag*' (i.e. Other discounts) on your tax return form.

**Tax example:**


An au pair who came to Norway in January 2014 earned 5,200 kroner per month. The value of board and lodging is calculated to be 114 kroner per day, which amounts to 3,420 kroner per month. The tax office thus calculates the au pair's wages to be 8,620 kroner per month, or 103,440 kroner per year. According to the tax office's 2014 tax rates, the au pair would then have to pay 8,500 kroner in tax per year, or 708 kroner per month. If you have a tax card containing a tax table, it is possible you will pay as much as 1,200 per month in tax. If you pay too much tax, the excess amount will be paid back to you.



## Norwegian language course

All au pairs have the right to attend a Norwegian language course. The host family is responsible for finding such a course and paying for it. There are, however, no rules to say that the au pair may not find a Norwegian course her/himself if she/he prefers to do so. The rates for Norwegian courses change annually and UDI at all times maintains an overview of the amount the host family is obliged to pay for the au pair's course. The host family pays for the au pair's course, study material and travel to and from the place of study.<sup>12</sup>

From 1st October 2014, the minimum amount the host family is to pay for the au pair's Norwegian language course is set at 8,100 kroner, corresponding to 675 kroner per month.<sup>13</sup>



The Norwegian language course is regarded as part of your cultural exchange and Norwegian language courses are recommended to all au pairs. Here you will become more familiar with Norwegian culture and often get to know au pairs from many different countries.

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12 UDI Standard kontrakt om kulturutveksling mellom vertsfamilie og au pair, punkt 9.

13 <http://www.udi.no/viktige-meldinger/okte-minimumssatser-for-lomme-penger-og-norskkurs-for-au-pairer/>







## **Working hours and work duties**


Working hours and work duties are described in the au pair contract, pt. 10. The thought at the outset is that the au pair is to be part of the family and that, as part of the household, it is natural that she/he help by carrying out certain work duties, light housework, for example. The au pair's working hours should not normally exceed five hours a day. It is possible under the contract, however, that the au pair work slightly longer days once or twice a week as long as the total number of hours the au pair works does not exceed the maximum of 30 per week.

The au pair must not under any circumstances carry out work duties that are not linked to the host family's children or home, or work for other employers or persons.

The host family is obliged to set up a detailed overview of what the 'average working week' will be like for the au pair. Here, both the expected use of time and the types of duties must be stated. There is of course room to have slightly different tasks from week to week.

***– My children are very happy to have new people in the house; they're used to having au pairs. They are always happy to see me at kindergarten. They are proud of me and don't want me to leave.***

Filipino au pair, 22



**UDI has no guidelines as to what entails ‘light’ housework or childcare, but these are examples from the Atlantis Au Pair agency:**

**Duties related to childcare:**

- washing, dressing and giving children breakfast in the morning
- accompanying children to kindergarten/school
- child-minding during the day
- playing, playing games, reading for or going for a walk with children
- helping with homework and accompanying children to leisure-time activities
- making food, including children’s dinner
- bathing and preparing children for bed; putting children to bed
- clearing up after children (e.g. toys)

***– Some parents are very busy and do not want their children to disturb them. Then we have to deal with them. My host mother, for example, can’t bear the baby crying. Then I have to take her.***

Filipino au pair, 26



### **This is examples of 'light housework':**

- making/changing children's beds, cleaning children's bathroom
- vacuum-cleaning and dusting children's rooms and shared areas
- ironing children's clothes and putting them away in drawers/wardrobes
- washing family clothes in the washing machine, hanging them up, using the tumble-drier
- doing the washing up, filling and emptying the dishwasher
- tidying and keeping the kitchen clean, including mopping/washing the floors
- buying food (other than the weekly grocery shopping)
- sharing cooking with other adult members of the household
- airing and feeding pets (must be agreed beforehand)
- keeping own room/bathroom clean and tidy

### **Housework which is not suitable for the au pair:**

- weekly grocery shopping
- making/changing host parents' bed
- washing host parents' private bathroom
- serving family guests/visitors/or at christenings/confirmations
- gardening (unless the au pair wishes to do so or the whole family is engaged in communal work)
- washing the car
- spring-cleaning and doing the weekly wash, including windows
- cleaning the oven, other than wiping down surfaces
- cleaning and tidying up after pets that are not house-trained
- looking after pets in the au pair's leisure time/holiday



### *What is work and what is participation in family life?*


The au pair scheme gives a young woman or man the opportunity of seeing new countries and experiencing a different culture. The reality of the situation, however, is that many host families need help to ease the pressure of time rather than anything else and are more interested in that than undertaking cultural exchange at home.

The combination of these aspects can create a complex picture, often resulting in daily dilemmas concerning the dividing line between work and natural participation in a family. Dilemmas such as the following crop up often:

- If everyone, including the au pair, sit and have dinner together and then clear the table together afterwards, is that work or being part of the family all helping together?
- If the au pair watches TV with the children, is that child-minding or forging bonds with 'new family members'?
- If the children come into the au pair's room and play there, is she/he then at work or spending her/his leisure time with the family's children?

It can be almost impossible to define what work is and what leisure time is during the course of a normal day. A useful pointer, however, is that the au pair should *never feel like a domestic worker*, for then it is impossible for her/him to feel part of the family.

Norwegian families who wish to have an au pair must have realistic expectations in relation to being a host family and be aware that efforts will have to be made from both parties. Small details



can often play a significant role, such as how one is made welcome and having good information before commencing the placement. There is a big difference between the au pair *always* clearing the table after dinner and doing it *now and again*. There is a big difference between helping the family clean the whole house on Fridays and having the responsibility of doing it alone. Both host family and au pair are responsible for making sure the au pair does not work more than the contract allows.

The quote below is from an au pair who had worked in two other European countries before coming to Norway. Definitely food for thought...

***– Even though I’m getting on well, being an au pair in Norway is very different from in other European countries. Here the host family says that you are part of the family but I don’t feel it. With my German host family, for example, we always cleared the table after dinner together, while having a laugh and chatting together. Here the family leaves the table while I clear away. A lot of my au pair friends say the same thing. I’m also a bit wary of going on holiday with my host family. Other au pairs have told me how they are left to mind the children all day while the host family goes off skiing. Sometimes I get a very strong feeling about being a foreigner, about being different, because it’s always being pointed out that I’m not from here.***

Filipino au pair, 24



## **The au pair's leisure time**

The au pair is to live like a family member and participate in ordinary family activities. This can make it difficult to know what counts as leisure time. Most au pairs will benefit from having a life outside the house too, with friends and other activities. For many, going to church is also important, while others want to take part in sports or indulge other hobbies.

The minimum required leisure time for an au pair is laid down in the au pair contract, pt.11. In addition to this, the au pair has the right to be able to attend Norwegian language courses and other leisure time activities.

Under the contract, the au pair has the right to the following:

- At least one day, i.e. 24-hour period, completely free per week.
- The free day must be a Sunday at least once a month.
- An additional afternoon free on a fixed day each week. The afternoon is taken to start at 12 o'clock midday.


It is important that the host family respect the au pair's days off. There is a good chance that she/he will have arranged to meet friends or is looking forward to other plans. It can be painful to have to cancel because the host family asks for help. Bear in mind that it is very difficult for some au pairs to say no when they are asked for help by the host family.

*What should the au pair do if she/he works too much?*

- Tell the host family that you know you are working too much.
- Make your point calmly and in appropriate fashion. Refer to the regulations and the contract.
- Stand up for your rights. This can be important for other au pairs meeting the same problems and it is also important in order to prevent the au pair scheme being exploited by people who are mainly interested in cheap labour.
- If the family refuses to listen or does not take you seriously, you can contact the Au Pair Center.

***– Host families are very well aware of the au pair contract but some ignore it and close their eyes. I know of a girl from the Philippines who came here via Singapore. After six months here she told me that, while she was an au pair, she was also working and cleaning a number of houses in the neighbourhood. She wasn't getting any extra pay for this. She works full days from 8.30 to 16.30. She'd like to escape from the situation but doesn't know how to go about it.***

Filipino au pair, 24



***– My host family's alright but there's an awful lot of work. Sometimes the parents go to their cabin and I'm left with responsibility for the children for the whole weekend. The mother is very exacting about my housework even if she's very untidy herself and leaves things lying around everywhere. When both are at home at the weekend, the whole house is a catastrophe on Monday morning. They leave all the mess and washing up to me after the weekend and sometimes I just feel like crying when the week begins.***

Filipino au pair, 22


## **Holidays and holiday pay**

It is the Annual Holidays Act that regulates how much and when an au pair can take a holiday, in exactly the same way as other employees in Norway.<sup>14</sup> An au pair should normally have 25 working days' holiday during the calendar year. Since this includes Saturdays, this amounts to four weeks and one day. Below, we explain the holiday regulations that the au pair and host family are obliged to relate to during the au pair's placement in Norway.

### ***Right to holiday***

- All au pairs who arrive in Norway before 30<sup>th</sup> September are entitled to 25 working days' holiday in the same calendar year.
- Under the Annual Holidays Act, the au pair is entitled to three weeks' holiday during the period from 1st June to 30<sup>th</sup> September, if desired.



- 
- Au pairs who arrive in Norway after 30<sup>th</sup> September are entitled to six working days' holiday the same calendar year. The following year, she/he will be entitled to the full holiday.
  - The same rules apply should the host family be changed as long as the au pair can document that she/he has not already taken her/his holiday with the previous host family.


### **National holidays/red days:**

So-called red days, for example, during Christmas, Easter and on the National Day, the 17<sup>th</sup> May, are holidays for everyone. These days are not included in the 25 working days' holiday to which au pairs are entitled.

Remember, however, that such days are important in the context of the au pair wishing to participate in Norwegian culture. The host family should try to invite the au pair to take part in these festivities without requiring her/him to work or contribute more than anyone else. The au pair is nevertheless entitled to celebrate these days alone or with friends should she/he wish to do so.

### ***Holiday pay – not wages***

An au pair in Norway is entitled to take a holiday in the first year she/he is here as an au pair but she/he is not entitled to paid holiday in the first year. This is the same as for other employees in Norway. The reason is that an au pair builds up a so-called 'holiday pay calculation basis' during the first year of the placement in Norway. The holiday pay calculation basis is the au pair's gross income plus the value of the board she/he receives from the host family in the period of one year.<sup>15</sup>



The holiday pay calculation basis is used to work out the au pair's holiday pay. An au pair who arrived in Norway in 2014 is entitled to holiday pay in 2015. Holiday pay replaces the au pair's wages/pocket money in the month when it is paid. Many host families pay out the au pair's holiday pay in June, but the au pair is entitled to request that the holiday pay be paid before she/he goes on holiday. It is probably wise to agree upon this as quickly as possible and in good time before the au pair wishes to go on holiday.

Example of holiday pay calculation:

Holiday pay = 10.2 % of the total gross income (holiday pay calculation basis) plus the value of free board received as part payment for work done. The rate for au pairs' pocket money/wages in 2014 was fixed at 5,200 kr. per month until 01.10.14 and 5,400 kr. from 01.10.14. For 2014, the value of free board was fixed at 82 kr. per day. If the au pair has worked throughout 2014, she/he should receive around 9,500 kr. in holiday pay in 2015. The exact amount will depend on whether the au pair had unpaid holiday in 2014 and, if so, for how long.



When you finish as an au pair for a host family, you must remember to ask for any earned holiday pay which has not been paid out. This also applies when you have worked as an au pair for two years and are returning to your home country.



### ***Can the host family oblige the au pair to take a holiday?***

Under the Annual Holidays Act § 5 (5) an employee/au pair can decline the taking of a holiday and any additional free time to the extent to which her/his holiday pay does not cover the lack of wages during the holiday absence. This means that a host family cannot force the au pair to take more holiday than her/his earned holiday pay will cover.

The host family cannot suddenly travel away for a weekend or a week without the au pair and decide that this is the au pair's holiday.


### **What happens if the au pair becomes ill?**

Au pairs who are to be in Norway for more than 12 months, and who have a valid residence permit, are members of the Norwegian National Insurance Scheme, *Folketrygden*. This means they have full entitlement where medical assistance and hospitalisation are concerned, on an equal footing with all other citizens.


If the au pair has been with the host family for more than four weeks, the au pair is entitled to sick pay if she/he becomes ill and is unable to work.<sup>16</sup> Under the National Insurance Act § 8-19, the host family must pay the au pair her/his pocket money/wages for the first 16 days of the period of illness – the so-called employer period. The host family must continue to provide free board and lodging.

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16 Folketrygdloven § 8-2



The au pair must visit the doctor to receive a sick note if she/he is sick for more than three days in a row. As the 'employer', the host family must give the sick note to their local NAV office. NAV will be responsible for sick pay once the employer period is over. Should the illness turn out to be of a long-term nature, the host family may, in consultation with the attending doctor, assess whether the au pair placement be brought to an end. Refer to the information concerning insurance for return home at page 47.



### ***Entitlement to a regular General Practitioner and the specialist health service***

The purpose of the regular GP scheme is that everyone who wishes to have a regular General Practitioner to relate has the opportunity to do so. Most people who reside in Norway are entitled to a regular GP as are all persons with a registered address in Norway with a Norwegian personal identity number or D-number.

You will be assigned a General Practitioner as your regular doctor after you have registered at the Tax Office. You will receive a letter with the name of your regular GP and this will be the person you go to should you need medical advice or assistance. If you need immediate help, you contact *Legevakten* (Accident and Emergency). This is a medical centre that is open around the clock.

Everyone who lives in Norway is entitled to seek medical help. This includes the specialist health service, for example, psychiatrists, gynaecologists and orthopaedists. If you wish to see a specialist, you will need to get a referral from a General



Practitioner (often your regular GP) before you can make an appointment with a specialist in the public health service.

In Norway, just about all medical assistance is free but you will need to make a fixed contribution on medicines and if you visit your doctor. You can, of course, visit your doctor without having to inform your host family.

There are also private doctors and private health services in Norway. These are much more expensive than the public sector services. You can get an appointment more quickly, particularly if you need to see a specialist, but be aware that this will cost much more. The regular GP you get assigned to you will always be from the public health service.


- Dental treatment is not covered by the National Health Service in Norway! And dentists can be very expensive. If you have the option, it is far better to visit a dentist in your home country when you are visiting or on holiday.

**Au pairs coming to Norway must be tested for tuberculosis.<sup>17</sup> The host family must ensure this is done before the au pair starts spending any time with the children. This rule does not generally apply if the au pair comes from Europe, North America or Australia.**

**Do you need an ambulance or emergency assistance?  
Ring 113**

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17 <http://www.udi.no/har-fatt-svar/au-pair/har-fatt-ja-pa-soknad-om-au-pair-tillatelse/#link2>



## **Au pair pregnancy – the way forward**

It may occur that an au pair becomes pregnant while on her placement in Norway. If you become pregnant while you are an au pair in Norway, go to your regular GP. Here you will receive information about what it is like to be pregnant in Norway and the kind of follow-up you are entitled to from the Norwegian national health service. If you do not wish to continue the pregnancy, you will be able to get information about choosing an abortion.

If you choose to continue the pregnancy, you must talk about it with your host family. What will you do now? What would the host family's attitude be if you became too ill to work during your pregnancy? It is up to the host family and the au pair to solve this unforeseen situation between them. If difficulties in communication occur, contact the Au Pair Center.

An au pair in Norway is not generally allowed to have her own children.<sup>18</sup> This means that you cannot continue as an au pair after you have given birth because the conditions for the au pair residence permit are no longer fulfilled. The au pair must then either return to her home country or apply for residence on other grounds if she wishes to continue living in Norway.

You must also think practically: Where is the child to be born? What does the child's father think? If you are not from the same country, this conversation becomes even more important. Even if one of the child's parents is Norwegian, and the child becomes a Norwegian citizen, this does not

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18 UDI rundskriv RS 2012-015, punkt 3.1.2

mean that the second parent will automatically be allowed to stay in Norway.

If you have legal residence in Norway when the child is born, you may be entitled to a lump-sum grant from NAV. This is a single payment given to women who give birth in Norway, and who have legal residence, but have not earned the right to full parental benefits.<sup>19</sup> Contact NAV by telephone:

55 55 33 33 or read more on NAV's website, [nav.no](http://nav.no).



- No rights accrue under the provisions of the au pair residence permit in the immigration regulations if an au pair becomes pregnant.
- If the father is Norwegian or is staying in Norway on a permit that may provide the basis for family immigration, the mother may apply for family reunification with the father if they are married or intend to live together. If the parents are not married and do not intend to live together, the mother can apply for family reunification with the child if the child is Norwegian. For more information about family immigration, go to [www.UDI.no](http://www.UDI.no).
- If the mother or father is Norwegian, the child will be Norwegian also. More information as to who are considered Norwegian citizens can be found on UDI's website.

Source: UDI

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19 Nav.no; Engangstønnad ved fødsel og adopsjon



## **Host family's obligation to take out insurance**

All host families are obliged to take out insurance for their au pair. <sup>20</sup> This insurance includes travel home if the au pair becomes ill, is injured or, in a worst case scenario, dies. This insurance must cover the entire period the au pair is here.

A host family that does not take out such insurance for their au pair is in breach of the au pair contract. Should the au pair become ill or die while she/he is an au pair, the host family would then be obliged to pay for the home journey. This can prove to be very expensive so it is important to make sure the au pair has valid insurance. The insurance is directly linked to the au pair; it will not be refunded if the au pair changes host family or in cases where a residence permit is not granted.

If the au pair is to live in Norway less than 12 months, she/he must also have additional travel insurance that covers illness. Unless the au pair and host family agree otherwise, the au pair must pay for this her/himself.

If the au pair is to pay, maybe it is possible to use the same insurance company as the host family?

## **Termination and dismissal**

Termination and dismissal in relation to the au pair relationship is regulated by the au pair contract, pt.18. Notice of termination of the au pair relationship applies from the day the opposite party receives notification. The au pair or

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20 Se au pair-kontrakten punkt 15



the host family must notify the local police station or UDI when the contract is terminated. There is a period of notice of one month for both parties but the au pair and host family may agree other solutions. Remember to wait to contact the authorities until the period of notice has expired.

### *Host family*

For a host family to be able to dismiss an au pair, there must be reasonable grounds for dismissal. This means that not every reason the host family gives will necessarily be regarded as reasonable grounds for dismissal. The host family must make the dismissal in writing and explain the grounds for dismissal if the au pair requires that they do so. The host family must give the au pair a period of notice of one month. In this period the au pair has the right to live with the host family and receive her/his normal pocket money/wages. If the au pair wishes to live somewhere else, she/he must pay for this her/himself. If the host family wants the au pair to live somewhere else during the period of notice, the host family is obliged to meet the costs.

If the au pair has committed a gross breach of contract, she/he may be dismissed immediately. In such circumstances, the period of notice no longer applies.





### *Au pair*

An au pair can terminate the contract and quit at any time but there are certain rules which must be followed. These are:

- You must give the host family one month's notice. The period of notice runs from the day the opposite party receives the notification.
- You must give notification in writing.
- You need not tell your host family your reason for quitting. This is regarded as a private matter.
- If you have holiday owing, you are entitled to take this during the period of notice.

If the host family is in serious breach of the au pair contract, the au pair may leave the host family immediately. In such cases, the au pair may notify the family either verbally or in writing. Nor, in such cases, is the au pair obliged to work through the period of notice.

A serious breach of contract might be, for example, that the au pair's pocket money/wages have not been paid as agreed or that she/he receives less than what she/he is entitled to under the contract. If the au pair works more than the maximum 30 hours per week or performs work that cannot be considered *light* housework, this can also be regarded as a serious breach of contract. It is also, of course, a serious breach of contract if the au pair is exposed to physical or sexual abuse/harassment. For further details, see page 53.



## **Who pays for the return home at the end of the au pair placement?**

Under the au pair contract, pt.14, the host family is to cover the necessary travel costs in connection with the au pair's homeward journey. This obligation does not apply if the au pair remains in Norway on different grounds for residence after the contract period is over or if the au pair wishes to travel on to another country rather than return home.

This means that the family with whom the au pair most recently had a valid au pair contract is obliged to cover the au pair's homeward journey. This host family may have to cover the homeward journey for the au pair even if the au pair contract has expired by the time the journey takes place. If the erstwhile host family or the au pair is in doubt as to who should cover the expenses for the homeward journey in a specific case, contact the Au Pair Center, where an independent assessment of the case can be made on the basis of information provided by both parties.

Under the contract, the host family is to cover the necessary expenses for the au pair's return home. This means the family must meet the travel costs for the au pair for the entire journey home. For example, not all au pairs from the Philippines live in Manila, and in such cases it would be right and proper to cover the au pair's expenses all the way to the home town or village.



## Breach of the au pair contract

### **Host families can be put in quarantine**


Are you an au pair in a family that you would not want other au pairs to experience? Do you know of a host family that does not treat its au pair well? Notify the visum section of UDI or the police. If you think that is too difficult, inform the Au Pair Center, who can then take the case further. The centre has a duty of confidentiality and cannot reveal anything to the police or UDI without your agreement.

Breach of the au pair contract may result in quarantine for the host family. Breaches of the au pair contract include, for example, requiring that the au pair work too many hours, not paying her pocket money/wages, withholding her passport or not providing her with her own room in the house.

The purpose of the quarantine scheme is to catch those persons who exploit their au pair, not she or he who is being exploited.

Quarantine can be imposed in the following situations:

- Quarantine can be imposed if a host family is in gross breach of, or repeatedly breaches, the terms of the au pair's residence permit. How long the imposed quarantine may last depends on the nature, extent and duration of the act. Quarantine means that residence permits will not be granted for au pairs to stay with the family concerned. The conditions for au pair permits are laid down in the au pair contract and it is up to UDI to assess whether there are sufficient grounds for the imposition of quarantine.

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- Alternatively, quarantine may be imposed if a person in the host family has been penalised (for an act or acts which could result in a term of imprisonment of more than three months) for an act committed against a person who was an au pair in the host family at the time the act was committed. In such cases, a conviction will be on record.


**UDI recommends that those wishing to be a host family thoroughly explore what the au pair scheme involves. Cultural exchange is at the core of the scheme, and working hours and pocket money/wages are regulated in relation to this. If what the family really needs is an intern, domestic help or child-minder, the family should employ such a person instead.**

### **Serious situations - harassment, abuse and exploitation**

Sometimes serious abuse of an au pair may occur that requires help and assistance from the police and legal system. Such instances include, for example, physical abuse of the au pair, verbal harassment, enormous workloads or sexual harassment and abuse. Here we take a closer look at what the au pair must do if she or he is a victim of any of the above.

**Report it! Such abuses are forbidden in Norway.**

Cases have also arisen where the au pair is not paid what she is owed and the host family consciously withholds the money in order to gain control over her. Neither is the host family allowed to take the au pair's passport or other personal documents.



! Never sign any documents you do not understand.


***– I have experience of an au pair who was beaten by the host mother. I've also helped an au pair who was verbally harassed by her host mother.***

Regina Deana Cruz Pascual, activities manager at the Au Pair Center.

*Where can you get help?*

**If you are in immediate danger, call the police emergency number: 112.**

- Contact the Au Pair Center. They can help you out of the host family's house if you need such assistance. The Au Pair Center can also provide advice in relation to the services of a lawyer if that is needed. In many cases, an au pair who has been exposed to harassment or other abuses will have the right to engage a lawyer on her/his behalf.
- Au Pair Center has a duty of confidentiality.

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- Keep hold of any evidence of abuse or threats
  - Keep a diary if you are experiencing abuse
  - Tell a friend what is happening




Regrettably, some au pairs have experienced being exposed to sexual abuse in their host family.

If you experience sexual abuse from the host family or anyone else, you can:

- Call the police if you are in immediate danger
- Contact the Au Pair Center if you are at a loss and unsure as to what you should do. There is a lawyer there who will be able to help you.
- Contact the ROSA-project in Oslo, which has expertise in helping women and men who have experienced sexual exploitation.

The ROSA-project has a 24-hour telephone service available if you experience sexual abuse and need immediate assistance to get away: **22 33 11 60**

**Au Pair Center experience that many make contact too late, When a conflict has escalated and difficult to solve. Please make contact immediately if you face challenges.**



***– Some of the children get spoiled. They expect that we fetches things for them.***

*Filippinsk au pair, 24 år*



## Take cultural differences into account

*There are obviously cultural differences between au pairs and host families. After all, they come from different countries. Many a host families has chosen an au pair from a country far away. This may present extra challenges but it is just as likely to prove extra positive. More than anything else, the interplay between au pair and host family depends on their respective personalities and the kind of family the au pair comes from in her/his home country. For example, some are more used to lending a hand than others. Some are chatty and open while others are shy and more private. And of course the same goes for host families!*

Some host families consciously choose an au pair from a culture similar to our own. Host parents Hallvard and Ingerlise have had one au pair from Italy, and one from Latvia. That they were from Europe was a conscious choice:

***“We wanted someone on a par with ourselves and neither did we want one of the youngest au pairs. It was important that they really wanted to learn Norwegian and spoke good English. Our Italian au pair spoke seven languages! She was quite a girl!”***

Another host couple says how happy they were with their first au pair from the Czech Republic and that they subsequently wanted to be a little bolder and meet a more unfamiliar culture. This time they chose an au pair from Peru. In retrospect, the couple see that they were perhaps so eager to get to know Peruvian culture that they did not read the au pair's application thoroughly enough:

***“There are a number of au pairs from South America who have grown up with a domestic worker themselves. The girl we got wasn’t used to doing anything and she didn’t actually want to come to Norway either, but to go to the Netherlands where her sister lived. We didn’t actually take that on board from the application. It didn’t work. She forgot to fetch the children and wasn’t interested in learning Norwegian. I had to give her notice. It was all quite sad. After that, we got a new Czech au pair who really wanted to come to Norway and learnt to speak Norwegian fluently after three months. She played loads with the children and was creative and active. It wasn’t before she left we realised how much housework she’d actually been doing! We visited her later in Prague and she and her boyfriend are coming to visit us in the summer.”***



At the centre of the au pair scheme, there are often children, and they get an entirely new adult person in their lives to relate to. Au pairs, on the other hand, sometimes meet a completely different way of bringing up children from the one they are used to.

Au pairs in Norway must be aware that over 90% of Norwegian children attend kindergarten. To have a nanny or intern, or to be a stay-at-home mother or father is not at all common. Thus much of the time the au pair spends with the children will involve taking them backwards and forwards to school or kindergarten.

It is also worth knowing that many Norwegian parents value having quality time with their children: playing together, going on outings, reading or going with their children to their leisure time activities. As one family puts it:

***– The au pair does a lot of the practical work and we ease the pressure of housework instead of arguing about it. Dinner arrives quickly on the table too so we have time to play with the kids afterwards.***

Another host family has a similar view:

***– The au pair gives us parents more time with the children. It's good for the children to see that we have more energy left over for them.***

For some au pairs, it is doubtless a relief not to have to be a child-minder much of the time. For others, it will feel more of a loss because they thought child-minding was a larger part of being an au pair.

The host family and au pair must talk about what each party expects from day-to-day life and the role the au pair is to have in the children's lives.



### **Don't let the au pair be the children's servant**

Stein Erik Ulvund is a professor of pedagogy at the University of Oslo. He thinks it a lost opportunity for children if the au pair does all the housework and the children do not participate and learn responsibility. He thinks making food together, for example, is a very important shared activity for the family and a good learning situation for the children. If this is completely left in the hands of the au pair, both children and host parents lose out.


He gives the following advice to Norwegian families with children who have an au pair:

- It is important that the host family make it clear to the au pair that she/he is not the children's servant, who is always obliged to fetch glasses of water and tidy their rooms.
- Parents have a responsibility in the way they talk to and behave towards the au pair. Children can easily take on the role of 'parents' when the parents themselves are not at home and begin to boss the au pair about if that is the tone they have learnt to be familiar with.

- Remember that the children in many ways are the weakest party here. They are at the mercy of the au pair that their parents have chosen for them.
- The children will not be linguistically confused by the au pair not knowing Norwegian or speaking it poorly.
- When the au pair returns to her/his home country, the parents must tolerate a reaction of grief or sorrow from their child. Maybe the child is only two years old and has known the au pair its entire life? If the child does not react when the au pair leaves, it could be a danger signal. But even if the child is unhappy and experiences a crisis, children cope with such losses much better than we think.
- If the child gets a new au pair, the parents must accept that the child may behave aggressively towards her/him to start with, owing to the feelings of grief and loss for the one who returned home.
- Most children tackle having a change of au pair perfectly well, but it is best for the child that they do not get a new au pair more often than necessary.
- All families are different. Take the time to show and explain to the au pair about elementary upbringing in your family. What is specific in your family concerning what is important in relation to the children?
- Do not expect the au pair to do things in exactly the same way as you. Besides, children tolerate trial and error better than we think.

***– Once my child said that an au pair was like a slave. That upset me a lot even if the host mother was angry at the child, apologised and was very embarrassed.***

Filipino au pair, 26



***– I remember telling my daughter off once for coming indoors with dirty boots. And then she said: Well can't she just do the vacuuming again? That was a bit of a wake-up call for us. We don't want the children to think we've got a kind of servant in the house. We've since been much clearer about it, that the children have to contribute to the clearing up. For there's so much that magically gets cleared away or put in its place when you have an au pair. We have to make sure, for example, that the kids fetch glasses of water for themselves because the au pair's so willing to be nice towards the kids.***

Host mother with three children

***– I quickly learned Norwegian words by being with the children. Now I speak Norwegian fluently. To start with, I didn't understand what they were saying, but that didn't really matter because then they just did what I said without being able to argue about it!***

German au pair, 19

***– Some of the children are spoiled. They expect us to fetch things for them.***

Filipino au pair, 24

***– My child leaves her clothes lying around and I have to ask her to clear up. We have to be aware that the children shouldn't get used to everything being done for them. The host mother gives me her full support in my not performing services for the children.***

German au pair, 19



## How does one bring up children in Norwegian?

Stein Erik Ulvund gives these tips to the au pair with responsibility for Norwegian children:



- Many may find it unusual that Norwegian children get to decide so much within the family. Respect that it is often this way in Norwegian families, who see codetermination as an important part of learning about democracy and the exercise of choice. Get familiar with the Norwegian way of bringing up children! Many cultures have a more authoritarian parenting role than we have in Norway.
- It is common for Norwegian children to choose many things themselves but just let them choose within a limited area. For example, do not ask what they would like to eat but give them a choice between a sandwich or yoghurt when it is time to eat.
- Some au pairs probably find it unusual for children not to have the same respect for elderly family members such as they are used to in their home country. But they love their grandparents for all that!
- One need go no further than other parts of Europe to find out that bringing up children is done differently elsewhere. That Norwegian children can be perceived as outspoken and perhaps lacking manners in certain situations is an example, but do not let the child speak to you in a cheeky way! That is not alright. Most parents want their children to be well brought up and you can help them achieve this.
- When you arrive in the house as an au pair, the children may be sorrowing over their previous au pair and may react aggressively. This may last a while, and you must accept it and be patient. Things will be fine after a while!

***– I love the children! One of the most fun things we do is play on the trampoline together.***

Filipino au pair, 19

***– The child was only eight months old when I came and she thinks I'm part of the family. She always calls for me first when she wakes up.***

Filipino au pair, 25

***– The children are curious about what we eat in the Philippines, want to meet our families back home and like to hear about our chickens and other animals. When the typhoon swept over the Philippines, the children wanted to help and collected money.***

Filipino au pair, 22


### **It was fun to teach the au pair Norwegian**

Tonje was 6 when the family got its first au pair. Altogether she and her brother had three au pairs. Today she is a teenager.

This is the way she remembers what it was like to have an au pair:

***We taught the au pair Norwegian using drawings and Post-it notes. That's one of the best memories I have. Two of the au pairs we had were very helpful and always wanted to help out in the house. They also spent a lot of time with me and my brother, playing.***





***What was most irritating was that the second au pair we had wasn't interested in learning Norwegian. Neither could she be bothered playing with my brother and me. I didn't like her very much to be honest. She didn't really want anything to do with us children. That was one of the reasons she quit, even though the decision to do so was probably far more complicated than we children understood. When she left, I was actually just pleased.***

***Our friends didn't say anything in particular about our having an au pair but they wondered who she was and what an au pair was. No-one ever said anything negative about it.***

***One au pair has sent us chocolate and typical food from the Czech Republic in all the years since she left us. We've also been there and visited her. While she was here she taught us children to climb, which was one of her hobbies. And soon she's going to come and visit us in Norway!***


***I may well choose to have an au pair if I ever have children. I remember it as a very positive experience. I don't fancy being an au pair myself, however. One of the reasons is that I wouldn't want to stay so long away from my family.***

## Tips to au pairs and host families



### Tips to au paires from au paires:

- Have a proper talk with your host family about what they expect you to do before you sign the contract with them. If you feel they expect too much housework, find a new family.
- Most host families are nice people and want things to work. It usually goes well if you talk openly about not being happy and helps find a solution. No-one can read your thoughts, so speak up about what is bothering you.
- Participate in the family's daily life to become a part of the family. Don't withdraw to your room all the time.
- Get to know your rights and be certain that your host family knows them too.
- Be positive and optimistic
- Be social and find friends outside of the family. Get to know other au pairs so you can share experiences. Get friends from many countries!
- Be open-minded. Be aware that people in your new family will live differently from the way you are used to.
- Explore your neighbourhood. Go out and get to know all the places around where you live.
- If things don't work out with your host family, try to change family quickly. Otherwise it's easy to start thinking it's your fault that things are not going well.
- Do your job professionally.
- If you miss home, skype with friends and family there or hang out with new friends here.
- Join the family for holidays and celebrations. That way you get to know Norwegian culture!

- 
- If you are treated badly and can't find a new family, consider all options including returning home.
  - Don't compare yourself with other au pairs who have their own car, for example, or other benefits.


***– It's strange to live where you work; you can't go home when you're finished for the day. I think this can be tough for a lot of au pairs. When I talk with other au pairs, it turns out we often have the same challenges. It's often to do about working far too much. I'm going to miss my host family when I return home but I'm not going to miss living in somebody else's house!***

American au pair, 28



## Tips to host families from au paires:

- Be prepared financially to have an au pair. It can be more expensive than you think and arguments about money are difficult for both parties.
- Remember that the au pair is young and a long way from home. Put yourself in her position. Imagine if your daughter was in a foreign country. How would you want her to be treated? Be nice to your au pair.
- The au pair is very well aware that she is there for the purpose of cultural exchange and will not be at all happy if she feels like cheap labour. Plan her work duties with her.
- Many au pairs come on the basis of looking after children and are surprised that many prefer to have help with the housework. Find a balance here and come to agreements that are good for all parties.
- Work with your au pair but do not become dependent on her.
- Don't have too high expectations. Don't push all the housework onto her.
- Make a clear agreement as to what is expected and what she is to do.
- Show your appreciation for what the au pair does. Notice the housework that has been done and comment upon it. Don't 'pick holes' in it.
- Invite the au pair on holidays and trips to the cabin
- Motivate the au pair to get out of the house and find new friends.
- Let the au pair be part of the family. If, for example, you buy 17th May ribbons for the whole family, don't forget to buy one for the au pair too!

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- Let the au pair have a TV and Wi-Fi in her room. It's nice to be invited into the lounge but time on one's own is needed too.
  - Filipinos in particular can be submissive and have so much respect for older people that they won't speak up. Host families must be aware of this.
  - Respect her leisure time and don't be too spontaneous.
  - The au pair helps you in the house; why not do her some favours too.
  - Help the au pair sort out her regular doctor, tax and bank account.
  - Talk with her every week. How did the week go? How long did it take to clean the bathroom? Would you like to make more dinners, or fewer? Let the au pair have a say in planning her own day.
  - The au pair may be anxious about what will happen in her life when she is finished being an au pair. Maybe she could do with some help from her host family or friends to orientate herself about future options?


***– When it was Christmas, the host family explained what the typical Christmas food was, where it came from and what people eat in different areas around Norway. The host family talks a lot about its own culture but I don't say much about mine because they ask so little. But if they came and asked, I could tell them all sorts of things. I could talk for hours!***

Filipino au pair, 21



### **Tips to host families from host families:**

- You must think it's nice to have an extra person at the dinner table every day if you are going to have an au pair. Remember that you're actually inviting a guest that won't be leaving for a year.
- Put aside a lot of time during the first few days so you can get to know each other. Make a good start to your communication.
- Buy a TV and maybe a computer that they can have in their room.
- Having an au pair is often more expensive than you think. Work it out: remember she should have a bus pass, telephone and warm, winter clothes in addition to her pocket money/wages.
- Remember that we host families are older than the au pairs. It may well be that they don't think it very exciting to sit with us in the lounge, that they would rather be in their room, and that it's ok to decline from being with you. But it is important to ask!
- Say when you are going to go away and the au pair will have the house to herself. Most think that's really nice.
- Have a house meeting once a month. Ask if everything is ok and if there is anything the au pair wishes to do more or less often.
- Imagine a young man or woman from your own family when you get an au pair. What would he or she be able to manage in terms of cooking and cleaning for another family in another country? It's natural that many au pairs need teaching and guidance in practical household affairs.

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- Norway is a rather special country in relation to both weather and distances. Involve the au pair in this.
  - Be clear to the children about who the au pair is and what her role is. It can be a big change for many children to both get an au pair and to say good bye.
  - The au pair is not to be the children's servant!
  - Help the au pair to find other au pairs in the neighbourhood so that she can build up a network of friends.
  - There can be more expenses connected to having an au pair than you are aware of to start with. Make certain you can afford to be a host family and, if things get tight financially, don't discuss this with, or in front of, the au pair. It's not her problem or her fault.
  - Many families are wary of saying things directly to the au pair, but au pairs are often young and need feedback about themselves just like all other young people. Some things may of course be rather touchy but it's most often best to hear the truth rather than walk around wondering what's wrong.

***– We are very careful about her not working more than the maximum 30 hours per week but sometimes there can be extra work, if we're having a party, for example. Then we give her extra days off afterwards. Of course we've heard terrible stories about how au pairs work too much and we don't want to be one of them. We like to keep things tidy but we don't want someone running about the house working all the time.***

Host family with three children



### Tips to au pairer from host families:

- Be clear what you mean, don't just say yes. Ask again if you don't understand what has been said to you.
- Ask for a list of duties so you know exactly what you are supposed to do and there will be less chance of conflict.
- Don't expect the host family to have the finances to be able to pay extra expenses, such as large dental costs for example.
- Familiarise yourself with the local area and whatever activities or other points of interest are going on.
- The family to which you are coming has established routines. You need to relate to these and not try to change them. It is quite common in many families, for example, that the children are not allowed to watch as much TV as they want to. You need to respect this.
- Most people in Norway are quite direct with one another. Don't be scared of discussing problems straight away should they arise.

***– The au pair really wanted to come up to the cabin with us. No loo or running water. She thought it was terrible! She warned subsequent au pairs precisely about this aspect of Norwegian culture. Many au pairs have no idea what they are going to; they have never had responsibility for a family before. This au pair travelled around Norway a lot with other au pair friends.***

Host family with two school-age children



## Take home ideas about equality and the welfare state

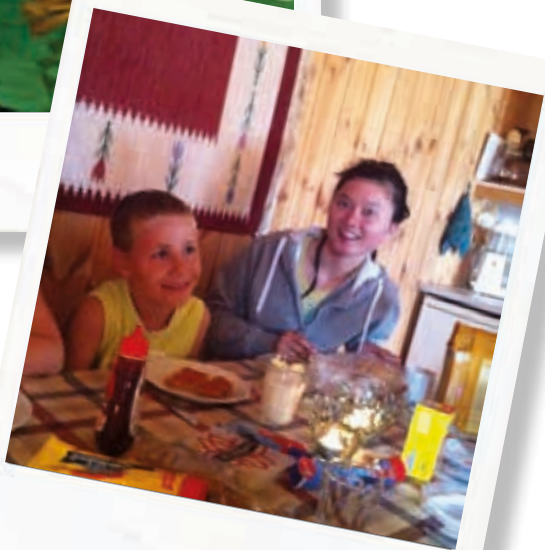
Most au pairs in Norway today come from the Philippines. Although many Filipinos do not primarily come here to get to know Norway, they nevertheless take many new values home, such as equality between the sexes. They may, for example, have witnessed at close hand the way in which Norwegian men contribute at home and with the children. This is completely new to many.

***– We see fathers carrying their babies here, pushing prams and following their children to kindergarten. It's so nice! I'm going to ask my future husband to do that.***

Au pair, 19

The Church and religion is important to many Filipinos. They feel it gives them strength. Filipino au pairs must be allowed to attend church on Sundays. This can be difficult for many modern Norwegians to understand.





## Au pairs from the Schengen/EEA area

There are many au pairs in Norway who come from countries within the EEA area. Persons from these countries should not apply for an au pair visum through UDI.

EEA citizens that work as au pairs in Norway must remember the following:

- As soon as you arrive, you must contact your local tax office to obtain an ID number. This gives you many rights in Norway. *Remember to take your passport or other ID document with you.*
- Ask about applying for a tax card at the same time. You have to pay tax on your earnings and the value of your board and lodging.
- Open a bank account as soon as you have your ID number.

EEA citizens wishing to work as au pairs can enter Norway and work here under the provisions of the Immigration Act §§ 111-112. EEA citizens do not receive a standard au pair residence permit but have to register with the police if they intend to stay in Norway longer than three months. For more information about being a foreign worker in Norway, go to: *Work in Norway- The Official Guide.*<sup>21</sup>

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21 <https://www.nav.no/workinnorway/?;sessionid=C0E92E15FDDAF-6698CA3F3CD2A11BECB>



## Learn more about being an au pair!

*In this section, au pairs and host families talk about their experiences. Here there is something to learn for everyone who is interested as to what daily life is like for those who participate in the au pair scheme.*

Precisely because the au pair scheme has changed character in Norway in recent years, and because new dilemmas and challenges have arisen, the au pair scheme is of great interest to researchers and other social commentators. Researchers ask: How do au pairs get on in Norway? Are there large differences between those who come from the Philippines and those who come from Germany? What does it say about Norwegian society that more and more families wish to engage an au pair?

### **- More and more Filipino au pairs come for the sake of experience**

At the Sociology Institute of the University of Bergen, Mariya Bikova is engrossed in taking a doctorate concerning au pairs in Norway. A former au pair in Norway herself, when she later began studying sociology she became interested in understanding the au pair scheme as part of a larger social phenomenon and as an expression of larger social processes.

- By seeing who comes to Norway as au pairs, and the motivation they have for so doing, it is possible to study changes both in the countries from where the au pairs come and in our own society.



- *What is the focus of your paper?*

- My thesis gives particular focus to au pairs from the Philippines and what the au pair scheme has meant for the au pairs themselves and their families back home. The number of Filipino au pairs in Norway has increased considerably since the middle of the 2000s despite the fact that, until June 2010, it was forbidden for Filipinos to work as au pairs in Europe, including Norway. This raises important questions: What is the au pair's real motivation in coming to Norway? What kinds of risk did they take on in breaking Filipino law and travelling illegally as an au pair to

Norway before 2010? Since

the travel ban was abolished in 2010, the number of au pairs from the Philippines has increased still further, something which makes the need for more

knowledge about the au pairs'

situation in Norway even more


pressing. We know that many Filipinos have duties of care to family members in their home country but know little about the consequences of 'cross-border care' for either the au pairs or their families.

**- When Norwegian families choose to engage au pairs from the Philippines, it is often the Filipinos' reputation for being good, reliable employees that they are most interested in, not the Filipino culture.**



- *Is there anything unclear about the au pair scheme as it stands today that could make it easy to misunderstand for au pairs or host families?*

The purpose of the scheme is clearly defined by both Norwegian and Filipino authorities. This means in theory that



***That more and more people make use of au pairs means that the threshold for bringing assistance into the house for child-minding and housework is being lowered.***

both au pairs and host families should be clear that the scheme is primarily about culture and not about work. But when Norwegian families choose to engage au pairs from the Philippines, it is often the Filipinos' reputation for being good, reliable employees that they are most interested in, not the Filipino culture. Filipino women for their part do not generally come to Norway to experience Norwegian culture but to work. Many host families are aware that Filipino women come to Norway to work, and that these women are often breadwinners for their families back home. This can result in au pairs working long days, with or without extra payment.

- *How did you set about researching Filipino au pairs?*

- I interviewed people who are working or have worked as au pairs for Norwegian families about what it was like to be an au pair in Norway and what motivated the migration to Norway. I also interviewed au pairs' family members: mothers, fathers, siblings and close friends in order to understand what it meant to the au pairs' family networks to send a person to Norway. In order to gain greater insight into life in the Philippines and what motivates Filipino women to travel to Norway, I lived with au pairs' families and participated in their daily lives. I have also interviewed Norwegian and Philippines immigration authorities about how they view the au pair scheme and analysed the legislation and documents that regulate au pair placement in Norway. I have also read up on earlier research about au pairs.





- *Have you found anything that surprised you?*

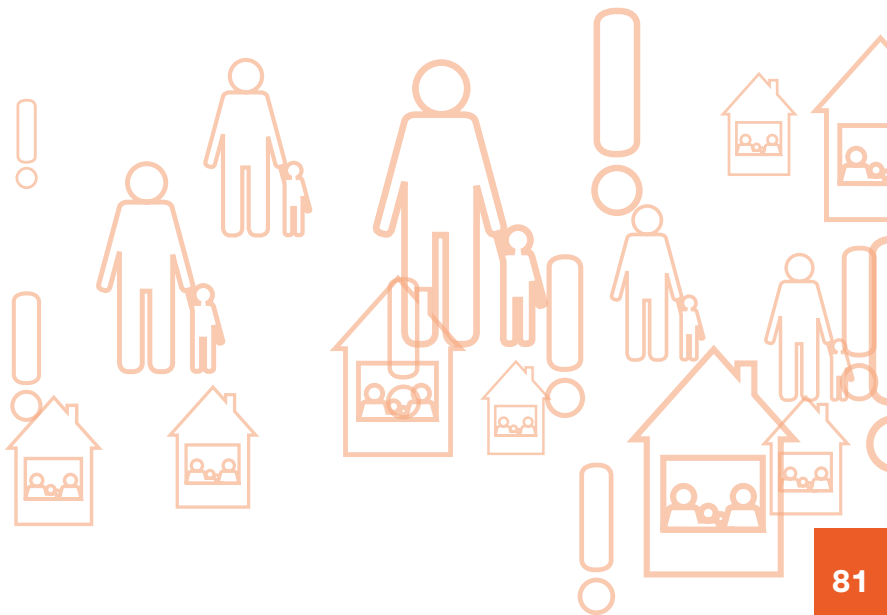
- Yes, although my analyses show that many au pairs from the Philippines are motivated by looking after their families with income from Norway, there is an expanding group of au pairs who come to Norway primarily for the sake of experience. These are educated young people who have a genuine desire to experience Scandinavian culture and who are absolutely not prepared to function as home helps, such as is the case with many au pairs from the Philippines. It is important to remember this when formulating legislation or giving out a handbook such as this one. All the same, there remains a large group of au pairs from the Philippines who regard the au pair scheme first and foremost as work. These usually work long days and seldom say 'no' when the host family asks for a little extra help with child-minding and housework. These are often the au pairs with duties of care in their home country too. Where the au pairs' families back home are concerned, I find that the whole family benefits from the money sent from Norway, and that the money is often put towards the education of siblings and relatives.





- *What does the au pair scheme tell us about Norway today?*

- The increased use of au pairs in Norway is an expression of a number of important changes in Norwegian society. That more and more people make use of au pairs means that the threshold for bringing assistance into the house for child-minding and housework is being lowered. Bringing in assistance or a home-help is being normalised. The use of au pairs also creates a division between families who can afford help and those who can't, and a division between women who employ au pairs and women who work as au pairs. In other words, the increased use of au pairs challenges the established norms concerning equality, democracy and international solidarity.



## **Norwegian families are not as equal as you think**

*Mary comes from the USA and is au pair for a family in Oslo with a school-age son. The family wanted the son to be able to learn English and Mary thinks it is fine to get to speak English too. She is not that bothered about learning Norwegian and quite happy to make do with just a few phrases.*

- I wanted to be an au pair because I'm very fond of children and I wanted to show a bit of American culture to other parts of the world. I have learnt so much about Norway while I've been here! Traditions, Easter, Christmas, 17th May, what kind of food you eat and a bit of history. Norwegians are not as open and friendly as Americans so I think it's been quite difficult to find new friends, which is unusual for me. But I do have a couple of au pair friends who live in their own house. There it's really easy to visit.

Before I came, I skyped with the family and got a good impression of them. I arrived in the summer and the first thing I did was go on holiday with them. Then I really felt I became part of the family.

On a normal day, I get up at 06.30, make the family breakfast and sort out the lunch-box for school. Then I clean up a bit, do a bit of washing and have a break outside or in my room. From between 1 and 2 in the afternoon, I do regular tasks that I've taken over from the au pair who was here before: vacuum-cleaning, dusting and washing. Then the boy comes home from school, starts his homework and gets a bite to eat. I make dinner every day, which I then eat with the family before I clear away.



I hadn't actually expected there to be so much housework as part of the au pair scheme and I'm not completely comfortable with it although I've accepted it. I told my host mother that I think it's a bit much but nothing changed. I work more or less five hours a day and have Saturday and Sunday off unless they need a child-minder. I think that's ok. Sometimes I also help if they're having big parties. I relate mostly to the host mother and get the impression that this is the same for all au pairs. I guess it's still the mother who governs the household in Norwegian families and thus the au pair too. When you live closely with a family, you see that the mothers do much more at home than the ideal of equality might suggest. I don't know if it's her that is taking control or whether it's expected of her?

The family is used to having au pairs and was interested in my culture. They want to take me up to their cabin but I prefer to stay at home when they go there. It's lovely to have the house all to oneself!

It's strange to live where you work; you can't go home when you're finished for the day. I think this can be tough for a lot of au pairs. When I talk with other au pairs, it turns out we often have the same challenges. It's often to do about working far too much. I'm going to miss my host family when I return home but I'm not going to miss living in somebody else's house!

I'm thinking about going on to Germany when I'm finished to study psychology.



**I have got more self-confidence from being an au pair**

*Jan is 24 and comes from the Philippines. She studied computing in her home country and was an au pair in Denmark for two years before coming to an Oslo family with three school-age children.*

- I really wanted to learn a new culture and a new language, and I chose Denmark first because I have aunts and cousins who work there, and who found a host family for me. Another reason to be an au pair is to earn money for my family in the Philippines. I'm making sure that both my little brother and little sister can have an education and that my parents can afford somewhere to live. It is normal in our culture to help the family in this way.

I found the Norwegian family through a private website. I chose Norway because it was close to Denmark and I also have friends who came here.

On an ordinary weekday, I make breakfast and lunch-boxes for the kids, I make dinner, clean the house and sometimes do the child-minding at the weekends, at nights too if the parents are away. Sometimes I get extra money for this, sometimes not. I relate mostly to the host mother, maybe because we're both women, but also because the host father is away a lot with work. The family asks me to speak English with the kids, that way they'll get to learn it better. On weekdays while the kids are at school, I prefer to stay in the house rather than go out but sometimes I go out and meet



friends. When I go away on holiday with them, I'm allowed to sleep as long as I like and it really feels like I'm on holiday too.

Norwegians are more outgoing and direct than us Filipinos. That was difficult to start with. We're more used to saying and doing things in such a way that others don't feel trodden on. Neither am I used to men and women being as equal as they are here. Back home, men have more power over women in marriage.

When I meet other au pairs and we talk together, the most common problem is that they work too much or the host family isn't very nice to them. For example, I know of an au pair who is at home with the baby all day while at the same time being expected to clean the house and make the dinner. She resigned in the end and got a new family. Of course the host families know we're only supposed to work five hours a day but many don't care about that.

I spent the first Christmas with my host family but I preferred to spend the second one with friends. I don't know how interested the host family really is in my culture, but they ask a few things and seem curious.

I feel really free here! I can meet boys. In the Philippines, it's much stricter, at least while you're living at home. I've got more self-confidence by being out in the world alone as an au pair, and have got lots of new friends. I hope to be able to study here or in another country afterwards.

## **The au pair eases the pressure of housework**

*In one of the country's towns live Hilde and Stein, their three small children and an au pair from the Philippines. She is their first au pair, and the family is very satisfied with the arrangement. The au pair not only solves the pressure of time but gives the family an exciting meeting with a new culture, Hilde says. This is the family story.*

-We have quite a few friends with au pairs, and when we were expecting child number three we needed help. Not so much with the kids but with the house. Our friends had au pairs from the Philippines, all on recommendations from each other, and that's how we got ours too. It seemed safe, rather than looking on the internet and random advertisements. The au pair does most of the daily tasks, cleans, makes dinner and helps with the chaos in the mornings.

The au pair does a lot of the practical work and we ease the pressure of housework instead of arguing about it. Dinner arrives quickly on the table too so we have time to play with the kids afterwards.

Before she came we talked about the cultural exchange aspect of the scheme and agreed that if we don't want her to be part of the family, then we won't have an au pair. She would be allowed to join in with everything: Sunday dinners, ski-trips, stays at the cabin and holidays. It was important that she got Christmas presents like the rest of us. To begin with she joined in with everything too, but she gradually began to say no thanks and preferred to stay at home. She's a young woman after all so I've




got full understanding for that- I think we manage to include her in the family. When she came to us I was at home with the baby and we had a lot of time together and became connected. I feel in many ways a kind of parental role towards her.

There is of course a paradox in the au pair scheme that we must be aware about. Although she is to be a part of the family, she is still supposed to work. That can feel a bit strange. We are very careful about her not working more than the maximum 30 hours per week but sometimes there can be extra work, if we're having a party, for example. Then we give her extra days off afterwards. Of course we've heard terrible stories about how au pairs work too much and we don't want to be one of them. We like to keep things tidy but we don't want someone running about the house working all the time. I remember telling my daughter off once for coming indoors with dirty boots. And then she said: Well can't she just do the vacuuming again? That was a bit of a wake-up call for us. We don't want the children to think we've got a kind of servant in the house. We've since been much clearer about it, that the children have to contribute to the clearing up. For there's so much that magically gets cleared away or put in its place when you have an au pair.

We have to make sure, for example, that the kids fetch glasses of water for themselves because the au pair's so willing to be nice towards the kids.

As host families, we must remember that many au pairs come from cultures where having servants is normal. To start with, she always wanted to carry all the shopping bags and walk behind me. And I thought, no, no, that's not the way we want it!



I'm also very strict about the kids not going into her room, whether she's there or not. We have to respect her free time. I know of au pairs who have to cancel their own arrangements because the host mother suddenly decides to go out for a run. What can the au pair say? If she says 'no', she knows there won't be such a pleasant atmosphere.

There's been a bit of negativity connected to having an au pair from the Philippines. You get given the stamp of buying yourself free time. I have friends who say they could never have an au pair. But I'm not ashamed. I have three small kids all close together and think it's lovely to have an au pair in the house. I want her to have a great experience here and keep in touch in the future.

I think it's difficult to remember the au pair's just an ordinary girl in her twenties. She's not a children's nurse or a chef or a professional cleaner. A lot of people from the Philippines have never even seen a fridge or freezer, so when you find mussels in the freezer and ice in the fridge you understand there's a few elementary things we've forgotten to teach her. It's our responsibility. And there's been a few woollies disappear! In the end we had to give her a little course in washing wool. Some of our clothes were coming out rather small.

Our au pair has learnt how to make lots of Norwegian dinners and she's introduced lots of new dishes and ingredients to us, some of which we'll keep on using.

The au pair gets to use the house as much as she likes while we're away and to invite friends home. We hear from some of her





friends that they don't dare invite friends home or use their host family's kitchen on their own. It's a shame; that's not the way it's going to be with us.


**“Au pairs are what they have on the west side!”**

*In a smaller town outside Oslo, Pia and Trond live with twins, a girl and a boy. When the kids started school, they decided to get an au pair, mostly for the opportunity to meet a new culture.*

- When the kids started school, we wanted them to be with an au pair rather than at SFO. We thought the children were tired after school and that it was better to come home to an adult, make food together and do their homework. We were also concerned that our children should meet other cultures, that the world should come a little closer. Some of our neighbours were sceptical: “What! Au pair? That's what they have on the west side of Oslo.” We had to explain about the cultural exchange. We were concerned that the au pair should be part of the family.

We wanted to do it properly and used Atlantis so that both parties should feel safe. We spoke about ourselves, left photos and were interviewed, and Atlantis was to find an au pair to suit us. We emphasised that we live in the country and wanted someone who would live an active life there, not someone who was most interested in pubs and urban life in their free time.

We had no preferences as to country and ended up with an au pair from Slovakia who loved skiing. We thought



she knows what it's like to get frozen feet and will know what to do with the kids when they're cold! Her motivation was to travel and learn Norwegian and she knew masses about Norwegian sportsmen and women. We liked that she consciously wanted to come to Norway.

The children didn't quite understand who the au pair was to start with. I remember one of them saying "Are we getting a maid?" The girl was sceptical and a little angry. She already had a mum and now here was this other woman. It wasn't easy for the au pair to start with; she felt rejected and sad. She tried all kinds of tricks to be liked, including spaghetti in chocolate sauce. After a while they came to like and trust her. I felt it was like having a teenager in the house and gained valuable experience. After a bit, she got a TV in her room. Both parties need their own space.

We took the kids to school and the au pair brought them home. She asked about doing the cleaning but that gave me a bad conscience. Cleaning wasn't a challenge for us; the adults in the house just share it. We thought if you need a cleaner, you should buy in such services, not have an au pair. We were never worried about her working more than five hours a day. It's strange, because although me and my husband share all the work at home, I felt extra responsibility for the au pair. Maybe because we had lots of good girl talk together? Or because I was forced to tell her about her body odour? It turns out that they had to save electricity and water back home so she wasn't used to washing her clothes after training, for example. Communication is important.

The au pair really wanted to come up to the cabin with us. No loo or running water. She thought it was terrible! She warned subsequent au pairs precisely about this aspect of Norwegian culture. Many au pairs have no idea what they are going to; they have never had responsibility for a family before. This au pair travelled around Norway a lot with other au pair friends. The year after she finished, she came back to visit us. We also learnt a lot from having an au pair. You see your family life from outside, in a new way.

When you live in the country, it may be difficult finding a relevant language course. We ended up paying a Norwegian teacher to give private tuition with other families who had au pairs.

Having an au pair has made us grateful for what we have in Norway. The children now feel secure in speaking English and are not at all scared about meeting new people.

<https://www.facebook.com/AuPairCenterNorge/>









# Norwegian People's Aid

## **Au Pair Center**

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