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Reference:

Kil Tine, Wood Jonas, Neels Karel.- Parental leave uptake among migrant and native mothers : can precarious employment trajectories account for the difference?
Ethnicities - ISSN 1468-7968 - (2017), p. 1-36
Full text (Publisher's DOI): <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796817715292>
To cite this reference: <http://hdl.handle.net/10067/1440900151162165141>

Parental leave uptake among migrant and native mothers: Can precarious employment trajectories account for the difference?

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Abstract

Family policies such as parental leave schemes increasingly support the work–family balance. Low maternal employment in migrant populations raises questions on family policy uptake among mothers of migrant origin. This study documents differences in parental leave uptake between native and migrant mothers of different origin groups and generations, and assesses the extent to which precarious employment trajectories can account for these differentials. Using longitudinal data from Belgian social security registers, mixed-effects logit models of leave uptake, full-time or part-time leave uptake and the labour market position following leave are estimated for 10,976 mothers who entered parenthood between 2004 and 2010. Results indicate that uptake of parental leave is lower among mothers of migrant origin, since they fail to meet the eligibility criteria as a result of being overrepresented in unstable labour market positions. Whereas differential leave uptake can be accounted for by non-universal eligibility and precarious labour market trajectories, migrant-native differentials in part-time uptake and labour market positions following leave persist when controlling for pre-birth employment characteristics. The differential pattern of leave uptake among first-generation migrant women, in particular, is not explained by pre-birth employment characteristics, as they remain overrepresented in full-time leave, and first-generation mothers of non-European origin more frequently retreat from the labour force following leave. We conclude that difficult access to stable employment and non-universal eligibility are major factors explaining migrant-native differentials in parental leave use. As such, Belgian parental leave policies perpetuate labour market disadvantages by limiting support for work–family reconciliation to those already established in the labour force.

Keywords: Parental leave - employment - motherhood - migrant - family policy - work-family balance - labour market - minority - Belgium

Published in Ethnicities: <http://journals.sagepub.com/eprint/9RwuJnaQyhzUwpIVirsG/full>

Introduction

In response to declining fertility levels and rising female labour force participation, Western European governments have increasingly developed family policies geared towards the reconciliation of labour force participation and family formation (Rindfuss et al., 1996; Thévenon, 2008). In addition to family policies such as family allowances established earlier, the availability of formal childcare and parental leave schemes has increased considerably since the 1980s (Klusener et al., 2013; RVA, 2012; RVA, 2013). The rising popularity of such policies, in tandem with increased maternal employment and the changing relation between female labour force participation and fertility (Ahn and Mira, 2002) suggest that family policy meets the needs of a growing number of dual earner couples. Although labour force participation among mothers in majority populations has increased in recent decades, maternal employment levels (Bevelander and Groeneveld, 2012; Holland and de Valk, 2013; Kil et al., 2015a; Kil et al., 2017; Rubin et al., 2008) as well as uptake of family policies (Kil et al., 2016; Lapuerta et al., 2011; Merens et al., 2006; Neels and Wood, 2016) remain low in migrant populations across Europe. This contrast between native and migrant groups raises questions on the determinants of migrants' uptake of family policies. This paper documents differences in parental leave use between mothers with and without a migration background, distinguishing different origin groups and generations, but also assesses to which degree differential patterns of leave use can be explained by employment characteristics and eligibility criteria governing access to these schemes. We draw on longitudinal register data (1999–2010) for Belgium, a country characterized by a relatively flexible parental leave system (Maron and O'Dorchai, 2008; Ray et al., 2010). In addition, Belgium has the largest employment rate gap between migrants and natives in Europe, making insights into the processes leading to this gap essential for theory and policy alike (Corluy, 2014).

Although parental leave schemes were introduced to enhance work–family compatibility, previous research on the effects of parental leave on labour force attachment and family formation is inconclusive. Despite the fact that parental leave supports mothers to keep a foothold in the labour force (Pronzato, 2009; Pylkkänen and Smith, 2004), leave can also delay mothers' return to work (Matysiak and Szalma, 2014) and long periods of leave in particular may hamper future employment (Fagnani, 1999; Lalive and Zweimuller, 2009). With respect to fertility, reported effects are typically small, although failure to acknowledge population heterogeneity in the uptake of parental leave has been a major source of bias in the literature assessing such effects (Neyer and Andersson, 2008). Recent research has identified various determinants of parental leave use at different levels (e.g. individual, couple, company) ranging from economic determinants (e.g. eligibility, income) to attitudinal factors (e.g. preferences concerning work–family combination) (Bygren and Duvander, 2006; Geisler and Kreyenfeld, 2011; Lappegård, 2008; Lapuerta et al., 2011). Our understanding of differential uptake by migrant groups, however, is limited. Previous studies on parental leave uptake in migrant populations show small differences in Sweden, which is characterized by universal eligibility (Mussino and Duvander, 2016). In contrast, uptake by migrant groups is typically lower in countries (e.g. the Netherlands, Spain) where eligibility is related to labour force participation (Lapuerta et al., 2011; Merens et al., 2006). Whereas former studies have concentrated on the Swedish policy context (Mussino and Duvander, 2016), have focussed on

descriptive analysis (Merens et al., 2006), or have identified migrants only using an indicator on foreign nationality (Lapuerta et al., 2011), our study is the first to analyse determinants of parental leave use among migrant groups of different origins and generations for a country where eligibility is conditional upon labour force attachment. Furthermore, this contribution yields detailed insight into differential parental leave strategies by distinguishing full-time from part-time leave and assessing whether women return to the labour force following leave uptake.

Results indicate that lower uptake of parental leave among mothers of migrant origin is largely explained by the interaction between precarious employment trajectories and eligibility criteria governing access to parental leave schemes, suggesting that parental leave perpetuates labour market disadvantages by reserving work–family reconciliation to those already firmly established in the labour force. Among mothers using parental leave, we find that full-time leave use is more prevalent among first-generation women, whereas employment following leave uptake is lower among non-European first-generation mothers. These differences persist when taking pre-birth employment characteristics into account, suggesting unobserved heterogeneity with respect to employment characteristics, work–family preferences, knowledge of leave regulations or migrant-specific characteristics. We conclude that the exclusive character of current eligibility criteria as well as the accumulation of labour market disadvantages over the transition to parenthood need to be acknowledged in order to extend the inclusive character of the parental leave system.

Background

Parental leave in Belgium

Although parental leave schemes exist in all European Union Member States, large differences occur between countries. The design of parental leave arrangements varies in terms of eligibility criteria, maximum length of leave, generosity of benefits and employment protection (Anxo et al., 2007; Moss, 2015; Ray et al., 2010). In Belgium, parental leave is an individual entitlement and the right is not transferable from one parent to the other (ACLVB, 2013). To be entitled to parental leave, an employee needs to have worked for the current employer for 12 out of 15 months prior to the application¹ and have a child younger than 12². Parents on parental leave receive a flat-rate benefit, which was 727 euro per month for full-time leave in 2010³ (Merla and Deven, 2010). This benefit approximates 30% of the median gross income from employment in Belgium⁴. Three degrees of labour reduction occur: (i) a 100% reduction for maximum three months, (ii) a 50% reduction for up to six months, or (iii) a 20% reduction of working hours limited to 15 months. The two last options are permitted only for full-time workers, with some exceptions in the public or education sector. Parents are allowed to split up the leave period depending on the sector of employment and previous work history (Desmet and Glorieux, 2007; Merla and Deven, 2013; Morel, 2007; Ray, 2008; RVA, 2012). Given that parental leave can be used until the child is 12 years old, that periods can be split up, that varying degrees of labour reduction are available and that the 20% labour reduction is most popular (Anxo et al., 2007; Desmet and Glorieux, 2007; Plantenga and Remery, 2005), the Belgian parental leave system is relatively flexible (Maron and O'Dorchain,

2008; Ray et al., 2008). On the other hand, eligibility criteria imply that only workers with a stable labour market position can take up parental leave and the income replacement level is low.

From a European perspective, the rate of parental leave uptake in Belgium is low, with only 7% of all eligible parents using parental leave (Anxo et al., 2007; Plantenga and Remery, 2005). Moreover, parental leave uptake is strongly gendered. Results from the 2007 Labour Force Survey show that 20% of employed mothers with a child under age one take leave, while the proportion of employed fathers taking leave is close to zero (OECD, 2010).

Migration to Belgium

As a result of active recruitment of migrant workers after the Second World War and post-colonial migration, Belgium is an old immigration country. More recently, free movement of people within the European Union, the gradual enlargement of the European Union and migration flows of asylum seekers have contributed to Belgium's ethnic diversity (Corluy, 2014). Since the 2000s, Belgium has been characterized by large minority groups with European as well as non-European origins.

With respect to European migrant groups, Belgium recruited guest workers in Southern European countries such as Italy, Greece and Portugal to perform industrial labour after the Second World War (Phalet, 2007). The economic downturn associated with the oil crisis led to a migration stop in 1974 and labour market opportunities deteriorating disproportionately for previously migrated groups (Lesthaeghe, 2000). Despite the official migration stop, migration from Southern Europe continued via family reunification in subsequent years. Also, as the free movement of persons took effect under the gradual extension of the Schengen agreement in the 1990s (European Commission, 2011), and as labour migration was gradually facilitated, Belgium increasingly received Eastern European migrants. In addition to migration from Southern and Eastern Europe, a large proportion of migrants in Belgium originate from neighbouring countries, facilitated by common languages.

Concerning non-European migration, Moroccan and Turkish workers were actively recruited for industrial labour in the 1960s. Notwithstanding the migration stop and economic crisis that followed in the 1970s, the reunification of migrant families in the 1980s and 1990s gave rise to growing Turkish and Moroccan communities. In contrast to European migrant groups, a substantial share of second-generation Moroccan and Turkish migrants continue to marry partners from their parents' country of origin (Corijn and Lodewijckx, 2009). Post-colonial migration has additionally given rise to a substantial Congolese minority group. Finally, Belgium has increasingly received refugees from outside of Europe since the late 1990s, further elevating its degree of ethnic diversity (Centrum voor gelijkheid van kansen en racismebestrijding, 2013).

Theoretical framework

Literature shows that leave uptake typically relates to factors at the individual, household, employer and institutional level. First and foremost, uptake is only possible for parents

eligible for parental leave. The eligibility criteria in Belgium imply that a relatively stable labour market position is a prerequisite for taking up parental leave. Research shows that migrant women are less attached to the labour force than are native women (Kil et al., 2017). The difficult access to stable employment for migrant women has been linked to strategies of becoming a parent as an alternative to developing a career (Friedman et al., 1994; McDonald, 2000; Wood and Neels, 2016), which, in turn, reduces the probability of meeting the eligibility criteria for parental leave.

Second, parental leave is not automatically granted to eligible parents in Belgium, so knowledge of parental leave arrangements is also a precondition for parental leave use. Women of migrant origin – particularly shortly after arrival in Belgium – may face language problems and social barriers leading to a lack of institutional knowledge of parental leave regulations (Merens et al., 2006). Qualitative research regarding the labour force participation of Moroccan and Turkish origin women in Flanders confirms the lack of knowledge on parental leave legislation among these women (Van Hal, 2016). In similar vein, a qualitative study by Wall and Jose (2004) points to a lack of knowledge of formal child care services among migrant families in Europe.

Third, as the parental leave benefit in Belgium is limited, affordability is an important factor in the decision to take up leave. Research on Sweden has shown a positive association between the mother's as well as the father's earnings and father's parental leave uptake (Bygren and Duvander, 2006; Lappegård, 2008). Since migrant workers and their partners are overrepresented in low-income groups (Corluy, 2014), limited affordability may hamper migrants' parental leave use.

Fourth, with respect to work environment, parents enjoying stronger job protection (e.g. permanent contracts, higher seniority and jobs in the public sector) and parents working in companies where procedures of leave uptake are institutionalised and socially accepted are more likely to take up leave (Anxo et al., 2007; Bygren and Duvander, 2006; Geisler and Kreyenfeld, 2011; Lapuerta et al., 2011). Migrant women, however, are generally overrepresented in temporary, unstable and low-skilled jobs (Rubin et al., 2008) which possibly hampers their use of parental leave.

Fifth, the opportunity costs of taking parental leave in terms of foregone career opportunities are larger for parents with high human capital. For example, parental leave use may signal lower work commitment to the employer, which potentially has consequences for parents in otherwise rewarding career tracks (Evertsson and Breen, 2008; Evertsson and Duvander, 2011). As migrants are generally overrepresented in low human-capital groups (Corluy, 2014) and consequently face lower opportunity costs when taking up leave, migrants may thus be more likely to take leave. In contrast, Swedish and Spanish research indicates that education is positively associated with parental leave uptake (Bygren and Duvander, 2006; Lapuerta et al., 2011), suggesting that other factors associated with education (higher income, job stability and job protection) outweigh the higher opportunity costs of leave uptake.

Sixth, individual preferences (Hakim, 2000) as well as social norms regarding childrearing matter in the decision to take up parental leave (Pfau-Effinger, 1998). Mother's leave length is found to be positively associated with a stronger orientation toward family in Sweden (Duvander, 2014) and Germany (Rahim, 2014). As particularly Turkish, and some of the Moroccan migrant families in Belgium come from rural regions where the roles of men and women are strongly divided in the private and the public sphere, they generally foster more traditional views on the division of care and domestic work (Bernhardt et al., 2007; Goldscheider et al., 2011; Huschek et al., 2011; Merens et al., 2006). This may stimulate parental leave uptake among women of non-European migrant origin.

Finally, kin networks that take up a part of the caring responsibilities can be crucial for an efficient combination of a job and children. Women who recently immigrated usually lack extended networks in the destination country (Raijman and Semyonov, 1997; Wall and Jose, 2004). Consequently they have less family and kin to rely on and may be more likely to rely on parental leave.

Considering the factors that influence parental leave uptake in majority populations, it is largely unknown to what extent these mechanisms also apply to parental leave uptake in migrant populations. Only a limited number of studies have addressed migrants' parental leave uptake, generally finding that uptake is lower compared to natives.

Previous research on parental leave use among migrants has mainly focused on Sweden where all mothers are entitled to parental leave, independent of previous labour force participation (Mussino and Duvander, 2016; Vikman, 2013)). For example, research by Mussino and Duvander (2016) shows that migrant mothers in Sweden more frequently use leave immediately following childbirth, whereas Swedish-born mothers exploit the flexibility of the parental leave system to a larger extent. In migrant populations, continuous leave uptake in the first year following childbirth is related to a higher prevalence of inactivity and unemployment before parenthood. The Swedish context differs considerably, however, from the situation in many other European countries where eligibility is tied to labour force attachment. Research by Merens et al. (2006) on the Netherlands indicates that Moroccan, Turkish and Antillean working women exhibit lower leave uptake, which is partially related to a lack of knowledge of regulations. Similarly, Lapuerta et al. (2011) find that parents of foreign nationality in Spain are less likely to take up parental leave than Spanish natives. Indicators of employment position (working regime, contract type, income position, seniority) and work environment (sector, firm size) explain the disproportional non-uptake of leave among these women (Lapuerta et al., 2011). Hence, both in countries where parental leave eligibility is universal and countries where entitlements are tied to labour force attachment, differential parental leave strategies among migrants are related to precarious employment trajectories. With former studies concentrating on the Swedish context (Mussino and Duvander, 2016), focusing on descriptive findings (Merens et al., 2006) or restricting migrants to women holding a foreign nationality (Lapuerta et al., 2011), our study is the first to analyse determinants of parental leave use for different migrant groups and generations in Belgium, a country where eligibility is conditional on labour force attachment.

Data and methods

Data

We use data from the Belgian Administrative Socio-Demographic panel (ASD Panel) that draws longitudinal microdata from the National Register and the Crossroads Bank for Social Security. The ASD Panel is representative of the female population aged 15 to 50 years legally residing in Belgium between 1 January 1999 and 31 December 2010. To maintain the cross-sectional representativeness of the panel throughout the observation period, annual top-up samples of 15-year-olds were drawn to guarantee the presence of the youngest age group in the sample. Similarly, supplementary annual samples were drawn from women aged 16 to 50 years who had settled in Belgium in the preceding year. Apart from the sampled women, the ASD Panel also includes all individuals officially being part of the household of sampled women on 31 December in each year. The panel provides detailed annual information on the household composition of sampled women, as well as detailed information on labour market positions, earnings and social security benefits of sampled women and their household members on a quarterly basis. All samples of the ASD Panel are disproportionately stratified by nationality, using sampling fractions of 1/40 for Belgian women and 1/20 for foreign women respectively. In addition, the Crossroads Bank for Social Security provides data on country of birth both of women and their parents, allowing us to identify women of the second generation. Given the extensive information on household composition and labour market position and the oversampling of migrant populations, these data are well-suited for the analysis of leave uptake among migrant groups in Belgium.

The analyses document leave strategies across origin groups for 10,976 women who entered parenthood between the first quarter of 2004 and the fourth quarter of 2010. We observe these women until the end of the observation window in 2010 or until death or emigration. As we aim to link the socio-economic position before parenthood to parental leave uptake after childbearing, we select only mothers who are observed one year before their first child is born (N: 11,043). Removing women with missing values for origin group, results in a sample of 10,976 women for the descriptive analysis. For the multivariate analysis, only mothers eligible for parental leave⁵ and employed one year before the first birth are taken into account (N: 6501).

Although this paper focusses on parental leave uptake, the information available in the ASD Panel does not allow distinguishing between parental leave and other leave types embedded in the Belgian ‘Time Credit’ system. Therefore the uptake of leave refers to all types of Belgian ‘Time Credit’ leave schemes⁶. However, previous research (Desmet and Glorieux, 2007) shows that spending more time with their children is the main motivation for Belgian women to take up leave. As our analyses focus on leave uptake among new mothers, we assume that most leave is used to take care of infants and young children.

Analysis

Nesting mothers in pre-birth employers, three types of analysis are executed. First, mixed effects logit models of leave use (Table 1) are estimated to assess migrant–native differentials

in leave uptake. The indicator on leave uptake reflects whether a mother has ever used parental leave in the observation period following the birth of the first child. Second, mixed effects logit models are estimated distinguishing full-time from part-time leave use (Table 2) to shed light on the way parental leave is used by mothers in different origin groups. Given that only a limited number of mothers combine part-time and full-time spells of uptake⁷, we estimate the odds of full-time leave use (100%) versus part-time uptake (50% or 20%). In this model we study the probability of taking full-time leave at least one moment in the observation period versus the probability of exclusively taking part-time leave. Finally, mixed effects logit models of the employment status immediately following leave use (Table 3) are estimated to assess the migrant–native differentials in labour force participation following leave uptake. Two separate models are estimated: (i) comparing the probability of being unemployed or inactive to the probability of being employed (whether part-time or full-time); and (ii) comparing the probability of being employed part-time (less than 100%) to the probability of being employed full-time. While mothers constitute the units of observation for the analyses of leave uptake and full-time leave uptake, the analysis of maternal employment considers the labour market position in the quarter immediately following each spell of leave use. As the birth of additional children results in additional parental leave entitlements and parents have the possibility to split up leave in different periods, 25% of the sampled mothers are in multiple leave spells.

The main independent variable of interest in this study is origin group. We distinguish nine groups: (i) mothers originating from Belgium (N: 6433); (ii) first-generation migrants originating from neighbouring countries (Germany, France, the Netherlands and Luxemburg, N: 475); (iii) second-generation migrants originating from neighbouring countries (N: 337); (iv) first-generation migrants originating from other European countries (N: 508); (v) second-generation migrants originating from other European countries (N: 443); (vi) first-generation migrants originating from Turkey or Morocco (N: 853); (vii) second-generation migrants originating from Turkey or Morocco (N: 472); (viii) first-generation migrants originating from other non-European countries (N: 1197); and (ix) second-generation migrants originating from other non-European countries (N: 258). A woman is identified as a migrant when she (first generation) or one of her parents (second generation) was not born in Belgium. When both parents were born in different countries, the most distant country is considered as the country of origin. Although the administrative panel distinguishes seven different origin regions: (1) neighbouring countries; (2) Southern Europe; (3) Northern Europe; (4) Eastern Europe; (5) Turkey; (6) Morocco; and (7) Other non-European countries, we chose to pool migrants originating from Southern, Northern and Eastern European countries in a single category due to small sample sizes for migrants from Northern Europe and first-generation migrants from Eastern Europe. Similarly, we pool mothers originating from Turkey and Morocco in a single category.

In order to assess the degree to which migrant–native differentials in parental leave strategies can be accounted for by employment characteristics, this study relies on four nested models. The first model (model *a*) considers, in addition to origin group, the number of children at the end of the observation period, assuming that the need for leave is stronger the more children

one has. Second, both linear and quadratic terms for age at first birth are included, as previous research on female labour market participation after childbearing shows a positive effect of age at first birth that turns negative after the age of 30 (Kil et al., 2015a; Kil et al., 2015b). Third, to control for variability in terms of observation length, we include duration of the observation period (in quarters). Fourth, we control for the year and quarter of first childbirth. As women who enter parenthood in the last quarters of the observation period exhibit particularly low leave uptake, dummy terms for the fourth quarter of 2009 until the fourth quarter of 2010 are included. To control for the gradual increase in parental leave use in tandem with the increasing flexibility of the parental leave system, a linear term of quarter of childbirth is included. As the economic context and parental leave legislation differ slightly between Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels⁸, the analyses also control for region of residence. Furthermore we take into account several household characteristics: household position before parenthood (distinguishing cohabitation with a partner, living in the parental home, single or other), being partnered following the transition of parenthood (for at least one quarter) and having a partner who also takes up parental leave.

To assess the extent to which varying patterns of leave use can be explained by socio-economic positions at earlier stages in the life course, we subsequently control for employment characteristics of women one year before the birth of their first child. In models *b-d* we additionally control for mothers' pre-birth employment regime, amount of jobs (model *b*), salary (model *c*) and sector of employment (model *d*). Employment regime distinguishes five categories, based on the percentage of working hours of a standard full-time job in the sector of employment: (i) unknown position; (ii) marginal employment (less than 46%); (iii) part-time employment (between 46% and 80%); (iv) near full-time employment (between 81% and 99%); and (v) full-time employment (100% or more). With respect to income, we include salary measured in quintiles for the employment regime considered. As a result, this operationalisation of salary does not represent the absolute income, but rather the relative income position compared to others working in the same employment regime. The variable sector is categorised into 10 groups: (1) agriculture and industry; (2) wholesale and retail; (3) logistics and energy distribution; (4) education; (5) public administration and extraterritorial organisations; (6) health services and social care; (7) recreation and other services; (8) finance and estate; (9) administration, support services and ICT; and (10) hotel and catering.

For maternal employment following leave uptake (Table 5), models *b* and *c* additionally control for the cumulative number of quarters spent in full-time leave use and the cumulative number of quarters spent in part-time leave use, as previous research indicates that longer periods of leave hamper the return to work (Fagnani, 1999; Lalive and Zweimuller, 2009). In addition, instead of parity at the end of the observation period, parity at the moment of the observation is taken into account.

Tables 1 and 2 provide an overview of the distribution of the covariates and sample sizes.

Table 1. Summary statistics.

	Origin group									
	BE	NB G1	NB G2	EU G1	EU G2	T&M G1	T&M G2	nEU G1	nEU G2	Total
Labour market position before first birth										
inactive	10.87	43.36	19.25	46.17	12.87	68.93	20.34	59.38	20.25	24.71
unemployed	5.60	5.31	8.91	3.93	9.71	9.23	27.67	5.10	8.26	7.02
unknown	1.76	2.65	2.01	1.77	1.58	1.52	4.40	2.38	1.65	1.96
marginal	1.68	1.33	2.01	1.77	1.58	2.22	2.31	2.88	2.07	1.89
part-time	11.07	7.74	10.06	9.43	14.00	5.37	9.43	6.41	9.09	9.87
near full-time	4.24	1.11	5.17	3.73	4.29	1.99	2.94	1.40	1.65	3.52
full-time	58.90	32.96	46.55	28.49	52.82	9.58	31.45	19.24	50.41	46.16
self-employed	5.55	5.31	6.03	4.72	2.93	1.17	0.84	3.21	6.20	4.62
partly self-employed	0.34	0.22	0.00	0.00	0.23	0.00	0.63	0.00	0.41	0.26
<i>total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Parity at the end of the observation										
one child	58.06	67.70	62.64	72.69	65.24	54.32	55.77	65.87	52.89	59.93
two children	36.76	28.32	31.03	24.17	32.51	36.21	37.53	28.37	42.15	34.66
three or more children	5.18	3.98	6.32	3.14	2.26	9.46	6.71	5.76	4.96	5.41
<i>total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Region										
Flanders	63.89	42.48	39.94	33.99	20.32	35.75	43.82	46.55	35.95	53.50
Wallonia	31.59	29.42	49.14	15.72	65.46	21.61	16.56	22.86	34.30	30.35
Brussels	4.52	28.10	10.92	50.29	14.22	42.64	39.62	30.59	29.75	16.15
<i>total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Household position before first birth										
parental home	12.75	6.42	16.38	5.11	13.32	4.32	12.58	7.48	17.36	11.12
single cohabiting with partner	9.30	17.26	15.80	17.49	12.19	10.51	10.06	18.01	13.64	11.52
other	74.74	70.58	64.08	72.10	71.33	71.85	71.70	65.71	66.12	72.42
<i>total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Mean age at first birth (in years)										
	28.05	29.27	27.66	30.54	28.83	27.02	25.33	28.47	27.47	28.07
Mean duration of observation (in quarters)										
	14.31	12.37	14.77	11.83	14.96	14.17	14.25	12.52	15.22	13.96
Mean birth quarter of first child										
	2007 q2	2007 q4	2007 q2	2007 q4	2007 q1	2007 q2	2007 q2	2007 q4	2007 q1	2007 q2
Partner that uses leave (in percent)	18.59	17.26	22.13	18.86	19.41	11.68	15.51	21.38	18.18	18.32
<i>N total</i>	<i>6433</i>	<i>452</i>	<i>348</i>	<i>509</i>	<i>443</i>	<i>856</i>	<i>477</i>	<i>1,216</i>	<i>242</i>	<i>10,976</i>

Note: The sample is restricted to mothers legally residing in Belgium who had their first child between 2004–2010.

BE = Belgium; NB = neighbouring countries (France, Germany, the Netherlands, Luxemburg); EU = other European countries; T&M = Turkey and Morocco; nEU = other non-European countries; G1 = first generation; G2 = second generation

Source: Administrative Socio-Demographic Panel, 1999–2010, calculations by authors.

Table 2. Summary statistics.

	Origin group									
	BE	NB G1	NB G2	EU G1	EU G2	TM G1	TM G2	nEU G1	nEU G2	Total
Salary before first birth										
quintile 1	18.52	19.55	25.00	21.89	25.66	42.96	30.30	28.78	20.13	20.64
quintile 2	19.06	17.88	22.64	27.36	23.68	24.44	25.25	21.51	20.13	20.07
quintile 3	19.79	10.61	17.92	17.41	20.39	14.07	25.76	16.57	24.83	19.44
quintile 4	21.59	21.79	15.09	9.95	17.43	14.07	10.10	15.70	19.46	19.97
quintile 5	21.03	30.17	19.34	23.38	12.83	4.44	8.59	17.44	15.44	19.87
<i>total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Sector before first birth										
agriculture, industry	9.37	10.61	6.60	6.97	8.22	3.70	7.07	5.81	5.37	8.72
wholesale, retail	14.33	18.44	15.57	13.43	21.05	7.41	17.68	13.08	16.11	14.71
logistics, storage, distribution	4.29	5.59	4.25	1.99	5.26	4.44	3.03	3.20	4.03	4.20
education	15.69	6.70	11.79	3.98	7.89	5.93	5.56	5.81	10.74	13.44
public administration, extraterritorial organizations	12.28	2.79	12.26	5.97	12.50	8.89	13.13	7.56	8.72	11.46
health services, social care	21.85	16.76	21.23	13.93	16.12	17.04	19.70	20.93	25.50	21.04
art, recreation, other services	2.91	6.70	8.49	7.46	6.58	2.96	4.04	6.40	8.05	3.85
finances, estate administration, support services, technical activities, IT	11.74	22.91	11.79	31.84	15.13	40.00	23.74	19.77	14.77	14.27
hotel, catering	2.55	6.70	4.25	8.46	3.29	8.89	3.03	12.50	2.68	3.61
<i>total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Women with more than 1 job (in %)										
	3.58	2.23	2.83	2.99	2.30	3.70	4.55	2.03	1.34	3.34
<i>N total</i>	<i>4779</i>	<i>179</i>	<i>212</i>	<i>201</i>	<i>304</i>	<i>135</i>	<i>198</i>	<i>344</i>	<i>149</i>	<i>6501</i>

Note: The sample is restricted to mothers legally residing in Belgium who had their first child between 2004–2010, who were employed one year before the transition to parenthood and who were eligible for parental leave, Belgium.

BE = Belgium; NB = neighbouring countries (France, Germany, the Netherlands, Luxemburg); EU = other European countries; T&M = Turkey and Morocco; nEU = other non-European countries; G1 = first generation; G2 = second generation

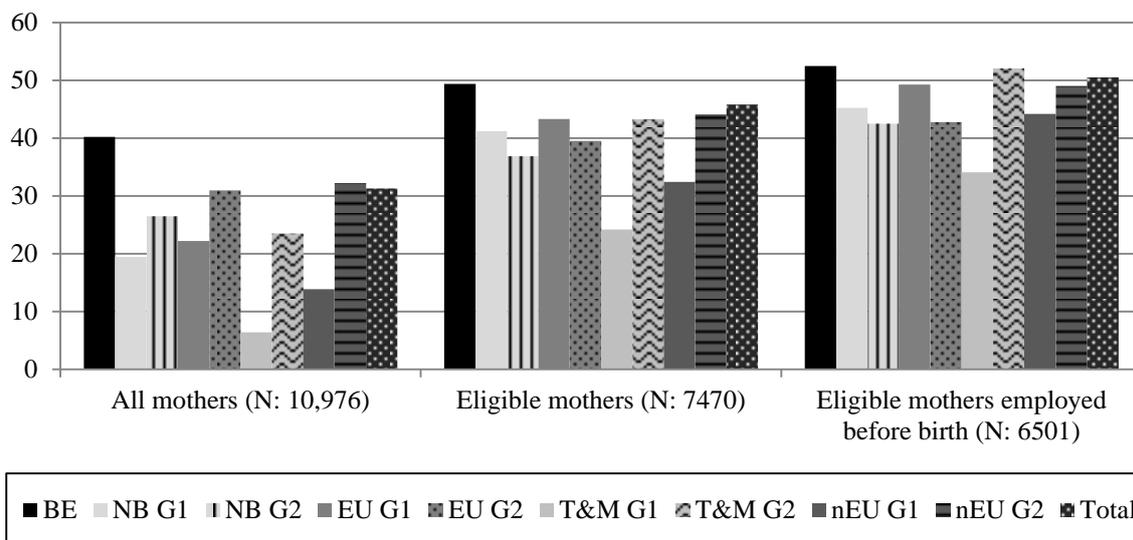
Source: Administrative Socio-Demographic Panel, 1999-2010, calculations by authors.

Results

Parental leave uptake by origin group

Figure 1 shows the percentage of mothers by origin group who used parental leave. In line with our expectations and consistent with results for the Netherlands and Spain (Lapuerta et al., 2011; Merens et al., 2006), we find large migrant–native differences in parental leave uptake (left-hand panel of Figure 1, N: 10,976). Whereas 40% of native mothers used parental leave following the transition to parenthood, this proportion is limited to 19%, 22%, 6% and 13% among first-generation migrants originating from neighbouring countries, other European countries, Turkey or Morocco and other non-European countries respectively. Although the proportion of mothers taking up leave is considerably higher among second-generation migrants – 26%, 31%, 23% and 32% among mothers originating from neighbouring countries, other European countries, Turkey or Morocco and other non-European countries respectively – uptake levels do not approximate the degree of leave use among native women.

Figure 1. Migrant–native differences in parental leave uptake (in %).



Note: The sample is restricted to mothers legally residing in Belgium who had their first child between 2004–2010. BE = Belgium; NB = neighbouring countries (France, Germany, the Netherlands, Luxembourg); EU = other European countries; T&M = Turkey or Morocco; nEU = other non-European countries; G1 = first generation; G2 = second generation

Source: Administrative Socio-Demographic Panel, 1999-2010, calculations by authors.

As migrant groups are overrepresented in precarious labour market positions before the start of family formation, the differential uptake of parental leave following parenthood may partially reflect differential eligibility. When only considering mothers who at some point in the observation period were eligible for parental leave (middle panel of Figure 1, N: 7470), differences get considerably smaller. Among eligible native mothers, 49% use parental leave, compared to 41%, 43% and 32% among eligible first-generation women originating from neighbouring countries, other European countries and other non-European countries, and 37%, 39%, 43% and 44% among eligible second-generation women originating from neighbouring countries, other European countries, Turkey or Morocco and other non-

European countries respectively. First-generation women of Turkish origin, however, continue to show a considerably lower uptake rate of 24%.

Given that parental leave use is extremely low among women who were inactive or unemployed before the transition to parenthood, we additionally selected women who were employed one year before first childbirth (right-hand panel of Figure 1, N: 6501). Controlling for pre-birth labour market position and eligibility, migrant–native differences in parental leave use are largely explained. Differences in uptake rates between women of Belgian origin (52%) and first- and second-generation women originating from neighbouring countries (45% and 42%), other European countries (49% and 43%), and other non-European countries (44% and 49%) and second-generation women of Turkish and Moroccan origin (51%) are now very small. The uptake rates of first-generation women of Turkish and Moroccan origin, however, continue to be relatively low (34%).

Focusing further on the 6501 mothers who were eligible for parental leave and employed before the birth of their first child, models 1a-1d (Table 3) show how the remaining differences in leave uptake change when additionally controlling for pre-birth job characteristics. In line with the descriptive results, first-generation migrants of Turkish and Moroccan origin show significantly lower uptake with odds being 55% lower compared to native women (model 1a). The other covariates show a positive effect of parity, a reversed u-shaped effect of age at first birth, higher leave uptake in Flanders, a positive effect of cohabitation with a partner, and a positive association with the leave use of the partner.

Models 1b to 1d additionally control for pre-birth employment regime, number of jobs, salary and sector of employment. These models show that the differences between first-generation migrants of Turkish and Moroccan origin and native groups decrease but remain significant (OR=0.601*, model 1d). However, sensitivity analyses show that this is explained mainly by the relatively high unemployment risk of this group⁹. Variation in leave uptake situated at the employer level (ρ) decreases from 14% to 9% when incorporating these socio-economic differences, which mainly results from taking the employment sector into account. Model 1d shows moderate positive effects for first-generation migrants originating from other European countries and second-generation migrants of Turkish and Moroccan origin compared to native women, although the differences are not statistically significant. The inclusion of pre-birth employment characteristics in the model shows that labour force attachment and income are positively associated with leave uptake. The differential socio-economic position before the transition to parenthood thus largely explains migrant–native differences in leave uptake.

Table 3. Explaining migrant-native differences in parental leave uptake (in odds-ratios).

	leave uptake (1) – no leave uptake (0)							
	Model 1a		Model 1b		Model 1c		Model 1d	
	OR	sig.	OR	sig.	OR	sig.	OR	sig.
<i>Individual-level covariates</i>								
Origin group (ref. Belgium)								
<i>Neighbouring countries, gen1</i>	0.841		0.857		0.893		0.924	
<i>Neighbouring countries, gen2</i>	0.761		0.771		0.795		0.810	
<i>Other European countries, gen1</i>	1.100		1.221		1.263		1.325	
<i>Other European countries, gen2</i>	0.878		0.884		0.906		0.925	
<i>Turkey or Morocco, gen1</i>	0.449	***	0.532	**	0.585	*	0.601	*
<i>Turkey or Morocco, gen2</i>	1.159		1.226		1.239		1.248	
<i>Other non-European countries, gen1</i>	0.787		0.883		0.936		0.990	
<i>Other non-European countries, gen2</i>	1.045		1.027		1.009		1.011	
Parity at end of observation (ref. 1 child)								
<i>2 children</i>	2.073	***	2.021	***	2.008	***	1.998	***
<i>3 or more children</i>	3.411	***	3.507	***	3.565	***	3.553	***
Age at first birth								
<i>age at first birth linear</i>	1.474	***	1.347	***	1.242	**	1.228	**
<i>age at first birth square</i>	0.994	***	0.996	***	0.997	*	0.997	*
Region (ref. Flanders)								
<i>Wallonia</i>	0.531	***	0.546	***	0.548	***	0.553	***
<i>Brussels</i>	0.657	***	0.640	***	0.642	***	0.655	***
Quarter of birth of first child								
<i>quarter linear</i>	1.043		1.042		1.041		1.037	
<i>2009Q₄</i>	1.009		0.973		0.947		0.927	
<i>2010Q₁</i>	0.794		0.781		0.767		0.740	
<i>2010Q₂</i>	0.650	**	0.648	**	0.648	**	0.639	**
<i>2010Q₃</i>	0.314	***	0.304	***	0.314	***	0.315	***
<i>2010Q₄</i>	0.021	***	0.021	***	0.021	***	0.021	***
Duration of observation								
<i>duration linear</i>	1.056		1.055		1.056		1.050	
Household position before first birth (ref. cohabiting with partner)								
<i>not cohabiting (parental home)</i>	0.618	***	0.627	***	0.642	***	0.642	***
<i>not cohabiting (single)</i>	0.720	**	0.723	**	0.746	*	0.753	*
<i>not cohabiting (other)</i>	0.789		0.811		0.814		0.811	
Having a partner								
<i>partnered</i>	1.855	***	1.810	***	1.777	***	1.751	***
Leave use by partner								
<i>leave use</i>	2.067	***	1.969	***	1.941	***	1.893	***
Employment regime before first birth (ref. full-time)								
<i>unknown</i>			0.365	***	0.340	***	0.357	***
<i>marginal</i>			0.327	***	0.320	***	0.356	***
<i>part-time</i>			0.540	***	0.527	***	0.550	***
<i>near full-time</i>			0.633	**	0.620	***	0.633	**
Number of jobs before first birth (ref. 1 job)								
<i>multiple jobs</i>			0.512	***	0.510	***	0.565	**
Salary before first birth (ref. first quintile)								
<i>second quintile</i>					1.491	***	1.438	***
<i>third quintile</i>					1.931	***	1.794	***
<i>fourth quintile</i>					1.605	***	1.470	***
<i>fifth quintile</i>					1.327	**	1.231	*

Note: The odds-ratio's result from mixed-effects logit models where persons are nested in employers. The sample is restricted to mothers legally residing in Belgium who had their first child between 2004–2010, who were employed one year before the transition to parenthood and who were eligible for parental leave.

Significance levels: * p< 0.05; ** p< 0.01; *** p< 0.001

Source: Administrative Socio-Demographic Panel, 1999-2010, calculations by authors.

Table 3. Explaining migrant-native differences in parental leave uptake (in odds-ratios), continued.

	leave uptake (1) – no leave uptake (0)							
	<i>Model 1a</i>		<i>Model 1b</i>		<i>Model 1c</i>		<i>Model 1d</i>	
	<i>OR</i>	<i>sig.</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>sig.</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>sig.</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>sig.</i>
<i>Individual-level covariates</i>								
Employment sector before first birth (<i>ref. health services and social care</i>)								
<i>agriculture, industry</i>							0.788	
<i>wholesale, retail</i>							0.728	**
<i>logistics, storage, distribution</i>							1.150	
<i>education</i>							0.412	***
<i>public administration, extraterritorial organisations</i>							0.667	**
<i>art, recreation, other services</i>							0.653	*
<i>finances, estate</i>							1.107	
<i>administration, support services, academia, it</i>							0.770	*
<i>hotel, catering</i>							0.458	***
<i>Random parameters</i>								
Rho(employer)	0.135	***	0.120	***	0.119	***	0.087	***
<i>Model parameters</i>								
-2LL	7936.166		7819.849		7767.144		7718.477	
N Persons	6501		6501		6501		6501	
N Employers	3643		3643		3643		3643	

Note: The odds-ratio's result from mixed-effects logit models where persons are nested in employers. The sample is restricted to mothers legally residing in Belgium who had their first child between 2004–2010, who were employed one year before the transition to parenthood and who were eligible for parental leave.

Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Source: Administrative Socio-Demographic Panel, 1999-2010, calculations by authors.

Full-time versus part-time leave uptake by origin group

For the 3281 women who used parental leave (out of the 6501 eligible mothers who were employed before the birth of their first child) we assess whether full-time or part-time leave was taken. Since in Belgium, part-time leave is not available for people who work part-time, we select only women who worked full-time the quarter before taking parental leave (2580 women).

Results show that first-generation migrants are much more likely to use full-time leave, particularly non-European migrants (Table 4). Compared to native women, the odds of full-time leave uptake are 119%, 230%, 203% and 216% higher among first-generation women originating from neighbouring countries, other European countries, Turkey or Morocco and other non-European countries respectively. Second-generation migrants resemble native women more closely, the odds-ratios of full-time versus part-time leave uptake being 0.982, 1.164 and 0.960 for women originating from neighbouring countries, other European countries and other non-European countries respectively. Differences between these second-generation migrant groups and natives are not substantial nor significant. For second-generation women of Turkish and Moroccan origin, however, we do observe significantly larger odds-ratios of full-time leave uptake (OR=2.344***, model 2a).

Models 2b to 2d control for women's employment characteristics before the birth of their first child. Although the differentials between migrant women and natives are somewhat attenuated, they do not change considerably when additionally controlling for pre-birth employment regime and number of jobs held (model 2b), salary (model 2c) and sector of

employment (model 2d). The results indicate that a higher income position is associated with lower odds of full-time versus part-time leave uptake. Variation at the employer level diminishes from 13% to 9% when taking into account pre-birth employment characteristics. Hence, differences in socio-economic position before childbearing explain only a small part of migrant–native differences in the uptake of full-time versus part-time leave uptake.

Table 4. Explaining migrant-native differences in full-time parental leave uptake (in odds-ratios).

	full-time leave uptake (1) - part-time leave uptake (0)							
	Model 2a		Model 2b		Model 2c		Model 2d	
	OR	sig.	OR	sig.	OR	sig.	OR	sig.
<i>Individual-level covariates</i>								
Origin group (ref. Belgium)								
<i>Neighbouring countries, gen1</i>	2.194	**	2.228	**	2.229	**	2.279	**
<i>Neighbouring countries, gen2</i>	0.982		0.970		0.945		0.939	
<i>Other European countries, gen1</i>	3.304	***	3.294	***	3.094	***	3.167	***
<i>Other European countries, gen2</i>	1.164		1.173		1.119		1.160	
<i>Turkey or Morocco, gen1</i>	3.025	*	3.099	*	2.753	*	2.450	*
<i>Turkey or Morocco, gen2</i>	2.344	**	2.449	**	2.286	**	2.312	**
<i>Other non-European countries, gen1</i>	3.161	***	3.159	***	3.120	***	2.976	***
<i>Other non-European countries, gen2</i>	0.960		0.955		0.960		0.969	
Parity at end of observation (ref. 1 child)								
<i>2 children</i>	1.144		1.141		1.199		1.187	
<i>3 or more children</i>	2.764	***	2.761	***	2.904	***	2.841	***
Age at first birth								
<i>age at birth linear</i>	0.602	***	0.601	***	0.688	**	0.687	**
<i>age at birth square</i>	1.008	***	1.008	***	1.006	**	1.006	**
Region (ref. Flanders)								
<i>Wallonia</i>	0.495	***	0.491	***	0.475	***	0.476	***
<i>Brussels</i>	0.714		0.710		0.704		0.697	*
Quarter of birth of first child								
<i>quarter linear</i>	0.998		1.014		1.022		1.007	
<i>2009Q₄</i>	0.857		0.869		0.913		0.908	
<i>2010Q₁</i>	1.534		1.562		1.648		1.669	
<i>2010Q₂</i>	1.112		1.102		1.161		1.154	
<i>2010Q₃</i>	2.365		2.378	*	2.242	*	2.269	*
<i>2010Q₄</i>	1.000		1.000		1.000		1.000	
Duration of observation								
<i>duration linear</i>	1.003		1.019		1.021		1.007	
Household position before first birth (ref. cohabiting with partner)								
<i>not cohabiting (parental home)</i>	1.104		1.100		1.082		1.103	
<i>not cohabiting (single)</i>	1.352		1.371		1.293		1.272	
<i>not cohabiting (other)</i>	0.821		0.807		0.808		0.833	
Having a partner								
<i>partnered</i>	0.925		0.922		0.950		0.952	
Leave use by partner								
<i>leave use</i>	0.702		0.710		0.752		0.776	
Employment regime before first birth (ref. full-time)								
<i>unknown</i>			0.492		0.578		0.714	
<i>marginal</i>			1.082		1.084		0.978	
<i>part-time</i>			1.980	**	2.222	**	2.091	**
<i>near full-time</i>			0.898		0.852		0.833	

Note: The odds-ratio's result from mixed-effects logit models where persons are nested in employers. The sample is restricted to mothers legally residing in Belgium who had their first child between 2004–2010, who were employed one year before the transition to parenthood, who subsequently used parental leave and who were full-time employed the quarter before leave use. *Significance levels:* * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001

Source: Administrative Socio-Demographic Panel, 1999-2010, calculations by authors.

Table 4. Explaining migrant-native differences in full-time parental leave uptake (in odds-ratios), continued.

	full-time leave uptake (1) - part-time leave uptake (0)							
	<i>Model 2a</i>		<i>Model 2b</i>		<i>Model 2c</i>		<i>Model 2d</i>	
	<i>OR</i>	<i>sig.</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>sig.</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>sig.</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>sig.</i>
<i>Individual-level covariates</i>								
Number of jobs before first birth (<i>ref. 1 job</i>)								
<i>multiple jobs</i>			0.639		0.704		0.655	
Salary before first birth (<i>ref. first quintile</i>)								
<i>second quintile</i>					0.828		0.849	
<i>third quintile</i>					0.558	***	0.590	**
<i>fourth quintile</i>					0.464	***	0.491	***
<i>fifth quintile</i>					0.586	**	0.634	**
Employment sector before first birth (<i>ref. health services and social care</i>)								
<i>agriculture, industry</i>							1.038	
<i>wholesale, retail</i>							1.049	
<i>logistics, storage, distribution</i>							0.741	
<i>education</i>							1.868	*
<i>public administration, extraterritorial organisations</i>							1.083	
<i>art, recreation, other services</i>							0.734	
<i>finances, estate</i>							0.972	
<i>administration, support services, academia, it</i>							0.750	
<i>hotel, catering</i>							2.282	*
<i>Random parameters</i>								
Rho(employer)	0.133	***	0.126	***	0.120	***	0.089	***
<i>Model parameters</i>								
-2LL	3304.908		3293.017		3262.853		3243.929	
N Persons	2580		2580		2580		2580	
N Employers	1625		1625		1625		1625	

Note: The odds-ratio's result from mixed-effects logit models where persons are nested in employers. The sample is restricted to mothers legally residing in Belgium who had their first child between 2004–2010, who were employed one year before the transition to parenthood and who were eligible for parental leave.

Significance levels: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Source: Administrative Socio-Demographic Panel, 1999-2010, calculations by authors.

Labour market position after leave use by origin group

Finally, we assess the labour market position one quarter after leave use for 2640 mothers who used parental leave. Taking into account all leave spells for which activity status in the subsequent quarter is known results in 3319 observations on the labour market position following leave use¹⁰. In general, the majority of mothers who have used leave return to employment. However, migrants are more likely to be unemployed or inactive in the quarter immediately following leave use. Whereas 4% of the native mothers are out of employment in the quarter following leave uptake, this proportion amounts to 11%, 8%, 7% and 18% among first-generation women originating from neighbouring countries, other European countries, Turkey or Morocco and other non-European countries respectively, and 4%, 7%, 7% and 6% for second-generation mothers originating from neighbouring countries, other European countries, Turkey or Morocco and other non-European countries respectively.

Table 5. Explaining migrant-native differences in the labour market position one quarter following parental leave (in odds-ratios).

	not employed (1) - employed (0)						part-time (1) - full-time employed (0)					
	<i>Model 3a</i>		<i>Model3b</i>		<i>Model 3c</i>		<i>Model 4a</i>		<i>Model4b</i>		<i>Model 4c</i>	
	<i>OR</i>	<i>sig.</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>sig.</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>sig.</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>sig.</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>sig.</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>sig.</i>
<i>Individual-level covariates</i>												
Origin group (ref. Belgium)												
<i>Neighbouring countries, gen1</i>	2.894	*	3.098	*	2.557	*	1.806		1.865		2.238	*
<i>Neighbouring countries, gen2</i>	0.991		1.127		1.227		0.906		0.947		1.361	
<i>Other European countries, gen1</i>	1.713		1.617		1.464		1.000		0.972		0.813	
<i>Other European countries, gen2</i>	1.453		1.341		1.220		0.988		0.940		1.051	
<i>Turkey or Morocco, gen1</i>	2.070		1.723		1.101		1.324		1.300		1.048	
<i>Turkey or Morocco, gen2</i>	1.672		1.242		1.072		1.891	*	1.636		1.514	
<i>Other non-European countries, gen1</i>	4.434	***	4.293	***	3.775	***	1.165		1.151		0.884	
<i>Other non-European countries, gen2</i>	1.331		1.347		1.292		0.822		0.795		0.823	
Parity (ref. 1 child)												
<i>2 children</i>	1.111		1.120		1.130		1.636	***	1.660	***	1.643	***
<i>3 or more children</i>	0.836		0.883		1.056		1.949	**	2.018	**	2.069	**
Age at first birth												
<i>age at birth linear</i>	0.982		1.115		1.279		0.743	*	0.771	*	0.974	
<i>age at birth square</i>	1.000		0.998		0.996		1.005	*	1.004	*	1.001	
Region (ref. Flanders)												
<i>Wallonia</i>	0.796		0.817		0.894		1.221		1.222		1.164	
<i>Brussels</i>	0.998		1.046		1.287		1.045		1.090		1.127	
Quarter of birth of first child												
<i>quarter linear</i>	0.795	**	0.791	**	0.799	**	1.022		1.021		1.104	
Duration of observation												
<i>In quarters, linear</i>	0.803	**	0.791	**	0.794	**	1.018		1.011		1.096	
Household position before first birth (ref. cohabiting with partner)												
<i>not cohabiting (parental home)</i>	0.937		0.929		0.988		1.430		1.404		1.332	
<i>not cohabiting (single)</i>	1.329		1.271		1.228		0.852		0.829		0.751	
<i>not cohabiting (other)</i>	0.404		0.393		0.396		0.633		0.624		0.494	*
Having a partner												
<i>partnered</i>	0.294	*	0.272	*	0.276	*	0.702		0.686		0.942	
Leave use by partner												
<i>leave use</i>	0.550		0.567		0.606		0.841		0.841		0.926	
Number of quarters spent in leave												
<i>Full-time leave</i>			1.377	***	1.308	***			1.278	***	1.165	***
<i>Part-time leave use</i>			1.051		1.051				1.058	*	1.087	**
Employment regime before first birth (ref. full-time)												
<i>unknown</i>					0.548						2.103	
<i>marginal</i>					0.974						20.705	***
<i>part-time</i>					0.982						15.698	***
<i>near full-time</i>					0.231						12.616	***
Number of jobs before first birth (ref. 1 job)												
<i>multiple jobs</i>					0.231						2.746	**
Salary before first birth (ref. first quintile)												
<i>second quintile</i>					0.625						0.810	
<i>third quintile</i>					0.571	*					0.791	
<i>fourth quintile</i>					0.517	*					0.627	**
<i>fifth quintile</i>					0.313	**					0.378	***
Employment sector before first birth (ref. health services and social care)												
<i>agriculture, industry</i>					3.003	**					0.702	
<i>wholesale, retail</i>					2.461	**					0.961	
<i>logistics, storage, distribution</i>					2.162						1.047	
<i>education</i>					0.857						0.599	
<i>public administration, extra-territorial organisations</i>					1.040						0.544	**
<i>art, recreation, other services</i>					1.742						1.861	*
<i>finances, estate</i>					0.766						1.313	
<i>administration, support services, academia, it</i>					3.520	***					1.181	
<i>hotel, catering</i>					1.414						0.824	

Note: The odds-ratio's result from two separate logit models where observations are nested in employers. The sample is restricted to mothers legally residing in Belgium who had their first child between 2004 – 2010, who were employed one year before the transition to parenthood and who subsequently used parental leave.
Significance levels: * p< 0.05; ** p< 0.01; *** p< 0.001

Source: Administrative Socio-Demographic Panel, 1999-2010, calculations by authors.

Table 5. Explaining migrant-native differences in the labour market position one quarter following parental leave (in odds-ratios), continued.

	not employed (1) - employed (0)						part-time (1) - full-time employed (0)					
	<i>Model 3a</i>		<i>Model3b</i>		<i>Model 3c</i>		<i>Model 4a</i>		<i>Model4b</i>		<i>Model 4c</i>	
	<i>OR</i>	<i>sig.</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>sig.</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>sig.</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>sig.</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>sig.</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>sig.</i>
	<i>Random parameters</i>											
Rho(employer)	0.274	***	0.306	***	0.162	***	0.363	***	0.353	***	0.270	***
	<i>Model parameters</i>											
-2LL	1297.557		1262.435		1209.548		3760.628		3730.124		3260.743	
N observations	3319		3319		3319		3143		3143		3143	
N employers	1620		1620		1620		1531		1531		1531	

Note: The odds-ratio's result from two separate logit models where observations are nested in employers. The sample is restricted to mothers legally residing in Belgium who had their first child between 2004 – 2010, who were employed one year before the transition to parenthood and who subsequently used parental leave.

Significance levels: * p< 0.05; ** p< 0.01; *** p< 0.001

Source: Administrative Socio-Demographic Panel, 1999-2010, calculations by authors.

Self-evidently, the working regime before childbirth is an important predictor of the labour market position after leave uptake. As expected, women working part-time before childbearing have larger odds of continuing part-time work after leave uptake. Furthermore, a higher income before childbearing is negatively associated with unemployment/inactivity after leave uptake, while being positively associated with full-time employment. Employer variation in the odds of unemployment/inactivity after leave uptake decreases from 27% to 16% when taking into account employment characteristics before birth, while the employer variation in the probability of working part-time diminishes from 36% to 27%.

Longer use of full-time leave is associated with a significantly larger risk of dropping out of work. Accumulated periods of full-time as well as part-time leave are positively associated with the probability of working part-time rather than full-time following leave. In general, these results show that women who take leave for shorter periods and combine leave with labour force participation (part-time uptake), have the largest probability of being employed full-time following leave uptake.

Discussion and conclusion

Family policies such as parental leave support work–family reconciliation for an increasing number of parents. Although employment remains low among mothers of migrant origin, few studies have addressed population heterogeneity in the uptake of family policies (Neyer and Andersson, 2008). Available research indicates small migrant–native differences in Sweden where all mothers are entitled to parental leave (Mussino and Duvander, 2016), whereas countries where eligibility is connected to labour force participation (e.g. the Netherlands, Spain) typically show larger differentials (Lapuerta et al., 2011; Merens et al., 2006). These findings suggest that eligibility criteria related to previous employment are largely responsible for the differential uptake of parental leave between natives and mothers with a migration background. Using unique longitudinal microdata for Belgium, this study documents migrant–native differences in parental leave uptake, and is among the first to assess the degree to which precarious employment trajectories and eligibility can explain these differences (Lapuerta et al., 2011; Merens et al., 2006; Mussino and Duvander, 2016).

Results show large migrant–native differences in the uptake of parental leave among mothers in Belgium, with particularly low use among first-generation mothers of Turkish and Moroccan origin. This finding corroborates previous research indicating differential parental leave strategies in these origin groups (Merens et al., 2006; Mussino and Duvander, 2016). When controlling for eligibility and pre-birth employment characteristics such as employment regime, salary and sector, however, differences between origin groups largely disappear. Hence, this study identifies the difficult access to stable employment for migrants and non-universal eligibility as major factors explaining migrant–native differentials in parental leave uptake.

Consistent with the increasing flexibility of parental leave legislation, this contribution also provides insight into differential parental leave strategies by distinguishing full-time from part-time leave uptake. This study shows that first-generation mothers of migrant origin exploit this flexibility to a lesser extent than natives and second-generation mothers do. They are more likely to take up leave on a full-time basis, while natives and second-generation women more often use part-time leave. Similarly, Swedish research (Mussino and Duvander, 2016) shows that mothers of migrant origin exhaust their right to parental leave as soon as possible, while natives stay connected to the labour force when taking leave. The pre-birth employment characteristics used in this study cannot explain these differences, suggesting that they are related to other factors such as stronger preferences for childcare in the household context or a lack of knowledge regarding parental leave regulation (Merens et al., 2006; Mussino and Duvander, 2016; Wall and Jose, 2004).

The overwhelming majority of mothers resume labour force participation after leave uptake. Since stable employment is an eligibility criterion for parental leave and mothers enjoy job protection during leave, this observation is not surprising. However, first-generation migrant groups show lower employment following leave use compared to the other origin groups, with particularly low employment among women originating from other non-European countries. The discrepancy between natives and first-generation migrants from neighbouring and other non-European countries persists when controlling for pre-birth employment characteristics as well as the length and type of leave uptake. This is consistent with previous research (Kil et al., 2015a; Kil et al., 2017), indicating that first-generation migrant groups of non-European origin show relatively unstable labour market trajectories around childbearing. A stronger retreat from the labour force for these groups may be related to unobserved employment characteristics, more traditional childrearing attitudes but also to inadequate access to childcare after the exhaustion of parental leave (Neels and Wood, 2016).

To conclude, this paper calls for increased attention to the role of subgroup variation in the study of the triad between social policy, the family and the labour market. Contemporary literature argues that, in contrast to Esping-Andersen’s notion of ‘politics against markets’ and ‘decommodification’, contemporary welfare states progressively support labour markets, particularly by stimulating female labour force participation and work–family combination (Cantillon and Buysse, 2016; Iversen and Soskice, 2015). In the context of increasing labour market dualisation and unequally distributed labour market uncertainties, questions arise

concerning the social distribution of the benefits of state-provided, work–family reconciliation policies (Hook, 2015; Iversen and Soskice, 2015). Adding to the growing body of research on social inequalities in the uptake of work–family reconciliation policies (Ghysels and Van Lancker, 2011; Marx and Vandelanootte, 2014; Van Lancker and Ghysels, 2012), this study indicates that, in a context where eligibility is connected to labour force attachment, parental leave reinforces labour market disadvantages by providing work–family reconciliation to those already established in the labour force. In Belgium – a country characterised by a large migrant–native employment gap – this implies that migrants in particular are underrepresented among the beneficiaries of subsidized leave schemes. The finding that migrant–native differentials in the uptake of parental leave largely disappear when controlling for eligibility suggests that individual agency in the use of work–family policy should not be overestimated. In attempts to enhance the inclusiveness and effectivity of social policy, the design features of parental leave entitlements in relation to labour market disadvantages need to be reconsidered.

Finally, we identify three avenues for future research on parental leave uptake among migrant populations. First, given that the organisation of work and childcare is likely to be closely related to structural factors such as leave eligibility requirements, but also to individual attitudes and cultural norms, our knowledge of differential work–family strategies would benefit from qualitative studies focussing on women with a migration background. With respect to our finding of unexplained variation in full-time versus part-time leave use and labour market position following leave, the potential explanations in terms of a lack of knowledge regarding regulations or traditional gender roles, remain speculative.

Second, the development of data focussing on work–family behaviour and the oversampling of migrant groups should be encouraged. Small sample sizes for particular origin countries in our data limited the possibility to focus on specific origin groups. Research infrastructure with more specific information on origin and larger sample fractions for migrant groups could overcome this issue.

Third, in line with the growing body of research studying fathers' behaviour or taking a couples' perspective in the study of the work–family nexus, we identify the study of fathers' and couples' parental leave use among populations with a migration background as a fruitful path for future research. This paper's individual approach focussing solely on mothers limits the possibility to approach migrant–native differences in parental leave use from a gender perspective.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by grants from the Research Council of the University of Antwerp (BOF-DOCPRO2013) and the Flemish Research Council (G032715N).

Notes

1. To be eligible for parental leave, civil servants do not have to meet the condition of having worked 12 out of 15 months for the same employer at the time of application. Apart from this condition, the parental leave regulation for civil servants is identical to that for private sector employees.

2. In the early 2000s, parents were only entitled to leave for children younger than 4 years. This age limit was raised to 6 years in 2005 and subsequently to 12 years in 2009.
3. Parents using 50% or 20% reductions of labour force participation receive a flat-rate benefit proportional to the rate of reduction (Merla and Deven, 2013). Parents that worked part-time at time of the application receive a benefit proportional to their employment regime. The Flemish community government provides an additional benefit for people living in Flanders, thus further encouraging leave uptake. In 2010 the additional benefit was approximately €160 per month for a full-time leave.
4. With a median gross income of €2621, €2460 and €2130 for respectively Belgian-born, EU-born and non-EU born inhabitants of Belgium, the benefit replaces respectively 28%, 30% and 34% of the median income.
5. A parent is eligible for parental leave when (s)he has been working with the same employer for 12 out of the 15 months prior to the application. This condition does not apply to civil servants. As civil servants are not perfectly identifiable in our data, we apply the eligibility criterion of 12 months to all women, regardless of their sector of employment.
6. Parental leave schemes are embedded in a broader leave system called Time Credit. Within the Time Credit system, three more specific leave legislations exist: (i) leave in order to provide palliative care; (ii) leave to care for seriously ill relatives; and (iii) parental leave schedules.
7. The number of women combining full-time and part-time leave is limited to 17%, whereas 34% exclusively used full-time leave and 50% exclusively relied on part-time leave.
8. Belgium is a federal state with six different governments. Parental leave is a federal responsibility and thus applicable to the entire Belgian population. The Flemish community government provides an additional benefit for people living in Flanders (Merla and Deven, 2010).
9. When repeating this analysis for mothers who were eligible for parental leave during at least 85% of the observation period (N: 4518), we observe an odds-ratio of 0.70 for first-generation mothers of Turkish and Moroccan origin that is no longer significant.
10. The number of leave spells during the observation period ranges from one to four. For 75% of mothers, only one leave spell is observed.

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