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Abstract

Drawing mainly on qualitative evidence gathered from interviews with migrant handyman and with labour-using households in the UK, this paper analyses how this migration typifies economic and social divisions within Europe and embodies conflicting tensions between economic and social policies at an interpersonal level. By supplying household services, migrant handyman enable labour-using households to alleviate time pressures and conflicts in time priorities arising from tensions between economic expectations regarding working hours and work commitment, and social expectations regarding contemporary ideas of active parenting. Similarly to the outsourcing of feminized domestic labour and care, these tensions are in part resolved for labour-using households by extending class divisions across national boundaries while leaving gender divisions changed but not transformed and in some instances exacerbating work/life tensions among the migrants. These broad findings are complicated by differential desires and capabilities around fathering practices among fathers in labour-using households and among the migrants, and economic differentiation among the migrant population. Although we cannot tell from our study whether such movement reinforces or redresses uneven development, what we can say is that existing cohesion policies are insufficient to redress uneven development, and individual responses including migration can reinforce existing social divisions. Further, existing social policies for promoting gender equality fail to recognize or redress the deeply embedded gendered norms.

Keywords

Europe, gender, global care chains, male domestic work, migration, social divisions, uneven development

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Introduction

Following the early years of intense economic and social dislocation arising from the post-socialist transformation, accession to the European Union for a number of Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries has been associated with less traumatic change (Pickles, 2010). This paper addresses this more recent period, and, specifically, the migration from the eight accession countries (A8)¹ to the UK, which expanded rapidly from 2004. We focus on a particular tranche of migrants, predominantly from Poland, who work as handymen in UK households.² Our aim is to demonstrate how this migration is a response to uneven levels of development within the enlarged European Union (EU) and to the social divisions within and between member states, which have intensified throughout the post-socialist transformation. We try to show how the conduct of both migrant handymen and labour-using³ households represent micro-level responses to unresolved tensions between European Union economic and social policies.

As employment in the UK expanded in the 2000s, migrant workers came to fill a variety of niches at different levels in the employment hierarchy, from high finance to mopping floors. Their ease of entry was similarly differentiated in the increasingly complex migrant regulatory structure (Wills et al., 2009). With EU enlargement, migrants from A8 countries experienced relatively easy entry, and came to dominate UK inward migration between 2004 and 2008 (see Pickles, 2010). Among these, a small proportion were workers who registered as handymen – by which we mean people (predominantly men) doing stereotypically masculinized forms of domestic work such as home maintenance and gardening.

Drawing mainly on qualitative evidence gathered from interviews with migrant handymen and with labour-using households in the UK, this paper analyses how this migration flow typifies individualized responses to uneven development and social divisions within the enlarged EU, and reflects the conflicting tensions between EU economic and social policies at an interpersonal level. Our research confirms that, in aggregate, migrants respond to migration regulations, uneven development and differential earnings across the EU, while nonetheless expressing

a diversity of more personal motivations. Our research also shows how people across Europe, with a specific focus on the UK and East Central Europe, endorse the EU's family-friendly and equality policies, including those relating to a more active and nurturing role for fathers. It explores whether these new broader understandings of fatherhood are overdrawn and support for gender equality overstated such that 'changing views exist alongside continuities in practice' (Edwards et al., 2009; Gillies, 2009: 52). If practice is less progressive than expressed attitudes, then is this because fathers are reluctant to enact these understandings because they have a preference for paid work or leisure? Or are there countervailing constraints, such as demanding working time regimes, low earnings and flexible and precarious work, as implied by the economic and competitiveness agenda, and which, in different ways for fathers from the different regions, lead to long working hours? Our research sheds some light on these issues, and on whether buying in masculinized household services eases these tensions for labour-using households in more developed regions, and, if so, at what cost to those from A8 countries supplying these services. In sum, we are exploring some 'micro-level enactments'⁴ in response to tensions between economic and social divisions within the enlarged EU and within the EU policies designed to resolve them.

The research draws on the analysis of 25 in-depth interviews with migrant handymen, largely from the accession countries, predominantly Poland. The majority were aged between 25 and 45, and approximately half were fathers; beyond that, the profile is diverse in terms of precise geographical origin, professional status, motivations and intentions. In addition, we carried out in-depth interviews in 24 households with dependent children and a resident father, who buy in help for male domestic work on a repeated basis. Among the labour-using households we sought to interview each partner separately. In total, 45 interviews were conducted in households. The total is less than 48 since our interviewees include one single gay father and, in two households, we failed to secure an interview with the father. The households employed migrant and non-migrant handymen, and we interviewed five non-migrant handymen in order to identify specifically migrant dimensions to working

in this sector. In addition we interviewed spokespersons from four agencies to identify a sector-wide perspective. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. The majority of interviews with migrant handyman were conducted in the mother-tongue of the handyman and translated into English at the time of transcription. Transcripts were analysed using grounded theory by the research team. Each author independently analysed and identified concepts and themes for the first half of the transcripts for each interview group. These were compared and discussed by all authors. The remaining transcripts were analysed in depth by just one of the authors, with new concepts and themes being discussed by the team. This qualitative analysis was situated within a quantitative background drawing on data from the Worker Registration Scheme, the Labour Force Survey and the UK2000 Time Use Survey (UK2000TUS), as well as the wider literature (see Kilkey and Perrons, 2010).

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Next is a brief review of the tensions between the European Union's economic and social policies. Then, drawing on our analysis of secondary quantitative data, we document the migration from A8 countries to the UK in the period 2004–8 in the context of uneven development within the enlarged EU, before drawing on our qualitative data to discuss the migrant handyman's own rationale. We then locate the migrant handyman phenomenon within the wider global care chain literature and the growing demand for commoditized household services, predominantly from professional households. Drawing on the interview data we analyse the extent to which this phenomenon enables both labour-using households in the UK and migrant handyman from A8 countries to resolve some of the competing tensions between EU economic and social policies at an individual or household level, and question whether these individual resolutions redress inequalities at a wider scale.

European Union economic and social policies

European Union policies are multi-tiered and there are tensions and contradictions between different dimensions that are not always addressed or resolved.

The inclusion of CEE countries has widened absolute differences in levels of development and in social practices across the EU, exacerbating the challenge of cohesion. Within neoliberal theory, the formation of the single market should contribute to narrowing differences through capital and labour movements. Our research is partially consistent with this optimistic scenario with respect to employment levels, but it also suggests that regional, social and gender divisions are likely to be maintained (Smith and Timar, 2010).

The Lisbon Strategy and its subsequent re-launches reflect the longstanding EU objective for economic growth, competitiveness and cohesion and the idea that cohesion can be secured through job creation, paying little attention to the terms and conditions of employment or potential conflicts with competitiveness (European Commission, 2000, 2008; Juncker, 2005). In policy discussions surrounding the Lisbon Strategy, references are made to the wider economic growth and stability objectives, but rarely is mention made of social policy objectives relating to gender equality, active parenting and work/life balance. In effect, the economic and social policies reflect 'competing work-life scenarios' between the 'free competitive disembodied worker' presumed within economic policy and the embodied worker for whom permissive work/life policies, parental leaves and working time regulations are advocated in social and equality policies (Hobson and Fahlén, 2009: 214; Lewis and Plomien, 2009). UK fathers reflect this tension: 40 percent express concerns that they spend too little time with their children. Yet they are reluctant to take paternity leave or ask for flexible working hours, fearing a negative impact on their career prospects (EHRC, 2009), fears that are shared more widely among European parents. Within the A8 countries, gender equality in paid work was presumed though not realized within the socialist model (Pollert, 2005; Plomien, 2006), but the related question of work/life balance has gained policy visibility associated with EU accession (Plomien, 2009). Although aspirations regarding family time among EU parents are very similar, practices among countries vary.

Attitudinal surveys in the enlarged EU demonstrate widespread support for working hours that allow people time for the family and for which responsibility should

be shared equally between women and men. Using data from the European Social Survey of 2004 for a subset of people aged between 20 and 55, in paid work and living in a couple with at least one dependent child (criteria that broadly match the households in our study), Barbara Hobson and Susanne Fahlén (2009: 221–2) show that over 75 percent agree with the statement that the ‘family should be your main priority in life’; over 70 percent that ‘men and women should have equal responsibility for home and family’; and over 75 percent of fathers considered it important to find a job ‘that enables them to reconcile employment with family life’. UK and Polish fathers score well over 90 percent on this last measure, even though in both countries over 70 percent work more than 40 hours a week. Thus the extent to which people actively endorse these attitudes in practice is more questionable; whereas the majority of UK fathers state that they would like to reduce their hours, the majority of Polish fathers, who are already working 50 hours a week, would like to extend their hours (Hobson and Fahlén, 2009).

Given that the EU rarely specifies priorities between different policies even when they potentially conflict, and that EU directives and policies, partly as a result of the Open Method of Co-ordination, are implemented through national legislation in different ways, the degree of conflict varies among member states. That is, despite common European policy intentions, clear differences remain within Europe with respect to labour market regulations, working times, parental leaves and the degree of social infrastructure provision for child and elder care. Comparative national-level analyses of the implications of these differences for employment quality, gender equality in employment and work/life balance have been reviewed extensively in the welfare regimes, gendered welfare regimes and varieties of capitalism literatures (see, for example, Lewis, 1992; Estévez-Abe, 2005; O’Reilly, 2006; Lewis and Plomien, 2009; and Rubery, 2009). Our micro-level analysis aims to complement this literature by examining how migrant handymen from A8 countries assist labour-using households in the UK to resolve the tensions between economic and social goals, and what impact working as a migrant handyman has on their own capacity to resolve such tensions.

Migration from the A8 to the UK and migrant handymen

With European Union enlargement in May 2004, the UK, similarly to Ireland and Sweden, gave immediate but controlled access to the labour market to nationals from A8 countries. Estimates of the scale of migration are complex owing to different regulations and correspondingly different recording criteria, each with strengths and limitations (see ONS, 2009a, and Kilkey and Perrons, 2010). What is clear is that all measures show that A8 nationals formed the major share of migrants to the UK in the period between 2004 and 2008, their annual net migration peaking in 2007 and falling sharply but remaining positive with the onset of the ‘global’ economic recession, which affected the UK before the A8 (see Figure 1).⁵ Our data mirror this pattern, as the vast majority of handymen in our study migrated to the UK after the 2004 enlargement, intensifying a long tradition of labour migration from East to West (GUS, 2008, 2009).

The UK required A8 nationals seeking employment to register via the Worker Registration Scheme (WRS) and restricted their access to benefits. Between 2004 and 2008 there were 805,010 applicants, among whom Polish workers predominated (66 percent) (Home Office, UK Border Agency, 2008; 2009). The number of WRS registrations peaked in the year ending March 2007 (231,000), falling to 133,000 in the year ending in March 2009 – a fall of 43 percent (ONS, 2009b).⁶ WRS data understate the level of migration because they exclude the self-employed, who are not required to register under this scheme.⁷ Some of these may be identified in International Passenger Survey (IPS)⁸ data, which likewise show decline, as does the number of National Insurance Certificates issued to A8 nationals. Even so, some 265,000 certificates, required by all those seeking to work, were issued to A8 nationals during the year ending 2008, indicating that A8 nationals continue to make a sizeable contribution to the UK labour force and indeed can be a preferred category for employers (Pollard et al., 2008; Labrianidis and Sykas, 2009; Stenning and Dawley, 2009; Wills et al., 2009).⁹ Overall, from a UK perspective the net migration balance remains positive.¹⁰

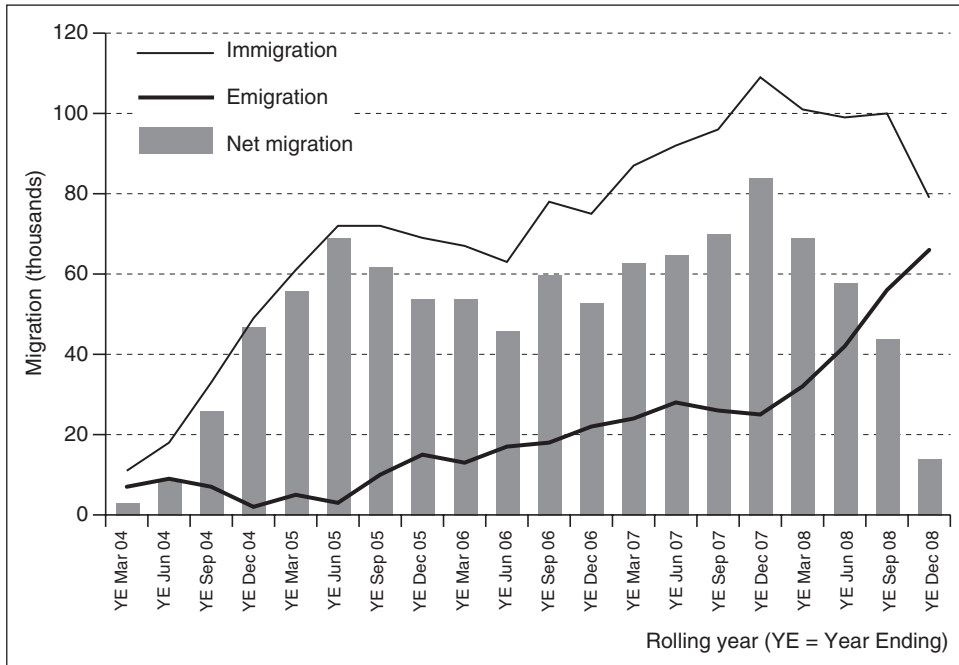


Figure 1. UK A8 migration, 2004–8

Source: ONS (2009c).

Notes: These figures are estimates of people intending to stay for more than one year from the International Passenger Survey. The standard errors are quite wide – 11 percent or higher on immigration and 16 percent or higher on emigration. The figures for 2008 are provisional estimates. No source of UK migration is infallible. The broad pattern corresponds to WRS and National Insurance Certificate data.

In the short period between 2004 and 2008, UK immigration figures from the A8 countries therefore show sharp growth immediately following accession, then a levelling off as the frustrated demand eased, and finally decline as the UK's economic crisis became evident in 2007. Poland, by contrast, experienced high levels of economic growth at least until year ending 2008. Polish employment rates rose and unemployment fell, while in the UK these rates were more stable before moving in opposite directions, reducing but not eliminating opportunities for migrant workers (see Figure 2).¹¹ Emigration or re-migration (Finch et al., 2009) of A8 nationals increased throughout the period, indicating that many migrants stay for short periods (see Figure 1). The sharp increase in emigration from the UK from December 2007 reflects the way that migrants in aggregate respond to relative changes in economic conditions between origin and destination.

Individual migrants have unique rationales but the broad movement corresponds to the differential levels of economic development. Subsequent to EU enlargement, regional disparities within the EU15 and EU27 have declined. This decline, however, reflects a combination of decreasing inequalities between countries and an increase in within country inequality, with interpersonal inequalities in incomes and earnings being particularly wide in countries where regional disparities are large (Monfort, 2009). Although the relative position of Poland increased steadily from 2004 as a consequence of high growth rates, and the UK's relative growth rate declined (even prior to the economic crisis¹²), absolute disparities remain wide. At the national level in 2008, GDP per capita in the UK was 117.5 percent of the EU average, compared with 57.5 per cent in Poland, and at the subnational level the gulf was wider: Inner London, the richest region in the EU, had 335.9 percent of EU average

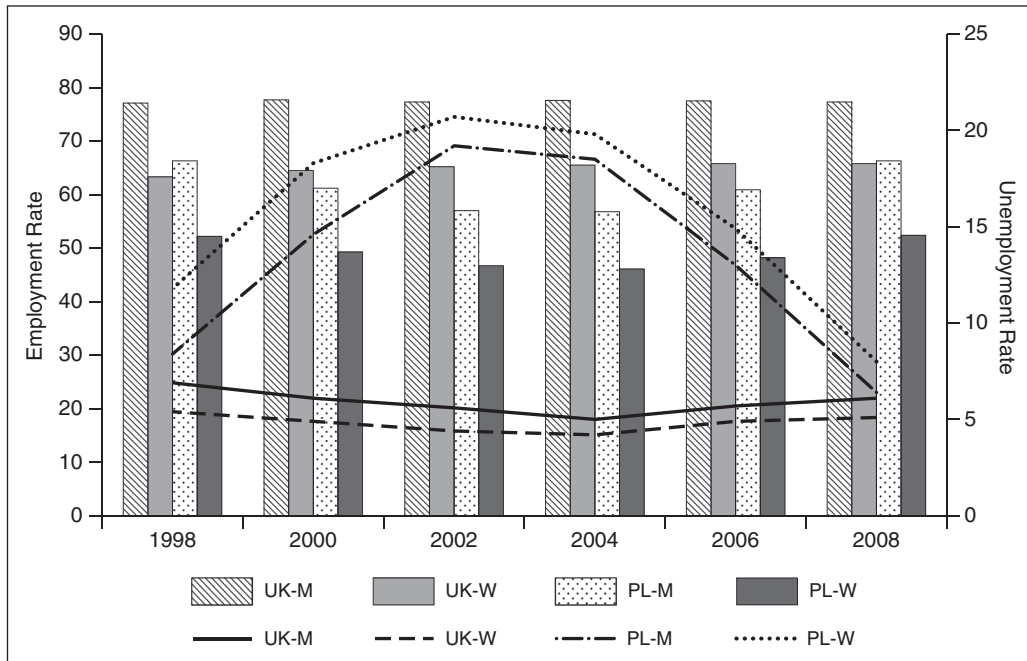


Figure 2. Employment and unemployment rates in the UK and Poland, 1998–2008, by gender

Source: Eurostat (2009a).

Notes: Employment rates (15–64) depicted by bars (left axis) and unemployment rates (15+) by lines (right axis).

GDP per capita in 2006 compared with Mazowieckie, the richest region in Poland, which had 83.6 percent, and with Pomorskie, the region around Gdansk where some of our migrant handyman originated, which had only 51.5 percent (Eurostat, 2009b).

Despite the recession and the fall in the value of sterling relative to the Polish zloty,¹³ these data show that a strong economic gradient remains between the UK and Poland, and this theoretical rationale for migration is very much confirmed in our research. Aggregate IPS data (Home Office, UK Border Agency, 2009) show that 85 percent of A8 migrants gave work-related reasons for migrating, and the economic incentive was a recurring motivation among our interviewees. In one case, a handyman reported on occasion being able to earn the equivalent of a month's salary in Poland in a single day in London: 'I used to earn 1300 zloty, now it would be about £300 a month. Sometimes I can earn so much during a day, if I'm lucky' (Migrant Handyman 11). Confirming this

economic rationale, others remarked: 'I don't really like England. In England I like the pound' (Migrant Handyman 17); 'obviously, dough ... but not only the money but also the adventure' (Migrant Handyman 19). As the last quotation indicates, 'dough' (slang for money translated from the Polish equivalent 'kasa') is by no means the only motivation; adventure, change and love were other prominent rationales in our data, conforming to the wider IPS survey (see also Vertovec, 2007; Williams, 2009).

Although all migrants had specific reasons and histories, it is clear that they were continually, though sometimes only implicitly, making decisions with respect to a comparative or dual frame of reference between Poland and the UK (Waldinger and Lichter, 2003; Wills et al., 2009), within which the economic gradient figured strongly. Whether such movements bring about greater economic balance as predicted by neoclassical equilibrium models, or reinforce existing inequalities as in the more

Keynesian-inspired disequilibrium models, is unclear because it is difficult to isolate migration from other aspects of economic change. Clearly, emigration from Poland on this scale is likely to have contributed to the increase in employment and reduction in unemployment rates in Poland, and likewise the return of migrants from the UK is likely to have depressed any decline in the UK employment rate consequent upon recession (see Figure 2).

Different groups of migrants come to occupy different niches in the labour market (Kilkey et al., 2009). The majority (80 percent) of A8 migrants who have registered with the WRS are concentrated in occupations defined as low skilled and, of these, a small percentage (just less than 1 percent) registered as handymen and gardeners. Among the handymen, Polish workers dominated.¹⁴ The figure of 1 percent is likely to be an underestimate owing to people switching to handyman work after registering for other work and people doing handyman work as a second job, especially those registered to work in the construction industry, which formed a higher percentage (5 percent) of worker registrations (Kilkey, 2010). In addition, our qualitative research revealed that self-employment was common among migrant handymen; however, as self-employed they would not have been required to register with the WRS.¹⁵

Polish migrants rapidly established sector visibility as handymen and secured a reputation for high-quality work. In some ways this is surprising because our interviewees had not previously worked as paid handymen in households, though some had worked as builders. Deeper reflection suggests that the migrant handyman phenomenon directly embodies economic and social divisions between post-socialist Poland and the neoliberal UK. Socialist and post-socialist economies were characterized by relatively low wages and low wage inequality, and so were more even in terms of socioeconomic class. As a consequence, the service sector was underdeveloped; generally people could not afford to outsource domestic labour and repairs were done at home. Throughout the post-socialist period, wage and class differentials have widened, but this skill and knowledge have not been lost. Neither has the attitude of ‘why pay someone else if you can do it yourself’

disappeared, an attitude that contrasts markedly with some of our labour-using professional households discussed below. In moving to the UK, the migrant handymen drew on these skills to supply services to relatively affluent, but time-pressed, households and rapidly acquired a reputation for flexibility, hard work and skill, reflected in the stereotype of the ‘Polish plumber’. Some handymen drew on this reputation to establish firms using this label explicitly – *The Polish Handyman* was one example.¹⁶

These understandings were reflected in our household interviews, with trust, reliability, quality and flexibility repeatedly expressed as the key selection criteria. Poles and older men were preferred to ‘British workmen’, who were frequently portrayed as ‘cowboys’, as conveyed in the following comment from a labour-using household:

I am completely against these cowboys ... whereas ... I trust Poles and Eastern European immigrants hugely. I just don't trust Brits. But on the other hand I have a British handyman who does our work who's a lovely old bloke. (Household 6 Man)

In addition, Polish handymen were considered to be flexible and willing to do a variety of interlinked tasks often necessary for home maintenance. These virtues were expressed by both households and handymen, who reported how households valued their services for ‘attention to detail’; for ‘conscientiousness’; for ‘completing of tasks’; for ‘quality’; and above all for the ‘variety’, or as one of our handymen expressed it, fulfilling the requirement for a ‘Renaissance man’:

Many customers require multi-skilled workers, they don't want to call one person to do some small plumbing job. They want a ‘Renaissance man’ who can do everything. (Migrant Handyman 11)

These understandings reflect a dual interpellation (McDowell et al., 2007) or double recognition and endorsement among handymen and their clients of the idea of the high-quality Polish handyman. The handymen in our study reported that other A8 handymen used the Polish label, because clients could rarely distinguish between Central and Eastern

Europeans. Yet it is also clear that this understanding is a stereotype, with much greater variation being found in practice. The Polish handymen, for example, were critical of other Poles and reported very mixed dealings with compatriots (see Eade et al., undated).

The term 'Renaissance man' would also fit our British handymen who expressed their advantage over firms providing only specialist trades. In both cases, on occasion the handymen would draw on their friends and colleagues to assist when either the scale of the job or the skills required exceeded their own capabilities, leading to an integrated service. This process also led to some differentiation among the migrant handymen as a small number moved from coordinating the activities of co-workers on an ad hoc basis to more conscious employment of others at quite different rates of pay and with the aim of spending more time coordinating activities and less time actually working as a handyman. One of the key differentiating criteria in this respect was command of the English language:

they can't find this job because they can't speak the language. They can't put their advertisement on Gumtree or other English websites ... and these people I take to do the job ... I charge for the work approximately £180 or £190, ask him whether he would agree to work for £50. (Migrant Handyman 11)

Another handyman teamed up with his wife in order to retain ownership and control over the work as well as more of the value added.¹⁷

This differentiation among handymen indicates the complexity of migrant positioning within the social hierarchy¹⁸ and highlights the significance of migrants' agency, something not always identified in migration studies (Ong, 2006; Sassen, 2010). Even though migrant handymen tended to provide a cheaper service, a small proportion of our migrants – 5 out of 25 – reported earnings in the top decile. The potentially high financial returns available in masculinized household work may also explain why, although foreign workers are overrepresented, the sector is less migrant dense than stereotypically feminized forms of domestic work (Kilkey and Perrons, 2010). Similarly, high potential earnings might also account for the emergence of migrant entrepreneurship in this

sector. In this respect, the handyman phenomenon does not result simply in widening class divisions between men in the way that employment of nannies has led to or reinforced class divisions among women (Tronto, 2002), and neither does it result in this group of migrants being invariably concentrated in the lowest rungs of the UK hierarchy.

Nonetheless, the majority of our interviewees' earnings were closer to the male median, with those from outside the A8 countries, including some asylum seekers, earning significantly less. In addition, earnings were precarious because the flow of work was unpredictable, something that had intensified with the UK recession. Our interviews were carried out in late 2008 and 2009 and, although we interviewed only those who had stayed, they reported a decline in the flow of work and a reduction in prices, and referred to others who had returned to Poland.

So far, we have set the broader context of uneven development in the enlarged European Union that underpinned A8 and specifically Polish migration to the UK. We have also considered how Polish migrants were perceived and indeed marketed themselves as handymen, drawing on skills acquired by living in socialist and post-socialist societies characterized by repair rather than replace. We now explore the demand for handymen in UK households and its implications for reconciling the tensions between economic and social policies in the enlarged EU.

Time pressures, time priorities and demand for handymen in UK households

Recognition of migrant handymen represents another dimension in the global chain of social reproduction and transnational social divisions (Hochschild, 2000; Parreñas, 2001; Cox, 2006). Whereas the role of migrant men in cleaning (Wills et al., 2009) and hotels (McDowell et al., 2007) has been recognized, Kilkey and Perrons (2010) note that less attention has been given to male migrants working in households. This, they suggest, is despite research evidence (Cancedda, 2001) indicating that men account for 10 percent of household workers across Europe and 27 percent in the UK. Further, with some exceptions

(Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2009), this global care chain literature has focused mainly on the female time squeeze and commodification of feminized domestic work, especially care, cleaning and catering (Cox, 2006; Hochschild, 2000). Yet men too face a time squeeze; they are expected to be committed and competitive workers as well as active nurturing parents (see also Kilkey, 2010).

Data from the UK TUS 2000 show that the overall demand for stereotypically masculinized forms of domestic household work is on a par with feminized forms (Kilkey and Perrons, 2010). Around 6 percent of households pay specialists for household repairs/construction and gardening and for house-cleaning/tidying. A smaller number of households pay for ironing (3 percent), child care (4 percent) and elder care (just 1 percent). Dual-earner households are more likely to purchase services than single-earner households; this suggests support for the time squeeze rationale, though interestingly the highest demand comes from one-and-a-half-earner households, suggesting that having some time at home is necessary in order to organize and oversee the handyman work.¹⁹

London, where the majority of interviews took place, is a global city with a high proportion of dual-earner high-income professional households, for whom city centre living forms a key dimension of managing the work/life balance (McDowell et al., 2005). Professional workers, especially in branches such as law (Ashley, 2008) and finance (Crompton, 2006), are expected to work extremely long hours and arguably reflect the disembodied worker referred to by Hobson and Fahlén (2009) and presumed in the competitiveness agenda. Such households express time pressures and have been termed 'the professional household without a wife' (Sassen, 2010).

These households might also be said to be 'husband free', not in the sense of lacking a breadwinner²⁰ but in terms of someone to carry out stereotypically masculinized forms of household work, such as fixing, mending, small-scale decorating and, to a lesser degree, gardening, which appears to be more gender neutral within households than when commoditized. Agencies have emerged to coordinate buyers and suppliers of small-scale household services and use this representation of households to advertise their services. One such firm, Hire a Hubby, claims to

provide services 'for all those jobs your hubby can't or won't do because he's in the pub, or watching football!'²¹ The characterization of skill deficiency and lassitude is matched by responses from our interviewees, with the women more than the men emphasizing lassitude to a greater extent. As one stated: 'he did strip the banisters and that took him about two years ...' (Household 4 Woman); and another: 'when I say to my husband I'll, um, "we need this doing, or shall we get this done", he'll say "yeah, yeah", and then it'll just wait' (Household 5 Woman). The fathers too acknowledged their inertia and recognized traditional understandings of a muscular and physically adept masculinity, but they were often quite open about lacking the necessary skills, not considering these attributes critical to their sense of masculinity. With very few exceptions they expressed no ambivalence over outsourcing 'their' domestic chores. Instead, their own sense of identity and masculinity derived from success within their careers, and to some degree from fatherhood.

The more frequent and indeed almost universal rationale for outsourcing among our interviewees was time and affordability, coupled with a preference for spending what time they had with their children. In this respect there are parallels with the wider global care chain literature (Hochschild, 2000; Parreñas, 2001; Cox, 2006), with its references to the female time squeeze arising from combining motherhood with a career.²²

Given the concern among men to spend more time with their children (EHRC, 2009) and European social policies that stress the significance of fathering and equality of opportunity, drawing on other men to carry out some of their traditional household responsibilities represents one way of meeting this desire. Similarly to the case of nannies and cleaners (see Tronto, 2002), such fulfilment can lead to widening class divisions among men. The financial returns and higher status of male domestic work, however, makes the picture more complex. As we have already shown, there is differentiation among migrants, with some becoming employers.

With reference to feminized forms of domestic work and care, Saskia Sassen (2010), argues that migrants play a critical role in labour-using households. Specifically she argues that migrants constitute

'strategic infrastructure maintenance workers' for advanced sectors in richer countries where households 'have to function like clockwork because the professionals have to function like clockwork' (Sassen, 2010: 11). Our quantitative analysis of time use data (UK2000TUS) and qualitative interviews endorse this view to some degree. As indicated above, our quantitative analysis showed demand for stereotypically masculinized domestic services is on a par with feminized equivalents such as child care and cleaning in terms of the proportion of households drawing on such services, though the frequency of use is lower (Kilkey and Perrons, 2010). We also found that households that outsource repair and construction tasks are statistically significantly more likely to have dependent children, to have labour market income and to buy in help with a wide range of other services, confirming that outsourcing is associated with time squeeze. This formed the most uniform response among our interviewees.

Our interviewees included dual full-time and one-and-a-half-earner households in a variety of predominantly professional occupations, in addition to a small number of male-breadwinner households. Men in particular expressed concerns about the time demands of their work, but explicit reference to demanding employers was made less frequently than to their own expectations about what they wanted to achieve within work, possibly suggesting that working time demands have become more onerous as a consequence of being internalized (Brannen, 2005). These sentiments could also reflect satisfaction derived from employment and the way in which work forms a central aspect of contemporary identity, more so for men in our study than women. Our women interviewees were more likely than their partners to have reduced their hours or otherwise made adjustments to accommodate their parenting role, reflecting the asymmetric convergence between male and female lifestyles (Addis, 2002).

There was a clear sense among fathers that paid work, far from constituting negative utility, was pleasurable, something to be enjoyed and somewhere where they wanted to be (see James, forthcoming) and, for some, outsourcing of domestic tasks had created time for more work:

So not doing those jobs has kind of given me a bit more of an impulse to do more work ... more efficiently and for longer hours ... sometimes I'm not back 'til 9 ... if I came home any earlier it would end up as kind of emails and odds and sods ... just the sheer volume of work. (Household 4 Man)

For this father with three children, use of handymen does not so much resolve the contradiction between work and life as accommodate it – but whether this can be said to be a necessity and whether this means that handymen constitute 'strategic infrastructure maintenance workers', as Sassen (2010) suggests in the case of nannies and cleaners, is more questionable. Taking this view would deny the agency of the fathers in shaping their career choice and their preference for a high income life style. In addition, it would overlook their complicity in shaping expectations regarding the time spent at work, something they positively enjoy. A father of four expressed this choice:

I enjoy my work mostly so that's ... it's very demanding but it's, er, enjoyable. And I like the fact that the weekend – it's set aside for quality family time not for doing handyman work ... [W]hen you're in your 30s and your early 40s and you're putting in those long hours to try and get to the top of the pyramid, your family are suffering as a result. So yes, I mean, I could work from 9 'til 5 like my father did and put bread on the table ... and be there more for my children. But what's the right balance? Do you provide more for them in the material sense and send them to expensive schools and send them to expensive universities or do you put bread on the table and they go to a government school and their dad's home at 5 o'clock every day? Those are the choices you have to make. (Household 21 Man)

Fathers nonetheless expressed anxieties about combining paid work with their desire to be active parents and in this context the concept of the *involved caring father*, reflected at the aggregate scale in the European Social Survey discussed above and embedded in UK policies and social expectations (O'Brien, 2005), was clearly evident in the responses (see also EHRC, 2009). So whereas Hobson and Fahlén (2009) argue that employers tend to assume a disembodied worker unencumbered by care responsibilities who is able to 'devote

all his or her energies to the workplace', in our case, although a small number of fathers shared this view, overall it was more a question of workers themselves aspiring to this view but then as 'real embodied workers' having to reconcile these conflicting demands in their minds and in their practices (see also Edwards et al., 2009). The particular occupation maybe critical here, but we found that people with quite different working hours expressed similar work/life tensions and vice versa, suggesting that to some degree time priorities rather than time pressures may also be significant.

The fathers in our study clearly spent more time with their children compared with their own fathers, again corresponding to quantitative data (O'Brien, 2005),²³ and they developed complex strategies in order to do so. This father, for example, recognizes that his commitment to work is at least in part self-chosen:

You know, that work/life balance thing, yeah, there are weeks where I would like to work less, er, there are weeks where I would like to spend more time with the kids, weeks when I would like less pressure at work, but I don't do anything to change all of those things and I certainly have the freedom, unlike many people, right, so I must, you know, in some deep sense, I'm comfortable with the balance that we achieve. (Household 3 Man)

However, he 'makes time' to spend with his children by fitting in work around their schedule:

I generally try and see them, even if it ... [means] ... working before they get up, so sometimes I'll start the day at sort of 4:30, 5 in the mornings, so that ... means ... working in the evenings, [I] can see the boys when they wake up at 7, spend some time with them, come in, work, go home, see the kids, have their bath, work again. (Household 3 Man)

This father strategizes in order to spend time with his children, illustrating a wider applicability of the notion that 'to spend time, mothers first have to make it by anticipating and planning and getting things done ahead of time' (Everingham, 2002: 338–9). We found this form of singular, sporadic, definable engagement, such as breakfast and bath-time, typified fathers and contrasted with the 'constant, repetitive and unrelenting' care and household work of mothers,

whose free time was more likely to be characterized by multi-tasking (Everingham, 2002: 338–9), suggesting a continuation of the uneven gender division of domestic work. Even here though, there is change in the sense that some fathers would spend some more general time with the children at the weekend.

Outsourcing domestic work was clearly another way of making time for children. In this way households expanded their time wealth by using their high earnings associated with professional work in London to draw on the services of lower-paid others whose supply has been increased by the large-scale migration from A8 countries. London, as discussed above, has the highest GDP per capita in the UK and earnings are higher and disparities (measured by the inter-decile ratio) wider than in any other UK region and far wider than in A8 regions, especially for men (Perrons, 2010). As a consequence, professional households are more likely to be able to afford to pay for services and by so doing privately resolve tensions between 'competing work-life scenarios' envisioned within economic and social policies (Hobson and Fahlén, 2009). Their preferences in this respect were voiced by comments such as:

I could make time to do it, but I choose not to. I can choose not to because I have the money. (Household 9 Man)

She earns fairly well, but this is the first time that I've earned well and we can afford to pay someone to do irritating manly tasks around the home that I am really crap at and that can ruin my entire weekend. (Household 6 Man)

Why would you wanna waste your weekends that you could spend with your family, doing it, when you can just pay, I don't know, a tenner an hour to get it done quicker, better, more efficiently? (Household 2 Woman)

I'm lucky enough to be quite a high income earner and, er, when I'm not working then I want to spend time with my family, not putting up shelves, whatever. (Household 2 Man)

Another father pointed out the differential between his own earnings and those of the handyman he employed:

Well, you know, my day rate's a thousand quid, right, so anything that's less than that is fine, you know [laughs] within reason it's kinda fine, so you know, 200 quid,

200 quid a day to have someone to come and decorate the house doesn't seem very expensive, really. (Household 3 Man)

Recall that the handyman we interviewed indicated that this sum would be equivalent to two-thirds of his month's pay in Poland – as well as to the Polish statutory monthly minimum pay. This double differentiation (between the migrants' previous pay in Poland and their London earnings and between these and the pay of the households they work for) draws attention to the way that migration in a relatively open labour market responds to social divisions within countries, as well as to the uneven development between them.

Many of the professional fathers we interviewed used their comparatively high earnings to buy handyman services in order to spend time with their children, but not all fathers prioritized family time. Indeed, the EHRC's (2009) finding that 40 percent of UK fathers would like to spend more time with their children suggests that the other 60 percent are either content with the status quo or may indeed want to spend time in other ways. One of our fathers found time spent with a young child quite exhausting:

Although we sort of fight over mowing the lawn because it's easy, it gets us off from the baby. (Household 6 Man)

This father construes household work as an opportunity to escape child care, which parallels the sentiments expressed by some of Andrea Doucet's (2006) stay-at-home fathers. In addition, this father was quite ambivalent about fulfilling the social expectations regarding active parenting and rather wistfully reflects on the more traditional gender division he observed among what he describes as African families in his neighbourhood:

On the whole I think it's um great. I mean I'm a little bit ... I envy the time that I see that lots of other dads have. I mean we live in [neighbourhood in south London], you know there's mostly quite traditional, um loads of Africans, African families and it's largely the mums with the children on the weekends, and the dads are watching the football and playing football or something like that. I envy them being able to sneak off and do that but I don't want necessarily, um, I don't

envy ... I wouldn't want that arrangement and I am glad that I spend as much time as I do with my daughter. With that being said I wish I spent less with her but I am glad and I don't try to sneak off or to go to the pub anymore; just I would like to if there was more time but I don't really feel like giving up the things that a) I consider my responsibility like cooking and tending to [my daughter] but also b) the kind of um, yeah, yeah the child care I suppose as well. (Household 6 Man)

For most fathers, conflict over time between work and family was more evident, mentally if not always physically, as their minds wandered towards work even when caring:

That's always slightly at the back of my mind, even when I'm with them. So, you know, when I'm putting them to bed I sometimes hurry to put them to bed a bit because then I can read just while they're dropping off to sleep, something like that. (Household 10 Man)

Our findings suggest that fathers and households more generally do have some discretion over their time use. This means that there is an element of choice with respect to the extent of outsourcing. So, although migrant handymen facilitate the lives of dual-earning households and indirectly their employers and London as a global city, we would not go so far as to suggest that they are a 'strategic necessity' (Sassen, 2010). By contrast, the handyman fathers experienced tension between paid work and parenting as a consequence of their working hours, over which, in the main, they had less control, indicating how common EU social policies are experienced differently according to position within the social hierarchy.

Time pressures and time priorities among migrant handymen

Fathers among our migrant handymen indicated a shift in the perception of fathering in the sense that, similar to the labour-using households and consistent with the findings from the European Social Survey, they endorsed active parenting and sought to act differently from their own fathers and to some extent were able to do so in practice. Nonetheless, they felt constrained by their more adverse economic circumstances, which

limited their ability to realize these aspirations. In addition, perhaps because of necessity, the breadwinning role was also emphasized:

A good dad it is a person who above all puts the good of his family first and tries to guarantee them some kind of an existence, some kind of a good life, on a level, so that they never lack anything. (Migrant Handyman 2)

For those with children who remained in Poland this was particularly evident, but, even among those who lived with their children in the UK, their long working hours, which routinely extended into evenings and weekends and were considered necessary to maintain themselves or to establish their businesses, constrained their family time. One father, for example, describes poignantly how prior to Christmas his handyman role extended to assembling toys for his employer's children, and how he would have liked to have the opportunity of doing the same for his own child:

You come from work tired and there are other things to do and ... you have to dedicate your free time to the child and you don't always have that time ... I would like to have time to do what I do with the boss's children. Whatever he would like to do, whether he wants to play football or guitar or go swimming, so I had time to do it with my child too, as much as he wants, and not only on Sundays. (Migrant Handyman 7)

The handyman husband and wife team likewise remarked on how setting up the business limited family time:

We leave the house at 7.00 or 8.00 am and work till 9.00 pm and the children when we come back home we see them for an hour and they go to sleep. We are very tired. Sometimes we don't even have the energy to play with the children. It is so. And, unfortunately, people expect more and more. (Migrant Handywoman 20)

Q: Your customers?

Yes, the customers. (Migrant Handywoman 20)

It's because there is a big competition. You know it well yourself, that there is a big competition on the market. To get the job you have to be very flexible, at the cost of the family. (Migrant Handyman 19)

The migrants' incomes were more precarious than those of labour-using households and a wide income gulf remains between them, even though, as pointed out above, five handymen reported earnings in the top decile. So, in the allocation of time to paid work it is not always clear as to what is a preference and what is a constraint. Many of the migrant handymen in our study referred to the necessity of working while jobs are available, especially in the context of the recession.

Overall, migrant handymen contribute to enabling the labour-using households to resolve the tensions between economic expectations for long working hours and social expectations for active parenting at an individual level. What this also means is that the migrants are effectively reinforcing the status quo, leaving gender divisions, discussed briefly below, changed but not transformed and social divisions largely in place, because these professional fathers are able to combine high-paid work with parenting by drawing on the services of lower-paid handymen.

Gender divisions of labour

Our research suggests that there has been some assimilation of professional men into the world of caring, reflecting aggregate aspirations and social policies endorsing the involved caring father and for equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women (Hobson and Fahlén, 2009). We also found that to some degree this assimilation has been facilitated by employing handymen similarly to the way that the outsourcing of feminized tasks has facilitated the entry of women into paid employment. Nonetheless, in key respects a clear gender division remained.

Provision for parents' leave in the UK remains highly gendered, with paternity leave being very limited and paid paternity leave even more so. As elaborated in more detail elsewhere (Kilkey, 2010), the arrival of children often marked a re-traditionalization of the gender division of labour. The mothers took leave and quite often returned to work on a part-time basis, and then almost without reflection assumed more traditional gendered responsibilities. Our research indicates that the outsourcing of stereotypically masculinized household work to some degree reinforced this re-traditionalization. Both the handymen and the mothers confirmed that it was largely the

mothers who arranged and over-saw the work, with the fathers often taking little interest. On the other hand, fathers did a range of traditionally more feminized tasks, such as shopping on the way home from work, preparing dinner and taking sole care of the children for limited periods over the weekend while their partners had a 'lie in' or made short trips to the gym. In this respect there has been a shift in gender relations conforming to the aspirations of EU gender equality policies. However, we found that the domestic work and child care the fathers did tended to be specific and time bounded, with responsibility for overall management of household relations and care resting with the mother, leading this mother to comment:

But he does pick and choose what he will do, so he's actually more traditional than he thinks. (Household 8 Woman)

The end result of such patterns is less change in the gender division of labour than might have been expected. To the extent that households reflected on this gender division, it was considered necessary, inevitable or practical at this stage in their lives rather than challenged. The depth of these gendered norms also came as a surprise to some of the UK mothers, who found their gendered practices far more traditional than they would have anticipated or consciously chosen, reflecting how deeply embedded gendered norms and power relations can be and how EU policies for equality need to probe much more deeply into the foundations of such inequalities rather than assuming that greater gender equality in the home would be welcomed unquestioningly (Gillies, 2009).

Conclusion

We have provided evidence to suggest that outsourcing stereotypically masculinized forms of domestic work has contributed to the classed ability of men to conform to the new fathering ideals found in European social policy. Professional households in the UK are able to exercise their class privilege to resolve some of their time pressures by drawing on the labour of

others from lower-income European countries, facilitated by the relatively free movement of labour within the single market. In this respect there are parallels with the care chain literature, which highlights how the feminization of professional work has been associated with rising class divisions between women inflected by nationality and race (Tronto, 2002; Hochschild, 2000). Fathers in the labour-using households clearly spent more time with their children than their own fathers had and also contributed to a range of traditionally more feminized forms of household work such as preparing dinner and shopping. Nonetheless, despite the quantitative attitudinal survey data, there seems to be little scaling back of working hours among fathers. Long hours have to a large degree been internalized as necessary and form another aspect of masculine identity that in the main they actively endorse. Mothers were more likely to adjust their paid working hours and retain responsibility for managing child care, the household and the organization of the outsourced work, indicating a shift in, rather than a transformation of, gender relations.

We have also shown (see also Plomien et al., 2009) that the fathers among the migrant handymen share, but have fewer opportunities to realize, aspirations for active parenting, which largely of necessity is subordinated to the more traditional breadwinning task. In addition, the shift in gender relations is less pronounced and in some ways reflects a continuity of those preserved in the former socialist system (Plomien, 2006).

Well-functioning professional households may form a part of a well-functioning global city and in this sense migrant handymen could be said to play a strategic role, especially in a neoliberal society with largely unregulated working hours for professionals and limited social infrastructure (Sassen, 2010). Our analysis of the micro-level enactments in response to competing pressures suggests that it might be more appropriate to argue that professionals within a more affluent society are able to exercise their class privilege to realize their time priorities rather than solve time pressures, and in a way that leaves gender divisions and social divisions changed but not transformed. It was clear that fathers are playing a greater role in child care, but mothers still retain

overall responsibility for household maintenance and are more likely to reduce their paid working hours as a consequence. Whether these private solutions are more prevalent in the UK, where the level of inequality is wider, working time regulations laxer and degree of social infrastructure lower, than in other European countries is an issue that remains to be researched.

Turning to the broader implications of the research, it is clear that open labour markets in the context of uneven development within the European Union are constitutive of this migration. The direction of migration corresponds to economic differentials between the UK and Poland, but from our small-scale study we cannot say whether such movement reinforces or redresses uneven development. What we can say is that this particular form of migration does little to challenge social divisions because it allows professional households with children to find private solutions to the conflict between the disembodied workers assumed in economic policy by firms and arguably within the professional imagination and embodied workers with caring aspirations. Given that male domestic work can command above-average wages, then migrant handymen are not necessarily located at the bottom of the social hierarchy. This indicates how a neoliberal market is quite compatible with widening diversity in terms of migrant status and ethnicity, even though divisions by gender and social class also remain. Indeed, the greater ease of securing work, and the greater ease with which firms could be established in a flexible neoliberal economy, was one of the factors that attracted the migrant handymen to the UK.

We have also shown that, although the European Union has common policies, and fathers in the UK and Poland have similar aspirations with respect to roles within the family, practices are very much shaped by economic and social divisions. What is clear is that existing cohesion policies are insufficient to redress uneven development, and individual responses, including migration, can reinforce existing social divisions. Further, existing social policies for promoting gender equality fail to recognize or redress the deeply embedded gendered norms.

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Notes

- 1 The EU was enlarged on 1 May 2004 by membership being granted to 10 countries; Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. Whereas Maltese and Cypriot nationals were given full freedom of movement and access to the labour market of the existing EU15 countries, member states had the right to regulate labour market access for the citizens of the other 8 countries – the Accession 8 (A8) countries. The UK, along with Sweden and Ireland, granted relatively unrestricted access to A8 nationals, requiring them simply to register to work in the UK under the so-called Worker Registration Scheme (WRS) if they wish to work for an employer in the UK for more than one month. Once they had completed 12 months of continuous employment they were given free access to the labour market. Alternatively, A8 nationals could register as self-employed. Bulgarians and Romanians, who became members of the EU in 2007, were granted more restricted access in the UK.
- 2 We use the term 'handyman' deliberately since it is more widely recognized than its gender-neutral equivalent and our data show that the vast majority are indeed male (Kilkey and Perrons, 2010). We interviewed one woman doing this line of work, and we termed her a 'handywoman'.
- 3 We use the term labour-using rather than employing households because our households had no direct employment relationship with the handymen. They did not act as employers in the sense of making social

- security contributions or paying a regular salary, but drew on their services directly or via agencies or through building companies.
- 4 A term used by Sassen (2010).
 - 5 A recession is formally declared following two successive quarters of negative growth. The financial crisis in the UK began earlier in the autumn of 2007.
 - 6 The WRS data show seasonal fluctuations. The first quarter in any year tends to be lower than subsequent quarters – but comparing the first quarter of successful applications in 2008 (47,000) with those in 2009 (21,000) shows the extent of the decline. Over 90 percent of applications are successful (Home Office, UK Border Agency, 2009).
 - 7 Polish people formed the highest single national group of all recent intra-EU movers (defined as persons resident in the host country for four years or less) in 2007 (25 percent of the total) (European Commission, 2009: 129) and the UK was by far the most popular destination (59 percent). GUS (2009) estimates that there were 150,000 Polish migrants in the UK at the end of 2004 and 650,000 at the end of 2008.
 - 8 IPS data that record long-term migration, that is all people intending to stay for more than one year, show net migration of over 80,000 in the year ending in 2007, declining to 40,000 in the year ending in September 2008 (ONS, 2009a, 2009b).
 - 9 NINo data record only successful applications, so there can be some delay between arrival in the UK and registration.
 - 10 Finch et al. (2009) estimate that around 1 million migrant workers came to the UK from the A8 countries since 2004 and that approximately half have left.
 - 11 Real GDP growth in Poland was 6.2 percent in 2006 and 4.8 percent in 2008 (Ministerstwo Gospodarki, 2009). Factors underlying economic growth in Poland include foreign direct investment attracted by well-educated and skilled labour with low wages, high domestic consumption, which generated a boom in construction, and dynamic growth in exports.
 - 12 As a percentage of the EU27 average, GDP per capita in the UK declined from 123.7 in 2004 to 117.5 in 2008; the comparative figures for Poland were 50.6 and 57.5 (Eurostat, 2009b). Negative growth rates were recorded in the UK from the third quarter of 2008 whereas growth rates remained positive for Poland, with a GDP growth rate of 4.8 percent in 2008, compared with an EU average of 0.9 percent and a UK average of 0.7 percent (Eurostat, 2009b).
 - 13 LGA (2009) report a 40 percent fall in the value of sterling relative to the zloty between 2004 and 2008, thereby reducing the value of remittances from the UK.
 - 14 These figures draw on our analysis of WRS data on A8 country nationals registered between 1 May 2004 and 31 March 2008, received under Freedom of Information.
 - 15 For a fuller discussion of the data please see (Kilkey and Perrons, 2010).
 - 16 Source: <http://www.thepolishhandyman.com/services.html> [accessed 24 August 2008].
 - 17 Female handymen are unusual but in this case proved to be attractive to households.
 - 18 See Hernan Ramirez and Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo's (2009) study of Mexican gardeners in Southern California for a parallel illustration.
 - 19 Another reason for this higher rate may be linked to the greater likelihood that these households have resident young children.
 - 20 In this research we have focused on households with dependent children and a resident father because our interest was in the impact on the gender division of labour and opportunities for fathering. Stereotypically masculinized domestic services are also used by lone-mother households, single-person households and the elderly (especially with respect to gardening). See Kilkey and Perrons (2010).
 - 21 These agencies parallel The Polish Plumber referred to earlier in the paper, but some are large multinational franchises (Kilkey and Perrons, 2010). Examples are 0800Handyman [<http://www.0800handyman.co.uk>] or Hire a Hubby [<http://hireahubbygroup.com/>], both last accessed November 2009. Some of these firms will also supply more complex certifiable work and work for offices as well as for households.
 - 22 To our knowledge, apart from the wider research project upon which this paper is based, there has been little exploration of the implications for households arising from the use of migrant labour as a substitute for male household work; the closest parallel is the study by Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2009), though they focus on gardeners.
 - 23 Research shows that, whereas fathers spent on average only 15 minutes a day with children in the 1970s, the average time per day is now 2 hours (O'Brien, 2005).

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