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The Professionalisation of Foster Care in Norway

Renee Thørnblad and Jeanette Skoglund

RKBU North, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Norway

Correspondence: Jeanette Skoglund (jeanette.skoglund@uit.no)

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Abstract

In Norway, as elsewhere, child welfare services have long prioritised placing children in foster homes over residential care when children cannot live with their parents, to ensure upbringing in family settings. Today, it is also stated in the law that child welfare services must always consider whether anyone in the child's family or close network could be chosen as foster parents. The idea has been that kinship foster care can safeguard the child's cultural identity, continuity in social networks, and family connections. Parallel with the prioritisation of foster care and kinship foster care, foster care has become increasingly professionalised. In the Norwegian context, the possible unintended consequences of increased professionalisation have been minimally addressed. This article aims to contribute to vitalising this discussion about some of the unintended consequences professionalisation may have for safeguarding the values associated with foster care in general, and particularly for kinship foster care. For our discussion, focusing particularly on economic conditions, we draw on both our own and others' research related to foster care. Using concepts from sociological theory on different rationalities or logics as a basis for action, we illustrate and discuss how instrumental rationality and the field logic of child welfare have increasingly influenced the conditions for foster homes.

Keywords

child welfare services; foster care; kinship foster care; payment; professionalisation; reimbursement

1. Introduction

An ongoing professionalisation of foster care has been described in the research literature for more than 25 years. This was, among other things, linked to an acceptance of foster parenting as an alternative career opportunity (Corrick, 1999; Kelly & Gilligan, 2000; Kirton, 2001a). The term professionalisation refers to a process in which an activity based on civil commitment develops towards an occupation or profession

(Lorentzen & Helleland, 2013, pp. 144–145). Professionalisation is to be understood as both descriptive and normative and as an inherent feature of modern society (Haug, 2013). Examples showing aspects of professionalisation of foster care are: Stricter structures for the approval and monitoring of foster homes, professional training and guidance for foster parents, the strengthening of foster parents' rights and their advocacy organisations, as well as increases in economic compensation and payment. Increased professionalisation must also be viewed in relation to the broader influence of diagnostic and therapeutic perspectives on children's needs (O. J. Madsen, 2020), the commodification of care work, and juridification in society. Dominating ideas about the vulnerability of children in foster care, where foster care is highlighted as a different type of upbringing compared to other families, are also a contributing factor (Skoglund & Thørnblad, 2024).

As pointed out by Colton et al. (2008), any consideration of remuneration for foster parents will be "confronted with the professionalism versus altruism dilemma, which is characterised by the perceived conflict between moral obligation and financial reward" (p. 877). With increases in funding for foster care, such tensions become relevant to highlight. Issues that arise include: Should foster care be regarded as voluntary work or paid employment? What value-based foundation should foster care be built upon—altruism or market regulation? Should the foster family model itself on contemporary family life or as an enterprise in the market? Should the role of the foster parent be modelled on that of a parent or a professional practitioner? In discussions about the professionalisation of foster care in the international literature (e.g., Kirton, 2022), kinship foster care has been largely overlooked.

The size of economic transfers and salaries can be said to signify what foster parenting is considered to be in a society and reflects the value of the efforts made by foster families. Particularly when foster parents are released from their regular profession or paid employment, this situation overlaps with, or signals, a transition from foster parenting to professional childcare. A consequence of this is that foster parenting as a form of paid employment moves the foster care institution away from "ordinary" parenting and family life as the ideal or model (Kirton, 2013).

Parallel to the professionalisation of foster care, kinship foster care—i.e., being raised in foster homes with relatives or within an extended network—has become an established measure and a prioritised foster care alternative in many Western countries. The prioritisation of kinship foster care can initially be seen as a movement in the opposite direction to professionalisation, where values and considerations such as safeguarding the child's cultural identity, enduring (emotion-based) family relationships, continuity in social networks, and the biological principle are central.

This raises the question of whether it is desirable or even possible to include kinship foster care in the professionalisation process in the same way as other foster homes. Should, and can, kinship foster care be treated like other foster care arrangements? These questions are particularly relevant in Norway, where professionalisation (and increased funding) are prominent, and where kinship foster care is now incorporated as a measure on an equal footing with other foster homes in terms of regulation and remuneration.

In the Norwegian context, possible unintended consequences of increased professionalisation have been minimally addressed in research and professional-political debates. With this article, we aim to contribute to the discussion about some of the unintended consequences professionalisation may have for safeguarding

the values associated with foster care in general, and particularly for kinship foster care. We point out some possible adverse consequences of the practice of the economic system for foster care.

2. Money as Economic Compensation, Motivation, Symbol, and Negotiation Tool

In international research, various aspects of economic transfers to foster homes are studied and problematised. The significance of economic support (i.e., the size of payments/transfers) for recruitment, quality, and retention of foster homes has been given particular emphasis. From American research, we find studies on the importance of economic incentives for recruiting new foster homes. For example, Doyle and Peters (2007) show in their study from the USA how increased economic support can serve as an incentive for recruiting foster homes. Similar results are found in Duncan and Argys (2007) study, who demonstrate how increased payments also contribute to stability and limit the movement of children from one foster home to another. Regarding the adoption of children in foster care, which has been promoted in the USA for some time, economic support is also shown to have a significant effect on the prevalence of adoption (Hansen, 2007). In Doyle and Melville's (2013) study from Australia, both altruistic and economic motives underpinned foster parents' decision to become foster parents.

In a review from the UK, it is summarised that the level of economic compensation is one of four essential factors in the recruitment of foster homes in the UK (Baginsky et al., 2017). Kirton's (2001a) study showed that, although payment was not a motivating factor at the start, it could sustain foster homes facing challenges with children's behaviour and development. In the Nordic countries, economic conditions also seem to play a role in foster care. In our study of different factors that might affect the retention of foster homes in Norway, economic conditions were a significant factor (Mabille et al., 2025). Similarly, Swedish studies highlight the importance of economic transfers in the recruitment and retention of foster homes (Pålsson et al., 2022; Wiklund & Sallnäs, 2010). When comparing the use of kinship foster care in Denmark and Norway—two comparable countries within the Nordic model—economic transfers appear to be a factor influencing the prevalence of kinship foster care. In Norway, kinship and network foster homes have the same economic conditions as other foster homes, whereas Denmark only compensates for expenses related to the child. In 2021, about 33% of children in care in Norway lived in kinship and network care compared to 13% in Denmark (Rasmussen et al., 2024).

Research highlights, in various ways, how the combination of economic compensation (or remuneration) and foster parenting can either be reconciled or come into conflict, both in terms of values and quality assessments. Hardesty (2018), for example, argues that foster parents' potential economic motivation for fostering cannot serve as a litmus test for the quality of foster care. The fact that foster parents have economic motives does not exclude them from being good foster parents. For instance, Swartz (2004) demonstrated how foster mothers combined altruistic motivation with economic interests. Roman (2016), on the other hand, claims a positive correlation between increased remuneration and higher quality and explicitly argues for the professionalisation of foster care in the USA. She writes from a child welfare context where poverty, racism, and gender discrimination are significant factors. Traditionally, caring for children (like other caregiving work) has been considered to require no special skills—something that, in principle, anyone could manage—hence the traditionally low economic compensation. By instead viewing foster parents as paid workers, she argues that the quality of foster care would improve. Expectations of foster parents could then increase, for example, through training and the development of their skills. According to

Roman (2016), this would benefit children by providing more competent and engaged foster parents and more stable foster homes.

Other studies focus on the symbolic or cultural significance of finances in child welfare across different cultures. In a cross-cultural analysis, Colton et al. (2008) examine trends that pose significant global challenges for foster care and highlight three aspects: foster parents' motivation and capacity, professionalisation versus altruism, and formal criteria for foster homes and kinship foster care. They show, among other things, how different cultural norms influence the recruitment of foster homes. Such norms can, for example, make it easier in certain cultures to recruit relatives rather than non-relatives to care for others' children. Living standards and funding systems in different countries have a significant impact on the recruitment and retention of foster homes, both within and outside kinship networks. Colton et al. (2008) further point out that recruitment will become more difficult in the future if foster parents do not receive appropriate remuneration. Increased funding is directly linked to professionalisation, and they simultaneously highlight that the conflict between professionalisation and altruism represents a real challenge for child welfare. Their proposal appears to be a "para-professional" foster family (Colton et al., 2008, p. 879).

In the Nordic cultural context, studies also show that money has symbolic meanings that can influence relationships within foster families, as well as the collaboration between foster parents and child welfare services. In qualitative studies conducted in the Nordic countries and the UK, it is observed that issues related to money often appear as taboos in foster homes and are a topic that children in foster care are generally shielded from (Jacobsson, 2023; Kirton, 2008; Ulvik, 2003). Jacobsson (2023, pp. 120–124) describes how questions about finances and paid parenting represent a "moral minefield" because, in general perception, the emotional and intimate are kept separate from financial matters. A focus on finances can cast foster parents in a negative light, and potential foster parents' economic motives can disqualify their application to become foster parents. On the other hand, it is reported that in determining economic transfers (e.g., in the form of release from regular work), many foster parents, as contractors, make demands and enter a type of negotiation with child welfare services, which act as the contracting authority (NOU 2018: 18; see Ministry of Children and Families, 2018; Ekhaugen et al., 2018). This might indicate that the morality of money in foster care settings is shifting, and, to a lesser extent, that it remains a moral minefield or taboo. As we will see later, negotiations about release from regular work appear to have increased significantly among Norwegian foster parents in recent decades.

3. Norwegian Context

3.1. Child Welfare Characteristics

The lack of foster homes and the challenges of recruiting and retaining foster parents remain a persistent issue. Throughout the history of modern child welfare, there have been continuous descriptions of crises caused by queues and waiting lists for suitable foster homes. This remains the case today, despite a decline in the number of children requiring care measures. Foster homes in Norway are divided into three categories: emergency foster homes and specialised foster homes, which are state-run, and foster homes within and outside the family or close networks of the child, which are managed by municipalities. Approximately 10% of children in foster care live in emergency or specialised foster homes, while the rest live in foster homes within

or outside kinship or networks (Meld. St. 29 [2023–2024]; see Ministry of Children and Families, 2023–2024). This article focuses on the latter category, with a particular emphasis on kinship foster care.

In Norway, approximately 1% of all children (aged 0–17) are placed outside their parental home by child welfare services. In 2023, 73% of these children were in foster homes, and about 35% of these foster homes were within the child's kinship or network. The remaining children live in care centres or institutions (Statistics Norway, 2024b)—a measure that in past decades has been deliberately reduced in Norway, as in many other countries. Similar to other Nordic countries, child welfare services in Norway are characterised by a child-centric perspective, as well as being family-oriented in their approach (Berrick et al., 2023; Skivenes, 2011).

In cases of care orders, it is legally mandated that persons in the child's kinship and network must always be considered first as potential foster parents (Ministry of Children and Families, 2021). Through a more resource-oriented approach to the child's family and network, the child's closest relations are now to be mobilised in terms of taking on greater responsibility when possible. Family group conferences and other network interventions organised by child welfare services are encouraged to recruit foster homes (Bufdir, 2021).

In Norway, foster homes within kinship and network are regulated by the same legislation as other foster homes. This includes a standardised number of oversight measures, such as home visits by child welfare services (at least four times per year), supervisory visits with the child (at least four times per year), and documentation requirements. Individuals wishing to become foster parents undergo a process in which their suitability, economic situation, and other factors are assessed, and all are, in principle, required to complete a training programme to prepare for the role of foster parents. All approvals are carried out by public child welfare services, which also have the economic and formal responsibility for the follow-up of foster homes (Ministry of Children and Families, 2021).

3.2. Payment and Reimbursement to Foster Parents

Economic transfers to foster homes are divided into three parts: remuneration for foster parents, expense coverage for the child, and compensation for time off from paid work. The first two are standardised, while compensation/time off from paid work can be subject to negotiations between child welfare services and foster parents. Both public child welfare services and private, non-profit, and commercial actors actively recruit foster parents. The activities of non-profit organisations and commercial actors, as well as their profits, are financed by the public child welfare system. Lack of economic support and restricted economic conditions are key issues in the foster care and kinship foster care literature in most countries (e.g., Hegar & Scannapieco, 2017). Due to high living standards and a generous welfare state, this is less relevant for the Norwegian context today.

All foster parents receive a standard remuneration amount and expense coverage based on the child's age (this is tax-free). Foster parents are entitled to leave from paid work when a child moves into their home (modelled after parental leave). Child welfare services compensate for lost income during the leave period. As of 2025, foster parents earn pension points like other employees. Beyond the regular paid leave period, as mentioned, foster parents can also be compensated for leaving their regular paid work, in Norway known

as *frikjøp*. This reinforcement measure has increased significantly in the past years and is significant in the development of the professionalisation of foster care. Public reports advocate for future standardisation of wage determination for compensation (Ministry of Children and Families, 2018; see also Meld. St. 29 [2023–2024]).

In 2018, 44% of foster parents (40% of these for more than one year) were compensated for leaving their regular work, and the use of compensation was expected to increase (Ekhaugen et al., 2018, p. 7). There is no publicly available data showing the development over time regarding compensation for foster parents. However, in a survey conducted by The Foster Care Association (2024, p. 13), 70.2% ($N = 1089$) reported that they were fully or partially compensated for leaving their regular paid work. The compensation amount is linked to the profession from which the parent is compensated, rather than to any specific skills required by child welfare services.

The extent and duration of compensation for foster parents leaving work should, according to current regulations, primarily be based on professional assessments of the child's temporary or permanent need for a stay-at-home foster parent (Bufdir, 2025). According to Ekhaugen et al. (2018, p. 62), a problem with this system is that it may exaggerate descriptions of the child's problems, as the specific needs of the child justify the compensation. The scope and duration of compensation thus signal the level of the child's problems and the burden the child represents for the foster family. Another driver of the significant proportion of today's foster parents in Norway being compensated to stay at home is private and commercial actors in the foster care sector, who advertise compensation in their recruitment efforts and pay foster parents higher wages than others (Ministry of Children and Families, 2020, p. 221). The Foster Care Association is also a significant advocate for regulating and increasing foster parents' rights, including their economic conditions.

4. Theoretical Framework

The terms "private" and "public" spheres illustrate the differences in the basis for action, ideals, and norms that typically apply to families and private life in general, as opposed to those that apply in public institutions and (formal) case management. For foster homes in general, and particularly for kinship foster homes, the basis for interaction and decision-making from these different systems can overlap or represent a conflict, creating tension between foster parents and child welfare services.

Ambiguity has emerged in previous studies of foster parents' understanding of roles, where some supported the idea of foster homes as professionalised paid work, while others saw this as the antithesis of family life (e.g., Kirton, 2001b; Triseliotis et al., 2000). Wilson and Evetts (2006, p. 39) describe that kinship foster carers have "been less likely to regard themselves as members of an aspiring professional group."

Examples of how such conflicts can manifest include foster parents wishing to be regarded as colleagues or equal partners in collaboration and expressing dissatisfaction with the hierarchical power dynamics between child welfare services and foster families. On the other hand, in kinship foster care, foster parents may primarily identify with private life terms and roles, such as grandparent, aunt, uncle, and may resist child welfare services' intrusion into family life (Holtan, 2002; Kaiser et al., 2024; Skoglund et al., 2022).

The difference between providing care within a family setting and in an official context can be seen as a contrast between personal care—characterised by its emotional, informal, experience-based, and continuous nature—and professional care—defined by its formal, science-based, and fragmented qualities. Kinship foster care, as a space where the public and private spheres overlap, embodies these conflicting approaches. For foster parents in kinship care, this will often involve a liminal position. Simply put, one could describe this as the distinction between "caring for others" and "caring for each other" (C. Madsen, 2002, p. 11). Schematically, the various bases for action and interaction in the private and public spheres can be presented, for example, as shown in a table by Skoglund et al. (2022; see also Table 1).

Table 1. Personal and professional care: Different rationalities.

	Personal Care: Family	Professional Care: Child welfare
Relationship status	Private	Public/official
Basis of relationships	Affective/emotional	Rational
Duration of relationships	Long-term/life-long	Temporary/time-limited
Reciprocity	Mutual assistance (unpaid)	Unilateral assistance (paid)
Basis of responsibility	Obligation, belonging, regulated by norms	Professional ethical guidelines, regulated by law
Power relations	Symmetric	Asymmetric
Agreements	Unwritten, informal	Written, formal
The position of children	The child in the family/network	The child as an individual, a client
Social control	Informal	Formal
Rationale	Care-oriented	Goal-oriented

Source: Based on Skoglund et al. (2022, p. 58).

In sociological theory, the distinction between the private and public spheres is described in various ways. For instance, Habermas (1985) uses the conceptual pair "lifeworld" and "system." Excessive intervention by public systems into private life is understood here as the "colonisation of the lifeworld." Another conceptual pair is Tönnies' classical ideal types, *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* (Falk, 2000). These terms highlight how relationships in the private sphere or families are characterised by long-term emotional bonds and tradition-based, collectively oriented activities. This contrasts with market- or trade-based associations, which are marked by individualism, transient relationships, and utility maximisation.

Similarly, Bourdieu (2001) distinguishes between the logic and bases for action within and outside the private life of the families. While the internal symbolic economy related to family life is characterised by gift exchange and altruism (moral obligations), explicit monetary exchanges (profit) define relationships in society outside the family.

A key shared point across these theoretical perspectives is that the bases for action in private and public systems or spheres are primarily founded on different values or logics, including those related to relationships, economics, and exchanges. Monetary transfers, therefore, do not have a "neutral" function that merely contributes to the material living conditions of the families. They also carry symbolic meanings that may influence how relationships and roles within the foster families develop and how the foster families

are perceived by the outside world (e.g., Ulvik, 2003; Zelizer, 2021). In the following, we discuss what this can involve in terms of safeguarding the values associated with foster care in general, and particularly for kinship foster care.

5. Discussion: Unintended Implications of Professionalisation

In this article, we have described some developments related to professionalisation, particularly financial aspects of foster care in Norway, as well as theoretical perspectives that clarify differences in logics and practices within the private and public spheres. We now turn to discuss some of the unintended consequences related to the development of professionalisation, with particular focus on consequences for kinship foster care families.

5.1. Important Qualities May Be Lost

In the lifeworld, which is constituted by language and culture, the child (within the private sphere of the family) is incorporated through shared references, traditions, attitudes, living conditions, etc. (Brekke et al., 2003, p. 77). It is precisely these qualities in familial, emotional, mutual, and enduring relationships that have justified the child welfare prioritisation of foster homes over orphanages/institutions, and particularly the prioritisation of kinship foster care. In contrast, system integration involves the goal-oriented, formal structures, such as those of the legal system, bureaucracy, and market, where money and power are the governing mechanisms. In other words, the lifeworld is removed from its context and subjected to systemic demands and thus colonised (Habermas, 1985). The professionalisation of foster care in general, and kinship foster care in particular, can be seen as an example of such colonisation. As shown, becoming a foster home involves the regulation of family relationships and formalisation of decisions concerning private life. The troubles which arise, according to Andersen (1999, p. 364), can include the instrumentalisation of social interaction, loss of meaning, uncertainty about one's own identity, and weakened trust in public institutions. In a foster care setting, this can manifest in different ways—for example, foster parents and/or children might experience uncertainty regarding the duration of the foster care arrangement, as well as the definition or meaning of their relationship. Children not feeling like part of the family, despite perhaps having lived in a foster home for several years, serves as another example of this (Holtan, 2002; Skoglund et al., 2018).

While kinship foster care families can challenge colonisation, such actions might be problematised within child welfare. For example, research from the Norwegian context shows that kinship foster parents described their own circumventions of formal child welfare decisions—for example, those concerning visitation and contact with the child's parents—as matters of private life rather than a public concern (Holtan, 2002). However, from the perspective of child welfare workers, this becomes an example of kinship foster carers' lack of loyalty towards the child welfare services, which poses a challenge to collaboration (e.g., Mabille et al., 2025). An alternative view is to regard kinship foster parents as having a double role: managing demands from child welfare services, and often from their own children.

Through the concepts of "para-professional," "quasi-professional," or "hybrid," attempts have previously been made to encompass and conceptualise the complexity in the development of the foster care institution (e.g., Colton et al., 2008). The competitive or conflicting dynamics between the foundations of action within the private and public spheres, as well as the gradual increase in professionalisation, still create ambiguities

about what foster care should or can be, presenting challenges on multiple levels. As we have seen, this can apply both at the individual level—for the child in foster care and the foster parents and parents—or between foster parents and representatives of child welfare services. Kirton (2013, p. 670) expresses it as follows:

> With a relative lack of temporal and spatial separation between "work" and "family," this creates what might be termed a "deep hybridity," where both domains come under very close scrutiny and management and where tensions between the two are sharpened.

Because work and family life—the public and the private—cannot be separated or dissolved in this context, we must ask how values associated with private family life can be maintained without undermining the child welfare services guidelines related to the best interests of the child. Increased awareness is needed regarding this dichotomy in the collaboration between foster parents and caseworkers. Discussions about boundaries concerning what issues are family matters and what should be relevant for caseworkers' instructions or involvement are examples of this (e.g., Pålsson, 2024).

5.2. Regulations of Economic Support: Dependence and Possibilities for Negotiations of Families and Children's Needs

A problem with the current system is that some children and their families/relatives are likely kept unnecessarily within a colonising system. In Norway today, 25% of children in foster care remain there for 7 years or more, and 10% for 13 years or more (Meld. St. 29 [2023–2024]). Through our research, we have encountered many who grew up in such long-term placements, who have spent most or all of their upbringing until adulthood with grandparents or other close relatives, or in foster homes outside the child's family. Many of these are well-functioning families where foster parents see themselves as substitute parents or parents rather than foster parents, and children who experience their sense of belonging and family situation as positive; nevertheless, they are still maintained as a measure within the child welfare system. If these long-term foster families wish to exit the child welfare system, the economic consequences would be significant, as it would involve the loss of economic transfers from the child welfare services. With current legislation and practices regarding remuneration and compensation, this could amount to substantial sums for the household.

The economic conditions involved in professionalisation can thus create a relationship of economic dependence on the child welfare system and a motivation to continue as a foster home for as long as possible. Looking at statistics in Norway regarding foster children who are adopted, children over the age of 18 constitute the largest age group of adoptees (Statistics Norway, 2024a). There is reason to believe that economics is one of the significant factors contributing to such adoptions occurring so late (cf. Hansen, 2007). In other words, one can choose to delay formalising an established familial relationship until economic transfers from the child welfare system to the foster family have ceased. An adoption confirms the mutual attachment and means that the child gains the same legal status as biological children within the family. In Norway, however, there are no professional or political guidelines or policies that encourage or facilitate the adoption of children in foster care, nor alternative economic support for the adoption of children in foster care. This may indicate that some children's status as foster children is unnecessarily prolonged, also for economic reasons.

While economic dependence is one challenge, another relates to the possibilities for negotiations related to, for example, compensation for foster parents' time off from paid work. Criteria to legitimise such compensation are based on the extent of the child's problems and specific needs. An exaggerated focus on problems can have serious consequences for the individual child, but can also contribute to the negative categorisation of foster children in general. In turn, this promotes generalised demands for professional expertise and foster parenting as paid work/compensation for leaving paid employment, i.e., the increased professionalisation of foster care. An excessive problem focus on these children has also been addressed in (public) reports (e.g., Ekhaugen et al., 2018; Ministry of Children and Families, 2018; PWC, 2015). Sharply formulated, one might ask what these children "are" in a child welfare context: *a gift*, as children are generally most often regarded, or mostly *a burden* for the foster family.

6. What Should Today's (Kinship)Foster Home Be: Upbringing in a Family or a Professionalised Care Institution?

A positive consequence of the inclusion of relatives in child welfare legislation was that they were recognised as potential caregivers for children who did not have sufficiently functioning parents. The recognition that moving children to new and unfamiliar environments was not always in the child's best interest, and that relatives, despite their flaws and shortcomings, could be a good alternative, allowed grandparents and other close relatives to "keep" a child within the family.

However, it is striking that the unintended consequences of increased professionalisation, which also affect this group of foster homes, are discussed to such a limited extent. As described in international literature (e.g., Kirton, 2013; Wilson & Evetts, 2006), politicians and other gatekeepers in Norway often support the perception of foster care as a form of professional activity, without differentiating or explicitly including or excluding kinship foster homes. This is often in line with interest organisations whose task is to strengthen the position of foster parents as paid workers, for example, through new legal regulations and increased economic transfers.

Even though kinship foster homes are usually based on established mutual emotional and social relationships in private life and shared cultural belonging, the same legislation applies to them as to other foster homes (where relationships between children and foster parents must be established from scratch). Such legal equal treatment of foster homes within and outside the child's family and/or kin, as described, entails the same asymmetrical relationship between child welfare services and families in terms of decisions and control routines, as well as rules for financing. The downside of juridification is a challenge, i.e., that decisions (the regulation of family life) are tied to the fulfilment of child welfare's legal provisions and guidelines rather than other considerations.

In other words, it is likely that common legislation for foster homes and other formal guidelines for child welfare practices will force or stimulate a parallel development, namely, tendencies towards the professionalisation of kinship foster homes as well. In our view, this will contribute to undermining or counteracting the distinctiveness and advantages of kinship foster homes as a family environment for children.

For today's and future foster care, contradictions and conflicts between various competing value systems and logics point to several fundamental questions: How are children in foster care regarded when professional policies are developed—as a benefit or more of a burden for the family? Can foster parents be both parents and paid workers in their relationship with the children they have taken responsibility for? What competency requirements should, in that case, be established for such professional practice? Is it possible or desirable to maintain the nuclear family as the model and ideal for foster families, while more and more frameworks, regulations, and practices are drawn from professional life and the labour market? Is it desirable or possible to shape kinship foster care after the model of traditional foster care? Another question that can be raised is whether it is possible to limit professionalisation processes within the foster care system while still ensuring favourable conditions for children's upbringing in foster homes (cf. Roman, 2016).

Our intention is not to argue against the professionalisation of foster parents where children have significant problems and special needs. However, this is far from the case for all children. Our point is rather that legislation and measures for children who cannot live with their parents should be more differentiated than is currently the case in Norway. This is particularly relevant where children can grow up with their relatives—but also for other children who are placed long-term outside their parental home.

In this article, we have pointed out some unintended and unfortunate consequences of today's semi-professionalised foster homes. For a healthy development of foster homes in the future, research is needed that takes a closer look at these conditions. This also applies to topics that we have not touched on, such as what professionalisation has involved for the case workers' role. Particularly, their management of economic support and its impact on the relationships with the families they are meant to support.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

Due to the nature of the research, data sharing is not applicable to this article.

LLMs Disclosure

During the preparation of this work, the second author used chat.uit.no to review the manuscript for spelling, grammar, verb tense, and correct word choice in British English. The author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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About the Authors

Renee Thørnblad is a sociologist and professor at RKBU North at UiT The Arctic University of Norway.

Jeanette Skoglund is a sociologist and associate professor at RKBU North at UiT The Arctic University of Norway. She leads the research project Outcome and Experiences of Foster Care and Nordkin—a research network for kinship and network care researchers in the Nordic countries.