



IAPA
International Au Pair Association
(Munich) e.V.
Oetztalerstr. 1
81373 Munich
Germany
Registry of Associations
of the Munich District Court
VR 209926

To the Government of NORWAY

RE: Consultation - proposal to discontinue the au pair scheme in Norway

Munich, 19 June 2023

Dear Sirs,

The International Au Pair Association (IAPA) represents around 160 organisations in over 40 countries who are active in au pair placements and services for au pairs, host families and agencies. Several of our member organisations work with agency partners in Norway to facilitate safe and highquality au pair and cultural exchange placements with Norwegian families. And to ensure young Norwegian citizens have a safe and rewarding au pair experience abroad. IAPA promotes the au pair programme as a cultural exchange programme and our members are required to ensure rigorous screening, preparation and support for participants throughout their entire au pair stay. We want au pairs and host families to have enriching experiences with each other by means of quality placements with clear rules and regulations.

We have observed with great concern the latest developments in Norway regarding the au pair programme. We are very disappointed and alarmed to learn that the Norwegian government is planning to close down the inbound au pair programme. This would mean that young people from all over the world are no longer able to travel to Norway to benefit from this rich cultural exchange experience.

It is worth noting that the au pair programme has an official history in Europe of more than 50 years. On 24 November 1969 the Council of Europe published its Agreement on au pair placements.

Whilst Norway is not part of the EU, it is very closely connected as a member of the EEA and as part of the Schengen community. Norway ratified this agreement in 1971 and it is still in force. (See Chart of signatures and ratifications of Treaty 068 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=signatures-by-treaty&treaty=068>).

The latest "DIRECTIVE (EU) 2016/801 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 11 May 2016 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals

for the purposes of research, studies, training, voluntary service, pupil exchange schemes or educational projects and au pairing” clearly states that:

“Au pairing contributes to fostering people-to-people contacts by giving third-country nationals an opportunity to improve their linguistic skills and develop their knowledge of and cultural links with the Member States. At the same time, third-country national au pairs could be exposed to risks of abuse. In order to ensure fair treatment of au pairs and address their specific needs, it should be possible for Member States to apply the provisions of this Directive regarding the entry and residence of au pairs.”

We fully agree that the rights of au pairs must be protected. We welcome the Norwegian court's ruling against an abusive family and the UDI's decisions to exclude families from the programme who are not following the rules and regulations of the programme.

Au Pairs and host families need to understand and embrace the true nature of au pairing as a cultural exchange programme and not as cheap labour.

The idea of the programme is for young people who come to the host country to share their own culture with their host parents and children. **They travel to Norway as ambassadors of their home country. And return home with valuable skills and as ambassadors for their host country.**

We have reviewed some of the numbers from UDI and the Caritas Au Pair Center that were also published in the media and we have spoken to agencies and organisations involved in the au pair programme in Norway. In relative terms we disagree with the argument that ‘most au pairs’ in Norway are being abused. What we see instead is that the focus of the press and of those who are not in favour of the au pair programme is mainly on a small number of negative cases giving the impression that these, admittedly serious, incidents represent the majority.

According to the Caritas Au Pair Service, who handle complaints from au pairs, only 3-4 % of au pair complaints involve serious problems. And the majority of these are successfully resolved. See also <https://www.dn.no/innlegg/arbeidsliv/au-pair/caritas/innlegg-heller-forbedring-enn-skroting-av-au-pair-ordningen/2-1-1072446>

As a global association, we oversee many au pair programmes around the world and, from time to time, we are approached by au pairs as well as host families who are experiencing problems. After all, the au pair programme brings people from different cultures to live together in the same house. This implies that inevitably misunderstandings and/or conflicting expectations may arise. However, in our experience, Norway has a very good track record of protecting au pairs’ interests and generating successful au pair placements. Au pairs placed in Norway are mostly well informed, have someone to turn to when they have a problem and host families must also attend a course before welcoming an au pair which we find very useful and which should be an obligation also in other countries.

We would respectfully suggest that, instead of stopping the au pair programme altogether, more analysis is carried out of the issues in question to determine whether and how the programme could be further improved to protect au pairs’ best interests. We at IAPA would be most willing to join the conversation on this matter with the relevant stakeholders. And to work together with them on a viable solution to further enhance this important and meaningful cultural exchange programme. One possible solution is to implement a comprehensive screening process for host families and au pairs, which could be facilitated

through an agency or another organization. This screening process aims to ensure that expectations are fully clarified, both au pairs and families meet the necessary criteria, and everyone involved understands that they are participating in a cultural exchange program. We believe that informing and educating au pairs and host families is key, as well as establishing clear guidelines, agreements and oversight. Of course, further options are possible as well.

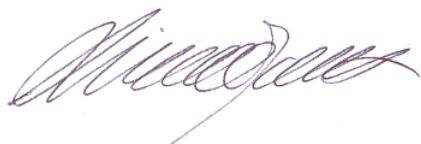
Where safety conditions are in place and where there is a clear understanding of expectation, we witness numerous young people every year having wonderful experiences in their host countries, learning a new language and acquiring new skills that shape and grow their personalities and futures. We see children getting to know another culture and even learning the language of their au pairs thus broadening their horizons. And we see families welcoming their au pairs like a family member developing lifelong friendships.

Many countries who currently offer au pair programmes are allowing Norwegian youth to come to their country as au pairs (e.g. USA, EU countries, Australia and NZ). Shouldn't Norway also offer this opportunity on a reciprocity basis to other nationals wishing to be an au pair in your country?

We are sure you will agree **that youth and cultural exchange is essential for our nations to continue to foster ongoing mutual understanding, cooperation and peace in the future** and hope that we might have an open and productive conversation with you to save the Norwegian Au Pair Programme and to help ensure that Norway's doors remain open to young people from around the world. We would love to work with you to ensure it will be a truly win-win cultural exchange experience and thank you in advance for your consideration on this urgent matter.

We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely



Linda James
Chairperson, IAPA



Patricia Brunner
Managing Director, IAPA
patricia.brunner@iapa.org
+49 (0)89 20189550

In 2019 IAPA initiated an International Au Pair Day on 24 November to raise public awareness of legal au pair programmes worldwide and to celebrate and thank au pairs. This year will be the fifth year this day will be celebrated worldwide www.internationalaupairday.com.