

# The gender revolution continues: Housework time in 25 European countries, 2002-2022

Caroline Berghammer<sup>1</sup> and Jorge Balmaseda Hernández<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vienna Institute of Demography, Austrian Academy of Sciences

<sup>2</sup> Universidad Carlos III de Madrid

## Research question

Across western countries, gender equality has advanced significantly over the past decades. However, some recent contributions have cast doubt on the expectation that countries would eventually move – with highly educated being the forerunners – towards a “gender egalitarian equilibrium” (Esping-Andersen et al., 2013), showing that, for some contexts and indicators, progress is moving very slowly or has even stalled (e.g. England et al., 2020). This raises the possibility that “gender relations might settle at differing levels of egalitarianism” in different countries (Kan et al., 2022, p. 390). This study contributes to that debate by examining trends in housework time between 2002 and 2022 across 25 European countries.

Housework is a constant in almost all people’s everyday life. In the latest period with available data, 2005-2010, women spent on average 2.5 hours per day on housework (9 countries), compared to 51 minutes among men (Altintas & Sullivan, 2016). In comparison with the period just before (1997-2002; 13 countries), the gender gap further narrowed, but mostly because women reduced their housework time, not because men increased theirs.

We study how the time spent on housework has evolved among men and women in 25 European countries for the years 2002, 2012, 2022 based on data from the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP). For 16 of these countries, data are available for all three waves. Our focus is on how the education gap in housework time has changed over the period.

This study’s contribution is as follows. First, we extend existing research by covering the most recent period (2012-2022). Time use surveys are collected every ten years, but the 2020 wave was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with data for individual countries being only released gradually. This update allows us address the question on whether the gender revolution has really stalled and whether different countries stabilize at different levels of gender equality (Kan et al., 2022).

Second, by including many countries, we can compare different regions, being characterised by different work-family policies or gender norms. In particular, the Central and Eastern European region is well represented – a region less well studied due to the general lack of time use data. Moreover, for 16 countries, information is available across all waves, allowing us to analyse trends consistently within the same set of countries.

Third, we will be able to show whether the highly educated are still the “vanguards of gender egalitarianism” (Esping-Andersen, 2017, p. 58) or whether a diffusion to their less educated peers has taken place. Highly educated women are known to do less housework, while the education effect is small and often not significant for men (Hook & Nazio, 2025).

## Data and method

The study is based on data from the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP). We include 25 European countries, 16 of which are represented in all three waves. The countries are clustered into the following regions: Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden), Western countries (Belgium, France, Ireland, Netherlands, United Kingdom), German-speaking countries (Austria, Germany, Switzerland), Southern countries (Italy, Spain, Portugal) and Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia).

Our analytical sample is restricted to respondents age 25 to 59 (not in education or retirement) with a partner in the household, resulting in sample sizes of around 500 to 600 respondents by year and wave.

Housework was measured with the question: “On average, how many hours a week do you personally spend on household work, not including childcare and leisure time activities?” Our analytical strategy consists of two steps. First, we present descriptive evidence on trends in mean housework time by gender and educational level as well as variation in housework time. Second, we analyse housework time in a multivariate framework using OLS regression models (e.g. Hook & Nazio, 2025) and Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition (Pailhé et al., 2021).

## Expected results

Preliminary results show that the gender gap has narrowed at a similar pace in both periods (2002-2012 and 2012-2022). In the earlier decade the convergence was driven by a modest increase in men’s participation combined with a decline among women: the share of men with low participation (0-5 hours per week) decreased – most notably among the higher educated. By contrast, in the more recent decade, the closing of the gender gap was – in all regions – driven almost entirely by a decline in women’s housework time, while men’s contribution remained stable. Notably, this decline was concentrated among women with low/medium (non-University) education. This consistent pattern across all European regions suggests that the gender revolution has not stalled; rather, it diffused to the low/medium educated women who have joined the higher educated forerunners. Compositional changes – such as the decline in housewives and rise in higher educated – also contributed to the reduction in women’s housework time.

## References

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