

European couples' division of domestic labor: The role of work from home and gender

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Despite a growing number of women participating in the labor market, the division of housework and childcare within couples remains unequal, with women carrying out the larger share (Churchill et al., 2023; Román & Ophir, 2024). Working from home, which rapidly rose during the COVID-19 pandemic (Eurostat, 2024), could potentially increase gender equality in the division of domestic labor by helping women combine paid and unpaid work (Chung & van der Horst, 2018) and enabling men to participate more in housework and childcare (Kuang et al., 2025; Petts et al., 2023). At the same time, a growing number of studies suggest that remote work might exacerbate gender inequality (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020) by pushing women to perform more domestic labor (Cao & Wang, 2025; Wang & Cheng, 2023) and men to do more paid work (Chung & van der Horst, 2020). The inconclusive evidence on whether working from home promotes or stalls gender equality might be attributed to the variation in the contexts in which the outcomes of remote work were measured. Since most of the studies focus on single countries, it is unclear whether work from home is universally unable to bring about better gender equality outcomes (yet), or if it is introduced in places where some contextual characteristics limit its potential to challenge the unequal division of domestic labor.

Against this backdrop, this study investigates how work from home is associated with the division of housework and childcare among individuals in dual-earner partnerships in nine European countries. It contributes to the previous literature in several ways. First, it explores how work from home shapes the domestic division of labor post-pandemic. Second, it focuses

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on couple-level work-from-home arrangements, a limitation of several previous studies that looked at only one person in the couple (Chung & Booker, 2023; Lyttelton et al., 2022). Third, this paper discusses the role of contextual characteristics in shaping the association between working from home and domestic labor, since European countries are quite heterogeneous in terms of the prevalence of work from home, female labor market participation, and gender roles. Finally, it explores the variation of the within-country individual gender role attitudes.

The study is based on the second round of the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS-II), starting in 2020. GGS is a cross-national representative survey on life-course and family dynamics of individuals aged 18-79 with a net target sample per country of 7,000 to 10,000 respondents. The survey collects data on both partners' work-from-home (WFH) status and the division of housework and childcare responsibilities. Respondents are asked: "Thinking about the last four weeks, did you do any work at home, including using the internet for professional purposes, checking emails, or having professional phone calls?" with the potential answers: no, yes, twice or more per week, or yes, less than twice a week. The same question is asked regarding their partner's WFH status, which allows for constructing couple-level work from home constellations with four categories, which combine the "yes" answers into one category: no one, she, he, or both WFH. As a robustness check, we conduct a separate analysis exploring the intensity of WFH. A battery of questions measures involvement in housework and childcare. For housework, the survey collects information on who is preparing meals, doing laundry, and vacuuming. For childcare, the data is collected on who is responsible for dressing children, staying home when they are ill, playing with them, doing homework, and putting them to bed. For each task, the respondent has to indicate on a 5-point scale whether it is usually the respondent (1) who does the task or their partner (5). We recode the scale so that higher values mean that a woman in the couple is doing more housework or childcare, and the lower

values indicate that a man is primarily responsible for these tasks. For the measure of gender ideology, we use a statement “A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his/her mother works”, in which case respondents who totally agree or agree with this statement are coded as traditional. Those who neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or totally disagree are coded as egalitarian. The present study focuses on individuals in dual-earner partnerships aged 25-59 from nine European countries that represent different regimes in the prevalence of work from home, female labor market participation, and gender egalitarianism (Austria, Germany, the Czech Republic, France, the Netherlands, Denmark, the UK, Estonia, and Croatia).

To analyze the relationship between couples’ working from home and division of housework and childcare, we apply linear regression analyses to each country separately and to the pooled sample, including country fixed effects and country-equilibrated weights. Since gender role attitudes are measured only for one member of a couple, to assess the role of gender ideology, we separate the analysis by gender. We include several control variables with the information from both partners on whether they have fixed start and end of working time, the level of educational attainment, managerial status, age, and working hours. In addition, we include information on the household composition, such as whether there are children in the household, the number of children, the age of the youngest child, and marital status.

Preliminary results indicate that in many dual-earner couples in Europe, at least one of the individuals works from home (WFH) to some extent (i.e., on average, in 40% of couples, both WFH, in 19% only he WFH, in 18% only she WFH, and in 24% no one WFH). When she is the only one who does work from home, the division of childcare is more unequal. When he is the only one working from home, the division of childcare is more equal. Gender ideology only mattered for housework distribution. Particularly, among traditional women working from

home, the division of housework is the most unequal. However, when both are working from home, the division of housework is more equal only if the male partner is egalitarian. We also observe some variation across European countries, particularly for the division of childcare. The results of this study indicate that work from home can help individuals to divide housework and childcare more equally. However, traditional gender ideology might hinder these outcomes.

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