

A woman's work is never done?

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One of the greatest social changes across Europe in recent decades has been the increase of women in the labour market. However, changes in women's work patterns have not always been matched by changes in the division of household tasks between the sexes, reveals a study from the European Social Survey (ESS).

So perhaps not unfairly [women](#) often feel their work is never done, with those working full-time still responsible, on average, for around two-thirds of the total time heterosexual couples spend on housework. However, with women doing most of the housework this can lead to feelings of work-life conflict - for men!

The 'double-burden' of paid and domestic work on women's experiences of work-family conflict was also explored, which found that despite the added burden of being responsible for most of the housework, women in these countries working full-time did not experience greater feelings of work-life conflict than men working similar hours. In fact, these findings from a large study by the ESS suggest that it may be men rather than women who have the most to gain from a more equal distribution of housework between the sexes.

Northern European men whose female partners did most of the housework were more likely to experience work-family conflict, compared with men who took on a larger share of the housework. Perhaps men in this situation feel guilty for not doing their fair share or perhaps the unequal division of [household tasks](#) creates tension between them and their partner?

- It is still common for women to do the majority of housework, even when they hold down a full-time job
- The distribution of household labour is most equal in Nordic countries and least equal in southern Europe
- In the UK, 70 per cent of all housework is done by women and still nearly two-thirds of all housework is done by women even if they work over 30 hours per week
- In Greece, over 80 per cent of all housework is done by women and for those women working 30 hours or more per week, more than three quarters of them still have responsibility for household chores
- Swedish women seem to have the most helpful partners with only two-thirds of all [housework](#) done by women, and this figure improves again if they are working more than 30 hours per week

These are some insights into attitudes on moral and social issues that have been revealed in newly published findings from the ESS and shows that significant differences between countries still remain despite closer European integration.

ESS, whose fieldwork in the UK has been funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), has collected data from more than 250,000 interviews in 30 countries over the last decade on a wide range of topics that tap into key issues facing contemporary Europe. These include people's experience of working in a recession, welfare state, political participation, immigrants' civic participation, fear of crime, well-being, ageism and homosexuality.

Paul Boyle, Chief Executive of ESRC, commented: "This latest selection of findings from the European Social Survey provides a valuable insight into attitudinal and behavioural trends across Europe. Despite the closer integration of these countries through the European Community, it highlights that significant differences remain. Only through the

production of such rigorous, cross-national data will key stakeholders and policy makers be able to interpret how the social, political and moral fabric is not only changing within individual countries but also throughout Europe as a whole."

Director of the ESS, Rory Fitzgerald, said: "The European Social Survey has been measuring social attitudes and behaviour across Europe for just over a decade. The data paints a fascinating picture of the differences and similarities across Europe and highlights important regional variation. For instance the Great Recession has led to a growing economic and political gap between North and South, whilst attitudes towards homosexuality have become more polarised between East and West. The ESS Findings Booklet reminds us that there are many social, economic and moral differences between the countries and regions of Europe."

Six ESS surveys have now been conducted, carried out every two years and covering more than 30 countries throughout Europe. Further rounds are planned to paint an accurate picture of European attitudes.

The UK has led the ESS's application for ERIC status, on behalf of 15 countries. The European Commission's decision setting up the ESS ERIC is anticipated shortly.

More information: www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/ESS%20JULY%202013%20FINDINGS%20BOOKLET_FINAL%20v2_tcm8-27183.pdf

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