

# Work commutes getting longer and gender differences persist

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On average, Swedish men and women have different commuting habits. Despite an increasingly gender-equal society, traditional household patterns are changing very slowly. The regional enlargement in many parts of the country – or geographic extension of labour markets – imply longer commuting times. These are the key conclusions of a new doctoral thesis from the School of Business, Economics and Law at the University of Gothenburg.

'The regional enlargement have led to longer commuting times for both women and men, and are not related to faster commuting as commonly assumed,' says human geographer Ana Gil Solá, who has studied people's commuting habits over a 10-year period starting in the mid-1990s.

'My study points to a new trend. This finding is important since commuting time is often considered an economic cost when evaluating infrastructure investments. It is generally assumed that the regional enlargement should contribute to regional growth, yet the longer commutes also imply increased costs and reduced welfare for the individual. This aspect is not receiving much attention,' says Gil Solá.

The [gender differences](#) in commuting distance vary significantly between regions, with the area of Gothenburg having the largest differences and the Malmö region the smallest. Gil Solá also interviewed parents of small children about the desires, priorities and decisions associated with their commuting and how the travel affects family life and the distribution of household work.

'The interviews show that people's views of [gender roles](#) affect how they make decisions in the household. For example, couples with conservative views tend to prioritise the man's car use. And when the man drives the only car in the household, the couple may feel that they can't afford a second car even if the woman's commuting would be made easier with two cars. Maybe she would even to be able to get a better job. The opposite attitude is practically unheard of. Men's mobility has no price tag. It is taken for granted and never questioned in these households,' says Gil Solá.

'Gender-equal households give equal weight to the needs of women and men. They buy two cars if needed, or find other solutions. I found more variation in problem solving among these households, since it is important to them to not get stuck in traditional solutions.'

Overall, the study shows that people's commuting is slowly becoming more gender equal. The gender differences in commuting distance, travel speed and car use for commuting purposes decreased somewhat over the studied period. Yet there are significant differences across regions and different types of households.

Provided by University of Gothenburg

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