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

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Background

- **Women's housework time declined** since the 1960s; **men's housework time increased slightly/stalled** but remained at a low level → overall, the gender gap narrowed (Altintas & Sullivan 2016; Pailhé et al. 2021)
- **Housework comprises many tasks:** cooking, cleaning and shopping are the most time-intensive; gardening is the most equally shared; repairs (not very time-consuming) is the only male-dominated activity (Trap & Foissner 2023)
- **Housework is not very pleasurable** and people seek to minimize it; the distribution in couples is shaped by partners' relative resources
- **“Cognitive housework”** is part of the broader mental load (Petts et al. 2025)
- **Wide range across countries**, e.g. between 55% women's share in Sweden and 77% in Italy around 2010 (Pailhé et al. 2021)

Research questions and contribution



Quelle: <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/10/well/family/couples-arguments-fights.html>

How has housework time evolved among women and men between 2002 & 2022?

- Extend to most recent decade (2012-2022)

What regional differences are observed (25 countries)?

- Regions well represented, especially CEE

How has the educational gap changed?

- Highly educated women have long been the forerunners of less housework

Theoretical framework

Couple level

- Time availability perspective, bargaining models, doing/displaying gender

Country level

- Multiple Equilibrium Approach: societies move towards an egalitarian equilibrium - a stalled revolution? (Esping-Andersen et al. 2013)
- Gender revolution framework: higher gender equality can lead to turnarounds and reversals in family life (Goldscheider et al. 2015; Lappegård et al. 2021)

Role of education

- Higher educated women have greater bargaining power; higher education linked to more egalitarian gender role attitudes; “intensive motherhood norms” reduce time for housework; resources facilitate outsourcing

Data and methods (1)

International Social Survey Programme

- Topic “Family and changing gender roles“ 2002, 2012, 2022
- 25 European countries, with 16 participating in all three waves (grey shading) → pooled (each country gets same weight)
- High methodological standards: probability-based sampling, (mainly) face-to-face interviews
- Sample sizes: 1,000-2,000 respondents per country & year

	2002	2012	2022
Denmark			
Finland			
Iceland			
Norway			
Sweden			
Belgium			
France			
Ireland			
Netherlands			
United Kingdom			
Austria			
Germany			
Switzerland			
Italy			
Spain			
Portugal			
Bulgaria			
Croatia			
Czechia			
Hungary			
Latvia			
Lithuania			
Poland			
Slovakia			
Slovenia			

Data and methods (2)

Sample selection

- Restricted to respondents in couples (due to restrictions in 2002)
 - Age 25-59
 - Excludes respondents in education or retirement
- final sample sizes around 500-600 per country & year

Data and methods (3)

Measure of housework time: “On average, how many hours a week do you personally spend on household work, not including childcare and leisure time activities?” (top 1% of values dropped) - also asked about partner

Methods

- Linear regression models: housework time as dependent variable
- Kitagawa-Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition (Pailhé et al. 2021)

Data and methods (4)

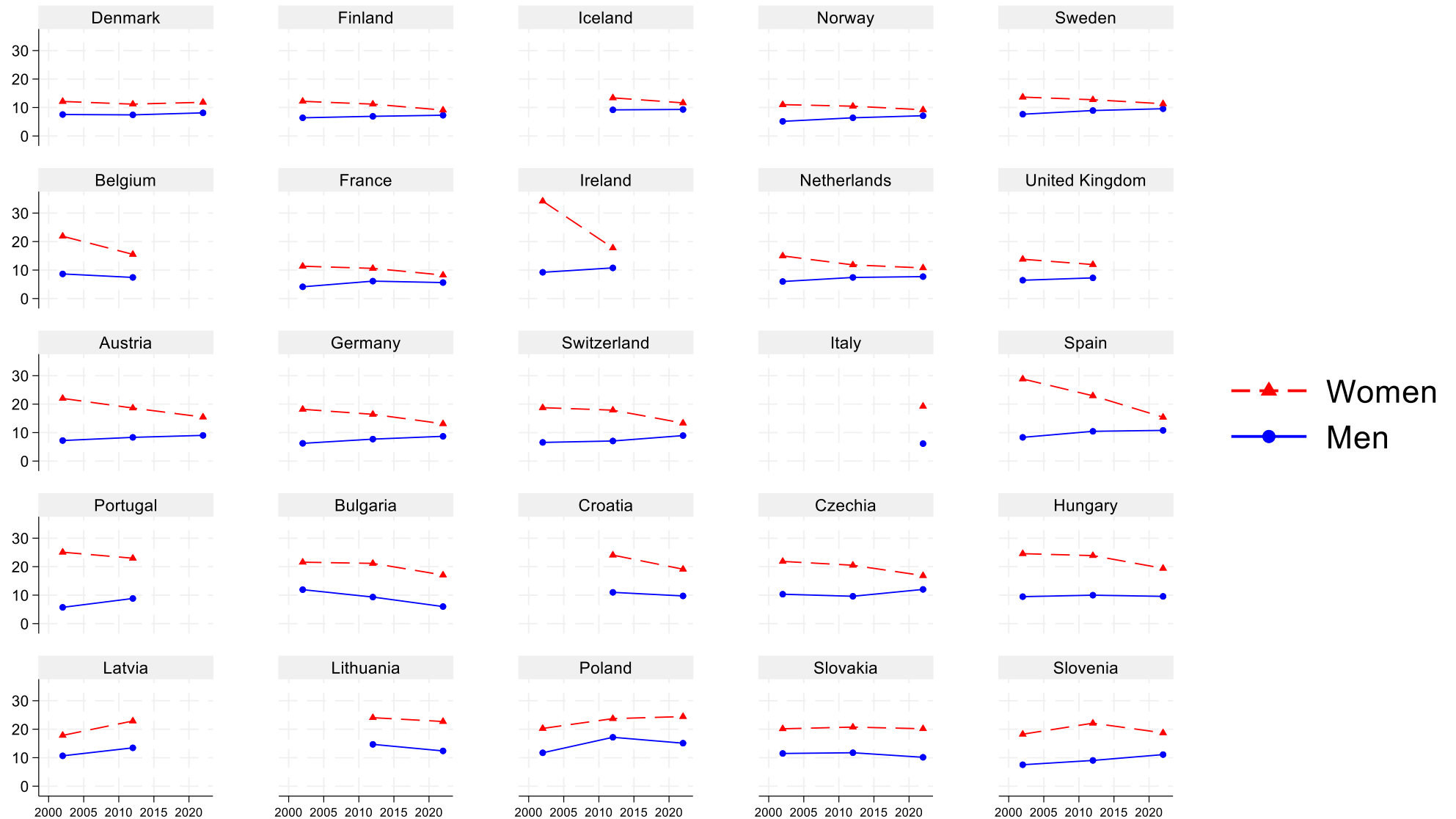
Covariates

- Education: less than University; University
- Employment: full-time (30+ hours); part-time (1-29 hours); unemployed and inactive; others
- Age
- Household size
- Gender-role attitudes (average score: “A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works”, “All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job”, “A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family”: 1 strongly agree ... 5 strongly disagree)

Data limitations

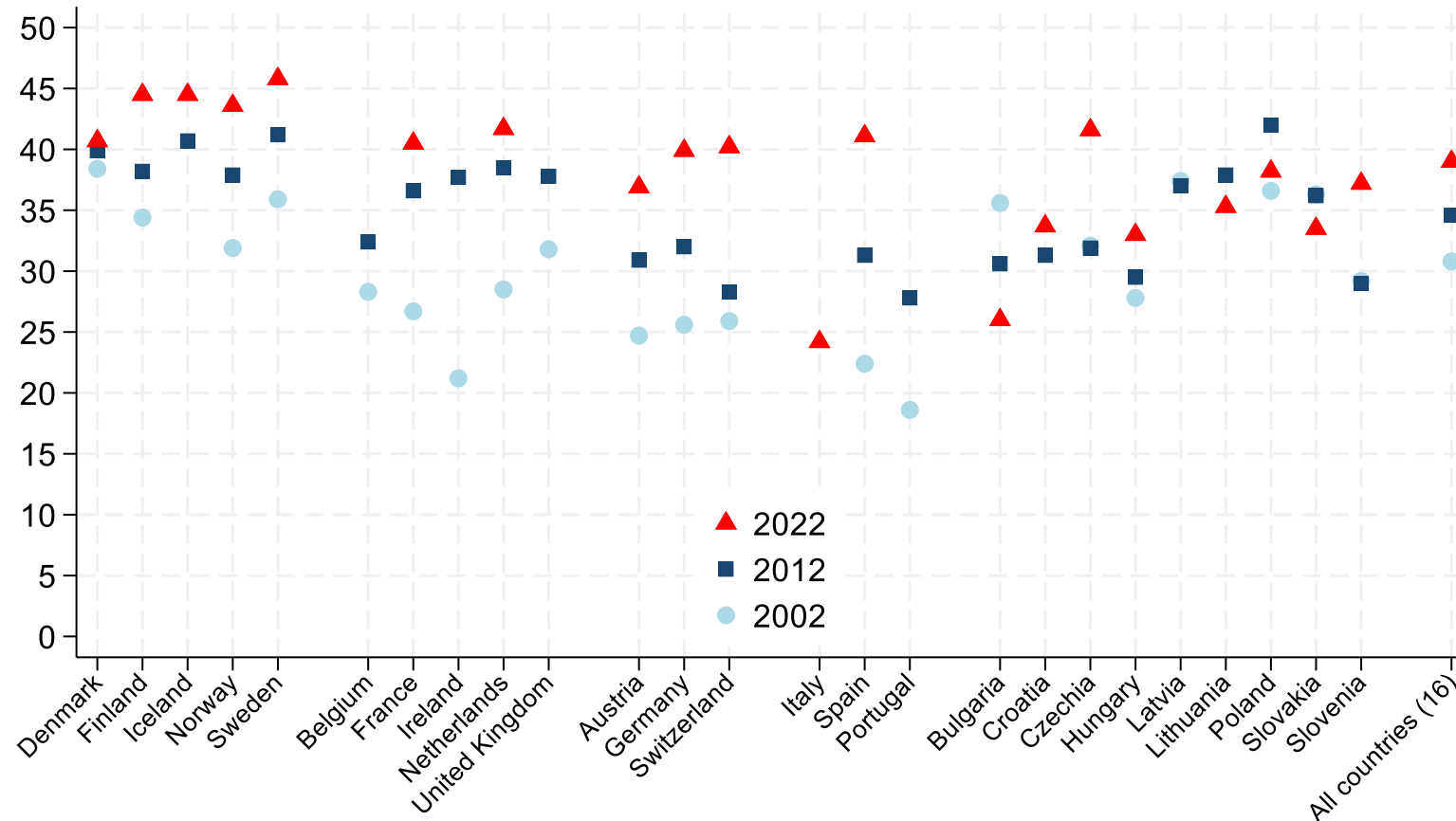
- Housework time measured retrospectively, unlike in time-use surveys
- Some variables are not available: number & age of children, married/cohabiting, info on partner characteristics varies by wave, no info on partner's gender, education usable only in dichotomous form

Results: Trends in housework time, 2002-2022



Results: Trends in men's share

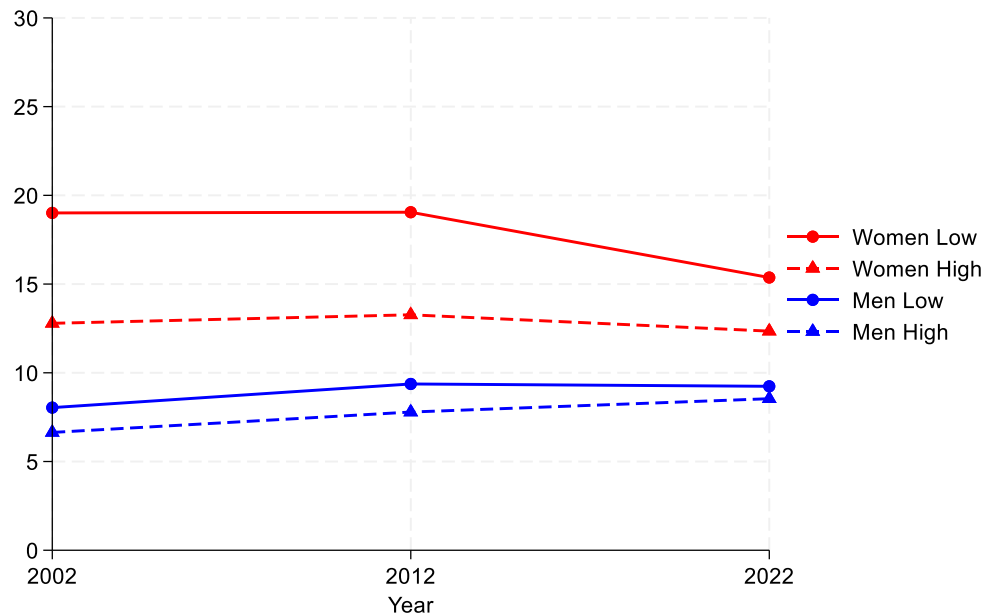
Men's share of housework time (in percent)



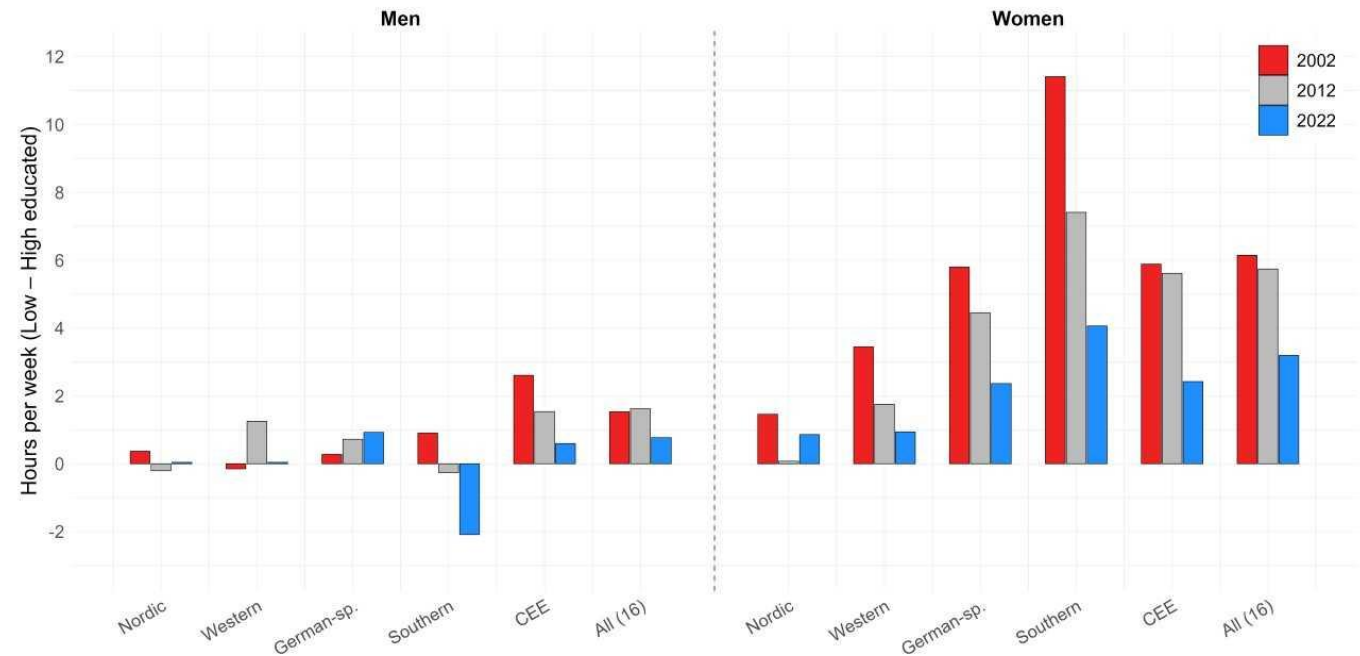
- Gender gap narrowed at a similar pace in both periods (2002-12 and 2012-22)

Results: Differences by education

Housework time by gender and education (mean hours per week), 16 countries pooled



Difference in housework time (mean hours per week) between low and highly educated, by region



- Decline in housework time among low educated women
- Educational gradient in women's housework time declined in all regions, often in both periods

Predictors of housework time, linear regression, pooled 2002, 2012, 2022 (16 countries)

	Nordic (4 countries)	Western (FR & NL)	German- speaking (3 countries)	Southern (ES)	CEE (6 countries)	All countries (16)
MEN						
Survey (ref. 2012)						
2002	-0.29	-1.75***	-1.09**	-0.82	-0.74#	-0.88***
2022	0.86*	-0.52	0.99*	-0.18	-0.13	0.22
Education (ref. low)	0.33	-1.42**	-0.42	0.49	-1.06	-0.50#
Interaction survey & education						
2002 & high	-0.41	1.13	0.35	-1.67	-0.48	-0.13
2022 & high	-0.30	0.87	-0.12	1.89	0.48	0.29
WOMEN						
Survey (ref. 2012)						
2002	1.20***	1.83***	1.67***	3.74***	-1.81***	0.19
2022	-0.42	-1.55***	-3.16***	-5.33***	-2.18***	-2.24***
Education (ref. low)	0.47	-0.81#	-2.11**	-3.10*	-3.28***	-1.75***
Interaction survey & education						
2002 & high	-1.18*	-1.42*	-1.20	-1.92	0.05	-0.50
2022 & high	-0.49	1.07	2.60**	0.83	2.60**	1.67***

Controlled for: household size, employment, age, gender roles, country. Significance levels: *** p<0.001; ** p<0.01; * p<0.05; # p<0.10

Results: Decomposition of housework time

Men (16 countries)



Women (16 countries)



- Role of changing composition particularly among women in the German-speaking countries and Spain: increasing share of higher educated women and declining share of housewives leads to decline in housework time

Summary and conclusions

The gender revolution continues: gender gap narrowed at a similar pace between 2002-12 and 2012-22

- Men: housework increased slightly in the first period in some countries
- Women: housework decreased clearly, especially among non-University educated

Gender revolution diffused to lower educated women in all regions

Possible reasons: increasing labour force participation among lower educated women, diffusion of intensive motherhood norms, lowering standards of cleanliness

Compositional changes (higher education and less housewives) matter mainly in more traditional regions

Questions? Comments?



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Website: <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/vid/research/research-projects/flin>



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