

Great opportunities for comparative research: the European Social Survey

Despite ever closer European integration, EU countries show persistent and remarkable differences in a variety of fields. The European Social Survey (ESS) covers a wide range of topics that tap into key challenges facing Europe today.

Gerbert Kraaykamp and Kees Aarts



Women in full-time paid work are responsible, on average, for around two-thirds of the total time heterosexual couples spend on housework
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The ESS studies a broad range of attitudes and behaviours in a changing Europe in a two-yearly sequence. Topics addressed in the main questionnaire of the ESS vary from moral opinions, health issues, trust and social capital to all kinds of aspects of a person's socio-economic position and household circumstances. Other topics change from round to round, enabling the ESS to cover a wide thematic range and adapt to changing demands. The ESS is widely used by academics, researchers, politicians, policymakers and journalists interested in patterns in public opinions and behaviours which vary over time and across

countries.

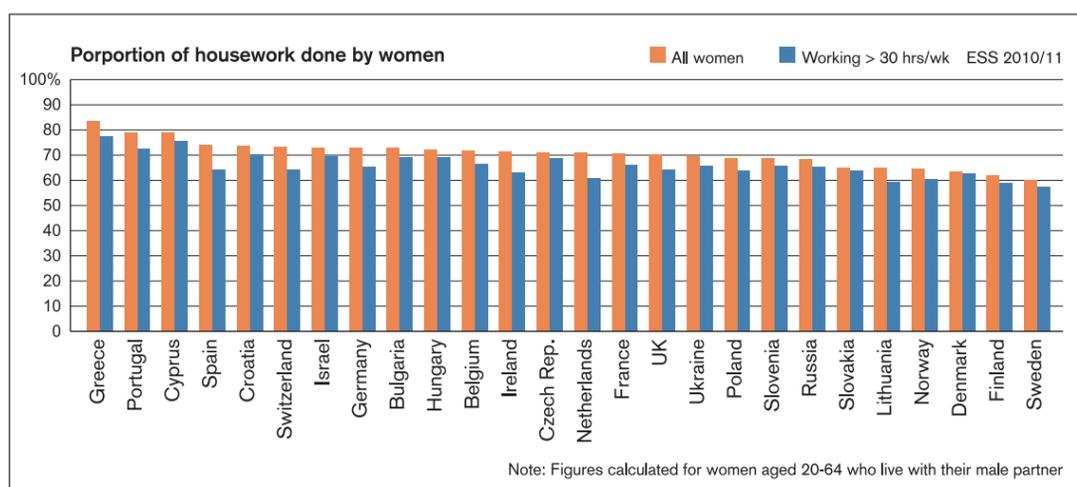
The ESS data, collected in more than 30 countries in six rounds since 2002, thus may be used to shed light on issues of comparability and/or differentiation. For instance, significant differences in political engagement and social attitudes persist between Eastern and Western Europe, underpinned by differences in history, culture, institutional and legal conditions. There is also evidence of a growing economic and political divide between Northern and Southern Europe, fuelled by different experiences with the Eurozone crisis.

Over the past decade, the ESS has

become an authoritative source of reliable data about Europe's evolving social, political and moral condition with high standards of rigour in cross-national research with respect to sampling, data collection, reduction of bias, and reliability of questions.

europeansocialsurvey.org

This article is based on the ESS report 'Exploring public attitudes, informing public policy. Selected findings from the first five rounds', 2013.



Removing barriers to facilitate cross-border research

A wider use of data leads to an improved understanding of societal problems.

Whether they are researching, say, family changes in modern society, social effects of primary schools or attitudes towards data, social scientists want to use and compare data from as many different European countries as possible. CESSDA could play an important role in acquiring these data.

Cross-border access

The main goals of CESSDA are to facilitate and promote the wider use of data in social, economic and political research and, by doing so, improve our understanding of ongoing societal problems as well as available solutions. CESSDA aims to achieve these objectives through the development and coordination of standards, protocols and professional best practices in data management and technical infrastructure. CESSDA will provide relevant training programmes, which are also explicitly aimed at countries

where national infrastructures still have to be set up from scratch. One of CESSDA's key objectives is to facilitate access to data resources regardless of the location of either the researcher or the data, in Europe or elsewhere. A real challenge for international research today is cross-border access to these resources. CESSDA intends to break down the barriers created by specific national requirements. The EU-funded Data without Boundaries project, in which CESSDA is involved, has already started work on this. CESSDA has a solid base as it contains the oldest digital archives of Europe. It was founded in 1976 as the Council of European Social Science Data Archives. As a European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ERIC), CESSDA has now become a permanent legal pan-European research infrastructure in 2013. *Heiko Tjalsma*
cessda.net



COLUMN

Personal preferences matter, if culture allows

Why do some women work full-time, when others work only part-time and some not at all? The number of hours that women work is affected by their personal preferences on the one hand, and by national culture on the other. In a recent study conducted with colleagues at the University of Twente, we have analysed this interplay between individual work preferences and social conditions. We focused on the extent of gender egalitarianism in 24 European countries. The European Social Survey (round 2, 2004) provided suitable data for testing existing theories about the influence of work preferences on women's decisions concerning work and family. Using the European Social Survey turned out to be a prudent choice. First of all, round 2 of the European Social Survey comprises a dedicated set of questions on family, work and wellbeing. With these questions we could measure not only individual work preferences, but also the extent of gender egalitarianism in the countries.

Secondly, the strong methodological basis of the European Social Survey ensures cross-national comparability of the data, an issue that makes the ESS the most important survey of its kind. Thirdly, the European Social Survey provides important information on the respondents' socio-economic characteristics: indispensable information for scholars aiming to understand social phenomena in their national context.

The main conclusion of our study is that the number of hours worked is neither exclusively determined by women's personal work preferences nor exclusively determined by a country's culture

of gender egalitarianism. It is the interplay of personal preferences and prevailing cultural values that seems to matter: the individual preferences appear to matter most in the European countries, where the populations at large share more gender-egalitarian attitudes. The European goal of increasing women's labour-market participation thus cannot be achieved by just 'activating women'. Indeed, the population at large should also embrace values of gender equality – a challenge for the policy-makers of the 21st century. Our dive into the European Social Survey proved to be rewarding.

Andringa, W., Nieuwenhuis, R. and Gerven, M. van (to appear). Women's employment: The interplay between individual work preferences and country liberalism in 24 European countries.

Minna van Gerven
photo Charles Kuiper

