



**European Survey Research Association**

**II ESRA International Conference**

**25 - 29 June, 2007**

**Prague**

**Session: Human Values**

**Coord.: Eldad Davidov**

# **New meanings of the family on the swing with work: an European overview**

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# **1. Introduction**

- Exploring data from ESS 2004, EB 60.3 and CCEB 2003 about gender, work and family values.
- Discussing some methodological questions (formulation of questions, effects of the research contexts).
- Comparing and discussing results about gender, work and family values in Europe.

# What do men and women want?

- Some authors claim that, regarding work and family, women choose a life style according to their preferences (Hakim's theory);
- Others (Crompton *et al*) have shown that structural, institutional and cultural constraints shape "preferences". Choices are though constrained.

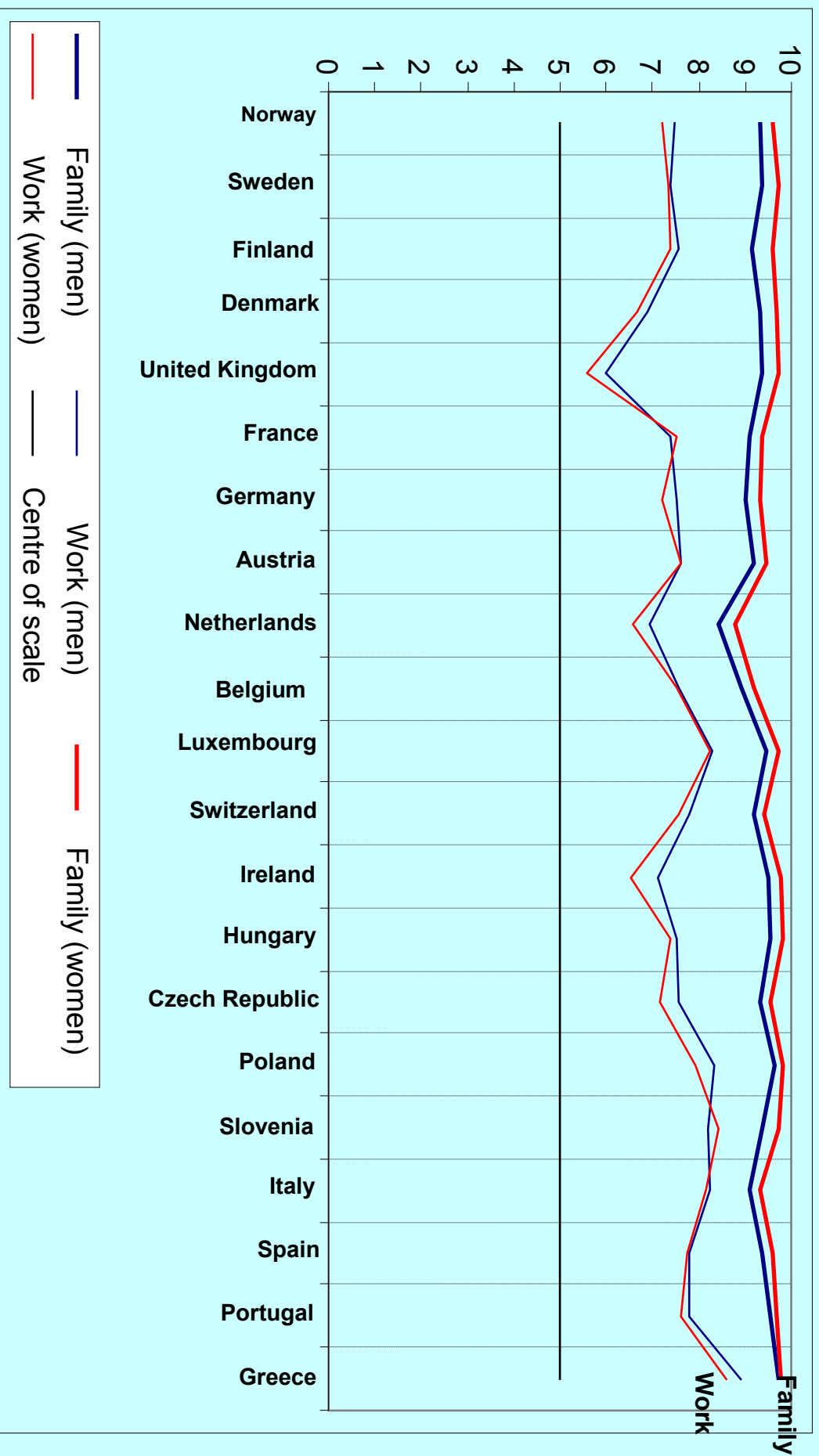
- **In our research results we will try to show for Europe that:**
  - Women and men want to invest in both spheres (work and family).
  - New meanings of the family are emerging for both men and women and for all countries in Europe.
    - Egalitarian perspectives but also ambiguities and difficulties in assuming positions.

## Analytical strategies...

- To understand differences between countries regarding work-family issues we must account for **structural, institutional, cultural but also the dynamics** of change in a specific country.
- To understand trends and configurations in each, and in all countries, we must mix methods and account for **methodological issues**.
- To understand work-family balance we must perceive work and family as two fundamental dimensions in a process of constitution of **personal life projects**.

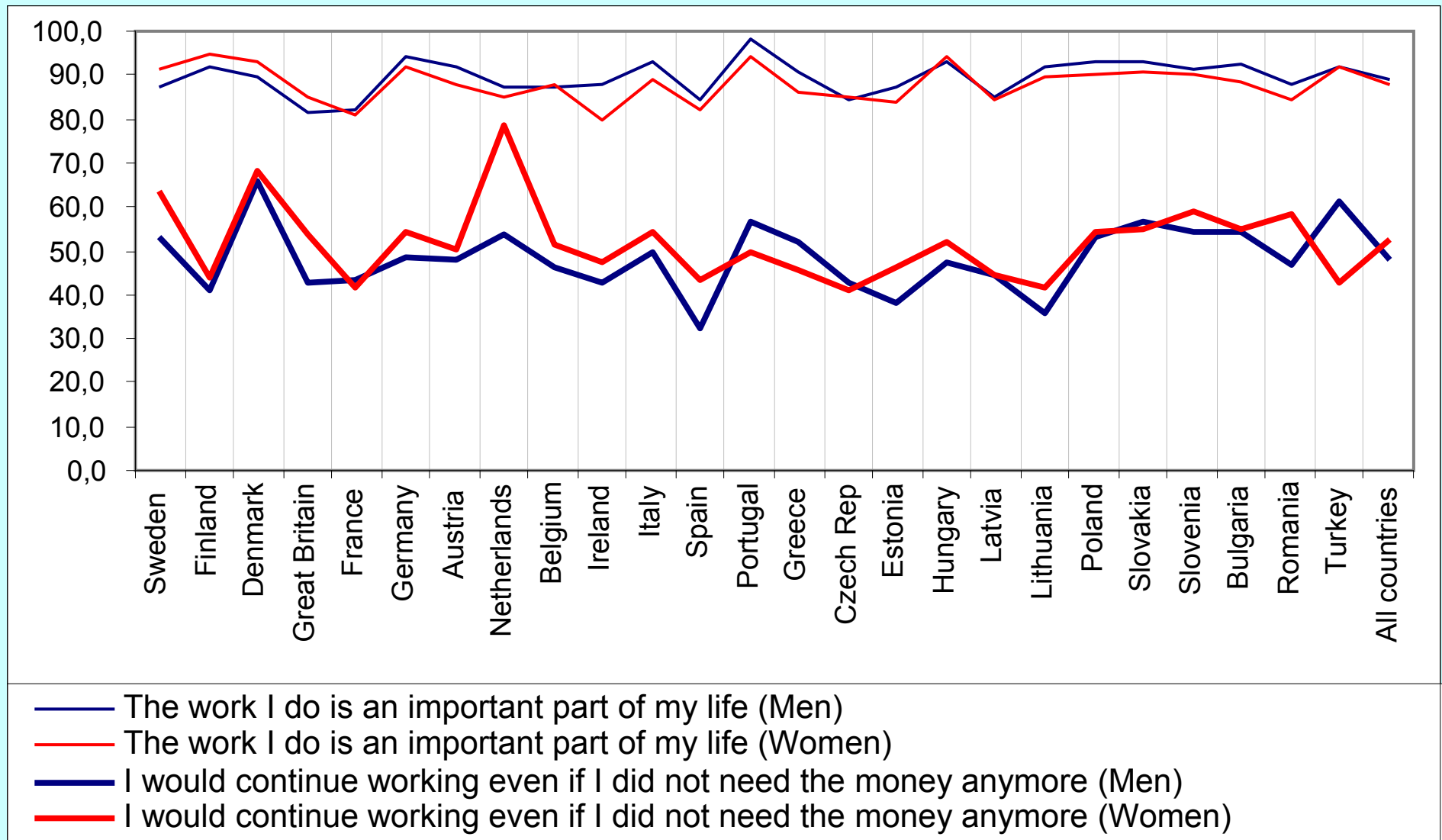
**2. When questioned about the importance of work and family in a neutral way Europeans answer...**

## The importance of family and work in Europe





## Work attachment for men and women (%) 2003

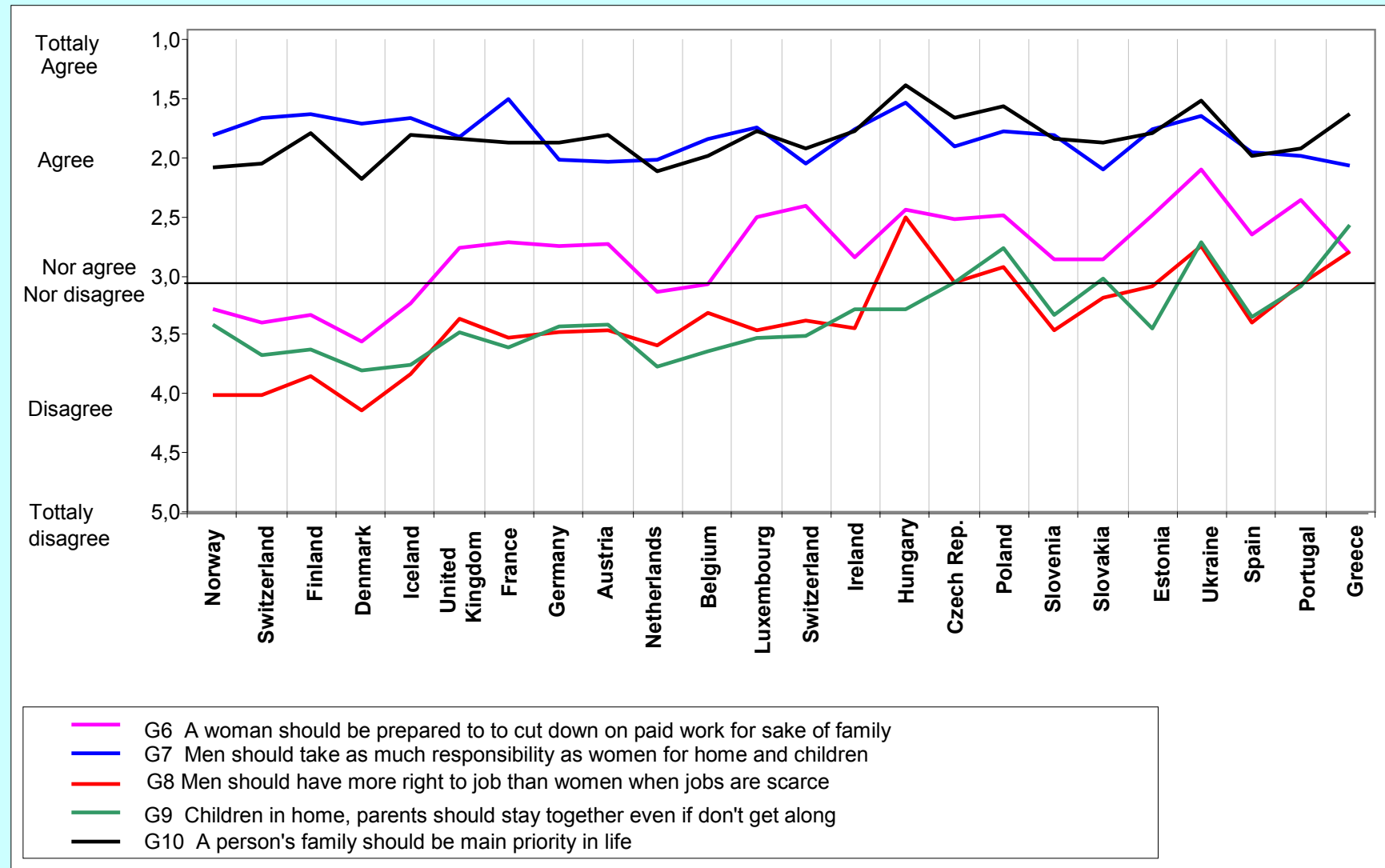


Source: EB 60.3 and CCEB 2003

- **Contradicting the stereotypes:**
  - **Women tend to attribute the same importance to work as men do.**
  - **Work is a value in itself, making part of a feminine social identity, even in countries where there is a lower participation of women in the labour market.**
- **The discrepancies between the sexes are far narrower than the differences between countries.**
  - **For men to family is important.**

**3. When questioned about the gender roles in the family and at work they answer...**

# New meanings of the family in Europe



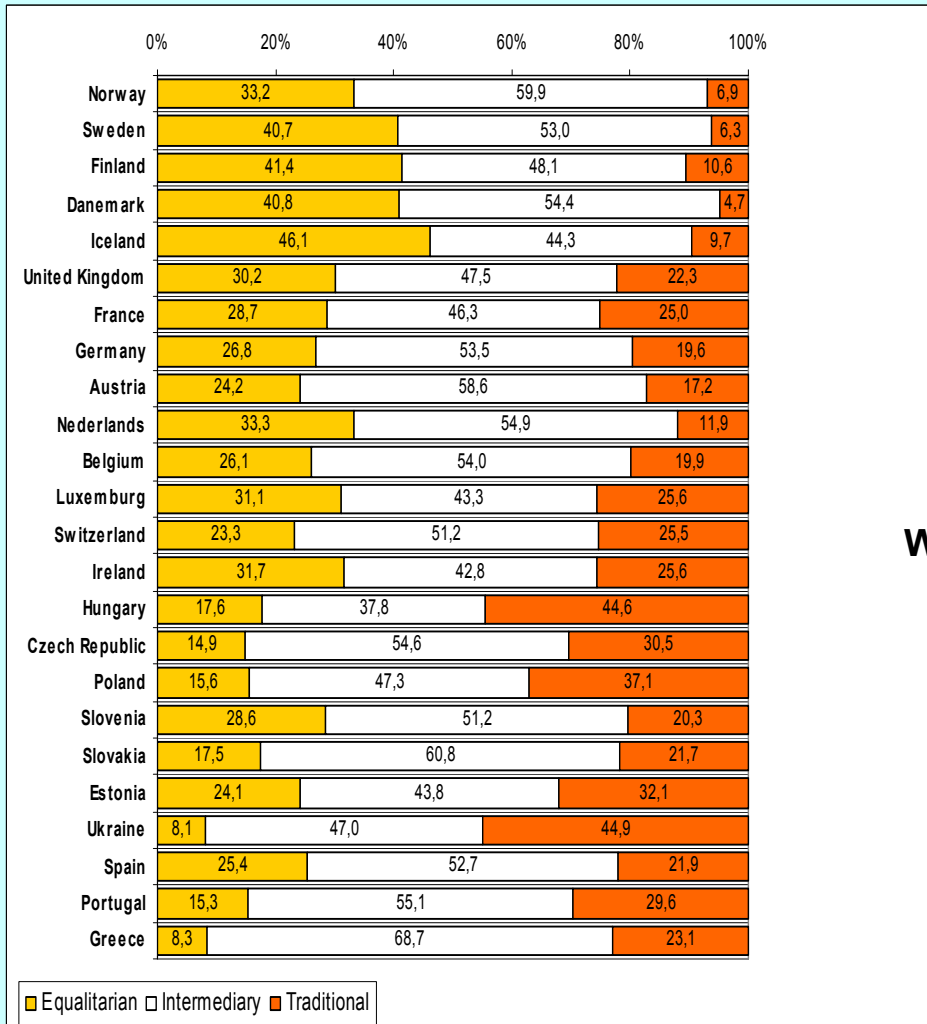
ESS (Round 2), 2004

# European Patterns

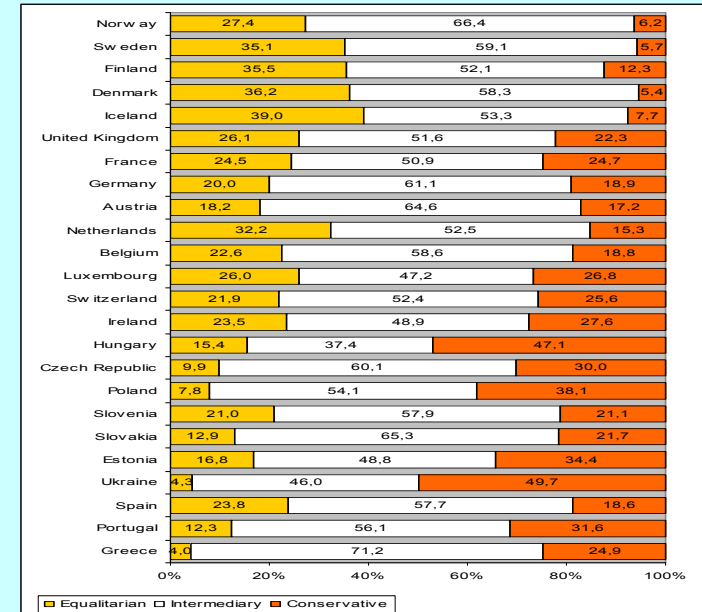
- **General consensus and very high agreement about:**
  - **A person's family should be main priority in life**
  - **Men should take as much responsibility as women for home and children**
    - New meanings of the family.
    - Egalitarian perspective and rejection of a traditional division of men and women's roles in the family.
- **Intermediary (undefined) positions:**
  - **A woman should be prepared to cut down on paid work for sake of family's well-being.**
    - 47% of the European agree.
    - Marked differences among countries. Scandinavian tend to reject but the majority is near the middle or undefined point (nor agree nor disagree), and some tend to the agreement.
- **Rejection:**
  - **Men should have more right to job than women when jobs are scarce.**
  - **Children in home, parents should stay together even if don't get along.**
    - The sacrifice of the female professional work in favour of men is rejected by the majority (52,9%).
    - The idea of the indissolubility of marriage due to the existence of children is also, globally, rejected (52,2%).
    - Distinction between countries: Scandinavian express a much clear position (of rejection), while the others have more difficulty in standing for or against the statements.

# Equalitarian, intermediary and traditional, by country and gender

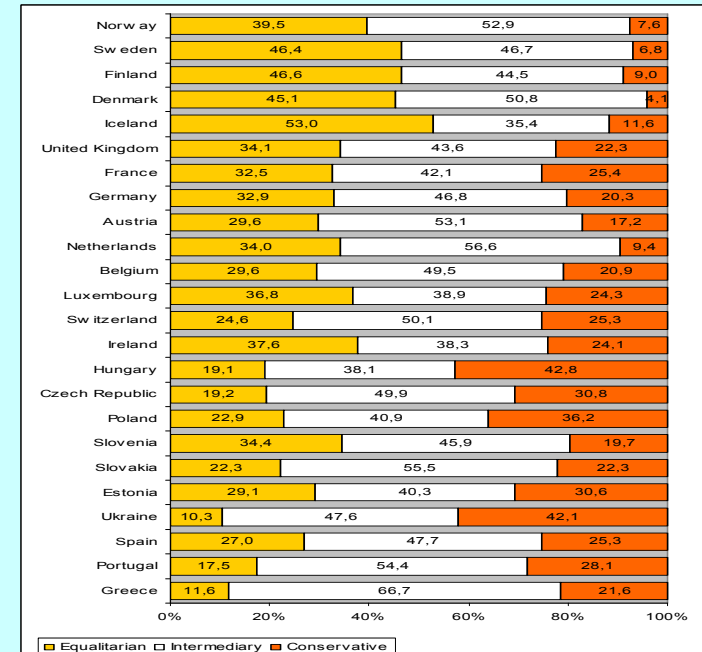
Men



ESS (round 2) 2004



Women



- The intermediary position is the dominant one
  - In a cross country perspective
  - In gender perspective
- Nordic countries have higher percentages of egalitarian individuals
  - Iceland (46,1%), Finland (41,4%), Denmark (40,8%), Sweden (40,7%), Norway (33,2%)
- Women are always more egalitarian than men
  - Hungary (42,8%), Ukraine (42,1%) and Poland (36,2%) present a relative high percentage of conservative women

3. Methodological Issues: not every  
thing that shines is gold



- Looking closer to the dominant intermediary position we noticed the importance of the answer **not agree/nor disagree**.
- Usually in quantitative approaches the meaning of these type of answers are disregarded.
- Importance of assuming an ethnographic look towards every question.

## Two possible interpretations:

- Gap between the ideological discourses and the universe of practices – gap between new incorporated discourses and older dispositions for action:
  - At ideological level: Europeans tend to be equalitarian
  - At practical level: some objective constraints feed traditional gender practices – e.g: different positions in the labour market, institutional and policy packages, welfare state regimes.
  - New meanings of the family not yet fully grounded, coexisting two different movements producing an ambivalent positioning
    - incorporation of new gender ideology in the family
    - conservation of traditional practices
- Different ways of asking questions produce different answers.
  - Questions addressed with a gender neutral perspective will be answered according to personal projects and wishes.
  - When gender roles are directly at stake the answers tend to be filtered by gender stereotypes.

## 4. Conclusions and general trends

- A. Work as a dimension of social identity for both women and men. Women “prefer” to work professionally.
- B. New meanings of the family. Valuing family on a more modern, open and egalitarian mode. Clear desire of more involvement of men in the family.
- C. The parsonian model for the middle class – women at home men at work – is no longer sustained. Equality is a clear ideal, more involvement of men in the family is clearly desired.

D. But these new meanings of the family are not yet fully grounded, coexisting two different movements:

- Incorporation of new gender ideology in the family
- Conservation of traditional practices

E. Exploring these contradictions we found elsewhere that:

- Women want to invest in both fronts (work and family). But in the majority of countries they have to pay a price for maintaining both investments
- Men don't do the majority of housework, nor care. The difference between men and women's hours of work (paid and unpaid) is unfavourable for women – women's overload.

F. Different ways of asking questions produce different answers and make visible these contradictions

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