

ESA Research Network “Gender Relations in the Labour Market
and the Welfare State”

Work-family tension among European couples. A source of domestic conflict?

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In this presentation we will try to answer to several questions:

- ❑ **Do men and women feel more pressured by paid work tasks on their family life and responsibilities, or do family' responsibilities make more pressure on paid work? Are there gender differences?**

- Work and Family Pressure –

- ❑ **How do work and family spheres influence and interfere on each other? Can we find tension and conflicts?**

-Work Family Conflict –

- ❑ **Are there different patterns of behaviour comparing countries? And how do institutional conditions interfere and affect work-family balance?**

- Cross-country comparison -

In our results from previous research – from quantitative and qualitative methods - we have seen for Europe that:

- ❑ Both men and women, fathers and mothers, want to invest in both spheres - work and family. But for women, keeping both investments, may face specific obstacles. (Torres, Brites, Haas and Steiber, 2007; Torres and Brites 2006; Torres, Mendes and Lapa, 2006).
- ❑ In general, women are overburden by paid and unpaid work even though men work more hours in paid work (Torres et al, 2006; Torres, et al. 2000 and 2004).
- ❑ Structural, institutional and cultural constraints shape individuals choices (Crompton *et al.* contradicting Hakim's theory).
- ❑ Especially in some countries, we have found out that in general individuals do not assume the existence of conflicts and disagreements over the division of household work (Torres et al, 1999, 2000)

Based on **ESS data 2002, 2004** and on **qualitative data** (interviews held in Portugal) on the scope of the EU FP6 Workcare Project coord. by Claire Wallace. We will focus our approach on working couples (both on the labour market). Interviews are also being held in Austria, UK, Hungary, Denmark, Italy and Poland

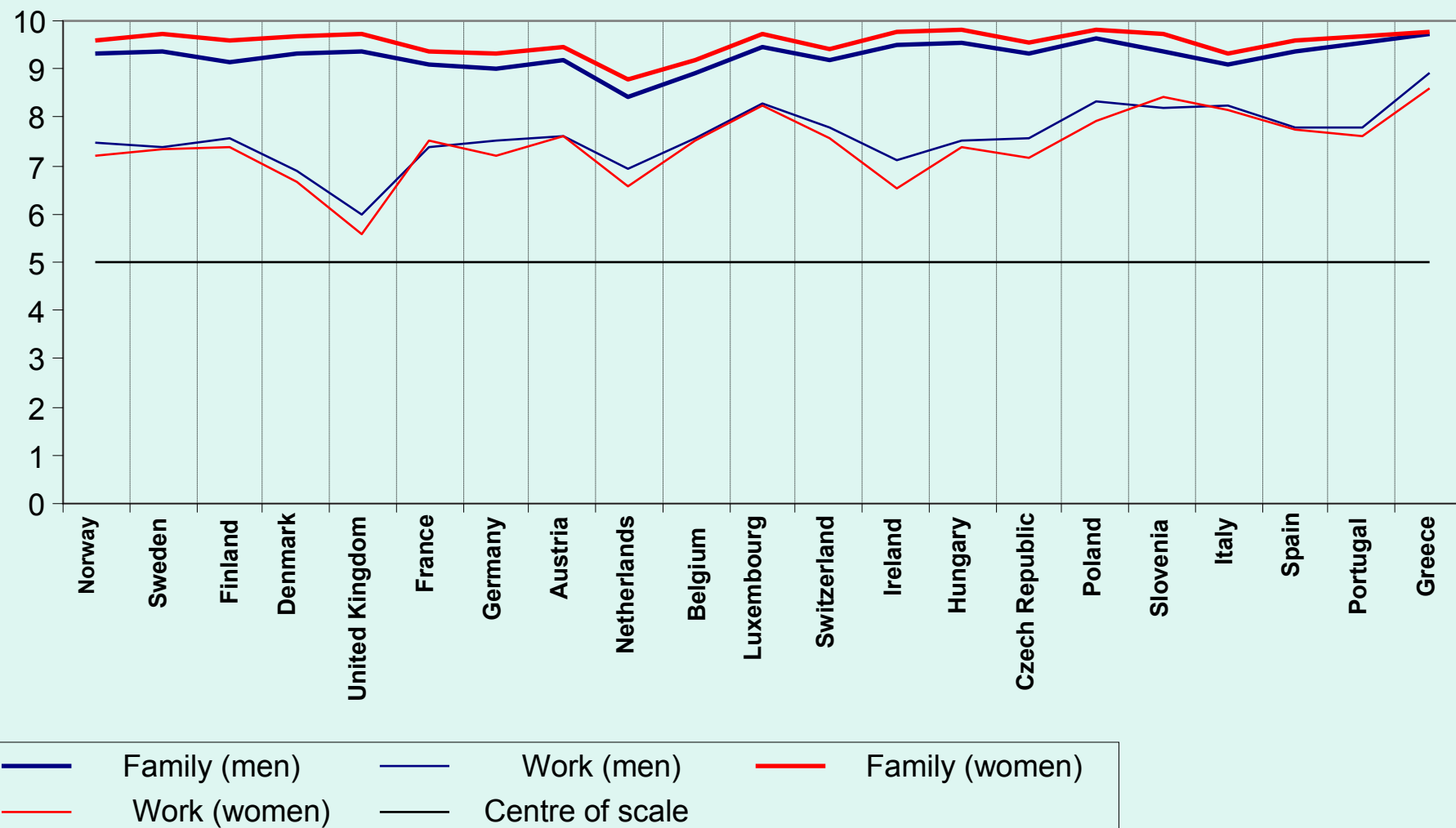
We will see first the importance given to work and family by men and women

And then we will test our present **Hypotheses**:

1. **Men feel more pressured by work than women**
2. **Little children' parents feel more pressured by work than other people**
3. **In countries with more policies targeted at work care arrangements, individuals will experience less work pressure. In countries with no policies, individuals experience more work pressure**
4. **Women don't reveal work-family conflict situations as much as men, because they need to assume a neutral position, when their professional (and monetary) autonomy is at stake**
5. **There are gender differences in the division of paid and unpaid work which generate some conflicts among european couples**

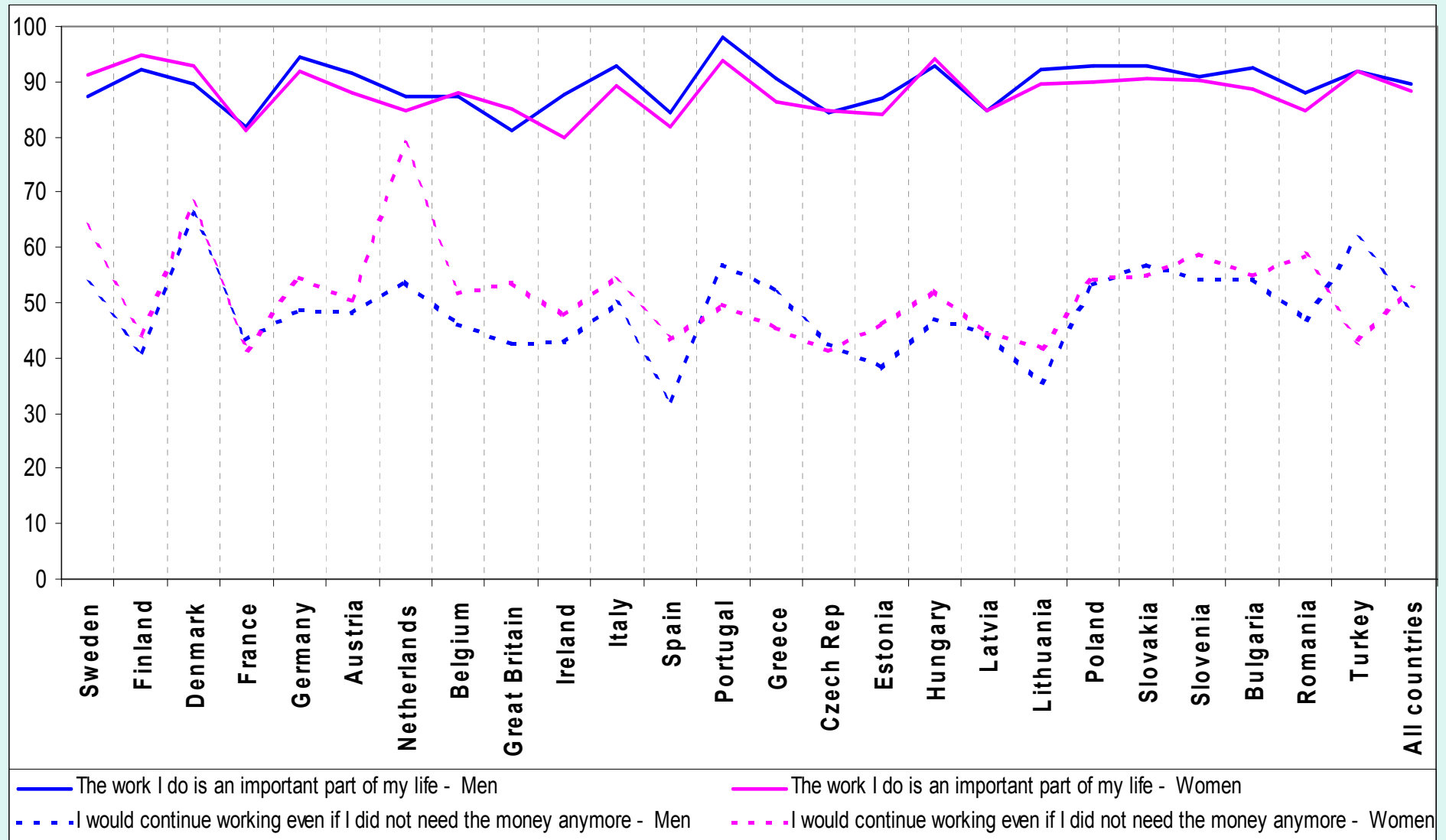
Main dimensions of a life project: family and work

The importance of family and work in Europe (ESS, 2002)



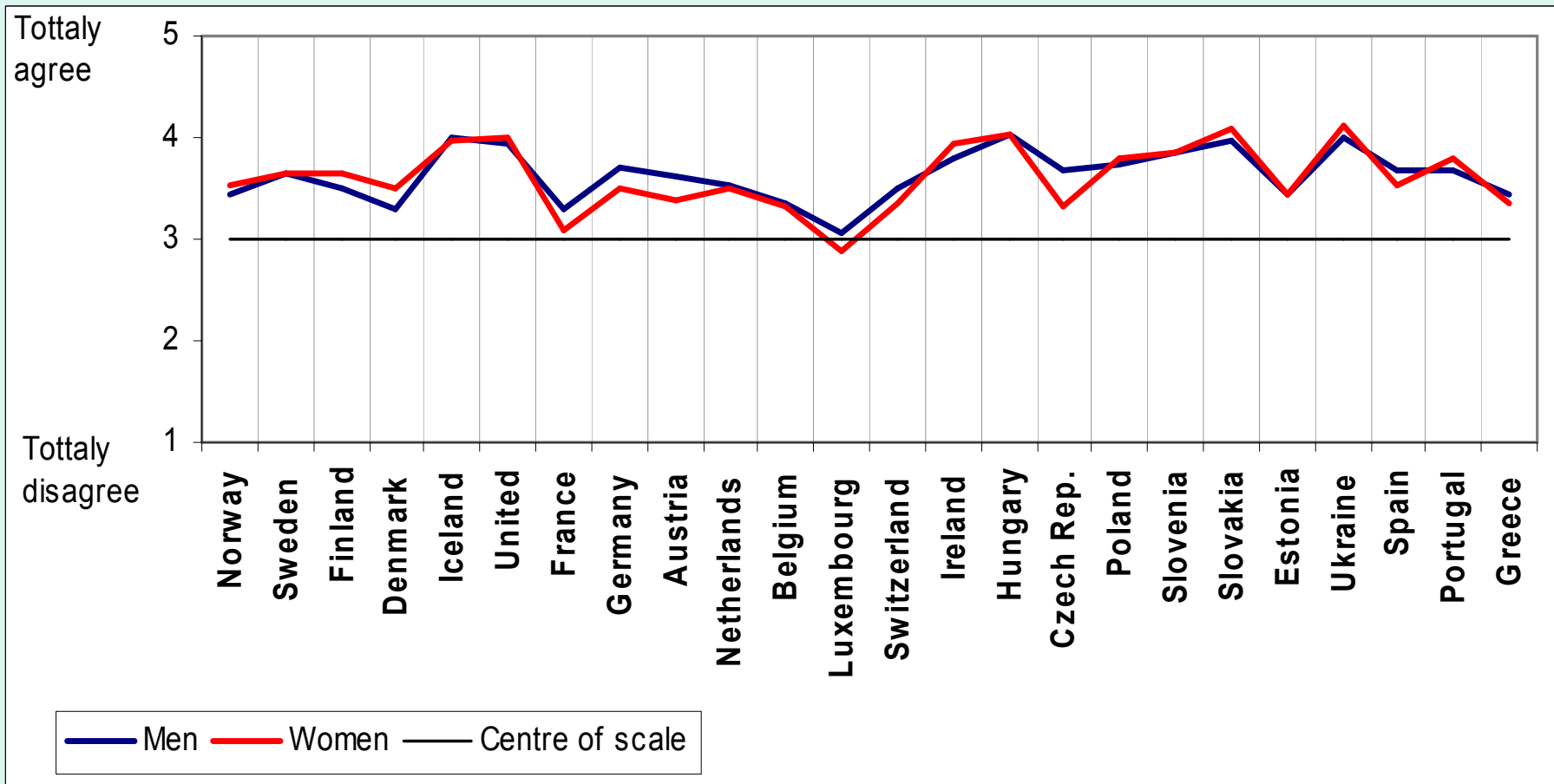
Work attachment for men and women (%)

2003



Source: EB 60.3 and CCEB 2003

“My job requires that I work very hard”



Although there are many ambivalent answers (not agree nor disagree) men and women tend to find their work demanding, implying intensity or long hours. Countries where this is more evident are: Iceland, United Kingdom, Ireland, Slovakia and Ukraine.

At the labour market...

Besides working longer hours in their normal schedule (data from previous research), men also do extra hours more than women

WORK EXTRA SCHEDULE INDEX

Variables:

How often your work involve:

- *Working evenings/nights*
- *Having to work overtime at short notice*
- *Working at weekends*

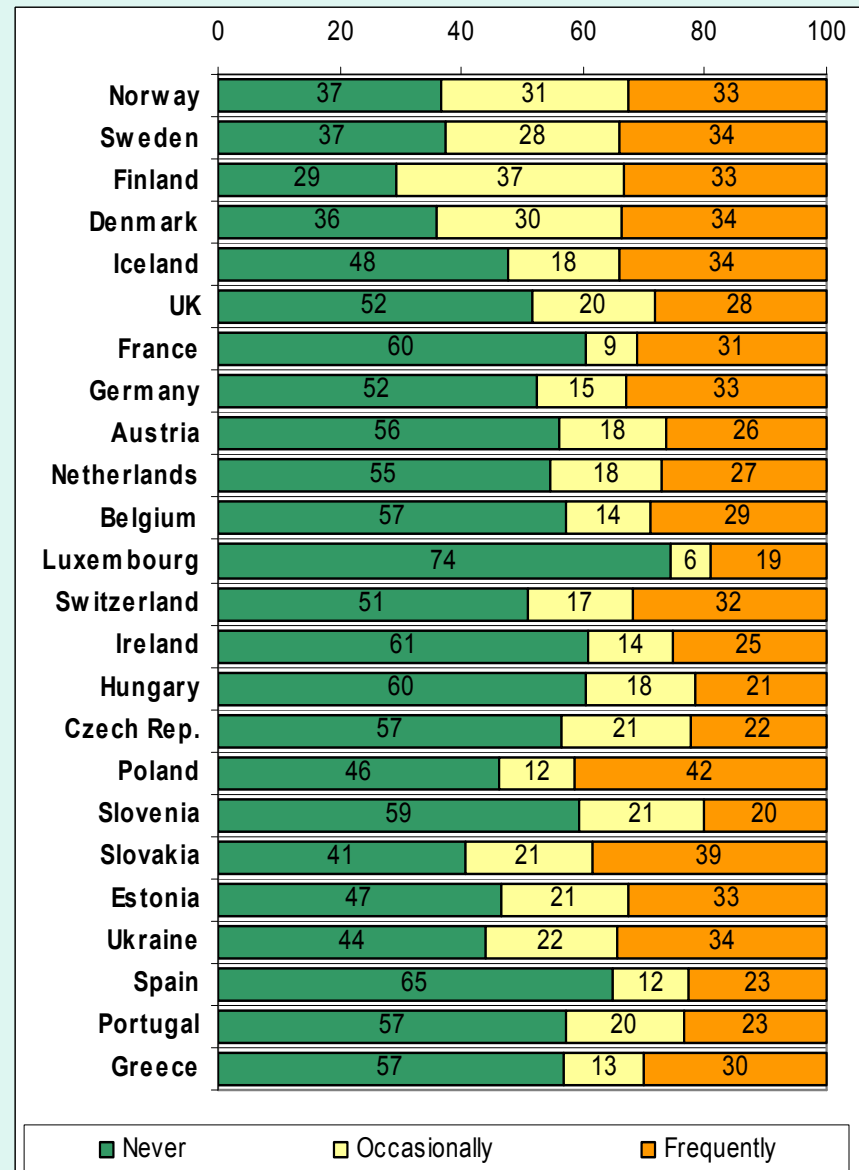
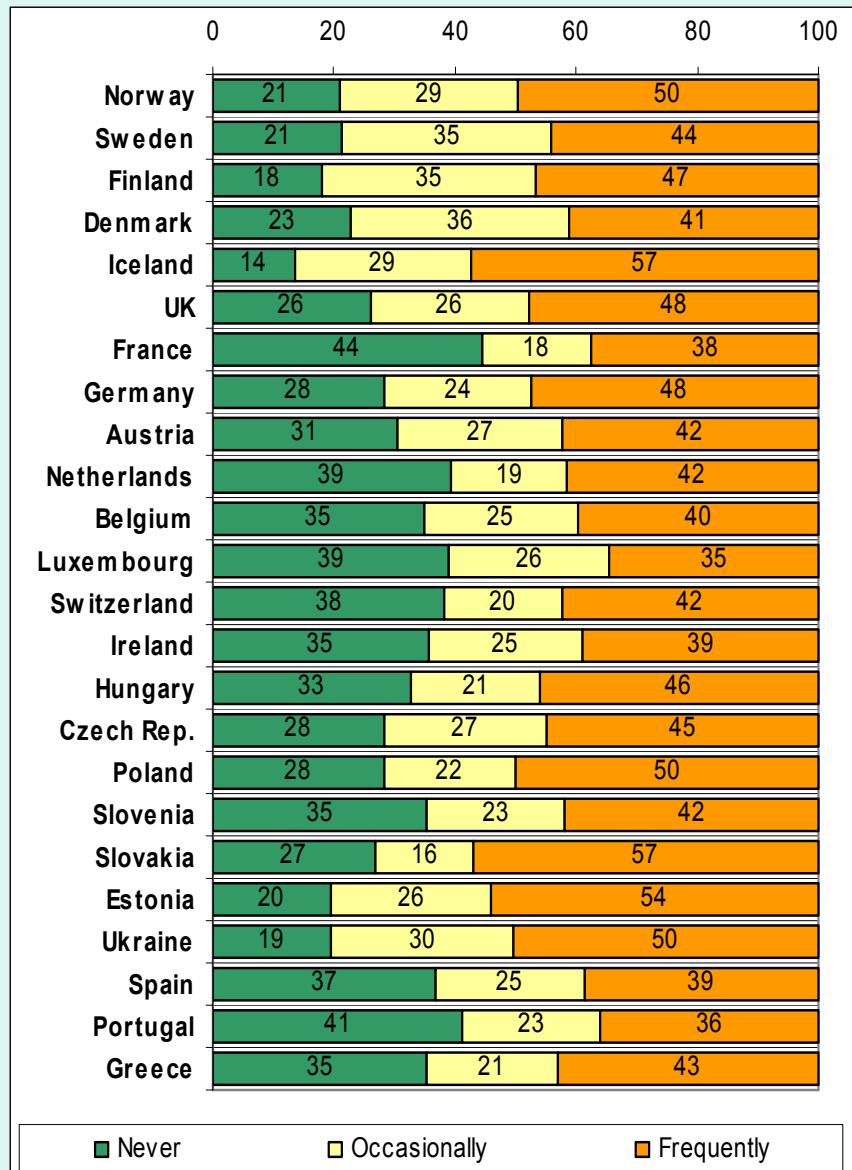
In the answers given to the variables above. The dominant answer for men was “frequently” while for women was “never”.
This is true in almost all countries

Work extra schedule

Men

(percentages)

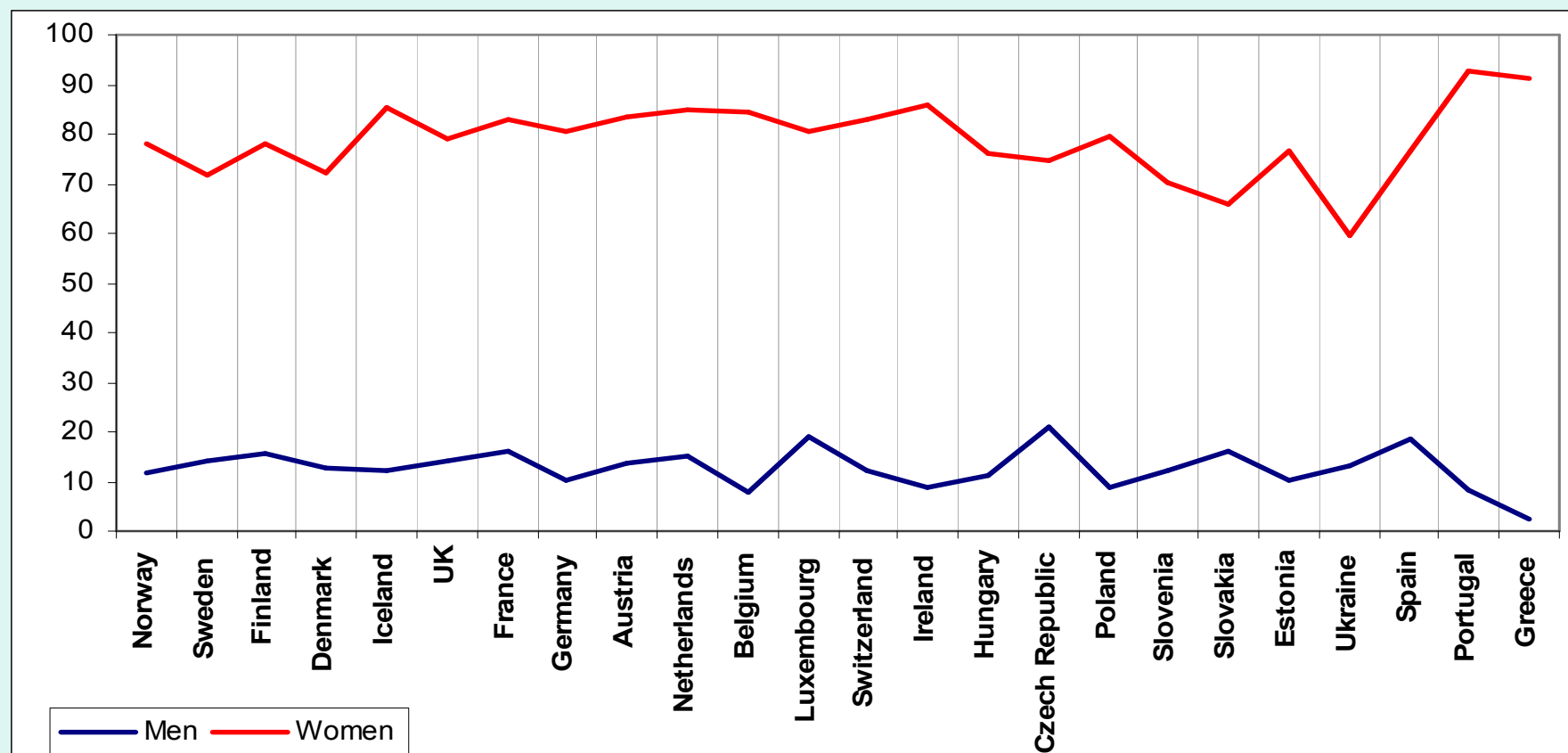
Women



At home...

Domestic tasks

People saying that they spend more than a half of the total time spent by the household in the domestic tasks, in a week normal day



ESS 2004

□ We could say that men work more at workplace and women work more at home, compensating each other's burden.

But ...

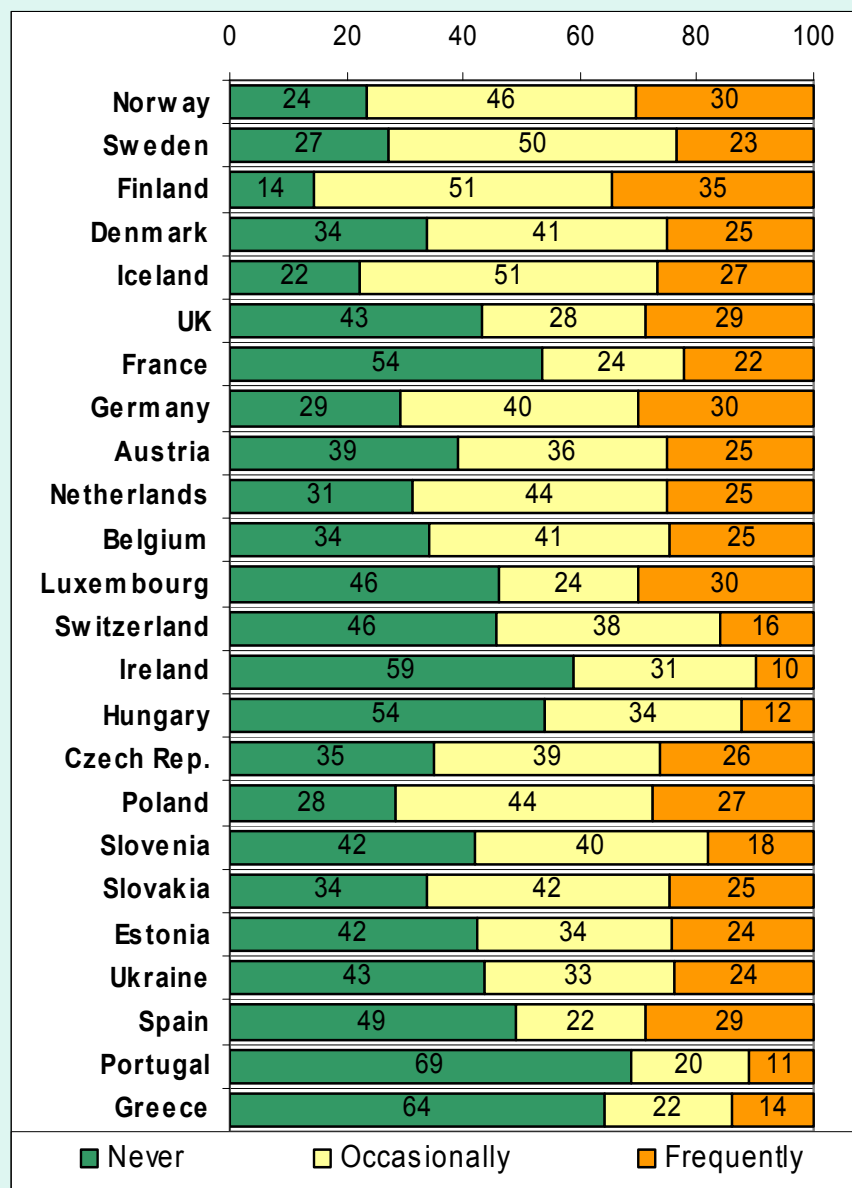
- Although men actually work longer paid work hours;
- Women have to cope with more than the double of household tasks – they are overburden.

□ Although previous research states that couples don't generally assume **domestic conflicts**, our data reveal that, despite housework not being a very strong source of conflict, there *are relatively high percentages of Europeans saying that often disagree with their partners about that issue, especially women.*

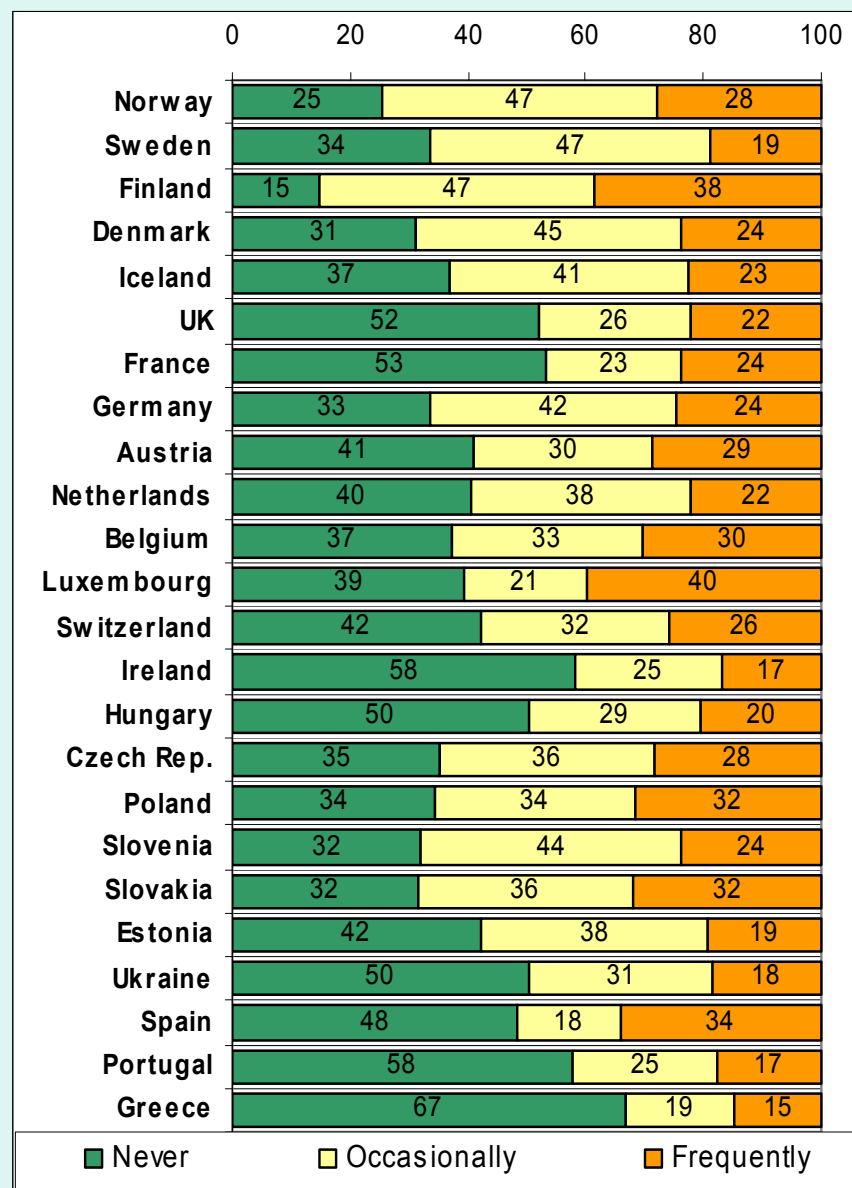
Disagreements about housework

(ESS 2004 percentages)

Men

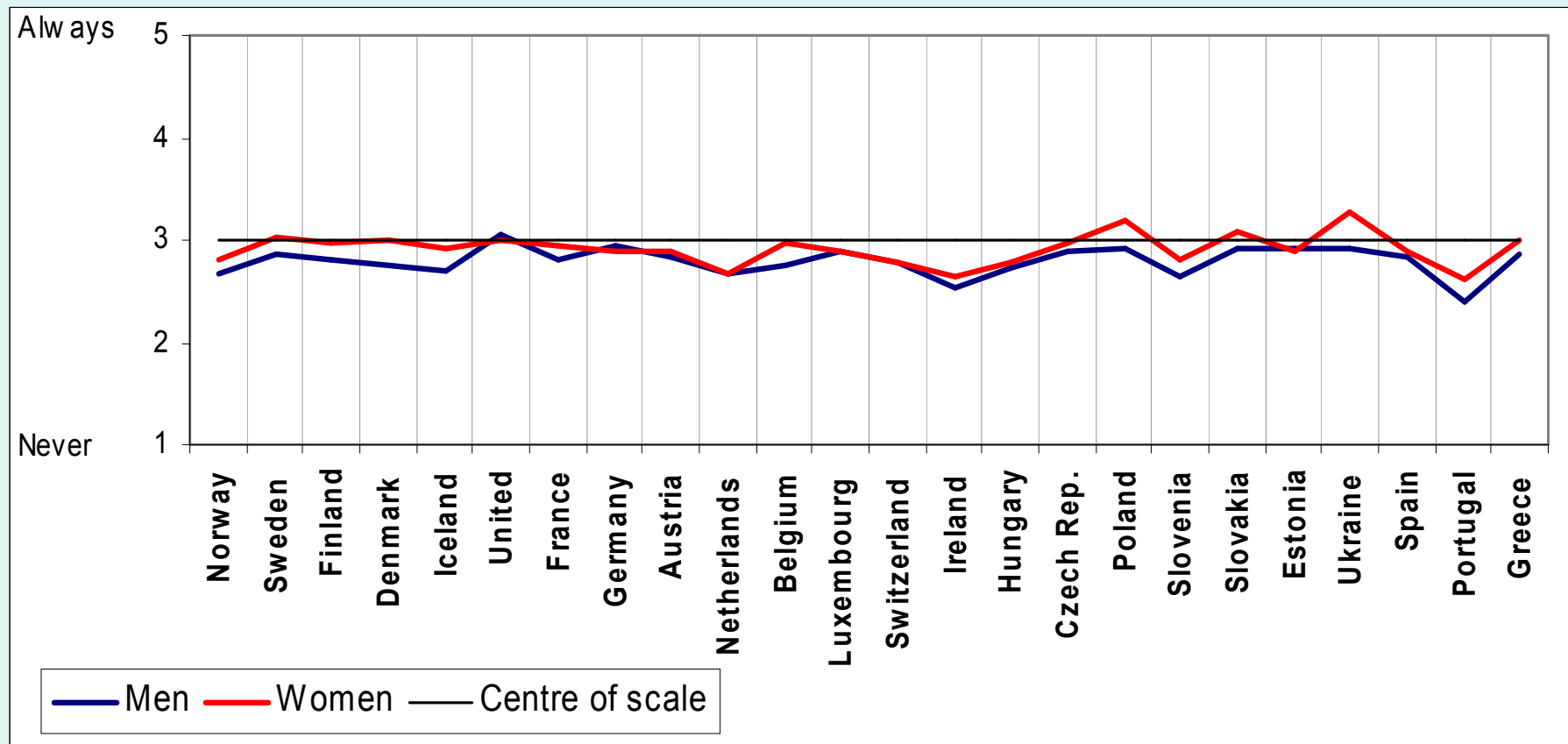


Women



Work pressure on family

“How often do you feel too tired to enjoy the things you would like to do at home?”

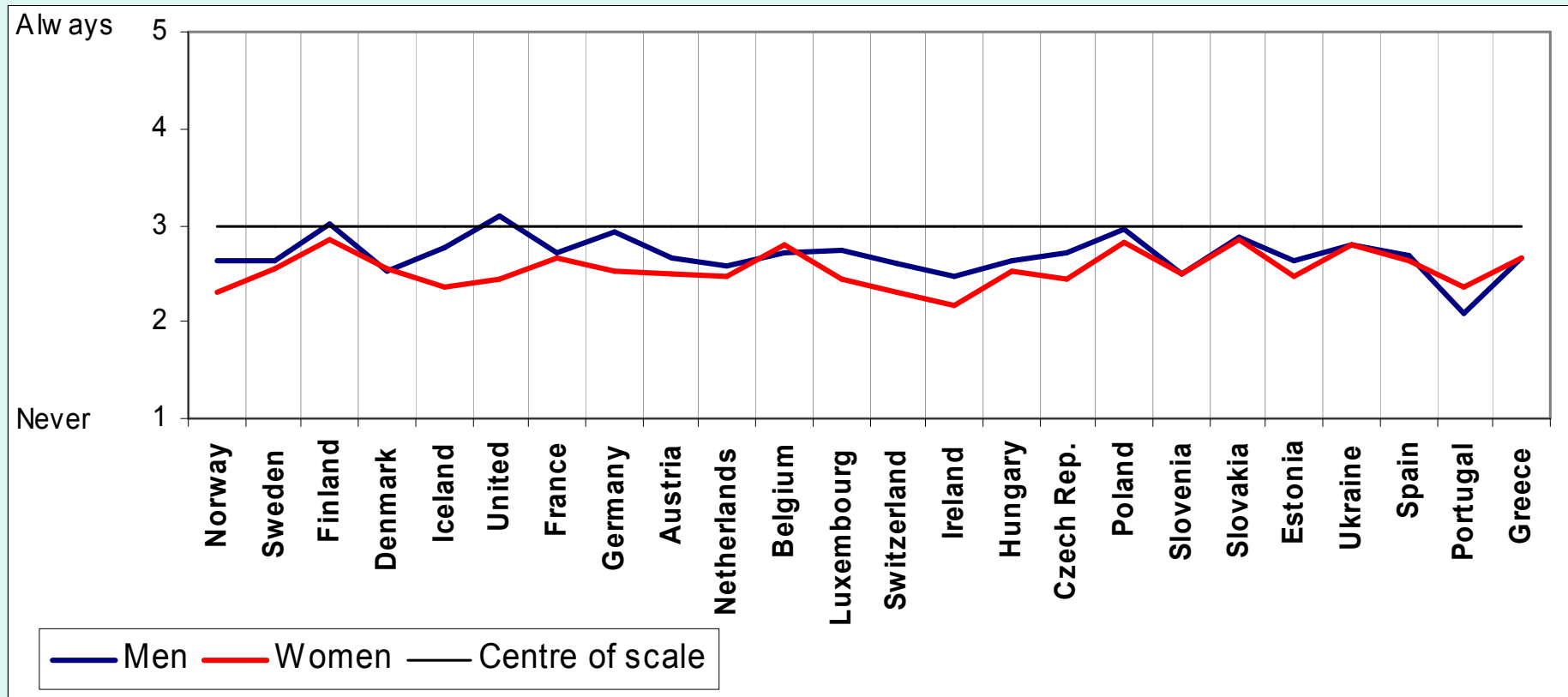


ESS 2004

There is a clear majority of women saying that they feel tired after work and are not able to enjoy family time as they wished (maybe because they have to do the bulk of housework, as we have already seen)

Work pressure on family

“How often do you find that your job prevents you from giving the time you want to your partner or family?”



ESS 2004

Women clearly reject the idea that work prevents them of dedicating time to their partner and family – as an attitude in defence of their autonomy – because if they want to invest in both spheres, they can't reveal any vulnerability – they can't put their activity at stake

Work pressure on family index

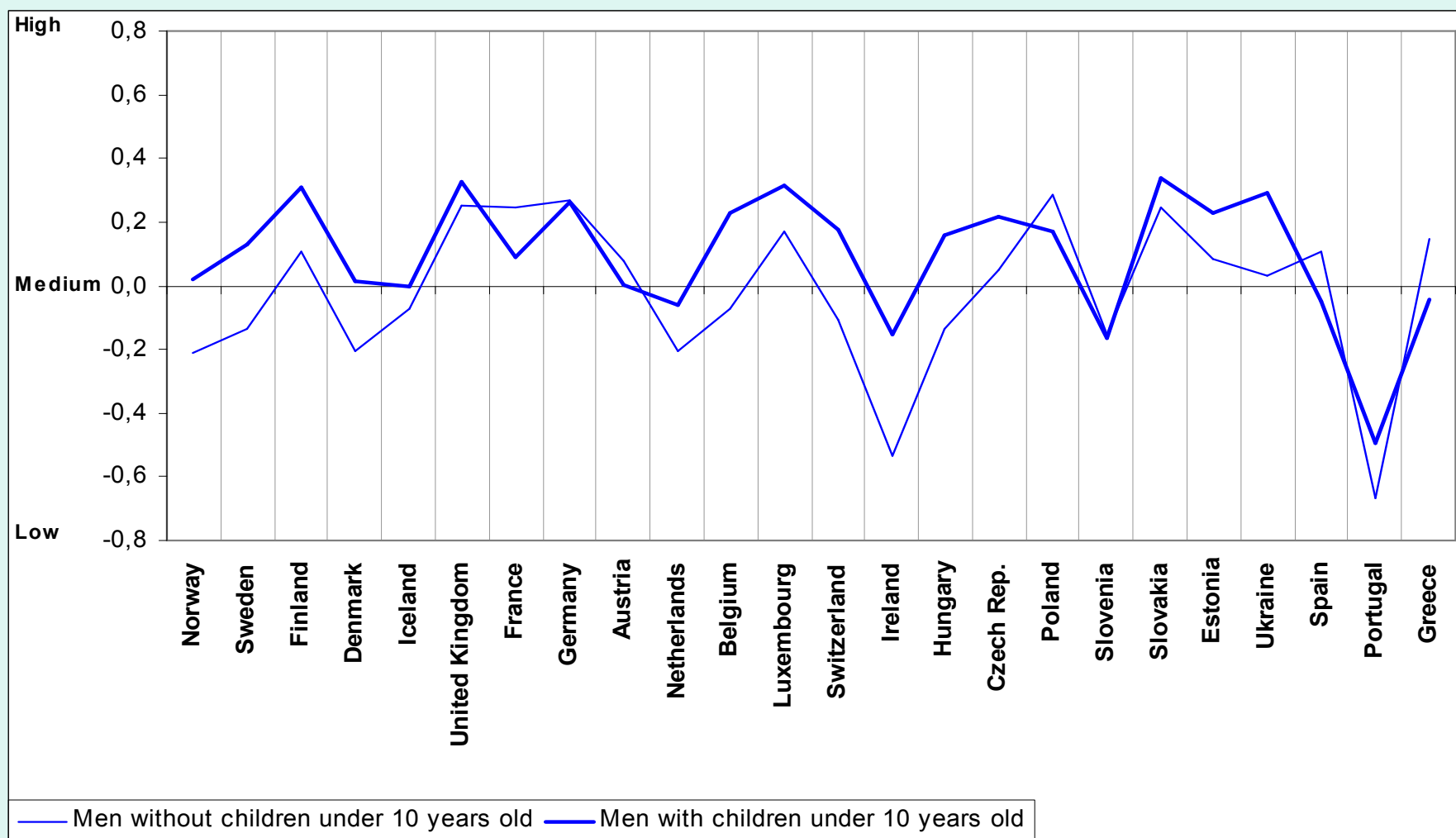
We added one more variable to the ones we've already presented, in order to create an index of work pressure on family:

Index variables: How often are you worried about work problems when you are not working; How often are you too tired after work to enjoy things you like to do at home; How often job prevents you from giving time to your partner or family

And we analysed if the existence of little children is a factor of differentiation in terms of the feeling of that kind of pressure...

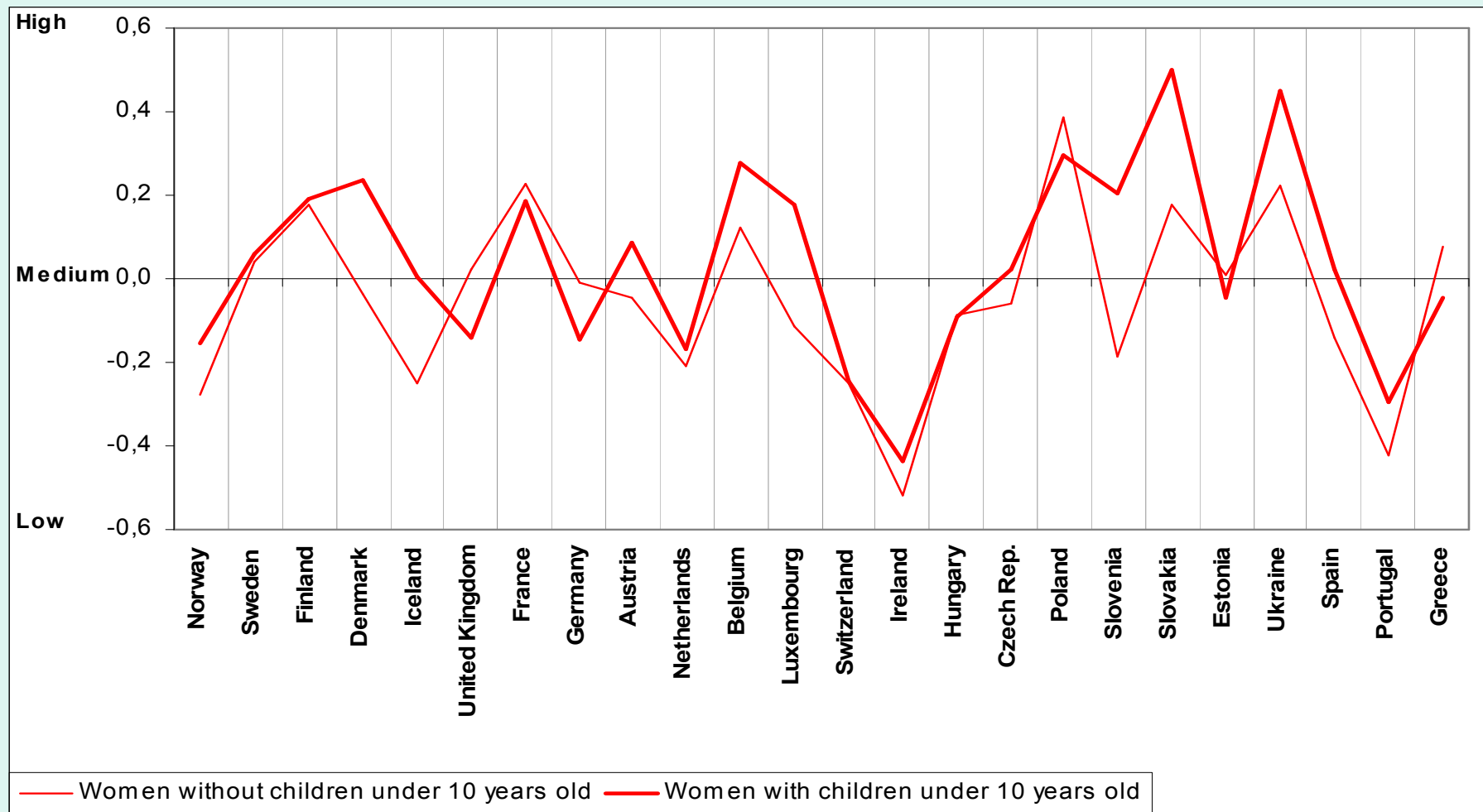
Work pressure on family

Men with and without children under 10 years old



Work pressure on family

Women with and without children under 10 years old



Both men and women feel that their family time is pressured by work
(with the exception of Hungary and Portugal)

But it is clear that people with little children say that they feel a higher work pressure on family - this is particularly true for men

We can't find a trend associated to groups of countries. However, taking men and women into consideration, we may highlight that:

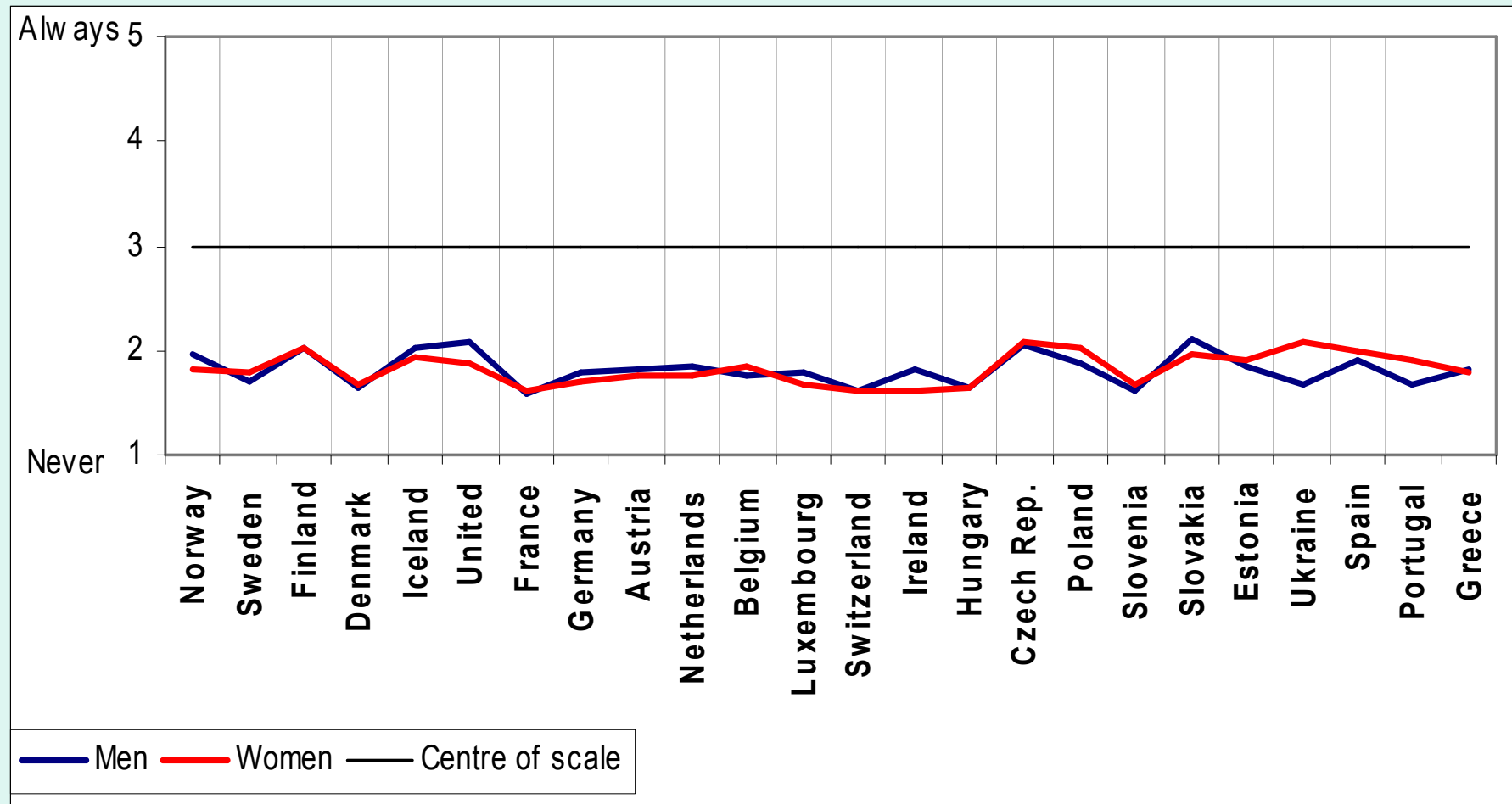
- ☐ *UK, Luxembourg and Germany present the highest levels of work pressure, together with some Enlargement countries.*
- ☐ *The Nordic countries and the post communist regimes present many variations.*

This might be related to differences of policies in promoting gender equity in the labour market and compatibility between paid and unpaid work.

On the other hand, the respondents express a low pressure of family on work ...

Family pressure on work

“How often do you find it difficult to concentrate on work because of your family responsibilities?”



Maybe this is not an ideal indicator to catch family pressure, since the “concentration” on work may not be very affected by family worries

Data from qualitative research

Portuguese interviews present a clear trend of:

- ❑ Women's and mother's attachment to work: for the sake of financial independence, for more power to negotiate in conjugal relationship, for sociability, for fulfilment.
- ❑ But strong incorporation of traditional gender roles in the division of the domestic tasks – and therefore some complaints by women, about the unfairness of that division.
- ❑ However those complaints don't lead to serious conflicts.

Final conclusions and general trends

Answering our initial questions

- ❑ Work as a dimension of social identity for all, men and women.
 - Work family pressure –
- ❑ Both men and women feel more pressured by work than by family.
Men tend to assume more “professional responsibilities” for themselves (masculinity hegemony). They though feel more work pressure than women, especially little children’ fathers.
 - Work family conflict -
- ❑ There are tensions related to work family balance
- ❑ **Women** assume more responsibility about the family, since men don’t do the majority of the housework. The difference between men’s and women’s hours of work – accounting for paid and unpaid work – is then unfavourable for women.
- ❑ Practices don’t fit the discourses of equity - in spite of the end of the *parsonian* division, we still feel the signs of the incorporation of that model (this was clearly revealed by Portuguese interviews) which generates some disagreements among couples – it is not a peaceful coexistence.

- Cross-country comparison –

- ❑ There are differences among countries, in terms of work-family arrangements, related to different kinds of policies on gender equity promotion.

So...

- ❑ Women want to invest in both fronts, family and work. But in the majority of the countries they have to pay a price for maintaining both investments (housework overburden, work pressure when children are little, family disagreements..). They seem, though, constrained in their practices.

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