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Impact of COVID-19 crisis on gender equality in care work

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COVID-19 & Gender Equality

According to the [European Institute for Gender Equality](#), the gendered impact of COVID-19 concerns six areas:

Frontline workers →	Gender impacts on health →	Unpaid care and housework →
Economic hardship and gender →	Gender-based violence →	People in vulnerable situations →

Gendered impact of Covid 19 on gender equality in care work



Is there anything new or has the outbreak simply unveiled old challenges?

Paid care work

- Most health workers are women.
- The whole **care sector**, which altogether represents **21% of the European labor force**, is strongly feminized. Women make up:
 - ▶ 93% of childcare workers
 - ▶ 86% of personal care workers in health services
 - ▶ 95% of domestic cleaners and helpers are women [1]



Devaluated jobs: Gender inequalities in paid care work



In addition to the horizontal segregation, this sector is characterized by

- Vertical segregation, with mainly men occupying higher positions.
- Gender pay gap (not affecting only women in care work)
 - ▶ Hourly wage gender pay gap in Europe is 16%
 - ▶ Gender gap in overall earnings* is 40%.
 - ▶ The situation is worse for working women with children below six years old: they earn 48.5% less than men with children of the same age [2].

Unpaid care work



- Housework (cleaning, preparing meals, shopping,)
- Direct care (children, disabled, sick, and older members of the family)

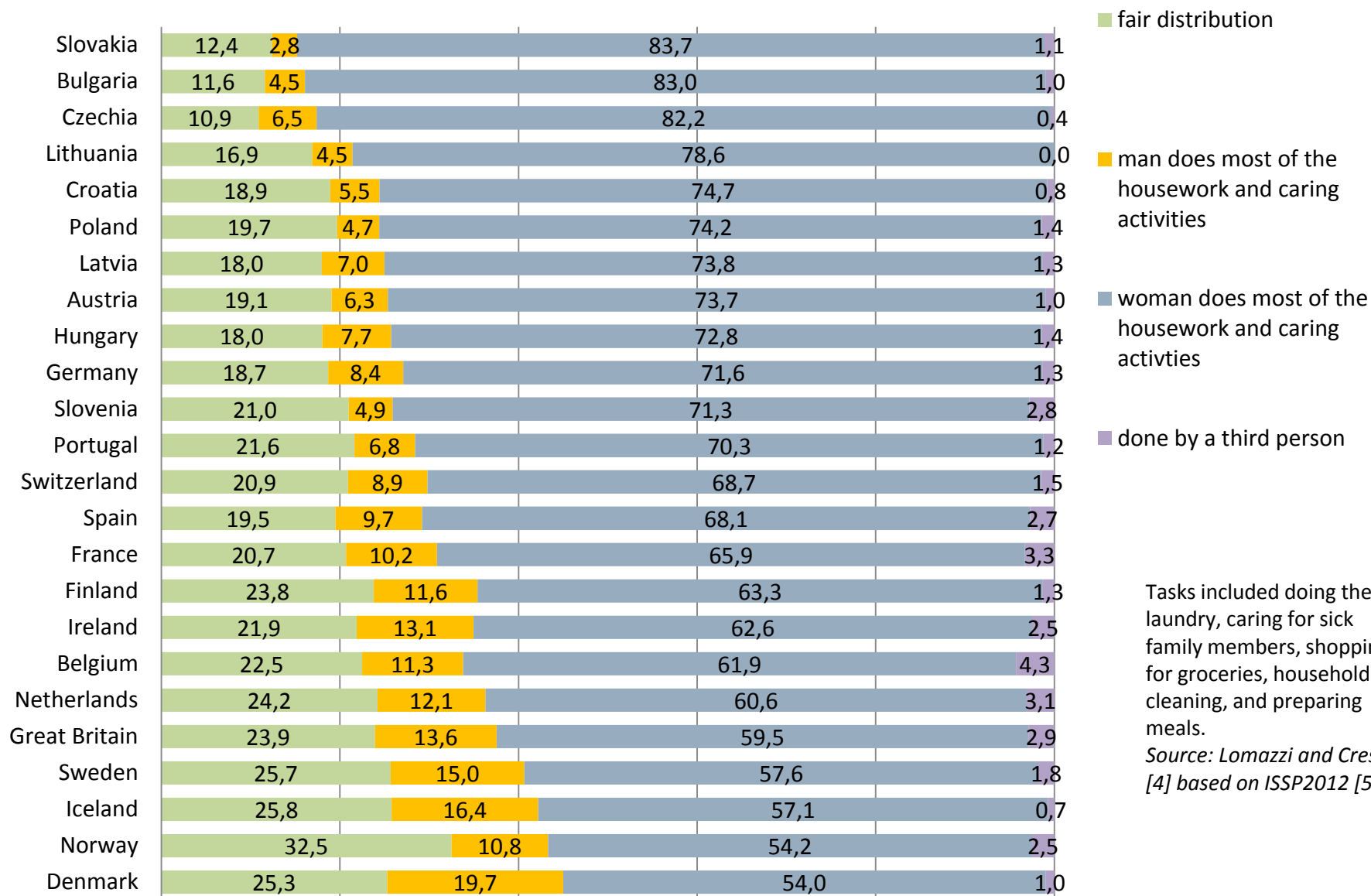


Caring is still a woman's business



- In Europe:
 - ▶ among working women, 81% are involved, on a daily basis, in the unpaid care of children, vulnerable members of the family, and housework.
 - ▶ In contrast, 48% of men are engaged in unpaid daily care.
 - ▶ Furthermore, women dedicate themselves to care more intensively than men (3.9 hours a day versus 2.6 hours of men) [3].
 - ▶ Household care work arrangements (who-does-what?)

Distribution of household care work arrangements (%)



Household care arrangements (gender contracts)

- How do partners decide **who-does-what** to fulfill the functioning needs of the household?
- Rarely, this happens with an explicit agreement
 - ▶ implicit gender role socialization and reciprocal expectations (negotiation between gender ideologies).
 - ▶ household's employment patterns and relative economic resources that provide partners with different bargaining power
 - ▶ interaction between structural and cultural components (opportunity structure given by family policies and societal gender norms)

Structural aspects

- The inter-individual negotiation between partners takes place in a societal context, which may foster a gendered separation of responsibilities instead of challenging traditional gender roles.
- Family policies supporting the dual-earners/dual caregivers family model versus to those addressing family models where men are considered as the household's main (or only) earner [6] [7]



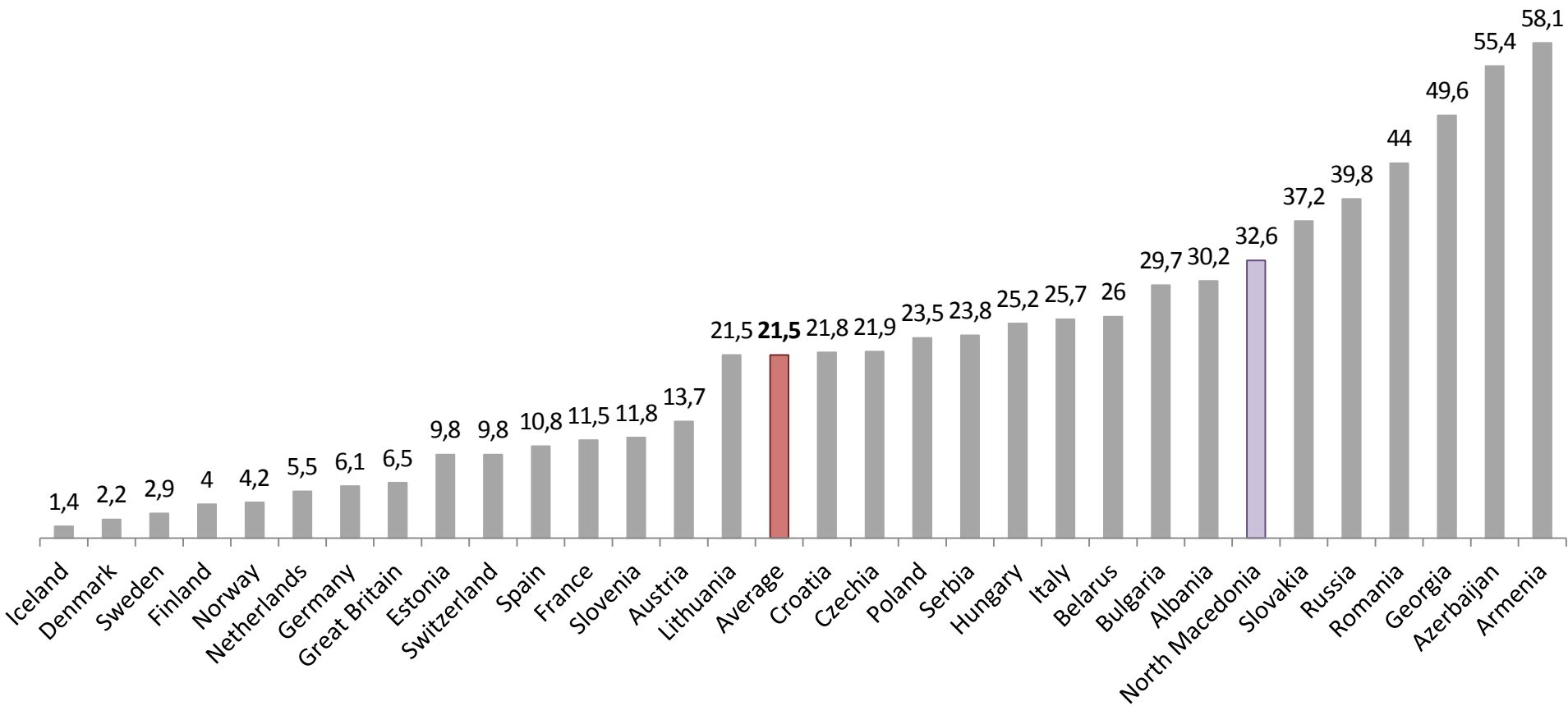
Cultural aspects

- Cultural devaluation of care (historical economic division between productive/unproductive work)
- Historical economic, political and social pathways that shape gender cultures differently across societies

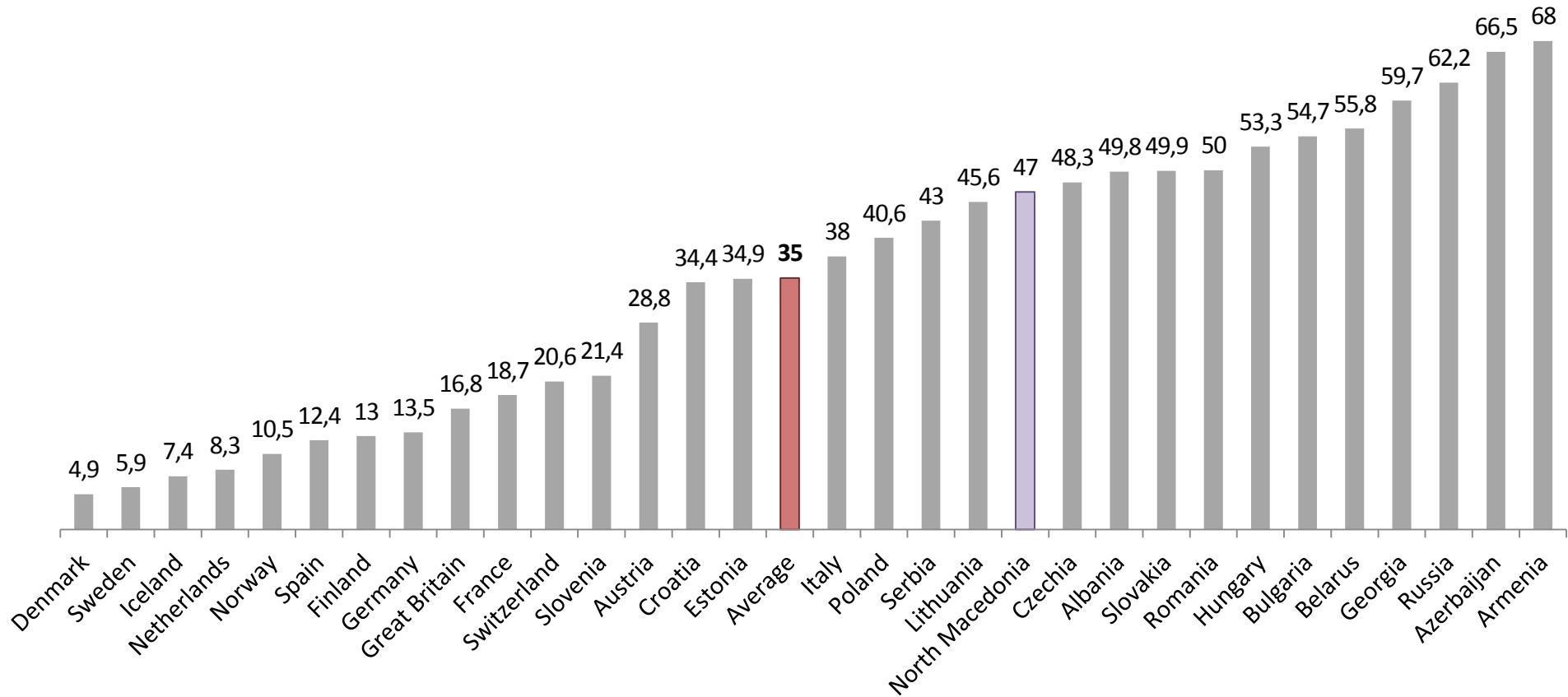


- Societal gender norms
 - ▶ Recent data from the European Values Study (EVS) provides information on the cultural aspects where the future crisis may nest

“When jobs are scarce, men have more right to a job than women” (% “agree” + “strongly agree”, weighted data)



“A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family” (% “agree” + “strongly agree”)



Is COVID-19 to blame?

- During the lockdown, countries have applied a variety of restrictions, which have often implied working from home or suspending work activity.
 - ▶ What institutional measures have been taken to support both parents with the competing demands of caring and working from home?
 - ▶ What measures have been taken to support the return to work of both parents?
- Gender inequalities in unpaid care work are not due to COVID-19. But this emergency **highlights** the weakness of societal structures and cultural backgrounds, which still recalls traditional gender roles almost everywhere.

We shouldn't be surprised

We shouldn't be surprised if women are and will be more affected than men, or if working mothers in Europe are exposed to more risks concerning job insecurity, lower salaries, or employment segregation.



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This has already been so.

The COVID-19 emergency, just like any other humanitarian emergency, emphasizes and exacerbates pre-existing gender inequalities.

Can COVID-19 be an opportunity?

- *Yes, if we use the knowledge we have!*
- We know that pre-existing gender inequalities risk to increase
- We also know what has happened with the previous economic crisis:
 - ▶ The austerity measures implemented by Europe and member states have resulted in gender equality policy cuts [9] [10]
- Same mistakes could be avoided by taking into account the gendered impact of the crisis and institutional measures. In particular policy-makers should consider:
 - ▶ the intersection of inequalities, giving value to care work, extending the attention from childcare to long-term care, and implementing policy packages.
- We don't need a symptomatic answer but a **systematic strategy**



Thanks for your attention

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European *Values* Study



<https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/>

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