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Attitudes towards gender equality at work and in the family. The Portuguese case between tradition and change

Actitudes hacia la igualdad de género en el trabajo y en la familia. El caso portugués entre la tradición y el cambio

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses attitudes towards the social division of labour and gender inequalities in paid and unpaid work in Portugal. The study was based on a survey of 2375 local public administration employees in the Cávado region and used validated measures of gender attitudes. Principal component analysis (PCA) revealed three latent dimensions in relation to gender attitudes: gender attitudes in the work-family interface; gender attitudes in housework and care; perceptions of the evolution of gender equality. In addition, bivariate inferential tests (t-tests and one-way ANOVA) were performed to identify and compare patterns of gender attitudes between women and men according to age, education, geographic area, and parenthood. Results show progress in attitudes towards gender equality, especially among women, suggesting that Portuguese society differs from the traditional gender regime in southern Europe. However, we also identified trends of regression among younger male workers, which may present increased challenges to gender equality policies.

Keywords: Gender attitudes, gender roles, work and family, work-life reconciliation, Portugal.

RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza las actitudes hacia la división social del trabajo y las desigualdades de género en el trabajo remunerado y no remunerado en Portugal. El estudio se basó en una encuesta realizada a 2375 empleados de la administración pública local en la región de

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Cávado y utilizó indicadores validados de actitudes de género. El análisis de componentes principales (ACP) reveló tres dimensiones en relación con las actitudes de género: actitudes de género en la relación trabajo-familia; actitudes de género en las tareas domésticas y de cuidado; percepciones de la evolución de la igualdad de género. Se realizaron tests inferenciales bivariados (teste t y ANOVA unidireccional) para identificar y comparar los patrones de actitudes de género entre mujeres y hombres según la edad, la educación, la zona geográfica y la parentalidad. Los resultados muestran un progreso en las actitudes hacia la igualdad de género, especialmente entre las mujeres, lo que sugiere que la sociedad portuguesa difiere del régimen de género tradicional del sur de Europa. Sin embargo, también se identificaron tendencias de regresión entre los trabajadores masculinos más jóvenes, lo que puede suponer un mayor desafío para las políticas de igualdad de género.

Palabras clave: actitudes de género, roles de género, trabajo y familia, conciliación de la vida laboral y familiar, Portugal.

INTRODUCTION

The reconciliation of work with personal and family life is an established theme in the field of social sciences. Gender differences and the distinct roles played by women and men in professional and domestic life are among the most covered subjects in recent literature, with most studies pointing to the persistence of gender disparities, in which women take on the greatest share of reproductive work (Rashmi & Kataria, 2022). These differences are largely due to gendered social representations that attribute responsibilities to men in the public sphere and care and domestic roles to women (Amâncio, 1994; Monteiro et al., 2015). Likewise, there has been an increase in the number of articles on family-friendly policies –particularly studies on the role of mothers–, focusing on the potential of public policies to either reduce or reinforce inequalities (Li & Zhang, 2023).

In fact, public policies, mainly established at the national level, can play a major role in determining satisfactory standards of work-life reconciliation and promoting more egalitarian gender relations, although a change in attitudes, particularly regarding gender equality, can also take place independently of public policies (Ramos et al., 2019). Therefore, although the relationship between work and family is significantly influenced by the legal and institutional framework of each life and work context, the dominant social and cultural norms in each country are a key factor in understanding the variations in social policies and the way these are perceived at the individual level (Pfau-Effinger, 2023).

This article presents the results of a quantitative survey of local public administration employees from the Portuguese region of Cávado, specifically the intermunicipal community (CIM) of Cávado. The CIM of Cávado is composed of six municipalities: Amares, Barcelos, Braga, Esposende, Terras de Bouro, and Vila Verde. It is situated in the northern region of the country, occupying an area of 1246 km² (INE, 2022), and is a diverse territory, including coastal municipalities, such as Esposende, and rural mountain municipalities with low population density, such as Amares or Terras de Bouro, as well as densely populated urban municipalities, such as Braga (CIM Cávado, 2024). The aim of the CIM is to create synergies between the different municipalities and to find solutions to shared problems.

The questionnaire was conceived within the scope of a project aimed at promoting work-life reconciliation and gender equality through local public policies. The project began with a diagnosis, in which we carried out the questionnaire survey that underlies the analysis presented in this article. In addition to indicators on professional and domestic practices, the survey included questions on gender attitudes, under the assumption that attitudes towards gender equality have repercussions on the way policies promoting it are received both by the population at large and within a particular work organization (Coron, 2020).

In Portugal, female employment patterns display particular qualities within the European context. The country combines high full-time employment rates for women, a predominantly dual-earner model based on an “early return to full-time work” (Escobedo & Wall, 2015) and low salaries, with signs of what has come to be considered a traditional gender culture (Tavora & Rubery, 2013). This traditional gender culture coexists with a strong state orientation towards the development of public policies promoting equality (Marques et al., 2021).

On the one hand, the predominance of high female employment and full-time work, as well as egalitarian legislation, challenge more traditional views of gender. On the other hand, the entry of women into the labour market was not accompanied by enough care structures and equipment, or an equivalent entry of men into the domestic and care sphere. Thus, the strong presence of women in employment, especially those with younger children, often gives rise to “contradictory and guilt-inducing” attitudes (Ramos et al., 2019) that hinder defamilization (Perista et al., 2016; Marques et al., 2021).

This is the context on which our research is grounded, together with the specific features of employment in local public administration. In 2022, the public sector in Portugal employed 742194 individuals, representing around 15% of total employment – approximately 75% of public administration workers are employed in central administration, with the remainder distributed across regional and local administrations (Direção Geral de Administração e Emprego Público [DGAEP], 2023). This workforce shows a marked aging trend, with a high concentration of employees in older age groups. Between 2011 and 2022 the number of public administration workers declined across all age groups under 55, with the most significant decreases in the 25-34 and 35-44 age groups, representing approximately 11% and 22% of this workforce in 2022, respectively. This trend is pronounced among local public administration workers – in 2022, 36.2% of local public administration employees were aged 55 or over, compared to 31.5% in central public administration (DGAEP, 2023). A strong presence of women is characteristic of the public employment sector, which – in spite of the changes it has undergone – offers more favourable working conditions than the private sector, not only in terms of salaries, but also in terms of working time arrangements and measures to support work-life balance (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions [Eurofound], 2020). In Portugal, as well as the work-life measures that are available to all workers (namely paid and unpaid leaves), public sector workers are legally entitled to flexible work arrangements and continuous working days, which may or may not be possible in the private sector. However, public employment is highly diverse, including occupational disparities that are relevant to understand variations in attitudes towards reconciliation, especially at local level.

In Portuguese public administration, women represent 61.8% of the total number of workers (DGAEP, 2023). There are three main occupational categories in the local public sector and a strong correspondence with specific educational levels: senior officers (professionals with higher education, such as legal experts, engineers, economists, HR managers); technical assistants (technical and administrative occupations, usually with non-tertiary education); and operational assistants (support staff in areas such as cleaning, gardening or maintenance, with basic educational levels). In 2022, around 55% of public administration workers held higher education degrees, while 27% and 18% had secondary and basic education, respectively – these distributions differ in local public administration, where 30.0% held higher education, 31.5% secondary, and 38.5% basic education (DGAEP, 2023). Women are overrepresented among senior officers (68.7%) and technical assistants (73.2%). They are also predominant in middle management positions (56.9%), but most top management positions are still occupied by men (55.7%). There is also a strong occupational gender segregation in specific sectors: for instance, men represent 80.3% of local police agents and 95.9% of fire workers (DGAEP, 2023). The sector is therefore subject to logics of labour market segregation, both horizontal and occupational, as well as vertical (Burchell, 1996; Mora & Ruiz-Castillo, 2004; Monteiro et al., 2015).

This article begins by presenting the Portuguese context. In the following sections, we focus on the methodology, results and their discussion. We finish with the main conclusions and limitations of the study.

PORTUGAL: BETWEEN TRADITIONALISM AND EMBRACING GENDER EQUALITY

Portugal is a particular case with regard to gender equality in the EU context: while it shares traditional values and representations with some countries from the south of Europe (particularly, Italy¹), whether specifically concerning gender or with a consequence for gender equality, it shares other practices with countries from the north of Europe, such as the widespread presence of women in the labour market. In Portugal, the female employment rate for women between the ages of 15 and 64 was 74.0% in 2022, i.e. above the EU-27 average of 69.5% (Eurostat, 2022). Women are more widely represented in the Portuguese labour market than in other countries from the south of Europe, such as Italy or Greece (with employment rates for the same year of 56.4% and 61.4%, respectively) and mainly work full-time, as opposed to countries from the north of Europe. In Portugal, only 7.2% of employed people work part-time, in contrast with 17.8% of employed people in the European Union (Eurostat, 2023a).

However, the significant presence of women in the Portuguese labour market cannot be immediately attributed to more egalitarian gender attitudes, but instead to the fact that Portugal is also one of the Western European countries where people receive some of the lowest work-related income, representing a fourth of the income earned in Nordic or Central European countries (Leão et al., 2024). The need for an income from work results in maternity not having its usual impact of diminishing the presence of women in the labour market, although it still influences career progression and exacerbates inequalities in care work (Leão et al., 2024). Portugal is the European country where women spend most time (more than four hours a day) on household chores or childcare, and where the difference between women and men is the greatest (European Institute for Gender Equality [EIGE], 2022a). The participation of men in household and care responsibilities is a gender equality dimension that is still found to be lacking, with care, reproductive and unpaid work being ensured by women through the “second shift” in the domestic sphere (Blair-Loy et al., 2015; Hochschild & Machung, 1989). As demonstrated by several studies, Portuguese women combine their active participation in the labour market with a domestic and care workload, which continues to be mainly taken on by them (Amâncio & Correia, 2019; Perista et al., 2016; Rodrigues et al., 2015; Wall et al., 2016), with repercussions on women’s mental health and wellbeing (Guerreiro & Carvalho, 2007).

In terms of values, according to the World Values Survey (2017-2022), and taking the Inglehart-Welzel world cultural map as reference, Portugal appears close to 0.5 on the axis of survival (with emphasis on economic and physical security) vs. self-expression values (support for post-materialistic values, including gender equality), therefore already qualifying for the latter, albeit still somewhat tentatively (Haerpfer et al., 2022). Within the axis that measures traditional (including traditional family values) vs. secular values (distance from traditional family values and support for egalitarian gender roles), Portugal continues to appear in the former, although close to 0.0. Therefore, we seem to be facing a changing society (Torres et al., 2013), which is becoming more open and supportive of diversity and gender equality, although still situated within traditional values, characteristic of weaker economies, where families rely more heavily on the state (Haerpfer et al., 2022). This is probably a consequence of the nearly fifty-year-long dictatorship that promoted different roles for women and men both inside and outside the family (Wall et al., 2016), and which only came to an end in 1974 with the Carnation Revolution.

1 In fact, it no longer seems possible to talk about a gender regime specific to the south of Europe, with a resulting set of shared values, as demonstrated by Alonso et al. (2023) in their comparison of Italy and Spain.

When analysing indicators directly linked with gender equality, there are also signs of more traditional views coexisting with more progressive approaches. According to data from the Eurobarometer ([European Commission, 2017](#)), Portugal and Sweden have the greatest consensus in EU-28 countries in totally agreeing that the promotion of gender equality is important to ensure a fair and democratic society (98.0). However, Portugal is close to the EU-28 average in the gender stereotype index (7.3), scoring 7.2, while Sweden scores 3.0 ([EC, 2017](#)).

Ever since the restoration of democracy in 1974, there has been significant development at legislation level, as well as progress in public policies promoting gender equality or affecting gender equality. In the Social Institutions and Gender Index ([Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development \[OECD\], 2023](#)), Portugal gets a score of “very low” for gender discrimination. However, in the EU’s Gender Equality Index, more anchored in measuring practices than legislation, Portugal scored 67.4 in the same year, below the EU-27 average of 70.2 ([EIGE, 2022b](#)).

POLICIES TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY

Although at a less immediate pace than legislation, public policies promoting gender equality have been developing in Portugal and were initially driven by the country’s accession to the then European Economic Community in 1986. In 1997, the first Global Plan for Equality was approved ([Resolution of the Council of Ministers 49/97](#)), with the aim of combating discrimination, promoting equal participation of women and men in the different spheres of life, and ensuring work-life reconciliation for both men and women. Successive national plans followed until the launch of the current National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination 2018-2030 ([Resolution of the Council of Ministers 61/2018](#)).

Important policy measures to tackle gender disparities in the family sphere and in care have also been developed and implemented in the country, namely recognition of the right to work-life reconciliation for all workers (since 1997); compulsory parental leave to be used exclusively by the father (since 1999); incentives for shared parental leave; and the terminology employed, since 2009, determining the use of the expression “parental leave”, as opposed to “maternity” or “paternity”.

Portugal’s administrative structure is highly centralized, with policies being determined mostly by the central government. However, concrete efforts have been made to emphasize the role of municipalities in the promotion of gender equality, namely the creation of the Municipal Plans for Equality, coordinated by municipal councils. Recently, the National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination 2018-2030 encouraged widespread implementation of these in all 308 Portuguese municipalities, as well as the creation of intermunicipal plans for equality. These plans should include measures to promote gender equality internally, such as the implementation of flexible working time arrangements, or incentives to using parental leave, and others aimed at the promotion of gender equality externally, in areas such as education, health, social services, urban planning, or environment. However, at the time of our study, none of the municipalities involved in our research had an equality plan in place.

METHODOLOGY

Procedures

To meet the objectives of the study, a questionnaire survey was conducted with local public administration employees from the Cávado’s CIM in Portugal.

The questionnaire was specifically designed for this study and included attitude indicators and scales previously validated in the literature. The pre-test questionnaire was applied during the month of July 2021 to approximately thirty employees, who formed a diverse sample in terms of gender, age, schooling, professional category and work department. Once the necessary changes were made, the survey was conducted between the months of September 2021 and January 2022, both online and in person, to ensure participation from employees with less access to technology.

All participants were informed of the objectives of the study – the application of the survey was preceded by information sessions about the project, during which workers were encouraged to participate. Participation was voluntary, the anonymity of all employees was ensured, and prior consent was required before answering the questionnaire.

Sample

The universe of the study consists of 3708 local public administration employees from the CIM of Cávado. All employees from the six municipalities were invited to participate in the study by email, letter, or through their direct superiors. A total of 2375 valid responses were obtained, corresponding to a response rate of 64%. Although the questionnaire was distributed to the entire population, participation was voluntary and based on self-selection. Therefore, the sample is considered non-probabilistic, as no random selection process was applied. Nevertheless, we have obtained a statistically robust sample which ensures a high degree of statistical representativeness.

Measures

To analyse gender representations among the study population, we used a variable including 10 statements, in relation to which participants had to express their agreement or disagreement on a four-point Likert scale, where 1 meant “totally agree” and 4 “totally disagree”. We gave priority to the use of measures already validated in international surveys and applied in Portugal (Monteiro et al., 2015; Wall et al., 2016; Leite et al., 2016) – International Social Survey Programme (ISSP Research Group, 1988, 2012); European Social Survey [ESS] (2004); European Values Study [EVS] (1999); we also used a statement of our own, adapted from a previous study (Saleiro & Sales Oliveira, 2018):

- When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women (ESS, 2004)
- A husband's job is to earn money. A wife's job is to look after the home and family (ISSP Research Group, 1988, 2012)
- It's better to have a man as your boss than a woman (Leite et al., 2016; Monteiro et al., 2015)
- All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job (ISSP Research Group, 1988, 2012; Monteiro et al., 2015)
- In the organization where I work, there are jobs that should be done only by men and others only by women (Leite et al., 2016; Monteiro et al., 2015)
- In a couple, the man and woman should share the household chores equally (ISSP Research Group, 2012; Wall et al., 2016)

- The father is just as capable as the mother of looking after a baby under the age of one (ISSP Research Group, 1998, 2012; EVS, 1999)
- Children suffer when fathers are not involved in childcare (ISSP Research Group, 2012; Wall et al., 2016)
- Women already have the same opportunities as men in professional life (Leite et al., 2016)
- Inequality between men and women is a thing of the past (Saleiro & Sales Oliveira, 2018)

Considering the strong social desirability pressure of the topic, and the likelihood of respondents showing socially acceptable behaviour, the original scales were adapted to four-point measures to avoid misuse of the midpoint and to force a choice (Chyung et al., 2017). Data analysis included an initial exploratory review (distributions and missing values), descriptive comparisons of agreement levels by gender, and a principal component analysis (PCA with varimax rotation) to reduce dimensionality and identify components underlying gender attitudes. These components were tested for internal consistency and used in bivariate analysis (t-test and one-way ANOVA), conducted separately for women and men, to assess differences by age, education, geographic area, and parenthood. The results were significant at 0.05. Data was analysed with the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences, IBM SPSS Statistics version 28.0).

RESULTS

Description of the sample

Table 1 presents the main sociodemographic characteristics of the sample by gender. In line with the gender distribution in Portuguese public administration, the sample is mainly composed of women (62.7%). Ages range between 20 and 69 and the average age is approximately 48 (SD=9.6). The most represented age group is 45-54-year-olds (36.9%), followed by 35-44-year-olds (24.0%). Just as with the current age distribution in Portuguese public administration, where there is a pronounced ageing trend (DGAEP, 2023), older employees are more represented than younger ones. Men are more represented in the 55 and over age group, which is a legacy of the more recent massive entry of women into the formal labour market in Portugal.

Most of the respondents completed secondary education (International Standard Classification of Education, ISCED 3) (40.3%), and the percentage of those with higher education (31.1%) is virtually the same as those who only completed basic education (ISCED 2) (28.6%). The large proportion of less qualified workers reflects not only the levels of formal schooling in the country, where most of the population has received less education (Eurostat, 2023b), but also in municipal public administration, where, as previously mentioned, the percentage of workers with higher education still falls short of that in central public administration (DGAEP, 2023). However, as a recent trend in Portuguese society, women are more qualified than men and are more represented in secondary education (45.3% of women and 32.0% of men) and in higher education (32.4% and 28.9% respectively). Men are still significantly more represented in primary education (39.1% of men and 22.3% of women).

The majority of workers are concentrated in urban areas, which are more densely populated, and most of them are women. Regarding parenthood, most respondents have children (80.2%), although more women than men have children.

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of female and male workers

		n	%				
				Women		Men	
Gender ²	Women	1488	62.7				
	Men	886	37.3				
	Total	2374	100.0	n	%	n	%
Age	≤ 34	202	9.8	133	10.0	69	9.5
	35 - 44	493	24.0	322	24.2	170	23.5
	45 - 54	757	36.9	511	38.4	246	34.0
	55 - 59	322	15.7	201	15.1	121	16.7
	≥ 60	280	13.6	162	12.2	118	16.3
	Total	2054	100.0	1329	100.0	724	100.0
Education	Basic	673	28.6	330	22.3	342	39.1
	Secondary	950	40.3	670	45.3	280	32.0
	Tertiary	733	31.1	480	32.4	253	28.9
	Total	2356	100.0	1480	100.0	875	100.0
Geographical area	Urban	1821	77.2	1169	79.2	652	73.9
	Rural	538	22.8	307	20.8	230	26.1
	Total	2359	100.0	1476	100.0	882	100.0
Children	Yes	1888	80.2	711	47.8	391	44.1
	No	467	19.8	777	52.2	495	55.9
	Total	2355	100.0	1488	100.0	886	100.0

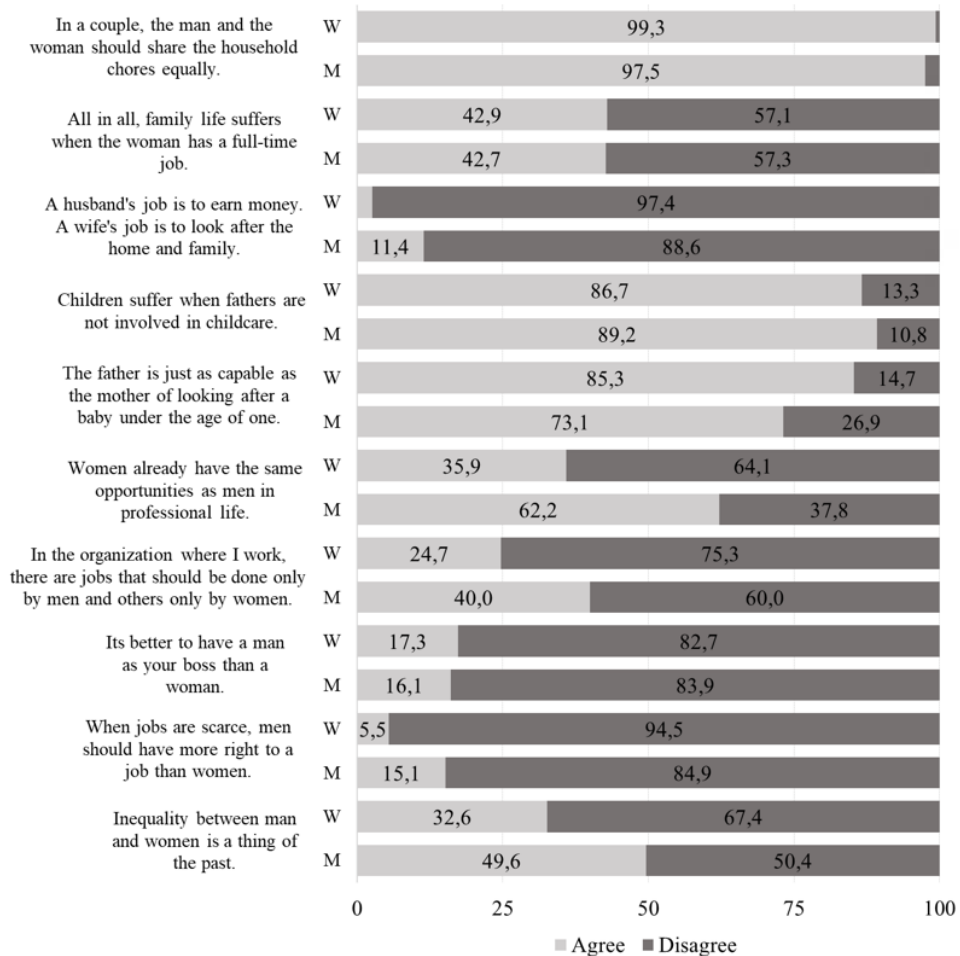
Source: Questionnaire survey "Equality and reconciliation of personal, family and professional life" in the NUTSIII Cávado (2021/22). Own elaboration.

Attitudes towards gender roles

Considering each of the statements individually and merging the totally agreement/totally disagreement and the agreement/disagreement levels, results show tendentially egalitarian gender attitudes, although these are more evident in the group of women (Figure 1).

The statement that points towards a stereotyped view of gender roles, where men are expected to be the economic providers of the family and women are expected to care for the home and family, has the highest levels of disagreement. For women, this disagreement is almost consensual, while for men, 11.4% still agree with the statement. The statement with the highest level of agreement is that which indicates the need for an equal division of household chores between women and men, with the highest level of consensus both for men and for women.

² The variable "gender" was measured through the question "Do you identify yourself as: a) male, b) female, c) other. Which?" Since only one person identified with the "other" category, it was not included in the analysis.

Figure 1. Attitudes of female workers and male workers towards gender equality (%)

Source: Questionnaire survey “Equality and reconciliation of personal, family and professional life” in the NUTSIII Cávado (2021/22). Own elaboration.

To reduce multidimensionality and increase the interpretability of data, a principal component analysis (PCA) with orthogonal rotation (varimax) was conducted. The adequacy of the data for PCA was confirmed by the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test, with a score of 0.768 – above the usually considered acceptable 0.6 (Reis, 2001) –, and by the Bartlett’s test of sphericity, which was significant ($\chi^2_{(45)} = 3460.292, p < 0.05$). The analysis of eigenvalues indicates that three factors meet the Kaiser criterion (eigenvalue > 1) and explain 54.7% of the total variance. The

scree plot also showed inflections retaining three factors. Based on these statistical results and existing literature, three principal components were retained (Table 2).

Component 1 – *gender attitudes in the work-family interface* – includes statements that point towards stereotyped gender views concerning the role that women and men should play in employment, in organizations and in the family, and specifically, in the way of reconciling work and family. Component 2 – *gender attitudes in housework and care* – includes statements referring to egalitarian social representations in terms of the division of household and care responsibilities between women and men. Component 3 – *perceptions of the evolution of gender equality* – includes views on gender equality at a global level, indicating attitudes of gender blindness or gender (un)awareness. Among the three, component 2 is associated with the most egalitarian attitudes, followed by component 1, and then component 3.

Based on these components, we created composite variables by calculating the mean of employees' responses to the items with the highest loadings in each dimension. For component 2, item scores were reversed to ensure that higher values consistently correspond to more egalitarian attitudes (i.e. 4 = highest level of agreement).

To assess the internal consistency of each component, we calculated Cronbach's alpha, the Spearman-Brown coefficient, and the average of inter-item correlations. Component 1 proved to have adequate consistency [$\alpha = 0.699$; average of inter-item correlations = 0.47, i.e. within the 0.15-0.50 range recommended by Clark and Watson (1995)]. Component 2 presented a lower alpha ($\alpha = 0.500$); although values below 0.6 are usually considered to reflect poor reliability, they are not necessarily unacceptable – particularly in exploratory research or when components include a small number of items, as is the case here (George & Mallery, 2003). Moreover, the average inter-item correlation for this factor was 0.51, suggesting a strong internal relationship between the items. Component 3 obtained an alpha of 0.618 and an inter-item correlation of 0.45, which is considered acceptable within the context of exploratory analyses.

Subsequently, and to understand to what extent the independent variables of the study explain the existence of significant differences in each of the components, we conducted several bivariate analyses, performing t-tests for the differences between means and analyses of variance (one-way ANOVA), in two subsamples: women and men.

Gender attitudes in the work-family interface

Table 3 shows the results of the statistical tests carried out for the first dimension, where higher mean scores reflect more egalitarian gender attitudes. Overall, workers tend to reveal egalitarian social representations regarding gender division in employment ($M=3.12$, $SD=0.526$).

Table 2. Gender attitudes. PCA with varimax rotation

Variables	Principal components		
	Gender attitudes in the work-family interface	Gender attitudes in housework and care	Perceptions of the evolution of gender equality
When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women.	0.736	-0.211	0.251
A husband's job is to earn money. A wife's job is to look after the home and family.	0.695	-0.224	0.197
It's better to have a man as your boss than a woman.	0.690	-0.044	0.045
All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job.	0.622	0.042	-0.109
In the organization where I work, there are jobs that should be done only by men and others only by women.	0.580	-0.076	0.172
In a couple, the man and woman should share the household chores equally.	-0.145	0.730	-0.077
The father is just as capable as the mother of looking after a baby under the age of one.	-0.207	0.691	0.147
Children suffer when fathers are not involved in childcare.	0.055	0.685	-0.168
Women already have the same opportunities as men in professional life.	0.069	-0.050	0.848
Inequality between men and women is a thing of the past.	0.205	-0.044	0.791
% variance explained	23.4	15.9	15.5
α (average inter-item correlation)	0.699(0.47)	0.500(0.51)	0.618(0.45)

Source: Questionnaire survey "Equality and reconciliation of personal, family and professional life" in the NUTIII Cávado (2021/22). Own elaboration.

Table 3. Gender attitudes of female workers and male workers regarding employment

		Mean	SD	Statistic	Mean Difference
Gender	Women	3.175	0.467	$t(1303.376)=6.210^{***}$	
	Men	3.018	0.602		
Women					
Age	≤ 34	3.515	0.388	$F(4.1198)=24.016^{***}$	≤ 34 ≠ 35-44 ^{***}
	35 - 44	3.240	0.427		≤ 34 ≠ 45-45 ^{***}
	45 - 54	3.184	0.441		≤ 34 ≠ 55-59 ^{***}
	55 - 59	3.105	0.453		≤ 34 ≠ 60 or more ^{***}
	≥ 60	3.020	0.509		55-59 ≠ 35-44 [*]
					≥ 60 ≠ 35-44 ^{***}
≥ 60 ≠ 45-54 ^{***}					
Education	Basic	2.947	0.474	$F(2.1309)=94.273^{***}$	Basic ≠ Secondary ^{**}
	Secondary	3.122	0.427		Basic ≠ Secondary ^{***}
	Tertiary	3.387	0.425		Secondary ≠ Tertiary ^{***}
Geographical area	Urban	3.175	0.470	$t(1304)=0.424$	
	Rural	3.162	0.456		
Children	Yes	3.130	0.461	$t(1308)=-7.350^{***}$	
	No	3.363	0.449		
Men					
Age	≤ 34	3.232	0.698	$F(4.658)=14.639^{***}$	55-59 ≠ ≤ 34 [*]
	35 - 44	3.246	0.524		55-59 ≠ 35-44 ^{***}
	45 - 54	3.093	0.535		≥ 60 ≠ ≤ 34 ^{***}
	55 - 59	2.918	0.553		≥ 60 ≠ 35-44 ^{***}
	≥ 60	2.773	0.582		≥ 60 ≠ 45-54 ^{***}
Education	Basic	2.708	0.597	$F(2.758)=102.675^{***}$	Basic ≠ Secondary ^{***}
	Secondary	3.032	0.488		Basic ≠ Tertiary ^{***}
	Tertiary	3.389	0.497		Secondary ≠ Tertiary ^{***}
Geographical area	Urban	3.079	0.586	$t(760)=5.228^{***}$	
	Rural	2.819	0.607		
Children	Yes	2.985	0.591	$t(759)=-3.049^{**}$	
	No	3.148	0.630		

* $p<0.05$ ** $p<0.01$ *** $p<0.001$

Source: Questionnaire survey "Equality and reconciliation of personal, family and professional life" in the NUTSIII Cávado (2021/22). Own elaboration.

The analysis shows significant differences between men and women, indicating that, on average, women ($M=3.175$, $SD=0.467$) hold more egalitarian attitudes than men ($M=3.018$, $SD=0.602$) concerning gender attitudes in the work-family interface [$t(1303.376) = 6.210$, $p = 0.000$].

There are also significant differences in terms of age groups for women [$F(4.1198) = 24.016$, $p = 0.000$] and for men [$F(4.658) = 14.639$, $p = 0.000$]. In the sub-sample of women, younger individuals (until the age of 34) present the most egalitarian social representations ($M=3.515$, $SD=0.388$), whereas older ones present the least egalitarian views ($M=3.020$, $SD=0.509$). As we progress along the age groups, mean scores decrease. Significant differences were found between the group of younger workers and all the other age groups, as well as between the older age groups (55-59 years old and 60 or older) and the groups immediately preceding them (35-44 years old and 45-54 years old). However, in the sub-sample of men, workers aged 35-44 years show relatively more egalitarian attitudes ($M=3.246$, $SD=0.524$) than the youngest ones ($M=3.232$, $SD=0.698$). Significant differences were found between the oldest age group and the three age categories immediately preceding, and between those aged 55-59 years and the two youngest age groups.

The level of schooling also influences individuals' gender attitudes for both women and men [$F(2.1309) = 94.273$, $p = 0.000$ and $F(2.758) = 102.675$, $p = 0.000$, respectively], as significant differences were found between all educational levels under analysis. As the level of schooling increases, workers tend to reveal more egalitarian social representations, on average. Workers who only completed basic education present less egalitarian attitudes than those who completed secondary education or higher education, on average. The latter are those with the most egalitarian social representations, both in the sub-sample of women and of men, although women show higher levels of egalitarian views than men in all three educational categories.

The geographic area impacted significantly the attitudes of men ($t(760) = 5.228$), with those working in urban areas showing more egalitarian attitudes ($M=3.079$, $SD=0.586$) but showed no significant impact in the group of women.

Finally, parenthood appears to be related to less egalitarian attitudes, as individuals without children showed more egalitarian views than those with children, both in the subsample of women [$t(1308) = -7.350$, $p = 0.000$], and of men's [$t(759) = -3.049$, $p = 0.000$]. The difference between having or not children is greater for men. Men with children show less egalitarian views ($M=2.985$, $SD=0.591$) than women with children ($M=3.130$, $SD=0.461$), and women without children present more egalitarian views ($M=3.363$, $SD=0.449$) than men without children ($M=3.148$, $SD=0.630$).

Gender attitudes in housework and care

Just as in component 1, the results show significant effects between women and men [$t(1446.585) = 4.981$, $p = 0.000$] in the component that measures representations regarding household and care responsibilities, with women revealing more egalitarian attitudes ($M=3.380$, $SD=0.459$) than men ($M=3.267$, $SD=0.526$) (see [table 4](#)).

Age also proved to be a statistically significant variable, both in the case of women [$F(4.1197) = 14.745$, $p = 0.000$], and of men [$F(4.663) = 10.611$, $p = 0.000$]. Overall, younger women show more egalitarian attitudes than older women, especially in the lower age groups (until the age of 34) ($M=3.648$, $SD=0.402$) which has a statistically significant difference from all the others, and the group immediately after it – 35-44 years old ($M=3.416$, $SD=0.446$), which is also significantly different from the oldest age group, 60 and over ($M=3.249$, $SD=0.502$). The youngest men ($M=3.385$, $SD=0.534$), on the other hand, only differ significantly from the oldest ones ($M=3.052$, $SD=0.521$), with no significant differences from the 55-59 age group ($M=3.220$,

SD=0.476). The second youngest age group of men, 35-44 years old ($M=3.449$, $SD=0.478$), in turn, differs significantly from the 55-59 age group ($M=3.220$, $SD=0.476$).

Education also has a significant effect on the representations of women [$F(2.1314) = 23.308$, $p = 0.000$] and men [$F(2.765) = 35.528$, $p = 0.000$] regarding attitudes towards domestic chores and caring. Both women ($M=3.495$, $SD=0.465$) and men ($M=3.458$, $SD=0.492$) with higher education have more egalitarian attitudes than women and men with lower degrees, respectively. The difference lies in the fact that in the groups of men there is also a statistically significant difference between those with secondary education ($M=3.303$, $SD=0.498$) and those with only basic education ($M=3.086$, $SD=0.521$).

Just as in the previous component, the geographic area impacted significantly the attitudes of men [$t(767) = 5.129$, $p = 0.000$], with those working in urban areas showing more egalitarian attitudes ($M=3.321$, $SD=0.515$) but showed no significant impact in the group of women.

Finally, parenthood appears to be related to less egalitarian attitudes for women [$t(1313) = -4.245$, $p = 0.000$], as women without children ($M=3.489$, $SD=0.466$) showed more egalitarian views than those with children ($M=3.355$, $SD=0.454$). However, in the sub-sample of men, this variable showed no significant effect on this component.

Perceptions of the evolution of gender equality

In component 3, significant differences could be noticed according to gender [$t(2131) = 11.697$, $p = 0.000$], with women presenting more awareness of the persistence of gender inequalities ($M=2.775$, $SD=0.731$) than men ($M=2.393$, $SD=0.721$) (see [table 5](#)).

Significant differences by age groups were found in the sub-sample of women [$F(4.1216) = 8.420$, $p = 0.000$], but showed no effect for men. Younger women (until the age of 34) present more egalitarian social representations on average than all the other age groups ($M=3.096$, $SD=0.720$). As age increases, gender-awareness views diminish, i.e. those that recognize that there is still some room for improvement in the current state of gender equality.

The level of schooling also has significant impact on the assessments of the current state of gender equality in Portugal, for both women [$F(2.1341) = 53.813$, $p = 0.000$], and men [$F(2.776) = 5.307$, $p = 0.000$]. Higher levels of schooling are associated with greater awareness of gender inequalities. Workers with basic education are, on average, less aware than those with secondary education, or higher education. The latter are those with greater awareness. In the group of women, significant differences were found between all three educational levels, while for men, these differences are only significant between basic education ($M=2.288$, $SD=0.671$) and higher education ($M=2.489$, $SD=0.772$). Having children or not is another element with an impact on assessments of the current situation of gender equality in Portugal. Significant differences could be noticed between workers with and without children, for both women and men. Women without children ($M=3.026$, $SD=0.674$) present a less positive view of the current situation of gender equality than women with children, on average ($M=2.718$, $SD=0.731$). In the same line, men without children show more gender awareness ($M = 2.519$, $SD=0.782$), than those with children ($M=2.368$, $SD=0.701$).

Finally, geographic area does not seem to determine individuals' views of the current situation of gender equality in these groups of workers.

Table 4. Gender attitudes of female workers and male workers regarding the division of household and care responsibilities

		Mean	SD	Statistic	Mean Difference
Gender	Women	3.380	0.459	$t(1446.585)=4.981^{***}$	
	Men	3.267	0.526		
Women					
Age	≤ 34	3.648	0.402	$F(4.1197)=14.745^{***}$	≤ 34 ≠ 35-44 ^{***}
	35 - 44	3.416	0.446		≤ 34 ≠ 45-45 ^{***}
	45 - 54	3.363	0.455		≤ 34 ≠ 55-59 ^{***}
	55 - 59	3.335	0.438		≤ 34 ≠ ≥ 60 ^{***}
	≥ 60	3.249	0.502		35-44 ≠ ≥ 60 [*]
Education	Basic	3.282	0.449	$F(2.1314)=23.308^{***}$	Tertiary ≠ Basic ^{***}
	Secondary	3.339	0.443		Tertiary ≠ Secondary ^{***}
	Tertiary	3.495	0.465		
Geographical area	Urban	3.385	0.461	$t(1307)=1.110$	
	Rural	3.351	0.455		
Children	Yes	3.355	0.454	$t(1313)=-4.245^{***}$	
	No	3.489	0.466		
Men					
Age	≤ 34	3.385	0.534	$F(4.663)=10.611^{***}$	≥ 60 ≠ ≤ 34 ^{**}
	35 - 44	3.449	0.478		≥ 60 ≠ 35-44 ^{***}
	45 - 54	3.295	0.535		≥ 60 ≠ 45-54 ^{**}
	55 - 59	3.220	0.476		55-59 ≠ 35-44 [*]
	≥ 60	3.052	0.521		
Education	Basic	3.086	0.521	$F(2.765)=35.528^{***}$	Basic ≠ Secondary ^{***}
	Secondary	3.303	0.498		Basic ≠ Tertiary ^{***}
	Tertiary	3.458	0.492		Secondary ≠ Tertirary ^{**}
Geographical area	Urban	3.321	0.515	$t(767)=5.129^{***}$	
	Rural	3.097	0.526		
Children	Yes	3.268	0.514	$t(764)=-0.364$	
	No	3.285	0.567		

* $p<0.05$ ** $p<0.01$ *** $p<0.001$

Source: Questionnaire survey “Equality and reconciliation of personal, family and professional life” in the NUTSIII Cávado (2021/22). Own elaboration.

Table 5. *Perceptions of female workers and male workers of the evolution of gender equality*

		Mean	SD	Statistic	Mean Difference
Gender	Women	2.775	0.731	$t(2131)=11.697^{***}$	
	Men	2.393	0.721		
Women					
Age	≤ 34	3.096	0.720	$F(4.1216)=8.420^{***}$	≤ 34 ≠ 35-44*
	35 - 44	2.851	0.730		≤ 34 ≠ 45-45***
	45 - 54	2.751	0.727		≤ 34 ≠ 55-59***
	55 - 59	2.720	0.685		≤ 34 ≠ ≥ 60***
	≥ 60	2.641	0.717		
Education	Basic	2.530	0.718	$F(2.1341)=53.813^{***}$	Basic ≠ Secondary**
	Secondary	2.698	0.695		Basic ≠ Tertiary***
	Tertiary	3.044	0.700		Secondary ≠ Tertiary***
Geographical area	Urban	2.780	0.725	$t(1336)=0.599$	
	Rural	2.751	0.750		
Children	Yes	2.718	0.731	$t(430.327)=-6.563^{***}$	
	No	3.026	0.674		
Men					
Age	≤ 34	2.477	0.757	$F(4.669)=0.582$	
	35 - 44	2.466	0.744		
	45 - 54	2.407	0.739		
	55 - 59	2.345	0.687		
	≥ 60	2.400	0.719		
Education	Basic	2.288	0.671	$F(2.776)=5.307^{**}$	Basic ≠ Tertiary**
	Secondary	2.416	0.715		
	Tertiary	2.489	0.772		
Geographical area	Urban	2.398	0.747	$t(359.198)=0.375$	
	Rural	2.377	0.640		
Children	Yes	2.368	0.701	$t(775)=-2.374^{*}$	
	No	2.519	0.782		

* $p<0.05$ ** $p<0.01$ *** $p<0.001$

Source: Questionnaire survey "Equality and reconciliation of personal, family and professional life" in the NUTSIII Cávado (2021/22). Own elaboration.

DISCUSSION

In general, the representations expressed by local public administration employees from the CIM of Cávado tend towards agreeing with equality between men and women. This is in line with the path followed by Portuguese society over the last fifty years, after breaking with a dictatorship opposed to changes in gender roles within families, at work and in society at large. However, in all the components of analysis, women consistently showed more egalitarian social representations than men. It is mainly women who feel the effects of gender inequalities on their rights and on their well-being. In this sense, they are much more aware that equal opportunities between men and women are still largely unfulfilled, as shown by the results of component 3, the one with the greatest difference between the appreciation of men and women. This difference in attitudes based on gender has been noted in the literature, with women usually having more egalitarian attitudes in countries that are less egalitarian, although with some country variations (McDaniel, 2008). The high rates of women's participation in the Portuguese labour market also influence this difference, since it is recognized that women with paid work tend to have more egalitarian attitudes than those without (Khouidja & Fleichmann, 2018; Lietzmann & Froderman, 2023; Preston, 2023).

The predominance of egalitarian attitudes is visible both in the sphere of work and in the sphere of household and care responsibilities. However, in general, the most egalitarian social representations were found regarding the participation of men in private life. The component relating to the sharing of responsibilities for household chores and care is the one with the least differences between the overall average for men and women and where it is possible to notice a generational effect, with men from younger generations presenting more egalitarian views than older ones. In line with what has been demonstrated by Cunha et al. (2017), Escobedo & Wall (2015), or Farré et al. (2022), for the case of Portugal and Spain, tendentially egalitarian attitudes regarding the role of men in the family can already be seen. This is partly due to investments in public policies, or to an openness towards having gender equality policies implemented, even though the least egalitarian social representations continue to come from men. Also, a result of the evolution of public policies, education seems to have an influence on the formation of more egalitarian attitudes, both in the case of women and men.

The participation of women in the formal labour market already has a longer tradition in Portugal, which has one of the highest female full-time employment rates in Europe. However, although there is broad consensus on the participation of women in the labour market, there is less agreement on the impact that participation has on family life. In fact, if women's pursuit of full-time employment does not go hand in hand with men entering the spheres of work, home, and care, the quality of domestic and care work could suffer. This is particularly true in countries like Portugal, where low salaries, especially among lower and medium-skilled workers, leave little room for outsourcing domestic services.

There is still dissonance between the level of social representations, tendentially egalitarian, and the level of practices, which continues to be based on traditional views of gender roles (Amâncio & Correia, 2019; Ramos et al., 2019; Cunha & Atalaia, 2019). This was also the finding for this same sample in the study of work-life reconciliation practices (Barroso et al., 2024).

On the other hand, the equal participation of men and women in the labour market does not necessarily mean they perform the same tasks, as evidenced by one of the statements where there was less disagreement, concerning the existence, in local public administration, of tasks preferably aimed at women and others aimed at men. In the dimension of work, representations of horizontal and vertical segregation still prevail, as other studies of local public administration workers have already shown (Monteiro et al., 2015). The essentialization of the existence of jobs for men and women in local public administration, which includes

some of the most traditionally gendered professions, especially those that are less qualified / more manual and require physical strength or resistance to bad weather, continues to be more associated with male stereotypes. However, in our study, and contrary to the previous survey (Monteiro et al., 2015), women also stand out as having more egalitarian attitudes than men in this variable, which may be due to the fact that we are dealing with a more highly qualified sample of women. Similarly, it does not mean parity at the level of leadership roles, since women were only a majority at the level of middle managers (DGAEP, 2023). And, although much more of a minority than in previous surveys (Monteiro et al., 2015), but here following the same trend, for 16% of men and 17% of women there is still a preference for leadership roles to be occupied by men, which highlights the apparent greater difficulty in eradicating the naturalization of vertical discrimination, even among women. In this sense, it can also be affirmed that the predominance of egalitarian views regarding the participation of women in paid work exists alongside segmented views of occupations, in a labour market that continues to be very segregated, both vertically and horizontally.

In spite of the predominance of egalitarian views, the data confirm variations in gender attitudes according to certain sociodemographic variables. The role of education, which continues to be a vehicle for the promotion of egalitarian ideals (Abrantes, 2016), is noticeable in the differentiation between attitudes according to the level of schooling, with more qualified individuals demonstrating more egalitarian attitudes, in line with the results obtained in previous studies (Du et al., 2021; Rivera-Garrido, 2022; Wall & Amâncio, 2007). Thus, education proves to be an ally of gender equality and of the awareness that it is not yet fully implemented. In this study, higher education, even more than age in the case of men, was shown to have an effect on egalitarian attitudes in all three components under analysis.

Another important variable concerns parenthood and the experience of having children or not. The data show that more egalitarian attitudes towards work-family reconciliation and towards gender roles in the sphere of household and care responsibilities prevail within the group that do not have children, especially amongst women, being less present among those who do have them. As suggested by Stone (2007) and Stone and Lovejoy (2021), there are a number of idealized expectations that, once a child is born, collide with reality, namely at the level of the effects of maternity on the careers of women, or of the lack of organizational or institutional support for reconciliation, resulting in the traditionalization of gender roles (Stone, 2007; Boehnke, 2011).

Regarding the geographic area, it seems to have more impact in the group of men, where egalitarian views are more widespread in urban areas than in rural ones. Urban areas provide more economic opportunities for the participation of women, particularly in education and formal employment, and more and better services, such as transport or childcare services, combined with a more diverse context, greater possibilities for anonymity and, therefore, less social control (Evans & UNU-WIDER, 2017; Pandey & Kumar, 2021), which can explain differences in attitudes between urban and rural areas. Additionally, the fact that there are significant differences between workers from rural and urban areas can mean that those very organizations have their own gender regimes (Connell, 2006) that are not immune to context and the way workers are influenced by that context. However, women workers seem to be resisting it, as no significant effects of geographic area were found for women workers.

Finally, age is also a relevant factor in explaining variations in attitudes: overall, in our study, younger people, especially working women, have more egalitarian attitudes than their older coworkers. When particularly analysing the perceptions on the evolution of gender equality over time, the experience of changes that have already taken place leads to more optimistic views of the evolution of gender equality (Connell, 2006). Younger generations, especially women, in turn, have greater expectations for the future and are more demanding in terms of the breadth of change and, thus, have fewer positive views of the evolution of

equality. In the specific case of Portugal, the end of the dictatorship in 1974 is an essential milestone that explains generational differences: while the older generations have witnessed exceptional changes in gender roles and in the rights of women over the last 50 years, the younger generations – especially those born after the consolidation of democracy – are less likely to value the changes that have already taken place. This reading is not straightforward in the case of men, reinforcing the relevance of gender-disaggregated analyses.

Moreover, the fact that older people are those with less egalitarian views in the dimension of work and family may result in them having more modest expectations and demands concerning what gender equality should be. In addition, women show a linear and recurrent tendency for each new generation to have more egalitarian representations than the previous generation, and this seems to be changing in the case of men, reinforcing again the relevance of gender disaggregated analysis. Recent literature has, for example, studied the electoral behaviour of men and women in Europe (e.g. [Abou-Chadi, 2024](#)), showing a divergence between the two, especially in the case of the young population, with men joining parties with ideologies that are adverse to gender equality ([Carbonell, 2025](#)). In line with this, the present study indicates that younger workers attitudes (up to the age of 34) do not differ significantly from those of the generations that precede them (particularly those aged 35-44). Significant differences were found between younger and older workers (60 or over), but only in the first two components. In the third component, which concerns the dimension of awareness of achieving gender equality, age has no significant effect in the group of men, which means that they do not differ from any previous generation, including those over 60, in the way they assess the evolution of gender equality over time.

CONCLUSIONS

This study, based on a sample of 2375 local public administration employees from the Intermunicipal Community of Cávado, contributes to the debate on Portugal's specific features regarding attitudes towards gender equality.

Over the last decades, Portuguese society has experienced notable changes in equality between women and men. This study suggests that these changes, at the level of social representations, are mainly being personified by women, younger and more qualified people, and in urban contexts. However, these changes coexist alongside a traditional gender ideology that is an obstacle to the country's full modernization ([Amâncio & Correia, 2019](#); [Tavora & Rubery, 2013](#)) and reflects the crossroads to modernity that have characterized Portugal ([Viegas & da Costa, 2000](#)). Even so, as this study has shown once again, Portugal consistently has more egalitarian representations regarding the sharing of responsibilities than other southern European countries. Looking at the [EIGE \(2023\)](#) indicators measuring beliefs about attitudes and roles of men and women regarding unpaid childcare and housework in the EU-27 in 2022, we see that, in that directly measuring equal sharing of responsibility for household chores, Portugal (66.8%), is in a very similar proportion to that found for the Cávado region under analysis here (65.5%) and comes in just behind Spain (68.9%) in total agreement, further away from Italy and Greece (54.3% and 51.5% respectively). In terms of representations, there seem to be two blocs in southern Europe, with the former above the EU-27 average (57.2%) and the latter below it. These representations, although not automatic and in the same proportion, as this study also found when measuring practices for the Cávado region ([Barroso et al., 2024](#)), may have some translation into practices, if we consider Portugal's evolution (although still insufficient) in the "Time" dimension of the EIGE Index, from 47.5% in 2022 to 67.8% in 2024 ([EIGE, 2024](#)). Even so, Portuguese men, unlike Spanish men, show lower total agreement than Italian and Greek women ([EIGE, 2023](#)), showing the

relevance of gender in this type of analysis. This analysis becomes more complex if we add the non-linear attitudes of new generations of men, which this study also already indicates.

Therefore, the discussion of attitudes towards gender and gender roles continues to be topical and pertinent, while continued action is necessary, namely in terms of policies promoting gender equality. These policies are currently threatened by the growing anti-gender backlash in Europe (Benpeza, 2025). In southern Europe, the paths seem to be different, with continued investment in Spain and Portugal, and currently challenging investment in Italy and Greece, but which the indexes, such as those of the EIGE, do not yet fully reflect. However, in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index 2024 rankings, Portugal is in 17th place, up 15 places, while Italy is in 87th place, down eight places (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2024). Furthermore, we cannot ignore the complexity of the dynamics of gender equality representations and practices in each country, which are affected by development, political, and economic dynamics, particularly crises.

Our study makes it clear that, despite tendentially egalitarian attitudes, there is a growing need for public policies that place men at the centre of their approaches, since they are the ones who continue to present fewer egalitarian attitudes. Special attention should be given to education policies, given the resistance of younger men to egalitarian values and the effects of schooling in promoting gender equality among men. Schools should also continue, or even strengthen, their role in promoting gender equality, particularly in the current times of challenge and backlash. Likewise, it is essential for policies to be designed according to the sociodemographic characteristics of their target audiences and with immediate knowledge of the geographic areas in which they will be implemented.

This study paves the way for future research, and we acknowledge some limitations to be considered. First, as it focuses on local public administration employees in a specific Portuguese region, findings are context-dependent and should be interpreted with caution when applied to other sectors or areas with different institutional and cultural characteristics. Second, we believe our data can be further explored and complemented in the future with multivariate analysis.

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DECLARATION OF USE OF AI

The authors of this article declare to have used the language platform DeepL, based on deep learning models, to assist the first revision of the translation. The article was later

translated, reviewed, and proofread by a professional human translator. The authors take full responsibility for the content, interpretations, and conclusions of this work.

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