



# OFICINA DO CES

**ces**

Centro de Estudos Sociais  
Laboratório Associado  
Universidade de Coimbra

**LINA COELHO**

**WOMEN, THE ECONOMY AND THE STATE IN  
PORTUGAL: A CRITICAL LOOK**

**Setembro de 2015  
Oficina n.º 428**

**Lina Coelho**

**Women, the Economy and the State in Portugal: A Critical Look**

**Oficina do CES n.º 428  
Setembro de 2015**

**OFICINA DO CES**

**ISSN 2182-7966**

Publicação seriada do

**Centro de Estudos Sociais**

Praça D. Dinis

Colégio de S. Jerónimo, Coimbra

**Correspondência:**

Apartado 3087

3000-995 COIMBRA, Portugal

**Lina Coelho\***

## **Women, the Economy and the State in Portugal: A Critical Look<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** The economic and social status of Portuguese women has improved intensely over recent decades. This represents an important part of the structural changes that influenced various dimensions of economic and social life as well as the relationship between State and Community. Public resources and policies proved to be crucial for that process, which was instigated and shaped by the State, as legislator, service provider and employer. This paper intends to document and discuss this process and to show how it was only partially assimilated into the sphere of values and representations, thus creating social paradoxes and inconsistencies. It will be shown that these have been alleviated by the deep class inequalities that characterize Portuguese society. Moreover, the current crisis is putting the actual achievements in gender equality under threat.

**Keywords:** gender contract; female employment; path-departure; inequalities in Portugal.

### **As mulheres, a economia e o Estado em Portugal: uma apreciação crítica**

**Resumo:** O estatuto económico e social das mulheres portuguesas melhorou drasticamente nas últimas décadas, através de um processo complexo, com efeitos múltiplos, que perpassam a sociedade, a economia e as relações entre o Estado e a Comunidade. Os recursos públicos foram fundamentais neste processo, determinado e moldado pelo Estado enquanto legislador, prestador de serviços e empregador. Este artigo procura documentar e discutir esta mudança profunda cuja assimilação, apenas parcial, na esfera dos valores e das representações dominantes criou não conformidades e contradições cuja acomodação tem sido conseguida no quadro das grandes desigualdades de classe que caracterizam a sociedade portuguesa. Por outro lado, a crise atual coloca novas ameaças às realizações já conseguidas no domínio da igualdade de género.

**Palavras-chave:** contrato de género; emprego feminino; rutura de trajetória; desigualdades em Portugal.

### **Les femmes, l'économie et l'État au Portugal: une appréciation critique**

**Résumé:** Le statut économique et social des femmes portugaises s'est considérablement amélioré au cours des dernières décennies, à travers un processus complexe, avec des effets multiples, qui ont touché la société, l'économie et les relations entre l'État et la communauté. Les ressources publiques ont été cruciales dans ce processus, qui a été guidé et façonné par l'État, en tant que législateur, fournisseur de services et employeur. Le but de ce texte est de documenter et discuter ce processus dont l'assimilation, à peine partielle, dans la sphère des valeurs et représentations dominantes a créé des contradictions qui ont été accommodées dans le contexte de profondes inégalités de

---

\* Faculdade de Economia da Universidade de Coimbra and Centro de Estudos Sociais da Universidade de Coimbra, Portugal. Contact: lcoelho@fe.uc.pt

<sup>1</sup> This article was written as part of the project "FINFAM – Finances, Gender and Power: how are Portuguese families managing their finances in the context of the crisis?" (PTDC/IVC-SOC/4823/2012 – FCOMP-01-0124-FEDER-029372), financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), through the Operational Programme Factors of Competitiveness (COMPETE) and nationally through the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT).

classe caractérisant la société portugaise. Par ailleurs, la crise actuelle menace les progrès que l'on jugeait acquis dans le domaine de l'égalité des genres.

**Mots-clés:** contrat de genre; emploi féminin; interruption de trajectoire; inégalités au Portugal.

## **Introduction**

Over the last four decades an enormous change in the economic and social status of women has occurred in Portugal. This has had profound consequences both on intra-household relationships and on the way families interact with other institutions such as the market, the State and private non-profit organizations. It will be argued in this article that such a process of change implied a significant departure from the former Portuguese gender contract and has been key to the whole social regulation system.

The present outcome in terms of gender equality has its roots in the aftermath of the 1974 democratic revolution, which may thus be conceptualized as the critical juncture in the development of a new gender contract in Portugal. However, the present situation is not free of contradictions and tensions, namely because social and economic inequalities are still at the core of the whole social regulation system.

In spite of the inequality it implies, the high employment rate of Portuguese women provides them (even the least qualified) their own monetary income, thus highlighting their contribution to the household budget rather than domestic work. Paid work is, in fact, a powerful tool for the empowerment of women as it contributes to increasing their intra-household bargaining power; enables them to make their own economic decisions; and allows them to enhance their self-determination, including, in some cases, being able to escape from unsatisfactory marriages.

This article intends to document and discuss the dynamics of gender equality in Portugal over the last few decades and the way it came to terms with class inequalities. It will be argued that the Portuguese society is halfway to a full transformation in what concerns gender equality, as this has been only partially assimilated into the sphere of values and representations, thus creating awkward social implications. Moreover, the actual crisis is putting actual advancements under threat.

## **Gender Contracts, Welfare Provisioning and Path-Breaking Ruptures**

Southern European countries show specific traits in the combination of State, Market and Family as welfare providers, thus implying specificities in what some authors call

the ‘gender contract’. This constitutes “a pattern of implicit rules on mutual roles and responsibilities, on rights and obligations, and it defines how the social relations between women and men, between genders and generations, and also social production and reproduction are organized in our societies” (Rantalaiho *apud* Gerhard, Knij and Lewis, 2002: 116). This kind of pattern must be acceptable to be effective and so differs according to the society and the period involved.

This approach conceptualizes gender as the result of social and power relations between the sexes that contributes to their differentiation (the identities, characteristics and social positions of men and women are clearly distinct) and hierarchy (men, masculinity and the related social position being superior to women, femininity and the respective social status) (Hirdman, 1996; Gerhard, Knij and Lewis, 2002: 116).

The use of the term ‘contract’ in such a context has been criticized on the grounds that it is not a formal organized contract. Furthermore, it does not mean that it is balanced or that parties involved in the contract are equal, given the unequal power and access to resources for men and women (Gerhard, Knij and Lewis, 2002). However, it is a valuable conceptual framework “we might use in order to analyse the changing practices of a transforming reality” (Hirdman, 1996: 35).

Birgit Pfau-Effinger complexified and reframed the concept under the term “gender arrangement” which varies from the gender contract by the importance accorded to culture (Pfau-Effinger, 1998, 2002, 2004, 2008). It comprises a “gender order” and a “cultural model” and implies that culture and social order are designed to be relatively autonomous. Therefore, consistency between them is not assumed.

Drawing on a diverse theoretical framework – the regulation school’s approach to the economy – Heidi Gottfried (2000) discusses the interactions between gender contracts and production/accumulation regimes in shaping social regulation modes.<sup>2</sup> While the regime of accumulation specifies the logic of the production paradigm, the (embedded) gender contract indicates the type of compromise made regarding the gender division of labour both in the workplace and at home.

A gender contract is negotiated; it can be contradictory, contested and subject of change. The dynamics of social life engender changes at the cultural, institutional or economic levels that can take place at differing rates and may thus result in tensions and asynchronies inside the cultural, social or economic systems, or between systems.

---

<sup>2</sup> A mode of social regulation is composed of an ensemble of complementary state forms, habits and social norms (Peck, 1994: 152).

Commenting on the role of gender in the construction of the modern welfare states, Yvonne Hirdman (1996: 30) points out the “[...] clash of disharmonious structures, where the segregating practices and ideas concerning gender, battled against integrating practices and ideas of the Modern Project” (namely the reforming thoughts of equality and democracy inherent to it).

Recently Pfau-Effinger (2011) used the concepts of path-dependence and path-departure to enlighten how and why changes in gender arrangements occur and may result in various trajectories.<sup>3</sup> The concept of path-dependence emphasizes the constraining role of the past on present development and it may usefully be used to account for the relatively high stability of the institutional orders of welfare states. However, institutions are not solely determined by endogenous factors as they are embedded in an overall context of institutional, cultural and socio-economic factors and are subject to the relative power of social actors. Pfau-Effinger suggests that the chances for “path departure increase in a situation in which the path has been eroded by tensions in the institutional, cultural and social surroundings, and in which particular groups of social actors are able to mobilize power in favour of a new paradigm” (*ibidem*: 16).

The framework mentioned above may be useful for understanding the considerable changes that have taken place in Portugal over the last four decades regarding the economic roles and autonomy of women. It will, therefore, be used in this paper.

### **The Democratic Revolution as a Path-breaking Rupture in the Portuguese Gender Contract**

Portuguese labour market stands out clearly in Southern Europe for the intensity and characteristics of female participation in employment. How Portugal acquired these distinctive features and their implications for the emancipation and well-being of women are therefore interesting analytical questions.

Such distinctive features are closely related to the structural evolution of the economy and the welfare state over recent decades.

Women’s integration into the labour market happened very rapidly and in a comprehensive way, as it cuts across the whole social spectrum. At the same time,

---

<sup>3</sup> The concept of ‘path-dependence’ was first developed in the context of economics of technological innovations (David, 1985) and has subsequently been widely used for the analysis of social institutions and social policy analysis (Pfau-Effinger, 2011).

households have changed in line with trends observed in the developed world, as populations age and become more urbanized. The combined effects of these changes have transformed Portuguese women's lives tremendously. Their share of the family monetary income has increased, making their contribution to the material well-being of household members more apparent. As a consequence, their bargaining power in the household must have increased too. By the same token, women became market agents, who make consumer choices on their own. This whole transformative process has resulted in an undeniable step forward in terms of women's empowerment, with widespread implications in such diverse social and economic domains as consumption behaviour, reproduction, human capital formation, income distribution and well-being.

While female activity rates have been increasing steadily, the bulk of the change occurred during the 70's, when they grew from one of the lowest levels in Europe (in line with the other Southern countries) to one of the highest levels, a position it has maintained henceforth (see Table 1).

**Table 1 – Women's Labour Force Participation Rates and Part-time Employment (%)**

	Women's participation rates (%)					% Female part-time jobs	
	1973	1983	1989	2000	2009	1989	2010
<b>Austria</b>	48.5	49.7	54.3	62.5	69.6	16.0	42.9
<b>Belgium</b>	41.3	48.7	51.6	56.6	60.9	24.0	40.9
<b>France</b>	50.1	54.4	56.2	62.5	66.3	23.1	29.4
<b>Germany</b>	49.6	49.7	54.5	63.0	71.4	31.0	44.7
<b>Netherlands</b>	29.2	40.0	51.0	65.7	74.1	51.0	76.3
<b>Italy</b>	33.7	40.3	44.3	46.2	51.1	9.5	28.3
<b>Greece</b>	32.1	40.0	43.3	50.6	56.5	10.4	9.9
<b>Spain</b>	33.4	33.0	39.9	51.8	64.8	--	22.3
<b>Portugal</b>	32.1	59.1	59.7	63.7	69.0	6.6	12.0
<b>United Kingdom</b>	53.2	57.2	65.4	67.8	69.5	45.2	42.5
<b>Ireland</b>	34.1	37.8	37.5	55.6	62.4	21.0	34.2
<b>Denmark</b>	61.9	74.2	77.3	75.9	77.3	42.2	37.7
<b>Finland</b>	63.6	72.7	73.3	74.1	73.5	11.4	17.6
<b>Sweden</b>	62.6	76.6	80.5	73.4	76.4	45.1	38.6

Source: OECD, available at <http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DatasetCode=STLABOUR>

Moreover, Portugal shows low rates of part-time female jobs, in sharp contrast to most European non-Southern countries (see Table 1). Another salient feature is the very high percentage of female wage earners who are the mothers of young children, older women and the relatively unskilled, since these groups show below average employment rates in most other countries (see Tables 2 and 3).



**Table 2 – Maternal Employment Rates, Women Aged 15-64, 2005**

Country	By age of Youngest Child			
	0-16	<2	3-5	6-16
Greece	50.9	49.5	53.6	50.4
Italy	48.1	47.3	50.6	47.5
Portugal	67.8	69.1	71.8	65.4
Spain	52.0	52.6	54.2	50.9
Sweden	82.5	71.9	81.3	76.1
<b>OECD average</b>	<b>61.5</b>	<b>51.9</b>	<b>61.3</b>	<b>66.3</b>

Source: OECD, 2010.

Table 3 shows that in 2005 the gap between male and female employment rates for all age and schooling levels was also much narrower in Portugal than in the EU-25 average and even more so when compared with the other Mediterranean countries.

**Table 3 - Male and Female Employment Rates, by Age and School Level, 2005**

Age	Level	Women (%)					Men (%)					Men-Women (p.p.)				
		Countries					Countries					Countries				
		PT	ES	GR	IT	UE-25	PT	ES	GR	IT	UE-25	PT	ES	GR	IT	UE-25
25 - 39	Low	72.3	50.6	51	43.8	49.5	88.3	85	89.1	83.6	79.4	16	34.4	38.1	39.8	29.9
	Medium	78.6	67.3	67.4	65.5	69.2	83.3	87.3	88.7	85.2	86.1	4.7	20	21.3	19.7	16.9
	High	88.5	78.3	79.1	71.9	81.6	88.9	88.2	88	81.4	90.5	0.4	9.9	8.9	9.5	8.9
40 - 49	Low	70.4	47.1	-	43.4	56	86.4	84.8	89	87.3	81.3	16	37.7	-	43.9	25.3
	Medium	81.1	66.4	82.8	70.4	75.4	92.9	91.5	93.8	94.6	87.6	11.8	25.1	11	24.2	12.2
	High	94.7	79.8	88.7	88.4	87.1	97	93.7	95.2	97.9	94.1	2.3	13.9	6.5	9.5	7
50 - 64	Low	50.1	26.6	37.4	20.2	33.7	65.5	65.4	66.2	48.9	53.8	15.4	38.8	28.8	28.7	20.1
	Medium	55.7	49.3	61.5	48.5	50.5	62.4	71.9	68.6	66.7	63.4	6.7	22.6	7.1	18.2	12.9
	High	72.3	50.6	51	43.8	49.5	88.3	85	89.1	83.6	79.4	16	34.4	38.1	39.8	29.9

Source: EUROSTAT, 2007.

To understand the reasons behind this process one must look to the contemporary evolution of Portuguese History, Society and Culture.

Up until the 1960s the Portuguese gender arrangement contained key features that can be summed up as:

- Strong gender difference and rigid social roles were apparent, in a wider context of suppression of civic and political rights.

- The hierarchical social position of males was regarded as superior to that of females with the authority of husbands and fathers backed up by law.

- A clear division between the public sphere which was regarded as the realm of men, and the private/domestic sphere which was the domain of women. Female access to paid employment was limited by law and social practice and supported by both the government and Catholic Church, which emphasized the ‘sacred’ value of the family and the crucial role of the woman/mother/housekeeper in it.<sup>4</sup>

- The law and social practices gave legitimacy to the authority of men over family affairs and family members without outside interference. The husband was formally regarded as the “head of the couple” and the father “the person in charge of children’s education”. Domestic violence against women and children was widely tolerated or even accepted as a normal feature of family life.

However, the 1960’s proved to be a decade of significant economic and social change in Portugal. A new economic strategy driven towards increasing industrialization, combined with the stimulus to international trade that resulted from the European integration process,<sup>5</sup> led to a sudden increase in economic growth and significant changes in both social and demographic dynamics. Furthermore, there was a decrease in the active male population because of the colonial wars (1961-1974) and the flood of economic emigration to European countries (mainly to France and Germany).<sup>6</sup> Given the absence of husbands, many wives had to carry out the effective role of ‘head of the family’ and began to play a part in a whole new set of social functions and interactions in the public sphere (Silva, 1983).

However, the biggest impetus to gender equality and women’s full citizenship came from the democratic revolution of April 1974, which led to a sudden increase in egalitarianism in terms of the values, norms and hierarchies that had previously ruled Portuguese society and thus had also affected gender relations. The 1974 revolution may therefore be considered to represent the kind of situation where “[...] a change in the state’s gender paradigm occurs in conditions of significant societal change as new collective ideas reconfigure both society’s gender bargain and the institutionalization of the state’s gender paradigm. A new paradigm emerges as the result of a battle of ideas

---

<sup>4</sup> In the political rhetoric of the time “God, Motherland, Family” was one of the main ideological mottos and the woman/mother was commonly referred to as the “Home Fairy”.

<sup>5</sup> Portugal was a Member of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) from 1960 onwards.

<sup>6</sup> In most cases married men emigrated alone, eventually (but not always) taking their families when they had a stable professional occupation in the host country.

involving pre-existing and new interest groupings” (Connolly, 2005: 14). It may thus be conceptualized as a ‘critical juncture’ leading to a path departure for the development of a new gender arrangement built on new collective ideals of equal citizenship, civil rights and individual freedoms. While these concerned wider aspects of state policy, they inevitably ended up affecting gender relations by undermining the subjection of women to men, both in the public sphere and in the family.

The new Democratic Constitution (1976) established equal citizenship rights for men and women and forbade discrimination on a gender basis. This meant a huge step forward as it gave women access to all public jobs and functions. As a matter of fact, until then they were excluded from several public careers such as the magistracy, diplomacy, the police, the army, *etc.* The recognition of equal rights also resulted in the abolishment of the husband’s right to opening his wife’s mail (1976) and new dispositions in family law, such as women no longer having a status of dependency on her husband and the removal of the legal concepts of “marital power” and “the householder”. Thus both spouses got equal rights to jointly make decisions regarding all family matters (1978).

In the years that followed, female public employment increased steadily, especially in the fast growing social sectors, such as education, health and social security<sup>7</sup> (Ferreira, 1999). At the same time, the economy evolved towards increasing specialization in traditional labour intensive products whose international competitiveness depended upon low rates of pay and monetary depreciation. This also led to growth in female employment because most of the faster growing activities traditionally employed a high percentage of women, such as textiles, shoes, food and drinks, ceramics and light metalworking (Cardoso, 1996). That is to say that, after a decade and a half of almost no job creation (1960-1974), the Portuguese economy suddenly created many new jobs that made a quick uptake of female labour supply possible.

The whole process was instigated and shaped by the State, either as legislator, service provider or employer. This implies that public resources and political measures were fundamental to the promotion of Portuguese women’s economic emancipation.

---

<sup>7</sup> In 1968 women represented only 30% of public servants; in 1972 they were already 52% and they became 61% in 1996. On the other hand, public jobs were multiplied by 2.2 in the period 1968-1983 (DGAP, 2007).

From 1974 onwards, the previously almost non-existent Portuguese welfare-state grew and developed through both the adoption of new measures and increased coverage. This has also been to the great benefit of women.

A minimum social pension (covering disability, old age, survivors) was established in May 1974, which, although extremely low in financial terms, may be considered as the beginning of a universal social protection system based on citizenship, and not depending on previous contributions. This was an important tool for reducing the extreme poverty that had previously been experienced by old women.

The new Constitution (1976) brought in a minimum wage that was to be regularly revised and was to cover all occupations, including domestic services. This was a measure that was to benefit many less well qualified women.<sup>8</sup>

A fully paid maternity leave of 30 days was established in 1976, which proved to be an important woman-friendly measure, making the reconciliation between professional and family life easier.

From the institutional point of view, the establishment in 1979 of the *Comissão para a Igualdade no Trabalho e no Emprego* (CITE)<sup>9</sup> – a public body to oversee equality in work and employment – was key in the fight against discrimination and in the promotion of equality between men and women in employment or on vocational training. And in 1977 another government agency had been established, which is now known as the *Comissão para a Cidadania e Igualdade de Género* (CIG).<sup>10</sup> Its main objectives were to develop the study of the actual situation of women and to give advice to the government in terms of women and family-friendly legislation.

The establishment of a public national health service (1978) was also crucial both for the health of mothers and children and for women in general, as it included family planning services from the outset. Moreover, the creation of a universal, free and compulsory basic schooling system proved to be a powerful tool for the empowerment of women: female education rates grew steadily making it possible to overcome the traditional gender gap in this area, as shown in Table 4.

---

<sup>8</sup> The national minimum wage was established in May 1974 for most occupations and subsequently extended to include agricultural workers (1977) and domestic service workers (1978).

<sup>9</sup> Commission for the Equality in Labour and Employment.

<sup>10</sup> Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality.

**Table 4 - Male and Female Education Levels, by Age Group, 2005**

Age Group	Level	Women					Men					Women-Men (p.p.)				
		Countries					Countries					Countries				
		PT	ES	GR	IT	UE-25	PT	ES	GR	IT	UE-25	PT	ES	GR	IT	UE-25
30 - 34	Low	57.9	33.9	21.6	32.2	22	67.8	43.8	28.9	40.8	24.6	<b>-9.9</b>	-9.9	-7.3	-8.6	-2.6
	Medium	20.4	23.1	50.9	47.9	47.1	18.6	21.7	47.9	45.1	48.6	<b>1.8</b>	1.4	3	2.8	-1.5
	High	21.7	43	27.5	19.9	30.9	13.7	34.5	23.3	14.1	26.8	<b>8</b>	8.5	4.2	5.8	4.1
40 - 44	Low	73.4	49.1	36.5	45.4	29.6	78.5	50.2	33.9	49.7	27.8	<b>-5.1</b>	-1.1	2.6	-4.3	1.8
	Medium	13.3	23.4	42.4	42.6	48	11.7	22.9	42.2	39.2	49.3	<b>1.6</b>	0.5	0.2	3.4	-1.3
	High	13.3	27.5	21.1	11.9	22.4	9.8	26.9	23.9	11.1	22.9	<b>3.5</b>	0.6	-2.8	0.8	-0.5
50 - 54	Low	84.2	66.2	54.0	60.2	38.9	83.5	60.1	47.3	53.8	31.4	<b>0.7</b>	6.1	6.7	6.4	7.5
	Medium	5.7	17.0	32.3	28.9	42.6	7.4	16.6	31.8	34.4	47.1	<b>-1.7</b>	0.4	0.5	-5.5	-4.5
	High	10.1	16.8	13.7	10.9	18.5	9	23.3	21	11.8	21.5	<b>1.1</b>	-6.5	-7.3	-0.9	-3

Source: EUROSTAT, 2007.

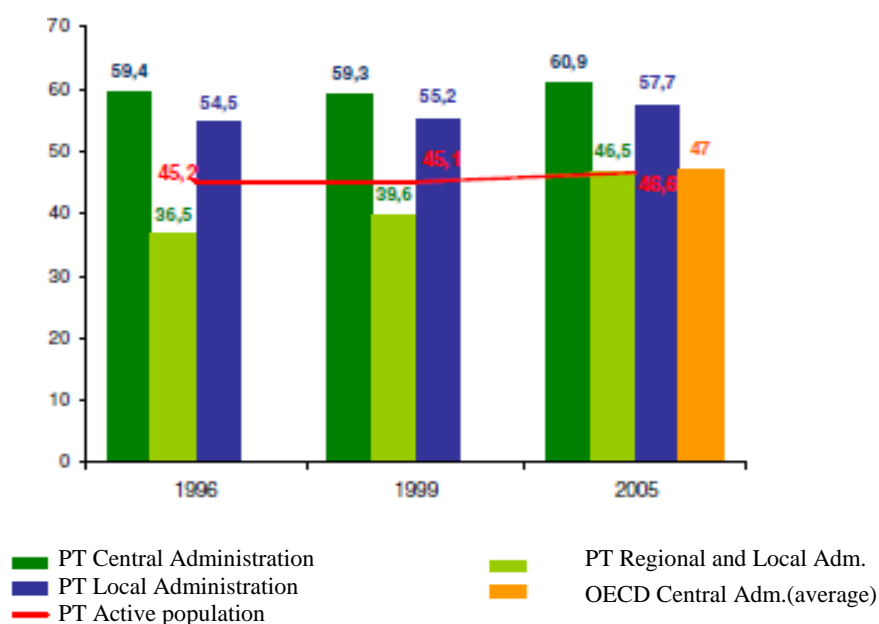
However, the outstanding aspect of this whole process was the strengthening of the State social functions, which also led to increased job creation (Table 5). Women, especially college graduates, were the main beneficiaries of this. As shown in Figure 1, in 2005 Portuguese women accounted for approximately 45% of the economically active population but made up 60% of the public servants in Central Administration. This is a much higher figure than the OECD average.

**Table 5 - Public Servants in Portugal**

Years	Number	Growth rates (%)
1968	196,755	-
1979	372,086	89.1
1988	485,368	30.4
1999	716,418	47.6
2005	747,880	4.4

Source: DGAEP (2009:14).

**Figure 1 -Women in Public Employment and Active Population in Portugal**



Source: DGAEP (2009).

As shown in Table 6, women with higher education in Portugal are especially apparent in the health and education services, which are mostly public. The figures for Portugal are well above the European Union average and the values recorded in Spain, Greece and Italy, especially for the age group 40-64.

**Table 6 - Employed Men and Women with High Educational Level by Sector of Activity, 2005**

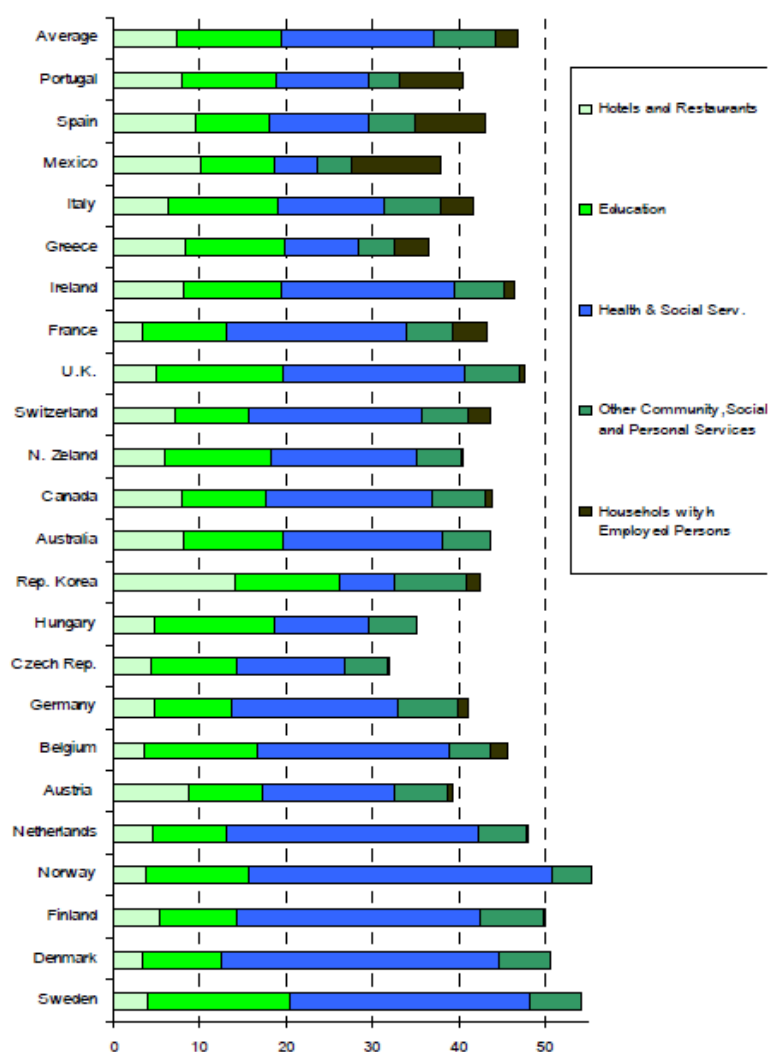
Age Group	Sector	Women (%)					Men (%)					difference M-H (p.p.)				
		Countries					Countries					Countries				
		PT	ES	GR	IT	UE-25	PT	ES	GR	IT	UE-25	PT	ES	GR	IT	UE-25
25-39	Public Administr.	9.3	6.9	8.8	6.5	9.0	8.0	7.0	17.9	7.4	9.1	1.3	-0.1	-9.1	-0.9	-0.1
	Health+Education	45.6	29.2	45	38.2	39.7	23.0	12.1	21.6	15.4	15.0	22.6	17.1	23.4	22.8	24.7
	Other	45.1	63.8	46.3	55.3	51.5	69.0	80.9	60.5	77.3	75.8	-23.9	-17.1	-14.2	-22	-24.3
40-64	Public Administr.	10.2	13.0	12.9	9.0	10.0	15.7	12.7	15.9	10.8	11.2	-5.5	0.3	-3.0	-1.8	-1.2
	Health+Education	68.9	52.7	52.2	65.2	56.7	34.3	22.7	33.3	38.2	24.2	34.6	30.0	18.9	27.0	32.5
	Other	20.4	34.2	34.9	25.9	33.3	50.0	64.6	50.8	51.0	64.6	-29.6	-30.4	-15.9	-25.1	-31.3

Source: EUROSTAT, 2007.

It should be emphasized that those women got access to relatively well paid jobs, as civil servants' wages grew above those of the private sector. In fact, several studies established that the benefits of education in Portugal, in particular for college graduates, became very significant, especially in public administration. More specifically, Pedro Portugal and Mário Centeno (2001: 94-95) estimated that in 1998-2000 a typical female

college graduate earned 91.7% more than a woman who completed high school education. For men the corresponding figure was 88.5%. These were impressive figures as in most European countries the wage premium associated with college education varied between 30 and 40 per cent. They also concluded that, taking into account the observed characteristics of workers, in Portugal women working in general government benefited from a wage differential of 26.5 per cent vis-à-vis private sector workers. The corresponding differential for men was 12.9 per cent. More recently, Maria Campos and Manuel Pereira (2009: 75) also concluded that the public sector wage premium has risen over the 1996-2005 period, benefiting especially women. Moreover, Coelho (2006, 2010) showed that the overall women's share of household income was 25% in 2000. But it amounted to 43% in the case of college graduate and public servants. And it was only 32% and 33% for high school graduates and private sector workers, respectively.

**Figure 2 - Share of Female Employment, 2008 (%)**



Source: OECD, available at <http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DatasetCode=STLABOUR>.

**Table 7 - Growth of Female Employment in Services, by Sector, 1995-2008 (%)**

	Hotels and Restaurants	Education	Health & Social Services	Other Community, Social and Personal Services	Households with Employed Persons	Total Female Employment
Sweden	48.2	88.5	-16.1	24.8		12.8
Denmark	0.9	22.6	18.4	27.1	-100.0	14.6
Finland	53.5	14.7	30.4	35.9	33.3	21.3
Netherlands	42.4	46.5	54.2	57.9	-54.5	38.6
Austria	27.7	-23.3	33.8	51.2	-13.8	17.0
Belgium	12.6	35.4	63.4	23.5	-55.5	29.1
Germany	41.1	31.3	44.6	21.3	82.7	16.1
Czech Rep.	10.3	-7.4	17.8	19.5	100.0	-1.8
Hungary	36.2	-2.9	10.3	10.0	87.5	8.6
Rep. Korea	26.8	107.9	213.9	94.0	-21.2	19.6
Australia	84.1	46.2	56.9	33.5	-87.0	37.3
Canada	37.6	38.4	39.9	61.4	-17.3	34.3
Switzerland	2.8	45.0	41.9	32.1	8.3	21.1
U.K.	-4.6	47.0	27.4	23.9	-28.2	16.7
Ireland	86.8	85.5	136.7	72.0	113.3	90.8
Greece	68.4	51.3	47.4	58.4	128.5	30.8
Italy	102.4	19.9	70.2	68.4	134.2	33.3
Mexico	109.7	37.0	66.7	15.9	70.5	56.2
Spain	150.3	70.4	117.5	118.8	130.2	99.7
<i>Portugal</i>	85.1	9.6	73.4	-31.0	108.2	22.0
<i>Average</i>	52.6	39.7	45.5	39.8	61.3	30.4

Source: OECD, available at <http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DatasetCode=STLABOUR>.

This state of affairs resulted in a cascade of effects for less well-qualified women as high employment rates for relatively affluent graduate women led to a huge market demand for domestic services, such as cleaning, laundry, cooking, caring for children and the elderly. However, this is a result of the prevalent high wage inequalities (*i.e.* a wide gap between the highest and the lowest wages) that made it possible for higher income households to pay for low-qualified services in the market. As a result, these make up an important share of female jobs in Portugal. Figure 2 shows that 7% of all female jobs in 2008 were in private households while 8% were in hotels and restaurants. Among OECD member countries, only Spain and Mexico showed similar figures in the first of these categories. Moreover, these figures have grown over the previous decade in all South European countries, including Portugal, where jobs in these sectors almost doubled (Table 7).



The high purchasing power of the more affluent families is strongly associated with positive assortative mating between couples as most women marry men with similar human capital levels (Coelho, 2010: 272, 282). This reinforces income inequalities between families, given the huge returns to college education. Portugal is thus a very unequal society especially from a woman's (and even more so a mother's) point of view because highly qualified married mothers manage to reconcile both a career and family life with relative ease while less well-qualified women and/or single mothers face considerable difficulties. These less fortunate women have to deal with a very heavy double workload and live very hard lives in a society where the resilience of patriarchal values continues to prevent men from sharing domestic tasks in a fair way, as has been clearly demonstrated in various sociological studies (Aboim, 2010; Perista, 2002; Portugal, 2006, 2013; Torres, 2001, 2008; Torres, Guerreiro and Lobo, 2007; Torres *et al.* 2001; Torres *et al.*, 2004; Wall, 2007; Wall and Guerreiro, 2005; Wall and Amâncio, 2007). The less-well qualified women in Portugal do not have access to market care services because of their low purchasing power. They are likely to have precarious jobs and depend on relatively scarce and poor quality care and education services (in terms of intrinsic quality, opening hours, location and cost). These services are provided directly by the State or by subsidized non-profit organizations and have been insufficiently invested.

We may therefore conclude that disfavoured Portuguese women bear the burden of cumulative disadvantages disproportionately as they suffer from higher job insecurity, lower wages and a heavy double work load as a consequence of inadequate and unsatisfactory public provision of child care and care for the elderly. This division between women based on access to and control of resources which depend on their social class, may be considered essential to the socio-economic regulation of the country all over the last few decades. Perhaps the most perverse consequence of this situation is the disincentive effect it has on the most able women to effectively fight for gender equality. They see no reason to threaten their privileged position. As they are the main beneficiaries of the low wages and insecure labour conditions of disadvantaged women, they do not feel the need for effective action in defines of female empowerment across the entire social spectrum. This is unfortunate as such action could make significant steps towards a more egalitarian progressive society.

Thereby, the Portuguese situation seems to conform to Nancy Folbre's (2009: 208-209) appraisal of that in the United States of America where "affluent women have

little incentive to push for greater state provision” because they manage their care responsibilities by hiring low-wage women. Thus, poor women suffer both from low wages and a low level of public support for care provision. Although Portugal does not have the characteristics of a liberal market economy, as the U.S.A, the situation described corresponds closely in terms of both gender and class inequality which, by reinforcing each other, intensify differences among women.

We may therefore conclude that the path-breaking rupture caused by the Portuguese democratic revolution has not yet found the effective material and ideological conditions required for a full realization of gender equality. As a result, new tensions and contradictions have arisen due, in particular, to the limited willingness of men to become involved with care work. This has led to an accommodation process in the framework of intertwined dimensions of inequality that is especially detrimental to poor women.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The evolution of the Portuguese gender arrangement over recent decades has assured a high rate of employment for women, across all social strata, giving them an income of their own and making their contribution to the material well-being of the family more apparent. This significant transformative process undoubtedly contributed to women's increasing self-assertion and bargaining power within the family. As such, Portugal took a clearly distinct path towards gender equality from that taken by other southern European countries.

However, as public resources and policies have been crucial for Portugal's way forward to women's emancipation and empowerment, the current severe crisis may threaten progressive moves towards a fully equal status gender arrangement. In fact, the ongoing cuts in public spending and employment might be creating the conditions to the re-emergence of a more conservative gender arrangement.

The more gender egalitarian culture that has come along with higher levels of education for women, which now exceed those of men, has introduced important new issues into the debate regarding gender equality. However, the current situation raises renewed concerns, by putting increased autonomy of women under threat. This is especially true for younger and less qualified women.

These issues are being disregarded in all spheres of Portuguese public debate, despite their extensive implications for the whole social regulation.<sup>11</sup> The crisis seems to leave no room for this type of discussion.

Still, the collective apathy and indifference toward these matters is not new. As the change in women's status occurred so abruptly, as part of a disruptive revolutionary political process, it has been only gradually absorbed by the whole set of institutions and social groups and its implications have not yet been fully integrated into the sphere of collectively shared values and representations. This theme is thus still envisaged as marginal even in academia, not to mention the other domains of public debate, revealing the true resilience of patriarchal values.

As a matter of fact, Portuguese political agenda only explicitly adopted gender and career-family related policies as a consequence of European gender equality policies that were already in place. And, after 40 years of social transformation, women are still widely left out of the main economic and political decision forums. However, this may be the fundamental condition that enables Portuguese society to fully acknowledge the paradoxes in gender and class relations and to build on a truly progressive and family-friendly society.

## References

- Aboim, Sofia (2010), "A vida familiar no masculino: negociando velhas e novas masculinidades", in Karin Wall; Sofia Aboim; Vanessa Cunha (eds.), *Género, família e mudança em Portugal*. Lisboa: Comissão para a Igualdade no Trabalho e no Emprego (CITE).
- Campos, Maria M.; Pereira, Manuel C. (2009), "Salários e incentivos na administração pública em Portugal", *Boletim Económico do Banco de Portugal*, verão, 61-83.  
Accessed on 11.07.2013, at  
[http://www.snesup.pt/htmls/\\_dlds/Salarios%20e%20incentivos%20na%20Admini  
stracao%20Publica%20em%20Portugal.pdf](http://www.snesup.pt/htmls/_dlds/Salarios%20e%20incentivos%20na%20Admini%20stracao%20Publica%20em%20Portugal.pdf).
- Cardoso, Ana Rute (1996), "Women at Work and Economic Development: Who's Pushing What?", *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 28(3), 1-34.

---

<sup>11</sup> An example of such implications is the impressive low fertility rate in Portugal that decreased to the lowest figure recorded in the European Union in 2012 (Eurostat).

- Coelho, Lina (2006), “A dependência económica das mulheres portuguesas que vivem em casal”, *Oficina do CES*, 255, 1-25. Accessed on 11.11.2014, at <http://www.ces.uc.pt/publicacoes/oficina/ficheiros/255.pdf>.
- Coelho, Lina (2010), *Mulheres, família e desigualdade*. PhD Dissertation. Faculdade de Economia da Universidade de Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal. Accessed on 11.07.2013, at [https://estudogeral.sib.uc.pt/bitstream/10316/13833/1/Disserta%C3%A7%C3%A3o%20Dout Lina%20Coelho.pdf](https://estudogeral.sib.uc.pt/bitstream/10316/13833/1/Disserta%C3%A7%C3%A3o%20Dout%20Lina%20Coelho.pdf).
- Connolly, Eileen (2005), “The Role of Ideas in the Construction of Gendered Policy Regimes: The Relationship between the National and the International”, *Working Papers in International Studies Series*, 1, 1-17. Accessed on 17.07.2013, at <http://doras.dcu.ie/2127/1/2005-1.pdf>.
- David, Paul (1985), “Clio and the Economics of QWERTY”, *The American Economic Review*, 75(2), 332-337. Accessed on 11.07.2013, at <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/1805621?uid=8445376&uid=3738880&uid=2&uid=3&uid=8445360&uid=67&uid=62&sid=21102913654537>.
- DGAP - Direcção-Geral da Administração Pública (2007), *Caracterização dos recursos humanos: evolução dos efectivos*. Accessed on 17.09.2013, at [http://www.dgap.gov.pt/2pap/rhs\\_adm/rec-hum.htm](http://www.dgap.gov.pt/2pap/rhs_adm/rec-hum.htm).
- DGAEP - Direcção-Geral da Administração e do Emprego Público (2009), *A década: emprego público em números 1996-2005*. Accessed on 11.07.2015, at <http://www.dgaep.gov.pt/upload//OBSEP/Decada/Decada EP 1996-2005.pdf>.
- EUROSTAT (2007), “The Narrowing Education Gap between Men and Women”, *Statistics in Focus - Population and Social Conditions* - 130/2007. Accessed on 21.07.2013, at <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/publications/collections/sif-dif/sif>.
- Ferreira, Virgínia (1999), “Os paradoxos da situação das mulheres em Portugal”, *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, 52/53, 199-228.
- Folbre, Nancy (2009), “Varieties of Patriarchal Capitalism”, *Social Politics*, 16(2), 204-209.
- Gerhard, Ute; Knijn, Trudie; Lewis, Jane (2002), “Contractualization”, in Barbara Hobson; Jane Lewis; Birte Siim (eds.), *Contested Concepts in Gender and Social Politics*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 105-140.
- Gottfried, Heidi (2000), “Compromising Positions: Emergent Neo-fordisms and Embedded Gender Contracts”, *British Journal of Sociology*, 51(2), 235-259.

- Hirdman, Yvonne (1996), *Key Concepts in Feminist Theory: Analysing Gender and Welfare*. Aalborg: Department of History, International and Social Studies, Aalborg University. FREIA's tekstserie; no. 34. DOI: 10.5278/freia.14136339. Accessed on 17.09.2013, at <http://vbn.aau.dk/files/14136341/34.pdf>.
- OECD - Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2010), *Babies and Bosses - Reconciling Work and Family Life (Vol. 5): A Synthesis of Findings for OECD Countries*. Accessed on 12.07.2013, at <http://www.oecd.org/els/family/babiesandbosses-reconcilingworkandfamilylifeasynthesisoffindingsforoecdcountries.htm>.
- Peck, Jamie (1994), "Regulating Labour: The Social Regulation and Reproduction of Local Labour Markets", in Ash Amin; Nigel Thrift (eds.), *Globalization, Institutions and Regional Development in Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 147-176.
- Perista, Heloísa (2002), "Género e trabalho não pago: os tempos das mulheres e os tempos dos homens", *Análise Social*, XXXVII(163), 447-474.
- Pfau-Effinger, Birgit (1998), "Gender Cultures and the Gender Arrangement - A Theoretical Framework for Cross-national Comparisons on Gender", *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Sciences*, 11(2), 147-166.
- Pfau-Effinger, Birgit (2002), "Changing Welfare States and Labour Markets in the Context of European Gender Arrangements", in Jørgen Goul Andersen; Per H. Jensen (eds.), *Changing Labour Markets, Welfare Policies and Citizenship*. Bristol: The Policy Press, 235-249.
- Pfau-Effinger, Birgit (2004), *Development of Culture, Welfare States and Women's Employment in Europe*. Ashgate: Aldershot.
- Pfau-Effinger, Birgit (2008), "Cultural Change and Path Departure – The Example of Family Policies in Conservative Welfare States", in Wim van Oorschot; Michael Opielka; Birgit Pfau-Effinger (eds.), *Culture and Welfare State: The Value of Social Policy*. Cheltenham, UK/Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar, 185-204.
- Pfau-Effinger, Birgit (2011), *Comparing Path Dependence and Path Departure in Family Policy Development – The Example of Germany and Finland*. Accessed on 10.07.2013, at [http://espanet2011.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/st18\\_pfau-effinger\\_op\\_sin\\_caratula.pdf](http://espanet2011.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/st18_pfau-effinger_op_sin_caratula.pdf).
- Portugal, Pedro; Centeno, Mário (2001), "Os salários da função pública", *Boletim Económico do Banco de Portugal*, Setembro, 91-100. Accessed on 12.07.2013, at

<http://www.bportugal.pt/pt->

[PT/BdP%20Publicaes%20de%20Investigao/AB200105\\_p.pdf](http://www.bportugal.pt/pt-PT/BdP%20Publicaes%20de%20Investigao/AB200105_p.pdf).

- Portugal, Sílvia (2006), *Novas famílias, modos antigos. As redes sociais na produção de bem-estar*. PhD Dissertation. Faculdade de Economia da Universidade de Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal.
- Portugal, Sílvia (2013), *Família e redes sociais: Ligações fortes na produção de bem-estar*. Coimbra: CES/Almedina.
- Silva, Manuela (1983), *O emprego das mulheres em Portugal: a 'mão invisível' na discriminação sexual no emprego*. Porto: Afrontamento.
- Torres, Anália (2001), “Casamento e género: mudança nas famílias contemporâneas a partir do caso português”, *Revista Intersecções*, 3, 53-70.
- Torres, Anália (2008), “Women, Gender and Work. The Portuguese in the Context of the European Union”, *International Journal of Sociology*, 38(4), 36-56.
- Torres, Anália; Silva, Fernando V.; Monteiro, Teresa L.; Cabrita, Miguel; Jesus, F. (2001), “Trabalho e vida familiar: problemas, soluções e perplexidades”, *Cadernos de Política Social: Redes e Políticas de Solidariedade*, 2-3, 29-48.
- Torres, Anália; Cabrita, Miguel; Silva, Fernando V.; Monteiro, Teresa L. (2004), *Homens e mulheres entre família e trabalho*. Lisboa: Comissão para a Igualdade no Trabalho e no Emprego (CITE).
- Torres, Anália; Guerreiro, Maria das Dores; Lobo, Cristina (2007), “Famílias em mudança. Configurações, valores e processos de recomposição”, in Maria das Dores Guerreiro; Anália Torres; Luís Capucha (eds.), *Quotidiano e qualidade de vida*. Oeiras: Celta Editora, 7-38.
- Wall, Karin (2007), “Atitudes face à divisão familiar do trabalho em Portugal e na Europa”, in Karin Wall; Lúcia Amâncio (eds.), *Família e género em Portugal e na Europa*. Lisboa: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, 211-257.
- Wall, Karin; Amâncio, Lúcia (2007), “Família e género, atitudes sociais dos Portugueses”, in Karin Wall; Lúcia Amâncio (eds.), *Família e género em Portugal e na Europa*. Lisboa: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, 35-91.
- Wall, Karin; Guerreiro, Maria das Dores (2005), “A divisão familiar do trabalho”, in Karin Wall (ed.), *Famílias em Portugal - Percursos, interações, redes sociais*. Lisboa: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, 303-362.