

A literature review on violence and discrimination against trans people in Portugal: Are we still living in a dictatorship?

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Abstract

This literature review presents a characterization of violence and discrimination against trans people in Portugal, offering a critical analysis of the national efforts aiming to protect trans people's rights. Its main objective is to highlight and frame the oppression historically suffered by trans people in family and intimate relationships, social discrimination, school, medical care, and employment. Despite legal advances in Portugal in the conquest of rights for trans people during the last two decades, violence and discrimination are still a social problem that needs urgent academic research for its effective prevention and combat.

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Introduction

Portugal lived under a dictatorship¹ for nearly 50 years, with democracy blooming only in 1974. *Estado Novo*, which had its origin in the military coup of 28 May 1926, was marked by the absence of freedom in several personal, social, and political domains (Da Silva and Ferreira, 2019), with intimacy and sexuality being particularly restricted and sanctioned for women and LGBTI people (Ferreira, 1996; Freire, 2020; Pimentel, 2002), who were subjected by the fascist regimen to moral surveillance highly tight, due to their powerless position in the social hierarchy. In fact, the appeal to conservative ideals of masculinity, femininity, and the family union has led to a pattern of sexual restraint in which women should be primarily committed to marriage and maternity and men to the heterosexual patriarchal model (Brandão, 2011). When such a pattern was challenged, the *transgressors* were destined for stigma and marginalization.

To provide an adequate framework of the historical, social, and legal evolution of LGBTI rights in Portugal, homophobia will also be approached in this introduction since it represents a lever of change in these matters and also because it affects LGBTI, namely trans, and non-LGBTI people who are discriminated against for not strictly fulfilling socially expected gender roles (e.g., ILGA Portugal, 2020).

Although homosexuality had been formally criminalized in 1954, homosexual acts (e.g., *sodomy*) were penalized and considered deviant since the Portuguese Penal Code of 1852 (Afonso, 2019; Almeida, 2010). In the first decade of *Estado Novo*, the active vigilance of LGBTI people, especially gay men, was notorious, with homosexuals being accused of attempting against family values and, therefore, the alleged natural order of life (Correia, 2017), the central core of the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic of 1933. In fact, during Salazarism, the State and the Catholic Church haunted Portuguese society with an atmosphere of censorship where non-heteronormative sexuality was defined as disrupting and transgressive (Freire, 2020). In the same way, being transgender was classified as abnormal and sinful (Moleiro and Pinto, 2015). Both homosexuality and transsexuality, supposedly defying the gender norms and threatening the obligatoriness of biological procreation, faced strong resistance during the *Estado Novo*, and all-around Europe, in medical, political, legal, and social terms. In Portugal, decriminalization of homosexuality took place only in the 80s, when social change towards gender equality had started (Pereira and Santos, 2013) and visibility of gays and lesbians as an organized community had emerged (Brandão, 2011). In the 90s, the early years of the LGBTI movement in the country, along with the expansion of gender equality policies, social attitudes towards LGBTI issues had positively changed among Portuguese (Da Silva et al., 2008).

In the two first decades of this millennium, the country has been conquering important civil rights for LGBTI people assuring, among others, civil partnerships (2001), same-sex marriage (2010), gender identity provisions (2011), same-sex parenting (2016), legal gender recognition without medical requirements and prohibition of surgical procedures

on intersex babies (2018) (Brandão and Machado, 2012; Caldeira et al., 2014; Gato, 2016; Santos, 2013).

The 6th Revision of the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic, which was passed in 2004, included sexual orientation in the Principle of Equality. Thus, article 13 started to refer that “no one may be privileged, favored, prejudiced, deprived of any right or exempted from any duty for reasons of ancestry, sex, race, language, the territory of origin, religion, political or ideological beliefs, education, economic situation, social circumstances or sexual orientation.” Both Labor Code (Law 99/2003 and Law 7/2009) and Penal Code (articles 132, 145, 152, and 240) penalizes discrimination and violence on the ground of sexual orientation or gender identity and, for the first time, in 2018, Portugal launched the National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination (2018–2030) which integrate a Plan intending to promote non-discrimination regarding LGBTI people and to combat all forms of violence based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and sexual characteristics.

In what trans people’s rights are concerning, until 2011, to change official documents Portuguese trans people had to sue the State in a judicial process and to fulfil certain requirements in court, namely proof of sterilization and childlessness and proof of “completed” hormonal and surgical procedures, such as genital surgery (Moleiro and Pinto, 2020, p. 224). Portuguese Law 38/2018 establishes the right to self-determination of gender identity, gender expression, and the protection of the sexual characteristics of each person. Medical requirements initially attached to legal gender recognition (Law 7/2011) have been eradicated and the change of gender marker in the civil registry is not depending on medical treatments or a gender identity dysphoria diagnosis.

Despite legal advances in Portugal, trans people still face high rates of violence and discrimination in Portugal, particularly in family and intimate relationships. The following section pulls together empirical and statistical data on violence and discrimination against trans people in contemporary Portugal. The literature review method adopted has included screening and extracting data from all the electronic databases on B-ON, the most complete online tool conceived for the Portuguese scientific community to search for knowledge. Using a time frame from 2000 to 2020, peer-reviewed articles were eligible for inclusion if (a) they included the keywords “LGBT,” “LGBTI,” “transgender,” “trans people,” “transsexual,” “transsexuality,” “violence,” “discrimination,” “Portugal,” “Portuguese,” “gender identity,” “homophobia,” and/or “transphobia”; (b) they were related to the areas of family and intimate relationships, social discrimination, school, medical care, and employment; and (c) they were written in Portuguese or English.

Violence and discrimination against trans people in Portugal

There are no global data on the LGBTI population in Portugal, even less on victims of violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sexual characteristics. Nevertheless, as many international and national studies have pointed out, LGBTI people are at great risk of suffering violence perpetrated by strangers and significant others since childhood (e.g., Biedermann et al., 2021).

Amongst European LGBTI people, trans people are the group with the highest rates of violence, harassment, and discrimination (FRA, 2014). Data from a survey led by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in 2012, with 93,000 LGBT people, showed that trans people respondents were the most likely to report attacks or to have been threatened with violence (35%), compared to 25% of all EU LGBT survey respondents. Near 30% of all respondents were physically or sexually attacked or threatened with violence for any reason at home or elsewhere. Women and trans people participants were the ones most likely to suffer a sexual attack. Approximately 50% of bisexual women and 30% of trans people felt that they were attacked for being LGBT. The countries where these attacks were more frequent were France (48%), Latvia, Portugal, and Sweden (41%) (FRA, 2014).

A more recent survey conducted by FRA (2020) with 140,000 LGBTI participants from 30 countries concluded that 40% of Portuguese felt discriminated at least in one area of life in the year before. In the same period, 30% revealed have been harassed, 20% felt discriminated at work and 25% referred having avoid often or always certain locations for fear of being assaulted. One in five trans and intersex people were physically or sexually attacked in the 5 years before the survey. Near 15% of trans people revealed have been subject to physical or sexual attacks by police authorities and 8% to discrimination experiences by an equality body or another organization (FRA, 2020).

Although Portugal occupies the 8th place in the Rainbow Map among 49 European countries (ILGA Europe, 2020), national research regarding Portuguese LGBTI people corroborates that trans people are exposed to multiple forms of violence and discrimination, in different contexts of their lives, such as family, intimate relationships, school, medical care, and employment (Costa, 2009; Costa, et al., 2010; Figueiredo et al., 2020; Hilário and Marques, 2020; Moleiro et al., 2016; Saleiro, 2009, 2013; Saleiro and Sales Oliveira, 2018; Silva, 2019). In the following sections, the main results and conclusions achieved in national scientific studies on violence and discrimination against trans people in Portugal will be presented.

Family and intimate relationships. Family and intimate relationships are two of the riskiest contexts for trans people in terms of violence and discrimination. Notwithstanding, there aren't studies on its prevalence, and official data concerning domestic violence doesn't allow us to analyze the numbers based on gender identity's victims or perpetrators. Even not having these elements, but considering empirical evidence, Portugal felt the need to create, in 2016, and for the first time, three specialized services for LGBTI people victims of domestic violence. Managed exclusively by NGOs, Associação Plano i, Casa Qui, and ILGA Portugal, in 2000 attended 753 persons (CIG, 2021). Of them, 105 persons were attended in presence, from which 46% were trans people, 22% were women and 24% were men. Distance attendance was provided to 647 persons, being 42% trans people, 22% women, and 20% men. The most prevalent typology of violence was psychological, and most aggressors were men.

Also, in 2018, the first emergency shelter for LGBTI people victims of domestic violence was opened by Associação Plano i. Since then, the majority of victims have been trans women, aged between 18 and 35 years old, who suffered several forms of aggression

by partners, former partners, or family members. The same entity inaugurated, in 2020, the first apartment of autonomization for LGBTI people, which has been assisting mostly trans women victims of domestic violence.

Focusing on the situation of Portuguese trans young people, the latest Reports of the LGBTI Education Project (2019 and 2020) uncovered that there is still a lack of visibility, inclusiveness, and openness in the family context, which constrain this group to talk about issues related to sexual orientation, gender expression, or gender identity. Near 40% of the respondents do not talk about the matter at home and for those 14.9% who talk, the subject causes discomfort (Rede Ex Aequo, 2019), enhancing isolation and suffering, consequences well documented in the literature (Moleiro and Pinto, 2015).

Since its creation in 2013, the [Portuguese] Observatory of Discrimination Against LGBTI+ People, a non-governmental mechanism aiming to collect, analyze, and spread information on the issue, has received 1385 cases. Of these, trans people represent about 9.82% of the victims, that is, one out of 10 in the total cases. In 2019, the same Observatory received 171 cases. The average age of the victims was 27 years old and they were mostly discriminated against by unknown people (40%). Despite this, 17.03% were discriminated against or abused by an intimate partner or a family member, with nearly 14% of the cases occurring at home (ILGA Portugal, 2020). As shown, home and family do not always play a protective role in trans people's lives, with domestic violence seeming to stand out among other forms of aggression perpetrated by significant people (ILGA Portugal, 2020).

Recognizing the extension of domestic violence, the effort to train professionals to assist LGBTI people victims in public services, such as police and health authorities, has been largely increasing in the last few years. Also, it has motivated several initiatives to improve victims' protection by capacitating professionals, such as the publication of a Guide to good practices for professionals in victim support structures (Moleiro et al., 2016) by the Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality, the governmental body responsible for the promotion of equality between women and men.

Social discrimination. The Constitution of the Portuguese Republic declares that "every citizen enjoys the rights and is subject to the duties enshrined in the Constitution" (article 12). In the last 10 years, Portugal has been developing several initiatives to guarantee trans people's rights, including new strengthened anti-hate crime laws to address transphobic violence and discrimination, facilitating the prosecution and punishment of perpetrators (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). That paradigm shift has contributed to the mediatic effects of Gisberta's murder, in 2006, a Brazilian trans woman was found killed by a group of Portuguese young boys, the oldest aged 16 years old.

Furthermore, Portugal is considered one of the most LGBTI-friendly countries in Europe as the Portuguese Penal Code criminalizes hate actions based on gender identity and sexual orientation (article 240.º) and LGBTI people's discrimination constitutes a priority factor under the application of certain penalties, with homicide, per example, being considered qualified if the murder's motivation is concerned to victim's gender identity or sexual orientation (article 132.º). LGBTI people are also seen as special victims in terms of the Asylum Law. The international protection is regulated by Law 27/

2008 of June 30, amended by Act 26/2014 of May 5, which determines that LGBTI asylum seekers must have the right to be supported by the Portuguese State. However, despite advances in formal mechanisms, evidence of social discrimination persists. The European Union Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Survey showed that 51% of Portuguese respondents felt discriminated against or were harassed based on their sexual orientation; and 36% felt discriminated against in areas such as employment, education, healthcare, and housing because of being LGBT (FRA, 2013).

According to the 2015 Eurobarometer, 69% and 65% of the Portuguese people considered that discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, respectively, was widespread. Near 20% replied that they would feel uneasy having a trans colleague and 17% an LGB colleague. 18% felt like the measures to combat discrimination in Portugal were effective and 29% thought they were moderately effective (European Union, 2015).

Even though hate actions are prohibited by Law, 26% of the Portuguese respondents considered that discrimination on the basis of being trans is very widespread; 21% said they would feel uncomfortable about having a trans person in the highest elected political position; and 42% said they would feel uncomfortable about having their children in a love relationship with a trans person. However, when it comes to being able to change their civil documents to match their gender identity, 72% of the Portuguese respondents believe that they should be able, which represents a higher average compared to the EU's 59% (Karsay, 2018).

Since 2011, and until March 2021, more than 1000 trans people have changed their name and gender on the civil registry. Despite this, the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on these processes, with legal gender recognition being classified as "non-essential" (ILGA Europe, 2020).

During the year 2019, the [Portuguese] Discrimination Observatory Against LGBTI+ People received 171 confidential and anonymous reports (ILGA Portugal, 2020). Approximately 7% of the victims were trans women and 6% were trans men. Public services workers, police officers, healthcare professionals (8.15%), or their employers and co-workers (6.67%), among others (e.g., landlords, neighbors, security guards) figured in 14.81% of the reported situations, as aggressors. Most violence and discrimination occurred in the street (15.53%), followed by home (13.66%), school (13.04%), public services (8.7%), nightlife venues (7.45%), and work locations (6.83%). Insults and threats represent 46.58% of the reports. Bullying and assault (8.70% each), discrimination in access to essential goods and services (6.21%), domestic violence (6.21%), health discrimination (4.35%), work discrimination (3.73%), educational discrimination (1.86%), and property damage like graffiti (1.86%) were reported too. 9.94% of the respondents also referred to other situations like being expelled from restaurants, being suggested to conversion services, blocking access to bathrooms, and being discriminated against in blood donation (ILGA Portugal, 2020).

When asked about aggressors' motivations, 65.22% of the respondents considered homophobia, 10.14% transphobia, and 19.57% both homophobia and transphobia. Also, 10% considered that the motivation for the perpetration of violence or discrimination was related to theft, extremely conservative political ideology, religious

beliefs, or labor conflicts. In 49.26% there were witnesses, who did not help or intervene because they felt impotent about the situation, in disbelief, or with fear of reprisals at work, among other motives. 62.69% of the situations were officially reported to the authorities. In the cases they weren't reported, the reasons were associated with fear of reprisals or in any way harming the situation of the victim or other people involved (20.65%), ignorance of rights, procedures, or instances to which complaints can be filed (17.39%), lack of evidence that allows a complaint to be filed (16.3%), and disbelief in the authorities or fear of further discrimination (10.87%). Although it is possible to file a complaint to the police authorities, it is still not possible to register the motivation underlying the practice of the crime, which difficulties the true understanding of this phenomenon (ILGA Portugal, 2020).

School. Sexual orientation, gender expression, gender identity, and sexual characteristics are still vulnerable factors for violence and discrimination in different ages. The school remains as a risk context for LGBTI youth, as illustrated by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights Survey (FRA, 2013). In fact, 94% of the respondents heard negative comments or saw negative conducts when a schoolmate was perceived as LGBT during their schooling years and 60% hid or disguised being LGBT frequently during that period. In Portugal, multiple studies have been demonstrating that LGBTI students are effectively subjected to school environments characterized by hostility and harmful stereotypes (e.g., António et al., 2012; António and Moleiro, 2015; Borges et al., 2019; Grave et al., 2016; Menezes et al., 2017, 2018).

The LGBTI Education Project Report (2016–2018) found that 79.2% of students watched situations where their peers were victims of discrimination or aggression based on their sexual orientation or gender identity (Rede Ex Aequo, 2020). The National Study on the School Environment suggested that negative comments on gender expression are heard regularly (45.7%) or frequently (35.2%), made both by students (66.7%), and by teaching and non-teaching staff (33.9%) (ILGA Portugal, 2018). Due to their gender expression, 21.6% of the respondents claimed to have heard transphobic comments on a regular or frequent basis, 66.6% to have been victims of verbal aggression, 17.9% of physical harassment, and 7.7% of physical aggression. Discrimination based on gender identity also had significant values, with 25.7% of students claiming to have been victims of verbal abuse, 7% of physical harassment and 4.4% of physical abuse (ILGA Portugal, 2018).

Although only 31% of the students have witnessed acts of LGBTI discrimination, nearly 60% of teachers confirmed having seen situations of discrimination, aggression, or bullying based on sexual orientation or gender identity (Rede Ex Aequo, 2019), and recognize not having reacted properly.

A recent study conducted with 663 participants (aged from 15 to 20 years old) indicated that most participants has had experiences of discrimination, were exposed to many sources of prejudice, and felt lack of LGBTI information in school curriculum (Fernandes et al., 2021). This confirms the necessity of professional training (Saleiro, 2017), even though 18% of the Portuguese people revealed not to agree with the inclusion of the theme in classes (European Union, 2015).

Since 2017, the National Strategy for Citizenship Education is being implemented in schools, aiming to reinforce citizenship education from preschool education to the end of compulsory education and stimulating “(...) plural and responsible participation of all in the construction of themselves as citizens and of fairer and more inclusive societies, in a democratic context of respect for diversity and the defense of Human Rights (Portuguese Republic, 2017, p. 3). Sexuality, in terms of diversity, rights, and sexual and reproductive health are topics included in the Strategy.”

Likewise, Act n°. 7247/2019 established the administrative measures that should be implemented to comply with Law n°. 38/2018, namely, regarding the education and teaching system. According to this Act, the Portuguese State must ensure the adoption of measures that promote the right to self-determination of gender identity and/or expression and the right to protection of the sexual characteristics of people, namely measures that intend to prevent and combat discrimination, violence and social exclusion within the school context, respecting the privacy, autonomy, and self-determination of young people; the promotion of detection and intervention mechanisms in risk situations related to young people whose gender identity/expression is not in accordance with the one attributed at birth; and, to perform adequate training of teachers and other educational professionals in the sphere of issues related to gender identity/expression of children and young people, ensuring their inclusion as a process of socio-educational integration. Thus, aiming to guarantee the full development of children and young people’s personalities, the Government must assure the implementation of these measures, as well as the necessary articulation with their legal guardians.

Medical care. The Portuguese Law recognizes trans people’s right to self-determination, but full citizenship still requires continued work against discrimination, especially for healthcare (Dinis et al., 2011). Portugal still does not ban conversion therapies on minors, still does not allow for a non-binary gender option at the birth certificate and the scarcity and morosity of health services affects negatively medical procedures and trans people’s well-being and life quality. As many trans people can’t afford private care (Hilário, 2017), some of them recur to clandestine markets.

Although the progression made in recent years, there are only two health facilities specialized for trans people, located in the North (Oporto) and in the Center (Coimbra), responding to the entire country. This is particularly problematic considering that trans people and moreover those in their teens (Moleiro and Pinto, 2012), have a higher risk for poor mental health due to the stigma and discrimination suffered since childhood (Figueiredo et al., 2020; Moleiro and Pinto, 2012, 2020). Mental health issues such as anxiety, personality disorders, depression, and suicide attempts are widely documented in literature (Figueiredo et al., 2020; Moleiro and Pinto, 2020), as well as the delay in seeking psychological support (Moleiro and Pinto, 2012).

In 2014, ILGA Portugal’s “Health in Equality” project concluded that being a LGBT person still constitute a barrier to access to healthcare. This reality is still present, as a study developed by Afonso et al. (2019), points out that the majority of elder LGBTI women and men do not have disclosed their sexual identity to their health professionals.

An investigation carried by [Figueiredo et al. \(2020\)](#), with a sample of 71 trans people averaging 26 years old, concluded that the large majority had already attended emergency services, general practice and family medicine or surgery. Half of the group reported having been victims of at least one episode of discrimination on all the three services. Emergency services (44.7%) represented the highest frequency of discrimination, followed by general practice and family medicine (25.3%), and the surgical context (19.4%). These episodes are related to some of the following forms of discrimination: use of prejudiced or insulting language (27.9%), denial of gender identity (20.6%), discouragement of exploration of gender identity (19.1%), refusal of assistance or termination of care (17.6%) and ridicularization or diminishing (16.2%). Nearly 35% of trans people state they do not feel comfortable discussing issues related to trans health.

Biased visions of sexual orientation and gender identity, often associated with conservative beliefs on gender norms, interfere with professional practice and origins misconducts potentially traumatic. To avoid it, the Portuguese Psychologists Order launched, in 2017, a Guide for Psychological Intervention with LGBT People, in consonance with the Standards of Care of the World Professional Association for Transgender Health and the Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Transgender and Gender nonconforming People of American Psychological Association. In the same direction, the [Portuguese] General-Directory of Health created, in 2019, the Health Strategy for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex People, with the first volume dedicated to Trans and Intersex people. The document seeks to “(...) ensure a better response to the health needs of LGBTI people by rationalizing resources and ensuring the implementation of good practices” ([Moleiro et al., 2017](#), p. 3).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, guidelines focused on moving face-to-face appointments to telehealth or online services were built. However, trans people report that under these circumstances they were not able to access continued care. Similarly, non-nationals in Portugal who were unable to travel home reported being unable to access hormone therapy ([ILGA Europe, 2020](#)).

Employment. Employment experiences show how violence and discrimination have an adverse effect on victims' daily lives, with cis privileges undermining trans people's rights ([Yavorsky, 2016](#)).

Several studies have been pointing out that trans people are frequently excluded from the *traditional* labor market, engaging in sex work to survive ([Churchill et al., 2019](#)). It is estimated that trans sex workers comprise 2% of all sex workers in Portugal. Later, [Oliveira \(2013\)](#) found that 19.8% of apartment sex workers were trans people and [Barros et al. \(2015\)](#) affirmed that nearly 8% of sex workers, both indoor and outdoor, were trans people too. [Oliveira \(2020\)](#) argued that to be a male or a trans sex worker could seriously aggravate victimization and for trans people to ingress in the traditional labor market is not simple due to stereotypes.

The results of the 2015 Eurobarometer ([European Union, 2015](#)) indicated that 33% of Portuguese respondents thought that candidates' gender identity, if trans, is a disadvantage when a company wants to hire someone and must choose between two candidates with equal skills and qualifications. Also, 18% said they felt uncomfortable having a trans

colleague at work and with whom they would maintain daily contact. In addition, only 21% affirmed that enough is being done in their workplace to promote diversity in terms of being trans.

Trans people not only face difficulties in accessing the workplace but as in progressing in their careers. According to [Grilo \(2019\)](#), recruitment and selection processes are not neutral, with discrimination being higher when the recruiter is male.

To assess organizational environments and policies regarding LGBTI's people inclusion in different companies and universities, the ADIM Iberian Project ([Pichardo et al., 2019](#)), developed by Portugal and Spain, concluded that discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity is not easy to detect. In a sample of almost 8600 people, of which 1147 were LGBTI, 36% of respondents admitted having heard some joke or negative comment, 13% reported having witnessed, with some frequency or very often, a person being mocked or insulted and 7% answered having witnessed situations in which an LGBTI person was professionally harmed. In that sense, LGBTI people regularly dissimulate sexual orientation or gender identity, using the argument that they are private matters (54%) and hiding their sexual orientation or gender identity in order to avoid rumors, labels or stereotypes (43%), fearing that visibility may change their professional value (24%) or lose opportunities in their professional career (21%) ([Pichardo et al., 2019](#)).

Corroborating the previous data, ILGA Portugal's report, from the [Portuguese] Observatory of Discrimination against LGBTI+ People (2020), showed that in 6.67% of the reported situations, the abusers were identified as their employers and co-workers.

Although the Portuguese Labor Code enshrines gender identity within the right to equality in access to employment and work ([Labor Code, 2009, 2015](#)), the results of the LGBT Survey of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights ([FRA, 2014](#)) concluded that only 50% of Portuguese respondents are aware of such Law prohibiting discrimination against people because of their sexual orientation or gender identity when applying for a job.

The above-mentioned factors help to explain why LGBTI people tend to not claim labor rights (e.g., marriage licenses, absences due to death, sick leave due to health or accident of partner or relatives) or participate in informal dynamics where significant others are invited, such as parties, dinners, or different team events.

Despite this, an LGBTI-inclusive workplace climate is being improved in some companies and organizations in Portugal lately. Thus, it is urgent a deeper understanding of the dynamics of LGBTI discrimination in the labor market to implement strategies to increase opportunities and reduce risks.

Conclusions

This paper highlights some of the key aspects of the violence and discrimination affecting trans people in Portugal, seeking to answer the question "Are we still living in a dictatorship?". As a dictatorship is a political regime marked by the absence of freedom and restriction of fundamental rights, particularly for vulnerable groups, it was our goal to analyze if trans people are still exposed to the conditions of oppression and discrimination even after the fall of Salazarism.

Portugal had lived under a dictatorship for 47 years, but some of the core values of the authoritarianism imposed by the New State remain for all those who continue to suffer from violence, discrimination, abuse, and invisibility in the different spheres of their lives, as reflected in the case of trans people. Although the country has, in the present, a much longer story of democracy than of dictatorship, the fact is that the scars of past authoritarian rule still linger in various aspects of society.

Due to the absence of scientific studies on trans people and the tendency to dilute them into the LGBTI initials, the understanding of their subjectivities is hard to acknowledge. So, trans people are almost invisible in society and in academia, as well as their vulnerability to being exposed to violence and discrimination.

Although scarce, data suggest that trans people are confronted with multiple forms of oppression in different contexts of their lives along a vital cycle. From family to workplace, fundamental rights are diminished or denied, with hate acts affecting both personal, social, and professional relationships, even though it is forbidden by Law.

As young or adults, trans people struggle with formal and informal barriers to freedom and self-determination, denouncing that there is a gap between what is guaranteed by the Portuguese State and what is performed in the daily life contexts, which is marked by suffering and discomfort, rejection, and exclusion.

National research about violence and discrimination against trans people, even though barely insufficient, confirms what the international literature has been suggesting. Family members, intimate partners, peers, teachers, work colleagues, and professionals are sources of oppression, contributing to the sense of being displaced wherever trans people are (e.g., [Moleiro et al., 2016](#)).

Meanwhile, systematic research on trans people as victims of domestic violence is nonexistent. In this regard, and despite the efforts made into creating policies and give adequate training for professionals working in strategic areas, domestic violence is devaluated and weakly sanctioned.

From what violence and discrimination happening in public space is concerned, there is a generalized feeling that sexual orientation and gender identity/expression are strong risk factors. The studies reveal how feelings of discomfort emerging from direct and disguised prejudice are common in family environments, within the school community (e.g., transphobic bullying), in different healthcare services (e.g., healthcare professionals addressing issues of identity and gender roles in a conservative way, hindering a relationship of empathy and trust) and in employment settings (e.g., in different labor processes). Thereby, it's plausible to affirm that we still live in a dictatorship, not in terms of a political regimen, but in terms of a social and cultural cisnormative system that tries to push into shadows trans people's existence.

Nevertheless, in recent years not only LGBTI people have been more accepted by family and members of their close circle, as they are more empowered to fight for their rights and claim their own voice ([Rede Ex Aequo, 2020](#)). As [Pereira \(2020\)](#) argued, political and legislative efforts to normalize LGBTI lives have had considerable success despite the persistence of conservative Portuguese society. However, public policies must ensure urgent changes regarding banning conversion therapies on minors, allowing a non-binary gender option on the birth certificate and ensuring a prompt and effective public

health service, enforcing laws for anti-discrimination crimes against LGBTI people, training authorities in these matters, promoting inclusive education in schools, thus promoting global social change (OECD, 2020).

To conclude, it's important to note that violence and discrimination affecting trans people and the banalization of such acts demand closer attention and further research. Trans people's experiences must be unveiled, so they became understandable. On the other hand, it's urgent to highlight the T from the LGBTI initials, as trans people are often ignored and forgotten. Thus, academic research exploring other areas besides family and intimate relationships, social discrimination, school, medical care, and employment is needed. Studies on the prison and justice system, for instance, would be fundamental to understanding the unique challenges and experiences of trans individuals within these contexts. Additionally, exploring the intersectionality of being both trans and a person of color or immigrant or refugee, could shed light on the challenges and disparities that specific groups of trans people may continue to face.

Author contributions

All the authors made substantial contribution to the conception of the paper. Sofia Neves, Mafalda Ferreira and Edgar Sousa were responsible for draft manuscript preparation. All authors revised the paper critically and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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Note

1. A dictatorship is a form of government where absolute power and authority are concentrated in the hands of a single individual or a small group of individuals.

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