



Comparative analysis of the equality plans of the Provincial Council of Ourense, Spain

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Abstract

The purpose of this document is to identify which actions in the Equal Opportunities Plan 2023–2026 of the Ourense Provincial Council have the potential to increase equality of opportunity between women and men in positions of similar status, with respect to an analysis of the objectives of the First Equality Plan of (2017–2021). The methodology for measuring the achievements of these strategic objectives consisted of a descriptive comparative study, where the changes in the stated objectives were analyzed, and a quantitative functional study was undertaken to determine the relationship between the typology and functionality of each position. A clear distinction was made between the goals achieved and those requiring more decisive intervention in future. In addition, it recognizes that women are very underrepresented in the most desirable positions at Ourense Provincial Council.

Keywords

equality, job opportunity, gender, promotion, work, job functionality

1 Introduction to the study of equality in public administration

Equal opportunities between women and men are a priority both for the image of public administration, and for its proper functioning. It is essential to guarantee that there are no discriminatory practices reproducing gender inequalities between the men and women working in public administration, since the right to gender equality is a fundamental value in any democracy. Furthermore, the cross-cutting nature of this issue means that public authorities are required to take it into account in the analysis, planning, design, and implementation of their policies (Corominas, 2022).

Equal opportunities comprise a value recognized in the Galician legal system. Act 2/2015 of 29 April on public employment in Galicia article 72.2 lays down the obligation for public administrations to develop an Equality Plan and establish staff working conditions in their Collective Agreements.

Since then, the Ourense Provincial Council, which presented its first Plan for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men 2017–2021, is currently beginning to implement the

Second Plan for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men 2023–2026¹. It is for this reason that the analysis of the results derived from the implementation of the first plan forms the basis of this comparative analysis.

According to the Final Evaluation Report of the 2017–2021 plan, of all the actions laid down in the plan: 69% were carried out; 22% are ongoing; 6% were suspended; and 3% are pending. In December 2022, the Ourense Provincial Council had a workforce of 797 people (including permanent staff), of whom 625 (78%) were men and 172 (22%) women. This is in contrast with the fact that women are usually better represented in public administration than in the private sector; moreover, as stated in the Second Equality Plan (2023–2026), the areas where the provincial council employs a greater number of staff are Infrastructure and Environment, both of which are very male-dominated with women underrepresented.

Gender equality is of central importance for growth and competitiveness, so it is important to compare one plan with the next to identify which actions have been effective, which have not and, if necessary, to help design new actions to improve the gender balance among staff at the Ourense Provincial Council in an effective manner.

1.1 Theoretical framework and review

The consideration of gender equality “seeks to open a space for reflection on the roles that society attributes to women and men, claiming gender equality as that which understands the participation and empowerment of women and men in the public and private spheres, with equal access to decision-making opportunities” (Aguilar, 2010, 76).

Aguilar (2010, 76) defines the concept of gender as “a socio-cultural construction that analyses the behaviors, attitudes, values, symbols and expectations elaborated on the basis of the biological differences that each society attributes to women and men, according to their own characteristics”, while for Villalobos and Avilés (2012, 21) “gender acts as a structuring principle of human societies, differentiating men and women, and converting these differences into hierarchical and unequal relationships”.

If we seek out the origin of the term ‘gender’, we find it in John Money, the first to spoke of ‘gender role’ with reference to the modes of behavior, way of expressing and moving, and preference for topics of conversation and play characterizing masculine and feminine identity. For Money, the establishment of gender identity occurs at eighteen months, as the culmination of a process involving both biological and social components. The impact of his research in the social sciences is due to the importance he assigned to cultural factors compared to biological ones, which saw in difference, and even in inequality, an expression of the opposite nature of the sexes (Puleo, 2008, as cited in Villalobos & Avilés, 2012, 26).

Therefore, the concept of gender equality is configured through different interpretations developed by a variety of institutional and civil society actors, following previous interpretations that have become dominant or entrenched as ‘common sense’. The meanings of the concept are fixed for some time, narrowed within, or extended beyond labels, and adapted to political frameworks (Lombardo, Meier & Verloo, 2010, 109). For Beltrán y Puga (2008, 201) “equality has to do with everything: with the protection of fundamental rights by prohibiting arbitrary and unjustified treatment of women in decision-making and by legitimizing positive actions that promote equal opportunities for social groups”.

¹ The plan was recognized as a first runner-up in the “Government Campaign of the Year 2023” section of the Napolitan Victory Awards, organized by The Washington Academy of Political Arts and Sciences.

Women have historically been thought of as those responsible for reproduction; meanwhile, the state – as a place of public affairs and formulation of policies aimed at citizens constituted by neutral and disembodied subjects – has been thought of as alien to the lives of women who develop within the private-domestic sphere. This historical nature of the State supports policies that consider women as inappropriate beings. In this way, the feminist gender point of view has illuminated something that was not perceptible until a few years ago: state policy is sexually biased. To address the issue of the sexual bias in the relationship between the State and women through public policies and their effects on gender relations, we will consider the concept of citizenship (Anzorena, 2014, 27).

Thus, “one of the areas in which most efforts, constitutional and legislative reforms, plans and platforms for action, and affirmative action measures at both international and regional levels have been concentrated is around guaranteeing equality between women and men” (Pautassi, 2011, 280).

However, policies are not mere tools of the State, rather they are its builders, in a process in which the state and the recipients of public policies intertwine and interact in a framework of the exercise of power and resistance. Concepts of gender, the relationships they imply, the roles they legitimize, and the practices that are normalized and contested are constructed, signified, and resignified in this same process (Río Fortuna, González Martín & País Andrade, 2013, 58).

If we look at the path taken by gender equality policies in Spain, we can observe three strategic lines of action in the design and planning of these policies by the general state administration in Spain and the European Commission; these are (Fernández de Castro, 2012, 79):

- gender mainstreaming in public policies,
- the demand for measures leading to women’s empowerment, and
- co-responsibility as an evolution of the principle of work-life balance.

Article 14 of the Spanish Constitution proclaims the right to equality and non-discrimination on the grounds of sex. Furthermore, Article 9.2 enshrines the obligation of public authorities to promote conditions for the equality of persons and groups to become real and effective. From the above normative review, one issue is clear: the objective of the law is the right to effective equality between women and men. However, in some cases it concerns combating direct and indirect discrimination, while in other cases, it merely concerns ‘promoting’ equality (Bodelón, 2010, 98). Empirical reality shows how job performance depends on many factors that cannot be controlled in advance. Hence, the basic objective of the regulations is to implement and promote a socio-labor framework which facilitates gender equality.

According to Bodelón (2010), the reason it is necessary to move towards a concept of effective equality is the lack of a basic explanation for the inability to achieve formal equality and equal treatment which can account for the social relations of subordination and for the structures of authority developed around gender.

Those policies that strengthen the processes of individualization, empowerment and increased representation of women as political subjects provoke greater resistance because they directly affect the mechanisms of the distribution of power, and the sexual division of labor between women and men, while also challenging policy paradigms (Guzmán & Montaña, 2012, 32).

Guzmán (1998) states that the resistance which has made the social construction of gender equality a difficult organizing principle of democracy responds to various causes. Some of these are the result of the inertia of cognitive and value systems; others arise from the reluctance of men to see their interests threatened by competition from women in public and private spaces, and others arise from a deeper substratum: they are associated with fear generated by changes

in the other's identity caused by questioning their own identity, and with uncertainty about the meaning and consequences of the transformations underway.

However, according to Bodelón (2010, 99) this variety of attitudes and social connotations that policymakers seek to eradicate means that political and social approval and discussion in this regard involves including demands and concepts from the feminist movement, which are sometimes based on exclusively ideological aspects without considering professional practice (Corominas, 2022; Málaga University, 2013). According to Bustelo and Lombardo (2006), the existence of idealized 'interpretative frameworks', devoid of any professional pragmatism and far removed from the problem of gender inequality, conditions the formulation of equality policies.

In Europe, there is a wide variety of interpretations and analyses of gender issues and many strategies intended to address them, influenced by each national political context. "Among feminists, academics or activists, and among ordinary political actors, there is hardly ever a real consensus on either the diagnosis or the prognosis (solution) of the problem" (Bustelo & Lombardo, 2006, 119).

Bustelo and Lombardo (2006, 132) explain that due to gender roles, there is a problem in that men are not included in the representation of either the problem or the solution, making progress towards gender equality difficult. The success of effective gender equality requires a holistic social vision, introducing an intersectional analysis.

Therefore, when talking about positive actions and, more recently, parity, it is thought that the conventional policies intended to create equal opportunities, the objective of which is to equalize the starting conditions, are insufficient in situations where real inequality is very pronounced, even if formal equality can be achieved through such policies (Osborne, 2005). In many cases, the diagnosis of the problem is not correct, which means that the solutions are not aimed at the actual problem and often exclude the socio-labor reality in the performance of a job or an operational function.

In this research, we will focus on the area of work where Bustelo and Lombardo (2006, 132) exemplify this perfectly: in the EU texts, the weak diagnostic framework on the existence of gender inequalities in the labor market is transformed in practice into how women can reconcile work and family through part-time jobs and flexible working hours. As such, the solution does not address the real problem; flexibility and part-time work are temporary solutions to the discrimination against women in employment, and as such merely addresses internal organizational issues.

Unequal gender relations are those that have historically established a subordinate place for women in society and determine the domestic sphere as a priority and reproduction as their main function, while assigning them complementary or secondary positions in the public sphere. Women have been taking on responsibilities in the workplace and community without relinquishing any of their existing responsibilities, driving them into a situation of physical and psychological overload (Anzorena, 2008).

Despite the introduction of gender diversity criteria in organizations, "gender segregation in the workplace is a phenomenon present in most countries, regardless of socio-economic conditions and the existence of anti-discrimination laws that ensure women's full citizenship" (Heredia, 2004, 39).

State intervention reaffirms the sexual division of labor and knowledge. The assignment to certain tasks due to sexual difference implies the denial of the possibility of performing others. Furthermore, through income transfer policies or social goods and services, the State intervenes in the organization of households in need of such assistance, by influencing how tasks are distributed according to sex within the household. The domestic unit, preventing the very same members from arranging the distribution of activities within the home is the new situation (Anzorena, 2008).

To realize the benefits of the diversity and potential offered by women in organizations, it is necessary to create an environment which overcomes traditional barriers to their professional development. “It is not only the workers who have to adapt to the company’s philosophy; the company must also adapt to the needs of its members” (Heredia, 2004, 41).

In this context, it is clear that “actions at company level are not enough. It is necessary to adopt measures to reconcile work and family life, beyond those applied to labor relations” (Artazcoz, Escribá-Agüir & Cortés, 2004, 34).

Article 45 of Organic Law 3/2007² for the effective equality of women and men includes an obligation for companies to draw up an equality plan negotiated with the legal representatives of the staff of each organization.

“To say here that the cost-benefit ratio of equal opportunities or, in other words, between the level of equal opportunities in a company and its results is a subject that has hardly been explored; companies must convince themselves through certain advantages of the convenience of implementing equality plans” (Calvet et al, 2009, 171).

The above makes it clear that one of the unavoidable obligations of the public sector is to create the structural basis for facilitating an effective work-life balance, a fact stated in almost all the plans analyzed. Hence the need to promote the evaluation of the impact of gender equality policies and how to assess their ‘success’.

To this end, Espinosa-Fajardo and Bustelo (2019) proposed the following actions:

1. The evaluation of equality policies creates an essential space to debate the different views on the ‘success’ of these policies and to build consensus, recognizing the diversity of voices, on what we want to achieve and how to achieve it.
2. Define evaluation criteria for each specific policy and context, broadening evaluation approaches towards other supposedly universal models that only generate a limited understanding of evaluation that focuses on the ‘measurable’.
3. Finally, take the criteria of ‘gender inclusiveness’, ‘political commitment’, ‘understanding complexity’, ‘contextualizing gender equality’, ‘intersectionality’, ‘participation and empowerment’ and ‘incremental transformation’ as a blueprint for evaluating the design.

In this way, it is hoped that “the potential of evaluating equality policies as a tool for learning, improvement and accountability on the part of public administrations makes it necessary to deepen and reflect on it” (Espinosa-Fajardo & Bustelo, 2019, 168). This also reveals how transferring this type of policy to private practice is costly and time consuming, since a majority of equality plans either end up becoming mere declarations of principles or establish measures that are not related to the reality for which they are intended (Sierra Hernáiz, 2018, 204).

Therefore Article 72 second paragraph of Act 2/2015 of 29 April on public employment in Galicia, expressly states the obligation of the public administrations to draw up an Equality Plan and to establish an agreement on working conditions for their staff in the Collective Agreement. As with any public policy, this makes it necessary to evaluate the measures in the Equality Plan, and to guarantee equal opportunities for women and men, with the aim of sufficiently improving gender balance in the workforce by recruiting a greater number of women into public administration.

However, all this leaves an important gap when considering equality in the public sphere, namely that part of the Public Sector which carries out a business activity. Moreover, even within the Public Administration, there are jobs that due to their specific characteristics or

² Online: <https://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-2007-6115>

operation influence the typology of the human capital which performs them; a large part of the jobs performed by a Provincial Council fall under this specific operational function. This means that the distribution of jobs is defined by their nature, making them desirable according to gender.

2 Objective and methodology

Hence, the aim of this paper is to identify which measures in the Plan for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men 2023–2026 of the Ourense Provincial Council have the potential to improve equal opportunities for women and men in positions of similar status in comparison with improvements achieved under the First Equality Plan (2017–2021). However, it is first necessary to describe the public institution analyzed: the Ourense Provincial Council, which governs a province with 304,550 inhabitants as of 2023, 34% of whom live in the provincial capital (city of Ourense)³.

Research question: What new actions does the Provincial Council need to implement in its Equality Plan to facilitate access to the workforce for women in an effective manner?

Regarding the methodology used to measure the scope (achievement) of the General Objectives or Strategic Axes set out in the I Equality Plan (2017–2021), two studies were carried out:

1. A comparative descriptive study in which through a survey of the staff of the Ourense Provincial Council, the level of achievement of each strategic Axis (major objective) was addressed separately, using direct questions in relation to the strategic and operational objectives of each Axis. The survey was conducted between November 2022 and March 2023, and the number of responses obtained was one hundred and ten, which represents a response rate of 17.6% of the number of council staff on contract as of 31 December 2022.

The questionnaire that makes up the survey was inorganized into seven thematic blocks:

1. General data on the workforce
2. Professional classification, promotion and training
3. Conciliation and co-responsibility
4. Working Day
5. Occupational health
6. Prevention of gender violence
7. Language and inclusive communication.

The questionnaire was drawn up in keeping with guidelines set out in Royal Decree 6/2019, Article 45, paragraph 2, which states: Equality plans shall contain an ordered set of assessable actions aimed at removing obstacles that prevent or hinder the equality of women and men in practice, and shall include at least the following areas:

- a. Recruitment and hiring
- b. Professional classification
- c. Training
- d. Professional promotion
- e. Working conditions

³ The Ourense Province has an area of 7,273 km² and is made up of 92 municipalities; it is the only province in the Autonomous Community of Galicia that does not have sea access.

- f. Co-responsible exercise of the rights of private, family and work life
 - g. Female underrepresentation
 - h. Remuneration
 - i. Prevention of sexual and gender-based harassment (see Infonalia, 2020).
2. A functional study of a quantitative nature in relation to the typology and operation of each job in the Ourense Provincial Council, according to Ministry of Equality criteria for evaluating these jobs from a gender perspective. To complete the job performance study, three independent variables were added, these being⁴:
- Occupational Functionality: 1. managerial; 2. technical; 3. administrative; 4. basic; and 5. unclassifiable.
 - Professional Category: A1. Base level 26; A2. Base level 24; B. Base level 21; C1. Base level 19; C2. Base level 16; D1. Base level 14; and D2. Base level 12. (A = highest category and D = lowest category).
 - Gender feasibility (presence of women) according to the National Classification of Economic Activities (CNAE⁵): High; Medium; Low.

3 Analysis of results

The following is an analysis of the results regarding the status and achievement of equality-related objectives at Ourense Provincial Council after the implementation and development of the First Equality Plan, differentiating in this regard the two types of analysis mentioned above.

3.1 Level of achievement of the Strategic Objectives of the First Equality Plan of the Ourense Provincial Council (2017–2021)

In the First Plan for Equality between Women and Men of the Ourense Provincial Council, 4 strategic axes were drawn up in order to promote equal opportunities. Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4 summarize the main strengths and weaknesses arising from the implementation of the First Equality Plan of the Ourense Provincial Council for each strategic axis. These are: 1) Strategy and internal organization, 2) Balanced participation between women and men, 3) Working time and 4) Health and Safety at Work.

Based on these four major general areas of intervention, nine strategic objectives, twentyfive operational objectives and forty-five actions were specified, which were distributed across the four axes. Studies of a similar nature and characterization can be found in Málaga University (2013) and Pompeu Fabra (2018).

The three strategic objectives included in Axis 1 were to promote gender mainstreaming in the Ourense Provincial Council; incorporate the gender perspective in internal and external corporate institutional communication; and progressively incorporate the gender perspective in all training activities.

⁴ Variables that make it possible to define the occupational functionality of each type of work.

⁵ Classification included in Royal Decree 475/2007 by which the National Classification of Economic Activities 2009 (CNAE-2009, which aims to reflect structural changes in the economy and especially technological development) is approved, in addition, to comply with the requirements of Community Regulation No. 1893/2006 of the European Parliament and Council).

To this end, the nine operational objectives and the seventeen actions that belong under this axis sought to disseminate the Provincial Council’s commitment to gender equality through the public presentation of the plan; provide internal communication channels that enrich the actions carried out and guarantee their execution by the distribution of responsibilities by the Equality Commission; incorporate the gender variable and include equality clauses in the hope of eliminating gender invisibility caused by the sexist use of language; guarantee the use of non-sexist language and images; adapt and correct sexist uses of language in internal and external documents, external documents and web pages; guarantee, through revision, the use of non-sexist language and images, adapt and correct sexist usage in the language of internal and external documents and provincial council web pages; and incorporate the gender perspective in all training activities, promoting equality training and awareness-raising.

At the end of the implementation period for the First Plan, fifteen of the seventeen actions had been carried out. However, the results of the survey show that of the total number of participants, 54.3% stated that they had not received training from the Provincial Council in the last year; although 86.9% were aware of the training actions promoted by the Provincial Council. 65.3% of the respondents said that they had received no training in gender mainstreaming, compared to 34.7% who did have such training, and of these 53.8% were women and 46.2% men.

Analyzing the responses on the inclusive use of language, the majority (> 80%) of the provincial council staff consider their use of language to be inclusive from a gender perspective. However, 76% stated that they had not received any training on inclusive use of language, and of the remaining 24%, 54.2% said that such training had not been provided by the provincial council. The summary of the situation of this first Axis is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Situation descriptor Axis 1 “Strategy and Internal Organization”

Strengths, aspects to be reinforced
Communication, the staff are aware of the training activities promoted by the provincial Council and consider that their use of language is inclusive from a gender perspective.
Weaknesses, areas for improvement
Staff have not received regular, formal training in gender mainstreaming from the provincial council and are unaware of any protocols or guidelines on the inclusive use of language.

Source: Authors’ own table.

The two strategic objectives that make up Axis 2 were: to promote the incorporation of opportunities between women and men in the management of the Provincial Council’s resources; and to promote full participation of staff in all the organization’s processes. This axis is made up of seven operational objectives and thirteen actions.

This axis seeks to review and modify the content and wording of advertisements for employment, to eliminate those elements that could lead to a gender-biased result; to generate analysis of the situation of the entity from a gender perspective in order to develop employees’ professional potential; to strive for gender balance in job applications; to integrate gender perspectives into internal promotion procedures; to favor equal participation of staff in all the organization’s processes; and to encourage negotiation meetings and participation in schedules that reconcile work and family life.

In this case, out of the thirteen actions planned in 2017, seven were carried out. The results show that participants in the survey do believe that the selection of personnel is carried out by following criteria that guarantee gender equality. Although 52.6% of the respondents accept that there are positions in which men or women are very underrepresented; out of this 52.6%, 52.5% are men and 47.5% women.

Analyzing the distribution by occupational subgroups shows that the ratio of women to men in subgroup A1 (highest category) is very similar, in contrast to subgroup A2, where the percentage of women (56.4%) exceeds that of men. In the next subgroup (category B), men outnumber women. In subgroup C1 (administrative staff) the situation is reversed; the percentage of women and men is similar, with a slightly higher percentage of women, although in subgroup C2 the percentage of men is higher.

Analyzing the staff according to the type of employment contract shows that in the case of staff with civil-servant status, the percentage of women and men is similar, with a slightly higher percentage of men. With respect to permanent staff, the proportion of men is 80% compared to 20% of women.

Only 15.6% of the respondents had applied for promotion in the last five years, and of these only 37.5% were women. It is also noteworthy that 43.7% of the people surveyed are not seeking promotion or to change to a better job, and 77.4% think that women and men are promoted equally.

In terms of working hours, most of the participants work full time (94.9%), i.e.: between thirty-five and forty hours per week. It should be noted that 61.4% say that they have flexible working hours, while 96.2% do not have reduced working hours. It is also important to highlight that 80% say that work, meeting, and training times help them to reconcile work, private and family life, but more so in the mornings and less so in the afternoons. Table 2 summarizes the status of the second Axis.

Table 2. Situation descriptor, Axis 2 “Balanced participation of women and men”

Strengths, aspects to be reinforced
The selection of personnel is carried out according to criteria that guarantee gender equality. Women and men are equally promoted to better jobs. Working hours, meeting times and training schedules facilitate the reconciliation of work, personal and family life for provincial council staff.
Weaknesses, areas for improvement
Male employees account for almost 80% of the workforce. There are jobs in which men or women are very underrepresented and which do not facilitate access to any professional group or category for women and men → the effects of flexible working hours are hardly reduced, with the option of reduced working hours being unexploited.

Source: Authors’ own table.

Axis 3 has a single strategic objective: to promote the reconciliation of private, family and working life, facilitating changes in attitudes which are favorable to co-responsibility in the domestic and professional spheres.

This led to the design of four operational objectives and nine actions to be carried out. In short, they aimed at identifying the needs of the provincial council’s employees in terms

of work-life balance; offering employees different options to enable them to easily reconcile work, family and personal life, through financial aid, more flexible working hours and the establishment of preferences for the choice of shifts and holidays for caring responsibilities; as well as encouraging the use of work-life balance actions among male employees of the provincial council.

By the end of 2021, five of the nine actions had been implemented. This was reflected in the survey responses, where, despite 49.5% of people claiming to have either one or two children, it is remarkable that 47.6% have no children of their own, and of this 47.6%, 52.6% are women, compared to 47.4% men.

Of the 49.5% of respondents who say that they have family responsibilities (of whom 65.7% are women and 34.3% are men), 65.5% say that they are the main carers of family members. Of the people who need help to meet family responsibilities, 62.1% rely on their family network, 44.8% on professionals and 13.8% on public services.

While it is true that 61.9% say that they manage to reconcile work and family life satisfactorily, 30.2% say that they do so only with difficulty and 7.9% say that they do so with great difficulty. However, if we analyze these data broken down by sex, 40.5% of women say that they manage to reconcile work and family life, 38.9% say that they manage to do so with some difficulty and 60% say that they manage to do so with great difficulty. Meanwhile, 59.5% of men say that they manage to reconcile work and family life, 61.1% that they do so with some difficulty and 40% that they do so with great difficulty. Table 3 outlines the state-of-play for the third axis.

Table 3. Situation descriptor, Axis 3 “Working Times”

Strengths, aspects to be reinforced
The provincial council develops actions which favor flexible working hours, facilitating a satisfactory work-life balance for staff.
Weaknesses, areas for improvement
Most of those women who family members’ main carers report great difficulty in reconciling work and family life. Lack of effective public services to facilitate work-life balance.

Source: Authors’ own table.

Finally, the strategic objectives set out in Axis 4 are threefold: to incorporate the gender perspective in the promotion of occupational health; guarantee a working environment free of harassment, sexual harassment, and gender-based harassment; and guarantee the right to comprehensive protection for victims of gender-based violence.

This axis includes five operational objectives and six actions, focused mainly on assessing occupational risks and their repercussions, especially for women; guaranteeing health protection and improving workers’ quality of life by providing them with work equipment and/or uniforms adapted to their needs; guaranteeing a respectful working environment free of harassment at work, sexual harassment and gender-based harassment through the development of a preventive protocol and the training of staff responsible for monitoring these cases; and disseminating the rights and protection actions aimed at female workers who are victims of gender-based violence.

Even though only three actions were carried out of the six planned, the data obtained in the occupational health section show a workforce which regularly reviews its medical situation,

is aware of the existence of the Occupational Risk Prevention Plan⁶ and a workforce which believes that the work patterns, volume, and breaks are adequate.

However, 35.6% of the participants, of whom 25% are women and 75% are men, consider that they occupy a position with a certain risk to their physical or psychological health, mainly due to hours of computer use, stress, pressure, poor planning of events, handling chemical products and a heavy workload. In addition, 47.5% of men and 52.5% of women consider that they do not receive the necessary information and materials to ensure their physical or psychological welfare at work.

Now, regarding the prevention of gender-based violence, 84.5% of people consider it necessary to train staff in the detection and prevention of harassment at work, as they are not aware of the existence of a protocol for action in cases of sexual aggression or gender-based aggression, nor do they know what procedures to follow in the event of harassment at work.

74.3% of the respondents do not believe that ironic or mocking comments about people’s physical appearance, dress or sexual orientation are commonplace at the provincial council; 25.7% responded in the affirmative, 72.22% of them being women and 27.78% men, Table 4 shows the state-of-play for this fourth strategic axis.

Table 4. Situation descriptor, Axis 4 “Safety and Health at Work”

Strengths, aspects to be reinforced
Provincial council staff are aware of the existence of the Occupational Risk Prevention Plan and consider that work patterns, volume, and breaks are adequate. It is considered that at the provincial council there are no ironic or derisive comments in relation to people’s physical appearance, clothing, or sexual orientation → optimal working climate.
Weaknesses, areas for improvement
A high percentage of jobs present a high risk to physical and mental health. Staff are not provided with the information and materials necessary to ensure their welfare is protected. Staff are unaware of the existence of a protocol for dealing with alleged cases of sexual assault, gender-based violence or harassment at work → more training on how to act in the event of such a case.

Source: Authors’ own table.

3.2 Functionality and labor typology of the Provincial Council of Ourense

As explained above, analysis of the information at the level of gender equality obtained from an internal survey at the Ourense Provincial Council was completed with a study of the functional and operational typology of council jobs. For this purpose, Table 5 shows the distribution by sex of the staff of the Provincial Council on 30 June 2022 (period of maximum staffing levels to meet summer needs) and where there is strong male preponderance, precisely in those areas with a larger workforce, these being Infrastructure and Environment, both characterized by

⁶ The Occupational Risk Prevention Plan (PRL) is an internal management plan, the purpose of which is to protect the health and safety of employees at work.

high levels of itinerant and manual jobs, characteristics that lower the desirability and presence of women.

Table 5. Distribution of W/M according to Major Areas

	Women		Men		Total	
	NO.	%/Tot	NO.	%/Tot	NO.	%/Tot
Large Functional Areas						
General Administration	35	24.3%	36	5.8%	71	9.30%
Finance	32	22.2%	20	3.2%	52	6.8%
Infrastructure	14	9.7%	290	46.9%	304	39.9%
Environment	10	6.9%	158	25.6%	168	22.0%
Area of Culture and Sport	34	23.6%	54	8.7%	88	11.5%
Transparency and Open Government	3	2.1%	13	2.1%	16	2.0%
Presidency	16	11.1%	47	7.6%	63	8.3%
Total	144		618		762	
Media	20.571		88.286		108.86	
Coefficient of deviation	0.5821		1.0616		0.8319	

Prepared by the authors, note: the workforce totals 762 jobs when including temporary and intermittent staff hired to meet the summer and current temporary needs on 30 June.

Meanwhile, the areas with the highest rate participation by women are General Administration, Culture and Sports, and Finance. These are areas where functionality is less susceptible to differences in terms of desirability according to gender, and where a large part of the jobs they include are technical or administrative, where access is usually by competitive examination and where the main influencing factor is usually the level of studies obtained and previous work experience, with a high deviation observed in all cases.

For these reasons, the data in Table 5 make it clear that there are certain limits to achieving a substantial modification in the W/M ratio due to the large-scale recruitment in two areas: infrastructure (public works, conservation, and maintenance) and the environment (cleaning, parks and gardens and environmental sustainability). These are functions where a large part of the tasks performed require that the worker is mobile and involve a physical component. The W/M ratio will only change substantially if the standard tasks of the provincial council are modified.

Table 6 shows labor distribution by gender according to the criteria of the Ministry of Equality, to which three characterization variables have been added: functional occupation, professional category, and gender feasibility in female key according to the CNAE, which is necessary to interpret the composition of the Ourense Provincial Council workforce.

The functional typology shown by the data reflects a nominatively heterogeneous distribution of jobs: categorization with fifteen types of jobs belonging to the higher categories, A and B, and fifteen types of jobs belonging to levels C and D; occupation with fifteen types of jobs belonging to occupations 1, 2 and 3, and the same to occupations 4 and 5. However, when studying the number of jobs per functional typology, the concentration of jobs in the medium-low category and occupation increases, as shown in tables 7, 8 and 9.

Table 6. Labor Panel for gender-sensitive job evaluation

Post	Women	Men	Total	Function	Category	Feasibility (W/M)
administrative	6	9	15	3	C1	HIGH
bricklayer	0	6	6	5	D2	LOW
architect	0	1	1	1	A1	MEDIUM
consultant	4	9	13	2	A2	HIGH
auxiliary	7	11	18	4	C1	HIGH
assistant	1	27	28	5	C2	MEDIUM
firefighter	0	12	12	2	B	LOW
foreman	0	21	21	3	B	MEDIUM
warden	0	1	1	4	C2	HIGH
chauffeur	1	153	154	4	D1	LOW
driver	0	15	15	4	D1	LOW
coordinator	0	5	5	2	A2	HIGH
director	1	1	2	1	A1	HIGH
electrician	0	2	2	4	B	LOW
team leader	0	5	5	1	A2	HIGH
laboratory technician	0	1	1	2	B	HIGH
road labourer	2	62	64	5	D2	LOW
cleaner	4	0	4	5	D2	HIGH
machinist	0	23	23	4	D1	LOW
mechanic	0	7	7	2	B	LOW
teacher	4	9	13	2	A2	HIGH
monitor	4	13	17	3	B	HIGH
officer	2	33	35	2	B	MEDIUM
operator	8	52	60	4	C1	HIGH
pawn	1	30	31	5	D2	LOW
janitor-sereno	11	30	41	5	D1	MEDIUM
sprinkler	0	6	6	5	D2	MEDIUM
technician	1	2	3	2	B	MEDIUM
watchman	0	13	13	4	D2	LOW
team leader	1	8	9	1	A1	HIGH
Totals	58	567	625			

Source: Authors' own table, based on the data collected in the Second Plan for Equal Opportunities between women and men of the Provincial Council of Ourense, following the criteria of the Ministry of Equality and the National Classification of Economic Activities.

Only the characterization of the four jobs with the highest number of people employed shows the specialization of the Ourense Provincial Council in jobs where men are very overrepresented:

driver + road worker + operator + porter = 319 jobs, no less than 51% of the total number of jobs identified; this situation makes it especially difficult to achieve strategic axes 2 and 3.

Table 7 shows the distribution of the workforce of the Ourense Provincial Council on 30 June 2022, based on the criterion of a greater/lesser presence of women performing jobs, according to CNAE data. The first thing that can be observed is that jobs in which women are underrepresented account for more than half of the workforce of the Provincial Council (52.3%) and, moreover, in these jobs the number of women barely exceeds 1% of those employed. Furthermore, in those jobs where women are highly represented, the Ourense Provincial Council barely reaches female participation of 24%.

Table 7. Gender Feasibility W/M

	Women	Total	% M/T	%over/ Template
High	39	163	23.93%	26.1%
Medium	15	135	11.11%	21.6%
Low	4	327	1.22%	52.3%
Total	58	625	9.28%	

Source: Authors’ own table.

Thus, the gender feasibility of the job, as expressed in Table 7, acts as a constraint on the distribution of staff between women and men. The occupation type has a limiting effect on the competitive gender balance.

Table 8 classifies the Ourense Provincial Council workforce, according to the nature of the occupation exercised, and where it can be seen that occupations which require fewer qualifications and are more manual are those that predominate. However, there is no direct relationship in either direction between occupation and number of women employed, and the percentage of women in the management is barely 12% and in the basic category 10.5%.

Table 8 also relates occupation to gender desirability, showing how female desirability decreases as we go down the occupational ladder, 72% low female presence in auxiliary occupations and 56% in basic occupations. By contrast, managerial positions have high gender desirability. However, the total number of managerial positions is only seventeen; the case is similar for the administrative level with high gender desirability (60%) but only fifty-three jobs.

Table 8. Occupational Function W/M and its relation to Gender Feasibility

Occupation	Women	Total	%M/T	Feasibility – High	Feasibility – Medium	Feasibility – Low
1. Directive	2	17	11.76%	16–94%	1–6%	0
2. Technical	11	89	12.36%	32–36%	38–43%	19–21%
3. Administrative	10	53	18.87%	32–60%	21–40%	0
4. Auxiliary	16	286	5.59%	79–28%	0	207–72%
5. Other basic occupations	19	180	10.56%	4–2%	75–42%	101–56%
Total	58	625	9.28%	163	135	327

Source: Authors’ own table.

In statistical terms, the functional occupation shows a high correlation with respect to the gender distribution of jobs, with an R2 of 0.57 between women’s job distribution and occupation. Again, jobs are clustered at lower skill levels and with a higher manual workload. The standard sampling error is low, although the distribution of the data is insufficient to ensure high statistical significance, as reflected by the value of the t-statistic 1.64017 (single-digit breakdown).

Table 9, classifies Ourense Provincial Council staff, based on their professional category⁷. This classification organizes public employees into the following categories:

- A1. Career civil servant in management or supervisory positions;
- A2. Career civil servant with great specialization in their field of work;
- B. Career civil servant with a medium level of responsibility and technical skills;
- C1. Civil servant with intermediate training who performs simple administrative or technical tasks;
- C2. Official with minimum required training and who performs general or support tasks;
- D1. Auxiliary or general service official who performs specialized support and assistance tasks;
- D2. Auxiliary or general services official who performs basic tasks.

Where it is observed that the categories of lower qualification are those with greater presence within the composition of the reference staff, category D (positions without specific qualifications) currently represents 57.1% of the Ourense Provincial Council staff. It is followed by 15.7% of technicians at level B, and senior administrative staff (C1) with 14.9%. The A category accounts for 7.7%.

Women are only represented to any significant extent in two categories, C1 and A2, with over 20% participation of women in both cases. In this sense, there is a direct and negative relationship between category and representation of women, since the three categories requiring the lowest qualifications are those with the lowest participation of women.

When relating category and gender feasibility, Table 9 again shows how female feasibility decreases as staff categorization decreases, see the 82% low female presence in category D1 and 92% in D2. In contrast, category A maximizes high gender feasibility.

Table 9. Job Category W/M and its Relationship to Gender Feasibility

Category	Women	Total	% M/T	Feasibility -High	Feasibility -Medium	Feasibility -Low
A1	2	12	16.67%	11–92%	1–8%	0
A2	8	36	22.22%	36–100%	0	0
B	7	98	7.14%	18–18%	59–60%	21–22%
C1	21	93	22.58%	93–100%	0	0
C2	1	29	3.45%	1–3%	28–97%	0
D1	12	233	5.15%	0	41–18%	192–82%
D2	7	124	5.65%	4–3%	6–5%	114–92%
Total	58	625	9,28%			

Source: Authors’ own table.

⁷ The classification by functional categories of employment is included in Royal Legislative Decree 5/2015 of the Law of the Basic Statute of Public Employees.

Statistically, and although the R2 is low at 0.27, there is a relationship between the category and the percentage of women represented. The t-statistic gives us a more significant value in this case of 0.81014, although again it should be borne in mind that we are working with a small sample and that the breakdown by category is not particularly large.

Finally, Table 10 shows the combined segmentation of occupation and category in terms of gender feasibility, a classification obtained by filtering the panel data collected in Table 6. To characterize the employability of the Provincial Council accurately in terms of gender, and where the functional operational structure of the Provincial Council’s jobs is a factor that limits a substantial increase in the number of women it employs, we can see the predominance of low-feasibility manual jobs.

Table 10. Characterization of Occupation vs. Job Category according to W/M feasibility

Feasibility – High		Feasibility – Medium		Feasibility – Low	
Occupancy-Categ	No. of jobs	Occupancy -Categ	No. of jobs	Occupancy -Categ	No. of jobs
Technicians-A2	31	Technicians-B	38	Auxiliary-D1	192
Auxiliary-C1	78	Basics-D1	41	Basic D2	101
%/High Feasibility	109 (66.9%)	%Medium Feasibility	79 (58.5%)	%/Low Feasibility	293 (89.6%)

Source: Authors’ own table.

The analysis using dynamic tables⁸ shows the operational-functional dependence of the distribution of jobs at the Ourense Provincial Council, which reveals that men are very overrepresented in terms of both occupation and administrative/professional category.

4 Discussion of results

The analysis of the results obtained with the First Equality Plan of the Provincial Council of Ourense, from the perspective of its workers, presents a series of factors to be considered, among which it is possible to differentiate between those that are considered achieved and those that require more decisive or effective action. This means that the achievement of Gender Equality as studied is an open question and subject to the characterization of the investigated environment, as reflected in their work, Corominas (2022) or Palumbo et al. (2022).

First of all, it is worth highlighting that the implementation and dissemination of the 1st Plan facilitated transversality and the perception of the need for a problem, giving rise to an institutional image of awareness in this respect, an institutional effect observed in practically all the Plans analyzed (Málaga University, 2013; Badajoz Provincial Council, 2019; Miguel Hernández University, 2020; Pamplona City Council, 2022). And the translation of which is manifested in aspects such as a good working environment, inclusive language, and a real commitment to reducing gender inequality.

⁸ Summary in tables 8, 9 and 10.

One achievement is the implementation of highly flexible working hours in order to promote the reconciliation of work and family life, along with the scheduling of work meetings in the mornings. Other as yet unexplored solutions could be exploited, such as reducing working hours in special circumstances, providing leave adjusted to specific needs (Málaga University, 2013; Pompeu Fabra, 2018; Badajoz Provincial Council, 2019; Pamplona City Council, 2022), and identifying when teleworking is a feasible solution without reducing the quality of service, by days/week, time slots. However, this may be controversial: finding positive examples such as Pompeu Fabra (2018) or, on the contrary, teleworking is an extra effort to reconcile work and family life, Miguel Hernández University (2020).

The questions on professional selection and promotion do not seem to reveal any negative issues, concurring with Málaga University (2013), Pompeu Fabra (2018) and IdISSC (2021), the relevant regulations seem to be being followed effectively; the anonymized competitive examination system provides reassurance in this respect, highlighting the great job conformism observed.

Among the most notable deficits is the lack of effective practical training, a protocol, or guidelines for action in the event of an actual case of harassment, aggression or bullying at work, an issue also found in Málaga University (2013), Pompeu Fabra (2018), Miguel Hernández University (2020) and IdISSC (2021). An example of the work to be done is the difficulty of achieving female work-life balance, which is twenty points higher than that of men.

Finally, the high overrepresentation of men or women in certain occupations is recognized in terms of the typology of occupations in the provincial council, a fact which, in quantitative terms, prevents substantial change in terms of the number of women/men employed; this is also evident in plans closest to the type of institution Badajoz Provincial Council (2019) and Pamplona City Council (2022). The characterization of functions, especially those requiring highly mobile staff, carries great weight in the functionality of the provincial council: public works, road maintenance, land management, and environmental conservation. The higher professional scale (level A) and the administrative scale are those that show the greatest equality.

5 Conclusions and new avenues for further study

Considering the facts described above, it can be said that although in recent years women have begun to make progress in accessing male-dominated occupations, stereotypes, a lack of opportunities and references remain the reasons that it is difficult for women to enter sectors such as transportation, electricity, mechanics, or construction. Even more important are the characteristics of the professional practice of such activities, as well as the working conditions and the work environment which also influence this social behavior.

Ourense Provincial Council staff consider that staff are selected according to criteria which guarantee gender equality through an optimal working environment and daily work practice; however, they are aware of the high number of occupations previously characterized according to gender. This explains why 78% of the employees are men (high rate of overrepresentation of men), since the areas in which the provincial council employs the most staff are Infrastructure and Environment.

The reasons given are that the working conditions, especially the working hours (sometimes at night) and commuting, as well as the physical strength required in many cases, mean that women are reluctant to take up this type of work.

It is worth highlighting two factors in the more recent survey of provincial council staff: 1) even in occupations where women are overrepresented, most women who are the main carers of their dependents state that it is very difficult to reconcile work and family life; and 2) workers, both men and women, do not receive the necessary information and materials to ensure their welfare (computer exposure), despite the fact that they consider a high percentage of occupations to pose a high risk to physical and mental health.

Even though the objectives of the Equality Plans are to eliminate the situations of inequality identified in the analysis and to outline strategies which will guarantee permanent, structural changes over time, thus facilitating social development, from a quantitative point of view, substantial changes in terms of the number of women/men employees is a challenge, because the characterization of functions has a very great weight in the functionality of the provincial council.

In this sense, being unable to alter the structure of occupations substantially, the plan cannot achieve real (quantitative) gender equality; this is also demonstrated in the examples observed in similar public institutions. Both men and women produce and reproduce barriers, gaps and inequalities that make it impossible to introduce women into mostly male-dominated jobs.

In this respect and on the basis of these research, it is proposed to continue with the development of structural and subjective actions which facilitate the participation of women in all labor markets, and encompasses the problematic realities which they face.

Accordingly, it should be emphasized that beyond modifying the structure of activities and occupations carried out by a provincial council – something which would require operational changes – one issue which should be highlighted is the low number of women in management and technical positions at the Ourense Provincial Council. For this reason and in order to facilitate internal promotion of women, one option would be to study the effects of applying a fixed schedule between in-person work and teleworking, the elimination of the split day and requiring all meetings to be scheduled during the early part of the morning.

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