

# **An insight into the Portuguese professional librarian workforce in Academic Libraries**

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## **Abstract**

This communication presents a summary of the results of the Survey of Information Professionals in Portuguese Academic Libraries, a work carried out by the Portuguese Association of Librarians, Archivists and Information and Documentation Professionals. The main purpose of this study is to characterize the human resources that have their activity in the field of Information and Documentation in the Academic Libraries of Portugal, for the following variables: sex, age, professionals with some deficit, nationality, professional category, qualifications and background training in the field of Information Science. Another objective is to make some reflections related to the analysis and discussion of the results obtained and the challenges faced by the profession. The questionnaire survey was sent to the managers of information institutions in Portugal between 2021 and 2023, using the LimeSurvey platform. The data collected with the questionnaire were loaded into Excel files, divided by sectors of activity and worked with pivot tables. The results of the questionnaire survey allowed to assess the existence of a total of 903 information professionals in academic libraries, with a gender distribution of 78% female and 22% male. As far as qualifications are concerned, the questionnaire data

showed that professionals have relevant higher education, with 47% with a degree in Information Science and 53% without. This study is of great importance as it is the first one carried out in Portugal on this group of professionals working in academic libraries. The conclusions are presented in the form of overlapping inferences of the different variables analyzed and in the form of general recommendations that the Portuguese Association of Librarians, Archivists and Information and Documentation Professionals will use for the defense of the profession.

Keywords: Academic Library Professionals, Academic Library Advocacy, Portuguese Professional Association Strategy.

## **Introduction**

This communication presents a summary of the results of the survey of information professionals (IP) in Portuguese Academic Libraries, a work carried out by the Portuguese Association of Librarians, Archivists and Information and Documentation Professionals (BAD). The creation of the BAD in 1973 was the result of the efforts of information and documentation professionals with the aim of defending and supporting them in their activities and professional careers, developing activities that contribute to the development of this professional and scientific field and to the creation of document centers with qualified professionals.

The Association started in 2021 a survey by questionnaire addressed to different type of institutions (Local and Central Administration, Higher Education, Enterprises, Foundations, etc.) as part of a study to identify and characterize the information and documentation professionals in all the country. In the present study, the results will be referred to higher education - Academic Libraries.

The main purpose of this study survey is to characterize the human resources that have their activity in the field of Information and Documentation in the Academic Libraries of Portugal, for the following variables: sex, age, professionals with some deficit, nationality, professional category, qualifications and background instruction in the field of Information Science. Another objective is to make some reflections related to the analysis and discussion of the results obtained and the challenges faced by the profession.

This survey is the result of the dynamism and concern of a professional association that wants to know better the Portuguese reality in order to act and define strategies and plans for the defense of the profession and its professionals.

### **Literature review**

The American Library Association (ALA) has carried out a questionnaire since 2005 to get to know its members in the United States of America. In 2014, 2016 and 2017 they presented demographic reports about its members/associates. In 2017, the questionnaire received 37.666 responses from ALA members. The female sex with 81% and the male with 19% are distributed by the following age groups: 1% with less than 25 years, 17% with between 25-34 years, 23% with 35-44 years, 22% with 45-54 years, 22% from 55 to 64 years, 14% from 65 to 74 years, 2% with more than 75 years; the professionals with some deficit are 3%;-Master of Law Studies (MLS) qualification there are 62%, with Bachelor 58%, with Master 26% and with PhD 4% (ALA, 2017).

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) published in 2014 a report about the professionals that work in libraries, based on the results of the *Australian Bureau of Statistics*. It is mentioned that in the libraries sector number of staff remained static in the last ten years (2004-2014), considering 25.000 librarians, library technicians and library assistant, excluding the ones that work in this area without specific

qualifications. For example, only less than half of the workers in the National Library of Australia have specific qualifications.

In mid-term, the information profession will experience a high number of people that will be retired. There is an imbalance in the professionals on what concerns the age and sex, as the workers universe is centered in the aged feminine sex. The salaries for of these professionals reveal that they aren't well payed. The professionals of this field rarely occupy the higher positions in the hierarchy of the organizations (ALIA, 2014).

The two British associations, *Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals* (CILIP) and *Archives and Records Association* (ARA) launched an ambitious project with the aim to map the professions that work in libraries, archives, information managements, data management, etc., published in 2015. It was the first study in the United Kingdom that identified the working sector of Information Professionals, in the scope of a professional association. The survey estimated about 86.376 professionals in the information sector. The libraries are the ones who have the most part of employees (59,4%). Among them is the Higher Education that is the biggest employer in this sector (21,6%) that correspond to 18.657 persons. The main conclusions of this study is that women are the majority of the labor (78%) when related to the man (21,9%); women are underrepresented in the higher hierarchical positions and the male sex occupies the directive positions and there is a significant difference between the man and women salaries. This working class have a high academic qualification, 61% have a post-graduation diploma, 50% in the Information Science area, 60% in Higher Education; these workers are getting old and most of the active population is between 45-55 years old; the ethnical diversity is very reduced, 96,7% of the workers identify themselves as white race. (Hall, Raeside, Dutton, & Chen, 2015). In 2022, a consortia of different organizations, employers and partners of CILIP, started another data survey about

information professionals, with the purpose to update the data from 2015 (Reddington, 2023).

The Brazilian Federation of Librarians, Information Scientists Associations developed a project to map the professionals that was named Brazilian Librarianship and Information Science Census. This Census aims to be a referential source for the knowledge and recognition of people graduated or with a degree in Librarianship, Information Science and Information Management in Brazil, that are working in the sector or not. The data are being collected since 2022 and show the sociodemographic picture, the academic education and professional status. Until now there are no published reports because the survey is still open. When viewing the data online, in January 2024, the answers refer to 4631 professionals (FEBAB, 2024).

In Spain this study it's a cornerstone in the bibliography about the social characterization of information professionals with the responsibility of the Spanish Federation of Archival, Library, Documentation and Museistic Societies (FESABIB) and was carried out by the libraries of Navarra Region. The amount of professionals that participated in this study are 183 that answer to a questionnaire and were personally interviewed. The analyses of data present key ideas that give a general view of the profession: women are the most represented sex in the profession; the qualification level of the professionals is high, as well the motivation and restlessness; the professional is aged; the libraries are spread over all the territory, despite sometimes isolated, they have coordination; there is continuous education available and the practice of sharing knowledge between professionals; the career is not related to the library sector (Bernardo Suárez, 2023).

The Federation of Documentary Circles (FMD) promotes the cohesion of associations and the professional solidarity of all the stakeholders of information and documentation sector in the French-speaking world of Canada. A research project started in 2023 with

the aim of knowing the professional diversity in the field of documentation in Quebec province (Canada) using a survey sent to the professionals and published in social media. This research will describe the profile and professionals characteristics in the different fields of action. Until now it is not available a published report with the results.

Up to now there is no information on who and how many information professionals work in the information and documentation sector in Portugal. There are no sociological studies on the total number of people working in this field and on other parameters such as sex, age, professional category, qualifications and background training in information science, among others. There are researches and statistical reports about the information professionals of the local administration (DGLAB, 2022; Freitas, & Marinho, 2019; Macedo et al., 2023) and about the Network of School Libraries (RBE, 2023). There are no statistical reports about academic libraries and studies about information professionals.

## **Methods**

Using LimeSurvey platform it was applied a survey by questionnaire sent by email, between 2021 and 2023, to the persons in charge of the Portuguese academic libraries in Higher Education institutions and 128 responses were obtained.

For the data analysis phase, the data collected with the questionnaire were loaded into Excel files, divided by activity sectors and applying pivot tables to create different tables and graphs to support the study (Coutinho, 2015).

## **Results**

### **Sex**

Regarding the characterization of information professionals (IP) the questionnaire allowed to assess the existence of a total of 903 IP in the academic libraries of all the regions of Portugal. The figure 1 represents the relationship between female and male

information professionals. The female sex of professionals represents 78% (702) and the male sex 22% (201).

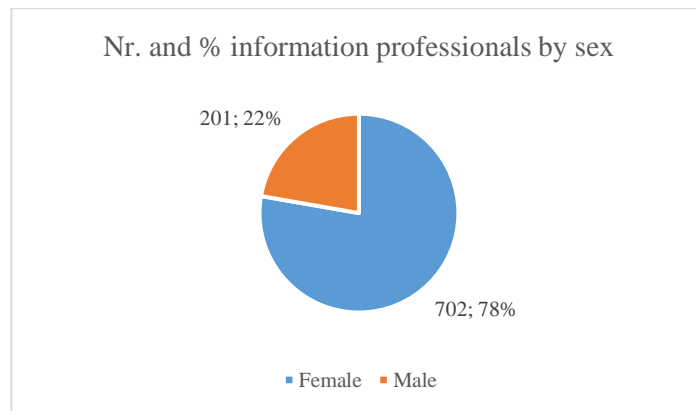


Figure 1 Number and percentage of information professionals by sex (n=903). (Source: Authors)

### Age range

On what concerns the age scale characterization, the questionnaire allowed assessing the existence of 853 professionals. The figure 2 shows the total number of professional by age range. The interpretation of the graph allows seeing that the age range with more representation is from 51 to 60 years old, that figure 39% (336), followed by the range from 41 to 50 years old, that figure 27% (227). The third age range more represented is from 61 years old or more with 18% (156), followed by the 31 to 40 years old 11% (94). The last is the age range from 21 to 30 years old with 5% (40). This means that 57% of the people working in the academic libraries have more than 51 years old.

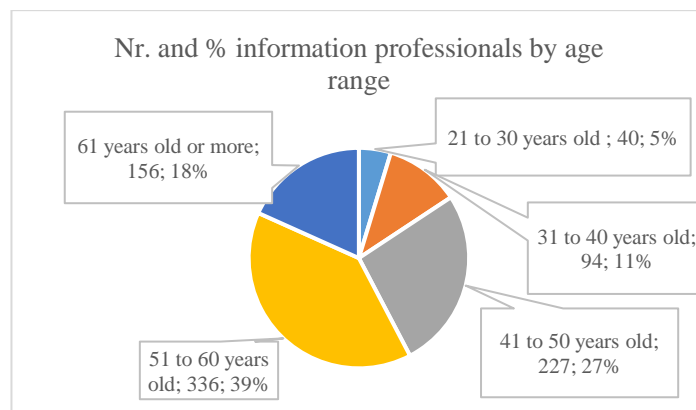


Figure 2 Number and percentage of information professionals by age range (n=853) (Source: Authors)

## Nationality

Of the 128 responses, ten of the information professionals are foreigners, including five of Brazilian nationality and one of the following nationalities: Ukrainian, Cape Verdean, Spanish, French and Bengali.

## Disabled professionals by Portuguese regions

The figure 3 shows the number of disabled professionals by the Portuguese regions, with a total of 12.

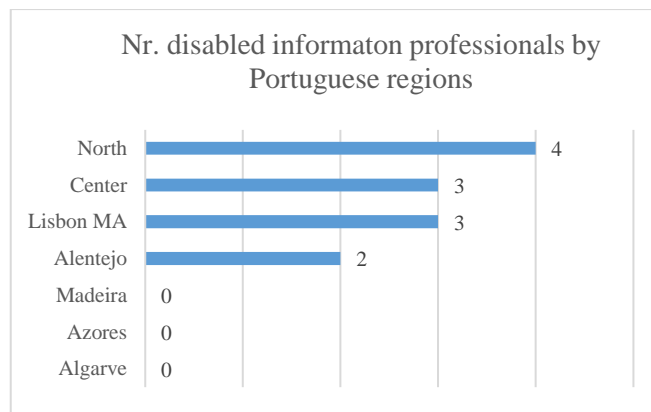


Figure 3 Number of disabled information professionals by Portuguese regions (n=12) (Source: Authors)

In the North there are four professionals, in the Center and in Lisbon Metropolitan Area three and in Alentejo two. There are no reference in the regions of Madeira, Azores and Algarve.

## Professional category

The figure 4 shows by the Portuguese regions the total number of 903 professionals by professional category. The regions with more professionals in all the categories is the North (282), followed by the Lisbon Metropolitan Area (Lisbon MA) (262), the Center (254), Alentejo (45), Algarve (27), Azores (17) and Madeira (16). The total of professionals in the different professional categories are: Senior Technician (ST) 397, Technical Coordinator (TC) 29, Technical Assistant (TA) 326, Operational Manager



(OM) four, Operational Assistant (OA) 86, Technical Framework (TF) two, Administrative Staff (AS) 11, Temporary Worker (TW) six, Professor (P) four, Librarian Teacher (LT) three, Scholarship holder (S) 15, Volunteer (v) four and Other categories (O) 16.

*Figure 4 Number of information professionals by professional category and regions (n=903)  
(Source: Authors)*

Regions	ST	TC	TA	OM	OA	TF	AS	TW	P	LT	S	V	O	Total
Alentejo	18	0	22	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	45
Algarve	10	0	15	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	27
Lisbon MA	136	6	75	1	13	0	9	0	1	2	5	1	13	262
Center	109	13	89	0	23	1	2	1	3	0	7	3	3	254
North	112	9	107	1	44	1	0	5	0	1	2	0	0	282
Madeira	8	0	6	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16
Azores	4	1	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	17
Total	397	29	326	4	86	2	11	6	4	3	15	4	16	903

## Qualifications

The figure 5 shows the results of crossing of the variables of Qualifications and Professional category, in a total of 905 professionals.

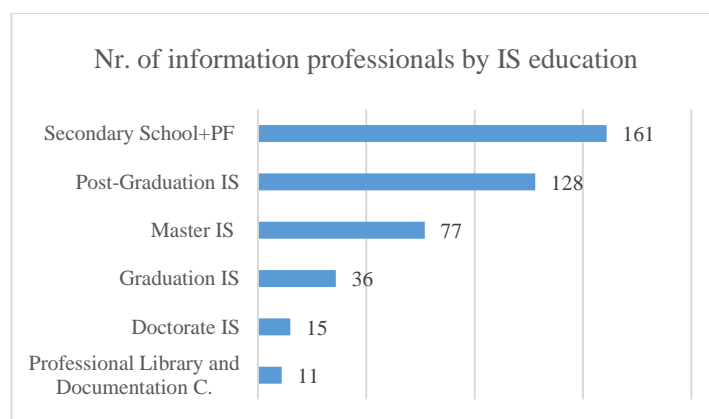
*Figure 5 Number of information professionals by qualification and professional category (n=905)  
(Source: Authors)*

Qualifications	ST	TC	TA	OM	OA	TF	AS	TW	P	LT	S	V	O	Total
Doctorate	19	3	2	0	1	0	0	0	3	3	2	0	0	33
Doctorate IS	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	15
Master	49	5	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	63
Master IS	69	3	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	77
Post-Graduation	62	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	68
Post-Graduation IS	112	10	5	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	128
Graduation	115	11	23	0	1	1	2	1	1	0	1	0	3	108
Graduation IS	27	3	5	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	36
Bachelor	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
LDC	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Secondary+PC	0	4	102	3	19	7	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	161
PLDC	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11
PSC	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
12 <sup>th</sup> Grade	0	3	74	2	24	1	7	0	0	0	0	0	2	124
9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	0	0	12	1	24	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	49
6 <sup>th</sup> Grade	0	0	1	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10
4 <sup>th</sup> Grade	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
Other	1	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	1	8
Total	468	45	248	6	84	15	14	2	4	3	8	0	8	905

The most referred qualifications are Secondary School + Professional Course (Secondary + PC) with 161 (TA 102), Post-Graduation in Information Science (Post-Graduation IS) 128 (ST 112), 12<sup>th</sup> Grade 124 (TA 74, OA 24); Graduation 108 (ST 115, TA 23), 9<sup>th</sup> Grade (49), (OA 24, TA 12), Post-Graduation 68 (ST 62), Master 63 (ST 40, TA 8), Graduation IS 36 (ST 27), Doctorate 33 (ST 19, and between one and three other professional categories), Information Science Doctorate 15 (ST 14, O 1) and other qualification with reduced values.

### **Education in Information Science and Documentation area**

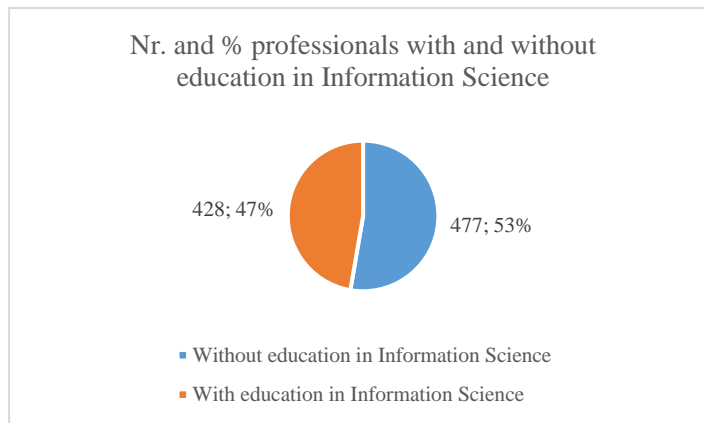
The information professionals, in Higher Education, with Education in Information Science (IS) education area are 428 from the total of 905 professionals.



*Figure 6 Number of information professionals by Information Science education (n=428)  
(Source: Authors)*

In the figure 6 it is seen that Secondary School+PF is the education more mentioned (161) followed by the IS Post-Graduation (128), Master IS (77), Graduation IS (36), Doctorate IS (15) and Professional Library and Documentation Course (11). The education in Higher Education that stands out more is the Post-Graduation IS.

Figure 7 shows the number and percentage of professionals with and without Information Science education.



*Figure 7 Number and percentage of professionals with and without education in Information Science (n=905). (Source; Authors).*

The percentage of professionals with IS education is 47% (428) and 53% (477) without it.

### **Considerations**

The results of the questionnaire survey made it possible to assess the existence of a total of 903 information professionals in Academic Libraries. The gender distribution is 78% female (702) and 22% male (201), revealing that the profession is feminized. The age range between 21 and 30 years old have 5% (40) and 57% of the academic libraries professionals have more than 51 years old, showing the aging of this profession. Most of the professionals have Portuguese nationality except ten, and twelve are disabled. On what concerns to the professional category, 397 are Senior Technicians and 326 Technical assistants. Most of the professionals are located in the North, Center and Lisbon Metropolitan Area according to the existing Higher Education institutions.

As far as qualifications are concerned, the questionnaire data revealed a total of 905 professionals. The most frequently mentioned qualifications were secondary education (12<sup>th</sup> Grade) and specialization in libraries (161), Post-Graduate in Information Science (128), 12<sup>th</sup> Grade (124), Graduation (108), 9<sup>th</sup> Grade (49), Post-Graduate (68), Master

(63), Graduation in Information Science (36), other qualifications have no significant number.

The Academic Libraries professionals have a relevant higher education. With education in IS area are 428 (47%) and without it 477 (53%).

This study is of great importance because it is the first one carried out in Portugal on this professional group that works in academic libraries. It will allow making a demographic and social portrait of these information professionals.

The conclusions are presented in the form of overlapping inferences of the different variables analyzed and in the form of general recommendations that the Portuguese Association of Librarians, Archivists and Information and Documentation Professionals will use for the defense of the profession.

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