



# Rights-Based Vision: a Portuguese Validation of the Human Rights Lens in Social Work Scale

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## Abstract

Integrating human rights principles into social work practice is essential for advocating and protecting clients' rights. The Human Rights Lens in Social Work (HRLSW) scale, which measures social workers' ability to see the human rights dimensions of their work, can be used to promote rights-based practices within social work. Originally developed in the USA, the scale requires validation in different cultural contexts to ensure its applicability and relevance. Therefore, to assess the scale's reliability and construct validity in Portugal—and to examine its applicability among Portuguese social workers—a study was conducted to validate the HRLSW-PT, the Portuguese version of the HRLSW. The sample consisted of 138 social workers, mostly female (88.4%) with an average age of 31.63 years ( $SD = 11.94$ ). Principal component analysis and confirmatory factor analysis supported a revised two-factor structure for the HRLSW-PT, consisting of nine items ( $RMSEA = 0.019$ ;  $TLI = 0.996$ ;  $CFI = 0.997$ ). The HRLSW-PT and its two factors, “clients seen as experiencing rights violations” and “social problems seen as rights violations,” demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach's .84, .87, and .69, respectively). The HRLSW-PT is a reliable and valid tool for assessing Portuguese social workers' perspectives and attitudes towards human rights issues. The HRLSW-PT can now inform educational and professional development programs, enhancing social workers' capacity to advocate for and protect human rights, thereby promoting social justice and equity in Portugal. The authors argue for similar validations in countries worldwide to facilitate cross-national comparisons and promote rights-based practices among social workers worldwide.

**Keywords** Human rights · Social work · Human Rights Lens in Social Work scale · Validation

Social work practice is intrinsically linked to the defense of human rights (International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW] & International Association of Schools of Social Work, 2014). This link is rooted in the recognition of the inherent value of each individual and the commitment to

fostering societies where people feel safe, can thrive, and are treated with dignity (United Nations, 1994). Since its inception, social work has been a profession anchored in human rights principles (Healy, 2008). Pioneers such as Jane Addams in the USA, Octavia Hill in the UK, Manon Lütichau in Denmark, Alice Masaryk in Czechoslovakia, Alice Salomon in Germany, Helena Radlińska in Poland, and Maria Veleda in Portugal were remarkable social reformers who prioritized advocacy and the dignified treatment of the less fortunate, thereby embodying the core values of human rights within their work (IFSW Europe, 2010; Monteiro, 2013).

Mapp et al. (2019) argue that this commitment to human rights is echoed internationally in the profession's many ethical codes that reflect the principles embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948). This alignment is evident in the ethical codes of social work in Portuguese-speaking countries, such as those of the Association of Social Work Professionals (2018) in Portugal and

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the Federal Council of Social Work (2012) in Brazil. These codes ensure that the profession remains grounded in internationally agreed-upon values and principles despite the ongoing technical and methodological advancements driven by evolving socio-economic and political contexts.

Social work practice involves daily interactions with individuals facing injustices, requiring access to essential services such as housing and healthcare (McPherson, 2015). Social workers must employ their skills at both micro and macro levels to address the immediate needs of these individuals while also advocating for the equitable redistribution of privileges, power, and resources within society (McPherson, 2020).

The intersection of social work and human rights advocacy provides significant opportunities for collaboration and professional growth. It offers a legal and normative framework that includes tools for advocacy, empowerment, accountability, education, and awareness. Social work equips practitioners with practical skills to assist those experiencing human rights violations, integrating this perspective into everyday practice. A human rights-based approach in social work promotes social justice by addressing issues within our service users' socio-political and structural contexts rather than focusing solely on individual pathology (McPherson et al., 2017). This approach empowers, reframing human needs as rights, and provides powerful tools to educate about social inequalities. Additionally, a rights-based approach enhances professional rigor by integrating micro and macro actions to address individual needs and systemic injustices (Androff & McPherson, 2014).

Integrating human rights into social work education is essential for maintaining the profession's relevance. Effective advocacy and client protection demand a nuanced and contextually informed approach to integrating human rights principles into social work practice. The uncritical use of human rights discourse has faced valid criticism (Garrett, 2024), underscoring the need for greater sensitivity to the complexities of both individual and collective rights in diverse cultural contexts.

Ife (2008) argues that human rights represent one of the most powerful ideas in contemporary discourse. In an era of economic globalization, where individualism, greed, and personal enrichment are often prioritized, traditional moral frameworks are increasingly giving way to postmodern relativism. In this context, human rights provide an alternative moral reference point that reaffirms humanitarian values. The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted social and economic disparities, emphasizing the need for social workers to collaborate to safeguard all individuals' human rights (Sousa-Meixell et al., 2022). Educational programs should focus on human rights, integrating them into curricula to prepare students for future challenges. By embedding human rights education within social work training, students can

better understand social justice issues and learn to apply human rights principles in their practice.

However, to effectively teach and evaluate this integration, it is necessary to have reliable tools to measure social workers' abilities in recognizing human rights violations.

The Human Rights Lens in the Social Work (HRLSW) scale, which measures "a social worker's ability to see individual and social problems as resulting from human rights violations," is a potentially powerful tool for accomplishing this goal (McPherson et al., 2017, p. 233). As originally validated, the HRLSW comprised two subscales for which the Cronbach's alpha values were strong: .89 for "social problems as rights violations" and .84 for "clients as experiencing rights violations" (McPherson et al., 2017). Thus, this study was designed to adapt and validate the HRLSW for the Portuguese social work context. This adapted scale is intended to provide Portuguese social work educators and practitioners with a means to ensure that social workers are well prepared to identify and address human rights issues in their professional practice.

## Methods

The first step of the study was the translation and adaptation of the Portuguese version HRLSW—known as the HRLSW-PT—followed by the guidelines of Hambleton (2005) and the International Test Commission (2017). The original 11-item HRLSW, consisting of two subscales, "clients seen as experiencing rights violations" and "social problems seen as rights violations," was translated and back-translated, with questions and instructions initially translated into Portuguese by two independent researchers fluent in English.

Any inconsistencies identified during the translation process were resolved through discussions with experts, specifically human rights professors in social work courses, all of whom held doctorates in social work. The finalized translated version was then provided to an independent native Portuguese speaker unaware of the original questionnaire, which was subsequently back-translated into English. A high level of correspondence was achieved between the two versions. To ensure the adequacy of the language used, the research team administered the final HRLSW-PT to three Portuguese social workers. These social workers reported no issues understanding the questions and instructions. As with the original HRLSW, the responses were scored on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). The finalized version was then sent to the corresponding author of the original scale for review.

A survey was developed containing the proposed HRLSW-PT along with sociodemographic items. These items were designed to describe the study sample and included variables such as gender (male, female, or other),

age, type of institution that awarded the degree, course duration (in academic years), course typology (pre-Bologna or post-Bologna), and qualifications.

The Ethics Committee of the lead author's academic institution approved the research (Protocol N°. CE-P16-23).

Data was collected by disseminating the questionnaire on social media platforms related to social work. The online survey system ensured complete anonymity, minimizing the researchers' influence on the participants' responses and allowing them to freely express their perspectives. Furthermore, no financial or other incentives were offered to participate in this study.

## Participants

The sample consisted of 138 social workers (Table 1). Most participants were female ( $n = 122$ ; 88.14%), which is consistent with the demographics of the social work profession in Portugal. The mean age was 31.63 years ( $SD = 11.94$ ), with an age range of 46 years (min. = 20; max. = 66). Most participants attended private and cooperative higher education institutions ( $n = 62$ ; 44.9%). Most participants completed a 3-year course ( $n = 51$ ; 37.0%); and most ( $n = 48$ ; 34.8%) held post-graduate certifications (with an equal number holding master's degrees).

**Table 1** Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample ( $N = 138$ )

Variable	Number	Percent
Gender		
Female	122	88.4
Male	16	11.6
Institution type		
Private and cooperative university education	62	44.9
Public university education	32	23.2
Concordat university education	4	2.9
Public polytechnic education	34	24.6
Private and cooperative polytechnic education	6	4.3
Licentiate degree duration (academic years) <sup>a</sup>		
5 years	25	18.1
4 years	31	22.5
3.5 years	31	22.5
3 years	51	37.0
Additional qualifications <sup>b</sup>		
Post-graduate	48	34.8
Master's degree	40	28.6
Doctorate	15	10.7

<sup>a</sup>Until 1999, social work degrees in Portugal lasted 4 to 5 years, except for the 3-year 1939 plan. Post-1999, the Bologna Declaration restructured degrees into three cycles: licentiate (3–3.5 years), master's, and doctoral

<sup>b</sup>Percentages do not sum to 100% as participants may have multiple types of education

## Statistical Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 28, and Jeffreys's Amazing Statistics Program (JASP), version 0.17.2.0.

The component structure of the HRLSW-PT was assessed using principal component analysis (PCA) with Oblimin rotation. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity were used to determine the suitability of the dataset for component analysis. Several criteria were employed to determine the number of components to retain: visual inspection of the scree plot (assessing whether the extracted components had substantive meaning by comparing them to the solution of the original scale), extracting components with eigenvalues greater than one, and performing parallel analysis.

Internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega. Descriptive statistics were calculated for sociodemographic variables and the HRLSW-PT item scores. Finally, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to verify the internal validity and construct validity, and model fit was analyzed using the root mean square error of approximation ( $RMSEA < 0.08$ ), the Tucker–Lewis Index ( $TLI > 0.90$ ), and the Comparative Fit Index ( $CFI > 0.90$ ). Standardized factor loadings were considered adequate if they were  $> 0.5$  (Hair et al., 2019).

## Results

### Principal Component Analysis

The 11 items of the proposed HRLSW-PT scale were subjected to PCA. Before performing the PCA, the suitability of the data for factor analysis was assessed. The inspection of the correlation matrix revealed the presence of many coefficients above .3. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin value was .86, exceeding the recommended value of .6 (Kaiser, 1970, 1974), and Bartlett's test of sphericity (Bartlett, 1954) reached statistical significance, supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix ( $\chi^2 = 520.91$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

The PCA identified three components with eigenvalues exceeding 1, explaining 39%, 13%, and 9% of the variance, respectively. Inspection of the scree plot revealed a clear break after the second component. Using Cattell's (1966) scree test, two components were retained for further investigation. This decision was further supported by the results of parallel analysis, which showed only two components with eigenvalues exceeding the corresponding criterion values for a randomly generated data matrix of the same size. Based on these criteria, the two-component solution explained 52% of the variance, and we retained the two components, which was consistent with the original authors' solution.

Oblimin rotation was performed to aid in the interpretation of these two components. The rotated solution revealed a well-defined structure with significant loadings on their respective items. Most items exhibited high loadings on their respective components, except for item 6, which showed substantial cross-loading on both components, and item 5, which loaded below .2 on both components (Table 2).

The internal consistency analysis for the subscale Social Issues as Rights Violations (Cronbach's alpha of component 2 = .51), coupled with the cross-loading of item 6 on both components and the loading below 0.3 for item 5, led us to conduct a CFA excluding these two items.

### Construct Validity

The CFA supported the two-factor structure with nine items (RMSEA = 0.019; TLI = 0.996; CFI = 0.997). Figure 1 presents the graphical representation of the CFA model, showing factor 2 ("social problems seen as rights violations") comprising items 1, 2, 3, and 4, and factor 1 ("clients seen as experiencing rights violations") comprising items 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11.

### Internal Consistency

McDonald's omega and Cronbach's alpha values indicated that the HRLSW-PT scale exhibited good internal consistency (McDonald's omega = .86; Cronbach's alpha = .84). Additionally, considering the size of each subscale, the internal consistency was adequate for both factors of the HRLSW-PT scale, with factor 1 showing McDonald's omega = .71 and Cronbach's alpha = .69, and

factor 2 showing McDonald's omega = .87 and Cronbach's alpha = .87.

### Descriptive Statistics for the HRLSW Scale

Table 3 provides the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values for each scale item in both the HRLSW-PT and the original US versions, as well as for the HRLSW-PT's two factors. The descriptive analysis of the results obtained in Portugal revealed that social workers score above the midpoint of the Likert scale on all items of the scale and factors 1 and 2. In the US version, although the mean values were above the midpoint of the Likert scale, they were lower than those obtained in Portugal. The factor with the highest score was "clients as experiencing rights violations," with an average of 5.96, indicating a notable difference compared to the factor "social problems as rights violations," which had an average of 4.94.

### Discussion

This study successfully validated the HRLSW-PT scale, ensuring its reliability and applicability within the Portuguese context. The results provide substantial evidence supporting the reliability and validity of the HRLSW-PT scale, and these findings have significant implications for the integration of human rights principles into Portuguese social work practice and education, reinforcing the essential role of social workers in advocating for and protecting human rights.

**Table 2** Rotated component matrix loadings

Items	Component	
	1	2
1. Hunger at the community level stems from the government's failure to protect people's human right to food	-.09	<b>.66</b>
2. If the human right to housing were protected, many fewer people would be homeless	.05	<b>.70</b>
3. Lack of access to medical care is a human rights violation	.10	<b>.65</b>
4. Poverty is a violation of the human right to a decent standard of living	-.04	<b>.84</b>
5. A community's lack of adequate employment is not a human rights issue. (r)	-.09	.16
6. Unequal access to goods and services in society is a human rights issue	.32	.39
7. It is common in Portugal for social work clients to experience violations of their human rights	<b>.78</b>	-.09
8. Clients' needs are often related to violations of one of their human rights	<b>.77</b>	0.09
9. When I look at my clients, I see rights violations where others may see failure or pathology	<b>.85</b>	.00
10. Clients generally need social services because their human rights have been violated	<b>.81</b>	.02
11. The problems I address in my social work practice tend to be violations of my client's human rights	<b>.83</b>	.03

Component 1, clients as experiencing rights violations; component 2, social problems as rights violations; extraction method, principal component analysis. Rotation method, Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization. Bolded values represent the highest loadings for each item, indicating strong factor loadings. Italicized values indicate problematic loadings, such as cross-loadings or low factor loadings; items marked (r) are reverse scored

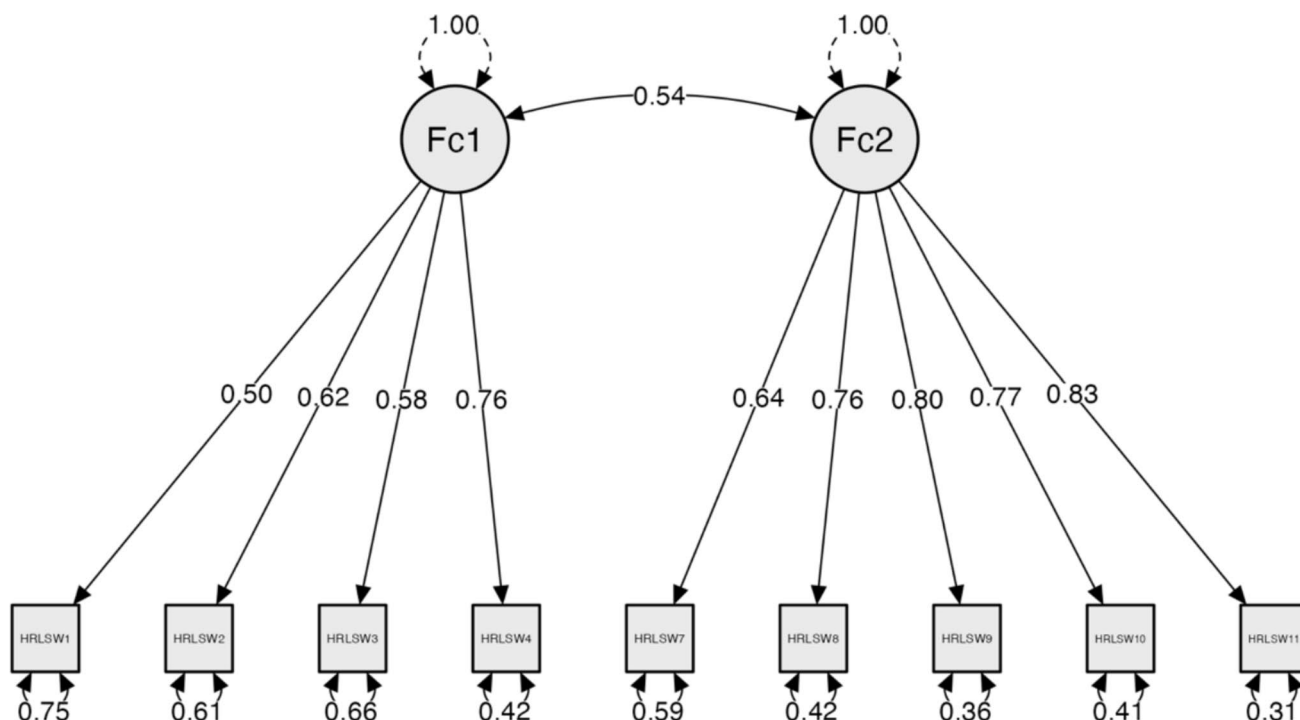


Fig. 1 Graphical model of the confirmatory factor analysis

Table 3 Descriptive statistics of items and factors of the HRLSW-PT and the HRLSW

Items	HRLSW-PT				HRLSW	
	M	SD	Min	Max	M	SD
Item 1 – SPRH	5.10	1.58	1	7	4.1	1.7
Item 2 – SPRH	5.91	1.31	1	7	4.6	1.7
Item 3 – SPRH	6.70	0.88	1	7	5.8	1.4
Item 4 – SPRH	6.14	1.30	1	7	4.9	1.7
Item 5 – SPRH (r) (x)	5.13	1.79	1	7	4.6	1.6
Item 6 – SPRH (x)	5.07	1.66	1	7	5.3	1.6
Item 7 – CERV	4.85	1.78	1	7	4.8	1.6
Item 8 – CERV	5.09	1.62	1	7	4.3	1.5
Item 9 – CERV	4.59	1.79	1	7	4.4	1.4
Item 10 – CERV	5.10	1.58	1	7	3.9	1.4
Item 11 – CERV	4.66	1.77	1	7	3.5	1.5
CERV — items 1 to 4	5.96 (∑ 23.86)	0.93 (∑ 3.72)	2.50	7	—	—
SPRH — items 7 to 11	4.94 (∑ 24.72)	1.40 (∑ 7.02)	1	7	—	—
HRLSW total — 9 items	5.40 (∑ 48.58)	1.02 (∑ 9.22)	2.22	7	—	—

HRLSW-PT, Human Rights Lens in Social Work-Portuguese Version; HRLSW, Human Rights Lens in Social Work; CERV, clients as experiencing rights violations (factor 1); SPRH, social problems as rights violations (factor 2); items marked (r) are reverse scored; items marked with an (X) have been removed from the Portuguese version

Concerning construct validity, the CFA results provide strong support for the two-factor structure of the HRLSW-PT scale with nine items. This finding validates the scale construct and assures its effectiveness in capturing the intended dimensions of social work

practice related to human rights. Additionally, this model aligns with the original scale, reinforcing its applicability across different cultural contexts and supporting its robustness as a tool for evaluating human rights in social work practice.

Factor 1, “clients seen as experiencing rights violations,” includes items that focus on clients’ direct experiences of the human rights violations they face. This factor underscores the importance of recognizing and addressing the specific rights infringements encountered by individuals in their interactions with social systems and services. By grouping these items together, the scale emphasizes the role of social workers in identifying and responding to personal and immediate rights violations, aligning with the core principles of social work that advocate for the protection and promotion of client rights.

Factor 2, “social problems seen as rights violations,” encompasses items that relate to broader societal issues and their impact on human rights. This factor highlights the systemic nature of social problems and the necessity for social workers to engage in advocacy and policy reform to address these larger-scale injustices. Separating these items into distinct factors reinforces the dual focus of social work practice, which involves not only supporting individual clients but also challenging and changing the societal structures that perpetuate inequality and rights violations.

The strong model fit indicated by the CFA suggests that the HRLSW-PT reliably differentiates between these two aspects of social work. This differentiation is important for both practical and theoretical reasons. Practically, it allows social workers to more accurately assess and address the distinct needs related to individual client experiences and broader social issues. Theoretically, it supports the conceptual framework that views social work as a profession committed to well-being and justice at both the individual and societal levels.

Regarding findings related to the structure of components of the HRLSW-PT scale, following Catell’s scree test and parallel analysis, we found that the scale maintained the same number of components as the original version. The HRLSW-PT comprises two components: “clients as experiencing rights violations,” encompassing the last five items of the scale, and “social problems as rights violations,” covering the first four items. Two items were removed from the Portuguese version: item 5 (“A community’s lack of adequate employment is not a human rights issue”) due to loadings below 0.2, and item 6 (“Unequal access to goods and services in society is a human rights issue”) due to cross-loading on both components.

To understand the removal of item 5 in the HRLSW-PT, it may be useful to consider the differences between Portugal and the USA: they have different social contexts, welfare systems, and public policies, which can influence how people perceive the relationship between employment and human rights. Historically, the USA emphasizes a more individualistic approach to human rights, while Portugal tends towards more collective

approaches and a broader welfare system. In the USA, significant reductions in access to healthcare services for unemployed individuals are observed (Paes-Sousa et al., 2018). In the USA, health services are predominantly private and expensive, creating a scenario where fortunate individuals have employer-provided insurance or health coverage through Medicare or Medicaid, while those not covered face greater risks; unemployment is widely understood as an individual problem (de Silva & Mattos, 2009).

In Portugal, access to healthcare is not dependent on employment status. The right to health protection is enshrined in the constitution, culminating in the establishment of the National Health Service (SNS) in 1979. The creation of the SNS ensured broader and more equitable healthcare coverage than is available in the USA, and, unlike the USA, the new Portuguese constitution stipulated that “everyone has the right to health protection,” to be achieved through “the creation of a universal, general, and free national health service.” Thus, while the lack of adequate employment in the USA may be viewed as a social problem and a human rights violation that also impacts access to healthcare, in Portugal, the issue of inadequate employment (Rodrigues et al., 2022) can be interpreted as a mismatch between job characteristics and educational qualifications.

Portugal has historically faced higher unemployment rates than the USA, remaining in double digits between 2009 and 2017 (INE, 2017). These divergent contexts suggest that Portuguese social workers may perceive the adequacy of employment more as a result of governmental policies than as a human rights issue. Some social workers may interpret adequate employment within the framework of imbalances in governmental policies rather than as an element of the “social problems seen as rights violations” factor. Moreover, the welfare regime of a country profoundly influences social work practices and the interpretation of human rights (Reynaert et al., 2022). In the USA, individualistic approaches underscore personal responsibility, whereas, in Portugal, collective approaches highlight state responsibility and community support.

For item 6, the cross-loading indicates that Portuguese social workers see unequal access to goods and services as pertinent both to individual professional practice and broader social issues. This dual relevance might suggest that social workers in Portugal recognize the multifaceted nature of inequality, viewing it as a barrier to individual client well-being and a systemic issue requiring broader societal interventions. However, this cross-loading complicates the interpretation of the item, leading to its removal from the Portuguese version of the scale. The perception of inequality in access to goods and services as relevant to both micro and macro levels of intervention aligns with the

core values of social work, which emphasize social justice and the need to address systemic inequalities. The comprehensive welfare system and the SNS likely influence this holistic view in Portugal. Portuguese social workers may be more attuned to the broader societal structures that contribute to inequality, given their professional environment's emphasis on collective welfare and social equity. While item 6 captures significant aspects of social work concerns, its cross-loading indicates that it does not fit neatly into a single component.

In relation to the item scores across the respective factors, our findings align with a descriptive study by Carvalho et al. (2025), which reports similar ratings. The items in factor 1, with the highest scores, indicate that the lack of medical assistance is perceived as a violation of human rights (item 3), and that poverty is viewed as an infringement of the right to a decent standard of living (item 4).

Conversely, the items in factor 2 that received the lowest scores in our study include item 9, which reveals that when professionals observe their clients, they often identify human rights violations, whereas the general public tends to focus on failures or pathologies. The second lowest-scoring item was item 11, which states that “the problems addressed in social work practice are predominantly perceived as violations of their clients’ human rights.” This item also holds the lowest score in the study by Carvalho et al. (2025).

Regarding internal consistency, the HRLSW-PT shows slightly higher values for “clients seen as experiencing rights violations” (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .87$ ) compared to the original (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .84$ ) and lower values for “social problems seen as rights violations” (Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  of .69 vs. .89). As discussed by Tavakol and Dennick (2011), the lower alpha for “social problems seen as rights violations” may be due to the reduced number of items (4), as fewer items typically result in a lower Cronbach’s alpha. Even with fewer items, the HRLSW-PT (9 items) still exhibits robust reliability (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .84$ ) as compared to the original HRLSW (11 items; Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .90$ ).

To better understand the context in which these findings were obtained, it is important to consider the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample. The sample was predominantly composed of female social workers. These findings align with other studies involving samples of social workers in Portugal (Carvalho et al., 2025; Daniel & Espirito-Santo, 2021; Daniel et al., 2019). The predominance of females in the social work profession reflects an enduring characteristic of the professional profile, historically influenced by gender norms at the time of the profession’s inception (Branco, 2015). The mean age of participants was 34.1 years, which might suggest a relatively young workforce. However, this could also reflect a selection bias, as younger social workers may be more inclined to respond to surveys distributed via social media platforms. Most participants had obtained their degrees from private and cooperative higher education institutions, and a significant portion had completed their education under the post-Bologna system, indicating a trend towards newer educational frameworks.

Beyond its value to Portuguese social work educators and practitioners, the HRLSW-PT will be useful to researchers in Portugal and around the world. With the HRLSW-PT, researchers can evaluate the human rights commitments of Portuguese social workers, and they can also facilitate cross-national comparisons and promote rights-based practices among social workers worldwide. For example, it is interesting to note that items 5 and 6 were also removed when the HRLSW was validated for use in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Šadić et al., 2022). This convergence has the potential to prompt additional research questions for comparing these two European societies.

Multiple HRLSW translation projects have been completed or are currently in progress, and these tools now allow cross-cultural comparisons among social workers in societies as diverse as the USA, South Korea, Portugal, and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Lee & McPherson, 2023; McPherson et al., 2017; Šadić et al., 2022). An additional value of

**Table 4** Factorial studies on Human Rights Lens in Social Work scale

Authors (year)	Country	Sample ( <i>N</i> )	Context	# items	Cronbach’s $\alpha$
McPherson et al. (2017)	EUA	1024	Licensed clinical SW	11	SPRV, .89 CRV, .84
Šadić et al. (2022)	Bosnia and Herzegovina	296	SW in various settings	9	SPRV, .76 CRV, .80
Lee and McPherson (2023)	South Korea	401*	SW Students	9	SPRV .74 CRV, .80
Present study	Portugal	138	Licensed SW	9	SPRV, .87 CRV, .69

SW, social workers; SPRV, social problems as rights violations; CRV, clients experiencing rights violations

\*Randomly divided into two groups (group 1 = 202; group 2 = 199)

the HRLSW-PT is that the Portuguese language is spoken in multiple South American, African, and Asian countries, and researchers may now test its reliability in places such as Brazil, Angola, and East Timor. Table 4 presents the psychometric properties of the validated versions of the HRLSW that are currently available.

## Limitations

Despite this study's significant findings and contributions, limitations must also be acknowledged. First, the sample was predominantly composed of female social workers, which reflects the gender distribution in the profession in Portugal. While this enhances the representativeness of the findings within the national context, future research could benefit from exploring the perspectives of male social workers or those of other genders to ensure broader applicability of the results across different contexts.

Second, the mean age of participants was relatively young, which may suggest a selection bias, particularly given that the survey was distributed via social media platforms. Younger social workers might be more inclined to respond to online surveys, potentially skewing the results. Including more diverse age groups in future studies would help better represent the full spectrum of the social work profession.

Third, the study relied on self-reported data, which can be subject to social desirability bias. Participants might have provided responses they perceived as socially acceptable rather than accurately reflecting their true beliefs or practices. Employing additional data collection methods, such as interviews or observational studies, could help mitigate this bias and provide a more comprehensive understanding of social workers' engagement with human rights.

Fourth, while justified, the removal of two items from the original HRLSW scale to fit the Portuguese context may impact the comparability of the results with studies using the full original scale. Future research should explore the implications of these modifications and consider validating the scale in other cultural contexts to assess its robustness and adaptability further.

Fifth, while the study provides evidence for the reliability and validity of the Portuguese version of the HRLSW scale, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw causal inferences. Longitudinal studies are needed to examine how social workers' perspectives on human rights evolve over time and in response to various professional experiences and training programs.

Sixth, though adequate for the purpose of this study, a larger sample size would allow future researchers to test the scale using exploratory factor analysis, in addition to the CFA used in this study.

Finally, although this study successfully produced a reliable and valid version, the elimination of these two items was necessary due to factor load overlap and minimal saturations. Future research should explore the performance of new items that reflect sociocultural characteristics, thereby influencing the perception of human rights.

## Conclusion

This study successfully validated the HRLSW-PT, demonstrating its reliability and construct validity of a "human rights lens" among social workers in Portugal. Our findings confirmed the HRLSW-PT's ability to capture the dual focus on individual rights violations and systemic social issues central to social work practice, aligning with the two-factor structure proposed by McPherson et al. (2017) in their original scale validation.

The validation of the HRLSW-PT is significant for the future of rights-based social work in Portugal. This tool allows for the assessment of the extent to which social work students and professionals can identify human rights violations. This assessment can identify areas needing improvement and guide appropriate education and training, and the HRLSW-PT can measure the knowledge acquired through these educational interventions.

Although social work has a history of perpetuating oppressive policies (Ioakimidis & Wyllie, 2023), the profession is shifting internationally from a needs-based approach to a more empowering rights-based one (Gabel et al., 2022; Thompson & Thompson, 2001). The HRLSW-PT provides a tool for measuring this rights-based orientation for practice. Seeing through this lens allows social workers to recognize rights instead of needs, rights holders instead of charity beneficiaries, and human rights violations instead of individual pathologies.

The validated scale provides a robust tool for assessing and enhancing human rights engagement within the profession. It can inform educational curricula and professional development programs, ensuring that social workers are well equipped to advocate for and protect the rights of their clients. By integrating this tool into practice, social work professionals can more effectively address both personal and societal dimensions of human rights issues, promoting greater social justice and equity.

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**Data Availability** We are currently considering depositing the data associated with this study in the Social Sciences Database of the Instituto Superior Miguel Torga Repository (<https://repositorio.ismt.pt/collecciones/58bee7c7-bac3-452f-966bdc762b2e546a>)

## Declarations

**Competing Interests** The authors declare no competing interests.



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