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**The fundamentals of a Guiding
Framework to assess the
potential for impact of social
innovation initiatives**

**Portugal Social Innovation
2023**

1. BACKGROUND

The public initiative, Portugal Social Innovation, was created with the twofold mission of promoting social innovation and social entrepreneurship and boosting the social investment market in Portugal, by mobilising funds from the European Social Fund under the Portugal 2020 Partnership Agreement and to try out different and new funding instruments. Those instruments allowed to fund social innovation projects and promote partnerships between investors and social organisations. Considering the pioneering nature of its mission in Portugal and the experimental profile of the projects that were supported, it developed a **guiding framework**, still being tested, to look at the impact of such projects.

As a guiding framework, it is specifically intended that the **Impact Assessment** provides answers to the following five key questions:

1. Do projects supported by Portugal Social Innovation promote **positive change**, i.e. contribute to solving, mitigating or preventing persistent or emerging social problems?
2. Are projects supported by Portugal Social Innovation **efficient** in the use of resources to achieve their goals?
3. Are projects supported by Portugal Social Innovation **replicable** in identical/similar contexts?
4. Do projects supported by Portugal Social Innovation propose solutions with potential to be integrated in **public policy**?
5. Do projects supported by Portugal Social Innovation have **economic sustainable** intervention models?

2. ASSUMPTIONS

The **Impact Assessment** model for the projects supported under Portugal Social Innovation Social was developed based on the following six assumptions:



1. **Complementarity**

All projects supported under Portugal Social Innovation are subject to the monitoring procedures and checks specific to projects funded under Portugal 2020 programming period. Although these procedures make it possible to check compliance with contracted goals, they do not allow for a multidimensional analysis of the impact that transcends the mere fulfilment of targets. For a more comprehensive analysis, it was, therefore, necessary to develop a complementary Impact Assessment model.

2. **Customisation**

Currently, there is no consensual tool or model for Impact Assessment and, despite some attempts to create common principles and criteria, there are prevailing trends towards customising procedures adjusted to the specificities of each context and the goals of each assessing entity. The main methodologies available do not offer solutions that are simple and cross-cutting enough to effectively and efficiently assess the impact potential of a high number of wide-ranging projects financed with public and private funds. It was, therefore, necessary to develop a model adjusted to the specificities of the projects supported under Portugal Social Innovation.

3. **Comparability**

Despite the high number of projects, the fact that they address very diverse social issues and have different scales and formats, it was considered important to outline criteria and methods that could allow us to compare the impact potential of the supported projects. Common benchmarks facilitate cross-sectoral comparison and overall analysis of the impact of the Portugal Social Innovation initiative itself.

4. **Specificities of public funding**



The funding model managed by Portugal Social Innovation is pioneering in Europe, mobilising European Union funds to finance innovative and experimental interventions to address social problems. Therefore, as the source of funding is public, European and national, it is relevant to analyse the project's potential to influence the evolution of existing public policies.

5. Contribution to assessing public initiative

Although the Impact Assessment of the projects supported under Portugal Social Innovation does not coincide with the assessment of this public initiative, it should contribute to a general analysis of the overall quality of the projects supported, of the social changes created, of the networks promoted, and of the potential of such projects for transforming social interventions and create new dynamics within the social sector in Portugal. This Impact Assessment does not, therefore, resume the impact of the public initiative Portugal Social Innovation, but is an important element of that process.

6. Evaluation of experimental projects

In the framework of the Impact Assessment of social projects, it is important to distinguish between assessing *experimental projects* and assessing interventions that, even though innovative and different, are *more consolidated*. The assessment criteria and methodologies may be different in each case and should be adjusted to the goal and scale of the projects. As part of Portugal Social Innovation, all supported projects are considered **experimental projects**, and the Impact Assessment model should be geared towards assessing their potential to become consolidated (mainstream) interventions.

3. METHODOLOGY

TIMING FOR DATA COLLECTION



Under Portugal Social Innovation, once the proposal and funding are approved, experimental projects go through different sequential phases, from planning operations to consolidating results. In order to accurately identify the timing when the Impact Assessment should be carried out, it is important to map out the stage of implementation where each of the funded projects is at:

- i) **Preparation** (no intervention with the end-beneficiaries yet);
- ii) **Execution** (intervention in progress);
- iii) **Results** (in the final stage of intervention and completion of the project).

The Impact Assessment of the projects should only be carried out when the projects reach the Results Phase or have already concluded all interventions with their end-beneficiaries.

METHOD

The data required to carry out the Impact Assessment should be collected through three **standard questionnaires**, with close-ended questions, applied to the following entities:

- Project end-beneficiaries
- Project promoter/leader
- Public entities responsible for implementing public policy

In the case of the end-beneficiaries, whenever they have a profile that does not allow them to answer the questionnaire (children, people with disabilities or mental illnesses, etc.), it must be answered by an adult belonging to their proximity network who has accompanied the end-beneficiary throughout the implementation period of the project (parent, caregiver, etc.).

4. IMPACT ASSESSMENT MODEL



As mentioned, despite the diversity of problems and methodologies, all projects supported under Portugal Social Innovation aim to generate social change in the long term (system change). The reasoning about this long-lasting impact can be made by analysing the immediate impacts on people and the potential for dissemination of each project.

Thus, the proposed model aims to assess the results of each project from the standpoint of the projects' impact on the people who were the end-beneficiaries of the interventions and its potential to be disseminated (as an indicator of its potential to bring about significant and sustainable change in society).

For this purpose, the Impact Assessment Model of the projects developed under Portugal Social Innovation proposed the following five dimensions:

Individual impact:

I	IMPACT	<i>Changes in the lives of end-beneficiaries</i>
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Dissemination potential:

E	EFFICIENCY	<i>Suitability of the resources mobilised in relation to the goals that were set</i>
R	REPLICABILITY	<i>Ease of replication in similar contexts</i>
I	INFLUENCE ON PUBLIC POLICY	<i>Potential to influence public policy</i>
S	SUSTAINABILITY	<i>Degree of dependence on external financing</i>



The Impact Assessment model of projects supported under Portugal Social Innovation aims to analyse in a **very simple and comparable way** each project's potential to become a consolidated intervention with a wide and long-lasting impact.

This Impact Assessment model assumes that all projects can be assessed in each of the five dimensions and that these can be **ranked on a quantitative scale** that reflects the result achieved by each project, **allowing the comparison between the various projects** despite their specific characteristics.

Thus, to infer the potential of social change generated by each intervention, i.e., to assess the potential of the Results achieved in the short term to generate positive Impacts in the long term, it is required to:

- assess the changes in the lives of the end-beneficiaries of each project
 - IMPACT
- as well as the project potential for future dissemination (potential for growth & scaling):
 - EFFICIENCY
 - REPLICABILITY
 - INFLUENCE ON PUBLIC POLICY, and
 - SUSTAINABILITY.

