National report on social impact evaluation practices

PORTUGAL

Portugal Social Innovation
Sair da Casca

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1. Introduction & Context

1.1. Definitions of key terms and concepts

The Portuguese social impact evaluation ecosystem, although with previous minor and timid approaches, started to develop and expand with the creation of the public Portugal Social Innovation in 2014. This initiative aimed at boosting social innovation and social investment, with financing instruments specifically designed for this purpose and mobilising European Union funds for its implementation. Subject to the application of these financing instruments, a social impact evaluation was requested from the beneficiary entities responsible for the interventions.

With the creation and development of the social impact and social innovation ecosystem, a wide range of concepts and terms has emerged, with contributions from various agents within the ecosystem, including government institutions, universities, think tanks, foundations, consultancy firms, and experts. Portugal Social Innovation has developed a glossary to help clarify the meaning of concepts and terms commonly used in the context of social innovation[1]. The main terms and concepts used are the following:

- **Beneficiaries**: Entities that receive funding to develop and implement a social innovation project (terminology adopted in the context of European funding). Outside this context, the term 'beneficiary' is commonly associated with the people and communities for whom an intervention is intended (who, in European funding terminology, are referred to as 'recipients').
- **Impact Economy**: Concept of economic and social organization that prioritises the impact and resolution of social and environmental issues and combines this pursuit with sustainable financial performance.
- **Impact Evaluation**: Evaluation process that aims to verify the effect of an intervention on the achievement of the intended objectives and results, establishing a causal relationship between the intervention and the effects generated.
- **Impact Investment**: Capital investment in projects or entities with the aim of contributing to positive social or environmental impact, alongside the repayment of the capital invested, if possible, with a financial return.
- **Impact Management**: Process of planning, organising, controlling and monitoring the impacts generated by an entity's activity, requiring strategic alignment, impact and performance indicators, methods for collecting and processing information and evidence, corrective capacity, and mechanisms for disseminating and communicating these impacts.
- **Impact Measurement**: Process of analysing, calculating and quantifying the effects and changes created by an organization's intervention. This process allows the information and/or data obtained to be used to improve the entity's intervention, in order to increase positive results and reduce potential negative results.
- **Impact Monitoring**: Continuous and regular process of collecting, analysing and measuring data and impact indicators relating to the implementation of an intervention and its performance against expected results.
- **Recipients**: People and communities for whom an intervention is intended.
- **Social Economy**: A set of collective activities aimed at social purposes with private assets, mainly consisting of cooperatives, associations, charities, mutual associations, foundations, entities

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[1] Portugal Social Innovation – Glossary, link

covered by the community and self-management subsectors, and other entities with legal personality that respect the guiding principles of the Social Economy.

- **Social Impact**: Effect and/or social change, positive or negative, intentional or unintentional, generated or with the potential to be generated by an intervention on a specific issue and/or target audience.
- **Social Investment**: Capital investment in projects or entities with the aim of contributing to positive social or environmental impact.
- **Social Investor**: Term generally used to identify an entity that finances a social innovation project developed by another entity.
- **Social Value**: Quantification of the relative importance that recipients of an intervention attribute to the changes they experience in their lives.
- **Theory of Change**: Logical model for structuring a specific intervention or the actions of an entity, which aims to establish a link between the changes identified and/or envisaged and the resources available to the entity. It constitutes a plan on how the change should be achieved (a priori) and an explanation of how it occurred (a posteriori). The purpose of defining this logical model is also to evaluate and adjust the resources and activities carried out, taking into account the changes that are intended to be achieved.

A key term within the social innovation ecosystem is the Social Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship Initiative SISEI (IIES in Portuguese). It was first defined in the framework of Portugal 2020 Partnership Agreement with the European Commission as "projects that promote innovative interventions differing from traditional ones in solving social problems, with high potential for impact and sustainability". However, the operationalisation of this concept benefited from clarification and densification of such a general definition, and it has evolved over time. Portugal Social Innovation coined the concept, to refer to "a project that aims to intervene in an innovative and efficient manner on one or more social problems with the goal of generating positive social impact".[2]

Therefore, SISEI is the term used to identify the projects which are supported by Portugal Social Innovation. A SISEI may differ, depending on its goals or its type or methodology.

From the point of view of its goal, a SISEI can have a preventive or corrective approach, depending on whether it aims to prevent a social problem or to tackle an existing one.

From the point of view of its type or methodology, a SISEI can be a direct or indirect intervention. A project with direct intervention means that it works directly with a target group in a vulnerable situation. A project with indirect intervention means that it contributes indirectly, through other organizations, people or projects, or by changing consumption habits and behaviours, to reduce vulnerabilities. Given their cross-cutting and comprehensive nature, some SISEI may have both a preventive and corrective profile and act both directly and indirectly.

1.2. Background and origins

The practice of social impact evaluation in Portugal has evolved significantly, particularly since the early 2010s, marked by institutionalisation and the strategic mobilisation of European structural funds to foster a dynamic social investment market. The increased focus on social innovation in Portugal coincided with a greater European emphasis on these policies, specifically reinforced by the creation of the Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) program in 2013.

A foundational step was the creation of the Portuguese Working Group for Social Investment in 2013. This group was coordinated by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (FCG), recognised for its experience and leading role in this thematic area within the Portuguese context. This Working Group was instrumental in mobilising various entities within the ecosystem to develop the national strategy for social innovation and investment covering the 2015-2020 period.

One priority aspect regarding the implementation and development of the social impact evaluation practice was the awareness and adoption by the public sector agents of the importance of an evaluation-based culture. Therefore, the need for impact assessment and training within the public sector was acknowledged early on and the initial focus was on addressing persistent social challenges through new and effective responses. As early as 2015, the Portuguese Working Group for Social Investment had identified the need to promote an outcomes-based approach in public services[3]. In a monitoring report from 2018[4] regarding the evolution and implementation of the 2015 recommendations, the public sector showed the least progress in implementing social investment recommendations. Therefore, the need for public entities to develop competencies in results-based contracting was addressed by training programs provided to the public administration leaders and senior technicians through a partnership between the philanthropic and the public sector.

Academic and research institutions played a vital role in defining the social innovation ecosystem. The first steps and approaches to these topics started with research projects and activities in universities and have since fuelled the development of the sector. Academic and research institutions also play significant roles in analysing, evaluating, informing and supporting the development of public policies related to social innovation. Over the years, the academic intervention evolved to researching and applying impact evaluation tools and methodologies, creating and promoting capacity-building programs and training sessions, creating social innovation and entrepreneurship courses and providing support to investors and social organizations.

Significant evolutions to the practice over time

The practice of social impact evaluation evolved from nascent strategic discussions into a formal, publicly coordinated field, driven by European funding mechanisms.

The most significant change was the establishment of Portugal Social Innovation in 2014, under the Portugal 2020 Partnership Agreement. Portugal became the first country in the European Union to mobilise European structural funds to create an entity exclusively dedicated to social investment. Portugal Social Innovation quickly assumed the role of energising the ecosystem, leveraging social investment across a large number of projects, thereby contributing to the growing maturity of the sector in Portugal.

The investment dynamic expanded beyond the initial public and third sector actors. Social investors, particularly private entities, focused on financing social innovation. By 2023, over a third of the corporate sector was already supporting the social sector, although predominantly through traditional philanthropy (€263 million)[5]. However, the private sector committed to invest only €35.8 million in SISEI since 2014. The difference between the capital transferred to social action and that invested in SISEI is partly due to the fact that traditional philanthropy has robust regulatory incentives, while incentives for social investment are still considered insufficient by the ecosystem of investors and potential investors.

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[3] Portuguese Social Innovation Taskforce (2015), *A Blueprint for Portugal's Emerging Social Investment Market*
[4] Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, MAZE (2018), *Grupo de Trabalho Português para o Investimento Social – Relatório de Progresso*
[5] Informa D&B (2024), *Donativos: Envolvimento das* empresas com a comunidade, 6th edition, link

With the establishment of Portugal Social Innovation, the social impact evaluation became a requirement for the different financing tools under management. The SISEI that were (and still are) financed by Portugal Social Innovation tools needed to provide a social impact evaluation report, particularly for the *Parcerias para a Inovação Social / Parcerias para o Impacto* (Partnerships for Social Innovation / Partnerships for Impact) where applicants must set result indicators and targets and, once approved, submit a *Relatório de Execução e Impacto* (Execution and Impact Report) per year of funding. This requirement was applied in the previous and in the current European funding cycles. A more detailed explanation regarding this and other financing tools can be found in chapter 3.1.

In 2022, in order to provide a strategic view of the Portuguese impact ecosystem, the *Agenda para o Impacto 2030 (API30)*[6] was developed. Resulting of the work developed by the Consulting Council of the National Competence Centers for Social Innovation, the document sets a renewed national strategy for social investment and innovation through 2030. This strategy maintains Portugal's positioning as a leading actor in the topic and contributes to the effective mitigation and resolution of social problems.

In terms of methodologies and tools, over the last few decades, there has been a proliferation of impact assessment models, many of which are complementary, resulting in fragmentation in their application. In the early stages of development in the field of impact measurement there was a tendency to reduce complexity and emphasise the choice of a single, universal way of measuring impact. However, in the Portuguese ecosystem there is no agreement on the best methodology for social impact evaluation, even though there may be more prevalent and widespread tools, such as the Theory of Change[7].

Despite the pioneering role of Portugal in social investment, many SISEI promoters still face capacity building needs, especially in key areas such as fundraising, strategy, and crucially, impact evaluation[8].

Currently there is no legal status nor labels establishing the legal figure of "social enterprise". Discussions surrounding the regulation of social enterprises highlight the possibility of creating a legal status, or establishing a label (certification), or a new legal figure specific to social enterprises in Portugal[9], but there have been no recent visible developments on this subject.

The evolution of impact evaluation in Portugal mirrors a move from informal, foundation-led initiatives to a structured, publicly funded ecosystem. The current stage, heavily supported by European funds and Portugal Social Innovation, seeks to establish robust institutions and tools (such as the 2030 Impact Agenda, the National Competence Center for Social Innovation, the One Value platform), to set a common approach to techniques and methodologies, and to promote social impact evaluation to ensure continuous improvement and sustainable growth for the entire sector.

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[6] Consultative Council of the National Competence Centers for Social Innovation (2022), *Agenda para o Impacto 2030 - Estratégia Nacional para o Investimento e Inovação Social,* link

[7] CATÓLICA – LISBON (2021), *Estudo de análise sobre a avaliação do potencial de Impacto de IIES,* internal document

[8] *Agenda para o Impacto 2030* (note 6)

[9] *Agenda para o Impacto 2030* (note 6)

2. Actors

2.1. Mapping key actors

In Portugal, social impact evaluations are mainly done by specialized consulting firms and universities. However, there is a rich social impact ecosystem, composed by a comprehensive range of agents that promote social impact evaluation:

Governmental and public entities

Governmental and public entities are responsible for requesting, financing and, in some cases, performing social impact evaluations. Other relevant tasks are to contribute for the structuring of the social innovation ecosystem The most relevant public entities working on the social impact evaluation ecosystem are:

- **AD&C – Agência para o Desenvolvimento e Coesão** — ESF+ managing authority which coordinates evaluation under Portugal 2030 and manages the Global Evaluation Plan (which comprehends the evaluation of the European funding programs attributed to Portugal).
- **National Competence Centre for Social Innovation** – responsible for creating, in partnership and with specialised resources, the Portuguese structures designed to support and boost social innovation ecosystems.
- **PlanAPP – Centre of Competence for Planning, Policy and Forecasting** — hosts an evaluation-related repository (with guides and instructions) and conducts evaluations of public policies and legislative initiatives.
- **Portugal Social Innovation** – public initiative responsible for supporting social innovation and social entrepreneurship as well as fostering the social investment market, which requests and finances social impact evaluations of the supported projects.
- **REPLAN** – interministerial network for cooperation and sharing of knowledge and resources in the areas of strategic planning, public policy and foresight; has a specific multisectoral team dedicated to the evaluation of public policies.

Consulting firms and other companies

As aforementioned, specialized consulting firms and companies are, together with universities and investigation centres, the main actors performing social impact assessment and impact management. Some relevant companies with expertise within the social impact evaluation ecosystem are:

- **4Change** – evaluation and capacity building.
- **ADORIOR** – support in application to financing, evaluation and auditing
- **Aliados Consulting** – evaluation of public policies and social impact.
- **Aplixar** – specialized in applied research, intervention, innovation and impact.
- **CORE** – social impact/ESG projects for public and social sectors.
- **Ethical** – design/management of impact programs and ecosystems.
- **Logframe** – impact evaluation and monitoring expertise.
- **MAGNA Consultores** – social impact monitoring and assessment services.
- **Quaternaire Portugal** – evaluation of policies, programs, and projects and impact focused studies.
- **Sair da Casca** – sustainability and impact projects with social impact assessment.
- **Setor3** – sustainability strategy and social impact evaluation expertise.
- **Skillent** – sustainability and impact assessment of social businesses and projects

- **Social Data Lab** – focused on data analysis and forecasting, with social impact evaluation tools.
- **Stone Soup Consulting** – impact measurement and management services.
- **Systemic** – consultancy in sustainability/impact.
- **TESE | Associação para o Desenvolvimento** – capacity building/support for organizations to generate and measure impact.
- **ValeConsultores** – social impact monitoring and assessment services.

Universities and research centres

Together with consulting firms, universities and research centres are another core actor within the social impact evaluation ecosystem. The main tasks performed focus on impact evaluation of initiatives, public policy evaluation, research, capacity building and training programs, among others. The most relevant and active examples are:

- **cef.UP – Centre for Economics and Finance (FEP/UP) —** applied research informing policy evaluation.
- **CES | Coimbra University –** evaluation and monitoring of policies**.**
- **CIES | ISCTE —** projects and postgraduate programs focusing on policy design/evaluation.
- **CoLABOR – Laboratório Colaborativo (CES/UC) –** evaluation of social responses and annual studies.
- **GOVCOPP | Aveiro University –** research unit in governance, competitiveness, and public policies, with research in social innovation.
- **ICS-ULisboa / Observa —** research and projects with a public policy evaluation component.
- **IPPS | ISCTE —** training and consultancy in the impact evaluation of public policies**.**
- **Nova SBE Economics for Policy Knowledge Centre —** advanced training in policy impact **evaluation.**
- **Nova SBE Public Policy Institute —** applied research and public policy evaluation; evidence for decision-making.
- **Observatório das Desigualdades (ISCTE) –** studies and analyses with a social impact focus, providing an empirical basis for evaluation.
- **SINCLab - Social Inclusion Laboratory (FPCEUP) –** research centre dedicated to social inclusion and social impact.
- **Universidade Católica Portuguesa Porto | Cross-cutting Area of Social Economy –** social economy dedicated knowledge centre, with training, research and evaluation programs.
- **Yunus Social Innovation Center | Católica Lisbon –** research centre focused on social innovation.

Investors

These agents focus their actions in requiring, financing and publishing social impact evaluations, normally related to programs and projects promoted and/or financed by them. In Portugal, the social investors may be aggregated in three main groups (aligned with the terminology applied by Portugal Social Innovation to the investors in its financial instruments): foundations, private social investors and municipalities. More information can be found in chapter 3.1.

Foundations

- **Fundação Aga Khan Portugal** – social investment with reporting and evaluation requirements
- **Fundação Ageas** — social/impact investing and evaluation of supported initiatives with emphasis on "sustainable social impact"
- **Fundação Altice –** social investment in projects related to education and technology

- **Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian** – publishes reports on specific programs with reflection and evaluation of results/impact
- **Fundação EDP** — support to projects and publication of impact studies/reports on social programs
- **Fundação "la Caixa" / BPI** – social programs with selection, monitoring and evaluation

Private sector

The private sector, as aforementioned, has played an important role in applying financial resources in the social economy, but the majority has been made through traditional philanthropy. Even though the investment from the private sector may be considered timid in social innovation instruments, there are private sector entities that promote social innovation and aim to be an important part of the ecosystem.

Regarding the committed investment by private sector social investors in Portugal Social Innovation financing tools, in the previous cycle PT2020 there were 558 social investors with a compromised investment of 24,467,625€. In the current cycle PT2030, there are 576 social investors with a compromised investment of 11,371,548€.

The private sector investment tends to be related to corporate social responsibility strategies and action plans. These strategies define the major impact topics that the companies focus on and guide the companies' intervention. In some cases, companies are starting to introduce social impact evaluations for its own community-engagement activities and partners.

Municipalities

Another relevant investor in social innovation projects are municipalities, which promote local programs and initiatives. In the previous cycle PT2020 there were 166 municipalities, involved as social investors, with a compromised investment of 15,209,932 €. In the current cycle PT2030, there are 151 social investors with a compromised investment of 8,610,065 €.

Incubators and other actors

These agents have important roles in promoting, implementing and evaluating social innovation programs and to promote collaboration among the social impact ecosystem. Portugal Social Innovation supports a wide range of incubators:

- +Economia
- 11 Hub - Centro de Empreendedorismo de Impacto do Douro, Tâmega e Sousa
- Academia Spin-off Social
- ACTIVE – Centros de Empreendedorismo de Impacto no Alto Tâmega e Barroso
- Algarve Up! Social
- Ave Social Hub - Centro para o Empreendedorismo de Impacto do Ave
- AVEIRO IMPACT HUB - CENTRO PARA O EMPREENDEDORISMO DE IMPACTO DA REGIÃO DE AVEIRO
- Basto Empreendedor Social
- CEIS-FCA - Centro de Empreendedorismo de Impacto Social da Fundação Cardoso do Amaral
- Centro de Empreendedorismo de Impacto da Lezíria do Tejo
- Centro de Impacto Rural
- Centro de Inovação Social do Alto Alentejo

- Centro para o Empreendedorismo de Impacto do Barlavento Algarvio
- CONNECT – Transformar conhecimento em impacto
- DOURIIS
- Farol - um guia para o empreendedorismo e impacto social
- Fator C'Idade: Empreendedorismo Sénior e de Impacto em Coimbra
- Human Power Hub – Centro de Inovação Social de Braga
- I3S BSE- INCUBADORA ITINERANTE PARA O EMPREENDEDORISMO DE IMPACTO
- i9social - Centro de Inovação Social
- Incubadora de Inovação Social de Viseu Dão Lafões
- Incubadora de Inovação Social do Baixo Alentejo - Centro para o Empreendedorismo de Impacto
- Incubadora Social de Investigação e Inovação
- INOVA COMUNIDADE DE IMPACTO SOCIAL
- INterioriza-te! Youth - Social Innovation Hub
- Jobs Airport - Centro para o Empreendedorismo de Impacto
- Lx Circular
- MAIS Impacto Social
- Mind Empreende
- Moinho | Centro para o Empreendedorismo de Impacto do Sotavento Algarvio
- NORDESTE_IN - empoderar a comunidade para a inovação social
- Oeste Respira - Ecossistema para o Impacto
- PINHAL imPACT - INCUBADORA ITINERANTE DE EMPREENDEDORISMO DE IMPACTO DO PINHAL INTERIOR
- Ponte Hub: shift happens
- Porto de Impacto
- Prontos + shift = Impact Village
- RIBA – Uma Start-up social ancorada no Tejo (Alentejo)
- RIBA – Uma Start-up social ancorada no Tejo (Centro)
- Social IN | Incubadora Social de Castelo Branco
- Social Start In
- Vieira Viva - Centro de Resiliência e Inclusão para a Ação

Other relevant actors are:

- **IES Social Business School –** social innovation-focused business school with capacity-building and training programs and with social impact and entrepreneurship knowledge centre.
- **IRIS – Incubadora Regional de Inovação Social** – incubation and impact accompaniment of projects.
- **maze impact** – development and monitoring of Social Impact Bonds and acceleration programs with measurement, evaluation and reporting.
- **RIIS – Rede de Incubadoras de Inovação Social** – collaborative structure disseminating measurement/evaluation practices among incubators.
- **Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa – Casa do Impacto** – hub financing and accompanying impact ventures, with regular impact measurement practice.

2.2. ESF+ managing authorities

In Portugal, the managing authority regarding European funding, in which the ESF+ is included, is the Agency for Development and Cohesion (AD&C). Its mission is to coordinate Regional Development Policy and ensure the overall coordination of European Funds.

The AD&C developed the Global Evaluation Plan (PGA PT2030)[10] for the funding program Portugal 2030, which defines the evaluation strategy for Portugal 2030, serving as a guiding document for conducting quality evaluations that are useful in promoting more relevant, effective, efficient and evidence-based public policies. The PGA PT2030 evaluation strategy prioritizes the impact evaluation of the funding programs, with two main goals: i) distinguish the effects of an intervention from the contribution of other factors to a given objective; and ii) understand how the intervention in question works to produce these effects. The AD&C is responsible for the overall management of the evaluation process, which is implemented by the specific management authorities with the support of monitoring groups.

Two approaches are recommended for impact evaluations under the PGA PT2030:

- **Theory-Based Evaluation**: aims to assess the contribution of interventions to the expected results, i.e., how change occurs with the contribution of the intervention. Methods that can be used include Theory of Change, Realistic Evaluation, Process Tracing, Contribution Analysis, Qualitative Comparative Analysis and Most Significant Change.
- **Counterfactual Impact Evaluation**: It consists of using control or comparison groups to identify the causal change that can be credibly attributed to the intervention.

The main methodological approach applied to the impact evaluation of social innovation is Theory-Based Evaluation, and the methods that can be used include Theory of Change, Realistic Evaluation, Process Tracing, Contribution Analysis, Qualitative Comparative Analysis and Most Significant Change, often combining qualitative techniques (interviews, focus groups, case studies) with document and data analysis. Particularly in the case of social innovation, impact assessment follows an *ex post* perspective (regarding the previous European funding cycle - PT2020) **due to the need to capture effects that take time to materialise, recognising the maturation time of instruments** promoting a social investment market and the subsequent development of projects.

Portugal Social Innovation is one of the funding initiatives that applies ESF+ funding, directly towards social innovation projects and is, therefore, under the evaluation scope of the PGA PT2030. The evaluation plan defines specific guidance for impact evaluation of social innovation programs, and the main goal is to **evaluate the social and economic impact of solutions/measures promoting social innovation in territories and communities**. Other relevant goals include: assess whether the instruments chosen were the most appropriate in responding to the specific needs of social innovation projects; assess the effectiveness of the intervention in communities and their respective territories with regard to the needs identified in an initial diagnosis; assess how the potential and/or actual results of the intervention align with public policy objectives, contributing to the desired trajectory in terms of the objectives and targets of that policy; assess the degree of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, innovation, and sustainability achieved through the support granted in the field of social innovation, through the various interventions, with reference to the objectives pursued, the expected results, and the results observed; and assess the contribution of solutions leveraging social innovation to the promotion of equal opportunities, non-discrimination, active participation and improved employability, particularly among disadvantaged groups.

The evaluation process in PGA PT2030 is a process of shared responsibility and the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders and partners is a guiding principle. Although AD&C is the responsible entity for the

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[10] Agência para o Desenvolvimento e Coesão, I.P. (2023), *Plano Global de Avaliação do Portugal 2030,* link

elaboration and monitoring of the PGA, the governance of the evaluation plan is made in partnership with other governmental bodies. Particularly for impact evaluation, there are monitoring groups made up of fund coordination and management authorities, representatives of sectoral public administration, social partners and experts. These actors ensure technical and methodological supervision and are crucial for the appropriation and systematic use of results. There is also the participation of sectorial public entities with expertise in public policy formulation and external experts (which are the main carriers of the impact evaluation). One specific use envisaged for the results of the social innovation assessment is to communicate results and constraints to the territories and their communities. **In this case, monitoring groups generally include representatives of beneficiaries and recipients (social partners and other relevant entities).**

The primary objective of the evaluation process is to ensure the widespread and systematic use of evaluation results. The planning of evaluations is designed to be used with the aim of promoting learning and supporting decision-making. For impact evaluations, **the results should inform future public policy and programming decisions**. A crucial mechanism for ensuring use is the follow-up of the implementation of recommendations.

The perspectives from the Portuguese managing and implementing authorities of European funds, regarding impact evaluation show that the assessment of impact in social innovation, especially within the scope of Portugal Social Innovation and European funds, constitutes a complex challenge. Unlike more tangible sectoral policies, social innovation interventions produce multiplicative, diffuse, and long-term effects that involve diverse stakeholders, making comprehensive measurement challenging. Evaluation must therefore adopt a mixed approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data, often relying on sampling, case studies, or external assessments to capture real community impact and the social/economic integration of beneficiaries.

A critical point of consensus is the rationale for prioritising ex post evaluation, which is largely driven by timing constraints. Social innovation effects require a long maturation period that extends beyond the typical funding allocation cycle. Consequently, ex post evaluation provides the necessary time to observe, measure, and reliably assess the effective results and medium-to-long-term sustainability of interventions that began in previous cycles (e.g., PT2020 evaluated under PT2030). This retrospective analysis is considered crucial, as it provides a robust, evidence-based foundation for making informed decisions and defining investment priorities for subsequent community programming cycles.

The use of Theory-Based Evaluation (TBE) helps understand the mechanisms and processes that explain why an intervention worked, which is deemed more useful for complex policies than the counterfactual model (which is generally impossible or impractical at the programme level). TBE, conversely, is better suited to complex, contextual policies as it allows evaluators to map the causal chain and understand the mechanisms and processes of change (the "why" and "how" an intervention worked). Promising approaches to complement TBE include Realistic Evaluation and targeted case studies that account for project diversity

Significant challenges arise from the operational context of the social sector in Portugal. The sector is often considered financially fragile and less professionalised, leading entities to have limited internal capacity or resources to contract external expertise for robust evaluations. Organisations often face pressures for sheer survival, potentially resulting in project design being driven by immediate funding opportunities rather than long-term strategic continuity. A further difficulty lies in the inherent tension between the experimental nature of social innovation and the European funds' bias towards measuring "big numbers". Therefore, evaluation of social innovation initiatives requires special sensitivity and appropriate reading matrices that acknowledge the time needed for systemic effects to emerge and accept the potential for project failure

The main objective of the evaluation is to translate this complexity into useful evidence for public decision-making and should ultimately serve to justify increased funding in successful areas.

3. Funding & financing

3.1. Funding sources

Who pays for social impact evaluation in Portugal?

Portugal's social innovation ecosystem is rapidly maturing, moving beyond traditional philanthropy towards a more sophisticated model of social investment. This evolution has brought a critical imperative to the forefront: the need for robust, credible social impact evaluation. As the sector professionalizes, the ability to measure and articulate social outcomes has become a decisive factor for securing funding, ensuring accountability to stakeholders, and ultimately, achieving systemic change. As aforementioned in chapter 1.2, Portugal has distinguished itself as a leader in this domain with the creation of Portugal Social Innovation. This pioneering step underscores a national commitment to not only financing social good but also to ensuring that this financing is effective, efficient, and evidence based.

The relationship between investment models and impact assessment financing in Portuguese social innovation is characterized by a strong emphasis on outcome-based funding and mandatory measurement, driven primarily by public initiatives and increasingly adopted by private and philanthropic actors. In Portugal, the financial model often dictates the required depth and rigor of the social impact assessment. Investment models that seek a financial return or rely on public outcome-based payment mechanisms place the heaviest demand on measurable impact.

Over the last decade, Portugal's social finance architecture has normalised the idea that money follows **evidence of outcomes**. Funders increasingly underwrite the **design, execution and reporting** of evaluations—sometimes as explicit budget lines and sometimes through payment logics that make results measurement unavoidable.

Public and EU instruments: where evaluation is mandatory by design

The central driver is Portugal Social Innovation, first under Portugal 2020 and now **Portugal 2030**. In **Parcerias para a Inovação Social/Parcerias para o Impacto**, applicants must set **results indicators and targets** and once approved, submit a **Relatório de Execução e Impacto** with each reimbursement or final balance request. In practice, this compels projects to budget for baselines, data collection and reporting capacity, anchoring evaluation inside delivery[11].

Portugal Social Innovation's **Títulos/Contratos de Impacto Social (SIBs/CIS)** tighten the connection further: public payment is triggered only if **pre-agreed outcomes** are verified. Investors finance delivery up front; government repays against measured results in priority domains such as **Social Protection, Employment, Health, Justice and Education**. Evaluation here covers indicator design, data systems and independent verification—an investment that is integral to the instrument rather than an add-on[12].

Alongside grants and outcomes contracts, the **Fundo para a Inovação Social (FIS)** deploys repayable finance (credit guarantees and co-investment in equity/quasi-equity). While FIS finances ventures, not evaluations per se, its selection and monitoring require **impact plans and metrics**, pushing investees to build measurement capacity with the capital they receive[13].

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[11] Portugal Inovação Social, Parcerias para o Impacto (link); Parcerias para a Inovação Social (link)
[12] Portugal Inovação Social, Títulos de Impacto Social (link); Contratos de Impacto Social (link)
[13] Banco Português de Fomento, Fundo para a Inovação Social (link)

The **EEA Grants – Active Citizens Fund (Portugal)** also funds evaluation indirectly by imposing **program-level results frameworks**[14]. Projects report against standardised **outputs and outcomes**, and the program itself commissions external **results and impact evaluations –** a structure that cascades measurement requirements down to grantees[15].

Finally, the administrative context matters. Under **Portugal 2030**, the expansion of **Opções de Custos Simplificados (OCS)** reduces compliance burden and **shifts attention to results**. This does not fund evaluation directly, but it frees managerial bandwidth and stabilises the rules for results-oriented claims[16].

Foundations and corporates: from reporting to paid evaluation capacity

Portuguese **corporate foundations and banks** are embedding evaluation expectations—sometimes with explicit budget lines.

- **BPI Fundação "la Caixa" Prizes**: disbursements are tied to **report validation**; a **final impact/results report** is mandatory for all projects, and a **mid-term report** is required for two-year grants. This makes evaluation work an embedded, funded requirement of implementation[17].
- **Caixa Geral de Depósitos – Prémios Caixa Social**: evaluation quality materially affects award decisions. The criterion **"Avaliação e medição do impacto social"** carries **18%** of the scoring, rewarding clear objectives, indicators and impact logic, and end-of-project impact reporting[18].
- **Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian (FCG)**: beyond funding programs, FCG has led the Advisory Board that produced the **Agenda para o Impacto 2030**, which codifies an outcomes-oriented approach across the ecosystem—raising the bar for theories of change and indicators in funded work[19].
- **Fundação EDP – "EDP Energia Solidária"**: proposals must define **changes, indicators and targets**; funded projects are obliged to deliver **interim and final reports**. Crucially, **"capacity building and impact evaluation" is an eligible budget line, capped at 5% of total project costs**—a clear signal to fund evaluation activities[20].

Some foundations now blend **venture philanthropy/impact investment** logics with explicit **impact metric** covenants. **Fundação Ageas**, for instance, frames investments around **metrics set ex-ante** and continuous **outcomes measurement**, using instruments from grants to quasi-equity (e.g., SAFE). This model funds both delivery and the measurement capabilities required to prove it works[21].

Private impact investors: evaluation as part of governance

Impact funds operating from Portugal routinely **contract for measurement**.

- **3xP Global – Impact Innovation Fund** positions itself as Iberia-focused growth capital that **"refines or establishes impact metrics"** with portfolio companies while maintaining financial performance[22]; local institutional investors (e.g., **Banco Montepio**) have joined the LP base[23]. This pulls evaluation practice into later-stage ventures too.

[14] EEA Grants, Active Citizens Fund - Targets and outcomes (link);
[15] EEA Grants, Active Citizens Fund (2024), Results and Impact Evaluation Study (link)
[16] Agência Nacional de Inovação (2024), *Novo modelo de Custos Simplificados (OCS) – SI I&D – PT2030* (link)
[17] Banco BPI | Fundação la Caixa, Prémios BPI "la Caixa" – FAQs (link)
[18] Caixa Geral de Depósitos (2025), Prémios Caixa Social – Regulamento (link)
[19] *Agenda para o Impacto 2030* (note 6)
[20] Fundação EDP (2025), EDP Energia Solidária – Regulamento (link)
[21] Fundação Ageas, Investimento de Impacto (link)
[22] 3xP Global, Impact Innovation Fund (link);
[23] Banco Montepio (2019), Press Release - *Banco Montepio é investidor no Impact Innovation Fund* (link)

- **Mustard Seed MAZE (MSM)** focuses on **one or two core impact metrics per investee**, with **four-year annual targets** approved by the fund's Advisory Board; investees then report consistently against these metrics. The approach aligns with IMP/SDG frameworks and turns measurement into a board-level discipline[24].

What gets funded (and measured): patterns you can expect

Outcome-based designs (SIBs/CIS) consistently carry dedicated evaluation spend—indicator definition, data pipelines and independent verification—because **payment depends on measured results**. Priority sectors are **inclusion/social protection, employment, health, justice and education**, reflecting public policy priorities[25].

Grant co-funding with mandatory reporting (Portugal Social Innovation Parcerias; ACF) funds monitoring systems, baselines/endlines and stakeholder feedback to satisfy program rules and reimbursement cycles. Evaluation here tends to follow **theory of change + outcomes/outputs** templates with SMART indicators; more rigorous counterfactual designs appear selectively in outcomes contracts where feasible[26].

Foundation/corporate programs are increasingly explicit: some **score impact measurement** as a standalone criterion (CGD), others **finance evaluation capacity** directly (EDP's 5% cap). Together they reward credible evaluation design at application stage and finance the reporting required at close-out[27].

Private impact funds finance the instrumentation of metrics and dashboards as part of value creation and risk management, often tying milestones to board oversight and LP-approved targets. This brings sustained funding for **measurement infrastructure**, not just end-of-grant reports[28].

Finally, two structural patterns from your draft hold when we look only at **evaluation** spend: sectoral concentration around social inclusion/employability/health/education, and a **coastal–urban bias** in where evaluation suppliers and data systems mature first—because that is where projects (and therefore evaluations) cluster.

Practical implications for promoters and funders

In Portugal, evaluation is most reliably funded when it is **contractual** (SIBs/CIS), **rule-bound** (Portugal Social Innovation Parcerias; ACF) or **scored/earmarked** (CGD; EDP). Where repayable finance and impact funds are used, measurement is embedded in **governance** and supported by capital for data and reporting systems. The administrative shift toward **simplified cost options** should further enable organizations to devote time and resources to **results**, not just compliance[29].

Future outlook

The financing of social impact evaluation in Portugal has evolved into a dynamic, multi-faceted ecosystem where public, private, and philanthropic capital are increasingly converging around a shared objective: to fund what works. The ecosystem's maturation follows a clear narrative. Public financing through Portugal Social Innovation laid a critical foundation, creating the infrastructure, language, and initial demand for outcome-based models. This spurred a professionalized private impact investment market, which refined and scaled impact measurement for tech-enabled ventures. In parallel, philanthropic and corporate funders

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[24] Mustard Seed MAZE (2023), Social Entrepreneurship Fund - Statement on Principal Adverse Impacts (link)
[25] Portugal Inovação Social (note 12)
[26] Portugal Inovação Social (note 11)
[27] Caixa Geral de Depósitos (note 18); EDP (note 20)
[28] Mustard Seed Maze (note 24); 3xP Global (note 22)
[29] Agência Nacional de Inovação (note 16)

have adapted these principles for more strategic grant-making, while a dedicated support ecosystem of consultants and academic institutions has emerged to service this collective demand.

The definitive trend emerging from this landscape is the decisive shift from activity-based funding to outcome-oriented investment. For social organizations across Portugal, robust impact measurement and management is no longer an optional add-on but a core competency—a prerequisite for accessing capital, proving value, and achieving long-term sustainability.

Looking ahead, the next phase of the ecosystem's development will depend on addressing the systemic challenges identified in this report. The future requires simplifying access to funds, building deeper and more widespread capacity for evaluation, and, most importantly, creating clear pathways to ensure the long-term sustainability and scalability of proven social innovations. By tackling these issues, Portugal can solidify its position as a European leader in social investment and continue to foster an environment where innovative solutions to pressing social problems can truly thrive.

3.2. Funding access

The accessibility of funding for social innovation projects and, specifically, the adequate funding of social impact evaluation activities face significant limitations and structural barriers in Portugal. Despite significant progress, Portugal's social innovation ecosystem faces several structural obstacles that hinder its growth and effectiveness[30].

Capacity gaps

There is a persistent need for capacity building among Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship Initiatives (IIES). Many organizations require stronger skills in fundraising, strategic planning, and, critically, **impact assessment**. This gap persists despite the availability of targeted instruments like Portugal Social Innovation's "Capacity Building for Social Investment" – a financing instrument focused on capacity building and training for social organizations, covering different topics, such as impact evaluation, fund raising, digitalization or financial management[31] and support from consultants, indicating a need for greater scale and uptake.

The lack of competence in developing or operationalising **impact measurement indicators** makes it difficult to rigorously demonstrate effectiveness[32]. Rigorous evidence of impact is vital to legitimise an initiative and is typically required at a phase of growth of the intervention, to attract the substantial resources necessary for expansion. Without proper impact evaluation processes and instruments, some initiatives may be at risk of being limited or even dismantled.

Besides the lack of competence or capacity, social organizations also have very limited or insufficient financial, material and human resources to deploy to social impact evaluation, which is a resource- and time-consuming process.

Mobilization of private capital

Mobilising private capital for social investment is consistently difficult. A key difficulty lies in the inadequacy of the available financial instruments to accommodate the diverse risk strategies of potential investors.

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[30] *Agenda para o Impacto 2030* (note 6);

[31] Portugal Inovação Social, Capacitação para a Inovação Social (link)

[32] Mota et al. "Estudo do Ecossistema de Inovação Social em Portugal – Mapeamento e Observatório", Universidade de Aveiro, 2022

Another relevant aspect is relative to incentives and regulation. The low uptake of private capital is partly due to the fact that traditional philanthropy benefits from robust regulatory incentives, while incentives for social investment are insufficient. Currently, only investments in Social Impact Bonds offer a fiscal benefit.

There is also a lack of sufficient information available concerning the potential for social investment to generate both impact and financial return simultaneously. This results in a lack of knowledge among potential investors regarding the instruments and available social investment options. Regarding Portugal Social Innovation funding instruments, the substantial demand observed for non-reimbursable capacity building and partnership instruments compared to the lower uptake of Social Impact Bonds is seen as indicative of a lack of understanding about the potential financial return of social investment.

At last, another factor is the regional disparity and sectorial concentration of the social impact ecosystem. Private social investment is heavily concentrated in certain geographical areas (the coast and urban centres). In more rural regions like Alentejo, there is a noted absence of social investors, which severely impacts the financial sustainability of local projects.

Bureaucratic hurdles

The ecosystem is hampered by bureaucracy and payment delays, particularly in processes associated with the public and EU funding mechanisms. These administrative burdens can place significant strain on the financial stability of social organizations.

As mentioned in *Agenda para o Impacto 2030*, the high administrative burden associated with the reimbursement claim processes for Portugal Social Innovation funding instruments is one of the main challenges. This burden often stems from the requirement to demonstrate regularly where and how expenses were actually incurred, in compliance with complex national and European regulations[33].

Consequently, beneficiary entities often face significant administrative loads and, in some cases, incur additional expenses that are not considered eligible under the funding. Moreover, delays in payments threaten the financial stability and sustainability of the projects, and occasionally the supporting entities themselves[34].

For these reasons, a major simplification effort was made in PT2030, introducing new instruments and financing models such as Simplified Cost Options ('OCS') and Non-Cost-Related Financing ('FNAC'), in order to ease the administrative burden and reduce the response time of fund management structures.

Funding processes are sometimes perceived as slow and complex by social entrepreneurs. Furthermore, there is a recognized lack of flexibility in financing processes which can "suffocate" smaller organizations[35].

One objective outlined for the National Competence Centre for Social Innovation (CNCIS) is the simplification of access and management processes for social innovation project financing. It was proposed that adopting Non-Cost-Related Financing methods, where reimbursement depends on results rather than incurred expenses, would simplify the bureaucratic burden faced by these entities[36].

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[33] *Agenda para o Impacto 2030* (note 6)

[34] *Agenda para o Impacto 2030* (note 6)

[35] Mota et al. (note 32)

[36] *Agenda para o Impacto 2030* (note 6)

Sustainability of projects

A common challenge is securing long-term financial sustainability. Many projects struggle to find follow-on funding after their initial support from Portugal Social Innovation or other sources concludes, threatening the continuity of proven solutions.

Fragmented information

Project promoters report difficulty in finding clear and consolidated information on funding sources beyond the well-known programs offered by Portugal Social Innovation.

Despite these challenges, the overall trajectory of social impact financing in Portugal remains one of increasing sophistication, collaboration, and opportunity.

4. Methods and practices

4.1. Methodology and approaches[37]

Data collection methods and tools

Social impact evaluation typically relies on a multitude of data collection sources and combines both quantitative and qualitative data inputs. It is essential to select the data sources and collection tools that are most relevant to the project (in terms of its mission and practices but also available resources) and most able to answer the evaluation questions. Data collection tools must also be selected according to the projects' stakeholder groups and their accessibility (for example data collection among children, people with disabilities etc.).

It is also essential for evaluators to be cautious of biases when selecting and deploying data collection tools. Many evaluators choose to include a detailed explanation of their methodological choices in the final evaluation report so as to ensure transparency.

Qualitative data collection tools

Qualitative data refers to non-numerical information, or information that "qualifies" impact. These data can provide insight into stakeholders' experiences, perceptions and behaviors. They therefore often allow for contextualizing quantitative data within an individual's lived experience and their larger societal ecosystem. Below are explanations of some examples of the most commonly used qualitative data collection tools in social impact evaluation practices: interviews, focus groups, observations and outcome stars.

Interviews

Stakeholder interviews are a flexible tool used to ask open-ended questions to better understand individuals' experiences, attitudes and feelings about certain topics. Interviews aim to collect stakeholders' perceptions of the project being evaluated and identify patterns therein. Interviews may last anywhere from 30 minutes to two hours, they are typically recorded (with consent) and transcribed before being analyzed. Interviews are typically analyzed using a thematic grid (based on themes identified in the design phase), which can be done manually or using a software. Interviewers follow an interview guide or framework of questions which correspond to relevant, central themes identified by a literature review and/or benchmark of similar projects.

Social impact evaluation interviews typically draw on social science methodologies, mainly those originating from sociology and anthropology. As such, the most commonly used type of interview in social impact evaluation is semi-structured interviews. These include a limited number of in-depth questions, as opposed to structured interviews which make use of a questionnaire or survey that includes a larger number of directive questions.

Interviews may be conducted by a team-member internal to the project, or by an external expert (researcher or consultant), depending on expertise as well as stakeholder identity. For example, in the case of interviewing vulnerable populations, it may be preferable for internal team-members to conduct interviews in order for interviewees to be in a trusting dynamic and therefore at ease. Interviewing requires

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[37] The content presented in subchapter 4.1 was provided by Avise and included in this report, with minor adaptations in order to be aligned with the Portuguese ecosystem

specific skills, notably the ability to make interviewees feel comfortable to express themselves freely, as well as analytical skills are required in order to accurately identify themes from interviewee's responses.

This method can also help identify best roles for stakeholders to have in the evaluation process and determine their involvement. Exploratory interviews can be conducted during the design phase of an evaluation in order to better define the relevant themes and questions to be pursued in further interviews or questionnaires. The results from exploratory interviews are not used in the data analysis or evaluation results, they are used for establishing the evaluation framework.

Focus groups

Focus groups are group interviews conducted with several stakeholders at once. Focus groups typically include stakeholders with similar demographics so as to better understand shared experiences or perspectives. Focus groups can also allow evaluators to better understand group dynamics through observing interactions between stakeholders.

Focus groups also rely on an interview guide of questions that relate to central themes identified in the design phase of an evaluation. However, the phrasing of the questions will typically differ from the questions asked during a one-on-one interview.

Focus groups typically include 5 – 10 stakeholders. Multiple focus groups may be organized with different groups of stakeholders, or multiple focus groups may be organized with the same cohort of stakeholders over a period of time in order to observe changes and conduct comparisons.

Observations

In-situ observations involve observing stakeholders or a group of stakeholders in the context being evaluated (during the intervention of the program or service). These techniques draw upon the methods of ethnography and aim to capture non-verbal behaviors, micro-interactions or spontaneous verbal expressions that may not appear during interviews. During observations the evaluator may be also engaging in the activity being evaluated ("participant observations"), or not. Observations are often used to complement interviews.

Case studies

Case studies are an in-depth portrait of an individual stakeholder or cohort, using data collected in interviews, observations and surveys. Their aim is to illustrate the experience and trajectory of a stakeholder throughout their participation in a program or receiving a service. By examining the changes generated by a project through the perspective of a stakeholder, case studies can provide an embodied view of social impact and point to the reasons such changes took place. This can be particularly useful for the storytelling of impact evaluation results externally or internally.

This method typically requires a longer-term framework for evaluation (as opposed to interviews, focus groups or surveys), as well as significant access to the stakeholder(s) being portrayed.

Outcomes stars

Outcomes stars are a relatively recent data collection tool (created by actors of the social solidarity economy) that are less widely known or used. This tool resembles a star (see image below), where each point corresponds to a different targeted impact, or change, with a scale of 1-10. The tool is often administered in-person, in place of a questionnaire, or during an interview. Stakeholders are asked to rate their feeling, attitude or experience of the targeted impact according to the scale and administrators may engage in a discussion around these responses.

This tool can provide both quantitative and qualitative data, as well as acting as a tool for mediating dialogue between evaluators or project team-members and stakeholders. The stars are customizable to different fields, topics and populations, and as such are a flexible tool. They are often used for conducting data collection with vulnerable groups, as they are easy to understand and can lead to meaningful dialogues.
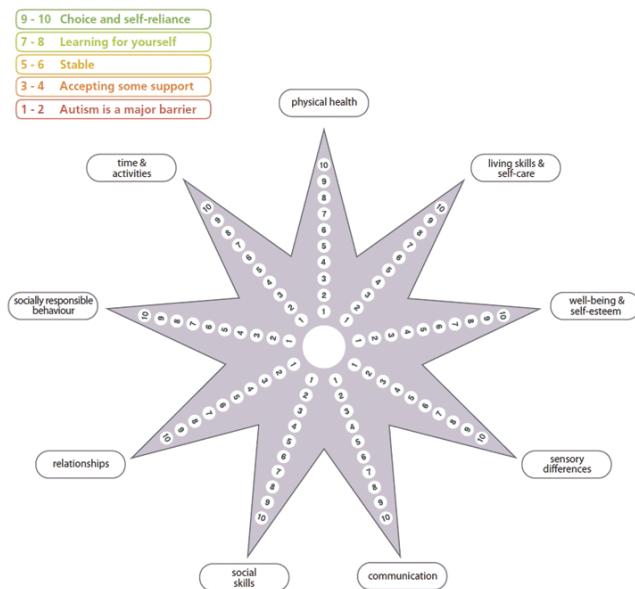
Credit: Clear Solutions Outcomes Star

Quantitative data collection tools

Quantitative data are numerical information that can be measured and analyzed using statistical methods. These collection tools typically allow for a larger data set than qualitative data collection tools in order to assess the magnitude or scope of impacts as well as the statistical significance of impacts. It is generally considered that quantitative data are more objective than qualitative data and thus less subject to interpretation or bias. This often involve standardized tools (i.e. software) for collection and analysis.

Below is a description of the most commonly used tool for quantitative data collection (not including causal inference models), surveys.

Surveys
Surveys are used to provide a larger (than qualitative tools) data set, therefore allowing for a wider or more general perspective on a topic. Surveys offer the advantage of translating qualitative information (changes generated by an action) into quantitative data. They are therefore a very commonly used data collection tool in social impact evaluation, and are often combined with interviews.

Surveys are conducted using a written questionnaire of closed questions (yes/no, multiple choice, Likert scales). They can be administered via paper or digital forms, or administered in-person. Survey questions are established during the design phase of an evaluation and pertain to the central themes or targeted impacts to be evaluated. Evaluators often aim to survey a representative sample of their targeted population. A representative sample is a group that accurately represents the characteristics of a larger population, both in terms of size and in terms of demographic characteristics (gender, age, etc.). The analysis of survey results should fall within a statistically acceptable margin of error (the estimated variation

of a sample size from the larger population). Survey results are analyzed using statistical data processing software which can range in technical complexity.

Multiple surveys may be used during an evaluation so as to tailor the questions asked to different stakeholder groups, or to different stages of the evaluation. For example, a survey may be deployed to beneficiaries at the beginning of a project (or start of service) to create a baseline, and then again after several months or one year in order to provide a comparison. The before/after comparison is helpful for allowing evaluators to establish changes generated through a project.

Impact valuation & monetization

Valuation and monetization techniques draw upon economic analyses and public policy evaluation techniques to attribute or compare economic value to social impacts. They are often used in external communication or advocacy with public or private financers in order to raise or renew funding for social enterprises. The goal of these techniques is to demonstrate the relevancy and importance of social innovation projects using economic indicators in addition to social impact indicators. Valuation techniques involve quantifying intangible impacts (through establishing proxies) in order to attribute monetary values or compare against monetary values. They are therefore complex and multidisciplinary, drawing more heavily upon economic measures and practices.

Social return on investment (SROI)
SROI aims to analyze the efficiency of a project or organization by analyzing the net present value of a monetary investment in the organization. In this approach, all of an organization's impacts are monetarized in order to attribute a monetary value to the social value (or non-financial value) created. An SROI ratio measures the social value generated per monetary unit (euro, dollar, etc.) that is spent on a project or program.

Typically, an SROI analysis will use a baseline or proxy using public data (the cost associated with providing a similar service to the given stakeholder group) to estimate the monetary value of a service or program. It will then associate this monetary value to the change or impact generated by the service as established through a previous impact evaluation (using one or more of the above data collection tools).

Given its complexity and reliance on economic measures, using SROI methods requires specific training and accreditation. It can be a powerful way to communicate the impact created by a project, and can be particularly useful in dialogue with financial or public actors due to its use of monetary values. This method is often used by non-profit or social solidarity economy actors to provide evidence of the value generated by this sector as compared to, or as complementary to, government initiatives.

Avoided-cost analysis
This technique targets certain social impacts or stakeholders of a project, namely those which directly concern a funder or financer (typically in the public sector). The goal is to understand whether the monetary value of impact results is greater than the resources mobilized to obtain them. Calculating this ratio includes comparing public investments in social enterprises (through subsidies and tax benefits) working on a specific social need or sector, with the social benefits saved and taxes generated by the activities. The results of this type of evaluation therefore highlight the societal costs with and without the existence of the project in question. As compared to SROI, this practice does not attribute monetary value to all of an organizations' impacts but rather targets some specific impacts and often one stakeholder group.

Cost-benefit analysis

This approach analyses the cost-benefit ratio of a project on a stakeholder group in order to evaluate and demonstrate its economic efficiency. The cost-benefit ratio includes the overall (positive) impact generated by a project and the (negative) monetary costs of generating those impacts. In order to calculate this ratio, the total costs of a project or program are compared against the total benefits, both tangible and intangible. This technique typically only accounts for the current value and costs of actions ("net present value") as opposed to future values or costs. As compared to SROI, this practice does not attribute monetary value to all of an organizations' impacts, but rather targets some specific impacts and often one stakeholder group.

Triple capital accounting or restauration approach

This systemic approach includes social, economic and environmental impacts in the evaluation. A monetary value is attributed to the negative social and environmental effects of a project or organization in order to conclude the economic costs of restoring the degraded human and natural capitals.

One such method developed in this approach is the CARE-TDL (Triple Depreciation Line) accounting method. CARE applies traditional financial accounting standards to natural and human capital in order to account for and integrate the degradation of these capitals into the financial accounting of enterprises. The goal is to better account for negative externalities generated by enterprises and ultimately guarantee environmental and human ecosystems.

Experimental and causal methods

Experimental and causal (inference) methods are those that aim to determine the cause and effect (as opposed to correlation) between a specific intervention or program and outcomes among stakeholders. These approaches take on an experimental or quasi-experimental approach and are, for this reason, typically considered to be more scientifically rigorous than others.

Randomized control trials (RCTs)

Inspired by research techniques from the medical field and policy research, RCTs are an experimental study that aims to prove causal links between actions and impacts. In this approach, stakeholders (or cluster groups) of similar demographics will be randomly assigned to either an intervention group (who receive the service or benefits of the program) and a control group (who do not receive the service or benefits). The control group is used as a baseline to compare the outcomes or measured effects among the intervention group. As such, typically the same indicators will be studied for both groups so as to establish a comparison and thus causality linked to the program in question.

The goal of randomization (randomly assigning stakeholders to the two groups) is to reduce bias in the study and the influence of external factors. However, for this reason RCTs have ethical implications, as the control group do not receive any services that could benefit them socially despite being from the same stakeholder group in need.

For this reason, some RCTs will not include a control group, but rather compare analyses of an intervention group with a benchmark of similar programs or previous versions of the same program.

Counterfactual analysis

Similar to the above approach, counterfactual analysis seeks to compare the outcomes of an intervention with a baseline of non-intervention. The process estimates what could have happened to stakeholders had they not received the services or benefits of a program. To begin, a theoretical counterfactual is established (using a statistical model such as regression analysis or a logical model), this is a conceptual scenario that elaborates what would have occurred to the stakeholder group without the given intervention. This

scenario is then compared to the outcome observed among stakeholders that did participate in the program. This outcome is typically evaluated using statistical models such as propensity score matching.

Methodological approaches

Regardless of the data collection tools used to measure outcomes, there are different methodological approaches to social impact evaluation. This refers to the way in which evaluation practitioners approach their data collection, frame their data indicators and interview or survey questions, etc. The choice of approach may be based on the nature of the project to be evaluated (sector, intended impacts, stakeholder populations) and the strategic goals of the evaluation.

Participatory approach

Based on the conviction that it is essential to include those directly affected by the actions of a program and not to speak on their behalf, participatory evaluations are defined by actively involving beneficiaries or users throughout the impact evaluation process. In this approach, all aspects of an impact evaluation (design, data collection and analysis and use of findings) are co-designed between project teams and stakeholders through collaborative practices. Such practices include workshops, focus groups, community meetings and stakeholder committees.

This approach aims to better account for the experiences and needs of stakeholders in order to collect more pertinent and context-specific data, data that can better be used to serve these very populations. Additionally, an inclusive approach can empower stakeholders, building up their self-esteem, sense of ownership and trust in the project and overall competency. A collective effect can also take place, allowing stakeholder communities to gather together to share their thoughts, difficulties and needs in a constructive way.

It is often used for impact evaluations of projects or sectors that work with disenfranchised or marginalized groups. This approach can indeed be more time-consuming and resource-intensive as it requires specific facilitation techniques.

Systemic approach

This approach is based on placing social impact as a part of a complex and dynamic system in which outcomes are multi-factorial and in constant evolution. Based on the conviction that social issues (and therefore their responses) are multidimensional, these types of impact evaluations attempt to understand impact as a whole, or a system. Data is framed and analyzed within a framework of interactions and dynamics between factors in order to therefore gain better understanding of the larger patterns.

This approach typically gives greater attention to negative or unintended social impact data, rather than isolating data relevant to the intended (thus positive) impacts of a project. Isolating data or certain specific impact runs the risk of resulting in isolated solutions that can aggravate negative impacts in other areas. This approach may also focus on indirect or emergent effects of actions rather than direct outcomes in their choice of indicators. Proponents of the systemic approach frame it as a mindset, rather than a method, which is to say that it relies on a holistic or systems-level thinking about impacts rather than a certain type of evaluation method. It often therefore requires a collective buy-in from stakeholders (particularly leadership) and a longer timeframe.

Sectoral approaches

Going beyond the evaluation of impacts generated by a specific project or organization, sectoral approaches aim to evaluate the impacts created by part or all of an industry sector. Often done at the initiative or with

the support of a sectoral network or sectoral financer (i.e. foundation), these evaluations involve a grouping of multiple actors within the same industry or intervening on the same social theme.

The goal is to better understand the unique characteristics of a sector in terms of its generated effects, affected stakeholder groups and professional practices. Additionally, insofar as they demonstrate specific patterns of social impacts, this approach can allow for organizations and networks to better advocate for the social value of the sector as a whole.

In practice, this approach involves gathering many actors from a same sector to co-design a reference system or list of indicators that can then be used to evaluate impacts of a program within that sector. Results from those evaluations can than be pooled and compared to demonstrate the larger impact of the sector. Reference systems also typically draw upon industry standards and priorities (for example sector-specific SDGs), regulatory frameworks or public policy as it relates to the given sector.

While this approach can provide great insight into common impacts within a sector, it can also limit insight into cross-sectoral impacts on a given social issue.

Sectoral approaches

This approach, inspired by research and development practices in the private sector, focuses on the continuous development and adaptation of projects. Rather than focusing on evaluating direct outcomes or proving positive impacts, this approach is intended to provide real time feedback to support projects in evolution and dynamic environments. Given its deductive and responsive way of approaching evaluation, this approach is primarily used for innovation projects, projects that are in the midst of a radical re-design, or those in a context of urgency or crisis.

The most significant distinction of this approach lies in the position of the evaluator in the process: developmental evaluators are intergraded internally into the project team in order to adopt a larger role in project strategy. The evaluator actively participates in all aspects of the evaluation but also many other internal missions so as to ensure alignment with other ongoing dynamics of the project.

The data collection aspect of the evaluation is typically approached with flexibility and adaptability, given the complex, rapidly changing dynamics of an innovation project. The indicators, data collection and analysis are all approached from a learning mental model (or systems thinking), the goal being to produce the results that are the most useful to the ongoing learning of teams and thus development of the project. Data results and communication are for example, often user-centric as opposed to oriented towards financers or other partners as can be the case in traditional evaluations.

Considering the integration of the evaluator into the internal project team, this approach to evaluation is significantly time-consuming and resource-intensive. It also requires a high degree of agility and openness on the part of the evaluator.

Qualitative comparative analysis

A theory-based approach, this practice examines various combinations of factors and their contribution to outcomes. The goal is to understand under which conditions and for which stakeholders are outcomes achieved by a project. The conditions are first established in a thorough theory of change model, which not only outlines expected outcomes (a classic theory of change) but also details contextual aspects that identify when and where conditions are present.

Concretely, the practice consists of coding qualitative conditions into quantitative values and placing them on a matrix with cases (a specific project or program, geographical area, population, etc.). This matrix is

used to identify which combinations of conditions have led to positive outcomes (according to the numerical values attributed). In some cases, this matrix serves as a basis for establishing causal pathways, which analyze the interconnected causal links that generate different outcomes. These analyses are typically conducted using a specialized software and, for this reason, require specific technical training and strong analytical abilities.

This approach allows evaluators to bridge qualitative and quantitative data and to account for the complexity of factors and mechanisms in an intervention. This approach is more often used in public policy evaluation and the evaluation of international development programs.

Outcomes harvesting

This approach inverses traditional evaluation processes: instead of first establishing targeted impacts and collecting evidence as to their realization, outcomes harvesting first evaluates generated changes and then works backwards to analyze if and how the project contributed to those changes.

Once data has been collected through a combination of the tools detailed above, findings are formulated into outcome statements describing who and what changed, when and where the change took place and how the intervention contributed to the change. The outcomes statements are verified with key stakeholders, then analyzed through classification or outcome clustering. Often this takes the form of outcome mapping, which identifies the causal pathways between patterns of outcomes and the project activities.

Outcomes harvesting is an iterative and participatory process and thus requires skill and flexibility on the part of the evaluator but also project teams. In order to accurately apply this approach, it is essential to frame indicators and interview or survey questions as open-ended. This ensures that all possible outcomes (including unintended ones) are explored. It is often used in the context of innovations and development work, as it is well adapted to complex systems of social change.

4.2. Practices

In Portugal, practice mirrors the toolbox described in chapter 4.1 but is shaped by two forces: (i) the operational needs and constraints reported by organizations; and (ii) guidance to match methods to the life cycle stage of the social innovation (from developmental to formative to summative evaluation).

What strategy and planning tools are most used and why

Building a clear evaluative logic has become a common entry point.

- **Theory of Change (ToC), stakeholder and impact mapping** are frequently used to clarify intended outcomes, assumptions and indicators before fieldwork, because they are low-cost, scalable and align internal and external stakeholders. ToC and systems/problem mapping are explicitly identified as front-loaded methods in early stages (1); conceptual work tends to be co-designed with external partners, as identified by social innovation initiatives that participated in a recent internal inquiry from Portugal Social Innovation (made in partnership with impact evaluation specialists from the Portuguese ecosystem), signalling broad acceptance of these tools[38].

- **Holistic management frameworks**—IMP, Impact Europe's 5 steps, BetterEvaluation's Rainbow, and the Principles of Social Value—are referenced as the "common language" that helps

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[38] CATÓLICA – LISBON (note 7)

organizations move from one-off measurement to ongoing impact management, a need repeatedly raised by practitioners[39].

What strategy and planning tools are most used and why

Organizations in Portugal converge on mixed-methods, with a strong quantitative backbone complemented by qualitative depth.

- **Surveys/questionnaires** are the top tool in Portugal, used by **the vast majority of respondents** the internal inquiry from Portugal Social Innovation, because they translate outcomes into comparable metrics and support before/after comparisons - exactly as described above.

- **Interviews** and **focus groups** add context and lived-experience; considering the detail above regarding their strengths and limitations (e.g., need for skilled facilitation), Portuguese organizations address them through collaboration with external specialists (see division of roles below).

- **Monitoring of output/outcome indicators**, **document analysis**, **standardised scales**, **observation/ethnography**, and **case studies** are present as secondary methods, used to triangulate survey findings and to capture change pathways that are not easily quantified.

- **Outcome stars** appear selectively for vulnerable groups, valued for blending quantitative scoring with facilitated dialogue.

- **Timing of data**: multi-point collection (before–during–after) is common in Portugal, enabling contribution claims without heavy causal designs.

Where and how valuation and monetisation is used

Monetary valuation is used more sparingly, mainly for external communication and funding dialogues, consistent with the recommended caution regarding complexity and skills requirements.

- **SROI** is employed when programs reach scale and have mature indicator systems; SROI/cost-per-impact is considered as appropriate in later life-cycle stages when proportionality and credible evidence are achievable[40].

- **Avoided-cost** and **cost–benefit analysis** arise in projects tightly coupled to public budgets (e.g., health, housing), where demonstrating fiscal efficiency matters.

- **Triple-capital accounting/CARE-TDL** is rare and mainly exploratory, reflecting its systemic scope and accounting sophistication.

When causal/experimental approaches appear

A **contingent, stage-appropriate** use of causal designs is recommended - quasi-experimental comparisons, contribution analysis and only exceptionally RCTs - given ethical, cost and feasibility constraints typical in social innovation[41]. This resonates with the above framing of RCTs/counterfactuals as rigorous but resource-intensive. In Portugal, their adoption remains selective and is generally justified by high-stakes scaling or policy uptake.

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[39] CATÓLICA – LISBON (note 7)
[40] CATÓLICA – LISBON (note 7)
[41] CATÓLICA – LISBON (note 7)

How evaluation approaches are applied

Portuguese practice blends the above listed three approaches as context demands:

- **Participatory**: visible in collaborative design and feedback loops with beneficiaries; it builds ownership and relevance.

- **Systemic**: used to map interdependencies across actors (e.g., labour market, health pathways), normally at framing stage via systems mapping.

- **Sectoral**: leveraged by funders or networks to harmonise indicators and enable portfolio-level reading; it aligns with the "Agenda para o Impacto 2030's" (Agenda for Impact 2030 – AFI30) intention to mobilise investors and foster outcome-based commissioning[42].

How evaluation approaches are applied

Surveys conducted by Portugal Social Innovation provide a clear picture of who leads evaluations and how responsibilities are shared across phases. It shows a mixed model: external expertise for design and analysis, with internal teams ensuring field access and communication.

- **Who leads**: In their most recent evaluation, **73.7%** of respondents report an **external lead** (of which **65.1%** companies and **34.9%** universities). When the lead is internal (**26.3%**), it is usually the **project team** (≈**74.2%** of those cases).

- **Division of labour by phase**: **co-design** of conceptual models and methodological plans is common; **instrument development** and **data collection** are often **collaborative**; **data analysis** tends to be **external**; **result communication** is typically **internal**, reinforcing ownership and learning.

- **When evaluations happen and how data are gathered**: Most organizations collect data **before, during and after** interventions, using **questionnaires** as the primary instrument, supported by **interviews** and **indicator logs**. This setup permits proportionate evidence while containing cost and skills requirements.

Situational analysis of practices in Portugal

Evaluations in Portugal are **predominantly project-level** and are triggered by a mix of intrinsic learning needs and funder requirements. The practice is maturing: organizations combine internal ownership with targeted external expertise and express strong appetite for further capacity building.

- **Where evaluations occur and why**: Around **three-quarters** of surveyed entities have conducted impact evaluations; among those, **project-level** assessments are far more frequent than organization-wide ones. The **two main drivers** are **funder/investor requirements** and **the organization's own initiative**[43].

- **Internalisation vs. externalisation**: External leadership and analysis are prevalent (see above), reflecting the perceived need for methodological rigour and neutrality; at the same time, organizations keep communication and operational follow-up in-house to integrate lessons[44].

- **Common difficulties/limitations**: Among entities that have **never** evaluated, the most cited reasons are **limited know-how** and **cost of external services** (both **37.9%**), **time constraints**

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[42] Agenda para o Impacto 2030 (note 6)
[43] Portugal Social Innovation (2025), internal surveys regarding social impact evaluation practices
[44] Report on social Impact Evaluation (note 43)

(**27.6%**) and perceptions of **low relevance** (**31%**) or **lack of need** (**24.1%**) [45]. Even among those who have evaluated, budget and internal resource allocation emerge as recurrent pain points.

- **Methodological proportionality and cost drivers**: A study from UCP has highlighted that evidence standards should **scale with the initiative's life-cycle** and outlined cost benchmarks and drivers (e.g., geography, access to vulnerable groups, skills mix), recommending capacity building and selective external support as mitigations[46].

- **Enablers and forward momentum**: The ecosystem's strategy - **AFI30** - explicitly calls for **raising capital for outcome-based contracting** (Goal 4) and **mobilising social investors** (Goal 5), which implies stronger, comparable measurement and evaluation capabilities across actors[47].

Synthesis: what is most commonly used (and why), by actor and project type
Drawing on the presented taxonomy and national evidence, Portuguese practice can be summarised as a pragmatic "good-enough now, robust later" model that privileges proportionality, collaboration and learning.

- **Planning tools**: *Theory of Change* and stakeholder/impact mapping are the starting point for most evaluations because they are low-cost, clarifying and compatible with participatory/systemic thinking. They are frequently co-developed with external specialists to ensure quality and to reduce bias.

- **Data collection**: *Questionnaires* lead usage, with *interviews* and *indicator logs* as the main complements; *focus groups*, *observation*, *document analysis*, and *standardised scales* appear as needed to triangulate and contextualise. Multi-time-point data collection (before–during–after) is a prevailing pattern.

- **Approaches**: *Participatory* elements are common (co-design and beneficiary feedback), *systemic* tools inform framing (systems mapping), and *sectoral* approaches surface where funders/networks seek comparability.

- **Causal and monetisation methods**: Adoption is **selective** and **stage-dependent**—from contribution analysis and quasi-experimental designs in mid-to-late stages to monetisation (SROI, avoided-cost) in mature programs. Cost/feasibility and ethical considerations moderate their use.

- **By actor type**: **External leads** dominate when methodological complexity is higher; **internal project teams** lead communication and embed lessons into management. Universities and consulting firms are the main external providers.

- **Barriers and needs**: The **knowledge gap** and **cost** remain the twin barriers to wider diffusion; targeted **capacity-building** and clearer **budget norms** for evaluation (linked to project stage/risk) are repeatedly indicated as solutions—fully consistent with UCP's proportionality guidance and AFI30's ecosystem goals.

Implications for strengthening practice

The evidence suggests four practical directions that can be taken forward without disrupting current workflows while responding to investors' and organizations' needs.

- **Codify a minimum viable toolkit** (ToC + indicator dictionary + data plan with before–during–after checkpoints), aligned with the Rainbow/Impact Europe steps, to increase comparability across projects at low marginal cost.

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[45] Report on social Impact Evaluation (note 43)
[46] CATÓLICA – LISBON (note 7)
[47] Agenda para o Impacto 2030 (note 6)

- **Pair internal ownership with external assurance**: keep communication and use of findings internal; seek external support for design and analysis when complexity or stakes increase - maintaining the balance already visible.

- **Adopt proportional evidence standards**: use developmental/qualitative methods early; add quasi-experimental/monetisation only when scale and decision needs justify the cost.

- **Leverage sector-level initiatives**: where AFI30 promotes outcome-based funding, co-create sector indicator sets to ease reporting burden and enable portfolio-level learning for investors and public commissioners.

Focus

Social impact evaluation specifically adapted to social innovation initiatives/projects often requires custom methodologies that explicitly account for the novelty, risk, and potential for replication inherent in innovative solutions.

Examples of adapted evaluation models for Social Innovation:

A. **The 55+ Project Monitoring and Evaluation Model**[48] The project, an innovative social economy initiative that values inactive people aged 55 and over, co-created a comprehensive Monitoring and Impact Evaluation Model specifically tailored to their goals. This customization allows for the deep measurement of long-term social changes they intend to create. The model was designed to be simple, trustworthy, and easy to implement, with the hope that it could be used by **other entities aiming for social change**.

B. **The Social Data Lab Impact Index (SLI2®)**[49] The evaluation of the *Apps for Good* program utilizes the SLI2® model developed by the Social Data Lab, a custom methodology for estimating social impact. The SLI2® methodology is centered on the **"Triplo P" (Triple P)**: Profundidade (Depth), Perenidade (Perennity), and Peculiaridade (Peculiarity), along with factors like the degree of gravity and cost/benefit analysis ("deve e haver"). This framework provides specific metrics for assessing the unique nature and durability of the social innovation being implemented.

C. **Impact Management Project (IMP) Framework**[50] Organizations like Missão Continente, which position themselves as social impact investors, use frameworks like the IMP to analyze projects, including those focused on social innovation. The IMP structure requires analyzing five dimensions: "What", "Who", "How much", "**Contribution**," and "**Risk**". This methodology is inherently suitable for innovative projects as it structures the analysis around the potential for solving problems (Classification C: Contributes to Solutions).

Evaluation grid for social innovation

The following evaluation grid provides a structured, evidence-based framework for assessing the specific dimensions that define the innovative character and transformative potential of social innovation initiatives. It integrates the most effective criteria observed across leading Portuguese social impact evaluations—namely, *originality, relevance, stakeholder involvement, experimentation and risk, and scalability*. Each criterion is supported by tested methodologies drawn from practical applications such as

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[48] 55+ (2023), Interim Impact Report 2020–2022 (M&E model) (link)
[49] Apps for Good (2023), Social Impact Measurement Report (SLI2®, 2023), (link)
[50] Missão Continente (2025), Impact Report 2024 (link)

the SLI2® model (Social Data Lab), the CPSB Technical Dossier, the SROI framework, and integrated impact measurement systems like those of Missão Continente, 55+, and Apps for Good. The grid enables consistent assessment across diverse projects by combining qualitative depth with quantifiable indicators, ensuring that innovation is understood not only as novelty, but as the capacity to respond meaningfully to social needs, mobilise those affected, manage risk in testing new solutions, and create conditions for long-term replication and systemic change:

Criterion	Practical measure(s) that can be scored	Example
Originality / Newness	*Uniqueness score* (Unique / Rare / Not rare); evidence of novelty vs current alternatives; document "what's truly different" in ToC	SLI2® "Peculiaridade"[51]; CPSB selection criteria ("Inovadora"; "Não testada")[52].
Relevancy to the targeted need	Problem statement quality; fit between activities and beneficiary outcomes in ToC; proportion of indicators that are beneficiary-reported	IMM define + ToC[53]; SROI materiality principle[54].
Involvement of beneficiaries / actors	Evidence of co-design (FGs/interviews before metrics); stakeholder-set weights for Durability/Importance; feedback loops	Apps for Good qualitative[55]; CPSB stakeholder-weighted Durability /Importance[56]; SROI principle #1[57].
Experimentation & risk	Prospective pilot with baseline (T0); document risks/assumptions; sensitivity or contribution analysis (Discount A/B); decision rule for scale-up	CPSB prospective pilots & counterfactuals[58]; SROI transparency/verification[59]; IMM pilot→replicate logic[60].
Scalability / Reproducibility	Replication tests across sites; compare outcome persistence (Durability) and unit economics across geographies; document adaptation	55+ territorial expansion/learning[61]; IMM replication example (M3NTORIA 3D)[62]; CPSB emphasis on replicable methods[63].

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[51] Apps for Good (note 52)
[52] Centro Paroquial São Bernardo (2023), Projeto "Capacitar, crescer e fazer a diferença": Impact Evaluation - Technical Dossier
[53] Missão Continente (note 53)
[54] Galp Energia Solidária (2016), Social Impact Analysis Report - SROI Methodology ([link])
[55] Apps for Good (note 52)
[56] Centro Paroquial São Bernardo (note 55)
[57] Galp Energia Solidária (note 57)
[58] Centro Paroquial São Bernardo (note 55)
[59] Galp Energia Solidária (note 57)
[60] Missão Continente (note 53)
[61] 55+ (note 51)
[62] Missão Continente (note 53)
[63] Centro Paroquial São Bernardo (note 55)

5. Trainings & education

Overview

Training and education in social-impact evaluation in Portugal are still at a formative stage but have expanded considerably in recent years. Although there is no national program dedicated exclusively to this field, an increasing number of initiatives now address it either directly, through specialised courses, or indirectly, within broader frameworks on sustainability, public policy, and social innovation. The section below presents these initiatives through a **Typology of Training and Capacity-Building Clusters**, reflecting the diversity of actors — academic institutions, public bodies, corporate and philanthropic foundations, business networks, and municipalities — that together contribute to building national competences in social-impact evaluation.

Typology of Training and Capacity-Building Clusters

Formal Education Programs

Higher-education programs in Portugal, including undergraduate degrees, master's degrees and postgraduate diplomas, increasingly incorporate topics related to social-impact evaluation and measurement. These topics are normally included as specific modules or curricular units within broader programs in management, economics, social innovation, sustainability, or public-policy evaluation. The approach is predominantly theoretical and conceptual, complemented by applied case studies, project work, and analysis of national and international frameworks for social-impact assessment. Overall, these programs contribute to the academic consolidation of impact-evaluation knowledge, though Portugal does not yet offer a full degree exclusively dedicated to this field.

- Main providers: Católica Lisbon School of Business & Economics, ISCTE Business School, ISMT, ISEG, NOVA SBE, ISCSP, University of Minho, University of Aveiro.
- Target audience: Students, public and private-sector professionals, and early-career practitioners interested in integrating social-impact evaluation skills into broader studies of sustainability, innovation, and policy management.
- Content covered: Theory of Change and logic-model approaches; SROI (Social Return on Investment) and cost–benefit analysis; indicator selection and metrics for social and environmental outcomes; quantitative and qualitative methods for program evaluation; and impact reporting, stakeholder mapping, and performance assessment.

Professional and Institutional Capacity-Building Programs

Professional and institutional capacity-building initiatives in Portugal are promoted by public and semi-public organisations that support the development of the social-economy and social-innovation ecosystem. Their primary objective is to strengthen the technical and managerial competences of organisations working in these areas, through training, mentoring and advisory services focused on impact evaluation and organisational management. Some initiatives are linked to national or European funding programs (such as Portugal 2030 or ESF+), while others are implemented directly by public entities with training mandates. The format of these activities varies — ranging from structured online courses to short in-person sessions and thematic workshops — and typically combines conceptual introduction with applied examples and methodological guidance.

- **Main providers**: CASES – Cooperativa António Sérgio para a Economia Social – offers the certified online course Avaliação de Impacto Social[64] (50 hours, free of charge); Portugal Inovação Social (EMPIS) – manages the Capacitação para o Investimento Social[65] instrument, which finances consultancy, mentoring or certified training for social-economy organisations; EAPN Portugal – European Anti-Poverty Network – organises training sessions [66] on social-impact evaluation methodologies, theories and case studies for NGOs and community organisations; Incurso – Capital Humano – provides the course Metodologias de Avaliação de Impacto nas Organizações da Economia Social[67], supported by the Human Capital Operational Program.
- **Target audience**: Managers and technicians of cooperatives, IPSS, NGOs and social enterprises, as well as public-sector officers responsible for implementing ESF + and Portugal 2030 projects.
- **Content covered**: Foundations of social-impact evaluation, indicator definition and data-collection methods, planning and implementation of evaluation processes, analysis and interpretation of results, and reporting of social outcomes.

Corporate and Philanthropic Capacity-Building Programs

Corporate and philanthropic capacity-building initiatives are promoted by private foundations and companies as part of their corporate-social-responsibility or philanthropic strategies.
These programs usually combine financial support with mentoring, training and acceleration components designed to professionalise the management and impact-evaluation practices of their beneficiaries.
Unlike institutional programs, they are privately funded and targeted, focusing on organisations that already receive grants or participate in acceleration challenges. Learning is hands-on and tailored, often delivered through partnerships with academic or specialised organisations.

- Main providers: Fundação Ageas – ÍMPARES Program[68] – 12-month mentoring and capacity-building for social entrepreneurs, including modules on impact measurement and sustainability; Fundação EDP & IES – Impact Bootcamp: Inovação Social para uma Transição Energética Sustentável[69] – intensive training for projects supported by the Energia Solidária fund; Fundação Montepio – Impacto Social Program[70] – developed with CASES to strengthen evaluation competences of partner organisations; TUI Care Foundation & IRIS Social Incubator – Futureshapers Portugal[71] – capacity-building for impact initiatives in sustainable tourism, combining workshops, online mentoring and masterclasses; Plataforma Lisboa Sustentável – Capacitação em Sustentabilidade ESG para Empresas[72] – hybrid training on ESG management and impact metrics for corporate participants.
- Target audience: Beneficiaries of foundation or corporate funding (NGOs, social enterprises, start-ups and entrepreneurs) and corporate partners engaged in sustainability or social-impact projects.

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[64] CASES – Cooperativa António Sérgio para a Economia Social (2024), Avaliação de Impacto Social ([link](#))

[65] Portugal Inovação Social (EMPIS), Capacitação para o Investimento Social ([link](#))

[66] EAPN Portugal – European Anti-Poverty Network, Avaliação de Impacto Social: metodologias, teorias, matrizes e casos práticos ([link](#))

[67] Incurso – Capital Humano, Metodologias de Avaliação de Impacto nas Organizações da Economia Social ([link](#))

[68] Fundação Ageas, Programa ÍMPARES ([link](#))

[69] Fundação EDP & IES – Social Business School, Impact Bootcamp: Inovação Social para uma Transição Energética Sustentável ([link](#))

[70] Fundação Montepio & CASES – Cooperativa António Sérgio para a Economia Social, Programa Impacto Social ([link](#))

[71] TUI Care Foundation & IRIS – Incubadora de Inovação Social (n.d.), Programa TUI Futureshapers Portugal – Social Innovation in Tourism ([link](#))

[72] Plataforma Lisboa Sustentável – Câmara Municipal de Lisboa, Capacitação em Sustentabilidade ESG para Empresas ([link](#))

- Content covered: Strategic planning for impact, Theory of Change, indicator design and KPIs, impact-management and reporting frameworks, mentoring on sustainability and organisational performance.

Awards and Competitions with Training or Mentoring Components
Awards that integrate learning or mentoring into their application and follow-up processes. These combine recognition with structured training, often including bootcamps, workshops, and ongoing mentoring for laureates and finalists.

- Main providers: Caixa Geral de Depósitos (*Prémios Caixa Social*[73]); Fidelidade - Programa Comunidade (*Prémio Fidelidade Comunidade*[74]); Banco BPI & Fundação "la Caixa" (Prémio BPI / Fundação "la Caixa" Capacitar[75]); Fundação Maria Cândida Vilares (Prémio Maria Cândida Vilares[76]); Fundação Santander Portugal (Prémio Inovação Social 2025[77]); TUI Care Foundation (Programa TUI Futureshapers Portugal – Social Innovation in Tourism[78])
- Target audience: NGOs, social enterprises, and innovators in the field of social impact.
- Content covered: Introduction to impact measurement; development of impact plans; communication of results; project-scaling methods; mentoring on governance and sustainability.

Business Networks and Associations
Networks and associations that support companies in integrating sustainability and social impact evaluation into their business practices. These initiatives facilitate peer learning and promote certified training among corporate members.

- Main providers: GRACE Empresas Responsáveis (Formação Certificada em Avaliação de Impacto Social[79]); and BCSD Portugal (Journey Towards Sustainability and Open Executive Program on Sustainable Management in partnership with Porto Business School [80])
- Target audience: Corporate sustainability and CSR managers.
- Content covered: Corporate impact-evaluation methodologies; integration of social indicators into ESG strategy; SROI and value-chain impact assessment; impact reporting and communication.

Local and Municipal Programs
Municipalities increasingly act as local investors and facilitators of social innovation, organising training and mentoring to strengthen community-level capacities for project management and impact assessment.

- Main providers: Municipalities of Cascais (RS Capacita 2025[81]); and Porto (Laboratório de Inovação Social[82])
- Target audience: Local NGOs, social enterprises, and public officers.

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[73] Caixa Geral de Depósitos (CGD) (2025), 7.ª Edição dos Prémios Caixa Social ([link](#))

[74] Fundação Fidelidade, Prémio Fidelidade Comunidade ([link](#))

[75] Banco BPI & Fundação "la Caixa", Prémio BPI / Fundação "la Caixa" Capacitar ([link](#))

[76] Fundação Maria Cândida Vilares, Prémio Maria Cândida Vilares ([link](#))

[77] Fundação Santander Portugal (2025), Prémio Inovação Social 2025 ([link](#))

[78] TUI Care Foundation & IRIS – Incubadora de Inovação Social, Programa TUI Futureshapers Portugal – Social Innovation in Tourism ([link](#))

[79] GRACE – Empresas Responsáveis, Formação Certificada em Avaliação de Impacto Social ([link](#))

[80] BCSD Portugal – Business Council for Sustainable Development, Journey Towards Sustainability ([link](#))

[81] Rede Social de Cascais – Câmara Municipal de Cascais (2025), RS Capacita 2025: Capacitar para Transformar o Setor Social em Cascai ([link](#))

[82] Câmara Municipal do Porto, Laboratório de Inovação Social ([link](#))

- Content covered: Project-management and impact-evaluation basics; stakeholder engagement; monitoring and reporting tools; alignment with ESF+ and PT2030 funding requirements.

The mapping of training and education initiatives shows that Portugal's ecosystem for social-impact evaluation is diverse but still developing. Academic institutions provide the conceptual foundation, while public bodies and networks focus on disseminating practical tools, and corporate and philanthropic actors promote hands-on capacity building through mentoring and acceleration programs. Municipalities are gradually emerging as facilitators of applied learning at the local level. Continued coordination among these actors and the expansion of advanced, specialised training will be essential to strengthen professional expertise and consolidate a more cohesive national framework for social-impact evaluation.

6. Resources

There have been efforts among the Portuguese social impact evaluation ecosystem to develop instruments, frameworks and tools available to entities that seek to assess, manage and communicate their social impact and to, simultaneously, promote and support the practice of social impact evaluation in Portugal.

For the purposes of this mapping, a resource was considered relevant when it directly helps design or conduct a social impact evaluation by offering methodological guidance, operational tools or standardised frameworks. This includes guidebooks and manuals, self-assessment tools, databases and indicators, as well as other materials that can be used by social economy organizations, public bodies, foundations and evaluators. In contrast, resources that are purely conceptual, diagnostic or academic, which discuss impact evaluation without providing practical methods, were not included.

The selection followed five criteria:

- Practical applicability: the resource teaches or structures how to plan, measure, analyse or report social impact.
- Clear target users: it is designed for practitioners such as social enterprises, NGOs, foundations, companies with impact programs, or evaluators.
- Portuguese context: it was developed or adapted for Portugal or is commonly used by national actors.
- Instrumental nature: it provides a tangible instrument (e.g., a methodological guide, logical model, checklist, database or indicator framework).
- Verifiability - it is publicly available and documented through an official source or publication.

Together, these categories provide a comprehensive picture of how social impact evaluation is supported and operationalised in the Portuguese context — from the institutional foundations that define standards, to the data systems that enable measurement, and finally to the guides and tools that make evaluation actionable.

Institutional and system-level resources

Institutional and system-level resources provide the methodological foundations for social impact evaluation in Portugal. These resources cover key national frameworks, guides and instruments that establish common standards, governance structures and evidence-based practices for evaluating social impact across the public and social economy sectors.

Among the most relevant institutional resources for impact evaluation in Portugal are the methodological guides[83] developed by PlanAPP, the national Centre for Planning, Policy and Foresight Competences. Produced within the *Incubadora de Competências para as Políticas Públicas (icPP)*, this collection aims to build technical capacity and harmonise practices in planning, monitoring and evaluation across public administration. Three guides are particularly relevant to impact evaluation. *Introdução à Teoria da Mudança*[84] presents the Theory of Change as both a conceptual and practical tool for defining causal pathways, clarifying assumptions, and identifying expected outcomes and impacts in public policy planning and assessment. The *Guia de Avaliação de Políticas Públicas*[85] consolidates the main principles, stages and

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[83] PlanAPP (2023), Methodological Guides (link)

[84] PlanAPP (2023), *Introdução à Teoria da Mudança – Ferramentas e Guias Metodológicos* (link)

[85] PlanAPP (2024), *Guia para a Avaliação de Políticas Públicas* (link)

methods for conducting evaluations, providing clear guidance on planning, data collection, analysis and reporting. It also includes a dedicated chapter on impact evaluation, explaining its objectives, methodological requirements and value in demonstrating the causal effects of policies and programs. Complementing these, the *Avaliação de Impacto Legislativo – Introdução ao exercício*[86] outlines the purpose, scope and procedures for assessing the social, economic and environmental implications of legislation, drawing on international frameworks such as the OECD *Better Regulation Toolbox*. Together, these guides form the conceptual and methodological backbone of Portugal's evaluation system. They provide public institutions with a shared language and structured approach for analysing results and impacts, ensuring that evaluations - including those focused on social outcomes - are designed and implemented with consistency, rigour and transparency.

At the methodological foundation of Portugal's impact evaluation framework lies the guide *"Conceber e Encomendar Avaliações de Impacto Contrafactuais"*[87], produced by the Agency for Cohesion and Development (AD&C) and adapted from a guide by the European Commission. This publication introduces the core principles and stages of counterfactual impact evaluation, explaining the logic of causality and the use of experimental and quasi-experimental designs to determine the net effects of interventions. It outlines the key steps for commissioning, designing and implementing evaluations that meet standards of validity and reliability, including data requirements and analytical procedures. By promoting the use of counterfactual methods in public and social programs, this guide provides a rigorous methodological foundation for assessing effectiveness and learning from evidence-based results.

Building on these methodological resources, the *Plano de Avaliação do COMPETE 2030*[88] sets the strategic and governance framework for evaluation within Portugal's 2021–2027 programming period. Approved by the Managing Authority of COMPETE 2030, the plan defines the objectives, governance structure, quality assurance mechanisms and evaluation methodologies that will guide all evaluations under this program. It establishes methodological priorities—particularly theory-based evaluation and counterfactual impact evaluation—and emphasises principles of transparency, proportionality and learning. The plan also reinforces coordination and capacity-building within the *Rede de Monitorização e Avaliação PT2030*, aiming to consolidate a culture of evidence-based decision-making across national and regional programs. As such, it embeds impact evaluation within the institutional architecture of Portugal's public policy system.

The *Ferramenta de Autodiagnóstico de Inovação Social e Impacto*[89] (Self-Assessment Tool for Social Innovation and Impact) complements these system-level frameworks by translating national evaluation principles into a practical tool for organizations with a social or environmental mission. Developed by Portugal Inovação Social in partnership with the IES – Social Business School, this online platform enables users to assess their potential for innovation and impact through a structured questionnaire organised into five analytical dimensions. It can be applied at both organizational and project levels, focusing respectively on innovation capacity and potential social impact. The tool promotes reflection, internal discussion and strategic prioritisation, helping teams identify strengths, weaknesses and areas for development. It also provides benchmarking insights and recommendations for improvement, fostering greater alignment between governance, management and impact objectives. For social impact evaluation, this resource is particularly relevant because it makes national evaluation principles tangible and accessible to practitioners. By encouraging structured self-assessment, it helps organizations understand their level of impact readiness and identify the steps needed to strengthen their measurement and management

[86] PlanAPP (2024), *Avaliação de Impacto Legislativo: Introdução ao exercício* (link)

[87] AD&C (2013), *Conceber e Encomendar Avaliações de Impacto Contrafactuais: um guia prático para as autoridades de gestão do FSE* (link)

[88] COMPETE 2030, Unidade de Planeamento, Avaliação e Estratégia ((2023), *Plano de Avaliação do COMPETE 2030* (link)

[89] Portugal Inovação Social & IES–SBS, *Ferramenta de autodiagnóstico de inovação social e impacto* (link)

practices. In doing so, it promotes a shared culture of evaluation and learning across Portugal's social economy, supporting the professionalisation and scalability of impact assessment among smaller and emerging organizations.

Concluding this institutional perspective, the *Avaliação das Medidas de Promoção da Inovação Social*[90] illustrates how the national frameworks and tools for evaluation are applied in practice. Conducted by the AD&C and Portugal Inovação Social, this study examined the effectiveness and relevance of the instruments that promoted social innovation in the 2014–2020 programming period, including *Parcerias para o Impacto*, *Títulos de Impacto Social* and the *Fundo para a Inovação Social*. The evaluation combined document analysis, interviews and case studies to understand how these mechanisms contributed to strengthening Portugal's social innovation ecosystem. It also analysed the extent to which impact measurement practices were adopted by funded projects, identifying lessons to inform the next programming period. As one of the first comprehensive evaluations of Portugal's social innovation policies, this resource provides valuable empirical evidence on how impact evaluation principles are operationalised within national policy implementation.

Together, these institutional and system-level resources constitute the backbone of Portugal's national framework for impact evaluation. They define the methodological principles, governance structures and operational tools that guide how impact is assessed and managed across both public programs and the social economy. In doing so, they align closely with Avise's category of *Principles and Criteria for Evaluation*, which includes international frameworks such as the OECD evaluation criteria, the Social Value International principles and the Common Approach foundations. Like these European references, the Portuguese resources establish the standards of rigour, coherence and transparency that underpin credible, evidence-based impact evaluation.

Data and indicator-based resources

Building on these institutional frameworks, the next group of resources focuses on the data infrastructure (indicators and data systems) that supports the quantification and validation of social impact evaluation in Portugal. These resources — including national indicators, databases and analytical tools — enable the quantification and validation of social results, helping organizations and policymakers translate qualitative impact logic into measurable evidence. Together, they strengthen the empirical foundation for impact assessment and reinforce a culture of evidence-based decision-making and continuous improvement.

The *OneValue*[91] platform is a free-access database that centralises information on public investment across major social policy areas in Portugal, including social protection, education, health, employment and justice. Developed through a partnership between the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, MAZE Impact and the Portugal Inovação Social 2030 Mission Structure, it provides quantitative data and indicators that help identify and quantify social challenges, track public expenditure and assess policy outcomes. For social impact evaluation, *OneValue* is a critical resource because it offers reliable, continuously updated reference data that can be used to validate indicators, estimate the economic value of social outcomes and demonstrate potential public savings generated by impact initiatives. By linking social results with financial metrics, the platform enables more rigorous, evidence-based assessment of the social and economic impact of programs and projects.

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[90] Quaternaire Portugal (2022), *Avaliação das Medidas de Promoção da Inovação Social* (link)

[91] Portugal Inovação Social, One Value – Public Investment and Social Policy Database, link

The *Social Data Lab Impact Index (SLI²)⁹²* is a data-driven analytical tool that quantifies the social impact of organizations and regions in Portugal using publicly available indicators. Developed by Social Data Lab, it integrates multiple datasets—covering areas such as employment, education, health and social inclusion—into composite scores that reflect each organization's or region's contribution to social value creation. For impact evaluation, SLI² is relevant because it provides an empirical benchmark that enables comparison of social performance across territories and sectors. By translating complex social data into comparable impact indices, it supports evidence-based analysis, facilitates impact reporting and helps identify areas where social interventions generate the greatest value.

Agile Impacts offers a free *Impact Indicators App⁹³* designed to help organizations quickly generate a Theory of Change and identify relevant impact indicators from their mission statement. The tool provides an accessible entry point for defining impact objectives and translating them into measurable outcomes. For social impact evaluation, it is useful because it simplifies the initial stages of evaluation design, helping organizations clarify their logic of change and select indicators consistent with their mission and goals. By lowering the technical barriers to developing a Theory of Change and defining impact metrics, *Agile Impacts* supports a broader adoption of structured and evidence-oriented impact evaluation practices.

Together, these Portuguese resources strengthen the national infrastructure for evidence-based impact evaluation by providing reliable data, indicators and analytical tools that translate social outcomes into measurable results. They align with Avise's category of *Databases and Indicators*, which includes the *Global Indicator Framework for the Sustainable Development Goals* and the *IRIS+ system* developed by the Global Impact Investing Network (GIIN). Like these international reference frameworks, *OneValue*, *SLI²* and *Agile Impacts* enhance the consistency, comparability and credibility of impact measurement. They provide the quantitative backbone that supports organizations and policymakers in designing, validating and assessing social impact, ensuring that evaluation in Portugal is grounded in verifiable data and aligned with global standards for transparency and accountability.

Methodological and practical guides

Having established the data infrastructure that enables the measurement and validation of social results, the chapter now turns to the resources that put these principles into practice. This final group presents methodological and practical guides that translate impact evaluation frameworks into concrete, operational processes. Developed by public institutions, corporations, social organizations and academia, these resources make evaluation methods accessible to practitioners, offering step-by-step approaches, practical guidance and illustrative examples for planning, implementing and communicating social impact.

At the local government level, the *Toolkit de Inovação Social⁹⁴* was developed within the *Laboratório de Inovação Social*, an initiative promoted by the Porto City Council through the Porto Social Innovation Centre (CIS Porto), under the *Programa Integrado de Inovação e Experimentação Social e de Animação Territorial do Porto – Abordagem Integrada para a Inclusão Ativa (AIIA)*. The toolkit is part of a network of resources that CIS Porto offers to citizens and organizations developing social innovation projects and compiles forty practical tools covering all stages of project design, implementation and evaluation, offering accessible templates and guidance for practitioners. By embedding evaluation as a central element of project design, it helps teams define objectives, outcomes and indicators from the outset, strengthening their ability to

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⁹² Social Data Lab – Impact Index (SLI²®), link
⁹³ Agile Impacts – Impact Indicators App, link
⁹⁴ CIS Porto – Centro de Inovação Social (2021), *Toolkit de Inovação Social,* (link)

measure and learn from results. In doing so, it builds local capacity for impact assessment and promotes systematic evaluation practices within community-level innovation initiatives.

At the corporate level, the *Missão Continente Impact Report 2024*[95] includes a methodological chapter that functions as a practical guide for evaluating social initiatives. This section details how to define objectives, structure a logic model, select indicators and collect data to measure outcomes. It also explains how material issues are identified, how changes in beneficiaries' wellbeing are assessed, and how results are connected to the company's broader sustainability strategy. By documenting this structured approach, Missão Continente provides a model that can be replicated by other organizations, helping to integrate rigorous evaluation practices into corporate social responsibility. This methodological framework exemplifies how private-sector actors can contribute to professionalising and disseminating social impact evaluation methods in Portugal.

Within the social economy, the *Guia de Avaliação de Impacto*[96] developed by Associação 55+ in collaboration with the Aga Khan Foundation, the Ageas Foundation and the University of Aveiro, offers a comprehensive, step-by-step methodology tailored to the needs of social organizations. Conceived alongside the association's first impact report, the guide adapts evaluation theory to the Portuguese third sector, covering all stages of the process—from defining objectives and mapping stakeholders to selecting indicators, collecting data and analysing results. By turning frameworks such as the Theory of Change into practical exercises, it provides an accessible operational model that helps smaller organizations embed evaluation into their daily practice and foster a stronger culture of impact measurement and accountability.

Apart from these resources, there are also academic research materials available for consultations, namely a growing number of master's thesis and other research papers about social innovation-related topics, aligned with the active role of universities and research institutes in promoting and developing the social innovation ecosystem.

Taken together, these resources illustrate the growing maturity of Portugal's social impact evaluation ecosystem. They translate theoretical principles into concrete practice, providing organizations of all types — public, private, and social — with tools to measure, understand and enhance their impact. What distinguishes this set of resources is their complementarity: from local government toolkits to corporate and civil-society methodologies, they collectively demonstrate how evaluation is becoming embedded across sectors and scales. This convergence reflects a shift from isolated measurement exercises to a shared culture of learning and accountability, where evaluation is viewed as a strategic driver for innovation and improvement. In this regard, the Portuguese experience aligns closely with Avise's *"Platforms, Guidebooks and Tools"* category, which includes international resources such as the OECD's *Measure, Manage and Maximise Your Impact* guide, the *Better Evaluation* platform and the *Social Value International Self-Assessment Tool*. Like these European references, the Portuguese guides contribute to making impact evaluation more practical, participatory and comparable, helping to consolidate a common language and raise the overall quality of social impact practice.

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[95] Missão Continente (note 53)

[96] 55+ (2024), *Guia de avaliação de impacto: Um racional de aplicação a projetos sociais* (link)