



Spanish national report on social impact assessment

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1. Executive summary

This report constitutes Spain's official contribution to the European **BIRDS** project, an initiative funded by the *European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)* aimed at strengthening the capacity of Member States to design, test and scale innovative solutions to complex social challenges. In this context, the Spanish Secretary of State for Social Rights (*Secretaría de Estado de Derechos Sociales - SEDS*), with the support of the Institute for Older Persons and Social Services (*Instituto de Mayores y Servicios Sociales - IMSERSO*), assumes national leadership in developing an exhaustive and up-to-date diagnosis of the state of social impact evaluation in the country. This work takes place at a particularly relevant moment for Spain, marked by progress in results-oriented public policies, a growing demand for evidence to support decision-making, and the implementation of large-scale social innovation processes. The document directly contributes to the creation of the Spanish Social Innovation Competence Centre (called *Centro de Competencias en Innovación Social* in Spain or *CECIS*), which aspires to become a structuring node within the public innovation system, oriented towards professionalising methodologies, articulating relevant actors and promoting experimentation portfolios capable of generating transferable learning and verifiable results. From this perspective, the analysis presented seeks to provide a strategic outlook that supports progress towards a coherent, robust and useful national system of social impact evaluation for the design, monitoring and improvement of public policies.

The report systematically analyses the **evolution of the Spanish ecosystem of social impact evaluation**, paying attention to its conceptual, methodological and institutional development, as well as to the **progress made** in recent years and the gaps that continue to hinder its consolidation. The analysis is based on two complementary processes: first, an exhaustive documentary review covering the period 2018-2025; and second, a qualitative consultation process with a group of 24 experts from public administrations, academia, the third sector, specialised consultancy, impact investment and the social economy, who form the Social Innovation Network (*Red de Innovación Social*) that supports and advises SEDS in this project. Through this dual approach, the document provides a precise diagnosis of the current state of the evaluation ecosystem in Spain and of the conditions necessary to advance towards a coherent, robust and learning-oriented national system.

The **report is structured into seven chapters** that offer a broad, rigorous and systematic overview of the current state of social impact evaluation in Spain. After the introduction, which outlines the purpose, scope and methodology used, the second chapter addresses the conceptual framework, clarifying definitions, concepts and shared references in relation to measurement, management and impact evaluation. The third chapter examines the main methodologies and evaluative practices, describing tools such as the Theory of Change, mixed methods, causal inference techniques and economic valuation methods, as well as their actual use by national actors. The fourth chapter maps the institutional ecosystem, identifying key actors and analysing their levels of maturity, functions and capacities. The fifth chapter reviews the training resources, methodological tools and data repositories available in Spain, describing their relevance for consolidating a more professionalised evaluation system. The sixth chapter analyses the financing of evaluation, examining who finances it, how it is financed and what barriers exist in accessing these resources, with particular attention to the role of the ESF+ Managing Authority (*Unidad Administradora del Fondo Social Europeo - UAFSE*) and to trends identified by the Public Policy Evaluation Observatory (*Observatorio de Evaluación de Políticas Públicas*). Finally, the seventh chapter presents strategic



recommendations and a roadmap to guide the transition towards a more coherent, collaborative and results-oriented national system.

Based on the analysis conducted, the report identifies a set of **lessons** that help understand the current dynamics of the evaluation ecosystem in Spain. First, it confirms the lack of a common language and the coexistence of multiple definitions of social impact, measurement, management and evaluation. Although the ecosystem is gradually converging towards international frameworks, this conceptual diversity hinders comparability, interoperability and the accumulation of evidence. Second, it observes a significant expansion of the methodological repertoire, with a growing use of tools such as the Theory of Change, mixed methodologies, Social Return on Investment, cost-avoidance analysis and quasi-experimental approaches such as Propensity Score Matching and Difference-in-Differences. However, the adoption of these methodologies remains uneven and heavily dependent on the availability of resources, internal capacities and the requirements of calls for proposals or funders.

The ecosystem also shows relevant progress, although highly unequal across actors and territories. The third sector, foundations and impact-investment-related entities have played an especially dynamic role in professionalising evaluative practices. In contrast, public administrations show heterogeneous development: some ministries and autonomous communities have established technical units and consolidated practices, while others maintain limited capacities and rely on ad hoc evaluations. The analysis also reveals a strong dependence on fragmented financing. European funds have acted as the main methodological driver, but most national evaluations are financed through small contracts or low-budget tenders, limiting the possibility of conducting longitudinal, long-term or technically complex evaluations.

One of the most important **limitations** identified is the limited integration of evaluation into the early phases of the policy cycle. Most evaluations remain ex post and respond to administrative obligations rather than to a systematic learning-oriented strategy. This dynamic reduces the usefulness of the evidence produced and limits the possibility of building solid counterfactuals, which are necessary to estimate the actual impact of interventions. Additional structural gaps include limited internal technical capacities, the absence of multi-annual planning, territorial fragmentation and the prevalence of price-driven contracting criteria, all of which hinder the professionalisation of the evaluation ecosystem.

The report proposes a **roadmap with five strategic lines to strengthen the Spanish national system of social impact evaluation**. The **first** focuses on integrating evaluation from the design stage of public policies, adopting clear theories of change, defining relevant indicators from the outset and building robust monitoring systems so that evaluation becomes a structural component of the policy cycle. The **second** proposes shifting from isolated project evaluations towards experimentation portfolio models oriented to complex social challenges. This approach facilitates observing interactions, comparing interventions, accumulating learning and generating useful evidence for strategic decision-making. The **third** highlights the need to strengthen inter-institutional cooperation through stable coordination mechanisms between public administrations, universities, social entities, consultancies and impact investors. Building a shared community of practice is key to reducing current fragmentation and promoting more harmonised use of methodologies and standards.

The **fourth** strategic line refers to the development of hybrid and sustainable financing models that combine public resources, European funds, philanthropic funding and impact-investment mechanisms. Continuous evaluation requires overcoming dependence on ad hoc calls and ensuring adequate funding throughout the lifecycle of interventions. Finally, the **fifth** line emphasises the need to promote an interoperable digital ecosystem that improves the traceability, quality and accessibility of data. Digitalisation and advanced



analytical tools, including artificial intelligence applications, can facilitate the generation of robust evidence and strengthen evidence-based decision-making.

Building on these lines, the report points out that the CECIS must play a structuring role within the national social innovation ecosystem. Its mission will be to strengthen the State's capacity to innovate and evaluate rigorously, promoting a common language, shared methodologies and cooperation among administrations and social actors. It will support the design and evaluation of mission-oriented innovation portfolios, promote the digitalisation of learning and evaluation, and foster hybrid financing models to support the scaling of effective solutions. In doing so, the CECIS will contribute to consolidating social impact evaluation as a strategic and stable practice for improving public policies in Spain.

2. Introduction: why talk about social impact evaluation now

This report is framed within the work of the Spanish Secretary of State for Social Rights (*Secretaría de Estado de Derechos Sociales - SEDS*) and the Institute for Older Persons and Social Services (*Instituto de Mayores y Servicios Sociales - IMSERSO*), representing Spain in the European **BIRDS** project (Boosting Initiatives and Resources to Develop Social Innovation), a transnational initiative promoted by the European Commission through the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), which seeks to strengthen the capacity of Member States to promote innovative solutions to complex social challenges. The project constitutes one of the key actions derived from the European Union's Social Innovation Initiative, aimed at consolidating more mature and sustainable national ecosystems capable of generating, measuring and scaling social impact.

The European Union conceives social innovation as the development of new ideas, services and models that respond to social needs not adequately addressed by traditional systems, contributing to improving people's wellbeing and strengthening social cohesion. Within this framework, the National Competence Centres for Social Innovation (called *Centro de Competencias en Innovación Social* in Spain or *CECIS*) represent a strategic tool for advancing the professionalisation and coordination of the national actors involved. These centres, funded during the 2021-2027 period under the ESF+, are consolidated as knowledge, learning and methodological support nodes serving public administrations and social innovation ecosystems.

The BIRDS project, in which the NCC-IS of France, Portugal, Sweden and Spain participate, has the shared purpose of professionalising these centres, promoting interinstitutional cooperation and strengthening the capacities of national ecosystems around four core pillars: ecosystems, impact evaluation and scaling support, social innovation financing and the operational consolidation of the NCC-IS. With an expected duration until June 2027, the project includes both national and transnational activities, including mutual learning processes, knowledge production and the development of common methodological tools.

This report is part of **Work Package 2** (WP2), led by Avise (France), focused on social innovation evaluation and scaling support. This document constitutes Spain's contribution to the international comparative analysis on social impact evaluation practices in the participating countries. Through this work, Spain seeks to provide a contextualised, critical and forward-looking view of the current state of the field of social impact evaluation in the country, its advances and challenges, as well as the opportunities for its strategic integration into the design and improvement of public policies.

The SEDS promotes this report with the **aim** of strengthening the role of impact evaluation as a tool for learning, experimentation and continuous improvement in the country. SEDS also leads the process of creating CECIS, a structure still in its formation phase that aspires to become a national reference node, promoting from the General State Administration (*Administración General del Estado - AGE*) the activation and connection of the national social innovation ecosystem, coordination with other ministries and institutions, and support for innovative projects that, through an experimentation portfolio logic, address complex social challenges in priority areas such as deinstitutionalisation and long-term care, among others.



From this perspective, SEDS seeks in this report a broad understanding of the social impact evaluation ecosystem in the country, not only as an accountability instrument but also as a strategic mechanism for shaping evidence-based public policies. Likewise, the report aims to identify the institutional, technical and cultural conditions that favour its application and highlight the gaps that persist in consolidating a coherent and results-oriented national system. In this sense, the document aims to contribute to a shared vision among public and private actors on how to move towards portfolio evaluations centred on addressing complex social challenges through collaborative approaches.

For the **preparation of this report**, collaboration was established with the *Cátedra de Impacto Social* from *Universidad Pontificia Comillas*, a reference in Spain on issues related to social impact measurement and management.

The **methodology** adopted for the preparation of the report relied on two methods:

- First, a documentary review of academic, institutional and regulatory sources published between 2018 and 2025. To this end, a systematic search was carried out using keywords in academic search engines such as Google Scholar, to ensure the coverage and up-to-date nature of the sources analysed. Complementarily, various information extraction and analysis techniques were used, including web scraping, natural language processing (NLP) and the use of RSS feeds, complemented by text-mining tools and social listening tools aimed at identifying trends, concepts and relevant actors in the field of social impact evaluation.
- Second, a qualitative verification process with a group of experts from the Spanish ecosystem (from public administration, academia, impact investment, the third sector and others) through surveys and interviews. This group is composed of 24 individuals (see detailed information on its composition in Annex 3) belonging to the CECIS's Social Innovation Network (*Red de Innovación Social del CECIS*). This participatory process has helped enrich the analysis with diverse and updated perspectives on evaluation practice in the country.

The report is **structured** into seven sections. After this introduction, the second chapter explains the conceptual framework and common references of impact evaluation in Spain. The third examines the main evaluation methodologies, approaches and predominant practices in the country. The fourth presents the mapping of main actors and the role of the ESF+ Managing Authorities. The fifth outlines the training and resources available in Spain. The sixth analyses the sources and conditions of financing social impact evaluation, and the seventh offers a set of recommendations aimed at strengthening the national social impact evaluation system.



3. Conceptual framework and common references



3.1. Definition of key terms and concepts

Throughout the documentary review and qualitative consultation carried out for this report, a multiplicity of definitions and conceptual frameworks have been identified around four key concepts, reflecting both the growing maturity of this field and the need for greater conceptual coherence. The four concepts are: social impact, impact measurement and management, impact evaluation and social innovation. The aim of this chapter is to clarify the main concepts used in the field of social impact evaluation in Spain and to contribute to building a common language that facilitates collaboration among the different actors in the ecosystem.

The concept of “social innovation” in Spain

Among the concepts analysed in this report, social innovation is probably the one that shows the least consensus regarding its definition and scope within the Spanish context. Although there is a general understanding aligned with the definition of the European Commission, which describes it as the development and application of new ideas, models, services or processes that respond more effectively to social needs and generate new relationships or collaborations, in practice the term is used with diverse meanings depending on the sector, institution or purpose from which it is approached. This plurality of interpretations reflects the richness and breadth of the field, but also the need to move towards a shared language. In Spain, at least **four major terminological approaches coexist**:

- The technological approach, which understands social innovation as an extension of technology-driven entrepreneurship oriented towards the common good.
- The business approach (social entrepreneurship and impact economy), focused on sustainable and scalable models that combine economic profitability and social value.
- The public or institutional approach, linked to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of social policies and public services.
- And the systemic or transformational approach, which places emphasis on cultural and structural change.

From another perspective, social innovation is also understood not only by its results but also by the **type of change it generates** in the system (sustaining or disruptive) and the **sphere from which it emerges** (formal or informal). Thus, social innovations can be classified as:



- **Improvement** innovations, when they optimize the performance of existing actors or institutions without questioning their structure.
- **Reframing** innovations, when they introduce profound changes from within the system, reshaping traditional roles and dynamics.
- **Complementary** innovations, when they emerge from the informal sphere and strengthen impact through collaboration among diverse actors.
- **Transformative** innovations, when they generate completely new responses, replacing or reinventing existing structures.

From **our perspective**, social innovation emerges when traditional solutions are unable to respond to complex social challenges, requiring innovative approaches that act on entire systems, combining all dimensions (cultural, technological and process-related) and avoiding fragmented approaches. To truly generate responses to these challenges, social innovation must adopt a systemic approach and involve collaborative processes that integrate all actors (public, private and citizens) and are results-oriented, where impact evaluation is conceived not as a control mechanism but as a shared learning tool among the various actors in the ecosystem. From this perspective, it is proposed that the Spanish innovation ecosystem evolve from a project-management model based on isolated initiatives towards innovation platforms focused on transforming complex systems.

Within this framework, social innovation is understood as the development, testing and learning of new ways to address complex social challenges through collaborative, experimental and evidence-based processes. It involves working on entire systems, combining cultural, organisational and community-level changes, supported by digital capacities that facilitate collaboration, traceability and shared learning. More than a type of project, social innovation is an institutional and community capability for learning, cooperation and transformation, oriented towards results and the wellbeing of people and territories.

The concept of “social impact” in Spain

The concept of **social impact** has evolved significantly in Spain, shifting from an approach associated with philanthropy to becoming a central axis of public policies, social programme management and impact investment. This change reflects a progressive institutionalisation and the need to build a common language among public, private and academic sectors. During the analysis carried out for this report, a broad diversity of definitions was identified within the Spanish ecosystem, similar to what is observed at the international level. For this report, the definition of social impact developed by *Cátedra de Impacto Social de la Universidad Pontificia de Comillas*, a reference chair in Spain on issues related to social impact measurement and management, will be used:

“These are the changes experienced by both people and the planet as a result of a specific activity, project, programme or policy, and which affect human conditions in the long term. These changes may be measurable, positive or negative, intentional or unintentional, tangible or intangible.”

Source: Comillas Pontifical University, 2023a (p. 11).

This definition encompasses perspectives that understand social impact as a transformative and structural change, both quantitative and qualitative in nature, which may manifest at the individual, community or systemic level. It incorporates three key elements: the dual social and environmental dimension, recognising the interdependence between human wellbeing and ecological sustainability; the long-term perspective, acknowledging that social changes require time to consolidate; and the recognition of negative or unintended change, which is essential for more realistic evaluations.



Aligned with international frameworks, it also includes enduring changes, positive or negative, that occur beyond what would have happened without the intervention, requiring demonstration of causality and attribution of change.

At a technical level, the concept of social impact used in Spain is grounded in the logic model, which describes the relationship between resources, activities, outputs and outcomes, and in adjustment factors (e.g. deadweight, displacement, alternative attribution and drop-off) that allow the estimation of the real net impact of an intervention. Thus, from this perspective, social impact is conceived as the attributable and sustainable result of an intervention, key to understanding how social interventions generate value and contribute to learning, coherence and sustainability within the social innovation ecosystem. More importantly, from our point of view, social impact should be understood as a transformative and structural change linked to social wellbeing and long-term sustainability.

The concept of “impact measurement, management and evaluation” in Spain

In the Spanish social innovation ecosystem, the terms **impact measurement and impact evaluation** are used almost synonymously and will be used interchangeably in this report. Although some authors distinguish between the two based on the level of analysis, considering measurement as a more micro-level exercise and evaluation as a macro-level approach, in practice both seek the same objective: generating evidence on the changes causally produced by an intervention (understood as the social impact generated by the intervention) and guiding decision-making processes towards continuous improvement and institutional learning.

Impact measurement and management represent the practical dimension of social impact and have undergone profound transformation in the last decade. In recent years, impact measurement and management have gained increasing importance in Spain, driven both by the demand for transparency and by the desire to strengthen the effectiveness of public policies and social initiatives. This process reflects a deep conceptual evolution: what initially emerged as an accountability exercise has evolved into an approach oriented towards learning, innovation and strategic improvement. An increasing number of organisations, both public and private, place impact measurement at the core of their decisions, aligning with the international trend towards evidence-based policies and programmes.

The *Cátedra de Impacto Social de la Universidad Pontificia Comillas* defines impact measurement and management as follows:

“It is the identification and quantification of metrics agreed with stakeholders that allow us to measure the changes experienced by both people and the planet as a result of a specific activity, project, programme or policy, and the extent to which the agent contributes to those changes. This produces learning that must guide the organisation’s actions and determine the management of the intervention.”

Source: Comillas Pontificia University, 2023c (p. 36).

In line with this view, **impact management** is also understood as the approach adopted by entities that have consistently incorporated impact measurement practices, using the results of those measurements to guide their operational and strategic decision-making processes. This approach reinforces the idea that managing impact implies integrating the knowledge generated through measurement into planning, strategy and governance. Consistent with international references, impact management is conceived as a continuous and integrated practice, based on systematic measurement and oriented towards maximising positive impact and minimising negative impact. From this perspective, this definition reflects a growing



convergence among different actors (e.g. ministries, Autonomous Communities, foundations, social enterprises and universities) towards a common framework in which measurement is not conceived as a technical end, but as a tool for learning, decision-making and transformation.

Following Comillas' perspective, three key principles are recognised:

- The centrality of stakeholders, whose participation in the identification of indicators and interpretation of results strengthens the legitimacy and meaning of measurements.
- Attributable contribution, understood as the capacity to distinguish the effects of an intervention within a complex social context.
- The purpose of managing, which places the evidence generated at the service of strategic improvement and informed decision-making.

This concept is key within the Spanish ecosystem because it represents the foundation upon which to foster an evidence-oriented culture of measurement that supports the formulation, design and continuous improvement of public policies, strengthening coherence between innovation, learning and tangible results.

3.2. Background and origins

Origins and evolution of the practice of impact evaluation in Spain

The practice of social impact evaluation in Spain is relatively recent and has evolved in a progressive and fragmented manner. Unlike Anglo-Saxon countries, where an evaluation culture became consolidated decades ago, in Spain impact evaluation began to develop at the beginning of the 2000s, driven mainly by international cooperation, the third sector, academia and, to a lesser extent, public administration. In these fields, result-oriented evaluation methodologies began to be applied, especially in development projects, social innovation or public policies, although with a still limited approach and an emerging understanding.

The first systematic exercises emerged from humanitarian and academic organisations, as well as from public agencies interested in improving accountability and the efficiency of expenditure. These pioneering experiences were sporadic and weakly connected to each other, which resulted in unequal and poorly coordinated growth. During the 2010s, however, the practice began to gain visibility due to the influence of European programmes (e.g. Horizon, EaSI, LIFE) and the introduction of explicit evaluation requirements in those programmes with a dual objective of accountability and learning generation.

Today, experts agree that impact measurement and management in Spain continue to have a reduced and fragmented dimension, although clearly expanding. There is widespread consensus regarding the existence of more discourse than consolidated practice, because of the absence of a common strategic framework coordinating intersectoral efforts. However, within this dispersion, a significant evolution can be seen: an increasing number of organisations, both public and private and social, integrate evaluation practices into their management processes, although not always under that formal denomination. The third sector continues to be the main driver of this evolution, while impact investors have played a leading role in the last decade in the country, by incorporating outcome measurement as an essential part of their financing and accountability processes. In the business sphere, interest has grown notably in recent years, driven by sustainability and corporate responsibility departments, while many national, regional and local public administrations have begun to institutionalise the practice of impact evaluation (e.g. experience of CDTI (*Centro para el Desarrollo Tecnológico y la Innovación*), the evaluation of innovation portfolios carried out



by the Ministry of Social Rights, Consumer Affairs and the 2030 Agenda (*Ministerio de Derechos Sociales, Consumo y Agenda 2030*), the Public Policy Lab of the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration (*Ministerio de Inclusión, Seguridad Social y Migraciones*), BMINCOME by the Barcelona City Council¹ (*Ayuntamiento de Barcelona*)).

The clearest turning point occurred in 2020 with the creation of the Think Tank of the *Cátedra de Impacto Social de la Universidad Pontificia Comillas*, which succeeded in bringing together a community focused on impact measurement and management made up of more than 70 organisations from academia, the third sector, the private sector, impact investors and public administrations. Since then, the development of a more structured national ecosystem has accelerated, with a growing demand for impact measurement and management from funders and institutional actors, the consolidation of a common language and the development of shared reference frameworks, the creation of training resources (e.g. Comillas' *Programa Superior de Gestión y Medición del Impacto Social*), and the emergence of more mature organisational practices, with a measurement and impact management cycle incorporated into organisational strategy. In terms of frequency, evaluation practices have shifted from being merely occasional to becoming integrated into many public funding calls and internal strategic processes in many organisations, although unevenly depending on the sector and size.

On the other hand, the evolution of impact evaluation in Spain has been strongly influenced by international strategic frameworks, in particular the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, the European Green Deal and the mission-oriented approach of the European Union, which guide innovation priorities and performance indicators. European funds (e.g. the ESF+, NextGenerationEU, and the Recovery and Resilience Facility - *Mecanismo de Recuperación y Resiliencia*) have also acted as drivers of the institutionalisation of evaluation, by introducing measurement, transparency and results-oriented requirements in public and private management.

Regulatory frameworks and quality standards in Spain

Within this context, the **European regulatory framework** on sustainability has acquired decisive importance in the country. The EU Taxonomy, the Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation (SFDR), the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) and the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) now form the regulatory architecture that drives transparency, sustainability and accountability. These instruments, complemented by the European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS), not only affect large corporations but are beginning to permeate the Spanish ecosystem as a whole, also guiding the practices of social entities and public administrations towards more robust impact frameworks.

At the **national level**, relevant progress has been made towards the institutionalisation of impact evaluation. Law 27/2022 (*Ley 27/2022*), on the institutionalisation of public policy evaluation, consolidates evaluation as an essential tool to improve policy quality, promote transparency and ensure efficient use of public resources. Added to this is Law 18/2022 (*Ley 18/2022*), on Business Creation and Growth, which introduces the figure of the *Sociedad de Beneficio e Interés Común* (SBIC), granting legal recognition to companies with an explicit social and environmental purpose. The Spanish ecosystem has also begun to adopt voluntary international standards (e.g. Social Value International, Capitals Coalition, UNDP SDG Impact or B Corp) that contribute to structuring impact management systems and fostering methodological convergence. Initiatives such as the Impact Management Project, created in 2016, or the SDG Impact

¹ Ivàlua (2019). Barcelona city council welfare programme: Impact evaluation results. BMINCOME Project.D 7.1.3 Final report: Impact evaluation of GMI on household outcomes



Standards also provide common reference frameworks that are being progressively incorporated by Spanish organisations.

Current gaps and opportunities

Despite these advances, the expansion of the field remains **limited and asymmetrical**. In general, the third sector and social investors show greater maturity and accumulated experience with impact evaluation, while public administrations, in general, present limitations in technical capacities, understanding of the importance of evaluation and institutional continuity. Territorial differences also persist, with a greater concentration of evaluation practices in Madrid, Barcelona and Bizkaia, and a lower presence in regions with fewer institutional or business structures.

In the face of these gaps, the ecosystem identifies **clear opportunities for strengthening**: improving technical training, promoting common standards, creating national evidence repositories and fostering intersectoral collaboration. In this context, the CECIS could play a key role in the institutionalisation of social impact evaluation. Its function would be structured around four main lines: developing common methodologies, training and supporting entities in integrating evaluation from design to implementation, contributing to evidence generation and promoting the consolidation of social impact evaluation, also from public administrations, as a standard practice in the formulation and monitoring of social innovation processes for their transfer into public policies.



4. Evaluation practices and methodologies



The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the methodologies, approaches and practices used in social impact evaluation in Spain, as well as the level of professionalisation and technical capacity among the actors who promote or carry it out. Through this review, the aim is to understand how social impact is evaluated in practice, which tools and methods predominate, how they are adapted to the national context and which institutional and human resources and capacities support their application.

The content is organised into **two complementary subsections**:

- **Methodologies and approaches.** This subsection presents an overview of the main tools, frameworks and methodologies used in the strategy and planning of social impact evaluation. It analyses the most used conceptual tools, such as the theory of change, stakeholder mapping and impact mapping. It also reviews the data collection methodologies most used in evaluations, including quantitative approaches, focused on statistical and comparative measurement of results, qualitative approaches, oriented towards an in-depth understanding of change processes and stakeholder experiences, and financial approaches, which make it possible to estimate the social value generated or the social returns of interventions. Finally, it explores the predominant evaluation approaches, participatory, systemic and sectoral, describing how they differ in their purposes and levels of analysis.
- **Practices.** This subsection focuses on how the methodologies and tools mentioned above are applied in the national context, identifying which methods are most used and the reasons behind their selection. It also examines the use of different methodologies according to the type of actor, analysing how evaluation practices vary between public administrations, universities, foundations, consultancies or third sector organisations. It explores recurring difficulties and limitations faced by different actors, along with the structural barriers that hinder the development of more robust and sustainable evaluation practices in the Spanish context.

This section aims not only to provide an overview of social impact evaluation practices and methodologies in Spain, but to do so from a critical perspective that allows us to better understand their selection and value at different stages of innovation project development. It also makes it possible to assess the need to incorporate new evaluation and impact demonstration systems or combinations of these, as well as new methodologies or digital tools that add value from an approach oriented towards addressing complex social challenges.



4.1. Methodology and approaches

This section presents the main elements involved in the design and implementation of an impact evaluation. Impact evaluation is a systematic process that seeks to identify, understand and assess the changes generated by an intervention, programme or policy. To do so, it is necessary to bring together a set of conceptual tools, information collection techniques and analytical approaches that make it possible to determine not only what changes, but also how it changes, for whom, under what conditions and why. This section first describes the tools used to plan the evaluation and structure the logic of change. Second, it sets out the most common methods for data collection, both qualitative and quantitative, together with the techniques for economic valuation of impact. It then presents the methodological approaches that guide the analysis, and the section closes with a synthesis of the causal inference methods used in different types of evaluation.

Taken together, all the concepts, tools and approaches presented in this section are widely documented and have solid references both in international practice and in the Spanish context. Although some methods are more widespread than others in evaluations carried out in Spain, all of them have technical resources in Spanish, methodological guides and tailored training materials. For more detailed consultation on these sources and their availability, see section 6.2. *Resources*, which compiles the main documents and information sources used in Spain that go deeper into each of these contents.

1) Tools for evaluation design and planning

This section presents the tools that make it possible to organise the logic of the intervention and establish the necessary foundations for a rigorous impact evaluation. Its purpose is to clarify how the intervention is expected to generate changes, which actors are involved, which evidence is needed and how the evaluation process will be organised.

The **theory of change** is usually the starting point and is widely used today. It is an explicit representation of the mechanisms through which an intervention is expected to generate outcomes and impacts. The theory of change is not limited to listing activities and results, since it also makes explicit the assumptions that underpin the logic of change, the conditions required for the effects to occur and the sequence through which the changes materialise. By doing so, it makes it possible to identify gaps in the design, anticipate risks and guide the key evaluation questions.

As a second step, drawing up a **stakeholder mapping** exercise makes it possible to situate the intervention within its real ecosystem and is also a common practice in Spain. Through this exercise, actors who participate directly or indirectly in the intervention are identified, along with their roles, interests, channels of interaction and potential influence on the evaluation. This analysis is considered essential for designing relevant data collection instruments, defining participation strategies and understanding how different voices influence the interpretation of the changes observed.

A third step involves **impact mapping** and the results chain, since they offer a clear visualisation of how effects are expected to evolve from initial activities to final impacts, and what the causal chain of the intervention is. These tools make it possible to break the intervention down into logical components, assign appropriate indicators at each level and facilitate the identification of the most relevant mechanisms of change.

Lastly, designing the **indicators and verification sources matrix** constitutes the fundamental operational instrument for planning. This matrix specifies which indicators will be measured, how they will be measured, with which data sources, at which points in time, under which quality criteria and with which internal responsibilities. Its preparation requires ensuring that indicators are specific, measurable, achievable and relevant, and that verification sources are accessible, reliable and consistent over time.

2) Data collection methods

Data collection constitutes the empirical basis of any impact evaluation. This section describes the main **qualitative and quantitative tools** used in evaluation practice, as well as the methods available to assess results in economic terms.

Qualitative approaches make it possible to understand perceptions, experiences, processes and mechanisms that cannot be captured through numerical information. **Interviews** are a widely used tool, since they provide structure and flexibility to explore the core topics of a project from the perspective of different stakeholder groups. Their application requires skills to encourage open expression, create safe environments and subsequently analyse thematic patterns using clear coding and categorisation criteria. Derived from interview methodology, **focus groups** make it possible to explore collective information through structured discussions on relevant topics. Their usefulness lies in the possibility of observing convergences, divergences and interaction dynamics that enrich understanding of the phenomenon. Their implementation requires expert moderation, the ability to facilitate equitable participation and attention to potential dominance biases. Usually in combination with focus groups, the technique of **observation**, both participant and non-participant, provides direct information on practices, behaviours and processes as they occur in natural settings. Its value lies in its capacity to capture elements that are difficult for participants themselves to verbalise or recognise.

Case studies, for their part, integrate multiple sources of information in order to examine particular situations or specific trajectories in depth. They are a useful way of documenting complex mechanisms of change, especially when the aim is to understand how and why certain results occur in particular contexts. For this purpose, another useful tool is **Outcome Stars**, since they combine rating scales with qualitative reflection, allowing perceived progress to be visualised in key areas of change. Their structure facilitates participants' expression and the shared construction of meaning in relation to the progress observed.

As regards **quantitative approaches**, these make it possible to measure results systematically, objectively and comparatively. **Closed surveys** are the most common instrument and require precise design in order to avoid ambiguities, ensure comparability and minimise bias. The use of representative samples is essential for extrapolating results, while questionnaire administration must be consistent and aligned with the evaluation objectives. In combination with surveys, quantitative approaches often use data from reliable sources such as **administrative records**, since they provide stable and continuous information on processes, results and participant characteristics. More importantly, when kept up to date and well structured, they constitute a valuable source that enables longitudinal analyses and comparisons between groups. In the case of Spain, labour market data, quality-of-life surveys and social security data are good examples.

Financial and non-financial indicators complement quantitative analysis by incorporating economic, efficiency, quality or institutional performance dimensions. These indicators are used in particular in economic valuation methods, since they offer a monetary approximation of the impact generated by an intervention. Among the most widely used in the country, **Social Return on Investment (SROI)** is highly relevant, since it estimates the social value created for each monetary unit invested, integrating financial



and non-financial measures. As a complement to SROI, **cost-avoidance analysis** calculates the savings generated by an intervention compared with the costs that would have been incurred in the absence of the project, which is typically used to develop the business case for programmes with potential to involve impact investors, such as Social Impact Bonds. Finally, **cost-benefit analysis** compares total benefits and costs in order to determine the economic desirability of the intervention. It is one of the most commonly used methods to assess the economic desirability of an intervention, especially in areas where public administrations need to justify the allocation of resources. Its objective is to compare, in a systematic way, the benefits generated by an action with the costs required to implement it, expressing both in monetary terms to allow a direct comparison.

3) Evaluation approaches and methodological tools

This section presents the different orientations that guide the design, analysis and interpretation of impact evaluation. Each approach introduces a particular way of understanding change and requires specific methodologies, instruments and capacities.

The **participatory approach** recognises the value of involving stakeholders in the design, implementation and interpretation of the evaluation. This approach is based on the idea that people directly affected by an intervention possess situated knowledge that is essential for understanding the relevance and meaning of observed changes. Participation can occur at different stages, including co-design of indicators, identification of key questions, validation of findings and discussion of implications. Its contributions include improving the conceptual relevance of evaluation, strengthening the legitimacy of the process and enhancing the sustainability of recommendations. However, it requires specific facilitation skills, longer timeframes and mechanisms to manage expectations, power and diversity of voices.

The **systemic approach** starts from an understanding of interventions as components embedded in complex social systems. From this perspective, changes do not follow linear trajectories and may generate indirect effects, feedback loops, externalities or emergent patterns. Evaluating from a systemic approach involves observing connections between elements, interdependencies and dynamics that influence final outcomes, with the iceberg model being a good example of systemic analysis. This approach is useful in areas where social problems have multiple causes and interrelated dimensions. Applying it requires in-depth contextual analysis, conceptual models of systems, the capacity to manage heterogeneous information and sensitivity to identify unforeseen effects.

The **sectoral approach** seeks to analyse impact patterns generated by programmes and initiatives that operate within the same thematic or industry field. By bringing together evidence from different actors, it enables the identification of shared trends, common reference frameworks and aggregated contributions. This approach is relevant when the aim is to inform public policies, develop sectoral standards or argue the strategic importance of a sector. Its application requires coordination among multiple organisations, methodological comparability and the capacity to harmonise indicators.

The **Developmental evaluation** is an approach designed to support initiatives that are in the process of being created, adapted or expanded within complex and changing environments. Unlike traditional evaluations, which are usually applied once a programme is already defined and stabilised, this approach is used when solutions are still evolving and require continuous learning. In practice, developmental evaluation involves the evaluator being closely integrated with the team designing or implementing the intervention. The evaluator does not act as an external auditor arriving at the end, but as ongoing support that helps interpret what is happening, detect patterns, test hypotheses and adjust strategy as implementation progresses. This



is achieved through intensive use of qualitative and quantitative data, facilitation of reflection processes and documentation of decisions and learning. This type of evaluation is especially useful when working in complex social systems, where outcomes are difficult to predict or identical conditions cannot be replicated, for example in public policies implemented for the first time, social prototypes, pilot programmes or interventions addressing problems with multiple interrelated causes.

Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) is a methodology that combines qualitative and quantitative elements to identify causal patterns in contexts where multiple interacting factors are present. Its particularity lies in the fact that it does not seek to determine a single factor that explains an outcome, but to understand which combinations of conditions may produce that outcome. This makes it particularly useful in complex systems where different pathways may lead to similar effects. QCA analyses cases, for example programmes, territories, organisations or experiences, and examines whether they meet certain conditions. Based on this information, it constructs logical expressions that show which combinations of factors are necessary or sufficient to generate a particular outcome. This methodology is applied when the number of available cases is limited but sufficient for comparison, something common in public policies, pilot programmes or social projects. It enables robust findings without requiring large samples of the kind needed in randomised experiments.

Finally, the **outcomes harvesting methodology** reverses the usual logic of evaluation. Instead of starting from a predetermined set of expected results, it first identifies the changes that have actually occurred and then reconstructs how the intervention contributed to them. It is an evaluation approach that focuses on identifying and analysing real changes, whether or not they were planned or anticipated. Instead of starting from a rigid theory of change and examining whether it has been fulfilled, this method begins by gathering evidence of observed outcomes, for example changes in behaviours, practices, relationships, policies or capacities, and then works backwards to understand how the intervention contributed to those changes. This method is particularly useful in environments where results are not easily measurable in advance, where causality is diffuse or where processes are influenced by multiple actors and external factors. It works very well in policy advocacy programmes, institutional strengthening, social innovation or community development, where changes are often non-linear and may appear unexpectedly. The typical process involves several stages, including the identification of significant outcomes, documentation of the evidence supporting them, analysis of the contribution and verification through consultation with other actors. The aim is not to attribute an exact percentage of responsibility, but rather to understand how the intervention facilitated or influenced the emergence of those changes. The evaluator's role is to work collaboratively with the team to clarify what happened, why it happened and what implications it has.

With regard to **tools and frameworks**, several internationally validated instruments are frequently used in Spain, collected by the *Cátedra de Impacto Social de la Universidad Pontificia Comillas*. In the case of companies, the **B Impact Assessment** is a self-assessment tool designed for companies to assess their sustainability performance in a structured and comparative way. It operates through an online questionnaire that examines four central dimensions of corporate functioning, governance, labour policies, relations with communities and environmental management. Based on these areas, the tool makes it possible to identify responsible practices, weaknesses and opportunities for improvement that can translate into more responsible management aligned with impact criteria. The process is usually carried out in three stages. First, the company completes the questionnaire and obtains an initial assessment, then it compares its performance with similar organisations in terms of size and sector, and finally it can plan specific improvements to increase its score. The overall scale ranges from 0 to 200 points, and exceeding 80 makes it possible to apply for certification as a B Corporation, a label recognised internationally for its focus on social and environmental impact.



Another tool is the framework developed by the **European Venture Philanthropy Association (EVPA)**, which serves as a comprehensive guide for organisations that wish to measure and manage their impact in a systematic way. Initially designed for social investors, venture philanthropy organisations and social enterprises, it proposes an iterative five-phase process that accompanies initiatives from the definition of objectives through to the verification of the results achieved. Its premise is that impact measurement is not limited to collecting data, but rather to using those data to strengthen decision-making and manage the entire change value chain. The first phase focuses on clarifying what is to be achieved, the second on identifying and engaging with stakeholders, the third addresses the measurement of results by distinguishing between outputs, outcomes and impact, the fourth incorporates tools to validate and cross-check information, and finally the fifth examines the extent to which the investor or funder contributes to the impact generated. This final reflection is particularly relevant for venture philanthropy, which seeks not only to fund but also to strengthen organisations and intervention models. One of the distinctive contributions of the EVPA framework is that it explicitly recognises methodological challenges in impact evaluation, such as the difficulty of attributing results, measuring deadweight or creating comparison groups. The approach encourages organisations to work with these complexities rather than ignore them, promoting realistic and action-oriented measurement.

Finally, the **Impact Management Project (IMP)** is a collaborative initiative launched in 2016 with the aim of generating a common language and shared practices for managing social impact. It brought together thousands of professionals, organisations and international networks seeking to align approaches, share learning and move towards greater coherence in impact measurement. As a result of this collective process, IMP has become a reference point in many global discussions on standardisation and good practices. Its main contribution is a framework based on five dimensions, what changes, for whom it changes, how much it changes, what the contribution is and what the risks are, accompanied by a set of indicators and guiding questions. This approach does not define rigid standards or establish mandatory requirements but serves as a flexible guide for organisations of different profiles to reflect on their impact, improve internal systems or classify project portfolios.

The emphasis of IMP on management rather than simple measurement is one of its most notable characteristics. It invites organisations to integrate impact into daily decision-making, rather than limiting themselves to reporting periodically. It also places stakeholders at the centre of analysis, incorporating questions that help identify whether the change generated really responds to their needs. In addition, it recognises that impacts can be negative, something that has historically been less visible in many traditional methodologies. Another important contribution is the inclusion of risk analysis, with nine categories that allow reflection on uncertainty and variability of results. Although the framework does not provide a specific methodology for managing these risks, it does offer a clear structure for identifying them.

4) Methods of causal inference

This section explains how evaluations can estimate the extent to which the observed changes are due to the intervention. Causal inference seeks to establish valid causal relationships between an intervention and an outcome. To do so, it is necessary to distinguish between causality and correlation, understand the statistical assumptions involved and manage confounding factors, biases and threats to internal validity.

Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs) are the most robust experimental design, since random assignment ensures that treatment and control groups are comparable in all observable and unobservable characteristics, which makes it possible to attribute differences in outcomes solely to the intervention. Randomisation guarantees that both groups are comparable at baseline, so any subsequent difference can



be attributed to the intervention. This design makes it possible to estimate with great precision whether a programme works and to what extent, provided it is well implemented. It is widely used in areas such as education, health, employment, cash transfer programmes and social interventions where participant allocation can be controlled.

RCTs require certain conditions, such as enough participants, clear ethical safeguards, operational capacity to manage random assignment and stability in implementation. They are not always viable in complex contexts or in policies where it is not possible to assign individuals randomly. They can also be costly and require long timeframes to observe results. Despite these limitations, they provide unique value, since they enable measurement of net impact and rule out alternative explanations.

They are particularly useful when decisions need to be made about which programmes to scale, replicate or fund, as they offer robust evidence and clear comparisons with other interventions. In practice, RCTs can adopt different variants, such as lottery designs, random selection among eligible individuals or phased experiments. Results are analysed using statistics that compare means and other characteristics between groups. When all conditions are met, they allow evaluators to answer with a high degree of confidence whether an intervention works, how much it works and for whom it works, providing a solid basis for public policy decisions.

Quasi-experimental methods offer alternatives when randomisation is not possible but there is still an interest in estimating the impact of an intervention rigorously. Although they do not reach the same level of causal certainty as an RCT, they approximate it by using strategies that imitate, as far as possible, comparability between groups. These methods are applied in public policies where randomisation would be impracticable or inappropriate, such as established education, health or social programmes.

Their central logic is to construct a credible counterfactual, that is, an estimate of what would have happened to beneficiaries had they not received the intervention. To do so, different approaches are used, such as similar comparison groups, longitudinal analyses, statistical models or changes in access rules. Quasi-experimental methods make it possible to capture effects in real-world contexts where conditions are less controlled than in an experiment. They are useful when extensive administrative data are available or when there is natural variation in programme implementation across places or over time. They also help identify not only whether a programme works, but how it works and for whom. Their main contribution is that they provide solid evidence without requiring changes to the usual implementation of programmes. However, they require careful analysis to ensure that the comparison group is truly similar and that results are not driven by external factors. When well applied, they offer a credible estimate of impact and are key for decisions on programme adjustment, improvement or expansion.

Looking in more detail at particular quasi-experimental methods, **propensity score matching** pairs individuals or units with similar characteristics to approximate comparable conditions between groups. Its objective is to reduce selection bias, that is, pre-existing differences between those who participate in a programme and those who do not. To this end, it estimates the probability, or propensity score, that each person receives the intervention based on observable characteristics such as age, educational level, employment situation or previous conditions.

Individuals in the treatment group are then matched with individuals in the comparison group who have similar propensity scores. In this way, equivalent groups are constructed in terms of observable variables, attempting to replicate experimental conditions. The process involves three main steps, estimating the probability through a statistical model, often logistic regression, matching individuals using that probability and then comparing outcomes between matched groups. PSM is useful when good pre-intervention data are available and when it is suspected that participants and non-participants differ in relevant



characteristics. Its main limitation is that it only controls for observable characteristics. If unobserved differences exist, such as personal motivation, they may bias results. For this reason, it is often used alongside other methods rather than as a single source of evidence.

The **probit model** is a statistical tool used when the outcome of interest is binary, that is, it has only two possible categories, for example yes or no, success or failure, participates or does not participate. Unlike a traditional linear regression, which is not appropriate for such variables, the probit model estimates the likelihood that a given outcome will occur based on different characteristics of individuals or organisations. In impact evaluation, the probit model is typically used for two main purposes. First, to analyse which factors are associated with a certain behaviour or outcome, such as the likelihood of finding employment after participating in a programme or the probability of school dropout. Second, as part of the calculation of propensity scores in quasi-experimental methods, since the probit model can estimate the probability of receiving an intervention. Its functioning is based on a statistical function that transforms values of explanatory variables into probabilities between 0 and 1. This makes it possible to interpret the model in terms of relative risks or changes in the probability associated with changes in specific characteristics. For example, it may show how the probability of finding employment increases when a person has a certain level of training or lives in an area with better opportunities.

Another commonly used method is **Difference-in-Differences (DiD)**, applied when data are available from before and after the intervention for both the group receiving the programme and a comparison group that does not. The key is to observe how each group evolves over time and compare those trajectories. If the treated group improves more, or worsens less, than the comparison group, and both had similar trends before the intervention, that difference can be attributed to the programme.

DiD is used when randomisation is not available, but longitudinal or administrative data exist. It is common in public policies where programmes are introduced progressively across different territories or for different groups. The method is useful for assessing impacts in areas such as employment, health, education or wellbeing, especially when multiple pre-intervention periods can be observed. Its main strength is that it automatically controls for all fixed differences between groups, including unobserved ones, if these differences do not vary over time. This reduces biases that would affect other methods. It also allows the estimation of effects even when the groups were not identical at baseline. The key condition for DiD to function properly is the parallel trends assumption, meaning that before the programme both groups should display similar trajectories. If this condition is not met, the estimate may be biased, which is why graphical and statistical tests are usually conducted to verify it.

Simpler methods include **pre-post** designs that simply compare results before and after the intervention within the same group. Their usefulness is limited for rigorous causal inference, since they do not control for external changes that may have influenced outcomes, but they are valuable for internal evaluations and continuous improvement processes. **Interrupted time series (ITS)**, commonly recognised as an improved version of the pre-post method, analyse long-term trends to identify breaks in patterns associated with the implementation of the intervention. The interrupted time series approach is applied when many data points are available over time and a relevant change occurs at a specific moment, for example the implementation of a policy, programme or reform. The idea is to analyse whether that intervention point alters the previous trend. ITS is useful in public policies where new regulations, campaigns or programmes are introduced on a specific date, for example legislative changes, service expansions or the introduction of incentives. It is a robust methodology when a suitable comparison group is not available but long series before and after the change are available. Its strength lies in its ability to distinguish real effects from normal, seasonal or random fluctuations. It can also incorporate multiple periods, seasonal effects, non-linear trends or comparisons between several groups or regions if parallel series exist. This method requires a significant



amount of data before and after the change, as well as analyses to rule out the influence of pre-existing trends or external factors.

4.2. Practices

The findings presented in this section come mainly from the testimony of experts from the *Red de Innovación Social* consulted for the preparation of this report, as well as from the research work carried out by the *Cátedra de Impacto Social de la Universidad Pontificia Comillas*. This dual approach makes it possible to combine empirical observation of the real use of impact evaluation methodologies in Spain with a systematic review of the most established trends in the academic field.

Use of evaluation methods and tools in the national context

In the national context, the use of **impact evaluation methods and tools shows considerable diversity**. Although there is a trend towards professionalisation and the adoption of international frameworks, the Spanish ecosystem continues to be characterised by the coexistence of heterogeneous approaches adapted to the resources and objectives of each organisation. The theory of change, SROI and quasi-experimental methodologies are among the most frequently used tools. One of the organisations consulted described its practice as follows:

“we work with the theory of change as an approach to design the impact model in an already designed project... it helped us identify the hypotheses underpinning the logic of the intervention and to define a monitoring model that would allow us to test them”. This testimony reflects a frequent pattern in the Spanish context, the application of the theory of change not so much as the foundational basis of policy design, but as a tool for ex post rationalisation once projects are already under way.

In parallel, **quantitative** methodologies have gained ground. Among the most frequently mentioned methods are probit models, propensity score matching and Difference-in-Differences strategies, mainly applied in evaluations with causal evidence requirements. In such cases, econometric techniques are complemented by qualitative analyses to contextualise the results and enrich the interpretation of data, see examples at the end of this section. For their part, SROI and social accounting methods are used mainly in third sector organisations interested in estimating the social return generated by their programmes and in communicating the value created in a tangible way. One organisation explained that this approach:

“makes it possible to estimate the social return generated in monetary terms, facilitating both the communication of the value created and strategic decision-making”.

There is also **growing use of participatory approaches** and evaluations based on the theory of change combined with sustainability and SDG criteria, especially in programmes focused on employment inclusion, housing or care. These methodologies tend to incorporate indicators on job quality, technological accessibility or compliance with the DNSH principle, “do no significant harm”.

Differences in application depending on the type of actor

The surveys carried out by the *Cátedra de Impacto Social de la Universidad Pontificia Comillas* with expert groups in its impact measurement and management community of practice² reveal notable trends. The Impact Management Project (IMP) is the most widely used tool, mentioned by 65 percent of organisations, followed by the EVPA framework, the B Impact Assessment (BIA) by B Lab and the SDGs. This gap highlights two key aspects of the Spanish context. First, the coexistence between actors with a higher degree of professionalisation, who tend to adopt standardised tools aligned with international frameworks, and more emergent actors, who develop their own instruments adapted to their practice or sector. Second, the absence of a common language and shared standards, which hinders comparability of results and the accumulation of collective knowledge.

In many cases, evaluations are aimed primarily at accountability and programme management improvement, with a predominance of traditional approaches and an emphasis on measuring outputs rather than long-term impacts. One participant summarised this limitation by noting that:

“impact takes time and therefore only output is usually collected”.

The pressure to deliver immediate results, together with annual funding cycles, limits the adoption of longitudinal or counterfactual impact evaluations.

In the **third sector and social entities**, methodologies are applied with greater flexibility, combining participatory approaches, SROI or social accounting with qualitative assessments of perceived value. In these organisations, evaluation is conceived as a collective learning process rather than as an administrative requirement. Some entities described the use of evaluation to validate their value propositions and identify “the moments when decisions tested in social innovation processes drive social value exponentially”. However, lack of financial and human resources remains a recurrent barrier.

Consultancies and specialised firms operate mainly as external providers, adapting methodology to the type of project and the requirements of the contracting organisation. They tend to combine quantitative methods, surveys, impact models, multivariate analysis, with qualitative components, and sometimes design hybrid methodological frameworks that seek a balance between technical rigour and operational feasibility. In academia, impact evaluation is more closely associated with applied research, using experimental or quasi-experimental designs, although its translation into practice remains limited due to the lack of structured collaboration with public administration and the social sector.

Financial and structural constraints

The responses of the consulted group show that methodological choice and the depth of evaluations depend largely on the financial framework and the requirements of funding calls. As one participant noted, projects that secure funding tend to be aligned with funders' objectives and to demonstrate a specific methodology, access to strategic partnerships and concrete and verifiable results. Others noted that the use of internationally recognised methodologies, such as RCTs or SROI, increases the likelihood of securing funding by conveying greater technical credibility to evaluators or donors.

At organisational level, the most frequently mentioned **difficulties** relate to a lack of stable resources, insufficient support from senior management and the absence of specialised internal teams. Financial

² Between 2021 and 2022, the *Cátedra de Impacto Social de la Universidad Pontificia Comillas* created a community of practice to explore practical cases of social impact measurement and management, GMIS. More than 30 organisations with direct experience in GMIS took part in this community, coming from different areas of specialisation, including academia, consultancy, business, incubators, banking, foundations and other non-profit organisations.



factors strongly influence the type and quality of evaluations. The availability of public or European funding often determines methodological scope, projects with limited resources rely on evaluations based on simple indicators, while programmes co-financed by structural funds can afford more rigorous and longitudinal approaches. As one respondent put it,

processes are hampered by “*the means and resources needed to carry it out externally, team training, annual funding cycles that make a minimally rigorous evaluation impossible*”. Other limitations mentioned include insufficient monitoring data, “*sample size limitations*” and the lack of robust information collection and analysis systems.

According to respondents, funding calls value methodological coherence and clarity of results more than the use of a specific technique. One participant stated that successful projects are those that “*know how to convey what they want to do in the application, use a recognised methodology, access strategic partnerships and present concrete and verifiable results*”. However, others stressed the lack of stable resources, insufficient support from senior management and the absence of multiannual planning: “*annual funding cycles make a minimally rigorous evaluation impossible*”. In short, the most frequent limitations are budgetary, related to technical staff or to data availability.

Examples of impact evaluation in social innovation projects in Spain

Example 1. Labour Inclusion Policy Lab promoted by the MISSM (*Ministerio de Inclusión, Seguridad Social y Migraciones*) (2022 to 2024)

Programme description

The *Ministerio de Inclusión, Seguridad Social y Migraciones*, through the *Secretaría General de Inclusión*, launched the [Labour Inclusion Policy Lab](#) as an initiative oriented towards public policy innovation and based on rigorous evaluation. The Lab was implemented with investment from the Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan (*Plan de Recuperación, Transformación y Resiliencia*), in the context of the rollout of the *Ingreso Mínimo Vital (IMV)* established in 2020. Its purpose was to develop and test new interventions to improve the social and labour inclusion of IMV beneficiaries and other vulnerable groups.

The Lab brought together a set of 34 pilot projects, developed in collaboration with autonomous communities, local entities and third sector social action organisations. Through these pilots, inclusion pathways were designed and implemented, combining different measures of support, guidance and activation, aimed at generating evidence on what works and under which conditions to improve participants’ situations.

Each project was built on its own theory of change, defining the expected transformation mechanisms, intermediate results and anticipated impacts. This ensured that the interventions were grounded in an explicit, coherent and verifiable rationale. In addition, the initiative placed particular emphasis on the participation of beneficiaries, ensuring that they were informed and that their consent was obtained at all stages of the process.

The Lab was characterised by broad governance, integrating public and private actors, as well as specialised academic advice in impact evaluation. The results and learning generated were published in the report [Palancas para la Inclusión, Recomendaciones del Laboratorio de Políticas de Inclusión en base a la evidencia científica](#), consolidating this experience as a reference point in public innovation in Spain.

Impact evaluation description

The evaluation of the Labour Inclusion Policy Lab was based on Randomised Controlled Trials, RCTs, making it one of the first major social experimentation processes promoted directly by the national administration. This approach made it possible to obtain rigorous evidence on the causal impacts of the interventions, comparing the results of treatment groups with those of control groups.

To ensure the integrity of the evaluation process and the protection of participants, an Ethics Committee was established, responsible for overseeing compliance with ethical standards and addressing the risks inherent to this type of methodology. Key challenges included the possibility of contamination between treatment and control groups, high levels of drop-out, particularly in control groups, and difficulties in maintaining the sustained participation of those involved. One of the lessons identified was the need to intensify recruitment and retention strategies throughout the entire process.

The evaluation generated learning not only on the effectiveness of inclusion pathways, but also on the social innovation and evaluation process itself. Some projects showed significant potential for being scaled as public policies, demonstrating improvements in areas such as guidance, social and labour inclusion, and the application of innovative methodologies. Taken together, the Lab established itself as a pioneering experience combining public innovation, rigorous experimentation and impact evaluation, providing valuable evidence for the design and improvement of inclusion policies in Spain.

Example 2. Neotec Programme of the CDTI (*Centro para el Desarrollo Tecnológico y la Innovación*) (*Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovación y Universidades*)

Programme description

Neotec is a public programme managed by the *Centro para el Desarrollo Tecnológico y la Innovación*, CDTI, whose objective is to support the creation and consolidation of technology-based companies in their early stages. To this end, it provides grants to newly established companies whose business model is based on the development and commercial exploitation of novel technologies. It is one of the main public instruments for promoting technological entrepreneurship in Spain, implemented through annual competitive calls. The CDTI, a public business entity attached to the *Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovación y Universidades*, mobilises a significant volume of resources each year to finance business R&D&I projects. Its mandate includes promoting competitive innovation ecosystems, facilitating technology transfer and contributing to the improvement of the business fabric, with a broad domestic and international collaboration network.

In this context, Neotec represents a strategic instrument to drive innovation from the early stages of entrepreneurship, enabling technology startups to access public funding, institutional support and visibility within the national innovation system. Although its evaluation has traditionally focused on technological and economic results, the CDTI's growing interest in understanding the social impact of innovation created the opportunity to explore broader dimensions of public value. These include contributions to gender equality, technological accessibility, environmental sustainability, reducing inequalities and the inclusion of vulnerable groups.

The need to innovate in this area emerged from a key question within the CDTI, to what extent the programmes it manages are generating social changes aligned with current demands. To address this, a participatory methodology was developed to understand how projects supported through Neotec



contribute to tackling specific socio-environmental challenges such as the digital divide, technological accessibility for vulnerable groups, climate change adaptation or the transition to a circular economy.

The work process included the identification of relevant actors according to three criteria, prior knowledge of the programme, proximity to its field of action and interest in the evaluation. In the circle of control were beneficiary and non-beneficiary companies, as well as programme managers within the CDTI. In the circle of influence were entrepreneurship support centres, specialised consultancies and regional administrations with similar programmes. In the circle of interest were entities involved in promoting entrepreneurship, including initiatives with a gender perspective and social inclusion focus.

This participatory approach, in addition to introducing a social perspective that had traditionally not been evaluated in R&D&I programmes, made it possible to define the scope of the analysis and the indicators used with precision, and contributed to broad acceptance of the initiative within the CDTI and the National Innovation Ecosystem.

Impact evaluation description

The social impact evaluation of Neotec was carried out between 2022 and 2023 using a participatory methodology designed by the CDTI and a team of external evaluators, within the framework of the European project Pro-Ethics, financed by the European Commission through the Horizon 2020 programme. The initiative was structured in two phases, an exploratory phase to identify key actors and define social impact indicators, and an implementation phase dedicated to the evaluation of the programme.

During the exploratory phase, interviews and discussion groups were conducted with the actors included in the impact circles, whose participation was essential for formulating the evaluation questions. Based on these dynamics, a set of social impact indicators was defined, covering multiple social and environmental dimensions, such as social inclusion, employment of groups facing insertion difficulties, gender equality, gender perspective in technological development, environmental sustainability, social orientation of new technologies, accessibility, user participation and corporate social responsibility. In the implementation phase, quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques were used, including a questionnaire to applicant companies and various group dynamics. After analysing the information, evidence triangulation took place, which made it possible to draft a first version of the results, later validated in workshops with programme managers and other participating actors.

The evaluation generated relevant evidence for improving R&D&I policies and resulted in a recommendations document made available to the CDTI Management Committee (*Comité de Dirección del CDTI*). Its results have shown high value for the future design of instruments and have stimulated reflections on alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals, positioning the CDTI as a reference point in the incorporation of social dimensions in its evaluations.

For further information, see the [programme evaluation final report](#).

Example 3. SOMOS VOZ Programme of the *Coordinadora Estatal de Plataformas Sociales Salesianas*

Programme description

The SOMOS VOZ programme, a pilot project financed by the *Secretaría de Estado de Derechos Sociales* and part of the VIDAS social innovation platform, addresses a widely recognised need within the Spanish child protection system, preventing children and adolescents in vulnerable situations from entering

institutionalisation processes and strengthening the capacities of their families and communities to provide safe and stable environments. This orientation aligns with the priorities set by the Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan and by the national agenda for modernising social services, which promote preventive models based on early, evidence-informed interventions.

The programme's intervention focuses on contexts where socioemotional, educational and family risks converge, potentially leading to unwanted separations, deterioration of emotional wellbeing, difficulties in educational trajectories or community isolation. Children supported by the programme often present multiple simultaneous risk factors, while families experience situations of stress, precariousness, loneliness or ongoing challenges in parenting tasks. These circumstances frequently exceed the capacity of public systems to act preventively, creating a gap between real needs and available responses.

SOMOS VOZ is framed within instruments such as *LOPIVI*, the *PRTR* and *RD 1101/2021*, which promote protection measures centred on childhood and family wellbeing. The methodology used in the programme makes it possible to identify differentiated needs among each group involved, among children, the need for emotional support, stable relationships and participation spaces; among families, the need for guidance, support networks and stress reduction; among professional teams, coherent tools to detect risk situations and assess progress; and within the community, mechanisms for coordination and early access to resources.

Impact evaluation description

The impact measurement of SOMOS VOZ was carried out using IMPACTA, a digital tool that fully incorporates the SROI methodology and has represented an innovation in the evaluation of socio-educational and community programmes. Its design enables the principles of SROI to be applied in a digital environment, automating calculations, systematising information and facilitating the generation of verifiable results. This technological integration made it possible to estimate elements such as deadweight, attribution, displacement and drop-off, monetise qualitative transformations, compare results between different groups and generate clear reports for public authorities and organisations.

The analysis of the programme followed a structured process that included the identification of all relevant stakeholders, the detailed definition of the changes they experienced, the economic valuation of intangible benefits and the examination of elements such as duration, risks and attribution. IMPACTA made it possible to combine quantitative information, qualitative assessments, subjective perceptions and contextual analysis, all linked to the theory of change developed and validated by professionals, families and children involved in the programme.

Stakeholder participation was central to the evaluation. Children and adolescents contributed through adapted questionnaires, focus groups and interviews, providing essential information on subjective wellbeing, social relationships, participation and socioemotional competences. Families contributed their perspective through guidance spaces and information collection tools, showing improvements in areas such as family organisation, communication and perceived support. Professional teams took part in methodological definition, indicator design, result interpretation and follow-up processes, while territorial entities and specialised external actors participated in the technical and methodological validation of the analysis.

The final report, submitted to a formal verification process, confirmed significant improvements in emotional and family wellbeing, social participation, community ties and other key dimensions, with an estimated social return ranging between 1.42 and 3.37 euros for every euro invested.

For further information, see the description of the tool [here](#).

From the perspective of addressing complex social challenges, strengthening evaluation practice requires moving towards a model that strategically combines different approaches, participatory, experimental, counterfactual and economic, depending on the nature of the social challenge and the phase of the intervention cycle. Within this view, there are no methodologies that are “better than others”, each provides a complementary perspective that, when integrated, makes it possible to capture the multiple dimensions and levels of maturity of social innovations. In this way, combining **ex ante** evaluations, to test hypotheses and theories of change, **developmental** evaluations, to support learning and adaptation during implementation, and **ex post** evaluations, to measure results and impacts rigorously, constitutes a key pathway to understanding the real scope of social innovations.

It is also necessary to move from evaluating isolated projects to models that make it possible to evaluate experimentation portfolios, which would facilitate the identification of patterns, transferable learning and aggregated results with greater relevance for public decision-making. In the Spanish context, adopting this hybrid approach would contribute not only to generating richer and more useful evidence, but also to building a common methodological language aligned with consolidated international frameworks yet adapted to the needs, capacities and priorities of national social policies.

5. Stakeholders and the evaluation ecosystem

The development of social impact evaluation practice in Spain cannot be understood without analysing the role played by the **main actors** that make it up. This section aims to identify and characterise the principal actors involved in the Spanish social impact evaluation ecosystem, describing their functions, relationships and degree of institutionalisation. Understanding who they are, how they interact and what capacities they possess is a key step towards strengthening interinstitutional coordination and promoting a more strategic use of evaluation as a tool for learning, management and evidence-based policymaking. Within the broader purpose of this report, this actor analysis seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Spanish social impact evaluation ecosystem, identifying capacities, alliances, synergies and gaps.

This section is structured into **two complementary subsections**. The first, **Mapping of main actors**, offers an overview of the range of entities and institutions actively participating in social impact evaluation in Spain. This subsection identifies the main groups of actors, public administrations, universities and research centres, specialised consultancies, foundations, think tanks, incubators and collaboration networks, classifying them according to their role in the “value chain” of evaluation, which spans from policy design and the provision of methodological tools to implementation, evaluation and specialised training. This mapping exercise makes it possible to visualise both the diversity of approaches and the points of convergence and cooperation between the different sectors.

The **second** subsection, **ESF+ Managing Authorities**, analyses the role of these entities as strategic public actors in the incorporation of evaluative practices within programmes financed by European funds. Their relevance lies in their capacity to operationalise the principles of social impact evaluation in concrete policies and projects, as well as in their methodological leadership within public administration. This subsection covers the types of programmes evaluated, the methodologies applied, the mechanisms for collaboration with other public and private actors and the opportunities to improve the coherence and systematisation of evaluative practices funded through FSE plus.

From the **CECIS perspective**, actor analysis is a fundamental tool for understanding existing capacities and the gaps that still prevent the consolidation of a solid and well-articulated national ecosystem of social impact evaluation. This diagnosis seeks not only to describe the current situation, but also to identify areas to strengthen cooperation between public administrations, academia, the private sector and civil society, promoting a cohesive community of practice that shares methodologies, learning and common standards. Advancing towards a transversal evaluation culture among ecosystem actors is essential to ensure the quality of social policies, improve the allocation of public resources and consolidate the *Centro de Competencias en Innovación Social* as a reference space for coordinating knowledge on social impact evaluation in Spain.

5.1. Mapping of main actors

Key actors in the national ecosystem

Before going into detail, it is important to note that **this mapping exercise does not aim to provide an exhaustive list of all entities that promote or incorporate social impact evaluation in their practices**. Given that the Spanish ecosystem is characterised by dynamism and diversity, with numerous organisations developing relevant initiatives at different territorial levels and across sectors, such a list would be impossible to produce. Therefore, the examples included in this section are illustrative and representative of the main types of actors and trends observed, without implying the exclusion or undervaluing of the work carried out by other entities contributing to the consolidation of a social impact evaluation culture in the country.

Within the Spanish ecosystem, multiple actors can be distinguished, each with differentiated but complementary functions. In general terms, the ecosystem is made up of the following:

- **Public administrations**, which constitute the structural and regulatory framework of the ecosystem and which in recent years have been promoting and incorporating impact evaluation practices across different entities. The *Secretaría de Estado de Derechos Sociales* has promoted impact evaluation in social innovation policies through the projects of the *Plataforma VIDAS* and its innovation portfolio approach. The *Ministerio de Trabajo y Economía Social*, through the *Unidad Administradora del FSE*, is also a central actor as it acts as the managing authority for ESF+ in Spain and coordinates the mandatory evaluations of co-financed programmes. For its part, the CDTI has developed the Learning through Evaluation Strategy (*Estrategia para el aprendizaje a través de la evaluación*), aimed at integrating evaluation processes into its business innovation support activity. Another key public entity is the *Ministerio de Inclusión, Seguridad Social y Migraciones*, which has led the creation of the *Fondo de Impacto Social* (FIS), and which, together with the public company COFIDES, manages the FIS, which has become a driver of impact investing and therefore of the need to measure results in funded social projects.
- **Applied research centres**, universities and think tanks, which contribute methodological rigour, training resources and conceptual innovation. Notable institutions include the *Cátedra de Impacto Social de la Universidad Pontificia Comillas*, *Universidad de Deusto*, *Universidad Pompeu Fabra*, *Universidad de Mondragón*, *ESADE*, *Universidad Complutense de Madrid* and *Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona*, among many others. These institutions promote applied research lines, undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and alliances with public and private entities, helping to train the next generation of professionals in impact management and evaluation, as well as evaluating the impact of policies and programmes addressing a wide range of social challenges in the country.
- **Third sector organisations, foundations and social organisations**, pioneers in the practical application of impact methodologies. Foundations, NGOs and social economy entities have operated as innovation laboratories, linking results measurement with improvement of interventions. Here, corporate and family foundations play a dual role, promoting their own programmes and acting as funders of third-party projects while incorporating impact indicators into their accountability processes. Illustrative examples include the various third sector entities that have developed projects under the *Plataforma VIDAS*, carrying out social innovation processes that, as a mandatory condition of the call designed by SEDS, included solid and robust impact evaluations. Another key example is *Fundación "la Caixa"*, which has incorporated evaluation into



all its programmes and in 2021 published a report on the impact of the Social Project Grants Programme 1999 to 2020, with a quantitative-qualitative analysis of more than 18,000 supported projects. Other corporate foundations such as *Fundación SERES*, which brings together socially responsible companies, also publish annual reports on the aggregate social impact of member companies and promote improved metrics within the corporate sector.

- **Social enterprises, cooperatives and *Sociedades de Beneficio e Interés Común* (SBIC)**, which represent a new generation of organisations that sit between private enterprise and public commitment, and which also have obligations to evaluate their impact for their investors or shareholders.
- **Private entities, banking institutions and impact investors**, including both financial funds and intermediaries that channel capital towards social projects with measurable results. In this field, several actors stand out, for example *CREAS*, *La Bolsa Social*, *Ship2B* and *GAWA Capital*, among many others, which have contributed to the professionalisation of the sector and the consolidation of impact investing in Spain, requiring impact-based accountability from their investees.
- **Specialised consultancies and technical support platforms**, which provide methodologies, tools and guidance to organisations across all sectors. These entities are essential for knowledge transfer and for building technical evaluation capacities. Here, *EslImpact*, the *Asociación para la Medición y Gestión del Impacto Social en España*, is notable as a meeting point for professionals and organisations across sectors to disseminate impact measurement knowledge. The *Sociedad Española de Evaluación de Políticas Públicas (SEE)* is also key as it represents the community of academic and governmental evaluators, although with a broader focus than solely social impact.
- **Platforms and ecosystem-building organisations**, which structure interaction between different sectors. These entities act as connectors within the ecosystem, fostering collaboration, incubation of impact projects and the adoption of common standards. Their role has been fundamental in raising the visibility of impact measurement and connecting actors that traditionally operated in isolation.

Despite the increasing diversity of actors, experts agree that **Spain still lacks entities that exercise clear, structural leadership in the field of social impact evaluation**. Although numerous active and recognised organisations exist, their influence remains dispersed, and practice continues to be fragmented. This absence of consolidated reference entities highlights the need for stronger institutional coordination and more stable cross-sector collaboration mechanisms.

Functional classification of actors

The analysis makes it possible to group the identified actors into **four functional categories** according to their role in the value chain of evaluation and their organisational nature. This typology can be complemented by the conceptual classification of the Spanish ecosystem proposed by *Fundación Open Value*, which distinguishes between “givers”, meaning funders and donors, “doers” or change-makers, meaning implementing organisations, “thinkers”, meaning knowledge centres, and “connectors” or change enablers, meaning intermediaries and networks. These four categories are as follows:

- **“Creators of public policies and support structures”**, which include ministries, intermediate bodies of the ESF+, regional evaluation agencies and local entities that promote regulatory and methodological frameworks and provide financial support.

- “**Producers of knowledge and methodologies**”, made up of universities, research centres, evaluation agencies and think tanks that develop analytical models, promote training and set the conceptual foundations of evaluation.
- “**Providers of services and technical support**”, including third sector entities, foundations, business associations, investors and coordination platforms, for example the *Asociación Española de Fundaciones* and the *Fundaciones Comunitarias de España*.
- “**Networks and intermediaries within the impact ecosystem**”, comprising consultancies, innovation laboratories, technological platforms and impact certification bodies, among others.

Networks, communities and knowledge spaces

The strengthening of communities of practice has been decisive in consolidating the field of social impact evaluation in Spain, although existing experiences remain limited and relatively young. The following examples illustrate this landscape:

- At the **academic level**, the Think Tank of the *Cátedra de Impacto Social de la Universidad Pontificia Comillas* has become a national reference space for building a common language around impact measurement and management. It has brought together more than 70 organisations from public administration, business, social investment, the third sector and academia, promoting cross-sector collaboration and the generation of shared knowledge.
- From the **business and financial sphere**, SpainNAB, the Advisory Board for Impact Investment and Spanish representative at the GSG, articulates the largest national strategic alliance between the investor community, the business ecosystem, the third sector and civil society. Its purpose is to promote a new economic model that mobilises greater capital flows towards social and environmental challenges, strengthening the connection between sustainable finance and results-oriented public policies.
- Within **professional networks**, there are several relevant initiatives that connect professionals with evaluation needs. Illustrative examples include the [Instituto de Políticas y Bienes Públicos of the CSIC \(CSIC\)](#) and the *Xarxa de Professionals de l’Avaluació promoted by the Institut Català d’Avaluació de Polítiques Pùbliques, Ivàlua*. This network provides a meeting space between evaluation professionals and public policy managers, with the aim of linking professionals with evaluation demands.

This preliminary mapping of actors constitutes a strategic instrument for understanding the institutional architecture and interdependencies of the Spanish social impact evaluation ecosystem. More importantly, through the CECIS, the aim is to foster cooperation between social, academic, financial and business actors, helping to generate common standards, shared repositories and to act as a methodological reference point for impact evaluation in the country. Ultimately, this effort seeks to transform the impact evaluation undertaken by each of these actors and networks, communities and knowledge spaces into a structural and cross-cutting practice within Spanish public policies and social innovation.



5.2. ESF+ Managing Authorities

This section draws primarily on the *Plan General de Evaluación de los Programas de Fondo Social Europeo Plus 2021-2027 en España (Plan General de Evaluación)*, published and currently available on the website of the **Unidad Administradora del Fondo Social Europeo (UAFSE)**³.

Role of the ESF+ Managing Authorities in social impact evaluation in Spain

The ESF+ constitutes, in the 2021-2027 period, one of the most relevant instruments in Spain for implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights and promoting policies on employment, education, social inclusion and poverty reduction. In this context, the Managing Authorities of the ESF+ in Spain play a strategic role within the public ecosystem of social innovation and evaluation, by ensuring the correct administration of resources and the results orientation of co-financed interventions.

The UAFSE, under the Ministry of Labour and Social Economy (*Ministerio de Trabajo y Economía Social*) through the *Secretaría de Estado de Trabajo*, acts as the Managing and Certifying Authority for the ESF+. Its responsibilities include planning, monitoring, certifying expenditure, evaluating results and coordinating with intermediate bodies at regional, local and ministerial levels that implement the operational programmes.

Under the ES-FSE+ Programming Period 2021-2027, impact evaluation is considered a key instrument for guiding public policies funded with European resources. In line with Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the ESF+ and Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 on Common Provisions (*RDC* in Spanish), Member States are required to develop evaluation plans, conduct systematic programme monitoring and integrate evaluation results into the mid-term review and future programming processes. The RDC establishes that all evaluations must be carried out by independent experts, be based on reliable data and be published on the websites of the managing authorities.

In response to this mandate, the UAFSE is responsible for coordinating the implementation of the *Plan General de Evaluación de los Programas FSE+*, ensuring the quality, coherence and homogeneity of the evaluations. This plan aims to determine which interventions are most effective, which provide the greatest added value to citizens and how the results can be translated into useful learning for future policymaking. The experience accumulated in the previous period (2014-2020) and the lessons from the *Plan Estratégico Nacional de Evaluación del FSE 2014-2020* made it possible to progressively integrate evaluation into different phases of the policy cycle, while also revealing the need to strengthen gender mainstreaming, an aspect reinforced in the RDC. In the current period, the *Red de Políticas de Igualdad en los Fondos Europeos* plays a central role in promoting the gender perspective.

Classification of programmes and projects subject to evaluation

The UAFSE manages four national programmes: ÉFESO dedicated to education, training, employment and the social economy, *Empleo Juvenil* focused on the labour integration of young people, *Inclusión* covering social inclusion, child guarantee and poverty reduction, and *BÁSICO* which supports basic material assistance. These programmes are complemented by regional and territorial cooperation programmes that ensure territorial adequacy within cohesion policies. The allocation of funds is supported by socio-economic diagnostics carried out by the UAFSE, enabling priority-setting based on identified needs and establishing a baseline for evaluations.

³ https://www.mites.gob.es/UAFSE/es/FSE21_27/evaluaciones/index.htm - access date: 01/11/2025



The *Plan General de Evaluación del FSE+ 2021-2027*, whose implementation runs until December 2029, defines the principles, methods and timeline for all evaluations. Its purpose is twofold: on the one hand, to strengthen the quality and homogeneity of the evaluations, and on the other, to generate institutional learning that guides the continuous improvement of public policies. In addition to fulfilling regulatory obligations, the plan responds to **five strategic objectives**:

- Identify strengths and weaknesses in programme design.
- Measure the actual impact of public policies on beneficiary populations.
- Improve decision-making through empirical evidence.
- Support accountability and transparency in the use of funds.
- Generate and disseminate knowledge useful for future policies.

Evaluations cover different **levels and methodologies**, ranging from outcome analysis by programme to estimating the aggregate impact of interventions on the broader system. A territorial lens, gender equality and social cohesion are central throughout, in line with European Commission priorities. The plan distinguishes five types of evaluations, each with its own schedule and responsibilities:

- Programme evaluations (Article 44.2 RDC) assessing programme impact before 30 June 2029.
- Evaluations based on specific criteria (Article 44.1 RDC) examining effectiveness, efficiency, relevance and coherence.
- Structured deprivation surveys (Article 23.3 FSE plus) planned for 2025 and 2028.
- Evaluations of effectiveness and sustainability (Article 18.1 RDC) assessing the 2014-2020 actions that continue into the FSE plus.
- Evaluations of REACT-EU resources (Article 92, RDC 2014-2020) analysing the impact and inclusiveness of the extraordinary post-COVID-19 recovery funds.

Overall, the *Plan General de Evaluación* seeks to shift from a fragmented approach to a systemic and learning-oriented model, where results contribute to improving future policies and reinforcing the legitimacy of public interventions. Its scope includes all evaluations carried out during the programming period, both cross-cutting and programme-specific, at national and regional levels. As part of this plan, the following will be undertaken:

- One evaluation feeding into the mid-term review due on 31 March 2025.
- Twenty-three mid-term reviews, one per programme.
- Three thematic evaluations with specific criteria, each documented in a technical fiche to be approved by the Evaluation Committee.
- Twenty-three impact evaluations, one per programme.

Methods used to evaluate the impact of funded projects

The evaluation **methods** employed by the UAFSE depend on the object and scope of each evaluation, combining different approaches and techniques according to the characteristics of each programme. The RDC requires the selection of methods that can reliably distinguish the effects of interventions from those of external factors, ensuring functional independence and technical robustness. The principal evaluation modalities include:

- Effectiveness, which assesses progress toward stated objectives using output, result and impact indicators.
- Efficiency, which examines the relationship between resources used and results achieved, including cost-benefit analysis when feasible.



- Relevance, which evaluates the alignment of interventions with the real needs of the population.
- Coherence, which analyses complementarity across policies and programmes.
- EU added value, which identifies the specific contribution of European funds beyond what national measures would have achieved.
- Impact, which applies counterfactual or quasi-experimental methodologies to establish causal relationships and quantify net effects.
- Inclusiveness and non-discrimination, examining differentiated effects by sex, age, origin or disability.
- Gender perspective, which assesses the contribution of interventions to equality between women and men.
- Visibility and good practices, evaluating the interventions' capacity to communicate results and replicate successful experiences.

Evaluation **sources** include both internal and external information (specialised consultancies, universities and research centres). **Methodological tools** encompass interviews, surveys, document analysis and case studies, selected according to the objectives and characteristics of each evaluation. This methodological system supports balanced, participatory and inclusive evaluation that integrates gender perspective and fosters institutional learning.

Collaboration of UAFSE with other actors in the impact ecosystem

UAFSE plays a central role not only in the financial and administrative management of the funds, but also in shaping a **collaborative governance system** that ensures coherence, quality and institutional learning in the field of evaluation. Aware that the ESF+ 2021-2027 programmes involve the participation of numerous actors at national, regional, local and European levels, UAFSE has promoted a set of coordination mechanisms designed to integrate evaluation efforts and strengthen the collective capacities of the system.

These mechanisms aim to improve evaluation methodologies, share results and recommendations, foster synergies between funds and institutions and promote the dissemination of good practices. Their overarching purpose is to ensure that evaluation does not remain a technical compliance exercise but becomes an effective governance tool. The *Plan General de Evaluación de los Programas de Fondo Social Europeo+ 2021-2027 en España* identifies the following key coordination instruments:

- **Monitoring Committees of the ESF+ Programmes (Comités de Seguimiento de los Programas FSE+).** Beyond supervising programme implementation, these committees assume essential evaluation functions in line with the RDC. Their responsibilities include approving evaluation plans, reviewing their implementation and examining findings, summaries and follow up processes derived from the conclusions. They also play a relevant role in strengthening the administrative capacity of intermediate bodies by facilitating direct dialogue, technical support and the dissemination of guidance.
- **National Evaluation Committee 2021-2027 of the ESF+ (Comité Nacional de Evaluación 2021-2027 del FSE+).** This committee operates as a platform for methodological coordination and knowledge exchange among actors involved in fund management. Its central mission is to ensure coherence between programme evaluations, disseminate results, propose improvements and strengthen institutional technical capacity. In this regard, it contributes explicitly to building the administrative capacity of intermediate bodies through training and on demand support, for example on indicators, evaluation methodologies or eligibility of expenditure, as well as through the



preparation of guidance documents. The committee includes UAFSE, state and regional intermediate bodies, social and economic partners, third sector entities, civil society organisations, sectoral networks linked to the ESF+ and a consultative representation from the European Commission.

- **Coordination Committee of European Funds (Comité de Coordinación de Fondos).** This body ensures alignment between policies supported by the various European cohesion funds, including *FSE+, FEDER, Fondo de Transición Justa, FEMPA, FAMI, FSI and IGFV*, and their coherence with other EU policies. In the field of evaluation, the committee acts as a forum for exchanging methodologies and knowledge, promoting the planning of joint evaluations and meta evaluations that integrate lessons learned from different instruments.
- **ESF+ Evaluation Partnership.** Spain actively participates in this network led by the European Commission, which serves as a technical and methodological cooperation forum among Member States. Through this partnership, UAFSE exchanges experiences, receives technical assistance and contributes to the development of common standards, indicators and methodological guidance. The network also strengthens national evaluation capacities through specialised workshops, training sessions and peer review processes. UAFSE has also made use of the resources provided by the Center for Research on Impact Evaluation, drawing on its reports and assessments as technical references for its own evaluation processes.
- **Ad hoc working groups and communities of practice.** UAFSE and the National Evaluation Committee (*Comité Nacional de Evaluación*) may establish specialised working groups to support the definition, implementation and review of specific evaluations. These groups are composed of academic, technical and administrative experts and help ensure the independence, rigour and quality of the evaluations. Their work also facilitates the translation of recommendations into operational improvements within the programmes.

Within this institutional architecture, **UAFSE** is responsible for producing and compiling the data required for evaluations in accordance with Article 42 of the RDC, ensuring their disaggregation by specific objectives and regions and their semi-annual updating through electronic means. **Intermediate bodies and beneficiaries** are jointly responsible for providing accurate information on the operations they manage, participating in evaluation processes and implementing the resulting recommendations. Finally, **Autonomous Communities and Autonomous Cities**, acting as intermediate bodies of regional programmes, are obliged to carry out impact evaluations of their respective programmes under Article 44.2 RDC, as well as to design specific evaluation plans where applicable.

6. Resources and capacities

6.1. Training and education

This section provides an illustrative, non-exhaustive overview of the training offer available in Spain in the field of social impact evaluation and management. Given the diversity and dynamism of the ecosystem, producing a complete mapping of all existing degrees, workshops and active programmes exceeds the scope of this report. Nevertheless, representative examples of academic and professional initiatives are presented, reflecting the growing institutionalisation of the field and the professionalisation of the actors involved. The objective is to identify the **main formal and non-formal education programmes** linked to social impact evaluation in the country, describe their characteristics, approaches and levels of specialisation and assess their contribution to capacity building within the Spanish ecosystem. The section draws on contributions from the *Cátedra de Impacto Social de la Universidad Pontificia Comillas*, which had previously undertaken a similar mapping exercise.

Formal academic offer

Over the last decade, Spain has moved from isolated training opportunities to a consolidated group of academic and postgraduate programmes that integrate impact evaluation within public management, social innovation and impact economy studies.

The *Programa Superior de Gestión y Medición del Impacto Social of the Universidad Pontificia Comillas* is one of the country's leading training references. Its approach combines theoretical foundations such as theory of change, SROI and economic evaluation with a strong practical orientation. The programme is led by the *Cátedra de Impacto Social* and has trained several cohorts of professionals since 2021, in collaboration with social enterprises and foundations. *Comillas* also contributes to other programmes and collaborations included in the broader ecosystem mapping, either as a leading institution or as an academic partner, strengthening the connection between academia, practice and the public sector.

At university level, other relevant training pathways include:

- **Master's Degree in Programme and Public Policy Evaluation** (*Máster en Evaluación de Programas y Políticas Públicas de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid*). A national reference that prepares professionals to design and conduct rigorous evaluations of public policies, combining theoretical underpinnings with applied methodologies.
- **Master's Degree in Impact Investment** (*Máster en Inversión de Impacto de la Universidad Autónoma de Madrid*). A pioneering programme that integrates sustainable finance with the measurement of social and environmental impact, aimed at preparing professionals to manage purpose driven investments.
- **Master's Degree in Development and Social Impact Project Design and Management** (*Máster en Diseño y Gestión de Proyectos de Desarrollo e Impacto Social de la Universidad de Salamanca*). A postgraduate programme focused on international cooperation and territorial development that incorporates evaluation as part of the full project management cycle.

- **Social Innovation through Knowledge Exchange (SIKE)** at the *Universidad de Deusto*. A European initiative promoting university driven social innovation through collaborative projects between academia, the social sector and the business ecosystem.
- **Bachelor's Degree in Entrepreneurial Leadership and Innovation** (*Grado en Liderazgo emprendedor e Innovación de la Universidad de Mondragón*). An undergraduate programme that combines entrepreneurial leadership, social innovation and sustainable development with a strong focus on creating positive impact.
- **UNED**, with the course Philanthropy and Impact Investment (*Filantropía e Inversión de Impacto*). An online programme exploring strategic philanthropy and impact investment, with emphasis on tools to measure generated social value.

University training in Spain maintains a hybrid orientation, combining methodological tools with strategic competencies in impact management and communication. Although the number of specialised programmes remains limited, their level of maturity and technical relevance has grown substantially. Many of these programmes are delivered in collaboration with sector experts such as consultancies and foundations, ensuring updated and practice-oriented content.

Non formal, professional and technical training

Alongside university education, Spain has a dynamic ecosystem of professional and technical training, led by consultancies, foundations, specialised chairs and sectoral networks. These short and medium duration programmes respond to the demand for practical and immediately applicable skills among active professionals. Some of the most relevant current examples include:

- **Coordinadora de Organizaciones para el Desarrollo**, with "Measuring social impact from a rights-based approach" (*La medición del impacto social con enfoque de derechos*). A practical programme aimed at integrating impact evaluation within human rights and accountability frameworks in development organisations.
- **Candriam Academy**, with "Introduction to sustainable investment" (*Introducción a la inversión sostenible*). An online introductory programme on ESG criteria and responsible investment for professionals seeking to integrate sustainability and impact in financial decision making.
- **ESImpact**, with "Measuring Impact using SROI" (*Medición de Impacto SROI*). An intensive programme oriented towards professional certification in the measurement and monetisation of social value, delivered by experts accredited by Social Value International.
- **Fundación Ortega y Gasset**, with "Evaluation of social impact projects" (*Evaluación de proyectos con impacto social*). A specialised programme on designing evaluation systems, with focus on planning, indicators and results management in social projects.
- **Fundación Open Value**, with programmes such as "*Fondo de Fundaciones de Impacto*" and "*Social Impact Doers*". These combine impact investment and social management, encouraging applied learning and collaboration among foundations.
- **Acumen Academy España**, with the Acumen Fellows Programme. A leadership pathway for social entrepreneurs, combining training in transformative competencies with long term impact support.
- The "**Learning Community on Impact Measurement and Management**" (*Comunidad de Aprendizaje en Medición y Gestión de Impacto*) led by ESADE and Fundación BBK, which represents an innovative peer learning model where foundations and social sector organisations exchange learning, develop capacities and apply measurement methodologies to real projects.

Strengthening capacities in social impact evaluation is a strategic pillar for advancing towards a national public policy system oriented to results and grounded in evidence. Formal and non-formal training in all its

academic, technical and professional expressions is the primary vehicle to ensure the quality, comparability and usefulness of evaluations as well as to cultivate an institutional culture of continuous learning and improvement. From this perspective, the CECIS positions itself as a coordinating space for knowledge, methodologies and experience. Its role is not to deliver training directly, but to map existing supply, facilitate access to training resources and connect organisations with the most suitable providers. Through this function, the Centre could structure recommended training routes without assuming teaching responsibilities, acting instead as a coordination node that helps organise, make visible and connect available opportunities. This approach would strengthen the professionalisation of the ecosystem and consolidate a national community of practice committed to improving public policies and social impact.

6.2. Resources

The development of social impact evaluation in Spain over the past decade has been accompanied by a growing production of methodological, technical and academic resources, developed by public institutions, universities, foundations and specialised consultancies. This section provides a synthesis of the main resources available between 2015 and 2025, including guides, tools, academic articles, databases and standardised indicators. It should be clarified from the outset that this is not an exhaustive inventory, but a representative selection of the most influential and structuring resources for social impact evaluation practice in Spain. Their review makes it possible to identify trends, methodological advances and gaps that will inform the design of the CECIS promoted by the SEDS.

Guides and manuals

Between 2015 and 2025, numerous guides have been published to standardise concepts, methodologies and evaluation processes. Some of the most relevant include:

- *Guía práctica para la medición y gestión del impacto. Asociación Española de Fundaciones (AEF) and European Venture Philanthropy Association (2015).* Spanish adaptation of the Practical Guide to Measuring and Managing Impact by EVPA. It offers a structured five step approach, setting objectives, measuring results, analysing impact, communicating and managing, and incorporates case examples from Spanish foundations. It was one of the first guides to introduce the notion of impact management beyond simple measurement in Spain, marking a turning point for the national philanthropy sector.
- *Midiendo el valor del impacto social empresarial: Guía de herramientas. Forética (2018).* A compilation of the main models used in the measurement of corporate social impact, with practical recommendations for sustainability and CSR departments. It includes business case studies in Spain and consolidates the reference framework for the private sector in social impact.
- *Guía de Innovación Social en el ámbito de los Servicios Sociales. Observatorio de la Realidad Social de Navarra (2021).* A conceptual framework for promoting innovation in social services, defining principles, design phases and mechanisms for institutional learning. It forms the theoretical basis for the subsequent guide by the same institution.
- *Guía para la evaluación de la innovación social. Observatorio de la Realidad Social de Navarra (2022).* It sets out a specific methodological system to measure social innovation in public and community programmes. It proposes five vectors, innovation, impact, systemic change,



participation and consistency, and ten elements under each. It includes the HELIX digital application, which translates these criteria into quantitative indicators.

- *Propuestas para la medición y gestión del impacto social, reports from the Think Tank of the Cátedra de Impacto Social, Universidad Pontificia Comillas (2021 to 2025)*. An annual series produced with partners such as Fundación Repsol, Open Value Foundation and Management Solutions. It includes the reports *En búsqueda de un lenguaje común* (2021), *Medir para decidir* (2022), *Gestionar para maximizar el impacto* (2024) and *Trabajo decente y medición de impacto* (2025). These documents have been essential in consolidating reference frameworks and consensus driven principles for measuring and managing social impact in Spain.

Tools

Alongside methodological frameworks, tools and platforms have emerged to support practical evaluation and the systematisation of results:

- *HELIX (Herramienta para la evaluación de innovación social)*, *Gobierno de Navarra, Observatorio de la Realidad Social* (2022)⁴. A web application developed as a complement to the corresponding guide. It enables project evaluation through a scoring system, comparison of interventions and automatic report generation. Its modular structure makes it applicable across scales, from local projects to regional programmes.
- *Portal para la Gestión del Impacto Social*, *Cátedra de Calidad Ciudad de Tudela, UNED* (2023)⁵. An online collaborative platform that brings together methodologies, glossaries, regulations, teaching materials and databases. It includes a manual for measuring university impact using SROI, practical cases and self-assessment tools, functioning as an open repository for academic and social sector entities.
- *Ivàlua guías prácticas (2015 to 2025)*⁶. The resource platform of *Ivàlua, Instituto Catalán de Evaluación de Políticas Públicas*, provides a wide array of instruments designed to support practitioners in the evaluation of public and social interventions. Its Resources section includes practical guides, step by step toolkits, an evaluation repository and a documentation centre.

Academic articles and publications

Academic production on social impact evaluation has expanded significantly since 2015, with major contributions from universities and research centres:

- *Evaluación de Impacto Social: teoría, método y casos*. *Antonio Aledo and José A. Domínguez Gómez* (*Universidad de Alicante, 2019*). Aimed at researchers, practitioners and university students, this publication offers a rigorous and applied introduction to the design, practice and teaching of social impact evaluation.
- *Luces y sombras de la medición del impacto social en España*. *Sophie Robin and Bernardo García* (*ESIMPACT and Fundación BBK, 2019*). This study provides a panoramic view of the state of social impact measurement and management in Spain. It maps key stakeholders, examines concepts and methodologies used, analyses motivations and describes the evolution of impact practices across sectors.

⁴ <https://innovacionsocialnavarra.com/en/nueva-guia-para-evaluar-iniciativas-de-innovacion-social>

⁵ <https://gestionimpacto.quned.es/>

⁶ <https://ivalua.cat/es/node/45>



- *Muller, P., and Fontrodona, J. (2020). Medición del impacto social: bases para un marco común de diálogo.* A contribution towards defining and fostering a common framework for dialogue in the field of social impact measurement.

Databases and data repositories

Statistical sources and information systems form the basic infrastructure for evaluating public policies and social programmes. The main resources include:

- *Observatorio Social de la Caixa. Barómetro.* An interactive data portal with multiple statistical series on inclusion, education, demography, housing and wellbeing. It integrates information from INE, Eurostat and various ministries. It is currently inactive.
- *Infancia en Datos. Ministerio de Derechos Sociales y Agenda 2030 and UNICEF España (2017 to present)*⁷. A web platform containing more than fifty indicators on child wellbeing, including poverty, education, health and protection. It aggregates official sources and offers dynamic visualisations. It is the main national statistical reference for evaluating child related policies.
- *Encuesta de Condiciones de Vida (ECV), Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE)*⁸. The national source for measuring poverty, exclusion and inequality. Its microdata enables the calculation of the AROPE index, the principal indicator of social inclusion within the EU. The ECV is the empirical basis for numerous evaluations in Spain and for regional strategies.
- *Indicadores FSE+ 2021 to 2027, UAFSE*⁹. A structured presentation of key data and metrics required for the monitoring and evaluation of cofinanced programmes. The portal presents values for output and result indicators for operations at both national and regional levels, as well as the reporting mechanisms that managing authorities must fulfil to ensure transparency and traceability.

The resources described constitute the technical and methodological repository of the Spanish social impact evaluation ecosystem. Their value lies not only in their diversity, but in their potential to support a shared learning system among public administrations, universities, businesses and social entities. The CECIS could play a decisive role in systematising, updating and disseminating these resources, promoting the creation of new open repositories, common standards and data interoperability.

⁷ <https://www.juventudeinfancia.gob.es/es/infancia/infancia-en-datos>

⁸ https://www.ine.es/prensa/ecv_prensa.htm

⁹ https://www.mites.gob.es/UAFSE/es/FSE21_27/indicadores/index.htm

7. Funding and promotion of impact evaluation

Funding is a key element for understanding the evolution and consolidation of social impact evaluation in Spain. It not only determines the scale and sustainability of evaluative practices, but also the degree of institutionalisation of an impact culture within public policies, public administration and the wider social innovation ecosystem. This section aims to **analyse the current landscape of funding linked to social impact evaluation**, with particular attention to the resources that support social innovation initiatives and the generation of evidence in public policies. The analysis is organised into **two complementary subsections: Sources of funding and Access to funding**. Both examine interrelated dimensions of the same phenomenon, who provides funding and through which mechanisms, and who is able to access those resources and under what conditions.

The **first subsection** identifies and describes the main sources of funding that support social impact evaluation in Spain and analyses the financial flows and investment patterns that characterise them. It presents a mapping of the financial actors that currently channel resources towards evaluation and social innovation. It examines the different funding mechanisms used and explores how these flows are distributed across sectors, methodologies and types of intervention, highlighting the dynamics that shape resource allocation.

The **second subsection** addresses access to funding, analysing the conditions, barriers and opportunities faced by entities seeking to integrate impact evaluation into their projects. This analysis provides insight into how the characteristics of calls for proposals, technical requirements, administrative timelines or capacity constraints influence the ability of different types of organisations to obtain resources for measuring and managing their impact. It also examines the support mechanisms that facilitate or incentivise the incorporation of evaluation. Taken together, this subsection places the discussion on funding within the context of accessibility and equity in the ecosystem, highlighting not only who holds resources, but who is effectively able to use them.

The **ultimate purpose of this section** is to contribute to understanding how evidence generation in social innovation is financed in Spain, recognising funding not only as a means to execute projects but as a strategic mechanism for guiding public and private decision making towards impact. From this perspective, strengthening funding mechanisms for impact evaluation is understood by the SEDS as an essential step towards consolidating the *CECIS*.



7.1. Sources of funding

This subsection examines the main sources of public funding allocated to social impact evaluation in Spain, with particular attention to resources originating from programmes and instruments of the national administration and the Autonomous Communities. It should be noted from the outset that this analysis is not intended to be exhaustive. The Spanish ecosystem of impact evaluation and measurement is made up of a wide diversity of actors, including ministries, Autonomous Communities, local authorities, universities, cooperation agencies and third sector organisations, among others, which continuously issue calls and contracts, both through public procurement and through smaller contracts or direct commissions. A complete mapping therefore lies beyond the scope of this report.

Given this dispersion and the limited availability of consolidated information, the analysis focuses exclusively on the main structured public funding flows and on those budget lines with stable multiannual planning and implementation mechanisms. The **focus is placed on public sector funding**, and particularly on funding directed at generating evidence and learning within the framework of social policies. It should also be highlighted that the analysis is not limited to the evaluation of social innovations, since very few calls in Spain explicitly specify this purpose. Consequently, the section addresses the broader landscape of funding for social impact evaluation, which includes both the evaluation of innovative projects and the evaluation of policies and programmes with social or environmental aims.

The information presented comes mainly from the *Observatorio de Evaluación de Políticas Públicas en España*, managed by the *Asociación para el Avance de la Evaluación de las Políticas Públicas*, which constitutes the most systematic and up to date source on the evolution of public evaluation activity in the country.

Funding from the UAFSE

Among the most relevant sources of public funding is the **UAFSE** which, within the framework of the *Plan General de Evaluación 2021 to 2027*, allocates a considerable proportion of programme technical assistance to the financing of intermediate, final and thematic evaluations, ensuring the availability of specifically assigned resources for this purpose until 2029. The specific budget for each evaluation is not detailed in the *Plan General de Evaluación*, since it is determined case by case once its technical fiche has been approved by the *Comité de Evaluación*. Nevertheless, the plan establishes that evaluations will be financed through the technical assistance lump sum of the FSE plus, guaranteeing stable funding. As an illustrative reference, the *Plan de Evaluación del FSE+ 2021 to 2027* of Catalonia, one of the Autonomous Communities with the most extensive evaluation activity, sets a budget of 540,000 euros for the evaluation of the regional programme. This provides an approximate indication of the national budgetary effort, bearing in mind that there are 19 regional programmes and several state programmes, all subject to evaluation exercises.

The **national evaluation calendar** foreseen by the UAFSE reflects a progressive and coordinated approach that combines thematic, transversal and impact focused exercises:

- In 2024, the evaluation of the use of REACT EU resources, aimed at assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of European support during post pandemic recovery.
- Between 2024 and 2025, the evaluation of the effectiveness and sustainability of actions under the 2014 to 2020 Operational Programmes (*Programas Operativos 2014-2020*) that continue into 2021 to 2027, in order to estimate their contribution to the overall objectives of the FSE and to the European Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth (*Estrategia Europea de Crecimiento Inteligente, Sostenible e Integrador*).

- The structured survey of the *Programa de Privación Material* (2024 to 2025), followed by a second survey between 2027 and 2028, focusing on the living conditions and access to basic goods of beneficiaries.
- The midterm review for assessing progress, results and the adequacy of interventions across all programmes, both state and regional.
- In 2027, the evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of measures implemented under the *Garantía Infantil*, and between 2027 and 2028, the evaluation of social inclusion measures under the FSE plus programmes and their relevance to the specific inclusion objectives.
- In 2028, the global evaluation of employment related measures, including youth employment, and between 2028 and 2029, an individual evaluation for each programme to determine its impact.

Main funding flows and actors in social impact evaluation (2020 to 2025)

According to the annual reports of the *Observatorio de Evaluación de Políticas Públicas*, public funding directed at social impact evaluation showed an upward, albeit irregular, trend between 2020 and 2025. This period is characterised by **three major developments**: sustained growth in the number of public contracts related to evaluation, a greater diversity of contracting authorities and an increase in the average value of public tenders.

During **2020 and 2021**, marked by the COVID 19 pandemic, the evaluation of public policies experienced moderate growth driven by the need to measure the impact of emergency and recovery measures. The *Observatorio* reports that, during this period, most contracts were issued by ministries, Autonomous Communities and local authorities in the fields of social services, health and employment, largely financed through European recovery funds. Methodologically, funding was concentrated in ex post evaluations and rapid reviews, more geared towards monitoring and control than towards deep impact analysis. During **2022 and 2023**, the public evaluation market became more dynamic and diversified, with the number and thematic variety of calls reaching historic highs. In particular, the role of regional and local administrations increased significantly, accounting for more than half of all tenders registered in 2023, and mixed funding sources expanded through the combination of national and European funds, especially the ESF+ and the FEDER.

The year 2024 represented a turning point for public policy evaluation in Spain, with a considerable increase in both the number of calls and the financial resources allocated. This growth is largely explained by the inflow of Next Generation EU funds, which made it possible to finance more evaluations with higher budgets. However, *Ley 27/2022*, designed to institutionalise evaluation within public administration, has not yet translated into a sustained increase in the volume of commissioned evaluations, indicating ongoing challenges in practical implementation and operational consolidation. The *Observatorio* notes a stabilisation in the number of procedures, although with greater technical complexity and higher budgets.

In the **first half of 2025**, the *Observatorio* reports that most contracted evaluations were final evaluations (n=13), more than double the number of intermediate evaluations (n=6). There remains a persistent scarcity of ex ante evaluations, a gap already highlighted in previous years, which indicates that the predesign phase of public policies continues to be the least addressed in evaluative terms, hindering the use of robust counterfactuals. In methodological terms, fifteen of the evaluations registered were integral evaluations, covering multiple assessment criteria such as effectiveness, efficiency, impact or quality, and analysing the different phases of the logical intervention framework. In contrast, six evaluations adopted a more limited scope, focused on a single criterion such as impact or transparency. The 2025 data confirm that, despite institutional and regulatory advances, public policy evaluation has not yet fully consolidated in Spain. The

number of evaluations remains low relative to the large number of plans, strategies and programmes that should incorporate evaluative processes before, during and after implementation.

In terms of **actors**, the main funders identified are national and regional public administrations, such as *Gobierno Vasco, Generalitat de Cataluña, Junta de Andalucía, Comunidad de Madrid and the Administración General del Estado*, including its dependent agencies, bodies and public enterprises. Evaluation at local administration level remains limited. They are followed by European bodies and instrumental entities linked to the third sector and the social economy. The *Observatorio* also highlights the role of specialised consultancies and research centres which, although not direct funders, play an essential role as implementing agents and disseminators of evaluative knowledge. The *Observatorio* further notes that structural shortcomings affect all three levels of administration, state, regional and local, and nearly all areas of public policy. According to the *Observatorio*, this situation reflects an evaluative culture that remains incipient in many directorates, as well as the absence of clear institutional incentives to promote evaluation. As a result, evaluative practice is often activated only when there is a legal or regulatory obligation, as is the case for programmes subject to EU regulations.

Types of funded projects and emerging patterns

The longitudinal analysis conducted by the *Observatorio* makes it possible to identify the sectors, types of evaluation and methodological patterns that have concentrated public funding for impact evaluation during the period 2020 to 2025.

The **sectors** with the highest volume of evaluative investment have been social inclusion, employment, education, sustainability, international cooperation and health, followed by emerging areas such as ecological transition. In terms of **evaluation types**, there is a progressive shift from process evaluations towards results-based evaluations focused on outputs. The *Observatorio* also identifies a significant increase in the use of mixed methodologies combining quantitative and qualitative techniques, as well as growing interest in participatory evaluation and in the integration of gender perspective and environmental sustainability. Counterfactual evaluations remain a minority due to their complexity and cost, but they have become more established in programmes cofinanced by the FSE plus, particularly in the fields of employment and inclusion.

The period also shows **budgetary fragmentation**. Most evaluations are financed through small scale contracts or minor tenders below 75,000 euros, which limits the feasibility of conducting longitudinal or comparative studies. This pattern coexists with a smaller number of high budgets, nationwide evaluations, particularly those driven by ministries or European funds, which absorb a large share of the available resources. The *Observatorio* also notes that funding tends to prioritise **ex post and intermediate evaluations** focused on results and accountability, over ex ante counterfactual evaluations.

In summary, between 2020 and 2025 public funding for social impact evaluation in Spain evolved from a fragmented and reactive model towards a more consolidated, diversified and results oriented ecosystem. According to the *Observatorio*, the maturity achieved over these five years reflects a growing internalisation of evaluative culture within the public sector, although challenges remain in relation to budget stability, strategic planning and technical capacity to undertake evaluations of greater complexity and territorial scope.

7.2. Access to financing

This section analyses **access to public financing for social impact evaluation in Spain**, understanding that the objective is not to exhaustively cover all available sources, but rather to describe the main conditions, actors and barriers that determine the possibility of financing and carrying out impact evaluations. The information is drawn mainly from the *Observatorio de Evaluación de Políticas Públicas*, complemented with data from national and regional evaluation plans and insights from actors in the ecosystem.

As noted earlier, the Spanish impact evaluation ecosystem is composed of a wide variety of actors, both public and private, that launch calls and procurements on an ongoing basis through competitive procedures, minor contracts or direct awards. Given the fragmentation of private and philanthropic initiatives and the lack of systematised information on their calls and budgets, this **exercise focuses exclusively on public financing** flows that are publicly accessible through the *Plataforma de Contratación del Estado*. Likewise, since tenders rarely specify whether the evaluations relate explicitly to social innovation projects, this analysis addresses the general landscape of social impact evaluation, including both social innovations and other policies with social or environmental objectives.

General overview of access to public financing for evaluation

Access to financing for social impact evaluation in Spain has progressed in recent years, although it continues to be characterised by strong institutional fragmentation, territorial inequality and limited budget predictability. According to data from the *Observatorio*, between 2020 and 2025 there is an upward trend in the number of tenders and in the funding allocated to evaluation. However, this growth remains insufficient in relation to the volume of active policies in the country.

During the **2020 to 2021 biennium**, Spanish public administrations tendered a total of 98 impact evaluations, with an approximate budget of 8 million euros, equivalent to an average of 89,380 euros per evaluation, although most budgets were below 60,000 euros. The *Administración General del Estado* accounted for 29 evaluations with 3.89 million euros, the autonomous communities for 45 evaluations with 3.19 million euros and local authorities for only 16 evaluations with 0.97 million euros. The most frequently evaluated policies were employment, equality, social inclusion and education, while most contracts gave greater weight to price than to technical quality: on average, 50 percent of the total score corresponded to the economic offer.

In **2023**, only 51 evaluations were tendered, with a total budget of 5.2 million euros. Regional administrations, in particular *Cataluña, Madrid, Andalucía and País Vasco*, led the contracting process, but the market remained highly concentrated. Of the 84 companies that participated, only 28 were awarded contracts. Most tenders corresponded to final evaluations, with very limited presence of *ex ante* evaluations, thus reiterating the system's continued focus on accountability rather than learning. In **2024**, administrations tendered 78 evaluations, an increase of 52.9 percent compared with 2023, with a total budget of 8.15 million euros, a rise of 154.6 percent. This increase was largely driven by the boost from Next Generation EU funds, which made it possible to finance evaluations of greater scale and methodological complexity. Six evaluations exceeded 300,000 euros, accounting for 43 percent of the total budget.

Finally, during the **first half of 2025**, available data show a slight contraction. A total of 21 evaluations were tendered for 2.53 million euros, of which 13 corresponded to autonomous communities with 1.83 million euros, 7 to the *Administración General del Estado* with 0.66 million euros and none to local corporations. The most frequently evaluated policy areas were innovation with five evaluations and health with three,



followed by smaller numbers in employment, social services and housing. Most evaluations were final evaluations with only one *ex ante* evaluation, confirming that evaluation in Spain continues to be focused on the post implementation phase. Across the board the data from the *Observatorio* show that evaluation has not yet been fully institutionalised. Processes still depend largely on regulatory mandates or European funding, and total investment remains low relative to the number of plans and programmes that should incorporate evaluation in their various phases, before, during and after implementation.

Market structure and absorption capacity

Limited access to financing is partly explained by the **structure of the evaluation market, which is characterised by its small size and low level of specialisation**. According to the *Observatorio*, the Spanish evaluation market continues to be an emerging, fragmented and small-scale ecosystem, where the supply of specialised services is growing gradually but without consolidating a stable fabric. Between 2020 and 2025, the number of entities participating in evaluation tenders increased, but most of them are microenterprises and small consultancies with fewer than 50 employees, reflecting a highly atomised sector dependent on occasional contracts. For instance, in 2023, 84 companies participated in policy evaluation tenders, but only 28 were awarded contracts, illustrating intense competition for a small market. On average, the awarded contracts represent less than 20 percent of the annual turnover of these companies, making evaluation a complementary rather than strategic activity for most, except for a few specialised consultancies.

Between 2020 and 2025 public procurement of evaluations in Spain also shows **significant territorial concentration**, reflecting asymmetries in institutional capacities and evaluation culture across autonomous communities. According to the *Observatorio*, *Cataluña* and *the Comunidad de Madrid* have consistently been the regions with the highest number of tenders and the largest budgets, followed at some distance by *Andalucía* and *País Vasco*, which maintain a continuous evaluation trajectory in areas such as employment, innovation, social services and training. In these territories, more stable technical structures can be observed, such as evaluation units or offices, as well as more systematic use of European funds to finance impact studies.

At the opposite end, several regions show minimal or no evaluative activity or rely on evaluations promoted by the *Administración General del Estado*. These include *Cantabria*, *Extremadura*, *La Rioja*, *Murcia*, *Navarra* and *Canarias* among others, where the number of tenders is minimal or non-existent throughout the period analysed. Other regions, such as *Aragón*, *Galicia*, *Castilla y León*, *Castilla La Mancha* and *Comunidad Valenciana*, show intermittent activity, with occasional low value tenders. Overall, the data reveal that more than 60 percent of the evaluations tendered in the country between 2020 and 2025 are concentrated in four autonomous communities, *Cataluña*, *Madrid*, *Andalucía* and *País Vasco*, highlighting a persistent **territorial gap** in access to public financing for social impact evaluation.

Barriers to access, recent trends and opportunities

Based on the above diagnosis, the *Observatorio* identifies several **structural barriers** that restrict equitable access to financing in Spain.

- First, **budgetary precariousness and the absence of multiannual planning**, resulting from ad hoc calls and limited budgets, often below 100,000 euros, prevent the consolidation of stable teams and the accumulation of institutional knowledge.

- Second, **administrative fragmentation and a lack of intergovernmental coordination**, stemming from the high degree of decentralisation in the public procurement system. Ministries, autonomous communities and local entities operate autonomously, creating overlaps, gaps and territorial inequalities. While some regions such as *Cataluña, Madrid or País Vasco* show significant progress, others have barely developed evaluative structures.
- Third, **award criteria centred on price**, where the economic component usually exceeds 50 percent of the total score, and in 9 percent of tenders is the only criterion. This approach discourages methodologically robust proposals, fosters competition based solely on cost and limits the possibility of applying complex or long-term methodologies.
- Fourth, **bureaucratic burden and administrative complexity**, which restrict the participation of small consultancies, universities and third sector organisations. Solvency requirements and procurement procedures limit the diversity of actors and inhibit methodological innovation.
- Fifth, **inequality in institutional and technical capacities**, reflected in significant differences across administrations in terms of resources, training and political backing. Some autonomous communities have specialised technical units, while others lack stable structures to integrate evaluation into the policy cycle.

These **limitations** mean that evaluative practice remains reactive and dependent on European funding rather than an embedded function of public management. Despite these constraints, recent years show signs of positive change. The creation of technical evaluation offices in several autonomous communities, such as *Madrid and Cataluña*, the availability of regional plans with specific budgets and greater collaboration with universities and research centres illustrate progress towards a more professionalised ecosystem. Likewise, the increase in evaluations cofinanced by the ESF+ is promoting the dissemination of methodological standards and the use of common indicators, particularly in employment, inclusion and education. The *Observatorio* also notes a gradual rise in mixed and intermediate evaluations, suggesting an emerging shift towards learning processes and continuous improvement.

The panorama described highlights the need to strengthen institutional and financial capacities for evaluation in Spain, and that the CECIS will have to play a key role in making financing for social impact evaluation more accessible and diverse, helping move towards a system in which evaluation is no longer a formal requirement but a structural learning tool. In this context, the incorporation of other potential sources of financing, including initiatives such as SpainNAB, becomes particularly relevant, as does the need to articulate a model that combines public, philanthropic and impact investment resources. The CECIS could also act as a connector between these sources, guiding organisations on the available alternatives and facilitating their access to suitable financing mechanisms. Furthermore, a new model based on the logic of experimentation portfolios would require combining different financing modalities throughout the project life cycle, understanding that each instrument may be more appropriate at different stages and thereby contributing to a more systemic and adaptive vision of how evaluation is financed.

8. Recommendations and roadmap

In light of the analysis developed throughout the report, the progress achieved, the persistent gaps and the opportunities for consolidating a national results-oriented evaluation system aligned with European standards in social innovation and evidence become clearly apparent. Building on this basis, a synthesis of the main lessons and a proposed strategic roadmap for Spain are presented to position social impact evaluation as a structural component of the formulation and review of public policies.

Reflections on the systematic incorporation of impact evaluation into public policy design in Spain

The report shows that impact evaluation in Spain continues to be intermittent, fragmented and, in many cases, driven by external requirements rather than by an internal culture oriented towards learning. This diagnosis contrasts with an increasingly favourable European and national regulatory context for the evaluation of public policies, placing the country before a strategic opportunity to consolidate a solid and stable evaluative system.

At the same time, the ecosystem has accumulated methodologies, tools and approaches, yet their adoption remains uneven across actors and territories. Despite the progress made by public administrations, universities, consultancies, foundations, social entities and impact investors in developing more systematic evaluative practices, the sector still requires greater conceptual clarity, methodological alignment and institutional coordination. The expansion of training programmes and financing for evaluation confirms this dynamism, though its reach remains insufficient in relation to the growing demand and the heterogeneity of existing capacities.

Taken together, these elements indicate that Spain finds itself before a window of opportunity to evolve towards a more structured, professionalised and collaborative model of social impact evaluation in the field of social innovation. The consolidation of a shared language and conceptual clarity, together with the identification of actors and practices, provide the foundations for an institutional architecture that incorporates evaluation as part of the ordinary functioning of public policies.

Key lessons, challenges and next steps for the Spanish social impact evaluation ecosystem

The analysis developed throughout the report makes it possible to identify both the key lessons of the Spanish social impact evaluation ecosystem and the challenges that still limit its consolidation. At the same time, these elements justify a set of **strategic lines of action**, which should not be understood as sequential steps but as interrelated and parallel dimensions that must be addressed simultaneously to strengthen the national ecosystem.

Line 1. Integrate evaluation from the design phase of public policies

The first relevant lesson is the absence of a common language and shared definitions, which hinders interoperability, comparability and the accumulation of evidence. The coexistence of multiple concepts of impact, measurement and evaluation creates barriers that directly affect policy and project formulation. This challenge justifies the first strategic line: incorporate evaluation from the design phase, ensuring clear theories of change, relevant indicators and consistent monitoring systems. Addressing this dimension from the outset will allow interventions to be built on shared conceptual foundations, reducing ambiguities and



facilitating future comparability of results. This early integration is key for evaluation in Spain to cease being an ex-post exercise and become a structural component of public policy.

Line 2. Shift towards portfolios of experimentation oriented to complex social challenges

The Spanish ecosystem shows uneven capacities across territories, sectors and institutions, as well as evaluative practices that depend heavily on isolated initiatives and limited resources. This fragmentation makes it difficult to address social challenges that, due to their systemic nature, require multiple and simultaneous interventions. This lesson underpins the second strategic line: adopt models based on experimentation portfolios capable of integrating different initiatives around a shared challenge and enabling comparisons, new interactions and connections, cumulative learning and cross cutting evidence. The strength of such portfolios lies in their capacity to observe how different solutions interact in real contexts and to identify patterns, trajectories and mechanisms of change that cannot be captured through evaluations of isolated projects.

Line 3. Strengthen interinstitutional cooperation to build a coherent ecosystem

The diagnosis reveals a plural ecosystem with relevant actors, but lacking structural coordination and stable governance mechanisms, particularly between administrations at different levels. Territorial gaps also persist due to uneven availability of technical evaluation units, financing and political commitment. This situation justifies a third strategic line: strengthen interinstitutional cooperation by articulating mechanisms to share standards, methodologies, data and learning. This cooperation must involve public administrations, universities, social entities, consultancies and impact investors, with the aim of building a community of practice that facilitates collaboration, the exchange of good practices and reduces the current fragmentation.

Line 4. Develop hybrid and sustainable financing models

Another central lesson is that financing for evaluation in Spain remains fragmented and unpredictable, limiting the possibility of conducting longitudinal, rigorous evaluations based on advanced methodologies. The dependence on small contracts or ad hoc calls that do not always foresee funding for evaluation creates discontinuities that weaken the country's evaluative capacity. This challenge supports the fourth strategic line: promote hybrid financing models that combine public instruments, European funds, philanthropic resources and impact investment mechanisms. This approach would enable evaluations to be sustained throughout the entire policy cycle, ensuring continuity, quality and the capacity to generate robust evidence.

Line 5. Promote an interoperable digital ecosystem that improves traceability and analysis

Across the ecosystem, the country does not yet fully leverage interoperable digital systems, data automation or advanced analytical tools, particularly within public administrations and third sector organisations which generally have low levels of digital maturity. This situation limits the quality, efficiency and usefulness of evaluative practice. This lesson gives rise to the fifth strategic line: consolidate a digital ecosystem for evaluation that allows processes to be automated, diverse data sources to be integrated and the use of advanced analytical tools, including artificial intelligence, to be strengthened. This digital dimension should be considered a key enabler for increasing comparability, accessibility and analytical precision.

The strategic role of the CECIS in consolidating the Spanish social impact evaluation system

The CECIS in Spain will be a key factor in bringing coherence, stability and ambition to the Spanish social impact evaluation ecosystem. Its central role will be to structure a system that is currently fragmented, providing it with a shared conceptual framework, common methodologies and permanent mechanisms of collaboration between the actors involved.

First, the CECIS will need to **lead the definition of conceptual and methodological standards that can overcome the current diversity of approaches and facilitate data interoperability, comparability of results and the accumulation of evidence**. This requires building a shared language and promoting its adoption across public administrations, academia and social entities. Second, the Centre will need to **promote the development of experimentation portfolios oriented towards complex and nationally relevant social challenges**, supporting institutions in their design, monitoring and evaluation. These portfolios will make it possible to observe collective contributions, compare interventions and generate learning that can directly inform public policy decisions.

Third, the CECIS will need to **act as an articulator of the ecosystem, strengthening interinstitutional cooperation and facilitating the exchange of knowledge, data and experiences** between administrations, universities, social organisations and impact investors. This role is essential to reduce the current fragmentation in Spain and foster a robust and well-connected community of practice. In addition, the Centre must **contribute to the development of hybrid and sustainable financing models that combine public resources, European funds, philanthropic contributions and impact investment mechanisms**. This function will ensure more continuous, rigorous and learning oriented evaluations, avoiding dependence on unstable budgetary cycles. Finally, the CECIS will need to **lead the digitalisation of social impact evaluation by promoting interoperable tools and strengthening the digital capacities of the ecosystem**.

Taken together, the CECIS in Spain is poised to become a structuring and transformative actor. Its mission will be to enable the institutional, methodological, financial and technological conditions necessary for social impact evaluation to become a stable, useful and strategic practice in the design and improvement of public policies in the country.

9. Annexes

Annex 1. Glossary of terms

- BIA. B Impact Assessment.
- BIRDS. Boosting Initiatives and Resources to Develop Social Innovation.
- CECIS. Centro de Competencias en Innovación Social.
- Deadweight. Portion of the impact that would occur without the intervention.
- Displacement. Shift in effects generated by an intervention.
- DNSH. Do No Significant Harm.
- Drop off. Progressive reduction of impact over time.
- EVPA. European Venture Philanthropy Association.
- FSE+. Fondo Social Europeo Plus.
- IMPACTA. Digital measurement tool based on SROI.
- IMP. Impact Management Project.
- IMSERSO. Instituto de Mayores y Servicios Sociales.
- LOPIVI. Ley Orgánica de Protección Integral a la Infancia y la Adolescencia frente a la Violencia.
- NCC-IS. National Competence Centres for Social Innovation.
- NLP. Natural Language Processing.
- ODS. Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible.
- PRTR. Plan de Recuperación, Transformación y Resiliencia.
- PSM. Propensity Score Matching.
- QCA. Qualitative Comparative Analysis.
- RD 1101/2021. Real Decreto 1101/2021.
- RSS. Really Simple Syndication.
- SBIC. Sociedades de Beneficio e Interés Común.
- SEE. Sociedad Española de Evaluación de Políticas Públicas.
- SEDS. Secretaría de Estado de Derechos Sociales.
- SROI. Social Return on Investment.
- UAFSE. Unidad Administradora del Fondo Social Europeo.

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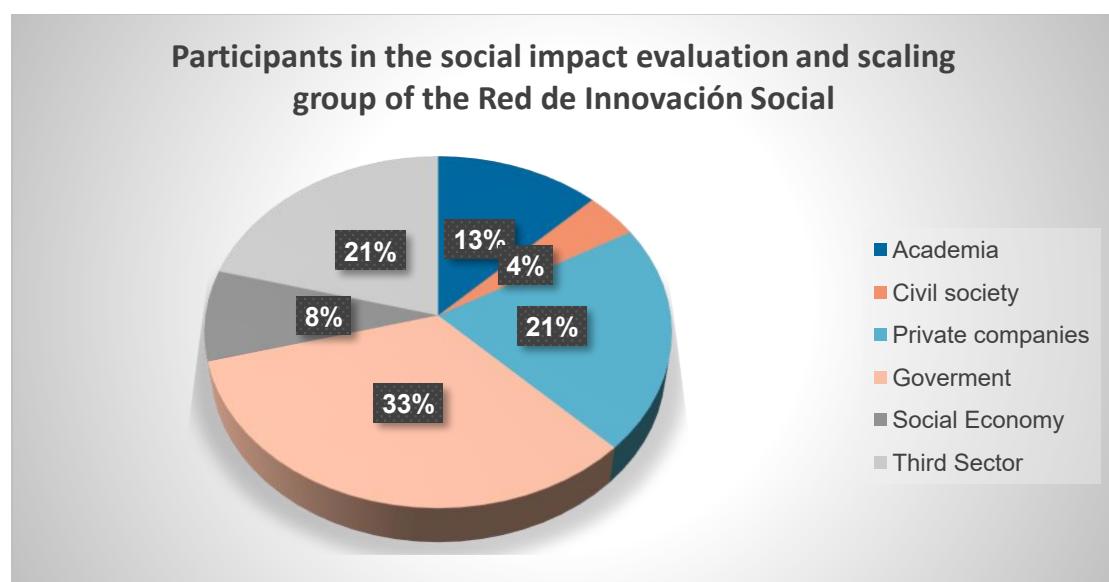
Annex 3. Participants in the social impact evaluation and scaling group of the *Red de Innovación Social*

Composition of the group of experts that forms part of the working group on social impact evaluation and scaling of the *Red de Innovación Social*:

Both during the consultation process for the preparation of this report and throughout the different activities included in the work package on social impact evaluation and scaling of the Proyecto BIRDS, we counted on the participation of various experts from:

- State and regional public administration: *Ministerio de Inclusión, Seguridad Social y Migraciones, Ministerio de Trabajo y Economía Social, Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación, Instituto de Mayores y Servicios Sociales (IMSERSO), Centro para el Desarrollo Tecnológico Industrial (CDTI), Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC), Fundación CSAI, Nasertic (Gobierno de Navarra)*.
- Private sector companies specialised in consultancy and technical support: *Red2Red, Urbegi, Fresno, Abreparéntesis*.
- Third sector: *Provivienda, Acción contra el Hambre, Hogar Sí, Icong*.
- Academia: *Cátedra de Impacto Social de la Universidad Pontificia Comillas, Centro de Documentación sobre Servicios Sociales y Política Social (SIIS)*.
- Social economy: *Grupo Tangente, Andaira*.
- Civil society: independent experts.

In total, this group of experts is composed of 24 individuals. The following chart shows their distribution.





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