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**Active
citizens** fund



Executive Summary

EVALUATION STUDY OF THE RESULTS AND IMPACT

**ACTIVE CITIZENS
PROGRAMME**



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EVALUATION STUDY OF THE RESULTS AND IMPACT

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2. Methodology of the evaluation

The research strategy has been based on a Theory-Based Evaluation (TBE), conceived through a participated (re) construction of the Programme’s rationale (Theory of Change – ToC), identifying the processes that oriented the selection of the activities and the transformation process to achieve the global objectives of the ACP.

THE INITIAL CONTEXT OF ONG’S, DEMOCRATIC VALUES, CITIZENSHIP AND THE PARTICIPATION OF CITIZENS, HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUALITY

MECHANISMS

Activities

Demand formation

→ Outputs

How to achieve the quality of projects

→ Results

How to enlarge temporally and in terms of effects the results of the ACP

Global Purpose

Complementarity and synergies with other policy instruments

CRITICAL FACTORS



The intervention context

The evaluation work began with some meeting interactions between the evaluation team (ET) and the management bodies (MB) and technical staff of the ACP to build the ToC associated to the Programme. The image reproduced in the next page presents a synthesis of the result of that process.

1. Object and objectives of the evaluation

The evaluation of the Active Citizens Programme (ACP) has been focused on its four-intervention priority Outcome(s) – Outcome 1: Strengthened democratic culture and civic awareness; Outcome 2: Increased support for human rights; Outcome 3: Vulnerable groups are empowered; and Outcome 4: Enhanced capacity and sustainability of civil society. The evaluation covered the period between 9 July 2018 and 30 June 2024, although considering data observed after that period, if made available during the evaluation work and related to the evaluation object. This period integrated, in practical terms, more than one year of implementation during the pandemics. The evaluation work has been conceived as a results and impacts evaluation, assuming the consequent methodological implications, that are developed in the next chapter of this ES.

The evaluation objectives were the following:

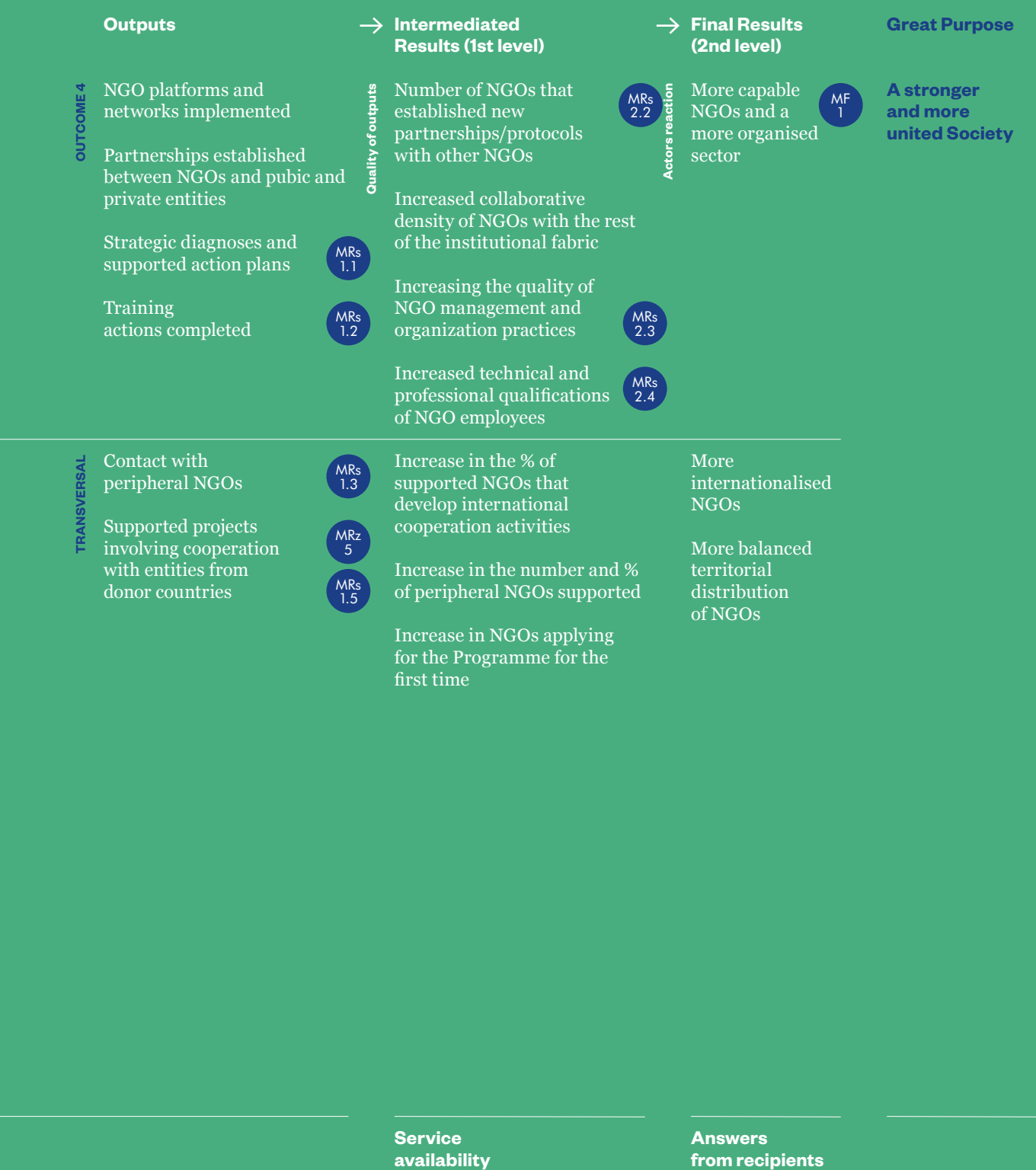
- a. “To know and understand the results achieved in comparison with the objectives contracted with the EEA Grants in the *Programme Implementation Agreement*.
- b. To measure the effective and anticipated impacts of the ACP support on the civil society organisations (CSO) and on the targeted groups of the projects.
- c. To identify the strengths and weaknesses of the Programme’s implementation.
- d. To compare approaches and results with other national programmes with similar objectives.
- e. To identify good practices and success cases.
- f. To design recommendations about aspects to improve in future interventions/ programmes targeted at empowering the CSO.

The ACP objectives are in line with the assessment made about the Portuguese society, based not only in national studies, but also on those published by international institutions. The context that results from those studies point out to a weak development of active citizenship and participation conditions in the country and to the already known and related weakness of governance processes not only at national level, but also at territorial and local levels.



Problems	Means	Processes Programme	→	Activities	→
Fragmentation of civil society	General Regulation	Specific support regulations	Preconditions	Promoting citizen participation in civis activities	Operational factors
Low civic participation of citizens	Management and technical structures: logistical and technological means; governance model	Management system (information system, administrative procedures, monitoring, evaluation...)		Promotion af volunteering	
Discrimination, LGBTQI+, migrants				Training actions for citizenship	
Gender inequality and domestic violence	Resources Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation	Design and launch of calls (Eligibility, Forms of support, Target groups, Selection criteria)		Monitoring of public policies by NGOs	
High material deprivation of vulnerable groups	Resources Bissaya Barreto Foundation		MRz 1	Human Rights Advocacy	OUTCOME 2
Particular vulnerably of the ROMA community and younger people	Financing for EEA Grants projects	Demand activation actions (communication strategy)	MRz 2	Human Rights Awareness	
	Bilateral Cooperation Financing	Analysis and selection of operations to be supported	MRz 3	Training professionals in HR	
		Monitoring and evaluation of Interventions		Strengthening youth involvement HR	
		Processing financial support and monitoring the physical and financial execution of operations	MRz 4	Empower vulnerable groups economicaly and socially	OUTCOME 3
				Adopt participatory methods and innovative solutions in response to the needs of vulnerable groups	
				Projects for the involvement and participation of young people at risk of exclusion	
				Support for victims and their rehabilitation	

Answers from beneficiary entities



Problems

Means

**Processes
Programme**



Activities



Preconditions

OUTCOME 4

Design and implementation of
NGO platforms and networks

Partnerships between NGOs
and public and private entities

Training in management and
organization of NGOs

Training for
professionalization of NGOs

Operational factors

TRANSVERSAL

Specific support for
peripheral NGOs

Programme Roadshows

Visits to donor countries;
matchmaking events

**Answers from
beneficiary entities**

To respond to the methodological challenges, the evaluation applied a multi-method approach, combining the analysis of information systems, extensive desk-research followed by field work through interviews, focus groups and case studies and one online survey.



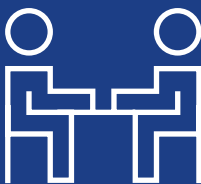
Desk research

In-depth analysis of data concerning projects and the Programme



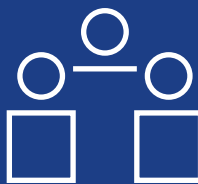
Case studies

10 case studies have been elaborated, involving beneficiaries, partners and in some cases targeted publics



Interviews

28 interviews to institutions leading approved projects, the ACP MB and the Embassy of Norway



Focus group

With nine experts in Citizenship and Human Rights



Inquiry process

Online survey of 119 promoters that presented applications to the ACP



MECHANISMS
Demand Formation

MRz1. The clarity and objectivity of the calls induces the formation of desired demand

MRz2. Communication aimed at relevant target audiences complements the demand induction Effect

MRz3. Designing actions that correspond to real problems and needs of NGOs and that are not covered by other policy instruments induces demand

MRz4. The Programme reveals the ability to direct solvent and reactive demand to the support provided

MRz5. The NGOs involved reveal the ability to choose and mobilize proactive partners

MECHANISMS
Promotion of project quality

MRs1.1. The quality and effectiveness of training encourages more NGOs to present higher quality projects

MRs1.2. Training promotes the design of more relevant and coherent projects

MRs1.3. The positive discrimination of institutionally less dense territories makes it possible to support more relevant projects in this context

MRs1.4. Training and support for organizational development increase the potential of NGOs for human rights advocacy

MRs1.5. Sharing experience and collectively building problems and solutions with other organizations in bilateral cooperation induces effects of empowerment and innovation

MECHANISMS
Extension of results

MRs2.1. Mass Effect and relative weight of NGOs supported

MRs2.2. The articulation/complementarity with the support to social innovation (IPIS) and other instruments extends the effects of the ACP

MRs2.3. The divulgation and communication actions focused on positive results and best practices extend the ACP intervention to other NGOs

MRs2.4. The increase of the collaborative density within the NGO ecosystem favours the transfer of knowledge and effects of contagion/dissemination among NGOs

MRs2.5. The core themes of the ACP acquire higher political notoriety

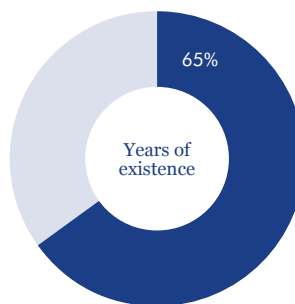
MECHANISMS
Complementarity and synergies

MF1. The NGO ecosystem focused on the ACP's issues consolidates itself

MF2. The issues of citizenship, civic and democratic culture and advocacy of human rights consolidate their position in the mainstream of public policies through programmes and policies dedicated to them.

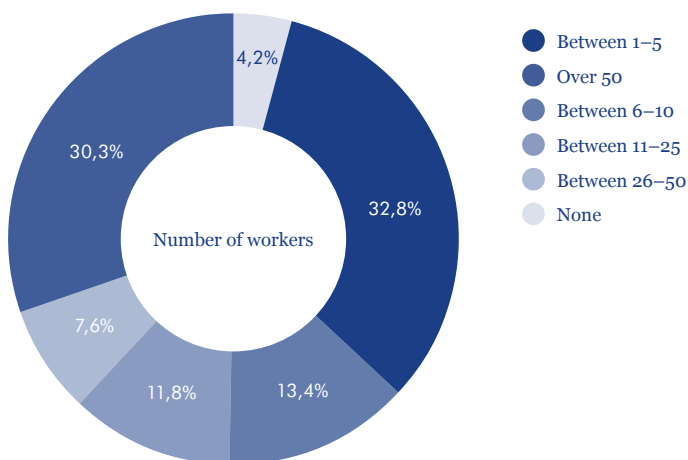
MF3. The growing qualification of the Portuguese society, mainly concerning the qualification of younger women, strengthens its cohesion

NGO type



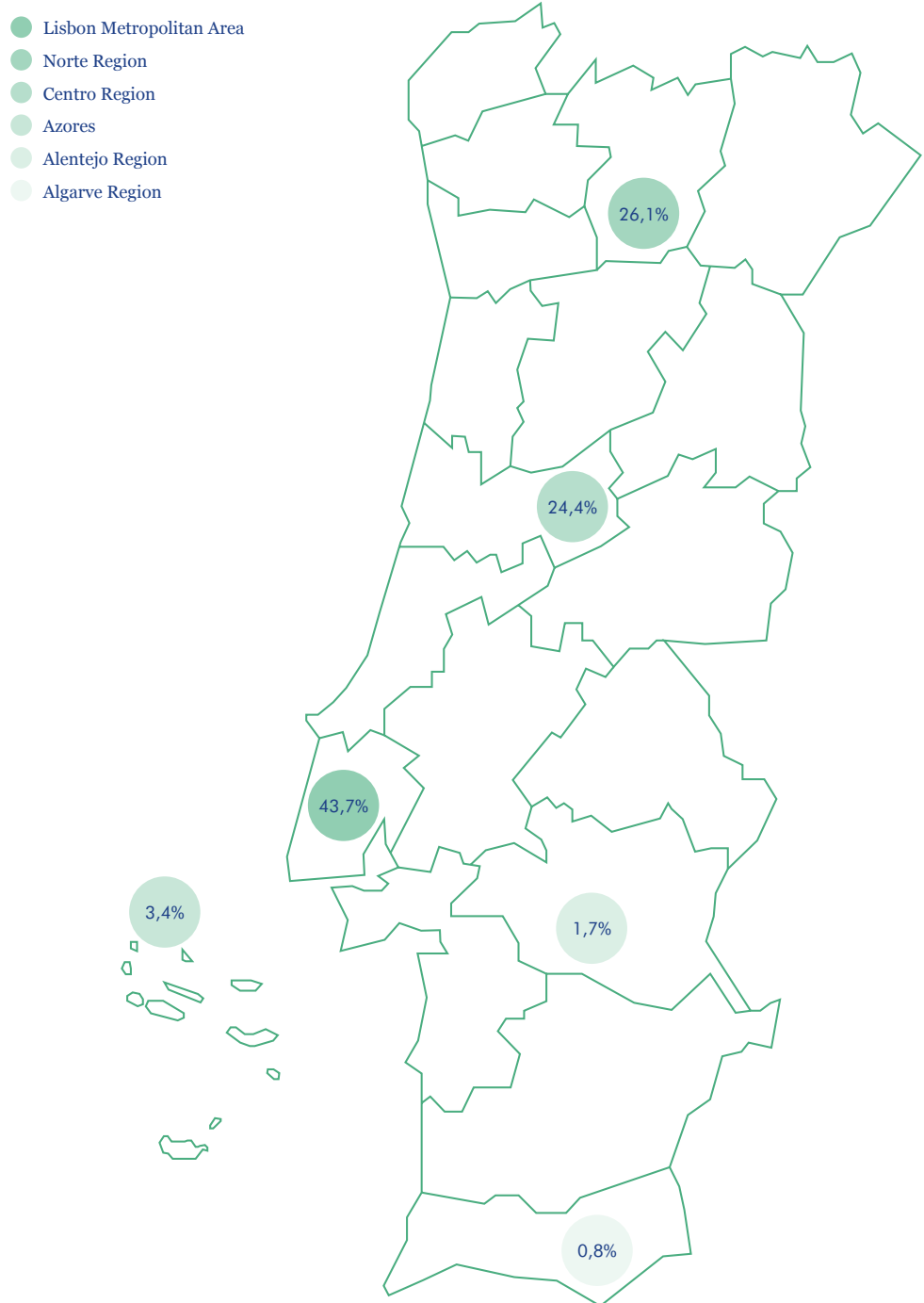
65% of the institutions that responded to the survey have more than 15 years of existence

Universe of beneficiaries



The ACP distinguished itself by strengthening the intervention of less experimented organisations in projects, although presenting already some years of experience in achieving social responses – particularly those in territories less covered by the Programme. The distinctive ACP’s approach relatively to other funding instruments has been broadly recognised by the promoters, who identified the Programme as a unique opportunity to be supported. Although some NGOs declared to have experience in submitting projects to programmes and initiatives such as the OP SIE – Social Inclusion and Employment, Portugal Social Innovation, PT 2020, PRR – Plan of Recovery and Resilience, Healthy Neighborhoods or Bip/Zip, among others, most of them stressed the links with the EEA Grants, mentioning previous projects supported within the framework of the Active Citizenship Programme or through other calls of ACP. When the EEA Grants were not the first funding source, several smaller and less experimented organisations mentioned the support of private foundations, like for example the Prizes BPI/ La Caixa Foundation.

3. Brief characterisation of the universe of entities that benefitted from the programme



3. To what extent did the “open call for applications” model allow for the recognition, dissemination and replication of good projects and good practices, reinforcing the sustainability and quality of organisations?

4. Reinforcement of bilateral relationships

1. What contributions can be attributed to the Programme regarding the visibility and notoriety of EEA Grants? To what extent is the support from EEA Grants known to Portuguese Civil Society organisations? To what extent are the measures to publicise the support by the projects and the Programme's communication plan considered effective? Which measures had the greatest impact?
2. What effective gains in terms of knowledge and implementation of new practices can be attributed to the Programme as a result of bilateral cooperation between beneficiary organisations and donor countries?
3. To what extent can the results achieved be considered sustainable and promote lasting connections in the future, including the implementation of joint projects?

5. Social impact

1. What impact can be inferred from the implementation of the Programme in promoting democracy and democratic values and changing political culture and participation? To what extent did the Programme impact the participation of citizens in civic activities in Portugal, namely the volunteering rate and the number of people involved in petitions?
2. What impact can be inferred from the implementation of the Programme in the defence and recognition of Human Rights and the promotion of equality?
3. What impact can be inferred from the implementation of the Programme in promoting social justice and the inclusion, training and empowerment of vulnerable groups?
4. To what extent has the Programme stimulated broader social, environmental or economic effects on the well-being, Human Rights, equality or environment of people, beyond its direct beneficiaries?

6. Quality of the management system

1. Was the Programme's management, monitoring and control system appropriate? To what extent was the role and support given by the Programme Management Unit to candidates and project promoters adequate? To what extent are the Programme's regulatory provisions, support manuals and other materials available accessible, concise and detailed?
2. To what extent has the partnership between the consortium entities reinforced the Programme's capacity to act and the impact of its actions and resulted in the transfer of experience and know-how between the entities? What effects did the partnership have on the results achieved and in the support for candidates and promoters? To what extent did the specific support mechanism adopted by the Programme respond to the needs of organisations and what impact did it have on the organisations that benefited from it?

4. Summary of conclusions

This evaluation has been focused on a set of evaluation questions regarding the implementation, the results and impacts of the ACP, covering six thematic domains – relevance and coherence; effectiveness; strengthening civil society organisations, strengthening of bilateral relationships, social impact and quality of the management system – briefly summarised in the following graphic.

1. Relevance and coherence

1. Was the Programme well designed? To what extent were the Programme's objectives, priorities and typologies of support adapted to the reality of Civil Society and the needs of NGOs and vulnerable groups?
2. To what extent did the Programme seek to respond to relevant gaps (areas not covered) in support for organisations or the community, adding value to existing support programmes in Portugal? What is the role and relevance of the Programme in the creation and/or support of umbrella organisations that structure Civil Society and increase its capacity for intervention?
3. To what extent were there synergies and links to other interventions and other funders? How does the Programme compare to other national programmes with equivalent objectives in terms of financial allocation, typologies of support and project size?

2. Effectiveness

1. What influence and effects did the Programme have on applications and the implementation of supported projects? What conditions facilitated the implementation and/or the success of the projects?
2. To what extent were the goals set for the Programme achieved? To what extent did the products created and the results achieved reach the desired levels of quality (as opposed to quantity)? Which factors influenced the achievement of goals and the quality of results? What outputs and results beyond those foreseen in the contracted indicators materialised and contributed to the Programme's objectives?
3. To what extent were opportunities provided and was possible to mobilise small organisations and/or those from less favored regions of the country, taking into account the NGO landscape in Portugal? What factors contributed to this mobilisation?

3. Strengthening of civil society organisations

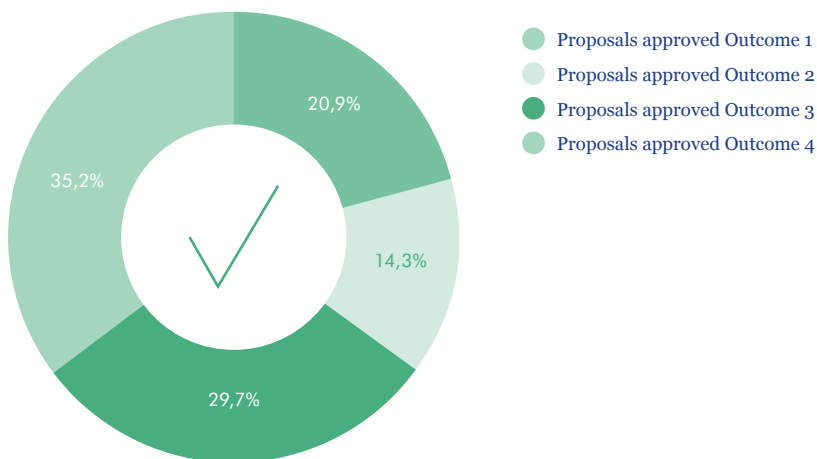
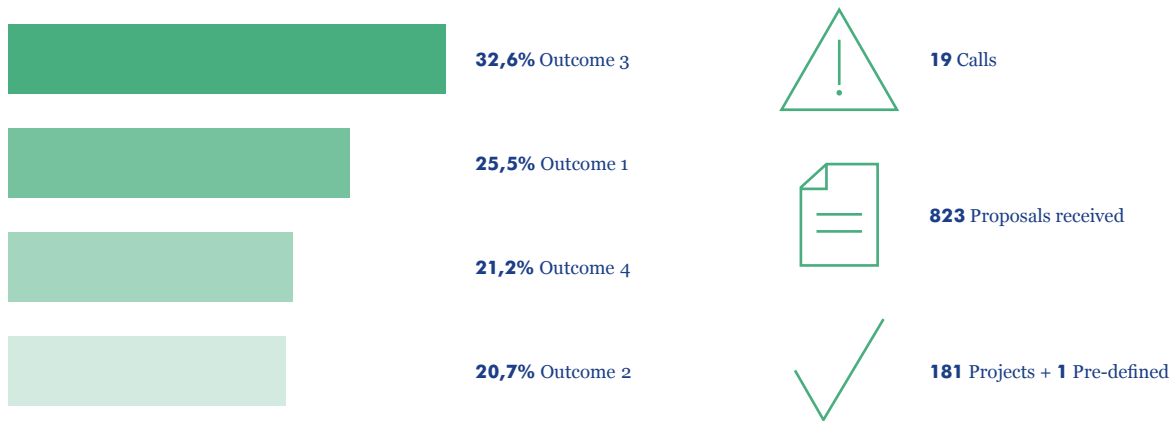
1. What results can be attributed to the Programme in terms of improving the capacity, independence, visibility and sustainability of beneficiary organisations?
2. What impact can be inferred from the implementation of the Programme on the skills, robustness and intervention capacity of the beneficiary organisations and the sector in general?

organisations to elaborate applications were also a distinctive feature of the ACP. In this process, the experience, prestige and capacity of mobilisation of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (CGF) and Bissaya Barreto Foundation (BBF) played a strategic role, fostering the demand by institutions that recognised the challenge and the relevance of submitting a project to this Programme. These strategies strengthen the CSO's capacity of intervention and of influence, revealing the distinctive character of the ACP in comparison with other existing supports and the positive and broad impact of the Programme.

Effectiveness

The ACP had a high level of demand in all the intervention outcomes of the Programme. The demand for support exceeded two times and a half the availability of funding resources.

Total amount approved by outcomes





In the following paragraphs, there is a summary of the evaluation conclusions, organised through the different evaluation questions, corresponding as it was already mentioned to six distinct thematic fields.

Relevance and coherence

The ACP is broadly known and appreciated because it offers the opportunity of intervention in situations and problems that other programmes or policy instruments don't cover and reach not yet targeted population groups, as for example immigrants in irregular situations. The majority (51,3%) of the promoters leading approved projects that responded to the evaluation survey mentioned that their main motivation to present a proposal to this Programme has been the inexistence of specialised funding to their projects or of other supports available. So, one can conclude that the ACP responds to failures not covered by the whole of public policies, although presenting a smaller financial dimension than other programmes, such as the Operational Programme Social Inclusion and Employment 2014-2020.

Capacity-building is also mentioned as a crucial ACP's support, strengthening the internal capacity of Civil Society organisations (CSO), independently from their dimension, scope of intervention or geographic localisation. Capacity-building is particularly important when it is associated to intervention issues in which the Portuguese society has problems (advocacy for example).

The Programme stands out also for incorporating unique aspects, such as the financing of volunteer participation, particularly appreciated by the supported organisations, mainly those presenting less professionalised structures. 40,9% of the promoters that responded to the survey stressed that the ACP's support allowed to increase the number of volunteers within the organization. The generous percentage of co-funding and the flexibility in the management of the Programme were also dimensions mentioned by promoters as important and distinctive in comparison with other existing programmes in Portugal.

The support to the capacity-building of CSOs, to the establishment of strategic partnerships and the strengthening of links with local communities were also considered as relevant, contributing to the strengthening of the CSO's ecosystem and increasing their intervention and capacity of influence in the Portuguese society. The possibility of elaborating organisational needs assessments, capacity-building and external evaluation of the projects and the incentive to build national and international partnerships significantly contributed to the success of projects. One evidence of this effect can be found in the fact that ACP exceeded the established goals, generating qualitative benefits.

The mechanism of demand formation implemented by the Programme through the implementation of information initiatives throughout the country, the creation of an autonomous web site with several resources and, particularly the support to small

Strengthening the CSOs

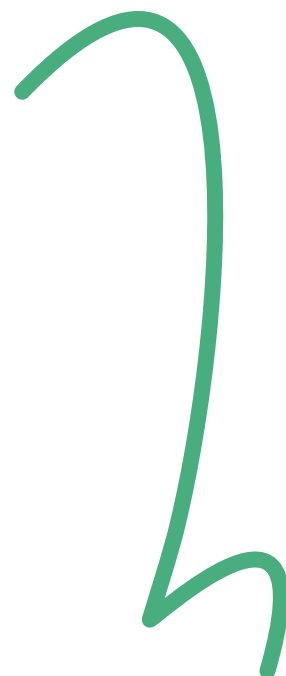
Concerning capacity-building, the ACP effects were globally very positive within the vast and diversified universe of NGOs that participated in the Programme.

The decision to maintain and deepen the capacity-building issue has been correct, covering one intervention field already present in the previous Active Citizenship Programme, transforming it into a transversal domain to all Outcomes of the Programme and dedicating it a specific Outcome (Outcome 4). This decision has been otherwise appreciated by the generality of projects promoters (and direct beneficiaries of organisational assessments and capacity-building activities), that considered as very positive not only the activities performed but also their contribution to strengthen the internal management practices, particularly concerning planning, recruitment and management of human resources, financial management, diversification of funding resources and fundraising and also concerning the relationships with the targeted groups, the media and with political decision makers (advocacy). In some cases, the coexistence of the organisation's capacity-building and the project represented an additional effort to the supported organisations, stressing how relevant it is in the projects analysis to take notice of the planning submitted and of the articulation between the two dimensions.

So, despite the smaller financial dimension comparatively with other programmes, the contribution of the ACP has been relevant and very positive to empower and strengthen the NGO's ecosystem in Portugal, transforming the supported NGOs into more robust organisations to face not only their daily challenges, but also, through the organisational assessments and planning activities, to assume a more critical and informed positioning concerning their mission and intervention objectives in society.

On the other hand, the concerns regarding the identification and diversification of funding opportunities and fundraising, as well as communication and advocacy shared by several approved projects, will tend to create better conditions to guarantee the future sustainability of the NGOs supported by the Programme. In line with this, it is relevant to highlight that a high percentage of institutions supported by the Programme have declared that they continue to use in their activity the techniques and the methodologies learned during the projects.

In another perspective, one should also recognise the positive impact of these capacity-building processes concerning the qualitative improvement of the projects themselves, by inducing implementation efficiency. The competitive model used by the Programme revealed itself as an adequate model in general terms, with no evidence of difficulties identified by the stakeholders heard by the evaluation either in interpreting the texts of calls or fulfilling the application forms. The materials published by the Programme such as the manual or the video tutorials have been significantly appreciated, as well as the remote support (by telephone and/or email) dedicated to organisations that intended to access the Programme. This dimension has been transversally valued as exemplary by the promoters of supported projects.



Demand figures show that Outcome 2 presents less attractiveness and suggests that the Portuguese NGOs have been less attracted to advocacy projects aiming at influencing public policies – that were the focus of ACP’s Outcome 2 support. The lack of advocacy legislation, the NGO’s dependency on public funding and some frustration with no answers from the political decision-makers are some of the reasons presented to explain the apparent smaller vocation of the organisations to make proposals for projects in that field. Notwithstanding this, some promoters, although having presented projects covered by other priorities of the Programme, tried, at least to acquire competences within the framework of their capacity-building plans.

The interviews and case studies carried out by the evaluation allowed us to identify projects in which the supported organisations incorporated in their projects relevant dimensions to influence political decision-making. It is the case of projects focused on the implementation of actions involving a specific target group, but simultaneously invested on the capacity-building of the organisation itself in dimensions such as external communication, the ability to interact for example with the media and with political actors, or of projects that tried to establish links between institutions and responses, inducing the creation of networking. The gathered qualitative evidence sustains the perception that this objective of strengthening civil society and advocacy-based institutional capacity-building is much more important and significant than was expected, considering the weight of Outcome 2 in the total amount of projects supported by the Programme. There is a need and a will of the civil society to intervene in public policies and the ACP is the only existing support in Portugal in this field.

The fostering of the demand increase for the Programme’s support has been carried out mainly through the investment done by the ACP in communication actions, including the increase of the number of communication actions and events, organised across the country and through the already differentiation of the Programme supporting areas usually not covered by other funds. More than 60% of promoters that responded to the survey mention that they participated in information sessions and from these 95% say that participation has been relevant to develop their projects.

As far as the output and results indicators are concerned, most of the goals have been exceeded, particularly in the cases of strengthening the democratic culture and empowerment of vulnerable groups. The evaluation also concluded that the Programme has been very effective in involving less experimented institutions and institutions with no project experience at all and regions in which the number of promoters of projects is usually low. In this issue, the role of BBF has been effective in enlarging the territorial incidence of demand, allowing to expand the ACP outside the larger urban areas.

in civic participation and human rights, evidence recognised by the interviewed NGOs. This cooperation is seen as a crucial factor inducing the quality and effectiveness of the projects.

The effectiveness of the cooperation can be calculated through the proportion of donor countries institutions that became formal partners and the proportion of projects that resulted from those partnerships. Using the data published by the Programme, the evaluation concluded that the ACP had an effectiveness rate of 50% in formalising partnerships with donor countries institutions and of 76% in generating cooperative projects with Portuguese entities involved in the Programme. Additionally, one third of large projects involved partnerships, especially in Outcome 2 – Human Rights. These results indicate a high level of success in promoting bilateral cooperation and in promoting sustainable joint projects.

The partnerships created a base for future collaborations and the implementation of new practices, showing a high potential to build durable relationships and joint projects, despite the need to upgrade the processes and procedures of the Programme (for example, inexistence of translation of relevant information about the Programme, budgetary limitations for travelling, housing and food introduced difficulties in organising visits to donor countries; and bureaucratic issues, such as differences in fiscal legislation and required documentation). Notwithstanding, the interest revealed by Portuguese NGOs in continuing to cooperate with donor country partners and the positive evaluation of existing partnerships point out to a promising future for cooperation networks in the long term.

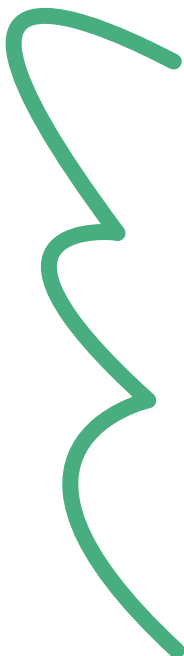
Social impact

The impact that the ACP succeeded to generate is essentially qualitative and results from the singularity of the thematic coverage of the Programme, broadly recognised by a large percentage of supported promoters, as it has already been mentioned.

The biggest issues in enlarging the social impact of the Programme are in the two last sequences of the Theory of Change, concerning final results and impacts and are related, on one hand, with the temporal extension of the effects of the projects and, on the other hand, with synergies and complementarities between public policies targeted for a more cohesive Portuguese society.

The evaluation team concluded that, after the ACP's conclusion and within the framework of preparing a new Programme, it would be interesting to establish specific actions to replicate projects, promote the dissemination of solutions and programming of concrete initiatives to increase synergies and complementarities between public policies. The themes of immigration and their reception and integration represent, according to the evaluation team, a favourable field to achieve that objective. Additionally, it is possible

Finally, although obviously not ignoring the vast magnitude of the NGO's ecosystem in Portugal¹ and the reduced incidence of the ACP (182 projects approved in which one was a predefined project), there was a significant renovation rate of NGOs that presented an application to the Programme: 64,7% of the promoters that responded to the survey mention that it was the first time that they submitted an application to the ACP, suggesting a significant renovation rate within the universe of NGOs supported by the Programme.



Reinforcement of bilateral relationships

The ACP generated high notoriety of the EEA Grants among the NGOs and other Portuguese CSOs. That influence encompassed an efficient communication process involving a large mailing list, contacts with several social local networks, municipalities, Social Solidarity Private Institutions, the Confederation of National Solidarity Institutions and Social Security; an informative website; the implementation of several workshops and webinars, in-person and online events (due principally to adaptations made by the Programme during the pandemic period); the publication of tutorial and communicational videos; the mediatic coverage of the Programme led by the TV channel SIC and the radio station TSF, the campaign #CivilSocietyStartsHere, that generated more than 7.300 interactions in social media, highlighting innovative projects – including projects developed with the ACP's support. This communication strategy guaranteed high visibility, a vast reach and capacity-building of NGOs, being a success for the Programme.

The bilateral cooperation with the donor countries generated significant gains of knowledge and the implementation of new practices. Four matchmaking events facilitated the interaction between 47 Portuguese entities and 30 donor countries' entities, with the results of 15 formal partnerships and 36 collaborative projects, particularly concerning Outcome 2 – Human Rights. These bilateral cooperation dynamics contributed positively by fostering the exchange of experiences, the elaboration of joint manuals and the realisation of joint capacity-building actions. One should stress that 22,5% of the projects incorporated at least one partnership with a donor country, highlighting the role of Portugal concerning the bilateral cooperation within framework of the EEA Grants. Although sporadic, the partnerships were strategic, focused on the exchange of experiences and capacity-building. Notwithstanding this, they faced some difficulties, either regarding the identification of partners or concerning the management of partnerships, including the need to overcome language barriers and budgetary and organizational limitations.

The Bilateral Cooperation Fund approved 19 of 44 proposals, using 93% of the available funding. The collaboration with the donor countries is strategic due to their experience

¹ About 28.000 entities, following the diagnostics that supported the ACP. See Franco, R. Campos (coord.) (2015) *Diagnóstico das ONG em Portugal*. Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian.

Notwithstanding these critical commentaries, the support given to candidates and promoters of projects can be considered as adequate. As it has been previously mentioned, the support materials distributed, diversified and technically rigorous, have been positively evaluated by the promoters, allowing to limit the impact of team reductions.

The partnership between the Consortium entities – CGF and BBF – strengthened significantly the ACP's capacity of intervention and the impact of its actions, facilitating the transfer of experience and knowledge between the two entities. This collaboration has been a crucial factor inducing the Programme's success, particularly concerning the achievement of the objectives to increase the territorial incidence of the Programme, contributing for the improvement of the quality of projects and for achieving the established objectives.

In fact, the ACP succeeded in achieving a very acceptable territorial coverage (75 projects in 182 are associated to NGOs not located in the more important metropolitan areas. The creation of the Specific Support Mechanism (SSM), essentially targeted at stimulating applications presented by small NGOs located outside the Metropolitan Areas of Lisbon and Porto, ended up having, in terms of projects approved, a smaller relevance than expected. Adding to the evidence available the number of support actions concerning the revision of proposals and consultancy services, the number of projects benefitting from the SSM increases to 66 – although a substantial part of those projects ended up not being supported by the Programme. Despite the relatively low utilisation of this mechanism of support, due to the low number of eligible projects among those supported by the SSM, those who used it recognized its importance to the success of their proposals.

The evaluation team also concluded that the ACP's management model has been very effective in transforming outputs into outcomes and those into 1st level results. The output and results indicators show a high level of achievement of the Programme's goals, corroborated by the high satisfaction of the promoters. The issues in which the Programme's results fall short of goals, like accountability and density of collaborative partnerships, should be understood in an unfavourable national context, previously mentioned, and suggest the need in future editions of the Programme to conceive specific interventions at this level.

The influence of the management model in transforming 1st level results into 2nd level results and on social cohesion has been very limited. The main reasons are: (i) a practically inexistent intervention to enlarge temporally the effects, demonstration and replication of projects, best practices and dissemination and contagion of results within the NGO's ecosystem; (ii) a limited intervention in promoting synergies and complementarities with other fundamental policy instruments to achieve a more cohesive society. So, the continuity and replication of projects strongly depend on their quality and robustness, highlighting that the Programme's management model plays here a more indirect role.

within the framework of a predefined project of a future Programme to support the creation of social deliberative forums targeted at promoting the dialogue between the CSOs and representatives of political actors, similar to other initiatives organised all over the world.²

Quality of the management model

The ACP's management, follow-up and control system generally achieved a vast set of activities and functions, developed essentially at three levels: (i) interacting with funding entities, principally the articulation with the *Financial Mechanism Office*, consuming a lot of resources (one can estimate that 3 to 4 months/year of a full-time equivalent staff member) (ii) demand formation; (iii) and promoting the quality of approved projects.

The intervention concerning the demand's formation has been very effective. The materials helping promoters, as well as the calls published by the Programme, showed a significant technical quality and their utility has been recognised by beneficiaries. Additionally, the ACP benefitted from a high effectiveness and participation in communication initiatives and from the existence of a solvent demand for the Programme's support, explained by unmet needs by the universe of public policies concerning the issues corresponding to the ACP's intervention and from the recognition that the ACP had a distinctive action comparatively with the other instruments and programmes available in Portugal.

As far as the quality of projects is concerned, the results achieved by the management model are very positive as well. The quality of this intervention is corroborated by most of the promoters that value positively issues such as the selection criteria of projects, the eligibility conditions and the results of the application evaluation. The competitive model of approvals tends to favour the quality of projects and the need to reject projects with a positive score reinforces the link between selectiveness and quality.

However, the evaluation identified some areas to improve regarding the follow-up of the implementation of projects – understood as a good process and presenting variable intensity – and regarding control – understood as generically excessive. The evaluation registered as well that the Programme faced some challenges determined by team reductions, that generated a high turnover – criticised by the promoters – and the need to cumulate functions for the project managers, leading to the increase of response times. In this regard, there is room to lead a more robust and continued practice, allowing the Programme to improve the knowledge of specific difficulties faced by different projects – safeguarding, obviously, the issues related to the necessary reinforcement of human resources.

² See e.g. <https://participedia.net/>

5. Recommendations

5.1. General recommendations

R1. With two programming periods about to be concluded, evaluations that generate learning and a critical perspective on the results obtained, the evaluation team considers that a new edition of the Programme is justified and recommends that it should be focused on more innovative and on dimensions less covered by mainstream public policies.

This is the case in domains such as (i) advocacy, (ii) the defence and dissemination of human rights culture in the contemporary Portuguese society, in which the increase of a foreign immigrant population and young immigrants in the school system is visible, in absolute and percentage terms, (iii) support for more specialized NGOs capacity-building processes, and (iv) the valorisation of topics that, due to their particular characteristics, call for innovative and creative crossings between different intervention domains that, typically, are the object of highly sectionalized support measures and instruments and that rarely communicate with each other – such as, for example, the intervention on addictions and gender and LGBTQI+ rights issues.

R2. The various contacts carried out by the evaluation team with NGOs that promote operations approved by the Programme (interviews, surveys and development of case studies) allow us to conclude that most of these NGOs would positively appreciate the valorisation and intensification of the monitoring function of projects (not just from a financial point of view) to be implemented by the Program's technical management structures, thus contributing to strengthening its internal competencies and substantially improving the quality of the results achieved.

R3. In the next edition of the Programme, it is recommended that an operational balance continue to be sought between, on the one hand, granting opportunities for continuity and deepening some of the most innovative projects with greater potential for results' replication and dissemination and, on the other hand, continue with the effort to get more NGOs (in number and diversity – thematic and territorial) to apply to the Programme, thus increasing the number of those who, in the Portuguese NGO's ecosystem, have done so at least once.

R4. The Programme has room to manoeuvre and relevant material to generate new communication and demonstration actions, thus publicizing the most innovative projects and thus encouraging new NGOs to join the Programme.

R5. The practice that began in this Programme of providing technical assistance to smaller NGOs located in lower-density territories on its project design should be continued and deepened in the future. This practice should also be understood as a form of additional identification of new specific capacity-building needs that may be encountered by the Programme.

On the other hand, the ACP's contribution for social cohesion has been perceived through the thematic differentiation and the quality of projects, that opened perspectives to more comprehensive public policies, although the impact on social cohesion has been more modest.

The singular position of CGF and BBF within the universe of foundations in Portugal has been stressed: the prestige of these institutions, their technical capacity and principally the capital of Independence revealed by both institutions place them in a good position to play the role of managers of a programme searching for innovation, critical perspectives and the exercise of citizenship and advocacy.

Summarising, the Programme's management has been effective in guaranteeing the quality and the implementation of supported projects, promoting a successful demand formation. However, its ability to influence more vast transformations in promoting human rights and in strengthening the CSOs and social cohesion in Portugal was limited, needing a better articulation with other public policies to maximise its impact.

effort to update the participation of NGOs in the Programme, a special attention should be given to find conditions for these small organizations to sustain their activity.

R14. It is recommended that, within the scope of a new edition of the Programme, additional objectives can be established to promote conditions and initiatives to improve the levels of accountability and quality of NGO's governance and support the intensification of collaborative practices in the NGO's ecosystem.

R15. In a new edition of the Programme and with a view to expanding the time and effects of supported projects and strengthening complementarity between public policies, it is recommended that the Programme's communication strategy organizes and promotes seminars and workshops focused on these objectives, challenging NGOs and public entities to participate in this discussion.

R16. The evaluation team recommends the continuity and deepening of the good practice that constituted the creation of the SSM, doing so in two directions: on the one hand, increasing the results of its application in terms of number of projects supported and, on the other hand, increasing the spatial incidence of this Mechanism.

R17. It is recommended that the next Programme edition actively promote initiatives that encourage the sharing of knowledge and practices, but also encourage networking between the supported entities. In this sense, and in addition to other initiatives, it would be interesting to rethink the initial training events for project managers, to take on a more comprehensive profile, allowing the different supported entities gathered on this occasion to become aware of the other projects and entities present, eventually organizing in groups of entities with greater affinity in terms of themes and/or territory.

R18. To reinforce its intervention in the domain of advocacy, it is recommended that a deliberation network be organized between civil society organizations and political leaders. This network and the set of related dynamics that it could achieve could culminate in the holding of a Forum for Active Citizenship, focusing on each area of activity of the Programme, possibly with a biannual edition, to put together CSOs, political authorities, and other stakeholders.

R19. Finally, it is recommended that a new edition of the Programme find suitable conditions to support projects that, due to their thematic focus, required specialized skills.

R6. It is recommended to update the characterization of the Portuguese NGO's ecosystem, particularly the part of this ecosystem that deals with the themes that have been supported by the Programme, so that the supported NGOs have a clearer perception of the field in which they are integrated and a better knowledge of the conditions for sharing resources within it.

R7. It is recommended that, in the next edition of the Programme, and with specific support for this matter, project promoters are encouraged to focus on improving the conditions for replicability and dissemination of results.

R8. Assuming the ACP as a pioneering programme in the development and experimentation of some social policies, supporting operations that can be considered upstream from the stabilized structure of social policies, the evaluation team recommends that the Program's communication policy defines dissemination priorities aimed at the entities responsible for social policies in Portugal and seek to capitalize the great projection and credibility of the Fund Operators, by getting involved in the creation and dynamization of channels between Portuguese civil society organizations and political power.

R9. The evaluation team considers that, with two programming periods completed, it can be justified to invest in the design of a more robust Programme information system, thus avoiding contingency programming solutions and, above all, improving the ability to extract relevant information about the implementation of the Programme.

R10. It is recommended that, in the next edition of the Programme, a more robust management intervention can be developed to make a greater contribution to a more significant social impact, namely seeking to contradict the two main evaluation conclusions on this matter: (i) practically non-existent intervention in terms of expanding the temporal effect of projects, demonstrating and replicating project's good practices and disseminating and contagion of its results within the Portuguese NGO ecosystem; (ii) limited intervention in promoting synergies and complementarities with other policy instruments crucial to the search for a more cohesive society.

5.2. Specific recommendations

R11. The financing of voluntary actions must continue to be a priority in the next edition of the Programme, especially in the context of its capacity-building.

R12. The NGO training should continue to represent a priority in the next edition of the Programme, whether from the point of view of an instrument to attract new NGOs to the Programme, or in parallel with the project's effort to innovate and their thematic ambition.

R13. Given the extremely innovative nature, in terms of processes and intervention themes, of some projects promoted by very small NGOs, it is recommended that, in the

Technical team

Elements	Functions performed
António Manuel Figueiredo	Global coordination of the evaluation study Co-construction of the Theory of Change Answering evaluation questions Preparation of the evaluation recommendations
Carlos Fontes	Inquiry process
Filipa Barreira	Responsible for coordinating the inquiry process Co-construction of the Theory of Change Interviews, case studies and document analysis Answering evaluation questions Preparation of the evaluation recommendations
Maria Álvares	Co-construction of the Theory of Change Interviews, case studies and document analysis Answering evaluation questions Preparation of the evaluation recommendations
Patrícia Amaral	Interviews, case studies and document analysis Answering evaluation questions Preparation of the evaluation recommendations
Pedro Quintela	Responsible for bibliographic review Responsible for the overall synthesis of interviews Interviews, case studies and document analysis Answering evaluation questions Preparation of the evaluation recommendations

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Executive Summary

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