

External Evaluation – Programa Escolhas

PROCEDURE n.º 4/PESSOAS2030/2025

—

Executive Summary

May 2026

FICHA TÉCNICA

Document type:

Executive Summary

Title:

Executive Summary

Team:

- Sónia Costa (coordination)
- Bárbara Ferreira
- Catarina Mendes Cruz
- Diogo Silva da Cunha
- Frederico Cantante
- Pedro Estevão
- Tânia Almeida
- Sara Nunes e Jorge Caleiras (collaboration)
- Luís Vargás (specialist technician)

Advisory Forum: Bernardo Lemos (estaticista), Isabel Guerra (Dinâmia'CET - ISCTE-IUL), Isabel Menezes (UPorto), Jorge Malheiros (CEG/ IGOT – ULisboa), José Manuel Henriques (Dinâmia'CET - ISCTE-IUL), Manuel Sarmiento (Centro de Investigação em Estudos da Criança CIED/IE), Rogério Roque Amaro (CEI/ ISCTE-IUL), Rosa Madeira (Universidade de Aveiro, Professora Auxiliar - Departamento Educação e Psicologia) e Rosa Monteiro (FEUC – UC).

Data:

21 may 2026

Contacts:

CoLABOR - Laboratório Colaborativo para o Trabalho, Emprego e Proteção Social Rua das Taipas, n.º 1, 1250-264 Lisboa
www.colabor.pt | geral@colabor.pt | +351 218065369 +351 919 811 971

1. Purpose, Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

The Escolhas Programme was created in 2001 (Council of Ministers Resolution No. 4/2001), with the aim of preventing juvenile delinquency in vulnerable urban territories. This focus clearly defined the programme's first generation (E1G, 2001–2003), in response to the concerns then prevailing in public and political debate.

Currently integrated into the Portuguese Institute of Sports and Youth, I.P. (IPDJ), under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, this public Programme has, throughout its nine generations (2001–2025), progressively assumed a broader role in the social inclusion of children and young people.

This evolution is reflected in four main dimensions: 1) a gradual expansion of the target population, shifting from a focus on adolescents at risk to encompass children from the age of 6 and young people up to the age of 25 from socio-economically vulnerable contexts and, in some cases, their families; 2) a territorial expansion, from centrally driven initial interventions concentrated in metropolitan areas to nationwide coverage, prioritising socio-economically vulnerable territories, where interventions have, since the E2G, depended on local institutional initiative(s); 3) an increasing diversification of strategic areas, currently organised into four major fields – education and training; employment and employability; health, sports and well-being; and families, community and citizenship; and 4) an innovative intervention model, operating through consortia of, at least, four local entities and incorporating the role of the urban youth mediator and, subsequently, that of the community facilitator.

Across the nine generations (2001–2025), almost a thousand applications were approved – 53 in the E1G and 921 between E2G and E9G – a significant proportion of which correspond to local interventions approved across successive generations, known as 'continuity projects', *i.e.* they work with the same target population, are implemented in the same territory and are typically led by the same consortium. On this basis, the Programme may be said to have supported 309 distinct interventions since the E2G: 111 participated in one generation only, while 198 had successive applications approved, spanning between 2 and 8 successive generations.

The external evaluation of the Escolhas Programme (henceforth 'EP') aims to assess the impact of the funded interventions throughout their implementation (from 2001 to the present) at the national level, through an integrated view of the programme's evolution – considering, on the one hand, the characterisation of each intervention (e.g. areas of intervention, target groups and activities) and, on the other, implementation models and strategies (e.g. the resources mobilized by the projects, types of partners involved and carried out activities). This evaluation falls within the Thematic Programme on 'Demography, Qualifications and Inclusion' of the PESSOAS 2030 framework, in accordance with the monitoring and accountability requirements established for Portugal 2030 and the PT 2030 Global Evaluation Plan, jointly coordinated by IPDJ and PLANAPP. Such is guided by two main requirements: a political and institutional one – responding to the need for transparency, accountability and demonstration of results to society and to national and European governance structures; and a programmatic one – supporting the consolidation and evolution of the Programme by equipping it with the conceptual and empirical tools needed to strengthen its relevance, coherence and sustainability. To that end, the evaluation addresses a set of criteria and questions aligned with national and European guidelines on the monitoring and evaluation of public policies. Accordingly, it focuses on:

- the adequacy of the Programme's objectives in relation to social and territorial needs, and its articulation with other public policies and with European and national strategic frameworks (Relevance, and Internal and External Coherence);
- the degree to which expected results were achieved (Effectiveness) and the relationship between resources mobilised and results obtained (Efficiency);
- the effects produced on direct and indirect participants, and within communities and territories (Results and Impacts);
- the conditions for the continuity of those results beyond the funding period (Sustainability);
- the Programme's contribution to the social and territorial cohesion objectives established within the European Union framework (European Added Value).

2. Methodology

This is a Theory-Based Evaluation (TBE), which starts from the assumption that, in order to understand the value and impact of an intervention, it is not enough to observe the results achieved – it is necessary, above all, to understand how, why and under what conditions those results were obtained. A central element in this exercise is the further development of the Theory of Change (ToC), which makes it possible to: i) map the causal chain linking problems, strategic areas of intervention, activities or actions, outputs, results and impacts; ii) clarify the assumptions and mechanisms of change underpinning the intervention; and iii) identify the contextual factors that enhance or constrain results across different territories and target groups. This approach is complemented by a Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), used to test the influence of the factors (conditions) affecting the mechanisms of change and to identify combinations associated with the success of some projects and corresponding interventions.

To put this approach into practice, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods and techniques was adopted, enabling a robust triangulation of collected evidence and the construction of a comprehensive evaluation framework. The applied methodology combines the breadth provided by extensive and longitudinal data analysis with the intensive analytical depth offered by qualitative research. Accordingly, the following methods were used:

- A systematic literature review of national interventions with young people in vulnerable situations, to deepen and substantiate the EP's Theory of Change;
- A meta-analysis of past EP evaluation reports (from the E1G to the E8G);
- Document analysis of the legislative, regulatory and programmatic evolution of the EP from the E1G to E9G (2001 to 2025);
- An extensive statistical analysis of relative deprivation scores in several dimensions (demographic, educational, health, and socioeconomic factors) at the municipal level, which enabled the construction of a Territorial Social Vulnerability Index (TSVI) inspired by the location quotients applied in regional economic analysis;
- Statistical analysis of data from the AGIL information system to provide an extensive characterisation of Escolhas projects, regarding their interventions, participants and results (available for E8G and E9G), as well as to support the construction of the QCA matrix;
- AI-powered content analysis of the perceived success and constraining factors, results and impacts retrieved from self-evaluation reports of the implemented projects available from the E5G onwards, to complement the construction QCA matrix;
- Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) based on the characterisation of supporting information for the construction of the QCA matrix projects included in the E8G and on a set of data relating to consortium dynamics and constraints identified in projects throughout the generations in which they participated (in the case of continuity projects), captured through the analysis of self-evaluation reports from those projects in previous generations;
- Analysis of administrative quantitative data recorded in the internal Financial Information System (AFINA, available only for the E8G and incomplete for the E9G);
- In-depth qualitative analysis of the six selected case studies, i.e. projects covering different territories and different EP's strategic areas, participant profiles, performance trajectories, levels of institutional maturity and consortium composition. The case studies included focus groups with the local technical teams and consortia, participatory workshops with young project participants, as well as secondary information available on the AGIL platforms, namely applications, self-evaluation reports and other supporting documentation;
- Biographical interviews with 30 current participants and former participants from those six projects, capturing how participants experience their context and their participation in the Escolhas projects, reflecting on their past life trajectories and how they envision their future;

- Semi-structured interviews (11) with former and current programme officials and with stakeholders responsible for related public policies (e.g. education, social protection and youth).

3. Responses to the Evaluation Questions (EQ) and Overall Assessment

EQ1. To what extent does the EP adequately and appropriately respond to the social needs and challenges of its target groups?

Within the limits of its field of competence and legitimacy, the EP responds adequately and appropriately to the main social needs and challenges of its target groups in the territories where it intervenes, such as school unsuccess and absenteeism, early educational and training dropout, low levels of qualifications and skills, high youth unemployment and inactivity, fragile family networks and social ties, deviant and risk behaviours, limited civic and community participation, scarcity of educational, material and human resources, which create territories of particular vulnerability. Gradually, the EP has evolved to strengthen participants' personal and social skills, support young people's autonomisation and improve social mediation with schools and families.

More recently, the EP has shown the capacity to adapt to contextual changes, as projects have sought to respond to emerging needs associated with increasing cultural diversity due to migration flows, identification and referral of mental health issues, social isolation, and digital exclusion exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to note, however, that such adaptation also depends on preventive, integrated and specialised responses, accompanied by complex, multidimensional and multilevel evaluations, which may limit the programme's capacity for action and impact.

These needs and challenges are reinforced by the absence or insufficient reach of local responses directed at children and young people in more isolated and/or stigmatised areas. Nevertheless, while the intervention is deemed appropriate where it takes place, several deprived and vulnerable territories owing to an intervention do not gather enough institutional and collective mobilisation to submit applications to the EP, thus lacking the resources and support offered by the granted projects which will further aggravate the local context.

Finally, it is worth noting that the EP is widely recognised as relevant, particularly by the participants themselves. Relationships of proximity and trust between the teams and the participants, together with stronger local legitimacy, are widely recognised. However, we observe significant variations regarding the adequacy between objectives, actions and concrete needs, as well as differentiated approaches depending on the characteristics of the target groups, the vulnerabilities of each territory and the institutional priorities of each project.

EQ2. Is the operationalisation of the EP coherent with the envisaged principles and objectives?

Overall, the operationalisation of Programa Escolhas is broadly coherent with the envisaged principles and objectives, showing alignment between the strategic design and the interventions 'on the ground', as well as the capacity to adapt to the evolving characteristics and needs of target groups.

However, a tension persists between a regulatory framework in which the EP has been referred multiple times as 'an experimental programme' since its inception in 2001 and its ongoing implementation strategies and practise, which does not fully correspond to the assumptions associated with an experimental initiative, in which ongoing learning and the co-construction and dissemination of knowledge produced by the interventions are fundamental to further action and progressive co-adaptation.

In fact, the overall analysis of the programme's implementation model suggests it sits closer to a public policy disguised through succeeding projects of limited duration, apparently more focused on operational and administrative execution metrics and short-time results than on understanding the underlying processes of social exclusion and partially incapable of incorporating the new learnings into its future practise and/or to disseminate them more widely for policy learning. Furthermore, it

is equally important to clarify the programme's domains of intervention to ensure that the implementation model is coherent with the defined strategic objectives.

EQ3. To what extent is the intervention within the scope of EP articulated with other public policy measures?

The intervention of the EP demonstrates a growing articulation with public policies, reinforcing its coherence and its role in promoting social inclusion, although contextual disparities are still to be observed. At the central level, limitations persist in the coordination with related entities and policies, namely with IEFPP (Institute for Employment and Professional Training) and other similar social programmes, such as CLDS (Local Contracts for Social Development) and TEIP (Educational Territories of Prioritised Intervention). At the local level, the institutional coordination of each project implementation shows territorial inconsistencies, reflecting the different local partnership dynamics occurring in each context. Although projects are generally complementary to local policies, the desired strengthening of EP's external coherence would benefit from more formal alignment mechanisms at the central government level.

EQ4. Did the carried-out interventions achieve the specific objectives defined in the EP applications for each respective specific target group?

The evidence shows that EP largely achieved the objectives set by its projects.

Results are strongest in education, training and skills, where participants show clear gains – consistent school attendance, greater academic success and higher qualification levels, with more young people completing secondary education. These improvements suggest the programme helps offset the disadvantages many participants face, and in some cases turns around trajectories of school failure and imminent dropouts. They are matched by growth in personal, social and digital skills, and a noticeably more positive outlook among young people about their futures.

In the remaining areas – employment and employability; health, sport and well-being; and families, community and citizenship – results are more modest and uneven. On employment, the programme focuses more on building young people's readiness for the labour market than on securing actual jobs, though it does help them make more informed career choices. In health, sport and well-being, and in families and community life, real qualitative progress is evident – greater participation, healthier lifestyles, stronger parental empowerment and improved community cohesion – though these gains are harder to measure and it is not always clear whether underlying risk factors have genuinely been addressed. Engaging families and local communities remains a challenge in many settings, with wide variation in how much people get involved.

In short, the programme performs well at the individual level and in areas it can directly shape – with longer-running projects consistently delivering better results. It falls short, however, on broader structural goals, such as lasting employment integration, and on sustaining and tracking reductions in risk behaviours, lifestyle changes and deeper shifts in family and community dynamics. These outcomes depend heavily on external factors – available resources, institutional coordination and continuity of funding – and on how well the programme joins up with the wider set of public policies that, together, can drive lasting change in these communities.

EQ5. Were the resources allocated adequate and sufficient to meet the objectives of the public policy in question?

The analysis of EP efficiency identifies several factors that constrain or undermine the efficiency of projects, namely: a structural reduction in funding throughout successive generations, only partially mitigated in the E9G in comparison with the previous three generations, yet still 40% below the level recorded in the E2G; an equal distribution of funding disregarding territorial and target-group specificities; and a funding model based on reimbursement against invoices and mandatory compliance with public procurement rules, which is poorly suited to the characteristics of most promoting and managing entities, frequently non-profit organisations with limited cash flow and short on (technical) staff.

In addition, the short duration of funding periods – typically between two and three years – and long *hiatus* between generations, together with low salaries and precarious contractual conditions – also resulting from reduced funding – lead to high turnover among technical teams, thus weakening the relationships of trust between participants and the teams, found to be essential to achieving positive and more enduring results.

The bureaucratic burden associated with some administrative tasks, namely the volume and detail of reports required within the AGIL and AFINA platforms, e.g. regarding project's activities and participants or reimbursement requests, represents a risk factor for the efficiency of the Programme, due to the intensive allocation of qualified human resources to tasks to the detriment of their direct intervention.

In terms of material resources, weaknesses are also identified relating to equipment obsolescence (e.g. computers), as well as limitations in acquisition and renewal. Conversely, the low-cost or free provision of various resources, such as a physical space to support projects' activities and transportation means, often granted by consortium members and/or other formal and informal partners, is highlighted and considered essential to carry out the planned activities.

Alongside the constraints inherent to the current EP implementation model, there are external factors that may compromise or limit the efficiency of the Programme and its projects, namely unforeseen public health events – such as the COVID-19 pandemic – dynamics associated with migration flows and changes in government priorities, particularly in the fields of addictive behaviours and dependencies and migration policies, the latter with legislative implications.

EQ6. What were the unit costs per participant group and per intervention typology in relation to the results generated by the intervention(s)?

The analysis of unit costs shows the programme to be very cost-efficient, though this finding is subject to methodological limitations. Based only on available E8G financial data, the average cost per participant is approximately €445 for the whole entire intervention period, corresponding to around €148 annually. These figures are particularly low considering the complexity of the intervention contexts and the high level of vulnerabilities among the target groups, suggesting a highly favourable cost-benefit relationship.

Regarding the costs by intervention typology, there is a strong concentration of resources allocated to four main typologies – cultural, artistic and sports activities; civic education; education; and skills development. Other typologies, such as employability, employment and vocational training or other referral activities, account for only a marginal share. This overall picture of the E8G data suggests the need of the EP to reinforce the financing and allocation of resources to projects in such areas.

EQ7. What are the effects of the EP support to children and young people from vulnerable backgrounds aged 6 to 25?

The evaluation of EP's impact within the wide scope covered by the Theory of Change (ToC) requires careful interpretation. Measuring how complex phenomena – such as socio-economic and territorial vulnerabilities – change because of specific interventions is challenging. A key difficulty is pinpointing the effects of any single intervention within contexts that vary in social, cultural and institutional characteristics. Nevertheless, the evidence gathered in this evaluation supports several conclusions.

The first conclusion is that EP's impacts are mainly at the individual level. Participation in the Programme changed the life paths of some children and young people. Though limited in scale by design (mainly operating at a neighbourhood-level), the EP did not produce broad structural change. However, it successfully created positive forces that reduced or eliminated some vulnerabilities that drive poverty and social exclusion phenomena. For example, improvements in school success and access to the job market have shown to help break cycles of poverty and exclusion among some participants.

The second important conclusion is that EP's impacts on employment and employability have gradually reduced. While only a small number of projects in the most recent EP generations have

focused on this area of intervention, many participants have reported that their career paths have significantly improved through their involvement in the Escolhas Project, showing promising results which ought to be more disseminated. As such, the declining impact in this specific area partly reflects poor(er) coordination between the EP and central employment and training policies (esp. with IEFP), to further engage employment centres and other relevant services in the tasks of referral to skills training or to job offers that match each young adult profile.

The information collected in this evaluation shows that EP had significant positive impacts on young people's physical and mental health and on promoting healthier lifestyles in the intervention areas. These results mainly come from activities that develop personal and social skills and prevent risky behaviours, as well as recent initiatives focused on children, young people and their families' mental health. However, like other impacts, these are mainly visible only at the individual level, thus not overcoming wider and deeper structural barriers that compromise the future of those vulnerable groups and their life trajectories.

EQ8. What impact did EP have on the socio-economic context of the implementation territories?

The evidence from this evaluation shows that the EP had positive impacts on social cohesion and community participation. Many EP projects created and/or reinforced social, cultural and institutional dynamics in the areas where they worked, leading to better self-esteem among residents and reduced stereotypes, stigmas, and territorial fragmentation. Through EP projects, a few local leaders have emerged who then became key figures in the local community development process. Alongside education, training and skills, the work of Escolhas Projects with families and the promotion of community and citizenship participation has produced the strongest and most widespread results across all nine EP generations. However, due to the self-selection bias of the EP application process, it is likely that many vulnerable communities lacking networked groups and institutions will remain without the opportunities offered by the EP funding, thus intensifying their relative disadvantage over time.

EQ9. To what extent do the effects of the intervention endure over time?

The sustainability of the EP has gradually improved over the nine generations, with some activities and partnerships continuing after EP projects ended, and a few local coordinated groups deriving from the previous consortia remaining in close articulation. However, these cases are rare and depend heavily on the capacity (*esp.* human and financial resources) and commitment of the organisations and local networks supporting the projects. Since most projects mostly depend on external funding and cannot gather alternative resources, given the socioterritorial frailties of the context in which they operate, widespread concerns about the long-term sustainability of the work they have locally developed are justified, especially given the uncertainty about future funding opportunities in next EP generations. Ensuring sustained public funding for socioeconomically deprived areas and mainstreaming the Programme into central and local policies against poverty and social exclusion – either universally aimed or targeting the younger generations – would greatly minimise this risk.

Q10. What is the added value of European Funds within the national context under EP?

European Funds are crucial to the EP. They have been essential to make the Programme viable, ensuring its continuity and establishing it as a recognised social programme at national and international level. These funds have allowed a redistribution of resources to several communities dispersed in the national territory (mainland and islands, urban and rural) targeting vulnerable population, which would be more difficult to achieve under more restricted national spending. Working within European policy frameworks has also allowed Portugal to experiment with new social intervention approaches, thus enabling local innovation processes. However, this dependence constitutes a structural vulnerability, as it makes national public policy measures dependent on European funding strategies and guidelines. On the positive side, European funding requirements for planning, monitoring and evaluation have progressively improved local practises and fostered a results-focused approach.

The European support and corresponding predicates have increasingly helped the funded projects to develop multi-level governance strategies and to adopt the creation of local partnerships as standard practise in local development processes, thus fostering improved efficiency and a more comprehensive and cross-sectional approach to the challenges faced by the community. It has also enhanced the capacity of the consortia members, widening their knowledge and competences, key to successful and enduring projects.

4. Main conclusions

1. An Experimental Programme with 25 Years of Existence or a Time-Limited Public Policy?

Since its creation, EP has been defined by an ambiguous nature. While it is officially designated as an experimental programme, it lacks the corresponding expected mechanisms and funding that allow collective and participatory experiments to take place over the necessary time, so that innovative practises and tailored responses emerge to effectively tackle the challenges faced in each context. Knowledge co-construction, consistent dissemination opportunities and mainstreaming strategies are what truly define the essence of an experimental programme. The EP appears to function mainly as a weak public policy, implemented through temporarily funded projects, without the stability of an assumed and long-lasting national policy. This unclear definition, which spreads towards its scope or aim – is it aimed at improving the conditions of vulnerable younger generations and their families? Or is it a programme to fight structural poverty and social exclusion phenomena? Or perhaps a funding instrument to improve disadvantaged and critical areas and territories? Such nuances are essential to guarantee the best allocation of resources and specialised practises for each aim. The undefinition of the EP in this regard may further undermine effective social change and the sustainability of interventions, thus clarifying exactly what the EP will be onwards – experimental, structured public policy or a hybrid model – as well as its scope and aim is essential for strengthening its strategic effectiveness.

2. The Scale of the Programme, Its Potential and the Constraints of Its Evaluation

Over 25 years, EP has achieved significant scale: nine generations, around 900 approved applications, nationwide coverage and thousands of participants. Repeating interventions in the same areas helped build common knowledge, trust and institutional experience – key factors in local success. However, this scale and diversity pose evaluation challenges. Changing target groups, strategic areas and monitoring tools proved the long-term evaluation of the EP extremely difficult, if not impossible in some respects. While the AGIL platform holds extensive information, lacking data, varying consistency and quality in the available data, and lack of standardisation procedures, has limited a longitudinal and deeper understanding of how change happens and whether the impacts last, thus narrowing the scope of the external evaluation. Local teams also view the monitoring and internal evaluation process as too bureaucratic and of limited value, especially since recommendations from external evaluations are rarely used.

3. An Appropriate Response for Vulnerable Territories?

The EP has shown to adapt to the challenges of areas accumulating social, economic and relational vulnerabilities and disadvantages. It works in areas such as education, employability, health, digital inclusion, citizenship and migrant integration. Its integrated and local approach is well-suited to vulnerable communities, fostering proximity, mediation and community involvement and participation. The EP can address the multiple causes of social exclusion by bringing together local actors and building trust across participants. However, reliance on local application processes and short funding cycles creates gaps in the support provided by the EP and an unequal distribution in the national territory – mechanisms which prove to be particularly inappropriate to communities lacking institutional ties and local dynamics to appropriate the EP opportunities, thus risking falling

more severely behind. While the EP creates observed change at individual and, in some contexts, at a wider community level, it cannot address the deep structural inequalities that cause poverty and social exclusion, so it should be reinforced and tailored to work alongside broader and more sustained central and local policies.

4. Operational Coherence Based on Local Partnership Networks

Running local projects align well with the EP's goals of social inclusion and community participation. The required articulation of local networks and partnerships involving schools, municipalities, civil society organisations, associations and public services are crucial to the Programme's success, ensuring close relationships within participants, progressive local support and appropriation of the project, and enhanced local trust, essential to local development processes. Community mediation strategies and the shared use of local resources are key mechanisms for the project's operational success. However, there are a few challenges: effective results depend heavily on the capacity of technical teams to animate the younger and wider community and on informal leaders' abilities and commitment to the project, opportunities vary between projects and territories, and the EP does not articulate well enough with other national policies and programmes. Low funding, unstable and insecure staff positions, excessive paperwork for the local coordinators and inconsistent implementation across territories compromises the Programme's operational coherence anchored on local partnerships, thus threatening its long-term effectiveness.

5. Between Individual Outcomes and Structural Challenges

The evidence shows the EP produces strong results at individual and community levels, especially improving school performance, developing personal, social and digital skills, and boosting young people's confidence, independence and civic engagement. In the area of youth employment, the impacts are more limited and depend on further challenging external conditions, reflecting the complexity of interventions in this specific area. The strongest results arise where intervention is continuous over time, the staff remains relatively stable over generations, and the project is increasingly appropriated by the community and local institutions, becoming locally embedded. In such cases, the EP has fostered growing cooperation among institutions, stronger local ties and relationships, and personal (more rarely collective) empowerment processes, thus helping to break cycles of social exclusion and preventing a wider spread of social problems. However, it cannot and does not aim to drive structural change alone. To address the root causes of poverty and social exclusion requires broader and more generous government policies on areas such as social protection and welfare, education, economic opportunities, urban planning, housing affordability and conditions, access to public services, primary health care, among others. The EP should therefore be mainstreamed and fully integrated in a larger system of public policies and instruments which work best synergistically within a coordinated and multilevel approach to address social and territorial gaps and inequalities.

5. Recommendations

The conclusions of the evaluation process are now geared towards a set of recommendations, some of which have been repeatedly put forward in previous external evaluations. These recommendations are organised into six domains, relating to: the identity and positioning of the programme; planning and coherence; monitoring, evaluation and learning processes; capacity-building and human resources; institutional articulation and partnerships; and territory and financial sustainability.

The following table seeks to summarise the conclusions and correlated recommendations, listing possible implementation actions to improve the EP and their target stakeholders.

Recommendation	Conclusion	Actions for Implementation	Target Stakeholders
1. Clarify the strategic positioning and identity of Programa Escolhas	The evaluation highlights an ambiguity between the EP being an experimental programme and as a consolidated public policy. This lack of definition compromises the coherence of the programme's design, the stability of interventions, funding models, evaluation mechanisms and the capacity for knowledge production, learning, dissemination of knowledge and innovation.	1.1. Formally define, within the strategic and regulatory framework, the nature of the programme (experimental, structured public policy or hybrid model).	Ministry responsible for the policy (supported by the central structure of the EP).
		1.2. Define the domain(s) of intervention, aligning them with the adopted strategic positioning.	
		1.3. Differentiate experimental and structural components, should a hybrid model be adopted.	Central structure of the EP.
2. Strengthen Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Incorporation Instruments	Despite the growing coherence between principles, objectives and activities, there remains an evaluation logic excessively centred on the operational and financial execution of activities and output indicators, with limited data regarding underlying mechanisms of change, alongside a reduced	1.4. Adapt funding, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to the model defined.	
		1.5. Produce clear technical guidelines and adequate resources for promoting entities and project teams financed under the programme.	Central structure of the EP.
		2.1. Provide adequate financial, material and human resources for the reformulation of the Programme's monitoring and evaluation system, including the reconfiguration of the administrative data recording platforms (AGIL and AFINA).	Central structure of the EP.
		2.2. Reconfigure the AGIL and AFINA systems in order to produce information oriented towards decision-making.	
		2.3. Develop a system of qualitative and quantitative monitoring and evaluation indicators, applied longitudinally and centred on trajectories, enabling the follow-up of	

	capacity for the longitudinal analysis of results. The evaluation identified structural weaknesses in the quality, consistency and comparability of data recorded within the AGIL and AFINA platforms, where implementation indicators predominate, despite their limited analytical usefulness in comparison to the burden and opportunity costs associated with EP's extensive recording requests. Internal evaluation is frequently perceived by teams as bureaucratic, inspection-oriented and of limited usefulness.	participants and projects over time. 2.4. Involve local technical teams in the definition of indicators and monitoring instruments, promoting their co-construction and greater ownership and perceived usefulness of evaluation processes. 2.5. Identify, with the support of the projects, the principal difficulties associated with completing the IARPS-CJ and define standardised procedures for its use, namely regarding to whom and when it should be applied, and whether it should apply only to direct participants or to a sample thereof. 2.6. Regularly update the TSVI in support of decision-making and monitoring. 2.7. Strengthen articulation between internal and external evaluation in order to ensure a process of mutual learning (based on complementary objectives, perspectives and data).	
		2.8. Re-establish an adequate timeframe for conducting external evaluations in order to ensure a better understanding of processes of change.	Central structure of the EP.
		2.9. Ensure that evaluation results are returned to local teams in an accessible, comprehensible and timely manner, with concrete usefulness for project management and improvement.	Central structure of the EP.
		2.10. Create systematic mechanisms for knowledge production, learning processes, dissemination and transferability.	Central structure of the EP.
		2.11. Participate in processes of systematisation and co-production of knowledge, learning, dissemination and transferability.	Local consortia; project technical teams.
3. Invest in the Capacity-Building and Stability of	The quality of the EP's interventions depends heavily on the project's teams, yet problems of labour	3.1. Provide financial resources and/or promote interministerial coordination to support training plans leading to academic and/or professional qualifications for participants in training activities.	Ministry responsible for the policy.

Project Technical Teams	precariousness, high turnover rates, professional burnouts and insufficient valorisation of their capacities and learning processes persist.	3.2. Establish, within the EP regulatory framework, mechanisms for professional valorisation, including improved remuneration conditions, reduced contractual precariousness and the retention of qualified human resources.	Ministry responsible for the policy.
		3.3. Implement mechanisms for professional valorisation, including improved remuneration conditions, reduced contractual precariousness and the retention of qualified human resources.	Local consortia.
		3.4. Formalise and promote cooperation protocols with training providers (academic and other entities) for the provision of training plans.	Central structure of the EP.
		3.5. Review training needs, adapting them to territorial needs.	Central structure of the EP; Promoting entities.
		3.6. Promote peer-learning processes (e.g. <i>workshops</i>).	Central structure of the EP.
		3.7. Strengthen technical teams by increasing project funding and/or increasing partners' contributions to projects.	Ministry responsible for the policy; consortia.
4. Strengthen Institutional Articulation and Partnerships	The evaluation demonstrates strong local coherence, but insufficient strategic articulation with other public policies (education, employment, health, housing and social protection), which limits structural impacts and may generate overlaps or gaps in responses.	4.1. Create formal and regular mechanisms of interinstitutional coordination (e.g. formalisation of articulation protocols with public bodies and public policies in areas considered essential), enabling the implementation and strengthening of effective network-based articulation, namely with IEFP, DGS, CLDS, TEIP, Schools, Social Networks, among others.	Ministry responsible for the policy; Sectoral ministries.
		4.2. Create concrete coordination mechanisms ensuring complementarity between PE and other public policies (sectoral and/or integrated) present within territories.	
		4.3. Effectively operationalise the monitoring committee envisaged under the E9G of PE.	Ministry responsible for the policy.
		4.4. Participation and involvement in the monitoring committee envisaged under the E9G of the EP.	Sectoral ministries represented on the monitoring committee

		4.5. Develop multilevel strategies for integrated territorial intervention, whenever possible building on existing local governance dynamics (e.g. Social Networks, GPI, Social Forums, Community Groups).	Ministry responsible for the policy.
		4.6. Strengthen the involvement of municipalities and parish councils in providing technical and financial support to projects.	Ministry responsible for the policy.
		4.7. Promote the participation and involvement of entities within the local institutional network.	Consortia; local networks.
		4.8. Strengthen the Programme's central team.	Ministry responsible for the policy.
		4.9. Improve communication channels between the central structure and projects, supported by a strengthened central team.	Central structure of the EP.
5. Strengthen the Territorial and Financial Sustainability of Interventions	The application model and short funding cycles generate discontinuity in interventions and financial fragility among promoting entities. Difficulties in liquidity persist because of the expenditure reimbursement model, with various opportunity costs affecting the development of activities.	5.1. Implement, within the regulator, proactive mechanisms for identifying territories requiring priority intervention through the use of the Territorial Social Vulnerability Index and other instruments. 5.2. Establish regulatory provisions for supporting territories identified as priorities, or renewal in cases where projects are already underway and demonstrate positive results. 5.3. Ensure increased financial support for territories identified as priorities, but with weaker institutional structures or dynamism, in the submission of pilot projects aimed at building local community partnerships. 5.4. Adopt more stable multiannual funding models, with guarantees of reinforced financial support. 5.5. Review the programme's financial model, anticipating funding for human resources expenditure. 5.6. Adapt financial mechanisms to the realities of social and solidarity economy organisations. 5.7. Create transitional bridging periods between programme generations, ensuring a minimum continuity of project functioning between the end of one funding cycle and the start of the next, using hybrid funding models.	Ministry responsible for the policy.

		5.8. Promote the development of feasible and monitorable sustainability plans.	Consortia; local networks.
		5.9. Develop sustainability and local ownership plans for projects, fostering the integration of project-developed responses into public policies and local planning instruments, while strengthening the shared responsibility of municipalities, public services and civil society organisations for their continuity.	Consortia; local networks.
		5.10. Develop strategies to promote local ownership of initiatives and projects by local stakeholders and communities.	Consortia; local networks.