



# Monitoring Portugal's Recovery in the COVID-19 Pandemic and Post-Pandemic Context. A Conceptual Model and Methodology for Monitoring the Economic and Social Recovery

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## ABSTRACT

The Research Project 'Monitoring Recovery – Proposal of a Conceptual Model and Methodology for Monitoring the Economic and Social Recovery of Portugal in the COVID-19 Pandemic and Post-Pandemic Context' was carried out by the Public Policy Monitoring Unit [UMPP] of the University of Évora between October 1, 2021 and October 1, 2022 and was funded by the Technical Assistance Operational Program [POAT] of the Partnership Agreement Portugal 2014-2020 [PT2020]. The results achieved by this Research Project are divided into a set of documents and specific studies, which, as a whole and in an integrated manner, aimed to formalise a concrete guidance proposal - albeit conceptual - for the design, operationalization and implementation of a Monitoring System to support pursuit of the 'Portugal 2030 Strategy' and the mix of public policy instruments contributing to its achievement. In this context, a roadmap for action structured around six key components is presented: 1) Definition of Objectives and Scope of the Monitoring System; 2) Mobilization of Stakeholders and Definition of the Governance Model; 3) Systematization of the Public Intervention's Rationale; 4) Identification of Information Needs; 5) Definition of Indicators and Methods for Information Collection; 6) Design of Communication Products and Dissemination of Results.

**Keywords:** Public Policy, Monitoring System, Recovery and Resilience, COVID-19, Portugal.

**JEL classification:** C54, D78, E61, Z18.

## 1. CONTEXTUALIZATION AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The theme of public policy monitoring has received growing international attention. In a recent publication, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] argued that, in a growing context of misinformation and contradictory information, such as the world is currently facing, the key component of democracy is access to and availability of reliable information, which is an essential condition to strengthen the credibility and trust of public institutions<sup>9</sup>. According to this organisation, the polarisation of opinions arising from weaknesses in the quality of the information made available is likely to affect governments' ability to implement their policies effectively and efficiently, as well as their capacity to involve and mobilise citizens and other stakeholders in the rationale of the policies, justification of the respective rationale for intervention and the goals and objectives they propose to achieve<sup>10</sup>. It is therefore important to develop better governance models for the information ecosystems associated with the performance and execution of public policies, in which monitoring should play a structuring role and not be understood only as a minor subsidiary or mere instrument to support evaluation, but rather as absolutely necessary and on an equal footing with that evaluation<sup>11</sup>.

In this case, it is important to highlight that this Research Project finds its original pertinence in the pandemic framework of COVID-19 and in the whole set of often disruptive impacts resulting from this. It is closely aligned with the need to initiate a structural process of economic and social recovery in Portugal, which is particularly demanding in terms of the (re)formulation and implementation of public policies.

As this was an event on a global scale, a wide and diverse set of initiatives were conducted at the international level by entities such as the OECD, the United Nations [UN], the World Bank [WB], the International Labour Organization [ILO] and the European Commission [EC], part of a massive effort to collect and compile data on the pandemic and its impacts. This also supported the production of analyses and recommendations on a wide range of topics and issues in order to address the multiple needs and associated challenges. Analysis of the nature and content of these initiatives was given special attention by the Research Team when this project was designed and resulted in some of its intermediate products<sup>12</sup>.

At the national level, and with decisive importance for the present project, it is especially relevant to point out the Portuguese Government's 'Portugal 2030 Strategy'<sup>13</sup>, whose design is based on the 'Vision for the Economic Recovery Plan for Portugal 2020-2030' produced by Prof. António Costa e Silva<sup>14</sup>. The 'Portugal 2030 Strategy' stands as a central strategic reference to respond to the impacts generated by the COVID-19 pandemic and currently serves as a guideline for public policies implemented (or to be implemented) in Portugal until the end of this decade. These include the community financing instruments corresponding to the Recovery and Resilience Plan [RRP] (adopted in direct response to the pandemic crisis) and the PT2030 Partnership Agreement (which operationalizes in Portugal the European Cohesion Policy throughout the 2021-2027 programming period).

Given the context described briefly above and the particularly challenging and demanding framework for the formulation and implementation of public policies in Portugal, the main objective of this study is to propose a conceptual model and methodology to monitor Portugal's economic and social recovery in the COVID-19 and post-pandemic context. It focuses on analysing the impacts and economic and social effects of the pandemic and the economic and social impacts arising from the implementation of different public policy instruments that contribute to fulfilling the 'Portugal 2030 Strategy'.

The methodological proposal is based on the simultaneous combination of a sectoral and territorial approach in formalising the rationale for monitoring. In order to respond to the provisions of the 'Post-Programme Surveillance Report - Portugal, Spring 2021'<sup>15</sup> of the EC, it will also be possible to monitor the structural reforms to be implemented in Portugal during its economic and social

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<sup>9</sup> Vd. [www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/b407f99c-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/b407f99c-en](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/b407f99c-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/b407f99c-en).

<sup>10</sup> Vd. [www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/b407f99c-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/b407f99c-en](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/b407f99c-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/b407f99c-en).

<sup>11</sup> On the differences between monitoring and evaluation, vd. P.NETO, N.DUARTE & J.FERMISSON (2022).

<sup>12</sup> Vd. P.NETO, J.FERMISSON & N.DUARTE (2021) and P.NETO, N.DUARTE & J.FERMISSON (2022).

<sup>13</sup> Vd. Resolution of the Council of Ministers nº 98/2020, of 13 November.

<sup>14</sup> Vd. A.COSTA E SILVA (2020).

<sup>15</sup> Vd. [https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/post-programme-surveillance-report-portugal-spring-2021\\_pt](https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/post-programme-surveillance-report-portugal-spring-2021_pt).

recovery process in the pandemic and post-pandemic context. In addition, the level of change registered in the national economy's competitiveness will be gauged, based on the perspectives of green recovery, smart recovery and inclusive recovery<sup>16</sup>.

Therefore, the conceptual and methodological monitoring model proposed here aims to be a *complete system*. It is complete because, as mentioned above, it focuses on monitoring implementation of the 'Portugal 2030 Strategy' and how public policy instruments (including the RRP, PT2020 and PT2030) contribute to its achievement. It is also complete because the proposed conceptual monitoring model aims to monitor all public policies regardless of the origin of the public resources financing them (i.e. not being limited, as is often the case, to those that come from the EU), to ensure a global vision of the public policies implemented in Portugal. Finally, it is complete because it aims to be a system with a perennial and continuous character, and not only a response to temporally defined cycles of public resource application. For obvious reasons of feasibility, it is considered natural to structure the design and operationalisation of the proposed conceptual model and monitoring methodology in an evolutionary and model-like way, with a view to its widespread adoption and use in the long long term, also enabling the future addition of other dimensions of analysis that may contribute to more comprehensive monitoring<sup>17</sup>.

Finally, the proposed conceptual model and monitoring methodology is intended to be useful firstly for society, Public Administration, companies and the various public and private entities that benefit directly or indirectly from the support these policies mobilise, and secondly for citizens, as it may contribute to creating better conditions for greater knowledge of public policies, their governance and implementation and for greater understanding of their results and impacts. With this in mind, the implementation of this project was guided by concerns about practical applicability in specific institutional contexts of Portuguese Public Administration.

The conceptual model and monitoring methodology designed within this project is not designed to overlap or replicate existing monitoring systems already in operation in Portugal, but rather to add new dimensions and approaches of analysis and to generate, in relation to those systems, new complementarities and synergies. The monitoring of public policies implies the use of "a very wide range of methods and tools. It comprises data collection and processing systems, information analysis, communication processes and decision-making procedures and plays a crucial role in assisting decision-making (both at the strategic and operational levels), in supporting learning, communication and accountability processes, and in building the capacity of the public administration and the different actors directly involved"<sup>18</sup>.

## 2. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The main results of the Research Project 'Monitoring Recovery - Proposed Conceptual Model and Methodology for Monitoring the Economic and Social Recovery of Portugal in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Post-Pandemic' are summarised below. Given that the project produced a set of documents and studies<sup>19</sup>, all with their own relevance and more specific analytical focus, the aim here is to focus on presenting the proposal that was developed with the aim of supporting the design, operationalisation and implementation of a Monitoring System to support pursuit of the 'Portugal 2030 Strategy' and the set of public policy instruments that contribute to its achievement. In this context, a roadmap for action structured around six key components is presented:

- Definition of Objectives and Scope of the Monitoring System;
- Mobilization of Stakeholders and Definition of the Governance Model;
- Systematization of the Public Intervention's Rationale;
- Identification of Information Needs;
- Definition of Indicators and Methods for Information Collection;
- Design of Communication Products and Dissemination of Results.

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. P.NETO, J.FERMISSON & N.DUARTE (2021) and P.NETO, N.DUARTE & J.FERMISSON (2022).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. P.NETO, N.DUARTE & J.FERMISSON (2022).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Design and Implement a Monitoring System. Methodological Guide (<https://www.tdh.ch/en/media-library/documents/monitoring-system>).

<sup>19</sup> Vd. P.NETO, J.FERMISSON & N.DUARTE (2021), P.NETO, N.DUARTE & J.FERMISSON (2022), P.NETO, J.FERMISSON, N.DUARTE & A.RODRIGUES (2022) and P.NETO, N.DUARTE, J.FERMISSON & A.RODRIGUES (2022).

## 2.1 Definition of Objectives and Scope of the Monitoring System

The main objective of the proposed Monitoring System is to collect, process, analyse and communicate relevant and timely information on the process of economic and social recovery started in Portugal following the COVID-19 pandemic, based on the strategic development options set out in the 'Portugal 2030 Strategy'<sup>20</sup> and the contribution of the set of public policy instruments (policy-mix) mobilized for its achievement in the 2030 timeframe. In a complementary, but integrated way, it is considered appropriate and pertinent that this System also allows analysis regarding Portugal of international benchmarks to which Portugal is committed, such as the Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs] of the United Nations 2030 Agenda or the European Pillar of Social Rights (and respective Action Plan).

From the Research Team perspective, implementation of a Monitoring System with this scope and degree of integration will make it possible to close important gaps that still exist in the ecosystem of public policies in Portugal, and which, to a considerable extent, were also identified in the Case Studies [CEs] analysed in the Benchmarking Study prepared within the framework of this project<sup>21</sup>. From this point of view, and in the first place, the Monitoring System to be implemented should be structured according to the development objectives and goals referred to in 'Portugal 2030 Strategy', since this "embodies the vision of the next decade of Portugal's recovery and convergence with Europe, interrupted in the meantime with the COVID-19 disease pandemic, while ensuring internal social and territorial cohesion and resilience".<sup>22</sup>

From the Research Team's point of view, it is full incorporation of this strategic reference at the top of the Monitoring System that makes it possible to ensure a monitoring logic oriented towards achieving previously established results (i.e. what does success look like?). A substantial part of the analytical effort is directed towards following up the indicators assessing the process of economic and social recovery in Portugal with reference to the objectives and goals set out in the 'Portugal 2030 Strategy'.

The other structuring and defining element of the proposed Monitoring System lies in the incorporation of information elements to analyse the implementation and contribution of the various public policy instruments mobilised to achieve the objectives and targets of the 'Portugal 2030 Strategy'. This Monitoring System must be endowed with a logic that expressly contemplates the follow-up of the public policy instruments whose implementation is deemed essential to reach those objectives and targets. This will enable a consistent and - as far as possible - real time reading of their (potential and/or effective) contribution to achieving the economic and social recovery trajectory set out in the 'Portugal 2030 Strategy'. This connection takes into account the option of positioning the 'Portugal 2030 Strategy' as "the main reference for planning public policies to promote the country's economic and social development"<sup>23</sup>, including the way in which resources from EU funding raised through instruments such as the Recovery and Resilience Plan [RRP], the Partnership Agreements Portugal 2020 [PT2020] and Portugal 2030 [PT2030] and the Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan [PEPAC] are mobilised and directed.

Therefore, operationalization of this logic requires the mapping and systematization of the catalogue of public policy instruments which are recognized as having the greatest potential contribution to achieving the 'Portugal 2030 Strategy', being a crucial step in defining the perimeter of analysis covered by the proposed Monitoring System, as well as its own governance model. Despite the recent - and praiseworthy - provision by the new Competence Centre for Planning, Policy and Foresight of Public Administration [PlanAPP] of a list identifying and briefly characterizing the main planning instruments of public policy<sup>24</sup>, it is considered necessary to move towards an effective densification of the expected contribution of each of these instruments to the objectives and goals of the 'Portugal 2030 Strategy' (including assessment of their conformity/coherence with this strategic reference framework), since this is an essential condition for establishing causal links between their implementation and the results achieved and to ensure (especially from an ex-ante perspective) that the pursuit of each of those objectives and goals is supported by concrete, well-identified public policy instruments.

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<sup>20</sup> Vd. Resolution of the Council of Ministers nº 98/2020, of 13 November.

<sup>21</sup> Vd. P.NETO, J.FERMISSON, N.DUARTE & A.RODRIGUES (2022).

<sup>22</sup> Vd. Resolução do Conselho de Ministros nº98/2020, de 13 de novembro.

<sup>23</sup> Idem.

<sup>24</sup> Vd. <https://planapp.gov.pt/lista-instrumentos/>.

Despite monitoring more operational aspects associated with implementing these policy instruments (i.e. focused on the analysis of resources mobilised, activities undertaken and results achieved), it is mainly regarding the production of strategic information (e.g. results and impacts) that this approach proves to be more promising and challenging.

Finally, it is important to mention that establishing a Monitoring System with these characteristics includes but clearly goes beyond the purpose of ensuring greater transparency (i.e. accountability) of public intervention<sup>25</sup>, highlighting here its contribution to other equally relevant purposes such as direct support for the management activities of public policies or acquisition/consolidation of knowledge about what works (or not) and why. From this point of view, the proposed Monitoring System clearly presents an enormous potential to respond to the information needs of a very wide and diversified set of users and target groups.

## 2.2 Mobilization of Stakeholders and Definition of the Governance Model

The scope, complexity and ambition underlying the conceptual model of the proposed Monitoring System present very significant challenges to its operationalisation and management, clearly emphasising the need to adopt particularly demanding governance structures and mechanisms at the institutional and organisational level.

This need has been recognised in the literature of reference, such as the whole-of-government approaches (of particular relevance for the present study), alerting to the importance of promoting increased coordination and integration between Public Administration structures and greater interaction between policies in public governance<sup>26</sup>. Not surprisingly, in this regard, the criticism that the principle of single purpose organisations, with many specialised and non-overlapping roles and functions, may have produced much fragmentation, self-centred authorities and a lack of cooperation and coordination, undermining the effectiveness and efficiency of public governance and the policies in their charge<sup>27</sup>. On the other hand, it is also worth highlighting the relevance attributed by various authors to the urgency of changes in the very relationship that Public Administration should establish with the various institutions, entities and economic and social actors. There should be a growing focus on processes of co-creating public policies, increasingly based on multi-stakeholder participatory methodologies to structure the processes of policy formulation, its implementation, monitoring and evaluation<sup>28</sup>.

It is also important to bear in mind that the 'Portugal 2030 Strategy' addresses this issue in a very general way. According to the Resolution of the Council of Ministers approving this 'Strategy'<sup>29</sup>, its overall coordination and monitoring is ensured by the member of the Government responsible for the planning area, while its follow-up and evaluation of its implementation is the responsibility of this same element in articulation with the members of the Government responsible for coordinating the strategic challenges set out in the Government Programme. At a more operational level, the Agency for Development and Cohesion [AD&C] is responsible for ensuring technical support for the 'Strategy', in articulation with the planning structures of the ministries involved. Finally, an annual report on monitoring of the 'Portugal 2030 Strategy' must be drawn up and publicly disclosed, subject to appreciation by the Council of Ministers. As it is considered relevant, it is also worth mentioning the governmental change that took place following the anticipated general election at the end of January 2022 (including, for example, the extinction of the Ministry of Planning), as well as the recent creation (March 2021) of the Competencies Centre for Planning, Policy and Foresight of Public Administration [PlanAPP]. This organism in the meantime (i.e. after approval of the 'Portugal 2030 Strategy') has been assigned explicit competences in the areas of planning, design and innovation, ex-ante and ex-post impact assessment, monitoring and review of public policies.

Therefore, the framework described indicates an exploratory approach to the governance model that we consider necessary in order to fully materialise the Monitoring System proposed in this project<sup>30</sup>, an exercise that is naturally based on the current governmental structure and organisational

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<sup>25</sup> Central purpose, for example, of the More Transparency Portal (<https://transparencia.gov.pt/pt/>).

<sup>26</sup> Vd. T.CHRISTENSEN & P.LGÆREID (2007).

<sup>27</sup> Vd. J.BOSTON & C.EICHBAUM (2005).

<sup>28</sup> Vd. C.MATTI & G.RISSOLA (2022).

<sup>29</sup> Vd. Resolution of the Council of Ministers nº 98/2020, of 13 November.

<sup>30</sup> It has as reference the approach initially proposed in a previous report of this project, namely in P.NETO, N.DUARTE & J.FERMISSON (2022).

architecture of Portuguese Public Administration. In this context, and from a political and governance point of view, there seems to be an unequivocal need to directly associate a Monitoring System with the scope and objectives of the one proposed here with the epicentre of the Government currently in office, i.e. the Prime Minister and the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. From the Research Team's perspective, this option naturally derives from the positioning of the 'Portugal 2030 Strategy' as the "main planning reference for public policies to promote the country's economic and social development"<sup>31</sup> and appears as a basic condition to ensure its nature as transversal to all governmental action, clearly adopting supra-ministerial relevance.

At the technical level, the Research Team considers that institutional anchorage of the proposed Monitoring System should be based on the recently created PlanAPP, given the foundations of its institution and its mission and range of competencies. Also here, and with reference to the diploma that created the PlanAPP<sup>32</sup>, this seems to be a natural and consistent option given the current organisational architecture of Portuguese Public Administration, as well as the nature and scope of the proposed Monitoring System. Without detracting from the institutional centrality attributed to the PlanAPP in operationalising and implementing the proposed Monitoring System, it is important to emphasise that we defend its focus on functions of global technical coordination of a vast and diversified network of public organisms which, due to their nature and functions, will also have to be an integral part of the proposed governance model.

Consequently, this perspective differs from an approach that concentrates responsibilities on a single entity (which, in fact, is considered unfeasible or inconsistent), advocating instead the orchestration of a broad, multi-institutional model supported by the mobilisation and active involvement of other public bodies with operational responsibilities regarding technical specification, collection, production and/or supply of information and the production of technical analysis of the different components (e.g. sectoral/thematic and regional/territorial) included in the scope of the proposed Monitoring System.

From the Research Team perspective, determining the public entities to be involved in the governance model of this Monitoring System should be directly related to the catalogue of public policy instruments that may be part of its scope of analysis. These should include the entities responsible for formulating and/or implementing public policies or for managing the public policy instruments contemplated therein. In the case of entities with direct responsibilities for managing instruments with community funding (e.g. AD&C or Mission Structure 'Recovering Portugal'), their participation and contribution within this governance model does not replace or overlap with their specific responsibilities towards the European Commission or other entities with their own governance models associated with implementation of those instruments. On the other hand, and given their specific mission and functions regarding the collection, processing and/or dissemination of official statistical information, it is also considered essential to include in the governance model the relevant entities of the National Statistical System [SEN], namely Statistics Portugal, the Regional Services of Statistics of the Autonomous Regions of Azores and Madeira and other entities to which Statistics Portugal has delegated powers to produce and disseminate relevant official statistics.

### **2.3 Systematization of the Public Intervention's Rationale**

The proposed Monitoring System aims, firstly, to provide relevant and timely information on the progress made towards achieving the objectives and development goals set out in the 'Portugal 2030 Strategy'. This task is performed by compiling information showing the evolution observed on the ground (i.e. the dynamics of ongoing economic, social and environmental change) and comparing this with the desired situation in the 2030 timeframe (i.e. the goals set out in the 'Strategy' itself).

In addition, the proposed monitoring system seeks to produce useful knowledge about how these results are - or are not - being achieved, particularly considering analysis of the role played by the public policy instruments mobilized in connection with the development goals and targets set out in the 'Portugal 2030 Strategy'. As pointed out by some literature of reference, it is considered necessary to provide the current monitoring activities with a reference framework that clearly explains, for each instrument considered in the catalogue of public policy instruments, which intervention rationale underlies its design.

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<sup>31</sup> Vd. Resolution of the Council of Ministers nº 98/2020, of 13 November.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Decree-Law No. 21/2021 of 15 March.

To this end, it seems particularly appropriate to mobilise the theoretical and methodological references which, for several decades, have been produced in the sphere of so-called theory-based approaches, and in particular, within the framework of theory-based evaluation. The defining feature of this type of approach is that they set out from the idea that any structured intervention (policy, programme, project, etc.) is supported by explicit or implicit theories regarding the way (i.e. how?) and the reasons (i.e. why?) it is expected to produce the intended effects<sup>33</sup>.

According to this perspective, it is about identifying those theories, usually referred to as theories of change, explaining them as clearly and in as much detail as possible and identifying all the assumptions/hypotheses underlying them. This enables and guides subsequent factual assessment of how much they are confirmed by the evidence gathered in monitoring and evaluation processes and contribute (or not) to the results observed (contribution analysis)<sup>34</sup>. Given their applicability to practically all stages of the life cycle of interventions (starting with their conception/planning), theory-based approaches can be defined as approaches oriented towards processual analysis of complex systems, combining the planning of actions with the capacity to positively influence the evolution of those systems and the monitoring of changes to which those actions have contributed. More simply, they serve as a guiding framework for all stages of reflection, action and awareness-raising within the framework of intentional interventions in processes of social change<sup>35</sup>.

In this context, and from the perspective of the proposed Monitoring System, this type of approach is mobilised in order to identify the theory of change underlying the intervention studied and assess its success by comparing that theory with its effective implementation. The aim is to assess whether the activities developed and the changes observed correspond to what was expected and to understand how and why that intervention contributed to its materialisation<sup>36</sup>.

In instrumental terms, practical application of the Programming Theory is often carried out using so-called logic models, which as an appropriate tool to visualise the theory of change of a certain intervention, are typically based on the schematic representation of the sequential causal relationships that are assumed to exist between four main components<sup>37</sup>:

- **Inputs:** correspond to the specific means (financial, human, logistical, etc.) that are allocated to the intervention to enable its implementation;
- **Activities:** correspond to the actions developed within the framework of the intervention's management/implementation, based on the resources allocated to it and with the immediate aim of converting them into concrete achievements directly attributable to the intervention;
- **Outputs:** correspond to the achievements directly and immediately resulting from the activities developed within the framework of the intervention (their aggregate treatment not being uncommon), typically expressed through the quantity and/or type of products and services completed and made available to their target audiences and recipients following the respective implementation;
- **Results:** correspond to the changes triggered by the intervention and whose occurrence is considered decisive for the achievement of its objectives/purposes, and are often disaggregated according to their timeframe (i.e. short, medium and long-term results), causal relationship with the intervention (i.e. immediate/direct and intermediate/indirect results) and/or their sequentiality (i.e. initial, intermediate and final results).

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. C.H.WEISS, *Nothing as Practical as Good Theory: Exploring Theory-Based Evaluation for Comprehensive Community Initiatives for Children and Families*, in J.CONNELL, A.KUBISH, L.SCHORR & C.H.WEISS (Eds.), *New Approaches to Evaluating Community Initiatives*, Aspen Institute, Washington DC, 1995.

<sup>34</sup> Idem.

<sup>35</sup> Adapted from M.VAN ES *et al.* (2015).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. EVALSED Sourcebook: Method and Techniques, European Commission, s.l., 2013.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. J.A.FRECHTLING (2007).

In addition to describing/characterising each of these components, the logic models attach equal (or even greater) relevance to explaining the causality mechanisms represented by the links that connect these components and make the inputs>activities>outputs>results chain work.<sup>38</sup> Regarding the specification of the theory of change, it should be noted that it is in these connections that a very significant part of the long series of assumptions/hypotheses resides, the verification of which is decisive for the intervention to produce the intended effects<sup>39</sup>.

Finally, it is important to note that any intervention operates within and/or in parallel with a wider external environment, from which it receives influences (which may enhance or limit its success) and which it simultaneously aims to influence, thus implying that it should be expressly considered in the theory of change and in the logic model that supports it<sup>40</sup>. From this perspective, it will be essential to identify and describe the main factors external to the intervention and beyond its control that may influence its success positively or negatively, particularly with a view to understanding the context conditions in which the intervention takes place and how these affect its results<sup>41</sup>.

## 2.4 Identification of Information Needs

The proposal for operationalisation of the Monitoring System proposed by the Research Team adopts an integrated and systemic approach to the different stages considered and the products and tasks developed therein. Here it is important to note, for reasons of feasibility and rationality of the proposed Monitoring System recognised by the Research Team, that not all aspects subject to monitoring will receive the same attention and not all monitoring objectives proposed will be equally relevant and met.

It is therefore essential in the process of developing the proposed Monitoring System to specify the domains of monitoring and the areas of information to be subject to monitoring. Here it helps to have a clear intervention rationale (theory of change) that is recognised by all involved. Understanding the objectives incumbent on each stakeholder and the associated monitoring efforts will help decide, collectively, how to fulfil the different roles outlined in implementing public policies in the most effective way.

It is the Research Team's understanding that the Results-Based Management [RBM] approach is a fundamental reference in formulating the monitoring system proposal presented here, resulting in a Results-Based Monitoring System. The main purpose of a Monitoring System of this nature is to follow the performance of an intervention, i.e. to assess its degree of execution compared to what was planned and the degree of success achieved in the intended results. It is the link between the progress in implementing and the progress in achieving the desired objectives (outcomes) of government policies and programmes that makes results-based monitoring most useful as a tool for public management. Implementing this type of monitoring system allows organisations to modify and adjust their intervention rationales and implementation processes giving more direct support towards the desired objectives and outcomes.

A Results-based Monitoring System can track both implementation (inputs, activities, outputs) and results (immediate results, intermediate results and impacts). Both types of monitoring are important in results-based monitoring<sup>42</sup>. There should be a different set of outcome indicators (for defined impacts and results), and implementation indicators (for planned outputs, and activities and resources mobilised). This is an important classification when there is a need to prioritise indicators, but always bearing in mind that indicators are required for all levels of results.

Implementation monitoring tracks the means and strategies (i.e. inputs, activities, outputs found in institutions' work plans) used to achieve a given result. These means and strategies are supported by management tools, including budgetary resources, personnel, and activity planning. A challenge in establishing implementation indicators is that often, to calculate them, information is required which

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<sup>38</sup> As stated in P.ROGERS, Program Theory: Not Whether Programs Work But How They Work, in E.STERN (Ed.), Evaluation Research Methods – Volume III, SAGE Publications, London, 2005, the logic models that do not make these mechanisms explicit are normally associated with the so-called blackbox evaluation, that is, with an evaluation that, although focused on the results of an intervention, does not investigate the processes that allow establishing (or not) a causal relationship between those results and the intervention

<sup>39</sup> Cf. C.H.WEISS, Which Links in Which Theories Shall We Evaluate?, in New Directions for Evaluation, no.87, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2000.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. J.C.DAVID & L.R.L.HAWTHORN (2006).

<sup>41</sup> Cf. J.A.MCLAUGHLIN & G.B.JORDAN, Logic Models: a Tool for Telling Your Programs Performance Story, in E.STERN (Ed.), Evaluation Research Methods – Volume III, SAGE Publications, London, 2005.

<sup>42</sup> On this subject, vd. IPDET (2007), A.MARKIEWICZ & I.PATRICK (2016) and Z.KUSEK & R.RIST (2004).



is mostly not available in the organisations' information systems, i.e. the numerator and denominator of the indicator will require different counting rules and new collection tools.

It is the Research Team's understanding that the proposed conceptual model and monitoring methodology should be structured according to a design of an evolutionary and modelling nature that allows for its long-term adoption and use. This evolutionary and model-based nature underlying the proposed conceptual model and monitoring methodology is also intended to ensure a degree of flexibility to accommodate changes in the policy-mix supporting operationalization of the 'Portugal 2030 Strategy'.

It is also important to add here that in certain intervention typologies the expected results and changes involve complex situations, consisting of several interdependent elements and presenting situations that take longer to appear, often after the end of the relevant projects. Here, the role evaluation can play in developing more targeted and ex-post analyses is highlighted. Monitoring should focus on those elements that indicate the conditions for results and change are present, so that it can actually take place.

The proposed approach essentially provides for an increased focus on the use of outcome and impact indicators, as well as improved quality of indicators through more refined methods for their identification and quantification. However, it should be recognised that the use of indicators has only limited value in capturing impacts, because information arrives late and it is often difficult to provide evidence of the links between outcomes and the activities of initiatives<sup>43</sup>. Furthermore, it should be borne in mind that the materialisation of an impact is often a partial measure to gauge the effectiveness of public policy instruments, given its exposure to factors external to the direct action of these instruments over which the influence of direct stakeholders is relatively small.

Thus, what stakeholders can (and should) be held accountable for are not impacts, but rather the tasks for which they are responsible - and carrying out those tasks in a way that effectively influences the behaviour of other agents in the desired direction, making it more likely that impacts will be achieved. But this requires a complementary approach to monitoring, also looking at the processes that are expected to lead to outcomes or impacts - not just indicators as their ultimate measure. This will provide early information to stakeholders about the likelihood of outcomes or impacts being achieved, and emphasis can be placed on the areas they can influence or for which they are responsible. It is therefore about identifying the elements that will provide us with information on developments and the likelihood of these developments being on track to achieve the expected outcome. The main challenge is to identify the likely links between resources, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts and to check during implementation whether these links remain valid and actually take place.

Care should also be taken to capture, as far as possible, the full range of effects that can be observed (i.e. unintended or unexpected effects) and to consider deviations from the intended routes not a priori as negative phenomena, but to deal with them in a more differentiated way. Differences between plan and implementation, as well as exceptions or unexpected effects, are important sources of information for learning and improving implementation, as they can help to identify weaknesses, point out possible alternatives or lead to new solutions.

## **2.5 Definition of Indicators and Methods for Information Collection**

Monitoring involves measuring progress and performance towards achieving an outcome or impact, associated with a defined objective. However, the objective may not be measured directly. It should first be translated into a set of indicators that, when measured regularly, will provide information on whether or not the intended outcome or impact is being achieved. An indicator can be designed as a unit of measure that helps to demonstrate changes occurring in a particular condition. As such, it establishes a link between what is to be measured and what can be observed. An objective associated with an intervention may contain several indicators, and it is necessary to identify those which can be measured and produce relevant information on implementation of the initiatives under analysis.

Using indicators can reduce the scope and information needs, allowing for greater focus and objectivity in data collection and analysis processes. However, there are limitations in the mobilisation of indicators, due to the fact that they are sometimes simplified readings of reality, and at the same time, do not have the explanatory capacity to support understanding of the changes

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. R.HUMMELBRUNNER (2005), R.HUMMELBRUNNER (2006) & R.HUMMELBRUNNER *et al.* (2005)

occurring within the context of the interventions analysed. Another aspect worth highlighting here is the static nature of indicators, unable to respond to unforeseen situations, which implies the need for their replacement by others, arising from substantial or structural changes in the context of the intervention.

The participation of the different stakeholders in the process of selecting and validating indicators is essential to obtain a meaningful set of indicators that provide an overview of the intervention and represent its performance. The work to define this information may sometimes lead to a revision of the indicator wording if it proves not to be sufficiently precise, does not lead to consensus or requires resources or skills that are not available within the monitoring system. This is also an iterative process. Here, the use of pre-defined indicators may ensure an agreed definition and reliable measurement using proven methods, but always bearing in mind that indicators should be internally driven and tailored to the organisation's needs and management information requirements as far as possible.

Indicators are important instruments to create and record information and knowledge. Their development requires first and foremost a study and learning exercise, as they require full understanding of the intervention (of whatever nature) to which they refer. When indicators are being developed, they should be fully defined. No indicator should be implemented without an associated full definition. In other words, the essential components of the indicators must be clearly defined, facilitating analysis of their role and suitability for the intended purpose, which must be substantiated through production of the associated metadata.

The significant advances achieved in the processes of collecting, organising and disseminating data and information have been made possible, among other aspects, by the recent evolution of information technologies. These have enabled the generalised use of data and indicators in a much more strategic and precise manner and by many more organisations and people than was possible a few years ago. With this, work can be much more effective, since decisions are taken not only based on impressions and suggestions - which must be considered - but also with the technical support of an information system, an aggregator of evidence.

The organisation and structuring of data, information and indicators raises new needs and challenges in implementing assertive and targeted strategies when configuring monitoring models for initiatives. A key aspect to be considered here is the distinction between the concepts of 'set of indicators' and 'system of indicators', which are often used interchangeably. A set of indicators can be defined as a list of indicators that may or may not be based on a particular reference (of whatever nature), as opposed to a system of indicators, where indicators are based on a specific conceptual framework.

Thus, a system of indicators is a set of information selected and organized based on a certain theme<sup>44</sup>, with the support of official or internally produced information sources (statistical or otherwise), in order to meet the specific objectives of the organizations or initiatives. Once the theme has been defined and the intended objectives are clear, the organization of the system of indicators, territorial coverage, frequency of updates and the desired reports should be defined.

When organising the system, it is essential to define the basic structure to be used to organise the information, with the necessary breakdowns for what is to be monitored. The most suitable way to do this is to follow a logic of progressive focus, going from the macro to the micro, that is, based on the objectives, define the themes, sub-themes (if there are goals) and within each sub-theme, the indicators.

The intention is to create a system of indicators, fed in a general manner, which will allow looking at reality from different points of view, in a segmented manner. In other words, the basic information is the same, the feeding system will be common to all indicators, but these, through various lenses, will allow the information to be disaggregated. The different levels of disaggregation, through different lenses, enable us to look at the same reality (quantitative or not) from different points of view. For example, the aim is to understand how the unemployment rate has evolved throughout the pandemic, but this evolution can be seen from a purely budgetary (associated expenses) or a more social point of view.

In parallel with the definition and construction of indicators, it is necessary to define the origin of the data, i.e. the data source, which may be from an organisation, an organisational unit, a computerised system or another source such as reports or surveys of external origin. As previously mentioned, indicators mobilise data and/or information, by means of a pre-established rationale, to gauge one or

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. ORBIS (2010).

more variables defined to measure an abstract concept, related to a specific meaning, so as to guide decisions about a certain phenomenon of interest.

Data innovation is a fundamental principle underlying the positioning of the team in the development of the research activities advocated here and in the project this study is part of. To a large extent, it is the rationale and the conceptual and informational support that can ensure the effectiveness of the proposed conceptual and monitoring model to be developed, both in terms of its ability to capture and assess the effects to be observed and its ability to provide timely responses (i.e. to observe, as much as possible, in real time)<sup>45</sup>. It is considered that only by mobilising administrative data and the existing interoperability potential, is it possible to fully provide the intended responses to capture and measure the effects to be observed within the scope of this project, in a timely manner, in Portugal. Some countries and institutions are world leaders in the use of administrative data. They have already organised platforms and systems to make microdata available in a systematic and secure way<sup>46</sup>. However, it is considered that this is not fully achieved in Portugal, and this is assumed as one (the) critical success factor for effective implementation of a results-based monitoring system.

The monitoring system strategy should include a clear definition of the data collection strategy and methods and a detailed analysis plan. Here, pre-testing or pilot experiences in the implementation of data collection instruments and procedures is vital to build an effective monitoring system. This will allow assessment of possible weaknesses or difficulties in its implementation, namely in the relationship with external entities in the data provision process.

## **2.6 Design of Communication Products and Dissemination of Results**

The dissemination of results feeds back into the process of building indicators and strengthens the links between the objectives of the organisation responsible for monitoring and the stakeholders. Communication is a preponderant factor for the organisation's integration and the deployment of results at all levels, internally and externally. "The new standard for making public what is in the public interest today, whether it is governments, public institutions or companies, is to make it freely available online. This certainly seems an entirely reasonable standard for research that is publicly funded and produced under the auspices of an educational institution."<sup>47</sup> (Rickinson, 2016).

A myth in relation to communication and decision-making is that there is currently no time to make information available and analyse it <sup>48</sup>. The interaction between teams and the alignment of knowledge create synergies and a common vision of action. The communication process moves actions, stimulates change, generates awareness and involvement, and keeps the pace of the organisation in search of better performance.

It is important to share information so that it can be useful and to use the information to make the right decisions and learn lessons from the monitored action. This work is crucial. Monitoring data is only relevant if it is used by stakeholders. The expected results can only be achieved if the stakeholders make changes, which can only happen by reflecting on the information, taking the time to learn the lessons and make the necessary decisions. We sometimes describe this process as critical scrutiny. It is therefore important to check whether the decisions taken have actually been implemented.

Here again we stress the need to identify the relevant stakeholders to be involved in the critical review and keep them informed. These stakeholders must be identified and informed of their involvement at the initial design stage of the monitoring system. Critical examination of the monitoring system needs to be encouraged. Stakeholders' engagement in a critical review may be restricted by various factors: internal hierarchical relationships and power games; an asymmetry of roles of different stakeholders; pressure from funding and political entities, the desirability of not challenging what has been decided, cultural and/or social barriers (risk of losing face when acknowledging a mistake or not knowing how to answer a question, rigid hierarchies, dependence on clientele, etc.).

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<sup>45</sup> Vd. P.NETO, N.DUARTE & J.FERMISSON (2022).

<sup>46</sup> Vd. P.NETO, J.FERMISSON, N.DUARTE & A.RODRIGUES (2022).

<sup>47</sup> M.RICKINSON, Communicating Research Findings, in D.WYSE, E.SMITH, L.E.SUTER & N.SELWYN (Eds.), *The BERA/Sage Handbook Of Educational Research*, Sage, London, 2016.

<sup>48</sup> Vd. L.O.BAHIA (2021).

Thus, there should be a readiness for critical examination and communication when designing the monitoring system, organised and planned so as to provide the time and means for information to be shared and examined and lessons learned. The challenge, wherever possible, is to integrate information sharing and discussion time into operational procedures so as to minimise the burden on the overall system, but also to feed into major and minor decisions made on the basis of monitoring. Much of this time is formal, but it is also important to capitalise on informal discussion times. Specific times should be organised for this purpose.

The step of communicating performance involves effort to convey as much information as possible in the shortest amount of time. To this end, dashboards should be designed to provide a relevant and necessary set of indicators displayed in the form of graphs and tables with flags so that information on performance can be conveyed to stakeholders for consumption and absorption in decision-making processes<sup>49</sup>.

The way in which information is represented is fundamental to facilitate analysis and dissemination. Whenever possible, results should be transformed into graphs, maps or comparative tables to allow natural, intuitive and logical understanding of what one wants to communicate. Often, due to ignorance, the same graphs and tables are always used, when there would be better ways to represent the information, and consequently, communicate better.

The dissemination of reports and other information products is an important process that supports their potential use and influence. A range of formal and informal disclosure strategies can be adopted, which are mutually reinforcing. Formal dissemination opportunities may include publications that are distributed in print or on websites. In addition, both face-to-face and virtual presentation and promotional opportunities may be available. Outreach planning is important to maximise the chances of the reports and information products reaching the intended audience. While the benefits of outreach are apparent, it is not always carried out.

When developing a communications and outreach strategy, it is important to consider how different stakeholders may respond to different media. While some stakeholders are familiar with, and expect, more substantial technical reports, others may require shorter, more targeted, and more easily accessible reports.

Key considerations in disclosure include not only the identification of audiences and their information needs, but also a full appreciation of how those audiences receive, respond, react to and use the information. Ideally, dissemination should include dynamic elements that promote interaction and debate. To achieve the best fit between audiences and the methods used in dissemination, active monitoring of the impact of the dissemination approaches used is advisable. The extent of guidance provided for information and dissemination processes will vary according to the needs of the conceptual framework supporting the monitoring system developed.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

The conceptual and methodological model to monitor the economic and social recovery of Portugal in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and post-pandemic resulting from this Research Project is based on the proposal of a global and comprehensive (i.e. complete) system to monitor this process based on a results-oriented management logic (i.e. Results-Based Management). It adopts as a reference the set of strategic development options established under the 'Portugal 2030 Strategy' and focuses the analytical effort on assessing the implementation and contribution of the set of public policy instruments (i.e. policy-mix) mobilised to achieve them within the 2030 timeframe. From the Research Team's perspective, implementation of a Monitoring System with this scope and degree of integration will close important gaps still existing in the ecosystem of public policies in Portugal (and also evident in other geographies), significantly strengthening the State's ability to acquire, structure, use and disseminate knowledge on the implementation and results of public policies.

This is a proposal, and in particular, a proposal of a conceptual nature, thus providing a set of guidelines to support the design, operationalization and implementation of a Monitoring System to support the aforementioned 'Portugal 2030 Strategy' and the entire set of public policy instruments that contribute to its implementation. This option is embodied in an action roadmap based on six key components for which specific guidelines are produced

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<sup>49</sup> Vd. analysis presented in P.NETO, J.FERMISSON, N.DUARTE & A.RODRIGUES (2022).

- Definition of Objectives and Scope of the Monitoring System;
- Mobilization of Stakeholders and Definition of the Governance Model;
- Systematization of the Public Intervention's Rationale;
- Identification of Information Needs;
- Definition of Indicators and Methods for Information Collection;
- Design of Communication Products and Dissemination of Results.

Full operationalisation and implementation of the proposed conceptual model and monitoring methodology now depends on how it is received by the agents that make up the ecosystem of public policies. In addition, the concern that has existed from the outset in terms of the involvement of some of the main players in this ecosystem in developing this project should be highlighted. Despite the scope, complexity and ambition underlying the conceptual model of the proposed Monitoring System, which requires the activation of especially demanding governance structures and mechanisms at the institutional and organisational level, the Research Team believes this is a challenge that deserves to be pursued.

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