



Mid-term Evaluation of the Centro Regional Operational Programme Summary

The main objective of the Mid-Term Evaluation of the OP Centro 2020 was to "*identify and explain the contribution of the OP to the results expected in the Specific Objectives of each Intervention Priority mobilised in each of its Priority Axes*".

This evaluation used a theory-based model as its methodological framework and involved structuring the logical framework of the OP intervention and the respective Theory of Change. The evaluation process applied various methods and techniques for collecting and analysing information, including documentary and statistical collection, 9 interviews, 4 *focus groups*, 4 case studies, and 2 surveys (to business promoters and public bodies).

The evaluation verified a high degree of coherence between the OP and the *policy mix* associated with its main pillars of intervention and the territorial and sectoral context at the time.

Overall, the evaluation showed that the support instruments mobilised by the program were appropriate to the needs of the target groups. The overall performance was positive, even after several reprogrammings that reflected the OP adaptation to the changes in the internal and external context.

The economic crises in the first phase and the effect of the pandemic, amplified by the war in Ukraine in the second moment, contributed to slowing down the OP pace of implementation. On the other hand, the lack of predictability and regularity of calls and the high average time taken to analyse applications and payment requests (especially for companies) also impacted the level of implemented projects. That explains the inconclusive picture of the OP's ability to produce the expected impacts.

Nevertheless, the progress made in some areas is worth highlighting:

- The excellent performance in improving preschool and primary school facilities, modernising 1st, 2nd and 3rd cycle schools, promoting educational success and strengthening equal access to education and the qualification of teaching and professional learning;
- The effectiveness of the interventions and the scale of the results already achieved suggest that the OP has made a significant contribution to improving the regional employability performance;
- The OP support for hiring highly qualified human resources has proved to be effective and transformative in the sense that it has led to changes in behaviour, especially in companies, with growing adherence to this instrument, which suggests the verification of diffusion effects and a growing appreciation and demand by regional companies;
- The integrated urban regeneration interventions have had multiple impacts on the qualification of the regional urban system, with effects in a positive demographic dynamic between 2011 and 2021 in the predominantly urban areas in the region. In addition, the public space improvement strengthens the attractiveness of numerous regional urban centres, attracting more visitors/tourists.

The ESI Funds made possible a substantial part of the investment made and the results achieved by the supported projects (without the support, a significant amount of the projects would not have been realised).