EVALUATION OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF EUROPEAN STRUCTURAL AND INVESTMENT FUNDS FOR THE MODERNISATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The present Evaluation focuses on the set of interventions that benefited from the support of the European Structural and Investment Funds [ESIF] through QREN (Portuguese National Strategic Reference Framework for the 2007-2014 period) and PT2020 (Partnership Agreement for 2014-2020 period) to promote modernisation and capacity building of Public Administration [M&CAP] in Portugal, covering the period between 1 January 2007 and 31 March 2020. These interventions correspond to a total of 2,410 operations with an eligible cost of 1,052 million Euros and a funding (ERDF and ESF) of 765 million Euros, spread across 11 Operational Programmes [OPs] of QREN and 7 OPs of PT2020.

One of the key components that were included in the strategic design of QREN was increasing the efficiency and quality of public institutions, corresponding to the recognition of structural constraints in the organisation and functioning of public institutions and their negative impact on the quality of the formulation and effectiveness in implementing public policies. These objectives were pursued in an articulated manner within the framework of the Thematic Operational Agendas "Competitiveness Factors" and "Human Potential". In the first case, the action of the QREN was structured around the so-called 'Integrated Interventions for Reducing Public Context Costs', essentially aimed at improving the quality of services provided by the public system and in the dimension of predictability, transparency and simplification of public procedures, thus seeking to obtain gains in collective efficiency. Regarding the second case, the QREN action was structured around the so-called 'Management and Professional Improvement' measures, essentially directed towards the promotion of the innovation, management and modernisation capacity of organisations (and, in particular, of Public Administration) through the valorisation of professional training as a key support element for the qualification of management practices and organisational change.

PT2020, in turn, has positioned the 'Public Administration Reform' as one of the Key Areas around which its programming and implementation was structured, pursuing the priorities outlined in terms of M&CAP through the Thematic Domain 'Competitiveness and Internationalization' and, more specifically, in OT:2 (Improve Access to Information and Communication Technologies and Promote their Use and Quality) and OT:11 (Strengthen Institutional Capacity and Ensure an Efficient Public Administration). In the first case the action of PT2020 is directed to accelerate administrative modernization processes supported by ICT, with emphasis on strengthening and improving digital interaction with citizens and businesses, as well as to promote efficiency gains in the internal operation of the PA, particularly through the implementation of shared services and simplification measures, reengineering and dematerialization of processes and operating models. Regarding OT:11, the action of PT2020 was directed to strengthen the adaptability, productivity and motivation of managers and workers in public functions, as well as the personal and professional skills of workers in a situation of requalification.

The following Evaluation Objectives were established:

- OA1: To assess the adequacy of the strategies adopted by QREN and PT2020 and their governance and operationalisation models vis-à-vis the needs diagnosed and the objectives outlined in terms of M&CAP;

- OA2: To evaluate if the way the supported typologies were/are being implemented is the one that best allows maximising the expected results, selecting the projects with greater potential to induce structural changes and respond to the specific objectives set;

- OA3: To assess the degree of effectiveness and efficiency of the support granted through QREN and PT2020 and to identify its effect and contribution to the objectives pursued by the public policy under analysis;

- OA4: To explain how the interventions supported by QREN and PT2020 produced/are likely to produce the observed/expected effects, which are the underlying causal mechanisms and the characteristics of the respective operating contexts, as well as the critical success (and failure) factors for obtaining the desired results;

- OA5: To identify and produce knowledge about the best practices of QREN and PT2020 in critical areas for M&CAP;

- OA6: To identify the main needs, challenges and priorities of a strategic, programmatic and operational nature that should be taken into account in the 2021-2027 programming period.

This Evaluation is supported by the 'Theory-Based Approach to Evaluation' [ABT], adopting the ' Programming Theory' [ToP] approach as the main operative reference for its implementation. ABT is based on the idea that any structured intervention (policy, programme, project, etc.) is supported by explicit or implicit theories concerning the way (i.e. how?) and the reasons (i.e. why?) it is expected to produce the intended effects. Thus, ABT consists in identifying which are those theories, usually referred to as theories of change, explaining them as clearly and in as much detail as possible and identifying the assumptions/hypotheses underlying them, acting as a guide for the

factual appreciation of the extent to which they are confirmed by the evidence gathered in the evaluation process and contribute to the observed results (contribution analysis). The mobilization of ABT in this Evaluation is done with the purpose of identifying the theory of change underlying the intervention under study and assessing its success through the comparison between that theory and its effective implementation, seeking to assess whether the observed changes correspond to what was expected and to understand how and why that intervention contributed to its materialization. In this context, the Evaluation Team has reconstituted the rationale behind the design of QREN and PT2020 programming in the field of M&CAP, providing this evaluation exercise with a structuring reference for its development. This reconstitution work sought to systematise the set of intentions, options and expectations assumed in both programming periods, based on the analysis of documentary information and, given the limitations and shortcomings found, complementing it by conducting interviews with stakeholders directly or indirectly linked to the programming (and/or its implementation) and also by listening to the Expert Panel associated with the Evaluation Team. The result achieved was globally validated by a wide and diverse set of stakeholders (via the 'QREN and PT2020 Programming Theory Validation Workshop').

According to this analytical framework, there were considered four Domains of Intervention which structured the analysis and respective conclusions produced within the scope of the outputs and results of the operations:

- A > Adoption of New Public Service Distribution Models and Solutions;
- B > Technological Equipping for the Digital Transformation of the Public Administration
- C > Institutional Capacity Building and Organisational Development of the Public Administration
- D > Qualification of the Public Administration's Human Capital.

The methodology included the use of a broad and diversified set of sources and techniques of information collection, namely (i) documentary and statistical collection, (ii) the exploration of the QREN and PT2020 Information Systems, (iii) semi-directive interviews, (iv) three questionnaire surveys (Beneficiaries, Metropolitan Areas/Municipalities and Resident Population in Portugal), (v) three focus groups on specific themes and (vi) 23 Case Studies.

One of the main goals of this evaluation was to provide conclusive and reasoned answers to the evaluation questions previously formulated, based on the PT developed. The conclusions are as follows:

1. *Did QREN and PT2020 programmatic options, regarding modernisation and capacity building of the Public Administration, meet the needs diagnosed and the objectives and priorities of the public policy in place throughout their implementation?*

The QREN and PT2020 intervention within M&CAP took place in a context which, although turbulent, embodied a long cycle of major public policy options followed by the successive governments that have been in office over the last 15 years. Despite the multiple and intense pressures to which the Public Administration was subject during this period (especially those resulting from the implementation of the Economic and Financial Assistance Programme between 2011 and 2014), it can be said that improving the efficiency of Public Administration services and reducing public context costs for Citizens and Companies (which were the ultimate objectives of the M&CAP public policies), were always priorities assumed by these Governments. This continuity has provided a clear and stable political and strategic framework for defining options for allocating the funding resources made available through QREN and PT2020. Thus, it is concluded that QREN and PT2020 established programmatic options with a high capacity to address the needs, problems and challenges identified during the diagnosis, as well as a clear alignment with the macro-objectives of the M&CAP public policy. Despite the insufficient translation of these options into the battery of indicators and result goals of the funding OPs, which would have allowed a clearer and measurable identification of the intended changes and the full application of the result-oriented principle, it is considered that the strategic and programmatic conception adopted enabled an effective framework for the subsequent stages of the respective operationalisation cycle, generating relevant contributions to the achievement of the intended goals of each of the four Intervention Domains of PT.

2. *Were the models and practices of governance, operationalisation and implementation adopted in the QREN and in PT2020 adequate to achieve the objectives identified in the programming regarding the modernisation and capacity building of the Public Administration?*

The analysis carried out shows that the mechanisms adopted in the governance, operationalisation, and implementation of NSRF and PT2020 influenced how the M&CAP objectives identified in the respective programmes were sought and/or achieved. The overall adequacy of the specific regulations produced, and the

added value provided by the delegation of management to Intermediate Bodies (e.g., the AMA or the AM/CIM) are dimensions where this influence was clearly positive, contributing effectively to the implementation of programming options and ensuring qualified monitoring of beneficiaries and their applications/operations. On the other hand, and despite some progress, there are still significant margins for progress in dimensions such as: i) the simplification of the management and use of ESIF (especially in the case of the ESF); ii) the operationalisation of the results-orientation principle; and iii) the maximisation of complementarities and synergies between the different ESIF (i.e., ERDF and ESF).

3. Were/are the supported operations able to achieve the specific objectives and targets set by QREN and PT2020 regarding the modernisation and capacity building of the Public Administration?

The analysis carried out shows that the vast portfolio of operations that were (or still are) being supported through QREN and PT2020 made effective and significant contributions to achieve the specific objectives of M&CAP pursued in both programming periods. There are some shortcomings in terms of the adopted output and result indicators, which are insufficient to cover the diversity of typologies involved. This portfolio of operations reveals a strong presence of association logics between the different Intervention Domains considered in the PT, emphasising the integrated nature that characterised most of the supported interventions.

On the specific contributions to the digital transformation of the Public Administration:

The Public Administration digital transformation promotion clearly stands out in the universe of operations under consideration, due to its centrality and transversality. This is true both from the stricter perspective of the Public Administration technological modernisation and as an expression of a broader structural change with an impact on the agility of its operation, adjusting, throughout the programming, to the rapid evolution of that concept. Even though the perspective of technological modernisation maintains a relevant expression in the profile and/or cost structure of the operations supported, the existence of a trajectory of progressive sophistication of the interventions should be highlighted, as is the case of the incentive to adopt advanced artificial intelligence and data science techniques that take advantage of the volume of data available in the Public Administration. The most direct and immediate result of the achievements supported is the reinforcement/optimisation of the technological capacities necessary for the promoters to operate. Although less expressive, the progress achieved in terms of setting up basic conditions for the integration of processes and services between different Public Administration entities should also be noted, a dimension that will require significant consolidation and deepening efforts in the future. The impact of the achievements is reflected primarily in the reduction of the average execution time of administrative tasks supporting the activity of the promoting entities, and in requests' satisfaction from users of the services provided, accompanied also by an increase in the degree of personalisation of these services. The impact seems to be much more contained in the reduction of current operating costs (especially with regard to personnel expenditure) and asymmetric in the case of the reduction in documentation delivery already existing in the Public Administration by end-users, signalling differentiated progress in compliance with the only-once principle that cannot be dissociated from the still limited integration of processes and services between different Public Administration entities.

On the specific contributions at the level of public service distribution models and solutions:

The establishment and qualification of service channels and of service availability of public services was one of the areas with the greatest focus and visibility of the QREN and PT2020, promoting very significant transformations in terms of the distribution models of services provided by the Public Administration to Citizens and Companies, to better meet their needs, expectations and preferences. The analysis of the achievements supported in this Intervention Domain shows that most of the interventions in the PA front-offices were developed within the context of broader and more integrated logics of modernisation and empowerment of the promoting entities, clearly emphasising that the quality of the service provided to end-users goes beyond the strict logic - albeit essential and still with a relevant margin for progress - of the quality of the service and/or the greater or lesser usability of the electronic channels made available. In this context, it is worth highlighting the increasing adoption of supply (re)design logics structured on the digital by design principle, achieved through multi-channel distribution models supported on common knowledge management platforms capable of ensuring the consistency and quality of the services provided through different channels, and the possibility of using them in a complementary way without discontinuity risks (for example, start of a service in a given channel and subsequent follow-up or closure in another channel). Notwithstanding the focus on broadening the supply of services through the electronic channel, it can be observed from the profile of the supported achievements that the face-to-face channel is very relevant in the set of projects developed, which reflects its still very expressive weight in the

configuration of the PA distribution model and, naturally, in the habits and preferences of its users. In general, it can be concluded that the supported achievements made a direct and immediate contribution to facilitating access and/or use of public services, something that is clearly visible in terms of both the face-to-face channel (namely through the expansion of the network of Citizens' Shops and Spaces) and the electronic channel. It is not easy to estimate (and even less easy to isolate) the impact of the supported achievements on improving the degree of satisfaction of public services users, firstly because of the limited availability of data to do so, but also because this indicator is quite exposed to other factors - perhaps dominant - that transcend what is the direct and specific contribution of the operations under appraisal (e.g. insufficient allocation of human resources to service functions for budgetary or other reasons).

On the specific contributions to capacity building and organisational development:

Although it was already present in QREN, it was especially in PT2020 that the Intervention Domain related to the Institutional Capacity Building and Organisational Development of the Public Administration assumed greater strategic importance in terms of programming options, placing the change in management models and practices in the Public Administration at the centre of the priorities for this new period. The analysis of the supported achievements makes it possible to observe a strong association of most of the interventions with the broader logic of modernisation and capacity building of the promoting entities, with emphasis on the links established with the ongoing digital transformation process (e.g., dematerialisation and process automation). Regardless of the diversity that characterised the profile of the supported operations, the focus of these achievements was preponderantly centred on the re-engineering of the internal operational processes of the promoting entities, often in support of initiatives aimed at their dematerialisation. The most direct and immediate result from the supported implementations is at the level of rationalising the operation of the entities, both internally (e.g. elimination of redundant and/or non-value-added tasks/processes) and in terms of the response given to their end-users, being less evident in the other dimensions where equally relevant contributions were expected (i.e. focusing on the pursuit of the entities' core missions and activities and rationalisation of the structures and resources allocated to their operation). The impact of the supported achievements in terms of improving the promoting entities organisational and operational performance receives a clearly positive evaluation in practically all the considered dimensions, although the risk of bias inherent to this analysis in itself, and the difficulty in finding common metrics capable of sustaining a credible evaluation for the set of operations supported, must be acknowledged. Despite this, and especially when it is the operation/organization that serves as the scale of analysis, the Case Studies carried out show the relevance of the assumptions that PT assumed as necessary to achieve the desired result (i.e. the existence of a results-oriented culture materialized in the planning practices adopted and also in strengthening the role of the performance monitoring and evaluation functions).

On the specific contributions to the qualification of human capital:

The strengthening of the PA human resources qualification corresponded to a design that was present in the strategic formulation of QREN and PT2020 within the scope of M&CAP, thus seeking to respond to the needs and deficits identified in the diagnoses that framed the respective design. However, the profound asymmetry that characterised these two programming periods - clear in the fact that over 90% of the operations supported (in number and value) were implemented under QREN - and the scarce relevance - absolute and relative - of the achievements supported through PT2020 make the contribution of the latter practically residual to that goal. The most direct and immediate result of the supported achievements should be translated into the acquisition/improvement of professional skills held by the actives who attended the supported training interventions, an objective that a clear majority of the respondents to the survey considered to have been achieved. However, given the scarcity of available empirical evidence and the fact that almost half of these entities declared not to have formal instruments and systematic practices to assess learning nor to have evaluated in an exhaustive way the supported training interventions, the Evaluation Team has to face that assessment with reservation. Also, for the evaluation of the impact of the supported training on the professional performance of the trainees, it is clear the weakness that, in general, characterises the mechanisms adopted by the promoting entities (or the lack of them).

4. *Were QREN and PT2020 able to produce/generate significant and lasting contributions towards achieving the public policy objectives of modernising and empowering the Public Administration?*

QREN and PT2020 are an integral part of a wider set of means and initiatives that, together, have been used to achieve the general objectives pursued by the M&CAP's public policy, namely 'Improving the Efficiency of Public Administration Services' and 'Reducing Public Context Costs for Citizens and Companies'. Although it is relatively

unanimous, among most of the interviewed entities, that the role of the operations supported by the ESIF has had a relatively limited impact on achieving those objectives, due to the reduced size of their financial envelope, the nature of the interventions supported and, most particularly, the weight assumed by factors of a political and/or legal nature that largely transcend the field of action of the ESIF, it is pertinent to identify the type of specific contributions that have been, or are expected to be, produced as a result of the implementation of the operations supported by QREN and PT2020. Thus, regarding the objective of 'Improving the Efficiency of Public Administration Services', it seems plausible to assume that the specific contribution of the operations supported was/will be primarily felt in terms of increased productivity and the more rational use of available resources in public administration, being much less expressive in the reduction of its operating costs and, above all, the volume of human resources mobilised. This assessment, which is consistent with the nature of the supported operations, thus suggests that their contribution is more in terms of doing more and/or better than doing it with less, also supporting the idea (expressed by most of the stakeholders consulted) that the production of effective and expressive impacts on the reduction of public expenditure refers to fields of action and decision largely outside the intervention of the ESIF. About the objective of 'Reducing Public Context Costs for Citizens and Companies', it seems plausible to assume that the specific contribution of the operations supported towards this policy objective was/will be felt with special intensity in increasing the speed and effectiveness of services provided to end-users, being less expressive - but still relevant - in simplifying the bureaucratic burden imposed on users and, above all, in reducing the users' need to interact with the PA. This assessment, therefore, suggests that this contribution is materialised more in terms of improving the operational performance of the services provided than in terms of transforming the form and intensity with which Citizens and Companies interact with the Public Administration, although, also from this last perspective, the basic conditions have already been created (to a large extent technologically based) which are essential to bringing about this change and trigger interventions capable of leveraging it in a next cycle of investment. Also, according to the analysis carried out, the more or less lasting nature of these contributions seems to be mainly dependent on factors endogenous to the entities promoting the operations (change in political/organisational management priorities, restrictions of a budgetary and technical nature, etc.), with a rather asymmetric distribution in terms of the degree of exposure of these entities to this type of factors.

5. Is the relationship between the resources mobilised and the results of the interventions supported through QREN and PT2020 in the field of modernisation and capacity building of the Public Administration satisfactory given the objectives pursued?

The analysis carried out shows that the QREN intervention within the scope of M&CAP presented a cost-effectiveness ratio that can be classified as clearly positive, suggesting that, in general, it was possible to do more with fewer resources. In effect, the implementation dynamics of the NSRF was marked by several re-programmings whose dominant emphasis was based on the existence of movements in opposite directions in terms of financial allocation (generally downwards) and achievement objectives (generally upwards); this relationship was not so evident in the result's targets, in which, there were cases where these were not achieved. The information available for PT2020 - still in progress - seems to allow a similar conclusion in the case of the interventions supported through the ERDF, also verifying that the foreseeable achievement of the expected output targets does not have an equivalent translation in terms of results. In the case of the ESF, this analysis is made impossible by the almost total absence of production and results indicators, preventing a substantiated assessment of the cost-effectiveness reached.

6. What is the added value of mobilising and using European Funds through QREN and PT2020 in the field of modernising and building the capacity of the Public Administration in Portugal?

The analysis carried out shows that the funding resources of QREN and PT2020 were decisive (i.e., made a difference) to achieve the long and strongly transformative cycle that has characterised the evolution of the Portuguese public administration over the last 15 years. This contribution was firstly at the level of the so-called volume effects, and it was practically unanimous among the various consulted stakeholders that without the support of the ESIF the progress achieved would have been much more limited due to the scarcity of budgetary resources. More substantially, it appears that the ESI Funds also leveraged quite a significant scope and function effects. In the first case, these effects are particularly evident in the high rate of coverage of the universe of potential beneficiaries (estimated at 77% out of a total of 818 entities in the Central Government, Regional Government and Municipal Government), allowing financing resources to reach entities that would otherwise have had difficulty in investing in this area. In the second case, these effects are particularly visible in the incentive

to both the financing of structuring projects to leverage the digital transformation process of the Public Administration (e.g., Electronic Identification and iAP - Public Administration Interoperability Platform), and the financing of experimental approaches and testing of innovative M&C solutions, allowing the emergence of projects with strong transformative and replicability potential. On the other hand, it was at the process effects level that the contribution of ESIF was underachieved, which is a result of the less effectiveness in the operationalisation of the result-orientation principle and the excessive bureaucracy associated with the use of ESIF.

Based on the findings explained, and aiming to support both the design and the content of the next programming period of ESIF, it is recommended:

R01: BROADEN AND DEEPEN THE KNOWLEDGE BASE ON PA ACTIVITY AND PERFORMANCE

The Evaluation Team considers it is essential to start a structured initiative at the national level to broaden and deepen the knowledge base that currently exists on public administration (considered at its different levels), including the definition of new indicators and common metrics to support a harmonised characterisation of the activity carried out by its different bodies and the levels of performance achieved. From the perspective of the Evaluation Team, this is an initiative that should have clear and proactive leadership from M&CAP's political authority(ies), sustained by the direct involvement of all relevant stakeholders, mobilising the knowledge and skills available within the national scientific system, and deserving of financial support from the ESIF

R02: SUPPORT THE NEW PROGRAMMING PERIOD WITH A SOLID AND REASONED READING OF THE STARTING SITUATION

This recommendation should be implemented within the framework of preparing the Portugal 2030 Partnership Agreement and the new OPs with intervention within the scope of M&CAP, with a view to properly characterising the starting situation (i.e. main needs, problems and challenges) and correctly substantiating the priorities to be adopted in the respective programming, a matter in which a very relevant margin for deepening and specification is still identified at the level of the Partnership Agreement proposal already known (to be reflected and developed in the new OPs). From the perspective of the Evaluation Team, this is a collective task that should be undertaken by the entities responsible for preparation of the new programming period in close articulation with the relevant political authority(ies) and, by their indication, with the public bodies with direct intervention within the scope of M&CAP, as well as with the entities representing the Local Government.

R03: ENSURE THE EXISTENCE OF COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE MECHANISMS BETWEEN M&CAP FUNDING INSTRUMENTS

Create and implement specific collaborative governance mechanisms to identify and materialise the potential complementarity and synergy between the interventions of the Recovery and Resilience Plan and the Portugal 2030 Partnership Agreement within M&CAP (together with other relevant policy and/or funding instruments). Given the detailed knowledge that already exists regarding the interventions foreseen in the RRP, it is now important to deepen and specify in greater detail what space and role should be assumed by the Portugal 2030 Partnership Agreement (still underdeveloped in this area of intervention) and the respective OPs.

R04: STRENGTHEN THE CAPACITY TO FRAME AND MANAGE THE PROCESS OF MODERNISATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING OF THE LOCAL PA

To strengthen the capacity to frame and manage the process of modernisation and capacity building of Local Public Administration, thus countering the relative fragility and lack of definition that has characterised its political and institutional framework in recent years. To this effect, it will be pertinent and opportune to consider the possibility of structuring a limited set of typified interventions with high replicability potential in Local Public Administration that make it possible to encourage/accelerate its change in certain areas or key processes of its activity, as is the case of digital transformation (e.g. access to the iAP - Public Administration Interoperability Platform to provide integrated services and compliance with the only-once principle, generalisation of electronic authentication, etc.) or the creation/enhancement of shared solutions that ensure critical mass to obtain the economies of scale necessary to develop initiatives, projects and services of common interest (e.g. public procurement, vocational training, etc.). From the perspective of the Evaluation Team, this is a recommendation that should assume the AM/CIM as essential vehicles for its implementation on the ground, ensuring that its operationalisation within the new OPs (ideally to be developed in articulation with the new Roadmap for the Institutional Capacity Building of the ESIF Ecosystem) is compatible with the maintenance/enhancement of the role of their status as IOs (e.g. through the direct management of this type of supra-municipal interventions by the MAs).

R05: Improve the mechanisms and practices for the results-oriented principle operationalisation

The design and operationalisation of future interventions within the scope of M&CAP should be supported by a more solid and detailed explanation of the respective programming rationale, ensuring that it is able to specify the type and/or magnitude of the expected results. This guideline should also be more present in the chain of instruments supporting the operationalisation of the programming, from the specific regulations to the calls for proposals and invitations to submit applications, namely in matters such as the definition of eligibility and selection criteria, the specification of the merit analysis benchmark or the selection and measurement of specific results of the operations (having as a benchmark the concept of initial result adopted in this Evaluation). Given the experience of QREN and PT2020, it is considered that the way these instruments were implemented through the current Competitiveness and Internationalisation PO may serve as a reference practice to be deepened/improved, with a view to its dissemination, appropriation and adaptation by the remaining funding POs (i.e. Regional POs).

R06: Fostering the expansion and qualification of the supply of new generation electronic services

Accelerate the expansion and qualification of the supply of new generation electronic public services (cf. Strategy for the Digital Transformation of Public Administration 2021-2026), both through the transition/adaptation of existing services and through new services, favouring the design of a catalogue of services that makes full use of the investments already made in the field of interoperability and data sharing/reuse between different public bodies and that is structured from the perspective of the user. This investment should be able to materialise more effectively the only-once principle, simplify access/use of public services and, whenever possible/applicable, adopt solutions for the automatic provision of those services (i.e. reducing the need for user intervention and the number of interactions with the PA), with the agents of the ESIF ecosystem (especially the MAs of the new funding OPs) being responsible for ensuring - supported by political and sectoral technical guidelines - that the instruments supporting the operationalisation of the next programming period (specific regulations, eligibility requirements, merit analysis criteria, etc.) adequately reflect and consider their framework and/or valorisation (e.g. establishing eligibility requirements for operations such as compliance with the National Digital Interoperability Regulation, connection to the iAP - Public Administration Interoperability Platform, etc.).

R07: Consolidating the PA's face-to-face service network

Maintaining a strong commitment to the development and qualification of the face-to-face channel in the distribution model of public services, simultaneously ensuring that that is accompanied by a growing integration (physical and functional) of the offer made available by different public administration bodies/services. In this sense, it is proposed that the decision to fund the creation/qualification of attending points and/or the provision of public services should expressly value - e.g. through mechanisms to increase the merit of applications - solutions of an integrated nature by means of either the physical concentration of entities (e.g. public service condominiums) or, above all, the unified offer of integrated services (i.e. end-to-end services) or of multi-services (e.g. Citizens' Spaces).

R08: Promote compliance with legal requirements and adoption of accessibility and usability practices in public services

Ensure effective compliance with the legal requirements on accessibility and usability applicable to public services, namely those resulting from the application of Decree-Law No. 163/2006, of 8 August (in its current wording) and Decree-Law No. 83/2018, of 19 October. In this sense, it is proposed that the decision for M&CAP operations funding expressly and generally includes the obligation to comply with those legal references, namely in interventions directly associated with the provision of services to Citizens and Companies, which may be accomplished through the inclusion of that obligation as an eligibility requirement and/or its integration in the eligible operations typologies (e.g., in existing facilities or websites).

R09: Strengthen the contribution of M&CAP interventions in combating infoexclusion

Affirming the specific role and contribution that public M&CAP policy has been playing and should continue to play in fighting infoexclusion, namely by consolidating/extending the experience of assisted digital service in Citizen Spaces. In this context, and given the perspective (already assumed in political terms and reflected in the Portugal 2030 Partnership Agreement proposal) of physically expanding the Citizen Spaces network, it is fundamental to maintain investment in initial and continuous training of Digital Service Mediators and to expand

the catalogue of services made available through this type of structure, covering here the progressive inclusion of public services provided by the Local Public Administration.

R10: GENERALISE THE ADOPTION OF SERVICES QUALITY EVALUATION PRACTICES

Generalising the adoption of practices for assessing public services quality provided to Citizens and Companies, whether in terms of setting and monitoring key operational performance parameters (average waiting time for service, average response time, etc.) or in terms of assessing the level of user satisfaction (e.g. through satisfaction surveys). In this sense, and in line with the already existing legal provisions on this matter, it is proposed that funding award decisions for M&CAP should expressly include the obligation to implement (or confirm the existence of) systems for assessing the quality of services provided by the beneficiary entities and the broad dissemination of their results, namely in interventions directly associated with the provision of services to Citizens and Companies; in parallel, the maintenance of specific funding for design/review and implementation of this type of systems should be foreseen.

R11: ENCOURAGING THE ADOPTION OF STRUCTURED PRACTICES TO IMPLEMENT THE TRAINING MANAGEMENT CYCLE IN THE PA

Strengthening training programming, management and evaluation practices of the PA's human resources by fostering a strategic approach to the training management cycle (i.e., defining performance benchmarks, identifying training needs, designing training, and evaluating its activities and results). Considering that this is a matter expressly provided for several years ago in existing legislation (cf. Decree-Law no. 249/2016, of 29 December), and in view of the lesser effectiveness it has shown in its transposition into the field, it seems pertinent to take advantage of the function effect - and also the process effect - that the ESIF may have on the adoption, generalisation and/or improvement of this type of approach by the public bodies that make up the Portuguese public administration. To this effect, it is recommended that the public bodies responsible for the coordination of vocational training in public administration (i.e. INA and DGAL) - naturally supported by their respective political tutelage(s) - take the initiative to propose to the entities integrating the ESIF ecosystem measures that contribute to achieve this goal, namely at the level of the definition of typologies of operations and eligible expenses under the next programming period (e. g. diagnosis of training needs, preparation of training plans/programmes and evaluation studies of the training results) and the establishment of the obligation to evaluate the training interventions financed by ESIF.

RA12: DIVERSIFY FUNDING ASSIGNMENT LOGIC IN THE PA' TRAINING

Adopting a broader perspective on how the role of ESIF is foreseen in supporting the qualification of PA human resources, a greater diversification of the funding allocation logic in this domain is recommended. It is considered pertinent that the next ESIF programming cycle should explicitly foresee the broadening of the training development approaches and models that may be funded, including - besides maintaining the training logic associated with specific M&CAP projects - interventions targeted at training specific segments of the PA's professionals (managers training, initial training, etc.) and in specific competencies of strategic interest to M&CAP, which should be the object of prior definition by sectorial entities with responsibilities at this level (see INA and FEFAL) and included in the operationalisation instruments of the new funding OPs. Besides the creation of the conditions to (re)position this type of agent as a training entity of reference, the valorisation of the AM/CIM role as centres of rationality in the training activity aimed at the Local PA's professionals is also recommended.

R13: STIMULATE EXPERIMENTATION, DISSEMINATION AND REPLICATION OF INNOVATIVE M&CAP SOLUTIONS

The design and operationalisation of future interventions within the scope of M&CAP should continue to stimulate - and even more generally - the adoption of experimentation and innovation projects in the PA, endowing them with resources and financing conditions suited to their exploratory nature and their results profile (uncertain by definition). This type of approach, where the added value provided by the ESIF is evident (function effect), should be made operational through specific competitive calls and foresee the adoption of mechanisms that promote and encourage the dissemination of results, thus enhancing their dissemination and appropriation/replication by the universe of PA bodies.

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