

## IMPLEMENTATION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (until 2022)

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September 2015, Portugal committed to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda. In 2016, the Government approved the institutional model of implementation and, in 2017, presented the National Voluntary Report, in which it identified six SDGs as priorities for Portugal:

SDG 4 – Quality Education; SDG 5 – Gender Equality; SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure; SDG 10 – Reducing Inequality; SDG 13 – Climate Action; and SDG 14 – Protecting marine life.

A new institutional model was approved in January 2023 and the second Voluntary National Report is scheduled to be presented in July. By the end of 2022, with around half of the time horizon of the 2030 Agenda, this report reports that, in the context of EU countries, in most SDGs Portugal performs above average, but there are others for which indicators point to the need for a strengthened focus. This is the case for SDG 10 – Reducing Inequalities, whose negative developments have not yet been reversed and SDG 2 – Zero Hunger, whose indicators show slow progress. In addition, there is little progress on four other SDGs, also related to SDG 3 – Good Health and Well Being, SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities and SDG 12 – Sustainable Production and Consumption (see point 4.1).

With regard to the SDGs selected as priorities, despite positive developments in a set of indicators, areas with less than desirable developments are identified, which reinforce the urgency of measures leading to their implementation, in particular (see paragraphs 4.2 to 4.7):

- ◆ SDG 4 – Quality Education – Despite the favourable evolution of most indicators, which highlight the tertiary attainment rate and the reduction in the rate of early school leaving, two important indicators, the proportion of underperforming pupils in reading, mathematics and science, are still far from the 2030 target.
- ◆ SDG 5 – Gender Equality – Most indicators have evolved favourably, including a reduction in the gender pay and employment gap. There has also been an increase in positions held by women on boards of directors and management positions, although they are still below the EU average in the latter.
- ◆ SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure – It is among the most unfavourable priority SDGs, as seven of the nine indicators put Portugal still below the European average, especially in terms of air emissions from industry and patent application. The use of buses and trains in passenger transport, as well as rail and inland waterways in freight transport, has decreased

since 2015. Households with high-speed internet connection almost double, clearly exceeding the European average (70.2 %) in 2021.

◆ SDG 10 – Reducing Inequalities – In 2021/2022, there was a backlash in convergence with the EU average, not only taking into account the decline in Gross Domestic Product per capita and gross disposable household income per capita (to 77 % and 80 % of the European average, respectively), but also the worsening of other indicators such as the difference between the rate of poverty or social exclusion of people living in cities and people in rural areas and

disparity in citizenship between EU and non-EU citizens in the education of young people.

◆ SDG 13 – Climate Action – Evolution has been positive in most indicators, including with some of the targets being exceeded. Net greenhouse gas emissions were reduced, in particular in the land use, land use change and forestry sector, and the target for the share of renewable energy consumption in final energy consumption was exceeded. With the exception of economic losses per inhabitant and the contribution to climate-related expenditure, Portugal is more favourable than the EU average.

◆ SDG 14 – Protecting marine life – Data for Portugal are limited to the quality of marine waters and the proportion of marine protected areas, indicators for which there has been a positive development since 2015, with the exception of the percentage of marine waters affected by eutrophication. However, it is evident that the national commitment to protect 30 % of marine areas by 2030 remains difficult to achieve.

At the level of governance, it is realised that:

1) The institutional model in place until 2022 did not guarantee the definition of responsible and implementation plans. In fact, it was a model based on coordination by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in liaison with the Ministry of Planning and Infrastructure, with ministries designated as coordinators and with a network of focal points. However, the specific responsibilities needed to achieve the objectives and targets of the 2030 Agenda have never been identified, as:

◆ the coordination activity was limited to the preparation of the 2017 Voluntary National Report and the intervention of the network of focal points was restricted to the circulation of information, mainly aimed at the preparation of the UN High Level Political Forum and the dissemination of events.

◆ no activities with a view to the sectoral implementation of the SDGs by the coordinating ministries have been identified, in particular through the development of implementation plans including the identification of responsible entities, the breakdown of policies, measures and resources needed to achieve the targets, as well as the definition of corrective actions in the framework of monitoring.

◆ no guidelines were produced to promote the articulation between the various levels of government – local, regional and national – thus undermining a more multisectoral

engagement and an integrated and cross-cutting approach to public policies, as called for in the 2030 Agenda. In 2023, a new institutional model was adopted determining the transition from coordination at government level to the area of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers in liaison with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which retains the competences of the external dimension of the Agenda (see point 3.1).

2) The alignment of planning documents with the SDGs needs to be improved. It appears that the public policy guiding documents mainly published in 2022 – namely the National Reform Programme 2022, the Major Options 2022-2026 and the Portuguese Cooperation Strategy 2030 – constitute a first approach to aligning policy measures with the SDGs, but weaknesses remain, in particular in the sectoral policy documents. Although they contain measures that contribute to sustainable development, most of them do not mention the 2030 Agenda or only refer to it in general – indeed, out of the 54 planning documents analysed, only three are structured according to the SDGs or align measures with the SDGs and targets. However, these weaknesses do not support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, as the link between commitments made and public policies is not clear, nor do they contribute to raising awareness, visibility and dissemination of the 2030 Agenda at national level (see point 3.2).

3) The quantification of the financial resources allocated to the SDGs was limited to Official Development Assistance, especially since the reports accompanying the proposals of the State Budgets (2016 to 2023) and the respective General State Accounts (2016 to 2022) do not quantify the possible contributions of public revenue and expenditure to this end. At the reporting level, only the Strategic Cooperation Plans on Official Development Assistance concluded between Portugal and the Portuguese-speaking African Countries and Timor-Leste present the financial envelopes aligned with the SDGs, promoting their implementation (see point 3.3).

4) The promotion of the SDGs and stakeholder engagement was based on ad hoc initiatives. No plan has been developed to promote the SDGs to the public and stakeholders. Also at the level of public policy making, a mechanism was not adopted to ensure the systematic and continuous involvement of private sector entities, civil society organisations and other stakeholders in the coordination and implementation processes of the 2030 Agenda (see point 3.4).

5) Results measurement and monitoring systems have yet to be implemented. The monitoring of compliance with the SDGs remains limited to the statistical aspect highlighted in the annual reports drawn up by the National Statistics Institute, and the Government has not ensured the development of systems for measuring the results of the implementation of the SDGs and does not define the entities responsible for the production of information, monitoring and evaluation of the achievement of the SDGs. Furthermore, the 2030 Agenda targets have not been adapted to the national reality, which compromises an assessment based on specific and relevant indicators for the Portuguese case, which is essential for the introduction of possible corrective measures over the broad timeframe of the Agenda (see point 3.5).

This report also provides an overview of the main audit results developed by the Court under public policy programmes and measures that contribute, directly or indirectly, to the objectives and targets of the 2030 Agenda (see Annex I).

◆ in the area of control of European funds, the contribution to the achievement of SDG 1 – No Poverty, SDG 2 - Zero Hunger, SDG 14 – Protecting Marine Life and SDG 15 – Protecting Land Life was analysed. It was highlighted, in particular, the impossibility of quantifying and evaluating the results of the programmes in terms of their contribution to the targets set in relation to the SDGs.

◆ in the area of environment and natural resources, we examined issues related to SDG 3 – Good Health and Well Being, SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities, SDG 12 – Sustainable Production and Consumption, SDG 14 – Protecting Marine Life and SDG 15 – Protecting Land Life. The audits highlighted problems in the design of the instruments, preventing them from being properly aligned with other strategies and policies, in particular with the commitments of the 2030 Agenda, making it impossible to quantify and evaluate the results of the programmes in terms of their contribution to the targets set for the SDGs. There was also a lack of operationalisation in the link between the strategies defined and the instruments for their implementation and financing, with insufficient specification of the actions to be carried out, the responsible entities, their timing, the costs, the sources of funding and the appropriate incentives to achieve the objectives, as well as weaknesses in their implementation and effectiveness.

◆ in the field of education, we examined a number of policy measures that contribute to the achievement of the goals of SDG 4 – Quality Education. These audits identified weaknesses related, inter alia, to the lack of a central system for monitoring school drop-outs and to the sustainability and monitoring of the measure of free availability of textbooks. In the context of distance learning in the context of the pandemic, it was found that the conditions for its effectiveness were not met, and that an investment programme for the digitisation of schools was needed, which in the meantime took place, and the development of a strategic plan to replace digital means. As far as higher education is concerned, the measures taken by the Government have contributed to increasing the number of graduates, but weaknesses have been identified with regard to the monitoring of employability and the funding model, which does not promote the efficient performance and quality of higher education institutions.

◆ in the area of gender equality, we reviewed the systems for planning, implementing, monitoring, reviewing and reporting on SDG 5 – Achieve gender equality and empowering all women and girls, including progress made at both national and international level. The audit revealed that at the end of 2022, the targets and objectives of gender equality and preventing and combating domestic violence were set out in the various planning documents and contribute to various degrees to the achievement of the respective SDGs. However, there is no systematisation and correlation with the goals of that SDGs nor with any strategic planning system.

◆ in the area of economic functions, we carried out audits on the operability of infrastructure and transport, the prevention of bank resolution (which contributes to the stability of the financial system) and the reaction to the adverse impact of the pandemic on the housing sector and the economy, the subjects of which contribute to achieving SDG 8 targets – Decent Work and Economic Growth, 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, 10 – Reducing Inequalities and 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities. The audits revealed, on infrastructure and transport, lack of investment and insufficient operability, on the prevention of bank resolution, lack of capacity to exercise its responsibilities with operational independence and, on extraordinary measures to react to the pandemic, disarticulation between its implementation and the pursuit of the public interest, inadequate monitoring and control structure, incompleteness and insufficiency of the reported information, insufficient implementation, inadequate and ineffectiveness