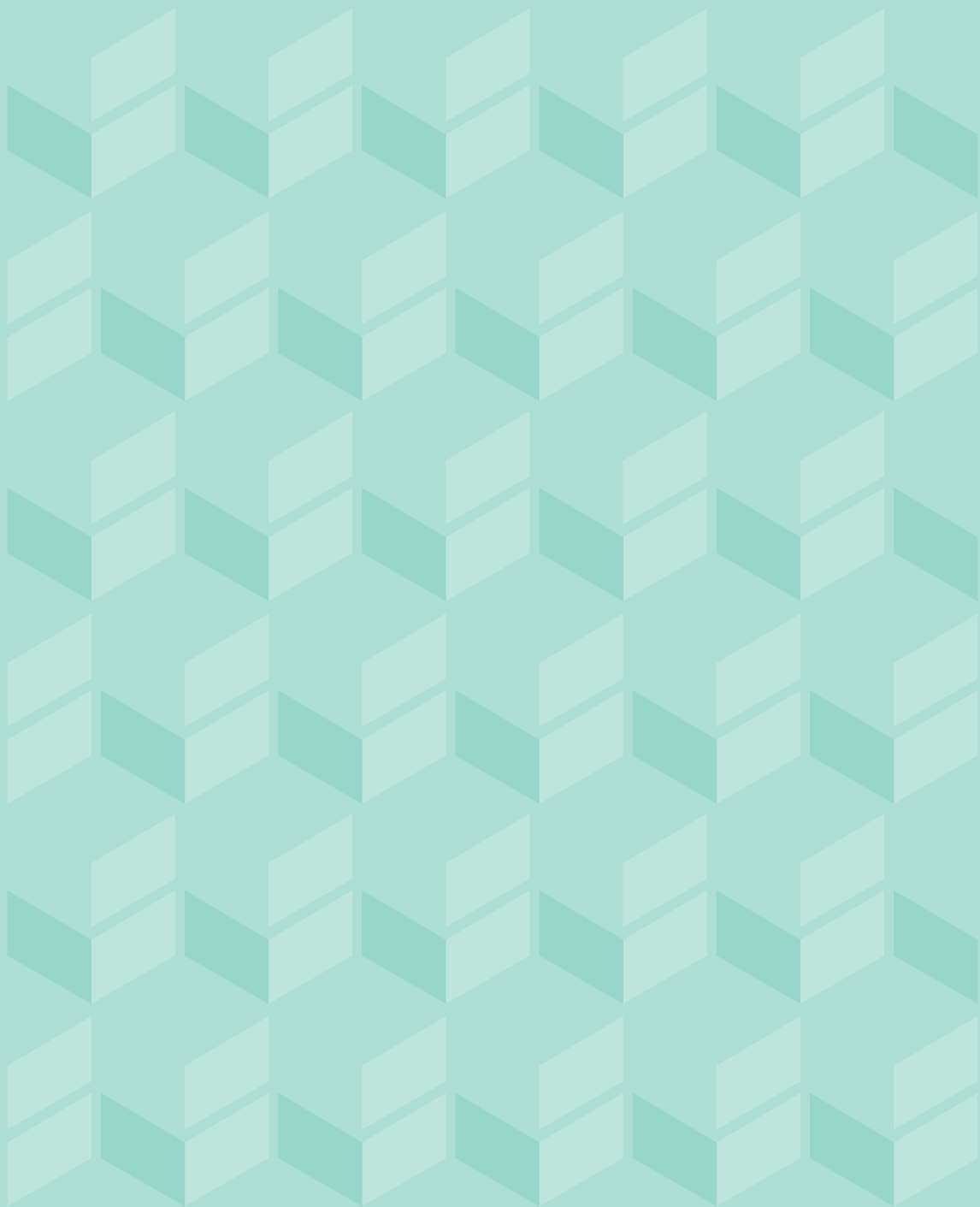




**FUNDAÇÃO
FRANCISCO
MANUEL
DOS SANTOS**

STUDY
PROGRAMME
2024-2026



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1.

Introduction to the FFMS Study Area

FUNDAÇÃO FRANCISCO MANUEL DOS SANTOS (FFMS) was set up in 2009 with the mission of promoting and learning more about the Portuguese reality, thus seeking to contribute to the development of society, the reinforcement of the rights of citizens and improving public institutions. Given this goal, a study area was organised and it has approved and promoted over 75 academic studies in a wide variety of social sciences since 2012.

The authors of the FFMS studies are affiliated with national and international universities and research centres. They are selected through a transparent and open application process in order to assure the rigour and independence of the research produced. This process is described in detail in the corresponding section of the FFMS website.

For the duration of the current study programme (2024-2026), the applications submitted should respect the three research topics defined by the governing bodies (presented further ahead in this document). These topics basically correspond to the areas that believes could contribute most decisively to the well-being and development of Portuguese society.

It should also be noted that the Fundação Francisco Manuel dos Santos created a collection of policy papers in 2023, inspired by the work of major international think tanks, such as Brookings (USA), Bruegel (Belgium) and Chatham House (UK). The goal of this collection is to produce short articles which, following thorough analysis, include recommendations and lines of action that could be useful to national public decision-makers.

FFMS policy papers are produced by academics and, naturally, follow all the principles of scientific method. Therefore, all the proposals will go through the same assessment process as FFMS studies.

2.

Aspects of the applications taken into account by FFMS

FFMS studies are not based on purely theoretical research, no matter how relevant this may be, so they should be on subjects that are, in fact, present in the daily concerns of the Portuguese or that are decisive for the progress of society. Therefore, FFMS will prioritise the research projects with more guarantees as to the pursuit of the four essential dimensions:

2.1. Rigour and independence: It is vital for the studies produced to be based on empirical evidence and not used as instruments for spreading any party political ideology or agenda, doing justice to the FFMS mission to disclose accurate information and encourage free and informed public debate.

2.2. Impact: One of the greatest challenges faced by FFMS is the impact of its activities not only in terms of scientific studies, but also in terms of other initiatives it organises, such as publications, documentaries and statistical portraits by Pordata. Therefore, research projects that are capable of informing public decision-makers about policies that are useful for the development of Portugal and that could also be interesting for increasingly broad sectors of the population will be favoured. Priority will therefore be given to projects that guarantee more of a social impact.

2.3. Interdisciplinarity: Projects that also use contributions from different areas of social sciences in order to analyse the topic chosen from the most comprehensive and complementary per-

spective will be favoured. FFMS is therefore prepared to invest in broader, more ambitious projects than those developed thus far, both in terms of the methods and techniques used and the number and diversity of researchers involved.

2.4. Internationalisation: There is no denying that many of the economic, social and political problems affecting Portugal are not exclusive to the country. Therefore, they imply a comparative analysis with other countries and regions around the world and they demand transnational or even global responses. This is why FFMS will favour projects that include internationally known research institutions (such as universities and think tanks) that can contribute with approaches and, particularly, perspectives that are necessarily different from and complementary to those of national researchers.

3. Indispensable requirements

ALL THE PROJECTS CHOSEN by the Fundação Francisco Manuel dos Santos must follow international best practices in terms of scientific research. For this reason, they must meet five indispensable requirements before the projects are selected by FFMS. Namely:

3.1. Submission of applications in English: applications for the study programme (2024-2026) must be submitted in English only, so that FFMS will be able to contract international referees whenever justified. FFMS endeavours to find the best external referees for each application in order, on the one hand, to ensure the independence and impartiality of the assessment process and, on the other, to contribute to refining the projects while still in the application phase.

3.2. Submission of conflict of interest declaration: all participants must fill in a form where they list any possible conflicts of interest that might emerge throughout the project. This form, which is aimed at ensuring the impartiality of the potential researchers to be contracted, will be provided by FFMS in good time.

3.3. Prior assessment by FFMS Ethics Committee: the applications that are approved by the FFMS study team and the external referees contracted will also be assessed by FFMS Ethics Committee — a body made up of a multidisciplinary team of academics affiliated with different national universities — before being submitted for consideration to the governing bodies of FFMS, which have the final say on any project. The Ethics Committee must ensure that all of FFMS studies meet the strictest ethical

requirements currently adopted by social sciences, particularly with the aim of protecting the fundamental rights of the people responding to the opinion polls or whose personal data (although anonymised) are analysed by the researchers contracted by FFMS.

3.4. Free availability of data: Since it was set up in 2009, Fundação Francisco Manuel dos Santos has encouraged the compilation and availability of credible data, doing justice to its mission of “promoting and learning more about the Portuguese reality”. The institution has sought to follow the principles of what is called open research, which place an emphasis on the transparency of the research methods and techniques used, as well as free and open dissemination of the results obtained, without ever neglecting any ethical principles or the fundamental rights of all those involved. This approach facilitates the replicability of the analyses done, as well as the dissemination of the information obtained, with the ultimate goal of making the production of science more collaborative and efficient, thus contributing to the development of society. With this priority, FFMS recommends that its studies provide for the publication of the information compiled in a database (variable according to the speciality area), which must be completely free and open both to the international academic community and to the general public.

3.5. Availability to assist in the disclosure of the results: Fundação Francisco Manuel dos Santos puts as much commitment (and investment) into the assessment and monitoring of the research projects as it does into the public disclosure of the results. FFMS in-house team has the expertise necessary for helping the study authors to disseminate the information obtained (through events, TV debates, radio programmes, podcasts, infographics, press releases, posts on social media, etc.). Even so, the social impact FFMS aims at with each study promoted requires the availability of the authors to communicate the results, both to the public in general and to the appropriate stakeholders.

4.

Research topics for 2024-2026

THROUGHOUT THE 2024-2026 THREE-YEAR PERIOD, Fundação Francisco Manuel dos Santos will endeavour to choose projects that fall clearly under the following research topics: I — Economic development; II — Social policies for combatting poverty and inequality; III — Quality of democracy.

These three thematic lines were chosen by the FFMS governing bodies over other important issues because it was believed that they would give rise to studies and policy papers more capable of producing a social impact in strategic areas for the country in the medium term. In other words, the consensus was that these topics would be able to generate unprecedented knowledge capable of informing public policies based on empirical evidence, contributing to relaunching the national economy, mitigating poverty and inequality and increasing the quality of Portuguese democracy.

The three FFMS research topics for the 2024-2026 three-year period are described below, as well as their main subtopics, which should be seen as binding. In other words, applications that are not unequivocally in line with at least one of the subtopics presented will not be chosen, no matter how interesting they may be.

4.1. Economic development

Scientific consultant — Miguel Ferreira (Nova SBE)

The Portuguese economy has faced significant challenges in recent decades, from joining the EEC in 1986 to the financial and economic crisis in 2010-2013 and, most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic, inflationary pressure and the war in Ukraine. In order to assure

sustainable economic development and the resilience of the country to future crises, it is crucial for economic research to focus on pertinent and relevant issues. Therefore, this section aims to define the thematic lines for this research on the Portuguese economy, with Fundação Francisco Manuel dos Santos intending to invest in these in the period between 2024 and 2026.

The coming years are a critical period for the Portuguese economy insofar as the country is facing complex, dynamic challenges. Economic research will play a vital role in the identification of solutions and public policies capable of promoting sustainable growth, stability and social inclusion.

SUBTOPICS

4.1.1 Economic and environmental sustainability

The transition to a more sustainable, environmentally friendly economy is a pressing global challenge. In Portugal, research should focus on assessing the economic impacts of the transition to renewable energy sources, an analysis of the role of companies in the reduction of carbon emissions and the introduction of policies that promote the circular economy. In addition, it is important to investigate how the Portuguese economy can take advantage of emerging economic opportunities, such as sustainable tourism, the production of organic food and the exploration of marine resources.

4.1.2 Innovation and technology

The global economy is becoming increasingly dependent on innovation and technology. This is why FFMS will prioritise projects that analyse ways to promote innovation in key sectors, such as information technology, biotechnology and the automotive industry. It is also crucial to understand how the Portuguese economy can attract foreign investment in technology companies and startups, as well as to promote the training of qualified workers for these industries. And it's important to understand talent attraction and retention in the country in general and in these sectors in particular.

4.1.3 Economic and social inequality and mobility

Economic and social inequality is a persistent challenge in Portugal. The research should analyse the causes and consequences of inequality, including the distribution of income and wealth, access to quality education and healthcare, and social mobility opportunities. In particular, studies should be undertaken that make it possible to quantify the effectiveness of the “social ladder” and what the main barriers to how it works are.

a) Health

Healthcare is an essential component of people’s well-being and has significant economic implications. In the area of health economics, it’s important to identify strategies for improving the efficiency, accessibility and quality of healthcare services. The research areas should include:

- Assessing the effectiveness of the Portuguese health system in terms of access and cost, as well as identifying areas for improvement.
- Measuring the economic impact of different health policies, such as funding the health system, access to medication and resource management.
- Studying the relationship between mental health, productivity at work and associated economic costs and identifying strategies for improving the mental well-being of the people.

b) Education

Education plays a fundamental role in training workers and in the promotion of social mobility, as well as in improving company productivity. It is also important to analyse how education policies can be optimised to bring more training for a qualified workforce and promote innovation. The research areas should include:

- Assessment of the quality of the Portuguese educational system, focusing on access, student performance and teacher training.
- Analysis of strategies that improve the quality of professional and technical training in order to bring worker skills into line with the needs of the labour market.

- Studying how digital education can be effectively integrated into the curriculum to prepare students for an increasingly digital world.

c) Housing

The real estate market in Portugal has undergone profound changes, with a significant impact on people's well-being and on attracting/retaining talent. Therefore, the studies to be done should include the following topics:

- Studying the obstacles to the acquisition of housing, including the determination of rental prices, mortgages, supply and demand and housing policies.
- Analysing how the real estate market affects regional development, including the concentration of housing in metropolitan areas.
- Exploring strategies to promote the construction of sustainable housing with a low environmental impact.

4.1.4 Fiscal and budget policy

Public finance management plays a vital role in Portugal's economic stability. FFMS aims to promote studies that analyse the effectiveness of the existing fiscal and budget policies and propose reforms that favour a healthy balance between economic growth and fiscal sustainability. In addition, it is important to study how Portugal can attract foreign investments and foster economic growth through appropriate fiscal policies and incentives. It is also important to carry out a critical analysis of fiscal and budget policies in Portugal to determine their effectiveness in the promotion of economic growth and a reduction in inequalities. The fiscal system needs to be examined and explored, including the real progressiveness of the system and the dimension of tax evasion, as well as how to drive a reform of the fiscal system that will contribute to sustainable economic development — providing a response to challenges such as the climate crisis and demographics, and reducing inequality. Finally, the most effective policies for reducing imbalances should also be analysed, such as progressive taxation and social welfare programmes, as well as how these policies can impact economic growth in the long term.

4.1.5 Company productivity

Company productivity is a crucial factor for sustainable economic growth. The low productivity of the Portuguese economy is one of the aspects that has contributed most to the economic stagnation in Portugal in the last 20 years. Therefore, the studies to be chosen by FFMS should examine the obstacles to productivity, such as red tape, the inefficiency of the judicial system, the lack of investment in technology and training and the lack of competition, as well as proposing strategies for improving the efficiency of Portuguese companies. Related topics include supply chain management, automation and the adoption of innovative business practices. The studies to be done in this area should also analyse aspects such as:

- The adoption of innovative technologies and efficient production processes.
- Promotion of the development of skills among entrepreneurs, manager and workers, including continuous training and education.
- Assessment of the regulatory and business environment in Portugal, identifying obstacles to company productivity and competitiveness.

4.2 Social policies for combating poverty and inequality

Scientific consultant — Amílcar Moreira (ISEG, ULisboa)

4.2.1 The Portuguese Welfare State: Short-Term Problems

Excluding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, in the period between 2015 and 2022, Portugal saw an improvement in key socio-economic indicators (see Eurostat, 2023; GEP, 2023). Both activity (15-64) and employment rates (20-64) increased steadily — from 72% to 76% and from 68% to 78%, respectively. Unemployment was more than halved during the same period — from 13% to 6%. Long-term unemployment was also significantly cut from 8% to 3%. Levels of precarious employment in the labour market, while remaining significantly high, decreased — as attested to by the increase in the rate of transitions

from temporary to permanent contracts from 26% (in 2015) to 35% (in 2020). The real gross disposable income of households, per capita, also increased between 2015 and 2022. As a result of these developments, the percentage of the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion decreased from 26% (in 2015) to 19% in 2022. Income inequality levels have also declined, even if less markedly — with the quintile share ratio (S80/S20) decreasing from 6 to 5.7 points.

Notwithstanding this overall improvement, important problems remain. For instance, despite recent successes in reducing income poverty, in-work poverty has not gone down — and remains above the EU-27 average (10.3% vs 8.5% in 2022). In the same way, although it has decreased over time, youth unemployment remains above the EU-27 average (19% vs 14.5% in 2022).

Furthermore, as a result of both long-term trends and more immediate events (the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis), new problems seem to be emerging. Perhaps the most noticeable of these 'new social issues' concerns the difficulty in access to and the cost of housing. According to the OECD (2022), Portugal is one of the advanced economies where house prices have risen the most since 2015. Indicators of severe housing deprivation have also been increasing in recent years — particularly for people living in rented accommodation (6.5% to 9% between 2017 and 2020).

Another area that is becoming problematic concerns access to healthcare (see OECD / European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, 2021). In a country where the share of out-of-pocket expenditure on overall healthcare expenditure per household is (and has remained) significantly above the EU-27 average (28% vs 14% in 2020), the recent increase (from 1.6% to 2.9% in the period between 2020 and 2022) in self-reported unmet needs for medical care seems to suggest an increase in the difficulties in getting medical care. This adds to a broader problem that concerns the prevalence of chronic illness, which is attested to by the fact that healthy life expectancy, at age 65 in Portugal remains approximately two years below the EU-27 average (see INE, 23).

Overall, of the various demographic groups in Portuguese society, two seem to be in particular need of support. The first group is young people transitioning from education to the labour market. As shown in a recent study by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

(Martins, 2021), in addition to the relatively high levels of unemployment (19% in 2022), this group bears the brunt of the high levels of precarity in the Portuguese labour market. Moreover, almost 2/3 of young people aged between 20 and 30 work under fixed-term contracts. At the same time, they are among the most affected by the increasing lack of affordable housing, particularly in the Lisbon and Porto metropolitan areas.

The second group in special need of attention is families with children. These families are more exposed to the risk of poverty (14% in 2019) than families without children (11%). This problem is even worse for single-parent families with young children, where the risk of exposure to poverty was twice as high (34% in 2019) than in the population as a whole (17%).

4.2.2 Long-term Challenges

Beyond these comparatively short-term problems, the Portuguese welfare state is faced with two (intertwined) long-term challenges. The first concerns the implications of demographic ageing. The second concerns the need to transition to a model of economic growth that leverages knowledge and innovation to create value in global labour markets — which will be critical in dealing with the economic challenges prompted by demographic ageing.

a) The Demographic Challenge

Being one of the fastest-ageing countries in the world, with 22% of the population aged 65 or over, Portugal is also one of the countries where ageing will accelerate most in the coming decades (European Commission, 2021). As a result of this, the number of individuals aged 65 or over, per every 100 individuals of working age (20-64), is expected to increase from 37 in 2019 to 67 in 2070 (GPEARI, 2021).

This increase in the number of people of retirement age is likely to increase pension expenditure, notably in the next two decades. According to the 2021 Ageing Report, public expenditure on pensions is expected to increase from 12.7% of the GDP (in 2019) to 14.4% in 2040. At the same time, as a result of the ageing process and the rising cost of technology, health expenditure is expected to increase from 5.7% of the GDP in 2019 to 7% in 2045 — remaining

above this figure until 2070. Finally, given the current prevalence of chronic illness, it is expected that significant investments will have to be made in the near future.¹

Even more worrying than these pressures on the public purse, demographic ageing will prompt a very significant decrease in the size of the workforce — which sustains the functioning of the economy and the financing of the welfare state. According to the 2021 Ageing Report, Portugal will have lost approximately 1.9 million people of working age — almost a third of its potential workforce — by 2070. Portugal's ability to deal with this loss of human capital will depend on its ability to a) retain existing human capital and b) attract migrant workers that can help fill the future skills gaps in the labour market — both in elementary and more qualified occupations.

b) The Economic Growth Challenge

As mentioned above, Portugal has been very successful in reducing the levels of poverty and inequality in recent years. In fact, excluding the impact of the 2008-09 Financial Crisis and the Eurozone Crisis in the period between 2010 and 2013, it can well be argued that Portugal has performed reasonably well in this domain in the last two decades.

The same, however, cannot be said in terms of the economic performance of the country (see Alexandre et al, 2019). In the past two decades, the country has been hit by a series of external shocks: the enlargement of the EU to Eastern Europe, the opening of European markets to Chinese exports; the 2008 Financial Crisis and the subsequent Eurozone Crisis; and, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of this, the accumulated growth in the past two decades is dismal, particularly when compared with the performance of countries in Eastern Europe. More worryingly, the country has not been able to fully capitalise on the noticeable increase in qualifications in the labour force during that period (Conselho Nacional para a Produtividade, 2019).

¹ On this, the 2021 Ageing Report suggests that expenditure on long-term care will increase from 0.4% of the GDP in 2019 to 0.8% in 2070. However, this (arguably conservative) estimate is based on an assumption of no policy change, i.e., that current levels of underfinancing in this area will remain and there will be no demands for increased public funding in this area.

If it is to improve its economic performance, Portugal must move from a model based on the export of employment intensive, low-value services/goods to an alternative export-led growth model — based on the leveraging of knowledge and innovation to create value in global markets (Alexandre, 2021). If the Portuguese economy is to compete in international markets on the basis of knowledge and innovation, important changes in the model of welfare provision will be required, namely:

- A stronger focus on what scholars have deemed ‘social investment policies’ — childcare, education, active labour market policies, life-long learning, higher education (see Morel et al, 2012) which allow individuals to gain the skills that are needed in this type of economy;
- Strengthening the policies that enable individuals/families to make investments in skills — particularly in the fields of housing, healthcare and transport/mobility;
- Designing labour market institutions (unemployment protection, active labour market policies, etc.) in such a way as to facilitate the mobility of (qualified) human capital in the labour market and to allow for the allocation of workers to the most dynamic sectors in the economy;
- While being wary of the distributive implications (namely in terms of increased wage and income inequality), designing the welfare, tax and wage-setting systems in such a way as to allow individuals to maximise the benefits from their investments in education.

Despite constituting a window of opportunity for the Portuguese economy and society, the transition to this new model of economic growth in itself entails important risks. If poorly managed, this transition process could (at least in the short/medium term) produce temporary unemployment and/or abandonment of the labour market by older cohorts. On the other hand, bearing in mind that our social protection model is fundamentally financed by taxes on work (contributions to Social Security and IRS income tax), a lowering of the tax burden on investments in education might harm the financial sustainability of the Portuguese welfare state.

4.2.3 Social Policy in Portugal: A Research Agenda

Bearing this socioeconomic context in mind, Fundação Francisco Manuel dos Santos is interested in funding research projects that address the above-mentioned short-term problems and long-term challenges faced by the Portuguese welfare state. In particular, FFMS is willing to prioritise projects which deal with the following topics in a cross-cutting, multidisciplinary way:

- Transitions into and out of Poverty in Portuguese Society;
- Financial Stress and Economic Security in Portuguese Society;
- The Social, Educational and Economic Consequences of Housing Vulnerability;
- Education to Work Transitions in the Portuguese Labour Market;
- Human Resources Needs/Gaps in the Welfare Sector: Education, Healthcare, Long-term Care;
- Delivering Long-Term Care: Future Needs and Funding Options;
- The Social, Educational and Economic Impact of Social Investment Policies in Portugal;
- Impact of the Welfare State on the Performance of the Portuguese Economy;
- Employment (Dis)Incentives in the Portuguese Welfare System;
- Successful Models for the Training/Requalification of the Labour Force;
- The Role of Tax and Welfare Policies in promoting a Brain Gain in the Portuguese Economy.

In conducting research on these (and other) topics, FFMS will privilege projects that:

- Involve the creation of datasets (on welfare regulations, benefit take-up, etc.) that will leverage future research into the Portuguese welfare state;
- Explore the potential of administrative data, namely in the context of experimental studies;
- Explore the potential of simulation tools in evaluating alternative policy interventions or counterfactual cases;

- Conduct cost-benefit (comparing costs and outcomes of interventions in monetary terms) and cost-effectiveness (comparing the cost of interventions with a chosen primary outcome) analyses of alternative policy interventions;
- Whenever relevant, explore cross-regional variations in their analysis;
- Explore best practices from abroad.

4.3. The quality of democracy

Scientific consultant — Carlos Jalali (UAveiro)

The study programme for the 2024-26 three-year period embraces a symbolically important period. Its first year will mark the 50th anniversary of the revolution on 25 April 1974, when the democratisation process began in Portugal and the third wave of democracy began worldwide. The last year of the three-year period, 2026, marks half a century since the Constitution and the first fully democratic general and presidential elections, where all citizens had the right to choose their representatives, marking the moment when the transition to democracy was made complete.

50 years on, it is important to place the analytical focus on the quality of democracy. This is a multidimensional concept and is widely discussed in the literature. However, at its core, the notion is beginning to take root that democracy requires not only the existence of formal procedures that allow for political equality and government control, but also that these principles are substantively met.

In their seminal work, Diamond & Morlino (2004: 22) define the quality of democracy as a “stable institutional structure that realizes the liberty and equality of citizens through the legitimate and correct functioning of its institutions and mechanisms”. The theory of these authors is that the assessment of the quality of democracy falls into three different dimensions, in an analogy with the quality of industrial products. The first refers to the procedures, which in democracy include, for example, the existence of the Rule of Law, electoral competition and mechanisms of accountability in the political system. The second, to its content: if the regime effectively guarantees the freedom and equality of its citizens. The third, to its

results, particularly the assessment that the citizens make of how it works. Therefore, quality of democracy exists when there is balance between the different dimensions.

Democracies can thus differ in their performance, both among themselves and over time. To this end, the concept of quality of democracy is also related to the dynamics of democratic backsliding, which we have seen in the 21st century. These include the gradual erosion of democratic norms, with repercussions in the form of a decline in the quality of democracy.

The aim is for the studies and policy papers approved under this three-year programme (2024-2026) to take a multidimensional look at the quality of democracy. To do this, they must take into account not only the different dimensions of the quality of democracy, but also the way they are related to each other. While with industrial products, there is a close connection between the different dimensions — better procedures tend to generate substantively superior products, thus also generating more satisfaction — the same might not be the case in democratic regimes. The existence of democratic procedures in and of themselves does not increase the equality and freedom of the citizens, nor does it necessarily generate satisfaction with the way the democracy works.

In this framework, the following eight subtopics are proposed for the 2024-26 three-year period, arising from four prior considerations. First, the aim is to tackle relevant dimensions in the analysis of the quality of democracy in Portugal from a comparative perspective. Second, they should promote a connection between the quality of democracy, economic development and social policies in order to generate studies that are more relevant and that have greater impact. Third, they should focus on identifying relevant topics still relatively unexplored in order to generate more added value for public debate on FFMS studies. Finally, the goal is to generate recommendations that can contribute to the quality of democracy.

SUBTOPICS

4.3.1 Governance capacity and quality of public policies in Portugal

The existing studies indicate that there is room for improvement the governance capacity in Portugal, with an impact on the quality of public policies. In this framework, the aim is to study the use of empirical evidence in political decisions; the role of ministerial offices and political advisors; the contribution of scientific knowledge and the role of experts in the public policy process; the effectiveness of the implementation of public policies and the existing constraints; the role of *ex ante* and *ex post* assessment in public policies; the participation of citizens in the public policy process; the definition of the agenda (what topics are included and excluded in response terms); and the role of the digital, and of artificial intelligence. The goal will be to carefully analyse the Portuguese case, putting it into comparative perspective, in order to be able to identify how governance capacity and the quality of public policies in Portugal can be reinforced.

This topic is related to the thematic line of research into economic development insofar as governance capacity and the quality of the public policies produced contribute to this goal. Therefore, it will also be relevant to explore this connection.

4.3.2 Time horizon of public policies

In democracy, tension emerges between the time horizon of many of the more pressing societal challenges and the time horizon of the different governments given the electoral cycles. In this framework, the aim is to see if the incentives in the Portuguese political system weaken its capacity to respond to long-term challenges. This topic has a relevant connection with the other FFMS thematic research lines, insofar as the response to the challenges of productivity, inequality and ageing, among others, require strategies that go beyond the time horizons of a legislature.

4.3.3 Political polarisation

Political polarisation has contributed to a decline in the quality of several western democracies and is a phenomenon that seems to be on the rise in Portugal. In this framework, it is important to

analyse the factors behind this political polarisation from a comparative perspective, while also considering the impact of new technology, such as artificial intelligence (AI).

4.3. 4 Media

A pluralist, robust and independent media system is an essential pillar in the quality of democracy. Therefore, the aim is to promote studies that look at the relationship between the media and the quality of democracy, a topic still relatively unexplored in the Portuguese context. This is why it will be interesting to look not only at the traditional media, but also at new media. In this context, it is important to analyse the effects of media coverage and the factors behind the media agenda (which topics are included vs excluded in terms of coverage). It will also be interesting to look at the role of the media in how informed citizens are and what they know about politics, bearing in mind that their political attitudes and behaviour are influenced by the media.

4.3.5 Inequality, poverty and quality of democracy

As mentioned above, quality democracy requires the effective political freedom and equality of all citizens, not merely in formal terms. In this context, it is important to analyse to what extent economic inequality in Portugal affects the political freedom and equality of the citizens, including in the political decision-making process. It will also be interesting to assess to what extent social inequalities and poverty influence attitudes to democracy, which is related to the other FFMS research topics.

4.3.6 Political recruitment policy

The quality of democracy also depends on the quality of the political elite. This is why it will be interesting to look at the dynamics of political recruitment in Portugal from a comparative perspective. One particularly relevant dimension has to do with political recruitment, given the central role of political parties in the democratic delegation process.

4.3.7 The European Union and the quality of democracy

The last year of this programme's three-year period, 2026, also marks the 40th anniversary of Portugal joining the European Economic Community. This date thus serves as a reference point for analysing the role of the European Union (EU) in the quality of Portuguese democracy. In effect, the workings of the Portuguese political system cannot be dissociated from its integration into Europe. National political options are influenced by the European framework and Europe largely serves as a reference both for politicians and for citizens. Therefore, the quality of Portuguese democracy also benefits from the capacity and quality of the European institutions.

This role of the EU in national democracy takes on additional relevance given the challenges the European Union has faced in the last decade, leading some authors to describe a context of permanent crisis (*permacrisis*) in Europe. This context is marked by multiple, criss-crossing fronts, including economic (sovereign debt crisis, more recently, inflationary pressure); geopolitical (invasion of Ukraine); social (for example, the refugee crisis); political (growth of populist parties, divisions in the heart of the EU); environmental, etc.

4.3.8 Rule of law

As stated in the introduction, the Rule of Law plays a vital role in the quality of democracy. It is therefore important to examine this important axis in terms of procedures, content and results. One interesting point would be to look at the topic of punishment and rehabilitation of criminals, a relevant area in Portugal, as well as the perception and experience of citizens in relation to the legal system and justice, thus assessing the scale of the results.



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