



Peer Review on Experimental methods for impact evaluation of social inclusion policies

Host country discussion paper

The Inclusion Policy Lab: Towards a New Era of Policy-Making in Spain

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Acronyms

CEMFI	Centre for Monetary and Financial Studies (Centro de Estudios Monetarios y Financieros)
J-PAL	Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab
MIS	Minimum income scheme
MISSM	Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security, and Migration
RCT	Randomised Control Trial
SGOIPS	Secretariat General of Goals and Policies for Inclusion and Social Welfare

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1 Introduction

Today Spain ranks among the European countries with the highest rates of poverty and social exclusion. In 2021, almost three out of 10 citizens were at risk of poverty or social exclusion and the income disparities between the richest and poorest population groups are significant (see [Section 2](#)). Until recently, the policy response to this situation was suboptimal. A large share of social spending was devoted to pensions and unemployment benefits, with limited targeted support to the most disadvantaged individuals ([AIReF, 2022](#)). In 2020, in response to the COVID-19 crisis and to improve structural deficiencies of existing social inclusion policies, the Spanish Government introduced a national minimum income scheme (MIS). This landmark policy targets 2.3 million people ([AIReF, 2022](#)), 4.8% of the Spanish population, and 17.6% of the population at risk of poverty and social exclusion. While income support policies play a key role in addressing poverty, they may not be enough to uplift households from poverty and encourage wider social inclusion. Supplementary interventions can open up various avenues for social inclusion.

Against this background, the Spanish Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security, and Migration (MISSM), which developed and implemented the Minimum Income Policy, decided to complement the policy with an array of other measures that would provide a more holistic approach in the fight against social exclusion. The MISSM created a Policy Lab to test and evaluate innovative interventions, leading to 34 pilot programmes. The Ministry invited the Centre for Monetary and Financial Studies (“Centro de Estudios Monetarios y Financieros”, CEMFI) and J-PAL Europe as scientific partners to ensure that the evaluations of pilots would be carried out according to the highest scientific standards. The Lab solicited innovative programmes from the regional and local governments and the third sector and collaborated with them and their scientific partners to develop rigorous evaluation strategies. A total of 34 educational, employment, and psychosocial support pilot programmes funded by NextGenerationEU Recovery Plan funds and channelled by the MISSM to promote social inclusion are being evaluated by the Lab. The evaluation of these programmes is carried out through Randomised Control Trials (RCTs), also known as randomised evaluations. These are an impact evaluation method that allow to understand the specific changes to participants’ lives that can be attributed to the programme being evaluated. This unprecedented approach is a milestone in the impact evaluation of public policies in Spain to support the generation of evidence-based policy making in such a crucial policy area.

This paper provides the theoretical and practical background to show how RCTs can play an integral role in evaluating social inclusion policies. The case of Spain will be presented to provide an overview of the role played by the Policy Lab. Section 2 presents an overview of the situation in Spain, with a focus on existing social inclusion challenges and responses provided by the country. Section 3 introduces the Policy Lab, Randomised Control Trials, as well as the Lab’s policy scope and financial, legal, and institutional frameworks. Section 4 focuses on considerations for rigorous evaluations of social policies through the experience of the Lab. Section 5 outlines discussion points ahead of the Peer Review event in Madrid, particularly focusing on how the emerging evidence can be used for policy making. The paper will use programmes, pathways, pilot projects, and pilots interchangeably to refer to the 34 interventions evaluated in the context of the Policy Lab. Similarly, the concepts of randomised control trials (RCTs), randomised evaluations, and rigorous evaluations will be used interchangeably.

2 Situation in Spain

In recent years, the levels of poverty and inequality in Spain have increased in the context of the pandemic¹, accentuating the urgent need for policies dedicated to alleviating poverty and social exclusion. In Spain, 13.1 million people, almost 28% of the total population, were at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2021. More than 10% of the total population was affected by severe poverty, and 8% suffered from severe material and social deprivation. These indicators were particularly concerning for households with children or teenagers, placing Spain as the fourth country in the EU with the highest poverty rate. In 2021, the income disparity between the richest 20% and poorest 20% of the Spanish population was significant: the income of the richest 20% was 6.2 times higher than that of the poorest 20% (EAPN, 2022). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted the importance of reinforcing key social protection areas such as health, education and employment to support the most vulnerable in Spain.

In terms of educational outcomes, the most recent data from the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) shows that, on average, Spanish students scored below the OECD average in mathematics and science. Importantly, students' socio-economic background accounted for 12% and 10% of the variation in performance in mathematics and science, respectively (OECD, 2019). Another priority for social inclusion in Spain entails reducing unemployment, especially among young people. Spain has one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the EU, amounting to 30% in 2023 (INE, 2023).

The rapid expansion of social spending and the larger attention devoted to inclusion policies reinforce the need for rigorous evaluation to guide the decision-making processes. Until 2010, social spending had remained considerably low in Spain, as such expenditure relative to GDP was below 25%. In the last decade, social spending increased significantly, reaching 30% of GDP in 2020. In 2019, social expenditures are concentrated on unemployment (7.2% of total social spending), pensions (around 50%) and healthcare and disability (almost 35%), considerably more than the share of social spending in these areas in other European countries. However, spending targeting families and children (5.6%), housing (0.5%), and social exclusion (1.0%) remains below the EU average (AIReF, 2022).

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Spain was one of the few EU countries without a national minimum income scheme. However, it had regional level schemes, varying in terms of size and scope. Besides providing unequal financial support across the regions, these regional schemes only reached an average of 8% of people living below the poverty line in the country. Since 2014, in its Country Specific Recommendations for Spain, the Council of the European Union has systematically pointed out the large disparities in the access conditions across regions caused by various minimum income schemes targeting different groups and managed by different administrations. A consequence had been that a substantial number of people in need had been left without support. These recommendations have highlighted the need to enhance the effectiveness of minimum income schemes by addressing their coverage gaps, streamlining the complex system of regional schemes, and reducing disparities in the access conditions (Council of the European Union, 2019; Council of the European Union, 2018; Council of the European Union, 2017; Council of the European Union, 2014).

In an effort to address the high levels of poverty and social exclusion in the country, the MISSM introduced a national minimum income scheme (MIS) in May 2020. The existing MIS offers cash transfers to individuals and households depending on their income and size. As of 2023, after taking other sources of income into account, the cash transfer guarantees a monthly income of around EUR 560 for a single individual and EUR 900 for a

¹ As of 2021, Spain ranked as the fourth EU country with the highest levels of inequality in the EU according to the S80/S20 ratio (EAPN, 2022).

two-parent household with one child. The MIS was designed to provide a country-wide base benefit that regional governments could complement through the pre-existing transfer programmes. The MIS and the social inclusion pathways are contributing to increase not only the level of social spending, but also the share of spending that is targeted towards mitigating social exclusion.

Although minimum income schemes are an important tool to tackle poverty, they are often not sufficient on their own to lift the households from poverty and promote broader social inclusion. Social exclusion is a multi-faceted phenomenon, with a variety of underlying causes. To address this situation, the Ministry launched a companion policy to the Minimum Income Scheme to develop and evaluate the “inclusion pathways”. These are complementary programmes designed and implemented by the regional and local governments or the third sector that could cover an array of different interventions in areas such as education, health, labour, or psychosocial areas (See [Section 3.2](#) for more details).

The inclusion pathways were conceptualised to be pilots of innovative policy strategies to promote social inclusion in Spain. A key component of this programme was to evaluate these pilots to assess what policies could be more effective to promote social inclusion. In order to obtain this evidence, it was important to carry out rigorous evaluations of the impact of these programmes. The MISSM decided to mandate the evaluation on the basis of Randomised Control Trials, which represent the most rigorous methodology to estimate the causal effects of interventions. This methodology also provides lessons on how programmes can be adapted to become more effective, as well as generating the knowledge to scale them up at larger levels. A more in-depth overview of rigorous policy evaluation is provided in [Section 3.2](#).

Despite the global trend of increased collaboration between the academic researchers and policy makers to generate robust evidence, Spain lags behind in the degree to which the scientific knowledge and evaluation influences policy making, particularly when compared to countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States. In these countries, economists and other social scientists actively contribute to policy making processes through think tanks, policy labs, and advisory boards.

In Spain, the evaluation of public policies is dispersed and heterogeneous. It includes a wide range of activities, such as supervision, audit, follow-up, and analysis, performed by different public institutions. Traditionally, evaluation has been understood as the process of ensuring public budgets were spent to achieve their objectives and effectively reach their recipients. The [Independent Authority for Fiscal Responsibility \(AIReF\)](#), created in 2013, has been a pioneer in carrying out impact evaluation through ex-post evaluation of public spending. However, no large-scale randomised control trials had been conducted by any governmental body in the country at the national level. Only a few small-scale experimental initiatives had been undertaken by some local governments. The [Recovery, Transformation, and Resilience Plan](#)² (“Plan de Recuperación, Transformación y Resiliencia”) emphasised the importance of public policy evaluation and ensured its continuity through the creation of a permanent division on the evaluation of spending at AIReF. In 2022, the approval of the Law on the Evaluation of Public Policies (“[Ley de Evaluación de Políticas Públicas](#)”) marked a milestone in Spain’s journey towards evidence-driven decision making. The objective of the law is to institutionalise the evaluation of public policies and regulate its practice, with the aim of contributing to improve the effective and efficient use of public resources and adding transparency to decision making processes.

² The [Recovery, Transformation, and Resilience Plan](#) lays out the roadmap for the development of the [Next Generation EU](#) recovery funds. The Recovery Plan focuses on the first implementation phase and details investments and reforms over the period spanning from 2021 to 2023. The aim is boosting the modernisation of the Spanish economy, promoting economic growth and job creation, following the COVID-19 crisis, as well as preparing the country for future challenges.

The increasing recognition of the need to take rigorous measures to address the social inclusion challenges Spain is facing offers an exceptional opportunity to rigorously test effective programmes and promote a culture of evidence-based policy making in the country. In this context, the partnership between the MISSM, CEMFI, and J-PAL Europe to evaluate the 34 innovative programmes for social inclusion is a pioneer initiative.

3 Policy measure

3.1 Introduction to the Policy Lab in Spain

This section provides an overview of the Policy Lab, an initiative that aims to generate robust evidence on the effectiveness of social policies in Spain and strengthen social inclusion among the MIS beneficiaries and other vulnerable groups in the country. The COVID-19 NextGenerationEU Recovery Plan funds were channelled to finance 34 innovative social inclusion pathways complementary to the MIS, and implemented by the regional and local governments as well as the third sector. The condition to fund these programmes was to evaluate the policies using the most rigorous evaluation method, namely RCTs, which stands as the most reliable tool to infer the causal impact of a policy.

The Minister of Inclusion, Social Security, and Migration, José Luís Escrivá, together with the Secretary General of Goals and Policies for Inclusion and Social Welfare, Milagros Paniagua, envisioned the Policy Lab as an opportunity to strengthen the rigour of policy evaluation in the country. This initiative to evaluate public policies at national level through randomised evaluations is unprecedented in Spain and has few precedents in Europe, especially in terms of the programme's budget and geographical coverage.

As a first step to build the Policy Lab, the Secretariat General for Inclusion Goals and Policies and Social Welfare (SGOPIPS) of the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration (MISSM) collected proposals for innovative social inclusion policies from the regional and local governments and the third sector. The Ministry in cooperation with a group of researchers and academics at CEMFI developed strategies to evaluate the programmes on the basis of RCTs. J-PAL Europe provides technical advice on these programme evaluations as well as in the evidence generation process. In [Section 3.4](#), the relationships between the different actors involved in the Policy Lab is described more in detail.

The main objective of the Policy Lab is to generate robust evidence on effective social inclusion policies for the MIS beneficiaries and other vulnerable populations by addressing diverse areas such as education, digital learning, employment, social support, and health. This new approach to social inclusion policy making aims to be comprehensive, innovative, and transformative. The incorporation of an evaluation component serves a parallel objective to generate rigorous evidence that can inform policy making decisions and processes.

The key coordinating actors involved in the Lab are outlined in the boxes below.

Box 1. About MISSM and SGOPIPS

The [Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security, and Migrations \(MISSM\)](#) is the Spanish ministry responsible for social security and pensions, as well as the formulation and development of policies on foreigners, immigration and emigration, and inclusion policies. José Luis Escrivá has served as the Minister of Inclusion, Social Security, and Migrations since January 13, 2020.

The [Secretariat General of Goals and Policies for Inclusion and Social Welfare \(SGOPIPS\)](#) is the body within the MISSM responsible for the design, promotion, and evaluation of inclusion policies supporting the most vulnerable population groups to ensure their full participation in society and the labour market. María Milagros

Paniagua San Martín is the Secretary General of Goals and Policies for Inclusion and Social Welfare.

The MISSM and the SGOPIPS are the bodies responsible for the implementation and evaluation of the [Minimum Income Scheme \(MIS\)](#) introduced in May 2020 and the 34 pilot programmes being evaluated to launch [complementary inclusion pathways to the MIS](#). The MIS benefit is managed by the [National Social Security Institute](#) (Instituto Nacional de la Seguridad Social), independent from the MISSM.

Box 2. About CEMFI

The Centre for Monetary and Financial Studies ([Centro de Estudios Monetarios y Financieros, CEMFI](#)) is an institution devoted to teaching and research in Economics. CEMFI has an active and stimulating academic environment which is supported by its faculty members: numerous professors have been elected Fellows of the Econometric Society, Fellows of the European Economic Association, Research Fellows of the Centre for Economic Policy Research, and have held several grants from the European Research Council.

In 2016, CEMFI was awarded the “María de Maeztu Unit of Excellence” distinction by the Spanish National Research Agency. This distinction is granted to public research centres and units that demonstrate global scientific leadership and impact.

A specific [agreement](#) has been set up in December 2021 between CEMFI and the MISSM for the evaluation of the social inclusion pathways.

Box 3. About J-PAL Europe

The [Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab \(J-PAL\)](#) is a global research centre working to reduce poverty and exclusion by ensuring that social policy and programmes are informed by scientific evidence. J-PAL co-founders Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo, with Michael Kremer, were awarded the 2019 Nobel Prize in Economics for their pioneering approach to alleviating global poverty. A private entrepreneur Mohammed Jameel KBE launched the Community Jameel in 2003. The Community Jameel partnered with J-PAL in 2005 with three significant endowments that led the lab’s expansion to the worldwide research centre.

Anchored by a network of more than 600 affiliated and invited researchers at universities around the world, J-PAL conducts randomised impact evaluations to answer critical questions in the fight against poverty. They engage with hundreds of partners around the world to conduct rigorous research, build capacity, share policy lessons, and scale up effective programmes. To date, these programmes have reached over 560 million people globally.

[J-PAL Europe](#) leads J-PAL’s research, policy, and training work in Europe. J-PAL was launched at the [Massachusetts Institute of Technology \(MIT\)](#), and its European office is based at the Paris School of Economics.

3.2 Methodology: Randomised Control Trials (RCTs)

Randomised control trials (RCTs), or randomised evaluations, are a method used for impact evaluation to assess the causal impact of a policy. In these studies, participants are randomly assigned to different groups, with some receiving (different types of) an intervention (intervention groups), and others serving as a comparison group without any intervention. Researchers then measure the outcomes of interest in the intervention and comparison groups. Randomised evaluations provide rigorous estimates of the causal impact of an intervention. In other words, they enable researchers and policy makers to understand the specific changes to participants’ lives that can be attributed, in a causal way,

to the programme. They consist of an evaluation methodology, where the research team works side-by-side with the implementing partner in the design of multiple aspects of the intervention, evaluation and data collection and analysis.

Randomised evaluations allow researchers and policy makers to tailor their research designs to answer specific questions about the effectiveness of a programme and its underlying theory of change, meaning how and why a desired change is expected in a specific context. When carefully designed and implemented, a randomised evaluation can answer questions such as: How effective was this programme? Were there any unintended side-effects? Who benefited most? Which components of the programme work or do not work? How cost-effective was the programme? How does it compare to other programmes designed to accomplish similar goals?

Randomised evaluations are particularly well suited to assessing how a social programme works in real-world situations, especially when focusing on human behaviour and participants' responses to programme implementation. Randomised evaluations are advantageous as they allow tailoring the intervention and data collection to answer specific questions. For instance, it may be important to understand the impact of different programme components and the channels through which they operate. Evaluating a programme during its initial implementation phase can be an opportunity to improve its design by testing different aspects of the programme. If different models of the programme or, the overall programme, proves to be less effective than expected, policy-makers can use this information on their decision of allocation of resources across programs. Randomised evaluations can also provide useful evidence when considering whether a programme should be implemented at a larger scale and inform the development of policies based on evaluations carried out in similar contexts. They can also be used to assess the long-term effects of an intervention (see [Annex 5](#) for an introduction to non-experimental and experimental research).

3.3 Policy scope

The Policy Lab aims at testing the effectiveness of social policies that strengthen social inclusion among the beneficiaries of the national minimum income scheme (MIS) and other vulnerable groups in the country.

The MIS targets more than 2.3 million people in 830 000 households across the country and has an annual budget of EUR 3.000 million ([AIReF, 2022](#)). The basic eligibility criteria include the residence in Spain in the previous year, a demonstrable vulnerable economic situation (through an income and wealth test) and having belonged to the household for the last six months. The transfer guarantees a basic monthly income of around EUR 560 for a single individual and EUR 900 for a two-parent household with one child, taking into account other income sources of individuals.

In December 2022, the MIS reached 283 811 households, about 35% of the potential beneficiary households and had an annual cost of EUR 1.919 million in 2022 ([AIReF, 2023](#)). This coverage varies by region and type of household. It ranges between 59% in La Rioja and 32% in the Illes Balears. The reach is higher among households with children, ranging from 19% (four adults and one child) to 56% (two adults and three children). For households without children, the coverage ranges between 15% (four adults) and 37% (one adult).

The MIS (Law 19/2021) is conceived as a package of policies whose aim is not only providing a monetary transfer, but also providing beneficiaries with access to pathways to improve their overall situation. With the objective of strengthening the effectiveness of the MIS, the 34 pilot social inclusion programmes were launched with a total investment of EUR 212 million. Around 200 000 people have directly or indirectly benefited from these interventions, either by being direct participants in the programmes (more than 100 000 people) or having other household members participating in them.

The pilot programmes evaluated through the Policy Lab mainly target the MIS beneficiaries, as well as the regional minimum income beneficiaries and other individuals at risk of social exclusion. The programmes target different population groups, including children and youth (35%), women who are victims of gender violence or sexual exploitation (18%), unemployed people (15%), and migrants (12%). Programmes also target families, elderly people, individuals experiencing homelessness, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities.

The programmes evaluated in the context of the Policy Lab are implemented across the whole Spanish territory, with activities in every autonomous community as well as in the two autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla. Some projects are carried out in a single community, but most of those implemented by the third sector operate across several provinces or even the whole Spanish territory (see image below). [Figure 1 in Annex 1](#) shows the geographical reach of the programmes by type of the implementing partner.

The pathways address social inclusion with different approaches and scopes, applying and combining diverse methodologies in their interventions. The main intervention areas are education (88%), social support (71%), employment (65%), digital learning (56%), health (18%), housing (15%), caregiving (12%), MIS take-up (12%), energy poverty (9%), and entrepreneurship (3%). [Figure 2 in Annex 1](#) shows the programmes by intervention area.

The pilot projects can be also classified by the type of the implementing partners. Among the 34 programmes, 16 are implemented by the regional administration bodies, 4 by the local administrations, and 14 by the third sector. The role of these different partners as well as their place in the legal framework of the Policy Lab are explained in [Section 3.4](#). The list of implementing partners is available in the [Annex](#). The interventions have an average duration of 8 months and range between 1.5 months in the shortest case to 18.8 months for the longest programme.

The Policy Lab, which comprises the design, execution and evaluation of the pilots, is currently in the last stage of a three-year process. The [Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan](#) (Plan de Recuperación, Transformación y Resiliencia) approved in April 2021 set three milestones in the development of the inclusion pathways (see [Figure 3 in Annex 1](#) for a scheme of the Policy Lab timeframe):

- The first one consisted of signing eight collaboration agreements with the regional or local public bodies or organisations from the third sector to develop the pathways by the first quarter of 2022. In October 2021, 16 pilots were launched by the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security, and Migration through the [Royal Decree 938/2021, on October 26th 2021](#)³.
- The second milestone, which envisioned the signature of at least 10 additional agreements by the first quarter of 2023, was achieved in May 2022 with the launch of 18 pilots through the [Royal Decree 378/2022, on May 17th 2022](#).
- The third milestone will consist of the publication of 18 good practices by the first quarter of 2024. The publication will include the most relevant results and policy learnings of the most successful pilot programmes.

To date, among the 34 pilots, 16 have finished programme implementation and are starting their data analysis, 16 are currently developing the interventions, and two have not finished the recruitment process. [Figure 5 in Annex 1](#) shows the list of pilots by the level of achievement of the different milestones. [Annex 2](#) presents examples of pilot projects, with their objectives, target population, intervention design and partners.

This means that as of timing of this report, the results from 34 pilot RCTs are not yet available, as the first RCT results are expected to be published in 2024.

³ See [Section 3.4](#) for more detailed information on the Policy Lab legal framework.

3.4 Financial, legal, and institutional framework

The Policy Lab operates within the legal framework established by the Law of the Minimum Income Scheme ([Ley 19/2021](#)). As stated in the law, the MIS is not an end in itself, but a means to facilitate the transition of individuals from social exclusion to full participation in society. This objective of inclusion is at the heart of the design of the MIS, which introduces a system of incentives aimed at preventing the creation of what social policy experts refer to as "poverty traps", in other words, self-reinforcing mechanisms that lead to the persistence of poverty.

The launch of the MIS coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in Spain in March 2020. The COVID-19 NextGenerationEU Recovery Plan funds assigned to Spain were channelled through the [Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan](#) (Plan de Recuperación, Transformación y Resiliencia) to address the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. Within the adoption of this plan, the government outlined ten policies that provide the direction to achieve sustainable growth in Spain. For each policy, they articulated specific components that would contribute to that overall goal.

The Policy Lab was created in the framework of policy number 8 aiming at modernising the labour market in Spain. Within this objective, component 23 aims to create "New public policies for a dynamic, resilient and inclusive labour market". To implement it, the government has planned multiple investments, one of which being "Fostering inclusive growth through the inclusion paths associated with the MIS". The Policy Lab operates within the policy framework established within this particular investment. The framework specifies the following two objectives: 1) improving access to MIS for people at risk of social exclusion who are not receiving it (in other words, increasing MIS take-up); and 2) increasing the effectiveness of the MIS by complementing financial assistance with a set of inclusion pathways. Additionally, it specifies that the programmes should be evaluated using randomised controlled trials (RCTs)⁴.

After the formalisation of this framework, the Secretariat General of Objectives and Policies for Inclusion and Social Welfare (SGOPIPS), the governmental institution responsible to execute it, launched public consultations for regional governments, local entities, and third-sector organisations to submit proposals for inclusion pathways. Then, they issued two Royal Decrees (Royal Decree 938/2021, on October 26th 2021 and Royal Decree 378/2022, on May 17th 2022). These documents outline the available budget and identify the implementing partners who receive grants, specifying the methods and procedures for transferring funds to them. In the initial case, a sole payment is made upon signing individual agreements with the partners. In the second scenario, third sector entities receive their grant in a lump sum, whereas regional and local governments receive two payments: one upon the contract signing and another upon the project completion after all documentation and deliverables have been submitted.

The Policy Lab operates within a multifaceted governance structure involving various actors, each with distinct responsibilities and roles in the initiative. The MISSM is the promoter of the project, which canalises the funds and sets the objectives of the Policy Lab. Within the MISSM, the SGOPIPS holds the key responsibility. The SGOPIPS evaluates projects, collaborates in designing evaluations, and signs agreements with implementing partners. These agreements, which outline the legal and financial conditions, implementation plans, and evaluation designs, are made public in the Official State Gazette (links to individual agreements are provided in the [Annex 2](#)).

Implementing partners are responsible for the implementation of the programmes and co-manage the programmes with the SGOPIPS. They are also responsible for organising data collection activities in the framework of the evaluations. The SGOPIPS and the

⁴ See [Figure 4](#) in [Annex 1](#) for a scheme of the Policy Lab financial framework.

implementing partners collectively design the evaluation, including the outcomes to measure, the theory of change, the recruitment and randomisation processes.

Due to the initiative's complexity and the goal of generating robust evidence, the SGOPIPS collaborated with two academic institutions: CEMFI and the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) Europe. CEMFI convened a group of 18 researchers with experience in randomised evaluations, who supported the SGOPIPS in the design of the evaluations and provided technical assistance to ensure adherence to rigorous academic standards. These researchers conduct the data analysis and reporting of some of the pilots, while the SGOPIPS is responsible for others. J-PAL Europe, a network of researchers specialised in the evaluation of public policies through randomised evaluations, employed dedicated staff working with the SGOPIPS and the researchers at CEMFI. They provide technical assistance to generating evidence and strategizing how to use it in policy making. On some occasions, the partner institutions had their own scientific teams which represented a new actor to coordinate with.

Additionally, an Ethical Review Board, composed of three independent individuals from the academic field, reviews and approves projects according to ethical standards formulated by the MISSM and implementing partners, as outlined in the Ministerial Order ISM/331/202211. The MISSM is the ultimate actor responsible for the evaluations which represent the key deliverable to the European Commission. [Figure 5 in Annex 1](#) shows a visual representation of the institutional framework and governance of the Policy Lab.

4 Considerations for rigorous evaluations of social policies

From its conceptualisation to its implementation, the Policy Lab has developed in-depth knowledge and know-how of the key aspects to take into account when designing and conducting rigorous evaluations of social policies through similar initiatives. These can be useful lessons to consider for future partnerships of similar nature. Below, we enumerate and describe some of these lessons learnt.

The rich and complex structure of the Policy Lab requires strong communication and coordination to strengthen the partnership and efficiency among the different actors involved. The Policy Lab structure involves various actors that vary in nature, size, objective, knowledge, and skills. The complexity of this institutional framework requires an additional effort in setting an adequate governance that clarifies the roles and interaction between the different actors. In randomised control trials, typically the scientific team works side-by-side with the implementing partner. In this case, the scientific team (typically composed by researchers from CEMFI and J-PAL) worked in collaboration with the MISSM and then with the partner, which required an additional level of coordination. On the other hand, the Ministry had a greater degree of influence over some partners and this was particularly useful in cases in which the partners had limited knowledge of the needs of the evaluation. Overall, the MISSM and the SGOPIPS have played an integral role from the design to the evaluation of interventions. Importantly, the collaboration between public administration and third sector partners sets a milestone for future partnerships aimed at fostering the implementation of social inclusion policies. To strengthen coordination channels among the different partners involved in the Lab, limited direct communication among different actors, such as researchers and implementing partners, can pose challenges to maintaining a smooth flow of information and providing more direct guidance to the projects. Therefore, it is key to define models of governance in the Policy Labs that have flexible communication channels between the different actors involved.

As many public sector systems in Europe may not have been historical hubs for rigorous impact evaluation methodologies, it is key to ensure that stakeholders are adequately prepared right from the start. In systems such as Spain, policy makers and

implementing partners had limited prior exposure to randomised control trials (RCTs) before the conception of the Policy Lab, thereby strengthening the need for first-hand knowledge and practical expertise. Preliminary sessions for both policy makers and implementing partners can be beneficial to consolidate the knowledge base necessary to conduct and follow the design, implementation and evaluation processes. For example, collaborating with organisations already equipped and interested in conducting RCTs as is the case in the Spanish Policy Lab might streamline this process. Investing in the evaluation capacity building within the public sector institutions and third sector organisations, such as through training sessions, workshops, and seminars, as well as leveraging on the expertise of researchers familiar with RCT methodologies can also be useful strategies. Today, Spain enjoys a growing body of professionals well skilled in social policy RCTs, laying the foundation for more evidence-based policy making in the future.

Designing scientifically rigorous evaluations takes time, which should be acknowledged when setting up the operational frameworks to run similar initiatives. In fast-paced political landscapes, quick action is often demanded. To design and plan rigorous evaluations, adequate time resources are integral. The establishment of the Policy Lab's operational framework required policy makers to carefully plan and prioritise under tight time limitations. This encouraged their adaptability and learning by doing. A response to time sensitivity could be focusing on the evaluation of a number of policies in specific sectors, such as education and labour market inclusion. Once these projects generate actionable insights and prove the effectiveness of the governance model behind the lab, they can be expanded to cover broader policy areas. This gradual approach allows for the refinement of systems and structures, making it easier to implement larger initiatives in the future.

The maximisation of our learning from randomised evaluations of interventions with multiple components requires a design that estimates the impact of each component in isolation. For instance, when assessing the impact of a programme that combines individual assistance for applying to the MIS and a social media campaign, it becomes challenging to discern which intervention is responsible for the observed effect on MIS take-up if both are applied simultaneously. A well-structured RCT, involving distinct groups – one receiving only the first intervention, another receiving only the second, and a control group – can enable the separation of these interventions' effects. This approach allows researchers to identify precisely what aspects of the programme are effective. Very comprehensive programmes that combine multiple interventions of different nature hindered the understanding of the importance of the different components. Evaluations should be designed to study the effectiveness of each type of intervention⁵. Therefore, it is essential to devote enough time to the design stage, involve researchers from the beginning of the process and ensure implementing partners understand the methodology correctly.

In the evaluation design, anticipating the need to achieve the desired sample size is integral to yielding evaluation results that can generate evidence useful to inform policy making processes⁶. Vulnerable populations often prove challenging to reach through conventional survey methods such as phone calls, text messages, or emails. Additionally, these groups might encounter obstacles such as limited time, resources, motivation, or trust in institutions. As a consequence, reaching out to potential participants to encourage them to participate in the intervention and ensuring enough engagement might be challenging. This can lead to the need to broaden the initial target group or extend the participant recruitment phase, causing delays in the implementation and evaluation processes. More severely, it can reduce the final sample size of the evaluation, which can

⁵ Some of the RCTs followed this approach such as the ones in collaboration with the European Anti Poverty Network in Spain (EAPN-ES), the European Anti Poverty Network in the Canary Islands (see Annex 2) and the Santander local government.

⁶ See [Annex 5](#) for additional information on why sample size is important.

have significant drawbacks for impact analysis. Anticipating challenges related to recruiting participants and focusing on experimental designs that minimise these difficulties is therefore of primary importance. This entails adjusting sample size predictions and outreach strategies to suit the specific characteristics of the target groups. Additionally, working with implementing partners who know the population they are serving is key to more easily recruit participants and engage them throughout the implementation and evaluation process.

When designing an evaluation, it is crucial to exert significant efforts to minimise attrition. Attrition refers to the phenomenon of participants in the experiment dropping out from the sample (for instance, by failing to complete the intervention, or refusing to answer endline surveys). Similarly to the challenge of recruiting, attrition should be anticipated to ensure an adequate final sample size. Three main strategies can help achieve this. Firstly, the team designing the evaluation can adopt a research design that guarantees ongoing programme access to all participants. Secondly, randomising at a higher level can make sure that individuals in close interaction receive identical intervention⁷. Thirdly, strengthening data collection methods, including survey design, administration, and tracking can be beneficial to minimise attrition (Glennerster and Takavarasha, 2013). Being able to follow participants' outcomes using administrative data provides a key advantage to tackle this problem, since the risk of attrition is substantially reduced⁸. Indeed, some of the pilots are using administrative data, such as the one in collaboration with the European Anti Poverty Network in Spain (EAPN-ES) (see Annex 2), while others are currently working on its access.

Facilitating access to and collection of administrative microdata for evaluation purposes can help throughout the different stages of rigorous evaluations. Accessing data can be challenging for both researchers and policy makers due to complex bureaucratic structures in place. This can occur for administrative data necessary to design and plan an evaluation as well as for evaluation processes, including evaluation results. If partners have limited knowledge on effective data collection methods, collecting data can also be challenging. The access to and collection of administrative data for evaluation purposes can be facilitated by improving bureaucratic systems in place and raising awareness on the usefulness of administrative data for evaluation. Increasing the awareness of administrative data as a service useful not only to administrative bodies but also the whole society can be key. Additionally, promoting the publication of administrative microdata in the framework of the European Union can be useful.

Putting ethics at the core of the design and implementation of rigorous evaluations is integral. To minimise the ethical concerns around rigorous evaluations, the MISSM created an Ethical Review Board formed by renowned academics in Spain, with prior experience in the ethical review. They have examined all pilots during the design stage, making a number of recommendations and suggesting the introduction of ethical safeguards on multiple occasions. RCTs aim to assess the most effective interventions to scale up, thereby serving the greater good by optimising the allocation of limited resources. In the quest for evidence-based policy making, failing to evaluate a programme rigorously can lead to the implementation of ineffective or suboptimal policies. Some ethical concerns might arise with respect to excluding a group of individuals from receiving the intervention, notably the control group. If not adequately addressed, social workers who are in direct contact with beneficiaries might encounter a level of difficulty in implementing the programme. Some of the common solutions to ethical concerns can be to provide the control group with the “status quo” or existing standard services while offering the innovative intervention to the intervention group. This approach, applied by the Policy Lab, ensures

⁷ If individuals in close interaction belong to the treatment and control groups, those in the control group can be more easily discouraged (Glennerster and Takavarasha, 2013).

⁸ See [Annex 5](#) for additional information on attrition.

that nobody is left without any form of support, while still enabling the evaluation of the programme's effectiveness. Another option is to use a randomised phase-in design, which means to initially treat part of the sample and learn the intervention effects before extending the treatment to the full sample.

5 Discussion points

1. Next steps: How to use the generated evidence in future policy making?

The Policy Lab was created with the aim of generating evidence that helps to identify effective policies to improve social inclusion and complement the MIS. This paper explained how the Policy Lab has promoted the generation of this evidence. It is important to delineate next steps to guide the use of its results in policy making processes. In 2024, it will be key for partners to work together on how to identify and apply insights from this research to drive the design and scaling of new social inclusion programmes. Differences among the 34 pilot programmes in terms of target population, intervention area, geographical reach, partners' expertise with the RCTs, size and nature of the partners will provide evaluation outcomes that might differ in their quality. An action scheme can be useful to address the possible heterogeneity in programme results. If there is strong and robust evidence on the positive impacts of a programme, public administrations should support it, finding ways to scale it up making it available to the whole target population. On the contrary, if there is clear evidence that the programme did not have a positive impact, the programme should not be scaled up. Further investigation and new RCTs will be needed to investigate the reasons for the lack of impact, and to possibly examine longer-term effects. Finally, if the results obtained are inconclusive or imprecise, it will be necessary to carefully think of a new RCT design and to conduct a new evaluation. When results are not conclusive, one should not conclude that the programme did not work, but that more resources are needed to be able to accurately infer its causal impact.

Beyond the added value that the generated evidence provides to social inclusion policy makers in Spain, this evidence constitutes a valuable input for policy makers worldwide. The design of new randomised control trials or new policies must be inspired by previous evidence as the one generated in Spain.

The difficulties to recruit and keep participants committed, whose participation is strictly voluntary, have underscored the need to assess external validity problems when considering scaling up the pilot programmes to the whole eligible population. The effects observed in the pilot programmes might not necessarily reflect the potential impacts in other settings or on the entire population. When considering scaling up a programme, a generalisability framework could be useful to assess whether the programme will yield similar outcomes by examining the presence of key success factors in the new context.

2. What is the future of the Policy Lab?

The need to carefully analyse the scaling of successful pilot programmes, adapting the evaluation designs with unclear results and formulating new evaluation designs raises questions about the future direction of the Policy Lab. It prompts consideration of how these next steps will be implemented, and the framework under which they will operate.

The implementation of effective social inclusion policies and the generation of evidence supporting them should be a systematic and permanent activity. Promoting social inclusion policies and their evaluation should be a priority irrespective of changes in the political or economic landscape. Therefore, it is essential to discuss how to transform the exception of the Policy Lab into a systematic and structured process of the policy impact evaluation. In future evaluations, it will be beneficial to leverage on the valuable knowledge and expertise on randomised evaluations generated among partners, public administration, and researchers and build upon successful partnerships and governance models.

Partnerships with NGOs (non-governmental organisations) and CSOs (civil social organisations) as well as with local and regional governments are key to reach the target population with programmes adapted to their specific situations. New Policy Labs could be established within the regional governments or in partnership with the third sector. This would allow rigorous evaluation of key policies and the use of administrative microdata to improve programmes and policies. In order to explore these new collaboration opportunities, it is essential to devote adequate time to explain and discuss the experience of the current Policy Lab and its results on the evaluation of social policy in Spain.

3. *What governance structure and stakeholders are most suitable for a Policy Lab?*

The Policy Lab put together researchers, policy makers and implementing partners in an innovative way to generate evidence on social inclusion policies. The complex structure of these collaborations and their own governance constitutes an exception in the country and, therefore, it deserves a thoughtful assessment.

A successful evaluation requires the involvement of various stakeholders from the beginning of the process. Finding ways to integrate academic expertise in each stage of the evaluation process is crucial to be able to increase the standards of the evaluation and facilitate follow-up procedures.

The participation of policy makers, the SGOPIPS and the MISSM, constitutes another innovative element. Nowadays, governmental bodies often abstain from participating in the evaluation of policies under their jurisdiction for reasons related to concerns about independence or perceiving evaluation primarily as a process to verify budget allocation. However, the MISSM and the SGOPIPS have played an integral role in the Policy Lab from the design to the evaluation of the interventions. Their active participation in the Lab has contributed to a deeper understanding of the MIS and its challenges, while also consolidating valuable resources in the form of data and knowledge.

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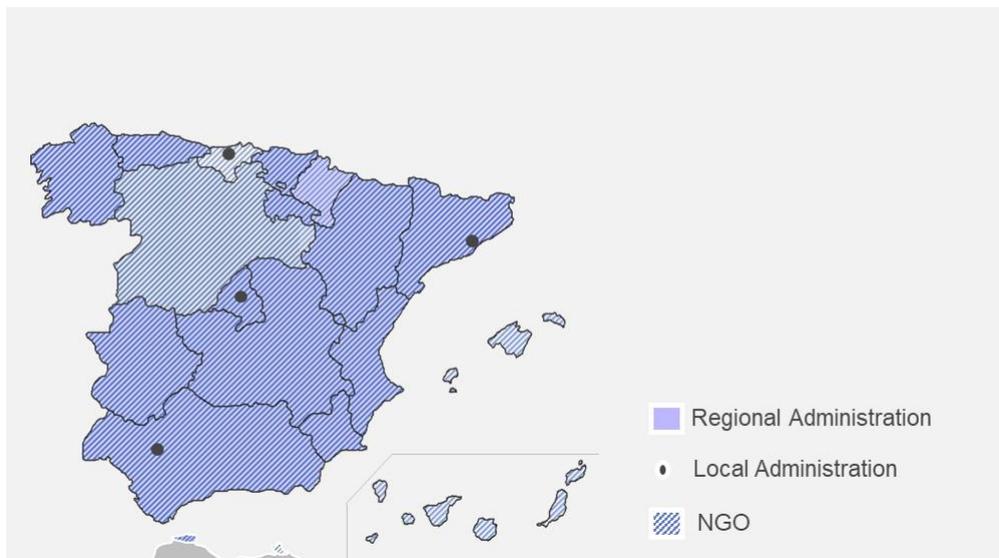
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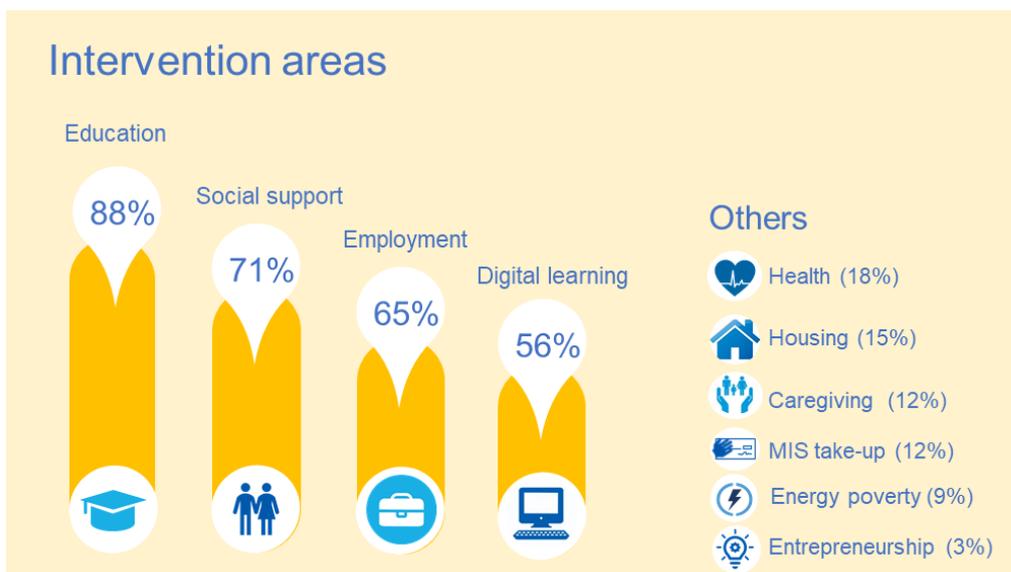
Annex 1 – Figures on Policy Lab programmes

Figure 1. Geographical reach by type of implementing partner



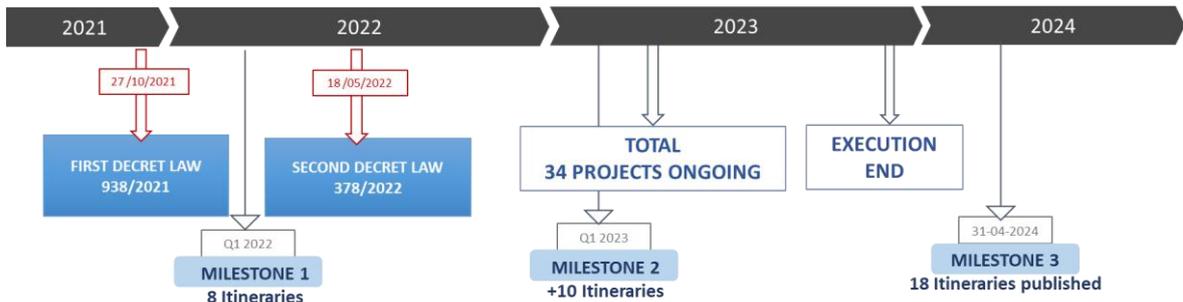
Source: Spanish Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security, and Migration.

Figure 2. Policy Lab programmes by intervention area



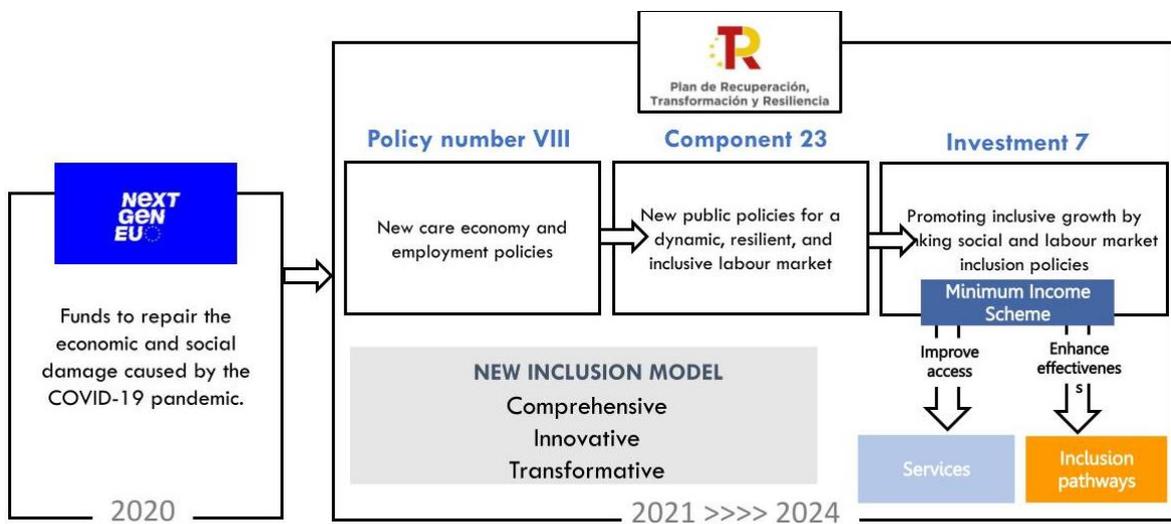
Source: Spanish Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security, and Migration.

Figure 3. The Policy Lab timeframe



Source: Spanish Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security, and Migration.

Figure 4. The Policy Lab financial framework



Source: Spanish Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security, and Migration.

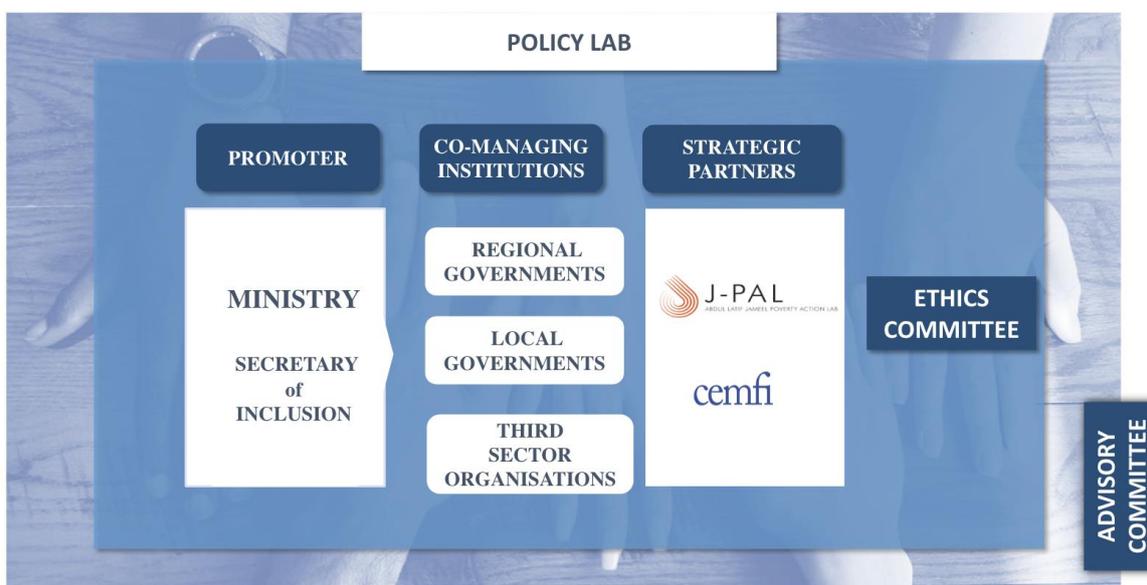
Figure 5. Pilot programmes based on achieved milestones

This visual representation illustrates the categorisation of the 34 pilot projects based on milestones accomplished as of the closure of the report on October 24, 2023. The purpose of this illustration is to show the monitoring systems put in place by SGOIPS, which provides weekly updates on project progress.



Source: Spanish Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security, and Migration.

Figure 6. The Policy Lab institutional framework and governance



Source: Spanish Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security, and Migration.

Annex 2 – Examples of pilot projects

Table 1. Examples of pilot projects

Project	Objective	Target population	Intervention	Partner
Detection and mobilisation of people eligible for MIS in a non-take-up situation	Understanding and reducing the MIS non take-up rate	Population in census tracts with severe poverty thresholds across the national territory	<p>12 000 participants randomly assigned to either Intervention Group 1, 2, 3 or Control Group:</p> <p>Intervention group 1: Information campaign and outreach strategy (counselling, accompaniment, guidance)</p> <p>Intervention group 2: campaign messages in social media</p> <p>Intervention group 3: will receive the treatment from intervention group 1 and intervention group 2</p> <p>Control group will not receive any intervention</p>	European Anti Poverty Network in Spain (EAPN-ES)
Pilot project for digital inclusion and employability improvement itineraries	Addressing and reducing the digital divide and the low employability that affects people receiving the MIS and the Canary Islands insertion benefit (PCI)	People receiving the MIS and the PCI between 45 and 65 years of age	<p>3 000 participants distributed randomly in 3 groups: control group, intervention group 1, intervention group 2</p> <p>Intervention group 1 is given a Tablet for one year, without any additional interaction</p> <p>Intervention group 2 receives a Tablet for one year and a training in digital skills. In a second phase, they receive personalised counselling, aimed at improving their employability.</p>	REDLAB Canarias

			No interaction takes place with the control group.	
Early childhood support project for families in situation of social vulnerability	<p>Developing parenting skills from the paradigm of positive parenting with emphasis on care, parenting and educational support.</p> <p>Promoting the psychomotor, cognitive and social development of children 0-3.</p> <p>Empowering mothers and fathers of children 0-3 through support for labour and social insertion processes.</p>	Children between 0 and 3 years old, whose families are in a situation of vulnerability	<p>Intervention group 1 receives standard social accompaniment and goods to support the hygiene and feeding of their children.</p> <p>Intervention group 2 receives what the first group receives and they also participate in non-systematized mother-child activities.</p> <p>The comparison group receives individualized course selection among different options and 15h/ family for a more continuous and intensive accompaniment.</p>	Fundación La Caixa
Pilot project to support labour market inclusion of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities	Promoting new employment opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (ASD, Cerebral Palsy, etc.), through personalized employment methodology.	Families with at least a member with intellectual or developmental disabilities.	<p>500 participants distributed randomly in 2 groups.</p> <p>The intervention group receives a personalized interview to determine his/her professional abilities in order to match him/her to the right employer</p> <p>No interaction takes place with the comparison group.</p>	Plena Inclusión

Source: Spanish Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security, and Migration.

Annex 3 – List of implementing partners

Table 1.

Partner	Link to agreement(s)
NGOs and CSOs	
Confederación Plena Inclusión España	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-1709
Fundación Save the Children	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-1531
Cáritas Española	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-1638
	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-16013
Fundación Red de Apoyo a la Integración Sociolaboral	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-1530
Fundación Secretariado Gitano	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-1641
Red Europea de Lucha contra la Pobreza y la Exclusión Social en el Estado Español (EAPN-ES)	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-15166
Fundació Jaume Bofill	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-15164
Red Europea de Lucha contra la Pobreza y la Exclusión Social de Canarias	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-15114
Fundació Catalana de l'Esplai	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-15163
Cruz Roja Española	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-15201
Fundación la Caixa	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-15202
Fundación Ayuda en Acción	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-15165
Fundación Cepaim Acción Integral con Migrantes	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-16014
Regional and local governments	
Comunidad Autónoma de Andalucía	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-18340
Comunidad Autónoma de Aragón	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-1633
Principado de Asturias	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-1636

Junta de Comunidades de Castilla-La Mancha	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-1634
Generalitat de Catalunya	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2023-110
Comunitat Valenciana	https://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-2022-2673
Comunidad Autónoma de Extremadura	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-2776
Xunta de Galicia	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-1528
Comunidad de Madrid	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-15752
Comunidad Autónoma de la Región de Murcia	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-24662
Comunidad Foral de Navarra	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-1637
Comunidad Autónoma del País Vasco	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-1529
Comunidad Autónoma de La Rioja	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-16573
Ciudad Autónoma de Ceuta	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-1527
Comunidad Valenciana	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2023-1949
Comunidad Foral de Navarra	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-22460
Ayuntamiento de Barcelona	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-1639
Ayuntamiento de Madrid	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-1640
Ayuntamiento de Sevilla	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-22461
Ayuntamiento de Santander	https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2022-16390

Annex 4 – Pilots with amount granted

First Royal Decree

Autonomous communities:

- País Vasco (€ 6,590,610.57.-)
- Galicia (€ 10,602,625.83.-)
- Asturias (€ 7,341,491.29.-)
- Comunitat Valenciana (€ 10,243,668.33.-)
- Aragón (€ 7,471,600.81.-)
- Castilla - La Mancha (€ 8,999,085.14.-)
- Navarra (€ 5,820,682.11.-)
- Extremadura (€ 8,803,049.27.-)
- Autonomous city of Ceuta (€ 2,127,186.65.-)

Local authorities:

- Madrid (€ 10,680,601.95.-)
- Barcelona (€ 9,319,398.05.-)

NGOs/CSOs:

- Fundación Secretariado Gitano (€ 2,536,971.00.-)
- Cáritas España (€ 6,170,912.00.-)
- Hogar Sí (€ 2,891,015.00.-)
- Confederación Plena Inclusión España (€ 2,540,972.00.-)
- Fundación “Save the children” (€ 7,647,534.00.-)

Second Royal Decree

Autonomous communities:

- Cataluña (€ 11,000,000.00.-)
- Andalucía (€ 15,000,000.00.-)
- La Rioja (€ 825,089.00.-)
- Comunitat Valenciana (€ 6,800,000.00.-)
- Región de Murcia (€ 3,131,403.00.-)
- Comunidad de Madrid (€ 3,465,899.00.-)
- Navarra (€ 2,280,000.00.-)

Local authorities:

- Sevilla (€ 5,702,210.00.-)
- Santander (€ 827,800.00.-)

NGOs/CSOs:

- Fundación Jaume Bofill (€ 12,500.000.00.-)

- Fundació Bancaria Caixa d'Estalvis i Pensions de Barcelona "La Caixa" (€ 2,737,370.00.-)
- Fundació Cepaim. Acció integral con Migrantes (€ 4,443,005.00.-)
- Cruz Roja Española (€ 3,222,885.00.-)
- Red Europea de Lucha contra la Pobreza y la Exclusión Social en el Estado Español (€ 6,173,427.00.-).
- Fundació Catalana de l'Esplai (€ 3,027,578.00.-)
- Fundació "Ayuda en acción" (€ 4,303,776.00.-)
- Red Europea de Lucha contra la Pobreza y la Exclusión Social de Canarias (€ 8,035,624.00.-)
- Cáritas Española (€ 8,560.000.00.-)

Annex 5 – Technical note - Non-experimental and experimental impact evaluation research and threats to robust RCT analysis

Box 1. Impact evaluation: non-experimental and experimental approaches

The aim of impact evaluation is to assess a programme's effectiveness by comparing the experiences of participants with what those same participants would have experienced without the programme. Although measuring outcomes for programme participants is feasible, determining the outcomes for the counterfactual scenario - what would have occurred without the programme - is impossible to directly observe and must be inferred. As the counterfactual cannot be directly measured, impact evaluation methods strive to emulate it by selecting a comparison group of non-participants that resembles the group of participants. If this comparison group closely mirrors the participants before the beginning of the programme, any disparities in outcomes observed after the implementation of the programme can be attributed to the programme itself.

Non-experimental approaches to build a comparison group require the assumption that the two groups were comparable, on average, before the start of the programme (including in ways that cannot be directly measured, such as inherent personality traits). Moreover, it is also necessary to assume that no other factors besides the programme affected the outcomes of either groups over time. Because it is not possible to test these assumptions, it is impossible to know with certainty that the observed changes are caused by the programme or by something else. Randomised evaluations do not require making these assumptions.

In a randomised evaluation, participants and non-participants are randomly selected from a sample of eligible programme participants. Random assignment ensures that, with a large enough sample, the intervention and control groups are similar on average before the start of the programme.

Box 2. Why is sample size important?

When the sample size is small, the variance in sample outcomes increases. Smaller samples are less representative of the overall population of interest. As the sample size decreases, the estimate of the intervention effect becomes less precise. Thus, a smaller sample increases the probability of failing to detect a statistically significant effect.

In other words, smaller sample sizes make the randomised evaluation less informative. When the sample size is smaller, the impact of the programme must be larger to be able to detect it. If the evaluation does not lead to a statistically significant impact, it becomes challenging to determine whether the programme has no effect or if the small sample size compromises the ability to detect it accurately.

Box 3. What is attrition and why should it be minimised?

Attrition constitutes a common problem among many evaluations. This occurs when researchers are not able to collect some or all the outcome measures for some participants in the sample. This can happen if participants drop out and therefore their outcomes cannot be measured, if they are still involved but refuse to be interviewed, or if they decline to answer certain questions. Attrition is a threat to the internal validity of the evaluation, as it can reduce the comparability of intervention and comparison

groups, if attrition rates or types differ between the two groups (Glennerster and Takavarasha, 2013).

Additionally, attrition reduces the sample size, exacerbating the problems related to sample size mentioned above, which are caused by challenges in recruiting participants. In situations where immediate assistance is crucial for the target population, individuals in the control group might lose motivation to complete their participation since they are not receiving the intervention, unlike a similar group that is. Notably, attrition has occurred more frequently in programmes that run for longer and among highly vulnerable or highly mobile population groups.

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