

Regeneration Alignment with Portugal's National Goals

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The Portuguese version of this document is the binding version.

How long term Guardianship responds to Portugal's ecological, social and territorial challenges

The model and the governance are settled. The practice of measurement, monitoring and reporting is being built in stages and reaches full operation during the course of 2027.

Executive summary

Portugal faces a convergence of long term challenges: ecological degradation, demographic imbalance, rural decline, and institutional limits to long horizon care. While national strategies for climate, biodiversity, water and territorial cohesion are robust on paper, their success depends on who holds land, for how long, and under what incentives.

Terra Agora Foundation addresses a structural gap: the absence of durable, non speculative mechanisms for the responsible care of land, capable of operating across generations. Through land protection, Guardianship and long term governance, the Foundation creates conditions in which public objectives can be realised on the ground, not as short projects, but as enduring commitments.

Portugal's context: structural realities to be addressed

Portugal's national strategies operate within a set of constraints that are now widely recognised.

Only 0.02% of Portugal's territory is under strict protection, against the 10% target of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030.¹

In 2023, 4.9% of Portugal's farm managers were under 40, one of the lowest shares in the European Union, and 51.9% were 65 or older.²

To these constraints are added:

- Rural populations continue to decline, leading to abandonment, fire risk and loss of local knowledge
- Water use is increasingly unsustainable, under climate stress and fragmented management
- Soil fertility and structure are deteriorating, undermining food security and ecosystem resilience

These are not failures of intention or policy. They reflect a mismatch between short term ownership models and long term ecological processes.

¹Araújo, M. B., Alagador, D., Naimi, B., Neto, D. and Rozenfeld, A. (2025), Towards a climate-resilient conservation network in Portugal, *Biological Conservation*, 308, 111249.

²Eurostat, Farmers and the agricultural labour force, statistics, 2023 Farm Structure Survey.

The Foundation's core contribution: holding land for time

The Foundation's model is designed to complement, not replace, public policy, providing what policy alone cannot:

- Perpetual land protection outside speculation
- Institutional continuity beyond electoral, funding and ownership cycles
- Prepared human care rooted in place
- Accountability mechanisms that persist even when people change

By separating:

- ownership from use
- funding from control
- care from speculation

Terra Agora Foundation creates a stable platform upon which national goals can meaningfully unfold.

Alignment with national climate goals

Portugal's Climate Law and National Energy and Climate Plan (PNEC) require land based solutions that endure beyond project cycles.

The Foundation's contribution is as follows:

- Land already held is under the statutory inalienability of the Strategic Assets, which prevents future conversion of carbon rich ecosystems
- The model is intended to support long term soil regeneration, carbon sequestration and water retention
- The model enables regenerative land use that remains viable well beyond grant periods

Regeneration under Guardianship is not a mitigation project: it is long term climate infrastructure.

Alignment with national biodiversity goals

National biodiversity goals depend on connectivity, continuity and continued care, not only on designation.

Terra Agora Foundation is structured to:

- Protect land in perpetuity, including outside formal protected areas
- Support landscape scale ecological recovery, rather than isolated plots
- Embed the care of biodiversity in daily livelihoods, rather than in external enforcement alone

Where public protected areas are limited, Guardianship offers a parallel pathway to durable biodiversity protection.

Alignment with water and soil policy

Water scarcity and soil degradation are systemic risks in Portugal's future.

The Foundation's approach is designed to:

- Treat water, soil and land as interdependent systems

- Support regenerative practices that restore infiltration, fertility and resilience
- Hold land long enough for slow ecological processes to recover

Short leases and speculative ownership cannot restore soils. Time is the missing ingredient.

Alignment with territorial cohesion and rural renewal

Portugal's territorial strategy recognises the need to:

- Revitalise rural areas
- Support livelihoods rooted in place
- Reduce abandonment and fire risk

Terra Agora Foundation is structured to:

- Enable new generations of people who care for land to reach it without needing to own it
- Support viable, place based livelihoods under long term agreements
- Re embed land in community, culture and shared responsibility

This addresses demographic imbalance without relying on inheritance or land markets.

Why governance matters for public alignment

The Foundation's alignment with national goals is not only thematic: it is structural.

Key safeguards include:

- Statutory inalienability of the Strategic Assets, preventing resale or speculation
- Separation of powers between landholding, Guardians and funders
- Independent oversight bodies: the Board of Trustees, the Board of Administration, the Technical Advisory Council and the Supervisory Board
- Public reporting; independent statutory audit provided for in the statutes
- Legal provisions ensuring land remains protected even if the Foundation dissolves

This ensures that the public interest is protected even under financial, political or human stress.

The National Nature Restoration Plan

The question the Foundation adds, and not an objection to the plan

Portugal has prepared its Plano Nacional de Restauro da Natureza under Regulation (EU) 2024/1991. The draft plan was in public consultation until 30 August 2026, following a notice published in the Diário da República on 9 July, and covers terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems. The investment foreseen is in the order of €500 million a year to 2030.

It is a public commitment of rare scale, and the Foundation says so without qualification. Debate has naturally concentrated on the targets, the areas of intervention and the sum. The Foundation adds a question that seems to it less debated and possibly decisive:

How is ecological restoration to go on producing results once the funding ends, governments change, and land passes to new owners?

From the experience of those working on implementation, three conditions determine the answer: continuity of governance, stability of funding, and the legal instruments that allow a territory to be protected across several generations.

The Foundation works on precisely that third condition, and that is where it offers itself. It has no criticism to make of the plan and no alternative programme to propose. It has an instrument, the perpetual *Direito de Superfície*, and a willingness to put it at the service of whoever needs it, the State included. The shared objective is easily stated: to turn a public restoration policy into a commitment that outlives political cycles.

The Foundation also offers itself for a function nobody enjoys taking on and everybody needs: independent and credible verification of what matters most in a landscape, beginning with the retention of water. Verification is not policing. It is giving whoever invested, whether the State, a Patron or a community, a reading they can trust of what actually happened on the ground, over years.

The Baldios, and What Portugal Already Knew

There is an answer to the same question in Portugal that long predates the Foundation. A baldio is land held in common by a local community and administered by its compadres: it is not private property, it is not for sale, and its use is decided in assembly by the people who live there. It covers a significant part of the country's uplands, precisely where fire, water and depopulation are decided.

The Foundation arrives late to this conversation and knows it. What it proposes is not to replace or improve the regime of the baldios, which belongs to the communities and to the legislator. It is to offer, to whoever finds it useful, what it has: an instrument that separates ownership from use, experience in building it, and independent capacity to verify.

The Foundation is a young institution, still experimenting and still learning, and it approaches in that spirit. It brings no closed answers. It brings ideas about how things might, perhaps, be done differently, at the service of the communities and of the State alike.

One rule governs this relationship and admits no exception: the interest to be served is that of the people who live in that territory and, above all, that of the environment itself. Where those two interests are better served by a route other than the Foundation's, that is the right route, and the Foundation will say so.

Complementing the State, not replacing it

Terra Agora Foundation does not substitute public authority. The Foundation:

- Acts where the State finds it hardest to operate, across long time horizons and in non market logic
- Provides stable partners for municipalities and agencies
- Translates national strategies into lived, local practice

Guardianship is a civil infrastructure for long term care, aligned with the public interest.

Conclusion: regeneration as national capacity

Portugal's challenges are not primarily technical. They are temporal.

Terra Agora Foundation contributes a missing layer in the national ecosystem:



- Institutions that can hold land for generations
- People prepared to care, rather than to extract
- Governance designed for continuity, rather than for speed

In this way, Terra Agora Foundation aligns regeneration with national goals not as a project, but as a durable public good, held for the future.

Invitation

If you would like to talk about this alignment, we invite you to begin with a conversation.

Regeneration held long enough to matter.

Terra Agora Foundation