



Sensing Groups Final Report

Portuguese Province Hospitaller Order of Saint John of God

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Introduction

This report outlines the results of the activity carried out by the Sensing groups in the Portuguese Province of the Hospitaller Order of Saint John of God (PPOHSJD) between January and April 2024.

The Sensing methodologies were implemented consistently on a large sample – representing the whole Hospitaller Family, stakeholders and civil society – in the following institutions:

- Saint John of God Institution (ISJD): ISJD headquarters (Lisbon); Casa de Saúde do Telhal (Mem Martins); Casa de Saúde S. João de Deus (Funchal); Casa de Saúde S. Rafael (Angra do Heroísmo); Casa de Saúde S. João de Deus (Barcelos); Casa de Saúde S. Miguel (Ponta Delgada); S. João de Deus Hospital (Montemor-o-Novo); Casa de Saúde S. José (Areias de Vilar); S. João de Ávila Clinic (Lisbon) / S. João de Deus Institute (Carnaxide);
- Saint John of God Foundation;
- Saint John of God Health Support Centre – Laclubar (East Timor).

1. Topics and Sensing groups in brief

The topics for the Sensing groups were selected by the representatives of the PPOHSJD at the European Regional Assembly held in November 2023 in Marseille.

The selection of topics and the related target groups was based on strategic enablers for the development and evolution of Saint John of God’s mission in the PPOHSJD for the next sexennium. The objective of taking a picture of the perceptions of all those living, working and interacting with our mission is considered achieved. 1,027 people were interviewed, distributed as follows:

2. Spiritual and community life of the Brothers

Topic	Target population	No. of participants
Spiritual life of the Brothers	Saint John of God Brothers	34
Reason for choosing the topic	The spiritual and community life of the Brothers is a key enabler for the vitality of the Portuguese Province of the Order; it has a predominant influence on how people experience the charisma, encouraging the continuity of Saint John of God’s heritage.	
Methodology	Focus Group (listening to the guiding questions)	

After collecting ideas from a moment of reflection and listening to everyone’s sharing, some key intuitions emerged: **the importance of the mission for the Brothers** (Users are a vital motivation in our religious life) and the fact that **our life of faith and prayer is interconnected with our commitment in hospitality** (Contemplative Hospitality or Praying Hospitality).

It was confirmed that the methodology used facilitated dialogue and sharing and that meetings focused on sharing/perception are important to promote unity and brotherhood among

Brothers, as well as their active participation in building their thoughts and planning to support the decisions of the Superiors.

To this end, the key issue that emerged in the different groups was to keep the few Brothers informed, motivated and engaged in the Order's life and mission, fighting against isolation and individualism, slanders and the fact of only focusing on the past, and encouraging their active engagement in the centres, together with Users and Co-workers. It is also necessary to continue enhancing the testimony of older Brothers and come up with creative ways to integrate them in the process of sharing the charisma with Co-workers.

In East Timor, a sense of belonging to the community and the mutual service for the common good and the mission are highly appreciated. There is concern for the lack of vitality within communities, and communication among Brothers and communities, as well as for the poor guidance and integration of candidates through the different phases of formation.

3. Environmental crisis

Topic	Target population	No. of participants
Environmental crisis	Co-workers, Families, Users, Brothers, Volunteers, Service Providers and Benefactors (Saint John of God Foundation)	87
Reason for choosing the topic	The environmental crisis presents a number of ecological challenges that threaten ecosystems globally, with implications on the well-being and security of populations.	
Methodology	Focus Group (listening to the guiding questions)	

Perception Sensing on this topic represents an added value to collect a wide range of perspectives on the issue. It was very positive to see that there are shared concerns and hopes in the different realities of the Order. As a result, during the process of discernment, people felt appreciated and heard on important issues for the Order.

Approaching this topic sheds light on real hopes and concerns, revealing strong awareness and engagement in the environmental crisis challenges, as shown in the table below. Yet, the following concerns emerge:

- “High costs linked to energy transition (increase in the cost of goods and services)”;
- “Failure to implement individual and institutional environmental good practices, such as: replacing the overuse of plastic bags with cloth bags, power management (turning off lights/sensors), not throwing gloves in the unsorted waste, using biodegradable medical devices, increasing recycling, reusing materials for lab activities, recycling cleaning product packages,” etc.;
- “Facilities and services (old buildings) with no thermal insulation, leaks and lack of maintenance of systems that do not ensure energy efficiency”.

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Regarding hopes, the following emerge:

- “Awareness of an organizational culture of saving and recycling, implementing environmental protection practices (using LED bulbs; reusing paper; using tap water; using sunlight and paying attention to turning off lights in the areas that are not used)”;
- “Materials are reused and recycled in the institution and waste is separated”;
- “Continuous investments in facilities (to ensure energy, thermal and air-conditioning efficiency)”.

The dynamics created to face this topic made it possible to realize the importance of implementing an environmental policy in the institution and to continue to make progress in this area, especially by promoting greater formation and development of skills on this topic, and renewing the equipment to reduce consumption/costs and ensure energy efficiency.

Key issues that will make it possible to include environmental crisis in the future institutional agenda were identified, starting from a “careful and reliable analysis of the current situation”. The focus group findings not only inform the General Chapter, but they also improve institutional strategic planning.

4. People, talent and well-being

Topic	Target population	No. of participants
People, talent and well-being	Brothers/Co-workers/Former Co-workers/ Users/Families/Volunteers	110
Reason for choosing the topic	Addressing the topic of human resources – People, talent and well-being – is a fundamental dimension of Saint John of God’s mission. We serve people by engaging them. From this perspective, it is essential to look after, enhance and recognize the talent and needs of “our” people, who take care of and live the charism, allowing Saint John of God’s heritage to continue to this day.	
Methodology	Group 1: Focus Group <i>vis-à-vis</i> (perceptions sharing) Group 2: Former Co-Workers (online questionnaire – via email)	

The depth and breadth of qualitative data collected through the focus groups exceeded expectations. Such data provided valuable insights on Co-workers’ (employees) motivations, challenges and ambitions. We believe that the practice of active listening should be embedded as a vital part of the organizational culture, improving internal communication and strengthening Co-workers’ “morale”.

Co-workers widely appreciate communication transparency on organization decisions and status. On the contrary, they consider the lack of open communication to be a significant source of stress.

Well-being and talent development are not only ethical but also strategic responsibilities. A real investment in human resources will result, as a benefit, in a happier, healthier and more productive workplace. This finding shows the importance of a holistic and tailored approach to managing people’s talent and well-being, emphasizing that real value lies in people and the way they are treated and developed within the organization. In other words, organizational culture has a major impact on well-being and the development of talent.

The following key questions were developed for the future:

- What are the key skills and abilities needed for the future?
- How can we attract and retain talent?
- How can we promote a better work-life balance for our Co-workers?
- What healthcare efforts can we implement to promote the physical and mental well-being of our Co-workers?
- How can we promote transparency and open communication (to reduce rumours and increase Co-workers’ trust and sense of security)?

5. Transmission of charism

Topic	Target population	No. of participants
Transmission of charism	Brothers/Co-workers/Users	131
Reason for choosing the topic	The transmission of the charism of Saint John of God focuses on the PPOHSGD's ability to keep alive, cultivate and spread the charism that characterizes and distinguishes us among all those who live such mission. This topic was chosen for its importance as a foundation to guarantee the existing organizational culture and promote inspiration for its consolidation and continuity in the future.	
Methodology	Interview (specific questionnaire for the target group: Brothers/Co-workers/Users)	

The most important aspect of dynamization was recognizing and appreciating people when they were heard on this topic. We interviewed staff (Co-workers), Users and Brothers, and they often answered by taking a few seconds of silence and reflection, which was truly a way to observe the actions each person carries out in their daily life. We were surprised by Co-workers and Brothers' deep concern for the continuity of the charism, that the technical and financial aspect prevails over their experience, and that some Brothers do not play an active role in the transmission of charism. It was also very rewarding to hear that our charism is recognized and appreciated and distinguishes us at all levels, that the patient's holistic well-being is the reflection of charism, and that many employees feel responsible for the transmission of charism. The result was a reflection, a diagnosis of respondents' needs, concerns and hopes.

We discovered that people distinguish our mission from that of other centres, but they realize that it is no longer crosscutting to all Co-workers and Brothers, and that charism is experienced on different levels.

It was confirmed that if we do not take the transmission of charism seriously, our centres risk losing the identity and essence that have always characterized and defined them.

The dynamics and methodology created provided an understanding of both older and younger Users, Brothers and Co-workers' perception of charism and its experience. We tried to understand if they feel "Lay Hospitallers", people who are committed to and identify with the responsibility to ensure the continuity of our charism and our values. What is the role of Brothers in this important process and how is the charism of hospitality experienced today? What is the key to maintaining this way of living, following the footsteps of Saint John of God, which characterizes and distinguishes us?

6. Governance

Topic	Target population	No. of participants
Governance	Brothers/Co-workers/Partners	91
Reason for choosing the topic	It is essential to regularly adapt governance practices to address current challenges and benefit from the opportunities of an ever-changing world. Effective governance is key for sustainable development and promotes transparency, accountability, participation and integrity.	
Methodology	Group dynamic	

The methodology used allowed participants to experience different roles, resulting in great engagement and interest in decision-making/internal communication, feedback/recognition and delegation/empowerment/accountability.

The topic of governance made it possible to show how the Hospitaller Family is particularly interested in analysing the present situation, which reflects the need to adapt recognition and feedback policies to be more effective and pressing. In terms of decision-making processes, stakeholders are engaged, yet internal communication could be improved. Delegation and empowerment are clearly a means to maximize existing resources, but the right conditions are needed to make this possible.

It was confirmed that human resources policies should be constantly adapted to changing needs, exacerbated by generational challenges, turnover and the struggle to retain talent.

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It turned out that positive feedback is not clear and objective, and it is therefore important to align the organizational culture and leaders to redirect such tool of hospitality.

From the perceptions reported, different issues for the future of the Province and the Order emerged:

- How can we more effectively engage stakeholders in decision-making?
- How can we develop internal communication methodologies that enable the engagement and alignment of stakeholders?
- How can we strengthen the existing recognition policies and bring them closer to the needs and expectations of recipients?
- How can we realign the positive feedback culture to ensure better performance?
- What strategies can we implement for an effective culture of delegation that allows for the personal and professional development of leaders and the people they lead?

7. Sustainability

Topic	Target population	No. of participants
Sustainability	Brothers/Co-workers/Benefactors/Funding Bodies/Governing Bodies	82
Reason for choosing the topic	Sustainability is a pivotal topic nowadays, encompassing environmental, economic and social aspects. It is paramount as it is one of the pillars that will ensure the continuity of Saint John of God's mission in the future, allowing for the continuity and development of the apostolic centres going forward.	
Methodology	Group dynamic / online questionnaire	

The Sensing dynamics clearly highlighted the idea, shared by everyone, that depending on the State is not beneficial to the pursuit of our activities and objectives, that we need to find alternative sources of financing and that we need to maintain our assistance model, so characteristic and distinctive in terms of care that makes us unique.

It was emphasized that many people are committed to improvement, especially in terms of environmental sustainability and fight against waste.

The perception methodologies used have confirmed:

- a) employees' pride in being clothed with hospitality, in doing good in a good way and in a way that distinguishes them from other institutions;
- b) partners recognize the quality of the services offered;
- c) the need to continue to do more and better to achieve better conditions for everyone, Users and Co-workers;
- d) the need to have more financial resources to offer the necessary assistance services, which are increasingly complex;
- e) the need to provide more responses, diversifying services and addressing emerging social issues.

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Looking ahead, we asked ourselves how we can respond to emerging social needs, how we can think about the future without depending on the State so much, and how we can continue to do a lot with the little we receive.

Regarding the Order, it was highlighted that we can continue to be such a diversified institution in terms of assistance – although we have very few resources –in an ever-changing world, where needs change and become increasingly complex; and that we can help others, recognizing their weaknesses and their needs, adapting to them and to the social environment.

8. Innovative hospitality

Topic	Target population	No. of participants
Innovative hospitality	Brothers/Employees/Volunteers/Patients/Families Funding and Reference Bodies/Institutions/Partners	161
Reason for choosing the topic	Innovative hospitality was considered to be a highly important topic, based on our core value that makes us stand out, distinguishes and characterizes us: hospitality. Innovative because it is necessary to keep such value relevant, meeting the needs of a changing world and the generational challenges of the Hospitaller Family members.	
Methodology	Focus Groups – (guiding questions) / online questionnaire	

Approaching the topic of Innovative hospitality allowed us to perceive the power of listening to other people and their views, the importance and value given by participants to focus groups, and to realize there are crosscutting concerns in care centres. This gave us and our Co-workers hope in the opportunity to grow and improve our institution. It helped us understand that, despite the improvements needed and the reported concerns, we make a difference in many people's lives and our Co-workers are truly committed. Furthermore, we are recognized as Partners, we are seen as complementary and providing humanized and quality answers.

Unmet emerging societal needs were highlighted, as well as new types of patients who need diverse and sometimes specialized answers. There are several possible areas of intervention for the Order: high complexity (autism and intellectual disabilities with behavioural alterations), dementia, social cases discharged from the hospital and with no housing solution, children and young people's mental health, substance or non-substance addiction, homeless people, immigrants. Additionally, the lack of responses not only in hospital assistance, but also in outpatient assistance and community teams to improve assistance continuity in the field of mental and physical health, the need to strengthen networking and the extension of shelter services for women.

Participants have shown a general concern about the retention (attraction) of staff and the low Users/Co-workers ratio, an excessive workload and the need for staff (Co-workers) formation; the need for smaller units and additional job opportunities, as well as diversified responses, adapted to new needs; the importance of volunteers; the *continuum* of responses during the period the patient stays at home, the lack of time limits and the importance of community housing solutions. Furthermore, the importance of responses that go beyond mental health, including social responses (extra beds provided by the NHS), and formation in the field of community health.

As for the future, it was clear that we need to shift from being responsive to anticipating needs and being more proactive. New societal needs can represent an opportunity for the Saint John of God Institution. In some areas we already have the necessary experience to respond, while in others we need specialized responses. People reported the need to take care of the recipients of our assistance (staff strain); the need for smaller units, a reduction in the disproportion between

Co-workers/Users, more appropriate facilities, specialized responses and diverse human resources; the need to reformulate some responses in certain houses in the area of psychosocial and physical rehabilitation. And again, the importance of community responses and the development of innovative projects.

Regarding the Order and its work in the future, attention should be paid to the new response needs in society (types of patients for whom there is no care); to specialized responses, which could represent an opportunity for the Order; to possible investments, not only in hospitaler assistance, but also in outpatient or community teams' assistance; and to taking charge of caregivers.

9. Communication

Topic	Target population	No. of participants
Communication	Employees, Brothers, Volunteers, Families, Users/Participants, Benefactors, Partners and Civil Society	294
Reason for choosing the topic	Communication plays a key role in organizations, both for the effectiveness of their operation and the way they position themselves in relation to the society/community they serve. As for the mission of hospitality, communication can contribute to a better perception of its purpose, by enhancing it.	
Methodology	Focus Group (guiding questions) / questionnaire / questionnaire on Facebook	

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Regarding the topic of communication, we were surprised by the positive feedback received following the consultation meetings. Everyone agreed it was a great initiative and felt appropriately heard, but they all shared the same concern that, after the work of the Sensing groups, “everything will stay as it is”. We were surprised by people’s willingness to find care centres on social media and show their potential; and by the fact that some people who interact with the Order were not aware of the religious, national and global dimension of such centres.

Due to the reported lack of awareness of the Order’s dimension, one month after the various meetings, the Saint John of God Foundation started organizing a series of monthly meetings to give people the opportunity to learn more about Saint John of God and the work of the Order in Portugal and worldwide.

We found there is concern about how we are communicating to the outside world and fear that this can affect how “we are clothed with hospitality”. We found that we need to talk more about Saint John of God and his heritage, both “inside” and “outside”. And that people are concerned because they do not know what is going on in the other houses of the Order. They do not feel part of a whole: “We are a big family, but each one of us is locked in their corner”.

We confirmed the perception that young people do not live the charism as those who already know Saint John of God’s heritage. There is a sense of losing the purpose of the Order / a lack of unity, of the whole: is it a job or a mission?

We also confirmed that some employees (Co-workers) and civil society, especially the elderly, do not know how to properly use technology, revealing a lack of knowledge in the digital world, whose language is not adequate to different interlocutors.

In terms of hope, the community and partners see us as reliable and professional, and our work is appreciated. Internally, we understand we can improve in the area of communication, which is a real concern and resulted in our Chapter proposal (in the Portuguese Province): “Implementing a marketing/communication plan”.

Apart from this necessary improvement, we already have some “tools” and practices to promote internal and external communication, such as institutional email, communication procedures, internal and external meetings, sharing activities and results with stakeholders, using social networks, etc.

Regarding the future, the following key questions are emphasized:

- Should we invest in human resources that are specialized in communication or provide internal formation?
- Should we create a global or national institutional brand?
- How can we promote the heritage of hospitality, both internally and externally?
- How can we promote more transparent communication on what we do within, between and outside our houses?

After opening Pandora’s box, changes in the area of communication at the level of the Province and of the Order are inevitable.

10. Saint John of God Health Support Centre – Laclubar (East Timor)

Topic	Target population	No. of participants
St. John of God Health Support Centre – Laclubar (East Timor)	Brothers/Co-workers/Users/Families/Volunteers	37
Reason for choosing the topic	Including this topic in relation to the PPOHSJD’s mission in East Timor is justified by the fact that the country is an integral part of the Province and carries out a mission that makes a difference for the populations it assists, representing an equally distinctive response in the area of mental health in East Timor.	
Methodology	Focus Group (guiding questions)	

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In the development of perception dynamics, we were surprised to see that the topic of economic and financial sustainability is crosscutting to all participants as a personal experience, i.e., the critical situations of national minimum wage, economic issues, different financial concerns about the sustainability of the centre and the current situation in the country, that directly and indirectly affects the functioning of the centre in terms of sustainability. The Sensing methodology used was very easy to understand, making everyone feel comfortable in personal reflection, sharing and active listening to individual and collective sharing, with a great deal of attention and respect.

As a result, each participant was given the space and time to share their personal experiences, concerns and hopes, and felt appreciated and respected by others. In terms of hope, the Sensing group highlighted multiple aspects with the aim to maintain and improve the economic situation of the centre, including by creating the right conditions to achieve self-sufficiency in terms of financial and economic sustainability at national level, in compliance with the country regulations and guidance.

We confirmed the importance of implementing clear and consistent strategies in the Foundation, as well as concrete plans to strengthen the cooperation policy of social services in the country, in order to maintain care centres for mental health and social needs functioning.

Looking to the future, we highlighted that the entire sharing not only will be made available to the General Chapter, but it will also be used to evaluate and improve the Foundation's economic conditions and assistance activities. Moreover, it allowed us to present the existing difficulties regarding the centre's economic and financial sustainability, improve the centre's self-sufficiency and always ask for the Province's support, when needed.

Regarding the topic of human resources – People, talent and well-being – some critical situations were underlined, such as national minimum wage, employees' (Co-workers) monthly salary, as well as the current situation, i.e., the country hardly respects the rights of employees directly, resulting in a decrease in employee commitment. In terms of hope, the Sensing methodology highlighted many aspects with the aim to improve the economic situation of employees in terms of respecting their rights, including by creating the conditions to achieve a fair wage, providing continuous formation and recognizing their personal and professional skills.

It was reported that the Foundation should act as a spokesperson to express criticisms towards governance or the Government in East Timor, to ensure they respect workers' rights and their equal treatment based on the country labour legislation, creating the right conditions to accommodate the rights and obligations of Co-workers in the Saint John of God Mental Health Centre (CSM-SJD).

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Regarding the topic of communication, the importance of effective communication was underlined, to facilitate legal processes and the functioning of the Foundation as a legal person or institutional entity. In brief, the Sensing group emphasized the objective to improve communication among professional technicians, Co-workers and Brothers, and at local, regional and provincial level.

The importance of listening to criticisms on communication efficiency and effectiveness within the Foundation was reinforced, in order to facilitate the service process and functioning in each area, both in the centre and among the Brothers of the community. The reflection carried out made it possible to assess and improve communication and relevant information, including about assistance, economic and political activities and the service of hospitality in East Timor.

Portuguese Province of the Hospitaller Order of Saint John of God,
31 May 2024.

Br. José Paulo

Provincial Superior of the
Portuguese Province of the Hospitaller Order of Saint John of God
PPOHSJD