



# IMPACT

November 2020

An affiliate of:

  
NATIXIS  
INVESTMENT MANAGERS

# OUR IDEA OF IMPACT

Mirova was created in 2014 with the ambition of proving the relevance of a new investment model placing sustainable development issues at the heart of investment decisions.

Since then, many investors have, to varying degrees, taken steps to integrate social and environmental criteria. Whether this takes place at the engagement or investment level, and whether their approach involves taking ESG (environmental, social and governance) issues into account, SRI (Socially Responsible Investment), or impact investing, investors appear increasingly eager to take the issue of sustainability into account. Amidst this vast –but unfortunately hazy– movement, it seems to us important that we clearly articulate what makes our approach unique.

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*Impact investing: investments made in companies or organisations with the intention of contributing to a measurable positive social or environmental impact, and generating financial returns.*

per the International Finance Corporation - 2019

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## Impact investing: a transverse approach that calls for explicit definition

The term impact investing is relatively new to the vocabulary of finance. Initially applied specifically to describe unlisted equities, it identifies investments that seek to achieve impact without compromising financial return.

Because impact investing is a way of looking at investment, rather than an asset class per se, we feel this approach may legitimately be applied in all asset classes: listed equities, bonds, infrastructure, real estate, etc. Nevertheless, any expanded view of the concept is open to interpretation, with the attendant risk of a mismatch between investors' expectations of anticipated impact and the reality of

such impact, a situation described as 'impact-washing.' Because of this, we believe it necessary to specify precisely what makes an impact investing approach unique, and what distinguishes a sincere and effective impact approach.

## Mirova: are we an impact investor?

Mirova was created with the goal of offering investors strategies for reconciling the creation of financial returns while also having a positive impact on society. Our positioning is precisely in line with the impact investment approach, which we apply across all our asset classes. Furthermore, as the concept of impact investing has become more familiar and widely used, we felt it was necessary to reflect on the definition and nature of our impacts.

Regarding the achievement of financial performance for our investors, we believe the matter is easily quantified by the performance achieved by the funds and the associated returns. The issue of positive contributions to environmental and social objectives, however, is much more complex and raises genuine questions. Do the companies and projects in which we invest actually contribute to the transition towards a more sustainable economy? Do our choices as investors have an impact on our assets? What influence do we have over issuers? How do we assess such impact?

While it is difficult to give firm answers to all these questions, we feel it is our duty to contribute to framing these debates and providing the foundations of answers for our clients, peers and regulators, who increasingly attach importance to sustainable development issues.

## HOW DO YOU RECOGNISE AN IMPACT INVESTOR?

The principle of intentionality, for an investor, implies that they have formally included the search for impact among their objectives. In other words, simply investing in assets with a positive impact or encouraging responsible behaviour is not enough to constitute impact investing, as there is no guarantee that such actions will continue over time.

The principle of additionality requires that an investor be able to demonstrate that their actions have made

a difference to the behaviour of the entity in which they are invested (company, project, community).

The concept of additionality implies some improvement in quantity or quality of impact levels compared to a prior situation.

The principle of measurability affirms that it is necessary to measure impact – both upstream, to guide actions, and downstream, to report outcomes – to demonstrate the relevance of actions undertaken.

# IMPACT INVESTOR

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INTENTIONALITY + ADDITIONALITY + MEASURABILITY

# INTENTIONALITY

Making the search for impact an objective



More and more investors are now turning to socially responsible investing (“SRI”) and integrating ESG criteria into their investment processes. However, all too often, analysis of extra-financial elements remains limited to improving the financial performance of a portfolio, usually over a limited time horizon. The same applies to so-called ‘thematic’ funds, which seek to capture yield opportunities linked to the growth prospects of environmentally positive activities.

From a financial point of view, these approaches certainly appear relevant. But, applied *stricto sensu*, they do not explicitly seek to transform the economy. In the absence of intentionality, we see the terms 'impact investment' or even 'responsible' or 'socially responsible investor' as inappropriate for characterising this type of approach.

For an investor, clearly stating that their objective is not solely financial may come with real consequences. It could mean that said investor will be obliged to take ESG criteria into account, even when this does not create financial value added. A prime example is the topic of biodiversity loss. Because it is not easily measurable, the destruction of biodiversity has only a limited visible impact on companies' balance sheets, and investors can accordingly remain diffident in approaching it.

However, the topic is crucial to maintaining the balance of our economies, and is a keystone of sustainable development issues. An investor committed to an impact approach will seek not only to avoid risks, but also to direct its investments towards the preservation of biodiversity. This is especially true of us, since Mirova has put biodiversity on its agenda,<sup>1</sup> and seeks at once to invest directly in projects to restore natural capital and to find a way of calculating the biodiversity footprint of its investments and listed portfolios.<sup>2</sup>

Although Mirova's positioning and its intentionality as regards the commitment to impact are already expressed throughout our investment processes, we wanted to go further. Thus we have placed integrating our contributions with the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals)<sup>3</sup> at the core of our mission, and of all our investment processes. In 2020, Mirova adopted the legal status of a [Social Purpose Corporation](#),<sup>4</sup> and received approval as a [B-Corp](#).<sup>5</sup>



1. Mirova, Biodiversity, our 2020 Roadmap (March 2020)

2. "AXA IM, BNP Paribas AM, Mirova and Sycomore AM launch joint initiative to develop pioneering tool for measuring investment impact on biodiversity" (Press release, January 2020)

3. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as defined by the United Nations in 2015.

4. Article 176 of the law of 22 May 2019 on the growth and transformation of companies, known as the Pacte law, introduces the status of Social Purpose Corporation. This status allows a company to publicly affirm its status as a 'société à mission' by specifying its 'raison d'être' or corporate purpose, one or more social and environmental objectives that the company has set itself to pursue in the course of its activities.

5. Since 2006, the B-Corp movement has endorsed strong values to promote change worldwide, to make companies "a force for good" and identify those reconciling profit (for-profit) and collective (for-purpose) interests. B-Corp status certifies companies that integrate social, societal and environmental objectives into their business model and operations.

# ADDITIONALITY

The power of change



Additionality may be brought to bear in several ways: through investment, through engagement, or through the actions of the management company itself, as a pioneer and an example.

- > CAPITAL ALLOCATION
- > ENGAGEMENT
- > PIONEERING ROLE OF THE MANAGEMENT COMPANY

## Additionality through capital allocation

Many people still equate impact investment with investments in unlisted companies. True, in the context of such direct investments, the link between the investor and the project leader is simple to understand. At the level of Mirova's experience, we certainly observe that communication focused on impact is easier in our natural capital and energy transition infrastructure projects.

However, while this impact seems real enough to us, additionality is not always easy to demonstrate. In the current context of abundant liquidity, some might think that impact projects, if profitable and well managed, ought to find financing, whether from impact investors or the more traditional variety.

In our view, what impact investors can bring to the table is their ability to uncouple from the market when the latter overvalues the risk of certain projects.

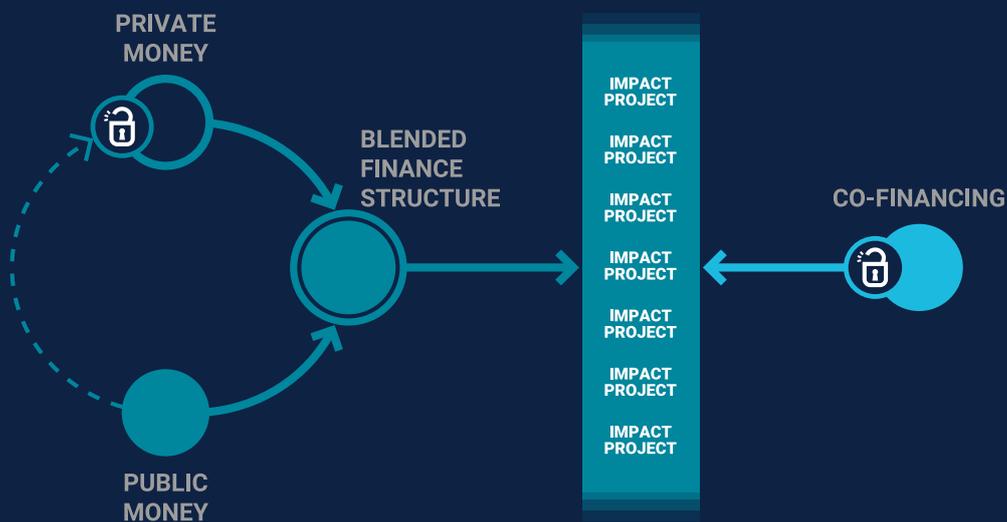
High-impact projects are often based on new techniques/technologies, may be located in emerging countries, and frequently face the challenge of scaling up. Traditional investors are rarely equipped to accurately analyse the associated risks and tend to overestimate them.

This is where the contribution of impact investors can not only make it possible to bring a project to fruition, but also swing the market back to a reasonable assessment of the risks involved, paving the way for future financing. In this way, the presence of impact investors makes it possible for sectors to develop, rationalise and become profitable. The mechanism known as blended finance is an example of this approach.



## Additionality through investment: the example of blended finance mechanisms

Blended finance is a form of financing in which public and/or philanthropic capital is used to absorb risk and enable the mobilisation of private capital. Blended finance initiatives can help establish investment track record, reducing the perception of risk and thus paving the way for additional private investment in new players, new sectors or new asset classes.



Source: Mirova

We believe that blended finance instruments enabled the mainstreaming of investment in renewables, and are now supporting the development of investment in natural capital.

Regarding listed investments, many observers dismiss the idea that investors can have an impact on the grounds that the market is liquid and intermediated. We believe this vision is flawed. While it is difficult for a single investor to influence the market, the system cannot ignore a fundamental trend in investor behaviour.

Whether you look at listed equities or the bond market, the now almost universal consideration of ESG criteria by investors has had a significant impact, first on the way companies communicated, then on their decision-making, and finally on their strategy. ESG considerations affect the cost of financing, the ability to self-finance via bond issues or IPOs,<sup>6</sup> and also the value of securities on the secondary market.<sup>7</sup>

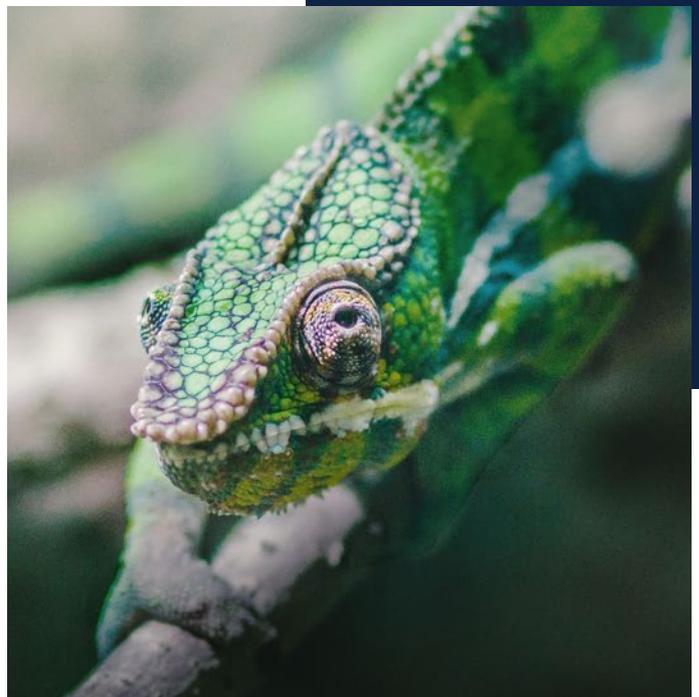
This increased perception of ESG criteria by investors is gradually making misguided projects less attractive and facilitating access to financing for projects oriented towards sustainable development. And while investors' impact on this asset class may appear diluted, it is also much broader, because it inspires large-scale change in our economies. These capital allocation choices are a key component of the impact regulated markets have.

However, markets are not always rational, and these movements could result in excessive discrepancies between the valuation of assets

and their economic reality, leading to the emergence of a 'green bubble'<sup>8</sup> for instance, in which weak projects were overvalued.<sup>9</sup>

Naturally, this should be avoided. A real transformation of the economy can only take place through projects that are both sustainable-development oriented and economically sound.

In this respect, we believe Mirova's twofold expertise in the realms of both financial and extra-financial analysis is essential when it comes selecting our investments.



6. Initial Public Offering

7. The secondary market governs the purchase and sale of existing financial assets.

8. Overvaluation by investors and the market of assets and companies positioned on the challenges of environmental transition.

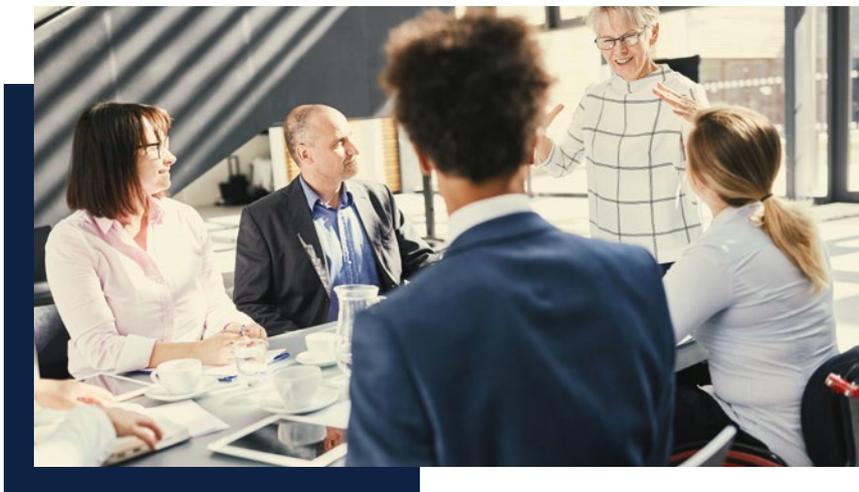
9. To find more about Mirova's appreciation of a green bubble, see p.8 of 'Mirova: Creating Sustainable Value #5', published in October 2020.

## Additionality through engagement

Looking beyond the allocation of capital, we believe investors may influence listed companies through individual and collective engagement actions with their management. Such an approach alone cannot constitute the core of a responsible investment approach, but it certainly plays a part. Here, two characteristics of any engagement bear close attention.

Firstly are the expectations associated with the engagement, which can be determined by an analysis of an investor's voting policy. Today, 99% of such policies remain based on the classic doctrines of shareholder governance, according to which management's role is to maximise profit for shareholders. In order for engagement to have an impact, voting policies must follow suit, placing greater emphasis on sustainable development issues.

The second element to consider is the consistency of engagement topics with an investor's investment policy. Obviously, if the engagement carries no consequences in terms of voting or investment, it risks being all talk, with no impact. Our engagement actions are a cornerstone of our approach as an impact investor. We maintain an ongoing dialogue with each of the companies and projects in which we invest. We are also involved in market engagement initiatives, for example on the topics of gender equality<sup>10</sup> in the workplace and the need to measure listed companies' impact on biodiversity.<sup>11</sup>



10. Six asset managers call on French large caps to establish action plan to have at least 30% women in executive management teams by 2025 (Press release, November 2020).

11. AXA IM, BNP Paribas AM, Mirova and Sycomore AM launch joint initiative to develop pioneering tool for measuring investment impact on biodiversity (Press release, January 2020).

## Impact as an asset management company per se, a further form of additionality

At Mirova, we believe that our impact transcends the weight of our assets under management. The creation and development of a player entirely dedicated to financing sustainable development, responding to a different logic from that of the vast majority of the market, demonstrates to financial players and investors that risk/return ratios is not an inexorable force and that a different investment rationale is indeed possible. Coupled with high standards, the generalisation of an impact investment approach to all asset classes also proves that the impact is not the sole purview of unlisted companies.

Moreover, the ability to innovatively structure financing so as to encourage the emergence of players and sectors that are as yet poorly or insufficiently served is a highly distinguishing feature. Whether it be our early investments that helped launch the renewable energy sector in France, our 90/10 funds<sup>12</sup> which fostered the development of responsible employee savings and supported social and inclusive entrepreneurship, or our involvement in the financing of nature-based solutions and natural capital, Mirova has always sought to open up new areas of impact investment.

And last but not least, we actively engage in advocacy with regulators and market players to work towards a generalisation of sustainable practices in finance.



12. Refers to funds invested up to 90% in listed shares and between 5 and 10% in unlisted companies and solidarity projects.

# MEASURABILITY

Proving the relevance of actions undertaken



Our job is to invest. Whether we invest in a project, a company, a public player, this entity will have an impact on humans and on the environment, be it positive or negative. Often, it will even have a whole range of impacts, both positive and negative. This is where the question of impact measurement and communication on the subject arises for investors.

Calculating the impact of a business can be very complex. Few of the existing impact metrics fit into a life-cycle logic (impact of the company, but also of its value chain) or take into account both positive and negative impact (e.g. impacts avoided).

Investors clearly have a role to play in the emergence of standards and databases for measuring a company's impact in ways that are relevant.

For this reason, Mirova tackled the issue of carbon footprint in 2015, bringing to fruition an innovative methodology<sup>13</sup> that takes into account the entire life cycle, covering risks and opportunities. We are now taking a similar approach to enable the design of a metric for assessing the impact of a business on biodiversity,<sup>14</sup> which promises to be quite a challenge.

But whether the topic is biodiversity or another pressing issue, the fact that we cannot yet quantify impact by no means justifies inaction. While precision is certainly useful, the reality is that qualitative analysis suffices to determine whether a business has a positive or negative impact.

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*Technical difficulties should not be a hindrance to action. While some type of measure seems to us essential as a means of ensuring that an action is headed in the right direction, precise quantification of impact must not become a prerequisite for an investor committed to a sincere impact approach. Often, one can be fairly confident about the positive or negative impacts of a project without being able to precisely quantify them.*

Mathilde Dufour, Head of Sustainable Development Research - Listed Equities, Mirova

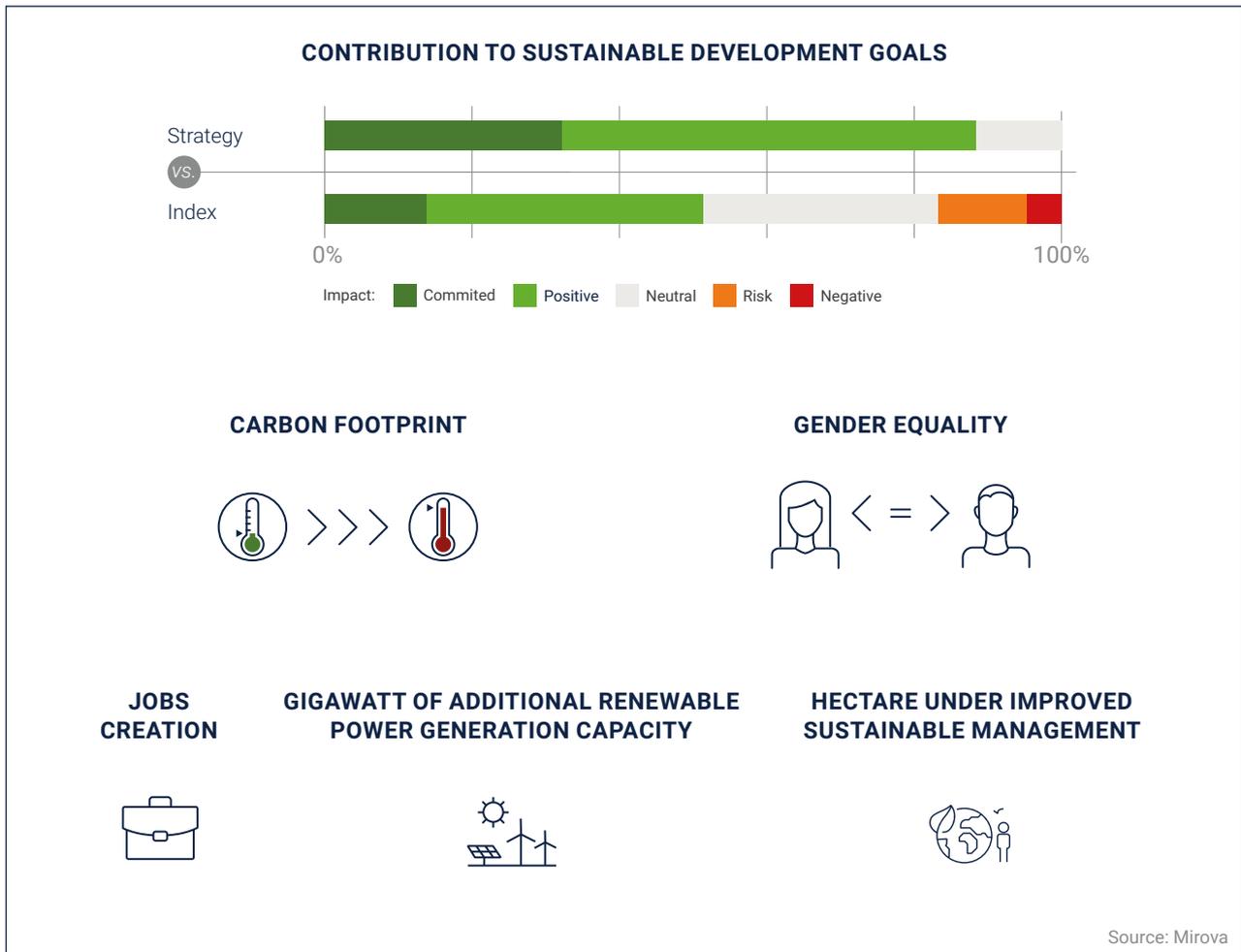
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13. Mirova, "Aligning Portfolios with the Paris Agreement" (November 2019).

14. Refers to funds invested up to 90% in listed shares and between 5 and 10% in unlisted companies and solidarity projects.

## MIROVA'S INDICATORS FOR MEASURING IMPACT



## How can we quantify the impact of an investor today?

Is it merely the sum of the impact created by the projects in which they invest? It seems a trifle simple, simplistic even, to imagine that by holding 1% of the capital in a company whose activity enables it to avoid 100,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> annually, an investor may claim to have enabled 1% of these 100,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> savings.

Quantitative monitoring of investor impact is very difficult. Tracking the impact of investments at least makes it possible to gather a first set of data for assessment, however incomplete.

Until we find better indicators, we are pursuing what we believe to be the right strategy to create impact, while seeking to report as best we can on our impacts and those of our portfolios. Qualitative elements for each asset class, based on Theory of Change, may, however, be considered in order to better assist our clients in understanding our impact.

# CONCLUSION

In terms of impact, there are two pitfalls we see as essential to avoid. On the one hand, we cannot say that investors have no impact, as though they were somehow neutral with respect to the economy. Conversely, it is also an exaggeration to think that investors can singlehandedly direct our societies to more sustainable practices. Investors have an important role to play in the emergence of a more sustainable economy. But change will come about only if all financial agents –including individuals, companies and regulators– mobilise to make it happen.

Having an impact, for an investor, must involve taking action on capital allocation choices across all asset classes, in addition to ambitious voting and engagement policies and broad-based efforts in the realm of advocacy and communications.

More than the impact of any specific investment solution, Mirova's quest for impact comes into its own through its positioning as a pure player in sustainable investment –through its ability to increase its expertise, to demonstrate the relevance of its model, to offer comprehensive solutions for investors that help them orient their investments, to explore and create new solutions for investing with impact.

Today, this comprehensive attitude towards impact is at the heart of the Mirova approach; while acting on our own scale, we also contribute to leading as many others as possible to join this path.



# Their idea of impact

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In the US, we seek to invest in companies that contribute positively to achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and generate strong financial returns the long term.

*It is encouraging to see that more and more companies' executive management are addressing the impact their companies have on the world both by minimising negative impacts (e.g. addressing their company's emissions) and by focusing on sustainable opportunities.*

Of course, we recognise that no company is perfect, and in 2018, Mirova had 39 individual engagements and 5 collaborative engagement initiatives with companies in the Global Sustainable Equity strategy<sup>15</sup>, where we asked the company to come up with stronger policies and procedures to address their material ESG risks. As a company's ESG strategy can have significant influence on its intangible assets (i.e. brand recognition) which represents a majority of most company's market value and therefore on its stock

performance, most companies have been willing to engage and make meaningful changes in their policies in an effort to strengthen the sustainability of their business model. ”



Hua Cheng, Equity  
Portfolio Manager,  
Mirova US



Clémence Peyraud,  
Product Specialist,  
Listed Strategies

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We don't consider impact investing to be the preserve of private equity, quite the contrary. Who actually believes that companies will be able to invest massively in sustainable development issues if their shareholders remain motivated exclusively by the lure of maximum short-term returns? Building a sustainable economy necessarily requires a transformation of investment attitudes across the financial markets. At Mirova, our approach to the equity markets is impact driven. Firstly, through capital allocation: to look at an environmental theme, we support players that address environmental transition, such as a leading manufacturer

of turbines for wind power, a leader in waste and water management, a developer of technologies like green hydrogen or an innovative producer of green cement; on a social theme, we'll seek to identify issuers that can create jobs over a 3-year cycle in France or those in favour of gender diversity that show a sufficient proportion of women on executive committees and in key positions in the company.

*Secondly, exercise of voting rights can foster the emergence of best practices on sustainable development issues by mobilising investors.*

Engagement offers an additional tool that can spur an issuer's transformation process. And lastly, the choice of capital allocation, when saturated with this search for positive impact, will prompt the use of additional tools that push for ever greater transparency to arrive at more sophisticated impact measures.

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15. The strategy is exposed to risk of capital loss, equity market risk, global investment risk, currency risk, risks linked to changes in laws and/or tax regimes, portfolio concentration risk, risks linked to corporate capitalization size and to emerging markets.

# Their idea of impact

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How many subsidised employment companies, disabled-friendly companies, associations, cooperatives, inclusive land companies, and socially committed entrepreneurs have been financed by our social impact investing strategies? More than a hundred over the last ten years.

But is it enough to say that inclusivity and impact go hand in hand and stop there? Certainly not. For Mirova, the great challenge of social impact investing is to bring together the impact model, the economic model and the governance model.

The Impact model is key because the first question is how to define the utility (social and environmental) of the supported project, how to measure it, monitor it and report on it.

The Economic model also, because our participation (in debt, quasi-equity and equity) constitutes neither a grant nor a subsidy, but an investment intended to support the development of the structures so financed, in order that their impact may be lasting and increase.

The Governance model cannot be ignored, because our responsibility is to ensure that the sharing of value among stakeholders is fair and balanced, and that the interests of funders and funded are aligned.

It is in this comprehensive approach that the role of a responsible and socially responsible investor takes on its full meaning, a profession that abounds in long periods of exchange, sharing and support for the structures it finances.

Beyond our investments, Mirova's impact also comes from its central role within the Paris Financial Centre in the area of socially responsible finance. It is worth recalling that we manage the two oldest social impact investing strategies in France.

*But being a pioneer is not an end in itself, and staying at the forefront is different challenge.*

Mirova's teams are closely involved in debates on the evolution of social impact investing as members of forums for reflection and exchange, and through our long-term partnerships with other social inclusion finance providers. ”

Fabien Leonhardt,  
Equity Portfolio Manager  
and Head of the Social  
Impact Investing Expertise



Edit Kiss,  
Investment Director,  
Mirova Natural Capital<sup>16</sup>

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Mirova's Natural Capital line is uniquely positioned to bring natural capital impact solutions at scale. We take a direct investment approach to a wide range of businesses, from highly innovative, high-growth projects to more mature companies that can deliver significant environmental and social impact.

These nature-based solutions are designed to create net positive impact for climate, biodiversity, ecosystems and communities, while also creating value for investors in a way that markets have failed to do so far.

*Impact is at our core in the Natural Capital business line and, through our pioneering strategies, we have contributed to shaping the natural climate solutions carbon market.*

Building on this success, we now have the opportunity to push the market further and continue to innovate in other Natural Capital and ecosystem service markets such as biodiversity, which can see our portfolios help to create systemic change and measurably contribute to achieving global targets, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and, the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.

Our ambition is to make natural capital a mature mainstream asset class, where investment models are well established. In this new emerging market we have the opportunity to create tangible, measurable and additional impacts on the ground by actively co-building and shaping our investees' impact strategies and theories of change, thereby creating best-in-class investment standards for the market.

Through our holistic strategy we are able to merge step-wise top-down and disruptive bottom-up approaches, creating positive impact on multiple levels.

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16. The services of Mirova Natural Capital are reserved exclusively for professional investors and eligible counterparties. They are not available to non-professional clients.

# Their idea of impact

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Today, the search for impact via bond investments is often reduced to a single term, that of green bonds, and more rarely social or sustainability bonds. In fact, these instruments finance projects and assets for which it is possible to measure something, as for instance, carbon emissions avoided, or improved access to housing or water, then gauge additionality and monitor the use of funds to determine whether their initial allocation has indeed financed the planned programmes within the planned timeframe. In addition to these ESG (environmental, social, governance) impacts, there is also the benefit of transparency:

*green, social and sustainability bonds revive a form of capitalism where the investor has full knowledge of what they are financing, and not just of the company and the management to whom they are entrusting their funds.*

We should not forget the potential that conventional bonds from issuers whose business generates positive impacts will soon have: bonds have by no means finished yielding impact. ”

Bertrand Rocher,  
Fixed Income  
Portfolio Manager



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Our determination to have an impact in our asset class can be summarised in a few principles:

*First of all, we want to enable private capital, whether savings or institutional investments, to be directed towards infrastructure projects with a tangible and intrinsic impact (renewable energy production, storage, decarbonised mobility, etc.). This calls for the creation of investment products that can offer the level of returns our investors expect while maintaining level of risk they consider acceptable.*

When we started to invest in this sector in the early 2000s, we made particular use of 'blended finance' structures, in which public capital backed the private investment. It is thanks to this type of initiative that investors are now familiar with renewable energies and fully integrate them into their investment strategies.

Secondly, we believe that it is our responsibility as an impact investor to finance the scaling up of less mature technologies, such as electricity storage or hydrogen. At Mirova, we are able to identify and analyse these technologies and then bring them into our investment strategies. In doing so, we support investors and enable these emerging sectors to become structured, and thus truly investable.

And lastly, we are extremely attentive to making sure we are able to monitor and report clearly on our positive impacts: the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions avoided, or job creation linked to our projects... We are constantly seeking to improve by developing new ESG analysis criteria, as, for instance, taking into account the acceptance of our projects by local populations and society in general, or their impact on biodiversity.

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Witold Marais,  
Investment Manager,  
Energy Transition  
Infrastructure

This Document is a non-contractual document of a purely informative nature, Finalised November 2020  
Mathilde Dufour, Deputy Head of Sustainability  
Ladislav Smia, Head of Sustainability

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