International Agency for Research on Cancer

World Health Organization

Governing Council **GC/67/18**
Sixty-seventh Session 8 April 2025

Lyon, 6–8 May 2025
Hybrid format

ADMISSION OF A NEW PARTICIPATING STATE
The Government of Portugal

1. The Director has the honour to inform the Governing Council that the Government of Portugal has applied to be admitted as a Participating State in the International Agency for Research on Cancer. This application was communicated under cover of a Note Verbale to the Director-General of the World Health Organization dated and received on 12 March 2025 (see Appendix below).

2. The Director-General transmitted this application to all Participating States by a Note Verbale on 31 March 2025 and informed them that it would be considered by the Governing Council in accordance with Rule 50 of the Rules of Procedure of the Governing Council.

3. The documents in relation to the application of Government of Portugal were sent for review to the members of the Governing Council Subcommittee on the Admission of New Participating States, who will meet by teleconference on 9 April 2025, and report to the Sixty-seventh Session of the Governing Council.

4. A report on cancer research activities by the Government of Portugal is also appended (see Appendix below).

APPENDIX

PERMANENT MISSION OF PORTUGAL
GENEVA

OMS - 67 /2025

The Permanent Mission of Portugal to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva presents its compliments to the Office of the Director General of the World Health Organization and has the honour to enclose herewith a letter by H.E. The Minister of Health, Dr. Ana Paula Martins, addressed to H.E. the Director General, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, requesting the admission of Portugal as a Participating State in the International Agency for Research on Cancer of the World Health Organization.

The Permanent Mission of Portugal avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Office of the Director General of the World Health Organization the assurances of its highest consideration.

MISSÃO PERMANENTE DE PORTUGAL GENEBRA

Geneva, 11 March 2025

Office of the Director General
World Health Organization
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DGOffice@who.int; lonnquistf@who.int

E-SG/SEC-7304/2025-DATA: 10-03-2025

MS | S 1203/2025 | 10-03-2025 | P 040.15.02 - 200/2025

REPÚBLICA PORTUGUESA
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Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
Director General
World Health Organization
Avenue Appia 20
CH-1211 Geneva 27
Switzerland

Portugal's Application for Admission as a Participating State in the International Agency for Research on Cancer of the World Health Organization

Dear Dr. Tedros Ghebreyesus,

On behalf of the Government of Portugal, the Ministry of Health formally requests admission as a Participating State in the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), with immediate effect.

In accordance with Articles III and XII of the IARC Statute, we are submitting our application for admission, which includes a brief description of cancer research and control activities in Portugal. We would be grateful if these documents could be forwarded to the IARC Governing Council ahead of its next session, scheduled to take place in Lyon from 6 to 8 May 2025.

The Ministry of Health, representing the Government of Portugal, hereby commits to observing and applying the provisions set forth in the IARC Statute, Rules, and Regulations. This includes assuming the financial obligations associated with being a Participating State, as determined by the Governing Council.

We look forward to the processing of this application and to Portugal becoming a Participating State of IARC at the earliest opportunity. We are eager to contribute actively to the Agency's scientific and technical work. Our understanding is that, upon admission, Portugal would have full voting rights from the first year of its participation.

For any further clarifications, please contact the Ministry of Health at Av. João Crisóstomo, 9, 1049-062 Lisboa, Portugal. Additionally, we wish to inform you that a copy of this letter has been sent to Dr. Elisabete Weiderpass, Director of IARC.

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REPÚBLICA PORTUGUESA
MINISTRA DA SAÚDE

We appreciate your attention to this request and look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Ministra da Saúde

Ana Paula Martins

Enclosure: Summary of cancer research and control activities in Portugal
cc: Dr Elisabete Weiderpass, Director, IARC, director@iarc.who.int

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Summary information to be filled in by the applicant state for the attention of the Subcommittee on the Admission of new IARC Participating States

A description of the current cancer research community, including relevant expertise in the areas of IARC activities:

- *Instituto Português de Oncologia, with three centers: Lisbon, Coimbra and Oporto;*
- *Instituto de Investigação e Inovação em Saúde da Universidade do Porto (I3S);*
- *Institute of Molecular Pathology and Immunology of the University of Porto, IPATIMUP);*
- *Gulbenkian Institute for Molecular Medicine;*
- *Fundação Champalimaud.*
- *Directorate-General for Health*

Details of the presence of a national cancer institute or equivalent "lead" cancer organizations:

- *Instituto Português de Oncologia, with three centers: Lisbon, Coimbra and Oporto*

A description of cancer research funding in the public and NGO sectors:

- *Research Grants from Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia (FCT);*
- *Research Grants from the Agency for Clinical Research and Biomedical Innovation (AICIB) and the Directorate-General of Health (DGS);*
- *Research Grants from Liga Portuguesa Contra o Cancro (LPCC).*

Information on a national cancer control plan, if one exists:

- *Estratégia Nacional de Luta Contra o Cancro, Horizonte 2030, available at https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/detalhe/despacho/13227-2023-835712442*

The potential for the Participating State to contribute to the research priorities of IARC, as described in the Agency's Medium-Term Strategy[1]:

- *Implementation research initiatives in cancer screening, namely for lung and gastric cancer;*
- *Basic research on the Understanding of Cancer research initiatives;*

[1] IARC Medium-Term Strategy (2021-2025):
https://events.iarc.who.int/event/29/attachments/67/154/GC63_6A_MTS_2021-2025.pdf

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- *Collaboration on the Capacity Building and support for the next generation of research in both Portugal and Portuguese speaking African countries;*
- *Collaborative Cancer Research between Portugal and Portuguese speaking African countries.*

Evidence of current scientific and technical exchange with IARC.

- *Collaboration on several EU/European funded programs, namely CanScreen-ECIS; CCI for Europe; EU CanScreen Joint Action*
- *Expert participation on the development of the European Code Against Cancer*
- *Participation in the development of WHO Classification of Tumors (Blue Books)*
- *Collaboration on ongoing cancer control programs of Portuguese speaking African countries*

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Portugal Application for Admission as a Participating State in the International Agency for Research on Cancer of the World Health Organization

-Annex-

1. Description of the Current Cancer Research Community

Portuguese Institute of Oncology (IPO) – Lisbon, Coimbra, Porto: The Portuguese Institute of Oncology (Instituto Português de Oncologia, IPO) is a network of three comprehensive cancer centers in Lisbon, Coimbra, and Porto. IPO Lisboa, founded in 1923, was the country's first dedicated cancer hospital. Over the decades, the IPO network has become the cornerstone of cancer care and clinical research in Portugal, integrating treatment, education, and research. For example, the IPO Porto Research Center is an FCT-recognized unit that in 2023 alone produced 298 peer-reviewed publications, reflecting the strong emphasis on translational research. Each IPO center hosts multidisciplinary teams and participates in clinical trials across oncology fields. Notably, IPO Porto and IPO Coimbra have collaborated in innovative prevention projects demonstrating their role beyond hospital walls in public health research. The IPO centers also serve as training hubs for oncologists and researchers, have pioneered supportive care services since early in their history (IPO Lisboa established palliative care services as early as the 1950s).

Institute for Research and Innovation in Health (i3S), University of Porto: The i3S in Porto is one of the largest health research institute in Portugal. Formed as a consortium of three research institutes (including the renowned IPATIMUP, see below), i3S brings together over 800 scientists and clinicians to pursue interdisciplinary biomedical research. Cancer research is one of its central programs. At i3S, teams study cancer biology from basic mechanisms to translational applications – for example, investigating how tumor cell communication and metastasis can be targeted. The institute's impact is evident in its leadership of major scientific events like the Porto Cancer Meeting, an international conference originally started by IPATIMUP in 1990 and now a flagship annual gathering for cancer researchers. Recent research highlights from i3S include advances in understanding how RNA molecules influence cancer progression (the focus of the 2024 Porto Cancer Meeting), and innovative work on cancer biomarkers and nanomedicine. Importantly, i3S houses state-of-the-art shared facilities (for genomics, microscopy, etc.) and has earned competitive grants from European programs and FCT, enabling notable studies ranging from cancer genetics to immunotherapy. The institute's community includes world-class scientists reinforcing the level of expertise in i3S's cancer researchers and their ongoing impact on cancer research and policy.

Institute of Molecular Pathology and Immunology of the University of Porto (IPATIMUP): IPATIMUP is a distinguished cancer research center known especially for its expertise in oncologic pathology. Now integrated as part of i3S, IPATIMUP has a legacy of groundbreaking work in cancer diagnostics and molecular pathology – particularly in gastrointestinal cancers. IPATIMUP became a world leader in the study of gastric cancer, producing numerous high-impact papers on stomach and esophageal tumors. Its focus on early detection and characterization of gastric cancer (including precancerous lesions) has made it a top-level institute in Europe in this domain. IPATIMUP researchers have contributed to international cancer classification efforts, shaping global standards in pathology.

Beyond research, IPATIMUP has been instrumental in training pathologists and scientists (many from Portugal and other Portuguese-speaking countries) and in providing advanced diagnostic services nationally. The integration of IPATIMUP into i3S has only strengthened collaborative cancer research, combining IPATIMUP's pathological expertise with i3S's broader biomedical research environment. This has led to notable studies in areas like cancer genetics (e.g., hereditary gastric cancer syndromes), biomarker discovery, and cancer prevention strategies, reinforcing Portugal's capacity in fundamental cancer research.

Gulbenkian Science Institutes (IGC and iMM) – now the Gulbenkian Institute for Molecular Medicine: The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation has fostered two major biomedical research institutes in Portugal – the **Instituto Gulbenkian de Ciência (IGC)** in Oeiras and the **Instituto de Medicina Molecular João Lobo Antunes (iMM)** in Lisbon. These institutes have recently merged their programs to form the new **Gulbenkian Institute for Molecular Medicine (GIMM)**. The merger, an initiative supported by the Gulbenkian Foundation, is aimed at creating an innovative research powerhouse that capitalizes on the strengths of both IGC and iMM. IGC has traditionally been a leader in fundamental life sciences, with strengths in genetics, cell biology, and immunology – fields that intersect with cancer research in areas like genomic instability, tumor immunology, and cell cycle regulation. Meanwhile, iMM (affiliated with the University of Lisbon) focuses on translational and clinical research, targeting diseases including cancer. iMM groups have made notable contributions in cancer immunology and targeted therapy; for example, iMM scientists are exploring new immunotherapeutic strategies and biomarkers for leukemia and solid tumors, often in partnership with Lisbon's medical school and hospital. With the creation of GIMM, these efforts are now unified. The Gulbenkian Institute for Molecular Medicine will leverage combined resources to drive cancer research ranging from basic mechanisms (e.g. how genetic mutations lead to cancer) to novel treatments. This also streamlines large grants and infrastructure – supported by both national funding and Gulbenkian's endowment – to support cutting-edge projects. Early outcomes of this collaboration include joint programs in cancer genomics and participation in international consortia. The formation of GIMM underscores Portugal's commitment to sustaining world-class research environments that can tackle cancer at the molecular and population levels.

Champalimaud Foundation – Champalimaud Centre for the Unknown: The Champalimaud Foundation in Lisbon is a private biomedical research foundation internationally recognized for its forward-looking approach to cancer research and treatment. At its state-of-the-art Champalimaud Centre for the Unknown, opened in 2010 on Lisbon's waterfront, the foundation integrates basic research with a clinical center that treats cancer patients in areas like breast, pancreatic, and lung cancer. The facility itself is designed to foster interaction between scientists and clinicians where laboratories and clinics are intermingled. Champalimaud research programs emphasize translational research, particularly in technologically advanced therapies: for example, the foundation has pioneering programs in radiation oncology (including one of the most advanced radiotherapy units in Portugal) and in personalized medicine. In recent years Champalimaud researchers have been investigating how to employ AI and big data in oncology, developing novel imaging techniques, and exploring immunotherapy (one current initiative is establishing a cellular therapy unit to develop CAR-T and other immune cell therapies). The foundation also awards significant grants and international prizes to stimulate innovative cancer research worldwide. In Portugal, it collaborates with academic institutions and hospitals, has launched an International Cancer Doctoral Programme to train the next generation of cancer scientists.

Overall, the Champalimaud Foundation's presence adds a dynamic, well-funded engine for cancer innovation in Portugal's research ecosystem, complementing public institutions with its flexibility and global outlook.

Directorate-General for Health (DGS): Portugal's Directorate-General for Health (Direção-Geral da Saúde, DGS) is the national public health authority, and while it is not a research institute, it plays an important role in the cancer research community through policy, data, and funding initiatives. The DGS oversees the National Program for Oncological Diseases (Programa Nacional para as Doenças Oncológicas, PNDO) which coordinates cancer control strategies across the country. In terms of research, DGS facilitates large-scale epidemiological studies (e.g., national cancer registries and risk factor surveillance) and often partners with scientific agencies to support implementation research. For instance, DGS collaborates with AICIB (the Clinical Research and Biomedical Innovation Agency) to fund competitive research grants focused on cancer prevention, early diagnosis, and outcomes (details below) . The DGS has also convened expert task forces to translate research into practice; a recent example is the working group for lung cancer screening that DGS assembled in 2025 to design a pilot screening program (defining target populations, protocols, quality indicators, etc.). Moreover, DGS officials and experts represent Portugal in international cancer research collaborations, including EU joint actions and IARC initiatives. The DGS thus serves as a bridge between research evidence and health policy, ensuring that findings from Portuguese institutions (like those on effective screening or new treatments) inform national guidelines and programs. Through PNDO and partnerships with organizations like the Portuguese League Against Cancer, the DGS helps channel funding to priority research areas (such as cancer prevention in low-income populations) and supports capacity-building efforts (like training healthcare professionals in oncology best practices). In summary, the DGS provides crucial leadership and coordination that amplify the impact of Portugal's cancer research, aligning scientific innovation with public health strategy.

2. National Cancer Hub

Portugal does not have a single National Cancer Institute. However, there is a single Comprehensive Cancer Center by Porto's Portuguese Institute of Oncology (IPO). The three IPO centers (Lisbon, Coimbra, Porto) collectively are public hospitals dedicated exclusively to oncology, combining specialized cancer care with research and education. The IPO network, under the Ministry of Health, ensures nationwide coverage of cancer services and often spearheads multicenter research initiatives. For example, the IPOs coordinate many of the clinical trials in oncology conducted in Portugal and host cancer registries that serve the whole country, as well as tumor banks. Additionally, the National Program for Oncological Diseases (PNDO), led by DGS, provides a formal governance structure that brings together IPO leadership and other stakeholders to set priorities and monitor the National Cancer Control Plan. The combined efforts ensure that Portugal's cancer research community remains focused on nationally relevant challenges (like improving early detection and equitable access to care) while also contributing to global cancer science, serving the National Cancer Hub as a success example of these, having been created in February 2022.

The National Cancer Hub is the national structure that brings together the relevant scientific, technological and social players in the fight against cancer, to successfully implement the Europe's Beating Cancer Plan (EBCP) in Portugal. It is coordinated by the DGS and the AICIB, an entity that supports, funds and promotes clinical research and biomedical innovation in Portugal, and of which the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) is one of the founding members. Through its creation, the DGS and AICIB seek to ensure that the Portuguese community maximizes its participation in European funding opportunities in the field of cancer, that the results of research, innovations and scientific evidence are incorporated into national health systems and policies, and that health care, quality of life and fair treatment for cancer patients and citizens are improved.

3. Cancer Research Funding in the Public and NGO Sectors

Cancer research in Portugal is supported by a mix of **public funding agencies** and **non-governmental organizations**, each playing distinct roles. The primary public funding body is the **Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT)**. FCT provides the bulk of competitive grants for fundamental and translational research at universities and institutes across all fields, including oncology. Through FCT, Portuguese cancer researchers secure funding for projects ranging from molecular oncology studies to epidemiological research. FCT also funds multi-year programs of R&D units – for instance, the IPO Porto Research Center has been financed as an FCT research unit since 2004. This stable support has allowed cancer centers to build infrastructure and long-term research agendas. In addition, FCT invests in human capital by awarding doctoral and postdoctoral fellowships in cancer research and co-funding international partnerships (Portugal's participation in ERA-NETs like TRANSCAN for translational cancer research has been backed by FCT).

Another key player is the **Agency for Clinical Research and Biomedical Innovation (AICIB)**, which specifically promotes clinical and translational research. AICIB often partners with the **DGS** to target national health priorities. A recent example is the **National Cancer Hub-PT initiative**, coordinated by AICIB and the DGS's cancer program (PNDO). In 2025, this initiative launched its **second edition of grants for Clinical and Innovative Biomedical Research in Cancer**, with an expanded budget of €215,000 (double the previous year). This funding, supported by AICIB, DGS, and the Portuguese League Against Cancer, is directed at projects in areas such as primary prevention, early detection, better diagnostics, treatment innovation, survivorship, and pediatric oncology. The goal is to stimulate research that has a direct impact on cancer care quality and aligns with the national cancer plan. The first edition of these "National Cancer Hub" grants (2023) funded several projects (with ~€100,000 total), and by 2024 the program grew in scope. AICIB and DGS also organize scientific meetings (like the National Cancer Hub forums) for investigators to share findings and ensure alignment with European Cancer Plan actions.

In the **NGO sector**, the **Portuguese League Against Cancer (LPCC – Liga Portuguesa Contra o Cancro)** is prominent. LPCC is a charitable organization with nationwide reach, focused on cancer education, patient support, and research funding. It raises funds through public campaigns and channels some of them into research grants, often in partnership with public agencies. For instance, LPCC has joined AICIB and DGS in co-funding the National Cancer Hub grants since 2025.

LPCC also supports young investigators via grants and awards (such as prizes for the best cancer research papers, or funding for specific topics like oncology nursing research). Additionally, disease-specific foundations (e.g., the Portuguese associations for leukemia, breast cancer, or lung cancer) and international donors (like the "la Caixa" Foundation through its health research program) contribute to funding certain cancer research projects in Portugal.

Overall, the funding structure for cancer research in Portugal is **multi-tiered**: FCT underpins basic and translational science; AICIB and DGS target research and strategic initiatives (often tapping EU funds or special state budgets).

4. National Cancer Control Plan

Portugal has a comprehensive National Cancer Control Strategy to guide its fight against cancer. The current plan, titled *"Estratégia Nacional de Luta Contra o Cancro, Horizonte 2030"*, was approved in late 2023. This strategy mirrors the EBCP and serves as the country's roadmap for cancer control up to the year 2030. It is structured around four key pillars: Prevention, Early Detection, Diagnosis and Treatment, and Survivorship/Palliative Care. Each pillar contains specific objectives and targets to reduce cancer incidence and mortality and improve quality of life for patients. For example, under Prevention, the plan calls for reducing tobacco use and obesity rates, improving vaccination coverage (like HPV vaccination to prevent cervical cancer), and reducing exposure to environmental carcinogens. In terms of Early Detection, the strategy emphasizes increasing coverage of population-based screenings (breast, cervical, and colorectal, and evaluating lung and gastric screening in high-risk groups) and ensuring timely diagnostic pathways. The Diagnosis and Treatment pillar focuses on providing equitable access to state-of-the-art therapies, strengthening multidisciplinary tumor boards, and expanding hospital capacities. Finally, the Survivorship and Palliative Care pillar aims to enhance long-term follow-up, psychosocial support, and end-of-life care services.

The National Cancer Plan 2030 aligns closely with the EU's "Europe's Beating Cancer Plan," ensuring that Portugal is contributing to and benefiting from European-wide initiatives. It is integrated into the broader National Health Plan and includes a robust governance structure: a national coordination committee led by the Director of the PNDO (National Cancer Program) at DGS and involving representatives from AICIB, NHS Executive Board (DE-SNS), Central Administration of the Health System (ACSS), Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation and patient associations. This committee is tasked to implement the strategy and update actions as needed. Instituto Nacional de Saúde, Dr. Ricardo Jorge (INSA) is responsible for the monitorization and evaluation the outcomes.

Already, the strategy has led to new actions. One recent development from the plan is the expansion of organized screening programs: by direction of the Health Ministry and DGS, pilot projects for lung cancer screening (low-dose CT for high-risk smokers) are being designed, and an innovative approach to gastric cancer prevention via H. pylori testing has been launched in the Azores (described in the next section). The plan also underscores the importance of research and innovation – it explicitly encourages "implementation research" to test and refine cancer control interventions in the Portuguese context. In essence, the National Cancer Control Plan provides a strategic framework that not only sets public health goals but also galvanizes the research community to address practical challenges (like improving screening uptake or tailoring therapies to population needs). With Horizonte 2030, Portugal aims to curb the projected increase in cancer

cases and ensure that advances in science are translated into saved lives and better patient experiences.

5. Contribution to IARC's Research Priorities

As Portugal seeks to become a Participating State of the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), the country's research community has been emphasizing areas that resonate with IARC's global strategic priorities. Several key initiatives illustrate how Portugal contributes to and can further support IARC's mission.

• **Implementation Research Initiatives in Cancer Screening:**

Implementation research in cancer screening is a prominent focus. In line with IARC's emphasis on cancer early detection, Portugal has moved to evaluate and roll out new screening programs for cancers with high mortality. Lung cancer – the leading cause of cancer death in Portugal – is a prime target. In early 2025, the DGS convened a multi-disciplinary working group of pneumologists, oncologists, radiologists and public health experts to plan a lung cancer screening pilot. This group is setting the terms for selecting high-risk individuals (likely long-term heavy smokers) and determining screening protocols using low-dose CT scans. The aim is to implement a controlled pilot in certain regions (for example, it has been signaled that in the Azores islands a lung screening program will start by 2025). By carefully studying the outcomes – e.g., how many early-stage lung cancers are detected and the program's cost-effectiveness – Portuguese authorities hope to generate evidence to guide a national roll-out. This kind of implementation research in lung screening places Portugal among the front-runners in adopting the new European Commission recommendation to include lung cancer in organized screenings.

In parallel, gastric cancer prevention is being innovatively addressed. Portugal has one of the higher rates of stomach cancer in Western Europe (particularly in certain regions), and IARC has identified Helicobacter pylori (H. pylori) infection as a major risk factor for gastric cancer. Accordingly, in March 2024, a pioneering program for gastric cancer prevention was launched on Terceira Island in the Azores. This program offers free H. pylori screening and eradication therapy to the adult population via local pharmacies. By identifying and treating H. pylori infections, the initiative aims to reduce future gastric cancer incidence. The choice of the Azores for this pilot is strategic – the region has a significant prevalence of H. pylori and gastric cancer. The program is a collaborative effort: the Azores Oncology Center leads it with crucial support from mainland research centers (IPO Porto and IPO Coimbra provided technical and financial backing). Early indicators like participation rates and infection prevalence are being carefully monitored as part of this "real-world" study. If successful, this model of H. pylori test-and-treat could be expanded to other high-risk communities. Such implementation research not only addresses a local cancer problem but also contributes to global knowledge on gastric cancer prevention – aligning well with IARC's focus on cancer prevention research and its call for evidence-based strategies to reduce infection-related cancers.

Beyond lung and gastric initiatives, Portugal continues to run and research its established screening programs for breast, cervical, and colorectal cancer, seeking to optimize them by improving screening technology (digital breast tomosynthesis or HPV primary testing) and increasing coverage in underserved populations. All these efforts demonstrate Portugal's commitment to evidence-based cancer prevention, echoing IARC's priorities of reducing the cancer burden through early detection.

• **Fundamental and Translational Cancer Research:**

Portugal's strong foundation in **basic cancer research** directly supports IARC's "Understanding Cancer" priority (which calls for elucidating cancer mechanisms to inform prevention and therapy). Across the institutions mentioned earlier, Portuguese scientists are investigating key questions about cancer biology: how genetic mutations accumulate, how tumors evade the immune system, and how cancers metastasize. For example, researchers at i3S and IPATIMUP have shed light on the molecular pathogenesis of gastric cancer, including hereditary syndromes like Hereditary Diffuse Gastric Cancer – knowledge that feeds into prevention (identifying high-risk individuals) and classification of tumors. In Coimbra and Lisbon, university labs (often funded by FCT) are exploring the biology of **lung cancer**, such as identifying molecular biomarkers that could predict which patients respond to targeted therapies.

Furthermore, Portugal is active in **translational research** to bridge lab findings and patient care. There are multi-center projects, for instance, investigating new drug combinations for stomach or pancreatic cancer, supported by both national grants and European funds. The country's participation in the EU's Cancer Mission projects (some of which IARC coordinates) means that Portuguese teams contribute data and insight to large international studies on tumor biology and inequalities in care. By maintaining robust fundamental research – from cell biology to epidemiology – Portugal not only produces findings relevant within its borders but also adds to the global corpus of cancer knowledge that IARC synthesizes in its monographs and research publications.

• **Capacity Building and Collaborative Research with Portuguese-Speaking African Countries:**

One of IARC's goals is to build research capacity worldwide, and Portugal is uniquely positioned to aid cancer control efforts in Portuguese-speaking African countries (Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe) as well as East Timor and Brazil. In recent years, Portugal has indeed ramped up collaborative programs with these nations, leveraging shared language and historical ties to improve cancer research and care – a priority also highlighted in the national strategy.

A flagship effort is the "We Forward – Health Science Capacity in PALOP" initiative, a partnership launched by the Gulbenkian Foundation and the "la Caixa" Foundation. In 2025 this program selected and funded four projects aimed at strengthening research in African Portuguese-speaking countries (often called PALOP) . Two of the four projects directly address cancer: in Angola, a project led by the University of Katyavala Bwila focuses on improving the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of cancer in people with albinism, who are at extremely high risk of skin cancers due to sun exposure. This project is a collaboration between Angolan institutions and Portugal's IPO Porto, among others, and involves setting up infrastructure, training personnel, and researching molecular characteristics of tumors in albino patients. In Guinea-Bissau, another project is establishing an "Oncology Initiative" at the Jean Piaget University, aiming to create a research and care ecosystem to boost early diagnosis and treatment of cancer locally. Portugal's support (financial, technical, and human expertise) is crucial to these efforts.

Beyond specific projects, Portuguese institutions often host African healthcare professionals for training. For instance, it is common for physicians from Angola or Mozambique to receive oncology or pathology training at IPO hospitals or at IPATIMUP in Porto.

The Champalimaud Foundation has also treated patients from PALOP at its Lisbon clinic and is exploring telemedicine links to advise on cases abroad. Moreover, joint research is burgeoning e.g., studies of infection-related cancers (like HPV-related cervical cancer or hepatitis-linked liver cancer) in Mozambique involve Portuguese public health researchers, creating data that serve both nations.

This collaborative approach not only helps those countries build capacity (leading to better cancer registries, trained oncologists, and local research data) but also enriches Portuguese research – by involving unique patient populations and cancer profiles, fostering a sense of global health responsibility. It aligns with IARC's focus on cancer in low- and middle-income countries and capacity building. Indeed, IARC's own collaborations in Africa (such as the AFCRN cancer registry network) could be reinforced by Portugal's bilateral support to establish registries in PALOP countries. The Portuguese government has formal health cooperation agreements dating back decades, and cancer is increasingly a topic of focus in these ties. In summary, Portugal is leveraging its expertise to uplift cancer research and care in Portuguese-speaking Africa – an endeavor that promises to contribute to cancer control in regions where incidence of some cancers (like cervical, Kaposi sarcoma, or liver cancer) is high and resources are limited.

6. Evidence of Current Scientific and Technical Exchange with IARC

Portugal already actively collaborates with IARC and other international bodies on various research and policy projects, providing a solid foundation to expand those ties as a full IARC Participating State. One area of collaboration is cancer information and screening programs in Europe. Portuguese experts and institutions have partnered in EU-funded initiatives coordinated by IARC. For example, the CanScreen-ECIS project – which aims to enhance cancer screening data collection and integration with the European Cancer Information System – has seen involvement from Portugal through its national screening coordinators and registry specialists (with DGS and IPO representatives contributing data on Portugal's screening performance). Likewise, Portugal participated in the EU Joint Action on Cancer Screening (IPAAC and its successor), where sharing best practices for screening programs (like the implementation of colorectal screening) was key.

Portuguese health authorities and scientists also contribute to the development of international cancer prevention guidelines. A notable instance is the European Code Against Cancer, an initiative led by IARC and the European Commission to outline key cancer prevention recommendations for the public. Portugal has promoted the 4th edition of this code domestically – the Portuguese League Against Cancer and DGS translated and disseminated the 12 ways to reduce cancer risk, such as not smoking, healthy diet, vaccinations, etc., ensuring these evidence-based messages reach Portuguese citizens. Additionally, Portuguese experts were part of the working groups that updated the Code; for example, Portuguese epidemiologists contributed knowledge on diet and cancer, and an oncologist from Portugal took part in evaluating the recommendations, reflecting Portugal's scientific input into this Europe-wide effort.

In the realm of cancer classification and research, as mentioned, Portugal's leading pathologists are deeply involved with IARC's WHO Classification of Tumours (Blue Books) program. This collaboration is ongoing, with Portuguese experts continuing to be consulted for new editions (e.g., in areas of digestive system, endocrine tumors, and hematology). This ensures that Portuguese research findings (such as unique molecular subtypes identified in local studies) feed

into global cancer knowledge. It also means Portuguese institutions are early adopters of the latest diagnostic criteria, benefiting patients through more precise diagnoses.

Portugal is also part of European research networks aligned with IARC priorities. For instance, the country is engaged in the Cancer Prevention Europe consortium and the new EU Cancer Mission projects. In October 2023, IARC hosted a meeting of the "Understanding Cancer" cluster of EU Cancer Mission projects, and Portuguese teams from institutions like i3S and iMM (which coordinate EU grants on cancer biology) were present, underlining their contribution to Europe's big research scenario.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Portugal's cancer research community – hospitals, universities, government agencies, and foundations – is aligned with international efforts. The country has recent statistics and success stories to highlight its achievement in cancer research, a robust funding structures that sustain research (FCT, AICIB/DGS, LPCC, etc.), and growing international collaborations that extend its impact (especially with other Portuguese-speaking countries and European networks). By expanding and enriching these efforts, Portugal is poised to make substantial contributions to IARC's mission of understanding and preventing cancer worldwide, while continually improving its own cancer control outcomes through research-driven policy and practice.