International Agency for Research on Cancer

World Health Organization

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REQUEST FOR SUPPORT FROM THE GOVERNING COUNCIL SPECIAL FUND:
A. COMPUTING INFRASTRUCTURE FOR THE IARC SCIENTIFIC IT PLATFORM
B. STAFFING EXPENDITURE
C. NEW ENTREPRISE RESOURCE PLANNING (ERP) SYSTEM

A. COMPUTING INFRASTRUCTURE FOR THE IARC SCIENTIFIC IT PLATFORM

1. The IARC Scientific IT (SIT) platform was developed to provide a cost-effective shared centralized infrastructure for storing and analyzing scientific data. It offers researchers access to secure and high-performance computing resources based on modern tools and best practices, ensuring compliance with worldwide data protection standards and supporting the Agency's efforts in collaborative and data-centric cancer research.

2. The SIT platform is a cornerstone of IARC's scientific work, enabling researchers to handle increasingly complex datasets efficiently. It is aligned with the IARC Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) 2021–2025 by fostering high-quality research, promoting collaboration across scientific disciplines, and supporting open-science initiatives.

3. The SIT platform was initially funded by the Governing Council Special Fund (GCSF) in 2020 (see document SC/56/4 and Governing Council Resolution GC/62/R15), with additional contributions from various IARC Branches since then. Since its inception, the platform has experienced a regular growth in terms of projects hosted, data stored, and computational demands, becoming an essential scientific infrastructure for IARC (see the Scientific IT platform case study document p.45 for more details).

4. The SIT platform also contributes to IARC's move into Open Science (see document SC/60/7), specifically by developing a means to allow access to IARC-held data to third-party investigators remotely in a secure fashion. This objective also addressed demands from various funding agencies that require IARC to share scientific data generated within funded projects to external investigators. This vision aligns with the principle of making scientific data and resources "as open as possible, as closed as necessary," fostering global collaboration while respecting legal and ethical constraints.

5. The SIT platform is operated as a shared resource provided by the IT Working Group of the Data Science Steering Committee (DSSC), with the Director of Administration and Finance (DAF) being formally the governing authority for the SIT platform, and the DSSC serving in an advisory capacity to provide strategic guidance on key decisions. The DSSC works closely with the DAF to

align the platform's development with IARC's strategic objectives, ensuring efficient resource allocation and operational management.

6. The computing servers that form the backbone of the SIT platform were installed in January 2018 and are now approaching the end of their operational lifespan. The current infrastructure is no longer sufficient to support IARC's scientific activities effectively, and replacing these servers is crucial to ensure continuity, efficiency, and scalability of the platform.

7. This funding request amounts to €250 000 for the purchase of new computing servers, including some with high-performance graphics processing unit (GPU) designed for artificial intelligence analyses, as well as general infrastructure (network, power supply, cables) and maintenance of the servers for a period of five years. These servers aim to provide 2000 compute cores, 15 TB of RAM, and a 25 GBps network, integrated with the recently upgraded storage system (see document SC/60/6). In parallel, the DAF, the Budget and Finance Office (BFO), and DSSC members are developing a cost-recovery system to support the operational cost and the long-term sustainability of the SIT platform. This investment will secure the SIT platform's capacity to meet the current and future computational demands of IARC's scientific projects while supporting its open-science mandate.

B. STAFFING EXPENDITURE

8. The financial landscape around the world has undergone significant changes recently, presenting challenges that were unforeseen when the Programme and Budget for IARC for the biennium 2024–2025 were initially planned, in early 2022. At that time, the budgeting, especially for staff costs, was based on past costing trends, reflecting a more stable economic environment. However, since then, the global situation has evolved drastically, leading to a sharp increase in inflation and staff costs, which were not anticipated in the original budget.

9. In 2024, the impact of these increased costs has already been felt. While inflationary pressures have stabilized to some extent, the higher staff costs continue to represent a significant financial liability. For the regular budget alone, the total increase in staff costs, including estimates up to the end of the current biennium, amounts to nearly six million euros. To address this increased liability, additional funding is required. In 2024, the additional staff cost liability has been covered through savings achieved through the implementation of efficiency measures like reorganizing and reprioritizing the budget of vacant positions. However, a shortfall of 1.5 million euros still remains to be covered up to the end of the biennium.

10. To address the shortfall, a request is being made to the Governing Council for approval of the use of the Governing Council Special Fund to cover the additional staff costs. This would ensure that the financial requirements are met and that the operations of the Agency can proceed without disruption for the remainder of the biennium.

C. INVESTMENT IN A NEW ERP SYSTEM

11. IARC currently relies on a fairly old and limited version of the Finance, HR and Procurement management system, namely the SAP. This version of SAP is outdated and approaching its end of mainstream maintenance by December 2027. The SAP system cannot be simply upgraded, but a transition to a cloud-based environment is mandated by the software provider, corresponding to a new implementation in cost and complexity. This underscores the urgent need for its replacement with a considerably wider scope on a modern and comprehensive platform.

12. In addition, since the SAP implementation scope is very limited, IARC relies on a number of stand-alone systems that are not integrated with each other or with SAP, leading to data silos that make running processes and reporting challenging and time-consuming. Many of these systems are also nearing the end of their useful life and need urgent replacement. Making any replacement in the current structure where the core ERP requires replacement does not make financial sense and would result in a duplicate investment at the time of the new ERP implementation. This fragmented approach to administrative systems creates significant inefficiencies, requiring staff to spend valuable time on tedious and cumbersome processes. These inefficiencies hinder overall productivity, increase errors and necessitate multiple manual controls, ultimately leading to higher implementation cost and longer lead times. The lack of integration between systems severely impedes the Agency's ability to work effectively and make timely decisions, highlighting the urgent need for an upgrade to a more modern and streamlined solution. The outdated system with degraded level of maintenance poses significant risks in terms of compliance and persistent operational inefficiencies that hinder overall effectiveness.

13. Transitioning to a modern, cloud-based ERP framework would address these challenges effectively. A cloud-based system facilitates regular updates, enhances security, improves scalability to adapt to IARC’s evolving needs, and aligns seamlessly with its digital transformation objectives and IT roadmap. Implementing a cloud-based and integrated solution is crucial to overcoming existing inefficiencies and driving significant operational improvements before the discontinuation of the mainstream maintenance of SAP ERP Central Component (ECC) on-premises system in 2027. Beginning this project immediately is imperative.

14. Initially, IARC planned to collaborate with WHO to implement the WHO Business Management System (BMS). However, due to delays in the BMS rollout at WHO and a range of technical challenges, this approach is no longer viable. Discussions with WHO have revealed significant cost constraints, as well as functional and technical limitations that have made this solution unfeasible for IARC.

15. Given these constraints, IARC has explored alternative options within the United Nations system, as well as the possibility of implementing an independent system. A key opportunity lies in partnering with UNDP to share their ERP infrastructure, Quantum, an Oracle-based cloud system that has been developed for use across multiple UN agencies.

16. This solution offers several key advantages, including economies of scale, as it is already deployed and operational at other UN agencies. By adopting this well-tested ERP system, IARC would benefit from the experiences and best practices of these agencies, ensuring smoother implementation. Additionally, joining Quantum, the United Nations Development Programme

(UNDP) ERP system, would alleviate the burden of developing and maintaining an independent system, which would require significant investment in both one-time costs and ongoing maintenance. Collaborating with larger entities is the most beneficial approach for a small agency such as IARC in terms of one-time costs and running costs, in particular when taking in the staff costs. Additionally, Quantum offers advanced functionalities such as AI-powered analytics, hyper-automation with Robotic Process Automation (RPA), and machine learning, ensuring it stays at the forefront of innovation. Its platform's modular licensing model offers flexibility, enabling IARC to implement additional modules as needed, supporting the scaling of the ERP solution to align with evolving business requirements.

17. A Discovery Workshop was conducted between IARC and UNDP on the various functionalities of the Quantum tool, which are found to satisfactorily align with the needs of IARC. The aim is to use this tool with a template implementation approach, a minimal customization, and use this modernizing initiative as an opportunity for IARC to refine its policies, procedures and processes, making them more efficient going forward. This approach is cost-effective and facilitates smoother future updates of the system, while reducing risks associated with maintenance and upgrades.

18. An initial technical and financial proposal has been received from UNDP including the estimated one-time implementation as well as annual maintenance costs. IARC is working with UNDP to draft a project plan detailing total cost of ownership for IARC. While the annual maintenance costs will be included in the budget planning of the future biennia, the Secretariat is requesting a one-time allocation of €5 million from the Governing Council Special Fund. The budget includes the initial investment costs, including UNDP implementation costs, possible third-party costs such as interfaces and migration, IARC staff back-filling, as well as a buffer for unforeseen expenditure during the implementation phase. The Director will report on the use of these funds to the Governing Council in its future sessions.

D. Review by the Scientific Council

19. The Scientific Council (SC) noted that the purchase of new computing servers will secure the SIT platform's capacity to meet the current and future computational demands of IARC's scientific projects while supporting its open-science mandate.

20. The SC noted that a cost-recovery system is being developed to support the operational cost and the long-term sustainability of the SIT platform.

21. The SC noted that a request for allocation of funds from the GCSF will be submitted to the Governing Council to cover the shortfall in the staff budget for the biennium 2024-2025 as well as to invest in a new ERP system.

22. The SC recommended that the Governing Council approve the allocation of €6,75 million from the GCSF in support of the Director's requests.

E. Requested budget

23. The Governing Council is requested to approve, at its 67th Session in May 2025, the allocation of €250 000 for the purchase of a computing infrastructure for the IARC SIT platform described under Section A, as well as the allocations of €1,5 million for staffing expenditure described under Section B, and €5 million for investment in a new ERP system described under Section C.

	Approximate cost (€)
Computing infrastructure for the IARC SIT platform	250 000
Staffing expenditure	1,5 million
Investment in a new ERP system	5 million
Total requested budget	6,75 million