International Agency for Research on Cancer

World Health Organization

Governing Council
Sixty-eighth Session

Lyon, 27–28 May 2026
Hybrid format

GC/68/5
13 February 2026

REPORT OF THE SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL ON ITS SIXTY-SECOND SESSION

INTRODUCTION

1. The Sixty-second Session of the Scientific Council (SC) of the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), was opened by Dr Sirpa Heinävaara (SC Chairperson), at 09:00 on Wednesday 11 February 2026. She welcomed the participants, including the seven new SC members: Drs Mohamad Ussama Alhomsi (Qatar), Robert Barouki (France), Mariana Emerenciano (Brazil), Lúcio José de Lara Santos (Portugal), Henrik Hjalgrim (Denmark), Rayjean Hung (Canada), and Eva Schernhammer (Austria).

2. She also welcomed Professor Dorothy Keefe (Chairperson, Governing Council [GC], Australia) and Dr Alarcos Cieza (Unit Head, Management of NCDs PPC, WHO Representative, Observer), Professor Beatrice Fervers (Centre Léon Bérard, Observer), and Ms Suzanna Tittenbrun (UICC, Observer)[1].

3. Apologies for absence were received from Dr Satish Gopal and Dr Al-Hareth Al-Khater, Governing Council Vice Chairperson, for the entire session.

4. For ease of reference a list of acronyms of IARC Pillars and Branches can be found in Annex 1 at the end of this Report.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

5. Declarations of interests were summarized by the Secretariat and available for consultation by SC members. Please refer to Annex 2 at the end of this Report.

ELECTION OF RAPPORTEUR

6. Professor David Gisselsson Nord (Sweden) was elected Rapporteur.

[1] Photographs: participants were not asked to sign a consent form. The Secretariat read a statement, at the opening of the session, informing participants that their presence on the steps for the Group photograph was taken as equivalent to their consent to have their picture displayed on the Governance website, and kept in the IARC archives for future use. This also covers consent for pictures taken during the meeting. Participants were asked to let the Secretariat know formally if they wished not to have their picture published by IARC, at the time of the meeting or in future.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA (Document SC/62/1)

7. The agenda was adopted.

PRESENTATION OF E-POSTERS BY IARC SCIENTISTS: CO-CREATING THE FUTURE OF CANCER RESEARCH:

8. In order to engage as many SC members as possible in the discussions on cross-cutting research topics, the SC was split into small groups for seminars around selected IARC projects distributed across IARC branches.

9. Scientists in branches and in the Laboratory Support, Biobanking and Services were invited to prepare ePosters to showcase and present their work to SC members during a dedicated session, in the format: 5 minute presentation, 5 minute questions, 5 minute feedback by SC members per presentation.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT INCLUDING:

THE IARC BIENNIAL REPORT 2024–2025 (Document SC/62/2)

10. The Director's presentation of the scientific highlights from the IARC Biennial Report 2024–2025 was made available on the INDICO platform and on Teams.

11. A companion webpage to IARC Biennial Report 2024–2025 can be found at: https://www.iarc.who.int/biennial-report-2024-2025web/

12. An IARC corporate video was projected, and the Director delivered a summary of her presentation available online in which comments and questions received prior to the meeting were addressed.

13. The SC congratulated the Director and her staff on the IARC Biennial Report 2024–2025.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 67th SESSION OF THE GOVERNING COUNCIL (GC)

14. The documents and minutes of the 67th GC session are available on the event management platform (https://events.iarc.who.int/e/GC67). The main highlights were as follows:

- Portugal joined IARC as a new Participating State in May 2025.
- GC approved the 2026–2027 budget at a level of €53 522 415.
- GC approved the Evaluation Report of the IARC Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) 2021–2025.
- GC noted the Report of the Working Group on Sustainable Financing of IARC.
- GC noted the Biennial Report of the IARC Ethics Committee, 2023–2024.

15. The SC thanked the Director for these highlights from the 67th GC session.

DIRECTOR'S UPDATE FROM THE 61st SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL

16. The Director mentioned that all items requiring follow-up will be covered in the next three days.

17. The SC noted the Director's update from the 61st SC.

18. The representative of the WHO emphasized the strengthened collaboration between IARC and WHO, commended IARC on the great impact it already has had on policy and look forward to creating additional impact by joint collaborative efforts.

19. The SC thanked the Director for her update from the 61st SC session.

20. The SC expressed concern about the discontinuation of the Epigenomics and Mechanisms (EGM) Branch as a distinct entity; its visibility and continued support were considered important, highlighting the importance of epigenetic research. The Director explained that, although the EGM produced excellent work, a strategic decision was made to integrate most of its activities into the Environment and Lifestyle Epidemiology (ENV) Branch following the retirement of the former EGM Branch Head, and in light of budgetary constraints. She clarified that the EGM research activities in epigenetics will continue within the ENV Branch.

21. The SC recognizes and appreciates the substantial contribution the United States of America has made for the last 44 years to the *Monographs* programme. This decades-long continuity of the programme has made a significant global impact. The SC noted it would be a fundamental loss if the IARC *Monographs* Programme was not further supported, not least considering its unique position of authority and independence in cancer prevention and occupational health promotion. Also, the SC notes the past and ongoing efforts of the IARC Secretariat to secure additional funding to the *Monographs* programme.

22. The SC recommends additional coordination with national/regional agencies to harmonize efforts in hazard evaluation. The Director confirmed that the *Monographs* Programme is actively pursuing funding opportunities for the coming years. Subject to availability of resources, an update of the Preamble to the Monographs is also anticipated, ensuring that the Programme continues to incorporate the latest scientific and methodological advances in cancer hazard identification. In light of the above, the SC strongly urges the GC to take decisive action to secure sustainable funding for the *Monographs* programme, recognizing its indispensable role in protecting public health worldwide**.**

23. The SC highlighted that the Handbooks Programme is very important. The Director acknowledged its significance.

24. The SC congratulated the Director on producing outstanding, excellent science and stressed here again that providing a financial base for the IARC *Monographs* and Handbooks, which are freely available, would be essential.

25. The Director expressed appreciation for the positive feedback and recognition of the Agency's scientific excellence.

BIENNIAL REPORT ON IARC EDUCATION AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES, 2024–2025 (Document SC/62/3)

26. Ms Anouk Berger, Head, Learning and Capacity Building (LCB) Branch, made her presentation of the key achievements of the IARC Research Training and Fellowship programme (FEL), covering the period 2024– 2025, available on the INDICO platform.

27. For the Research Training and Fellowship Programme, in addition to maintaining the programme at its current level of quality, and onboarding/supporting Early Career and Visiting Scientists (ECVS) and their host team on a daily basis, the focus of LCB will be to:

- Further implement the terms contained in the Programme's Handbook and monitor the need for any modifications;
- Contribute to the deployment of the new ERP QUANTUM, in relation to the contractual and onboarding, daily support and offboarding procedures of ECVS;
- Continue to interact with all stakeholders, in particular the IARC Early Career Scientists Association (ECSA);
- Continue to develop and sustain initiatives to contribute to enhance the training experience/career prospect of ECS, in particular doctoral students and postdoctoral scientists;
- Identify additional financial resources to maintain or expand training opportunities for Postdoctoral Fellowships; and
- Further strengthen and/or develop the links with local and international stakeholders.

28. In the coming years the focus of LCB will be to:

- Further identify resources to sustain the IARC Learning infrastructure, in partnership with the WHO Academy;
- Continue to produce/publish learning and teaching material in English and other languages;
- Pursue the organization of webinar series, with recorded sessions/material posted on IARC Learning for free access;
- Pursue collaboration with and support to Branches for the design, development, organization and/or evaluation of education and training materials, courses or programmes;
- Identify funding resources to continue to run the IARC Summer School on a regular basis;
- Sustain partnerships for the maintenance of regional learning centres and develop additional centres as possible;
- In line with open science principles, implement open education, more specifically through open educational resources; and
- Monitor the use of learning and teaching resources and impact of learning events.

29. SC was asked to comment on the activities and achievements of the programme as well as to suggest areas for further enhancement or which may be reduced in emphasis.

30. SC was also asked for advice on seeking additional resources from, for example, Participating States and Foundations, in order to finance the maintenance and future developments of the IARC Education and Training programme.

31. In response, the SC made the following comments/suggestions/recommendations:

- Expressed appreciation for the support to early-career scientists, students and postdoctoral scientists around the world;
- Highlighted that the courses programme should continue to be developed hand in hand with the Human Resources Office, looking at emerging needs for planning upcoming learning courses;
- Commended the global collaboration with different organizations and encouraged seeking additional collaborations internationally, thus positioning IARC for even greater impact;
- Suggested continuing and expanding partnerships around the world with universities to offer IARC learning modules as coursework (e.g. Master's of Public Health programmes, teaching toolkits) and with other entities (e.g. the oncology community, about prevention), including showcasing how IARC learning resources can be integrated into the university curriculum.

32. The SC congratulated the Director and IARC staff for the report on Education and Training Activities.

REQUEST FOR SUPPORT FROM THE GOVERNING COUNCIL SPECIAL FUND. A. SCIENTIFIC EQUIPMENT AND B. AUTOMATION SOFTWARE FOR IARC PUBLICATION (Document SC/62/4)

33. The SC considered the Director's proposal to request an allocation of €788 200 from the GC Special Fund (GCSF) to:

1. Purchase four pieces of equipment identified as essential (dedicated biobanking LIMS system; automated tube labelling and aliquoting system; dedicated LIMS for Histopathology, and a new liquid nitrogen tank), for a total of €718 200.
2. Purchase of an automation software for IARC publications for a total of €70 000.

34. The SC noted the next objective of the IARC Biobank to attain the ISO20387 "Biotechnology and Biobanking" certification to align with IARC MTS 2026–2030.

35. The SC noted that the annual costs of the requested equipment will be covered from extra-budgetary sources and invoicing for the IARC Biobank services.

36. The SC noted that the new automation software for IARC publications will replace the current commercial product being discontinued

37. The SC recommended that GC approve the allocation of €788 200 from the GCSF in support of the Director's requests.

SCIENTIFIC FOCUS: LABORATORY-BASED REASEARCH (Document SC/62/5)

38. 31. IARC scientists highlighted the added value of IARC's laboratories (metabolomics, epigenetics, proteomics, genetics), particularly the highly specialized protocols developed in-house. They emphasized the importance of laboratory activities in supporting key research areas, including:

- **Etiological research**: identification of novel risk factors for hormone-related cancers through targeted approaches; identification of biomarkers of habitual alcohol consumption for pancreatic and liver cancers using untargeted metabolomics; identification of epigenomic biomarkers of environmental/lifestyle exposures in relation to childhood leukemia in high income countries; identification of epigenetic biomarkers of mycotoxins and infectious agents in relation to endemic Burkitt lymphoma in Sub-Saharan Africa.

- **Early detection biomarkers:** development of urine biomarkers (e.g. TERT promoter mutations) for the early detection of bladder cancer, through next-generation sequencing, in both high- and low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Key steps towards clinical application to advance non-invasive diagnostics of bladder cancer are underway.

39. The Secretariat confirmed that IARC remains active in the field of exposomics particularly through metabolomics approaches and stated that the long-term stability of alcohol metabolites in blood samples stored for more than 30 years is not yet known.

40. Regarding the technical fields of exposomics and metabolomics in relation to the above projects, the IARC branch representative confirmed that these, partly overlapping techniques are used in conjunction and that the technical development in multiomics is being carefully monitored and are being leveraged, for example by coupling mutational signatures, epigenomics and proteomics.

41. The SC noted the measurements of mycotoxins in breast milk and urinary cytology, as screening methods for detection of breast and bladder cancer, and emphasized the importance of also focussing on squamous cell carcinoma of the bladder as it remains a major health issue in some countries.

42. The SC noted the challenge to translate technically advanced techniques to LMICs in the contact of TERT mutation detection versus cytology. In the context of being a WHO agency, challenges and additional considerations with licensing and patenting were discussed as routes for clinical implementation.

43. The SC recommended to monitor the development of techniques mentioned above to safeguard routes to clinical and policy implementation of these very promising projects

REGULAR UPDATE ON IRCC INITIATIVE FOR RESILIENCE IN CANCER CONTROL (Document SC/62/6**)**

44. Isabelle Soerjomataram, CSU Deputy Branch Head, presented an update on the research activities of the IARC Initiative for Resilience in Cancer Control (IARC IRCC) (formerly, the IARC-C19 or the COVID-19 and Cancer Initiative).

45. The SC noted that the updated major aims of the initiative cover three overarching workstreams: i) monitoring cancer incidence, survival, and mortality during and after crises; ii) investigating causes of disruptions to cancer services and context-specific mitigation strategies; and iii) providing tools to model the impact of such disruptions on cancer outcomes to strengthen resilience in cancer control.

46. The SC noted that the IARC IRCC also launched its dedicated website which describes the scope of the initiative, as well as providing a centralized source of information and updates about ongoing work. With an estimated economic impact of USD 224 billion in 2025 and over 1.5 million people with cancer—roughly 1 in 12—living in crisis-affected environments, the initiative is essential for IARC to understand how crises disrupt cancer outcomes and to develop strategies that strengthen resilience in cancer control globally.

47. The SC inquired about the magnitude of excess mortality during crises. It was noted that the impact on cancer mortality is particularly pronounced in countries facing multiple, overlapping crises. However, mortality among cancer patients can be mitigated with appropriate interventions.

48. The SC asked whether cancer patients are disproportionately affected. It was highlighted that cancer care is inherently complex, making patients more vulnerable during crises.

49. The SC suggested exploring whether IARC could develop intervention packages aimed at mitigating the impact of crises on cancer outcomes.

UPDATE ON DATA SCIENCE ACTIVITIES (Document SC/62/7)

50. The Secretariat was requested to update SC and GC on its data science activities on a regular basis, including bioinformatics, biostatistics, and (supporting these areas) Information Technology (IT).

51. The presentation of this update was made available on the INDICO platform and Teams. Vivian Viallon presented this item on behalf of the IARC Data Science Steering Committee (DSSC) that oversees the data science activities, including bioinformatics, biostatistics, computational biology, and scientific information technology (SIT). The DSSC is composed of three working groups (WG): the bioinformatics WG, the biostatistics WG, and the IT WG.

52. The SC noted that the extension of the SIT platform to external collaborators remains in a pilot phase, and that two dedicated working groups were established to improve the operational framework, i) developing a financial sustainability model to be implemented, and ii) defining the requirements for a centralized "back-office" management tool to streamline contracts, user management, and software licensing.

53. The SC noted the update, looked forward to future such updates on a biennial basis and made the following observations/recommendations:

- The SC noted the significant progress made in bioinformatics and digital pathology, and the substantial efforts devoted to improving reproducibility and standardization.
- The SC also noted the many outstanding examples of how data science supported core IARC projects, not least by the accommodation of machine learning methods in the IARC data science portfolio.
- The progress in federated analyses was noted and applauded. The importance to collaborate in data sharing/federated learning methods with other academic actors was stressed
- The SC recommended that because of limitations of federated learning other ways of data sharing should also be explored.

UPDATE ON IARC@60 ANNIVERSARY

54. Clément Chauvet, Strategic Engagement and Resource Mobilization officer, presented this item and especially the IARC@60 Conference to be held in Lyon from 19 to 21 May 2026 under the title "Cancer Research into Action". A large number of participants have registered and more than 1200 abstracts submitted.

55. The SC noted the details regarding the registrations and content of the different sessions proposed and expressed its appreciation to the Secretariat for the organization of this major event. The importance of this conference under current times of financial distress was noted. It was stressed that both social and traditional media channels should be used for communication and to invite key stakeholders. The Secretariat responded reassuringly to these points.

SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL FEEDBACK ON E-POSTERS

56. Scientists in all Branches and in the Laboratory Support, Biobanking and Services were invited to prepare ePosters to showcase and present their work to SC members during a dedicated session, in the format: 5 minutes presentation, 5 minutes questions, 5 minutes feedback by SC members per ePoster. The ePosters presented within each Branch were assessed by 3-4 SC members and observers, based on different criteria:

- Quality of presentation, including scientific background, presentation of results, discussion and conclusion, quality and originality of slides
- Alignment with the IARC MTS (2021–2025) and benefit for IARC
- Potential impact of the research proposal on the unlet needs in cancer control
- International collaboration

Each detailed evaluation was shared with the respective Branch.

General comments and recommendation

Overall, the SC made the following comments:

- Clear overview by Branch Heads.
- All Branches demonstrated high scientific quality, strong alignment with the IARC MTS 2021–2025, and a clear commitment to impactful, policy-relevant cancer research.
- Presentations across all Branches ranged from excellent to outstanding, with well-articulated scientific rationales, clear result summaries, and thoughtful discussion of methodological considerations.
- All Branches showed strong international collaboration (including the WHO), meaningful engagement with early-career researchers, and a forward-looking perspective on future analytical needs.

- High relevance of the work for public health and policy, including primary prevention, early detection, and international capacity building.
- Taken together, the poster sessions reflect a vibrant, collaborative, and methodologically rigorous scientific environment.

57. The SC congratulated the young scientists for their presentations.

Suggestion for next year poster session (SC/63)

- Given that the 63rd Session of the SC (SC/63) will be held remotely, the Secretariat suggests that flash-talks (recorded videos) be held online, early December 2026, as was done in the past for sessions of the SC held fully remotely.
- Overview of branch activities by Branch Heads (5-min video)
- 5 flash-talks per branch.

58. The SC appreciated the exercise and thanked the Director and her staff on the very informative ePoster session.

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS: "CO-CREATING THE FUTURE OF CANCER RESEARCH"

59. SC members were invited to review abstracts and registered to the sessions they were willing to join within the two following tracks:

- Track #1:
    1. Regional needs for cancer research in the MENA region
    2. Planetary Health
- Track #2:
    1. Lung cancer prevention and screening
    2. Early-onset colorectal cancers

60. The SC appreciated the exercise and thanked the Director and her staff on the very interactive discussion.

PRESENTATION OF THE MEDIUM-TERM STRATEGY (MTS) (2026–2030), INCLUDING THE PRIORITIZATION SCENARIO

61. The Director gave key messages for presenting IARC's MTS 2026–2030, explaining why the new strategy matters, how it was developed, and how it will be implemented and prioritized, as summarized below.

- **Goal:** Maximize global impact on cancer prevention amid rapid global shifts.
- **Built through:** Evidence-based, highly consultative process across IARC, WHO, SC, GC.
- **IARC's role:** Unique global authority for independent evidence, global data, standards.
- **Four Pillars:** Data • Discovery • Implementation • Knowledge.
- **Cross-cutting priorities:** WHO initiatives • Lung health • Planetary health.
- **Five Enablers (Bridges):** Synergies • Operational excellence • Governance • Partnerships • Science for society.
- **Shift to outcomes-level targets:** Policy relevance • Equity • Future preparedness.
- **100% commitments by 2030:** Policy-relevant outputs • Equity by design • Future-ready science.
- **Prioritization framework:** Transparent, governance-endorsed; five tiers guide strategic focus.
- **Result:** Protect core mission, guide investment, enable modernization without disruptive cuts.

62. The SC asked whether evaluation could go beyond a standard performance assessment, given the complexity of the landscape, and include broader indicators. The Director agreed and noted that the Monitoring and Evaluation framework is still under development. She explained that IARC is moving progressively toward a more mixed-methods approach: earlier frameworks were largely quantitative; the 2021–2025 framework combined quantitative and qualitative elements; and the new framework will further strengthen qualitative analysis across all three commitments and across outputs and outcomes, while retaining quantitative indicators where appropriate.

63. The SC asked for more detail on the implementation plan, the scoring framework, and the feedback loop for short-, medium-, and long-term impact. The Director indicated that once the MTS is endorsed, a detailed evaluation framework, including indicators, targets, and a clear timeline, will be developed and presented; annual KPI reporting will support monitoring and iterative improvement.

64. The SC asked how IARC expects to maximize policy uptake at country level. The Director reaffirmed that IARC is not a normative body: this role lies with WHO and Participating States and explained that stronger, more structured collaboration with them is the main pathway through which IARC research will translate into policy impact. She added that the ten IARC Flagships are key vehicles to operationalize, demonstrate, and track these research-to-policy pathways.

65. The SC noted the distinction between immediate and medium-term impact and asked when tangible impact is expected. It also observed that, although lung cancer is appropriately prioritized given that its determinants are well established, the determinants of pancreatic cancer remain less clearly understood. The Director acknowledged this comment and explained the rationale for prioritizing specific cancers.

66. She further clarified that the work conducted across the Pillars was reviewed with a focus on areas where the greatest measurable impact could be achieved in order to further promote equity.

67. The SC emphasized the need of equity in efforts against cancer, particularly in LMICs, as those countries are projected to bear the greatest share of the global cancer burden. The Director acknowledged this point and reaffirmed the Agency's commitment to addressing inequities in cancer prevention and care.

68. The SC asked whether there is room within the MTS to accommodate emerging research questions (Tier 5). The Director explained that for Tier 4 projects there will be less investments and many will be phased out to free up resources that will be strategically allocated to the highest-priority projects, recognizing that current resources are insufficient to expand the overall research portfolio.

69. The SC acknowledges that while IARC may not have the required expertise and resources, and bearing in mind IARC's mandate to make the results of its research widely available and accessible, it may at times face opportunities with intellectual property potential for non-profit public goods. The SC acknowledges that IARC and its Director will likely require SC and GC support and guidance, and potentially a governance framework (ethical, legal, etc.) to navigate these opportunities.

70. The SC congratulated the Director on a well-prepared MTS.

SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP OF THE REVIEW PANELS IN 2027

71. In 2027, the CSU branch, Head: Freddie Bray and the ENV branch, Head: Joachim Schüz, will be reviewed.

72. Dr Roberta De Angelis, Professors Prashant Mathur and Adam Elshaug will participate in the CSU Review Panel. It was agreed that Professors Prashant Mathur and Adam Elshaug will co-chair the Review Panel.

73. Professors Henrik Hjalgrim, Rayjean Hung and André Karch will participate in the ENV Review Panel. It was agreed that Rayjean Hung will chair the Review Panel.

74. The external members will be chosen by the Secretariat in consultation with the Chairs of the Review Panels and the SC Chair.

75. The reviews will take place remotely (five half days) respectively on 11–15 January 2027 for ENV and on 18–22 January 2027 for CSU.

DIRECTOR'S RESPONSE TO THE EPIGENOMICS AND MECHANISMS (EGM) BRANCH REVIEW, HELD REMOTELY IN JANUARY 2025

76. The details of action taken following the EGM branch review were discussed.

77. The Director noted with great satisfaction EGM's outstanding overall evaluation.

78. The SC made the following observations and noted the Director's response to the EGM Review:

- Epigenetics is recognized as a critical research area, providing insights into mechanistic pathways.
- The SC inquired whether the EGM personnel are funded through the Regular Budget (RB). The Director clarified that some positions are on RB, while others are funded through Extra-Budgetary (EB) resources.
- The SC asked whether technical support is sufficient to sustain former EGM epigenetics projects. The Director explained that:
  - One lab assistant on RB will continue supporting the EGM programme on childhood cancer (within ENV). Further support will be provided by EB grants.
  - One lab assistant on RB will continue supporting the EGM programme on infections and cancer (within the Early Detection, Prevention and Infections (EPR) Branch).
  - One lab assistant previously funded on RB has been moved to an EB position due to budgetary constraints.

79. The SC expressed satisfaction with the Director's responses and appreciated the efforts of the EGM branch to address the recommendations.

DIRECTOR'S RESPONSE TO THE EARLY DETECTION, PREVENTION AND INFECTIONS (EPR) BRANCH REVIEW, HELD REMOTELY IN JANUARY 2025

80. The details of action taken following the EPR branch review were discussed.

81. The Director noted with great satisfaction EPR's outstanding overall evaluation.

82. The SC made the following observations and noted the Director's response to the EPR Review:

- The SC queried on background of the reorganization of the Risk Assessment and Early Detection (RED) Team to EPR and the Director explained that this additional clinical expertise was needed by the EPR Branch, fitting in an environment dedicated to screening and hopefully enabling its capacity for attracting external funding.
- The SC asked about the impact of the review report and the Director clarified that each sentence is taken into account.
- A question was raised regarding the implementation project for health impact of vaccination in LMICs. Branch Heads explained how the incentives of government actors are stimulated by involvement early on by IARC and the WHO.

83. The SC appreciated the efforts of the EPR branch to address the recommendations.

SCIENTIFIC REPORT OF THE GENOMIC EPIDEMIOLOGY (GEM) BRANCH REVIEW AND DISCUSSION (Document SC/62/WP2)

84. The Scientific Report of the GEM Review was presented by Dr André Karch, Chair of the Review Panel (RP).

85. The external experts and SC members of the RP were thanked for their valuable contributions.

86. The RP noted the following concerning the GEM Branch:

Assessment of GEM's scientific quality (using the six-point scale below)[1]

- GEM's past performance: Outstanding
- GEM's future plans: Outstanding

Assessment of the relevance of GEM's work to the mission of IARC[2]

- GEM's past performance: Perfect fit
- GEM's future plans: Perfect fit

87. Overall recommendations for GEM Programme:

88. The Review Panel recommends continued support for GEM at the highest level possible due to its cutting-edge research and vital contributions to IARC's MTS. This means maintaining strong institutional backing, stable funding, and strategic alignment with IARC's global cancer mission. Further reductions in core support would risk erosion of scientific, technical and infrastructure capacity that cannot be easily replaced through external, cyclical funding, with direct implications on IARC's ability to deliver on its mission.

89. GEM is a world-leading research group whose scientific excellence is symbiotic with IARC's convening power and makes a core contribution to the agency's mission, enhancing its institutional credibility. Its role is complementary to other branches and spans across the IARC pillars, and it leverages and expands international engagement, particularly with LMICs, through scientific collaborations, high-quality training and strong networks. Importantly, GEM's staff are highly committed to the work they do and to IARC's mission.

90. At the same time, GEM operates as a highly ambitious academic unit outside a traditional higher-education environment, where academic roles and progression are less clearly defined, and with a portfolio that stretches staffing capacity and regular budget resources, highlighting the importance of sustaining core

[1] The following classification will be used:

O (Outstanding)	Outstanding work of the highest international calibre, pioneering and trend-setting. This score will only be applied to exceptional programmes of work, not because a programme was particularly topical or in an under-researched area.
F (Forefront)	Work that is at the forefront internationally and that, it is considered, will have an important and substantial impact.
C (Competitive)	Work that is internationally competitive, of high quality, and will make a significant contribution.
NC (Not competitive)	Work that is not considered competitive or high quality and is unlikely to make a significant contribution.
U (Unsatisfactory)	Unsatisfactory or poor quality work.
P (Preliminary)	Work that is too preliminary to rate, which should be continued and monitored/reassessed by the Director in the short- to medium-term with subsequent update to the Scientific Council.

[2] The following classification will be used:

1: **Perfect fit**: This type of work is ideally suited to the mission of IARC.
2: **Good fit**: This type of work is suited to the mission of the Agency.
3: **Questionable fit**: Uncertain.
4: **Poor fit**: Work which should not continue.

Scores should be accompanied by justifications and recommendations for action, where necessary.

funding and supporting the retention and development of the next generation of senior scientific leaders. Our commendations and recommendations reflect this overall assessment.

91. **Commendations:**

- **Scientific excellence** — cutting-edge genomics integrated with epidemiology
- **Impact** – driving our understanding of cancer causes and mechanisms, informing strategies for prevention and early detection, contributing to classification of cancers and definition of carcinogens and carcinogenic processes.
- **Global inclusivity** — focus on diverse populations and LMICs
- **Capacity building** — training that broadens global research expertise
- **Open science & robust data sharing** — ethically structured and regulatory compliant
- **Sustainable resourcing & partnerships** — diversified support through external funding and collaborations
- **Staff belonging –** staff at all levels reported loyalty to the institution and the noble work undertaken by IARC.
- **Citizenship -** ethos of collegiality across all staff grades and levels in operations that serve the agency.
- **Strong leadership –** at senior and mid-levels, and upward scientific trajectories of mid-level and more junior branch members

92. **Recommendations**

Core funding, scale and sustainability

- Consider the potential agency-level jeopardy of restricting core budget related to GEM Branch activity. Maintaining scientific excellence in this area is key for delivering IARC's mission and is predicated upon centralized support, continuity of scientific and technical expertise, and core infrastructure including biorepository and data management.
- The panel recognizes that further growth through external funding invariably requires additional core expenses, and this can exceed the agency's fiscal support capabilities. When planning future research commitments (or periodically), consider the optimal composition (including across grades and levels) and size of the branch and focus work programs to balance individual career progression with agency aligned scientific output and impact.
- At agency and branch level, consider mechanisms that increase role agility and promote career progression opportunities. For example, consider developing a more structured professional development or career framework programme, generating guidelines for term, managing career development expectations, and enabling career progression of early career staff.

Integration and institutional agreement

- Keep up the process of integrating the work of the merged groups towards an integrative molecular epidemiology unit which is key to the mission of IARC
- Foster further cross-branch and cross-pillar collaboration. Continue strengthening cross-disciplinary integration and coordination, ensuring strong communication, shared infrastructure, harmonized workflows, and unified research priorities.

Scientific portfolio and innovation balance

- Keep the very good balance between mature and high-risk projects, the excellent environment with multidisciplinary staff and the diverse skill portfolio, which are all necessary for integrative epidemiology and central for fueling future innovative and impactful initiatives.
- Continue to leverage the power of large-scale networks, international training, and global collaborations.

People, workload and career development

- Improve communication and transparency at agency and branch level. Within GEM, particularly with the ECVS and the General Service (GS) cohorts - perhaps regarding standing items at regular scheduled meetings, and visibility of existing personnel and career development guidelines and resources (including for example, mentoring opportunities, annual review format and avenues for raising issues beyond the immediate supervisory framework), with senior level re-enforcement of their value. At agency level – transparency around prioritization of internal budgets across pillars, project tier criteria and rationale for, and details of, funding application approval-processes.
- Consider workload models so as to ensure the expectations of people's time commitment, and the nature of their duties is clear, including when submitting applications, for example for GS staff. For greater efficiency and clarity of roles, formalize additional parts of the induction and review processes for branch members, including technical training such as for working on the computing cluster.
- Consider extending the range of reward and recognition initiatives for all staff categories, for example regarding corresponding authorship, visibility for external presentations or work package leadership.
- Consider appropriate forum(s) for discussion and training about building and extending leadership skills among all staff.

93. The overall recommendations for the GEM Branch were discussed and approved.

94. The Branch Head and Deputy Branch Head appreciated the in-depth and high-quality discussion during the Review, describing it as a very positive and encouraging experience. A retreat is planned with the Branch to share ideas and strengthen collaboration.

95. The Director expressed appreciation for the report and thanked the RP. She indicated that the Secretariat is exploring options to address one key challenge faced by mid-career scientists who have limited opportunities to advance to senior positions due to budgetary constraints, creating frustration for this category of personnel.

96. SC comments on the Review Report:

- Different solutions to budget constraints to the career system were discussed, including novel venues to external funding and the encouragement of junior scientists to apply for grants such as those from the European Research Council (ERC). Out-of-the box solutions may be necessary to retain excellent talent.
- The issue of whether the epigenetics (former EGM) team could have been hosted by the GEM genomics unit was discussed and the Director explained why a different decision was made; also GEM branch leadership ensured that collaboration with the epigenetics team is ongoing.
- The SC stressed the importance of not diminishing core funding from the RB to the GEM Branch as a result of success in obtaining external funding.
- The SC commended the positive example of leadership and community found in GEM which should be regarded as a flagship for the ethos at IARC.
- The RP stressed how the unique global reputation and network of IARC, made the excellent science performed by GEM possible.

97. The GEM Branch Review Panel Report was formally accepted by the SC.

ELECTION OF CHAIRPERSON AND VICE-CHAIRPERSON FOR THE 63RD SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL IN 2027

98. Dr Young-Woo Kim was elected Chairperson.

99. Dr Roberta De Angelis was elected Vice-Chairperson.

DATE OF NEXT SESSION

100. The 63rd session of the SC will take place on Wednesday 10, Thursday 11 and Friday 12 February 2027 and will be fully remote. Considering budget constraints, scientific reviews will be fully remote until further notice while sessions of IARC SC will be held in-person every other year. Proposing additional in-person meetings will depend on budget decisions taken by IARC GC.

ADOPTION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL REPORT (Document SC/62/9)

101. The report of the Sixty-second Session of the SC was adopted.

CLOSURE OF THE SESSION

102. The customary expressions of thanks were exchanged.

103. Dr Weiderpass thanked the outgoing members of the SC, Drs Satish Gopal (USA), Sirpa Heinävaara (Finland), Henrik Hjalgrim (Denmark), Valery Lemmens (Netherlands) and Ben Spycher (Switzerland).

ANNEX 1 – LIST OF ACRONYMS OF IARC PILLARS AND BRANCHES

ACRONYM	PILLAR / BRANCH
	Pillar I: DATA FOR ACTION
CSU	Cancer Surveillance Branch
	Pillar II: UNDERSTANDING THE CAUSES
GEM	Genomic Epidemiology Branch
NME	Nutrition and Metabolism Branch
	Pillar III: FROM UNDERSTANDING TO PREVENTION
ENV	Environment and Lifestyle Epidemiology Branch
EPR	Early Detection, Prevention and Infections Branch
	Pillar IV: KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION
ESC	Evidence Synthesis and Classification Branch
LCB	Learning and Capacity Building Branch
LSB	Laboratory Support, Biobanking and Services
	DIRECTOR'S OFFICE
SSR	**SERVICES TO SCIENCE AND RESEARCH**

ANNEX 2 – DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Declarations of interest were provided by all Scientific Council members.

Upon review by the Secretariat none of the declared interests were considered to represent a potential or significant conflict of interest with respect to the content of the meeting.