

# Response to the Recommendations from the Environment and Lifestyle Epidemiology Branch Review

Investigating environmental, lifestyle,  
occupational and radiation-related causes  
of cancer in human populations

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*Scientific Council 59, item 6,  
8 February 2023*



# ENV's Five Objectives



1: To investigate environmental and lifestyle causes of cancer



2: To study the epidemiology of cancers associated with known and suspected carcinogens in the occupational setting



3: To study the epidemiology of cancers associated with exposure to low doses of ionising radiation and to non-ionising radiation (electromagnetic fields)



4: To identify barriers to improving survival of common curable cancers in LMICs



5: To enable cancer prevention and control through research evidence translation

# Recommendation #1: Scope of Work

## Recommendation

The Review Panel is impressed by the work being initiated and conducted in *LMICs* and recommends to at least keep this work at the current level of engagement but preferably *increase it and expand it* to other countries, as it fills major *gaps in knowledge* and fosters *capacity building* in these countries. IARC's recognized *impartiality positions* it ideally to conduct such research. This work requires that IARC personnel, both PIs and their team, *can be regularly on site* in the field, including for pilot and feasibility studies.

## Our Assessment

## Our Response

# Recommendation #1: Scope of Work

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## Our Assessment

We agree with all of the considerations of the Review Panel, including with the expansion of our developed methodologies to other LMIC to which they apply. We agree that capacity building and fieldwork require regular mutual visits.

## Our Response

# Recommendation #1: Scope of Work

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## Our Assessment

We agree with all of considerations of the Review Panel, including with the expansion of our developed methodologies to other LMIC to which it applies and with that capacity building and fieldwork requires regular mutual visits.

## Our Response

- Methods developed in one setting are applied to other settings where relevant (e.g. hot beverage measurement developed for East African setting was applied in China and now also India)
- Study protocols were adapted to other settings (e.g. Breast cancer survival study in Sub-Saharan Africa applied in WHO/EURO initiative in Eastern Europe)
- World Code against Cancer Framework was launched in 2022
- Non-Staff RB 2024/25 has been assigned as seed money for stepwise expansions

## Recommendation #2: Scope of Work

### Recommendation

To further respond to IARC's MTS 2021-2025, ENV could be encouraged to broaden Objective 2 to also include the study of *exposures to potentially important new causes of cancer*. For instance, it may be that LMIC economies involve exposure circumstances not previously encountered (ex. certain chemical mixtures, interaction with environmental heat or other agents in e-waste depositories, etc.), which would go beyond the current focus by ENV on known and suspected carcinogens. The Review Panel discussed the possibility of developing a *priority plan* within this objective but recognizes that competing demands from on-going projects renders this difficult.

### Our Assessment

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## Our Assessment

We appreciate those considerations of the Review Panel, which are indeed part of the ENV future strategy. Objective 2 is mainly supported through extra-budgetary funding.

## Our Response

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## Our Assessment

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## Our Response

- Feasibility study protocols and collaborative networks for human exposure surveys in LMIC to emerging or unique exposure circumstances are underway (including e-Waste, pesticides, uranium, unique occupational exposures (focus on petroleum industry) as the four priorities)
- Priorities based on scientific impact (in terms of anticipated subsequent cancer prevention) and how realistic it is to achieve the goals (considering local political circumstances and availability of resources)



# Recommendation #3: Scope of Work

## Recommendation

IARC is in a prime position to also *advance dissemination projects* not only in HICs and MICs, but particularly in *LICs*, which often do not have the financial and scientific capacities to advance this. The Review Panel encourages ENV to lead and support dissemination efforts in LMICs and help building up capacity in these countries.

## Our Assessment

## Our Response

# Recommendation #3: Scope of Work

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## Our Assessment

We agree that dissemination is important and in particular Objective #5 has a large dissemination component.

## Our Response

# Recommendation #3: Scope of Work

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## Our Assessment

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## Our Response

- E-Learning has become an essential component of all our activities on cancer prevention recommendations (Objective #5)
- In addition, together with our collaborators, we provided the contents for an E-Learning Module in environmental and occupational cancer
- With the new edition of “Cancer Epidemiology: Principles and Methods” ENV contributes strongly to the education of the next generation of cancer epidemiologists
- Results from studies in Africa always have dissemination elements to ensure they reach the respective responsible stakeholders

# Recommendation #4: Scope of Work

## Recommendation

The Review Panel encourages ENV *to prolong its policy to focus on areas where ENV can make a difference*, either because an independent organization is needed or because of ENV's experience in work in LMICs.

## Our Assessment

## Our Response

# Recommendation #4: Scope of Work

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## Our Assessment

We are very thankful for this encouragement by the Review Panel as this has been our main decision-making criterion in setting project priorities.

## Our Response

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## Our Assessment

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## Our Response

We continue to apply this focus.

This is also related to recommendation #1 as our work in LMIC clearly includes this focus.

# Recommendation #5: Resources

## Recommendation

The Review Panel recommends maintaining critical mass in the area of *radiation research* and ensure sufficient *training possibilities* for international scientists. As nuclear power is gaining in importance due to the climate crisis, it is essential to maintain sufficient expertise globally

## Our Assessment

## Our Response

# Recommendation #5: Resources

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The Review Panel recommends maintaining critical mass in the area of radiation research and ensure sufficient training possibilities for international scientists. As nuclear power is gaining in importance due to the climate crisis, it is essential to maintain sufficient expertise globally

## Our Assessment

We agree with the considerations of the Review Panel. Capacity in radiation and cancer has always been a strength of the Agency, given the IARC impartiality in assessing cancer consequences of radiation accidents or nuclear testing or nuclear waste dumping.

## Our Response



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## Our Assessment

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## Our Response

- We will maintain the assignment of regular budget resources stable (one professional position dedicated to ionizing radiation)
- We provide training options in radiation epidemiology in ENV through our postdoctoral fellowship opportunities
- We continue to collaborate with the key international organisations responsible for radiation protection, especially UNSCEAR and ICRP, and closely work together with the WHO Radiation Team

# Recommendation #6: Resources

## Recommendation

Given the work being planned, the Review Panel believes that IARC should consider funding a position in *exposure assessment*, in particular with a focus on LMICs-specific exposure circumstances. The Review Panel felt that it could be of value to conduct exposure assessment now of exposures considered of high risk in LMICs in order to be able to conduct cancer studies in the future.

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## Our Assessment

We appreciate the recommendation of the Review Panel and indeed such a position would benefit from a longer term perspective.

## Our Response

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## Our Assessment

We appreciate the recommendation of the Review Panel and indeed such a position would benefit from a longer term perspective.

## Our Response

Due to lack of additional regular budget resources, no such position can be funded by IARC presently. In the meantime, we will continue our current and so far successful approach of utilizing cost-recovery/non-staff RB funds to initiate pilot studies, which subsequently attract competitive external funding.

At present in ENV, we have combined smaller extra-budgetary resources to create a 2-year junior professional position to be supported by the entire team with the aim to build up such a program, that also aligns perfectly with recommendation #1 on the expansion of our work in LMIC.

# Recommendation #7: Resources

## Recommendation

ENV's objective 5 is very important and timely and is an IARC-wide priority. However, the funding of this objective depends completely on external sources. Therefore, the Review Panel recommends that internal funding from the regular budget be allocated to this important objective to provide a stable basis.

## Our Assessment

## Our Response

# Recommendation #7: Resources

## Recommendation

ENV's objective 5 is very important and timely and is an IARC-wide priority. However, the funding of this objective depends completely on external sources. Therefore, the Review Panel recommends that internal funding from the regular budget be allocated to this important objective to provide a stable basis.

## Our Assessment

We agree this is a very critical recommendation. With the World Code against Cancer Framework there is a commitment of maintenance while extra-budgetary resources can mostly be obtained only for new deliverables. This has created challenges in the past.

## Our Response

# Recommendation #7: Resources

## Recommendation

ENV's objective 5 is very important and timely and is an IARC-wide priority. However, the funding of this objective depends completely on external sources. Therefore, the Review Panel recommends that internal funding from the regular budget be allocated to this important objective to provide a stable basis.

## Our Assessment

We agree this is a very critical recommendation. With the World Code against Cancer Framework there is a commitment of maintenance while extra-budgetary resources can mostly be obtained only for new deliverables. This has created challenges in the past.

## Our Response

Due to lack of additional regular budget resources no new position can be created by IARC at the moment.

We have identified possibilities within ENV to internally change assignments so that the professional position for the World Codes can to a large part be supported by the ENV regular budget assignment. Instead, previous assignment of Data Analyst resources will have to be obtained from extra-budgetary funding, but this will be more project-related based on the immediate needs.

# IARC-related Recommendations

## Recommendations

The Review Panel expressed concerns over the increasing *administrative burden and bureaucracy* associated notably with the creation and maintenance of consortia activities, which are at the core of ENV's research. It recommends exploring whether more administrative tasks could be taken over by technical staff to leave more room for scientific work. However, the Review Panel is well aware of the fact that the Branch's administrative staff has its limits.

The Review Panel notes that the *European General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)* (or its interpretation by specific countries) is impeding sharing of raw data within scientific collaborations. This is not a problem specific for the Branch or even IARC but requires due attention.

## Our Response



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## Our Response

Reducing the administrative burden and bureaucracy for scientific staff is ongoing work with development of more automatized tools. However this is partly beyond the control of IARC given it often comes from donors such as the very comprehensive documentation requirements of EU funded projects.

A Data Protection Officer position at IARC has been established to deal with GDPR and other data protection matters.