

Newsletter

Issue 5. November 2023



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Approaching the last year of the project: Letter from the project coordinator

EU-Africa PerMed is approaching its last year, with relevant activities to be finished and launched, being the most relevant one the preparation of the **EU-Africa PerMed Action Plan**. Important findings from the work done need to be highlighted and taken into account when developing policies and actions to advance Personalised Medicine (PM) in African countries and supporting and strengthening international collaborations, including those with Europe.



EU-Africa PerMed partners in the Conference on Personalised Medicine organised by the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, along with members of the European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP).

Africa is ready for Personalised Medicine. Many African countries are already developing genomics programs and are interested in PM, but there are important differences among countries and regions that need to be considered: not all countries are in the same level of maturity for PM and there is not a one-way approach for all when it comes to international collaboration. There is also a need to strengthen cross-country and regional collaborations on PM.

EU-Africa PerMed is already working on the preparation of the **Action Plan**, a relevant and major direct outcome of our project that will include a set of recommendations for actions at policy and research level, for facilitating, fostering and promoting the collaboration of Africa and Europe in Personalised Medicine. These actions will be design using a two-way approach: top-down, so that they comply with the already existing policy agendas that are setting the context for STI collaboration between Europe and Africa, such as the [AU-EU Innovation Agenda](#); bottom-up, by defining areas for collaboration of mutual interest from both regions and specific topics and models for collaboration, based on the findings from the stakeholder engagement activities carried out by **EU-Africa PerMed**.

The project continues with the effort of incorporating more African organizations to the International Consortium for Personalised Medicine ([ICPerMed](#)). Together with the South African Medical Research Council ICPerMed has, since July 2023, another African partner as full member: The Academy of Scientific Research and Technology (ASRT) from Egypt. More international collaboration is also foreseen in the recently launched European Partnership for Personalised Medicine ([EPPerMed](#)), which opens another window of opportunity to enlarge the PM community.

Training and capacity building activities are still an important task of our project, with a second summer school planned for May 2024 in Kenya, focused on Implementation of Personalised Medicine Research. It will be an opportunity to train participants with knowledge and skills to set up their research under the scope of PM Implementation and second, to support the creation of research networks.

EU-Africa PerMed will continue its effort towards fostering a stronger AU-EU collaboration in PM with the aim of achieving our major goal of shortening the existing health disparities between regions and countries, by incorporating African countries in the global PM agenda. Our objective is that all countries can benefit from the opportunities that these new technologies offer to address global health challenges and improve the health of the people across the world.

Thank you all for following and supporting us in this mission. Merci à tous de nous suivre et de nous soutenir dans cette mission.



Erika Sela, EU-Africa PerMed Coordinator

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Project highlights

The Academy of Scientific Research and Technology from Egypt joins ICPeMed

On July 2023, the **Academy of Scientific Research and Technology (ASRT)** has become a full member of the **International Consortium for Personalised Medicine (ICPeMed)**. It is the first organisation from **Egypt** to join ICPeMed, and the second from Africa, after the South Africa Medical Research (SAMRC) joining last year.



An Egyptian institution, the Academy of Scientific Research and Technology, joins ICPeMed

ICPeMed was formally established in 2016, with the support of the European Commission (EC). It brings around fifty European and international partners representing ministries, funding agencies and the EC. Together, they work on coordinating and fostering research to develop and evaluate personalised medicine approaches. ICPeMed seeks to contribute to the reasonable and fair implementation of personalised medicine approaches into the health systems for the benefit of patients, citizens, and society as a whole.

The **Academy of Scientific Research and Technology** is a national coordinating body and funding organisation for research and innovation in Egypt. It serves as Egypt's national house of expertise, and national think tank in the field of Science, Technology, and Innovation. Egypt is shifting its approach from "one-size-fits all" to more personalised healthcare via advancing the practice of medical genetics and genomics across the country.

ASRT joining ICPeMed is a big step towards ICPeMed's internationalisation, which contributes to align research and funding activities beyond national borders. It is also a significant step for the EU-Africa PerMed project, which supports the integration of African organisations in ICPeMed as one of its main objectives, in order to contribute to a successful implementation of Personalised Medicine in the global context, shortening existing health disparities between countries and regions and facilitating the access of African countries to new tools and technologies that have the potential to make healthcare more efficient and equitable.

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EU-Africa PerMed has participated in the Conference on Personalised Medicine organised by the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union

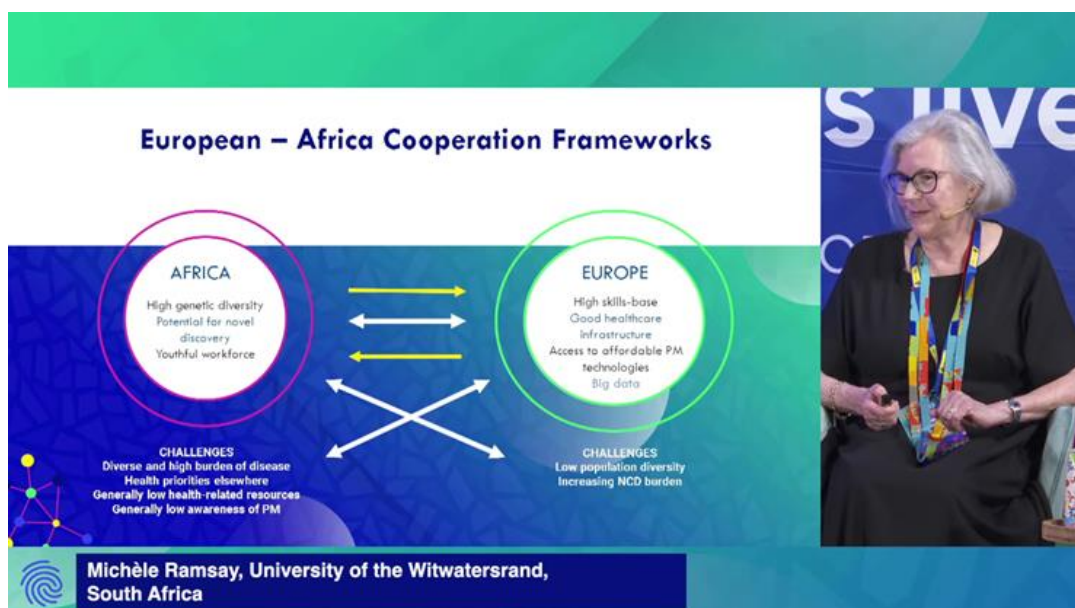
As part of the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, a **High-Level Conference on Personalised Medicine** was held in order to reflect on its influence on the evolution of healthcare to improve people's lives. This event took place on **4-5 October 2023 in Valencia, Spain** and brought together a large number of high-level experts and stakeholders with different backgrounds and expertise, from different types of organisations and countries, including from outside Europe, to discuss challenges and opportunities in genomic-based personalised medicine, as well as aspects not covered by research and funding.

EU-Africa PerMed has taken an active part in this important conference. Firstly, two members of our project participated as experts at the roundtable entitled "Best practices in international cooperation in the context of Personalised Medicine": **Rizwana Mia**, from the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) and partner of the project, and **Prof. Michèle Ramsay**, director of the Sydney Brenner Institute for Molecular Bioscience (SBIMB) of South Africa and member of the EU-Africa PerMed Advisory Board.



Group photo of the Roundtable on Best practices in international cooperation in the context of Personalised Medicine.

In this roundtable, **Prof. Michèle Ramsay** presented an overview of Personalised Medicine in Africa stating that genomics is on the rise in Africa, thus what is needed is to find effective ways to translate this into action. She discussed the Europe-Africa Cooperation Framework, highlighting what each continent can offer the other and potential challenges.



Afterwards, **Rizwana Mia** presented the EU-Africa PerMed project, gave a context of the Personalised Medicine Agenda in Africa and proposed a Regional Consortium model. Also, she outlined how cooperating with the EU can be beneficial.

EU-Africa PerMed

- ✓ The EU-Africa PerMed project seeks to facilitate and strengthen research and innovation collaboration between Europe and Africa in Personalised Medicine (PM), fostering joint projects and programmes as well as facilitating the participation of African organisations in the International Consortium for Personalised Medicine (ICPerMed).
- ✓ The project started in February 2021 and will run for 4 years.
- ✓ Funded by the European Commission - Horizon2020 Research and Innovation Programme

The EU-Africa PerMed Consortium

Rizwana Mia, South African Medical Research Council, South Africa

Monika Frenzel, our project partner from the French National Research Agency (ANR), was also a speaker at this event as a key component of both ICPerMed and EP PerMed as well. She presented in the session "The European Partnership for Personalised Medicine (EP PerMed) and its Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda", as partnership coordinator. As onsite attendees, **Erika Sela** and **Joaquin Guinea** from Innovatec (EU-Africa PerMed coordinators) and **Maria Jose Ruiz** from the Ministry of Health of Italy also participated in this High-Level meeting.

EU-Africa PerMed consortium members participating in the Conference had the opportunity to closely interact with many ongoing initiatives and programmes significant to the project work, including the EDCTP programme and relevant Personalised Medicine infrastructures, as well as participate in the official launching of the new European Partnership for Personalised Medicine (EP-PerMed).

Recording of the roundtable "Best practices in international cooperation in the context of Personalised Medicine" is available [here](#); also, are available all presentations of [day 1](#) and [day 2](#).

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EU-Africa PerMed has participated in the 2nd ICPerMed family meeting

The **second ICPerMed Family meeting** "Staying connected to shape the future for Personalised Medicine" took place virtually on **19 October 2023**. EU-Africa PerMed, as a member of the ICPerMed family, participated in this meeting which was aimed at sustaining continuous collaboration between ICPerMed and the related Coordinated and Support Actions (CSAs), as well as in the light of the European Partnership for Personalised Medicine (EP PerMed).

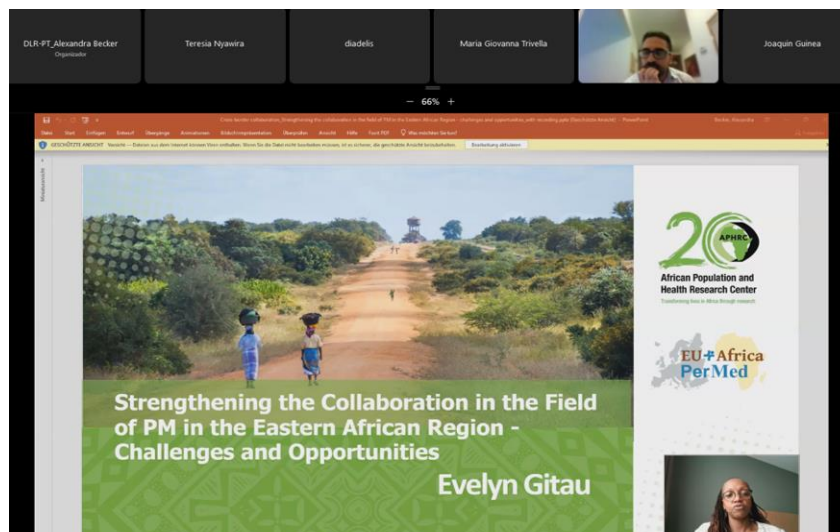
During the session "**International Perspectives on Personalised Medicine**", two EU-Africa PerMed partners presented on the topic of African-Europe collaboration in Personalised Medicine, focusing on East Africa with national and regional perspectives. On one side, **Teresia Nyawira** from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) gave a policy perspective, highlighting the status of Personalised Medicine in Kenya and the impact of African-European collaboration in the field of Personalised Medicine on the national strategy. She also shared her experience of participating in international collaborative projects.



Introduction

- Kenya does not have a centralized national Precision Medicine programme, but has supportive policy and institutional framework to enable adoption and implementation
- Relatively mature policy framework with ambitious objectives to harness benefits of a strong and well coordinated ST&I ecosystem
- Collaborations and networks have contributed to advancing knowledge about PM, created awareness among relevant stakeholders, and availed systems and practices for benchmarking

On the other side, **Evelyn Gitau** from the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) centered her presentation on the challenges and opportunities of cross-border collaboration in the field of Personalised Medicine in the Eastern Africa Region. She highlighted that Personalised Medicine can be an opportunity to advance disease surveillance, enabling early detection and response to regional health challenges.



[More information about ICPeMed Family](#)

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A successful AU-EU collaboration in Personalised Medicine Research: Interview with Julia H. Goedecke, OPTIMA project coordinator

OPTIMA, *Omics Approach for Personalised Prevention of Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus for African and European Populations*, is a primary personalised prevention project funded by the [ERA PerMed 5th Joint Transnational Call 2022](#).

The global prevalence of type 2 diabetes (T2D) is increasing, with sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) having the highest projected relative rates of increase in both impaired glucose tolerance (IGT) and T2D, collectively termed dysglycaemia. Notably, the pathophysiology of T2D differs by ethnicity and sex, but risk stratification and guidelines for the prevention of T2D are generic and rely on evidence from studies including predominately Europeans. Accordingly, the overarching goal of this project is to develop ethnic- and sex-specific clinically feasible and cost-effective algorithms for the early prediction of dysglycaemia to inform culturally acceptable preventative dietary modifications in European and SSA populations.

This project involves **South Africa, Sweden and Germany** in a transnational collaboration that enables the sharing and harmonisation of prospective cohort data from two African cohorts (South African and Ghanaian adults from the MASC and RODAM cohorts, respectively) as well as an European cohort (Swedish adults from the SCAPIS cohort).

With **OPTIMA** being an example of AU-EU collaboration in the field of personalised medicine research, EU-Africa PerMed has interviewed the OPTIMA coordinator, **Julia H. Goedecke** of the South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) and the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS Developmental Pathways for Health Research Unit, Dept. of Paediatrics, Faculty of Health Sciences), South Africa.



OPTIMA project members in the Kick-off meeting in January 2023

How did you start the collaboration with the researchers from Germany and Sweden that are partners in OPTIMA? Is this the first project you carry out together? Did the invitation to join come from Europe or you were part of the idea from the beginning? How did the idea to collaborate come up and from who?

I had seen the ERA PerMed call and attended the information session, and thought it was an amazing opportunity to follow-up our Middle-Aged Soweto Cohort (MASC), which is a cohort of ~1000 Black South African men and women on whom we have extensive phenotype data collected in 2017/8. We had recently published a study that used targeted proteomics to predict prevalent T2D in this cohort, but a validation using a longitudinal approach, and in another African cohort was required. This funding scheme provided the perfect opportunity to validate biomarkers of T2D in African populations, and to compare these to European populations. This is important as we had previously shown that the pathophysiology of T2D in African populations differs to that of their European counterparts. I immediately contacted my long-term collaborator, Prof Tommy Olsson of Umeå University in Sweden, who was integrally involved in the proteomics paper. He was very interested and put me in touch with Prof Rikard Landberg from Chalmers University of Technology, who is an expert in metabolomics and nutrition. This linked extremely well with the other partner who I invited to the consortium, Prof. Ina Danquah from the Heidelberg Institute of Global Health, Heidelberg University in Germany, who I met at a conference in Germany in 2016. Prof. Danquah is a nutrition scientist and her research focuses on characterizing dietary behaviors of sub-Saharan African populations under transition. She was previously involved with the RODAM (Research on Obesity and Diabetes among African Migrants) cohort, and through additional collaboration with Prof. Charles Agyemang of the University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands, we obtained access to the RODAM cohort, which is a cohort of Ghanaian men and women in various stages of the epidemiological transition. Based on the expertise of all partners, as well as members within the collaborating institutions, the research aims, objectives and workplans were refined and the application submitted.

How do you consider the collaboration between the AU and the EU to be added value in this project?

Collaboration between the AU and EU will provide a unique opportunity to identify and validate metabolites and proteins in prospective studies of incident T2D in two African cohorts (South Africa and Ghana) at various stages of the epidemiological transition and a European cohort (Sweden). The project would not be possible without the contribution of both unions, with the cohorts derived from both Africa and Europe, the OMICS analyses being undertaken in Europe, and joint contribution to the write up of the data.

What is the expected impact of the OPTIMA project?

The pathophysiology of T2D differs by ethnicity and sex, but risk stratification and guidelines for the prevention of T2D are generic and rely on evidence from studies including predominately Europeans. In

contrast to genetic risk factors, early biomarkers of disease aetiology are modifiable through pharmacological and/or lifestyle interventions. We propose to develop ethnic-specific algorithms that employ established clinical risk factors and biomarkers for the early detection of T2D in SSA and European populations. Outcome dependent, there is the potential to develop and commercialise simple targeted assays that may be incorporated into sex- and ethnic-specific algorithms for the early prediction of T2D. Dietary modifications constitute a safe and low-cost tool for the primary prevention of T2D. To enhance the societal uptake, lifestyle interventions need to be tailored to the pathogenetic features, cultural preferences, and economic situation of high-risk individuals (personalised prevention). The identified biomarkers will also be linked with dietary patterns to inform tailored, person-centred and culturally adapted dietary modifications. The cost-effectiveness of these proposed dietary modifications to prevent or delay the onset of T2D will be assessed in the different settings. In addition, perceptions regarding the early detection of T2D and willingness to participate in targeted nutrition preventative strategies in the different settings will be assessed using a qualitative approach. This will inform future interventions for the prevention of T2D in both African and European populations.

Did you find the ERA PerMed instrument (funding scheme) a valuable tool to support research collaboration with Europe? What other funding programmes could be launched to facilitate the research collaboration with Europe? Is there any further suggestion for the future of AU-EU cooperation in this field?

Most definitely. Without the ERA PerMed instrument, I would not have set up new collaborative links with German and Swedish researchers, and this grant also facilitated the continuation of an existing collaboration with a Swedish researcher. Notably, this grant supported research that is extremely relevant to Africa, with far reaching clinical implications. In terms of other funding programmes, I would suggest focusing on research in Africa, not only to harness the genetic diversity to gain mechanistic insights into variability in disease processes, but to also increase equity and health resources in this understudied and underserved population.



Julia H. Goedecke, OPTIMA project coordinator

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Upcoming events

EU-Africa PerMed 2nd Summer School

The **EU-Africa PerMed Second Summer School**, scheduled for May 21-23, 2024, in Nairobi, Kenya will focus on implementing Personalised Medicine in various fields, aiming to equip participants with skills to support Personalised Medicine implementation and research network creation.

This event will be open to around 35 junior researchers, policymakers, and healthcare workers from EU and African countries. At least 6 participants will be selected to receive a travel and accommodation grant. Currently, we are in the selection phase, and the final decisions are slated to be shared by December 2023. We have garnered 156 applications from 36 diverse countries, showcasing a wide geographical reach that extends beyond Europe and Africa. Among the applicants, 85 are women, and what makes this group particularly intriguing is their collective interest in Personalised Medicine approaches. Notably, they bring diverse scientific backgrounds to the table, and an additional 20 applicants are currently students of medicine.



You can find [more information](#) in our website, where is also available the [Call Document](#), the [Draft Agenda](#) and the [Application Process and Evaluation Criteria](#) document.

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EU-Africa PerMed 3rd Stakeholder Workshop

As part of the activities carried out by EU-Africa PerMed to facilitate and strengthen research and innovation collaboration between Europe and Africa in PM, the **3rd Stakeholder workshop** will take place in Dakar (Senegal) in June 2024, hosted by the Institute for Health Research, Epidemiological Surveillance and Training (IRESSEF), partner of the project.

This workshop, the third and last stakeholder engagement activity, will have as **main objectives**:

- To present and disseminate the EU-Africa PerMed Action Plan to the participants.
- To discuss and validate with relevant stakeholders the Actions proposed in the Action Plan.
- To discuss with relevant stakeholders' recommendations for the future, how to sustain the EU-Africa PerMed work further on the project life (sustainability of collaboration).
- To support and mentor the development of regional PerMed Consortium in Africa.



Agenda and more details will be available soon on the [project website](#). For information, please contact project coordinator (erika.sela@innovatec.es)

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Check regularly our [website](#) and [social media](#) to keep updated on all our upcoming events

Launch of the forthcoming European Partnership for Personalised Medicine

The new **European Partnership for Personalised Medicine (EP PerMed)** was formally launched on 5th October 2023 at the high-level **Conference on Personalised Medicine** organised by the Spanish Presidency of the European Union in Valencia.

As speakers in this ceremony participated Cristobal Belda (Director General at the Institute of Health Carlos III), Irene Norstedt (Director People Directorate of the European Commission) and Veronika von Messling (Director-General for Life Sciences at the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research).



Speakers at the launch of the EP PerMed: Cristobal Belda, Irene Norstedt and Veronika von Messling.

This Partnership kick-off is a boost to research in personalised medicine across the European Research Area, with 54 partners participating in its development. It will promote all areas and disciplines of personalised medicine, facilitate innovation and transfer, as well as encourage its consolidation in health systems for the benefit of patients, citizens, and society, allowing continuous improvement.

Within EP PerMed, several earlier European Initiatives on Personalised Medicine are joined under one roof. It will continue the activities of **ERA PerMed** in funding transnational innovation and research projects. In addition, EP PerMed will work closely together with **ICPerMed** for overarching strategic activities. Recordings of the EP PerMed Launch are available [here](#).

[More information](#)

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EP PerMed first Joint Transnational Call 2024, JTC2024

The new **European Partnership for Personalised Medicine, EP PerMed**, has just started and information about the first call for proposals are expected to be published soon. Please have a look on the EP PerMed website.

You can also follow EP PerMed via its social media accounts:

X: [@EPPerMed](#)

LinkedIn: [EP PerMed - the European Partnership for Personalised Medicine](#)

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ICPerMed Workshop “Advancing Personalised Medicine through Technology Development”

Around 90 healthcare professionals, leading experts and industry pioneers as well as representatives of ministries and funding organisations gathered for the **5th ICPerMed workshop** on 14th and 15th November 2023 in Siena, Italy, to discuss latest technology developments and the frontiers of personalised medicine innovation. The prestigious one and a half day event at the Museum Santa Maria della Scala was organised by the **International Consortium for Personalised Medicine (ICPerMed)** and hosted by the Tuscany Region.

Advancing Personalised Medicine through Technology Development

ICPerMed Workshop | Siena, November 14-15, 2023



This [Workshop](#), which took place in a hybrid format, has had 4 keynote lectures, 3 panel discussions – all interactive with the audience, and a session promoting the ICPerMed Recognition winners of this year. A workshop report summarising the main results will be available soon on the [ICPerMed website](#). These results will help ICPerMed and also the upcoming European Partnership for Personalised Medicine to shape their work during the coming years.

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Representatives of the Tunisian Ministries of Health and Education met with ICPerMed, EP PerMed and EC members

At the 5th **ICPerMed Workshop**, Myriam Razgallah Khrouf (Tunisian Ministry of Health) and Helmi Mardassi (Tunisian Ministry of Education and Scientific Research) met with the ICPerMed Chair Ejner Moltzen (Innovation Fund Denmark), the two ICPerMed Vice-Chairs Hemma Bauer (Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research) and Gianni D'Errico (Toscana Life Sciences, Italy) as well as with the EP PerMed coordinator Wolfgang Ballensiefen (DLR, Germany) and the EC representative Indridi Benediktsson.



ICPerMed is looking forward to **Tunisia** joining the consortium as well as the activities of the upcoming **EP PerMed**.

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ICPerMed State of the Art Report 2022



ICPerMed publishes a state-of-the-art report on an annual basis to facilitate the follow-up of the development of personalised medicine research and its implementation throughout Europe and beyond. On June 30, 2023, the ICPerMed State of the Art Report 2022 was published. The report provides information about ICPerMed's activities, the upcoming European Partnership for Personalised Medicine, EP PerMed, and other activities in the field of personalised medicine.

Document is available for download by clicking [here](#).

[More information](#)

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ICPerMed recommendations for PM Research



On 14 June 2023, **ICPerMed** published recommendations to **“Overcome Barriers in Personalised Medicine Research”**.

One aim of ICPerMed is to accelerate the translation and implementation of results of personalised medicine research projects. In order to understand the barriers and gaps currently encountered by researchers, the ICPerMed Secretariat conducted and analysed a survey with researchers from PM projects. The results of the analysis, including potential strategies to overcome the barriers, are available for download.

Document is available for download by clicking [here](#).

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External events and news

New AU-EU Innovation Agenda



On **19th July 2023**, the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU) adopted the **new joint AU-EU Innovation Agenda** which aims to transform and increase the innovative capacities and achievements of European and African researchers and innovators into tangible outputs, such as products, services, businesses and jobs. A **Roadmap** was developed to supplement this final version, which followed the **Working Document** published on 14 February 2022.

Currently, the implementation of the short-term actions of the AU-EU Innovation Agenda is intensifying. This work is kicking off with a series of [online workshops](#).

This Agenda represents the mainstay of the cooperation on Science, Technology and Innovation between Africa and Europe for the next decade. **Precision Medicine** is named as one of the long-term actions in Public Health. Collaboration is essential to ensuring Personalised Medicine becomes a reality for patients and citizens, and **EU-Africa PerMed** is already working towards this objective.

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11th EDCTP Forum



Eleventh EDCTP Forum, entitled "Partnering for Global Health Research Innovation and Impact in Africa" took place in Paris next **7-10 November 2023 in Paris, France**.

This Forum marked the 20th anniversary of EDCTP and was hosted by France. It was jointly supported by the Second EDCTP Program (EDCTP2) and the EDCTP3 Global Health Joint Undertaking (EC GH EDCTP3). Around 600 participants got together in Paris and in some sessions online participation was possible.

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Upcoming webinar: "It's time we talk about patient engagement"

Two patient organisations -the **European Patients' Forum** and the **European AIDS Treatment Group**- and two large academic networks of independent research institutes in the life sciences across Europe -**EATRIS** and **EU-LIFE Alliance**- have joined forces to inspire and encourage academics to get started in Patient Engagement. Therefore, this webinar will serve as an introduction to researchers who are new to patient

engagement and curious to learn more about good practices. This event will take place on December 7th 2023 at 12:30 CET virtually.

7 December 2023, 12:30 CET

SAVE THE DATE | WEBINAR:
**“IT’S TIME WE TALK ABOUT
PATIENT ENGAGEMENT”**



More information, agenda and registration link [here](#).

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EU-Africa PerMed webinars

To advance the translation of Personalised Medicine Research into clinical application and foster collaborative networks among European and African researchers, the EU-Africa PerMed project conducted a series of impactful **webinar sessions**:

- "Oncology: Personalised Medicine approach" held on 17 May 2022. Recording is available [here](#).
- "Personalised Medicine Ethics and Regulations in Africa: From Principles to Practice" that took place in two sessions on 29 September and 15 December 2022. Recordings: [first session](#) and [second session](#) (both conducted in French with English/French subtitles).
- "Experiences, opportunities and challenges of implementing Personalised Medicine in Africa" that took place on 23 November 2022. Recording is available [here](#).
- "The role of Health Technology Assessment (HTA) under the Personalised Medicine approach" held on 14 April 2023. Recording is available [here](#).
- "Capacity Strengthening for Research and Implementation of Personalised Medicine" held on 22 June 2023. Recording is available [here](#).
- "Empowering Patients as Partners in Clinical Research" held on 23 October 2023. Recording is available [here](#).

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 **Twitter:** @EU_AfricaPerMe

 **LinkedIn:** EU-AFRICA PerMed

 **LinkedIn Group:** EU-AFRICA PerMed

 **Youtube:** EU-AFRICA PerMed Project

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