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Information Sciences, Technologies and Architecture Research Centre

ISTAR-Iscte Strategic Development Programme

2026 - 2029

Catarina Ferreira da Silva

ISTAR-Iscte Strategic Development Programme

Audácia – Promoting quality in the pursuit of excellence and impact

Catarina Ferreira da Silva - Director

Miguel Sales Dias – Subdirector Internationalisation and Fundraising

Valderi Leithardt – Subdirector Human Resources Development and Valorisation

Luísa Domingues - Design and Development of Management Tools

António Raimundo - Servers Management and Equipment Loans

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This programme sets out the guidelines for the strategic development proposed by this application for ISTAR-Iscte for the three-year period 2027–2029, in accordance with Article 19 of the ISTAR-Iscte Regulations.

It is a foundational and unifying document, open to active contributions from the ISTAR scientific community, aimed at consolidating the quality and excellence of research, valuing people, and expanding the academic, scientific, societal, economic and institutional impact of the knowledge produced by ISTAR members.
The guidelines are based on six strategic objectives (section 5):
SO1. Scientific excellence and internationalisation
SO2. Valuing ISTAR members, talent and scientific culture
SO3. Scientific, technological and societal impact
SO4. Institutional sustainability and operational capacity
SO5. Scientific audacity
SO6. Advanced training and the development of future generations of researchers

1. Strategic performance indicators (2023–2026)

ISTAR-Iscte has been consolidating its position as a leading interdisciplinary research unit on the national and international scientific scene. During the outgoing management's term of office, highly significant results were achieved, which deserve to be recognised and highlighted. Among these, the maintenance of the '**Very Good**' rating in the evaluation by the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) stands out, in a particularly demanding context for units with a high degree of scientific diversity[1]. ISTAR was awarded a rating of **4** in each of the three assessment criteria, on a scale of 1 to 5, falling just one point short of the top rating of '**Excellent**'.

Despite the 38 per cent reduction in FCT funding for the 2025–2029 period, ISTAR increased its annual total funding expenditure from 723 k€ in 2023 to 1 157 k€ in 2025 (**+434 k€, +60 per cent**). At the same time, it closed the 2025 financial year with a contribution margin of €150,000, including overheads (general expenses), demonstrating a growing capacity to secure and implement competitive funding, reduced dependence on structural funding from the FCT, and increased resilience on the part of ISTAR in the face of the reduction in the FCT's core funding.

Indicator	2023	2025	Variação
funding expenditure (K€)	723	1157	**+434** (**+60%**)

We had 28 research projects and service provision contracts underway in 2023, compared with **44 in 2025**, representing an absolute change of **+16 (+57.1 per cent)**.

[1] Of the 313 units that were deemed eligible for funding, 43 per cent were rated 'Excellent' (136 units), 37 per cent were rated 'Very Good' (116 units) and 19 per cent were rated 'Good' (61 units) (https://www.fct.pt/divulgacao-dos-resultados-do-processo-de-avaliacao-e-financiamento-de-unidades-de-id-2023-2024/).

This growth demonstrates the strengthening of ISTAR-Iscte's competitive capacity in securing and implementing external funding, the deepening of its national and international collaboration networks, and the growing recognition of the knowledge produced by the unit. The sustained increase in contracted activity also contributes to the diversification of revenue sources, a reduction in dependence on structural funding, and the strengthening of the scientific, economic and societal impact of the research carried out. It also reflects an increase in project implementation and management capacity, and the growing recognition of the scientific expertise of ISTAR's members.

Indicator	2023	2025	Variação
Number of projects and service provision contracts currently underway	28	44	**+16 (+57,1%)**

In 2023, 17 funding applications were submitted, compared with 27 in 2025, representing an absolute change of **+10 applications (+58.8 per cent)**. This growth demonstrates a greater ability to identify and capitalise on funding opportunities, increasing engagement by the ISTAR scientific community in securing external funding, and a heightened ambition to participate in competitive national and international programmes. This result also reflects the deepening of collaborations with strategic partners, both national and international, as well as the positive impact of the stabilisation of support teams and the consolidation of pre-award and post-award management processes, which are essential for the effective preparation, submission and monitoring of applications and the implementation of projects.

Indicator	2023	2025	Variação
Funding applications submitted	17	27	**+10 (+58,8%)**

The total number of ISTAR members rose from 133 in 2023 to 214 in 2026, representing an increase of **81 members (+60.9 per cent)**. Over the same period, the number of full members rose from 46 to 59, an increase of **13 members (+28.3 per cent)**.

Indicator	2023	2026	Variação
Total number of members	133	**214**	+81 **(+60,9%)**
Full members	46	**59**	+13 **(+28,3%)**
Proportion of full members	34,6%	**27,6%**	-7 p.p.

The 60.9 per cent increase in the total number of members highlights ISTAR-Iscte's strong ability to attract staff and expand its scientific activity, supported by an increase in the number of research grants, service contracts and research projects, which reached their highest number (48) in 2026. This growth stems primarily from the strengthening of research teams associated with projects and research grants, demonstrating a greater capacity for scientific execution and for securing competitive funding.
Although the number of permanent members also increased significantly (+28.3 per cent), their relative proportion fell by 7 percentage points, reflecting faster growth in the number of researchers and staff employed under funded projects. This indicates both the dynamism of the unit and the importance of continuing to strengthen its core of permanent members, thereby ensuring long-term scientific and institutional sustainability.

The following shows how the unit's composition has evolved since 2021:

ISTAR members	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Integrated	40	42	46	50	52	**59**
Associate	38	34	35	34	39	**41**
PhD students	61	50	39	51	55	**61**
Other colaborators	5	12	9	11	32	**48**
Staff	3	4	4	5	5	**5**
Total	147	142	133	151	183	**214**

Particularly noteworthy is the increase in the number of full-time researchers at ISTAR, from three in 2023 to five in 2026, reflecting the success of the talent recruitment strategy, which resulted in the recruitment of two full-time researchers under the FCT-Tenure programme.

The funding of **€284,774 secured by ISTAR through the PRR for infrastructure equipment in 2025** enabled a substantial improvement in the unit's research facilities in 2026. It should be noted that this amount could not have been used for the recruitment of staff or for the purchase of other goods and services. In this regard, the acquisition of this equipment should be viewed as an asset for ISTAR-Iscte, strengthening its capacity and the resources available for the development of its research activities.
In total, **€170,864 (60 per cent)** was spent on the purchase of laboratory equipment and a high-performance computing server, thereby increasing the installed capacity for carrying out advanced scientific activities. The remaining **€113,910 (40 per cent)** was allocated to needs identified by Iscte and the CVTT.

ISTAR activity reports for the period 2023–2025:

- ISTAR_ActivityReport2023.pdf
- ISTAR_ActivityReport2024.pdf
- ISTAR_ActivityReport2025_rev2.1.pdf

ISTAR institutional website

ISTAR is currently developing a new version of its institutional website, which is currently in the testing phase and available at https://istar-iscte.vercel.app/. The plan is for the platform to migrate to Iscte's servers in 2026, replacing the solution currently in use. Developed using Next.js, the new website features a revamped public interface (front-end) and a content management system with a dedicated administration area (back-end), enabling more efficient updating of institutional information and better promotion of ISTAR's scientific activity, projects, publications and members. This development is being carried out by a research assistant at ISTAR.

Tool for managing researchers' own funds

With the aim of modernising and streamlining the management of researchers' own funds, ISTAR is developing a computer application, to be made available following testing, preferably during 2027, designed by an intern at the unit under the guidance of permanent ISTAR staff. The platform is intended to provide a personalised dashboard through which researchers can monitor the balances and transaction

history of their respective funds in real time, as well as a user guide. At the same time, the application will provide tools to support administrative and financial management, contributing to greater transparency, a reduction in the administrative burden and an improvement in the quality of information made available to ISTAR members. As well as enhancing transparency and access to information, the solution aims to contribute to the automation of internal financial management processes, thereby increasing operational efficiency and reducing the administrative burden associated with these tasks.

Contextual summary

The results achieved and the initiatives undertaken in recent years provide a solid foundation for the next phase of ISTAR's growth and consolidation. The sustained growth in competitive funding, ongoing projects, scientific infrastructure and ISTAR's research community, combined with the proposed strategic plan to modernise management tools and prepare in advance for the FCT/AI² evaluation, demonstrates that this application continues a path of development that has already begun and is underpinned by concrete and measurable results.

However, the coming years will be particularly challenging. The national and European science and innovation system is undergoing a period of profound transformation, marked by the revision of the Legal Framework for Higher Education Institutions (RJIES), the new legal framework for the National System of Science, Technology and Innovation in Portugal – including the creation and implementation of the AI² agency – the reduction in core funding from the FCT, as well as by growing international competition for funding.

This context is further characterised by the rapid evolution of Artificial Intelligence, the widespread use of which in the preparation of funding applications is significantly altering the competitive dynamics of national and international programmes. At the same time, new opportunities are emerging in connection with the forthcoming European Framework Programme 2028–2034 (FP10), which is expected to have an overall budget of around 174 billion euros, reinforcing the importance of participation in international networks of excellence and the coordination of large-scale collaborative projects.

Against this backdrop of transformation, ISTAR's success and its attainment of a future 'Excellent' rating will depend on its ability to consolidate a culture of scientific excellence based on the principles of open science, responsible research, scientific integrity and the valorisation of knowledge. It will also be essential to strengthen the mechanisms for monitoring, evaluating and continuously improving scientific activity, whilst promoting greater recognition of the scientific, technological, economic and societal impact of the research produced. At the same time, it is important to strengthen the unit's capacity to demonstrate excellence, relevance and impact through practices aligned with the highest national and international standards, ensuring sustained preparation for the next evaluation of R&D units by the FCT/AI², scheduled for 2029–2030.

Within this framework, ISTAR-Iscte must establish itself as an ambitious, rigorous, collaborative and internationally recognised scientific unit, focused on producing knowledge of excellence and creating an effective and lasting impact on society.

Scientific excellence should be understood not merely as a quantitative target, but as a collective culture grounded in the quality of research, scientific integrity, societal relevance, innovation, internationalisation and the ability to attract, develop and retain talent.

This ambition requires the creation of conditions in which researchers, students, science managers, specialist technical staff and other staff members can fully realise their potential, with dignity and freedom, thereby contributing to the sustainable strengthening of ISTAR's scientific capacity and to the enhancement of its standing on the national and international stage.

This ambition requires the consolidation of a culture of research and innovation based on the integration of on-site and remote work, through an ongoing dialogue between the Management and the various members of ISTAR. To this end, the aim is to promote a more in-depth mapping of the skills, experience and expectations of members of the community, recognising their contribution and potential. This process will be supported by the regular use of CVTT facilities and Iscte's laboratories (Building 1), as well as by holding regular meetings between the Management, the Scientific Committee and the research group coordinators, as stipulated in ISTAR's regulations, complemented by other opportunities for gathering, sharing and joint reflection.

2. Mission

ISTAR-Iscte's mission is to produce scientific knowledge of the highest calibre through fundamental, applied and interdisciplinary research, promoting convergence between Computer Science, Information Technology, Artificial Intelligence, Computational Mathematics, and Digital Architecture and Urbanism. The integration of skills and academic disciplines enables us to tackle complex scientific, technological and societal challenges in an integrated and multidisciplinary manner, contributing to the advancement of knowledge and to responsible and sustainable innovation.
ISTAR-Iscte is dedicated to the study, design, development and evaluation of systems and technologies centred on people and the spaces in which they live, with a particular focus on digital environments, information systems, software, artificial intelligence and computational modelling. By combining theoretical, methodological and experimental approaches, we seek to understand complex phenomena, develop innovative solutions and generate scientific, economic and societal impact, contributing to digital transformation and to more sustainable and inclusive development.

3. Vision 2036

Over the next decade, ISTAR aims to establish itself as a **leading interdisciplinary research unit at national, European and international level**, recognised for the excellence, originality and audacity of its research, as well as for its ability to integrate knowledge, methodologies and expertise from its disciplinary fields - Computer Science, Information Technology, Artificial Intelligence, Computational Mathematics, and Digital Architecture and Urbanism – in order to address complex scientific, technological and societal problems.

By 2036, we aim for an **ISTAR that is scientifically robust, internationally recognised and institutionally sustainable**, capable of attracting, developing and retaining top talent, of fostering an inclusive, demanding, collaborative and intellectually stimulating research environment, and to lead scientific networks and partnerships of high strategic value, acting as a preferred partner for industry and other relevant organisations in strategic partnerships, particularly in the field of digital transformation. We intend to establish ourselves as a leading partner in national and international ecosystems of research, innovation and co-creation of knowledge, actively contributing to pushing the frontiers of science and technology.
ISTAR also aspires to be recognised as a **hub for the creation, integration and valorisation of knowledge,** whose research – centred on people and guided by the principles of open science, scientific integrity, social responsibility and sustainable innovation – generates a lasting impact on science, innovation, organisations, public policy and the well-being of society.

Through the convergence of fundamental and applied research and collaboration across different disciplines, ISTAR-Iscte will seek to transform knowledge into solutions, technologies and scientific evidence capable of contributing to a smarter, more inclusive, sustainable and resilient society. Our ambition is for scientific excellence to translate not only into international academic recognition, but also into tangible benefits for people, organisations and regions, thereby strengthening ISTAR-Iscte's role as a driver of knowledge, innovation and societal progress.

4. Values

This application bases its scientific and institutional leadership on six core values:

1. Excellence, integrity and scientific quality
A commitment to rigour and the production of original and internationally relevant knowledge, whilst promoting the highest standards of quality, ethics, scientific integrity and academic freedom. We value excellence in research and the ongoing pursuit of scientific and societal impact.

2. Interdisciplinarity, collaboration and the scientific community
Valuing diversity and integrating different fields of knowledge, methodologies and scientific perspectives, thereby fostering collaboration between researchers, research groups, institutions and international networks. We believe that complex challenges require collaborative and interdisciplinary approaches.

3. Respect, equity, inclusion and valuing people
We place people at the heart of our work, fostering an inclusive, transparent, demanding and stimulating research environment. We champion equal opportunities, respect for diversity, the recognition of merit, and the personal and professional development of all members of the ISTAR community.

4. Audacity, creativity and scientific innovation
We encourage intellectual curiosity, experimentation, creativity and the exploration of new ideas and scientific agendas. We promote innovative approaches and research with high transformative potential, capable of challenging paradigms and generating

new opportunities for knowledge. We will promote the active involvement of ISTAR members in collaborative initiatives and knowledge-sharing with members of other research units, particularly within the framework of the Socio Digital Lab for Public Policy and with external organisations whose expertise complements that of ISTAR members, thereby fostering interdisciplinarity, the creation of new synergies and the development of joint projects and initiatives.

5. Responsibility, impact and sustainability
We are committed to supporting the development of ethical and socially responsible research, contributing to the sustainability of ISTAR, people's well-being and the improvement of organisations, public policies and society. We seek to ensure institutional sustainability, the efficient management of resources, process improvement, and the strengthening of research and innovation capacity.

6. Openness, Knowledge Sharing and Advanced Training
We promote open science, dissemination, knowledge sharing and advanced training, fostering the circulation of ideas and collaboration with the scientific community and wider society. We place great value on advanced training for PhD students, early-career researchers and professionals, contributing to the development of skills in individuals and organisations and to the circulation of knowledge at national and international levels. We are committed to a cross-disciplinary and inclusive training policy, aimed at researchers and science managers, which promotes the continuous development of skills, enhances competitiveness and strengthens cohesion and the spirit of collaboration at ISTAR-Iscte.

5. ISTAR-Iscte strategic objectives (2027–2029)

In line with the 2025–2029 Activity Plan submitted to the FCT, five strategic objectives have been defined, focusing on scientific excellence, the development of staff, the impact of research, institutional sustainability, strengthening ISTAR-Iscte's national and international competitiveness, and advanced training. These objectives will be achieved through SMART targets (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound), which will be monitored annually.

SO1 — Scientific excellence and internationalisation
To strengthen the quality, interdisciplinary nature and international reach of ISTAR-Iscte's research, consolidating its position as a centre of excellence and laying the groundwork for achieving an 'Excellent' rating in the forthcoming FCT/AI2 evaluation.

- **SO1.1:** Increase the annual average number of Q1 publications per FTE (Full-Time Equivalent) researcher by 10 per cent, excluding predatory journals, supplemented by annual monitoring of publications in the top 10 per cent and top 5 per cent journals and at internationally recognised conferences.
- **SO1.2:** To increase the number of interdisciplinary projects currently underway by 30 per cent compared with 2024.
- **SO1.3:** To submit 18 competitive international applications, of which at least six are coordinated by ISTAR-Iscte and receive financial support from the Rector's Office, securing funding for at least three projects.

- **SO1.4:** Carry out two external scientific evaluations with the International Advisory Board and implement 80 per cent of the priority and feasible recommendations by 2029.

SO2 — Valuing ISTAR members, talent and scientific culture

To promote an inclusive, equitable, collaborative, demanding and stimulating research environment that values people, fosters the development of scientific careers and strengthens the sense of belonging to ISTAR.

- **SO2.1:** Strengthen the induction and mentoring of 100 per cent of new ISTAR members at the start of their careers.
- **SO2.2:** To retain and support five researchers on full-time contracts dedicated to research. To seek out and secure funding opportunities, encouraging engagement and creating the conditions to enable PhD students and early-career researchers who are already part of ISTAR – and who demonstrate a high level of quality and merit in their research and training activities – to continue on their career paths.
- **SO2.3:** To publish annually ISTAR's work plan and report on the results of its scientific, strategic and financial activities, in consultation with ISTAR's Scientific Committee and Scientific Council.
- **SO2.4:** To achieve an overall satisfaction rate of 80 per cent by 2029, based on a minimum participation rate of 60 per cent in annual surveys, supplemented by improvement measures arising from the results obtained.

SO3 — Scientific, technological and societal impact

To strengthen the exploitation and transfer of knowledge produced by ISTAR, in collaboration with other stakeholders in society, businesses, public bodies, academic networks and international organisations, with a demonstrable impact.

- **SO3.1:** To develop at least six new collaborative projects with external organisations, including businesses, public authorities or civil society organisations.
- **SO3.2:** To validate six technological or scientific outcomes in a real-world context, whilst promoting the external adoption of at least three of them.
- **SO3.3:** To support the incubation or acceleration of two start-ups or spin-offs based on ISTAR-Iscte research, in collaboration with Iscte's subsidiaries specialising in knowledge transfer (Iscte_CI) and entrepreneurship (AUDAX).
- **SO3.4:** To produce three documented scientific and cultural contributions to public policy (e.g., policy briefs, reports).
- **SO3.5:** To enhance the public visibility of the research carried out at ISTAR through regular scientific outreach and science communication activities.

SO4 — Institutional sustainability and operational capacity

To ensure ISTAR's financial, organisational and infrastructural sustainability by diversifying its funding, strengthening its capacity to support competitive, high-quality research, enhancing its science management and technical support resources, and improving its operational, scientific and laboratory management tools.

- **SO4.1:** To increase the annual average revenue from commissioned research, innovation and scientific services by 20 per cent, in addition to the institution's core funding.
- **SO4.2:** To provide ISTAR's laboratories with utilisation and maintenance plans up to 2028, ensuring participation in research, advanced training and external collaboration up to 2029. To develop a computerised tool to support the management of equipment loans.

- **SO4.3:** To ensure structured support for 100 per cent of funding applications submitted in good time, including the implementation of funded projects.
- **SO4.4**: To develop and implement, by 2029, at least two digital tools to support the scientific and administrative management of ISTAR, promoting transparency, operational efficiency and the provision of up-to-date information to its members.

SO5 — Scientific audacity

To encourage original, exploratory and disruptive research, promoting new scientific agendas and approaches with high transformative potential.

By 2029:

- **SO5.1:** To collaborate with the SocioDigital Lab in organising three internal calls for proposals for interdisciplinary exploratory research, with a view to securing funding for at least two projects.
- **SO5.2:** To support the submission of at least three applications to frontier research programmes (ERC, EIC Pathfinder, MSCA or equivalent).
- **SO5.3:** Launch three internal ISTAR seed funding calls to promote interdisciplinary collaboration between members of different research groups, and disruptive exploratory initiatives with the potential to develop into larger-scale projects and applications with greater impact.
- **SO5.4:** To develop three exploratory initiatives with national (including those from the SocioDigital Lab) and/or international researchers or R&D organisations, leading to joint scientific results.
- **SO5.5**: Hold at least two wide-ranging discussions with ISTAR members to update the current strategic research themes, ensuring they are aligned with scientific, technological and societal developments, as well as with national and European funding priorities.

SO6 — Advanced training and the development of future generations of researchers

To contribute to advanced academic and professional training, strengthening ISTAR's links with doctoral programmes, the training of young researchers and lifelong learning, whilst playing an active role in scientific and professional development and promoting generational renewal within the scientific community.

- **SO6.1:** To establish at least two cooperation agreements with new polytechnic universities in Greater Lisbon and neighbouring regions (e.g. Lisbon, Setúbal, Santarém, Tomar, Beja, Portalegre), as part of the development of doctoral programmes at these institutions, providing for the participation of researchers from ISTAR-Iscte in the supervision or co-supervision of doctoral theses.
- **SO6.2:** To submit at least 8 applications for PhD scholarships linked to ISTAR-Iscte's research themes, with particular focus on the PhD programmes associated with ISTAR - ISTA's Doctoral Programme in Information Sciences and Technologies, ISTA's Doctoral Programme in the Architecture of Contemporary Metropolitan Territories, and Iscte-Sintra's Doctoral Programme in Digital Technologies and Innovation, exploring interdisciplinary collaborations within the context of ISTAR and SocioDigital Lab, or inter-institutional collaborations.
- **SO6.3:** Monitor all PhD students on an annual basis, in particular by organising two annual PhD meetings focused on topics relevant to PhD students. Promote mentoring and support mechanisms to facilitate completion, involving supervisors, with the aim of increasing the annual average number of completed PhD theses by 15% by 2029.

- **SO6.4:** To organise six international scientific lectures or seminars, and three seasonal schools, workshops or equivalent initiatives.

Monitoring: All targets must be met by the end of 2029. The percentage growth figures are based on the annual average for 2024–2026, except for SO1.2 (2024 figure). The baseline figures and targets will be validated at the start of the term of office and monitored annually. Periodic monitoring (every six months) will be carried out to assess the status of activities and indicators achieved, with a view to defining compensatory measures.

6. Action plan and targets (2027–2029)

The action plan sets out the six strategic objectives and the 25 SMART sub-objectives, linking targets, actions and verifiable evidence.

6.1. Implementation and measurement criteria

Commitment	Monitoring rule
Deadline	Targets up to 31 December 2029, unless a specific deadline is stated; annual balance sheets for 2027, 2028 and 2029.
Reference	Percentage changes compared with the annual average for 2024–2026, except for SO1.2 (2024 figure). The figures will be finalised in the first half of 2027.
Evidence	Auditable records of publications, applications, funding decisions, contracts, financial implementation, research activities and results.
Responsability	Director and the Scientific Committee, working in conjunction with the research group coordinators, the scientific and financial support services, the relevant departments at Iscte and the partners.

The quantitative targets remain programme-level commitments subject to technical validation of the reference values. Achieving an ‘Excellent’ rating in a future FCT assessment is a cross-cutting ambition, but not a result under the exclusive control of the Management.

6.2. Strategic development priorities – Action plan by strategic objective

SO1 — Scientific excellence and internationalisation

To enhance the quality, interdisciplinary integration and international recognition of research.

SMART sub-objective and target	Priority actions	Evidence of compliance
SO1.1: +10 per cent in the annual average number of Q1 publications per ETI researcher.	Define indicators by area and update the Quality Manual, subject to approval by the Scientific Committee; monitor publications and citations using a graphical dashboard; highlight relevant publications and support scientific peer review and publication in reputable forums.	Annual Q1/ETI ratio (single count, quartile and base documented), Top 10 per cent, Top 5 per cent; average for 2027–2029 compared with 2024–2026. Evidence of the implementation of measures to promote high-impact publications, characterised by scientific leadership, relevance and scientific quality.
SO1.2: A 30 per cent increase in the number of interdisciplinary projects currently underway compared with 2024.	To map skills and challenges at the intersection of ISTAR members' areas of expertise, organisations and sustainability; to facilitate meetings between groups, joint projects and consortia.	Projects involving the substantive participation of ≥2 members from different groups; a comparison between 2024 and the situation in 2029.
SO1.3: 18 competitive international applications, ≥6 coordinated by ISTAR and ≥3 funded.	Systematically monitor preferential national and international funding opportunities (Horizon Europe, Digital Europe and others) aligned with the expertise of ISTAR members; consolidate existing networks and form new, high-profile consortia; provide technical support for proposal writing, scientific review, budgeting, project submission and management, and the leadership of applications, through collaboration between groups, with the aim of securing funding for at least 3.	Record of applications submitted, ISTAR's role and favourable decisions up to 2029; distinguishing pending decisions.
SO1.4: 2 external scientific evaluations; implementation of 80 per cent of the priority and feasible recommendations.	Convene the International Advisory Board on a regular basis, ensuring direct interaction with the groups; gather recommendations on excellence, internationalisation and impact; maintain a portfolio of evidence and an improvement plan for the next FCT/AI2 evaluation.	External opinions, a matrix of recommendations, prioritisation decisions and evidence of implementation.

SO2 — Recognising ISTAR members, talent and scientific culture

To foster an inclusive, transparent and stimulating environment, whilst supporting scientific and professional development.

SMART sub-objective and target	Priority actions	Evidence of compliance
SO2.1: Induction and mentoring for 100 per cent of interested new members at the start of their careers by 2028.	Create a structured onboarding programme for new members, in particular for early-career researchers, newly appointed academic staff, contracted researchers, scholarship holders and PhD students: mission, organisation, rights and responsibilities, quality and progression criteria, procedures, platforms, groups and contacts; assign mentors and publicise interdisciplinary opportunities. Coordination with the actions set out in the Human Resources Strategy for Researchers (HRS4R) plan.	Annual record of eligible candidates, interested parties, participants and reported mentoring activities. Monitoring and implementation of the actions set out in the HRS4R plan defined by Iscte.
SO2.2: To retain and support the careers of five researchers on full-time research contracts until 2029.	To support the career development of the five researchers and recognise diverse career paths, including contributions to publications, projects, supervision, events, communication, knowledge transfer and scientific service.	Number of active contracts and full-time equivalents as at 31 December 2029; reference: 3 in 2024.

SMART sub-objective and target	Priority actions	Evidence of compliance
SO2.3: To publish annually ISTAR's activity plan and report on the results of its scientific, strategic and financial operations, in consultation with ISTAR's Scientific Committee and Scientific Council.	Update and publicise quality and recognition criteria in consultation with the Scientific Committee; publish resources, activities and results; discuss priorities and decisions with researchers, PhD students, science managers and support teams.	Annual reports and minutes of discussion meetings, in accordance with ISTAR's regulations, to be circulated to members.
SO2.4: ≥80 per cent overall satisfaction and ≥60 per cent participation in annual surveys by 2029.	Introduce an anonymous survey from 2027; assess inclusion, equity, transparency, collaboration and wellbeing; discuss the results and implement corrective measures, communicating scientific rigour in a constructive and well-founded manner.	Response and satisfaction rates, survey reports and annual improvement plan.

SO3 — Scientific, technological and societal impact

To translate research findings into demonstrable value for organisations, businesses, citizens and public policy.

SMART sub-objective and target	Priority actions	Evidence of compliance
SO3.1: 6 new projects with external organisations, including businesses, public authorities or civil society organisations.	To identify challenges and partners, including businesses, schools, local authorities, public bodies, civil society and international networks; to promote the co-creation of knowledge and the formation of consortia involving interdisciplinary teams, projects and the provision of scientific services.	Contracts, consortia or projects formalised between 2027 and 2029; types of partners.
SO3.2: 6 scientific or technological results validated in a real-world context, ≥3 of which have been adopted externally.	Identify prototypes, digital tools, methodologies and demonstrators; validate them with users and organisations in a real-world context; gather evidence of usage, technological and economic benefits, and societal and institutional impact.	Validation dossiers, pilot reports and documentary evidence of external adoption.
SO3.3: To support two science-based start-ups or spin-offs by 2029.	Identify transferable outcomes, support intellectual property and scientific entrepreneurship; liaise with Iscte's departments and business partners regarding incubation, acceleration, specialist services and commercialisation.	Evidence of the incubation/acceleration of two research-related initiatives by ISTAR members.
SO3.4: Produce three documented scientific contributions to public policy.	To produce studies, recommendations, analyses and decision-support tools for public policy, in collaboration with public bodies, local authorities and policy research centres; to systematise findings and evidence on their use and disseminate them.	Reports, opinions or recommendations submitted, and details of the recipient organisations.

SO4 — Institutional sustainability and operational capacity

To ensure financial and operational sustainability, through shared resources and efficient support for the project cycle; to maintain and enhance science management and technical support resources; and to improve operational, scientific and laboratory management tools.

SMART sub-objective and target	Priority actions	Evidence of compliance
SO4.1: +20 per cent in the annual average of external research funding.	Regularly monitor national and international calls for proposals; publicise opportunities and provide advance notice of deadlines; support consortia, and assist with drafting, reviewing, budgeting, submitting and implementing projects; diversify funding instruments. Promote expertise, laboratories and commissioned research services; foster links between businesses, local authorities and public bodies; strengthen contracts for R&D, scientific and innovation consultancy, and the provision of specialised services.	Revenue generated and recognised in 2027–2029 compared with 2024–2026, excluding core institutional funding.
SO4.2: 100 per cent of laboratories to have utilisation and maintenance plans in place by 2028; ≥75 per cent to be active in research by 2029.	Keep the inventory of equipment, costs, maintenance and priorities up to date; develop a computerised tool to support the management of equipment loans. Draw up plans for use and shared access; integrate laboratories and digital infrastructure into projects, inter-group activities and institutional collaboration.	Inventory and approved plans; percentage of laboratories involved in research projects/activities.
SO4.3: Structured support for 100 per cent of applications submitted in good time, up to 2029, including the implementation of funded projects.	To identify best practices and help streamline the management of application processes and the implementation of projects, contracts and services; to implement deadline alerts and financial monitoring; to help improve the SINGAP (ISCTE) and Sigest (CVTT) tools, by coordinating and supporting the scientific, technical, administrative and management teams.	Eligible applications and support provided at the pre- and post-award stages, with application criteria and deadlines published in advance, and evidence of proposals and claims for reimbursement submitted.
SO4.4: ≥2 digital tools to support the scientific and administrative management of ISTAR, promoting transparency, operational efficiency and the provision of up-to-date information to its members.	Identification and prioritisation of requirements; development of an internal grant management platform; development of complementary scientific management tools, including a graphical dashboard for monitoring scientific indicators; monitoring through pilot tests and continuous improvement. To improve the mechanisms for monitoring strategic indicators, thereby enabling up-to-date information to be made available to ISTAR members and preparing for ISTAR's future evaluation.	Tools implemented and in regular use; technical and functional documentation produced; user adoption and satisfaction indicators; evidence of improvements in management processes supported by the solutions developed.

SO5 — Scientific audacity

To create the conditions for exploratory, original research with high transformative potential.

SMART sub-objective and target	Priority actions	Evidence of compliance
SO5.1: 3 internal calls for exploratory research proposals; ≥2 projects funded by 2029.	Organise three transparent competitions for high-risk, interdisciplinary ideas in collaboration with the SocioDigital Lab for Public Policy; select proposals on the basis of originality and potential; provide scientific support and mentoring, whilst documenting lessons learnt from previous experiences.	Call for applications, evaluations, funding decisions and reports from three calls for proposals. Final reports on the approved projects.

SMART sub-objective and target	Priority actions	Evidence of compliance
SO5.2: 3 applications to frontier research programmes, such as the ERC, EIC Pathfinder, MSCA or equivalent schemes.	Systematic monitoring of international and national funding opportunities; identifying emerging scientific agendas; supporting training, drafting and external evaluation of proposals for the ERC, EIC Pathfinder, MSCA or equivalent schemes; encouraging high-calibre international teams.	Eligible applications submitted in 2027–2029, with a scientific role identified.
SO5.3: Three internal ISTAR Seed Funding calls to promote interdisciplinary collaboration between members of different research groups, and disruptive exploratory initiatives with the potential to develop into larger-scale projects and applications with greater impact.	Publish the annual call for applications; monitor the evaluation, implementation and results processes; analyse the results upon completion of each project.	An annual call for applications for the internal Seed Funding scheme. A final report on the completion of each project. Publicisation of the results achieved.
SO5.4: 3 exploratory initiatives with national and international researchers or R&D units.	To promote idea workshops, inter-group meetings, visiting researchers and external research placements; to form teams with national and international institutions to develop new research agendas, publications and joint applications. To support the organisation of leading conferences at ISTAR organised by members.	Three documented initiatives with a plan and joint outcome (project proposal, publication or line of research).
SO5.5: ≥ 2 wide-ranging discussions with ISTAR members to update the current strategic research themes.	Strategic assessment of developments in ISTAR's research areas; organise at least two participatory strategic sessions; incorporate internal and external input; review and update the strategic research themes; disseminate and implement the updated themes, exploring their potential impact.	≥2 meetings held; minutes and reports produced; updated strategic document setting out the potential impact, approved by the Scientific Committee and a majority of the Scientific Council; evidence that the defined priorities have been incorporated into the activity plans and reports, and into the preparation of the FCT/AI² evaluation.

SO6 — Advanced training and the development of future generations of researchers

To integrate research and doctoral training, supporting advanced qualifications and new institutional partnerships within the academic and business sectors.

SMART sub-objective and target	Priority actions	Evidence of compliance
SO6.1: ≥ 2 cooperation agreements with new polytechnic universities by 2029, as part of the establishment of new doctoral programmes at those institutions.	Identify new polytechnic universities and nearby institutions (such as Lisbon, Setúbal, Santarém, Tomar, Beja and Portalegre); assess alignment, reputation and mutual benefit; negotiate agreements, joint supervision arrangements and the involvement of researchers in the supervision/co-supervision of PhD students, in collaboration with Iscte. Implement strategies to attract PhD students from abroad, making use of existing networks and partnerships, e.g., the PIONEER Alliance.	≥2 signed agreements providing for scientific participation or the possibility of supervision or co-supervision, subject to institutional approval and applicable requirements.

SMART sub-objective and target	Priority actions	Evidence of compliance
SO6.2: ≥ 8 applications for PhD scholarships and ≥ 4 scholarships awarded.	To liaise with doctoral programmes associated with ISTAR; to identify candidates and research topics aligned with ISTAR's research priorities, exploring interdisciplinary collaborations and national and international joint supervision arrangements; to support applications for scholarships, and to encourage and support the establishment of national and international joint supervision arrangements, as well as integration into research groups and projects; organise doctoral seminars, methodological workshops and scientific writing sessions; promote cross-cutting skills in ethics, open science, data protection, security, science communication, data management and the preparation of grant applications.	Eight applications received and decisions made to award at least four scholarships.
SO6.3: Annual monitoring of 100 per cent of PhD students, two annual PhD meetings and a 15 per cent increase in the annual average number of completed theses.	To ensure the effective supervision and integration of PhD students into research groups and projects; to organise doctoral seminars, methodological workshops and sessions on academic writing; to identify difficulties, support students in completing their degrees, and recognise the contributions of PhD students.	Annual progress reports; findings by year, average for 2027–2029 compared with 2024–2026. Evidence of the promotion and organisation of PhD meetings; Promotion of PhD students' contributions via ISTAR's channels.
SO6.4: 6 international seminars or lectures and 3 seasonal schools or equivalent initiatives.	To organise international seminars, seasonal schools (e.g. summer and winter schools) and training programmes for PhD students, researchers and professionals on scientific or support-related topics, e.g. ethics, integrity, open science, scientific communication, data management, funding and career development.	Programmes, participant lists and reports for 6 events and 3 training initiatives.

7. Cross-cutting measures and implementation tools

These measures put the actions under the six objectives into practice; they do not create any additional strategic targets. Their implementation is monitored using the indicators associated with SO1–SO6.

Instrument	Measures and commitments regarding implementation
Participatory governance and recognition	Hold regular meetings with the Scientific Committee (every two months), Group Coordinators (every three months), researchers, PhD students, research managers and technical staff. Convene the Scientific Council at least twice a year. Clarify priorities, quality criteria, resources and responsibilities; recognise scientific leadership in high-impact publications, projects, supervision, event organisation, collaboration and scientific service; update the Quality Manual. Promote the careers of technical and science management teams.
Internationalisation and mobility	To consolidate existing networks and partnerships and establish collaborations with highly reputable institutions; to promote joint publications, projects, joint supervision, visiting researchers and research stays abroad; to publicise mobility opportunities and expand participation in European and international networks.

Instrument	Measures and commitments regarding implementation
Communication, visibility and open science	Revamp and update the website from a technological and user experience perspective, incorporating up-to-date information on the Mission, Vision and Values, Strategic Objectives, Research Themes, pages on research groups, members, projects, publications and laboratories; create short biographies and videos showcasing research outcomes; revitalise newsletters, regular posts on institutional social media, and the promotion of calls for proposals, events and science communication activities for non-academic audiences. Continue to actively manage ISTAR's social media channels (LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube) with coverage of events, PhD defences, projects, researcher profiles and interviews, and other relevant activities.
Management and digital tools	To improve the mapping of processes relating to applications, projects, contracts and the provision of services; to promote the streamlining of workflows and procedures with Iscte and CVTT; co-ordinate SINGAP and Sigest, scientific and financial records; provide deadline alerts and up-to-date graphical dashboards to monitor activity and financial implementation; create mechanisms for monitoring strategic indicators to provide up-to-date information to ISTAR members and prepare for the future evaluation of ISTAR.
International Advisory Board	To organise regular meetings and engage with the groups, seeking input on excellence, internationalisation, impact, FCT/AI2 evaluation and progress on the strategic plan; to record recommendations, responsibilities and the implementation of improvements.
Ethics, integrity and scientific culture	Promote Open Science and responsible research practices, founded on respect, equity, academic freedom, and accessible communication; provide an enabling environment for the growth and development of members, while recognising and valuing scientific, technological, societal, institutional, and educational contributions with significant impact.
Impact Monitoring	Enhance the systematic collection of evidence of scientific impact (publications, citations, leadership roles, and collaboration networks), technological and economic impact (prototypes, tools, companies, and services), societal and institutional impact (schools, municipalities, public organisations, and civil society), and educational impact (doctoral students, researchers, and professionals).
Doctoral Programmes and Partnerships	Strengthen collaboration with existing doctoral programmes, thesis topics, and national and international co-supervision arrangements; establish one to two cooperation agreements with new polytechnic universities for the development of doctoral programmes and the potential supervision or co-supervision of doctoral candidates by integrated researchers, in accordance with institutional regulations and accreditation procedures.

8. Governance Model and Proposed Team

The implementation of this Strategic Development Programme requires a **participatory, transparent, and results-oriented governance model**, capable of mobilising the entire ISTAR community around shared objectives. The Board and the Scientific Committee are presented as a **cohesive and complementary team**, committed to promoting scientific excellence, valuing people, and ensuring the sustainable strengthening of ISTAR.

The selection of the members of the Board and the Scientific Committee took into account different levels of seniority, professional roles (faculty members and researchers), schools, and scientific fields, with the aim of ensuring a diverse and balanced representation capable of integrating different perspectives, experiences, and areas of expertise.

Building on reflections regarding the work carried out and the lessons learned during the previous mandate, ISTAR will continue to be managed according to the principles of **rigour, integrity, accountability, and continuous dialogue** with its members. The definition and monitoring of strategic priorities, the efficient use of available resources, the assessment of achieved outcomes, and regular reporting and accountability will constitute central elements of this governance model.

Beyond ensuring the effective management of a Research Unit, the objective is to strengthen the conditions that enable researchers, students, research managers, and

technical staff to fully develop their potential, thereby contributing to a stronger, more collaborative, more international, and more impactful ISTAR-Iscte for science, innovation, and society.
The implementation of this programme will be based on a **close, transparent, and results-oriented leadership approach**, working in coordination with the Scientific Committee, research groups, technical and scientific teams, doctoral candidates, and other Iscte structures. Decision-making will seek to balance **scientific ambition, sustainability, impact, and informed participation**.

Role or function	Team and Responsibilities
Director	Catarina Ferreira da Silva: Coordination with all ISTAR and Iscte governing bodies, as well as with research group coordinators, the technical team, ISTAR members, and doctoral students, while ensuring the external representation of ISTAR.
Deputy Director for People Valorisation	Valderi Leithardt: Responsibility of Human Resources Development and Valorisation
Deputy Director for Internationalisation and Funding	Miguel Dias: Responsibility of Internationalisation and Funding Aquisition
Management Tools	Luísa Domingues: Responsibility of Design and Development of Internal Management Tools and Support for Information Transparency
ISTAR Servers and Equipment	António Raimundo: Responsibility of Management of ISTAR Equipment Loans and Server Infrastructures
Scientific Board	Sérgio Moro (Information Systems) Manuel Alberto Ferreira (Systems Computational Modeling) Stefania Stellacci (Digital Living Spaces) Carlos Coutinho (Resilient and Secure AI-based Systems) Collegial coordination with the Board of Directors and ISTAR Research Groups.

1. Timeline and monitoring

Period	Priority Milestones and Deliverables
2027 — Launch	Consolidate the 2024–2026 baseline reference indicators and prepare the 2027 Activity Plan for approval by the Scientific Council. Prepare a proposal for updating the ISTAR Scientific Quality Manual and its associated indicator dashboard; hold an extended meeting to review and update the research thematic lines in preparation for the FCT/AI² evaluation. Launch a structured onboarding and mentoring programme. Design a laboratory utilisation plan in collaboration with the research groups. Launch the first exploratory call and implement the first internal Seed Funding call. Establish a schedule for funding applications, mobility activities, communication initiatives, and partnerships. Identify requirements and design an internal platform for the systematic monitoring of indicators, including a visual dashboard. Develop a management tool for members' own research funds. Update the document containing proposals for improvements to the SINGAP and Sigest management systems. Hold an extended meeting with the Advisory Board and identify priority areas for improvement. ssue the 2027 Activity Implementation Report.

Period	Priority Milestones and Deliverables
2028 — Implementation	Issue the 2028 Activity Plan for approval by the Scientific Council. Mainstream mentoring practices and recognition criteria across ISTAR. Launch the second exploratory research call and implement the second internal Seed Funding call. Monitor the implementation of the improvement actions. Ensure continuous monitoring of all strategic objectives. Test and validate the management tools developed and implemented. Monitor indicators related to mobility, communication, advanced training, and impact assessment and validation. Negotiate doctoral programme partnership agreements. Issue the 2028 Activity Implementation Report.
2029 — Consolidation	Assess the achievement of targets across all 24 sub-objectives and associated indicators, including funding applications, outcomes, funding secured, quality indicators, partnership agreements, and training activities. Prepare the 2029 Activity Plan for approval by the Scientific Council. Launch the third internal Seed Funding call. Hold a meeting with the Advisory Board and update institutional improvement priorities. Conduct an extended meeting to review the evolution of the research thematic areas in preparation for the forthcoming FCT/AI² evaluation. Publish a participatory scientific and financial assessment report, including evidence, deviations from planned targets, and corrective actions, to support preparation for the FCT/AI² evaluation, as part of the 2029 Activity Implementation Report.

Method: percentage-based indicators using a harmonised 2024–2026 baseline, except for SO1.2 (2024 baseline); documentary verification of results; separate reporting of processes dependent on external decisions (funding, recruitment, accreditation, or application approval).

2. Commitment to Implementation

ISTAR-Iscte is at a particularly significant juncture in its history. After twelve years of activity, the retention of its 'Very Good' rating, the steady growth in funding secured independently of the FCT's structural funding, the strengthening of its human and technical resources, and the expansion of its national and international collaboration networks form a solid foundation for a new phase of consolidation and growth.

The retention of the 'Very Good' rating, achieved in a particularly demanding context, demonstrates ISTAR-Iscte's scientific strength. The challenge for the coming years is to transform this foundation into a new cycle of growth and recognition, mobilising the entire community to achieve an 'Excellent' rating in the next FCT/AI² evaluation and to strengthen the unit's national and international recognition.

This journey will require scientific rigour, strategic vision and the ability to deliver, but also a culture of trust, mutual support and shared responsibility. It will require internationalisation, without losing internal cohesion; it will require results and impact, without compromising scientific integrity, organisational sustainability and social responsibility.

This programme sets out a strategy to strengthen ISTAR-Iscte's position as a leading research unit, capable of producing high-quality scientific knowledge, training new generations of researchers, developing partnerships of high strategic value and making a significant contribution to science, innovation, organisations and society.

The achievement of these objectives will depend on the active involvement of all ISTAR members. The Management is committed to creating the necessary conditions for researchers, students, research managers and technical staff to fully develop their potential, by supporting initiatives that strengthen scientific excellence, internationalisation, interdisciplinary collaboration and the impact of research. It is in this spirit of ambition, high standards, collective responsibility and institutional commitment that this application is submitted.