



# STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-2029

This strategic plan was submitted as part of the FCT evaluation for the 2025-2029 period. Although the evaluation process is still ongoing, these are the guidelines to which CEI-Iscte is committed.

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Center for  
International Studies

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## Summary of the Activity Plan for 2025-2029

### *Summary in Portuguese*

O CEI dedica-se à produção de conhecimento e à realização de investigação de excelência, abordando desafios globais. A nossa abordagem baseia-se em análises locais e setoriais que podem ser adaptadas e aplicadas globalmente, contribuindo assim para enfrentar eficazmente estes desafios. Desde a sustentabilidade e as alterações climáticas até ao crime transnacional organizado, passando pelas ameaças à democracia, à segurança global e à paz, a investigação do CEI proporciona perspetivas e contributos para estas questões críticas. Para 2025-2029, o CEI pretende reafirmar o seu estatuto como um centro de referência em Estudos Internacionais, não só em Portugal, mas também globalmente.

Nos últimos seis anos (2018-2023), o Centro cresceu significativamente na qualidade e quantidade dos seus resultados de investigação, nos esforços de internacionalização e na integração do ensino e da investigação. Com base neste crescimento, reestruturámos os nossos grupos de investigação para melhor abordar áreas-chave: Política e Segurança Global; Democracia, Ativismo e Cidadania; e Sociedades Sustentáveis. Estes grupos são ainda enquadrados por cinco linhas regionais: Ásia; Médio Oriente e Norte de África; África; América Latina; e Europa e Relações Transatlânticas. Esta reestruturação na matriz de investigação visa fomentar a colaboração mais estreita entre os investigadores, com o objetivo de desenvolver projetos interdisciplinares e comparativos. Ao reforçar esta interligação, o CEI fortalece as suas atividades, alinhando-se com a agenda mais ampla do Iscte para as ciências sociais contemporâneas. Do ponto de vista estratégico, para 2025-2029, o CEI planeia reforçar a sua posição internacional através do alargamento e consolidação da sua equipa de investigação. Isto inclui o apoio a carreiras de investigação no âmbito do Iscte e a liderança de projetos de investigação internacionais.

Daremos também prioridade a uma maior integração entre a investigação e o ensino, apoiando atividades de ensino pós-graduado. Com base nos grupos de investigação, iremos concentrar-nos nas seguintes temáticas:

1. Política e segurança mundiais: Incidência na governação e nos desafios da segurança mundial, incluindo as ameaças tradicionais à paz e os desafios transfronteiriços, como a prevenção do terrorismo e a relação entre alterações climáticas e segurança.
2. Democracia, ativismo e cidadania: Ênfase em abordagens multidisciplinares da democracia, do ativismo de base e da cidadania em diversos contextos geográficos, explorando a política a partir de várias perspetivas.
3. Sociedades sustentáveis: Promover a inovação na compreensão da mudança socioambiental, estudando manifestações, interconexões e implicações para o desenvolvimento e a mudança socioambiental.

Através destes esforços, o CEI pretende tornar-se um centro internacional de referência em Estudos Internacionais, atraindo investigadores de topo e contribuindo significativamente para o panorama do conhecimento global.

### *Summary in English*

CEI is dedicated to producing top-tier knowledge and conducting research of excellence, addressing global challenges. Our approach is based on local and sectorial analyses that can be adapted and applied globally, contributing to tackling these challenges effectively. From sustainability and climate change to transnational organized crime, threats to democracy, global security, and peace, CEI's research provides insights and potential solutions to these critical issues. In the coming years, CEI aims to reaffirm its position as a leading reference in international studies, not only in Portugal but also globally.

Over the last six years (2018-2023), the Centre has significantly grown in the quality and quantity of its research outputs, internationalization efforts, and the integration of teaching and research. Building upon this growth, we have restructured our research groups to better address key areas: Global Politics and Security; Democracy, Activism, and Citizenship; and Sustainable Societies. These groups are further framed by five regional lines: Asia; Middle East & North Africa; Africa; Latin America; and Europe and Transatlantic Relations. This restructuring aims to foster closer collaboration among researchers, with the goal of developing interdisciplinary and comparative projects. By enhancing this interconnection, CEI strengthens its activities and projects, aligning with Iscte's broader agenda towards contemporary social sciences. Looking ahead to our strategic vision for 2025-2029, CEI plans to reinforce its international position by enlarging and consolidating its research team. This includes supporting research careers within Iscte and leading competitive international research projects.

We will also prioritize deeper integration between research and teaching, supporting activities at the postgraduate level. Based upon our research groups, we will focus on the following issues:

1. Global Politics and Security: Focus on governance and global security challenges, including traditional threats to peace and cross-border challenges like terrorism prevention and the climate change-security nexus.
2. Democracy, Activism, and Citizenship: Emphasis on multidisciplinary approaches to democracy, grassroots activism, and citizenship in diverse geographical contexts, exploring politics from various perspectives.
3. Sustainable Societies: Promote innovation in understanding social-environmental change, studying manifestations, interconnections, and implications for development and socioenvironmental change.

Through these efforts, CEI aims to become an international hub for research in International Studies, attracting top researchers and contributing significantly to the global knowledge landscape.



## Description of the Activity Plan for 2025-2029

### Objectives and strategy of the R&D Unit for 2025-2029

CEI is committed to producing knowledge and developing research of excellence, addressing the global challenges of our time. Given the transnational nature of these global challenges, we aim at developing local/sectorial analyses that can be expanded, adapted, and applied in different realities, thus contributing to tackling these challenges. From sustainability and environmental change to transnational organized crime, from threats to democracy to issues of global security and peace, the research developed at CEI contributes to providing reflections and possible solutions to some of these key issues.

To that end, CEI will reaffirm its position as a leading reference in international studies in Portugal and expand our global reach. In the last six years (2018-2023), the Centre has grown, in quality and quantity of its research outputs, in internationalization and in ensuring the connection between teaching and research. Building upon this growth, we have restructured our research groups so that they reflect the key areas of research to which we are dedicated, while maintaining the original geographical matrix, with some adjustments (as explained in section 11.2). Additionally, CEI is a member of Iscte - Knowledge and Innovation (Iscte-KI), founded in 2020, which enhances the Centre's conditions to develop its activities. Our strategic vision for 2025-2029 will therefore take advantage of these favorable conditions and reinforce the international position of the Centre, through the enlargement and consolidation of its research team, while aiming for increased leadership of research projects with competitive international funding. We have structured this strategic vision around five main objectives, which in turn are consistent with the goals achieved during the 2018-2023 period.

#### **1) Enlargement and consolidation of the research team**

During the last six years, the Centre was able to attract a significant number of top-level national and international researchers, through post-doctoral funding, government-funded employment programs, such as the Stimulus to Scientific Employment, or through the integration of tenured-track professors in the Centre's research team. With this approach, CEI's team became more focused and professionalised. We wish to continue this trend by attracting researchers in different stages of their careers and providing a world-class research environment for Early Career Researchers. We have applied to hire, in 2025, five permanent researchers through the FCT-Tenure programme, which will add to the three Researchers (two assistant and one principal), hired in 2022 and 2023 as part of Iscte's broader strategy for research careers. We will continue to use existing resources to increase the number of researchers on a permanent contract. This means that we will have a growing permanent set of researchers to ensure the sustainability of our research agenda, and we will continue to work on increasing the number of permanent contracts. Regarding the support to younger researchers, we are strongly engaged with the development of the PhD programs in which CEI is involved. Through the requested funding for PhD scholarships and advanced training, we will be able to attract more high-quality students and provide them with a set of tools that will improve their ability to scientific writing, grants applications and science communication.

## **2) Increase the scientific leadership of the research team**

Given the increase in the outputs, both in quality and quantity, we now seek to go further and pursue a more relevant role in the leadership of international research consortiums, funded through competitive calls, such as Horizon Europe and Erasmus+. Based upon our experience in coordinating several Erasmus+ projects, we aim to become more ambitious. We will do this through several incentives to our researchers. Some have already been successfully implemented, such as pre- and post-award support to applications for competitive calls and training on project management; support for organization of major international conferences at Iscte; and incentives for international project applications. We will provide additional financial incentives in the form of seed funding for the build-up of networks and consortiums, as well as for exploratory projects. In the previous evaluation period, we successfully supported an application to an ERC Starting Grant and we will build on that experience and encourage more applications. With the support of Iscte-KI, we will use consultancy services to prepare such kind of applications and we will provide incentives for researchers (and professors) through the reduction of teaching and management duties. Another objective is to increase CEI's support to participate in international conferences/networks, both at the individual and institutional level. For example, we are already institutional partners of ECPR and members of ECOLISE (European network for community-led initiatives on climate change and sustainability) and the International Communal Studies Association, and we will host ICOSA's 2025 annual conference at CEI.

## **3) Better articulation between research and activities at different levels of teaching, in particular at the postgraduate (Masters and PhD) level**

Starting in 2020, CEI began to directly manage the PhD in African Studies, the PhD in History, Security Studies and Defence, and the newest PhD in International Studies. This allowed for a closer integration of the PhD students in the Centre's activities. However, it is important to increase and deepen this participation. Therefore, we will reinforce communication with the students (also in terms of practical, logistical information), create more events directed towards them (scientific writing retreats, grant-application workshops) as well as continue initiatives that will allow to share their research and receive feedback from the rest of the research team. Together with the School of Sociology and Public Policy, and the Centre for Research and Studies in Sociology, we will continue to organize every year a three-day event where 3rd year PhD students present and discuss their work with the academic community. CEI is also closely connected to Iscte's Master programmes, such as the MA in International Studies and the MA in African Studies. Additionally, CEI's researchers are actively involved as professors and supervisors in the Masters in Humanitarian Action, Modern and Contemporary History, Political Science, Governance and Sustainability of the Sea, and Development Studies. CEI will also develop several strategies for including students at a Master level and undergraduate students in its projects and activities, continuing to welcome internships in its projects, as well as developing summer course programs ('América Latina Hoje', 'Global Challenges'), which work as optional courses for all Iscte's master students. We would also highlight Iscte's Grants for Scientific Initiation Scholarships, through which undergraduate students can develop small research projects on one of Iscte's RU. Previous students have been hosted by CEI, which led them to enroll in a masters' programme at Iscte.

#### **4) Increase the Centre's participation in Open Science and Open Access**

Iscte has been promoting training sessions for researchers and researcher managers on how to follow open access rules regarding FCT and European guidelines, including the management of research data and promoting training on data management plan. It is worth noting that the publications under the management structure of CEI, such as 'Cadernos de Estudos Africanos' and 'Ler História' (Scopus Q1 in 2021 and in 2023, Scopus Q2 in 2018-2020 and 2022 History) already integrate the Open Edition Platform. For the next period of funding, the Centre will focus on the improvement of the 'Cadernos de Estudos Africanos', in terms of regularity and quality of publication, with the goal of improving its position in both journal rankings and outreach.

#### **5) Reinforce Knowledge Transfer and social value creation**

The Centre's focus is on fundamental research, but it also prioritises the transfer of knowledge for societal benefit, making it accessible as a public good. In line with this goal, CEI emphasises directed research and applied knowledge, fostering connections with public policy development and addressing contemporary societal challenges. This commitment is demonstrated through its support to decision-making processes in both governmental and other sectors, and through its engagement with national and international media outlets, which enhance the Centre's public visibility, the direct contact with the public and the dissemination of science and research produced. The Centre is now a formal partner in the consortium responsible for the European Researchers' Night in Portugal. Additionally, CEI uses different platforms for disseminating its research. During the next funding cycle, we wish to have a stronger presence in the different digital communication channels. With these objectives in mind, CEI will naturally establish itself as an international reference for research on International Studies, continuing to attract world-level researchers striving for excellence in research, teaching, and dissemination of knowledge.

## Organization of the R&D Unit for 2025-2029

CEI's strategic organisation and objectives for the next five years will be based on the current structure but will also improve in terms of management and implementation mechanisms. These improvements will cover four main areas: 1) internal management structure of the Centre; 2) interconnectedness among the three renovated research groups and with the regional lines; 3) articulation between CEI and Iscte - Knowledge and Innovation (Iscte-KI); 4) collaboration between CEI's researchers and the SocioDigital Lab.

- 1) As a decentralised organic unit of Iscte directed to develop its own autonomous scientific research and transfer of knowledge both within academia and society, CEI has adopted and will continue to follow a strategy aligned with the comprehensive goals followed by Iscte. In this framework, its governing bodies account for the different research areas in the Centre and include the Director, the Deputy Director, the Scientific Committee and the Scientific Council composed by all integrated PhD researchers. Among the 5 members comprising the Board of Directors and Scientific Committee, 4 are women, and the leadership of the research groups is ensured by women. Overall, the gender distribution within the Scientific Council stands at 44% women and 46% men, reflecting a balanced gendered representation. The permanent staff is currently composed of four people who are responsible for project management, research dissemination and organisation of scientific events, administration and financial management. Regarding staff composition, the most evident proposed adjustment will consist of a new position dedicated to the management of the PhD programmes (PhD in African Studies, PhD in International Studies and PhD in History, Security Studies and Defence) and the journals ('Cadernos de Estudos Africanos', 'Portuguese Journal of Social Sciences', and 'Ler História').
- 2) The main novelty is the reformulation of CEI's research matrix, under which the groups will adopt the following designations: Global Politics and Security; Democracy, Activism and Citizenship; Sustainable Societies. The first group will mainly focus on major global challenges for the 21st century, highlighting widespread interest in security issues, public policies and global governance. The second group will aim at strengthening multidisciplinary and multidimensional approaches to current forms of democracy, grassroots activism and citizenship. The third group will deal with transnational economic, social, environmental, cultural and technological phenomena concerning contemporary forms of sustainability. This reorganisation has been designed with the purpose of emphasising deeper interconnections between the heterogeneity of areas studies developed in the Centre and including the researchers' contributions, in a bottom-up approach. The regional lines will also reflect an adjustment, namely with the separation between Asia and Middle East & North Africa, alongside the remaining regions that already warrant a more consolidated focus: Africa, Latin America and Europe & Transatlantic Relations. CEI's attention to these regional areas has always been one of its strengths since its foundation in 2013 and will remain so in the coming years. The three research groups and the five regional lines will remain at the core of CEI's coordination and planning in order to allow researchers to interact and collaborate in closer



ways, from the organization of interdisciplinary conferences to project applications dealing with comparative regional contexts. This interconnection will contribute to strengthening the activities and projects within CEI as well as within Iscte's comprehensive agenda aimed at strategically incorporating fields of study that have become the core of contemporary social sciences.

- 3) Another important part of CEI's organisation for the next five years is related to the articulation with a new management institution, the Iscte-KI that since 2020 has brought together Iscte's research centres, technological resources, laboratories, observatories, and support services, in one single building dedicated to research. CEI is a founding member of Iscte-KI, contributing to all the research activities of the team such as project proposals and implementation of the project's activities. With this new framework, CEI's goal is to maximise our research activities within this new shared space for research, participating in additional opportunities for cooperation and knowledge transfer, in close partnership with other RU and groups based at Iscte. This will allow fostering new synergies and to promote the interaction between social sciences and technologies, as a strategic priority in a national context. This collaboration will also have beneficial outcomes in terms of financial investments in supporting research grants, career development, and above all in creating an incremental internationalisation of CEI's research and its team. Also noteworthy is the sharing of services, laboratory infrastructure, equipment and other facilities, such as Iscte-KI's Data Centre, which will contribute to improve the quality of the infrastructure and support further technology transfer.
  
- 4) A direct strategic outcome of Iscte-KI was the creation of the SocioDigital Lab - Associated Socio-Digital Laboratory for Public Policies (SDLab). CEI has contributed to this initiative and will continue to create new interdisciplinary opportunities for cooperation and knowledge transfer with the aim to promote a closer linkage between social sciences and digital technologies, along with a more influential role in designing and reinforcing public policies. CEI is based on a solid interdisciplinary approach towards contemporary global challenges in the social, economic, environmental, cultural and political domains. Based on the research goals and activities of the SDLab and in partnership with the other Iscte's RU, we will strengthen our role in this domain through a more active co-coordination of the Thematic Line 4 - Global Governance, focused on major research and public policies' agendas concerning migration, democracy, security and development through a multilevel (local, national and international) lens of analysis and in dialogue with relevant stakeholders and policymakers.

## Proposed Research Groups

### 1) Global Politics and Security

#### *Política Global e Segurança*

**Keywords:** Global Politics, Security & Defence, Global Governance and International Organizations, Emerging and Disruptive Technologies.

This research group encompasses two major research lines:

1) The first deals with global governance, where researchers will study the intersection of key components and key fallouts of the current international order. The goal is to unpack the relationships between domestic politics and foreign policies, decision-making processes, and public policies in world affairs that foster different global regional, formal, and informal solutions. The interest is set in relations between countries but also between transnational non-governmental organizations as well as their influence on global, national, or local policy arenas. Particular attention will be paid to dynamics emanating from the European, Atlantic, and Asian contexts.

2) The second research line focuses on global security challenges. It includes traditional threats to peace, such as interstate and regional armed conflicts, but also cross-border and transnational challenges such as terrorism prevention, the interplay between critical and disruptive technologies and security, the climate change-security nexus, the perils of global pandemics, or the inshore connections of maritime security. Significant focus will be assigned to expanding networks of junior and senior researchers by means of additional applications for national and international funding.

This research group aims to consolidate and reinforce the capacity of CEI to host and support new research teams, that can apply and successfully compete in international funding bids, while focusing on three self-reinforcing tasks: ensuring an active transfer of knowledge, increasing new partnerships with other relevant national and international institutions, and leveraging such knowledge and partnerships into the design of public policies and overall societal transformation.

### 2) Democracy, Activism and Citizenship

#### *Democracia, Ativismos e Cidadania*

**Keywords:** Political systems, Conflicts, Inequalities, Social Movements.

The group intends to strengthen its multidisciplinary and multidimensional approaches towards the interaction between current forms of democracy, grassroots activism and citizenship in different geographical contexts, with specific attention to the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa. One of the main goals is to promote comparative studies that can bridge regional divides and to reflect on global issues, especially coming from the regions of the Global South. In particular, the group's researchers will deepen their projects in investigating socio-political issues from their different contexts and fieldworks, including institutional and non-institutional politics, while considering politics from the margins and decolonial perspectives. This will be translated in greater engagement with contemporary debates on the relevance of social justice and good practices in global politics

and, at the same time, with current processes of public policy production and implementation of the 2030 agenda. As a result, the main objective of the group's researchers will be to apply for international competitive funding as principal coordinators. In terms of activities, the researchers intend to continue with their participation in international research networks, along with the organisation of different forms of knowledge transfer events, both within academia and in partnership with civil society organisations. This strategy will be especially strengthened with partners based in the regional contexts mentioned above that have become the core of most of the research projects and teaching subjects of the group. An example of this is the ongoing involvement in the organisation committee of the Latin American Congress of Political Science, which will bring together 1,400 researchers from all over the world in July 2024.

### **3) Sustainable Societies**

#### *Sociedades Sustentáveis*

**Keywords:** Socio-environmental change, Sustainability, Development, Livelihoods.

Building on projects developed between 2020 and 2024 (e.g. MYNA, EuroREGEN, AfDevLives, Fruit Fly, COVID-19 in Drylands), this research group aims to promote theoretical and methodological innovation in the transdisciplinary understanding of global trends in social-environmental change, by studying their geographically and historically situated manifestations, their cross-scale interconnections, and their implications for development and socio-environmental change.

Such understanding will be pursued by examining the impact and legacies, across time, of diverse epistemologies, forms of collective action, development interventions, forms of engagement with public institutions in policy and institutional innovation, and strategies of promoting synergies between humans, nature, and technologies. The group will apply methodological approaches that favour in-depth, contextualized understandings of long term, multidimensional phenomena, as well as participatory approaches to knowledge production. This includes cosmologies, epistemologies, spiritualities/wisdom traditions, non-mainstream pedagogies, action research methodologies, and other engaged and participatory approaches to knowledge production and diffusion, and cultural positions providing post-human, post-patriarchal and decolonial counterpoints to modernity, by resignifying relationships with the non-rational dimensions of human existence, as well as other-than-human dimensions of nature.

This group will deliver innovative strategies to the training of new cohorts of scholars and practitioners, with the purpose of impacting civil society dynamism, environmental sustainability, entrepreneurship, and policy innovation at the international level. In addition to fundamental and applied research and dissemination, this will happen through

contributions to policy briefs, working papers, databases, and other research tools among other forms of engagement with civil society, policy actors and entrepreneurial agents.