European Rare Diseases
Research Alliance

Resource on the State of the Art of Rare Disease Activities

2025 Report for Portugal

National Mirror Group

Portugal has a National Mirror Group (NMG), which was launched on 27th January 2021. The NMG is coordinated by the National Institute of Health Doutor Ricardo Jorge (INSA). This NMG has overseen the collection of data from Portugal via a data contributing committee. Contributors are listed at the end of this report.

Definition of a Rare Disease

Portugal adopts the formal European Union (EU) definition of a rare disease (i.e. those with a prevalence of no more than 5 patients per 10,000 persons. This definition is laid down in Regulation EC no. 141/2000 on Orphan Medicinal Products, Directive 2011/24/EU on Cross Border Healthcare as well as in the Council Recommendation on an action in the field of rare diseases of 8 June 2009.). The National Plan espouses this definition and there are no instances when a different definition is used.

Status Quo of any National Plan or Strategy for Rare Disease

What is the status quo?

Portugal's approach to rare diseases has evolved through two key national initiatives. The first was the National Programme for Rare Diseases, approved in 2008, with the goal of improving the country's response to the healthcare needs of individuals with rare diseases and their families, as well as enhancing the quality of care provided. The programme was initially implemented between 2008 and 2010, followed by a consolidation phase from 2010 to 2015. Its main objectives were to provide more appropriate and effective healthcare services tailored to rare disease patients.

In 2015, this programme was replaced by the Integrated Strategy for Rare Diseases 2015–2020. This new strategy established a national plan focused on improving diagnosis, treatment, patient follow-up, and social inclusion. It adopted an interministerial, intersectoral, and interinstitutional approach, coordinated by a commission led by the Directorate-General of Health. The strategy aimed to enhance the coordination of health and social care, promote early diagnosis, ensure access to appropriate treatments, strengthen clinical and epidemiological information systems, foster scientific research, and

Co-funded by the European Union

ERDERA has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under grant agreement N°101156595.
Views and opinions expressed are those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or any other granting authority, who cannot be held responsible for them.

guarantee social inclusion and the exercise of citizenship. Key components included the development of specialised Reference Centres, training for healthcare professionals, active involvement of patient associations, the use of technologies such as telemedicine, and integration into European Reference Networks (ERN).

The Portuguese government recognised the need to reassess and update its national approach in response to evolving challenges and European priorities. As a result, the Intersectoral Working Group for Rare Disease (Grupo de Trabalho Intersectorial para as Doenças Raras, Despacho n.º 5505/2023) was established in 2023. The main objectives of this group were to evaluate the previous strategy and to develop a new National Intersectoral Plan for Rare Diseases, aligned with the strategic goals of the European Commission.

The new plan, titled 'Action for Rare Diseases: From Strategy to Person 2025–2030', builds on the previous Integrated Strategy (2015–2020) and seeks to expand its achievements through a more comprehensive, person-centred approach that responds to the needs of individuals living with a rare disease, as well as their families and caregivers. Recognising that rare diseases require a coordinated response beyond the health sector alone, the plan promotes multisectoral collaboration across healthcare, education, social protection, employment, and local government. It is structured around four key pillars:

- The reorganisation and strengthening of Reference Centres and other Care Centres
- The implementation of a Single Electronic Health Record and the Person with Rare Disease card
- The development of a national research and innovation agenda, in coordination with institutions such as the FCT (Foundation for Science and Technology) and the AICIB (Agency for Clinical Research and Biomedical Innovation)
- A robust programme of information and training for the general public, healthcare professionals, and caregivers

The new plan was formally submitted to the Portuguese government in February 2024 and is currently awaiting official publication.

Elaboration and Adoption/How was the original plan elaborated?

A dedicated group has been established to oversee the drafting and adoption of Portugal's National Plan for Rare Disease for 2025-2030. The following stakeholder types are included within this group:

- Patients/people with lived experience of rare condition
- Portugal's National Alliance of Rare Disease Patient Organisations
- Health Ministry/Competent National Authority in charge of Health or Care
- Research Ministry/ Competent National Authority in charge of Research
- Social or Welfare Ministry/ Competent National Authority in charge of social affairs
- Research funders
- Researchers/clinicians from rare disease centres
- ERN coordinators or representatives

The group included representatives from 13 public institutions, including health, education, research, and social security sectors, as well as designated members from the Secretaries of State for Health Promotion, Inclusion, and Digitalisation. The plan was developed through extensive public consultation.

Is there funding for the Plan? How is it Implemented and/or Monitored or Evaluated?

There are no funds dedicated to Portugal's National Plan for Rare Disease nor for any of the actions within the plan.

As Portugal's National Plan for Rare Disease is awaiting official publication, no formal evaluation or monitoring has currently taken place.

Research in National Plans or national research strategies relevant to rare disease

Portugal's National Plan for Rare Disease has now expired but it did address rare disease research and included the following topics relevant to rare disease research:

- National RD research investment, opportunities and funding calls
- International/transnational RD research investment, opportunities and funding calls
- Registries or registry catalogues for rare diseases
- Biobanks/biosample catalogues for rare diseases
- Ontologies, codification or data standardisation
- Diagnostics research ('solving unknown conditions')
- Basic research (e.g. cell lines, animal models etc)
- Clinical/Translational research
- Sociological (e.g. Quality-of-Life-related) or socio-economic research

Portugal's new National Plan, that is currently awaiting publication, is closely aligned with other major national and European initiatives, particularly Portugal's National Genomics Strategy (PT_MedGen). Recognising that around 80% of rare diseases have a genetic origin, the plan places strong emphasis on expanding access to genetic testing, integrating genomic data into clinical systems, and strengthening links with national platforms such as GenomePT (Research Infrastructure for Genome Sequencing and Analysis).

The plan includes a strong emphasis on international coordination, particularly focused on collaboration within the European Union. One of its key priorities is the integration of Portuguese healthcare services into European Reference Networks (ERNs). The plan also encourages participation in major European initiatives such as ERDERA and JARDIN.

Select Achievements of the National Plan

Below are five select achievements resulting from Portugal's National Plan for Rare Disease:

1. Enhanced clinical and genetic information: alignment with Orphanet nomenclature, including the review and translation of over 2,000 rare disease diagnoses, along with the registration of more than 100 genetic tests.

2. Intersectoral coordination: collaboration among health, education, and social sectors, along with patient organizations, ensured an integrated and comprehensive approach to rare diseases.
3. Publication of a support manual for people with rare diseases, where different services are described for people with rare diseases in the field of health care, education and social support.
4. Implementation of training and awareness actions for teachers in primary and secondary schools.
5. Implementation of the National Registry, which integrates Primary Care with Hospital/Reference Centres and Specialized Care.

Rare Disease Research Programmes and Funding

There are no funding calls or programmes dedicated to rare disease research in Portugal.

According to Portugal's new Action Plan for Rare Disease, the main sources of funding for research and innovation in rare disease are the FCT (Foundation for Science and Technology), the European Commission, and the pharmaceutical industry. During the 2014–2020 period (Horizon 2020), Portuguese scientists and companies obtained €1.1 million for research, a figure expected to double in the next period, Horizon Europe (2021–2027). Pharmaceutical companies have been investing around €90 million per year since 2019, with a significant increase to €121 million in 2021 (APIFARMA 2024). In addition, healthcare units, using their own resources, carry out multiple studies in the field of rare diseases (e.g. case studies, case series analyses).

There has been no specific policy decision to allocate a portion of Portugal's national research budget specifically to rare disease research. However, the Agency for Clinical Research and Biomedical Innovation (AICIB) was created in 2018, with the mission of promoting, coordinating, and supporting activities in the areas of clinical and translational research and biomedical innovation through:

- Collaborative actions between clinical research centres
- Fostering Portugal's competitiveness, namely through the creation of a common 'entry portal' (one-stop shop)
- Catalysing digital transition and data sharing in healthcare
- Promoting support programs for scientific projects and training initiatives

The AICIB is also responsible for establishing a National Clinical Research Network by:

- Encouraging and strengthening healthcare units and promoting a research culture within the Central Administration of the Health System
- Fostering synergies between research centres and other stakeholders
- Promoting a national training program aligned with the activity plans of the Academic Clinical Centres (CAC) and institutional postgraduate training programs

The AICIB also aims to stimulate internationalisation by strengthening Portugal's role in European and other contexts, integrating into networks and consortia, and attracting funding.

Rare Disease Registration and Biobanking

Currently, Portugal does not have national nor regional registries for Rare Disease. The new National Plan for Rare Disease does include the provision of tools to ensure a reliable clinical registry, with appropriate coding for rare diseases and interoperability between information systems. However, lack of dedicated funding remains the main barrier to the implementation of this objective. Within the National Plan, there are plans to generalise the use of the Digital Card for People with Rare Diseases. Although it is not a clinical registry, the card identifies the physician and reference centre, as well as the recommended intervention in urgent or emergency situations, and allows access through the National Health Service (SNS) portal to a set of clinical data and guidelines.

There are rare disease specific registries within Portugal that are managed at the level of the Reference Centres for these conditions. Various Reference Centres also participate in existing European registries related to their respective pathologies.

Portugal does not have a national biobank for the collection of rare disease biosamples. Within Portugal's new National Plan, an updated mapping of research and innovation infrastructures is planned, under the responsibility of FCT, AICIB, academia, and Research Centres. The objective is to develop a comprehensive map of research and innovation infrastructures, such as biobanks, cohorts, disease models (cell lines, organoids, animal models), genomics and bioinformatics platforms, and to create a national repository of scientific publications on rare disease.

Organisation of Rare Disease Care

Centres of Expertise

Portugal has a policy in place to designate Centres of Expertise for rare disease, both at cross-rare disease and disease specific levels. There are 48 Centres of Expertise in Portugal. The designation of a Centre of Expertise (CE) for Rare Diseases in Portugal is regulated by Ordinance No. 194/2014, of 30 September, and subsequent complementary legislation (e.g., Portaria 195/2016, Despachos 9415/2016 and 11648-B/2016).

Criteria for designation include:

1. Clinical expertise: Demonstrated experience in the diagnosis, management, and treatment of rare diseases in a specific area.
2. Concentration of resources: Access to advanced diagnostic tools, laboratories, and specialized treatments.
3. Multidisciplinary approach: Integration of medical, nursing, and allied health professionals.
4. Research and innovation: Participation in clinical research, trials, and knowledge dissemination.
5. Collaboration and networking: Engagement with other national and European reference centers, including participation in European Reference Networks (ERNs).
6. Quality and safety: Commitment to quality management, accreditation processes

Relationship with EUCERD / ERN criteria:

- The Portuguese criteria are broadly in line with the EUCERD recommendations for Centres of Expertise for Rare Diseases.
- When a Centre of Expertise applies to participate as an ERN Health Care Provider (HCP), additional ERN-specific criteria apply, particularly for cross-border networking and reporting, but the core clinical and organisational standards overlap.
- Therefore, the Portuguese designation criteria for a Centre of Expertise are largely compatible with ERN HCP criteria, though not exactly identical.

ERNs

Portugal is involved in multiple European Reference Networks. For the latest details on participating HCPs, click here.

Newborn Screening

29 conditions are screened for in Portugal's Newborn Screening Programme: Congenital Hypothyroidism, Inherited Metabolic Disorders, Aminoacidopathies, Phenylketonuria (PKU) / Hyperphenylalaninemias, Tyrosinemia Type I, Tyrosinemia Type II, Maple Syrup Urine Disease (MSUD), Citrullinemia Type I, Argininosuccinic Aciduria, Hyperargininemia, Classical Homocystinuria, Hypermethioninemia (MAT Deficiency), Organic Acidemias, Propionic Acidemia (PA), Methylmalonic Acidemia (MMA, Mut–), Isovaleric Acidemia (IVA), 3-Hydroxy-3-Methylglutaric Aciduria (3-HMG), Glutaric Aciduria Type I (GA I), 3-Methylcrotonylglycinuria (3-MCC Deficiency), Malonic Aciduria, Inherited Disorders of Mitochondrial Fatty Acid β-Oxidation, Short-Chain 3-Hydroxyacyl-CoA Dehydrogenase deficiency (SCHAD), Medium-Chain Acyl-CoA Dehydrogenase Deficiency (MCADD), Very-Long-Chain Acyl-CoA Dehydrogenase Deficiency (VLCADD), Long-Chain 3-Hydroxyacyl-CoA Dehydrogenase / Trifunctional Protein Deficiency (LCHADD/TFP), Carnitine Palmitoyltransferase I Deficiency (CPT I), Carnitine Palmitoyltransferase II / Carnitine-Acylcarnitine Translocase Deficiency (CPT II / CACT), Multiple Acyl-CoA Dehydrogenase Deficiency (Glutaric Aciduria Type II), Primary Carnitine Deficiency (CUD), Cystic Fibrosis, Sickle Cell Disease and Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA). Further information can be found here.

All laboratory analyses are performed at the Newborn Screening, Metabolism and Genetics Unit of the Department of Human Genetics at INSA in Porto, which establishes contact with healthcare centres to guide the management of newborns with a positive screening result. The inclusion of new diseases in the program is carried out by the coordination of the National Newborn Screening Program, in collaboration with the Board of INSA and with the Ministry of Health.

Diagnostics

At the public level, several laboratories in Portugal offer genetic testing for a wide range of rare diseases, such as the National Institute of Health Doutor Ricardo Jorge and the genetics laboratories of some reference centres. Portugal, as a country that is part of the international ORPHANET consortium, shares information about the laboratories that perform genetic tests according to the Orpha code. The GenomePT consortium includes 14 public laboratories (4 in Lisbon, 1 in the Algarve, 4 in the Centre, 4 in Porto, and 1 in Minho). However, none currently have high-throughput sequencing capacity within appropriate timeframes or costs, so Whole Exome and Whole Genome sequencing are performed externally in private research laboratories.

According to Decree-Law No. 177/92 of August 13, Portuguese citizens may access these genetic tests abroad whenever, due to a lack of technical or human resources, they cannot be provided in Portugal, without any prior agreements established at the level of the Ministry of Health.

In Portugal's National Action Plan for Rare Diseases, there is a section dedicated to the 'Management of Suspected Rare Disease Cases Without Diagnosis'. Under the responsibility of hospitals that host Reference Centres the plan foresees:

- The creation of Paediatric and Internal Medicine consultations specifically for patients with suspected rare diseases who remain undiagnosed and present with nonspecific clinical features, ensuring support from Medical Genetics.
- The implementation of a multidisciplinary 'Diagnostic Impasse' consultation, intended for individuals with a suspected rare disease not yet confirmed but already referred to a specialised centre.

Portugal's National Plan recommends that Reference Centres should have a dedicated consultation for the follow-up and symptomatic treatment of cases with unresolved diagnoses, including regular monitoring appointments (at least once a year), according to the specific needs of each condition and within a multidisciplinary framework, as well as discussion at the level of National Collaborative Networks and ERN.

National Alliances of Rare Disease Patient Organisations

Portugal's National Alliance of Rare Disease patient organisations is RD Portugal. Further information can be found here. RD Portugal is involved in setting the strategic direction of rare disease research in Portugal.

Information Resources for Rare Disease

National Orphanet Engagement

There is an operational Orphanet team within Portugal, which is hosted by the Directorate-General for Health (DGS).

Helplines

The patient association, Associação Raríssimas, provides information through LINHA RARA (Portugeuse rare disease counselling and support helpline), via phone, email, or in person, and has recorded over 16,000 contacts as of December 2023. LINHA RARA is part of the ENHRD (European Network of Helplines for Rare Diseases).

Training and Education

There are rare disease training activities within Portugal. These training activities include the following topics:

- Diagnostics
- Raising awareness of rare disease
- Clinical research

Scientific societies, such as the Portuguese Society for Inherited Metabolic Diseases, the Portuguese Society of Paediatrics, and the Portuguese Society of Human Genetics, periodically promote training and networking activities focused on rare disease, targeting clinicians, researchers, and laboratory technicians.

Some training activities are also organized by the national Reference Centres for rare disease. These courses usually have a fee and are conducted in Portuguese.

There are awareness raising activities carried out in Portugal within schools, including the 'Informar sem Dramatizar' (Inform Without Dramatizing) program. This program was designed by RD-Portugal in partnership with the Ministry of Education, aimed at raising awareness about rare diseases in Portuguese schools, without stigma, through the distribution of educational materials. The project was launched in 2021 and has involved over 80 schools and 7,000 students, aged 3 to 18 years, since its inception.

Orphan Medicinal Products (OMPs)

As of June 2024, 175 OMP applications have been assessed under the centralised procedure. 18 have been refused and one has been withdrawn, leaving a total of 156 OMPs with valid marketing authorisation. The proportion of OMPs registered in Portugal is 80.8% and only 38.5% are currently

being marketed. The respective proportions in Portugal for Antineoplasic and Immunomodulating Agents (AIA) and Alimentary and Tract Metabolism drugs (ATM) are 42.1% and 18.3% and 20.6% and 7.1%.

Of the 156 OMPs with valid Marketing Authorisation (MA), 38 (24.4%) are being accessed through a national early access program. Further information can be found here. A national decree changed the conditions for Exceptional Use Authorization (AUE) of medicines with a MA. It was established that, from the date of MA issue and during the legally defined period for prior evaluation procedures, the supply of medicines under AUE must take place within the framework of an Early Access Program (PAP) for medicines.

Disclaimer: The data collection activities which enabled this 2025 national report were supported by the ERDERA. ERDERA has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under grant agreement N°101156595. Views and opinions expressed are those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or any other granting authority, who cannot be held responsible for them, nor should this document be viewed as an official national 'position'.

The Data Contributing Committee of Portugal, which provided this 2025 data (correct as of the end of November 2025) in the context of the Resource on the State of the Art of Rare Disease Activities, is composed of the following individuals:

- Sandra Alves, National Institute of Health Doutor Ricardo Jorge (INSA)
- Paulo Gonçalves, RD Portugal
- Carla Pereira, Directorate-General of Health (DGS)
- Glória Isidro, National Institute of Health Doutor Ricardo Jorge (INSA)
- Ana Marcão, National Institute of Health Doutor Ricardo Jorge (INSA)