



SHIFT-HUB Entrepreneurial Discovery

EXPLORING NORTHERN PORTUGAL'S OPPORTUNITIES FOR SMART HEALTH

SHIFT-HUB Entrepreneurial Discovery Workshop: Exploring Northern Portugal's Opportunities for Smart Health

Porto, October 09, 2024 – The SHIFT-HUB project, funded by the EU, hosted a workshop titled "Exploring Northern Portugal's Opportunities for Smart Health". The event took place during the [Future Health Conference Porto](#) in Porto. The workshop featured a comprehensive panel discussion followed by a networking session aimed at connecting smart health stakeholders in the Northern Portugal region, fostering collaboration and identifying opportunities for improvements to strengthen the regional ecosystem.

Panellists

The workshop was chaired by Alena Bubeck from the SHIFT-HUB project coordinator S2i and Anastasia Papachristodoulou from KiNNO. The panel discussion featured notable speakers who provided insights into various facets of the regional smart health ecosystem:

- **Bárbara Macedo**, Research and Innovation Manager, [Institute of Research and Innovation in Health \(i3S\)](#)
 - o Role & Responsibilities: Bárbara is an experienced and self-motivated PhD Health Innovation Manager bringing 9 years of experience on Life Science R&D Projects with a solid academic and entrepreneurial background. As a Research and Innovation Manager at Institute of Research and Innovation in Health (i3S), she has deep know-how transferring the knowledge developed at i3S to the Life Science Ecosystem, involving relevant stakeholders in its valorization and exploitation into knowledge-intensive products or services. At i3S they have launched to the market several start-ups providing services and products in the Life Science sector, namely healthcare.
- **Lídia Fonseca**, Technology and Business Manager, [U.Porto Innovation \(UPIN\)](#)
 - o Role & Responsibilities: Lídia is a Technology and Business Manager at the Technology Transfer office at the University of Porto (U.Porto Innovation) since 2018. Lídia manages technologies of the university in the areas of Health and Life Sciences and Biotechnology, interacting with researchers and companies in order to protect and help commercialize the innovative inventions that are developed at the university. She has also been managing funded projects related to knowledge transfer and the BIP PROOF program, which provides support for proof-of-concept projects in the University of Porto's research ecosystem. Lídia worked for several years in academic research in the field of Virology and Gene Therapy, both in Portugal (Instituto Gulbenkian de Ciência and Instituto de Medicina Molecular) and in the USA (University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute). She has also worked in consultancy in national and European Research and Development projects (FP7 and H2020) and in the translation (English-Portuguese) of scientific articles. Lídia Fonseca holds a PhD in Pharmacy, specialty Microbiology, from the University of Lisbon. She also holds a BSc in Applied Chemistry-Biotechnology from NOVA University Lisbon and a MSc in Clinical Microbiology (University of Lisbon)
- **Maria Oliveira**, Business Director, [Technology Transfer office at the University of Porto \(UPTEC\)](#)
 - o Role & Responsibilities: Maria is Business Director at UPTEC. With more than 15 years' experience working in technology transfer, entrepreneurship and innovation management, Maria worked in several capacities in Portugal and abroad, namely in innovation consultancy, heading of U.Porto Innovation, invited fellow of Boston University, Executive Director of UTEN, a component of the UT Austin | Portugal Program. She is regularly invited as an external expert to evaluate proof of concept

proposals for the European Commission and to participate in conferences and seminars. Maria graduated in Engineering (UTAD), with a M.Sc. in Innovation and Technological Entrepreneurship (U.PORTO), an Executive Certificate in Management and Leadership from the MIT Sloan School of Management and MBA from Porto Business School.

- **Ana Rita Pinto**, Delegate and National Contact Point, [Agência de Investigação Clínica e Inovação Biomédica \(AICIB\)](#)
 - o Role & Responsibilities: As a Delegate and National Contact Point for the Health sector within the European Commission's Horizon Europe and Digital Europe Programme frameworks, Ana Rita Pinto plays a crucial role in shaping the future of health research and innovation in Portugal. With a PhD in Biomedical Engineering and 17 years of academic research experience, Ana Rita Pinto has established herself as a knowledgeable and experienced professional. Her contributions span various fields, from regenerative medicine to pancreatic cancer research, and she has a proven track record of developing original products through close collaboration with key stakeholders in the health ecosystem. She has extensive experience in funding surveillance and project writing. She was a professional consultant in European Projects, specializing in helping SMEs navigate deep tech health applications, particularly within the EIC Accelerator instrument.
- **Ângela Carvalho**, Co-founder & CEO, [BEAT Therapeutics](#)
 - o Role & Responsibilities: Ângela Carvalho is co-founder and CEO of BEAT Therapeutics, dedicated to developing innovative therapies against challenging and resistant forms of cancer. She holds a PhD in Biomedical Engineering from the University of Porto, having initiated her career as a researcher in the life sciences. She later focused on cancer precision medicine and led a project on the development of new methods for non-invasive diagnostic and prognostic of cancer. Prior to founding BEAT Therapeutics, Carvalho was a project manager for a health acceleration program, where she supported health startups and entrepreneurs in technology transfer and product and market validation. Her journey from a scientist to a biotech entrepreneur is driven by a deep dedication to health innovation and a firm commitment to advancing treatments in oncology and improve patient outcomes
- **Ricardo Moura**, Co-Founder and CEO, [Gripwise](#)
 - o Role & Responsibilities: Ricardo is an experienced entrepreneur and business leader with over 20 years of experience in various management areas. He is currently the Co-Founder and CEO of Gripwise, a company focused on bringing innovative medical devices to market. Ricardo is also the Co-Founder of Wisify, a sports nutrition company. His background includes strategic consulting, project management, and business development. Ricardo holds a postgraduate degree in Engineering and Innovation Management from the University of Beira Interior, where he also completed his undergraduate studies in Business Administration and Management. He has demonstrated expertise in business strategy, strategic planning, and innovation management throughout his career. Ricardo is passionate about improving people's quality of life through entrepreneurship and innovation in the healthcare sector.
- **Miguel Botto**, Investment Director, [Portugal Ventures](#)
 - o Role & Responsibilities: Miguel has been working in the Venture Capital industry since 1992. His track record includes some of the most notable investments in the Venture Capital sector in Portugal. He has served on more than 20 boards of

directors. Previously, he worked in the tourism sector as CFO and a member of the Board of Directors of a publicly traded company. Alongside his professional career, Miguel has extensive academic experience, having taught at HEC Lausanne, ESADE in Barcelona, and later at the University of Minho (Management Control and Corporate Governance). He holds a degree in Economics (Lausanne), which he later complemented with studies in Finance and Strategic Management (Católica Lisbon), Negotiation (Nova), and Leadership (Harvard). Currently, Miguel is the Investment Director of the Life Sciences unit at Portugal Ventures

Key Discussion Points

Existing Regional Initiatives and Services

At the beginning of the discussion, the services provided by the panellists' institutions to support smart health innovators, start-ups and SMEs in Northern Portugal's ecosystem, particularly in Porto, were explored. The innovation intermediaries and technology transfer-focused organisations UPIN and UPTech outlined their services and entries for researchers and innovators at various steps. The services offered by the European Commission were introduced by the representative of national contact point AICIB. Additionally, the representative from the research organisation i3S as well as the co-founders of two start-ups shared their success stories of technology transfer in Porto. This was then followed by a discussion on the panellists' experiences with public and private funding highlighting the specific needs and challenges faced by start-ups and healthcare professionals in the region.

Status of the Northern Portugal's Ecosystem and Existing Support Measures and Challenges

The discussion revealed that Northern Portugal's start-up ecosystem, particularly in the health sector, is still evolving.

While funding opportunities exist, they are not always "smart money," meaning that they do not necessarily come with strategic guidance or market validation. **Investors** emphasized that many Portuguese entrepreneurs rely too heavily on grants, which do not ensure long-term sustainability. Instead, market validation and private investment should play a more substantial role in fostering growth and commercial success.

In regard to **entrepreneurs and start-ups**, the panel underscored the necessity of bridging the funding gap between early-stage development and full-scale commercialization. While public and private funding opportunities are available for early development as well as later scaling stages on the national and the European level, funding in between is lacking. Particularly in the health-tech sector this becomes crucial as entrepreneurs struggle with obtaining funds for necessary validation phases such as clinical trials. Also, the regulatory framework for health-tech start-ups was deemed complex and costly, making regulatory requirements a significant hurdle for start-ups. This becomes even more critical in regard to the late transfer of funds during public funding, which requires start-ups to often pre-finance technological developments.

The panellists also agreed that start-ups not only need financial backing but also structured mentorship and market access. A lack of specialized professionals, industry-specific expertise and experiences with founding and scaling start-ups within the ecosystem was identified as another major challenge on Northern Portugal's ecosystem. Many successful Portuguese entrepreneurs relocate abroad due to a lack of structured support. To prevent this loss of knowledge and experience, participants stressed the need for stronger international collaborations and connections to attract further investment. A robust start-up ecosystem should provide networking opportunities that facilitate collaboration between investors, founders, and researchers. Entrepreneurs also called for government initiatives to foster a

more connected and supportive ecosystem, reducing fragmentation between regions and creating an environment conducive to innovation and collaboration.

Internationalization and Learning from Other Ecosystems

Panellists acknowledged that Portugal's ecosystem, especially in smart health, can benefit from adopting best practices from other European, U.S. and Chinese start-up environments. A key difference between Europe and the U.S. is the ability to translate scientific knowledge into market-ready solutions. Europe's academic and research institutions are strong in generating knowledge but often lack the mechanisms to commercialize innovations effectively.

Furthermore, while EU funding plays a significant role in enabling collaboration and scaling up businesses, panellists highlighted the need for Northern Portugal to increase its focus on practical solutions for patient care. The integration of researchers with industry stakeholders remains limited, slowing down the process of bringing innovations to market. Again, the panellists called for a more collaborative and supportive ecosystem.

Recommendations for Enhancing the Portuguese Health-Tech Ecosystem

1. **Close the funding gap** by providing more targeted financial support for evaluation and validation phases, especially for clinical trials.
2. **Reduce bureaucratic barriers** to allow start-ups to focus on innovation rather than administrative tasks.
3. **Strengthen networking opportunities and mentoring by experienced entrepreneurs** to create a more integrated and supportive ecosystem.
4. **Enhance government strategies** for branding and promoting Portugal's start-up landscape and opportunities within the ecosystem.
5. **Foster international partnerships** to enhance knowledge exchange and increase funding opportunities.

Conclusion

The panel discussion provided valuable insights into the current state and challenges of Portugal's smart health ecosystem. While the country has a strong research base and funding opportunities, several gaps hinder start-ups from scaling successfully. By addressing regulatory complexities, funding gaps, and a lack of specialized entrepreneurial expertise, Northern Portugal can build a more robust and internationally competitive smart health ecosystem. Collaboration among government bodies, investors, and entrepreneurs will be key in driving sustained growth and innovation in the sector.