RNi

STARTUP PORTUGAL

Portugal Incubators

REDE NACIONAL DE INCUBADORAS

INCUBATOR CERTIFICATION

BY STARTUP PORTUGAL

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

2025

1. INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Compared to 2024, the eligibility criteria for RNI – Portugal Incubators have undergone some changes in 2025, namely, the introduction of two new designations: **Tech Incubator** and **Local Incubator**.

The purpose of introducing these new designations is to better map the incubators that are part of RNI – Portugal Incubators according to their area of focus, target audience, expected impact, and vision.

Below is a characterisation of the two new incubator designations:

	Tech Incubator	**Local Incubator**
Focus of activity	**Primarily supports** the creation and development of startups, according to the legal definition of a startup: ● Innovative businesses; ● Easily scalable businesses..	**Primarily supports** the creation and development of other types of businesses not covered by the legal definition of a startup.
Target audience	Entrepreneurs with technical/scientific training or innovation experience. Startups with a focus on technology or innovation and global ambition. Businesses that aim to revolutionise industries or create scalable products.	Local community entrepreneurs. Businesses that aim to serve the national market or contribute to regional economic development.
Expected impact	Development of innovative solutions with global reach.	Strengthening the local and national economy and increasing employment opportunities.
Vision	To be part of a global innovation ecosystem.	To be at the centre of the region's and the country's economic and social revitalisation.

a. Impact of the new incubator designations on the applications to RNI – Portugal Incubators

For the purpose of certification by Startup Portugal and integration into the RNI – Portugal Incubators, the two incubator groups are subject to slightly different eligibility criteria. These criteria are detailed on the following page, grouped by Tech Incubator and Local Incubator.

Before starting an application to the RNI – Portugal Incubators, please note the following:

- There is a single application form to be part of the network, meaning all applicants must answer the same set of fixed questions.

- The incubator will be classified as either a Tech Incubator or Local Incubator based on the responses provided in the application form.
  - **Note:** Being classified as a Tech Incubator for the purpose of the RNI – Portugal Incubators application means that the incubator demonstrates the capacity to support the creation and development of startups, being its main area of **focus**. This does not mean that Tech Incubators cannot also support the creation of other businesses that do not meet the legal definition of a startup.

- The Tech Incubator or Local Incubator designation will be shared with the incubator upon receiving the application outcome, if approved.

- The list of Tech and Local Incubators will not be made public and will be used internally by Startup Portugal to enable the design and implementation of targeted initiatives for these two national incubator groups.

2. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA IN 2025

To be certified by Startup Portugal and become a member of RNI – Portugal Incubators, an incubator must meet the requirements listed below.
Differences in eligibility criteria between Tech Incubators and Local Incubators are highlighted in yellow.

1. Incubator Profile

Eligibility Criterion	Mandatory Requirement	
	Tech Incubator	**Local Incubator**
a. Physical spaces with dedicated facilities:		
Coworking space	Must have at least one option	
Private office rooms		
Meeting rooms (owned or external, e.g., leased or shared)	Yes	
Social/networking space or community gathering area	Yes	
b. Publicly available support channel for visitors and incubees (e.g., front desk and/or email/phone support with details published on the incubator's website)	Yes	

c. Completion of an Excel file listing incubees, including trade name, legal name, and tax ID (if applicable) [1]	Yes
d. Adequate working conditions in the facilities:	
Internet access (at least in shared areas)	Yes
Cleaning service (at least in shared areas)	Yes
Toilets	Yes
Mail handling	Yes
e. Legal entity established in Portugal	Yes
f. Operating incubator (i.e., the incubator must have started operating before the date of application to RNI – Portugal Incubators)	Yes

2. Services Provided (internal or through partners)

Eligibility Criterion	Mandatory Requirement	
	Tech Incubator	**Local Incubator**
a. Support services for incubees (can be provided by the incubator or partners, e.g., other incubators in the area with cooperation agreements):		
Business model development support	Providing, at least, 3 types of support	
Access to funding support		
Marketing/communication support		
Go-to-market strategy support		
Product development or prototyping support		
Legal support		
Accounting support		
Integration into the local community support		
Other types of support (subject to Startup Portugal validation)		

3. Human Resources and Skills

Eligibility Criterion	Mandatory Requirement	
	Tech Incubator	**Local Incubator**
a. Number of people dedicated to the incubator	At least 2 people full-time[2]	At least 1 people full-time[2]
b. Access to knowledge networks for incubees:		
Network of mentors	Yes	
Network of investors	Sim	Providing access to, at least, 1 of these networks
Network of business and corporate partners	Providing access to, at least, 1 of these networks	
Academic research / innovation network		
Other relevant network (subject to Startup Portugal validation)		

4. Entrepreneurial Community

Eligibility Criterion	Mandatory Requirement	
	Tech Incubator	**Local Incubator**
a. 30% of physically incubated incubees have been in the incubator for less than 5 years	Yes [3]	
b. The incubator has hosted at least 10 physical incubees in the last two years	Yes [4]	
c. At least 25% of incubated businesses are recognised with startup or scale-up status by Startup Portugal.	Yes	No
d. Programmes and event organization:		
Networking events	Organize, at least, 2 events per year	
Entrepreneurship events open to the community		
Pitch sessions with incubees and investors/partners		
Events on topics relevant to incubees (e.g., marketing or sales)		
Acceleration or pre-acceleration programmes		
Other community-relevant events (subject to Startup Portugal validation)		
e. Existence of general incubation regulation	Yes	

Note: Incubators operating as a network must apply using a single tax entity.

Startup Portugal may, in exceptional and duly justified cases, accept the admission of incubators that do not meet certain criteria due to the specific nature of their incubation projects (e.g., a focus on research-based projects with long time-to-market, which may prevent 30% of incubees from having been in the incubator for less than 5 years). In such cases, the incubator must complete the application form and simultaneously send a request for exception and justification to: rni@startupportugal.com.

[1] You can find the Excel file to complete [here](#).

[2] For this criterion, the number of work hours allocated to the incubator is considered. For example, two part-time staff members each working 4 hours/day on incubator activities is equivalent to one full-time staff member. In public institutions, full-time is 7 hours/day, while in private entities it is 8 hours/day.

[3] In the event of the same incubee being registered by more than one incubator, Startup Portugal may contact the incubee and assign the record only to the primary incubator (where the incubator-incubee relationship is more relevant).

[4] This criterion is waived for incubators in their first two years of operation. If the incubator offers only virtual incubation, the criterion will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, subject to a justified exception request.