PRACTICAL GUIDE

How to Set Up a Company in Portugal



CENTRO DE INCUBAÇÃO ATLÂNTICO

ATLÂNTICO BUSINESS SCHOOL

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This Practical Guide was developed by Centro de Incubação Atlântico, Atlântico Business School's entrepreneurship support unit (www.abs.pt). It is based on the “Legal Bites – StartUP Portugal” leaflet and supplemented with information from official Portuguese justice and government portals. This Guide provides general information and does not replace individual legal, tax or accounting advice.www.abs.pt

1. Before setting up a company: the business decision

Incorporating a company is a relatively quick legal process; preparing a viable business requires decisions beforehand. Before proceeding, clarify:

- The problem your business solves, its target customers and value proposition.
- Who will the shareholders be, how much each will invest and how decisions will be made.
- The revenue model, initial costs, cash-flow needs and sources of funding.
- The company name (legal name), trademark, domain name and any intellectual property rights.
- The registered office, corporate purpose and appropriate CAE activity codes (CAE Rev. 4).
- Applicable licences, permits, insurance, certifications and sector-specific requirements.

Note: a company can be incorporated before it is ready to sell, but administrative and tax obligations begin to apply from incorporation and the commencement of activity.

2. Choosing the legal form

For many early-stage ventures, the most common options are a single-member private limited company (sociedade unipessoal por quotas) and a private limited company (sociedade por quotas). A public limited company (sociedade anónima) is generally suited to larger structures or specific capital and governance requirements.

Legal form	Shareholders	Share capital	Practical note
Single-member private limited company	1	Minimum quota of €1	Suitable for a sole founder; liability is generally limited, subject to legal exceptions.
Private limited company	2 or more	Each quota has a minimum value of €1	Suitable for teams; requires clear rules between shareholders.
Public limited company	Generally 5 or more shareholders	General statutory minimum of €50,000	More demanding management and governance structure; legal exceptions apply to the number of shareholders.

Articles of association and beneficial ownership

The articles of association constitute the company's founding agreement. They should define, among other matters, its name, registered office, corporate purpose, capital, ownership interests and management/representation rules. The beneficial owner is the natural person who ultimately owns or controls the company, directly or indirectly.

3. Documents and information to prepare

- Identification documents and Portuguese tax identification numbers (NIF) of shareholders and managers; up-to-date contact details and addresses.
- Proposed company name and, where applicable, a certificate of name admissibility.
- Registered office and proof of entitlement or authorisation to use the address, where required.
- Corporate purpose and primary and secondary CAE activity codes.
- Share capital amount, allocation of quotas or shares and method of payment.
- Identification of managers/directors and their powers of representation.
- Articles of association (pre-approved or customised).
- Details of the certified accountant, where required by the procedure.

If a shareholder is a legal entity, identification of the entity, current corporate documents, a resolution authorising its participation and identification/powers of its representatives may be required. Foreign documents may require translation or additional formalities.

4. Three ways to incorporate a company

Route	Where / how	Indicative cost	Indicative timeframe
Empresa Online 2.0	Official portal; digital authentication and	€220 with pre-approved articles; €360 with	Depends on review and any corrections

	signatures of the parties	customised articles; urgent: €440 / €720	
Empresa na Hora	In-person service desk, with shareholders attending or valid representation	€360 for standard applications; additional charges may apply	Generally on the same day
Traditional registration	Commercial Registry Office, with documents prepared in advance	Variable; the leaflet indicates €360 + €75 for the CAF, where applicable, plus other charges	Variable

Indicative fees checked in October 2026. Always confirm the applicable fees before starting the process.

Empresa Online 2.0

- Choose the company type and name: pre-approved name, automatically generated name or certificate of name admissibility.
- Define the registered office, corporate purpose, CAE codes, capital, shareholders and management.
- Choose pre-approved articles of association or submit customised articles.
- Authenticate the parties and obtain the necessary digital signatures.
- Submit the application, attach the required documents and make payment.
- Once approved, retain the articles of association, permanent commercial registration certificate and company access codes.

This option is particularly useful when the parties have digital authentication and signature tools. Requirements vary where shareholders are legal entities or parties are foreign nationals.

Empresa na Hora

- Visit an Empresa na Hora service desk, preferably by appointment.
- Bring the required identification and representation documents.
- Choose the company name and an available model of articles of association.
- Define shareholders, quotas, capital, management, registered office, corporate purpose and CAE codes.
- Complete the incorporation process and receive the company's registration details.

Simplicity and speed come at the cost of less flexibility for highly customised articles of association. Where complex corporate arrangements are involved, prior legal preparation is advisable.

Traditional registration at the Commercial Registry

This route is suitable where specific documentation, particular formalities or transactions incompatible with simplified procedures are required. It may involve requesting a certificate of name admissibility, drafting articles of association, signature certification, notarial acts where required and commercial registration. A public deed is not universally required: this depends on the nature of the transaction and the assets involved.

5. What to do after incorporation

Action	Deadline / points to note
Declaration of commencement of activity to the Tax Authority	Generally within 15 days of commercial registration; arrange with a certified accountant and confirm the applicable tax position.
Central Register of Beneficial Ownership (RCBE)	Initial declaration, generally within 30 days of incorporation registration.
Share capital	Comply with the payment method and deadlines declared at incorporation; whether payment may be deferred depends on the applicable rules.
Social Security	Confirm the applicable status and required notifications/registrations for the company, managers and employees.
Bank account and invoicing	Arrange the company account, an appropriate invoicing system, document retention and control procedures.
Licences and compliance	Check sector-specific licensing, data protection, complaints book, consumer information and other obligations, where applicable.

The RCBE must be updated when relevant information changes and is subject to annual confirmation as required by law. Registration of a company does not remove the need to obtain licences required for its activities.

6. Costs not to overlook

The incorporation fee is only part of the budget. Also consider:

- Ongoing accounting and tax support.
- Bank account, payment methods, invoicing and software.
- Trademark and domain registration and protection of intangible assets.
- Insurance, licences, certifications and any legal fees.
- Premises, incubation, technology services and communications.
- Social security contributions and tax obligations, even during periods of low turnover.

7. Common mistakes and how to avoid them

Risk	Good practice
Choosing the legal form solely on cost	Assess the number of shareholders, liability, financing and expected development.
Using generic articles of association for a complex team	Regulate the admission and exit of shareholders, decisions, intellectual property and dispute resolution.
Confusing company name, trade mark and domain	Check availability and protection of each separately.
Choosing overly restrictive CAE codes or corporate purpose	Define current and foreseeable activities accurately and unambiguously.
Delaying appointment of an accountant	Involve a certified accountant before incorporation.
Missing post-registration deadlines	Use a checklist with assigned responsibilities and deadlines.
Incorporating before validating the business	Test the value proposition, market, costs and financial capacity.

8. Entrepreneur's checklist

☐ I have validated the idea, market and business model.
☐ I have chosen the legal form and identified the shareholders.
☐ I have defined capital, quotas, management and decision-making rules.
☐ I have checked the company name, trade mark and domain.
☐ I have prepared the registered office, corporate purpose and CAE codes.
☐ I have gathered identification and representation documents.

☐ I have chosen the incorporation route and confirmed the costs.
☐ I have prepared or selected appropriate articles of association.
☐ I have confirmed the certified accountant.
☐ I have saved the documents and access codes after registration.
☐ I have planned the declaration of commencement of activity and RCBE filing.
☐ I have checked licences, invoicing, insurance and other obligations.

9. Note for participants in entrepreneurship programmes

Recipients of grants or public support should check, before incorporating a company, whether the relevant call imposes timing restrictions or other conditions. For StartUP Voucher, incorporation must be aligned with the specific rules of the programme edition and its eligibility timetable, avoiding actions that could jeopardise support. This guidance does not replace consulting the call for applications and official IAPMEI communications.

10. Where to find information and support

- Empresa Online 2.0: https://justica.gov.pt/Guias/Como-criar-uma-empresa-online
- Company incorporation platform: https://registo.justica.gov.pt/empresa
- Empresa na Hora: https://registo.justica.gov.pt/Empresas/Empresa-na-Hora
- Beneficial Ownership Register: https://registo.justica.gov.pt/Empresas/Declarar-o-Beneficiario-Efetivo
- Portuguese Tax Authority portal: https://www.portaldasfinancas.gov.pt/
- Centro de Incubação Atlântico: https://incubadoraatlantico.pt/

Centro de Incubação Atlântico can support entrepreneurs in developing their business model, structuring their finances and planning company incorporation. Formal incorporation and specialist legal, tax or accounting advice should be provided by the relevant qualified professionals, where needed.

How to Set Up a Company in Portugal?

From planning to the start of operations, in 7 steps.

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1 Define your project

- Validate your idea and business model
- Define products and services
- Analyse the market and the competition

2 Choose the legal form

- Private limited company (Sociedade por Quotas)
- Single-member private limited company (Sociedade Unipessoal por Quotas)
- Other legal forms (specialised advice)

3 Define the structure

- Shareholders and respective shares
- Share capital
- Management bodies (management/ administration)
- Shareholders' agreement (articles of association)

4 Define the company name

- Choose the company name
- Check if you need to obtain the **Certificate of Admissibility of Firm or Name (CAF)***
- Reserve or use a pre-approved name

5 Gather the documentation

- Identification documents of the shareholders
- Articles of association or shareholders' agreement
- Proof of registered office address
- Other documents, depending on the case

6 Incorporate the company

- Empresa Online 2.0 (online)
- Empresa na Hora (in person)
- Traditional registration at the Commercial Registry Office

7 Register and start operations

- Commercial registration
- Company Tax Identification Number (NIF)
- Tax start-of-activity declaration with the Tax Authority
- Registration with Social Security (when applicable)
- Sector-specific licences and requirements (when applicable)
- Set up accounting
- Issue invoices

3 ways to incorporate a company

Choose the option that best suits your case.

1 EMPRESA ONLINE 2.0	
What is it?	State online platform to incorporate companies 100% online
Where?	Online at **justiça.gov.pt**
Who can use it?	Shareholders (individual or corporate) using authentication, or through a lawyer or notary
Cost (2026)?	With pre-approved articles of association: • Standard application: **€ 220** • Urgent application: **€ 440** With articles of association prepared by the shareholders: • Standard application: **€ 360** • Urgent application: **€ 720**
Incorporation timeframe?	2 working days

2 EMPRESA NA HORA	
What is it?	In-person service that allows you to create a company on the same day
Where?	Any Empresa na Hora desk
Who can use it?	Shareholders (individual or corporate) through their legal representatives
Cost (2026)?	Standard application: **€ 360** If the share capital is contributed by non-cash assets, an additional cost is charged per asset registered.
Incorporation timeframe?	Same day

3 COMMERCIAL REGISTRY OFFICE	
What is it?	Traditional way of incorporating a company
Where?	Commercial Registry Office (Conservatória do Registo Comercial)
Who can use it?	Shareholders (individual or corporate), directly or through their legal representatives
Cost (2026)?	**€ 360** (incorporation) + **€ 75** (CAF, when applicable) + variable fees for signature recognition and other charges + notary fees (public deed, when applicable)
Incorporation timeframe?	Variable

Certificate of Admissibility of Firm or Name (CAF)

A CAF is only required when **you want** to use a personalised name that needs to be approved by the Registo Nacional de Pessoas Coletivas (RNPC).
It is not necessary when using a **pre-approved** name from the pool of available company names or an automatically generated name based on the shareholders' names (when permitted).

Cost: € 75 (standard) | € 150 (urgent)
Validity: 3 months

After incorporating the company

Main steps to start and develop your activity.

Register with the Tax Authority

- Obtain the company NIF
- Submit the start-of-activity declaration
- Choose the VAT and accounting regime

Register with Social Security

- Register the company
- Enrol managers and employees

Set up accounting

- Choose a certified accountant
- Define the accounting regime
- Set up invoicing and internal processes

Sector-specific licences and requirements

- Check whether your activity requires licences, authorisations or specific registrations

Focus on growth

- Implement your business plan
- Seek financing
- Develop partnerships
- Start commercial activity