



Frequently Asked Questions

1. How does the 3-year Portugal HQA Visa business incubation program provide a clear path to eligibility for Permanent Residency or Citizenship?

Over the course of the 3-year program, participants will be supported in their applications for Residency Permits that extend for a total of 5 consecutive years.

In order to be eligible for Permanent Residency or Citizenship, applicants must have been legal residents for 5 consecutive years. There are no business performance requirements associated with eligibility for Permanent Residency or Citizenship. PR/Citizenship applications are evaluated on an objective basis : if all criteria are met, then PR/citizenship will be granted.

Supporting legislation

HQA Visa : <https://www.vistos.mne.pt/en/national-visas/necessary-documentation/residency#teaching-purposes-highly-qualified-or-cultural-activity-or-highly-qualified-subordinate-activity>

Renewal #1 – based on R&D project : <https://imigrante.sef.pt/en/renovar-residencia/art78-2-aq/>

Renewal #2 – based on business continuation : <https://imigrante.sef.pt/en/renovar-residencia/art78-2-ap/>

Citizenship criteria : <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b52e4.html>

Permanent Residency criteria : <https://imigrante.sef.pt/en/solicitar/residir/art80/>

2. Do I need to have a business idea to qualify for the HQA program?

Applicants are not required to have a fully formed business idea. Admission to the HQA program does not depend upon the quality of the applicant's business idea, but rather the quality of the applicant. Applicants are evaluated on the depth and breadth of their domain(s) of expertise and on their ability to provide strategic direction to an innovative venture with the potential for significant growth. Over the course of the incubation term, the business idea, whether initially conceived by the applicant or co-conceived with Empowered Startups, will be subject to iterative testing and development resulting in a validated business model at program graduation.

3. Is any further investment required, during the Portugal HQA program or after graduation?

No further investment is required during the program. The structure of the program allows the business to grow risk-free, in Empowered Startups' care, according to the strategic direction provided by the program participant. Following graduation, the program participant may choose to grow the business further as they see fit; there are no business performance requirements to be eligible for PR or Citizenship.

4. Are there tax advantages to participating in the HQA program?

The HQA program provides several opportunities to optimize participants' global tax position. As new tax residents in Portugal, program participants can benefit from 0% tax on foreign earned income for 10 years. Participants can pay only 20% tax on personal income earned on HQA activities in Portugal. The business in the HQA program can be eligible for tax incentives, grants, and subsidies through its status as a startup, as an R&D driven business, as a rurally-headquartered company, and as a small business. Furthermore, the IP generated by the company can be submitted to qualify under patent box tax legislation, allowing revenues derived from that IP to be subject to highly favourable tax rates.

5. What security does the HQA program offer?

The strategic value of the business in Portugal increases over the course of the incubation program. As an EU-headquartered corporate entity, with a financial history at a recognized EU banking institution, regular tax filings, and EU-generated IP, the business built through the HQA program offers many avenues to leverage its value. Some entrepreneur-investors conduct arms-length transactions between their existing businesses abroad and their company in Portugal. Furthermore, the activities of the business during incubation provide proof of authentic links to an EU country, beyond what a passive real estate investment would, which strengthens the applicant's position as a legitimate resident of the EU.

6. How long does the application process take?

By law, the HQA Visa decision must be issued by Portuguese authorities within 30 days of receiving the application. From the initial meeting with Empowered Startups Intake Committee until the arrival of the residency card following the landing appointment in Portugal, the entire process can take 3-6 months.

Applicant accepts invitation to join HQA program

Within 2-6 weeks : strategic plan is finalized and R&D project is negotiated

Residency Visa Appointment at Embassy

Within 30 days : residency visa decision is issued

Landing Appointment in Portugal (applicant has 4 month window to arrive for appointment)

Within 60 days: residency card arrives by mail

7. What is the structure of HQA business incubation?

Empowered Startups provides entrepreneur-investors opportunities to make strategic decisions about the evolution of their innovative startup. The incubation program follows LEAN startup methodology, using Empowered Startups proprietary virtual incubation platform, allowing founders, mentors, advisors and collaborators to work on the venture's development from anywhere at any time. The platform includes foundational LEAN startup education, validation tools, and collaboration spaces. Some founders choose to become very involved in driving the day-to-day development of the company; some prefer to receive quarterly updates, and allow the business to grow organically. For the first 12-18 months, incubation focuses on managing the R&D project; for the subsequent 18-24 months, the focus is on validating the business model.