

PORTUGUESE INNOVATION HUBS AND FREE TECHNOLOGICAL ZONES

Telecoms, cybersecurity, health and tourism are some of the areas represented in the new digital innovation hubs that will now apply in the European network. There were also proposals for free technological zones (zonas livres tecnológicas), which will allow testing innovative technologies.

CONTACTS

JOÃO DE MACEDO VITORINO

JVITORINO@MACEDOVITORINO.COM

JEFFERSON FERNANDES

JFERNANDES@MACEDOVITORINO.COM

The Portuguese Government presented last week a [Digital Transition Action Plan](#) that includes Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs) and Free Technological Zones (ZLT - *Zonas Livres Tecnológicas*). Digital Innovation Hubs are collaborative networks of specific digital centres in cybersecurity, tourism, health, and other sectors, with the objective of disseminating advanced digital technologies to companies, especially small and medium companies, through the development, testing, and experimentation of those technologies. One of the objectives for DIHs is to be drivers of the digital transformation of companies, stimulating the incorporation and integration of artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and supercomputing in the adaptation of different business models.

In this context, the 17 DIHs projects already approved (by [Order 6269/2021](#)) will have access to annual funding of up to one million euros each (from the Recovery and Resilience Plan) - an amount that can be doubled if these hubs become part of the European network: Produtech (industry and manufacturing), DIH4GlobalAutomotive (mobility), Connect 5 (Telcos and TICE), InnovTurismo (tourism), Portugal Blue Digital Hub (sea economy), Azores Digital Innovation Hub (regional), Smart Island Hub (regional), C-Hub (cybersecurity), PTCentroDIH (regional), Defence4Tech Hub (defense), Digi4Fashion (fashion and footwear), DIGITALbuilt (construction), ATTRACT DIH (AI and data science), AI4PA Portugal (public administration), SFT-EDIH (agro-food sector), DIH4ClimateNeutrality (urban sustainability) and DigiHealthPT (health).

The Free Technological Zones (regulated by [decree-law 67/2021](#)) are geographically delimited spaces where companies/researchers will be able to experiment and test, under real conditions, products and technologies that are still in the experimentation phase. The Portuguese Government expects ZLT will bring in foreign investment and international projects to stimulate the Portuguese entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Investors interested in promoting a ZLT must submit an expression of interest to the National Innovation Agency (ANI) (filling out a specific [form](#)). The selection criteria to incorporate a ZLT are:

- Priority areas, sectors of activity or technologies for testing - always safeguarding the possibility of testing technologies, products, services, and processes that cross several areas or sectors;
- The geographical scope of the ZLT;
- The objectives of boosting the business in the selected geographical delimitation;
- The availability of resources, including human, material and infrastructure, to the promoters to conduct the tests;

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- The identification of the managing entity responsible for the management, operation and maintenance of the ZLT, or the process for selecting the managing entity; and
- The conditions for access to the ZLT by the promoters, as well as all the requirements for conducting the tests, and for termination and suspension of the tests.

Three entities that have already filed a ZLT project with ANI: CEiiA, S. João Hospital Center and the Portuguese Navy, through its Operational Experimentation Center. The Portuguese Government has also announced the creation of three energy sector specific ZLT: one in Viana do Castelo for offshore and nearshore wind farm projects; a second one in Abrantes (at the now extinct coal power Pego unit) for renewables' production, storage and self-consumption; and a third one at the river Mira parameter for energy-agricultural dual projects.

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