

STARTUP LEIRIA · FI GROUP BY EPSA



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PROGRAMME REGULATION

Acceleration programme for the integration of technology companies into European Defense value chains.

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Preamble

Developments in the international geopolitical context and the strengthening of European investment in Defense have created new opportunities for technology companies able to develop innovative solutions applicable to the Defense and Dual-Use sector. At the same time, the growing complexity of the technological, regulatory and commercial requirements associated with this market makes it essential to have mechanisms that support companies in preparing for integration into national and international value chains.

In this context, the Defense Accelerator is an acceleration programme designed to support technology companies in consolidating their value proposition for the Defense market, promoting the development of their capabilities, engagement with strategic partners, access to specialised knowledge, and stronger preparation for collaboration, investment, funding and procurement opportunities.

The 2nd Edition of the Defense Accelerator is jointly promoted by STARTUP LEIRIA (EU | BIC accredited incubator) and FI GROUP by EPSA, with the involvement of partners and public and private entities that form part of the national and European Defense Innovation ecosystem.

This Regulation sets out the rules for participation, application, selection, participation and operation of the Programme, defining the rights and duties of participants, as well as the guiding principles for its organisation and implementation.

Article 1 — Object

- 1. This Regulation sets out the rules applicable to applications, selection, participation and operation of the 2nd Edition of the Defense Accelerator, hereinafter referred to as the “Programme”.**
- 2. The Programme consists of a structured business acceleration journey intended to support companies with technological solutions with potential application to the Defense and Dual-Use sector, promoting the strengthening of their technical, strategic and commercial capabilities and facilitating their integration into national and international value chains.**
- 3. The Programme is developmental and capacity-building in nature; it does not constitute a public tender or a procurement procedure, nor does it confer on participants any right to funding, investment, conclusion of contracts or establishment of commercial partnerships.**
4. Participation in the Programme does not affect the strategic and business autonomy of participating entities, nor does it imply any exclusivity with regard to the activities they carry out.

Article 2 — Promoting entities

- 1. The Programme is promoted by Startup Leiria in partnership with FI Group by Epsa, which ensure its design, coordination, organisation and implementation.**
- 2. For the purposes of this Regulation, the entities referred to in the preceding paragraph are jointly designated as the Organisation.**
- 3. The Organisation may involve other public or private entities in the delivery of the Programme, including institutional partners, companies, research centres, universities, investors, business associations, specialists and mentors, whenever this contributes to the pursuit of the Programme’s objectives.**
- 4. The involvement of such entities does not confer on them any competence in the management of the Programme beyond the functions specifically assigned by the Organisation.**

Article 3 — Programme objectives

The purpose of the Programme is to contribute to the development of technology companies with potential application to the Defense sector, pursuing in particular the following objectives:

- a) To promote companies' capacity to respond to technological, industrial and commercial challenges associated with the Defense market.
- b) To support the preparation of companies with technology-based solutions for Defense market entry requirements (qualification, certification and regulatory compliance) and for their integration into national and international value chains as suppliers or pre-qualified partners.
- c) To facilitate contact between companies, industrial partners, public entities, investors and other relevant ecosystem players.
- d) To promote the development of collaborative projects and the establishment of strategic relationships among the various stakeholders in the sector.
- e) To accelerate companies' preparation for funding, procurement and cooperation opportunities, both at national and European level.
- f) To promote the creation of a pipeline of qualified partners for consortium applications to national and European Defense funding programmes.
- g) To contribute to strengthening the national Defense and Dual-Use Innovation ecosystem, anchored in the Leiria / Marinha Grande industrial cluster.

Article 4 — Target beneficiaries and eligibility conditions

1. The Programme is aimed at technology-based companies with their own legal personality, whose solutions are applicable to Defense and/or dual use, including in particular artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, unmanned aerial systems (UAS), sensors and materials.

2. Companies at different stages of development, established in any Member State of the European Union or in an eligible country as defined by the Organisation in the Call for Applications, may apply, provided they demonstrate the technical and organisational capacity to benefit from participation in the Programme.

3. Given the nature of the Programme and the funding and collaboration opportunities it seeks to unlock for participating companies, the Organisation may require applicants to demonstrate compliance with requirements relating to their establishment, ownership and control structure, including in particular that the company:

- a) is legally established in an eligible country;
- b) is not subject to direct or indirect control by entities established in non-eligible countries, where this may compromise the requirements applicable to the targeted opportunities;
- c) ensures autonomy in decision-making and in the management of its assets, technologies and intellectual property, under the terms required by applicable regulation.

4. Admission further requires a technology readiness level of TRL 4 (technology validated in a laboratory environment or equivalent)¹ for the technological solutions presented.

5. Without prejudice to compliance with the eligibility requirements set out in this Regulation and in the Call for Applications, companies that have demonstrated their potential through participation in innovation, entrepreneurship or technology development initiatives — including pre-acceleration programmes, hackathons, open innovation challenges, applications to funding programmes, or other initiatives promoted by the Organisation or by

other national and international entities — may also apply to the Programme.

6. The Organisation may establish thematic priorities or additional specific eligibility criteria according to the Programme's strategic objectives; such criteria shall be set out in the Call for Applications.

7. Submission of an application implies full acceptance of this Regulation.

¹ TRL (Technology Readiness Level) – International scale used to assess the maturity of a technology, from TRL 1 (basic principles observed) to TRL 9 (system proven in an operational environment). For the purposes of this Programme, the eligible level is TRL 4: technology validated in a laboratory environment or an equivalent environment.

Article 5 — Applications

1. The opening of applications is announced through the Programme's official channels, indicating in particular the timeline, the specific requirements of the edition and the documentation required.

2. Applications are submitted through the electronic platform made available by the Organisation, by completing the dedicated form and submitting the requested documents within the deadline set in the Call for Applications.

3. The application shall include, in particular:

- a) Identification of the company;
- b) Identification of the team responsible for participation;
- c) Description of the technological solution and substantiation of the respective TRL;
- d) Description of applicability to the Defense and Dual-Use sector;
- e) Indication of the status of intellectual property;
- f) Any other elements considered relevant for evaluation.

4. The Organisation may request complementary elements or arrange clarification interviews whenever it considers this necessary for the proper evaluation of applications.

5. The provision of false statements or the omission of relevant information constitutes grounds for exclusion from the selection process or, where applicable, from the Programme.

6. Given the international nature of the Programme, applications may be submitted in Portuguese or English, without prejudice to certain activities, communications or events taking place in Portuguese where the composition of the participating cohort so allows or where previously defined by the Organisation.

Article 6 — Evaluation and selection process

1. Applications are evaluated by a Selection Committee designated by the Organisation.

2. The Organisation may seek support from external specialists in evaluating applications, ensuring the absence of conflicts of interest and a duty of confidentiality regarding the information provided.

3. The final decision will be communicated individually to applicants, with no right of appeal except in the case of a material error.

Article 7 — Structure and operation of the Programme

1. The Programme runs as a structured acceleration journey, with an indicative duration of 14 weeks, organised in different phases designed to support participating companies from the

initial diagnosis through to market engagement.

2. Participation in the Programme is entirely free of charge for selected companies.

3. Without prejudice to adjustments that may be introduced by the Organisation, the Programme includes, in particular, the following phases, in accordance with the Timeline to be defined in the Call for Applications:

a) Selection: corresponds to the process of evaluating the applications received and selecting and admitting companies.

b) Phase I — DEFENSE BUILDER: the first capacity-building phase, aimed at supporting companies in consolidating their Defense market entry strategy. During this phase, each company will develop, with support from the Programme team and its mentors, a Market Entry Dossier bringing together the main elements needed to define its positioning strategy. Without prejudice to adjustments arising from each company's characteristics, this Dossier may include, in particular:

b.1) Certification Map: identification of certifications, standards or regulatory requirements relevant to the technology developed;

b.2) Supply Chain Map: identification of the supply chains, integrators or potential partners most suitable for the company's positioning, including NATO chains where the company may have a realistic fit. It includes contacts of primes, integrators and entry channels.

b.3) Business Model: development or adaptation of the business model to the specific context of the Defense market, including commercial proposal structures, decision cycles and contractual models.

b.4) Due Diligence: preliminary analysis of aspects relating to intellectual property, technology protection and security, export controls (ITAR/EAR assessment) and identification of risks and other relevant requirements.

During this phase, mentoring sessions, individual follow-up and capacity-building actions deemed appropriate to each company's needs will also be promoted.

c) Gate Review: a formal intermediate evaluation milestone. It is intended to assess the progress achieved by each participating company, taking into account, in particular, the development of the Market Entry Dossier, the technical viability of the solution, alignment with the identified value chains, the progress demonstrated throughout Phase I, and the level of preparation to proceed to the next phase.

The Gate Review will determine which companies progress to the second phase of the Programme, under the terms defined in the Call for Applications.

Companies that do not progress to the subsequent phase may still benefit from other forms of follow-up defined by the Organisation, including the provision of an Evaluation and Recommendations Report summarising the work carried out, identifying strengths and areas for improvement, and providing guidance and suggestions for continued development and market entry.

d) Phase II — DEFENSE SCALE: this phase is intended to support selected companies in consolidating business development opportunities and in preparing for engagement with strategic partners, funding entities and potential customers. During this phase, participating companies will have access to three follow-up tracks and specialised mentoring and individual follow-up sessions:

TRACK A) Pilot & Contracts: matchmaking with potential qualified buyers, preparation and negotiation of pilot contracts, qualification as a supplier in the identified chains, and structuring of collaboration opportunities with value-chain partners.

TRACK B) Investment readiness: concept notes and application plans for public funding instruments, with recommendations to strengthen the application, structuring of a business case for presentation

to Defense investors, and preparation for Venture Capital Funds, where applicable.

TRACK C) Legal & Export: review of contractual models for procurement, preparation of documentation to support commercialisation or internationalisation,

Participating companies shall complete at least two of the available tracks, according to their priorities and the recommendations received.

e) DEFENSE DEAL DAY: The Programme culminates in a private event designed to promote contact between participating companies and relevant Defense Ecosystem entities, including potential qualified buyers and investors, through institutional presentations, bilateral meetings (matchmaking), open networking and other initiatives aimed at facilitating contacts and collaboration opportunities.

This will be the Programme's closing moment, giving companies the opportunity to present their solutions to industrial partners, investors, public entities and other ecosystem stakeholders.

As a result of the journey undertaken throughout the Programme, participating companies and the stakeholders present may explore the establishment of Letters of Intent (LoI) or Memoranda of Understanding (MoU), including for the following actions:

- i. Development of cooperation initiatives, future collaborative projects or pilots between organisations;
- ii. Knowledge exchange;
- iii. Preparation of future applications to national or European public funding instruments;
- iv. Concrete opportunities for equity or quasi-equity investment or bank financing;
- v. Concrete partnership opportunities for integration into Defense value chains.

4. Participation in the Programme does not imply any obligation to conclude contracts, invest or establish partnerships between the entities and partners involved.

Article 8 — Timeline

1. The timeline for the edition, including application deadlines, the dates of the different Programme phases and other relevant activities, will be published in the Call for Applications and made available through the Programme's official channels.

2. The Organisation may adjust the timeline whenever necessary for the proper operation of the Programme, undertaking to communicate such changes in advance to participating companies.

3. Where applicable, the timeline may provide for periods of interruption of Programme activity, including for holidays or festive periods, which will be communicated to participants in advance.

Article 9 — Mentoring and follow-up

1. Throughout the Programme, participating companies benefit from a follow-up model oriented towards the evolution of their solution and their Defense market entry strategy, which may include individual mentoring sessions, collective thematic workshops, meetings with specialists, preparation sessions for presentations to partners, and other activities considered relevant by the Organisation.

2. The Organisation defines the composition of the mentor pool, its allocation to participating companies and the format of the respective sessions, and may adjust the follow-up model according to needs identified during the Programme.

3. The involvement of mentors does not imply any obligation of investment, procurement,

commercial partnership or continued follow-up after the end of the Programme.

4. Participating companies undertake to prepare adequately for mentoring and follow-up sessions, providing the information necessary for the proper conduct of the work, without prejudice to the confidentiality rules set out in this Regulation.

Article 10 — Evaluation bodies

1. The evaluation of applications and of participating companies' progress is carried out by evaluation bodies designated by the Organisation.

2. The process of admitting companies at the start of the Programme (Phase 0) is conducted by a Selection Committee composed of representatives of Startup Leiria and FI Group by Epsa, and may include mentors and specialists in regulation, dual use and procurement.

3. The intermediate evaluation and down-selection of companies progressing to the Defense Scale phase (Phase 4) will be conducted by a Gate Review Jury, which includes, in addition to the Organisation, strategic partners of the Programme, as well as investors and Armed Forces representation.

4. Deliberations are governed by criteria of impartiality, with declaration and management of conflicts of interest and a duty of confidentiality regarding companies' information.

5. Decisions of the evaluation bodies are final, with no right of appeal except in the case of a material error.

Article 11 — Rights and duties of participants

1. The rights of participating companies include, in particular:

- a) Participating in the activities provided for in the Programme, according to the defined model;
- b) Benefiting from the capacity-building, mentoring and follow-up actions made available by the Organisation;
- c) Accessing networking initiatives, market engagement and ecosystem linkage promoted under the Programme;
- d) Receiving timely information on the timeline, activities and other aspects relevant to their participation in the Programme;
- e) Having the confidentiality of shared information ensured, under the terms set out in this Regulation.

2. The duties of participating companies include, in particular:

- a) Participating actively and diligently in Programme activities;
- b) Ensuring the presence of designated representatives at sessions considered mandatory by the Organisation;
- c) Meeting deadlines and delivering the elements requested for proper monitoring and evaluation of their participation;
- d) Providing true, complete and up-to-date information, as well as following the guidance issued by the Organisation;
- e) Acting in good faith and cooperating with the Organisation, mentors, partners and other participants.

3. Serious or repeated breach of the duties set out in this Article may result in the company's exclusion from the Programme, by reasoned decision of the Organisation.

Article 12 — Intellectual property and confidentiality

1. The intellectual property of participating companies remains with them. The Programme does not acquire rights over companies' solutions, data or know-how merely by virtue of participation.
2. The Organisation, mentors, strategic partners and other intervening parties are likewise bound by a duty of confidentiality regarding non-public information to which they have access; the Organisation may adopt non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) whenever appropriate.

Article 13 — Data protection, security and export control (dual use)

1. The processing of personal data complies with the GDPR and applicable national legislation, with determined legal basis, purpose and retention periods, and with adequate information security and cybersecurity measures.
2. Given the Defense and dual-use nature of the Programme, the Organisation adopts proportionate security practices and raises companies' awareness of the export control regime (ITAR/EAR) and other applicable requirements, and may refuse or condition participation on security grounds.
3. Programme data governance is treated as a dedicated task, with an associated risk register, consistent with the security and data protection obligations assumed in ecosystem projects.

Article 14 — Communication, image and use of trademarks

1. For the purposes of communication, dissemination and institutional promotion of the Programme, companies' participation implies their authorisation for the Organisation to disclose the name, corporate name, logo and a summary description of participating companies, and to record and use images, photographs or video recordings captured during Programme activities.
2. Use of the elements referred to in the preceding paragraph shall be exclusively for Programme promotion and shall not entitle participating companies to any financial compensation.
3. Use of the trademarks, logos or visual identity of the "Defense Accelerator", "Startup Leiria" and "FI Group by Epsa" by participating companies requires prior authorisation from the Organisation, without prejudice to references to participation in the Programme for institutional or curriculum purposes.
4. Where there are commercial, strategic, contractual or confidentiality reasons justifying restrictions on the disclosure of certain information or images, the participating company shall notify the Organisation, which will seek to accommodate such limitations provided this does not compromise the Programme's communication objectives.

Article 15 — Amendments to the Regulation and omitted cases

1. The Organisation reserves the right to amend this Regulation whenever justified in the interest of the Programme, giving publicity to the amendments made.
2. Doubts of interpretation and omitted cases shall be resolved by the Organisation. In the

event of divergence between language versions of this Regulation, the Portuguese version shall prevail.

Article 16 — Contacts for clarifications

1. Any requests for clarification should be addressed to the Organisation through the Programme contacts:

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- francisco.aguiar@startupleiria.com
- manuel.baptista@epsa.com