



STIFTERVERBAND

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GRÜNDUNGS- RADAR 2025

How universities support start-ups

Gefördert durch:



Bundesministerium
für Wirtschaft
und Klimaschutz

aufgrund eines Beschlusses
des Deutschen Bundestages

BY THE NUMBERS: SUPPORT FOR START-UPS AT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

START-UPS

YEAR 2021:

2.779

Start-ups in total

1.108

Of which with knowledge and/or technology transfer

254

Thereof based on specific intellectual property rights (e.g., patents)

YEAR 2023:

2.927

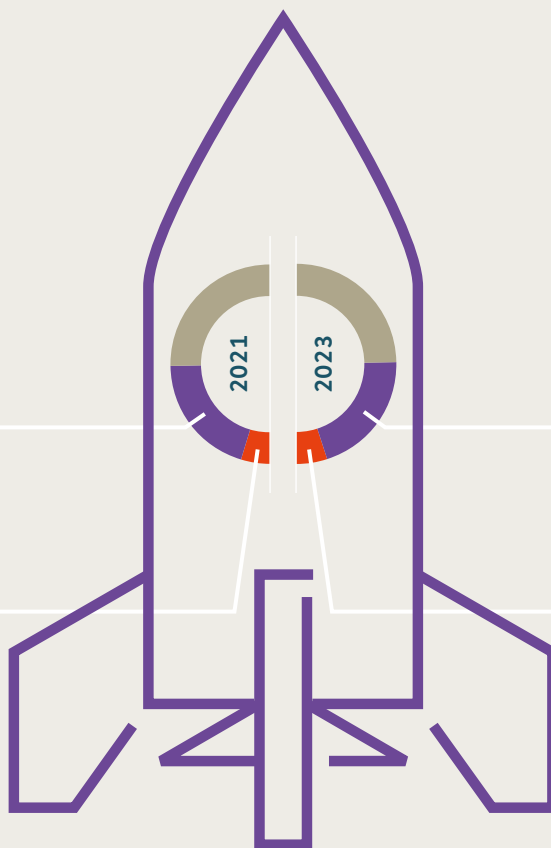
Start-ups in total

1.184

Of which with knowledge and/or technology transfer

290

Thereof based on specific intellectual property rights (e.g., patents)



FIELDS OF TECHNOLOGY

86
Energy



203

Communication



399

Software

225

Internet Technologies

20

Optical Technologies / Laser

392

Social Entrepreneurship



60

Biotechnology

101

Medical Technology



50

Materials Technology

82

Mechanical Engineering

106

Environmental Technologies

17

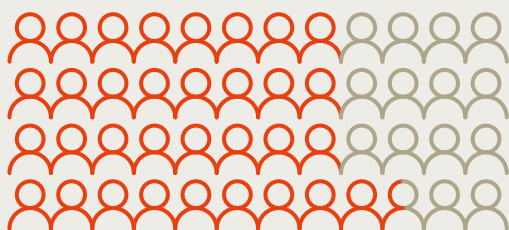
Microtechnology / Microsystems Technology

PROPORTION OF FEMALE AND NON-BINARY FOUNDERS

30%

PERSONNEL IN START-UP SUPPORT (2023)

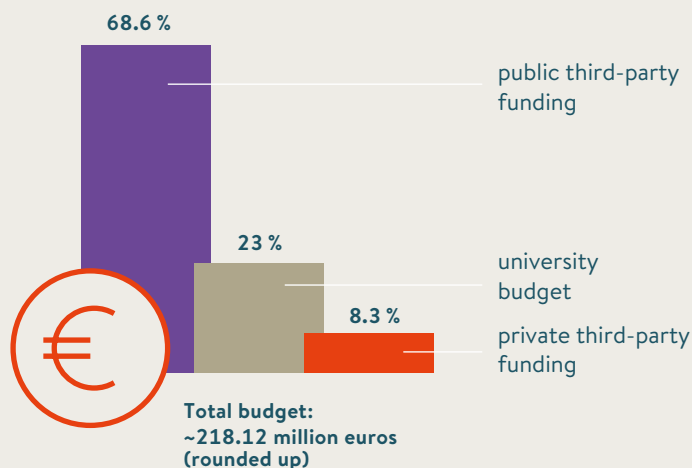
Total employees: 1,363 full-time equivalents



69.5 %
temporary/project-based positions

30.5 %
permanent positions

BUDGET 2023



CHALLENGES IN STRENGTHENING START-UP SUPPORT

To what extent do you consider the following factors as challenges in maintaining and strengthening startup support at your university?

| | | No Challenge | Minor Challenge | Moderate Challenge | Major Challenge | Critical Challenge |
|------------------------------|---|--------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Finances | University Budget funds | 1% | 4% | 13% | 24% | 59% |
| | Federal funds | 0% | 2% | 11% | 38% | 48% |
| | State funds | 2% | 10% | 21% | 30% | 38% |
| | Private funds | 1% | 4% | 16% | 25% | 55% |
| Personnel | Availability of qualified staff | 4% | 13% | 32% | 31% | 19% |
| | Securing staff retention | 3% | 7% | 6% | 21% | 63% |
| Infrastructure | Laboratory spaces | 15% | 29% | 30% | 17% | 9% |
| | Maker spaces | 19% | 27% | 27% | 15% | 12% |
| | Office spaces | 32% | 31% | 21% | 10% | 6% |
| Networks | Start-up networks | 46% | 38% | 12% | 3% | 1% |
| | Universities | 42% | 35% | 16% | 6% | 1% |
| | Companies | 14% | 24% | 36% | 20% | 6% |
| | Alumni engagement | 11% | 31% | 34% | 18% | 6% |
| Research and Teaching | Integration of start-up-related content | 10% | 22% | 25% | 30% | 12% |
| | Interdisciplinary collaboration | 11% | 27% | 27% | 28% | 7% |
| Monitoring | Systematic monitoring | 7% | 23% | 32% | 25% | 13% |
| | Visualization | 5% | 18% | 29% | 30% | 19% |

Source: Stifterverband 2025. 187 German universities took part in the survey from May to August 2024 using an online questionnaire.

SUMMARY

For its seventh edition, the Gründungsradar examines support systems for start-ups at higher education institutions (HEIs) in Germany. These support systems are considered an essential driver of start-up activities and innovation in Germany. The current survey is based on the same methodology and, with one exception, the same indicators as the surveys from the Gründungsradar 2022 and 2020. This allows for a feasible comparison between the studies over time. From a total of 191 participating HEIs, for whom entrepreneurship support is an important topic, 187 survey responses were received (as several institutions submitted joint responses). The Gründungsradar thus provides a valid data basis for an overview of start-up activity and support at German HEIs for the year 2023.

Top rankings in the Gründungsradar 2025

In the top tier, universities are increasingly close in terms of their overall scores, reflecting a similarly high quality of start-up support across the board. However, since the Gründungsradar 2020, a several institutions have secured their spots as top performers in their respective categories. Among large HEIs, Munich University of Applied Sciences attained the highest ranking for the second time consecutively. Similarly, HHL Leipzig Graduate School of Management maintained its leading position among small HEIs, as observed in all previous Gründungsradar surveys. Within the category of medium-sized HEIs, the University of Bayreuth demonstrated significant progress, securing the top ranking in this cohort for the first time.

The number of start-ups and start-up projects continues to show a slight upward trend

In 2023, the participating HEIs reported a total of 2,927 start-ups, reflecting a 5.3 percent increase compared to the previous survey year (2021: 2,779 start-ups). Of these, nearly 40 percent (1,184) are based on scientific research and/or technology transfer, while 9.9 percent (290) are rooted in intellectual property rights, such as patents (2021: 254). Additionally, the participating HEIs reported a total of 13,288 start-up projects in 2023, marking an increase compared to the 10,066 projects recorded in 2021.

Funding - high share of third-party funding, declining private contributions

As of 2023, start-up funding at universities remains highly dependent on third-party sources, which account for 76.9 percent of the total budget of approximately €218 million (2021: 74.3 percent). This strong reliance on external funding presents a significant challenge to establishing a stable and long-term framework for start-up support (see Chapter 5). HEIs themselves allocate only a marginal portion of their budgets—just 0.25 percent on average—to start-up funding. Another concern is the



All results of the Gründungsradar can be found at www.gruendungsradar.de

decline in private third-party funding, which has decreased from 8.9 percent to 8.3 percent, further exacerbating financial constraints in the start-up ecosystem.

The number of employees increases, but permanent positions remain scarce

As of December 31, 2023, a total of 1,905 individuals were employed in start-up support across the 186 responding HEIs, corresponding to 1,362 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions. This represents a slight increase compared to 2021, when 1,313 FTE positions were recorded. The student-to-staff ratio has remained stable at six FTEs per 10,000 students. However, 69.5 percent of these positions are temporary or project-based, highlighting the persistent challenge of transitioning to permanent employment structures. Ensuring long-term staffing stability remains a critical issue for HEIs in sustaining and expanding their start-up support initiatives

Increase in the number of participants in start-up-related events

In the 2023 academic year (summer semester 2023 and winter semester 2023/24), more than 14,000 start-up-related events were conducted, including approximately 6,200 curricular offerings, with a total attendance exceeding 400,000 participants. This marks a substantial increase compared to the 2021 academic year, which recorded just over 300,000 participants across approximately 12,000 events. Notably, 43 percent of all start-up related courses offered at the participating HEIs are eligible for accreditation, underscoring the growing integration of entrepreneurship education into academic curricula.

Intellectual property regulations established

Intellectual property regulations have further developed, with an increasing number of HEIs implementing formalized guidelines. As of the latest survey, 69 percent of participating HEIs have established written policies for managing intellectual property, compared to 59 percent in the previous survey. Notably, approximately 55 percent of institutions now have explicit regulations for scenarios such as buy-outs, sales, or transfers—representing an increase of nearly 20 percentage points. Furthermore, all other surveyed aspects, including exclusivity of use, duration of use, and licensing fees, have also become more widely institutionalized compared to the previous assessment.

The importance of networking increases

Nearly all HEIs engage in partnerships to support start-ups. Compared to the previous Gründungsradar survey, the number of documented cooperation projects involving companies and/or political stakeholders in co-creation has more than doubled, reaching 1,910. Among HEIs collaborating with international partners, 55 percent now engage with international investors, marking an increase of over 10 percentage points since the Gründungsradar 2022.

Quota of women in start-up teams and start-up projects remains stable

The proportion of female and gender-nonconforming founders within start-up teams remains stable but still relatively low. Among the 5,145 founders recorded by HEIs that provided specific data, approximately 1,700 identify as female or gender-nonconforming, representing a share of around 30 percent.

Demands for policymakers – Challenge of institutionalization and changing framework conditions in the funding landscape

The issue of long-term institutionalization is a central focus of the Gründungsradar 2025 and has been comprehensively analyzed for the first time. HEIs identify financial resources and staffing conditions as the greatest challenges in ensuring the sustainability of their start-up support activities.

Regarding policy demands, 84.5 percent of HEIs consider the continuation of funding as a key priority for policymakers. Additionally, 62 percent advocate for the continuation of funding programs, with 39 percent also calling for a reduction in bureaucratic hurdles. Other significant concerns include the improvement of incentive systems (approximately 34 percent), the stronger curricular integration of start-up support (29 percent), and a targeted focus on disciplines such as the humanities and the arts (10 percent). Furthermore, around 8 percent of HEIs emphasize the need for improved framework conditions for venture capital and institutional investments.



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