

# Swiss AI Startup Ecosystem 2025

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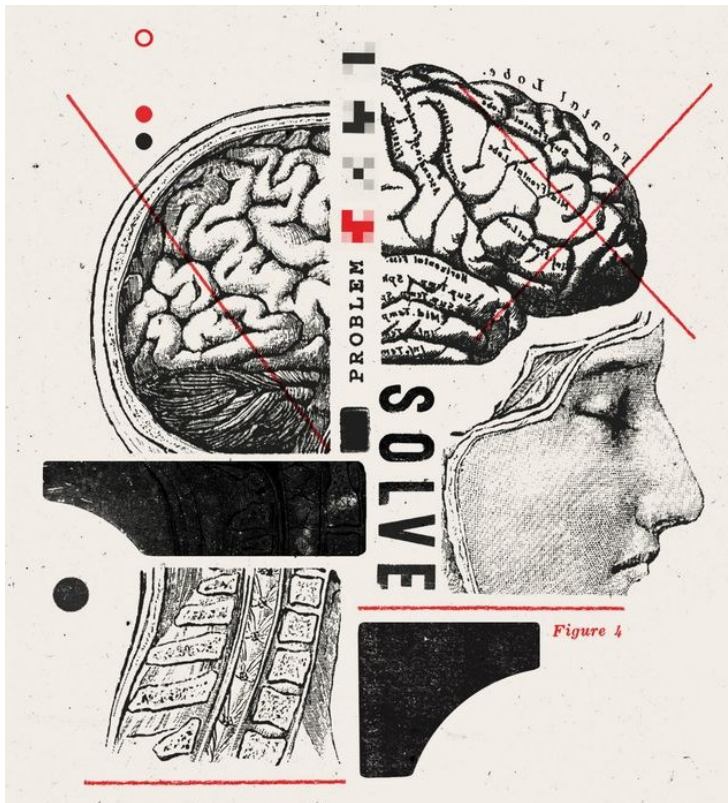
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## Executive Summary

Switzerland's startup ecosystem – particularly around **ETH Zurich** – is thriving, with AI at its core. ETH Zurich's spin-offs enjoy **remarkable success rates**, underpinned by deep research foundations and a supportive entrepreneurial infrastructure. **Google Cloud's "Future of AI: Perspectives for Startups 2025"** outlines critical AI trends (from agentic AI to infrastructure and investor priorities) shaping startup strategies. This report distills these trends and ties them to Switzerland's venture landscape:

- **AI Trends for Startups:** GenAI-driven **AI agents** and infrastructure modernization are front-of-mind. Investors emphasize solutions solving real-world problems and sustainable "AI + X" use-cases.
- **ETH Zurich Spin-Offs:** ETH produced **37 spin-offs in 2024** (total 580+ since 1973), with a **93% five-year survival rate** and cumulative funding that surged to **CHF 425 M**. ETH spin-offs boast four unicorns, robust diversity (35% with female co-founders), and increasing exits & venture rounds.
- **Startup Infrastructure at ETH:** A vibrant pipeline of programs – **ETH Entrepreneur Club** events (Launch, InCube, Speed Dating), ETH Juniors' **jFund** seed grants, and the **BOOST** accelerator (CHF 40k+ prize) – fuels startup formation. **Student Project House** provides makerspaces, prototyping labs, and seed funding to turn ideas into MVPs.



**Funding & Sector Overview:** Swiss startups raised **CHF 2.3 B** in 2024 across ~513 deals, with **health/biotech** leading (CHF 1.0B, ~45% share) and **software/analytics** a strong second (CHF 397 M, ~17%). Notably, **AI-centric startups doubled** their deal count (113 rounds) and saw a **+134% surge in funding** to CHF 345 M, even as overall funding volume dipped. Top-funded Swiss startups in 2024 (non-unicorn) included **Lakera** (~CHF 17 M, AI security), **EthonAI** (~CHF 15 M, industrial AI), **Jua** (~CHF 14 M, climate/AI), and **Prem Labs** (~CHF 12 M, AI).

**Recent Startup Activity & Headlines:** Despite macro headwinds, ETH spinoffs and Swiss AI startups are securing notable rounds:

- **Unique (ETH spinoff, AI for finance):** Raised **\$30 M** Series A to build “agentic AI” co-pilots for banking & insurance ([Unique, a Swiss AI platform for finance, raises \\$30M | TechCrunch](#)). Solutions include out-of-the-box **AI agents for KYC, investment research, and due diligence** that handle complex workflows ([Unique, a Swiss AI platform for finance, raises \\$30M | TechCrunch](#)).
- **Cerrion (ETH AI, industrial automation):** A Y Combinator-backed Zurich startup applying **video AI to manufacturing** closed a **\$5 M seed**, led by YC and Justin Kan’s Goat Capital. Cerrion’s computer-vision platform monitors production lines via CCTV to preempt faults, already cutting factory losses by 30%+.
- **Logic Star AI (ETH/INSAIT spin-off):** Secured **€2.9 M** pre-seed (Northzone led) to develop **autonomous software maintenance agents**. The platform aims for self-healing code – addressing bugs and updates without human intervention.
- **Cradle (AI biotech, ETH ties):** Raised **\$73 M Series B** to scale its generative **protein-design platform**. After a \$24 M Series A in 2023, Cradle’s AI helps pharma firms iterate protein sequences faster (treating amino acids like an “alien programming language” for the model).
- **Calvin Risk (ETH spin-off, AI governance):** Closed **\$4 M** seed to expand its **AI risk management platform**. With upcoming **EU AI Act** regulations, Calvin helps enterprises quantify & monitor AI “black box” risks in real-time across their AI models portfolio.
- **ETH Zurich AI/biotech spin-offs:** *Neustark* (carbon capture) raised ~\$69 M; *Bright Peak* (immunotherapy) raised ~\$90 M; others like **Terensis** (agri-AI) and **CellIX** (biotech for pollution)

exemplify diverse deep-tech innovation.

- **International Recognitions:** *WIRED* (2024) named Zurich a hotspot for **AI language learning startups, medtech robotics, and next-gen battery companies**, featuring ETH spin-offs like **Decentriq** (data clean rooms) and **LatticeFlow** (AI robustness) in its "Hottest Startups" list. Switzerland continues to produce new unicorns (e.g., Scandit, Climeworks, South Pole, GetYourGuide) and attract global attention for AI-driven innovation.

## 1. AI Trends for Startups (Google Cloud's 2025 Report)



**Generative AI (GenAI) Momentum:** Startups are the **engine of GenAI innovation** in 2025, rapidly creating new applications and business models. *Google Cloud's "Future of AI: Perspectives for Startups 2025"* gathered insights from 23 AI leaders to chart this path. Key themes include:

- **Rise of AI Agents:** An **"agentic AI" movement** is underway. Unlike simple chatbots, AI agents can make decisions, execute tasks, and act autonomously. Experts predict AI agents evolving from task-specific helpers to **"ambient agents"**, always-on digital assistants that proactively handle background tasks ([What's next in AI for startups, from 23 industry leaders | Google Cloud Blog](#)). For example, Harrison Chase (LangChain CEO) envisions agents monitoring events and only alerting humans when intervention is needed ([What's next in AI for startups, from 23 industry leaders | Google Cloud Blog](#)).
- **Emotional Intelligence:** Next-gen AI will better understand **human emotions and intent**. **Matthieu Rouif** (Photoroom) and **Jia Li** (LiveX AI) foresee AI tailoring content to user emotions and truly grasping customer intent – making interactions feel "more human than mechanical."
- **AI Infrastructure & Integration:** Breakthrough AI needs **breakthrough infrastructure**. With skyrocketing compute demands for AI models, startups must architect systems for flexibility and scale. **Amin Vahdat** (Google Cloud) notes **"never-seen-before"** compute density requirements, pushing modular model architectures and robust *observability*. Startups should plan for **plug-and-play model**



**upgrades** to avoid constant overhauls. *Key insight:* Building AI into real business workflows, with strong observability and A/B testing vs. existing processes, is vital (per **\*\*Mayada Gonimah\*\***, Thread AI CTO).

- **Investor Priorities:** In 2025, VCs and angels refocus on **AI startups solving concrete problems**. No more “AI-for-AI’s sake”: Investors seek **applied AI** in health, climate, housing, etc. (**Salim Teja**, Radical Ventures). They value **high-quality proprietary data** moats, productivity gains (especially dev tools), and clear ROI over hype. **Crystal Huang** (GV) succinctly says “If your product is easy to implement, it’s just as easy to uninstall” – meaning successful AI products must become **indispensable, deeply integrated in workflows**. In short, “stickiness” and path to profitability trump novelty.
- **Competitive Moats:** To **leapfrog competition**, startups need more than wrapping a generic LLM behind an interface. **Yoav Shoham** (AI21 Labs) urges teams to find “Product- Algo Fit” – leverage **today’s best models** in clever ways rather than waiting for future improvements. **David Friedberg** (Ohalo Genetics) warns against being just an “LLM wrapper” – sustainable AI ventures will have an “**engine of value**” like proprietary data or network effects that continuously improve the AI.
- **Looking Ahead Responsibly:** The **GenAI revolution’s pace** is unprecedented. Google Cloud’s report concludes with a call for **responsible AI** collaboration – ensuring infrastructure, tooling, and guidance keep up so startups can harness AI ethically and effectively. Founders are advised to capitalize on resources like cloud credits (up to \$350k) and expert consultations.

**Takeaway:** For Swiss AI startups (and their investors) in 2025, **the bar is high**: those who combine **cutting-edge AI (agents, LLMs)** with **real-world utility** and **strong execution** will lead. ETH Zurich’s talent pool and tech focus align well with these trends, helping local startups build responsibly and ambitiously.

## 2. ETH Zurich Spin-Offs – 2024 Data & Achievements



ETH Zurich has cultivated one of Europe’s most prolific academic startup ecosystems. The **ETH Spin-Off Report 2024** reveals the scale and success of this pipeline:

- **Record Launches:** 2024 saw **37 new ETH spin-offs**, slightly below 2022's record but extending a long-term growth trend. Many of 2024's spin-offs target **AI (10) and biotech/pharma (8)** – the top two domains. Examples:
  - *Terensis* – uses satellites + AI in agriculture to predict crop yields.
  - *CellX* – biotech tackling PFAS and microplastics with pollutant-eating bacteria.
- **Survival & Scale:** An **incredible 93%** of ETH spin-offs **survive 5+ years**, far exceeding typical startup rates. As of early 2025, ETH spin-offs total **580+ companies since 1973**, with 519 still active in Switzerland. This longevity underscores ETH's supportive environment and strong founder preparation.
- **Funding Boom:** ETH spin-offs raised **CHF 425 M** in 2024 (42 financing rounds) – a +25% jump YoY, and **10x growth versus a decade ago**. The report notes a *tenfold increase* in annual investment since 2014. Flagship 2024 fundraises:
  - **Neustark** (climate tech) – ~\$69 M for CO<sub>2</sub> capture in concrete.
  - **Bright Peak Therapeutics** (biotech) – ~\$90 M for protein-based immunotherapies. These large rounds signal that ETH spin-offs are scaling beyond seed stage, attracting global VC interest.
- **Unicorns & Exits:** ETH Zurich has birthed **4 unicorns** to date:
  - *GetYourGuide* (travel platform, founded 2008) – became a unicorn in 2019.
  - *Scandit* (comp. vision barcode scanning, 2009) – unicorn in 2022.
  - *Climeworks* (direct air capture, 2009) – unicorn in 2022.
  - *South Pole* (carbon finance, 2008) – unicorn in 2022. In 2024 alone, ETH spin-offs had **8 exits via acquisition** – e.g., ABB's purchase of Sevensense (robotics) and Oxford Instruments buying FemtoTools (precision instruments). Exits and unicorns provide **capital recycling and alumni mentorship**, fueling the ecosystem.
- **Global yet Local:** ETH spin-off founders are internationally diverse (46 nationalities since 2017; ~55% non-Swiss), but importantly **>99% of spin-offs stay in Switzerland**. This "brain capture" reflects Switzerland's attractiveness for business (IP rights, grants, quality of life). The ETH network helps foreign founders navigate incorporation and local growth, benefiting the Swiss economy through job creation and innovation.
- **Diversity Progress:** Female founders are rising. In 2024, **14% of spin-off founders were women** and **35% of new spin-offs had mixed-gender teams**. While all-female founder teams remain rare, the trend of mixed teams is encouraging, showing ETH's efforts (like **Women in Tech** initiatives) are gaining traction. The **Student Project House** and targeted programs help broaden participation.
- **Domains & Departments:** Top ETH departments spinning off companies are **Mechanical & Process Engineering (D-MAVT)** and **Information Tech & Electrical Eng. (D-ITET)** – aligning with strengths in robotics, AI, medtech. Fewer spin-offs originate in purely theoretical fields (e.g., Math had the fewest). This suggests a strong link between **applied research** and entrepreneurship at ETH. On the industry side, **AI/software** and **biotech/medtech** dominate recent spin-offs, often converging (e.g., ETH AI in healthcare imaging).

**Bottom Line:** ETH Zurich's spin-off engine combines world-class research, founder-friendly culture, and strong institutional backing – yielding startups that not only launch in record numbers but *thrive* and scale.

For investors, ETH spin-offs represent **de-risked, high-potential bets** given their survival stats and deep IP; for founders, ETH offers a model launchpad with resources from lab to market.

### 3. Startup Infrastructure at ETH Zurich



ETH Zurich's entrepreneurial success isn't accidental – it's supported by a **rich infrastructure of clubs, funds, and facilities** that guide founders from student to CEO.

#### ETH Entrepreneur Club: *Inspire, Educate, Accelerate*

A student-driven powerhouse, the **ETH Entrepreneur Club (EC)** connects aspiring founders with resources, mentorship, and each other. Key activities:

- **Launch (Startup Fair & Conference):** Co-hosted with SICTIC (investor network), **Launch** is ETH's annual startup showcase (e.g., Oct 2024 at ETH Zentrum). It mixes an expo of **40+ startups**, "*Founders meet Industry*" sessions, workshops, and a **Startup-Investor matchmaking lounge**. *Scale:* 1000+ students, 200+ investors, and corporates gather – making Launch a prime networking event to **ignite partnerships and funding** for ETH ventures.
- **InCube (Global Challenge):** A unique 5-day hackathon where students literally live in a **glass cube** to ideate solutions ([InCube Challenge | Think Inside the Box](#)). InCube is an **international innovation competition** – open to students worldwide (ETH covers expenses). Multidisciplinary teams tackle a challenge while cohabiting in a public cube, an intense experience fostering creativity and resilience ("*Working with 4 strangers in a cube for 5 days was a life lesson*"). The finale at Launch crowns a winner. InCube serves as a **gateway to entrepreneurship** for young talent, often sparking new startup ideas and multicultural collaboration.
- **Startup Speed Dating:** A one-evening event where **startups meet 1:1 with students** in a rapid "speed date" format. Typically held each semester (e.g., May 2024), it attracted ~120 students and 30 startups

in past editions. The mission is to help startups find **early employees or interns** and students to explore startup careers. *Impact:* Many ETH spin-offs made their first key hires through Speed Dating, injecting fresh talent and giving students real startup exposure.

- **RocketHub Incubator:** A **startup co-working and incubator space** run by the EC ([ETH Entrepreneur Club | Inspire, Educate, Accelerate](#)). Located near campus, RocketHub offers **30+ startups** access to **makerspace, coworking desks, a mentorship program, and events/workshops** ([ETH Entrepreneur Club | Inspire, Educate, Accelerate](#)). Notably, membership is nearly free (CHF 50/semester plus a small coworking fee per team size) – ensuring even bootstrapped student teams can afford it. RocketHub cultivates an on-campus startup community where teams share knowledge and get **hands-on support** (peer feedback, EC-organized sessions). It's essentially ETH's internal "pre-accelerator".
- **JoinUp (Startup Jobs Platform):** Launched in 2023 by ETH EC and Swisspreneur, **JoinUp** is Switzerland's **free startup job portal**. It bridges startups needing talent with students/grads seeking entrepreneurial jobs. Key features:
  - Free job postings for startups, free applications for candidates.
  - ETH EC promotion ensures broad reach in the student community.
  - Direct contact: Startups get notified when candidates apply, streamlining hiring (no HR middleman). JoinUp strengthens the talent pipeline, helping keep ETH-trained talent in the local startup scene rather than corporates.

In sum, the ETH Entrepreneur Club's offerings – from inspiration events (Launch) to hands-on programs (RocketHub, Speed Dating) – create a **full-spectrum support system**. They **inspire** students (talks, InCube), **educate** them (workshops, hackathons), and **accelerate** early startups (incubation, investor links). For VCs, EC events like Launch and the Startup Speed Dating are prime places to spot promising teams early.

### ETH juniors & jFund: *Student Consulting Meets Funding*

**ETH juniors** is a student-run consultancy (a "junior enterprise") that hires ETH students to do projects for industry. It's unique because it plows profits back into **supporting student founders**:

- **jFund (ETH juniors Fund):** Established in 2015 by ETH juniors and the ETH Seniors alumni club, **jFund** provides *seed money grants* to ETH students launching startups. Essentially, a portion of ETH juniors' consulting revenue is recycled into this fund. Only ETH juniors alumni (former members) can apply, ensuring the recipients have already proven themselves via juniors. It's a **micro-VC for student founders**:
  - Often first money in (pre-seed grants).
  - Leverages an alumni network for mentorship alongside funding. While amounts are modest (historically in the CHF 5–25k range), jFund can be pivotal at concept stage – and it builds a culture where **students see entrepreneurship as a viable path** (backed by peers, not just personal risk).
- **Boost (Pre-incorporation Accelerator):** **BOOST** is a new (since 2023) **accelerator program** co-hosted by ETH juniors and the EC. It targets ETH-affiliated startups *before* or just at incorporation:
  - ~10 early teams are selected and matched with mentors.
  - Intensive workshops and coaching run for several weeks.

- Culminates in a **Final Pitch Competition** (e.g., May 5, 2025 at ETH HG Hall) ([ETH Entrepreneur Club | Inspire, Educate, Accelerate](#)).
- **Prizes:** 2025 offers **CHF 40k** prize pool plus in-kind legal packages (incorporation, IP, etc.) for winners. The 2024 winner *House of Charts* (AI for healthcare admin) exemplifies the kind of impactful startup BOOST elevates.

BOOST fills a gap between ideation (hackathons, class projects) and raising seed funding. By focusing on incorporation readiness (business case refinement, term sheets, legal structure), it **bridges academia to company formation**. The collaboration between juniors (with their business acumen) and EC (student founder community) is a powerful combination.

**ETH juniors Consulting:** Indirectly, ETH juniors also benefits startups by **training future founders**. Students who run juniors learn to manage projects, handle clients, and think entrepreneurially – skills directly transferable to launching a venture. Many ETH juniors alumni indeed start companies, which the jFund then seeds. It's a virtuous cycle: consulting success funds new startups, and successful startups often become juniors' clients or hire juniors members, continuing the ecosystem synergy.

### Student Project House (SPH): *Makerspace & Idea Accelerator*

ETH's **Student Project House** is a creativity lab open to all students – a **sandbox to tinker and prototype**:

- **Facilities:** SPH offers **makerspaces with advanced equipment** (3D printers, laser cutters, electronics labs) and co-working areas. Students can get **free access to build prototypes or hardware** for their startup ideas. This lowers the barrier for hardware or biotech-focused founders who need experimentation space beyond their research labs.
- **Seed Funding & Coaching:** SPH runs programs like **Spark or Ignition Grants** – small funds (often CHF 5–10k) for early-stage student projects. They emphasize learning by doing, not equity or IP. SPH coaches (experienced students or staff) also mentor teams on project management and design thinking.
- **Community & Events:** Regular meetups, idea-pitch nights, and "Ask the Expert" sessions (covering topics like regulatory, CAD design, etc.) foster a maker community. Projects at SPH range from social impact tech to AI-driven gadgets, often sowing seeds for future startups. Teams can join SPH early, then "graduate" to RocketHub or apply to BOOST as they formalize.
- **Example Projects:** A team developing water quality sensors (like **Riverkin** by an ETH student, mentioned in 2024 highlights) can prototype at SPH, get initial funding, and eventually spin out if viable. SPH thus acts as the **nursery for innovation** at ETH, complementing formal incubators.

### Additional ETH Resources

ETH's ecosystem extends further:

- **ETH Zurich Foundation & Fundraising:** The foundation often helps match industry sponsors or philanthropists with startups (for example, funding competitions or providing bridge grants).
- **IP & Tech Transfer (ETH transfer):** A dedicated office helps spin-offs **license ETH-owned IP** smoothly and file patents. This is critical for deeptech (where ETH might hold core patents from research).
- **Entrepreneurship Courses:** ETH offers lectures on startup topics, sometimes with VC guest speakers or founder alumni. Coupled with nearby University of Zurich's initiatives, the academic environment encourages mixing theory and practice.



**Summary:** At ETH, a student can **ideate at SPH, validate in an EC hackathon, get early funding from jFund, incubate at RocketHub, accelerate via BOOST, and showcase at Launch – all within the campus network**. This end-to-end support significantly de-risks startup formation and growth. For investors, it means ETH startups are often **better prepared and vetted**. For corporates, the ecosystem provides a **steady stream of spin-outs for potential partnerships or acquisitions**.

## 4. Funding and Sector Overview



Switzerland's startup funding landscape in 2024–25 has seen **mixed fortunes** – a slight downturn in volume, but bright spots in certain sectors, especially **AI and biotech**.

### Overall Funding Climate

- **Total Funding Decline:** Swiss startups raised ~**CHF 2.3 B in 2024**, down ~15% from 2023. This marks the second year of decline from the 2021–2022 boom (2022 was ~CHF 3.9 B). Contributing factors:
  - Macro-economic tightening (higher interest rates, VC caution).
  - Lack of mega-rounds (>CHF 200 M); more conservative follow-ons.
  - However, **H2 2024 showed slight recovery** vs H1, hinting the bottom may be behind us.
- **Deal Count: 513 funding rounds** in 2024 (vs 550 in 2023, –6.7%). The decline was sharper in H2 (225 deals) compared to H1 (288), reflecting a summer slowdown. By early 2025, investors seem more optimistic, especially in high-tech verticals.
- **Round Sizes:** Fewer blockbuster rounds but healthy seed/Series A activity. A notable trend is many smaller AI startups getting funded (as evidenced by AI deal count doubling even as total deals fell). *Implication:* VCs spread bets in AI and biotech, while growth-stage funding is more scarce except for top performers.

## Sector Breakdown

### 1. Health & Biotech:

- *Dominant in Capital:* **Health-related startups** (biotech, medtech, digital health, etc.) raised ~**CHF 1.0 B** in 2024 – about **45%** of all Swiss startup investment. Biotech alone took **68%** of health's share (~CHF 680 M) across 63 deals, including some of the year's largest rounds.
- *Top Deals:* Multiple **biotech startups** (many in *Basel/Zurich arc*) closed CHF 50–150 M rounds. E.g., **Anokion** (autoimmune therapy) and **CRISPR-focused firms** were big winners (though not ETH spin-offs, they uplift the ecosystem with talent and supplier networks).
- *Medtech & Healthtech:* Medtech raised ~CHF 275 M (51 deals) – modest growth in volume. Digital health and wellness also contributed but biotech's science-driven raises dwarfed them. A standout ETH example: **SulzerSENSE** (spinoff in health sensing) got Series B funding.
- *Outlook:* Strong fundamentals (Switzerland's pharma hub status, top universities). *VCs remain bullish on biotech* despite long R&D cycles, thanks to potential outsized returns (or strategic pharma buyouts).

### 2. Software & AI:

- *Deal Leader:* **Software & analytics** had the most deals (153 in 2024), surpassing health's 135 deals – though average round size was smaller. Total funding ~CHF 397 M (17% of market). Many of these are B2B SaaS, fintech, or AI-enabled software.
- *AI as a Cross-Cutting Theme:* **AI-focused startups** saw **113 deals (up 2x)** and CHF 345 M (up 134%) invested. This means **22% of all rounds involved AI**, signaling AI is often a key part of the pitch across sectors (AI in health, AI in fintech, etc.). ETH's own spin-offs like **LatticeFlow** (AI model validation, raised ~\$12 M) and **Reframe.ai** (AI scheduling) exemplify this surge.
- *Fintech/Insurtech:* Swiss fintech funding actually **dropped ~51%** to ~CHF 206 M in 2024, as some later-stage fintechs paused raises. But early-stage fintechs (especially *crypto/blockchain* and *B2B finance tools*) kept emerging. Zurich's **neobanks and crypto brokers** (e.g., Neon, Relai) still attract capital.
- *Notable Swiss AI startups:* **Lakera** (AI security auditing), **EthonAI** (manufacturing AI, ETH spinoff), and **Jua** (weather AI) each raised ~CHF 12–17 M in 2024. These mid-size rounds show local AI talent being backed for global plays.

### 3. Hardware & Deep Tech:

- *Hardware Startups:* Accounted for ~7% of funding. This includes robotics, semiconductors, IoT. ETH spin-offs like **SynSense** (neuromorphic chips) and **Sevensense** (robot vision, acquired by ABB) stand out. Investors here are often corporate VCs or specialized funds (e.g., for drones, space tech).
- *Energy Tech:* While small in absolute, **energy startups** had a breakout +362% jump in funding rounds (many new climate-tech companies). ETH's **Neustark** and **Climeworks** illustrate this category's growth (carbon capture).
- *Others:* AgriTech/FoodTech fell by 68% (perhaps fewer agrifood deals after a bumper 2023). Mobility, media, etc., also saw fewer deals – Swiss focus has sharpened on core strengths (health, deeptech, finance, AI).

### 4. Exits & Late Stage: A quick view:

- 2024 had **fewer IPOs or unicorn births** in CH; instead, several M&A exits (like ETH's spin-off acquisitions above). Still, companies like **SOPHiA Genetics** and **On** (both former startups, now public) show the pipeline's potential.

- Unicorn pipeline: *Scandit* (ETH spinoff, comp vision) and *Climeworks* hit unicorn status in 2022. Others to watch include **WeFox** (insurtech, \$600 M+ raised) and **MindMaze** (neurotech).

## Subsector Spotlights

- **Biotech vs. Medtech:** Biotech (therapeutics, drug discovery) commands larger rounds but longer horizons. Medtech (devices, diagnostics) sees more but smaller deals. ETH contributes to both (e.g., **CUTISS** – skin graft biotech, **Nanoflex** – medtech nanotech sensor).
- **Fintech & Crypto:** While fintech funding dipped, **blockchain and digital asset startups** in “Crypto Valley” (Zug) remain active. Several raised Series A/B rounds (though valuations cooled from 2021 highs). Traditional fintechs (payments, regtech) still find corporate backing due to Switzerland’s financial hub status.
- **AI & Data Startups:** Many Swiss startups are now “AI + X”: e.g., **Decentriq** (secure data collaboration using AI encryption), **Squirro** (AI-driven insights platform). These often lean on ETH/EPFL research (Switzerland’s two big tech universities).
- **Cleantech:** Besides energy, **climate tech** is rising (carbon capture, sustainable materials). ETH’s science focus (environmental science department spin-offs) yields companies like **Meteomatics** (weather data startup, just raised €21 M).
- **Venture Capital Trends:** Swiss VC firms (e.g., Swisscom Ventures, VI Partners, b2venture) co-invest heavily with foreign VCs for larger rounds. The ecosystem is internationalizing – for example, **Northzone led LogicStar’s round** and **DN Capital led Unique’s**. **European and US VCs are actively sourcing ETH startups** due to their tech strength and Switzerland’s stability.

**Key Insight for Founders/Investors:** The Swiss startup scene in 2025 is **sector-polarized**: deeptech and health are capital magnets (with patient capital available), whereas consumer apps or purely local plays may struggle to raise. **AI is a golden thread**, enhancing pitches across sectors, but teams need a credible “moat” (data, tech or traction). ETH founders should leverage their **technical differentiation** – investors are keen on that, given Switzerland’s **premium on quality and IP**.

## 5. Recent Startup Activity & Headlines



The past year has produced **headline-grabbing deals and innovations** in the Swiss & ETH startup community. Here are highlights, with context:

- Unique – AI Agents for Finance:** *“Zurich-based Unique raises \$30M Series A” – TechCrunch, Feb 2025.* An ETH Zurich spin-off (founded 2021), Unique builds a platform of **agentic AI co-workers for banks**. This “AI workforce” can handle tasks from KYC checks to summarizing investment research, acting as a **copilot for knowledge workers** ([Unique, a Swiss AI platform for finance, raises \\$30M | TechCrunch](#)). The term “agentic AI” (one of 2025’s big buzzwords) aligns perfectly with Unique’s pitch, and their traction (blue-chip Swiss banks as clients) convinced DN Capital and CommerzVentures to lead the round. Unique’s funding now totals ~€50 M, and it’s cited as a **category-definer in vertical AI**. Investors are betting on Unique as part of a broader trend of **specialized AI platforms (finance, legal, etc.)**. The startup also attracted top talent, e.g., a Google DeepMind PM joining as CPO, highlighting how Swiss startups can draw global experts for the AI gold rush.
- Cerrion – Industrial Automation AI:** *“AI-powered automation startup Cerrion raises \$5M” – Tech.eu, Sept 2024.* Cerrion, co-founded by an ETH alum (Karim Saleh, ex-Egypt water polo captain turned engineer), addresses **factory efficiency via computer vision**. Its AI monitors production using existing cameras, detecting anomalies (like a fallen bottle on a line) and reacting in real-time. The \$5M seed was led by **Y Combinator and Goat Capital** – notable because YC itself leading a round is rare, and signals high confidence (Cerrion graduated YC S22). With deployments in 8 countries and **30%+ reduction in production losses** at client sites, Cerrion exemplifies a **deeptech startup turning cutting-edge AI into immediate industry ROI**. For Switzerland, it shows that not all AI is software-only – integration with manufacturing prowess (Switzerland’s machinery sector) can yield world-class startups. Cerrion plans to expand across EU/US manufacturing hubs, riding trends of Industry 4.0 and labor shortages in industrial jobs.
- LogicStar AI – Self-Healing Software:** *“LogicStar secures \$3M pre-seed (spin-off from INSAIT & ETHZ)” – The Recursive, Feb 2025.* LogicStar spans Zurich and Sofia, combining ETH Zurich’s systems research



(Prof. Martin Vechev, co-founder) with Bulgaria's INSAIT AI institute. It's building **AI agents to autonomously fix software bugs and maintain code** – essentially aiming for AI-driven DevOps. Northzone's lead investment is significant: a major European VC backing a pre-seed suggests belief in both the team's caliber and the massive market (every company runs on software that breaks). ETH's involvement indicates the foundational tech likely came from research (Vechev is known for program analysis tools). *Implication*: ETH's AI labs are spinning out ambitious "hard tech" startups, not just applications. LogicStar must prove its AI can reliably write patches (an unsolved problem at scale), but if it does, it could revolutionize software maintenance.

- **Cradle – Generative Biotech:** *"Cradle raises \$73M for protein-design AI" – TechCrunch, Nov 2024.* Though Amsterdam-based, Cradle has Swiss ties (some team/advisors) and sits at the intersection of AI and life sciences. Its large Series B (led by Index Ventures and others) highlights how **AI in biotech** is attracting big money. Cradle uses AI (including large language models, but for protein sequences) to **suggest genetic or protein modifications** that achieve desired traits faster. By cutting down iterative lab experiments, they promise pharmaceutical companies huge time and cost savings. ETH Zurich's strong bio-engineering and computational biology programs may spawn similar startups – blending AI expertise with biotech domain knowledge. For founders, Cradle's story shows that **pairing AI with lab operations ("wet lab") is not only feasible but fundable**. It also shows European startups can lead in deeptech: Cradle emerged in 2022 and within 2 years raised a substantial war chest, demonstrating *speed when riding the right wave*.
- **Calvin Risk – AI Governance:** *"Calvin Risk (ETH spin-off) raises \$4M for AI risk platform" – EU-Startups / Forbes, Nov 2024.* Calvin Risk tackles a pressing enterprise need: **how to trust and control AI models**. Born out of ETH in 2022, their platform continuously assesses AI systems for technical and ethical risks – think of it as **"AI audit and compliance software"**. The raise, led by Join Capital and Seed+Speed, coincides with regulatory moves like the **EU AI Act** which will enforce transparency and risk management for AI in Europe. Calvin's early partnerships (Aviva, Lloyds Banking, etc.) show corporates are already seeking solutions. It's a great example of an ETH spin-off aligning academic insight (AI safety research) with market timing (regulations). For venture capital, AI governance is a hot emerging sector, and Calvin Risk positions Switzerland as a thought leader (particularly fitting given Swiss reputation in compliance and risk management). Expect Calvin to expand its product as AI use proliferates – their challenge will be staying ahead of giant consulting firms and platforms that might develop similar tools.
- **Other Noteworthy Startups:**
  - **\*Meteomatics** (St. Gallen)\* – Raised €21 M (Jan 2025) for **weather data analytics**, showing the ongoing value of specialized data platforms (in this case, critical for aviation, energy, etc.).
  - **\*Oxyle** (ETH spin-off)\* – Raised €15.3 M (Jan 2025) to remove water pollutants with nanotech, reflecting environmental deeptech interest.
  - **\*SAEKI** (Zug)\* – €6.4 M (Feb 2025) for **autonomous factory robotics**, highlighting Switzerland's strength in robotics.
  - **\*Invasight** (ETH spin-off)\* – Early 2024 winner of W.A. De Vigier Award (a top Swiss startup prize) for AI-powered cancer therapy discovery.
  - *Unique's peers in AI:* **Starmind** (AI knowledge management) and **Squirro** (AI-driven insights) are more mature Swiss AI startups continuing to raise and expand globally, paving the way for newcomers.

- **Media Recognition:** The **WIRED “Europe’s 100 Hottest Startups 2024”** list put Zurich in focus. It praised Zurich’s **fintech base and emerging diversity** in robotics and AI. ETH spin-offs likely on that list: **Decentriq** (secure data collaboration platform labeled the “Switzerland of data”), **LatticeFlow** (AI robustness testing), **Verity** (indoor drone inventory), etc. Such accolades attract international investors scanning for Europe’s next big successes. *Fintech News* and *venturelab* also frequently list top-funded or most-promising Swiss startups, often peppered with ETH spin-offs (e.g., Unique itself was ranked #32 Top 100 Swiss Startups 2023).

In summary, the latest news paints a picture of a **maturing ecosystem**: seed rounds are frequent (LogicStar, Calvin Risk), larger Series A/B happen for those proving product-market fit (Unique, Cradle), and strategic exits and unicorn valuations are no longer rare (Sevensense exit, ETH’s unicorn alumni). The **common thread** is deep technology addressing real needs – from factories and banks to labs and compliance departments.

## About the Author



Shaswat Gupta is an MS Computer Science student at ETH Zurich, and a rank 1 gold medalist from IIT Bombay. With hands-on experience as an ML engineer at organizations like the World Bank, AB InBev, ISB, and startups, Shaswat specializes in machine learning, scalable engineering, and data-driven solutions. Known for his analytical rigor combined with a creative flair in music, poetry, journalism, and public speaking, Shaswat loves tackling challenging problems and welcomes exciting collaborations.

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## 6. Miscellaneous Data Points & Resources



To round out the picture, here are a few additional data points and resources relevant to Swiss and ETH startups:

- **ETH Spin-off Historical Data:** Since formal tracking in 1973, ETH has produced over **580 spin-offs**. On average, ~20+ per year in the 2010s, now ~30+ per year. ETH spin-offs by sector (2020 study) had ~30% in ICT (software/AI), ~20% in medtech/biotech, rest in cleantech, advanced materials, etc.
- **Top-Funded Swiss Startups (all-time):** Many have ETH roots:
  - *Climeworks* (~\$800 M total funding) – carbon capture.
  - *GetYourGuide* (~\$883 M) – travel platform.
  - *On* (~\$740 M before IPO) – sports shoes (ETH alum founded).
  - *SonarSource* (~\$457 M) – code analysis (Geneva, not ETH).
  - *Wefox* (~\$1.3 B) – insurtech (ETH co-founder). These figures show that Swiss startups *can* raise at scale when scaling globally, often requiring tapping into US and Asian investors over multiple rounds.
- **Venture Capital & Accelerators:** Aside from ETH's internal ecosystem, startups leverage:
  - **Innosuisse (Swiss Innovation Agency)** grants for R&D and coaching.
  - **Venture Kick** (pre-seed grant & training program) – many ETH projects get a quick CHF 150k non-dilutive boost.
  - **Venturelab's TOP 100** – an annual ranking & events that increase visibility.
  - **Incubators/Accelerators:** e.g., MassChallenge Switzerland (Lausanne) and F10 (fintech in Zurich). These complement ETH's programs, especially for non-ETH founders or after ETH stage.
  - **Corporate Programs:** e.g., UBS's Future of Finance challenge, SwissRe's InsurTech accelerator – often relevant to fintech, giving POCs and sometimes funding.

- **Media & Information Hubs:**

- *TechCrunch* and *EU-Startups* now regularly cover Swiss deals (as seen with Unique, Calvin Risk) – a sign of the ecosystem’s increasing international interest.
- *The Recursive* (focused on CEE) covering LogicStar shows ETH’s collaborations extending to Eastern Europe.
- *Startupticker.ch* remains the go-to Swiss news aggregator (in English/German) for daily startup news, including smaller grant wins, competition results, etc.
- *Fintechnews.ch* provides specialized coverage and periodic analysis (like the AI funding surge piece).
- *Wired* and *Forbes* occasionally profile Swiss startups to watch or broader trends like AI governance.
- ETH’s own news site (ETH News) frequently publishes “success stories” – worth reading for insight on how ETH positions its entrepreneurial impact (e.g., the “*Start-up boom thriving*” article).

- **Notable Lists:**

- **TOP 100 Swiss Startups Award** – curated by investors, often a bellwether for up-and-comers. Recent top ETH spin-offs on it include *Scrona* (nanotech printing), *CREAL* (AR display), *Synhelion* (solar fuel), etc.
- **W.A. de Vigier Awards** – Switzerland’s premier startup awards for early-stage, many ETH winners over years (e.g., *Animatico* AI avatar, *Microcaps* 3D printing).
- **EU Horizon Grants & EIC Accelerator** – EU funding for deeptech: ETH startups like *Microcaps* (drug micro-encapsulation) got €2.5 M grants. This non-dilutive funding is significant in budgets and is a unique advantage for European startups (accessible even for Swiss companies via bilateral agreements).

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## Conclusion – Major Takeaways



Switzerland’s AI and deeptech startup scene, anchored by ETH Zurich, is **entering a new stage of maturity**:



- **AI is pervasive** – not only birthing new startups (AI for X) but supercharging legacy sectors (finance, manufacturing, biotech). Startups like Unique and LogicStar reflect how ETH talent is driving this AI wave with domain-specific solutions.
- **ETH Zurich's ecosystem works** – a case study in how a university can consistently translate research into high-impact companies. The numbers (93% survival, hundreds of millions in funding) speak to an environment VCs can trust. Founders benefit from integrated support (Entrepreneur Club, jFund, SPH, etc.) that **lowers risk and increases quality**.
- **Sector strengths** – Swiss startups dominate in certain niches: Biotech/health and Fintech (historically), and now an emergent leadership in **AI safety/governance** and **industrial AI**. Founders in Switzerland should leverage these clusters for mentorship and specialized investors.
- **Funding outlook** – While total funding dipped in 2024, the ecosystem proved resilient, with **smaller deals in greater frequency** (especially AI) offsetting fewer mega-deals. As capital markets improve, many well-structured ETH spin-offs (seed-funded during 2022–24) will be poised for larger Series B/C in 2025–26. Venture capitalists see Swiss startups as high-quality (if sometimes undervalued) opportunities.
- **Globalization** – Swiss startups are more international than ever: cross-border founding teams (ETH's international students), foreign VCs leading rounds, and serving global customers from Day 1. Unique's clients, Cerrion's deployments, and Calvin's alignment with EU law all show **thinking beyond Switzerland's borders** is now the norm.
- **Sustainable Innovation** – With ETH spin-offs often tackling big problems (climate, healthcare, automation), the ecosystem aligns profit with purpose. This is attractive to many VCs and corporates looking for impact investing or future-proof tech.

For **venture capitalists**, the Swiss AI startup ecosystem offers **technically robust, founder-resilient companies** emerging from a proven pipeline. Engaging early (via ETH events or collaborations) can provide an edge in deal flow. For **startup founders**, ETH Zurich demonstrates how leveraging a strong network and being at the nexus of research and industry can dramatically enhance a venture's trajectory.

As we move through 2025, expect ETH Zurich and its spin-offs to continue spearheading innovation in AI, deeptech, and beyond – keeping Switzerland firmly on the map as a European Silicon Valley equivalent, albeit one with its own Swiss character of quality, precision, and global responsibility.

**Sources:** Google Cloud's *Future of AI: Perspectives for Startups 2025*; ETH Zurich Spin-off Report 2024; ETH News; ETH Entrepreneur Club docs; EY Startup Barometer 2025; TechCrunch, EU-Startups, The Recursive for startup funding news; Wired (Zurich startups 2024); Fintechnews.ch; EU-Startups (Calvin Risk), etc.