INDUSTRY RESEARCH / 2026

The Fragmented State of Startup Support

An evidence-based examination of the challenges facing startup-support organisations, and what fragmented information, inconsistent progress tracking and limited coordination may mean for innovation and growth.

Based on research among 38 respondents, complemented by European Commission, EIB and OECD research.

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Executive summary

Startup support is delivered through a diverse network of programmes, coaches, educational institutions, funders and regional organisations. The research finds that many of these organisations operate with fragmented tools and information, making it harder to maintain a consistent picture of startup development.

The most frequently reported challenge is objective progress measurement (47%), followed by scattered data (42%). Respondents rate the integration of their current workflows at just 5.6 out of 10. Spreadsheet, document-sharing and CRM tools remain central to day-to-day work.

The findings suggest an industry-level coordination problem: information exists, but it is not always structured as shared, current, verifiable evidence of startup progress. This has implications for coaching continuity, portfolio oversight, programme reporting and collaboration across the ecosystem. These consequences are analytical interpretations of the reported problems, not separately measured outcomes.

Five findings

• Fragmentation is routine: 58% use three to five tools side by side.

• Objective progress measurement is the most commonly reported problem.

• Generic office software dominates, while shared maturity and evidence structures are less apparent.

• The strongest expressed needs are portfolio visibility, maturity tracking and central startup records.

• Technology can support coordination, but cannot by itself resolve overlapping roles, funding gaps or fragmented regional programmes.

1. About the research

This exploratory validation survey was conducted in May–June 2026 among 38 people working in organisations that support, finance or guide startups, ventures and innovators. The questionnaire examined organisational context, software use, operational challenges, desired capabilities and perceived organisational benefits.

Organisation type	Respondents	Share
Incubator	13	34%
Educational institution	9	24%
Knowledge/technology transfer office	7	18%
Innovation hub / campus	7	18%
Venture capital / fund	6	16%
Regional development agency	5	13%

Organisation type	Respondents	Share
Government / grant organisation	4	11%
Accelerator	3	8%

Respondents could select multiple organisation types. Some 32% support 26–50 startups annually, while 21% support more than 250. This purposive sample is useful for identifying patterns and hypotheses, but it is not statistically representative of the whole industry.

2. Fragmented tools are the operating reality

The most common working environment is a combination of spreadsheets, shared drives, CRM systems and other applications. Many organisations can perform their daily work using this setup, yet the connections between systems are imperfect.

Tooling pattern	Share of respondents
Excel or Google Sheets	79%
Drive or SharePoint	68%
CRM system	61%
Three to five tools used alongside each other	58%

Respondents scored the overall integration of their current way of working at an average of 5.6/10. This does not establish that the tools themselves are ineffective; rather, it signals incomplete coordination across the workflow.

What this can mean in practice

Information may be distributed across separate files, contacts and applications. As portfolios grow, teams may spend more effort finding the latest status, reconciling updates or preparing an overview. These are plausible operational consequences of fragmentation; the survey did not quantify the time or financial cost of each consequence.

3. The deeper challenge is objective progress

The most cited challenge was measuring startup progress objectively: 18 of 38 respondents (47%). Scattered information was cited by 16 of 38 (42%). Reporting effort, visibility and scalability formed a second cluster of issues.

For a startup-support organisation, a progress update is useful only if people can understand what has changed, what evidence supports that change and what remains uncertain. Without a common structure, assessments can depend heavily on individual coaches, programmes or reporting conventions.

Potential consequences

• Less comparable assessments: progress may be described differently between startups or cohorts.

• Harder handovers: knowledge may remain with individual coaches rather than in a shared record.

• Delayed decisions: programme managers may need to reconcile multiple sources before acting.

• Inconsistent reporting: stakeholders may receive snapshots built using different definitions and data.

These consequences are interpretations grounded in the observed challenges, not independently measured causal effects.

4. Portfolio oversight becomes harder as programmes scale

A portfolio requires more than a list of participating startups. Support organisations need to see stage of development, evidence, milestones, risks and support needs across many companies. In the survey, 61% identified portfolio management as a desired capability, while 58% identified maturity tracking.

Central startup records and KPI dashboards also featured prominently. Together, these preferences point to a need for consistent, longitudinal information rather than isolated periodic updates.

Why this matters

A common evidence-based view could help teams identify which startups need intervention, where programmes are effective, and which portfolio-wide patterns deserve attention. The study establishes demand for these capabilities, but does not prove that introducing them will improve outcomes.

5. The cost of fragmentation is broader than administration

Respondents associate improved tooling with organisational efficiency (61%), less fragmentation (58%), stronger portfolio control (45%) and more professional support (42%). They rated the expected contribution of better tooling to organisational success at an average of 7.2/10.

Area	Observed signal	Possible implication
Operational workload	61% expect greater efficiency	More time may be available for substantive support if repetitive coordination is reduced.
Portfolio governance	45% expect better portfolio control	Managers could make decisions with a clearer cross-portfolio view.
Quality and consistency	42% see more professional support	Shared definitions may reduce differences between individual support approaches.
Ecosystem coordination	Open answers describe overlapping roles and fragmentation	Shared information may ease handovers, but cannot solve institutional fragmentation alone.

Importantly, these are perceived benefits and possible mechanisms. The research did not directly measure hours saved, financial losses, startup survival, funding outcomes or programme effectiveness.

6. What participants say

The open-ended responses add nuance to the quantitative findings. Respondents describe a need for structure without sacrificing agility, as well as concerns about fragmented responsibilities between support organisations.

Selected translated comments

“Growth makes it challenging to maintain oversight. We need slightly more structure without losing speed and agility.”

“Startup support is fragmented across the region. Different parties have overlapping roles.”

These comments illustrate experiences within the sample. They should not be interpreted as statements representative of every startup-support organisation.

7. Technology is only part of the answer

Shared language and maturity

Several participants called for uniformity, objective benchmarking, maturity definitions and a shared framework. A common vocabulary can help different organisations interpret startup development consistently.

Integration instead of another isolated tool

Respondents referenced data integration, access to multiple systems and information sharing. A new stand-alone system could compound fragmentation if it is not designed to coexist with existing workflows.

AI may reduce manual effort

Participants described potential uses for AI in reporting, analysis, monitoring and linking information. The study captures expectations, not verified performance gains from AI.

Human guidance remains essential

Strategic choices, trusted introductions, coaching and conflict resolution remain fundamentally relational. Better information infrastructure can support these activities, but does not replace them.

Structural fragmentation cannot be solved by software alone

Open responses also point to overlapping programmes, fragmented roles, funding gaps and weak coordination between regions or organisations. Addressing these challenges requires governance, collaboration and aligned incentives alongside technology.

8. Implications for the startup-support sector

Industry challenge	Suggested response
Different definitions of progress	Adopt shared maturity concepts and explicit evidence standards.
Scattered records	Agree on core startup information, update ownership and accessible history.
Limited cross-portfolio visibility	Use consistent indicators and periodic portfolio reviews.
Time-consuming reporting	Reuse structured data across coaching, management and stakeholder reporting.
Fragmented ecosystem relationships	Develop shared handover protocols and clarify programme responsibilities.
Emerging AI applications	Evaluate privacy, data quality, interoperability and human oversight before scaling.

These responses are recommendations derived from the findings. They have not been experimentally tested by this study.

9. Conclusion

The research identifies a recurring structural challenge in startup support: organisations have many tools and large amounts of information, but lack a consistently integrated way to follow and evidence startup development.

The most consequential issue is not the software stack in isolation. It is the gap between fragmented information and a shared, reliable understanding of progress. That gap can affect coaching continuity, portfolio oversight, reporting and coordination.

A more mature support infrastructure would combine common progress definitions, accessible evidence, connected workflows and human judgement. Future research should test how these practices affect administrative workload, decision quality, programme consistency and startup outcomes over time.

Methodology and limitations

This report is based on an exploratory, purposive sample of 38 completed responses collected in May–June 2026. The survey is not a statistically representative market study. Several questions were multi-select, so their percentages need not total 100%. Open answers were interpreted thematically. Results are descriptive and self-reported. No causal impact estimates are claimed. Names and email addresses from the underlying data are excluded.

Research source: Validatieonderzoek Startup Support Operating System (2026). This English public edition focuses on industry challenges and their implications; commercial questions from the original validation instrument are intentionally outside its scope.

10. The wider innovation opportunity gap

The findings from our 38-person survey sit within a larger body of European research documenting structural barriers to commercialisation, scaling and ecosystem connectivity. These studies examine different populations and problems; they reinforce the importance of coordination but do not establish that fragmented support software causes missed growth outcomes.

European Commission — Beyond Fragmentation (2024)

StepUp Startups identifies disconnected European startup ecosystems, uneven access to finance, mobility barriers and regulatory differences as constraints on cross-border growth. Its central argument is that better ecosystem connectivity can help unlock opportunities. Our survey adds an operational perspective: information and progress tracking are fragmented within the organisations tasked with supporting startups.

[1] European Commission, StepUp Startups, Beyond Fragmentation: Connecting Europe's Startup Ecosystems for Growth and Innovation (26 November 2024).

European Investment Bank — Investment Report 2024/2025

The EIB reports that 74% of innovative European firms identify regulatory inconsistencies as barriers to expanding in the single market. It also finds that EU scale-ups raise about 50% less capital than US counterparts in their first ten years. These are broader market and financing constraints, not measures of support-organisation software. They illustrate the scale of opportunities at risk when innovative firms cannot expand efficiently.

[2] European Investment Bank, Investment Report 2024/2025: Innovation, Integration and Simplification in Europe (5 March 2025).

OECD — What It Takes for Start-ups to Scale Up (2026)

The OECD finds that EU firms with patents take roughly 1.5 years longer than US peers to reach scale after their first patent filing, despite comparable invention intensity among patenting scale-ups. It characterises Europe's gap as involving commercialisation rather than simply a lack of invention. The OECD also stresses that ecosystem spillovers from successful scale-ups are not automatic. Our survey points to one possible area for operational improvement: consistent evidence, progress monitoring and coordination across support organisations.

[3] OECD, What It Takes for Start-ups to Scale Up (2026).

European Commission — EU Startup and Scaleup Strategy (2025)

The Commission describes two recurring 'valleys of death': the failure to translate innovations into marketable products and the difficulty of scaling successful businesses. It notes fragmented markets, slower innovation uptake and underused public procurement. Better startup support alone cannot resolve these issues, but more systematic tracking may help programmes identify where founders stall and coordinate timely interventions.

[4] European Commission, EU Startup and Scaleup Strategy, COM(2025) 270 final.

How the findings connect

External research: Europe loses growth opportunities through barriers in market access, capital, commercialisation and ecosystem connectivity. Our survey: support organisations report difficulty measuring progress objectively, scattered information and limited integration. Interpretation: clearer evidence, better handovers and more consistent portfolio oversight could help the support system respond to known barriers. This is a hypothesis for further testing, not a demonstrated causal effect.

References and access

https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/beyond-fragmentation-connecting-europes-startup-ecosystems-growth-and-innovation

https://www.eib.org/en/publications/20240354-investment-report-2024

https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/what-it-takes-for-start-ups-to-scale-up_1f743fa7-en/full-report.html

https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52025DC0270