



REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE
MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY
AND TECHNOLOGY

LOCAL
DEVELOPMENT
MOVE



**START IN
ISTANBUL**

Insights

THE STATE OF ISTANBUL STARTUP ECOSYSTEM 2025

Start, Grow and Go Global from Istanbul



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WELCOME TO THE ISTANBUL STARTUP ECOSYSTEM 2025

**START,
GROW
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FROM ISTANBUL**

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

Quick Look at the Ecosystem

Istanbul has officially transitioned from a frontier market into a high-velocity global tech hub, serving as the primary innovation engine for both EMEA and SEE with a proven track record of seven unicorns, including two decacorns. The ecosystem is characterized by a sophisticated lifecycle for founders, supported by 18 technoparks, 101 acceleration programs, and a dense talent pool fueled by 58 universities. Istanbul remains a global powerhouse in Gaming, ranking as the second-largest studio hub in Europe and recently achieving an unprecedented milestone with Loom Games, which reached unicorn status in early 2026—just six months after its founding. Fintech has also reached a critical inflection point, securing a record-breaking \$197 million in funding in 2025 as the sector moves toward open banking and global expansion. Furthermore, a new wave of 660 AI-native startups, 68% of which were founded after 2020, is creating a high-potential Series A and B pipeline. Supported by proactive regulatory frameworks like the Türkiye Tech Visa and the 2026 launch of the “Start in Istanbul” platform, the city has solidified its status as a premier destination for international VCs, entrepreneurs and strategic acquirers.

01

ISTANBUL SNAPSHOT



Achievements Unlocked



02

ISTANBUL: FROM FRONTIER TO UNICORN FACTORY

Genesis of Istanbul's VC-Backed Era

To understand the trajectory of the Istanbul startup ecosystem, one must analyze it through the lens of the broader Turkish tech landscape, as the two have evolved in near-perfect synchronicity. Historically, the ecosystem was defined by a pre-2010 era of high capital efficiency and “survivalist” entrepreneurship, where founders chased success stories through a pure bootstrap model. This period was dominated by pioneers such as Yemeksepeti, GittiGidiyor, Sahibinden, and Mackolik. These companies were built in an environment devoid of angel investors or venture capital, navigating a landscape where internet speeds were still measured in kilobits and market adoption was in its infancy.

While Silicon Valley's roots are famously tied to the defense sector, Istanbul's evolution shares a much stronger DNA with global commercial hubs like New York or London. Its emergence as a tech powerhouse is a direct result of its unique position as a cosmopolitan center of gravity, consolidating the nation's finance, media, commerce, and human capital into a single high-density node. The pivotal transition from organic growth to a venture-backed (VC) ecosystem was triggered between 2009 and 2010. During this window, companies like Markafoni, Trendyol, and Peak demonstrated that high-growth models fueled by external financing could scale rapidly, fundamentally shifting the founder mindset toward seeking institutional capital.

This influx of high-potential startups catalyzed the institutionalization of the local investment landscape. The founding of Galata Business Angels marked the arrival of structured early-stage support, followed shortly by the launch of 212 as the city's first dedicated venture capital fund. This sequence of events triggered a domino effect,

leading to a surge of subsequent funds and networks that have since transformed Istanbul into a sophisticated, VC-driven marketplace.

Learning Phases and Structural Maturity

The period between 2010 and 2018 served as a formative learning phase for the Istanbul ecosystem, during which local talent and investors calibrated their strategies to international standards. This evolution was significantly underpinned by a robust institutional framework; the Ministry of Industry and Technology, TÜBİTAK, KOSGEB, İSTKA and technoparks acted as critical catalysts, providing the non-dilutive capital and R&D infrastructure necessary to sustain early-stage innovation. As the ecosystem's technical depth increased, the landscape saw the emergence of thematic funds starting in 2015, which shifted the focus toward high-barrier verticals such as DeepTech.

This foundational strengthening culminated in a pivotal milestone for the region: the realization of the first \$100 million+ exits, which validated the market's ability to generate significant liquidity. These landmark successes provided the track record required to navigate the strategic restructuring of 2018 and 2019, a period defined by capital recovery and the raising of sophisticated follow-on funds. By converting these early wins into second-generation capital, the ecosystem effectively institutionalized its gains. This consolidation set the stage for hyper-growth, as the infrastructure for supporting high-growth companies became more sophisticated and global scalability became the ultimate benchmark for viability.



The Great Acceleration and Global Recognition

While the onset of the pandemic was undeniably a period of profound global adversity, it functioned as a paradoxical catalyst for the Istanbul startup ecosystem. Just as the local market began to harness its collective experience and pivot toward true global ambition, the crisis disrupted traditional roadmaps, only to replace them with a massive tailwind that accelerated digital transformation by an estimated five to six years.

Even amidst this volatility, the ecosystem demonstrated remarkable resilience, delivering landmark liquidity events that signaled its coming-of-age. Notable milestones included Zynga’s \$1.8 billion acquisition of Peak and the rapid \$180 million exit of Rollic, successes that cemented Istanbul’s status as a preeminent global gaming hub. By 2021, this momentum reached a fever pitch as Getir achieved unicorn status and Dream Games hit a billion-dollar valuation in record time. Coupled with Hepsiburada’s Nasdaq IPO and Trendyol’s ascent to decacorn status, the city effectively transitioned from a frontier market into a high-velocity global tech powerhouse, proving that its foundational knowledge and newfound scale were ready for the world stage.

Resilience and the Path Forward

As the tailwinds of the pandemic began to subside in early 2023, the rapid pace of global digitalization inevitably decelerated, leading to a significant recalibration in the private capital markets. Venture Capital and Private Equity firms, which had grown accustomed to hyper-growth trajectories, found themselves unable to realize the aggressive multiple expansion they had initially projected. This shift triggered a widespread liquidity crunch—a “money shortage” that forced a pivot from growth-at-all-costs to fiscal discipline.

While this subsequent global market correction led to a risk-off sentiment and a funding winter, valuations in Istanbul avoided the sharp corrections seen in other markets due to a lack of prior irrational exuberance. The ecosystem demonstrated remarkable resilience, particularly in pre-Series A stages, buoyed by strategic regulatory shifts. The introduction of equity-based crowdfunding and the establishment of major fund-of-funds provided essential support for VCs. Furthermore, the 2021 regulation allowing R&D firms to accelerate investments into Venture Capital Investment Funds created a new influx of capital. By late 2023, the transformation of the BiGG program into a pre-seed investment fund further insulated the early-stage layer from global macro headwinds.

The Unrivaled Gravity Well of Regional Innovation

Today, Istanbul has evolved into a sophisticated powerhouse anchoring the broader regional startup landscape. As a massive innovation engine, the city is home to 18 technoparks, 101 acceleration programs, and 55 incubation centers. This robust infrastructure is supported by 58 universities, ensuring a continuous pipeline of high-tier human capital and specialized engineering expertise. The city’s financial maturity is evidenced by its role as the headquarters for 19 active VCs, 84 Corporate Venture Capital arms, and 16 angel investment networks.

This dominance is further underscored by the 2025 investment landscape, where Istanbul-based startups captured a staggering \$532 million of the \$593 million total capital deployed across Türkiye. This 90% concentration of deal flow reaffirms the city’s status as the nation’s central gravity well for high-growth assets. This momentum is visible across the entire lifecycle; notably, Istanbul also serves as the primary launchpad for early-stage innovation, accounting for 33% of all startups established via BiGG pre-seed investments over the last two years. Having already served as the birthplace of 7 unicorns, the city has solidified its position as the most resilient and dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystem in the region. Moving forward, Istanbul is poised to remain the definitive powerhouse for capital attraction, offering unparalleled alpha opportunities for global investors seeking scalable startups.

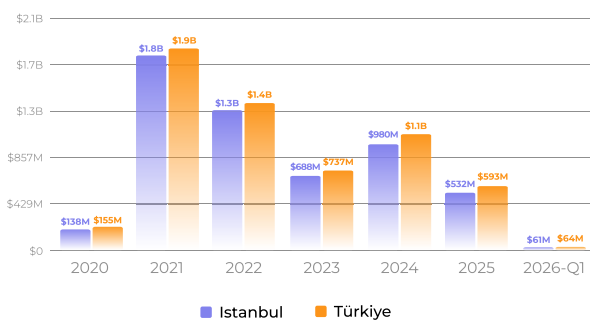


Chart 1 - Istanbul vs Türkiye (Deal Size) ⁽²⁾

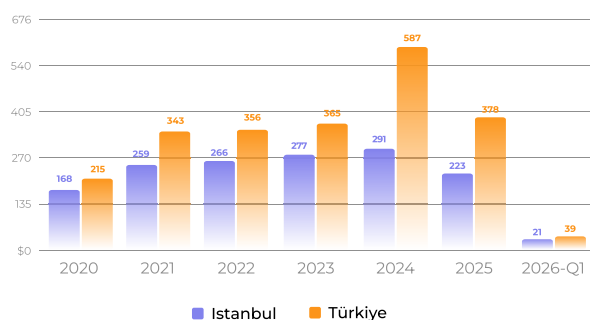


Chart 2 - Istanbul vs Türkiye (Deal Count) ⁽²⁾

03

POLICY-DRIVEN GROWTH

Institutional Foundations and Capital Expansion

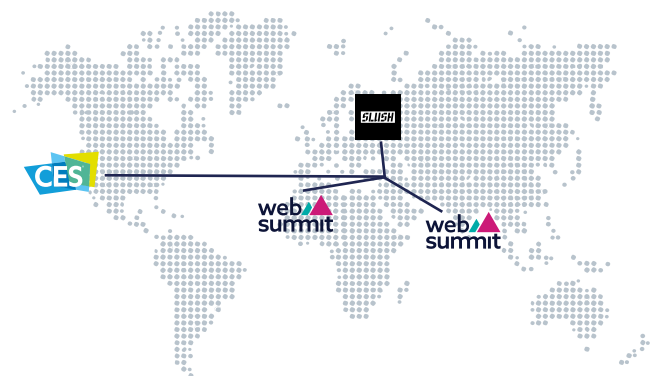
The evolution of the Istanbul startup ecosystem has been defined by a consistent, multi-layered expansion, catalyzed by the establishment of the İSTKA in 2008. This pivotal milestone laid the groundwork for a structured support system, which quickly gained momentum in 2010 when İSTKA began announcing its Financial Support Programs (FSPs) to inject necessary capital into the local market. As the decade progressed, the ecosystem's growth trajectory was bolstered by strategic initiatives from the Ministry of Industry and Technology, such as the 2016 introduction of the Turkish Growth and Innovation Fund (TGIF) and the 2018 launch of TÜBİTAK's VC Program (1514). This period of institutionalization was further strengthened by regulatory breakthroughs, including the introduction of equity-based crowdfunding in 2019. These developments provided startups with diverse financing avenues while simultaneously establishing a mandatory VCIF investment requirement for R&D companies to ensure sustained capital flow into innovation.

Global Scaling and Strategic Integration

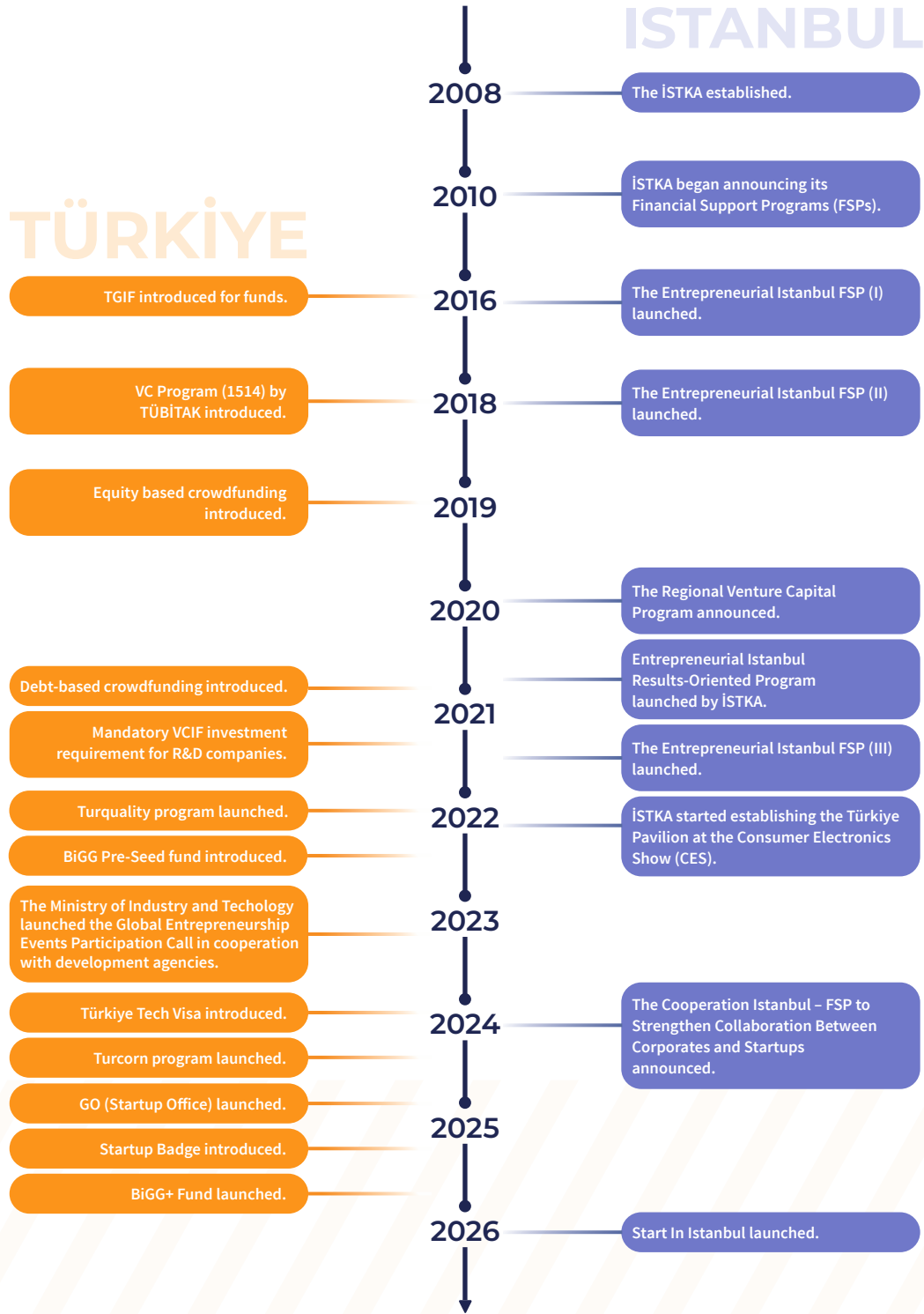
Building on this foundational stability, the ecosystem has moved toward global integration and high-value scaling through sophisticated programs launched by both İSTKA and the Ministry of Industry and Technology.

The 2022 debut of the Türkiye Pavilion at CES established a critical international foothold, a move further solidified by Ministry of Industry and Technology's Call, in partnership with İSTKA and 4 development agencies, for Participation

into the Global Entrepreneurship Events. These initiatives were specifically designed to bridge the gap between local innovation and global markets, accelerating market familiarity and providing the strategic runway for startups to scale globally. Recent years have seen an aggressive push toward elite-tier growth, evidenced by the 2024 launch of the Turcorn program and the Türkiye Tech Visa, designed to attract and nurture world-class talent and "unicorn" potential. This trajectory culminates in 2026 with the launch of "Start in Istanbul," a platform designed as the definitive central resource for international stakeholders to navigate and engage with the local landscape. By serving as a primary gateway for global investors and entrepreneurs, the initiative solidifies Istanbul's position as a premier gravity center for startup activity.



Infographic 1 - Global Entrepreneurship Events Participation ⁽⁶⁾



Timeline 1 - Prominent Regulations, Programs for Türkiye and Istanbul Startup Ecosystems^(6,7)

04

A ROBUST ECOSYSTEM, POWERED BY STRONG ENABLERS

The Istanbul startup ecosystem has undergone a radical transformation over the last five years, evolving from a local hub into a sophisticated global powerhouse. This maturation is driven by a synergistic blend of institutional support, private capital, and grassroots advocacy. The city's infrastructure now offers a full-spectrum lifecycle for founders, with the sheer volume of supporting entities acting as a force multiplier for innovation and regional competitiveness.

Institutional Growth and Specialized Support

At the heart of this evolution lies the TEKMER model, which decentralizes the specialized incubation advantages of Technoparks to provide early-stage startups with localized access to institutional-grade infrastructure and mentorship. By uncoupling these high-value resources from traditional tech hubs, TEKMERs significantly lower the barrier to entry for emerging startups and accelerate their path to scalability. Istanbul has seen a remarkable surge in this niche, reaching 21 TEKMERs within the last five years. This institutional expansion is mirrored by the proliferation of Technoparks, which have grown from 11 to 18 in the same period. These hubs do more than just provide office space; they create dense clusters of R&D activity that benefit from significant tax incentives and collaborative proximity.

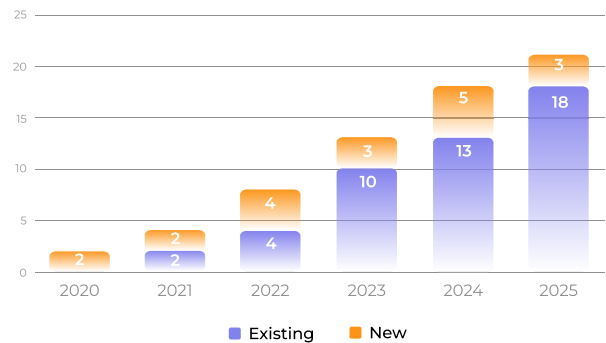


Chart 3 - TEKMERs in Istanbul⁽³⁾

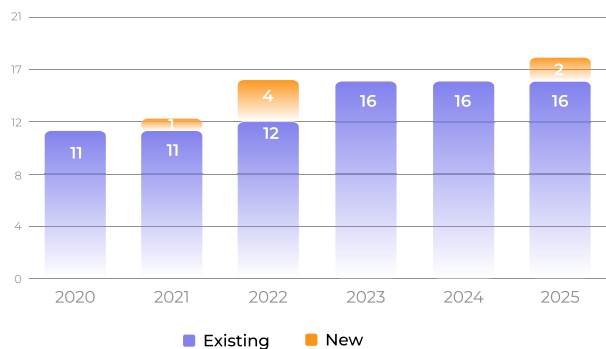


Chart 4 - Technoparks in Istanbul⁽¹⁾

Scaling the Pipeline: Accelerators and Incubators

The capacity to nurture early-stage ideas has effectively doubled. In early 2020, Istanbul hosted 29 Incubation Centers; as of year-end 2025, that number has climbed to 55, providing a robust safety net for pre-seed founders.

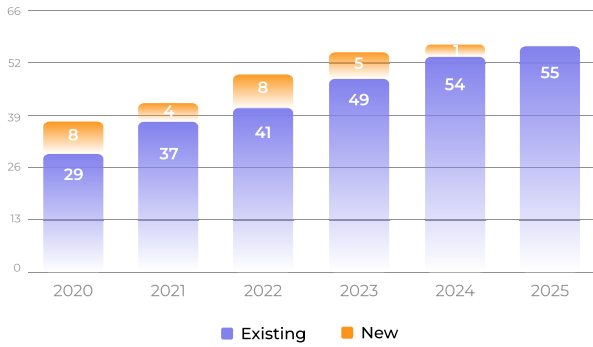


Chart 5 - Incubators in Istanbul⁽²⁾

However, the most aggressive growth has been in the Accelerator segment. The number of active programs has nearly tripled over the last five years, reaching a total of 101. This explosion in acceleration capacity ensures that the ecosystem is not just starting companies, but systematically preparing them for international Series A rounds and beyond.

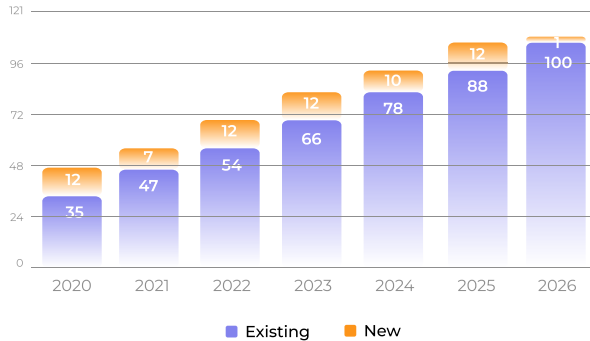


Chart 6 - Accelerators in Istanbul⁽²⁾

Financial democratization has also taken center stage through the rise of Equity-based Crowdfunding. While a relatively new phenomenon in the Turkish landscape, it has matured rapidly over the last five years, with 10 active platforms now operating out of Istanbul. This adds a critical layer of liquidity for early-stage startups, allowing the “crowd” to participate in the value creation traditionally reserved for seed stage investors. Complementing this is the emergence of the GO (Startup Office) program. Despite being a recent initiative, it has already established 4 centers outside of traditional Technopark zones within just one year, signaling a move toward making the ecosystem more accessible and geographically integrated.



Chart 7 - Equity Based Crowdfunding Platforms in Istanbul⁽²⁾

NGOs: The Cultural and Strategic Catalyst

Beyond the hardware and capital, NGOs serve as the vital catalysts of the ecosystem, providing the networking tissue and global connectivity required for high-impact growth. Organizations like Endeavor Türkiye focus on identifying and supporting “high-impact” entrepreneurs to scale globally, while GEN Türkiye works to foster a comprehensive entrepreneurial culture by connecting local players to the global Startup Nations network. Similarly, GİRVAK (Turkish Entrepreneurship Foundation) plays a pivotal role in cultivating the next generation of founders by instilling an entrepreneurial mindset in university students. While these entities represent the cornerstone of the movement, they are part of a much broader, sophisticated network of non-governmental organizations and industry associations that serve as the ecosystem’s strategic backbone. Together, these organizations have provided the strategic advocacy and mentorship that have elevated Istanbul’s reputation on the world stage.

The Path Ahead

The quantitative data paints a clear picture: Istanbul is no longer in a “nascent” phase; it is in a period of high-velocity scaling. With the doubling of incubators, the tripling of accelerators, and the introduction of modern funding vehicles like crowdfunding, the city has built a resilient and diversified architecture. For investors and founders alike, the current density of support structures—ranging from the newly minted GO offices to the established powerhouses of the NGO world—makes Istanbul one of the most compelling and high-upside ecosystems in the SEE and EMEA region today.

05

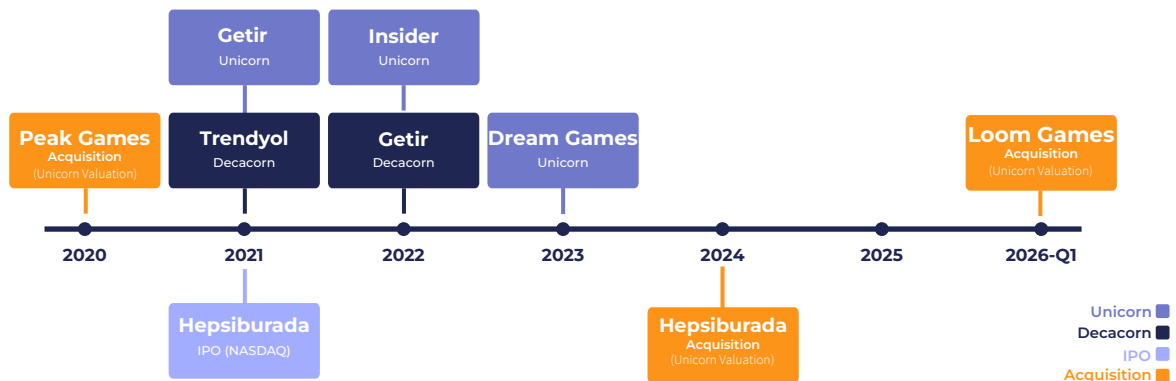
HARVESTING MATURITY, SEEDING THE FUTURE

Harvesting Maturity and the Decacorn Era

Over the past five years, Istanbul has fundamentally rewritten its growth narrative, evolving from a regional hub into a high-velocity powerhouse that has produced seven unicorns, including two decacorns. This era of “harvesting maturity” is anchored by a sophisticated financing landscape where veteran VCs—most notably 212, Revo Capital, and e2VC—are now deploying their third-generation funds. These experienced GPs bring the global perspective necessary to bridge the gap between local success and international exits. The transition from Peak’s landmark unicorn status to the decacorn heights reached by Trendyol and Getir demonstrates a massive leap in market confidence, culminating in the unprecedented speed of Loom Games, which achieved a unicorn exit in a staggering six-month window. This success is underpinned by a surge in liquidity, driven by VCIF regulations that have successfully channeled capital from R&D firms and pension funds directly into the venture asset class.

Seeding the Future and Vertical Expansion

While the ecosystem’s current trophies lie in Gaming and E-commerce, a new wave of “local champions” is being groomed across more technical verticals. Istanbul’s entrenched position as a banking and financial services powerhouse has provided the perfect sandbox for Fintech, which is now reaching a critical mass poised for unicorn valuations. Simultaneously, the ecosystem is entering a high-conviction “seeding” phase in Deeptech and Artificial Intelligence, leveraging Türkiye’s exceptionally strong financing environment at the pre-seed and seed stages. While SaaS ventures are already proving their mettle in the international arena with consistent, scalable growth, the next cycle of Istanbul’s evolution will likely see these nascent sectors move from the sowing stage to global prominence, fueled by a regulatory and financial framework that remains one of the most proactive in the region.



Timeline 2 - Billion Dollar Transactions in Istanbul⁽²⁾

Gaming’s Next Powerhouse: Istanbul

Istanbul gaming ecosystem has become a proven investment hub, marked by rapid execution, efficient capital use, and repeated global exits. As the second city in Europe with the highest number of game studios(2,12), right after London, its depth of talent continues to stand out. Experienced founders consistently scale new studios, turning Istanbul into one of the most attractive markets for high-return opportunities. With its track record of billion-dollar acquisitions and a steady pipeline of ambitious teams, the ecosystem offers investors both resilience and outsized growth potential.



Infographic 2 - Gaming Snapshot for Istanbul⁽²⁾

Gaming Startup Factories Triggered by Success Stories

Following Peak’s record-breaking exit, 114 alumni established 87 startups—43 of which were gaming-centric—drastically accelerating knowledge transfer and regional ecosystem development. This “mafia” effect has yielded extraordinary benchmarks: one venture reached unicorn status in a mere 23 months, while another secured Türkiye’s largest gaming investment in 2024. Furthermore, a startup led by another former employee rapidly ascended to become one of the nation’s top 10 gaming entities, illustrating the profound multiplier effect of Peak’s legacy. This entrepreneurial density is mirrored by Gram Games, where 26 alumni launched 21 new ventures, 18 of which focus on gaming.

Capping this evolution is the unprecedented trajectory of Loom Games; founded in August 2025, the studio shattered all previous records by achieving a unicorn-valuation exit in early 2026. This lightning-fast liquidity event signals a new era of hyper-efficiency and maturity within the Turkish gaming sector.

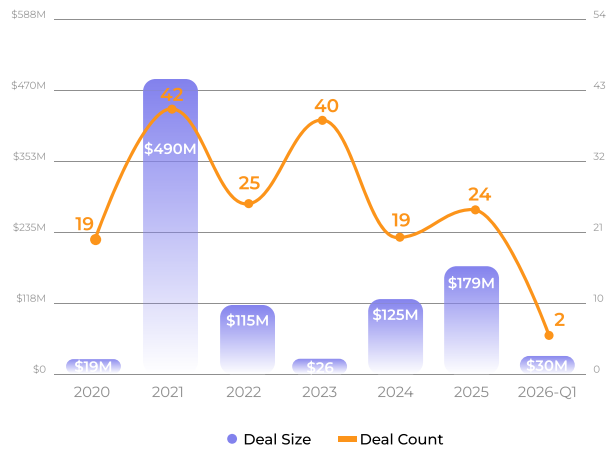


Chart 8 - Gaming Deals in Istanbul⁽²⁾

Increased Investor Appetite

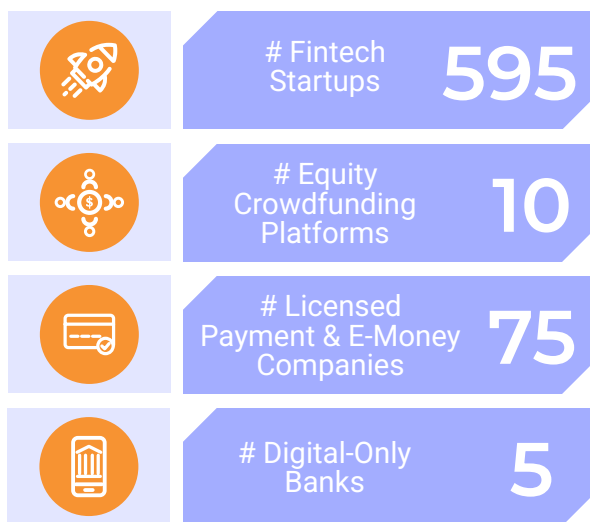
While it may appear that external investment is unnecessary in the gaming ecosystem due to the industry’s self-sustaining dynamics, the increasing number of studios aiming to become global gaming giants, coupled with the challenges faced by publishers, has fueled growth and interest on the investor side. This growth is also driven by the gaming sector’s ability to generate revenue at a faster rate than many other industries.

For instance, several gaming startups in Istanbul achieved over \$1 billion in revenue within their first five years, and this has significantly heightened interest among Turkish investors. The most striking example of this exponential growth occurred with Loom Games, which reached unicorn status in early 2026—just months after its founding—following a major acquisition by Scopely. This unprecedented milestone, achieving a billion-dollar valuation in such a short window, serves as a catalyst that is expected to shift the focus of not only gaming-specific funds but all venture capital toward the sector in the coming period.

With the growing popularity of Türkiye’s VCIF, the past four years have seen the establishment of game-focused funds, and even single-asset single-fund structures created solely to invest in individual gaming ventures.

Istanbul Emerges as a Next-Gen Financial Center

Istanbul has long functioned as Türkiye’s economic engine, but its recent transformation into a centralized financial hub marks a new strategic era. The convergence of major commercial banks, the relocation of the Central Bank, and the inauguration of the Istanbul Financial Center—complemented by the launch of the dedicated “Fintech Zone İstanbul” technopark—has solidified the city’s dominance. This infrastructure does more than just centralize capital; it creates a high-velocity environment where traditional banking excellence meets aggressive technological disruption. With 595 active fintech startups and five burgeoning neobanks now calling the city home, Istanbul has firmly established itself as the undisputed epicenter of Turkish finance.



Infographic 3 - Fintech Snapshot for Istanbul^(2,8)

Record-Breaking Momentum and Global Ambitions

The ecosystem’s journey from early-stage mobile payments to a sophisticated landscape of Open Banking and Banking-as-a-Service (BaaS) has reached a critical inflection point. Investor confidence is at an all-time high, evidenced by a landmark \$197 million in fintech funding in 2025—a record-breaking figure that underscores the sector’s maturity and scalability. While the vertical remains regulation-driven, Turkish fintechs are successfully transitioning from local traction to international expansion. The “globalization pains” of the past decade have given way to a new era of cross-border acquisitions and market entries, as Istanbul actively engineers “global champions” ready to capture market share across neighboring regions and beyond.

A Proactive Regulatory Catalyst

This rapid acceleration is underpinned by one of the region’s most forward-leaning and innovation-friendly regulatory frameworks. Since the landmark 2013 payment services legislation, Turkish regulators have maintained a proactive stance, swiftly integrating frameworks for equity-based crowdfunding, digital onboarding, and crypto-securities. This rapid adaptation has not only instilled deep market confidence but also provided the necessary playground for scalable business models to flourish. By bridging a sophisticated banking legacy with modern agility and record-level capital inflow, Istanbul has officially transitioned into a premier global destination for fintech talent and venture capital.

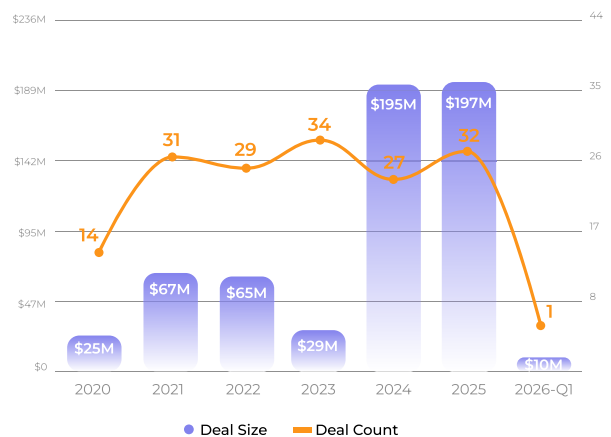


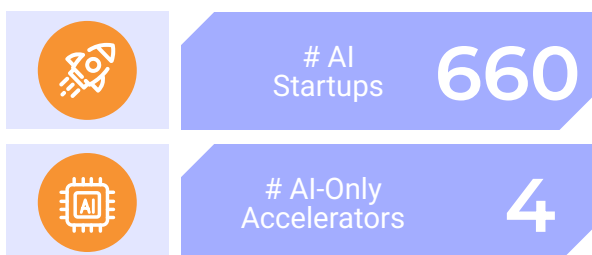
Chart 9 - Fintech Deals in Istanbul⁽²⁾

The Dawn of AI in the Bosphorus

Istanbul has demonstrated remarkable agility in its pivot toward Artificial Intelligence, evolving rapidly from a regional tech hub into a high-conviction AI ecosystem. Currently, the city hosts 660 active AI startups, a figure that underscores a profound generational shift: a staggering 68% of these startups were founded after 2020. This influx of “AI-native” founders represents a young, aggressive ecosystem that is just beginning to hit its stride. The momentum is further evidenced by the record-breaking investment activity of 2025, during which 70 Istanbul-based AI startups successfully secured funding. While the majority of these transactions were concentrated in pre-seed and seed stages, this concentration functions as a massive, high-potential pipeline. As these early-stage companies mature, we expect to see a significant “graduation” into larger Series A and B rounds, signaling a robust multi-year growth cycle.

A Foundation of Institutional Conviction

The vitality of this sector is backed by a sophisticated infrastructure that spans academia, capital, and community. With 23 specialized AI undergraduate programs feeding a continuous stream of technical talent and four dedicated acceleration programs streamlining the path to market, the ecosystem’s structural integrity is stronger than ever. Perhaps the most telling indicator of local market confidence is the emergence of five “AI-only” venture funds. This specialized capital, paired with a relentless community cadence—averaging an AI-focused event every two weeks in 2025—has created a dense feedback loop between builders and investors.



Infographic 4 - AI Snapshot for Istanbul^(2,5)

From Mobile Gaming Mastery to AI Supremacy

One of the most unique competitive advantages of Istanbul’s ecosystem is the strategic talent transfer from its world-class mobile gaming sector. We are witnessing a sophisticated evolution where established game studios are re-tooling their “muscle memory” in user acquisition and monetization to build AI-powered mobile applications. These studios are already achieving impressive Monthly Recurring Revenue (MRR) metrics in record time, proving that Istanbul’s expertise in global consumer apps is highly transferable to the AI era. This synergy between proven mobile operational excellence and cutting-edge machine learning suggests that Istanbul is not just adopting AI, but is positioned to dominate the global mobile AI market.

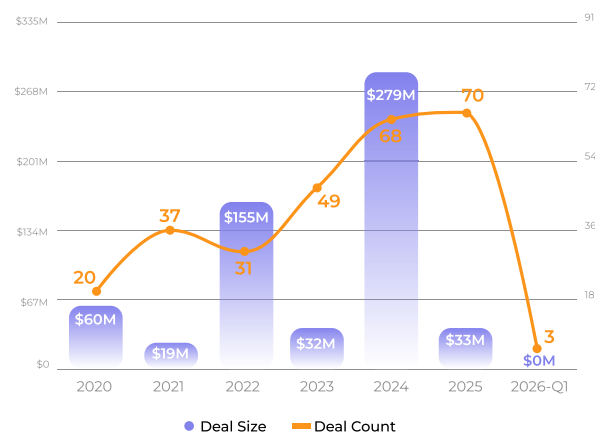


Chart 10 - AI Deals in Istanbul⁽²⁾

The Catalyst of the Ecosystem: E-Commerce

E-commerce holds profound historic significance in shaping the trajectory of both the Istanbul and broader Turkish startup ecosystems. The definitive breakthrough occurred during the 2008-2009 period, a time when the local landscape lacked formal Venture Capital (VC) structures or established angel networks. In this vacuum, the ability of early pioneers like Markafoni and Trendyol to secure significant international funding and scale successfully served as a powerful paradigm shift for the entire region. Their success was not merely a corporate achievement but the fundamental catalyst for the birth of a VC-backed ecosystem in Türkiye. While Markafoni set early benchmarks with one of the era's largest exits, Trendyol's trajectory has been nothing short of meteoric, escalating from a local startup to a global giant with decacorn status. This evolution has firmly established Istanbul as the undisputed cradle of e-commerce, a city that consistently produces high-caliber tech narratives capable of reaching world-class valuations.



Infographic 5 - E-Commerce Snapshot for Istanbul⁽²⁾

Institutional Maturity and Strategic Consolidation

The maturation of the Turkish e-commerce sector is best exemplified by the landmark achievements of Hepsiburada, which made history as the first Turkish company to list on the NASDAQ. This global visibility has culminated in a major milestone for the ecosystem: the recent acquisition of a majority stake in Hepsiburada by the Kazakh fintech giant

Kaspi.kz in a deal valued at approximately \$1.1 billion. This transaction represents a significant exit and a high-profile strategic consolidation, underscoring the sustained institutional appetite for Istanbul's digital assets. Beyond these headline-grabbing deals, these giants have successfully transitioned into sophisticated marketplace models, evolving into independent ecosystems that serve as vital income engines for hundreds of thousands of SMEs. Today, e-commerce stands as the pioneering sector defining Istanbul's economic identity, proving the city's capacity to build and scale enterprises that attract massive international capital and strategic partnerships.

The Birthplace of Global Delivery Giants: Meal & Grocery Delivery

The narrative of global delivery dominance finds its true epicenter in Istanbul, a megacity that has served as the ultimate high-density laboratory for last-mile logistics since the turn of the millennium. This legacy of operational excellence traces back to 2001, when Istanbul-born Yemeksepeti began scaling in an era devoid of traditional venture capital or angel networks, eventually culminating in a landmark \$589 million exit in 2015. This exit didn't just provide liquidity; it proved that Istanbul's unique urban complexity could breed world-class tech, setting the stage for Getir to invent and globalize the "ultrafast delivery" model. By successfully executing the ecosystem's first \$100 million and \$500 million+ funding rounds, Getir transformed from a local startup into a decacorn powerhouse, proving that Istanbul-born business models are capable of defining global benchmarks.

The strategic gravity of the Istanbul market is further validated by the recent aggressive M&A activity from global giants seeking to capture this battle-tested infrastructure. A watershed moment occurred in 2025 when Uber acquired an 85% stake in Trendyol Go for \$700 million, signaling a massive bet on the city's integrated "super-app" logistics. This consolidation trend has only intensified as Uber moves to cement its regional monopoly, recently filing with competition authorities to acquire Getir's diversified business units—spanning food, grocery, retail, and water delivery. These high-ticket acquisitions and regulatory maneuvers underscore a fundamental truth: Istanbul is no longer just a regional hub, but the primary location of operations and a strategic blueprint for the future of global commerce.

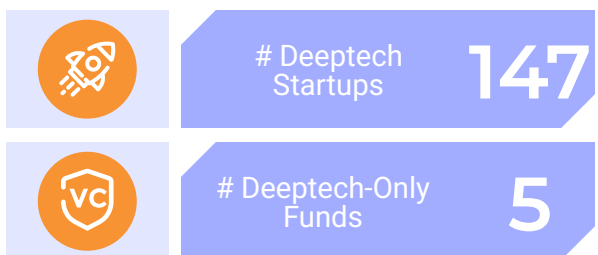


Deeptech in Istanbul: A Solid Foundation for a Developing Frontier

While the Deeptech vertical is defined by protracted R&D cycles and capital-intensive infrastructure requirements—ranging from specialized cleanrooms to advanced laboratory environments—the Istanbul ecosystem has cultivated a unique trajectory to meet these challenges. The city’s Deeptech consciousness is not a recent phenomenon; its foundations were laid in the early 2010s by pioneering corporate-led initiatives like Inovent and Inventram, which proved instrumental in seeding the initial mindset for IP-based innovation.

However, the ecosystem’s true inflection point arrived with the emergence of dedicated venture capital. The launch of ACT and DCP, the region’s first deeptech-only VC funds, provided the necessary institutional muscle and risk appetite to transition from academic research to scalable commercial ventures. This shift effectively bridged the “valley of death” for early-stage founders, signaling a move toward a more sophisticated, investment-ready landscape.

In recent years, this momentum has been further fortified by the development of specialized physical infrastructure. Entities such as Cube Incubation, İTÜ USTTL (Advanced Technologies Research and Development Center), and the Boğaziçi University Kandilli Deep Technology Base are now providing the critical technical bedrock—such as high-spec laboratory environments and cleanrooms—that was previously a significant barrier to entry. By aligning legacy institutional knowledge with modern venture capital and state-of-the-art facilities, Istanbul is strategically positioning itself as a premier regional hub for high-barrier, transformative technology.



Infographic 6 - Deeptech Snapshot for Istanbul⁽²⁾

Istanbul: The Global-First SaaS Factory

Istanbul has rapidly evolved into a premier hub for SaaS innovation, moving beyond localized solutions to build a high-velocity, export-oriented ecosystem. With 513 active SaaS startups, the landscape is energized by the milestone achievements of local champions like Insider, Paraşüt, and Apsiyon. These success stories have validated the region’s technical depth and provided a blueprint for a new generation of founders who view “global-first” as a strategic imperative.

Driven by cloud scalability and capital efficiency, Istanbul-based entrepreneurs are increasingly bypassing regional constraints to contest mature markets. We are observing a significant trend of “cross-border by design” ventures, with a growing cohort of startups stress-testing value propositions in the USA and UK. This outward-looking ambition, coupled with Istanbul’s deep talent pool and favorable cost-to-output ratio, positions the city as a formidable factory for world-class enterprise software, ready to capture a larger share of the global digital economy.



Infographic 7 - SaaS Snapshot for Istanbul⁽²⁾

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WHAT'S NEXT?

Istanbul: A Proven Global Powerhouse

The meteoric rise of Istanbul's startup ecosystem is no longer just a local narrative; it is a data-driven global reality validated by the world's most rigorous benchmarks. In a testament to its maturing infrastructure and high-velocity success stories, Istanbul surged 10 spots in the Startup Genome Emerging Ecosystems Ranking 2025, clinching the 3rd position globally. This momentum is further echoed by Dealroom.co's Global Tech Ecosystem Index 2025, where the city secured the 2nd spot on the Top Rising Stars list. These rankings reflect a robust CAGR in venture capital deployment and a dense network of stakeholders—from agile state institutions to visionary founders—that have collectively transformed the city into a magnet for international institutional LPs and strategic acquirers.

RANK	ECOSYSTEM	REGION
1	Wuxi	Asia
2	Jakarta	Asia
3	Istanbul	Europe
4	Research Triangle	North America
5	Copenhagen	Europe
6	Salt Lake-Provo	North America
7	Barcelona	Europe
8	Dublin	Europe
9	Nanjing	Asia
10	Greater Lausanne	Europe

List 1 - Emerging Ecosystems Ranking 2025 by Startup Genome⁽⁹⁾

RANK	ECOSYSTEM	REGION
1	Lagos	Africa
2	Istanbul	Europe
3	Pune	Asia
4	Belo Horizonte	South America
5	Mumbai	Asia
6	Curitiba	South America
7	Riyadh	Asia
8	Johannesburg	Africa
9	Chennai	Asia
10	Ho Chi Minh	Asia

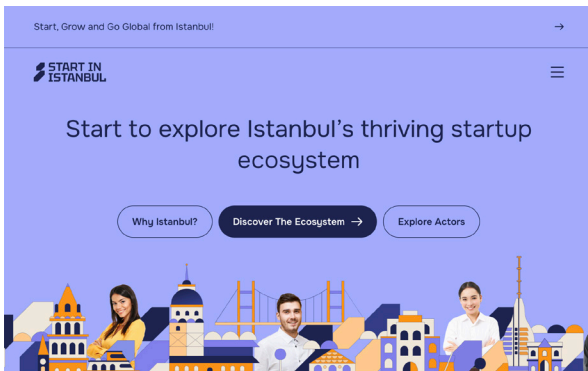
List 2 - Top Rising Stars (2025) by Dealroom.co⁽¹⁰⁾

Istanbul's Global Gravity Shift

This heightened global profile has shifted Istanbul from a regional hub to a premier destination for the international tech elite. The city has recently become a host for world-class activities, including satellite events for Slush, signaling its integration into the top-tier European circuit. Flagship summits like Takeoff have further solidified this "gravity effect," drawing a diverse mix of global investors and tech talent to its shores. This momentum is set to reach a fever pitch in 2026, as the city prepares to host the landmark GITEX AI event, further cementing its status as a high-conviction node for deep tech. The presence of an increasingly international audience at these gatherings underscores a fundamental shift: Istanbul is no longer just producing local champions but is acting as a critical intersection for global cross-border innovation.

Start in Istanbul: The Gateway to the East-West Corridor

To streamline this influx of international interest, İSTKA officially launched the Start in Istanbul platform in 2026. Designed as a frictionless “single point of entry,” this digital and operational gateway serves as the definitive roadmap for foreign founders and investors navigating the Turkish market. Whether it is regulatory clarity, networking with local unicorns, or identifying co-investment opportunities, Start in Istanbul synthesizes the ecosystem’s complexities into a coherent, actionable resource. It effectively lowers the barrier to entry, ensuring that the city’s vibrant energy is matched by administrative ease and strategic transparency.



Terminal İstanbul: The Physical Epicenter of Innovation

Complementing these digital and administrative advancements is Terminal İstanbul, the ecosystem’s most ambitious physical infrastructure play to date. Announced in 2024 and achieving official Technopark status in 2025, the project involves the historic transformation of the Atatürk Airport terminal buildings into the world’s largest technology and entrepreneurship hub.

As a massive catalyst for regional dominance, Terminal İstanbul is engineered to be more than just a workspace; it is a high-density “innovation city.” By repurposing iconic infrastructure into a sprawling campus for R&D, incubation, and cross-border collaboration, it serves as the definitive gravity well for the MENA and CEE regions. In the coming cycle, Terminal İstanbul will stand as the crown jewel of the city’s tech landscape, offering an unparalleled physical headquarters for the global talent and capital converging on the Bosphorus.



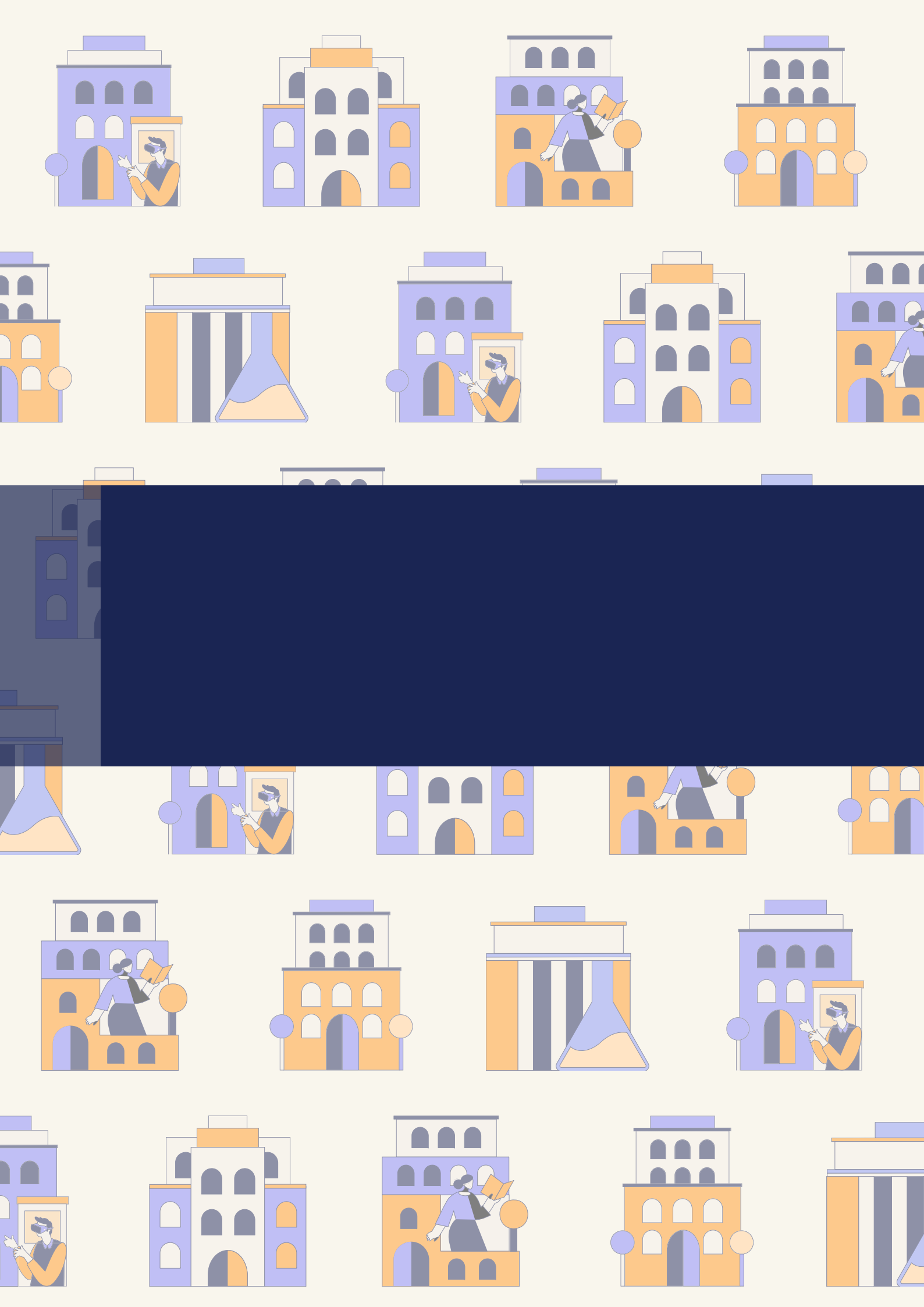
GovTech İstanbul: Orchestrating Public-Private Synergy

To further leverage this momentum, İSTKA is currently finalizing the launch of the GovTech İstanbul program—a strategic initiative poised to institutionalize the bridge between public sector demand and startup agility. Set to go live shortly, GovTech İstanbul will operate on an innovative co-development model where mission-critical public sector challenges are opened to the startup community via high-impact “Open Calls.” This initiative is expected to accelerate the digital transformation of public services while positioning İstanbul as a premier sandbox for government-scale innovation.

Catalyzing International Expansion

Looking ahead, the synergy between the Ministry of Industry and Technology, İSTKA, and a multifaceted network of ecosystem stakeholders will continue to serve as a high-octane catalyst for growth. The strategic roadmap is clear: aggressively scaling the internationalization of Turkish startups through high-impact global acceleration programs and a presence at marquee international forums.

Crucially, İSTKA is currently finalizing its comprehensive scale-up strategy, marking a pivotal shift toward supporting high-growth scaleups in their journey to achieve global market leadership. By bridging İstanbul with global capital hubs, these institutions are not just fostering local innovation—they are ensuring that İstanbul remains a permanent, dominant fixture in the global venture capital landscape.





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APPENDIX

Disclaimer

The information provided in this report is general and does not constitute financial, tax, or legal advice. Whilst every effort has been taken to ensure the accuracy of this report, the editors and authors accept no responsibility for any inaccuracies or omissions contained herein. Financial, tax, or legal advice should always be sought before engaging in any transaction or taking any legal action based on the information provided. Should you have any queries regarding the issues raised and/or about other topics, please contact the authors of this report.

All information in this report is up to date as of May 10, 2026



Key Terms and Definitions

BiGG: Individual Young Entrepreneur Program. A strategic “Grant-to-Equity” bridge program orchestrated by TÜBİTAK to catalyze tech-driven startups at the ideation stage.

Corporate Venture Capital (CVC): Investment arms of large corporations (e.g., Google Ventures, Intel Capital) that invest corporate funds into external startups to achieve both strategic and financial objectives.

Decacorn: A privately held startup with a post-money valuation exceeding \$10 billion.

Equity Crowdfunding: A fundraising method where a “crowd” of individual investors contributes smaller amounts of capital via online platforms in exchange for equity, often led by a syndicate.

Exit: A liquidity event, such as an IPO (Initial Public Offering) or an M&A (Merger & Acquisition), that allows founders and investors to sell their shares and realize returns.

GO: Entrepreneurship Offices. An umbrella designation and branding framework applied to all technoparks, Incubators, and off-campus Entrepreneurship Offices operating under the Ministry’s ecosystem.

İSTKA: Istanbul Development Agency. A regional catalyst focused on enhancing Istanbul's global competitiveness. It provides grant-based funding for high-impact projects in innovation, creative industries, and social entrepreneurship.

KOSGEB: Small and Medium Enterprises Development Organization. The backbone of SME support. It offers a mix of grants and interest-free loans focused on digitalization, manufacturing scaling, and internationalization for established small-to-medium businesses.

Pre-Seed Investment: The earliest funding stage focused on Proof of Concept (PoC). In the Turkish ecosystem, these rounds typically hover below \$50K and support initial MVP development.

Private Equity (PE): Investment in mature, cash-flow positive companies. PE firms often take majority stakes and focus on operational efficiencies and long-term profitability.

Seed Investment: Funding aimed at achieving Product/Market Fit (PMF). Startups at this stage usually have a live product and early traction. In Türkiye, seed tickets are generally around \$200K.

Series A: The first significant institutional round (often the first VC-led round) focused on scaling a proven business model. Turkish Series A rounds typically average \$1M.

Series B, C, D, E: Successive expansion rounds characterized by increasing valuations, designed to fund market dominance, international expansion, or pre-IPO preparation.

Startup: A high-growth, scalable tech venture focused on solving a problem under conditions of extreme uncertainty. Distinct from “lifestyle” or “agency” models, startups prioritize product-led growth over tailor-made service provision.

TEKMER: Technology Development Center. KOSGEB-backed early-stage incubation centers provide office space, mentorship, investor access, and advisory support—catering to younger startups than traditional technoparks.

TÜBİTAK: Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye. The national powerhouse for R&D and deeptech. It acts as the primary funding body for academic and industrial research, offering extensive grants for product development and technological breakthroughs.

Unicorn: A privately held startup valued at \$1 billion or more.

VCIF/GSYF (Venture Capital Investment Fund): A regulated, tax-advantaged fund structure under the Turkish Capital Markets Board (SPK) designed to pool capital for startup investments.

VCIT/GSYO (Venture Capital Investment Trust): A joint-stock company structure regulated by the SPK that specializes in managing a portfolio of venture capital investments.

Venture Capital Funds (VC): Pooled investment vehicles that manage third-party capital to invest in high-growth startups for minority stakes. They typically operate on a 10-year fund life with a 5-year investment period.

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