



Redefining innovation and entrepreneurship through vibrant ecosystem of startup India

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Abstract

Startup is an entrepreneurial venture which is typically an emerging, fast growing business that aims to solve an unmet need by developing a viable business model around an innovative product, service, process or a platform. India's startup ecosystem has evolved rapidly over the last decade and at present, it has the 3rd largest startup ecosystem in the world. The startup India initiative was launched by the Government on 16th of January, 2016 to build a strong ecosystem for nurturing innovation, startups and encouraging investments in the startup ecosystem of the country. Several targeted policies and schemes have been introduced for making greener landscape of startups in India.

Keywords: Employment generation, entrepreneurship, innovation, Startup India, Startup Mahakumbh

Introduction

On January 16, 2026, India marks ten years of Startup India, a transformative journey that began in 2016. Designated as National Startup Day, this occasion celebrates the nation's strides in fostering a robust and inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem. Launched as a flagship initiative of the Government of India, Startup India aimed to nurture innovation and catalyse the growth of startups across the country.

With more than 1.59 lakh startups recognised by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) as of January 15, 2025, India has firmly established itself as the third-largest startup ecosystem in the world. This vibrant ecosystem, driven by over 100 unicorns, continues to redefine innovation and entrepreneurship on the global stage. Major hubs like Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Mumbai, and Delhi-NCR have led this transformation, while smaller cities have increasingly contributed to the nation's entrepreneurial momentum.

Startups in fintech, edtech, health-tech, and e-commerce have tackled local challenges and gained global recognition. Companies like Zomato, Nykaa, and Ola showcase India's shift from job seekers to job creators, driving economic progress.

The Startup India Initiative

Over the past ten years, the Startup India initiative has played a pivotal role in shaping a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem in the country. By fostering innovation and inclusivity, it has achieved remarkable milestones that highlight its impact on India's economy and society.

- The number of DPIIT-recognised startups has grown from around 500 in 2016 to 1,59,157 as of January 15, 2025.
- As of October 31, 2024, a total of 73,151 recognised startups include at least one woman director, showcasing the rise of women entrepreneurs in India.
- From 2016 to October 31, 2024, recognised startups have reportedly created over 16.6 lakh direct jobs, significantly contributing to employment generation.

Core Features of the Startup India initiative are

- **Ease of Doing Business:** Simplified compliance, self-certification, and single-window clearances streamline processes for startups.
- **Tax Benefits:** Eligible startups enjoy tax exemptions for three consecutive financial years.
- **Funding Support:** The ₹10,000 crore Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS) supports early stage funding.
- **Sector-Specific Policies:** Focused policies for sectors like biotechnology, agriculture, and renewable energy foster targeted growth.

Job Creation by Startups

As of October 31, 2024, DPIIT-recognised startups have created over 16.6 lakh direct jobs across various sectors, significantly contributing to employment generation. The IT Services industry leads with 2.04 lakh jobs, followed by Healthcare & Lifesciences with 1.47 lakh jobs, and Professional & Commercial Services with around 94,000 jobs. These contributions highlight the role of startups in driving economic growth and creating diverse employment opportunities across industries.

Table 1: Job Creation in Startups (as of October 31, 2024)

Sector	Jobs Created
IT Services	2.04 Lakh
Healthcare & Lifesciences	1.47 Lakh
Professional & Commercial Services	94060
Education	90,414

Source: www.startupindia.gov.in

Flagship Schemes Implemented Under Startup India

The Startup India initiative has launched various flagship schemes to provide comprehensive support to startups across different stages of their journey. These schemes aim to address critical areas such as funding, market access, and credit guarantees, ensuring the growth and sustainability of startups.

Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS)

The scheme was launched for a four-year period starting from 2021-22 with a corpus of ₹945 crore, the scheme

supports startups in areas like proof of concept, prototype development, product trials, market entry, and commercialisation. It is operational since 1st April 2021, the scheme is overseen by the Experts Advisory Committee (EAC), which evaluates and selects incubators for fund allocation. As of October 31, 2024, the EAC has approved 213 incubators, which have in turn selected 2,490 startups for a total approved funding of Rs 454.04 crore.

Credit Guarantee Scheme for Startups (CGSS)

The scheme offers credit guarantees for loans provided to DPIIT recognised startups by Scheduled Commercial Banks, NBFCs, and Venture Debt Funds under SEBI-registered Alternative Investment Funds. The scheme got implemented by the National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company Limited (NCGTC), it aims to provide a credit guarantee up to a specified limit to eligible startups. Under this scheme, ₹555.24 crore in loans were guaranteed to 235 startups, including ₹24.60 crore to 18 women-led startups as of October 31, 2024.

Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS) Scheme

The scheme introduced in June 2016 with a corpus of ₹10,000 crore, the Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS) aims to enhance access to domestic capital for Indian startups and boost the entrepreneurial ecosystem. The scheme, managed by SIDBI, does not invest directly in startups but provides funding to SEBI-registered Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs), which further invest in startups through equity and equity-linked instruments. By 2024, ₹11,148 crore was committed, catalysing investments of ₹21,221.36 crore in 1,165 startups.

Other Initiatives under Startup India

The Startup India initiative extends its support to startups through a range of initiatives aimed at fostering capacity building, promoting outreach, and facilitating ecosystem collaboration. These efforts ensure the development of a vibrant and inclusive entrepreneurial environment across India.

The key measures are being presented hereunder:

Capacity Building and Handholding

To strengthen regional startup ecosystems, capacity-building workshops are conducted year-round, including in non-metro cities, under the States' Startup Ranking framework. These workshops aim to assist States and Union Territories in developing local ecosystems. Specialised handholding sessions are also organised for incubators in regions beyond metropolitan cities, ensuring equal access to guidance and resources.

Outreach and Awareness

The initiative focuses on outreach and awareness activities to inspire entrepreneurs, particularly in non-metro areas. These activities include facilitating funding opportunities, incubation, mentorship, and business connections in collaboration with State and UT administrations. Startup showcases provide a platform for entrepreneurs to pitch their ideas to investors, while the initiative's programmes are actively promoted on social media to reach a broader audience.

Ecosystem Development Events and Programmes

National-level events like the Startup Mahakumbh bring together stakeholders to foster innovation and entrepreneurship. Initiatives such as ASCEND workshops support budding entrepreneurs in North Eastern States, and the Startup India Innovation Week, held around National Startup Day on 16th January, celebrates entrepreneurship and innovation across the nation.

International Exposure and Linkages

India's G20 Presidency institutionalised the Startup20 Engagement Group to facilitate collaboration among global economies. Meetings across the country showcased India's regional startup ecosystems, enhancing international exposure. Additionally, Government-to Government partnerships, participation in global forums, hosting international events, and building bridges with other nations have strengthened cross-border collaboration.

Encouraging Ecosystem Collaboration

The Startup India Hub portal serves as a comprehensive digital platform for entrepreneurial ecosystem stakeholders. It provides access to resources, information, and benefits under the initiative, ensuring inclusivity by improving accessibility for startups and entrepreneurs, especially those outside metropolitan regions.

BHASKAR: Empowering India's Startup Ecosystem

In addition to the initiatives mentioned above, the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) launched the Bharat Startup Knowledge Access Registry (BHASKAR) platform in September 2024. This cutting-edge initiative, part of the Startup India program, aims to centralize and streamline interactions within India's entrepreneurial ecosystem. By connecting startups, investors, mentors, service providers, and government bodies, BHASKAR aspires to foster innovation, collaboration, and growth, aligning with India's vision of becoming a global leader in entrepreneurship.

Key Features of BHASKAR are:

- **Seamless Networking:** Connects startups, investors, mentors, and stakeholders for effective collaboration.
- **Centralized Resources:** Provides quick access to essential tools and knowledge for scaling startups.
- **Unique Identification:** Offers personalized BHASKAR IDs for streamlined interactions.
- **Enhanced Discoverability:** Advanced search for resources and opportunities.
- **Global Outreach:** Promotes India as a global innovation hub, enabling international collaborations.
- **Empowering Non-Metro Regions:** Enables startups and entrepreneurs from nonmetro cities and regions to connect with the larger startup ecosystem, fostering inclusivity and regional growth.

Startup Mahakumbh: Driving Innovation

The Startup Mahakumbh stands as a flagship event, bringing together startups, unicorns, soonicorns, investors, industry leaders, and ecosystem stakeholders under one roof. It showcases India's entrepreneurial spirit and technological prowess while fostering dialogue to strengthen the nation's startup ecosystem.

The first edition, held in 2019, marked a milestone with over 500 startups, investors, and industry leaders in

attendance. It featured workshops on emerging technologies, investor pitch sessions, and networking opportunities, setting the stage for future events.

Startup Mahakumbh 2024 witnessed remarkable participation, with 48,000 attendees, 1,300 exhibitors, and global delegations from 14 countries, underscoring its growing prominence in shaping India's entrepreneurial landscape. Further, the fifth edition of Startup Mahakumbh has taken place on March 7-8, 2025, in New Delhi, celebrating innovation, collaboration, and entrepreneurial growth.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as India celebrates ten years of the Startup India initiative, the country has witnessed a remarkable transformation in its entrepreneurial landscape. With over 1.59 lakh DPIIT-recognised startups and a growing workforce, India has firmly established itself as a global hub for innovation and entrepreneurship. The initiative's support through flagship schemes, capacity-building efforts, platforms like BHASKAR, and events such as Startup Mahakumbh has empowered startups across sectors and regions, including non-metro cities. As India continues its journey towards becoming a global leader in innovation, the Startup India program remains a key driver of economic growth, fostering an inclusive and vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem.

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