

Press Release

20 Years of the Swiss National Startup Team: Venture Leaders Delivers Global Impact for Switzerland's Innovation Ecosystem

Zurich/Lausanne, May 20, 2026 – Today's geopolitical uncertainty and the acceleration of competition between innovation ecosystems make the contribution of innovative startups to Switzerland's economic strength more evident than ever. Since 2006, Venturelab has been accelerating Switzerland's most promising startups onto the international stage through the Swiss National Startup Team and its flagship program, Venture Leaders. As the program celebrates its 20th anniversary, new figures underline its lasting impact. Venture Leaders alumni have created 20,550 jobs, raised CHF 9.5 billion in growth capital, and strengthened Switzerland's position as a globally relevant innovation hub. The anniversary will be celebrated on June 24, 2026, at the startup space in Schlieren, together with alumni, investors, partners, and representatives of the Swiss innovation ecosystem.

Venture Leaders addresses one of the central challenges of Switzerland's innovation system. While excellent research and strong early-stage startups are created in Switzerland, sustainable growth requires international market access, capital, and global networks. This is exactly where the program comes into play, exposing Swiss founders early on to the world's most relevant innovation and investor ecosystems.

"Swiss startups need to think global at an early stage. Not in theory, but through direct access. Not as visitors, but as players. Global business is not learned from books, it is experienced," says Beat Schillig, founder and president of Venturelab.

Global program with a competitive selection process

Since 2006, Venture Leaders has evolved from an initial roadshow to Boston into a multi-vertical roadshow model. Today, the program spans leading innovation hubs across Biotech, Cleantech, Fintech, Medtech, Mobile, and Technology. Each delegation represents Switzerland through a highly competitive selection process that identifies startups with the strongest potential for international fundraising and global expansion.

Across more than 60 international roadshows in 13 cities, Venture Leaders teams have delivered over 3,500 investor pitches. These took place both in curated one-on-one meetings with leading venture capital firms such as Bessemer Venture Partners, Founders Fund, and New Enterprise Associates (NEA), as well as at large public pitch events in cities including Boston, San Francisco, New York, Beijing, Hong Kong, Barcelona, London, and Munich, where Swiss startups often pitched head-to-head against local teams.

A model with long-term impact

The impact of the Venture Leaders program is reflected in major funding milestones, acquisitions, and public listings. In total, Venture Leaders startups have raised CHF 9.5 billion in growth capital. Among the largest funding rounds are Climeworks with CHF 600 million and GetYourGuide with CHF 484 million. Over the past two decades, 82 Venture Leaders alumni have been acquired by global companies including ABB, Apple, Boehringer Ingelheim, Bruker, Intel, Johnson & Johnson, Qualcomm, Sony, and Vifor Pharma, highlighting the scalability and industrial relevance of Swiss technologies.

For several alumni, going public marked the next step in their growth journey. Five Venture Leaders startups are now listed on public markets: BioVersys, MindMaze, ONWARD Medical, Astrocast, and HeiQ Materials.

“Venture Leaders is one of the best startup programs you can participate in. One week of intensive entrepreneurial experience, combined with an exceptional group of people, had a decisive impact on the success of our fundraising,” says Marc Gitzinger, CEO of BioVersys AG.

A Bridge Between Startups, Investors, and Corporates

Venture Leaders not only provides startups with access to international markets and capital, but also forges direct connections between corporate partners and Switzerland's most promising innovation champions.

This bridge further extends the impact of Venture Leaders, enabling companies to test new technologies and business models through pilot projects, explore new market opportunities, and secure access to future growth areas.

Over the past 20 years, the Swiss National Startup Team has been supported by numerous partners, including Alpian, AMAG, Canton of Zurich, Debiopharm, digitalswitzerland, DPD, EPFL, Ernst & Young, ETH Zurich, Gebert Rüt Stiftung, Hansjörg Wyss, Helbling Technik, HIH Aargau, Huawei, Immomig, Innosuisse, InSphero, Intel, Kellerhals Carrard, Navyboot, Novartis, PostFinance, Preclin, PSI, Redalpine, Rentsch Partner, Romande Energie, Rothschild & Co Bank, S-GE, Swiss, Swiss Biotech Association, Swisscom Ventures, swissnex, TX Group, Unicorn Anchor, University of Basel, University of Zurich, Canton of Vaud, Vischer, Walder Wyss, Waypoint, and Ypsomed.

Looking Ahead

In future fields such as artificial intelligence, life sciences, robotics, climate tech, and industrial innovation, international access to markets and capital will continue to gain importance.

Venture Leaders aims to remain at the forefront of connecting Swiss startups with global networks, investors, and corporates, while positioning Swiss innovation on the global stage.

“What began in 2006 with the vision of positioning Swiss startups more strongly on the international stage has grown into a reference platform for startups with global ambition,” says Jordi Montserrat, founder and managing partner of Venturelab.

“Our Venture Leaders clearly demonstrate how Swiss innovation creates economic and societal value,” adds Stefan Steiner, co-managing director of Venturelab.

Measurable Contribution to Switzerland’s Economy

Over the past 20 years, Venture Leaders has become one of the most important programs for the international scaling of Swiss startups. Its impact is measurable:

- More than 5,000 startup applications reviewed
- 643 startups accelerated
- 78 percent survival rate among Venture Leaders alumni
- An average of 9.9 granted or pending patents among medtech startups, 7.6 in engineering, and 7 in robotics
- 20,550 jobs created
- CHF 9.5 billion raised
- More than 3,500 investor pitches delivered
- 82 exits, five IPOs, and three unicorns among Venture Leaders alumni

20 Years of Venture Leaders: Anniversary Celebration in Schlieren

Venture Leaders will celebrate its 20th anniversary on June 24 at the startup space in Schlieren.

The event will bring together alumni, investors, corporate partners, and key stakeholders from the Swiss startup ecosystem to highlight the program’s impact and to look ahead to the next generation of Swiss startups scaling internationally.

More information is available at www.venture-leaders.ch/20years.

About Venture Leaders

Venture Leaders is an international program by Venturelab that brings together members of the Swiss National Startup Team with one clear goal: to become global players and take the first decisive step toward international expansion.

With over 20 years of experience, Venturelab connects Switzerland's most promising entrepreneurs with leading global technology hubs, including Silicon Valley, Boston, China, London, Barcelona, and Munich.

Companies founded by more than 600 Venture Leaders alumni have created over 20,000 jobs and raised more than CHF 9.5 billion in investment capital.

For more information, visit www.venture-leaders.ch.

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