

**TECHIRELAND**

# **FEMALE FOUNDER** **FOUNDING REVIEW**

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2023 EDITION

In association with



TechIreland's free-to-use startup database portal has a comprehensive list of..

- ★ **3,100** Indigenous Product Innovation Companies
- ★ **458** Tech Multinationals
- ★ **312** Innovation Hubs [accelerators, coworking spaces..]
- ★ **495** Investors

## ACROSS 13 SECTORS

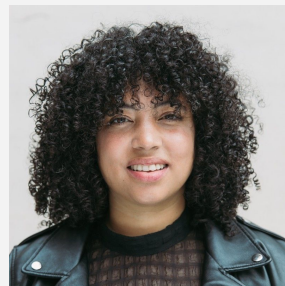
AGRI/FOOD, CONSUMER/E-COMMERCE, CLEANTECH, EDTECH, ENTERPRISE SOFTWARE, ENTERTAINMENT/SPORTS, FINTECH, HEALTH/MEDTECH, INDUSTRIAL TECH, MEDIA/ADTECH, SECURITY, TELECOMS AND TRAVELTECH

## AWS SUPPORTS WOMEN IN IRISH TECH

Fundraising is the hot topic for founders within early stage companies across EMEA at the moment. There is a general consensus that raising investment will be harder in 2023, and this message is being echoed by VCs, media, and analysts. Funds are looking at operational efficiency more closely and founders have to demonstrate a much clearer value proposition with traction in the market.

According to Pitchbook VC investment in Europe is showing some “robustness”. Although the number of deals is decreasing, larger deals are being struck. So while there may be some tougher times ahead, there is still weight in good companies that will always be able to raise. I have heard the Irish market being referred to as “sleepy”, “still in its infancy” and other terms that belie the talent and technology that is being produced by Irish founders. This seems to be compounded even further when we focus on female founders alone. In fact, TechIreland's data shows a record investment into female led startups last year.

Recently, Dublin came in at number 25 on the Women Entrepreneur Cities list, climbing from number 34 in 2017. This is a reflection of its increasing ability to attract and foster female entrepreneurs.



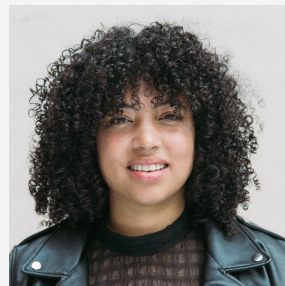
AINE MULLOY



## AWS SUPPORTS WOMEN IN IRISH TECH

Working with companies through the Startup Loft Accelerator, we see first-hand the impact of having a strong network ecosystem around you. Now is the time for female founders to think about the different channels to accelerate their time to market be that through design partners, channel partnerships, or other methods.

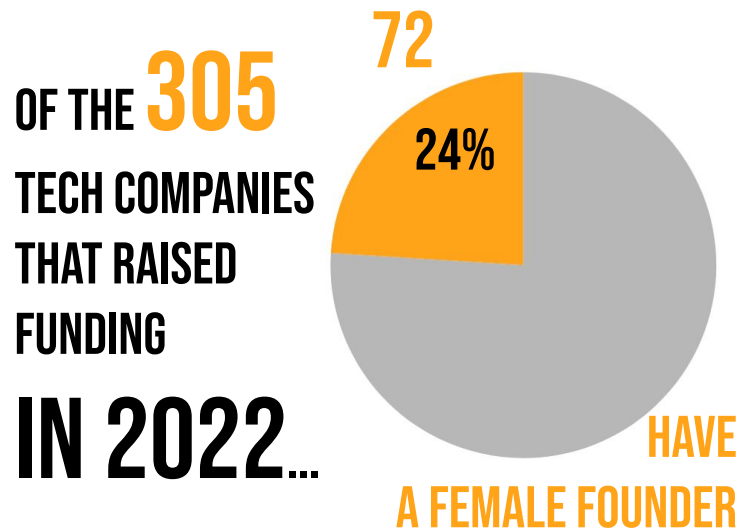
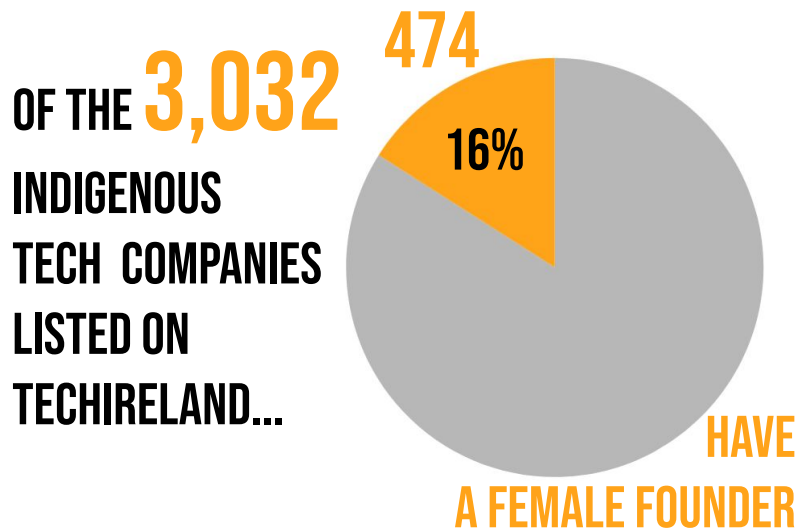
In 2022, female founded Irish companies raised a record €234 million, or about 16% of total investment. Yes, there's still a way to go, and there are challenges on the horizon but we are seeing some incredibly exciting innovations coming from female founders in Ireland. The key step is to tap into the resources available and really become part of the ecosystem to help accelerate success.



AINE MULLOY



## 1 IN 4 STARTUPS THAT RAISED FUNDING IN 2022 HAD A FEMALE FOUNDER/COFOUNDER



## A REWARDING ENTREPRENEURIAL JOURNEY

I am the CEO and co-founder of CroiValve, a medical device startup that is developing a novel solution to repair a valve in the heart without needing open heart surgery. We are a spin out from TCD, based on an invention by my co-founder, Dr Martin Quinn, an interventional cardiologist. Since CroiValve was founded in 2016, we have raised over €20M and now employ over 30. The device has gone from concept through to clinical trials where it is treating patients with tricuspid regurgitation, a life-threatening condition.

The entrepreneur journey has been an exciting one for me. I always loved maths & science as a way to solve problems. My original degree was mechanical engineering, but I was drawn to biomedical engineering which finds solutions that improve the quality of life. I went on to do a PhD which helped develop my understanding of detailed research. I then spent some years working in multinationals where I got great experience.

I always thought I was too risk averse for startups but reached a point in my career where I wanted to get involved in earlier stage projects.



LUCY O'KEEFFE



## A REWARDING ENTREPRENEURIAL JOURNEY

Luckily, I met my co-founder, thanks to Bruce Murphy in TCD, and CroiValve was born!

Developing a heart valve implant is a detailed and capital-intensive process. The key challenges CroiValve faced was the technical challenge of ensuring a comprehensive understanding of how a novel device is going to perform in the dynamic environment of a patient's beating heart. There was also the financial challenge of securing the capital for the significant development and testing. We are achieving this with our dedicated team of specialists in engineering and medicine. Funding the journey required us to invest in the key areas of risk, while minimising spend that doesn't move the needle in terms of progressing the technology.

We have gone after all sources of funding, both equity and grant, needed to bring this device to patients. It is an intense but rewarding journey. Hearing the transformative impact our device can have on the lives of the patients we've treated ensures the effort is worth it.



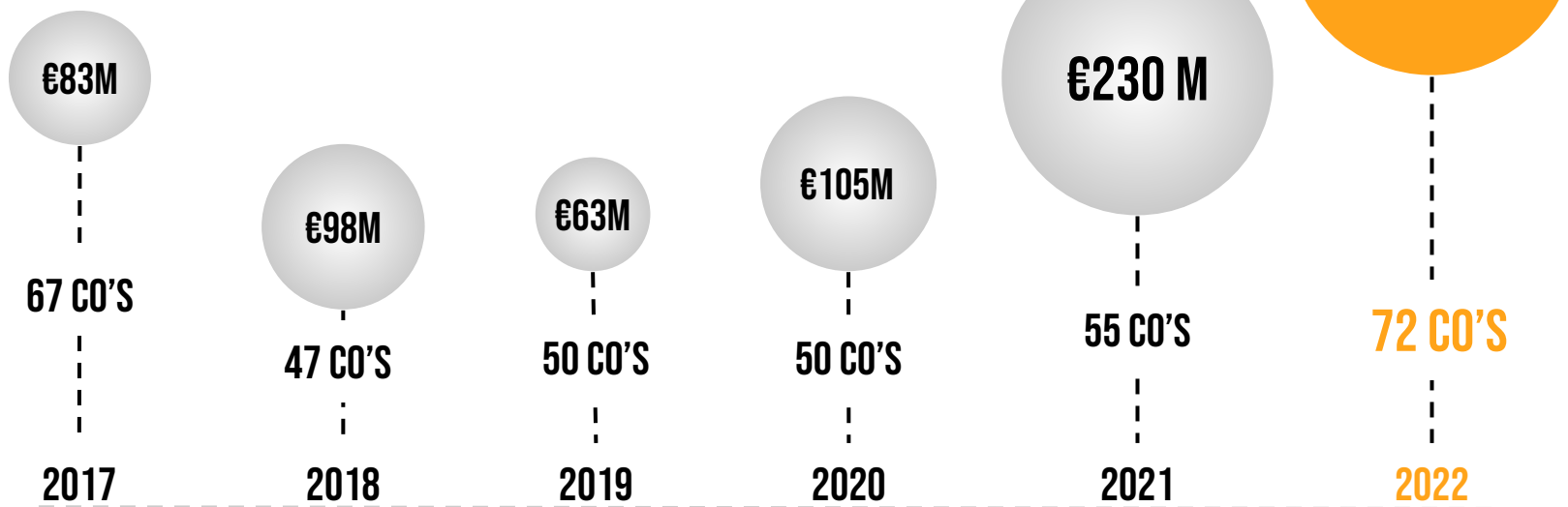
LUCY O'KEEFFE





## FUNDING TRENDS

## A RECORD YEAR OF FUNDING..



(not to scale)



## AVERAGE FUNDING

The average funding into female led startups decreased in 2022, but this is because a larger number of startups raised early stage rounds, bringing the overall average down. However, **the disparity** we see between average size of rounds into female led startups and the overall startup population continues to be a concern.

TechIreland Funding Review 2023 Edition will be published soon with overall funding data.

FEMALE FOUNDERS

2021

€4.1 M

2022

€3.2 M

ALL FUNDED CO'S

€5.3 M

€5 M

(not to scale)

## THE TOP 4 OUTLIERS MAKE 77% OF THE TOTAL BUT AN IMPROVEMENT IN EARLY STAGE ROUNDS

	2018		2019		2020		2021		2022	
	#CO'S	€	#CO'S	€	#CO'S	€	#CO'S	€	#CO'S	€
€100K TO €300K	2	€0.2 M	6	€1.4 M	6	€1.1 M	1	€0.1 M	38	€7.5 M
€300K TO €500K	5	€2.3 M	3	€1 M	6	€2.2 M	5	€1.8 M	5	€1.9 M
€500K TO €1M	7	€5.5 M	5	€3.3 M	4	€2.8 M	6	€4 M	5	€3.9 M
€1M TO €3M	15	€27.4 M	6	€12.7 M	13	€23.4 M	13	€27 M	7	€10.5 M
€3M TO €10M	3	€10.5 M	7	€31.6 M	7	€41.9 M	7	€31 M	5	€29 M
€10M+	2	€51 M	1	€12 M	2	€33 M	8	€165 M	4	€181 M

**NOTE:** Some undisclosed rounds are not counted above.

## GENDER BALANCE IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND ENTERPRISE IS GOOD FOR BUSINESS

Over the past decade Enterprise Ireland has focused on increasing the number of women founding High Potential Start Ups. Back in 2011 only 7% of EI backed HPSUs included a woman founder. By putting a spotlight on this and providing capability and funding supports specifically targeting women, in 2022 this has tripled to 37%.

- In 2022 70% of the Seed & Venture Capital funds that Enterprise Ireland supported have women at partner/investment manager level.
- In 2022, 30% of deals supported under the Halo Business Angels Network (HBAN) had female founders.

Through our Action Plan for Women in Business, Enterprise Ireland is now taking a broader approach to influence fundamental and lasting change to the overall enterprise landscape. The aim is to harness the full talent and expertise of a diverse population by increasing the number of women starting, leading and growing Irish businesses of Scale. This is a long-term strategy that requires systemic change across the broad enterprise base. In 2021 Enterprise Ireland launched The Level Project to drive this objective.



**SINEAD LONERGAN**



The Level Project Action Planning Toolkit ([www.levelproject.ie](http://www.levelproject.ie)) is now available online to all businesses, who can use it to assess their current situation and create an action plan around gender diversity challenges. It allows companies to put in place practical actions that will improve gender balance in their senior teams and on their boards, levelling the playing field. Enterprise Ireland client companies can then apply for a Level Project Consultancy Grant (80% funding), to engage a diversity expert to support the development of their strategy.

- All application forms for funding from Enterprise Ireland now include questions on the gender balance of the applicant company senior management and board.
- Enterprise Ireland offers a Part Time Key Manager grant, specifically designed to encourage companies to provide more flexible arrangements for senior managers

There is a significant body of research which shows that companies perform better when they have gender diversity in decision making and leadership – they are more profitable, more productive and deliver better returns on assets. Enhancing the gender balance of senior teams in businesses can help to attract and retain talent in what is an increasingly competitive environment.

Enterprise Ireland believes that Ireland's economic success will be driven by harnessing a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem that fully uses skills, ambition and talent of a diverse population.



## SECTOR VIEW

HealthTech (22) and eCommerce (11) sectors saw a significant increase in the number of female-led startups funded.

Most other sectors remained small. Despite continued emphasis to support CleanTech, the sector dwindles with small numbers and investments into sustainability, climate action etc.

SECTOR	#COMPANIES	2021 FUNDING	#COMPANIES	2022 FUNDING
HEALTHTECH	15	€117 M	22	€106 M
ENTERPRISE SOLUTIONS	19	€58 M	16	€43 M
CONSUMER/ ECOMMERCE	1	€50 K	11	€2 M
EDUCATION	4	€0.7 M	6	€1 M
FINTECH	2	€3.4 M	4	€72 M
CLEANTECH	2	€5 M	4	€1.7 M
AGRI/ FOOD	4	€7.5 M	3	€1 M
ENTERTAINMENT/ SPORT	4	€17 M	2	€0.15 M
SECURITY/ SAFETY	1	UNDISCLOSED	1	€0.5 M
INDUSTRIAL TECHNOLOGIES	1	€21 M	1	€0.2 M

## IMPROVE THE GENDER BALANCE OF BOTH INVESTORS AND INVENTORS

Supporting female founders is essential to the mission of creating a vibrant startup environment in Ireland. There is clear international evidence that companies with gender diversity in senior positions benefit from increased profitability, better performance on investments and increased ability to attract and retain talent. In this context, creating an environment that encourages women to participate in entrepreneurship is fundamental to developing the next generation of disruptive Irish businesses with the potential to scale.

Atlantic Bridge is committed to investing in businesses with talented and diverse management teams. 30% of the companies funded by University Bridge Fund have female executives in key senior roles. Female founded companies in our portfolio are among our highest performing and have collectively raised over €110m to support development of technology solutions addressing global challenges in healthcare, climate and communications. ProVerum Medical, the Trinity spinout, co-founded by CTO Dr Riona Ni Ghriallais, has raised over €40 million from leading healthcare investors including Gilde Healthcare and Lightstone Ventures. The company, which is developing groundbreaking treatment options for urological disease, has taken a bench-top prototype through to large-scale clinical evaluation in the US and is targeting FDA approval in 2024. Tympany Medical, a spin out from the University of Galway, is pioneering highly novel, endoscopic imaging technology for use in complex surgical procedures.



**HELEN MCBREEN**



## IMPROVE THE GENDER BALANCE OF BOTH INVESTORS AND INVENTORS

The company was co-founded by CEO Dr Liz McGloughlin, a medical doctor whose passion for technology innovation was sparked at the BioInnovate programme. Inclusio, a DCU spin out that provides science-based, data-led diversity and inclusion platforms, was founded by organisational psychologist turned entrepreneur Sandra Healy. In 2022, the University Bridge Fund led Inclusio's Series A round of €5m to support the company's ambitious scaling plan. These are examples of just some of the highly disruptive, deep technology businesses founded by women that have been backed by Atlantic Bridge.

Women's participation within the investment community is also critical to creating a diverse start up environment. Atlantic Bridge are proud to be leaders when it comes to promoting women to key decision-making positions. 40% of the University Bridge Fund Investment team is female, and this figure increases to 50% of the individuals on the Investment Committee. We empower female funders to invest in talented female founders building scalable, disruptive technology businesses.



**HELEN MCBREEN**





## GENDER-SMART INVESTING - A PATHWAY TO OUTSIZED RETURNS

At WakeUp Capital we know that gender-smart investing<sup>[1]</sup> is a pathway to outsized returns. In pursuing a fund mandate of investing in sustainable and inclusive B2B innovations, we directly contribute to closing the gender gap in access to start-up and scale up funding. We intentionally pay closer attention to and invest in women-owned or -led enterprises, whose business models align with our investment thesis. More than half of our dealflow has at least one female founder.

While this report shares some positive strides, WakeUp Capital remains cautious about a prevailing illusion of robust progress for female entrepreneurs. In Europe, the proportion of funding went to women-only teams has dropped from 3% to 1% since 2018.<sup>[2]</sup> In the US, since 2011, the proportion of the amount of VC dollars raised by women-only teams has ranged from 1.8% to 2.7%; it is now 2.0%.<sup>[3]</sup>



**FAYE WALSH  
DROUILLARD**

WakeUp  
Capital

## GENDER-SMART INVESTING - A PATHWAY TO OUTSIZED RETURNS

Here are three practical ways WakeUp Capital is tackling this disparity:

At **an investment firm level**, we apply a gender-smart investing approach to our operations and we:

- Align with like-minded investors (LPs) who also employ a gender lens
- Seek to diversify our team across gender, ethnicity, and background
- Create a professional culture that is values-led, respectful, safe and nurturing
- Measure, analyse and report on progress of gender related KPIs

At **a portfolio level**, we evaluate companies throughout the investment process beyond basic female founder headcount by seeking:

- Female representation in founding team, management, shareholders and boards
- Products and services built by and for women and girls
- Workplaces promoting equality and equal opportunity
- Value chains and operations prevent or do not cause harm to women and girls



FAYE WALSH  
DROUILLARD

WakeUp  
Capital

## GENDER-SMART INVESTING - A PATHWAY TO OUTSIZED RETURNS

At a **community level**, we publicly share, support and make the case for gender-smart investing by:

- Taking board roles where decisions have impact on gender-related policies
- Contributing to research and reports that influence decisions makers
- Mentoring and investing time in very early stage founders and students
- Engaging in groups such as [AwakenHub](#), [Level20](#) or [WVC:E](#)

As a female founder, I have first-hand experience of leading a venture that required continuous permutation of experience, maturity, connections, and timing to create a semblance of a level playing field. Now, as a VC, I look forward to meeting and collaborating with Irish women-owned or -led enterprises that promote workplace, financial and education equality or products that substantially improve the lives and health of women and girls. Gender-smart investing is smart investing for all.

[1] <https://www.gendersmartinvesting.com/>

[2] <https://www.eu-startups.com/2022/12/10-of-the-biggest-funding-rounds-by-female-led-startups-in-europe-this-year/>

[3] <https://www.forbes.com/sites/columbiabusinessschool/2022/06/21/the-illusion-of-venture-capital-for-female-founders/?sh=589e97e774c6>



FAYE WALSH  
DROUILLARD

WakeUp  
Capital

## FEMALE FOUNDERS STILL MAKE A SMALL PERCENTAGE

The headline findings of Tech Ireland's latest Funding Women Entrepreneurs report are very positive – 2022 was a record year for funding into female founded start-ups. This is all the more impressive given the challenging investment background in the second half of the year.

However the total funding into female founded startups in 2022 does not tell the full story. Sadly, female-led companies represent just 24% of the total number of companies that raised funding last year, and only 13% of the total funding raised.

But again, when less than 20% of Irish start-ups have a female founder, those findings are not surprising.

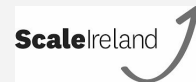
What is positive is that the sector is now proactively highlighting and supporting female founders, and also women who are interested in setting up a start-up or working in one.

The latest findings from Scale Ireland's State of Start-ups Survey 2023 provide a good roadmap on how we can change those numbers.

Of the 248 CEOs and Founders who responded, 45% said greater visibility of female founders would help increase the number of female founders, followed by more support at university level (29.7%), greater networking opportunities (28%), more mentoring (26%) and greater incentives from government (20%).



**MARTINA  
FITZGERALD**

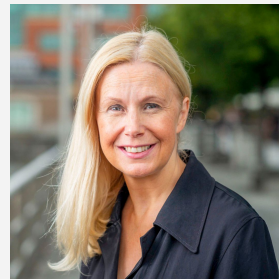


## FEMALE FOUNDERS STILL MAKE A SMALL PERCENTAGE

These are all achievable but require proactive action. What is positive this year is that Scale Ireland, Tech Ireland, the Tech Hubs, the IVCA, Euronext and many of the big companies in this sector – not to mention Enterprise Ireland and Ireland Strategic Investment Fund - are all actively working to address this issue. And that's how we will change the numbers.

We must also not lose sight of this issue once International Women's Day is over. If we are genuinely interested in addressing this issue, it will need more attention and targeting.

And we all have a role to ensure our organisations reflect that in our agendas, the profile of our panels and the support – public and private - that we provide to female founders and also to women working in this dynamic sector.



**MARTINA  
FITZGERALD**



## 2022 FUNDING BY REGION

N.IRELAND	#COMPANIES	2022 FUNDING
BELFAST	1	€2 M
DERRY	2	€1.9 M

**Dublin made 40% of the total.** Although 60% of the total going into the regions outside Dublin is a strong figure, two large outliers drive this percentage.

The most notable regional investments were:

- TransferMate (Kilkenny) raised €66M,
- Carrick Therapeutics (Galway) raised €58M

COUNTY	# COMPANIES	2022 FUNDING
DUBLIN	34	€95,752,437
KILKENNY	2	€66,300,000
GALWAY	5	€58,600,000
WESTMEATH	2	€2,640,000
MEATH	8	€2,200,000
CORK	8	€1,680,000
MAYO	1	€1,100,000
CLARE	1	€600,000
CARLOW	1	€200,000
LIMERICK	1	<€150K
SLIGO	1	<€150K
WEXFORD	1	<€150K
DONEGAL	1	<€150K
KILDARE	1	<€150K
OFFALY	1	<€150K

## STRONG INVESTMENT IN FEMALE FOUNDED COMPANIES IN THE WEST

The WDC Investment Fund continues to see strong investment levels in female founded / led companies in the Western Region. Almost one third of our enterprise investment in 2022 was in female founded and/or led enterprises. While this is well above the national average there is still room for improvement to get to parity. The companies supported are highly innovative with global reach and include Ovagen, a biotech company based in Ballina, Co Mayo; Nuwave Sensors based in Ballinrobe, Co Mayo; Hookebio, a life science tools company based in Shannon, Co Clare and The Portershed, a hotbed of tech start-ups and scale-ups in the West. The WDC also expects to close a number of investments in Q1 2023 in female co-founded/led companies in the AI, Technology and Digital Health sectors. Ovagen, in addition to raising domestic equity capital from the WDC and angel investors in 2022 also secured €10m in funding from the European Innovation Council Accelerator and another of our female founded companies, Byowave, won the All-Ireland Seedcorn Award in 2022.

Some sectors that WDC Investment Fund invests in have very strong female representation, in particular the broad life science sector, from biotech, medtech and diagnostics. We have seen female representation in this sector increase exponentially with almost parity now achieved between male and female founded/led teams, albeit with the caveat that the 50% of companies with a female Founder or CEO are usually mixed founder teams, the other 50% are all male teams.



**GILLIAN BUCKLEY**





## STRONG INVESTMENT IN FEMALE FOUNDED COMPANIES IN THE WEST

A key part of the reason the life science sector has such strong female representation is that girls and young women are studying biomedical engineering at third level and this is feeding through to start-ups. And one of the reasons that biomedical is so popular over other engineering disciplines is that girls want careers that help people.

We need to better communicate to girls and young women that other engineering disciplines also help people and address major societal issues. We must also encourage more women into the VC industry and more female angel investors. A better diversity of funders can assist in a better diversity of founders funded. Better diversity of funders will also help ensure there is better balance on portfolio company boards as investors usually take a seat on their portfolio company boards.



**GILLIAN BUCKLEY**



## NORTHERN IRELAND AND THE NORTH WEST – GLIMPSES OF FUTURE PROMISE

2022 saw a small number of female-founded medtech and medical device companies in Northern Ireland raise investment but there's very little else to report in the wider investment ecosystem. QUBIS-backed Sonrai Analytics raised twice in 2022, the second investment came from New York-based venture firm Eckuity. Other companies that raised significant private and public sector funding in 2022 include Derry's Respiratory Analytics (the company's Aflo platform uses sensor tech and data analytics to improve inhaler technique in patients with asthma and COPD) and Belfast's MoveTru (another hardware/software solution using machine learning and technical textiles to eradicate preventable injuries, especially ACL tears).

It's no surprise that the three companies mentioned above are looking to the US for investment. Movetru has already raised from US-based angels and founder Naomi McGregor joined Respiratory Analytics founder Dr Susan Kelly on AwakenHub's recent trade mission to New York City, hosted by Bank of Ireland at their NYC Hub. All six of the women-founded companies that pitched have received warm investment interest from US family firms and private individuals. Northern Ireland remains a tough place for talented women founders to access investment.



MARY MCKENNA



## NORTHERN IRELAND AND THE NORTH WEST – GLIMPSES OF FUTURE PROMISE

It's not all about medtech, however. 2022 has again seen some interesting niche female-led businesses emerging as future winners. Amongst them Belfast's Jetpack Learning (led by Roisin Maguire, Jetpack launched the Seedling platform last year, enabling indigenous and minority language teachers to easily create digital materials personalised for their students) and Right Revenue (led by Adrienne Hanna, the fast-growing company provides software to maximise revenue generated by independent hotels).

I warmly congratulate those women founders who have bravely taken the leap and founded a startup in 2022. As the recently launched [Rose Review Progress Report](#) shows, women across the UK founded more than 150,000 new companies in 2022 despite (and maybe because of) the challenging economic environment, twice as many as in 2018. However, there's a long, long way to go before our ecosystem is more gender balanced. AwakenHub features in the report as a social enterprise successfully helping to address the many and unique challenges female founders face.

Female founders deserve so much better than the stats often show. The EU recognised this and in 2022 extended their Women TechEU pilot to a fully-fledged €10m programme to provide additional supports for very early stage female founders of deep tech businesses. Ireland once again punched well above its weight in the EU's Women Innovator Prize 2022 with two fantastic Irish winners, Ciara Clancy of Beats Medical and Niamh Donnelly of Akara Robotics



MARY MCKENNA



## KEY INVESTORS INTO COMPANIES WITH A FEMALE FOUNDER IN 2022

ATLANTIC BRIDGE	KERNEL CAPITAL	WESTERN DEVELOPMENT COMM.	WESLEYAN INVESTMENT FOUNDATION
ACT VENTURE CAPITAL	NDRC	CAMBRIDGE INNOVATION CAPITAL (CIC)	VENTUREWAVE
ELKSTONE CAPITAL	SEROBA	ARCH VENTURE PARTNERS	HAATCH
ENTERPRISE EQUITY	SURE VALLEY VENTURES	BROADVIEW VENTURES	BVP (BUSINESS VENTURE PARTNERS)
ENTERPRISE IRELAND	TINY VC	LIGHTSTONE VENTURES	TRINITY LAUNCHBOX
FRONTLINE VENTURES	TRUESIGHT VENTURES	THE YIELD LAB	ECKUITY
HBAN	WAKE UP CAPITAL	OYSTER CAPITAL	QUBIS

Email [Sree@TechIreland.org](mailto:Sree@TechIreland.org) for the full list of Companies and Investors

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