



What is their X factor?

The three ingredients of success
(or failure) for startups in 2024

forv/s
mazars

Just when you think you've said and read everything there is to say about startups, one vital question remains that preoccupies all those involved in the entrepreneurial ecosystem: what really makes a startup successful? Is it a question of leadership, timing, technology – or is their success down to a mysterious 'X factor'?

In this publication, we delve into the heart of the startup ecosystem to explore preconceived ideas and stereotypes, taking advantage of VivaTech's unique insights into sector trends, and in particular the 1,700 candidates for the VivaTech Female Founder Challenge over the last four years.

In reality, we are all responsible for the success of startups. Responsible for encouraging these visionaries so their ideas become reality. Responsible for enabling everyone to

be entrepreneurial so that diverse and varied innovations can come to life. Responsible for supporting the growth of these new kinds of businesses, more agile and faster than their predecessors, so they can invent new models.

That's why, with the Forvis Mazars XFactory, we've created a startup accelerator like no other.

The XFactory is committed to female entrepreneurship; to putting our multidisciplinary skills at the service of innovative projects, both tech and non-tech; to providing independent, objective support and advice.

This is also why we are sharing this exclusive immersion in the startup ecosystem, to question prejudices and stereotypes, and identify three key lessons.

Let's celebrate the diversity and dynamism of entrepreneurship, a real source of inspiration for our economies and societies, and above all, for our future. We are all responsible. Let's act accordingly.



Florence Sardas
Partner, founder of the
Forvis Mazars XFactory



Table of contents

- 03** Editorial
- 05** Executive Summary
- 06** Methodology
- 10** Startup or not startup, that is *not* the question
 - What is a startup?
 - Startups: multifactorial diversity
 - The startup's quest for identity (and gender)
 - Startups and startup entrepreneurs: a story of alchemy
 - The startup is dead. Long live the startup!
- 19** No to fundraising (at any price)
 - Lesson 1: the right amount
 - Lesson 2: the right moment
 - Lesson 3: the right reasons
 - Lesson 4: the right partner
- 29** Startups, modern-day superheroes
 - Solving the problems of contemporary society
 - Imposing new rules
 - Abolishing borders
- 38** Focus: female entrepreneurship in Ukraine
- 41** The Forvis Mazars XFactory: committed to female entrepreneurship



The spectacular rise of startups in the modern economic landscape has not gone unnoticed. From Palo Alto to Paris, from Lagos to Shanghai, every corner of the planet has its share of young companies calling themselves ‘startups’.

Beyond the fashionable term, however, what lies behind this diversity of projects and businesses labelled as startups? Who are these men and women embarking on their entrepreneurial adventures, and what challenges are they facing?

Is ‘startup’ just a generic buzzword, or does it reflect a genuine revolution in the way we think about innovation and entrepreneurship? Above all, how do startups impact our modern societies and economies?

These are the questions we sought to answer by examining four years of applications to the VivaTech Female Founder Challenge, a unique repository of market trends. Led by a team of experts from the Forvis Mazars XFactory, the study delves deep into the entrepreneurial ecosystem and analyses more than 1,700 profiles from over 100 countries to highlight the challenges and opportunities that will drive the entrepreneurial sector in 2024.

In addition to the findings of the study, a dozen experts – forerunners in the startup space - contributed to the analysis of the current context, sharing their personal experiences, insights and advice, whether entrepreneurs, investment funds, accelerators or other stakeholders in the startup ecosystem.

The startup is dead. Long live the startup!

The diversity of projects claiming the status of startup raises a number of issues, and there is an urgent need to demystify the stereotypes and prejudices surrounding the term.

While celebrating the diversity of the startup ecosystem, we also highlight the real substance of entrepreneurial projects with a revised definition: projects that are emerging, innovative, scalable and fast-growing (and not necessarily tech-driven).

By questioning the gender stereotypes often associated with this field, we invite you to take a fresh look at the qualities needed for successful entrepreneurial projects: innovation, resilience and the talent of the founding teams.

No to fundraising (at any price)

Raising funds is often seen as the ultimate goal for startups. But success is measured by more than just the amount of money raised. The real value of fundraising lies in securing the right amount, at the right time, for the right motive and from the right partner.

The enlightening insights of investment funds, experienced investors and entrepreneurs themselves confirm that raising funds is a strategic turning point that needs to be anticipated and managed to maximise its impact.

Startups: modern-day superheroes

Startups are not like other companies. They demonstrate a clear commitment to solving contemporary challenges. Whether it's health, education, the environment or cyber defence, startups are tackling the most pressing economic, social, geopolitical and technological problems shaping our world.

Through a series of portraits of female entrepreneurs in Ukraine, we highlight the dynamism and determination of startups committed to rebuilding their country and their society.

By analysing the challenges facing startups in 2024, this report shines a light on the path ahead for those embarking on, or continuing, their entrepreneurial adventure in the months and years to come.

Executive Summary

4

years of applications for the
Female Founder Challenge

1,700

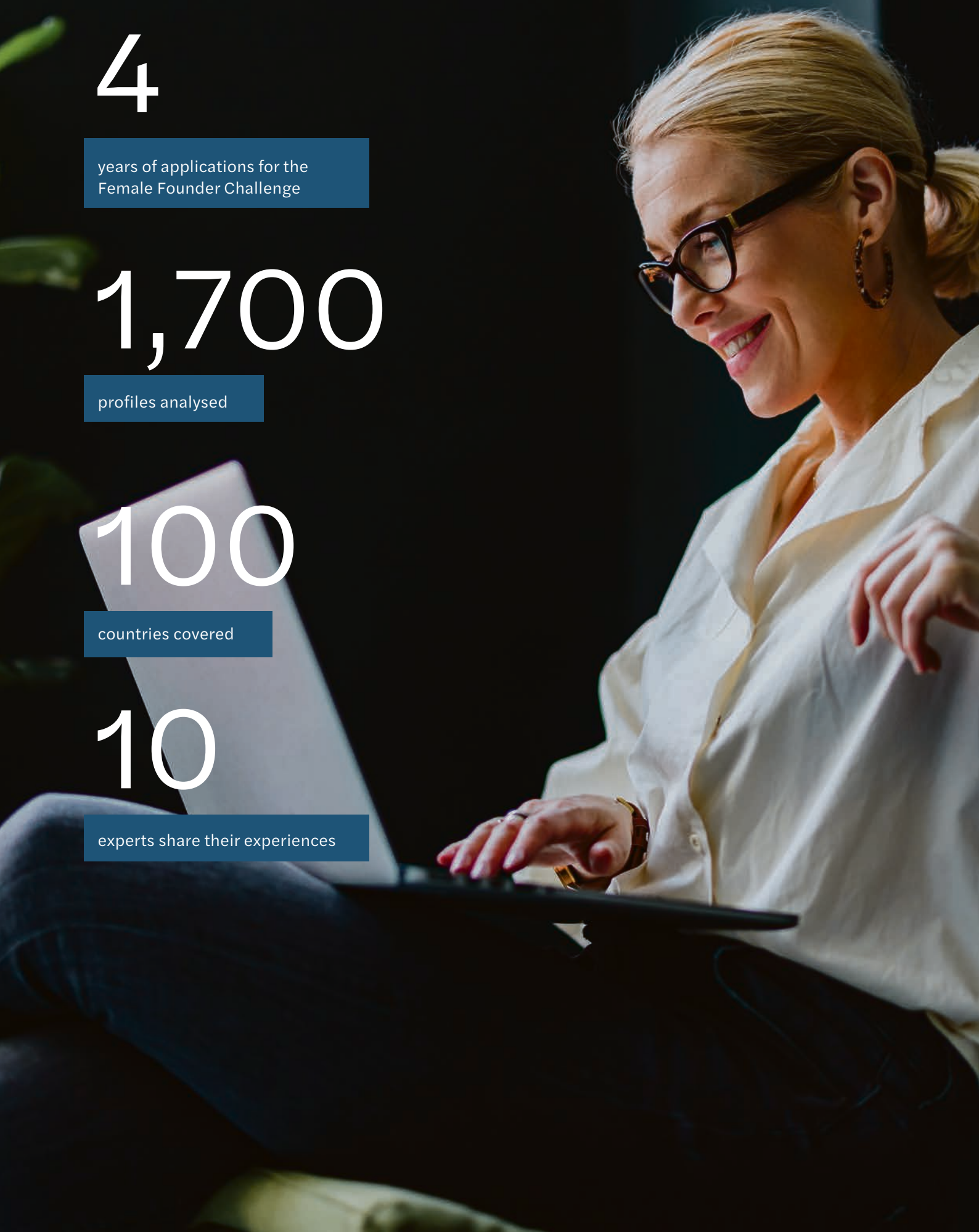
profiles analysed

100

countries covered

10

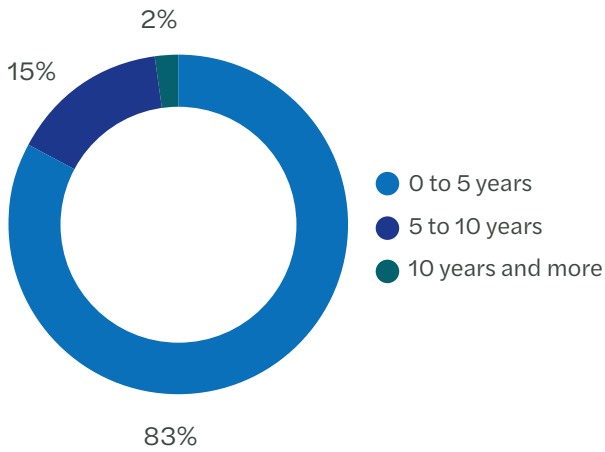
experts share their experiences



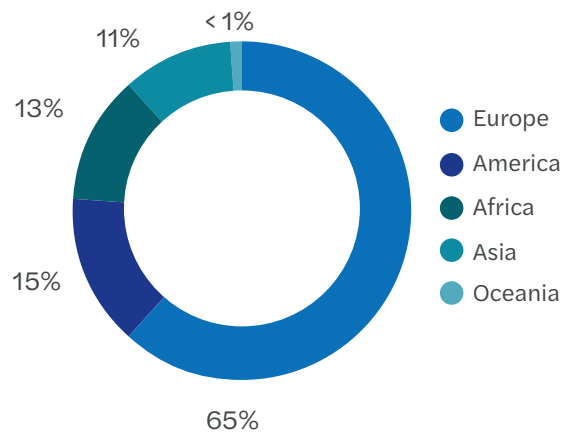
The Forvis Mazars XFactory, in partnership with VivaTech, has analysed the 1,700 applications received by the Female Founder Challenge over four years, from 2021 to 2024.

Number of startups on our panel

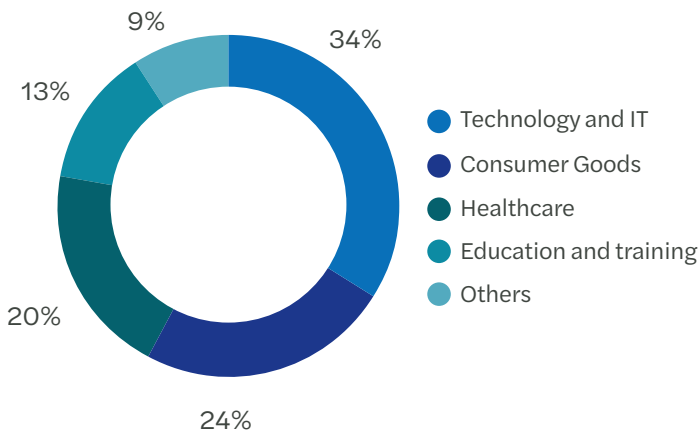
Startup by seniority



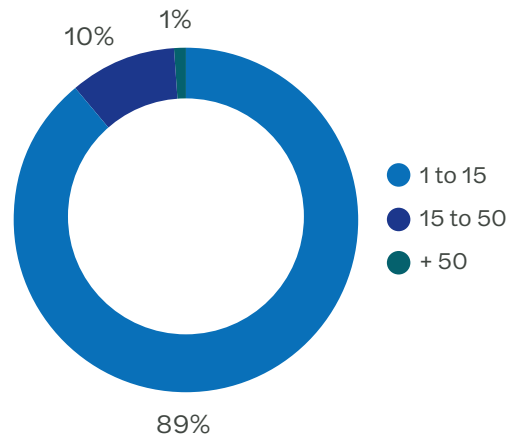
Location of startups



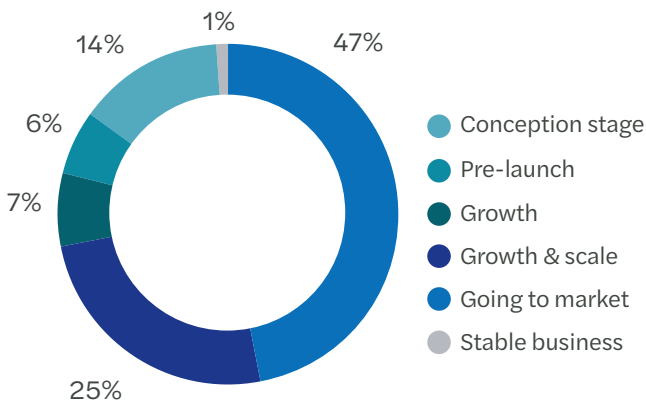
Breakdown by sector



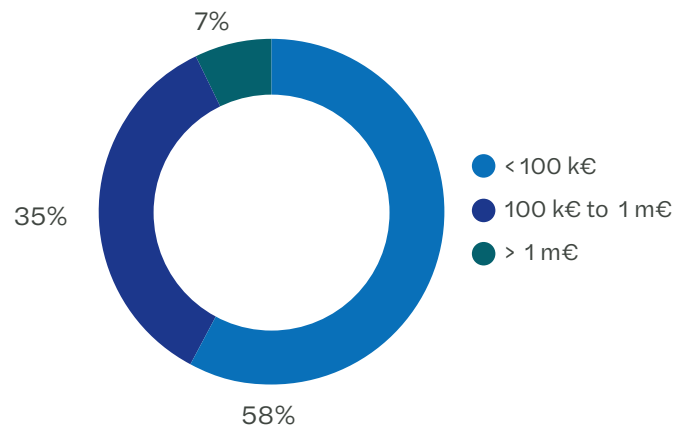
Workforce by startup



Maturity of startup



Average revenue by startup





Eléonore Crespo

CEO and Co-founder - Pigment

Eléonore began her career at Google as a financial analyst before joining Index Ventures as an investor. She then founded Pigment, a business planning platform, with former Criteo co-founder Romain Niccoli. Pigment helps managers plan, make decisions and adapt to change by bringing people, data and processes together in a single platform.



Anne-Sophie Gervais

Co-head - RAISE Sherpas

For the past eight years, Anne-Sophie has been co-director of RAISE Sherpas, a philanthropic accelerator of the RAISE Group, financing and supporting French startups. She provides free day-to-day support to help these companies scale up, drawing on the expertise of 150 key operators to help them address their strategic and operational challenges. Anne-Sophie is deeply involved, both personally and as part of her role, in developing women's entrepreneurship and supporting the ecosystem of impact startups, with the aim of seeing tomorrow's champions emerge to meet the environmental and societal challenges of our generation.



Kate Kallot

Founder and CEO - Amini

Kate is the Founder and CEO of Amini, a leading AI startup building the environmental data infrastructure for Africa. With over a decade of experience leading AI innovation in the global technology sector at companies such as NVIDIA, Intel and Arm, she is a recognised expert who regularly advises international organisations and governments. Kate was named by TIME magazine in 2023 as one of the world's 100 most influential people in AI.



Véronique Beaumont

Managing Director - L'Escalator Publicis

An engineer by training, Véronique discovered the internet in Silicon Valley in 1994. She has subsequently built her entire career around her expertise in digital transformation, combined with strong marketing and business development skills.

After more than 25 years in consulting and services, including the last 10 as CEO of digital agencies within the Publicis Group, Véronique now runs Escalator, a new startup incubator supporting more inclusive technology. She is convinced the current technological revolution must be used to help us make the transition to a world that is ecologically sustainable and socially fairer.



Olivia Hervy

Chief Ecosystem Officer - Viva Technology

Olivia is Chief Ecosystem Officer at Viva Technology (VivaTech), Europe's largest event dedicated to startups and technology.

VivaTech accelerates innovation by connecting startups, technology leaders and major investors to address our world's biggest challenges.

Olivia has spent the last 15 years working in the startup ecosystem and has supported over 100 startups (from pre-seed to Series A funding) in the development of their businesses.

She is passionate about innovation.

Previously, Olivia launched and managed WeWork Labs in Paris, WeWork's incubator, before pivoting it into a global platform.

She also launched Growth Campus in Europe, WeWork's initiative to help the European startup ecosystem rebound post-Covid.

Prior to this, she headed up innovation topics for Midem, the leading international B2B event for the music industry, and founded Midemlab, the leading international music startup accelerator.



Caroline Ramade

Co-founder and CEO - 50inTech

Caroline is convinced the future of technology lies with women. As founder and CEO of 50inTech, she has been defending this vision and supporting women entrepreneurs in the digital economy for a number of years.

She is the former deputy head of the Digital Department at Paris City Hall and managing director of WILLA (formerly Paris Pionnières), Europe's largest incubator for women founders.

Caroline launched 50inTech in 2019, with the aim of creating a reference network for women in tech and connecting female talent with companies committed to greater gender equality. Caroline is also a board member of UN Women France and 'Les Canaux'.



Louisa Mesnard

Chief Marketing Officer - Elaia

Before joining Elaia, Louisa was co-founder and COO of Citron. She then worked with corporates to develop their international intrapreneurship program. A TedX speaker, she is very involved in the entrepreneurial ecosystem – especially through StartHer – and mentoring.



Anaëlle Guez

Vice-president - Women in Web3

Anaëlle began her career in law before founding a consultancy specialising in digital transformation in the legal sector. With a passion for new technologies and a strong commitment to diversity, she co-founded Women in Web3, the largest association of women in web3, while also serving as Chief Transformation Officer within the Havas group. Today, as CEO and co-founder of Cleo Academy, she is dedicated to promoting more inclusive and accessible technology. Cleo Academy's mission is to provide an inspiring platform for continuous learning, helping people delve deeper into tech topics and contribute to a more diverse tech sector.



Catherine Abonnenc

President - Femmes Business Angels

Catherine has been investing in startups for around 10 years. She is also a partner and member of the investment committee of WinEquity, an investment fund dedicated to entrepreneurial diversity, and a partner in Femmes Business Angels.

Catherine is a member of the strategic committees of several startups, a corporate governance trainer and a certified administrator. She is also an interim manager for small and medium-sized companies and listed groups, having previously worked as marketing and communications director for major groups and professional organisations in the agri-food, textile, automotive, press and audit consulting sectors, including PwC, Didot-Bottin, Renault, FDJ and the Institut Français des Administrateurs.



Sandrine Joseph

Director of Innovation & CSR Programmes, Orange and Director, Women Entrepreneurs Programme

Sandrine is an expert in business transformation through open innovation. A pioneer in the adoption of disruptive technologies for over 20 years, she has led bold programmes to accelerate the adoption of new digital practices. She uses her skills in digital innovation to identify, finance and deploy digital solutions developed by startups in response to the CSR challenges faced by major companies.

Sandrine is currently Director of Innovation and CSR Programmes at Orange. She is a Young Global Leader, and a telecom and diversity expert for the World Economic Forum.

Startup or not startup, that is not the question

The sheer variety of projects that claim to be startups raises several questions. Among the buzzwords and the hype are some dynamic companies that are truly breaking the mould. It's time to get behind the prejudices and the stereotypes and explore the realities.



What is a startup?

In the entrepreneurial galaxy, the startup is 'the place to be', promising a dynamic, young, fun working environment that reinvents traditional codes. While the political world has made a slogan of it with the 'startup nation', the contours of these companies are often vague and clichéd.

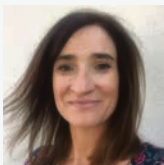
What is a startup?

The dictionary defines a startup as 'a young innovative company, particularly in the new technologies sector'. But one of the most widely used definitions is that of Steve Blank, an entrepreneurial theorist, who defines a startup as 'a temporary organisation in search of a repeatable and scalable business model that enables exponential growth'.

Both these definitions converge on a number of criteria: firstly, the temporary aspect of startups, implying there is a certain lifespan before they move into the corporate world; secondly, innovation, defined as the dynamic of experimentation with a solution or product that shakes up the codes of its market. However, two important concepts emerge in these definitions: that of exponential growth, encapsulated in the very term startup, a contraction of 'start' and 'up'; and that of industrialisation, pointing towards the 'scalable' dimension of projects and their ability to experience rapid growth trajectories.

“By definition, a startup must have a product. This is the essential condition for being able to scale and drive rapid growth.

Companies often call themselves startups when in reality they are not. It's not enough to have equipped a service with cutting-edge technology. Not just anyone can be a startup.”



Olivia Hervy
Chief Ecosystem Officer,
Viva Technology

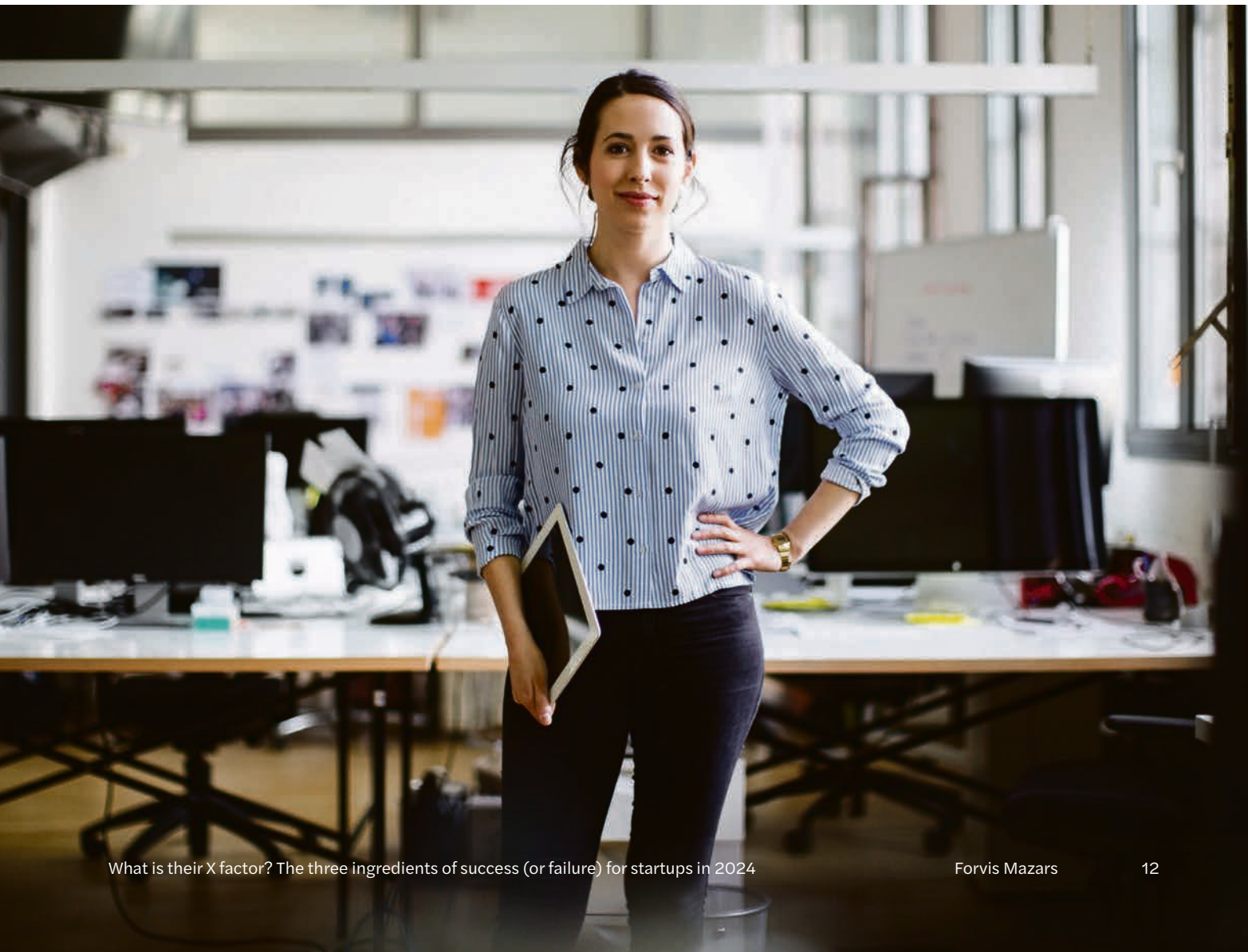
Startup or not startup, that is not the question What is a startup?



“The entrepreneur is an adventurer who sets a course and then gives themselves the means to move their ship and crew forward. All too often, the world of entrepreneurship is equated with the world of ideas. But a true entrepreneur is someone who succeeds in creating value on the basis of those ideas. An entrepreneur is a bold builder.”



Sandrine Joseph
Director of Innovation & CSR
Programmes, Orange and Director,
of Women Entrepreneurs Programme



Startup or not startup, that is not the question

What is a startup?



Behind the generic term lie very different realities: the barometer of the VivaTech Female Founder Challenge clearly illustrates the diversity of projects that call themselves startups.

Among the 1,700 startups analysed, more than 12 sectors are represented, with teams ranging from solopreneurs to more than 100 employees, establishment dates sometimes going back more than 10 years, and revenues in excess of €25 million.

Duration of existence	Team size	Revenue	Fundraising
Average			
3	4	€266,421	€1,247,547
Mini - Maxi			
0 - 24	1 - >100	€1 – €25 million	€1 - €25 million

The startup is therefore more a concept than a reality, and corresponds to stories, projects and teams that are all unique. So, if it's not the age of

the company, the business sector or the turnover, could it be the team behind the project that unites all startups?

“As business angels, what matters to us is not the status of the company or the nature of the tech; we focus on the innovation of the solution or product, on the level of response to the pain point identified, and on the market potential. In fact, when we're evaluating investment projects, we don't talk about entrepreneurship, we talk about innovation.”



Catherine Abonnenc
President, Femmes Business
Angels

Startup or not startup, that is not the question

The startup's quest for identity (and gender)



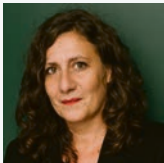
In a startup, it's not so much the project that count as the people behind it.

Whether we are talking about leadership, vision or embodiment, it is the vision and determination of the project owner that transforms an idea into a startup and guides it through its growth. A good startup entrepreneur is often described as visionary, ambitious, independent, passionate (and exciting), resilient, flexible, competitive, persuasive and courageous. All terms that, in some sense, are part of a lexicon of qualities generally associated with men.

On the other hand, the social and cultural stereotypes that are considered feminine, such as empathy, sensitivity and cooperation, are mentioned much less often.

This is probably one of the keys to unlocking access to entrepreneurship for women: breaking down the stereotypes associated with the very notion of startups.

“As long as the clichés associated with startups describe them as ultra-ambitious, aggressive, self-confident and competitive, we won't succeed in developing female entrepreneurship in a world riddled with representational bias. It's time to break down the prejudices about startups and entrepreneurs and boost women's access to entrepreneurship.”



Caroline Ramade
Co-founder and CEO,
50inTech



Startup or not startup,
that is *not* the question
**The startup's quest for identity
(and gender)**

“The world of entrepreneurship reflects the biases of traditional businesses and is cruelly lacking in female role models. Awareness of the fund-raising efforts of women is a key factor paving the way and encouraging other female entrepreneurs.”



Anne Sophie Gervais
Co-head, RAISE Sherpas





“Among the essential qualities needed to run a startup, we often forget the importance of emotional intelligence, the ability to be a good manager, leadership, a sense of customer experience and attention to detail.

Above all, we forget the most important thing: common sense. This quality is actually quite rare, and it makes all the difference in an entrepreneurial venture, if you want to reconcile this sense of detail and precision with listening to your ecosystem.”



Eléonore Crespo
CEO and Co-founder, Pigment

Startup or not startup, that is not the question

Startups and startup entrepreneurs: a story of balance



More than anything, it is a combination of novelty, innovation, scalability and the team behind it that dictate whether a startup is viable. Having a clear strategic vision and aligning it with the skills of the management team is essential to ensure that an innovative idea becomes a story of dazzling growth.

Contrary to popular belief, entrepreneurship cannot be a solitary adventure; as soon as the project is structured, you need to quickly surround yourself with others so you can face the challenges together. First and foremost, the team needs to share a common vision in order to define a clear direction and apply the necessary resources. The myth of the solitary entrepreneur needs to be seriously challenged. Although more than half the startups on our panel are comprised of teams of fewer than five people, team growth and sales growth are directly proportional: more than 85% of startups generating more than €1 million in revenue are led by teams of more than 15 people.

The skills mobilised must match the strategic vision to ensure smooth execution and management of the business plan. Unfortunately, it is often because of shortcomings in implementation that many good ideas end up in the startup graveyard: financing difficulties due to poor forecast management, unanticipated supplier debts, insufficiently detailed go-to-market strategy, etc.

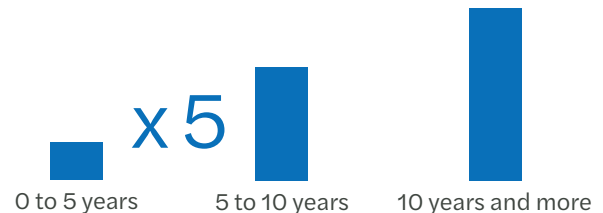
A good idea on its own is not enough. It's crucial to find the right team to turn the idea into a fast-growing project.

In this sense, diversity is a lever that should not be overlooked. Gender and skills diversity, of course, but also age and social diversity. Entrepreneurship provides proof that vision and success also go hand-in-hand with inclusion.

Once this balance is found, growth follows.

Of the 1,700 startups on the panel studied, sales after five years of existence are five times higher than in the first five years.

Average sales by age of business



“We have chosen to put social inclusion at the heart of our mission, because we are convinced it is a decisive factor in driving entrepreneurial success. Why do we do this? Because what drives the entrepreneurs we support, and the close-knit groups they create, is determination and a desire for emancipation.”



Véronique Beaumont
Managing Director,
L'Escalator Publicis



As there is no consensus on the definition of startups, nor on the profile of their founders, we need to question the very point of using a single word to describe a diverse movement. The aim is to shake up the established order by discussing innovative ideas and enabling them to grow rapidly, through technology or a new approach, in a mature sector or a new market, with a B2B or B2C product or solution. All of this, of course, supported by a team that is aligned with the company's strategic vision and that can bring the right mix of skills to bear on the project to ensure successful execution.

It's up to us: let's banish the term startup from our lexicon and talk more about ideas, projects and the teams behind them. This is the key to inclusion for tomorrow's entrepreneurs, especially women, so we can break away from stereotypes and give projects the attention they deserve.

“We spend too much time questioning the startup model and trying to define what a startup is. In reality, there is no single model, there are as many models as there are projects and entrepreneurs.”



Kate Kallot
Founder and CEO, Amini

No to fundraising (at any price)

Is the obsessive quest to raise funds justified or just a fad? Between the euphoria of a massive influx of funding and the tangible impact on a project's growth, it's crucial to define a method for knowing when and how to launch a fundraising campaign.



Raising funds is often seen as the holy grail of modern entrepreneurship. For many, raising millions of dollars in investment seems to be the key to success and exponential growth; indeed, this was the ethos that gave rise to the term ‘unicorn’ in 2013, to describe unlisted startups valued at over a billion dollars.

When considered as a strategic turning point, raising capital remains a unique growth booster, enabling startups to achieve rapid expansion, provided the capital raising is part of a bold, broader strategy for growth.

“I’ve never liked Pigment being described as a ‘unicorn’. Quite apart from the term, which borders on the ridiculous, it’s regrettable there’s so much buzz around fundraising. It in no way reflects the economic reality of a project, which is directly linked to its potential for exponential growth, and the financing needs to fuel it. The quality of a project lies first and foremost in its product and value proposition, and in its ability to be deployed rapidly at scale.

Most companies that raise funds do so in haste, losing some of their freedom without benefiting from the advantages of a partnership with an investor. In practical terms, fundraising is a very specific mechanism, and you need to master the principles before taking the plunge. But the amount raised cannot be the determining factor in a project’s success. What counts above all is the project’s economic viability, market traction and value proposition.”



Eléonore Crespo
CEO and Co-founder, Pigment

No to fundraising (at any price)

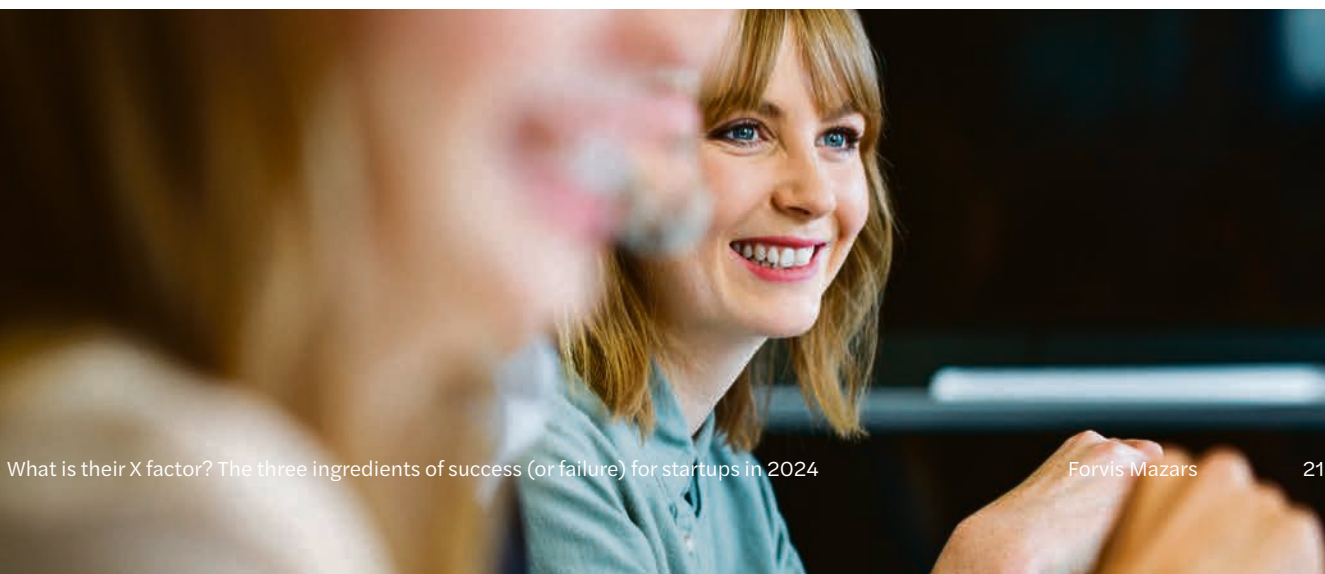
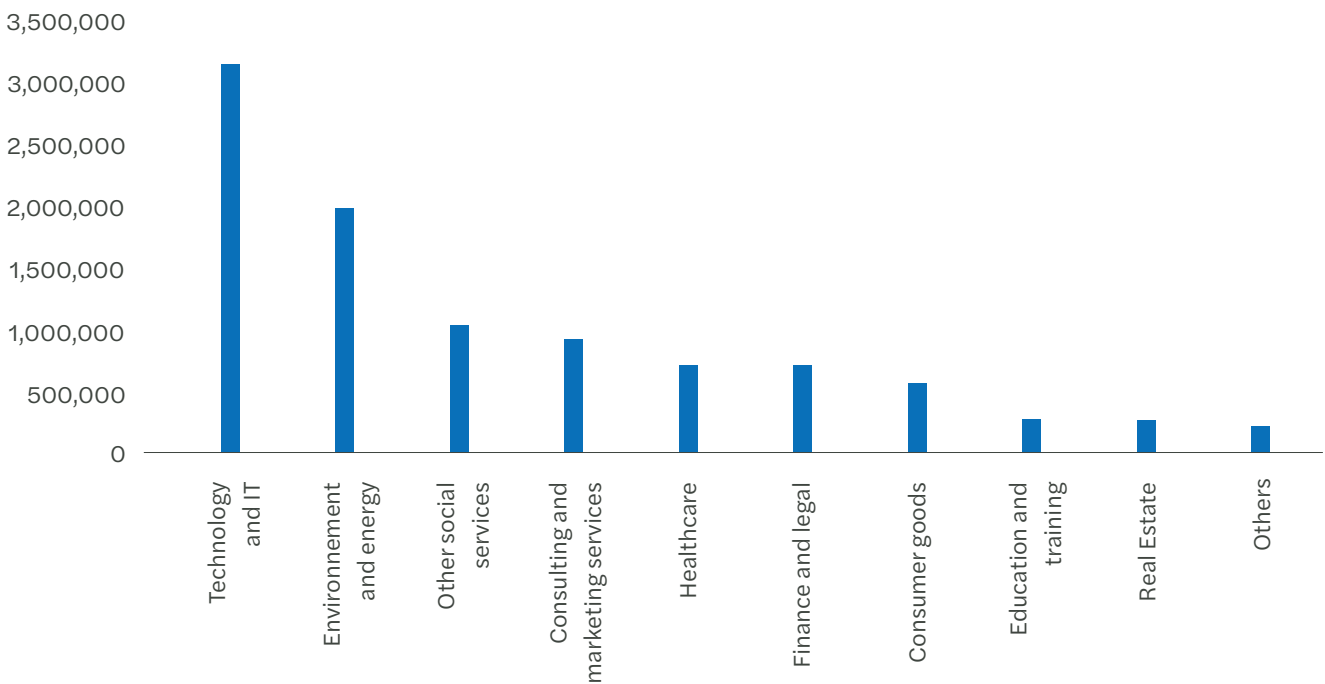
Lesson 1: the right amount



The appeal of raising capital is obvious: accelerating development, recruiting talent and possibly diversifying market segments, products and/or distribution channels, for example. However, it is essential to remember the dilutive effect of fundraising. Each new round of capital can lead to a dilution of the ownership of the founders and the initial investors who were alongside them. This gradual dilution limits control over operations and strategic decisions, and imposes new rules of the game: reporting to a third party, sharing guidelines or regulatory constraints, for example.

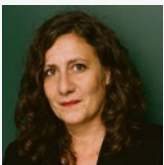
In our panel of 1,700 startups, the amounts raised ranged from €100 to several hundred million euros, with an average of around €1m. More specifically, the technology sector, accounting for 61% of the amounts raised by the panel, clearly requires more capital to ensure the development and sufficient maturity of their product.

Average amount raised per sector (per euros)





“The importance of investment varies depending on the project. For example, technological projects, which require platform development and frequent updates to gradually capture market share, cannot solely rely on revenue. Beyond momentum generated by sales, raising funds is essential to keeping up the pace and maintaining progress.”

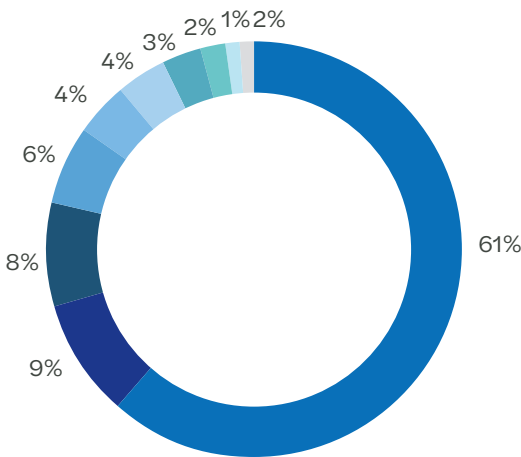


Caroline Ramade
Co-founder and CEO,
50inTech

No to fundraising (at any price) Lesson 1: the right amount



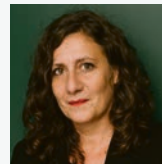
Amount raised by sector



- Technology and IT
- Consumer goods
- Healthcare
- Other social services
- Environnement and energy
- Consulting and marketing services
- Finance and legal
- Education and training
- Hospitality, tourism and entertainment
- Others

It is therefore crucial to carefully manage the amounts raised and the valuation of the company, to avoid a non-anticipated dilutive effect.

“Depending on the business, the fuel of investment is often vital; on technology projects that require the development of platforms and regular software upgrades, for example, revenue alone is not enough to fuel growth. They need to raise funds to maintain the pace.”



Caroline Ramade
Co-founder and CEO -
50inTech

Lesson 2: the right moment

Raising funds too early, over and above the premature dilution of the founder(s)' ownership, can create artificial pressure to grow at all costs. In fact, under pressure of an external stakeholder to whom it must be accountable, the startup may be pushed to take decisions that do not favour the growth strategy initially targeted, but which serve the interests and timelines of the fund or investor.

Conversely, waiting too long to raise funds can potentially hinder growth.

Some 79% of the startups on our panel raised funds in their first five years, while only 19% continued raising funds beyond that period. The right time to raise funds depends on:

- The maturity of the company: without a clear demonstration that the product or solution effectively addresses a major pain point, the startup will not be able to use this funding to support its growth project and risks using it for preliminary stages that do not require such acceleration.

- Market traction: market recognition, and the first signs of it in the form of sales generated by the product or solution, are the best indicators of the project's progress, and of the fact that an acceleration through external financing would give a significant boost to the growth trajectory.
- The project's ability to demonstrate a viable business model: the value proposition, its monetisation into revenue, its sustainability and its scalability all determine the viability of the startup's business model. Without a robust model, the funding injected will have only a limited impact on the development of the project and will be dissipated in structuring activities that do not contribute directly to growth.

Finally, we must not overlook the importance of the timing of the fundraising announcement. It must come at a strategic moment in the process, at a time when the market's attention is needed to support the launch of a new product or a particular development.

“Raising awareness of the fundraising activities of women is crucial. The ecosystem is still very young, and we lack female role models to inspire female entrepreneurs and reassure them about growth trajectories, while opening up all the possibilities for access to finance. Raising funds can provide tremendous visibility for the whole ecosystem of peers, partners and customers.”



Anne Sophie Gervais
Co-head, RAISE Sherpas

Lesson 3: the right reasons

Raising funds should not be a goal in itself, but a means of achieving specific strategic objectives. For example, it may enable the company to enter a foreign market, extend its range of solutions and products, invest in research and development, improve the reliability of a technology platform, or strengthen its go-to-market strategy. Apart from the amount, which flatters the entrepreneur's ego more than anything else, the focus should be on how the funds are used.

Money makes you happy, so they say. For startups, which are often made up of small teams, money is not enough, and it is essential to find points of support from investors in areas such as branding and influence strategy, access to networks of prospects, expertise on certain regulations, etc. In the investor jungle, it's best to go for 'smart money', invested by people who are well-informed about the field and can contribute their expertise, their network or their strategic vision.

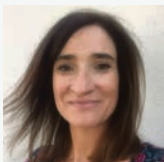
“In addition to accelerating the development of our products through financial investment, our equity story has enabled us to benefit from tailored support for our growth challenges, from mentoring to business advice and access to networks of contacts. This has really propelled us into a new dimension, but investor confidence can never replace the unrivalled confidence of our customers.”



Eléonore Crespo
CEO and Co-founder, Pigment



“It is important to bear in mind that investment funds do not have the same position or the same ambition with regard to their portfolio; they should not be limited to a simple financial role. Some investors can also provide invaluable support on specific business issues, which startups should take into account when choosing their investor.”



Olivia Hervy
Chief Ecosystem Officer,
Viva Technology

No to fundraising (at any price)

Lesson 4: the right partner

The choice of investor is at least as important as the amount of money raised. Investors don't just provide capital; by taking a stake in the company, they become strategic partners and can influence the future of the business. Finding the right investment partner means looking for individuals or funds who understand the company's sector, share its values and can bring relevant expertise and networks.

“When choosing an investor, you need to understand the different profiles that exist.

For example, male investors will tend to ask 'how does it work', whereas female investors will tend to ask 'what is it for?'”



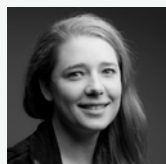
Catherine Abonnenc
President, Femmes Business
Angels



Lesson 4: the right partner

“Raising funds should be anything but spontaneous. First, you need to plan ahead, and the relationship needs to be established six to 12 months before the investment. Secondly, you have to accept a kind of marriage, while thinking about the terms of your future separation even before you seal the deal.

This financial contribution is like a drip-feed, making you dependent on a third party and creating obligations. Finally, the most important thing is to choose the right investor. Raising funds requires an understanding of how funds work, and more specifically, of how the fund you are targeting works, so you can carry out genuine reverse due diligence and check it is appropriate and relevant to your project.”



Louisa Mesnard
Chief Marketing Officer, Elaia

Fundraising is a project in its own right. You need to be able to resist the siren calls of cash and concentrate on your strategic ambition, seeking out the necessary resources, and not just

financial resources, to give your project a boost. It is only by balancing ambition and realism that the impact of fundraising will be maximised.

Startups: modern-day superheroes

With their boldness and agility, startups offer real hope for a better world, by solving the most pressing challenges of our time.





Between health crises, climate change, geopolitical conflicts and economic and social inequalities, the world is facing increasingly complex challenges. Governments, international organisations, the private sector, civil society and the media all have their share of responsibility. In a fast-moving world in which many traditional companies sometimes struggle to address these issues, startups are playing a decisive role.

“The reason we leave large organisations to set up a company is because we are obsessed by a problem and we think that no one in the world is better placed to solve it than us. That’s where it all starts.”



Kate Kallot
Founder and CEO, Amini

Startups: modern-day superheroes

Solving the problems of contemporary society



Pandemics such as Covid-19 have highlighted the crucial role of startups in public health. Startups quickly emerged with rapid diagnostic technologies accessible to all, or medical monitoring platforms. These startups reacted with surprising agility, bypassing traditional patterns of solution development and accelerating the development of critical value propositions. Their ability to innovate rapidly and adapt to new and evolving needs were crucial in tackling this global health crisis. The year 2021 illustrates the commitment of women entrepreneurs to the health sector, with almost a third of our panel focusing on this sector, before dropping to 30% in 2022.

Similarly, as the pandemic shone a light on distance learning systems, edtech solutions aimed at enabling training in new formats grew by nine percentage points between 2021 and 2022.

Startups are also committed to solving the pressing environmental problems we face. From waste reduction to the transition to renewable energies, startups are rethinking the way we produce and consume.

From digital diplomacy to cyber defence, they know how to use the potential of technology in all its forms to bring new perspectives to age-old problems.

“The Women Entrepreneurs programme has been a fascinating field of observation for the past six years: we have seen that for every 100 female entrepreneurs we support every year, 150 jobs are created outside their own businesses. They use tech as an ally to meet our societal challenges. This demand for impact in the creation of economic value makes them pioneers in the field of startups ‘for good.’”

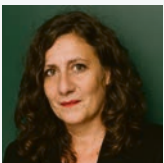


Sandrine Joseph

Director of Innovation & CSR Programmes, Orange and Director of Women Entrepreneurs Programme



“Given the challenges of sustainability in today’s world, the social and societal utility of projects should be a key criterion for access to funding. This is the very essence of entrepreneurship: creating value and renewing economic models, while contributing to a regenerative approach to the planet.”



Caroline Ramade
Co-founder and CEO,
50inTech

Solving the problems of contemporary society

“There is a real surge of interest in inventing new paradigms and new business models to meet the major challenges facing our societies. In my view, it is companies, rather than governments, that must and will make the transition happen. Especially as companies have the power to influence their ecosystem of stakeholders. At the moment, however, they are not very disruptive, even though their contribution is needed, as illustrated by the new regulations on sustainability. Startups are the only organisations to have taken an active interest in these issues and are now providing companies with solutions in this area. The links between large companies and startups have the potential to develop into a partnership for cross-fertilisation, while also drawing on the world of not-for-profit organisations. A 360° virtuous circle is not only desirable, but also possible.”



Anne Sophie Gervais
Co-head, RAISE Sherpas

Startups: modern-day superheroes

Impose new rules

Whatever the subject, startups have a unique ability to think differently and act quickly. Freed from the rigid structures of large organisations, they can experiment and take calculated risks. They are always fuelled by a passion for change and a deep conviction that bold ideas can transform the world.

Even in their business models, startups are reinventing the rules by creating virtuous, impact-based models that seek to reconcile revenue and positive impact, in the way they collaborate with the rest of the ecosystem, and in their reinvestment strategies.

“Women investors are ground-breakers in their understanding of the issues and models of the modern world. They systematically integrate the impact dimension, whether economic, societal or environmental, into their investment approach, and pay particular attention to these issues.”



Catherine Abonnenc
President, Femmes Business
Angels



Startups: modern-day superheroes

Impose new rules



“The impact of our projects must be an obsession. We urgently need to redefine our capital models and reshape them to better integrate these sustainability dimensions. The success of a startup should be measured not by the amounts raised, but by the positive impact of the project on the world of tomorrow. We should be celebrating the tangible impact of our solutions on the daily lives of citizens and professionals, not the scale of their financing, because that’s not the point.”



Eléonore Crespo
CEO and Co-founder, Pigment



Startups: modern-day superheroes

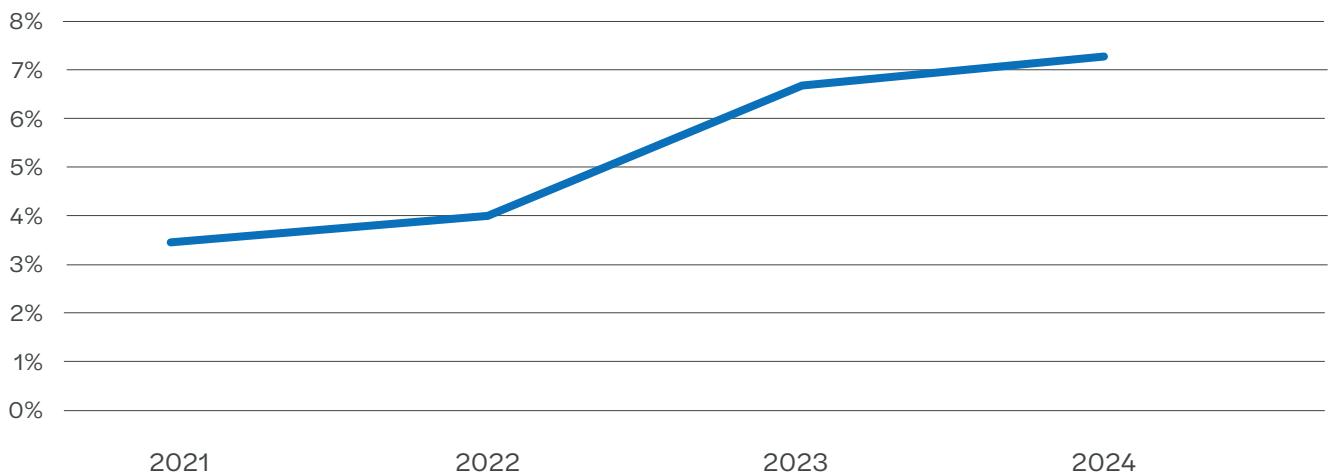
Abolishing borders



This new business model, the startup, is one of the rare vectors of innovation in regions of the world that are often neglected by investment. By creating projects in regions far from the world's economic centres, startups open up new economic opportunities, attract and develop talent, and help to create new and dynamic industries in underserved areas.

As a result, an increasing proportion of applicants to the Female Founder Challenge come from countries classified as emerging¹, rising from 3% of applications at the launch in 2021 to over 7% in 2024. The strong dynamism of the African continent is also confirmed, with more than 220 projects during this period.

Proportion of startups from emerging countries



“In the web3 ecosystem, the dynamism of communities of women entrepreneurs in Africa is remarkable, with a deep-seated desire to cultivate mutual support and personal development through entrepreneurial projects. This contributes to the development of networks and has a visible impact on the development of isolated regions.”



Anaëlle Guez
Vice-President, Women
in Web3

¹: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and Turkey

Startups: modern-day superheroes

Abolishing borders



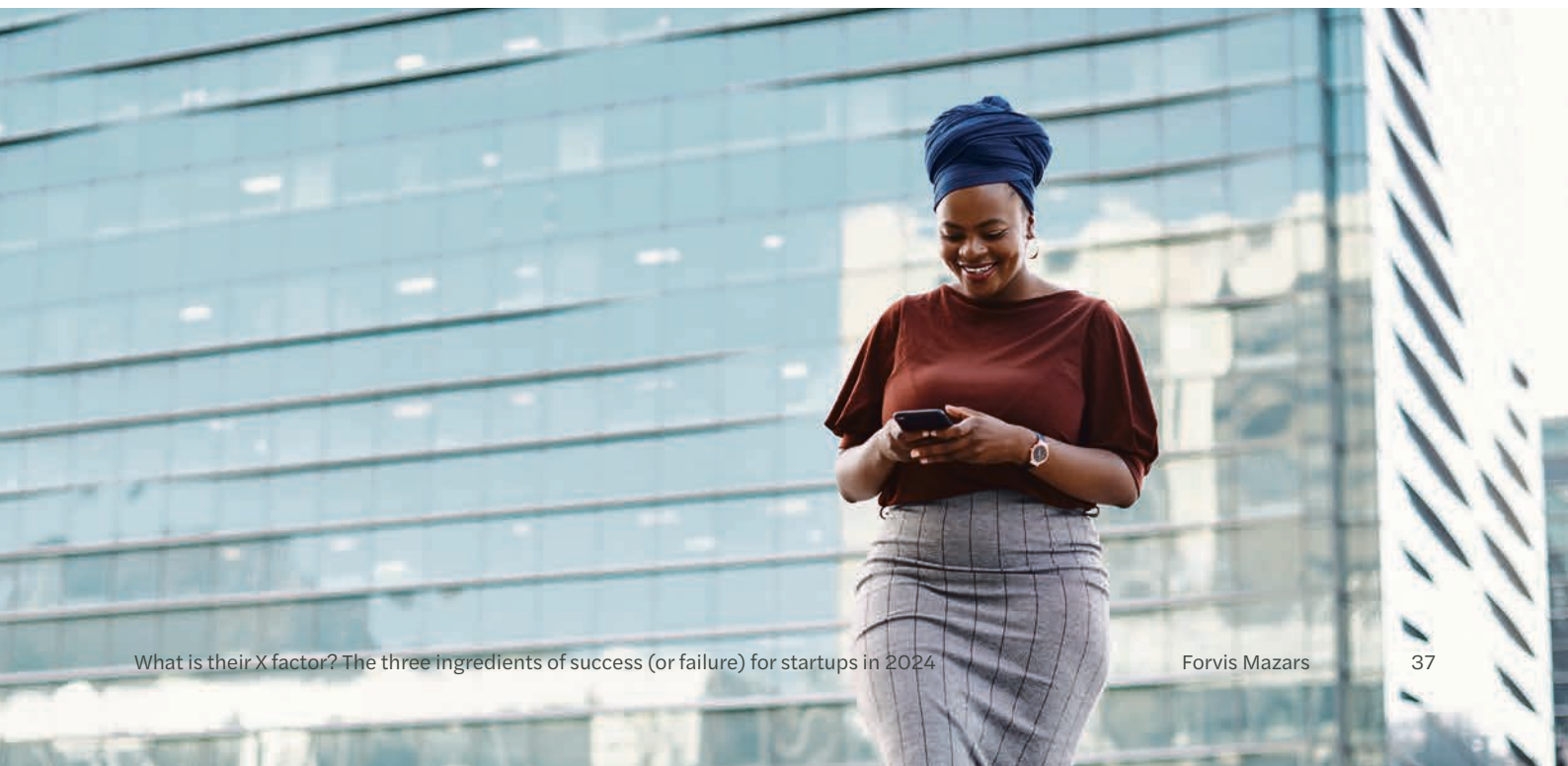
“Today, there is a gulf between the innovations that emerge from developing regions, and investors, who are usually located in more mature markets. This creates real difficulties in understanding between entrepreneurs and investors. Scalability is often harder for them to perceive, as they are not sufficiently close to the problem being addressed. It’s a very biased view of innovation, and there’s an urgent need to deconstruct these legacies of the past to enable the impact innovations that are emerging in these geographies to benefit from the investment they need to scale up.”



Kate Kallot
Founder and CEO, Amini

Startups are key players in solving complex global challenges because they offer innovative solutions and business models. Their ability to innovate rapidly and responsibly is helping to

shape a more resilient and equitable world. We are all responsible for their destiny, and we owe them strong support and guidance.





Diana Sidko is a member of the Board of La French Tech Kyiv, an advisor on public affairs and international cooperation, and coordinator of the Ukraine reconstruction project at Forvis Mazars

“The Russian invasion of Ukraine has profoundly disrupted the country’s economic and social development, causing unprecedented destruction and loss. Despite the dramatic human and security situation, the innovation sector has demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability. Ukrainian technology companies have persevered in the face of adversity, maintaining their activities and establishing themselves in international markets.

Amid the continuing challenges of war, the IT sector is positioning itself as a vital pillar of resilience for the Ukrainian economy. Over the past decade, the growth of IT services in Ukraine has been remarkable. In the first year of the full-scale invasion, the IT sector was the only one to experience export growth, increasing by almost 6% to US\$7.34 billion.

The technology sector’s growth trajectory is impressive, having expanded 18.2 times since 2010, ranking second among export-oriented sectors and accounting for 41% of Ukraine’s service exports and nearly 5% of GDP.

With over 2,300 companies and 2,600 startups, Ukraine’s technology ecosystem continues to thrive. The adaptability and flexibility of the industry is evident, with more than 200 startups being created between 2022 and 2023. In addition, the sector’s workforce has grown substantially, with over 346,200 skilled professionals employed to date, demonstrating a significant increase since 2018. Impressively, 87% of IT specialists hold higher education qualifications, underlining the sector’s commitment to expertise. In terms of graduates with technology qualifications, Ukraine produces 43% more technology graduates than Poland, 70% more than the UK and 53% more than France.

According to research, women now account for one quarter (24% to 26%) of technology specialists in Ukraine.

Sources:

- State of European Tech 2022 - <https://stateofeuropeantech.com/>
- Digital Tiger: The Power of Ukrainian IT Research for 2023
- Incredible Tech: Investors guide to Ukrainian IT

This marks significant growth compared to 2011, when women accounted for just 7% of the country’s tech talent. Since the Russian invasion, there has been a remarkable shift in the role of women in business, particularly in the technology and entrepreneurial spheres. Many women have taken on leadership roles in companies and have become key negotiators on the international stage, acquiring new skills needed for global engagement.

This change is partly driven by necessity, as men are deployed to the front or face restrictions on travelling from Ukraine. Women are managing these new responsibilities skilfully and successfully. Remarkably, in the two years since the invasion, the representation of women in technology and innovation has risen to between 4%-6%.

To promote gender equality and support women in technology, a number of initiatives and programmes have emerged in Ukraine. These efforts aim to promote female leadership, combat inequality and encourage their participation in the technology sector and entrepreneurship. They include educational initiatives, as well as subsidy and promotion programmes for companies run by women.

Despite the challenges posed by the war, Ukraine’s technology sector continues to win global recognition for its innovation. Motivated founders not only continue to innovate, but also find new ways to thrive in adverse conditions. With women playing an important role today, many have been honoured at prestigious global and European awards, such as Forbes 30 under 30, EU Prize for Women Innovators, and many others, highlighting their significant contribution to the industry.

As we explore their inspiring stories and contributions, it is clear these women leaders share a common commitment to overcoming obstacles and bringing about positive change through innovation.”



Julia Bialecka is CEO and co-founder of startup S.Lab, winner of the EU Prize for Women Innovators 2023-2024 in the 'EIT Women Leadership' category. S.Lab is a sustainable and biodegradable

packaging solution, a winner of multiple awards in Ukraine and across Europe.

“Sometimes it takes time to find your place in the world. Sometimes opportunities are hidden behind challenges or even crisis situations. If you know where to look, you can not only create something meaningful, but become a person who leads change.

That’s the story of S.Lab - recognising the problem of plastic pollution and focusing on the solution. Our vision is to replace harmful polystyrene with natural packaging, to provide an eco-friendly solution that protects products and, at the same time, helps companies achieve their sustainability goals.

History teaches us that together we are stronger. In the same way that agricultural waste becomes stronger with mycelium, people become stronger when they work together. We need to unite to defeat the enemy, to solve local and global challenges.

The path to success is one step after another, and another step after another. It requires passion, courage, commitment and persistence. Our ability to unite and move forward is our superpower.”

<https://www.ilab-s.com>



Anastasiia Smyk is CEO and co-founder of INPUT SOFT. She is an aerospace engineer with over nine years' experience in the aviation industry worldwide, a Forbes 30 under 30 Chicago nominee, and a TEDx speaker.

“My mission as a passionate and innovative leader is to create value for the aviation sector, improve efficiency and safety, and transform all existing paper processes into digital ones.

At INPUT SOFT, we are developing a new ERP system for airport operations. We have two software suites that will help to collect data on the services provided during aircraft ground handling operations, allocate human and technical resources efficiently, save money on payroll and reduce waiting time for aircraft to depart with engines running, thereby reducing CO2 emissions.

INPUT SOFT is the brainchild of three aviation professionals with over 25 years' experience in the industry. Our team has worked closely with civil aviation over the past 10 years, so we know that now is the best time to bring a new solution to market that will make a difference.

We started our operations in early 2022 in Ukrainian airports, but the war stopped us. For almost a month, each of the founders worked to help Ukrainians. We volunteered, transported humanitarian aid across the border and helped internally displaced refugees. One of the founders became a member of the territorial defence. Later, we decided to continue to develop our company, but to do so on a global scale, always hoping that we would have a role to play in the development and recovery of civil aviation in our country.”

<https://www.inputsoft.net>



Iryna Volnytska is President of SET University, a higher education institution in Ukraine. She has over 10 years' experience leading technology teams in tech and business consulting companies.

SET stands for science, entrepreneurship and technology. Under Iryna's leadership, the university is pursuing its mission to give innovators the means to influence the changing world.

Although SET was announced just before the start of the war in Ukraine, its team did not give up on the idea of creating an innovative university for Ukrainians. On the contrary, they felt empowered to provide a progressive technological education to knowledge-hungry talent from around the world.

"I believe gender equality will lead to positive global change. As we continue to strive towards this goal, our collective responsibility is to create a multitude of opportunities and initiatives that enable women to start their own technology businesses or pursue successful careers in the corporate world. At SET University, we are fully aware of this responsibility and we are committed to it. That's why we offer free boot camps and training programmes for women, as well as scholarships to enrol them in our masters programmes."

<https://www.setuniversity.tech/en>

The Forvis Mazars XFactory: a commitment to women's entrepreneurship



The Forvis Mazars XFactory is a new kind of accelerator, born from a truly entrepreneurial dynamic. Through its immersion at the heart of the startup ecosystem, it has developed the drive and direction to respond to the needs and pain points of startups in their acceleration phase.

Growth, compliance, technology and cyber security, financing and influence: Forvis Mazars staff from all its business lines come together for five months to provide time, strategic advice and contacts to 10 startups in each cohort.

It is a very practical way of putting Forvis Mazars' multidisciplinary expertise to work for ambitious young businesses; a collaborative channel to share the ideas, issues and pain points of pioneering entrepreneurs with the firm's specialists and key corporate clients; an agile and tailor-made service, shaped by the startups we support.

With no financial element, the Forvis Mazars XFactory and its partners embody a form of support that is as much about the genuine relationship created with the teams as it is about the strategic level of expertise provided in support of each project. It represents an ambitious commitment to provide different and relevant support for the benefit of entrepreneurs and, ultimately, society.

To find out more, visit:

Forvis Mazars XFactory | A commitment to female entrepreneurship - Forvis Mazars - France

Thank you

Our warmest thanks to all our forerunners for their contribution. Their shared experience, vision and energy were truly inspiring and essential to our thinking.

Their unique perspectives have enriched our study and contributed to a singular insight into the challenges and opportunities facing startups in 2024.

We're honoured to have them as our partners. Let's celebrate the diversity and dynamism of entrepreneurship together.





Contacts

Florence Sardas

Partner, Founder of the Forvis Mazars XFactory,
Member of the Executive Committee of Forvis Mazars in France
Mobile: +33 6 62 54 62 30
florence.sardas@mazars.fr

Forvis Mazars Group SC is an independent member of Forvis Mazars Global, a leading professional services network. Operating as an internationally integrated partnership in over 100 countries and territories, Forvis Mazars Group specialises in audit, tax and advisory services. The partnership draws on the expertise and cultural understanding of over 35,000 professionals across the globe to assist clients of all sizes at every stage in their development. Visit forvismazars.com to learn more.

© July 2024

forvismazars.com

forvis
mazars