

The logo for WeRin features the text "WeRin" in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The letter "i" is lowercase and has a small orange dot above it. The text is centered within a white circle. Surrounding this circle are several overlapping, fan-shaped segments in various colors: purple, pink, orange, and yellow, arranged in a circular pattern.

WeRin

Regional Scan of the Current State of Gender Inclusivity

Ireland



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Foreword

The Hincks Centre for Entrepreneurship Excellence and the Rubicon Business Incubator Centre in Munster Technological University, Ireland are proud to present the results of the extensive Inclusivity Regional Scan, with a focus on the 'Gender' dimension of the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the south of Ireland.

After the launch of the Europe 2020 strategy and recent policy measures to expand entrepreneurship in each of the EU Member States (e.g. The Missing Entrepreneurs, 2019), Europe has taken the path to strengthen entrepreneurial culture and networks by pulling strategies and actions together to enable everyone to start a successful and sustainable business, despite their gender, age, place of birth, or other personal characteristics.

The assumption that underlies most entrepreneurial ecosystems is that all entrepreneurs have equal access to resources and support within the entrepreneurial ecosystem. In theory, this assumption is valid, however, in practice, this is not always the case (Brush et al., 2019). According to the 2nd European Start-up Monitor, only 14.8% of start-up founders are female.

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2019 shows that Europe had the lowest female involvement in early-stage Entrepreneurial Activity of every analysed region (6%) and the lowest gender parity. The lower entrepreneurial activity amongst women has been argued to be owed to the traditional general attitudes in entrepreneurship education, which are discouraging for women (Dilli & Westerhuis, 2018, p. 375).

Traditional masculine assumptions are therefore fed into ideas about entrepreneurship, which in turn are presented to students in a classroom. There is little to no reflective process in the development of the curriculum and entrepreneurship courses in challenging the 'gendered entrepreneurship' (Tegtmeier & Mitra, 2015, 266).



Against this background there is a need for more inclusive approaches in entrepreneurship. In this sense, women's entrepreneurship is analysed within the context of inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystems. The present report is a comprehensive analysis of the degree of inclusivity of key entrepreneurship education and support programs offered by the academic and non-academic partners in the region of Munster. In addition, it analyses key elements from an entrepreneurial ecosystem, namely, a conducive culture for women entrepreneurship, available financing, the acquisition, and development of human capital through education and training programmes, new markets for products and services, and a range of institutional and infrastructure support systems targeted at women.

This report presents a brief description of the regional context and entrepreneurial ecosystem in the Munster region of Ireland, its key players, and some basic statistics related to the student and entrepreneurial population with a specific focus on female participation. In addition, it uses a qualitative approach emphasising the perceptions of four main stakeholders interviewed, namely a) educators of entrepreneurship at universities, b) program managers at incubators and other units in charge of entrepreneurship within the regional entrepreneurial ecosystem; c) students/program participants/alumni; and d) other key players in the regional entrepreneurial ecosystem in Ireland.

Our approach towards understanding female entrepreneurship is holistic and takes an entrepreneurial ecosystem perspective, which in turn is unique. WeRin sees entrepreneurship education as being an entry point into the regional entrepreneurial ecosystem. However, this only happens if HEIs and other parties active in the ecosystem beyond academia such as science parks, incubators and others are connected and collaborate in such a way that graduates know where to turn for entrepreneurship support after leaving university. For this reason, WeRin includes both parts of the

ecosystem and seeks to foster stronger interlinkages and cross-involvements to be included in educational and support program design.

The results of the regional scan by MTU have revealed fragmentation and diverse views about how women entrepreneurship should proceed to achieve a gender inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem within the Munster region. Clear recommendations for the region include to improve measurement to track progress for women's entrepreneurship, starting early in education to begin to modify culture and social norms, bias training (for conscious and unconscious bias) that incorporates a practical element so that it can be applied in the classrooms, a better understanding of how women only and mixed gender approaches will lead to an integrated gender inclusive ecosystem. Bias in the supports available for the business sectors where women entrepreneurs are most represented should be considered and addressed to provide access to support for business growth for women entrepreneurs in all sectors.

All stakeholders within the ecosystem were conscious of the importance of women role models, although many still believe that the normative entrepreneur is male, particularly within the representations in mainstream media, and within the areas of investment and funding for business.

The entire team of the Rubicon and the Hincks Centre for Entrepreneurship Excellence within Munster Technological University, Ireland is proud to deliver this report for the sake of improving the degree of gender inclusivity in the regional entrepreneurial ecosystem. We feel honoured to have been able to work with different stakeholders in this study and we would like to thank everybody who has enabled us to conduct this study, particularly the respondents in our qualitative study from whom we have received substantial and highly valuable contributions for this regional scan.

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Meet Our Team

The Hincks Centre for Entrepreneurship Excellence in Munster Technological University (MTU) and the **Rubicon Business Incubator** work closely together and are key in the University's entrepreneurial ecosystem. We are working together to map the gender inclusive ecosystem.



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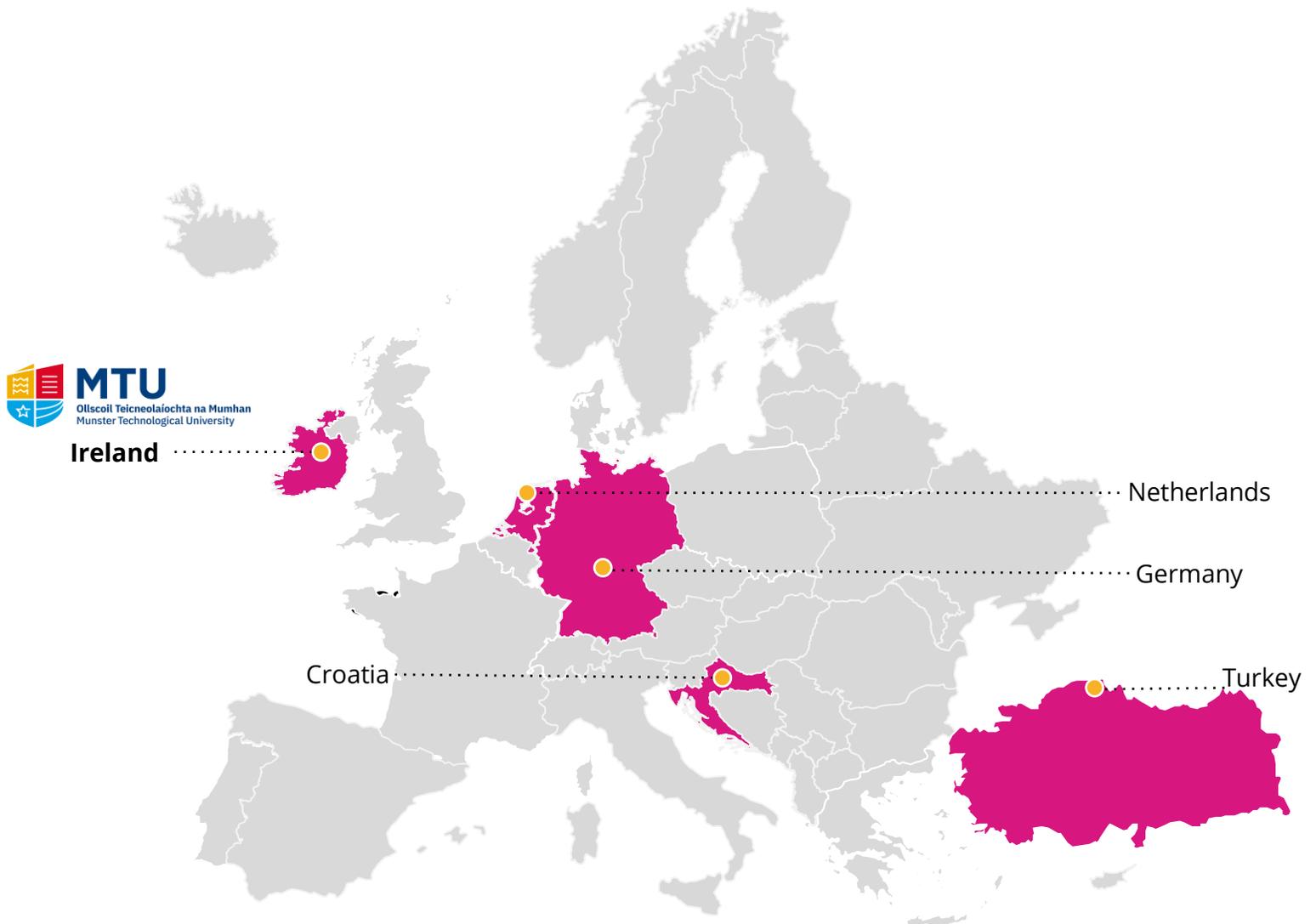


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Ireland

The report pertains to the Republic of Ireland, with a largely Cork-based focus. The Hincks Centre for Entrepreneurship Excellence and the Rubicon Business Incubator Centre of MTU have collaborated to produce this regional report.



Entrepreneurship in Ireland

Ireland is an entrepreneurial country. For early stage entrepreneurs in 2019, Ireland ranked 10th within the OECD and 4th in Europe. A small and open economy, three quarters of early stage entrepreneurs in Ireland expect to trade internationally and Ireland is an innovation-based economy. At government level, Ireland has a national system for entrepreneurship overseen by the Department of Enterprise, Trade, and Innovation and delivered nationally by Enterprise Ireland and regionally by 31 Local Enterprise Offices. All policy initiatives that are intended to stimulate or promote entrepreneurship and innovation form the basis of the national system for entrepreneurship in Ireland. The GEM Report for Ireland (2019) estimates that over 3,000 people started a new business every month in 2019. Rates of early stage entrepreneurship are increasing for both men and women, with a stronger rate of increase for men. The Global Enterprise Development Index, or GEDI, (2014) characterised Ireland in relation to the UK, Denmark and the USA and found that gender scoring within Ireland was the lowest with the USA the highest of the group. More recent initiatives point to an improving gender situation, with targeted programmes and supports for women entrepreneurs.

Equality for Women measures (2000-2007) and (2008-2013) led to the first government agency report fully dedicated to understanding women entrepreneurship in Ireland in 2006. The 2017 OECD report, "Supporting Women Entrepreneurs in Ireland: Rapid Policy Assessments of Entrepreneurship Policies and Programmes" applied the Jennings and Brush (2013) definition that: *"female entrepreneurship primarily focuses upon women who start and/or run their own businesses (including those who are self-employed)"* This report identifies the term 'female-led' in recruitment literature for female-only programmes.

A Balance for Better Business initiative was launched in 2018 targeting more women in leadership positions, both as CEOs and as business leaders. This is a new long term strategy aimed at increasing women's participation at senior management, with potential for the future of women's entrepreneurship and business growth. Enterprise Ireland's 2020 Action Plan for Women in Business specifies four key objectives: (1) increasing the number of women-led companies growing internationally, (2) Increasing the number of women in middle and senior management and leadership roles in Irish companies, (3) Increasing the number of women becoming entrepreneurs, and (4) Increasing the number of women-led start ups with high growth potential. These objectives each have 6 action items (total 24 actions) identified to achieve improvement in gender diversity.

A target for Enterprise Ireland 2025 is to double the number of women-led companies with international focus and double the number of women in management development programmes. Outside of high growth potential businesses, the Local Enterprise Offices nationwide will target a 50% increase in the proportion of female-founded enterprises and Enterprise Ireland is aiming for a 30% increase in the proportion of High-Potential Start-ups with female-founders. Currently, the Central Statistics Office (2021) show an improving picture, 13% of CEOs in Ireland are women (11% in 2019), 22% of members of boards of management are women (20% in 2019), with 14% of boards chaired by a woman (7% in 2019), and women comprise 30% of all senior executives in business in Ireland (28% in 2019). However, the Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs points to cultural differences whereby individuals tend not to perceive that others think they are innovative and tend not to strategically plan their careers (<25% in both cases). This Mastercard Index (2020) showed a drop of 8 places in Ireland's ranking and with a score reduction from 66.8% (2019) to 66.3% (2020) with Ireland's total women business owners in 2020 estimated as 23.4% of all business ownership.

Ireland & Cork Region

Located in the southwest, County Cork is the largest county in the Republic of Ireland. Situated in the province of Munster, it boasts the country's second largest city, also called Cork. The Cork region (City and County) is entrepreneurial and scored 93.9% in the 2020 World Bank Report on Doing Business in Ireland. Figures compiled by credit risk analyst CRIFVision-net showed that 1,399 start-ups were registered in Cork between January and June 2021. This represents an increase of 45% on the previous year, with a national average increase of 42%. The Central Statistics Office estimates that 28,377 enterprises are based in the Cork region, approximately 10% of the national enterprises. Gender breakdown of the start-ups at a regional level for the Cork area is not available.

| Indicator | Number |
|---|---|
| Inhabitants Cork City and County | 543,000 |
| Quality of life index for Ireland (United Nations Human Development Index 2020) | #2 (World) |
| European Digital City Index (Cork) | #45 (Europe) |
| Number of companies (Cork City and County) | 28,377 (10% of national number) |
| % of female entrepreneurs | Estimated 20% (national average, local Cork figure not available) |
| Number of students at HEI's (Cork) | 36,000 |
| % of female students at HEIs | 52 |

Table 1 Basic facts and figures

The GEM Report for Ireland (2019) states that every month in 2019, over 3,000 people started a new business. For early stage entrepreneurs in 2019, Ireland ranked 10th within the OECD and 4th in Europe. Rates of early stage entrepreneurship are increasing for both men and women, with a stronger rate of increase for men.

Research methodology

- Desk research for macro information about Ireland and the Cork region.
- Primary Data: 68 semi-structured interviews were conducted online from March-August 2021, average time 45 minutes.
- Ethical approval for data collection was received from the MTU Research Ethics Committee.
- Snowball sampling was applied for recruitment of interviewees. The sample comprises Female Entrepreneurs (20), Program Managers (6), Entrepreneurship Educators (11), Students & Alumni (26), and Ecosystem Stakeholders (5).
- Interviews were based on the WeRin project interview protocols.
- Interviews are analysed based on their thematic content in the areas of role models, networks, social safety and social role theory.





The Entrepreneurial Ecosystem in Ireland

- Government support agencies (**Enterprise Ireland** & a network of 31 **Local Enterprise Offices**), the **HEIs**, such as Munster Technological University with associated **business incubators** such as the Rubicon in MTU, business accelerators with university accredited modules and programs run directly by enterprise offices, incubators and accelerators.
- General and sectoral focused networks among other (Chamber of Commerce, it@Cork)
- Female-only business networks among others (Network Ireland, Women in Business)
- The banks and enterprise investors
- The women entrepreneurs
- Female only or mixed gender programmes/supports are available. The female-only policy approach addresses underrepresentation of females and is aimed at increasing the inclusivity of the ecosystem.

Irish Female Entrepreneurship

Enterprise Ireland's 2020 Action Plan for Women in Business shows gender gaps in the Irish Entrepreneurial Ecosystem. In particular:

- Ireland has the highest gender gap in self-employment in the EU, with a 12% gender gap in labour force participation rates.
- only 30% of senior managers are women — approximately 20% of CEOs are women, falling to 9% in larger companies.
- Less than 10% of VC funding is going to companies with female founders.
- Only 3% of angel investors are women (Enterprise Ireland's 2020 Action Plan for Women in Business).
- The Central Statistics Office, '*Gender Balance in Business*' survey points to a slowly improving gender inclusive entrepreneurial landscape in Ireland.

2018- 2019

The GEM Women's Entrepreneurship Report considered perception of high status with business ownership. Ireland has the lowest rate with only 42.8% of women associating high status with business ownership – approx. 60% the rate for men and Irish women are nearly twice as likely to invest in a family member than men. Ireland belongs to the group with the smallest rates of women investors (alongside Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Italy and the UK) with less than 2% and consistent with a lower start-up rate for women in these countries.

2019

Women, according to the 2019 'Caring and Unpaid Work in Ireland Report' from the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and the Economic and Social Research Institute, continue to provide unpaid work. According to the Institute, 45% of women provide care for children and older adults daily, compared with only 29% of men.

Educational Landscape

Higher education in Ireland is provided by both public and private higher education institutions (HEIs). The Higher Education Authority (2018) estimated 180,000 undergraduate students in Ireland in 2017/2018. A breakdown of this figure by discipline, shows that Arts & Humanities and Business, Administration & Law each comprise 19% of the overall undergraduate population; Health & Welfare comprise 17%; Science & Maths 11%; and Engineering 11%. In 2017/2018, 57% of postgraduate students were female. At secondary level, in Ireland, primary and secondary education offers either mixed-gender schools or male-only and female-only schools.

Within Cork, the two key public HEIs are University College Cork and the newly formed Munster Technological University with an estimated 36,000 full time students in the city. Munster Technological University amalgamated two HEIs and now has six campus locations in Counties Kerry and Cork.

Within Irish HEIs, positive steps towards gender equality (such as Athena Swan) are ongoing and initiatives are now monitored. The Gender Equality Taskforce reported slow progress, with 24% women professors in 2017 (21% in 2016) and women comprised only 30% of the highest paid staff in the universities and only 18% in the IoTs. (29% and 17% in 2016, respectively).

Entrepreneurship Education

Within MTU, entrepreneurship is supported on campus with undergraduate modules, a Student accelerator program called Student Inc, a postgraduate module in Enterprise and Innovation. Each campus has a business incubator, the Tom Crean Centre in Kerry and the Rubicon Centre in Cork. The Hincks Centre for Entrepreneurship Excellence promote excellence in all forms of Entrepreneurship across the Cork Campus.

General support offerings, such as Enterprise Ireland's New Frontiers Programme, are open to female applicants as well as males. In Cork, the programs are run in MTU's Rubicon incubator. Within MTU's Rubicon, on average 20-25% of women participate in the New Frontiers program. In 2020, the New Frontiers reported a 50:50 gender balance, although in 2021 this returned to 25%.

Programs and supports have been introduced that target **female-only**; with no specific male-only offerings or supports. Enterprise Ireland's female-focused capability building programmes for women entrepreneurs include the "Going for Growth", the EXXCEL programme run in the Rubicon Centre in MTU and the INNOVATE programme at Dublin BIC. The ACORNs programme targets women entrepreneurs in rural areas.

Munster Technological University has a number of undergraduate modules related to entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship is included within the Department of Management and Enterprise. Any student may apply to Student Inc and attend an accredited 12 week programme during the summer months. This program has been extended to six Irish HEIs.

There are no Master's level entrepreneurship programmes, however a postgraduate module related to entrepreneurship and innovation is available and open to all disciplines. UCC offer a year-long taught Masters in Innovation, Commercialisation & Entrepreneurship.

Women's Entrepreneurship Education

MTU-based Female Only Education programs

Female only programmes have been developed and offered at Munster Technological University. These have included:

The PINC program (2012 -2015) was an intensive programme for female entrepreneurs developed by the Rubicon Incubator to encourage female entrepreneurs to explore their business ideas. The programme ran part time two mornings a week over ten weeks, allowing participants to balance their family commitments while at the same time plan and develop their business ventures. This popular programme was oversubscribed with funding sourced from various locations. This was an early local initiative matched to a perceived need in the area. Attendees of this programme were women over 30 years of age.

The WREN program (2017-2018) or Women in Rural Entrepreneurial Networks was developed by the Hincks Centre for Entrepreneurship Excellence and the Rubicon Incubator Centre in MTU to promote entrepreneurial skills and business start-up amongst women in the Cork and Limerick region. The WREN project is currently co-funded by the Irish Government through the Department of Justice and Equality and the European Social Fund as part of the ESF Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) 2014-2020 and has been operated in those regions by two local development offices.

CUMUS Programme: The six-week Cumus programme, was designed and delivered by the Rubicon Centre in 2016-2017. The programme helped to build Female Entrepreneurship Capacity in the region, by helping women to develop the skills to research and launch their new business ventures. The programme delivered a mixture of 1:1 training, workshops and peer to peer learning, culminating in a presentation and showcase of their business. During the course, participants were provided with the tools they need to grow and develop their business including; idea evaluation, business planning, market research, business funding, financial planning, business models, presentation skills and business development. This initiative was delivered in local communities with all the participants coming from within 20km of the town or village.

The EXXCEL programme (2014 – ongoing) is a six month STEM-focused, part-time female-only program funded by Enterprise Ireland and run in the Rubicon Incubator Centre in MTU. Exxcel is aimed at busy female entrepreneurs with high growth and export potential ideas. Participants undertake modules on different business topics on Saturdays, are supported by on-going, one-to-one mentoring and coaching, with the opportunity to remain in full-time employment, whilst validating their business ideas with their mentors and the Programme Manager. An investor ready business plan is targeted as a key output of the programme.

With an impressive beyond-the-incubator survival rate of 73%, the Rubicon Incubator reports that 16% of all of their incubator start-ups have been female-led, with a further 3% with joint male and female founders. Recent trends show higher numbers of women entrepreneurs with slow increases in the STEM area and a rapidly increasing trend of women entrepreneurs with a focus on new forms of media.

National Support Schemes for Women Entrepreneurship

For growth potential businesses, Enterprise Ireland offer three capability building programmes that are women entrepreneur focused: (1) [Going for Growth](#), (2) [EXXCEL Female Entrepreneurship](#) at the Rubicon Centre in MTU and (3) [Innovate Programme](#) at the Dublin Business Innovation Centre.

Going for Growth is a free, female-only programme that was started as a support network for female entrepreneurs. Enterprise Ireland and KPMG fund the programme which offers monthly meetings with experienced female led entrepreneurs that provide a round-table mentoring service to small groups of female business owners. The programme also provides access to network with other leading entrepreneurs.

The **Competitive Female Feasibility Fund** is run by Enterprise Ireland, with the objective of helping female entrepreneurs investigate the viability of their business becoming a High Potential Startup (HPSU). The maximum grant available is €25,000.

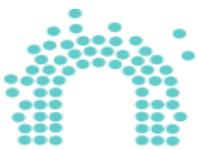
The **Female Competitive Start Fund** is also run by Enterprise Ireland and aims to accelerate the growth of female-led businesses that have the potential to make an impression in global markets. The maximum support available is €50,000 for a 10% ordinary equity stake in the startup. They must also be operating in the areas of manufacturing or internationally traded services, must be less than five years old and not have annual revenues of over €60,000

This female targetted and inclusive approach saw a five-fold increase in the number of female applicants, who perhaps responded to the direct female call. Successful applicants are prepared to the level of seed investor readiness

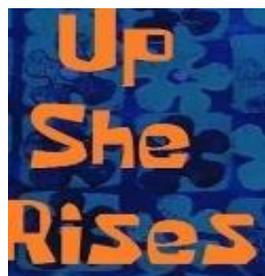
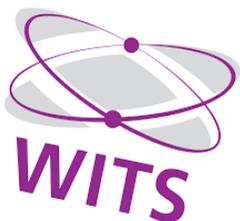
Networking and Role Models

In Ireland, the main women's networking organisations are Network Ireland, Women in Business, and the Enterprising Women Network. Some regions have provided support via the Local Enterprise Offices (state support agencies) and have created female-focused networks such as Women in Business and the Enterprising Women Network. Network Ireland was established in 1983, it has 8 branches spread across the country and currently has approximately 500 members. It was created to support the professional and personal development of women. Network Ireland membership is made up of a very diverse group of women, from budding entrepreneurs, SME owners, professionals, and leaders in indigenous and multinational organisations to non-profits, charities, and the public sector. They are committed to promoting diversity and equality, entrepreneurship, and leadership development.

Role models and success stories promote the promise of entrepreneurship to others of similar backgrounds. Many successful female entrepreneurs are generous in offering their time to support new ventures. Promotional events, including National Women's Enterprise Day and the International Women's Business Conference, offer female entrepreneurs showcase opportunities.



Network
Ireland



**Cork
Chamber**
Advancing business together

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NDRCC BEST PLACE TO START



Meso Level Ireland/Cork

This regional analysis is based on four ecosystem target groups:

- A) Entrepreneurship educators
- B) Program managers and other ecosystem stakeholders
- C) Students (including alumni) and program participants
- D) Women entrepreneurs.

Interviews were analysed to examine the data related to four thematic areas, that have been identified as important through a prior WeRin literature review. That review identified key thematic areas including role models, networks, social safety and social role model theory. It is hoped that the data here will inform the next WeRin project phases and help to design and develop training materials to develop a gender-inclusive ecosystem.



Entrepreneurship Educators

11 Entrepreneurship Educators were interviewed. Educators range in age from 40 to 65 years of age and 8 are Female. All are educated to Masters Level or above, with 5 holding doctoral degrees and 2 currently enrolled as PhD students, alongside their lecturing work. Educators are teaching on both mandatory and elective modules and programs. 7 Educators work in MTU and the other educators were from 4 other HEIs.

All Educators had 6+ years of general career experience. Assistant-lecturer to senior lecturer levels were polled. The number of network memberships ranged from 0 to 10 with the average between 3 and 4 networks for the sample.

Role Models

Educators nominated a wide variety of role models and were aware of a male dominance in entrepreneurial role models in the media.

Educators nominated some of the usual suspects, such as Elon Musk, but female role models were also mentioned by many educators, with local role models and particularly alumni role models reported as more accessible and relatable for students. One male educator indicated that he was becoming more aware of the need to balance gender in the selection of role models. Educators within MTU mentioned the on-campus incubator The Rubicon as a valuable source of role models.

Most educators state they try to maintain gender balance when presenting role models, however, they also report trying to balance role models by phase of entrepreneurship and to include role models who have experienced failure. Many invite student entrepreneurs or alumni as role models.

Networking

Educators report on average belonging to 3-4 networks,. These networks include university networks that promote and support teaching of entrepreneurship, the **Accelerating Campus Entrepreneurship** and the **Community of Practice for Entrepreneurship Educators and Researchers** were identified by many educators as useful to keep them in touch with current research and practice. One educator reported that “Even things like network building, you know, staff are fairly isolated”. Others mentioned the difficulty of networking with a high number of lecturing hours leaving little time to network. Most commonly LinkedIn was the network promoted to students and one male educator mentioned two female students reporting inappropriate comments.

“It's not just about male/female. It's about diverse, culturally diverse” [EED7]

Social Safety

Entrepreneurship classes are reported as having various gender balances depending on module and base discipline. All educators stated that classes are not very ethnically diverse, with few

non-Irish students. The few social safety incidents mentioned reported intersectional problems and underlying barriers, such as disability or mental health problems.

‘And sometimes people from the minority will come and say, ‘I wish you hadn't said that. I just want to be anonymous in here’. [EED3]

Educators noticed a reluctance in students to work with those students whose English knowledge was limited or those with reputations for slacking. Some educators report that they ensure that no female or male student is the sole person of a particular gender within a class project group, with one educator stating they use software to help with team balancing. Gender is not discussed in class by any educator.

Two women educators reported gender issues dealing with traditional class groups (in this instance agricultural students). These educators reported that these students were a difficult group to manage, despite one female educator with a farming background, pointing to a possible gender issue. The second female educator has requested not to teach this group and module again. One educator reported discrimination issues on returning to work in her institution after maternity leave. She now works in a different HEI.

Approximately half of the lecturers had received some unconscious bias training, mostly as part of the wider university, but none reported it as directly useful for practice. Most educators reported no experience with having to deal with gender related social safety complaints or incidents in class. Equality and equity appear to be assumed and there was consensus that:

We've gotten to a stage where that generation Z are very open and very accepting [EED1].

Social Role Theory

"I think a lot of women think because they have children, they can't have a career."
[EED1 - F]

Some educators expressed concern that 'selling your own hoodies' or 'a mobile cafe' is considered entrepreneurial by many students and were worried by the lack of creativity of ideas produced by students. Educators reported a bias towards 'traditional female type sectors in female students' business ideas (in beauty, fashion or health).

"At undergraduate level. I do find female students seem to be geared towards that and the lifestyle type of stuff is stereotypically cool"

Two educators .[EED3, EED4] pointed to universal design as having potential to overcome gender issues in education.

Educators pointed both positively and negatively to the role of social media and social influencers.

"I do think that social media influencers have helped promote female entrepreneurship a lot. And I know it's a very difficult industry to break into, but there are so many female social media influencers now that have built up business empires for themselves"

This positive viewpoint is counterbalanced by one educator's awareness of a social bias against social media female entrepreneurs

"I wanted more females and to show the work that goes into it because I've heard people say she's dumb [Instagram beauty business], you know. But of course, she's not dumb. She's got her own successful business. She's the opposite of dumb" [EED2 - F]

Entrepreneurship Educators Testimonials

Role Models

Experienced Entrepreneurship Educator and PhD student focused on Social Entrepreneurship

“

“The top ten entrepreneurs of the world are all male and that is a misrepresentation of entrepreneurship.”

Networking

Educator and program manager outside of Munster with a rural focus.

“

“The women in business that I am connected with, they would feel that women are completely alienated, particularly women that aren't in tech.”

Social Safety

Male Educator reports increasing number of women in their sector and class

“

“No, and maybe we should [discuss gender equality in class]. I know that is not something that we do and we probably take for granted.”

Social Role Theory

Recent PhD graduate and experienced educator reported discrimination when she returned to her job after maternity leave.

“

“Even when we finish our PhDs, we [women] are still questioning ourselves, you know that sort of way.”



Stakeholders & Program Managers

Stakeholders ranged in age from 38 – 55 years and three were women. The five stakeholders included three participants from Local Enterprise offices in Cork, one participant from Enterprise Ireland and one participant from the enterprise development office in Cork County Council. The 6 Program Managers ranged from 29 - 60 years and three were male. Experience ranged from managing incubation centres and direct enterprise development programs, both mixed gender and female-only.

All six program managers and three stakeholders were educated to Masters degree. Program Managers averaged membership of four networks (range 2-10). Stakeholders averaged between three and four (range 0-9) networks. No program manager had less than six years and four of them had 25+ years professional experience. All Stakeholders had at least 11 years professional experience.

Role Models

The stakeholders agree that there is not a typical entrepreneur. For role models, the Apple story and Arthur Guinness and Dragon's Den were mentioned, alongside local entrepreneurs. Family role models, mothers and grandmothers, were identified.

"Strong female role models early in life. I think, are a great way of actually removing any bias be it conscious or unconscious or otherwise." [S1-M-LEO]

Female interviewees pointed to a lack of relatable female role models.

I think one thing women probably are lacking a lot of the time is role models in terms of just people that they know or can see in the same space. [S2-F-CorkCoCo]

Typical characteristics of an entrepreneur included being driven, courage, determination, hard-working and being good at-risk calculation.

Across county level, at regional level, and then at national levels, there is certain amount of networking and that I consider to be more formal networking [S2 -F]

Stakeholders network with other stakeholders (HEIs, local groups, Chamber of Commerce etc.) and with other enterprise agencies regularly, particularly at management level. Many serve on boards and regularly meet a wide range of stakeholders. Both formal and informal networking were identified by stakeholders, as well as mixed gender networking and women-only supports.

"So, there's a high level of interaction, so formal and quite a lot informal " [S1-M]

And I'm not a member of a female network, and I suppose, I've always worked in male dominated jobs [S2-F]

For entrepreneurs, networking is considered important by all of the stakeholders interviewed, but it must have a business focus or goal.

"I don't necessarily think there's a negative side to doing a female only thing, if only just to get the participants used to the idea of networking and used to the idea of it being a useful tool"

Most were positive about the benefits of women-only support networks, with cliques identified as a drawback. One stakeholder indicated that it helped some women to get started in networking, likening it to training wheels when learning to cycle.

This stakeholder pointed to the supportive network as an outcome of Women in business programs.

"A business buddy system that kind of comes up out of it, in that a lot of them will stay in touch with each other, but positively, to kind of help each other and reinforce each other" [S1 -M]

One stakeholder [S5-F] indicated that she would promote women only networks when she is talking to women's groups and women entrepreneurs but would mention more mixed gender network groups in general mixed gender audiences.

Enterprise Ireland is beginning to look at gaps in the ecosystem between small businesses traditionally supported by the Local Enterprise Offices and growth potential for women entrepreneurs. Difficulties remain in balancing the Venture/Angel investment where the percentage of women is still negligible.

"There are particular challenges on us [support agencies], but like it or lump it, you are not going to change the composition of the angel or VC Community overnight."

Social Safety

All stakeholders stated they have an 'open door' policy and that they are equally accessible for all. No stakeholder reported directly experiencing any social safety issues/complaints.

No stakeholder believed that they, or their colleagues would act in a biased way based on gender, ethnicity, or minority status. Potential bias in funding for women was attributed to them likely starting lifestyle businesses, ineligible for enterprise support funding. One stakeholder [S1-M] did point to some unconscious biases referred to as 'residual elements'.

"If you look at a younger woman in her 20s early 30s. Do people look at her and say she's probably only biding her time until she takes time out? Unfortunately, there's an element of that."

He reported a general conversation with a male acquaintance about a woman, known to both, who returned to work from maternity leave.

"She's just back after having her first child. ... but I suppose you know she should be doubling up anytime now and we will be getting the next doctor's note to say that she's off again' and the reason I say this, the same guy, I don't think there is a misogynistic bone in his body." [S1-M]

Women felt the ecosystem is improving, with barriers remaining. Diversity of opinion about the ecosystem shows in the range of opinions.

"I mean, it certainly is still a boys club." [S3-F]

As a woman. I probably will always be championing women and younger women particularly, because I think there's a lot of barriers still there, but again I don't think it's by design. [S2-F]

Social Role Theory

At regional level, the LEOs confirm that mostly women are eligible for training with far fewer receiving funding. Training numbers for females also include employees, so higher female numbers in training does not count only women CEOs or Founders. The Enterprise Ireland stakeholder too refers to ongoing development of useful metrics for women entrepreneurs.

The stakeholder from Enterprise Ireland indicated the complexity of making a gender inclusive ecosystem.

"People wriggle uncomfortably when you talk about it because really you are talking about psychology and culture and tradition. There is something deeply embedded in us in the way that women and men approach things. You know, It is not simple. Even if you take why was it that women were not applying for the Competitive Start Fund until such time as we said this competitive Start Fund is for women" [S5-F]

One stakeholder indicated that she might point out to female applicants to consider if they were taking on too much alongside family commitments and would never feel that she had to say that to a male.

"Women are as capable as men, if not more capable, And they're supreme multi taskers, but I do feel that women, the confidence is not there and then, the whole responsibility of a home, children would hold a lot of women back and it's partially choice, and you know that's what holds them back" [S3-F]

Imposter syndrome was mentioned by all groups interviewed. One stakeholder indicated that we will have an inclusive ecosystem when we can replace women's imposter syndrome with an

"I actually belong here syndrome" [S1-M]

Stakeholder Quotes

Social Safety

Stakeholder – LEO Cork - Female

“

“I think the role of women in society - you know, we have a long way to get us on a level playing pitch”.

Role Models

Stakeholder LEO manager, Cork - Male

“

“Strong female role models early in life. I think, are a great way of actually removing any bias be it conscious or unconscious or otherwise.”

Social Role Theory

Stakeholder -LEO Advisor (Cork) - Female

“

“I've had a single mom, recently separated, set up her own business. And it's very successful now. It's employing five people but it wasn't a thing you know she didn't make a drama out of it, you know it was just she was practical”.

Networking

Enterprise Developer with County Council

“

“They're not all equally visible. If you were starting out in the morning, I think a lot of entrepreneurs don't know, probably have no idea of the supports that are out there or what's available to them, even within universities or research centres”.



Program managers

Key entrepreneurial characteristics

- Risk-taking
- Passion
- Drive
- Creativity
- Persistence
- Communicator
- Ability to Adapt
- Extroversion, Energy & Enthusiasm
- Not afraid of either being in debt or having no security.

Role Models

All program managers agreed that there is no typical entrepreneur, although different types were mentioned. One manager pointed out that some people like the idea of being an entrepreneur more than the reality of it. All provided examples of female role models and often the role models had graduated from the programs or incubators. Two of the three female managers were also part-time entrepreneurs. Program managers were conscious of growth or jobs potential when evaluating business ideas.

“good thought, provoking question there. The reason I hesitate,, first of all is I think the people that first of all come to mind are probably stronger in the scaling of the business” [PM4-M]

One program manager [F] expressed admiration for a female entrepreneur who was extremely successful who grew her business organically. Three program managers reported that when seeking role models that it was easier to get a male entrepreneur to agree to talk to a group than a female. One manager estimated that this was between 5 and 10 times more difficult. One program manager [F] stated that the men tended to just say yes where women entrepreneurs wanted more information and to know how they could be relevant for the target group. This echoes a female entrepreneurs comments that she would say no to being a role model, because she was often just too busy.

Networking

Directors/Senior Managers are networked and meet with their counterparts regularly. Two women running programmes reported that they do not get the opportunity to network and share best practice, pointing to the potential in the future building of a community of practice by the WeRin project.

All expressed the importance of networking for entrepreneurs, with opportunities provided for both formal and informal networking. Some program managers distinguished between student entrepreneurship networks and programs such as New Frontiers that are not tied to any graduate program. As part of a student incubator, networking is considered to be very important, with the class cohort a first support network, the associated incubator another.

“So, we built it into the program in terms of who's who in the ecosystem” [PM3-F]

Mixed responses to women's only networks and programs were noted. Some favour open networks and some trying women only to increase applicants in the technology sector.

“What if you're running a monthly women's network? Does that not mean that your other network is going to become a men's network? Are the women going to be twice as networked as everybody else? Actually, let's call it the open networks are very open and I see males and females interacting. And I think the likes of a Cork BIC, for example, you see a good representation of successful female executives at those events as well. And they are all pretty balanced as I would see it “ [PM4-M]

“One of the ideas is to create a female only entrepreneur competition to encourage people to come out of the woodwork and just maybe see, as a starting point, if that will yield anything”. [PM5- M]

Social Safety

No program manger reported any issues with social safety on programs. One manager mentioned a few older male business mentors as potentially acting in gender biased way to nascent women entrepreneurs. Two program managers [M] had direct experience running women-only training and mixed training programs. Both indicated that they felt there was an openness and trust in the women's only programs and that was not the same in the mixed group programs. For mixed gender programs, merit of the business idea is the criteria for selection

*“Personal growth and it's over the six months it doesn't happen overnight. So it's everybody instilling that confidence in them in a kind of an indirect way.”
[PM6 -F - female only program]*

*“It depends on how you measure underrepresented. Its not that we say this [gender balance] is what our cohort should be made up of and then we're either underachieving on that or not.” 26
[PM4-M]*

"On our New Frontiers, its the 14 best projects is what we go after." [PM1-M- mixed gender program]

Potential long-term consequences of female-only may negatively impact on inclusivity and discourage women from competing in more intense environments and one male manager pointed to a double standard doubting if male only groups would be accepted by women.

"If they see a female program, they probably pigeonhole themselves into the female program and unconsciously discount themselves from other programs. So, I think while it's hugely valuable to encourage females and have those opportunities, I don't know in the longer term of being inclusive that it would benefit us in having a more equal playing field." [PM2- F]

Social Role Theory

Program Managers were conscious of the impact of gender, family and social norms on women entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs. Both men and women reported that work-life balance was more difficult for women, requiring adjustments.

"So a man like me, I can swan into the hotel to an event from five to seven or five to eight and sit there, whereas a female entrepreneur mightn't have that luxury to be able to do that" [PM1-M]

"I suppose I would say maybe a bit harder decision. And yes, there's more of a work life balance to be achieved or it's more stressful because they have more to do. Maybe there's an unfair distribution" [PM5-M]

"to do the work life balance and I couldn't give, couldn't go at the pace that I was going five days but I could for three" [PM3-F]

A focus on back to work for women inspired the first bespoke female only program in MTU and is a current theme in a recent women-only program.

"The PINC program was our first female only program. We looked at a gap in the market where a lot of females who were in the workforce previously left to go home and raise a family. Then, when the last child was ready to

go to school, they were looking for something to do. They always had an idea in their head to try and do something. So we created a program around them. So we did it at times to suit them" [PM1-M]

"You have raised your family, they're in school. Now is the time when you have the time to work on the business idea. That's a kind of a common theme" [PM6-F]

"Whether or not it's a lifestyle business, I hate that term because you're still running a business. It makes it sound like it's a joke. But the idea that you may have an ambition, but because of your bandwidth, there are limitations as to how far it can go. And you maybe have to make a decision. There are cut-off points. I've seen that in friends who've run medical practices or physio practices. And, you know, just it came to a decision in terms of the impact it was having on family life. They had to change. And it was the female that had to change you know." [PM5-M]

Program managers both male and female were conscious the business supports targeted for growth may not align with many women entrepreneurs, leading to limiting of entrepreneurial ambition and choices for scale of business, or in the words of one female program manger *different meanings for a successful business.*

"Our start-up support structures to encourage people to raise investment and encourage people to be high potential start-ups mean that you can tend to steer people down the road that may not necessarily align with their own interests, their own personal ambitions, if you like. I think a number of the females that we have worked with would have been somewhat limiting in their ambition, if I can phrase it that way, or scaling for the business, because they were mindful of family priorities and other things that they were also trying to juggle in there" [PM4-M]

Program Manager Quotes

Social Safety

Programme Manager on female only program

“Sometimes ladies who do EXXCEL will do New Frontiers or Ignite as well. So it's an interesting question. They know that it's female only. and it's not an issue. Nobody who got through the screening process said, why are there no men on it, It is just a given”.

Role Models

Program Manager – Female – mixed gender program

“And so I do think we need to be more deliberate about asking females [role models]. They mightn't be as forthcoming as if you ask the male”.

Social Role Theory

Program Director – mixed gender with extensive entrepreneurship and industry experience

“They want to see a scalable business requiring lots of VC investment with some technology behind it. And all that kind of stuff, lots of females aren't necessarily on that journey. And therefore, the overt supports maybe aren't quite as obvious”.

Networking

Program Manager - Female

“I think they [female only networks] were hugely valuable for females, but I think it's not a long term approach to inclusive”.

Program Mangers

Female Only Programs

PINC program
EXXCEL program

General Programs

New Frontiers
(Enterprise Ireland)

Incubators

Rubicon MTU.
Ignite and UCC



Students & Alumni

26 participants (4 Male). Students (19) & alumni (7) were interviewed. Ages ranged from 20 -55 years averaging 27.5 Years. 15 students were undergraduates, 9 at Masters level, and 2 entrepreneurship-based PhD students. All were taking or had partaken in an entrepreneurship module or program. 19 students were based in Cork HEIs, 5 in the wider Munster region, and 1 in Dublin. 8 students/alumni were not in any business networks. 8 professional networks were listed, with the average network membership between 1-2 networks. Ten students reported <2 years professional experience, 8 with 2-5 years, 2 with 6-10 years, and 6 with 11-24 years.

Of the Alumni, 2 are currently business founders. Students outside of formal degree-based modules mentioned programs such as, Student Inc, EXXCEL (female only STEM focus), European Creative Futures and the Enterprise internships. Many students had their own small businesses or were working part-time in entrepreneurial firms.

Business Growth



Students/alumni often confirmed that they were working to save up enough to be able to start up their businesses and very few had plans to seek outside investment in the wider entrepreneurial ecosystem. Some expressed fear/serious reluctance to take on financial loans with a stated preference for saving to grow independently over seeking investment.

“There's a huge focus on high growth and awards and potential to export, funding, winning funding investors, you hear all that but not the local businesses down the road”.
[ST23]

Five of seven Alumni were employees with 2 (1 male) still active in entrepreneurship. A mature female student and entrepreneur was enrolled on Masters in Entrepreneurship to explore a new business.

“And making the most [money] wouldn't really, I suppose it would motivate me. But it's more the impact that the business has”. [ST1]

“Tech. businesses are all in at the moment”.
[ST4]

Role Models

Many students pointed to family members, in many cases it was a dad, uncle or a family business, in some cases the role model was female, a mother or aunt or friend.

"If entrepreneurs had a trait, they all break the norm." [ST1]

"Typical entrepreneur, honestly, probably for myself. I always kind of thought of my dad as the entrepreneur. And even though my mom always had the ideas" [ST3 – family business background]

Instagram provided a further source of their personal role models and influencers, with key role model characteristics identified as transparency, honesty or authenticity. Other entrepreneurial characteristics identified by students included drive, not afraid to fail, confident, empathy, risk taking, great at sales, resilience, passion, and creativity,

Within classes or modules some still reported the traditional successful male stereotypes were used as role models, although many identified that female role models were considered and introduced in class. Many were aware of female role models through existing programs for women, such as the EXXCEL program, although more sectoral variety would be welcome. As a counterpoint, one student pointed to an element of tokenism and stated that she felt strongly about bringing in women entrepreneurs because they are women and wanted it to be more about the inspiration, ideas and why an entrepreneur is great.

Networking

Students appeared to be more familiar and comfortable with the on-campus entrepreneurial ecosystem and less familiar with the wider ecosystem outside of the HEIs. Many of the them were aware of the on-campus incubators as a first source of support for a new business idea. They appeared, in many cases, to be less aware of supports that are available outside of the university.

Some students identified the potential to feel isolated or lonely as a negative aspect of entrepreneurship that could be offset by community support.

"I wouldn't really be expecting necessarily to be making the big bucks. But I think having like someone or a group of people who, have shown that they really care about you and that they will support you, I think that's quite an admirable and good thing. That you don't automatically think of, but to have your own little community." [ST25]

Students were encouraged to network by lecturers through competitions, societies and were encouraged to join a professional body, where relevant. Otherwise, LinkedIn was most often mentioned by students as the network encouraged by lecturers. Many students reported difficulty in building a professional network on LinkedIn, with requests to connect often ignored. This they attributed to ageism or being a student.

For a male alumni [entrepreneur]

"Inclusivity not like creating female only, but like female focused and then men can join if they want There's some events where I'd love to talk with people but we [men] weren't allowed to go in." [ST20]

For a female alumni

"I think it [female only EXXCEL program] was a more inclusive environment. I felt that everybody had a voice" [ST23]

Social Safety

Regarding inclusivity, no male students volunteered to be interviewed and they were more difficult to access for interview. The 4 male students/alumni (2 were non-Irish) were recruited through recommendations by a male program manager. One male alumni stated that his girlfriend warned him to be careful as he could get into trouble talking about gender and he initially wondered if he would have anything relevant to contribute. One media student reported that when she approached a STEM group to include the ARTs and rebrand as STEAM, she was dismissed and was told that 'would lower the tone' of the STEM group.

Role Models

Students confirmed variability in gender balance in their classes, depending on discipline and confirmed little diversity in class groups. Most reported no gender-based problems working in or selecting class groups and confirmed in many cases, the educators' comments about slacking being the key reason for exclusion of other students. Students entered third level from both mixed schools and from single gender schools. For those coming from all-girls schools, some reported an adjustment ("*you feel you're being judged more and slightly uncomfortable sometimes*" [ST23]).

In exploring confidence, many female students specifically referred to a lack of confidence in first year with confidence improving over the course of their degree. One instance of negative gendered text abuse was reported when reporting action was taken against a male student based on lack of contribution to the team. A further student indicated that when she and a male student both approached a male third-party for help, the male student received a response, and she got no reply which she attributed to gender. One student found that her work in digital photography was often used without attributing the work to her and she struggles to get her complaints taken seriously and to get paid for her work.

Social Role Model Theory

Students questioned gendered language around women entrepreneurship and pointed to terms such as 'girl boss' or 'mumpreneur' as unnecessary and potentially subversively dismissive. Only a few female students reported that some male students automatically expected them to organise their class team. Some expressed concern that standing up for themselves would be perceived negatively, effectively a double standard. [A man is assertive, and a woman is a nag]

"It is kind of that image thing. Yeah., that they don't want to seem bossy or pushy." [ST23]

Many female students reported that the females tended to be more self-deprecating but also more prepared for class than the male students.

"Not to sound cocky, but like, I have more work

[in own business] coming to me than I can keep up with" [ST2]

From a male alumni view, a previous attendee of the Student Inc. program:

"I thought that the girls on the program worked a lot more and were a lot more action ready." [ST20 -M]

Work-life balance featured alongside family concerns as barriers to entrepreneurship for women students and alumni:

"There's an opening there and there's money to be made, but the thing that holds me back now, like is the fact that my children are so small. Like, I just I can't, like, I just wouldn't." [ST4]

"I think it is always in the back of women's minds as well, but like that you want to have children you want to have a family and you need to have a balance and if you are going to be working in one of these huge jobs, something has to give."[ST2]

"I think it is becoming more equalled out, more stay-at-home fathers and so on". [ST6]

Students & Alumni Quotes

Role Models

Student – experience as an Enterprise Intern

“

“You know, the whole 2020 women in sport. If you can see it, you can be it!”

Networking

Alumni Student

“

“When I walk into the room in a networking situation where I have to speak to somebody else that I don't know. I do not like that”. [ST4 - Alumni]

Social Safety

Student Entrepreneur with social media business

“

“You're selling your business, but you're also selling yourself”.

Social Role Theory

Alumni Student PhD level with an undeveloped entrepreneurial idea

“

“There's an opening there and there's money to be made, but the thing that holds me back now, is definitely the fact that my children are so small. Like, I just, I can't, I just wouldn't”.



Women Entrepreneurs

Twenty women entrepreneurs were interviewed, aged 25 – 60 years with an average age of 38 years. 15 had an international business focus, 4 a national focus, and 1 had a regional focus. Businesses were based in Cork (16), Tipperary (3), and Dublin (1). Two Women had doctorates, 8 had Masters level and a further 8 had bachelor degrees, with 2 older women reporting third-level diplomas.

12 women had more than 11 years professional experience. 9 stated that they were not a member of any professional network. Average professional network membership was between 1 and 2 networks and was the 5 maximum networks for this group.

Business Sectors:

- 1 Life Sciences
- 2 Food,
- 2 Energy/Sustainability,
- 3 Education
- 2 Cosmetics,
- 5 Health/Fitness/Education,
- 5 Services (Recruitment/Marketplace/Rental)

Role Models

For some women entrepreneurs, their role models are sectoral-based and others selected successful female entrepreneurs. Many pointed to improved wider availability of women entrepreneurs as role models for young aspiring entrepreneurial women. A few women entrepreneurs report not having any particular role model/s and pointed to eclectically taking the bits they like from many different entrepreneurs. Where women selected male role models they either mentioned the 'traditional' stereotypical male role models or they tended to mention **transparency, honesty** and **empathy** as the characteristics that they admire in the chosen role model, often based locally or accessible online. For one entrepreneur there was a peer effect.

"And it was having my peers also in entrepreneurship definitely really helped. It was like, it's huge and it's intimidating but, if I know he can do it, I know I can do it" [FE17]

Other entrepreneurial characteristics included **ambition, passion, persistence, adaptability, confidence, drive, resilience and patience.**

When asked if they themselves are role models for others, most hoped that they would pass on the help they received themselves. Some based this role model status on having received calls for information from other early-stage entrepreneurs and this ties in with a comment by a program manager that women role model entrepreneurs often take other less experienced women entrepreneurs 'under their wing'.

"I've definitely talked to people that are earlier in their journey than I am. And I think I am a role model in some sense." [FE2]

Networking

Networking was reported to have changed drastically with the Covid-19 pandemic. Many mentioned a large difference in networking online versus in person.

"I do enjoy networking more in person though, where you meet people and kind of get an energy from them, more so than virtual." [FE13]

Most of the experienced women entrepreneurs had attended more than one entrepreneurship program with EXXCEL, New Frontiers, WREN, Ignite, Go for Growth programmes mentioned by interviewees. Accelerator and Incubator networks were pointed to as a first port of call for many of the women entrepreneurs. Many mentioned the women's only business support networks, with as found in the other stakeholder groups, a mixed response on membership.

Shortage of time in a busy schedule was identified as a key barrier for those who enjoy networking *"I love networking, love it. I don't always have time but I love it."* [FE16] with others not feeling comfortable at networking events and feeling forced to do them.

"Going to network chamber and the girls would be up in the high heels and the full face, the makeup, the hair would be unreal looking. And there's me that wears no makeup." [FE10]

Mentoring was mentioned by many as a vital area of support that can be difficult to secure. Support and information sharing were mentioned as key benefits.

It's a group of friends that you're getting valuable feedback from. I had a promo video done and I sent it to both the New Frontiers group and the Going for Growth group. And I was just expecting a 'Yeah, it's great' and got back 'Maybe do this' and those paragraphs of feedback, like, Wow! This is really, really valuable to get that information. So, I love it. And I think it's great to be able to have that group." [FE13]

Business Growth

"There seems to be missing steps, you know, for support" [WE9]

"So not everything has to be a unicorn!" [WE8].



Social Safety

Some women entrepreneurs reported biased interactions or gendered assumptions with mostly older males 'male, pale and stale' [S1] in the entrepreneurship support services and in funding.

"So not only am I a woman, but my products are [female personal hygiene]. So, if you are speaking to men, if you're speaking to one man, one investor, then they can kind of treat you, there is a little bit of sexism there. They can look at your looks even, where are you from, that you are not from the networks, maybe. They can judge you by that. And so, I had a few examples like that. But at the same time, I also met amazing people and amazing men who are open to talk about it. So, it's very individual." [WE15]

One woman believed she was rejected for funding and a male at the same stage in the same sector was selected.

"And I would have gotten a grant prior to this from the same organisation so clearly the industry and the business idea was not something that was doubted then. So maybe there's inequality there in relation to that funding. That will be my experience." [WE3]

Getting used to hearing no and continuing to get a yes, was an area identified as needing support by many women entrepreneurs.

"If I wasn't confident, I definitely would not be applying for grants on a daily basis. It's like an emotional rollercoaster. You ever see the graph of living a start-up life and it's like up and down, up and down! I think if I wasn't confident, I still wouldn't be trying." [WE2]

Male dominance featured in HBAN (Halo Business Angel Network) estimated as 1 woman out of 15 and a reason to seek women only supports.

"I try my best to surround myself with women that are women in business, like those programs, the Acorns programs, people I know that can potentially help or who could have a contact that could help me grow that bit further." [WE9]

Social Role Theory

"Women have a very different way. And it's not about equality or lack of equality or lack of opportunities. It's just women live in a very different life from a very, very different energy. So, we need supports in different ways." [WE1]

Many felt that women have a different approach to entrepreneurship to men, and that women were less likely to bluff or overestimate on potential business earnings when pitching or applying for investment. Many women entrepreneurs did feel that they must work harder to get to the same outcome as a man and many indicated that they may overprepare.

"I don't know why we should be putting ourselves in that competitive mindset, I suppose, in that, women have to work harder to do this. Like technically speaking, it should be on the balanced scale", [WE11]

One female entrepreneur with growth aspirations clearly states that she has no plans to have children when applying for business funding and she indicated that she feels she benefits when she 'act[s] like a male' in a male dominated sector. Another woman entrepreneur states,

"And the banks, they are very slow with the finance. Huge drawback. If you go in as a man, you'd probably be handed it twice as fast as a woman, you have to really fight for your place as a woman." [WE16]

"I like to see the way they have programs at the minute for Female Entrepreneurship. I do look forward to a day when there isn't any female programs. I don't mean that because I'm accepting them. But I think if there are no female programs, then it means that time has evolved and that there's gender equality and there's 50 50 representation on both sides. So, I do look forward to that day, but I think it's a it's a good while away." [FE9]

Female Entrepreneur Quotes

Social Safety

WE6

Role Models

WE8

“I have sought out one or two women because I wanted a female mentor instead of being spoken at and being talked with, you know, and it's just a different headspace altogether.”

“So, you're trying to often pitch products and pitch things to a mindset of a very specific demographic. And then if they are male as well, it can be very challenging to overcome whatever stereotypes and biases”.

Social Role Theory

WE 14 and WE5

Networking

WE1

“If you are in a networking group with women, what women need is support. You know, they need someplace that they can go with other women who have the same things going on with them. I mean again would I ever imagine a man on a golf course going, ‘oh, I'm so exhausted I have been up all night’”.

“In my eyes anyway, there's more weight given to a male entrepreneur”.

“It's not about women stepping up and becoming the same as the men.”

Main conclusions

Approaches to Gender

There was no consensus in the data of the **women only** versus an equal but **mixed gender** ecosystem. Very diverse approaches to gender included women entrepreneurs and students who were very comfortable in the women only settings and those who would avoid women only settings completely. Some participants stated that a women only approach was very limiting and did not lead to eventual equality and inclusivity. They believed it divided entrepreneurship into a 'them and us', that should be unnecessary.

Justification for women only approaches from stakeholders were to reach equity, with this becoming obsolete when equal numbers are attained. There was a *"we have to do something"* view showing that there is work to do to progress women entrepreneurship that is evidence based. Negative views were expressed about environments with only male or only female. All female work environments were mentioned by many groups as having been very difficult work-places and many women found the support of women-only enterprise networks to be helpful.

Reaching equity in the ecosystem through quotas was also not considered to be ideal. Some women expressed the concern that quotas raise questions about women's 'merit' and legitimacy. Some participants pointed to universal design offering potential solutions.

Business Growth

Entrepreneurship is often associated with 'start-up, scale up and sell up'. Stakeholder interviews confirmed that the most enterprise supports are targeted to those with scaling and export potential, in manufacturing or internally traded services. These interviews pointed to lifestyle businesses as often excluding women from financial supports, with one stakeholder referring to it as simple job replacement or self-employment.

Students were mostly focused on self-employment ideas – often online businesses. Most did not expect to employ others, at least at first and very few would consider taking on debt or investment towards starting a business. Some students, with family, home and mortgage aspirations pointed to entrepreneurship's norm of focused working 24/7 as a barrier for them.



Main conclusions

Entrepreneurship modules are few, often electives and there is no basic degree in entrepreneurship, with one educator calling for a progression framework. Few educators reported focusing on business growth as most students are taught the business model canvas, business plan and entrepreneurial mindset, with a focus on generating business ideas, and with an eye to graduate employability skills. Investment, venture capital and angel funding were areas pointed to by the women entrepreneurs as male dominated with one entrepreneur seeing this as an opportunity for women in the future. Women entrepreneurs on a growth path spoke about 'organic growth' and sustainable business and indicated that the 'grow to sell' approach in acceleration was stressful and potentially unnecessary. They confirmed that appearing to a funding panel of males was daunting and some thought that, for female-targeted businesses, understanding of the target market would be lacking to achieve investment.

Sectoral preferences and structural exclusion

Female students and entrepreneurs appear to consider their other roles and commitments when setting or not setting their entrepreneurial goals, with one woman openly stating her decision not to have a family is related to being considered eligible for business investment and an alumni who couldn't consider entrepreneurship while her children are young. Lifestyle business and related work life-balance featured in all segments of the data gathered. These businesses are not as well supported as the HPSU, with potential for structural gender inequity.

Heterogeneity

Within this report the participants were categorised as being students/alumni, women entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship educators, program managers and external stakeholders. For this report, interviews were categorised based on the interview protocol applied. During the interviews, it transpired that many of the students, even those who were not currently on an entrepreneurship program, had their own businesses already and were mostly trading online. One mature woman was engaged on a Masters program to get her newest venture off the ground and to rebuild her entrepreneurial network. Many of the women entrepreneurs were still actively engaged in support programs, such as New Frontiers, WREN. Similarly, two educators were current PhD students alongside their lecturing duties and many of the educators were also currently entrepreneurially active.

Entrepreneurship Education

There is no national progression framework for entrepreneurship and educational offerings in entrepreneurship depend on the region and on the university. Entrants to entrepreneurship comprise both those who may have had enterprise experience in second level and those with no knowledge of the ecosystem, Within MTU, all first-year students take part in a module that includes elements of entrepreneurship, but educators have pointed out that outside of voluntary competitive application for places on the student incubator, students receive very few invitations to explore entrepreneurship. In cross-disciplinary entrepreneurship, classes may be very gender imbalanced, and most educators reported being conscious of student isolation in teams where they are the only male/female in a group/class. There were differences in opinion on whether teaching about gender differences in classes will bring a benefit. One educator stated that if there were reliable statistics, she would incorporate them into classes. A further entrepreneur-educator pointed to the potential to exacerbate differences by focusing on them. Universal design was pointed to as potentially offsetting the gender biases in the system and one stakeholder pointed to examining entrepreneurship through extroversion/introversion as opposed to potentially gendered traits, such as risk. One educator/female entrepreneur believes that improvement will only come when entrepreneurship education can *"articulate the value that women will get from becoming part of this [eco]system"* [EED3].

Inclusive Ecosystems

“How can the program be inclusive of male and female and get them to a level that they're both as equally as great. But they just have different aspirations and different meanings for a successful business, and who are we to judge or to pigeonhole people because they didn't get to their male counterpart's level or they went beyond that.” [PM2 -F]

“But I really feel like the men should be educated on this because, like, you know, the learning has to take place, for both of the genders, for change to actually happen. Both genders have to be on the same page”. [WE11]

“And this is a long term project, I mean you asked me about metrics and its the same internally, everyone's always looking for what's the results are going to be next year. The question is what are the results going to be in twenty years?” [S5 -F]

“It always kind of baffles me. Why the push for employment? You go to school, and you go to college for employment rather than entrepreneurship.” [ST1]

Recommendations

1. The Macro-level research shows that women's entrepreneurship requires better measurement to track the improvements and progress at both regional and national level.
2. The WeRin data shows a very mixed response to the women only approach. The rationale for women only networks and women only training needs to be better understood within the inclusive ecosystem and a route to long term gender and structural inclusivity needs serious consideration. The women only approach has worked to improve inclusivity and increase the number of women applicants and it needs to be proven for its ability to embed women in a gender inclusive ecosystem (McAdam *et al.* 2019). Long term plans for how a women only approach integrates to true inclusivity for all should be explored.
3. The growth/ unicorn perspective and work-life balance for females should be further studied to examine supports for sustainable growth with further investigation of the effects of the accelerated pace of scale up required for investment. What investment supports can be put in place for more 'organic' growth of business – this could provide a universal approach.
4. (Growth) Funding supports for the more **traditional business sectors** that are associated with women should be given consideration as many women's businesses may fall into the displacement exclusion category and they are eligible only for training support with the LEOs, a structural gender bias in effect.
5. The interviews support that educators and programme managers either have received no unconscious bias training or were unable to apply it directly to their educational practice.
6. Gendered language consideration may benefit women entrepreneurship. It was mentioned by students that they did not see the need for specific terms that point to gender such as 'mumpreneur' or 'girl boss'. The enterprise agencies confirmed that they rely on experience to review the language for advertising and recruitment to programs and do not use any formal checks for gendered language. This is an area for further research. Women apply for women-only programs and apply less often to the 'open to all' category and language may well be one barrier in the self-exclusion from the 'open to all' approach.
7. The data points to potential benefits in a community of practice. One stakeholder pointed to the benefit of training, networking and webinars but regretted that a lack of follow up meant the learnings were not maximised. Two program managers pointed that they never had the opportunity to network and share best practice with others and would welcome the opportunity to share experiences. Educators pointed to the lack of time to develop networks, particularly during semesters.

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