Celebrating International Women’s Day: what we know about women in Swiss entrepreneurship and putting women founders in the spotlight

St. Gallen/Zurich/Lausanne, March 6, 2019 – Increasing the number of female founders in the high-tech startup scene is a constant preoccupation and objective. The celebration of the international’s women day on Friday is the opportunity to share some numbers on female entrepreneurship in the Swiss startup ecosystem showing that the trend is moving upwards, as well as illustrating it with a selection of women entrepreneurs.

“By sharing gender diversity data for our different startup programs operated by Venturelab is one way to contribute to the discussions on gender and high-tech entrepreneurship,” said Jordi Montserrat, co-founder and managing partner of Venturelab. “These number do not represent an exhaustive study, but provide interesting insights and hopefully motivate more women to embrace this career.”

Reviewing Venturelab’s data we discovered 172 entrepreneurial women in leading roles at Swiss startups. To illustrate the rise of women entrepreneurs, we offer a selection of 31 top female entrepreneurs to watch.

Innosuisse Start-up Training 2018 (15% to 38%)
Starting at the training level. The proportion of women among the 393 entrepreneurs in in Innosuisse Start-up Training workshops for business creation and business growth, varied strongly depending on the sector vertical. The data for female participation ranges from 15 percent, in the Advanced Engineering, to 38 percent in the Medtech courses. ICT, the most frequent course, averaged 19 percent, whereas in Biotech, 24 percent of participants were women.

As Innosuisse requires participants to demonstrate their project or company’s strong technological, academic or business model-oriented innovation, which usually requires a degree from one of Switzerland’s university or universities of applied sciences, these numbers are probably correlated with the number of women following a university courses in the respective fields.

Venture Kick 2018 (32%)
Moving from training to building the company, we find Venture Kick, which provides seed stage financing to innovative, science-based startups. About a third of spin-off projects that received Venture Kick support in 2018 included women in their team. Since the start of 2019, Venture Kick has seen a clear increase with 7 of the 12 projects winning stage 1 including women in their team, an impressive 58 percent and a very encouraging signal for the future.

TOP 100 Swiss Startup Award 2018 (28%)
Every September a panel of 100 leading investors and startup experts selected the 100 most innovative and promising Swiss startups. Last year all of the top three startups had women in their founding teams, as well as six of the top ten. Overall teams with women among the founder accounts for 28 percent of those ranked last year.

Venture Leaders 2018 (34%)
Venture Leaders – the swiss startup national teams – have been pitching international investors and networking with their global peers at high-level roadshows around the world since 2001. The selection process requires the startup to choose one team member to represent the company. In 2018, the cumulated number of women selected in Venture Leaders was only 10 percent (5 out of 50), whereas 34% of the companies included women among the founders. Women founders could come forward more often in this case.

Finally, here’s our selection of 31 top female entrepreneurs to watch, some of the real people behind the statistics:
Selina Capol, Martina Hotz, and Aleksandra Iakusheva, co-founders of 5am Games GmbH. The game-makers first product, a multilinear coming of age story told through pen pal letters, encourages players to (re)discover fun with words.

Olga Dubey CEO of AgroSustain SA. The company is developing and commercializing novel, efficient, plant-inspired treatments against a broad range of plant fungal pathogens for post-harvest applications. The entrepreneur's vision led to her inclusion in Forbes' 30 Under 30 for Europe.

"I never felt underestimated as a woman in the start-up community. The entrepreneurial environment in Switzerland is extremely open and friendly. Indeed, there are more men than women, but I believe this ratio is more linked to the high pressure and insecurity than any other factors. My only concern is that some jury members might sometimes find it confusing to judge a woman entrepreneur, but they have to get used to it! Men and women can each bring something unique to their startups, and I believe that only by working closely with each other can we build strong companies."

Madiha Derouazi, CEO and founder of Amal Therapeutics SA. The developer of a colorectal-cancer vaccine raised 33.2 million francs last year. The vaccines, which stimulate the body's own immune system to kill cancerous cells, result from more than 13 years of research by Derouazi.

Lea von Bidder, COO and co-founder of Ava AG. The Zurich, San Francisco and Belgrade-based company, which developed a wristband to accurately track and recognize fertile days, raised $30 million in 2018. Von Bidder, who leads Ava's U.S. business, will become group CEO next year.

Anne Mellano, co-founder of Bestmile SA. The maker of software to manage fleets of vehicles driven by machines or humans, won acceptance for driverless buses among the Swiss public through its 2016 pilot with the country's biggest bus company. Those shuttle-loop services in Sion, Switzerland, have grown to recent trials in Strasbourg, France.

Cristina Rossi, CEO and co-founder of b-rayZ. The imaging specialist is working with radiologists at the University Hospital of Zurich to develop artificial intelligence to make it easier and cheaper to detect abnormalities in breast tissue.

Léa Miggiano, co-founder Carvolution AG. The Swiss car subscription service, which offers vehicle registration, taxes, insurance, maintenance, and tires for a monthly fee, recently raised investment from Zurich venture capitalists Redalpine.

Fabienne Hartmann-Fritsch, Chief Clinical Officer and co-founder of CUTISS AG. The University of Zurich spin-off that develops personalized skin grafts has raised more than 8 million francs.

Daniela Marino, CEO and co-founder of CUTISS AG. The University of Zurich spin-off that develops personalized skin grafts has raised more than 8 million francs. Marino recalls closing her company's financing round the day after giving birth.

"Being a mother and being a CEO require the same soft skills. One needs to be organized, find money, entertain and keep the team focused and passionate about the vision, one needs to be a multitasker and a fast decision maker, never lose your cool, never panic and react positively to stress. Having a company is like having three kids for me! It was my decision to bring all three to life, and I am now responsible for making them all three grow and flourish."

Anna Beltzung, CTO and co-founder of dimpora AG. The engineer's understanding of polymer synthesis is at the foundation of dimpora's fluorine-free, breathable and waterproof material, which may disrupt the outdoor-wear market that currently uses compounds that are potentially harmful to people.

Eugenia Balysheva, CEO of Dotphoton AG. The software company, which uses quantum physics to compress image files without distortion, wants its lossless compression software to let research hospitals and biotech labs store and share machine-readable images more easily, and thus enable AI for health. For Balysheva, entrepreneurship is a "huge responsibility, and also a huge joy. It's what
drives me – that there's something this important that keeps me awake at night. But it doesn't make me feel tired, it makes me feel very resourceful. I have to bring the resources to the team.”

**Anne Schmidt**, CEO of Elthera AG. The company is developing a candidate drug to treat several highly malignant tumor types for clinical testing, and planning to internationalize its investor base with a substantial (CHF 40 million) Series A funding round.

**Michela Puddu**, CEO and co-founder of Haelixa AG. The chemical engineer's company provides green tracer products that can give any solid or fluid a unique fingerprint. Haelixa's clients include companies the oil and cotton industries.

**Özge Karakas**, co-founder of Hi-D Imaging. The ETH engineer is combining advanced scanning, 3D-printing and imaging techniques to find the best type of heart-valve for each individual patient. The technology will reduce complications after-surgery and improves patient recovery and quality of life.

**Séverine Chardonnnens**, CTO of IDUN Technologies AG. The bioengineering company is developing a glueless, skin-friendly adhesion material, inspired by the structure of grasshoppers’ feet, for wearable devices and sensors.

**Mélanie Guittet**, co-founder of INVOLI SA. INVOLI is building software and hardware to monitor low-altitude air traffic, which will make the sky safe for drones and other airspace users, right down to the ground. The company has already deployed its Micro Control Towers on existing telecom infrastructure across 10,000 square kilometers of Switzerland.

**Antonia Bolla**, CEO, and **Lidia Bolla**, co-founders of Jamie & I AG. Creators of an AI-driven, online stylist that learns shoppers' personal styles to curate outfit recommendations.

**Luiza Dobre**, co-founder of Komed Health. The software-maker, which already connects doctors and medical staff securely and simply in 29 Swiss hospitals, is preparing to internationalize aggressively. Dobre relishes the challenges of entrepreneurship:

"You always live a rollercoaster experience, it's the reality of being an entrepreneur. For example, in the morning you've nailed a very important meeting and you think the world is yours, and by the evening something happens on the product or the customer side and you're thinking 'Oh my god, we're going to hell – we're never going to make it.'"

**Aike Festini**, CEO, and **Maite Mihm**, COO, co-founders of LuckaBox Logistics AG. As the Winterthur-based company's flexible, on-demand courier service across urban Switzerland has already won major clients, LuckaBox is expanding in neighbouring countries.

**Deborah Heintze**, COO and co-founder of Lunaphore Technologies SA. The company's automated instruments use a microfluidic technology to perform faster tissue assays of potentially cancerous cells. The company, which has raised more than 11 million francs, brought its first diagnostic device to market in February.

"Having been surrounded mostly by men in several periods of my life, this was not completely new to me when entering the entrepreneurship world – especially in the high-tech field and close to EPFL, where there is a minority of women. I encountered situations where people thought I was the secretary or would not necessarily look at me when talking about technical topics, but this, luckily, was quite rare."

**Zsuzsanna Püspöki**, COO and co-founder of Mirrakoi AG. The company providing software to simulate real-world physical contact when modelling digitally in 3D digital enables everyone with an idea to become a designer.

**Christina Vallgren**, CEO and co-founder of PetoP. The CERN-spin-off is developing a safer, more precise and faster ion beam therapy for cancer treatment.
Dorina Thiess, CEO and co-founder of Piavita AG. Piavita makes wireless, non-invasive device to help vets and owners measure horses’ vital signs. The Zurich-based company won Silicon Valley investors through Thiess’ pitches with Venture Leaders. Thiess recently shared her love of her business career, tweeting:

"Entrepreneurial life at its best: waking up still being stunned about how far our “crazy” idea has come, working every day wt over 30 fantastic team mates, & moving forward in changing equine vets lifes."

Claudia Hoessbacher, co-founder of Polariton Technologies AG. The scientist is commercializing nanoscale technology to make fiber optic communication infrastructure less energy-intensive and four times faster.

Danuta Cichocka, CEO and co-founder of Resistell AG. Resistell has developed to diagnostic device to identify the best antibiotic to treat a particular infection between 10- and 100-times faster than current technology. The speed and accuracy reduce the cost of hospital infections and slow the growth of antibiotic resistance, by helping doctors treat infection with the correct antibiotic first time. Cichocka met half the investors for Resistell’s seed round through Venture Kick. “Having access to Venture Kick’s network is invaluable. Winning stage 3 is a mark of quality for many stakeholders and investors,” Cichocka said.

Meriam Kabbaj, COO and co-founder of Versantis AG. The clinical-stage pharmaceutical company is developing orphan drugs to treat liver and pediatric diseases.

Amélie Béduer, co-founder of Volumina Medical SA. The medtech company has developed an injectable scaffolding that allows the body to rebuild itself after surgery. The technology enables the natural reconstruction of soft tissues, including fat and muscle, as well as glandular, connective and supporting tissues. Volumina Medical's first product will serve women choosing reconstructive therapy after a mastectomy.

About Venturelab
Together with successful founders, key academic and industry partners, Venturelab designs and operates programs to bring the best startup talents to the next level of development. Our mission is to support entrepreneurs towards successful fundraising and business growth throughout the evolution of the company. The Venturelab team, based in offices in Zurich, Lausanne and St Gallen, organized 375 events in 2018, supporting more than 1,000 Swiss startups, which raised 735 million francs in funding during those 12 months. World-class startups. Swiss made.

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Women to watch in the Swiss startup scene