











 PFR Venturesinovo^{vc}

Polish VC Market Outlook 2024



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About the Authors

PFR Ventures

PFR Ventures oversees funds of funds, which, in collaboration with private investors, business angels, and corporations, invest in Venture Capital and Private Equity funds. The primary goal of PFR Ventures is to use this capital to bolster Polish innovative companies at different stages of development. Presently, PFR Ventures manages a portfolio of over 85 funds that have collectively made over 900 investments.

inovo^{vc}

Inovo.vc is a venture capital fund dedicated to supporting the most ambitious entrepreneurs from Poland and the CEE region. We invest in early-stage start-ups, providing funding of up to EUR 4 million to help them establish global brands. Over the past decade, we have backed over 80 entrepreneurs from 35 start-ups, including Booksy, Infermedica, Spacelift, Tidio, and Zowie. Additionally, we have co-invested with leading global VC funds such as Insight Partners, a16z, Gradient Ventures, and Tiger Global, among others. With our three funds, Inovo.vc will oversee more than EUR 160 million in capital.

Local data sources:



2024 highlights

> **142**

businesses received funding

2023: 399
2022: 435
2021: 379
2020: 300

> **493**

EUR m invested

> **147**

funds involved

> **-10%**

decrease in funding value 2024 to 2023*

Europe: -6%
North America: +27%

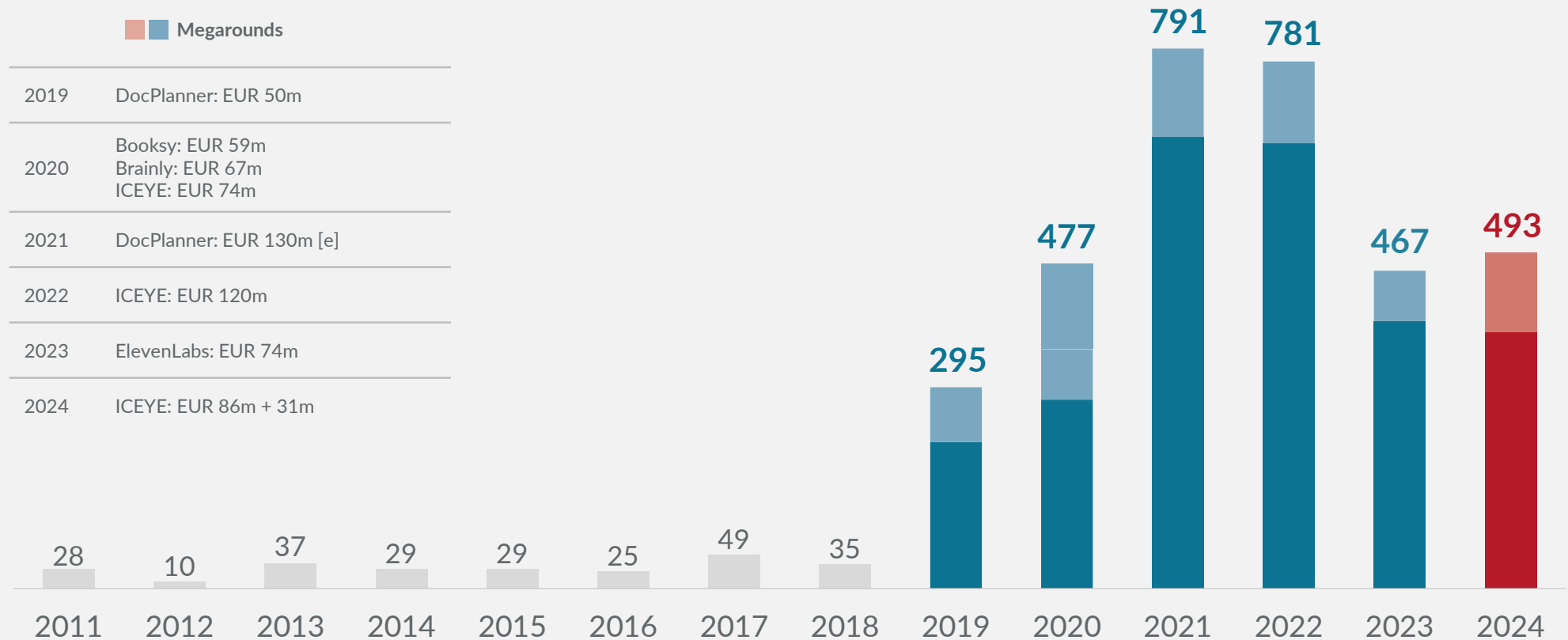
Section 1

Market Outlook



VC investments in Poland 2011 – 2024

Value of investments (EUR m)



(1) Source for archival data 2011-2018: Invest Europe.

(2) We deliberately present megarounds separately in the summary, as they distort the statistical picture (see: [outlier](#)).

(3) A megaround is defined as a transaction exceeding 10% of the total value of all investments in a given year.

Authors' comments



Aleksander Mokrzycki
Vice-President of the Board,
PFR Ventures

The 15 largest transactions by Polish start-ups in 2024 attracted over EUR 200m in VC investments. Another similar amount was contributed by the remaining 134 rounds.

In previous years, the proportions of capital raised were similar, but the number of transactions was significantly higher. The main reason for this change was the limited availability of EU funds, which in Poland is most evident in seed rounds.

We expect an increase in the number of early-stage transactions in 2025. This will result from the growing number of funds fuelled by European Funds for the Modern Economy (FENG). Last year alone, we invested in 9 teams with a total capitalisation of EUR 160 million; these teams are expected to invest in around 100 start-ups over the next few years. New teams will also be joining this group soon.



Karol Lasota
Principal, Inovo.vc

“It was a great year—one I will never forget.” As Poles, we can be proud of the success of ElevenLabs, but there are increasingly more examples of ambitious companies like it. A new generation of entrepreneurs is emerging, leveraging the potential of the AI revolution. For instance, companies such as Pathway, Osla, and Zeta Labs come to mind.

In 2024, we maintained a stable level of EUR 493 million in investments, which, considering the lack of active EU-funded support programs, is an excellent result. Unfortunately, my prediction of exceeding the EUR 700 million threshold turned out to be off the mark. The delay in announcing one of the rounds was the reason behind this. Nevertheless, we'll kick off 2025 with momentum!

I am very optimistic about 2025. I see many companies with great potential. Additionally, new funds backed by PFR Ventures will kick off their investments. This time, we'll undoubtedly surpass the EUR 700 m investment milestone.

Authors' comments



**Prof. Jerzy Małachowski, PhD,
Eng.**
Director of the National Centre
for Research and Development

The year 2024 brought stability to investment levels in the Polish VC market. A significant boost for development in 2025 will come from programmes within the new funding perspective, the increasing adoption of AI, and the growing demands of the defence sector.

Many companies that received funding, including repayable instruments from NCBR programmes, have made their mark in the largest transactions of 2019–2024. VC fund portfolios under the OP Smart Growth Bridge VC programme include companies such as Ramp Network and Uncapped. The Bridge Alfa programme (OP Smart Growth) supported the R&D components in companies like SunRoof and Nevomo, while the financing of HiProMine was assisted by NIF. These represent only the largest transactions.

This confirms that our know-how and focus on the research and development element remains a crucial specialisation. When combined with co-investments from other market participants, this approach proves effective. NCBR's role in this area is to leverage these resources and accumulated experience. For this reason, we are working on the concept of new initiatives to support R&D projects through grant-and-capital-based activities.



Paweł Chorąży
Managing Director of the
European Funds Division, BGK

The year 2024 marked the launch of the European Funds for the Modern Economy (FENG) programme, with the selection of the first 9 management teams. The capitalisation of the funds they will manage exceeds EUR 160 milion.

In this context, and considering the ongoing rounds for selecting additional VC funds (Starter, Biznest, Otwarte Innowacje, KOFFI, CVC), there is significant optimism for 2025 regarding the availability of resources for investments targeted at innovative SMEs.

It is also worth noting that additional funding rounds from private investors have been secured by companies such as Tapline (EUR 32 million) and Swotzy (EUR 0.25 million). These companies had previously received capital support from Regional Operational Programmes.



Luiza Nowacka
Investment Manager,
Vinci

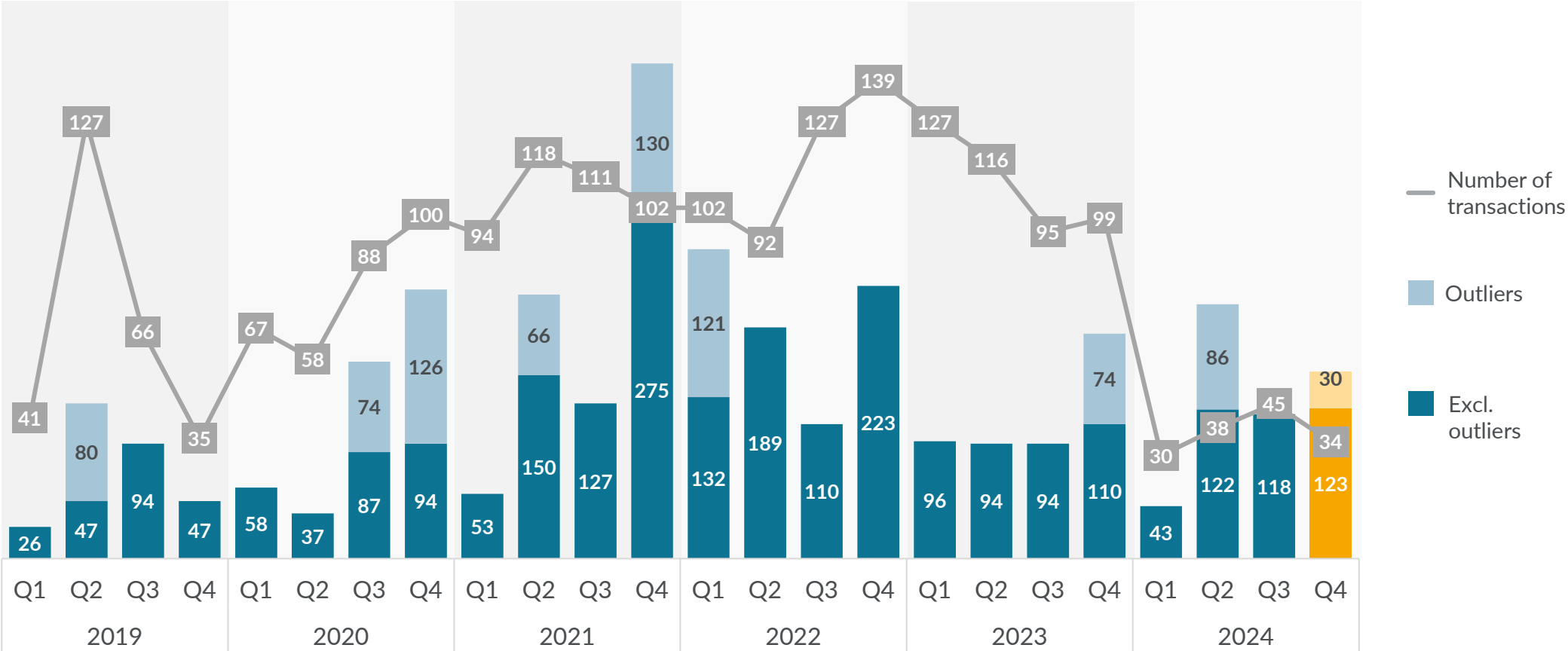
The increasing average value of investments indicates that in 2024, funds primarily financed companies at later stages of development. Public-private capital remains a significant pillar, accounting for 38% of transaction value. At the same time, 51% of total funding comes from international funds. A challenge continues to be the emigration of promising projects, such as Wordware, which secured a record-breaking seed round abroad.

Vinci closed 2024 as one of the most active VC funds in Poland, completing five investments in companies at various stages—from seed to growth. In 2025, we will continue to support companies with significant growth potential that can become our flagship on global markets and strengthen the strategic areas of the Polish economy.

Looking at investment trends, there has been a noticeable increase in the share of investments in Cybersecurity—unsurprising given the rapid development of AI. Leading sectors, as in previous years, remain Health, Data & Analytics, and Food & Beverage. There is less activity in the Finance sector, but I believe this is a temporary situation.

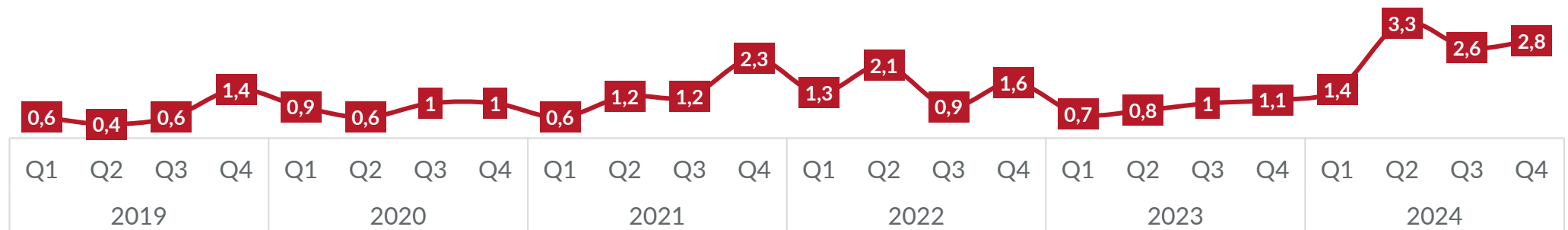
VC investments in Poland 2019 – 2024

Quarterly, value and number of transactions (EUR m)

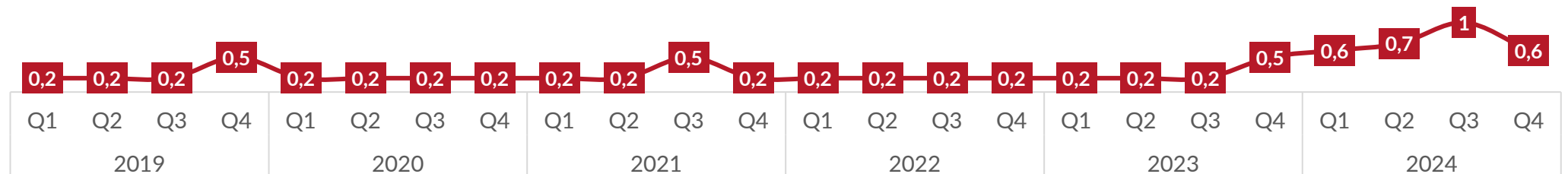


VC investments in Poland 2019 – 2024

Quarterly, average transaction value (EUR m)



Quarterly, median transaction value (EUR m)



In the calculations for the average transaction value, we did not include outliers. For the median, all rounds are included.

VC investments in Poland 2019 – 2024

Breakdown by type of round (quarterly, number of transactions, fewest most rounds of a given nature)

	2019				2020				2021				2022				2023				2024			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Seed	37	124	59	32	56	54	79	89	88	104	93	82	86	76	120	123	114	104	77	84	26	26	29	28
A	3	2	5	2	10	3	7	6	5	12	15	13	12	10	5	10	8	11	14	13	3	10	12	5
B			1	1	1	2	1	2		2	2	5	3	5	2	6	4	2	3	2	2		4	
C			1				1	2	1					1								1		
D/E		1						1				2	1									2		1



Maciej Małysz

Partner,
Inovo.vc

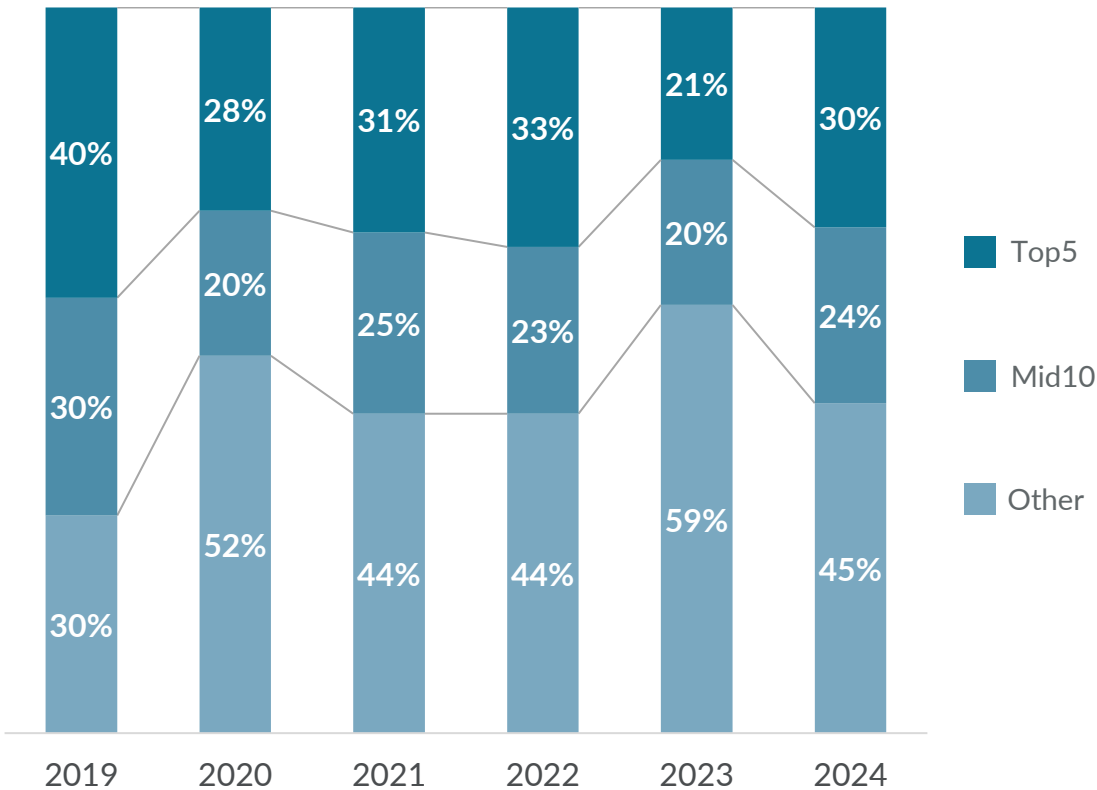
The past year has clearly highlighted the capital gap at the earliest stages of building businesses in Poland, where many seed funds supported by PFR Ventures have concluded their investment periods, while new ones have not yet launched. Combined with the still relatively small number of active business angels, the result has been a dramatic drop in investments at this stage, from 379 to 109.

The outlook for the coming years appears much more promising, given that entrepreneurs who have already achieved success, such as Mati Staniszewski of ElevenLabs or Konrad Howard of Booksy, are becoming increasingly active as business angels. Furthermore, several new seed funds supported by PFR Ventures are expected to commence investments, including some established by former business angels and entrepreneurs, such as Hard2Beat. This should significantly improve the situation for technology entrepreneurs at the earliest stages of their development.

In cases where a start-up/fund does not define the round at the time of announcing a transaction, we rely on data from Dealroom, PitchBook, or Crunchbase, taking into account (a) the company's financing history; (b) the investor's profile; (c) the size of the funding obtained. The seed category also includes pre-seed transactions. Categories A-E may include individually assigned growth VC transactions.

VC investments in Poland 2019 – 2024

Share of largest rounds in 2019 – 2024



Mid10 refers to the next 10 transactions after the Top 5, excluding outliers
*amount of the round announced in 2Q24 + extension in 4Q24, reduced by the value of debt financing

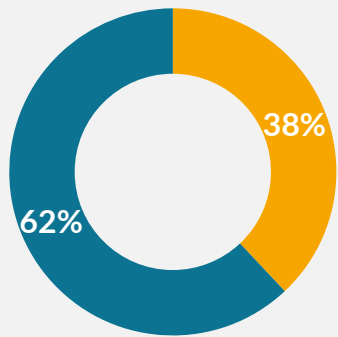
Top5 rounds in 2024

ICEYE	EUR 117m* Series E	
kontakt.io	EUR 44m Series C	
wordware	EUR 28,1m Series A	
SMARTLUNCH	EUR 13,9m Series A	
RedStone	EUR 13,7m Series A	

Sources of capital

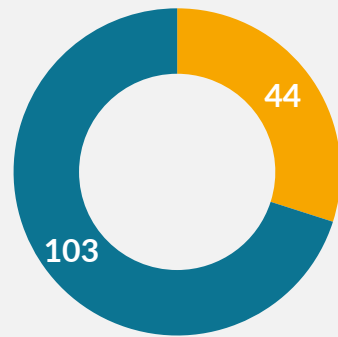
Share of private and public-private funding in 2024

Value of transactions



Public-private

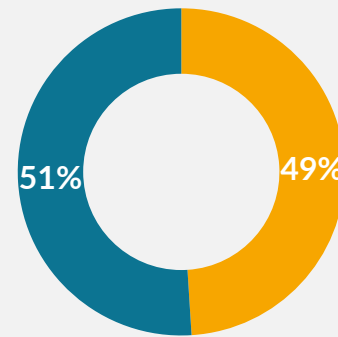
Number of transactions



Private

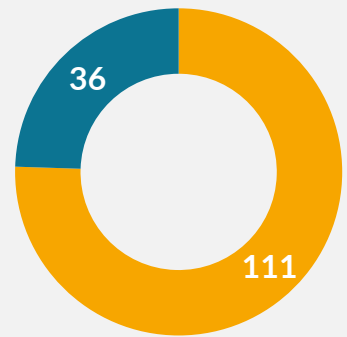
Share of funding from international and Polish funds in 2024

Value of transactions



Polish funds

Number of transactions



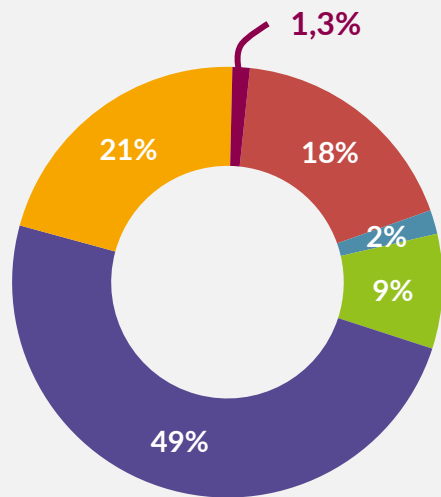
International funds

- (1) Individual transactions have been allocated depending on the predominant share of private or public-private equity funding;
- (2) International fund transactions include all transactions with at least one international fund involved.

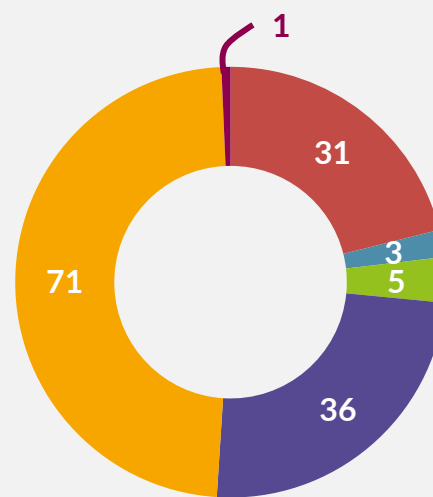
Sources of capital

Public programmes and private capital in 2024

Value of transactions



Number of transactions



(1) Individual transactions have been allocated on account of the predominant share of capital involved;

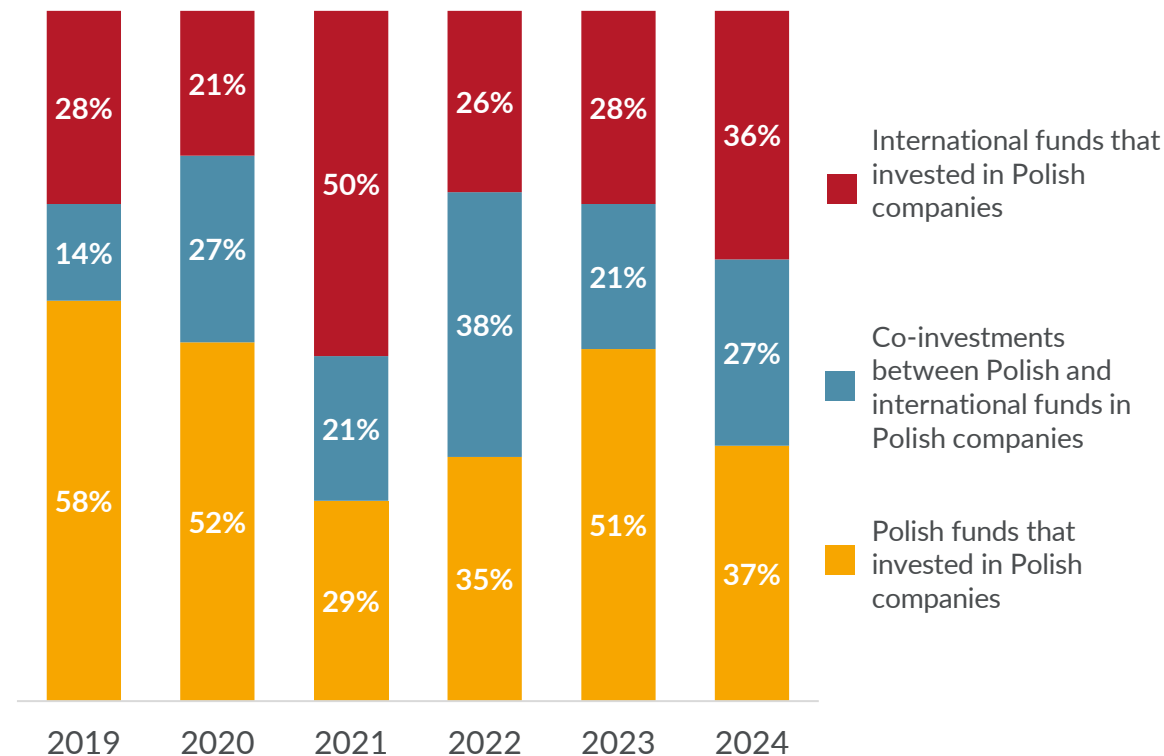
(2) International fund transactions include all transactions with at least one international fund involved;

(3) Some of the transactions classified as "PFR Ventures" come from the PFR NCBR CVC programme co-developed with the National Centre for Research and Development;

(4) Some of the transactions classified as "PFR Ventures" were also co-financed by BGK funds or State Treasury Companies (e.g. Orlen).

Investments and co-investments 2019 – 2024

Share in the total transaction value



The year 2024 belonged to international investors. The most prominent trend of the past year was the significant increase in the share of international funds in transactions conducted on the Polish market (based on value share). For every EUR 10 million entering the Polish VC market, EUR 3.6 million came from international funds. This represents a record level, surpassed only in 2021. Compared to the previous year, there was also an increase in the share of transactions where foreign funds co-invested with Polish ones.

The greater share of funds from international investors is linked to the situation among local teams. The vast majority of them relied on EU funds (OP Smart Growth), which mandated investments in companies no later than the end of 2023. With the launch of capital from the new EU programme (European Funds for the Modern Economy), Polish teams are expected to become active again in 2025.

The above summary does not include outlier transactions.



Martyna Zwierzchowska

Investment Associate, PFR Ventures

Most notable transactions 2024

	Investors	Company	Funding	Round*
EUR 20-60m	Undisclosed	Undisclosed 	EUR 10-13m	D
	TQ Ventures, Lead Ventures, 4Growth, Warsaw Equity Group	Oxla	EUR 9.7m	Seed
	Vinci (BGK)	Quantum Innovations	EUR 9.5m	A
	TQ Ventures, Kadmos Capital, Inovo VC, Market One Capital, Id4 ventures, angel investors	Pathway 	EUR 9.4m	Seed
	angel investors	CampusAI	EUR 9.3m	A
	Vinci (BGK)	Kodano	EUR 9.3m	B
	Andreessen Horowitz, Credo Ventures, Blocktower VC, angel investors	Vlayer Labs	EUR 9.1m	A
	True Global Ventures, PortfoLion	Giganci Programowania	EUR 8.5m	A
	OpenAI, General Catalyst, angel investors	Kick	EUR 8.4m	Seed
	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	EUR 8.1m	Seed
	Zalando, Target Global, Cherry Ventures, TQ Ventures, Auto1, SNR fund	Saleor Commerce	EUR 8.7m	Seed
	VTEX	Synerise 	EUR 7.7m	B
	Vinci (BGK)	MMI	EUR 7.7m	A
	Open Ocean, Y Combinator, SMOK VC, Peak Capital, Aman Ventures	Authologic 	EUR 7.4m	A
	Undisclosed	Undisclosed	EUR 7m	Seed
	SeedFolio, Orphinic Scientific, NuFund Venture Group	Vasa Therapeutics	EUR 6.5m	Seed
	Undisclosed	Undisclosed 	EUR 5.5m	Seed
	Orlen VC, Torus VC	Euroloop	EUR 5m	A
	Warsaw Equity Group, angel investors	Xopero Software 	EUR 4.7m	B
	bValue	Sportano 	EUR - m	B

*Individual classification based on the value of capital raised in the absence of information or disturbed order of rounds.

Most active funds in 2024



Krzysztof Grochowski

Managing Partner,
Simpact Ventures

The past year was challenging for the entire VC ecosystem in Poland. The lack of stable institutional support led to a financial gap and the cessation of investment activity by many funds, resulting in a decline in the number of transactions. We currently anticipate a particularly difficult period for projects at the seed stage. The discontinuation of the Bridge Alfa programme (approx. 50 funds) confirms this assessment. The Polish market is eagerly awaiting investment activity from new PFR Ventures funds and further initiatives to increase the supply of much-needed capital. Despite a dynamically developing economy, Poland remains at the bottom of the ranking of developed economies in terms of VC investment value relative to GDP. This figure in Poland is only 0.01%, compared to 0.14% in Estonia and over 0.20% in countries such as Canada and the United States. Additionally, Poland lacks a high-profile international event that could attract key participants from the new technologies and VC sectors while promoting the country as an innovation hub in Europe.

The data in the report indicate consistent activity by private funds that are not constrained by geographic, financial, or temporal requirements linked to EU funding. These funds have been active both in Poland and abroad. For Simpact Ventures, 2024 was a record year in terms of the number of transactions – we completed a total of 10 impact investments in the CEE region across various industries. We predict that the coming year will be significantly better, particularly for the Polish market, with increased financing opportunities and a rise in the number of transactions.

Number of local transactions*

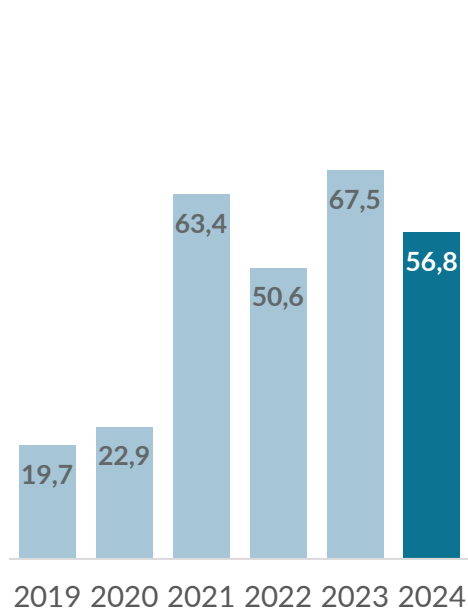
4-5	>5
AIP Seed	
Aper Ventures	
Montis Capital	
Seed Capital	
Simpact Ventures	Inovo.vc
Smartlink Partner	
Smok VC	
Unfold VC	
Vinci	

*w tym follow-on

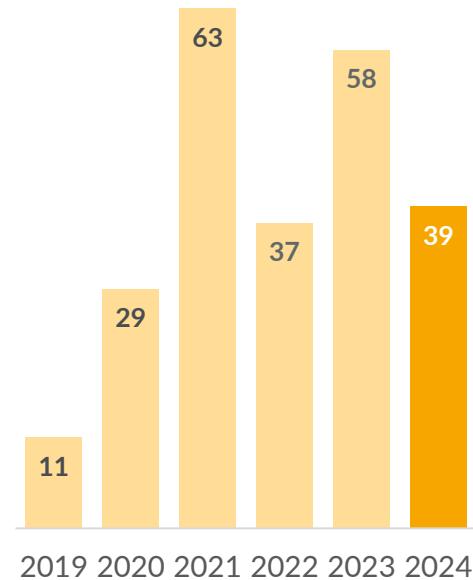
Foreign investments by Polish funds 2019 – 2024

Investments by Polish teams in foreign companies

Value of transactions EUR m



Number of transactions



These figures are not included in the statistics on the Polish VC market on pages 1-16

Following the optimistic scenario outlined in the previous quarter's report, the annual results for 2024 surpassed those of 2022: Polish VC funds completed a total of 39 international transactions worth EUR 56,8 million. While this represents a decline in investment value by 22% and in the number of transactions by 33% year-on-year, the upward trend observed between 2019 and 2024 remains intact.

The fourth quarter of 2024 saw a marked rebound in the investment activity of Polish VC funds in foreign markets. After a weaker third quarter, the funds completed as many as 13 investments worth approximately EUR 15 million, returning to the trend of over 10 international investments per quarter, which has been observed over the past two years.

The year 2024 confirmed that international investments have become a permanent component of the strategy for Polish VC funds. Despite quarterly fluctuations, investment activity remains relatively high, demonstrating the ability to compete on the international stage.



Dmytro Golournyi

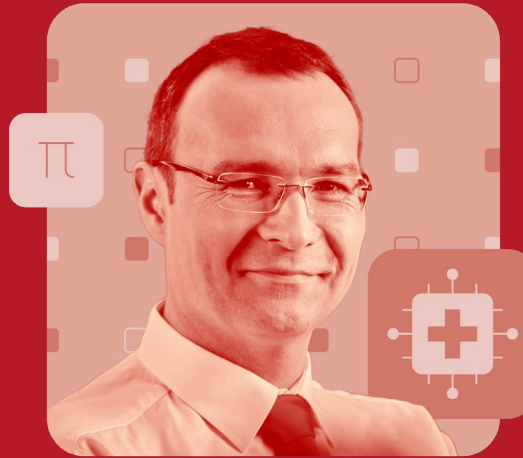
Investment Associate, PFR Ventures



Section 2

Sectors and business models

Does Origin Matter?



 PFR Ventures

 INOVO^{vc}

Maciej Ćwikiewicz 

President of the Board
PFR Ventures

In 2024, companies focusing on data analytics, cybersecurity, and education gained popularity. However, healthcare remains the leading category where investors most frequently see opportunities for growth and, ultimately, profit.

Public discussions about the development of Poland's innovation ecosystem often return to two questions: (1) In which sector do Polish companies have the greatest chances of success? (2) Do Polish companies stand a chance in [insert name of a popular industry]? As a rule, Polish entrepreneurs are subject to certain cultural conditions that can indeed influence their trajectory. Following this logic, one might conclude that challenges related to public healthcare or Poland's cryptographic (Marian Rejewski) or mathematical heritage (Stefan Banach) push the country in specific directions. But does this explain why Poland's two leading technological successes have revolved around digital voice generation (Ivona, Eleven Labs)?

I believe that we do not sufficiently leverage the areas where we have natural potential. Our innovation ecosystem has always been rich in talented individuals, and in recent years, they have been able to rely on venture capital funds—including seed funds for so-called “paper-based projects.” However, we need to activate the remaining parts of the ecosystem.

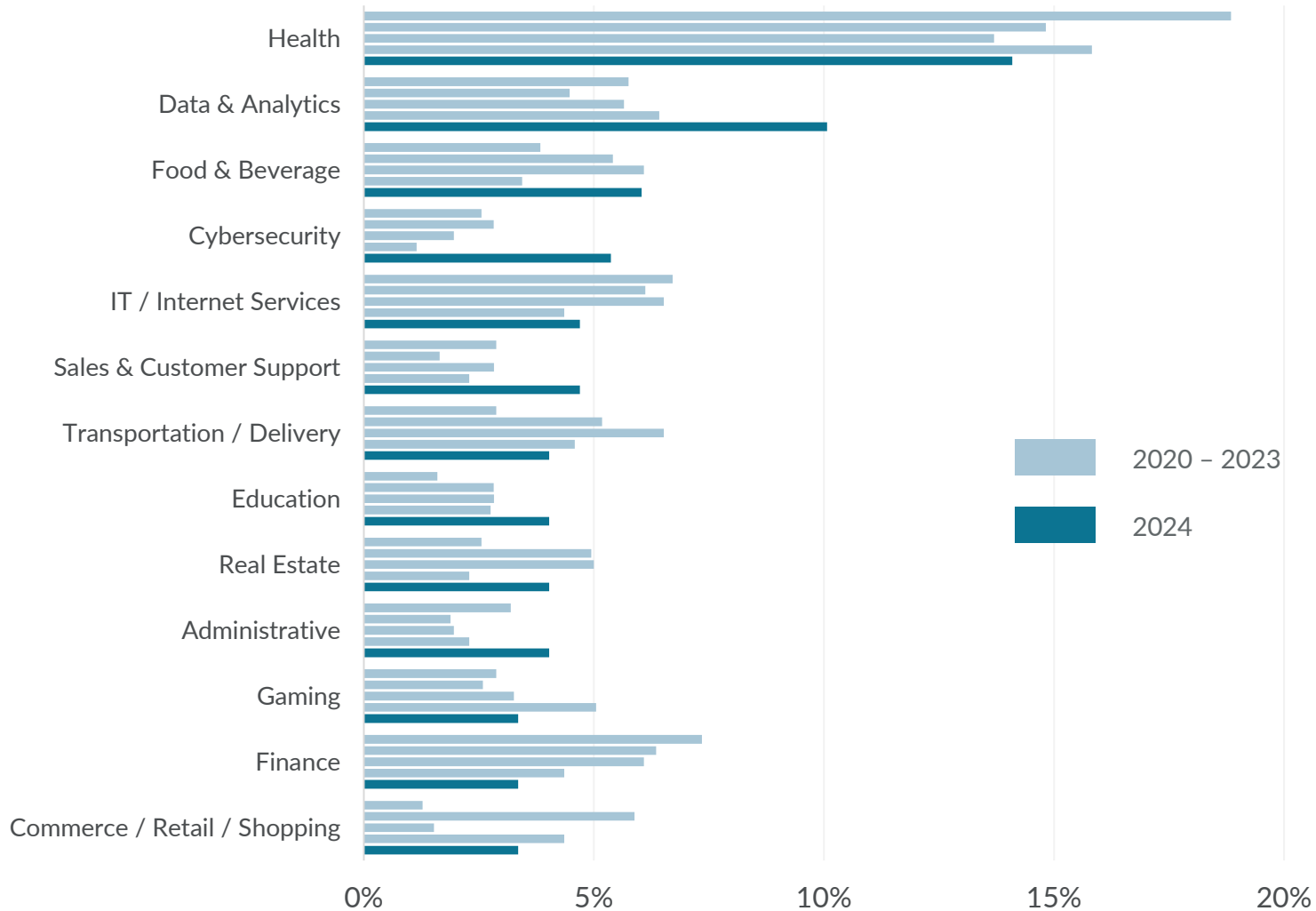
Academic institutions and commercial accelerators require the most urgent attention. Effectively integrating these two areas into the ecosystem would significantly enhance the supply of projects, enable the identification of genuinely technological innovations, and prepare them for business development. Well-prepared projects would then have a better chance of growth, gaining clients, and attracting follow-on investors.

In addition to improving quality, it is equally critical to “scale up” significantly. The number of innovative projects remains too low, and too few individuals are willing to take on the challenge of developing them. In this context, education is essential but so is fostering entrepreneurship. The growing number of mentoring programmes is a positive step forward, as they provide young people with valuable guidance from seasoned entrepreneurs.

If Poland is to lead in any innovative field in the future, we must provide comprehensive support across all parts of the ecosystem. This includes having specialised funds, engaged universities, and resources that clearly outline the starting path. Without aligning these elements, chance will continue to dictate the course of our progress.

What do the funds invest in?

% share of individual industries in total number of transactions



Industries with a share of <3% in 2024

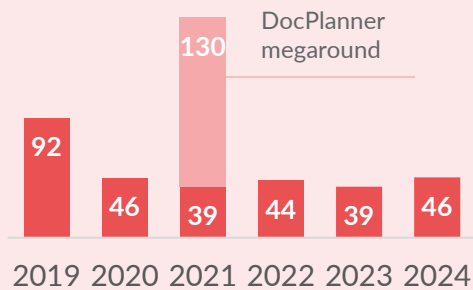
(sorted 0-3)

- Dating
- Events
- Hosting
- Travel
- Consumer products
- Home Living
- Other
- Sports
- Media
- Legal
- Kids
- Music
- Fashion
- Wellness Beauty
- Biotechnology
- Agriculture & Farming
- Robotics
- Energy
- Telecom
- Pets
- Marketing & Advertising
- Industrial / Semiconductors
- HR / Recruitment

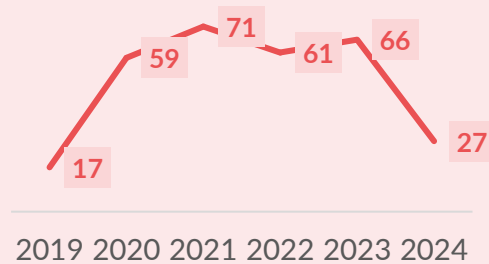
The following slides present data for selected sectors. We have used a different methodology there, so the figures will not match the statistics above. For example, a company listed under Cybersecurity in the above chart could be included in the FinTech sector in the following slides.

Value of transactions

EUR m



Number of investments



Joanna Broy

EIT Health InnoStars Ecosystem Lead for Poland

Largest rounds 2019-2024

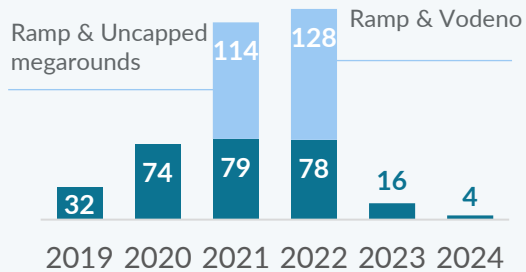
Company	Round value (EUR m)	Investors
DocPlanner	130 (est.)	undisclosed
DocPlanner	80	Goldman Sachs PE, One Peak Partners, Piton Capital, ENERN Investments
Infermedica	26	One Peak Partners, Karma Ventures, Inovo.vc, EBRD, Heal capital
Infermedica	9	Karma Ventures, Heal Capital, Inovo.vc, EBRD, DreamIt Ventures
Quantum Innovations	9	Vinci (BGK)

Global and local trends highlight growing investor caution and a focus on start-ups achieving faster profitability, which likely explains the decline in transactions in 2024. Despite fewer investments and funds adopting a more selective approach to project selection, Poland’s HealthTech sector remains highly attractive, with considerable growth potential. Emerging technologies such as AI in medicine, XR, and biotechnology continue to draw significant investor interest. However, access to capital—particularly in the early stages, during the proof-of-concept phase—remains the most pressing challenge.

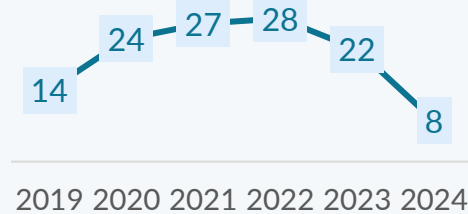
Programmes like the Healthcare Investment Hub, supported by EIT Health, play a crucial role in addressing this gap. Building partnerships with experienced players who understand the intricacies of the healthcare market and can provide access to vital knowledge, infrastructure, and expertise enhances credibility with investors. Innovators who effectively utilise these relationships and resources greatly increase their chances of success.

Value of transactions

EUR m



Number of investments



Krzysztof Drzyzga

Co-owner and CEO at Verestro and a number of companies in the FinTech sector



Largest rounds 2019-2024

Company	Round value (EUR m)	Investors
Ramp Network	70	Mubadala Capital, Korelya Capital, Balderton Capital, Cogito Capital Partners
Uncapped	66	Lakestar, Global Founders Capital, White Star Capital, Seedcamp, Mouro Capital, All Iron Ventures, Cogito Capital Partners
Vodeno	58	NatWest Group
Ramp Network	48	Balderton Capital, NFX, Galaxy Digital, Seedcamp, Firstminute Capital, Fabric Ventures
Silent Eight	37	HSBC, Wavemaker Partners, S.C. Ventures, OTB Ventures, Aglaia, TYH Ventures,

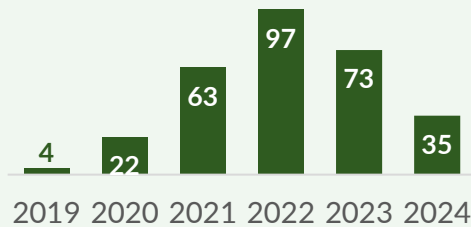
The FinTech investment market in Europe has returned to growth in valuations and the number of transactions. However, this trend is not yet visible in Polish data, likely due to: (1) companies focusing on profitability, thereby reducing their investment needs; (2) a limited number of local funds in the investment phase, which prioritise valuations favourable to founders; and (3) investment risks associated with the war in Ukraine.

Global data shows that the fastest-growing company valuations are in the fields of Embedded Finance (Bank-as-a-Service) and InsurTech. In 2024, investors focused on rapidly expanding companies that simultaneously generate positive cash flows and can deliver above-average returns. Key factors remain the potential for success, the creation of competitive products, technological advancement, client acquisition, and the team's experience in international markets.

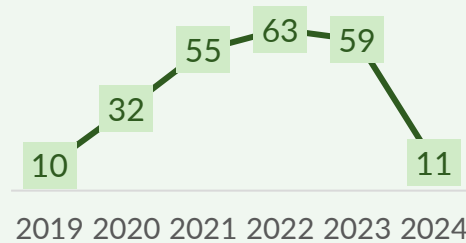
2024 has been the best year in our group's history. All our companies (Verestro, Fenige, Quicko, Sparados, GoPay, Orovera, Sportigio) achieved positive financial flows and dynamic growth. In 2025, Financora will be launched – a company that will consolidate the operations of these firms. It will be one of the largest and fastest-growing FinTech entities in the region.

Value of transactions

EUR m



Number of investments



Michał Miszułowicz

Director of Cooperation in the Innovation Sector
BNP Paribas Polska

Largest rounds 2019-2024

Company	Round value (EUR m)	Investors
SunRoof*	28,5	Alantra, SMOK Venture Capital, Inovo.vc, Alfabeat, ODDO BHF, World Fund, Nordic Alpha Partners, Legal & General Capital
Proteon Pharmaceuticals	21	PFR Life Science, Nutreco, Montis Capital, Seventure, Aqua-spark, Newtree,
Nevomo	15	EIC Accelerator
Contec*	15	Vinci (BGK), Warsaw Equity Group
undisclosed	8-15	undisclosed

*value from first round announcement + extension

In 2024, Poland implemented the CSRD directive, introducing mandatory carbon footprint measurement and reporting for an increasing number of companies. This has influenced the investment plans of Polish firms. The market features numerous early-stage start-up projects that are poised to gain momentum.

I find hope in the highly positive feedback from the ESG Matchmaking event we organised in October at BNP Paribas Bank Polska SA. At this event, 10 major corporations (primarily from the Real Estate sector) met with 25 of the most promising start-ups. The discussions we held clearly demonstrated growing interest in "green technologies," which not only contribute to cost savings but also enable businesses to gain a competitive edge.

The best indicator of the rising interest in ClimateTech is the dynamic growth of Envirly, a start-up offering a certified tool for ESG measurement and reporting, as well as planning reduction strategies.

I believe that 2025 will pleasantly surprise us in terms of investments in this segment.

FoodTech

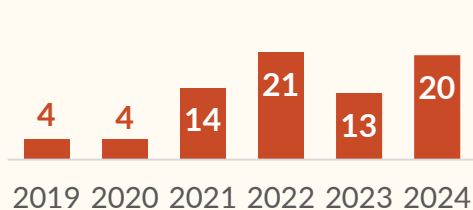
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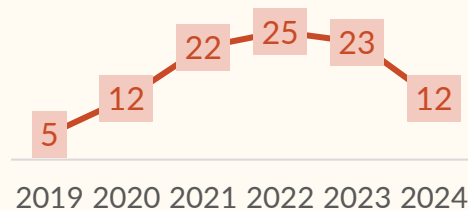
foodtech.ac

Value of transactions

EUR m



Number of investments



Piotr Grabowski

Co-Founder
foodtech.ac

Largest rounds 2019-2024

Company	Round value (EUR m)	Investors
SmartLunch	14	Benefit Systems
HiProMine	7	Fidiasz EVC, Sirius Investment
Sundose	6	Delivery Hero VC, Atmos Ventures, Investible Club, Polipo Ventures, ARIA AIFM, Venture Inc., Knowledge Hub, Ataraxy Ventures Noga, Delivery Hero VC, angel investors
Restaumatic	6	Supercharge Capital, Deal Fund, Inventures
undisclosed	2-5	undisclosed

In 2024, the Polish FoodTech market saw a notable investment of EUR 14 million by Benefit Systems into SmartLunch, a company operating in the field of food benefits. The most common exit path for FoodTech start-ups is through acquisition by industry strategists, which makes such an investment in the domestic market particularly encouraging.

Excluding this transaction, the FoodTech investment market in 2024 slowed down somewhat. According to DigitalFoodLab data, global investments in the sector also contracted by 6%. In 2023-2024, many FoodTech start-ups closed operations. From our perspective, this is a natural phase of market validation for the first wave of start-ups established in 2019-2022. On the other hand, those FoodTech companies that have survived are reporting steadily growing revenues – ...from EUR 40,8 million in 2021, to EUR 56,5 million in 2022, and EUR 93,6 million in 2023. We are awaiting financial reports to summarise 2024.

A widely discussed issue here is the capital gap, which directly impacts the number of new initiatives. In 2024, we made only one investment in a completely new start-up, while the other three involved recapitalisation of existing companies. We hope 2025 will reverse this ratio.

AI investments in 2024

AI in the number of transactions

■ Develops AI tools ■ Significantly uses AI ■ No significant AI components



Value of AI investments (EUR m)



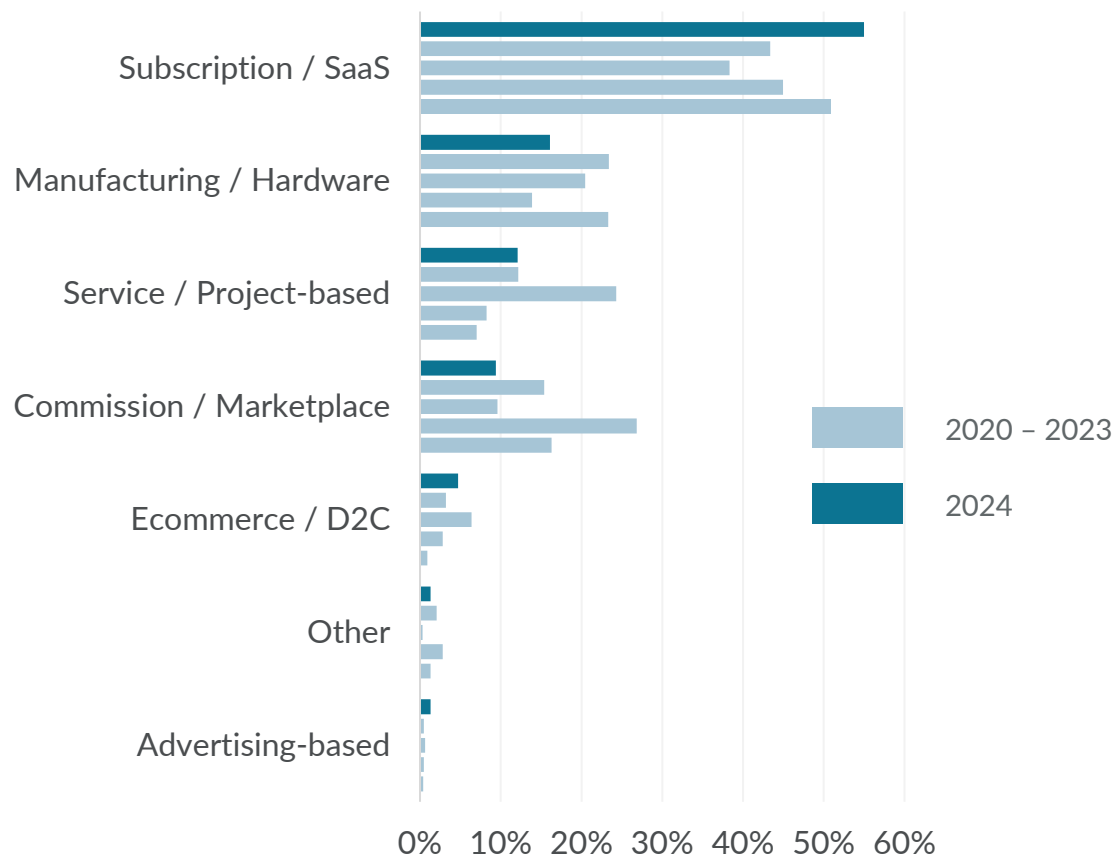
Artur Kurasiński
Entrepreneur and Investor

The year 2024 was anticipated to be—and indeed became—the year of AI. Data indicates that VCs are eager to invest in companies that integrate AI as part of their operations, but not necessarily in those building foundational AI technologies. The low proportion of transactions and funding allocated to companies developing AI-based tools may stem from high technological barriers, extended R&D timelines, and the greater risks associated with advancing core AI technologies.

The dominance of investments in entities without significant AI components suggests that AI has become a tool for supporting innovation rather than a decisive factor in the investment process.

Under which models do start-ups operate?

% share of individual business models in total number of transactions



In 2024, as in previous years, the dominant business model among start-ups remained the SaaS model, capturing 55% of the market share. This comes as no surprise—this model is favoured by the majority of VC funds due to its advantages, such as predictable revenues, scalability, low initial costs for customers, and high margins.

The service/project-based model has shown stability compared to the previous year, suggesting that its market share will likely remain steady at around 10% in the coming years. A significant decline in the number of start-ups operating under the marketplace model is an interesting trend. This may be attributed to the challenges that domestic start-ups face in reaching individual customers. It is worth noting that half of the marketplace-profile start-ups were primarily supported by business angels rather than traditional VC funds.



Piotr Marszałek

Investment Associate, PFR Ventures

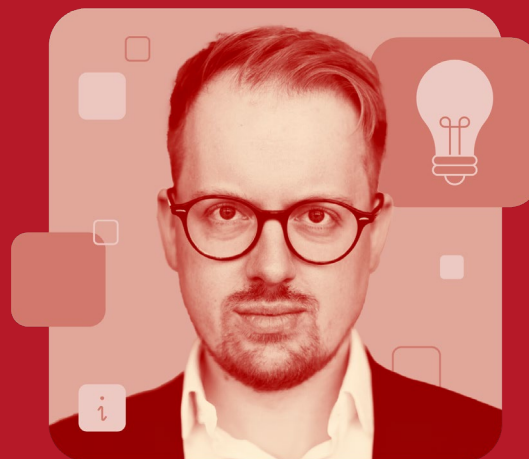


Section 3

Comments from market experts

Three Strong Yet Flexible Opinions

(i.e., strong opinions, loosely held)



PFR Ventures

inovo^{vc}

Kamil Stanuch 

Analyst, business angel,
newsletter author

Firstly, the development of tools supporting software engineers, based on LLMs like Replit or Cursor, significantly lowers the entry barriers. However, this accessibility ("I can build an MVP in two days") does not necessarily give us a local edge. Increasingly, unique insights, sales, or distribution channels—areas where Poles are still building their expertise—will play a more prominent role ("50 sales reps in San Francisco, 50 devs in Poland and Romania"). Paradoxically, with the influx of AI tools, "it's easier to start a company, but harder to build one," and the latter requires more substantial financial and social capital (connections and relationships). This shift is particularly relevant for the role of local VC funds and angels. Perhaps our role as Polish investors should evolve towards acting as "talent scouts"—rather than competing with global funds, we should focus on identifying and supporting the most promising founders at the earliest stage, essentially funding their metaphorical ticket to the U.S.

Secondly, the reduction in software development costs at the start (for standard solutions, not deep tech) and the gradually decreasing competitiveness of developer rates compared to the West are already leading to slight corrections in the market for software houses and contracting firms. This might potentially free local talent

from "golden cages" and push them towards building their own companies, as the allure of "50k on B2B" becomes as plausible as building a unicorn.

Thirdly, the growing popularity of "solopreneurship" and "bootstrapping" may also act as a positive stimulus for the entire start-up ecosystem. This trend, often viewed as an alternative path or a symbol of independence—and even more appealing in an era of automation tools ("I built it myself, without external capital, running the business solo")—helps distinguish between two distinct business trajectories. On one hand, we have individual creators building small yet profitable businesses that don't require external funding. On the other, we have entrepreneurs focused on creating scalable companies that need VC capital. I believe that greater awareness of these two paths will benefit both sides—entrepreneurs and investors alike, who can avoid the proverbial "cat in the bag" deals.

Personally, I believe that ten \$100M companies—or even a hundred \$10M ones—can be just as valuable as a single \$1B unicorn.

Two Barriers Blocking Innovation in Corporations



PFR Ventures

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Monika Synoradzka 
CEO, Huge Thing

Reflecting on 12 years of presence at the intersection of large organisations, including corporations, and the start-up ecosystem, we can confidently state that an increasing number of companies are consciously embedding innovation as an integral part of their development strategies. Consequently, there is growing interest among large firms and corporations in adopting solutions developed by start-ups. Research conducted by Huge Thing reveals that two aspects hinder corporations from reaping the benefits of incorporating innovation: (a) Managerial and strategic barriers, stemming from improper definition of areas for company development and a lack of understanding of innovation and its specificity; (b) Organisational barriers, related to how companies operate. Specifically, processes, operational methods, and organisational culture do not create an environment conducive to implementing innovation.

A significant number of organisations are either at the stage just before opening up to start-ups or in the process of building readiness for a deliberate innovation-driven growth. This trend is encouraging.

On the other hand, there are companies such as Orlen, PKO BP, PZU, Benefit Systems, or BNP Paribas that have been active participants in the ecosystem for years. These firms acquire

start-ups, run acceleration programmes, connect employees with external creators of innovation, and encourage the development of internal start-ups. In doing so, they are building complete innovation ecosystems around themselves. Here, innovations have already proven their value, showing measurable business benefits. The next step involves undertaking more advanced initiatives, such as creating corporate venture capital (CVC) funds. As evidenced by the interest in the CVC Academy (an educational programme preparing firms for such initiatives), there is growing enthusiasm among companies for this approach. However, these projects are not straightforward—they require not only capital but also operational capabilities that are not typically characteristic of large organisations. Looking ahead, I believe we will witness the establishment of additional such vehicles, but for now, we may need to wait a little longer.

A banner for the CVC Academy. It features a blue background with white text. On the left, there is a small icon of a target. On the right, there is a small icon of a person with a dollar sign. The text reads: "CVC Academy" in a large, bold, blue font, followed by "Applications until 17.02" in a smaller, white font. Below this text is a large, dark blue button with the text "APPLY NOW" in white, bold, uppercase letters.

Vice President of Common Sense



PFR Ventures

INOVO^{VC}

Radek Zaleski 

analyst, business angel,
newsletter writer

When I was younger, I was deeply interested in the NBA. Bill Simmons, a commentator, often spoke about how, in the frenzy and rush to win titles, team managers were prone to making monumental mistakes: signing absurd contracts, committing to long-term deals with star players, and getting overly excited about new trends. “We must act now, no matter the cost. The title is worth everything.” Unfortunately, there are 30 teams, but only one can win the championship. It’s a scenario that feels familiar in the start-up world.

Simmons imagined a role he called the “VP of Common Sense”—a vice president tasked with attending every meeting, arriving slightly late and uninvolved in the details, and asking the “dumb” questions. “Why are we doing this?” “How will this impact our results?” “Has anyone succeeded with this before?” “Did we sleep on this decision?” “This sounds very expensive—has anyone run the numbers?”

Every great team, he suggested, should hire someone like that.

It seems that after a few years of relentless ambition and attempts to win at all costs, the start-up world is now recognising the need for this kind of perspective. Following the era of “growth at any cost, God sort us out later,” we’re entering an age of pragmatism—just plain, solid business sense.

This shift is particularly evident in marketing and sales. Previously, we saw limitless budgets, endless experiments with new channels and “growth hacks,” enormous sales teams, advanced sales methodologies, and an obsession with top-line growth. Now, we’re seeing hiring freezes, a focus on doing one thing well, limited resources for new initiatives, performance management of salespeople, and a clear emphasis on profitability.

It’s a new (or perhaps old?) paradigm and a different era. It demands significant adaptability, especially from younger teams who’ve never operated in this kind of “real economy.” Increasingly, the so-called VP of Common Sense is turning up in meetings, asking uncomfortable questions. And increasingly, it’s becoming clear that if growth isn’t being financed (now that massive funding rounds have dried up), growth often turns into mere survival.

In the background, the hype around AI continues to grow. Everyone insists it’s essential to act now—to replace sales and marketing teams with AI-powered agents, because “that’s the way things are done now, and the ROI will be amazing.” Maybe so... but has your VP of Common Sense weighed in on this yet?

Sekcja 4

Case Studies



What Has "Grown" from Docplanner and Booksy

 **Docplanner**

 **booksy**

8 founders

EUR ~400m raised
from 23 VCs and
angel investors

Total of 3,870
employees



 **Bartosz Lipnicki**

Managing Director
Endeavor Poland

I believe that fostering trust between founders and encouraging employees to make bold decisions are key to driving entrepreneurship in Poland. When experienced entrepreneurs share their knowledge, support, and invest in new initiatives, the entire ecosystem gains momentum. A great example is Booksy and Docplanner—they demonstrate how to scale a business globally while simultaneously strengthening the local ecosystem. By inspiring others, they indirectly contribute to bringing additional capital into Poland and creating new jobs.

22

Polish start-ups founded by former employees

50%

Received funding from VC funds

EUR 10m +

The total amount raised by these start-ups

23

Former employees who started start-ups

511

People employed by their companies

1

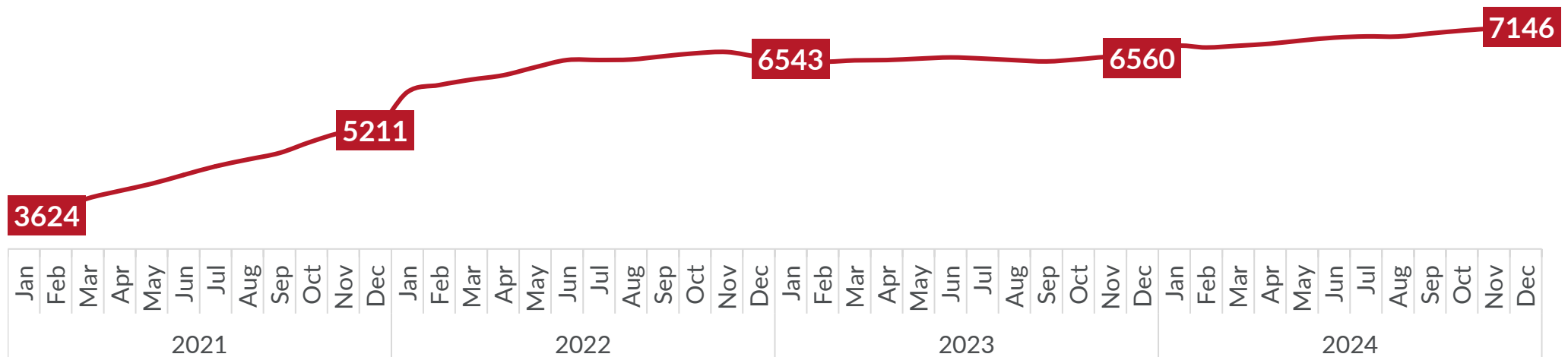
Company that has already completed an exit



Start-up jobs

Number of employees in 2024

(19 start-ups ranked by funding round size 2019–2024, >30 employees)



+362

New jobs created in 2024

+149%

Largest growth (*ElevenLabs*)

56%

Average share of employees from Poland

2,179

Total employees from Poland as of 12/2024

Source: LinkedIn (data from primary company profiles), analysis by PFR Ventures

*In 2021, we mapped 15 start-ups using these criteria. In 2022, we added 3 new ones that would qualify for the top 15, while retaining the previous ones. In 2023, we added one more start-up. Data for 2023 was updated during the collection process for 2024 data.

Start-up jobs

Number of employees in 2024

(top19 start-ups by amount of round 2019-2024, >30 employees)

	Jan 24	Dec 24 ↓	%PL employees 12/24	Annual % change
Docplanner	2,875	3,231	11%	12%
ICEYE	579	664	14%	15%
Brainly	678	659	30%	-3%
Booksy	591	639	50%	8%
Infermedica	217	214	62%	-1%
ElevenLabs	78	194	11%	149%
Tylko	201	186	89%	-7%
Synerise	194	176	89%	-9%
Tidio	176	173	72%	-2%
Ramp	191	152	68%	-20%
eStoreLabs	142	126	83%	-11%
Codility	127	116	47%	-9%
Silent Eight	116	113	58%	-3%
Packhelp	139	105	91%	-24%
Vue Storefront	103	95	59%	-8%
Grid Esports	105	94	19%	-10%
Uncapped	88	83	31%	-6%
Proteon Pharmaceuticals	122	81	86%	-34%
SatRev	62	45	87%	-27%
number=sum, %=avg	6,784	7,146	56%	0%

Transactions from a legal perspective

Popularity of selected provisions in investment contracts of Polish companies, 2022-2024

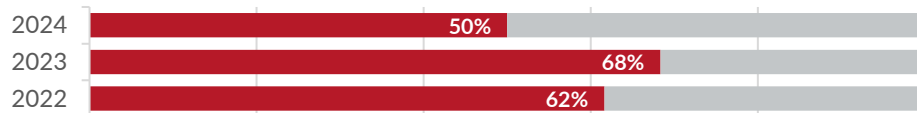
Use of Convertible Notes



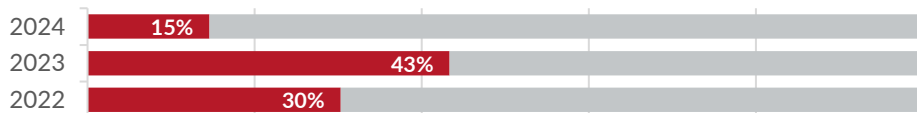
Liquidation Preference clause



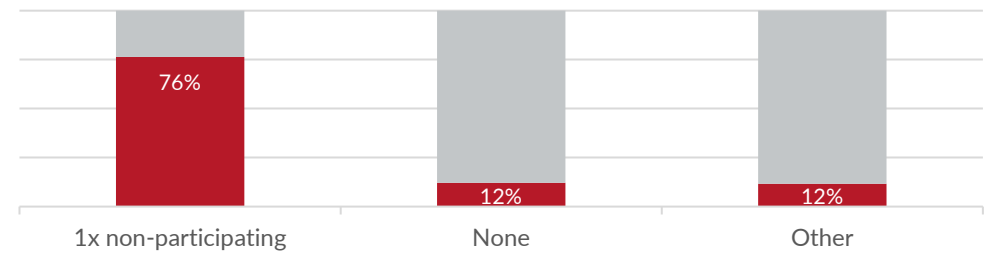
ESOP clause



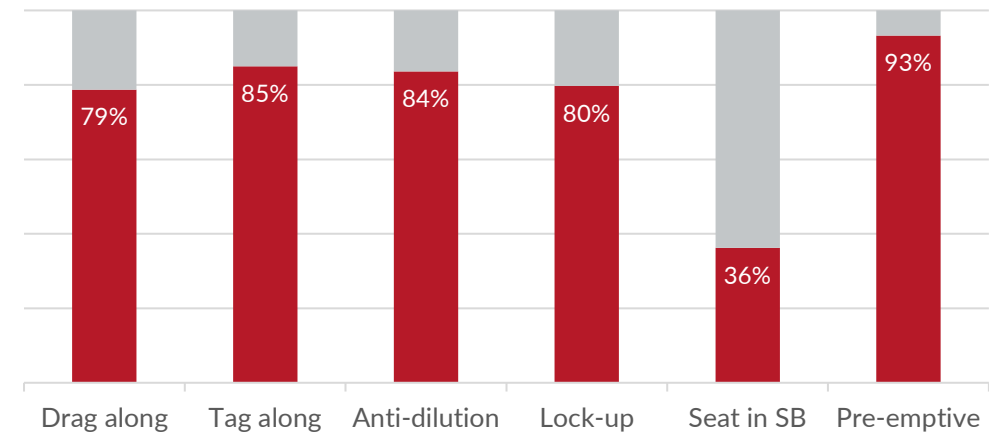
Reverse Vesting clause



Form of the Liquidation Preference clause, cumulative figures 2022-2024



Popularity of selected fund entitlements, cumulative figures 2022-2024



2022 = 99 contracts, 171 investors, total > PLN 500m, seed transactions = 86
 2023 = 60 contracts, 110 investors, total > PLN 250m, seed transactions = 52
 2024 = 48 contracts, 70 investors, total > PLN 320m, seed transactions = 38

Sources of data on contract terms:



Are These the Times of Friendly Investors?



 PFR Ventures

 INOVO^{vc}

Agnieszka Syguła 

Director of the Legal Department
at PFR Ventures

This year's decline in investor interest in clauses like ESOP, reverse vesting, and liquidation preference, alongside the growing popularity of financing through convertible notes, reflects a shift in the Polish VC market. One can observe a change in priorities for both investors and start-ups, leaning towards greater flexibility and simplicity in financing at the expense of fully securing investor interests. This trend is particularly characteristic of seed-stage investments.

At earlier stages of start-up development, investors prioritize quick entry into the company and securing growth potential rather than intricate control mechanisms. Reverse vesting (ensuring founders remain in the company) and ESOP (employee stock option plans) tend to become more relevant at later stages, when a company grows and stabilizes its structure. The reduced emphasis on these provisions could stem from increasing investor trust in founding teams. In more mature ecosystems, investors often trust that founders will act in the company's best interests without the need for complex safeguarding mechanisms. As a result, there is also less interest in securing oversight of founders' activities or representation on supervisory boards..

On the flip side, the lack of mechanisms like ESOP could hinder the recruitment and motivation of key employees, potentially impacting a start-up's scalability. Similarly, the absence of protection for a fundamental investor interest—return on invested capital—could lead to tensions between founders and investors when it comes time to negotiate exit terms. Meanwhile, most standard contractual clauses, such as the right of first refusal, tag-along, and anti-dilution, remain prevalent in the market, suggesting a balanced approach to aligning the interests of both founders and funds. I don't see these trends as posing particularly adverse effects on the investors' position.

We'll see what happens in 2025. In 2024, transaction volumes were significantly lower than in 2022–2023, which could encourage—or even compel—investors to forego stricter protective clauses... Additionally, they need to remain competitive with more liberal foreign investors. These dynamics could ultimately result in Polish funds becoming more "founder-friendly."

Deal exits announced in 2024

Company	Selected investors*	Buyer	Cash-on-cash	Comment
Alphamoon	Sunfish Partners, Satus Starter, Kvarko	Box	-	
Booksy	VNV	Booksy	-	shares sold by VNV fund
Brand24	Inovo VC	Semrush	-	buyer plans delisting from WSE
Coinfirm	Alfabeat	Lukka	-	
Eway	Rubicon Partners		-	release reported that this is the 6th exit
Frontu	LT Capital	Everfield	-	
Heart Sense, Heart Guard	YouNick	-	-	
Noctulica	ValueTech Seed, Rubicon Partners, JR Holding	-	-	IPO
Perfect Gym	Innovation Nest	Sport Alliance GmbH	-	
PozLab	YouNick	Selvita	-	
SmartLunch	LF Akcelerator	Benefit Systems	-	partial sale of shares
SMEO	Finch Capital	Everest Finanse S.A.	-	
Wellbee	Tar Heel Capital Pathfinder, bValue	Benefit Systems	10x	shares sold by THCP

Radosław Czyrko

Managing Partner
Tar Heel Capital Pathfinder



The Polish start-up market needs more significant and high-profile exits from investments to attract broader interest from foreign and private investors. While the past few years have seen a few noteworthy exits, we are still awaiting those truly spectacular cases, their greater consistency, and the regular generation of profits for investors by funds.

*Not in every exit did the investors listed in this section sell their shares.

Glossary

International/foreign fund

An international fund is considered to be one that has international partners on its team or relies on foreign capital.

Activity on the Polish VC market

Activity on the Polish VC market is interpreted as local investments (Polish fund-Polish company) and foreign investments (foreign fund-Polish company).

What is a Polish company?

Selection is determined by meeting 3 out of 4 criteria:

- % of employees working in Poland
- Polish founder/co-founder
- Polish capital
- Self-identification

Data sources

The data used for this study were taken from internal reports of PFR Ventures, Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego (BGK), National Centre for Research and Development (NCBR) and Inovo.vc. Some of the information was obtained from Invest Europe research as well as media reports and publicly available data.

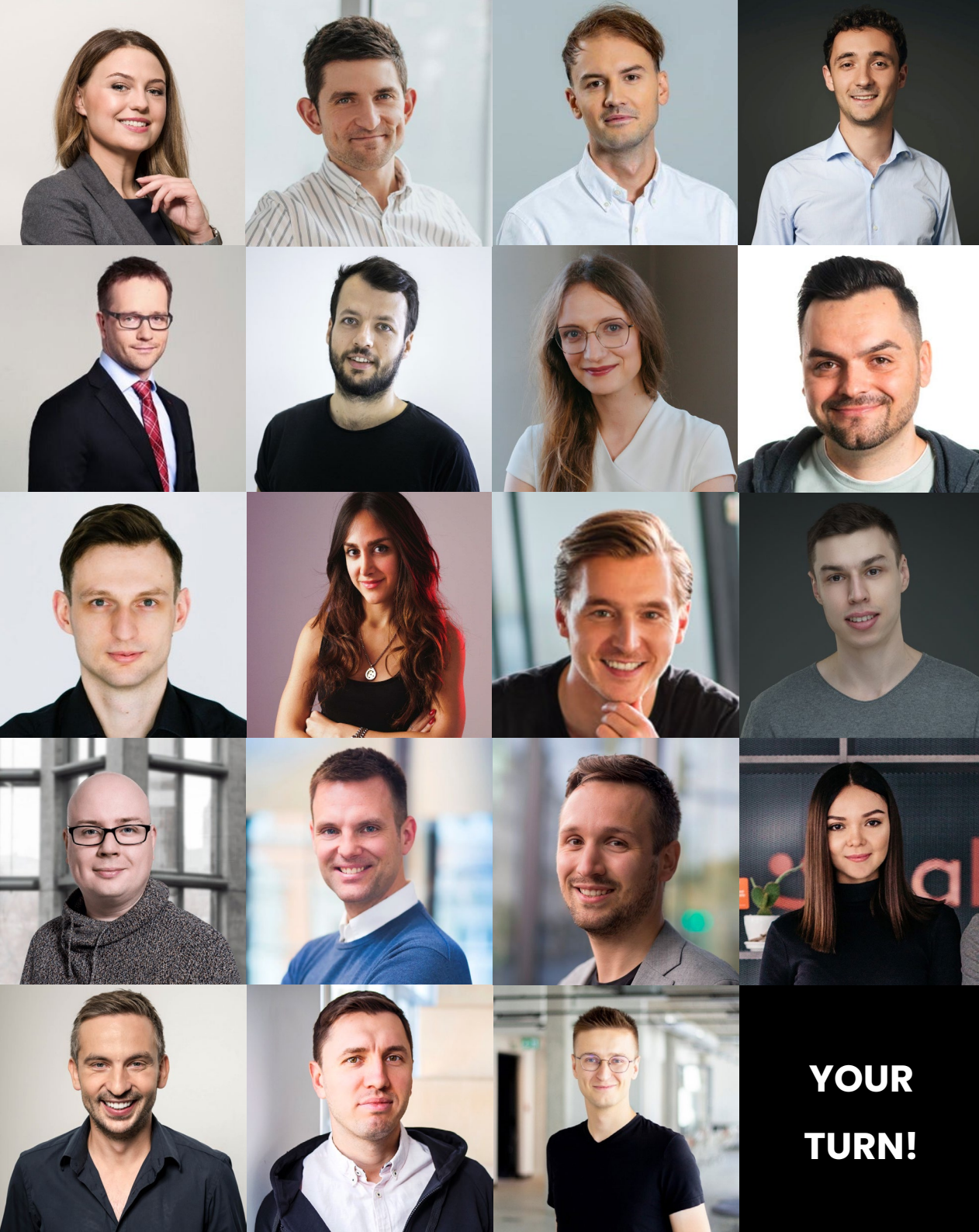
EUR/USD to PLN exchange rates

We have used a 3-month average rate for most statistics. The exceptions are the pages dedicated to the most notable transactions, where we have presented the amounts as reported in the media.

All calculations are based on PLN.

More info:

kontakt@pfrventures.pl | 800 800 120




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Find us here:

 inovo.vc/team

**YOUR
TURN!**



Polish Innovation Ecosystem

PFR Ventures

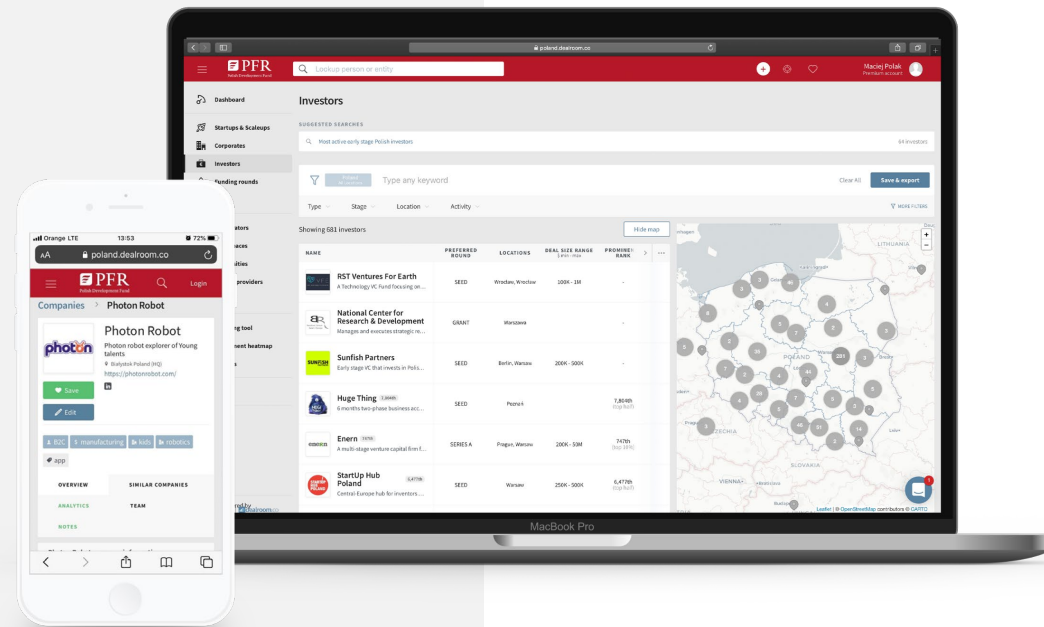
inovo^{vc}



Together with Dealroom.co we have prepared a map of the Polish innovation ecosystem. We encourage all funds and start-ups to become part of it.

Here you can add information on your organisation:

 startup.pfr.pl/ekosystem-innowacji



+3,000

start-ups

+100

VC funds



dealroom.co



startup.pfr.pl

