

Mná na hÉireann, Women of Ireland Fund



FINAL
EVALUATION
REPORT

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Introduction to the Fund

In September 2019, Rethink Ireland, in partnership with Bank of America and the Department of Rural and Community Development via the Dormant Accounts Fund launched the Mná na hÉireann, Women of Ireland Fund. The three-year Fund was designed to support non-profit organisations, charities and social enterprises who were focused on assisting women experiencing disadvantage to progress to further education and employment. It had the following goals:

1. Double the capacity of the Awardees on the Fund
2. Support 500 women into accredited education
3. Empower 1,000 women into sustainable employment

Following the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Awardees and on the employability landscape in Ireland, the Fund was extended to cover an additional year (2022-2023).

What did the Awardees Receive?

Through the Mná na hÉireann, Women of Ireland Fund, Rethink Ireland supported six Awardees with cash grants, a non-financial business supports package, access to an Accelerator Programme and Champions Programme. Rethink Ireland awarded a total of €1,760,000 in funding.

→ **Cash Grants**
Awardees received between €50,000 and €100,000 per year. This investment could be spent on costs related to staff salaries, project running costs, training, IT infrastructure etc.

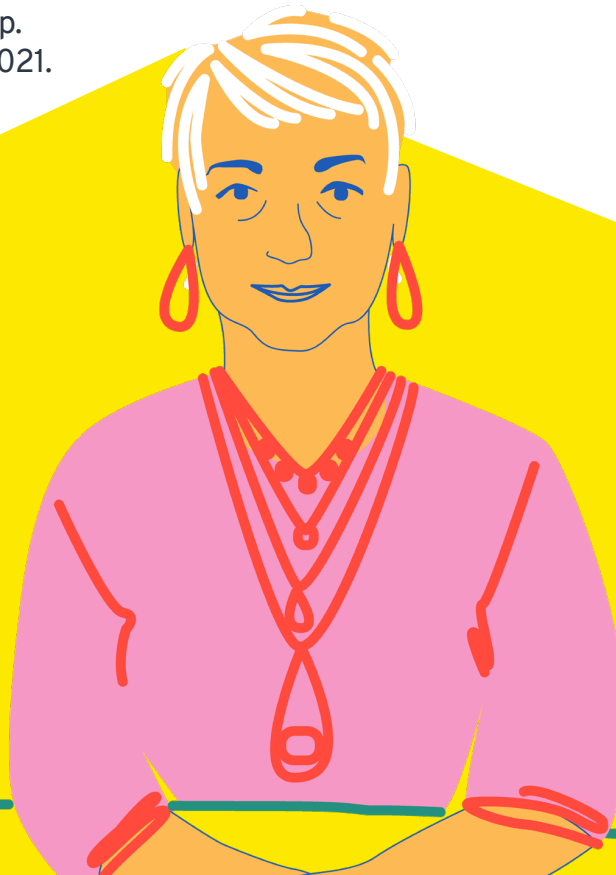
→ **Non-Financial Supports Package**
These supports were delivered by a team of external consultants as well as Rethink Ireland's team in a one-to-one capacity. Supports included guidance on impact measurement; strategic planning; programme development; and event planning.

→ **Accelerator Programme**
The programme was delivered by Rethink Ireland via a series of online webinars. It aimed to build the capacity of Awardees, providing advice and knowledge across a range of areas including fundraising; strategic planning; leadership; and impact measurement.

→ **Bank of America Champions Programme**
The programme provided needs-based mentoring from Bank of America staff to build capacity within Awardees' organisations across a range of areas including internal operations; fundraising; board/governance support; networking and relationship building.

Mná na hÉireann, Women of Ireland Fund Awardees

- **Work Equal: Core Services**
Supporting individual women to enter the workforce with confidence (via suiting service, career advice, mentoring, returnships and financial education programmes) and initiating a national discussion on barriers to economic equality for women.
- **Westmeath Community Development: *Here Come the Girls***
Removing the barriers that prevent and discourage women living rurally from taking part in training and upskilling, offering women an opportunity to gain relevant labour market training and qualifications.
- **An Cosán: *Women's Education Programme***
Addressing the challenge of providing empowering and effective progression routes through education into quality employment for disadvantaged women.
- **Irish Refugee Council: *Integration from Day One***
Addressing the barriers and challenges that refugee women face in developing and maintaining skills while in the asylum process, or seeking employment once eligible to work, through a tailored package of support and training.
- **Equal Ireland: *Amplifying Rural Voice***
Offering women living rurally the opportunity to gain a degree in social and commercial enterprise, community development and leadership and management, to prepare them for employment and promotional opportunities as well as voluntary endeavours.
- **Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI): *Superwomen Programme***
Providing personal and professional development for trans women. The programme also worked with employers to address internal and external barriers to labour market participation for this group.
TENI exited the Fund in 2021.



Impact Overview

Awardee Reporting



€1,760,000

Funding
Awarded



6

Total
Awardees*

2,989



Women
Supported

747



Women in
Accredited
Education

1,088



Women in
Sustainable
Employment

*TENI exited the Fund in 2021

Learners Reached



25/26

Counties Reached

18 → 65+

Participants ranged
from under 18 to
over 65



34+

Nationalities Reached

Sustainable Employment and Accredited Education*

2,989

Women have successfully
engaged in and completed
programmes

1,280

Women have secured
sustainable jobs

2,301

Women have been
supported to enrol in
accredited education

*Based on survey data. Further details on page 17

Awardee Capacity

119% Increase

Fund Context

Employability Landscape in Ireland at Fund Launch



Females accounted for 46% of the employed population in Ireland with an employment rate of 63.5% compared to 74.5% for males.



Labour force participation rate for females in Ireland in 2018 was 14% less than males at 63.8% and 77.5% respectively.



A greater percentage of women were considered low paid than men. Part-time workers accounted for over 50% of all National Minimum Wage employees; 80% of whom were female, with an estimated 60 and 65% of minimum wage workers in Ireland being women.



Nearly 1 in 10 women (7.3%) experienced some form of discrimination in the workplace, with gender the most common ground identified. Migrant women, minority ethnic, and Traveller women were found to experience additional disadvantages in access to the labour market as well as in the workplace.



98% of the people who were looking after home or family in 2016 were women. Older women were five times more likely than men to leave work to care for a family member.



Nearly a fifth (17.1%) of families headed by a lone parent (86% of whom were women) were in consistent poverty compared to 6.1% for two-parent households with no children.



The COVID-19 pandemic had a gendered impact with inequalities in employment rates and caring responsibilities exacerbated for women.

Systems Change

The publication of *The Impact of COVID-19 on Women's Economic Mobility* in collaboration with the National Women's Council and proudly supported by the Government of Ireland via the Dormant Accounts Fund is an example of the Fund's systems change approach to women's economic empowerment. This report highlighted the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated lockdowns negatively impacted women's economic mobility.

The report detailed that between July and September 2020:

- The Irish unemployment rate for women rose by 54%, more than double that for men in the same period;
- Women deprioritised their mental health, and felt that they no longer had the time to practice activities that support their mental wellbeing;
- Unpaid care work increased during the pandemic, with 71% of women providing care for children, adults, or both, in their home.

Following this collaboration and support, the *Rocking the Cradle or Rocking the Boat Report* was published on International Women's Day 2023. This report found that care responsibilities significantly impacted women's economic mobility. Gendered expectations of care meant that women were more likely than men to reduce their hours or leave work entirely to care for children. Additionally, women who worked in the care sector faced barriers to increasing their economic empowerment. The vast majority of these workers are poorly paid and do not have access to benefits such as maternity leave or pensions. The report concluded that not only is this a significant problem for the women of Ireland, this gender imbalance negatively impacts the country as a whole. It lists a number of recommendations submitted by the National Women's Council on how to gender proof the economy and encourages all genders to meaningfully engage with care work.



Evaluation Methodology

In December 2019, S3 Solutions was commissioned by Rethink Ireland to undertake an evaluation of the Mná na hÉireann, Women of Ireland Fund.

Data Collection

The evaluation adopted a mixed method approach to data collection and has been informed by the following:



Evaluation reports for years one, two and three



Desk review of steering committee reports



Awardee organisational capacity data



Five organisational outcomes questionnaires



19 telephone interviews with participants as case



15 semi-structured online interviews with Awardees



A web-based, reflective participant survey gathering a total of 196 responses between December 2022-February 2023.

Work Equal
52 responses
(3% response rate)

Equal Ireland
82 responses
(32% response rate)

Westmeath Community Development
23 responses
(2.59% response rate)

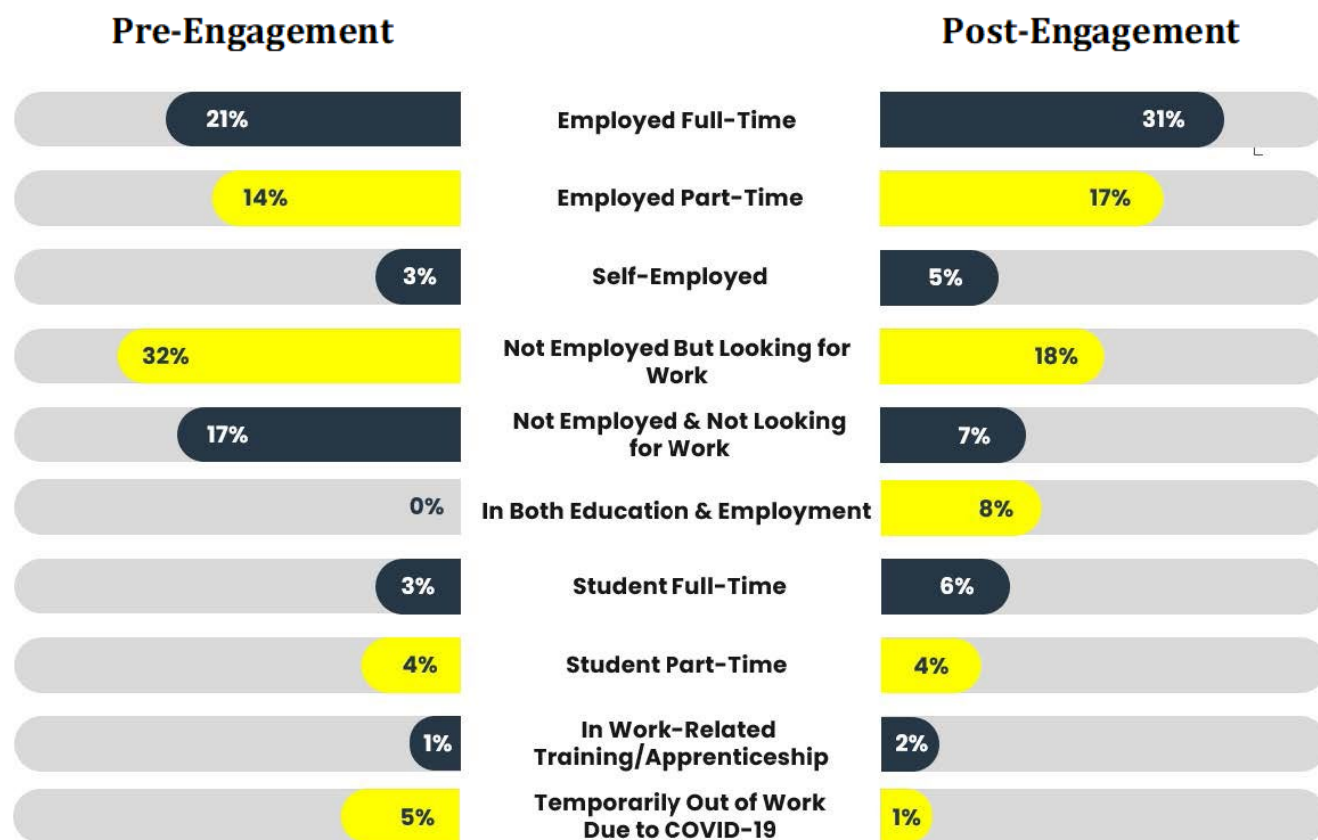
Irish Refugee Council
38 responses
(16% response rate)

An Cosán
3 responses
(0.9% response rate)

Impact on Learners: Survey Findings

Employment Status

After receiving support, more learners were in employment (38% pre vs 61% post) and less were unemployed and not in education (62% pre vs 38% post). More learners were also in some form of education or training after receiving support (8% pre vs 20% post). 31% of learners transitioned from unemployment to employment and 9% transitioned from unemployment to education during the Fund.



Creating Pathways to Employment

On average, respondents perceived that the training and qualifications they had achieved would create a pathway to employment. Examples of qualification, and apprenticeship areas included: Business Management; Construction; Customer Service; Food Safety; and Social Care.

Sustainable Employment

- 88%** → Of employed respondents (N=106) reported their employment matches their experience and interests either fairly or very well.
- 68%** → Of employed respondents (N=106) reported their employment provides opportunities for them to advance and earn more.
- 68%** → Of employed respondents (N=106) indicated that support from the Awardee played a part in helping them to get a job.



Amanda's Story

"I am a 47-year-old woman living in County Dublin. I began engagement with An Cosán in 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic. I first heard about An Cosán through my local job centre and applied to a course in business administration. The support from An Cosán has been amazing; they are there to help with technology and assignments and the tutors are fantastic. A few months ago, I was invited to an interview and my tutor took time with me to go through some questions and to give me a trial run. They really go above and beyond for their students. I was successful in the interview and am now working for the National Learning Network in a permanent part-time administration role. Without An Cosán, I don't think I'd have had confidence or the support to get back out into the world of work."

I've recently enrolled in a Level 6 community and leadership course with Equal Ireland. An Cosán, and seeing what they can do for someone online, has really given motivation to continue my own development. I am focused on progressing and getting my degree so that I can become a tutor and work in my community to help other people get back into education and employment. Without An Cosán, I think I'd still be at home. Other courses I saw in the job centre didn't interest me very much and the providers weren't very good at getting back to you. An Cosán has changed my life."

Audrey's Story

"I am a 49-year-old woman living in Westmeath. I started receiving support from Westmeath Community Development in 2018. I had been on a community employment scheme, and they made me aware that that a course was available. I had spent 22 years at home looking after my children and I wanted to do something for myself. I had been working as a kitchen porter in a nursing home and when I started interacting with residents, I realised that this was the sector that I wanted to work in. Through Westmeath Community Development, I took part in a course which would help me become a care assistant."

When I first engaged with Westmeath Community Development, they informed me of everything I was entitled to and did all of the paperwork for me; it really opened my eyes to what was out there. I did 10 modules altogether and each module helped match up my previous experience to a new sector. They helped me do up my CV and with the job application process. The course tutors were brilliant. They were there to help, even on our days off and after the course finished. After receiving this support, I have found a job working as a care assistant. It's been life changing. I didn't feel capable of doing better for myself before, but the tutors encouraged me and now I'm in employment. The support from Westmeath Community Development has really fulfilled my expectations. After being at home for years I now feel more confident in myself."

Impact on Personal Development

72%

Of learners reported their sense of feeling valued in their community had improved.

81%

Of learners reported that their relationships with others had improved.

84%

Of learners reported that their employability skills had improved.

93%

Of learners reported that their aspirations/ambitions to improve employability prospects had improved.

80%

Of learners reported their mental health and wellbeing had improved.

89%

Of learners felt their ability to reach their potential improved.

35%

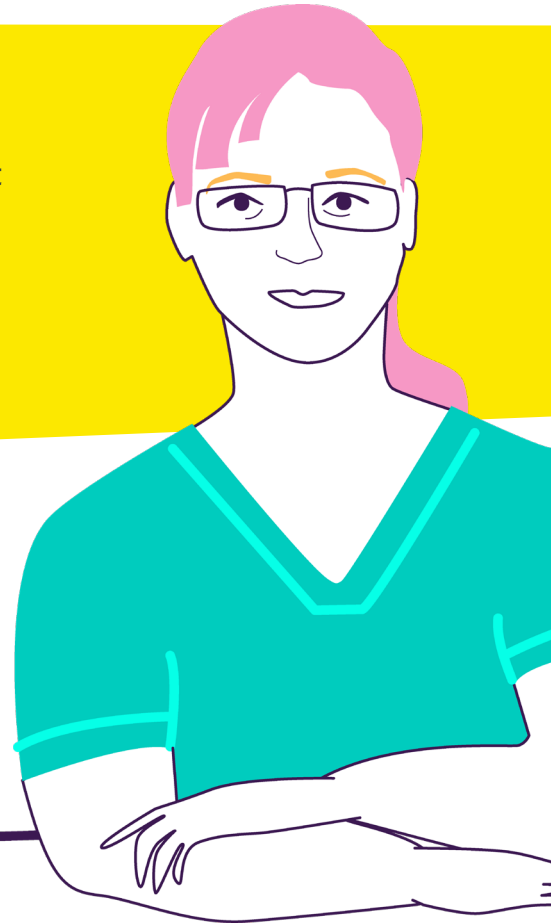
Increase in learners' motivation (sense of optimism to get work)

87%

Of learners reported that their confidence to enter and navigate the labour market had improved.

38%

Increase in learners' levels of confidence to get a job.



40%

Increase in learners' self esteem.

38%

Increase in learners' access to a support network to assist with training/education.

30%

Increase in learners' ability to identify and apply for jobs.

Most Important Aspects of Support

Participants were asked what the top three most important aspects of the support they received were. The most common feedback related to the following (listed in order of most frequently identified):

- **Personal Development:** this included confidence building, development of more robust self-esteem, boosting motivation, and developing skills for focus.
- **Education:** this included the quality of tutors and access to skilled and knowledgeable individuals as well as the specific courses facilitated, the level of education respondents were supported to achieve e.g. a degree, and support to access further education.
- **Employability:** this included career guidance, CV writing, interview skills and preparation, work placements, and the provision of appropriate interview attire.
- **Staff Approach:** respondents noted how staff provided a supportive environment, reassurance, and encouragement, were active listeners, non-judgement and approachable, and helped them to feel valued, respected and that their voices were heard.
- **Accessibility:** this included the availability of tutors/teachers/staff, the financial assistance to cover the cost of engaging in the respective programmes, the provision of IT equipment to support their participation, and weekend provision.
- **Connections and Networking:** this included opportunities to meet with a wide range of individuals, share learning, make contacts and friendships.

Participant Feedback:

"I received great advice, emotional support and was invited to participate in online sessions with other women such as myself all seeking to better our present situations."

"It opened up the opportunity for me to receive training appropriate to my needs."

"Supportive environment gave me confidence I could do it."

Natalia's Story

"I am a 51-year-old woman living in County Dublin. Work Equal had been on my radar for years. On the radio one day, Work Equal were being interviewed and they said something that really resonated with me, that the women who come through their programmes often say they "don't recognise themselves." That was something I had felt. My CV was good, and I had a lot of work experience in administration and communications, but after having been home for so many years I didn't feel like my CV represented me anymore. I was afraid about going back to work and scared that if I got a job, I wouldn't be able to do it again; I didn't know where to start and I felt alone. On the radio, Work Equal said that people needed to be brave and ask for help and then be able to access it. As a result of hearing that I rang them up during the COVID-19 pandemic. The process after that was really uplifting and characterised by gentle encouragement.

I was apprehensive before I started engaging with Work Equal. I wasn't used to having to target companies with key phrases and I wasn't on LinkedIn. It all seemed so daunting, and I'd only been on one Zoom call in my life. I soon found though that the environment at Work Equal is so safe and the people are so nice. One element of the Work Equal provision which I found really useful was around formal dress and how would I appear at office. They put me on a Zoom call with a stylist and at that stage my confidence was growing again, and she was so lovely and gave me suggestions. The turning point for me was the mentoring programme. I found it amazing. Straight away I was really comfortable, and my mentor made me feel deserving. She would do anything she could to help, and we'd have weekly texts and check ins. There's help at every stage and I was surrounded by kindness the whole time.

I attended a Work Equal workshop with Brown Thomas and they were very positive about working with the company and I was able to give them my CV. I had an interview and I started last year in their shop on Grafton Street. It was all intimidating to begin with, but a year later I'm loving it and learning new things every day. I feel like a completely new person. Things have really changed for me over the last year. I can really see my confidence coming back and I feel like everything I do is important. I had a funny interaction recently which really summed up my progress. Before a training session at work, I was in a bathroom and a woman said to me that 'I look effortlessly cool.' That made me look at how things have changed. That was the perception I had of other and never thought it would be me again. Women always think everyone else has it all together but never ourselves. We find it hard to reach out and get help, but it is so important."

Impact on Awardees: Capacity Building

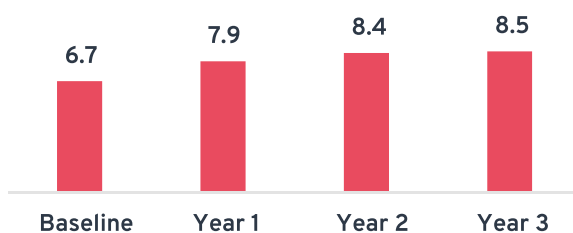
Informed by consultation findings, the following presents an overview of the Fund impact on its Awardees.



46%

Increase in knowledge, understanding and skills to deliver services that positively affect women's economic mobility in Ireland

49%
Increase in financial capacity to deliver services that positively affect the economic mobility of women in Ireland.



47%

Increase in confidence to deliver services that positively affect the economic mobility of women in Ireland

60%
Increase in perceived levels of engagement of their learners



Learning and Conclusions

Sustainable Employment and Accredited Education

The Fund aimed to **empower 1000 women to secure sustainable employment**. According to the UK National Audit Office, having sustainable employment means that an individual remains in work for 6 months, either in one job or by moving to other jobs and that work provides opportunities to advance and earn more (National Audit Office 2007:7).

The Fund Awardees report that after 3 years:

- **2,989** Women have successfully engaged in and completed programmes
- **1,088** Women have secured sustainable jobs

Based on survey data, the evaluators estimate that after 3 years:

- **2,989** Women have successfully engaged in and completed programmes
- **1,280** Women have secured sustainable jobs

The Fund Awardees reported the first set of education and job figures. The second set of figures was generated from averages taken from participant surveys which were then aggregated out to reflect the Fund as a whole. The evaluation concludes that the Fund had a greater impact than was captured by Awardee data. Based on this information, it appears that the Fund and its Awardees delivered against the Fund's aim of empowering women to secure sustainable employment.

Accredited Education

The Fund aimed to support **500 women into accredited education**.

The Fund Awardees report that after 3 years:

- **747** Women were supported to enrol in accredited education

Based on survey data, the evaluators estimate that after 3 years:

- **2,301** Women were supported to enrol in accredited education

Based on this information, it appears that the Fund and its Awardees delivered against the Fund's aim of supporting women into accredited education.



Journeys to Sustainable Employment

Women's journeys to employment were mapped using the JET Framework which identifies seven key factors that contribute to achieving a job outcome in recognition of the many barriers impacting women's economic mobility in Ireland.

Personal Circumstances

- 19% increase in participants' life stability
- 13% supported to overcome caring / childcare needs

Emotional Capabilities

- 40% reported increased self esteem
- 89% better able to reach potential
- 80% reported improved mental health and wellbeing

Attitudes

- 93% reported improved aspirations
- 35% increase in participants' motivation to get a job

Employability Skills

- 84% reported improved employability skills
- 30% increase in ability to identify and apply for jobs
- 27% increase in participants skills to get a job

Qualifications & Training

- 77% supported to enrol in qualifications or courses
- 26% supported to overcome educational barriers to employment

Experience & Involvement

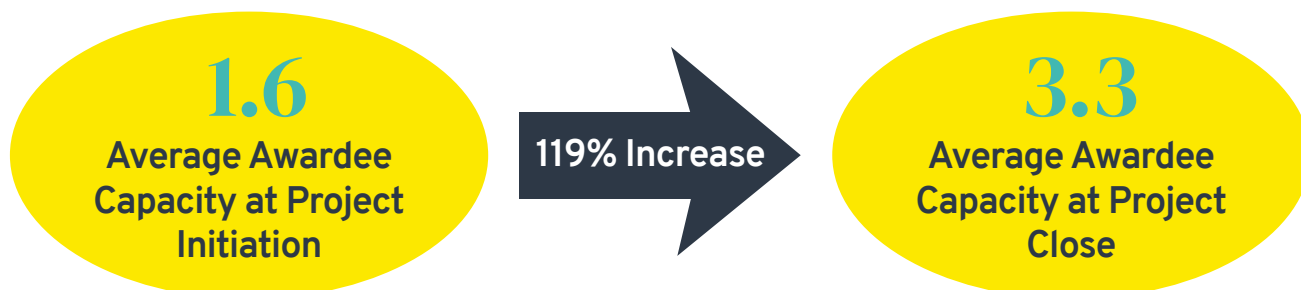
- 38% increase in participants access to support network
- 72% of participants feel more valued in their community
- 9% supported to overcome limited work experience

Career Management

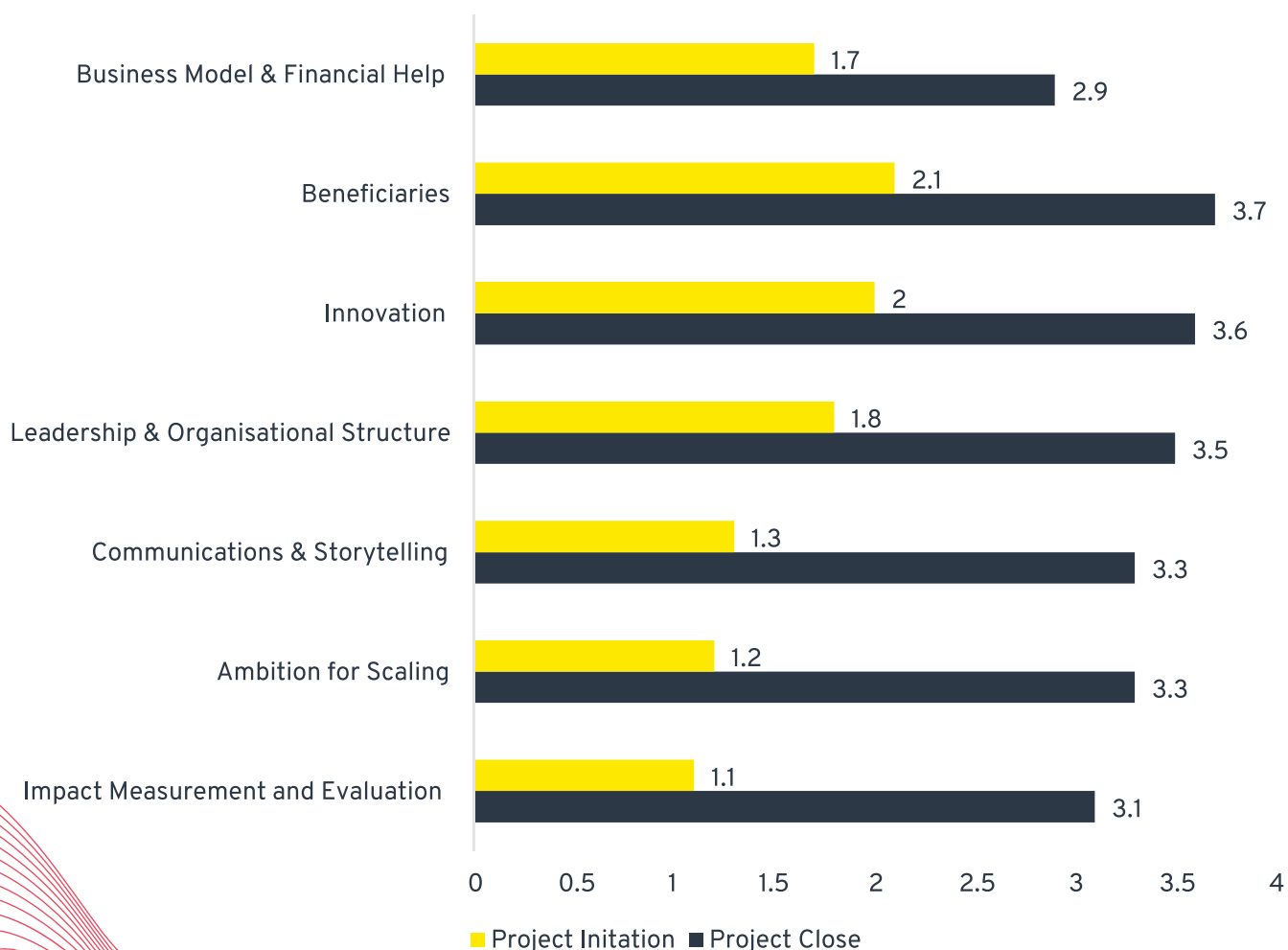
- 87% with improved confidence to enter the labour market
- 38% increase in participants confidence to get a job
- 19% increase in participants employment prospects

Awardee Capacity

The Fund aimed to **double the capacity of Awardees**. To capture impact in this area, Rethink Ireland collected organisational capacity data across seven key areas: learners; leadership & organisational structure; business model & financial health; innovation; impact measurement & evaluation; ambition for scaling; and communication / storytelling.



Awardee capacity has been improved across all 7 areas.



Strategic Relevance

After four years, the evaluation findings show that the Fund and its Awardees have delivered positive impacts which support women's journeys to employment and their overall ability to secure sustainable employment. All women have been supported to overcome at least one barrier to employment including for example a lack of confidence, low levels of education, limited employability skills and low job search skills. Additionally, Awardees' organisational capacity has been improved.

In achieving this impact, the Fund has delivered against a number of key national policies and priorities including:

National Policies:

- Programme for Government – Our Shared Future.
- Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework.

Employment Policies:

- National Skills Strategy
- Inclusive and Empowered Communities
- Pathways to Work 2021-2025 Strategy
- Government's Economic Recovery Plan 2021
- Enterprise Ireland's Leading in a Changing World Strategy 2022 – 2024

Women's Policies:

- National Women and Girls Strategy

Given the strategic alignment of the Mná na hÉireann, Women of Ireland Fund to such a wide range of policy priorities, the Fund represents an important investment at a national level for addressing the issue of women's economic mobility in Ireland.



Thank You to Our Donors

We are very proud of the work carried out by the Awardees of the Mná na hÉireann, Women of Ireland Fund, the first Fund of its kind to support charities and social enterprises that promote the economic mobility of Women in Ireland. The Fund has supported women along their journey to employment and has demonstrated that women are agents of positive change in their lives. When they are empowered, they have a powerful and positive transformational effect on their families and communities.

We would like to thank Bank of America and the Department of Rural and Community Development who have made direct contributions to the Awardees of this Fund. It is your generous and proud support that makes the Awardees impact possible. The Mná na hÉireann, Women of Ireland Fund Awardees have achieved tremendous impact by empowering these women to lead and thrive socially and economically. I look forward to watching them scale further in the coming years.

Deirdre Mortell, CEO, Rethink Ireland



