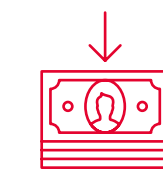# Women's Social Entrepreneurship in
IRELAND

An uphill battle against gender discrimination

In Ireland, women are running successful social enterprises in the fields of Health and Education, but entrenched sexism is preventing them from rising to the highest positions in the sector.

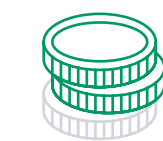## SNAPSHOT* *Out of 14 women surveyed*

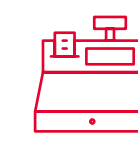Over **50%** of women surveyed have an annual revenue of **50,000 €** or more

Average length of operation of a woman's social enterprise is **3 YEARS**
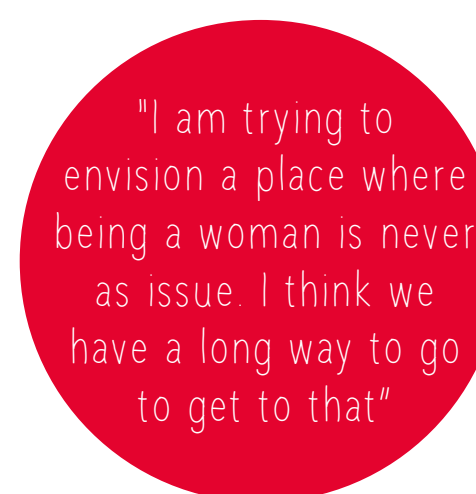
HALF of women have care responsibilities

90% of the profits are reinvested back into the organisation's social mission (by the majority of women social entrepreneurs)

Less than **1/3** of women sustain their households off the income of their social enterprise

2 JOBS are generated by women-led social enterprises on average

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Recommendations for Policy Makers

*Develop more efficient accountability and reporting mechanisms.

*Create a female only social entrepreneur network, training and support programme to bring more women leaders into the sector. Provide training grants for women in social enterprise to access additional training resources around fundraising, management and leadership.

*Research grants for overseas 'discovery' learning journeys, supporting women to learn from successful models of enterprise internationally.

*Feasibility grants for researching initial idea and testing the market.

*Enable access to business model 'robustness' assessments at start up stage to help social enterprises determine if their revenue model is feasible while having the social impact they desire. This in turn will help social enterprises not be as reliant on grant support or state finance.

*Investigate childcare support and maternity benefits for female social entrepreneurs, developing support systems which enhance the ability for women to be in senior leadership roles while caring for the needs of their families and dependents.

KEY FINDINGS

ECOSYSTEM
• Around 520 social enterprises in Ireland (estimated); no specific policy or legislation • Estimated that majority of social enterprises are fairly new, established within the last 8 years

SECTORS
• Healthcare and Education (including Childcare)

MISSIONS
• Missions range from alternative forms of health care, to youth empowerment, to promoting access for people with disabilities within the mainstream education system

MOTIVATIONS
• Seeking to make a specific social impact, responding to an unmet need in the community, innovative idea for new product, process, market or service, personal experience with a social issue

BARRIERS
• Availability of and access to funding, lack of national policy, lack of visibility of social enterprises • High level of accountability and bureaucracy associated with funding

GENDER
• Women social entrepreneurs contribute to women's empowerment in Ireland • Women give priority to collaborative methods of decision making and holistic working style

IMPACT
• Majority of women social entrepreneurs measure social impact

> "I am trying to envision a place where being a woman is never as issue. I think we have a long way to go to get to that"

George Boyle
FOUNDER OF THE FUMBALLY EXCHANGE
(a collaborative working space)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Adding Values, Delivering Change. The Role of Social Enterprise in National Recovery, Report of the Social Enterprise Task Force. Clan Credo and The Dublin Enterprise Pact., June 2010.
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Women Interviewed:
Caroline Carswell, Sound Advice / Colette Ryan, CareBrite / Edel Moloney, Speedpak / George Boyle, Fumbally Exchange / Joan Hamilton, Sli Eile Farm / Michelle O' Donnell Keating, Women for Election / Rachel Moore, Express Your Gender / Shelia Gallagher, Green Sod

ABOUT THE PROJECT

This mini-report is based on primary empirical data gathered by Clare Mulvany from February to May 2015 in Ireland, on behalf of European Women's Lobby. Qualitative data was gathered via in-depth semi-structured interviews with 8 informants using feminist interview methods. Quantitative data was gathered via an internet survey taken by 14 respondents. New data was supported by extensive desk research.

These findings are part of a 1-year pilot study initiated by the European Women's Lobby entitled WEstart: Mapping Women's Social Entrepreneurship in Europe. Focusing on 10 European countries, WEstart seeks to gain a better understanding of the situation and state of play of women's social entrepreneurship in Europe.

For more details about WEstart visit:
www.womenlobby.org
or www.WEstartEurope.org

BACKGROUND

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE IN IRELAND

History
Ireland has a long history of non-profit or charitable activity undertaken both with religious connections and in more recent years, by secular 'not for profit' organisations. Companies and organisations that are today understood as 'social enterprises', (or actors in the 'social economy') fall into this latter category. The term 'social enterprise' is fairly new within the Irish context; most social enterprises that meet the EU definition (specifically, which receive a portion of their income from selling in the market) have been started in the last eight years.

Ecosystem
The social enterprise 'eco-system' is a mix of different kinds of organisations- from community organisations and co-operatives, to for-profit companies with a social mission. The majority of social enterprises fall broadly into Education (specifically Childcare) and Healthcare, with focus on inclusion, youth empowerment, increasing employment and supporting people with disabilities. Many organisations are involved in the provision of State services (receiving some grant or statutory funding) and the provision of services and products.

Legal Format
There is currently no distinct legal status for social enterprise in Ireland. The majority are Companies Limited by guarantee without shareholders. These can also apply for Charity Status (CHY number) and be eligible for certain philanthropic supports and grants. A small number of social enterprises are Company Limited by guarantee with shareholder. Co-operative status is also available and 'Friendly Societies'. The majority have a board of directors.

Size of Sector
National data suggests there are around 520 social enterprises in Ireland which meet the Social Business

Initiative definition of a social enterprise (European Commission, 2014, ii). The majority of social enterprises have less than 5 employees. However there is an estimated one volunteer for every employee.

National Policy
There is no specific policy or legislation pertaining to social enterprise. However a number of recommendations and policy recommendation have been made through Forfás (previously Ireland's advisory board for enterprise, innovation and jobs). A Task Force for Social Enterprise was also initiated by Clan Credo, one of the social investment funds and social finance lenders, which made recommendations to government. However there have been no legislative outcomes as of yet.

Future of the Sector
There has been growth in the sector over the last 10 years, with more support organisations being established and social entrepreneurship & social enterprise being taught in universities. These include Trinity College School for Non-Profit Management, The Ryan Academy (DCU), and UCC (MBS Co-operative and social management).

Awareness of social enterprise has also grown significantly in the last 10 years in Ireland, specifically with the establishment of key support organisations for social entrepreneurs including Social Entrepreneurs Ireland, Ashoka and the Social Enterprise Network. Media profile has increased during this time of the terminology surrounding social entrepreneurship giving rise to additional awards and grants for enterprise, including social enterprise/ entrepreneurship categories in traditional business awards programmes.

Social entrepreneurship has also entered the education stream, becoming a topic of study at third level institutions and business schools. With increased awareness of social enterprise comes more organisations self-identifying as social enterprises and a corresponding call to have social enterprise recognised as a separate legal entity within Ireland.

Women for Election

Women for Election is a non-partisan organisation with the vision to have equal representation of men and women in political life in Ireland. They aim to inspire and equip women to succeed in politics. Set up in 2012, they saw a need for tailored training and mentoring to support for women to encourage and prepare them to run for office. Their approach is to offer accessible, affordable learning programmes which provide the practical skills required for running for a political position. The nationwide training programmes also serves as connectors for women, developing a network of female leaders across Ireland. Their work is also helping to boost the confidence of women running for election. **To date 50% of all female counselors in Ireland have come through a Women for Election programme.**

SOCIAL IMPACT OF WOMEN-LED ENTERPRISE

Women report moderate to high levels of success in achieving their social impact goals. Sometimes they underestimated the possibilities for success, or the speed at which they would reach it. Many women see the need for a relationship to other countries where there may be similar organisations and so they can prove the concept or gain inspiration from elsewhere. Similarly, where there has been a proven model here in Ireland, the women were open to sharing resources and learning internationally.

Overall significant impacts included: increasing the number of females represented in politics in Ireland; increasing awareness of gender issues and gender diversity; increasing employment, access to employment and work supports for those out of work.

Sli Eile

Sli Eile ('Another Way') Farm was set up by Joan Hamilton to offer a place where people with mental health difficulties can find safety and support to recover and prevent re-entry into the full time psychiatric system. Based near Mallow, Co. Cork, it offers both housing and employment opportunities for residents. Through the establishment of a bakery and a small farm, alongside residential care, a holistic approach to recovery through community living is promoted. The bakery stocks local supermarkets in the region with freshly baked breads and cakes.

Slie Eile emerged from Joan witnessing her own daughter's experience with available State mental health services, which prompted her to establish an alternative model of care.

While the number of residents remains low, Sli Eile has piloted and showcased an alternative model for mainstream mental health care services, showing that 'another way' is possible. Since establishing the farm, Joan has noticed a great increase in the wellbeing of the residents and the growth of Sli Eile. *"We have exceeded expectations"*, she commented. *"We did not expect it to come together so quickly. The farm is attracting more support"*.

WOMEN SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS

Motivations
Unmet Needs, Social Impact, Innovative Ideas

Amongst the women social entrepreneurs who took the survey and were interviewed for this project, the desire to make a specific social impact and/or respond to an unmet need in the community were key motivations for starting their enterprise. Reflection on how to make this impact or meet this need often resulted in an innovative idea for a new service or product.

Michelle O' Donnell Keating, who founded Women for Election - a highly successful social enterprise that equips and supports women in Ireland to run for political office - had always been politically active, and was frustrated with the lack of women in politics in Ireland. While campaigning around the country on a volunteer basis, she noticed the disproportionately small number of women running for election, and this sparked the idea for her social enterprise.

Similarly, Rachel Moore, founder of Express Your Gender, a social enterprise that caters to the trans-gendered community, founded her organisation after working part-time as a clinical psychologist with transgendered patients, and realizing that there were severe financial barriers that prevented her patients from getting the care they needed. At the time, Moore was employed in the corporate world, and realized that when it came to corporate diversity policies and programmes, there was a huge gap concerning trans-gender issues. Observing these two unmet needs was what motivated Express Your Gender.

The economic and social context also plays a pivotal role in affecting a woman's decision to start a social enterprise. For some, the economic downturn in Ireland, which resulted in unemployment, was, and continues to be a strong motivating factor. Seeking their own employment and in turn the employment of others, female social entrepreneurs are motivated to create hubs or develop an eco-system for training, learning and enhancing the prospect of employment. In doing so they create a chance to remain in Ireland rather than facing emigration.

"I wanted to tease out collaborative opportunity", commented George Boyle, who established the Fumbally Exchange, a collective workings space, in response to the economic downturn and the need to find a collective response to the problem, adding, *"Good ideas, with integrity that help people will find wheels if you believe in them and approach humbly".*

Personal experience with a social issue

The desire to make a specific social impact or fill missing gaps, correlated strongly with another key motivation: a personal experience with a particular social issue.

For Caroline Carswell, founder of Sound Advice, a social enterprise that helps parents of children with hearing-loss connect with hearing technologies and digital tools, her own experience with deafness was a major motivating factor. As Carswell recalls, *"15 years ago, I had a good job... it paid well, had perks. Then about 6 years ago, I realized I need more. I was aware of issues that people (with hearing loss) were facing; they could not access hearing services or speech services."*

For another social entrepreneur, who runs a social enterprise that provides alternative mental health services, it was the experience of having a daughter with mental illness that sparked her desire to launch a social enterprise. *"I watched her change from a happy teenager, to being withdrawn,"* the woman relates. *"It was soul destroying."*

Additionally, many women were seeking to feel purposeful in their work, and saw that they had transferable skills which they had gained in the corporate sector, such as finance and management, which they could take to the social sector via social enterprise. *"The experience in the private sector was good in terms of professionalism and the training you get in those places"*, added Edel Moloney, who is on the management team of SpeedPak, a social enterprise that produces customized prizes and ribbons and provides work to unemployed people.

Barriers

Funding and issues relating to funding supply are cited as the main barriers women face to setting up social enterprises, however this is not necessarily different to those of men. High level of accountability and bureaucracy associated with even small grants were also seen as challenges. For many, trying to keep funders happy while meeting needs of beneficiaries places high demand on their time, energy and abilities to effectively and efficiently deliver on their missions.

"The level of bureaucracy can get in the way of innovation", explained Edel Moloney, *"I learned that it is harder to bring good idea to fruition then you think."*

Gender Barriers

Pay is also a challenge for the majority of women running social enterprises. The majority do not rely on the enterprise for the sole source of their income and many reported that they would be unable to do their work without the support of a spouse or partner.

Lack of skills, particularly in relation to leadership, management and finance were also raised as challenges. This in turn led to a lack of confidence regarding running for senior management/ CEO roles. *"We need more training on marketing and pushing yourself out there"*, commented Colette Ryan from Carebrite, a major homecare provider and social enterprise.

As there are fewer women in leadership roles, women reported feelings of isolation or loneliness when in those roles.

"I see great value in industry groups which support women."

said Caroline Carswell, believing this is one way to overcome the issue.

Gender discrimination was also cited as a major problem for women social entrepreneurs, especially at the senior level. One woman, who requested anonymity, describes being passed up for a big promotion after years of work at her company; the position was given to a young man with much less experience who she herself had brought on as an intern.

"It's not that I am not empowered but the higher I go, the more barriers I meet and I find that actually more disempowering as the real extent of the «glass ceiling» becomes clear" she notes.

"I was informed of the exiting CEO's resignation after coming back from a holiday and the appointment of his replacement as a fait accompli with no process, no consultation and no opposition from the Board which had several high profile women on it.

"Overall 3 more experienced women were passed over for the role. I feel that this situation is an accurate reflection of the "state of play" in Ireland where women lead the sector but men still hold much of the power, particularly where corporate investment is concerned."

Gender and Social Entrepreneurship

According to available data, men and women are equally likely to start social enterprise, however organisations supporting social entrepreneurs (such as Social Entrepreneurs Ireland) report higher numbers of applicants from females.

Several interviewees did note that women tend to wait until they have a product or service perfected before they will set up their venture and are less risk adverse than men, especially in relation to fundraising. As Michelle O'Donnell Keating from Women for Election noted,

"Women feel they need to be far more prepared than the male equivalent. Men are happy to give it a lash, where women need another study."

Access to networks and networking skills was noted as a difference also, with women finding more relational, less formal network easier and more accessible than formal networking events. *"Women's relationships are more friendship based, and based on building up trust"*, commented Edel Moloney from Speedpac.

Different levels of comfort with the word 'leader' were also expressed. Some women encountered negative perceptions of their abilities as a woman to lead an organisation or encountered surprise when they present themselves as a CEO. For Caroline Carswell of Sound Advice, who is also deaf, the challenge was two-fold,

"I think I have a double challenge being a female social entrepreneur who has a perceived disability."

Gender Roles

Prevailing gender roles for women were noted within the sector, with more women in care positions and men in leadership roles, especially on boards and at senior management levels. *"In Ireland we have a lot of catching up to do"*, commented George Boyle from The Fumbally Exchange.

"I am trying to envision a place where being a woman is never as issue, that it is just another part of the rainbow of qualities. I think we have a long way to go to get to that."

The women interviewed displayed a set of characteristics and capacities which notably supported the development of their social enterprise.

These included:

• **Resilience:** Women demonstrated tenacity and sticking power to their missions, often working through complex family issues and/or personal health challenges.

• **Tending to relationships:** Women tend to focus on developing a wide network of support and focus on people and communication skills.

• **Process orientation:** Women tend to focus not only on the end goal but also the process, building relationships and networks as they go. Priority is often given to collaborative methods of decision making.

• **Empathy** was also a common characteristic with women displaying strong empathic responses to those in need.

• **Adaptability and Flexibility:** The women seek creative ways to solve problems, often deferring or forgoing personal recognition to get to the best outcome.

The women interviewed take systemic, holistic approaches to their work. They see the big picture and work within the old system to create new paths to solutions and opportunities.

Gender Equality

For the majority of women addressing gender equality did not play a role in their initial involvement with social entrepreneurship. However, viewing their work holistically, many make the connection that addressing issues such as childcare, employment for women, female political representation, and adult education at a systemic level will improve the overall opportunities for women.