



## STARTING STRONG, IRELAND

### What?

Starting Strong is an initiative for women entrepreneurs with growth ambitions. It was launched in 2014 and provides an integrated package of training, mentoring and peer coaching. Starting Strong is operated by the Going for Growth initiative (an entrepreneurship programme for women which won the European Enterprise Promotion Award 2015), and receives financial support from Enterprise Ireland and in-kind support from corporate sponsors. The initiative uses peer learning, which can help participants build their networks with similarly ambitious entrepreneurs, and has been successful at using former participants as “Lead Entrepreneurs” that deliver much of the support.

### Why?

The programme was launched in response to a demand by women entrepreneurs in the Going for Growth initiative who had a strong growth potential, but had not yet reached a growth phase. To qualify for Starting Strong, candidates must have an innovative business and significant growth ambitions from the outset. Participants’ businesses typically are in the early revenue stage.

### Key activities

The initiative uses volunteer successful entrepreneurs, referred to as Lead Entrepreneurs. Their role is to lead structured round table discussions and facilitate peer-learning among groups of women entrepreneurs over a 6-month period. Lead Entrepreneurs share their experience with their group, nurture a culture of trust and collaboration, and facilitate the sharing of experiences and challenges. The strength of this approach is that the initiative leverages coaching and peer-learning simultaneously, which is both cost-effective and also enables participants to build their entrepreneurship networks. This approach is similar to the one used by the Going for Growth programme, but has been adapted to suit the specific stage of development needs and concerns of Starting Strong participants. For example, funding, access to finance and cash flow are a major concern for Starting Strong participants while Going for Growth participants cited recruitment and management issues as a more pressing challenge, and the content of the support is adapted accordingly. The Starting Strong programme offers thematic workshops in addition to the peer roundtables. An annual event is also held. The Starting Strong programme typically works with two groups of participants each year (approximately 17 participants per year).

## Impact

The 2019 cohort had 17 participants. Total combined turnover for the businesses is EUR 2.4 million, and this volume of turnover increased nearly EUR 500 000 over the 6-month cycle (21%). At the end of the cycle, 9 of the participants had export experience and there were 75 people employed in the participants' businesses.

*This case study was adapted from material published in: OECD/European Union (2019), The Missing Entrepreneurs 2019: Policies for Inclusive Entrepreneurship, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264251496-en> [1]*

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### Links

[1] <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264251496-en>