Empowering Small Businesses: **360° in Madrid**

ie FOUNDATION

Empowering Small Businesses: 360° in Madrid

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Executive summary

This report delivers a thorough, strategic analysis of the 360º Project - Empowering Small Businesses in the City of Madrid, a project supported by JPMorganChase and the Madrid City Council and conducted by the IE Foundation's Center for Social Innovation and Sustainability. Over two cohorts, the project has directly engaged 206 small business owners from different districts in Madrid, aiming to enhance their entrepreneurial capacity and resilience through three main cornerstones: finance, general management skills, and marketing and digital presence.

The primary aim of this report is to assess the development and progress of project beneficiaries over the past two years, placing their experiences and outcomes within the broader socioeconomic context of Spain and, more specifically, Madrid. In doing so, it seeks to shed light on both the project's impact and the changing needs of Madrid's small business community.

The report begins with an overview of beneficiaries' journey throughout the project and their profile. It then examines the financial situation of their micro-enterprises, workforce size, and the development of their knowledge and skills. Additionally, the report addresses topics such as resilience and takes a forward-looking view of the participants' future.

A core component of the analysis focuses on a detailed examination of beneficiary progress, combining robust quantitative metrics with qualitative narratives. To provide a deeper understanding of individual experiences, each section of the report features a case study of one of the project's participants, showcasing their personal and professional transformations on a specific topic. This dual approach not only provides a snapshot of the entrepreneurs' current status but also offers insight into their long-term ambitions and how they envision their future.

The findings presented in this report are grounded in data gathered from participant surveys administered across both cohorts. They are further enhanced by insights drawn from a series of focus groups, which were designed to foster a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the micro-business ecosystem in Madrid, capturing diverse perspectives and uncovering systemic dynamics that influence small business owners' experiences.

Project Implementation 2023-2025

PHASE 1

206 beneficiaries selected

106 in the first cohort **100 in the second cohort**

Welcome

- **Welcome activities with the City Council of Madrid**
- **Team's project introduction**

PHASE 2

General training

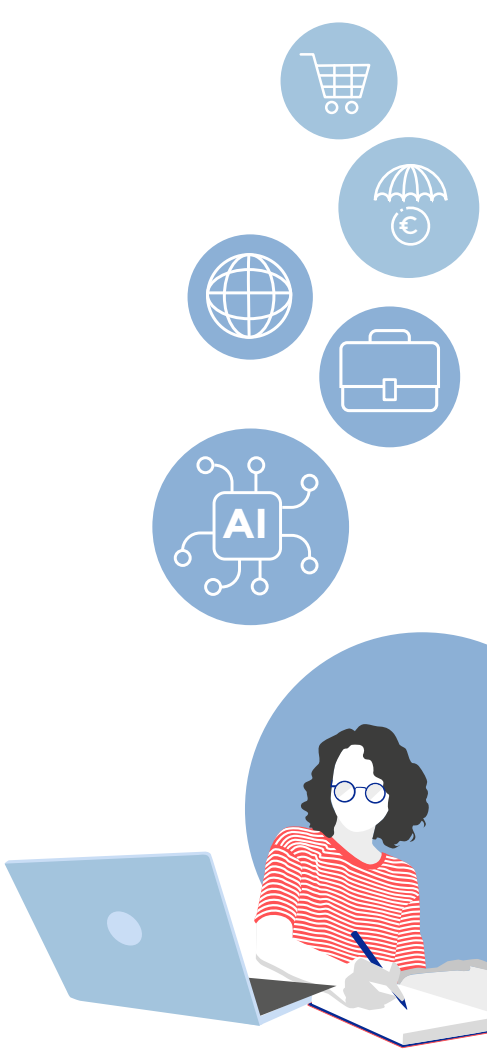
- **Start of practical training and group tutoring sessions**
- **6 double training sessions (asynchronous and synchronous sessions)**
- **12 double tutoring sessions**

PHASE 3

Diagnosis

- In-person workshop about leadership & finance
- Session: access to financial resources
- Optional 1:1 tutoring sessions
- Progress assessment and tutor feedback
- Selection of beneficiaries for the specialization phase

PHASE 4



Specialization

Personalized learning tracks: finance, general management skills, marketing and online presence

- **15 double training sessions**
- **15 double tutoring sessions**

TRAINING FORMATS

Synchronous and asynchronous sessions, recorded content + Q&A, group and **individual tutoring sessions**

In-person workshops at IE Business School: conflict resolution, business positioning and two **bonus sessions**

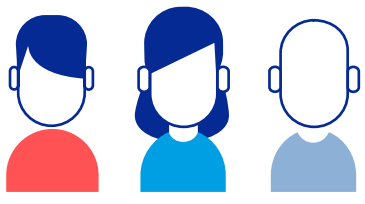
PHASE 5

Consolidation

- Reflections and sharing of lessons learned
- Final in-person workshop: metaverse for brands + hands-on AR/VR experience/ artificial intelligence

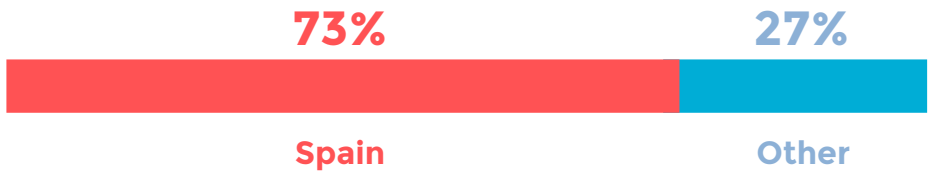
Beneficiaries' profile

Gender



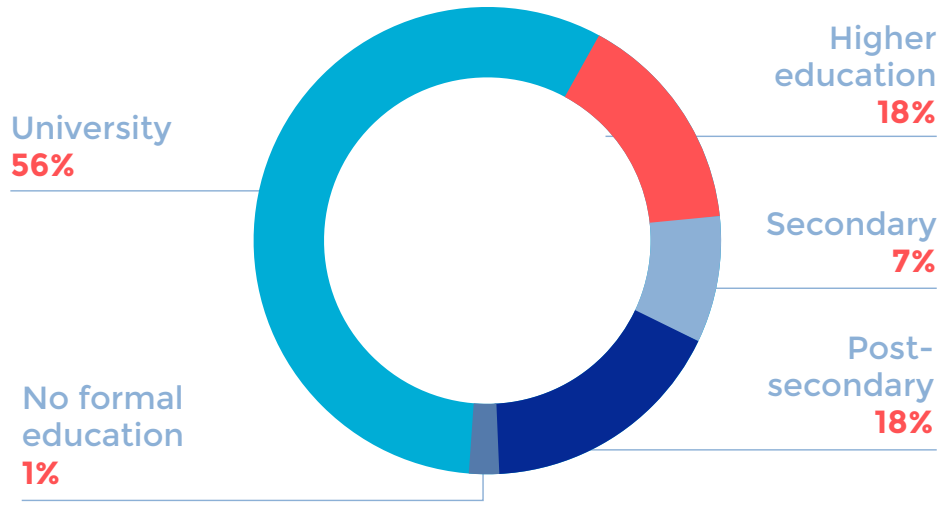
Gender	
Female	61%
Male	38%
Prefers not to answer	1%

Country of origin

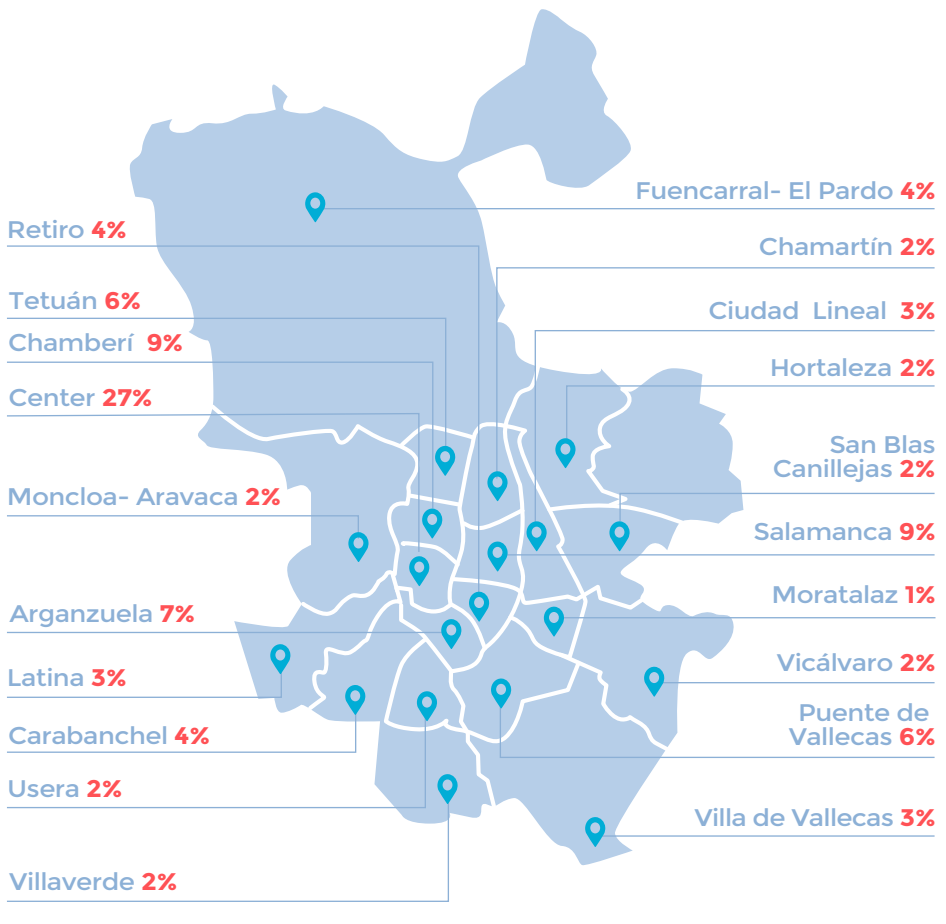


Type of business

Education



Geographic location



Turnover Challenges for Beneficiaries

While Spain's broader economy is showing signs of recovery, not all businesses are benefiting equally. The latest report published by the Spanish Confederation of Small and Medium Enterprises (CEPYME in its Spanish acronym) for the third quarter of 2024 reveals a concerning disparity: large and medium-sized companies are witnessing growth, yet micro-enterprises are continuing to struggle.[1]

The report points out that there is no reliable sales data available for micro-enterprises. However, the existing information is sufficient to demonstrate that these firms are finding it hard to recover. Despite the absence of precise sales figures, CEPYME and various news sources agree on the stagnation of micro-enterprises.[2]

Although the Spanish economy is experiencing 3.4% year-on-year growth, small retail businesses are finding it difficult to gain momentum. According to Eurostat, sales in this sector fell by 0.6% in November 2024 compared to the previous month.[3]

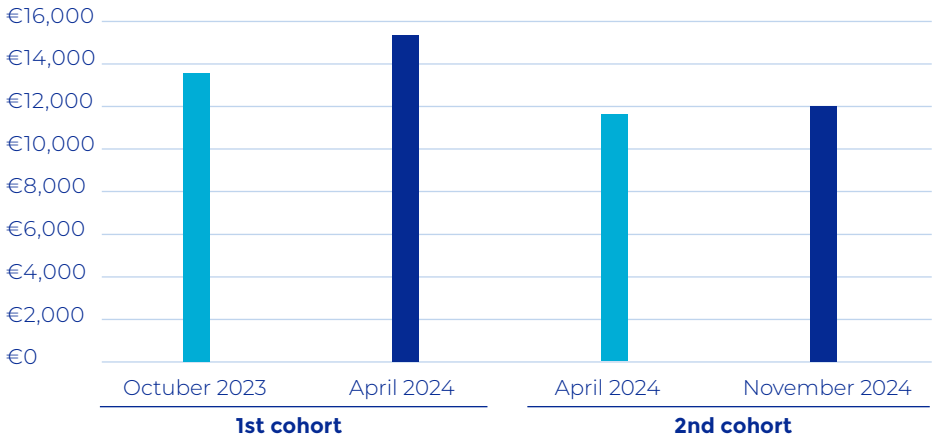
In this context, it is worth highlighting that the micro-businesses participating in the project increased their revenue. In the first cohort, increases were more robust than in the second one, with sales rising by 11.29% in the first group, while turnover in the second cohort rose by 3.20%.

[1] *Indicador CEPYME sobre la Situación de la Pyme - III Trimestre de 2024

[2] *Indicador CEPYME sobre la Situación de la Pyme - III Trimestre de 2024

[3] https://gaceta.es/economia/espana-es-ya-el-segundo-pais-de-europa-en-el-que-mas-caen-las-ventas-del-pequeno-comercio-20250114-1228/

Figure 1. Beneficiaries' turnover during the project



Source: authors' own based on information provided by the beneficiaries.

The case of Arantxa

Cose Madrid is a creative sewing and design studio located in the heart of Madrid, hosting weekly classes for those eager to sharpen their fashion skills. It also organizes intensive weekend workshops led by seasoned industry professionals, including Arantxa, the firm's founder. In addition, it provides tailored tutoring for fashion and pattern-making students and features a bespoke atelier where custom garments are brought to life.

Arantxa founded Cose Madrid five years ago. She started out by selling surgical caps in 2020, at the height of the pandemic, in a venture that proved unexpectedly successful and gave her the means to open a physical studio. However, 2021 and 2022 were **financially challenging**, both ending in losses. 2023 followed a similar path. In October 2023, she decided to take part in the first cohort of the 360º Project, aiming to totally redefine her strategy and finally enabling the business to turn a corner.

By the end of that same year, she had managed to generate most of her annual income and saved the business. What sparked the change? Beyond the realization that continued losses were unsustainable, it was the insights shared by Lucia Egea, the 360º Project's finance tutor, which shifted her mindset. Arantxa began managing her finances differently, developing stronger financial literacy and refining her approach to analysis.

In 2024, Cose Madrid's business revenue went up by 58%. This increase meant she could start paying herself a salary, which would have been unthinkable during the previous year. Arantxa even anticipates modest growth in 2025. To drive further progress, she conducted a thorough analysis to see how to optimize her expenses.

Although things have improved, Arantxa is realistic about the challenges facing small businesses. Despite recent growth, moving into a larger studio is not an option at present given ongoing rent increases.

Arantxa's **financial progress** is not solely due to improvements and changes in her money management. A key part of her success has come from her improved digital presence. She has significantly increased her visibility through storytelling workshops, boosting visits to her website by 40%. Her Google profile views have also risen by 46%, while her Pinterest impressions have soared from 3,000 to over 372,000. She has also added a new app so students can automatically book or reschedule sewing classes, thus streamlining the customer experience and improving client satisfaction.

These changes, combined with Arantxa's resilience and adaptability, have had a powerful, highly positive impact on her business.

In her own words:

"The 360º Project has given me a much more thorough understanding of my finances. It has helped me to analyze my business and has provided me with the tools I need to tackle the future."

Workforce size trends

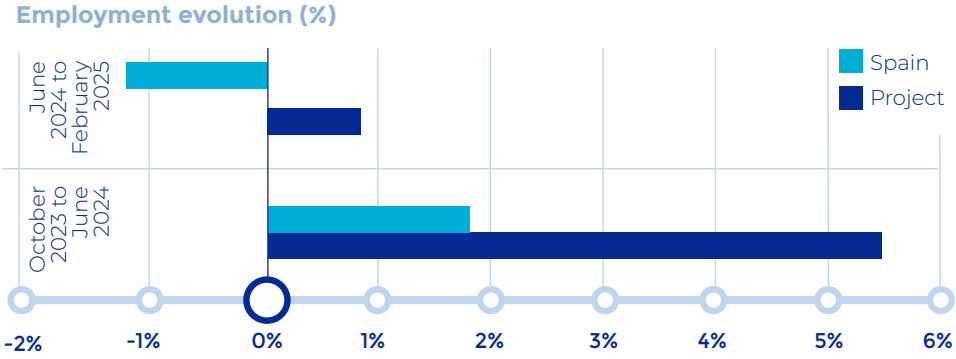
It is essential to understand the broader employment landscape to contextualize the impact of the 360º Project on participating small businesses. In recent years, data from Spain's Social Security system has highlighted moderate overall employment growth among SMEs. However, this growth has not been uniform across all company sizes. Micro-enterprises with only one to two employees have shown no signs of growth, reflecting the job stagnation that has persisted over two consecutive years.

According to Spain's Social Security statistics, at the end of December 2023,[4] the number of employees working in SMEs had increased across all company size categories, except for micro-enterprises with one or two members of staff. This stagnation persisted in 2024, with no employment growth recorded in this segment.[5] By contrast, data from the 360º Project shows that participating businesses had an average of 2.97 employees, situating them in the middle of the two smallest employment subcategories. This makes the absence of growth in Spain's smallest enterprises especially relevant when assessing the project's outcomes.

Against this backdrop, the progress observed in the 360º Project is particularly significant. Both project cohorts recorded a positive increase in the number of employees throughout the project, with a sharp rise in the first group. The graph below compares national employment figures for micro-enterprises with three to five employees between 2023 and 2025 with data from the project. While national statistics reveal only slight gains between 2023 and 2024 and a decline from 2024 to 2025, the businesses supported through the 360º Project experienced continued employment growth across both periods.

[4] https://www.mites.gob.es/es/estadisticas/mercado_trabajo/EMP/welcome.htm
[5] https://www.mites.gob.es/es/estadisticas/mercado_trabajo/EMP/welcome.htm

Figure 2. Employment figures for the micro-enterprises participating in the project compared to national figures



Source: authors' own based on data provided by project beneficiaries and by the Spanish Ministry of Labor and Social Economy in its statistical reports on companies registered in the Social Security system *(Estadística de empresas inscritas en la Seguridad Social)* for December 2023, December 2024 and February 2025.

The case of Antonio

Pastelería Luzón has a rich history spanning seven generations of master pastry chefs who have created homemade cakes and pastries. The bakery was purchased by Antonio's grandfather in 1952 and has remained in the family ever since. Antonio, the current manager and master chocolatier, works alongside his father in the same small shop where his grandfather once worked.

Every sweet treat from their kitchen, located just behind the shop, is baked with high-quality ingredients with no saturated fats or preservatives. These creations are a testament to genuine passion and a deeply rooted family tradition. Every day, Antonio bakes fresh goods that combine authenticity with craftsmanship, leaving a lasting impression on everyone who tastes them.

Until recently, however, Antonio lacked a clear financial strategy. His main goal was to survive. This changed with his participation in the 360º Project. As he attended the finance training sessions, he began to grasp essential concepts such as financial health, the importance of data, and how to use tools such as Excel. It was the first time he had used this program, and it has since become a key part of his daily routine.

During his learning journey, Antonio discovered what cash flow is and also gained a clear understanding of how much he can invest in raw materials. He developed a holistic overview of his business, analyzing its financial progress from 2021 to 2025. This clarity has enabled him to recognize real growth, which he directly attributes to the impact of the 360º Project. In fact, he managed to pay off a loan thanks to a better understanding of his finances and access to up-to-date information. Today, he can see tangible signs of business growth, which he wasn't aware of before.

His planning and cash flow management have significantly improved. Antonio says this transformation happened because he was willing to seek help and openly share his financial situation. He has created a detailed Excel document that breaks down income and expenses, providing a clear view of sales and costs for every item he makes. He has also made a conscious effort to step out of the kitchen, where he traditionally spends most of his time. This willingness to move outside his comfort zone has also brought meaningful results.

In **employment** terms, Pastelería Luzón maintained the same team throughout the 360º Project. Despite the increased workload, Antonio has made substantial financial investments in the business of which he is deeply proud. Moreover, he has not ruled out expanding the team in the future. In fact, he is considering whether to hire a **new employee** in September 2025, which could mark a key milestone in the ongoing growth of the firm.

In his own words:

> "As a pastry chef, I've realized that the key is balance, not just in the kitchen, but also with customers and in running the bakery. From a management standpoint, the project has ticked all the boxes I needed. Now, I feel as though I'm in control."

Training prior to the project:

finance, online presence and marketing, and general management skills

Before we could tailor the project to the beneficiaries' needs and track their progress, we needed to find out what prior knowledge they had. Therefore, when applying for the project, participants were asked about their training in three key areas: finance, online presence and marketing, and general management skills.

They were specifically asked about any accredited and non-accredited courses, programs or MOOCs they had done on these topics. Assessing participants' backgrounds before the project began was crucial, given the wide range of subjects the training could encompass.

The results showed that 71% of the participants had no or only basic financial training before the project, while 67% had no prior training or only basic knowledge about online presence and marketing. Finally, 52% of the beneficiaries had not received any prior training in general management skills.

Figure 3. Prior financial training

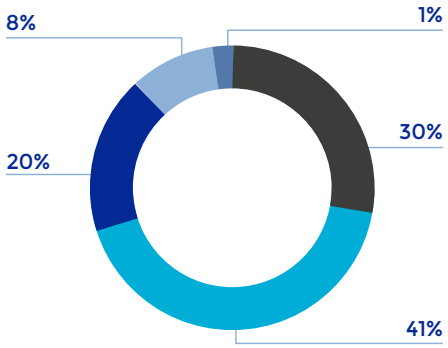


Figure 4. Prior marketing and online presence training

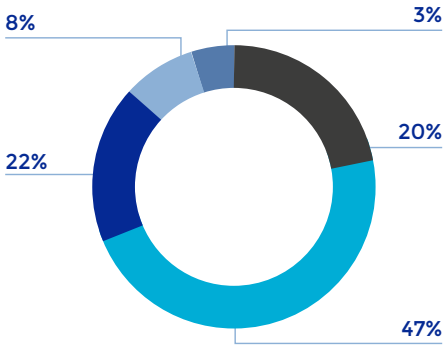
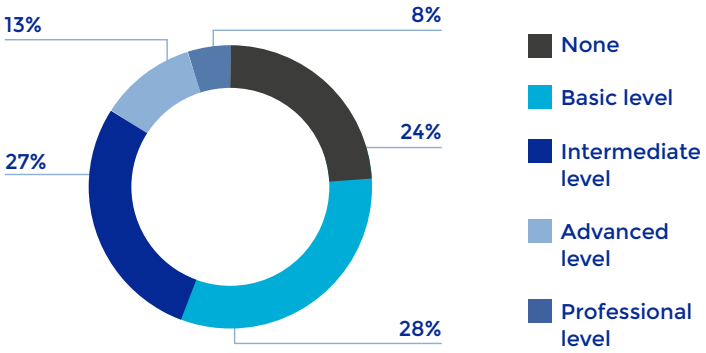


Figure 5. Prior management skill training



Source: authors' own based on information provided by the beneficiaries.

PRIOR KNOWLEDGE OF FINANCIAL TOPICS

In the focus groups, participants emphasized that a small business owner must possess a range of skills "as if they were the CEO of a multinational corporation." These essential skills included financial knowledge, which many small business owners unfortunately lack. There was a consensus that financial education should start in school. One of the focus group participants stated the following:

> "I believe there is a need for more in-depth advisory support for micro-business owners on a number of key areas identified by this focus group, such as finance, business management, training, adapting to current trends such as social media and the Internet, accessing grants, networking, and combining complementary skills."

According to the data gathered from the surveys, 30% of participants had no prior financial knowledge, while only 41% were familiar with financial topics at the start of the project. However, 89.5% of the participants reported some level of improvement after participating in the initiative, with many indicating significant progress in their financial acumen.

The case of Alberto

Alba Óptica is a specialist optical and hearing care practice, offering a wide variety of products and services. The business was founded by Alberto's father 50 years ago and is now owned by Alberto.

Before he joined the 360º Project, Alberto had only basic knowledge of finance, general management skills, and online presence. Coming from a family business, he was used to handling operations the way they had been done for years. His father had overseen finances, but when Alberto took over, he continued the same financial practices, simply following the existing routine. As Alberto himself admitted, he mainly learned through trial and error. In 2024, he decided to join the 360º Project, and from the very first classes and group mentoring sessions, he could already tell it was going to be an eye-opening, highly transformative experience. The insights he gained throughout the program helped him identify areas for improvement, discover useful tools, and, more importantly, develop a much more hands-on understanding of financial management.

In the beginning, when he took charge of the **finances** at the opticians, he didn't use a balance sheet or do any stocktaking either. His approach was straightforward: "This is what I have, this is what I spend." Now, he implements the financial tools and strategies he has learned from the project's finance tutor. What once were monthly cash flow reports are now weekly, and he has plans to move to daily reports. Alberto's progress is undeniable. He has gone from having limited financial knowledge to confidently mastering his outlet's finances.

He also learned a great deal about **marketing and online presence** during the project. This has helped him to shift from a narrow mindset to thinking about the business' online presence from a more holistic, 360º perspective. While his focus has mainly been on strengthening the financial side of the business, he is already planning new marketing strategies and intends to dedicate more time to this in the near future.

In his own words:

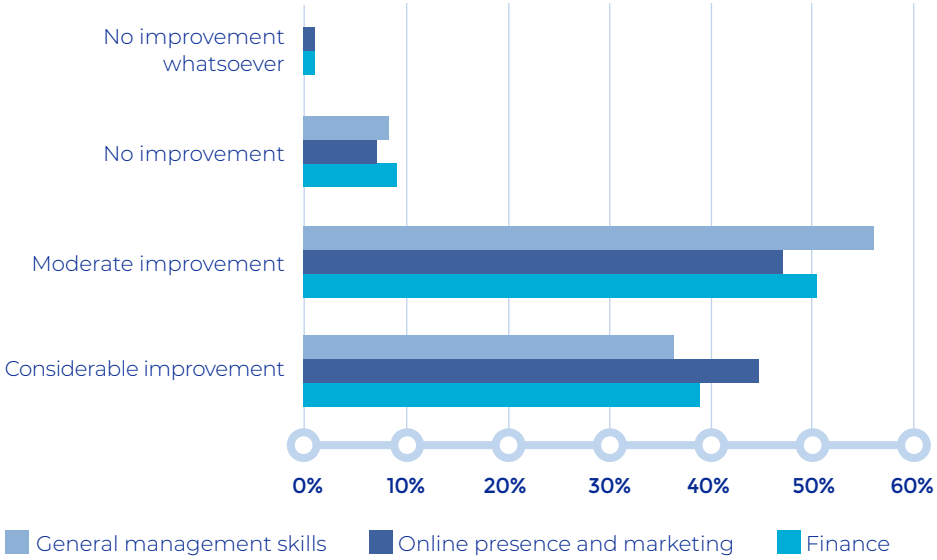
"The future may be uncertain, but now I have all the tools I need to keep moving forward and, ultimately, to grow."

Impact on knowledge improvement

During the project, participants received training in three key areas: finance, online presence and marketing, and general management skills, as mentioned above. All the participants acquired basic understanding of these topics in the general part of the training program. In the specialization phase of the project, they could choose to attend the courses on one, two, or all three of the key areas, depending on their interests, though a minimum number of sessions on each topic was compulsory.

Upon completing the training, 51% of participants reported a moderate improvement in their financial skills, while 39% noted considerable improvement. In terms of online presence and marketing, 47% said that they had noticed some improvement, and 45% reported significant progress. In the area of management skills, 55% felt they had improved to some extent, while 37% felt they had advanced considerably.

Figure 6. Participant improvement in the three main topics



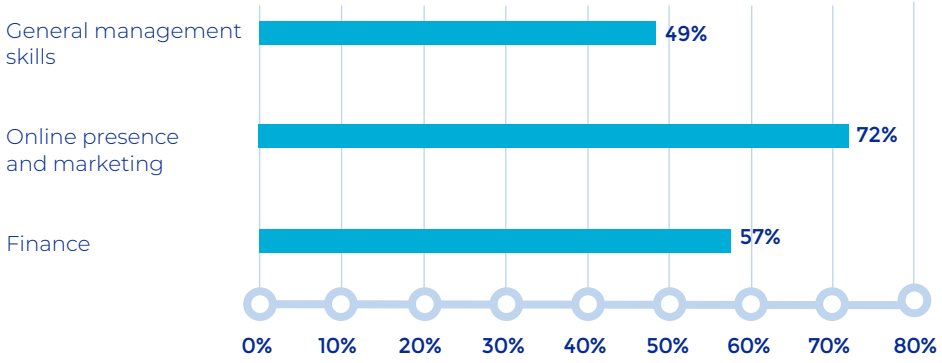
Source: authors' own based on information provided by the beneficiaries.

Beneficiaries who improved across all three areas reported making significant changes:

- 49% implemented general management strategies, such as *holding weekly staff meetings and organizing their teams more effectively.*
- 72% adopted online presence and marketing strategies, including *enhancing their Google profile, leveraging AI, and refining social media storytelling.*
- 57% implemented financial strategies, such as tracking sales, *ensuring timely payments, managing inventory, and seeking funding for growth.*

This data highlights the tangible impact of the training, with many participants actively applying their newly acquired skills to strengthen their businesses.

Figure 7. Participant implementation of strategies on the three main topics



Source: authors' own based on information provided by the beneficiaries.

The case of Roselba

Arrocería el Trato is located in the heart of the Chamberí neighborhood in Vallehermoso Market. It is a favourite among both locals and tourists, and in 2021, the restaurant was given the award for Best *Paella Valenciana* in Spain. Arrocería el Trato is a family-run business, perfect for gatherings, celebrations, and special events, and it offers a wide variety of different paellas. When we spoke to Roselba about how much she had progressed in different areas during the project, it was clear she'd come a long way.

First, Roselba had taken some **short digital skill courses before joining the training sessions** and already had some idea of what an online presence was, as she has always been passionate about staying up to date with the latest trends. Since joining the 360º Project, she has approached the digital aspect more holistically. Understanding the importance of Google, increasing her presence on social media, and targeting the right audience has been crucial for her firm. As a result, her business now reaches a much wider audience, attracting customers from around the world who come to Madrid and want to visit her restaurant.

Secondly, Roselba **had not received any formal training in general management skills** before she took part in the project. During the Project, Roselba introduced a range of initiatives to keep her team motivated, as maintaining high-quality work was a top priority for her. Additionally, she met Nacho, another participant who runs a small business focused on corporate training through Lego workshops, and she decided to organize a Lego workshop for her restaurant team. As a result of this experience, Roselba has introduced some changes to help her team get along better and understand each other more.

Thirdly, she had had **no prior training in finance** and relied more on intuition. After attending the financial training sessions, she was able to apply all the lessons given. She started paying more attention to price comparisons and supplier evaluations. For instance, she created an Excel spreadsheet to compare suppliers based on quality and price.

"Even though I've made a lot of progress in different areas, I still feel there's so much more to learn. For me, it's essential to keep moving forward. I'm really motivated by being part of the community that's formed among the project participants. Some of us created a group called Vitamina, where we share what we've learned to help each other grow in our respective fields."

The case of Carlos

Carlos, the owner of El País de los Ceviches, comes from a family of entrepreneurs. He had always been involved in his family's businesses, but when he arrived in Spain in 2006, he began to work for someone else for the first time. After several years in the hospitality trade, he decided to open El País de los Ceviches in 2017. Since then, he has been managing the establishment which is located in San Fernando Market.

Before joining the 360º Project, Carlos remembers posting content on social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. While he received a few likes, he quickly realized that most of these interactions came from friends and family, and he wasn't seeing any real conversions. Customers couldn't find El País de los Ceviches through his social media posts. During the project, he learned about Google Ads and decided to try it out. He started by running a campaign with relevant keywords, restaurant details, and other key information. Investing €3 a day in Google Ads, i.e., €100 a month, was a real challenge for him. Yet, he quickly noticed a substantial rise in customer interest. According to Carlos:

> "People would come in with their phones in their hand, saying they had found us through Google. There were customers from Atocha who came to Lavapiés. When I asked them how they had found us, they said they had come across our profile on Google."

A year later, Carlos decided to increase his budget in Google Ads to €10 a day. Now, he finds these campaigns less stressful because he can see clear, tangible results.

Carlos now feels that he has truly "found the right formula" for his firm with this strategy to improve his online presence. He feels much more at ease with the digital marketing side of the business and is actively working to enhance his Facebook and Instagram profiles. He now understands that maintaining a strong online presence is essential for continued growth.

The case of Zaida

Zaida opened Liberespacio 14 years ago in Chamberí. Her idea was to set up a bookstore specializing in literature for children and young adults. She is passionate about her business and carefully chooses each book she stocks, making a point of thoroughly so she can offer truly thoughtful, highly personalized recommendations. She wants the bookstore to be a warm, welcoming space where individuals and families who share a love of reading can come together and connect.

Over the years, the bookstore has gone through various "chapters", each with their own "story". She has participated in the two 360º Project calls, which has given her valuable insights and opportunities related to strategic thinking and the development of core management skills.

One of the **key areas of transformation** since she took part in the 360º Project has been her relationship with suppliers. She has gained a much clearer **understanding of her firm's financial standing**, enabling her to engage in negotiations with greater clarity and purpose. In addition, she has begun conducting robust, data-driven analyses, replacing instinct-based decisions with evidence-backed strategies. As a result, she has successfully secured better purchasing conditions, which have significantly boosted her profit margins.

Another turning point came when Zaida had to deal with a challenging situation involving an employee. After her participation in the project, she was able to make a difficult yet necessary decision: she had to let her employee go. Now, as she looks to bring someone new onto the team, she has a well-defined profile of the skills and priorities she is seeking. Thanks to personalized coaching and training sessions, she has also **discovered new resources to enhance the recruitment process**, including platforms such as LinkedIn and AI-powered tools.

She has also **refined her approach to connecting with customers**, turning small interactions into meaningful relationships and, ultimately, into sales.

Zaida started putting her new knowledge into practice after a management session focused on identifying customer behaviors and preferences, such as recognizing returning clients and remembering their names. She now makes a conscious effort to **personalize the customer experience**, further strengthening loyalty and engagement.

Above all, Zaida highlighted how the project has helped her to respond quickly to change in a constantly evolving business landscape. In her own words:

> "I think it's important to take advantage of the tools available and stay up to date with the new developments out there, so I can keep growing and moving forward."

Her journey through the 360º Project is best captured in the following reflection: "This project has helped me break free from the daily routine that can so often hold us back. It has pushed me to see things from new angles, embrace change, and take action to grow, innovate, and try out new ideas."

Resilience:
at personal and business level

Resilience is a highly valuable trait and is essential for small business owners. Whether they are facing unexpected drops in revenue or the everyday demands of running a business, being able to adapt and stay the course is what truly makes the difference. Resilience helps these business owners weather setbacks, make tough calls, and ultimately find ways to keep moving forward. This trait was clearly visible in the progress made by project beneficiaries throughout 2023 and 2024. Despite a complex, often uncertain environment, both personal and business resilience grew sharply over the course of the program.

Specifically, business resilience indicators increased by up to 20%, while personal resilience rose by as much as 13% from the beginning to the end of the project.

Table 1. Business resilience

Item	Beginning	End
Our company has a formal medium to long-term risk plan.	15%	35%
We have a system to identify changes as soon as they arise.	29%	48%
If unanticipated cash flow problems were to arise, our company could quickly access financial resources.	35%	61%
Our company is financially stable.	42%	55%
We ensure that we are not overly dependent on any one supplier.	74%	85%
We ensure that we are not overly dependent on any one customer.	78%	91%
Planning has been adjusted to align with the timing of sales.	56%	75%

Source: authors' own based on information provided by the beneficiaries.

Table 2. Personal resilience

Item	Beginning	End
I believe that difficult situations can help me to grow.	71%	80%
I actively look for ways to fill the losses I come across in life.	66%	78%
I look for creative ways to turn difficult situations around.	73%	85%
I believe I can control my reactions whatever happens to me.	59%	72%

Source: authors' own based on information provided by the beneficiaries.

The case of Eugenia

Caprichos Decoregalos was founded nearly 30 years ago, but it wasn't until six years ago that Maria Eugenia took over this small shop in the heart of Vallecas. Caprichos Decoregalos specializes in offering totally unique gifts for any occasion.

Maria Eugenia's story is an excellent example of **resilience**, both in business and in life. In the early days of running her business, she often felt alone. However, over time, she started to feel more supported and found a clearer sense of direction. Initially, managing the store was a real challenge, especially since it had already been open to the public for 23 years. She had to listen closely to customers, who helped her understand key aspects of the business, and also had to adapt to the shop's dynamics and its different product ranges. Yet she wanted to go further. The owner of Caprichos Decoregalos felt the need to make the business her own, to put her personal stamp on it, and to introduce new products. It was a process of trial and error, but it led to significant learning and growth.

Today, Maria Eugenia **continues to work on building resilience in her business.** In fact, it is something she focuses on every day. One example of this is her decision to work with multiple suppliers, ensuring stability by not relying on just one, even though she has strong relationships with each of them. Moreover, her business has evolved beyond being just a gift shop. Recently, she has made room for a parcel collection point, which has not only made Caprichos Decoregalos a place to pick up online purchases but has also significantly increased her visibility.

Maria Eugenia's business resilience and personal growth have also evolved during the project, thanks to the training program. Now, she has a much deeper understanding of every aspect of her business. Her improved financial knowledge has made her more resilient in managing inventories and has given her a solid approach to risk management. What she has learned about leadership has also empowered her to handle customers more effectively, recognizing that they are truly the heart of her business.

"What I've learned about personal resilience in the 360º Project has boosted my self-confidence and has equipped me with the tools to deal with every aspect of my business more effectively. It has reinforced what I already knew but has given me a greater certainty."

Shifting the perspective:
from isolation to connection

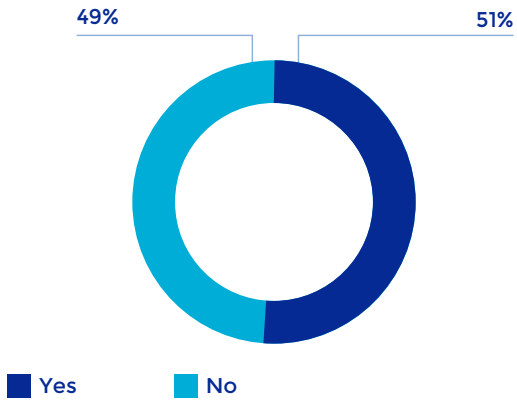
A sense of isolation emerged as a recurring theme among micro-enterprise and small business owners during the focus groups. When discussing key stakeholders in small businesses, some participants shared that they often felt isolated. Although industry-specific associations offer a sense of community, they don't fully address this need.

The beneficiaries emphasized the positive impact of being part of the 360º Project in helping to counter these feelings of isolation, as it gave them an opportunity to reach out to fellow business owners. As shown in Figure 8, half of the participants engaged with one another during the program, often fostering meaningful connections as well as working together on collaborative projects.

The following comment was made during one of the focus groups by one of the participants:

> "Thanks to the WhatsApp group, we have requested our first grant. It's great because we can discuss useful things that small business owners need. There are all kinds of micro-enterprises, and sometimes you come up with something that you think is specific to you, but it turns out that other colleagues have gone through the same experience."

Figure 8. Connections between participants



Source: authors' own based on information provided by the beneficiaries.

The case of Nuria

Since 1973, the bakery 3 Letras PAN has been making homemade bread and pastries. What started as a small family-run business has grown into a brand that is renowned for its delicious, wholesome products. In 2020, Adriana and Nuria took over the business, prioritizing high-quality, locally sourced ingredients. The team works hard to bake exceptional homemade bread and pastries for their customers every day.

Many of the project beneficiaries are a clear example of **collaboration**, and Nuria embodies this spirit.

Nearly half of the beneficiaries from the first cohort decided to organize in-person meetings at different locations, including Nuria. These gatherings enabled them to connect, share concerns, and spark numerous collaborations. It was at one of these meetings that Nuria met Arantxa who explained that she wanted to include a small coffee break with pastries during the sewing courses she taught. Nuria offered to provide this service through 3 Letras PAN. Since then, Nuria and her team have regularly prepared this coffee break service for Arantxa's courses. However, Arantxa is not the only one who relies on Nuria's catering solutions. Mariola Conde, a former beneficiary of the project, also consistently chooses 3 Letras PAN's services for events held at her beauty salon.

When Susana, the owner of the hair salon Agadú, celebrated her 20th anniversary, she wanted to involve all her colleagues, not just by inviting them to the event, but by hiring their services. Nuria was the caterer, while Jose from Ciccio Pizza made his best pizzas for the celebration.

Paloma, from the travel agency Viajes Nieva, has hosted several breakfast events for her clients, pairing the wonders of travel with Nuria's delicious pastries. Additionally, in February, they launched a joint initiative in which Paloma sent a *roscón* (traditional Spanish sweet bread) to her most loyal clients to thank them for their continued custom, ensuring they would feel appreciated.

Nuria is also part of Zaida's story as they worked together at a *roscón* workshop in Liberespacio. This was just the beginning of their partnership and later they organized an event with Mayte from Canterano, combining their love for reading, flavors, and design.

These are just **a few of the partnerships** Nuria has already established, but she has many more in the pipeline, including a World Book Day workshop with Beroiz at her shop Encuadernaciones Calero and a circular baking workshop with Mimi from ReStore.

The outcome of all these collaborations is not only an increase in sales and customers. It is also the creation of a network built on trust. In Nuria's own words:

> "This network is incredibly enriching. We've built a community where we face the same daily challenges, share common concerns and needs, and offer each other meaningful support. It has all happened so naturally. Now, if I want to go on a trip, I reach out to Paloma from Viajes Nieva. If I need a massage, I talk to Mariola from Mariola Conde Salud y Belleza Holística."

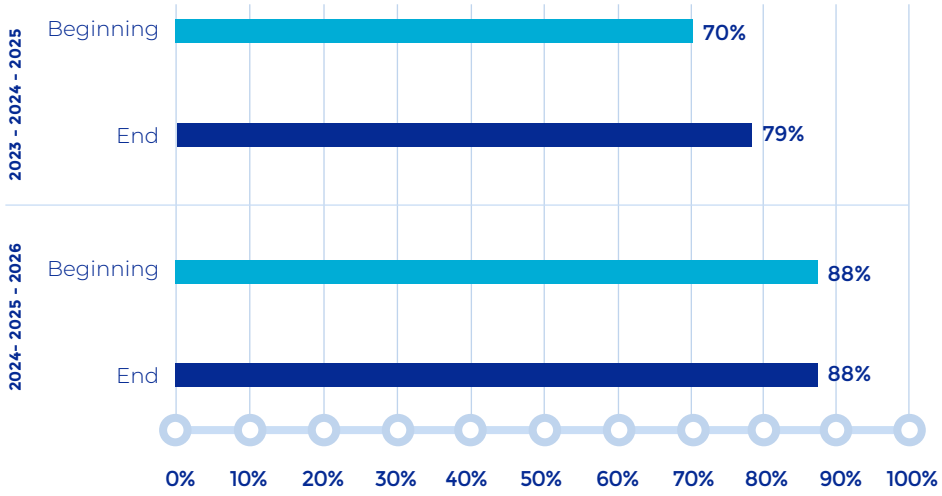
Narrative for the future

TURNOVER EXPECTATIONS

Forecasting future growth is a complex task for small businesses navigating an ever-changing economic landscape. According to the CEPYME barometer published in the first quarter of 2023,[6] when small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) were asked about their expectations for sales growth over the coming year, three out of four did not anticipate any increases. In 2024, only 27.22% of SMEs surveyed believed their turnover would rise.[7]

These national figures offer a valuable benchmark to compare the expectations of the 360º Project participants. As part of the project assessment, beneficiaries were asked about their expectations for business growth at the beginning and the end of the training program. Interestingly, most participants in both the first and second cohorts were confident that their turnover would increase. This contrast suggests a more optimistic outlook among project participants.

Figure 9. Participants' turnover expectations for the following year



Source: authors' own based on the data provided by project beneficiaries.

[6] Barometro-LaPymeHabla-JUL23.pdf
[7] Barómetro #LaPymeHabla - 2024

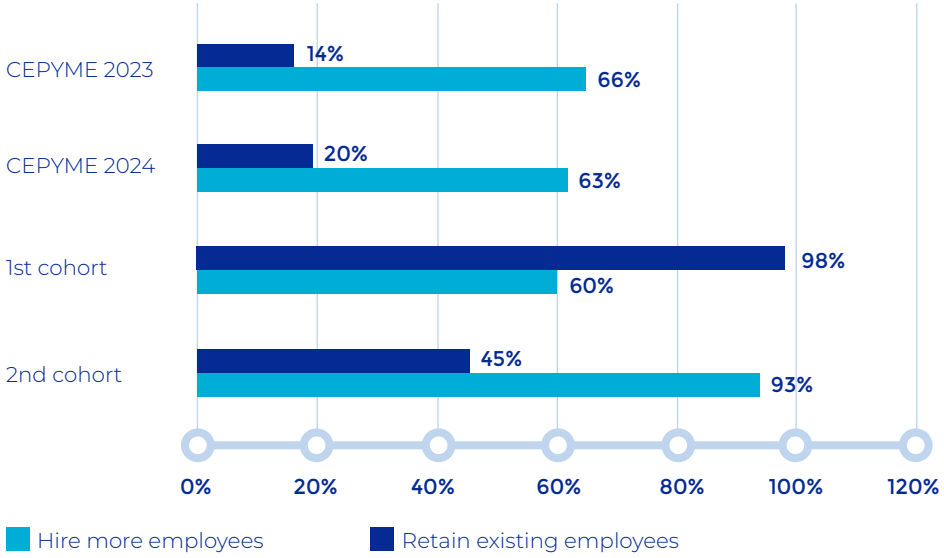
EMPLOYMENT EXPECTATIONS

The employment forecasts shared by project participants for the following 12 months reflected an optimistic outlook in both cohorts. This highlights both the perceived importance of growing their teams as well as their commitment to retaining current employees.

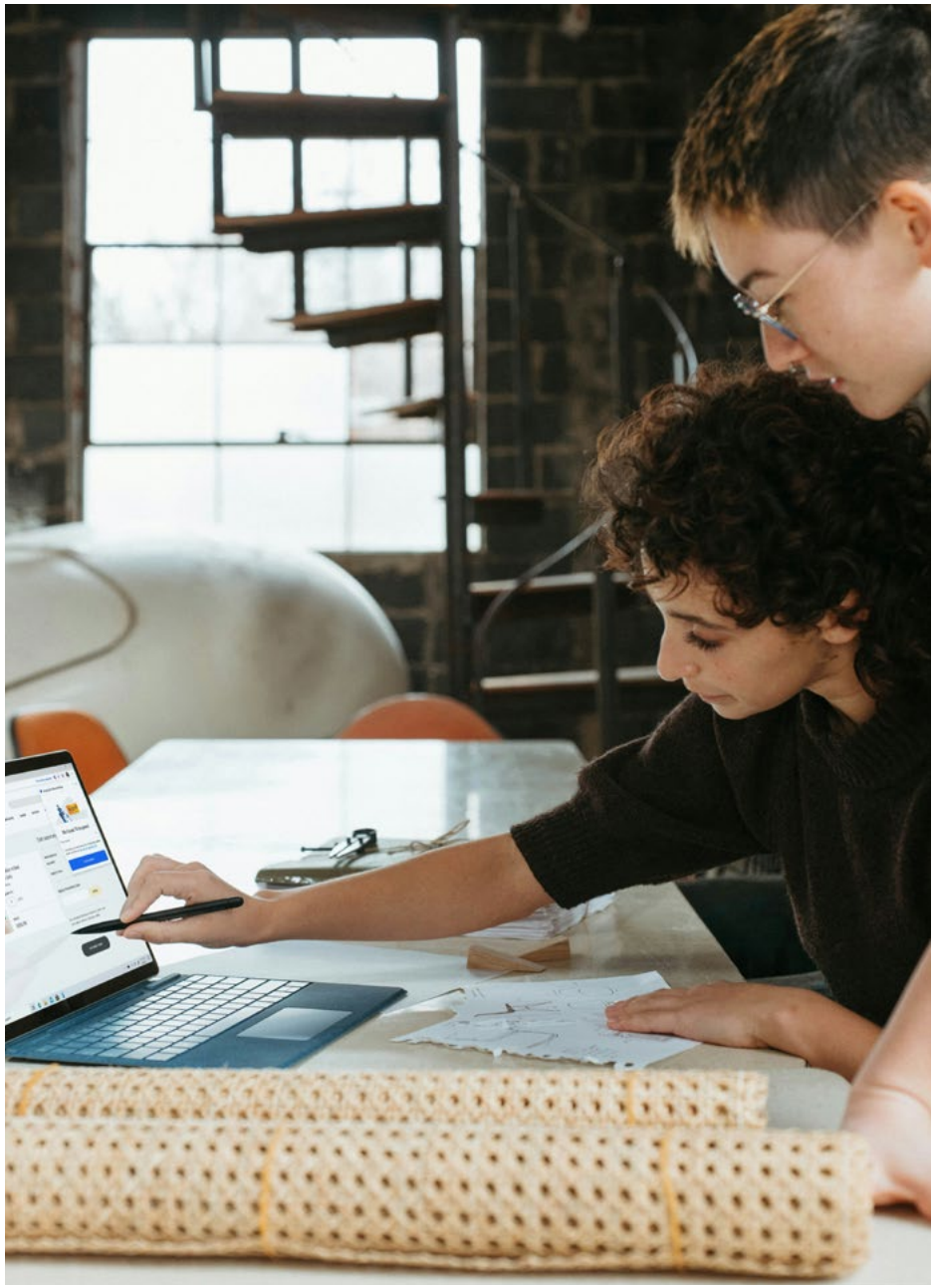
While national data from the CEPYME barometers for 2023 and 2024 revealed greater caution among micro-enterprises, participants in the 360º Project were more hopeful about the future. Their responses suggest a degree of confidence in their ability to grow and offer stable employment, despite the broader economic challenges.

The project assessment explored two dimensions of future employment: the likelihood of maintaining existing staff and the probability of hiring new employees.

Figure 10. Participants' employment expectations for the future



Source: authors' own based on information provided by the beneficiaries.



The case of Beatriz

Muebles Makumobel was founded 50 years ago. Initially, the store was located in different premises from its current outlet. The firm was set up by Beatriz's grandfather, aunt, and father. Its first premises were in a former hardware store, but Beatriz's family had a vision to create something bigger. As her grandfather was a varnish sales representative and had strong connections with local furniture factories, the family decided to set up Muebles Makumobel.

Over the years, Beatriz's parents continued to grow the business and adapt to the changing times, though the methods they used to sell furniture before are different from how they do business now. Beatriz has been running the firm for about 15 years.

When she took over, Beatriz knew she wanted to make changes but was not sure how to carry them out, so she joined the 360° Project. Her participation enabled her to renovate the store as she had envisioned. The network she built with other project participants helped her connect with other stores that were facing similar challenges. Initially, she felt alone managing the firm. Now, she says she no longer feels isolated. In the past, when a problem came up in the business, she did not know who to turn to. Now, she has a group of project colleagues to rely on.

Beatriz has been steadily transforming her business for the past 15 years. She has recently renovated the store, making it more appealing and attracting a new target audience. Looking ahead to the next five years, she envisages expanding and consolidating her product range with new items such as pet beds designed to match the sofas made for their owners. In terms of sales, she is confident that the website she has developed will bring in more customers and increase revenue as a result. Sales have already gone up since the store's renovation. She also plans to hire another team member to cater for growing demand.

While her **outlook is positive**, Beatriz is realistic. She points out that it is becoming increasingly difficult to find qualified staff for a furniture and bedding business like hers, and she also acknowledges the challenges posed by the current economic instability. In terms of expertise, she understands that it is essential to increase her knowledge of the various aspects of her small business. Although she is already working on this, she plans to continue improving her Google profile to reach even more customers.

In Beatriz' own words:

> "Every class has been incredibly valuable. I've learned something in all of them. I have redesigned my store's logo, gained a deeper understanding of the customers I want to attract, have been introduced to AI tools, and increased my average sales. I've applied everything I've learned about marketing and having a digital presence. The only thing left is the website, and I'm already working on that."

Assessment methodology

The project assessment focused on evaluating processes and outcomes that aim to increase efficiency. The methodology included the following tasks:

1. Data gathering: through surveys, interviews and focus groups.
2. Data analysis. All survey responses were tabulated and combined to build a comprehensive longitudinal dataset. Information from open questions was also coded as were the insights gained from interviews. A comprehensive analysis of the information assessed the project's outcomes according to the success indicators.
3. Beneficiary data collection via interviews. The research team interviewed a sample of beneficiaries who had successfully completed the project to gather detailed accounts and insights as to its impact.
4. Focus groups. The research team collected insights from beneficiaries and stakeholders in Madrid's micro-business ecosystem through a series of focus groups, documenting their views on the current state of small businesses and their surrounding environment.

Report*: the report includes a detailed description of the project and the situation of the beneficiaries, as well as the results and lessons learned.

*This report was drawn up according to the responses given by 85 project beneficiaries throughout the project. The section on improvements in topics and examples of strategies was answered by 82 to 85 participants. The report also took into account the information gathered from the interviews carried out with nine of the beneficiaries and with 22 participants in the focus groups. It analyzed the data based on the general answers of the 85 beneficiaries, examining the participants' progress and comparing it with the current situation at national level in Spain. In addition, turnover data was winsorized at the upper end to mitigate the impact of outliers.

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