[FEM]power
in Finance - skills to thrive

“It wasn’t that I didn’t understand money, I just never thought about the long-term. Now I do, and I want my daughter to start sooner than I did”

Name: Maria* (not her real name)

Country: Ireland

Introduction

Maria* is a 57-year-old woman living in Dublin. Originally from the UK, she has spent over 30 years building a life in Ireland, juggling full-time work, raising a family, and caring for elderly parents. She currently works part-time at a busy local medical clinic.

Up to recently, her financial role was reactive: budgeting, managing, coping, but not planning. Pensions, investments, and financial security were things she assumed would “work out.” Her husband is semi-retired, and their son recently moved out, leaving Maria with more space, for the first time in years, to think long-term. That changed when she realised that hope wasn’t a strategy.

Over the last two years, Maria has completely restructured her approach to money. She reviewed her pension entitlements, adjusted her savings strategy, and made clear decisions about what she wanted for the years ahead.

Maria’s Story

Financially, Maria has always been “sensible.” She’s good at budgeting, tracks the bills, and knows exactly what’s coming in and going out each month. But when it comes to pensions, savings, and long-term planning, she has always felt a step behind. Despite working for decades, her pension contributions have been interrupted by part-time work and unpaid care roles. Like many women of her generation, she didn’t have the time or confidence to ask the right questions or plan ahead.

What changed was a conversation with her daughter. ***“She said to me, ‘Mum, I don’t want to end up like you, always worried about money, always guessing.’ It hit me hard. Not because she was wrong, but because she was right. I want her to feel confident about her finances in a way I never did.”***

That moment pushed Maria to take action, for herself, but also to break the cycle for the next generation. Her story shows that it’s never too late to learn, plan, and take control.

Main financial challenges faced

Delayed Retirement Planning: Maria only started thinking seriously about her pension in her 50s. Until then, she had focused on day-to-day financial responsibilities and simply hoped "things would work out." Looking back, she wishes someone had helped her plan sooner.

Limited Savings: Maria's pension record was patchy, consisting of contributions from a previous job in the UK and a small Irish private scheme. She was unsure how it all fitted together, or whether it will be enough.

Caring & Health Costs: Over the years, Maria has stepped in as a carer for her parents. This meant time off work, reduced earnings, and growing concerns about her own health cover and future needs.

Financial Inequality in Marriage: Like many women, Maria took on the emotional and practical load of managing household finances but never had full independence. Only recently has she focused on building her own financial security.

What tools help manage Personal Finances?

✅ **Online Pension Calculators**
Maria uses free online pension calculators to estimate her entitlements, both from her Irish contributions and her earlier UK employment. These tools helped her understand where she stands and what gaps to address.

✅ **MyWelfare.ie & GOV.UK**
She accesses her social insurance records and pension info through MyWelfare.ie and UK State Pension portal.

✅ **Digital Budgeting Apps**
She now uses her online banking app's budgeting function to track her savings and allocate money specifically for long-term goals, such as private pension top-ups.

✅ **Trusted Financial Education Sites**
Maria visits consumer-focused websites that explain pensions, AVCs, and PRSAs in clear terms, helping her explore the idea of low-risk pension savings suited to her age and situation.

Top Tip

"Creat a simple "financial folder" with key documents, policies, and contacts . This gave me instant peace of mind."

What helped overcome those challenges?

Maria's biggest barrier wasn't access. It was her mindset. She overcame:

- The belief that financial planning was "too late" for her
- The tendency to put others first and herself last
- Shame around what she didn't know

When her son moved out of the home, Maria made a conscious choice to invest in her own future, both financially and emotionally. She let go of the idea that it was "too late" and began to take small, practical steps. Maria started asking questions. She sought out advice. She joined a local credit union, used pension calculators, and researched her rights. Each step gave her a little more clarity and a lot more confidence. She now feels informed, not dependent. She no longer avoids conversations about money; she leads them. That shift has improved her own outlook and made her a source of guidance for others.

What interventions or support would have been useful?

Today, Maria believes every woman should have access to practical, life-stage-appropriate tools, yes, to understand the system, but just as importantly, to **feel** confident using it. Looking back, Maria wishes someone had talked to her about money earlier in life — not just day-to-day budgeting, but real planning for the future. In her twenties and thirties, she was busy working, raising a child, and caring for family members. Financial advice often seemed aimed at someone else, and in most cases, it was directed at wealthier, younger, or male individuals.

What she needed was support that spoke to her directly: clear, honest information, delivered without judgment. A course or programme designed for women like her, who had gaps in their work history, who weren't confident with financial jargon, but who wanted to take control, would have made all the difference. Maria also sees now how much impact peer stories and relatable role models could have had. If she'd seen other women her age talking openly about pensions, savings, and financial independence, she would have started sooner and with less fear.

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