

# From Vision to Innovation: Women's Inspiring Paths in Tech

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# Introduction

The participation of women and girls in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) is not only about representation, but also about progress. Every society that wants to innovate, grow and thrive must ensure that women have equal access to education, opportunities, and leadership.

Across Europe and here in Kosovo, the European Union works to bridge the gender gap in STEM by supporting education programmes, scholarships, mentoring initiatives and professional networks that empower young women to explore, learn and lead. When women and girls have access to knowledge and technology, they do not just shape their own future, they help build a more resilient, creative and forward-looking society.

We have seen time and again that when women participate fully in the digital and innovation ecosystems, they bring new perspectives, empathy and problem-solving skills that benefit everyone. Their contributions drive technological transformation, from classrooms to coding labs, from startups to public institutions. This publication, *From Vision to Innovation: Women's Inspiring Paths in Tech*, celebrates



women who dared to take the first step into spaces where they were often the only ones, who turned challenges into achievements, and who now inspire others to follow.

Their journeys remind us that equality in STEM, in addition to being a value we uphold, is an investment in the kind of future we want to create: inclusive, innovative, and driven by the potential of all.

The European Union remains committed to this vision. Through its long-standing support to education, research and digital innovation in Kosovo, the EU will continue to help create opportunities for women and girls to lead, innovate, and shape a better tomorrow.

## **Eva Palatova**

*Deputy Head of the European Union in Kosovo*

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## I – Pioneers Leading the Way

Empowerment. Inspiration. Innovation. Action. These words encompass the spirit of women who are changing the face of technology in Kosovo and beyond. With the support of the European Union, various platforms are creating new opportunities for girls and women who want to dare, learn and build their own and others' futures in STEM fields. This publication presents stories, voices, actions and visions of women who do not wait to be invited to the table, but build it themselves.



# Teuta Sahatqija

*Director, Women in Tech  
Kosovo.*

## **Inspiration on the ground**

When I started my career as a programmer, there were no women in programming and, as a matter of fact, even men were a minority in this profession. But today, at the Technical Faculty, the faculty where I studied, girls make up half of the students. To me, this is not just a number, but an indication that change is possible.

Through my engagements as Executive Director at Women in Tech Kosovo (a non-profit network that empowers girls and women in STEM by connecting them with mentors, providing skills training, and advocating for equal opportunities in the technology ecosystem across Kosovo), I have worked alongside girls who want to try, fail, and get back up. With projects like Girls in ICT Day and collaborations with various projects, I have seen that when girls feel supported, they know no limits, and they excel. When I see a girl or a woman leading, programming or lecturing, I know



that she understands: "I can do it too." This is the real change. My message to young girls is: Don't wait for someone else to open the door for you. Build it yourself! Every code you write, every idea you develop, every step forward is a step towards the world you want to see. I strongly believe that the world of technology needs you, it needs your voice, your intelligence and the empathy that only you can bring.



# Edona Maloku

*Former Deputy Minister of Education (May 2021 – July 2023)*

## **Policies that create opportunities**

My journey in supporting women and girls in STEM began as a researcher and later as a policy-maker. As an academic, I have studied social and psychological barriers that hinder women's participation in STEM by documenting stereotypes, family expectations and school practices that often underrate girls' potential, in the face of their high academic results. For this reason, I have worked on developing policies and initiatives that help girls stay and advance in STEM, including mentoring, scholarships and role-modelling programs.

A special contribution that I have made while I was Deputy Minister of Education (May 2021 – July 2023) was the creation of STEMinists, a national platform for networking, mentoring and exchange of experiences for women



in STEM in Kosovo. The platform shows that when research, politics and advocacy unite, spaces that transcend gender barriers and stereotypes can be created.

Family and social support are equally essential, because the trust and encouragement that girls get in their immediate environment often determines the decision to pursue a career in STEM. Integrating sustainable policies and continued support for girls' education are essential to transform their talent into real opportunities for development, innovation and social impact. I strongly believe that every girl in Kosovo deserves the opportunity to see herself as a scientist, engineer, and innovator.



# Prof. Dr.Jelena Đokić

*Professor of Environmental Engineering, Public University in Mitrovica North.*

## **The engineering professor who was inspired by Trepça/Trepča**

I was born in a mining and metallurgical town, with both my grandfathers working in Trepça/Trepča mining complex. When the time came to decide what to study, it was natural for me to continue the family legacy and contribute to the community through engineering and technology.

At first, my family was a little hesitant. They thought engineering was too difficult for a girl and advised me to study economics or languages. But that only made me more determined. I wanted to prove that I was just as capable as any male student. So, I chose to study Environmental Engineering



at the Faculty of Technical Sciences (Public University in Mitrovica), where I now teach as a Tenured Professor

When I started my career, I had to prove my dedication and competence to my male colleagues. Over time, I built my reputation based on merit, not gender. In the classroom, I became a mentor and guide for young women looking for someone who believed in their potential.

Today, I see a clear transformation. Many girls are studying technology and engineering, and in most cases, they show exceptional dedication and results. I now mentor both female and male PhD candidates equally, and I see how much

confidence and passion young women bring to science when they feel supported.

My message to young girls is simple: be persistent, be patient, and be brave. Seek knowledge, believe in yourself, and never let stereotypes decide your path. With family and institutional support, women in science can achieve balance, innovation, and leadership. Education is not just a career, it is the foundation of equality.



# Vjollca Çavalli

*Executive Director, Kosovo Association of Information and Communication Technology (STIKK)*



## **Effort and vision for women in IT**

I embarked on technology at a time when the presence of women was minimal, and the first challenges were the social prejudice that technology is an occupation for men and the absence of structured opportunities for professional development. Yet, personal commitment and desire to be part of a sector that transforms society have motivated me to move forward.

Today, women's participation in IT in Kosovo is increasing every year, owing to the commitment of organisations, projects and initiatives to empower women in the sector. The assistance that the European Union has provided to strengthen the sector is extraordinary. There are women's start-ups that have started to run owing to this very assistance.

Stereotypes, the absence of inspiring role models and limited professional networks remain real barriers for girls embarking on technology. To overcome these barriers, in addition to mentoring, scholarships and dedicated internship opportunities, awareness-raising among parents and teachers, as well as work policies that support gender equality and women's professional development, are required. To all girls who dream of becoming part of IT, I want to say: Technology is a field open to anyone with passion, creativity and perseverance. Believe in your abilities, seek support from the right networks and pursue your dreams with determination. Every step forward is an example that shows that women and girls belong in science, technology and innovation and can have a powerful impact on Kosovo's future.



## II – Honouring Women’s Journeys in IT

*In every code, in every network and in every idea that changes the way we live lies a human story; in many of them, a girl who dared not give up. This second chapter follows naturally after the visions of women leaders, bringing closer the reality of the effort, challenge and determination that constitute the journey in technology. Blerta, Adelina, Shqipe and Valdete, each with her own story, prove that the path to success is not always straight, but it is possible.*



# Adelina Neziri

*Distinguished Engineer,  
Nettxio*

## **The engineer who 'covered' Kosovo with the internet**

Her journey in telecommunications began with curiosity and inspiration from her family. "As a child, I admired the work of my father, a distinguished engineer in the energy sector, and this motivated me to attend the Faculty of Electrical and Computer Engineering (University of Pristina), with a focus on telecommunications. This admiration, coupled with my nature of always seeking to develop and learn something new, made it easy for me to choose this field," the engineer Adelina Neziri says. Working in this sector has not been without challenges. "The biggest challenge has been to always keep abreast of rapid developments in technology, especially in telecommunications, as well as to strike a balance between my professional work and family



life," Adelina says. However, her passion and dedication have been joined by the satisfaction of real achievements: "When the work of engineers is implemented and the final successful outcome is seen, it is considered an achievement. First, it fulfils one emotionally and professionally, and then it motivates one not to stop there." One of Adelina Neziri's most important achievements is her contribution to the planning of new telecommunications technologies at IPKO, one of the largest telecom companies, covering urban and rural areas of Kosovo. "Today, the network covers more than 98% of the country's territory," she points

out. To her, success is not only measured by a completed project, but also by the sustainability and continuity in learning and innovation: "If they can keep up with technological changes, all engineers will feel accomplished in their work."

To young girls who dream of following her path, Adelina says:

*"I constantly encourage young girls to believe in themselves and to follow their dreams, despite barriers or prejudices that may occur on the way. Opportunities to work in different fields of technology are numerous, and companies offer space for internships and development."*

Adelina currently works at Nettxio, where she contributes to telecommunications services for operators in the US, and emphasises that every professional step taken by young women has the potential to open new doors.



# Shqipe Neziri

*Co-founder & Chair, Kosovo Women in Energy & Mining (WEM-K).*

## **From journalism to energy and global influence**

Shqipe's journey began far from the energy sector – as a journalist at the Radio Television of Kosovo (RTK), covering youth topics in a post-conflict society. "There I learned how important it is to give voice to topics that affect people, but also how much impact public policies can have on our daily lives," she recalls. That start led her to studies in Public Policy and then to a special course on energy policy at Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), where she discovered that: "Behind every energy decision lies a story of development, strategy and social impact. Energy is not just electricity production, but the meeting point of technology, politics and everyday life."

Since then, her career has moved from drafting laws and strategies to managing global programs for the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) in Oslo. "It



hasn't been an easy road. But the challenges made me more resolved and motivated me to refuse being a 'symbolic participant'."

The will to support women and girls in the energy sector led her to establish the Kosovo Women's Network in Energy and Mining. "We decided not to wait any longer and created a network to connect and empower women and girls working in energy and mining," she says. Today, the network has over 100 members and is part of global mechanisms, creating inspiring models and mentoring spaces for new generations.

Shqipe believes that women are crucial to energy transition: "When women are part of the process, discussions are more balanced, and

solutions are more creative. Just transition cannot happen without the inclusion of women, not as an obligation, but as a must for sustainable development.”

She also shared her advice for girls who want to follow the path of energy:

*“Don’t limit yourself because of fear or stereotypes. Prepare well, search for mentors and don’t be afraid to apply for positions that seem out of your comfort zone. Every step, even a small one, contributes to a bigger change.”*



# Blerta Thaçi

*Executive Director, Open Data Kosovo.*

## **Blerta Thaçi's journey into technology**

"My journey into technology did not start with a clear plan, but with a deep sense of curiosity," Blerta Thaçi says. In her pre-university education, she felt that logic and problem-solving appealed to her more than theories. "I was attracted to the way equipment, programs, and structures worked. That naturally led me to computer engineering at university, a field where I could explore and challenge myself every day," she explains.

And there were challenges. "Once I finished my studies, the labour market was difficult: high requirements, minimal experience and few opportunities to learn in practice." Instead of drawing back, I attended training after working hours, I tested technology myself and learned in small, but steady steps. I realised that success is not only measured by skill, but also by patience and consistency," Blerta says.



Introduction to the concept of open data was a decisive moment. "It was no longer just technology for technical solutions, but technology for civic empowerment," she says. This made her join Open Data Kosovo, a non-profit organisation that develops digital tools and open data solutions to make institutions more transparent and accountable. "Technology is not neutral! The way it is designed and used can either strengthen or weaken democracy, equality and social justice," Blerta points out.

Her experience at Open Data Kosovo strengthened her belief that technology and collaboration can drive change. Building on that experience, she later founded ZenVen Coworking Space, "a mix between home tranquillity and office productivity," as she explains.

ZenVen is home to many success stories: professionals who started out alone and set up teams, collaborations that started in a coffee shop and turned into funded projects, businesses from the diaspora that found a room to invest in their homeland.

Blerta knows that young women's path in IT is not always straight. "There are obstacles that are not just technical: lack of self-confidence, gender stereotypes and lack of role models and professional networks for development. But all it takes is one step, one effort, one helping hand," she says. "What I would like to say to the girls is: Try it! Be curious, be persistent, learn every day."

In the next 5 or 10 years, Blerta wants to see more women at the top of technological developments.

*"I want to see women who are business founders and innovation leaders. And to make this possible, I also have a responsibility: with spaces, mentorship, personal example and community."*



# Valdete Marevci-Dërmaku

*Engineer, District Heating JSC  
Prishtina, Termokos.*

## **The woman who 'dared' to become a mechanical engineer**

When Valdete Marevci-Dërmaku enrolled in the Technical Faculty of the University of Pristina in 1997, she was the only girl studying Mechanical Engineering in her generation. Before that, she had completed two and a half years of technical studies in Ferizaj/Uroševac, followed by a two-year break before continuing her education in Pristina.

"The technical studies were very challenging, but the pride and respect shown by my professors and peers motivated me," she recalls. This early experience shaped the courage and determination that would follow her throughout her career.

Upon graduation, Valdete started working at KFOR as a Construction Quality Control Engineer, and then at the Ministry of Trade and Industry. When she applied for a job with Termokos, a public heating company, she was hired, and two weeks after she started to work, she



was selected as the Acting Director of the Department of Mechanical Maintenance. "Leading a department with 45 employees was a big challenge, but I've had the support of my colleagues," she says.

At Termokos, Valdete contributed to the development of the network, maintenance of boilers and installation of equipment, at a time when the company was operating

with fuel oil. Today, she is in charge of coordination between Termokos and numerous institutions and follows major development projects, such as cogeneration and solar energy. "Owing to the projects and support of the European Commission, Termokos is becoming more efficient and environment-friendly," Valdete declares.

Yet, beyond technical projects, Valdete's story is one of courage and commitment.

*"I encourage all girls to pursue technical careers. Women and girls are committed and responsible managers. They shouldn't be afraid of challenges, and they will always make it."*



### III – Interviews with women who are making a difference in the ICT

*Following the stories of women who led the way and laid the foundations in the field of technology, this section provides an overview of women who are currently making a difference in the ICT sector. These interviews are more than biographies; they are a testament to a new era in which women not only participate but lead with vision, courage and competence. From coding to digital security, from entrepreneurship to social transformation, these women are forces shaping the future.*



# Abetare Gojani

*Executive Director, The Foundation House.*

## **The 'voice' that opens doors for girls in technology**

In an industry where gender bias is still felt, Abetare Gojani has chosen to reject limits set by others. "My beginnings were not easy," she says. "I embarked on a field in which the absence of women in managerial or technical positions was obvious. But the experience with girls who couldn't even convince their own families to pursue a path in technology has pushed me to engage more. This has become the motivation for my mission: to break the myth that technology is a man's field." This mission has not remained just an idea. Over the past few years, Abetare was involved in many programs that have had a direct impact on girls and young women in Kosovo, providing them with access to training, mentoring and opportunities that once seemed out of reach. "An experience that



I will never forget," she recalls, "was when, during the pandemic, we managed to support 190 girls from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, with laptops and basic training. Many of them are continuing their education today or have enrolled in our advanced programs. It was a moment that proved to me that change starts with a computer but ends with a better life."

Every step of the way, Abetare has felt both scepticism and inspiration. "I, like many other girls, have faced questions like 'Why are you in

tech?' or 'Isn't this a field for men?' But what prompted me to keep on was the desire to show that women not only have a place in this field but can also be leaders and inspiring role models.

This vision led to the founding of The Foundation House, where Abetare Gojani serves as the Executive Director, an organisation that has helped over 50,000 young people in Kosovo develop skills in ICT, STEM and innovation for more than a decade now. However, Abetare remains realistic.

*"Statistics still show significant gender inequalities in ICT companies. This means that the journey is not over and that we still have a lot of work to do. But I believe that change happens every time a girl chooses not to give up."*



# Jeta Zagragja

*Founder & CEO,  
AnchorzUp.*

**Jeta, who builds digital bridges from Kosovo to the world**

After completing her studies in the U.S. in 2015, Jeta Zagragja decided to return to Kosovo to build a career in an industry transforming every aspect of life, technology. Her early experience at Gjirafa, an Albanian-language search engine and e-commerce platform, and Cacttus, one of Kosovo's first IT and software development companies, laid the foundations for a career that would soon expand at an incredible pace. Two years after returning to Kosovo, in 2017, she co-founded UCX, a company that managed to grow to over 90 employees and carry out a successful exit in 2021. Today, as the founder of AnchorzUp, Jeta leads a company that develops digital solutions for clients in America, Switzerland, Australia and Canada, positioning Kosovo on the global



map of innovation.

The road to success has not been easy. It was built on persistent efforts, dedication and courage to move forward even in moments of uncertainty. Challenges such as securing investment, building teams, creating an organisational culture that values professionalism and inclusion or confronting prejudices towards Kosovo's market have strengthened her vision further. "Every achievement was a result of consistent work, dedication and courage to learn from failures," she points out.

To Jeta, professional success and family are not choices that exclude each other. They can coexist when there is understanding and flexibility in the workplace.

*“When a woman helps another,  
the entire system benefits.  
This is the true meaning of  
empowerment.”*



# Donjeta Sahatçiu

*Director & Head of Campus*

## **From the municipal office to a new digital generation**

For Donjeta Sahatçiu, technology is not just a code or a screen, but it is a way to bring people closer to each other. It was always there, at every step of her journey, from a university deeply rooted in IT to managing digital companies, where she understood that every genuine system begins with communication and collaboration.

When she moved from industry to municipality, Donjeta began to see technology with a different eye, as a tool for smarter, closer and more inclusive governance. As Deputy Mayor of Pristina, from February 2022 to 2024, she used her role to create opportunities for women: digital training, inclusion in local employment policies and spaces where young girls can try, think and build.



*“I’ve often been the only woman at the table, but I’ve never wanted to be the last, because every time a girl wins the place she*

*deserves, the way is opened for another one after her.”*

From coding workshops for over five thousand girls to the digitalisation of processes that make women's lives easier, for Donjeta, equality is not a cause but a way to bring about development wholeheartedly.

Today, at 42 Tirana, a tuition-free coding school that uses a peer-to-peer learning model and is part of the global 42 Network, she sees herself giving the younger generation what she once sought for herself: the opportunity to believe that even here, you can create something that can change the world.



# Zana Tabaku

*Founder, Appdec*

## **From the magic of the first screen to artificial intelligence**

Zana Tabaku was only 13 when she saw a computer for the first time. "It was after the war in Kosovo, at a time when technology was both luxury and hope. When I saw the screen reacting to my commands, it felt like magic," she recalls. For a girl who was growing up in a reality of reconstruction, that cold light of the screen became a symbol of a new world, a world that spoke the language of possibilities.

Although later she chose to study English Language and Literature at the University of Pristina, her passion for technology did not leave her alone. She enrolled in a programming academy at a time when girls in this field were almost invisible. "I was the only girl in my group, but I knew I belonged there," she says. That experience, built between the lines of coding and faith, led her down a path that



defined her career, from her first coding to AI.

At the age of 23, Zana founded the Appdec Company, becoming one of the first women in Kosovo to create a company in the field of ICT. "At the time, it was something unprecedented," she recalls.

With the Junior Geeks program, which she co-founded to inspire young people in STEM, she has helped over 500 high school students gain practical skills in technology, innovation and critical thinking. Over 80% of them have pursued studies in ICT-related fields, and many of them are already employed in local and international companies.

*“The greatest impact of a company is not measured by the products it delivers, but by the people it nurtures and inspires.”*

Today, Zana sees the future in artificial intelligence, a field she describes as “the most advanced way to understand the world and make it more just.” Her goal is to develop innovations that preserve the human essence of technology and build an ecosystem where women and girls are part of every level of digital transformation.



## IV – Catalysts of Change

*In building a more equal and inclusive digital future, the role of organisations that act as a bridge between women's potential and real opportunities is essential. This chapter depicts the institutional and community foundation that empowers the individual success of many women that we have presented so far. Without these catalysts of change, networks, programs, incubators and initiatives, talent often remains undeveloped, while young women's dreams go unsupported. Accordingly, the European Union, through support for these structures, invests in the social and professional infrastructure that renders success stories possible. In this chapter, we present some organisations and networks that are acting as catalysts for change, connecting girls with educational opportunities, mentorship and pathways to careers in technology.*

# STIKK – The voice of the ICT sector and leader of transformation

The Kosovo Association of Information and Communication Technology (STIKK), founded in 2008, has developed into one of the main organisations representing the ICT companies in the country. At present, it represents more than 100 members and covers more than 60% of the ICT labour market and over 75% of the annual turnover of the sector with its activities. STIKK is not just a representative organisation. It also promotes transformation, and this is also owing to the support of the European Union.

STIKK founded TechPark Pristina, an incubator that hosts 25 start-ups with two-year support and modern infrastructure for growth and international expansion. The EU-funded STAR UP project has played a critical role in rendering the park operational as a space for innovation and entrepreneurship.

STIKK and its partners also organise editions of Girls in ICT Week in Kosovo, initiatives that involve girls in technical activities, mentoring seminars and exhibitions. In 2025, the seminars took place in 9 institutions in 8 municipalities across Kosovo, with over 300 participating girls and 15 professional mentors from local and international organisations and companies

## Women in STEM Kosovo – Community and networking for girls in STEM

In Kosovo, women make up about 56% of all students, around 32% in STEM programs, while in the technology sector, they represent less than 20% of the workforce. These figures highlight that gender disparities in STEM remain significant.

The Women in STEM Kosovo network was created to bring together girls and women studying or working in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, providing a community that offers mentoring, workshops, and professional networking opportunities. Today, the network includes over 50 successful women from various STEM fields and works closely with public universities across Kosovo.

## Global Engineer Girls (GEG Kosovo)

Global Engineer Girls (GEG Kosovo) is an educational initiative supported by Limak Kosovo and UNDP that empowers girls to pursue engineering and STEM careers through scholarships, mentorship, and internships. Through this program, girls and young women have gained access not only to financial support but also to valuable hands-on experience and professional guidance.

The aim of the initiative is to ensure that women's success in STEM does not remain just an individual achievement, but becomes a pathway that inspires and encourages other young women to enter and thrive in these fields.

## Girls in ICT – A movement that makes a difference on the ground

"Empower, Inspire, Innovate" is the motto that guides Girls in ICT, a movement that promotes girls' participation in technology. In Kosovo, the movement is coordinated by DigiWomen Cluster Kosovo, a network of women-led tech companies operating under the auspices of STIKK (please see STIKK article on page 11).

During the Girls in ICT Week, young women get included in seminars, practical activities and networking with mentors.

The 2025 edition took place in educational institutions in Pristina, Peja/Peć, Gjakovë/Đakovica, Prizren and surrounding municipalities, and included private and public institutions. In total, around 300 girls participated in interactive panels, questionnaires and mentoring sessions with experts from the fields of technology and business.





## V – Spotlight on Collaborative Forces

In a rapidly changing ecosystem, the empowerment of women in technology does not happen by accident. It is built through collaborations, forums and events that build bridges between young women, industry, and institutions that believe in equality and innovation. In Kosovo, some of these initiatives have become true pillars of development.

This section is essential to the publication because it shows that gender empowerment in technology is not an isolated effort but is built upon collaboration, knowledge sharing and platforms that support the journey from idea to implementation. These collaborative forces create an environment where women's talent is not only recognised but also flourishes.

# KosICT – When industry and education join forces

KosICT, the largest technology festival organised by STIKK, stands at the heart of the technology ecosystem in Kosovo. This annual event is more than a conference; it is a bridge that connects academia, industry and young talent.

Through B2B matchmaking sessions, international speakers and start-up presentations, KosICT offers a space where girls and young women have the opportunity to meet mentors, companies and investors who can alter their professional journey.

In recent editions, a special focus has been placed on gender inclusion and girls' participation in technology. With the support of EU-funded and supported projects like STAR UP and TechPark Pristina, dozens of girls have attended training, been employed in ICT companies or have founded their own start-ups. This type of collaboration opens the doors of the industry to a new generation of professionals who are transforming the way technology is perceived in Kosovo.



# DOKU.TECH – Inspiration between art, technology and change

In an atmosphere that combines culture with innovation, DOKU.TECH has become one of the most inspiring events for young people, and especially for girls seeking to find their place in technology.

Since its establishment in 2014, this festival has gathered over 15,000 participants and over 100 international speakers, transforming Prizren into a centre of dialogue between art, science and digital society.

In each edition, DOKU.TECH brings topics that affect the future: artificial intelligence, digital ethics, cybersecurity and the social impact of technology. Festival organisers report that, in recent years, the participation of female speakers has reached around 40%, making this event a model for gender representation in technology.

On the DOKU.TECH stage, young girls find inspiration beyond technology: they learn about collaboration, courage and creativity. One of the latest



panels, "Accelerating Women's Representation in AI", emphasised the necessity for women to be included in the process of creating digital solutions and in decision-making, because, as it was stated, the technology of the future must reflect everybody's voice and diversity.

## Global Entrepreneurship Week – The space that connects innovation with action

Global Entrepreneurship Week (GEW) is a global initiative that inspires millions of young people in over 200 countries to venture, create and innovate. In Kosovo, GEW is organised by the Innovation Centre Kosovo (ICK), a leading hub that supports startups through incubation, training and community programs, in collaboration with over 45 partner organisations, becoming one of the most important platforms for promoting entrepreneurship, innovation and development of the startup ecosystem.

Each GEW edition brings activities that connect creativity with practical solutions: innovative design competitions, interdisciplinary workshops, business presentations and meetings with local and international investors. In the 2025 edition, held in collaboration with schools, universities and innovation hubs across Kosovo, events took place in nine institutions across eight municipalities, engaging over 300 young women and 15 professional mentors from local and international organisations and companies. Participants worked on projects linking technology, entrepreneurship and community impact — continuing the mission to inspire the next generation of women innovators.



## VI – Educators paving the way for girls in technology

*If there is one key factor that determines the long-term success of women's involvement in technology in Kosovo, it is education. Education not only as a formal system, but as an experience built by examples, mentors and leaders who do not keep knowledge to themselves but share it to help others grow. This chapter brings to light the figures laying this foundation—the women who, through teaching, mentoring, and the creation of new educational institutions, are paving the way for generations to come.*



## jCoders Academy – From students to mentors

Founded in 2015, jCoders is among the most important academies that aims to develop digital skills in children and young people. With branches in Pristina, Mitrovica South, Gjilan/Gnjilane and Pejë/Peć, it offers courses in programming, electronics, and robotics for ages 7–18.

Supported by the European Union for several projects, in addition to technical teaching, jCoders has created a cycle of influence where many girls who started as trainees are now part of the staff as mentors. This model not only empowers them personally but also creates an educational chain where inspiration turns into concrete impact.

# The Foundation House

## – A decade of creating opportunities for girls

Another educational pillar is The Foundation House, which has been the driving force behind the flagship Girls in ICT program. In April 2024, at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) Kosovo campus, this program marked its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a conference where achievements were presented: over 3,000 girls have gone through its training, mentoring and activities.

In this space, girls meet role models from private, academic and institutional sectors – a network that connects them to real opportunities and boosts their confidence to enter STEM fields is created.

Importantly, the program also reaches girls from minority communities across Kosovo, ensuring that opportunities in technology and education are inclusive and accessible to all. Through initiatives such as the Innovation Catalyst for Minorities, implemented by The Foundation House, dozens of girls from Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian, Bosniak, Serb, and Gorani communities have gained digital and financial skills, participated in mentoring sessions, and developed community projects that use technology for social impact. These initiatives not only build confidence and employability but also create role models who inspire other young women to follow similar paths.





## Digital School – Leadership from within the system

The Digital School, founded and led by **Hana Qerimi**, is one of the most successful initiatives in Kosovo, which combines technological education with gender inclusion.

With a staff made up of over 67% women and an approach that promotes active participation of girls, the school has transformed technology education into an inclusive and inspiring environment.



At Girls in ICT Week 2024, more than 100 girls participated in workshops and activities developed by the School, building self-confidence and new competencies.

A major international achievement was marked with the signing of the agreement with Berlitz, a global leader in language education and training, which paves the way for the Digital School program to expand to around 500 global locations, turning a local initiative into a success story with international impact.

Meanwhile, Hana has become one of the most powerful figures who is helping to change this field. She has created an educational model that not only conveys knowledge of technology but also inspires.

"From the get-go, I was attracted to the idea that through technology one can create something that really impacts people, a solution, an experience, a new opportunity," Hana says, indicating that her motivation has always been tied to the social impact of technology.

The Digital School is built on this philosophy that technology should be accessible to everyone, especially girls and women who have traditionally been excluded from this field.

"Being a role model for young women is a responsibility, but also a privilege. We encourage girls to be confident, to experiment and to make bold decisions. Because technology is not just coding, it is creativity, it is problem solving, and it is the way to become leaders of the future," she emphasises.

For Hana, true success is not only measured by statistical data about girls participation in STEM but by the transformation that occurs when a young girl sees herself as a creator rather than a mere user of technology.





## VII – Bridges between education and opportunities

*In Kosovo, a sustainable digital economy cannot be developed short of a strong connection between education and the labour market. This connection is being built through intermediary institutions such as VentureUP, Cacttus Education, and BIT Academy, spaces where theory meets practice and where young people, especially girls, are prepared for the real world of work and innovation.*

# VentureUP – The connection between the university and the job market

One such example is VentureUP, the Entrepreneurship Centre and official incubator of the University of Pristina, which has helped over 50,000 young people combine academic knowledge with practical and entrepreneurial experiences. In collaboration with industry experts, and with the support of the European Union, VentureUP designs training programs, selects trainers and provides internship or employment opportunities for participants who complete them successfully. In 2024 alone, 160 young people, including 92 girls, have completed one of the ten training programmes that were provided. Since its establishment, over 3,000 students have participated in various programs, and 45% of them have been employed in the private sector.



# Cacttus Education – Digital education with a practical approach

With its “cooperative education” approach, Cacttus Education, a vocational education institution, represents an innovative model of integrated education in the field of technology. Students attend the theoretical part in school and undergo vocational internships in tech companies, building real experience that brings them closer to the labour market.

Licensed by the Ministry of Education and accredited by the National Qualifications Authority, Cacttus Education is the first two-year vocational school in Kosovo that offers a practical learning model in collaboration with the industry.

In the framework of projects supported by the European Union and international partners, this institution has developed programs that empower girls and women in technology through training, mentoring and vocational internships. Projects like Skill Factory and Cooperative Training (CT) aim to increase representation of women in the IT sector and help young people build sustainable careers in local and international digital markets.





## BIT Academy – Technology with a direct focus

Founded in 2013, BIT Academy is among the first institutions in Kosovo to offer professional training in technology, built according to the real needs of the labour market. Through the practical approach of "Skill Up, Stand Out, Get Employed", the academy helps young people develop technical and professional skills that prepare them for sustainable careers in IT.

BIT Academy specialises in training like Cisco CCNA, QA, web development and system management, offering individual mentoring and a collaborative environment for professional development. In the framework of projects supported by the Youth Online and Upward (YOU) Program — an initiative implemented by the Kosovo Ministry of Economy to equip young people with digital skills and connect them to online job opportunities — the Academy has offered training in Python programming language, providing young people with an opportunity to gain practical knowledge and access to the digital market.

With a wide network of lecturers and industry professionals, BIT Academy is helping increase representation of girls and women in technology, turning their interest in innovation into tangible careers and long-term impact.

# Gracanica Innovation Centre – Supporting girls in technology

For several years, Gracanica Innovation Centre (GIC) has worked to empower young people through technology, innovation, and digital education. A special focus of its programs is the inclusion of women and girls from the Kosovo Serb community, helping them gain confidence and skills in the tech field.

Through trainings in 3D printing, digital design, Arduino programming, and digital literacy, participants have learned to apply technology creatively, from using Canva and online marketing tools to developing handmade products through laser engraving and 3D design.

In the past three years, over 60 women and girls have joined GIC programs,



with several continuing as mentors and assistants in new workshops. One participant, after completing 3D design training, now develops her own local products and trains younger girls – proof of how opportunity leads to empowerment. Looking ahead, GIC plans to launch “Girls in Innovation” a new program to build technical and leadership skills among high school girls in Serb-majority communities across Kosovo.





## VIII – Transformation: From Learner to Entrepreneur

The power of these institutions does not only lie in statistics or collaborations, but in the real stories of the girls who have gone through them. Whether through a first training that evoked a hidden passion, a mentor who gave her direction or an internship opportunity that boosted her confidence, each girl's experience is a testament to the impact that happens when dedicated education meets the potential of a new generation. The stories of some of them below show how investing in technological education is an investment in new success stories. And for those who guide and teach them, the change is equally visible.



For **Bardha Ajvazi**, co-founder of Brandfluence, a Pristina-based digital marketing and communication agency specialised in branding, the impact of education is something she witnesses every day. She has collaborated with Cacttus Education, RIT Kosovo, as well as organisations such as Women in Tech Kosovo and DigiWomen STIKK in developing training that strengthens not only technical skills, but also those of leadership, communication and creative thinking. According to Bardha, "girls who enrol in these academies not only learn to code but gain the courage to build something of their own."

Meanwhile, a simple 3D design training at the Gracanica Innovation Centre (GIC) completely changed **Mateja Košić**'s path. "I've always loved combining art and technology," she recalls. "But it was during this course that I realised how ideas can become something tangible, something that people can actually hold and use."

That first experience became the spark that shaped her future. "The training didn't just give me technical knowledge, it gave me confidence," Mateja says. "It made me think like a creator, not just a learner."

What started as a small experiment has now grown into a local initiative: Mateja designs and produces her own 3D-printed creations, connecting traditional elements with modern design. "I wanted to bring our culture into something fresh and useful. Seeing people use something I made is the best reward."

Today, she shares that same passion with younger girls who are discovering technology for the first time. As a mentor at GIC workshops, Mateja helps them overcome fear and self-doubt. "I want them to see that technology isn't a male field. It's a space full of creativity, courage and opportunity," she says.

*"Don't wait for the perfect moment, start now. Every small step matters, and courage always leads to growth."*



A simple training in social media management completely changed **Diora Binxhiu's** path, too. "I was 20 and, like many young people at the time, I saw technology as something that helps us connect and share everyday life, but not as a tool to build the future," she recalls. That first training session made her rethink everything. That is where the idea that social networks are not just for following, but for leading was born. "I realised that technology gives you a voice, and if you use it with a purpose, it also gives you influence."

This idea turned into a vision: at the age of 24, Diora founded Polar Bear Agency, the first green marketing agency in Kosovo and the wider region. With a unique approach that unites technology, creativity and environmental activism, Diora built a space that did not exist before. "For me, it was a way to do something I believe in." In more than a decade, Diora has become one of the most committed voices for the inclusion of girls in the digital sector. She has conducted training, mentored new girls and, in international panels, talked about the importance of access to spaces that nurture courage and self-confidence.

# Postscript

This publication reveals a mosaic of real stories, personal journeys and collective initiatives that demonstrate women's power to transform not only their lives, but also the future of technology in Kosovo.

From classrooms and labs to digital academies, start-ups, mentoring and courageous communities, the women and girls that you have met on these pages are building a new, more equal and more inclusive reality.

"From Vision to Innovation: Women's Inspiring Paths in IT" is more than a documentation of achievements, it is a call for continuity, for trust in every girl's potential and for a shared commitment to making technology a space of opportunities for all.



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