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Empowering Women: Building Leadership And Advocacy Skills For Young Europeans

Booklet



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Sector: 210YOU

Duration: 20 months

Main aim

This project is dedicated to empowering young European women by developing their leadership and advocacy skills and promoting gender equality and women's rights.

Objectives

- 1.To enhance the leadership skills of young European women through targeted training programs, workshops, and mentoring.
- 2.To provide the necessary tools and resources for these women to develop robust advocacy skills, advocating effectively for gender equality and women's rights.
- 3.To raise awareness about gender inequality and the specific challenges women face in various life aspects, including education, employment, and leadership.
- 4.To foster cross-cultural exchange and cooperation among young European women to address gender inequality and advocate for women's rights.
- 5.To encourage and increase the active participation and representation of young European women in decision-making processes, striving for a greater gender balance in leadership positions.

Activities

1. A kick-off meeting for project coordinators in Malta.
2. An international workshop in Sweden for exchanging experiences.
3. A midterm online meeting for progress assessment.
4. Local training programs complemented by study visits for immersive learning.
5. Creation of tangible outputs to encapsulate project learnings.
6. A final meeting and dissemination event – a conference held in Lithuania.

Expected results

1. Participants will see enhanced leadership skills, ready to tackle gender equality projects.
2. Young women's advocacy skills will be significantly strengthened, propelling gender equality and policy change.
3. Increased knowledge and understanding of gender issues, including the facets of intersectionality.
4. Production of educational materials, such as handbooks and toolkits, on leadership and gender equality.
5. Promotion of cross-cultural understanding and cooperation among European women.
6. Empowerment of participants, instilling confidence to take active roles in community and gender equality initiatives.
7. Dissemination of project outcomes through multiplier events in partner countries.
8. Enhanced visibility and awareness of the importance of empowering young European women.
9. Establishment of sustainable networks and partnerships for continued efforts in gender equality.

Introduction

The booklet you hold in your hands was created by the partnership in the project Empowering Women: Building Leadership and Advocacy Skills for Young Europeans.

The empowerment of young women is a critical aspect of achieving gender equality and promoting women's rights in Europe. In order to address the various challenges that young women face in their communities and societies, it is essential to provide them with the tools and skills necessary to become effective leaders and advocates for gender equality. This booklet serves as a platform to showcase the success stories of young European women who have developed their leadership and advocacy skills and made a significant impact in their respective fields.

We hope that these stories serve as a source of motivation and encouragement for readers as they pursue their own goals and aspirations. May these success stories inspire you to push through any obstacles and challenges that come your way, and may they remind you that with determination and persistence, anything is possible.

We invite you to read on and be inspired by the incredible journeys of these individuals who have shown that success is attainable with hard work, perseverance, and a belief in oneself.

These success stories showcase the impact that investing in the leadership and advocacy skills of young European women can have on promoting gender equality and women's rights. By providing young women with the tools and resources they need to become effective advocates, we can create a more inclusive and equitable society for all.

PARTNERS



PARTNERS



Lithuania

Asociacija IVAIGO

Asociacija IVAIGO is a prominent organization dedicated to gender equality, youth empowerment, and the active engagement of young women in policymaking and leadership roles. With a commitment to addressing contemporary challenges related to gender inequality and women's rights, the organization leverages its expertise in fostering creativity, critical thinking, and advocacy among youth. It actively supports the development of leadership and professional skills in young European women, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, promoting their active participation in ERASMUS PLUS programs and other international forums. Asociacija IVAIGO collaborates with NGOs and educational institutions and municipalities to promote education and empower young women. The organization fosters cross-cultural exchange and advocates for women's representation in decision-making, aiming for a more equitable society.

Website: www.ivaigo.lt

Instagram: www.instagram.com/ngoivaigo

Facebook: www.facebook.com/ivaigongo

PARTNERS



Malta

Innovative Youth

Innovative Youth is a platform providing moral and directional support to young people as they foster the necessary life and entrepreneurial skills to pursue their goals.

Our mission is to promote measures and mechanisms for youth entrepreneurship, to influence the policy of national institutions, and promote a culture among young people of job creation rather than job seeking.

Innovative Youth is a non-governmental, independent and non-profit making national and regional youth platform that works towards empowering young adults to foster entrepreneurial skills in order to try and generate a business activity by seeking new and innovative opportunities for the benefit of the society and the economy.

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/innovativeyouthmalta>

PARTNERS



B-Creative Förening

Sweden

B-Creative Association

B-Creative is an association that are developing courses, event, workshops in different topics such as language learning, virtual travelling, education concepts and cultural concepts.

B-Creative have a large network in Sweden and in Europe with NGOs, education organisations and associations.

The staff in B- Creative have experience of European projects, development of education material, marketing, networking and focus on the individual are central values for us.

Website: <https://b-creative.link>

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/be_creative_link/

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/BCreativeAssociation>

IVAIGO

Interview with Gabija Baronaitė



Gabija Bajorinaitė, a first-year student at VILNIUSTECH, who chose the Civil Engineering study programme. Having chosen a stereotypically "male" path, Gabija proves that one should strive to achieve goals regardless of the opinions and attitudes of others.

What made you choose civil engineering?

I really, really believed that I was going to be an architect, but only because I hadn't heard of a study programme like civil engineering. I had actually lost interest in mathematics for a while, but the tutor I was studying with for the VBE awakened my love for it and made me more open to study programmes that are more focused on it. At one point, I was even debating between architecture and mathematics, but I found what I thought was the perfect middle ground.

How is this journey going?

Excellent. I like both what I am studying and the people around me at the university. As an ambassador of the university, I often talk to students who don't know what they want to study, so I share my enthusiasm with them, and I believe I have convinced more than a few of them to join our community and study this particular programme - civil engineering. I love what I do and I believe that this is a field that deserves much more interest.

Which is the hardest part?

The hardest part is probably the time management. There are plenty of opportunities of how to spend your time while studying. You can do anything you want, but to do so much without being able to plan your time is simply impossible.



What advice would you give to girls who want to get into civil engineering?

DON'T BE AFRAID! I have met many girls who were afraid to get involved just because of the idea that it's a man's profession and women are not welcomed there, but even though I am only a first year student, I have managed to get the impression that it's a total myth. When I talked to representatives of various construction companies, lecturers, and older students in the field, they were all opposed to this view, saying that it was just a stereotype and that women were just as welcome in the field as men.

IVAIGO

Interview with Justė Petrauskaitė



Justė Petrauskaitė, one of Lithuania's youngest forest protection specialists, shares her forestry journey in this interview! Starting her forestry journey during her studies, Justė is actively involved in various activities aimed at educating and encouraging public interest in this field.

How would you introduce yourself to someone you have just met?

A simple yet complex question. There is no single answer. I am Justè. I would introduce myself as a daughter in some cases, a sister or a friend in the others. I can be met in many places, so I can present myself in many different ways. I have been introducing myself as a forester for several years. I am also a student, about to graduate with a Master's degree in Forestry. I have also been a volunteer with the organisation "White Gloves". And I am a future hunter.



What made you choose a career as a forester?

The classic short answer is a love of nature. When I was choosing my studies, I was looking for something related to the natural sciences because they were the most interesting. I chose forestry studies based on my gut feeling, because I didn't know anyone who had any close connection to forestry. When I told adults where I was going to study, I often got the comment that it was a "man's" speciality. If you dig deeper into the motives behind my choice of study, a lot of it was the desire to prove to myself and others that there are no male specialities. I remember that the phrase "a man's specialty" used to sound like an insult to me. My peers had never heard of such a thing as forestry, so there was not much advice or opinion from them. And for me it was another hook, to choose a unique study that was not widely known.



How is your journey going?

The journey is going well. I have proved to myself that I am capable of a lot, which I think is the most important thing. And, more importantly, I realised that I don't really have to prove anything to others (as I wanted to do at school). I do things because I really like them. Overall, the journey is very dynamic. I finished my bachelor's thesis sitting in a forest fire tower above the treetops and started my career as a fire warden. Later I was a forest ranger, a deputy forester and now I am a forest protection specialist. I have fun.

What is the hardest part?

Sometimes the desire to do everything perfectly gets in the way. It sounds like a good thing to strive for the best result, but on the other hand, chasing perfection is more likely to lead to burnout than the desired result. Results don't always have to be 'best', sometimes they can be just 'good'. Sometimes my thinking is way too complex and I could get a medal for "overthinking". I am learning to look at things more simply and don't pay attention to some of the "imperfections". Everything and everywhere needs a balance and I am learning to find it and to be responsible not only to others but also to myself.



What advice would you give to girls who want to follow your path?

First of all, I would advise you not to compare yourself too much with others. Looking at other lives, especially instagram lives with smiles, flowers and holidays, sometimes we start to underestimate our own beautiful lives. There is a time for everything and for everything and there is no "right" formula for what should happen when. Someone travels around the world after school, someone rests, someone studies, someone starts a family, and someone combines everything together, and everything is fine in all cases. It is important to listen to your heart. I would also advise you not to be afraid to follow a path that seems untrodden, whether it is unconventional studies, solo travel or volunteering. It's better to try something and realise it's not for you than to do nothing and wait until you magically realise what you want out of life. I wish everyone to overcome their fears and experience life.

Innovative Youth

Béatrice Njoya



Born and raised in Cameroon, Béatrice Njoya's life was a tapestry woven with threads of adversity and courage. Her journey led her to Malta - a place where she would redefine beauty, challenge stereotypes, and inspire countless hearts.

From Darkness to Light

Béatrice carried scars—both visible and hidden. As a survivor of domestic violence, she knew the depths of despair. Yet, fuelled by an unwavering spirit, she sought refuge in Malta - a land promising hope and renewal. Her three children - Faith, Emma, and Nathan - became her anchors, their innocent eyes reflecting her determination.



The Miss Universe Malta Contest

At thirty-nine, Béatrice stood on the precipice of transformation. Representing St Paul's Bay, she entered the Miss Universe Malta contest—an arena where beauty transcended age. The crown wasn't her sole pursuit; it was a platform to amplify her voice.

Facing Racism with Grace

The victory came, but so did the storm. Racist comments flooded social media, attempting to diminish her radiance. Béatrice responded with grace: "I will make Malta proud." Her resolve echoed through the digital vitriol. She understood that unity mattered more than prejudice.

A Purpose Beyond Beauty

Béatrice's journey wasn't skin-deep. She used her platform to raise awareness about domestic abuse - a topic often silenced. Her scars became symbols of survival, etching depth into her beauty. In interviews, she spoke candidly, urging others to break their silence.

Malta: Her Chosen Home

Questions arose about her eligibility as a non-Maltese woman. Béatrice's response was both understanding and proud. "I chose to live in Malta," she asserted. "It is an honor to represent this island in Miss Universe." Her gratitude for Malta's opportunities resonated.

A Trailblazer

As the oldest contestant in the international Miss Universe competition, Béatrice carried a torch. Age was no barrier; courage knew no bounds. Her victory symbolized inclusivity, breaking free from conventions. Mexico awaited - the global stage where her voice would echo.



Conclusion

Béatrice Njoya's journey wasn't just about crowns; it was about resilience, empathy, and rewriting narratives. Her legacy whispered: "Don't let age hold you back." And so, she stepped into the spotlight, a beacon for those who dared to dream beyond limits.

Innovative Youth

Roberta Metsola



In the heart of the Mediterranean, on the beautiful island of Malta, a woman named Roberta Metsola was born. She grew up in a humble family, with her parents and two sisters, in the town of Gżira. Roberta was a bright student and pursued law at the University of Malta.



Roberta's journey to success began when she stepped into the world of politics. She was active within Malta's Nationalist Party (PN) from a young age, serving in various roles and volunteering with the PN's election arm ELCOM. Her dedication and hard work led her to be elected as a member of the European Parliament (MEP) in 2013.

In 2020, Roberta became the First Vice-President of the European Parliament. But her crowning achievement came in January 2022, when she was elected as the President of the European Parliament. This made her the youngest ever president, the first Maltese person, and the first female president since 2002.

Roberta's success story is a testament to her dedication, hard work, and commitment to serving her country and the European community. She has not only made her country proud but has also inspired many young women around the world. Her story is a shining example of how a woman from a small island nation can rise to the top and make a significant impact on the world stage

Being married with 4 children How did she balance family life and political responsibilities?

Roberta Metsola, a mother of four boys, has always been a strong advocate for balancing family life and political responsibilities. She married Ukko Metsola, a Finn, on October 1, 2005. Their sons were born in 2007, 2008, 2011, and 2017.

Despite the demanding nature of her political career, Roberta has always prioritized her family. She and her husband became the first married couple to run in the same European Parliament election from two different member states. This unique experience further strengthened their bond and understanding as they navigated the complexities of political life together.

Roberta acknowledges that balancing a career and family life is challenging. She has been quoted saying, "Despite all the advances in childcare and flexible working, the truth is that my husband and I would not be able to raise a family and have a career without the help we have– and I am determined to do what I can in the time I have in politics to make it easier for other parents".



In addition to her political work, she is often seen spending quality time with her family. For instance, a documentary titled “The First Vice” features her cooking chicken for her four young boys. Her Finnish husband, Ukko, also shared his experiences dealing with his wife’s absence when she first campaigned to become an MEP.

Did she face any criticism for prioritizing family life?

Roberta Metsola, despite her high-profile political career and family commitments, has largely been praised for her ability to balance both. Her family, including her husband and parents, have publicly expressed their pride and admiration for her achievements.

However, like any public figure, Metsola has faced criticism, but it's important to note that these criticisms are not necessarily related to her prioritizing family life. For instance, she has faced scrutiny for her stance on various political issues. But these criticisms are part of the political landscape and are not unique to Metsola.

In fact, Metsola's ability to balance her family life with her political responsibilities has been seen as a testament to her resilience and dedication. It serves as an inspiration for many, particularly women who aspire to take on leadership roles while also managing family responsibilities.

It's also worth noting that the perception of women in leadership roles is complex and multifaceted. The appointment of a woman into a position long-held by men is often seen as a positive sign for gender equality. However, it's important to remember that the presence of women in leadership positions does not automatically equate to progress in the fight for gender equality. Each individual's contributions and actions play a crucial role in this ongoing struggle. In Metsola's case, her commitment to her family and her country demonstrates her dedication to both her personal and professional life.

Innovative Youth

Zenah Hemedan



Her entrepreneurial journey in Malta began in November 2021 when she founded her own business specializing in Project Management Training & Consultancy. Over the past few years, she built a small team and formed several alliances. Their mission was to empower their partners and clients with the skills and knowledge they need to excel in their careers.

She is proud of the milestones they have achieved so far:

Training Programs & Courses

Conducting 14 training programs in 4 countries, 7 online courses, and over 70 instructor-led sessions have been a global experience! Participants from 9 different countries joined their sessions, bringing diverse perspectives and enriching their collective learning journey.

Leading projects

Assisted by her team, she has led 6 software implementation projects to successful go-lives. Each project came with its own challenges, but through proper planning, critical thinking, and effective team leadership, they were able to deliver outstanding results.

Youth Leadership Program:

The recent milestone, and one of the most fulfilling, has been the launch of the Youth Leadership Program designed to prepare young individuals to become future leaders. The program focuses on essential skills such as leadership, creative thinking, and project management, which are increasingly vital in today's technologically advanced world.

She is currently in the final steps of venturing into the AI Usage in Project Management. This initiative, which is close to her heart, will add great value to their partners. It is designed as interactive discussions and workshops to explore the practical use of AI in project management. It will assist project professionals in leading their organizations on the AI maturity journey and ensure the responsible usage of these tools.

Innovative Youth

Final word

These women exemplify resilience, dedication, and a commitment to breaking barriers. Béatrice, a survivor of domestic violence, leveraged her platform to challenge stereotypes and raise awareness about critical social issues. Roberta, balancing her demanding political career with family life, shattered ceilings as the youngest and first Maltese President of the European Parliament. Zenah Hemedan entrepreneurial journey in Malta has been marked by significant achievements in project management training, successful project implementations, and the launch of a Youth Leadership Program, with exciting new ventures into AI in project management on the horizon. Their journeys inspire countless individuals, demonstrating that with perseverance and courage, one can overcome adversity and make a significant impact on both a local and global stage. Their legacies are a testament to the power of dreaming beyond limits and forging paths for future generations of women.

B-Creative Association

Success story 1

This woman grew up in the Stockholm suburb of Rinkeby with roots in Iran. She competed with her father in most things growing up, and despite the age difference, he never let her win just because she was a child. He reminded her that "You win when you win. The world will not give you special treatment". This relationship shaped Susanne's personality and motivated her to study at the Stockholm School of Economics. During her studies, she started a subsidiary of Oriflame in Iran and got her first taste of entrepreneurship. She then forged a marketing career with Procter & Gamble and travelled the world - until the day she broke her neck in a skiing accident. It was a turning point in her life and Susanne decided to realise her dream of becoming an entrepreneur.

Already at the age of 22, she started her first company. She is the entrepreneur who breaks norms and drives change with her company Backing Minds, which invests in the blind spots of the venture capital industry.

Her parents came to Sweden from revolutionary Iran and worked hard to support her and her siblings.

-In the beginning, they could work three jobs and study at the same time. Seeing them work so hard has made them my biggest role models in life.

She started at the Business School by chance. It was the mother of a friend who advised her.

- "I didn't know what Commerce was, but she thought I should go for it.

And invest, she did. Her studies opened many important doors for her and at the age of 22 she started her first company, Oriflame's subsidiary in Iran. She sold it after a while and started a successful career at the American company Procter & Gamble. There she was responsible for some of the world's biggest brands internationally.

But suddenly one day her life took an abrupt turn. She was involved in a skiing accident and broke her neck, millimetres away from death. While on sick leave, she made a decision.

- "That's when it hit me. What do I have to lose? I am not paralysed, and I am not dead. So, I called and quit my job and started setting up a lot of different companies.

There were almost ten companies, of which Eleven, one of the main e-commerce players in beauty, was the biggest. During a poker night a few years later, she met entrepreneur Sara Wimmercranz. One thing they both pondered was the question: "Who actually gets venture capital in Sweden?".

After some analysis of statistics and figures, the answer is obvious. It is a very homogenous market. Almost all capital goes to Stockholm companies, even though the majority of all companies are started outside Stockholm. Female entrepreneurs receive only a few tiny per cent of the capital and entrepreneurs with a foreign background as well.

- "We thought, what kind of crazy figures are these? But instead of just seeing it as a problem, we saw it as a great opportunity.

Together they started BackingMinds and have since changed the statistics on who gets venture capital.

We even received an award for starting the first ever female-founded venture capital company in all of Europe. We didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

The first fund has yielded high returns and with the investment thesis proven, another fund of half a billion SEK has been raised, backed by a number of big names. In principle, all investors in the first fund have also invested in the second. She sees this as a sign that investors actually want to help change the otherwise very traditional venture capital industry.

Since then, she has started several companies, mainly in e-commerce and tech. Right from the start, she set a high goal of reaching 100 million in turnover before she turned 30, a dream that was fulfilled with the company Eleven - one of the Nordic region's largest online retailers of beauty products.

B-Creative Association

Success story 2

Someone who has really put time into building her business is a 20-year-old girl. But time is also her biggest enemy, as she is constantly fighting to maximise the efficiency of her work.

She often finds herself in a café, a place where she spends the first hour of her working day. This is followed by meetings, customer relations, administration - and then even more meetings. A year ago, she started a company that deals with matching in the advertising and marketing industry. As an example, she mentions a company that sells flowers and needs help with marketing. By posting an assignment on her company's website, others can then compete to perform the service.

The recipe for ideas

She has had hundreds of business ideas, and the drafts are carefully documented in folders. A year ago, he was leafing through them and was reminded of the basic idea for his current business. But the idea was already a few years old.

Today she has eight employees and works in premises in the centre of Stockholm. But the thirst for new ideas has not been quenched.

Dare to seek contact

- "It can be good to find someone who has more experience than you in certain areas. Building networks, for example through associations, is good. The networks exist, it's all about having the courage to seek contact.

One person who played a major role in developing her business was her economics teacher at the upper secondary school.

- "He was a good sounding board. We used to sit around after class and discuss how to move businesses forward.

Nowadays, she networks mainly through LinkedIn, where she has over 3 000 followers. She also recommends free events where you can easily meet people with whom you can develop business ideas. Once you have found like-minded people, you don't have to spend so much time running your business.

- "It's possible to run a business when you're in high school and have an extra job on the side. You definitely don't have to spend as much time as I do. But I've always done it - and we have a lot of fun," she says.

Two topics in particular are trending among young entrepreneurs. According to Elin Östblom, Communicator at Young Enterprise, they both have the common denominator of trying to mitigate the social problems we face.

- "Companies that focus on sustainability or preventing mental illness among young people, for example, are hot right now.

- "It can be about creating solutions that reduce food waste or recycling materials," Östblom continues.

As long as you have permission from a guardian or supervisor, you can start a business in Sweden when you are 16 years old. But as a young person, there is a great risk that many people will doubt your competence. This is why Elin Östblom emphasises the importance of a large network.

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Youth**



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