

Women in tech take the floor

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8 March is International Women's Day. A day on which women and men all over the world raise their voices for emancipation, equal rights and inclusion. Although these issues gain a lot of attention in the Belgian business world, the share of women in certain sectors is still lagging behind.

Recent figures show, for example, that there are significantly fewer female engineers than males. So there is still a battle to be fought, even in our modern western society. Perhaps the most powerful weapon in that battle is inspiration: the tech world needs female role models. And as the innovation centre of the technological industry in Belgium, Sirris can give these female role models a platform.

Francine Schoumaker, head of the mechanical test lab at Sirris and active in the sector for 30 years, agrees that International Women's Day is no superfluous propaganda. 'It seems as if our society still does not give women a place in the industrial and technical world. So I am always over the moon to meet a young woman in this so-called man's job.' After all, why are these jobs considered to be 'for men', or why might they not suit women?

'In my job in tech, I can express my curiosity. If we want to think in female stereotypes, isn't troubleshooting something that women are very good at? For me, my job in tech is inspiring, intellectually challenging and allows me to channel my creativity', says Elena Tsiporkova, one of the InspiringFifty Deeptech 2022 and head of the Data and AI competence lab at Sirris

(EluciDATA).

Sarah Klein, data scientist at EluciDATA Sirris, backs this statement: ' "Why" was always my favourite question. Working in tech helps me every day to understand what things are doing around me, which services are only after my personal data and which ones can genuinely provide a solution to my problems.'

'The possibilities of technology are huge, and so our job is very diverse. One day you're working around energy, then the next day you're working around manufacturing. Technology is also constantly changing, so you really gain a lot of knowledge,' says Caroline Mair, Customer Relationship and Project Management Officer at the EluciDATA Lab of Sirris.

Özlem Ceyhan Yilmaz, Application Engineer at Sirris' OWI-Lab: 'My job is intellectually challenging, which I really like and need. It keeps me sharp. Besides, it is very satisfactory to see my contribution in a complex environment.'

Why representation is so important

According to Elena Tsiporkova, it is important for women to be represented in the tech world. 'We consume technology just as much as men do, so we should also be involved in its development. That way we can be sure that the tech we use also meets our needs and preferences.'

Sarah Klein adds, 'Many data-related products are still biased. Not only around gender, but also around age, nationality, religion, ... I am convinced that only research and development by diverse IT teams can reduce these biases. So as a young woman, you are an indispensable addition to the team.'

Setareh Gorji Ghalamestani, Project Engineer Metals, agrees: 'Everybody has their own creativity and a unique way of problem-solving. Thus, everyone can make a unique contribution to tech, regardless of gender. We should strive to make the future of tech include all talents.'

Francine Schoumaker: 'When I was looking for my first job in tech, it turned out to be quite a challenge not only because of prejudices, but even because the infrastructure was not adapted to female colleagues. Many steps have already been taken, but we must continue to fight against gendered connotations in the professional world. Not only for tech but also for say plumbers or butchers. Only when we achieve this mindset shift, when International Women's Day disappears or International Men's Day is created, only then will we have won the battle.'

(Source picture: https://www.pexels.com/@thisisengineering/)

Authors