December 2024

Femme Forward

EU Dissemination & Rollout Programme
Deliverable 7.3.

Femme Forward

Fast-tracking women into new tech careers and supporting successful female-let start-ups

About Femme Forward

Femme Forward - *Fast-tracking women into new tech careers and supporting successful female-let start-ups* - is a two-year transnational project funded under the Erasmus+ Programme.
Through an innovative and comprehensive training programme, women with various backgrounds will be empowered to either start a career in tech or employ their experience and knowledge to set up a tech start-up.
Femme Forward will identify, develop, and pilot high-quality digital education content that tackles the current gender gap in the digital economy. This will enable at least 500 women to start on the track to tech employment or entrepreneurship.
Femme Forward will offer an easy-to-use and extensive repository of tested, high-quality educational materials, available in multiple languages, and on a multi-device compatible learning platform: femmeforward.eu

Project partners

The Femme Forward consortium, led by SIMPLON.co, is composed of 14 partners and brings together key industry, technology, and education stakeholders in Europe.

Full partners
1. SIMPLON.CO (France)
2. TOP-IX (Italy)
3. ENGIM PIEMONTE (Italy)
4. Tech and Teach GmbH (Germany)
5. BeCode (Belgium)
6. Big Blue Data Academy (Greece)
7. CYPRUS COMPUTER SOCIETY (Cyprus)
8. Asociatia ETIC (Romania)
9. Le Techspace (Belgium)
10. HOCHSCHULE HANNOVER (Germany)
11. Factoria F5 (Spain)

Associated partners
1. AMAZON WEB SERVICES EMEA SARL
2. RANDSTAD NEDERLAND BV
3. FUJITSU SERVICES LTD
4. DIGITALEUROPE AISBL

Subcontractors
Schuman SA

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Revision History			
Version	Date	Modified by	Comments
1	09/12/2024	Engim	Initial version
2	18/12/2024	Engim	Review on structure & additional sections after review by other partners
3	20/12/2024	Engim	Integrated comments after "quality assurance" review

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Executive Summary

This document presents the Femme Forward - *Fast-tracking women into new tech careers and supporting successful female-led start-ups* - EU-wide Dissemination Programme.

The initial phase of the project primarily aimed to engage women, disseminating the project's values – particularly the significance of active female participation in the ICT sector – and raising awareness of the available courses. Conversely, the second phase broadened its focus to encompass training and education providers, industry stakeholders, and target groups of women, representing a natural progression from course participation to integration into the professional workforce.

This document demonstrates how the second phase of the project successfully attained its objectives, aligning with the comprehensive communication objectives outlined in Deliverable 7.1.

The following were the overarching communication and dissemination objectives of the project:

- **Raising awareness about Femme Forward's value** propositions towards key stakeholder groups.
- **Ensuring the adoption and further dissemination of the project** outputs by the identified beneficiaries and beyond (multipliers and other stakeholders).
- **Providing Femme Forward's partners and multipliers with a Communication Package for project internal and external usage**, including supporting material, tools, and guidance to optimally support the Femme Forward work in progress and achieve successful results by the end of the project.

1. Introduction

The Femme Forward project aimed to empower women by equipping them with the skills and confidence to thrive in the male-dominated tech industry. This involved creating a highly skilled workforce that was in demand. Following the completion of training courses, the second phase of the project focused on facilitating a smooth transition into the tech world.

Work Package 6 was specifically designed to achieve this goal. It aimed to place graduates in employment with large tech companies and SMEs or support them in starting their ventures. Tailored transition strategies were developed for each pathway, leveraging the expertise of the consortium partners. The ultimate objective was to establish an efficient process that would enable graduates to transition successfully into employment or entrepreneurship. For more information, refer to Deliverable 6.1.

Another crucial step towards the project's long-term sustainability was to engage other Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers. By raising awareness of these courses, the project aimed to encourage their implementation by other institutions. This strategy ensures that the project's positive impact will continue to grow even after its official conclusion.

To consolidate these activities and objectives, an EU-wide Dissemination Programme was planned within Work Package 7. This initiative focused on training and education providers, industry, policymakers, and relevant target groups of women for the abovementioned reasons. The main objective was to identify common strategies for a diversified partnership, develop easily replicable tools, and adopt a European perspective while respecting regional needs.

Consequently, the EU-wide Dissemination Programme action aimed to achieve two common objectives:

- **Promoting Femme Forward's value propositions** to key stakeholders, including forging partnerships with relevant companies, educational institutions, and women's associations.

- **Maximizing the adoption and dissemination of project outputs** among identified beneficiaries, multipliers, and other stakeholders.

2. Project objectives linked to D7.3

The project's general objective was to build an international consortium able to pilot and deploy a comprehensive training program based on high-quality educational materials focusing on the most in-demand advanced digital skills and on the tools and methodologies needed to reach vulnerable target groups effectively. Within the specific project objectives of this phase, the relevant ones are the following:

Objective 14 - Encourage the adoption of the training programme across Europe and the widespread dissemination of project results and best practice guides, leading to the highest possible uptake and significant impact.

Objective 15 - Ensure the widespread promotion of tech jobs as a career choice for women, highlighting the numerous job opportunities and the fast-track VET programmes to access the profession from any career starting point or skill level.

3. Approach

Given these objectives, our communication strategy was divided into two main areas:

- **Local Outreach.** To engage companies, educational institutions and women's associations at the local level, the project implemented a targeted outreach strategy.

- **Policy Advocacy.** To influence policymakers at the national and transnational levels, the project organized conferences and small events to bring together key stakeholders, including policymakers, industry leaders, and academic experts. These events provided a platform for discussing the challenges and opportunities facing women in the ICT sector and advocating for policy changes to address these issues.

This approach was determined to be the most effective strategy for reaching our target groups. While the consortium's international nature provides significant advantages, the practical realities of education and business are often deeply embedded within national and local contexts.

To meet these objectives, the partnership referred to the communication and dissemination framework of D7.1. Each partner, at both local and national levels, developed tailored communication and dissemination activities for their respective target audiences. Nevertheless, the overall communication strategy for the consortium was:

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- Creating databases of Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers, Advanced Training Providers (ATPs), and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) interested in future collaborations and course development.
- Establishing databases of companies seeking to hire women trained through the Femme Forward program and/or invest in startups initiated by program participants.
- Informing VET trainers, ATPs, HEIs, and companies about ongoing project results.
- Leveraging existing networks.
- Implementing targeted email campaigns.
- Sharing posts on social media tailored to specific target audiences.
- Organizing networking events.
- Attendance at job fairs.
- Sponsor the course and candidates on dedicated platforms.
- Conducting face-to-face meetings and small-scale events.
- Sharing project deliverables and distributing participant CVs.

Image 1. Networking event in Cyprus by Cyprus Computer Society

4. Fostering Audience Engagement

To encourage active participation from our target audiences, we implemented strategies tailored to their specific needs and objectives. Below, we outline the key actions and examples for each target group. Femme Forward's these activities have been monitored and measured against the defined key performance indicators (KPIs).

4.1 European and national policy stakeholders

To engage with European and national policymakers, a key strategy involved active participation and representation at significant European conferences. Specifically in:

- the "Inclusive AI & Skills" conference in Brussels, 160 delegates from 18 countries, including 14 EU member states, participated. BeCode and Randstad Enterprise Solutions had the opportunity to showcase the Femme Forward program at this event.

- The 2024 edition of the "20x30: Europe's Advanced Digital Skills Summit" attracted over 150 attendees and featured 47 speakers from diverse sectors across Europe, including CEOs, Deans, Senior Strategists, and policymakers from leading companies and institutions.

- The 7th EU-GCC Business Forum in Bahrain, themed "Redefining Economies: Building a Sustainable and Diversified Future". Femme Forward was highlighted as a showcase program to bridge the gender gap in the tech sector, necessary to build an inclusive economy.

For more information, refer to Deliverable 7.2.

Participation in these conferences was not the sole avenue for engaging with public bodies. Partners also had the opportunity to interact with municipalities at smaller events. These interactions, like the conferences, demonstrated a strong interest in addressing the gender gap in the ICT sector and supporting initiatives aimed at reducing it.

For example:

- TOP-IX involved the City of Turin in the final presentation of the project results (Italian Future Startup Founders track), which has shown interest in supporting future editions or course replication.
- Factoria F5 involved public administration, such as the Barcelona City Council and the government of the GENERALITAT DE Catalunya.

4.2 Industry

To effectively engage employers, a continuous dialogue was established through newsletters, shared learning materials, and the distribution of participants' CVs and testimonials, as delineated above. Additionally, given the specific target group, further communication efforts were undertaken with partner organizations, Randstad and Robert Half, a management consulting firm. These collaborations facilitated opportunities for students through their respective clients.

The communication and dissemination efforts contributed significantly to the realisation of the transition pathway. All women who took the courses had the opportunity to get in touch with companies offering ICT jobs or internships. The total number of companies involved was over 100.

Based on the overall communication plan, each partner leveraged existing networks and actively sought new collaborations with companies. This dual-pronged approach aimed to identify suitable companies for course graduates and cultivate long-term relationships to ensure the project's sustainability.

Regarding the input provided for the *Start-up Founders* course, the approach emphasized induction into local entrepreneurial networks, focusing on women in entrepreneurship. Partners regularly shared updates, news, and opportunities related to the start-up ecosystem, including start-up events, funding opportunities, and industry news. The most significant dissemination action was the organization of mock pitching events, where course participants presented their final projects to relevant stakeholders. Networking events have proven to be the most effective method of introducing participants to the world of work and entrepreneurship.

The following testimonials from courses' contact persons illustrate how dissemination efforts contributed to the successful transition of participants into employment or internships.

BeCode
"The dissemination efforts significantly contributed to achieving the transition pathway, with tangible outcomes including 33 internships and 17 durable job placements. Engaging employers played a crucial role in positioning learners for tech roles, fostering valuable connections, and creating opportunities aligned with the program's goals.".

Factoria F5
"A pilot initiative was launched to engage companies through tailored dissemination strategies, prospecting, and leveraging existing partnerships. This resulted in various collaboration opportunities, including group mentoring programs, access to job postings, direct referrals, and the creation of a database of employers and job offers."

TECHSPACE

"We supported the transition pathway by engaging employers and fostering connections that helped female entrepreneurs acquire their first customers. Through networking events, partnerships with companies, organisation of specific events, and targeted initiatives focused on women, the project created opportunities for female entrepreneurs to present their startups, pitch ideas, and build relationships with potential clients. These efforts enhanced visibility and provided critical market access for their entrepreneurial ventures."

Simplon Romania

"Four major companies were directly involved, with representatives sharing their personal experiences, organizational culture, and hiring practices. Some of these companies offered junior positions to participants, who subsequently progressed to the interview stage. Additionally, a communication network was established between participants, trainers, and mentors to facilitate the sharing of professional opportunities."

TOP-IX

"Effective dissemination activities can significantly contribute to the success of programs like those for women entrepreneurs. In our case, organizing and participating in events, webinars, and industry conferences proved particularly effective. These platforms allowed participants to showcase their products, prototypes, and services directly to a relevant audience. One notable example is a course participant who successfully applied to an Acceleration Programme managed by TOP-IX (Impact Deal) with their startup."
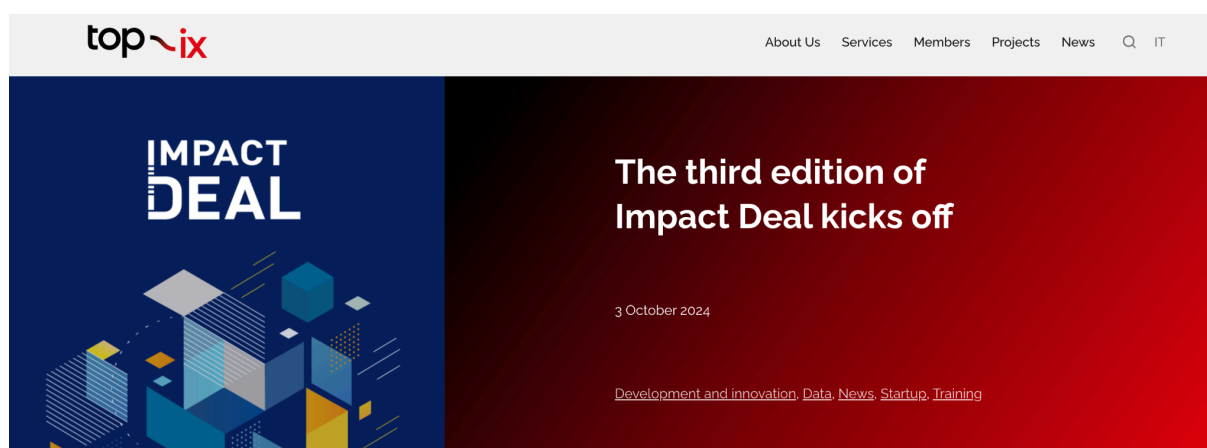

Image 2. TOP-IX website - announcement of the Impact Deal, the European data-driven acceleration program for social and environmental impact enterprises.

One of the challenges faced by the partnership was encouraging tech companies to broaden their talent search beyond university environments. To address this, specific campaigns were launched to highlight how non-traditional institutions can also cultivate exceptional talent in the tech sector.

A successful example is the format that Factoria F5 employed: networking with companies in a Speed Dating format. During this day, participants experienced professional interviews in a Speed Dating format, getting in touch with real technology companies in 10-minute interviews. A unique opportunity to showcase their talent, motivation and skills in Cloud technology. For their part, the companies discovered the enormous potential of these diverse and specialised talents, reaffirming the importance of betting on inclusion in the digital sector.

Image 3. Event "Talent Connection Mornin'" at Factoria 5 in Madrid

4.3 VET providers, HEIs and ATPs

To effectively involve other educational and training bodies, a similar approach to the one used for companies was followed. This aimed to facilitate adopting and adapting the Femme Forward model and course materials. A continuous dialogue was maintained through newsletters and shared teaching materials, culminating in the sharing of all materials on Moodle in the final phase.

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The dissemination campaign revealed that with the support of Femme Forward partners, VET providers and training entities could potentially implement tailored programs to meet their specific needs and target audiences.

4.4 Women associations

Initially, the project aimed to disseminate the Femme Forward program directly to relevant target groups of women in the EU-wide Dissemination Programme. However, the strategy was later adjusted to focus on collaborating also with associations and organizations that work with women as target groups. This shift in approach aimed to maximize the program's impact and reach.

Examples of these associations are:

- **Women&Tech® ETS**, an association dedicated to providing support and opportunities for women working in the technology sector. Through a series of projects and events, they strive to create an inclusive community and promote gender equality in technology.
- **R-Ladies Italy**, whose goal is to promote diversity and encourage women to be involved in the community of R.
- **Torino Città per le donne** (*Turin City for Women*), is an association whose main objective is to transform Turin into a city designed and organised entirely for women.
- **SheTech**, a non-profit organisation that wants to make a concrete contribution to bringing gender equality into the digital and tech world.
- **Rete al Femminile Torino** is the social promotion association that strengthens the professional skills of women entrepreneurs and people who feel they belong to the female gender. It is aimed at self-employed women.

All these organisations contributed to the dissemination of Femme Forward and declared their intention to collaborate with institutions to facilitate women's access to the courses.

These associations were, and continue to be, primarily interested in the project's outcomes, positioning themselves as potential multipliers. This outcome has significantly amplified the project's impact.

5. Communication tools

The following table outlines the primary communication tools employed for the EU Dissemination & Rollout Programme, along with their key features. The various

channels (website, blog, newsletter, social media) were chosen according to the specific audiences and purposes.

Channels	Characteristic	Target
Website	Official, informative, semi-formal, narrative	Companies and Organisations with demand in ICT skills, VET providers
Social media	Informative, interactive, visual, engaging,	Companies and Organisations with demand in ICT skills, Women associations
Mailing	Official, informative, narrative, promotional	Companies and Organisations with demand in ICT skills, VET providers
Events/Webinars	Official, informative, storytelling, promotional	Companies and Organisations with demand in ICT skills, Women associations

The following dissemination activities illustrate the diverse range of messaging and content employed to reach the specific audience of EU wide dissemination campaign.
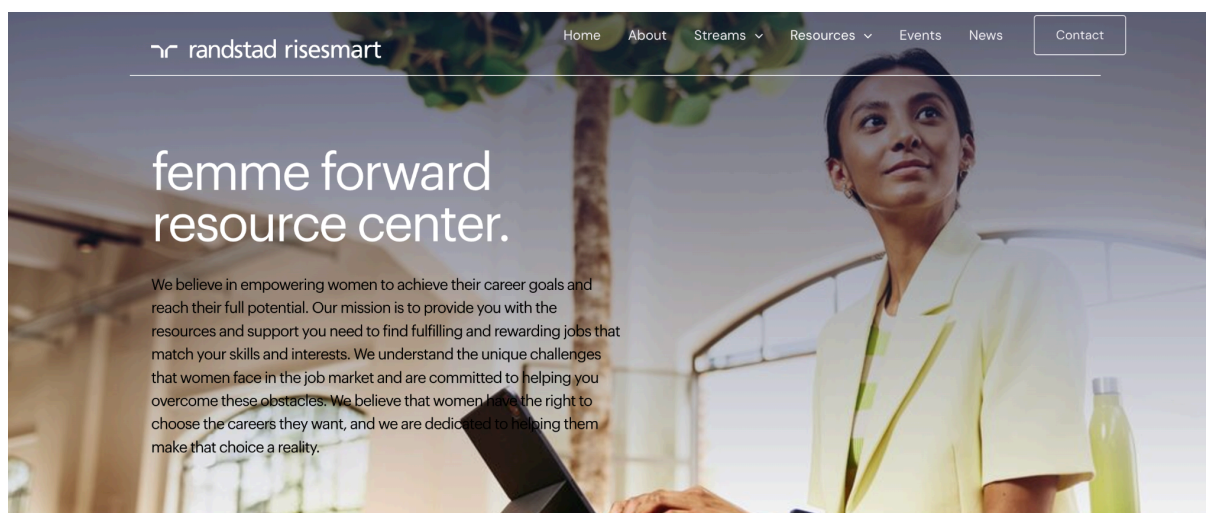
Image 4. Femme Forward resource center by Randstad

The page created by Randstad on the official Femme Forward website is an example of how websites were used as a communication channel to reach a

diverse audience, including women interested in ICT careers, companies seeking skilled professionals, and other vocational education and training (VET) providers. This official, informative, and semi-formal page showcases how Femme Forward participants receive cross-training, not just in technical skills but also in career development with the support of industry professionals.

Image 5. Instragram post from Simplon Romania: *Cum pot beneficia companiile de programul Femme Forward* ("How companies can benefit from the Femme Forward program").

🌟 As the Femme Forward program draws to a close, we invite companies to join the discussion on how they can collaborate with our participants. 🌟

Throughout the program, our participants have gained skills in key areas of technology such as programming, AWS cloud computing, networking, and cybersecurity. They worked on applied projects and participated in mentoring sessions with industry leaders, all designed to prepare them for the real challenges of the job market.

💼 How can companies benefit from this partnership?
By integrating Femme Forward graduates into your teams, you'll bring not only up-to-date technical skills but also a fresh and innovative perspective. The women enrolled in the program are ready to actively contribute to your projects, bringing with them not only technical knowledge but also teamwork skills and adaptability.

🤝 *We are open to discussing how our graduates can align with your company's needs and projects. Contact us to explore how we can work together to maximize the potential of this partnership.*
At Femme Forward, we are committed to developing the next generation of women leaders in technology, and working with innovative companies is key to the success of this journey.

Simplon Romania's campaign exemplifies how to align corporate interests with the benefits of hiring Femme Forward graduates. A key aspect of their communication strategy was to position themselves as advocates for women, rather than merely an intermediary between companies and participants. This approach proved highly effective, significantly impacting the target audience of companies and beyond.

Furthermore, this strategy underscores the project's core value: emphasizing the importance and added value that women bring to the IT sector.

Image 6. Femme Forward newsletter

A targeted newsletter was created and distributed to the partnership, who then forwarded it to their relevant stakeholders. This communication aimed to showcase the project's transition pathway and provide key information resources.

An additional objective was to serve as a reference point for other vocational education and training (VET) providers, enabling them to replicate the course and support women's employment outcomes.

6. How to get involved?

While the project is nearing completion, its lasting impact and results will continue to endure. Stakeholders can get involved in Femme Forward's activities in different ways, according to their profile. But, at all times, you can freely invite them to:

- Subscribe to the project information newsletter (via the website).
- Join the project events and spread the word about the project.
- Browse and promote outputs (via Moodle).
- Contact info@femmeforward.eu to seek an active contribution to the project activities.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

The European-wide Dissemination Program played a pivotal role in achieving project objectives and maximizing impact. This success extended beyond project participants – many of whom now thrive in the tech sector – to influence industries, policy-making bodies, women's organizations, and the vocational education and training (VET) sector.

Based on these diverse experiences, the following strategies have proven effective in facilitating a successful transition pathway in terms of communication and dissemination:

- **Inviting Entrepreneurs.** Encourage entrepreneurs to share their insights on company needs, industry trends, and personal experiences.
- **Leveraging Women's Success Stories.** Showcase the achievements of successful women in the IT sector through testimonials.
- **Facilitating Networking Opportunities.** Organize working "speed dates" to connect participants with potential employers.
- **Establishing Partnerships.** Formulate Memoranda of Understanding with medium to large companies to secure internship placements.

These strategies are highly recommended for anyone seeking to replicate the courses and facilitate participants' successful transition into the job market.