



# Women of Georgia in Technology





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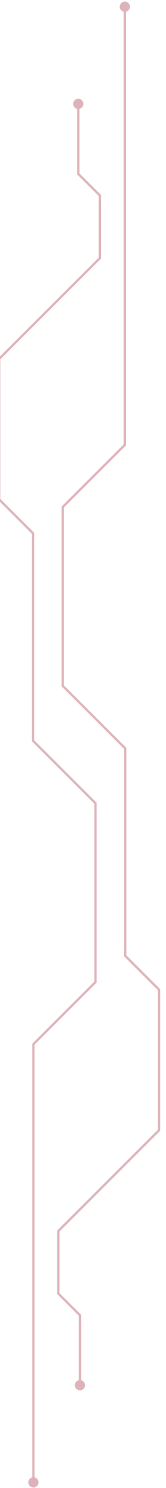
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This publication was prepared within the framework of the project “A Joint Action for Women’s Economic Empowerment in Georgia” supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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# Foreword

The process of empowering Georgian women economically still faces many challenges. Gender-based segregation of professions is one of the many factors that divide the work done by women and men into separate socially and culturally normalized compartments.

According to 2018–2019 data from “Geostat”, only 18% of the graduates in one of the most in-demand professions on the labor market, IT specialization, were women. Also, high-paying careers and in-demand specialty programs such as engineering, industry, and construction only represent 16.1% of female graduates.

International student assessment (PISA) records of 2018 are also interesting: In Georgia, girls show much better results in the technical field — girls, on average, get 4 points higher grades in math, and 15 points higher in science in general, showing that girls use different criteria when choosing a profession.

Like in many other fields, girls and women face social and cultural barriers when choosing a profession. At some point, this problem is exacerbated by stereotypes about women’s development and interests, prevalent in school and in families. Often women are considered “natural caregivers”, and, as a result, they choose professions with more flexible schedules and revolving around care. Girls receive less encouragement and support from their family members to overcome existing stereotypes and establish themselves in non-traditional, competitive professions.

The lack of female role models in technology reinforces stereotypes in media, advertising industry, and educational institutions — as if the technical field was “a man’s thing”.

In 2019, with the support of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in partnership with the Innovative Education Foundation, Geolab, and Universities of Batumi, Kutaisi, and Tbilisi, UN Women launched a free web programming and social media marketing training program and internship for women in western Georgia.

The purpose of the program was to provide professional training to women in the field of information technology, which would significantly improve their knowledge in digital sciences. This would help women find employment in modern professions and to empower them economically.

124 women registered to participate in the program. After intensive training, participants had the opportunity to start internships in various organizations. Private companies, non-governmental organizations, and public services participated in the internship program.

The program, along with modern knowledge, has made women more confident to better handle the competitive environment in the labor market. Some of the graduates signed new employment contracts, others improved their positions, and most importantly, the monthly salaries of 42% of participants increased by an average of 400 GEL.

It’s also worth mentioning that the women involved in the program have set an amazing precedent for solidarity — they themselves became “goodwill ambassadors” for spreading digital knowledge among women in the region.

The platform “Women of Georgia” and the UN Women created 8 success stories of 8 women involved in the program.

Our goal is to promote women in digital technologies and to display women’s role in other “non-traditional professions” and to create role models, making it easier for other women to better-overcome gender stereotypes in the future and establish themselves in establishing professions.

# Meri Ezieshvili

27 years old, Ozurgeti, Guria

"I was born and raised in Ozurgeti. I was interested in social media and programming, but I thought that business, accounting, and auditing were jobs more suited to me. I even learned auditing, but didn't ultimately choose that field — I realized that I was interested in something else and I was looking for something new. I made various accessories — wallets, bracelets, decorative handmade Christmas trees and I sold them at markets and exhibitions. I can probably make anything that can be handmade myself.

I was 25 years old when I participated in a training by "Innovative Education Center" — social media marketing and web programming. A month and a half before the project started, my child, who was then two and a half years old, told me — "I want the world to know you" — he had such ambitions. I explained that I wasn't sure about the world, but I promised Georgia would know me. In addition, I was interested in this field because I wanted to open an online store for my accessories. I needed Facebook and Instagram pages for this, but I didn't know how to manage them. Everyone can make a page, but having a page is not enough, if you don't manage it in the right way, don't choose the right segment and so on, there is no point to have it. When I was told about the project, I thought, I'll try to use it later for my pages — I didn't think I would achieve such success. When I went through certain stages of the training, I realized that I could do more in the social space than I imagined and started working for it more enthusiastically — for me, it was important to learn it deeply and to be totally concentrated. Before that, I was always told that I should be a role model for others, and I thought to myself — after that I'd be an even better role model for people. When I say that, I mean for teenage girls. We had so many great trainers, and we got comprehensive answers to all the questions. Some girls also worked as a group, we had active communication with each other and with this, I learned how to work in a group. Everybody supported us, at any time, we could call any supervisors or mentors and ask them what to do and how.

Photo: Geda Darchia







When the training was finished, 40 girls were selected for the internship. We had the opportunity to introduce our work; I was one of them. After the presentation, I found out that I got into Grapevine Marketing Agency — this is a marketing company where I could maximize my abilities. Since this company didn't utilize WordPress yet, I started learning to code. As for social media, they let me manage several Facebook accounts and I was actually pretty good at it. Also, I used to sit down with designers and learn what they were doing. Then, I was told that if I learned web design, they would help me in development. I learned web design, already using my own funds, and I'm very happy that they gave me a chance to develop myself. I was on an internship for a month, and then I stayed at this company as a graphic designer.

This project also changed my life financially. Now I also take private orders. In the future, I want to know everything related to technology. I'd like to offer a complete package to the customer. If I can do this, and I know I can, I'll be very happy because my son's dream will come true. I realized that just as others can help me, I can do the same and teach others. I have a plan to conduct trainings for women. I also want to do activities for women in the regions. My friends and I are thinking to record lectures for women on social media and to share experiences. Soon we'll have Youtube channel as well.

I always had support from my family. My parents have always been proactive when I was learning something. When I decided to participate in the training, my sister quit her job to take care of my son. Later, my mother replaced my sister. My dad uses to say, how can you be learning something all the time? Take a break, have some rest. When I called him and said that I had some success and I'd be more successful in the future, he was very happy. They believe in me, they know that whatever I'm doing I'm doing it at my best level.

I want those stereotypes about women to be broken. It's very important to me that I'm in this field today and I'm doing exactly this job. Especially it's important in the regions, where women rarely get such opportunities. I advise all girls to aim for what they want and they'll be able to do everything. The goals lead us to success and success is important for everyone."

# Tamar Oniani

25 years old, Village Nagomari, Guria

"When choosing a profession for girls, often school and family influence them a great deal. They are often advised to choose a profession that is close to other women's experience and doesn't compete with men. Such attitudes kill women's motivation to try their abilities for a more lucrative profession and pursue personal interests and desires.

The exact same thing happened to me. Even though I always wanted to study information and communication technologies, due to the insistence of my family, I chose the faculty of foreign languages, with a perspective of future employment as a teacher. I don't want to belittle the teacher's profession as an option, in the opposite, the only thing is that my interest was completely different from the offered option from my family. However, later, my first dream came true with my master's degree — I got a degree in communications at GPA.

After finishing my studies, I was certain in my decision to return to my region. Although it's easier to find your place in a big city, I wanted to continue my professional development in Guria. Finding a job was very difficult — in such a small space everything depends on your relatives. Therefore, after a few interviews, either I got rejected, or more often than not, no one called me back. However, my efforts paid back and I joined the "Young Teacher Union" in Ozurgeti, where I work today.

A year after I was hired, I learned that UN Women, together with partners, announced admission to an IT training course for girls living in western Georgia. I was always interested in technologies but never had enough free time or enough funds. Therefore, I thought it would be an opportunity for my development.

In the 21st century, our life is intertwined with technology, but the role of women in this profession was lost. So, I not only applied for this training but advised all girls living in Guria to do the same.

The learning process was very interesting — I learned a lot about many new platforms and techniques that would help me in my professional growth. I have to mention that in this process, women didn't compete with each other, but strengthened each other — we shared new findings and resources with each other.



Photo: Rezo Kvachadze / Geda Darchia







After the training, the UN Women announced a competition for graduates to attend the Lisbon Web Summit. The selection process coincided with a tragedy in my family — I lost my father and I felt so bad that I don't even remember what I said at the interview. Later, I was called and informed that I was going to Lisbon. I was so happy because I knew it would be an opportunity for me to have a closer look at modern technological advances.

At the web summit, I met with digital representatives of Facebook, Google, Samsung, and other large companies, most of whom were women. I saw how these women shared their achievements with each other and tried to strengthen each other and raise their self-beliefs. At one of the Summit forums — “I Am Important”, a Google representative asked us to remind ourselves about our achievements. I mentioned that I had the opportunity to work with young people, including girls, and give out professional consultations. I've been influenced by gender stereotypes when choosing a profession, the same path other girls have to go through. I'm glad that I get the chance to have motivational conversations with these young people, to tell them not to be afraid of stereotypes and choose a profession that interests them and helps their financial situation. It's my achievement that I have changed many girls' minds and strengthened their interests in the technology field.

Mastering a new profession and knowledge gave me more self-confidence. In the Covid-19 era information technology became even more important. First of all, this allows you to work remotely, also, it gives you the chance to choose the employer and have several jobs at the same time, which directly affects the financial improvement. This knowledge supports me and I know I can always find an interesting job.

I think education is valuable only when you share it. I have a desire to create such a network through which I'll share my knowledge about technology with women in the regions completely for free, to make them feel more confident and no longer depend on family members.

I already do this voluntarily. I already planned many projects and social media strategies for many start-ups. Women need motivation and support and also, many role models. Therefore, I consider it my personal responsibility to help and encourage them to take independent steps in the future.

I'd like to advise girls to make their own decisions when choosing a profession. You may listen to others, but you can't be happy with someone else's decision. They shouldn't be afraid to take different steps, they should overcome fear and make decisions independently. In addition, women in the technology field have been already able to cross the line and it will be easier for others to walk this path now.”



## Kristine Kutateladze

30 years old, Tskaltubo, Imereti

"I've been interested in technology since childhood. When I was in the 8th grade, I enrolled in a free Microsoft office program course of one of the NGOs together with two of my friends. Even though my friends left the course in the first month and I was left alone, I still made it to the end of the course. I connected my future profession to it and enrolled in a faculty where computer technologies and foreign languages were taught at the same time. However, after the first semester, according to the Minister's order, the computer teaching part was removed and we were only left with an opportunity to become English language philologists. I was not happy with that and therefore, never worked in that profession. Initially, I worked mainly on non-governmental projects, and in addition, I joined the Tskaltubo Art Festival as a member of the organizing group. This festival, which is organized by "Tskaltubo IDP Women", was held for the eighth time this year.

After graduating, I went through training in creating a blog conducted by Dodi Kharkheli. I learned then for the first time what a blog was all about. The training turned out to be very useful and interesting and when I got home, I spent two nights creating my personal blog. It was a huge achievement for me, I was so happy — I was actively writing my personal views and sketches on this blog. Then there was the project for "Open Maps Caucasus", where we were drawing maps of western Georgia using GPS technology. Back then it was a new technology and we traveled all over Imereti with GPS. We entered this data into the computer with a special tool and, in short, I felt very comfortable with new technologies. However, there wasn't any opportunity to get additional knowledge in Tskaltubo and it was difficult for me to go to Kutaisi because there is no transport coming back in the evening. Then I got married and had to stay at home during my pregnancy, which turned out to be very difficult for me.

One day, by accident, I found a statement from UN Women about a social media marketing and web programming course for women. I decided to try it but didn't have high hopes that I would be selected from so many people. I had almost forgotten about this when I received a letter announcing that I had passed the second stage and now I had to pass the test. At this point, I already had hopes that I might have made it to the end and completed the test very motivated. I received another message that I was selected and invited to the opening in Batumi. It made me very happy. I already had two children and I remember thinking, how I could say that I'm going to Batumi for three days for this great occasion?! In the beginning, of course, there was skepticism — "Why do you go to such a training?", "Why do you waste your time?!", "Will it be useful at all?!", etc. I have always proved to such people that I really made use of every training I ever went to.



I arrived in Batumi very motivated and full of enthusiasm. I was very happy and completed the course so successfully, that in the end, I was among the 40 best women who were selected for an internship. I remember very well what we were told at the opening of this course — “By joining this program, you’ll be able to change your professions.” I immediately thought that I would do it, and now, I can say that my dream came true. My second profession became programming, which is all I ever wanted. I made the first website for a relative, and later, got a paid order too. I was unconditionally happy. When my kids get older, I plan to learn to write code and write websites from beginning to end.

In addition to private orders, these new skills have also helped me to find a job. The first one who believed in me and hired me was the director of the St. Gabriel Bishop Tskaltubo Theological Gymnasium. I teach information and communication technologies at the gymnasium, and I’m also an art teacher. The director of the fourth school was also interested in my skills — he said, “I heard that you feel in technology like a fish in water and I need someone like you”. That’s how I became an information manager in a public school. At school, I always try not to limit myself only to books — by telling stories about successful women, I teach children that girls can also succeed in information technology. Nowadays, unfortunately, many families convince girls that they can’t do it and that’s why women are less interested in technologies.

All of this, of course, affected my income, but on the other hand, I’m always happy when helping those in need. For example, I gladly help teachers and they take private lessons with me, I help them improve their technical skills because now they desperately need it. Since I share my knowledge with other women, my self-esteem has increased. Because I know a foreign language, I work in the art field, I have a small handmade toy business and web programming has already become my profession, I didn’t stop during the pandemic. New knowledge has given me important skills and I know that no matter what, I won’t be lost anymore.

My motivation in technology and particularly in the UN women program, was Lily Pulariani, with whom we also have a volunteer Facebook page — “Women Sharing Digital Knowledge.” During this pandemic, we have big plans — we want to help women use online technologies. For me, as an entrepreneur, my knowledge has helped me a lot in online sales and in doing online marketing. Therefore, I really want to help many entrepreneurial women we have in Tskaltubo and teach them everything I know about social media marketing.”



# Ia Tavdishvili

31 years old, village Gurianta, Guria

“I live in the village Gurianta with my husband and three children. I got married very young when I was 18, but I was lucky to have a great family. During the first 7–8 years, I was sitting at home and raised my children, but when they grew up, I wanted to have my own job and be busy with my own business. I learned to sew from my mother, sat in front of the sewing machine and it turned out that I was really good at it. In two–three months, I had already opened my atelier and now I joke that I first opened an atelier and only later learned to sew — I was still learning. I opened an atelier in Ozurgeti and choose to produce childrens' clothes. Sewing covers many areas and I wanted to be a professional in one particular area. I still only sew children's clothes and it works very well. In this process, I met one girl, Ana Maslova, who sent me the registration link to a social media and programming training and told me, maybe it could be interesting for me or helpful for my business. I'm very grateful to her because I would never be able to find this information by myself — I was sitting day and night by the sewing machine, cutting, and sewing. I filled out the registration form, sent it and I was rejected. Of course, I felt sad, but I thought it wasn't my destiny. In a few days, the project trainer, Khatuna Rusishvili, called me and told me that one of the participants couldn't attend and as it turned out, I was in the reserve group and if I would still like, I could join them. I was cutting a dress and, out of the joy, I dropped the scissors and I said — of course, I'd love to come! I talked to my husband and he always has such an attitude that "if you want to do something, do it, I'll be by your side".

I had to attend training for four months, including in Tbilisi. I temporarily set my scissors aside and started the new job. If I do something, I always put my whole heart into it, and here too, I was involved with all my strength and motivation. During that period I had taken some orders and my mother helped me — she put the patterns and my girls from the atelier were sewing. The children were left with my husband and father-in-law. My computer was broken and my husband brought me a new one, handed it over to me, and he himself took care of the children. Then, when I came from the atelier and sat down to study, he would tell the children not to disturb me.

The learning process was very interesting. I wanted to study all the time. Before that, I didn't even know how to create a Facebook page; I had a personal account, which I used for a business page as well. First of all, the best thing I did for my business was to make a page — I learned to advertise, set up the answering machine for questions, learned how to adjust settings, and so on. At first, I was a little scared of how I would do it, but I did it, I started and didn't get up until four in the morning, I sat at the computer, and in the morning I already had my business page. Ozurgeti had a really amazing team, the girls helped each other, we didn't sleep at night, and we were always online on our chat. We also found and did things that we hadn't learned.



Photo: Rezo Kvachadze / Geda Darchia







After the training, miracles start to happen — we knew that after the training, we had to get certificates, and they gave us an opportunity for an internship as well. I was among the forty best participants who did an internship in very successful companies. I got an internship at Lingwing, which is a very innovative and promising company with an amazing team. I did an internship in the field of social media. When the internship was over, I thanked them and said that I felt really sorry to say goodbye. "You don't have to say goodbye, stay with us!" — They said. I couldn't imagine this would happen, usually, companies prefer to have an employee on-site, but for more than a year now, I've been working here.

After the internship, we were told that top three participants would go to a web summit in Lisbon. It was the largest technology summit attended by IT representatives from different companies from all over the world. I got into these top three and I achieved this on my own, my hard work was appreciated. We spent amazing eight days in Lisbon, we visited lots of great places — we saw the technology museum, the latest inventions... we traveled to every part of the city. We used every opportunity that could be used, we gained connections, knowledge. I also attended the workshop by Anna Vainer — "I am remarkable". I liked this workshop so much that when I came back, I went through the online training and became a facilitator. When I came from Lisbon, I helped a lot of people. This is the coolest thing — when you learn something and then share, help, and teach others, it makes you happy. All this made me grow, I started in technologies from scratch, and today I already know a lot and I have to learn so much more... This is an inexhaustible topic. Since I did my business page, my income has tripled; before that, I took orders only in Ozurgeti, but now I already get orders from many different regions.

I haven't felt stereotypical attitudes from anyone, but I heard something like this — one of the very talented girls wasn't able to attend the training because her husband didn't let her. When remembering this, it breaks my heart. Once another participant drove her home and she didn't let him drop off in front of her home to avoid making her husband jealous. Finally, he made her quit training and I always think that maybe that girl could have done more than me and others and she couldn't use her talent.

At some time, I had a complex because I didn't graduate from university and I didn't have a diploma. Then I realized that this paper means nothing. The most important thing is to always want to develop yourself. When you find yourself in a field that you couldn't even imagine before, there's such happiness. I advise girls not to give up; if they don't succeed, they should try one more time. If they think that this is what they need and want, they should do everything to achieve that goal."



Photo: Davit Shvelidze/Geda Darchia

## Tamta Kapanadze

20 years old, village Tkemlana, Samtskhe-Javakheti

“My childhood, growing up in the village, was like every other kid living there. I helped my parents do chores, and I was teased and restless. I always heard in my family that there is nothing more important than education. My mother is a mathematician and my father is also highly educated, so I too tried to be a good pupil. I was lazy sometimes, but when I saw how much support I had and how they struggled, I wanted to be successful. I participated in different projects, went to camps and I grow up mentally. When a child grows up in a village, she has less communication; so, I wasn’t used to contacting strangers, and the first time I went to the camp, I was a little shy. When I came back home, I realized that behaving like that was nonsense, and when I went there for the second time, I already behaved in a different way — I became very open and tried to get the most out of it. I used the school period, especially last year, very well.

While I was preparing for the university exams, I decided not to use the help of tutors — I don’t like this trend, which lately has become a must. I was preparing independently — if others didn’t go to school during this time at all, I had only missed probably just a few days and the school teachers also helped me a lot. I was studying maths at home and the whole family was involved in the learning process. If I had something to solve, my parents did nothing but help me. I got enrolled at Akaki Tsereteli State University, in Kutaisi — the faculty of Mathematics. I didn’t know exactly what I wanted, but I knew I was going to the technical field. Mathematics is a prerequisite for too many fields and that’s why I chose it. Many people thought that I wanted to become a teacher, they told me that I would be a teacher and take care of my family easier. Some people told me to choose some other faculty — there are such stereotypical attitudes towards professions, but I wanted to do it and I did it.

I was in the 11th grade when I participated in the FLEX program, this was my second attempt. When I was in the last round and I already thought that I was going to the USA, I got rejected. It was very painful for me and, even today, when I talk about FLEX and my unfulfilled American dream, it’s very difficult, but this story changed my future — I no longer fear failure and if something interesting appears, I always try my luck. Therefore, I also got interested in social media and web programming training. I also had previous experience with the Innovative Education Foundation and I was sure that would be a huge source of experience for me.



The training process was great, we had an amazing trainer and we were a good team. Even though it was on a weekend and it was the holidays, everyone was happy to go there because of the great environment. It was out of the question that we'd need help and Megi or any other members wouldn't help. The learning process was both fun and productive, we put a lot of hard work into it. In the end, we learned a lot — making a business page, advertising, we learned how to bring our message to customers, in general, what kind of content we needed to create, creating a web site on WordPress; we learned how to work in a team, which is very important.

When we finished the training, I didn't plan for an internship, I thought the times would overlap with my lectures at university. I finished the project with great scores and Megi was worried, that I was doing my maximum and I shouldn't be giving up, so I filled out the internship form anyway. That's how I got into "Aldagi". I was very happy about it. My job was to take care of PR for one of the programs. I created content, brochures, and chose my region — Samtskhe-Javakheti, where I had to support the promotion. Most importantly, this was my first job and I learned to work there. After the internship, all of us got the chance to fill out an application to travel to Lisbon. I didn't have high hopes because really great girls and women were involved in this project, however, I got among those four chosen participants. The main motivation to go was to see on what level the world is today. More focus there was on startups, which interested me less. So, I attended more sessions that were tailored to programming. I was observing what I could learn for the future — what was the priority for me, which similar methods could I use in Kutaisi, and, in general, in Georgia.

Before I left for Lisbon, I saw that Google was launching a project for developer students across Europe to promote “Google Developers” Products and introduce new technologies to students. Those who already have some knowledge in this field will be able to learn more, while those who don't — will get a better chance to make a choice for the technology field. Even though it seemed unrealistic to me, I went through the interview and I was chosen. Within this project, I was in Paris, at the European Summit of the Student Club of Developers, and that's where I finally decided that I should be a woman in technology. When the project was over, I decided that Kutaisi needed "GDG Kutaisi" — the Google developers' team, and I created it. We have only managed a few events. I was planning to conduct a technology festival in Kutaisi, I submitted this project at the university, I also wrote to Google, I solved all the organizational issues, but due to the pandemic, we had to stop. When all of this is over, I'll definitely do it. Google later started the mentors' project and I was chosen as a mentor to help new leaders.

I believe that I feel most comfortable in the programming field and I'm going to enroll in the Institute of Business and Technology. They say that programming doesn't require a diploma, but I want to go through all the stages. I already know how being a student should feel like; in addition to the knowledge I want to gain, I also want to take advantage of all the benefits of being a student — participate in different projects or in researches.

I'm now in my fourth year at the university, I work here in student services, plan and implement projects, offer ideas, etc. In the future, I also plan to start a business, but only after I return to Akhaltsikhe. During school, I was heartbroken that in Akhaltsikhe there wasn't any school similar to "Komarov", which specialized in physics-mathematics and computer science. So, I really want such a school to be here — there are many children in Akhaltsikhe who are good at math and we really need it. I'm planning to start a business in my village — more and more people are leaving and I want to lend a hand to people to have jobs. In general, I plan to live in the village, but I also have plans for the city: I want to be a part of improving the educational field — maybe I can't create a new one, but I know what I'd implement. After returning to my region, I'll work as a programmer but only as a freelancer. I want to create free programming learning groups in Akhaltsikhe. I especially want to help women because stereotypes await women everywhere and in the regions — even more. I know it requires a lot of work, but nothing is immutable.”







## Mariam Kveliashvili

Kutaisi, Imereti

“I graduated from the Economics faculty, but during the studying process, I discovered that actually, I was interested in a completely different field. My father was an amateur photographer. I remember he had a “Zenit” brand camera. He took photos and developed them himself in a small darkened room where my siblings and I were not allowed, but I really wanted to see the process. It was then that I got interested in photography — I too wanted to take pictures. However, when I became a photographer, I chose a digital camera — I don’t have to count how many shots I have left.

I learned photography on my own. I was basically looking for learning resources on the internet. My photograph friends also helped me and shared their experiences. Later I made a blog on WordPress; now that I think, it was mainly for fun, but working on this blog gave me an important thing — I was creating both content and visuals for the posts; it helped me improve. My goal was to learn social media on a professional level.

During this time, I began working as a social media coordinator for the Civic Education and Teacher Training Program. I had to work with pupils and teachers from Imereti, Racha-Lechkhumi, and Kvemo Svaneti villages. There was a lot of work to do and the salary was minimal, but I enjoyed my job.

The main value of this job was that I had the opportunity to share my knowledge with the people who needed it the most and for those with less access to it. I traveled to highland villages — I conducted training for pupils, teachers, and directors of schools in social media management and video advocacy. I was happy to see how quickly and successfully people started using this knowledge in practice.

Photo: Davit Shvelidze / Geda Darchia



In the teaching process, I grew professionally. Along with photography, I learned videography and editing. Now I make video stories myself.

I mastered information technology at a professional level during a free UN Women course.

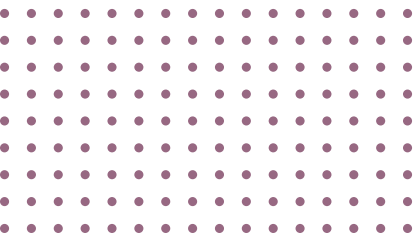
This opportunity strengthened my self-confidence. I often say that during this time I proved to myself many things — in addition to being on the panel, I also helped trainers professionally.

After completing the UN women training course, I decided to start my own business and started to offer consulting services.

There are 3- and 6-month packages that include setting up social platforms, preparing audio-visual materials, and training for the staff. For the last 3 years, I've been working on different segments in Kutaisi, Batumi, and Tbilisi. Tourism, medical facilities, developer companies, real state agencies — this a shortlist of areas where I successfully used my professional knowledge in technology. I invested part of the income in my education again — everything is changing fast and the competition is huge, so, it's very important to keep up with the newest trends. At this point, I'm making animations as well as teaching video editing and excel.

The pandemic affected my job; it hindered me. It became difficult to find new companies and to start collaborating with them. I decided to use my free time to spread my knowledge. I help everyone who needs help with social media. For example, I helped one teacher who lives in Zestaponi — I set up a WordPress blog and through that, she gained extra points. It's very nice to be the cause of people's happiness.

It was really difficult to have been through this path, and I'd love to make it easier for women and girls, and I'll do my best not to let them go through the same."



# Ana Titmeria

34 years old, Zugdidi, Samegrelo

"I was always good at math and I knew when I was in school that I wanted to study computer technologies. When I told my math teacher that I was going to study computer science, she wasn't surprised, in the opposite — she was very happy to hear that and always helped me. I enrolled in the informatics faculty at the Sokhumi State University and got a bachelor's degree, but I expected to receive better knowledge at the university, and, for example, learn more about algorithms. In fact, one year is enough to study any field completely and train for a specific profession, but the education system back then only gave you general education. Imagine, I was studying informatics and I didn't have a computer at home, so I went to internet cafes where I had to pay hourly and it was impossible to develop myself further there.

After graduating, I worked as a tutor — I trained pupils in math, but I never stopped improving my technology skills, I didn't miss a chance and always attended various kinds of training, where I learned a lot. Technologies are developing so fast that I can never say that I'm finished developing in this field.

Among all training I've gone through over the years, so far the most productive was the training by UN Women. I remember exactly, how I filled out the application at the last minute and sent it at 4 AM. To be honest, at that time I didn't have high expectations that I would get some special kind of knowledge there, but in a very short time, I learned exactly what I needed. This course turned out to be very successful for me because I can say that it brought me back to the profession that I couldn't learn at the university. Out of 124 selected women within the program, I got into the top 40 and with this program, I passed an internship in the Georgian logistics company „STYX” in the field of social media marketing and web programming.



ფოტოგრაფი: ირაკლი გამსახურდია/გედა დარჩია





At the end of the training, the most important thing was that we, participants from Samegrelo, formed a team and we work on various private contracts. We have created websites for several local entrepreneurs where they can sell their products. I can't say that my income depends solely on this, but I can work with my team on private projects and I can earn additional income.

I have never met resistance from my family members because of my interests. On the opposite, everyone supported me when I decided to study computer science, and later, when I was trying to improve in this field, I had support from my husband's family as well. My biggest supporter was my mother-in-law, who helped me with everything. Therefore, I often mention that it's important for women to support each other. However, there are stereotypes in society that technologies aren't for women. Years ago, one vacancy appeared at one of the banks — they needed a technical supervisor. When I went to the interview and they saw a girl, they were shocked. They couldn't believe that a woman could work in this position. In the end, of course, I didn't get the job. Such circumstances gave me more motivation and right after that, I went through a lot of trainings. By the way, my mother-in-law taught me how to sew and I turned my hobby into a business — in 2017, "Enterprise Georgia" financed us and I bought sewing machines. When I started producing home textiles, I soon realized that social media played an important role in increasing sales, and additionally, if you have a website, you can cover not only your city but the region and even the whole country. After these trainings, I created my own business website and set up a Facebook page as well. As a result, my sales increased by 30%, which means a lot for a small business. I strive to and I try my best to share my knowledge with women and young people to let them use it for growing in the social media area and growing their family businesses. By the way, I made a web page for one of my neighbors, who owns a clothing store, and as she says, it saved her business. These trainings made me more self-confident — 34 years doesn't necessarily mean that it's too late to learn something new. I have more interests and motivation to deepen my knowledge in various fields and to study in a vocational school of web-design."

# Gvantsa Kikaleishvili

37 years old, Village Torsa, Samegrelo



“I’m a doctor by profession; I worked at the Chachava Clinic for a year. In 2010, I had to move temporarily to the village and ultimately, I stayed there for a long time.

In 2013, the non-governmental organization “Atinati” appeared in our village, which, with the help of the UN project, “Promoting Gender Equality”, and the Georgian Strategic Research and Development Project, “Empowering women for Change”, was selecting a target group of rural women. After the interviews, our village was also selected and that’s how I got into the non-governmental sector for the first time. In the same year, we created a women’s initiative group in the village Torsa, and we did a lot of projects within the group. In 2017, we had already realized that we were ready to register the organization and established the Education and Development Center “Toliskuri”. After that, we had more opportunities to implement different projects, but we have to work hard to stay relevant.

I saw the UN Women training program on social media and shared it with my team member, Ani Bukia. Fortunately, it turned out that both of us were selected from our organization and got involved in the project. Even though I didn’t have much to do with the technology field before, I became interested in social media marketing. During that time, our organization established a small enterprise for dried fruits, where IDP women are employed, and I thought that the knowledge we’d gain would be helpful for the further development of our enterprise. Although I’ve been through a lot of training before, this program was a big challenge for me because it was a completely new field for me. After completing the training, I can’t say that I can program, but the knowledge and experience I’ve gained, especially in social media marketing helps me a lot in my job. In addition, this program has contacted me with very important people, for example, Nana Dikhaminjia, Lili Pulariani, and many others with whom I’m still friends. Nana and Lili share their knowledge about modern technologies and cybersecurity with the volunteers from our organization. Now I see more necessity and I’m also trying to make sure the rural youth don’t miss the technical knowledge and innovations. Even today, there still are stereotypical ideas that technology needs math and that this field is not for girls. We try to raise awareness about it in young people. I myself was a victim of these stereotypes since I always heard in my childhood that women should study humanitarian subjects, but during the training, I saw many young women and I believed that if I really wanted to, I would be able to gain knowledge in this field. I remember Lili Pulariani’s presentation, which greatly inspired me and I believed that nothing’s impossible. More than 120 women participated in the program and today most of us use this knowledge in different directions.

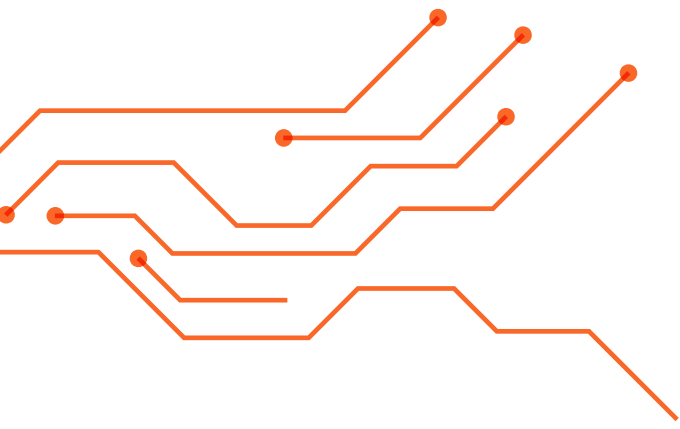


Since our organization is actively working with young people, I and Ani have prioritized sharing our knowledge with them. In addition, we now have completely different perspectives on the development of our organization and we started more projects to implement digital technologies. Our partners also trust us more when they learn that we've been through social media marketing and web programming training and we understand the importance of technological innovations in our business.

In our organization's headquarters in Khobi, we have a day center for children with disabilities. Within the framework of the project funded by the Tbilisi Human Rights House, we completely digitized our day center. We have 20 children there and our beneficiaries, under the supervision of a special teacher and a psychologist, can use their tablets individually for cognitive-educational programs. The knowledge, experience, and contacts gained in the training for the new technologies helped us a lot in the implementation of this particular project.

Under the Covid pandemic, almost every field needs to use technologies. Many people around me have already started selling different things on Facebook, but most of them don't have basic knowledge of marketing and branding. Therefore, according to my observation, their posts have a low response rate and this also affects their sales.

At this point, Ani and I are managing our organization's Facebook page. All the activities of the organization are planned online, but we manage to spread information and mobilize people. Sometimes I think that we might be able to involve more people online than we managed to do offline. During the pandemic, the knowledge that this program gave me was even more needed than I thought. So, I have one piece of advice for women — when seeing an opportunity to learn something, don't refuse. We don't know what life is preparing for us and when we're going to need that knowledge.”



Women of Georgia