



We Can Do It! Women have the power

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Competent, talented, beautiful, unmatched in their pursuit of goals and full of positive energy. Women are active in every sector of city life, changing it for the better every day. On the occasion of International Women's Day, in cooperation with our international partners, we have prepared an extraordinary portrait gallery of interesting, intriguing and committed women. Meet the ambassadors of success of various cities - their contemporary superheroines!

Every city has its superwomen. Every city has its superheroines. They do not need to have supernatural powers to be able to act and change the reality around us. It is enough that they have the drive, positive intentions and ideas. They are ordinary-extraordinary women.

While it is impossible to present them all, we would like to introduce some of the fantastic women our partners are proud of. No figures are more or less important - the cities are listed in alphabetical order:

Edinburgh

SHONA McCARTHY

of the family to go to university and developed a love of creativity at a young age. Music, books, poetry and film quickly became more than just entertainment: they provided a space to look at things from different perspectives and be part of a global artistic community.

She is now in her sixth year as Chief Executive of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society - the charity that underpins the world-renowned Edinburgh Fringe. She loves this festival because it is founded on the principle that anyone can take part. She loves her job because it is rooted in how creative experiences can make the world a better place.

Before falling in love with Edinburgh and the Fringe, she headed up Derry-Londonderry's year as the first UK City of Culture. She was the Director of Film Festivals in Derry and Belfast and the Director of the British Council in Northern Ireland. Her work has taken her all over the world, from Australia to the Middle East. She is a Nesta Fellow which took her to live and work in Calcutta in 2007. She was awarded the Eisenhower Fellowship in 2014.

Florence

LARISSA IAPICHINO

She recently set the world junior record in the long jump indoor championships held in Ancona



in early March. Larissa's 6.91 meters let her equal the record that belonged to her mother, Fiona May (two-time world champion and winner of two Olympic silver medals).

Lapichino competes with extraordinary passion and modesty setting an example for everyone. Inch by inch Larissa is reaching important milestones. She is a natural athlete and already an emerging champion. Long jump requires passion and sacrifice. Larissa is young (she was born on July 18, 2002) and faces all challenges with true commitment and determination. And she is having fun, always meeting each stage of her career with a smile. She is a true example for young people in Italy but also to others.

The results of the recent long jump competitions have turned the spotlight on her in the Italian and foreign press.

To quote a comment in Forbes "She represents an Italy that is changing"; the fashion magazine WWD called her "the new face of Italy". With the victory in the European Under 20 Championships (a title she received in 2019) the 18 year-old Italian long jumper is supported by the biggest international sponsors like Red Bull, Puma or Red Valentino, which has just chosen her as an "unconventional female personality" in the Inspired by Red Valentino project.

Larissa enjoys the well-deserved success, but she doesn't like to brag about it. She manages to combine being an athlete, a teenager and a student. She chose to follow a traditional educational path, has excellent marks in the humanities, but she is also good in science. In the future she wants to go to law school in her native city of Florence, because one of her dreams is to become a lawyer and make things right.

The superwoman from Florence visited Poland on 5th March 2021 to take part in the European Athletics Championships in Toruń. **"I am here for fun and pleasure and to gain new experience"** - she said during an interview, which can be seen [here](#).

Frankfurt am Main

SUNNY GRAFF

Sunny Graff has declared sport and martial arts in Frankfurt a "political affair"! She founded the association Frauen in Bewegung (Women in Motion) - one of the first martial arts clubs in Frankfurt dedicated specifically to women and girls.

By combining sport (martial arts) and feminism, she achieved something quite unique worldwide with regard to self-defence, assertiveness and prevention of violence. With her innovative, inclusive, intersectional approach, she has been training and inspiring thousands of girls and women for decades. She intervenes and engages both locally and politically.

Graff has always been a courageous role model. She has been honoured with an award for her many years of charitable work as a feminist, lawyer, martial artist and advocate for women's



rights.

Innsbruck

DIANA BUDISAVLJEVIĆ

in her home town after her death.

With her civil courage and selflessness, Diana Budisavljević represents many of today's energetic and courageous women, who - while remaining in the background - work every day in Innsbruck for the benefit of disadvantaged people. Whether in the field of volunteering, in associations, in social institutions or in education, their work and dedication are a backbone of our society.

Diana Budisavljević, who was born in Innsbruck in 1891, was a courageous woman. She married the Serbian doctor Julije Budisavljević and settled in Zagreb. Between 1941 and 1945, she was committed to helping the children of those interned by the Ustasha regime. She saved countless lives in this way. Budisavljević returned to her native Innsbruck in 1972 and it was here that she spent the last years of her life. Her humanitarian commitment only came to light in 2010 - during her lifetime Budisavljević received neither praise nor awards for it, and remained a heroine in secret.

Today Diana Budisavljević's work is commemorated by a plaque on her parents' house in Innsbruck. You can read more about this interesting figure [here](#) and in Wilhelm Kueh's book "Diana's List" (Tyrolia Verlag).

Leipzig

GENKA LAPÖN

training unemployed women. In 1995, she was appointed Equal Opportunities Commissioner by the Leipzig City Council and has since headed the city's Gender Equality Department. For 25 years she has been working to strengthen equal opportunities policy in Leipzig by implementing innovative ideas.

Genka Lapön has an excellent working relationship with the city administration, political circles and civil society in Leipzig. She supports women's associations and advocates for greater recognition of women's achievements. In 2013, she and her team developed the Women Make History project, which featured portraits of important women on a special website. There are now up to 190 of them! In 2020, the Active in Association project created 4 videos to recruit young members to association boards.



Genka Lapön does not see herself as a superheroine, but as a courageous, albeit imperfect woman. Her life motto is **“Never follow other people’s expectations, have your own goals and fight for them”**.

Leuven

GEERTRUI VANLOO

Geertrui Vanloo was raised in Leuven as the youngest of a family of 5 girls and 1 boy. Her parents challenged their children to be intellectually curious and compassionate. For 12 years she travelled constantly for work all over the world, and lived a few years in India. She feels privileged to have met many inspiring people, and experience from within the dynamics and diversity of cities and societies.

When Geertrui Vanloo started a family of her own, she chose to contribute to society as a civil servant for her home city. In 2019 she became the first woman general director of the city of Leuven in its more than one thousand years of history.

Geertrui Vanloo believes that empathic and cooperative leadership is essential to building a better future. Diversity is key to harnessing all the innovation strength our world needs. Daring and caring is how Leuven has successfully coped and even leads by example. She aims to make a difference, every day, with big ideas and small steps, for the good of her city and to make Leuven contribute to a better future for all.

Nanjing

JIE DING

and deputy head of Leading Group for COVID-19 Prevention and Control.

She is responsible for assessing the development of the pandemic in the city, epidemiological research, analysing information on the course and spread of the virus among Nanjing residents. Since the COVID-19 outbreak, Jie Ding has devoted herself completely to the work of preventing and containing the pandemic. She uses her professional experience and analytical skills to participate as an expert in the city’s key working teams. Aware of the unusual and complex nature of the pathogen, she had already started to effectively coordinate the activities of various municipal departments including epidemiologists, health services, infectious disease control and laboratory testing, and collecting and analysing data on the developing virus at the time of the outbreak in Wuhan. Thanks to her foresight, quick action and great dedication, Nanjing had precise analyses of the situation, and specialists were able to develop effective strategies for preventing the disease and controlling the spread of the virus.



Jie Ding has participated in international conferences and working groups, including those within the United Nations, sharing her knowledge and experiences, as well as the strategy of early detection, early reporting, early isolation and early treatment successfully implemented in Nanjing, along with the standardisation of prevention and control measures. For her commitment, Ding has received decorations and the honorary title of Provincial Advanced Individual in Fighting COVID-19 Pandemic.

Nuremberg

NADJA BENNEWITZ

historian in Nuremberg since 1996. Her research interests include topics related to the history of women and gender in the Late Mediaeval and Early Modern periods, as well as the 19th and 20th centuries, especially the Nazi period.

In addition to her work as an independent researcher, since 2007 she has been employed as a research associate in the Department of Didactics at the Friedrich-Alexander University.

In her work, she is involved, firstly, in scientific research and, secondly, in publicising historical contents concerning women and the results of her own research in the form of lectures, city tours, theme-based visits to museums and churches, seminars, concerts, talks, publications, exhibitions, plays and radio broadcasts.

She is the winner of the Women's Promotion Award of the City of Nuremberg for her success in promoting research results (1998) and the Award of the Evangelical Church of Bavaria for her scientific contribution regarding women of the Reformation period in Nuremberg (1998).

Pécs

SZILVIA BOGNÁR

"If I see hopelessness, I proclaim bravery; if anyone is anxious I encourage them to fight" - this is how Szilvia Bognár, one of the Vice Mayors of the Hungarian town of Pécs, defines her mission.

Bognár is a proud holder of three diplomas from the University of Pécs. She graduated as a human resources advisor, a political analyst and a communication and media specialist. Making the most of her extensive education, she originally worked for television and radio stations and was involved in a number of European Union projects - among them the Pécs-2010 European Capital of Culture programme. Now, following her motto: "people come first", she serves the citizens of Pécs as the town's Vice Mayor for Culture and Social Relations.



Bognár is also a happy mother of two adult sons and a 4 year old girl and assures she is “grateful for every minute” she can spend with her family.

The Vice Mayor is driven by a “passionate desire to alter the world” and describes herself as an idealist. “The world has changed and I believe that the people today have to challenge the schemes of the past”, she says.

As a local politician, Bognár wants to eradicate old practices and create paths of dialogue that will pave the way for a new approach to politics, eventually helping us shape a new world. A world, she envisions as “a clean, diverse and democratic [place], where we can all be more colourful and better, than we would ever think. Where the equality between genders is not in dispute, equal opportunities are not in question, where the family is family and where being different from others is not a shame.”

A strong advocate of equality, Bognár reminds us that **“Not so long ago, women’s right to vote was unthinkable. Today, I am the Vice Mayor of the beautiful town of Pécs”**.

San Francisco

PATRICIA ALGARA

Patricia Algara is a successful businesswoman and a nationally recognized leader in coalition building and community-driven design.

Her work in landscape architecture connects communities with the built and natural worlds. She is the founder of With Honey in the Heart, a non-profit organization that creates healthy habitats for and educates people about pollinators. She is the co-founder of the Algarden Demonstration Urban Farm, a centre for permaculture education and natural beekeeping. She is also an adjunct professor at UC Berkeley, where she teaches “Designing for Difference,” which focuses on the social factors influencing the design of public spaces.

A beekeeper and apitherapist, she draws inspiration from bees, whose artistry and industriousness demonstrate that beauty, function, structure, and communication can and should coexist sweetly. That is why **“With Honey in the Heart”** is her life motto.

Solothurn

BRIGIT WYSS

Brigit Wyss is a woman with a courage to do anything she sets her mind to! She first completed her education as a carpenter and then specialised in psychiatric nursing. Following the birth of her son, she decided to take the school-leaving exams at the age of 30. For practical reasons



she chose to study law rather than marine biology which she had dreamed of.

Brigit Wyss has been a member of the cantonal government since 2017. As a Green Party politician she holds environmental issues close to her heart. She thinks positively and acts with great conviction and prudence. From 2003 to 2017 she was a member of the City Council in Solothurn, and from 2007 to 2011 she was a member of the National Parliament. In 2017, residents elected Brigit Wyss to the cantonal government. As head of the Department of Economic Affairs, she now has to deal with the severe economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

Brigit Wyss' life shows what can be achieved through determination, ability to reach consensus, an open mind and the joy of new challenges. She is a role model for young women who want to be committed and successful in their professional and political lives.

Vilnius

MILDA MITKUTĖ

Vilnius is proud of Milda Mitkutė, the founder of the first unicorn startup and one of the most famous Lithuanian companies Vinted.

Milda Mitkutė, who came to study to the Lithuanian capital a few years ago, created a website with her friend. This was just a hobby at first – people could sell their old and second-hand clothes on the website. The project became popular in no time and attracted attention of foreign investors.

This is how Vinted became Milda's principal activity. Today, it is an international business operating in 11 markets in Europe. The multinational team of the company consisting of about three hundred employees works from its head office in Vilnius and branches in Berlin, Prague and Warsaw. Milda Mitkutė and Vinted are to be thanked for making Lithuania and Vilnius known all over the world.

The fusion of a modern city and nature is what Milda likes about Vilnius the most. Being a young lady, she is also fascinated by the mind set of Vilnius as a youthful city which is not afraid to be different and to experiment. Milda fell in love with Vilnius and plans to live and continue her business in the city.

Last year, Milda Mitkutė was awarded the statuette of St. Christopher, prestigious award of Vilnius, for the first unicorn startup established in Vilnius.

We are also particularly proud of the work of Polish women living in our partner cities. Here are brave Polish migrants, whose activity is noticed and appreciated by our international partners:



JOANNA ZAWADZKA (Scotland)

for the Polish community, migrants, women and the LGBT+ community.

Joanna started her social work in 2007 as a member of the SPCA (Scottish Polish Cultural Association). In 2008, she organised the It's My Place project, which promoted the art of young Polish artists in Edinburgh. In 2009, together with Lidia Krzynówek, she founded the Polish Cultural Festival Association. One of the most interesting projects carried out by Joanna, as a response to the emerging xenophobic sentiments in the British Isles, was Bloody Foreigners (2015). In turn, the project Vote - You are at Home encouraged Polish migrants to exercise their right to vote in Scotland.

In 2018, together with Marek Lazarowicz (a Scottish lawyer and politician of Polish origin), Joanna founded the Citizen Rights Project - an organisation that helps EU migrants to obtain settlement status in the UK. Also since 2018, she has been involved with the women's rights support programme Zero Tolerance, where she has delivered the projects Any Woman, Anywhere and You can Be. In September 2019 Joanna was also involved in organising the Kraków presentation in Edinburgh.

Friends and colleagues describe Joasia as a person who is wonderful, open-minded and full of energy.

KRYSTYNA CHCIUK (USA)

As a WWII Warsaw Uprising veteran, she was considered a stateless ally and afforded veterans' benefits. Her husband was a decorated fighter pilot in WWII. Krystyna met him in London where displaced Poles gathered until forced to emigrate.

In San Francisco, Krystyna founded Bay Area Polish Scouts, the first Polish school, and a Polish folk dancing group. She was a board member and activist at the Polish Club in San Francisco.

As a long-time community leader and organizer, Pani Krysia not only initiated and helped run numerous Bay Area Polish organizations, she did so as their Board President or Committee Chair during an era when female leadership typically took a back-seat role to male colleagues. She was an innovator and community uniting force while maintaining a full-time professional position and raising her own family. To this day, she promotes all things Polish. She is a long-time member of [San Francisco-Krakow Sister City Association](#).

Krystyna said her experience is a reminder to treasure your freedoms: **"Don't be so complacent about your freedoms here. America is the best country, and hopefully we are far away from harm's way. But freedom you have to fight for. You have to teach your children to guard it and fight for it every day"**.

We hope that after reading these stories, all girls and women will feel their full



**Magiczny
Kraków**

potential and the motivation to do in life all the things they can do so well! Whatever we are planning, remember: we have the Power! We Can Do It!