



## FUTURE HEROES, ESTONIA, LATVIA , LITHUANIA

### What?

Future Heroes is a leadership and business development programme supporting teenage girls (15-19 years old in Estonia and 13-17 years old in Latvia) in developing entrepreneurial projects for positive change while developing entrepreneurial skills. The programme was initially founded by the UK Department for International Trade and is supported by the British Council and other non-governmental partners.

### Why?

The programme was established to help increase the number of women in entrepreneurship and management position by addressing the lack of relatable role models and mentors for girls. The Future Heroes programmes sets to offer clear role models on female leadership and entrepreneurship and help teenage girls build capacities and confidence and realise their potential to create impact. The programme focuses on building an entrepreneurial mind-set and skills at a critical time in girls' lives when they start forming ideas about their future careers.

### Key Activities

The programme operates over four-month cycles in Estonia (six-months in Latvia). Throughout the cycle participants develop their own entrepreneurial projects from scratch in groups of five with the support of mentors. The projects aim to solve issues that participants are passionate about: topics of the 2020 edition included food waste and dialogue with the deaf community. Over the course of the programme, participants attend a series of eight to ten free workshops, held in English. Inspirational speakers kick off each session and are followed by a practical skills workshops and team mentoring. Workshop topics include strength identification, ideation and team formation, entrepreneurship and project management, financial literacy and fundraising, leadership and problem solving, digital impact and media literacy and pitching. Meetings are held every Saturday and include a buddy-programme and a support system to guide participants. In each team, participants take on specific role depending on their projects (e.g. CEO, CFO, etc.) and meet with mentors monthly to check in on the progress of

the project. The programme is hands on and participants can develop their project in different formats, either formally (registration of a company or an NGO if the team members are old enough) or informally. Participants are also encouraged to build community among themselves (“sisterhood”). The programme culminates in a final pitch and a gala event where participants present their project and results in front of a panel including entrepreneurs and investors. They receive feedback and guidance, and the event includes awards. Programme graduates can join the “Big Sisters” programme and further develop their skills while contributing to developing subsequent editions of Future Heroes. The programme adjusts its content every year based on feedback from participants.

How did the programme adapt to the Pandemic? Due to the pandemic, the first edition of the Latvian programme was held entirely remotely. Workshops and inspirational speeches were held on Zoom and Facebook live. Communication with mentors and participants and project development leveraged various virtual communication and collaboration tools (e.g. Facebook Workplace, Google classroom, WhatsApp, Miro, and Whimsical). While participants missed face-to-face socialisation and the online model added a burden to remote schooling, the programme was deemed successful and participants reached their goals and were able to further develop their digital skills. The Estonian programme was initially held in-person but now mixes online and offline workshops.

## Impact

The Estonian programme has held five editions for a total of 200 participants since 2016. The programme has engaged 150 speakers, coaches and mentors. As of May 2021, 21 alumni – “Big Sisters” – were actively engaged in shaping the Future Heroes programme. The programme assesses its impact primarily on the entrepreneurial spirit and skills development of participants, measured from an entry and exit questionnaire as well as qualitative feedback from programme operators. The participants are evaluated on 10 metrics: English language, Self-esteem and Confidence, Critical Thinking, Leadership, Entrepreneurship and Project Management, Communication, Collaboration, Financial Literacy, IT-Literacy. Overall, participants increase their scores on all metrics, with the highest scores observed in English, Self-esteem and Confidence, Leadership and Entrepreneurship. While immediate business creation is not the goal of the programme due to the age of participants, on average, 2 out of 10 continued their projects formally after participation. Others turned it into a hobby, and most continued their education (as expected). A notable example of project continued after the programme is the company Sisu which was incorporated and produces recycled materials to replace plastic bags. Two teams also received Office of the President of Estonia Awards for their projects in the category “Youth’s Big Achievements”. The programme keeps in touch with previous participants. Some programme graduates reported that participation was an asset for university and jobs as it boosted their confidence and led them to develop their English skills. The programme has received several awards, including being identified as one of the top-3 initiatives in Promoting Entrepreneurial Spirit at the European Enterprise Promotion Awards 2018 by the European Commission, and Country Winner at the World Summit Awards 2020.

Following the success of the Estonian version, the scheme was launched in Latvia in 2020. This first edition engaged 50 girls with ten projects, nine speakers and included ten workshops. The programme is being replicated in Lithuania, with a first cohort of girls (aged 13-17 years old) attending the programme in January-April 2022. The programme has also launched a spin-off programme called Switch that organises entrepreneurship and leadership sessions for women of all ages.

## Source:

Source: <https://futureheroes.ee/> [1]; <https://futureheroes.lv/> [2]; [www.facebook.com/FutureheroesEstonia/](https://www.facebook.com/FutureheroesEstonia/) [3]; [www.facebook.com/FutureHeroesLatvia/](https://www.facebook.com/FutureHeroesLatvia/) [4], interview with founder Eva-Kristiina Ponomarjov.

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**Links**

[1] <https://futureheroes.ee/> [2] <https://futureheroes.lv/> [3] <http://www.facebook.com/FutureheroesEstonia/>

[4] <http://www.facebook.com/FutureHeroesLatvia/>