

WOMEN 4CYBER
EUROPEAN CYBER SECURITY ORGANISATION
GREECE

W4C GR CYBERSECURITY WOMAN PROFILE OF THE MONTH

INTERVIEW WITH TANIA!

Name: Soultana (Tania) Ellinidou
Job Position: Cybersecurity Engineer
Current Employer: European Space Agency (ESA)
Cybersecurity areas of expertise: space cybersecurity, purple teaming, security monitoring, security operations center (SOC), hardware security
Previous careers: Cybersecurity Manager, Cybersecurity Engineer at Thales Belgium, PhD Researcher at Université Libre de Bruxelles
Educational background: PhD in Engineering Sciences and Technology from the Cybersecurity Research Center at Université Libre de Bruxelles with focus on hardware security
Other interests/hobbies: Traveling, Fitness, Baking
Favourite quote: “Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood.” – Marie Curie
Network with me: Soultana(Tania) Ellinidou, PhD | LinkedIn

Intro & Inspirational

1. Which values are guiding your life and work?

Curiosity, resilience, and kindness are values that guide both my personal and professional life. I strongly believe in continuous learning, supporting others, and staying authentic throughout your journey.

2. What's the most important life lesson you've learned?

That growth often comes from uncomfortable situations. Some of the moments that challenged me the most also helped me grow the most, both personally and professionally.

3. How do you define success? And what's the best advice that you can give about success?

For me, success is not only about titles or achievements, but also about feeling fulfilled, continuing to grow, and staying aligned with your values. My advice would be: do not compare your journey with others. Everyone progresses at their own pace.

4. Do you think your job makes a difference? How?

Yes, I believe so. Cybersecurity plays a critical role in protecting systems and infrastructures that society depends on daily. Working in the space sector adds another layer of responsibility, as these systems support communication, navigation, and many essential services.

5. What is the best and the worst piece of advice you received? (+How did you unlearn the latter or use it to your favour?)

The best advice I received was: "You do not need to feel 100% ready before taking an opportunity." The worst advice was probably to "just work hard and your work will speak for itself." Do not get me wrong here, hard work is important, but visibility, communication, and networking also matter a lot.

6. Can you name a book that has influenced your journey?

One book that influenced me, early in my industrial career, is the "Nice Girls Don't Get the Corner Office" by Lois P. Frankel, by challenging traditional expectations and encouraging a more confident and assertive approach to career growth and leadership.

Cybersecurity General

7. How can someone stand out in a competitive cybersecurity job market?

Being genuinely curious and proactive makes a big difference. Technical knowledge is important, but so are communication skills, adaptability, and a continuous willingness to learn and evolve.

I also believe it helps to stay engaged with the field beyond education or work—by attending events, talks, and seminars, and keeping up with new tools, technologies, and vulnerabilities. Reading articles, following industry developments, and staying informed about emerging threats can really help someone stand out.

8. What trends in the technology & cybersecurity industry are you keeping an eye on for the future?

I am particularly interested in the evolution of AI in cybersecurity and space and its impact on both offensive and defensive capabilities.

I also find it very interesting to follow the development of advanced AI systems such as Anthropic's Claude Mythos Preview, which is game changer in cybersecurity, demonstrating the potential to autonomously discover and exploit zero-day vulnerabilities across complex systems.

At the same time, this raises important considerations around responsible use, as such powerful capabilities must be carefully guarded to prevent misuse or access by malicious actors. From a broader perspective, I believe this could be a real game changer for the industry, acting as a wake-up call that pushes organisations to take cybersecurity more seriously, strengthen their security posture, and adopt proactive, rather than reactive, defence strategies.

9. What is the most common mistake someone could make when applying for a role in the cybersecurity industry? What do you believe makes a successful candidate/application?

One of the most common mistakes is focusing only on certifications or technical tools, while underestimating other important aspects such as curiosity, communication, and practical experience.

I also noticed that many people, especially women, tend to hesitate before applying unless they meet 100% of the requirements. In reality, job descriptions are often ideal scenarios, not strict checklists.

Another important point is visibility of learning. For example, if someone is following a training, workshop, or seminar, it should be included in a CV even if the certification is not yet completed. It still reflects active skill development and commitment to learning.

10. Do you believe that there are misconceptions people make about working in the cybersecurity industry?

Yes. Many people think cybersecurity is only highly technical or only related to hacking. In reality, cybersecurity is multidisciplinary and includes communication, risk management, leadership, governance, and collaboration.

11. Which concrete recommendations would you give to women who want to change career and join cybersecurity?

Do not be intimidated by the idea that you need to know everything before starting. Cybersecurity is a broad field with many different paths. Start learning step by step, connect with communities, like Women 4 Cyber and allow yourself to explore.

12. And any tips for those who are still very young and might be considering it? Can they start "preparing" somehow from early on?

Stay curious. Explore technology, participate in workshops or competitions, learn how systems work, and do not be afraid to ask a lot of questions.

13.Do you (or did you) have a mentor or someone who guided you? What is your opinion on mentoring as well as on getting a start via an internship/traineeship? Are you planning to mentor or coach others in the future, or have you been mentoring already?

Yes, I have been very lucky to have mentors throughout different stages of my journey and to participate to Women 4 Cyber Mentorship Programs both as mentee and mentor. Mentorship can truly accelerate both professional and personal growth because it provides guidance, perspective, and support. I also mentor others today, and I believe mentorship creates strong and supportive communities.

You & Your job

14. What was your childhood dream job (and why you liked it)?

As a teenager, I was always fascinated by technology, especially computers and early social media platforms like Hi5 and MySpace (before Facebook even existed).

I remember customizing my Hi5 profile and discovering that I could actually change the layout, colors, add music, and visuals by writing PHP, JavaScript, HTML and CSS code. That was my very first exposure to coding.

What fascinated me was that you could "create" something visual and interactive just by writing code. It felt like learning a new language—but one that was creative, flexible, and much more fun than traditional grammar rules. That experience was really the starting point of my journey into engineering.

15. Do (did) you ever experience imposter syndrome and self-doubt about your career and skills?
Absolutely. I think many people experience self-doubt, especially in demanding environments.
For me, it was particularly strong during my PhD. Working on a long-term individual research project meant constantly switching roles, you are the developer, the researcher, the writer, the presenter, and sometimes even the “marketer” of your own work.
Precisely, one of the most difficult moments came after 2 years in my PhD, when I realized how much there was still to learn and how vast the research field is. It can feel overwhelming to see how much expertise exists and how little you feel you know in comparison.
However, after completing my PhD and transitioning into industry, I started to see things differently. I realized that growth often comes with uncertainty, and that no one has all the answers. That shift in perspective really helped me overcome self-doubt.
16. What has been your most exciting role to date?
Working in the Galileo program and contributing to cybersecurity in the space sector has definitely been one of the most exciting experiences of my career.
17.What is the best and worst experience you have had in your career?
One of the highlights of my career was being nominated for “Young Cybersecurity Personality of the Year” by the Belgian Cybersecurity Coalition. It felt very meaningful because I had spent seven years in Belgium, studying for my PhD and working in Industry, and it gave me a sense of recognition and belonging. It also came at a transitional moment in my career, just before moving to a new role and country, which made it feel like a natural closure of that chapter.
On the other hand, some of the most challenging moments have been periods of major transition and uncertainty, changing countries, roles, and environments. Although difficult at the time, these experiences taught me resilience, adaptability, and the importance of trusting your own growth through change.
18.What role has networking played in your skill development?
Networking has played a very important role for me. Through networking, I gained opportunities, perspectives, mentorship, collaborations, and friendships that contributed significantly to my growth.

Other

19. How do you handle criticism?
I try to see criticism as an opportunity to learn and improve. I also make a conscious effort not to take it personally or react immediately. Instead, I prefer to take a step back, reflect, and revisit it with a calmer mindset.
Of course, this is not always easy, but I have found that constructive feedback can be extremely valuable for personal and professional growth.

20. How do you manage stress?
I try to maintain balance through sports, travelling, and spending time with people I care about. Interestingly, I also tend to work quite well under pressure and sometimes even find it motivating, as it helps me focus and be more productive.
That said, I do believe balance is important. Stress can be useful in short periods, but long-term wellbeing requires recovery, rest, and perspective.
21. Cybersecurity is considered a very demanding and "intrusive" career in someone's life (takes a lot of hours, lots of learning constantly, you are "seeing" cybersecurity triggers everywhere even outside of work). How do you balance work and personal life?
Setting boundaries and learning to disconnect are very important. To be honest, I am still working on this and I think it is something that evolves over time.
In cybersecurity, there is always more to learn and more to do, but I have learned that rest and personal time are essential to stay motivated, focused, and excited about what you do.