



W4C GR CYBERSECURITY WOMAN PROFILE OF THE MONTH

INTERVIEW WITH ELENA!

Name: Elena Matzaridou

Job Position: Digital Strategy Advisor

Current Employer: Combuss Business Consultants

Cybersecurity areas of expertise:

Cyber resilience in maritime operations

Cybersecurity governance and IT policy

Cybersecurity training and awareness

Previous career(s):

Commercial Shipping Operations / Maritime Digital Transformation – Dalex Shipping Co S.A.

Offshore Sailing Instructor & Maritime Training – Hellenic Naval Academy

Educational background: Academic background in maritime transport, international education and public policy analysis, including a Postgraduate Diploma in Shipping & Maritime Transport from National Technical University of Athens and a Master's Degree in International & Comparative Education from University of Brighton, UK.

Other interests/hobbies : Long-distance sailing, transatlantic offshore sailing, adventure travel

Favourite quote: A smooth sea never made a skilled sailor.

Network with me: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/elena-matzaridou-a9126516>

Are you hiring? : NO

Intro & Inspirational

1. Which values are guiding your life and work?

Curiosity, integrity, resilience and continuous learning. I also strongly believe in responsibility, especially in industries like shipping and cybersecurity where decisions affect real operations, people and global systems.

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

Complex systems cannot be understood only from theory. You need to understand how things work in reality, under pressure, with people, operational limitations and uncertainty.

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

Success for me is creating a meaningful impact while remaining authentic to who you are. Real success is not only professional achievement. It is being trusted, respected and able to keep evolving. The best advice I can give is: do not wait until you feel "fully ready." Growth happens through exposure and experience.

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

Yes, because shipping, digitalization and cybersecurity are becoming increasingly interconnected. Technology today influences operational resilience, safety, compliance and commercial decision-making. Helping bridge the gap between operational reality, regulation and technology can support more informed and resilient decisions across the maritime industry.

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: "Stay close to operational reality."

The worst advice was: "Stay in your lane."

I learned that many important opportunities happen at the intersection of different disciplines. My own journey evolved because I combined maritime operations, technology, regulation and strategy instead of limiting myself to one predefined path.

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

'Shipping moves in Cycles' by Philippos Begleris. The book explains how shipping constantly goes through ups and downs, and why resilience, adaptability and long-term thinking are so important in the maritime industry. I like it because it reflects the reality of shipping in a very honest and practical way.

Cybersecurity General

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

Technical skills are important, but what really helps someone stand out is the ability to understand the bigger picture.

Cybersecurity today is connected to operations, business continuity, human behavior and risk management.

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

I closely follow AI-driven cybersecurity and cyber resilience regulations from IMO and other international organizations. I am also very interested in how geopolitics increasingly affects cyber risk and digital infrastructure.

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?

Focusing only on certifications without demonstrating practical thinking or curiosity. Successful candidates show willingness to learn, adaptability, problem-solving mindset and the ability to communicate clearly.

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

Many people think cybersecurity is only for highly technical programmers sitting behind screens. In reality, the industry also needs operational thinkers, strategists and people who understand human behavior and risk.

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

Do not underestimate transferable skills. We need people with different backgrounds: operations, psychology, law, maritime, communications, management. Cybersecurity is broader than many people think.

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. Learn how systems work. Understand technology, but also communication and critical thinking. You can start early by exploring online courses, cybersecurity communities, coding basics and technology news.

13. What skills do you think are not “most important”, as this is very limiting, but skills that are key for a career in cybersecurity no matter the specific profile?

Adaptability and the ability to stay calm under pressure. Technology changes constantly. Learning how to learn is one of the most valuable skills.

14. 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?

Mentorship can accelerate growth tremendously. Sometimes one conversation with the right person can completely change your perspective or confidence level. I strongly support mentoring,, internships and hands-on exposure because practical experience is essential. I also believe in helping younger professionals navigate the industry.

You & Your job

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

Something connected to the sea and exploration. I was always fascinated by movement, international environments and complex systems!

16. Did peer pressure, trends or other factors play a role in your choosing cybersecurity and particularly your specific field of work in it?

No, actually, many of the environments I entered were uncommon choices for women at the time. Most decisions came from curiosity and a desire to understand how industries truly operate.

17. Did you face any challenges related to your gender, race, visual appearance, or background, or any stereotypical biases? How have you overcome these?

Yes, but over time, competence, consistency and confidence speak louder than stereotypes.

18. What has been your most exciting role to date?

Representing World Sailing at the International Maritime Organization and participating in international regulatory discussions connecting policy, technology and maritime operations.

19. What is the best and worst experience you have had in your career?

The best experiences were usually the most challenging ones for me because they forced growth. The worst moments often became the most educational later.

20. Do you enjoy your work, and why? What's your favourite and least favourite part of your job?

Yes! Because my work combines many different dimensions: technology, operations, strategy, regulation and international collaboration. What I enjoy most is connecting different worlds and translating complexity into practical understanding and decisions.

21. What role has networking played in your skill development?

Networking has played a major role. Shipping is a relationship-driven industry where conversations, collaboration and exchange of perspectives can significantly accelerate learning and professional growth.

22. What's the next big milestone you're working towards?

I would like to continue contributing at the intersection of maritime operations, digital transformation, cybersecurity and international policy, while expanding involvement in strategic industry discussions and innovation initiatives.

23. Do you have any passion or side-projects you're focusing on?

A passion of mine is long-distance and transatlantic sailing. Offshore sailing gives me the opportunity to experience systems, resilience and technology under real operational conditions, where connectivity, navigation, energy management and decision-making all matter in real time. I am particularly interested in observing and testing how new technologies perform in the "micro-setting" of an offshore sailing boat, a smaller but very real reflection of the wider maritime industry's operational challenges.

Other

24. How do you handle criticism?

I try to separate emotion from information. Constructive criticism can be extremely valuable if approached with openness and self-awareness. At the same time, I have learned the importance of trusting my judgment and remaining focused on long-term goals.

25. How do you manage stress?

Spending time near the sea, sailing, traveling and disconnecting from constant digital noise helps me reset mentally and maintain clarity.

26. 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?

Boundaries and discipline are essential. I believe long-term performance depends on recovery, perspective and maintaining interests and experiences outside work.

27. What do you do to prevent burnout in such a demanding line of work?

I try to maintain balance through rest, movement, meaningful conversations and activities that reconnect me with the physical world outside screens and constant information flow. I also believe it is important to recognize when to slow down and recharge.

28. How do you set boundaries in the workplace?

By communicating clearly, respecting my time and focusing on quality rather than constant urgency. I believe professionalism should include sustainability and long-term performance, not only availability.