



# REDRESSING THE BALANCE

*intersec invites a selection of women involved in cyber security to explain how the industry is evolving*

**I**nternational Women's Day always prompts introspection about the role of women in society, how things have changed, and what more needs to be done to further equality. This is especially true in cybersecurity, where women are still underrepresented. Research from industry analyst Forrester estimates that just 24 percent of the global cyber workforce are female today. So, how has the role of women in security shifted?

Daniela Da Cruz, VP Engineering at Checkmarx, comments: "While we see that progress has been made in recent years, with many organisations actively trying to address gender diversity, the current representation of women in the cybersecurity industry is still relatively low.

"This is consistent with what we also observe in other tech industries, and I think different factors contribute to this: under representation, a lack of role models and gender bias. However, increasing efforts are being made to encourage women to pursue careers in cybersecurity."

While women are still a minority in IT security, there are still many in the field helping to reverse the trend.

Soma Sinha, Senior Manager Business Application, Engineering at Barracuda, comments: "I was fortunate that my parents sent me to study computer science. I joined the tech industry in 2004 and have seen many female leaders who have inspired me. Each of them emphasised the same thing: focus on your priorities, take pride in and enjoy and celebrate every phase of your life. I believe that

diversity brings different perspectives and enables every individual to prepare and perform better.

Stephanie Reiter, Chief Financial Officer at Delinea, shares a similarly positive outlook, commenting: "As a female CFO, I feel fortunate to have had several role models who showed how women can be senior leaders within an organisation. At Delinea, I'm proud to sponsor our first employee resource group, Women @ Delinea, where our mission is to promote positive roles of women in technology. We are building an inclusive community and welcome all of our team to engage with us on this mission.

"As a company, Delinea is committed to our core values including respect, ownership and being spirited in everything we do. We strive to create an environment where everyone feels those values every day, in every interaction with customers and colleagues, and in every experience they have at Delinea."

While equality appears to be improving, most women working in the field today have faced challenges by being the only female in the room. More often than not, negative bias seems to be unconscious rather than malicious.

Brenda Robb, CMO at Blackfog, notes: "I've spent much of my career in male-dominated industries and companies. In one instance I was the only female in the EMEA team for the first few years. When I sat down to write this, I initially wrote that I didn't recall any significant instances of inequality or discrimination, but on reflection there have been a couple that come to mind. Perhaps petty, but I do recall being asked to step out of a customer event in Rome to buy a gift for a C-Level's wife, a task I politely declined! I also recollect a management meeting many years ago where myself and only one other woman were present. Despite being senior to several men in the room, my female colleague was tasked with chasing up the coffee when it didn't arrive on time."

"Fortunately, I have always felt comfortable when it comes to pushing back, but I understand this is more difficult for some women who have no doubt had experiences worse than mine. My thoughts are that the issue of inequality may be felt less in marketing than in other areas of business. I first got into technology via PR, followed by events and later marketing, all three probably more dominated by women typically. I've been fortunate to be able to progress within the technology industry and at BlackFrog I am part of the leadership team and on the board of directors. Good companies are built by good people, regardless of gender, an ethos we follow at BlackFog"

Similarly, Christine Bejerasco, CISO at WithSecure, explains: "I [have faced] some hurdles throughout my career as a woman in a typically male-dominated industry. In the earlier stages of my career, I encountered negative bias as a woman working in the technology field.

"There was one notable experience, where I was hired with a lower salary than my male counterpart, despite working in the same role and having similar backgrounds and experience levels. At the time, I chalked it up to my experience level and didn't act on it, but today I'd definitely raise it as an issue. Happily, in this case, my salary was adjusted to match my male counterpart once my managers saw my skills in action.

She continues: "Nevertheless, it's not always the same case for every woman in the security industry. I still believe that women in tech face numerous challenges, especially when it comes to particular niche areas like cybersecurity. There is still a tendency for women to have to prove their worth before being accepted at the same level as a man. In

my experience at least, it's often unconscious bias – the men are usually well-meaning and don't intentionally set out to discriminate and keep women out of the field."

Mor Bikovsky, Global Head of Business Development at Claroty, who entered the cyber field through seven years in the technology department of the Israel Defence Force (IDF), adds: "I've always worked in very male-dominated environments and have become used to being the only woman (and the youngest person) in the room. However, as a woman, you can achieve anything. At Claroty, for example, I've been awarded Employee of the Year by the CEO three years in a row.

## WOMEN IN TECH FACE NUMEROUS CHALLENGES, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT COMES TO CYBERSECURITY

"For me it's important to simply ignore the biases, be professional and focus on solving the business challenge at hand – ultimately, just show up and do my job! As soon as people recognise my expertise, skills and knowledge, I quickly earn their trust. The key is to not let the initial judgments and biases hold you back from demonstrating your capabilities and proving your value right off the bat."

With women still representing less than a quarter of security professionals, and many still facing bias in their roles, the consensus is that more needs to be done in the years ahead.

"While there have been improvements in work culture and inclusivity, there's still progress to be made in terms of greater female representation in leadership positions and support for women entering the industry," adds Christine at WithSecure.

Devona Chia, Marketing Director APAC at Hackuity, elaborates: "We're now well into 2023, and certainly, the tide is turning for women around the world. We have more female Prime Ministers, Presidents, Directors, etc. than ever before. I have more female peers and colleagues that I work with who are rising to excellent positions of leadership. This is mainly down to a higher level of gender awareness within the industry, as well as STEM subjects becoming a core part of education for the youngest generations. Though that's not to say we still don't have a long way to go, I would say this is a common theme among the gender gap on the whole, as equally men are now entering traditionally 'female-only' roles such as childcare and education.

"To overcome inequality in the workplace you need to be a voice for change. Stand up to the opposition, whether female or male, nobody should be put down, especially your own team. Perhaps the hardest part is recognising this, but the more that talk about it, the more they'll be aware of what they say. Some people don't realise they are being hurtful or stereotyping."

There is a strong sense that women already in the cyber industry, as well as IT and technology in general, have the biggest role to play in further equality. Most agree women who have risen to senior roles can create a positive environment for others entering the field.

Mor at Claroty explains: "The most important advice I can share with other women in tech is to learn from and help others. At Claroty, I've become a mentor to

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women across multiple departments, including Product, Research & Development and Technical Support – giving them advice on career progression and promotions, shifts between roles and dilemmas in a male-dominated work environment. I've even got to the point where I give advice to men who are double my age with twice as much experience!”

Sheila Hara, Director, Product Management, Application Delivery at Barracuda, believes support should also focus on helping young girls gravitate towards technical fields. She observes: “To encourage more women into technology, we need to cultivate curiosity in little ones, so they are not afraid of technology when they are older. Talk science at home and run experiments (that do not destroy your home, for the most part). Cultivate courage – let girls jump

## MOST WOMEN HAVE FACED THE CHALLENGE OF BEING THE ONLY FEMALE IN THE ROOM

off structures, swing on the monkey bars and bruise their knees so they feel brave and strong.

“With women outnumbered in many technology workplaces, training and mentorship programmes that focus on the needs of diverse employees can create support and recognition of career goals and potential. We can all play a part in speaking for other women when they are not in the room. Let women know how important their contributions are to the company's success. Showcase their work and achievements and demonstrate to the entire organisation that women are valued. Keep the faith and trust the journey! Be kind to yourself and give yourself permission to excel.”

Daniela at Checkmarx highlights three major steps that security leaders should be taking to promote diversity:

“Partnering with educational institutions to offer scholarships and internships is a great way to promote the security industry and create a diverse talent pipeline. By doing so, you can help students gain practical experience and exposure to the security industry, which can be invaluable in terms of building their knowledge and skillsets. Myself, as a teacher at university for Computer Science students, constantly promote these initiatives and the fact that I'm a woman in a leadership position might influence other women to understand it's possible to follow a similar path.

“Secondly, provide opportunities for professional development: we can help promote diversity by providing opportunities for professional development, including training, mentorship and coaching. This can help women build their skills and advance their careers in the security industry.

“And finally, create an inclusive culture. We, as leaders, should promote an inclusive culture where all employees feel valued and heard. This means recognising and addressing biases that may exist in the workplace and creating an environment where all employees feel comfortable sharing their ideas and perspectives.”

Hacktivity's Devona adds that women also need to believe in themselves and their abilities. She comments: “My biggest piece of advice to women starting in tech: Believe in yourself. You are no less worthy than your male counterparts. Don't fall into an 'imposter syndrome' mentality. Believe in your worth, your experience, and the value of what you bring to the table.

“It's difficult when the door is shut on you. But don't stop there. Find a mentor that can help you. Especially at the start of your career, guidance is essential to shaping your growth! And network. Network, network, network. You never know when contacts will come to good use.”

She concludes: “It's time to change the face of cyber. We've come a long way as females, but there's still a long way to go. Only one out of 365 days is International Women's Day, one too many. The aim is for that day to no longer be necessary. Ever” ●

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**Soma Sinha** is Senior Manager Business Application, Engineering at Barracuda.

**Stephanie Reiter** is Chief Financial Officer at Delinea. **Brenda Robb**

is CMO at Blackfog.

**Christine Bejerasco** is CISO at WithSecure.

**Mor Bikovsky** is Global Head of Business Development at Clarity.

**Devona Chia** is Marketing Director APAC at Hackuity and **Sheila Hara** is Director, Product Management, Application Delivery at Barracuda.

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