

GovStack Women in GovTech Challenge Report



FOREWARD



Katharina Mänz, Deputy Head of Division – Digital Technologies, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)

Around the world, we are building the foundations of tomorrow's societies through digital public infrastructure. But digital infrastructure alone is not enough—it must be built by and for people. Women's leadership in GovTech is not just a matter of equity—it's a strategic imperative for more inclusive, trusted, and people-centred digital governance.

Ingrid-Gabriela Hoven, Managing Director, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

GIZ is committed to breaking barriers for women in all sectors – including digital government. The Women in GovTech Challenge supports female-led solutions and empowers women to shape digital public infrastructure that reflects the diversity of the people it serves



Dr Cosmas Zavazava, Director of the Telecommunication Development Bureau, International Telecommunication Union (ITU)



Inclusive digital transformation requires the active participation and leadership of women—not just as users, but as architects of digital technology. True inclusion means involving women in the design and governance of digital public infrastructure.

FOREWARD



**Idah Pswarayi-Riddihough,
Global Director and Director of Strategy & Operations,
Digital Vice Presidency, World Bank**

We need your ideas, your leadership, your lived experiences at the center of digital government reforms. When women lead, services become more inclusive, more empathetic, and more impactful

**Amandeep Singh Gill,
Under-Secretary-General and Special Envoy for
Digital and Emerging Technologies**

The DPI Safeguards Framework and the building block approach of GovStack serve as complementary puzzle pieces. The building block approach of GovStack ensures technical quality, while the DPI Safeguards Framework provides guidance for responsible and inclusive governance. We celebrate not only the prototypes developed and the great pitches made, but also the journeys taken, the relationships built, and the networks of leaders sustained through this program.



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Acknowledgements

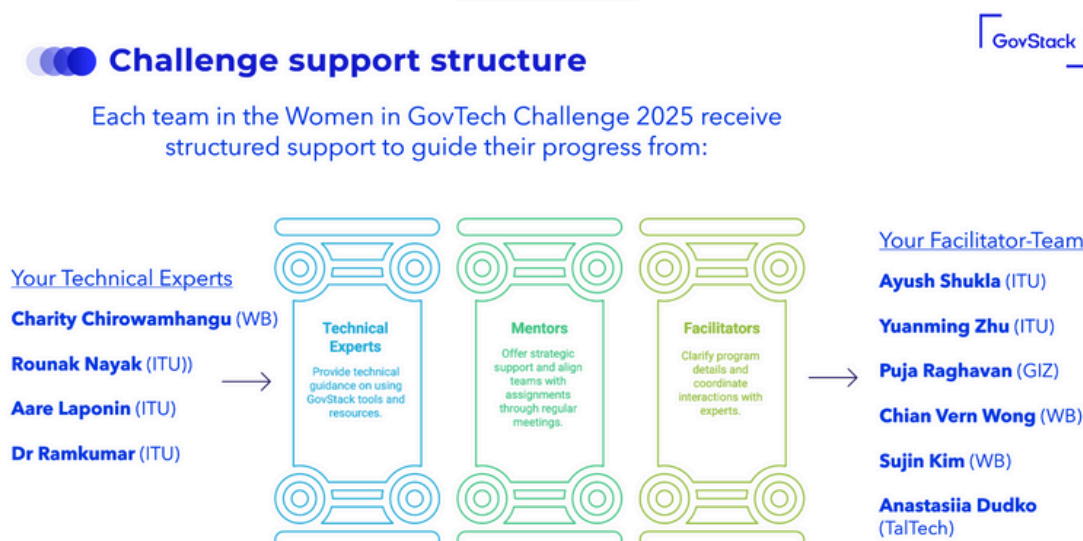
The GovStack Women in GovTech Challenge 2025 was made possible through the collective effort and passion of a diverse group of contributors who brought their time, insight, and commitment to building a more inclusive digital future.

We sincerely thank all our **Lecturers and Networking Session Speakers** for enriching the programme with their expertise and personal perspectives:

Aare Laponin, Andrea Donath, Ali Gonzalez, Betty Mwema, Cristina Martínez, David Eaves, Dr Eric Jackson, Dr PS Ramkumar, Josephine Lusi, Kathleen McGowan, Kelly Ommundsen, Kim Mallalieu, Kristo Vaher, Laurence Berry, Lucy Harris, Maria Luciano, Mei Lin Fung, Michelle Grell-Bereaux, Nele Leosk, Sarah Fischer, Raja Chandrasekharan, Rounak Nayak, Silvia Lips, Tarisiro Kuzinya, Yessenia Pennélope Henríquez.

A special thank you to our **Technical Experts**, who helped bring the DPI and GovStack vision to life through technical clarity and collaborative problem-solving: Aare Laponin, Charity Chirowamhangu, Dr P.S. Ramkumar, Rounak Nayak. We also gratefully acknowledge our **Facilitators**, who played a vital role in supporting the cohort throughout the programme: Anastasiia Dudko, Ayush Shukla, Chian Vern Wong, Puja Raghavan, Sujin Kim, Yuanming Zhu.

Lastly, the Challenge would not have been possible without partners—GIZ, ITU, the World Bank, the DPI Safeguards Initiative and academic partners TalTech and Coursera. The coordination team included Ayush Shukla, Cristina Cardenas, Francesco Stabilito, Hani Eskander, Ingrid Pappel, Josephine Lusi, Marushka Chocobar, Moritz Fromageot, Nora Hauptmann, Puja Raghavan, Pia Seiffarth, Yuanming Zhu and Yolanda Martinez.



Executive Summary

The second edition of the GovStack Women in GovTech Challenge (WiGTC) 2025, implemented by GIZ and ITU in collaboration with the **World Bank, UNDP, and UN Office for Digital and Emerging Technologies (UN ODET)**, Academic partner- TalTech and Coursera, marked a critical milestone in building a diverse and inclusive global community around Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) and GovTech.

155 mentees and 53 mentors from over 50 countries participated in an 8-week intensive journey focused on inclusive service design, DPI principles, and modular digital solutions. The Challenge **received over 400 applications**, from which a carefully curated cohort was selected across sectors, including government, private sector, civil society, academia, and multilateral institutions.

Participants engaged in six core lectures and three high-level networking sessions, featuring global leaders like Mei Lin Fung, David Eaves, Nele Leosk, Yolanda Martinez and many others. The sessions explored topics including citizen-centric service design, DPI safeguards, AI in government, and inclusive leadership for digital transformation.

A highlight of the programme was the development of real-world prototypes, with four finalist teams selected to showcase their solutions at WSIS 2025:

- GovSpark (Tunisia): A violence reporting and case management platform for women.
- TaxBuddy (Colombia): A mobile solution for low-value tax collection tailored for informal workers.
- GovYES (Kenya): A unified youth employment and entrepreneurship service platform.
- SHEUnit Tech (Ukraine): A tracking system to ensure transparency in agricultural input distribution for rural women farmers.

The programme's impact was confirmed through robust feedback: over 82 participants stated their expectations were met or exceeded, with an average satisfaction score of 4.23/5. Mentors appreciated the unique cross-sectoral and international exchange, with 100% indicating they would recommend the Challenge.

Additionally, post-programme impact from the first cohort was substantial—alumni took on new roles, led digital projects, and advocated for GovStack adoption. A majority continued to engage with the GovStack community, with many highlighting increased confidence and career clarity as key takeaways.

The 2025 edition responded directly to feedback from the first cohort by improving onboarding, increasing facilitation support, and launching new sustainability mechanisms like the GovStack WiGTC Alumni Network and GovStack WiGTC Ambassadors.

As the cohort's work continues to be amplified through the alumni community and global events like WSIS 2025, the Challenge stands as a strong testament to how inclusive leadership, technical empowerment, and community-driven design can shape the future of digital governance.

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The second edition of the Women in GovTech Challenge (WiGTC) 2025, led by the GovStack Initiative from GIZ and ITU in partnership with the World Bank and the Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) Safeguards Initiative (stewarded by the UN Office for Digital and Emerging Technologies - ODET - and the UNDP), marked a significant milestone in promoting inclusive, people-centric digital public services. Building on the learnings of the first cohort, this edition was scaled up to expand its reach, impact, and practical outputs.

With over **400 applications** from **50+ countries**, the Challenge selected **155 individual mentees and 5 group teams**, supported by **53 mentors** from a diverse array of sectors, including government, private sector, civil society, NGOs, and academia. The end of the challenge saw 28 mentees drop out. The total final numbers were **127 Mentees** and **53 Mentors**.

The programme was designed as a 6-week intensive training and mentoring initiative focused on designing inclusive digital public services, fostering leadership, and building global networks in the GovTech and DPI ecosystem.

The second edition picked up on the momentum from the first cohort of the WiGTC in 2023–24, which saw **139 individual mentees and mentors** from **49 countries**. It directly responded to feedback from that cohort, improving onboarding processes, deepening technical content, expanding participation to public, private, civil society, academia, and enhancing opportunities for peer learning and global networking.

The 2025 Challenge leverage a more mature set of tools aimed to expand the scope of the programme and placed stronger emphasis on facilitating more touchpoints with global experts, and culminated in the launch of the GovStack WiGTC Alumni community and the GovStack WiGTC Ambassadors, signaling a decisive step forward in the programme's evolution and sustainability.

01

INTRODUCTION

Overview of Applications & Selections

400+ Applications from 50+ countries



Applications received

of Individual Mentees: 365

of Groups (Mentees): 14

of Mentors: 73

of Countries: 80+



Selected Participants

of Individual Mentees: 155

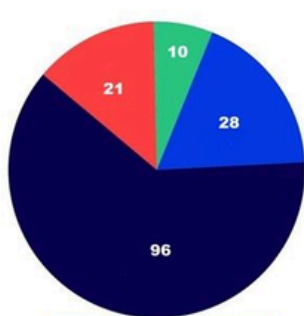
of Groups (Mentees): 5

of Mentors: 53

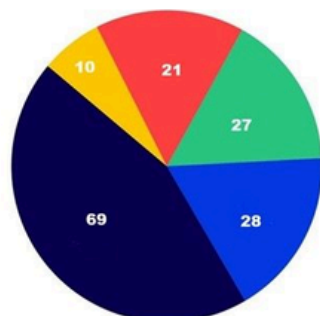
of Countries: 50+

Statistics: Start of the 2025 Challenge

Mentee



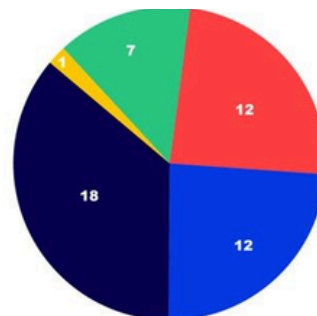
Sector



Nationality



Mentor



Sector



Nationality



PROGRAMME STRUCTURE

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The Challenge was structured across **five key phases**:

- **Launch and Outreach:** A global webinar on 18 February 2025 marked the official launch, introducing the call for applications and highlighting partner support. Outreach efforts were amplified through online campaigns, partner networks, and targeted regional engagement.
- **Selection Phase (March 17 – April 5):** Participants were selected based on motivation, sectoral experience, diversity, and regional representation. From over 400+ applications, a balanced cohort of mentees and mentors from 50+ countries was curated.
- **Training and Mentorship (April 14 – May 23):** This core phase included six weekly lecture sessions and three thematic networking events. Each mentee was placed in a team and assigned a mentor to guide them in developing a digital service design prototype.
- **Pitch Week (June 2 – 6):** Participants presented their proposals to a jury comprising global experts. Evaluation focused on innovation, inclusivity, user-centred design, and practical implementation.
- **Graduation and Community Launch (June 14):** A celebratory event showcased participant achievements and announced the launch of the Women in GovTech Alumni Community at WSIS 2025.

This year's edition also responded to retrospective insights from the first cohort—expanding the training duration, increasing the number of prototype outputs, and strengthening alumni engagement. To address the relatively high attrition rate observed in the first cohort, the 2025 edition included improvements such as earlier onboarding webinars, structured weekly touchpoints with facilitators, and a clearer timeline of deliverables. These changes helped retain 127 out of 155 mentees, a marked improvement in programme continuity.





Over 120+ participants from around the world attended the Webinar Launch of the Second Cohort of the GovStack Women in GovTech Challenge 3 months ago



Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung



Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH



REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS



In Partnership with:



THE WORLD BANK



DIGITAL PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE
Universal Safeguards



United Nations
Office for Digital and Emerging Technologies



LEARNING JOURNEY

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Participants engaged in six weekly lectures and three thematic networking sessions. Each event blended technical insight with lived experience:

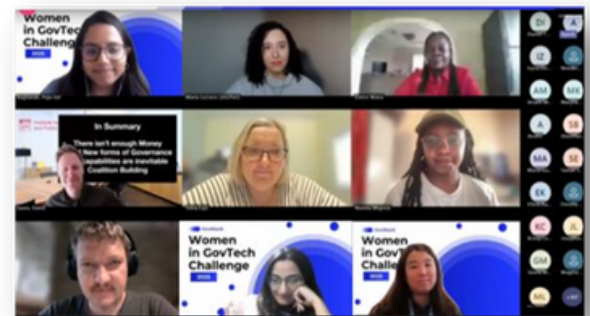
Lecture Sessions:

- **Week 1:** Introduction to GovStack, Citizen-Centric Service Design, and Service Prioritisation
- **Week 2:** Mapping DPI Ecosystems and Legal Frameworks
- **Weeks 3–6:** Focused on prototyping, DPI safeguards, open source, and inclusive design

Networking Sessions:

- **Session 1:** AI & LLMs in Government (24 April): Examined how AI systems intersect with ethics, equity, and service delivery.
- **Session 2:** Inclusive DPI and GovTech (12 May): Global leaders shared strategies to embed equity and resilience in GovTech systems.
- **Session 3:** Leadership for Digital Transformation (22 May): Brought diverse leaders to discuss managing institutional change and inclusive innovation.

These sessions, led by top experts including Yolanda Martinez, Mei Lin Fung, Cristina Martinez, Cynthia Antwi, David Eaves and many others, created bridges between global narratives and cohort experiences.



03

From Learning to Prototyping: Finalist Use Cases

The culmination of the learning journey was the development and presentation of digital service prototypes addressing real-world public sector challenges. The top four teams selected by an expert jury demonstrated exemplary application of GovStack principles, DPI Safeguards, and inclusive design.

Group 24 – Violence Reporting and Case Management Platform for Women in Tunisia

This prototype envisioned a modular, interoperable platform to support women survivors of violence. The solution emphasised privacy, consent management, and service integration across justice, health, and social support sectors—reflecting the DPI Safeguards focus on autonomy, security, and non-discrimination.

Group 17 – TaxBuddy: Smart Management of Low-Value Tax Collection in Colombia

Focused on increasing voluntary tax compliance, this mobile-first solution addressed digital and financial exclusion by tailoring outreach and payment options for informal workers. It leveraged DPI building blocks like Identity and Consent while also employing X-Road for secure, real-time interoperability.

Group 16 – GovYES: Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship Service in Kenya

Tackling fragmented access to public sector jobs and enterprise support, GovYES created a unified youth opportunity portal. With a national skills registry, multi-channel accessibility (USSD, SMS, web), and DPI-enabled workflows, the prototype directly responded to challenges of exclusion, trust, and coordination.

Group 12 – SHEUnit Tech: Agriculture Input Tracking System in Ukraine

This use case applied GovStack tools to enhance transparency in agricultural subsidies and input distribution. Designed to support rural women farmers and reduce leakages in supply chains, it showcased how inclusive DPI can reinforce food security and equitable service delivery.

These prototypes underscored the potential of DPI-based design to address governance gaps, while showcasing the tangible outcomes possible when technical training is anchored in inclusive, context-aware problem solving.

FEEDBACK FROM THE SECOND COHORT

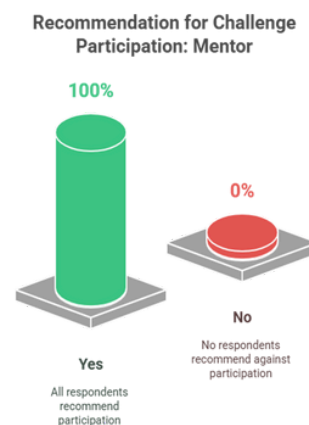
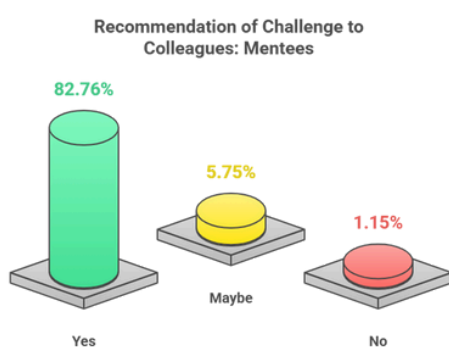
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Quantitative Insights

Survey responses from the 2025 cohort reflect a strong level of participant satisfaction and programme effectiveness. The average satisfaction score across all respondents was 4.23 out of 5, suggesting that the programme succeeded in meeting the expectations and learning needs of most participants.

Of the mentees surveyed, 82 participants (a majority of respondents) stated that the Challenge either met (60 respondents) or exceeded (22 respondents) their expectations. Only 6 participants indicated that the programme fell short of their expectations—a small minority that signals a generally positive experience across the cohort.

These figures indicate not only the relevance of the programme content but also the effectiveness of delivery formats, support mechanisms, and the ability of the Challenge to foster meaningful learning experiences in a short time frame. The low percentage of dissatisfaction suggests that the combination of structured content, mentorship, and networking opportunities addressed key participant needs across different career stages and regional contexts.



Qualitative Reflections – Mentees

Open-ended responses and thematic analysis of mentee feedback reveal several core areas of value. Participants cited concrete technical knowledge as a major takeaway, particularly around the design and implementation of citizen-facing digital public services. Many noted improved understanding of the GovStack building blocks, DPI Safeguards, and service design methodologies, particularly through the application of user journey mapping, service blueprints, and prototyping tools such as Figma.

04

Beyond technical tools, mentees appreciated the exposure to global policy frameworks and real-world DPI applications. The lectures and networking sessions helped contextualise theory through case studies and panel discussions, which in turn informed group project development. Importantly, the programme fostered a supportive learning environment where participants engaged in peer-to-peer exchange across countries and sectors, expanding their perspectives on inclusive digital transformation.

The majority of mentees also highlighted the Challenge's role in boosting their confidence, clarifying career pathways in GovTech, and building meaningful professional relationships—elements that are often difficult to measure quantitatively but critical for long-term leadership development.

Mentor Perspectives

Mentor responses were equally positive, with 100% of mentors stating they would recommend the Challenge to their peers or colleagues. The mentor cohort, drawn from across the public sector, academia, international organisations, and the private sector, valued the diversity of perspectives, the ambition of the mentees, and the programme's structured yet flexible format.

Mentors emphasised the strength of interdisciplinary collaboration and the programme's role in enabling cross-border dialogue on shared digital transformation challenges. Several mentors also observed that the Challenge created a rare space where junior professionals and senior experts could engage meaningfully, flattening traditional hierarchies and enabling mutual learning.

Taken together, the feedback from both mentees and mentors points to a well-executed programme that combined technical rigour with human-centred design and created a globally relevant learning ecosystem. It also indicates strong potential for continued community-building through the new Women in GovTech Alumni Network.

"The cohort had a unique energy. I loved seeing mentees gain confidence in the digital government space week after week."

Mentor, GovStack WiGTC 2025

IMPACT OF THE FIRST COHORT

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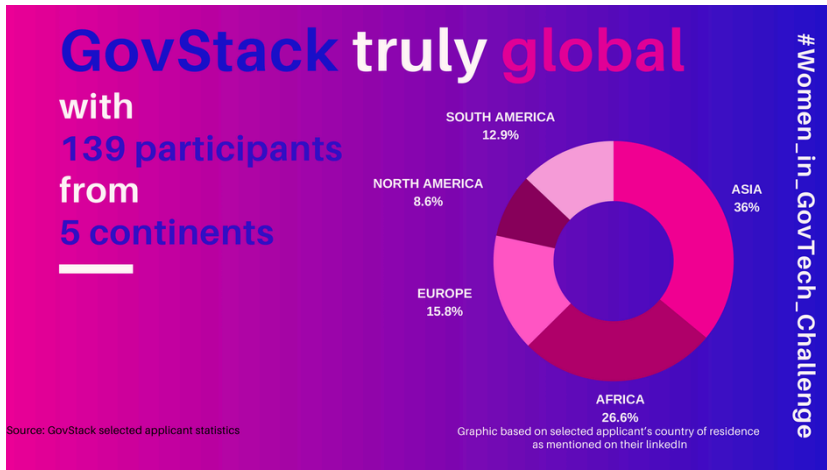
The first edition of the GovStack Women in GovTech Challenge in 2023–24 saw the graduation of 139 mentors and mentees from 49 countries in May 2024. The first cohort laid the foundation for a global community of practice in inclusive digital public infrastructure. A **retrospective survey was conducted in mid-2025** to assess the longer-term impact on participants' careers and engagement in the GovTech and DPI ecosystem. 17 respondents answered the survey questions, of which 11 were former mentors and 6 were former mentees.

Key **insights** from the survey include:

- **Professional Growth and Confidence:** Over 80% of respondents reported that the Challenge contributed significantly to their professional development. Most participants stated they gained confidence in their digital skills and felt more equipped to lead or contribute to digital government projects.
- **Career Progression:** Alumni have taken on new roles, received promotions, or led new digital initiatives in their countries. Several reported being invited to speak or advise on digital governance at national and international levels.
- **Influence on Professional Vision:** A strong majority indicated that they now have a clearer vision of their path in the GovTech space and are more likely to advocate for gender-inclusive digital services.
- **Network and Peer Exchange:** The cohort found great value in the relationships built through the programme. Most respondents shared that they formed meaningful professional connections and remain in contact with fellow participants.
- **GovStack Uptake and Advocacy:** More than half the respondents are actively exploring or have begun advocating for GovStack principles in their organisations or countries. While some are still in early stages of engagement, a few are already involved in formal pilots or policy discussions.

These insights informed the design of the 2025 edition, prompting an expansion in programme length, enhanced alumni engagement mechanisms, and deeper integration of practical prototyping. The first cohort demonstrated that targeted capacity-building, when paired with international mentorship and community, can catalyse leadership and inclusion in digital transformation efforts.

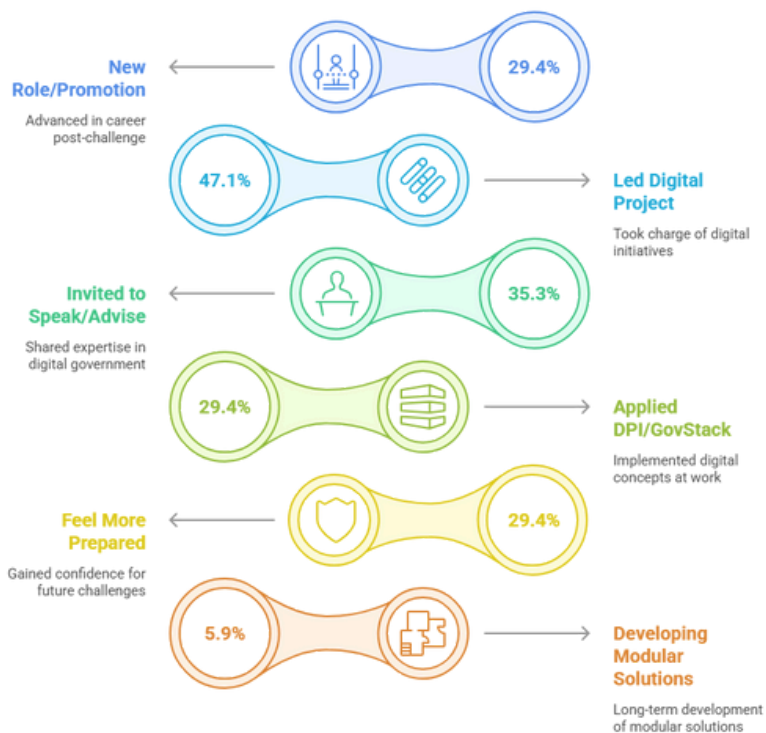
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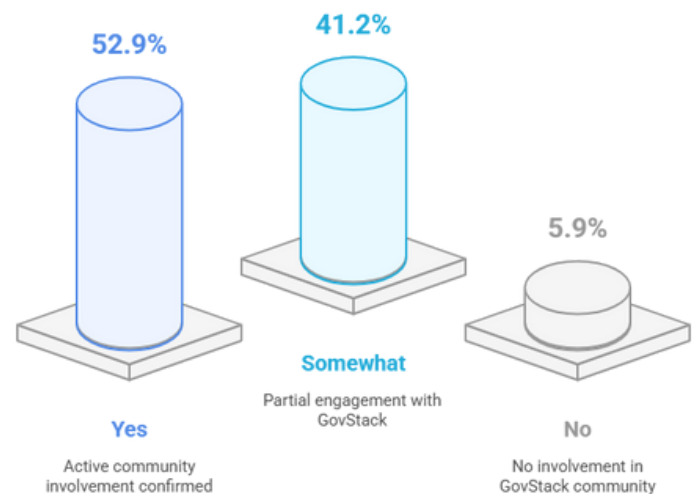
- ✓ **240** applicants
- ✓ **139** participants and mentors
- ✓ **59** countries represented
- ✓ **14** prototypes developed
- ✓ **3** best projects showcased at WSIS 2024



Outcomes Experienced Post-Challenge



Participation in GovStack Community Post Challenge



CONCLUSION

06

CONCLUSION

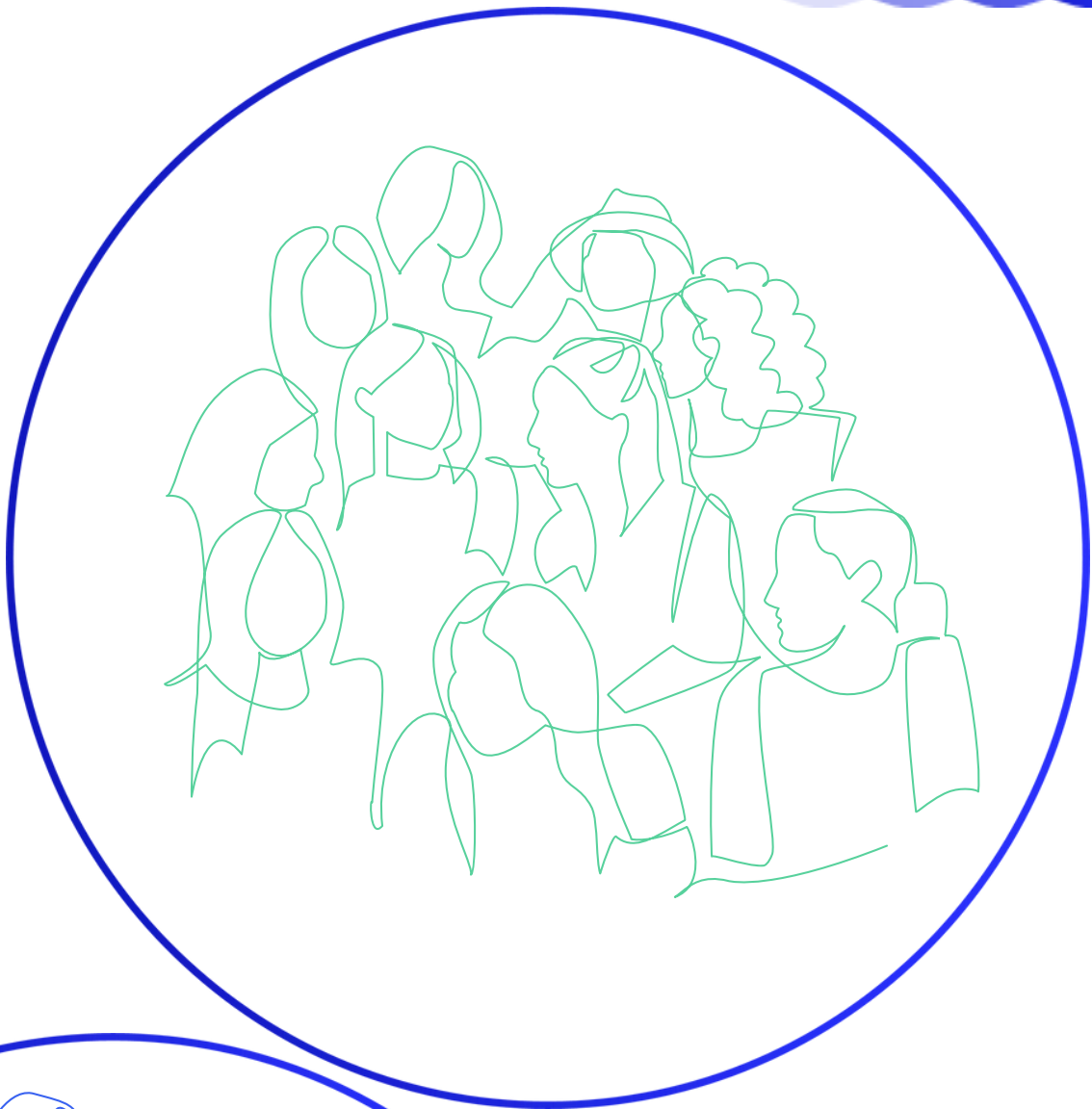
The Women in GovTech Challenge 2025 has marked a significant leap forward in cultivating a global, cross-sectoral community of practice dedicated to inclusive, interoperable, and secure digital public infrastructure. By centring women's leadership in digital governance and embedding real-world prototyping into the learning journey, the Challenge went beyond knowledge delivery—it fostered a space for collaboration, co-creation, and shared purpose.

This second edition not only built on the lessons of the first, but also scaled its ambition, expanding geographic reach, diversifying participation, and elevating the quality of outputs. The launch of the GovStack Women in GovTech Community at WSIS 2025 ensures that this is not the end of the journey but the beginning of a sustained movement.

As the alumni network continues to grow, future editions can deepen regional connections, expand access to mentorship, and drive more systemic inclusion in the DPI ecosystem. The seeds of a more equitable digital future have been sown, grounded in the voices, innovations, and solidarity of this vibrant global cohort.

Sustaining the GovStack Women in GovTech Community





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