

Czech-Finnish Business Networking & Women in Leadership

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On 18 September 2026, the Czech-Finnish Business Networking & Women in Leadership event brought together Czech and Finnish business leaders, innovators, public sector representatives, and advocates of inclusive leadership at the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Helsinki. The event was organized as part of the Czech delegation's presence at the Nordic Business Forum and focused on leadership, talent, innovation, sustainability, and the advancement of women in business and leadership positions. It was supported by **YIT Czechia**, a long-standing advocate of Czech-Finnish business cooperation, leadership development, and the exchange of best practices between the two countries.

The programme opened with a welcome by **Ondřej Fiala**, Deputy Head of Mission at the **Embassy of the Czech Republic in Helsinki**, who highlighted the importance of strong Czech-Finnish relations and the value of fostering dialogue between business communities from both countries.

Opening remarks were delivered by the Co-Founders of the **Inspire & Impact Network**, **Renata Mrázová** and **Tatiana Le Moigne**, who introduced the initiative, which supports women leaders, fosters mutual support, and inspires the next generation of leadership talent. They explained how, through networking, mentoring, and the sharing of experience among accomplished leaders, the Inspire & Impact Network aims to strengthen female leadership, support personal and professional growth, and contribute to positive social and the long-term prosperity of the country.

The central part of the event was a panel discussion moderated by **Lenka Simerská**, Executive Director of the Nordic Chamber of Commerce in the Czech Republic and equality expert, who guided an engaging conversation connecting leadership, business growth, innovation, company culture, sustainability, gender diversity, and women in leadership.

Distinguished Panelists

- **Renata Mrázová**, Co-Founder, Inspire & Impact Network; Group Chief People Officer, FNZ
- **Venla Laakkonen**, VP, Strategy and Business Development, Residential CEE, YIT Oyj
- **Susanna Siira**, CEO and Board Professional, Chair of the Board of Gaia Network, and Member of the Tuusula Municipal Council
- **Mika Lautanala**, Head of International Innovation Partnership, Business Finland

Leadership in a Rapidly Changing World

Building on the broader leadership discussions taking place at the Nordic Business Forum, the panel explored how expectations of leaders have evolved over the last decade.

The discussion emphasized that effective leadership in 2026 extends far beyond operational management and financial performance. Modern leaders are increasingly expected to demonstrate empathy, foster trust, support collaboration, and help their organizations navigate continuous change and uncertainty.

Panelists reflected on their own leadership journeys and shared perspectives on the qualities that are most needed today. Among the themes that repeatedly emerged were authenticity, curiosity, adaptability, long-term thinking, and the ability to create environments where people feel empowered to perform at their best.

Talent, Culture and People

A significant portion of the discussion focused on organizational culture and talent development.

Representing YIT, Venla Laakkonen spoke about company culture in a sector traditionally perceived as male-dominated. She shared insights into how YIT works to create an environment where diverse talent can thrive and highlighted the importance of leadership commitment in building inclusive workplaces.

Renata Mrázová addressed one of the most pressing questions facing organizations today: what differentiates companies that successfully attract, engage, and retain top talent. The discussion stressed that long-term success depends not only on compensation or benefits but on meaningful work, values-driven leadership, growth opportunities, and a strong organizational culture.

Drawing on both business and public sector experience, Susanna Siira discussed the role leaders play in creating cultures where individuals are able to contribute at their highest potential. She also shared perspectives from Finland, where collaboration, trust, transparency, and employee participation are deeply embedded in many organizations.

Innovation, Growth and Competitiveness

Innovation and international competitiveness formed another important pillar of the discussion.

Representing Business Finland, Mika Lautanala provided insights into Finland's internationally recognized innovation ecosystem and the role public-private cooperation plays in fostering new ideas, technologies, and business opportunities.

The conversation explored what Czech companies can learn from the Finnish approach to innovation and collaboration. Particular attention was paid to partnerships between businesses, research institutions, and public organizations, as well as the importance of creating ecosystems that support experimentation and long-term competitiveness.

Panelists also discussed opportunities for stronger Czech-Finnish cooperation in the years ahead and agreed that both countries have much to gain through closer collaboration, knowledge sharing, and investment in innovation-driven growth. Having spent 3 years at the Finnish Embassy in Prague, Mika Lautanala stressed that the Czech workforce is highly educated, skilled, and characterized by a practical, solution-oriented mindset. He noted that these qualities represent a significant competitive advantage and deserve greater recognition, as international investors do not always fully appreciate the value and potential they bring.

Sustainability and Long-Term Value Creation

Sustainability was addressed not as a compliance requirement but as a strategic business topic.

Susanna Siira highlighted how many Finnish organizations increasingly view sustainability through the lens of long-term value creation and resilience. The discussion examined how leaders can balance short-term business pressures with broader economic, environmental, and social impacts.

The panel emphasized that sustainable leadership requires a long-term perspective and a willingness to integrate responsibility into core business decision-making rather than treating it as a separate agenda.

Women in Leadership

The event's central theme focused on women in leadership and the progress that has been achieved in recent years.

Susanna Siira introduced the Gaia Network, a Finnish network of experienced executives, board professionals, and business leaders dedicated to strengthening female leadership and increasing the representation of women in executive and board positions. Drawing on her experience as Chair of the Board of Gaia Network, she highlighted the importance of professional networks, peer support, and lifelong learning in helping women advance into leadership roles and contribute to business and societal development.

Panelists reflected on the positive developments that make them optimistic about the future, while also acknowledging the challenges that remain. Rather than focusing solely on barriers, the discussion highlighted successful approaches to supporting female talent, increasing representation in leadership roles, and creating pathways for advancement.

Topics included mentorship, sponsorship, leadership visibility, organizational culture, and the importance of role models. Participants exchanged views on common misconceptions surrounding female leadership and shared examples of how organizations can create more equitable opportunities for career progression.

As a symbolic conclusion to the event, Susanna Siira presented a gift from the Gaia Network. In recognition of the inspiring discussion, Gaia Network had made a donation through the **Finnish Women's Bank (Naisten Pankki)**, supporting a training program for one woman to help her secure an independent livelihood. The gesture reflected the network's commitment to advancing not only women in leadership, but also women's economic empowerment and long-term self-sufficiency.

Engaged Audience and Networking

The panel was followed by an interactive Q&A session, which generated thoughtful discussion among participants and further expanded on topics such as leadership development, organizational transformation, female representation in business, and international cooperation.

The event concluded with a networking session, providing attendees with an opportunity to continue the conversation, establish new contacts, and explore future partnerships between Czech and Finnish organizations.

Strengthening Czech-Finnish Connections

The discussion demonstrated that leadership, innovation, talent development, sustainability, and diversity are deeply interconnected drivers of long-term business success. At the same time, it highlighted the strong alignment between Czech and Finnish business communities and the significant potential for future collaboration.

The discussion resonated strongly with both the audience and the speakers, who agreed that the topics raised during the event deserve continued attention and cooperation of all engaged networks across borders and sectors. Encouraged by the quality of the exchange and the strong alignment of values and interests, participants expressed a shared interest in staying connected, deepening cooperation, and building on the relationships established in Helsinki. Several ideas for future collaboration, knowledge-sharing activities, and joint initiatives were already emerging during the networking session, demonstrating the event's potential to create lasting impact beyond a single gathering.

The Nordic Chamber of Commerce in the Czech Republic extends its sincere thanks to all speakers, participants, partners, YIT Czechia for its support of the event, and the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Helsinki for contributing to an inspiring and forward-looking discussion on leadership, innovation, and the future of work.

About

The [Nordic Chamber of Commerce in the Czech Republic](#) is a business platform connecting companies, institutions, and professionals with ties to Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Through business events, high-level discussions, expert seminars, networking activities, trade promotion, and cross-border cooperation initiatives, the Chamber supports the exchange of knowledge and best practices between Nordic and Czech organizations. Bringing together both multinational corporations and local entrepreneurs, it serves as a bridge between the Nordic and Czech business communities, fostering international cooperation, responsible leadership, innovation, competitiveness, and sustainable economic growth.

[Inspire & Impact Network \(IIN\)](#) is a Czech community and leadership platform that connects women across business, public administration, academia, entrepreneurship, and the non-profit sector. Founded by a group of leading Czech executives and entrepreneurs, IIN aims to strengthen women's leadership, support equal opportunities, promote financial independence, and contribute to positive societal change through education, mentoring, networking, and advocacy initiatives. Today, the network brings together more than 550 active women and offers a wide range of development opportunities, including leadership academies, mentoring programmes, expert communities, and thematic working groups focused on areas such as modern labour markets, financial literacy, and women's leadership.

The [Gaia Network](#) is a Finnish network of experienced executives, board professionals, entrepreneurs, and experts committed to strengthening women's leadership and increasing female representation in decision-making roles. Through professional networking, peer learning, mentoring, and board development, the network supports women in advancing their careers and expanding their impact across business and society. Led by accomplished leaders from diverse industries, Gaia Network promotes responsible leadership, lifelong learning, and the active participation of women in shaping the future of organizations and communities.

The event is organized in partnership with [YIT Czechia](#), a leading residential developer and part of the YIT Group—the largest construction and development company in Finland. It focuses on building homes for high-quality living, as well as buildings, public spaces, and infrastructure that support thriving communities and the essential functions of society. The company operates in seven European countries—Finland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—and employs approximately 4,100 professionals. In 2025, the Group's revenue reached nearly EUR 1.8 billion, and YIT Corporation's shares are listed on the Nasdaq Helsinki stock exchange. In the Czech Republic, YIT Czechia has been developing and selling its own residential projects since 2008, focusing on attractive locations in Prague, Brno and Kladno, with emphasis on civic amenities, easy access to the city centre, and proximity to nature.



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