SANS | Cyber Programs
Europe & The Middle East



SANS x ReDI School Fast Track Cybersecurity Training Program Impact Evaluation

Program Purpose & Vision

Mission Statement

To empower migrant and underrepresented women in Denmark by providing free access to world-class cybersecurity training, hands-on practical labs, and globally recognised GIAC certifications. Delivered in collaboration with the SANS Institute and supported by the Danish Industry Foundation, the program equips participants with the technical skills, industry knowledge, and professional networks required to launch high-impact careers in cybersecurity.

Importantly, participants undertake this intensive training in a second language while also navigating the broader challenges of resettlement and integration. By fostering confidence, competence, and community in such circumstances, the program not only transforms individual trajectories but also contributes to closing the cyber talent gap in Denmark.



Problem Addressed

Denmark consistently ranks among the world's most digitally advanced countries, with over 5.9% of its population employed in ICT roles, well above the EU average. Yet women account for just 22.6% of ICT specialists, revealing a significant and persistent gender gap in the digital economy. At the same time, Danish businesses are struggling to fill cybersecurity roles in a rapidly growing threat landscape. The national shortage of qualified professionals, particularly within small and medium-sized enterprises, leaves organisations increasingly vulnerable to cyberattacks.

This creates a mismatch between Denmark's digital maturity and the availability of cybersecurity talent.

The Fast Track Cybersecurity Training Program responds to these dual challenges by creating a dedicated pathway for women from migrant and underrepresented backgrounds to enter the cybersecurity workforce. By recognising and addressing the additional barriers these women face, including studying in a new language while managing family, employment, or settlement responsibilities, the program lowers traditional barriers to entry such as cost, prior experience, industry access through subsidised training, inclusive pedagogy, and integrated career support. It also helps organisations tap into an underutilised talent pool, promoting both equity and resilience in Denmark's digital infrastructure.



Strategic Goal

The Fast Track Cybersecurity Training Program has a dual mission:

1. Strengthen Denmark's cybersecurity workforce by rapidly increasing the number of skilled, certified professionals.
2. Advance inclusion by empowering women from migrant and underrepresented backgrounds who have historically been excluded from ICT.

Through intensive training and direct career links, the program not only diversifies the field but also showcases the long-term value of inclusive talent development. Success is measured in certifications and employment outcomes, as well as in building a more equitable and resilient digital ecosystem.

Program Partners

SANS | GIAC CERTIFICATIONS

SANS Institute

Global leader in cybersecurity training, certification, and research. Provides hands-on courses, GIAC certifications, and community resources that strengthen security worldwide.

ReDI School of Digital Integration

ReDI School of Digital Integration

Non-profit tech school offering free digital skills education for refugees, migrants, and underserved groups. Its mission is to empower students with IT and coding skills to improve job opportunities and integration.

INDUSTRIENS FOND

Industriens Fond (The Danish Industry Foundation)

Philanthropic foundation dedicated to boosting the competitiveness of Danish businesses. Supports projects in innovation, digital transformation, sustainability, and international growth.

IDA

IDA (The Danish Society of Engineers)

Professional association for engineers, IT specialists, and technical professionals in Denmark. Provides career development, networking, and advocacy, while contributing to national debates on technology and society.

Our Fast Track Cybersecurity Trainin

February 2024

Cohort 1:
Information Event

February - March 2024

Cohort 1:
Recruitment and Assessment

April 2024

Cohort 1 Start:
35x Onboarded

April - June 20

Cohort
Study Per
21x SEC275 & 9



Decemeber

Cohort
Graduati
32x Trained | 13

November 2024

Cohort 3:
Information Event

December 24 - January 25

Cohort 3:
Recruitment and Assessment



March 2025

Cohort 3 Start:
32x Onboarded

March-May 2025

Cohort 3:
Study Period
21x SEC275 & 6x SEC401



June 2025

Cohort 3:
Graduation
27x Trained | 12x Certified

May 2025

Cohort 4:
Information Event

May - August 2

Cohort
Recruitmer
Assessm

ng Journey



June 2024

Cohort 1:
Graduation
30x Trained | 9x Certified

June 2024

Cohort 2:
Information Event

June - August 2024

Cohort 2:
Recruitment and Assessment

September 2024

Cohort 2 Start:
35x Onboarded



September 2024

SANS Copenhagen Community Event

September - November 2024

Cohort 2:
Study Period
23x SEC275 & 9x SEC401

r 2024

2:
on
x Certified

September 2025

Cohort 4 Start:
30x Onboarded

September - November 2025

Cohort 4:
Study Period
24x SEC275 & 5x SEC401



Decemeber 2025

Cohort 4:
Graduation
29x Trained | 17x Certified

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2025
4:
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Cohort 1

Introduction

The first cohort of the Fast Track Cybersecurity Training Program marked the launch of this pioneering initiative to empower migrant and underrepresented women in Denmark with globally recognised cybersecurity skills. Delivered in partnership with the ReDI School of Digital Integration, the program combined world-class SANS training with structured community support to set the foundations for long-term impact.

Candidate Pool & Selection

- Recruitment was targeted at ReDI School's student base of migrant and minority women.
- 46 students attended the initial information session, and 51 completed the SANS CyberTalent Enhanced (CTE) assessment, which tested both aptitude and existing skills.
- Placement was determined by CTE results and background: students with limited IT knowledge joined the Foundational track, while those with stronger experience or aptitude were considered for the Technical track.

Training Approach

- Training ran over 8 weeks, delivered virtually to ensure accessibility.
- Two parallel tracks were offered:
  - Foundational (SEC275 – GFACT): building IT and cybersecurity fundamentals through hands-on labs.
  - Technical (SEC401 – GSEC): providing advanced skills in defensive strategies, cloud, and endpoint security.
- Learning was supported by dedicated Slack channels, Subject Matter Experts, and fortnightly sessions on exam preparation and indexing.

30 Students Trained

9 Students Certified



April – June 2024

Program Objectives & Outcomes

- Objectives: at least 70% completion on the Foundational track and 80% on the Technical track.
- Outcomes:
  - 84% of Foundational participants completed their training.
  - 90% of Technical participants completed their training.
  - 100% of participants were women from ethnic minority backgrounds, directly advancing inclusion in Denmark's cyber workforce.

Demographics & Context

All participants were women from ethnic minority and migrant backgrounds, addressing a critical underrepresentation in the Danish cyber workforce.

The program delivered strong demand signals from the community, laying the groundwork for further cohorts.

> "I thought it was for people with the tech background. It was a little daunting but at the end of the 8 weeks I think thanks to the course I found my calling, and this is where I am. Although I couldn't pass the exam. The knowledge I gained was immense. I'm so proud of myself."
>
> Cohort 1 participant



Cohort 2

Introduction

Building on lessons from the pilot, the second cohort refined delivery and expanded engagement opportunities, including in-person industry events. The program continued to focus on bridging the digital gender gap in Denmark, while improving support structures to boost student confidence and outcomes.

Candidate Pool & Selection

- Recruitment again focused on ReDI School's student base, with candidates completing both a written application and the CyberTalent Enhanced (CTE) assessment.
- Selection was based on balancing aptitude, existing skills, and personal capacity to commit. This ensured both fairness and higher chances of success.

Training Approach

- Two tracks offered, delivered virtually via the SANS Foundations and OnDemand platforms.
- Structured support included:
  - Weekly virtual coffee mornings hosted by ReDI School.
  - Regular 1:1 check-ins via Slack with the SANS team.
  - In-person study groups formed in Copenhagen, based on feedback from Cohort 1.
- Students also attended a SANS Copenhagen Community Night, connecting directly with industry professionals and employers.

32 Students Trained

14 Students Certified



September – December 2024

Program Objectives & Outcomes

- Objectives: achieve 70% completion for Foundational students and 80% for Technical students.
- Outcomes:
  - Completion exceeded both targets, 100% in Foundational and 90% in Technical, with overall completion reaching 97%.
  - Certification success improved markedly, with 13 GIAC qualifications achieved, a 44% increase from Cohort 1.
  - Students self-reported a dramatic rise in confidence: average knowledge ratings improved from 1.5 (before) to 3.8 (after) on a 5-point scale.
  - Program satisfaction remained high, with an overall rating of 4.5/5.

Demographics & Context

Participants represented a wide range of migrant and refugee backgrounds, many balancing studies alongside resettlement commitments.

Industry and stakeholder engagement grew, strengthening the pipeline from training to employment.

> "What I enjoyed most about the SANS SEC401 track was how it broke down complex security concepts into clear, practical steps. It gave me hands-on tools I could immediately apply, especially around incident response and network defense."
>
> Cohort 2 participant



Cohort 3

Introduction

Now in its third iteration, the Fast Track Cybersecurity Training Program continued to strengthen pathways for migrant and underrepresented women in Denmark to enter the cybersecurity field. Building on the solid foundations of earlier cohorts, this version focused on consolidating best practices and fostering a strong sense of community among participants.

Candidate Pool & Selection

- Recruitment once more centred on ReDI School's student community, with applicants required to complete both a written submission and the CyberTalent Enhanced (CTE) assessment.
- Selection criteria considered aptitude, prior experience, and personal capacity to engage fully with the program, ensuring fairness and setting students up for success.

Training Approach

- SANS and ReDI School hosted an in person welcome and orientation event to kick-off training in March, helping to build a strong sense of community from the off.
- Two tracks offered, delivered virtually via the SANS Foundations and OnDemand platforms.
- Structured support included:
  - Weekly virtual coffee mornings hosted by ReDI School.
  - Regular 1:1 check-ins via Slack with the SANS team.
  - In-person study groups formed in Copenhagen.

27 Students Trained

12 Students Certified



March – June 2025

Program Objectives & Outcomes

- Objectives: achieve 70% completion for Foundational students and 80% for Technical students.
- Outcomes:
  - Completion exceeded both targets — 81% in Foundational and 100% in Technical, with overall completion reaching 97%.
  - Cohort 3 represented the first time the program received a 100% completion rate for the more challenging Technical Track.
- Students self-reported a dramatic rise in confidence: average knowledge ratings improved from 1.9 (before) to 3.7 (after) on a 5-point scale.
- Program satisfaction remained high, with an overall rating of 4.5/5.

> "The program covers a variety of topics, including programming, which I find very interesting. It's sometimes challenging, but I really like it and have definitely learned a lot."
>
> Cohort 3 participant

Demographics & Context

With two cohorts of alumni behind them, cohort 3 benefited from the strongest sense of community as yet demonstrated by the program.

- Gender: 95% female, 5% preferred not to disclose.
- Age: Majority born between 1978–1990, highlighting a strong cohort of mid-career women retraining.
- Education: 52% held bachelor's degrees, 48% master's degrees.
- Employment status: 81% unemployed at program start, 19% employed.



Cohort 4

Introduction

Cohort 4 continued the strong momentum of previous cohorts, delivering high engagement, strong performance, and some of the best exam results seen to date. Despite a small number of withdrawals due to illness or personal circumstances, the cohort demonstrated exceptional commitment and achievement across both training tracks.

Candidate Pool & Selection

- Recruitment targeted ReDI School's student community of migrant and minority women.
- 30 students were onboarded through a combined written application and aptitude-based screening process.
- Placement was determined by background and skill level, with students joining either the Foundational or Technical Track accordingly.

Training Approach

- Training was delivered across two tracks, offered virtually via the SANS Foundations and OnDemand platforms.
- Structured support included:
  - A program welcome session and guided orientation to set expectations and build early connection.
  - Weekly virtual check-ins hosted by ReDI School.
  - Ongoing 1:1 support and Slack communication with the SANS team.
  - • Opportunities for students to form peer study groups to reinforce learning.

32 Students Trained

18 Students Certified



September - December 2025

Program Objectives & Outcomes

- Objectives: achieve 70% completion for Foundational students and 80% for Technical students.
- Outcomes:
  - 56% of students achieved GIAC certification, with 18 out of 32 passing their exams.
  - Foundational Track: 64% pass rate.
  - Technical Track: 40% pass rate, with both achieving scores above 90% and receiving GIAC Advisory Board invitations.
  - Several standout performances, including eight Foundational students scoring above 90% and one achieving a perfect 100%.
- Students self-reported a significant rise in confidence: average knowledge ratings increased from 2.6 (before) to 4.1 (after) on a 5-point scale.
- Program satisfaction remained exceptionally high, with an overall rating of 4.8/5.
- Overall completion rates: 90% for foundation track, and 100% for technical track.

> "I am really grateful for this opportunity. I've learned a lot throughout the program, and it has made me even more curious to keep learning and hopefully apply what I've learned. Thank you for the support and the high-quality learning environment."
>
> Cohort 4 participant

Demographics & Context

As with earlier cohorts, participants represented diverse migrant and underrepresented backgrounds, many balancing family, integration programs, employment, and study commitments. Feedback emphasised the value of the supportive environment, high-quality content.



Cohort 1 | From Curiosity to Career: Aigerim's Journey into Cybersecurity

When Aigerim Raimbekova learned about the Fast Track Cybersecurity Training, she saw an opportunity to turn her fascination with technology into a clear career path.

"I had always been interested in digital technologies. With how fast IT and AI are developing, the question of keeping information secure has become incredibly important. When I attended the info session and heard from SANS staff and alumni about the depth of knowledge and community you could gain, I knew I wanted to apply."

For Aigerim, being selected for the program felt both exciting and humbling. She knew it would be demanding, but she was eager to challenge herself and gain professional direction. What she didn't expect was just how transformative the experience would be.

"It was an empowering experience for me, as I got to see that I am capable of doing a lot of things I'd never thought I could, like working with the Linux terminal or handling cybersecurity incidents. Because of my participation in the program, I met a lot of wonderful people, including my peer students, SANS and ReDI staff as well as many industry professionals, and got a clearer understanding of what kind of a career I want to build."

Throughout the program, Aigerim explored key cybersecurity concepts, completed practical labs, and learned directly from industry experts. The structure, support, and pace of the training helped her build confidence while developing new technical and analytical skills.

Her favourite part of the course was its hands-on nature.

"The labs were exciting; they made complex concepts real and helped me connect theory to practice. The examples felt authentic and prepared me for real-world scenarios."

Building Confidence and Community

Alongside her technical progress came a deep sense of belonging. Aigerim highlights the friendships and professional relationships that shaped her experience.

"I met so many inspiring individuals, fellow students, SANS and ReDI staff, and professionals from the industry. It made me feel part of a community that truly supports one another."

That community continues to play a vital role in her journey.

"Even though the course has finished, I still keep in touch with my peers. The encouragement and advice I get from this network keep me motivated to pursue my next steps."



A Foundation for the Future

Reflecting on her experience, Aigerim says the training helped her recognise her own potential more clearly.

"As I was improving my technical and professional skills, I gradually built my confidence and got a clear vision of my career ambitions. The knowledge and community I gained have given me a strong foundation to build upon, and I know where I want to go next."

Aigerim's journey reflects the spirit of the SANS x ReDI collaboration: empowering women from diverse backgrounds to gain not only skills and certifications, but also confidence, community, and purpose in a growing industry.

Cohort 2 | Self-Study to a Cybersecurity Career: Agata's Fast-Track Journey

Agata Kolodziej began her journey into cybersecurity with determination and self-discipline. Coming from a non-technical background, she taught herself IT fundamentals before discovering ReDI School of Digital Integration Denmark. When she learned about the Fast Track Cybersecurity Training program, she saw an opportunity to transform her self-study into professional skills and certification.

"I was so happy that the program exists and that I had the chance to apply and be admitted."

Building Knowledge, Confidence, and Belief

From the very beginning, Agata felt the program recognised her potential.

"Personally, it felt like someone believed in me and my potential, and that my dedication and self-discipline were noticed. Professionally, it opened the door to a 'formal' IT and cybersecurity education I would not have had otherwise. SANS is well known and respected worldwide, so being admitted made me feel proud and motivated to give it my best."

She joined the Foundational Track SEC275: Foundations – Computers, Technology and Security, designed to help learners gain practical knowledge of IT systems, networks, and security fundamentals, while preparing for the GIAC Foundational Cybersecurity Technologies (GFACT) certification.

Agata quickly excelled in the structured, hands-on approach.

"The instructor, James Lyne, explained complex concepts in such an approachable and funny way, genuinely infecting me with excitement and passion for cybersecurity."

Her favourite element was the practical labs that brought theory to life.

"Doing things with my own hands, exploring the command line, and seeing the results right away made learning feel exciting and real. And being part of a cohort of women going through the same intense course created solidarity and support that made a big difference."

From Certification to Career

Agata completed the program with exceptional results, achieving an **outstanding 99% in her GFACT certification exam.** She shared her preparation strategies with others, offering guidance and encouragement to new students following in her footsteps.

Soon after, she reached another milestone, securing an internship as a Security Architect at Danske Bank.



"I still can't quite believe that this is happening. This opportunity would not have been possible without ReDI School and all the amazing people involved. Becoming part of this community has been life-changing for me."

Building on her internship experience, Agata deepened her expertise in Cloud Security, IT Architecture, and Risk Assessment and has since progressed into a full-time role in Cyber Security at Danske Bank.

A Supportive Community for the Future

"I met incredible people who, like me, are excited about cybersecurity. I value being part of this community and look forward to learning with and from others, and contributing back."

Agata's story shows how determination, opportunity, and community can turn self-study into success, and ambition into a meaningful cybersecurity career.

Cohort 3 | From Newcomer to Certified Practitioner: Tifana's Story

When Tifana Taftazani joined the Fast Track Cybersecurity Training program, she was stepping into the unknown. With no background in IT or cybersecurity, she took a leap of faith and enrolled in the Foundational Track, designed to help newcomers build core technical knowledge and gain confidence in the field

"I was really worried at first. I had no prior experience in cybersecurity or IT. But the course was so well-structured and accessible. The videos were easy to follow, and the labs were hands-on and fun."

Building Skills and Confidence

The SEC275: Foundations – Computers, Technology and Security course introduced Tifana to the essentials of computing, networking, encryption, and incident response. Developed by industry experts at SANS, the course prepared her for the globally recognised GIAC Foundational Cybersecurity Technologies (GFACT) certification.

Balancing her studies with personal responsibilities, Tifana dedicated herself to the process. She revisited lab exercises, built a detailed index, and completed both practice exams to prepare for certification.

"I took both practice tests seriously and used the feedback to fine-tune my study strategy. It helped me focus on where I needed to improve."

Her persistence paid off. Passing the GFACT certification became a turning point — proof of her capability and determination.

"It was intense, yes, but achievable. Passing the exam gave me a huge confidence boost. It proved that I could really do this."

Hands-On Learning and Community Support

Tifana especially valued the program's practical approach and the strong sense of community that developed throughout the course.

"I liked and really enjoyed all parts of the program; it's a bit difficult to choose one. Maybe the hands-on labs and the community. Hands-on labs gave me a chance to test theoretical knowledge; they also sharpened my practical skills. I also had a chance to meet so many inspiring people in the community."

Through peer study groups and supportive mentors, she built lasting relationships that continued beyond graduation.

"The ReDI and SANS community helped me feel safe and gave me a sense of belonging. I met so many inspiring and wonderful women who support each other, share knowledge and advice, and genuinely want to see one another succeed."



A Career in Cybersecurity

Armed with new skills and renewed confidence, Tifana took the next step in her journey by securing a position as a Junior SOC Analyst. The program not only prepared her technically but also helped her find a clear direction for her future.

"The program sparked my interest and passion for cybersecurity. With the knowledge and certification I gained, I feel more confident and certain that I want to build my career in this industry."

Tifana's story shows how opportunity, structure, and community can empower beginners to transform their potential into achievement and build meaningful careers in cybersecurity.

Cohort 4 | Redefining Success: Oana's Story of Resilience

Many cybersecurity success stories follow a familiar pattern: hard work, a passed exam, and a clear next step forward. But not every journey unfolds that way. Oana-Catalina Mihai's story is about what happens when things do not go to plan, and why that moment can become a turning point rather than an ending. From the outset, Oana was clear that she did not want to write a conventional success story.

"I'm reading previous alumni spotlight stories and they often say things like, 'Passing the exam gave me a huge confidence boost.' People tend to only share success stories that put them in a good light. What I want to talk about instead is my failure story."

Coming into the SANS x ReDI Fast Track Cybersecurity Training, Oana already had a technical background from working as a software developer. As part of the program she first studied SEC275: Foundations – Computers, Technology and Security, passing with a fantastic 81%.

As a result, the concepts in the SEC401 Security Essentials – Network, Endpoint, and Cloud were not unfamiliar, but the pace and depth were intense. She committed fully, studying hard over ten demanding weeks. Despite that effort, the exam result did not go the way she hoped.

"I poured everything into this exam and failed. My brain buffer overflowed. I tried to load SEC401 into my head, and during the exam, instead of accessing data, I overwrote whatever self-esteem variable I had left."

Reframing Failure

The initial impact was heavy. She questioned whether failing meant she simply was not cut out for cybersecurity and seriously considered walking away. But with time and reflection, that interpretation began to shift.

"Failing didn't define me. How I respond to it does."

What followed was a realisation that changed her perspective entirely. She had been treating the journey as a solitary struggle, when in reality, cybersecurity careers are built collectively.

"I thought this was a one-woman battle, when in fact it's a team effort. Breaking into a male-dominated field, finding that first job, even surviving in cybersecurity, it's not a solo mission. You need an army."

Strength in Community

Without fully recognising it at first, she already had one. She was a student on the SANS x ReDI Fast Track Cybersecurity Training program, surrounded by peers, mentors, and program leaders who understood both the technical and emotional challenges of the field. Opening up about vulnerability did not weaken her position. Instead, it connected her more deeply to the people around her and gave her the strength to keep going. What initially felt like a setback became a deliberate rebuilding phase. New opportunities emerged, including her selection for a full scholarship to represent Denmark at the WiCyS 2026 Conference in Washington, DC, recognising not just technical ability, but resilience and growth.



Looking back, Oana no longer sees the exam result as a loss. She gained knowledge, a strong network, and the confidence to keep going. Her experience shows why programs like this matter: cybersecurity serves everyone, and diversity strengthens how we respond to evolving threats. Failure is not a verdict on potential, but a moment to lean on others, recalibrate, and move forward together.

Stakeholder Reflections



"I believe one of the major challenges in the cybersecurity workforce today is helping small and medium-sized enterprises understand the strategic value of cybersecurity. It's not just about technical protection, it's also about recognizing cybersecurity as a potential competitive advantage. Addressing this requires a holistic approach that includes everyone from top management to employees, customers, and suppliers.

There is also a clear need for educational programs that embrace this broader perspective. We need professionals who can drive the cybersecurity agenda within organizations, individuals who not only possess technical expertise, but who can also leverage both public and private initiatives to strengthen a company's overall cybersecurity.

I believe this program contributes significantly to that goal, as it brings together participants from diverse educational backgrounds and helps activate a broader set of competencies essential for advancing cybersecurity in a modern organizational context."

Nadika Bulathsinhala
Project Manager, Industriens Fond

INDUSTRIENS FOND



"Throughout the program, I've seen participants move from uncertainty to confidence, learning not only cybersecurity fundamentals but also how to think, speak, and position themselves as professionals in the field. They've developed structure in their learning, resilience in the face of complex material, and a clearer sense of where they want to go next.

Personally, the growth has often been even more powerful. Many participants joined the program at a point of transition, unsure of their direction, but over time, I've seen them build confidence and stay engaged even when the path has become challenging.

What stands out most is that there is no single "success story." Some participants have already entered cyber or tech roles, while others are still exploring, pausing, or reshaping their paths due to life circumstances. Yet across all these journeys, there is a shared sense of courage, persistence, and community.

The program doesn't just create skills; it creates the confidence to keep moving forward, whatever the next step may be."

Anne Marie Berså
Partnership Lead ReDI School Denmark

ReDI School of Digital Integration



"By combining flexible, online, coached cybersecurity training with on-site facilitated community and company matchmaking events, the program removed key participation barriers for women with migrant backgrounds and created motivation to enter the cybersecurity workforce"

Sofie Rasmussen
Head of Fast Track - Cyber Security Skills, IDA



"When I'm asked why it's so important to invest in inclusive, fast-track initiatives for underrepresented groups in tech, I tend to look at the answer on three levels: risk, fairness, and return. What we've seen in practice, across the last four cohorts of this programme, is that the cyber threat landscape is moving far faster than traditional education and hiring can keep up with.

If we rely solely on three-year degrees and conventional talent pipelines, we will never close the skills gap. Fast-track initiatives that focus on practical skills and recognised certifications gives employers access to capable, ready-to-deploy talent much more quickly, directly affecting our ability to keep organisations and societies secure.

From an inclusion and opportunity standpoint, underrepresented groups in tech, including women with lived experience of migration and displacement, face barriers at almost every step: their qualifications may not be recognised, they may lack professional networks in a new country, they're more exposed to bias in hiring, and they're often juggling caring responsibilities or financial pressure. If we don't deliberately design pathways that work for them, we shouldn't be surprised when the industry continues to draw from the same narrow pool. Inclusive fast-track programs counter that by lowering barriers, building confidence, and providing credentials that employers actually understand and trust.

Finally, there's the economic and societal return. When people who are under-employed or excluded from the labour market move into high-value, future-proof roles in cybersecurity, everyone wins. We fill genuine skills gaps, increase economic participation, support social mobility and integration, and build teams that better reflect the societies they serve. For me, investment in programmes like this isn't charity or a side project. It's a strategic choice: to strengthen the cybersecurity workforce, enhance innovation and resilience through diversity, and ensure the people protecting our systems are as broad and representative as the communities they defend."

Steve Jones
Head of Programs, EMEA, SANS

Challenges and Solutions

Factors Influencing Success

The program has achieved strong completion results through structured delivery, targeted support, and strong community links. Several factors have consistently shaped participant success and guided program improvements.

Program Design and Pacing

- Extending the schedule from 8 to 10 weeks created a more balanced rhythm for learners managing study alongside work and family.
- The revised structure provided space for revision and reflection, contributing to a 97% completion rate.

Supportive Learning Environment

- Weekly coffee mornings and 1:1 Slack check-ins maintained motivation and allowed early intervention when challenges arose.
- These touchpoints built accountability and confidence, particularly for students studying in a second language.

Peer and Community Learning

- In-person study groups complemented online learning, encouraging collaboration and shared problem-solving.
- These peer networks reduced isolation and strengthened commitment and understanding across the cohort.

Study Skills and Exam Readiness

- Held “How to Index”, “How to Use Your Practice Exam” and “How to Prepare for Your GIAC Exam” workshops, which helped students prepare for open-book GIAC exams with better structure and strategy.
- Clearer study guidance improved exam confidence and performance.

Addressing the Challenges

While outcomes have been consistently positive, the program has evolved to address challenges around intensity, learner diversity, and support capacity. Continuous adaptation has ensured a high-quality, inclusive experience.

Managing Program Intensity

- The original eight-week schedule was demanding for participants balancing multiple commitments.
- Extending to ten weeks eased pressure and improved preparation time for exams.

Tailoring Student Support

- Enhanced communication through coffee mornings, Slack, and individual check-ins improved visibility of progress and enabled faster support.

Refining Candidate Selection

- The application process now considers other commitments such as language courses and integration programs to ensure realistic participation.

Evolving Study Guidance

- Feedback led to more practical indexing and exam preparation resources introduced earlier in the course.

Strengthening Real-World Integration

- Continued collaboration with employers and community partners connects training with career opportunities, reinforcing motivation and long-term impact.

Conclusion



Strong exam performance with over half of certified students passing their exams with over 80%



GIAC-advisory board invitation for a student on our Technical Track



Strong sense of community with returning alumni continuing their training



Multiple students in cybersecurity internships

Across four cohorts, the SANS x ReDI Fast Track Cybersecurity Training Program has shown that addressing cybersecurity skills shortages and advancing inclusion are not separate challenges, but shared responsibilities best tackled through collaboration. The program's impact has been driven not by any single organisation, but by the combined strengths of industry, education, civil society, and professional networks working toward a common goal.

By bringing together world-class technical training from SANS, ReDI School's deep expertise in integration and community-based education, support from funders such as Industriens Fond, and engagement from employers and professional bodies, including IDA. The program demonstrates the power of cross-industry partnerships to unlock talent that traditional pathways often overlook. This collaborative model has enabled high standards to be maintained while removing structural barriers for women from migrant and underrepresented backgrounds.

The experience of the Fast Track program highlights several key lessons. Cohort-based learning and peer support significantly strengthen persistence and confidence. Flexible, well-paced delivery and early study-skills support are essential in intensive training environments. Most importantly, sustained collaboration between training providers, employers, and community organisations creates clearer pathways from learning into meaningful employment and long-term professional growth.

As demand for cybersecurity talent continues to accelerate, no single sector can solve this challenge alone. The success of the SANS x ReDI collaboration provides a tested, scalable model for how industry, educators, funders, and employers can work together to build a more resilient, diverse, and future-ready cybersecurity workforce.

The call to action is clear: continued investment in cross-industry, inclusive fast-track initiatives is needed to sustain and scale this impact. By strengthening partnerships, expanding employer engagement, and replicating this model in new contexts, stakeholders across the ecosystem can play an active role in closing the cybersecurity skills gap while ensuring the workforce protecting our digital infrastructure reflects the societies it serves.

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