

Work–Life Balance innovation at Deutsche Telekom AG



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Supporting work–life balance and addressing women’s underrepresentation in the labour market: approaches and good practices in the ICT sector

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As one of the largest corporations in Germany, Deutsche Telekom AG was one of the first companies to integrate into its rules of governance the 2012 Family Care Leave Act (*Familienpflegezeitgesetz, FPfZG*), and the first DAX 30 (publicly traded) company to adopt a voluntary 30% quota for the supervisory Board and senior positions.

Deutsche Telekom develops projects and initiatives either independently or in cooperation with NGOs, state institutions and universities, and implements processes within its own company structures that guarantee balance in terms of both gender equality and family and professional life. Projects and initiatives might have a dual goal, as in the Careers with Children mentoring programme project and the Stay in Contact network, or a single-policy focus, like pilot project the Family Manager, a work–life balance project, the Frauen Mint awards for women and girls studying ICT, and the former JUMP in MINT, a mentoring programme for Year 10 girls that promotes increased representation of women in the ICT industry.

What proved to be a really efficient strategy at Deutsche Telekom, was to focus on policy areas on implementing work-life balance strategies and develop partnerships with other organisations to make the sector overall more attractive for women at the same time. Trends show that care for elderly and sick family members and children is increasingly becoming a male as well as a female responsibility. Concrete work–life balance measures and provisions like lifetime work accounts or a flexible working model contributed to policy, which reflects tangible needs among employees of either gender.

Country information – policy in context

While the number of young women studying informatics/computer science at universities in Germany is growing – comprising 24.6% of participants in 2015, up from 19.4% in 2000 – it remains insufficient.

In order to increase the numbers of women and girls in STEM in Germany, numerous initiatives have been undertaken at the federal level – including a nationwide mentoring network that promotes women’s participation in STEM, Komm mach MINT – and at regional and local levels. Universities and companies now offer open days, workshops, summer courses and other initiatives for schoolgirls, introducing computer science studies and professions, and possibilities for career development in ICT, such as TasteMINT – Probieren von dem Studieren or GO4IT! Mädchen machen Informatik.

Notably, in response to the dearth of women employed in ICT, many business enterprises participate in local- and federal-level initiatives, or develop their own, purposely to recruit more women.

The German approach to policy on gender equality is best highlighted by a series of legislative changes. In 2015, a law was adopted on equal representation of women and men in leadership positions (*Gesetz für die gleichberechtigte Teilhabe von Frauen und Männern an Führungspositionen*) which requires a 30% quota of women in the boardrooms of listed companies with more than 2000 employees. In 2017, a law was passed on salary transparency (*Gesetz zur Förderung der Transparenz von Entgeltstrukturen*) which aims to guarantee parity of income for women and men doing equivalent jobs. In 2015, a law was adopted that was designed to enhance reconciliation of family and professional life (*Gesetz zur besseren Vereinbarkeit von Familie, Pflege und Beruf*) under which all employees have the right to reduce their working hours or temporarily suspend their paid duties to care for a disabled adult relative or small child. In 2015, Germany introduced Parental Allowance Plus, providing options for flexible leave for both parents; for example, the amount of time off that can be taken can even be doubled, if either parent returns to work part-time during a period of parental leave; or if both parents return simultaneously and work for between 25 and 30 hours per week, they receive the Partnership Bonus, which extends parental leave by up to four months.

Introducing work–life balance measures: good practice

Deutsche Telekom is one of the world's leading integrated telecommunications companies, with more than 165 million mobile customers globally, 28.5 million fixed-network lines and 18.5 million broadband lines.

Established in 1995, Deutsche Telekom is now present in more than 50 countries with more than 200.000 employees worldwide. It generated a revenue of 73.1 billion EUR in 2016 – some 66% of this outside Germany.

In 2009, Deutsche Telekom initiated its [work-life@telekom](#) programme, aimed at improving opportunities for professional–personal life reconciliation of company employees. To date, in order to achieve the goals of its work–life balance policy, the company has implemented the following measures:

- Remote-working options – To be able to better coordinate their professional and private lives, employees are free to work from home or on the move. With their manager's permission, employees whose position allows for flexibility can work from a suitable location of their choice.
- Provision for childcare – Deutsche Telekom provides day care for its employees' children at some locations.

- Parents' network – the `Väternetzwerk' network provides practical advice on balancing career and family, as well as contact information and discussion forums.
- Children's holiday programme – organizing holiday activities for employees' children
- Family holiday offers
- Youth exchange programmes
- Free emergency childcare
- Free help to find local childcare facilities
- Advisory and placement services for employees with elderly family members who need care
- Leave of absence for family emergencies

Deutsche Telekom's flexible-working model offers a range of options from flexi-time and part-time working to 'lifetime work accounts'. With a voluntary commitment in 2011 to providing part-time hours for managers, Deutsche Telekom is explicitly promoting work-life balance and facilitating its integration into the everyday working life of both women and men. The company has made a similar voluntary commitment towards those employed under collective agreements, and civil servants.

Job sharing, where two or more employees share one position is among Deutsche Telekom's many other part-time regulations to reduce working hours. This can be implemented using either a job-splitting model, in which each employee is responsible for different tasks, or via job sharing, where employees share responsibility for a single area. Other part-time models are structured for specific target groups. Since 2011, for example, single parents up to the age of 25 have had the opportunity to complete a course or training programme part-time, as part of a collaboration with the German Federal Employment Agency.

To encourage employees to make a switch, in 2013, the company laid out the conditions for a guaranteed return to a full-time position for any employee wishing to go part-time. These conditions allow employees to return to their original weekly hours (generally full-time) having given three months' notice, regardless of current operational needs.

Deutsche Telekom created the Stay in Contact network in 2010 with a view to maintaining a gender-representative quota on leadership positions. The network provides employees with support during parental leave by encouraging frequent contact, making it easier for parents to return to their job. The goal is to keep those on parental leave informed about the latest developments in the company via phone conferences (every six weeks) and informative materials sent by email. These measures facilitate a smooth transition back to work. Network members discuss the work–life balance issues of most concern to participants. Another goal of the network is to retain trained qualified employees.

Initiated in July 2015, the Family Manager pilot project provides points of contact, including a telephone hotline, offering employees personal advice on all kinds of work–family reconciliation issues. The project was scheduled to run for an initial 12 months and made available in the Bavaria region. Within a year, 200 personnel had contacted a family manager for advice. Monthly seminars in the Munich and Nuremberg offices attracted 500 participants. More than 40% of those who contacted the Family Manager were men, many of them in senior positions. As well as issues around childcare, there has been an upward trend in expressed needs for advice on care for elderly and disabled family members.

Starting in 2011 Deutsche Telekom ran a mentoring programme “Careers with Children” which was aimed at female and male managers and managerial trainees before, during and after parental leave. Under the auspices of the project, experienced managers support young mothers and fathers as mentors through the complexities of the parental leave period. They offer advice on ongoing career development, enhancing mentees’ career potential, and reconciling this with family life. Mentoring is reinforced by launch and closing events as well as seminars for reflection and specific training for the mentees, for example on compatibility, or managing in flexible work models. This programme is special in that it combines measures for individual support with instruments for cultural change.

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