

How to attract women to the workplace and keep them there?



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

The Kapsch Group is a worldwide operating company with headquarters in Austria. Within the scope of its good-employer policy, the company offers employees a number of measures to help reconcile their professional and personal life such as flexible working hours, remote or part-time working and a ‘family room’.

A number of activities are organised to ensure employees of either gender who are on parental leave can stay in the company, and to make their return to work easier. With initiatives targeting men as well as women, company figures show that both genders benefit from work–life balance to same extent.

Having implemented effective work–life balance initiatives, the Kapsch Group can now share the experience of mutual support and empowerment among employee families.

Country information – policy in context

There are a number of initiatives in Austria at secondary-school level, in higher education and in professional development that aim to increase the number of women studying informatics / computer sciences, engineering and other technical specialties (Girl's Day, Meine Technik, MINT Unterricht, FIT – Frauen in der Technik, MINT – Fächer in Theorie und Praxis). Some are run entirely or supported by ministries, including the Federal Ministry for Education and the Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy.

The goals of the initiatives, which include online platforms and web portals, are to raise interest in STEM and related professions among girls and young women, apply a gender-sensitive approach in education and training, identify good practices in the field, and organise related events.

While overall numbers of students enrolled in computer sciences are increasing, the number of girls and young women enrolling remains low and is not growing, despite the many initiatives under way for girls and young women. The following have been identified as some of the main reasons for this stagnation:

- The low numbers of girls in secondary schools specialising in sciences and IT
- Lack of awareness of the opportunities afforded by a university education in ICT
- Limited opportunities for female graduates entering the labour market
- Gender pay gap in this sector

Gender equality in Austria is largely regulated by the 1979 law of equal opportunities (Gleichstellungsgesetz), with a number of amendments according to state policy in the field. The law guarantees equal treatment for all and prohibits any kind of discrimination based on gender, religion, ideology, age, sexual orientation or ethnic origin. It covers the labour market, access to goods and services, and measures for transparency in payment.

According to Austrian legislation, parental leave is between two months and two years, and can be divided between parents. During parental leave and until their child's seventh birthday, parents have the right to work part-time, with a minimal workload; and after the period of parental leave, they can reduce their working hours by 20%. Both parents have the right to work part-time simultaneously to raise a child. Since 2014, employees have enjoyed the right to take an unpaid leave or work part-time in order to care for a disabled or elderly relative or a child with a serious health condition. Both options are temporary and limited to a period of three months. It is possible for a number of relatives who are caring for the same person to use this measure, but for no longer than six months per patient.

Introducing work–life balance measures: good practice

With its key entities Kapsch TrafficCom, Kapsch CarrierCom, Kapsch BusinessCom and Kapsch PublicTransportCom, the Kapsch Group brings together three branches of business: mobility solutions, communications services and automation solutions. Listed on the prime market of the Vienna stock exchange, Kapsch Group has 100 subsidiaries and branch offices in 49 countries on six continents worldwide, and employs more than 7000 people.

A family-owned Austrian company with its head office in Vienna, the Kapsch Group has been developing customer-oriented solutions for more than 125 years and throughout that time has maintained sensitivity for meeting the needs and demands of each respective era.

Kapsch Group has developed specific measures for women within the scope of its diversity policy in response to the continuing low female representation (25%) in the company. The [Women@Kapsch](#) initiative, for example, rolled out between 2011 and 2012, has two parallel objectives: recruiting and retaining female professionals to the company, and promoting increased representation of women in the sector as a whole. Under the retention measures, and with the aim of improving women's qualifications and supporting their career development within the company, the company organises a number of events such as speed meeting for women and women's breakfast meetings. To encourage more women to take part in the [Women@Kapsch](#) initiative, the company organises an annual conference to discuss the status of the programme and its activities, and questions around related topics of interest.

Due to the relatively low numbers of women in this sector of the economy, Kapsch Group cooperates with universities and educational institutions in a number of initiatives, which aim to drive up the number of women in the field and recruit young female talent into the company.

It is the experience of the Kapsch Group that life balance measures are used largely by women, but the number of men benefiting from them is growing. These measures aim to retain employees, giving them the opportunity to reconcile their professional life with their personal life. In order to increase overall female representation and improve opportunities for career development, single-sex, women-orientated measures are needed such as improving women's working environment, and supporting and recruiting future young female professionals of school or university age.

Having implemented effective life balance initiatives, the Kapsch Group can now share the experience of mutual support and empowerment among employee families. The company offers its employees different options to reconcile their professional and private lives, including flexible working hours, remote working up to six working days per month, a variety of retirement models, and part-time working. In 2014, the company introduced the 'family room', a specially arranged space that gives parents the opportunity to bring their children into the workplace if their usual childcare options are unavailable. The company named its work-life balance measures 'Life Balance' – life in the workplace.

Women make up around 25% of Kapsch Group's 7,000-strong workforce, and that proportion changes from year to year – i.e. when a new enterprise with predominantly male personnel enters the group, the overall female quota drops. Men still predominate in the Group's separate enterprises, and indeed throughout the field. While in numeric terms, more men than women currently benefit from the available work-life balance measures, the percentages of women and men who take advantage of them are almost the same.

In order to boost female representation and help women to remain in the company, Kapsch Group launched an initiative in 2011–2012 in which strategic and operational women's groups combine to attract competent women and orient them towards interesting career opportunities. The focus is on exchange of knowledge and experience, networking and breaking down barriers. A committee for equality was established to ensure general gender equality. All women employed by the company were invited to participate in the initiative and its events and activities. These include the following:

Speed-meeting for women – Newly recruited women have the opportunity to meet in person, in just a half a day, about 10 other sister professionals and women in leadership positions in the company. The idea is to give these newly appointed young employees the chance to create their own network almost instantly, getting to know potential contacts who can offer information, support or collaboration.

Women's breakfast – These breakfast meetings represent an early morning opportunity to establish and maintain a strong network of women professionals in an environment created for exchanging experience and knowledge. Men in senior positions may be invited also to share experiences and establish new contacts.

Women's conference – This annual event brings women at Kapsch Group together to discuss tangible measures to increase female representation in the company, reconcile professional and personal life, and explore together other areas of concern for women. A key goal is to empower women to take responsibility and develop their own initiatives. External guests are sometimes also invited to add to the discussion.

Breakfast for parents – The goal here is help employees who are on parental leave to stay in contact with the company and their colleagues and make their return back the job as seamless as possible. The group now includes fathers as well as mothers, and its numbers are growing.

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Further information

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