

Gender Equality Plan 2025 - 2029

Public

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1. Diversity and Gender Equality work at DFKI

1.1 Diversity and Gender Equality Office

The Diversity & Gender Equality Office of DFKI is an independent organisational unit with which has on average 12 members. The membership comes from different facilities and professions, and is also varied in terms of educational levels, nationality, age and gender. It is dedicated to diversity issues, with the aim of strengthening diversity and equality at all levels of DFKI – both within the organisation and within research. This includes the continuous development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the work to promote gender equality.

The Diversity & Gender Equality Office's mandate is endorsed by the managing directors of the organisation. Furthermore, the management provides the resources required for the design and implementation of diversity-related measures. The office reports directly to the top management. In addition, the office informs about and engages the entire staff in activities to ensure awareness. It works according to their needs and builds a strong network of stakeholders.

The Diversity & Gender Equality Office works closely with the Complaints Office, Work Council, the Representative for People with Severe Health Conditions or Impairments, and the Inclusion Officer, as well as the Ethics Team.

1.2 Relevant Characteristics of the German Research Center for Artificial Intelligence

The German Research Center for Artificial Intelligence (Deutsches Forschungszentrum für Künstliche Intelligenz GmbH – DFKI) was founded in 1988 as a non-profit public-private partnership. It has facilities in Kaiserslautern, Saarbrücken, Bremen, Berlin, Niedersachsen, Lübeck, Darmstadt and Trier. In the field of innovative commercial software technology using artificial intelligence, DFKI is the leading research centre in Germany.

Based on application oriented basic research, DFKI develops product functions, prototypes and patentable solutions in the field of information and communication technology. Research and development projects are conducted in 29 research departments, ten competence centres and eight living labs. Funding is received from government agencies like the European Union, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi), the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV), the German Federal States, the German Research Foundation (DFG), as well as from cooperation with industrial partners. Twice a year, a committee of internationally renowned experts (the Scientific Advisory Board) audits the progress and results of state-funded projects.

Apart from the state governments of Rhineland-Palatinate, Saarland and Bremen, numerous renowned German and international high-tech companies from a wide range of industrial sectors are represented on the DFKI supervisory board. The DFKI model of a non-profit public-private partnership (PPP) is nationally and internationally considered a blueprint for corporate structure in the field of top-level research.

DFKI is actively involved in numerous organisations representing and continuously advancing Germany as an excellent location for cutting-edge research and technology. Far beyond the country's borders DFKI enjoys an excellent reputation for its academic training of young scientists. The number of projects, employees, nationalities represented, staff members who have been appointed professors at universities in Germany and abroad, can be found on the DFKI website¹.

DFKI is committed to promoting diversity and equality in all its operations. This is anchored in DFKI's mission statement².

¹ <https://dfki.de/en/web/about-us/dfki-at-a-glance/company-profile>

² <https://www.dfki.de/en/web/about-us/dfki-at-a-glance/mission-statement>

2. Status Quo

To provide an independent, in-depth analysis, a survey of the current state of diversity and gender equality was conducted between September and December 2021 by experts from Fe:male Leadership Development³. The survey comprised a quantitative analysis and qualitative methods. While the statistics provide an insight into the hard facts, the interviews with numerous employees provided a comprehensive picture of the organisational culture.

In the past, the gender distribution at DFKI has not been actively monitored. According to retroactive estimations and current data, it becomes apparent that, with 30% among the staff as a whole and 20% among the scientific staff, women are underrepresented. The share of women in management positions is even lower. DFKI thus shows a stereotypical pattern, although it matches the overall graduation rate in STEM⁴ in Germany.

Based on the status quo, DFKI's primary goal is to arrive at a more even gender distribution, and ideally to align the gender distribution within the management and the staff members as a whole. To accomplish this goal, the DFKI aims to:

- Improve gender balance in leadership and decision-making
- Retain and support female talent
- Recruit more women

Since 2022, our action plan focuses on these goals, but at the same time addresses all other aspects of diversity and gender equality for which we believe there is room for improvement in terms of employee satisfaction and attractiveness as an employer.

Following the implementation of our first GEP, we are adapting the action plan in line with the results achieved for the period 2025-2029.

³ <https://female-leadership-development.com>

⁴ The comparison takes into account that about 80% of our scientific positions are in computer science.

3. Gender Equality Action Plan

DFKI's specific measures for 2025–2029 are described in the following under the headings:

- 3.1 Promoting diversity and gender equality
- 3.2 Work-life balance and organisational culture
- 3.3 Gender equality in recruitment and career progression
- 3.4 Gender balance in leadership and decision-making
- 3.5 Integration of the gender dimension into research and teaching
- 3.6 Measures against gender-based violence including sexual harassment

Each section presents a situation report, objectives and measures, including a timetable and information about who is coordinating the work.

| Timeframes | |
|-------------|-----------------|
| Short-term | 2025 |
| Medium-term | 2027 |
| Long-term | 2028 and beyond |

Please note that the various regions impose different (environmental) conditions on the respective DFKI sites. For this reason, numerous responsibilities are decentralised at DFKI, so that in some cases region-specific measures are pursued per facility.

The action plan for equality, and equality itself, affects each employee and is therefore every employee's responsibility. To reach the aims of integration of diversity dimensions – especially gender dimensions – in research, development and management, DFKI employees will be supported by bias, gender equality and female empowerment **trainings** that include sensitisation about their own bias, thought patterns/stereotypes. Target groups are all employees, from top management to beginning researchers, and from department heads and group leaders to clerks and assistants.

Unconscious bias trainings, including gender bias, are mandatory.

3.1 Promoting diversity and gender equality

Situation report – So far, DFKI has conducted both regular and occasional actions for the advancement of women and diversity in general, and actions in this area exist to varying degrees at different site locations. These activities have mostly been driven by individuals and have not been centrally coordinated.

Regarding communications, DFKI strives for gender-sensitive language in technical writing as well as for PR and communication purposes. Texts should be factually correct, understandable, readable as well as compatible for text to speech converters. They should ensure legal certainty and clarity,

and should be transferable to other languages. A guideline is available and its implementation is being coordinated by corporate communications.

Based on this situation report, DFKI strives to implement the following objectives and monitor its success with these measures and indicators.

Objectives

- Boosting DFKI's attractiveness as an employer
- Systematic promotion of diversity and equality throughout the company
- Gender-neutral and diversity-friendly profile internally and externally
- Raising awareness of equality by tackling biases and stereotypical mindsets

New measures (responsibilities; timeframe)

- Consolidation of diversity-promoting and gender equality measures and development of an action plan (Corporate communications, Diversity & Gender Equality Office; short-term)
- Incorporating diversity-specific requirements into the ongoing modernisation of the DFKI website (Corporate communications; short to medium-term)
- Continuous development of communication campaigns with a focus on diversity and gender equality (Corporate communications; continuous)
- Initiating and inspiring gender-related exchange at DFKI (Corporate communications, Diversity & Gender Equality Office; continuous)

Indicators

- Participation and feedback of employees
- Employee satisfaction regarding diversity & gender equality at DFKI

3.2 Work-life balance and organisational culture

Situation report – The DFKI is a family-friendly company and enables a responsible work-life balance. It actively supports the compatibility of family and career as well as the observance of working hours and participation in hobbies. This is made possible through flexible and trust-based working hours, mobile work opportunities, sabbaticals, parental leave arrangements, and the definition of maximum overtime as well as overtime compensation.

DFKI management reacts flexibly to changing circumstances and needs, such as parental leave, temporary reductions of working hours, change of departments, adapting to the coronavirus pandemic, or even during the process of spinning off a new company.

The company offers support in the event of childcare shortages for families with children.

Since 2007 the DFKI in Bremen offers an in-house childcare facility in case the crèche, kindergarten or school is closed. In 2022 this childcare unit moved to a new, larger and even more suitable

facilities including a secure outdoor area at the new building extension. This in-house childcare offer in particular significantly eases the burden on parents when it comes to reconciling work and family life. Children who were looked after there were proud to be near their parents and excited to be in an environment full of next-generation robots.

In Saarbrücken a kindergarten of the Saarland University is located opposite the DFKI and children of DFKI employees are eligible to join. The DFKI site in Kaiserslautern provides a well-equipped parent/child office.

To stay fit and counterbalance intensive work, the DFKI supports memberships at “EGYM Wellpass” and “Urban Sports Club” with high-quality sports and health facilities throughout Germany. In addition, DFKI frequently participates in cross-company sporting events, such as corporate challenges or team sports.

DFKI has been multinational from the very beginning. Our employees from more than 76 countries shape the organisational culture through a wealth of facets, languages, mentalities and cultures. Working in diverse, transnational and multidisciplinary teams is a matter of course for our employees and is part of their daily lives. The survey results as well as the low number and mild nature of complaints reflect DFKI’s positive culture of interpersonal interaction.

Based on this situation report, DFKI strives to implement the following objectives and monitor its success with these measures and indicators.

Objectives

- Ensure that measures remain in keeping with demand at each site
- Improve gender balance regarding parental leave

New measures (responsibilities and timeframe)

- Review employees’ requirements and satisfaction regularly (Company management; continuous)
- Adjust or develop measures accordingly (Company management; annual/continuous)
- Support male parents to engage more in family duties, e.g., by working part-time or taking (longer) parental leave (Company management, human resources; continuous)

Indicators

- Gaps between offerings and employees’ needs
- Employee satisfaction regarding work-life balance
- Gender distribution regarding parental leave

3.3 Gender equality in recruitment and career progression

Situation report – DFKI is dedicated to *inspiring and encouraging young talent* through numerous activities and is committed to *empowering women* in their professional development.

An argument that is found in the literature for why there is an underrepresentation of women in “technical jobs” is the inability of the employers to change the common image of lay people that working with technology is overly complex, emotionless, has little to do with real life, etc. Especially in the field of human-centred AI, however, a lot of research has quite the opposite character.

DFKI is actively trying to change this common image on the part of lay people by providing opportunities to take a first-hand look at the research that is going on at DFKI. Such opportunities are taken up by people across all age groups, from kindergarteners up to pensioners. While some events have a special focus on girls or women, such as the “Girls’ Day” or “Schülerinnentag”, others are open to anyone. Such events include the DFKI Open Day, the nationwide Digitaltag, local “Nacht, die Wissen schafft”, “Berlin’s Long Night of the Sciences”, “Digitaler Markt der Möglichkeiten”, “IT-Themenabend” as well as various STEM activities, guided tours, exhibitions (e.g., Hannover Messe), workshops, talks, internships and summer schools.

In order to sustainably increase the proportion of women taking up studies in the computer sciences, DFKI was also involved in the SMILE project, which offered STEM workshops exclusively for girls⁵. Furthermore, in an effort to achieve equal rights and opportunities for women and men in the field of artificial intelligence and robotics, the DFKI has been jointly organising events and associated marketing campaigns, for example together with “Women in AI & Robotics Germany”⁶, “Hackathon” etc..

Recruitment and personnel development is to a certain extent decentralised, as the required professional expertise and areas of operation differ greatly. As a result, all employees at higher career levels are involved in hiring and career development processes.

Based on this situation report, the DFKI strives to implement the following objectives and monitor its success using these measures and indicators.

Objectives

- Demystify public image and counter negative stereotypes about technology
- Increase attractiveness of DFKI in the competition for young talent, especially female talent
- Improve gender balance in recruitment and at all career levels
- Ensure fair recruiting processes that are free of bias

⁵ <https://www.dfki.de/en/web/news/project-smile-how-smart-houseplants-and-block-based-programming-can-raise-interest-for-computer-science>

⁶ <https://www.dfki.de/en/web/news/gemeinsam-frauen-in-der-ki-staerken-dfki-und-women-in-ai-robotics-starten-kooperation-mit-virtuellem>

- Ensure the same career opportunities for all genders and support their development in the most equal manner

New measures (responsibilities; timeframe)

In close cooperation with the activities on *promoting diversity & gender equality (3.1)*:

- Promote new job positions in a gender-equal way (Human resources; continuous)
- Encourage people of the underrepresented sex in the respective category to apply for the position (Human resources; continuous)
- Establish recruiting centre of competence (offering trainings, guidelines, checklists, minimum standards for employees involved in hiring processes) (Human resources; medium-term/continuous)
- Improve recruitment and career development (Company management, Human resources; medium-term/continuous)
- Design and implement quality assurance for recruitment and career development (Company management, Human resources; medium-term/continuous)

Indicators

- Gender balance in applications
- Gender balance of new hires
- Gender balance at all career levels

3.4 Gender balance in leadership and decision-making

Situation report – As in many academic institutes whose focus lies on computer science, management positions have rarely been taken by women. At DFKI, the number of women in leadership positions offers great potential for improvement. The management is committed to and actively drives the actions aimed at changing this situation.

Based on this situation report, DFKI strives to implement the following objectives and monitor its success with these measures and indicators.

Objectives

- Align the gender distribution in staff and leadership positions
- Drive professional leadership
- Establish a leadership culture that encourages female talent to strive for leadership positions

New measures (responsibilities; timeframe)

In close cooperation with the activities on *gender-equality in recruitment and career progression (3.3)*:

- Develop a strategic plan to improve the gender balance in leadership (Company management; short-term)
- Develop a common understanding of leadership, and derive and establish standards (Company management; short-term)
- Promote mutual support of female employees at DFKI (Diversity & Gender Equality Office, Human resources; continuous)

Indicators

- Gender balance in leadership positions

3.5 Integration of the gender dimension into research and teaching content

Situation report – We understand diversity and inclusion as innovation drivers and competitive factors. Systematic, company-wide integration in research and education has not been the focus before 2022. Instead, the topics were addressed in various projects.

In the public discourse on machine learning (ML) as currently the most prominent subfield of artificial intelligence (AI), questions about fairness or discrimination due to bias arising from training data are very salient. Besides data bias, algorithmic and designer bias can lead to discriminatory results. Our goal is to prevent this danger in our projects through different measures, from awareness raising to concrete recommendations like using data sheets for documentation. Furthermore, the appearance and characteristics of our prototypes should also reflect the diversity of the real world.

Regarding education, DFKI is a research institute. The research departments are headed by persons who also hold a professorship at a university. Further, employees of DFKI participate in teaching by giving lectures, seminars and supervising thesis work. Educational standards regarding the gender dimension are defined and ensured by the universities. However, teaching benefits from training on diversity issues and how to deal with prejudice, as well as from the inclusion of the gender dimension in research at DFKI.

Based on this situation report, DFKI strives to implement the following objectives and monitor its success with these measures and indicators.

Objectives

- Understanding diversity and inclusion as innovation drivers and competitive factors
- Seamless integration of all dimensions of diversity, especially the gender dimension in our research work
- Becoming a centre of excellence for “diversity-aware AI”
- Improving balance between all genders’ influence on research, working conditions and teaching

New measures (responsibilities; timeframe)

- Develop a strategic plan towards diversity-aware AI, i.e., AI systems that take into account the biological characteristics and the social features of genders and other inequalities of targeted users (Company management, Ethics Team, Diversity & Gender Equality Office; short-term)
- Raise employee awareness with trainings and tools (Company management, Diversity & Gender Equality Office; continuous)
- Define standard processes and checklists for integrating the gender/diversity dimension into research activities (Diversity & Gender Equality Office, experts; short-term)
- Establish expert groups on different aspects; groups support all employees with guidelines, checklists, workshops, best practices and so on (Diversity & Gender Equality Office; medium-term)
- Promote diverse teams (team leadership; continuous)

Indicators

- Number of projects taking the gender dimension and dimensions of diversity into account
- Number of “diversity-aware AI” prototypes
- Number of projects on diversity research
- Number of publications on diversity research

3.6 Measures against gender-based violence including sexual harassment

Situation report – The Discrimination Act (AGG) describes how efforts to promote a healthy work environment that is free from discrimination (based on religion/belief, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender, or race/ethnic background) should be organised. In this regard, gender equality work pays particular attention to sexual harassment. The implementation of the law in this area is specified in DFKI’s sexual harassment policy. The Complaints Office (Anti-Discrimination Office) is staffed equally by members of the works council and the HR department. The head of the Complaints Office has a responsibility to prevent and investigate harassment, as well as to take action to end ongoing harassment. The regulations and mechanism for complaints are already established and field-proven.

Objectives

- As new employees are frequently hired, it is important to ensure that all employees are always aware of the office and complaint procedures.

New measures (responsibilities; timeframe)

- Ensure that the staff is always informed about the complaint channels (Company management; continuous)
- For benchmarking, have a protocol on the prevention of sexual harassment in place (Complaints Office; continuous)

Indicators

- Severity and frequency of sexual harassment cases

4. Monitoring and Evaluation

To indicate whether a transformative dynamic is present, whether current measures are taking effect, and to help identify and address potential sources of resistance to change the DFKI continually monitors and evaluates the implementation of the GEP. As such, annual reports are drafted including regular statistics, as well as KPIs for monitoring progress and the identification of new challenges. Such KPIs may include the enrolment in supporting schemes and their impact on the current gender balance, indicators on the transparency of recruitment, indicators of development of a gender sensitive culture obtained for instance by means of a periodic survey, and monitoring sessions with core and extended teams.

5. Effective date, period of validity

The equality plan comes into effect on the day of signing and is intended to run for 5 years. The GEP will continuously be adjusted based on the evaluation results and results of further surveys. This includes the adaptation of actions as well as the establishment of new measures in order to react to current developments and opportunities in a timely manner.

Saarbrücken, March 17, 2025



Prof. Dr. Antonio Krüger, CEO



Helmut Ditzer, CFO