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Gender equality in the German Geophysical Society

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The German Geophysical Society (Deutsche Geophysikalische Gesellschaft, DGG) was founded in 1922 in Leipzig, Germany, on the initiative of the famous German seismologist Emil Wiechert (1861–1928), known for his fundamental work to record earthquake waves to study the earth’s interior. Facing the German historical background of the early 20th century, the 24 founding members wanted to lead German geophysicists out of isolation and toward outreach activities. DGG always understood and defined geophysics as a discipline beyond political borders, religious belief, or race, and promoted the scientific exchange between geophysicists in the Federal Republic of Germany, the former German Democratic Republic, and internationally.

Today, DGG is a nonprofit society guided by a steering committee and an advisory board, supported by more than 20 committees and working groups.

One of the central activities of DGG is the organization of the annual four-day DGG conference, hosted each year by a different geophysical institute at a German or German-speaking university. The number of participants typically varies between 230 and 600. Most oral and poster presentations are given in English, which attracts an increasingly international number of

attendees. Together with the Royal Astronomical Society, DGG publishes *Geophysical Journal International*. In addition, the society awards several prizes and medals.

DGG has 1222 members of which 278 are female, 903 are male, and 41 are companies, institutions, or other societies (as of October 2019). These numbers may reflect what can be expected from a natural science, technical discipline. However, the percentage of DGG members that is female has increased from 18.8% in 2012 to 23.5% in 2019 (Figure 1). This is still far from parity, but the junior DGG members (less than 30 years of age) have already reached this status (93 females and 82 males). Equal ratios between males and females hold up to the PhD and postdoctoral levels but drop abruptly at the senior scientist and professor levels.

While we have witnessed DGG becoming a progressively gender-open society, we also have experienced that gender equality and equal career opportunities are not intrinsically a matter of course within the general German geophysical community. The motivation to found the DGG Women Network of Geophysicists — named “Equal Opportunities” or “Chancengleichheit” in German — as a new DGG committee was a hearing in early 2017 between 15 female senior scientists and former DGG

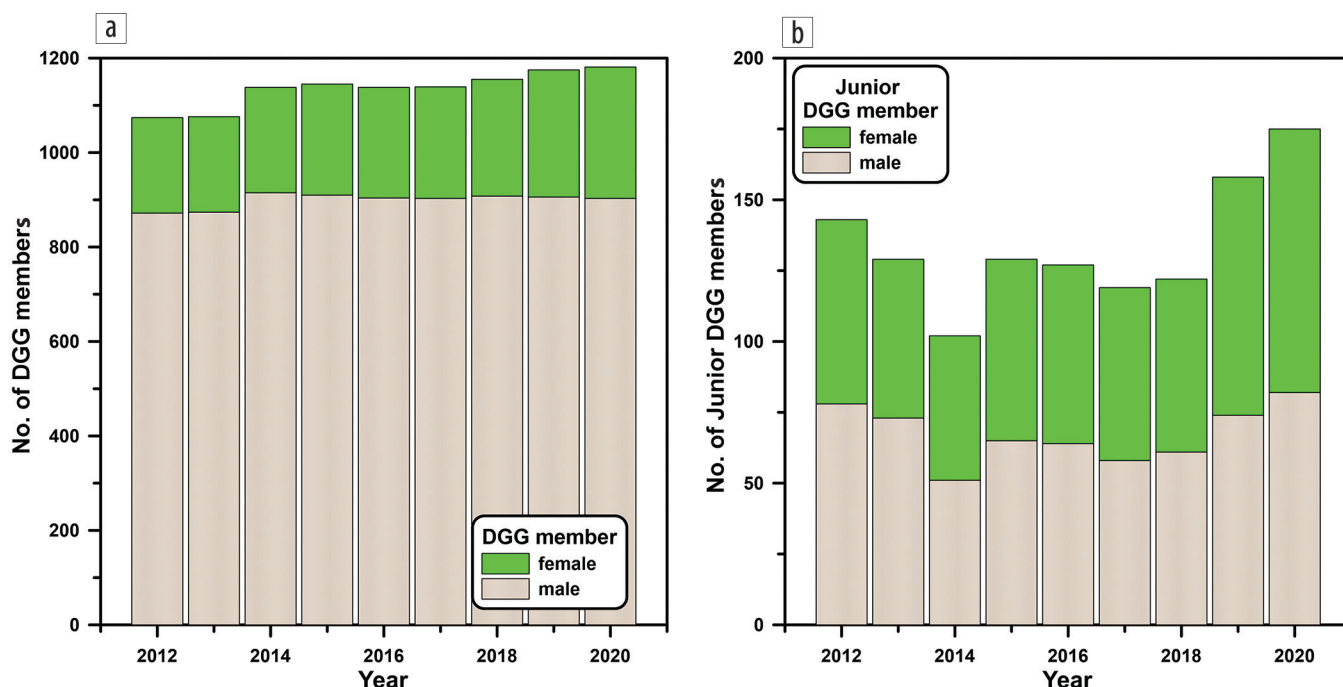


Figure 1. Statistics of DGG members, October 2019. (a) Statistics of all members. (b) Statistics of only junior members (less than 30 years of age).

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President Michael Weber to discuss gender issues within the DGG and define possible future recommended actions. We concluded that key positions within DGG and leadership positions within the German geophysical communities are dominated by males, and more discussions and general awareness are required to improve career opportunities for equally qualified female geophysicists. We also identified that we DGG women need to become more active ourselves and speak up about gender issues.

Meanwhile, the DGG Women Network represented by the DGG committee “Equal Opportunities” has 25 active members. We perceive ourselves as a networking platform in which DGG members can discuss gender issues openly. Our activities are manifold. We provide annual updates of the DGG member structure to inform about gender-related developments at various career levels. We promote the visibility of female role models through career interviews and portraits in our DGG member journal and support nominations of female colleagues for DGG awards. We address questions regarding the compatibility of family and career. For example, free childcare has become available at the annual DGG conference since 2018. Initial plans to start a mentoring program were abandoned due to the demands of time and requirements to do it properly. However, we evaluated the interest, state of knowledge, and experience regarding mentoring among a smaller group of female geophysicists. We also started a list with information on existing mentoring programs, which we will make available to DGG members, and we are in discussion with the DGG executive board about potential membership in international mentoring programs to strengthen our network and increase DGG’s international visibility.

Our most popular event is the “Meet & Greet” breakfast at the annual DGG conference. The breakfast was initiated by female DGG members in 2014 and has quickly evolved into an established event at the annual meeting with continued high demand. Female DGG participants can sign up with their conference registration. The breakfast is organized locally by volunteers, and in the past years we have invited external guest speakers for an impulse talk



Figure 2. Meet and greet event at the 2019 DGG meeting in Braunschweig, Germany.

or interview followed by open round table discussions moderated by senior scientists on various topics including networking, family–job compatibility, careers in industry, mentoring, and international work experience. For example, at the Meet & Greet during the DGG 2019 conference in Braunschweig, we invited Anke Kaysser-Pyzalla, president of the Technical University of Braunschweig, to discuss career and mentoring opportunities (see Figure 2).

For the upcoming DGG 2020 conference in Munich (23–26 March, <https://dgg2020.dgg-tagung.de/>) we are pleased to welcome Laurie Whitesell as a delegate of the SEG Women’s Network Committee. We also have planned a moderated discussion between two “science generations” and have invited an early-career female assistant professor and a formally retired senior scientist.

We believe parity between genders at all career levels can alter career conceptions of both male and female geophysicists in academia and industry and lead to a better work–life balance. There is still much left to do, but we are on a good path. In fact, Heidrun Kopp is currently the first female president in the nearly 100-year DGG history!

To learn more about DGG, visit their website (<https://dgg-online.de>) or see their Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/DeutscheGeophysikalischeGesellschaft>) or LinkedIn (<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/4925536>) pages.

Note: The authors head the recently founded Women Network of the German Geophysical Society and report on current developments and activities within the German geophysical community. **TLE**