

TELECOMMUNICATIONS DISPUTE
RESOLUTION PANEL

Activity report 2025



Bundesnetzagentur

Telecommunications dispute resolution panel

Activity report 2025

Report prepared in compliance with
section 34(1) of the Act on Alternative Dispute Resolution in Consumer Matters (VSBG) and
section 4 of the Ordinance on the Obligations to Furnish and Report Information
as per the Consumer Alternative Dispute Resolution Act (VSBInfoV)

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Foreword

Mutually acceptable solutions to disputes are a fundamental element in a well-functioning system of legal and consumer protection. The reporting year 2025 clearly shows that more and more consumers see out-of-court dispute resolution as an effective alternative to court proceedings. The number of customers of telecommunications companies opting to have their issues resolved by the Bundesnetzagentur's telecommunications dispute resolution panel is higher than ever before.

The dispute resolution panel's work represents a key contribution to enforcing consumer rights, building trust in government institutions and relieving the judicial system. As an independent, neutral and free service, it is an accessible, efficient and pragmatic option for dealing with conflicts. The aim is not to escalate disputes but to clarify the issues objectively in dialogue with the parties concerned.

The number of dispute resolution requests and other enquiries reached a new record high in this reporting year. The previous year had already seen the highest number of requests since the panel had been founded in 1999. This trend continued in 2025, when there were more than twice as many requests, and it underlines the high level of acceptance among consumers for the procedure.

Telecommunications companies also benefit from dispute resolution as a way of resolving conflicts constructively. The continued high degree of willingness to participate voluntarily shows that companies are increasingly recognising the dispute resolution panel as an integral part of responsible business practice. Frequent agreements at an early stage help to stabilise customer relationships and avoid lengthy legal disputes.

The use of the dispute resolution panel also reflects growing expectations of an efficient and accessible administration. However, the continued rise in the number of requests for dispute resolution has sometimes led to longer processing times and makes clear the need for structural action to ensure the effectiveness of this instrument in the long term. The most common issues in the procedures were again the content and implementation of contracts, disruption to service provision and billing.

Overall, the reporting year 2025 confirms the role of the telecommunications dispute resolution panel as a strategically relevant instrument of modern consumer policy. It combines effective legal protection with a focus on dialogue, reinforces market players' autonomy and makes a measurable contribution to relieving the courts. Strengthening the panel further is therefore in the interests of both society and politics.



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Contents

Foreword2

Contents.....3

1 Telecommunications dispute resolution panel of the Bundesnetzagentur.....4

2 The dispute resolution procedure.....4

3 Evaluating the dispute resolution requests and procedures from 2025.....6

 3.1 Dispute resolution requests in 2025.....6

 3.2 Subjects of dispute resolution requests received in 20256

 3.3 Outcome of dispute resolution procedures in 20258

 3.3.1 Proportion of dispute resolution procedures in which the parties reached agreement8

 3.3.2 Proportion of requests refused under section 14(1) and (2) VSBG in 2025.....8

 3.3.3 Proportion of procedures with no outcome9

 3.3.4 Average duration of procedures.....10

 3.3.5 Proportion of cases in which the parties kept to the outcome of the procedure10

 3.3.6 Proportion of cross-border disputes.....10

4 Common problems 10

5 Recommendations for avoiding or resolving disputes 11

6 Structural barriers to resolving disputes..... 12

7 Cooperation with other consumer conciliation bodies in networks to resolve cross-border disputes..... 12

8 Outlook..... 12

List of figures 13

List of abbreviations..... 14

Publisher’s details..... 15

1 Telecommunications dispute resolution panel of the Bundesnetzagentur

The telecommunications dispute resolution panel of the Bundesnetzagentur is an official consumer conciliation body under the Act on Alternative Dispute Resolution in Consumer Matters (VSBG).

Founded in 1999, it mediates as a neutral body in disputes between telecommunications companies and their customers. It acts in disputes arising from telecommunications contracts and related to the consumer protection provisions of the German Telecommunications Act (TKG). It aims to help parties reach a mutually acceptable solution so as to avoid a legal dispute before the courts.

The dispute resolution panel provides regular information about its work in the Bundesnetzagentur's annual reports and activity reports. In this activity report, it fulfils its legal obligation to provide information under section 34(1) VSBG in conjunction with section 4 of the Ordinance on the Obligations to Furnish and Report Information as per the Consumer Alternative Dispute Resolution Act (VSBInfoV) with regard to the reporting period 2025.

Further information on the telecommunications dispute resolution panel and the dispute resolution procedure, as well as the data that have to be provided under section 3 VSBInfoV, may be found (in German) at <https://www.bundesnetzagentur.de/schlichtung-tk>.

2 The dispute resolution procedure

The telecommunications dispute resolution panel of the Bundesnetzagentur mediates in disputes related to the provisions listed in section 68 TKG. These are the provisions governing customer protection: sections 51, 52, 54 to 67 TKG and the determinations made on the basis of those sections, section 156 TKG, an ordinance having the force of law issued by virtue of section 52(4) TKG, the current EU Roaming Regulation and Article 4(1), (2), (4) and Article (5a) of Regulation (EU) 2015/2120.

Dispute resolution procedures deal with issues like disagreements on the content and implementation of telecommunications contracts, faulty telecommunication connections, contested items on bills, reduced data transmission speeds and disputes over moving a telecommunications connection, switching provider or disconnecting a telephone line.

The telecommunications dispute resolution panel conducts the dispute resolution procedures in line with the provisions of the VSBG.

Further details of the procedure are also set out in the dispute resolution rules (SchliO) based on the VSBG. The

[SchliOhttps://www.bundesnetzagentur.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Sachgebiete/Telekommunikation/Verbraucher/Verbraucherschlichtung/Schlichtungsordnung_pdf.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=3](https://www.bundesnetzagentur.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Sachgebiete/Telekommunikation/Verbraucher/Verbraucherschlichtung/Schlichtungsordnung_pdf.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=3) has been published on the Bundesnetzagentur's website.

Anyone classed as an “end-user” can request the commencement of a dispute resolution procedure at the telecommunications dispute resolution panel. End-users are users who neither operate public telecommunications networks nor provide publicly available telecommunications services. They can request dispute resolution in the event of a dispute between them and a provider of publicly available telecommunications services or an operator of public telecommunications networks related to the provisions given above.¹ There generally needs to be a telecommunications service contract between the two parties.²

The applicant also needs to show that they have already raised the disputed claim with the telecommunications company and tried unsuccessfully to reach agreement.

The dispute must not be pending in court or already have been the subject of a dispute resolution procedure.

If the dispute resolution request is admissible, the panel starts the dispute resolution procedure by sending the documents submitted by the applicant to the respondent. It asks both parties about the matter and gives them the opportunity to put forward their individual points of view on the dispute.

If the parties do not come to an agreement during the procedure, the dispute resolution panel proposes an amicable agreement. The proposal is an individual solution tailored to the situation of the two sides. The parties may accept the proposal of the panel but do not have to do so. Either way, the dispute resolution procedure is then terminated. If both sides accept the dispute resolution proposal, it becomes binding, like a contract. The proposal may differ from the outcome that would occur if the dispute went to court. Either party is free to reject the proposal and take the matter to court.

Participation in the telecommunications dispute resolution procedure is voluntary for both parties. Both the applicant and the respondent may request the dispute resolution procedure to be terminated at any time.

The parties in dispute are not charged for the dispute resolution procedure. Each party only bears the costs it incurs from participating in the procedure.

The language of the dispute resolution procedure is German. The dispute resolution procedure is conducted in text form, ie by letter, fax or email.

The telecommunications dispute resolution panel provides a dynamic form on its website that guides the applicant through their request with information about the role of the dispute resolution panel and the details

¹ As some of these provisions only protect consumers and not all end-users, it is only possible in certain disputes for consumers to request dispute resolution by the telecommunications dispute resolution panel.

² An exception is if the dispute concerns a matter relating to the provisions of section 54 or section 156 TKG, see section 1(2) sentence 3 SchliO.

the applicant needs to provide. There is also an online form available for applicants to communicate with the panel throughout the procedure.

Applicants unable to use the online form can also make their request by letter, fax or email using the PDF form provided by the dispute resolution panel on its website.

3 Evaluating the dispute resolution requests and procedures from 2025

3.1 Dispute resolution requests in 2025

The telecommunications dispute resolution panel of the Bundesnetzagentur received 5,524 requests to start dispute resolution procedures during the reporting year. This represents a considerable increase in the number of requests. While in 2024 the dispute resolution panel reported the highest number of requests (2,534) in a year since the panel had been founded in 1999, the number received in the reporting year 2025 was more than twice as high. This shows the continued growth in interest in dispute resolution.

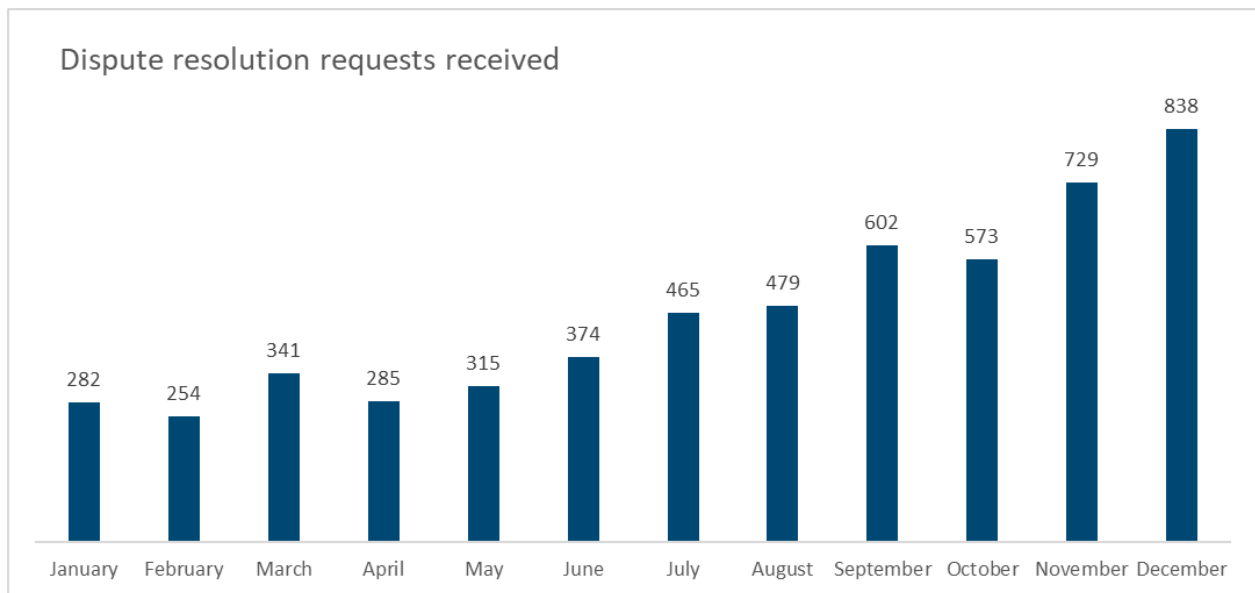


Figure 1: Dispute resolution requests received each month in 2025

In addition to the 5,524 dispute resolution requests, there were 1,551 other enquiries and requests for assistance. These were mostly requests for information by customers of telecommunications companies and enquiries about whether a particular circumstance could become the subject of a dispute resolution procedure.

3.2 Subjects of dispute resolution requests received in 2025

Over a third (35%) of dispute resolution requests in 2025 concerned the content and implementation of contracts. These included disputes relating to making or terminating contracts and contractual changes implemented unilaterally by the provider. Further examples are disputes relating to contract duration and customers' right to cancel contracts that have been automatically prolonged at any time with a one-month notice period after the expiry of the minimum period.

Further common sources of dispute included faults (19%), billing issues (13%) and reduced data transmission speeds (12%). There were also disputes related to moving premises (4%), switching provider (4%) and disconnections (2%).

A number of dispute resolution requests had to do with contract disputes that were not related to the TKG (10%).

In a few cases, disputes about other issues relating to telecommunications services and connections were brought before the dispute resolution panel.

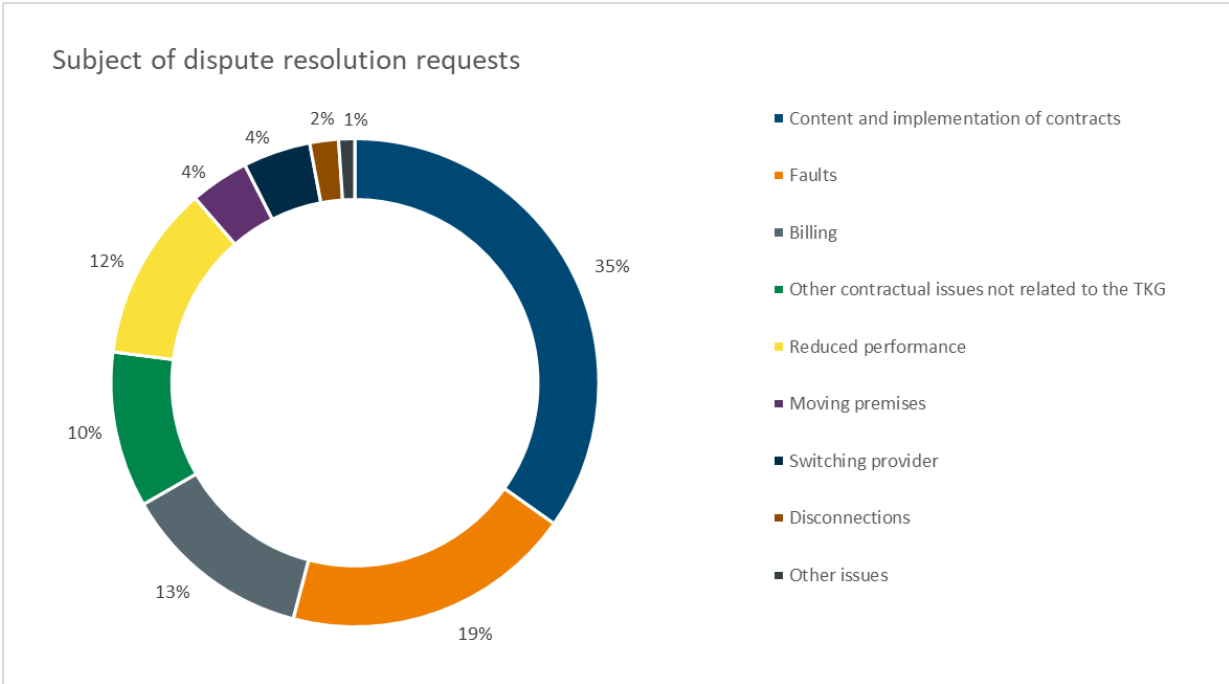


Figure 2: Subject of dispute resolution requests in 2025

3.3 Outcome of dispute resolution procedures in 2025

The telecommunications dispute resolution panel completed the processing of 3,391 procedures in 2025, 3,005 of which were admissible requests, ie the requirements for the commencement of dispute resolution procedures were met.³

3.3.1 Proportion of dispute resolution procedures in which the parties reached agreement

The parties in dispute reached agreement in 1,274 cases, which is 38% of terminated dispute resolution procedures. Of those cases terminated in which the requests were admissible and of which in 1,240 cases the parties reached an agreement during the procedure, the agreement rate is actually 42%.

The dispute resolution panel proposed a solution in 64 cases, of which 34 were accepted by the disputing parties.

3.3.2 Proportion of requests refused under section 14(1) and (2) VSBG in 2025

The dispute resolution panel refused a total of 386 inadmissible requests for dispute resolution.

Of the 3,391 terminated procedures, 11% of them were refused. The refusal rate was therefore slightly lower than in the previous year (13%).

Of the 386 refused requests for dispute resolution, 373 did not fall within the competence of the panel (section 14(1) para 1 VSBG). In 24 of those cases, the respondent was not able to be part of a dispute resolution procedure in accordance with section 68 TKG since it was neither a public telecommunications network operator nor a provider of publicly available telecommunications services.

The panel refused three requests because the applicant had not already asserted the disputed claim with the respondent (section 14(1) para 2 VSBG).

In another three cases, the requests were refused because the applicants had already requested dispute resolution on the same matter (section 14(2) para 1 VSBG in conjunction with section 7(1) para 4 SchliO).

In five cases, the dispute was already pending in court (section 14(2) para 2 VSBG in conjunction with section 7(1) para 3 SchliO), thus the requests were refused.

³ Admissible requests are those that the dispute resolution panel did not have to refuse, see 3.3.2.

3.3.3 Proportion of procedures with no outcome

Of the procedures terminated in 2025, 1,731 had no outcome.

In 1,029 of these, the respondent refused to take part in the dispute resolution procedure and did not offer a solution to the dispute. The proportion of procedures terminated in the reporting period (3,391) for which participation was refused was 30%. There was a slight increase in the proportion of participation refused from 26% in 2024.

The experience of recent years has shown that the majority of telecommunications companies look at requests for dispute resolution closely and often use their first statement as an opportunity to show flexibility to customers and offer to resolve the issue. It seems likely that, of the cases in which telecommunications companies exercise their right to refuse to enter dispute resolution, these are mostly matters in which the companies do not consider that they have done anything wrong⁴ and/or do not see leeway for a result in the dispute resolution procedure.

In 672 cases, requests for dispute resolution were withdrawn by the applicant, in 494 of which the withdrawal was made even before the panel had considered the request.

In 30 cases, there was no agreement because at least one of the parties rejected the settlement proposed by the dispute resolution panel.

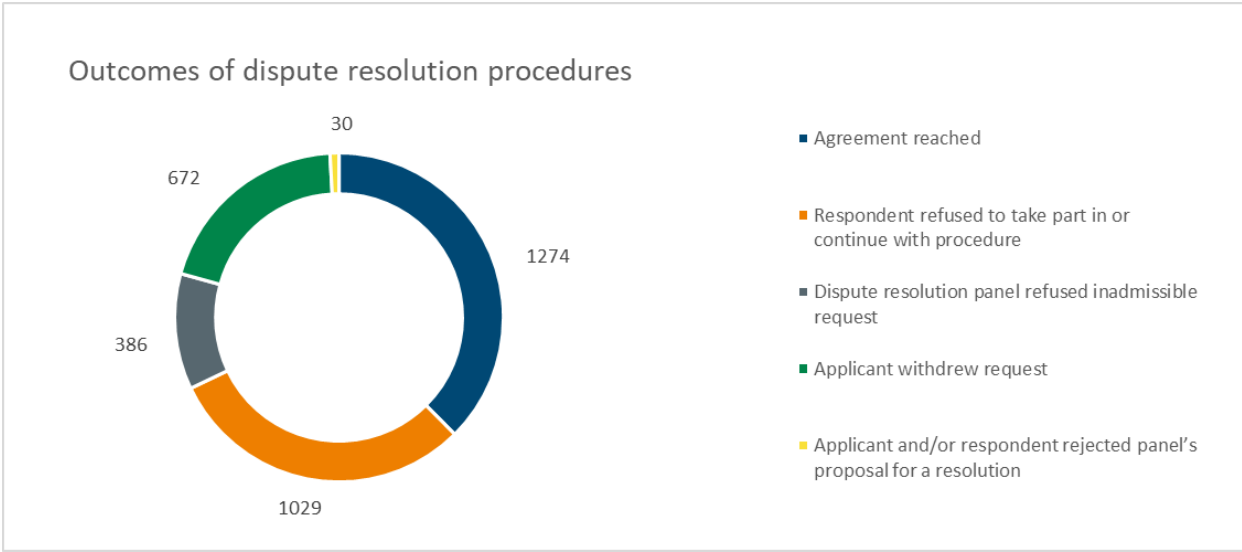


Figure 3: Outcomes of dispute resolution procedures in 2025

⁴ Since the provisions of the TKG relevant to the dispute resolution panel were amended in the version of the law from December 2021, the panel has commenced a procedure as soon as it is clear that the dispute is related to those consumer-protection provisions. This means that requests for dispute resolution now lead to procedures being commenced in cases that would have been refused by the panel before the amendment as no breach of the relevant customer protection provisions by the telecommunications company can be identified. In 2021, the proportion of participation refused was 14%.

3.3.4 Average duration of procedures

In the reporting year, the average time for the procedure from receipt of the application at the Bundesnetzagentur to the conclusion of the procedure was just under 14 weeks, which is longer than the average processing time in 2024 (nine weeks). This is due to the large increase in the number of requests received.

The average time from when all the documents needed for the procedure were complete until the dispute resolution proposal was made was six weeks.

3.3.5 Proportion of cases in which the parties kept to the outcome of the procedure

The dispute resolution panel is not aware of the number of cases in which the parties do not keep to the outcome of the procedure. It does not ask if the parties keep to the agreement. There were fewer instances in this reporting period of applicants returning to the dispute resolution panel because the telecommunications companies failed to keep their agreements. In such cases, the dispute resolution panel contacted the companies in question and gave them the opportunity to implement the agreements made.

3.3.6 Proportion of cross-border disputes

The dispute resolution panel did not record any procedures regarding cross-border disputes in the reporting year.

4 Common problems

In accordance with section 4(1) para 2 VSBInfoV and section 34(3) VSBG, the dispute resolution panel should report on conspicuous business practices or draw attention to systemic failings or those that occurred particularly often during the reporting period and led to requests for dispute resolution.

In the reporting year the dispute resolution panel noticed an increasing number of business practices in concluding contracts by telephone that it considered did not comply with the legislative provisions.⁵ In the dispute resolution panel's view, if a consumer concludes a contract for telecommunications services by telephone, the contract only becomes effective when the telecommunications company has sent the consumer the contract summary and the consumer has then agreed to the contract in text form after the telephone call. This is the only way to ensure that consumers have sufficient time to read and check the contract summary without any pressure.

However, consumers reported that telecommunications companies had sent them an email with the contract summary during the telephone call and had put pressure on them to agree to the contract while they were still on the telephone. Companies frequently claimed that consumers were considered to have agreed to the contract once they had been given a contract summary during the call. Some companies also claimed that

⁵ Section 54(3) and (4) TKG state: "Where, for objective technical reasons, it is impossible to provide the contract summary prior to the consumer making the contractual declaration, it shall be provided to the consumer without undue delay after the conclusion of the contract. The effectiveness of the contract depends on the consumer approving the contract in text form following receipt of the contract summary." These provisions were designed particularly with contracts concluded by telephone in mind (see Bundestag printed paper 19/26108, page 286).

consumers concluding a contract by telephone did not need to give their agreement anyway because they had been given a contract summary during the call before they had committed to concluding the contract.

In addition, the dispute resolution panel again noticed in this reporting year that companies were failing to keep to dates for the provision of fibre connections. Many companies took the view that the initial contract period did not begin until the start of service provision. They drew attention to relevant clauses in their contracts and were unwilling to release their customers from contracts, even more than two years after conclusion of the contracts.⁶

In the reporting year the switch by one network operator to a different mobile network again led to performance issues. Customers felt poorly informed about the change.

5 Recommendations for avoiding or resolving disputes

The dispute resolution panel welcomes the efforts made by telecommunications companies to continually improve the quality and accessibility of their customer service and to find and implement specific solutions for their customers from the first contact. An easily accessible and appropriately qualified customer service does not just help telecommunications companies and their customers to clear up disputes but can even prevent them from arising. However, if a provider's customer service is difficult to reach or does not fully resolve issues, or if customers do not feel they are being taken seriously, the business relationship is damaged. It is also helpful when customers receive full, binding and competent advice in the telecommunications companies' shops and when providers design their websites and contractual documents in a way that is transparent and understandable for their customers.

The dispute resolution panel recommends that customers make use of the information provided by telecommunications companies about their rates and services before signing a contract. Consumers should read the contract summary given to them by the telecommunications provider before committing to a contract. It should be noted that if consumers conclude a contract for telecommunications services by telephone, the contract only becomes effective when the provider has sent the consumer the contract summary and the consumer has then agreed to the contract in text form (such as by email).

Customers should check their bills and account statements regularly and, if they find a problem, contact their provider promptly. The deadline for raising objections is eight weeks, as set out in section 67(2) TKG.

The Bundesnetzagentur provides detailed information (in German) on consumer rights and dispute resolution opportunities on its website at

<https://www.bundesnetzagentur.de/schlichtung-tk>.

Well-informed consumers are better placed to know their rights and stand up for them if necessary.

⁶ See, however, the judgment by the Federal Court of Justice of 8 January 2026 (III ZR 8/25).

6 Structural barriers to resolving disputes

The dispute resolution panel does not see any structural barriers to resolving disputes at the moment (section 4(1) para 4 VSBIInfoV).

The telecommunications dispute resolution panel of the Bundesnetzagentur has been offering out-of-court dispute resolution since 1999. Its dispute resolution procedures have proven their worth.

7 Cooperation with other consumer conciliation bodies in networks to resolve cross-border disputes

The telecommunications dispute resolution panel has no cooperation with other consumer conciliation bodies in networks to resolve cross-border disputes (section 4(1) para 5 VSBIInfoV) to report for 2025. The dispute resolution panel generally deals with disputes relating to the German Telecommunications Act, so no cooperation with other conciliation bodies to resolve cross-border disputes arose during the year under review.

8 Outlook

The huge increase in the number of dispute resolution requests received by the dispute resolution panel in the reporting year shows the great need for out-of-court dispute resolution among customers of telecommunications companies. The accessible dispute resolution service avoids court cases and takes pressure off the judicial system. However, if the number of dispute resolution requests continues to rise, it is likely that processing times will become longer.

List of figures

Figure 1: Dispute resolution requests received each month in 2025	6
Figure 2: Subject of dispute resolution requests in 2025	7
Figure 3: Outcomes of dispute resolution procedures in 2025.....	9

List of abbreviations

EU European Union

SchliO Dispute resolution rules of the telecommunications dispute resolution panel of the Bundesnetzagentur

TKG Telecommunications Act

VSBG Consumer Alternative Dispute Resolution Act

VSBIInfoV Ordinance on the Obligations to Furnish and Report Information as per the Consumer Alternative Dispute Resolution Act

Publisher's details

Publisher

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