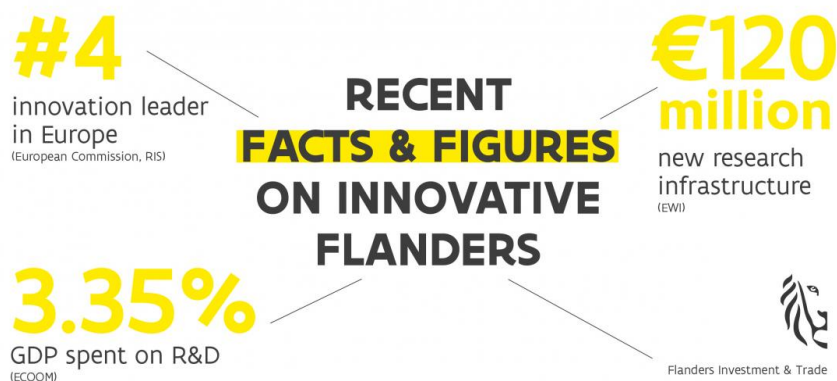


## 3 prominent indicators of Flanders R&D&I prowess



Flanders, the northern region of Belgium, has been dedicated to R&D and innovation for years. And its innovative ecosystem is only getting stronger! But don't take our word for it... Various facts and figures confirm how and why Flanders should be on your radar if you're looking to kickstart your R&D activities internationally. Let's zoom in on three prominent examples!

### Headline 1 – Flanders is a European innovation leader

In 2021, the European Commission released not one but two innovation rankings: the European Innovation Scoreboard (EIS) and the Regional Innovation Scoreboard (RIS). In a first for both the country and its northern region, these rankings highlight Belgium and Flanders as innovation leaders within the European Union (EU).

As such, Belgium came in 4th out of 27 EU member states, while Flanders came in 27th out of 240 regions – and thus belongs to the top 11% of EU regions. The innovation indicators on which Flanders scored best represent some of the region's most prominent strong suits. These include the successful crosspollination occurring between the private, public and academic sectors in the region, as well as a strong focus on education and talent development, innovation clusters and co-creation.

[Get the full scoop on Flanders' innovation leader ranking.](#)

### Belgium and Flanders rank as innovation leaders in the EU

In a first for both the country and its northern region, Belgium and Flanders have been ranked as innovation leaders within the European Union (EU). This was published in the European Innovation Scoreboard (EIS) and the Regional Innovation Scoreboard (RIS) released by the European Commission on 21 June 2021. The result of longstanding joint efforts by knowledge institutions, companies and governmental organizations, Belgium came in 4th out of 27 EU member states, while Flanders came in 27th out of 240 regions.



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### **Belgium in the European top 4**

The EIS classifies EU member states into four performance groups based on their scores: innovation leaders, strong innovators, moderate innovators and emerging innovators. While Sweden remains the EU innovation leader, Belgium completes the top 4 along with Finland and Denmark – all with an innovation performance well above the EU average and considered ‘innovation leaders’.

### **Flanders among the top 11% of European regions**

A regional extension of the EIS, the Regional Innovation Scoreboard (RIS) assesses the innovation performance of European regions on a limited number of indicators. Zooming in on Flanders, Belgium’s northern region, RIS has classified Flanders as an ‘innovation leader’ as well. Coming in at 27th place out of a total of 240, Flanders thus belongs to the top 11% of EU regions.

The region obtained its highest scores on innovation indicators such as:

- innovative small and mid-size enterprises (SMEs) collaborating;
- business process innovators;
- innovation expenditures per person employed;
- employment at innovative enterprises;
- tertiary education at universities and university colleges;
- international scientific co-publications.

Representing Flanders’ strong suits, these indicators highlight the successful crosspollination occurring between the private, public and academic sectors in the region as well as Flanders’ strong focus on promoting education and talent development, innovation clusters and co-creation in R&D.

### **Headline 2 – Flanders is a top 2 R&D spender**

3% of the GDP: that’s how much the European Council wants European nations and regions to spend on R&D. While the European average currently stands at 2.10%, the region of Flanders goes well beyond the threshold! ECOOM published an analysis indicating that 3.35% of Flanders’ GDP was invested in R&D in 2020, representing a total value of EUR 9.35 billion.

Consequently, Flanders comes in at 2nd place in Europe – just behind Sweden (3.4%) and ahead of large innovative economies such as Germany and Austria.

[Read more: Gain more insight into Flanders’ R&D expenditure.](#)

### **Flanders spends 3%+ of GDP on R&D, ranking 2nd in Europe**

3% of GDP: that's the target for annual expenditure on research and development (R&D) set by the European Council. While this percentage seems reasonable at first sight, few nations and regions currently manage to obtain this goal. Flanders, however, does and ranks second in Europe in this regard. Here's how and why.



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### **Leading the pack in Europe and beyond**

According to a recent analysis by R&D monitoring expertise center ECOOM, companies, governmental organizations and knowledge institution in Flanders collectively spent 3.35% of the region's GDP on R&D in 2019. As such, no less than EUR 9.35 billion went to R&D in the region.

This result places Flanders in 2nd place in Europe – just behind Sweden (3.4) and well above the European average (2.10%). As such, the region ranks ahead of large innovative economies such as Germany and Austria.

### **A talented workforce over 59,000 strong**

It's not just in Europe that Flanders' overall R&D expenditure shines. "Flanders is even doing better than the US in this respect," ECOOM confirms in a press release, adding that this impressive result goes hand in hand with a growing workforce of innovative R&D talent.

In 2019, more than 59,000 full-time equivalents (FTEs) – out of a relatively small population of around 6 million – were involved in research activities in Flanders. In 2018, this figure stood at 54,000 FTEs, which means that the region's total R&D workforce grew by 9% in only one year. Compared to 2009, when around 37,000 people were active in research activities in the region, Flanders' pool of R&D workers rose by a staggering 58% in just a decade.

### **Innovative enterprises blazing the trail**

Flanders' entrepreneurial world is the main driving force behind the region's R&D expenditure. As such, 76% of research is privately financed, while 24% is funded by the government of Flanders. Even more, R&D spending by companies is on the rise, a trend that, according to ECOOM, can be attributed to the following factors:

- there is an increasing number of various tax measures that make it more interesting for companies to invest in R&D;

- Flanders' companies are focusing ever more on boosting their digitization efforts and investing in digital innovations;
- there is a strong increase in R&D spending among biopharmaceutical companies as well as growth in clinical research.

### **Keeping a good thing going**

Flanders' Minister for Innovation Hilde Crevits is enthusiastic about the ECOOM analysis: "In 2008, Flanders just reached the 2% threshold for R&D expenditure. Today, our region's efforts already score well above the 3% goal. This indicates our success in building, maintaining and fortifying our knowledge-driven economy. Flanders is an absolute world leader when it comes to R&D spending – and with the increased efforts planned in the coming years, we seek to keep this drive going."

### **Headline 3 – Flanders channels millions into research infrastructure**

To fortify the region's strong position in R&D, the government of Flanders announced in 2021 that it will be funneling EUR 120 million into the development of new research infrastructure. This state-of-the-art infrastructure will include new laboratories, research centers, test environments and study equipment – available to businesses looking to start or expand their activities.

The investment entails 23 projects coordinated by Flanders' universities, strategic research centers and other institutes – all of which have been strategically chosen to focus on major socioeconomic challenges in sustainability, digitalization and health.

**Thank you for reading this Newsletter till the end!**

**Please let us know if you did and we will mention your name in the editorial of the next edition.**