



Flanders  
State of  
the Art

**STI**  
**IN**  
**FLANDERS**  
SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY  
& INNOVATION



**BRIEF  
OVERVIEW**  
2023

# STI IN FLANDERS

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION  
BRIEF OVERVIEW



"My government has set itself the ambition to become one of the top 5 innovative knowledge regions in Europe. This publication shows we are living up to our ambition. Flanders is one of the main European investment hubs for companies seeking added value through innovation, and the information in this brochure is evidence for this."

**Jan Jambon**

Minister-president of the Government of Flanders and Flemish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Culture, ICT and Facility Management



"In 2020, Flanders R&D-intensity has further increased to an impressive 3.60%, thereby surpassing Sweden which tops the European Member States rankings. 72% of the R&D-investments in Flanders are made by enterprises. These figures clearly demonstrate the presence of an innovative ecosystem. The Flemish Government actively nourishes this ecosystem, which is illustrated by the R&D-budget increases it has foreseen in current and past government periods. I believe Flanders has a unique place in Europe and the world when it comes to research and innovation, and I am convinced this brochure can persuade you to hold the

**Jo Brouns**

Flemish Minister for Economy, Innovation, Work, Social Economy and Agriculture



"Flanders is home to a rich STI landscape housing top institutions and organisations. This is a result of the Flemish policy on science and innovation, that has taken shape over the past 40 years. This brochure offers a quick glance at our extraordinary landscape through the four elements of the quadruple helix (government actors, knowledge institutions, business and civil society), which our government has set out as its new policy model."

**Johan Hanssens**

Secretary General, Department of Economy, Science and Innovation, Flemish Government

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Johan Hanssens, Secretary-General

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The Oval Office

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# RESEARCH AND INNOVATION IN A QUADRUPLE HELIX MODEL

The societal challenges that humankind faces, have grown more and more urgent in recent decades. At the same time, the ever-increasing pace of technological change and broad-based innovation hold the promise of global society rising to the occasion.

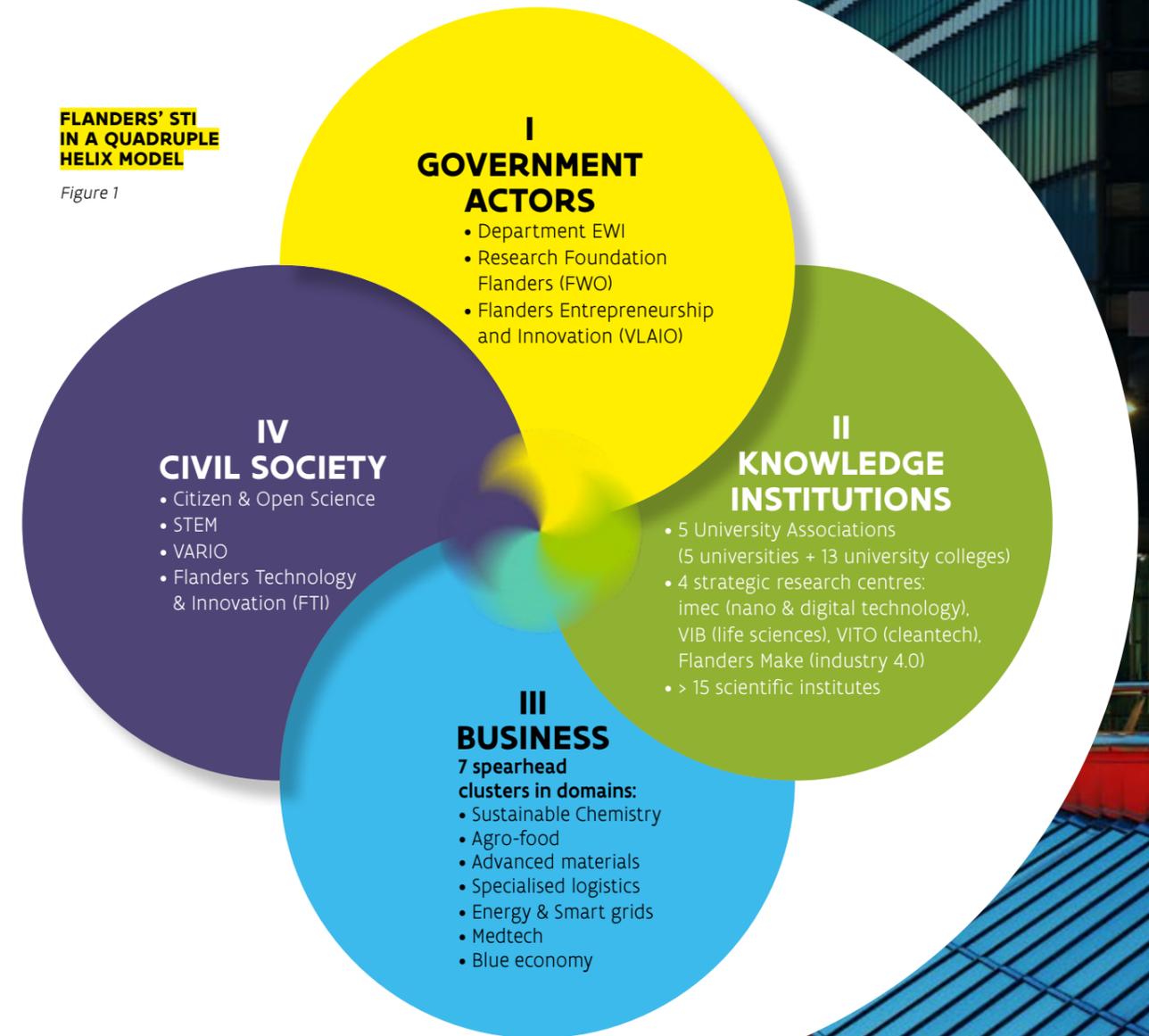
In order to overcome societal challenges, governments all over the world support the advancement of science, technology and innovation. Within Flanders, the EWI Policy Domain (Economie, Wetenschap en Innovatie / Economy, Science and Innovation) uses its Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) policy **to nurture and stimulate research and innovation in the region.**

However, the STI policy does not work in isolation. The Flemish Government has joined forces with knowledge institutions, business organisations and civil society to form a **quadruple helix** to develop initiatives, set policy targets and maintain important long-term efforts in the field of R&D and innovation.

This brochure looks at each of the elements of the quadruple helix in turn to give a glimpse of the STI-landscape in Flanders. For a more detailed overview, download the full STI in Flanders publication from [www.ewi-vlaanderen.be/publications](http://www.ewi-vlaanderen.be/publications).

## FLANDERS' STI IN A QUADRUPLE HELIX MODEL

Figure 1



**FLANDERS IN THE HEART OF EUROPE**

Figure 2

**FLANDERS** IN FACTS & FIGURES

- **58%** of Belgium's total population lives in Flanders (6.6 million inhabitants)
- Flanders covers **44%** of Belgium's surface area
- Flanders generates **59%** of the Belgian GDP
- R&D expenditure in Flanders is almost **€9.59 BILLION** (3.60% of Flemish GDP (2020)), which is 62% of Belgium's total R&D expenditure in 2019
- **1ST IN EUROPE** for the proportion of enterprises with innovation activities (2021 Eurostat Community Survey, published in 2022)
- **1ST IN EUROPE** for university business accelerators, top 5 worldwide (UBI Global, World Top 10 University Business Accelerators, 2019)
- **BRUSSELS** is the capital of Flanders and Belgium, the capital of the European Union and serves as the headquarters of NATO
- **3RD IN EUROPE** for innovative SMEs collaborating with others and **2ND IN EUROPE** for R&D expenditure in business (2022 European Innovation Scoreboard)
- **3RD BEST INNOVATIVE SYSTEM** in the world (2020 ZEW innovationsindikator)
- **3RD MOST INNOVATIVE ECONOMY** in the world (ZEW/ISI/BDI innovationsindikator 2020)
- The European Commission ranked Flanders as an **INNOVATION LEADER** (Regional Innovation Scoreboard 2021)
- KU Leuven ranks **1ST** on the list of the **MOST INNOVATIVE UNIVERSITIES IN EUROPE** and is the **7TH MOST INNOVATIVE UNIVERSITY** in the world (Reuters Ranking, 2019)
- **3 BIOTECH INCUBATORS** from Flanders are **IN THE EUROPEAN TOP 20** (Labiotech.eu, 2019)
- Flanders R&D-intensity has further **INCREASED TO 3.60%**, thereby surpassing Sweden which tops the European Member States rankings.

**WELCOME TO FLANDERS**

From a geographical and governmental viewpoint, Flanders has a unique position in the world.

**FLANDERS IN EUROPE**

As Belgium's northern region, Flanders shares land borders with France, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, with the United Kingdom located on the other side of the North Sea. The region is in the middle of the Blue Banana, an area responsible for a substantial part of the economic added value within the European Union (EU).

**FLANDERS IN BELGIUM**

Belgium is governed by a unique form of federalism. With its three Regions (the Flemish Region, the Brussels-Capital Region, and the Walloon Region) and three language Communities (the Flemish Community, the French Community and the German-speaking Community), it can be complicated to understand at first glance.

The system works by each Region and Community having their own separately elected parliament, government, administration, legislation, advisory bodies, etc. which have exclusive powers and competencies in various areas both inside and outside Belgium. It is important to note that there are no hierarchical relationships between the Federal level, the Regions and the Communities.

The Flemish Region and the Flemish Community have been combined into a single Flemish Government and Parliament that handles all matters in Flanders and for the Flemish community in Brussels.

**SCIENCE, RESEARCH AND INNOVATION IN FLANDERS: INNOVATION LEADER**

In Belgium, almost 80% of the total public R&D support is managed by the Communities and Regions. Flanders counts for 58% of all Belgian public R&D support. In Flanders, this means that €3.987 billion is aimed at higher education, scientific research and innovation, out of Flanders' total budget of €51.6 billion in 2022. The European Commission ranked Flanders in the Regional Innovation Scoreboard 2021 as an "innovation leader".

Flanders deploys a number of different activities and policy instruments in the field of science, research and innovation. These measures include:

- **Direct support for R&D&I**

Subsidies or other support channels for cutting-edge and applied research; business-oriented support; collective research opportunities; and the promotion and popularisation of STI in education, society and business.

- **Research related to the community**

Broad innovation and scientific research policies; research at higher education institutions, public research institutions (PROs), scientific institutes and policy research centres; research and innovation infrastructure; science parks, technology parks and incubators; and policy research.

- **Access to finance**

Financial support for start-ups and spin-offs including seed capital, risk capital, loans and business angel assistance.

**FLANDERS AS A CENTRAL REGION IN EUROPE**

Figure 3



# I GOVERNMENT ACTORS

Government plays a strong role within Flanders' quadruple helix in supporting and stimulating science and technology.

## GOVERNMENT STI POLICY

### INNOVATING OUR WAY OUT OF THE CRISIS

The corona crisis has shaken the world's economy, causing major social and financial consequences in countries around the world, including Flanders. The Flemish Government is taking this moment of upheaval to focus on resilient, innovative, and productive investments that will act as a catalyst as the Region transitions towards being a digital, sustainable, and circular economy. This is supported by the Flemish Government recovery plan which is investing over €4.3 billion in the region, including more than €500 million within the economy, science and innovation domain during 2021-2026.

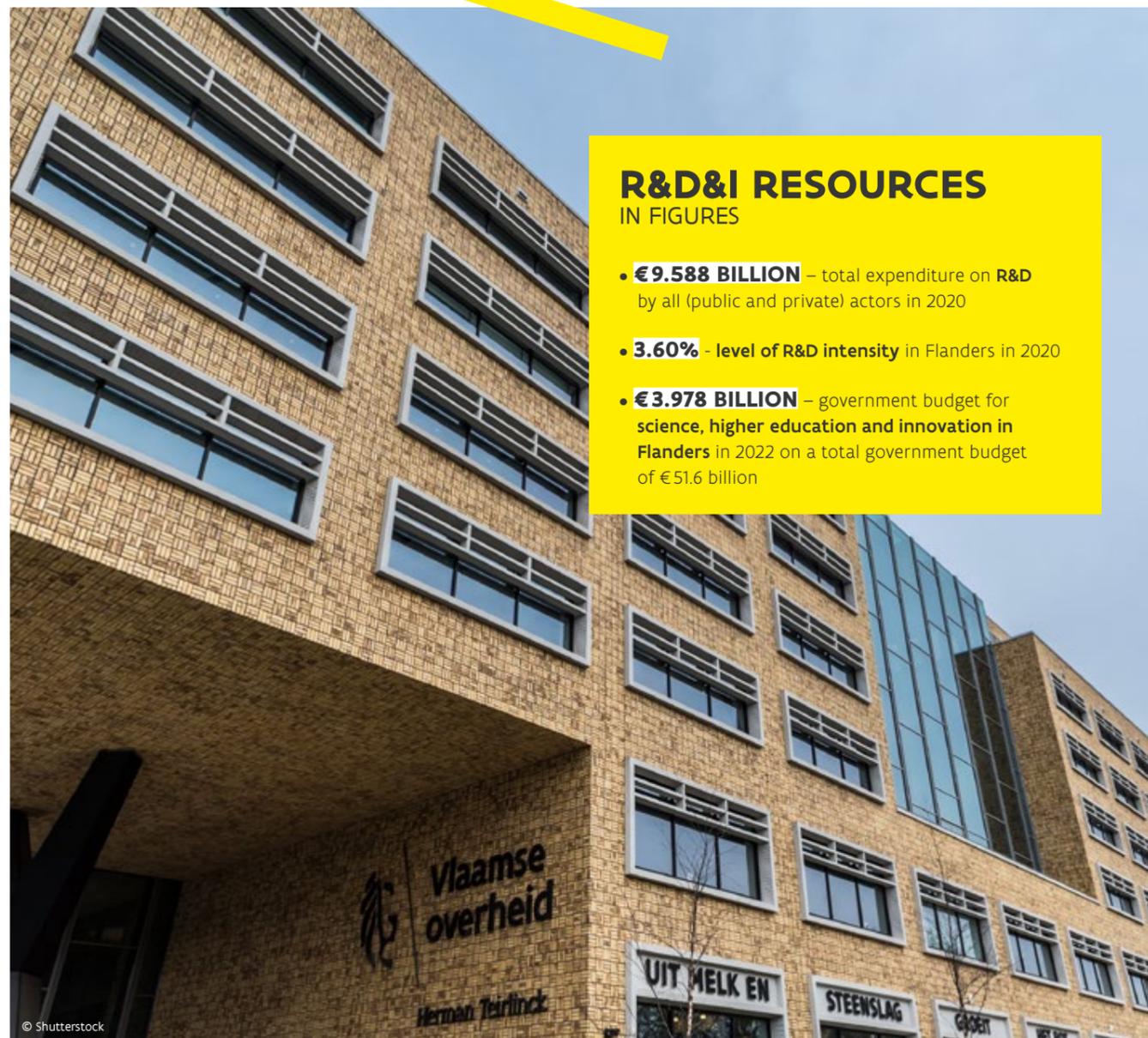
## GOVERNMENT STI ACTORS

The **EWI Department** is responsible for preparing, monitoring, evaluating and reporting on public policy in the field of enterprise, science and innovation. The EWI Department also funds fundamental and applied research at the universities,

strategic research centres and scientific institutes. From these evaluations and reports, the EWI Department creates **STI policy that aims to** create sustainable economic growth by facilitating entrepreneurship, stimulating innovation and encouraging knowledge creation.

Four agencies are tasked with the implementation of the STI policy:

- **FWO (Fonds voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek Vlaanderen /Research Foundation Flanders)** which supports fundamental and strategic research and cooperation at Flemish universities.
- **VLAIO (Vlaanderen Agentschap Innoveren en Ondernemen /Flanders Innovation and Entrepreneurship)** is the one-stop-shop for companies, managing all the economic and innovative support needed by new or growing companies located or active in the Flemish Region.
- **PMV (Participatie Maatschappij Vlaanderen/Flemish Investment Company)** provides capital, loans and guarantees for Flemish businesses.
- **LRM (Limburg Investment Company)** develops and stimulates economic growth in the Flemish province of Limburg by providing lending and venture capital.



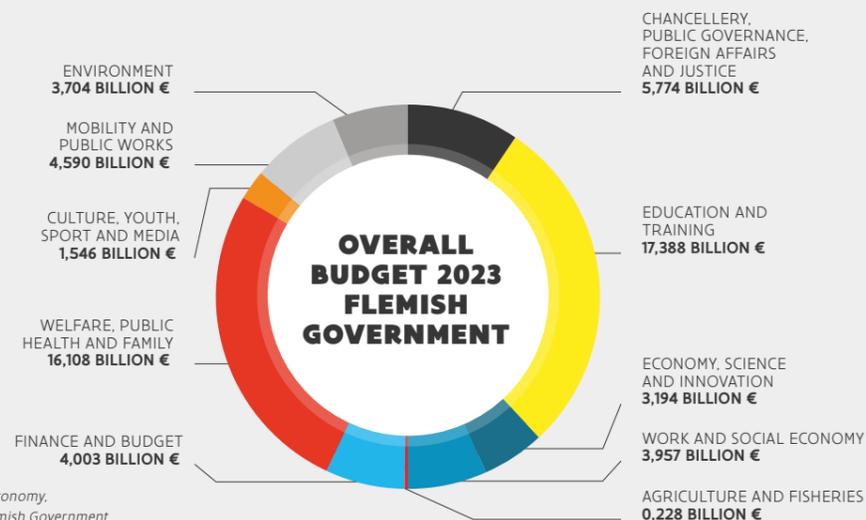
## R&D&I RESOURCES IN FIGURES

- **€9.588 BILLION** – total expenditure on R&D by all (public and private) actors in 2020
- **3.60%** - level of R&D intensity in Flanders in 2020
- **€3.978 BILLION** – government budget for science, higher education and innovation in Flanders in 2022 on a total government budget of €51.6 billion

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**FLEMISH AUTHORITIES: 10 POLICY AREAS WITH A BUDGET OF 60,491 BILLION EURO IN 2023**

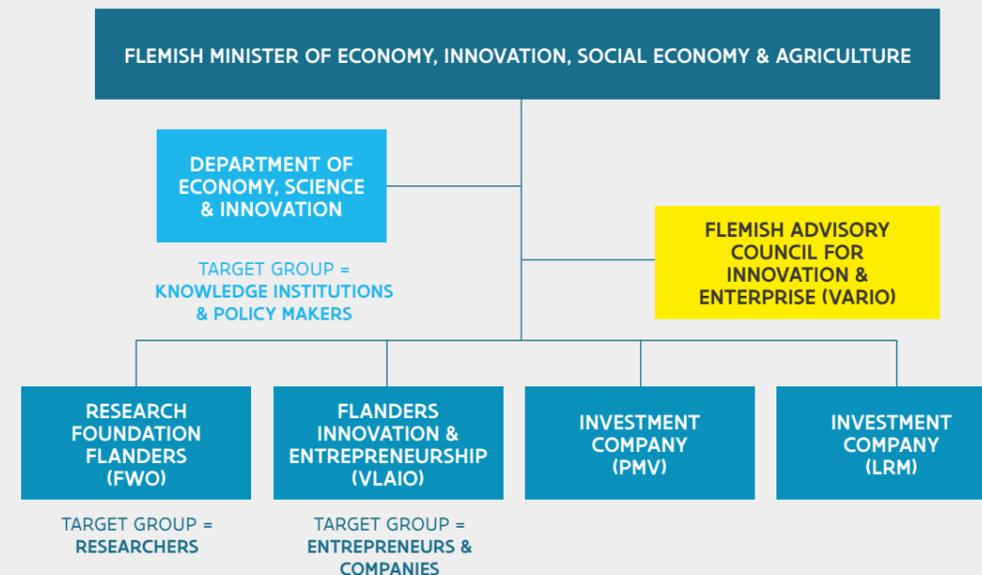
Figure 4



Source: Department of Economy, Science & Innovation, Flemish Government

## ECONOMY, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION (EWI) POLICY AREA FROM THE FLEMISH GOVERNMENT, ANNO 2023

Figure 5



# II KNOWLEDGE INSTITUTIONS

Research institutions – higher education institutes, strategic research centres and scientific & knowledge institutes – are vital for pushing technological boundaries, creating knowledge and sharing innovative ideas in Flanders.

## 5 HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

In 2003 the Flemish Parliament created university associations in order to stimulate the collaboration between the five universities (academic higher education and research) and 13 university colleges (professional higher education, applied research and arts).

Mission and goals of these 5 university associations are situated on the research, educational and service level. Therefor their aim is to coordinate and set up projects that stimulate the collaboration in order to strengthen the link between fundamental and practical research, create closer collaboration and stimulate student mobility between academic and professional educational programmes, and services offered by higher education institutions (such as sport activities, student wellbeing, science communication towards a broader public, collaboration between industries and higher education, cultural programmes). The five university associations tend to work together in order to strengthen the critical mass and efficient outcomes.

In addition to providing higher education and advanced vocational training, the five universities in Flanders undertake a significant amount of research, generating almost 90% of all non-private scientific output in the Region.

The headquarters of the five university associations of the Flemish Community are situated in the cities of Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent, Hasselt and Leuven.

### ASSOCIATIE KU LEUVEN

#### ASSOCIATIE KU LEUVEN (AKUL)

Katholieke Universiteit Leuven and the university colleges Odisee, LUCA Schools of Arts, Thomas More, UC Leuven Limburg and Vives Hogeschool.

[www.associatie.kuleuven.be](http://www.associatie.kuleuven.be)

### ASSOCIATIE UNIVERSITEIT GENT

#### ASSOCIATIE UNIVERSITEIT GENT (AUGENT)

Universiteit Gent and the university colleges Arteveldehogeschool, HOGENT and Howest and Schools of Arts KASK and Conservatoire.

[www.augent.be](http://www.augent.be)

### auha associatie universiteit & hogescholen antwerpen

#### ASSOCIATIE UNIVERSITEIT & HOGESCHOLEN ANTWERPEN (AUHA)

Universiteit Antwerpen and the university colleges AP Hogeschool Antwerpen and Schools of Arts Antwerp of Fine Arts and Conservatoire, Hogere Zeevaartschool and Karel de Grote Hogeschool.

[www.auha.be](http://www.auha.be)

### universitaire associatie BRUSSEL

#### UNIVERSITAIRE ASSOCIATIE BRUSSEL (UAB)

Vrije Universiteit Brussel and the university colleges Erasmushogeschool Brussel and Schools of Arts RITCS and KCB and a cooperation agreement with the Brussels based Royal Military School.

[www.universitaireassociatiebrussel.be](http://www.universitaireassociatiebrussel.be)

### ASSOCIATIE UNIVERSITEIT- HOGESCHOOL LIMBURG

#### ASSOCIATIE UNIVERSITEIT-HOGESCHOOL LIMBURG (AUHL)

Universiteit Hasselt and the university of applied sciences and arts PXL and MAD School of Arts.

[www.auhl.be](http://www.auhl.be)



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#### 4 STRATEGIC RESEARCH CENTRES

Each of the four SOC/SRC (Strategische Onderzoekscentra/ Strategic Research Centres) is active in a specific research area, and has co-founded several spin-off or start-up companies, often based on breakthrough research.



##### imec

- World-leading research and innovation hub in nanoelectronics and digital technologies
- Over 5,500 skilled people from over 95 nationalities
- Research sites across Belgium, in the Netherlands, and the USA, and offices in 3 continents
- €731 million revenue in 2021

[www.imec-int.com/en](http://www.imec-int.com/en)



##### VIB

- Independent research institute doing cutting edge research on molecular mechanisms of life, from microorganisms to plants and human beings
- 1,800 scientists from 75 countries
- Close collaboration with Flemish universities and businesses to bridge the gap between scientific research and entrepreneurship
- Achieved major biotech breakthroughs
- €134 million turnover in 2022

[www.vib.be](http://www.vib.be)



##### VITO

- World's largest multidisciplinary research centre, focus on accelerating the transition towards a sustainable future
- 1,000 experts from over 45 countries, including 100+ Phd positions
- Locations in Flanders, Middle East and China
- Focus on Energy, chemistry, materials, land use and health technology
- €221 million revenue in 2021

[www.vito.be](http://www.vito.be)



##### Flanders Make

- Independent research centre and Industry 4.0 ecosystem that boosts product and production innovation for the manufacturing industry and industry with manufacturing challenges
- 800 full-time researchers and about 200 company members, of which more than 50% are Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs)
- Intense collaboration with universities, other research institutions and companies
- High-tech research infrastructure for testing and validating new products
- €80 million turnover in 2022

[www.flandersmake.be](http://www.flandersmake.be)



## PATENTS IN FIGURES

- **40,924 PATENTS** applications were filed in Flanders between 1980 and 2020, of which 22,536 (55%) have been effectively assigned
- Flanders is ranked **9TH FOR THE NUMBER OF PATENTS BY ORIGIN** (based on inventor and/or applicant address) with 266.6 patents per million of population
- Almost **16%** of Flemish patents are held by **public research centres and universities**, which is significantly higher than the international average

## SCIENTIFIC AND KNOWLEDGE INSTITUTES

Flanders is also home to a wide variety of scientific and knowledge institutions, each with a specific focus. These institutions include such as:

- **Agency Botanic Garden Meise** (Agentschap Plantentuin Meise)
- **Institute for Agricultural and Fisheries Research** (Instituut voor Landbouw en Visserijonderzoek, ILVO)
- **Research Institute for Nature and Forest** (Instituut voor Natuur- en Bosonderzoek, INBO)
- **Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp** (Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen, KMSKA)
- **Agency for Archaeological Heritage** (Agentschap voor Onroerend Erfgoed, AOE)
- **Flanders Marine Institute** (Vlaams Instituut voor de Zee, VLIZ)
- **Institute for Tropical Medicine** (Instituut voor Tropische Geneeskunde, ITM/ITG)
- **Centre for Research and Conservation** (CRC) from the Royal Zoological Society of Antwerp (RZSA)
- **Antwerp Management School**
- **Vlerick Business School**

## COOPERATION BETWEEN RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS

Cooperation between Flemish research institutions is increasingly common:

- **Energyville** which researches sustainable and intelligent energy systems and
- **Neuro-electronics Research Flanders** (NERF) that researches nano-electronics and neurobiology.

## RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE

Flemish policy concerning research infrastructure is the responsibility of the FWO and EWI Department, with the EWI Department drafting policy and representing the Flemish position in international forums while the FWO supports Flemish research.

More information on the Flemish participation in international research infrastructures you'll find in the publication **Large scale research infrastructures in Flanders**.



## BIOECONOMY IN FLANDERS

As early as 2013, Flanders adopted its first regional bioeconomy strategy, which collected the priorities from a broad range of stakeholders and was accompanied by a detailed action plan from the government of Flanders.

The brochure **Flanders' bioeconomy** highlights four local assets that make Flanders a top European region in the field of bioeconomy and shows why bioeconomy in Flanders still has great potential for further growth.

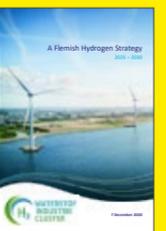


For more information, please consult the publications on [www.ewi-vlaanderen.be/publications](http://www.ewi-vlaanderen.be/publications)

## HYDROGEN STRATEGY

Flanders aspires to become a European leader in the field of hydrogen and published a Flemish hydrogen vision and strategy "European frontrunner through sustainable innovation" in November 2020. Hydrogen plays an important role in our energy and climate transition and it creates economic opportunities for the many Flemish companies and technology players that are active throughout the hydrogen value chain. Hydrogen will be crucial for the decarbonisation of the Flemish industry for both industrial processes and as a feedstock for sustainable chemical products, and to further decarbonise our mobility sector. Large offshore windpower farms off the Flemish coast generate green electricity, which can be used for producing green hydrogen that can be stored and used later for multiple applications with no carbon emissions.

The hydrogen community in Flanders is organised in the "Waterstof Industrie Cluster", a strong collaboration of companies, research institutes and government agencies and coordinated by WaterstofNet, the Flemish hydrogen knowledge centre. They join forces on pilot projects, studies and project consortia along the hydrogen value chain to establish a complete hydrogen ecosystem in Flanders. In line with the Flemish policy vision on hydrogen the WIC published "A Flemish Hydrogen Strategy 2025-2030" in December 2020.



For more information, please consult the publications on [www.waterstofnet.eu/en/knowledge-centre/publications](http://www.waterstofnet.eu/en/knowledge-centre/publications)

III

## BUSINESS

Business research and innovation activities are essential for maintaining Flanders' competitive advantage.

### 7 SPEARHEAD CLUSTERS

At the heart of Flemish R&I-policy aimed at enterprises are seven spearhead clusters that stimulate active and sustainable cooperation between ambitious and forward-thinking business organisations and knowledge institutes.

These large-scale initiatives develop and implement an ambitious long-term strategy and competitiveness programme in a strategic domain. The spearhead clusters in Flanders are:



**Catalisti**  
sustainable chemistry and  
synthetics  
[www.catalisti.be](http://www.catalisti.be)



**Flanders' Food**  
agro-food  
[www.flandersfood.com](http://www.flandersfood.com)



**Strategic Initiative  
Materials (SIM)**  
advanced materials  
[www.sim-flanders.be](http://www.sim-flanders.be)



**Flanders Logistics  
Cluster (VIL)**  
specialised logistics  
[www.vil.be](http://www.vil.be)



**Flux50**  
energy and smart grids  
[www.flux50.com](http://www.flux50.com)



**Blue cluster**  
sustainable North Sea  
economic activities  
[www.blauwecluster.be](http://www.blauwecluster.be)



**Medvia**  
crossover biotech, medical  
and digital technologies  
[www.medvia.be](http://www.medvia.be)

### R&D&I in companies

Enterprises play an important role in the STI system in Flanders, funding 76% of Flemish R&D in 2019. While most of this investment comes from innovation-active international companies, a growing amount comes from innovation-oriented high-tech SMEs.

### NETWORKS AND COLLABORATION

Flanders' network of science parks, research parks, incubators, and accelerators stimulate collaboration for research-based young companies and innovative enterprises to develop their internal knowledge and tackle common technological issues efficiently.

### BUSINESS ORGANISATIONS



**Voka**, the biggest Flemish network of enterprises, was established in 2004 as an alliance of the then eight Flemish Chambers of Commerce. As a network Voka unites more than 18.000 businesses. Its mission is to create an optimal framework for successful entrepreneurship.

[www.voka.be](http://www.voka.be)



**UNIZO**, the Union of Independent Entrepreneurs, has existed since 1948. UNIZO unites a total of 110.000 independent entrepreneurs and SMEs. Either they are a direct member of UNIZO or they are members through the more than 100 sector organizations that are affiliated with UNIZO.

[www.unizo.be](http://www.unizo.be)

### .AGORIA

**Agoria** is the technology federation for all technology-inspired companies in Belgium. Agoria is structured by expertise centres, market teams, industry teams and policy units.

[www.agoria.be](http://www.agoria.be)

## PRIVATE R&D&I IN FIGURES

- **72% OF R&D** in Flanders was funded by the business enterprise sector in 2020
- **75%** of all companies in Flanders in 2018-2020 can be called innovative (product innovation, business process innovation as well as ongoing or abandoned innovation activities) according to the 2021 Community Innovation Survey (CIS). This is the largest proportion of all EU-27 countries.
- Business expenditure on R&D in 2020 was **€6.882 BILLION**, of which 34% was invested in the chemical and pharmaceutical sector (2019)
- **20% of foreign investments** in 2021 took place in the R&D sector
- **R&D intensity** in the business sector was **2.58%** in 2020 (higher than the EU-27 average) compared to 2.41% in 2019
- Flanders represents about two thirds of the total Belgian patent portfolio, out of which **82%** of patent activity is accounted for by private companies

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Flanders: 1st in Europe  
for the proportion  
of enterprises with  
innovation activities

## IV

# CIVIL SOCIETY

The knowledge, skills and innovation of Flemish citizens form another important element of the quadruple helix. Flanders stimulates the curiosity and talents of people of all ages.

## CITIZEN SCIENCE

Flanders has implemented a number of initiatives to increase the scientific knowledge and literacy of Flemish society and encourage young people to study STEM. Some of these initiatives are:

- **Citizen Science:** researchers initiate projects that rely on the active participation of citizens for data gathering and processing.
- **Science Agenda:** the FWO and Royal Academy of Sciences regularly collect questions for scientists from Flemish citizens.
- **Science communication:** Technopolis science centre, Science Communication Expertise Centres, and other science information actors promote science through activities, experiments and workshops.
- **Media:** scientific themes are also spread via the Flemish Radio and Television Broadcasting (VRT) and EOS publisher.
- **Science festivals:** the general public can meet scientists at events like the Flemish Science Day, Day of Biotechnology, Sound of Science festival, and festival and Supernova science festival.

Flanders has implemented a number of initiatives to increase the scientific knowledge and literacy of Flemish society and encourage young people to study STEM.

## STEM EDUCATION IN FIGURES

- **3,489** more students in secondary education studied **STEM courses** in 2020-2021 compared to 2010-2011
- **28.7%** of higher education degrees are in **STEM subjects**
- **31%** of first entry master students at Flemish universities are studying in the **science and technology domain**
- **23%** of 20-29-year-olds in Flanders have a higher degree in **mathematics, science and technology**

## STEM EDUCATION

Attracting more people towards STEM careers starts early in Flanders. The STEM Action Plan 2020-2030 aims to encourage young people to seriously consider a STEM career with a range of initiatives, including rolling out STEM academies to teach young people coding and other computing skills.

## STEM CAREERS

Outstanding researchers are vital to Flanders' efforts to stimulate R&D&I in the region. For this reason, Flanders has developed a range of initiatives to encourage excellent researchers and support their long-term career paths. Flanders also encourages the mobility of researchers, welcoming researchers from China, Germany, India, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain, as well as many other countries.

## VARIO

The Flemish Advisory Council for Innovation and Enterprise (Vlaamse Adviesraad voor Innoveren en Ondernemen or VARIO) advises the Flemish Government and the Flemish Parliament on its science, technology, innovation, industry and entrepreneurship policy. The council does this on its own initiative as well as on request.

## OPEN SCIENCE

Flanders implements Open Science through its Flemish Open Science Board.

## FLANDERS TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION (FTI)

Flanders Technology & Innovation (FTI) is a uniting social project that aims to promote belief in progress and counteract growing societal discontent. FTI's objective is to connect people and knowledge to bring about innovation that improves industrial competitiveness and social well-being in a sustainable way.

<https://fti.vlaanderen/en>



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## STEM CAREERS IN FIGURES

- **61,358 FULL-TIME EQUIVALENTS** (FTE) R&D personnel in Flanders in 2019, which is **31.9% more than in 2015**
- **64.4%** of R&D personnel work in the **private sector**
- **72.2%** of R&D personnel in the public sector work for the higher education sector (HES), of which **81.4% are researchers**, a figure significantly higher than the EU-27 average
- **43.1%** of researchers in HES are **female**, which is more than in the neighbouring countries of France and Germany
- **72%** of R&D personnel working for the Flemish government research institutes are **researchers**, which is higher than the EU-27 average
- **1 IN 3** of all R&D personnel in the public sector has a **PhD**
- R&D personnel made up **1.91%** of the labour force or **0.90%** of the total population of Flanders in 2019 – higher than the EU-27 average
- About **2,000 PhDs** in Flanders in 2019-2020
- **45%** of PhD holders are **female**

# FLANDERS ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE

Flanders pushes beyond its borders entering into bilateral and international agreements, supporting companies as they expand, and cooperating with actors across Europe and the world.

## FLANDERS IN EUROPE

The Flemish Government has made considerable efforts to internationalise STI policy, with a particular focus on the EU level. Thus, Flanders aligns its priorities with those of the European Union and the European Commission, namely “developing a strong and vibrant economic base; building a climate-neutral, green, fair and social Europe; the European Green deal; a Europe fit for the digital age” etc.. In this way, Flanders is trying to meet major challenges together with Europe. Moreover, Flanders contributes to the further development of the European Research Area and is committed to improving and implementing EU funding programmes such as the EU’s main funding programme for research and innovation (Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe), the Digital Europe Programme, InvestEU, the Single Market Programme, etc. Furthermore, Flanders closely follows the European semester and actively contributes by drafting the Flemish Reform Programme, as part of the Belgian Reform Programme.

## HORIZON EUROPE

The Flemish government plans to participate in 13 of the 14 partnerships of the first wave of the first Horizon Europe strategic plan (2021-2024) for a total amount of around 120 million in cash and about 140 million in kind. This represents about 75% of Belgium’s contribution to the first wave of partnerships. A second wave of partnerships is currently being prepared by the European Commission and member states.

## FLANDERS IN THE WORLD

Flanders also works within the frameworks of the United Nations (UN) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to present Flanders’ strengths in the fields of economy, science, and innovation and to learn from other countries and regions.

## NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

### Flanders Investment and Trade (FIT)

Working in both the EU and further afield, FIT supports the international activities of Flemish companies and attracts foreign investors to Flanders. From its worldwide network of over 90 offices, FIT offers tailored advice and guidance, shares its network of contacts, and provides financial support and information about a wide range of financial incentives.

**VLAIO:** Regarding international innovation, VLAIO supports business organisations as National Contact Point (NCP) for Flanders for the European Framework Programme for research and innovation (together with FWO, also known as NCP Flanders) and Enterprise Europe Network Flanders (together with FIT). VLAIO also provides co-funding for European projects.

**FWO:** The actions of FWO are crucial to stimulate the internationalisation of research and focus on international mobility, including research projects, international collaboration, international contacts, European programmes and involvement in international policy.

**VLEVA:** The liaison agency Flanders-Europe (VLEVA) is successfully supporting Flemish actors to discover the most appropriate European funding opportunities. VLEVA creates a platform for Flanders in Europe by bridging the gap between Flanders and Europe and underlining how important Europe is to Flanders.

**EWI stakeholder platform:** The Flemish platform for European Programmes groups the ‘quadruple helix’ (government, knowledge institutions, industry and civil society) in Flanders into one umbrella platform. Stakeholder consultation through this platform not only supports and nurtures EWI representatives in European committees and working groups in the preparation of policy positions but also proactively produced policy reflection papers, such as an internationally well received paper on the new ERA.

Flemish partners already attracted €468 million and contribute in 664 projects of the Horizon Europe Framework.



## BELGIAN EU PRESIDENCY 2024

From 1 January to the 30 June 2024, **Belgium will chair the Council of the European Union**. The Presidency of the Council rotates among the EU member states every 6 months. During this period, it plays a leading role in the work of the Council of the European Union and acts as an honest and neutral mediator to ensure continuity of the EU agenda, legislative processes and cooperation among member states. The Presidency has two main tasks: planning and chairing meetings in the Council and its preparatory bodies and representing the Council in relations with the other EU institutions. Belgium, together with Spain and Hungary, forms a Trio Presidency that formulates medium-term objectives and develops a relatively limited Joint programme. Sweden currently chairs the Council of the European Union and will be succeeded by a new trio of Spain, Belgium and Hungary for the period from 1 July 2023 – 31 December 2024.

## FLANDERS, REPRESENTING BELGIUM, CHAIRS THE COMPETITIVENESS COUNCIL ON INDUSTRY

The Competitiveness Council works to enhance competitiveness and increase growth in the EU. It deals with four major policy areas: internal market, industry, research and innovation and space.

During the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU, Flanders plays an important role. The division of competences in Belgium between the federal government and the regions and communities also applies at EU level (*i.e. in foro interno, in foro externo*). During the EU presidency, Flanders will represent Belgium in the areas of youth, culture, audiovisual media, fisheries and industry. More specifically, Flemish Minister for Economy, Innovation, Work, Social Economy and Agriculture, Jo Brouns, will represent Belgium during the Presidency of the Competitiveness Council on industry.

# GLOBAL FLANDERS IN FIGURES

**IMPORT**  
**EUR 276 BILLION**  
(GOODS, 2021, NATIONAL CONCEPT)

**EXPORT**  
**EUR 260 BILLION**  
(GOODS, 2021, NATIONAL CONCEPT)

## PORTS IN FLANDERS



## FOREIGN INVESTMENTS 2022

€ 5.26 BILLION  
TOTAL INVESTMENTS

278  
NEW PROJECTS

6,540  
NEW JOBS

## INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

### 10 SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY OFFICES WORLDWIDE

in New York, Palo Alto, Paris, London, Copenhagen, Munich, Mumbai, Singapore, Guangzhou and Tokyo;

### SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION

agreements with a number of countries for the funding of potential exchange projects, namely with: Japan, Bulgaria, Poland, China, Brazil, Argentina, France, South-Korea, Taiwan, Turkey, Mexico, France-Tournesol, Hungary;

### BILATERAL RESEARCH COOPERATION

with Brazil, China, Ecuador, Vietnam, South-Africa, Québec (Canada);

### LEAD AGENCY PROCEDURES

with Luxembourg, Austria, Slovenia and Switzerland;

### BIG SCIENCE PROJECTS

the "Big Science" programme supports researchers at institutes of the Flemish Community who want to conduct research projects at major international research facilities, the membership for which is paid for by the Belgian Federal or Flemish government.

## MAIN EXPORT SECTORS (NATIONAL CONCEPT)

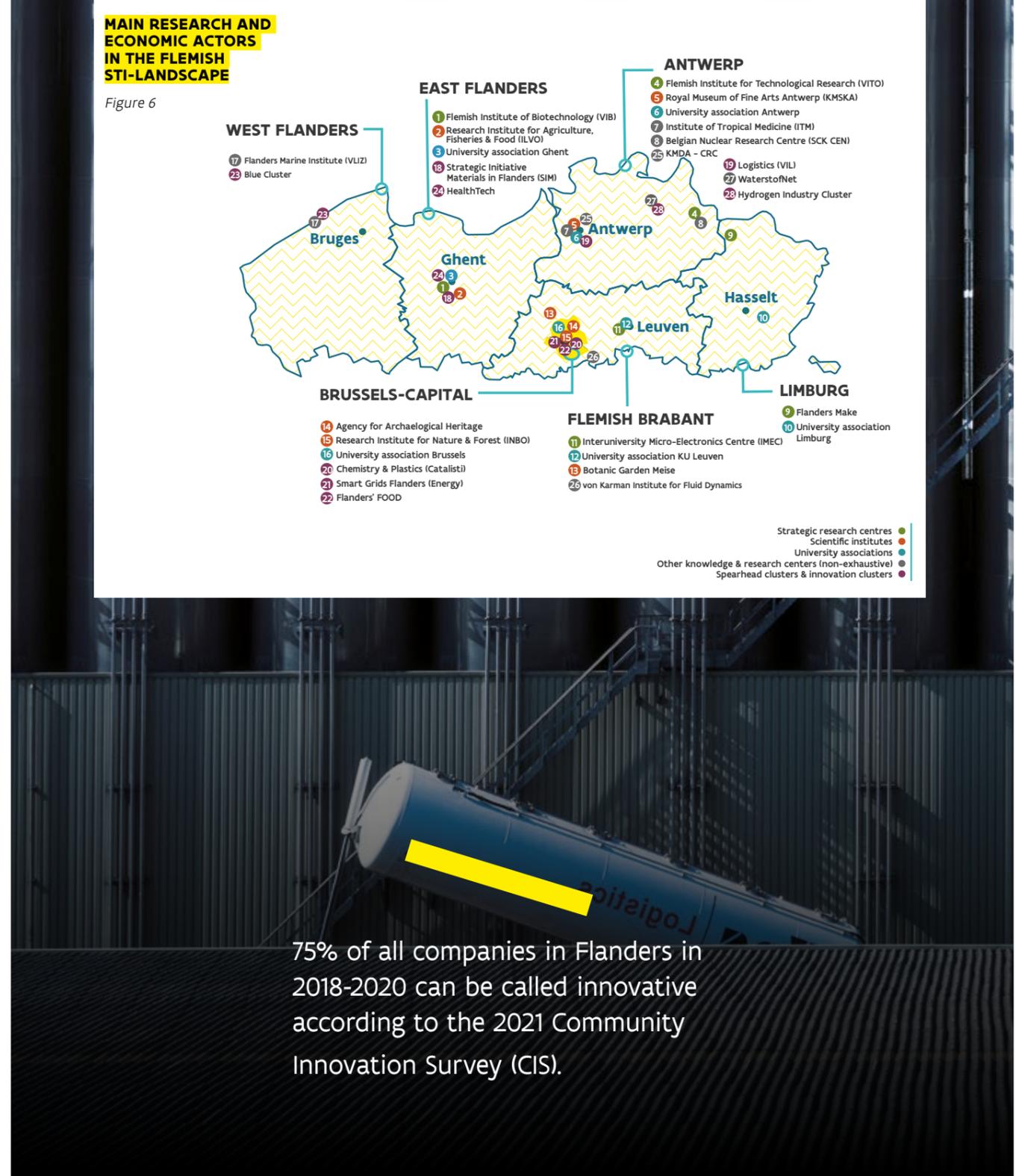
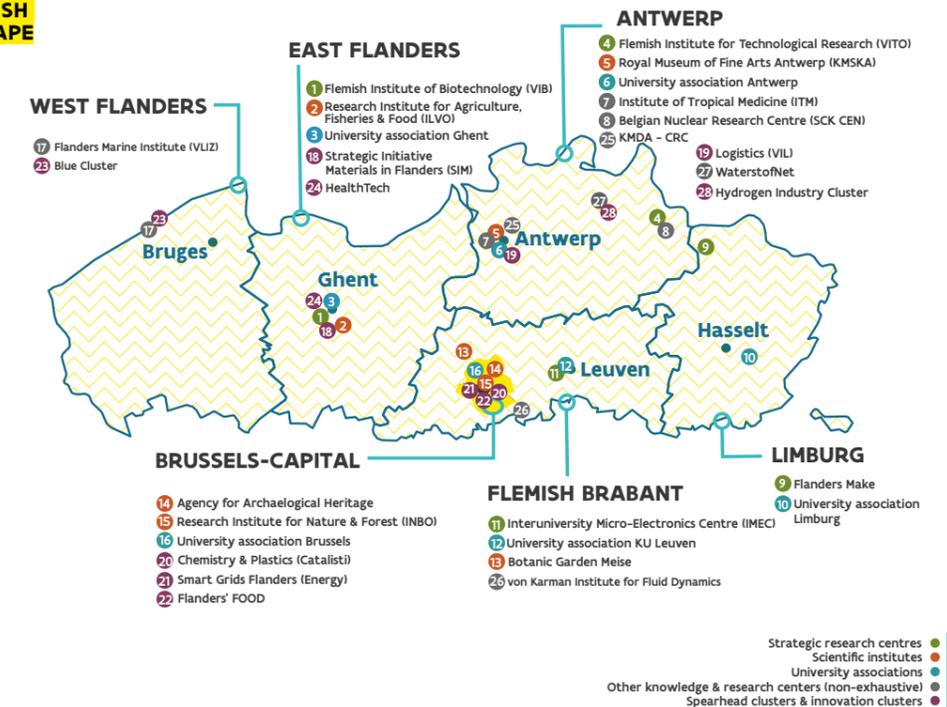
1. **CHEMISTRY AND PHARMA**  
**EUR 72,5 billion**
2. **TRANSPORT EQUIPMENT**  
**EUR 27,2 billion**
3. **MACHINES & ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT**  
**EUR 26,4 billion**
4. **MINERAL PRODUCTS**  
**EUR 22,3 billion**
5. **PLASTIC AND APPLICATIONS**  
**EUR 20,3 billion**

Source: Publication Flanders is international, Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office, Flemish Government Publication Science, Technology & Innovation in Flanders, Department EWI, Flemish Government



## MAIN RESEARCH AND ECONOMIC ACTORS IN THE FLEMISH STI-LANDSCAPE

Figure 6



75% of all companies in Flanders in 2018-2020 can be called innovative according to the 2021 Community Innovation Survey (CIS).

# R&D INTENSITY

Investments in R&D are key to ensuring a high level of productivity and maintain competitiveness in a global perspective. R&D-investments are also expected to be crucial to tackle grand societal challenges such as the energy and climate transition or an ageing population. In its Innovation Pact of 2003 and on subsequent occasions (Pact 2020, Flanders in Action, Vision 2050) the Flemish Government has stated its ambition to reach a 3% R&D-intensity (measured as the percentage of GERD related to GDP), thus subscribing to the Europe 2020 3%-target.

Investments in R&D are key to ensuring a high level of productivity and maintain competitiveness in a global perspective.

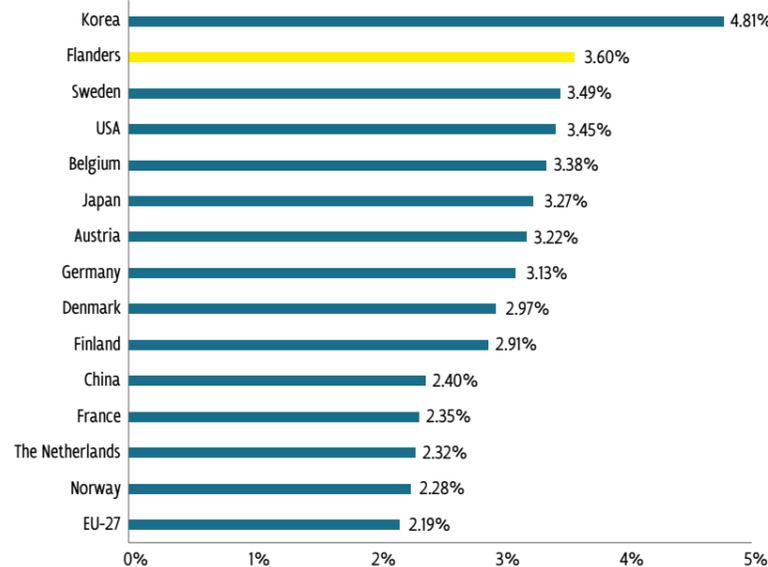
## GROSS DOMESTIC EXPENDITURE ON R&D (GERD)

In 2020, Flanders spent over 9,588 million euros on R&D (GERD). More than two-thirds of the research cost was paid by companies (the Business Enterprise Sector or BES) and almost one-third by public research institutes (PNP, GOV and HES).

The R&D intensity (measured as the percentage of GERD related to GDP) of Flanders was 3.60% in 2020 (compared to 2.88% in 2017, 2.94% in 2018 and 3.35% in 2019). Flanders ranks very high for the total R&D intensity of GERD in 2020 and only Korea (4.81%) ranks still higher (3.39%). Flanders ranks higher than Sweden, Austria, Germany, the USA and the EU-27 average.

GERD AS A PERCENTAGE OF GDP (2020)

Figure 7

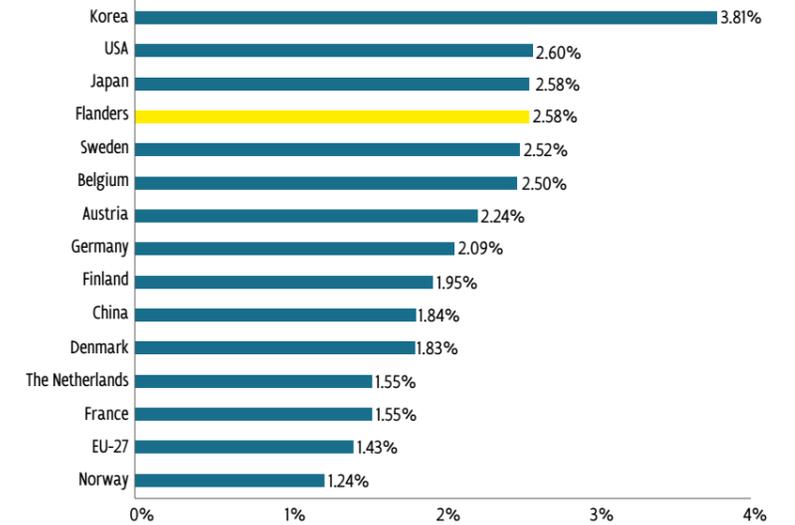


## BUSINESS ENTERPRISE EXPENDITURE ON R&D (BERD)

In 2020, the business enterprise sector spent 6,882 million euros on R&D activities in Flanders, measured at current prices. This is the Business Expenditure on R&D (BERD), which corresponds to a R&D intensity (BERD as a % of GDP) of 2.58%. Flanders therefore ranks much higher than the EU-27 average, the Netherlands, Finland, Germany and Austria. Flanders scores a little higher than Sweden and equal to Japan.

AS A PERCENTAGE OF GDP (2020)

Figure 8

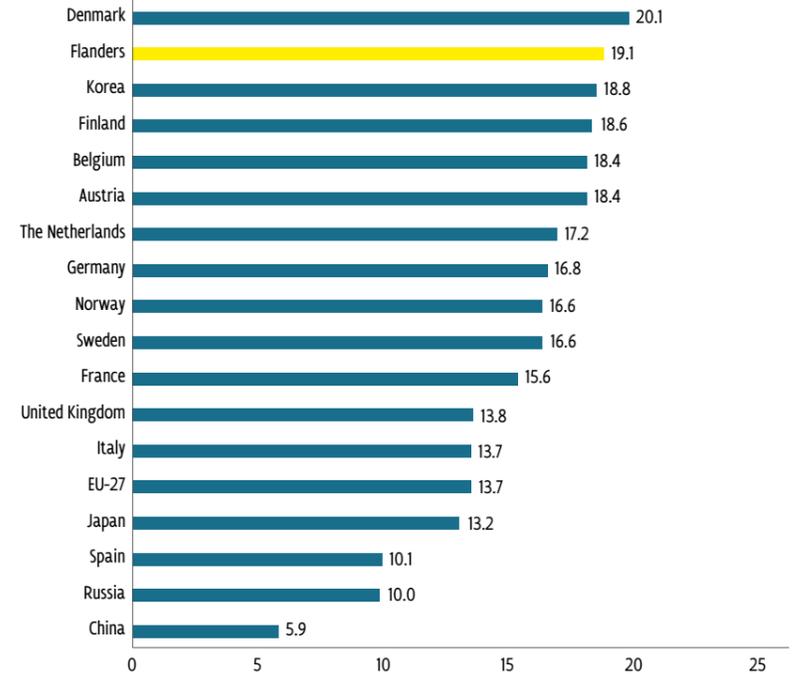


## TOTAL R&D PERSONNEL PER THOUSAND LABOUR FORCE

The level of R&D personnel corresponds to 19.1 (2019) per thousand labour force. Flanders therefore belongs to the top and this figure is much higher than the EU-27 average but Denmark has a significant lead.

TOTAL R&D PERSONNEL PER THOUSAND LABOUR FORCE (2019)

Figure 9



\* UK and Norway: figure for 2018

### FLEMISH UNIVERSITIES

All the Flemish universities score very high on these three different rankings and belong almost for each ranking to the top 3% worldwide.

The Catholic University of Leuven and the Ghent University even rank in the top 1% for all these three rankings. Each ranking uses different criteria with different weights in their calculation of the ranking position. We give the main elements for these three well know rankings.

**The Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings 2023** is an international "league table" ranking that uses 13 metrics clustered in following 4 areas teaching, research, knowledge transfer and international outlook.

**The Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) 2022**, the so-called "Shanghai Ranking", scores more than 1,800 universities yearly and the best 1,000 universities worldwide are published. This ranking uses objective indicators that are mainly focusing on research (Highly cited researchers in Web of Science, articles in Nature and Science, articles in two citation indexes of Web of Science and results on the indicators per

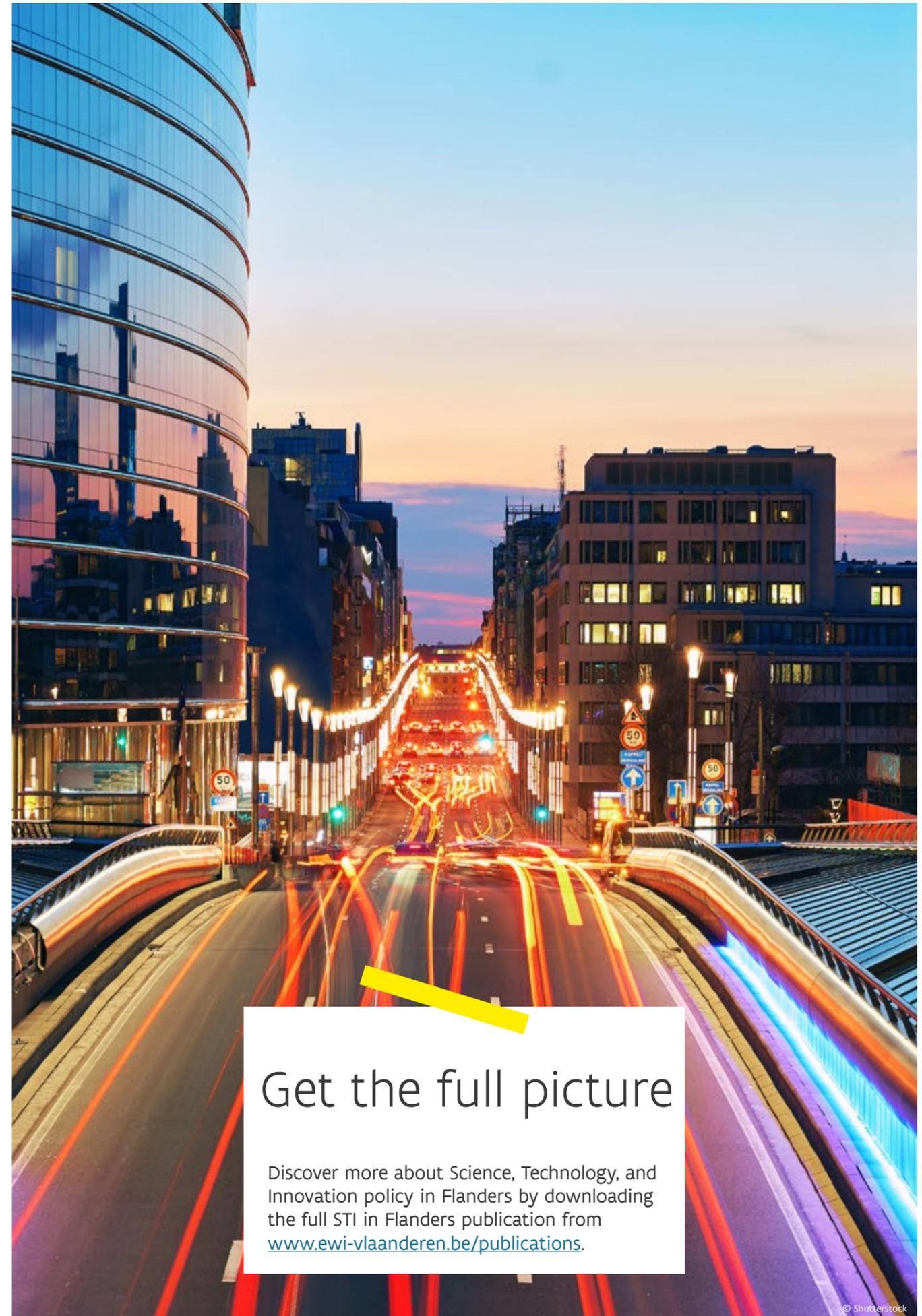
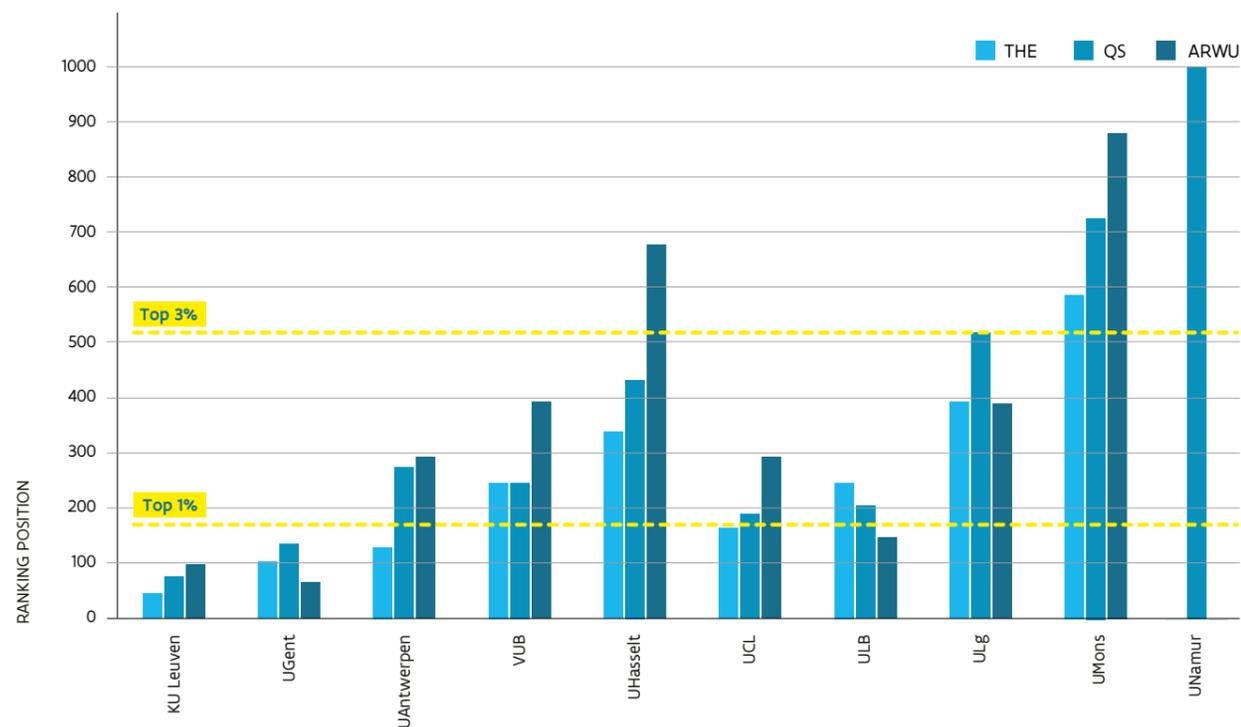
researchers) and prestige (Alumni and staff with awards). Since 2019 all Flemish universities are part of this ranking.

**The Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Ranking 2023** scores universities worldwide on the indicators Academic reputation, Employer reputation, Faculty/student ratio, Citations per faculty, International faculty ratio and International student ratio. Next to this three well known rankings, the European Commission asked to develop another type of ranking.

Since 2014 the **online ranking tool U-Multirank** is active. The U-Multirank is different than the other rankings because it scores the universities in groups from A "very good" to E "weak". This meets a frequently recurring criticism of rankings, namely that the allocation of ranking positions makes performance differences between universities appear larger than they really are. Through an online tool [www.umultirank.org](http://www.umultirank.org) it is possible to compare universities based on the criteria of your own choice. The different criteria are grouped into 5 dimensions: Teaching & learning, Research, Knowledge Transfer, International Orientation and Regional Engagement. The presence of universities from the Flemish Community in the major worldwide rankings is shown in the Figure below.

**RANKING POSITION OF THE BELGIAN UNIVERSITIES 2023**

Figure 10



Get the full picture

Discover more about Science, Technology, and Innovation policy in Flanders by downloading the full STI in Flanders publication from [www.ewi-vlaanderen.be/publications](http://www.ewi-vlaanderen.be/publications).

# MAIN R&D ACTORS

## PUBLIC AUTHORITY

Department of Economy, Science and Innovation	<a href="http://www.ewi-vlaanderen.be/en">www.ewi-vlaanderen.be/en</a>
Flanders Chancellery and Foreign Office	<a href="http://www.fdfa.be/en/home">www.fdfa.be/en/home</a>
Research Foundation Flanders (FWO)	<a href="http://www.fwo.be/en/">www.fwo.be/en/</a>
Flanders Innovation and Entrepreneurship (VLAIO)	<a href="http://www.vlaio.be">www.vlaio.be</a> <a href="http://www.vlaio.be/nl/andere-doelgroepen/flanders-innovation-entrepreneurship">www.vlaio.be/nl/andere-doelgroepen/flanders-innovation-entrepreneurship</a>
Flanders Holding Company (PMV)	<a href="http://www.pmv.eu/en">www.pmv.eu/en</a>
Limburg Reconversion Company (LRM)	<a href="http://www.lrm.be/en">www.lrm.be/en</a>
Flanders Investment and Trade (FIT)	<a href="http://www.flandersinvestmentandtrade.com/en">www.flandersinvestmentandtrade.com/en</a>

## ADVISORY COUNCILS

Flemish Advisory Council for Innovation and Enterprise (VARIO)	<a href="http://www.vario.be/en">www.vario.be/en</a>
Social and Economic Council of Flanders (SERV)	<a href="http://www.serv.be/en/serv">www.serv.be/en/serv</a>

## SCIENTIFIC INSTITUTES (from the Flemish Community)

Agency Botanic Garden Meise	<a href="http://www.plantentuinmeise.be/en/">www.plantentuinmeise.be/en/</a>
Institute for Agricultural and Fisheries Research (ILVO)	<a href="http://www.ilvo.vlaanderen.be/language/en-US/EN/Home.aspx">www.ilvo.vlaanderen.be/language/en-US/EN/Home.aspx</a>
Research Institute for Nature and Forest (INBO)	<a href="http://www.inbo.be/nl/webform/contacteer-inbo">www.inbo.be/nl/webform/contacteer-inbo</a>
Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp (KMSKA)	<a href="http://www.kmska.be/en">www.kmska.be/en</a>
Agency for Archaeological Heritage (AOE)	<a href="http://www.onroenderfgoed.be/">www.onroenderfgoed.be/</a>

## OTHER BODIES OF PUBLIC INTEREST IN THE FIELD OF SCIENCE AND INNOVATION

Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Arts and Sciences (KVAB)	<a href="http://www.kvab.be/en/home-1">www.kvab.be/en/home-1</a>
Royal Academy of Belgium for Medicine (KAGB)	<a href="http://www.academiegeneeskunde.be/">www.academiegeneeskunde.be/</a>
Royal Academy for Dutch Language and Literature (KANTL)	<a href="http://www.kantl.be/">www.kantl.be/</a>
Flanders Foundation for Technology Assessment in Innovation and Work (STV voor Innovatie en Arbeid)	<a href="http://www.serv.be/en/stichting">www.serv.be/en/stichting</a>
Flemish Academic Centre for Science and the Arts (VLAST)	<a href="http://www.kvab.be/nl/vlast">www.kvab.be/nl/vlast</a>

## UNIVERSITY ASSOCIATIONS

Antwerp	<a href="http://www.auha.be">www.auha.be</a>
Brussels	<a href="http://www.universitaireassociatiebrussel.be/en">www.universitaireassociatiebrussel.be/en</a>
Ghent	<a href="http://www.augent.be/en">www.augent.be/en</a>
Leuven	<a href="http://www.associatie.kuleuven.be/eng">www.associatie.kuleuven.be/eng</a>
Limburg	<a href="http://www.auhl.be">www.auhl.be</a>

## STRATEGIC RESEARCH CENTRES

Interuniversity Micro-electronics Centre (imec)	<a href="http://www.imec-int.com/en">www.imec-int.com/en</a>
Flanders Make	<a href="http://www.flandersmake.be/en">www.flandersmake.be/en</a>
Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB)	<a href="http://www.vib.be/en">www.vib.be/en</a>
Flemish Institute for Technological Research (VITO)	<a href="http://www.vito.be/en">www.vito.be/en</a>

## OTHER KNOWLEDGE INSTITUTES

Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ)	<a href="http://www.vliz.be/en">www.vliz.be/en</a>
Institute for Tropical Medicine (ITM)	<a href="http://www.itg.be">www.itg.be</a>
Centre for Research and Conservation (CRC)	<a href="http://bebol.myspecies.info/content/centre-research-and-conservation-crc">bebol.myspecies.info/content/centre-research-and-conservation-crc</a>
Antwerp Management School	<a href="http://www.antwerpmanagementschool.be">www.antwerpmanagementschool.be</a>
Vlerick Business School	<a href="http://www.vlerick.com">www.vlerick.com</a>
WaterstofNet	<a href="http://www.waterstofnet.eu/en">www.waterstofnet.eu/en</a>

**FEDERAL SCIENTIFIC INSTITUTES**

Belgian Institute for Space Aeronomy (BIRA)	<a href="http://www.aeronomie.be/en">www.aeronomie.be/en</a>
National Library of Belgium (KBR)	<a href="http://www.kbr.be/en">www.kbr.be/en</a>
Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences (KBIN)	<a href="http://www.naturalsciences.be">www.naturalsciences.be</a>
Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (KIK)	<a href="http://www.kikirpa.be/EN/1/61/Home.htm">www.kikirpa.be/EN/1/61/Home.htm</a>
Royal Meteorological Institute of Belgium (KMI)	<a href="http://www.meteo.be/en/belgium">www.meteo.be/en/belgium</a>
Royal Museum for Central Africa	<a href="http://www.africamuseum.be/en">www.africamuseum.be/en</a>
Royal Museums of Art and History (KMG)	<a href="http://www.kmkg-mrah.be/art-history-museum-0">www.kmkg-mrah.be/art-history-museum-0</a>
Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium (KMSK)	<a href="http://www.fine-arts-museum.be/en">www.fine-arts-museum.be/en</a>
Royal Observatory of Belgium (KSB)	<a href="http://www.astro.oma.be/en">www.astro.oma.be/en</a>
State Archives of Belgium	<a href="http://www.arch.be/index.php?l=en">www.arch.be/index.php?l=en</a>

**FEDERAL RESEARCH CENTRES**

Sciensano	<a href="http://www.sciensano.be/en">www.sciensano.be/en</a>
National Institute for Radio-elements (IRE)	<a href="http://www.ire.eu">www.ire.eu</a>
Nuclear Energy Centre (SCK)	<a href="http://www.sckcen.be/en">www.sckcen.be/en</a>

**INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTES, ORGANISATIONS OR PLATFORMS IN THE STI FIELD, LOCATED IN FLANDERS**

JRC - Institute for Reference Materials and Measurements (IRMM)	<a href="http://www.confidence.eu/participants/ec-jrc-irmm">www.confidence.eu/participants/ec-jrc-irmm</a>
EU Joint Technology Initiatives (IMI, Clean Sky, ECSEL, FCH)	<a href="http://www.rvo.nl/subsidie-en-financieringswijzer/joint-technology-initiatives">www.rvo.nl/subsidie-en-financieringswijzer/joint-technology-initiatives</a>
European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST)	<a href="http://www.cost.eu/news/ESA">www.cost.eu/news/ESA</a>
Business and Innovation Centre (ESA BIC)	<a href="http://www.sbicnoordwijk.nl/esa-bic">www.sbicnoordwijk.nl/esa-bic</a>
United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS)	<a href="http://www.cris.unu.edu">www.cris.unu.edu</a>
European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODnet)	<a href="http://www.emodnet.eu">www.emodnet.eu</a>
European Marine Board (EMB)	<a href="http://www.marineboard.eu">www.marineboard.eu</a>
Von Karmann Institute (VKI)	<a href="http://www.vki.ac.be">www.vki.ac.be</a>

**TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER OFFICES (TTO) AT THE UNIVERSITIES AND THE STRATEGIC RESEARCH CENTRES**

KU Leuven Research & Development	<a href="http://www.lrd.kuleuven.be/en">www.lrd.kuleuven.be/en</a>
UGent TechTransfer	<a href="http://www.ugent.be/techtransfer/en">www.ugent.be/techtransfer/en</a>
VUB TechTransfer	<a href="http://www.vubtechtransfer.be">www.vubtechtransfer.be</a>
AUHA Interfacedienst	<a href="http://www.uantwerpen.be/nl/onderzoek/informatie-voor-bedrijven">www.uantwerpen.be/nl/onderzoek/informatie-voor-bedrijven</a>
UHasselt Tech Transfer Office	<a href="http://www.uhasselt.be/techtransfer_en">www.uhasselt.be/techtransfer_en</a>
Tech Transfer Offices Flanders	<a href="http://www.ttoflanders.be/en">www.ttoflanders.be/en</a>

**SCIENCE / TECHNOLOGY PARKS**

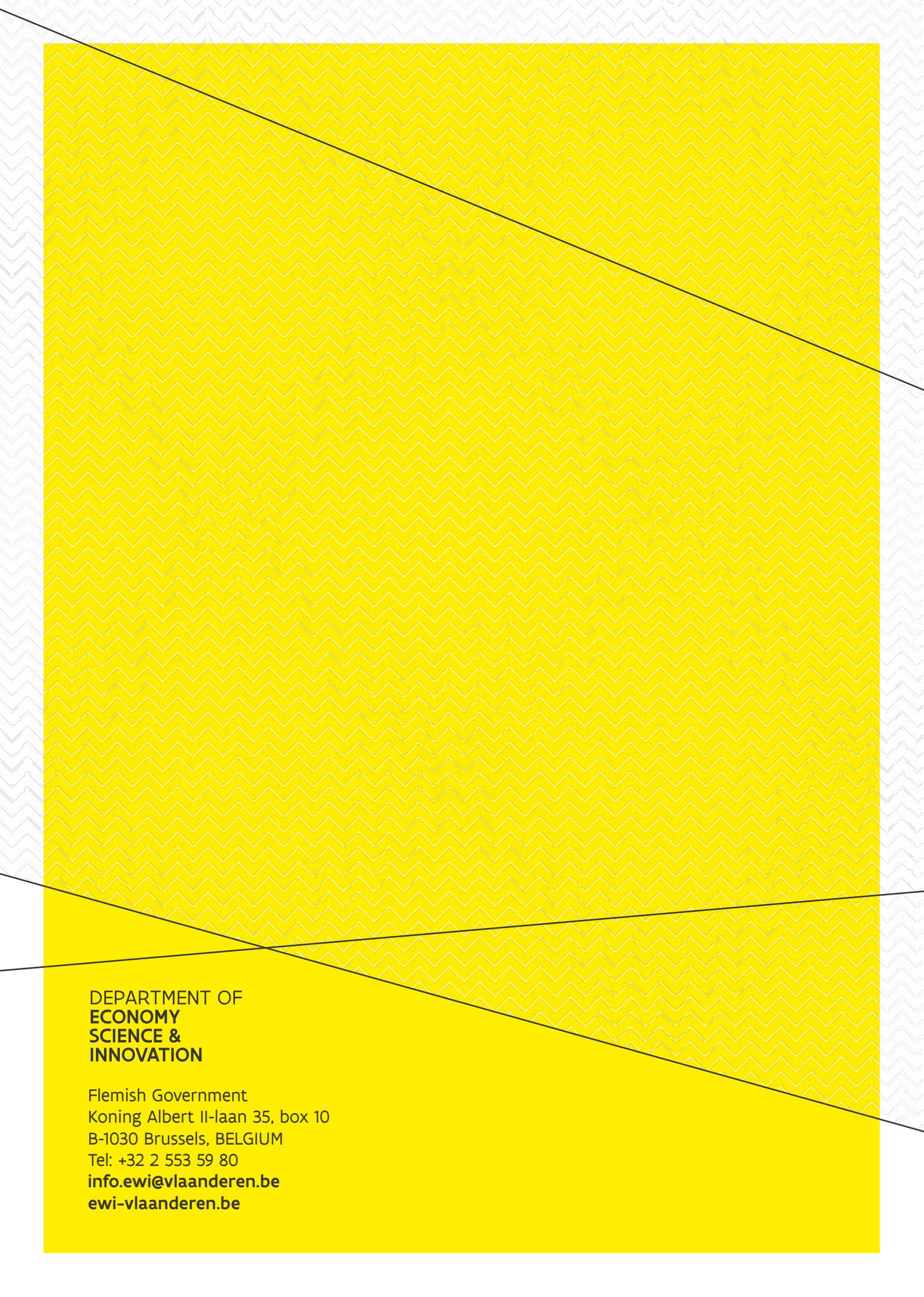
Tech Lane Ghent Science Park (previously the Ardoyen and Eiland Zwijnaarde parks) (Ghent)	<a href="http://www.techlane.be/about">www.techlane.be/about</a>
Zellik (Asse)	<a href="http://www.researchparkzellik.be">www.researchparkzellik.be</a>
Arenberg, Haasrode (Leuven)	<a href="http://www.wetenschapspark-arenberg.be/en">www.wetenschapspark-arenberg.be/en</a>
Feed Food Health (Tienen)	<a href="http://www.foodport.be">www.foodport.be</a>
Thor Park (Genk)	<a href="http://www.thorpark.be">www.thorpark.be</a>
Corda Campus (previously Research Campus Hasselt) (Hasselt)	<a href="http://www.cordacampus.com/en">www.cordacampus.com/en</a>

**SPEARHEAD CLUSTERS**

Catalisti	<a href="http://www.catalisti.be">www.catalisti.be</a>
Flanders' Food	<a href="http://www.flandersfood.com">www.flandersfood.com</a>
Strategic Initiative Materials	<a href="http://www.sim-flanders.be">www.sim-flanders.be</a>
Flanders Logistics Cluster	<a href="http://www.vil.be">www.vil.be</a>
Flux50	<a href="http://www.flux50.com">www.flux50.com</a>
Blue cluster	<a href="http://www.blauwecluster.be">www.blauwecluster.be</a>
Medvia	<a href="http://www.medvia.be">www.medvia.be</a>

**STRATEGIC RESEARCH CENTRES**

imec	<a href="http://www.imec-int.com/en">www.imec-int.com/en</a>
VIB	<a href="http://www.vib.be">www.vib.be</a>
Vito	<a href="http://www.vito.be">www.vito.be</a>
Flanders Make	<a href="http://www.flandersmake.be">www.flandersmake.be</a>



DEPARTMENT OF  
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SCIENCE &  
INNOVATION**

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