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Europe's Innovation Union

The ‘Innovation Union’ is one of Europe’s antidotes to the financial crisis. It is a way of creating jobs and growth through research and innovation.

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Innovation is everywhere, it does not only refer to the creation of new products. It is also about the creation of new processes, new services, new ways of marketing, social innovation that will add value to markets, governments and society.

Innovation does not happen by itself, it needs an innovation-friendly environment to flourish. This is what the Innovation Union is about.

For instance, Europe’s Member States have agreed to invest in smart ways of fostering innovation and in maintaining a solid knowledge base. This decision plays a central role in Europe’s 10-year plan for jobs and growth, dubbed Europe 2020.

Leaders and followers

- Sweden, Germany, Denmark and Finland are the EU’s innovation leaders.

- Netherlands, Luxembourg, Belgium, the UK, Austria, Ireland, France, Slovenia, Cyprus and Estonia come next as innovation followers.
- The performance of Italy, Spain, Portugal, Czech Republic, Greece, Slovakia, Hungary, Malta and Lithuania is below that of the EU average
- The EU Member States that are least innovative are Poland, Latvia, Romania and Bulgaria.

  *Source: Innovation Union Scoreboard, 2013

The Innovation Union is one of the seven flagships of this strategy. Under the impetus of the Innovation Union, the aim is to build a solid research and innovation 'system' in Europe. Great ideas and excellent research can more easily become products or services that will benefit us all and our economies.

To build this innovation friendly environment, broader partnerships between private and public sectors will be developed. For example, by bringing researchers, industry, users and public sector together in European Innovation Partnerships, Europe will reach its innovation potential more quickly. Under the Innovation Union, public authorities will be encouraged to use innovative public procurements encouraging companies to find creative solutions to a problem, rather than just offering the cheapest bid.

To make Europe a top class actor in science and innovation, bottlenecks such as, for example, rules and laws differing significantly between the Member States or outdated standards, have to be removed. This should lead to the creation of a true internal market for skills, regulations and capital, allowing ideas and new solutions to come to market more quickly.

Horizon 2020, Europe's future framework programme to fund research and innovation, will support cutting-edge science, and finance research and activities that will get products onto the market. This programme will be the engine that shall support the implementation of the Innovation Union's objectives. It is also pushing for free and open access to the results of publicly funded research.

If the target of investing 3 % of the EU's GDP on research and development (R&D) is reached by 2020, it could create 3.7 million jobs and increase annual GDP by up to EUR 795 billion by 2025.

To help ensure the Innovation Union is delivering the jobs and growth that Europe needs, the EU produces an Innovation Union Scoreboard, which ranks each country according to their innovation performance.

More info

Innovation Union action points

Innovation Union Scoreboard 2013

Europe 2020 strategy

Horizon 2020