

Number of EPO patent applications decreased slightly last year

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Last year, 180.250 European patent applications were filed with the EPO, a 0.7% decrease in comparison with 2019.

According to [statistics published by the EPO earlier this week](#), medical technology (+2.6%) "accounted for the most inventions in 2020, retaking the top spot from digital communication, which had been the most active field in 2019. The previous growth champions, digital communication (which includes technologies enabling 5G networks) and computer technology (including AI-related inventions), continued to show strong patenting activity, ranking second and third respectively, and growing by 1.0% and 1.9% on 2019. Meanwhile, transport showed the largest drop (-5.5%), especially in the sub-fields of aviation and aerospace (-24.7%), and to a lesser extent automotive (-1.6%)."

The top five countries in 2020 were (again) the US (44 293 applications), Germany (25 954), Japan (21 841), China (13 432) and France (10 554). As in 2019, the strongest increases among the top 10 countries came from Chinese (+9.9%) and South Korean (+9.2%) applicants, with Chinese firms filing more applications in biotechnology, electrical machinery/ apparatus/energy (...) and digital communication. Korean companies were particularly active in electrical machinery/apparatus/energy, telecommunications, semiconductors and computer technology, according to the EPO's numbers. "Conversely, US patent applicants, who account for a quarter of all applications at the EPO, filed 4.1% fewer applications in 2020, dropping significantly in the areas of transport, electrical machinery/apparatus/energy and organic fine chemistry."



"Companies and inventors from the EPO's 38 member states filed over 81 000 European patent applications last year, down by 1.3%. (...) While applications from Germany, Europe's biggest country of origin, dropped by 3.0% in 2020, French and Italian inventors filed 3.1% and 2.9% more applications respectively. Among the top 10 European countries, the Netherlands saw the biggest decline (-8.2%), followed by the UK (-6.8%)."

"The 2020 top applicant ranking also reflects the sustained growth of patent applications from China and South Korea. Samsung (with 3 276 applications) heads the table, followed by Huawei (3 113), which led the ranking in the previous year, and LG in third place (2 909). The top 10 includes five companies from Europe (the highest number since 2014), two from South Korea, and one from China, Japan and the US respectively."

EPO President António Campinos said: "The EPO's Patent Index for 2020 shows that demand for patent protection has remained high. (...) While this is a conclusive set of results for the year, it is far from presenting a complete picture of the longer-term effects of the pandemic. Those, I'm sure, are yet to be seen. And although we can't predict with any certainty the patent trends that will emerge in the coming months or years, we do know that it is innovation, research and science that will lead to a healthier world, and to stronger and more sustainable economies."