

Kluwer Patent Blog

EPO Patent Index 2022: most applications concern digital communication

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The European Patent Office received 193 460 applications last year, an increase of 2.5% compared to 2021 and a new record. Digital communication (+11.2% over 2021) was the field with the highest number of patent applications, followed closely by medical technology (+1.0%) and computer technology (+1.8%).

These are some numbers from the EPO's [Patent Index 2022](#), which was published today. The big increase in patent applications in digital technologies is permeating many other areas such as [healthcare](#), transport and agriculture.

Electrical machinery/apparatus/energy (+18.2%), a field that includes inventions related to clean energy, was the fastest growing among the top ten technology fields, driven in part by the boom in battery technologies (+48.0%). The areas of semiconductors (+19.9%) and audio-visual technology (+8.1%) also grew strongly, albeit from a smaller base. Patent activity in pharmaceuticals continued its steady rise (+1.0%), squeezing past transport (-2.6%) to break into the top five technology fields for the first time in the past decade. Biotechnology (+11.0%) also continued to boom.



Patent Index: key trends

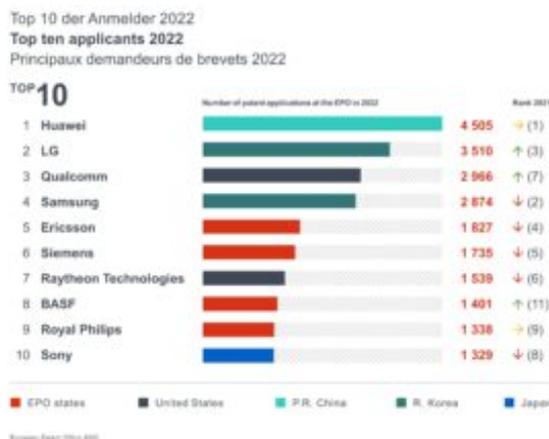


The top five countries of origin for patent applications at the EPO in 2022 were the United States (accounting for a quarter of the total), Germany, Japan, China and France. The growth in applications in 2022 was mainly fuelled by filings from China (+15.1% compared with 2021), which have more than doubled in the past five years, and to a lesser extent by filings from the US (+2.9%) and the Republic of Korea (+10.0%).

Although the number of patent applications originating from the 39 [European Patent Organisation countries](#) (83 955) was at the same level as in 2021 (83 894, +0.1%), their share of the total shrunk by a further percentage point to just below 44%. The growing share of applications to the EPO originating from outside Europe highlights the attractiveness of the European technology market for companies from around the world.

Patent applications from companies in Germany, Europe's leading country in terms of patent applications, dropped by 4.7% last year, largely due to declines in areas such as transport (which includes automotive), electrical machinery/apparatus/energy and organic fine chemistry. Applications from most other leading European patent filing countries were up, including France (+1.9%), Switzerland (+5.9%) and the Netherlands (+3.5%). Among other European countries with over 1 000 applications per year, the strongest growth came from Ireland (+12.3%), Belgium (+5.0%) and Austria (+3.4%). With respect to patent applications per capita, Switzerland was again the leader, followed by some of the Nordic countries.

The leading patent applicants at the EPO in 2022 were Huawei (No. 1 in 2021), followed by LG (up from 3rd in 2021), Qualcomm (jumping from 7th to 3rd), Samsung and Ericsson. The top ten includes four companies from Europe, two from the Republic of Korea, two from the US and one from each of China and Japan.



Patents are not only of interest to large companies. A significant proportion of the EPO's applications come from smaller entities: in 2022 one in five patent applications to the EPO originating in Europe came from an individual inventor or a small or medium-sized enterprise (fewer than 250 employees). A further 7% came from universities and public research organisations.

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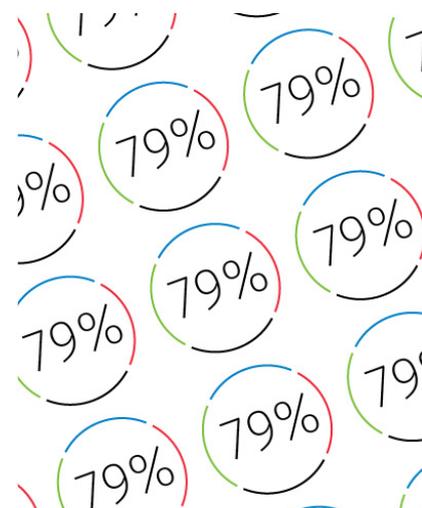
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