

Statistics in focus

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

THEME 9 – 4/2001

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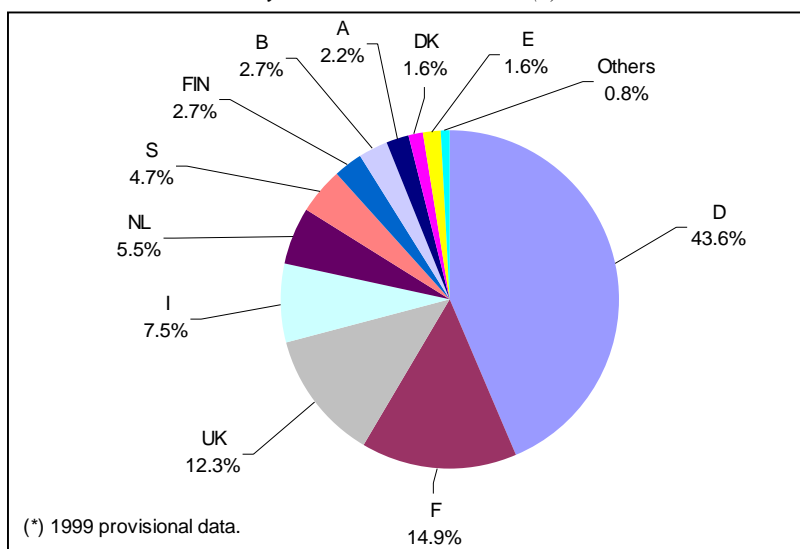
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Patent activities in the EU: international, national and regional perspectives

Alice Zoppè

Figure 1: Shares of the EU-15 patent applications to the EPO
by Member State in 1999 (*)



- In 1999, a total of 121 750 patent applications were filed by the European Patent Office (EPO); 36,8 % were applied for by inventors coming from EU-15; 11,7 % from Japan and 25,6 % from the US. Between 1990 and 1998, patent applications were increasing for all the three regions, with the highest annual average growth rate shown by the US.
- Within the European Union, Germany accounts for the largest share of European patent applications (43.6 %) followed by France (14.9 %) and the United Kingdom (12.3 %). Together, they account for over 70 % of the European patenting activity. However, patent applications in the rest of the Member States show an increasing trend.
- At the regional level, in 1999 Île de France was the European region with the highest number of patent applications, followed by Oberbayern and Stuttgart. Compared to their respective labour force, the German regions are clearly ahead of the French one, showing therefore Germany's dominance in this field.
- With regard to the patent applications in high technology areas in 1999, Oberbayern was again the leading European region, both in absolute and in relative terms. Regions in the UK and Finland also showed high patenting performance in the area this year.



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Introductory remarks

A patent is a public title of industrial property conferring on its owner the exclusive right to exploit the invention for a limited number of years.

Patents are the most widely used source of data for measuring the innovative activity and technology development, and for international comparisons of technology growth.

The patent data reported in this publication include the patent applications filed directly at the European Patent Office (EPO) and the patent applications entering EPO

via Euro-PCT route (see methodological notes, p. 7, for details). Although not all applications are granted, each application represents technical effort by the inventor and is therefore considered to be an appropriate indicator for the inventive potential.

The data presented here do not take into account patent applications in other organisations such as the US Patent and Trade Mark Office (USPTO) and the Japanese Patent Office (JPO) as well as national patent offices.

Patent applications to the EPO from EU-15, JP and US

Figure 2 shows the evolution of patent applications from the EU, Japan and US to the EPO. It should be noticed that the host country (in this case EU-15) has a 'home advantage' and that other countries' economic interest in seeking protection there may differ. This means that while comparing the three economies (EU, Japan and US), the reader has to be aware that the figures only refer to the EPO data and thus they relate to the European technology market.

Between 1990 and 1999, EU-15 patent applications increased from 32 309 to 44 767, showing an almost continuous upward evolution. Between 1990 and 1998, the EU experienced an annual average growth rate of 5.2 %; Japanese patent applications to the EPO have also grown, but more slowly. The number of patents demanded by Japanese inventors decreased between 1990 and 1995 from 13 449 to 11 083, and then increased to 14 236 in 1999. The annual average growth rate recorded for Japan between 1990 and 1998 is 1.8 %. On the other hand, the demand for patents from the US has increased from 19 077 in 1990 to 31 157 in 1999; the average annual growth rate between 1990 and 1998 is 5.6 %.

Patent applications published by EPO in 1999 and broken down by the 8 technological fields defined

according to the International Patent Classification (IPC) are presented in Figure 3 (see methodological notes, p. 7, for further details on IPC). Applications from the European Member States are higher than applications from the US and Japan in almost all the fields of technology, which is mainly due to the effect of the home advantage cited above. One exception occurs for 'physics', where the US applied for 6 355 patents while EU-15 countries for 6 305. 'Physics' encompasses all inventions relative to 'instruments' (for measuring and testing, optics, photography, cinematography and analogous techniques using waves other than optical waves, etc) and inventions in 'nucleonic' (nuclear physics and nuclear engineering). In all other sections the EU-15 shows a clear dominance. The gap with the US is smaller only in 'Human necessities' and 'Chemistry Metallurgy'.

Table 1 presents the share of patent applications by IPC sections applied for by the three economies. Patents on Electricity are the most frequent with respect to the total (19.5 %), with a higher share for Japan (27 %). EU seems more specialised in the section 'Performing operations and transporting', while US shows its largest share in the 'Physics' section.

Figure 2: Evolution of patent applications to the EPO from EU-15, JP and US from 1990 to 1999 (*)

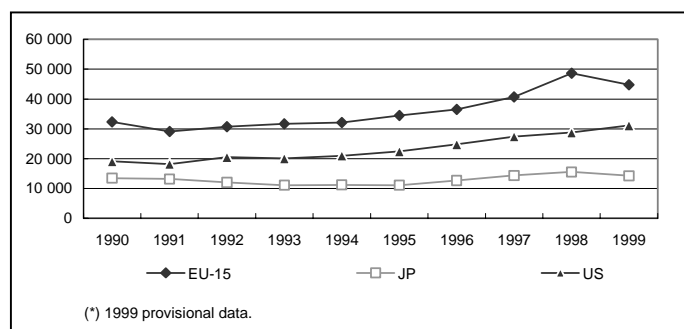
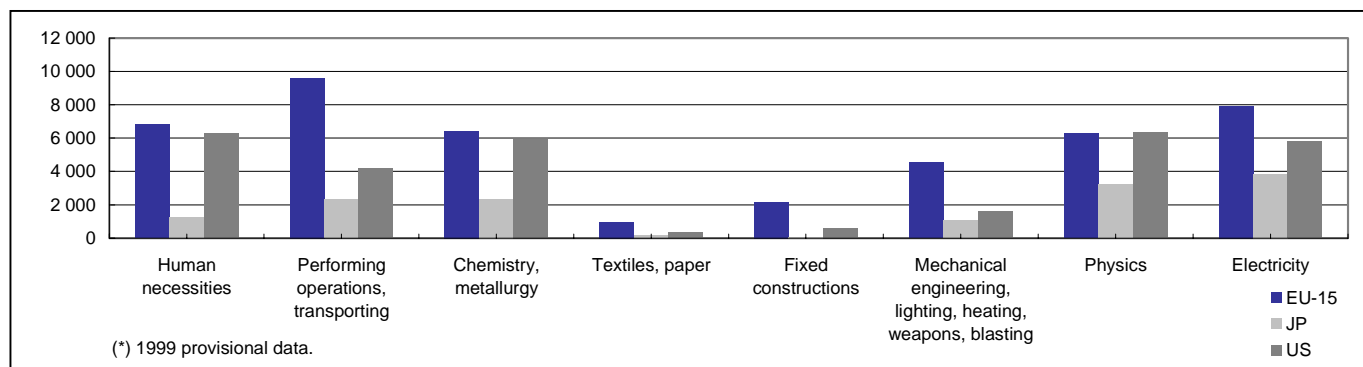


Table 1: Shares of patent applications to the EPO by IPC sections from EU-15, JP and US in 1999 (*)

IPC sections	EU-15 %	JP %	US %	Total %
Human necessities	15.2	8.6	20.3	15.9
Performing operations, transporting	21.5	16.3	13.4	17.8
Chemistry, metallurgy	14.4	16.5	19.1	16.3
Textiles, paper	2.2	1.1	1.1	1.6
Fixed constructions	4.9	0.6	1.9	3.2
Mechanical engineering, lighting, heating, weapons, blasting	10.1	7.5	5.2	8.0
Physics	14.1	22.5	20.4	17.6
Electricity	17.7	27.0	18.7	19.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

(*) 1999 provisional data.

Figure 3: Patent applications to the EPO by IPC section from EU-15, JP and US in 1999 (*)



Within EU-15: Germany is leading

At the Member State level, Germany is by far the European country with the highest number of patent applications to the EPO. Out of the total number of patents published in 1999 and applied for by the Member States, Germany alone accounts for 43.6% (Figure 1). France, with 14.9%, is only about one third of the amount demanded by Germany and the UK, with 12.3%, is even lower. All the other Member States have far lower percentages, with the minimum recorded for Portugal (0.07%).

Patent application data in absolute terms can give results biased towards the largest European countries. Comparing the raw data to the country's labour force provides a less distorted vision of the innovative potential of the Member States, as well as a more comparable portrait of patent activities. Figure 4 presents data on patent applications as a proportion of the labour force: again, Germany appears as the first patenting EU country, except in 1995, when Sweden showed the largest rate. Nevertheless, in relative terms, disparities across countries are smaller. In 1999 Germany applied for 493 patents per million people in the labour force, closely followed by Sweden (478) and Finland (455). The lowest rate is again shown for Portugal (6).

With regard to the evolution from 1990, it can be noticed that, overall, all Member States have increased their number of patent applications to the EPO. The lowest annual average growth rate was recorded for the UK (3%), France (3.6%), Italy (4.9%) and Germany (5%), which all grew under the EU average (Table 2). The smaller countries in terms of patent applications registered the highest rates: Portugal (20.8%) and Spain (14.5%), showing their high effort to improve innovation activities. A noticeably high rate is observed for Finland (13%).

Figure 4: Patent applications to the EPO per million people in the labour force from EU-15, Iceland and Norway in 1990, 1995 and 1999 (*)

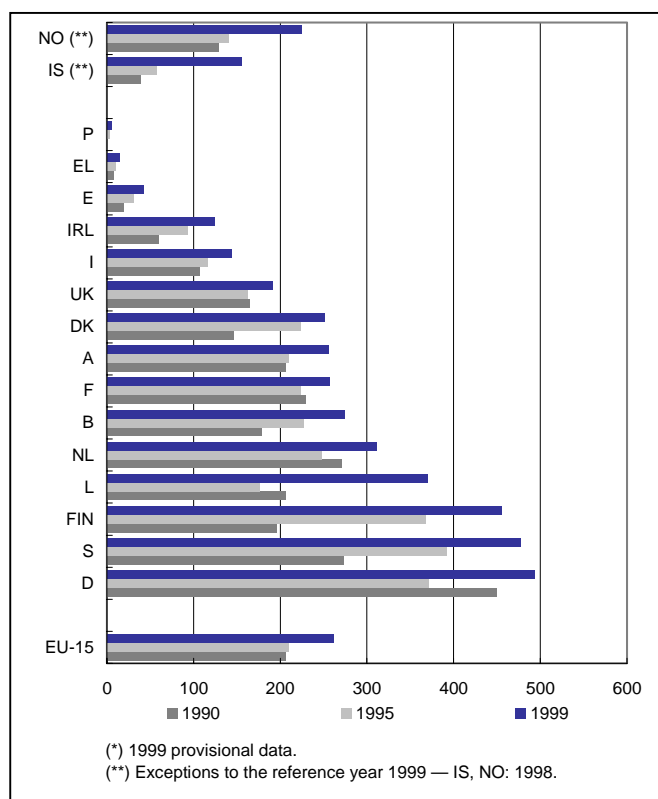


Table 2: Annual average growth rate of patent applications to the EPO from the EU by Member State for the 1990-98 period

Country	%	Country	%
EU-15	5.25	I	4.95
B	9.35	L	8.02
DK	7.21	NL	5.36
D	5.03	A	5.86
EL	12.52	P	20.82
E	14.49	FIN	13.02
F	3.65	S	10.37
IRL	12.77	UK	2.96

Regional perspective: in absolute terms, Île de France is the first patenting region

Data on patent applications in the leading European regions are presented in Tables 3 and 4. Table 3 shows the 15 European regions with the highest number of patent applications. Although in this case, Île de France (2 813) appears as the leading patenting region in Europe, Germany's predominance in the EU-15 is still well highlighted: in fact, out of the 15 leading regions registered in 1999, 9 are German. The predominance is even more evident if we look at the values of the first three regions of Germany (Table 4) compared to the first three regions of the other Member States. The value of the third German region, Darmstadt (1 510), is far higher than the value of the first regions of the other countries (with the exception of Île de France) regardless of the dimension of their economies. The figures showed by Portugal and Greece are very low in the three first regions. In terms of annual average growth rates, Noord-Brabant (16.6%) and Oberbayern (15.5%) show the highest rates.

Table 3: Number of patent applications to the EPO from the leading European regions in 1999 (*)

Ranking	Country	Region	1999 (*)	Annual average growth rate (%) 1995-99
1	F	Île de France	2 813	5.6
2	D	Oberbayern	2 538	15.5
3	D	Stuttgart	1 928	9.1
4	D	Darmstadt	1 510	2.4
5	D	Düsseldorf	1 385	3.4
6	D	Köln	1 177	3.5
7	I	Lombardia	1 096	4.9
8	F	Rhône-Alpes	1 092	4.0
9	NL	Noord-Brabant	1 030	16.6
10	D	Karlsruhe	984	6.3
11	D	Freiburg	854	8.9
12	S	Stockholm	744	7.6
13	DK	Denmark	716	3.4
14	D	Rheinessen-Pfalz	714	0.6
15	D	Arnsberg	638	7.3

(*) 1999 provisional data.

Table 4: Number of patent applications to the EPO from the top three leading regions of each Member State in 1999 (*)

Country	First region	Number	Second region	Number	Third region	Number
B	Antwerpen	257	Vlaams Brabant	219	Oost-Vlaanderen	143
DK	Denmark	716	:	:	:	:
D	Oberbayern	2 538	Stuttgart	1 928	Darmstadt	1 510
EL	Attiki	48	Kentriki Makedonia	12	Kriti	2
E	Cataluña	249	Comunidad de Madrid	168	Comunidad Valenciana	72
F	Île de France	2 813	Rhône-Alpes	1 092	Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur	335
IRL	Southern and Eastern	165	Border, Midlands and Western	43	:	:
I	Lombardia	1 096	Emilia-Romagna	508	Piemonte	438
L	Luxembourg	67	:	:	:	:
NL	Noord-Brabant	1 030	Zuid-Holland	347	Gelderland	243
A	Oberösterreich	214	Wien	173	Niederösterreich	172
P	Lisboa e Vale do Tejo	14	Norte	8	Centro (P)	4
FIN	Uusimaa (Suuralue)	553	Etelä-Suomi	392	Väli-Suomi	105
S	Stockholm	744	Västsverige	413	Östra Mellansverige	323
UK	Berkshire, Bucks and Oxfordshire	466	East Anglia	446	Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and North Somerset	372

(*) 1999 provisional data.

Table 5: Number of patent applications to the EPO per million people in the labour force from the leading European regions in 1999 ()*

Ranking	Country	Region	Number
1	D	Oberbayern	1 210
2	D	Stuttgart	989
3	NL	Noord-Brabant	865
4	S	Stockholm	854
5	D	Freiburg	842
6	D	Darmstadt	827
7	D	Karlsruhe	779
8	B	Brabant Wallon	768
9	D	Mittelfranken	757
10	D	Rhein Hessen-Pfalz	750
11	D	Tübingen	737
12	FIN	Uusimaa (Suuralue)	723
13	A	Vorarlberg	672
14	D	Braunschweig	652
15	D	Oberpfalz	618

(*) 1999 provisional data.

When the number of patent applications is divided by the labour force (millions of people), the situation does not change radically. German regions show again their dominance in Europe. As Table 5 shows, 10 out of the top 15 regions are German (all in the western part). In relative terms, Île de France is no longer the leading region, as Oberbayern (1 210) appears as the region with the highest rate of patent applications, followed by Stuttgart (989). The first non-German region is in this case Noord-Brabant (NL) with 865 patents per million people in the labour force, just ahead of Stockholm with 854.

Table 6 shows the number of patents per million people in their respective labour force for the first three regions of each European country. In relative terms, German dominance is still evident, but less striking. Belgian, French, Dutch, Finnish, Austrian, and Swedish regions are not as far as they were in absolute terms. Île de France, while showing the highest value in absolute terms, has a density of patents relative to the labour force lower than many other regions such as the Austrian Vorarlberg (672), the Finnish Uusimaa (723), and the Belgian Brabant Wallon (768).

Table 6: Number of patent applications to the EPO per million people in the labour force from the top three leading regions of each Member State in 1999 ()*

Country	First region	Number	Second region	Number	Third region	Number
B	Brabant Wallon	768	Vlaams Brabant	475	Antwerpen	370
DK	Denmark	251	:	:	:	:
D	Oberbayern	1 210	Stuttgart	989	Freiburg	842
EL	Attiki	28	Kentriki Makedonia	15	Kriti	8
E	Comunidad Foral de Navarra	112	Cataluña	93	Aragón	76
F	Île de France	513	Rhône-Alpes	438	Alsace	296
IRL	Ireland	124	:	:	:	:
I	Emilia-Romagna	281	Lombardia	272	Piemonte	235
L	Luxembourg	370	:	:	:	:
NL	Noord-Brabant	865	Limburg (NL)	298	Utrecht	271
A	Vorarlberg	672	Oberösterreich	329	Niederösterreich	237
FIN	Uusimaa (Suuralue)	723	Etelä-Suomi	423	Pohjois-Suomi	355
S	Stockholm	854	Sydsverige	511	Västsverige	474
P	Algarve	12	Lisboa e Vale do Tejo	9	Alentejo	7
UK	Berkshire, Bucks and Oxfordshire	407	East Anglia	405	Hampshire and Isle of Wight	349

(*) 1999 provisional data.

Patents in the high technology area: more uniform distribution

In this section, the analysis focuses on patents applied for in the high technology area, following the definition presented in the Trilateral Statistical Report (see methodological notes for details).

In 1999, 19.9 % of the EPO applications were filed in high tech. Figure 5 shows, for each Member State of the EU, the percentage of patents in the high technology area with respect to the total, published in 1990, 1995 and 1999. It emerges that, with the exceptions of Greece and Italy, the weight of high tech is increasing in all Member States, with Finland showing the highest share (34.6 %), followed by Ireland (23.8 %), in 1999.

Tables 7 and 8 present data on 'high tech' patents in the 15 top European regions in absolute and relative terms, respectively. In both cases a German region is

ranked first: Oberbayern, with 825 patents and 39 patents per million people in the labour force respectively. However, only four German regions are ranked among the top fifteen when data are expressed in absolute terms and three according to the number of high tech patents as a proportion of the labour force. In absolute terms, Île de France (630) is the second region patenting high-tech products, while Uusimaa (33.5) retains the second highest relative figure. Noord Brabant is placed third in both rankings. It can be noticed that four English regions enter both rankings: East Anglia; Hampshire & Isle of Wight; Gloucestershire, Wiltshire & North Somerset; Berkshire, Bucks & Oxfordshire. It can also be noticed the presence of three Finnish regions in the ranking according to high tech patents per million people in the labour force: Uusimaa (Suuralue) (33.5), Pohjois-Suomi (21.6), Etelä-Suomi (9.6).

Figure 5: Percentage of high tech patent applications to the EPO from the EU by Member State in 1990, 1995 and 1999 (*)

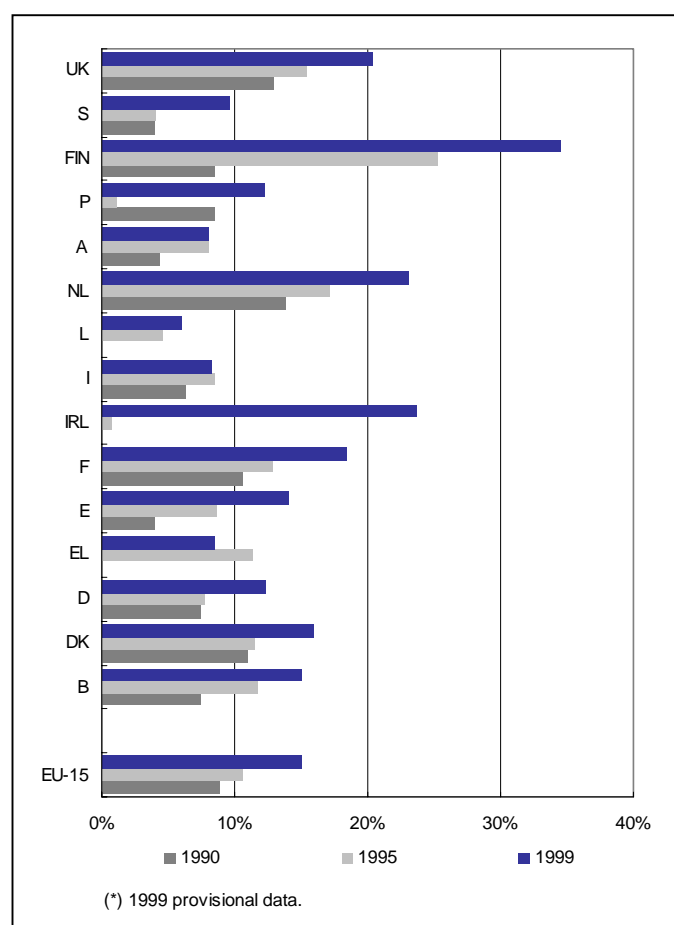


Table 7: Number of high tech patent applications to the EPO from the leading European regions in 1999 (*)

Ranking	Country	Region	Number
1	D	Oberbayern	825
2	F	Île de France	630
3	NL	Noord-Brabant	381
4	FIN	Uusimaa (Suuralue)	256
5	D	Stuttgart	238
6	F	Rhône-Alpes	197
7	UK	East Anglia	183
8	UK	Hampshire & Isle of Wight	147
9	I	Lombardia	144
10	UK	Gloucestershire, Wiltshire & North Somerset	135
11	D	Köln	123
12	UK	Berkshire, Bucks & Oxfordshire	121
13	F	Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur	115
14	DK	Denmark	114
15	D	Darmstadt	109

(*) 1999 provisional data.

Table 8: Number of high tech patent applications to the EPO per million people in the labour force from the leading European regions in 1999 (*)

Ranking	Country	Region	Number
1	D	Oberbayern	39.3
2	FIN	Uusimaa (Suuralue)	33.5
3	NL	Noord-Brabant	32.0
4	FIN	Pohjois-Suomi	21.6
5	UK	East Anglia	16.6
6	UK	Hampshire & Isle of Wight	16.2
7	D	Mittelfranken	12.9
8	D	Stuttgart	12.2
9	UK	Gloucestershire, Wiltshire & North Somerset	12.0
10	F	Île de France	11.5
11	UK	Berkshire, Bucks & Oxfordshire	10.6
12	S	Sydsverige	9.9
13	FIN	Etelä-Suomi	9.6
14	B	Vlaams Brabant	9.3
15	S	Oevre Noorland	9.3

(*) 1999 provisional data.

➤ ESSENTIAL INFORMATION – METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

Eurostat's regional patent database

Eurostat maintains the regional patent database in close co-operation with the European Patent Office (EPO). Every year the EPO supplies Eurostat with the latest available data, which are then processed by Eurostat to derive the regional indicators. Data are regionalised according to the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS) (*). The most detailed regional level data available is at NUTS level 3. Regional patent statistics refer to applications filed directly under the European Patent Convention or to applications filed under the Patent Convention Treaty and designating the EPO (Euro-PCT). Detailed regional European patent applications data series can be obtained from Eurostat reference database (New Cronos).

All the patent applications are counted according to the date of filing. Data become definitive after about 18 months from the application: therefore, definitive data for 1999 will be available only in August 2001.

For the regional statistics, patent application is allocated to the region where the inventor is resident. If one application has more than one inventor, the application is divided equally among the inventors and subsequently among the regions (fractional counting). This allocation procedure is different from that one used in the EPO report, where patents are recorded according to the country of residence of the first applicant.

For further information on definitions and explanatory notes refer to 'Research & Development — Annual statistics 1999'.

(*) This nomenclature was established by Eurostat to provide a single uniform breakdown of territorial units for the production of regional statistics for the EU. For further details, refer to 'Regions, Nomenclature Territorial Units for Statistics NUTS', Eurostat, 1998.

Patent Co-operation Treaty and PCT procedure

The PCT, effective since the early 1980s among the 100 PCT countries, allows for a filing of an international application to have the same effect as a national application in each of the contracting countries. For further details, see The Patent Manual (OECD, 1994); or visit the EPO web site (www.epo.org).

International Patent Classification (IPC)

The International Patent Classification (IPC) is a retrieval system for inventions claimed in patent documents: see <http://www.wipo.int> for details. IPC classifies technology hierarchically into 8 sections, then in subsections, classes, sub-classes and groups up to approximately 69 000 final sub-groups. An invention is assigned to an IPC-class by its function or intrinsic nature, or by its field of application (combined function-application classification system). One patent can be designated to several IPC sections. In the Eurostat's database, each patent application is divided equally among all the indicated IPC section in order to avoid double counting.

The high tech patent classification used in this publication is defined in the Trilateral Statistical Report, a joint publication of EPO, JPO and USPTO (1999). The following technical fields have been defined as high technology: computer and automated business equipment; micro-organism and genetic engineering; aviation; communication technology; semi-conductors; lasers.

Statistical abbreviations and symbols

- '.' not available;
- '-' not applicable or real zero;
- '0' less than half of the unit used.

Further information:

➤ Reference publications

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