

# New opportunities in NRW

Your No. 1 investment  
location in Germany

[www.nrwglobalbusiness.com](http://www.nrwglobalbusiness.com)

EUROPE'S  HEARTBEAT

 **NRW.GLOBAL  
BUSINESS**  
Trade & Investment Agency



# The heart of Europe beats here

NRW is not only Germany's economic engine, but also one of the most economically attractive locations in Europe. With its high population density, strong purchasing power and numerous high-turnover companies, the state offers the ideal environment for becoming established in the German and European markets.

**18.1 million** people live on  
34,112 square kilometers – more than in the  
neighboring Netherlands and Belgium.



**839.1 billion** euros are generated  
in the state – the highest gross domestic product of all German  
states and one fifth of the GDP of Germany as a whole.

**4.5 %** of the EU's GDP is contributed by NRW –  
one of Europe's most important economic regions,  
ahead of Sweden, Poland and Belgium.



**46 million** consumers within a radius of around  
200 km create the largest European market of potential customers that  
no other metropolitan region in Europe can boast.

# A mix of corporations and SMEs

A special feature that contributes significantly to the economic success of NRW is the mix of large corporations and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This has resulted in a broad and attractive market that offers international companies numerous B2B customers and cooperation partners. Among others, the business location NRW is home to:

**17** of the 50 highest-grossing companies in Germany

**702,000** small and medium-sized enterprises forming the economic backbone of NRW companies in Germany

**14** of Germany's 50 largest retailers, including companies such as Aldi, Metro and REWE

## We have the key players

Many hidden champions are based in NRW. They are NRW's hidden treasures: companies little known to the public and market leaders who have achieved a top global position in their industry. These small and medium-sized enterprises are excellent cooperation partners for the development of products, in production processes, as well as in service or research – making them magnets for international partners.

One special feature that distinguishes NRW's hidden champions is that they are often family-run businesses, and many have a long tradition. In addition, NRW as a business location is home to some of the most powerful among them – more than one in four family-owned companies in Germany with an annual turnover of at least 50 million euros is based here. NRW's largest family businesses include AUNDE, CLAAS and Vorwerk.



## Europe's largest talent pool

With a population of around 18 million and a workforce of around 9.8 million, NRW is one of the largest and most important labor markets in Europe. Compared to other top European economic regions, NRW scores not only with the size of its labor market, but also with a high density and availability of knowledge and human capital.

## Bright minds doing mind-blowing work

The labor market in NRW is one of the largest and most diverse in Europe, and the density of highly qualified specialists and academics is particularly high here. Young people are educated at around 70 universities and universities of applied sciences.

In Germany, NRW is regarded as the No. 1 pool of skilled workers: No other federal state has as many students at universities as here. They come from all over the world and after completing their education, form a large, international talent pool right on the spot.



More than

**750,000**

students are currently enrolled at universities in NRW – that's about as many as in the two academic hotspots Greater London and Île-de-France combined.

More than

**110,000**

graduates complete their studies in NRW year after year.



More than

**100,000**

international students are educated at NRW universities, more than in the neighboring Netherlands and Belgium. One in eight students has a foreign passport.

**4,700**

different study programs are available in NRW.



**500**

STEM study programs form an important focus of the subjects studied in NRW.

## Room for cutting-edge research

NRW has more academic institutions than Île-de-France or Greater London, and countless top research institutes act as accelerators for innovations. Many thousands of researchers advance know-how in their fields on a daily basis. In this way, they create the best conditions for innovation, technology and knowledge transfer – and a productive basis for the most vibrant startup scene in Europe.



## Europe's densest research network

Nowhere in Europe are as many prestigious research institutions in such a small area as in NRW: In addition to the approximately 70 universities, more than 60 technology and startup centers and more than 50 non-university research institutions form the densest research network in Europe. They offer ideal conditions for new innovations in NRW – this is how research, development and knowledge and technology transfer succeed.

# Top locations for **startups** in Europe



## Lively and constantly growing

Although many still think first of Berlin when it comes to startups in Germany, NRW is actually considered one of the top locations for domestic and international startups throughout Europe. With its large market, broad university and research landscape, and outstanding talents, the state offers the best conditions for forward-looking projects – from startups, spin-offs, or even unicorns.

According to the German Startup Monitor 2023, around 20 percent of all German startups are based in NRW. Every day, 1.3 companies are founded here – which means that NRW is more synonymous with innovation than almost any other federal state. Young companies benefit in particular from the strong networking structures and entrepreneurial concentration when developing their business model: Today, around 65 percent of all startups in NRW already generate more than 50 percent of their sales in the B2B sector.

# Excellent infrastructure

From NRW out into the world: by road or rail, by sea or by plane. With six airports, a close-knit road and rail network and the world's largest inland port in Duisburg, NRW boasts an excellent transport infrastructure in the heart of Europe – making the state a key hub.



**2,000 km** of highways and **17,600 km** of national and secondary roads

Germany's **densest rail network** with around **6,500 km**

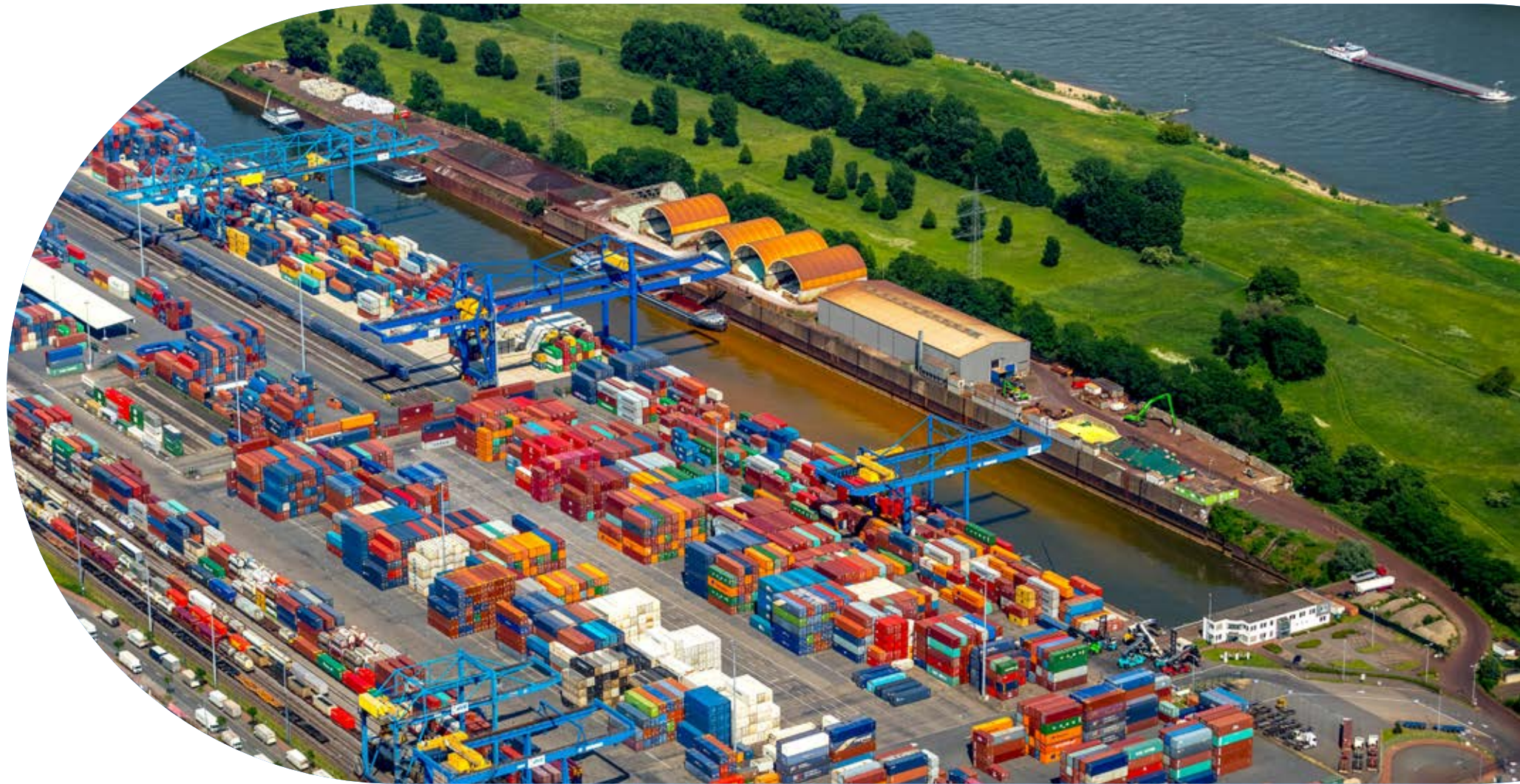


**6 airports** and **450 direct international flights** to all major cities worldwide

**120 inland ports** handle **98 million tons** of goods per year by ship







## From NRW to the world

Connections both within Europe and to China are excellent. Rail traffic between China and Europe along the “New Silk Road” has become firmly established. The number of connections is growing steadily. On the European side, NRW has the most important stations, with the port of Duisburg as well as train starting and ending points in Cologne, Düsseldorf and Dortmund.

With 720 kilometers of waterways, NRW is also floating internationally: the connections reach as far as the North and Baltic Seas, the Atlantic, the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. The direct connections to the Belgian and Dutch seaports as well as to Germany’s major seaports in Bremerhaven and Hamburg make NRW the central intersection of the most important European waterways.



# Infrastructure

**Hamburg**  
(approximately 2 hours  
by ICE from Münster  
to Hamburg / 280 km)

**The Netherlands  
Amsterdam**  
(approximately 1.5 hours  
by ICE from Duisburg  
to Amsterdam / 200 km)

**United Kingdom  
London**  
(approximately 1.5  
hours flight from Cologne/  
Bonn to London / 500 km)

**Belgium  
Brussels**  
(approximately  
1.5 hours by ICE  
from Cologne to  
Brussels / 220 km)

**France  
Paris**  
(approximately 1.5 hours  
flight from Düsseldorf to  
Paris / 410 km)





**Poland**  
**Warsaw**  
(approximately 2 hours  
flight from Düsseldorf  
to Warsaw / 1,000 km)

**Hungary**  
**Budapest**  
(approximately 2 hours  
flight from Dortmund to  
Budapest / 950 km)

**Frankfurt/Main**  
(approximately 50 min  
by ICE from Cologne to  
Frankfurt / 170 km)



# Top location for international companies

More than 24,000 international companies are based in NRW. They manage their German and European business activities from here. This is primarily due to the optimal conditions that international companies find here for their growth.

NRW is considered one of the most important investment locations in Europe: At the end of 2022, the German Bundesbank recorded a total of 196.1 billion euros in foreign direct investments in NRW.

In NRW, potential investors can find large sites in central locations – and at good prices. They benefit from a well-developed infrastructure and the opportunity to expand.

## Welcoming culture

Situated in the heart of Europe, NRW is a central and cosmopolitan location: International companies and their employees value not only these geographical key data, but also the quality of life, tolerance and open-mindedness to be found here. This welcoming culture ensures that both large and smaller communities from different countries quickly feel at home, not only in terms of business but also culturally.

## International & foreign schools

Employees of international companies and their families not only find the best conditions for a second home in NRW, but their children also have the opportunity to pursue an internationally oriented education here. In total, there are about 5,400 school facilities, including seven international and eleven foreign schools – an important location bonus for foreign company employees.



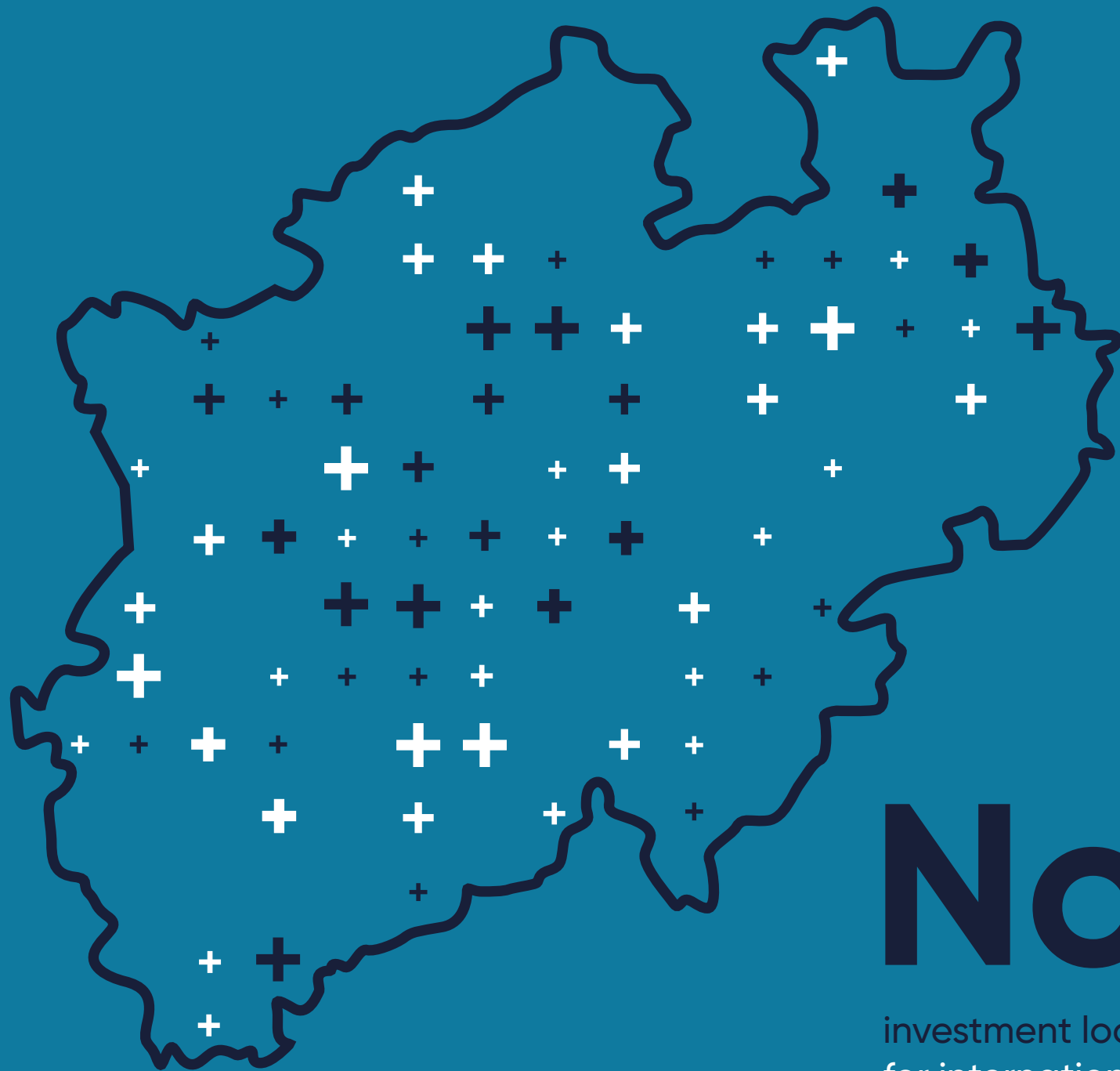
# 24,000

international companies are based in NRW.

About

# 1.3

million people in NRW work for a foreign company.



# No 1.

investment location in Germany for international companies

## Big players in NRW:

Amazon, 3M, BP, Ericsson, Ford, QVC, UPS, Toyota and Vodafone



# Lifestyle

## Quality of life in NRW

Life in NRW is diverse: Here, imposing industrial monuments stand next to relaxing landscape parks, elegant shopping streets alternate with urban metropolitan oases. Cosmopolitanism and creativity determine the attitude to life and the quality of life to be found in NRW. 130 stages offer the densest theater landscape in Europe. In addition, there are thrilling live events and plenty of sports to watch or participate in.

## Authentic and creative

Life in NRW is in a state of flow – work, leisure and education go hand in hand. Cologne, Düsseldorf and the Ruhr metropolis in particular are increasingly becoming destinations for digital nomads. All cities are closely interconnected. Not everything is smooth and perfect here, but people who love and help to shape their urban space live here, open to new inspirations and innovations.



@Cologne Cathedral



@Castle Augustusburg



@Aachen Cathedral

# We like to move it. To zero.

NRW is stepping up the pace of energy transition. As Germany's industrial heartland, NRW has set itself the ambitious goal of becoming the most modern and first climate-neutral industrial region in Europe. This means Germany's densest research network and innovative companies are driving smart solutions that optimize production, reduce waste and increase efficiency.

With a variety of strategies and federal programs, the government is setting the course to accelerate climate protection and energy transition. It has formulated firm goals such as a climate-friendly and affordable energy supply, the expansion of renewable energy sources and the development of a hydrogen ecosystem. This transformation is opening up new markets for business and innovative projects.

## Green is the new black

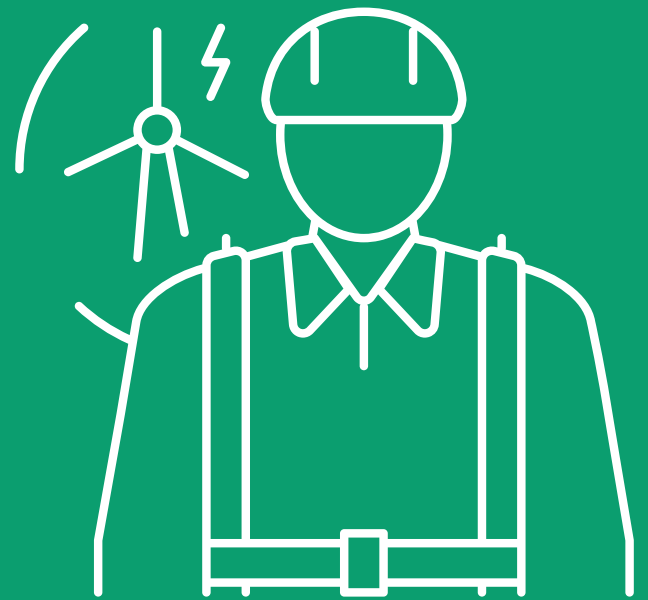
...and the future of the energy market is green. Fortunately, NRW has the power – for people and businesses. The state boasts a diverse energy landscape that encompasses solar, wind and green hydrogen solutions. By 2029, 70 percent of the nation's lignite capacity will be reduced. NRW is an international leader in the development, testing and commercialization of renewable energy sources.

The region has made significant investments in renewable energy. To meet climate change targets, the state government is working to further accelerate the restructuring of the energy system and the expansion of renewable energies.

More than

**4,700 companies**

employ around 46,000 people  
in the renewable energy sector.



NRW wants to double the  
installed capacity of wind energy

**by 2030.**

Wind power covers the  
annual demand of around

**3.5 million**

3-person households.





# Let's think circular.

NRW is not just a region; It is a movement towards smarter resource management. Where waste becomes a resource and products find new life in innovative ways. NRW's commitment to the circular economy is creating a ripple effect of positive change, from local businesses adopting eco-friendly practices to communities engaging in responsible consumption. With a focus on collaboration, NRW is fostering partnerships that drive future-oriented solutions. Industries are redesigning production processes, developing long-lasting and sustainable products, and embracing recycling and upcycling as essential components of the economy.



# The place where hydrogen meets **genius**



Smallest element. Biggest impact. NRW is the hub for hydrogen excellence. It is building Europe's largest hydrogen ecosystem in the areas of innovation, production, and infrastructure. Numerous small to large companies from this sector have already settled here. Experts estimate that up to 130,000 jobs will be created in connection with hydrogen. And this is happening all along the value chain: research, production, mobility and application.

NRW is home to the entire hydrogen chain: plants that generate green hydrogen from green electricity, pipelines that transport the gas across the country, trucks with fuel cells and CO<sub>2</sub>-free inland shipping all the way to the Netherlands. This is what the future could look like. In NRW it has already begun.

[Roadmap](#)





### Biotech

From novel therapies to fight cancer cells to sustainable new products to make the economy less dependent on fossil fuels – NRW is leading the way as an innovation center for biotech in Europe. More than 500 life science companies work every day to make life safer and healthier. Using the building blocks of life to pioneer new treatments, crop yields, and eco-friendly solutions.

### Cybersecurity

On the digital pulse of time, but one step ahead. In the dynamic landscape of digital innovation, NRW is one of the core centers for cybersecurity in Europe. More than 1,000 scientists at thirty research institutions and universities provide a safe space for companies to flourish. The Horst Görtz Institute at Ruhr University Bochum is one of the top three institutes for cybersecurity throughout Europe.



### Digital technologies

In NRW, software is not just a tool; it's a catalyst for innovation. Whether you are in manufacturing, finance, healthcare, or any other sector, integrating software solutions can propel you towards profitability. The "data highway" is not neglected here either. A forward-looking digital strategy and stable digital networks are important drivers here.

## E-mobility

NRW is driving the transition – literally. Thanks to its density of innovative companies and an excellent research landscape, NRW plays a special role as an electromobility state. Three centers of excellence for electromobility unite the research activities of science and industry – in the areas “vehicle technology”, “battery research” and “infrastructure and networks”.



## Energy technology

NRW is stepping up the pace of energy transition. The goal: transforming the state into Europe's most modern and climate-friendly center of industry. To achieve this, the government has formulated solid targets, such as a climate-friendly and affordable energy supply, the ramp-up of a hydrogen economy or the expansion of renewable energy sources.



## Greentech

Carbon off. Greentech on. NRW is shaping a future that is both smart and sustainable. Providing employment to roughly 468,000 people, NRW is the largest greentech location in Germany. Of all patents in the environmental industry licensed in Germany, 20 percent are from NRW, making it Germany's hotspot for greentech innovation.





## Innovation topics



### Hydrogen

Say hi to hydrogen in NRW! Production, transmission, mobility and application – the state is building a hydrogen ecosystem that is home to the entire hydrogen chain. With 240 kilometers of pipelines, NRW already has the largest hydrogen network in Germany. With cutting-edge research facilities, leading companies and a high industrial density, the state is a leading location for hydrogen technologies.

### Medtech

NRW tackles medtech! By generating sales of over two billion euros a year, NRW is a growth and innovation engine for medical technology. Max Planck, Fraunhofer and Leibniz institutes as well as over 60 technology and startup centers form a strong research landscape to redefine the patient care.



### New materials

Sustainable, functional, and efficient – new materials in NRW are reshaping traditional sectors and creating new solutions for land, air and space. The Institute of Materials Research at the German Aerospace Center (DLR) is exploring new applications in the aerospace, energy and automotive sectors.

## New logistics

Excellent infrastructure in NRW – the hub of Europe. At the crossroads of Europe, NRW is a logistical powerhouse for trade and commerce. With the world’s largest inland port, six airports, a close-knit road and rail network, NRW is the ideal destination for businesses, startups and entrepreneurs seeking access to economic opportunities.



## Smart city

A new way of moving – NRW is taking it to the streets. By transforming the infrastructure into a greener, cleaner and smarter network, NRW is building a state fit for the future. 91 million euros are being invested in model communities to develop and expand digital services for citizens and businesses. It is the most comprehensive funding program of any German state.

## Smart machinery

NRW – the place to be for industry. Here, a traditionally grown and innovative industrial landscape meets technological know-how. Leading companies and research institutes develop smart solutions to optimize production, using the state-of-the-art technologies. Around 18 percent of German industrial sales are generated here and 1.2 million people are employed in industry.



# NRW.Global Business – trade & investment agency

The state-owned foreign trade promotion agency NRW.Global Business is the partner for all companies when it comes to investment projects and settling in NRW, developing growth markets and networking with international business partners.

## Ready. Steady. Grow.

NRW.Global Business conducts international location marketing for NRW, Germany No. 1 investment location, and promotes foreign direct investment.