

Fondazione AGIRE, Tecnopolo and the Innovation Park

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For smaller and younger companies the canton relies on the foundation AGIRE (*Fondazione AGIRE*), which coordinates the regional innovation system. Its website describes its mission as supporting innovative start-ups and small and medium enterprises "throughout their growth journey" and states that it supports more than 80 start-ups each year, has 160 in its portfolio and has seen investments of more than CHF 85 million in companies since the establishment of the Tecnopolo Ticino, its network of offices and co-working spaces.¹ AGIRE runs the Boldbrain Startup Challenge with the USI Startup Centre, a programme of free coaching for selected projects over three months, and manages the operations of TiVentures, a seed investment fund for earlystage start-ups.² The canton's guide for start-ups of November 2025 lists further tax measures: start-ups organized as legal entities are exempt from gift tax and may benefit from a reduction of the capital tax to 0.01 per mille. Private investors may have income equal to the amount they invest in innovative companies taxed separately at a rate of 1 per cent, for the first five tax periods in which the company qualifies as innovative and subject to a minimum investment of CHF 50,000 and a ceiling of 80 per cent of the investor's taxable income in the canton.³

The Switzerland Innovation Park Ticino completed the system. Ticino joined the national network of innovation parks in spring 2021, with the plan of building a technology park on the site of the federal railway workshops (*Officine FFS*) in Bellinzona and with competence centres for drones, life sciences and lifestyle technology.⁴ The park was formally inaugurated in Bellinzona in November 2024, with further locations in Lugano and at the Riviera Airport in Lodrino. Its supporters include the canton, BancaStato, the Chamber of Commerce of Ticino (CC-TI), the Association of Ticino Industries (AITI), the Università della Svizzera italiana and SUPSI.⁵ AGIRE also signed a letter of intent with MIND

Milano Innovation District, the research district on the former Expo site in Milan.⁶ The cross-border link is deliberate. Ticino presents itself as the Swiss partner of the Milan innovation ecosystem, a role that Chapter I.III discusses for research and artificial intelligence.

1 A selective welcome: Chiasso 2013 and its lessons

The tension between attracting Italian businesses and protecting the local labour market became visible in September 2013. The municipality of Chiasso, whose office buildings had emptied after the decline of its banks and fiduciaries, advertised in Lombard newspapers an information event called *Benvenuta impresa* ("Welcome, business"). Within days 682 companies applied, 70 per cent of them from the tertiary sector. Space allowed only about 250 people from 168 firms to attend. Mayor Moreno Colombo explained that the town needed to fill about 3,000 square metres of offices intended for advanced services.⁷ Forty-two media outlets were accredited, among them eleven television stations, which shows how much attention the subject attracted in Italy.

The organizers set conditions that remain characteristic of Ticino's approach. Companies were expected to pay salaries in line with Swiss standards, to bring capital and know-how, to employ residents where possible and to avoid activities such as call centres or low-cost services that compete through wages. The mayor said that the town could not tolerate companies paying salaries below Swiss parameters.⁸ An Italian newspaper reported at the time that 60 companies from the province of Varese alone had moved to Ticino in the first half of 2013, and that Confindustria Lombardia estimated a loss of 2,000 jobs in Lombardy over 18 months.⁹ Ticino's political climate has since become more restrictive. The cantonal initiative *Prima i nostri* of 2016, the minimum wage law of 2021 and the controls on posted workers and self-employed service providers from Italy, discussed in Chapter H.I and below, all respond to the fear that relocation brings Italian wage levels into Ticino.

Essentials. Ticino supports relocating businesses through the Law on Economic Innovation of 14 December 2015. Tax relief on cantonal and communal profit and capital taxes may be granted to new companies, as a rule for up to five years and up to complete exemption, if they create at least 15 jobs within three years, invest at least CHF 1 million and meet sustainability requirements. The relief is capped at CHF 1 million and must be repaid if the company leaves within five years. Smaller firms are served by Fondazione AGIRE, the Tecnopolo and the Switzerland Innovation Park Ticino. All instruments presuppose real activity and local jobs.

2 Notes

1. Fondazione AGIRE, website, <https://www.agire.ch> (consulted 5 October 2026) ("Sosteniamo startup e PMI innovative durante il loro percorso di crescita"; more than 80 start-ups supported each year, 160 in portfolio, more than CHF 85 million of investment since the establishment of the Tecnopolo). Fondazione AGIRE, "Chi siamo", <https://agire.ch/chi-siamo> ("L'agenzia per l'innovazione del Canton Ticino nasce nel 2011"). ↩
2. Repubblica e Cantone Ticino, Dipartimento delle finanze e dell'economia, presentation for start-ups (English version), 5 November 2025, https://www4.ti.ch/fileadmin/DFE/DE-PORTALE-IMPRESA/documenti/20251105_slide_startup_sito_ENG.pdf (Boldbrain: "Free 3-month coaching for selected projects"; TiVentures: "Seed investment fund", "Managed by Fondazione Agire"). ↩
3. Presentation for start-ups of 5 November 2025 (above) ("exemption from donation tax and reduction of capital tax to 0.01 ‰"; "separate taxation of income equivalent to the amount invested in innovative startups at a 1% rate"); Legge tributaria del Cantone Ticino of 21 June 1994 (LT), Art. 37c, <https://m3.ti.ch/CAN/RLeggi/public/index.php/raccolta-leggi/legge/num/580>. ↩
4. Generoso Chiaradonna, report on the conference "Cavalcare cambiamento e innovazione tecnologica", laRegione, 28 September 2021, <https://www.laregione.ch/cantone/ticino/1538337/servizi>. ↩
5. Greater Zurich Area, "Switzerland Innovation Park Ticino open", 14 November 2024, <https://www.greaterzuricharea.com/en/news/switzerland-innovation-park-ticino-open>. ↩
6. Chiaradonna, laRegione, 28 September 2021 (above). ↩
7. RSI, "Sold out per Benvenuta impresa", 26 September 2013, <https://www.rsi.ch/info/ticino-grigioni-e-insubria/Sold-out-per-Benvenuta-impresa--750707.html>. ↩
8. Cristina Giudici, "Aziende andate in Svizzera, ma senza concorrenza sleale", Linkiesta, 26 September 2013, <https://www.linkiesta.it/2013/09/aziende-andate-in-svizzera-ma-senza-concorrenza-sleale/>. ↩

9. Giudici (above) (60 companies from the province of Varese in the first half of 2013); Musicò (above) (estimate of Confindustria Lombardia; about 180 companies registered for the Chiasso initiative). ↩

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