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# Wishful thinking about R&D policy targets: what governments promise and what they actually deliver

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## Abstract

As a revival of the 1960s, a new era of R&D policy based on R&D intensity goals gained momentum at the turn of the century with the Lisbon Agenda and Barcelona target. Setting GERD to GDP targets has become fashionable again at a much larger scale. This article is focused on assessing the effectiveness of this policy at an international level, by using a database purposefully built for this research based on information of 45 countries and 112 R&D intensity targets. The results show a consistent pattern of failure of this policy across countries and at country level, and only exceptionally a country was able to reach the intended R&D intensity targets. Governments have been promising much more than they are capable of delivering but, paradoxically, the popularity of the R&D intensity indicator remains high despite the complete lack of effectiveness of R&D policy based on R&D intensity targets.

**Key words:** R&D policy, R&D goals, policy effectiveness, R&D intensity.

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## 1. Introduction

Many governments worldwide recognize a strong link between R&D expenditures, innovation, competitiveness, and economic

countries have become committed to specific R&D goals for GERD (and BERD) as a percentage of GDP. It is a revival of a 1960s policy based on similar arguments but completely different contexts.