Europäisches Patentamt
European Patent Office
Office européen des brevets

EUROPEAN PATENT OFFICE

Annual Review 2024

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EUROPEAN PATENT OFFICE

Annual Review 2024

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In March 2024, the Administrative Council (AC) of the European Patent Organisation unanimously endorsed the EPO Strategic Plan 2028 (SP2028). The SP2028 has one goal – sustainability – which is underpinned by five drivers: people; technologies; quality products and services; partnerships; and financial sustainability.

Progress on the delivery of SP2028 is constantly monitored through a series of **key performance indicators** (KPIs). The KPIs on quality are published on the Quality dashboard on the EPO website, which is regularly updated to provide all users and stakeholders with a transparent picture of quality at the EPO.

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On **Driver 1, fostering the engagement of staff** remained a key priority. The 2024 Staff Engagement Survey recorded an engagement score of 73%, an 11% increase compared to 2022. It highlighted the importance of strengthening social connections for the sense of belonging: to foster this sense, the EPO organised Campus Days at all sites to promote team interaction, learning, health and wellbeing and diversity and inclusion, with over 4 400 staff participating. Further such initiatives are planned in 2025.

Meanwhile, **targeted recruitment, innovative talent development and strengthened mobility and flexibility** ensured that people remain at the centre of the EPO's transformation. In 2024, we recruited 146 new highly qualified professionals, including 111 examiners from 21 nationalities. In line with the objectives of SP2028, we took proactive steps to promote diversity in recruitment. Of 102 Young Professionals (YPs) who joined the EPO in 2024, 64% were women.

We supported our staff to develop and update the skills they need through **continuous learning**, investing in over 145 000 hours of training, including 50 000 hours on the patent granting process (PGP), and enhancing the new examiner academy. Updated regulations on the **New Ways of Working** (NWoW) were implemented and in 2024 98% of staff made use of flexible work arrangements.

The EPO continued to strengthen **social dialogue** as set out in the Social Agenda 2024, with more than 40 meetings with staff representatives contributing to progress on various topics including implementing gender-neutral guidelines in our Service Regulations, the evaluation of the NWoW pilot and the introduction of the new skills framework.

In SP2028, the EPO aims for its **buildings** to serve as a physical home for our people and support an engaged professional community. Thanks to efficient and responsible management, energy consumption of buildings decreased by 14% compared to 2023. Our carbon footprint was reduced to 3 032 tCO_2e (29% compared to 2023) taking us closer to our top-level KPI to be a carbon neutral organisation by 2030. During 2024, the renovation of the EPO's Vienna building was completed, new modern office spaces for staff were rented in Berlin, and the Building Investment Programme (BIP) for 2024 to 2028 covering Munich and The Hague was endorsed by the Administrative Council.

Under **Driver 2**, we are committed to leveraging technology to improve efficiency, quality and sustainability – and in 2024 significant advances were made. During the year we focused on simplifying and automating processes, removing dependencies on outdated legacy systems, incorporating secure cloud technologies and ensuring high availability of IT systems.

We fully digitalised examiner actions with digital workflows, bringing us a step closer to a **fully digital PGP**, and launched the Legal Interactive Platform (an AI-based tool that helps users answer queries about the European patent system). The introduction of AI-supported classification improved accuracy and consistency and ANSERA was fully adopted by the examiner community, becoming the exclusive tool for searching and viewing prior art and enabling EPOQUE to be decommissioned. We

advanced environmental sustainability by providing cited patent literature exclusively in electronic format, saving 6 million pages of paper annually.

Expanding the **MyEPO services** suite and releasing new functionalities throughout 2024 enabled us to significantly enhance the quality and transparency of online services by improving the user experience with new administrative functionalities, streamlined workflows and enhanced self-service capabilities. Growing interest was also seen in the "shared area" feature which allows for real-time collaboration between examiners and representatives, further improving efficiency and user satisfaction.

To modernise our infrastructure and improve efficiency, we **decommissioned legacy classification and search tools** including the legacy data analytics service, legacy Mailbox, MyFiles and Administration facilities services. The transition to two-factor authentication allowed the phasing out of smartcards, further enhancing the security of our online services.

Turning to **Driver 3, high-quality patents** are essential to a thriving innovation ecosystem. They are indispensable to commercialising innovation, building successful businesses and driving further innovation. Businesses large and small, innovators and their investors look to the high quality and timeliness of the EPO's products and services to provide the highest levels of legal certainty, predictability and consistency.

To deliver on the EPO's commitment to excellence, we take a holistic approach to quality, as outlined in our Patent Quality Charter, agreed with our staff, applicants and member states. In Spring 2024, for the first time, we published the **Quality Action Plan 2024** – providing greater transparency on our targeted quality actions for all stakeholders. Our annual Quality Report provides a comprehensive picture of how we work to improve quality throughout the PGP.

By focusing on **quality at every stage of the PGP** and monitoring quality through multiple lenses – we secured a number of achievements in 2024.

We improved formalities processes, with better handling of sequence listings and requests for oral proceedings, and achieved over 90% accuracy in routing incoming applications to the correct technical areas thanks to AI-based pre-classification.

In **search and written opinion**, we enhanced early collaboration for 260 000 search products under Active Search Division (ASD), leading to better quality written opinions. Careful planning and management of incoming work resulted in production in 2024 which was 15 472 products above budget, an increase of 6% compared to 2023. Overall, 81.9% of search, examination and opposition standard files were produced on time in 2024. In oppositions, 2 306 oppositions were finalised while the percentage of granted patents that were opposed dropped from 2.4% in 2023 to 2.1% in 2024.

Regular and constructive **dialogue with users** remained at the forefront of our pursuit of excellence in 2024. As the primary forum for discussion of quality, the SACEPO WP/Q met twice in 2024. Under this framework, three SQAPs were organised in 2024 concerning refusals, searches and written opinions and grants. During 2024, the EPO also held 26 bilateral meetings with large applicants from industry, 33 meetings with user associations and organised 29 one-on-one meetings with SMEs in Germany and the UK.

The EPO recognises that quality is a shared journey and a joint responsibility with our partners. To deliver on **Driver 4**, therefore, in 2024 we strengthened collaboration within the **European Patent Network** (EPN) under the established co-operation framework: IT co-operation; co-operation projects to enhance knowledge and quality; co-operation projects aimed at work-sharing; and co-operation projects to promote the convergence of practices by patent offices.

Following the 18th Annual Meeting on Co-operation in Vilnius in May, the catalogue of co-operation projects tailored to member states' needs was revised and expanded. In October, Bosnia and Herzegovina was formally invited to accede to the EPC. With Montenegro's recent accession, the number of EPC contracting states will soon reach 41.

Work-sharing intensified, with over 27 000 national searches performed by the EPO and the network of search co-operation partners set to expand to 21 states. On **convergence of practice**, work was concluded two common practice documents and advanced on two more, supported by a new transparency dashboard. We also explored extending the convergence programme to administrative topics. Support for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and micro-entities was boosted by a **revised fee policy**, benefiting over 5 000 applications.

The Unitary Patent system saw remarkable growth, with over 28 000 registrations in 2024 and overall uptake exceeding 25%.

The **Unitary Patent** system saw remarkable growth, with over 28 000 registrations in 2024 and overall uptake exceeding 25%. Romania joined the system on 1 September. The Unitary Patent Dashboard, launched by the EPO in July 2023 and updated daily, has been widely praised by stakeholders. In March 2024, it was upgraded with additional information, including the profile and geographical distribution of proprietors as well as uptake by country. In November 2024, the EPO published an updated edition of the Unitary Patent Guide and in parallel the first set of Unitary Patent Guidelines was developed.

In December, the Office presented for the adoption of the AC a legislative proposal for gender-neutral Implementing Regulations to the EPC. The amended rules entered into force in April 2025.

The EPO continued to expand its reach internationally, signing validation agreements with Laos and Costa Rica, renewing key reinforced partnerships and launching new Patent Prosecution Highway (PPH) pilots with Chile and New Zealand. Engagement in the IP5 and the Trilateral focused on sustainability, SME support and artificial intelligence (AI).

The European Patent Academy provided a comprehensive training and educational programme on patents and related fields, delivering 145 training activities with almost 1 500 hours of learning. This programme supports SP2028 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Live online training attracted 26 602 registrations, while the e-learning centre recorded 23 574 active users (an increase of 25.7% compared to 2023), demonstrating growing demand for flexible digital learning. Female participation reached 51.2%.

The Academy's reach extended globally through co-operation with validation states, reinforced partnerships and the Knowledge Transfer to Africa (KT2A) initiative. The Modular Intellectual Property Education Framework (MIPEF) reached some 1 300 students at 40 universities and the Academy launched a new Patenting Innovation course.

Espacenet, the world's largest public collection of patent documents, surpassed 150 million documents in early 2024 with automatic translation into over 30 languages. By the end of the year, Espacenet hosted six technology platforms on topics of societal relevance, showcasing how organised patent data can offer valuable insights to address real-world challenges.

The **European Inventor Award 2024**, celebrating outstanding inventors from 15 countries, took place on 9 July in Valletta, Malta. The event attracted over 1 million views and media coverage reached a record 4 612 reports. Social media engagement soared, reaching 53.8 million users and 6 million video views.

Implementing its first Biennial Work Plan, the **Observatory on Patents and Technology** provided insights on innovation trends, mapped critical technologies, launched new tools, connected innovation actors and opened a transparent dialogue on patents and technology beyond IP experts. In its first 15 months to December 2024, the Observatory delivered the Deep Tech Finder (DTF) tool, published six economic studies and two technology insight reports, launched three new technology platforms, organised six online events and participated in more than 60 outreach interventions.

A sustainable patent system must be efficient and accessible, so **Driver 5 – financial sustainability** is critical. Following the Financial Study conducted in 2023, which assessed the long-term financial outlook of the EPO and revealed a favourable trajectory based on the base-case scenario assumptions leading to an expected coverage surplus of EUR 4.2 billion, in 2024 the EPO commissioned an Asset Liability Management Study. This Study emphasised the need to make explicit the level of risk the EPO can accept in pursuit of its financial objectives and resulted in the Office taking a number of initiatives in the second half of 2024, including formalising the risk level; creating financial security buffers; and establishing a risk management and monitoring framework.

At the end of 2024, the EPO's **funding level** had been improved from 73% to 80.1%. **Productivity** steadily increased during 2024, reaching a record 111.5 products per full-time examiner in December.

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Key achievements in 2024

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DRIVER 01
PEOPLE

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In 2024, the EPO continued its commitment to fostering an engaged, diverse and high-performing workforce. Through a targeted recruitment approach, innovative talent development initiatives and strengthened mobility and flexibility measures, we have ensured that our people remain at the centre of our organisational development.

FOSTER STAFF ENGAGEMENT

Staff engagement continued to improve significantly in 2024, reflecting a positive cultural shift within the EPO. The results of the **Staff Engagement Survey 2024** demonstrate strong progress in areas such as collaboration, respect and digital enablement.

The 2024 Staff Engagement Survey recorded an **engagement score of 73%**, an **11% increase** compared to 2022, highlighting sustained improvements in workplace culture and collaboration. The largest positive shifts were seen in respect[1] (+32%), work distribution[2] (+25%), and speaking up[3] (+17%), showing a more inclusive and transparent work environment. Engagement was highest among staff who actively used flexible work arrangements, demonstrating the successful integration of New Ways of Working (NWoW). The results again highlighted the positive perception of **line managers** in the Office, with a 4% higher score than the European benchmark for such surveys, reinforcing their role in supporting teams effectively under NWoW.

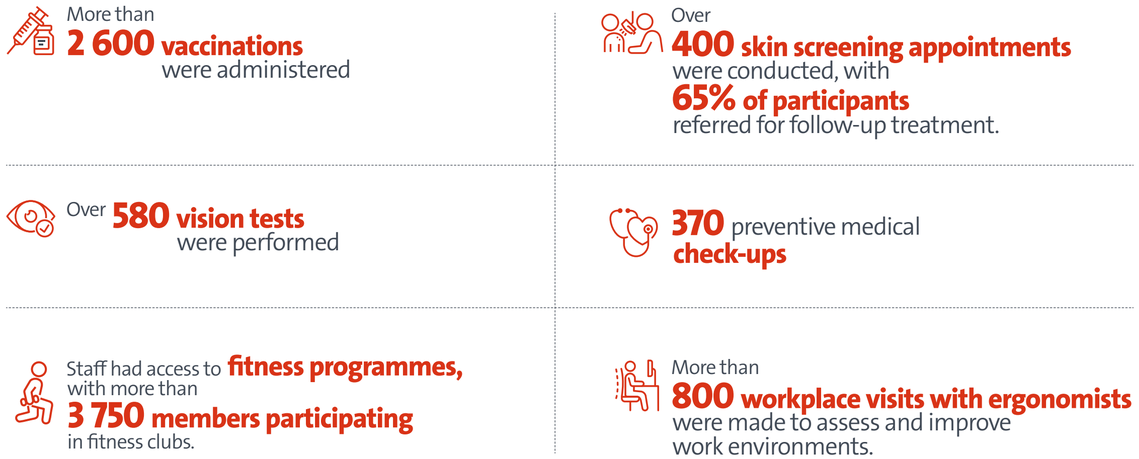
The results also highlighted the importance of strengthening social connections for the **sense of belonging:** 82% of staff reported coming to the office to meet colleagues, and 59% to participate in informal exchanges, underlining the value of in-person interactions. In order to further foster engagement and a sense of belonging, the EPO organised the **Campus Days** in 2024. Campus Days are events organised at all EPO sites offering a wide range of activities focused on team interaction, learning, health and wellbeing and diversity and inclusion (D&I) topics. Over 4 400 staff participated in these events, 22% more than the 2023 edition, with a satisfaction rating of 4.1 out of 5.

The findings of the Staff Engagement Survey were translated into an Office-wide action plan, to ensure staff feedback was heard and taken seriously. The actions focused on improving communication across the Office, strengthening the sense of belonging and best management practices to enhance teamwork and knowledge-sharing. Expanded Campus Days, with two editions per year foreseen as of 2025, and new communication initiatives, such as internal events for staff on strategic topics and exchanges between senior management and staff members, have been introduced to enhance knowledge exchange and reinforce connections across the Office.

1 - Survey question: “We treat each other with dignity and respect at work.”
2 - Survey question: “Our work is distributed in a way to make best use of the available resources (staff & skills).”
3 - Survey question: “It is safe to speak up at work.”

Additionally, in 2024 the EPO continued to prioritise staff health and well-being, reinforcing its commitment with successful ISO 45001 re-certification. As part of the NWoW, we introduced a range of health initiatives to support staff's physical and mental well-being. These comprehensive offerings reflect the EPO's ongoing dedication to fostering a healthy and supportive work environment.

Figure 1 – **Health related initiatives offered in 2024**



Source: EPO

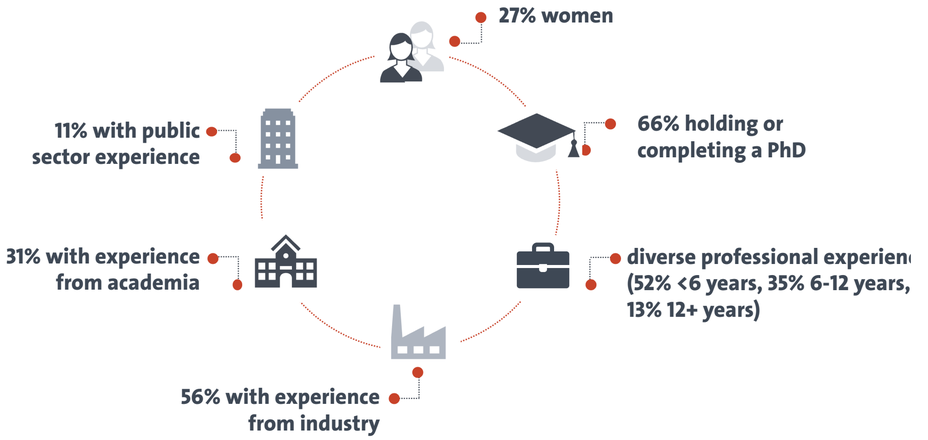
ATTRACT TALENT

The EPO strengthened its ability to attract and retain top talent in 2024, focusing on the quality and diversity of candidates, investing in our employer branding and improving the efficiency of our recruitment process to provide business areas with the right skills at the right time.

Despite a very competitive job market for highly skilled professionals, in 2024 the EPO received a **record number of applications for examiner positions** – over 9 000 in total – with more than 6 200 applications in the autumn campaign alone. This reflects the impact of our renewed employer branding and targeted outreach efforts.

In terms of **examiner recruitment**, the Office hired 111 new examiners in 2024. Notably, the country diversity of our new hires has increased, with 21 nationalities represented (up from 17 in 2023) while we continue to put emphasis on gender balance and inclusion of underrepresented groups.

Figure 2 – **New examiners recruited in 2024**



Source: EPO

- **Efforts to increase gender diversity of new hires:** In line with the Office's ambitions under SP2028, we actively reach out to potential candidates on social media and are therefore able to proactively target specific populations to promote their participation. We also participate in specialised events such as "Women in Tech", and continue to attract female candidates in our Young Professional (YP) scheme, thus training diverse future generations of IP practitioners.

- **Efforts on accessibility and inclusivity at the workplace:** In September 2024, the EPO welcomed eight talents with disabilities for a shadowing experience, offering them an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the EPO's operations, while receiving valuable career guidance. We have also improved the digital accessibility of our jobs website in Q3 2024, enhancing usability for visually impaired applicants.

- **Young Professionals (YP) Programme:** 102 YPs joined the EPO in 2024, representing 21 nationalities, with 64% of them being women, demonstrating the programme's role in fostering the diversity of the EPO's workforce. The YP programme continued to serve as a valuable pathway for career progression, with two former YPs successfully recruited as examiners and four into other roles in 2024. A tailored development programme was launched to equip YPs with skills for long-term career progression.

- **Streamlined recruitment processes:** Our agile recruitment strategy and the maintenance of a two-year candidate pipeline for examiners have ensured that we not only attract top talent but also integrate new staff quickly, which is crucial for meeting our evolving workload demands. For example, 53 job offers for new examiners to join in 2025 were already accepted by Q4 2024, putting us well on track toward our hiring targets for the following year. Additionally, 56% of job offers were made through our examiner recruitment pipeline, ensuring a structured and timely onboarding process for new hires and resulting in an end-to-end recruitment cycle time to hire of below four months.

DEVELOP TALENT

In 2024, the EPO continued to invest in the development of its people. The Office reinforced a culture of continuous learning, equipping employees with the necessary skills to excel in a rapidly evolving environment. The 70/20/10 learning model was continually expanded, integrating on-the-job learning, peer knowledge sharing, and formal training through targeted initiatives.

- **Embedding skills in our learning: I**n 2024, the skills framework was fully implemented, with 260 job profiles updated to include clearly defined skills, proficiency levels and expectations for all staff. The framework is fully digital, with 66% of staff having already completed a skills assessment and 70% having an Individual Development Plan (IDP) in place, which maps their target for professional development, ensuring their skills evolve in line with the needs of the organisation. These steps mark a major milestone in embedding skills-based development across the organisation, as the basis for keeping an up-to-date skills landscape in the Office, which will enable us to keep delivering high-quality products and services in the future.

- **Training programmes:** In 2024, we continued to prioritise the development of our workforce by investing in formal training programmes to enhance their skills and capabilities. These initiatives aimed to ensure that our people remain at the forefront of industry advances and are well-equipped to meet the challenges of the future.

- **Strengthening people management skills:** The EPO Management Community saw significant engagement, with over 500 different managers attending 17 learning sessions. Additionally, more than 300 experienced managers participated in nine specialised courses focused on enhancing EPO people management skills.

- **ANSERA search tool training:** Starting in 2023 and continuing in 2024, over 3 000 examiners followed a targeted search training aimed at improving their knowledge on the advanced ANSERA search tool, which by the end of 2024 became the single tool for search at the

EPO. As a result of the training programme, we have seen a proficiency improvement from 60% to 73% in the use of ANSERA, measured via a skills check-up carried out before and after the training, resulting in more efficient use of the tool which is a cornerstone of the quality of our PGP search.

- **Strengthened support for European Patent Administration Certification (EPAC) and European Qualifying Examination (EQE) candidates:** Building on the success of the 2023 EPAC study group for EPO staff, support was expanded in 2024 with tutored exam preparation sessions. An internal EPAC network was established to enhance exam readiness, encourage knowledge sharing and foster a supportive learning environment, alongside the European Patent Academy's official training and extensive self-study. In 2024, twelve EPO colleagues passed the EPAC examination, eleven of whom were study group members.

- **YP development programme:** The new tailored development programme for YPs is now a dynamic, three-year structured learning path, balancing technical, business and self-development skills. With reduced mandatory training and greater flexibility, YPs now tailor their learning through specialised courses, self-paced development and the possibility of being seconded to a national patent office or PATLIB in their third year, ensuring relevance to evolving business needs and long-term career growth, inside and outside the Office.

- **Enhanced learning journey for pipeline candidates**: Launched in Q2 of 2024, this provides expanded IP-related courses and language training in the three official EPO languages to job applicants in our recruitment pipelines, to better prepare potential recruits for future roles at the Office.

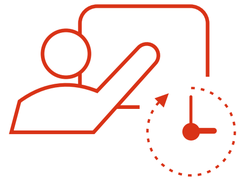
- **Revised rewards system:** Recognising achievements is integral to career development at the Office and to fostering sustainable engagement. In 2024, a revised rewards system was introduced to ensure more timely and clearly defined recognition. The updated scheme allows employees to be acknowledged for their contributions up to three times a year, with rewards granted promptly following performance discussions, without increasing the overall reward budget.

Figure 3 – **Learning facts and figures**



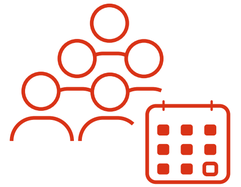
92%
staff

participated in at least one training activity



145 000+
hours

of training delivered (96% of instructor-led training included: 61% online courses, 38.7% on-site courses and a few "hybrid" courses)



5
iLearn Days

organised in 2024 (three general iLearn days, one iLearn day for managers and one "Together event" with participants from national offices)
Average satisfaction rating 4.5 out of 5

Source: EPO

The new tailored development programme for YPs is now a dynamic, three-year structured learning path, balancing technical, business and self-development skills

SUPPORTING MOBILITY AND FLEXIBILITY

Supporting mobility and flexibility remained a focus in 2024, with continued efforts to offer staff opportunities for professional growth while matching our skills and capacity with our needs as an organisation. As technology continues to change the way we work, we need to be able to adapt to best benefit from its potential. Flexible working arrangements under our NWoW policy helped maintain a committed, adaptable workforce.

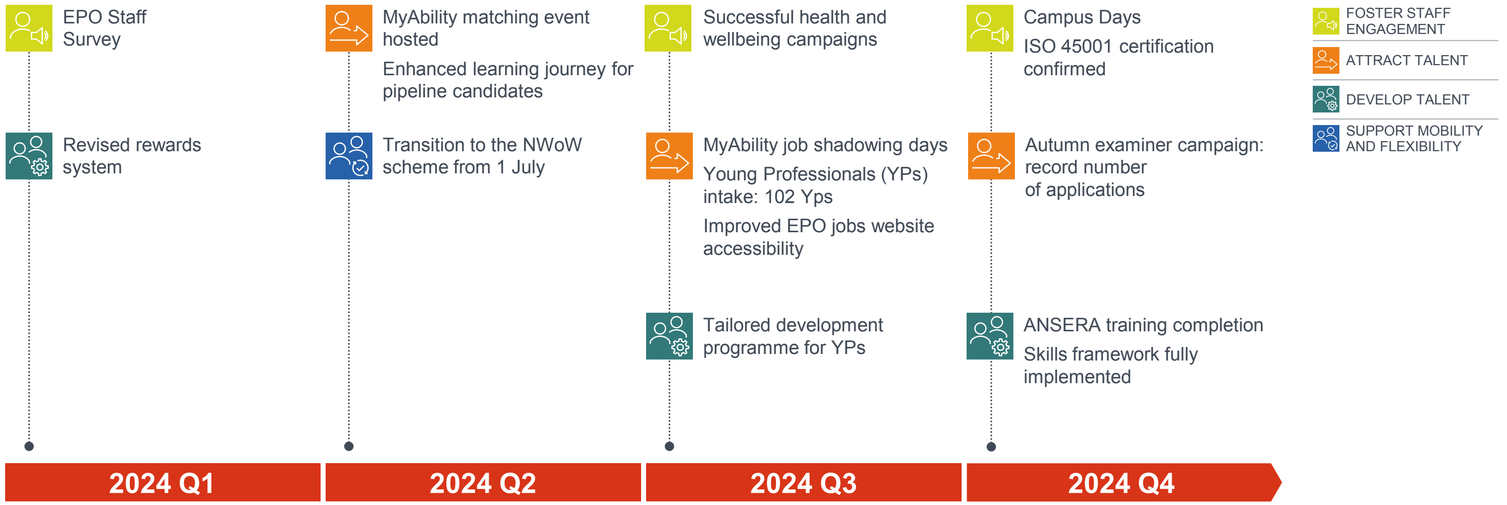
Our continuous efforts to support professional mobility ensure that staff have ample opportunities to grow within the organisation. Initiatives aimed at reviewing and upskilling roles – especially for formalities officers – have been central to balancing resources and meeting future demands. The Office intends to continue focusing on the internal workforce to meet its needs before going to the external market, with positive effects on staff engagement and financial sustainability.

- **Internal mobility:** As a result of upskilling and re-skilling efforts, 28 staff members were able to grow into a higher function in 2024, while 33 successfully moved laterally to new positions of the same level and 6 YPs were recruited as new contractual staff members. In addition, a total of 171 full or partial internal moves took place in 2024, allowing us to balance workload and capacity dynamically[4].

- **Women in management:** The Office is committed to engaging more women for managerial roles. In 2024, 32% of internal applicants for managerial roles were women, and 33% of internal hirings for managerial positions were women. At the end of 2024, 28% of all managers at the EPO were women. Among top managers[5], 40% were women by January 2025.

- **Flexible working arrangements:** The updated regulations on the NWoW received a favourable opinion from the Administrative Council (AC) in June 2024 and were subsequently implemented. The revised arrangements maintain the core structure of the teleworking policy established during the pilot that emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic. Adjustments addressed on-site attendance in cases of absence or during duty travel and introduced a regular review mechanism. The scheme is well-used, with 98% of our staff making use of the flexible work arrangements in 2024, and has received positive feedback from staff. For instance, the latest staff survey shows that engagement has increased by 11% since the introduction of NWoW and engagement is higher for staff who use the flexibility offered.

Figure 4 – **SP2028 People pipeline**



Source: EPO

4 - Some staff members changed roles more than once in the course of 2024.
5 - Principal Directors

STRENGTHEN SOCIAL DIALOGUE

In 2024, the EPO continued to strengthen social dialogue on a variety of topics set out in the Social Agenda 2024. Seven meetings of the General Consultative Committee (GCC) and four meetings of the Central Occupational Health and Safety Committee (COHSEC) took place. Additionally, 32 technical and working group meetings were convened with staff representatives to ensure thorough consultation before topics were presented to the GCC. This approach underlines the EPO's commitment to maintaining a constructive atmosphere and ensuring proper consultation. This contributed to progress on more than 29 topics, including: enhancing D&I by implementing gender-neutral language in our Service Regulations; the evaluation of the NWoW pilot; and the introduction of the skills framework.

The EPO also continued to actively pursue the resolution of disputes. This saw positive results in 2024, with a 36% decrease in management review cases registered in comparison to 2023, and a 44% decrease in internal appeal cases (representing an 80% decrease in individual appellants). Although the number of complaints filed before the ILOAT increased in 2024, this reflects a peak in the processing of internal appeals from the backlog the year before by the Appeals Committee. In parallel, de-escalation efforts brought positive results: settlement attempts were made in relation to 34 cases, with settlement being achieved in 19 of those (i.e. 56%). In addition, 20 cases covering all stages of dispute resolution were withdrawn.

Figure 5 – **Conflict resolution**



83 management reviews registered compared to 130 management reviews in 2023



20 withdrawals withdrawals covering all stages of dispute resolution



80 new ILOAT complaints, up from 24 in 2023, reflecting a peak in appeals in 2023 after the Appeals Committee resumed work



66 appeal cases registered concerning the same number of individual appellants, compared to 118 cases with 336 individual appellants in 2023



Number of pending appeal cases:
81% decrease since the internal appeal system was reformed in 2017 from 737 to 138 by the end of 2024



34 settlement attempts with 19 cases settled

Source: EPO

MANAGE OUR HOMES

Our continuous commitment to deliver high-quality products and services to our users, to maintain high standards of health and safety to safeguard our staff and stakeholders and to protect data and information with which we have been entrusted was further confirmed by the positive outcome of the external ISO audit, which validated our certifications in 2024. In addition, our transparent corporate reporting, prepared with reference to the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) universal standards, was complemented by a more complete GRI content index.

In 2024, the Data Protection Office (DPO) undertook several initiatives to further embed data protection principles into the Office's operations. The DPO supported the Office's business units in identifying data protection-related risks at an earlier stage, with the aim of mitigating them and safeguarding the rights and freedoms of the data subjects. Concrete measures included improving the methodology for assessing personal data breaches, revising the data protection risk assessment instruments and contributing to an independent oversight mechanism for the EPO Boards of Appeal, which was adopted by the AC in December. Additionally, the DPO supported the integration of AI in EPO operations by, for example, developing criteria for identifying high-risk operations when using AI systems and organising training on data protection and AI.

The DPO also worked with the European Commission on the formal recognition of the EPO's data protection framework, working towards an adequacy decision in 2025 that will facilitate cooperation and data flow with EU member states, especially in the context of IT co-operation projects. Moreover, the DPO engaged with various international organisations to share knowledge and best practices in data protection.

CREATE AN ENGAGING PHYSICAL HOME

In SP2028, the EPO aims for its buildings to serve as a physical home for our people and support an engaged professional community. Thanks to the efficient and responsible management of our buildings, their energy consumption decreased by 14% compared to 2023. Our carbon footprint was reduced to 3 032 tCO_2e (29% compared to 2023) taking us closer to our top-level KPI to be a carbon neutral organisation by 2030. Several milestones were achieved during 2024, with the completion of the renovation of the EPO's Vienna building, the rental of new office spaces for staff in Berlin, and the endorsement of Building Investment Programme (BIP) for 2024 to 2028 covering Munich and The Hague.



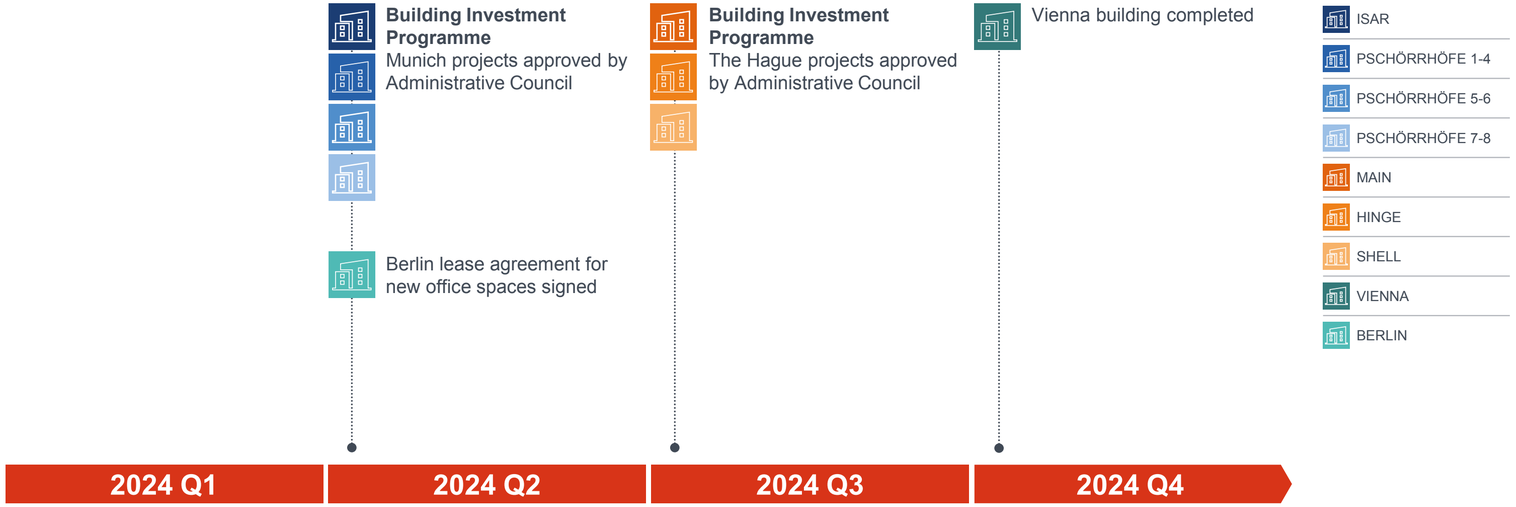


Vienna: In Vienna, the fully renovated building was completed on schedule and within budget, with approximately EUR 1.5 million remaining unspent from the original budget of EUR 51.7 million. This timely completion allowed EPO staff to move back into the building in November 2024, ahead of the target date of December 2024. The renovated building offers a modern, sustainable work environment, with more daylight and a flexible internal layout that supports both collaborative and focused work. It has achieved an "Outstanding" rating under the BREEAM certification standard for sustainable buildings and will be carbon-neutral over its lifetime, offsetting the CO_2 emissions generated during construction by producing more green energy than it consumes.

Berlin: In 2024, the EPO sought to secure a new building in Berlin that meets its requirements for a modern and sustainable workplace. In March, the EPO informed the AC of its proposal to lease the C1 building, a centrally located property under construction at Alexanderplatz that fully meets these criteria, and the lease agreement was signed in June following approval by the Budget and Finance Committee. The move to a new EPO Berlin sub-office was accompanied by the signature of a new simplified and streamlined seat agreement with Germany in November 2024. The building was completed on schedule, allowing staff to relocate as planned in early March 2025.

- **BIP (2024-2028):** During 2024, the AC endorsed the projects in the BIP for the period 2024 to 2028. The programme aims to modernise the EPO's building portfolio by addressing four key principles: safeguard health and safety; contribute to environmental sustainability, by reducing energy consumption thereby contributing to our goal of carbon neutrality by 2030; support sustainable staff engagement through modern workspaces which foster well-being and collaboration fit for the new ways of working; maintain the value of our patrimony and contribute to financial sustainability, including through the responsible use of office space. In 2024, we started the planning and design phase for our projects in the Isar and PschorrHöfe buildings in Munich, and The Hague buildings.

Figure 6 – **SP2028 Building Investment Programme pipeline**



Source: EPO

DRIVER 1 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Key performance indicator (KPI)	End 2024 value		Target 2028
Staff engagement	73%	in progress	75%
Sense of purpose	82%	in progress	85%
Gender diversity	35.3%	in progress	40%
Female managers	28%	in progress	40%
Geographic diversity	35 EPC countries	in progress	39
Recruitment cycle	4 months	target achieved	≤ 4 months
Impact of learning	54%	in progress	75%
Environmental sustainability	3 032 t CO_2e	in progress	≤ 1 000 t CO_2e
Build value	-14.1%	in progress	≤ -25.6%

= in progress; = target achieved

In 2024, the KPIs under driver 1 progressed well towards their challenging long-term SP2028 targets. Results from the 2024 Staff Engagement Survey (SES) highlighted notable progress in employee engagement, bringing the associated KPI closer to the SP2028 target. Sense of purpose, belonging and alignment was also well perceived by staff, who answered the related question positively in 82% of cases. Feedback from the survey has led to the development of concrete actions in many areas with the primary focus on how we connect with the Office and with each other.

The KPIs related to gender diversity remained stable throughout the year. Further data analysis shows large variations across the organisation, between examiner and non-examiner staff, due to the availability of talent in specific technical fields and gender imbalance among STEM applicants, and also between the levels of management. To address this, the EPO will increase the KPIs' granularity to show groups separately, introducing additional KPIs to monitor examiner recruitment and the representation of women in top management. The latter reached 40% of women in top management by January 2025.

The 35 contracting states of the European Patent Convention (EPC) represented among the EPO staff indicate a steady level of geographical diversity while we continue to put efforts into increasing the number of countries represented.

With a view to maintaining a responsive end-to-end recruitment cycle for examiners, the KPI respected the target of four months' time to hire that allows the Office to quickly react to capacity needs and evolving incoming workload.

Developing our people's talent is one of our strongest priorities and in 2024 we started monitoring the impact of training and development activities via a structured survey. In 54% of cases, staff found that the training received had increased their ability to perform their work. Following up on the comments received, improvement activities were put in place to further tailor the development opportunities and to enhance and facilitate the use of the learning offer.

With a total of 3 032 t CO_2e, corresponding to a 29% reduction in the CO_2 emissions from operations compared to the previous year, the environmental sustainability KPI drew closer to its ultimate SP2028 target. More details on the environmental performance activities are available in the dedicated Environmental Report 2024.

Our commitment to sustainability is also reflected in the reduced running costs for our buildings in Munich and The Hague, as measured by the KPI "Build value". At the end of 2024, the KPI shows a reduction of 14.1% compared to the baseline costs calculated in 2022.

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DRIVER 02
TECHNOLOGIES

EUROPEAN PATENT OFFICE
Annual Review
2024

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Guided by SP2028, we are committed to leveraging technology to improve efficiency, quality and sustainability. In 2024, our digital transformation journey has been marked by significant advances across various domains.

Throughout the year we focused on simplifying and automating processes, removing dependencies on outdated legacy systems, incorporating secure cloud technologies and ensuring high availability of IT systems.

PGP PIPELINE

The PGP pipeline aims to improve the PGP to deliver higher quality products and services to our users with increased efficiency.

- **100% digitalisation of examiner actions and automation of Formality Officers' tasks:** We achieved a milestone by delivering 100% digitalisation of examiner actions with digital workflows. We also advanced patent administration digitalisation and improved efficiency by replacing manual efforts with automated processing. For example, the dispatch of "notification of loss of rights" became automated or semi-automated depending on their complexity and in the majority of cases (ca. 50 000 per year), the notification is processed without any human intervention.

- **Modernisation of publication services:** We insourced and rebuilt the European Publication Server[6] and the Linked Open EP Data[7] services. As a result, we no longer depend on external providers and discontinued a contract saving EUR 320 000 per year. This also ensures that both services can be sustainably run to the highest standards and further developed as required to meet the changing needs of users.

- **Launch of the Legal Interactive Platform (LIP):** The LIP, launched in May 2024, is an AI-based tool that helps users answer queries about the European patent system. It is user-friendly, provides quick, structured search results with summaries and links to legal texts, and can generate summaries from Boards of Appeal case law. By the end of the year, the tool was established internally as a quality source of information and a helpful tool for daily work. For our external stakeholders, the LIP entered pilot phase with one national patent office (NPO) and with pilot users of MyEPO.

- **AI-supported classification:** Following successful use of AI in pre-classification and reclassification, in 2024 we introduced AI-supported classification in the majority of technical fields. In addition to reducing manual work and achieving efficiency gains, we have observed benefits in terms of improved accuracy and consistency, ultimately contributing to better quality.

- **Decommissioning of legacy classification tools:** The projects undertaken under SP2023 successfully developed a new classification service integrated in the search environment of ANSERA and covering a full range of classification tasks. This allowed the decommissioning of the legacy tools[8], contributing to streamlining and optimisation of the examiner toolset.

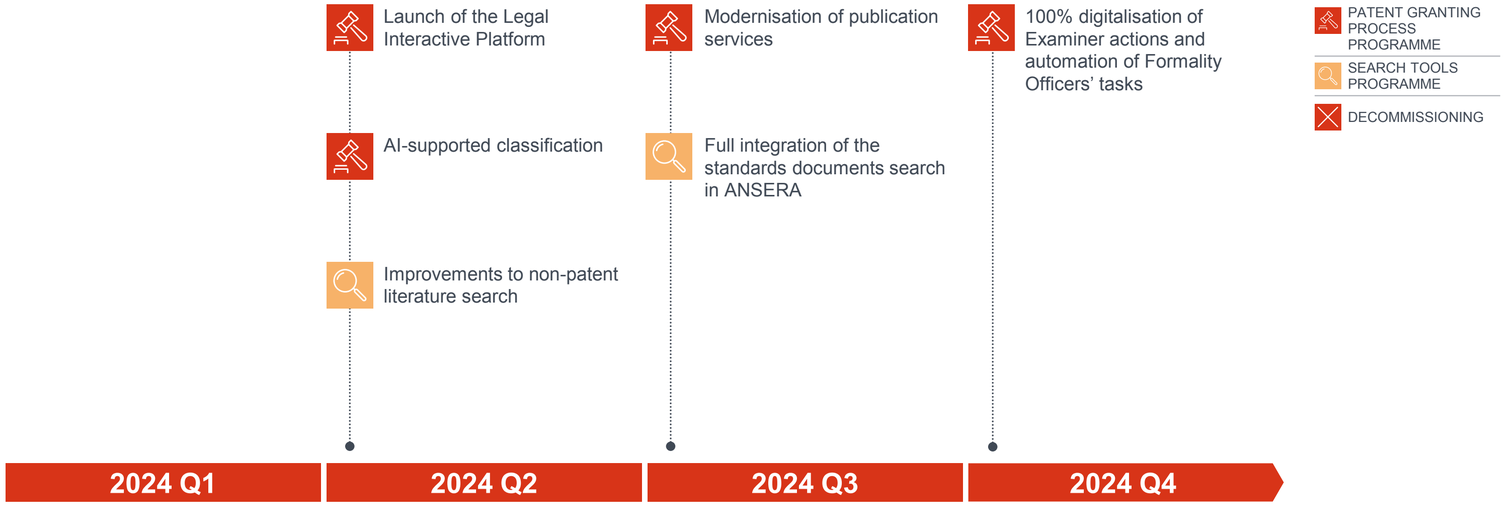
- **Improvements to non-patent literature (NPL) search:** Introduction of Web Search Assistant extended the search beyond the ANSERA in-house NPL collection and provided seamless access to billions of records from leading scientific and academic publishers. Enhanced access to prior art contributes ultimately to quality of search.

- **Full integration of the standards documents search in ANSERA:** Standards have a recognised significance as prior art, especially in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector and the EPO has developed extensive collections of standards, now comprising millions of documents. Thanks to full integration of standards search, examiners can fully rely on ANSERA and benefit from enhanced data quality and modern search practices to leverage this wealth of information.

6 - The European Publication Server (EPS) is the legally authoritative source of all patent applications and patent specifications published by the EPO. Moreover, the EPS provides free online access to all these documents for research, translation and instant download.
7 - The Linked Open EP Data (LOD) is a service allowing to combine datasets relating to patent applications and granted patents with other resources, such as business data, in a variety of formats, including for presentation on webpages.
8 - Doctool, Clip-on, Classtool, +Cla and REPA

- **Decommissioning of EPOQUE for internal search and other legacy search tools:** These achievements enabled the decommissioning of the legacy applications previously used for NPL search and standards documents search. ANSERA was enhanced with all EPOQUE full-text databases and other specific search functions, and the ANSERA viewer provided ergonomic and performance improvements compared to the legacy viewer. All this enabled us to decommission EPOQUE for internal search at the end of 2024.

Figure 7 – **SP2028 PGP pipeline**



CORPORATE PIPELINE

The Corporate pipeline aims to modernise and simplify systems supporting our corporate functions and ensure that our external and internal IT systems are built on resilient and secure infrastructure.

In 2024, we used technology to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of our **HR function** with the following actions:

- **Declaration of conflict of interest tool:** A single point of entry was introduced to enable staff to declare real, apparent or potential conflicts of interest and request authorisation for supplementary activities. As a result, the process of managing conflicts of interest is much simpler and more transparent, helping staff and the Office to demonstrate integrity, objectivity and impartiality.
- **Tool for follow up of the language skill development:** New features were introduced to assist line managers in the follow-up of language learning by staff recruited with language requirements within the first five or ten years of employment. The new tool provides transparency by offering easy access to the up-to-date information.
- **Update of tools to support the refined teleworking policy:** Building on the lessons and achievements of the two-years-long NWoW pilot, the Office implemented the teleworking policy endorsed by the AC in June 2024. Our tools were updated to facilitate more effective planning and coordination among colleagues and managers, through information dashboards, promoting a collaborative work environment. Other enhancements support staff to manage their way of working, including integration of booking workplaces and automated reminders for complying with the applicable quotas.

In the areas of **Finance and Procurement**, we also introduced new means to improve the efficiency of these functions with modern technology:

- **Activity-based budgeting fully implemented:** We introduced activity-based budgeting in 2023 and by 2024 we transitioned to this model in our finance and procurement systems, enhancing financial transparency and efficiency. Processes were adjusted for business units to report expenditures by activity, compare them against the budget, and streamline approval workflows. We also launched new expenditure monitoring dashboards, allowing all units to consistently report and monitor their budget consumption.
- **Roll-out of the new procurement tool to all departments:** The new procurement tool was made available to all EPO departments involved in purchasing. It enhances efficiency and transparency, and reduces manual work. The tool centralises supplier data, contracts and purchase requisitions, supports electronic signatures and improves the supplier experience through a dedicated portal. It also ensures seamless data integration with financial systems, minimising errors.
- **New e-invoicing solution:** At the end of the year, we launched the new e-invoicing solution, allowing us to fulfil our legal obligations while improving the efficiency of our invoice processing workflows.

Additionally, a number of improvements affected **all areas of the organisation**:

- **Implementation of the Retention Policy in our document management system:** To ensure administrative certainty and support long-term sustainability, the Office is dedicated to promoting reliable record management. The new Retention Policy provides a comprehensive framework and is key to our digital transformation and paper

reduction efforts. The policy was implemented in the new document management platform and the first review resulted in removal of 77 000 obsolete administrative documents for which the retention period expired.

- **Extension of the EPO Service Request Portal:** Initially used only for handling IT-related requests, the platform was expanded to include additional services such as HR requests, facility management and security-related services. The legacy system for handling HR requests was subsequently decommissioned.

- **Evaluation of MS Copilot:** In line with our approach to adopt the latest technologies in a prudent manner, we conducted a pilot based on specific and well-controlled use cases of MS Copilot, an AI-powered assistant designed to enhance productivity and streamline tasks within Microsoft 365 applications. Based on this positive outcome we are exploring options for further adoption of MS Copilot in our organisation where it can bring the most benefits.

- **Decommissioning of the legacy data analytics platform:** The new open-source data analytics platform was introduced in 2021. After a gradual migration of our data services, it has become the go-to tool for analysts across the Office. The complete transition to the new platform in 2024 allowed us to terminate external contracts for the legacy platform, generating savings of EUR 590 000 per year.

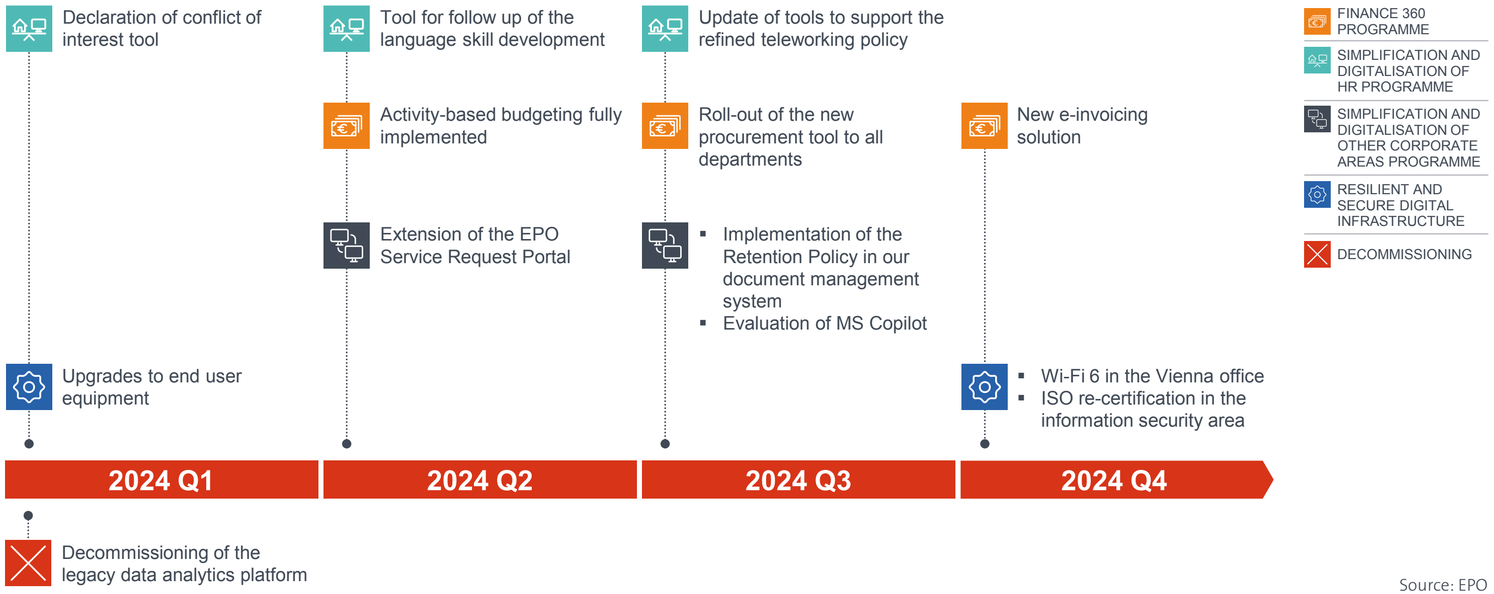
Finally, a number of initiatives will continue to modernise our **IT landscape**, contributing to a simpler and more sustainable IT function, which ensures high availability and a secure digital environment for the Office:

- **Upgrades to end-user equipment:** To enhance our working environment, we installed 1 600 new monitors and other hardware across all sites, creating a more streamlined and modern workspace. This setup mirrors the teleworking setup, making transitions between home and office seamless. Additionally, we provided 3 000 staff with new laptops featuring the latest technology to improve collaboration, performance and ergonomics.

- **Wi-Fi 6 in the Vienna office:** We provided faster data transfer speeds, increased capacity, improved power efficiency and better performance in environments with many connected devices in our refurbished building in Vienna.

- **ISO re-certification in the information security area:** The 2024 ISO audit confirmed our certification in the information security management areas as well as the successful transition of our framework to the new 2022 version of the ISO27001 standard, which reflects our commitment to maintaining high standards of information security management.

Figure 8 – **SP2028 Corporate pipeline**



Source: EPO

ONLINE USER ENGAGEMENT PIPELINE

The Online User Engagement pipeline aims to enhance quality and transparency by providing intuitive online services that cater to the diverse needs of users. We also empower users by extending the range of self-service capabilities.

- **Full release of MyEPO pilot phase 4 features:** The April 2024 release of MyEPO services extended the range of replies and requests that users can perform and provided new administrative options, moving us closer to a fully digital PGP. Users can now file amendments to international applications, request free certified copies of documents, manage licences and register transfers of rights. Additionally, users can upload bulk requests and open any public patent application.

- **Full release of MyEPO pilot phase 5 features:** The November release of MyEPO services extended workflows by offering a draft saving functionality. The claim refund procedure is now simplified and fully paperless, eliminating the need for refund codes and PINs by post. Moreover, MyEPO design and user empowerment features were enhanced, including granular access rights. In discussion with our user groups, we are working on an overhaul of the starting page of MyEPO and subsequent pages, which will go live in 2025.

- **Business-to-business application programming interfaces (APIs):** Recognising that many companies rely on their own IP management systems, we began to develop business-to-business technical interfaces (APIs) to facilitate seamless data exchange between MyEPO services and various IP systems. In 2024, we deployed two new APIs for retrieving and updating Mailbox content and information about applications and for online filing.

- **Discontinuation of incoming faxes:** On 1 July, the EPO discontinued accepting submissions by fax. Having stopped sending faxes in March 2023, all fax services relating to EP, PCT and Unitary Patent procedures ceased completely, being replaced by the web-based Online Filing 2.0 and, in emergency cases, the Contingency Upload Service via our website.

- **Decommissioning of the legacy Mailbox, MyFiles and Admin facilities**: The legacy Mailbox was taken out of service and replaced by MyEPO Mailbox, which continues to be regularly enriched with more functionalities and offers a multitude of features not available in the legacy system. The MyFiles and Administration facilities services were replaced by MyEPO Portfolio features, allowing easier access to files and file administration.

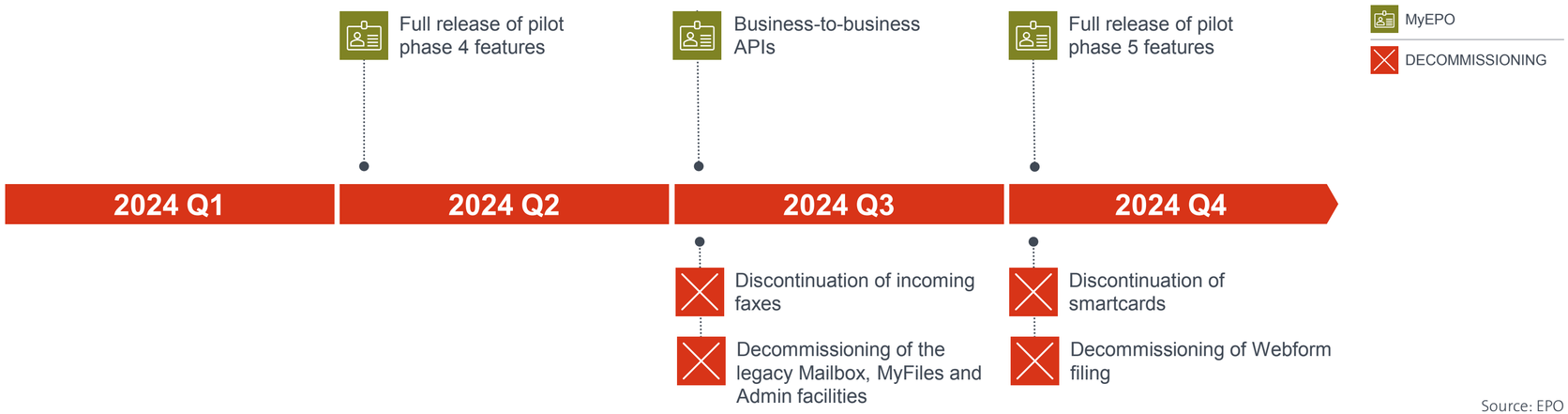
Our tools were updated to facilitate more effective planning and coordination among colleagues and managers, through information dashboards, promoting a collaborative work environment.

- **Discontinuation of smartcards:** As part of our effort to offer high-quality and secure online services, we introduced two-factor authentication (2FA)[9] for our external users accessing MyEPO. This allowed for gradual phasing out of smartcards, used previously as an authentication mechanism, which were finally disabled on 31 December 2024. The discontinuation of smartcards not only offers our users more secure and convenient authentication methods but also enables savings of approximately EUR 660 000 per year.

- **Decommissioning of Webform filing:** To further consolidate our filing tools around Online Filing 2.0, simplifying our IT infrastructure, the Webform filing service was discontinued for document submission.

9 - The two-factor authentication login process involves an additional layer of security in addition to username and password, allowing MyEPO users to choose between phone, email, Google Authenticator or Okta Verify.

Figure 9 – **SP2028 Online User Engagement pipeline**



Source: EPO

DRIVER 2 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Key performance indicator (KPI)	End 2024 value		Target 2028
Availability of IT system (internal)	99.7%	✓	99%*
Availability of IT system (external)	99.9%	✓	99%*
Corporate processes digitalised	78.8%	◔	90%
PGP processes digitalised	100%	✓	99.5%
Leverage AI	46.7%	◔	90%

◔ = in progress; ✓ = target achieved; *=2024 target

KPIs under driver 2 showed substantial progress in 2024, with three out of five already meeting the long-term SP2028 targets.

Thanks to continuous investments in state-of-the-art tools, ongoing decommissioning of old legacy tools and diligent problem management, the KPIs for internal and external "availability of IT systems" remained consistently well above the expected levels in 2024. As a result, the targets for 2025 will be increased to remain challenging.

The progress made in the transformation and simplification of our processes, as described above, is also reflected in achievements of the relevant KPIs. With 100% of PGP processes digitalised, our focus will turn to the digitalisation of patent administration processes, with a new KPI to be introduced in 2025. On the corporate side, the KPI is making good progress and will continue to assess the level of digitalisation of processes not only in HR and Finance but also in General Administration and other corporate areas.

In January, 15% of classification tasks did not require human intellectual classification. All the efforts to ensure high-quality, efficient and accurate AI-supported classification brought the value of the KPI "Leverage AI" up to 46.7% by the end of the year – on track to reach the 2028 target of 90%.

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DRIVER 03

HIGH-QUALITY, TIMELY PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

EUROPEAN PATENT OFFICE

Annual Review 2024

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QUALITY AT SOURCE

Quality is a shared journey and a shared responsibility between the EPO and its users. Applicants and their representatives play an important role in supporting quality at the earliest stages and then throughout the PGP. By pre-searching and careful drafting of clear applications with an appropriate scope of protection, they can facilitate both quality and efficiency and reduce costs.

The EPO strives to support quality at source, including by: working with the epi on the training and qualification of attorneys and patent administrators through the EQE and EPAC; developing tools for users; and simplifying the application process and user experience. The EPO also responds to suggestions from users to discuss topics and seek common solutions – clarity was one topic discussed in depth in 2024.



PGP SIMPLIFICATION BOARD

The PGP Simplification Board facilitates digital transformation, promoting quality and efficiency. Through technical implementation, supported by changes to legal rules, the EPO – in close cooperation and consultation with users – has further simplified and digitalised the PGP.

We completed the first set of legal changes supporting digitalisation and simplification in November 2023. In 2024 the EPO implemented the second basket of changes to make the PGP simpler and more suited to the digital age. A third legal basket, which builds on the achievements so far, is being developed.

PROVIDING DIGITAL SERVICES TO EXTERNAL USERS

In 2024, we expanded the use of electronic signatures, decommissioned fax and exempted legal practitioners from the obligation to file an authorisation. To establish a paper-free PGP, we abolished paper-based acknowledgments of receipt and stopped sending paper copies of patent documents cited in search and examination reports.

The end of 2024 also saw the pilot launch of access to LIP for users of MyEPO. A number of other decisions were taken and communicated to users in 2024, such as decommissioning of the legacy online filing software (eOLF) by the end of 2025. The EPO also announced the strategic goal to go paperless by April 2027.

PROMOTING EARLY COLLABORATION IN THE EXAMINATION PROCESS

The EPO continues to support users in making the digital transition, but it is not just about digital transition – it is also about changing the way in which we work within the PGP, in particular by promoting early collaboration between the applicant and the examination division during the examination procedure.

In 2024 the EPO continued to promote the Shared Area in MyEPO among our examining divisions and to our external users via channels such as user meetings, three online seminars and the annual User Day.

CLARITY WORKSHOP

Clarity is a topic which recurs in the EPO's meetings with users and through our feedback channels. The challenges of patent clarity were also raised by the Standing Advisory Committee before the EPO Working Party on Quality (SACEPO WP/Q). Stakeholder Quality Assessment Panels (SQAPs) assessors have identified challenges with assessment of clarity, such as whether formulations are ambiguous or clear in a particular technical area. In response, in November 2024 the EPO gathered 72 participants together to discuss the importance of clarity.

Recommendations emerged for both the EPO and for applicants and their representatives. We will act on these recommendations which now form part of our Quality Action Plan 2025.

FOR APPLICANTS AND REPRESENTATIVES:

- Work with experienced representatives and ensure non-European applicants understand EPC requirements.
- Prepare high-quality applications with clear, consistent terminology, strong supporting data, and fallback wording to anticipate clarity objections.
- Proactively engage with examiners on clarity issues and respond appropriately to objections.

FOR THE EPO:

- Raise awareness of the importance of clarity, including post-grant and for third parties.
- Ensure consistent, well-substantiated clarity assessments and raise necessary objections early in the procedure, with proposals for resolution where possible.
- Improve the Guidelines, develop a structured methodology for clarity and enhance collaboration with applicants.

RESKILLING AND TRAINING

Continuous improvement is a deeply rooted value at the EPO. We ensure that the knowledge and technical skills of our highly skilled staff remain up to date with the latest changes in technology, the law and our tools.

Recruiting and training highly skilled people and providing continued professional development throughout their career is the foundation of quality at the EPO. In 2024, 111 new examiners joined our newcomers patent academy, embarking on an extensive programme of classroom and on-the-job training.

During 2024 we conducted 50 000+ hours of PGP training to keep our staff up to date on the latest developments in our technical areas, our tools, patent law and case law. Technical training focused on rapidly expanding areas such as batteries. Conferences, trade fairs and lectures from industry and BoA also provided valuable learning. The EPO's Continuous Knowledge Transfer (CKT) initiative fosters collaboration and knowledge sharing. "Tips of the Day" is one mechanism colleagues can use to share useful information: in 2024, 272 new tips were filed by colleagues, contributing to the growth of the database of more than 5 000 curated and searchable tips. Key topics for tips published concerned PGP tools such as ANSERA and Patent Workbench (PWB).

In 2024, we organised more than 250 peer-to-peer events, which supported digital transformation and change management. Key topics for peer-to-peer events were ANSERA, PWB and Web Search Assistant (WSA).

More than 2 100 participants attended iLearn events in 2024 aimed at improving consistency in examination. These events included presentations on inventive step, patenting AI, computer-implemented inventions, amendments and sufficiency of disclosure.

We incorporated the decisions of the UPC into case law reports for examiners, keeping them up to date on developments in patent law.

ACCURATE AND TIMELY CLASSIFICATION OF PRIOR ART

In 2024 we reviewed our classification processes to further capitalise on AI support. Building on the extensive experience of our examiners and classifiers, AI was integrated more deeply into tools and workflows to tackle the task of assigning classification symbols to the ever-growing volume of documentation. The powerful combination of AI and our experienced classifiers ensure we classify both in a timely fashion (within four months of publication) and with a high level of accuracy (for at least 95% of the documents).

During 2024 we conducted 50 000+ hours of PGP training to keep our examiners up to date with the latest developments in our technical areas, our tools, patent law and case law.

As well as allocating symbols to prior art and to our applications, we are also working to optimise our Cooperative Patent Classification (CPC) system to improve the quality and efficiency of search and for its readiness for more AI support in future. We regularly align the CPC with the International Patent Classification (IPC), which requires updates of the scheme. Recent AI developments support examiners in handling these complex reclassification projects.

GETTING THE RIGHT FILE TO THE RIGHT EXAMINER AND DIVISION AT THE RIGHT TIME

The Digital File Allocation (DFA) tool is integrated into PWB. It is an AI-powered, fully digital system for allocating work to examiners and facilitating the best technical match between a file and the examiners in the division. Given the increasing technical complexity of applications – often an application covers multiple areas of technology – DFA helps us ensure quality by getting the right file to the right examiner and division at the right time.

In 2024, the introduction of a configuration screen for team managers in the DFA tool marked a significant stride in simplifying allocation processes within the EPO. By enabling team managers to configure allocations seamlessly, this feature eliminates the need for manual allocation and streamlines the process through automated suggestions in DFA, thereby enhancing efficiency in the PGP.

IMPROVING THE COMPLETENESS AND ACCURACY OF SEARCHES AND WRITTEN OPINIONS

Providing applicants with high-quality, timely search and written opinions with a thorough assessment of patentability helps them to make informed strategic and business choices on further investment in their invention.

The EPO has the world's most extensive prior art collection, which grew from some 333 million to 357 million documents in 2024.

In 2024, our NPL database increased by 18 million documents and now comprises 197 million documents, including abstracts and full text documents. Our standards collection also grew by 500 000 to over 5.5 million documents, demonstrating their importance to a complete and accurate search.

The EPO has the world's most extensive prior art collection, which grew from some 333 million to 357 million documents in 2024.

ACTIVE SEARCH DIVISION

Having the best experts with access to the leading global database and powerful tools is only part of the solution. We also need to make sure the search process is as robust as possible. The long-standing EPO practice of consultation between experts on search strategy was strengthened and formalised with the introduction of the Active Search Division (ASD) in November 2023.

Following a successful pilot phase in 2022, the ASD concept was fully implemented on 1 November 2023. Every search product is now routed via our digital workflow in PWB to all three members of the search division and the manager for review before being sent to the applicant.

In 2024 every search report and written opinion – representing over 260 000 products – benefited from the increased early interaction that ASD brings. A preliminary analysis of the impact of this change revealed promising early signs that ASD is having a positive impact on quality, efficiency and knowledge sharing. The analysis of cases processed under ASD showed:

- Improved assessment of fallback positions in written opinions, reported both by EPO managers and by users in meetings.
- Quality auditors note more complete written opinions e.g. addressing all independent claims in detail.
- Directorate Quality Audit (DQA) findings related to invalid objections in the search report and written opinion fell from 11.5% in 2023 to 6% in 2024
- Coaches reported that ASD facilitates more effective onboarding for new examiners.

There are also early indications that the ASD initiative is leading to enhanced legal certainty and efficiency. For cases treated since its implementation, we observe:

- fewer applications proceeded to examination
- fewer communications needed before grant

While early signs are positive, the ASD has been operating for only a year and its full impact cannot yet be assessed. We will conduct a more detailed analysis in 2025.

HIGH-QUALITY AND CONSISTENT EXAMINATION

Harmonisation has been a focus area in recent years (see Quality Report 2023). With increasing volumes of applications for inventions that embrace more than one technology, the Office has invested in making sure that divisions have the right mix of technical backgrounds to treat all aspects of claimed inventions. This "mixed division" remains throughout the process, from search to opposition. In 2024, some 40% of all grants included examiners from different teams.

In addition to practice harmonisation within examining divisions and teams, we need to ensure consistency of approach across teams working in related technical areas. This is an essential part of the EPO's commitment to the delivery of high-quality patents. Examiner-to-examiner exchange and discussion are key in achieving our goal of increased consistency. The ASD, the peer-to-peer review between divisions and the creation of mixed divisions of examiners from different fields of technology and sites all help us in this endeavour.

Peer-to-peer review – where examiners from different teams and sites share and review files – has been underway for some time. In response to requests from users, in 2024 we had a particular focus on practice harmonisation for emerging technology in the digital area.

Examining divisions in neighbouring teams reviewed more than 2 200 files from over 60 applicants in this area. These were cases where, for example, there was a potentially too early summons to oral proceedings, early indication of intention to refuse, or where there had been multiple rounds of communication without a resolution. This peer-to-peer review found that:

- In most cases, there were no areas for improvement identified.
- In some 10% of cases areas for possible improvement were identified. These included improvements to the summons to oral proceedings and suggestions for further communication.

In 2025, the initiative will be extended to more technology areas where there is divergent practice or procedure.

IMPROVING CONSISTENCY IN THE TREATMENT OF THIRD-PARTY OBSERVATIONS

Whilst substantive quality is important, we must also make sure that we apply our procedures correctly at every stage of the PGP. In the autumn 2023 meeting of the SACEPO WP/Q, it was suggested that there was some inconsistency in the way examining divisions treat third-party observations.

In response to this feedback, the EPO analysed the handling of over 2 000 third-party observations for consistency of practice. Results were presented at the SACEPO WP/Q in June 2024. The study confirmed:

- Third parties invest considerable efforts in filing observations, often citing new documents and providing thorough arguments, demonstrating the added value and increased quality that third party observations bring to cases pending before the EPO.
- In nearly all cases, EPO divisions examined the observations thoroughly.
- However, in some 20% of cases the division took the third-party observations fully into account but did not then provide clear, timely, written feedback on their relevance in the open part of the file.

The study concluded that there is room to improve how we record third party observations in the open part of the file. Acting on these findings we are raising awareness with our examining teams of the need to provide feedback on third party observations with the next communication and we will follow up by conducting a new study in 2026.

REFUSALS

The quality of our refusal decisions is also important. That is why in 2024 we held a dedicated SQAPs session on refusals. Assessors found the refusals mostly justified and aligned with prior communications, with the right to be heard respected throughout. However, better dialogue between division and applicant could have prevented several applications with patentable subject matter being refused. The findings of the 2024 SQAPs are annexed to the Quality Report 2024.

We also comprehensively analysed the BoA decisions where the examining division had refused the application and that refusal was appealed to the BoA. In 2024, 3% of files were refused; of these 12% were appealed to the BoA. This represents approximately 0.3% of applications filed.

Our review of the BoA decisions in such appeals found that the BoA decisions and those issued by our examining divisions were closely aligned. Of the 745 cases studied, only 4.8% resulted in the BoA granting a patent previously refused by the examining division. The main area of divergence was on inventive step. The study enabled the creation of an additional KPI for examination as envisaged in SP2028. Including this KPI in the Quality Dashboard[10] further increases our transparency, provides accurate information to the public and acts as a catalyst for quality actions within DG1.

OPPOSITION PROCEDURE

The aim of the EPO's opposition procedure is to act with the utmost impartiality, to provide fair and transparent opposition proceedings and to deliver legally valid decisions on time. Each case is dealt with by an opposition division composed of three highly experienced examiners, who can be joined by a legal member if required. Mixed divisions can also be allocated so that all technical aspects of the case can be properly assessed.

In 2024, 2 306 oppositions were finalised. The percentage of granted patents that were opposed dropped from 2.4% in 2023 to 2.1% in 2024. As with previous years, the 2024 opposition cases were not evenly distributed across technical fields: the highest opposition rates were in Agri-food (7.0%) and the lowest in the Digital Technology Community (0.4%).

In 2024, we reinforced best practices to ensure that decisions always take account of the higher-ranking requests and give reasons for rejection or acceptance using the three-step approach, which ensures that the right to be heard is respected. The divisions:

1. **provide reasoned decisions;**
2. **record disagreeing parties' arguments; and**
3. **provide reasoned arguments in response to the disagreeing parties' arguments**.

Examiners involved in oppositions were reminded that late submissions should be addressed first with admissibility questions such as an assessment of prima facie relevance. We also emphasised the completeness of summonses to oral proceedings in opposition and the completeness in addressing all objections and all auxiliary requests (down to the first acceptable one).

LEARNING FROM BOA DECISIONS AND SETTING NEW KPIS

One of the actions we set for ourselves in 2024 was to improve our learning from BoA decisions and to use that analysis to set a new KPI on outcomes from appeals from opposition and refusal decisions. Opposition decisions under appeal before the BoA represent a small but important subset of applications filed. In 2024, 2.1% of patent grants were opposed. The resulting decision by the opposition division can be appealed by one or more parties to the proceedings. An appeal is lodged in around 45% of opposition decisions, representing 0.7% of applications filed at the EPO.

10 - www.epo.org/en/about-us/services-and-activities/quality/quality-dashboard

Care is needed when looking at such a small but important subset of applications. Nevertheless, we believe that BoA decisions offer a rich source of learning for the opposition and examination divisions. It was in this context that we undertook an in-depth analysis of BoA decisions with the dual aims of creating enhanced input for continual improvement and creating new KPIs to help track progress.

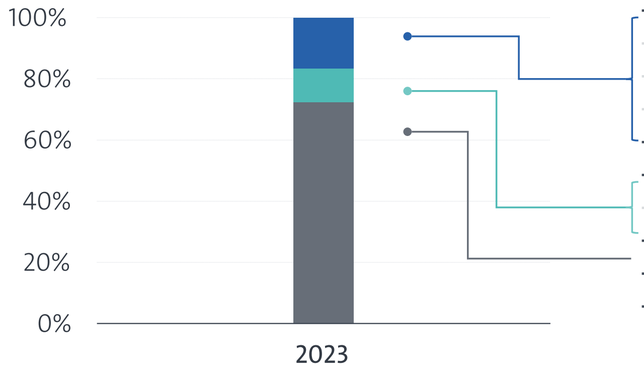
The analysis was conducted on a restricted set of data: those cases settled in 2023 falling under the Rules of Procedure for the BoA 2020 (this came to 1 519 cases). Looking at the cases under these rules of procedure minimises cases where the BoA might reach a different decision on the basis of different facts or evidence. As future cases will be under the new rules it also increases our ability to compare with future results and to track our progress. The study provided a more granular categorisation of BoA outcomes than has been previously available, as can be seen in figure 10. The results reveal a high level of alignment between first instance decisions and BoA outcomes, with 72.4% of appealed opposition decisions remaining unaffected.

With regard to the 16.5% of cases where the BoA revoked a patent maintained by the opposition division, lack of novelty was the ground for revocation in only 2.5% of cases. The largest area of disagreement, with 8.2% of cases, was the interpretation of inventive step, an aspect of patentability which is inherently more subjective.

Figure 10 – **BoA outcomes: inter partes cases settled 2023**

BOARDS OF APPEAL OUTCOMES: INTER PARTES CASES SETTLED 2023

Opposition division decisions under appeal; all cases falling under Rules of Procedure BoA 2020



	2023
Decision of the Board to revoke a patent[1] based on:	
Novelty[2]	2.5%
Inventive step[3]	8.2%
Added subject -matter[4]	5.0%
Sufficiency of disclosure[5]	0.9%
Decision of the Board to maintain a patent[6]	
Maintenance as granted	2.0%
Maintenance in amended form	9.0%
Opposition division decision unaffected/continuation	
Decision unaffected/continuation[7]	72.4%
Number of settled cases[8]:	**1 519**

Source: EPO

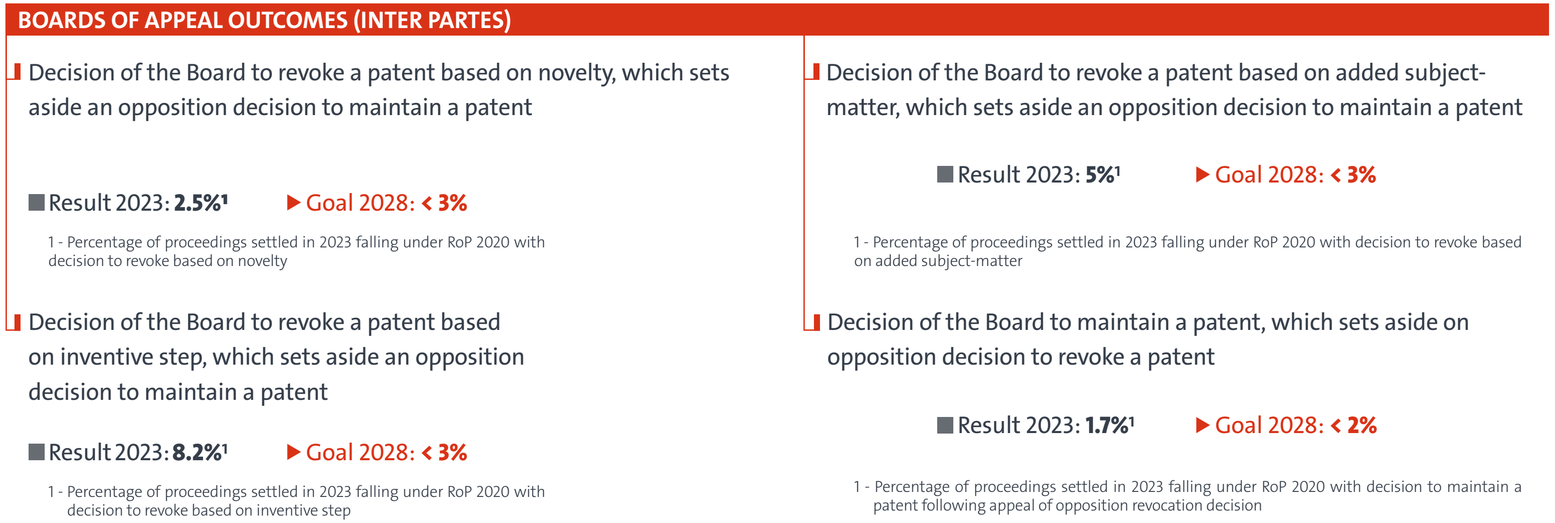
[1] Art. 138 EPC
[2] Art. 100(a) EPC (Art. 54 EPC)
[3] Art. 100(a) EPC (Art. 56 EPC)
[4] Art. 100(c) EPC (Art. 76, 123 EPC)
[5] Art. 100(b) EPC (Art. 83 EPC)

[6] Subset: maintenance where opposition division decided to revoke the patent: **1.7%**
[7] Includes appeals dismissed (309 cases), other disposal of the patent (700 cases, including withdrawal, inadmissibility of the appeal) and continuation of opposition (91 cases).
[8] All cases where Rules of Procedure Boards of Appeal 2020 applied

Four new KPIs based on BoA decisions arising from opposition decisions were devised that will allow us to drive change and monitor progress. These have been developed based on the analysis of the 2023 cases and in discussion with BoA in our Quality Dialogue meetings. Valuable input and feedback in the development of the KPIs has also been provided by the SACEPO WP/Q and member states via the Technical and Operational Support Committee (TOSC).

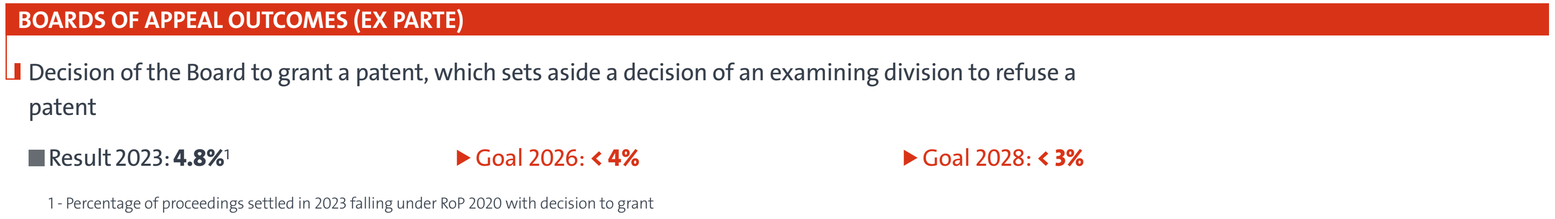
A new data collection method has been agreed with the BoA to provide the Office with data on the grounds for appeal decisions. This will facilitate the annual updating of the new Quality KPIs in our online Quality Dashboard[11] and support targeted learning for examining and opposition divisions. We will also use this data to inform our future quality actions.

Figure 11 – **KPIs for BoA outcomes (inter partes)**



Source: EPO

Figure 12 – **KPIs for BoA outcomes (ex parte)**



Source: EPO

11 - https://www.epo.org/en/about-us/services-and-activities/quality/quality-dashboard

ASSESSING QUALITY THROUGH DIFFERENT LENSES

SQAPs: Assessing quality together

Regular and constructive dialogue with users remained at the forefront of our pursuit of excellence in 2024. As the primary forum for discussion of quality, the SACEPO WP/Q met twice in 2024. Under this framework, three SQAPs were organised in 2024.

SQAPs are an important component of the EPO's user outreach programme as they provide European patent attorneys with the opportunity to work together with EPO experts to jointly assess the quality of work done by the EPO. They also provide the Office with valuable and actionable feedback on the quality of its products and services.

In 2024, the three SQAPs sessions concerned refusals (new in 2024), searches and written opinions (as in 2023) and grants (as in 2022 and 2023). The programme was very well received by the SACEPO WP/Q, the Institute of Professional Representatives before the EPO (epi), BusinessEurope (BE) and the SQAPs assessors.

In their findings, the panels identified examples of best practices and opportunities for improvement. Feedback from the 2024 SQAPs provided significant input for the EPO Quality Action Plan 2025. Key takeaways from the 2024 SQAPs included (see Quality Report 2024[12] for a full report):

- **Search reports and written opinions** were considered to have high quality, with relevant prior art and well-substantiated objections contributing to efficient proceedings. Search reports and written opinions were also generally consistent with each other. With regard to inventive step assessments, a more harmonised application of the problem-solution approach was recommended.

- **Grants** were found to be based on clear and well-argued communications, leading to justified decisions. Areas for continued improvement include consultation with applicants – especially for substantive amendments at the grant stage – and ensuring that all claims, including dependent ones, are assessed in more detail in examiners' communications.

- **High-quality refusals** have a clear structure, unambiguous grounds and well-reasoned argumentation that respected the right to be heard. Effective proceedings involved early citation of relevant prior art and consistency with previous communications. Areas for improvement include avoiding mixing different grounds for refusal and properly acknowledging third-party submissions. Greater examiner-applicant dialogue and openness to feedback can enhance efficiency and balance in decision-making.

LISTENING TO OUR USERS

User engagement was further enhanced in 2024. The EPO met with 22 large applicants from industry during 26 bilateral meetings, bringing the number of such meetings since the launch in 2021 to 80. In addition to the one-to-one meetings with industry, 33 meetings with international, European and national user associations helped us to understand various industry sectors and regions. The feedback received has been key to identifying the focus areas which have been integrated into the Quality Action Plan 2025[13].

On 1 August 2024 the EPO initiated a parallel outreach programme focusing on SMEs and in particular micro-entities. The programme involved 29 one-on-one meetings with UK and German companies and helped us to understand SME needs from the patent system and from the EPO in particular.

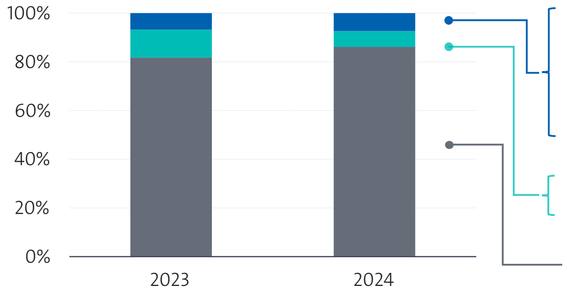
12 - the quality report is annexed to this report
13 - epo.org/en/about-us/services-and-activities/quality/quality-action-plan

DQA RESULTS

DQA results from the whole year of search and examination audits confirm a continued improvement in substantive quality, with 2.7% fewer findings overall at grant and 4.4% fewer findings overall at search compared to 2023. Search audit results yet again confirmed the high quality of the search, with auditors finding a closer, more relevant prior art document in only 3% of files in 2024, and findings where the quality of the examiner's reasoning in the written opinions could be improved decreased from 11.5% to 6% of sampled files.

Figure 13 – **Search: Quality audit findings**

SEARCH QUALITY AUDIT



	2023	2024
Findings potentially affecting validity[2]:		
Novelty, Inv. step[3]	6.0%	**6.2%**
Novelty	3.8%	**3.7%**
Inventive step	2.0%	**1.5%**
Exclusions, exceptions	0.2%	**1.0%**
Added subject - matter[4]	0.7%	**1.2%**
Sufficiency of disclosure[5]	0.1%	**0.0%**
Findings not related to validity:		
Clarity[6]	0.0%	**0.5%**
Quality improvements	11.5%	**6.0%**
No findings:		
No findings	81.7%	**86.1%[1]**

Number of files audited:	
2023:	**802**
2024 (12 months):	**404**

- **Findings potentially affecting validity[3]:**
  - **EPO Quality Dashboard KPI:** Incorrect assessment of Novelty/inventive step[4] (goal <5%);
  - **EPO Quality Dashboard KPI:** More relevant prior art found (goal <4%);
  - **Findings not related to validity: improvement** in findings related to written opinion reduced from 11.5 to 6.5%

- **Result:** stable at 6.2%
- **Result:** **goal met** at 3.0%

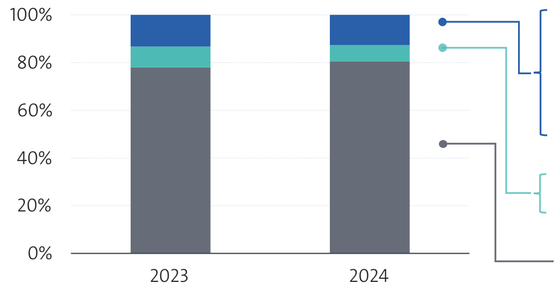
[1] Confidence interval (no findings): +/-3.4%. Note: Files with multiple findings are only counted in the category of the highest-ranked finding
[2] e.g. Art. 138 EPC, Art. 65 UPCA. Confidence interval (validity findings): +/ 2.6%.
[3] audit criteria includes e.g. R. 61, 62, Art. 52-57 EPC
[4] audit criteria: "added subject-matter": new information introduced in the application after filing date which impacts scope of claims, e.g. Art. 76, 123 EPC
[5] audit criteria includes e.g. Art. 83 EPC objection missing
[6] audit criteria includes e.g. Art. 84 EPC objection missing for independent claim

Source: EPO

Contributing to the positive evolution at grant is better assessment of novelty or inventive step, with incorrect assessments decreasing from 7.9% of sampled files in 2023 to 6.8% in 2024.

Figure 14 – **Grant: Quality audit findings**

GRANT QUALITY AUDIT



	2023	2024
Findings potentially affecting validity[2]:		
Novelty, Inv. step[3]	7.9%	**6.8%**
Novelty	5.2%	**4.7%**
Inventive step	2.4%	**1.8%**
Exclusions, exceptions	0.3%	**0.3%**
Added subject -matter[4]	5.0%	**5.9%**
Sufficiency of disclosure[5]	0.4%	**0.0%**
Findings not related to validity:		
Clarity[6]	5.3%	**4.8%**
Quality improvements	3.5%	**1.9%**
No findings:		
No findings	77.9%	**80.6%[1]**

Number of files audited:	
2023:	**1050**
2024 (12 months):	**984**

- **Findings potentially affecting validity [2]:**
  - **EPO Quality Dashboard KPI:** Incorrect assessment of Novelty/inventive step[3] (goal <5%);
  - **EPO Quality Dashboard KPI:** Findings on added subject matter [4] (goal <5%);
  - **Findings not related to validity:** Importance of **clarity [6]** reflected in **workshop with users** to help define expectations

- **Result:** improvement at 6.8%
- **Result:** 5.9% (above goal)

[1] Confidence interval (no findings): +/-2.5%. Note: Files with multiple findings are only counted in the category of the highest-ranked finding
[2] e.g. Art. 138 EPC, Art. 65 UPCA
[3] audit criteria: Art. 52-57 EPC; majority of findings in this category relate to Art. 54, 56 EPC
[4] audit criteria: "added subject-matter": new information introduced in the application after filing date which impacts scope of independent claims; Art. 76, 123 EPC
[5] audit criteria: Art. 83 EPC
[6] audit criteria: Art. 84 EPC

Source: EPO

OMBUDS OFFICE

Uptake of the Ombuds service continued to grow, with cases developing in both impact and quality. The Ombuds Office's turnover of 117 visits in 2024 exceed the 100 visits per year predicted when the service launched in April 2022. The growing proportion of unrepresented users, approximately 40% of contacts, suggests that the Ombuds is reaching its target user group.

Most cases related to information needs within the PGP. Nevertheless, 27 cases related to working relationships, such as undue limitations set by the examiner or persistent clarity objections. These were handled smoothly so that applications could get back on track through the normal channels. A new infographic has been developed to distinguish the Ombuds service from the complaints and feedback services.

Figure 15 – **EPO feedback channels**



Source: EPO

DIRECT SUPPORT TO OUR USERS

Customer feedback can be given through the enquiries and complaints/feedback channels and serve as valuable information for improving EPO products and services. Changes in the volume of enquiries or patterns in the types of questions asked can help us identify potential process or quality issues.

In total, 72 547 cases were successfully handled in 2024, slightly fewer than in 2023. The EPO managed to resolve 97.1% of cases in 2024 (96.7% in 2023) within the set internal time limits (16 business hours, five days or 20 days, depending on the enquiry), above the target of 95%.

In 2024 only 194 complaints and feedback cases were filed, down from 214 cases in 2023. In 93.4% of cases (92% in 2023), complainants received a detailed reply within 20 days, meeting the target of 90%. Justified or partially justified complaints and feedback in 2024 were 53%, lower than in 2023 (60%). The number of complaints in search and examination increased from 66 in 2023 to 100 in 2024. Of these, 56 (56%) were deemed justified or partially justified. However, 2024 saw a drop in complaints related to online tools, from 56 in 2023 down to 37 in 2024. In this category, 76% of cases were considered justified or partially justified.

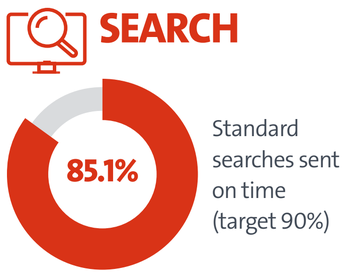
USS RESULTS

The biennial User Satisfaction Survey (USS) was launched in September 2024 and closed in April 2025. The results will be presented to the AC and then published on the EPO's website in 2025.

MAINTAIN TIMELINESS: BRINGING CERTAINTY TO THE MARKET

Timeliness is an important aspect of quality and legal certainty. Overall, 81.9% of search, examination and opposition standard files were produced on time in 2024.

Figure 16 – **Search timeliness**



Source: EPO

Search timeliness (standard cases[14]) remained strong, with 85.1% of searches and written opinions being despatched on time and a mean duration of 5.5 months.

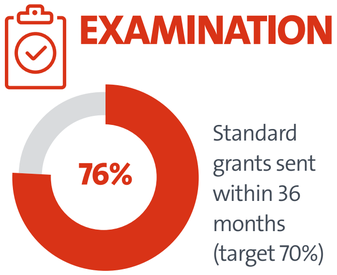
In 2024 we missed our 90% search target and ended the year with 85% of the searches being completed on time. This was due to the high volume of search workload received during the year, with 5% more searches than the year before, and 10% more than planned. Nevertheless, two thirds of the late searches were completed within four weeks of the limit date.

In addition to the number of new searches, we also tightened the time period for PCT-Bis searches from ten to eight months, improving the service to these applicants but making our target of 90% on time more challenging.

This is part of our programme for trying to harmonise all searches at six months. For example, since 2022 we have successively tightened the time period to deliver 90% of International Searching Authority (ISA) and national searches within nine months to eight months and now seven months.

The timeliness of the receiving section in 2024 was above 99.6% of tasks completed on time. In the case of opposition, the handling of new cases was on time for 99.8% of the tasks. Regarding the quality of the receiving section, the compliance rate in 2024 was 93.3%.

Figure 17 – **Examination timeliness**

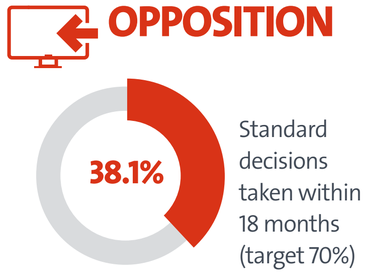


Source: EPO

Examination timeliness is also an important element of our quality policy as delays in the process can cause unnecessary costs and uncertainty for competitors and society. In 2024 76.0% of standard cases[15] were finalised within the 36-month target starting from the valid examination request, with a mean duration of examination of 24.9 months. For accelerated examination requests (PACE), the timeliness of combined first and further actions was 2.3 months.

In 2024, we managed to keep the number of old files under control, with only 18.6% of the examination stock older than 36 months. As the result of targeted action, we finished the year with only 5 294 old examination files pending with a valid examination request from before 2019 that could be processed by examiners (i.e. not awaiting applicants' action) and there were 7 649 actions pending in examination without examiner action for more than 30 months. Overall, our processing time from filing to grant in 2024 was 36.9 months for standard cases[16], with 75.2% of such cases being completed end-to-end within 48 months (79.3% within 48 months for divisionals).

Figure 18 – **Opposition timeliness**



Source: EPO

14 - Standard searches exclude (1) non-unity, (2) unclear and (3) incomplete cases.
15 - Standard examinations exclude cases with (1) more than one request for extension to reply, (2) more than one late fee payment and (3) rescheduling of oral proceedings.
16 - Standard cases are applications with a standard examination – for EP direct: time to grant from European filing date/for PCT: time to grant from entry into the European phase.

In 2024, we managed to keep the opposition stock at a low level of 3 691 pending files, less than the pre-pandemic number of 5 000. The overall mean duration is 20.5 months, with 38.1% of standard cases[17] completed within 18 months.

DIVISIONALS

Divisional applications are carefully monitored by the EPO. In recent years, the trend for voluntary divisional applications remains stable at circa 85% of all divisional applications filed and the volume of divisional applications is also stable at 6.3% of total stock. SP2028 defines stringent criteria to ensure that divisional applications are dealt with in a timely way. In compliance with these requirements, in 2024 the EPO's end-to-end timeliness of divisional applications remained at 80% (reflecting the percentage of standard cases granted within 48 months of request for an EP).

Additionally, the EPO implemented measures to ensure swift processing and legal certainty of divisional applications, including:

- The option to summon to oral proceedings as first action where the parent application was refused or withdrawn, since 2023.
- Early publication of the divisional application since 2023.
- Generation-specific fee introduced as prevention for sequences of divisionals since 2014.

These measures are proving effective, with the processing time from date of receipt to finalisation consolidating the positive trend of the previous year. In addition, acceleration is used in divisional applications (3.2% accelerated) more often than in regular applications (2.4% accelerated), both as PACE (acceleration by the applicant) and as ex officio acceleration following a non-anonymous, substantiated third party observation.

INCREASING DEMAND FOR OUR SERVICES

Demand for EPO products and services remained high in 2024. We received 1.9% more requests for searches than in 2023, 75% of them second filings.

Search type	Count	First or second filing
European first filing	31 510	first
European second filing	51 187	second
PCT Chapter I first filing	5 459	first
PCT Chapter I second filing	80 466	second
Euro-PCT (where EPO was not International Search Authority)	64 557	second
National first filing	27 242	first
National second filing	1 426	second
Total Search	**261 847**	

Legal certainty and thoroughness contribute to such strong demand, with the EPO remaining the number one ISA in the world: overall we find prior art relevant to novelty in close to 83.5% of our first filings, and even when we carry out a search after another ISA or patent office, for example in PCT-Bis proceedings, we still find potentially relevant prior art in almost 85.6% of cases.

In terms of examination workload, 177 197 applications entered the European examination phase, with a further 4 732 entering PCT Ch. II, bringing our total incoming workload to 446 218 patent products (searches/written opinions, examinations and oppositions) during the year.

PRODUCTION AND PRODUCTIVITY STATISTICS

Careful planning and management of incoming work resulted in production in 2024 which was 15 472 products above budget. This is an increase of 6% compared to 2023. Our renewed focus on examination allowed us to publish 109 526 patents in 2024 (budget target: 100 728).

17 - Standard oppositions exclude cases with (1) multiple opponents, (2) legal members to take evidence and (3) rescheduling of oral proceedings or multiple oral proceedings taking place

DRIVER 3 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Key performance indicator (KPI)	End 2024 value		Target 2028
Decommission legacy Mailbox and MyFiles	100%	✓	100%
Decommission incoming faxes in the PGP	100%	✓	100%
Decommission smart cards	100%	✓	100%
Decommission internal legacy search tools	100%	✓	100%
Users rating our online services as good or very good	91%*	✓	90%
Users rating our search products as good or very good	80%*	✓	80%
Users rating our examination products as good or very good	78%*	◌	80%
Timeliness of search	85.1%	◌	90%
Timeliness of examination	76%	✓	70%
Timeliness of oppositions	38.1%	◌	75%
End-to-end timeliness	75.2%	✓	75%
Timeliness of divisional applications	79.3%	◌	80%
Timeliness of prior art classification	85%	✓	80%
Accuracy of prior art classification	95%*	✓	95%
Quality of formalities (receiving section)	93.3%	✓	90%
Quality of formalities (opposition section)	89.2%	◌	90%

Key performance indicator (KPI)	End 2024 value		Target 2028
Search: more relevant prior art found	3%	✓	< 4%**
Search and written opinion: incorrect assessment of novelty or inventive step	6.2%	◌	< 5%**
Grants: incorrect assessment of novelty or inventive step	6.8%	◌	< 5%**
Grants: findings on added subject-matter	5.9%	◌	< 5%**
Boards of Appeal outcome on refusals (ex parte) – Decision of the Board to grant a patent, which sets aside a decision of an examining division to refuse a patent	4.8%*	◌	< 4%***
Boards of Appeal outcome on oppositions (inter partes) – Decision of the Board to revoke a patent based on novelty, which sets aside an opposition decision to maintain a patent	2.5%*	◌	< 3%
Boards of Appeal outcome on oppositions (inter partes) – Decision of the Board to revoke a patent based on inventive step, which sets aside an opposition decision to maintain a patent	8.2%*	◌	< 3%
Boards of Appeal outcome on oppositions (inter partes) – Decision of the Board to revoke a patent based on added subject-matter, which sets aside an opposition decision to maintain a patent	5%*	◌	< 3%
Boards of Appeal outcome on oppositions (inter partes) – Decision of the Board to maintain a patent, which sets aside an opposition decision to revoke a patent	1.7%*	✓	< 2%

◌ = in progress; ✓ = target achieved; *= Dec 2023 value; **= 2024 target; **= 2026 target

More than half of the KPIs under driver 3 have already achieved the SP2028 targets and the remaining ones have shown positive evolution in 2024.

At the end of 2024, our timeliness KPIs appeared well on track, with half already achieving their SP2028 targets. In particular, 76% of the standard examinations were completed on time and 75.2% of standard EP applications were granted on time (see above). Moreover, 85% of prior art was classified within four months of publication with a 95% accuracy level.

The KPIs monitoring the quality of formalities officers' work appear on track, with 93.3% of compliance in the operational quality control checks done on the receiving section and already 89.2% compliance in the checks on the opposition section, compared to a target of 90% by the end of SP2028.

The KPIs monitoring the quality of search and grant products are now complemented by five KPIs that allow learning from the BoA decisions. Detailed information on these is provided above.

Europäisches Patentamt
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DRIVER 04
PARTNERSHIPS

EUROPEAN PATENT OFFICE
Annual Review
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STRENGTHEN EUROPEAN CO-OPERATION

In 2024, we continued to collaborate with the members of the European Patent Network (EPN) under the established co-operation framework: IT co-operation; co-operation projects to enhance knowledge and quality; co-operation projects aimed at work-sharing; and co-operation projects to promote the convergence of practices by patent offices.

The 18th Annual Meeting on Co-operation took place in Vilnius in May. Following the discussions, and with the input of the TOSC, the catalogue of co-operation projects was reviewed and expanded to define new projects tailored to the diverse needs of member states.

On 11 October, the European Patent Organisation formally invited Bosnia and Herzegovina to accede to the EPC. With Montenegro's recent accession, and the ongoing work to prepare Moldova's, the number of EPC contracting states will soon reach 41.

Figure 19 – **18th Annual Meeting on Co-operation with EPO member states in Vilnius, Lithuania**



Source: EPO

In December, the EPO signed a working agreement on search co-operation with Portugal, and the AC approved the conclusion of three agreements with Ireland, Montenegro and Switzerland. The legal and technical implementation of these agreements, planned for summer 2025, will bring to 21 the number of countries engaged in search co-operation with the EPO. Overall, in 2024, the Office carried out 27 000 national searches on behalf of its EPN partners – a 4% increase over 2023.

Also within the framework of the European Patent Network, both the seconded national expert (SNE) programme and the secondment of EPO Young Professionals to national patent offices continued in full force, fostering valuable knowledge exchange within the network. Finally, to ensure we continue to engage in co-operation in the most effective manner, the governance of the TOSC was modernised with an updated mandate and working arrangements.

Pursue convergence of practices

A second cycle of the convergence of practice programme was launched in 2023, and the two first topics in this cycle – "allowable features in drawings" and "electronic priority documents" – concluded in early 2024. Work throughout the year focused on "observations by third parties" and "practices concerning assignment". A new convergence dashboard was launched to report on the implementation of agreed common practices at national and EPO level.

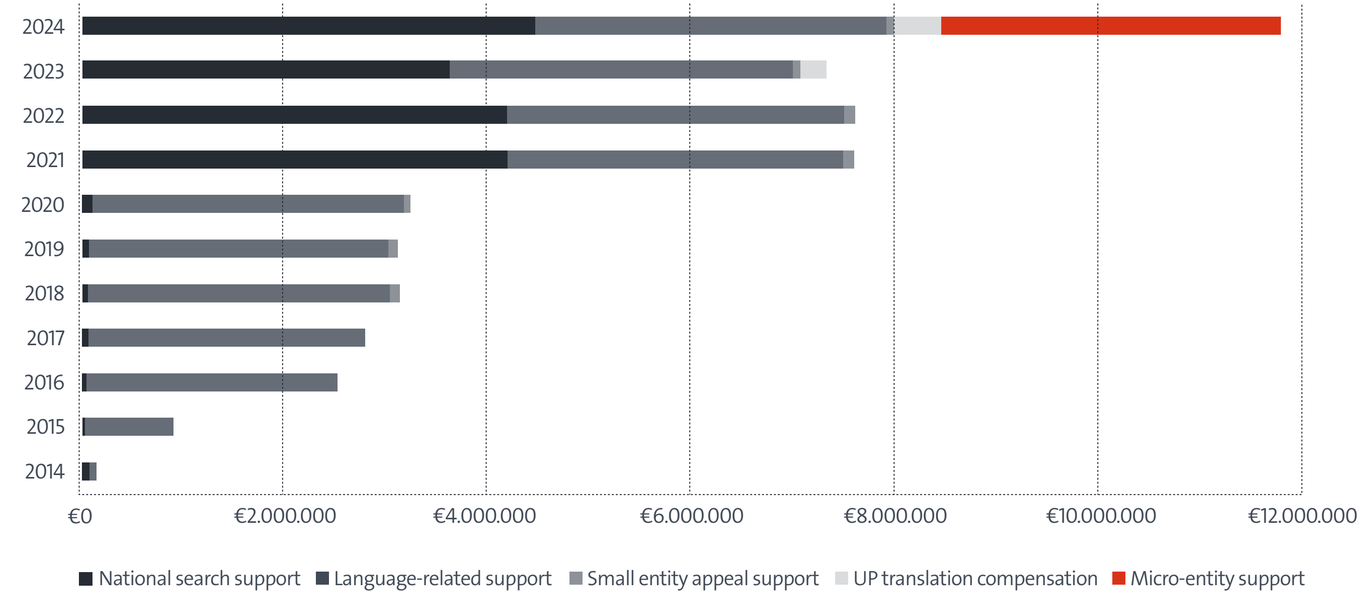
As part of the new SP2028 co-operation catalogue, exploratory work began on extending the convergence programme to practices on administrative topics, such as data protection, D&I and talent management.

Internationally, the EPO continued to work with its global partners on substantive patent law harmonisation (SPLH), and made progress towards building a consensus on a common European approach reflecting a balanced package. In May, the EPO hosted a Colloquium on SPLH with user associations and patent offices worldwide. In the second half of the year, a case law study on prior user rights was conducted, with the conclusions published in 2025.

Enhance support to SMEs and small entities

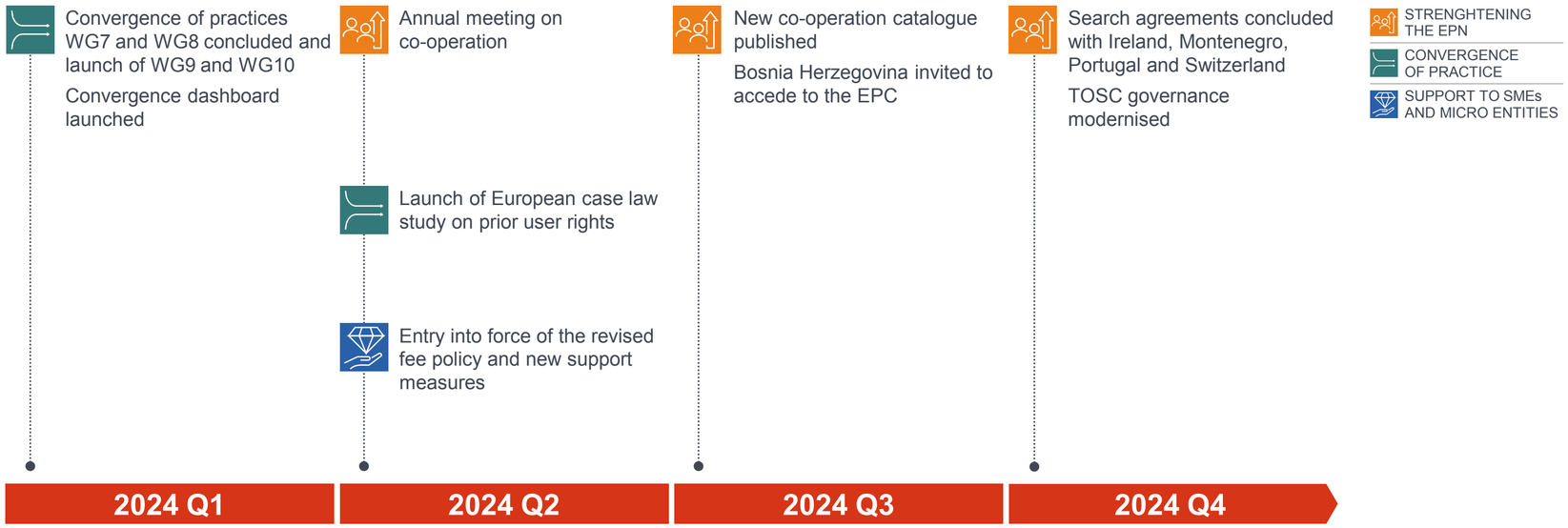
In April 2024, a revised fee policy came into effect with the aim of facilitating access to patent protection for under-represented stakeholders, specifically micro-entities. By the end of 2024, over 5 000 applications had benefitted from the new support measures, resulting in additional savings of EUR 3.3 million for small-scale innovators.

Figure 20 – **Support to SMEs and small entities**



Source: EPO

Figure 21 – **SP2028 European co-operation pipeline**



Source: EPO

ENHANCE IT CO-OPERATION

The IT co-operation pipeline aims to drive the digital transformation of the IP landscape in collaboration with key partners and stakeholders. The pipeline focuses on enhancing digital tools, decommissioning legacy systems and fostering interoperability across various platforms:

- **First NPO completed the switch to ANSERA-based SEARCH (AbS):** In February 2024, the Estonian Patent Office became the first NPO to switch to using the AbS tool exclusively. Since then, 14 countries have followed. At the end of 2024, AbS was live across 32 EPC states, with more than 1 800 active examiners.

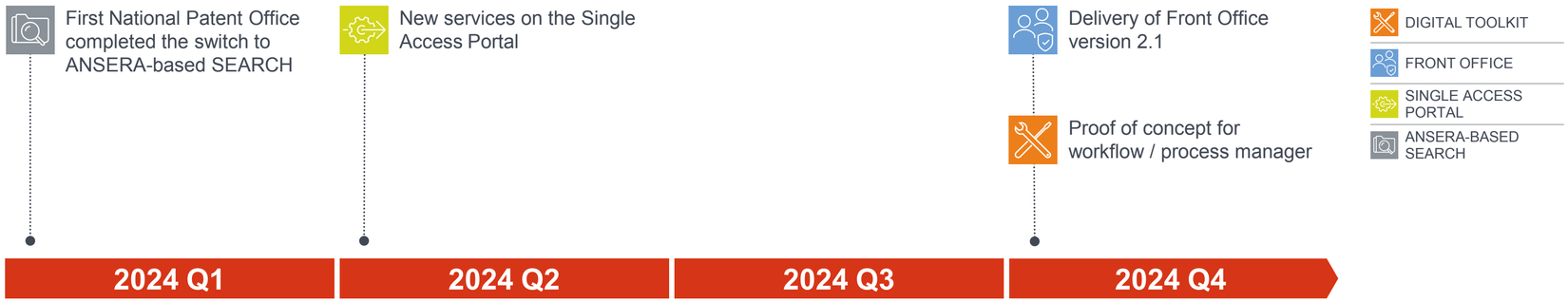
- **Delivery of Front Office version 2.1:** By the end of 2024, 10 countries had begun, and five countries had completed, implementation of Front Office, with over 38 000 filings received across various IP rights.

- **Proof of concept for workflow/process manager:** The Digital Toolkit has introduced modular

"bricks" to integrate IP filing and grant processes, benefiting from various cloud infrastructures. A proof of concept demonstrated how different modules could be connected to implement business processes.

- **New services on the Single Access Portal:** We revamped the website, deployed a new registration tool for participants at AC meetings, and piloted a reimbursement service for delegations.

Figure 22 – **SP2028 IT co-operation pipeline**



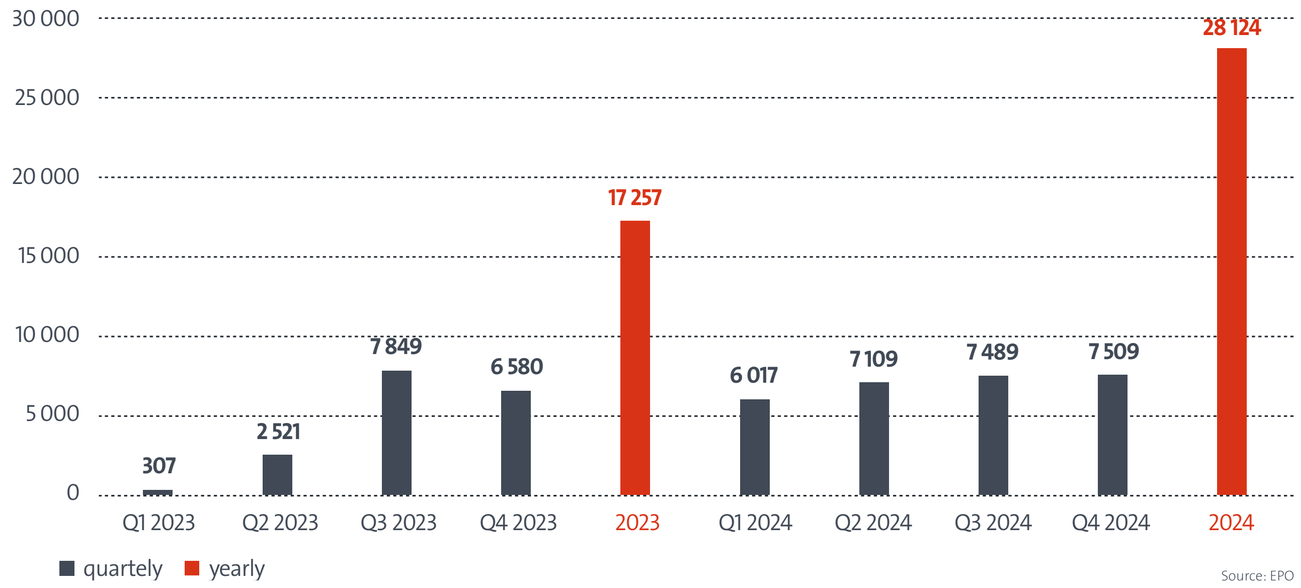
Source: EPO

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION, LEGAL DEVELOPMENTS AND THE UNITARY PATENT

The Unitary Patent: driver of innovation and competitiveness

After the launch of the Unitary Patent on 1 June 2023, there is significant and growing interest in the new system. The EPO registered over 28 000 Unitary Patents in 2024: more than one quarter of all granted European patents obtained unitary effect. Uptake among European applicants has been even higher, exceeding 36% in 2024.

Figure 23 – **Evolution of Unitary Patent requests 2023-2024**



Source: EPO

The Unitary Patent Dashboard, launched by the EPO in July 2023 and updated daily, has been widely praised by stakeholders for its transparency and its role in communicating the status and evolution of the Unitary Patent system and its users. In March 2024, the dashboard was upgraded with additional information, including the profile and geographical distribution of proprietors as well as uptake by country. Work also started on a new, more interactive version to be launched in Spring 2025.

MyEPO users can now register transfers of rights and licences free of charge or request certified copies of Unitary Patent certificates or extracts from the Unitary Patent Register, which continues to provide enhanced transparency for the public.

Romania's accession to the UPC Agreement on 1 September 2024 marked the beginning of a second generation of Unitary Patents, which now cover 18 participating member states. The growing geographical coverage of the Unitary Patent, with more countries expected to join the system, ensures that European innovators have access to a broader market without incurring additional costs.

In November 2024 the EPO published an updated edition of the Unitary Patent Guide, with new information on early requests for unitary effect, Romania's accession and the launch of the second generation of Unitary Patents. In parallel, and in close consultation with users, both online and through meetings of its advisory bodies, the EPO developed the first-ever set of Unitary Patent Guidelines, which were pre-published in early 2025. These provide comprehensive guidance on practices and procedures related to Unitary Patent proceedings before the EPO.

Figure 24 – **Romania became the 18th state to join the Unitary Patent system on 1 September 2024**



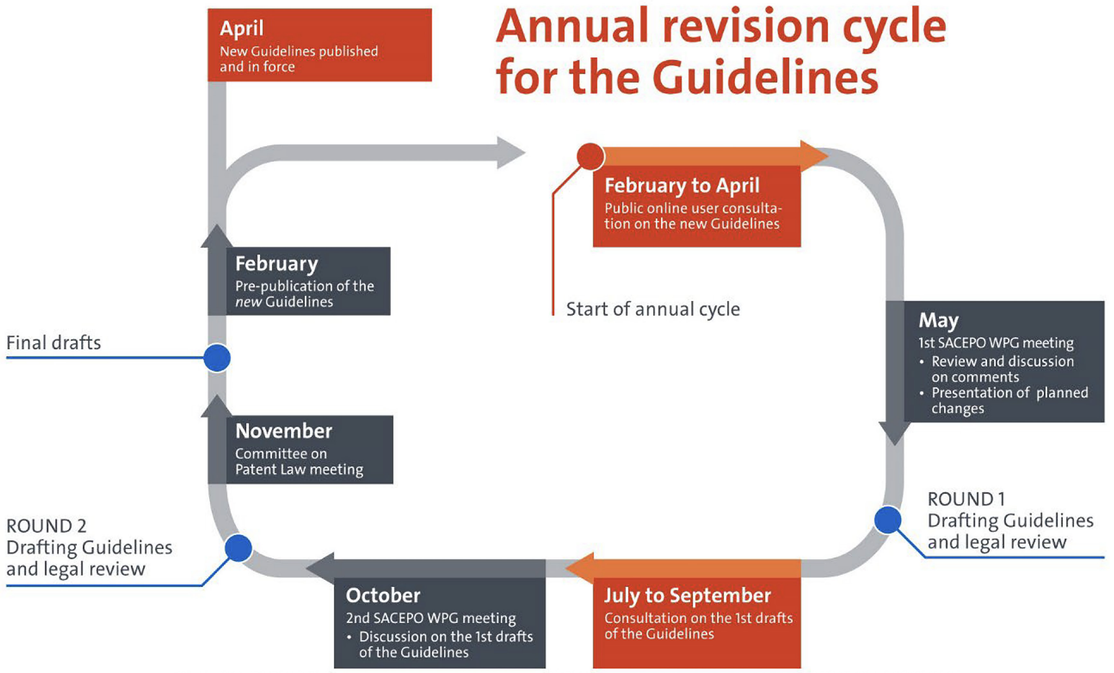
Source: EPO

Legal developments: toward certainty, accessibility and digitalisation

A fully digital PGP is a priority in SP2028. In support of this, the EPO continued to pursue a wide spectrum of legal changes aimed at simplification and digitalisation. The second basket of these measures, initiated at the end of 2023, saw numerous developments in 2024, including: the abolition of fax as a means of filing; streamlined handling of signatures; self-service of bulk requests via MyEPO; and the discontinuation of the postal dispatch to applicants of printed copies of patent literature. The necessary changes to the EPC Implementing Regulations entered into force on 1 April 2024, and the remaining measures of the second basket are on track for full implementation in 2025. Work started on defining a third basket to be implemented in 2025-2027.

Every February, the EPO publishes a new edition of the EPC and PCT-EPO Guidelines, which are developed in consultation with users and give instructions on the practices and procedures to be followed in the examination of European and international applications and patents. In 2024, the user consultation was expanded with a small survey on the revision process itself, and the outcome discussed with the members of the SACEPO Working Party on Guidelines. This paved the way for improvements in the preparation of the 2025 edition, including the consolidation of the Guides into the Guidelines and the move of the entry into force date to beginning of April, which also increases predictability for EQE candidates.

Figure 25 – **Annual revision cycle for the Guidelines**



Source: EPO

In June, the EU published a 14th package of sanctions against Russia, including measures regarding IPRs. Subsequently, and following consultations between the Office and the European Commission, the AC and its Select Committee adopted amendments to the EPC Implementing Regulations and the Rules relating to Unitary Patent Protection. The amendments ensure that, as long as the EU sanctions remain in place, Russian applicants cannot obtain Unitary Patents, nor validate European patents in EU Member States.

In December, the Office presented for the adoption of the AC a legislative proposal for gender-neutral Implementing Regulations to the EPC. The amended rules entered into force in April 2025.

International co-operation: projecting the European patent system beyond our borders

Validation extends the geographical scope of European patents to countries around the world, supporting international trade and investment, technology transfer and innovation, while reinforcing the EPO's position as the international patent office of choice for applicants with a global filing strategy. 2024 began with the validation agreement with Georgia coming into force in mid-January. In May, Lao PDR became the sixth state to sign a validation agreement with the European Patent Organisation and it was followed by Costa Rica in December. The AC also authorised the start of formal validation negotiations with Mexico, Panama, Trinidad and Tobago and Djibouti, while efforts continued towards reaching an agreement with Ethiopia.

Figures 26 and 27 – **Signature of validation agreements with Lao People's Democratic Republic and Costa Rica**





Source: EPO

Validation extends the geographical scope of European patents to countries around the world, supporting international trade and investment, technology transfer and innovation.

Figure 28 – **Potential geographical coverage of European patents as of 1 April 2025**

Map showing the potential geographic coverage of European patents

Member states (39)

- Albania
- Austria
- Belgium
- Bulgaria
- Croatia
- Cyprus
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Estonia
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Greece
- Hungary
- Iceland
- Ireland
- Italy
- Latvia
- Liechtenstein
- Lithuania
- Luxembourg
- Malta
- Monaco
- Montenegro
- Netherlands
- North Macedonia
- Norway
- Poland
- Portugal
- Romania
- San Marino
- Serbia
- Slovakia
- Slovenia
- Spain
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- Türkiye
- United Kingdom

Extension state (1)

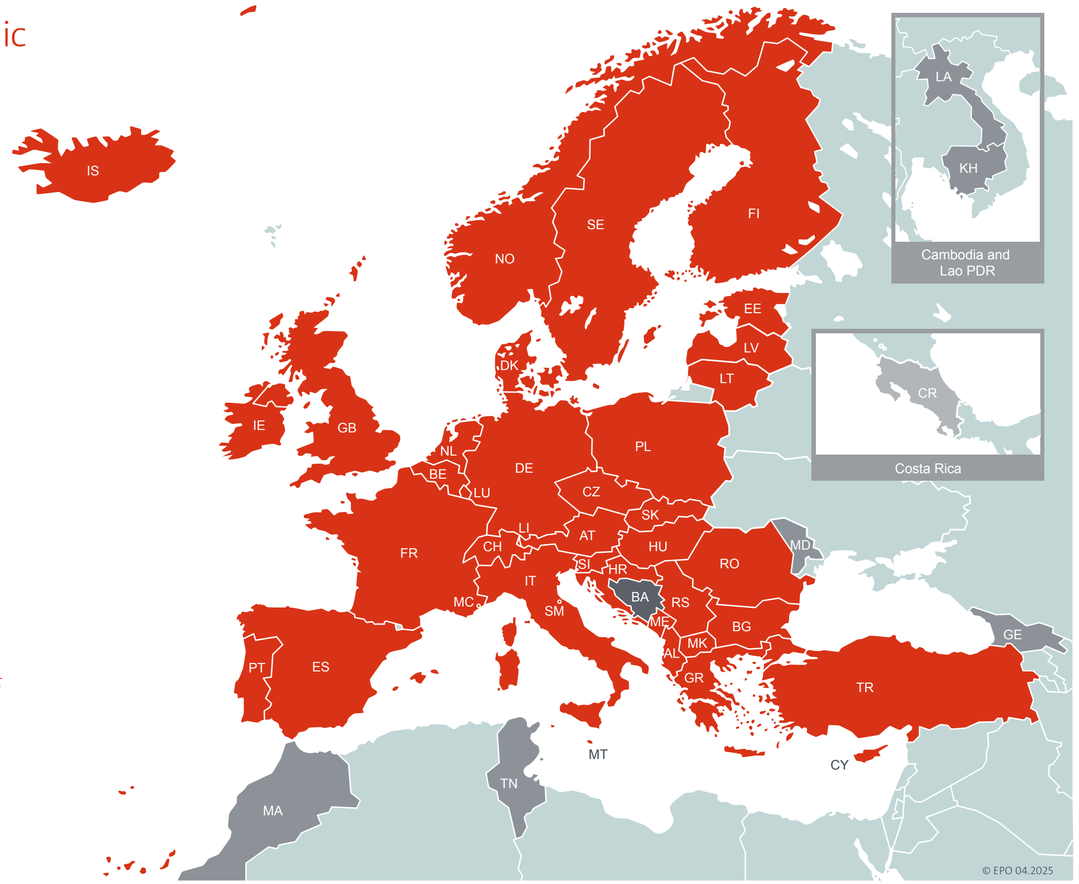
- Bosnia and Herzegovina

Validation states (6)
Agreement in force

- Cambodia
- Georgia
- Lao People's Democratic Republic
- Republic of Moldova
- Morocco
- Tunisia

Future validation state (1)
Agreement signed but not yet in force

- Costa Rica



Source: EPO

Strong co-operation continued with all seven validation offices (Morocco, Tunisia, the Republic of Moldova, Cambodia, Georgia, Laos and Costa Rica), as well as the 13 offices with which we have a reinforced partnership in place.

Strong co-operation continued with all seven validation offices (Morocco, Tunisia, the Republic of Moldova, Cambodia, Georgia, Laos and Costa Rica), as well as the 13 offices with which we have a reinforced partnership in place.

New agreements were also secured regarding the Patent Prosecution Highway (PPH). Pilots with Chile and New Zealand were launched in June and December, respectively, and the existing agreement with Brazil was extended for a second five-year period. Toward the end of the year, negotiations with Bahrain paved the way for the launch of a further PPH pilot in early 2025. At the end of 2024, the EPO had 17 active PPH agreements with national and regional offices worldwide.

The agenda for multilateral co-operation in 2024 focused on sustainability and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). At the 17th meeting of the IP5 Heads of Office, hosted by KIPO in Seoul, the Offices reaffirmed their commitment to an inclusive and accessible IP system, especially through initiatives and policies to support SMEs, micro-entities and start-ups.

On a similar note, the 42nd Trilateral Conference took place in October 2024 in Tokyo, Japan, focusing on IP initiatives for sustainable industrialisation (SDG 9). Discussions addressed SME patent strategies, digital tools and innovation policy.

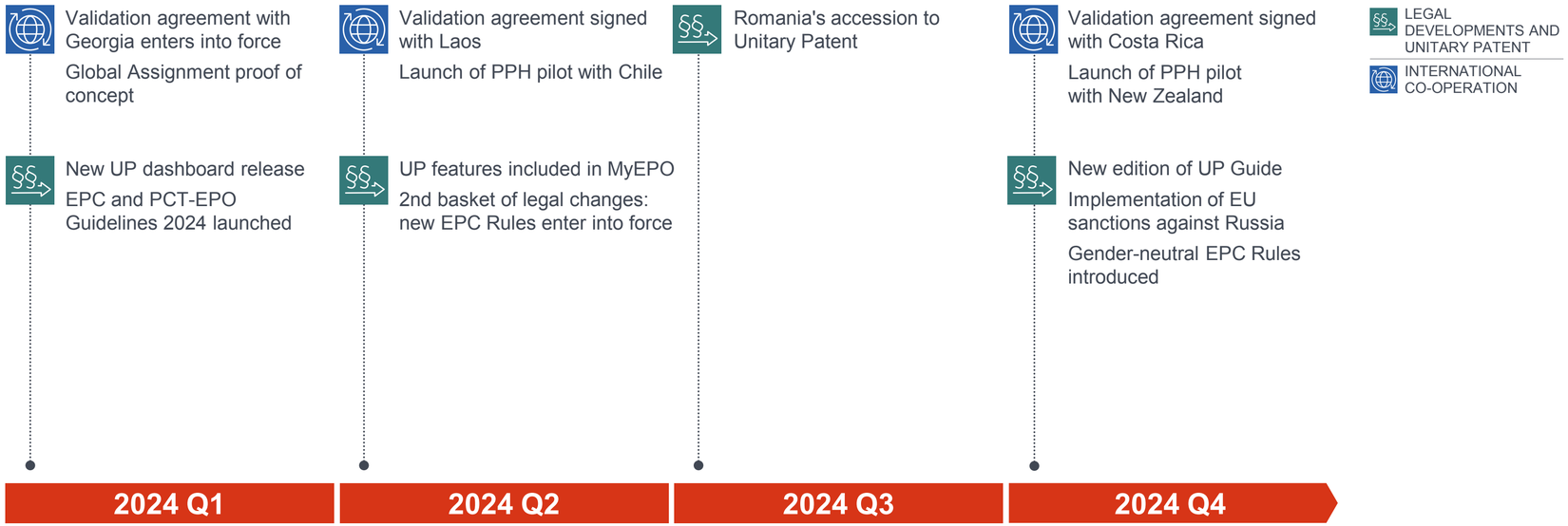
Since December 2020, the EPO has been acting as an ISA for nationals and residents of the People's Republic of China. As part of this pilot, applicants can select the EPO as their ISA when filing PCT applications in English with the China National Intellectual Property Administration (CNIPA). As of 1 December 2024, users of the EPO-CNIPA PCT pilot project can pay the international search fee directly at CNIPA in local currency (Renminbi), making fee payments easier and the pilot more attractive for applicants. In 2024, the EPO acted as ISA for 1 314 such applications, up 20% from 2023.

In May, WIPO hosted a Diplomatic Conference on Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources and Associated Traditional Knowledge. It concluded with the signature of a new international treaty, which introduces a mandatory disclosure requirement for patent applicants whose claimed inventions are based on genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge. The EPO attended as observer, and provided support to EPC contracting states before, during and after the conference.

The EPO also conducted a joint comparative study on the national patent laws and procedures of Southeast Asian nations, focused on computer-implemented inventions, biotechnology and pharmaceuticals. The outcome was formally endorsed by the ASEAN Working Group on IP Co-operation in May 2025.

In classification, more than 77 million patent documents are classified in the CPC for the benefit of users worldwide. Currently, 38 IP offices and organisations are in the CPC, including 23 EPC states. As of late 2023, users can benefit from the CPC text categoriser, an AI-powered tool which suggests CPC symbols within a fraction of a second following free text input in English, French or German.

Figure 29 – **SP2028 International co-operation, legal development and Unitary Patent pipeline**



Source: EPO

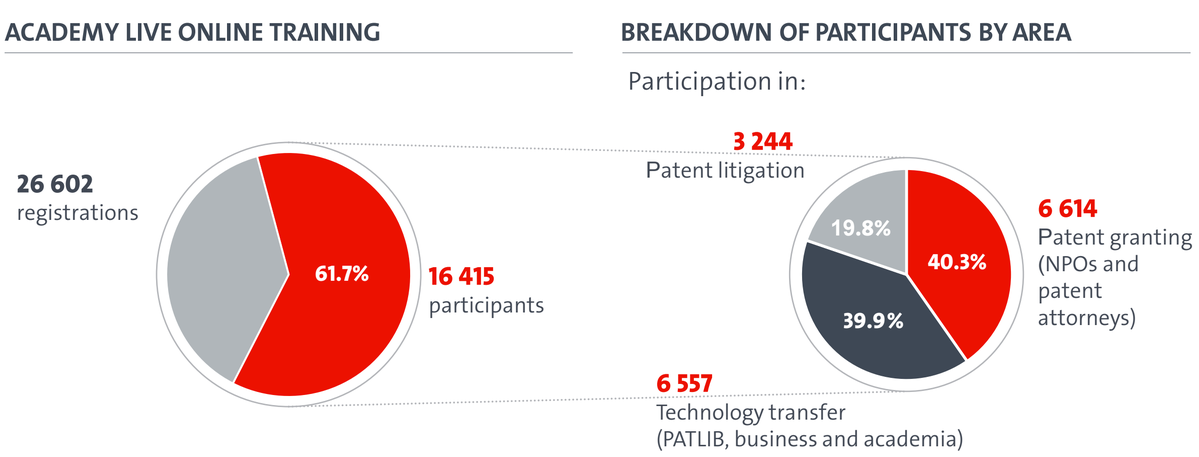
INCREASE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

The European Patent Academy: IP training of excellence

The European Patent Academy provides a comprehensive training and educational programme on patents and patent-related fields. The Academy's guiding principles are co-operation, quality, accessibility and modularity.

In 2024, the Academy expanded its training reach and engagement, delivering 145 training activities with almost 1 500 hours of learning. Live training, primarily conducted online, attracted 26 602 registrations. Additionally, the e-learning centre recorded 23 574 registered active users – a 25.7% increase from 2023 – demonstrating the growing demand for flexible digital learning. EPO member states account for 87% of training participants and 59% of e-learning centre users.

Figure 30 – **Participation in the Academy's live online trainings in 2024**



The e-learning centre recorded 23 574 registered active users – a 25.7% increase from 2023 – demonstrating the growing demand for flexible digital learning. EPO member states account for 87% of training participants and 59% of e-learning centre users.

Figure 31 – **European Judges' Forum 2024**



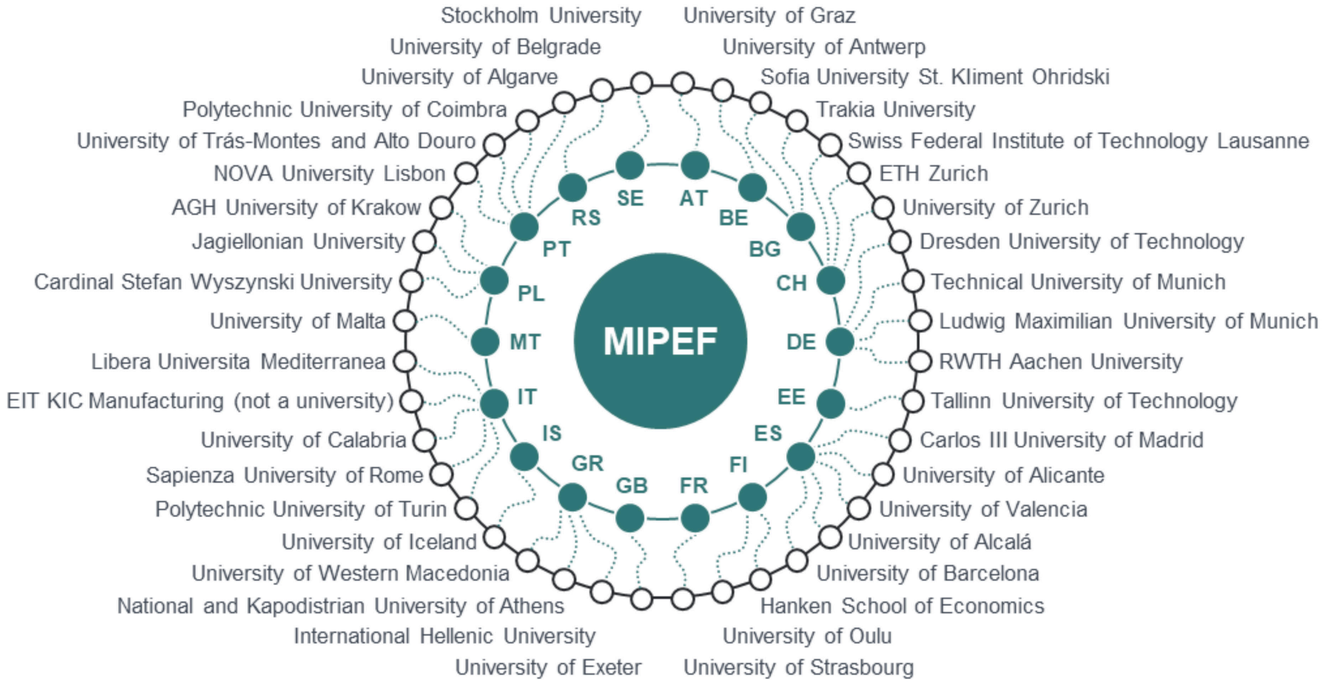
Source: EPO

Familiar fixtures in the EPO calendar include the annual Opposition Matters and Litigation Matters conferences, as well as the European Judges' Forum, all of which were again organised in 2024.

The Academy Catalogue provided a basis for customised training to NPO staff. For example, over 850 staff members from 28 NPOs received hands-on training in the use of the AbS tool, tailored to their level, and another 631 followed the open AbS course on the e-learning centre. The iLearn Together Day in October brought together NPOs and EPO staff to share insights and best practices on topics of common interest to NPOs and EPO examiners.

To address diverse learning needs and ensure wider access to quality IP education for the new generations, the EPO Academy partners with universities in member states to provide scalable courses through the Modular Intellectual Property Education Framework (MIPEF). In 2024, some 1 300 students from 40 European universities followed the two MIPEF courses, of three months each, successfully integrating patent education into university paths

Figure 32 – **Universities participating in the Modular Intellectual Property Education Framework in 2024 (MIPEF)**



Source: EPO

The Academy launched a new “Patenting Innovation” course, accredited by the Alliance of Technology Transfer Professionals and recognised towards the Registered Technology Transfer Professional qualification. A broadly encompassing and certified technology transfer learning offer is also now available to PATLIB members.

The PATLIB network consists of 332 centres across 37 countries, providing IP information and services to local industries, businesses, entrepreneurs, researchers and individual innovators. The 2024 annual PATLIB Conference was organised in Ankara, Türkiye, with over 2 600 participants. By the end of 2024, over 8 000 staff from PATLIB centres had completed the Academy's "PATLIB Learning Path". The EPO further organised five "Shaping the Future Together" seminars, allowing PATLIB staff to share experiences and learn from each other.

By the end the year, the KT2A programme spanned 76 universities in 24 African countries, 13 of them twinned with PATLIB centres in Europe.

Co-operation with validation states and reinforced partnerships, as well as the Knowledge Transfer to Africa (KT2A) initiative, further broadened global access to IP education. In April, a new course on "IP Basics for Innovators" was launched specifically for KT2A participants. In total, 14 tailored online training sessions and 95 online exchanges were organised for KT2A participants throughout 2024. By the end the year, the KT2A programme spanned 76 universities in 24 African countries, 13 of them twinned with PATLIB centres in Europe.

Figure 33 – **2024 annual PATLIB Conference in Ankara, Türkiye**



Source: EPO

Certifications: reinforcing the patent profession

Approximately 2 000 candidates from 58 nationalities participated in the 2024 edition of the EQE 2024, 40% of them women. This was the final edition held under the 2009 EQE regulations and involving a pre-examination.

To help candidates and tutors familiarise themselves in advance with the revised EQE 2025 format, the EPO published a revised Guide for Preparation, online training courses, live tutoring sessions and a mock exam for the new Paper F in July 2024.

The EPAC continued to consolidate its position as a cornerstone in the professional growth of European patent administrators. Some 360 candidates passed the third edition of this certification, held in October 2024. Reflecting the wide appeal and importance of the certification, approximately 80% of successful candidates work in industry or private attorney practices, 7% at patent offices, and 13% in diverse roles, including academia.

Since its launch in 2022, EPAC has attracted over 1 100 candidates from 60 countries across four continents. Of these, 87% were from EPC contracting states, while notable participation also came from Asia and Australia, which accounted for another 10%.

Democratising patent knowledge

Espacenet, the world's largest public collection of patent documents, surpassed 150 million documents in early 2024. It offers automatic translation into over 30 languages, including from English, French and German into 27 languages, as well as from English into Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Russian. By the end of the year, six technology platforms leveraged Espacenet data on diverse topics of societal relevance, showcasing how organised patent information can offer valuable insights to address real-world challenges effectively.

To further enhance the accessibility of patent information, the EPO revised its catalogue of patent knowledge products and services: the range of free data products was expanded, the pricing policy greatly simplified and outdated data products were discontinued.

Espacenet, the world's largest public collection of patent documents, surpassed 150 million documents in early 2024.

The 2024 edition of the CodeFest challenge welcomed 120 participants from 19 countries. They explored the transformative potential of generative AI in deriving new insights from patent data. The winning team developed a platform that leverages patent data to visualise patent landscapes, assist users in drafting patent applications and evaluate their patentability by providing a similarity score between the intended subject-matter and relevant prior art documents.

On 4 December, the EPO hosted its annual Patent Knowledge Forum (PKF), bringing together over 2 200 patent knowledge professionals, innovators and patent information experts. The PKF served as a virtual platform for the patent knowledge community.

A highlight of the Forum was the unveiling of the Technology Intelligence Platform (TIP), the EPO's next-generation tool for processing, analysing and visualising patent data. It offers a ready-to-use platform, computational power and access to EPO data collections, including PATSTAT and EP full-text. The platform aims to facilitate access to data by empowering researchers, businesses, innovators and everyday users to run advanced patent data analysis and gain insights. By giving businesses and users the data to make informed decisions, the platform supports sustainable entrepreneurship and innovation.

After its pilot phase with 100 users, TIP surpassed 450 users in its first month, paving the way for the next generation of EPO data tools.

The European Inventor Award and Network: public outreach for the future

The European Inventor Award 2024, celebrating outstanding inventors from 15 countries, took place on 9 July in Valletta, Malta. The event attracted over 1 million views and media coverage reached a record 4 612 reports. Social media engagement soared, reaching 53.8 million users and 6 million video views. The Young Inventors Prize continued to spotlight young inventors, reinforcing the event's impact on future innovation.

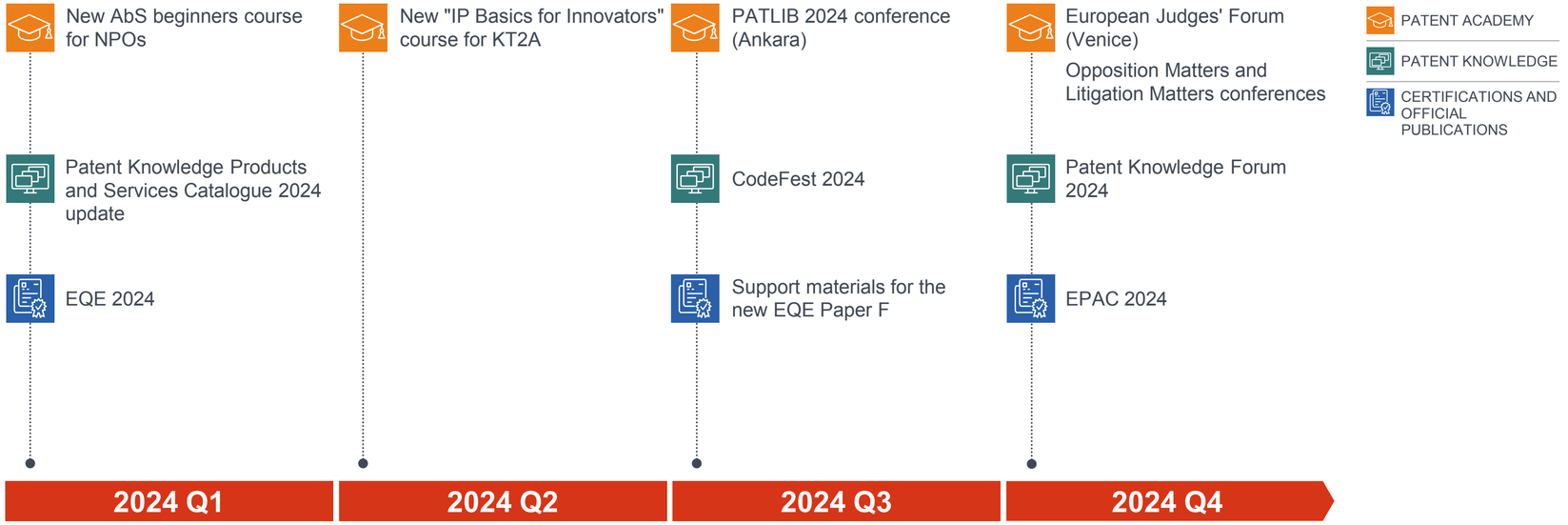
Launched in July 2023, the European Inventor Network (EIN) has continued to support activities aimed at inspiring schoolchildren across Europe. In addition to its members, the EIN has extended grants to inspiring individuals recommended by NPOs. In 2024, 18 inventor-led activities were implemented, and following a second call for proposals, the EIN received 24 more submissions, including 11 via NPOs (BG, IT, LV, LT, NL, PT). The EIN has once again helped encourage girls and young women to pursue STEM. Since 2023, it has reached approximately 3 000 children, about half of whom were girls. The EIN aims to reach over 6 000 children by the end of 2025.

Figure 34 – **European Inventor Award 2024 Winners**



Source: EPO

Figure 35 – **SP2028 Increasing skills and knowledge pipeline**



Source: EPO

Generate insight for a sustainable future: the Observatory on Patents and Technology

Since its launch in October 2023, the EPO Observatory on Patents and Technology has laid a solid foundation for its long-term mission to help build a more innovative society. By following through on its initial biennial work plan – outlined in CA/T 7/23 – the Observatory provided unique insights on the innovation ecosystem, primarily mapping trends and critical technology developments, making available new tools, connecting innovation actors and opening a dialogue on patents and technology beyond IP experts.

The topics addressed in 2024 were: cancer-fighting technologies, clean and water technologies, space-related and assistive robotics' innovations energy transition and patent activities in European universities. In its first 15 months of activity – up to December 2024 – the Observatory published six economic studies and two technology insight reports. It also organised six online events and participated in several outreach activities.

In 2024, 32 NPOs were actively involved in the Observatory's activities following the first call for interest. After the call launched in October 2024 for its planned activities in 2025, this number grew to 36 NPOs.

Working closely with EU institutions has allowed the Observatory to raise interest in IP within innovation networks and align its research with broader European innovation policies and priorities, particularly those covered in Mario Draghi's report on the future of European competitiveness.

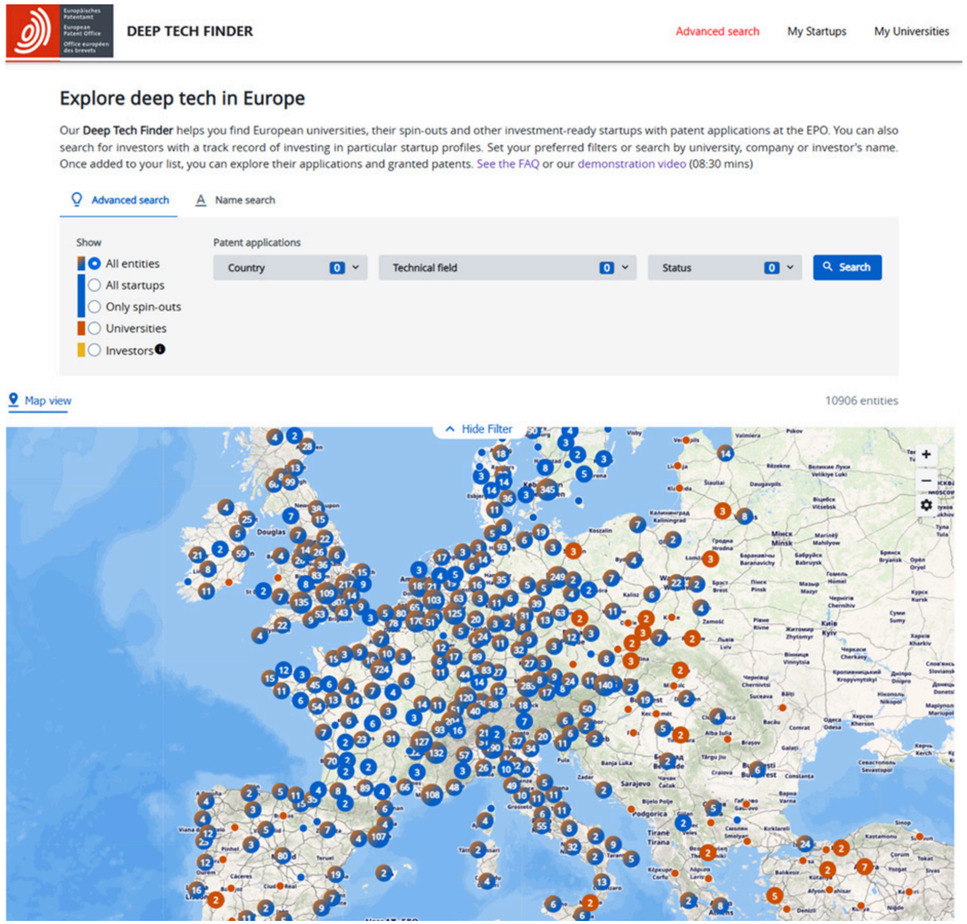
The Observatory partnered with key institutions to co-publish studies, leveraging the expertise and networks and increasing the impact, including partnerships with EUIPO on the study about startups; with the European Space Policy Institute and the European Space Agency on space technology; with the European Investment Bank on the study of clean technologies; with the International Energy Agency on the study on electricity grids; and with the Fraunhofer Institute for Systems and Innovation Research on the study about the role of European universities in patenting.

The research and analysis behind the studies conducted by the Observatory have already begun to be cited in authoritative sources contributing to the broader discourse on IP and innovation.

The research and analysis behind the studies conducted by the Observatory have already begun to be cited in authoritative sources contributing to the broader discourse on IP and innovation.

The Observatory also delivered important tools during the first months of its activity. With the release of DTF and its six subsequent updates, the Observatory introduced a user-friendly, free platform that seamlessly integrates both patent data (portfolios of EP applications) and business information data (ID cards, geolocation and access to the funding history of startups). In December 2024 the DTF included more than 9 500 startups and 878 universities, and the tool continued to be enriched in January 2025 with an update focused on investors.

Figure 36 – **Deep Tech Finder**



Source: EPO

We released three new technology platforms on the topics of “combatting cancer”, “space technologies” and “water technologies”, all of which are closely linked to SDGs. These technology platforms make it easier for scientists and researchers to explore the EPO’s free patent database and put the unique experience of EPO patent examiners at the service of the public.

The Digital Library project continued to be developed, in close cooperation with NPOs. In 2024, a Proof of Concept (POC) of the Digital Library based on a user-centred approach was implemented and in November 2024 a demo video showcasing the features of the POC was presented during the TOSC meeting.

DRIVER 4 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Key performance indicator (KPI)	End 2024 value		Target 2028
IT co-operation	141 IT projects implemented		240
Validation agreements	16 validation agreements		14
Convergence of practice	77.9%		90%
Modular IP education in university curricula	40 universities		80
Pan-European Seal universities that offer STEM degrees	82%		90%
Patent intelligence	6 technology platforms		14

= in progress; = target achieved

During 2024, KPIs under driver 4 demonstrated positive trends towards the relevant targets.

Notable progress was made in the IT co-operation area, underlined by the 24 additional project implementations measured by the associated KPI, with an increase of 21% on 2023. The positive outcome of our international co-operation activities is also reflected in the increased number of countries signing a validation agreement or entering into formal negotiations following AC approval.

The percentage of European Patent Network member states implementing the agreed common practices at the national level remained stable in 2024, in line with the evolving implementation status of the common practices projects.

Aiming to help shape future generations of innovators and decision makers, our partnerships with universities strengthened further. During 2024, 18 new universities integrated the MIPEF into their curricula (+82% on 2023) and 23 new universities offering STEM degrees joined the YP programme.

More accessible patent-related intelligence supports innovation and research. Our efforts in this respect brought the release of three new Espacenet platforms and increased the relevant KPI value to six.

Europäisches Patentamt
European Patent Office
Office européen des brevets

DRIVER 05

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

EUROPEAN PATENT OFFICE

Annual Review

2024

epo.org

The Financial Study provided the EPO with a comprehensive picture of how its finances are projected to evolve in the long term. Phase one of the Financial Study involved a strategic financial evaluation for the period from 2023 to 2042, focussed on assessing the long-term financial outlook of the Office. This evaluation took into account developments in the economic, financial and technological landscapes that have occurred since 2019, particularly in light of a surge in inflation from 1.2% in 2019 to highs of 8.4% in 2022 and 5.4% in 2023[18].

The findings, presented to the Budget & Finance Committee (BFC) and the AC in the last quarter of 2023 (CA/68/23), revealed a favourable trajectory based on the base-case scenario assumptions resulting in an overall expected coverage surplus of EUR 4.2 billion, especially when compared to the previous study conducted in 2019 in a context of low interest rates. However, sensitivity analyses highlighted ongoing vulnerabilities to capital market fluctuations and inflation, which could impact EPO's funding requirements.

In response, the EPO mandated the external consultant Oliver Wyman Mercer to conduct an Asset Liability Management Study (ALM Study) in the first quarter of 2024. This Study aimed to identify options for optimising available funding sources and to define a comprehensive funding plan to achieve full funding of all the long-term obligations.

The results of the ALM Study were presented during the May BFC and the June AC meetings (CA/23/24). The ALM study emphasised the need to make explicit the level of risk the EPO can accept in pursuit of its financial objectives. The EPO proposed a set of orientations designed to enhance its long-term financial sustainability (CA/39/24). Following a positive opinion from the AC on the orientations proposed, the Office made progress on these recommendations in the second half of 2024:

- The Office **formalised the level of risk it is prepared to accept**, increasing the probability of achieving target returns from 50% to 66%. This adjustment positions the Office more favourably to withstand potential risks from adverse developments in long-term capital markets and inflation volatility.

- **Financial security buffers** have been created by allocating assets within the EPO Treasury Investment Fund (EPOTIF) to three key reserves: the Sustainability Buffer for extraordinary circumstances (EUR 1 billion); the Operational Reserve for short-term liquidity needs (EUR 2.5 billion); the SAM Buffer to mitigate legal risks arising from the pending ILOAT judgement on the salary adjustment method (EUR 1.1 billion at the end of 2024, with the goal of reaching EUR 2 billion by 2026).

- We continued to make progress on the factors that are under our control, so that we can achieve long-term financial sustainability even in the face of unexpected economic shocks and negative external influences. **Productivity** objectives as well as our approach to **recruitment** and replacement of departing staff have been incorporated in the medium-term business plan and developed in line with the assumptions used in the financial study. This approach allowed the Office to contain its staff costs and contributed to achieving a strong cash surplus of EUR 573 million in 2024.

- The EPO further improved its **funding level** from 73% in 2023 to 80.1% at the end of 2024 thanks to a strong operational performance and the positive development of assets managed under EPOTIF and the EPO Reserve Funds for Pensions and Social Security (RFPSS). This supports our goal of reaching a desired funding level of 105% of the Office's defined benefit obligations by 2032, factoring in a 5% safety buffer to ensure that the funding level remains above 100% during periods of capital market volatility.

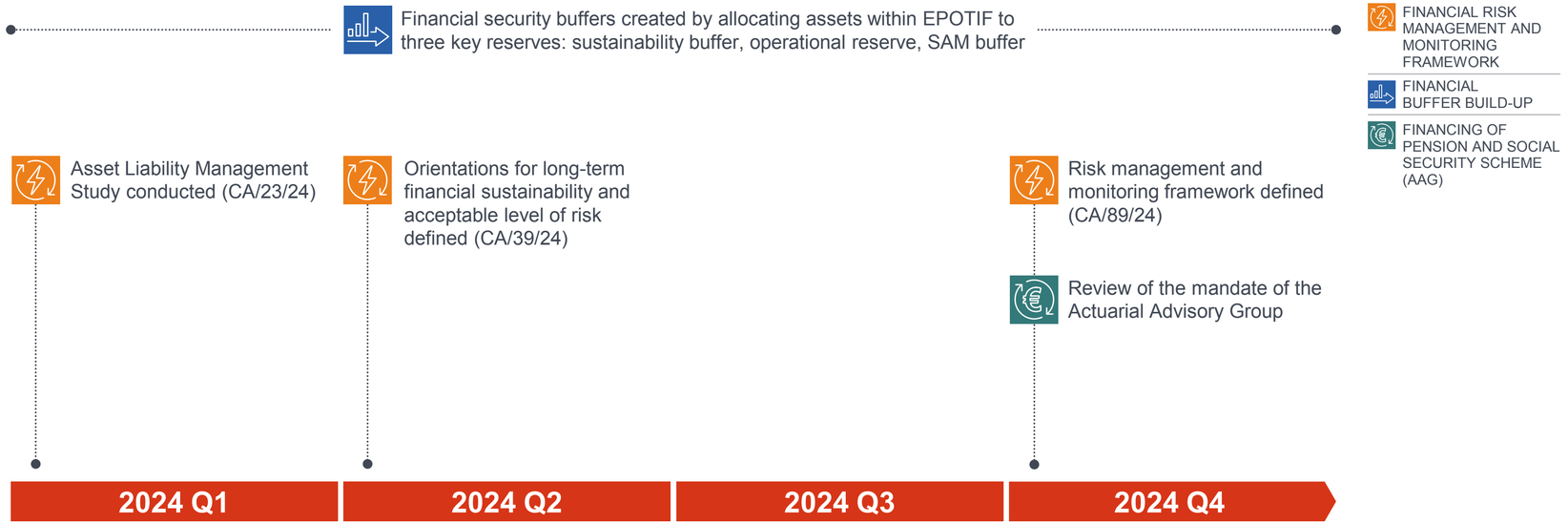
18 - Eurozone EURO area inflation

- At the end of 2024 the EPO initiated the establishment of a **risk management and monitoring framework**. A concept (CA/89/24) was submitted to the BFC and the AC. The concept foresees the tracking of relevant risk KPIs and a model dashboard showing risk KPIs in three main categories (strategic, macroeconomic and operational), to be made available to member states. It also foresees a comparison of the latest available actual values against the relevant values defined in the base case scenario of the Financial Study. Direct access to the risk KPIs dashboard, along with regular reporting provided by the EPO, will ensure that the governing bodies have a clear understanding of the EPO's financial situation, as well as of the progress made in the implementation of the orientations defined in the Financial Study.

- We enhanced the financial sustainability of **EPO's pension and social security schemes**. The EPO regularly conducts actuarial valuations to comprehensively review the assumptions that might influence the balance of social security and pension schemes and determine the contributions rates needed for their future equilibrium. Consistent with the outcome of the financial study and the financing policy of the Office, the mandate of the Actuarial Advisory Group has been reviewed, so that the 2025 actuarial valuation takes into account the new risk tolerance of the Office and considers the discount rate accordingly. In addition, the mandate of the Actuarial Advisory Group now includes a yearly assessment of the funding levels of the social security and pension schemes.

These milestones collectively reinforce the EPO's commitment to achieving long-term financial sustainability amid evolving economic conditions.

Figure 37 – **SP2028 Financial sustainability pipeline**



Source: EPO

DRIVER 5 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Key performance indicator (KPI)	End 2024 value		Target 2028
Productivity	111.5 SEO products per FTE	✓	2024 target: 110.5
Plan production	0% deviation	✓	2028 target: ≥-2%
Funding level	80.1%[19]	◌	2032 target: 105%

◌ = in progress; ✓ = target achieved

The KPIs under driver 5 showed positive evolution in 2024. In particular, "Productivity" steadily increased over the year, reaching a record of 111.5 SEO products per FTE in December 2024 and surpassing the yearly target. This represented a productivity increase of 4.8% over the previous year. In 2024, our production plan was well implemented, with no deviation between the actual output and the set target. Additional details can be found in the section on driver 3.

To achieve financial sustainability, we need to ensure that our long-term liabilities are covered. At the end of 2024 the funding level KPI, showing the ratio between the RFPSS assets and the defined benefit liabilities, reached 80.1% and marked a 9.7% increase in liabilities covered.

19 - The value of the defined benefit obligations is calculated using the standardised discount rate of 4.6%.

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ANNEX 1

MATERIALITY ASSESSMENT

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The European Patent Office (EPO) recognises that identifying and addressing material sustainability topics is fundamental to building a resilient, future-ready organisation. In an evolving global context, the EPO remains committed to understanding the impacts of its operations on society and the environment, as well as the sustainability-related risks and opportunities that influence long-term value creation and operational excellence.

In line with its Strategic Plan 2028 (SP2028), the EPO conducted a comprehensive materiality assessment structured in three phases: understanding the organisation's context, identifying actual and potential impacts, and evaluating their significance. This process embeds sustainability across the Office's five strategic drivers – People, Technologies, High-quality, timely products and services, Partnerships, and Financial Sustainability – and is aligned with international frameworks such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI).

The assessment combined in-depth internal analysis with insights from the public consultation on the EPO's SP2028, which invited stakeholders to share their views on how the EPO can contribute to a more sustainable patent system and society. Impacts were evaluated across economic, environmental, and social dimensions using a structured methodology based on four key criteria: nature of the impact, time horizon, intentionality, and reversibility. This approach ensured a transparent, evidence-based prioritisation of sustainability issues.

The results reaffirm the relevance of the EPO's strategic focus while providing greater clarity. Material topics such as innovation and economic growth, employment, energy and emissions, and customer privacy reflect the EPO's contribution to Europe's innovation ecosystem and broader sustainability objectives. These topics highlight the Office's role in fostering technological progress, enabling knowledge-sharing, supporting job creation, and promoting responsible operations.

To support these priorities, the EPO tracks performance through key indicators and reports annually on progress in areas such as carbon neutrality, digital transformation, staff engagement. Sustainability is fully integrated into the EPO's operational model and public service mission.

Looking ahead, the outcomes of the materiality assessment will continue to guide the EPO's sustainability reporting, monitoring, and strategic planning. Through this work, the EPO reinforces its commitment to robust governance, stakeholder transparency, and long-term impact – ensuring that its mission to deliver high-quality patents and efficient services continues to support innovation, competitiveness, and sustainable growth for the benefit of society.

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ANNEX 2
LIST OF ANNEXED REPORTS

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Quality Report 2024	**(CA/40/25 Add. 1)**
Social Report 2024	**(CA/40/25 Add. 2)**
Environmental Report 2024	**(CA/40/25 Add. 3)**
Digital Transformation Report 2024	**(CA/40/25 Add. 4)**
Data Protection Report 2024	**(CA/40/25 Add. 5)**
Partnerships Report 2024	**(CA/40/25 Add. 6)**

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ANNEX 3

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE ANNUAL REVIEW 2024

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AC	Administrative Council
AbS	ANSERA-based SEARCH
ALM Study	Asset Liability Management Study
API	Application programming interface
ASD	Active Search Division
BE	BusinessEurope
BFC	Budget & Finance Committee
BIP	Building Investment Programme
BoA	Boards of Appeal
CKT	Continuous Knowledge Transfer
CNIPA	China National Intellectual Property Administration
COHSEC	Central Occupational Health and Safety Committee
CPC	Cooperative Patent Classification
D&I	Diversity and inclusion
DFA	Digital File Allocation
DPO	Data Protection Office
DQA	Directorate Quality Audit
DTF	Deep Tech Finder
EIN	European Inventor Network
EP	European patent
EPAC	European Patent Administration Certificate
EPC	European Patent Convention
epi	Institute of Professional Representatives before the EPO
EPN	European Patent Network
EPO	European Patent Office
EQE	European Qualifying Examination
GCC	General Consultative Committee
GRI	Global Reporting Index
ICT	Information and communications technology
IDP	Individual Development Plan
IPC	International Patent Classification
IPR	Intellectual property right
ISA	International Searching Authority
KPI	Key performance indicators
LIP	Legal Interactive Platform
MIPEF	Modular Intellectual Property Education Framework

NPL	Non-patent literature
NPO	National patent office
NWoW	New Ways of Working
PACE	Accelerated examination
PGP	Patent granting process
PKF	Patent Knowledge Forum
POC	Proof of Concept
PPH	Patent Prosecution Highway
PWB	Patent Workbench
SACEPO	Standing Advisory Committee before the EPO
SDGs	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
SES	Staff Engagement Survey
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprise
SNE	Seconded national expert
SP2028	Strategic Plan 2028
SPLH	Substantive patent law harmonization
SQAPs	Stakeholder Quality Assessment Panels
TIP	Technology Intelligence Platform
TOSC	Technical and Operational Support Committee
UPC	Unified Patent Court
USS	User Satisfaction Survey
WSA	Web Search Assistant
YP	Young Professional

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