

Committed to excellence

The EPO Strategic Plan 2023 provides a clear roadmap and new vision for the EPO distributed over five goals. It outlines the actions and initiatives to be taken and the improvements required to deliver sustainability and excellence.



Our mission

As the patent office for Europe, we are proud to deliver high-quality patents and efficient services that foster innovation, competitiveness and economic growth.

Our vision

We will empower and motivate our staff to set worldwide standards in intellectual property. Our Office will be effective and transparent, respond to the needs of our users and be agile in managing the changing demands and conditions of a dynamic global patent system. Our work will contribute to a safer, smarter and more sustainable world.

Our values

All our relationships within our Office and with partners around the world will prosper through trust, fairness, mutual respect, adaptability, collaboration and a commitment to excellence.

Goal 1

Build an engaged, knowledgeable and collaborative organisation

As a knowledge-based organisation, the EPO's success is based on the commitment and expertise of highly-skilled staff. The Office will continue to foster a working environment that will attract and welcome the brightest minds in Europe, develop their talents, encourage professional development, foster knowledge transfer and collaboration, and offer them first-class working conditions.

Key Initiatives

1. Attract talent

In the years ahead, the Office must continue to be an employer that attracts the very brightest minds, even in a competitive environment. Effective workforce planning will allow the Office to respond to current challenges and adapt to future evolutions.

2. Develop talent

Professional development is of key importance as it directly affects sustainable staff engagement and performance, particularly at the EPO where low staff turnover and long-term careers are typical. The EPO will equip employees to reach their full potential and guide staff as they increase their capabilities, skills and competencies.

3. Foster professional mobility and work-life balance

The modern working world can be fast paced and demanding. As part of this initiative, the EPO will become more agile and consider measures that allow greater mobility and offer staff an even better balance between their professional careers and private lives.

4. Further develop a modern, sustainable and healthy working environment

The EPO aims to provide staff with a modern working environment that meets state-of-the-art sustainability, and health and safety standards. The Office also wants to encourage new, more flexible ways of working. This initiative is of strategic importance as workplace design drives collaboration, improves staff performance and positively affects employee well-being.

5. Improve communication

Effective communication is crucial to the success of modern organisations. The EPO has nearly 7 000 staff spread across four countries. To ensure that the Office functions efficiently, its communication strategy will be reviewed and its tools will be modernised. The EPO plans to implement measures that encourage a two-way flow of communication, both internally and externally.

6. Foster social dialogue

As the Office continues to evolve, it will aim to increase social dialogue in all forms, including direct dialogue with staff, managerial communication or dialogue through unions and staff representatives. By facilitating these constructive exchanges, the EPO intends not only to gain the support and commitment of staff, but also to create a working environment based on trust and mutual respect.



More info: epo.org/goal1

Goal 2

Simplify and modernise EPO IT systems

The EPO will work towards a digital transformation, incorporating tools that will encourage engagement and streamline processes, from both staff and user perspectives.

Key Initiatives

1. Implement a patent tool to support an end-to-end electronic patent granting process through a modular and scalable approach

The EPO intends to invest in a digital transformation that will benefit staff, users and stakeholders. A single tool that supports the complete end-to-end electronic patent grant process will form a central part of this transformation, offering an integrated approach from patent filing to appeals and post-grant procedures.

2. Improve existing EPO tools and manage high-quality prior-art libraries

The implementation of the end-to-end electronic patent tool is expected to extend beyond the timescale of this Strategic Plan. However, there is a need for advancement in the existing tools used by the Office. This Key Initiative groups a series of improvements that will contribute to higher quality, productivity, as well as staff and user satisfaction.

3. Develop new online user engagement

The EPO's website and online tools will be developed further to better address the needs of users, including non-specialist audiences.

4. Implement common tools together with other IP offices

As the EPO embarks on a programme of digital transformation, it will also consider building and implementing common tools together with other IP offices. Through collaboration with members of the European Patent Network (EPN), the Office will assess potential ways of co-operating on search, front- and back-office tools to offer support in areas of common interest.

5. Continue to digitalise and modernise Corporate Services, including HR, Finance, General Administration and document management

Corporate services spanning the entire Office will be digitalised and best practice processes will be implemented. Digitalised tools can help to reduce the administrative workload and bring greater transparency to processes in corporate areas such as finance, HR and facility management.

6. Build an innovation ecosystem

For almost two decades, EPO examiners have been developing their own tools with an open-source and collaborative approach. To tap into their knowledge and creative potential, the Office will build an innovation ecosystem that allows EPO staff to provide solutions for all stages of the patent grant customer journey.

7. Build an IT vendor management function and revise the IT sourcing policy

The EPO will strive towards proactive vendor management to monitor and improve service provider performance and ensure value delivery. Under this initiative, the Office will also review where to invest in in-house skills critical to the Office, and where to outsource to IT subcontractors (non-core tasks only).

8. Increase the agility, reliability and security of EPO systems

To ensure that the EPO is able to undergo a successful digital transformation, a technical infrastructure needs to be put in place. This secure infrastructure will provide the level of agility and reliability needed to develop a new end-to-end tool for the patent granting process, improve existing tools and support corporate services.



More info: epo.org/goal2

Goal 3

Deliver high-quality products and services efficiently

Measures that simplify patent processes for users will be implemented and underpinned by strategies aimed at maintaining the high standard of EPO products and services.

Key Initiatives

1. Master the prior art

Efficient, high-quality searches depend upon comprehensive access to the latest documents on technological developments. This prior art, consisting of patent and non-patent literature (NPL), is increasing exponentially. Under Key Initiative 1, the EPO will continue to enrich the content of its databases and ensure their accuracy, with a special focus on the growing Asian documentation and standards.

2. Improve quality

The EPO is held in high regard as a provider of legally-robust patents. To retain this position, the Office plans to develop and implement several internal measures aimed at improving the quality of its products and services. This is not a task that will be conducted unilaterally, but rather with greater input from the Office's network of stakeholders.

3. Offer a more flexible patent grant process

For EPO users, the PACE programme and Early Certainty initiative have helped to establish legal certainty more quickly. Furthermore, the Office is clearing its backlog and expects to achieve a steady-state regime within three years. With more manageable stock, and an agile, faster patent grant process, the EPO is in a better position to expand the choices available to its applicants when it comes to the timing of the patent grant process.

4. Encourage collaborative work and knowledge transfer

The Strategic Plan includes several Key Initiatives that will support quality and improve timeliness, but ultimately, it is the EPO's staff that play the biggest role. It is of strategic importance for the Office to facilitate knowledge transfer and more modern and collaborative working methods.

5. Harmonise and simplify patent procedures and processes

The EPO's annual results have shown a year-on-year production increase while external surveys prove that both quality and timeliness have improved. These positive results have largely been achieved thanks to the diligence, commitment and professionalism of staff. If positive trends are to continue, the patent grant process needs to be simplified and streamlined. The EPO is currently assessing this procedure to identify short, medium and long-term measures that could support the transition to an electronic grant process.

6. Improve the management of our stocks

While the Office is moving towards a steady-state regime, it is important to improve the management of remaining stocks and incoming files, and rebalance the workload appropriately. This dynamic business model will be driven by greater adaptability and flexibility among examiners and formalities officers.

7. Develop innovative products and services

As the EPO reduces its backlogs it will explore the option of developing innovative products and services. Further consultation with member states will be needed to ensure that these new products and services are fair and beneficial for all users.



More info: epo.org/goal3

Goal 4

Build a European patent system and network with a global impact

To ensure that Europe remains a globally attractive market with its robust IP rights system, the EPO will further strengthen co-operation with member states and strategic partners. The years ahead will also see an increased focus on patent information and measures that enhance IP knowledge.

Key Initiatives

1. Enhance access to patent information

In recent years, there has been a rise in the volume of patent applications and patent literature, combined with increasingly complex technologies and more players involved in disseminating patent information. The EPO will ensure that its patent information is complete, effectively managed and made available in a user-friendly format.

2. Improve access to patent knowledge

Providing access to patent information is just one role that the Office fulfils. Equipping users with IP knowledge is another. In close co-operation with member states, the EPO aims to make the European Patent Academy a benchmark for excellence in IP training, offering a high standard of IP education that ultimately strengthens the innovation sector.

3. Maximise the impact of co-operation

Co-operation with EPO member states and their national patent offices has been a contributing factor to European economic prosperity. Through Key Initiative 3, the EPO will review its co-operation activities that deliver the biggest impact, while also encouraging wider participation in these activities.

4. Define and prioritise co-operation activities

The EPO will consult closely with member states and develop a new catalogue of co-operation projects. Comprising ongoing and new initiatives, the catalogue will be centred on four pillars relating to the areas of IT, enhanced knowledge and quality, work sharing and best practices.

5. Broaden the European patent system and network impact

The attractiveness of the European system is based on the quality of the products and services delivered and on the geographic reach of the EPO. Currently, inventions can be protected with patents obtained from the EPO in 44 countries. It is important for the Office to reinforce and expand its coverage. It aims to achieve this by implementing a framework based on three possible models of co-operation: validation agreements, reinforced partnership agreements and technical co-operation.



More info: epo.org/goal4

Goal 5

Secure long-term sustainability

Measures related to financial sustainability, governance, transparency and accountability, as well as environmental and corporate sustainability, will be implemented to ensure the longevity of the EPO and its positive impact on society and its host cities.

Key Initiatives

1. Strengthen governance

Well-functioning political governance is paramount to the European Patent Organisation and to its independence as an international organisation. This Key Initiative considers the measures that could be implemented to strengthen governance, at both the political and corporate level.

2. Enhance process efficiency

The EPO is committed to excellence. To deliver the products and services that benefit the patent system, the Office must constantly review the way it operates. In the years that lie ahead, the EPO will look at its processes, and ensure that they remain efficient by mapping and adjusting them according to best practices.

3. Improve transparency and accountability

Public bodies have a responsibility to explain the actions they take and implement controls that ensure the responsible administration of valuable public resources. To remain accountable, the EPO will place greater emphasis on transparency and better communicate essential information to external audiences.

4. Spread a culture of corporate sustainability

The EPO is a responsible public institution that aims to have a positive impact on society, the environment and the cities in which the Office is based. While the EPO grants patents geared towards environmental protection, it can also play a more direct role. Key Initiative 4 will assess the actions needed to minimise the Office's environmental impact and steer it towards new levels of sustainability.

5. Ensure long-term financial sustainability

The EPO is responsible for securing its own long-term financial sustainability. As a self-funded organisation, it is able to leverage internal and external expertise to plan effectively for the future. Through a general sustainability report and comprehensive financial assessment of potential long-term scenarios, the EPO is better placed to control its destiny and continue supporting the European patent system.

6. Measure, evaluate and assess developments in the IP system with stakeholder involvement

The patent landscape is constantly evolving. To monitor these changes, the Office will create an Observatory offering stakeholders expert insights into innovation and patents. This inclusive platform will bring together public and private stakeholders to discuss the economic impact of patents and ongoing technology developments, such as the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR).



More info: epo.org/goal5