Europäisches Patentamt
European Patent Office
Office européen des brevets

Environmental Policy

Content

1. Introduction

Every year, the impact of climate change on our planet is more tangible, making any mitigating or adaptive actions increasingly urgent. For this reason, the EPO has decided to step up its engagement to sustainability by designing an ambitious, comprehensive and collaborative environmental policy guiding all aspects of our work including our core business: the patent granting process. By transforming the EPO in a more sustainable organisation and by fostering innovation and access to knowledge on climate change technologies, we intend to contribute to the United Nations Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals as well as to the more recent European Union action plan for climate neutrality: the European Green Deal.

The EPO plans to reach CO_2 neutrality by 2030 and has embedded concrete actions in its Strategic Plan 2023 (SP2023) to achieve this ambitious objective. In 2019 alone, the Office reduced its heat energy consumption by over 19%, waste generation by almost 30% and carbon emissions by 24%. Our goal can only be achieved if we work collaboratively within and outside of the EPO. Every employee has an important role to play in bringing the EPO one step closer to carbon neutrality; we are proud of the commitment of our staff to sustainability as well as their readiness to embrace new and more sustainable ways of working during these times of crisis and beyond.

Collaboration extends beyond the EPO to involve local, regional and international partners. Our mission is to promote innovation and competitiveness across Europe, and sustainable technologies are no exception. For this reason, we have simplified access to patent information on sustainable technologies for the public and relevant stakeholders. We are increasing our partnerships with international organisations focusing on environmental sustainability and producing empirical studies on critical technologies to foster an informed policy debate.

This document outlines our environmental objectives and describes how we intend to achieve them.

2. Implementation

The EPO is committed to a continuous assessment of the environmental impact of its operations and the improvement of its environmental performance.

The following objectives guide our actions:

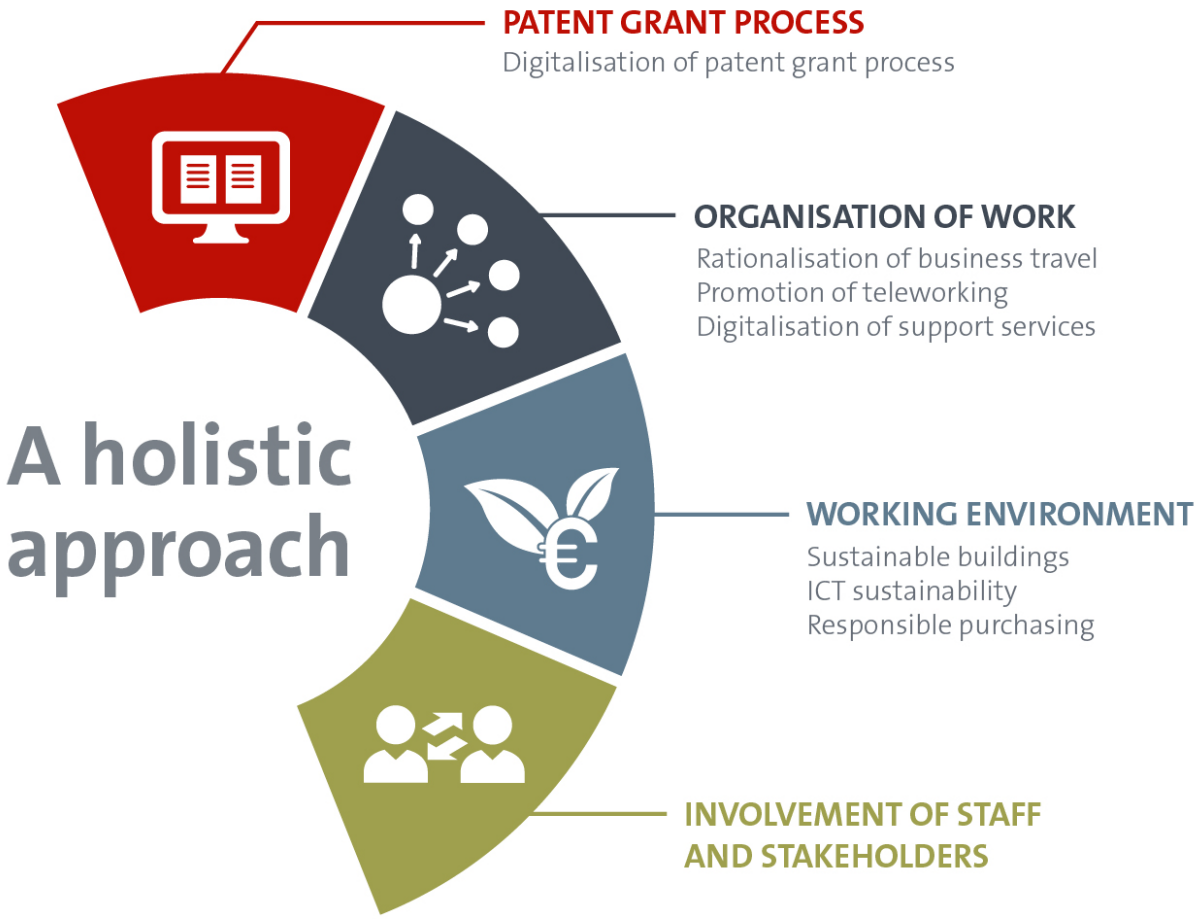
- Minimise the EPO's environmental footprint, reducing the consumption of resources and the generation of waste
- Comply with relevant environmental legislation and regulations

- Promote, encourage and contribute to environmental initiatives and schemes in Member States and in our sites of employment
- Involve all staff in the endeavour, whereby each and every staff member is asked to contribute and encouraged to develop new ideas on how to implement this policy effectively.

Accordingly, we will:

- Define and review measurable targets, assessing their achievement on the way to the overall objective of carbon neutrality
- Engage with local and regional institutions
- Provide our staff with appropriate training, advice and information on how they can play their part in reducing the EPO's environmental footprint
- Report transparently on the status of implementation of this policy, internally via the environmental dashboard and externally via the yearly Environmental Report.

We follow a holistic approach to meeting our commitments. These aim to cover emissions caused directly by our organisation's activities, indirect emissions resulting from our energy consumption and other indirect emissions caused along the value chain of our activities. Overall, we foster environmental sustainability in and through the Patent Grant Process, our core business, by optimising workflows and by creating a working environment which minimizes the EPO's environmental footprint while ensuring high-quality services. Through internal and external communication, the EPO seeks to disseminate sustainable thinking among stakeholders and the public and to actively involve staff as multipliers of our environmental policies and activities.



2.1 Sustainability in core business

End-to-end digitalisation of Patent Grant Process

The EPO acknowledges its responsibility to use natural resources sparingly and therefore strives to implement a fully digital patent granting process by progressively implementing paperless workflows. This will enhance process efficiency, enable a mobile workforce and remove the need for office space for paper archives, thereby directly contributing to reducing our environmental footprint. Several projects launched in the scope of SP2023 will contribute to our goal of reducing by 70% our paper consumption by 2023 compared to the level of 2018.

The EPO is constantly working on developing and improving e-tools in the patent granting process, increasing the level of digital communication in official correspondence. In this respect, the COVID-19 pandemic has acted as a catalyst for the further development of the digital infrastructure. Thereby, the Office aims at minimising the environmental impact of its operations whilst assuring the efficient and high-quality delivery of services.

2.2 Organisation of work

Rationalisation of business travel

In line with our objective to reduce CO_2 emissions, the EPO aims to significantly reduce business travel and encourages staff to use alternative means of collaboration and communication (e.g. videoconferences). When business travel is still deemed necessary, travel by train is promoted when feasible. Moreover, the EPO is promoting the adoption of online meetings for its governing bodies and for oral proceedings, providing remote simultaneous interpretation when necessary, thereby reducing travel to our premises.

By regularly communicating on the amount of greenhouse gas emissions caused by business travel, the Office aims to get the support of all stakeholders towards rationalising business trips. To balance the climate impact of unavoidable flights of our staff and governing bodies, we will offset the corresponding greenhouse gas emissions by purchasing recognised emission certificates.

Home office and teleworking

Commuting is a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions originating, albeit indirectly, from the EPO's activities. Leveraging the experience made in managing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the EPO intends to give more flexibility to staff concerning their place of work, thereby increasing their well-being. Consequently, we strive to create the conditions for a fully mobile workforce and provide the infrastructure for a safe and healthy working environment when home working.

Furthermore, we will continue to incentivise the use of public transport and bicycles for staff travelling to our premises: funding schemes for public transport tickets are available to Munich staff and it is planned to extend them to other sites. The number of roofed and fenced bicycle racks has been increased in order to create safe parking facilities. In Munich (Isar and PschorrHöfe) and The Hague, the EPO is gradually increasing the number of e-charging stations. Our next step is the launch of a comprehensive Mobility Concept to reduce emissions from business travel and commuting, taking into account the specific needs of each EPO site.

Digitalisation of support services

The SP2023 aims to continue digitising and modernising our corporate services, implementing suitable best practices as standard market solutions delivered through and with off-the-shelf functionality. Synergies between solutions will be sought to simplify and support the digital workflows between organisational entities while at the same time modernising the IT landscape to avoid obsolescence and harmonising solutions where several exist today.

Particularly relevant for our corporate sustainability goals are the SP2023 projects implementing a reliable, robust, secure and fit for purpose corporate document management solution and delivering a secure EPO digital workspace. This will support our staff in managing and organising their work from anywhere and provide improved tools to foster team work and collaboration, thereby facilitating long-term and ad-hoc teleworking.

2.3 Working environment

Sustainable buildings: technical infrastructure optimisation

We aim reduce our environmental footprint with energy-efficient and state-of-the-art buildings. In line with the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS[1]) certification process lifecycle, on a yearly basis we plan maintenance and refurbishment projects to improve the condition and sustainability of our buildings. Our technical infrastructure is continuously optimised to reduce energy consumption of lighting, heating, cooling and other devices and improve water and waste management.

To optimise energy consumption, the EPO relies on automated energy monitoring and control systems and collected data is regularly assessed and evaluated to identify potential measures for further improvement. We minimise our impact from energy consumption by using renewable energy sources wherever possible. All our premises are run with 100% green electricity to avoid the burning of fossil fuels. With the use of modern, environmentally friendly technologies, such as heat pumps, the EPO seeks to increase the share of renewable energies also for heating and cooling and of self-generated energy to have more control and transparency of the origin of the energy consumed.

Sustainable buildings: waste and water management

Waste generated at EPO's premises includes paper, packaging, food waste and waste from different other sources, such as construction. The amount of residual waste and any other waste can be subject to changing conditions, e.g. building projects. In order to reliably assess the volume of waste produced, the EPO differentiates between waste produced during ongoing operations, i.e. commercial municipal waste from day-to-day business, and exceptional waste generated e.g. from refurbishment measures.

To keep the environmental impact as low as possible, the EPO applies a common waste hierarchy "Reduce – reuse – recycle". As a first principle, the EPO tries to avoid waste whenever possible by minimising the input of materials in general and by increasing the life cycle of materials and products used. The EPO prioritises the use of materials from renewable or recycled materials. For example, reusable packaging is used in our canteens

[1] In accordance with Regulation (EC) No 1221/2009 of the European Parliament, Commission Regulation (EU) 2017/1505 and Commission Regulation (EU) 2018/2026.

as far as possible in order to minimise the use of plastic. If residues cannot be avoided, the EPO ensures that reusable materials are recycled or prepared for reuse as far as possible. Other waste is sent for thermal recycling to generate energy.

Finally, the EPO uses water for sanitary purposes, catering, cleaning and irrigation. We use water-saving fittings in the sanitary rooms and other devices to optimise the usage of water. To meet our goals for waste reduction and water consumption, we will develop and implement a centralised waste concept with local specification. We will continue to raise awareness of staff and service providers to reduce water consumption and to separate waste according to the local waste segregation schemes. This will contribute to make the cities where the EPO is located more sustainable.

ICT Sustainability: "Green IT and Green by IT"

Already four percent of the global greenhouse gas emissions originate from the IT Sector, a value that is projected to rise in the coming years. The EPO, as a knowledge intensive organisation, is highly dependent on ICT-technologies for its core business and will become more so as the digitalisation of its entire processes continues. Therefore ICT sustainability is an essential aspect of the EPO's environmental performance and, with increasing demand on ICT systems and digital end-to-end workflows, it is essential to choose environmentally friendly options and sustainable and efficient ways to run them.

To foster smart and sustainable decisions concerning its ICT systems, the EPO has developed a specific policy on ICT Sustainability and launched a dedicated project as part of the Strategic Plan 2023. The project will pursue the objective of reducing electricity and CO_2-equivalent emissions associated with ICT. This will be achieved by making ICT operations as sustainable as possible, partnering with other corporate functions to leverage ICT in making their business processes more sustainable, and by building a culture of ICT sustainability across the EPO.

Responsible purchasing

The EPO aims to support sustainable and eco-friendly processes and to reduce environmental impacts of services provided under its mandate. Environmental criteria have been integrated into the EPO Financial Regulations and tender guidelines. All staff responsible for procurement processes are required to consider environmental aspects wherever applicable. As soon as new suppliers are in the tender process, their environmental performance is assessed (e.g. by asking for an environmental certificate) and considered for the contract award.

Moreover, the EPO specifies environmental regulations for the provision of services in contracts with external companies. These include the obligation to meet all legal requirements and to act according to the organisation's environmental policy when working

on EPO's mandate, as well as the prevention, recycling and discharge of all waste generated by the external company. In addition, the EPO avoids buying products containing hazardous substances wherever possible and gives priority to carbon neutral products. We will further adapt our purchasing policy with the objective to procure goods only from environmentally friendly companies.

2.4 Involvement of staff and stakeholders

Climate protection needs everybody's contribution

The EPO will actively involve staff at every stage of the implementation of this policy, providing transparent information on the fulfilment of the commitments made. All staff members are invited to contribute to the improvement of our environmental performance. For this purpose the EPO has an internal communication concept which includes learning and awareness raising measures.

An environmental dashboard will be set up, showing consumption of resources on departmental and, where possible, individual level, to make staff aware of how they can directly contribute to improving the environmental footprint of the Office. Staff are also encouraged to contribute their own ideas and suggestions to further integrate sustainability into the EPO's operations and support environmental causes. Furthermore, we intend to promote, encourage and contribute to local environmental initiatives and schemes, actively demonstrating our commitment to support the sustainability goals of the communities where we live and work.

Disseminating sustainable thinking

The EPO actively promotes the dissemination of sustainable technologies by making information on inventions available to the public via its patent databases, thereby directly supporting the further development of climate-friendly technologies. To facilitate the access, the EPO has developed a patent classification scheme dedicated to climate change mitigation or adaptation technologies. Mitigation technologies focus on controlling, reducing or preventing anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases, as covered by the Paris Agreement 2015, while adaptation technologies support human action in adapting to already existing effects.

As a result, the Y02/Y04S patent classification scheme simplifies the search for relevant patents and makes it possible to map sustainable technologies, identify trends and facilitate further R&D. Y02/Y04S has become a global standard for searching patents for climate change technologies and is commonly used by patent offices, governmental agencies, intergovernmental organisations and academia for producing empirical analysis to support decision-making in the field.

In cooperation with international partners such as the UN Environmental Programme, the International Renewable Energy Agency and, most recently, the International Energy Agency (IEA), the EPO has studied the potential of the patent system to address climate change. As an example, in 2020 we published a study on innovation in batteries and electricity storage technologies in collaboration with the IEA, showing the importance of these technologies for the clean energy transition. These partnerships have helped spreading relevant patent information well beyond the traditional patent expert circles. This way the businesses, inventors, researchers and policy-makers who are engaged in the fight against climate change can exploit the full potential of this invaluable source of knowledge.

Finally, the EPO publishes every year an Environmental Report to communicate internally and externally on its environmental performance, the measures implemented and those planned. We will intensify the information about our efforts on sustainability and environmental performance by leveraging existing channels (e.g. our intranet and internet presence, social media and events such as the European Inventor Award) to better reach all our stakeholders.

3. Environmental management at the EPO

Since 2009, the EPO has adopted EMAS as the overarching framework for integrating sustainability in our day-to-day business. Our environmental management system helps us to continuously improve our environmental performance and to spread sustainable thinking among our staff. Under the guidance of the appointed management representative, the Environmental Management Officer is in charge of implementing and further developing the environmental management system within the EPO.

Representatives from all relevant business areas and sites form the Central Environmental Team, which is responsible for developing and implementing measures to reach our long-term goals. The credibility and effectiveness of our commitment to sustainability is confirmed yearly by the independent review of the environmental management system by an external auditor. The results are communicated to all our stakeholders via our yearly Environmental Report.

In addition to the EMAS certification, the EPO aims at obtaining outstanding results in the certification of all its building according to the Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM), which is a leading method for assessing the entire lifecycle of our assets, from new construction to in-use refurbishment. Finally, the EPO is actively cooperating in local initiatives with other organisations and institutions, sharing knowledge and learning from their experience (for example, in Munich we have joined a local initiative, "Betriebliches Mobilitätsmanagement", to reduce emissions from corporate mobility).

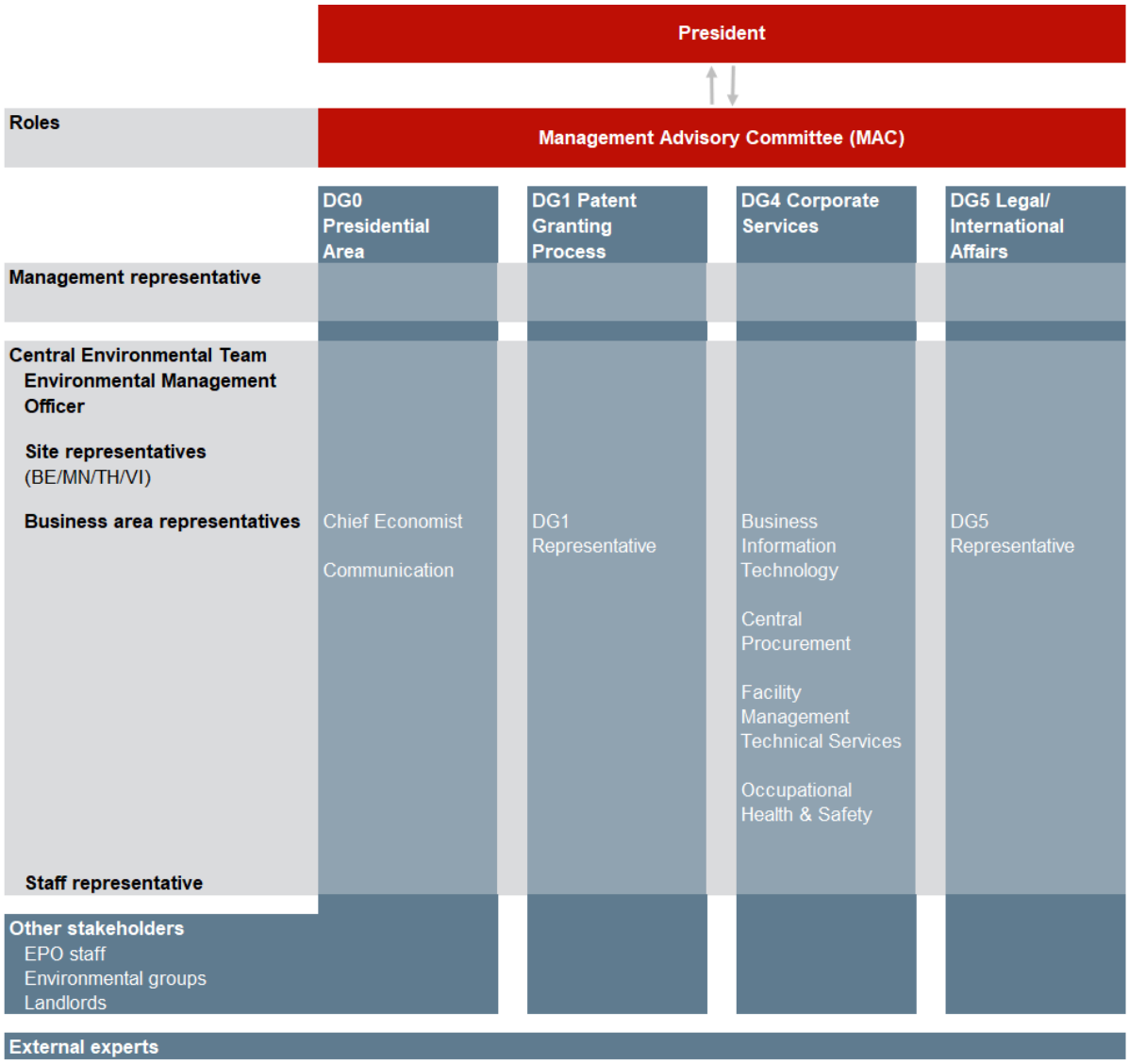


Figure 1: EMAS governance structure