

Learning path for patent administrators

The European patent system: EPAC – entry level

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Introduction

This publication, "The European patent system, EPAC – entry level", is part of the "Learning path for patent administrators" series which is edited and published by the European Patent Academy. The series is intended for patent administrators who are taking part in training and certifications organised by the European Patent Office (EPO). It is also freely available to the public for independent learning.

Topics covered include: general aspects of the patent system; the European patent system and the European patent granting procedure; the International Patent System (PCT) and the PCT procedure; European and international publications; filing a European patent application and filing an international application; the formalities during the European and during the international search; the formalities during the European examination and during the international preliminary examination; the formalities during the appeal procedure after refusal (EPC), during the opposition procedure (EPC); national validation (EPC); entry into national/regional phases and entry into the European phase (PCT).

Each chapter focuses on one topic at entry, intermediate or advanced level, as appropriate. The series will be revised annually to ensure it remains up to date.

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All references to natural persons are to be understood as applying to all genders.

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1. Learning objectives

Participants in this course will learn about:

- the EPO as a patent granting authority and the legal framework governing the European patent system
- the definition of designated states, extension and validation states
- relevant legal sources of information
- EPO online databases and services
- MyEPO
- the principles of representation before the EPO

2. The European Patent Office (EPO) as a granting authority

A European patent is granted after an examination designed to establish whether the European patent application and the invention to which it relates comply with the patentability requirements of the European Patent Convention (EPC). These requirements form the basis not only for the grant of a European patent, but also for the assessment of its validity by national authorities. In addition to this and under the EPC, the extent of protection conferred by the European patent is determined uniformly for all contracting states.

The European patent grant procedure consists of two stages. The first stage comprises a formalities examination on filing, preparation of the European search report complemented by an opinion on patentability and publication of the application together with the search report. The second stage is substantive examination.

After the grant of the patent there may be opposition: inter *parte* proceedings involving one or more opponents as third parties, revocation or limitation: proceedings which are initiated by the patent proprietor and appeal, which may be filed by any party adversely affected by a decision. Decisions on appeals are taken by the Boards of Appeal. Any party to appeal proceedings adversely affected by the decision of the Board of Appeal may file a petition for review by the Enlarged Board of Appeal, under certain circumstances, ([EP Guide, Chapter 5, 5.7.4](#))

3. The European Patent Convention (EPC) and the EPC Guidelines

The European Patent Convention (EPC) provides an autonomous legal system for the granting of European patents via a single, harmonised procedure before the EPO.

The [EPC](#) was signed in 1973 in Munich and entered into force on 7 October 1977. The [current edition](#) dating from November 2020 is the 17th and is available on the EPO website.

The EPC constitutes a special agreement within the meaning of the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property. The EPC also constitutes a regional patent treaty within the meaning of [Article 45\(1\) PCT](#), which means that European patents can be granted on the basis of an international application filed under the Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT).

The Guidelines for Examination in the EPO (EPC Guidelines) give instructions on the practice and procedure to be followed in the various aspects of the examination of European applications and patents in accordance with the European Patent Convention and its Implementing Regulations.

The April 2025 edition entered into force 1 April 2025, superseding the March 2024 edition. The corresponding notice published in the Official Journal ([OJ EPO 2025, A4](#)) lists the main updates.

Legal references:

Art. 87-89 EPC; Art. 150-153 EPC

Art. 45(1) PCT

Rule 157 EPC to Rule 165 EPC

EP Guide, Chapter 5, 5.7.4

4. Contracting, extension, validation and designated states

Contracting states are countries that have ratified the European Patent Convention. They are thus members of the European Patent Organisation. [The list of all these contracting states](#) can be found on the EPO website. There are currently 39 contracting states (December 2025).

Between 1993 and 2009, the European Patent Organisation signed [extension agreements with ten non-member states](#). The agreement with Bosnia and Herzegovina is still in force. Thanks to these agreements, a European patent application and a granted European patent have the same legal effect as a national patent application and national patent on the territory of the extension state. Extension agreements are international agreements.

Since 2010, the European Patent Organisation has signed [validation agreements with seven non-member states](#) (listed in chronological order) : Kingdom of Morocco, Republic of Moldova, Republic of Tunisia, Kingdom of Cambodia, Georgia, Lao People's Democratic Republic (all in force), and Costa Rica (ratifications pending). With these agreements, a European patent application and a granted European patent have the same legal effect as a national patent application and national patent on the territory of the validation state. Validation agreements are international agreements.

Designated contracting states are the countries the applicant indicates in the patent application at the time of filing as those in which protection is sought for the invention. In each contracting state for which it is granted, a European patent gives its proprietor the same rights as would be conferred by a national patent granted in that state.

All contracting, validation and extension states on the date of filing of the application are deemed to be designated states under [Art. 79\(1\) EPC](#).

The designation of contracting states is subject to the payment of a designation fee under [Art. 79\(2\) EPC](#) and pursuant to [Rule 39 EPC](#). For extension and validation states, an extension fee and a validation fee have to be paid.

The basic time limits for payment of designation, extension and validation fee(s) are:

- six months after publication of the European search report, under [Rule 39\(1\) EPC](#) for EP files
- six months after publication of the international search report or the filing date or earliest priority date + 31 months, whichever expires later, under [Rule 159\(1\)\(d\) EPC](#) for Euro PCT files and in case of valid early entry into the European phase

Legal references:

Art. 59 EPC; Art. 79(1) EPC; Art. 79(2) EPC
Rule 39 EPC; Rule 134 EPC; Rule 159(1)(d) EPC
G 4/98 (annex I)
Art. 7(3)(a) RFees; Art. 7(3)(b) RFees; Art. 7(4) RFees

5. Relevant sources of information

The official texts of the EPC and the Guidelines are the subject of two EPO publications: the European Patent Convention and the Guidelines for Examination in the European Patent Office, both available on the EPO website.

Beyond the EPC and the Guidelines, epo.org provides users with other relevant publications.

In particular, the EPO booklet entitled "National law relating to the EPC" contains detailed information on the regulations and requirements governing European patent applications and patents in the contracting, extension and validation states. The "Euro-PCT Guide" deals with this filing route in order to obtain patent protection in Europe on the basis of an international application filed under the PCT.

Legal references:

Art. 52(2) EPC; Art. 54(3) EPC; Art. 82 EPC
Rule 43 EPC; Rule 128 EPC
GL F-II, 4.2; GL G-IV, 5.3

6. Overview of EPO online databases and services

The EPO's website provides access to a number of online databases. The following three databases are particularly relevant for the daily processing of European patent applications and patents:

- Espacenet - a free online searchable database comprising more than 160 million patent documents from around the world
- European Publication Server - provides free access to all EP documents published on a weekly basis according to the decision of the President of the EPO dated 22 December 2004
- European Patent Register - provides direct access to all publicly available information on European patent applications as they pass through the granting procedure

The EPO databases or services:

Public access databases:

- Espacenet
- European Patent Register
- European Publication Server
- Database of professional representatives
- EP bibliographic data
- Linked open EP Data
- Online training

- Oral proceedings calendar
- Schedule of fees
- Search patent-related events
- Search Boards of Appeal decisions
- Third-party observations

Password-protected access services:

- Central Fee Payment
- EP full-text search
- Open Patent Services
- Raw data download
- Shop

Two-factor-authenticated access via EPO account:

- MyEPO (MyEPO Portfolio renamed MyEPO as of 1 April 2025)
- Central Fee Payment
- Online Filing 2.0
- ePCT Filing (only for PCT files, EPO acting as RO, ISA or IPEA)
- Contingency Upload Service

Software download services:

- IPscore
- Multipay
- Online Filing
- Sequence submission tools

Legal references:

Art. 52(2) EPC; Art. 54(3) EPC; Art. 82 EPC

Rule 43 EPC; Rule 128 EPC

GL F-II, 4.2; GL F-IV, 5.3

7. MyEPO

MyEPO is part of the EPO integrated suite of MyEPO services that makes it easy for a patent applicant, opponent or representative to conduct their EPO business. Within this suite of services, MyEPO is the place for interacting with the EPO during EP, UP and PCT proceedings: access to procedural data, procedural guidance, direct interaction with the EPO on files and the exchange of digital information.

MyEPO replaces the My Files, Administration and legacy Mailbox services, which were all decommissioned in June 2024.

MyEPO offers representatives, paralegal staff, applicants and opponents who have not appointed a professional representative:

- easy access to portfolios of applications, including direct access to the digital files associated with each application filed with the EPO
- fully operational access to their Mailbox, including options to create email alerts for new communications, pending tasks and deadlines
- the ability to reply directly to selected EPO communications, with streamlined procedural actions and procedural guidance
- the ability to request changes to their applications
- a shared area for live interaction with examiners on documents
- a representative area for updating data in the list of professional representatives

Furthermore, MyEPO enables company administrators to manage user permissions, access to the Mailbox and application portfolios and fee payment rights.

Detailed list of features

With MyEPO, users can:

- receive and process their Mailbox communications from the EPO
- view their portfolio of patent applications and granted patents
- view the content of the digital file for an application or a granted patent with pending proceedings.
- interact live with examiners on documents
- perform procedural acts within the prescribed period:
 - respond to a communication on the intention to grant the European patent (Rule 71(3) EPC)
 - respond to a communication under Article 94(3) EPC
 - respond to the extended European search report (Rule 70a EPC)
 - respond to an invitation to indicate subject-matter for search (Rules 62a and 63 EPC)
- Request changes to applications:
 - change or withdrawal of representation
 - changes to bibliographical data
 - withdrawal of application
- Grant other users access to their portfolio, so as to delegate the drafting of submissions
- Set up email alerts for new communications, tasks or deadlines
- Update personal details in the list of professional representatives before the EPO

Improved access

The functionalities of the legacy Mailbox and My Files services have been integrated into MyEPO with an interface that is user-friendly, intuitive and easy to access: documents are viewed in the digital file, with access to documents in their original data format, including parts in colour where available.

Mailbox access is available to international agents and non-European parties acting before the EPO under the PCT.

Procedural guidance

MyEPO provides information about pending tasks in reply to a communication from the EPO and the associated deadlines. It offers a simplified approach to making procedural submissions.

Users are guided through the process with procedural information. Plausibility checks and validations help reduce the risk of error.

Direct interaction with the EPO on files

MyEPO provides a personal shared area where users can upload, review, edit and annotate documents together with examiners during a live consultation. This real-time interaction increases quality, transparency and efficiency.

Exchange of digital information

MyEPO allows users to download data about their application portfolios, pending tasks and Mailbox communications, including links to the digital file.

Users can upload information when performing procedural acts in reply to a communication from the EPO.

Application programming interfaces (APIs) are regularly made available so that users can automate the exchange of data between their IP management systems and MyEPO services. The first available API allowed users to download documents and data from their Mailbox.

Legal references:

OJ EPO 2022, A51

8. Representation before the EPO

Applicants with their residence or principal place of business in an EPC contracting state are not compelled to get representation. However, they may opt to be represented by a professional representative, a legal practitioner or an authorised employee. One applicant may also act on behalf of all applicants filing a given European patent application. Any such applicant is called a common representative.

Applicants not having their residence or principal place of business in a contracting state may file an application, appoint a representative or withdraw the authorisation of a representative who has already been appointed. However, for all further procedural steps before the EPO, these applicants must be represented by a professional representative.

The conditions that professional representatives must meet are detailed in Art. 134 EPC.

Professional representatives must:

- appear in the public list maintained by the EPO
- be nationals of and with a place of business in a contracting state
- have passed the [EQE \(European Qualifying Examination\)](#)

- be a member of [epi](#), the Institute of Professional Representatives before the EPO

Authorisation is only required in exceptional cases.

Legal practitioners:

- are entitled to act as representative in patent matters in a contracting state and have a place of business in that state

As of 1 November 2024, legal practitioners are no longer required to file an authorisation in general, unless upon invitation from the EPO (Art. 1 of the decision of the President of the EPO dated 8 July 2024 on the filing and signing of authorisations, [OJ EPO 2024, A75](#)). Thus, legal practitioners are aligned with professional representatives and need to file an authorisation if a change of representation takes place where the former representative has not withdrawn from representation, or upon invitation from the EPO, e.g. where there is doubt as to the legal practitioner's entitlement to act.

Employees of applicants, i.e. legal or natural persons, having their residence or place of business in a contracting state:

- may only represent their direct employers
- do not need to be a professional representative
- always need an authorisation (EPO Forms 1003/1004)

Legal references:

Art. 133 EPC; Art. 134 EPC; Art. 134a EPC

Rule 41(3) EPC; Rule 151 EPC; Rule 152 EPC

GL A-III, 2; GL A-VIII

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