Europäische Patent-organisation

European Patent Organisation

Organisation européenne des brevets

Verwaltungsrat

Administrative Council

Conseil d'administration

Number:
CA/105/25

Original:
en

Date:
21.11.2025

Category:
Public

TITLE: **Annual Work Plan 2026**

SUBJECT: The Annual Work Plan 2026 is a roadmap to indicate how the EPO's efforts to implement the strategic directions will focus on the five main areas related to people, technologies, high-quality and timely products and services, partnerships and financial sustainability.

SUBMITTED BY: President of the European Patent Office

ADDRESSEES: Administrative Council (for opinion)

MAJORITY: Not applicable

LEGAL BASIS: Article 10 EPC

RECOMMENDATION: The Administrative Council is requested to give its opinion on the Annual Work Plan 2026.

SUMMARY: The Annual Work Plan 2026 serves as a guide, setting the direction of the EPO's efforts for the year ahead as we advance towards our sustainability strategic goal. It delineates the activities across five key drivers via major milestones and highlights the impact of the SP2028 implementation through the key performance indicators.

Annual Work Plan 2026

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Contents

Executive summary

The Annual Work Plan 2026 builds on the achievements of previous years, setting the direction of the EPO's efforts for the year ahead. It outlines our activities across the five drivers of the Strategic Plan 2028, as we advance towards a more sustainable Office, a more sustainable organisation and a more sustainable patent system.

In 2026, our activities under the first driver, **People**, will focus on three key challenges: **attracting top talent** in a competitive labour market; **enhancing digital and transversal skills** to keep pace with digital transformation; and sustaining staff engagement through **mobility and flexibility**. In rising to these challenges, we will continue to advance diversity and inclusion, with a focus on increasing the EPO's visibility among **women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)**, deepening co-operation with **technical universities**, and improving outreach to **underrepresented member states**. The aim is to cultivate a more diverse and agile workforce, with the aspiration that **40% of staff members** and **40% of top managers are women** and that **all member states are represented**.

Learning and development initiatives will focus on further strengthening internal **mobility**, supporting career growth through targeted up- or reskilling, and equipping staff with the expertise needed to work effectively in an increasingly digital and AI-driven workplace. Highlights include the expansion of the **AI learning campaign** launched for all staff in 2025 and more opportunities for staff to **engage directly with industry, research institutes and academia**, including by participating in external conferences, trade fairs and the EPO's expanded **industry lecture series**. Initiatives such as the twice-yearly **Campus Days** will further strengthen a sense of belonging and staff engagement.

At the heart of our community are the EPO's engaging physical homes, where we will continue to implement the **Building Investment Programme 2024-2028**, as endorsed by the Administrative Council. The programme supports four overarching goals: safeguarding **health and safety**, advancing **environmental sustainability**, promoting sustainable **staff engagement** and maintaining the **value of the EPO's patrimony** with a view to contributing to its long-term financial sustainability. The focus is now shifting to our sites in **The Hague**, where we will establish a **new conference centre**, and in **Munich**. Here, upcoming highlights include an **energy-efficient upgrade** of our Isar building, new room control units to make workspaces in our PschorrHöfe (PH) buildings more adaptable and the relocation of the Boards of Appeal to PH7.

Under the second driver, **Technologies**, the EPO will continue to advance its digital transformation to further **enhance quality, efficiency and user experience**. Guided by SP2028, the focus will be on streamlining digital workflows, deepening the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and simplifying the IT landscape by decommissioning legacy systems. The aim is to deliver a seamless, end-to-end digital experience for all stakeholders,

supporting operational excellence and user satisfaction. Simplification and digitalisation efforts will focus on three key pipelines.

The **Patent Granting Process (PGP) Pipeline** will see advancements such as the introduction of a smart communication drafting tool for examiners and workflows enhanced by the integration of AI into our Digital File Repository, Patent Workbench and ANSERA search tool. Upcoming highlights in the **Online User Engagement Pipeline** will pave the way for a paperless Office by April 2027. To support digital workflows further, the Office will complete the implementation of end-to-end DOCX filing, which will also reduce administrative burdens and enhance data quality. A new user interface will be implemented in MyEPO and early collaboration with users will be further enhanced through the MyEPO shared area.

In the **Corporate Services Pipeline**, the Office will continue to upgrade fundamental technologies to deliver major improvements in our corporate services tools. A combination of new tools and enhancements to existing ones will improve the user experience, streamline work processes and increase efficiency across corporate functions. In this context, we will focus on four main areas: **HR**, **finance and procurement**, **cross-Office improvements** and the **modernisation of our IT landscape** to ensure high availability and a secure digital environment.

As for the third driver, **high-quality, timely products and services**, we will build on recent progress made in strengthening quality throughout the PGP. Our focus will continue to be on **complete and accurate searches**, a **consistent and harmonised approach to examination** and **fair and transparent opposition**.

At the search stage, embedding best practices from the Active Search Division (ASD) will ensure that the benefits of increased interaction and alignment within three-person divisions are fully realised. A key area of focus will be on the consistent application of the European Patent Convention to all applications, and particularly applications relating to **computer implemented inventions (CII) and/or AI features,** as well as **divisional applications.** In examination, we are stepping up our efforts to document **added subject-matter checks** and substantiate our **objections**, paying special attention to **clarity**, **limitation of claims**, and **amendments to the description**. Moreover, a follow-up study on **third-party observations** will be carried out to measure the impact of the actions taken since the initial study in 2024.

In terms of **fair and transparent opposition**, we will build on the 2025 opposition examiner workshop by expanding our review of Boards of Appeal decisions. Furthermore, the findings of the first stakeholder quality assurance panels (SQAPs) on opposition in 2025 will be translated into targeted improvement measures tailored to each technical area.

As **timeliness** remains an important element of quality for our applicants, their competitors and society, we will continue working towards the delivery of our KPI timeliness targets,

which are set out in the SP2028. Meanwhile, **user dialogue** will play its central role in driving the continual improvement of the PGP and our high-quality products and services. In 2026, we will continue to organise **meetings with large applicants** to discuss both strategic and operational topics, as well as building on our **outreach to SMEs, universities and public research organisations** (PROs). We will also explore reaching out to companies that have not yet used the EPO's services and SME organisations.

Driver four, **Partnerships**, is a key enabler of the EPO's strategic vision of a more sustainable and innovation-driven future for Europe, the patent system, and society at large. In 2026, the EPO's dedication to advancing strategic collaboration will be greater than ever, allowing the organisation to respond effectively to the demands of a rapidly evolving patent landscape and its diverse stakeholders. By strengthening ties with national patent offices, international organisations, and the user community, the EPO will continue to promote knowledge exchange, harness collective expertise, and encourage the adoption of best practices. These efforts will reinforce the European Patent Network (**EPN**), which will celebrate two decades of co-operation in May 2026, as well as contributing to a more inclusive patent system, and empower innovators across all sectors.

Upcoming highlights include the conclusion of the second cycle and launch of the third cycle of the convergence of practices programme, which aims to harmonise patent practices across the EPN. As for IT co-operation in 2026, the **digital toolkit** will be the central vehicle for delivering new tools and services to our member states and other stakeholders, for whom the functionality of **ANSERA-based SEARCH** will also be enhanced.

Further initiatives to support applicants globally include our ongoing worldwide promotion of the **Unitary Patent** (UP). These efforts will complement our fee reduction schemes and support for smaller applicants and micro-entities, many of which are among the main beneficiaries of the UP system. Outreach efforts to universities and PROs will be stepped up too. Furthermore, building on the success of the first and second baskets of **legal changes to support digital transformation**, the EPO is preparing a third basket focused on transitioning to an essentially **paperless PGP by April 2027**. These and other reforms will enhance service quality, flexibility and efficiency, as well as supporting the EPO's sustainability goals.

Through targeted initiatives and purposeful alliances, the EPO aims to deliver a **more efficient, accessible and harmonised patent framework** — one that supports economic growth, technological progress and societal benefits across Europe and beyond. The EPO will continue to expand its international reach through a diverse range of co-operation models, including **validation agreements**, **reinforced partnerships** and **technical co-operation**. Reaffirming its role as one of the world's leading patent offices, the EPO will renew its agreement with the International Bureau of WIPO to continue acting as

International Searching Authority and International Preliminary Examining Authority under the PCT.

Finally, for the period 2026-2027, the new Biennial Work Plan of the EPO's **Observatory on Patents and Technology** details new and ongoing projects that will use EPO data and expertise to understand the ways in which innovation and technology are shaping Europe's future. Building on the first programme, the Observatory will work closely with a range of key partners, including our member states, other European and international organisations, research universities and startups, on a number of projects. These projects fall into three main areas: **shaping a brighter future with technology**, **empowering innovation actors**, and **breaking barriers to the innovation ecosystem**. To support all three areas, the Observatory will expand its digital ecosystem through a **range of new tools and data platforms**.

Driver five, **Financial sustainability**, connects and supports the implementation of the other drivers. As a self-financed organisation, the EPO must ensure that it remains resilient to external shocks and capable of meeting its long-term obligations, including full funding of its pension and social security schemes. Building on progress made in 2025, the Office will continue to implement the recommendations of the **Financial Study**, further strengthening its capacity to manage risk and maintain financial stability in a volatile global environment. With the current **salary adjustment method** (SAM) having been adopted by the Administrative Council in 2020 for a period of six years, milestones include submitting the proposal for a new SAM to the EPO's governing bodies during 2026. The EPO will also continue to monitor each KPI against the relevant values defined in the base case scenario of the Financial Study 2023 to **promptly identify and address any major risks** to long-term financial sustainability.

Implementation of SP2028 in 2026

1. Driver 1 - People

As outlined in SP2028, the EPO's ability to deliver on its mission depends on a workforce that is highly skilled, able to adapt to rapid change and engaged. In 2026, our activities under Driver 1 will address three key challenges: attracting top talent in a competitive labour market, enhancing digital and transversal skills to keep pace with technological transformation, and sustaining engagement through greater mobility, flexibility and well-being. In rising to these challenges, we continue to advance diversity and inclusion, as well as fostering equal opportunity and a sense of belonging. The Office will build on the progress achieved in 2025, combining simplification and digitalisation with a people-centric approach to ensure that flexibility, connection and learning remain at the heart of how we work. The development of the EPO's physical homes through modern, collaborative and environmentally sustainable workplaces, will further support this transformation by enabling staff to work and connect effectively across all EPO sites.

Attract talent

Recruiting the best talent remains essential to ensuring the Office's long-term success. In 2026, the EPO will further strengthen its position as an employer of choice by expanding its visibility among **women in STEM**, deepening cooperation with **technical universities** and improving outreach to **underrepresented member states** to build a broader talent pipeline. These efforts will reinforce the EPO's reputation as an inclusive, innovative workplace that supports career development. At the same time, recruitment practices will continue to evolve through **digital tools**, leading to a more efficient, objective and unbiased selection process. Together, these measures will help us to cultivate a more diverse and agile workforce, with the aspiration that 40% of staff members and 40% of top managers are women, that all member states are represented, and that the **end-to-end recruitment process is completed within four months**.

- **Launch of the "Women Examiners at the EPO" webpage and social-media campaign:** Launch of a new internet page and an accompanying social-media campaign showcasing the experiences of female examiners and promoting the EPO as an attractive employer for women in STEM.

- **Introduction of AI-supported pre-screening of candidates in HR software:** Integration of an AI-driven pre-screening function in our HR software (SuccessFactors) to improve the matching of candidates' skills with job requirements and enhance selection quality.

- **Implementation of gender-neutral recruitment documents:** Review and update of recruitment materials, including vacancy notices and offer letters, to ensure the use of inclusive and gender-neutral language.

- **Expansion of Young Professionals Programme** (**YPP) university partnerships to additional technical universities:** Pilot extension of the YPP to an additional twenty top STEM universities across member states, developing a talent pipeline for PGP roles.

- **Roll-out of targeted recruitment campaigns in underrepresented member states:** Implementation of country-specific outreach and advertising initiatives to raise awareness of career opportunities at the EPO and attract a more geographically diverse applicant pool.

Develop talent

Building on the progress achieved in 2025, the EPO will continue to invest in developing the skills and capabilities that prepare staff for current and future challenges. In 2026, learning and development will focus on further strengthening internal mobility, supporting career growth through targeted up- or reskilling, and equipping staff with the expertise needed to work effectively in an increasingly digital and AI-driven workplace. The **70/20/10** learning model - balancing formal training (10), peer-to-peer knowledge sharing (20) and learning on the job (70) - will remain the foundation of the Office's approach to staff development.

As technological transformation accelerates, the integration of artificial intelligence into EPO tools and processes represents a major shift in how we work and learn. To support staff in adapting to these changes, the AI learning campaign – known as the **AI Explorer Pass** – launched in 2025 will be substantially expanded in 2026. The programme will offer targeted learning paths to meet different levels of experience and expertise, from introductory modules for beginners to advanced courses for experienced users who will act as AI champions across the Office.

Training will combine practical exercises on AI-enabled tools with learning on technology fundamentals, ethics, and the implications of AI for patent examination. As part of broader skill development, patent examiners - and other staff where relevant - will continue to engage directly with industry, research institutes and academia in 2026 through their participation in **external conferences and trade fairs**. Building on the experience of the **Industry Lectures** pilot launched in 2025, this initiative will be expanded to include additional companies and technology fields. To reinforce the learning culture and measure its impact, the Office will launch new initiatives designed to improve the "Impact of Learning" key performance indicator (KPI), with the aim of reaching 75% in 2026.

- **Enhanced support for the new European patent administration certification (EPAC)**: Roll-out of comprehensive training to prepare staff for the new, modularised EPAC. From March, the certification track will offer a unique staff opportunity to deepen

their knowledge from filing to post-grant and to obtain formal recognition of their expertise.

- **Roll-out of new training for managers:** Implementation of new, practice-oriented learning resources covering performance management (Q1) and integrating well-being and health prevention into development plans (Q2), supporting managers in creating healthy and engaging team environments and addressing well-being matters with confidence.

- **Launch of the science and technology forums**: Introduction of a new initiative to foster connections between the PGP, science, and the innovation ecosystem at large. Internally renowned speakers of international standing will present the latest scientific developments and their societal impacts.

- **Launch of the Learn Zone digital platform:** Development of a new platform providing central access to all staff development resources, including learning materials and peer-to-peer knowledge sharing supporting the transition towards a culture of continuous learning.

Support mobility, flexibility and well-being

In 2026, the Office will further strengthen staff engagement by fostering mobility, flexibility and well-being as key enablers of a motivated and resilient workforce. **Internal mobility** will continue to support staff development and organisational agility. Building on the measures introduced in 2025, such as the up- and reskilling of Formality Officers, which created opportunities for 24 job profiles across all DGs, the EPO will further promote internal mobility as a practical and attractive option for staff. The **skills framework** will underpin a transparent and data-informed approach to career progression, helping staff and managers to align skills with workforce planning and development.

A culture that encourages flexibility and development also depends on healthy, motivated staff who can adapt and perform sustainably. In 2026, the Office will focus on prevention, including awareness and early intervention. Guided by health and absence data, access to screenings and preventive checks will be expanded and supported by targeted campaigns. The Office will also continue to monitor the effectiveness of the **new ways of working** (NWoW) and report regularly to the Administrative Council. Engagement will continue to be promoted through the Campus Days, held twice a year and which have proven an effective way of bringing staff together.

- **Introduction of skills pathways:** Launch of targeted skills assessments to map existing competencies and identify gaps across the Office, supporting staff mobility and career aspirations through specific check-ups followed by tailored learning measures.

- **Launch of targeted prevention campaigns:** Implementation of dedicated health campaigns to raise awareness, promote preventive habits and address gender- and age-related challenges through micro-learnings, events and community exchanges.

- **Launch of HealthConnect Portal:** Roll-out of the new self-service portal to improve access to occupational health services while safeguarding data protection and service quality.

- **Continuation of Campus Days:** Organisation of an Office-wide event twice-a year to promote engagement and well-being through activities that combine learning, team activities and integrated occupational health campaigns.

Figure 1: SP2028 People Pipeline
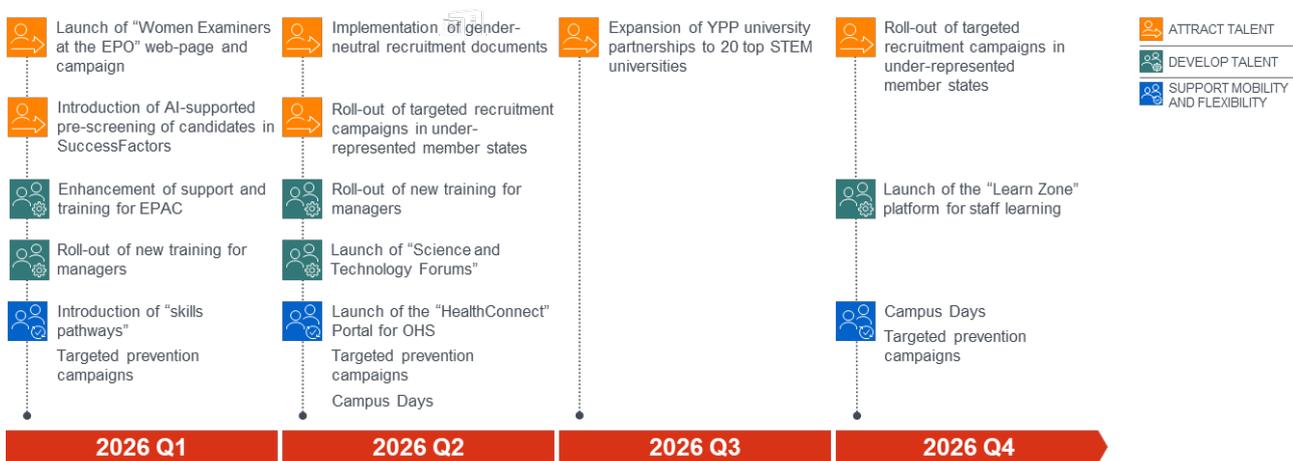
Source: EPO

Create an engaging physical home

The EPO will continue to implement the **Building Investment Programme 2024–2028**, as endorsed by the Administrative Council. The programme supports four overarching goals: safeguarding health and safety, advancing environmental sustainability, promoting sustainable staff engagement, and maintaining the value of the EPO's patrimony with a view to contributing to its long-term financial sustainability. With the **Vienna** building now fully operational and the relocation of **Berlin** staff to the capital's landmark centre completed, the focus of the programme is shifting to our sites in **Munich** and **The Hague**. By 2026, most projects at both locations will have progressed beyond the planning and design stages, with tenders launched and several construction activities under way. In Munich, work has begun in PschorrHöfe PH5-6 and solar panels have been installed on the roofs of PH7 and PH8, while the Shell building in The Hague is being prepared for environmentally responsible deconstruction.

- **Energy efficient upgrade of the Isar building**: The installation of a new thermal façade will significantly enhance the building's energy performance. Construction in wing B is scheduled for completion by the end of 2026, allowing staff to move into the upgraded areas and benefit from improved room climate control. The renovation of wing A is planned for completion by the end of 2027.

- **Opening of The Hague Main conference centre**: A new, modern conference centre and flexible meeting space with capacity for up to three hundred participants will open for large events and meetings. The facility will replace the former Shell building Auditorium.

- **Installation of LED lightning, modern room control units and new heating valves in PH7 and 8:** Upgrades such as dimmable LED lighting will enhance sustainability, while new room control units will make office spaces more adaptable to individual needs.

- **Relocation of the Boards of Appeal to PH7:** With the rental contract in Haar ending, the Boards of Appeal will move to PH7 in Q4 2026. The conference area in PH5/6 will also be dedicated to their exclusive use, with all meeting rooms equipped for hybrid sessions.

- **Installation of solar panels on PH5-6:** New rooftop solar panels will increase the site's renewable energy production and support the EPO's sustainability goals.

Figure 2: SP2028 Building Investment Programme Pipeline
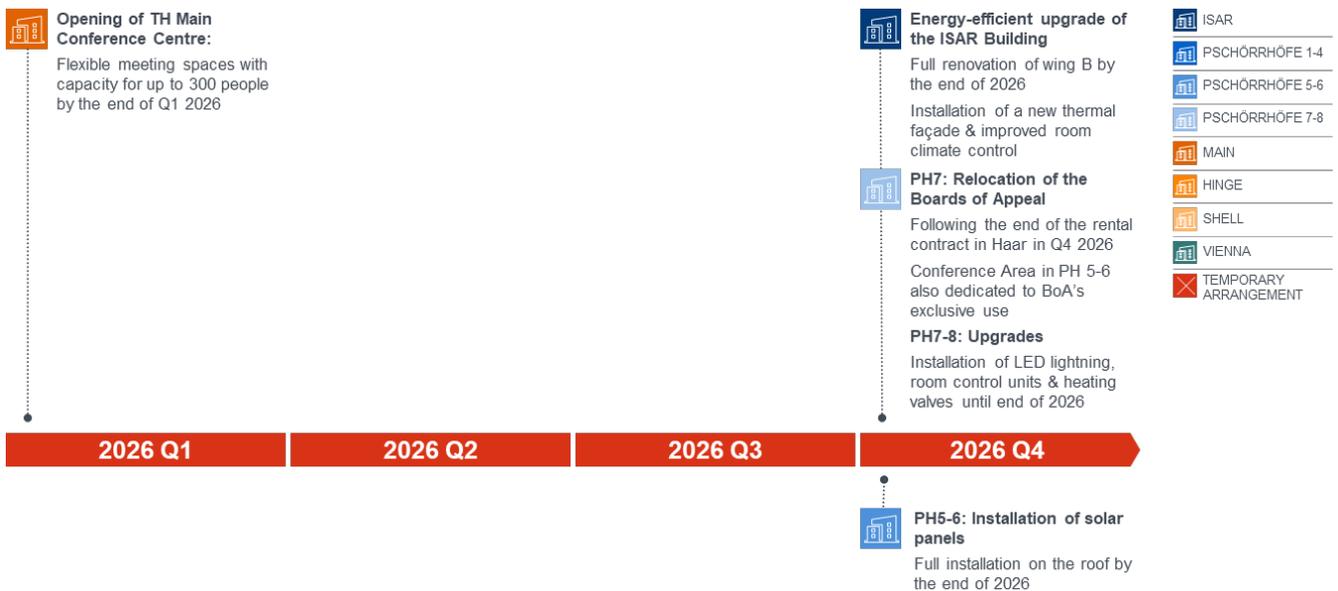
Source: EPO

Driver 1 key performance indicators

Key performance indicator (KPI)	Actual value[1]		Target 2028
Staff engagement	73%	○	≥ 75%
Recruitment cycle	3.7 months	✓	≤ 4 months
Gender diversity	35.4%	○	≥ 40%
Women recruited as examiners	30%	✓	≥ 30%
Geographic diversity	36 EPC countries	○	39
Impact of learning	54%	○	≥ 75%
Female managers	28.5%	○	≥ 40%
Women in top management	36.4%	○	≥ 40%
Environmental sustainability	2 274 t CO$_2$e	○	≤ 1 000 t CO$_2$e
Build value	-14.1%	○	≤ -25.6%
Sense of purpose	82%	○	≥ 85%

○ = in progress; ✓ = target achieved

Driver 1 KPIs have performed steadily across the board, largely remaining on track. Notably, "Recruitment cycle" and "Women recruited as examiners" were on target in 2025. The diversity KPIs, namely, "Gender diversity", "Geographic diversity" and "Female managers", showed minor fluctuations during 2025 and continue to progress toward their respective targets. In 2026, additional secondary indicators will be introduced to provide deeper insights into two strategic topics in driver 1:

▪ **Impact of learning**: To enrich the evaluation of the impact of training and development initiatives, a second level indicator, "Skills application readiness", will be introduced. This metric captures staff perceptions of their ability to apply newly acquired skills learnt during training in their roles. It will be based on the share of favourable responses to the post-training survey question *"I can apply the skills learnt during the course in my daily job".* In addition to the existing KPI, this insight will help to provide a more detailed understanding of how effectively learning initiatives address business needs and talent capability gaps. The 2025 baseline value is 84%, with interim targets set at 86% (2026), 87% (2027) and 88% (2028).

▪ **Environmental sustainability**: To support the KPI monitoring progress toward carbon neutrality by 2030, a new second-level indicator "Reduction in scope 1 and 2 carbon emissions" will be introduced. This metric focuses on those emissions over which the EPO has a high level of control (scope 1 and 2 emissions[2]). It will compare reductions against the 2019 baseline, which was the first year the EPO reported its carbon footprint

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[1] October 2025 update, as shown on the SP2028 dashboard in November 2025.

[2] The Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Protocol is an internationally recognised standard for accounting and reporting of emissions, used by the EPO in its environmental reporting. Scope 1 includes direct GHG emissions from facilities owned or controlled by the reporting organisation, such as natural gas burnt at premises owned by the EPO, fuels used for vehicles or leakages of cooling agents. Scope 2 covers indirect GHG emissions from purchased energy, in our case electricity and district heating. See the EPO's Environmental Report for more details.

according to the Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Protocol. This metric will be updated annually, with interim targets set at -70% (2026), -75% (2027) and -80% (2028).

2.   Driver 2 - Technologies

In 2026, the EPO will continue to advance its digital transformation, building on previous achievements to further enhance quality, efficiency and user experience. Guided by SP2028, our focus will be on deepening the integration of artificial intelligence, streamlining digital workflows and decommissioning legacy systems. Simplification and digitalisation efforts will be organised into three key pipelines: the patent granting process, online user engagement and corporate services. The aim is to deliver a seamless, end-to-end digital experience for all stakeholders, supporting operational excellence and user satisfaction.

Patent Granting Process Pipeline

The Patent Granting Process (PGP) Pipeline reflects the EPO's commitment to simplifying and digitalising the patent granting process, to further improve **quality, efficiency and user experience**. In 2026, efforts will focus on ensuring closer **integration** between search and examination tools, harnessing **artificial intelligence** to provide support for decision making and **automating** patent administration activities. The continued **decommissioning** of legacy systems will further support this transformation, creating a simpler and more integrated IT landscape.

- **Enhancing communication drafting and examiner workflows:** A **new Drafter** tool will progressively replace the legacy tool Trimaran, improving the quality and consistency of examiner communications and actions across all phases of the patent granting process. It will enable a seamless workflow from search to examination and final action, improving the visibility of next steps for both internal and external stakeholders. The new Drafter will also incorporate an **AI assistant to provide smart drafting support** and will facilitate collaboration within the division and with applicants.

- **Integrating AI in PGP core tools:** AI capabilities will be progressively embedded within the EPO's main tools to directly provide targeted assistance. This will allow users to focus more on intellectual and substantive tasks and benefit from smoother, more connected workflows. AI assistance will be integrated in the **Digital File Repository** (**DFR)**, the central PGP platform for accessing legal documents related to patent applications, the **Patent Workbench (PWB)**, which serves as the central hub for PGP workflow management and in **ANSERA**, the prior art search tool used by patent examiners.

- **Digitalisation and simplification of administrative workflows:** Administrative tasks will be further streamlined and automated, reducing manual effort and improving operational efficiency. Formalities processes are increasingly consolidated within two main tools (PWB and DFR), reducing fragmentation and strengthening collaboration among all actors in the patent granting process. The **decommissioning of**

CasexPrima[3] and **Madras**[4] will mark an important step towards a simplified and modernised IT landscape.

Figure 3: SP2028 PGP pipeline
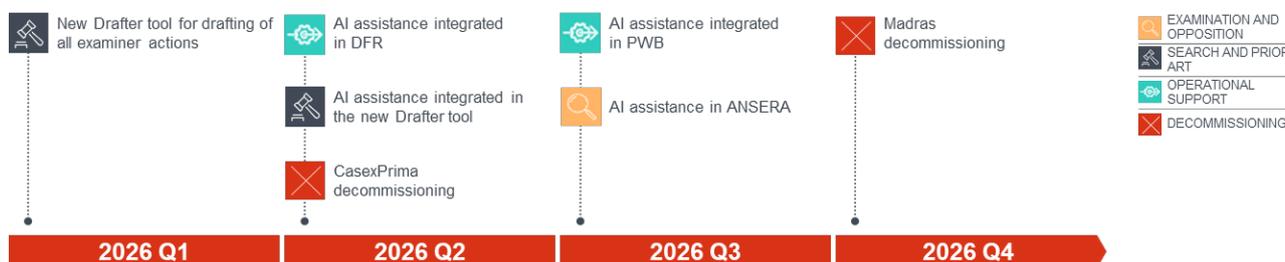
Source: EPO

Online User Engagement Pipeline

The Online User Engagement Pipeline will build on the progress made in 2025 to further improve quality, efficiency and transparency. In 2026, we will continue to prepare for a **paperless Office by 2027** by expanding user-friendly digital services that make it easier for users to access information and manage their tasks independently. The **decommissioning** of outdated tools will also further simplify the IT landscape. Our focus will be on improving user interfaces, expanding self-service features and enhancing early collaboration with users through the **Shared Area**. We will also introduce **AI-supported solutions** that provide users with insights to help them manage their application portfolios more effectively.

- **Transparency of file status:** We will improve transparency in MyEPO by introducing a new **Lifecycle** feature that shows the current status of a file and the next communication expected in relation to it, tailored to the relevant technical field. This will give users clearer, contextualised information and enable timely, well-informed actions, as well as strengthening user engagement.

- **MyEPO new interface:** We will deliver a fully revamped **MyEPO 2.0** interface, which will support users in a more streamlined and intuitive way, simplifying workflows and improving overall usability.

- **Decommissioning of old Third-Party Observations form:** Following the introduction of a new simplified form for submitting third-party observations in 2025, we will decommission the legacy form. This step will consolidate functionality within our platforms, reduce system complexity and improve user experience.

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[3] CasexPrima is a legacy IT system used within the EPO to support the processing and dispatching of structured communications related to patent dossiers. It was particularly relevant for formalities officers handling tasks such as search actions, annex management and communication generation.

[4] Madras is a legacy backend application which was used across the EPO for managing patent-related workflows. It served as a hub for formalities officers, examiners and other staff to process, track and manage patent files and communications.

- **DocX end-to-end:** We will complete the implementation of end-to-end DocX filing to ensure readiness for its upcoming entry into force, reducing administrative burdens, enhancing data quality, and supporting an end-to-end digital workflow.

- **User empowerment:** We will expand the range of **self-service features** in MyEPO, including full support for **PACE and enquiries**[5], enabling users to manage more tasks independently, reducing their reliance on support and improving efficiency for users and the Office. We will also enhance the application portfolio by including **information on oppositions**.

- **Enhanced shared area and back office integration:** We will strengthen the shared area to further promote early collaboration between examiners and external users across different proceedings, with deeper integration into back office processes leading to seamless workflows.

- **AI support:** Now that users have access to the Legal Interactive Platform, we will deliver new AI-driven features to help them work more efficiently on their portfolios. Our aim remains to make the EPO's internal AI solutions, such as the DFR AI assistance, increasingly available to users via MyEPO. These features will improve the overall user experience and help them to manage their applications more effectively.

Figure 4: SP2028 Online User Engagement Pipeline
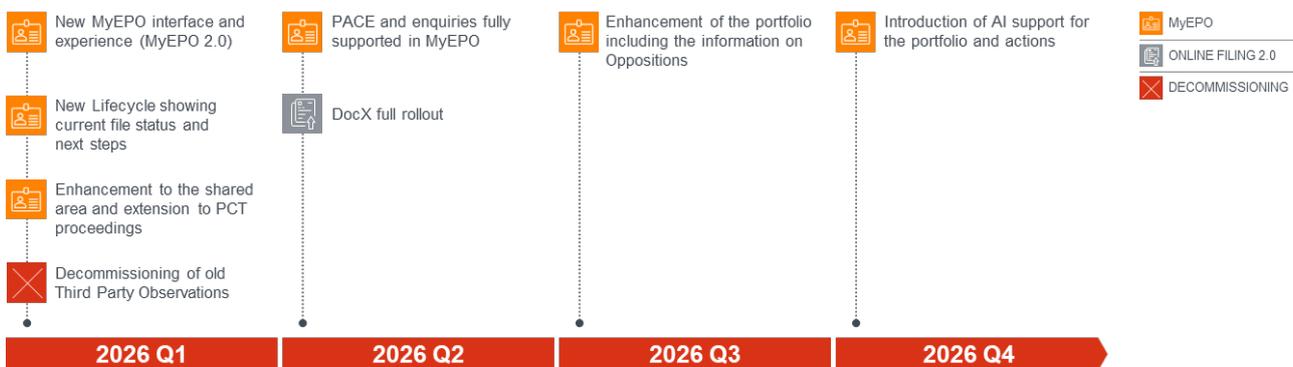
Source: EPO

Corporate Pipeline

The Corporate Pipeline aims to simplify and digitalise systems supporting the EPO's corporate functions and to ensure that both external and internal IT systems are built on **resilient and secure infrastructure**. In 2026, the Office will continue to upgrade fundamental technologies with a view to substantially improving its financial and procurement tools. We will also introduce new tools or enhance existing ones to improve

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[5] PACE are requests for accelerated processing of European patent applications. Enquiries are requests for information or clarification on the status or details of patent applications submitted to the EPO.

user experience, streamline work processes and increase efficiency across corporate functions. In this context, we will focus on four main areas: HR, finance and procurement, cross-Office improvements, and IT landscape modernisation and sustainability.

In 2026, we will use technology to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of our **HR function** by taking the following actions:

- **Simplification and digitalisation of HR processes:** New, simple **digital processes** will replace manual registration and the maintenance of staff personal data, and handling of death insurance declarations. We will also develop a **self-service tool** to enable staff to generate HR certificates by combining relevant system data with predefined text templates. These improvements will ensure that information remains up to date, while reducing the administrative burden on both HR professionals and staff.

In the areas of **finance and procurement**, we aim to improve efficiency by:

- **Digitalising the procurement plan:** Thanks to full integration with the activity-based budget, digitalising the procurement plan will foster collaboration and enhance the accuracy and reliability of procurement planning. This, in turn, will improve process efficiency while ensuring compliance with legal requirements and aligning procurement decisions with financial objectives.

- **Implementing a new Ivalua-based sourcing system:** The integration of the tender processes into our new procurement technology (Ivalua) will enable an integrated end-to-end procurement workflow from planning through contract and purchasing. This change will contribute to the efficiency, traceability and compliance of all tender procedures, facilitate supplier collaboration, and replace the legacy e-Tendering tool.

- **Implementing a new workflow for travel approval leveraging the latest SAP technology:** Following the adoption of our New Ways of Working, which has significantly reduced travel, we will leverage the SAP S/4HANA[6] platform to streamline travel management and approval workflows, eliminating unnecessary customisations to our systems. This will simplify our IT landscape, improve system maintainability and increase process efficiency, while ensuring alignment with our travel policy.

A number of improvements will affect all areas of the EPO:

- **Enhancement of AI support in corporate processes:** AI solutions will be progressively deployed to enhance efficiency, accuracy and consistency across different corporate processes. With the introduction of Copilot for various use cases, specialised AI solutions

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[6] S/4HANA is SAP's next-generation platform which integrates core business functions such as HR, finance and procurement. It enables real-time data processing, simplified data models and advanced analytics using technologies like AI and machine learning. The EPO completed migration to this platform in July 2025.

will be developed to support areas such as HR and Language Services, and expand the pilot for AI-assisted drafting of minutes for oral proceedings.

- **Implementation of the Codex 2.0:** We will simplify and digitalise the management of non-patent legal texts at the EPO. CODEX 2.0 will replace the legacy PDF-based CODEX system with a modular, editable and web-based architecture. It will offer easier access and clearer content categorisation for staff and stakeholders.

- **Implementation of the retention policy for corporate collaboration tools:** Building on the successful implementation of a retention policy for our central document management system, we will implement a retention policy also across corporate collaboration tools with a view to maintaining efficient, secure and compliant document management practices.

- **Migration of the EPO dashboards to a new platform:** The migration of the EPO dashboards to a new reporting platform, already piloted for the Unitary Patent and fees dashboards, will streamline operations by reducing manual tasks and improving efficiency. It will offer enhanced user self-service capabilities, provide faster access to comprehensive data and lower the overall costs of licensing and maintenance. This transition will also include the decommissioning of our expensive on-premises legacy solution (Tableau).

- **EPO external customer portal:** We will collaborate with our users to replace the current web form with a digitalised customer enquiry portal, enhancing self-service options, improving the efficiency of case management and increasing customer satisfaction.

Finally, we will continue to modernise our **IT landscape**, contributing to a simpler, more sustainable IT function that ensures high **availability** and a **secure** digital environment:

- **Decommissioning of VMWare infrastructure[7]**: We will decommission the final VMWare servers prior to the expiration of the current support contract in June 2026. This transition will eliminate licensing and maintenance costs, resulting in annual savings of EUR 650 000.

- **Consolidation of the Luxembourg data centre**: Given the gradual shift of systems to cloud platforms, we will start consolidating our remaining server and storage infrastructure in Luxembourg into a single room in 2026. This initiative will lower data centre leasing costs while reducing the EPO's carbon footprint through decreased electricity consumption.

- **Confidential cloud computing**: Based on a risk analysis and its recommendations for adopting confidential cloud computing (regarding encryption, for example) secure

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[7] VMWare is a software product which allows the creation of multiple virtual computers called Virtual Machines on a single physical computer, enabling more efficient usage of IT infrastructure.

environments will be deployed across the three leading (commercial) cloud platforms. By implementing these recommendations, we can securely host any EPO application or dataset in the cloud, while also reducing overall infrastructure costs.

Figure 5: SP2028 Corporate pipeline
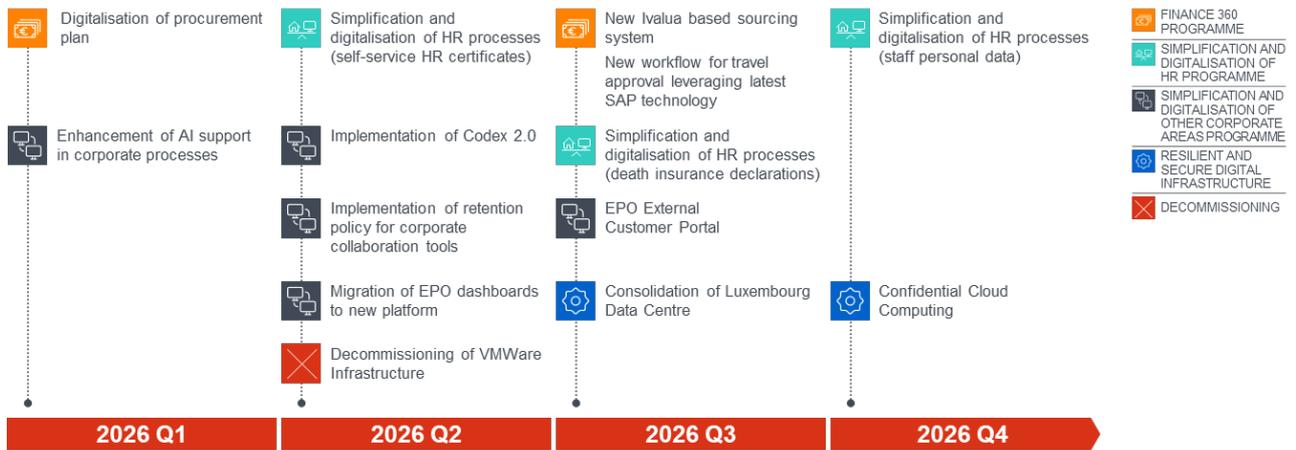
Source: EPO

Driver 2 key performance indicators

Key performance indicator (KPI)	Actual value[8]		Target 2028
Availability of IT system (internal)	99.8%	✓	**NEW**: ≥ 99.6%
Availability of IT system (external)	99.9%	✓	**NEW**: ≥ 99.6%
Digitalisation and modernisation of Patent Administration processes	29.0%	○	100%
Corporate processes digitalised	75.9%	○	≥ 90%
Leverage AI	47.2%	○	≥ 90%

○ = in progress; ✓ = target achieved

KPIs under driver 2 have progressed steadily. The two KPIs for the "Availability of IT systems" (internal and external), have already achieved the long-term SP2028 targets, consistently outperforming expectations. "Leverage AI" and "Digitalisation and modernisation of Patent Administration processes" show gradual progress towards their long-term targets. To ensure all KPIs remain relevant and challenging, the following changes will be made in 2026:

▪ **Availability of IT systems (internal/external):** Both KPIs showed strong performance throughout 2025. In view of their the progress and the continuous investments in state-of-the-art tools, the ongoing decommissioning of old legacy tools, and diligent problem management, we propose to increase the target, from 99.5% in 2025 to 99.6% in 2026.

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[8] September 2025 update, as shown on the SP2028 dashboard in October 2025.

3.   Driver 3 - High-quality, timely products and services

Improve quality throughout the PGP – complete, correct and consistent application of the EPC

Complete searches, consistent examination, fair and transparent opposition

In 2026, we will build on the progress achieved in recent years to achieve ever-higher quality throughout the PGP. Our focus is on complete and accurate searches, a consistent and harmonised approach to the application of the EPC during examination and fair and transparent opposition. Timeliness is a crucial element of quality for our applicants, their competitors and society, and we will work towards delivering our KPI timeliness targets outlined in SP2028. Embedding best practices from the active search division (ASD) will remain a priority and help us to reap the benefits of increased interaction and alignment within three-person divisions.

At search stage, our focus will be on the following aspects:

- **Enhancing the EPO's collection of non-patent literature (NPL):** We will further extend NPL coverage in our world-leading collection of prior art to facilitate higher quality prior art searching, which is a cornerstone of examination standards at the EPO.

- **Applications with CII/AI features:** The positive impact of actions taken to improve consistency in our application of the EPC and guidelines at the examination stage can be seen in both our harmonisation dashboard and in the latest user satisfaction survey (USS) results. In response to feedback in the latest survey, we will take steps to ensure that the EPC and Guidelines are applied with an even greater degree of consistency in the search and written opinion for cases involving computer-implemented inventions, AI features, and claims mixing technical and non-technical features.

- **Divisional applications:** Measures taken to speed up the publication of divisional applications have already reduced the time taken to publish such applications (from 5.8 to 2.7 months). Going a step further, we will strengthen the early assessment of EPC provisions for divisional applications, so that issues such as basis in the parent application or potential double patenting are identified and flagged to applicants at the search stage. This assessment will also be provided in the written opinion when the requirements are met, increasing transparency to applicants. Measures will be taken to make sure that examiners duly consider relevant prior art, arguments, and decisions from related opposition or appeal proceedings.

- **Coverage of fallback positions in written opinions:** Satisfaction with the coverage of independent claims improved from 74% in 2022 to 79% in 2024, but room for improvement remains in the coverage of dependent claims. Building on user feedback,

we will improve the referencing of prior-art passages relevant to dependent claims, resulting in clearer and more complete coverage of fallback positions in written opinions.

To measure transparently our actions and progress, we will continue to maintain clear and challenging KPIs for search and written opinions, focused on completeness, accuracy, and the correct assessment of novelty and inventive step.

In examination, we will take several steps to improve harmonisation and ensure the correct, consistent and complete application of the EPC, guidelines and case law:

- **Added subject-matter:** In recognition of the fact that this is a recurring finding in audits and a leading ground for revocation in opposition, we are stepping up our efforts to minimise such cases. Refresher training and practical job aids will be complemented by more complete documentation of added subject-matter checks in our communications, making quality control easier and results more transparent for users.

- **Balanced implementation of the EPC:** By renewing efforts to strike the right balance in our implementation of the EPC, we aim to avoid being overly strict or lenient. We will continue to improve the substantiation of objections, paying particular attention to clarity, limitation of claims and amendments to the description. Dialogue with users during the patent granting process will be actively encouraged to prevent misunderstandings and reduce unnecessary correspondence. Case law from the Boards of Appeal and the UPC will also be highlighted to reinforce harmonisation.

- **Third-party observations:** As a result of the analysis we carried out and the subsequent actions taken, we see an improvement in 2025 in acknowledging third-party observations in the public part of the file. Building on that work, we will focus on ensuring greater consistency in the level of detail provided in divisions' assessments of third-party observations. A follow-up study will be carried out in 2026 to measure the impact of the actions taken since the initial study in 2024.

The challenging KPIs set for examination will remain in place, combining results from Directorate Quality Audits, ex parte Board of Appeal outcomes, and user satisfaction surveys. Building on the positive progress seen in 2025, delivering these KPIs will be crucial to driving quality forward in 2026.

In opposition, we will focus on strengthening consistency and transparency to make sure that outcomes are predictable and aligned with established case law. Our priorities are:

- **Harmonisation of inventive step assessment:** Building on the 2025 opposition examiner workshop, we will expand our review of BoA decisions to cover not only revocation decisions from the Boards, but also cases where opposition divisions took a stricter approach than the Boards and cases which were remitted from the Boards back to the opposition procedure. Special attention will be paid to the use of common general

knowledge in the problem-solution approach, an area where we see scope for further harmonisation.

- **Follow-up on SQAPs findings**: The findings of the first Stakeholder Quality Assurance Panels on opposition in 2025 will be translated into targeted improvement measures that address the findings reported by the panels for each technical area.

- **Expansion of our tailored and comprehensive professional development programme for opposition examiners**: Core technical expertise will be deepened through specialised modules on advanced opposition techniques and a detailed analysis of inventive step, informed by recent Boards of Appeal decisions. Sessions will cover the selection of the closest prior art, the application of partial problems and how to handle multiple inventive step objections. Embedding innovation deeper into our practices, examiners will receive further training in AI-supported minute drafting, focusing on effective prompting while maintaining a human-centric approach, with a view to delivering minutes which are comprehensive and clear. Dedicated courses for chairs will cultivate collaborative skills, focusing on impactful communication, effective moderation within the division, and the ability to challenge opinions constructively. This will guarantee that our decision-making process remains consistently robust and collaborative.

We will track opposition outcomes against the four new KPIs introduced in 2025. These indicators will guide our quality initiatives and measure progress towards our long-term goal of closer alignment with BoA outcomes by 2028.

Maintain timeliness: bringing certainty to the market

Our timeliness targets are set out in SP2028. The timeliness of our products and services remains one of our key priorities – with the user satisfaction survey and feedback in meetings clearly demonstrating the importance of timeliness to our users. As we work towards our 2028 ambitions, we will regularly monitor and report on our performance in timeliness and ensure the timely delivery of our different products and services. A particular focus in 2026 will be on achieving search and opposition objectives.

Timely search

We aim to deliver 90% of standard searches[9] on time in 2026. As we bring the targets for our different search products into line at six months, we make it harder to hit this 90% target. During 2026, we will also reduce the time limit for national offices searches from seven months to the SP2028 target of six months – absorbing a month of extra work. With this change, our timeliness targets for 2026 for our search products will be:

- EP first and second filings: 6 months

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[9] Excluding cases with (a) a lack of unity, (b) a lack of clarity or (c) an incomplete search.

- ISA first filings: 7 months

- Searches for our national offices: 6 months (down from 7)

- Euro-PCT bis searches: 8 months.

Timely examination

In examination our focus will be on working on the right file at the right time – keeping track of the timeliness of the file, with a focus on files with a valid examination request filed before 2021. For our standard examination files, we will aim to issue 70% of standard grants[10] within 36 months.

Timely opposition

As we work through the backlog of cases (caused by the suspension of oral proceedings during the pandemic), our timeliness in 2025 did not meet users' expectations. In response, we will continue to action the oldest files first, but aim to achieve our target of finishing 70% of standard opposition files within 18 months through active file management. With our opposition stock at historically low levels, we will look to maintain a low stock level of pending cases.

End-to-end timeliness

Our target for end-to-end processing will remain 48 months from the request for a grant of an EP patent in 75% of standard cases[11]. We achieved 74.7% at the end of September. Our aim will remain to prevent delays and reduce the backlog of old files by:

- Moving the cut-off year of old files by one year to "valid examination request before 2021" so only 10 000 such files awaiting applicants' action should remain at the end of the year (at the end of September, there were only 13 500 old files pending with a valid examination request before 2020),

- Stabilising the number of examination files awaiting examiner action for more than 30 months, which numbered around 11 500 at the end of September.

Accelerating the process if necessary

To satisfy the needs of applicants who would like to accelerate the patent granting process, we will aim for each examination action to be delivered within three months if a PACE[12] request has been filed. We achieved 2.2 months at the end of September.

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[10] Excluding cases with (a) more than one request for extension of time limits to reply, (b) more than one late fee payment or (c) a request to reschedule oral proceedings.

[11] 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.

[12] Programme for accelerated prosecution of European patent applications.

With regard to responding observations from third parties, we will accelerate their processing, if those observations are substantiated and non-anonymous.

We will also continue to focus on ensuring the timely processing of divisional applications and strive to reach a decision to grant within 48 months of the filing of the divisional application in 80% of cases. We achieved 78.1% at the end of September.

Dialogue with our users

In 2026 we will continue to organise meetings with large applicants to discuss both strategic and operational topics. These high-level meetings pave the way for a technical (operational) follow-up meeting where few selected topics are discussed in greater detail. The technical meetings allow the applicant to understand better the EPO's practice in selected areas such as AI. These meetings also allow experts on both sides to exchange ideas on how to improve the patent system further.

We launched our SME outreach programme in August 2024 and by the end of 2025 we will have held over 100 such meetings. We have also expanded this outreach to universities and public research organisations (PROs). These sessions have enabled us to improve information to our smallest and emergent users, including the importance of the Unitary Patent and the fee reduction scheme for micro-entities. To extend our SME reach, we are conducting a pilot to address relevant SME organisations in a handful of member states. In 2026, we will continue to build on the experiences gained and expand our activities to include companies that have not yet used the EPO's services. We will also see a shift from one-to-one meetings with individual companies to collective meetings. In addition to our large and SME users, there is also a group of medium-sized companies (with 251 to 999 employees), which we have started to target in our endeavours, and plan to focus on in 2026.

Quality at source

Outreach meetings with SMEs have proven instrumental in getting to know our applicants and their needs from the European patent system. These meetings have also offered a unique opportunity to inform applicants of recent and future developments in patent systems and, more importantly, of the quality and timeliness of technically related files.

During these meetings, we will continue to present "quality at source" where we analyse all applications from the applicant compared to EPO averages as well as those in the related technical field. The applicant is made aware of outliers which helps them to draft and pursue applications with higher efficiency and quality. Where requested, these meetings are followed up with an in-depth technical meeting where we discuss how the drafting of the company's applications could be improved in greater detail.

Figure 6: SP2028 High-quality Products and Services Pipeline
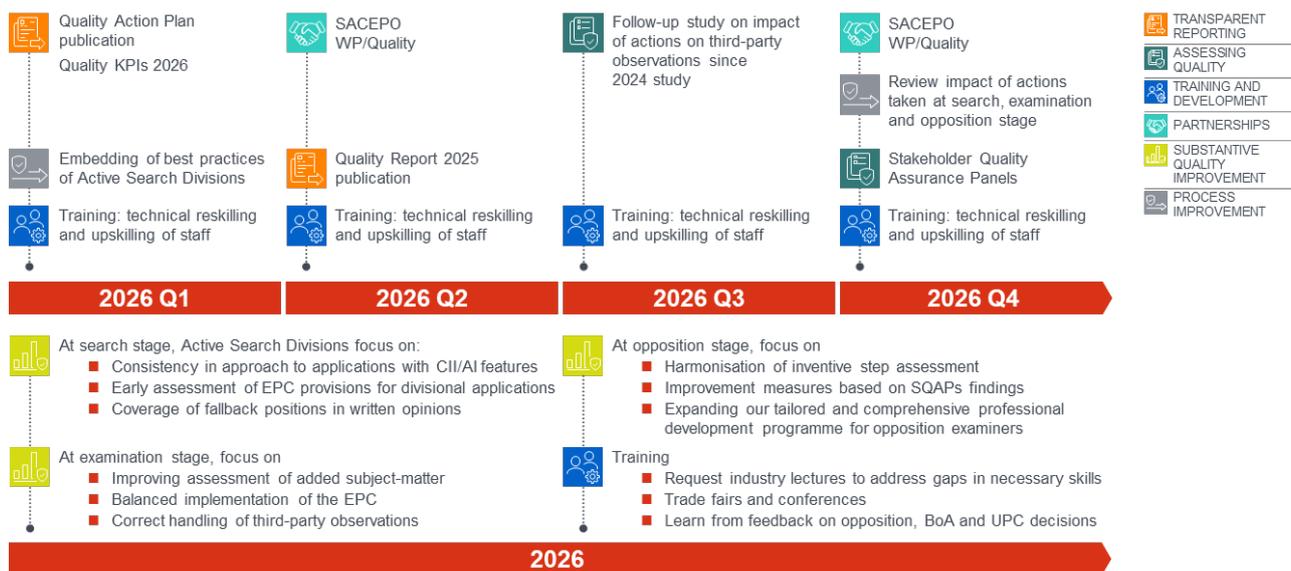
Source: EPO

Directorate Quality Audit

DQA will continue to foster continuous improvement through rigorous quality audits and by providing independent expert assessments. The quality audit dialogue process between the division and three auditors promotes joint learning. In 2026, DQA will not only report on audit statistics but will also focus on delivering actionable findings that lead to concrete improvements in the relevant technology communities. Proper independent monitoring of our quality metrics underpins sound quality management, while clear communication of insightful results ensures that corrective actions are both timely and effective. Special attention will be paid to highlighting recurring audit findings, alongside more granular and regular reporting at technology community level, so that follow-up actions can be precisely targeted and progress can be closely tracked.

Driver 3 key performance indicators

Key performance indicator (KPI)	Actual value[13]		Target 2028
Users rating our online services as good or very good	90.0%	✓	90%
Timeliness of search	85.9%	○	≥ 90%
Timeliness of examination	75.6%	✓	≥ 70%
Timeliness of oppositions	47.9%	○	≥ 75%
End-to-end timeliness	74.7%	○	≥ 75%
Timeliness of divisional applications	78.3%	○	≥ 80%
Accuracy of prior art classification	95.0%	✓	≥ 95%

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[13] October 2025 update, as shown on the SP2028 dashboard in November 2025.

Timeliness of prior art classification	85.0%	✓	≥ 80%
Quality of formalities (receiving section)	100.0%	✓	≥ 90%
Quality of formalities (opposition section)	95.5%	✓	≥ 90%
Search and written opinion: Incorrect assessment of novelty and inventive step	6.0%	◯	< 5%
Search: Closer prior art found	3.5%	✓	< 4%
Users rating our search products as good or very good	80.0%	✓	≥ 80%
Grants: Incorrect assessment of novelty or inventive step	6.4%	◯	< 5%
Grants: Findings on added subject-matter	5.1%	◯	< 5%
Boards of Appeal outcomes (ex parte) – Decision of the Board to grant a patent, which sets aside a decision of an examining division to refuse a patent	4.3%	◯	< 4%
Users rating our examination products as good or very good	79.0%	◯	≥ 80%
Boards of Appeal outcomes (inter partes) – Decision of the Board to revoke a patent based on novelty, which sets aside an opposition decision to maintain a patent	2.9%	✓	< 3%
Boards of Appeal outcomes (inter partes) – Decision of the Board to revoke a patent based on inventive step, which sets aside an opposition decision to maintain a patent	10.6%	◯	< 3%
Boards of Appeal outcomes (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	5.0%	◯	< 3%
Boards of Appeal outcomes (inter partes) – Decision of the Board to maintain a patent, which sets aside an opposition decision to maintain a patent	1.9%	✓	< 2%

◯ = in progress; ✓ = target achieved

Performance under driver 3 presents a balanced picture in 2025. In terms of timeliness, examination and end-to-end timeliness remain close to or above target, while search and oppositions continue to show room for improvement, partly reflecting the operational prioritisation of older files. Quality indicators remain solid, with both accuracy and timeliness of prior-art classification at or above target and exemplary results in formalities quality. Directorate Quality Audit (DQA) indicators continue to show incremental progress. The KPIs related to novelty and inventive step indicate a gradual decrease in findings, though they remain above the long-term target. At the same time, other DQA indicators, notably "Search: Closer prior art found", met its target, while "Grants: Findings on added subject-matter" improved markedly thanks to targeted action and is now close to target. These results confirm overall stability and continued improvement in the quality of search and examination outcomes.

User satisfaction continues to perform well across online services and search, opposition and examination products. The detailed survey results also show significant improvements in areas where quality actions were taken, such as consistency of examination. The

introduction of KPIs for Boards of Appeal outcomes provides a deeper insight into consistency between DG1 and the Boards, reinforcing the transparency of the quality monitoring framework.

For 2026, the focus will remain on improving the timeliness of oppositions, further reducing DQA findings and enhancing learning from BoA outcomes. This will be supported by the upcoming Quality Action Plan 2026.

4.   Driver 4 – Partnerships

Partnerships remain central to the EPO's strategic vision, enabling a more sustainable and innovation-driven future for Europe, the patent system, and society at large. In 2026, advancing collaboration will be crucial to meet the evolving demands of the patent landscape and its diverse stakeholders. By working closely with national patent offices, international organisations, and the user community, the EPO will foster knowledge exchange, adopt best practices and reinforce the European Patent Network. These efforts will broaden inclusivity, empower innovators and deliver a more efficient, accessible and harmonised patent framework that supports economic growth and technological progress, and benefitting society across Europe and beyond. Complementing this, the EPO's Observatory on patents and technology will continue to provide data-driven insights and expert perspectives to inform policymaking and strengthen innovation ecosystems. Through partnerships with leading institutions and dynamic stakeholder engagement, the Observatory underpins a sustainable and inclusive patent system.

European co-operation

Collaboration among European partners remains a cornerstone of the EPO's mission to shape a resilient, inclusive, and innovation-driven patent system. By working more closely with national patent offices, aligning practices, and enhancing access to shared knowledge, we aim to create a patent system that is efficient, harmonised, and accessible to all – with particular emphasis on supporting SMEs, micro-entities, and emerging innovators. The continued growth of the European Patent Network through the integration of new member states will further strengthen the EPO's commitment to a cohesive and globally relevant European patent landscape.

In 2026, we will continue to implement projects from the co-operation catalogue, evaluating their impact and tailoring it as needed in response to the needs of member states, thus ensuring that our initiatives translate into maximum tangible benefits for users and society. Similarly, search co-operation will continue with a view to freeing up capacity in national patent offices that can be better used to support local innovation ecosystems.

The following developments in European co-operation are expected to take place in 2026:

▪ **Accession of Moldova and Bosnia and Herzegovina to the EPC:** The EPO is actively supporting the Republic of Moldova and Bosnia and Herzegovina as they prepare to accede to the EPC. In close coordination with the national offices, a dedicated working group is ensuring that all of the legal, procedural and administrative arrangements are in place, including the termination of existing extension and validation agreements and arrangements for initial contributions. With these accessions, the total number of EPC contracting states will rise to 41, further strengthening the reach and impact of the European patent system.

- **Annual meeting on co-operation:** On 11 and 12 May, the heads of offices of all 39 member states, together with Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Moldova, will gather in Split, Croatia, for the annual meeting on co-operation to review progress under the current framework and set strategic priorities for the year ahead. This year's meeting holds special significance, as it marks 20 years of co-operation - two decades of shared progress and alignment across the European Patent Network (EPN). Participants will review the implementation of new bilateral co-operation agreements, evaluate the pilot phases of recently launched projects, and take stock of the key initiatives and commitments under the ongoing co-operation framework, in alignment with the SP2028.

- **Project 4.1 "Increase search and examination capacity at NPOs":** By the second half of 2026, the first phase of this new initiative - launched to support member states in addressing temporary capacity gaps in patent search and examination through the involvement of retired EPO examiners - will reach its scheduled conclusion. Through this initial stage, at least thirteen NPOs will have benefitted from expert support from retired EPO examiners, strengthening operational capacity and fostering knowledge transfer within the EPN. The insights and feedback gathered from NPOs and participating experts will inform the fine-tuning of operational arrangements going forward.

- **Implementation of search agreement with Switzerland:** Search co-operation agreements are a key element of work-sharing within the EPN. With the technical, legal and administrative preparations nearing completion, the search agreement with Switzerland is set to enter into force in summer 2026, coinciding with the implementation of Switzerland's revised Patent Act.

- **Triennial revision of search fee pricing policy (2027–2029):** The search fee pricing policy under the working agreements on search co-operation is subject to a triennial revision. The next update, covering the period 1 January 2027 to 31 December 2029, will be prepared and proposed for approval by the Administrative Council in Q4 2026.

In parallel, the EPO will continue to promote the convergence and harmonisation of legal practices, enhancing legal certainty for users and reducing barriers for innovators — notably small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) - across Europe. Major milestones ahead include:

- **Convergence of practices - conclusion of second cycle:** The convergence of practices programme has been implemented in successive cycles to harmonise patent practices across the European Patent Network. The first cycle, launched in 2020, addressed an initial set of six topics, establishing the groundwork for further alignment. The second cycle, launched in 2023, focused on six key topics organised into three pairs: "Allowable features in drawings" (WG7) and "Electronic priority documents" (WG8) – and were completed in early 2024. "Observations by third parties" (WG9) and "Practices concerning assignment" (WG10) were adopted in March 2025. "Broad claims" (WG11) and "Double patenting" (WG12) are scheduled for finalisation with the Administrative

Council's approval in March 2026. The conclusion of this second cycle will mark an important milestone in aligning patent practices and enhancing legal certainty across the European Patent Network.

- **Convergence of practices - Launch of third cycle:** Building on the second cycle's success, a third cycle will be launched as part of the Strategic Plan 2028, starting in 2026 with "Divisional applications" (WG13) and "Internet disclosures" (WG14) as the first pair of six new topics. Through this continued work, further simplification and harmonisation of procedures can be achieved across the EPN, making the patent system more efficient and accessible for all users.

- **Scheme to facilitate access to litigation advice for patent-holding micro-entities:** Linked to ongoing work focused on supporting startups and small businesses, and in close co-ordination with user associations and other international stakeholders, the EPO will further explore a potential scheme for enhancing the ability of smaller innovators to legally enforce their patents. Member states will be consulted on this concept, which aims to reduce barriers to entry to the patent system and complement existing SME and micro-entity support measures.

- **Substantive patent law harmonisation (SPLH): Proposal for a common European position:** Building on the PLC/63's unanimous support for the draft proposal for a common European position on best practice in an SPLH context, the next phase will focus on user consultations. The Office and national offices will publish the proposal for comment, with its results to be reviewed in an informal Committee on Patent Law meeting in early summer 2026. These inputs will feed into a final draft for submission to the October 2026 AC meeting for adoption. The position will guide future SPLH work within the Organisation, while remaining non-binding on national legislation or delegations' views.

Figure 7: SP2028 European Co-operation Pipeline
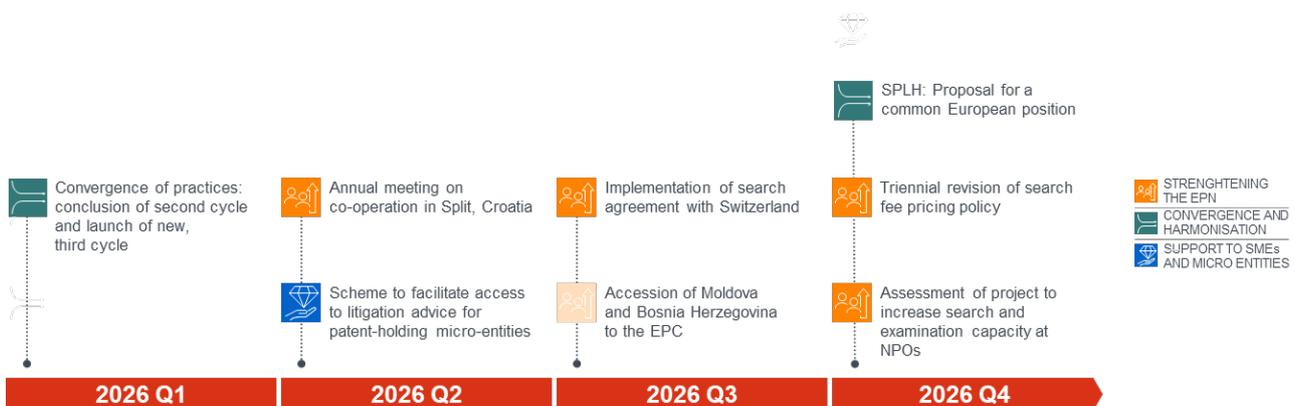
Source: EPO

IT co-operation

The IT co-operation pipeline continues to deliver the digital transformation of the IP landscape together with the EPO's key partners – primarily our member states – and other stakeholders. In 2026, the **digital toolkit** (DTK) will be the central vehicle for delivering new tools and services as functional "bricks".

▪ **Front Office, extension to portfolio:** In 2026, the initial online filing Front Office tool will be expanded to include portfolio services. This enhancement will enable national patent offices (NPOs) to provide applicants with a comprehensive overview of all their current applications and their respective statuses, improving transparency and efficiency. The first pilot of this service is scheduled to go live in Q2.

▪ **ANSERA-based SEARCH, Web Search Assistant**: The functionality of ANSERA-based SEARCH (AbS) will be significantly enhanced through the implementation of the Web Search Assistant. Already used internally at the EPO, the Web Search Assistant will enable national examiners to more easily assess the relevance of prior art by locating web-based prior art directly within the AbS databases.

▪ **Back office, first deployments:** Back office implementations are emerging as a new strategic focus within IT Cooperation, supported by the digital toolkit. In this domain, we plan to launch pilot initiatives with some member states and aim to secure NPOs' engagement with our first back office product: EP-Validation. EP-Validation digitalises the EP validation formalities and publication process, complementing the Front Office to provide a complete filing-to-publication workflow and paving the way for future back office "bricks".

▪ **Data quality, migration to new data platforms:** By the end of 2026, all search report data flows with NPOs will be fully migrated to the new data platform. Additionally, the number of full-text data flows will be expanded to further enhance data accessibility and coverage. The implementation of modern data exchange approaches, accompanied by ongoing technical and procedural support for NPOs, will lead to streamlined processes, greater efficiency and a reduction in resources.

Figure 8: SP2028 IT cooperation Pipeline

Source: EPO

Developments in patent law and the Unitary Patent

The EPO continues to drive meaningful progress in patent law, with a focus on delivering greater clarity, efficiency, and accessibility for users. Thanks to targeted reforms, updated guidelines, and digital transformation initiatives, practitioners and innovators can expect a more streamlined, reliable, and user-oriented patent system in 2026.

The following significant milestones are expected:

- **EPC, PCT-EPO and UP Guidelines 2026 published:** The 2026 editions of the EPC, PCT-EPO and Unitary Patent Guidelines will be pre-published in February and enter into force in April, following annual updates shaped by user consultation and expert discussions. Users will benefit from clearer, harmonised language, expanded gender-neutral terminology and new chapters that improve guidance on Euro-PCT procedures, fee reductions, opposition and claim clarity. These enhancements will make the Guidelines more accessible and easier to apply, supporting practitioners and EQE candidates in navigating current law and EPO practice with greater confidence and transparency.

- **Third basket of legal changes - paperless PGP:** Building on the success of the first and second baskets of legal changes to support digital transformation, the EPO is preparing a third basket focused on transitioning to an essentially paperless patent grant process (PGP) by 2027. In 2026, amendments to the EPC Implementing Regulations will be presented to the Administrative Council, with a view to further simplifying and digitalising patent procedures. Electronic filing and notification will become the standard, with safeguards to ensure accessibility for all users. These reforms will enhance service quality, flexibility and efficiency, support the EPO's sustainability goals, and make the patent grant process more streamlined and user-friendly.

- **Extension of appointment of the EPO as an International Authority under the PCT:** The EPO will advance the process for its reappointment as an International Searching and Preliminary Examining Authority under the Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT), ensuring continuity beyond the current mandate, which ends on 31 December 2027. Following the submission of its application and supporting documents, the EPO's reappointment will be reviewed by the Committee for Technical Cooperation (CTC), with subsequent steps leading to the renewal of the agreement with the International Bureau of WIPO. This process will ensure that users continue to benefit from the EPO's high-quality international search and examination services, supporting legal certainty and efficient patent procedures worldwide.

- **New disciplinary framework for professional representatives:** A comprehensive revision of the disciplinary framework for professional representatives will be implemented in 2026, marking a shift to greater self-regulation, efficiency, and transparency. The new system introduces clearer rules, proportional measures, and

improved rights for representatives - including access to public oral proceedings, the anonymised publication of decisions, and digital case management. These changes, developed collaboratively by EPO, epi and external experts, will ensure that disciplinary matters are handled independently, fairly and in a way that benefits representatives, clients and the public.

International co-operation

Building a network with global impact remains a key pillar of the EPO's strategy to establish an integrated, high-quality patent system that supports innovation and economic growth. In 2026, the EPO will continue to expand its international reach through validation agreements as its most advanced form of co-operation. These efforts will promote harmonisation, facilitate work-sharing and strengthen innovation ecosystems beyond Europe. A notable highlight in 2026 will be the Trilateral Heads meeting, which the EPO will host in Vienna. Through active engagement in multilateral and bilateral fora, the EPO will further advance digital transformation and support for innovators worldwide.

Key developments anticipated for 2026 include:

▪ **PCT ISA pilot with IP Australia:** The EPO and IP Australia will launch a two-year pilot allowing Australian applicants to designate the EPO as their International Searching Authority (ISA) and Preliminary Examining Authority (IPEA) under the PCT. This initiative will accelerate access to high-quality search and examination, offering faster processing, earlier legal certainty and removing the need for supplementary European searches for Australian users. Progress will be closely monitored and jointly evaluated, strengthening the EPO's role as a leading PCT authority and deepening international co-operation with IP Australia.

▪ **Validation agreement with Costa Rica expected to enter into force:** After the conclusion of legal and technical preparations, the validation agreement between the EPO and Costa Rica is expected to enter into force in the second half of 2026, pending the conclusion of a national legislative process. Throughout the year, the EPO will continue to engage with other potential validation partners, such as Mexico, Panama, Djibouti, Angola and Trinidad and Tobago, where formal negotiations are already underway. Other countries, including South Africa, El Salvador, Madagascar and Burundi, have shown strong interest and are being considered as potential candidates for opening formal negotiations.

▪ **Bilateral Patent Prosecution Highway with CNIPA:** The EPO and the China National Intellectual Property Administration (CNIPA) will launch a bilateral Patent Prosecution Highway (PPH) pilot programme under a newly signed Memorandum of Understanding. The initiative aims to accelerate the examination of corresponding applications, reduce the duplication of work and strengthen co-operation between the offices. Covering both

PCT and Paris Route filings, the pilot will run for an initial three-year period and will be supported by jointly developed guidelines and regular evaluations.

Figure 9: SP2028 International Co-operation, Legal Development and Unitary Patent Pipeline
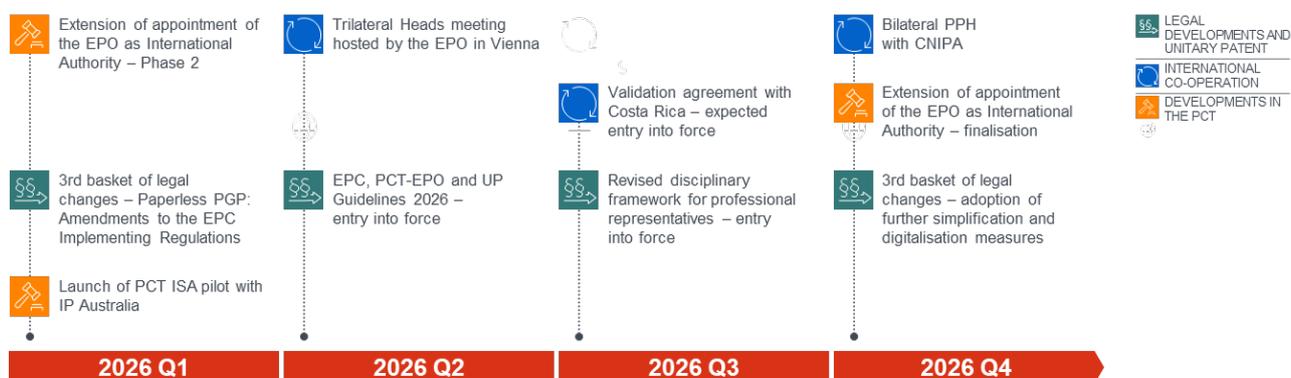
Source: EPO

Increasing skills and knowledge

To achieve its strategic objective of strengthening IP skills and knowledge, the EPO will continue to promote learning, awareness and capacity-building across the innovation ecosystem. Through the European Patent Academy and in close collaboration with member states, national patent offices and a wide range of partners, the EPO aims to equip users with the knowledge and tools to navigate the patent system effectively.

In 2026, its efforts will focus on improving the accessibility, inclusiveness and quality of learning opportunities. All initiatives will be guided by the principles of co-operation, digitalisation, modularity and certification under SP2028. The EPO will further expand modular learning paths, strengthen certification schemes and make greater use of advanced e-learning technologies to foster a culture of continuous learning and professional excellence. These initiatives will support innovation, technology transfer and sustainable growth across Europe and beyond.

The European Patent Academy's 2026 Catalogue offers 148 activities and nearly 1 900 hours of training across patent granting, information, technology transfer and litigation. Incorporating feedback from national patent offices, PATLIBs and other stakeholders, it introduces new EQE and EPAC modules, advanced ANSERA-based SEARCH tool training and new courses for a wide range of audiences – from professionals to students.

In parallel, the EPO remains committed to reinforcing the PATLIB network. It will focus on enhancing the value and reach of PATLIB services to deliver measurable benefits across the innovation ecosystem. Throughout 2026, the EPO will systematically assess and monitor impact to ensure that all initiatives contribute to the PATLIB 2028 objectives.

Together, the Academy's expanded, impact-driven offer and the strengthened PATLIB network support continuous improvement, sustainable growth and greater value for all stakeholders across Europe. Highlights in 2026 will include:

- **European Qualifying Examination (EQE) modernisation:** The phased rollout of the revised EQE will continue in 2026, following the entry into force of the new regulation on 1 January 2025. Next year will mark the final sitting of the legacy main exam papers (A, B, C and D), as well as the introduction of new modular papers M1 and M2. These changes reflect a broader shift towards a more flexible and skills-based assessment framework. Training support will remain a priority, with tailored resources and mock papers designed to help candidates prepare for the new structure.

- **Modular IP Education Framework (MIPEF):** The framework remains a cornerstone of the Academy's training offer for academia, bridging the gap between academic learning and real-world IP practice. In 2026, both spring and autumn editions will be delivered, along with the introduction of a new course tailored for MBA and Master of Laws students. With 90 universities from 28 countries already part of the MIPEF network, the programme continues to expand its reach and integration into university curricula.

- **Children and youth learning modules:** Building on efforts to inspire younger generations, in 2026 the Academy will work with European Schools and member states to roll out four modules of its Children and Youth learning initiative. Aimed at children aged 9 to 17, the courses - *From curiosity to innovation*, *Innovation through history*, *Innovation for a better world*, and *Tech meets culture* - will be made freely available to member states, along with supporting toolkits for teachers. To complement this learning offer, targeted sponsorship for science fairs, contests and STEM outreach activities will also be provided.

- **ANSERA-based SEARCH (AbS) training:** For member states, NPO employees have access to a tailored offer that combines 240 hours of live learning activities with on-demand exchange workshops. The Academy will continue to expand its offer of AbS training, combining courses for beginners and experienced users with an advanced workshop and train-the-trainer sessions for experts in national patent offices to develop their own in-house programmes. To complement these activities, an open-access online course available 24/7 will provide tutorials, self-assessments and a discussion forum, ensuring continuous learning and peer exchange among ANSERA-based SEARCH tool users.

- **Modular European Patent Administration Certification (EPAC):** The EPO will launch a modular version of the EPAC, replacing the current two-part format with four independent topical modules. Completion of individual modules will be recognised by a standalone diploma and completion of all four modules will lead to the full EPAC certificate. This reform aims to improve accessibility, broaden participation, and streamline exam delivery, while maintaining the existing syllabus and level of rigour.

Throughout the year, the Academy will continue to deliver a rich programme of conferences aimed at fostering professional development, knowledge exchange and engagement with key stakeholders. Major events will include **Search and Examination Matters** and **Opposition Matters**, both organised in co-operation with the epi, focusing on procedural interaction and opposition practice. The **2026 PATLIB Conference**, the network's flagship annual event, will bring together the EPO, national offices, stakeholders and PATLIB centres to exchange insights, explore new tools and advance co-operation in line with PATLIB 2028. The **Boards of Appeal Case Law** conference will provide insights into recent decisions and legal developments, while the **European Judges' Forum** and **Litigation Matters** will bring together leading experts to discuss patent litigation, including developments under the Unified Patent Court (UPC).

Figure 10: SP2028 Increasing Skills and Knowledge Pipeline

Source: EPO

Improving access to technology and patent insights

The **EPO's Observatory on Patents and Technology** connects evidence, data and expert perspectives on innovation in Europe. It provides policymakers, researchers and businesses with insights into how patents and related IP rights drive technological progress - working closely with national patent offices across EPO member states, and with key partners like other European and international organisations, research universities or startups.

For the period **2026-2027**, the Observatory's new **Biennial Work Plan** builds on the achievements of its first programme. Developed through a public consultation and in co-ordination with our member states, it uses EPO data and expertise to better understand how innovation and technology shape Europe's future. It will also continue to apply its model of dynamic engagement, gathering targeted stakeholder groups for each project that will develop to ensure complementary expertise and a plurality of views: it will strengthen its collaboration with leading institutions such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations' Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL), the International Energy Agency (IEA), the European association for professionals involved in knowledge and technology transfer (ASTP) and the

Fraunhofer Institute among others. The Observatory will also continue to regularly reach out to European Inventor Network (EIN), the Pan-European Seal (PES) universities, the PATLIB centres and LESI, promoting broad dissemination.

In 2026, the Observatory will focus on the following projects, divided in different areas:

Shaping a brighter future with technology

By highlighting technological solutions for sustainability and wellbeing, the following projects will show how innovation and the patent system are a powerful force for positive change.

- **Circularity in battery technologies (April 2026):** A study on patent trends in battery recycling and reuse, revealing how innovation supports a sustainable energy transition.

- **AI and medicine (November 2026):** An in-depth look at how artificial intelligence is transforming healthcare, using patent data to track adoption across medical fields.

Empowering innovation actors

The following projects will support and showcase the relevant role of the people and institutions behind innovation as another key focus:

- **Women in STEM (February 2026):** Using new data to analyse women's representation and career progression in science and technology, with a spotlight on key transition points like entrepreneurship and patenting.

- **Technology Transfer Offices and spinouts (October 2026):** A study of best practices and challenges in patent commercialisation and spinout creation, strengthening Europe's capacity to turn research into impact.

- **Reaching out to high-tech startups (throughout 2026):** A joint initiative with national offices to provide startups with tools, knowledge and visibility at major innovation events across Europe.

Breaking barriers to the innovation ecosystem

To keep Europe's innovation system globally competitive, the Observatory will deepen its analysis of how intellectual property interacts with policy priorities like standards, finance and economic growth through the following projects:

- **IPR-intensive industries and economic performance in the EU (January 2026, with EUIPO):** Measuring the contribution of IP-intensive sectors to Europe's economy.

- **IP rights and innovation in Latin America (May 2026, with CEPAL):** Extending the analysis to a new regional context.

- **Standards and the European patent system (July 2026):** Mapping the evolving relationship between patents and technology standards, including new insights on Standard Essential Patents (SEPs) and fair, reasonable, and non-discriminatory (FRAND) licencing.

- **Mapping institutions that lend against IP (December 2026):** Identifying banks and lenders that accept patents as collateral, improving transparency and access to finance for innovators.

Tools and data platforms

To support all three themes, the Observatory will expand its **digital ecosystem**. A new **Data Desk** will provide direct access to datasets and indicators, while key platforms such as the **Deep Tech Finder,** the **Technology Platforms**, the **Technology Investor Score**, the **Patent Standards Explorer** and the **Digital Library on Innovation** among others will be upgraded to deliver richer data and improved usability. Overall, these tools will reinforce the Observatory's role as a central, data-driven hub for understanding and shaping Europe's innovation landscape.

Supporting European authorities to deliver on their innovation agenda

In 2024, Enrico Letta and Mario Draghi published their landmark reports on European competitiveness requested by the European Commission. The European authorities are expected to deliver on a heavy innovation agenda to translate the recommendations made in these reports into reality, as illustrated by the EU competitiveness compass and the EU start-up and scale-up strategy in 2025. Further policies are to follow in 2026, such as the EU Biotech Act or the Quantum Act in 2026. In the context of its partnership agreements, the Office will continue to support the European Commission with its expertise, especially DG Research and Innovation. It will also reinforce its support to the European Innovation Council and its executive agency (EISMEA) in helping them to assess the technological background of projects filed by deep tech start-ups in order to obtain EU funding.

Review of the Scenarios for the future

In 2007, the Office published the study called ["Scenarios for the Future"](#) a novel and inventive approach of imagining how the future of IP could look like in 2025 The visionary study was a first of its kind at a time when strategic foresight was barely known to the IP world and it remains today as an inspirational work and a reference to many IP offices and policy makers in Europe and globally. Having reached this landmark, the Office decided to revisit these assumptions and scenarios and to engage in a new strategic foresight exercise aiming to reflect upon how the innovation system might evolve in the next two decades and what will be the role of the IP system and of IP offices. Under the aegis of the Observatory, multiple stakeholders are invited to participate to this collective exercise, whose outcomes will be presented in October 2027. Consultations with the AC delegations will start in 2026.

Figure 11: SP2028 Observatory Pipeline
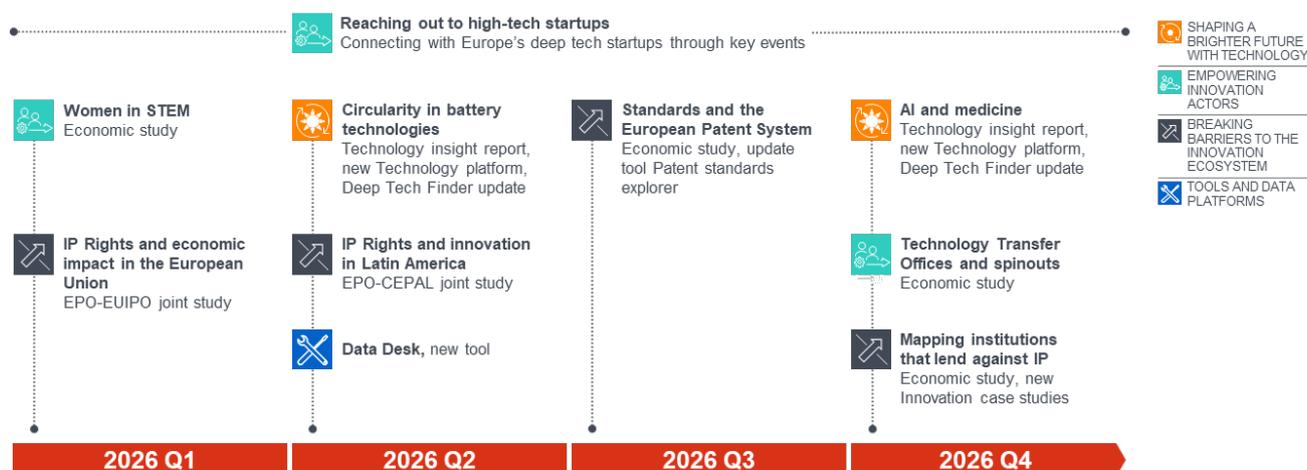
Source: EPO

Driver 4 key performance indicators

Key performance indicator (KPI)	Actual value[14]		Target 2028
IT co-operation	141 IT projects implemented	◯	240
Convergence of practice	77.9%	◯	≥ 90%
Validation agreements	16 validation agreements	✓	≥ 14
Modular IP education framework in university curricula	65 universities	◯	≥ 80
Pan-European Seal universities that offer STEM degrees	82.1%	◯	≥ 90%
Patent Intelligence	8 technology platforms	◯	≥ 14
PATLIB network training	6.0%	◯	40%
PATLIB network certifications	12.0%	◯	≥ 20%
Observatory on Patents and Technology	234 000 views	✓	**NEW for 2026**: 257 400 views

◯ = in progress; ✓ = target achieved

As most KPIs under driver 4 are updated annually, the majority of the 2025 values are not yet available and will be published in early 2026. Based on the latest updates reported this year, the "Observatory on Patents and Technology" exceeded its annual target, reaching 234 000 views; "Modular IP education framework in university curricula" expanded from 40 to 65 universities as of June 2025, with the end of year update expected to show another notable increase; and the share of "Pan-European Seal universities that offer STEM degrees" rose to 82.1% in June 2025. The following changes will be introduced from 2026:

- **IT co-operation**: Considering the dynamic nature of this KPI, which monitors the number of IT co-operation projects implemented by national patent offices (NPOs), members of

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[14] October 2025 update, as shown on the SP2028 dashboard in November 2025.

the European Patent Network (EPN) and other partners, the KPI update frequency will shift from annual to quarterly. This change will enable timelier monitoring and reporting of implementation progress.

- **Observatory on Patents and Technology**: This KPI measures public engagement with the Observatory's innovation-related content, tracking the total number of views across its digital platforms, including the website, studies, events, and tools such as the Deep Tech Finder, Digital Library, and Patent Standards Explorer. Following the outperformance of the 2025 target (152 900 views), it is proposed to increase the 2026 target by 10% to 257 400 views.

5.   Driver 5 – Financial sustainability

Safeguarding the EPO's financial sustainability is one of the key drivers of the Strategic Plan 2028. As a self-financed organisation, the EPO must ensure that it remains resilient to external shocks and capable of meeting its long-term obligations, including full funding of its pension and social security liabilities. Building on the progress made in 2025, the Office will continue to implement the recommendations of the **Financial Study**, further strengthening its capacity to manage risk, guarantee transparency and maintain financial stability in a volatile global environment.

Phase I of the Financial Study (2023) confirmed that the measures adopted in 2020 – cash injections, user fee increases, contribution increases and the moderation of salary adjustments – improved the Office's long-term financial position through joint efforts. However, it also highlighted ongoing exposure to inflation and market volatility. Phase II (2024), building on the first phase, delivered an a**sset liability management** study and issued key recommendations to enhance the robustness of the EPO's funding model.

In 2025, the Office acted on these recommendations by formalising its risk tolerance at a 66% probability of reaching long-term return targets and revising the mandate of the Actuarial Advisory Group (AAG) accordingly. To further limit exposure to market volatility, the Office defined financial security buffers and began allocating EPOTIF (EPO Treasury Investment Fund) assets accordingly. In parallel, it established a comprehensive **risk management and monitoring framework**, consolidating key indicators into a single dashboard to support timely and informed decision-making, and shared the dashboard with the governing bodies to promote transparency.

In 2026, the EPO will focus on:

- **Cascading the newly defined EPO risk tolerance through the organisation**: In 2025, the risk tolerance was formalised at a 66% probability of reaching return targets on financial assets. The AAG mandate has been aligned accordingly, resulting in higher contributions that should be applied as of 2026 based on AAG recommendations. This will help to enhance the financing of pension and social security schemes.

- **Insourcing of the EPOTIF asset management to RFPSS administration as a separate mandate**: This measure will enable the Office to realise synergies by leveraging the new RFPSS multi-fund platform without merging the two funds, while preserving their distinct governance and risk-return profiles. Insourcing EPOTIF will cut costs by eliminating external asset management fees. If endorsed by the Administrative Council in December 2025, the EPO will prepare the necessary technical adaptations and regulatory amendments during 2026 to enable it to proceed with the transfer in the first quarter of 2027.

- **Continue building financial security buffers:** Phase II of the Financial Study defined a target funding level of 105% for all benefit liability plans. A dedicated funding plan outlined the available funding sources and provided the path to fully fund benefit liabilities no later than 2030. In this context, and within the timeline outlined in the Financial Study, the Office plans to maintain the sustainability buffer of EUR 1bn and the operational reserve buffer of EUR 2.5bn, and fully fund the EUR 2.0bn salary adjustment method buffer established in EPOTIF to cater for the risks associated with ongoing litigation on the salary adjustment method.

- **Review of the salary adjustment method:** The current salary adjustment method was adopted by the Administrative Council in 2020 for a period of six years. The proposal for the new method will be submitted to the Council in March 2026 (for opinion), the BFC in May 2026 (for opinion), and the Council in June 2026 (for decision).

- **Risk management and monitoring framework**: Following the establishment of a risk management and monitoring framework in 2025, the EPO implemented a dashboard displaying financial risk KPIs grouped in three categories (strategic, macro-economic and operational), which is available to the member states via the Single Access Portal. In 2026, the EPO will continue to monitor each KPI against the relevant values defined in the base case scenario of the Financial Study, to promptly identify and address any major risks that could potentially derail it from the path to long-term financial sustainability.

Figure 12: SP2028 Financial Sustainability Pipeline
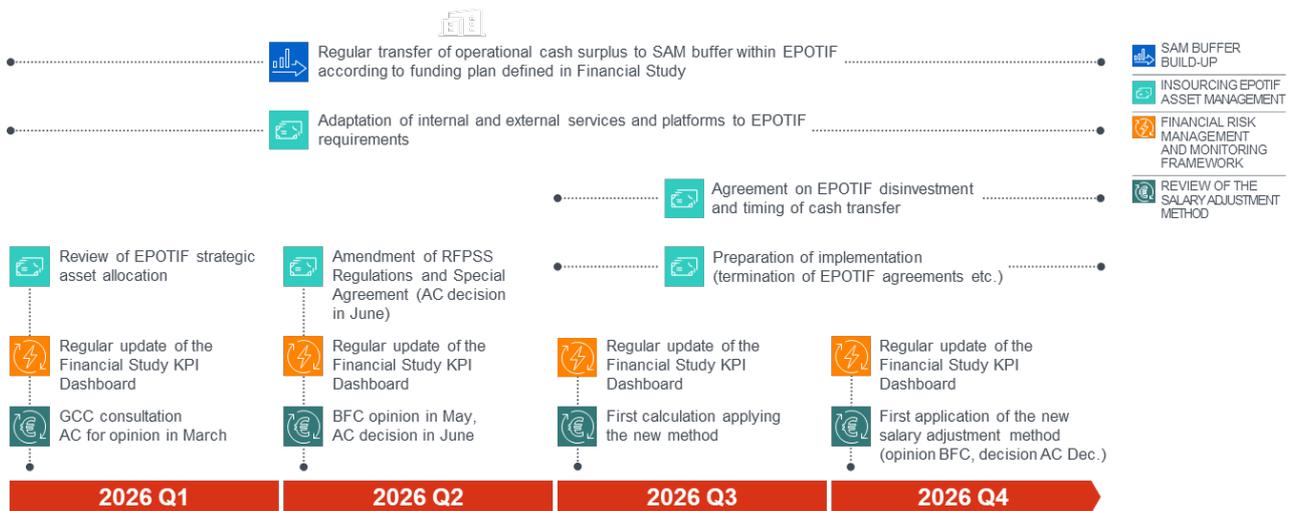
Source: EPO

Driver 5 key performance indicators

Key performance indicator (KPI)	Actual value[15]		Target
Productivity	115.2 SEO products per FTE	✓	**NEW for 2026**: 120.5
Plan production	0% deviation	✓	2028: ≥ -2%
Funding level	80.1%	○	2032: ≥ 105%

○ = in progress; ✓ = target achieved

Financial sustainability KPIs show continued improvement. Productivity exceeded the 2025 target, leading to a new goal for 2026. Production plan implementation remains fully on track at 0% deviation. The funding level has improved to 80.1% and is on track towards the 105% target by 2032.

- **Productivity:** In line with the DG1 Medium-Term Business Plan 2025-2029, the new objective is 120.5 SEO products per full-time employee (FTE) in 2026, up from 114.4 SEO products per FTE in 2025.

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[15] October 2025 update, as shown on the SP2028 dashboard in November 2025.