

Quality Report 2025

Annex to the Annual Review



Contents

1.	The EPO's transparent framework for targeted quality actions	6
1.1	Ensuring quality at the EPO	6
1.2	Public Quality Action Plans and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)	7
2.	People: developing and investing in talents	9
2.1	Actions taken to attract and retain highly talented people	9
2.2	Actions to train and develop staff	10
3.	Technologies: developing and improving tools to support quality	15
3.1	Actions to develop tools in-house and harness the potential of AI	15
3.2	Actions taken to grow the world's most extensive prior art databases	20
3.3	Quality results	21
4.	Quality, timely products and services: filing, routing and classification	23
4.1	Actions taken to improve the quality of filing	23
4.2	Actions taken to improve the quality of routing and classification	25
4.3	Quality results	26
5.	Quality, timely products and services: search and written opinion	27
5.1	Actions taken to improve the quality of our searches and written opinions	28
5.2	Search and written opinion data	29
5.3	Quality results	32
6.	Quality, timely products and services: examination	36
6.1	Actions to improve the quality of our examination	37
6.2	Examination data and outcomes	40
6.3	Quality results	46
7.	Quality, timely products and services: opposition	51
7.1	Actions to improve the quality of opposition	52
7.2	Opposition data and outcomes	53
7.3	Quality results	56
8.	Partnerships: sharing responsibility for high quality	58

8.1	Actions taken to refine our shared understanding of patent quality and jointly assess quality	58
8.2	Quality results	61
9.	Conclusions and outlook for 2025	63
10.	Annex – Stakeholder Quality Assurance Panels	65
10.1	The SQAPs programme 2025	65
10.2	SQAPs findings on search reports and written opinions	66
10.3	SQAPs findings on granted patents	68
10.4	SQAPs findings on oppositions	69
10.5	Actions following up on SQAPs findings	71

Executive summary

Granting patents fully complying with the provisions of the European Patent Convention (EPC) is the EPO's primary objective. During 2025, we took steps to improve further our reputation for quality by hiring and training highly qualified staff, developing our powerful tools and systems and listening to users. We evaluated the progress made by various means, including the 2024/2025 User Satisfaction Survey (USS), which had over 8 000 respondents, and the Stakeholder Quality Assurance Panels (SQAPs).

Our shared understanding of quality is set out in the Patent Quality Charter which was published on 1 October 2022. Our actions and goals are defined each year in the annual Quality Action Plan. Alongside the Quality action plan, we publish the Quality dashboard to allow our users to track our performance. As one of the actions from the Quality Action Plan 2024 we developed new KPIs for the Quality dashboard which were published in 2025.

Quality at the EPO is built on a highly skilled, adaptable workforce supported by detailed technical and legal training. During 2025, we onboarded 108 examiners, technical training of examiners was improved with new Industry Lectures and increased opportunities for examiners to attend conferences and trade fairs. With the increasing relevance of AI as a tool, a mandatory training programme, the AI Explorer Pass, was introduced to provide all staff with a foundational understanding of AI. On the legal side, the e-learning module on the changes to the Guidelines for Examination was updated and made mandatory for all examiners. Learning from others and sharing of knowledge is one of our key strengths and a total of 117 peer-to-peer continuous knowledge transfer events took place for examiners and formalities officers.

In line with the EPO's human-centric AI policy, we continued to enhance our AI-based tools in areas including classification, pre-search, search and started to explore AI in support of our examination processes. We also significantly strengthened digital filing services, including full support for colour and greyscale drawings. Progress on quality was made in all areas of the patent granting process (PGP). In formalities, our operational quality control checks found that 96.8% of files were handled correctly by the receiving section while in the USS 92% of respondents rated the support service provided by EPO formalities officers as good or very good. In search, in 2025 we focused on further embedding the best practices of the Active Search Division. By the end of the year, there were measurable improvements in search quality: 94% of audited files had no findings affecting validity, up from 92.6% in 2024, and 80% of USS respondents rated our search products as good or very good.

At the examination stage, targeted actions were taken to increase consistency in applying the EPC, strengthen checks on added subject-matter, improve the assessment of clarity and ensure the correct handling of third-party observations (TPO). Looking at our results, we can see that the rating for consistency of examination in the USS rose to 73%, up from 59%. We achieved our KPI on added subject matter, with 4.6% at the end of 2025 versus a target of <5%. We saw a measurable improvement in the handling of TPOs and in the USS, 79% of respondents rated our examination products as good or very good.

Audits at grant stage are also essential to ensure that examination practice remains consistently aligned with the EPC. The proportion of grant files with no findings affecting validity rose from 87.3% to 88.8%.

On timeliness in the examination phase, we delivered 75.8% of grants within 36 months from request for examination. For end-to-end timeliness, from filing to grant, we achieved 74.8% within 48 months.

In 2025, we implemented measures to enhance the consistency of inventive step reasoning in oppositions, based on analysis of Board of Appeal decisions. To broaden our assessment of quality at the opposition stage, the 2025 SQAPs programme included the first dedicated session on opposition decisions. We have continued to reduce the number of pending oppositions and improved our timeliness with 51.6% of cases completed within 18 months in 2025, up from 38.1% in 2024. In the USS, 72% of respondents rated our opposition procedure as good or very good; however, we know that user satisfaction in opposition is closely linked to the timeliness of the process and there is still room for improvement.

As mentioned earlier, user feedback is critical to maintain quality. In 2025, the SACEPO Working Party on Quality met twice and we held 130 meetings with representatives from SMEs, micro-entities, user associations, larger corporations, universities and public research organisations. These meetings helped us listen and respond to a broad spectrum of perspectives, across all sectors and from applicants of all sizes. The fourth online user Day in September 2025 attracted 9 000 viewers from 68 countries and we also partnered with users to organise conferences covering key aspects of quality across the PGP.

2025 was a very strong year for quality at the EPO with clear and measurable progress in all areas. We will build further on this through the Quality Action Plan 2026.

1. The EPO's transparent framework for targeted quality actions



KEY STRENGTHS

- **Patent Quality Charter:** sets out our joint understanding of what quality means and the principles that guide our work
- **Multiple lenses to assess quality:** internally through quality audits, jointly with our users through stakeholder quality assurance panels (SQAPs) and independently through user satisfaction surveys
- **ISO 9001-certified Quality Management System:** provides an internationally recognised, rigorous framework
- **Public Quality Action Plans, Quality Dashboard and Quality Reports:** provide transparency and regular updates on our goals, actions and progress



QUALITY ACTION PLAN 2025: KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- **Developed and published new key performance indicators (KPIs)** based on Boards of Appeal decisions
- **Expanded the scope of the Quality Report** providing further data requested by users and a more comprehensive account of the impact of the Quality Action Plan

Commitment to quality lies at the heart of all EPO activities. Ensuring that the patents we grant fully comply with the provisions of the European Patent Convention (EPC) is our primary objective. This requires hiring Europe's top talent, providing them with comprehensive training, equipping all staff with state-of-the-art tools and maintaining robust systems that safeguard the quality of our work.

We are continuously improving on our reputation for quality by listening to users, analysing internal data and implementing targeted, annual Quality Action Plans. To ensure transparency and accountability, we regularly publish our plans, goals and quality reports.

1.1 Ensuring quality at the EPO

Quality is a journey and a responsibility that is shared by patent offices, representatives and applicants. The Patent Quality Charter¹ – developed together with the EPO's staff, users and member states – sets out our joint understanding of what quality means and the principles that guide our work.

Building on these foundations, we have expanded the way we assess quality. We have extended and refined our quality audits and introduced highly valued feedback channels, such as our Ombuds Office service. We introduced and continue to refine our highly appreciated annual Stakeholder Quality Assurance Panels (SQAPs) and expanded our biennial user satisfaction surveys. These activities provide us multiple lenses through which to view and assess quality.

¹ epo.org/en/about-us/services-and-activities/quality/charter

Finally, our ISO 9001 certified Quality Management System provides an internationally recognised, rigorous framework, under which all these elements are brought together.

Figure 1 – Ensuring quality at the EPO



Source: EPO

Alongside the Patent Quality Charter and our feedback mechanisms, our constant and thorough operational checks ensure that we apply quality principles across the Patent Granting Process (PGP). Quality is already built directly into the EPC, which shapes the way that we work and collaborate diligently in three-person divisions.² In-process operational quality controls are performed by managers and senior expert examiners. The work of formalities officers is also monitored, and the work of opposition divisions undergoes operational quality checks by directors.

Quality audits are undertaken by Directorate Quality Audit (DQA), which is a dedicated, internal unit, independent of the operational area. Specially trained auditors review the quality of search, examination and opposition work, as well as the work of formalities officers, providing an additional impartial layer of evaluation of how divisions and formalities officers apply the regulations.

The random sampling of search products and proposals for grant is integrated into the digital workflow of operations. Sampled files are routed to auditors immediately after the division and line manager checks, allowing for any corrective actions to be taken before products are dispatched.

1.2 Public Quality Action Plans and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

In 2024, we strengthened the joint understanding of quality set out in the Patent Quality Charter by making our long-standing internal Quality Action Plan public for the first time. This responded to the wishes of users and member states for greater transparency regarding our actions and the progress we make in implementing them.

² Search, examination and opposition divisions; Articles 17, 18 and 19 EPC respectively.

To complement the Quality Action Plan and enable our users and member states to track our performance, we also published the Quality dashboard.³ This presents regularly updated KPIs derived from DQA and user satisfaction survey results.

In 2025, we developed and published new KPIs based on Boards of Appeal (BoA) decisions in consultation with the BoA and the SACEPO Working Party on Quality – demonstrating our ongoing commitment to transparent and measurable quality goals, actions and performance. We also expanded the scope of the annual Quality Report to include topics requested by users, and we enriched it with additional data to provide a more comprehensive account of the impact of the previous year's Quality Action Plan.

All quality-related data gathered internally is routinely assessed and cross-referenced with other data and user feedback. The resulting analysis shows where we are performing well and where action is needed, providing the basis for each annual Quality Action Plan.

The Quality Action Plan 2025 targeted key areas across the PGP, guiding investments in people, technologies and tools. This report provides detailed insights into the progress we made as a result of implementing the plan.⁴

Figure 2 – Overview of the Quality Action Plan 2025



Source: EPO

³ epo.org/en/about-us/services-and-activities/quality/quality-dashboard

⁴ link.epo.org/web/services-and-activities/quality/en-quality-action-plan-2025.pdf

2. People: developing and investing in talents



KEY STRENGTHS

- **A magnet for top European talent:** The EPO attracts and retains highly qualified professionals, investing heavily to ensure their knowledge remains at the cutting edge
- **Continuous learning at every stage:** From the newcomer academy to advanced legal, technical and tools training, staff are supported throughout their careers
- **Structured training ecosystem:** Digitally managed skills framework, Individual Development Plans (IDPs), knowledge sharing culture and tailored learning paths support career mobility, strategic alignment and continuous improvement



QUALITY ACTION PLAN 2025: KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- **Recruited** 145 highly skilled staff members, including 108 patent examiners
- **Expanded technical training** opportunities - over 350 examiners participated in 82 conferences and trade fairs
- **Launched new Industry Lectures series** for examiners to learn directly from major applicants in their technical areas
- **Introduced mandatory AI explorer pass**, providing all staff with a foundational understanding of AI, its capabilities, limitations and responsible use in line with the EPO's AI Policy
- **Held regular learning events** covering topics such as inventive step, third-party observations, Boards of Appeal case law and SQAPs findings

Quality at the EPO is deeply connected with our experienced staff. As a knowledge-based organisation, we invest heavily to ensure that our patent examiners remain at the cutting edge of technology. Our ability to attract and retain Europe's best talent, combined with very low staff turnover,⁵ ensure that our users can always rely on the valuable skills and knowledge our highly expert professionals have built up over many years. Maintaining this knowledge is not only important during our employees' careers at the EPO, but also when they choose to leave us. At that point, careful offboarding ensures their accumulated knowledge and experience is retained in our organisation.

Building on this strong base, in 2025 we continued to develop our people through targeted recruitment, expanded technical training, and a more structured approach to reskilling in fast-growing technical fields. These actions support our long-term goal of maintaining a highly skilled, adaptable workforce capable of meeting the evolving needs of users in a rapidly changing world.

2.1 Actions taken to attract and retain highly talented people

As outlined in the Quality Action Plan 2025, one of our highest priorities is to match the skills and competencies of our staff with changes in filing volumes across different areas of technology. By leveraging our established pipeline of suitable candidates, targeted recruitment can take place swiftly, ensuring that our

⁵ For more information, see the EPO's Social Report, which is published as an annex to the Annual Review.

users' needs are addressed in a timely fashion, especially in areas with strongly increasing filing activity.

For example, battery-related applications have increased dramatically in recent years, going from around 3 000 filings in 2021 to almost 9 000 in 2025. In response, the EPO has more than doubled the number of its patent examiners in this technical area, through a combination of recruitment and reskilling from related technical fields. This targeted expansion and reskilling is a clear example of our broader strategy to meet users' needs in rapidly developing technologies while maintaining our high level of substantive quality and timeliness.

2.2 Actions to train and develop staff

At the EPO, learning begins as soon as new staff accept their job offer. Training and development is a career-long process, continuously keeping examiners up to date with legal changes, advances in their technical fields and developments in the tools they use. Line managers guide the assessment of their staff's individual skills and needs through performance management, goal setting, individual development plans and focused learning. Our flexible, digitally managed skills framework aligns our staff's talent management with evolving business needs.

In 2025, this skills framework continued to be delivered with impact, offering structured newcomer training, individual development planning, opportunities for reskilling and retraining, extensive peer to peer learning, role specific programmes, technical training, tools training, regular legal updates and more.

Figure 3 – Overview of EPO training in the patent granting process



Source: EPO

Initial training

Of the 145 highly skilled people who joined us in 2025, we onboarded 108 examiners. The initial training programme delivers harmonised modules to develop the skills that all new examiners require. Continual feedback from course participants, presenters, coaches and PGP managers helps course designers implement improvements year on year.

New examiners benefit from 55 full classroom training days spread over their first two years at the EPO. During this time they work closely together with, and under

the supervision of, at least two highly experienced coaches. Through this combination of classroom training, coaching and their work within examining divisions, new examiners rapidly bring their skills up to the required level. The Active Search Division (see chapter 5) offers newcomers a further opportunity for on-the-job learning.

In 2025, newcomer training was further enhanced by the offer of specialised modules on computer implemented inventions and biomedical exclusions. Other new modules covered advanced searching with our search tool ANSERA, quality management and the Unitary Patent system. In addition, training material on clarity was reviewed and updated as a direct response to shared learning outcomes from the international clarity workshop with users held at the end of 2024.

Technical training: new Industry Lectures series

As set out in the Quality Action Plan 2025, a new Industry Lectures programme was launched to help ensure that examiners' knowledge remains at the cutting edge. Leading industry experts offered training sessions with in-depth technical insights into specific domains of some of the fastest-growing technology areas.

Three Industry Lectures were held in 2025, covering biodegradable polymers, structural heart technology and quantum computing. While primarily intended for examiners working directly in these areas, the lectures were open to all interested colleagues. Building on the success of these and integrating lessons learned, further lectures are planned for 2026.

Technical training: conferences and trade fairs

Attendance at conferences and trade fairs is an excellent way to help examiners stay up to date by engaging directly with peers and experts from their technical field, whether from industry or academia. As part of the Quality Action Plan 2025, the Office expanded opportunities for examiners to participate in these kinds of external events, with more than 350 examiners attending 82 conferences and trade fairs. Beyond applying the knowledge gained, participants were also encouraged to share key learning outcomes and insights with their colleagues through team and peer-to-peer activities.

Tools training: new programme of AI training

The potential of AI to improve efficiency and quality is clear, and its impact continues to grow. Just as digital literacy became essential in recent years, building AI literacy is now a clear necessity for all staff.

To support them, the Office launched a mandatory training programme, the AI Explorer Pass, to provide all staff with a foundational understanding of AI, its

capabilities, limitations and responsible use in line with the EPO's AI Policy⁶ (see chapter 3).

Stream 1, open to all staff, began in September 2025 and provided this core foundational knowledge. Streams 2 and 3 build on this, enabling staff to deepen their expertise regarding specific tools and business needs, and to develop more advanced knowledge.

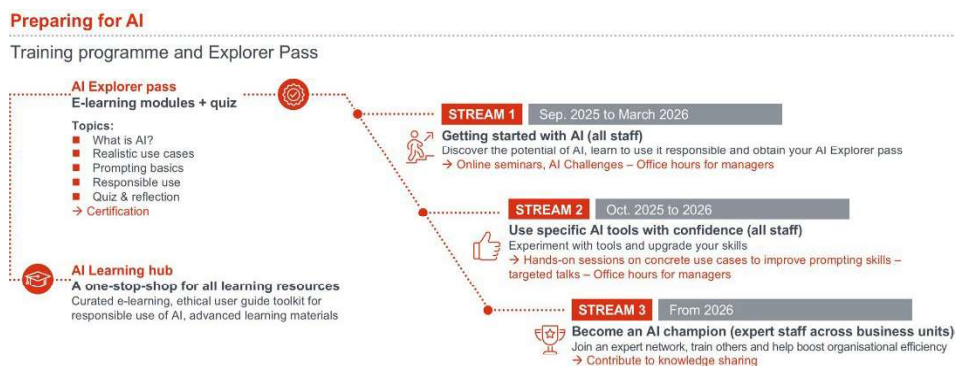
To encourage further independent learning, a new online AI learning hub was also launched. It offers a range of resources including:

- videos, tutorials, learning modules and articles
- user guides for specific AI tools
- information on upcoming online events and learning sessions
- links to platforms and communities

Throughout 2025, additional AI functionalities were integrated into examiner tools, offering further potential to enhance the quality of our work (see chapter 3). Whenever new features are introduced, examiners are invited to dedicated training sessions to support effective use and maximise the quality benefits.

Together, these training activities ensure that our staff are confident in fully utilising the opportunities this technology presents and deploy the Office's AI-supported tools to fully realise the benefits new digital capabilities have introduced across the PGP.

Figure 4 – Preparing for AI through training



Source: EPO

Tools training: the patent granting process

Seven dedicated continuous knowledge transfer (CKT) training events were held on the EPO's search tool, ANSERA, in 2025. Aimed at all examiners, the series provided targeted insights into selected topics and attracted over 3 000 participants. Sessions covered various functionalities, including the Chemical Text Converter.

⁶ link.epo.org/web/about-us/transparency-portal/en-epo-ai-policy.pdf

Four additional CKT training events focused on the use of the Legal Interactive Platform by examiners and formalities officers. These sessions drew more than 4 000 participants and led to increased in-house use of the tool.

CKT also delivered 23 further training sessions for formalities officers and examiners on tool-related topics. These covered areas ranging from software ergonomics to Liquid Text and the Patent Workbench, reaching over 6 000 participants. Opposition division members also received dedicated training on Liquid Text.

Further targeted training was provided to examiners on topics such as the use of external databases, chairing oral proceedings in examination, and more specifically for opposition division members, dedicated training on chairing oral proceedings in opposition and using the Liquid Text tool for annotations.

These training sessions and events help ensure staff remain confident about making effective use of the Office's core PGP tools, including new or enhanced functionalities introduced during the year.

Legal training

An e-learning module on changes to the Guidelines for Examination in the European Patent Office was provided to examiners for the first time in 2024. In line with our Quality Action Plan, this module was updated in 2025 and made mandatory for all examiners.

The decisions of the Boards of Appeal (BoA), national courts and the UPC present learning opportunities for our examining and opposition divisions. The Office has monitored decisions from the BoA for many years and continues to provide staff with internal reports on relevant cases.

In 2025, this practice was extended and a separate report established on cases and decisions of the Unified Patent Court (UPC). These present further learning opportunities although, unlike BoA decisions, those of the UPC are not binding on the EPO.

The 2025 BoA Case Law Report, which comprises selected decisions of the Technical Boards of Appeal, highlights for EPO staff the decisions that signal trends or exemplify the application of the instructions in the Guidelines – including in rare procedural situations. The report also feeds into the activities of various working groups, the preparation of training material and the revision of the Guidelines. Last year, examiners attended sessions to explore the latest BoA case law reports. The topics included added subject-matter, novelty, sufficiency of disclosure and inventive step.

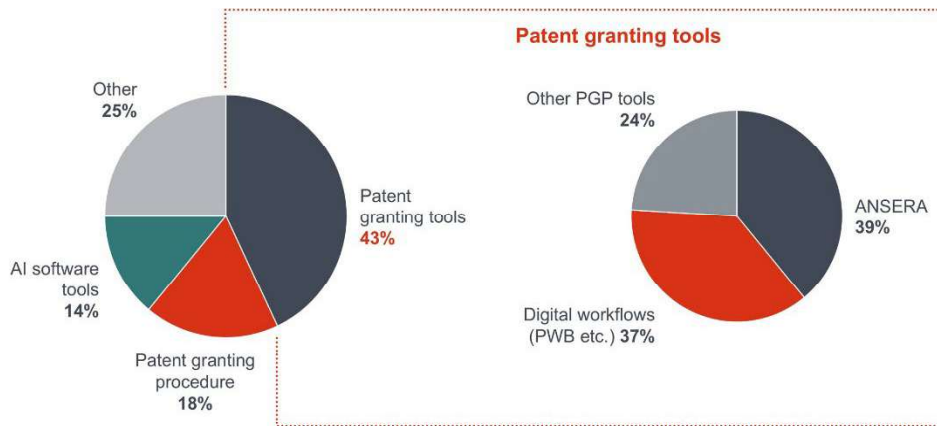
The EPO offers a wide range of courses for examiners taking up new roles in areas such as opposition or chairing oral proceedings. Staff wishing to pursue the European Qualifying Examination (EQE) or the European Patent Administration Certification (EPAC) are also offered training and structured exam preparation. In 2025, 23 EPO candidates passed the EQE and 14 obtained the EPAC.

Through these measures, examiners remain aligned with recent jurisprudence and can incorporate relevant developments directly into their day-to-day work.

Peer-to-peer learning

A total of 117 CKT events took place for examiners and formalities officers in 2025. Events featured training on quality, search strategies, legal certainty and tools, as well as sessions on third-party observations and Stakeholder Quality Assurance Panels (SQAPs).

Figure 5 – CKT events 2025



Source: EPO

CKT "tips" are submitted by staff, validated by experts and then published on the EPO's intranet homepage. In 2025, 132 new ones were published, contributing to the growth of a database of more than 5 300 curated and searchable tips. The tips are highly appreciated by our staff, as confirmed by the 52 000 views in 2025. Published tips provide insights into topics including the use of PGP tools such as ANSERA and best practices for examination.

This strong culture of peer learning supports day-to-day knowledge sharing and helps spread practical insights across teams and technical areas.

3. Technologies: developing and improving tools to support quality



KEY STRENGTHS

- **End-to-end digital ecosystem:** The EPO continues to develop state-of-the-art, in-house tools supporting the entire patent granting process from filing to publication
- **AI-powered quality and efficiency:** AI supports examiners and formalities officers in classification, allocation, search and legal queries, within the framework the EPO AI policy and quality management system
- **Unrivalled prior art resources:** The EPO maintains the world's largest collection of patent and non-patent literature, ensuring comprehensive and high-quality search
- **Seamless user services:** The MyEPO Services suite provides user-centric digital interaction, supporting quality, efficiency and transparency for applicants and representatives



QUALITY ACTION PLAN 2025: KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- **Launched the AI Policy:** our commitment to embracing AI in ways that strengthen quality and efficiency
- **Introduced additional AI support in pre-search:** making it even more powerful
- **Released our generative AI-based Legal Interactive Platform (LIP)** to all MyEPO users
- **Expanded prior art collections:** Our databases grew from 358 million to 376 million documents, ensuring our examiners have access to the best prior art



RESULTS

- **High satisfaction with our online services:** 90% of users rated them good or very good in the 2024/2025 user satisfaction survey

Of the 145 highly skilled people who joined us in 2025, we onboarded 108 examiners. The initial training programme delivers harmonised modules to develop the skills that all new examiners require. Continual feedback from course participants, presenters, coaches and PGP managers helps course designers implement improvements to this training year-on-year.

Central to the EPO's ecosystem are our prior art databases. The EPO maintains the world's largest collection of patent and non-patent literature, complemented by access to external collections. Ongoing investment in the growth of our databases ensure that they remain up to date and that our examiners continue to deliver the comprehensive, accurate searches our users expect.

3.1 Actions to develop tools in-house and harness the potential of AI

Throughout 2025, we continued to modernise our tools and leverage AI to support examiners, formalities officers and users. As part of this digital transformation, a range of formal aspects of the PGP have been further simplified or increasingly

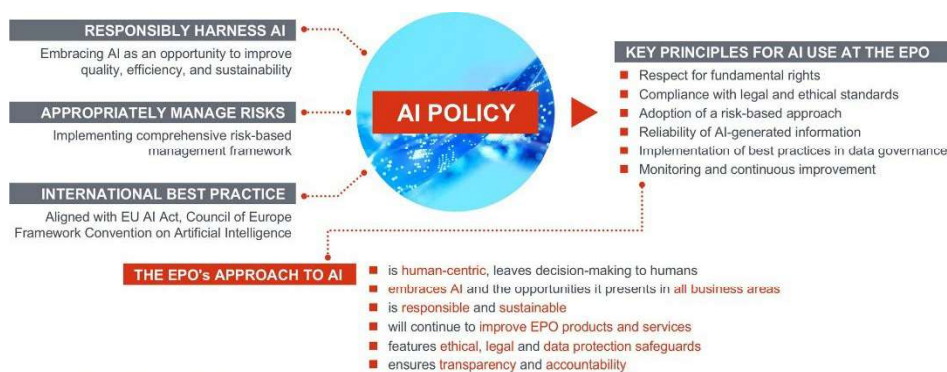
automated. The aim of the changes is to improve efficiency, enhance consistency and optimise the way our staff use their time.

AI governance and safeguards

In 2025, the EPO launched its AI policy, a clear statement of its commitment to embracing AI in ways that strengthen quality and efficiency. The policy codifies essential principles to ensure transparency, accountability and ethical behaviour in all areas where AI is adopted. Our approach is – and will remain – human-centric: AI is deployed to support decision-making, but final decisions and responsibility for them remain firmly with our staff.

Our AI Policy applies to the selection, development and deployment of AI features within our tools. At the same time, our established ISO-certified Quality Management System continues to safeguard the quality of our work, independent of the technologies used in its delivery.

Figure 6 – The EPO's approach to AI



Source: EPO

Leveraging AI in the PGP

Classification

New in 2025, AI-suggested Cooperative Patent Classification (CPC) symbols are now provided to classifiers together with plain-English explanations for the suggestions and supporting passages from the document to be classified. These explanations are generated by a large language model (LLM) to ensure examiners are well placed to evaluate and validate AI suggestions for classification while retaining full responsibility for all final decisions. This practice enhances consistency and accuracy, while safeguarding human decision-making in classification.

File allocation

Incoming applications are automatically routed to technical areas based on AI-generated CPC classification symbols. Before they are accepted by the examiner teams, a technical acceptance step establishes whether they belong to that

technical area. Since 2025, this has been partially automated using AI, reducing the need for manual review.

Search

In 2025, the search tool ANSERA was further enhanced and more closely integrated with examination tools to streamline the generation of citation passages for written opinions.

PreSearch is an AI-powered automated search tool used to identify potentially relevant documents for examiners before they begin their comprehensive search. In 2025, PreSearch was upgraded with an LLM-based component capable of generating refined search queries. It can now extract relevant information from figures and reference signs, and it also now covers additional non-patent literature and abstracts. These changes have increased the relevance of the top-ranked PreSearch results and the number of relevant results. Together, these improvements help examiners to establish complete, well substantiated search reports more efficiently.

Examination

The Legal Interactive Platform (LIP) was also enhanced in 2025. This tool allows examiners to query EPO legal sources using LLMs that have been trained on EPO documentation, including the EPC and related legal texts. The responses include direct links to the relevant source material.

The Digital File Repository (DFR) is a digital archive that stores all the documents relevant to any given application. In 2025, it was strengthened through the integration of an AI assistant (DFR-AI). This allows examiners to query application documents in natural language and supports tasks such as summarising applications, comparing them with prior art, checking amendments and navigating the available documentation efficiently. A corresponding solution for external users is in planning.

As set out in the Quality Action Plan 2025, a newly developed drafter tool was piloted by an initial group of examiners. The tool supports examiners in drafting office actions and facilitates greater quality and consistency in examiner communications. It facilitates the seamless reuse of annotations created by ANSERA at the search stage. Further development and expansion of the pilot are planned for 2026.

Ongoing automation of selected procedural steps continued in 2025. The sending and coding of communications indicating that an application is deemed withdrawn is now mostly automated, and more than half of all file closure steps no longer require the intervention of a formalities officer. These changes further reduce manual workload while preserving appropriate control points.

Oral proceedings

In May 2025, a pilot on AI-assisted minute writing for oral proceedings was launched across selected divisions in examination and opposition.

The system records proceedings, generates an AI-based transcript and prepares draft minutes. These are reviewed and finalised by the division, ensuring full human oversight and responsibility for the final content. All recordings are deleted after the minutes have been dispatched.

Feedback from divisions and users has been positive, highlighting improvements in the structure, consistency and clarity of minutes, as well as the more effective use of time made possible by the tool. Building on this feedback, the Office is gradually extending the AI-assisted approach to all oral proceedings in examination and opposition, as well as to those before the Receiving Section and the Legal Division.

Figure 7 – Enhancing PGP Quality through AI Support

	AI classification: better routing of applications, complete search databases
	Digital file allocation: right file to right division at right time
	AI pre-search: potentially relevant documents before examiner search
	Machine translation: enhances access to diverse prior art
	Legal interactive platform: correct application of patent law
	AI-assisted minutes for oral proceedings in examination and opposition (pilot): clear, complete minutes with consistent structure
	AI training on prompting and interacting with LLMs: builds expertise
	AI-assisted drafter (coming soon): clear, consistent, well-structured communications

Source: EPO

Digital user services: MyEPO

Significant enhancements were introduced in 2025 to strengthen digital filing services and support the submission of high-quality patent applications. Self-service options in MyEPO were expanded, enabling users to view and download patent and non-patent literature, including multimedia content.

As part of the ongoing digital transformation of the PGP under the Strategic Plan 2028, full support for colour and greyscale drawings was implemented in October 2025. When filed electronically, colour and greyscale drawings now retain their characteristics throughout the entire digital PGP, eliminating the previous conversion into black and white. This preserves the integrity of technical disclosures.

The Shared Area was further enhanced to promote transparent interaction between examiners and applicants through improved notifications, and this was complemented by the launch of a pilot project to explore additional refinements.

A major milestone in the simplification of the EPO's technical landscape was reached with the decommissioning of the legacy online filing (eOLF) system on 31 December 2025. The transition to Online Filing 2.0 was supported by comprehensive change management and user support activities to ensure service continuity, filing reliability and smooth adoption.

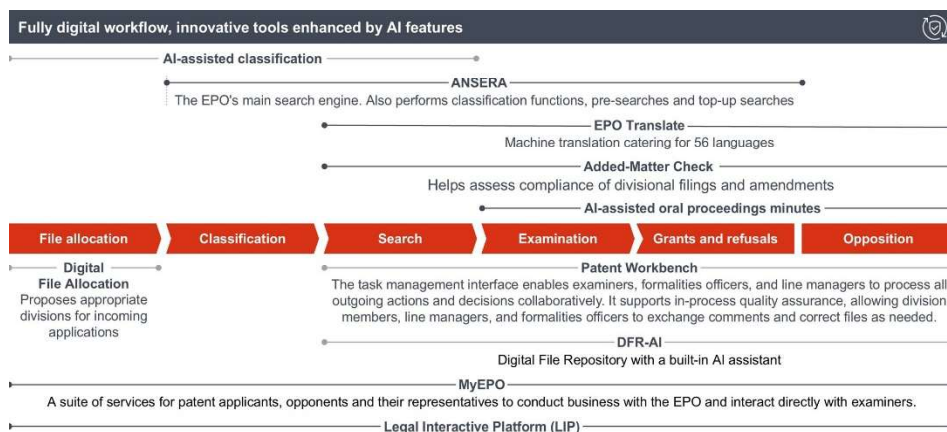
In parallel, work continued on implementing further improvements to the representatives' area, including the introduction of general authorisations for employees of a party to the proceedings and the publication of an updated, searchable database of professional representatives. These initiatives simplify and streamline procedures while safeguarding legal certainty and maintaining the highest quality. Together, these measures support more efficient, informed exchanges with the EPO.

User-centric rollout of new tools and functionalities

The EPO's approach to developing tools is focused on quality and meeting the needs of end users, therefore examiners and formalities officers are involved in this process at an early stage. This approach was further strengthened in 2025 by seconding experienced formalities officers to the Business Information Technology (BIT) department, ensuring that both new and existing tools benefit from their extensive operational expertise. Selected examiners also worked closely with BIT developers to provide user-driven input.

At the EPO we take a user-centric approach to rolling out new software. Applications are rigorously tested to ensure they deliver the intended benefits and uphold quality standards. This applies equally to AI-based tools. We leverage internal expertise, including the prompting experience of early AI adopters among our examiners, and have developed shared prompting libraries tailored to specific technical fields. These practices encourage consistent and responsible use.

Figure 8 – Overview of the EPO's PGP tools



Source: EPO

Further background information on our PGP tools is available in the Quality Report 2024,⁷ and the EPO's Digital Transformation Report.⁸

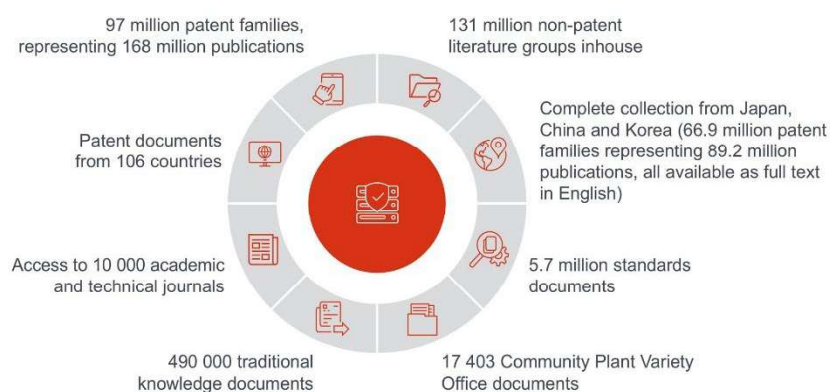
⁷ link.epo.org/web/general/annual-review-2024/en-quality-report-2024.pdf

⁸ The EPO's Digital Transformation Report is published as an annex to the Annual Review.

3.2 Actions taken to grow the world's most extensive prior art databases

The EPO further expanded its prior art collections throughout 2025 to ensure comprehensive technological and geographical coverage across all fields of innovation. Over the course of the year, the collection grew from 358 million to 376 million documents (Figure 9), reflecting sustained investment in both patent and non-patent literature resources.

Figure 9 – The EPO's prior art collection at a glance



Source: EPO

Patent publications

The number of patent publications in our databases increased from 161 million to 168 million in 2025, with 89.2 million publications from China, Japan or Korea. In the same period, the total number of patent families increased from 93 million to 97 million. Patent families with a family member from China, Japan or Korea account for 66.9 million families. This continued growth strengthens the global representativeness of the EPO's search database.

Non-patent literature

Non-patent literature (NPL) is an essential source of prior art in many technical fields. Our NPL database increased by 11 million documents in 2025, reaching 208 million documents, including abstracts and full-text documents.

For ease of access, documents are bundled into groups (e.g. by scientific publication or standardisation procedure), resulting in 131 million NPL groups. The number of searchable full-text NPL documents increased from 41 million in 2024 to 44 million full-text documents in 2025.

The NPL collection also contains 490 000 English-language abstracts and summaries of traditional knowledge documents originally published in India, China and Korea, as well as 17 403 full-text records of published applications and grants from the Community Plant Variety Office (CPVO).

Standards documentation

Standards-related documentation represents a strategically important category of prior art, particularly in fast-moving technical fields such as telecommunications and ICT. In 2025 the EPO's standards collection grew by 290 000 documents, reaching more than 5.7 million records.

The EPO maintains formal co-operation frameworks with standards development organisations (SDOs) to ensure effective access to relevant documentation for use in the patent granting process. Several agreements were renewed or extended in 2025, and further modernisation is planned for 2026 to reflect the increasing strategic significance of standards in emerging fields such as AI, the Internet of Things and quantum technologies.

Figure 10 – SDO documentation available to EPO examiners (new additions in red)

Third Generation Partnership Project	Open Mobile Alliance
Third Generation Partnership Project 2	Video Technology
European Telecommunications Standards Institute	International Association for Cryptologic Research
International Telecommunication Union	Joint Photographic Expert Group Std
Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers Standards Association	International Standards Organisation
International Electrotechnical Commission	CEN and CENELEC
Association of Radio Industries and Business	Advanced Television Systems Committee (ATSC)
Internet Engineering Task Force	WorldDMB
Digital Video Broadcasting Project	O-RAN Alliance
Standards for M2M and the Internet of Things	Organisations contributing to cryptography and IT security standards, including BSI and EMV

Source: EPO

In addition to final standards issued by SDOs, the EPO's databases include technical disclosures submitted during the standardisation process, draft specifications, technical reports and working documents. These materials are often critical for assessing novelty and inventive step, particularly in rapidly evolving ICT domains.

3.3 Quality results

Our KPIs confirm the resilience and reliability of the EPO's digital infrastructure. The availability of both internal and external IT systems remained at a very high level in 2025, already exceeding the goals for 2028 in both cases. User satisfaction levels also remained high, close to the target for 2028.

User feedback remains an essential indicator of quality and usability. MyEPO achieved an overall satisfaction rating of 86% in the 2024/2025 user satisfaction survey, with similarly strong ratings for system stability, functionality and technical support.

Online Filing 2.0, now used for more than two-thirds of applications filed with the EPO, received an overall satisfaction rating of 89%. This represents a statistically significant increase from 84% in the previous survey cycle, reflecting continued improvements in usability and performance.

KPI	Result	Goal 2028
Availability of IT systems (internal)	99.7% (2025)	≥ 99.5%
Availability of IT systems (external)	99.9% (2025)	≥ 99.5%
Users rating our online services as good or very good	90% (user satisfaction survey 2024/2025)	≥ = 91%

4. Quality, timely products and services: filing, routing and classification



KEY STRENGTHS

- **Skilled formalities officers:** Vital to procedural quality; supported by training, audits and harmonised practices
- **Robust Cooperative Patent Classification (CPC) system:** Jointly managed with the US Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) and adopted in 39 countries, including 24 EPO member states, ensuring harmonised and up-to-date coverage across technologies
- **Modern classification infrastructure:** AI-assisted tools ensure accurate and timely indexing of prior art



QUALITY ACTION PLAN 2025: KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- **Enhanced formalities processes:** Improvements implemented following audit recommendations, including better handling of PCT Direct cases
- **Fully classified 582 713 documents,** including 119 759 published EPO applications, facilitating their retrieval in prior art searches
- **Updated CPC scheme** three times in 2025, with 33 366 document families reclassified to maintain alignment with technological developments



RESULTS

- **96% compliance in formalities quality checks:** Exceeding the SP2028 target of ≥90%
- **85% of EPO-published patent applications fully classified on publication:** Target exceeded

A quality patent begins at source. Carefully and clearly drafted applications tailored to the European procedure improve both the quality and efficiency of prosecution before the EPO and the overall quality of the prior art corpus. This is why the EPO's Quality Action Plans address every stage of the patent granting process, including those prior to search and examination.

Recent legal updates supporting digital submissions, including the possibility to file colour drawings, have enabled enhanced clarity in technical disclosures, supporting examiners in understanding complex inventions more efficiently. Making sure that applications meet the formal requirements is also critical, as is accurate assignment of each application to the technically qualified examining division best suited to the technology involved.

Finally, timely classification of prior art is essential to ensuring the EPO's databases remain up to date, enabling examiners to retrieve the most relevant documents at the search stage.

4.1 Actions taken to improve the quality of filing

Quality at source through data-driven dialogue

At the EPO we monitor a wide range of metrics that provide insights into the quality of incoming applications and how they are subsequently prosecuted during the search and substantive examination phases. Our analysis shows

significant variations among the filings by applicants and representatives. For example, we observe differences in:

- the number of formal errors in applications
- the percentage of applications with lack of unity findings at the search stage
- the number of objections for lack of clarity, lack of inventive step or other substantive issues
- the frequency of oral proceedings in examination
- how applicant responses and amendments bring the procedure forward
- grant rates

These variations can result in additional costs and inefficiency for applicants and patent offices, as well as increased uncertainty for the public. While many factors may explain these differences, applicant practices can have a significant impact.

In a series of one-on-one meetings held with applicants in 2025 we shared procedural data relating specifically to their applications, as compared with EPO averages and data for applicants in their technology sectors. This fact-based dialogue deepens mutual understanding and helps applicants identify opportunities to improve the effectiveness and quality of their filings. It also helps pinpoint areas where applicants can improve the effectiveness and quality of their filings, enabling a smoother patent granting process that benefits the applicants themselves as well as other users, the EPO and society. For more information on our extensive user outreach programme, see chapter 8 of this report.

Procedural correctness through formalities expertise

The formal requirements that must be met by an application remain fundamental to ensuring the quality of a patent. Requirements such as the allocation of a valid filing date serve an essential legal purpose.

Actions to modernise and digitalise the filing of applications and submissions in the patent granting process continued in 2025 through amendments to the EPC Implementing Regulations.⁹ These legal changes support formalities officers in the correct handling of applications and simplify compliance with formal requirements for applicants. The measures also improve procedural quality by ensuring clearer electronic submissions, reducing formal deficiencies and enabling more efficient processing of applications.

EPO formalities officers conduct numerous checks on incoming applications and remain highly active throughout the entire patent granting process, so procedural and formal requirements are met at every stage. Formalities officers' work is regularly reviewed through quality checks and supported by a continuously evolving procedural framework to ensure quality is maintained and opportunities for improvement identified.

⁹ epo.org/en/legal/official-journal/2025

Improved coding of PCT direct filings

Actions were taken in 2025 in light of recommendations from formalities quality audits carried out in 2024. For example, these highlighted the need to enhance the accuracy of coding PCT direct cases in our systems. In response, the Office worked with WIPO to introduce improved PCT Direct functionality into the shared online filing software and offered webinars to users explaining the new feature.

In some cases, professional representatives or formalities officers at other Receiving Offices may incorrectly assign an application's PCT Direct status. These cases are monitored by EPO experts via a dedicated dashboard and corrected where necessary. Additional targeted training was also provided to formalities staff in the EPO's PCT Receiving Office.

4.2 Actions taken to improve the quality of routing and classification

Expanding and maintaining the CPC scheme

The CPC – jointly managed by the EPO and USPTO – provides a single, harmonised, refined scheme that builds on the International Patent Classification (IPC). With France having joined the CPC in 2025, a total of 39 countries or organisations have adopted the scheme to date, including 24 EPO member states.

When the CPC scheme is updated the EPO reclassifies documents according to the new scheme. In 2025 the CPC was updated three times to keep it aligned with technological developments and 33 366 document families (including both published patent documents and non-patent literature) were reclassified.

Improved routing of incoming applications through AI support

As mentioned in chapter 3, the EPO has leveraged recent advances in AI to support the routing of new incoming applications to the right examining division at the right time. Increasingly, incoming applications span various technical fields. In these cases, the allocation of mixed divisions (i.e. where examiners come from different technical fields) is proposed to ensure the most appropriate combination of expertise is dedicated to the case. The mixed division concept remains in place throughout the procedure, from search through examination and in opposition.

To promote consistency, divisional applications are routed to the division that treated the parent application.

Accurate and timely classification to support comprehensive search

Accurate and timely classification of prior art is fundamental to ensuring the most relevant prior art can be retrieved during the search.

The EPO invests heavily here, classifying a significant portion of the world's patent documentation in addition to the patent applications filed at the EPO. The use of AI-supported classification has been expanded to more technical fields in recent years, facilitating both accuracy and timeliness in classification.

In 2025 the EPO fully classified a total of 582 713 documents in the CPC scheme. Prior art patent documents are classified within four months of publication to ensure they are retrievable at the search stage.

4.3 Quality results

The SP2028 KPI for the quality of formalities monitors the results of operational quality control (OQC) checks performed in the receiving section and is updated quarterly. In 2025 these checks showed that 96.8% of files were handled correctly, exceeding the goal of $\geq 90\%$.

The 2024/2025 user satisfaction survey results were published in October 2025. They confirm the excellent quality of our formalities services, with 92% of respondents rating the support service provided by EPO formalities officers good or very good.

The Office also exceeded its SP2028 goal for timeliness of prior art classification, ensuring that classified prior art is available to examiners at the search stage.

KPI	Result 2025	Goal 2028
Quality of formalities (receiving section)	96.8% compliant files	$\geq 90\%$ compliant files
Timeliness of prior art classification	85.0% on time	$\geq 80\%$ on time

5. Quality, timely products and services: search and written opinion



KEY STRENGTHS

- **Active Search Divisions:** To promote quality, consistency and legal certainty, all search and written opinion products are reviewed by three-person divisions and managers before dispatch
- **In-process quality audit checks of searches and written opinions** identify where we can improve and measure progress



QUALITY ACTION PLAN 2025: KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- **Enhanced early collaboration** on over 550 000 search products by end of 2025 under the Active Search Division
- **Cited highly relevant prior art:** 83.0% of search reports cite a document prejudicial to novelty or inventive step
- **Comprehensive prior art searches:** Highest ever proportion of search reports citing Asian-language prior art and non-patent literature
- **Made clear progress** in quality at search stage, meeting two of our KPIs



RESULTS

- **Users and DQA results indicate improved written opinions:**
 - 94.0% of audited files have no findings affecting validity (up from 92.6%)
- **DQA search quality audit KPIs (percentage of audited files):**
 - Incorrect assessment of novelty/inventive step: 5.0% (target <5%)
 - More relevant prior art found by auditors: 2.8% (target <4%)
- **User satisfaction survey 2024/25:**
 - 80% of respondents are satisfied or very satisfied with the EPO's search products (target ≥80%)
- **Search timeliness:** 86.8% of searches delivered on time (target: ≥90%)

The EPO works to ensure that each patent application receives a complete and accurate search and a comprehensive written opinion. Delivering quality at this early stage strengthens legal certainty and helps applicants make informed decisions about the future of their inventions.

In 2025 our primary focus in enhancing quality at the search stage was on further embedding the best practices of the Active Search Division (ASD) within the patent granting process. Introduced in November 2023, the ASD strengthens collaboration between examiners by ensuring each search and written opinion product is reviewed by the three-member division and the line manager before it is dispatched to the applicant. This early interaction supports consistent reasoning based on a shared understanding of the invention.

Preliminary user feedback and quality audit results had already confirmed the positive impact of these actions by early 2025, with improvements observed in the correctness of novelty and inventive step assessments and the completeness of written opinions, as well as overall strengthening of legal certainty.

5.1 Actions taken to improve the quality of our searches and written opinions

Informed by these positive initial results, clear goals emphasising the importance of the ASD were set for examiners, team managers and directors. By the end of 2025 there were measurable improvements in search quality: 94% of audited files had no findings affecting validity, up from 92.6% in 2024, and the biennial user satisfaction survey (USS) showed increased satisfaction across various aspects of our search products. Audit and USS results are presented in more detail in section 5.3.

Early consultation within Active Search Divisions

Discussions within the division before or during the search enable valuable exchanges of expertise that can strengthen the search process. Members may be familiar with relevant databases, search strategies or technical terminology that the first examiner might not initially consider, helping to identify relevant prior art. Different perspectives can also reduce the risk of blind spots by leading to alternative search approaches, classifications or keywords. For inventions spanning multiple technical areas, the divisions regularly comprise examiners from different technical areas, bringing further cross-disciplinary insights to the search strategy and broadening the scope of search.

In 2025, emphasis was placed on systematically promoting these early consultations within the division, initiated by the first examiner for every search file.

Harmonising the approach to mixed-type inventions

Active Search Divisions were asked to pay particular attention to applications comprising a mix of technical and non-technical features (mixed-type inventions). Results from the 2024/2025 user satisfaction survey indicated that there is scope for improving consistency in our handling of such applications, particularly at the search stage.

Divisions were therefore reminded to identify the potential invention in the application at the earliest stage of the procedure and ensure a comprehensive search covering all claims, taking into account both the description and drawings. Due to this proactive approach, the use of "partial search" or "no search possible" practices which had been applied in some technical areas has reduced.

Promoting best practices in written opinions

The review of the completed search report and written opinion by the Active Search Division and manager ensures that the arguments presented are logically structured and legally sound. Exchanges can help identify potential weaknesses in the assessment of patentability and support clearer drafting, helping applicants better understand the objections raised and respond more effectively.

In 2025, examples of best practice for clearly written and well-reasoned arguments under key EPC Articles were collected across a range of technical

fields. These examples, including written opinions that the Stakeholder Quality Assurance Panels (SQAPs) rated highly, were used to develop a template that will support a more standardised structure for written opinions.

Thirteen examiner teams from diverse technical areas are currently testing and refining the template in co-operation with software developers working on the AI drafter tool (see Chapter 3). By ensuring that the best practices of the Active Search Divisions are reflected in our new AI-supported tools, these tools are able to further contribute to the harmonisation of practice.

Tightened timeliness goals for first filings

Timely delivery of the search report and written opinion is particularly important for first filings because applicants must decide on their next steps before the priority year expires. In 2022, we tightened the timeliness goal for delivery of the search report for national searches and PCT first filings from nine months to eight. In 2023, we reduced it to seven. To reflect our continued commitment to improved timeliness, in November 2025 the time limit for delivering national searches was reduced to six months.

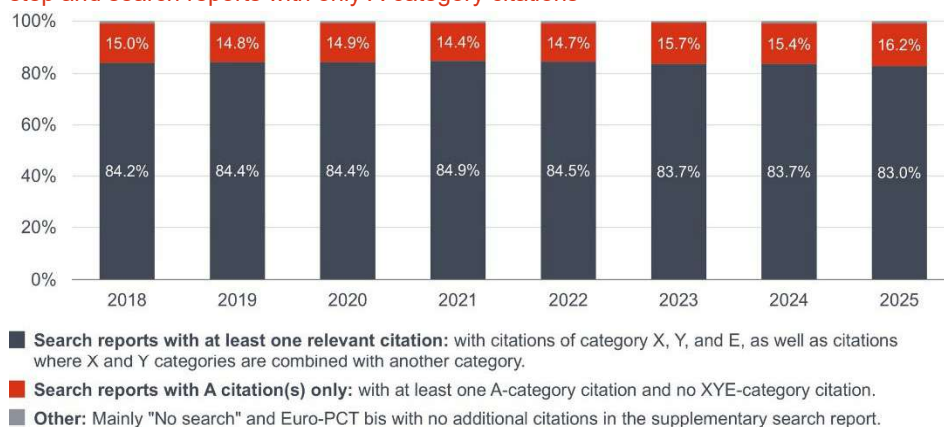
5.2 Search and written opinion data

EPO search reports identify highly relevant prior art from diverse sources

The EPO has a strong focus on providing early certainty to our applicants and the public by citing the most relevant prior art in the search report. This helps applicants take timely, well-informed decisions about how to progress their inventions.

In 2025, 83.0% of EPO search reports identified at least one document that was prejudicial to the novelty or inventive step of one or more claims. Only 16.2% of searches contained exclusively A-category citations, meaning that no documents prejudicial to novelty or inventive step were found during these searches. These figures, and their consistency over the years, demonstrate the robustness of EPO search practice.

Figure 11 – Search reports with at least one citation prejudicial to novelty or inventive step and search reports with only A-category citations

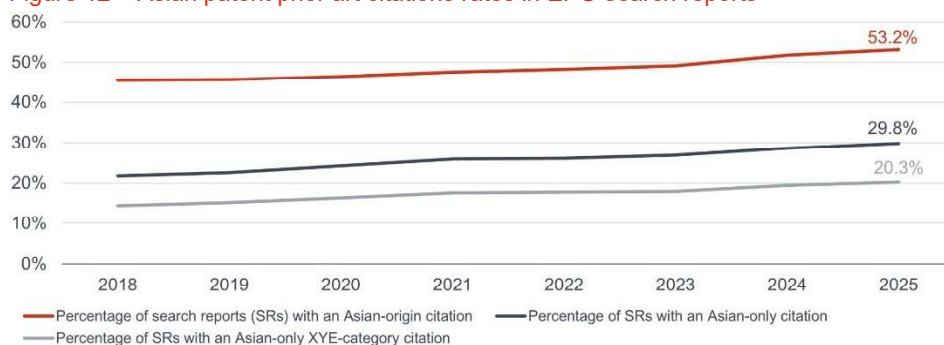


Progress in obtaining and using Asian prior art

Examiners routinely search for prior art in all three of the EPO's official working languages: English, French and German. Prior art from Asian countries has also long been included in EPO search reports. Where possible, examiners cite an English, French or German version of the relevant document from the relevant patent family member. Where this is not possible and a document deemed relevant for inclusion is only available in a language not readily understood by the search division, a machine translation is made and shared with the applicant.¹⁰

An Asian-origin citation is a patent document in Chinese, Japanese or Korean, or a priority document in one of these languages. An Asian-only citation is a Chinese-language, Japanese-language or Korean-language patent document that has no patent family member in any of the three official EPO working languages. The share of search reports including at least one Asian-origin and/or Asian-only patent citation has increased: over 53% of our search reports in 2025 included an Asian-origin patent citation (up from 51.8% in 2024), and 20.3% included an Asian-only XYE-category¹¹ patent citation (up from 19.4% in 2024). This upward trend confirms the increasing significance of prior art from Asia, alongside the EPO's progress in obtaining and using this documentation.

Figure 12 – Asian patent prior art citations rates in EPO search reports



An Asian-origin citation is a patent document either in Chinese, Japanese or Korean or with a priority document in one of these languages; an Asian-only citation is a Chinese-language, Japanese- language or Korean-language patent document that does not have any patent family member in an EPO language (English, French or German).

Source: EPO

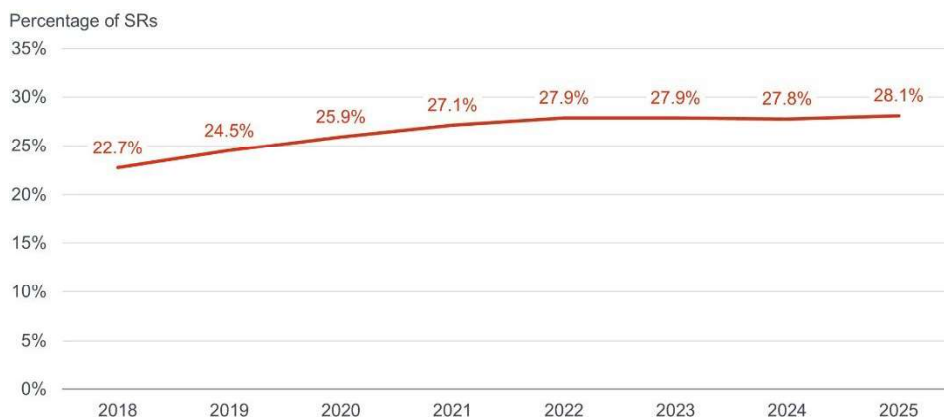
Non-patent literature coverage

In 2025, just over 28% of EPO search reports contained at least one non-patent literature (NPL) citation. The volume of cited NPL varies by technology. In 2025, the highest contribution of NPL to total citations continued to be in the life sciences and chemical technical fields, reflecting the strong reliance on scientific literature in these fields.

¹⁰ epo.org/en/legal/guidelines-epc/2025/b_x_9_1_3.html

¹¹ An XYE-category citation is a document which is prejudicial to the novelty and/or inventive step or a potentially conflicting patent document regarding the filing or priority date.

Figure 13 – Percentage of EPO search reports containing one or more NPL citation

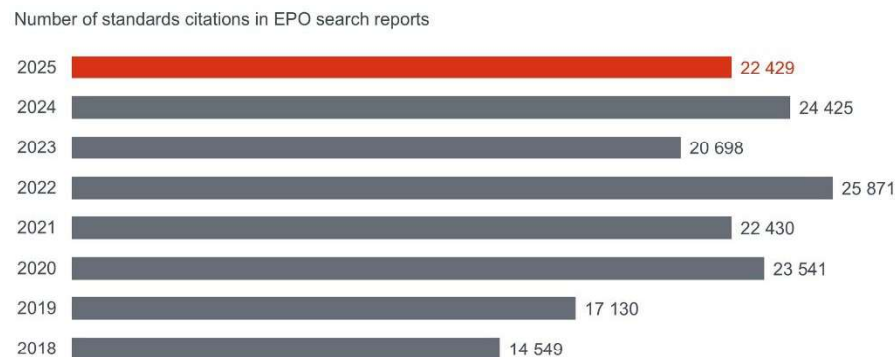


Source: EPO

Standards documentation in EPO searches

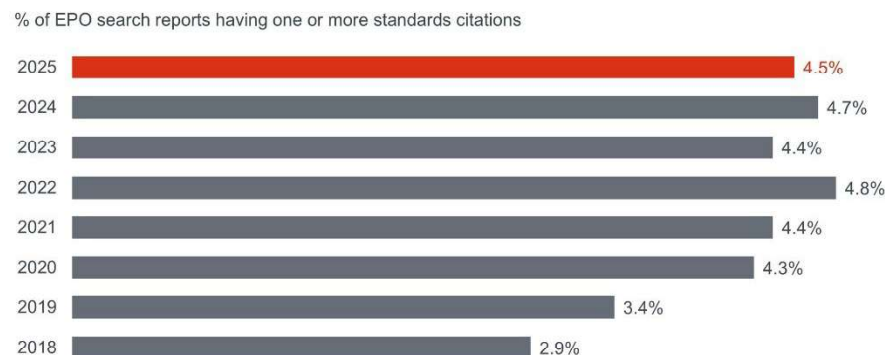
Overall, 4.5% of EPO search reports cited at least one standards document. 99% of the search reports with standard citations were issued in the areas of wireless communication, video coding and transmission, IT security and internet and Internet of Things. 3GPP was the most cited standard (70% of all standards citations). 28% of all search reports in these technical areas contained one or more standards citations.

Figure 14 – Number of standards documents cited in EPO search reports



Source: EPO

Figure 15 – Percentage of EPO search reports containing at least one standards document

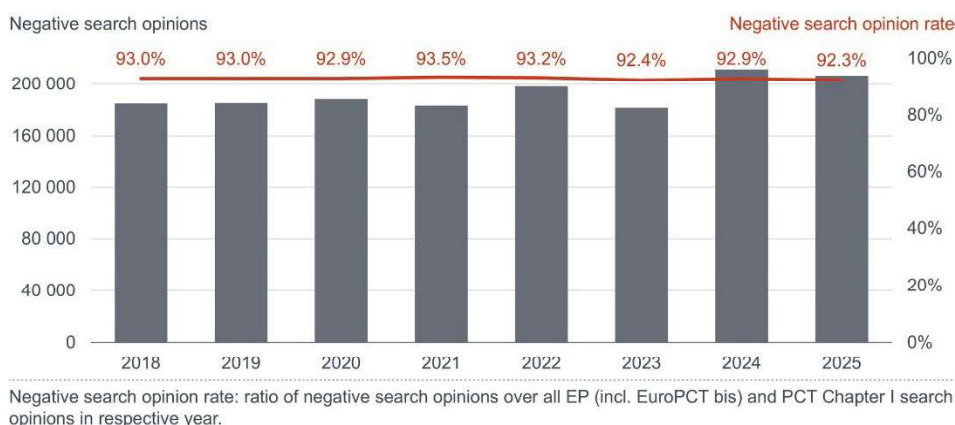


Source: EPO

Comprehensive written opinions at the search stage

As shown in figure 11 above, prior art prejudicial to novelty or inventive step was cited in 83% of search reports. Furthermore, over 92% of written opinions raised an objection to patentability under the EPC. This leaves just over 7% of opinions where the search division found no objection to patentability. The rate of positive search opinions has remained remarkably stable over the years, illustrating EPO examiners' consistent approach.

Figure 16 – Volume and frequency of negative search opinions issued by the EPO



Source: EPO

Non-standard searches

At the EPO, while we strive to provide our applicants with complete searches and written opinions, there are cases where this is not possible and examiners then issue partial or incomplete search reports. In 2025, partial search reports due to lack of unity of the invention were issued in 5.9% of cases. This figure is stable, ranging from 6.4% to 5.8% between 2018 and 2025. Other non-standard searches remained at a low, stable rate of 1.9% of all searches.

5.3 Quality results

Directorate Quality Audit (DQA) results

The EPO has audited the quality of its search products for many years. Our quality audit process is run by a dedicated unit that is independent of the operational area. This helps to ensure that EPO search reports and written opinions meet the high standards of legal certainty, consistency and completeness expected by applicants and the public, and to identify areas where further improvements can be made.

In response to user feedback, the scope of the search audit was extended at the end of 2021 to cover not only the relevance of the cited prior art, but also the quality of the written opinion. Sample sizes are selected to ensure statistically

relevant results, for the quality audit KPIs, with a 95% confidence level and a margin of error of at most 2.5%

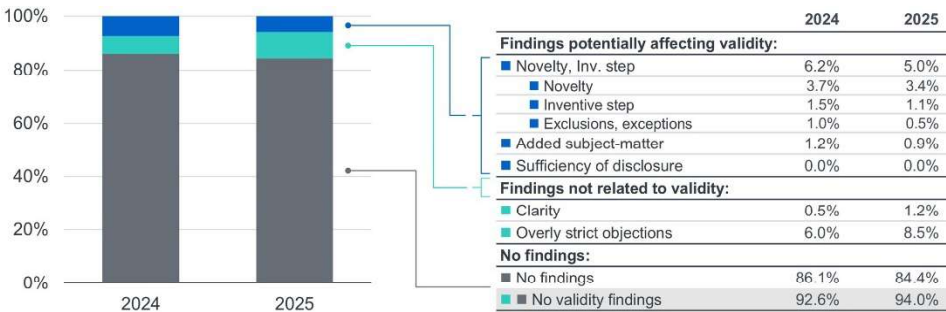
In view of the consistently high and stable quality, reporting on search audit results was adapted in the third quarter of 2025 from a 12-month to a 24-month rolling period, enabling more proportional audit sampling. As earlier results were reported over a 12-month period, direct numerical comparison should therefore be interpreted with caution.

In recent years, a steady increase has been observed in the share of audited files with no findings potentially affecting validity. The 2025 result of 94.0% of audited search files with no such findings is consistent with this trend and confirms the continued high quality and stability of the EPO's search and written opinions.

Findings related to novelty and inventive step were found in just 5.0% of audited files in 2025, down from 6.2% in 2024. The low number of audits where auditors identified a closer prior- art document was maintained, with the share of cases at 2.8%.

In 2025, the most frequent finding at the search stage related to overly strict objections in the written opinion. While these findings do not affect patent validity, they are monitored as a quality issue because they can increase the procedural burden for applicants, sometimes resulting in unnecessary claim limitations. The level observed in 2025 (8.5%) is below that reported in 2023 (11.5%), demonstrating the positive effect of the Active Search Division since it was introduced in November 2023.

Figure 17 – Search quality audit findings



The results are presented as a breakdown of the ratio of files having at least one finding. For files with multiple findings, only the finding corresponding to the highest in the ranking is counted. The other findings are not taken into account for the purposes of this table and results. All findings are considered for correction/learning purposes. Reporting in 2025 is on a rolling 24-month basis for 739 audited files vs 2024 which is on a 12-month rolling basis for 404 audited files.

Source: EPO

User satisfaction survey (USS) results

The 2024/2025 USS results were published in October 2025.¹² 80% of respondents rated our search products good or very good, meeting the SP2028 KPI objective of 80%. This is consistent with the strong user satisfaction recorded

¹² epo.org/en/news-events/news/user-satisfaction-survey-20242025-strong-results-and-clear-direction-further

in previous years and demonstrates the continued stability of perceptions of search quality.

Satisfaction with the timeliness of our search services increased from 73% in 2022 to 77% – a statistically significant improvement. Satisfaction with examiners' understanding of the core of the invention also saw a statistically significant improvement, from 75% to 78%.

There was also clear improvement in coverage of the independent claims and the comprehensibility of reasoning in written opinions, areas we have been addressing through the work of the Active Search Divisions.

Consistency, i.e. treating similar applications in a similar way, was rated good or very good by 64% of users. This remains a focus in our Quality Action Plan 2026.

The survey also included new questions based on suggestions from members of the SACEPO Working Party on Quality. As a result, new and more detailed feedback on our handling of computer implemented inventions at search stage, for example, indicates this is an area where we can improve further.

Key SQAPs findings: search and written opinion

Stakeholder Quality Assurance Panels (SQAPs) once again brought together EPO experts and European patent attorneys in 2025 to jointly review real EPO files. Last year they assessed 36 searches and written opinions in detail across various technical fields. Some of their key findings were:

- Well-structured written opinions with a summary of objections and suggestions, clear headings and section numbers are easier to read and follow. They also facilitate clearer applicant replies.
- Dependent claims could have been addressed more completely in several cases. This was also visible in user satisfaction survey results. We are working to improve this as part of the Quality Action Plan 2026.
- The problem-solution approach in inventive step reasoning is not always correctly applied. Properly formulated objections at search stage help applicants file constructive replies, enabling a more efficient exam procedure. We will continue with our actions to improve here.

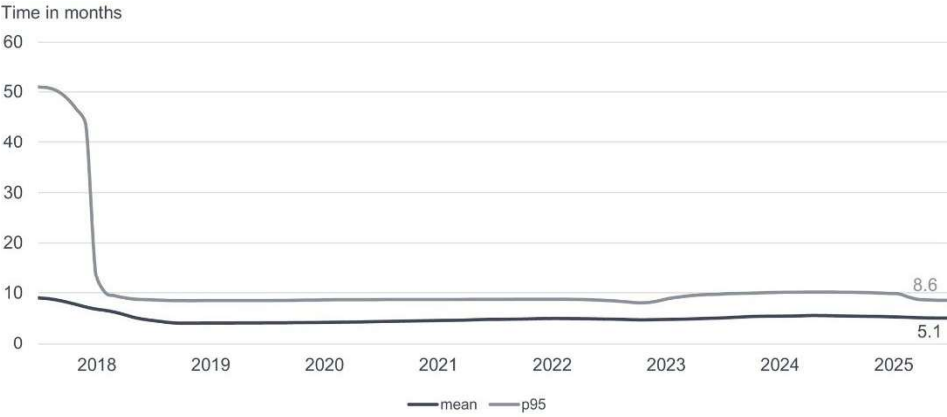
These findings mirror feedback obtained from other sources, including through broader user engagement, and suggestions for improvement have been taken forward in our Quality Action Plan 2026. For more information, please refer to this report's annex on last year's SQAPs.

Search timeliness results

Mean search timeliness for standard searches¹³ remained stable in 2025 at 5.1 months. 95% of searches and written opinions ("p95" in figure 18) were dispatched within 8.6 months, compared to 10.2 months in 2024.

¹³ Excluding cases with (a) a lack of unity, (b) a lack of clarity or (c) an incomplete search.

Figure 18 – Search timeliness 2018-2024



Source: EPO

KPIs for search and written opinion

The results for 2025 show that the EPO met or came very close to meeting all KPIs for search and written opinions.

KPI	Result 2025	Goal
Search and written opinion: incorrect assessment of novelty or inventive step (DQA)	5%	< 5% (2025)
Search: closer prior art found (DQA)	2.8 %	<4% (2025)
Users rating our search products good or very good (USS)	80%	≥ 80% (2025)
Timeliness of search	86.8%	≥ 90% (2028)

6. Quality, timely products and services: examination



KEY STRENGTHS

- **Consistent practice:** Promoted across examiners and technical fields through collaboration, mixed divisions, peer reviews and the practice harmonisation dashboard
- **Dialogue-driven patent granting process:** Constructive engagement with applicants via the shared area, intermediate communications and oral proceedings



QUALITY ACTION PLAN 2025: KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- **Strengthened added subject-matter checks and met our challenging KPI for the first time:** Job aids to assist examiners, refresher training, documentation of checks, analysis of opposition decisions revoked for added subject-matter, lecture from BoA
- **Improved handling of third-party observations** to ensure divisions' assessments are included in the public part of the file, including those considered not relevant
- **Published new KPI for examination** based on BoA decisions, to drive further improvement in our refusal decisions
- **Clear impact of our quality actions:** e.g. user satisfaction ratings for consistency in examination rose to 73%, up from 59% in the previous user satisfaction survey



RESULTS

- **Grant quality audit (DQA) KPIs:**
 - Incorrect assessment of novelty/inventive step: 6.6% (target: <5%)
 - Incorrect assessment of added subject-matter: 4.6% (target: <5%)
- **Examination KPI based on Boards of Appeal ex parte decisions:**
 - In 6.2% of cases the Boards set aside a decision of the examining division to refuse a patent (2026 target: <4%)
- **High user satisfaction:** 79% of respondents in the 2024/2025 USS rated the examination phase good or very good (target 2024/2025: ≥ 80%)
- **Examination timeliness:**
 - 75.8% of grants delivered on time (SP2028 target: ≥70%)

Our goal at the examination stage is to provide applicants and the public with well-reasoned communications and legally robust decisions. We achieve this through completely examining each patent application, correctly assessing the relevant prior art and consistently applying the legal provisions in a harmonised manner. Our extensive dialogue with users around the world confirms that applicants value this focus on quality, predictability and consistency.

In 2025, we continued to strengthen the consistency with which the EPC is applied across examining divisions. Targeted actions were taken to strengthen checks on added subject-matter, improve the assessment of clarity, and ensure correct handling of third-party observations. Decisions from opposition and appeal proceedings were also used to support learning.

The impact of these actions is seen in the results of our quality audits on grants, the user satisfaction survey and the SQAPs. In 2025, these showed continued improvement, as well as the areas where further efforts are needed to ensure the highest standards of examination quality.

6.1 Actions to improve the quality of our examination

The internal practice harmonisation dashboard was launched in 2023 to support actions aimed at improving consistency of examination practice. This allows teams and individual examiners to see how often they raise objections under various Articles of the EPC and compare their objection rates with anonymised data from peers and other teams. By highlighting variations between individuals and teams in similar technical areas, it helps identify unharmonised practices early, enables targeted corrective action and supports transparent tracking of progress over time.

Building on these insights, the peer-to-peer review process was established in 2024 for areas where divergent practices or procedures were observed. These reviews across divisions have further strengthened operational quality control and contributed to a more balanced application of the EPC across related technical areas. This progress is reflected in the results of our latest user satisfaction survey, where the rating for consistency in examination rose to 73%, up from 59% in the previous survey.

Strengthening checks for added subject-matter

In 2025, several actions were taken to support more structured and accurate checks for added subject-matter.

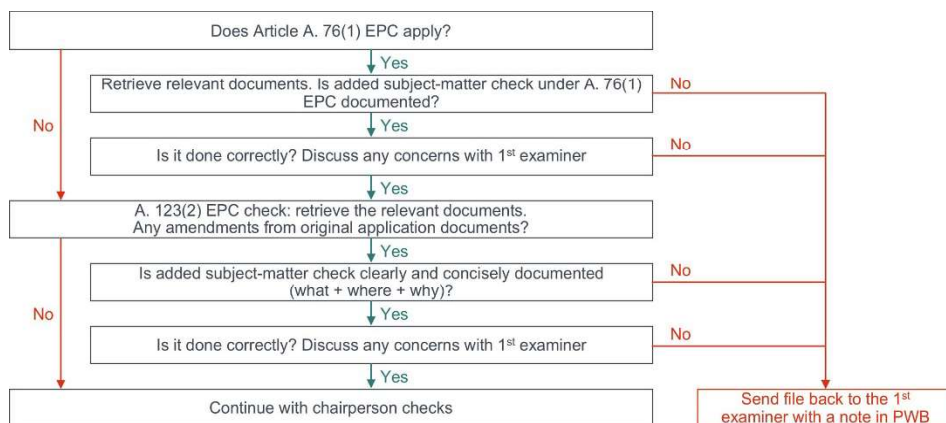
Specific online job aids were designed for the search and examination stages and for various roles e.g. first examiner, chairperson, team manager. To assist the work of the division and manager, examiners are required to document all their added subject-matter checks. This reinforces transparency and supports oversight at division and managerial level.

Targeted, mandatory refresher training on added subject-matter was given to examiner teams with quality audit findings in the first quarter of 2025.

Following a study on opposition decisions issued between January and May 2025 (see section below), a deeper analysis was carried out for decisions revoking patents for added subject-matter. It confirmed DQA findings that assessment of intermediate generalisation was the aspect where there was the greatest scope for improvement. This is also the aspect where assessments sometimes diverge between the decisions in opposition and the appeal.

To address this, in November 2025 a member of the Boards of Appeal gave a presentation to examiners on added subject-matter. Intermediate generalisation was discussed in depth, with a focus on "inextricably linked" features. The application of the "direct and unambiguous disclosure" requirement and the handling of amendments extending beyond the claim structure were also discussed. Over 1 300 examiners attended the live event, and the recording was added to our training material.

Figure 19 – Excerpt of added subject-matter job aid for chairperson (examination stage)



Source: EPO

Implementing clarity workshop recommendations

In November 2024, the EPO held a workshop on clarity with stakeholders from across the globe. It captured a broad range of perspectives from over 70 participants from industry, private practice, Boards of Appeal, Unified Patent Court and litigators. The outcome was a clear and actionable set of recommendations for both the EPO and for applicants and representatives (see Quality Report 2024,¹⁴ section 7.3).

One recommendation was that the section on clarity in the Guidelines for examination should be updated. As part of the 2025 Guidelines revision cycle, public online user consultations were conducted alongside internal consultations. All comments received, together with the EPO's responses, were published on the EPO's consultation results webpage,¹⁵ ensuring transparency.

As a result of this process, the EPO prepared an introduction to the concept of clarity and its general principles, refined the guidance on "broad claims", and provided additional information on claim interpretation based on decision of the Enlarged Board of Appeal G 1/24. These changes entered into force on 1 April 2026. Further actions taken throughout 2025 to implement the recommendations from the workshop included:

- raising awareness among examiners of the importance of clarity post-grant
- setting quality objectives for all examiners to approach clarity assessment with a "mind willing to understand" and, when raising clarity objections, state what is unclear and why, and propose solutions where possible
- reviewing and strengthening examiner training material on clarity
- tracking the correctness and consistency of clarity objections using quality audits findings, SQAPs findings and the practice harmonisation dashboard

¹⁴ link.epo.org/web/general/annual-review-2024/en-quality-report-2024.pdf

¹⁵ epo.org/en/law-practice/consultation/completed-consultations

Improving consistency in handling third-party observations

Under the Implementing Regulations, in proceedings before the Office following publication of a European patent application any third party may, present observations concerning the patentability of the invention to which the application or patent relates. This can be done via a dedicated online form.¹⁶

Feedback from users suggested that the consistency of the EPO's handling of third-party observations could be improved. To assess this, we carried out a comprehensive study (see Quality Report 2024) and identified areas for improvement. As a result, the following steps were taken:

- examiners were reminded to provide timely feedback for the public to view (GL-E-VI.3),¹⁷ even in cases where the division considers observations are not relevant
- a dedicated training event was held with practical guidance on how to handle third-party observations correctly
- formalities officers were instructed to verify that third-party observations were addressed in examiner office actions
- cases where the division overlooked third-party observations were analysed to determine root causes and enable corrective actions
- all directors were provided with the cases from their technical areas that were part of the study, supporting targeted training and learning
- concrete examples of best practice are being used to harmonise practice and promote clear, concise and transparent assessments of third-party observations

An interim follow-up study showed that by mid-2025 examiners were providing feedback on third-party observations as requested by the Guidelines in 88% of cases – up from 80% in 2024. To assess the impact of these ongoing actions, a comprehensive study will be conducted in 2026.

Learning from opposition decisions

Building on the methodology used since 2024 to analyse Boards of Appeal outcomes,¹⁸ in 2025 we applied a similar approach to opposition decisions to strengthen learning.

Figure 20 below shows a breakdown of outcomes for all 1 193 opposition decisions issued between January and May 2025. A more granular analysis of grounds was carried out for the 224 revocation decisions (18.8%) in which the main request was essentially identical to the patent as granted.

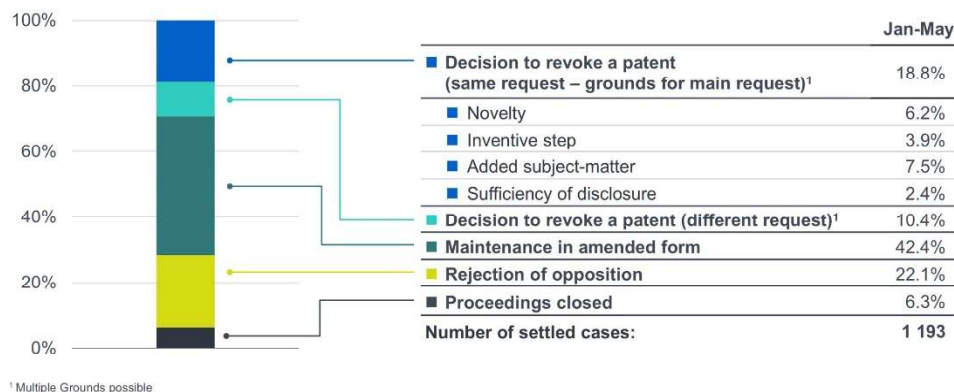
These revocation decisions were analysed and shared with examining teams in the corresponding technical areas to support targeted learning and further improve examination practice. One example is the strengthening of added subject-matter checks as outlined above.

¹⁶ epo.org/en/searching-for-patents/legal/observations

¹⁷ epo.org/en/legal/guidelines-epc/2025/e_vi_3.html

¹⁸ See section 5.1 in the Quality Report 2024: link.epo.org/web/general/annual-review-2024/en-quality-report-2024.pdf

Figure 20 – Outcomes of opposition decisions January-May 2025



Source: EPO

Improving the quality of refusal decisions

The quality of refusal decisions is also important for our stakeholders. For this reason, we held a dedicated SQAPs session on the topic in 2024. The findings helped shape actions under the Quality Action Plan 2025, such as promoting the consistent application of the problem-solution approach in decisions to refuse.

Another key finding from the SQAPs on refusals was that a more proactive dialogue between applicants and examining divisions during the procedure prior to the decision could help prevent the refusal of applications which contain patentable subject-matter. To address this, we took further steps in 2025 to enhance dialogue with applicants during the patent granting process. Examiners are more actively encouraged to initiate early dialogue, through the MyEPO shared area or by phone, to avoid potential dead ends on issues such as clarity or added subject-matter and indicate where potential amendments could lead to grant.

In addition to the SQAPs findings on refusals, we gained further insights through our analysis of ex parte appeal cases settled in 2023 and 2024. This analysis led to the development of a new examination KPI based on Boards of Appeal outcomes. The KPI was first published on the quality dashboard¹⁹ in March 2025 and updated in June. The analysis of Boards of Appeal decisions was consistent with SQAPs findings, confirming that the problem-solution approach could be applied more rigorously in decisions to refuse on the ground of lack of inventive step.

6.2 Examination data and outcomes

Divisional applications

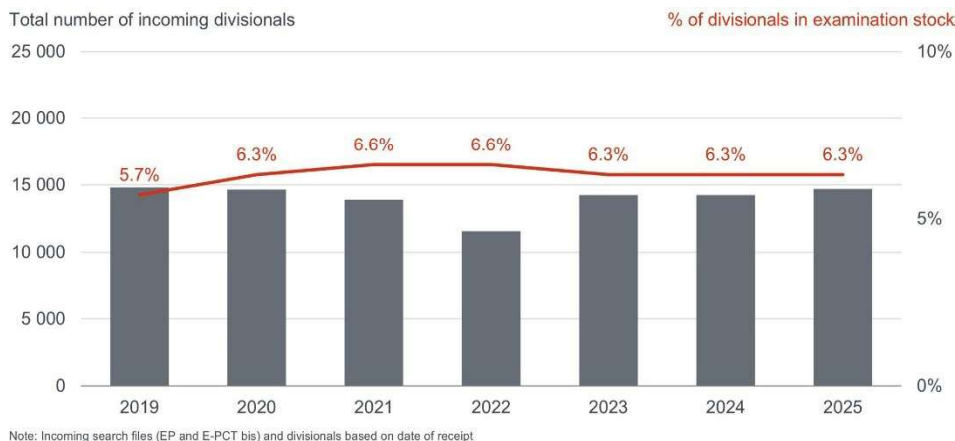
A divisional application may be filed relating to any pending earlier European patent application. The divisional application is accorded the same filing date as the parent application and benefits from any priority right of the parent application.

¹⁹ epo.org/en/about-us/services-and-activities/quality/quality-dashboard

They may be filed to overcome an objection of non-unity (mandatory divisionals) or on the applicant's own initiative (voluntary divisionals).

At present, pending divisional applications represent about 6.3% of the total volume of EP examination stock. In recent years divisional applications filed on a voluntary basis have remained stable at 86%. The remainder are filed following a lack of unity objection. Most divisionals are "first generation": 83.9% of divisionals finished in 2025 had only one parent.

Figure 21 – Number of incoming divisional applications and percentage of examination stock made up of divisionals



Source: EPO

For consistency of treatment, divisional applications are assigned, where possible, to the divisions that handled the parent application. In addition, the EPO publishes divisional applications as early as possible, thereby providing early transparency for third parties.

The EPO has also implemented measures for swift processing of divisional applications, including giving examining divisions the option to summon to oral proceedings as a first action in cases where the parent application was refused or withdrawn. Further, to avoid delays, decisions on divisional applications are taken despite pending opposition or appeal decisions in (grand)parent applications. Third-party observations are filed more often for divisional applications and will accelerate the processing of the application if they are non-anonymous and substantiated.

Divisional applications are also subject to a generation-specific fee to discourage sequences of divisional applications. Due to interest from users, we continue to monitor and report on the use of divisionals and, in particular, multi-generational divisionals in different technical areas.

Figure 22 – Generations of divisional applications finished in 2025 (not parents themselves)

Technology Community	Count	Divisionals with only 1 parent	Divisionals with only 1 parent (in %)	Divisionals with 2 parents	Divisionals with 2 parents (in %)	Divisionals with 3 parents or more	Divisionals with 3 parents or more (in %)
Sum	10 184	8 541	83.9%	1 253	12.3%	390	3.8%
Agri-food	213	192	90.1%	17	8.0%	4	1.9%
Digital	2 755	2 197	79.7%	406	14.7%	152	5.5%
Electronics & Physics	1 163	1 045	89.9%	97	8.3%	21	1.8%
Energy	390	327	83.8%	56	14.4%	7	1.8%
Health	2 849	2 286	80.2%	418	14.7%	145	5.1%
Infrastructure & Mechanics	798	707	88.6%	76	9.5%	15	1.9%
Materials & Production	1 321	1 154	87.4%	134	10.1%	33	2.5%
Mobility & Space Technologies	693	631	91.1%	49	7.1%	13	1.9%
Not applicable	2	2	100%	0	0%	0	0%

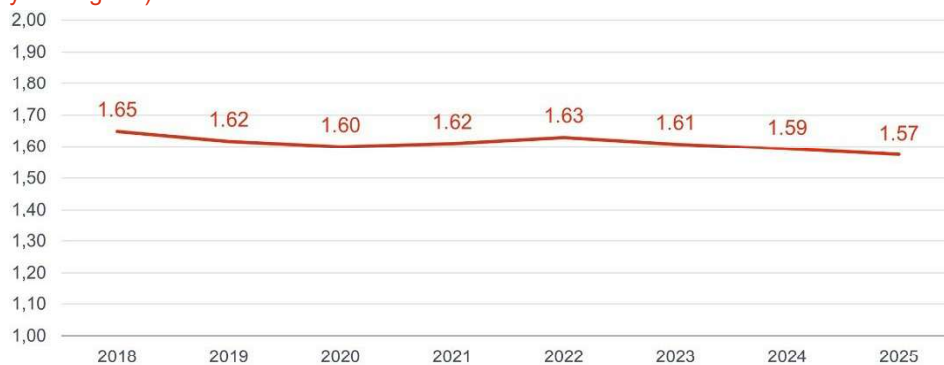
Source: EPO

Intermediate communications

The Office issued 170 967 intermediate communications in 2025. Divisions and applicants can opt for various forms of consultations to resolve outstanding issues, including interactions via the MyEPO Shared Area, telephone calls or oral proceedings before the examining divisions.

For grants issued in 2025 following an intermediate communication (i.e. excluding cases where a grant was issued as the first action in examination), an average of 1.57 intermediate communications were issued prior to grant. This figure has varied between 1.57 and 1.65 in the period 2018-2025.

Figure 23 – Average number of intermediate communications per application granted (by year of grant)



Average number of communications: Arithmetic average of needed intermediate communications for all non-direct published grants in respective year

Source: EPO

Oral proceedings

A total of 6 556 final actions in examination were issued in 2025 for applications which had a summons to oral proceedings, representing 5.3% of examination cases finalised that year. As for oral proceedings scheduled for 2025, 1 669 took place, while 5 887 were cancelled or rescheduled.

Although summonses to oral proceedings are generally issued for cases where the written procedure is not yielding progress, a summons does not in itself indicate any likelihood of a grant or refusal.

Figure 24 – Final examination actions 2020-2024, with and without a summons to oral proceedings

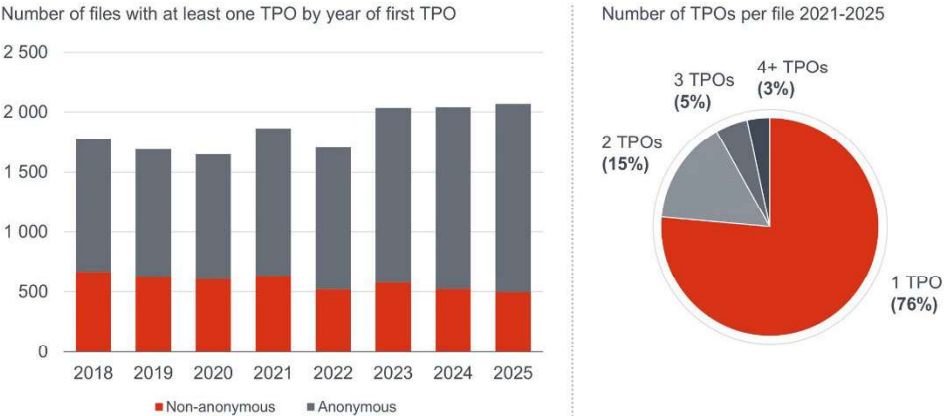


Source: EPO

Third-party observations

The filing of well-reasoned and well-substantiated third-party observations can improve the quality of granted European patents and may reduce the overall length of the procedure, as applications with non-anonymous third-party observations are accelerated in examination.

Figure 25 – Third-party observations (TPOs)

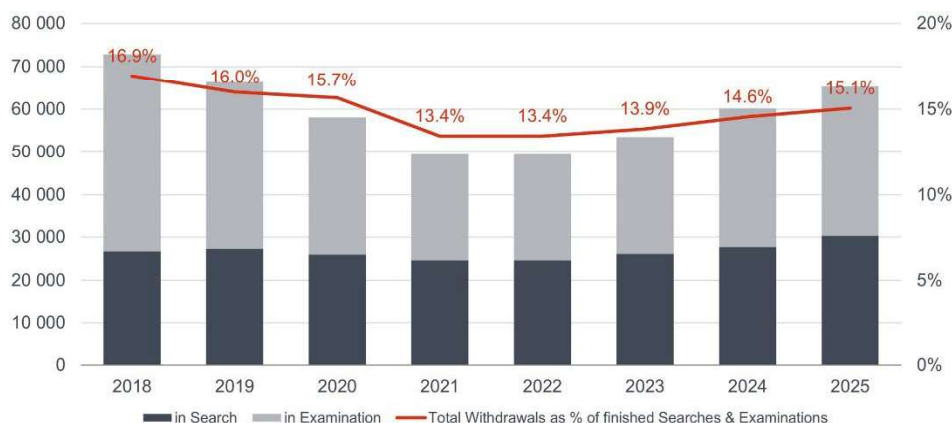


Source: EPO

Withdrawals

Various factors can influence the number of withdrawals of applications. Overall, withdrawal levels have remained broadly stable, showing only limited fluctuation over recent years.

Figure 26 – Withdrawals (by year of withdrawal)



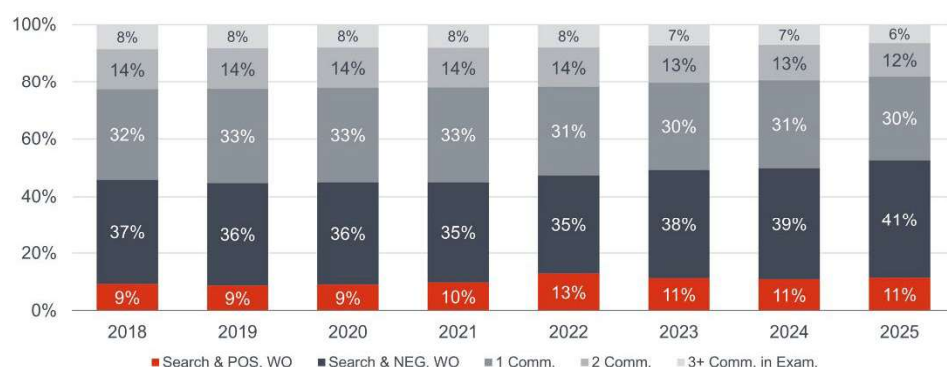
Source: EPO

Grants

In 2025, 52% of patents granted were granted as the first action in examination, a share that has remained stable over the years. In the remaining portion of granted patents, at least one intermediate communication was issued. Depending on the complexity of an application and the applicant's behaviour, some cases require more dialogue during the examination phase. 18% of grants in 2025 received two or more communications.

The EPO typically receives more than 4 000 PCT Direct²⁰ requests per year and internal analyses show that this route brings applicants tangible benefits in terms of time and cost savings. This is because PCT Direct files tend to have higher instances of grants as first actions in examination at the EPO compared to non-PCT Direct applications for which the EPO had been the International Searching Authority in the PCT phase.

Figure 27 – Number of communications required prior to grant 2018-2025



Definition: Break-down of all published grants in respective year by required number of interactions, i.e. grants after Search & positive or negative written opinion; after 1, 2 or 3+ intermediate communications in examination.

Source: EPO

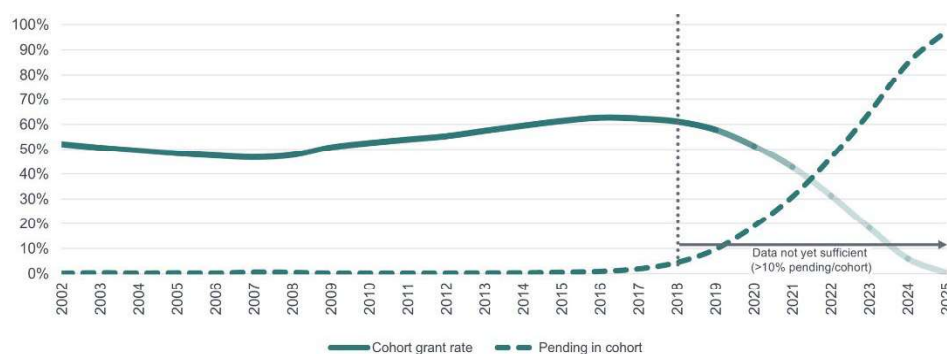
²⁰ epo.org/en/legal/guidelines-pct/2025/b_iv_1_2.html

Grant rates

In calculating grant rates, the EPO uses a "cohort" approach. Patent applications filed in the same calendar year are treated as a single group that is tracked until the final examination action, and two trend lines are plotted accordingly to reflect the final outcome. The grant procedure has been completed for 99% of all European patent applications filed up until the end of 2019. For these applications, the grant rate was 57.8% (see CA/F5/25²¹).

Grant rates are also influenced by the quality of incoming applications and the way they are prosecuted. The role of a patent office is to examine the applications submitted, grant those that comply with the requirements under the applicable law and refuse those that cannot be brought into line with the law – always ensuring the right to be heard. Its role is not – and should not be – to grant a certain percentage of the applications it receives. Therefore, the grant rate is not, and cannot be, an indicator of a patent office's quality.

Figure 28 – Grant rate as calculated according to the cohort approach



Cohort approach: Applications filed within the same given year are grouped, followed prospectively over the years and their current fate (as of end of 2025) is displayed in the chart, e.g. around 52% of the applications filed in 2002 have been granted as of end of 2025 and 0% are pending.

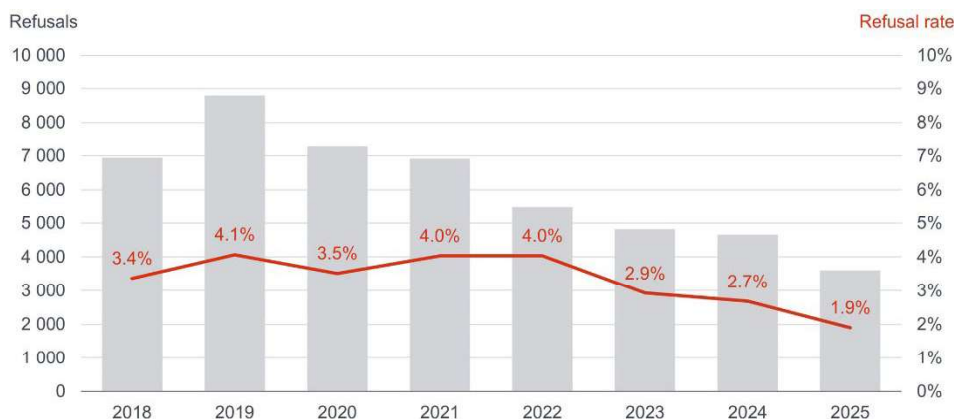
Source: EPO

Refusals

Refusal rates have remained remarkably consistent over time. The gradual decline in the refusal rate since 2022 mirrors a corresponding increase in withdrawals during examination during the same period.

²¹ link.epo.org/ac-document/CA/F%205/24%20-%20En.pdf

Figure 29 – Refusal rates 2018-2025 (by year of refusal)

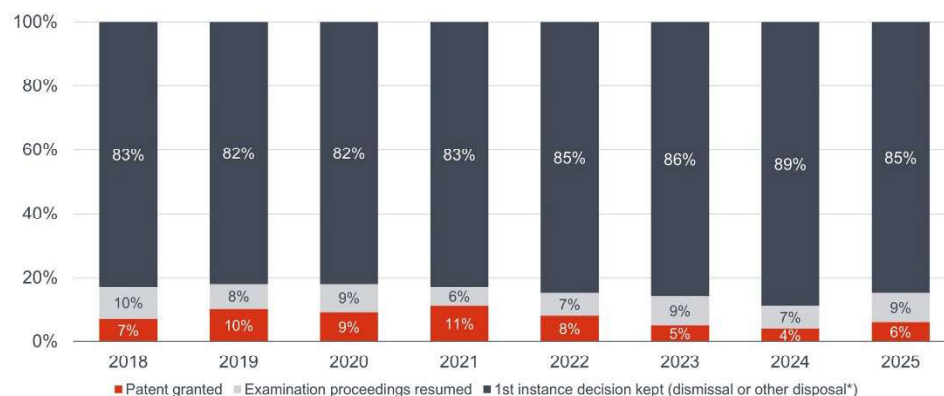


Source: EPO

Outcomes of appealed refusal decisions (ex parte)

Approximately 8% of refusals by examining divisions are appealed, representing 0.2% of applications files at the EPO. A total of 668 ex parte cases were settled, of which 242 were settled by a decision on the merits. Of these 242 cases, 41 were granted by the Boards of Appeal (see figure 1 in the 2025 Annual Report of the Boards of Appeal²²). As can be seen from figure 30 below, patents granted by the Boards of Appeal represent only 6% of all ex parte cases settled in 2025.

Figure 30 – Outcomes of the 946 ex parte cases settled in 2025



* Other disposal are e.g. withdrawal, inadmissibility cases
 Note: Figures are rounded; based on all BoA disposals
 Source: Report on Appealed Decisions

Source: EPO

6.3 Quality results

Directorate Quality Audit (DQA) results

The EPO has audited the quality of its grants for many years. Sample sizes are selected to ensure statistically relevant results for the quality KPIs, with a 95% confidence level and a margin of error of at most 2.5%. These audits are essential

²² link.epo.org/web/case-law-appeals/annual-reports/en-Annual-report-of-the-BoA-2025.pdf

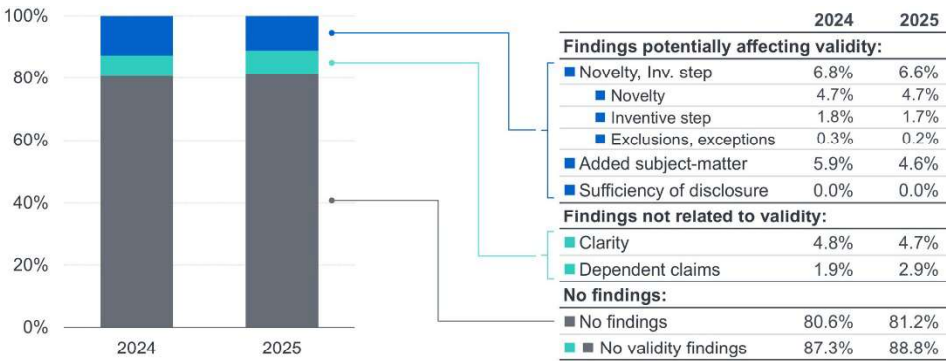
to ensuring that examination practice remains consistently aligned with the EPC, and that any emerging patterns or risks are identified early.

Grant audit results over recent years confirm a sustained improvement in examination quality. The proportion of audited grant files with no audit findings whatsoever increased from 76.6% in 2022 to 81.2% in 2025, while the share of files with no findings affecting validity rose from 84.6% to 88.8% in the same period.

Findings related to incorrect assessment of novelty or inventive step decreased from 9.5% in 2022 to 6.6% in 2025, driven in particular by improvements in inventive step findings. Findings related to added subject-matter improved from 5.9% in 2024 to 4.6% in 2025, meaning we were able to meet the challenging <5% target for the first time.

Findings related to clarity show a gradual downward trend over recent years and accounted for 4.7% of findings in 2025, while dependent claims remain an important focus area within the Office's broader effort to ensure consistent examination quality.

Figure 31 – Grant quality audit



The results are presented as a breakdown of the ratio of files having at least one finding. For files with multiple findings, only the finding corresponding to the highest in the ranking is counted. The other findings are not taken into account for the purposes of this table and results. All findings are considered for correction/learning purposes. Reporting is on a 12-month rolling basis. 1035 files were audited in 2025 vs 984 in 2024.

Source: EPO

User satisfaction survey (USS) results

The 2024/2025 USS results were published in October 2025.²³ Overall, 79% of respondents rated our examination products good or very good, while only 5% expressed dissatisfaction.

The biggest improvement in satisfaction was seen in consistency in examination, which rose to 73% rating good or very good, up from 59% in the previous survey. This is a very encouraging result because consistency has been the main focus of our examination quality actions for the past three years and this shows our actions are delivering results.

²³ epo.org/en/news-events/news/user-satisfaction-survey-20242025-strong-results-and-clear-direction-further

Significant improvements in satisfaction ratings were also noted in specific areas of examination targeted in our recent Quality Action Plans, for example, assessment of inventive step, clarity and coverage of dependent claims. These are important indicators that our actions are effective and examiners' assessments are improving in line with user expectations.

The latest survey also introduced new questions in areas of particular interest to users. These covered issues such as the application of the problem-solution approach, amendments proposed by the division, consistency in divisional applications, and the treatment of computer implemented inventions. The results and the free-text responses to these sections helped guide the development of the Quality Action Plan 2026.

Key findings from SQAPs: grants

The annual Stakeholder Quality Assurance Panels (SQAPs) brought together EPO experts and European patent attorneys to jointly assess the quality of 36 granted patents across various technical fields in 2025.

Key findings included:

- Openness to dialogue between examiners and representatives was identified as a best practice, helping resolve misunderstandings and support quality grants.
- Proactive examining divisions using clear reasoning were effective in guiding applicants towards EPC-compliant claims.
- Some cases revealed that intermediate generalisations had been overlooked, consistent with DQA findings. This will receive increased attention in the Quality Action Plan 2026.
- In some instances, amendment suggestions from the division lacked clear and unambiguous support in the application as filed. Awareness will be reinforced through actions on added subject-matter.
- Panellists raised concerns about amendments made to the specification at the grant stage without consultation with the applicant.

These findings mirror feedback obtained through other user engagement channels. Suggestions for improvement have been taken forward in our Quality Action Plan 2026. For more information, please refer to the annex to this report, which provides more detail on the 2025 SQAPs.

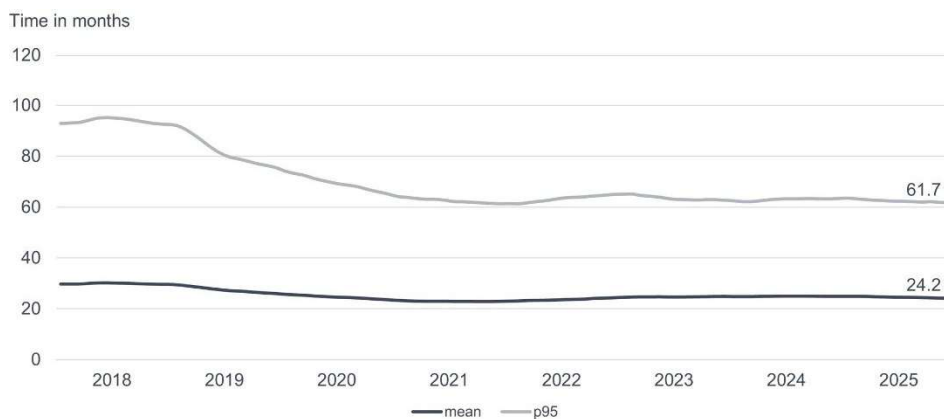
Timeliness results: examination procedure

Examination timeliness has been relatively stable since 2020, after years of improvements as historical backlogs were cleared. The mean duration of a standard examination procedure²⁴ – from the request for examination to issuing the intention to grant – for applications granted in 2025 was 24.2 months, down from 24.9 months in 2024.

²⁴ Standard examinations exclude cases with (1) more than one request for extension to reply, (2) more than one late fee payment and (3) rescheduling of oral proceedings.

Our goal was to deliver at least 70% of grants within 36 months. In 2025 we exceeded this and achieved 75.8%. For 2026 we have set an even more ambitious target of 75%. In 2025, 95% of examinations ("p95" in figure 32), were granted in 61.7 months, which is over 31 months faster than in 2018.

Figure 32 – Examination timeliness



Source: EPO

Timeliness results: accelerated examination

The programme for accelerated prosecution of European patent applications (PACE) at the EPO is free of charge. The EPO strives to issue the first examiner action within three months of receiving a PACE request. We met this target in 2025, with actions being issued in 2.5 months on average (mean) and 95% issued within 6.7 months. The average timeliness of combined first and further actions was 2.2 months.

The mean time to issue the extended/partial European search report in 2024 was five and a half months. This has enabled the EPO to include a revision of the acceleration mechanisms for European patent applications in its long-term planning as outlined in the Strategic Plan 2028. The sustained improvement in timeliness for providing the extended/partial European search report supports the EPO decision to restrict the acceleration mechanism of the PACE programme to examination only as from 1 February 2026.²⁵ This ensures acceleration efforts are focused where they can make the biggest difference to overall processing time.

Timeliness results: end-to-end

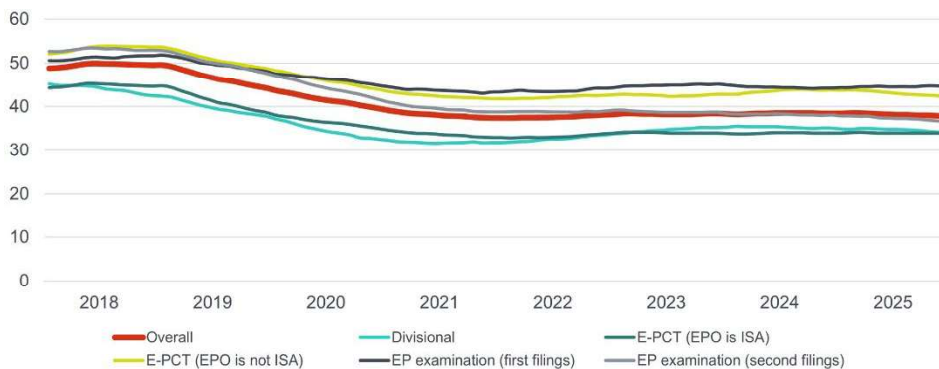
Our goal for overall end-to-end timeliness – from filing to intention to grant – is for 75% of standard cases²⁶ to be granted within 48 months of a request for a European patent. 74.8% of standard cases were processed on time in 2025. This translates to an average end-to-end pendency of 36.5 months. For divisional

²⁵ epo.org/en/legal/official-journal/2025/12/a69

²⁶ 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.

applications, we aim to issue at least 80% of decisions to grant within 48 months of filing of the divisional. In 2025 we achieved 78.5% on time.

Figure 33 –Average time from filing to grant for all applications following different filing routes (months)



Source: EPO

KPIs for Examination

KPI	Result 2025	Goal
Incorrect assessment of novelty or inventive step (DQA)	6.6%	< 5.0% (2025)
Incorrect assessment of added subject-matter (DQA)	4.6%	< 5.0% (2025)
Decision of the Board to grant a patent which sets aside a decision of an examining division to refuse a patent (BoA)	6.2%	<4% (2026) <3% (2028)
Users rating our examination products as good or very good (USS)	79% (USS 2024/2025)	≥ 80% (2024/2025)
Timeliness of examination	75.8%	≥ 70% (2028)
Timeliness of divisional applications	78.5%	≥ 80% (2028)
End-to-end timeliness	74.8%	≥ 75% (2028)

7. Quality, timely products and services: opposition



KEY STRENGTHS

- **Procedural fairness and transparency:** Strong focus on reasoned decisions, addressing all arguments and safeguarding the right to be heard
- **Continuous learning culture:** Regular training, workshops and feedback loops help opposition examiners stay aligned with evolving legal and procedural standards



QUALITY ACTION PLAN 2025: KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- **Enhanced consistency in the assessment of inventive step** thanks to workshops for opposition examiners and discussion of Boards of Appeal decisions
- **First-ever SQAPs session on oppositions** (in addition to regular sessions on searches and written opinions, and on grants)
- **Piloted AI-supported minutes of oral proceedings:** with positive feedback from examining divisions and users
- **Published four new KPI for opposition** based on BoA decisions, to drive further improvement in our opposition decisions



RESULTS

- **BoA KPIs:**
 - 2.9% revoked by Boards due to lack of novelty (goal 2028 <3%)
 - 9.9% revoked by Boards due to lack of inventive step (goal 2028 <3%)
 - 6.3% revoked by Boards based on added subject-matter (goal 2028 <3%)
 - 1.5% maintain a patent which had been revoked by the opposition division (goal 2028 <2%)
- **High user satisfaction:** 72% of respondents in the 2024/2025 user satisfaction survey rated the opposition procedure good or very good
- **Opposition timeliness:**
 - **19.1 months** mean duration (target: 18 months)
 - **51.6%** of cases finalised within 18 months (targets: 70% by 2026, 75% by 2028)

Opposition proceedings serve as a centralised, post-grant administrative review designed to safeguard the public interest by ensuring only valid European patents are maintained. In opposition, we aim to provide fair, impartial and transparent proceedings that deliver legally robust decisions on time. Every case is dealt with by an opposition division composed of three highly experienced examiners, with the option to include a legal member if required. Examiners working in opposition are selected for their significant expertise and experience and undergo rigorous training.

During opposition procedures, the chairperson of the division is always different from the chairperson involved in granting the patent, helping ensure an independent review of the earlier decision and reinforcing objectivity. Wherever possible, the complete opposition division differs from the examining division. For some technical fields where expertise is more limited, the requirements of Article 19 EPC are fulfilled by retaining a member of the examining division as first or second examiner.

7.1 Actions to improve the quality of opposition

Systematic analysis of *inter partes* BoA decisions has been part of our quality management system since 2024. The analysis has two main objectives: to provide fresh insights that drive continuous improvement of our opposition work, and to develop meaningful KPIs that help transparently track our progress over time.

BoA decisions that set aside an opposition decision are shared with the managers responsible for the opposition area and studied further by experts in the technical areas concerned, to identify areas where our opposition examiners can improve. This provides a structured feedback loop that supports targeted learning.

The four new opposition KPIs developed through this process were first published on our quality dashboard in 2025 and are updated annually. They can also be found at the end of this chapter, along with the progress we have made.

Enhancing consistency in the assessment of inventive step

Analysis of cases settled by the Boards of Appeal in 2023 and 2024 showed that the majority of decisions with diverging outcomes at the opposition and appeal stages involved the assessment of inventive step. Targeted actions were therefore taken in 2025 to improve the consistency of inventive step reasoning.

At a workshop in June, opposition examiners discussed examples of cases where the Boards had revoked a patent due to lack of inventive step, setting aside a previous decision of the opposition division to maintain a patent. The workshop outcomes were shared with all examiners and helped them understand where the divergence of opinion had taken place, while also serving as a reminder to apply all the steps of the problem-solution approach when assessing inventive step.

Further, an in-depth study was undertaken on all such BoA decisions from 2024 to revoke a patent due to lack of inventive step. The study indicated that decisions where the inventive step reasoning involved common general knowledge were more prone to diverging decisions. Opposition examiners and their managers were made aware and provided with example cases from their technical areas, so they could be more attentive to their reasoning.

Over the course of 2025, specific aspects of inventive step were also addressed at learning events. For example, selected cases from the case law of the Boards of Appeal were presented to 1 000 examiners. This focus on improving inventive step reasoning will continue in 2026.

First SQAPs on opposition decisions

To broaden our assessment of quality at the opposition stage, the 2025 SQAPs programme included the first-ever dedicated session on opposition decisions, which was welcomed by users. The findings (see the results in the section below and the annex) provided valuable insights and helped us develop actions for further improvement in 2026.

AI-assisted minute taking in oral proceedings

As part of the pilot on AI-assisted minute taking that commenced in May 2025 (see chapter 3), the minutes of 159 oral proceedings (84 in opposition and 75 in examination) were drafted with the help of a new AI tool. Positive feedback was received from users and the divisions. As a result, this AI-assisted approach was extended to all examination and opposition oral proceedings as of January 2026, as well as those taking place before the Receiving Section and the Legal Division.

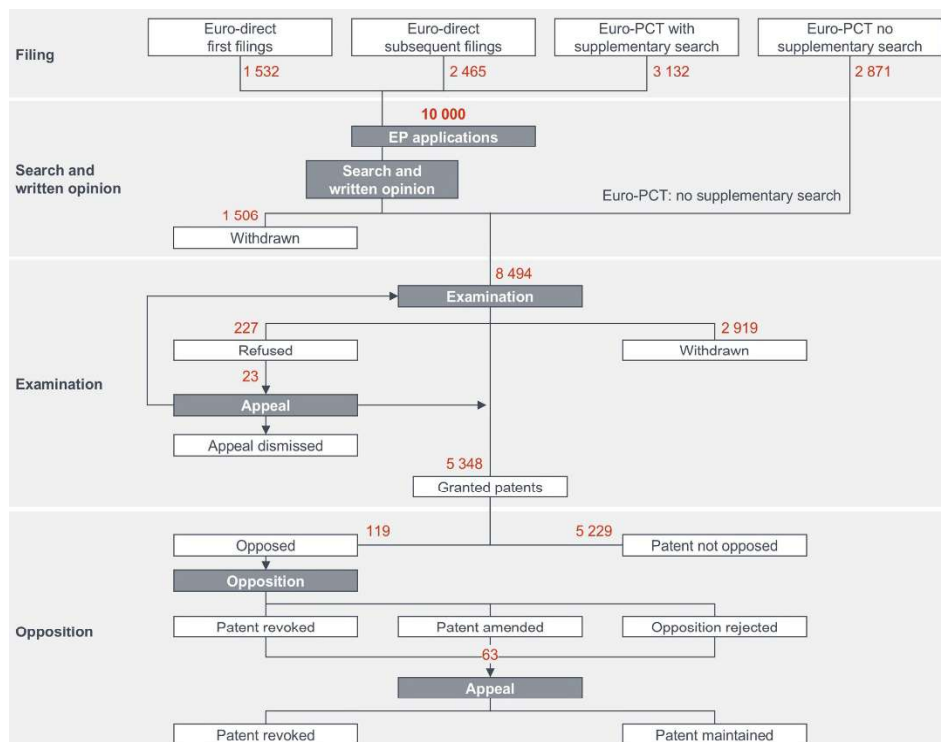
Structured opposition communications

In March 2025 a new structured template to assist with the drafting of summons and decisions was made available to opposition examiners. The template helps ensure all relevant provisions are addressed and promotes the delivery of well-structured written communications. This template will be incorporated into the new communication drafter tool (see chapter 3) and feedback from examiners who use the template will be reviewed to further improve it.

7.2 Opposition data and outcomes

The chart below shows the journey of a typical population of 10 000 filings through the EPO's patent granting process. Based on long-term average numbers, for every 10 000 patent applications filed at the EPO, around 119 granted patents are opposed. Thereafter, some 63 opposition decisions are subsequently appealed. Opposition therefore represents a small but important portion of the work of our examiners.

Figure 34 – Overview of file flow in the patent granting process: long-term averages

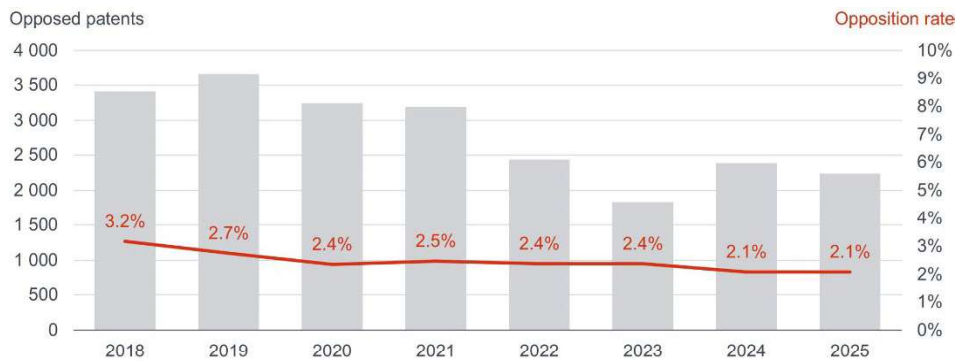


Source: EPO

Stable opposition rates

The percentage of granted patents that were opposed remained steady in 2025 at 2.1%. As has been the case previously, last year's opposition cases were not evenly distributed across technical fields.

Figure 35 – Number of granted patents opposed and opposition rate 2018-2025



Opposition Rate: Ratio of opposed patents over opposable patents (i.e. patents for which the nine months period for opposition expired during the respective year)

Source: EPO

Figure 36: Opposition rates in our technology communities

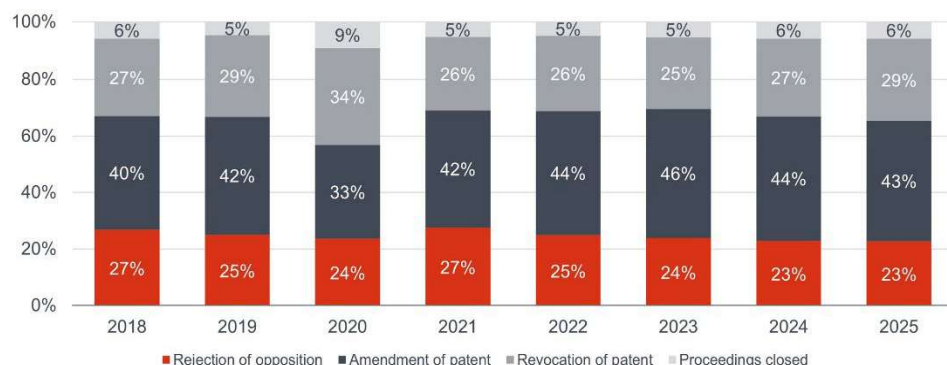
Technology community	Opposition rate 2025
Agri-food	8.5%
Materials & Production	3.7%
Health	3.1%
Infrastructure & Mechanics	2.3%
Energy	2.0%
Mobility & Space Technologies	1.6%
Electronics & Physics	1.1%
Digital	0.5%
Average	2.1%

Source: EPO

Opposition outcomes

As shown in the graph below, the outcome of opposition proceedings has been consistent over the years in terms of the proportion of patents upheld, amended or revoked. The fluctuation in outcomes observed in 2020 was a result of the measures implemented during the COVID pandemic, as only a limited number of the most straightforward cases were finalised in 2020.

Figure 37 – Opposition outcomes 2018-2025



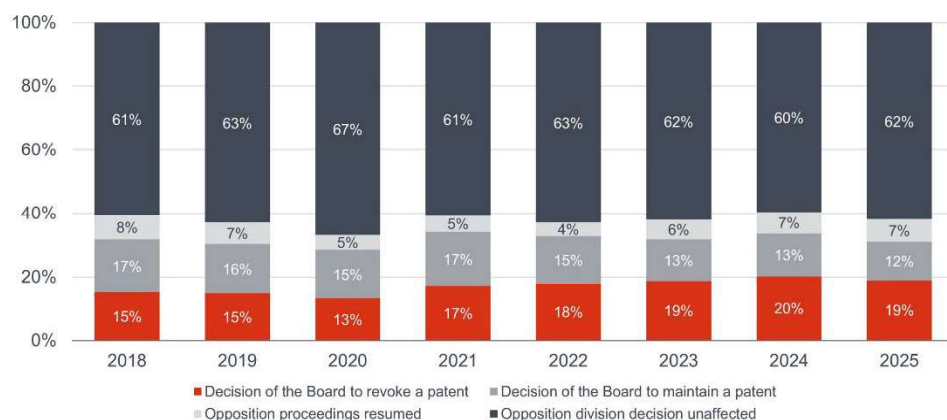
Source: EPO

Outcomes of appealed opposition decisions (*inter partes*)

An appeal against an opposition division's decision can be filed by the proprietor, one or more opponents, or both the proprietor and the opponent(s). Around 42% of opposition decisions are appealed, representing 0.9% of patent applications filed at the EPO. This figure has remained stable over the years and is a logical consequence of some files being highly contested for commercial and strategic reasons.

In 2025, a total of 1 978 *inter partes* proceedings were settled of which 1 969 fell under the Rules of Procedure of the Boards of Appeal (RoP) 2020. The Annual Report of the Boards of Appeal 2025²⁷ provides a breakdown of the outcomes for cases that were settled by a decision on the merits. Figure 38 shows the outcomes as a percentage of all cases settled. These outcomes have remained consistent over time.

Figure 38 – Outcomes of the *inter partes* cases settled in 2018-2025



Source: EPO

²⁷ link.epo.org/web/case-law-appeals/annual-reports/en-Annual-report-of-the-BoA-2025.pdf

7.3 Quality results

User satisfaction survey (USS) results

The 2024/2025 USS results were published in October 2025.²⁸ 72% of respondents rated our opposition procedure good or very good. Overall satisfaction has not yet returned to 2021 levels, but most aspects have improved. For example, satisfaction with the duration of the opposition procedure has increased, though there is still room for improvement. There has also been a statistically significant improvement in satisfaction with the time taken to issue minutes and decisions, up from 55% to 70%. Importantly, the perception of fair treatment has remained consistently high over the years, confirming users' trust in the EPO's opposition procedures.

Key findings from SQAPs: opposition

The first-ever SQAPs session on opposition assessed the quality of 36 opposition decisions across various technical fields. Key findings include:

- Impartial and balanced treatment of all parties, addressing arguments of both sides, including the losing party, is seen as crucial.
- There was a need for clearer reasoning on inventive step in some cases, particularly regarding selecting the closest prior art, establishing the technical effect and considering common general knowledge.
- Some decisions lacked sufficient explanation of why the divisions decided as they did.

These findings are consistent with our analysis of Boards of Appeal decisions and, wherever relevant, actions to address them have been taken forward as part of our Quality Action Plan 2026. For further information, the annex to this report provides more detail on the findings of last year's SQAPs.

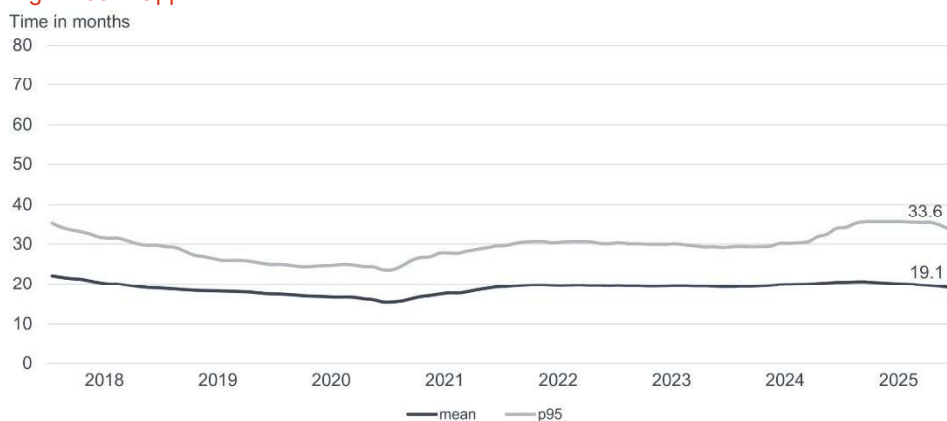
Opposition timeliness results

Around 2 900 oppositions were finalised in 2025. We have continued to reduce the number of pending oppositions, which is now at around 3 300 files. The mean average duration of a standard opposition²⁹ action is 19.1 months, not far above the 18-month target. 51.6% of opposition cases were completed within 18 months in 2025, up from 38.1% in 2024. We aim to reach 70% by the end of 2026 and 75% by 2028.

²⁸ link.epo.org/web/about-us/services-and-activities/en-user-satisfaction-survey-results-2024-2025.pdf

²⁹ Excluding cases with (a) more than one opponent, (b) a request to reschedule oral proceedings, or more than one oral proceeding, (c) a division that includes a legal member.

Figure 39 – Opposition timeliness



Source: EPO

KPIs for opposition

Four new opposition KPIs based on Boards of Appeal *inter partes* decisions were published on the Quality dashboard in March 2025. The 2028 targets reflect the time needed for current quality actions to impact future appeal outcomes. These KPIs are updated annually.

EPO examiners' assessment of novelty is very closely aligned with that of the Boards, as only 2.9% of opposition decisions were set aside due to lack of novelty in 2025. The results show scope for aligning opposition divisions more closely with the Boards in their assessment of inventive step and actions to address this will continue in 2026.

KPI	Result 2025	Goal
Decision of the Board to revoke a patent based on novelty which sets aside an opposition decision to maintain a patent (BoA)	2.9%	<3% (2028)
Decision of the Board to revoke a patent based on inventive step which sets aside an opposition decision to maintain a patent (BoA)	9.9%	<3% (2028)
Decision of the Board to revoke a patent based on added subject-matter which sets aside an opposition decision to maintain a patent (BoA)	6.3%	<3% (2028)
Decision of the Board to maintain a patent which sets aside an opposition decision to revoke a patent (BoA)	1.5%	<2% (2028)
Timeliness of oppositions	51.6%	≥ 70% (2026) ≥ 75% (2028)

8. Partnerships: sharing responsibility for high quality



KEY STRENGTHS

- **Shared responsibility:** Patent quality is a collaborative effort across the EPO, as well as between applicants, representatives and the EPO, guided by a jointly developed Patent Quality Charter
- **User engagement:** Ensures that our quality management system enables us to meet the needs of all users



QUALITY ACTION PLAN 2025: KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- **Expanded SQAPs programme:** Assessed search, grant and oppositions across 108 patent files; programme developed together with users and praised for the professional collaboration and transparency that it fostered
- **Completed user satisfaction survey 2024/2025:** 8 000+ respondents, new questions proposed by SACEPO members, higher satisfaction visible in areas of recent quality actions
- **Engaged in 130 user meetings** with user associations and applicants of all sizes, ensuring we listened and responded to a broad spectrum of perspectives
- **Held public user consultation:** To update the Guidelines for Examination and develop first Unitary Patent Guidelines incorporating user and expert comments



RESULTS

- **Closed 176 complaints:** 57% justified or partially justified
- **Handled 65 890 customer enquiries:** 97.6% resolved within time limits (target: 95%)

Patent quality is a shared journey and a shared responsibility for the EPO, applicants and representatives. It is strengthened when all parties contribute openly. Quality outcomes rely on continuous dialogue that can involve diverse and sometimes contrasting perspectives, but hinges on a shared understanding of how patentability requirements are applied. To support this dialogue the EPO provides a wide range of feedback channels and opportunities for direct engagement. These help applicants better understand our procedures, while we gain valuable insights into users' needs and experiences of the patent granting process.

The feedback gathered is collated and, together with our internal quality assessments, forms a core part of our evidence base for designing the annual Quality Action Plan and assessing the impact of ongoing quality initiatives.

8.1 Actions taken to refine our shared understanding of patent quality and jointly assess quality

The figure below summarises the diverse channels through which users engage with the EPO on quality-related matters. These channels support dialogue at various levels, whether relating to specific cases, general observations or exchanges on various perspectives, developments, trends or strategies. Input submitted via each channel creates valuable learning opportunities for us all.

Figure 40 – The EPO's user feedback channels³⁰



Source: EPO

Dialogue with users on patent quality

The Standing Advisory Committee before the EPO (SACEPO) is the EPO's main forum for dialogue with user representatives on developments in the European patent system. The SACEPO Working Party on Quality was established in 2017 and serves as the key consultative body on the quality of the patent granting process. It brings together 72 representatives from industry, the patent profession, research institutions and SMEs across 38 countries and all fields of technology.

The Working Party on Quality met twice in 2025, receiving updates on the EPO's key quality achievements and the implementation of the Quality Action Plan. Members actively contributed to discussions on improving substantive quality, and panellists from the SQAPs presented their findings to the group, strengthening the link between joint assessment and quality actions.

The 2025 SQAPs programme featured three sessions covering searches and written opinions, grants, and, for the first time, oppositions, reflecting the programme's continued evolution and ongoing stakeholder involvement in the assessment of quality.

As a result of consultations with members of the SACEPO Working Party on Quality, the latest user satisfaction survey included new questions about the EPO's digital and formalities services, as well as about the Unitary Patent. The 2024/2025 survey was our largest ever, with over 8 000 respondents. SACEPO members have also been invited to suggest questions for the next user satisfaction survey, which will ensure that future survey cycles are further enriched in accordance with the priorities of users.

Extensive engagement with stakeholders

As part of our outreach programme, 130 meetings took place in 2025 with representatives from 45 SMEs and micro-entities, 42 user associations, 26 larger corporations and 17 universities and public research organisations. This ensured

³⁰ epo.org/en/service-support/contact-us

that perspectives from applicants of all sizes and from all sectors were heard and reflected in our quality work, with an increasing focus on smaller applicants and educational and research institutions.

The programme included 12 high-level meetings with major applicants from industry and research, 14 technical meetings addressing topics across the patent granting process and extensive exchanges with user associations. Among the key topics discussed were patent quality, the Unitary Patent and Unified Patent Court (UPC), timeliness and artificial intelligence.

Conferences and events

Our fourth online User Day³¹ took place in September 2025, attracting 9 000 viewers from 68 countries. The two-day event presented the latest developments in digital user services, including MyEPO services, Online Filing 2.0, the Legal Interactive Platform and services related to the Unitary Patent. It also featured a panel discussion between EPO experts and patent professionals entitled "Quality as a shared effort between the EPO and the user community."

Also in 2025, we partnered with our users to organise conferences covering key aspects of quality across the patent granting process, including Search and Examination Matters, Opposition Matters, The Boards of Appeal Case Law Conference and Litigation Matters. These events provided structured forums for dialogue between EPO experts and the patent profession, supporting shared understanding and reinforcing transparency.

Support channels and user services

The EPO also provides an official online channel for users to lodge complaints and provide feedback.³² All complaints are considered carefully in consultation with the operational units concerned and a response is provided within 20 working days. Complaints and responses are generally included in the public part of the file, supporting transparency and accountability.

The EPO's confidential Ombuds Office service³³ assists users who continue to experience difficulties after regular resolution channels have been exhausted. Insights gathered from these cases contribute directly to the continuous improvement of EPO products and services, as well as to the development of our Quality Action Plans.

The Key Account Management (KAM) programme provides personalised support to frequent EPO filers. In 2025 the programme focused on supporting the transition to Online Filing 2.0 and ongoing adoption of MyEPO services. Activities included 18 public seminars delivered in each of the EPO's three official languages, along with 62 customised workshops and outreach activities,

³¹ <https://www.epo.org/en/news-events/news/over-9-000-viewers-68-countries-join-epo-user-day-2025-latest-updates-epo-services>

³² epo.org/en/complaintsfeedback

³³ epo.org/en/about-us/services-and-activities/ombuds-office

reaching more than 5 000 participants. The 2024/2025 user satisfaction survey recorded 95% satisfaction with the EPO's Key Account Management services.

Quality dialogue with the Boards of Appeal

Regular quality dialogue meetings between Boards of Appeal Chairpersons and senior EPO quality representatives continued in 2025. Topics addressed included case law monitoring, updates on the UPC case law report, progress with the Quality Action Plan 2025, Quality dashboard updates and the implementation of recent Enlarged Board of Appeal decisions.

A quality-focused knowledge sharing programme led by the Boards was agreed for 2026, including a series of lectures accessible to all examiners and in-depth masterclasses tailored to the needs of opposition chairpersons. The topics will be fully aligned with the Quality Action Plan 2026.

Guideline revision cycle

The Guidelines revision cycle continues to ensure transparency and broad consultation. In 2025 the online consultation generated several hundred comments from users and around 50 contributions from EPO experts. These were carefully reviewed, with many helping shape the latest revisions.

Updates were introduced across the EPC, PCT-EPO and Unitary Patent Guidelines, including enhanced guidance on clarity based on the outcomes of the international clarity workshop held with users in November 2024. The revised Guidelines entered into force on 1 April 2026.

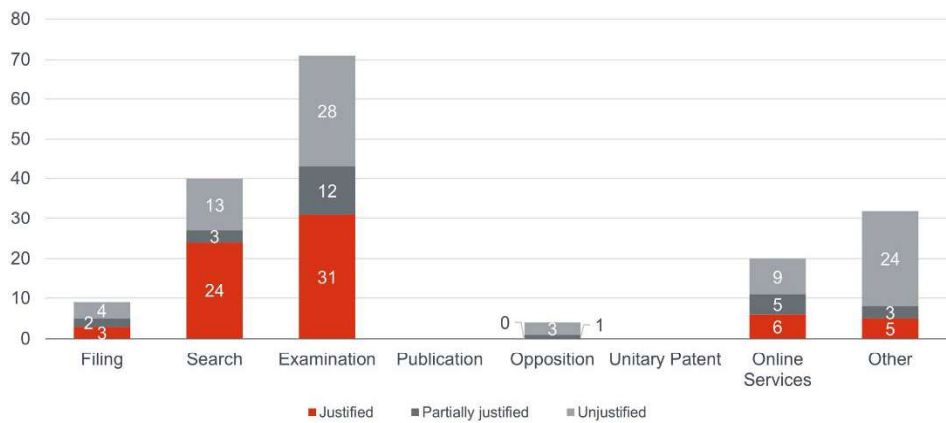
8.2 Quality results

Complaints and feedback

EPO examiners issued some 590 000 actions in 2025. Of the 176 complaints and feedback cases closed (compared to 198 in 2024), 150 were complaints, of which 57% (53% in 2024) were deemed justified or partially justified. 78% of all complaints and feedback cases closed in 2025 (60% in 2024) related to the patent granting process. In 99.4% of the cases closed in 2025 users received a detailed reply within 20 working days.

Independent professional representatives initiated approximately 47% of all complaints and feedback cases, with 73% found to be justified or partially justified. Companies submitted around 24% of complaints and feedback cases, with 49% found to be justified or partially justified. The remaining 29% were filed by users without legal representation, with 27% found to be justified or partially justified.

Figure 41 – Breakdown of 2025 complaints and justification status by procedural step or service



Source: EPO

Customer enquiries

The EPO handled 65 890 enquiries in 2025, resolving 97.6% on time, which surpassed our KPI target of 95%. The bulk of the enquiries concerned online services (29%), file-related queries for the Receiving Section (13%) and file-related queries in examination (14%). Upon case closure, the user receives an email inviting them to provide feedback on our handling of their enquiry. Satisfaction levels remained high, with 93.9% of respondents reporting a positive experience in 2025.

9. Conclusions and outlook for 2025

This year's Quality Report once again presents a wide range of data, insights, activities, achievements and areas for future attention. It provides a comprehensive overview of the impact of the Quality Actions Plan 2025, showing how we continued to ensure quality is firmly embedded throughout the patent granting process, and how user feedback, together with audits and analysis, have guided concrete actions. The extensive dialogue with our users, which has led to the enhanced product and service quality documented in this report, is essential to our ongoing drive for further quality improvements and reflected in our Quality Action Plan 2026.

2025 was a very strong year for quality at the EPO. Across the patent granting process, our results show clear and measurable progress. The quality of search and written opinion improved further. Highlights include fewer audit findings impacting validity, the highest ever proportion of search reports citing Asian-language prior art and non-patent literature, and more complete written opinions. This helped us meet two of our four KPIs in this area, with the other two within reach. Strengthened quality of examination was supported by sustained focus on consistent application of the EPC, continuous learning from opposition and appeal outcomes, and targeted actions on clarity, inventive step and added subject-matter where we successfully met our challenging KPI for the first time ever. In opposition, revised and improved role-based training, the expanded analysis of *inter partes* appeals and the first SQAPs session on opposition all contributed to improved consistency, the right to be heard and procedural quality. Overall **user satisfaction** has remained high, as demonstrated by the results of the 2024/2025 user satisfaction survey, confirming that the focus on quality, legal certainty and open dialogue is delivering results our users notice and value.

At the same time, our results highlight those areas where progress has been made but close attention is still required. These include further improving the timeliness of opposition, increasing the consistency of written opinions on mixed-type inventions, continuing to strengthen the handling of third-party observations, and further harmonising the application of the problem-solution approach in both examination and opposition. We will also keep integrating and building on the valuable recommendations which arise from our highly valued SQAPs sessions and our ongoing dialogue with users from around the world.

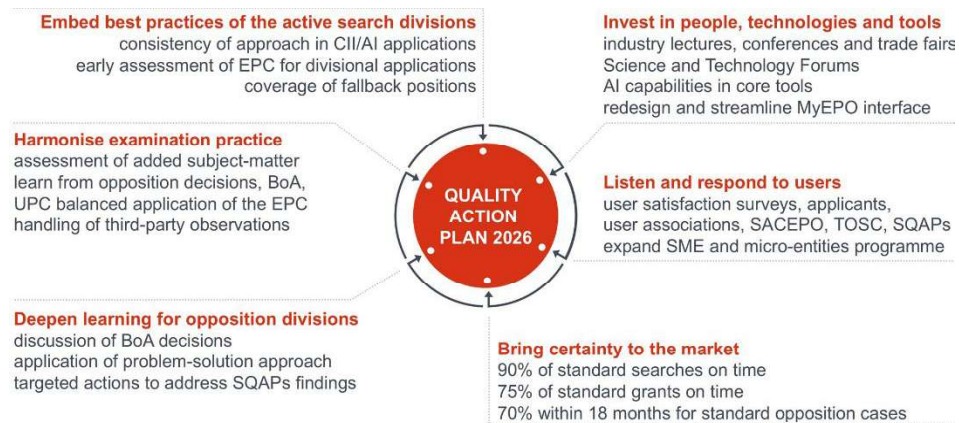
Informed by this wealth of insights, the Quality Action Plan 2026 lays out a targeted set of actions. It includes ensuring a balanced application of the EPC, and embedding best practices that are proven to consistently yield strong outcomes; deepening our learning from Boards of Appeal and UPC decisions; continuously developing our training, expanding the human-centric and transparent use of AI-supported tools (such as those for minute taking and our new drafting tools); and improving communication and dialogue with applicants. As in previous years, we will maintain our focus on timeliness, ensuring search, examination and opposition continue to deliver legal certainty, predictability and high-quality outcomes for the public as early as possible.

Finally, we warmly welcome comments on this report. Feedback from all users of the patent system, including applicants, representatives, user associations, and national offices, is fundamental to shaping our work. After all, quality is a shared endeavour. We encourage readers to make suggestions concerning how future

reports can be improved, the areas they should cover and any additional data that would make them even more valuable. Comments can be sent to quality@epo.org.

Your insights remain an integral part of our shared commitment to quality and will continue to guide our actions in the year ahead and beyond.

Figure 42 – Quality action plan 2026



Source: EPO

10. Annex – Stakeholder Quality Assurance Panels

The Stakeholder Quality Assurance Panels (SQAPs) established at the EPO under the SACEPO Working Party on Quality (SACEPO WP/Q) in 2019 have become a well-established forum for constructive, open dialogue with users. Through in-depth, file-specific exchanges, the panels support a shared understanding of substantive quality and contribute to continuous improvement in EPO practice.

Since the first joint assessment of quality by European patent attorneys and EPO experts in 2022, the annual programme has been expanded and developed significantly, progressively covering a broader cross-section of the EPO's work and involving an increasingly diverse group of experts. This continues to be directly informed by feedback from SACEPO WP/Q members, the Institute of Professional Representatives before the EPO (epi), BusinessEurope and SQAPs participants.

Each year the EPO holds one SQAPs session on search reports and written opinions, and another on grants, ensuring the panels assess our core products annually. These are complemented by a third session which offers additional insights into another stage of the patent granting process. In 2023 we focused on intermediate communications and in 2024 the first-ever session on refusals took place. In 2025 we held the first-ever SQAPs session dedicated to oppositions.

Within each panel, European patent attorneys work with EPO experts to assess the quality of selected cases. This deepens our shared understanding of patent quality and provides valuable, actionable feedback on the quality of EPO products and services.

The expert panels report their findings to the SACEPO Working Party on Quality, identifying examples of best practices and opportunities for improvement. These findings are then shared with all examiners and managers and are instrumental in shaping the EPO's Quality Action Plans.

Figure 43: Key SQAPs findings, 2025

	Search reports and written opinions	Grants	Oppositions
	Well-structured written opinions that address all claims, with clear, well-reasoned objections	Constructive dialogue with representatives	Self-contained decisions that clearly explain the reasons for the outcome
	More complete assessment of dependent claims	More attention to intermediate generalisations (added subject-matter)	More consistent application of problem-solution approach, especially technical effect and common general knowledge

Source: EPO

10.1 The SQAPs programme 2025

In 2025, three SQAPs sessions were held; one on search reports and written opinions, one on grants and the first-ever session dedicated to oppositions. In

total, 66 attorneys and EPO experts assessed 108 cases, organised into 18 panels across different technical fields.

Each panel consisted of four experts, two European patent attorneys and two EPO experts. The attorneys were members of the SACEPO WP/Q or nominated by the epi or BusinessEurope. The EPO panel members were selected from senior expert examiners, examiner team managers and quality auditors.

The patent attorneys selected six files per panel from random pools of 100 cases provided by the EPO. The pool of search reports and written opinions included a representative mix of procedural outcomes, including those which led to a grant, which did not enter examination or were withdrawn during examination or refused. The pool of opposition cases included both decisions that had been appealed and those that had not. For all files assessed, the procedures before the EPO were complete and no related cases were pending at the Unified Patent Court (UPC).

Around 130 observers attended the panel discussions, nearly twice as many as the previous year. The observers comprised members of SACEPO WP/Q, epi and BusinessEurope, as well as EPO staff.

Figure 44: The 2025 SQAPs schedule
SQAPs 2025 Schedule

	20 October Search reports, written opinions	21 October Grants	22 October Oppositions
09.00 to 13.00 CEST	Panel 1, Digital Panel 3, Health and agri-food Panel 5, Energy, mobility and space technologies	Panel 1, Digital Panel 3, Health and agri-food Panel 4, Infrastructure and mechanics	Panel 2, Electronics and physics Panel 4, Infrastructure and mechanics Panel 6, Materials and production
13.30 to 17.30 CEST	Panel 2, Electronics and physics Panel 4, Infrastructure and mechanics Panel 6, Materials and production	Panel 2, Electronics and physics Panel 5, Energy, mobility and space technologies Panel 6, Materials and production	Panel 1, Digital Panel 3, Health and agri-food Panel 5, Energy, mobility and space technologies

Source: EPO

10.2 SQAPs findings on search reports and written opinions

In 2025, the third annual SQAPs session on search reports and written opinions was held. To ensure comparability with previous years, the assessments focused on the same quality aspects as in 2024 and 2023 (see figure 45 below). Searching for prior art was outside the scope of this session.

Best practices observed by panels

- Relevant prior-art documents cited, with relevant passages precisely identified
- Well-structured written opinions, with clear, well-reasoned objections
- Clear mapping of prior art passages in relation to claim features.

Areas where views differed within panels

- The level of detail expected for assessment of dependent claims in written opinions, particularly whether it is practicable or necessary to provide problem-solution approach reasoning
- Whether examples of prior art should be provided in cases where common general knowledge is used to argue lack of inventive step

Consensus on opportunities for improvement

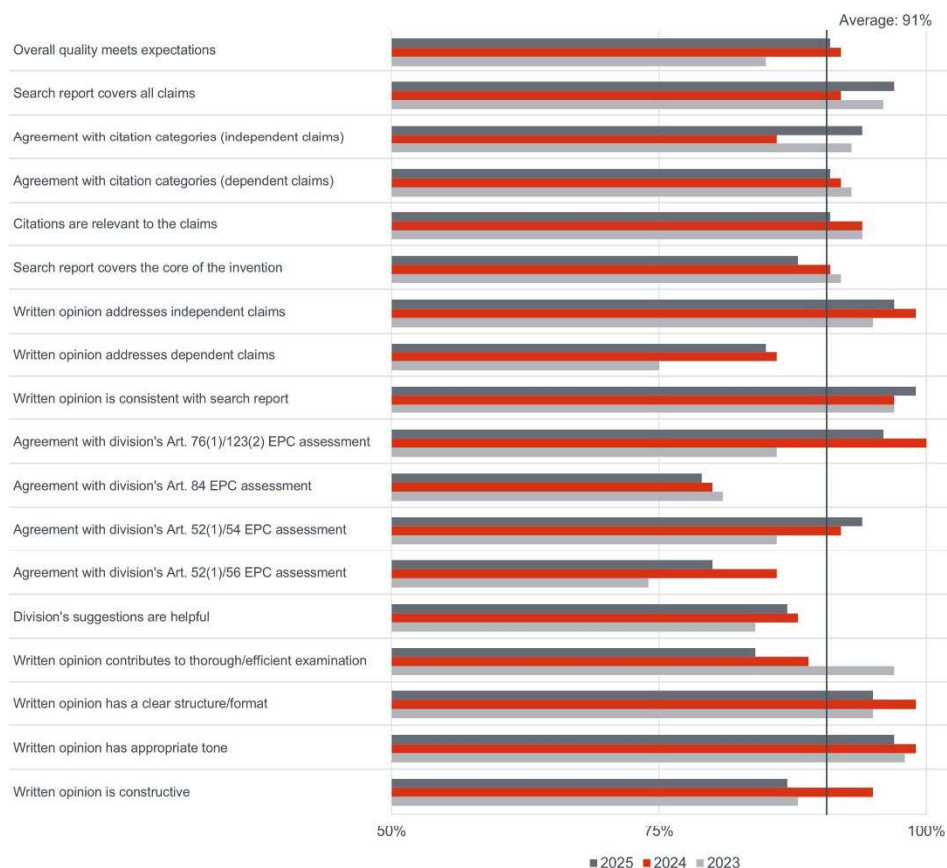
- For divisional applications: ensure written opinions are complete and self-contained and do not rely on reasoning provided only in the parent application
- Provide more complete assessment of dependent claims and assess alternatives in independent claims
- Apply the problem-solution approach more consistently
- Enhance the structure of written opinions (e.g. summaries, headings and numbering) to improve readability
- Provide more solution-oriented written opinions to support more efficient examination

Responses of SQAPs assessors to the questionnaire on assessed searches and written opinions

The chart below visualises the aggregate responses given by each of the 24 assessors for each of the six search reports and written opinions they assessed (36 files in total).

The bars represent the percentage of responses that agreed with the statements below "to a very large extent", "to a large extent" or "to some extent". The percentages are not statistically significant; however, the results broadly correspond with those from user satisfaction surveys, quality audit results and user feedback more generally. This also applies to figures 46 and 47 below.

Figure 45: SQAPs survey results on search reports and written opinions



Source: EPO

10.3 SQAPs findings on granted patents

In 2025, the fourth annual SQAPs session on grant was held. To ensure comparability, assessments focused on the same quality aspects as in 2022-2024 (see figure 46 below).

Best practices observed by panels

- Clear and well-structured examination communications, mapping prior art to claims and substantiating technical effects and added subject-matter objections lead to quality grants
- Openness to dialogue with applicants/representatives
- Proactive, solution-oriented examination, including amendment proposals. guiding applicants towards EPC-compliant claims

Areas where views differed within panels

- Level of leniency/strictness concerning clarity e.g. result-to-be-achieved features, vague terms such as "substantially", "optionally"
- Whether detailed examples can support broad functional claims, particularly in biological inventions
- Whether introducing additional cited documents after amendments improves quality or delays procedures

- Extent to which examining divisions should proactively propose amendments to claims

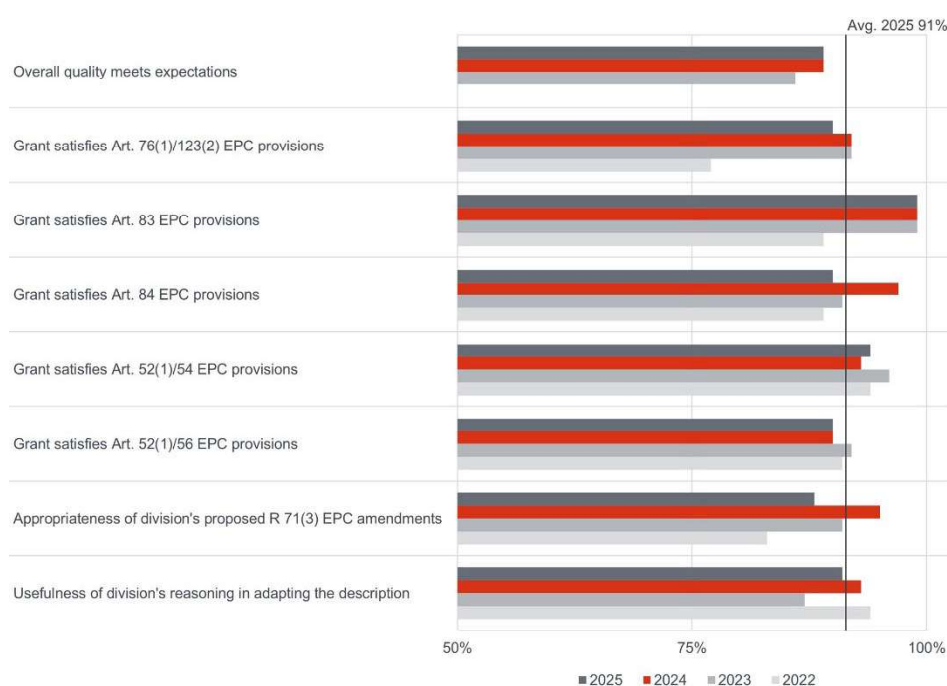
Consensus on opportunities for improvement

- State clearly when objections have been fully overcome
- Pay more attention to intermediate generalisations
- Ensure essential features are included in independent claims
- Improve consistency in examination of claims with functional features, verify support by the description and sufficiency of disclosure
- Check basis in original application before proposing amendments
- Call applicants more frequently to agree on allowable subject-matter and limit amendment rounds

SQAPs assessors' responses to the questionnaire on assessed grants

The chart below visualises the aggregate responses given by each of the 24 assessors for each of the six grants they assessed (36 files in total).

Figure 46 – SQAPs survey results on grants



Source: EPO

10.4 SQAPs findings on oppositions

The first-ever SQAPs assessment of opposition quality took place in 2025. The review focused on the correctness of the decision, clarity and completeness of reasoning, and overall structure. In cases where inventive step was a ground for the decision, panels also assessed the consistency of application of the problem-solution approach. These focus areas were selected following consultation with SACEPO WP/Q members.

Best practices observed by panels

- Accurate, concise and complete presentation of facts and submissions
- Impartial and balanced treatment of all parties, addressing the arguments of both sides, including the losing party
- Well-structured decisions with clear headings, a logical order of grounds and substantiated reasoning for each objection and conclusion
- Clear justification for non-admission of late-filed requests, new document combinations and unsubstantiated grounds

Areas where views differed within panels

- Need for the opposition division's own explicit reasoning beyond that reflecting the parties' positions
- Whether all novelty objections must be addressed in the decision
- Level of detail required for reasoning when identifying basis in the application as filed and applying the "directly and unambiguously derivable" standard

Consensus on opportunities for improvement

- Present clearer reasoning on inventive step, particularly regarding selecting the closest prior art, establishing the technical effect, and considering common general knowledge
- Ensure explicit reasoning for all auxiliary requests considered for the decision
- Provide a reasoned opinion based only on previously commented grounds, summarise the parties' counter-arguments, and explain why those arguments are unconvincing
- Ensure sufficient explanation of the division's final conclusions

Responses of SQAPs assessors to the questionnaire on oppositions

The chart below visualises the aggregate responses given by each of the 24 assessors for each of the six opposition files they assessed (36 files in total).

Figure 47 – SQAPs survey results on oppositions



Source: EPO

10.5 Actions following up on SQAPs findings

The SQAPs findings continue to play an important role in informing and shaping the EPO's quality initiatives. In 2025, insights from the previous year's SQAPs were translated into concrete actions under the Quality Action Plan 2025.

The detailed findings of the SQAPs 2025 were presented by the assessors to the SACEPO WP/Q in November 2025. Subsequently, all examiners and their managers were invited to attend technical-area-specific presentations by the EPO assessors, which were recorded and made widely available. Participants in SQAPs were encouraged to share insights within their teams, further reinforcing knowledge transfer. Managers were also asked to take targeted local actions in specific technical areas, such as treatment of unusual parameters, or mixed-type claims in CII applications.

Written opinions and opposition decisions that were very highly rated by the panels are now used to promote best practices in drafting clear and well-reasoned communications and decisions. These are also being used to optimise the design of templates for the new communication drafter which is in development.

Areas where the panels' views differed, or where room for improvement was identified, have been taken forward for further discussion and action under our Quality Action Plan 2026.