



Europäisches  
Patentamt  
European  
Patent Office  
Office européen  
des brevets

# Highlights of 2011







Analysis based on the European patent filings 2011 (Direct European filings). The filings have been allocated to the country of residence of the filer.

## Highlights of 2011

2011 was a record year at the EPO. We received almost 250 000 patent filings, the highest number ever in our 34-year history, showing that European patents are in high demand across the globe, and that Europe remains attractive for innovative industries.

At the same time patents have received unprecedented media attention, with mobile phone and other IT companies battling it out over technology rights worldwide. This has put intellectual property – and IP offices – increasingly in the public spotlight.

At the EPO we continued to make the delivery of high-quality patents our number one priority in 2011. Only solid patents protect the interests of both inventors and the public at large. And only high-quality patents can provide the legal certainty that is so crucial for innovators, whether in protecting their inventions or in steering clear of infringing their competitors' rights.

That is why we were delighted that users once again ranked us as the best patent office in the world in two independent surveys of patent quality in 2011 (IAM/Thomson Reuters Benchmarking Survey and the EU-commissioned PatQual Study).

To maintain and build upon this standing, we redoubled our efforts to improve our procedures, our technical tools and the working environment of our examiners, unlocking access to the most vast collection of technical information in the world, working with our partners in Europe and around the globe. This has enabled us to contribute to improving the environment for innovation in Europe, whilst honing our strategy for the future.





## A new strategy for the future

The global patent system is a dynamically-evolving one. The emergence of new technologies, a rising demand for patent protection, and the ever-growing amount of documentation (especially in Asia) that needs to be taken into account pose a major challenge to all of the world's patent offices. At the EPO we have taken a positive attitude to these challenges and have launched a broad review of our strategy.

In 2010 we commissioned two external reviews – of our IT systems and our finances. In 2011 we developed responses to their findings. We set out a new strategic framework, which was adopted by our member states in March. It aims at boosting efficiency and controlling costs while maintaining and enhancing the quality of our products and services.

The new strategy focuses on five key areas: IT, human resources, buildings, quality and co operation. For each of these priorities, a detailed "roadmap" was drawn up, outlining concrete projects and activities for the next four to five years.

This is expected to bring about major changes in the way we work. It will mean putting our IT systems on a new platform, boosting quality assurance, improving working conditions for staff, intensifying our co-operation with Europe's national patent offices and with our partners in the IP field. All of this will lay the ground for us to continue to play a leading role in supporting competitiveness and economic growth into the future and in shaping the global patent system.

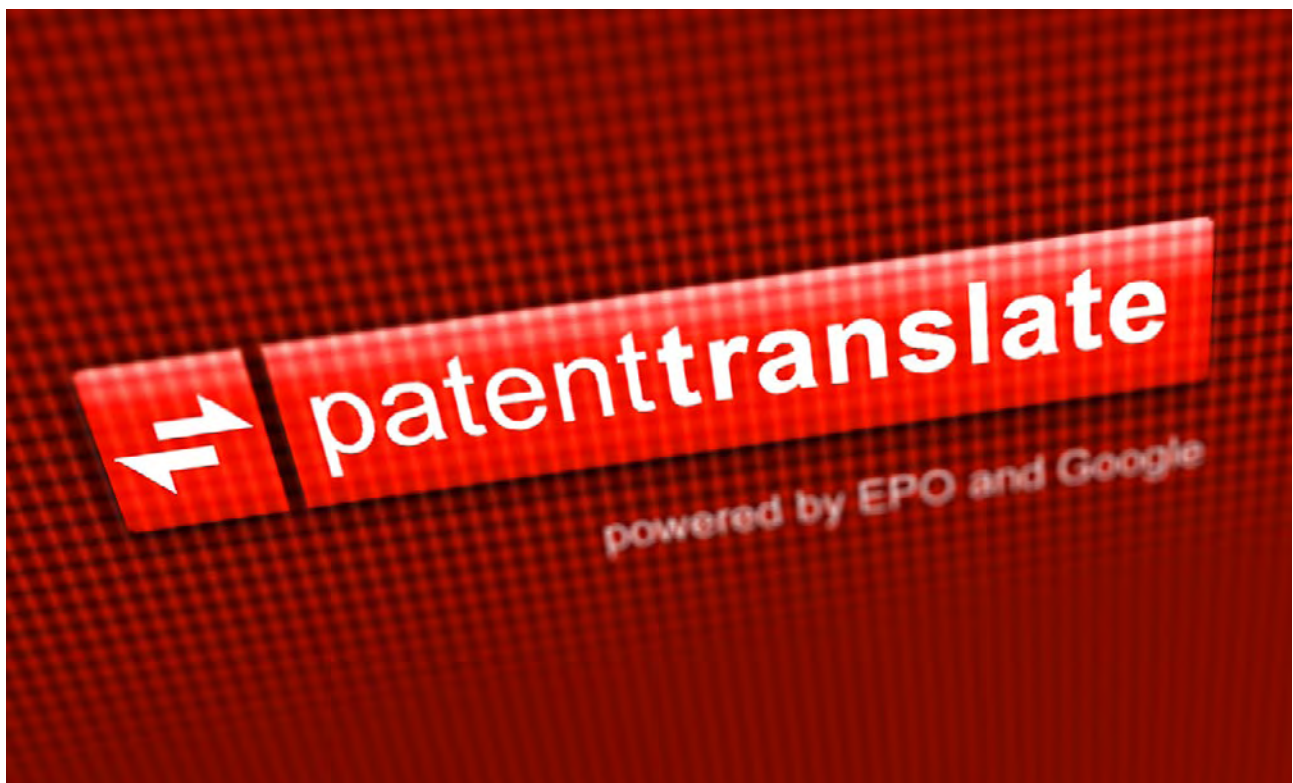
# Breaking new ground in disseminating technical knowledge

The EPO has long been a pioneer in providing free access to its patent-related data. Our public databases – containing more than 70 million documents and accessible free of charge on our website, [www.epo.org](http://www.epo.org) – are one of, if not the largest and most relevant sources of information about state-of-the-art technology available anywhere in the world.

Last year we broke new ground in removing the language barriers in the way of patent information: the EPO teamed up with Google on a machine translation project which will facilitate multilingual access to our vast collection of patent documents.

The new system, Patent Translate, will cover the 28 languages of the EPO's member states, plus Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Russian and will be of huge benefit to companies, inventors and scientists across the globe. It will allow them to cut costs and better orient their R&D by accessing patents relevant to their inventions from around the world in their own language. This project has benefited greatly from close co-operation with the national patent offices of our member states and with the biggest patent offices all over the world, which have made their data available to the EPO. A first set of seven languages (English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and Swedish) has already been made available, and the rest will follow by 2014.

In addition we worked hard to improve our search tools for patent examiners, which are used by professionals in more than 40 countries around the world.



# Making Europe the best place for innovation

Intellectual property rights, including patents, lie at the heart of the knowledge-based economy. A strong, integrated patent system in Europe is thus essential for companies competing in the global market.

Europe has a two-tier patent system, with the EPO as the single, central authority empowered to grant patents for all its member states, and the national patent offices playing a key role as a local partner for innovative companies.

The EPO works closely with the national patent offices to improve the environment for innovation. In 2011 we adopted a roadmap for co-operation with our European IP partners to strengthen three areas in particular: IT systems, training, and patent information and awareness.

We continued to involve the users of the patent system – researchers, inventors, industry, SMEs, research centres and IP professionals – entering into dialogue with them and seeking their views, in order to tailor the system to meet their needs.

We also engaged with other important partners: a co-operation agreement signed in May 2011 with the Office of Harmonization for the Internal Market (OHIM), responsible for registering trade marks and designs in the EU, will strengthen our efforts to promote the use of all types of IP rights in Europe.

Meanwhile, we continued to co-operate closely with other EU institutions, such as the European Commission, providing technical and legal expertise on patent matters. There was huge progress on the initiatives to set up a unitary patent and a Unified Patent Court during the period under review.







# On the road to a unitary patent for Europe

The European patent system was set up almost 40 years ago to support innovation and competitiveness. But despite its resounding economic success, the current system is structurally incomplete: today a patent holder choosing to have EPO-wide protection ends up with a bundle of 38 national patents covering countries speaking 29 different languages, and is subject to 38 different jurisdictions.

That is why the EPO supports the creation of a unitary patent system by the vast majority of EU member states along with a centralised, specialised European patent court in the EU. This is the only way that companies operating in Europe will be on a level playing field with their competitors in other markets such as China, Japan and the USA, which already have a unitary patent covering their respective territories and operate under a single jurisdiction.

2011 will go down in history as the year that a strong and near final go-ahead was given to establish a unitary patent in at least 25 EU member states, after decades of stalemate. This is expected to boost the competitiveness of the European economy by simplifying procedures and dramatically cutting the costs for businesses seeking patent protection in Europe. The reform will be especially beneficial for SMEs and research institutes.

The proposals foresee a primary role for the EPO: the Office has been designated by the EU as the body which will grant the unitary patent and centrally administer it on behalf of the participating EU member states. Over the past year we have been preparing to take on some new duties which will arise under the unitary patent scheme, from maintaining the register of unitary patents to collecting renewal fees.





# Upholding the gold standard for patents worldwide

The growing interdependence of technology markets leads many companies to file parallel patent applications for the same invention in several countries around the world. But businesses need to find comparable conditions in all markets if their global IP strategies are to succeed.

The EPO is leading the way in making the global patent system more user-friendly by improving quality and harmonising procedures as much as possible. In 2011 we continued to work closely with the World Intellectual Property Organization, and with the world's major patent offices, especially in China, Japan, Korea and the USA, which together with the EPO handle some 80% of the world's patent applications. With our reputation for high-quality products and services, the EPO has increasingly become a global benchmark for patent offices worldwide.

In the area of patent information, the EPO maintains the most comprehensive collection of patent-related literature in the world, making more than 600 million records, containing over 70 million patent documents, available to patent professionals across the globe and giving access to patent-related technical literature stored in over 120 specialised databases. Over the past year we continued to improve and expand this trove of information and made progress on machine translation of patents to break down the language barriers to accessing it. We also invested heavily in improving our cutting-edge electronic search tools for examiners, which are already used by more than 40 patent offices worldwide.

Another area where the EPO assumed global leadership is the classification of inventions. In 2011 we made progress on a joint patent classification system, launched in 2010 with the US Patent and Trademark Office and known as Common Patent Classification or CPC. Largely based on the European classification system, the CPC looks set to become the basis for a truly global classification system, as China and Japan have already indicated their interest in joining and further developing the scheme.

Another important milestone in harmonisation efforts was our joint launch with the Japanese and US patent offices in November 2011 of a new tool to make it easier to access results from patent searches carried out in parallel by multiple offices for the same invention. The Common Citation Document will boost the efficiency of our offices and save considerable time and effort for anyone using patents, for example inventors and patent analysts.

We also concluded several promising bilateral co-operation agreements in 2011 with important emerging economies such as Brazil, China and Russia. This will help export established European standards and make the IP landscape more similar in all these countries.

# Honouring Europe's outstanding inventors

*"Without a patent, this invention would have been just an academic exercise. No company would have wanted to take it to the real world."*

Ashok Gadgil, winner of the European Inventor Award 2011, whose team developed a simple, cost-effective UV water disinfection device that has helped deliver safe water to millions of the world's poorest

Behind every technical breakthrough is an individual or a team of people with a passion for discovery. Every year the EPO, with the support of the EU Council Presidency and European Commission, honours Europe's pioneering innovators, and their achievements in creating jobs, wealth and better living conditions for millions of people. Launched by the EPO in 2006, the European Inventor Award gives inventors the recognition they deserve.

The 2011 awards were presented last May in Budapest to pioneers in medical research and implant technology, clean energy technologies, construction and water purification. All of the award winners benefited from the European patent system. The 2011 winners were:

- Per-Ingvar Brånemark (Sweden – Lifetime Achievement)
- Ann Lambrechts, Bekaert (Belgium – Industry)
- Jens Dall Bentzen, Dall Energy Aps (Denmark – SMEs)
- Christine Van Broeckhoven, VIB, University of Antwerp (Belgium – Research)
- Ashok Gadgil and Vikas Garud, University of California/Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, WaterHealth International (Non-European countries – USA/India).







