



The European Patent Office

Promoting innovation to enhance Europe's competitiveness

The European Patent Office (EPO) was set up by the European Patent Convention of 1973. It applies a single, uniform procedure to examine patent applications in any of its three official languages (English, French and German), and thus enables inventors, companies and researchers to protect their inventions in a market of some 700 million people. Moreover, the EPO delivers and administers the Unitary Patent, a single European patent covering the territory of the participating EU member states.

From 16 signatory states in 1973, the European Patent Organisation has grown to 39 member states, including all EU countries plus Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, Türkiye, the UK and most of the Balkan states. European patents provide protection not only in the EPO member states but also in six further countries.

Today the EPO is Europe's second largest international public-service organisation. It employs some 6 300 people (4 000 of whom are highly specialised engineers working in three languages) from over 30 countries at its five sites – including its Munich headquarters – in four European countries. The Office is financed entirely from users' procedural and renewal fees and receives no funding from its member states. It has an annual budget of around EUR 2.5 billion.

The EPO receives nearly 200 000 patent applications a year. The globally acknowledged high quality of its products and services, such as the over 104 000 patents granted in 2023, attracts users from all over the world. More than half of all European patent applications come from companies outside Europe, mostly from the US, Japan, China and the Republic of Korea.

In addition, the EPO provides technical solutions on a global scale. Its dedicated patent search tool EPOQUE is used by patent offices in more than 40 countries worldwide, including Australia, Brazil, Canada, Malaysia, as well as most European ones.

The EPO is also a world leader in supplying technical information. Its public databases contain more than 150 million patent documents featuring information on inventions and technological advances. Known as Espacenet, this technology library can be accessed free of charge on the EPO website, and it receives more than 45 000 individual visitors a day. Thanks to Patent Translate, a free machine-translation tool developed in co-operation with Google, these documents are now available in multiple languages. This service offers on-the-fly translation from and into English for 31 languages (including Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Russian), and translation from and into French or German for 27 languages. It is helping to increase access to information about state-of-the-art technologies from around the world.