



Quality Action Plan 2026

Introduction



The EPO first made its annual Quality Action Plan public in March 2024. At the same time, we launched our public Quality dashboard. Together, these tools provide greater transparency than ever before on our targeted quality actions and how we monitor their impact.

The strong results of our latest independent User Satisfaction Survey (USS), which ran from September 2024 to April 2025, underline the progress made in areas where we took action. In addition to feedback received via our numerous channels open to users and experts from across the global patenting profession, the survey results also provide direction for additional improvements.

In 2026, the ingredients of our holistic approach to quality outlined in our Patent Quality Charter remain the same. The new Quality Action Plan builds on previous initiatives and, importantly, introduces new activities in direct response to both user feedback and the results of search and grant audits carried out by Directorate Quality Audit (DQA), a dedicated, internal unit that is independent of the operational area.

Further actions stem from our latest analysis of Boards of Appeal decisions and findings from the Stakeholder Quality Assurance Panels (SQAPs). The central strands of the plan remain consistent with our long-term strategy of delivering quality products and services.

In line with our Strategic Plan 2028, we will continue to focus on our people, providing a targeted offering of technical training and reskilling, which will ensure that our examiners stay

at the cutting edge of innovation. To enable our highly skilled staff to continue to meet the changing needs of users everywhere, throughout the patent granting process (PGP), we will maintain our human-centric approach to leveraging AI and advancing digital transformation.

Focusing on the quality of our search, examination and opposition procedures, we will place a strong focus on accurate and thorough searches and written opinions, achieved by harnessing the technical expertise of our staff through the Active Search Division (ASD) of three examiners. Introduced in November 2023, the ASD has been positively impacting searches ever since, more than 550 000 to date, with positive indicators in our DQA audits, USS and user feedback from across our channels.

Turning to examination, we will take a series of actions to further harmonise both the procedure and the application of the European Patent Convention (EPC) and the Guidelines. Further, new KPIs have been developed for opposition, based on analysis of Boards of Appeal decisions, and were published on our Quality dashboard in 2025.

Finally, open dialogue with our users is an essential part of our shared journey to excellence in patent quality. In 2026, we will continue to assess quality from many different perspectives and remain transparent about our performance, goals and progress.

Progress in 2025

The progress made under the Quality Action Plan 2025 built on previous achievements and was shaped by the insights of applicants, user associations, the Standing Advisory Committee before the EPO (SACEPO) and its working groups, along with the Stakeholder Quality Assurance Panels (SQAPs), among other initiatives and user feedback channels. Data analysis and feedback from across the EPO further guided last year's actions.

A comprehensive review of these actions, and their results across the PGP, will be published in the next Quality Report in June 2026. Key highlights are presented below.



We invested in our people

As a knowledge-based organisation, the journey towards high-quality patents starts with our people. This journey continued in 2025 with the following milestones:

- 145 highly skilled staff members **recruited**, including **108 patent examiners**
- Over 350 examiners participated in 82 **conferences and trade fairs**
- New **Industry Lectures series** launched for examiners to learn directly from major applicants in their technical areas
- **Professional qualifications supported staff development**, with 23 EPO candidates passing the European Qualifying Examination (EQE) and 14 passing the European Patent Administration Certificate (EPAC)
- **Regular learning events** were held throughout the year, covering topics such as inventive step, third-party observations, Boards of Appeal case law and SQAPs findings



We enhanced our use of technology and tools in the PGP

To help examiners deliver quality at every stage of the procedure, we maintained our human-centric approach to leveraging AI and advancing digital transformation. We also continued to enhance our user services.

- Our **prior art databases** grew from some 358 million to 376 million documents – ensuring that our examiners have access to the best prior art
- **AI-based routing** of incoming applications and **AI-powered classification** of prior art were extended to support more complete searches
- Our new **AI-assisted drafting tool** was piloted for **clearer, more consistent communications**
- We also piloted **AI-supported minutes of oral proceedings**, with positive feedback from examining divisions and users
- Our **generative AI-based Legal Interactive Platform (LIP)** was released to all MyEPO users, providing rapid and accurate responses to refinable queries on our legal texts and case law, complete with links to the relevant parts



We further harmonised our work practices

Through consultation and discussion, further progress was made in aligning our application of the EPC, and we put systems in place to optimise our PGP.

- **Early interaction within divisions continued to increase**, with over 550 000 searches conducted under the Active Search Division initiative to date
- **Refresher training on added subject-matter** was provided and **job aids** were introduced to assist examiners with checks
- A **new template for summons in opposition** ensured all relevant provisions are addressed
- **Consistency in the assessment of inventive step improved**, thanks to workshops for opposition examiners and discussion of Boards of Appeal decisions
- **Clearer instructions on handling third-party observations** (TPOs) ensured the division's assessment is included in the public part of the file (also for TPOs considered not to be relevant)





We deepened dialogue with users

The continuous improvement of our products and services was guided by insights from a growing spectrum of user perspectives on quality.

- **8 000+ respondents participated in the latest User Satisfaction Survey (USS 2024/2025)**, making it the largest ever of all our surveys, with new questions based on user input and dedicated questions on the Unitary Patent
- **130 user meetings** took place, including with user associations, large applicants, SMEs / micro entities, universities and public research organisations
- Our **SQAPs** programme included the **first ever session on opposition** (in addition to regular sessions on searches and written opinions, and on grants)
- **Users were consulted on the revision of the Guidelines**, which will enter into force in April 2026 and will incorporate user recommendations from the international workshop on clarity in 2024



We delivered strong results

The combination of investments in our people and technologies, harmonisation of practice and user dialogue positively impacted our results across the PGP.

- Thanks to the **Active Search Division initiative**, 94% of searches and written opinions audited by DQA had no findings affecting validity, with the User Satisfaction Survey (USS) 2024/2025 indicating 93% user satisfaction in the area of search, and the goal of the KPI “Search: closer prior art found” was met
- **DQA grant audit results improved**, with findings on added subject-matter down from 5.9% in 2024 to 4.6% in 2025, meeting our KPI
- **USS results further reflected the impact of our quality actions**; highlights included user satisfaction with consistency in examination reaching 73%, up from 59% in the previous survey
- **82.6%** of search, examination and opposition products were delivered on time

Quality Action Plan 2026

High-quality, timely products and services: excellence throughout the PGP

Investing in our people – technical training and reskilling

These actions will help to ensure that we stay at the cutting edge of developments across all areas of expertise, especially where rapid advances in technology increase the need for technical training.

Patent examiners remain a key focus group, as their expertise is at the heart of the quality of our PGP. The EPO will expand the **Industry Lectures series** introduced in 2025 as an additional measure to upskill staff in new and emerging technologies and address gaps in technical skills. Building on examiner feedback, the lectures will be refined so that both examiners and other staff members gain the full benefit of learning directly from industry leaders in a range of fields.

Following the positive learning experiences of EPO examiner teams who participated in **conferences and trade fairs** in 2025, opportunities will again be offered in 2026.

A new initiative, the **Science and Technology Forums**, will also be launched to strengthen connections between the PGP, science and the innovation ecosystem. Linking with the work of the Observatory, renowned keynote speakers will present recent scientific developments and their societal impacts, linking advances in research directly to the EPO's core work.

To complement targeted examiner recruitment in rapidly developing areas, the programme for **technical reskilling and upskilling** will expand to include further fields where filing levels are increasing, in addition to the field of battery technologies where the programme was piloted in 2025.

To support our Quality Action Plan further, a programme of knowledge sharing led by members of the **Boards of Appeal** will be developed, with events dedicated to specific topics such as added subject-matter and inventive step.

Enhancing quality through technologies and tools in the PGP and online user services – leveraging AI and advancing digital transformation

Our digital transformation efforts will focus on improving quality, consistency and efficiency for both examiners and users. We will harness technologies to support the correct and consistent application of the EPC and Guidelines, while simplifying workflows and strengthening transparency.

A **new drafting tool** will be gradually introduced, enabling seamless transitions from search to examination and final action. With integrated AI assistance, the tool will simplify communication drafting, improve clarity and foster collaboration both within divisions and with applicants. AI capabilities will also be embedded in core tools, including the Digital File Repository (DFR), Patent Workbench (PWB) and ANSERA. This will provide targeted, context-aware support to reduce manual effort and enhance citation accuracy. Administrative processes will be automated and consolidated to reduce errors and improve consistency, reinforcing the overall quality of our PGP.

On the user side, to support quality at source, we will introduce a redesigned and streamlined MyEPO interface and deliver new lifecycle transparency features, giving users clearer indications of file status and clearer insights into expected next steps. Self-service options will be expanded to include PACE (for users to accelerate the PGP) and enquiries, while portfolio enhancements will cover oppositions. To simplify processes, we will complete end-to-end DOCX filing and discontinue outdated tools. Finally, new AI-driven features will help users to manage their portfolios more effectively and make well-informed decisions.

KPI Digitalisation

User Satisfaction Survey, USS

- **Users rating our online services as good or very good**
 - Achievement 2024/25: **90%** ▶ Goal 2026/27: **≥ 91%**



Search and written opinion – complete and accurate

Providing access to diverse sources of prior art and embedding the best practices of the Active Search Division initiative will remain key to further improvements in the following aspects of our search products:

Enhancing the EPO's collection of non-patent literature

We will work to further improve NPL coverage in our world-leading collection of prior art to provide additional strength to quality prior art searching – a cornerstone of EPO examination standards.

Strengthening consistency of approach for applications with CII/AI features

The latest User Satisfaction Survey introduced new questions on computer-implemented inventions (CII) and AI. Guided by users' responses, we will work to ensure that the EPC and Guidelines are applied to search and the written opinion in a consistent manner, including across the growing number of areas that involve CII and AI features, as well as to claims with a mixture of technical and non-technical features.

Ensuring early assessment of EPC provisions for divisional applications

In response to user interest in our handling of divisional applications, we will strengthen the work being done to ensure that any issues regarding the basis for a divisional application in the parent application, or regarding potential double patenting, are identified and raised at the search stage. We will also remind examiners to consider any prior art related to the parent application, along with any arguments and decisions in opposition or appeal proceedings related to the parent application. Where appropriate, the division will call to oral proceedings as a first action at examination stage.



Improving coverage of fallback positions in the written opinion

Our users and quality auditors have reported improved coverage of independent claims in written opinions. To increase satisfaction levels for the assessment of dependent claims, and in response to users' suggestions from our latest User Satisfaction Survey and recent user meetings, we will provide clearer referencing of specific passages in prior art that is relevant to features of the dependent claims.

Search and written opinion KPIs

As in 2025, we will maintain clear and challenging KPIs to track the impact of our actions on providing a complete search and a comprehensive and accurate written opinion.

KPIs Search and Written Opinion

Directorate Quality Audit, DQA

- **Search and Written Opinion: incorrect assessment of novelty or inventive step**
 - Result 2025: **5.0%*** ▶ Goal 2026: **< 5%**
- **Search: closer prior art found**
 - Result 2025: **2.8%*** ▶ Goal 2026: **< 4%**

*24 month rolling average, sample size 739 search products (until Q3 2025, 12 month rolling)

User Satisfaction Survey, USS

- **Users rating our search products as good or very good**
 - Achievement 2024/25: **80%** ▶ Goal 2026/27: **≥ 80%**



Examination – complete, correct and consistent

We will take a series of actions to improve harmonisation of both procedure and the application of the EPC and the Guidelines. The focus will be on the following actions:

Improving assessment of added subject-matter

We will continue our work to improve quality audit results (DQA) and meet the challenging KPI goal we have set in this area.

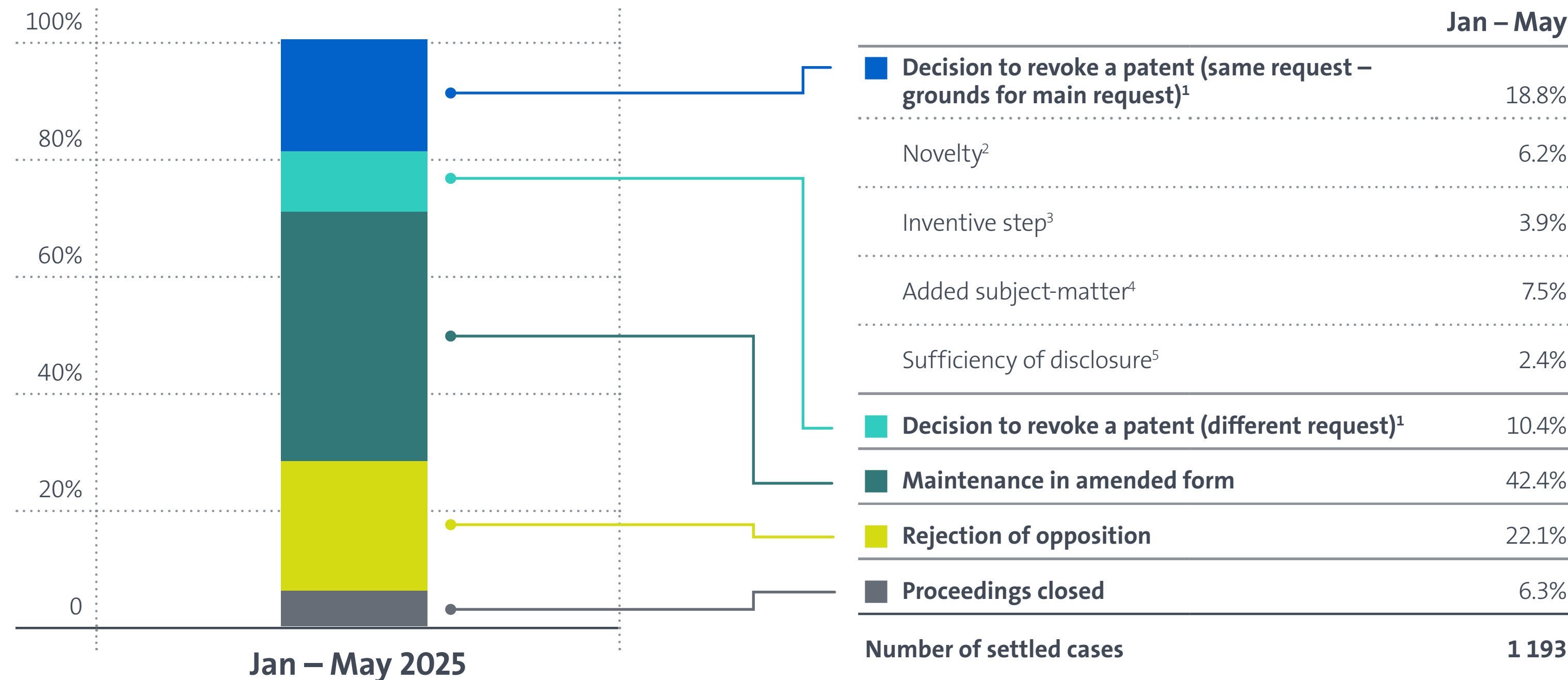
We will use opposition decisions based on grounds of added subject-matter as concrete examples to support learning in the examining divisions, especially for complex cases involving a combination of features and intermediate generalisations. We will ensure that the results of all added subject-matter checks by the primary examiner are properly documented in our communications. This will facilitate quality checks by the divisions and line managers and provide more transparency to users on whether amendments comply with the requirements.

Increasing our learning from opposition decisions

We will increase our learning from opposition decisions by building on the methodology used for the analysis of Boards of Appeal outcomes, which helps us to pinpoint learning opportunities for opposition divisions and examining divisions. A similar approach was taken in the analysis of opposition outcomes from January to May 2025.

The objective was to provide a granular breakdown of the reasons for the decisions and identify areas where the decisions of opposition divisions and examining divisions diverge. This breakdown is visualised in the chart on page 11. The results will support actions in 2026 to promote consistent practice between our examining and opposition divisions.

Opposition outcomes January – May 2025



1 Multiple grounds possible
 2 Art. 100(a) EPC (Art. 54 EPC)
 3 Art. 100(a) EPC (Art. 56 EPC)
 4 Art. 100(c) EPC (Art. 76, 123 EPC)
 5 Art. 100(b) EPC (Art. 83 EPC)



Ensuring balanced application of the EPC

We will continue to improve the substantiation of the objections we raise and endeavour to strike the right balance in our application of the EPC, so that we are neither overly strict nor too lenient. In this respect, we will pay special attention to assessment of clarity, limitation of claims and amendments to the description.

We will continue to actively encourage dialogue with users throughout the PGP to prevent misunderstanding concerning the scope of the invention and reduce lengthy correspondence. Relevant case law from the Boards of Appeal and the Unified Patent Court (UPC) will be highlighted to examiners to promote coherence and harmonisation in the application of European patent law.

Improving consistency in the handling of third-party observations

In 2026, the focus will be on harmonising the level of detail provided by the divisions in their assessments of third-party observations, so that the Guidelines are more consistently applied across divisions and technical areas. A follow-up study will assess the impact of actions taken since the previous study in 2024.

KPIs Examination

Directorate Quality Audit, DQA

- **Grants: incorrect assessment of novelty or inventive step**
 - Result 2025: **6.6%*** ▶ Goal 2026: **< 5%**
- **Grants: findings on added subject-matter**
 - Result 2025: **4.6%*** ▶ Goal 2026: **< 5%**

*12 month rolling average, sample size 1035 grants

Boards of Appeal outcomes (ex parte)

- **Decision of the Board to grant a patent, which sets aside a decision of examining division to refuse a patent**
 - Result 2024: **4.3%*** ▶ Goal 2026: **< 4%** ▶ Goal 2028: **< 3%**

*Percentage of proceedings settled in 2024 falling under RoP 2020 with decision to grant

User Satisfaction Survey, USS

- **Users rating our examination products as good or very good**
 - Achievement 2024/25: **79%** ▶ Goal 2026/27: **≥ 80%**



Opposition – fair and transparent

We will provide our opposition divisions with opportunities to learn from the decisions and assessments of other experts in their technical areas.

Harmonising application of the problem-solution approach for inventive step

In 2026, we will deepen our learning from Boards of Appeal (BoA) decisions, including by looking at the use of common general knowledge in the problem-solution approach, an area where divergent practices have been noted.

In addition to learning from revocation cases where the Board took a stricter interpretation than the opposition division, we will broaden the discussion to include cases where the opposition division was stricter than the Board and to cases where there was a remittal from the Board to the opposition division. This will deepen understanding of BoA reasoning, foster greater consistency in decision making at the opposition stage and help us progress towards our KPI goal of greater alignment with BoA decisions on inventive step.

Learning from SQAPs

The findings of the first Stakeholder Quality Assurance Panels (SQAPs) on opposition in October 2025 have been shared with opposition examiners and their managers. In 2026, we will implement tailored actions to address the SQAPs findings for specific technical areas.



Opposition KPIs

In 2025, we published a new set of four KPIs for outcomes of Boards of Appeal decisions. Based on the analysis of cases settled by the Boards in 2024, we have set the following goals. The 2028 goals reflect the time needed for current quality actions to impact future appeal outcomes.

KPIs Opposition

Boards of Appeal outcomes (inter partes)

- Decision of the Board to revoke a patent based on novelty, which sets aside an opposition decision to maintain a patent**

■ Result 2024: **2.9%*** ▶ Goal 2028: **< 3%**

*Percentage of proceedings settled in 2024 falling under RoP 2020 with decision to revoke based on novelty

- Decision of the Board to revoke a patent based on inventive step, which sets aside an opposition decision to maintain a patent**

■ Result 2024: **10.6%*** ▶ Goal 2028: **< 3%**

*Percentage of proceedings settled in 2024 falling under RoP 2020 with decision to revoke based on inventive step

- Decision of the Board to revoke a patent based on added subject-matter, which sets aside an opposition decision to maintain a patent**

■ Result 2024: **5%*** ▶ Goal 2028: **< 3%**

*Percentage of proceedings settled in 2024 falling under RoP 2020 with decision to revoke based on added subject-matter

- Decision of the Board to maintain a patent, which sets aside an opposition decision to revoke a patent**

■ Result 2024: **1.9%*** ▶ Goal 2028: **< 2%**

*Percentage of proceedings settled in 2024 falling under RoP 2020 with decision to maintain a patent following appeal of opposition revocation decision





Timeliness targets – bringing certainty to the market

In our user satisfaction surveys and in our meetings with applicants, there is a sustained emphasis on the importance of timeliness as an element of quality. Timeliness is also crucial to competitors and society, and it will continue to be an area of focus for the EPO.

A timely search – We will aim to **deliver 90% of standard searches¹ on time**, as follows:

- EP first and second filings: **six months**
- First-filing ISA: **seven months**
- First-filing searches for national offices: reduced from seven to **six months**
- Euro-PCT bis searches (EPO not ISA): **eight months**

A timely examination – For examination, we will set a more ambitious target of **75% of standard grants² on time** (previously 70%).

Preventing unacceptable delays and growth in the backlog of old files – We will continue to reduce the numbers of these older files in 2026 by moving forward the applicable cut-off year by one year to focus on pre-2021 examination requests.

¹ Excluding cases with (a) a lack of unity, (b) a lack of clarity or (c) an incomplete search. During 2025, the timeliness of search has improved from about 85% to about 87%. Next year it will further improve thanks to the changed limit dates for national searches, which will ensure that they will be finished earlier.

² Excluding cases with (a) more than one request for extension of time limits to reply, (b) more than one late fee payment or (c) a request to reschedule oral proceedings.

A timely opposition – We will **maintain the opposition stock below 4 000 pending cases** and strive to return to the timeliness achieved before the pandemic: **70% within 18 months for standard files**³.

End-to-end timeliness – Our target for **end-to-end processing will continue to be 48 months** from the request for a grant of an EP patent in 75% of standard cases⁴.

Accelerating the process when needed – The Office recently introduced a range of measures to ensure that **divisional applications** are processed swiftly to secure legal certainty. **These measures include issuing a summons to oral proceedings as a first action in examination for divisional applications** for which the parent application had an identical scope and was withdrawn or refused.

We will aim to issue at least 80% of the decisions to grant within **48 months** from the filing of the divisional application. **In response to requests from users, we will monitor and report on the use of divisional applications and in particular multi-generational divisionals in the different technical areas.**



³ 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. During 2025, the timeliness of opposition has improved strongly from 35% to about 47%. After having cleared the backlog, we will further improve next year.

⁴ 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.



Developing our partnerships – listening and responding

We will continue to engage with large applicants through strategic and operational meetings aligned with the EPO's goals. These sessions often lead to technical follow-ups that foster expert-level dialogue and improvements to the patent system.

Building on the success of our SME outreach programme – with 75 meetings by the end of 2025 – we've expanded our efforts to include universities and public research organisations, enhancing support for smaller users, especially around the Unitary Patent and SME fee reductions. In 2026, we will expand from one-to-one to collective meetings and begin targeted outreach to mid-cap companies (with 251-999 employees), to better understand that group's patenting needs.

The feedback received from more than 8 000 respondents to our latest User Satisfaction Survey has shaped the development of this Quality Action Plan for 2026 and will drive improvements in our PGP. The next survey will be prepared in consultation with members of the SACEPO Working Party on Quality, to ensure the questions we ask remain relevant to our users.

The 2025 SQAPs findings have been presented to SACEPO, as well as to all our examiners. These findings will be published in the Quality Report 2025 in June. Their valuable insights have been incorporated in the quality actions planned for 2026. The SQAPs programme for 2026 will be developed together with our users, responding to their feedback and suggestions.



Conclusion

In 2026, our combined investments in people, technologies, practice harmonisation and user dialogue will play a crucial role in the continuous improvement of our products and services. To meet the changing needs of stakeholders in a rapidly changing technology landscape, our targeted actions for the year build directly on the insights gained in 2025, from our partnerships with users of the European patent system, the outcomes of our studies, and analysis of data and audits. These actions will ensure the advancement of our shared journey towards excellence across the patent granting process.

Throughout the year, we will update our Quality dashboard so that everyone can follow the progress we make towards our goals. The outcome of all actions will be reported on in our Quality Report 2026, to be published in June 2027.



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