
Draft Strategic Plan 2025



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Introduction

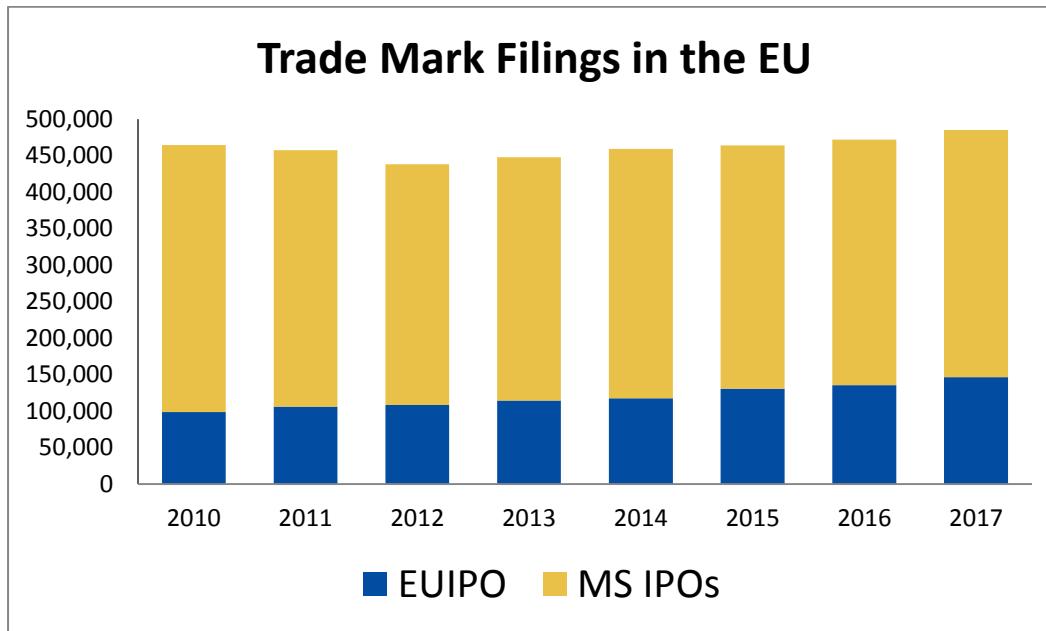
The European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) is an EU agency that was established in Alicante, Spain in 1994 to administer unitary rights that are valid in all Member States — initially the EU trade mark (EUTM) and later the registered Community design (RCD).⁽¹⁾

Having unitary trade mark and design rights was seen as vital for the proper functioning of the Internal Market and developing a strong and innovative EU business culture. Indeed, IP rights (IPR) represent an increasing proportion of the value of modern businesses and underpin jobs, growth and exports. They are a critical part of the EU's 'innovation ecosystem'.

During the more than 25 years of the Office's existence, there have been many changes in the business, technological and social environments, which have had a major impact on IPRs. The EUIPO has had to evolve accordingly.

This evolution has included taking on responsibility for cooperation activities within the two-tier European trade mark and design systems based on the principles of coexistence and complementarity, evidenced by the sustainable growth of trade mark filings in the last few years in the EU, shown in the chart below.

⁽¹⁾ In Regulation (EU) 2017/1001, the Office's name was changed from the Office for Harmonization in the Internal Market to the European Union Intellectual Property Office and the former Community trade mark (CTM) was renamed the EUTM.



Source: EUIPO data and WIPO Statistics Data Centre.

The Office has also been given responsibility for IP research, communication, knowledge sharing and cooperation with enforcement authorities, covering all IPRs, via the European Observatory on Infringements of IP Rights (the Observatory).

The expansion of the EUIPO's remit has been underpinned by two successive multiannual strategic plans since 2011, the second of which was **SP2020**.

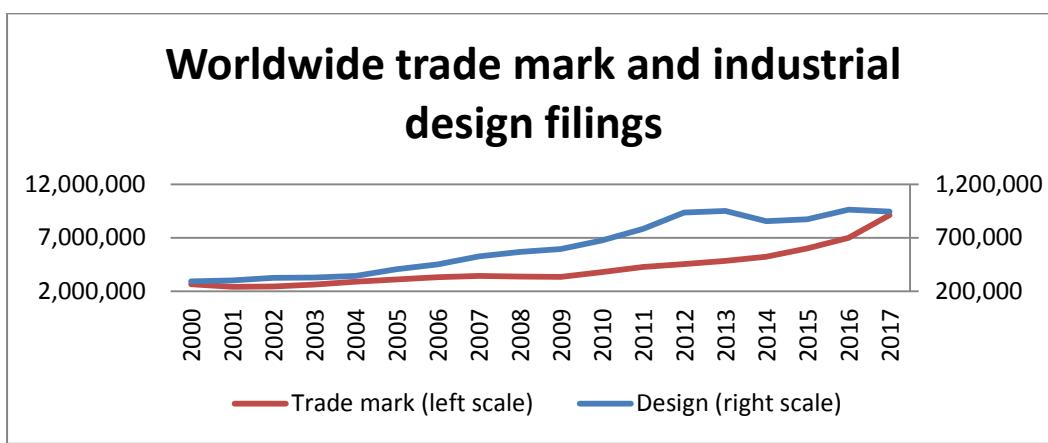
Both plans focused intensively on the interests of users of the EU trade mark and design systems and the need to put quality at the centre by becoming an Office of excellence. This was combined with a willingness to increase the Office's added value as the largest EU agency exclusively devoted to IPRs, as requested by the EU institutions.

The Office must now look at the next phase in its evolution. New thinking and new ways of delivering added value for businesses, institutions and society are now required, taking into account the future needs of all stakeholders.

The global IP landscape

Intangible assets, most of which are protected by IP, increasingly drive the success of individual companies and entire economies. For many firms, the value of their intangible assets far exceeds the value of their physical ones.

While there has been a slowdown of globalisation in recent years and a move towards more regional and bilateral trade arrangements, many companies continue to look beyond their home markets for growth, and the IP system must support this change. The continuing expansion of the IP system is evidenced by the growth of trade mark and design filings around the world, shown in the chart below.



Source: WIPO Statistics Data Centre, updated December 2018.

While demand for designs has been flat since 2011, trade mark filings have continued to grow.

However, IP faces some significant challenges from several sources. The technological changes that make new distribution channels and new business models possible also make it easier to infringe IPRs, most obviously in the realm of digital content on the internet, but also through online sales of counterfeit goods and improved transport networks to deliver them.

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The updated joint study on counterfeiting published in 2019 by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the EUIPO shows that trade in counterfeit and pirated goods continued to rise in the period up to 2016, reaching 3.3 % of world trade and 6.8 % of EU imports from third countries.⁽²⁾

Strong players have emerged in recent years that are operating on the margins of the IP system. For example, the surge in content uploaded to digital platforms raises new copyright issues. E-commerce sites have their own set of incentives and priorities when it comes to combating counterfeiting. The new business models pose a challenge to both the rights holders and the authorities tasked with registering and enforcing IPRs.

Some of the emerging technologies add new dimensions to IP. A good example is 3D printing (additive manufacturing), which is transforming global supply chains and shifting the value equation in favour of the underlying IPRs embedded in the design and manufacturing instructions.

The way companies and other rights holders use IP is also evolving and becoming more complex. Firms often protect their IP using a bundle of rights, some registered (most often a mix of trade marks, patents and registered designs), some not (e.g. copyright).

Individually owned IPRs are sometimes supplemented with collective rights such as certification marks or protected geographical indications. Domain names are also crucial to brand owners and the interplay of these names with trade marks is of major importance.

With the increasing use of artificial intelligence (AI), and other advances in technology, the future of work is changing and this also affects how IP offices will go about their tasks.

⁽²⁾) Trends in Trade in Counterfeit and Pirated Goods, OECD and EUIPO, 2019 Edition.

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Making the IP system work for businesses, particularly SMEs

Supporting innovation means supporting businesses, including Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs). SMEs represented more than 99 % of enterprises operating in the EU non-financial business sector in 2016.⁽³⁾

However, the generic category of SMEs encompasses a broad variety of businesses with different economic profiles — from local services such as the hairdresser on the corner to high technology firms. A further challenge for policy makers is therefore to identify and adequately support the specific segments of SMEs that would benefit from better use of IP.

The European Commission's report on European SMEs shows that from 2008 to 2017 SMEs generated 47 % of the increase in gross value added of the EU non-financial business sector and 52 % of its increase in employment.

The same study provides valuable insights into the most promising segments. In the EU, in 2016, there were 179 060 SMEs with a 3-year average growth rate in employment of at least 10 %. These so-called high-growth firms (HGFs) include start-ups and more classic SMEs in a large variety of sectors. Overall, their number increased by 24 % in the EU from 2014 to 2016.

These HGFs have diverse profiles and origins but, compared with other SMEs, their successful growth is often driven by their ability to develop internationally, both within and beyond the EU Internal Market.

Studies carried out by the EUIPO, in particular the SME Scoreboard (2016) and the IP Contribution Study at company level (2015), show that SMEs that own IPRs perform better economically than those that do not; the IPR owners have 28 % higher revenue per employee and pay their employees 20 % higher salaries than the non-owners. SMEs with

⁽³⁾) European Commission, 2018, Report on European SMEs.

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registered IPRs tend to be larger and to generate more of their turnover outside their home markets.

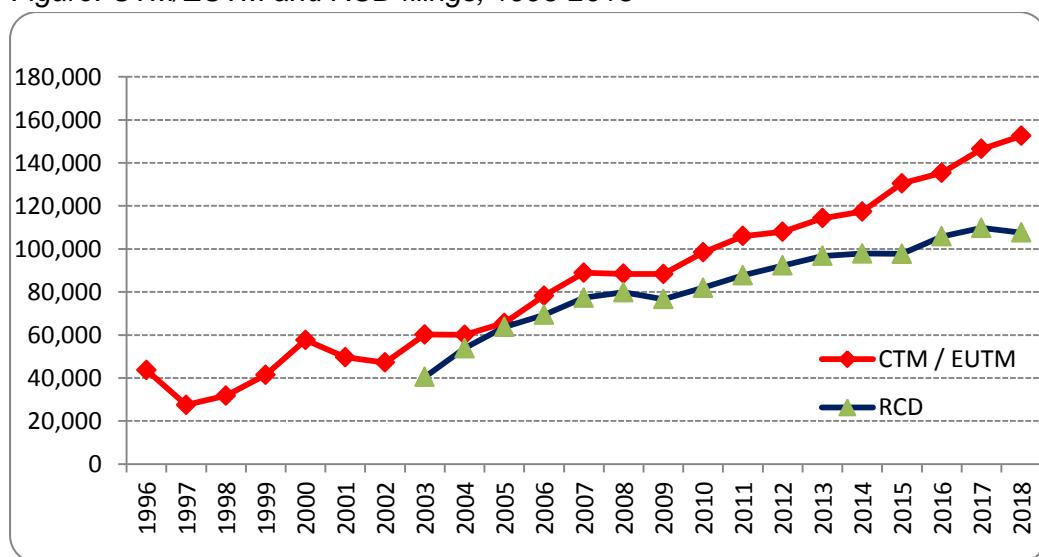
At the same time, only 9 % of SMEs own any registered IPRs. This low proportion partly reflects the fact that registered IPRs are less relevant for some small companies, or that those companies are not even aware of them, and partly reflects perceived and real barriers that SMEs experience when trying to protect their IP.

Demand trends for EU trade marks and designs

Since the first EU trade mark applications were received by the Office in 1996, filing volumes have been growing by approximately 5 % per year. In 2018, EUTM applications reached more than 152 000, and more than 107 000 RCDs were received.

The trend of both types of filings is shown in the figure below. While the volumes are clearly influenced by overall economic conditions, as evidenced by the flat or even declining figures in 2008-2010, the worst years of the financial crisis, the overall growth trend has been at historical levels in recent years, at least for trade marks.

Figure: CTM/EUTM and RCD filings, 1996-2018



Source: EUIPO

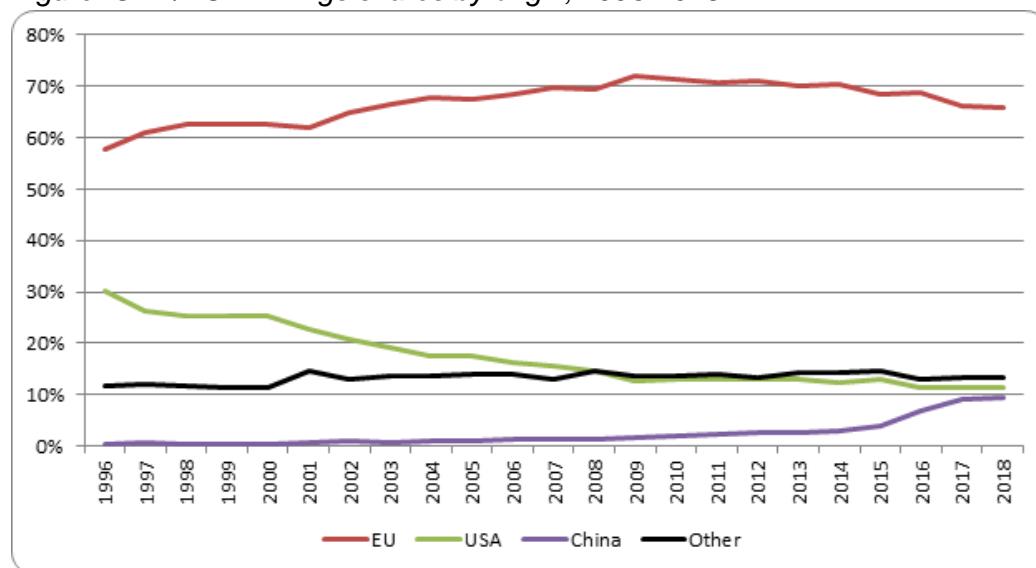
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In terms of the composition of filings, there has been a marked shift since the inception of the Office, as shown in the figures below. The EU's share of EUTM filings reached a peak of 72 % in 2009 and has since declined to 66 % in 2018.

Other trends include a marked decline in the share of trade mark filings originating in the USA, from about 30 % in 1996 to 11 % in 2018. Conversely, the filings from China have increased from virtually zero in 1996 to almost 10 % in 2018.

If the current tendency continues, China is likely to become the second largest country in terms of EUTM filings during the next years. This reflects the growing economic importance of China and its interest in accessing the EU market. It also underscores the need to intensify cooperation with this country in the area of IPRs.

Figure: CTM/EUTM filings shares by origin, 1996-2018



Source: EUIPO

Future challenges

The digital and physical infrastructure of the Office has been transformed over the last two strategic plans. Combined with new ways of working, this has helped the Office to adapt to an increased workload and an expanded remit with new types of tasks in line with the EU's evolving requirements and priorities for IPRs.

For the future, the EUIPO must combine dealing effectively with the often fluctuating demand for IPRs and the growth in new tasks with remaining agile enough to respond to new requests to deliver even further added value for the EU and its citizens, in response to changes to the EU's 'innovation ecosystem'.

Above all, there must continue to be a strong focus on the needs of all businesses, large and small, combined with the understanding that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach will not work, given the different needs of users of the EU trade mark and design systems.

It is clear that many of these users, particularly the smaller ones, would benefit from a holistic approach to IPRs, including support for innovation and competitiveness.

As part of this, European cooperation on IPRs must be taken to the next level. The EUIPO must ensure not only that the networks created under the first two strategic plans are sustainable, but also that their knowledge and energy are harnessed in delivering positive change.

Since 2010, the Office has invested nearly EUR 100 million in creating and expanding, together with EU national offices, a European Union Intellectual Property Network (EUIPN), particularly through the joint development of common tools and practices for the benefit of users.

In Regulation (EU) 2017/1001, the legislators decided to make promoting the convergence of tools and practices in cooperation with IP offices a core task of the Office. This change reflected the success of these activities and marked the beginning of a new era

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characterised by an even stronger collaborative structure allowing for a continuous exchange of expertise, knowledge sharing and the provision of services at an operational level.

An even deeper partnership with Member State intellectual property offices (MS IPOs) and other national authorities or intermediaries is vital, due to their geographical, cultural and linguistic closeness to SMEs. The MS IPOs can help ensure that there is a comprehensive approach to advice and assistance related to IPRs that will help SMEs to gain competitive advantage and ultimately create quality jobs.

Helping SMEs, in particular, to take advantage of their IPRs is one of the EU's priorities, and the European Commission has asked the Office to help with the IP aspects of its 'start up – scale up' initiative to improve the situation for smaller firms. This reflects the increasing priority being given to IPRs as a lynchpin of the EU's industrial policy, based on smart and sustainable growth, and the key importance given to SMEs.

Resolving disputes over IPRs, with the corresponding expense of litigation, is an issue that SMEs report as a major concern. To address this, alternative dispute resolution should enhance access to extrajudicial solutions for IP conflicts and cut costs.

Meanwhile, globalisation continues to bring new challenges and opportunities. It offers access to new markets for EU companies, including the major trading blocs, which are in turn significant users of the EU trade mark and design systems.

Given the global dimension of IP, strengthening European Union structures should be accompanied by enhanced international cooperation among IP offices, such as that taking place in the TM5/ID5⁴ framework that brings together IP offices from the EU, China, Japan, South Korea, and the USA, as well as with international organisations such as the European Patent Office (EPO) and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

⁴ TM5/ID5: EUIPO, China National Intellectual Property Administration, Japan Patent Office, Korean Intellectual Property Office and United States Patent and Trademark Office.

The generally increased volumes and complexity in IPRs on a global scale further complicate the challenge of ensuring that IPRs are respected and enforced. Over recent years, the Office, through the Observatory, has actively contributed at EU level to improved coordination with the police, customs, market surveillance authorities, prosecutors and judges.

While this represents progress towards creating a more joined-up IP system, still more needs to be done. For example, when users try to enforce their rights, even within the EU, they continue to report a number of difficulties, such as in communicating that an IPR exists and then ensuring that fake goods are identified and seized.

This is a gap that still needs to be filled and an area where the Office can offer even more added value in the future by helping MS IPOs, or other competent national authorities, to improve coordination.

In parallel, SMEs, larger or frequent IP users (including professional practitioners), IP offices and EU institutions must take account of the increasing pace of technological change, with AI, big data, the upcoming 5G mobile communication standard, 3D printing, and blockchain, among other things, creating a new business environment and new working methods.

For this reason, the EUIPO is already renewing its focus on the impact of new technologies. In this evolving situation it is important that the Office provides staff with the tools, training and career options needed to create stronger teamwork and extended skill sets that empower them to ‘work smarter’ and take advantage of these new opportunities, while also maintaining a good work-life balance.

Increased automation and the delivery of tools that are more ‘intelligent’, predictable and efficient will enable the Office to deliver a better quality service. They will also allow staff to develop additional competencies and to concentrate on more complex tasks requiring human assessment that cannot be left solely to technology.

Giving the users the same, or equivalent, tools will empower them to improve their filing strategies by providing access to pre-clearance functionalities that will reduce the chance of deficiencies or other problems down the line.

In summary, while there have been significant improvements in many areas, it is clear that the future continues to hold challenges. Based on the achievements of the Office's first two strategic plans and, in particular, its user-driven approach, the successful creation of the EUIPN, and the work of the Observatory, the Office must ensure that all the networks that it supports help to deliver change where it is needed, in response to globalisation, the rise of e-commerce and virtual marketplaces, and the threat of IP infringement.

It is increasingly obvious that there are significant gaps in the assistance available to companies, in particular SMEs, when they try to take advantage of their innovation and creativity, whether in Europe or the global marketplace. This is particularly the case given the rapid pace of technological change, which is shaping business models.

Overall, the Office needs to ensure it is an attractive and reliable entry point to IP protection covering a broad range of IPRs. It must therefore develop into an IP excellence hub providing high-quality public service that will assist European businesses to become more competitive in an ever more global and digital environment. The goal is clear: Europe must offer the best possible IP environment for users.

EUIPO Strategic Plan 2025 (SP2025)

1. SP building blocks

SP2025 is built on a vision of delivering ‘IP value for businesses and citizens in Europe’ through a number of interlinked strands of activities, each of which centres on a Strategic Driver that unites the Office and its stakeholders around a common purpose.

This vision recognises that while the Office’s focus on delivering excellent products and services to businesses when administering EU unitary IPRs remains unchanged, this is only one part of what it means to deliver IP value within the EU’s ‘innovation ecosystem’.

Cooperation on IP within the EU and globally, including aspects of enforcement, is now a core activity that both complements the EUIPO’s role as a registration office and adds value for the EU as a whole.

Consequently, the first Strategic Driver, ‘Interconnected, efficient and reliable IP System for the Internal Market’ (SD1), sets out how the Office intends to build upon the networks created in order to improve the IP system during a period when technology and global forces are changing the IP landscape.

The second Strategic Driver, ‘Advanced customer-centric services’ (SD2), guides the actions that will be taken in order to provide customers, including SMEs, large businesses and intermediaries, with the state-of-the-art tools, services and guidance that they need to thrive in this new environment. A tailored approach is needed, targeting the different needs of the user segments.

The third Strategic Driver, ‘Dynamic organisational skill sets and an innovative workplace of choice’ (SD3), recognises that the Office must continue to evolve in terms of skill sets and working practices in order to sustainably provide high-quality registration services in a

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state-of-the-art work environment that leverages the best aspects of technological change and facilitates a wider contribution to the IP system as a whole.

Since all three Strategic Drivers are designed to complement and reinforce each other within an overall multiannual strategic framework, they should be viewed as interlocking and equally important parts of a unified plan.

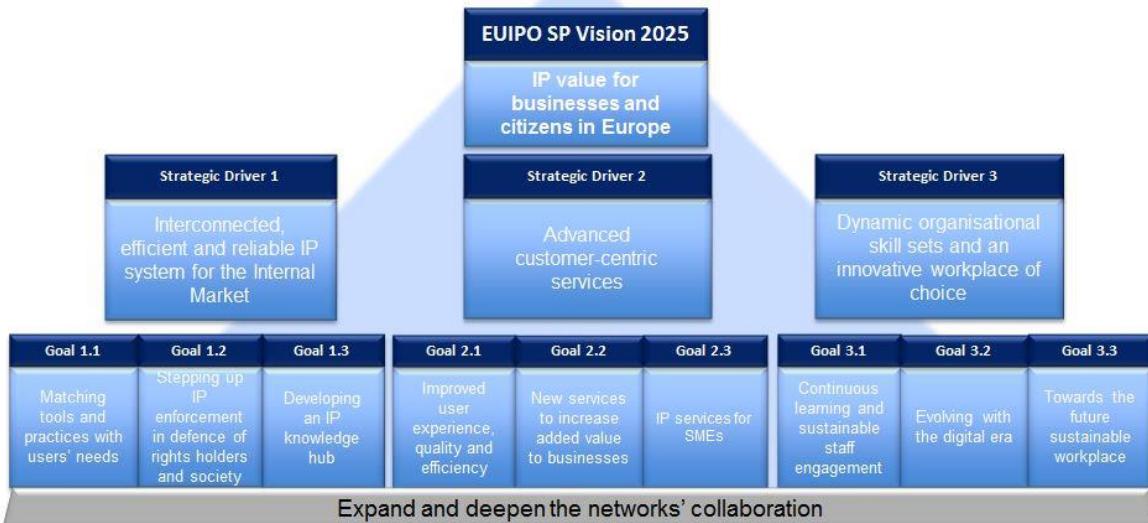
The SD1 initiatives will be designed to both strengthen the IP system and provide the foundation on which the advanced customer-centric services in SD2 are built. The initiatives under SD3 are intended to equip the Office to meet future needs in an agile, efficient and effective manner.

The **Strategic Drivers**, with their individual **Strategic Goals**, and interconnected **Key Initiatives** supported by examples of projects, activities, and anticipated benefits, will contribute to the EUIPO's overall aim of becoming an '**IP hub of excellence**', as described in the EUIPO SP2025 mission statement.

Each Key Initiative illustrates in a non-exhaustive manner the types of actions foreseen by SP2025, in order to help show the strategic direction in which the Office intends to travel.

The detailed proposals on how these thematic areas will be pursued will be included in future annual Work Programmes and European Cooperation Projects. The Office will continue to support these projects in order to respond to the evolving needs of businesses and society and the priorities of the European Union.

As with previous strategic plans, SP2025 has been designed around the concept of creating and measuring benefits for EU businesses, institutions and society, as well as for the Office's efficiency and effectiveness.



EUIPO SP2025 Mission

As an IP hub of excellence, the EUIPO provides customer-centric services and contributes to a stronger IP system, efficient enforcement and better understanding of IP rights in a global and increasingly digital environment by building and promoting sustainable networks, thereby supporting competitiveness, innovation and creativity in the EU.

2. The Strategic Drivers

Strategic Driver 1: Interconnected, efficient and reliable IP system for the Internal Market

EU businesses, citizens and other IP stakeholders need an interconnected, efficient and reliable IP system that supports the proper functioning of the EU's Internal Market and helps them in the global economy.

In response, the Office has developed networks with partners including the MS IPOs, other national authorities, the European Commission and EU agencies, the EPO, WIPO, user associations, intermediaries and other businesses.

Cooperation with MS IPOs, with the involvement of users, is now a core task of the Office, reflecting the two-tier nature of the European trade mark and design systems characterised by the coexistence of EU and national/regional titles and their complementary relationship. Under SP2025, the EUIPO will continue to dedicate significant resources to this, expanding the role and importance of the EUIPN in order to deliver positive change on the ground.

This network now extends into many areas of IPRs, including the Observatory Network, the networks of judges, prosecutors and enforcement officials, and those with responsibility for IP education, among others.

Since the Internal Market functions within a global marketplace in which EU businesses increasingly operate, the networks have also expanded to include other international and global players.

Building upon the work with all these networks, the Office will support the EU's policy priorities with regard to IPRs in order to ensure maximum added value is delivered in a transparent and accountable manner.

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With technological advances, the expansion of e-commerce and virtual marketplaces, and new business models rapidly reshaping the economic and social environment, many aspects of obtaining, exploiting and enforcing IPRs need to be adapted.

In response, the Office needs to explore new areas of cooperation. This must be reflected in further expansions of the cooperation networks, including new stakeholders and partners, while keeping the MS IPOs as key nodes of the networks.

In parallel, the awareness and behaviour of consumers need to be addressed in order to highlight the valuable role of IPRs in the EU's economic and social well-being and minimise the negative impact of counterfeiting and piracy.

To meet these challenges, SD1 will rely strongly on cooperation within these collaborative networks, which now need to be expanded and deepened in order to deliver their full potential to produce positive changes in the interests of EU business and society.

The three principal Goals of this Strategic Driver are: 'Matching tools and practices with users' needs' (Goal 1.1); 'Stepping up IP enforcement in defence of rights holders and society' (Goal 1.2); and 'Developing an IP knowledge hub' (Goal 1.3).



Goal 1.1: Matching tools and practices with users' needs

The Office will create stronger and more efficient networks with more connections in order to help deliver initiatives that will strengthen the IP system.

This will involve building and sharing more advanced tools and further converging practices while adapting to the evolving competencies of MS IPOs under the new Directive, and supporting the transposition and implementation of the latter, as well as extending the networks in various ways.

As the EUIPO is being asked to play a larger role in supporting the 'innovation ecosystem', this will mean providing greater input to EU decision-making processes.

In an increasingly global IP market, where businesses operate irrespective of national or regional borders, the Office also needs to intensify its relationships with IPOs and users beyond EU borders.

Key Initiative 1: Sustainable collaborative networks for the benefit of users

Following the legislative reform of the EU trade mark system, a new cooperation paradigm is being developed involving a more collaborative approach to exploring and promoting solutions with stakeholders and creating further common tools and practices in a more joined-up network.

Where needed, further support will be provided to MS IPOs on implementing the Trade Mark Directive, from both a legal and an operational perspective, including tools and practices, notably as regards opposition and cancellation proceedings.

The Office will also streamline communication with the MS IPOs through cooperation coordinators for specific countries or regions. Actions may also include deploying resources at IP offices, where this is needed for major cooperation projects in order to enable participation.

Furthermore, a new financial and operational model will be proposed to simplify cooperation, facilitate multiannual planning and optimise financial execution in line with best practices employed by other EU bodies. Improvements to the cooperation platform will be identified for optimising such planning and execution.

Under this Key Initiative, the Office will further develop collaborative online work solutions, tools and practices with the EUIPN members for the benefit of users. This will include adapting the cooperation framework to the evolving competencies of MS IPOs under the new Trade Mark Directive, and enhancing MS IPOs' capacity to continue to actively participate in cooperation activities, while promoting corporate responsibility as a core business value, including, for example, improving access to common tools for users with disabilities.

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Through the existing European Cooperation Projects network, tools will be improved and upgraded and the Office will continue to support the implementation of tools such as the Front Office and Back Office as well as sharing, where feasible, its own internal tools. Network tools related to building lists of goods and services, assessing the meaning of signs for examination purposes, comparing signs, comparing goods and services, and searching for similar designs will be extended and the Office will seek to enhance pre-clearance functions and improve searching and filing capabilities.

The flagship tools, in particular TMview, DesignView and the Harmonised Database, will be revamped to meet users' expectations. Upgraded network solutions will be deployed, some of them powered by AI and blockchain, with a stronger focus on improving service and data quality, as well as on the searchability of new types of trade marks.

A technology incubator will be created to conduct joint research, map the technological and business revolutions affecting IP services and explore the potential of new technologies for the further development of common tools. The incubator may bring together experts from MS IPOs and other stakeholders such as the EPO, TM5/ID5, WIPO and user associations.

As part of the development and update of common practices, further convergence analysis will be encouraged with increased interaction from stakeholders, and an index to measure the effective and actual application and impact of converged practices will be developed. The need for additional convergence programmes, including the area of appeal proceedings, will be explored, and the network of EU Agencies' Boards of Appeal will be further developed.

In addition, joint efforts will be made to create common EU guidelines with MS IPOs focusing on areas of convergence and helping to reach out to end users.

New shared services will be encouraged by supporting peer networks of experts, including setting up a think tank on legal issues and IP topics, and extending the scope of the Collaborative Network to new areas of collaboration.

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Other initiatives will include creating a shared pre-clearance platform and enhanced cooperation with domain name and company name administrators and service providers to prevent cybersquatting and other IP abuses.

Key Initiative 2: Closer cooperation with EU institutions and bodies

The description of the activities, initiatives and support mechanisms that are designed to support innovation and creativity within the EU as an ‘innovation ecosystem’ captures the diversity, complexity and changing nature of this task.

The desired outcomes for the EU include increased business competitiveness, social and technological advances and the creation of high-quality jobs. Helping SMEs is a particular target.

As the EU’s largest agency, exclusively devoted to IPRs, the EUIPO is increasingly being asked to play a larger role in supporting the ‘innovation ecosystem’. In order to do this effectively, the profile of IP at EU institutions needs to be raised, in close alignment and cooperation with the European Commission.

This can be achieved by increasing the visibility of the work the Office undertakes, presenting cooperation opportunities and knowledge exchanges, offering greater input from the EUIPO in EU coordination of IP matters, and providing evidence-based data to support policy development and decision making.

The Office’s wider communication activities will play a part in raising the profile but these need to be supported by specific actions with all EU institutions, such as the secondment of EUIPO staff and the provision, on demand, of IP technical support and expertise. Furthermore, the Office will offer support to the Commission in coordinating the EU’s position in WIPO for the purpose of seeking the extension of common tools and practices and further alignment with global solutions and databases, in particular in relation to classification and unconventional types of trade marks.

Under this Key Initiative, the Office will continue to provide technical support to the European Commission for evaluating EU legislation on the protection of designs, in view of a potential future revision of the designs systems in Europe, as well as for creating a consolidated database on geographical indications (GIs).

Complementing activities under the following Key Initiative, the Office will support the European Commission's external actions on IPRs in non-EU countries with regard to trade policy negotiations. In addition, it will continue to implement EU Funded Programmes in third countries, and consolidate and extend the deployment of IP attachés in selected regions.

Taking into account the role of the European Parliament (EP) in the functioning of the Office, through the participation in the MB/BC and Observatory Plenary, and in view of future Office activities such as participation in EU external actions and initiatives related to EU SMEs and consumers, the Office will deepen communication with the EP and its members.

The Office will also continue to cooperate at technical level with the General Court and the Court of Justice, as well as their Registries, on case-law developments, sharing data through the immediate update of the e-Search Case Law database with new cases lodged and judgments rendered in the IP area, giving users a single multilingual tool to access all IP case-law related information.

Cooperation with other EU agencies will be deepened in order to share further services and deliver synergies and efficiency gains within the EU public sector, building on the work already being done in the area of internal audit, disaster recovery, public procurement and data protection.

Key Initiative 3: Enhanced engagement with global partners for the extension of common tools and practices

The Office's international cooperation strategy contributes to, and is aligned with, the general EU policy priorities, particularly those related to the facilitation of business opportunities for European economic undertakings in foreign markets.

The realities of an increasingly global IP market, where actors wish to operate internationally regardless of national or regional borders, mean that the Office needs to intensify its relationships with IPOs and users beyond EU borders.

This will require more extensive and reciprocal contact with non-EU IPOs and User Associations, primarily from candidate and neighbouring countries, which in turn will provide an opportunity to promote the Office's work, offer its methodologies and services to new stakeholders, and gain fresh insights in return.

International cooperation will take place through bilateral cooperation with non-EU IP offices; through the implementation of EU Funded Programmes in third countries; and within the context of multilateral cooperation with international organisations such as the EPO and WIPO and the Office's TM5/ID5 partners.

Spreading the use of the common tools and practices of the EUIPN is one of the main objectives, given the important contribution that they make to the transparency and accessibility of the global IP system.

The Office will continue to consolidate these mechanisms, while expanding the reach of the EUIPN in regions such as Asia, Latin America or Africa, in line with EU policy priorities, including those associated with the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, concentrating on areas where this will deliver most benefits for EU businesses, in particular SMEs.

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The Office will continue to involve MS IPO experts in defining and implementing international activities designed to foster greater interaction between the EUIPN and non-EU partners. This will also entail the further involvement of global user representatives in the Office's activities and events, particularly in regions where this will advance the EU's interests.

Cooperation with non-EU partners will be broadened and the capacity to implement the EUIPN solutions will be strengthened in selected regions. To this end, the Office will explore setting up a dedicated international cooperation forum, as well as a visitor programme for non-EU stakeholders.

The Office will also take further steps towards institutionalised, regular and structured collaboration by, among other things, fostering synergies in cooperation efforts with the EPO and WIPO, and promoting further TM5/ID5 interaction.

Cooperation with the EPO will be optimised to ensure mutual support, exchange of best practices and a collaborative approach through the regular and systematic exchange of information on cooperation activities to generate synergies and avoid duplication of efforts both at European and at international level. This will ensure greater complementarity, consistency and efficiency of cooperation activities for the benefit of MS IPOs and users of the IP system.

Similarly, in cooperation with WIPO, the Office will continue to exploit synergies and avoid duplications. The aim is to improve international and global standards in examination and classification, including wider acceptance of the Harmonised Database of classification terms, and further cooperation in the area of tools and practices. This cooperation will also support the enlarged membership of international IP legal instruments such as the Madrid and Hague international protection systems.

Further interaction with the TM5/ID5 partners will be promoted, including, among other things, more joint activities in the area of virtual marketplaces and online commerce, as well as common efforts to protect global users from fraudulent or misleading practices. This

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interaction will be facilitated by, among other things, an inter-office exchange programme, and the possible reinforcement of administrative structures to support cooperation.

Exchanges at international level with Trial and Appeal bodies from the largest IP offices will also be promoted.

Goal 1.2: Stepping up IP enforcement in defence of rights holders and society

The Office's studies, digital tools to help enforcement authorities, and its close relationship with fellow agencies including Europol and Eurojust, combined with support for the high level group on enforcement, are contributing to the creation of a more joined-up enforcement system.

However, when users try to enforce their rights even within the EU, there continues to be a need for better coordination between actors. This is an area where the Office can offer even more added value in the future by helping the competent national authorities, including MS IPOs, to improve coordination.

Areas for attention include facilitating the exchange of data or information between different actors. This will be achieved by improving arrangements for sharing data between enforcement authorities and rights holders, and also between companies and the virtual marketplaces that have become increasingly important with the growth of online commerce.

Key Initiative 1: Effective tools and capabilities for IP enforcement

The Office will develop an integrated secure online service to help manage and enforce IPRs, thus further embedding IP enforcement services in the life cycle of registered trade marks and designs.

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This service will provide a secure EUIPO system giving owners of EU trade marks and designs information on the IP policies and IP protection programmes of participating e-commerce platforms.

At the same time, a mechanism for these platforms will be created to verify the rights of rights holders willing to join their IP protection programmes. In this context, the objective is also to create a more level playing field for smaller platforms, which do not have resources to create detailed IP enforcement programmes for their users.

The Office will examine the further development of this secure system to allow participating IP owners and platforms to exchange information on genuine and IP-infringing products and, if feasible, will facilitate access to online alternative dispute resolution and a more harmonised approach to the ‘take-down’ arrangements operated by different virtual marketplaces.

Specific actions could take the form of further integrating the Enforcement Database with all the other relevant services offered by the Office to its users, as well as expanding it by providing the technology to third countries. Furthermore, the EUIPO will aim to bring other enforcement authorities and other IPRs into the IP Enforcement Portal, while keeping it an EU instrument for security reasons.

The Office will also support knowledge-sharing, capacity-building and training in order to support the needs of enforcement officials, complementing actions envisaged elsewhere in the Strategic Plan.

Key Initiative 2: Harmonising and coordinating enforcement efforts

Setting up an enforcement network within the EU and the experience gained while working with Europol, Eurojust and enforcement bodies have demonstrated that there are opportunities to increase and harmonise coordination efforts.

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Under this Key Initiative, the Office will contribute to efforts to develop automated and standardised data exchange between enforcement authorities and improve the support framework for dedicated IP enforcement units and inter-agency cooperation.

Goal 1.3: Developing an IP knowledge hub

Developing an IP knowledge hub is a logical extension of the Office's existing activities, which combine IP research, knowledge sharing, support for education and training, cooperation and communication.

Actions in this area will include translating more information and IP training material through machine translation to enhance accessibility to Office services. Moreover, the Office will promote a network of IP e-libraries to harness IP knowledge.

Wider cooperation on knowledge sharing will be complemented and reinforced by initiatives under SD3 that are designed to extend and modernise the Academy Learning Portal in order to provide an EUIPO Virtual Campus for staff and stakeholders.

Under this strategic Goal, further progress will be made towards becoming an IP knowledge hub within three mutually supporting Key Initiatives.

Key Initiative 1: New and improved information resources

Previous strategic plans saw the development of major databases for trade marks and designs and efforts to make case-law accessible. However, more needs to be done to make the EU sources on IP law and practice more transparent and readily available.

Equally, while the EUIPO is working to build bridges between GIs and trade marks, there is still no consolidated GI database — even though these rights interact and are often used in a bundled fashion.

Likewise, while internet domain names are important business identifiers and often used in conjunction with trade marks, the linkages between these resources need to be improved.

At the same time AI and big data are not only providing the means to use information in new and creative ways, but are also increasing the demand for more information on IPRs in ways that are rapidly changing.

The interconnection of platforms and common tools aims to strengthen the EUIPN by eliminating duplication, creating single sources of reliable information and rationalising and harmonising usage for stakeholders.

Projects will include moves towards a more comprehensive and multilingual IP law and practice repository (serving as an e-Guide) and a consolidated GI database in cooperation with the European Commission and competent authorities of Member States as well as other relevant stakeholders at EU and national level.

Key Initiative 2: Evidence-based contributions to IP policy making

Office studies have brought better evidence of the key role that IPRs play in both the economy and society and this has paid dividends for users and society by making the role of IPRs much clearer.

Using the evidence of the studies already published, decision makers have the opportunity to develop better informed policies, and this has led to a growing recognition of the need for a more ‘joined-up’ IP system.

Under this Key Initiative, the Office will increase the leverage of the results of major studies — both in scope and geographical coverage. Support will be provided to third countries or authorities that wish to perform identical studies and the studies will be enlarged to cover

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as many IPRs as possible. Steps will be taken to improve forecasting and planning capabilities within the EUIPN.

The Office's commitment to maintaining a technology watch from an IP perspective will be developed via a technology incubator allowing the EUIPN to map the impact of business and technological change affecting IP.

The technology incubator, combining the expertise within the EUIPN with other international partners such as the EPO, TM5/ID5, WIPO and user associations will regularly monitor technological advances affecting IP in order to contribute to the identification of new projects.

This Key Initiative will also be the vehicle for projects and activities that deliver more data-driven science on SMEs and IP. In addition, since technological change and SME issues are both horizontal priorities for SP2025 as a whole, many of the activities under this Key Initiative will complement and support actions under the other Strategic Drivers, Goals and Key Initiatives.

Key Initiative 3: Wider and deeper understanding of IP

Policy makers, legal practitioners and larger companies have benefited from the research and communication activities on IP disseminated in recent years. However, major gaps remain in the understanding of IP among significant segments of society.

In cooperation with stakeholders of the Office's networks, including MS IPOs and user groups, the EUIPO will launch common awareness activities, encourage a stronger focus on the importance of IPRs at all levels of EU institutions, and raise awareness at high-impact key events targeting youth, SMEs, and consumers. There will also be actions to help citizens to identify sources of fake products and unlicensed content.

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The EUIPO will pursue wider partnership with other IP Academies, including those of the EPO, WIPO and major international partners such as the TM5/ID5. It will also extend the reach of educational and professional development activities such as the Pan-European Seal Professional Traineeship Programme and seek to ensure their smooth integration in the corresponding national schemes of Member States.

The IP in Education Programme will be expanded to reinforce the work being done with teachers and Education Ministries to develop cutting-edge tools that can both inspire and inform young people of school age on IP matters.

The latest linguistic technology will be used to offer IP training material in more EU languages in order to bring this learning opportunity closer to citizens.

A common aspect of actions under this Key Initiative will be the use of machine translation in order to make training materials more accessible and widen their reach, as well as the use of more user-friendly and open-access materials using advanced technology for e-learning, including interactive tutorials, chat bots and user forums.

For enforcement authorities, developments may include simulations of enforcement scenarios, and knowledge building in preparation for major public sports events.

Strategic Driver 2: Advanced customer-centric services

The Office has been on a journey for some years to change how it interacts with users by taking greater account of what they are seeking from a high-quality IP system.

In the quest to make services more customer-centric, it has become clear that more needs to be done to reflect the specific needs of different user segments.

The needs of larger users, who represent the greatest proportion of registrations, will continue to be addressed. The Key User Programme will be further developed, taking

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account of advances in technology, in order to meet evolving needs and the increased expectations of a more technically literate user base.

For some businesses, however, especially SMEs, the IP system needs to be more accessible in order to contribute to their competitiveness and ability to create high-quality jobs, and the Office must support this as well.

There is evidence that smaller firms need more tailor-made information and guidance, as well as help with IP commercialisation and enforcement in order to make better use of their innovation and creativity, and to enhance their competitiveness through their IP assets.

The Office's goal is to offer intuitive guidance throughout the full life cycle of the IPRs it administers — before, during and after registration.

Language barriers will be eliminated by offering tools and information as far as possible in all EU languages, thus facilitating exchanges with the Office and access to its services.

Measures will also be taken to help reduce the cost of protection of IPRs by looking at the possibility of swift and efficient answers to conflicts and disputes, including a complete range of dispute resolution services.

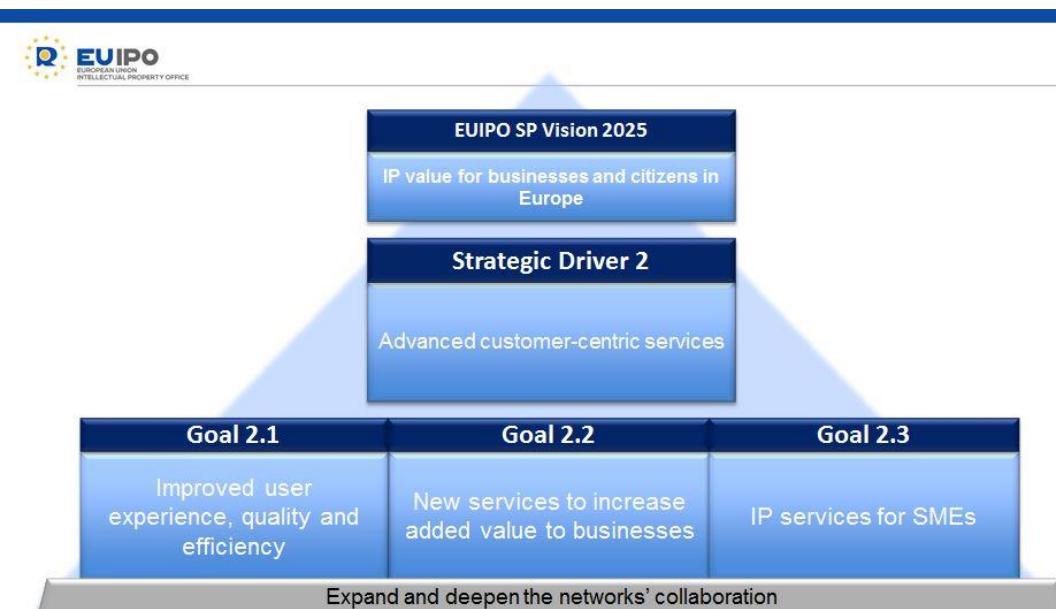
These improvements are designed to benefit all users, irrespective of their level of knowledge of the IP system. Consequently, while Goal 2.3 below explicitly references SMEs, many of the projects and actions under the other two Goals and their various Key Initiatives are relevant to businesses of all sizes.

The three principal Goals of this Strategic Driver are 'Improved user experience, quality and efficiency' (Goal 2.1); 'New services to increase added value to businesses' (Goal 2.2); and 'IP services for SMEs' (Goal 2.3).

To achieve these Goals, close cooperation with MS IPOs and other organisations will be vital given their close connection with businesses, particularly the smaller ones, their

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common language, and their ability to coordinate actions on the ground. Therefore, SD2 strongly benefits from cooperation within the collaborative networks that the Key Initiatives and actions under SD1 are designed to strengthen and make sustainable.



Goal 2.1: Improved user experience, quality and efficiency

While the EUIPO's responsibilities and its core business have been expanded under successive strategic plans, the focus on delivering best-in-class products and services as a registration office will be further reinforced under this plan.

This means taking advantage of new technologies to further enhance the efficiency of the Office's processes and offer more customer-centric services, while continuously improving quality, consistency and predictability.

Under this Goal, the Office will enhance the customer approach: identify customers' needs and behaviours, integrate their feedback and deliver solutions adapted to segments of customers (e.g. direct filers, Key Users, other legal representatives).

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In order to achieve this, cross-functional teams of experts from across the Office will be set up to design and deliver customer experiences. The experts, where needed, will adapt existing processes, tools and services or define new ones in order to improve user experience and product and service quality.

Involving and consulting users as frequently and in as many instances as possible will be essential. Consequently, the Office will continue to seek ways of getting closer to users and understanding the needs of the different user segments that rely upon the advanced tools that will be developed or improved under this plan and the common practices that are pursued.

This will include, among other things, efforts to make the dialogue more strategic and better structured by expanding the existing IP for You Programme and further improving communication channels.

Projects and activities will be organised under mutually supporting Key Initiatives aimed at further improving the quality of products and services and creating effective and simplified working practices. Both Key Initiatives rely upon and will take advantage of new technology initiatives under SD3.

Key Initiative 1: Quality of products and services

Maintaining and improving the quality of decisions and proceedings for all users will continue to be one of the Office's priorities. This covers actions to increase the quality of the applications received by the Office, which in turn will also help businesses submit applications that are less likely to face legal obstacles or challenges.

Personalised support to users will be expanded to cover assistance before, during and after registration. In addition, new technologies, such as chat bots and machine learning, will be used to enhance the user experience. Internal processes will be optimised to ensure that the vast majority of customer queries can be solved satisfactorily at the first contact.

Direct feedback from users will become even more central in managing quality. Systems to gather users' immediate feedback will be further expanded to cover all the main user interactions with the Office. Actions will be taken to guarantee that the input received is properly analysed and dealt with in an even swifter and more transparent way.

Existing schemes such as the Stakeholder Quality Assurance Panels (SQAP) will be extended to more products. SQAP will also be widened to include more stakeholders, such as MS IPOs in all areas where convergence has already taken place, in order to cross-check the implementation of harmonised practices and further strengthen consistency across the network.

In this respect, the Office's Guidelines will continue to be a focus for IP knowledge sharing and will be used as a basis for developing alternative systems to support users, whether in the form of tools or other knowledge-building materials.

Key Initiative 2: Effective and simplified working practices

The Office will continue to develop and extend working practices that simplify tasks and improve efficiency, predictability and effectiveness, while also maintaining and improving quality.

This will involve increasing use of helper tools, based on AI and big data, which will offer in a user-friendly and timely manner all relevant and contextualised information, simplify more routine operations, and further improve file management and smart task allocation, which in turn will allow examiners to concentrate efforts on elements that truly require human involvement.

New linguistic technology will help examiners to improve the quality of their communications and decisions while also easing the allocation of files and eliminating

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bottlenecks caused by insufficient coverage of all language profiles. Once proven, such linguistic capabilities will also be offered to users.

The Office's official procedural communications will be revamped both in terms of communication channels and content to ensure that they are adapted to the user segments and to guide them through procedures, providing them with the most relevant information depending on their needs.

Goal 2.2: New services to increase added value to businesses

Advanced technology combined with customer-centric strategies and a collaborative network open the way for a comprehensive upgrade of the online services of the Office and a host of new services that can make IP protection more accessible, transparent and attractive.

Based on a wider view of the responsibilities of IP offices, the Office will explore new ways of adding value by helping users to capitalise on their IPRs, and avoid problems after registration.

With this in mind, the Office will strive to improve the situation for businesses before filing, during examination and after registration.

Key Initiative 1: Before filing and during examination

A new digital platform will offer online services adapted to the different user segments from filing to enforcement. The possibility of integrating information and processes related to the registration of company and domain names, as well as of IP-related protection programmes offered by e-business platforms, will also be investigated.

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The platform will include the possibility of scheduling a direct exchange with the examiner who is handling absolute grounds or *ex parte* cases in order to understand any issue raised and facilitate personalised and user-friendly communication methods, including online chat, telephone and video calls. The platform will provide the same user experience across all devices, and the usefulness of creating an app will also be assessed.

Providing better guidance and advice to filers will result in files that are easier to deal with, leading to greater efficiency and fewer problems for the user. This will be achieved, for example, by supporting and encouraging a better understanding of the Office's practice and processes in order to make it easier to comply with formal and substantive requirements and reduce the likelihood of unnecessary deficiencies, thus helping to ensure a successful filing and the swift processing of the application.

Using the technology now available, triggers will be built into e-filing systems that activate a chat with a customer-care operator to ensure that common misunderstandings are avoided and problems are identified and tackled.

This, for example, should empower applicants to tailor their product specifications in line with their commercial strategies, while avoiding excessively or unnecessarily long lists of goods and services that make examination more complicated and increase the chance of oppositions and the risk of the mark being wholly or partially revoked due to lack of use.

All services in the new platform will be multilingual and offer, where possible, tailored pre-clearance tools, support for drafting submissions to the Office, and big data to enable users to analyse the efficiency and effectiveness of filing and enforcement strategies.

Simplifying the user experience with a view to achieving deficiency-free registration will be an important step in the right direction. However, businesses or individuals that are not yet ready to register a right but wish to have a simple means of establishing when they created a product or idea also face difficulties at present.

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In response, schemes such as the e-deposit systems operated in some MS IPOs will be considered under this Key Initiative, since they can provide evidence of IP ownership that courts, enforcement authorities or online marketplaces can request.

Key Initiative 2: Post-registration IPR management

While intangible assets, most of which are protected by IPRs, now form the majority of business value, companies continue to have difficulties in having these assets correctly valued and commercialised in the marketplace. This has consequences for their ability to raise capital and grow.

In addition, the SME IP Scoreboard provides evidence that smaller companies are deterred from registering rights because they believe that defending them in court is too complicated and expensive.

To address these and other issues facing companies post-registration, the Office will explore IP valuation services within a network of relevant external stakeholders and cooperation partners.

It may also be possible to work with insurance groups to establish a programme enabling companies to subscribe to insurance policies in order to cover the cost of certain legal actions.

The Office will promote solutions that either help prevent or de-escalate conflicts or will offer alternatives that are quicker, less harmful to business interests and more cost-effective than court proceedings.

Opportunities to assist bilateral negotiations via an electronic platform guiding users to a possible settlement should be explored as well as alternative dispute resolution using assisted negotiation tools (including video and telephone conferencing).

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Since even small companies now frequently face the issue of enforcing their rights in the international dimension, enforcement will be integrated into the overall customer experience.

The Office will continue to ensure that customers are helped to file customs Applications for Action (AFAs) through the Enforcement Database and will explore ways of assisting customs authorities to contact IP owners in case of need.

Under this Key Initiative, the Office will continue to work with National Offices, Europol, international organisations and user associations to enable fraud to be combated efficiently. It will also look at ways of protecting rights holders, in particular SMEs, from internet fraud by creating an anti-scam shield.

Goal 2.3: IP services for SMEs

The need to make IP more accessible and attractive for smaller businesses is a thread running throughout this plan and many of the projects and actions under the other Strategic Drivers, Goals and Key Initiatives are intended to address this imperative by delivering improvements that will be appreciated by all users but are particularly necessary when addressing small businesses or occasional filers.

The present Goal groups together projects that enhance the accessibility of the IP system to SMEs and encourage them to increase their competitiveness through better use of IPRs.

These initiatives will be organised under a specific SME Programme with the aim of empowering EU SMEs by protecting and enforcing their competitive advantage through IPRs within the EU and beyond.

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Key Initiative 1: Increasing the successful use of IP by SMEs

While many supportive instruments are already available for SMEs, the SME Programme will add value by investigating the best assistance and ensuring that any information or tools are available in all EU languages where possible and in one central place. This will be achieved by building on, and consolidating, what is already available across a broad range of schemes aimed at helping SMEs throughout their business cycle.

Content needed by SMEs is often dispersed, complicated and time-consuming to read and understand. In some cases, this can also be said for some content available at EU level through public bodies. There is a clear need for a complete information service that is accessible and tailored to meet the needs of smaller companies.

EU bodies provide funds for SMEs. However, for non-financial support, most organisations offer a limited range of content, much of which is only in English. In addition to this, the content of many sites only covers a small part of the SME journey. In consequence, a number of topics fall through the gaps, including IPRs.

Four priority areas need to be addressed: improving targeted information to SMEs; supporting their business experience with fast and efficient identification of problems and user-friendly resolution; strengthening existing support networks and complementing them with other stakeholders; and increasing successful use of IP.

A specific portal could be set up, complementing the initiatives under Goal 2.2: ‘New services to increase added value to businesses’, which will include information to raise awareness on IP offered to small businesses, making use of, and building upon, the initiatives that have already been established at national or EU levels.

The SME portal would have state-of-the-art functionalities such as a chat bot and a search engine that will harness machine learning to continuously improve the service offered. Where possible, the programme will link to activities across the Office that are of general benefit to users but can have specific added value for smaller businesses.

Additional support mechanisms will be explored, including, amongst others, a set of maturity assessment guides to support and guide SMEs and a ‘help visualisation centre’ dedicated to SMEs.

Solutions specifically tailored for smaller businesses should be on offer such as pro-bono advice and IP valuation on all the products and services of an SME, as well as advice helping to match its IP strategy to its future business strategy.

The idea of understanding IPRs as a business value will be explored, possibly in partnership with financial institutions that consider IPRs when granting loans. In this context, it needs to be explored how the EUIPN can contribute to building bridges between investors and the owners of IPRs with a view to facilitating their mutual understanding and thus improving the business environment for IPR-intensive industries.

At all times, the Office will seek to work closely with the Commission, the small business agency (EASME), MS IPOs as key partners for the SME Programme and other relevant national authorities and stakeholders.

The possibility of kick-starter programmes for SMEs that will use IPRs intensively will be investigated and the Office’s online facilities will be reviewed to overcome possible barriers that smaller companies and less frequent filers face when dealing with the Office or interacting with other parties in its proceedings.

Key Initiative 2: Increasing SMEs’ knowledge on the use and value of IP rights

Given the interests and needs of the different customer segments, the Office must provide more customised information and other support for users, depending on the frequency of contact, legal knowledge and position in their business life cycle or professional development.

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This would require specially trained personnel with in-depth knowledge of different customer segments and experience in dealing with them.

In order for the SME Programme to have maximum impact, it is important that the Office's online communication is improved and that this is complemented by direct contact with SMEs, their representatives and those who influence their business choices.

Ideas under the current Key Initiative include creating interactive tutorials in order to make the information about IPRs that is already available in Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) more accessible or making the contents of the Office's Guidelines more accessible to small or individual users.

Other possible initiatives include a specific awareness programme for SMEs built in cooperation with MS IPOs and user associations, which may take the form of a new European Cooperation Project.

Many of these actions will be launched under the auspices of the expanded network that will be supported under SD1 and that will need to involve and target innovation centres, start-up events, and Chambers of Commerce, among other things.

Strategic Driver 3: Dynamic organisational skill sets and an innovative workplace of choice

The technological revolution and organisational changes involving stronger teamwork and extended skill sets empower staff to 'work smarter', while also maintaining a good work-life balance.

In order to meet the challenges ahead, the Office needs to operate a modern and consistent staff policy, respecting diversity and equal opportunity, and continue to invest in technology, while also maintaining a high quality and sustainable physical environment.

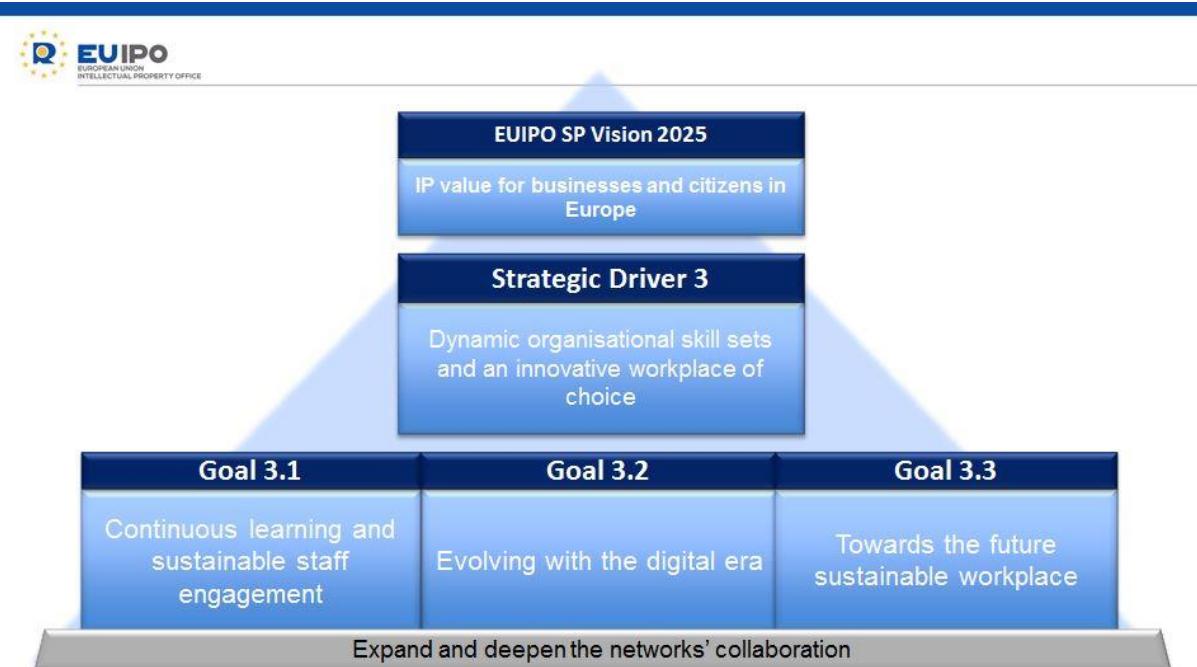
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It must make itself the workplace of choice for the best candidates, and continuously develop staff so that they can adapt to changes in the external world, perform at their best and have long-term and satisfying careers.

Ultimately, this will enable the Office to deliver a better, higher-quality service to users and increase the sense of achievement and personal satisfaction of staff.

The Office will continue to adhere to the highest standards of transparency and accountability through agile and effective reporting. It will also strive both to improve services and deliver efficiency gains that will help maintain its financial sustainability and autonomy.

The three principal Goals of this Strategic Driver are ‘Continuous learning and sustainable staff engagement’ (Goal 3.1); ‘Evolving with the digital era’ (Goal 3.2); and ‘Towards the future sustainable workplace’ (Goal 3.3).



Goal 3.1: Continuous learning and sustainable staff engagement

The Fourth Industrial Revolution is bringing new challenges and opportunities, going well beyond the digital transformation that has already taken place.

The EUIPO is committed to facing this future using a human-centric and benefits-driven approach that relies on staff's knowledge and skills, their adaptability and innovation, steady performance and modern management.

Given the changes in users' needs and the working environment, it is important that staff have dynamic skill sets and that both innovation and networking are employed to best effect in an atmosphere where lifelong learning and development are fostered.

This must be combined with good internal communication and a feedback-rich culture that encourages personal growth and supports staff to take opportunities for advancement based on merit.

In the new dynamic workplace environment, much of the learning and development will take place on the job, supported by feedback, as well as through training and self-study.

Key Initiative 1: Dynamic skill sets

Open competitions organised in cooperation with the European Personnel Selection Office on a regular basis will continue to be the preferred route for offering permanent positions as officials, complemented by ad hoc internal competitions and the possibility of transfers for established officials from other EU institutions.

Recruitment will focus on attracting the best talent with the skill sets and adaptability to meet the Office's present and future needs.

Since competition for the top talent within the European job market is keen, the Office must promote its staff policies and work environment in order for it to become the workplace of choice for the best candidates. There will be a particular emphasis on attracting young people who are digitally aware.

The Office will retain workforce flexibility in order to deal with fluctuations in workload and any new responsibilities. At the same time, where possible, it will favour longer-term arrangements that both help retain talent and provide greater job security.

In terms of staff composition, the Office intends to rely mainly on officials and temporary agents and to decrease progressively the number of contract agents.

A transparent and fair contractual policy will continue to be pursued for temporary and contract agents, with standard 5-year contracts, renewable in accordance with the Staff Regulations and under a clearly defined framework, and including, for a limited number of temporary agents, the possibility of a second contract renewal for an indefinite period.

In view of the new challenges and tasks brought about by the anticipated technological and organisational changes, the existing job mapping will evolve and the Office will gradually move towards recruiting a greater proportion of staff in the Administrator function group.

The Office will determine the skill sets needed to deliver innovation in its operations, and staff will be reskilled or upskilled accordingly in order to reflect the Office's needs. This will include a focus on business skills to enrich development paths.

In so doing, opportunities will be provided for staff to grow professionally, including possibly for Assistants to become Administrators, based on their performance, skills and merit.

This will involve making better use of staff's talent profiles to identify skills gaps and learning needs; creating individual learning and career development paths; enhancing

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continuous learning; and ensuring that the knowledge and skills of EUIPO staff are up to date.

Other projects and activities may include dealing with the impact of AI on job mapping and succession planning. Ensuring that talent is fostered in order to achieve an orderly transfer of knowledge and expertise will be a particular focus of this Initiative.

Key Initiative 2: Innovation-driven culture and networking

The future is likely to include increased automation that is more ‘intelligent’. This will make the staff’s work more efficient and even more interesting as staff will be freed to concentrate on higher-level or more complex tasks that can only be delivered by human beings.

This transition needs to be managed carefully in order to ensure that the Office takes advantage of the full potential of technological and organisational advances, wherever they deliver added value, while continuing to keep staff at the centre of everything it does.

Projects and activities will centre on making the best of the Office’s talent by enhancing cross-functional teams and professional networking.

Overall, the Office wishes to establish an innovation-driven culture, including the setting up of a ‘lab mind-set’ that encourages creativity, innovation and experimentation, and risk taking, in order to explore new technologies/tools and ways of working for the benefit of the Office, its staff, stakeholders and users.

Key Initiative 3: Staff development and engagement

Throughout their career, staff will receive personalised advice in terms of career perspectives and planning, and continuous learning and professional development, including the possibilities for moving to different types of contract.

The Office will continue to enhance a modern appraisal system, which rewards staff in a fair and transparent manner based on merit.

Staff with leadership potential will be supported to develop their skills and the Office will explore initiatives that promote equality of opportunity, including ensuring appropriate access to mentoring, bearing in mind the objective of a 50-50 gender balance in management positions.

Acquiring new knowledge is crucial for the Office's evolution and will therefore become a pillar of EUIPO staff career development to ensure a smooth transition as demand for certain profiles increases while certain other tasks may disappear or be outsourced.

To facilitate personal and professional growth, the Office will collaborate with top academic institutions and promote the sharing of best practices with the private sector.

Internal mobility, to meet identified and agreed career development needs, will be encouraged as will external mobility where the necessary competences are not available in-house.

A new framework will be established for temporary external mobility, enabling staff to gain experience, knowledge or skills in host organisations including the EU, national and international authorities.

Overall, learning must become part of the daily work of the Office, with a combination of both on-the-job development and appropriate periods devoted to training and upskilling, delivered

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in a blended learning environment that combines the best of online, face-to-face and on-the-job activities.

The existing Academy Learning Portal will be extended and modernised to include new channels and formats, such as short video-learning segments, virtual reality, micro-courses and game-based learning, which are particularly suited to mobile devices. It will be further developed in order to provide an ‘EUIPO Virtual Campus’ for both staff and stakeholders.

The Office will also explore broadening cooperation on training by sharing more online learning resources and encouraging the development of materials at a national level that either support the efficiency and effectiveness of offices or make IPRs more relevant and accessible to businesses, including SMEs, as well as to members of the public.

Goal 3.2: Evolving with the digital era

The Office must continue to invest in the latest technology in order to consolidate its digital advances and embrace emerging technologies as enablers to support the Office’s strategy.

This will include working on implementing the next-generation digital solutions based on AI, big data, cloud computing, blockchain, and other state-of-the-art technology.

The Office should also promote adopting emerging technologies and become an influencer in the areas where technology plays an important role for intellectual property by continuously exploring new technologies, fostering proofs of concepts and facilitating the adoption of use cases that can benefit its business and its users.

Increased efforts will be needed to identify and promote practical technological solutions to provide the right balance between purchased services and those relying on the Office’s own infrastructure.

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The Office's commitment to maintaining a technology watch, referred to under SD1, will be developed, allowing the exploration of those technologies that might bring new opportunities to deliver better services.

Since virtually every aspect of the Office's operations now relies upon advanced digital tools and services, this Goal supports, and interacts with, initiatives across the whole strategic plan.

Consequently, the EUIPO will continue to invest in modernising and consolidating its digital infrastructures and services (Key Initiative 1), embracing opportunities in emerging technologies (Key Initiative 2) and expanding Office tools (Key Initiative 3).

Key Initiative 1: Modernising and consolidating digital infrastructures and services

The Office will continue to invest in modernising the digital infrastructure, both software and hardware. To keep up with innovation, obsolete services will be phased out.

Renewing network infrastructure, telephony, refactoring existing applications into cloud-ready architecture and implementing a storage strategy are a few examples of this crucial modernisation.

Under this Key Initiative, the Office will move towards a fully structured modern content management framework in order to reduce the time, cost and complexity of storing and accessing content and increase efficiency through automated workflow management. Legacy content management systems, which are associated with huge maintenance costs, will be phased out in favour of more modern alternatives.

As part of the infrastructure and services modernisation, the EUIPO Cloud Strategy should be continuously refreshed to address the new opportunities emerging in this very dynamic market and adapt to the new challenges on security and data privacy.

Data is the currency of the digital era. The EUIPO must safeguard the availability, confidentiality, authenticity, integrity and non-repudiation of data provided by its staff and customers.

Since managing data in the modern world is a core business issue, measures under this Key Initiative will take into account the EUIPO's wider business needs and will complement and support initiatives in every part of the Strategic Plan.

Transparency and accountability will be the key drivers when processing personal data. To support the effective and coherent use of data whilst complying with the Data Protection Regulation, the principles of data protection by default and by design will be observed when developing and operating data processing systems.

Harnessing and updating Office systems should be accompanied by efforts to improve the data literacy of EUIPO staff in order to equip them to directly access and use the advanced data tools that will be provided.

As data becomes the backbone of managing the Office's main processes in terms of resources, priorities and user support, departments and services will progressively become empowered and autonomous in the use of reporting tools.

The Office will focus on applying the right level of security to ensure that the reputation and integrity of its own services and operations remain intact. This will be achieved by investigating and taking on new tools, new technologies and new collaborations. One key area for development will be in cybersecurity, where a partnership-based approach can result in knowledge sharing in an atmosphere of trust.

Security is particularly important since the Office is heavily investing in mobility, with the objective of implementing a more flexible work environment, leading to more collaboration and improving the work-life balance for EUIPO employees.

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The growing use of mobile devices and technology associated with a more flexible work environment, such as laptops, corporate smartphones, cloud computing services and collaborative tools, increases the number of potential targets requiring protection against cybercrime.

Key Initiative 2: Embracing opportunities in emerging technologies

The EUIPO should apply its experience in emerging technologies to collaborate with other institutions and exploit synergies. Potential cooperation partners will be other European agencies and European or international IP institutions and organisations.

In parallel, the Office must update its on-premise computer-centre facilities and procedures to enlarge the catalogue of services provided to other partners. This is in line with the request from the European Parliament, Council and European Commission to increase efficiency and accountability in European agencies by fostering synergies and strengthening cooperation in areas of common interest.

The Office should lead the way, taking the necessary steps to build a ‘European private cloud for IP’ model with high levels of security, resilience and data protection, capable of providing housing, hosting or cloud services to other IP offices.

Under this Key Initiative, and supporting initiatives elsewhere in the Strategic Plan, the Office will move towards fully exploiting the capabilities provided by AI and machine learning in order to improve the quality and consistency of its examination work.

AI-based solutions already contribute to a wide variety of business cases including formalities, classification, image search, goods and services comparison and machine translation. The Office also uses machine learning and deep-learning techniques for analysing rejection and decision letters.

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The potential to extend this type of solution to other aspects of the trade mark and design life cycle should be explored in areas such as analysing images for incorrect content, creating letters, and analysing deficiencies with the objective of reducing them.

This Key Initiative will complement and support the Office's commitment to developing a technology watch under SD1, exploring measures to implement blockchain solutions in areas of enforcement, and enhancing the flagship databases with international reach.

Blockchain has enormous potential in the domain of intellectual property and there are important use cases in enforcement and in the management of IPRs where it can be exploited to improve existing services.

As a possible area of development, an IP register in blockchain will facilitate better accessibility to information, allowing for real-time availability, and will pave the way to providing enhanced services on a single platform. Examples of such improved services are the possibility of downloading certificates that will prove ownership/existence of IP assets from the blockchain or managing priority documents.

Key Initiative 3 Expanding Office tools

Under this Key Initiative, IP Tool Back Office will be completed to take advantage of new technology and to provide the support needed by all parts of the Office, including publication, the Boards of Appeal and litigation.

The focus will be on further improving IP management procedures and tools to ensure that all opportunities are fully exploited and, where possible, fuelled by the AI measures described in Key Initiative 2.

The Office will implement advanced customer relationship management solutions and continue to work on advanced tools to upgrade and further integrate its finance and HR

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operations. It will implement modern portfolio and project management, integrated and automatic linguistic workflows and support for facilities management.

Capitalising on the effective solutions in place, the Office will seek further efficiency for its financial processes by applying advanced technologies and tools specifically designed for planning, reporting, procurement, vendor management and invoicing processes, including digitalisation of documents, electronic workflows, digital or e-signature, vendor risk management, performance tracking, contract life cycle management and e-payment solutions.

As with other digital transformation projects, the possible application of big data analytics and AI will be analysed with a view to applying them to the Office's financial processes, including the provision of advanced management information, reporting and analysis.

In parallel, the Office will continue to meet the highest standards of internal controls and anti-fraud measures, and to safeguard the digital security of the Office and its customers.

Goal 3.3: Towards the future sustainable workplace

The Office's journey towards being a sustainable organisation stems from the efforts made in different areas, including quality, risk and financial performance as well as the environmental and human capital (as defined in the Office's corporate sustainability report), which are dealt with under the present Goal and its linked Key Initiatives.

The Office will continue the drive towards becoming sustainable, with an increased focus on waste reduction and new technical installations that meet the highest environmental standards and 'green' public procurement.

While the Office already offers a top-quality working environment, the trend towards more flexible working and the use of mobile devices means that requirements are changing constantly and there is a need to keep pace with emerging needs.

There will continue to be a focus on meeting and exceeding contemporary standards for security, safety and accessibility through, among other things, increased use of ‘smart’ technologies that can provide real-time reporting on things like heating and ventilation, and also ensure good communication with users.

Key Initiative 1: A truly sustainable organisation

Waste reduction will require analysing all business processes in order to detect business waste that can have an avoidable environmental impact.

The Office will seek ways to reduce the impact of waste by reusing its declassified assets, donating furniture and IT equipment, repairing or reusing consumables, and analysing the use of composting for food waste.

Cutting the carbon footprint will be one of the main waste reduction goals. Measures intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions include more use of video conferencing and other online collaboration tools in cooperation activities. In addition to reducing the need for business flights in this way, the Office will also favour, where practical, using airlines that support ‘green’ transport policies.

As regards emissions produced by daily commuting, in order to complement the measures taken on greater use of bicycles, public transport and car sharing, the Office will take further steps to foster sustainable mobility by encouraging the uptake of low- or zero-emission hybrid or electric vehicles.

The Office will also increase its cooperation with the EU interinstitutional environmental management groups, with the goal of reaching a higher degree of synergy and harmonisation, particularly as regards carbon footprint reduction and offsetting. Where

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relevant, sharing best practices will be fostered with MS IPOs including areas such as change management and the impact of technology.

Renewable energy self-production will be increased in order to reduce the amount of energy purchased. New initiatives to further reduce water consumption on the campus will also be considered.

Green public procurement will drive the Office towards acquiring services instead of products and an environmental information hub will be created to make staff aware of their personal environmental impact, by emphasising the requirements for a sustainable lifestyle at work and at home.

Providing an automated and interactive ‘environmental dashboard’ will be explored in order to present information about the Office’s and departments’ environmental impact and inform staff about the most sustainable options.

Other specific measures will include further reducing the use of paper and single-use plastics.

Key Initiative 2: Improving the workplace environment

The Office will review and update its policies on teleworking based on experience and technological advances such as shared internet workspaces and accessible video conferencing from mobile devices.

Measures will be taken to support the different needs of an increased number of teleworkers by providing mobile devices that can link into the EUIPO systems from anywhere.

The Office will take measures to maintain and improve the Office’s physical environment and to provide and promote sports, leisure and other services and facilities that support a

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healthy work-life balance. In parallel, it will continue to support policies to ensure the staff's well-being in an environment where flexible working, including various forms of teleworking, becomes the norm.

The Office will also enhance the staff's well-being by continuing to optimise the quality of indoor air, drinking water, catering and lighting, and the comfort and appeal of workspaces.

Key Initiative 3: Campus infrastructures and facilities

While previous strategic plans made much progress in creating the EUIPO campus, the Office's physical infrastructure requires ongoing maintenance and continual upgrading to meet changing needs and contemporary standards for security, safety and accessibility.

The use of information and communication technologies will be maximised on the campus in a similar way to the 'smart city' concept now adopted in many places, in order to increase operational efficiency, ensure good communication with users, and improve both the quality of services and the users' welfare, while respecting the environment.

Teleworking, combined with the tools allowing staff to work in different ways and in different places, will require flexible use of workspaces. This will have the added benefit of reducing the administrative burden, inconvenience and disruption caused by internal staff moves.

Following the acquisition of the last available development plot next to the headquarters site in 2019, the Office will be able to benefit from and enjoy a unified campus incorporating the adjoining public road.

To encourage staff to play a constructive and active role in the future development of the campus, the Office will provide regular information on campus life, amenities, events, outdoor activities (such as planting new trees) and the Office's interaction with the local environment.

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The Office will continue to promote and reinforce its cooperation with the local authorities for developing better accessibility solutions to the Agua Amarga district, and additional connections with different points of Alicante.