Why WIPO?

WIPO is the global forum for intellectual property policy, services, information and cooperation.

We are a self-funding, specialized agency of the United Nations, dedicated to making IP work for innovation and creativity.

At WIPO we believe that IP and innovation go hand-in-hand. IP is about rewarding people for their ideas and original creations. It is about encouraging businesses to invest in innovations and new solutions. It is a means of enabling innovation and creativity for the benefit of all.

Why WIPO? Because for IP to work well – so people everywhere can benefit from it – the international IP system needs to be efficient. It needs to be easily accessible worldwide. And it needs a set of rules – agreed internationally – which balance the interests of those who produce and those who consume the fruits of innovation and creativity. Meeting these needs is what drives our work at WIPO.

Our role is to enable governments, businesses and individuals throughout our 187 member states to realize the potential of IP as a driver of innovation, because we believe that – in every society – innovation is one of the most powerful forces for human progress.

Our goal is to make IP work. For everyone.

So what is IP?

Intellectual property (IP) is generally described as referring to “creations of the mind.” These include inventions; literary and artistic works; designs; and symbols, names and images used in commerce.

IP is protected in law through, for example, patents, copyright, industrial designs or trademarks. These enable people to earn recognition or financial benefit from what they invent or create, by giving them certain rights to determine how their creations may be used by others.
We are the global forum for intellectual property
We shape international IP rules for a changing world

Some 130 years ago, when governments signed the first international IP treaties, they laid the foundations on which the international legal framework for IP is built. Those agreements – the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property and the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works – remain cornerstones of the IP system today.

But the world has changed beyond the wildest imaginings of the authors of those first treaties. And IP laws must keep adapting if they are to serve the needs of our digital, interconnected, global society, today and in the years to come.

At WIPO, we provide a global policy forum where governments, industry groups and civil society come together to address evolving IP issues.

Making copyright work for visually impaired people

Of the million books published each year in the world, less than five percent are currently available in formats accessible to blind or visually impaired people – such as Braille or digitized audio versions. That is set to change: In Marrakesh in 2013 WIPO’s member states adopted a new international treaty that will boost access to books for the 285 million people around the world with visual impairments or other print disabilities. Pop legend Stevie Wonder came to WIPO to urge negotiators to get the treaty “signed, sealed and delivered.” They did.

“I challenged you to put your hearts and minds together and conclude a treaty for the world’s blind. You answered the call with a steely determination to make a difference.”

Stevie Wonder to WIPO’s member states
“People have the impression that the IP system is very static. They don’t know how much it is trying to evolve to accommodate the interests of indigenous peoples and traditional knowledge. So when I left WIPO to return home, I brought back knowledge – and also hope.”

Jennifer Tauli Corpuz on the WIPO Indigenous Fellowship Program

Our member states and non-governmental organizations meet regularly in WIPO Committees on copyright; on patent law; on the law of trademarks, industrial designs and geographical indications; and on genetic resources, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions (folklore).

Their job is to negotiate the changes and new rules needed to ensure that the international IP system keeps working effectively to enable innovation and creativity. Our multilingual staff at the WIPO secretariat in Geneva support them in this work.

“Making IP work for traditional knowledge”

WIPO’s Indigenous Fellowship Program brings a member of an indigenous community each year to work with our Traditional Knowledge team. We have welcomed Fellows from Australia, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Philippines, Ukraine and the United Republic of Tanzania. Jennifer Tauli Corpuz, our 2012 Indigenous Fellow, is a lawyer and a Kankana-ey Igorot from the Cordillera Region of the Philippines. Jennifer helped reach out to indigenous peoples to increase their participation in WIPO negotiations aimed at developing a new international instrument (or instruments) to protect traditional knowledge, traditional cultural expressions/folklore and genetic resources.

Simplifying rules for registering designs

In the Standing Committee on Trademarks, Designs and Geographical Indications (SCT) our member states are seeking an agreement on how to streamline the international procedures for registering international designs.
We provide global services for protecting IP across borders

Businesses and innovators need easy, cost-effective ways to protect their inventions, their brands and their designs in multiple countries. WIPO’s international IP filing services help them secure that protection.

These services – the PCT, Madrid, Hague and Lisbon systems – enable applicants to file just one international patent application, or a single international registration for a trademark, design, or appellation of origin, which has effect in any of the countries party to the respective system.

Our world-renowned Arbitration and Mediation Center provides a range of alternative dispute resolution services – including for Internet domain name disputes – as an alternative to costly litigation.

For technology-leaders

“LG Electronics uses WIPO’s PCT international patent system to protect the billions of dollars it invests in research and technology. LG has filed more than 8,000 international patent applications through the system since the Republic of Korea joined the PCT in 1984, and is now among the top PCT filers worldwide.”

Kang-Hee Cha, the mastermind behind many of LG’s bestselling innovations in the world of electronics.

“Our patent and trademark filing systems make IP work for innovators and businesses, big or small

About half our staff are involved in the hands-on, daily operation of these global IP services, ensuring that they meet the changing needs of users worldwide. Revenues from our fee-based services make up more than 90 percent of our total budgetary income each year, and fund everything else that we do.

“For technology-leaders

“At LG, we try to establish a harmony between technology and design to create the only-one product that will transform people’s lives.”

Kang-Hee Cha, the mastermind behind many of LG’s bestselling innovations in the world of electronics.

Dr Abdul Munir

“A patent provides the legal safeguard necessary for the commercialization of our product. The support of WIPO has helped protect our know-how.”

For frugal innovation

Millions of people in rural Bangladesh are exposed to the risk of poisoning as a result of drinking water from wells contaminated by arsenic. Two brothers, Professor Abul Hassam and Dr Abdul K.N. Munir, invented the award-winning SONO filter which converts arsenic-contaminated water into safe drinking water. They patented the filter through the PCT system because they want their technology to be used to help save lives in other parts of the world.”

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For designers

Award-winning Spanish designer Patricia Urquiola designs furniture and other products for Italian company Flos, as well as being an architectural designer. Her industrial designs are protected internationally through the Hague system – such as this lamp inspired by antique Japanese armor.

“I like to think of design as a way of finding balance between objects, people and their surroundings.”
Patricia Urquiola, designer

For people who are proud of where their products come from

Café Machu Picchu Huadquiña – green coffee beans from Peru – was recently registered as an appellation of origin under WIPO’s Lisbon system. This name – or appellation – can be applied only to green coffee beans grown organically in a specifically defined area of about 1,600 hectares just north of Machu Picchu in the Cuzco region of southern Peru. The cooperative of coffee growers there can prevent anyone else from using their label, so that customers will know they are buying real Café Machu Picchu.

For brands

The abusive registration by cybersquatters of other people’s names or brands as Internet domain names is a problem that afflicts trademark owners and individuals around the world – including celebrities from Ronaldinho to Tina Turner to J.K. Rowling. But litigation to try to win back a name can be expensive and time-consuming. WIPO’s Arbitration and Mediation Center – using the Uniform Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policy (UDRP) – provides a cost-effective alternative to the courts for dealing with clear cases of cybersquatting.

“Since joining the Madrid system, we have been able to register our trademark in countries where it was previously difficult to do so. It has made our brand accessible to many more people.”
Brahim Moukbil, Financial Director of Ingelec

For brands

WIPO’s alternative dispute resolution: fast and flexible, delivering straightforward remedies.

WiPO’s alternative dispute resolution: fast and flexible, delivering straightforward remedies.

Photo: Youssef Kadiri

Photo: Patricia Urquiola

Photo: Patricia Urquiola

Photo: Patricia Urquiola

For businesses

Trademarks matter to Moroccan company, Ingelec, which stakes its brand reputation on the safety of the electrical equipment it produces. WIPO’s Madrid system is Ingelec’s first choice for protecting its trademarks internationally.

“I believe that protecting our trademark is vital to secure what we consider our real asset and wealth. The Madrid system has made this easier and more efficient.”
Brahim Moukbil, Financial Director of Ingelec

For businesses

For designers

For people who are proud of where their products come from

For brand owners
We build technical IP infrastructure to connect systems and share knowledge

Digital technologies have created almost unlimited possibilities for sharing work, data and knowledge – regardless of geographical location. Increasingly, IP offices in different countries are pooling tasks to avoid duplicating their efforts and to help speed up the processing of patents.

Many countries are also agreeing to share their databases of patent documents, opening up access to valuable technological information for innovators worldwide.

To make this work, IP offices need common technical standards so that IT systems in different countries can “talk” to each other and exchange data. The right tools also need to be freely available so that people can access, navigate and use that data.

WIPO coordinates with IP offices to develop worldwide interoperable tools and technical standards that make it easier for people everywhere to access and use technology information.

This knowledge-sharing infrastructure helps level the playing field by providing quick, free and universal access to the wealth of information generated by the IP system.

“Just as participation in the physical economy requires access to roads, bridges, and vehicles to transport goods, similar infrastructure is needed to participate in the knowledge economy. But here the highway is the Internet, bridges are interoperable data standards, and vehicles are computers and databases.”

WIPO Director General Francis Gurry

Connecting innovation networks

In cooperation with WIPO’s Technology and Innovation Support Center (TISC) program, IP offices in over 35 countries have created networks of centers to help scientists, researchers and businesses benefit from patent information. In the Russian Federation, WIPO is working with the Federal Service for Intellectual Property (Rospatent) to deliver training and services to some 80 centers.

“We believe that the TISC project will contribute to technology commercialization and to the effective use of IP assets in the Russian Federation.”

Elena Koroleva, Rospatent project coordinator

Sharing patent information

The international patent system generates a vast free repository of technology information. Here’s how it works: Every patent application that is published for a new invention does two things. It protects the rights of the inventor or patent holder. And it makes detailed technical information about the new technology publicly available so that anyone else can learn from it.

The information in these patent documents can be a treasure trove for innovators. We created PATENTSCOPE, with over 32 million patent documents, so that scientists, engineers, designers and inventors – anyone with an Internet connection – can access this information at the click of a mouse.
We deliver assistance
to make IP work for development

Human inventiveness and creativity are natural resources in which every country is rich. And every country prides itself on producing certain distinctive, desirable products. But when it comes to knowing how to use IP as a means of turning such resources into marketable assets, some communities are way ahead of others.

As a United Nations agency, we want to see IP working for the benefit of all communities.

WIPO helps governments and their IP offices build their capacity to use IP. We provide advice on integrating innovation and IP policies into national development strategies; and on developing balanced, appropriate legislative frameworks. We assist in updating their patent and trademark processing systems; and in building the IP skills of their people.

WIPO’s Development Agenda reaches across all areas of our work. It ensures that development considerations are integrated in a balanced way into everything we do.

Using IP strategies to add value to local products

WIPO projects in Panama, the United Republic of Tanzania, Thailand and Uganda are helping small-scale farmers use branding strategies—such as trademarks, certification marks or geographical indications—to increase the revenues they can earn from high quality local products. This project in Zanzibar (right) aims to promote the islands’ main cash crop—cloves, and to re-establish Zanzibar as a leading exporter of the spice.

Building IP skills and knowledge

The Principal Attorney & IP officer at the Library of Alexandria, Egypt, Hala Essalmawi is a WIPO Academy graduate. She began by attending a training course for young IP professionals in Geneva, and went on to complete Academy distance learning courses in copyright, e-commerce and general IP law, before being selected as one of 20 annual WIPO scholarship students to attend the Master Program in IP at Turin University.

“The WIPO Academy introduced me to a professional network of people around the world whom I can rely on for peer support and in-country knowledge.”

Hala Essalmawi, Library of Alexandria
We contribute practical solutions to tackle global challenges

We believe that IP has a role to play in encouraging the search for innovative, technological solutions to the greatest challenges facing mankind – challenges such as climate change, public health and food security.

WIPO contributes expertise, information, ideas and analysis to the global policy discussions on these issues. We also search for practical solutions.

Bringing together stakeholders from across the IP spectrum, we forge partnerships to create collaborative platforms which put IP to work for the benefit of humanity.

Partnering to tackle neglected diseases

More than one billion people suffer from neglected tropical diseases, tuberculosis and malaria. The WIPO Re:Search partnership platform fosters collaborations and provides a public database of available IP assets, expertise and resources to facilitate the research and development of new treatments for these diseases. Among the partners are Dr. Ellis Owusu-Dabo (below right) of the Kumasi Centre for Collaborative Research in Tropical Medicine, Ghana, and U.S. chemistry professor Denis Liotta (below left) of Emory University – whose 50 patents include two frontline HIV drug treatments.

“Towards science, if you want to do big things that are going to positively affect the health of the public, you had better find good partners. WIPO Re:Search is a catalyst – it is speeding up research into neglected diseases by coordinating activities between groups that wouldn’t normally interact.”

Denis Liotta, Emory University

We are the world reference source for IP facts and figures

Discussions about IP often get clouded by polemical arguments. The hotter the debate, the harder it can be to pin down the facts. But the decision-makers in our governments need reliable statistics and objective analysis in order to understand the real impact of IP-related policies on business, economic or technology trends.

WIPO is uniquely placed to produce empirical studies, data, reports and statistics. These provide policy-makers and business leaders with the information they need to make evidence-based decisions about how they use IP.

Innovation drivers

The annual Global Innovation Index (GII) evaluates the innovation capabilities of over 140 economies and assesses the conditions in which innovation flourishes. WIPO co-publishes the GII with leading graduate business schools, INSEAD, France, and Cornell University, U.S.

“We have benefited from the innovation insights of leading WIPO economists and the global reach of WIPO Ambassadors.”

Professor Soumitra Dutta, co-author of the Global Innovation Index
Our staff, member states and stakeholders share a common goal: an efficient and accessible IP system that provides benefits to all.
1 – Orville and Wilbur Wright (aviation pioneers, U.S.)
   Photos: Library of Congress

2 – Bob Dylan (singer, songwriter, U.S.)
   Photo: Getty Images/Fred W. McDarrah

3 – Wassily Wassilyevich Kandinsky (pioneer of abstract art, Russian Federation)
   Photos: unknown

4 – Auguste and Louis Lumière (pioneers of cinema, France)
   Photo: Collection Institut Lumière

5 – Hedy Lamarr (invented spread spectrum technology that makes cell phones and other wireless communications possible, Austria)
   Photo: Alfred Eisenstaedt

6 – Pablo Ruiz y Picasso (artist, Spain)
   Photo: Underwood & Underwood/Corbis
   Courtesy of the Succession Picasso

7 – Mark Twain (writer, U.S.)
   Photo: Library of Congress

8 – Orson Welles (actor, writer, director, U.S.)
   Photo: Library of Congress/Carl Van Vechten Collection

9 – Marie Skłodowska-Curie (physicist, chemist, pioneered research into radioactivity, Poland/France)
   Photo: Library of Congress

10 – George A. Fuller (architect, credited as being the “inventor” of modern skyscrapers, U.S.)
     Photo building: Detroit Photographic Company

11 – Gabriel García Márquez (writer, Colombia)
     Photo: © Isabel Stenvaern-Hernandez Collet/Corbis

12 – Frank Lloyd Wright (architect, U.S.)
     Photos: Library of Congress.
     David Heald © The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York

13 – Juan Sebastián Osorio (biomedical engineer, invented a device to prevent sleep apnea in babies, Colombia)
     Photos: MIT Technology Review – Juan Sebastián Osorio

14 – Miriam Makeba (singer, South Africa)
     Photo: © James Akinwunmi/Phalaphala/Corbis

15 – Larry Page and Sergey Brin (created Google, U.S./Russian Federation)
     Photo: FOX/SPA

16 – Massoud Hassani (product designer, invented an anti-landmine device, Afghanistan)
     Photo: Hassani Design

17 – Qixin Chen (electrical engineer, invented software to reduce power wastage, China)
     Photo: Getty Images/Jeremy Wismarman

18 – Léopold Sédar Senghor (poet, writer, Senegal)
     Photo: © Louis Monier/ Rue des Archives

19 – Gopalan Sunderraman (entrepreneur, engineer, India)
     Photo: WIPO/E. Berrod

20 – Steve Jobs (entrepreneur, inventor, co-founder of Apple Inc., U.S.)
     Photo: WIPO/E. Berrod

21 – David Kobia (software engineer, created Ushahidi web platform to share information for disaster relief, Kenya)
     Photo: Yvonne Boyd – ushahidi.com

22 – Louis Pasteur (chemist, microbiologist, invented pasteurization, France)
     Photo: Nadar

23 – Hugh Herr (engineer, biophysicist, invented robotic prostheses and running blades, U.S.)
     Photo: Shawn G. Henry

24 – Débêdo Francis Kéré (architect, Burkina Faso)
     Photo: WireImage/Corbis

25 – Anthony Atala (surgeon, regenerative medicine, engineered and implanted the first lab-grown human organ, Peru/U.S.)
     Photo: Steve Jurvetson/Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center

26 – Patricia Bath (ophthalmologist, invented a device for treating cataracts, U.S.)
     Photo: National Library of Medicine

27 – Omar Souleyman (musician, Syrian Arab Republic)
     Photo: Alex Woodward

28 – Victor Hugo (writer, driving force behind the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works, France)
     Photo: Nadar

29 – Geoffrey von Maltzahn (biomedical engineer, prolific young inventor of engineering solutions for challenges in nutrition, environmental sustainability and health, U.S.)
     Photos: Courtesy of Harvard-MIT Division of Health Sciences and Technology – Sangewa Bhatta Laboratory, MIT

30 – Daito Manabe (artist, programmer, VJ, Japan)
     Photo: Kazuaki Seki

31 – Kenneth Cobonhube (furniture designer, Philippines)
     Photo: Kenneth Cobonhu

32 – Yuan Long Ping (agricultural scientist, developed the first hybrid rice varieties, China)
     Photo: © Imaginechina/Corbis

33 – K’naan (rapper, singer, songwriter, Somalia)
     Photo: Seher Sikandar for nehaa creative