TECHNICAL AND PRACTICAL ASPECTS RELATED TO PATENT QUALITY IN THE CONTEXT OF STANDARD ESSENTIAL PATENTS

Exploratory study for WIPO

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WIPO Information Session
13 July 2018
WIPO, Geneva
Study Objectives and Methodology

• Exploratory character:
  - recast the discussion around technical standards in the larger context of patent quality,
  - highlight the significance of the use of standards documents for the purposes of prior art,
  - illustrate best practices in the field and,
  - provide policy recommendations

• Content generated through analysis of extensive bibliography, publicly accessible secondary literature, surveys and interviews with subject-matter experts and PTO/SDO representatives (disclaimer)
Interface of Patent Quality and Standards

- No systematic research on the link between patent quality and technical standards

- Why is a sector-specific discussion on patent quality relevant?

- Why does prior art search in the field of standard-essential patents need particular attention in the context of search and examination?
EPO-SDO Collaboration

• MoU with ETSI, IEEE-SA and ITU; further cooperation with other SDOs envisioned

• Collaboration is based on establishing a mutual advantage for both partners

• Standard-specific internal database is interlinked with the ETSI database; frequent, automated updates allow access to comprehensive, conclusive and timely information

• Examiner training
Collaboration Benefits for SDOs

• Upgraded and enhanced functionality of the ETSI IPR database as best practice example

• Towards a centralized repository of IEEE-SA documents
JPO-SDO Collaboration

- JPO-ISO cooperation agreement and access to ITU, IEEE-SA and 3GPP documentation
- Internal database but not interlinked to the SDO
- Selected standards documents are stored in regular update cycles and through rigorous selection process
- Advanced retrieval and screening capabilities allow examiners to search and identify prior art in an efficient manner
- Examiner training
What about the other patent authorities?

• Lack of awareness or existing misconceptions?

• Infrastructure constraints and lack of technical capabilities?

• Financial constraints?

• Organizational inertia?

• Strategic and political concerns?
Is the notion of “public prior art” a stumbling block?

• Legal status of technical information related to standards – “public availability” and confidentiality regimes

• EPO approach to confidentiality and ETSI dissemination policy

• Copyright aspects
Is the fragmentation of NPL a stumbling block?

- Non-Patent-Literature related to standards (i.e., standards drafts) is largely inaccessible and non-searchable in an efficient and conclusive manner
- Not all that information is relevant for the purposes of prior art
- There are significant differences across the various SDOs in terms of standards definition, format and publication quality
- Best practices for retrieving and harmonizing standards drafts: NPL repositories, document acquisition, technical capabilities, classification/SEP mapping etc.
Recommendations and Policy Outlook (1)

- Intensified use of standards documents in prior art search:
  
  Need for systematic accessibility and searchability of standards drafts and related data by patent examiner in a reliable and timely manner

- Collaboration between patent authorities and SDOs is isolated, but can be replicated - Not one size fits all:
  
  Mutual benefits, balance of powers between patent and standardization systems, clear definition of public prior art and dissemination policies between PTO-SDO, common documentation format etc.
Recommendations and Policy Outlook (2)

• WIPO as a global contact point between patent authorities and SDOs:

  WIPO could take on a multi-faceted role as advocate and facilitator, leveraging its political outreach and infrastructure

• Future research:

  No systematic knowledge of cross-country search and examination processes worldwide, information asymmetries etc.
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