

The **i**NTERPATENT newsletter



JANUARY 2026

EUIPO SME FUND 2026 “IDEAS POWERED FOR BUSINESS”

Starting from 2 February 2026 through 4 December 2026, the SME Fund will reopen, allowing small and medium-sized enterprises to apply for vouchers that provide partial reimbursement of costs incurred for the protection of intellectual property rights.

For the sixth consecutive year, the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) is once again launching the “Ideas Powered for Business” initiative, aimed at providing financial support to EU small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), including micro enterprises, for the protection of their intellectual property (IP) rights, with a total budget of approximately € 23 million.

Through this financial support, the aim is to prevent SMEs, particularly those facing economic challenges, from cutting back on spending for their intellectual property portfolios and/or their protection.

The financial support will be provided in the form of vouchers, as follows:

- **Voucher 1: IP Scan (pre-diagnostic services) and IP Scan Enforcement (not applicable to Italy, see below)**
- **Voucher 2: Trade Marks and Designs**
- **Voucher 3: Patents**
- **Voucher 4: Community Plant Varieties**

It is worth remembering that the scheme operates on a “**first come, first served**” basis, i.e. applications will be processed in chronological order of filing.

In the light of the strong uptake and success of the initiative in previous editions, we recommend not delaying the assessment of whether to take advantage of this measure.

Calendar

Timeframe for submitting applications: from 02/02/2026 to 04/12/2026 (unless funds run out).

Eligibility Criteria

Applicants must be small and medium-sized

enterprises (SMEs) based in an EU Member State or Ukraine (territories under effective Ukrainian control at the time of application).

We remind you that the main criteria for being considered an SME are:

1. Number of employees, and
2. Annual turnover

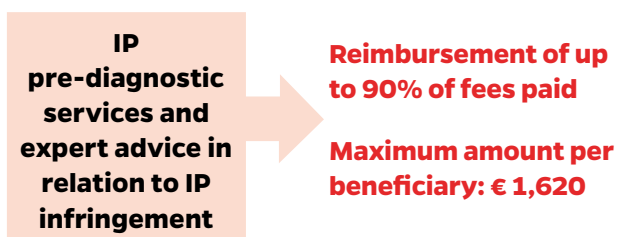
Business Type	Number of Employees	Annual Turnover	Annual Balance Sheet Total
Medium	<250	≤ € 50 million	≤ € 43 million
Small	<50	≤ € 10 million	≤ € 10 million
Micro	<10	≤ € 2 million	≤ € 2 million

Important remark: Vouchers may **also** be requested by **individuals**, on condition that they are **self-employed**. In such cases, a document certifying the performance of an economic activity must be submitted to the EUIPO.

Beneficiaries will also be required to submit a self-declaration confirming that they have not received and will not receive funding from other EU programmes for the same activities.

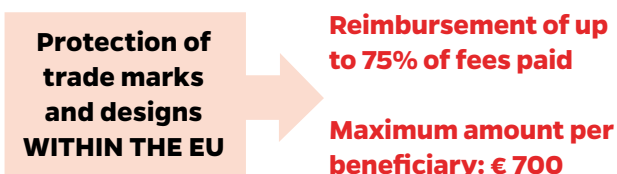
It should be noted that a voucher application may be submitted even if SME Fund incentives were obtained in previous years, provided that the intellectual property right concerned is different (e.g. the filing of a different trade mark).

VOUCHER 1 – IP Scan & IP Scan Enforcement



This Voucher is not applicable to Italy, as the Italian Patent and Trade Mark Office does not provide these services.

VOUCHER 2 – Trade Marks and Designs



Eligible IP rights include trade marks and designs filed directly - and in electronic form where possible - with the EUIPO and the IP offices of the EU Member States.

The reimbursement covers application filing fees, class fees, examination fees, registration fees, publication fees, and fees for deferred publication.



This initiative aims to broaden the support currently available to EU SMEs by accompanying them in their internationalisation process, while at the same time boosting innovation and global competitiveness.

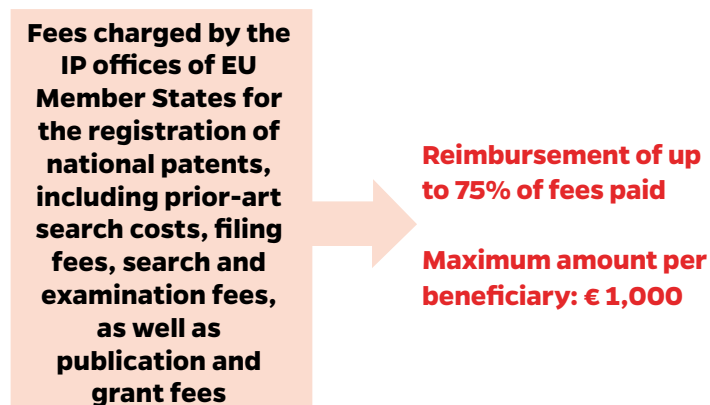
Reimbursable fees include those charged for applications (including basic fees, designation fees, and subsequent designation fees) under the following systems:

- the International Trade Mark System (Madrid System);
- the International Design System (Hague System).

Designation fees for an international trade mark and/or design are eligible, including those designating EU Member States and/or the EUIPO. Handling fees charged by the Office of Origin for an international trade mark and/or design application are excluded from this scheme.

VOUCHER 3 - Patents

At national level:



At European level:

Filing and search fees for European patents

Reimbursement of up to 75% of fees paid

Maximum amount per beneficiary: € 1,000

Legal costs (consultancy costs) for the drafting and filing of a new European patent application

Reimbursement of up to 50% of fees paid

Maximum amount per beneficiary: € 1,500

Attention! The legal costs mentioned above are eligible only if the corresponding services are provided by individuals or entities established in the EU and authorized to represent applicants in proceedings before the European Patent Office (EPO), in accordance with the European Patent Convention (EPC).

No voucher can be issued for a PCT patent application.

VOUCHER 4 - Community Plant Varieties

Online filing fees and examination fees charged by the Community Plant Variety Office (CPVO).

Reimbursement of up to 75% of fees paid

Maximum amount per beneficiary: € 1,500

How to Apply

Vouchers are not retroactive; any costs incurred for activities carried out before receiving the voucher cannot be reimbursed.

The steps to follow are:

1. Submit the voucher application
2. EUIPO decision (usually within 8 to 10 working days)
3. Voucher issuance
4. File the IP right of interest (paying the official fees)
5. Submit the reimbursement request

The voucher is not an advance on costs; it allows partial reimbursement of the amount paid after the application has been filed.

The online application form should become available soon.

As EUIPO SME funds usually run out quickly, and there is no guarantee that they will be replenished, it is advisable to submit voucher applications as soon as possible and we at INTERPATENT are available to offer our assistance in this matter.

THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT APPROVES “NOLO” (NO- & LOW-ALCOHOL) WINES



After more than a year of extensive negotiations, at the end of 2025, the Italian Government approved the interministerial decree - signed by the Ministry of Economy (MEF) and the Ministry of Agriculture (MASAF) - **authorizing the production and sale of dealcoholized and low-alcohol wines in Italy.** The decree establishes the regulatory framework, excise duties, and production requirements, bringing the country in line with EU legislation.

This measure paves the way for the development of a national “NoLo” wine sector - a rapidly growing market - allowing Italian producers to avoid relying on foreign facilities.

Until now, Italian entrepreneurs - even those who had invested in dealcoholization plants in Italy - were forced to carry out the relevant operations abroad, mainly in Germany and Spain, incurring additional transportation costs.

The measure, which for the first time establishes detailed rules for producers of zero-alcohol and very low-alcohol wines in Italy, ensures that Italian companies can compete on conditions comparable to those of their European counterparts. As stated by the Minister of Agriculture, Francesco Lollobrigida, this will result in “new opportunities for Italian companies in the sector.”

Below are the key elements of the measure:

- **Regulation of production:** the decree governs the dealcoholization of wine and the related technical operations. It differentiates producers based on their size, sets benchmark limits for annual production volumes, and introduces a regulatory framework calibrated to the scale of operations.
- **Fiscal framework:** the decree defines the applicable tax regime and excise duties, including those levied on the alcohol extracted during the process.
- **Competitiveness:** the aim is to bridge the gap with other European and non-European countries and to allow Italian wine producers to manage the entire production process in-house.
- **Growing market:** according to the Observatory of the Italian Wine Union, the NoLo wine segment represents one of the few areas of growth within the wine sector. The global NoLo wine market is currently valued at USD 2.4 billion and is expected to reach USD 3.3 billion by 2028, with an average annual growth rate of 8%. Notably, zero-alcohol wines recorded growth rates of 46% in Germany, 20% in the United

Kingdom, and 18% in the United States in 2025.

- **Clear rules:** the decree distinguishes between procedures based on production volumes (above or below 1,000 hectolitres per year) and ensures full product traceability.

The decree also regulates the issuance of the required authorizations, the related administrative obligations, and the rules governing the storage and marketing of the product, as well as the scope of ancillary activities, which are permitted solely insofar as they are strictly connected to the dealcoholization process.

The measure further allows operators that also act as tax warehouses for intermediate alcoholic products and wine to carry out wine dealcoholization processes, within specified quantitative limits.

Dealcoholized wine thus moves out of a zone of regulatory uncertainty and becomes fully integrated into the regulatory framework of the wine sector, positioning itself as a strategic tool to strengthen competitiveness and support the evolution of the Italian wine industry.

As already highlighted in our previous newsletters, **the liberalization of “NoLo” wines also has an impact on the field of Intellectual Property**. It is therefore **essential to pay close attention to the legal aspects related to trade mark protection**, particularly regarding registration in the appropriate classes of the Nice Classification.

It should be noted that beverages with reduced or zero alcohol content fall under Class 32 of the Nice Classification, rather than the traditional Class 33, which includes “wines.”

Our professionals are available to work with you in assessing the product categories to be protected and identifying the most effective tools to safeguard and enhance your Clients’ wine-related IP assets in Italy.

EPO'S REVISED PACE PROGRAMME

The **PACE** (*Programme for Accelerated Prosecution of European Patent Applications*) is a programme offered by the European Patent Office (EPO) designed to accelerate the prosecution of a European patent application, thereby enabling patent grant to be obtained within a shorter timeframe.

By requesting PACE, the EPO undertakes to expedite the **examination phase** of a patent application by issuing the next official communication within **three months** of the request for accelerated examination or from the start of the examination phase, and each subsequent official communication within three months of receipt of the response to the previous communication. This accelerated procedure makes it possible to significantly shorten the average time to grant, which might otherwise take several years.

By contrast, the accelerated procedure for the **search phase**, under which the EPO committed to issuing the Search Report within six months, will be discontinued as of **1 February 2026**, as it has become redundant. Indeed, the EPO has met - and has committed to continuing to meet - these timelines irrespective of whether an accelerated procedure is requested.

Maintaining the “PACE pace” (forgive the pun), however, requires **strict compliance**: any requests for time extension will result in the patent application being definitively excluded from the programme. The accelerated procedure is instead suspended if renewal fees are not paid within the standard deadlines.

The PACE request can be submitted **only once per application**.

Furthermore, **access to the programme is not unconditional**. The EPO guarantees accelerated processing only insofar as it is compatible with the workload of the individual examining divisions; in particularly “congested” technical fields, limitations may apply. In addition, to prevent abuse, applicants requesting PACE for an entire patent portfolio may be invited by the EPO to make a selection, limiting requests to those cases they are most interested in.

If your Clients would like to explore the possibility of accelerating prosecution of their patent applications through the PACE programme, please do not hesitate to contact our consultants, who will be pleased to discuss the matter with you in greater detail and provide tailored advice.



NEW NICE CLASSIFICATION NOW IN FORCE

As announced in our [November 2025 edition](#), we remind you that the 13th Edition (Version 2026) of the Nice Classification for trade mark registration came into force on 1 January 2026, introducing significant updates.

All trademark applications filed in Italy and at the EUIPO from 1 January 2026 onwards must therefore use the 2026 (NCL 13-2026) edition.

The key changes are the following:

- *Essential oils* are now classified according to their purpose, therefore, those used in manufacture are classified in Class 1 and those for fragancing stay with all the fragrances in Class 3. It has also been clarified that all food flavourings are now classified in Class 30 (whereas those being essential oils may have been previously classified in Class 3).
- *Corrective glasses*, sunglasses and contact lenses are moved from Class 9 to Class 10.

- *Emergency and rescue vehicles*: Fire engines, fire boats and lifeboats have been moved from Class 9 to Class 12.
 - *Clutch linings* have been removed from Class 17: these will now be classified according to whether they are for land vehicles (Class 12) or not (Class 7).
 - *Parasols* have been changed to read *hand-held parasols* in Class 18 and *patio umbrellas* have been added to Class 22, to make it clear that only hand-held umbrellas and hand-held parasols are classified in Class 18.
 - *Electrically heated clothing* not meant for protection against accident or injury nor for medical purposes has been moved from Class 11 to Class 25.
 - *Yoga* articles have been put into their appropriate classes, according to their nature. *Yoga and meditation cushions* are in class 20, *yoga gloves* are in class 25, *meditation mats* are in Class 27 and *yoga blocks* in Class 28.
 - The booking and arranging of access to airport lounges have been included in Class 43.
 - Changes to rental of spectacles and rental of sunglasses, both now classified only in Class 44.
- Our trade mark attorneys at INTERPATENT will ensure that any new trade mark instructions entrusted to us will be fully aligned with the updated Nice Classification for goods and services and would be delighted to support you should you wish to benefit from a preliminary check.



With regards to services, the following amendments can be mentioned:

- *Artificial intelligence as a service [AlaaS]* has been included as a new entry in Class 42.

The aim of this newsletter is to keep our Clients and Associates updated about developments in the sector of Intellectual Property in general and our firm in particular. In this way, we wish to provide a broader view of the tools that the field of trade marks, domain names, patents, designs and related rights offers to entrepreneurs to enhance and protect their efforts in researching and developing new solutions and ideas.



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