

**WIPO/IP/MIL/01/5**  
**ORIGINAL:** English  
**DATE:** February 2001



MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY AND FOREIGN TRADE



WORLD INTELLECTUAL  
PROPERTY ORGANIZATION

## **WIPO MILAN FORUM ON INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES**

organized by  
the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)

and  
the Ministry of Industry and Foreign Trade  
Government of Italy

**Milan, Italy, February 9 and 10, 2001**

MILAN PLAN OF ACTION

*Adopted at the Milan Forum*

The WIPO Milan Forum on Intellectual Property and Small and Medium Sized Enterprises, having met in Milan on February 9 and 10, 2001, at the invitation of the Italian Government and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) to address the issue of enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) through optimal use of the intellectual property system,

*recognizing* that SMEs play a vital role in employment creation, investment and exports, significantly contributing to national economic growth;

*noting* that SMEs, the world over, are proven innovators with great creative capacity and the driving force behind many technological advances;

*taking into account* that SMEs are an heterogeneous group with many differences according to business sector, capital assets, working capital, technological capacity and intellectual property assets;

*considering* that SMEs, through adequate and effective management and commercialization of intellectual property (IP), can significantly enhance their competitiveness, export opportunities, market share and their overall market value;

*realizing* that SMEs can significantly benefit from the wealth of technological information available in patent databases, thus avoiding duplication of research and development (R&D) efforts, and use such information for the development of new products, process and services and the conclusion of license agreements;

*being aware* that SMEs, in particular in developing and least-developed countries, often do not sufficiently exploit the potential of the IP system for increasing their competitiveness, innovative capacity and market access;

*acknowledging* that the underutilization of the IP system may be largely due to lack of information on how to acquire and manage IP assets and technological information in an effective manner, absence or shortage of IP related services in SME support institutions, as well as the perception that the IP system is complex, time-consuming and expensive, making it difficult for SMEs to acquire, maintain, enforce and use their IP rights effectively in trade whether domestically and internationally;

*taking into account* the recommendations contained in the Bologna Charter on SME policies, adopted in Bologna (Italy) on June 15, 2000 by the Ministerial Conference on "Enhancing the Competitiveness of SMEs in the Global Economy: Strategies and Policies" organized by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development and the Italian Government;

*recommend* that, in order to empower SMEs to fully benefit from the IP system, the following actions are undertaken:

1. Strengthening of interaction between SMEs, SME support institutions and associations, national governments and IP Offices, WIPO and other relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations with a view to better identifying the needs of SMEs and facilitating the implementation of customized targeted activities addressing the specific IP needs of each sector, group or cluster;
2. Support of national and international efforts for further integration of IP issues in programs and policy initiatives aiming at fostering the technological and innovative capacity and the export potential of SMEs;
3. Increase of awareness and understanding of IP issues within the SME business community particularly through awareness-raising campaigns and targeted training programs with the optimal use of modern information and communication technologies, so as to enhance the capacity of SMEs to maximize their benefits from the use of the IP system;
4. Encouragement of the creation and strengthening of IP-related services, in particular legal and technological information services, also within SMEs support institutions such as chambers of commerce and industry, business incubators and science parks;
5. Advice by WIPO, and other relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and IP Offices on the inclusion of IP issues in the relevant curricula of universities and institutions for technical and higher education, and strengthening their links between SMEs, universities and research and development institutions, through appropriate mechanisms for achieving greater synergy in joint research and higher rate of successful commercialization of research results;
6. Promotion of the use of arbitration, mediation and other alternative dispute resolution mechanisms for a more cost-effective enforcement of IP rights;
7. Assistance to IP offices and SMEs support institutions to develop SME-targeted IP services, including legal advice and IP information services based on the use of intellectual property databases;
8. Support of efforts of national structures to reduce the cost of acquisition, maintenance and enforcement of IP right while maintaining quality and reliability of rights.
9. Strengthening of WIPO's programs of activities for the benefit of SMEs, in particular to:
  - advise governments to take into account the specific needs of SMEs in their IP policies;
  - disseminate information on best practices on the use of IP by SMEs and of their exploitation of technological knowledge through the valorization and commercialization of IP rights; and
  - make the access to technological knowledge easier and cheaper for SMEs on a global basis.