SURVEY ON APPLICATION NUMBERING SYSTEMS

Editorial note by the International Bureau

The following survey presents the information on various aspects of application numbering systems implemented by the industrial property offices (IPOs), their compliance with the recommendations of WIPO Standard ST.13 and the practices of priority application numbering. The International Bureau undertook this survey in the year 2012 within the framework of the corresponding task of the Committee on WIPO Standards (CWS) (see Task No.30 in document CWS/3/12). At its third session, held in April 2013, the CWS considered the final version of the survey and agreed on its publication in the WIPO *Handbook on Industrial Property Information and Documentation* (see document CWS/3/14, paragraph 67).

SURVEY ON APPLICATION NUMBERING SYSTEMS

*Survey results presented to the Committee on WIPO Standards (CWS)
at its third session in April 2013*

INTRODUCTION

1.   This survey on application numbering systems was conducted in 2012, on the basis of the questionnaire prepared by the ST.10/C Task Force and approved by the Committee on WIPO Standards (CWS) at its first session, held in October 2010. (See Task No. 30 in the Annex to document CWS/2/12 and paragraphs 18 to 22 of the document CWS/1/10.)

2.   The objective of the present survey was to collect information about application and priority application numbering systems currently implemented by the IPOs, i.e., it does not cover the numbering systems used in the past.

3.   The main part of the questionnaire (Questions 1 – 11) covered various aspects of application numbering systems implemented by industrial property offices (IPOs). Question 12 related to the IPO practices on numbering priority applications and, if there were, any differences with application numbering. Question 13 related to the compliance of the IPO's practices with WIPO Standard ST.13. A compilation of the examples of application numbers and priority application numbers, along with relevant remarks, provided by IPOs in response to Question 14 is published separately.

4.   The following 35 Offices participated in the survey and submitted a total of 66 responses, each of them describing a different application numbering system implemented in the office for different types of industrial property rights (IPRs).

AT	Austria	FI	Finland
AU	Australia	GB	United Kingdom
BA	Bosnia and Herzegovina	HR	Croatia
BE	Belgium	IE	Ireland
BG	Bulgaria	IL	Israel
BR	Brazil	IT	Italy
BY	Belarus	JP	Japan
CA	Canada	KZ	Kazakhstan
CN	China	LT	Lithuania
CO	Colombia	MD	Republic of Moldova
CR	Costa Rica	PL	Poland
CZ	Czech Republic	RO	Romania
DE	Germany	RS	Serbia
EA	Eurasian Patent Organization (EAPO)	RU	Russian Federation
		SE	Sweden
EE	Estonia	SK	Slovakia
EM	Office for Harmonization in the Internal Market (Trademarks and Designs) (OHIM)	UA	Ukraine
		WO	World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) (International Bureau of)
ES	Spain		

5.   This report presents the summary of responses grouped by sections of the questionnaire. Individual IPO responses are published separately in the original language (the language of the response), along with the automatically collated results, in the WIPO website.

TYPES OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

6.   The first section of the questionnaire related to the types of IPRs numbered with the same system and to the date when the numbering system was introduced in the office.

7.   The collected results show that the same IPO may use different numbering systems for different IPRs. The number of numbering systems that are used by one IPO for numbering applications for different IPRs varies from one system (16 offices) to four (1 office). The list of offices is provided in the table below:

Number	Responding IPOs
One numbering system	AT, BA, BG, CN, CO, CR, EA, EM, FI, GB, HR, KZ, RO, RS, SK, UA (16)
Two numbering systems	BR, BY, CA, EE, IE, IT, JP, MD (8)
Three numbering systems	AU, BE, CZ, ES, IL, LT, PL, RU, SE, WO (10)
Four numbering systems	DE (1)

8.   In order to avoid possible confusion, for the purposes of this analysis, terms "utility models", "plant patents" and "design patents", as well as PCT related documents are not covered by the term "patents", but considered individually.

9.   As it was expected, patents, trademarks, industrial designs, PCT applications in the national phase and utility models are the most frequently reported types of IP rights. 35 numbering systems (slightly over a half of the responses received) cover patents; 30 cover industrial designs and 28 cover trademarks. The graph below illustrates the number of occurrences of different IPRs out of the total of 66 numbering systems described by the offices participated in the survey.
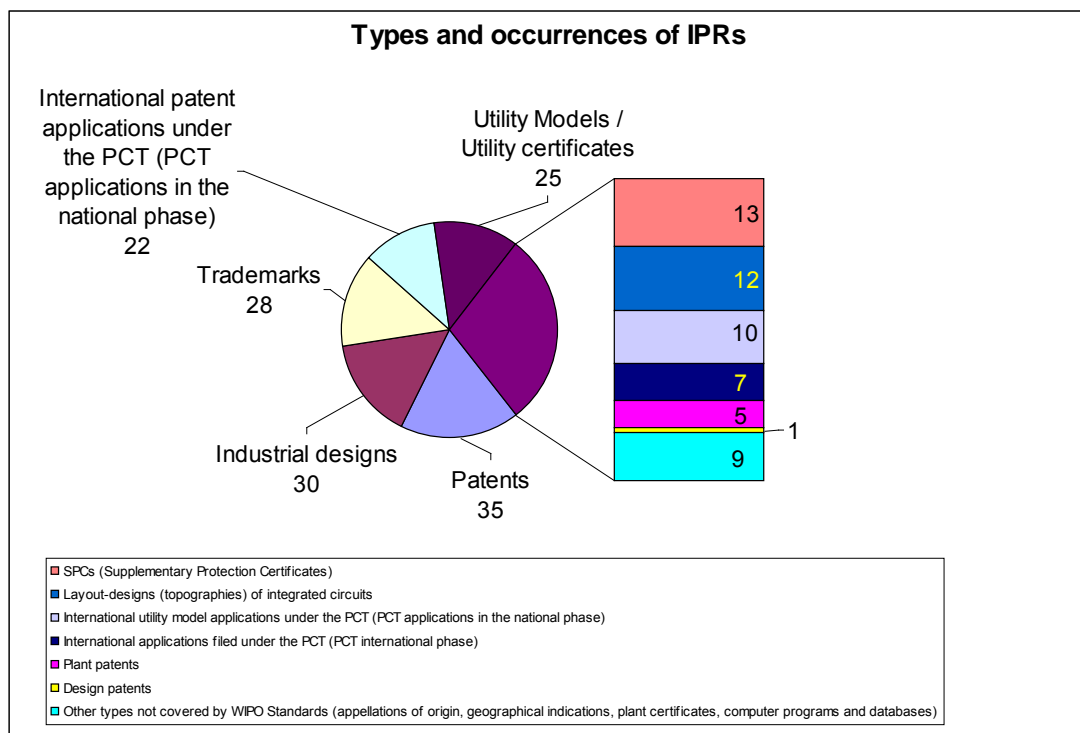
10.   The statistic on how many offices of the responding ones use the same numbering systems as for patent applications for the numbering of trademark, industrial design, PCT in the national phase and utility model applications is presented on the diagram below. In the graph there are three bars for each type of IPR; the first bar shows the number of offices using the same numbering system for patent and for the corresponding IPR, the second bar shows the number of offices using different systems, and the last one the number of offices which did not provide information on the corresponding IPR or the analysis is not applicable. It is interesting to note that, for instance, all offices which have provided information on the PCT applications in the national phase use for them the same numbering system as for patents. Almost the same trend is observed for utility models (only two offices use separate numbering systems for patents and utility models). The situation is rather different for industrial designs and trademarks, as the graph below shows.

Offices using the same numbering system for different types of IPRs as for patent applications
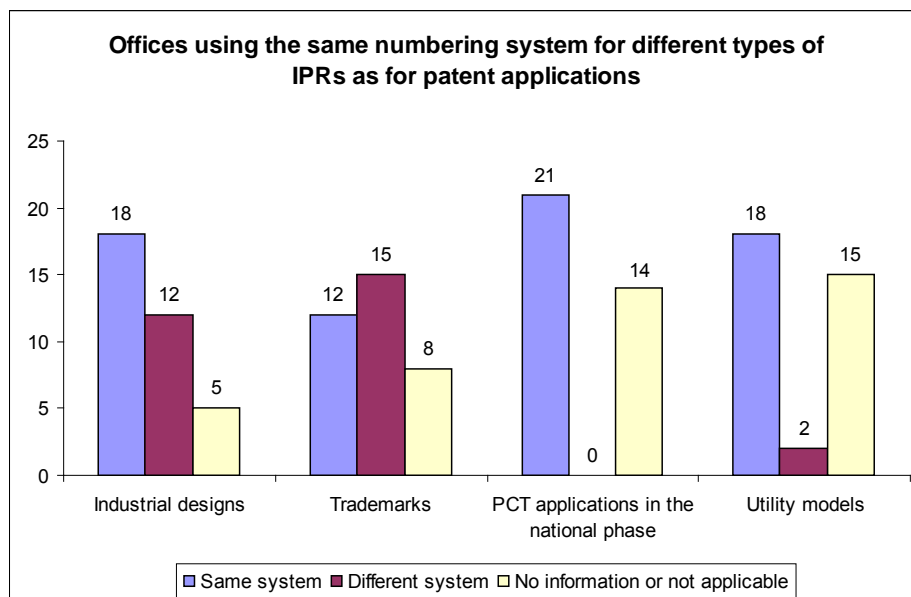
11.   The survey detected that a significant part of numbering systems which are currently in use (15 out of 66 systems) were introduced in 2000. The "newest" numbering system of reported ones was implemented in Brazil in 2012, and the oldest in Canada in 1867 (two systems). Three IPOs (AT, CZ and EM) indicated that the current numbering system had been used since the introduction of the corresponding IPRs (The statistic on the year of introduction of 56 numbering systems with respect to which the precise information was provided is presented in the diagram below). More details are available in offices' individual responses and section "Types of intellectual property rights (IPRs) covered by this copy of the questionnaire" of collated results.

Year of introduction of numbering systems in IPOs
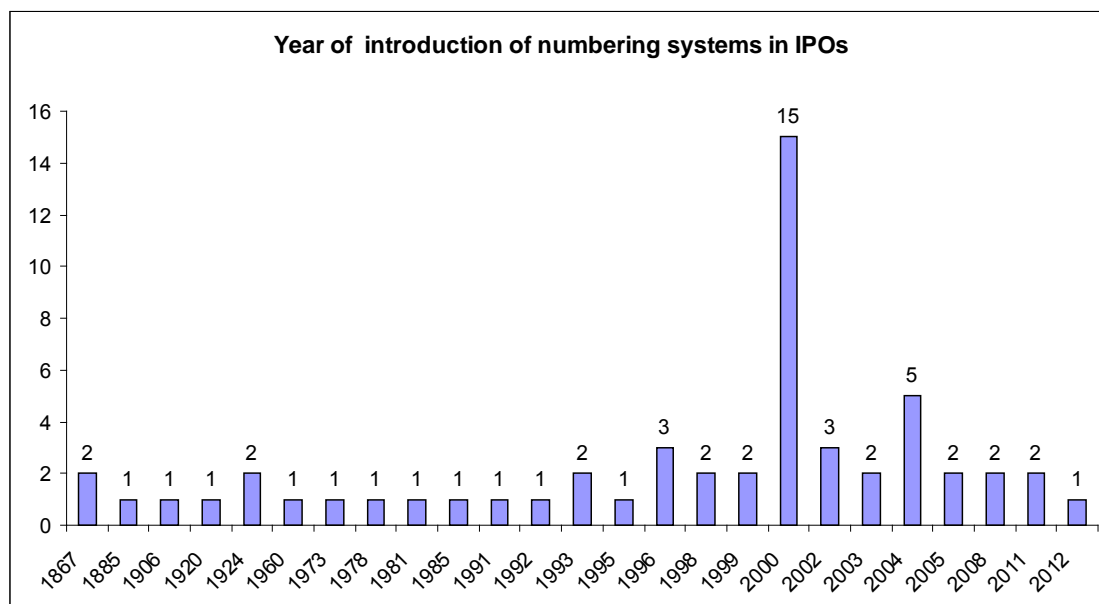
PARTS OF APPLICATION NUMBER

12.   The second section of the questionnaire related to the component parts of the application number. The goal was to survey whether the offices follow the recommendations of ST.13, which recommends that the indispensable part of the application number should consist of a code for the type of IPR, the year designation and the serial number. More than 40% of the numbering systems described in the responses (27 out of 66 systems) followed the recommendations of the Standard. In particular, all 66 numbering systems were reported to contain a serial number, more than 70% of them (47 out of 66 systems) include the year designation and half of them (33 out of 66 systems) contain the IPR code.

ORDERING OF PARTS

Ordering of parts

Other
18%

According to ST.13
29%

Follows ST.13
(not strictly)
53%
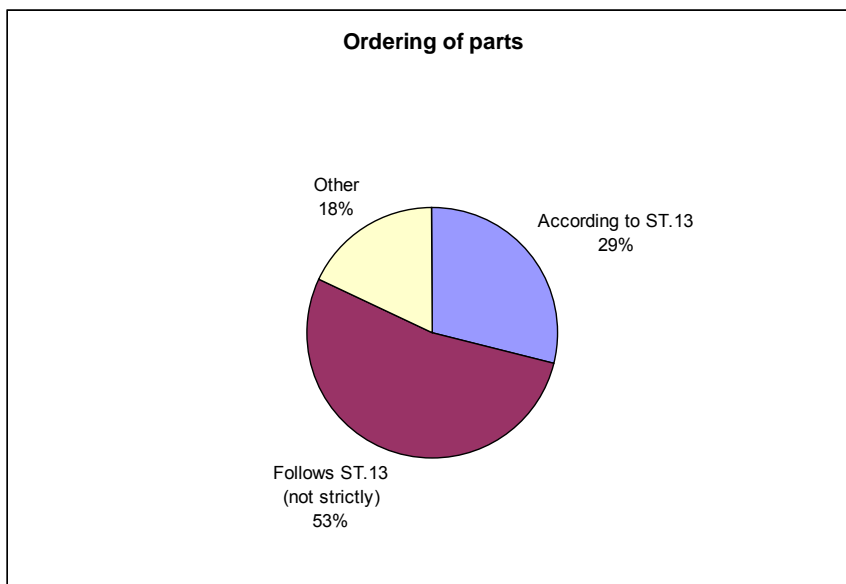
13.   The third section of the questionnaire related to the ordering of parts of the application number. Almost 30% of responses received (19 out of 66 systems) described numbering systems which strictly followed the recommendations of ST.13, i.e., the ordering of parts was <type><year><serial number>. It should be mentioned that in the other responses the sequence of parts was often also in line with ST.13 if we do not consider that certain components were missing comparing with the ST.13 recommendations, or when any additional parts, such as check digit, were included after the application number. E.g., in the example "<type><serial number>" the parts of the application number are actually ordered in accordance with ST.13, but the year designation is not included in the number. Such numbering systems formed more than 50% of reported ones.

LENGTH (FIXED/VARIABLE)

14.   The fourth section of the questionnaire related to the length of the application number. 86% of numbering systems (57 out of 66 systems) described by the respondents had a fixed length, 12% (8 out of 66 systems) variable length, no information was provided with respect to one numbering system.

Length (fixed/variable)

No information
2%

Variable
12%
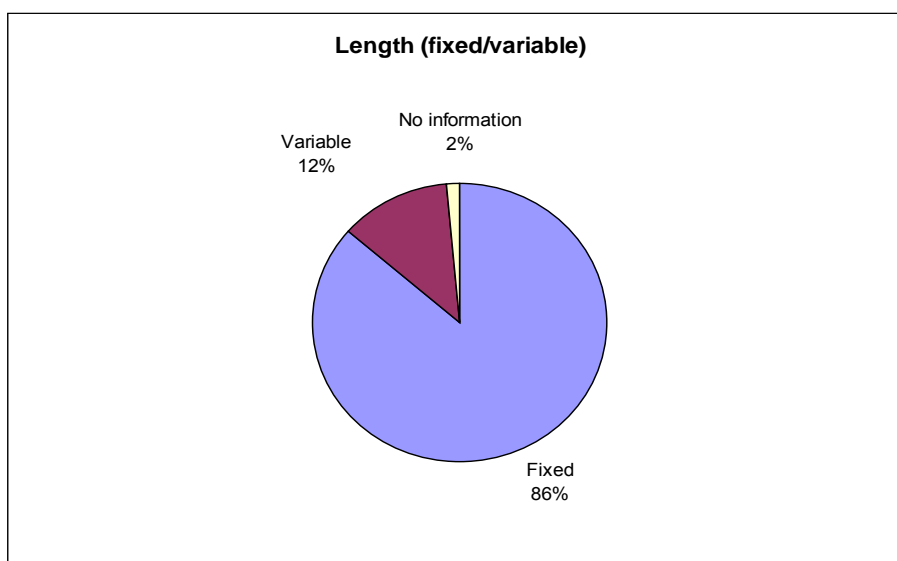
Fixed
86%

15.   The statistic on the number of characters used for different parts of the application numbers in the systems with fixed length is provided in the table below. The details of the numbering systems with variable length are available in the individual response of AU, BA, CR, CZ (three systems), EE and SK.

|	Number of systems
IPR code	
1 digit	14
2 digits	10
3 digits	1
Year designation	
2 digits	4
4 digits	35
Serial number	
3 digits	3
4 digits	13
5 digits	13
6 digits	19
7 digits	4
8 digits	1
9 digits	3
Other	1 (EE). The length of the application number depends on the type of IPR

CODES FOR TYPE OF IPR

16.   The fifth section of the questionnaire related to the coding of the type of IPR in the application number. More than 50% of the described numbering systems (35 out of 66 systems) included the code for the type of IPR in the application number. One office indicated that the code for the type of IPR, which appeared in the presentation, was controlled separately from the application number in the IT systems (see two responses by JP).

17.   The diagram below shows that the majority of systems which include the code for the type of IPR (66% or 23 out of 35 systems) use letters for this purpose, 26% (9 out of 35 systems) use only numerals and three systems (9%) use both letters and numerals for coding the type of IPR in application numbers. Examples of different codes used are available in individual responses and collated results.

Codes for the type of IPR

No code used
46%

Yes
54%

Only letters
35%

Only numerals
14%

Both letters and numerals
5%
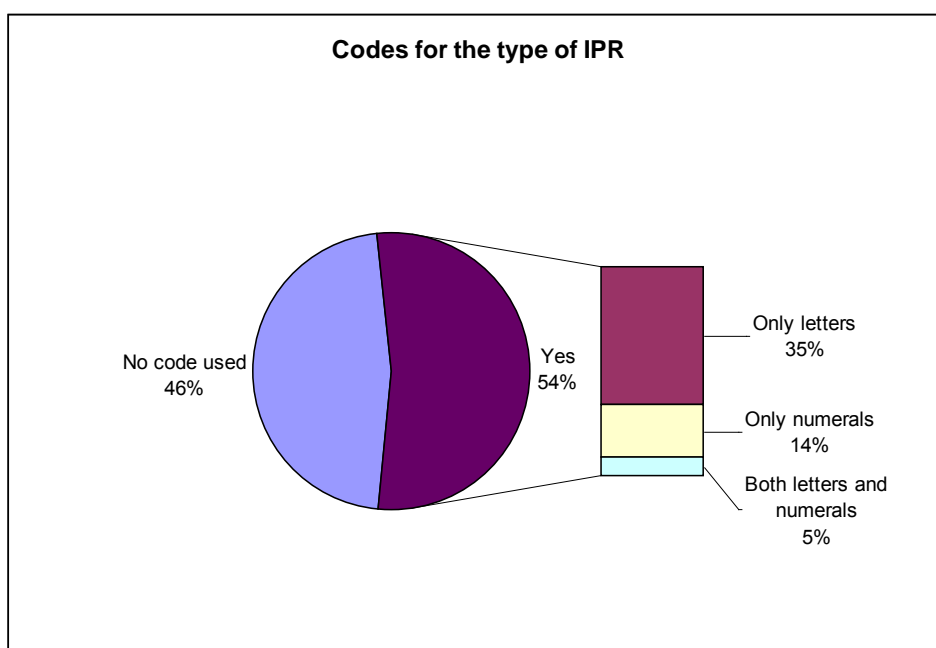
YEAR DESIGNATION

18.   Section number six of the questionnaire related to the year designation. According to the responses received, 70% of numbering systems (46 out of 66 systems) contained year designation in application numbers. It was reported that almost all of them (43 out of 46 systems) used four digits for coding a year; the other three used two digits. This information was coded according to Gregorian calendar. As a rule, it was the year of filing which was coded in this part of the application number, but in certain cases it was the year of first receipt of papers (see the response of WO) or the filing date of the initial application in case of the division of the application (see the response of AT).

Year designation

No year designation
30%

Two digits
5%

Four digits
65%
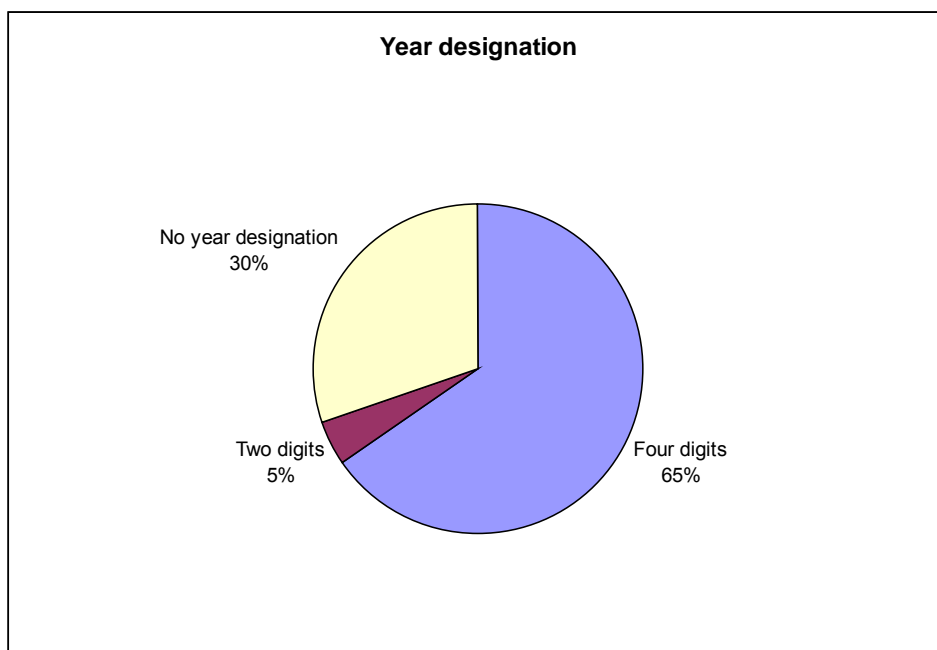
SERIAL NUMBER

19.   The seventh section of the questionnaire related to the use of a serial number in application numbers, its length, sequence and gaps in serial numbers, and differences between machine readable form and presentation. As it is indicated in paragraph 12, above, all numbering systems described in the responses (66 systems) contain serial number.

20.   In the majority of described cases (59 out of 66 systems) the serial number had fixed length, while seven numbering systems included the serial number of variable length (see responses submitted by AU, BA, CO, CR, CZ (two systems) and SK).

21.   The details of serial numbers assigned were explained in the sub-questions of this section of the questionnaire. The vast majority (94% of responses) of numbering systems included the sequential serial number, although 27% (18 out of 66) of them contained gaps. The serial numbers were restarted every year in two thirds of the described numbering systems; usually the numbering starting with number 1, except one numbering system where the first assigned digit in the serial number of patent applications is used to differentiate standard, innovation and provisional patent applications (see the response submitted by AU). Leading zeroes were omitted for presentation in 27% of reported cases. The statistics on the responses is illustrated on the graph below (in responses to the last three sub-questions of question seven, i.e., ones related to gaps in numbering, annual numbering systems and omitting leading zeroes, no information was provided for three, one and two numbering systems respectively).

Serial number
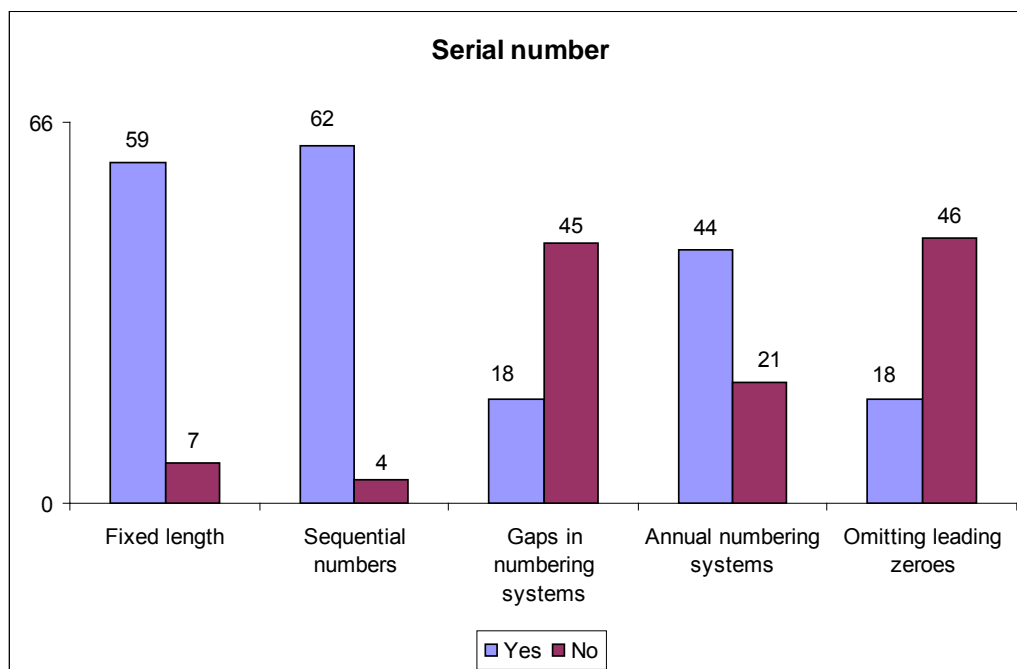
CODE FOR INTERNAL USE

22.   The eighth section of the questionnaire related to the code for internal use included in application numbers. In the vast majority of responses (59 out of 66 systems), it was indicated that this code was not used. At the same time, six offices indicated that they included the code for internal use as a part of serial number (see responses submitted by AU, BA and ES), or as a separate part of the application number (see responses submitted by CO, IT and UA).

23.   One of responding offices (IT) reported that it used this code for indication of the place of filing. The explanation of specific codes is available in individual responses submitted by offices mentioned in the above paragraph and in the section "Code for internal use" in the collated results.

CONTROL NUMBER (CHECK DIGIT)

24.   The following section (question 9) of the questionnaire related to the use of control number (check digit). The survey detected that 78% of numbering systems (52 out of 66 systems) do not contain this part. However, 20% of the responses (13 out of 66 systems implemented in 6 IPOs) indicated that the check digit was contained either as a part of the application number in the last digit (10 systems), or separately and located after the application number (3 systems). For more details on the use of the control number, see individual responses submitted by CN, EM, GB, DE (four responses), SE, BR (two responses), ES (three responses) or section "Control number (Check digit)" in collated results.

Use of the control number (check digit)
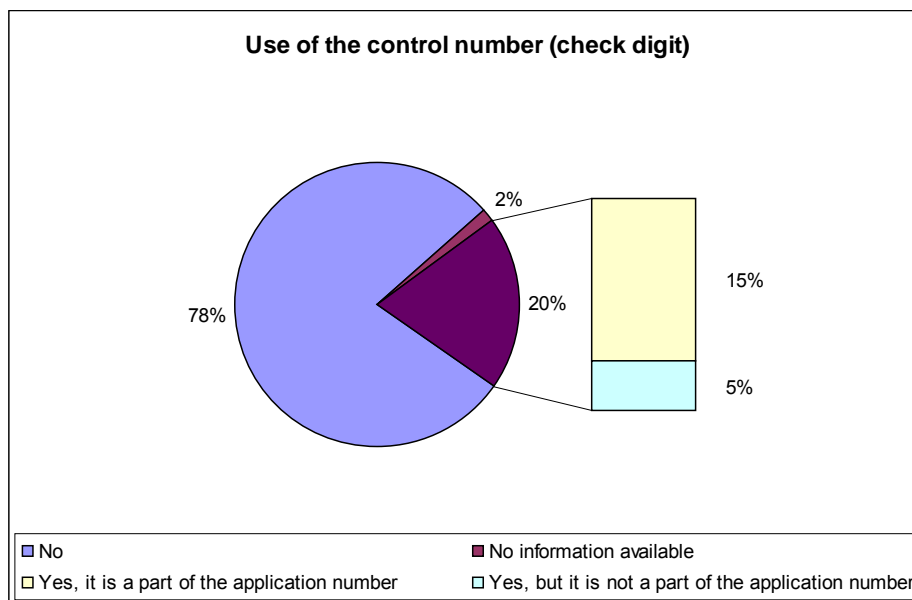
25.   Among 13 numbering systems, which were described as containing the control number, the majority (11 systems) had the control number provided as a single numeric character; the other two of them used single alphanumeric character for this purpose. Almost for all reported systems which contain the control number (11 out of 13 systems), the check digit was used both in the computer-readable form and for presentation. One system only used the control number in the computer-readable form (see response submitted by ES).

26.   All offices which responded that they included the control number (character) in the application number used publicly available algorithms like Modulus 10 (2 systems out of 13) or Modulus 11 (9 systems out of 13) for computing it. The said algorithms are, in certain cases, adapted to the office requirements (see, for example, the response submitted by EM).

OTHER INFORMATION

27.   Certain offices indicated that the application numbers contained some other information not covered by the previous sections of the questionnaire, this information was provided under section 10. For example, certain offices reserved numerical ranges for applications for different types of IPRs or to code e-filing information (see responses submitted by AT, EA, SE and SK), one IPO provided information related to the conversion from old system (WO).

SEPARATORS

28.   The section number 11 of the questionnaire related to the use of separators in application numbers. Almost two thirds of the numbering systems described in the responses (41 out of 66 systems) contained separators. It should be noted that there were offices which reported that they used two types of separators in one numbering system. One office (RU) indicated that they included the examiner department index and this information was separated by a slash, but this did not form a part of the application number. The diagram below shows the percentage of the corresponding separator used by different offices in different numbering systems out of the total number of separators mentioned in the responses.
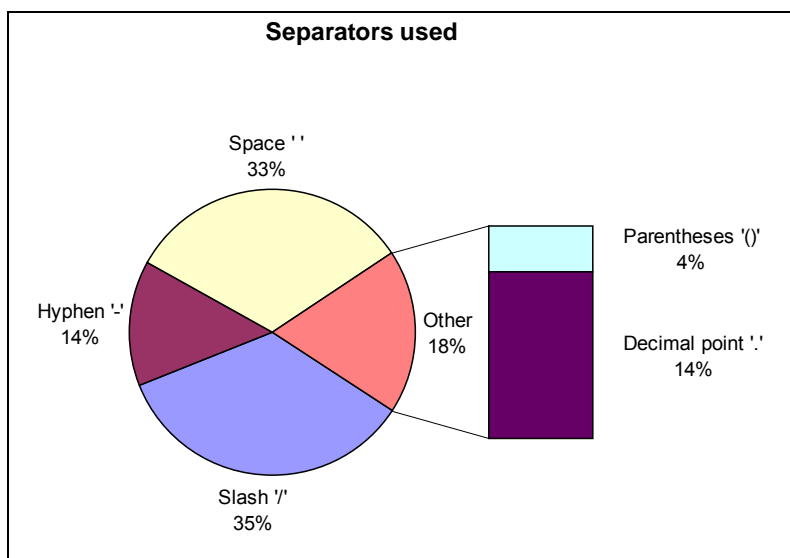
Separators used

29.   Almost two thirds of numbering systems containing separators (26 out of 41 systems) included the separators in both the computer-readable form and the presentation. In 11 systems out of 41 they were used for presentation only and in 2 systems they appeared only in computer-readable form.

NUMBERING OF PRIORITY APPLICATIONS

30.   The following section of the questionnaire (question number 12) related to the practices of numbering of priority applications. In more than 80% of numbering systems described in the submitted responses (53 out of 66 systems), the same format and presentation was used for priority application numbers as for application numbers, in 12% of cases (8 out of 66 systems) the format was different. The discrepancies and further details are available in individual responses submitted by BY, CO, CZ, ES, GB, JP and WO (two responses) and in section "Numbering of priority applications" of collated results.

COMPLIANCE WITH WIPO STANDARD ST.13

31.   Section 13 of the questionnaire related to the compliance of numbering systems used in the IPOs with the recommendations of WIPO Standard ST.13. IPOs reported that 70% of numbering systems described were in accordance with WIPO Standard ST.13 completely (7 out of 66 systems) or partly (39 of 66 systems). 24% of described systems did not comply with ST.13 recommendations. One of the responding offices (SK) commented that they planned to implement ST.13 in the future.

Compliance with WIPO Standard ST.13

Legend: Yes ■ Partly □ No □ No information available

Values shown: 11%, 59%, 24%, 6%
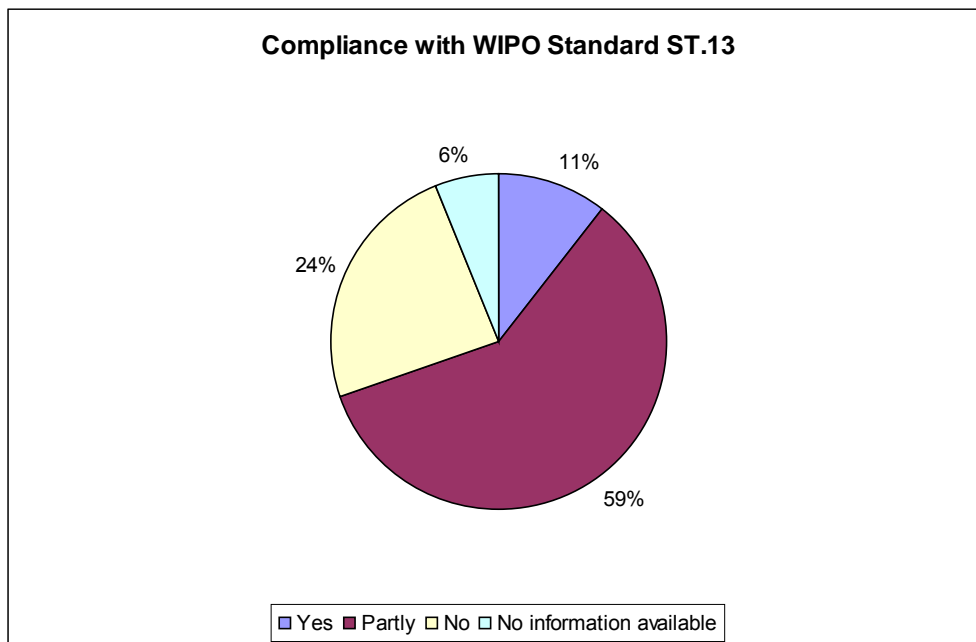
32.   In the majority of described numbering systems, deviations were encountered with respect to the indispensable parts of the application number and the fixed length of 15 characters as provided for in paragraph 5 (a) of WIPO Standard ST.13 and coding the type of IPR (paragraph 5 (b) of the Standard). Further details are available in the section "Compliance with WIPO Standard ST.13" of collated results (link).

FINAL REMARKS

33.   The recommendations provided in ST.13 remain relevant and, according to the majority of the responses received, they are sometimes implemented completely or, more usually, partially by the IPOs. WIPO Standard ST.13, last revised in February 2008, provides recommendations only to those offices which intend to change their present numbering systems, or to introduce new numbering systems. In this regard, it should be noted that changing a numbering system is a complex and resource consuming exercise, that IPOs do not undertake that often. It is, therefore, premature to draw any conclusions on the impact of revised recommendations on the harmonization of numbering practices. The survey shows that current practices of application numbering significantly differ in different offices, what confirms the statement made in WIPO Standard ST.13 (see paragraph 2) that formats and presentations of application numbers actually employed by IPOs have been historically inconsistent. We can conclude that despite major inconsistencies that still exist in numbering practices, ST.13 provides a common reference for IPOs on the constituent elements of the application number: type of IPR, serial number and year designation.

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