

PRESS RELEASE
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AFRICA IP SME HELPDESK TO SUPPORT EU BUSINESSES IN INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY MATTERS

On 21 October, the ‘Africa IP SME Helpdesk’ was launched in Rome, under the auspices of the EU-African SME Summit 2021. From now on, EU businesses will be able to find detailed and practical information on African intellectual property matters, and address specific questions through a Helpdesk online hub.

‘At the heart of our efforts are people, entrepreneurs and business leaders like you. Take advantage of the many resources available, including the EU’s new Africa IP SME helpdesk. It supports European SMEs with intellectual property rights management across Africa and helps African businesses gain access to global value chains’, said **Jutta Urpilainen, European Commissioner for International Partnerships**.

‘Today marks an important milestone for the promotion of intellectual property rights in Africa among EU businesses. The new IP SME Helpdesk will encourage Africa-EU trade by promoting intellectual property and will be valuable not only to EU SMEs, but also to lawyers, and practitioners’ said **Andrea di Carlo, EUIPO Deputy Executive Director**.

Over the years, EU-Africa trade relations have deepened. In 2020, the EU was Africa’s largest trade partner, accounting for 31 % of Africa’s exports and 29 % of its imports. This coincided with close to 70 % of goods exported from the EU to Africa being manufactured goods. Meanwhile, most African countries enjoy duty-free and quota-free access to the EU market, and manufactured goods dominate EU exports to Africa.

With the African Union’s Agenda 2063 and its flagship project, the new African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCTA), Africa-EU business relations, and in particular SMEs, have reached a wider relevance. In addition, **intellectual property (IP) has become a cornerstone of AfCTA and Africa-EU trade relations**.

The new Africa IP SME Helpdesk will raise awareness on IP matters in Africa, with detailed information on national IP landscapes, case studies, training materials, and webinars. The practical information on IP will help SMEs to better understand and protect their intellectual property assets (patents, trade marks, industrial designs, trade secrets, copyrights, etc) in Africa. It will support small and medium-sized enterprises in creating, protecting, utilising, administering, and enforcing intellectual property rights (IPR) across Africa, in line with international and European best practices.

In addition, **EU SMEs will be able to submit their own enquiries to the Helpdesk** related to protecting their IP rights in Africa through a dedicated helpline service. IP experts will provide useful advice, respecting confidentiality, within 3 working days.

The Africa IP SME Helpdesk is **established thanks to the [support of the European Union](#)** and implemented by the [EUIPO](#), through the [Intellectual Property Rights & Innovation in Africa \(AfrIPI\) project](#).

Background

Key features of the of the African IP SME Helpdesk

The African IP SME Helpdesk aims to advance mutual cooperation between EU SMEs and African countries in matters of trade. The Helpdesk's main objective is to contribute to sustainable development and economic growth in Africa whilst at the same time presenting new economic frontiers for EU businesses. As a result, the Helpdesk seeks to create an economic ecosystem that is based on mutually beneficial cooperation between the EU and African states.

The Africa IP SME Helpdesk is part of an [international network of helpdesks addressing EU businesses](#) and funded by the EU. Other regional helpdesks cover Latin America, China, South-East Asia, and India.

Why focus on SMEs?

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are becoming important drivers of growth in economies, both in the EU and Africa. According to the EUIPO/EPO report '[Intellectual property rights and firm performance in Europe: an economic analysis](#)', released in February 2021, companies which own at least one patent, registered design or trade mark generate on average 20 % higher revenues per employee than companies which do not own any of those IPRs.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) represent 99 % of all businesses in the EU yet less than 9 % of SMEs own intellectual property rights (IPR). Meanwhile, those firms that do own IPR have **68 % more revenue per employee** than firms that do not.

There are several factors that contribute to this situation. Apart from the lack of awareness on IPRs, especially among SMEs, there is a perception that IPR registration procedures are complex and costly. Moreover, there is often the concern that the cost of the enforcement of these rights would represent a financial burden to SMEs.

Nurturing African-EU common interests

Both the EU and African countries have a common interest in facilitating trade and investment by removing obstacles that hinder their development. African countries represent a wide and diverse spectrum of economic, cultural, and geographical features, as well as varying degrees of development of their IP systems. Nevertheless, all African economies share the need to keep track of international developments in the field of IP and to tailor them for implementation at Pan-African level. In turn, this will allow them to achieve an integrated continental economy and reap the benefits of regional and global value chains, through the protection and promotion of African products and services. With this in mind, the Helpdesk project aims to support African IPR policy and its harmonisation, by improving networks, tools, and capacity building. The Helpdesk will support IP capacity building by sharing valuable IP practices: from raising awareness of IP, using IP strategically, and finally, helping companies take full advantage of their IP.

The African IP Helpdesk supports European SMEs and research teams involved in cross-border business and/or EU-funded research activities manage, disseminate, and enhance the value of their IP.

The Helpdesk will also provide a broad range of informative material, a helpline service for direct IP support as well as on-site and online training.

More information

[Africa IP SME Helpdesk](#)

[EU-African SME Summit 2021](#)

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