

Intellectual property service boosts new business opportunities for hundreds EU companies in Africa

21 October 2022, Alicante, Spain: Over the past year, **the ‘Africa IP SME Helpdesk’ has assisted more than 500 EU Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in protecting Intellectual Property (IP) when expanding to Africa – one of the fastest-growing markets in the world – over the past year.**

The activities of the Helpdesk have also fostered mutual cooperation between EU and African countries in matters of trade, contributing to economic growth in Africa and opening new frontiers for EU businesses.

In less than 12 months, the EU-funded ‘Africa IP SME Helpdesk’ has produced dozens of up-to-date country factsheets, case studies, guides and training materials on the protection of IP rights in Africa, which are easily and freely accessible on the Helpdesk website. Along with its dedicated helpline providing expert advice to businesses in five languages, the Helpdesk has supported hundreds of EU companies in protecting, managing and enforcing their IP rights, namely patents, trade marks, industrial designs, geographical indications and copyrights.

Helping steer EU businesses internationalisation strategies through its “know before you go” approach, the service looks out for the regional nuances that affect trade and consequently, counterfeiting activities. Reflected in its comprehensive case study “Customs protection in Kenya”, a French company was able to avoid counterfeits of its goods entering its market in South Sudan after receiving advice to protect its trade mark in the regional transport hub of Kenya.

The recent African Continental Free Trade Area, which aims to eliminate barriers to trade in the region, offers business opportunities for what could one day be a \$3 trillion opportunity by some estimates. For many European businesses, this translates into scaling current relations and business investments also by protecting their Intellectual Property Rights (IPR).

The EU and its Member States constitute the most important trading partner for Africa. EU exports of goods to Africa increased in 2021 to EUR 288 billion from a low value of EUR 225 billion in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, 68 % of goods exported from the EU to Africa were manufactured goods.

France (€ 24 billion), Germany (€ 23 billion), Spain and Italy (both € 18 billion), the Netherlands (€ 17 billion) and Belgium (€ 16 billion) were the largest exporters of goods to Africa in 2021.

Marking the first year of activities, Christian Archambeau, Executive Director of the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO), says: *“By focusing on supporting SMEs, the Africa IP SME Helpdesk paves the way for EU businesses to make safe investment in Africa, while enabling African countries to access the global economy. The Helpdesk is today an important actor in the African Continental Free Trade Area”.*

“Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) are the backbone of many economies in Europe as well as in Africa. They represent 99% of all business in the EU, yet less than 9% of them own intellectual property rights (IPR). Those firms that do own IP rights have 68 % more revenue per employee than firms that do not. Companies owning at least one patent, registered design or trade mark generate on average 20% higher revenues per employees than those that do not own any of those IPRs”, he continues.

IP is a key driver for growth and innovation. IP rights are one of the main ways that companies and inventors generate returns on their investments in knowledge, innovation and creativity. A sound IP rights framework in Africa can act as an important backbone for innovation and development, thus

favouring the growth of economic relations between the EU and Africa, while contributing to sustainable development.

Launched in Rome on 21 October 2021 under the auspices of the EU-African SME Summit 2021, the new Helpdesk has kept its promises of putting at the heart of the efforts people, entrepreneurs, and business leaders. It provides first-line IP assistance service for European SMEs that operate or intend to access the African market to improve their global competitiveness. The various Helpdesk's activities have so far reached thousands of participants to date overcoming the widespread perception that IP rights registration procedures are complex and costly, and a financial burden to SMEs.

More case studies and factsheets are expected to be delivered in the coming months, including one covering the ARIPO (the African Regional Intellectual Property Organization), which will complement the already existing factsheet on the regional system of the OAPI countries (from the French acronym for African Intellectual Property Organization). Both these intergovernmental organisations promote regulatory convergence in patent and IP rights among various African countries.

Note to editors:

The Africa 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 established thanks to the support of the European Union and under the management of the EUIPO, through the Intellectual Property Rights & Innovation in Africa (AfrIPI) project.

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.

Media contact

EUIPO Communication Service
Tel.: +34 653 674 113
press@euipo.europa.eu