

Africa IP SME Helpdesk

Concept note

Contribution of the
Africa IP SME Helpdesk to the
3rd EU-Ghana Business Forum

1. Introduction

a. Empowering SMEs through Intellectual Property: the role of the AfrIPI Project and the Africa IP SME Helpdesk

[AfrIPI](#) is an international cooperation project funded and directed by the European Union, and co-funded and implemented by the European Union Intellectual Property Office ([EUIPO](#)).

Its overall objective is to facilitate intra-African trade and enhance African and European investment. Specifically, AfrIPI aims to support the creation, protection, utilisation, administration, and enforcement of Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) across Africa, in line with international and European best practices and in support of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the African Union's Agenda 2063.

The [Africa IP SME Helpdesk](#) is an initiative funded by the European Union under the AfrIPI project, designed to support European small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating in or looking to enter African markets. The Helpdesk provides free, confidential, and first-line advice on IPRs, assisting SMEs in understanding how to identify, protect, and enforce their IP across African jurisdictions.

The Helpdesk focuses on three main objectives:

- Awareness raising and training: Enhancing EU SMEs' understanding of IP rules and practices in Africa through training sessions, webinars, and online resources.
- Assistance and direct support: Offering confidential, personalised advice on IP-related matters via a dedicated helpline, with expert responses within three working days.
- Resource provision: Maintaining a comprehensive library of IP guides, glossaries, and tools to support businesses in their IP strategies.

Through targeted training, awareness-raising, and advisory services, the Helpdesk empowers businesses with the tools and knowledge needed to navigate Africa's IP landscape. It also collaborates with business support organisations (BSOs) and local institutions to strengthen capacity in addressing IP challenges in priority sectors.

Whether seeking to register a trade mark, protect a patent, or understand local enforcement procedures, the Helpdesk provides practical, business-oriented guidance to foster innovation, attract investment, and contribute to sustainable development. The Helpdesk does not provide legal support to register IPRs and cannot represent companies at the moment of filing an application to register an IPRs.

b. The 3rd Ghana-EU Business Forum

The European Union is one of Ghana's key trade and investment partners. To further strengthen this partnership, Ghana and the EU are currently discussing the launch of negotiations for a Sustainable Investment Facilitation Agreement (SIFA).

The EU's Global Gateway Strategy is a far-reaching initiative aimed at boosting sustainable connections between Europe and global partners through investment in infrastructure, digitalisation, energy, and trade. By prioritising partnerships with countries like Ghana, the Strategy supports economic development, regional integration, and broader global challenges such as climate change and health resilience. It aligns closely with Ghana's development goals, serving as a foundation for deeper trade and investment cooperation.

The 3rd Ghana-EU Business Forum, taking place from 20–21 May 2025 in Accra, will focus on: "Deepening Ghana-EU Cooperation on Trade and Investment in Non-Traditional Value Chains under the EU Global Gateway Strategy".

This theme reflects the EU's commitment to supporting investment in key sectors such as agribusiness, pharmaceuticals and health, and renewable energy, with the objective of building resilient and sustainable value chains that generate mutual benefit.

The forum serves as a platform for meaningful engagement between policymakers and private sector operators from both Ghana and Europe. It aims to highlight trade and investment opportunities, encourage private sector development, and promote a transparent, inclusive, and sustainable partnership.

The main objectives of the EU-Ghana Business Forum are to:

- Provide a platform for robust engagement between policymakers and private sector operators from Ghana and Europe;
- Identify and explore mutually beneficial opportunities in renewable energy, pharmaceuticals/vaccines, and agribusiness value chains;
- Raise awareness of trade and investment opportunities while reinforcing cooperation under the EU Global Gateway Strategy.

c. Previous engagements of the Africa IP SME Helpdesk and impact

The Africa IP SME Helpdesk is active and regularly takes part in business fora across Africa. For example, in February 2023, the Africa IP SME Helpdesk participated in the EU-Kenya Business Forum, where it delivered targeted IP training and engaged with both local and European stakeholders. These activities highlighted the strategic relevance of IP in business development and led to valuable partnerships. Notably, collaboration with European Chambers of Commerce resulted

in joint follow-up initiatives, broadening the Helpdesk's reach and benefits for both European and Kenyan SMEs.

In July 2024, the Helpdesk took part in two major business fora. At the 2nd EU-Ghana Business Forum, it engaged Ghanaian and European SMEs on topics such as trade marks and copyrights. The aim was to increase awareness of the technical aspects of IP and stimulate interest in protection strategies relevant to the Ghanaian market.

That same month, at the EU-Nigeria Business Forum, the Helpdesk connected with Nigerian and European businesses, policymakers, and institutional stakeholders. Discussions focused on the role of IP in safeguarding innovation and supporting sustainable development in priority sectors.

Most recently, in November 2024, the Helpdesk contributed to the EU-Malawi Business Forum, offering on-site advisory services and connecting with local and European companies. The engagement focused on the development of IP strategies in areas such as geographical indications and plant variety protection, both critical for Malawi's growing agribusiness and export sectors.

These engagements have resulted in a significant increase in IP-related enquiries, reflecting growing awareness and demand for IP support among SMEs and BSOs across the region.

2. Proposed contributions of the Africa IP SME Helpdesk

a. Participation with a stand at the "EU Village"

The Africa IP SME Helpdesk proposes to participate in the EU Village at the Forum, engaging directly with companies and BSOs. Matchmaking and business networking events such as this are crucial for the Helpdesk, as they offer direct access to its core audience.

A central goal of the Helpdesk is to raise awareness and offer first-line support on IP issues to EU SMEs operating or planning to operate in Africa. Being present at the stand enables the Helpdesk to provide practical, sector-relevant advice and to explain the importance of IP in safeguarding innovation, protecting investments, and fostering a competitive business environment. These face-to-face engagements are particularly relevant to the sectors highlighted at this year's forum: agribusiness, pharmaceuticals, and renewable energy.

Additionally, participation enhances the Helpdesk's ability to gather insights on emerging issues and trends, shaping future activities. It also fosters collaboration with local BSOs, chambers of commerce, and institutional partners, further strengthening its network and impact.

b. Participation in breakout sessions

The Helpdesk also proposes to organise a breakout session on IP as part of the Forum's official programme. This session will contribute to the Forum's objectives by fostering dialogue between institutions and private sector stakeholders from both Ghana and the EU.

Focusing on the strategic role of IP in fostering innovation, competitiveness, and sustainable development, the session will explore how effective IP management can create value in key sectors such as agribusiness, pharmaceuticals, and renewable energy. It aims to raise awareness among companies and BSOs of the broader benefits of IP, not only in protecting innovation, but also in attracting investment, supporting fair competition, and enabling inclusive growth.

By highlighting practical approaches to integrating IP into business strategies, the session will directly support the aims of the EU Global Gateway Strategy, particularly its commitment to building resilient, inclusive, and sustainable value chains.

Proposed breakout session structure

- **Duration:** 45 minutes
- **Format:** Training-style session led by an IP expert
- **Audience:** SMEs, BSOs, institutional stakeholders, media, and general public
- **Speakers:**
 - **Mr Gregor Schneider:** EU IP Attaché for Africa
 - **Mr Carlos Lleo Satorre:** Afripi Project Leader
 - **Mr Hamidou Kone:** AfrIPI IP Expert

Session description

The session will explore how effective IP protection and enforcement contribute to strengthening the business environment and supporting investment in Ghana. Focusing on the agribusiness, pharmaceutical, and renewable energy sectors, it will demonstrate how intellectual property can foster innovation, safeguard product integrity, and stimulate sustainable economic growth. Participants will gain a clearer understanding of the strategic value of IP and its role in enhancing market competitiveness, attracting foreign direct investment, and enabling knowledge transfer.

The session will begin with a 10-minute introduction to the AfrIPI project and the Africa IP SME Helpdesk, delivered by the AfrIPI Project Leader. This opening part will provide context on how this EU-funded initiative supports EU and African SMEs by offering free, confidential first-line advice on IP matters, as well as access to specialised tools, resources, and capacity-building activities. The introduction will

also highlight the broader goals of AfrIPI in fostering a harmonised IP environment across Africa that supports trade and innovation.

The core of the session will be a 35-minute interactive training led by an IP expert jointly with the IP attaché, focusing on practical aspects of intellectual property in Ghana:

- IP registration routes in Ghana: The expert will outline the main pathways for securing protection for trade marks, patents, industrial designs, plant varieties and geographical indications in Ghana, including national procedures and regional options available through ARIPO. Emphasis will be placed on cost-effective strategies for SMEs to secure their rights early in the business lifecycle.
- The role of enforcement in ensuring effective IP protection: This part will explore how legal and institutional enforcement mechanisms underpin the effectiveness of IP systems. Participants will learn about administrative, civil, and criminal enforcement channels available in Ghana, and how these mechanisms can be used to take action against counterfeiting, infringement, and unfair competition.
- Preventive measures for SMEs to protect their IP: The training will offer practical guidance on how businesses can proactively safeguard their intangible assets. This includes conducting IP audits, implementing internal protection protocols, and using contracts, such as non-disclosure agreements, to mitigate risks when engaging with partners, suppliers, or distributors.
- How strong IP enforcement builds investor confidence and drives sectoral development: Drawing from case studies and sector-specific examples, the expert will explain how robust enforcement frameworks help attract investment by reducing risk, protecting innovation, and promoting a fair and transparent business climate. The session will highlight how this is particularly relevant to sectors such as agribusiness (e.g. seed varieties and branding), pharmaceuticals (e.g. patents and anti-counterfeiting), and renewable energy (e.g. technological innovation and licensing).

To close the session, there will be a brief Q&A segment where participants can raise practical questions and seek guidance relevant to their specific challenges. Attendees will also be encouraged to contact the Africa IP SME Helpdesk for individual follow-up support, including access to tailored advice, sector-specific resources, and networking opportunities with local and international partners.

3. Conclusion

The Africa IP SME Helpdesk's participation in the 3rd Ghana-EU Business Forum presents a strategic opportunity to strengthen the implementation of the EU Global Gateway Strategy by empowering SMEs to protect and leverage their intellectual

assets. By integrating IP considerations into the forum's discussions and activities, the Helpdesk supports the development of resilient, sustainable, and innovative value chains that benefit both Ghanaian and European enterprises.