

EU-ACP Follow-up Committee – Draft programme for 2025

1. Introduction and political background

The Samoa Agreement was signed in November 2023 and entered into provisional application in January 2024. Article 95 thereof provides very clearly for the establishment of a mechanism for engagement with stakeholders, through which civil society is to be closely consulted on the implementation of the agreement. However, to date, there has been no real progress in setting up this consultation mechanism.

The EU-ACP Follow-up Committee was established by the Cotonou Agreement, which was signed in 2002 between the EU and 77 African, Caribbean and Pacific States, and established consultation with civil society organisations on implementing the Cotonou Agreement. Since its inception, the follow-up committee has thus played a key role in making sure the voice of civil society is heard, and has been the only institutional mechanism for consultation. However, with the Samoa Agreement, the future of the follow-up committee is currently uncertain.

In parallel, discussions are ongoing on the establishment of a civil society consultation mechanism within the framework of the EU-Africa partnership.

Together with the African Union's ECOSOCC, the EESC has put forward proposals for the creation of a new civil society consultation body, which would be broader than the current follow-up committee and would provide a platform for a wide range of organisations.

However, ongoing discussions at the level of the European Commission and civil society organisations on the creation of a new mechanism have not yet been concluded.

On 17 July 2024, the EESC and the African Union's ECOSOCC signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in Accra (Ghana) in which the two organisations underlined their willingness to work together more closely to promote the interests of civil society.

A first step in the implementation of this MoU was the joint declaration by the EESC and ECOSOCC presented at the UN Summit of the Future.

Against this backdrop, the work of the EU-ACP Follow-up Committee will build on the actions undertaken in 2024 and will focus more on the implementation of the partnership agreement between the EESC and ECOSOCC. A roadmap setting out the activities to be carried out together is currently being drawn up. These activities should focus on the priority areas of the EU-AU partnership (e.g. migration, where the role of civil society should be strengthened). The implementation of the MoU is to be evaluated every three years, and the roadmap should include a mechanism to monitor the implementation of the MoU in order to measure its results and impact.

2. Implementation of the programme

Activities we will organise to implement the action programme include the following:

- continuing cooperation with the European Commission and the OACPS on the implementation of Article 95 of the Samoa Agreement;
- participating in meetings of the OACPS-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly (JPA) (including regional assemblies where relevant, in particular the EU-Africa assembly) and stepping up cooperation with it, in particular as regards civil society events on the sidelines of the JPA;
- implementing the MoU with the African Union's ECOSOCC and further work on the update of the MoU with UCESA (Union of Economic and Social Councils and Similar Institutions of Africa);
- continuing work to ensure that civil society is involved in implementing the economic partnership agreements (EPAs), in particular the EU-Côte d'Ivoire EPA (following the 2022 mission and the exchanges with Côte d'Ivoire's Economic, Social, Environmental and Cultural Council) and the EU-SADC EPA (following the study carried out in 2023-2024);
- supporting the implementation of the EU-Kenya EPA with regard to the establishment of Domestic Advisory Groups;
- continuing work on the Indo-Pacific, including in the context of developing an EU-Pacific axis on the basis of the Samoa Agreement architecture.

3. Implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding with the African Union's ECOSOCC

With regard to the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding with the African Union's ECOSOCC, the following activities and topics will be considered and discussed with ECOSOCC in the context of drafting the roadmap:

- a. **Civil society engagement mechanism for the EU-Africa partnership:**
Continuing work on the establishment of a civil society engagement mechanism on the basis of proposals put forward and advocated by the EESC and ECOSOCC. This will also be the case for the implementation of the mechanisms for engaging the stakeholders in the Samoa Agreement.
- b. **Collaboration in the context of the OACPS-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly:**
Preparing and presenting common positions at sessions of the OACPS-EU Joint

Parliamentary Assembly and of the Africa-EU regional assembly and organising meetings/discussions/round tables with local civil society.

- c. Contribution **to the drafting of a common position between EU and African organised civil society** ahead of the EU-Africa ministerial meeting and summit to be held in 2025.
- d. **Exchange of information** and collaboration in the drafting of opinions on topics of common interest to the EESC and ECOSOCC. The opinion on legal pathways to the EU seems relevant here.
- e. Topics on which collaboration could be envisaged:
 - **migration and mobility:** joint activities are expected on this topic. Collaboration in the preparation of the opinion on legal routes to the EU should also be considered.
 - **financing for development:** analysis of the financial framework/overall architecture of development funds. A joint statement could be drawn up ahead of the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development (Seville, Spain | 30 June – 3 July 2025).
 - **sustainable development and democracy:** Following up on the own-initiative opinion on *Democracy in Africa* (REX/584), a conference could be organised on the issues regarding sustainable development and its (positive and negative) impact on democracy, with a focus on the importance of including civil society in the political processes to ensure that citizens are more involved in and accepting of the political decisions. Such a conference would also be an opportunity to address topics such as migration, the Pact for the Future, and climate change.
 - On the topic of **climate change**, joint action could be envisaged on the sidelines of the COP, including with the participation of UCESA.
 - Collaboration could also be envisaged on the topic of the ‘voluntary national reviews’ on the implementation of the **Sustainable Development Goals**, with a view to exchanging experience and best practices.
 - **women’s empowerment and employment:** drafting of a joint statement ahead of the UN CWS69 meeting in New York in March 2025 focusing on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the current situation regarding the status of women and women’s rights. We could also discuss how to make progress in implementing the provisions of the Samoa Agreement on this topic.

- **measures to promote and empower civil society:** what exactly is needed, and what exactly should be response be, beyond the general statements, as regards building capacity and/or countering disinformation? The question of sufficient financial resources should also be raised. This topic could be specifically youth-focused and involve an exchange of best practices in relation to promoting the participation of young people in public policy-making.
 - This could also involve exchanges with ECOSOCC with regard to the process of drawing up and promoting opinions.
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