



ACP-EU Follow-up Committee

Subject: Programme 2020-2023

**Copies: Chair of the ACP-EU Follow-up Committee
Members of the ACP-EU Follow-up Committee**

1. Introduction

The EU-ACP Follow-up Committee is an EESC body that is part of the External relations (REX) section. Its role is to closely monitor the EU's economic, social, cooperation, political and cultural relations with ACP countries with a view to their sustained development as part of a vision of shared interests on both sides, with the utmost attention being paid to the actions, development and promotion of civil society organisations in those countries, helping put common values into practice. The EU-ACP Follow-up Committee is therefore seeking a substantial role for civil society organisations in cooperation between ACP countries and the EU to secure relevant interests shared by all parties.

The EU-ACP Follow-up Committee is comprised of 24 members, 12 from the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and 12 from the ACP countries, appointed by the civil society organisations of these countries and respecting the balance between the interest groups represented. Its term of office is two and a half years.

In order to perform its role, the EU-ACP Follow-up Committee holds regular meetings at the EESC's headquarters, in Brussels or in ACP countries, organises seminars on specific topics, maintains relations with European and international institutions and promotes various initiatives (fact-finding trips and cultural events, amongst other things).

The current brief of the EU-ACP Follow-up Committee generally and consistently follows the broad lines set out previously, taking on board the positive experience of its last term of office, in particular the conclusions of the activity report for that term:

- hold the 7th meeting of the EU-Africa Economic and Social Stakeholders' Network, to prepare for the Africa-EU Summit Head of States (postponed to 2021/date subject to confirmation);
- keep up the pressure at all levels to achieve a prominent role for civil society in the EU-ACP cooperation process; the renewed Cotonou Convention wording on the role of civil society and the EESC must at least be the same as in the previous version of the convention;
- maintain the excellent working relations with the EU-ACP Joint Parliamentary Assembly and the European Parliament; continue to exchange invitations/visits;

- continue the excellent cooperation with the EU Commission's DG TRADE and DG DEVCO; the ultimate objective is the involvement of EESC/civil society representatives in all EU-ACP EPAs;
- continue active participation in the form of official visits by the EESC president to ACP States, in line with the programme and priorities set by the EU-ACP follow up committee;
- in the COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 era, continue to advocate for EU assistance and transfer of knowledge and funds, including health investment, to ACP countries affected by COVID-19.

2. Political background

The political framework for relations between the EU and the ACP states originally comprises several international agreements:

- The Cotonou Agreement, signed in Benin, on 23 June 2000. This cooperation agreement between the European Union (EU) and the ACP countries and involving more than 100 countries. Governing the ACP-EU relations until February 2020, the agreement was extended until the end of 2021.

In 2021, a new **Agreement between the EU and the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS)**, will replace the Cotonou Agreement. This partnership agreement, once approved, ratified and signed by the parties, will apply for 20 years and cover a wide range of areas, ranging from development and sustained growth to human rights, peace and security, and the focus of its implementation will be regional priorities. Once it enters into force, the agreement will serve as a new legal framework and will guide political, economic and cooperation relations between the EU and the 79 OACP states. As a whole, the agreement will cover 1.5 billion people and more than half of the UN member countries;

- The Joint-Africa-EU Strategy: at the second EU-Africa Union (AU) Summit of December 2007, the EU and 54 African state leaders adopted a Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES). The strategy governs the political partnership and enhance cooperation and should be profoundly reviewed at the *sixth summit* between the African Union and the EU (second semester 2021). This summit will discuss various areas of cooperation and relations between Europe and Africa, based on the [Joint communication for new strategy; towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa](#) and as proposed by the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Released in March 2020, the communication proposed:
 - (i) a partnership for the green transition and access to energy;
 - (ii) a partnership for the digital transition;
 - (iii) a partnership for sustainable growth and employment;
 - (iv) a partnership for peace and governance;
 - (v) a partnership for migration and mobility.
- the CARIFORUM-EU economic partnership agreement (EPA), signed in Barbados on 15 October 2008 and ratified on 27 July 2015, is a trade between the EU and 15 Caribbean States;

- The COVID-19 pandemic.

In the ACP countries, the pandemic has exacerbated existing problems, particularly those relating to the economy, social issues – especially health services and employment – good governance and human rights, and peace and security. Civil society organisations are at the heart of this situation and face enormous challenges, the first of which is their own resilience in order to be able to help resolve these problems.

3. Common values

The strategic concept of the 2020-2023 term is to carry out the EU-ACP Follow-up Committee's role in the three regions of its remit (Africa, Caribbean and Pacific), through activities based on principles and values. This concept is based on the new political framework created by the *Agreement between the EU and the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States* and the coherent approach developed with Africa (through the up-coming comprehensive strategy), the Caribbean (APE) and the Pacific. Our action will be also guided by a set of principles and common values, which make up the EU acquis, such as:

- democracy and rule of law;
- human rights;
- recognition and consultation of civil society and social partners;
- equality and fight against discrimination;
- decent work and ILO conventions¹;
- women's empowerment, gender equality, equal opportunities and rights for young people, children, the elderly and people with disabilities;
- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the strengthening of international cooperation;
- food security, and
- inclusive and sustainable development of ACP countries.

4. Programme

This policy framework outlines the main objectives and specific priority issues to be addressed during the term of office.

4.1. *Main topics for this 2020-2023 term*

- *COVID* — *the pandemic is jeopardising life and society at a global level*. Maintaining the call for a multilateral solution to the pandemic and ensuring fair access across the globe to diagnostics and therapies (vaccines), is the only humanitarian and just strategy and the only one that counters the speculation that is endangering the lives of millions of human beings and the very development of our societies. The Follow-up Committee will pay particular attention to the EU support to Least Developing Countries (LDCs); the impact of COVID-19 on human rights. The impact of COVID-19 on women and children in particular when it comes to education, sexual

¹ <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12000:0::NO>

violence and abuse and on the elderly (e.g. vaccination) will be scrutinised. The follow-up Committee will consider the impact of COVID-19 on the private sector and possible social discriminations that may occur/develop

- *Infrastructure* – a key focus for sustainable development. We should consider the notion of infrastructure as securing the conditions for sustainable development in a results oriented way, without which the latter cannot occur. In particular, *physical infrastructure* (energy networks, sustainable production facilities for renewable energies, transport networks – air, road, port, rail – and hydraulic systems) and *social infrastructure* (healthcare systems, education, training and skills development systems and social protection schemes). In the context of the current pandemic, the promotion of training as well as vocational education in the field of digitalisation should be ensured in an inclusive and fair way, in particular to pupils, consumers and public administrations. Finally, public-private partnerships (PPP) should be considered as a tool for strengthening of infrastructure, while also boosting capacity building should be reinforced in financial auditing.
- *Debt* – a real brake on sustainable development: Reducing debt is a necessity for dependent countries with fewer resources. Debt acts as a real brake on the sustained development of these states and it is vital to resolve this problem.

4.2. *Specific priorities*

Particular attention will be paid to the specific topics, such as the blue economy, a just transition to green and digital, economy migration and mobility.

4.3 *Implementation of the action programme*

To implement the action programme, we will hold several meetings, seminars and other events during the term of office, in particular:

- ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly and meetings;
- meetings of the ACP-EU Follow-up Committee during this term of office (2 per annum);
- seventh, eighth and ninth meetings of the *EU-Africa Network of Economic and Social Actors*;
- *29th meeting of the ACP-EU Economic and social interest groups*
- *18th Regional seminar of ACP-EU economic and social interest groups*
- *19th Regional seminar of ACP-EU economic and social interest groups*

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2.2021
