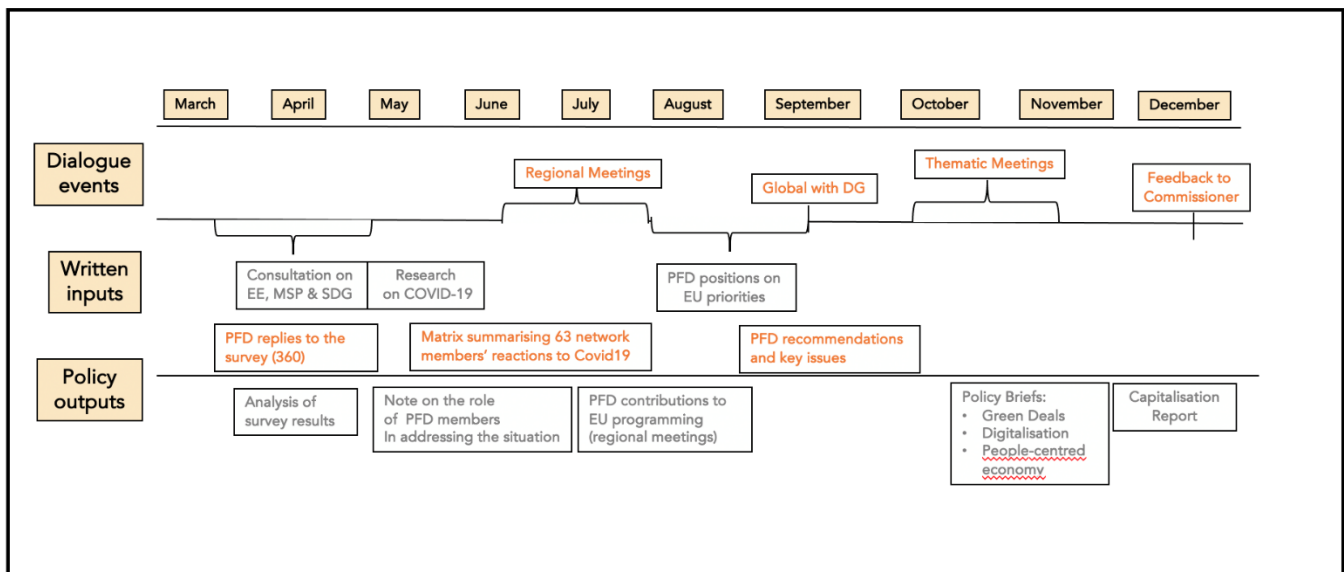


## PFD in Brief

### Thematic Webinars in October and November 2020

This year's **Virtual PFD** continued in October and November with a series of **three thematic webinars** on “**An Economy for the people**” (20 October), the **Green Deal** (27 October) and **Digitalisation** (3 November). These meetings were part of a broader consultation process among PFD members, to provide input into EU programming and complement the results of the PFD regional meetings organised in July 2020 and followed the first global virtual meeting with DEVCO Director General Koen Doens in September 2020. In each webinar, thematic experts of the European Commission were present to give a short overview of the respective topic and to answer PFD members' questions. This *PFD in Brief* summarises the main recommendations for programming by the PFD's members (a detailed summary of each thematic meeting can be found at our page on Capacity4dev: <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/policy-forum-development/wiki/thematic-webinars-october-and-november-2020>)

The results of the entire process will be discussed with the Commissioner for International Partnership, Jutta Urpilainen, during the global virtual PFD dialogue on 10 December 2020.



Graphic summarising the virtual PFD consultation process in 2020

### Just transition leaving no-one behind

The current green and digital transitions need to be inclusive and human-centred, leaving no-one behind. European Commission President Ursula Van der Leyen stressed that an economy that works for the people and the planet, based on equality for all and a green and just transition, is one of her top priorities. EU representatives explained the EU's multidimensional approach to addressing inequalities: addressing 'horizontal' inequalities (gender, minorities, etc.), via a rights-based approach and by fighting all forms of discrimination; and

addressing "vertical" inequalities (distribution of income and wealth), in a systematic and inclusive way and by considering new trends (digitalisation, COVID-19 implications, climate change).

The PFD CSO co-chair pointed out that “the current economic model based on growth and exploitation is not fit for purpose, is vulnerable to crisis and creates inequalities.” The EU needs to rethink its approach to rebuild better after COVID-19 and achieve sustainable development for all. And in this sense “we should not

give into an SDG fatigue – the EU must ensure that policies are designed to reach the 2030 Agenda.” Other PFD members also highlighted the importance of linking funding for recovery and resilience to the SDG agenda, stressing the need to identify new indicators, beyond growth and GDP, which measure the wellbeing of citizens in developing countries, such as access to renewable energy, education, health care and affordable housing, as well as indicators that better measure impact of EU actions within monitoring processes.

Participants noted the potential dichotomy between social justice and climate action, which should be made complementary and mutually reinforcing by addressing systemic tensions, ensuring the protection of human rights together with the environment and those of environmental defenders, and enforcing the principle of free, prior and informed consent of indigenous populations before using or developing their land, while adopting a more realistic understanding of the real capacity of civil society to influence government-led policies. There was a clear call to support the **agro-ecological transition**, which is increasingly recognised as a promising pathway towards strengthening both mitigation and adaptation measures for climate change.

The pandemic has shown that there is a **growing digital divide**: half of the Earth’s population has no access to the internet. Improving connectivity, through infrastructure and satellite services to provide access to high-speed internet is something the EU should undoubtedly support. However, this in turn requires that the companies which own services avoid creating dependence on them. Collective ownership of the internet services, e.g. based on the cooperative model is something to be explored in this respect.

Participants also considered the collateral effects in terms of a rise in unemployment resulting from the use of machines and artificial intelligence. For this reason, PFD members recommended the adoption of some fundamental principles in order to foster digitally-enabled sustainable development while at the same time ensuring social protection measures and social dialogue among the actors at stake. The use, security,

transparency and access to data are a crucial part of a just transition, as PFD members noted that digital rights are also civic rights and called for the EU to provide technical assistance and share its own know-how and experience around the passing and enforcement of the General Data Protection Regulation.



Key words from the thematic webinar on “Digitalisation”

### Social protection of workers, MSMEs including the informal sector

The role of the private sector will be pivotal to recovery after the pandemic and in providing decent jobs and inclusive economies. Micro - as well as small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), which comprise the majority of businesses, were hit hard by the COVID-19 crisis. Several PFD members insisted that in the recovery the EU should in particular support “inclusive and sustainable social businesses, as well as social enterprises,” which apply democratic governance models and whose purpose goes beyond profit, being rather focused on maximising benefits to society and the environment. Accountability and transparency



mechanisms for private sector engagement should be particularly preserved, which means that social and environmental indicators should be assessed when supporting businesses (including in public procurement procedures), in order to stay aligned with the achievement of the SDGs. The speakers from the European Commission stated that a focus on MSMEs is also key to achieving SDG 1, by helping to reduce the proportion of people in poverty through job creation and economic growth; and SDG 2, by ensuring sustainable food production systems. Participants highlighted that the EU should also focus on supporting MSMEs to face obstacles such as access to financing, improvement of skills, limited operational capacity and weak governance and management practises.

(EIP), the EU provides loans and other financial instruments to vulnerable groups and “underserved populations” that would normally not receive any credits due to their high level of risk. Additionally, since the beginning of the pandemic, the EU has applied a far more flexible approach in the use and granting of loans, allowing a broader definition of what loans can be used for to survive this dire period.

However, civil society organisations were sceptical about the high volume of funding being used to leverage private and public resources for investments, in comparison with the provision of grants and openly questioned the capacity of blending operations as well as of the European Fund for Sustainable Development to promote decent work or bring added value in the long-term. Some PFD members questioned the capacity of the new systems put in place to really reach those most in need on the ground. In addition, they warned that in any case, private sector financing instruments should be oriented towards business models that put people and planet first and provide local communities with access to micro and small funding without having to pass through governments or international banks, since they lack the capacity for such endeavours.

According to CONCORD’s statistics, 60% of the global population as well as 90% of all women are working in the informal economy at present. These people remain left out of labour rights, social protection, health and safety guarantees, without which any progress toward reaching the SDGs will remain illusory. An enabling business environment should not only aim at attracting investments, but also at facilitating the transition to the formal sector. Or as one of the participants put it: “there is a need to focus on domestic resource mobilisation at country level, as well as developing social protection systems.” He stressed the need to focus on social protection, noting that the reason that COVID-19 became not only an economic but a humanitarian crisis



Key words from the thematic webinar on “An Economy that works for the people”

The EC representatives explained that the EU measures the social impact of its blending operations, by conducting ex-ante assessments among the domestic financial institutions it works with, which also have an obligation to report disaggregated data by gender and age. In addition, through the European Investment Plan



high risks of poverty. The [PFD consultation](#) on COVID noted the specific and renewed threats to women and girls in the current reaction to the health crisis. Some PFD members lamented that both the EU communication on the Green Deal and COVID recovery were “gender blind” and that often sex and age disaggregated data were missing.

In all three webinars, numerous PFD members called for the protection and support of women and grassroots organisations, helping them to access funding and other support mechanisms. Women play a key role in initiatives that contribute to climate mitigation and enhanced resilience, but climate finance instruments remain difficult to access. The EU was called to include a gender perspective in programming and make funds available for women’s rights networks and organisations so that they can develop and upscale gender-just climate initiatives. This could also be translated into the EU Delegations’ National Indicative Programmes and earmarked funds for women’s rights networks organisations, e.g. the creation of a “Gender-Just Green Deal” or “Feminist Green Deal” flagship programmes. The EU could support initiatives in which organisations come together to organise trainings on virtual engagement and share resources and ideas, such as was done in the example of a feminist response to COVID-19 by Women Engage in a Common Future (WECF) (<https://www.feministcovidresponse.com/>).



The EU priorities could focus on providing **support to women’s groups** to advocate for the enactment of gender sensitive labour laws that are in line with international agreements, and resources and tools to actively monitor and address violations. This also requires targeted programmes to support women to unionise and invest in social protection measures, including for the many women in informal occupations currently excluded from legal coverage.

There are also certain risks that go along with opportunities for women that need to be further addressed. For example, the growing digitalisation presents opportunities for women’s political inclusion in local government, by increasing their access to information on local council processes as well as support networks and mentoring programmes, but at the same time brings an increased online abuse.

### The Role of Civil Society

The role of civil society as actors of development was strongly reiterated and PFD members insisted that civil society organisations (CSOs) of all types should be more actively involved in the programming process. However, the shrinking space for civil society does not always allow for free and constructive dialogue at national level. It is important to recognise that the level of freedom and influence that civil society has on government in a given country is a key factor, and to dedicate enough funding for CSOs to participate in policy dialogues and support their initiatives, including smaller actors that currently fall out of the funding schemes. This also means involving business and local business organisations at all levels to understand their contexts and priorities and create improvements through social dialogue, coordination and coherence.

Considering that civic space and public debate have practically moved to the digital realm, CSOs should have access to safe and reliable internet connections, as well





highlighted the importance of decentralised cooperation in strengthening capacities between peer subnational government and in advancing Commission priorities. Various examples of decentralised cooperation in the digitalisation field involving local authorities of different EU Member States were shared, which provide replicable examples of the “smart cities” approach.

### **The role of EU Delegations**

In all the three webinars, PFD members stressed how important it is to get their voices heard and that EU Delegations seldom involve them in decision-making processes and limit their contacts to periodic consultations. PFD members noted the repeated calls they made to the EU to include cooperatives, private sector actors, women’s groups, local authorities and social partners also at partner country level, and the important role the EU Delegations should play in involving them within the programming process, opening spaces for multi-stakeholder dialogue at country level.

It is important to support the EU Delegations to have a coherent and streamlined approach on consultation. To that end, it is important for EU Delegations to build on existing initiatives, so a first step could be to map out who is already working where, to ensure an understanding of what already exists, build collective knowledge and share best practices. Mapping who is working where will also add transparency to the digital transformation process and decision-making.

Further, Delegations can use available tools, such as the DEVCO handbook on mainstreaming inequalities in development cooperation, which must be widely distributed and understood if EU Delegations are to capture the multiple dimensions of inequality.

This need for more structured dialogue with EU Delegations has been recognised by the Director General of DG DEVCO, Koen Doens, who noted during the global PFD meeting in September that country-level consultation mechanisms would be set up by the EU Delegations, and that they would consider input from PFD members.