



Consultation on the Americas and the Caribbean RMIP

Virtual meeting held 28 May 2021

I. Summary

As a part of its consultations around the 2021-2027 programming of the EU, the Policy Forum on Development (PFD) hosted a virtual discussion to capture the views of PFD stakeholders and other CSOs and LAs on the EU Regional Multi-annual Indicative Programme (RMIP) for the Americas and the Caribbean.

Presentation of the draft RMIP

Marlene Holzner, Head of Unit for Local Authorities, Civil Society Organisations and Foundations in DG INTPA, opened the meeting and welcomed participants. This was followed by a presentation of the draft RMIP by colleagues from EEAS and DG INTPA.

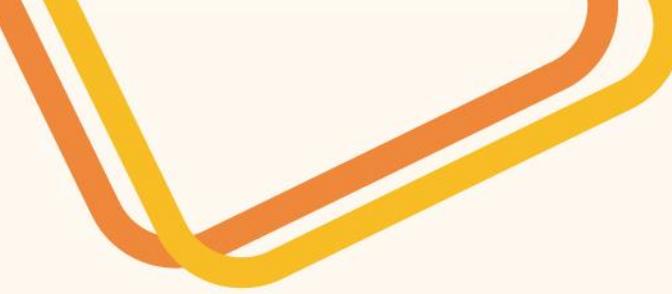
Claudia Gintersdorfer, Head of Division for the Americas in the EEAS kicked off the joint EEAS and DG INTPA presentation of the draft RMIP. The draft RMIP has been presented for consultation with EU member states, international organisations, the private sector and now with CSOs/LAs and will likely be finalised by the end of 2021 and guide EU-LAC cooperation until 2027.

The drafting process has also been informed by the current situation, taking into account the global pandemic and its impacts, the democratic backsliding in the region and the strong presence of protest movements. The focus of the RMIP will therefore be sustainable recovery and addressing pre-existing structural weaknesses, coupled with support to the green and digital transitions. Ms Gintersdorfer stressed that the new single financial instrument, the NDICI, will allow the EU to have greater focus and flexibility and a policy first approach to its external action. The NDICI will operate primarily through its geographic pillar, complimented by thematic ones. While the national level will serve as a foundation for EU action, the regional RMIP will fund value-added regional activities and bilateral activities with countries that do not have a country-level RMIP, such as Mexico, Brazil and Argentina. Ms Gintersdorfer clarified that with the North American partners, the focus will be on public diplomacy actions. CSOs and LAs are key partners in addressing inequalities, insecurity and governance challenges.

Felice Zaccheo, Head of Unit for LAC, DG INTPA, added that the EU's ambition is to be part of the global effort of building back better to achieve a digital, sustainable economy, including fighting inequalities, promoting democracy and human rights. The EU's existing trade and investment relationship with the LAC region will help it to promote its values.

Jacob TAMM, Deputy Head of Division for the Americas, EEAS, stressed that the objectives of the regional RMIP followed the goals of the 2019 EU-LAC communication: supporting LAC in its road to recovery, promoting an economic model less dependent on the exploitation of natural resources and using cleaner energy, and strengthening the strategic partnership with LAC. He stressed that in addition to the resources for the Americas, the regional programme foresaw a specific window for the Caribbean and would also be applying the Team Europe approach, working together with the member states to maximise impact.

Denis Thieulin, Deputy Head of Unit for LAC, DG INTPA presented the structure of regional funding for LAC as having two financial windows: the Pan-American and Caribbean, with the Caribbean also eligible for funds under the Pan-American window. Under the Pan-American window, the priorities are the green transition, digital transformation, sustainable and inclusive recovery, democratic governance, security and migration and social cohesion and



fighting inequalities. Under the Caribbean window, three partnerships are foreseen – for a green deal, for economic resilience and trade and governance, and for security and human development.

Mr Thieulin then presented the specific features foreseen for engagement with CSOs and LAs under the RMIP: amongst others, and when relevant, CSOs and LAs engagement across all priority areas; Team Europe initiatives to include also both CSO and LA dimensions when relevant and regional support measures to facilitate participation in regional/sub-regional platforms.

Other EEAS and DG INTPA colleagues then presented the detailed priorities under each broad priority area of the RRMIP.

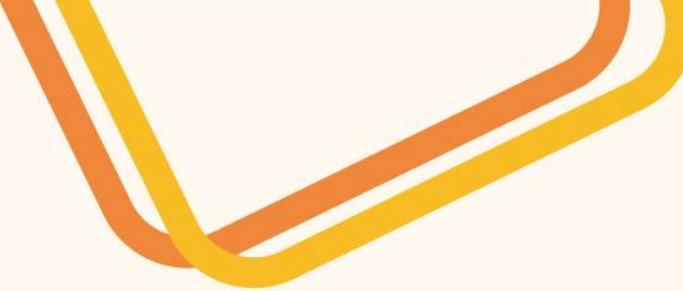
During the clarifying questions, participants asked about the process of determining the priorities for the RMIP – if consultations had taken place in all countries and with all actors, if evaluations had been conducted – and how these would be reconciled. Other questions concerned the interactions between the different levels of programming and the geographic and thematic parts of the NDICI, if CSO support was covered under the regional funding and if a focus on gender equality would be a transversal issue across priority areas.

Mr Thieulin clarified that the priorities were based on an analysis of the evolution of the situation in the region, as well as the new EU geopolitical priorities, taking into due account a number of extensive consultations with a range of stakeholders in this regard and also in light of the existing actions. As a result, a focus on social cohesion and inequalities and digital was chosen. He also clarified that the EU wants to act at country level first, with regional-level actions where these add value, meaning that there is complementarity and strong links between the national and regional levels in the NDICI. Mr Thieulin stressed that gender equality, alongside a focus on youth and vulnerable populations, is a cross-cutting theme. Ms Gintersdorfer clarified that CSOs have two thematic programmes dedicated to 1) human rights and democracy and 2) civil society, which provide support and address shrinking space for democratic participation. She stressed that the RMIP was currently a broad framework, and specific actions will become more defined as the programming progresses, as well as at national level.

The participants then broke out into six **thematic discussion groups** which focused on each of the priorities of the Pan-American window, and one specific to the Caribbean window. Within the groups, representatives of DG INTPA or the EEAS briefly presented the details of the priority focus area and moderated a discussion. Participants were encouraged to provide their feedback and recommendations on the issues included into the priority areas – if any important topics were missing or should be further highlighted – and presented suggestions on how CSOs and LAs could work together with the EU in these areas. Rapporteurs from each group then presented the main points of the discussion to the entire plenary.

Green transition

Participants in the discussion group on the **green transition** broadly agreed on the EU's chosen priorities, providing suggestions on how to further adjust the specific objectives under the priorities. However, concerns about **policy coherence** between EU policies on climate and the environment and those on economic growth were raised. Participants suggested a regional approach to **linking inequalities and climate justice**, in particular when it comes to the right to access land and natural resources, preserving traditional ways of life and preventing deforestation. In addition, the crucial role of and need to **protect land defenders**, including through the promotion of the regional Escazú Agreement, were stressed. The need to focus not only on mitigation, but also on **adaptation to climate change, the strengthening of early warning systems and promoting biodiversity** were also stressed.



Finally, the group underlined the **role of CSOs in promoting the green transition**, not just for implementation but through technical support.

Digital transformation and innovation

The group discussing **digital transformation** and innovation agreed that access to technology must be democratised, as its concentration in corporate hands is generating economic exclusion. To this end, social economy entities such as cooperatives should be strengthened to develop platforms, as well as in terms of logistics, marketing and finance; this could be done in cooperation with research centres and public universities. The group also pointed out that the promotion of data sovereignty is part of democratising access to technology. The pandemic has highlighted the link between digital transformation and the right to education. In the current context, the right to connectivity is the premise for achieving the right to education. The important link between digitalisation and research and innovation was also brought up, as was the current mismatch between supply and demand for technological skills in the labour market, demand outweighing supply. Finally, the importance of connecting different actors was underlined; the EUD4D hub was mentioned as a key tool for the integral connection between different sectors and actors, which is looking at how to include civil society, private sector, etc.

Sustainable and inclusive economic recovery

The group discussing **sustainable and inclusive economic recovery** stressed the need to link the different priority areas more closely, focusing also on the **promotion of decent work conditions and formalisation of employment when supporting environmental sectors**. The EU's focus on a sustainable economic recovery should be taken as an opportunity to promote moving away from **reliance on extractivist practices**. Promoting **equality and inclusion**, especially considering women's economic rights and ensuring that people with disabilities are involved in decision making, programming and implementation; and **economic justice**, through the introduction of **tax reforms** ensuring progressive taxation and social protection, were underlined as prerequisites for a sustainable recovery. On the EU's side, **ensuring a coherence between its cooperation and trade policies** is also essential to achieving this goal. The group expressed an interest in having a **structured dialogue at national and regional levels** and creating connections between those; it was suggested that CSOs/LAs could help the EU identify national partners to continue the dialogue.

Democratic governance, security and migration

The group discussing **democratic governance, security and migration** stressed the importance of **democratic institutionalisation**, protection of **human rights, citizens' trust** in institutions and independence of the powers, calling on the EU to promote democratic values, strengthen institutions, protect human rights defenders (HRDs) and strengthen CSO networks to reduce their vulnerability. The **centralisation of power and the inability of CSOs/LAs to participate in decision-making processes** in the region were further highlighted as challenges which needed to be addressed. While problems such as corruption, organised crime, drug trafficking and migration are not new in the region, their drivers have shifted over time. The double impact of the **pandemic and new migration flows** in the region have resulted in increased levels of violence, especially towards women and girls, human trafficking, and the presence of non-accompanied minors, who have specific protection needs which are not being met. As these are **cross-border phenomena**, they are best addressed at a regional level. Finally, the group called



on the EU to implement its strategy not only through governments but also through CSOs /LAs, in an alliance that goes beyond financial support.

Social cohesion, human development and fighting inequalities

The discussion from the group on **social cohesion, human development and fighting inequalities** stressed the **role that the EU could play in transferring messages** from the grassroots and LAs to policy makers in countries and also at the global level, with a focus on social and economic needs at local level and calls for the creation of decent employment and in defence of democratic principles. The importance of addressing all forms of inequalities, and also **promoting gender equality** in all areas, fighting violence against women, young people and girls and the financial support to health or education as the basis of the growth was underscored. The EU was called on to adopt a **cooperation model**, involving both national and regional/local authorities, **promote equitable and redistributive political, tax and fiscal reforms**, and strengthen the voice of CSOs and LAs, including through **addressing the shrinking space** for their operations and supporting democracy, rule of law and citizenship. The importance of access to and continuation of **education** was highlighted as crucial in a post-pandemic context, as was **strengthening workers' rights** and the reconciliation of work and family life, combatting inequalities, protecting vulnerable groups, and promoting **equal access to essential resources such as vaccines**. Finally, the group suggested the set-up of **new multilevel dialogues** for the elaboration of collaborative initiatives and exchange of experiences between the EU, LAs, CSOs and MSMEs in LAC.

Caribbean

On the **Caribbean window**, the group supported all three focus areas, but felt that **digital transformation should be transversal** across them and include data for development; the participants also wondered how the EU would support human rights across the three areas. With regards to the partnership on the green deal, important topics to consider were highlighted such as **disaster risk reduction** and investing in climate response early warning systems; in this context, indigenous people were brought up as stewards of the natural environment who need specific protections. The EU was seen as a voice which could increase the international recognition of the Caribbean's vulnerability to climate change. The **partnership on economic resilience and trade** was seen as a key area, where the EU should promote the diversification of economies, support MSMEs (specifically with capacity building) and foster strategies for inclusive societies. With regards to governance, actions relating to strengthening governance and promoting transparency were suggested; it was also noted that there is a need to keep in mind the impact of international and regional agreements on local communities and authorities. With regards to the support which the EU could provide CSOs/LAs in the Caribbean, networking and access to international organisations and forums for actors in the region was seen as valuable. It was also pointed out that despite being a key actor, LAs were falling in between the cracks between national and regional programming. Finally, the difficulty in accessing EU funding for small organisations was brought up.

Closing

Claudia Gintersdorfer and **Denis Thieulin** closed the meeting by thanking participants for their excellent input and reassured them that cross border cooperation, coherence of policy, the cross-cutting aspect of social cohesion and fighting inequalities, especially relating to gender inequalities and those facing youth, would be reflected in the RMIP. The key role of CSOs and LAs in implementing the programme and promoting common values was stressed; likewise, the importance of dialogue and engagement, also at national level, was highlighted. It was also clarified that the EU would be looking for avenues to facilitate multi-level engagement with CSOs at regional level and via the PFD.

II. Methodology

The 3 hours event began in plenary with a presentation of the main rationale and objectives of the future regional programme for the Americas and the Caribbean; then discussion in breakout rooms; and finally feedback in plenary from a rapporteur from each group. The 6 breakout rooms focused on the priorities in the corresponding Pan-American and Caribbean windows of the RMIP:

- 1) Pan-American window: Green transition
- 2) Pan-American window: Digital transformation
- 3) Pan-American window: Sustainable and inclusive economic recovery
- 4) Pan-American window: Democratic governance, security and migration
- 5) Pan-American window: Social cohesion Human Development and fighting inequalities
- 6) Caribbean window: key thematic areas

Participants pre-selected their break-out sessions and were given guiding questions in advance to frame the discussions.

Participants could share written input on the regional RMIP until 7 June, allowing more time for consultation with their members.

III. Group discussions around each geographical and priority area

Pan-American window: Priority area 1. Green transition

Participants welcomed the three priority areas defined for the Green transition, namely:

- i) Climate Action: implementation of the Paris Agreement through the NDCs and long term decarbonization plans, and support to adaptation and resilience;
- ii) Biodiversity: marine and forest conservation and transboundary management of ecosystems, with a focus on indigenous groups and environmental justice; and
- iii) Circular economy: promotion of sustainable consumption and production, diversification of LAC productive sectors, and creation of green jobs.

However, some CSOs expressed concerns about **policy coherence between EU policies on climate and the environment and those on economic growth**, as they felt that governments in the region prioritised economic growth over environmental and social considerations, even more so in the context of COVID economic recovery. Participants insisted that the region needs a green recovery that serves populations and biodiversity, with the inclusion

"Green Deals" should imply a Just Transition with social dialogue: as established in the Paris Agreement of the UNFCCC, we call on EU development cooperation to support proactive policies in partner countries to implement a just transition towards sustainable economies, together with workers' and employers' organisations through social dialogue. ITUC (International Trade Union Confederation)



of indigenous peoples and local communities¹ as a central axis. One suggestion delineated the link between the priority areas: **promotion of circular economy, bioeconomy and indigenous economies**, where the EU can support exchanges of best practices.

The **regional focus was particularly welcomed for environmental and climate programs**. In this regard, participants suggested building on existing transboundary initiatives to conserve land and marine ecosystems, and on existing cross border initiatives on adaptation and mitigation. Participants would like to see clear actions towards decarbonization and **protection of ecosystems and biodiversity**, including tackling **deforestation** and degradation of land, promoting soil regeneration and **restorative agricultural practices** which promote sustainable lifestyles based on local economies. The need to focus not only on mitigation, but also on adaptation to climate change and the **strengthening of early warning systems** was also stressed.

Include preventative measures to reduce communities' vulnerabilities to climate and weather-related shocks and promote strong complementarity with disaster risk reduction (DRR), prevention and preparedness strategies. Tailoring solutions to regional and local circumstances and addressing the needs of vulnerable groups affected by extreme weather events is the biggest challenge that should be tackled by increasing resources for forecasting and early warning action. Red Cross EU

The **role of women in a green transition** must be addressed, and particularly the need to minimize the vulnerabilities and inequalities which women and girls suffer disproportionately from the climate crisis. Investing in **early warning programmes better tailored to gender and youth** will improve the participation of these vulnerable groups in mitigation and adaptation plans.

The Green Transition should ensure **decent work conditions**. The just transition plans of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean as well as work to meet climate change commitments must **respect human rights** and pay special attention to the creation of decent work in new and environmentally sustainable sectors that will require the conversion of workers' skills as well as respect for all labour rights associated with decent work. Support for **social protection** systems is equally important to ensure an inclusive and just transition.

There is also an imperative need to work on **just transition in agriculture**. This involves moving away from conventional chemical-based agriculture to agroecology. This presents benefits for climate adaptation, continued livelihoods for smallholder farmers (most of whom are women) and protection of agro-biodiversity and biodiversity. Promotion of agriculture-based livelihoods is key for a green and just transition. These cut across the thematic areas of Green-Blue Alliance, economic growth, climate induced-migration and sustainable jobs and growth.

Linked to policies to guarantee the land rights of indigenous populations, local communities and afro-descendants is the need to **regulate the policies and practices of private companies** (agribusiness, extractive industries and rural property), regarding access to land, natural common goods, respect for the free, prior and informed consent, and the full respect of indigenous governance and laws.

¹ Including ensuring respect of the C169 - Indigenous and Tribal Peoples ILO Convention.
https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C169



Including business and private interests in intersect oral round tables is crucial, since a green transition also requires the commitment of these actors. In our region, environmental movements, often led by young generations, need spaces for dialogue that are open, democratic and committed to green transition ... CLADE (Latin American Campaign for the Right to Education)

Land concentration by big multinational corporations, often through violence and harassment, for extractive activities that deplete natural resources, or for monocultures intensive in the use of chemicals and pesticides (...) We recommend that the EU establish a robust mechanism of accountability for European companies operating in the region. SOLIDAR

Addressing **wildlife trade as a regional approach** was advised, since it is a transnational threat, with countries acting as supplier, transit or consumer. Note that pandemics of zoonotic origins are directly related to the trade of wildlife. This area is one of the most lucrative global criminal activities, and the EU could find synergies with priority 4 (Democratic governance, security and migration) on the fight against cross-border organised crime.

Regarding **conservation of ecosystems in transnational landscapes**, the EU has identified the most important 'Key Landscapes for Conservation' in Latin America through the very comprehensive 'Larger than Jaguars' report, which outlines a strategic approach and identifies priorities for biodiversity conservation in the region. This opens the door to look into priority landscapes and seascapes that could be supported. A concrete suggestion was to have a Team Europe Initiative (TEI) for the Cuenca del Amazonas region, river waters and mercury elimination, and protection of indigenous territories.

Environmental organisations expressed concerns with the lack of direct funding for biodiversity (not contemplated in the new Global Challenges program and not expected to be financed from thematic instruments).

Furthermore, it was suggested that there was a potential for a **regional approach to linking the topics of inequalities and climate justice**, in particular when it comes to the right to access to land and natural resources, preserving traditional ways of life and preventing deforestation. In this regard, participants urged the EU to promote free access to information and public consultation on environmental topics, and protect land defenders, in particular by promoting the ratification of the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean, better known as the Escazú Agreement.

Apart from a focus on Green Transition, there should be programmes that focus on adaptation, limits to adaptation (and hence that look at loss and damage), and **more research and evidence-based programming on migration and internal displacement due to climate change** and its implications for the affected populations and their host communities. The role of climate change in contributing to migration needs to be recognised as priority, as well as the gender dimensions of migration and mobility.

Finally, the group underlined the **role of CSOs in promoting the green transition**, not just for implementation but through technical support. There was the perception that there is a reduction of what CSOs can do within the NDICI, while the EFSD+ is focused on financial institutions and private sector. Therefore, participants called for a larger role for CSOs in this mechanism too.

Beyond supporting civil society organisations, their enabling environment and building their capacity, the EU was called on to **protect environmental defenders** and indigenous peoples who are the victims of harassment and persecution in the region. This includes making the defence of human rights and environmental defenders a



priority during dialogue with national governments, promoting and defending the role of civil society and defenders as a prerequisite for any democracy.

Participants touched on existing models of support and highlighted some keyways of working that must continue for successful implementation of the RMIP. They stressed building the capacities of local actors, authorities and communities through a participatory approach. They encouraged the EU to **foster the democratic and institutionalized participation of civil society organizations**, social movements, groups and networks - including groups of students and young people - in the debate, decision-making, monitoring of the implementation and evaluation of public policies. The role of CSOs in implementation, facilitation, oversight and local knowledge was highlighted. **The inclusion of multiple actors** was again reiterated as necessary, as only by working together with all actors will a just green transition be possible.

Local CSOs are also important players to facilitate inter-agency and transboundary government-to-government cooperation. The role of local CSOs can be further strengthened and leveraged through the « digital transformation » priority of the MIP's Pan American window. Promoting equal access to digital communication will be key for strengthening participatory processes in decision making as well as to set-up goals, targets and indicators to implement the 2030 Agenda at local level. Wildlife Conservation Society

Supporting the **stability and the capacity of governments, institutions and societies** is key to guaranteeing that states develop and improve their disaster laws, and that public authorities' frameworks on disaster risk management and climate change adaptation address climate risks and the needs of the most vulnerable.

As well, participants focused on **education** and awareness raising as necessary elements, at all levels, and noted the recent recently launched Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development (May 2021).

Representatives of the EU indicated that many of the mentioned elements have been taken into account in the elaboration of the RMIP. They agreed that coherence of policies is key, and that is especially addressed at the country level. There is a regular dialogue on cross-border protection of forests, with a ministerial group, looking for solutions together. While circular economy has not been centred in the past, it is very important; as well capacity building of partners is also a priority.

Pan-American window: Priority area 2. Digital transformation and innovation

The objectives under this area are:

- i. Strengthen standardisation and regulatory and policy cooperation on issues of common interest
- ii. Develop digital backbone connectivity within the LAC region and with the EU
- iii. Foster private sector collaboration, competitiveness and innovation in the digital area
- iv. Support the development and broad use of digitally-enabled products and e-services where the EU has specific expertise

The breakout session started with a presentation of priorities (noted above) from the EEAS, explaining the EU's intention to ensure that the digital transformation focuses on people and does not deepen already existing inequalities. It was mentioned that there is already some experience in cooperation between the EU and LAC in



cybersecurity or data protection, calling attention to the June 1st 2021 **inauguration of BELLA** (Building Europe Link to Latin America), which includes a direct submarine fibre-optic cable between the EU and LAC.²

This high-speed, high-capacity and high-security cable will facilitate the exchange of information and provide support to the **EU-LAC Digital Alliance**, a new digital cooperation framework under the new MFF, set to be launched at the upcoming EU-LAC Summit. This new priority will set in motion a clear political will, already expressed in ministerial meetings, in developing a strategic partnership on data and information management.

With regards to the **first priority (strengthening standardization and regulatory and policy cooperation on issues of common interest)** the EU's added value as a key partner is based on the **EU's own Regulatory and Policy Framework**, as well as its experience in the **Digital Single Market** and the **acquis** that has been accumulated in recent years, such as the legislative initiative on the regulation of platforms, personal data protection regulation, etc. Considering that in Europe digital economies are relatively small, the EU is promoting cooperation and integration among Member States, which is a similar situation to what is currently happening in LA, where governments are making an effort to **integrate digital markets** in the region. Besides, the EU's insistence on following a rights and values approach is of interest for like-minded allies, especially in areas with **ethical aspects such as artificial intelligence or data protection**. And finally, there is a need for the development of **digital skills** to facilitate access to the labour market and the use of technology in other areas such as e-commerce.

As for the **second priority (development of a basic connectivity network within the LAC region and with the EU)**, much investment is needed, as a significant part of the population in the LAC region is yet to be connected; hence the importance of the BELLA initiative.

The **third priority (fostering private sector collaboration, competitiveness, and innovation in the digital domain)** will be pursued through **digital innovation hubs**, namely, the Digital4Development Hub, which will support business digitisation processes and will require intervening at the policy level (regulation, access to finance, etc.) as well as at the operational level (platforms to support businesses exchanges and cooperation).

Finally, the **fourth priority (support for the development and widespread use of digital products and services where the EU has specific expertise)** is already underway in areas such as the space sector, Earth observation, or in green digital services. To this end, both **Copernicus** (data) and **Galileo** (signal), the two satellite systems that are open to the public and private sector, are already contributing to developing actions in these two areas.

In all, the aim is for digital transformation to be inclusive and for collaboration to be mutually beneficial, an objective that fits neatly into the two areas discussed in the ensuing debate: 1. the most pertinent challenges to be addressed between the EU and LAC in the framework of a people-centred digital partnership and 2. how the efforts of civil society, the private sector and institutional actors can be best coordinated to support digital transformation in LAC.

Respondents stressed that **access to technology must be democratised**, promoting free software instead of corporate software, which is generating economic concentration and exclusion. To this end, social economy entities such as **cooperatives need to be strengthened to develop platforms**, as well as in terms of logistics, marketing and finance, be it at local, regional or global levels, in order to avoid the current levels of concentration.

² The 6,000km undersea cable connecting data centres from Portugal to Brazil and beyond was completed on 4 March 2021. It is important to differentiate between the BELLA programme and the EllaLink cable, which is co-funded through a public-private partnership. While the EllaLink also ensures commercial transfers, the BELLA programme provides for research and innovation cooperation between the two regions, based on a consortium composed of 11 European and Latin American research and education networks.



Moreover, there should be more work with research centres and public universities in order to promote **data sovereignty**, working on connectivity on the one hand and storage capacity on the other, both for local authorities and for organisations such as cooperatives. Participants also highlighted the importance of developing initiatives at national and regional level - such as hackathons, hack labs and other incubation spaces - to generate decent work and local IT services.

A more general question about the way in which the **connections between research and innovation** are being considered in the regional framework was raised. There are other EU programmes such as Horizon 2020 that can reinforce this priority, with INTPA coordinating with colleagues in that other field.

Participants noted how the pandemic has highlighted the link between digital transformation and the right to education. The commitment to public education must counteract the proliferation of private sector actors during the pandemic that did not necessarily **respond to education needs from a human rights perspective**. The precariousness of the teaching profession must also be taken into account, so that digitalisation is not only approached from the perspective of the labour market but also from the perspective of education and human development. Moreover, **open access to educational platforms** should be guaranteed to avoid reinforcing already existing gaps.

Promoting open government data, open contracting and freedom of information as crucial tools to improve the quality, efficiency and accountability of public services.
Action Aid

Digitalisation in the region must go hand in hand with equality of access and ensuring that it does not contribute to increasing inequalities. Oxfam

The basis should be the rights-based approach. The process of digital transformation should also be based on and mainstreamed via this approach. CLADE

The right to connectivity is a premise for achieving the Right to Education and should now be considered a mandate. With regards to the democratisation of access, the EU expects that the connectivity priority, and especially BELLA, will provide the necessary infrastructure to expand access.

In that vein, INTPA agreed on the importance of connecting different actors (within priority 3) and introduced the **D4D hub**, a key tool for the integral connection between different sectors and actors, which is looking at how to include civil society, private sector, etc. so that the members are not only states. It represents an opportunity to address issues such as education, although this is not yet clear, as the network is still in the conceptualisation and development phase.

Participants from the EEAS reminded the group that recommendations on how to articulate the work with civil society are welcome, and perhaps the digital hub is one of the spaces to promote this kind of cooperation with civil society. Since something new is being built, the EU would like it to be a process of co-construction.

Welcoming the invitation to co-create the digital sphere in the EU-LAC regional, participants insisted nonetheless on the fact that the current lack of ownership over the key platforms will endanger our attempts to make progress, as relations between users and workers are being mediated by platforms that have no roots in our own territories, social relations are being weakened (not to mention the loss of foreign currency).



It was highlighted that **the pandemic has accelerated the clock** and brought forward a transition for which we were not yet prepared. Proof of that is that the unemployment rate remains very high, while companies are looking for technology talent, so it is crucial to make science careers more attractive to the youth.

Pan-American window: Priority area 3. Sustainable and inclusive economic recovery group

The objectives under this area are:

- i. Strengthen EU-LAC trade, investment and economic relations as enablers for sustainable and inclusive economic recovery
- ii. Support LAC's transition to sustainable economic practices and value chains
- iii. Support the inclusiveness of LAC's economic recovery

Many of the group's comments, both in the discussion and in writing after the meeting, stressed the impact of the pandemic on the region, and the need to link a just recovery that addresses inequality and strengthens solidarity (i.e via cooperatives) to the environment and its protection. They stressed the need for peace, stability and solidarity to allow for recovery. Several noted the great level of inequality in the region, and the need to address this and provide social protection for the most affected and most vulnerable. "Social recovery has to have social perspective; poverty is increasing, and we cannot have a convention on economic recovery without clear principles to protect the rights of vulnerable people." Several key themes emerged:

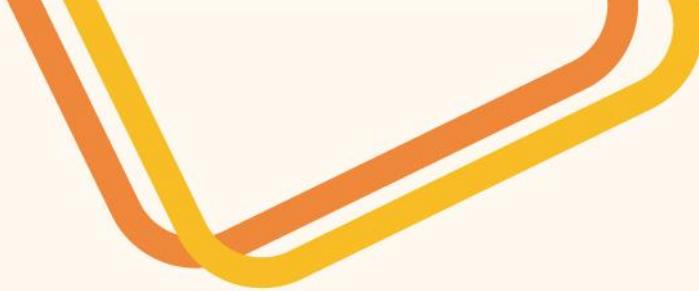
Equality and inclusion, especially gender equality, women's economic rights, inclusion of people with disabilities and promotion and protection of indigenous peoples and local communities.

The full inclusion and safeguarding of women, both as more vulnerable due to the rising sexual and gender-based violence and their increased unpaid workload during the pandemic and for their role in economic recovery, was mentioned by multiple participants.

Gender equality should be prioritized through regional strategies for economic recovery. The impacts of the pandemic on women and girls are disproportionate. The EU should be promoting proactive labour market policies that create jobs, protect women's rights and ensure safety in the workplace, including through the ratification of ILO convention 190.³ With a 30-40% increase in unpaid work in the region, it is crucial to fully realize the economic and social rights of women and girls and to strengthen women's entrepreneurship.

Reference to GAP III and linkage to the Global Europe targets should be included, including on gender equality and human development particularly. Gender-responsive policy interventions can integrate action on interlinked climate-induced crises. The role of women in resilience actions and humanitarian/crisis response should also be recognised. Action Aid

³ Ending violence and harassment at work (2019 agreement)



The EU should have as an objective strengthening women's entrepreneurship and business opportunities and reduce barriers to access financial products and services. To support an inclusive and sustainable economic recovery in LAC, the EU must have as an objective strengthening safety nets and social protection schemes, empowering women and girls, to better deal with crises and absorb economic shocks. Fostering women's inclusion throughout value chains and developing gender-specific financial products and services is a good first step. In addition to this, the EU should aim to support vulnerable value chain and economic actors' resilience and adaptation to climate change impacts, and the development of more sustainable economic practices. CARE

People with disabilities must participate in implementing all aspects of recovery; yet these organisations are not visible. The EU is encouraged to contribute to awareness raising of the role of persons with disabilities in order to support inclusion.

In discussing the need to protect the environment and biodiversity, participants highlighted the need for the protection and promotion of **indigenous peoples and local communities** in safeguarding land. An inclusive and sustainable economic recovery cannot leave behind the sectors that have been most vulnerable to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, most excluded and violated by the current market system: indigenous

and peasant populations, and especially the women who live in them.

Fundamentally a **rights-based approach** that includes a gender perspective and gender responsive policy interventions across all programming is required.

Decent work, formalisation of work, ensuring that supported sectors are respectful of environment

Economic recovery requires decent work for everyone. Decent work, and the formalisation of work, while ensuring that supported sectors are respectful of the environment. Participants noted that women face additional barriers and are overrepresented in the informal sector. It was noted that the RMIP framework should more explicitly address the social, economic and environmental causes that led to the pandemic and its impacts and the potential consequences if we do not address these aspects.

The EU is encouraged to promote sustainable economic recovery in the region via investments for the creation of decent and environmentally friendly jobs. The regional program was encouraged to support and strengthen the processes of formalizing the informal economy in accordance with ILO Recommendation 204.⁴ It is essential to consider the decent work deficits found in widely extended global production chains in the region. The countries of origin of the investments made in these chains must take responsibility for the labour rights of these workers, especially in those productive sectors that are promoted based on the principle of sustainability and respect for the environment.

A recovery of the economy in view of the pandemic requires debt management by households and by micro and small businesses. To allow for the recovery of companies and employment, debt will have to be restructured. This was especially noted in the case of micro and SMEs which are critical to economic recovery.

Participants suggested examples to learn from, including social innovation experiences.⁵ And contribute to the development of economic organizations of the Social Economy (SE), particularly cooperatives, which are

⁴ Recommendation N° 204 concerning the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy (adopted in 2015)

⁵ One example is: W4P promoted by CAIXA in which Fundación Entreculturas - Fe y Alegría participates: <https://fundacionlacaixa.org/es/programas-sociales/cooperacion-internacional/empleo/work-4-progress/que-hacemos>



intrinsically better distributors of wealth and drivers of local development, in line with ILO Recommendation 193 (2002).

Developing and promoting new livelihood opportunities and income-generating activities should be supported. Initiatives aiming at reducing energy poverty in rural areas, particularly in the field of access to energy for domestic use, should be priorities. The objective of these should be to improve livelihoods and save fuel costs as well as aim at generating income for local population.

It was noted that we also need to promote an **economy of care** and see how it can generate employment. Improvement of the care economy will help address unpaid care and impact women's participation in the economy. Participants called for social practices and fiscal, labour and public service policies that allow for the recognition, reduction, redistribution and remuneration of care work.

The recovery and the environment

The pandemic placed what was on the periphery at the centre of the debate, bringing the link between models of development, degradation of nature, and health as a priority issue. Therefore, the conservation of ecosystem health must be in focus in any sustainable and inclusive economic recovery strategy. To this end it was pointed out that reference to a 'One health'⁶ strategy is missing.

The economic recovery that is sought must be sustainable and green. We cannot return to the previous "normality" but should seize the opportunity presented by the pandemic to transform societies to be greener, fairer, more inclusive and more resilient.

... the EU Regional Programme for the Americas [doesn't] make reference to the One Health approach. Climate change, ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss, if not adequately addressed, will reverse and undermine the global public health and sustainable development gains made during the past 50 years. Addressing these critical issues constitutes the biggest development and global health opportunity of this century. Today there is consensus that the links between biodiversity and public health must address as well as go beyond tackling parasites and pathogens, to also incorporate socio-economic, evolutionary and environmental factors. Healthy wildlife and wild places – ecological health and intactness – underpin global human health. Wildlife Conservation Society

In order to do this, it is also key to understand and listen to the experience of local indigenous peoples, and to value these experiences. Multi-stakeholder, local development platforms where local actors from civil society, private companies and local governments participate, with the goal (local development) from different perspectives can contribute to the empowerment of women and young people.

In this area, participants also pointed out specific links to be made:

- Recovery, nutrition and access to land, as the situation is likely to worsen in the coming years.
- Natural disasters, such as the hurricanes and other natural disasters that are recurring, notably in Central America.
- Ensuring social and environment impact are assessed in the value chains of both consumption and production (present in food, minerals, livestock, mining). International level principles can be used where

⁶ 'One Health' is an approach to designing and implementing programmes, policies, legislation and research in which multiple sectors communicate and work together to achieve better public health outcomes. <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/one-health>



local ones do not exist; this should be considered in EU regional programming to reflect solidarity and address environmental degradation at all levels.

As the EU is the main investor in the region, efforts should be aimed at forging a more robust compliance system with internationally established environmental and social principles, good practices and standards by companies of European origin that produce in the region. In terms of actions, and thinking about valuable ecosystems such as wetlands, forests, glaciers (among others), this could be achieved through: a) the adoption of serious and respectful environmental impact assessments with the environment and local communities, b) Greater solidarity and co-responsibility in global production and consumption chains through rules of origin, certifications or seals that are integrated into the commercial chapter.

If we are talking about a green economy, it is essential that mechanisms be established to corroborate that extractive industries such as lithium exploitation do not generate irreversible impacts on Puna wetlands and on water resources, accentuating the effects of climate change in the region. It is necessary to take environmental costs into account and make a transition towards less polluting and degrading technologies of the environment. Wetlands International LAC (translated from ES)

Economic justice, progressive tax reforms and social protection

Participants pointed out the vast inequality in the region and the need for redistributive tax policies and social protection for individuals. They advocated for public policies at the national and international level to guarantee the financing of the emergency and economic recovery, promote fair and progressive tax systems, and foster international cooperation and debt relief.

Being the most unequal region on the globe, the adoption of fiscal justice mechanisms, such as progressive taxes and income redistribution initiatives, is urgent in the region. This would allow the tax base to be expanded to sustainably finance social policies and guarantee the realization of human rights. On the other hand, it is essential to create mechanisms to avoid tax avoidance and evasion, tax havens, and promote the cancellation and / or relief of debts. The EU should support the development of these instruments in LAC through cooperation initiatives.

It is essential to establish mechanisms to help the most vulnerable households, particularly due to the increase in extreme poverty because of a loss of livelihoods due to the pandemic and related restrictions. Quality provision of early childcare, public education, health and water, are crucial – alongside investments in energy, agriculture and social protection. A regional perspective on social protection could avoid major inequalities among targeted countries and populations, providing equitable access to mechanisms addressing poverty, as well opportunities for peer exchange and learning.

It was recommended that the European Union work more closely with the International Labour Organization to monitor the implementation of the different international Conventions. The reduction of labour informality, the strengthening of social protection systems and universal access to essential services must be conditions for trade agreements between the EU and the countries of the region. The EU can also support the exchange of good practices at the national level (between the countries of the region) and at the regional level (between the EU and Latin America).

The urgent need to make vaccines against Covid-19 accessible in the region, via neutralizing the patents of the vaccines and supporting the mobilization of medical supplies and medical personnel to allow rapid immunization was specifically raised.

Policy coherence: cooperation and trade policy



Throughout the discussions, participants reminded colleagues about the need for policy coherence, particularly between cooperation and trade policy. Finding alternatives to extractivist⁷ models was raised several times by participants. The current recovery plans must change past reliance. As well, investment needs to be sustainable. For example, poor practices in the renewable energy sector must be addressed and decent job creation promoted in this sector.

Specific to the framework presented, it was commented that it would be interesting to see objective 3 result 4⁸ go beyond corporate social responsibility (CSR) to look at fostering sustainable and inclusive business models.

Operationalisation

When discussing how to put all of these recommendations into practice, participants recommended support to CSOs, greater inclusion of CSOs in EFSD+ and a focus on social dialogue and multi-stakeholder dialogue, including local governments, trade unions, cooperatives, etc. There was interest in having a structured dialogue at national and regional level in order to put organisations from these two levels in touch and continue the dialogue at the national level. The need to connect all levels - national, regional and global – was emphasised. Some participants recommended using the Policy Forum on Development to identify who is who and help facilitate this dialogue, as it has existed for seven years already and has compiled experience.

In our experience, development processes promoted from social innovation go through a phase of listening to local actors, a phase to systematise pilot experiences to be implemented, and a phase to scale up, with a component of continuous evaluation and final impact. This can bring important local transformations towards the economic empowerment of the most vulnerable groups (women and youth). Fundación Entreculturas - Fe y Alegría

The possibility to facilitate the participation of CSOs in multiple areas that define regional and global governance is very important. A positive example in MERCOSUR is the Specialised Meeting of Cooperatives of Mercosur (RECM), as an institutional public-private space in the region to enhance and promote the sector. ICA (International Cooperatives Alliance)

Pan-American window: Priority area 4. Democratic governance, security and migration

The EU has set three objectives for this area of work:

- i) Democratic governance: strengthen democratic governance and enhance transparency, accountability and capacity of LAC democratic institutions.
- ii) Security: enhance the rule of law and the fight against organised transnational organised crime across the region.
- iii) Migration: Improve migration management policies and capacities, including in the areas of forced displacement, migrant protection and fight against trafficking in human beings and migrants smuggling.

⁷ Extractivism can be defined as an accumulation modality based on the large-scale exploitation of natural resources for export purposes - <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/democraciaabierta/luchas-resistencias-y-alternativas-al-extractivismo-en-am%C3%A9rica-latina-y-caribe-en/>

⁸ Socially responsible economic and business practices are promoted, in line with international principles and standards for Corporate Social Responsibility/ responsible business conduct



Starting from these objectives, the discussion and written inputs were structured around 1. the biggest challenges in the LAC region in the areas of Democratic Governance, Security and Migration; and 2. contributions of local authorities and civil society organisations, including youth organisations, which could best provide support to EU cooperation on Justice and Security in the LAC region.

Participants welcomed the maintained EU focus on the LAC region. They identified the main challenges for the region as the following:

Loss of democratic principles, especially in Central America, but also in countries like Brazil or Peru, where authoritarian tendencies are observed. The space for civil society organisations is being restricted, civic space is shrinking, and defenders of human rights and the environment are being threatened, persecuted and killed, even more so with the pandemic, with feminicides and violence against women and girls on the rise. In Colombia, for example, community leaders are being criminalised and activists have disappeared. This makes it very difficult for organisations to mobilise society. The **protection of human rights defenders** is crucial. Organisations asked the EU to be their ally on this, to provide not only funding, but also political support.

LAC stands out for being an extremely dangerous region for the defense of human rights, in particular the defense of environmental and land rights. The increasing trend of shrinking civic space weakens democratic governance and generates conditions of insecurity for defenders that, through their work, promote and seek respect and compliance with human rights and fundamental freedom. Protection International

From the perspective of LAs, the excess of centralised power in national governments is seen as a reason for weakening democracy, since policy decisions are made in small groups with no participation of other actors or administrative levels; this is known as '**caudillismo**', and it is reflected in the allocation of funding that does not address real problems of citizens. LAs see one of their roles as building the capacity of local actors to be able to address these challenges, and call for EU support to construct a strategy to do this in the region and to **allocate part of the funding that would otherwise go to central governments to CSOs/LAs**

Narcotraffic and corruption are at the heart of many of the problems in the region, closely related to the loss of democratic principles, but also to **insecurity** and overall instability of countries.

Organisations posed the question about how they can strengthen anti-corruption measures, with respect to human rights and building democracy. There is a need to enhance democratic institutionalisation (including the independence of powers) and protect human rights, to build citizens' trust in institutions.



Migration is not a new phenomenon in the region, but now, there is an externalisation of US borders to Central America, which fails to respect protection mechanisms and causes higher risk of human trafficking. And the situation in Venezuela has escalated the numbers exponentially, challenging neighbour countries that need to integrate migrants into host societies.

The reasons for people to leave vary between countries but include **climate change**, which is an **expeller factor** in communities of origin in the face of the loss of agricultural livelihoods. Therefore, **root causes of migration should be addressed at regional and also at sub-regional level**. In addition, migrants and refugees are not homogeneous populations, and treating them as such prevents taking into account their various needs and vulnerabilities that exist in the different phases of their migration process (origin, transit, destination and return). Furthermore, the lack of cross-border and regional efforts by governments to respond from a human rights rather than a national security approach makes migrants more vulnerable. Some participants said that actions and funds should not be directed towards specific nationalities, as the migration flux is mixed.

The EU should promote policy dialogue with national governments and local authorities where civil society should have a prominent role. Moreover, civil society contributes to monitoring regional and national EU policies in relation to justice and security, since CSOs are in direct contact with local communities and they know the main challenges first hand. SOLIDAR

The North of Central America (NCA) – El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras – and Mexico have been particularly affected by high poverty rates, economic hardship, job loss, domestic violence, gang criminality and limited access to basic services, also experiences environmental degradation and severe climate shocks. An early 2020 study by OCHA reports that 5.2 million people are in urgent humanitarian need, including 1.8 million people in need of protection due to the impact of chronic violence, and 3.5 million people facing food insecurity. These emergencies have exacerbated the needs and vulnerabilities generated by the pre-existing issues, increasing the need for many in the region to migrate. The Venezuelan refugee crisis also has a high impact in the region. More than five million Venezuelan refugees and migrants have left their country, of which 35% are children and adolescents. Additionally, the migrants' profile has changed in recent months, with an increase of women moving alone or accompanied by minors. Access to neighbouring territories is limited and there are increasing barriers to the access to basic services, as well as violations of fundamental rights, such as protection against all forms of violence, family reunification, identity, education, housing, health and employment rights, among others. Save the Children

Transborder policies are needed to provide health and education services to migrant and displaced populations; in particular, they are needed to address non-accompanied minors in migration flows. The EU should integrate this aspect in all of their national dialogues, focusing on the Global Compact for Migration⁹ as a shared responsibility. CSOs need to involve all actors to contribute to solutions, have a watchdog and implementation role, holding duty bearers to account.

⁹ <https://www.iom.int/global-compact-migration>



Finding and providing durable solutions to migration require cooperation among all actors with a long-term approach. The roles of CSOs in the LA continent is particularly important in addressing resilience and humanitarian activities to mitigate the crises affecting the region (for instance economic and environmental shocks), since CSOs in the region can ensure access to the most affected population and geographical areas since they have been assisting people for years as the first and often the only response. Building on their respective expertise, CSOs can play a crucial role in advocacy, coordination and promotion of accountability; and CSOs can contribute to the design of public policies, programmes and efforts to achieve safe and orderly migration in the LAC region and provide a detailed perspective on the structural causes of migration on the continent.

CSOs have a real, well-rooted and contextualised knowledge and understanding of the problems related to the suggested areas, including migration. Using their expertise in these areas is essential to designing programs and lines of work that address the real needs of affected populations, which is the end objective of the EU's cooperation.

Fundación Entreculturas – Fé y Alegría

The best guardians of democratic freedoms are civil society organizations, due to their independence and the fact that preserving an effective and open civic space is part and parcel of their political activities.

Civil society institutions provide services to victims of human rights violations by state actors who, in many cases, act under the guise of failed security strategies. Supporting the activities of these organizations working to eradicate torture, extrajudicial executions and enforced disappearances may help transition to more secure democratic environments.

In a context where governments are showing signs of democratic backsliding, it is crucial that financial support for government institutions be tied to commitments to engage civil society actors and experts in any attempt to move the policy agenda on democratic governance, security and migration.

Comisión Mexicana de Promoción y Defensa de los Derechos Humanos

A point was made to stress the fact that in Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, and the ABC islands (Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao) there is an influx of migrants from Venezuela, with evidence of human trafficking and organised crime. These countries lack the capacity to respond to this situation: institutions are not prepared to deal with these issues, and there are no policies to address this crisis. There is a gap in the Caribbean window as it does not consider a **cross-border dimension which enters the Caribbean**.

Inequality is a big challenge to democracy in the region, especially between women and men, since women are supporting their family economies and that of the country. Inequality is also at the heart of migration decisions, that are made due to the lack of opportunities and territorial inequalities. In this regard, trade unions called attention to the need to support sustainable development models that respect the right to a dignified life, decent work and a life free from violence.

It was noted that as we are not yet in the programming phase, it is not yet clear what actions will be implemented, what actions will continue and who will implement. Participants called for an alliance between the EU, CSOs and LAs to implement the RMIP strategy, have a greater impact and multi-actor political dialogue, and to strengthen the networks to reduce their vulnerability.



Pan-American window: Priority area 5. Social cohesion, human development and fighting inequalities

The objectives under this area are:

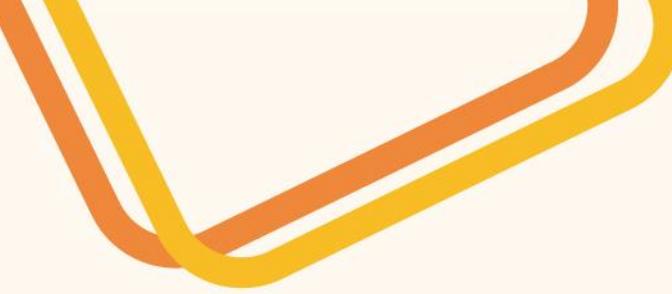
- i) Strengthening social contracts, guaranteeing inclusive participation in public policies.
- ii) Improving equitable revenue collection, effective and efficient allocation and use of public resources to finance key social sectors, reducing inequalities and addressing informality.
- iii) Strengthening systems to protect people from risks and ensure equal access to public goods and services (particularly for the most vulnerable).
- iv) Enhancing regional and bi-regional dialogue on social cohesion and inequality.

With these objectives in mind, the discussion and written inputs centred around the following questions:

- What do you see as the biggest challenge(s) in tackling inequalities and advancing social cohesion and human development at regional level? What do you see as major added value(s) in doing so at regional level?
- What contribution could civil society organisations, including youth organisations, and local authorities provide in the framework of this regional initiative? How could EU regional programmes benefit from a partnership with civil society organisations, including youth organisations, and local authorities to work on those topics at regional level?
- What type of EU initiatives at regional level in Latin America and the Caribbean would have the biggest impact on areas related to human development and fighting inequalities? How could they benefit the most vulnerable?

EU Regional programmes could reach and have an impact on the most vulnerable population in LAC if they consider the needs of the most marginalized. Presently, EU regional programmes have largely benefited the chambers of commerce across the LAC region, and whilst CARE International looks forward to engaging with the private sector in transformative programming, the engagement of the EU with the private sector in the LAC region needs to consider the needs of those most affected by inequalities, poverty, and injustice. Therefore, CARE International calls on the EU to prioritise regional programming to work with CSOs, especially women and young people that guarantee that the impact will reach the most vulnerable populations in the LAC region. CARE

The challenge of **inequalities**: the inputs from participants during the discussion, and also in writing, clearly point out to the various manifestations of inequality as the main challenge in the region. They made clear that inequalities are not only a matter of income, but also a question of gender, race and ethnicity, and "it is reflected in all aspects of daily life of Latin Americans". Therefore, this reality must be taken into account **in all phases of the programming**, and should be mainstreamed in an intersectional way, and evaluated accordingly. It is important to have **real data on social participation** and adapt programs to the different contexts. The fight against inequalities must include efforts to promote the end of all kinds of discrimination, whether based on race, ethnicity or gender. In the current situation, inequality is also blatantly expressed in the **lack of access to vaccines** for COVID-19.



Gender mainstreaming could be strengthened. Mainstreaming gender equality across programmes and supporting programmes aiming specifically at improving gender equality are an obligation for EU Delegations, the European Commission and the EEAS under the EU Gender Action Plan. Gender mainstreaming must therefore be strengthened in the regional programme for Latin America and the Caribbean and should at [a] minimum include:

- Proper mainstreaming of gender equality across all priorities. Mentioning women as target beneficiaries is not enough to mainstream gender equality. Based on the EU Gender Action Plan, EU actions must really be gender-transformative, which means they should aim at changing gender norms.
- At least one programme aiming specifically at improving gender equality in each of the windows (Pan-American and Caribbean).

IPPF (International Planned Parenthood Federation)

With regard to **gender equality**, several dimensions should be addressed:

-Health and education, specifically sexual and reproductive health. The region has a very high teenage pregnancy rates (46% in Ecuador); half of these pregnancies are unintended, and the other half are influenced by traditional gender roles. In Central America there is very restrictive legislation regarding legal access to abortion, and this puts mothers at risk and increases the mortality of women.

-Gender-based violence: there are around 15 million women who suffer gender-based violence, many of which end up increasing the numbers of unwanted pregnancies.

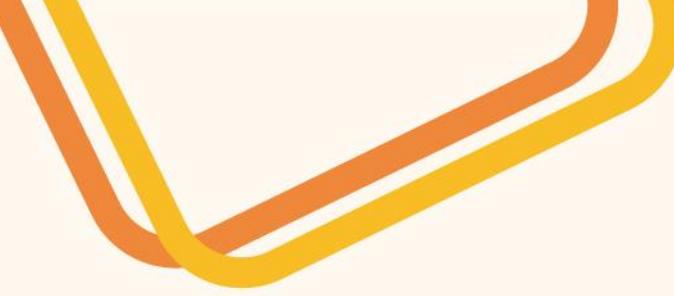
-Care labour and burden is very important and related to the previous two aspects. Promoting centres and communities of practice in the region on different issues could help. There is very little

evidence of what is working and how it can be strengthened, and the EU could contribute to generating knowledge (for example, on the issue of comprehensive sexual education, care issues, business and human rights).

Overall, the RMIP should support: the **promotion of the fundamental human rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining for all female workers; investments in care** to redistribute the burden of unpaid care work; **access to quality public services** and creation of **quality green jobs**; the **elimination of gender violence and harassment** in the world of work; and the promotion of economic, social and political **empowerment of women and girls**.

The lack of gender focus in public policies, together with a male-dominated culture in Latin America, makes decision-making non-participatory and led by men: this reinforces gender gaps. There has to be a **gender perspective** with which inequalities and social cohesion are viewed.

In addition to the inequalities challenges, in particular gender inequality, participants commented on the following aspects related to the social contract, public services and tax systems:



Social contract: Policies, even if designed in the right way, end up benefitting a minority. It is important to break these power relations, to balance them. Some organisations expressed their wish to reinforce the social contract to respond to workers' demands for jobs that are compatible with environmental protection and a just transition. A minimum of social and labour protection for workers should be guaranteed. Support to maintain better work-family balance is a challenge that must be addressed via strengthening equality, gender focus and decent work.

For the Trade Union Movement, the new social contract must respond to five demands of the workers: the creation of jobs, jobs compatible with the protection of the environment through a just transition; a minimum level of labour protection for all workers; the introduction of universal social protection; equality in relation to income, gender and race; and a more inclusive development system, allowing developing countries to truly develop their economies and ensuring fiscal systems that generate essential revenue so that governments can meet the needs of people and the planet. ITUC (International Trade Union Confederation)

Taxes and public services: The need for public services and a robust tax system to sustain these services is acute. This need will be even more acute in the aftermath of the pandemic, when a very possible wave of austerity could worsen the current situation.

To raise enough resources, tax reforms are necessary to end widespread tax evasion, the absence of taxes and to improve the ability of Latin American states to collect revenues. The EU could support tax systems' reforms, making them more equitable for society and emphasising the monitoring of business models at risk of tax evasion.

Social protection systems should be reinforced and also help formalise the informal economy. As the majority of workers are in the informal economy, this transition is fundamental to address social protection as well as decent work and gender equality. Trade unions called on the EU to support the call of the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights for a Global Social Protection Fund to provide funding and technical assistance for the implementation of social protection floors in the poorest countries.

Education: Already before the pandemic, the region had challenges of access to and continuation of education, with very complicated situations of school enrolment and retention. This reality is going to result in a wider gap in inequality in LAC. Participants recognised the importance of the commitment to education as a transformational tool in society, essential to achieving the rest of the proposed priorities (ecological transition, digitization, innovation, economic recovery, job creation, social transformation). In order for education to fulfil its potential to reduce gaps and offer opportunities, gaps must be reduced. It is urgent to invest in education systems to return to the level before the pandemic, and especially to strengthen public education systems.

Participants also highlighted the criminalization of student movements. This affects not only the right to education, but also rights of association and expression. It is a key issue in the region in the fight against inequality.

Digitalisation: digitalisation differences (or gap) are barriers that are worsening with COVID, as people who do not have access to the digital space are left out of education and other opportunities. Promoting the closing of this gap is an element of social cohesion. Related to this, access to information is also a great challenge. The amount of information circulating online is overwhelming, and some of might be false or contain manipulations.

Finally, participants commented on two big areas of relevance in the region: one related to policy coherence (trade and debt aspects), and the other related to the increasing limitations to civic space.

Policy coherence of the EU: Participants urged the EU to ensure coherence in its policies and strategies. The EU is the main commercial partner and investor in the region, and therefore has a capacity to negotiate. The EU can use its leverage in countries that do not comply with obligations. The EU has power in multilateral spaces as a



participant and a shareholder that could be used in support of CSOs and LAs demands in the LAC region.

Participants shared their concerns about the role of **corporations**, and within this debate the question of the **free trade agreements** and the impact that this has on the most vulnerable populations as well as land defenders. The EU should maximize the synergies between what is done by the EU in terms of development cooperation and free trade agreements (i.e. Mercosur). It was suggested that Free Trade Agreements could be made conditional on Social Justice « certificates » issued from the territories where goods and products are imported.

Concerns were also expressed about the impact of national debt on the most vulnerable populations, even more so in the context of the pandemic, when many states are allocating increasing percentages of budgets for the accumulation of new debt. They would like the EU to support debt alleviation.

Shrinking space for civil society, vulnerability and access to justice: Shrinking space for civil society is a concern, and with the pandemic there is less freedom, fewer possibilities to demonstrate and to protest. These are key elements of social cohesion to work on. The EU could have an added value in **opening up participation** and voice in contexts that are currently very closed. Participants urged the EU to strengthen this role.

Related to this, the situation in terms of vulnerability and **precarious access to justice** (especially for women and indigenous populations) is a significant challenge. There is a need to **improve complaint and monitoring mechanisms** regarding human rights violations. The EU should elevate these voices to progress on the 2030 Agenda. All of this has an impact on social investment in LAC countries.

To conclude, a question was raised about the **RMIP and middle-income countries**, in particular, if the criteria of the EU in terms of projects or processes applies to a middle-income country such as Mexico (being large and one of the most unequal).

Colleagues from INTPA clarified that the difference among high-income, middle-income or low-income countries correspond to a classification made by the OECD Development Assistance Committee, but that the EU is guided by need. The 2030 Agenda is a universal agenda that applies to all countries, and it is the key reference for EU international cooperation.

Caribbean Window

The objectives under this window are:

- i. Partnership 1 for a Green Deal
 - 1) The Caribbean is more resilient to the impact of climate change and natural hazards
 - 2) Caribbean countries scale up their inclusive green transition
- ii. Partnership 2 for Economic Resilience and Trade
 - 3) The Caribbean private sector grows in a sustainable manner and both partners benefit from trade opportunities of the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA).
 - 4) Common challenges in the Caribbean are increasingly addressed at regional level.
- iii. Partnership 3 for governance, security and human development
 - 5) Caribbean societies are safer, more inclusive and resilient

The discussion around the Caribbean window focused on three aspects:

1. Relevance of the 3 EU-Caribbean partnerships and the top three priority sectors for EU action within each partnership (EU added value)



2. Contributions and added value of local authorities and civil society to achieve the objectives, in particular in view of fostering gender equality and youth engagement in each of the 3 partnerships
3. Modalities to ensure articulate and active local authorities' and civil society participation at sub-regional level

The three focus areas outlined were fully supported. Participants stressed the need to reduce digital inequality and noted that **digital transformation should be transversal** across the three areas and include data for development; as well research and innovation should be throughout.

In our consultations, Local Authorities also identified, as a priority, the need for improved governance with particular emphasis on transparency and accountability. Digitisation could be a useful mechanism in this regard, in addition to its usefulness in improving efficiency of processes and operations within Local Authorities. As the level of government closest to the people investment in decentralisation and public education in nurturing the principles of democracy could present strategic entry points, reinforcing democracy at all levels, with an emphasis on social inclusion and a rights-based approach. Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF)

EU added value

There was also a call for the EU to strengthen its support for **human rights** across the three areas. Some participants requested a **focus on youth and gender**, and notably vulnerable youth groups. **Female participation** and the inclusion of women and girls throughout the regional programme was stressed as fundamental. As fewer resources are available in the region, the EU will need to see how to best engage and to be ready to meet its political ambitions. As well, the EU was reminded to uphold its development commitments in its political policies, as in the case of Haiti.

We agree on a comprehensive approach to the development of Caribbean societies centred on mainstreaming gender equality and equity and the inclusion of the most vulnerable communities and people (women, young people, the most impoverished people, people with disabilities ...). Fundación Entreculturas - Fe y Alegría

The EU must urgently and decisively contribute to overcoming the prolonged crisis in Haiti as a priority in the Caribbean region. Trade Union Confederation of the Americas

The Green Deal is one area of EU leadership, and the **EU must use its voice to leverage concerns on climate change while focusing on resilience and biodiversity conservation**. Specifically, there is a need to raise the point of developing and supporting disaster laws by governments and at EU level. As part of disaster risk reduction, investment is needed in **climate response early warning systems**. As well, the EU should promote the **protection of indigenous peoples as stewards of the natural environment**.

The EU also has a role to play in underlining the interlinkage between **climate change and security** (health, food security, conflict prevention and addressing root causes of migration, among others) and developing multi-risks strategies.

Based on a Caribbean CLGF consultation with 51 Municipal Councils and their national associations (Sept 2002-May 2021), interventions required include: capacity-building support for implementing green and local solutions to land degradation and flooding; disaster resilience, mitigation and management to cope with annual hurricanes which are increasing in intensity; public education regarding droughts and local interventions in water management; and capitalisation of local knowledge on coastal / wetland protection (mindful that Caribbean communities settle near the sea, many of which are fishing villages which are part of the food chain), to strengthen planning and mitigation measures across the region. Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF)



Economic resilience and trade are other key areas where the EU can bring its experience to bear. The need to diversify economies, and **support MSMEs** in the form of both capacity building and technical support were seen as part of an inclusive societies' strategies.

The EU also has a role to play in strengthening **governance, transparency**, and supporting the development of national policies. This includes leveraging, and if necessary, protecting from the impact of international and regional agreements on local communities and authorities. As part of its support to governance, the EU must **uphold human rights**, and notably **land rights**. This is especially important in conservation activities and protecting and promoting the role of indigenous peoples in conservation activities and community governance.

Finally, the EU can bring its experience in **convening multiple stakeholders** across multiple levels in partnership to bear to ensure equitable and sustainable development.

[The EU's] good relationship with national governments and credibility towards private sector should be spent: to ensure specific policies and legal frameworks for inclusive economic approaches, to promote vocational training, and inter-generational dialogue, to support business incubators and start-ups having inclusive strategies and reinforcing social protection mechanisms. Red Cross EU

LA and CSO added value: the session touched on the role of local authorities as key actors, even though LAs are engaged via national RMIPs in national level actions. The Pan American Development Foundation echoed the **importance of engaging with local authorities** as their insight is relevant to how programmes are designed. It was pointed out that LAs are involved in service delivery and reaching their communities, even more so during the COVID pandemic.

CSOs work hand in hand with local governments, so it is important to build in support for them from the start. CSOs in the region, notably in places with questionable democratic governance, are relied on to **identify the challenges and needs of the most vulnerable** and excluded communities.

Civil society could assist with the **dissemination of the research findings** and integration of research into projects in the area of gender equality and youth engagement. The University of West Indies (UWI) suggested that this dissemination could be done through artistic expression by grassroot organisations, which could influence a change in behaviour and attitude towards these topics. They also suggested youth engagement through sport as equally important as through culture and performing arts.

Modalities/funding: there was a clear call to support **access to funding** for smaller CSOs. The difficulty in accessing programming that is already in place was mentioned; there are concerns around the size and difficulty of managing grants (which are not accessible to smaller organisations). Some participants noted that sub-granting works well and that direct grants to CSOs are important to fund action research projects involving CSOs, the public and private sectors. In order to ensure the important engagement of gender and women organization's involvement, democracy and human rights funds, a suggestion was made to have **several different grant sizes**. In addition to funding, **capacity building** specifically for private sector organisations to increase engagement.

As well, the essential role of **networking** was touched upon by different participants. It was deemed essential to support CSOs with international networking, as accessing international organisations is important for regional actors. An **informational network** to share best practices amongst LAs and CSOs was suggested. This could help the visibility of LAs, which tend to fall in the cracks between national and regional programming. **Spaces for dialogue** and collaboration should be fostered, promoting regional initiatives that take into account the specificities and similarities of each context.