

Concept note on CSO-LA Consultation on  
Inclusive Multilateralism

13 September 2021  
13:30h - 16:00h CET

## Background

In February 2021, a **Joint Communication on strengthening the EU's contribution to rules-based multilateralism** was issued. The Communication calls for a truly inclusive multilateralism, where "the voices of civil society, the private sector, social partners and others count." In order to outline how this could be done in practice, and respond to a strong interest by civil society, including private sector associations, and local authorities to be associated to the future work pertaining to the roll-out of the Communication, a consultation on **inclusive multilateralism** is organised by the Directorate-General for International Partnerships of the European Commission (DG INTPA) and the European External Action Service (EEAS), in collaboration with the Policy Forum on Development (PFD).

The timing of this consultation broadly matches the **UN Secretary General's Report on "Our Common Agenda"** launched following the adoption of the political declaration on the occasion of the UN's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary and that will be formally presented on 10 September.

## Methodology

The meeting will bring together EU officials and representatives from CSOs and LAs networks from Europe, regional and global levels. The aim will be to consult participants about the Inclusive Multilateralism agenda, and allow space for questions and comments.

The 2.5 hours event will introduce the main rationale and objectives of the Inclusive Multilateralism agenda, followed by a session for clarification questions, suggestions and contributions from participants.

Written comments by participants will be gathered until 20 September 2021.

## Agenda

<b>13:30 – 13:45:</b>	Introduction by moderator followed by Video message by Commissioner Urpilainen and welcome remarks
<b>13:45 – 14:00:</b>	Presentations of the Joint communication on strengthening EU's contribution to rules-based multilateralism and its follow-up process
<b>14:00 – 14:20:</b>	Presentation of the UN's "Our Common Agenda" Process - UN Representative
<b>14:20 – 15:50:</b>	Plenary discussion to take place structured around the guiding questions (see below)
<b>15:50 – 16:00:</b>	Wrap up and conclusion

## Concept

We are at a juncture where we have a surplus of multilateral challenges but far too often a deficit of multilateral solutions. There are many complex and inter-twined reasons behind this situation. Emerging players, with competing visions and agendas are creating new dynamics, and relations between major powers are often confrontational and unilateralist. Development models based on a top-down approach are challenging inclusive, bottom-up governance systems. Global democratic backsliding has seen a shrinking of civic and political space. At the same time, strong non-state actors, such as digital platforms and multinationals, are increasingly shaping norms that influence or sidestep traditional channels of oversight and participation.

Rising inequality is straining the social contract between state and citizen, undermining social cohesion and trust in democratic systems. Economic and political inequalities are closely intertwined – and the distorting impact of ever higher concentrations of wealth can be felt globally. This is combined with an overall feeling of disconnection of citizens from all levels of governance that affects the legitimacy of the current multilateral set-up.

The COVID pandemic has deepened and accelerated many of these negative developments, making inclusive governance ever more elusive for the vast majority of citizens. In this context, as we deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and think of its aftermath, we need to rethink the foundations and core values underpinning collective action. We need to ensure that global recovery accelerates efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, gets back on-track towards the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement, and uses multilateralism and multilateral cooperation to help deliver critical global public goods.

With the Joint Communication on strengthening its contribution to rules-based multilateralism, the EU has set a vision that supports these objectives and spells out its long-term multilateral agenda. This comprises the ambition of ensuring that the multilateral system, with the UN at its centre, is fit for purpose and reinvigorated – through reform, through focus on addressing new areas that have been escaping global governance, and of course through new forms of partnership.

The EU is therefore committed to work towards ensuring truly inclusive multilateralism, where the voices of civil society, the private sector, local authorities, social partners, academia, independent media and other key stakeholders count. It is also working on enlarging inclusive formats of engagement on multilateralism, including its own future framework as illustrated by the ongoing process of the Conference on the Future of Europe. Inclusive formats like this are a crucial part of ensuring the relevance of the multilateral system and preserving its legitimacy. Meaningful participation of traditionally overlooked groups, including women and youth, is paramount. Digital technologies can be used to connect and amplify the voices of the most marginalised.

The EU wants to shape this in tandem with the many stakeholders it works with, especially as the notion is dynamic, multifaceted and requires engagement across the board. It is the subject of active debates and varied visions. Beyond those that see multilateralism as the reserved business of states, there have been calls for 'inclusive, networked multilateralism', 'project-based multilateralism', 'building of coalitions' as well as ad hoc historical or more recent pilot multi-stakeholder approaches.

In particular, the UN75 Declaration, follow-up, whereby the UN Secretary General was mandated to produce a report offering recommendations to advance 'Our Common Agenda', has initiated an important process of reflexion geared towards more networked, effective and inclusive multilateralism, drawing on civil society, cities, businesses, local authorities and more and more on young people. This included a global conversation (global listening exercise) that reached more than a million people around the world, with a special focus on the voices

of youth. The listening is the first step – of equal importance will be ensuring that these voices concretely shape agendas and contribute to setting priorities, also beyond the UN in other multilateral fora.

Work around inclusive multilateralism is strongly linked to other inter-related critical agendas, including the future of digital governance and reflexions around the future of democracy, including for example the upcoming US-hosted Democracy Summit, to name but a few. Such initiatives can be a practical demonstration of inclusive multilateralism, underlining the importance of working with like-minded partners - of all sizes - to promote universal principles and values.

The discussion in this session aims to explore participant experiences of engagement in multilateralism in various settings, including UN, EU and regional processes, with the goal of learning how we can concretely work to implement the agenda of inclusive multilateralism. With this in mind, the session is structured around the following guiding questions:

- ***What are the priority areas and processes for more inclusive multilateralism? Who are the key stakeholders?***
- ***Based on your experience in engaging in multilateral settings, how can we all advance the agenda of inclusive multilateralism both within and beyond the United Nations?***