Report of the 2023 Global PFD Meeting
Multistakeholder partnerships for building a better future:
The quest for equality and opening up civic space in the context of Global Gateway

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Introduction

This is a summary report of the 10th anniversary global meeting of the Policy Forum on Development (PFD) which took place in Brussels, September 27-29, 2023. The meeting brought together more than 145 representatives from civil society organisations (CSOs) and associations of Local Authorities (LAs), the private sector, Member States and representatives from the European Institutions, along with development experts as speakers and moderators. Participants celebrated the contributions made by the PFD to EU development over the past decade and focused on the value of multistakeholder partnerships in fighting inequalities and opening civic space.

Overarching key messages

Data is key – who collects it, how it is collected and used, the accuracy, disaggregation, transparency, etc. of data are all crucial aspects. Data is fundamental to evidence-based research, awareness-raising, policy and advocacy. In an age of digitalization, data and its safeguarding and accurate use become even more important.

Address systemic change remains fundamental to meeting our development goals. This means addressing power imbalances at all levels and maintaining a long-term vision. In the view of participants, bottlenecks that slow the reduction of inequalities, are:

These are systemic issues that take time to overcome.

Be inclusive of all actors. This was stressed beyond civic space and mentioned specifically in working with migrant groups, digital strategies, urban strategies and to address intersectionality. Include all viewpoints to ensure meaningful engagement, but also proper strategies that put people and planet first. Many participants noted local specificities, which reinforce the need for local inclusion. Private sector is not homogeneous, and small and collective enterprises merit more support. Workers need to be at the table and part of social dialogue in an open civic space; local women's organisations need more funding and recognition. **"Nothing for us without us."**

Inequality is multi-dimensional and intersectional. One of the two themes of this PFD meeting was fighting inequalities. We talked about changing paradigms away from economic-only measurements and many referenced the EC's inequality marker. We looked at inequalities through the lens of climate (where women are not adequately included in policy approaches); migration (where inequality is a cause and a consequence); digitalisation (where the digital divide is worsening for some); and urbanization (where service delivery is not enough, but housing, public transport, infrastructure and economic inclusion,

including embracing informal businesses need to be tackled, and including all partners as equals is needed).

Lack of understanding and respect for "what works" in local communities can create greater inequalities. We heard examples regarding land ownership and productivity, raised in discussions of migration, climate, and urban expansion. We specifically heard about international trade rules and practices that undermine traditional practices and thereby increase inequality and endanger food sources (removal of limits on land holding size and requirements for pasteurization of milk, for example). Policies to support the climate, for example, must be related to the socio-economic needs of communities and not used to displace indigenous communities.

Social justice and solidarity must be strengthened. Current political systems tend to increase inequalities in and between countries. There is limited sense of community in climate action or other areas, as exemplified by the **increasing debt** that developing countries are incurring.

The **balance between rights and obligations** in a democratic state has not been found. Participants reiterated the need for rule of law, democracy, accountability, and transparency to counterbalance the state. This is fundamental to protecting civic space, which many participants associated with 'free' space, as seen when asked for associations with civic space:

A focus on youth engagement in this PFD highlighted the need to **increase youth support and attention via funding and mentoring.** This means including youth as equal partners in concrete actions to achieve the SDGs, and ensuring diverse youth representation in **EU-funded programmes and support youth local leaders programs.**

Opening Session

Marlene Holzner, Head of Unit for Local Authorities (LAs), Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) & Foundations, International Partnerships (INTPA) at the European Commission (EC), kicked off this first physical meeting after a four-year hiatus with a call to celebrate the contributions of the PFD over the past decade.

Keynote speaker, **Jutta Urpilainen,** Commissioner for International Partnerships at the European Commission looked back over the PFD's achievements acknowledging that it has: *"grown into a model of collaboration, dialogue and partnership and has brought the EU together with those who have eyes and ears on the ground in the communities around the world – you!" "We make a difference together,"* she stated. She thanked participants of the PFD for their ongoing commitment and noted that the PFD has more work to do in *"charting a bold path forward."* The Commissioner pointed to three areas as priorities: **getting the sustainable development goals (SDGs) back on track;** reducing **inequalities** and ensuring no one is left behind; and rolling out the new **Global Gateway Strategy.** She reasserted the role of CSOs and LAs in the implementation of the Global Gateway. *"We must recommit to inclusivity, cooperation and a shared vision for a better world. This forum should be an illustration of these principles,"* she concluded.

Tanya Cox, Director of CONCORD and PFD Civil Society Organisations Co-Chair, explained how the pandemic should have taught us two important lessons on **solidarity** and **taking a systemic approach** and yet we are still peddling backwards when it comes to SDGs. On **taking a more systemic approach,** she said that geopolitics shouldn't be *"competition, but more about solidarity, mutual respect and cooperation"* to **strengthen equality** and **civic space around the world.** **Fabrizio Rossi,** Director, PLATFORMA and PFD Local Authorities Co-Chair, pointed to the **important role of local democracy** as a starting point for all civic engagement. With reference to the 10th anniversary, **Izabella Toth,** Director, Institutional Fundraising and Donor Relations at Cordaid and former PFD member, commended the Commission for its **foresight ten years ago** and on what was back then a new approach for development. Another founding member, **Jean-Pierre Elong-Mbassi,** Secretary General, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) Africa, noted that the PFD has more work to do to shift the mindset and become a real **partnership for development and space for a true dialogue.**

Erica Gerretsen, Director of Human Development, Migration, Governance & Peace (DG INTPA, EC), gave an update on the EU's policy and programmes designed to fight inequalities and protect civic space. The **Global Gateway** supports the economic development of local communities and requires an open civic space. She stressed the importance of dialogue at country level and urged participants to engage with the Global Gateway's different areas of partnership. The **Inequality Marker** shows the EU's commitment to the inequality agenda and to track all EU actions to reduce the gap. At the same time, the EU **Global Health Strategy** helps to ensure universal health coverage around the world.

Opening up civic space: Democracy under threat: During this plenary session moderated by **Marianna Belalba Barreto,** Research Lead, Civic Space Research Cluster, CIVICUS, the panel shared regional updates on the state of play of civic space. The global trend points to a civic space under attack with an increasing number of people living in "closed" countries and many others appearing on the watch list. **Wars and conflicts;** socio-economic factors and **increasing poverty;** and the **shifting geopolitical aspects** with countries jostling for power contribute to restricting civic space. **Susana Eróstegui,** Executive director, Unión Nacional de Instituciones para el Trabajo de Acción Social (UNITAS) and PFD member from Bolivia,

explained the rising tide of **populism** is the cause of **polarization** and of the erosion of civic space in Latin America; persecution and assassination of human rights defenders, proliferation of parastatal organisations, and civil society self-censorship is rising. Civil society in the region has power and that scares governments. She also highlighted the plight of **indigenous communities,** who are becoming stronger in their fight against discrimination. Finally, she noted **criminality** and the **serious issue of drug trafficking** in the region and its effect on civic space.

Citing the situation in the Arab region **Ziad Abdel Samad**, Executive Director of The Arab NGO Network for Development (AAND) and PFD member from Lebanon, noted the trend to put restrictions on civic space: "*The more civil society takes a transformative role, the more aggressive is the reaction from government and the traditional non-state actors that oppose transformation and democratic development*". In many Arab countries, despite having legal frameworks that protect human rights, **physical violence**, arrests, intimidation even assassinations are meted out against civil society. The **space for women and girls** to speak up and be heard **is shrinking fast**, especially on the African continent. **Babacar Ndiaye**, Research and Publications Manager at WHATI in Senegal, talked of the two to three-year period of **deterioration of civic space** in West Africa for the majority. Despite this, young Africans were turning to social media to defend democracy.

Including **youth** and young adults in discussions could help keep civic space open. **Vaida Aleknavičienė**, Deputy Mayor of Joniškis in Lithuania, highlighted youth were a particular focus in Lithuania with youth councils in most municipalities providing a safe space for 14-16-year-olds to express their opinions. She pointed out that **local democracy** is the basis for a healthy and strong democracy so **free, open and safe channels** are crucial as this is where civic dialogue happens. **Chiara Adamo**, Head of Unit for Gender Equality, Human Rights & Democratic Governance (DG INTPA, EC), agreed with the inclusion of youth as young people still preferred the democratic model but she cautioned that *"these same people [youth] are ready to give up the governance model if it does not deliver."* **The EU's key priorities** for opening civic space include **prevention** by monitoring early warning signs and providing swift support. **Capacity building and dialogue with civil society** including through the Framework Partnership Agreements can support journalists and promote freedom of expression and assembly. She also noted that **civic space is shrinking for specific groups** more than others, highlighting **women** and the need to fund more local women's organisations, support youth inclusion, and ensure the protection of human rights defenders. There was also a reminder from several African participants of the need to adhere to the [Maputo protocol](#).

The quest for equality: Speakers from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the EU shared their experiences of the threats that increasing inequalities pose to our civic space and, ultimately, democracy. **Eppu Mikkonen (Finnish Development NGOs, Fingo)** moderated this plenary panel, pointing out the intersection of **inequality** and the **climate crisis** is not only a moral or technical issue, but a political one. Lack of data to measure differentiated impact on different people makes inequalities invisible. Tackling inequalities forces us to do things differently. **Azra Sayeed**, Chairperson for Roots for Equity in Pakistan, said we are witnessing a new colonial state, and identified root causes of inequality as "*the plunder of our natural resources*" and the fact that some people are considered 'better' than others. **Sustainable production and consumption** are the way forward, and we must **question the economic model** (e.g., privatization and trade liberalization) that has brought us to this point. **Marita Gonzales**, Advisor at the Confederación Global de Trabajo in Argentina, talked of the **burden of debt** as a huge issue perpetuating inequalities and condemning Argentina – *"the most indebted country in the world"* – to a century of poverty.

She pointed to the intersection of gender and race in inequalities, and the key role women would play in the reduction of inequalities. For unions, minimum decent salaries, social dialogue and strong social protection systems are the tools to address inequalities. **Jean Pierre Elong-Mbassi** felt a **rethink of global governance and finance** was needed and called for the **private sector** to take a greater role in achieving the SDGs.

Gabriella Fesus, Head of Unit for Social Inclusion & Protection, Health & Demography (DG INTPA, EC), presented the EU priorities for tackling inequalities which include: working with partners on **digitalisation for a fairer transition**, supporting partner countries in establishing **social protection systems** and **scaling up private sector investment** through the **Global Gateway**. The Inequality Marker would help to measure inequality reduction. Action Plans on Gender and on Youth were also in place to tackle inequalities. Education is also a priority for the EU with a target to channel 10% of total spending into education.

Participants speaking from the floor felt that if politicians' interests continue to be different from the peoples' interests, there will always be inequality. **Social justice is missing** and pushing us towards inequality. Another attendee emphasized that the choice of word "inequality" is wrong and that we should be focusing on "**inequity.**"

Opening up civic space: During this session, moderated by **Marianna Belalba Barreto** (CIVICUS), speakers discussed the roles of national human rights institutions and the EU in supporting CSOs and LAs in the context of a shrinking civic space. It was followed by participants working in smaller groups to make recommendations to enlarge civic space.

National human rights institutions are the "watch dogs" created to monitor government's respect for human rights and protect human rights defenders, explained **Sille Stidsen**, Department Director, Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR). These institutions also reach out to civil society, raise awareness, build bridges with the local authorities and open the door to more dialogue. She called for **solidarity** to protect human dignity, equality, justice and environmental stability.

EU priorities for CSO/LA and the enabling environment, as presented by **Camilla Lombard,** Deputy Head of Unit for Local Authorities, Civil Society Organisations & Foundations (DG INTPA, EC), include **policy dialogue with local authorities and civil society** and **promoting an enabling environment.** A new EU **System for an Enabling Environment for Civil Society** (EU-SEE) aims to **strengthen** civil society, **prevent** deterioration, and **promote** a sustainable enabling environment. This new system consists of a monitoring tool and **Early Warning Mechanism**, and a **rapid and flexible support mechanism** for CSOs to react swiftly to deteriorating situations. It pays particular attention to vulnerable groups such as youth and women and will work specifically with local CSOs. CSOs would be able to design their own projects; subgrants would start around the second half of 2024. *"The 50 million euros really shows our commitment to supporting civic space, making it work and having effect on the ground,"* she explained.

Towards multi-stakeholder action and collaborative climate and green transitions:

Kicking off this session, moderator **Maureen Olyaro** Program and Policy Manager at FEMNET, Africa called for the transition to be **"gender just"** in which **girls and women** have a voice and their unpaid and informal work is recognized. Participants added that to be gender just they must have **access to finance** as green tech is expensive and highly protected through patents and contracts. A just transition should also **address the inequalities in power and wealth distribution** so we can move towards more affordable and renewable energy solutions. **Indigenous peoples** must be heard and **local knowledge** taken into account. For **Boitumelo Molete**, consulting policy coordinator at the Congress of South African Trade Unions, a just transition has to be **inclusive of social protection measures for all workers** with decent jobs and wages, accessibility to education, the possibility to upskill and reskills the workforce, and it should **address energy poverty.**

Polina Blinova, Youth and Europe Coordinator, Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN), Denmark, felt youth had been let down. **Imposing taxes or carbon credits and offsetting was not enough** as companies continue to emit greenhouse gases without consequences. **Niclas Gottmann,** Policy Officer, Unit for Environment and Land and Sustainable Natural Resources (DG INTPA, EC), explained how the EU interpretation of green transition is anchored in the Green Deal, a human rights-based approach and trying to make partnerships as inclusive as possible. He gave specific examples of work in arid zones in agroforestry, aiming to create organic fertilisation capacity and securing economic access, and in the forestry sector in Ivory Coast with a focus on gender equality, for example.

From the audience, some participants pointed to the corruption that exists in climate finance and appealed to CSOs to create more transparency in the process. The **increasing debt** in developing countries was a recurring theme throughout the three days. In the context of the climate transition, Boitumelo Molete expressed concern that the loans and grants provided under the Just Energy Transition Plans (JETPs) were pushing developing countries further into debt. **Workers need to be at the table** and part of the dialogue in an open civic space, especially for such investment decisions.

Speakers and participants pointed to the need to **democratise the language** and **emphasise local realities**. A just transition is aimed at **leaving no one behind** at its core.

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Recommendations on climate and green transitions:

- Raise greater awareness **on youth climate initiatives both big and small.**
- Provide more support **(e.g., education, training and exchange programmes) to youth to tackle climate change and climate migration.**
- Support the development of democratic youth movements **across the world and target support at different levels.**
- Measure the growth and impact **of youth climate programmes.**

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Driving change and building partnership in the urban context: **Javier Sanchez Cano**, Coordinator at the Organización de Regiones Unidas/ Foro global de Asociaciones de Regiones (ORU Fogar) in Spain, moderated this session on urbanization and opened with a reminder that cities are the biggest consumers of energy and other precious resources, and with the fast-paced, unplanned urbanisation around the globe *"cities are both the problem and part of the solution."*

> **Puvendra Akkiah's ten suggestions for bringing about change at city government level:**
>
> **1**. Reskill the workforce to adapt to the ever-changing dynamic; **2**. review policy for an enabling environment; **3**. reinvest in mechanisms and tools for city-level data sets; **4**. recommit to meaningful participation; **5**. reinforce multi-level governance; **6**. incorporate local, traditional and indigenous knowledge in repositioning cities as centres of excellence; **7**. replicate international good practice in the local context; **8**. ensure the free flow of information and technologies between cities; **9**. be relentless in the pursuit of integrated planning across the board; and **10**. review the funding and financing mechanisms.

Puvendra Akkiah, Integrated Development Plan Manager, City of eThekwini, Durban, South Africa, presented a case study of his city, eThekwini in Durban, and how it had to be replanned after the end of apartheid. Service delivery alone does not **equate with improved quality of life**; people expect and need decent housing, good public transport and the infrastructure to support it, more jobs, cultural and religious freedom. Any transition requires **all partners working together as equals, and the inclusion of all communities is also a means of influencing policy. Transport** was key in transforming disadvantaged areas but also a challenge, the biggest of which was: *"Navigating the relationship between private operators and public service providers."* **Economic inclusion** was also a top priority, particularly to **address and embrace informal businesses**, as was leveraging the huge potential of tourism as an economic driver as well as innovation particularly in creating jobs for the many unemployed youth.

Farooq Ahmed, Bangladesh Employers' Federation, also believed that **financing mechanisms to manage local government finances are essential** as is a **sound healthcare system** and **law enforcement**. Civil society should be involved in the decision-making and *"must remember that the urban exists alongside the rural."*

Mariam Al Jaajaa, General Manager, The Arab Group for the Protection of Nature (APN), presented the **perspective of the Arab region**, which is rapidly urbanizing. Various factors can be attributed to this mass move to urbanisation including population increase, climate change and systematic conflicts.

The Arab world is hosting one third of the world's refugees, mostly in urban areas. Some loans have conditionalities on reducing agricultural investment. The effects of the **removal of caps on land holding sizes** has also had a negative impact, dispossessing farmers of their land and forcing them to move to urban areas as they can no longer compete with real estate and investors. The increasing urbanisation is also forcing agriculture to less productive lands, where **more water is required to grow crops**, which is not sustainable in the long run.

Lars Gronvald, Head of Urban Sector, Unit for Sustainable Transport & Urban Development (DG INTPA, EC), noted the key takeaway that *"finding inclusive solutions […] so that the local population can see the benefits."* He pointed to the importance of integrated planning to ensure services e.g., transport, water, energy, reach all inhabitants, but acknowledged the challenges and increasing inequality in cities, as exemplified by large areas of informal settlements.

Participants raised issues about how to address the needs of diaspora and migrant communities in cities, as well as how to ensure inclusive transport for persons with disabilities. As well, the importance of youth employment was brought up and the effects of sexual violence in cities on other rights (work, education, leisure, health, etc).

Towards a sustainable and inclusive digital transformation: This session, moderated by **Paula Martins**, Social and Environment Justice Programme Manager for the Association for Progressive Communications in Canada, shed light on the increasing inequalities due to digitalization, while hearing proposals that could close the digital gap.

Civil society is promoting an approach that puts **people at the centre of digital transformation**, ensuring no one is pushed even further behind, while building on a more harmonised vision for implementing sustainable alternatives. The key components of the EU approach to digitalization, as highlighted by **Grazvydas Jakubauskas**, Policy Officer, Unit for Science, Technology, Innovation & Digitalisation (DG INTPA, EC), include a human centric approach for **accessible, affordable, inclusive, reliable** and **secure digital connectivity**. The **inclusion of civil society** is crucial to prevent harmful use of technologies: cybercrime, cyberbullying, online harassment, fake news, absence of privacy, abusive use of Artificial Intelligence and other negative effects on society. **Nicolas Dimarco**, Cooperator, Federación Argentina de Cooperativas de Trabajo de Tecnología, Innovación y Conocimiento (FACTTIC), Argentina, explained the situation in Argentina, where **inequalities have even increased** due to digitalisation. *"The new commodity is data but technology risks to intensify inequalities,"* he said, recommending that **everyone gets basic internet access** and that **free hardware and software** is readily available for all. **Celine Colucci**, General Delegate, Les Interconnectés, France, also agreed that everyone needs access to the internet but **computers and smartphones are expensive and infrastructure is not in place** everywhere. LAs can often find solutions at the local level, bringing different players together for a targeted approach to the problem but they need to develop their own capacities to face the challenges.

Mardiya Siba Yahaya, researcher, Uganda digital feminist collective, picked up on the **need for data and quantitative metrics to measure the impact** of digitalisation on communities and suggested that CSOs could play a key role in assessing the impact, but that cultural gaps often prevent them from engaging. Lack of or short-term funding and resources also hamper progress in the digital agenda.

When it comes to technology there is **no one-size-fits-all solution** to suit everyone, and final users should be involved throughout the whole technology development process and capacitated.

Participants engaged in the discussion, noting that **digital literacy** in India with its 300 different languages was a challenge further widening the **gender divide**. **Digital marketing is not understanding women's products or interests** and is mainly in English, meaning women and girls are often left behind. It was recommended that **funding for women in the informal economy** should be increased to provide training on how to use technology for their work. Reacting to this point panellist Mardiya Siba Yahaya also acknowledged the **tech biases** particularly against **women**. In addition, **with rural communities** around the world still not connected, the potential for **women** and **youth** to become more tech savvy goes untapped. One participant advocated for **universal design** as he recalled the issues faced by many users with disabilities. He cited the case of children who were taught remotely with tablets during Covid-19 and how this excluded those youngsters who could not use tablets due to intellectual impairment.

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Recommendations to address the digital divide included:

- Conduct **targeted advocacy** that recognizes and addresses power dynamics and the harm caused by digitalization.
- Adopt a **holistic approach** from problem-framing to inception, design, implementation and even governance; and **include all communities** throughout the process.
- Ensure digital justice through **open source, free software**/technology; and provide **internet access and training for all**.
- **Include women in the design of new technologies**, to respond to their needs and realities and ensure the protection of women and girls in social media and online spaces.
- Continue **capacity building for youth** in emerging technologies.

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Framing migration on justice and human rights: Opening this session moderator, **Stephanie Winet**, GFMD Business Advisory Group, International Organisation for Employers, invited all stakeholders to come together to shift the narrative to one that is more positive and balanced. **Aaron Ceradoy**, CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE), Asia (PFD member), set the context, explaining how present-day **migration rests on inequality** because far from promoting equality, migrant workers end up doing "DDD jobs" (dirty, difficult and dangerous) while living precarious lives. The PFD is a start but it remains a struggle for migrants to advocate for change. Policy should address these gaps to unleash the full potential of people; only inclusion of migrants in the discussion will make this happen.

Glorene Das, Executive Director, Tenaganita, Malaysia, reminded the group that *"Migration has a woman's face,"* adding that data shows that women actually move more often than men. This "feminization" coupled with a lack of labour migration policy **forces women into precarious and exploitative situations** (e.g., poor living and working conditions, excessive hours) in which many are trafficked, unprotected and excluded from basic workers' rights. **Migrants are not criminals** and should not be treated as such. More **engagement with the private sector employers** is needed to develop better policies, including understanding rights to unionize.

Pefi Kingi, Coordinator, Pacific Womens Indigenous Network, Pacific Island Association of Non-governmental Organisations (PIANGO) (PFD member), highlighted the issue of **climate migrants.** She urged participants to listen more to **youth** and find legally binding obligations to protect planet and people. At the heart of climate displacement are the **indigenous voices**, who should be heard. We heard from **Neila Akrimi**, Head of strategies and networks, VNG International (Agency of International cooperation of the association of Dutch municipalities), that **cities are the frontline in managing migration flows** and the "*battle*" in dealing with human mobility "*will be won or lost in cities.*" This is why **LAs are so important** in reviewing, influencing and changing national regulation for a **better legal framework** that works in practice. Migration is and will remain a priority for the EU (Camilla Hagstrom, Deputy Head of Unitfor Migration & Forced Displacement (DG INTPA). **Inclusive partnerships among equals** are the way forward with a **whole-of-society approach** in which civil society, including migrants, sit together with CSOs, LAs and the private sector to discuss and agree on common objectives.

PFD members agreed that youth must be included into the migration discussion. As well, criminalisation of migration must be avoided, as it feeds the negative narrative that migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are a security threat. There was a plea from participants to **make displacement safer** especially for women, young girls and children. Others pointed to a change in **legal frameworks** in line with migrant needs. To do this, **migrants should have a seat at the table** to discuss any policy changes that affect their future.

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<p align="center" style="color:#e8833a;">Recommendations on migration included:</p>

- Address the challenges of migration in arrival countries with an **all-of-government approach.**
- Provide **specific funding** to support inclusion and integration of migrants.
- Work on **jointly agreed priorities** (such as job creation) to improve cross-community relations.
- Adopt an **inclusive approach to decision-making** and ensure all voices can be heard in the social dialogue.
- Truly listen to civil society.
- Design migration policies that **protect women and girls,** that guarantee respect for their rights.

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Addressing Intersectional and Multi-Dimensional Inequalities: The last session of day two, moderated by **Elkin Velasquez**, Regional Director, Latin America, UN Habitat, centred on the policy recommendations to raise awareness and create change among decision makers to put people and planet first.

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People's economics (presented by Liza Maza)

1. Everyone who wants work has work
2. Farmers have land
3. Schools and hospitals are free
4. Affordable houses
5. Public water, electricity and transport
6. Air clean and water clear, countryside lush and green
7. Communities care for one another

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Liza Maza, Spokesperson, Council for People's Development and Governance (CPDG), Philippines, explained "people's economics" and then described the success of the **indigenous Austronesian people** in southern Philippines in empowering their own community through education and training before the current authoritarian regime clamped down, even killing some teachers. Recognition by local authorities led to the Department of Education accrediting their education system.

Mirai Chatterjee, Chairperson, Self-employed Women's Association (SEWA), India, explained that rallying workers around a common goal is essential, although uniting people across caste and class presents enormous challenges in India. Exercising the **three 'Ps: patience, persistence and perseverance** had helped her organization to make headway. She stressed the need to create evidence and make sure all voices are heard at all levels. **Anne Marie Ndayisaba**, City of Gitega, Burundi, gave the example of a series of projects led by French-speaking mayors aimed at the **economic empowerment of women with low- to middle-incomes** and **reducing inequalities**. A combination of skills training and awareness raising and the creation of cooperatives have succeeded in advancing equality, while continually learning from the challenges that arise. **Philippe Latriche**, Advisor SDGs & Inequalities, (DG INTPA, EC), recommended being systemic and systematic. This systemic approach should be applied to all levels: assess the impact of policies on inequalities; raise the issue at international institutions, conventions and fora; and apply the assessment (now with the recently adopted inequality marker) to all EU operations in partner countries and in its own EU domestic policies.

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<p align="center" style="color:#e07820;">Recommendations to decrease inequalities:</p>

- **Be systemic and systematic** in dealing with inequalities with an integrated and holistic approach, and ensure a multi-stakeholder perspective with civil society and LAs in the dialogue.
- Address shifting inequalities through **adaptative responses** and a multi-faceted understanding of the impact of actions, and in a timely manner.
- Invest in **accessible, timely, disaggregated data** specific to all the socio-economically disadvantaged groups, to expose existing inequalities and the impact of policies and interventions.
- In co-creating in partnership, apply a **human rights-based approach** to development with democratic and inclusive policy making.
- More **accountability** both for government, as the primary duty bearer allocating resources for people, and for the private sector who are partners in development.
- **Support more small- and medium sized enterprises** rather than big corporates as SMEs make a greater impact locally.
- See **LAs as valuable partners** to reach out to communities and reduce inequality.
- "Connect the dots" between the international (UN policies), multinational, regional and local actors to understand peoples' aspirations and co-create policy accordingly, across different policy areas, and in the implementation of Global Gateway.
- Policies and processes must be inclusive of everyone - women, people with disabilities, older people, younger people -everyone must find their voice.
- **Empower young people** to be active in driving progress towards the SDGs and support youth led initiatives and projects that further the SDGs in alignment with local needs.
- Address gender inequalities by **prioritizing women's unpaid care work and informal labour**.
- Promote equity and inclusion by **integrating indigenous and local knowledge** into policy.

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The EU Global Gateway as a values-based strategy: the role of CSOs and ALAs, and state of play of the GG Dialogue Platform: **Marlene Holzner**, Head of Unit for Local Authorities, Civil Society Organisations & Foundations (DG INTPA, EC), moderated this session focused on the role of CSOs and LAs at local level and their expectations regarding the Global Gateway and GG Dialogue Platform.

Fiona Ramsey, Head of Unit for Effective Development Policy and Team Europe (DG INTPA, EC), presented an overview of the Global Gateway, noting that public funds are not enough to achieve the green and digital transition, and the private sector will have to step up. Investments under the Global Gateway focus on **five areas: digitalisation; climate and energy; transport; education and research**; and **health.** Investments are to be made in accordance **with key principles**: democratic values and high standards, good governance and transparency, equal partnerships, green and clean: security-focused and catalysing private sector investments.

Sebastien Husson de Sampigny, Senior Civil Society Officer, Civil Society Division, European Investment Bank (EIB), explained that the EIB has worked hard to **enlarge the civic space as well as transparency.** He explained that the EIB applies all EU standards in its work with civil society, and detailed the complaint mechanism and transparency policy. He expressed his readiness to discuss with participants, noting that the head office has the mission of engaging with CSOs.

Laurent Sillano, former Head of Cooperation, EU Delegation, Democratic Republic of Congo, explained that the Global Gateway is about identifying packages of investments that can be gamechangers for a country. He noted the support to a strategic corridor in the DRC that will take advantage of regional connectivity to reduce territorial inequalities. The Global Gateway should increase coherence and impact of Team Europe Initiatives as it is a common approach to investments and will provide an incentive to cooperate.

Tanya Cox (CONCORD) emphasized that **people must be at the centre from the start** and design all projects intentionally for this outcome. Localise truly, listen truly and let go. She also advocated for **more meaningful involvement of CSOs**, not just ticking the box. From the perspective of CSO and LA, more focus on monitoring, transparency and accountability is desired.

Participants raised questions about how respect for labour rights and inclusion will be monitored, how stakeholder values are being implemented, as well as how the Global Gateway would ensure adherence to democratic values. **Fiona Ramsey** explained that there are different levels of monitoring, and a corresponding results matrix designed with EUDs and implementing partners; the challenge would be to aggregate these elements into a global monitoring overview and to educate private sector partners to monitor development outcomes. Moderator **Marlene Holzner** closed this session with a call to action to **join the Global Gateway Civil Society and Local Authorities Dialogue Platform** being created as part of the GG governance structure.

Taking stock of the Global PFD 2023: Conclusions and recommendations: This session, moderated by **Anetha Awuku**, International Organisation for Employers, was a report back from the two days discussions from rapporteurs on gender (**Lucy Garrido**, Articulación Feminista Marcosur), youth (**Mahlet Zeleke Redi**, AU Diaspora Youth Network), civic space (**Chahaiya Pilkington**, PLATFORMA), and inequalities (**Diego Lopez**, ITUC). It was a panel discussion format with active participation from the audience. The recommendations have been included in the appropriate parts of this report and can be found in full in the annex.

Closing: The meeting was closed by **Koen Doens**, Director-General of International Partnerships, European Commission. He acknowledged today's increasingly complex world where **democracy is under pressure** across the globe and **civic space is shrinking.** Partnerships for democracy and accountability are a top priority for the EU. On **data and digitalisation, Koen Doens** pointed to the issues outlined over the three days including **accuracy, protection,** and **collection of data. Inequalities** are undervalued as a real challenge of our times, and he highlighted the development of the first ever **Inequality Marker. Global Gateway** is helping to shape **the agenda together with partner countries.** Changes cannot happen with public funding alone and therefore the **private sector is a vital investor** and additional vehicle for sustainable growth and development. On **policy coherence** he acknowledged that there is "scope for improvement" particularly in the way the EU accompanies and supports partner countries. He explained how the Global Gateway is helping in this respect by shaping the agenda together with partner countries.

Annex: Conclusions and recommendations

The following are the full recommendations shared by volunteer rapporteurs on the transversal topics (gender, youth) and on the two main topics of the Global PFD: civic space and inequalities in the context of the Global Gateway.

Recommendations on Civic Space

Civic space is shrinking around the world. The closure of civic space does not happen in isolation; it is context, country specific and is not linear. The ability to **operate and act as empowered civic actors** and exercise fundamental rights depends on the preconditions that universal rights are fulfilled, and that legislation, legal frameworks, political awareness and political will exist to address this closure.

1. **Recognise complexity, strengthen the fundamental pillars of civic space and reinforce democracy**
   - **Address the structural causes** that generate social and political polarisation in countries that show a crisis of representation, and an erosion and weakening of democracy. Particular attention should be given to the disruptive impact of digitalisation. Counter-terrorism regulations and technologies for surveillance remain a concern.
   - **Strengthen the rule of law and the freedom of association, expression and assembly**. This is a must and should be considered a fundamental right for all citizens.
   - **Apply democratic principles and values** that guide the EU in negotiations and political dialogue, ensuring the delivery of commitments to protect human rights, civic space and institutional independence.

2. **Use trust building, the power of connectivity, shared narratives and action to reinforce the enabling environment for civic space**
   - **Enhance trust at all levels**, understanding and acknowledging respective fears among all actors. This should be a prerequisite to any actions in opening up civic space and building stronger partnerships.
   - **Multilevel** (at grass roots, local, national, regional) **and multi-stakeholder** (CSOs, human rights defenders, women, youth, indigenous, LGBTQ+, people with disabilities, migrants, refugees and informal citizens) **action is crucial**. National human rights institutions are important partners as bridge builders.
   - **Connect all levels of the institutional ecosystem** and anchor actions in global agendas and multilateral movements to support uptake, attract funds and increase scale.
   - **Share and co-construct narratives** between local authorities and CSOs to support better quality partnerships, projects and planning and strengthen the enabling environment for civic space.

3. **"Nothing for us without us" – Increase meaningful consultation, transparency and inclusion of local realities**
   - **Support concrete and meaningful outcomes** through contract bound spaces or platforms such as the PFD and which serve the objectives of constituencies' visions.
   - **Make space and create seats** at the table for more inclusive and constituency-based approaches. We want co-created agendas grounded in local knowledge and experience.
   - **Track and monitor feedback, recommendations and best practices** drawing from proven solutions anchored in a whole-of-society approach. Monitoring will ensure accountability of all actors.
   - **Enhance structural consultation with stakeholders** who are part of implementation, monitoring and review of policies aimed at protecting and opening civic spaces.
   - **Ensure solidarity** is an **underlying principle** across all actions so local experiences and know-how cannot be ignored.

4. **Increase rapid and flexible funding, greater capacity support and diversification**
   - Redirect and speed up **funding towards grassroots organisations** and especially women and youth to respond to fluxes in civic spaces to fight impunity.
   - **Get creative** - funders need to draw from in-country networks to identify intermediaries and champions to direct and absorb funds in restrictive environments.

- **Decentralise cooperation** through city-to-city partnerships, local authority networks and local NGOs. They are the means and the implementors, and they need greater support especially in restrictive spaces.
- **Remove red-tape**, boost the capacity, equip local CSOs/LAs with tools to respond to calls for proposals and opportunities from international funders.

5. Expand evidence-based policy-advocacy from lived experience
   - **Ensure evidence-based policies and decisions** anchored by data to inform and educate.
   - **Support bottom-up research**, indicators and assessments that are people-led to empower local actors to produce their own approaches and build capacity for monitoring.
   - **Strengthen advocacy with data.**
   - **Provide knowledge and raise awareness** about human rights as people do not always know their rights. This is crucial to fight the negative narrative eroding human rights, especially labour rights, and tackle misconceptions on contested topics such as climate change and migration.

6. Ensure that civic spaces are SAFE spaces
   - Address the **underlying causes eroding civic space** to enable citizens to exercise their rights in a safe and sustainable manner.
   - Leverage the **knowledge and experience of CSOs and LAs** - key partners in facilitating physical spaces as well as safeguarding and opening up civic space.

Recommendations on Inequalities

The inequality gap is increasing around the world. Wealth inequality has risen significantly since the Covid-19 health pandemic, hampering progress in alleviating poverty. The social limits of the current development paradigm need to change. Challenges to reducing inequalities are reflected in a lack of social justice, few environmental limits and eroding rights of workers, migrants & refugees. Migrants in particular are being criminalized, weaponised and commodified. We must address all these inequalities if we hope to reduce poverty.

1. Tackle shifting inequalities in our world
   - **Be systemic and systematic in dealing with inequalities** with an integrated and holistic approach.
   - **Address shifting inequalities** through adaptative responses and a multi-faceted understanding of the impact of actions.
   - **Ensure policy is flexible** enough to adapt to emerging challenges.
   - **Address inequalities in a timely manner** building on each others' experiences, knowledge and practices. Share information in fora such as the PFD.
   - **Build a culture of giving** with grants available at the community level.
   - **Strengthen grassroots** organisations with funding, tools and resources for greater localized impact.

2. Rethink the global financial system and the private sector
   - **Address the financial architecture** of the global trading system and global governance that is producing inequalities.
   - **Consider the role of IFIs** (e.g. the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank) in loan schemes that add to the burden of debt for many developing countries.
   - Look at **fiscal reform**, fighting tax evasion and corruption.
   - Provide more **flexible EU funding, lighter audits** and grant schemes adapted to the realities of beneficiaries.
   - **Ensure better monitoring** to counteract corruption and enable funds to go to where they are needed most.
   - **Consider the impact that austerity measures, privatization and a reduction in social spending** have on people, further increasing inequalities.
   - **Ensure the Global South** have a voice and a say in how funding is spent.
   - **Regulate the private sector** with strong private sector **accountability** ensuring business is conducted sustainably and responsibly.
   - **Consider** funding SMEs and **cooperatives** in the private sector as opposed to corporations.
   - **Invest more directly in the local economies** owned by the people. This allows for a more localized, tailored approach responding directly to local needs to address inequalities.

3. Change the social limits of the current development paradigm
    -   **Co-create transformative policies** that fight poverty and inequalities.
    -   **Put social justice at the centre:** develop minimum living wages, provide universal social protection, support the care economy, provide free access to public services, and ensure access to land, energy and a clean environment.
    -   **Invest in education, training and reskilling** to adapt to changes brought by digitalisation.
    -   **Change the narrative:** exporting labour is not a development solution; migrant workers cannot be thought of in terms of profit.
    -   **Recognise informal workers** and the contribution they make to the economy.
    -   **Make the state more accountable** as the primary duty bearer in providing for its citizens.
    -   **Value the role of women** in reinforcing social resilience and allow them the space to voice their opinions in development policy making.

4. Think in terms of a double environmental and digital transition
    -   Ensure **digital justice** through open source, free software/technology.
    -   Provide **internet access and training for all** to ensure no one gets left behind in the digital transition.
    -   **Use data to generate policies** that fight against inequalities.
    -   **Respect rights** including labour rights in the digital economy.

5. Change the narrative on migration
    -   **Address the challenges of migration in arrival countries** with an all-of-government approach.
    -   **Provide specific funding** to support inclusion and integration of migrants.
    -   **Work on jointly agreed priorities** (such as job creation) to improve cross-community relations.
    -   **Ensure migrants have a voice** in policy making

6. **Make cities part of the solution.** Urbanisation: cities are both the problem and part of the solution
    -   **Develop integrated strategic plans** within a flexible framework to respond to the changing environment of needs and exclusion in cities.
    -   **Ensure opportunities and investments are accessible** to the whole population particularly those most in need.
    -   **Include all stakeholders** in planning and development to ensure services actually serve those intended and meet everyone's needs.

7. Respond to intersectionality by forging a common vision with everyone sitting around the table
    -   **Be inclusive.**
    -   **Adopt an inclusive approach** to decision making and **ensure all voices can be heard** in the social dialogue. Truly listen to civil society.
    -   **Connect the dots** between inequalities and the Global Gateway by including CSOs and LAs as an advisory group at the same level as other bodies and avoid tokenistic participation.

Recommendations on Youth involvement and empowerment

Youth empowerment is important for achieving a better future in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs provide us with a universal framework to address the most pressing global issues, from poverty and inequality to climate change and peace-building. At the heart of these goals lies the principle of leaving no one behind. Youth, as a dynamic and diverse demographic, represent both the future and the present, and their inclusion in policy development forums such as the PDF is not just essential, it's imperative.

1. Develop partnerships with youth for impact
    -   **Encourage partnerships** that bring together governments, civil society, the private sector, and youth-led organizations as well as youths with diverse backgrounds.
    -   **Make young people** and youth-led organizations **equal partners** in decision-making processes.
    -   **Focus on concrete actions** within these partnerships to advance SDGs with a bottom-up and an intersectional approach.

2. Help youth achieve the SDGs
    -   **Empower young people** to take an active role in driving progress towards the SDGs.
    -   Support youth led initiatives and projects that further the SDGs in alignment with local needs.

3. Ensure accountability and inclusion when working with youth
   - **Hold stakeholders accountable for commitments** made in youth-focused initiatives.
   - Ensure diverse youth representation in **EU-funded programmes.**
   - Ensure diaspora representation in projects in country/regions of origin.
   - **Promote diverse youth** representation at all levels.

4. Encourage and support youth-led organisations in civic space
   - Make funding accessible to turn youth-driven ideas into impactful action.
   - Provide a mentoring programme to support young people.
   - Support the development of democratic youth-led organizations and movements.

5. Support youth in fostering digitalisation
   - Continue capacity building for youth in emerging technologies.
   - Understand the potential of global technology for policy implementation.

6. Support youth on climate
   - **Raise greater awareness** on youth climate initiatives both big and small.
   - **Provide more support** (e.g. education, training and exchange programmes) to youth to tackle climate change and climate migration.
   - **Support the development of democratic youth movements** across the world and target that support at different levels.
   - **Measure the growth and impact** of youth climate programmes.

Recommendations on Gender

Women and girls sustain economies through unpaid, informal work, especially in care – a reality that became more obvious during the Covid-19 pandemic. Women are also more often forced into migration often as victims of trafficking and are systematically discriminated against and excluded due to lack of social protection and poor working conditions. In areas of shrinking civic space women and girls' ability to organize and voice issues affecting them is often restricted in an attempt to suppress their freedom of expression and association. To open up civic spaces, a clear sign of a healthy democracy, women, feminist movements and human rights defenders need more direct, flexible and agile support, and the resources to be able to act.

1. Support women in reinforcing social resilience
   - **Value the role of women** and mainstream a gendered approach to policy development.
   - **Ensure climate investments reach women** and address informality.
   - **Promote an inclusive and socially-owned just transition** in pathways to the green economy, which is negotiated with social partners and communities to promote decent jobs, respecting workers' rights and be accompanied by upskilling and reskilling as well as social protection.

2. Close the inequality gap
   - **Provide direct, flexible and agile support** for women in civic space.
   - Address gender inequalities by **prioritising women's unpaid care work** and informal labour.
   - Promote equity and inclusion by **integrating indigenous and local knowledge** into policy.

3. Recognise that migration has a "woman's face"
   - Design **migration policies that protect women and girls** and guarantee respect for their rights.
   - Work with CSOs in countries of origin and arrival to **address the situation of migrant women from the framework of human rights** and not as "illegal" subjects.
   - **Improve the availability of and access to data** especially sex- and age-disaggregated statistics.
   - Quantify the value of reproductive and care work carried out by migrant and refugee girls and adolescents and the impact it has on their lives.

4. Make the climate transition a "gender just" transition
   - Ensure climate and environment policies involve **gender-inclusive and participatory processes.**
   - Ensure that **indigenous and local knowledge systems inform climate** policy and action.
   - Establish mechanisms to **ensure that climate and environment investments reach women and girls**, including capacity building sessions to increase their skills to access finance.

5. Protect and include women in digitalisation

Men are the main creators of technologies, which leads to discrimination against women and increased exposure to risks. To overcome this reality, in the digital transition, it is essential to:

- Include **women in the design of new technologies**, so that they respond to their needs and take into account their realities.
- Ensure the **protection of women and girls** in social media and online spaces.