

Dialogue and follow-up of the European Union-America and the Caribbean partnership

17 September 2024

Executive summary

As part of the ongoing dialogue with civil society and local authorities in the Policy Forum on Development (PFD), the European Commission held a hybrid meeting on 17 September 2024. The event brought together staff from the European Union (EU) and more than 100 representatives of civil society organisations (CSOs) and local authorities (LAs) from the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) (95 participants online and 12 face-to-face). At the meeting, the EU provided an update on: 1) the follow-up to the 2023 EU-CELAC Summit and the 2023-2025 roadmap agreed by both regions; 2) the launch of the EU-LAC Global Gateway Investment Agenda; and (3) the implementation of the EU Multiannual Regional Indicative Programme (RMIP) for the Americas and the Caribbean (LAC) 2021-2027, and dialogued with participants on these issues.

The meeting included high-level contributions from three Directors of the EU services: **Erica Gerretsen**, Director for Human Development, Migration, Governance and Peace, DG INTPA, European Commission, presented the current framework for EU cooperation with civil society organisations and local authorities; **Pelayo Castro Zuzuarregi**, Deputy Director-General for the Americas of the European External Action Service (EEAS), shared views on the state of play of the EU-CELAC Roadmap; and **Félix Fernández-Shaw**, Director for Latin America, the Caribbean and relations with all Overseas Countries and Territories, DG INTPA, European Commission, explained the operationalisation of the EU-LAC Global Gateway Investment Agenda.

At the second part of the meeting, **Denis Thieulin**, INTPA B, provided detailed information on the PFD's previous 2022/2023 comments and recommendations and presented the new EU programmes. At the closing, **Olga Baus**, Deputy Head of Unit, representing INTPA B1 and B2, highlighted the main points raised by the participants and requested close collaboration with CSOs and LAs. The main messages conveyed during the meeting were as follows:

For the EU:

- **Role of CSOs and LAs in bilateral relations:** The importance of CSOs and LAs in EU-LAC bilateral relations is recognised, especially in the current geopolitical context, as evidenced by the 2023 EU-CELAC Summit.
 - **Triple transition and new priorities:** Incorporate into the triple transition (green, digital, fair): 1) security and the fight against organized crime; 2) the shared aspiration to live in freedom and dignity (democracy, human rights, rule of law); and 3) global justice (debt, value chains, global taxation, etc.).
 - **Opportunities in LAC:** It is essential to present the LAC region in Brussels as opportunities, supporting investment and sustainable development and with whom we need to collaborate more to defend multilateralism and tackle global challenges.
- **EU-LAC Global Gateway Investment Agenda (GGIA):** The 2023 EU-CELAC Summit endorsed the Investment Agenda with the aim of mobilising up to €45 billion by 2027, which requires commitment and organisation to deliver.
- **Sustainable development and high standards:** A comprehensive approach to sustainable development is sought, promoting industrialization, proper regulation and the improvement of social and environmental standards, even if doing so is more costly. This relies on the experience of the Eurosocial programme and the full involvement of Team Europe, maintaining strong EU values and principles (democratic values, human rights, compliance with the rules, good governance and transparency, partnerships on an equal footing, green and clean, security and private sector engagement).

- **Social inclusion and equity:** Emphasis is placed on the importance of equality, social protection, and inclusive access to basic services, with a focus on gender equality, youth, and support for the most vulnerable households.

By the representatives of the CSOs and LAs:

- **Impact of the 2023 EU-CELAC Summit:** The positive spill-over effect of the Summit was highlighted and it was proposed to collaborate around the EU-CELAC 2025 forum.
- **Interest in the Global Gateway Investment Agenda (GGIA):** Several questions arose on how the GGIA will address social inequalities and the involvement of local actors (specifically interaction with CSOs and LAs), underlining the crucial role of governments and cities.
- **Accountability and transparency :** The need to ensure accountability and transparency in interactions between the private sector, public administrations and the GGIA was raised.
- **Inclusion of indigenous populations and energy transition:** The importance of giving greater prominence to indigenous communities was emphasized and concerns were expressed about the energy transition and its impact on local communities.

Closing remarks by Olga Baus:

- **Importance of urban dialogue:** Cities play a crucial role, and it is essential to establish a dialogue to improve the working mechanisms in the different areas.
- **Respect for indigenous communities:** The EU has a policy that requires indigenous communities to be consulted and respected, using human rights instruments focused on their needs.
- **Standards and collaboration with the private sector:** It is vital that when working with European companies in the framework of the GGIA, the rules are respected and safeguards are applied, maintaining an active dialogue with civil society.

Report

I. Context

The EU-LAC bi-regional dialogue has gained momentum in recent years with significant milestones. In June 2023, the Joint Communication called for a renewed strategic partnership and proposed priorities and concrete actions to improve bi-regional relations at all levels.

The EU Multiannual Regional Indicative Programme (RMIP) for the Americas and the Caribbean (LAC) 2021-2027 was adopted by the Commission on 13 December 2021 (C(2021)9356), and its implementation is ongoing. Five regional priority areas have been identified: 1. Green transition; 2. Digital transformation; 3. Sustainable and inclusive recovery; 4. Democratic governance, security and migration; 5. Social cohesion and the fight against inequalities. In addition, three specific EU-Caribbean partnerships were proposed: 1. For a Green Deal; 2. For economic resilience and trade; 3. For governance, security and human development.

The 2023 EU-CELAC Summit reaffirmed the commitment to strengthen the bi-regional partnership. The leaders of both regions issued a joint statement and agreed on an EU-CELAC roadmap for 2023-2025, which guides the future bi-regional engagement. Leaders committed to work together on shared policy priorities, including an inclusive green and digital transition, including diversification and resilience of supply chains (food, renewable hydrogen, critical raw materials) and protection of oceans and biodiversity. The Global Gateway Investment Agenda for EU-LAC (GGIA) was presented, with 130 projects in which the EU and its Member States committed to work with partner countries to

mobilise funding and advance the green, digital and fair transitions. In addition, a Joint Declaration on a Digital Alliance between the EU and 20 LAC countries was adopted.

Ahead of the Summit, on 13-14 July, the "EU-LAC Partners in Change Days" were held in Brussels, bringing together civil society organisations, young people, trade unions, local governments and government representatives. Representatives of civil society, local authorities and youth organisations made recommendations for future EU-LAC relations and multilateral engagement to support the bi-regional partnership.

The PFD has facilitated dialogues and consultations focused on the partnership between the EU and LAC. The first plenary session on the implementation of the MIP took place on 28 May 2021, followed by another on 15 December 2022. In 2023, the dialogue with PFD members was further enriched by the preparatory exchanges for the EU-LAC Days, which culminated in the 3rd EU-CELAC Summit in July 2023. At the meeting on 11 September 2023, participants made recommendations for the mid-term review of the EU Regional Multiannual Programme for the Americas and the Caribbean 2021-2027, while reaffirming the relevance of regional priorities.

II. Consultation methodology

The two-hour event on 17 September 2024 was divided into two sections, both in plenary. The first session focused on the political agenda of the EU-LAC partnership, with high-level interventions by three directors of EU services, and the second session on progress in the implementation of the RMIP, and how input received from previous consultations has been taken into account.

The hybrid nature of the meeting did not allow for discussions in smaller groups. However, there were two Q&A sessions with participants both in the room and online, and all organisations were invited to post contributions in the days following the meeting.

III. State of play of the EU-CELAC route and launch of the Global Gateway Investment Agenda (GGIA)

Ms **Erica Gerretsen**, Director for Human Development, Migration, Governance and Peace, DG INTPA, European Commission, presented the framework of relations with CSOs and LAs under her responsibilities, on the same day as the announcement of the composition of the future European Commission, which reiterates the commitment of the new administration to dialogue with civil society and local and regional authorities. She noted the active role played by Commissioner Urpilainen in promoting the participation of these organisations in the processes of reflection and implementation of external cooperation actions, particularly in the context of Global Gateway, where a specific platform has been established to facilitate this dialogue, which represents an important step forward in collaboration. She highlighted the PFD as a key space to foster dialogue between the EU and the LAC region, as well as the importance of these open and continuous dialogues to ensure that the views and recommendations of participants are duly considered in the formulation and programming of new interventions. This collaborative approach is crucial to the success of the Global Gateway and to effectively address the needs and priorities of the region. She concluded by further promoting these spaces for dialogue to strengthen cooperation and ensure the inclusion of all stakeholders in the process.

Mr Pelayo Castro Zuzuarregi, Deputy Director-General for the Americas of the European External Action Service (EEAS), presented the current state of play of the EU-CELAC Roadmap, focusing on three areas. First, recognising the importance of the work of CSOs and LAs, in a difficult context, to defend and represent civil society in LAC, the most dangerous region in the world for human rights defenders. He reiterated the commitment to maintain support and dialogue with civil society, in line with the work that was done at the 2023 Summit and ahead of the Colombia Summit in 2025. He highlighted the role of EU Delegations in this dialogue, where information is more relevant and work has a more direct impact, at a time when the universality of human rights, gender equality, the role of civil society, and democracies in general are under pressure from completely different narratives permeating other sectors of civil society. Secondly, Mr Castro outlined the relationship with CELAC, starting with the importance of the 2023 Summit and, above all, the importance of what happens between summits. The EEAS and INTPA have worked together, making significant progress in justice and security, with the launch of the transnational organised crime programme EL PACCTO 2.0 in Panama in March, alongside the CLASI ministerial meeting and the meeting of Ministers of Justice and Public Prosecution, and a High-Level Meeting of the EU-CELAC Coordination Mechanism on Drugs, alongside the annual COPOLAD programme meeting in Bolivia in February. The Digital Alliance has made further progress, with a first high-level dialogue in Colombia in 2023 and another on cybersecurity in the Dominican Republic in February 2024. Progress has also been made in scientific cooperation. In addition, a regional programme on human development and reduction of inequalities called "Inclusive Societies in LAC" is being prepared.

Finally, Mr Castro outlined what he felt should be the priorities and lines of action for the future. Recognising the importance of the EU's focus on the triple transition (a green transition, a digital transition and a just transition), he sought to incorporate a complementary triptych consisting, first, of security issues and the fight against organised crime, which are a problem shared by both LAC and the EU. The second element concerns the aspiration to live in freedom and dignity on both sides of the Atlantic, which implies the concept of good governance, with a focus on democracy and human rights, the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary, the separation of powers and the ability to formulate public policies. The third element would be global justice, addressing asymmetries in development, inequalities, debt, climate finance, green bonds, the attraction of private investment to close the investment gap that exists in the region, taxation, reorganization of value chains, new trade agreements, etc.

Mr Castro concluded by pointing out the importance of being very strategic and understanding that LAC is not part of the problem, but part of the solution, and that the EU aims to strengthen a rules-based international system that promotes peace and security, defends democracy and human rights, while strengthening economic security, reducing dependencies and diversifying relations to promote a green and sustainable agenda, a human-centred technological transformation.

Mr Félix Fernández-Shaw, Director for Latin America, the Caribbean and relations with all Overseas Countries and Territories, DG INTPA, European Commission, explained the operationalisation of the EU-LAC Global Gateway Investment Agenda. He indicated that, as a Euro-Latin American and Caribbean team, it is important to present the LAC region in Brussels as a strategic partner and an opportunity in the transition to green, digital and sustainable economies, highlighting the advances that are taking place in the region, rather than just focusing on the challenges. In this line, the desire of Latin America to diversify its economies and move towards industrialization in the implementation of the Global Gateway strategy has been emphasized. The region seeks to become an agent of transformation and not a mere supplier of raw materials. This includes investment in capital, technology transfer and capacity building, promoting a formal and socially responsible economy. An example is the upcoming conference in Granada on 'Sargassum seaweed,' which will seek to create value chains from this seaweed, transforming an environmental problem into an economic opportunity.

Mr Fernández-Shaw stressed that various initiatives are being carried out to address the needs of the region, such as electrification of public transport in Costa Rica and water and sanitation projects in Ecuador. These actions not only seek to improve infrastructure, but also create jobs and train local talent, ensuring a sustainable transition. In addition, waste management solutions are being explored, representing both an industrial and a social opportunity.

Mr Fernández-Shaw concluded by indicating that it is essential to continue the dialogue with civil society and consider its participation in future summits, seeking an inclusive approach that allows the representation of the voices of Euro-Latin American and Caribbean civil society. Initial discussions with Colombia on the next summit are already underway, and the aim is to ensure that the relationship with civil society is enriching and unreserved, promoting a collaborative environment in decision-making and policy implementation.

During the question and comment session, participants agreed with the relevance of offering solutions from the region, highlighting **the role that civil society can play as an ally** in this, as well as with the global justice agenda. In this sense, they listed the international meetings in the coming months (with CoPs 29 and 30, and the summit on financing for development in Spain) as an opportunity to define the role of civil society as allies, enhancing multi-stakeholder **participation mechanisms** with civil society, local authorities, youth organizations, etc.

Participants stressed the difficult working context for civil society in the region, where civic space is closing dramatically in several countries, and the need for EU Delegations to expand the range of CSOs they work with (e.g. by making access to funds more flexible). This alliance with CSOs can also take place around the Global Gateway to ensure that European principles are applied, although the focus on the private sector is worrying. **Greater attention to social issues** is lacking, taking into account the challenges of the region in the face of inequalities and human rights. They demanded more information, and highlighted **open accountability processes** as key to a successful implementation of the Global Gateway strategy.

In his reply, Mr Castro highlighted the important role of EU Member States in coordinating on some issues of global justice, facing the difficulty of reaching consensus on sensitive issues in which civil society is already actively participating by providing arguments and solutions. The participation of civil society will be crucial to open dialogues on these issues. He pointed out that it is essential that the European Union is seen as one entity to be able to explain and take advantage of instruments such as Global Gateway and achieve significant impact at global level. And on the challenges in governance and security, he noted that an additional effort is required to elevate and resize initiatives in security and the fight against organized crime, as well as to strengthen governance and social cohesion. This is key to promoting effective public policies that accompany transformative investments, integrating economic, environmental and labour aspects.

Mr Fernández-Shaw stressed that work is ongoing to assess the economic, social and environmental impact of European investments and, in this, it is crucial that Latin America raises quality standards instead of focusing only on price in tenders, thus promoting better job training and qualification. He highlighted the need to develop technical and professional skills in the LAC region to facilitate the transition to renewable energy and electrification of transport. This includes the creation of training curricula adapted to the demands of the local market and industry, rather than relying solely on the import of technologies. Finally, on the promotion of regional industry, he pointed out that it is vital that LAC not only exports natural resources, but also develops its own industry for the use of clean energies, such as green hydrogen, and suggested establishing an industrial value chain that allows the region to transform and use its resources in a sustainable way, creating jobs and promoting decarbonization.

To close this part of the meeting, Ms Gerretsen stressed how the European Union applies six fundamental principles related to good governance and environmental and social regulation in all actions of the Global Gateway programme, including the systematic use of markers to measure the impact on inequality reduction and gender, ensuring that investments align with these objectives. In addition, the EU seeks to establish an active dialogue among the EU, the private sector and civil society at local level, recognising that civil society plays a key role in identifying human rights-related risks and in ensuring that investments generate sustainable and quality jobs, promoting project implementation that is sustainable and beneficial for affected communities.

IV. Information on the implementation of the RMIP in Latin America and the Caribbean

Mr **Denis Thieulin**, Unit B.2 of DG INTPA, presented the state of play of the implementation of the RMIP adopted in December 2021 for Latin America and the Caribbean. The PowerPoint presentation is available [here](#).

During Q&A, participants noted the desirability of focusing on the **social dimension** of all programmes and interventions in the region, including Global Gateway. The **role of cities** in the design and implementation of the interventions promoted by the EU in the LAC region, as development actors, was highlighted, although with limited capacities despite the progress achieved in recent years. A stronger role for **indigenous communities** was called for throughout the regional programme, and for their values to be taken into account in the just transition and the green economy. In a similar vein, the need to take into account the needs of local communities was highlighted, in particular, those living in wetlands that are extremely fragile areas and in mining areas, in everything related to decarbonization. In reply, Ms Baus pointed out that the 'Inclusive Societies in LAC' programme seeks to increase the social impact of Global Gateway investments, covering aspects such as public policies in social and care areas, in addition to continuing the efforts of the previous Eurosocietal programme. He acknowledged that many Global Gateway initiatives will be developed in urban environments, so it is essential to maintain a continuous dialogue with the cities involved and that, in addition, work is being done to consult local communities on the feasibility and desirability of the proposed investments. Finally, he stressed that, although working with the private sector in the framework of the Global Gateway, not all European companies are aligned with the same objectives, and it is essential to ensure that investments meet social and environmental standards. Consultations are being carried out with local communities to ensure the acceptance of GG projects.

V. Closure

Ms Baus closed the session by noting that it is vital to maintain dialogue and collaboration with civil society and local authorities to guide Global Gateway investments and strengthen the relationship between the European Union and CELAC. She highlighted the importance of local analysis to identify risks and make progress in reducing inequalities, within the framework of democratic governance principles. In addition, she proposed diversifying contact groups through local platforms and emphasized accountability, with analysis of the impact of investments and the presentation of a state of progress of Global Gateway projects for the 2025 summit.

Ms Baus closed the session by thanking participants for the quality of the input and reiterating the importance of the contributions of CSOs and LAs.