



Civil Society, Youth and Local Authorities in Dialogue: Preparing for the Fourth CELAC-EU Summit

29 April 2025, online

Table of contents

Executive Summary	2
Welcoming notes	4
State of play of the 2023-2025 EU-CELAC Roadmap and organisation of the Fourth CELAC-EU Summit.....	5
Question and Answer Session	7
Role of Civil Society in the run up to the Fourth CELAC-EU Summit.....	9
Question and Answer Session.....	10
Closing remarks.....	12

Executive Summary

As part of the ongoing dialogue with civil society organisations (CSOs) and local authorities (LAs) within the framework of the Policy Forum on Development (PFD), the Directorate-General for International Partnerships of the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS), with the support of the Embassy of Colombia in Brussels and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Colombia - Directorate of Regional Coordination and Integration Mechanisms, representing the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) as Pro Tempore Presidency, held an online meeting on 29 April 2025. The meeting brought together representatives of CSOs and LAs from the European Union, Latin America, and the Caribbean (LAC) for a preparatory exchange ahead of the upcoming Fourth Summit, scheduled to take place on 9-10 November 2025 in Colombia. Building on the discussions held during the previous PFD dialogue on 17 September 2024,¹ the session was divided into two parts: the first addressed the state of play of the implementation of the [2023–2025 CELAC-EU Roadmap](#) and the organisation of the Fourth CELAC-EU Summit, and the second addressed the role of CSOs in the run up to the Fourth CELAC-EU Summit, which also covered the organisation of a Civil Society Forum. Both sessions allowed interactions and questions from the floor.

The meeting opened with a welcome by **Erica Gerretsen**, Director, INTPA G Human Development, Migration, Governance and Peace, who highlighted the important role played by CSOs in strengthening the relations and connections between the EU and CELAC. **Francisco Gutiérrez**, Director of Mechanisms and Regional Integration, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Colombia, confirmed Colombia's commitment to the Pro Tempore Presidency and the continued cooperation in the context of a mutually beneficial partnership that includes the interests of CSOs. In the context of the upcoming Summit, the Presidency will promote parallel events to support the bi-regional dialogue, including organising the Civil Society Forum, envisaged to be held in November 2025.

Subsequently, **Pelayo Castro Zuzuárregui**, Director/Deputy Managing Director for the Americas, EEAS, briefed the floor on the state of play of the 2023-2025 EU-CELAC Roadmap and the priorities of the upcoming of IV CELAC-EU Summit. Most areas in the 2023-2025 EU-CELAC Roadmap have witnessed progress, including Digital Transition, Green Transition, Human Development, Security as well as Research and Innovation. The presentation stressed the key role played by CSOs in the region, recognising the difficult context in which they

¹ In the last meeting, participants shared reflections on the current cooperation framework between the EU and CSOs and LAs, reviewed the state of play of the CELAC-EU Roadmap, discussed the operationalisation of the EU-LAC Global Gateway Investment Agenda, and discussed the implementation of the EU Regional Multi-Annual Indicative Programme for the Americas and the Caribbean 2021–2027.

operate. It highlighted the EU's commitment to maintaining its support to them. It also underlined the importance of sharing views, perspectives, and ideas on how the EU and CELAC can deliver results to address global challenges together. Continued attention from the EU will be placed on the Triple Transition: Green, Digital, and Social/Fair. It was also important to meet the challenges that lie ahead in this regard, as well as to step up efforts in three areas: democratic governance; security, citizen security and fight against organised crime; and multilateralism and global justice.

The presentations were followed by a Q&A session that allowed the participants to raise concerns and ask questions. Questions were raised regarding: the role of CSOs and mechanisms of involving them in the challenges facing democracy and governance; addressing climate emergency in the two regions; participation of children and adolescents in multilateral spaces and the parallel events to the Fourth CELAC-EU Summit; collaboration with the Financing for Development Conference in the context of multilateralism; and addressing connectivity in rural areas under the digital agenda of the Summit.

The second part of the meeting included a presentation by **Felice Zaccheo**, Head of Unit of INTPA B1 - Regional Programmes for Latin America and the Caribbean, who briefed the floor on the role of the CSOs in the run up to the upcoming Fourth CELAC-EU Summit, including organising a Civil Society Forum.

The Q&A session that followed the second part of the meeting opened with an intervention from the European Office of the Latin American Federation of Municipalities (FLACMA), who highlighted the importance of involving LAs in bi-regional cooperation and agendas, and called for setting up the IV Forum of local and regional governments to serve as a high-level consultation in order to reach a set of priorities and conclusions that can be conveyed to the Heads of States at the CELAC-EU Summit. Several questions were also raised by the floor, including enabling CSOs to follow up on the Roadmap; positions on the Pact on Care; involving youth; reinforcing CSOs via strong political messaging; and the possibility of having a process to engage CSOs in drafting the final declaration of the Summit.

The main takeaways and next steps are:

- The Colombian Pro Tempore Presidency will promote parallel events to support bi-regional dialogue, such as the Business Forum and the Civil Society Forum, that are envisaged to be held in November 2025, as part of the Fourth CELAC-EU Summit preparations.
- The European Commission will launch a call for expressions of interest in May or June 2025 to identify CSOs for the Civil Society Forum steering group.

- The CELAC-EU Academic Forum is tentatively scheduled between 3 and 5 September 2025. The IV EU-LAC Youth Days will take place 19-20 June 2025 in Rome.
- CELAC-EU Summit is held back-to-back with the 2025 UN Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC COP30) in Brazil (Belem, 10-21 November) which will serve as an opportunity for both regions to send a strong message of commitment towards green transition.
- On Research and Innovation, work is undergoing for a CELAC-EU ministerial meeting, envisaged for September 2025.
- EU and LAC will explore mechanisms for CSOs to be more involved in the implementation of Global Gateway projects.
- Confirmation of the importance of CSOs, LAs, and youth's participation in shaping the bi-regional agenda.
- CSOs can share specific contributions, papers, and policy recommendations with EU and CELAC ahead of the Summit.
- Collaboration to ensure multilateralism is encouraged, such as the case of the Financing for Development Conference.
- Local Authorities are envisaging organising a "Local and Regional Governments' Forum" to serve as a high-level consultation in order to reach a set of priorities and conclusions that can be conveyed.
- Employ the different forums to reinforce political messaging regarding the role of CSOs, especially in areas related to democracy and governance.

Felice Zaccheo thanked everyone for participating in the meeting and assured the floor that they will continue to be informed about developments. The meeting was closed.

Welcoming notes

Erica Gerretsen, Director INTPA G Human Development, Migration, Governance and Peace, welcomed everyone to the meeting, and highlighted the important role played by CSOs in strengthening the relations and connections between the EU and CELAC. The meeting highlights the crucial role that CSOs and LAs play in dialogue and in progress to move the partnership between the two regions forward. In the context of the PFD, several meetings have been held in the past years with representatives from CSOs and LAs, including with regard to consultations on the implementation of the EU Regional Multi-Annual Indicative Programme. The last meeting was held on 17 September 2024, which reviewed the state of play of the CELAC-EU Roadmap, the operationalisation of the [EU-LAC Global Gateway Investment Agenda](#), and the implementation of the [Regional Multi-Annual Indicative](#)

[Programme for the Americas and the Caribbean 2021-2027](#). The current meeting focused on the progress made in the implementation of the 2023–2025 CELAC-EU Roadmap, the upcoming Fourth CELAC-EU Summit, and the engagement with CSO and LAs in the run up to the Summit. The feedback and recommendations received from CSOs in the September 2024 meeting will be shared at a follow up meeting in a later stage in the framework of the regular consultations.

State of play of the 2023-2025 EU-CELAC Roadmap and organisation of the Fourth CELAC-EU Summit

Francisco Gutiérrez, Director of Mechanisms and Regional Integration, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Colombia, confirmed Colombia's commitment to the Pro Tempore Presidency and reiterated the work and preparation were being carried out with the European External Action Service and European Commission in the context of the Summit process. Colombia considers the consultations with CSOs and LAs to be fundamental for building a solid bi-regional relationship that responds to the needs of citizens, especially in the context of the geopolitical realities that require the renewal of strategic relationships. The Pro Tempore Presidency will work on cooperation and a mutually beneficial partnership that takes into account the interests of CSOs. In the context of the upcoming Summit, the Presidency will promote parallel events to support the bi-regional dialogue. Amongst such parallel events is the Civil Society Forum, envisaged to be held in November 2025. It will serve as an opportunity to present the results of the Academic Forum, and the IV Youth EU-LAC Days, thus ensuring broad participation of non-governmental actors. The CELAC-EU Academic Forum is tentatively scheduled between 3 and 5 September 2025, with the support of the Universidad Externa de Colombia. The IV EU-LAC Youth Days are scheduled for 19-20 June 2025 in Rome, with the support of the EU-LAC Foundation.

Regarding the EU-LAC Global Gateway Investment Agenda, around 130 flagship projects represent a significant opportunity for the region; the Colombian Presidency considers it crucial to explore mechanisms that allow CSOs to actively participate in the implementation and effective monitoring of the Agenda, thus ensuring that these projects respond to the real needs of communities. Colombia will promote effective communication between the various preparatory forums to ensure coherent messages and complementary proposals towards the CELAC-EU Summit.

Pelayo Castro Zuzuárregui, Director/Deputy Managing Director for the Americas, EEAS, in charge of the Americas, briefed the floor on the state of play of the 2023-2025 EU-CELAC Roadmap and the priorities of the upcoming of Fourth CELAC-EU Summit. The CSOs play an

important role in maintaining the relationship between the EU and the CELAC regions, whether with regard to sustainable development, fundamental freedoms, human rights, or democracy. It is worth noting that CSOs work in the context of challenging conditions, as the CELAC region is the most dangerous in the world with respect to human rights defenders. CSOs' voice is important in the context of the upcoming Summit. The EU-LAC Foundation plays a very useful role in reaching out to CSOs and organizing multi-stakeholder events with participants from both sides of the Atlantic.

Some areas in the 2023-2025 EU-CELAC Roadmap have witnessed sustained engagement and progress based on mutual interest between both regions. In the area of **Digital Transition**, the Digital Alliance now includes 24 members. The policy dialogues have made good progress, including the one on digital policy in Colombia, on cyber security in the Dominican Republic, and a thematic dialogue on e-governance.

In terms of **Green Transition**, developments include the LAC - EU Ministerial Meeting on Environment and Climate Change, and the memoranda of understanding that were finalised on energies and green hydrogen with Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay. There have also been agreements on sustainable value chains and critical raw materials with Argentina and Chile, and a conference on sustainable practices and economic opportunities for sargassum in Granada. Green Transition will remain a very important topic. The EU-CELAC Summit is held back-to-back with the 2025 UN Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC COP30) in Belem, (Brazil) which will serve as an opportunity for both regions to send a strong message of commitment towards green transition.

Regarding **Human Development**, high level dialogues focused on social policies and health have taken place. The Health Resilience Initiative will also be an important component of the Summit.

On **Research and Innovation**, work is underway for an EU-CELAC ministerial meeting, envisaged for September 2025.

Citizen Security, Fight Against Organised Crime, and Drugs continues to be a key area; the 3rd ministerial level meeting and a declaration with an operational section mark an important stepping stone towards the Summit. Other developments are the High-Level Meeting of the EU-CELAC Coordination and Cooperation Mechanism on Drugs, which took place in Bolivia, and an upcoming meeting of the mechanisms on drugs in Poland. There was a high-level launch of "El Pacto" meeting in Panama, and there will be a high-level event in June 2025 in Lima. Furthermore, the memorandum of understanding on disaster preparedness is being implemented.

The EU highlighted that in the current geopolitical context, it is important to maintain strategic relationships with CELAC countries. There are conditions of uncertainty and danger, and thus, it is important that relationships between the two regions allow for opportunities for partnerships, and for a positive agenda. From the EU's perspective, Latin America and the Caribbean are part of the solution, which is how the Summit is being approached, to find solutions to common problems. It is equally important to share views, perspectives, and ideas on how the EU and CELAC can deliver results to address global challenges together. Despite the US shift to protectionism, on tariffs, the message from the EU is one of openness and strengthening and reinforcing of trade and economic investment relationships between the EU and the world, including LAC. It is important to connect the Global Gateway Investment Agenda with the trade and economic agreements. Furthermore, multilateralism is key, because both regions represent one third of the United Nations. The multilateral context requires reinforced attention and cooperation between the EU and CELAC. The EU will reinforce dialogue with CELAC countries in multilateral forums (in Geneva, New York, Vienna, and Rome) on various multilateral issues of common interest including those related to international financial architecture.

Great attention from the EU continued to be placed on the Triple Transition: Green, Digital, and Fair/Social, which is part of the objectives of the EU-LAC Global Gateway Investment Agenda. It is important to meet the challenges that lie ahead in this regard, and step up efforts in three areas: **first**, “invisible infrastructure” of governance democracy and public policy making, especially with the global regression on democratic values. **Second**, citizen security and fight against organized crime, including drugs, and illicit trafficking. It is important to move this agenda upwards towards the leaders, and onwards with more ambition. **Third**, multilateralism and global justice, with key importance of the agenda of UN reform, and the Pact for the Future. The Summit is a chance that would allow communicating a strong message in this regard.

Question and Answer Session

Mesa de Articulación raised a question on the challenges on democracy and governance and enquired about the role played by CSO in terms of political dialogue. In Latin America, the participation of CSOs in this framework is critical, and challenging. They enquired about the nature of the social participation of CSOs and how it can be generated through such bilateral dialogue to foment the legitimacy of independent voices. **Pelayo Castro Zuzuárregui** commented that the challenge is to build a common agenda. From the EU perspective, the concern is about the regression of civic space and the difficult environment of work for many CSOs. The way to address it is to work bilaterally through dialogue, and in

some cases human rights dialogues, through delegations, as well as through action plans on a bilateral level. This does not only cover civil political rights, but also socioeconomic rights and cultural rights issues.

Climate Action Europe Network welcomed the areas of governance and global justice and highlighted the importance of addressing the climate emergency in the two regions. They added that this would be an opportunity for the reinforcement of the multilateral climate framework, and to reflect on how the trade and development architectures that exist between the two regions are having an effect on the ability of the states to address the climate emergency. They asked about the agenda on climate and environment, as well as the space for engagement with CSOs, and encouraged that this be communicated publicly and as early as possible in order to have time to engage before the Summit. **Pelayo Castro Zuzuárregui** explained that the Summit will be back-to-back with COP30 in Belem (Brazil). In 2025, a lot of the work on the climate front will be done in the context of the preparatory work towards COP30.

It is imperative to send a compatible and mutually reinforcing message between the specific negotiating track towards the COP30, and the CELAC-EU Summit as a political space to reinforce the joint commitment on climate.

Save the Children inquired about the participation of children and adolescents in multilateral spaces, such as the Youth Security Council, and about plans to structure the work in the areas of common interest. **Felice Zaccheo**, Head of Unit of INTPA B1 - Regional Programmes for Latin America and the Caribbean, noted that it is important to work on some concrete outcomes in that sense, and work is still in progress in this regard.

Caritas Europe raised a question regarding the collaboration with the Financing for Development Conference in Spain in June, given the importance of multilateralism. **Pelayo Castro Zuzuárregui** explained that there is a political opportunity to work together and listen to what the region is saying, and to build shared objectives. A lot of what INTPA is doing is to address the capital gap, which is the key demand of the countries' region, which are asking for more access to finance and capital in a predictable and affordable manner.

HiperDerecho asked about the topics of focus in the digital agenda of the Summit, noting that in the 2023 Summit, digital alliance, cyber security, AI, and other issues were addressed, but there remain challenges regarding connectivity in rural areas, security, and quality of infrastructure. They also highlighted the importance of focusing on climate justice and the environmental impact of technologies. **Pelayo Castro Zuzuárregui** agreed on the importance of addressing the issue of connectivity, particularly in rural areas, which is part of the

cooperation with some countries, including in Colombia. **Felice Zaccheo** added that a lot has been done since the last Summit in July 2023, when the Digital Alliance was launched. Advances were achieved on the four pillars that were set up by the Digital Alliance (regulatory framework, connectivity, Copernicus, and the digital accelerator). Work is ongoing in the framework of the digital accelerator, on e-health, and on telemedicine, amongst others.

Francisco Gutiérrez stated that the questions and concerns were noted, and he confirmed the messages conveyed by the EU. The Presidency will look forward to significant deliverables and is already working hard to make headway in the region and establish solid foundations for achieving progress.

Role of Civil Society in the run up to the Fourth CELAC-EU Summit

Felice Zaccheo, Head of Unit of INTPA B1 - Regional Programmes for Latin America and the Caribbean, briefed the floor on the role of the CSOs in the run up to the upcoming IV CELAC-EU Summit. The Third Summit that took place in July 2023 marked a milestone in relations between the two regions, and gave the CSOs, LAs, the private sector, and youth space to voice their opinions. Ensuring that the CSOs voices are heard is fundamental. The Global Gateway approach follows this logic, as it aims to support people, create jobs, and find sustainable economic development. Through the Global Gateway, there is an aim to invest in education, in youth, in gender equality, decent work, and reducing inequality. A key part of this work is ensuring that the CSOs and LAs are consulted and actively involved. This is why the EU delegations in the different countries use tools such as the CSO roadmaps to engage at the country level. The side events of the 2025 CELAC-EU Summit are going to build on this same inclusive spirit. Furthermore, Colombia is keen on hosting a Civil Society Forum, confirmed by the Colombian Presidency at the meeting. A mechanism of coordination between Colombia and the EU has been set up on how to shape the Summit.

Regarding the Civil Society Forum, it is aimed that it will enable a representative and balanced participation to allow the forum to be a space where CSOs from both regions can be heard. In order to set up a proper methodology, a call of expression of interest will be launched in order to identify a selected number of organisations to take part in the Steering Group of the Civil Society Forum. Discussions are ongoing on whether it would be a joint expression of interest (EU and LAC), or one exclusive for the EU civil society. The call for an expression of interest will be launched indicatively in May or early June 2025.

Question and Answer Session

The European Office of the Latin American Federation of Municipalities (FLACMA) emphasised the importance of close cooperation between Local Authorities and governments in the context of the bi-regional cooperation and agenda. LAs must have a voice in the cooperation procedures, and in the new paradigm of the Global Gateway. With administrative decentralisation, LAs are enabled to lead initiatives in the fight against inequalities and exclusion. In the run up to the Summit, several associations of LAs currently plan to organise the IV Forum of local and regional governments to serve as a high-level consultation to reach a set of priorities and conclusions that can be conveyed to the Heads of States of the two regions. The venue of the IV forum could be Bogota; FLACMA has been in contact with local representatives in this regard. Holding it in parallel with the celebration of the UN Habitat Day could be a good opportunity to create synergies. They expressed appreciation to the efforts exerted, especially regarding LAs, because they are the government closest to citizens. Coordination with DG INTPA, in particular Unit B1 and G2, is strategic to organizing such a forum of local and regional governments that can have an impact on the regional agenda.

The Coordinadora (The Spanish Development NGO Platform) referred to the work of EU-CELAC Civil Society Working Group, established after the previous Summit, and noted that their aim is to ensure the participation of CSOs at a regional level in the Summit and in the run up to the Summit. In April 2025, they hosted a meeting in Brussels and addressed a number of priorities, the agenda of the Summit, and how CSOs could participate in the process. They raised a question regarding the Civil Society Forum, and whether there would be more room to discuss how it would be carried out, apart from the organising committee. They also asked about the date and venue proposed for 2025, and whether the participation of CSO is foreseen in the Summit, as they would like to convey their input and see the declaration of CSOs be part of the political process and have an impact on the Summit. They repeated a suggestion they had shared before regarding the involvement of CSOs in a mechanism to enable the follow up on the Roadmap, performance, accountability, and transparency. They also raised a question on the political agenda of the Summit, and referenced the bi-regional Pact on Care, which was ahead of the previous Summit, but was not reflected in the draft declaration. **Felice Zaccheo** explained that the venue is to be decided by Colombia. Regarding CSO participation, there are spaces for consultations, and work will continue to further develop them. There are mechanisms in place for consultations with different stakeholders and cooperation will therefore continue to the run up for the Summit. Regarding the Pact on Care, this issue is given due consideration and is already embedded in the EU programmes, such as in the programme on Inclusive Societies.

A representative from the **Youth Sounding Board in Colombia** raised a question about how to ensure that youth will have space on the agenda of the Civil Society Forum, the Business Forum, and the agenda of the Summit. A representative from the **Youth Sounding Board of Ecuador** asked about how the participants will be selected from the youth organisations to take part in EU-LAC Youth Days. **Felice Zaccheo** explained that CSOs, LAs, and youth's involvement demonstrates the importance attached to the CSOs' components as a whole, as CSOs encompassed different actors, including youth. A committee will be set up and criteria will be devised and discussed in due time to select the representatives.

Articulación Feminista Marcosur emphasised the importance of reinforcing CSOs, rendering them allies to defend democracies. CSOs in some countries, such as Peru, are being prosecuted, banned, and sidelined. There is a need for a strong declaration in this regard, considering this fact. **Felice Zaccheo** noted that indeed, there is a need for a space to discuss and share views, but also to pass strong messages.

Wetlands International asked about mechanisms envisaged for CSOs to promote activities and operations that are not detrimental to wetlands and other environmental habitats, and whether there is a commitment to deforestation. They also asked whether there are mechanisms in place to promote the circular economy approach, to reduce demand and pressure on ecosystems. **Felice Zaccheo** confirmed that the issue of deforestation is important and is included in the programmes, adding that the EU Regulation on Deforestation is key in the work done. On the circular economy, work has just started to address this topic, and it is hoped to achieve first results to present in the context of the deliverables of the Summit.

EULAT Network noted that they have carried out an assessment of the previous forum, assessing the pros and cons, and suggested that this is taken into account. The assessment highlighted the importance of addressing certain issues differently. They also asked about the possibility of having a process to engage CSOs in drafting the final declaration of the Summit. For CSOs, it is necessary to know what the final topics would be, in order to provide suggestions on the declaration. **Felice Zaccheo** thanked them for the assessment and ensured that the opinions and suggestions will be looked into. Regarding the declaration, **Pelayo Castro Zuzuárregui** clarified that the negotiation process is highly sensitive, and many governments are involved. It is hoped that what has been shared and communicated is ultimately reflected in the final declaration. Participants can share their recommendations, papers, feedback, declarations, relevant documents, and insights that can be of interest and benefit for the Summit. **Francisco Gutierrez** confirmed that the Colombian Presidency and the EU have been listening to different questions and opinions and are committed to involve the CSOs in the various scenarios. The objective is to have spaces for CSOs to be represented

and be heard. Efforts are also exerted to ensure the continuity of the bi-regional relationships and to ensure effective participation of CSOs to achieve results.

Closing remarks

Felice Zaccheo thanked everyone for participating in the meeting. He confirmed that the number of questions raised and the level of difficulty of issues reveal the commitment and the good will of CSOs to support the process and play a critical role in the Summit, as was the case in the previous one.

Work on the logistical details and concept related issues are ongoing; as such, feedback is of essence to strengthen cooperation. The participants will continue to be informed about developments. The meeting was closed.