

Notes from the Steering Group meeting
LAC-EU Civil Society Forum 2025
Online, 23-07-25

1. Objectives of the meeting

First meeting of the newly formed Steering Group for the LAC-EU Civil Society Forum 2025, which will take place in Santa Marta (Colombia) on 7 and 8 November 2025, prior to the IV CELAC-EU Summit on 9 and 10 November.

The objectives of the meeting were to establish initial contact, explain the context and process of forming the Steering Group, review the Concept Note of the Civil Society Forum and the Terms of Reference of the Steering Group (documents previously distributed to the members of the Group), and agree on the next steps.

2. Content

The session opened with a welcome to all members of the Steering Group, as well as to the Colombian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the European Union (EU), who are collaborating in the organisation of the Civil Society Forum. This was followed by individual presentations by the participants.

The selection criteria for organisations for the Steering Group were explained: 10 representatives of civil society organisations (CSOs) from the Policy Forum on Development (PFD) and 5 representatives appointed by Colombia and the EU. The CSOs were selected on the basis of their regional representativeness (regional organisations were given priority over national ones), their thematic relevance to the issues of the IV CELAC-EU Summit, and their institutional capacity to contribute actively to the group.

It was clarified that this Steering Group is composed solely of the individuals identified and present at this meeting, who have the mandate to define the agenda, themes, content, sessions and key messages of the Civil Society Forum. The group was formed through the PFD, an instrument established by the European Union, widely recognised for its experience in facilitating institutional dialogue with civil society organisations and local authority associations, and whose use has been endorsed by Colombia. It was emphasised that the composition of the Steering Group does not limit or condition the inclusiveness, diversity, or breadth of participation in the Civil Society Forum. On the contrary, its members are expected to act as active nodes in their respective networks, sharing information, gathering input, and collectively enriching the decision-making process that will shape the event.

The objectives of the Civil Society Forum and the preliminary themes described in the Concept Note were reviewed. The difficulty of covering all relevant global and local issues in a very limited time was discussed, and it was agreed to continue refining these issues in future meetings, prioritising: the agenda of the IV CELAC-EU Summit, the EU's Global Gateway approach and the priorities of the participating CSOs. It was

emphasised that good thematic preparation for the Forum sessions will enable the identification of key messages that will serve as the basis for the Joint Final Declaration of Civil Society at the close of the Forum.

The Civil Society Forum will take place over a day and a half, with two plenary sessions (at the beginning and end) and three rounds of between two and three parallel thematic sessions in smaller groups (i.e. between six and nine thematic sessions). There will be opportunities for all participants to meet, as well as a dinner and a cultural event at the end of the first day.

Up to 300 people are expected to participate, including approximately 200 representatives of civil society, and up to 1,500 people will be able to follow the event online. A public call for expressions of interest will be launched in mid-August through the PFD. Participants will be selected based on criteria of inclusiveness, diversity and thematic relevance. Some participants will receive full financial support, while others will receive partial support, depending on budget availability and the total number of places allocated.

An open online information session is scheduled for 10 September, aimed at all interested CSOs, to share progress on the IV CELAC-EU Summit and the LAC-EU Civil Society Forum 2025, at which some members of the Steering Group are expected to present the progress made.

On the occasion of the IV CELAC-EU Summit, other events will be organised in addition to the Civil Society Forum, including a Business Forum, in which civil society is not expected to participate.

The meeting also reviewed the Terms of Reference of the Steering Group: the objectives, the work plan and how the next meetings will be conducted. The active role of the members of the Steering Group in proposing topics, designing the format, agenda, sessions, speakers and main messages was highlighted, as well as in drafting the Joint Declaration that will contain the final messages of the Civil Society Forum. Although the Steering Group has an advisory and propositional role, the bulk of the work of preparing the agenda falls on this group.

It was emphasised that the Steering Group will follow the basic principles of freedom of expression, respect and confidentiality.

The meeting concluded by thanking everyone for their participation in today's meeting and expressing confidence that the agreed work plan will enable progress towards a substantive agenda of common interest.

3. Agreements

- Consolidation of work with regular meetings: the Steering Group will meet every two weeks, from 20 August to November, on Wednesdays from 3pm to 5pm CET (Brussels

time), at the same link. If anyone is unable to attend on a particular occasion, they may notify the group and suggest a replacement.

- Minutes of the Steering Group meetings: these will be sent to the Group, which will have one (1) day to review them. Once reviewed, the final minutes will be made public on Capacity4dev and in an open online space within the PFD dialogue platform (PFD Dialogue Space).
- Steering Group members agree to share their email addresses. They may organise ad hoc meetings with other members and use the collaborative spaces (PFD Dialogue Space) to share ideas, documents and other relevant information.
- Conduct an initial identification of key topics for the Forum agenda.
- At the end, after the Forum but before the last meeting, conduct a written evaluation of the functioning of the Steering Group, which will be discussed collectively at the last meeting at the end of November.
- Share background documents, including the statement from the last summit and preliminary proposals for topics, as a starting point.
- Explicitly emphasise the importance of achieving a relationship between what civil society proposes and intergovernmental agreements between the European Union and the Latin American region.

4. Next steps

- Send invitations via Google Calendar to all scheduled meetings (PFD technical assistance).
- Enable a 'private' workspace for the Steering Group on the PFD Dialogue Space platform: PFD technical assistance will send the invitation and instructions, and everyone will register.
- Share a preliminary outline of possible thematic areas for discussion at the next meeting, together with the conclusions of the III EU-CELAC Summit of 2023 (PFD technical assistance, by email and in the PFD Dialogue Space collaborative space).
- All members of the Steering Group prepare proposals for thematic areas and a common thread to be shared at the next meeting.

Participants

Steering Group Members:

1. CSA / ITUC Americas
2. Youth Sounding Board, Colombia
3. Spanish Youth Council (CJE)/European Youth Forum
4. International Cooperative Alliance (ICA Americas)
5. Coordinator of Indigenous Organisations of the Amazon Basin (COICA)
6. EU LAT Network
7. The Coordinator of Development Organisations (La Coordinadora / CONCORD)
8. Global Network for Disaster Reduction (GNDR)
9. Transparency International (TI)
10. Marcosur Feminist Articulation (AFM)
11. FORUS International

12. Group of Institutes, Foundations and Companies (GIFE / WINGS)
13. Mesa de Articulación de Asociaciones Nacionales y Redes de América Latina y el Caribe (MESA)
14. Ministry of Equality and Equity, Colombia
15. European Commission, DG INTPA B.1

Observers:

- European Commission, DG INTPA G.2
- Colombian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Technical Assistance:

- GOPA
- PFD