



Latin America and the Caribbean and the European Union: towards a real renewed political partnership. Civil society proposals to strengthen the bi-regional relationship

**Document by the EU-LAC Working Group for the EU's
New Agenda towards Latin America and the Caribbean
and its bi-regional strategy**

Executive summary

In the current context of global transformation, overlapping crises and gradual post-pandemic recovery, relations between the European Union (EU) and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) have the potential to promote sustainable development and advance human rights. For this to happen, civil society should be involved as a key actor to enhance the inclusiveness, transparency and effectiveness of processes. After a relative standstill on the bi-regional agenda, there has been an agreement to renew the strategic partnership during a new EU-CELAC Summit on 17 and 18 July in Brussels. On 7 June, the European Commission published the Joint Communication “A New Agenda for EU-LAC relations” setting out the priorities and actions proposed by the EU in key areas.

LAC is a very important ally for the EU in terms of investment, trade and cooperation in key areas such as biodiversity, renewable energy, agricultural production, the defence of multilateralism, and strategic raw materials. An agenda has therefore been set around six priorities—deepening political dialogue; completing the network of trade agreements; cooperating on transitions (ecological, digital, and social); addressing security and justice challenges; promoting peace, democracy and human rights; and building a people-centred partnership.

The EU has launched the Global Gateway strategy to boost infrastructure investment globally, proposing a LAC-specific investment agenda to be adopted at the EU-CELAC Summit and for LAC to become the testing ground for the Global Gateway. However, this initiative lacks a horizontal bi-regional governance structure, the commitment to demanding due diligence processes and measuring the operational impact on inequalities, and the participation of civil society.

On top of that, the civic space is shrinking in many countries. This was compounded by the pandemic, which saw an unprecedented increase in attacks against human rights organisations, activists, and defenders, leading to displacement, violence and impunity. This situation has disproportionately impacted the most vulnerable. The new EU-LAC relations offer an opportunity to give priority to the defence of human rights and civic space. It allows for co-developing protection mechanisms at the bi-regional level, as well as for strongly committing to protect and expand civic space in countries and reverse the processes of political, administrative and financial repression against social organisations and defenders of rights and territories.

In LAC, the gap between poverty and extreme wealth has widened in recent decades

and inflation rates have soared, creating multidimensional and intersectional inequalities. While most people live in a situation of vulnerability, billionaires have seen their wealth increase (by 21% during the pandemic). Addressing these inequalities by promoting social protection, comprehensive care systems, progressive taxation, decent employment, resources for basic services and a bi-regional feminist partnership is imperative.

A green and just transition is key to address the climate emergency. It is also needed to reorganise societies and economies under the principles of human and labour rights, planetary boundaries, and welfare for all by promoting the transition to agroecological systems and the cancellation of external debt, for instance. Predictable and sufficient funding is required to support the transition and fight poverty and inequality in LAC.

Trade and investment agreements between the EU and LAC do not meet sustainable development goals nor contribute to reducing poverty. They tend to perpetuate dependence on extractive industries which have a major impact on territories and the environment. Even though they contain human rights and sustainability clauses, they lack binding mechanisms and have no significant impact, regardless of the severity of human rights violations.

In the global context of democratic regression, a constrained civic space and a crisis of public confidence, the engagement of an active and diverse civil society is crucial for the success and reliability of the bi-regional strategic project. In this regard, based on the historical contribution, the current relevance, and the legitimacy of the work of civil society organisations and networks that make up the EU-LAC Group, we propose the following recommendations for the renewal of EU-LAC relations.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE EU-LAC GROUP:

To establish a real renewed political partnership:

- Set up a **multi-stakeholder structure for participation, contribution, and follow-up to EU-CELAC processes** that will be formally incorporated into the permanent coordination mechanism to be created between the EU and CELAC.

Towards an open civic space for a vibrant democracy:

- **Review and examine outstanding loans or grants** from financial institutions to make sure that they are not granted to individuals or entities involved in **cases of corruption, illicit financing of political campaigns, or human rights violations.**
- **Vote against outstanding loans or aid to the responsible persons or entities of such abuses and impose visa sanctions** and the freezing of their economic assets and holdings in the EU financial system.

Towards an EU-LAC agenda that puts the fight against inequalities at its centre:

- Place **inequality reduction, ownership of the countries in the region, transparency, and the Sustainable Development Goals** at the centre of the Global Gateway strategy **over private and geopolitical interests**.
- **Agree on a bi-regional care society pact and support the regional fiscal platform** led by Colombia to develop tax policies in the region.

Towards a Green and Just Transition for both regions:

- **Ensure that the investment packages supported by the EU for LAC under Global Gateway** contribute to the transformation of the production system and energy matrix within the framework of human rights and respect for the environment. This must include stringent due diligence processes and be based on leadership and ownership of **local actors**.
- **Facilitate the availability of financial resources for the Green and Just Transition** by supporting LAC governments' debt cancellation efforts, and through progressive tax reforms, anti-tax avoidance programmes, the phasing out of fossil fuel subsidies, strengthening and extending universal social protection systems, and investing in quality public services.

Towards just and sustainable investment and trade agreements:

- **Review the EU's model trade agreements to incorporate at least one binding chapter on sustainability**, setting forth complaint mechanisms and sanctions in the event of non-compliance with social, environmental, and human rights clauses, and **conditioning the signature and ratification** of any agreement on the inclusion of that chapter.
- The EU and its Member States must **combine the adoption of an ambitious due diligence directive with the reform of trade and investment agreements**, eliminating the Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) mechanism and guaranteeing environmental obligations.

* The EU-LAC Working Group is an informal platform of European organizations and networks created in 2014. Its common objective is to work on EU-LAC topics. List of organizations and networks:

Caritas Europa; Pax Christi International; WSM; ODHACO; WIDE+; People in Need - PIN; Red EULAT; Oxfam; ActionAid; RIDHE; Solsoc; CIDSE; Brot für die Welt; COS-PE; Coordinadora ONGD España; Gret; WWF; Fundación Avina; SOLIDAR; Wetlands International; Alliance 2015; World Organisation against Torture - OMCT; ITUC; Plataforma Europa - Peru; Fundación Ebert Stiftung; ETUC; Human Rights Watch; Civil Rights Defenders; 11 11 11; FIDH; CSW; Amnesty Europe; AIDSFONDS; Justice et Paix; CONCORD; CNCD 11 11 11; Race and Equality; Heinrich Böll Foundation; IFSI-ISVI.

Other organizations supporting this document:

Free Press Unlimited; MPDL - Movimiento por la Paz; Fundación Alboan; Alianza de Organizaciones para la Eficacia del Desarrollo - AOED-ALyC; Plataforma Diálogos Nacionales Ecuador; Asociación Nacional Centros de Investigación Promoción Social y Desarrollo - ANC; Fundación Entreculturas; Grupo Propuesta Ciudadana; IM-Suecia; OMCT; ASTM; WSM; Trocaire; ACDA; BOS+; MATM; Red europea de Comités Oscar Romero; Solidair met Guatemala; Protection International; OCDIH, Organismo Cristiano de Desarrollo Integral de Honduras; FOS ngo; Red sin Fronteras RSF; Asamblea de Cooperación por la Paz (ACPP); PRODIVERSA - Progreso y Diversidad; Fundación Kallpa Bolivia; ISCOD -Sindicalistas sin fronteras; CGIL - Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro; ARCS – Arci Culture Solidali; ISCOS; Asociación CRECER; Liga Española de la Educación y la Cultura Popular;

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