

## ‘EU-LAC Gender Equality Forum’

### - Concept Note -

**Organisation:** EU-LAC International Foundation, EU-LAC Women’s International Network (EU-LAC WIN)

**Co-Hosts:** German Federal Foreign Office and Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation

**Implementing partners:** Unidas Women’s Network between Germany, Latin America and the Caribbean, German Organization for International Cooperation (GIZ)

**Dates:** 11–12 May, 2023

**Format:** Hybrid

**Location:** German Federal Foreign Office and external location (tbc), Berlin, Germany

**Languages:** Spanish/English

### Executive summary

The CELAC-EU Summit of Heads of State and Heads of State and Government, scheduled for 17 and 18 July 2023, will provide an opportunity to generate a high-level strategic dialogue on the challenges and opportunities of bi-regional cooperation around policies and programmes aimed at promoting gender equality in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and the countries of the European Union (EU). In the face of setbacks in the rights of girls and women as well as LGBTIQ+ persons, the increase in different forms of gender-based violence, and the social and economic inequalities aggravated by the pandemic, it is essential to agree on common strategies aimed at empowering girls and women and to redouble efforts to achieve an equitable, fair and sustainable development of our societies.

Consequently, and in the framework of its mission to facilitate the exchange between governmental and civil society authorities of the two regions (EU and LAC), the EU-LAC Foundation proposes convening a **Gender Equality Forum** as a space for deliberation that will bring together representatives of networks and civil society organisations working on gender equality and the rights of girls and women as well as of LGBTIQ+ persons, researchers and experts from international organisations specialised in the field, and government representatives. Its purpose is to generate inputs to feed the discussion agenda of the high authorities of the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean related to the Summit of Heads of State and Government in the field of women's political, economic and social rights, gender transformative climate action and the role of women in the consolidation of sustainable peace and security.

### Introduction

The **EU-LAC Foundation** is an international intergovernmental organisation established in 2010 by the States of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and the European Union (EU), as well as the EU itself through its institutions. Its mandate is to work towards closer collaboration with its 61 members, to promote bi-regional partnership and dialogue to generate relevant inputs for intergovernmental processes. An essential part of this mission is to build bridges to increase mutual knowledge and promote dialogue on issues that are

high on the agenda of the strategic partnership between the two regions. The Foundation also aims to achieve and offer new networking opportunities and to launch innovative initiatives at the bi-regional level. In this sense, EU-LAC Foundation seeks to foster international cooperation involving both institutional entities and civil societies to jointly respond to current political, social and economic challenges.

**"Renewing the bi-regional partnership to strengthen peace and sustainable development"**- this was the title of a meeting held in Buenos Aires on 27 October 2022 between the Foreign Ministers of the European Union and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). In this meeting the need was emphasised to renew the existing links between Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and the European Union (EU), based on "a forward-looking, substantive and positive agenda" which includes:

- **inclusive, equitable and sustainable post-pandemic economic recovery;**
- **innovation, the fight against climate change and biodiversity loss, disaster risk management and the digital agenda.**
- **multilateralism and cooperation in the field of security and governance, migration, and the promotion and protection of human rights**

During the dialogue, the **"empowerment of women and girls, gender policies as well as the fight against discriminations"** received special attention. It was underlined that the two regions not only share values such as the promotion and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law, but also a vision of democratic, free and equitable societies to achieve sustainable development.<sup>1</sup>

Based on a **Bi-regional Roadmap 2022-2023**<sup>2</sup>, it was agreed to organise a series of meetings on shared thematic priorities - including a **meeting hosted by the EU-LAC Foundation, through the EU-LAC Women's International Network, to work on priority areas of the gender agenda (climate action, care, leadership)** - leading to a **Summit of EU-CELAC Heads of State and Government** in Brussels in the second half of 2023, during the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU, which would re-launch the political dialogue at the highest level.

In their press release, the EU and CELAC representatives stressed that this meeting and the renewed commitment would imply a turning point and the beginning of a profound revision of relations between the two regions. From the perspective of civil societies in both regions, this review seems eminently necessary, considering that the last formal bi-regional agreements - which include cooperation on gender issues - had been established almost eight years ago, at **the last EU-CELAC Summit of Heads of State and Government held in Brussels on 10-11 June 2015**. It is worth recalling that, in the **2015 EU-CELAC Action Plan**<sup>3</sup>, a specific chapter was dedicated to outline the objectives, activities and joint initiatives in this area:

**Chapter 7 on "Gender"** identifies as its main objective to "prioritise the gender issue in the context of bi-regional relations and underscore the political will in both regions to

<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-ministerial-meetings/2022/10/27/>

<sup>2</sup> See: [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/celac-ue-bi-regional-roadmap-2022-2023\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/celac-ue-bi-regional-roadmap-2022-2023_en)

<sup>3</sup> See: <https://intranet.eulacfoundation.org/en/content/action-plan-eu-celac-summit-2015-10-11-june>

guarantee gender equality and the protection, exercise and promotion of women's rights, including:

- i) *Political participation of women;*
- ii) *Elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls, including sexual violence; and*
- iii) *Economic empowerment of women and their participation in the world of work and in all decision-making processes.*

The governments of both regions agreed to work towards these objectives through spaces for dialogue and exchange of experiences; cooperation and training programmes for women; and the promotion of public policies. The list of this joint work includes, for example, “measures to combat and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls” and “for the investigation of gender-based killing”; the promotion of women's participation “in the economy and in paid labour markets, with social security and conditions of fairness”, as well as “policies and laws to ensure equal pay for equal work”; “cooperation for the creation of synergies and mutual learning to optimise existing practices and lessons learned in the area of gender mainstreaming in all public policies”; the exchange of “experiences on peace achievements, conflict resolution and women's participation in these processes, including the implementation of relevant UN General Assembly resolutions in this regard, as well as UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security” (2000); or the continuation of cooperation, including - as far as possible - agreed language on common positions - in international forums, such as the United Nations, its General Assembly and the Commission on the Status of Women.

The reading of these objectives makes clear the need to evaluate the extent to which the proposed lines of action have been promoted, strengthened and provided with resources, based on bi-regional, regional and national policies, programmes and instruments. At the same time, an evaluation of the progress and challenges in bi-regional cooperation in the field of gender equality should also consider the changes at the international global level over the past years. To mention only a few relevant aspects that affected the two regions as a whole, with gender implications, the following could be mentioned:

A few months after the EU-CELAC Summit in Brussels in September 2015, leaders from 193 member countries of the United Nations adopted the **2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, with Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and very successful targets in terms of equal access for girls and women to education and health care, opportunities for decent work, as well as representation in political and economic decision-making processes. In this regard, it is important to understand that the realisation of gender equality in all SDGs offers an opportunity to effectively and sustainably address the challenges faced by humankind and our planet. Meanwhile, Goal 17 has opened the door for multi-stakeholder partnerships, policy coherence, capacity building and mobilisation of more resources to achieve the SDGs as a whole.

The **Paris Agreement**, adopted by 196 countries at COP21 in December 2015, which aims to limit global warming by 1.5 degrees Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels, was formulated in the face of the increasingly severe effects of climate change globally, and in an extreme form in some regions with greater exposure to excessive heat, flooding, etc.

In this regard, it should be noted that there is an inter-causal relationship between climate change and gender inequalities. Women are disproportionately affected by climate change, and social and economic inequalities place women in a situation that reduces their capacity to respond and react to critical situations. In turn, the impacts of environmental crises tend to deepen inequalities or create new ones. We also know that women and men contribute differently to climate solutions, which makes it necessary to address, in the design of policies and programmes, issues such as women's and men's energy needs and uses, employment and entrepreneurship, and the involvement of women's traditional knowledge and practices in mitigation strategies. But precisely when it comes to the design of policy frameworks and decision-making in areas such as climate and energy, women continue to be under-represented in leadership positions. Given this scenario, as pointed out at the **Regional Meeting on Climate Change and Gender Equality 2021**, led by Chile in its capacity as COP25 Presidency and with the support of the European Union through its **EUROCLIMA+ Programme** and ECLAC, both regions have made ambitious advances in the inclusion of concrete actions to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in their climate agendas.

The **Covid-19 pandemic** has evoked an unprecedented health crisis, aggravating structural inequalities in our societies, and highlighting inadequacies in the provision of basic goods and services to the population, the health and social protection systems, as well as the education and labour sectors. The coronavirus had a differentiated impact on women, due to, among other factors, their predominant role in household work, education and child rearing, and their performance in the (paid and unpaid) service, health, and care sectors more generally. In LAC, the pandemic generated a setback of almost 20 years in the levels of women's labour participation. In addition, with the confinement measures, women's organisations in various regions reported about alarming increase in levels of gender-based violence. Exposure to critical situations and violation of rights has been felt even more by women living in highly vulnerable conditions (e.g., migrant women, women with disabilities).

The pandemic also shed light on **the inequitable distribution of care work** as one of the main causes of gender inequalities that hinder the full exercise of rights and economic autonomy of women, adolescents, and girls. In LAC, women spend three times more than men on unpaid domestic and care work, with the burden being proportionally greater for lower-income women. This burden significantly limits their possibilities to participate fully in the labour market. According to ECLAC data, around 60% of women in households with children under the age of 15 indicated that they were not participating in the labour market because they had family responsibilities.<sup>4</sup> In EU countries, 92% of women consider themselves to be regular caregivers, i.e. they provide unpaid care services at least several days a week, compared to 68% of men who report being regular carers.<sup>5</sup> Difficulties in accessing care services are also evident in the EU, such as lack of financial resources, lack

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<sup>4</sup> Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) (2020). Social Panorama of Latin America 2020(LC/PUB.2021/2-P/Rev.1), Santiago, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.cepal.org/en/publications/46688-social-panorama-latin-america-2020>

<sup>5</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality (2020): Beijing Platform for Action: Gender inequalities in care and pay in the EU. Retrieved from <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-inequalities-care-and-pay-eu>

of availability of services, inflexible opening hours and distance from the centres where services are provided.<sup>6</sup> Estimates of unpaid care and domestic work in relation to GDP highlight the economic relevance of this kind of work in economic terms<sup>7</sup>, which is in contradiction with the low social value of this work and its consideration in policy design. In this regard, both regions have managed to forge agreements and promote significant progress: The European Commission presented, in September 2022, its **European Care Strategy for Caregivers and Care Receivers**<sup>8</sup> with specific guidelines, actions and recommendations to ensure comprehensive care services including the provision of quality, affordable and accessible early childhood and long-term care services in all EU countries. Meanwhile, the **Buenos Aires Commitment**<sup>9</sup>, adopted in November 2022 in the framework of the XV Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, recommends the adoption of normative frameworks that guarantee the right to care through the implementation of comprehensive care policies and systems, from the perspectives of gender, intersectionality, interculturality and human rights.

The time women spend on care also means that they lack time for other activities, such as their full **participation in public and political life**. In 2021, the percentage of women MEPs has decreased since the 2019 elections (41%) and stood at 38.9%.<sup>10</sup> Even so, this figure was higher than the European average for national parliaments at 30.5%. In the same year, in LAC, women held 33.6% of the seats in national parliaments. Meanwhile, at the municipal level, women held only 24.9% of elected seats.<sup>11</sup> In this regard, it is important to highlight the increasing trend in **harassment and political violence against women** candidates and women in political office, despite the successive adoption of policies and mechanisms (laws introducing quotas or parity; norms to prevent, investigate and sanction harassment and political violence).<sup>12</sup> In the same way, every day, women suffer abuse, threats or slander on digital social networks. A survey conducted by the German organisation HateAid shows that around 52% of women aged 18-35 have experienced **digital violence** at

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<sup>6</sup> See: European Institute for Gender Equality (2021). Gender inequalities in care and consequences for the labour market. Retrieved from <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-inequalities-care-and-consequences-labour-market>

<sup>7</sup> Some of the approximations carried out in the LAC region show that unpaid domestic and care work is worth between 15.9% and 27.6% of GDP. On average, 74% of this contribution is made by women; see: ECLAC 2022: The care society. Horizon for a sustainable recovery with gender equality. Retrieved from <https://oig.cepal.org/en/documents/care-society-horizon-sustainable-recovery-gender-equality>

<sup>8</sup> See: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&furtherNews=yes&newsId=10382#navItem-relatedDocuments>

<sup>9</sup> See: <https://conferenciamujer.cepal.org/15/en/documents/buenos-aires-commitment>

<sup>10</sup> See: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/689345/EPRS\\_BRI\(2021\)689345\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/689345/EPRS_BRI(2021)689345_EN.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> See footnote 5.

<sup>12</sup> See: OAS and UN Women (2020): Standards for the protection of the human rights of women: Necessary tools for the defence of women's political participation <https://intranet.eulacfoundation.org/en/content/standards-protection-human-rights-women-necessary-tools-defence-women%E2%80%99s-political>

least once.<sup>13</sup> The measures taken by the operators of these platforms are not sufficient to make the digital space a safer place for women (and other vulnerable groups). As a consequence of these violations, many women choose to stop talking about certain topics on these platforms or withdraw from public and digital spaces.

Finally, the **war in Ukraine** made visible the ways in which women are disproportionately affected by armed conflict, displacement, and sexual violence it entails, in addition to the loss of life despite being part of the civilian population<sup>14</sup>, - experiences to which women in Latin America, such as in Colombia, for example, had been exposed.<sup>15</sup> The central role of women in sustainable peacebuilding and security was also discussed. According to studies, peace agreements are more likely to succeed and last longer when women are involved in the negotiation process. Moreover, women's participation in decision-making and leadership positions in post-conflict societies tends to lead to more inclusive and equitable social policies. Although important steps have been taken since the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000, women continue being underrepresented, and their potential contributions undervalued, in peacebuilding efforts.<sup>16</sup>

In various declarations, forums and initiatives, the countries of both regions have committed themselves to gender equity in the search for sustainable development as a matter of justice, equality and democracy. In addition to the aforementioned initiatives and programmes, special mention should be made of the **EU Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021-2025 (GAP III)**<sup>17</sup> which aims to accelerate progress on women's empowerment through all EU external action and which provides the EU with a policy framework to accelerate advances towards meeting international commitments. Special attention should also be given to the **EUROSociAL+** programme, which had been focused on contributing to the improvement of social cohesion in Latin American countries by supporting their processes of design, reform and implementation of public policies, focusing its action on the areas of gender, governance and social policies.

The implementation of initiatives, programmes, policies at bi-regional, regional, and national levels, as well as high-level meetings, have been closely and critically monitored by various actors working on women's and gender human rights in both regions. It is these actors - networks and alliances, initiatives, organisations, foundations - who have represented and articulated the voices of the populations based on their diverse realities and experiences and formulated proposals to be taken into account by political decision-makers. At the same time, through their own projects and initiatives, these actors on both sides of the Atlantic have contributed to the realisation of rights and the creation of more democratic and equitable societies.

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<sup>13</sup> See: <https://eu.boell.org/en/2021/12/01/digital-violence-against-women-what-needs-be-done-now> and <https://hateaid.org/straftaten-im-netz/>

<sup>14</sup> See also: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/Rapid-Gender-Analysis-of-Ukraine-en.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Garrido Ortolá, A. (2021): La construcción de paz en Colombia: sin mujeres, no hay paz posible, en Cuadernos de Gobierno y Administración Pública 8-1, 71-81.

<sup>16</sup> See also: <https://www.en.1325.org.ua/>

<sup>17</sup> See: [https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-01/join-2020-17-final\\_en.pdf](https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-01/join-2020-17-final_en.pdf)

## General objective

Taking into account the mandate of the EU-LAC Foundation to facilitate the active participation of the societies in the 60 countries that make up the EU-CELAC Bi-regional Partnership, and recognising the fundamental role of civil society actors, the present Gender Equality Forum is proposed to be held to generate inputs for the adoption of common lines of public policies, as well as the actions of civil society actors that strengthen the links between the societies of both regions in terms of gender equality, in a framework sustained by the logic of social cohesion and inspired by the SDGs.

## Specific objectives

More specifically, this Gender Equality Forum is convened with the following objectives in mind:

- Facilitate an exchange on progress and achievements in policies, mechanisms and programmes to promote cooperation between the two regions on the human rights of women and LGBTIQ+ persons, and gender equality;
- Facilitate joint analysis on current challenges to advance the realisation rights of women and LGBTIQ+ persons and the reduction of gender inequalities in the social, economic and environmental spheres;
- Stimulate the formulation of concrete proposals to be taken into consideration by decision-makers in both regions, and by the authorities, particularly to supporting information for the EU-CELAC Summit of Heads of State and Government in July 2023;
- Provide a space to articulate sub-regional, regional and bi-regional gender equality initiatives and cooperation and thus enhance their potential impact.

## Methodology

The Gender Equality Forum is organised by the EU-LAC Foundation and its EU-LAC Women's International Network, it will be implemented in a hybrid format – in-person and virtual – in cooperation with the German Federal Foreign Office and the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation as co-hosts, and the Unidas Network and GIZ as implementing partners.

The structure of the Forum will include an opening session, keynote speeches by experts to inspire and guide the collective deliberations, and workshop-style work in three thematic working groups, in which invited guests will openly articulate their ideas, experiences and share their inputs for the dialogue. The results of the group work will be presented and articulated in a plenary session, and the Forum will end with a closing session.

The topics to be addressed in the three working groups will be as follows:

### Working group 1: Overcoming social and economic inequalities

- Access to basic services, health, education, and social security
- Equal participation in economies and decent employment
- Integral care systems

### Working group 2: Taking care of our planet

- Gender transformative climate action and disaster risk management
- Improvement of resilience and adaptive capacity
- Food security
- Solutions based on women's knowledge and skills

### Working group 3: Political leadership and peacebuilding

- Equal participation in the public sphere
- Combating gender-based violence in all its dimensions
- Empowering women's role in building sustainable peace and security

The thematic groups will work in parallel over the course of one and a half days, and will be divided internally between a group of people who physically attend the Forum in Berlin, and another group that attends the event virtually. Each working group will have moderators who will facilitate the dialogue based on interactive dynamics and guiding questions. Each group will be supported by rapporteurs who will synthesise the dialogues and the results of the deliberations and present them in a plenary session on the second day.

The work in the groups will take place in three sessions, and in each session, the participants will openly discuss their main topic following these guiding questions:

- (1) **Stocktaking and good practices:** *What have been the major advances on gender equality in both regions? What policies, programmes, initiatives and practices have generated relevant results, and why? What would be the main lessons learned?*
- (2) **Challenges and current bottlenecks:** *What are currently the greatest challenges and bottlenecks to deepening cooperation in this area? What are they due to? And what would be the key factors to overcome these obstacles and generate lines of cooperation with greater impact?*
- (3) **Common interests and recommendations:** *What suggestions and recommendations should be taken into account by policy makers in both regions to address the challenges identified? What existing policies, programmes and initiatives should be strengthened, and what other instruments could be developed in the short and medium term to achieve a greater convergence of efforts and a more efficient use of the resources invested? How could the initiatives and good practices generated in our regions be better articulated?*



## Participation in the Forum

To achieve the objectives of this Forum, representatives of initiatives, networks, associations and organisations working on gender equality in both regions will be invited to this activity, following a mixed approach:

- extension of invitations to experts and representatives of organisations and networks with a recognised experience in the field;
- selection of representatives of organisations and networks who expressed their interest in participating through an open call widely disseminated in both regions.

It is estimated that a limited group of approx. 30-40 persons may be invited to participate in person at the Forum in Berlin.

A larger group of people will be able to attend the Forum virtually, through a virtual platform.

In addition, networks, organisations and experts in the subject matter will be able to submit their input to the dialogue through an online expert survey, to be taken into account in the drafting of the final document.

This Forum aims to involve, in particular, representatives of initiatives, networks, associations, organisations working on gender equality and the rights of girls and women and LGBTIQ+ persons in the countries of the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean.

The evaluation of the expressions of interest in the Gender Equality Forum will be carried out by an internal evaluation committee of the EU-LAC Foundation, taking into consideration the following criteria, among others:

- expertise and competence in the thematic area, including different perspectives;
- geographical representativeness of both regions;
- gender (for the Gender Equality Forum, men and LGBTIQ+ persons are particularly invited to actively engage in the dialogue);
- age (young people and seniors);
- proficiency in the languages used in the Forum (English/Spanish).

## Expected outcomes

- Open and constructive exchange promoted between civil society representatives from LAC and the EU on the progress, challenges and opportunities for cooperation on the human rights of girls, women, LGBTIQ+ persons and gender equality;
- Articulation between sub-regional, regional and bi-regional initiatives of civil society organisations focused on the human rights of girls, women, LGBTIQ+ persons as well as gender equality;
- Elaboration of a document synthesising the deliberations and proposals to be considered as a contribution to the bi-regional agenda and, particularly, the EU-

CELAC Summit of Heads of State and Government in July 2023.

### Languages

Two languages will be used at the Forum - Spanish and English; if necessary, simultaneous interpretation will be provided to facilitate the dialogue.