

Bi-regional Relations



EU-LAC Foundation

# EU-LAC Webinars on COVID-19

Created and synthesised by Andressa Timm Bauer  
and Laura Sophie Thoma



## **EU-LAC Webinars on COVID-19**

The EU-LAC Foundation, following its mandate to foster the visibility of and promote debates on priority issues for the bi-regional agenda, organised a series of webinars to compare and share national and regional experiences on how to face the crisis related to COVID-19 and to discuss the challenges that it entails for bi-regional relations.

The objectives of the COVID-19 webinar series were (i) to exchange different perspectives on the challenges faced by the EU and LAC regions in the face of the pandemic, (ii) to reflect on the role and actions of regional organisations and the possibilities for more active cooperation between the EU and LAC and (iii) to identify common elements of a shared action agenda of governmental and civil society organisations for the processing of the pandemic.

The six webinars saw contributions from a group of experts from regional bodies, United Nations agencies, multilateral development banks, EU-LAC governments, academia, think tanks, media and non-governmental institutions from the regions of LAC and the EU. This report does not focus on the individual contributions but is organised according to the main topics discussed in each of the webinars. All the information contained here was compiled from the webinars; the link to access the full recording is available at the end of each webinar.

**EU-LAC Foundation**

# **EU-LAC Webinars on COVID-19**

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### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE ORGANISERS:**

This report was created and synthesised by Andressa Timm Bauer and Laura Sophie Thoma. The panellists contributed to the content of the webinar, and at the beginning of each webinar the participating panellists can be identified. The EU-LAC Foundation was responsible for organising the webinars, some of which involved collaboration with other organisations.

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## PRESENTATION

This report presents a written compilation of the series of webinars organised by the EU-LAC Foundation addressing the effects of COVID-19: The EU-LAC Webinars.

The digitalized and technological world in which we find ourselves today, made this series and sharing of ideas between actors of the regions Latin America and the Caribbean and the European Union possible. Nonetheless, only presenting the information in a video-audio format is limited. Therefore, this report which contains the six compiled webinars in written form has been created. Through giving access to a new and permanent source of information, its outreach is furthermore amplified. This offers the opportunity to a greater public, to critically comment and engage in the covered topics.

In this sense, it is in the interest and thus an objective of the Foundation to “encourage further mutual knowledge and understanding between both regions” and to “foster fruitful exchanges and new networking opportunities among civil society and other social actors”. The challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic are overwhelming for both regions, but they are also an opportunity to further develop the strategic partnership between the regions EU-LAC.

This report is based on the six webinars that took place from 27th April until 15th June. The videos are in total length available on the EU-LAC Foundation’s website. The report is organized in six different chapters, each reflecting the content of one webinar. Nonetheless, the content is not organized among the original structure of the webinars and the individual presentations, but according to umbrella topics which have been discussed among the panelists.

The EU-LAC Foundation very much appreciates the work of its interns Andressa Timm Bauer, Brazilian master student and DAAD scholarship holder of Democratic Governance and Civil Society at the University of Osnabrück, and Laura Sophie Thoma, German bachelor graduate of Cultural Studies and Political Science at Leuphana University in Lüneburg, for the careful listening of the webinars, the content’s compilation, and writing of the final report.

Adrián Bonilla  
**Executive Director**

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## INTRODUCTION

The current global crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic entails the most acute challenge that the world as a whole has collectively faced in the current century and perhaps since the end of World War II, considering that other crises of the latest decades were more geographically circumscribed. The pandemic emerged at a critical time for the European Union (EU) and for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) - which have hitherto been the regions most affected -, especially given the political, economic, and social contexts these regions have experienced in recent times. Latin America has witnessed a wave of protests driven by persistent inequalities and social vulnerabilities and consequent discontent. Simultaneously, the Caribbean has not been spared from the effects of the pandemic due to its high vulnerability to external shocks and the difficulty of diversifying its economies in an effective and sustainable manner. Meanwhile, the European Union has been faced with the challenges of anaemic growth and increasing inequalities, in addition to the institutional challenges created by Brexit.

The impacts and consequences of the COVID-19 crisis have dimensions never seen in recent history and therefore require new and appropriate policies, as much as joint responses to address them in the spheres of health, the economy and society. However, for these efforts to be effective, greater coordination and convergent strategies are needed at the multilateral, regional and interregional levels.

While the growing pandemic may reinforce nationalism and isolationism as well as autarky, and thereby precipitate the retreat of multilateralism, the outbreak may also stimulate a new surge of international cooperation as did the one that followed World War II. In fact, this pandemic is a global problem that cannot be solved exclusively through local and national policies, just like other major problems, such as climate change, for example. Hence, there is a need to discuss the importance of multilateral instruments to improve people's lives and to address common threats.

This new scenario paves the way towards a re-examination of the advantages and potential of the European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean Strategic Partnership, from a perspective of shared values, common challenges and joint solutions for mutual benefit, aligned with the multilateral agenda set by the international community.

Should both regions commit themselves to this path, they have the capacity to influence and encourage other members of the international community on this virtuous and necessary task, as they represent one third of the members of the United Nations and almost half of those of the Group of 20. Already in the past, their joint efforts have favoured the achievement of multilateral agreements in global forums such as Agenda

2030 for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Arms Trade Treaty and the Paris Agreement, to mention but a few.

Within the context of the pandemic, here are just a few examples of the commitment of the two regions to such cooperation and the results of this cooperation: initiatives such as the resolution pushed by the government of Mexico at the United Nations to guarantee equal access to medicines, vaccines and medical equipment, adopted with the support of 179 countries; Mexico's cooperation with the government of Argentina within the framework of the Community of Latin America States' (CELAC) regional action; the international cooperation programmes and packages that the European Union has deployed in record time; the international missions of doctors from Cuba; the multiple repatriation flights organised jointly by the governments of EU and Latin American and Caribbean countries.

Following its mandate to foster the visibility of and promote debates on priority issues for the bi-regional agenda, the EU-LAC Foundation organised a series of webinars to compare and share national and regional experiences on how to face the crisis and to discuss the challenges that it entails for bi-regional relations.

The objectives of the COVID-19 webinar series were (i) to exchange different perspectives on the challenges faced by the EU and LAC regions in the face of the pandemic, (ii) to reflect on the role and actions of regional organisations and the possibilities for more active cooperation between the EU and LAC and (iii) to identify common elements of a shared action agenda of governmental and civil society organisations for the processing of the pandemic.

The six webinars saw contributions from a group of experts from regional bodies, United Nations agencies, multilateral development banks, EU-LAC governments, academia, think tanks, media and non-governmental institutions from the regions of LAC and the EU. This report does not focus on the individual contributions but is organised according to the main topics discussed in each of the webinars. All the information contained here was compiled from the webinars; the link to access the full recording is available at the end of each webinar.

# **I EU-LAC WEBINAR: HOW ARE REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS RESPONDING TO THE PANDEMIC AND WHAT OPPORTUNITIES FOR COOPERATION EXIST**

**27 of April 2020 at 17:00 (CEST)**

The webinar was structured around the following questions: (i) What actions have been taken by regional organisations in response to the pandemic? (ii) What are the experiences that could be shared among such organisations of regional efforts to combat the effects of COVID-19? (iii) How could the strategies of regional organisations to combat the impacts of COVID-19 be improved? (iv) What challenges and opportunities does the current crisis create for the bi- regional partnership? and (v) How could the EU and LAC collaborate in the context of the pandemic and in the future, for example in terms of the prevention and management of further emergencies?

The inaugural session included contributions from Paola Amadei, Executive Director of the EU-LAC Foundation, Edita Hrdá, Managing Director for the Americas - European External Action Service (EEAS) and Ambassador Mauricio Escanero, Head of the Mission of Mexico to the EU – PPT CELAC).

Adrián Bonilla, Appointed Executive Director of the EU-LAC Foundation, was the moderator. The invited panellists were: Ambassador Mauricio Escanero, Claudia Gintersdorfer, Head of Americas Regional Division - EEAS, Alicia Bárcena, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and Caribbean (ECLAC), Douglas Slater, Assistant Secretary - General of Human and Social Development of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Olinda Salguero, Chief of Staff of the General Secretariat of the Central American Integration System (SICA) and Guy Van den Eede, Acting Director for Health and Consumers Joint Research Centre (JRC) from the European Commission.

## **Actions and strategies by regional organisations in response to the pandemic**

### **European Union**

In Europe, the virus had the biggest impact in countries such as Great Britain, Italy and Spain, where the highest number of cases of infection by COVID-19 was recorded. The first joint action of the European Union, when the pandemic began to spread, was to help retrieve citizens who found themselves in other parts of the world, and bring them back to their home countries. This is noteworthy, as consular issues are usually a national topic, but in this case, the added value of the EU became visible. Through the cooperation of the countries in Europe and around the world, half a million citizens were able to return home; 50,000 people did so with flights under the civil protection of the EU.

### **The Caribbean**

The Caribbean depends heavily on the travel industry, which due to the virus basically does not exist anymore. The political heads of government and ministers of the region have been very much engaged in a series of emergency meetings to discuss the various challenges. Other regional organizations from LAC such as ECLAC, CELAC and the Association of Caribbean States also participated in these meetings. The context in which the Caribbean is confronting the crisis is as follows: In some member states, tourism makes up to 50% of GDP and in some cases even more. Some member states, furthermore, depend on commodity exports for up to 40% of GDP. The Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) estimates that, on average, the Caribbean countries will lose 30% of their economic activity, although some are estimated to lose even more. However, some of the Caribbean countries are considered as middle-income countries, at least, they were before COVID-19. This means that not many would benefit from international aid. In addition, the vulnerability of the region is exacerbated by the Caribbean having to face the hurricane season, which was, at the time of the webinar, six weeks ahead. This further signifies tremendous losses for the whole region and this year was predicted to be a very active season. Many countries of the region have weak health systems; however, they are still trying their best to fight back. Furthermore, access to supplies is additionally difficult, as a global shortage is another effect of the pandemic. The Caribbean would therefore appreciate a review of the criteria used for aid offers.

### **Central America**

The eight member states of the Central American Integration System (SICA) held a virtual meeting on March 12th, in order to make a plan to fight COVID-19. The result was a contingency plan, with 1.9 billion dollars, which was constructed over 2 weeks

up to March 26. The plan needs to be understood as a starting point and a working plan and not a finished document. It contains five focuses: 1. Health and risk, 2. Trade and finance, 3. Security, justice and migration, 4. Strategic communication and 5. International cooperation. In Central America there are currently 4.4 million people who are in a food emergency and due to COVID-19 the number could be double. The plan further contains a gender focus and specific actions for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

The 1.9 billion are dedicated to 3 funds: a fiscal emergency fund, a support fund to help the central bank as well as a fund for the commercial bank for SMEs. SICA has already been able to set up a mechanism in the area of risk and health. The hiring of doctors through a joint negotiation is a priority in the contingency plan. The Caribbean is also very interested in that mechanism. Another priority is to strengthen academic work. This implies working with universities. The universities are already involved in the production of tests for the region and in at least 3 countries prototypes of respirators are being developed. This does not mean that the need is satisfied, as there is still a lot to work on. The region has 14 million cases of infections. Multilateral banks have further noted a negative growth in GDP of 2.5% – 4.9%, which is highly dramatic for the region. This could mean that the debt could increase by 4.7% to 7.6% which is a worrying sign.

### **Latin America and the Caribbean**

According to ECLAC, this is the time to question the hegemonic economic and commercial model. Globalization led to the development of international production chains that are now broken and have to be reorganised. This means that right now, the system is unable to respond adequately to the pandemic. Furthermore, privatization of the health system leads to fragmentation revealing more than ever the huge inequalities that exist in the region. It also becomes obvious that the austerity policies of recent years have led to the reduction of public services. The area of pharma and health will have to be delocalized, as well as reindustrialized.

It can already be predicted that the economic impact in the region will be very high. The economic repercussions will lead to the biggest recession in the region since 1914 and 1930. The figures presented by ECLAC indicate that the regional GDP is estimated to fall -5.3%. The fall in international trade is calculated to be -15%. In addition, unemployment will rise by 3.4%; this signifies that there will be 12 million more unemployed people in the region, on top of the many people (53%) who are already working in the informal sector. Furthermore, there will be a rise of 30 million poor people in the region, out of which 16 million are considered as extremely poor. This means that the number of poor people will rise from 186 to 214 million and people considered as extremely poor from 67 to 83 million.

In addition, it is important to note that 47% of the people do not have any social insurance, health insurance or insurance for unemployment. Thus, the challenges which LAC is facing will be intensified. More figures presented by ECLAC show that the region is losing financial resources. In the Caribbean, since tourism creates 80% of employment, its collapse due to COVID-19 has tremendous consequences. In addition, remittances, which are a huge income for many countries, are falling. South America has a fall of -5.2 %, Central America of -2.3 %, Mexico of -6.5% and the Caribbean of -2.5%. These numbers show how critical the situation is especially for Central America and the Caribbean. Finally, it has to be emphasised that Latin America and the Caribbean do not have the same conditions to face the crisis as Europe. Latin America has on average 2.2 hospital beds for 1000 people and Europe 6.5.

To allow an exchange of information CELAC launched an online observatory to follow the measures that each country has taken.

### **Bi-regional collaborations in the context of the pandemic**

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of multilateralism. This includes the bi-regional collaboration between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean, which will be addressed in this section.

Douglas Slater (CARICOM) expressed the view that there can be opportunities to mitigate the effects of COVID-19, for instance through exploring with and assisting partners in the EU and LAC in finding solutions to the challenges, namely in the field of cooperation for health.

In addition, Guy Van den Eede (JRC) underlined that there is a need for the standardization of joint actions. Their work focuses on assisting policy-makers in all EU member states through creating models based on estimations, analysing macro-economic impacts and harmonizing diagnostic methods and quality control. One important issue is that the tests around the world need to be standardized, so you can trust the tests not only in your own country but also in others. So it is necessary to assist other member states to achieve the highest quality. But until recently there was no control of tests at all.

Furthermore, it was mentioned that the president of the Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, will attend the Coronavirus Global response conference on May 4th to raise 7.5 billion euros to develop appropriate treatments as well as a vaccine against the virus which would be accessible to everyone.

The crisis is a challenge, which Central America hopes not to have to face by itself but with the support of the EU, to create a more united humanity. Also, the Caribbean countries appeal to not be left by themselves, since they are part of the global partnership and European partners usually travel to Caribbean destinations. The

EU has furthermore signed an agreement with a public health agency to support the Caribbean, which provides substantial assistance, but still not enough. The Caribbean would appreciate easier access to medical supplies from partners and is concerned about the capacity and quality of COVID-19 tests.

The Caribbean countries are, as already mentioned earlier, considered as middle-income countries, so they do not receive low-cost credits. The Caribbean appeals on that matter to Europe: "That criterion has to be changed and a new concept of cooperation with the EU has to be developed".

Concerning funds, the EU is trying to identify possible sources of resources, which could be redirected to fight against the virus. Thus, on April 8th, Josep Borell, EU High Commissioner, launched a package of approximately €20 billion on a global level to support partner countries in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic and its consequences. This large number is a result of the EU working together with joint efforts from the European Commission, the EAAS, the European Investment Bank (EIB), as well as its member states. For LAC countries the numbers are not fixed, but are rather in flux. At the time of the webinar, the amount of money which the EU planned to give to LAC was €927 million by the EC in addition to €325 million from the EIB. On top of this amount, the sum of what the member states are able to contribute will be added. In the next step, the delegations of the EU, who have a leader in every country, will compose packages adjusted to the necessities of every country. Thus, the delegations from the EU are consequently calculating the need of every country in order to decide the amount of support every country would receive. This will be calculated by evaluating (i) the health crisis and (ii) the humanitarian needs deriving from the crisis. This means that an answer to the social and economic challenge has to be identified especially because this crisis will last for a much longer time than the health emergency itself.

The funds which the EU has identified to support other suffering countries are rated as very important for the world, as they are for LAC. In the LAC countries the crisis will lead to people losing work, and will further strongly affect people who are already working in the informal sector, as well as young people and vulnerable groups like migrants and indigenous populations. These funds are not newly created, since it is the end of the financial cycle of seven years, but rather funds that the EU was able to redirect in the short term, as a response to COVID-19.

The EAAS mentioned that the EU is striving to identify a response to the major socio-economic challenge that the COVID-19 crisis will create. The EU and LAC will, in addition, continue to cooperate to fight the socio-economic effects created by COVID-19, namely, through trade and through taking up again the agenda of both inequality and digitalization.

## Challenges and opportunities for the bi-regional partnership in times of COVID-19 and in the future

There are different logics, as well as different possibilities and resources in LAC and in the EU; however, both regions have to deal with the same problem: COVID-19 and its socio-economic impact. This is a situation that will define the nature of international cooperation. The world has never faced an issue of this kind before. Although COVID-19 alters the whole system it does not mean that globalization will disappear.

Another topic that has to be put on the agenda of the bi-regional dialogue is the economic recession. The economy of the whole world will be affected by COVID-19. The pandemic is a global issue, thus there will not be a national solution. A joint global solution will need to be found.

In this context, the multilateral system is very important in such a crisis, caused by a virus that does not respect borders. The countries of both regions, as well as the whole world, need to work together in order to solve and regulate this crisis. Multilateralism enables us to provide platforms for governance and public goods in order to respond adequately to the challenges which humanity is facing. However, in all of this the importance of sustainability cannot be forgotten. Otherwise, the next crisis will be an environmental one.

The systemic crisis is severe and requires that we jointly forge a new, more equitable and sustainable model of development with more redistributive institutions, without forgetting about climate change. There are five specific areas of action to face the pandemic and its consequences: (i) Political dialogue and cooperation for multilateralism; (ii) Groups of experts in infectious agents; (iii) CELAC-EU Joint Initiative on Research and Innovation; (iv) Role of the EIB as part of the EU cooperation plan in LAC that has extended its priorities to the health and economic resilience sector, and; (v) The role of the European Parliament as part of the permanent dialogue and for coordination purposes, whose resolution of April 17th highlights the importance of working with LAC.

Furthermore, a green deal should be made between LAC and the EU to make the world more social, sustainable and less unequal. Concerning green deals, both regions are thinking similarly or even along equal lines: It is certain that they have to be implemented within the framework of cooperation between LAC and the EU. Climate change will not be stopped or solved just because COVID-19 exists.

It is certain that this crisis will define the nature of international cooperation. This will entail not only changes in agendas or in entropic trends, or even in logics of fragmentation, but also indispensable continuities, such as that of multilateralism and its institutionalism, from which the rest of the activities can be developed.

COVID-19 will certainly not be the last topic on which the two regions will have to work and cooperate together. But it has further illustrated where problems and needs

are. In the near future Ursula von der Leyen wants to address one of the most urgent challenges of the EU-LAC partnership: Inequality. Taking things further, one challenge which the bi-regional partnership also has to face in future will be cybercrime.

Dr. Adrián Bonilla (EU-LAC Foundation): *“The current situation is a global phenomenon, which means that interdependencies between all societies exist. Thus, the pandemic will not be solved if not jointly through multilateralism.”*

**EU-LAC**

**EU-LAC WEBINAR ABOUT COVID-19**  
**HOW ARE REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS RESPONDING TO THE PANDEMIC AND WHAT OPPORTUNITIES FOR COOPERATION EXIST?**

**MONDAY, 27 APRIL 2020**  
 17:00 - 18:30 (CEST)

**LIMITED AVAILABILITY**  
 PRIOR REGISTRATION: [BIT.LY/2YYXXMS](https://bit.ly/2YYXXMS)

**\*THE PANELISTS WILL SPEAK IN SPANISH AND/OR ENGLISH WITHOUT INTERPRETATION**

**CONFIRMED PANELISTS**

**OPENING**  
 Paola Amadell  
 Executive Director of the EU-LAC Foundation

**Moderator**  
 Adrián Bonilla  
 Appointed Executive Director of the EU-LAC Foundation

Mauricio Escanero  
 Ambassador Head of the Mission of Mexico to the EU - PPT CELAC

Claudia Gintersdorfer  
 Head of Americas Regional Division - EEAS

Alicia Bárcena  
 Executive Secretary of the ECLAC

Douglas Slater  
 Assistant Secretary-General of Human and Social Development - CARICOM

Olinda Salguero  
 Chief of Staff of the General Secretariat of SICA

Guy Van den Eede  
 Acting Director for Health and Consumers Joint Research Centre - European Commission

Word of welcome from Ambassador Edita Hrdá, Managing Director for the Americas - EEAS and Ambassador Escanero, Head of the Mission of Mexico to the EU - PPT CELAC

For the recording of the webinar: <https://vimeo.com/412657177>

## II EU-LAC WEBINAR:

### 'CHALLENGES FOR SOCIAL COHESION & SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: AGENDA 2030 AFTER COVID-19' (ORGANISED WITH EUROSOCIAL+, IN COLLABORATION WITH OBREAL-GLOBAL OBSERVATORY)

11 May 2020, 17:00h (CEST)

The following people participated in the inauguration: Paola Amadei, Executive Director of the EU-LAC Foundation, as well as Ambassador Edita Hrdá, Managing Director for the Americas at the European External Action Service (EEAS), Ambassador Mauricio Escanero, Head of Mission of Mexico to the European Union and Representative of the Presidency Pro Tempore of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), both in their capacity as Co-Presidencies of the Foundation's Board of Governors, and Marc Litvine, Senior Expert at the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development of the European Commission.

The panel, which was moderated by Francesco Chiodi, Coordinator of the Social Policies Area at EUROsociAL, comprised: José Antonio Sanahuja, Director of Fundación Carolina, Mario Pezzini, Director of the Development Centre at the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); Marisol Touraine, Chair at UNITAID; Heather Ricketts, Senior Lecturer at the Department of Sociology, Psychology and Social Work of the University of the West Indies Mona (UWI-Mona) and Carlos Maldonado, Social Affairs Officer at the Social Development Division of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

**Note:** A keynote address for this webinar was given by José Antonio Sanahuja, followed by a series of dynamic interventions from the panelists, which contributed greatly to the discussion.

## **Before COVID-19, where were we? Socioeconomic Inequalities, Democracy, and Regional Cooperation**

COVID-19 does not affect all countries and societies equally. Besides making inequalities more visible, it also has the potential to make them greater, depending on the pre-existing conditions at societal, economic, and political levels which are encountered by the pandemic.

There are significant inequalities among European, Latin American, and Caribbean countries and between the two regions as well. We are entering a new historical period where there is a risk that not only will existing differences between social classes in the countries be preeminent, but also, the poor countries will get poorer.

In the case of LAC, there were already signs of frailty and weakness in the economic, social, and political plans. As the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) stated before the pandemic, between 2014 and 2020 the region presented the lowest economic growth rate of the last seventy years, and an increase in poverty levels was foreseen. In fact, LAC is nowadays composed of segmented societies, where vulnerable groups tend to fall below the poverty line and traditional elites do not accept more open societies.

In the EU context, the concern with inequalities is not something new. For this reason, and considering how inequalities hamper sustainable development, which is one of the priorities of the Union, this issue has been the focus of various organisations, amongst which EUROsociAL has given a bi-regional focus.

A problematic situation that arises from linking previous inequalities to the current challenges posed by COVID-19 is that it sheds light upon the differences between people who have access to certain services, goods, or possibilities and those who do not. This applies to health services, nourishment, means of transportation (i.e. private car versus crowded buses), division of labour (home office or not), educational digital divide (half of the LAC region does not have access to good-quality internet, or any at all), aggravation of gender violence (given the already dire indicators concerning gender roles), and the fragility of the care economy, which is considerably precarious and marked by a 'feminised' profile.

There was and persists a discontent with the way democracy works in LAC. Latino-barómetro registered the worst indicators since the beginning of the historical series of measurements. In the electoral super-cycle (2017-2019), there was no clear pattern between left and right, but a general discontent with 'officialism' and a wish for change. This discontent led for instance to the election of extreme right-wing candidates, e.g. Bolsonaro in Brazil. In other cases, this discontent was not channelled through elections but manifested in social revolts, namely in Ecuador, Chile, and Colombia.

The reduction of inequalities is an objective common to the two regions. It is therefore part of the EU-LAC Foundation's mandate to promote and foster the understanding of the two regions of topics that are relevant on both sides of the Atlantic, for which new online formats have proven to be an effective tool.

Although previous to COVID-19 there were attempts to institutionalise regionalism in the LAC region, these endeavours did not prosper, partly due to ideological fractures. The Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), for instance, was first halted and then dismantled. The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) has been at a standstill since 2017, and now - in a promising way - is advancing with a less politicised agenda that focuses on technical cooperation, as intended by the Pro tempore presidency of Mexico.

Some bodies have lost credibility for their visible alignment with external actors, such as the USA. Examples are the Group of Lima and the Forum for the Progress and Development of South America (PROSUR). Others, such as the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), are facing internal difficulties regarding their 'future design'.

The importance of all the above is that the region has lost its relevant actor status. It became an arena for geopolitical competition, emerging from external actors such as the USA and China, thus losing its capacity to solve its crises and to coordinate in the social and economic fields, as it did when some of those organisations were conceived. This is relevant to understanding how the region has presented a low level of cooperation in the pandemic, both intra and interregionally. The paralysis of CELAC, for instance, greatly affected cooperation with the EU.

### **Challenges: maintaining past achievements and investing in an inclusive, sustainable and resilient future**

The current situation is notably complex and difficult because of the pandemic. Although the effects might vary in the two regions, they are significantly more pressing in LAC.

ECLAC estimates an economic contraction of -5.3%<sup>1</sup>, the highest in the region's history. Levels of poverty are also expected to increase. The groups most affected by the pandemic are informal workers, women, children and young people, the elderly, the disabled, and indigenous people, who have less access to health facilities. Nonetheless, it is especially complicated to measure its real effects since there are few indicators but only an increasing context of uncertainty.

The LAC region is also experiencing a dire macroeconomic situation, with debts that prevent increasing expenditure on health, supporting companies, maintaining jobs, and establishing basic survival means, whilst still managing to maintain social confinement.

1 NU CEPAL. Dimensionar los efectos del COVID-19 para pensar en la reactivación. Abril 2020. Available at <https://www.cepal.org/es/publicaciones/45445-dimensionar-efectos-covid-19-pensar-la-reactivacion>

The fiscal margin is small, and another telling fact is that in 2019 interest payments on the debt were already higher on average than the amount the region spent on health.

The international situation also affects the region and in a negative way: there is a reduction in remittances, which could be around 10% to 15% in 2020, a decrease in tourist activities, a massive outflow of capital, and currency depreciation. Therefore, monetary and fiscal policy has a great role to play in managing the crisis, since a chaotic panorama can be foreseen if the debt increases. Contrary to the US and Europe, which have different options in terms of financing, LAC has fewer fiscal margins. It only has the International Monetary Fund, which proved inadequate for fast and unconditional financing needs.

Unless action is taken, the region may face a cycle of unmanageable debt crises, and balance of payments crises, and thus even more difficult conditions to cope with the pandemic. We need to search for other ways so that the region can have access to liquidity and fiscal space to face the COVID-19 crisis and its effects under better conditions. These can be done with coalitions in the MIF and G20 so that the region can access additional resources and have a better fiscal margin. Above all we must avoid this crisis resulting in a major debt crisis, with recession and austerity.

Not only is a quick answer needed but we must also think about the medium and long term. If the countries achieve an adequate multilateral response, with more liquidity, it is possible to think about the shape of the recovery. Besides preserving jobs, we must think about new ways of developing. If crises are opportunities there is no need to go back to the 'normal'. The ways out of the crises should refer to and face the traps of development, namely, liquidity, institutionalism, productivity, and sustainability. For instance, when people ask for a service and this is not offered or improved, the citizens distrust the government. If they want access to health and the state does not provide it, the population will think it makes no sense to pay taxes, and therefore the state's execution ability will decrease. This will become a vicious cycle and increase the problem. Distrust generates tensions, so it is important to focus on these traps.

Even if we have conditions that allow several financial resources to flow into the state coffers, it will not be enough. It is not possible to recover and grow in the way some countries used to before the pandemic. So it is very important to define and approve broader packages of reform and act with urgency. In this sense, it is critical to try to grow a lot more: Not only do the countries need to pay the debt but also to finance development. The 'what' is as important as the 'how'.

Another face of inequality is that tax revenues is low, administered, and in a very uneven way. For instance, the tax evasion rates estimated for the LAC region are higher than it would cost to establish a minimum income for the most vulnerable people. This would cost 5% of regional GDP, while regional evasion is 7%. Another example is that there are relatively broad middle classes that resist paying more taxes, and then universal coverage of services is very difficult.

What is needed is a response to the external financing needs of the region, be it through a moratorium on debt payments, or a moratorium on special drawing rights, in the way the IMF strengthens the reserves of the countries of the region. A multilateral mechanism can be established with the participation of the IMF for exchanges that allow access to greater liquidity.

For this to happen, two commitments would be needed from the LAC region: i) greater regional cooperation since it cannot continue with this state of fragmentation due to ideological disputes, and ii) taxation, since it is difficult to present a multilateral response providing liquidity and fiscal space to the countries if there is not a greater fiscal effort internally.

This is an opportunity for the fiscal elements to provide a corrective element, even if they are extraordinary rates, on equity, and on the highest incomes, which could generate additional resources. We need to look for incentives or counterparts for this solution to come into being.

There are three principal challenges in Latin America and the Caribbean today. First and foremost, those related to the economy. There are various factors that have a great impact on this, such as the international price of oil and raw materials, as many countries are dependent on these products. China's economy is affected by the situation, and as it is one of the main commercial partners of the region, this will certainly entail a negative impact on the region. Besides these factors, immigration, capital flight, and institutional disenchantment will also have a major influence. The second challenge is the debt of several countries and the issue of cooperation. Even though traditional cooperation increased by 1.4% last year (circa 150 million), it will not solve the problems brought about by the pandemic, since the cost of this crisis is into the trillions. The third challenge is to build upon the importance of multilateralism, through which a series of negotiations need to be constructed, especially in relation to health issues in the current context. The response must be a global one, since the virus does not know or respect borders.

Thence is a need for an urgent answer to this health and economic crisis. To sum up, it must be multilateral and adequate for the finance requirements of LAC countries. It is necessary to have coalitions to access resources and to have wider margins. If not, a debt crisis today would undermine all the efforts made so far to fight poverty and inequalities.

It has become abundantly clear that, regarding the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), one size will not fit all. In order to align the way out of the crises with the SDGs, it is necessary to promote the care economy, sustainable agriculture, an inclusive and good-quality education, and to strengthen global partnerships.

In April 2020, ECLAC published a report<sup>2</sup> analysing how the pandemic affects the fulfilment of Agenda 2030. The results indicate that four indicators have already been fulfilled, for instance, the goal related to maternal mortality. Fifteen would be accomplished according to current trends; eight could be achieved with the intervention of public policies whereas thirteen could only be achieved with a significant role played by public policies, for example in extreme regional poverty. Twenty-seven indicators remain stagnant and five present a setback, i.e. emissions of greenhouse gases and forest area.

Within the social pillar, the impact of COVID-19 makes it more complicated to achieve SDGs related to (3) Good Health and Well-being, (4) Quality Education, and (5) Gender Equality. A few examples of the impacts are, respectively, the capacity of the health system, a lack of digital media access for vulnerable students, and the care workload, and domestic violence against women.

Despite the numerous challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis and the complex situation that it generates, the pandemic represents an opportunity to strengthen social policies, social cooperation, and overall to attend to the social situation of the countries in both regions. The pandemic stressed the necessity to pay significantly more attention to health policies. It gave rationale to the idea of universal health coverage. In this sense, there is a need to strengthen the health systems and invest in the training of health workers in the two regions.

The pandemic does not discriminate in the infection itself, but in its impacts on people and our capacity to protect them. Solidarity and collective responsibility are key in containing and dealing with the situation. The crisis has the potential to deepen expressions of discomfort, distrust, and democratic disenchantment. It represents a challenge to social cohesion and urges an appeal to a social pact focused on the wellbeing and the rights of peoples.

### **Revitalisation of EU-LAC cooperation to promote social cohesion and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals**

It is a challenge to transform this vicious cycle generated by the pandemic into a cycle of opportunities. At the same time, it is necessary to foster cooperation between the two regions.

It is critical to acknowledge that we cannot advance in social terms if we do not advance at the democratic level as well. Therefore, the action to be taken is to listen to civil society, i.e. associations and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and to include

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2 NU CEPAL. La Agenda 2030 para el Desarrollo Sostenible en el nuevo contexto mundial y regional: escenarios y precepciones en la presente crisis. Abril 2020. Available at <https://www.cepal.org/es/publicaciones/45336-la-agenda-2030-desarrollo-sostenible-nuevo-contexto-mundial-regional-escenarios>

them in the process. To have the capacity to listen to social demands in places where before it was not possible, as in the Chilean example.

The political proposal cannot be created without the possibility of a space for discussion, debate, and public expression of what is most important to the people. So we need to have social conversations nationwide, so that people can express their demands and organize themselves. Europe has this tradition and therefore can share it with other countries, through the implementation of this model of social policy. This could be an element of the relationship between LAC and Europe.

A large consultation where people sat down to examine together vision, strategy, and implementation was possible in the France of '68, where there was an elite of students who used to create riots. Nowadays there are more people in the streets and who want to have their voices heard. This type of social contract is indispensable now: the need to have a social pact and for this to form a national development plan involving local authorities and other social actors.

Extensive social investment is another challenge. For several countries in LAC, this will be arduous, since the focus has been on the economy, often disregarding the social aspect. The EU is also called upon to act in this direction, especially to transform its social investment, from what it has been so far (i.e. workfare, autonomy, responsibility, and the training of people) to more functional policies aimed at reducing social inequalities. What is happening today is going to need a very large financial social investment, to prevent parts of society from falling into poverty.

There is now a great opportunity for cooperation between EU-LAC offered by the EU Neighbourhood Instrument for development and international cooperation. The new pluri-annual financing framework and the new cycle of cooperation programming of the EU with Latin America must be clearly anchored in the 2030 Agenda, especially within its financial arm, the EUROsociAL+. Once approved, the regional thematic programs should meet the diversity of development agendas and contribute to the way out of the COVID-19 crisis. This goes beyond the immediate response of the European team, contemplating institutional strengthening, employment, security, social cohesion, migration, and energy transition with the European Green Pact.

While dealing with the crisis, the EU has managed to seek out more global solutions, such as the Coronavirus Global Response and „Team Europe“, which also benefited LAC. Since social revolt does not seem to be a viable option, social cohesion is fundamental for the strategy towards recovery and economic growth. The EU should have a greater investment of political capital, channelled into further dialogue with the LAC region. Despite the polarisation of the latter, the EU can associate with actors who are interested in making progress, thus avoiding the lowest common denominator.

While China and the USA approach Latin America under a geopolitical framework, with very explicit economic and political interests, the EU is the only global actor to

approach LAC with an agenda focused on the necessities and concerns of the Latin American and Caribbean societies. In other words, this relation could be aligned to the goals that compose Agenda 2030 and have the potential to form a renovation of the social contract, i.e. inclusion, social cohesion, quality of democracy, human rights, peace, gender equality, and environment. The EU is a geopolitical actor for it defines an agenda that makes the Union diverge from other international actors, which are still dwelling on struggles for power balance. Thus, the EU could use its institutional capacity to work jointly with LAC, also based on their shared values and principles.

LAC offers the opportunity for the EU to develop the external side of the European Green Deal. In order for this to be accomplished, a political dialogue with CELAC is needed. That is, a reinforced diplomatic and political strategy of the constructive involvement of the EU with LAC and vice versa with the understanding that social and geopolitical goals are not necessarily contradictory but can comprise a normative relation that reconfirms the commitment to multilateralism, democracy, and social inclusion.

It is essential to promote - in practical ways - a cooperation strategy, more horizontal and adapted to Agenda 2030. This would enable the regions to emerge out of the crises more oriented towards social cohesion and sustainable growth. It is necessary to think about a new way to approach international cooperation, within the regions and between them as well as social investment that includes a series of considerations about the democratic models of the countries in both regions.

*“For the EU and LAC, we must reinforce bi-regional strategic cooperation through inclusion, participation and social protection, in addition to strengthening the participation of civil society”* Heather Ricketts (University of the West Indies Mona)



**EU-LAC WEBINAR ABOUT COVID-19**

**CHALLENGES FOR SOCIAL COHESION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: AGENDA 2030 AFTER COVID-19**



**MONDAY, 11 MAY 2020**  
17:00 - 18:30 (CEST)

**LIMITED AVAILABILITY**  
PRIOR REGISTRATION

**\*THE PANELISTS WILL SPEAK IN SPANISH**  
AND/OR ENGLISH WITHOUT INTERPRETATION

**OPENING**



**Edita Hrdá**  
Managing Director for the Americas - European External Action Service



**Mauricio Escobar**  
Ambassador Head of the Mission of Mexico to the EU - PPT CELAC



**Jolita Butkeviciene**  
Director for Latin America and the Caribbean of the European Commission's Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development

**KEYNOTE**



**José Antonio Sanahuja**  
Special Adviser to the High Representative for Foreign Policy and VP of the European Commission

**PANELISTS**



**Marlo Pezzini**  
Director of the OECD Development Centre



**Marisol Touraine**  
Former Minister of Social Affairs and Health of France and President of Unitaid



**Carlos Maldonado**  
Social Affairs Officer, Social Development Division of ECLAC



**Heather Ricketts**  
Senior Lecturer in the Department of Sociology, Psychology and Social Work at the University of the West Indies

For the recording of the webinar: <https://vimeo.com/417622801>

## III EU-LAC WEBINAR:

### A NEW MULTILATERALISM IN THE COVID-19 ERA

18th of May 2020 17:00 – 18:30 (CEST)

The webinar was structured around the following questions: (i) What challenges and opportunities does the current crisis create for multilateral cooperation and how should they be addressed? (ii) How have multilateral organizations helped or how can they help countries cope with the pandemic and its consequences? and (iii) How could the bi-regional partnership contribute to building effective multilateralism?

The inaugural session was held by Paola Amadei, Executive Director of the EU-LAC Foundation, Edita Hrdá, Managing Director for the Americas – European External Action Service; Mauricio Escanero, Ambassador Head of the Mission of Mexico to the EU – PPT CELAC; Jorge Pizarro, Senator of Chile and Co-President of Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly – EUROLAT and Javi López, Member of European Parliament and Co-President of Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly – EUROLAT. Bernabé Malacalza, Researcher at National Council of Scientific and Technical Research – CONICET / Universidad Nacional de Quilmes was the moderator. The participating panellists were Luís Felipe López-Calva, Regional Director for Latin America of the United Nations Development Program - UNDP, Kristin Lang, Head of Division for Lending for Latin America and the Caribbean at the European Investment Bank – EIB, Antoni Estevadeordal, Representative at the Inter-American Development Bank - IDB office in Europe, Monica Hirst, Researcher at the State University of Rio de Janeiro – IESP / UERJ and Professor at the Universidad Torcuato Di Tella, and Anna Ayuso, Researcher of the Centre for International Affairs - CIDOB.

#### **Multilateralism in the era of COVID-19: An Overview**

The impacts and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis are of dimensions never seen in recent history and bring many challenges for Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean due to the socio-economic context existing in these regions before the health crisis. To meet these challenges, appropriate policies, new solutions and joint responses are needed. This means that greater coordination and convergent strategies within the multilateral framework is required.

Multilateralism can be understood as the coordination between three or more states. In its broadest sense, it is a tool of governance, a principle of conduct, including the rules of international law. COVID-19 has shown that multilateralism needs to be strengthened at global level and the health emergencies need to be addressed in the short term although there are many uncertainties and we cannot predict how long the pandemic will last.

The pandemic creates a need to reinvent and reform multilateral institutions, as well as mechanisms and the basis of multilateralism. Global multilateralism must be rethought, so that Agenda 2030 is at the centre of activities. This goes alongside the issues of inequality. Thus, gaps in the area of development must be considered in the current context in order to avoid leaving countries behind.

COVID-19 and its consequences show the enormous fragility of the system in the face of a threat, which was always probable. Furthermore, it is possible that the same could happen with the climate crisis. It must be acknowledged that humankind is a society of global risks, so global answers need to be identified. Furthermore, it is important to rethink the global agenda (in the regional, as well as global field), to give adequate responses to globalization.

The pandemic is testing the capacity of the United Nations to maintain its work and confront the crisis. This further shows the importance of multilateralism and the priority of international cooperation to create more appropriate and sustainable answers. The pandemic needs to be confronted globally as COVID-19 is synchronized globally, and it affects all countries in the world. This kind of crisis is new and there is a lot of learning taking place in the institutions and the countries themselves. Furthermore, COVID-19 is a crisis without precedent, and one which is taking place in multiple stages. It is not only a health but also an economic and financial crisis, to which a flexible and comprehensive response is needed. It is therefore important to relocate all financial and technical resources to support the public sector and the governments in both regions.

With the crisis triggered by the pandemic, it is certain that there will be a structural change in society. Although it is not yet possible to foresee the future, there is a consensus that the world will not be the same after COVID-19.

The economic collapse resulting from the health emergency can be compared with the global economic crisis of 2008-2009, representing a major disaster.

The crisis comes about through a lack of information, diagnosis and base. Agenda 2030 is necessary to measure the lack of "information of quality" in many countries. In times of COVID-19, it has become obvious that there exist differences between countries concerning access to information: those that have better access to information can respond faster and better. COVID-19 needs to be understood as a crisis of selective information. The system should represent its citizens. Therefore, as citizens are part of the politics, the system needs to be transparent.

There are three elements in the crisis of multilateralism that can be identified:

1. The origin of the crisis: High politics over multilateralism - The multilateral system is a system which is very much exposed to high politics. This is additionally deepened by the tension between the USA and China, which leads to a weakening of the political dimension of the system.
2. Normative (ideological) political nutrients, which historically built the multilateralism we know, which is politically liberal: The system has already suffered various setbacks and is a system of fatigue with a high level of rejection. This can be traced back to the political unaccountability from part of the USA. This is not something new, but rather a historical process, which, with the new government under Trump has become further entrenched.
3. Inefficiencies and exhaustion of the multilateral engineering of the crisis: Resource problems that are not solvable but hold out the possibility of better results

Furthermore, four gaps can be identified in the COVID-19 pandemic, which are faced day by day, in every dialogue with the governments and in every context:

### **1. Knowledge gap:**

There exists a huge knowledge gap in pandemic control and implementation of responses. This gap exists in the health area and its standards. Governments are still learning and accumulating more information on how to respond to the pandemic. Other crises like extreme weather events, such as earthquakes, can be understood as physical capital shocks. In order to respond to these crises, we have human capital. But this crisis is different. The consequence of this pandemic is a conflict of human capital, so the destruction is enormous.

### **2. Financing gap:**

This reflects the need for a horizon of financial stability, which is a huge fiscal challenge for many countries. To close the financing gap, multilateralism plays a central role and thus needs to be strengthened.

### **3. Coordination gap between countries**

A coordination gap exists especially in the LAC region, which is composed of middle-income countries, but there are many vulnerable groups within each society. Latin American countries are far from being consolidated middle-class societies. They have very little access to negotiable financing mechanisms.

A question that arises is how to make the debt rating companies give more weight to the speed of recovery, and not only to the generation of effective flows that allow the issuance of debt to be sustained? The rating agencies have their own mandate, and they must comply with it, but if a coordinated negotiation between countries existed, confronting the pandemic would be much easier than if the countries went separate ways.

This would further avoid races to the bottom, where countries make tax concessions to attract foreign capital, and end up being fiscally weak. Therefore, coordination between countries is required. Another very important issue which requires a great capacity for coordination is migration. Thus, not only do resources need coordination, but also fiscal and migration policies.

#### **4. Effective governance**

Lastly, there is a gap of effective governance: Governance needs to be used wisely, especially in times of COVID-19. Everything that makes society more resilient needs to be seen as “public”. There are a lot of funds which need to be used so the society regains confidence in governance instead of losing it.

Those four gaps are becoming obvious at a time of crisis. But they are structural problems, which the crisis only made more visible. There is a need for a joint direction so the countries can exit this crisis more resilient, sustainable and having more inclusive societies.

Another visible challenge brought by the growing pandemic of COVID-19 is the strengthening of nationalism, isolationism and the questioning of multilateralism. The pandemic has redefined borders in favour of the state. As soon as the pandemic began to spread, the initial reaction of some countries was to close the borders instead of proposing collaboration with their neighbours and the rest of the world. This is a major problem, since multilateralism is the biggest opportunity to overcome such a serious situation. The outbreak should stimulate a new wave of international cooperation similar to the one which occurred after World War II. In fact, this pandemic is a global problem that cannot be solved exclusively through local and national policies, just like other major problems, such as climate change, for example. Hence, there is a need to discuss the importance of multilateral instruments to improve people’s lives and to address common threats. That being said, the biggest risks in the EU are internal divisions. Despite its successful history as a supranational organization, when confronted with a crisis like this, internal divisions within the bloc have affected its ability to provide effective economic responses.

Furthermore, the increasingly peripheral role of both regions in the international arena should be a concern due to the competition between China and the USA. This polarization tends to increase the risks of new crises in the coming decades. Seeking

a new balance is evident and needed. The most important question EU-LAC countries must face is “How to rebuild the bi-regional cooperation and not get caught up in the debate about competition?”

COVID-19 can be understood as a very strong catalyst to already existing problems and challenges. The world political crisis had already manifested itself before, but the COVID-19 pandemic is accelerating this process as bipolar tensions between the USA and China are becoming more visible and affecting multilateralism.

### **Potential and responses by multilateral organisations**

The various different international organisations certainly have not all responded in the same way, but rather have used different approaches to confront the crisis resulting from COVID-19. Throughout this section the different approaches will be described.

Some multilateral organisations are being severely criticised for their lack of capacity to provide adequate responses, demonstrating some deterioration. While the UN Secretary General has been doing a great job, the Security Council has been unable to find coordinated solutions, as have the G7 and the G20, which were also failing to come up with proposals. Financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank are trying to respond with financial assistance, especially regarding the countries’ debt. However, the actions of these financial institutions, created by the Bretton Woods agreements in 1944, have also shown some limitations. In addition, major international players such as China and the United States have decided to play by rules outside multilateralism, which affects the EU-LAC countries.

The multilateral response by the system of the United Nations to the pandemic has three pillars: 1. Health response, 2. Humanitarian response, and 3. Socio-economic response.

The European Investment Bank (EIB) announced in April the details of a comprehensive response to the coronavirus pandemic outside the EU, contributing up to 5.2 billion euros in the coming months. The EIB response is aimed at strengthening urgent investment in health and accelerating long-term support for private sector investment, reflecting funding needs in more than 100 countries. The EIB post-COVID-19 development cooperation agenda will continue to have the fight against climate change as its focus, including for example support to the renewable energy sector or water and sanitation. In parallel, EIB will continue to support the countries of the region in a sustainable solution to the COVID-19 crisis. Regarding the future of “Team Europe” for Latin America, EIB will shortly be awaiting indications from the European Commission regarding the multiannual financial framework that will guide the Bank’s intervention in the region. In any event, collaboration between the EU Delegations, the Member States and the EIB has been strengthened in order to provide a coherent and harmonised European response. The EIB is also working together with other international institutions to find solutions.

Furthermore, the EU has already responded as a unit, with the Coronavirus Global Response on the 4th of May up to the amount of €7.4 billion.

The representative from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) explained that the flexible responses which had to happen were divided into 2 mechanisms. First, the resources that were already planned for other projects had to be quickly redirected to the current emergency. For example, infrastructure programs that were already approved were stopped and redirected to the government priorities. And secondly the 2020 programming had to be reorganized in a few days/weeks. The result is that 15 billion dollars will be localized this year. This preparation had to happen very quickly, within 2 / 3 months, for a process that normally takes around 6 months.

The IDB was preparing 50 new projects in more than 20 countries. There are four prototypes of projects:

1. Immediate response to the health crisis (emergency issues, support the management of the emergency, sectoral coordination by governments, interruption of the virus expansion chains, improving the capacity of today's health system and of the one that will be needed in a few months) – this prototype was already implemented in several countries.
2. Help for vulnerable populations in society (social protection programs) – this prototype is working with already existing networks outside the region. Conditional and unconditional transfer mechanisms were already in existence, but many segments of the population were not included in these; it has been necessary to find ways to reach these vulnerable populations, some in the informal and others in the formal sector.
3. Financial support (credit projects, defence of productive activities and employment: Support to strengthen financial capacity, especially for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and to address issues of liquidity in the short and medium term) – this prototype will be implemented in the second stage; when the health crisis is over and it becomes an economic crisis.
4. Macro Economic Support (Financial help for countries, knowledge and technical support to strengthen public policy and fiscal policy of governments, anticipating financial crises that will affect many of these countries). Nearly 30 high-level policy dialogues have been held to share experiences within and outside the region, further technological platforms and maps were created that show the innovations of the different countries in the public and private sector in order to respond to the challenges of the crisis.

The World Health Organization (WHO) shows the importance of multilateralism in the context of this crisis. However, the WHO does not have enough capacity to respond and needs to improve its structure. The WHO is a normative organization and not an

operational one. A vaccine against COVID-19 could be found and the health system capacity be improved – but the question is: “how to make these a ‘global public good’?” We need to take this matter seriously and reform the multilateral system.

Due to the crisis, multilateralism will change and shift its focus on the areas of health and sustainable development. Furthermore, the advantage will be that these two fields will become linked.

### **Bi-regional contributions to an effective multilateralism within Agenda 2030**

LAC and the EU had already faced many challenges and problems before the current crisis. The EU has been experiencing a long recession while the persistent challenge in Latin America remains inequality. LA, which is a region that has already suffered difficulties with unemployment and hunger, is becoming even more divided. Thus, inequality must be a priority target to be tackled. In addition, there is strong negative growth throughout Latin America, something that has not been seen in the last ten to twenty years.

The challenges that are becoming more visible through the pandemic lead to an uncertainty that is present in LAC, which comes along with the low capacity for carrying out COVID-19 tests. The numbers are growing but there are huge gaps between the countries. Chile and Peru have noted high numbers, but have also done many more tests than the rest of the countries. In the Caribbean the numbers are not as high as in some countries in Latin America, but there is less testing happening. Furthermore, the quality of the tests also differs. Right now, it is still too early to talk about a recovery or a recurrence, as we are only at the stage of controlling the pandemic.

COVID-19 does not know borders. Thus, the whole world must work together to face the pandemic. There is an urge for a joint global response to address health emergencies and their serious economic and social impacts. This challenge is twofold: not only to address issues in a framework of solidarity but going forward to correct global social deficits and to build a more equitable and sustainable development in the long term. To that end, international cooperation and multilateralism are indispensable.

Strategic partnerships are more than ever useful in the context of the pandemic. Based on shared values, CELAC and the EU are very committed partners in that sense. The two regions showed their commitment on April 20th with the Mexican proposal, which was adopted as “General assembly resolution 74/274” by the United Nations, entitled “International cooperation to ensure global access to medicines, vaccines and medical equipment to face COVID-19”.

The 2030 Agenda for sustainable development is an example of how the international community could cooperate and global solidarity is also important to tackle the pandemic.

Therefore, it is necessary to link more state with more internationalism and cooperation. The way forward involves explaining to citizens that increased international cooperation is key to meeting global challenges. In this sense, bi-regional cooperation between the EU and LAC is an urgent matter. Competitive logic, on the other hand, will lead to disaster.

CELAC and the EU keep working together and playing a leading role to find a global response to the crisis. The EU already has an enormous tradition in facing challenges jointly (like the financial crisis) and the EU can point to some notable successes. This is a clear benefit which needs to be used in favour of the bi-regional relationship.

It can be noted that this crisis has already provided examples of how to implement better public policies, through greater state presence, which is part of global governance and an important step in confronting COVID-19.

Certainly, health will be at the centre of concerns of multilateralism. It is part of human rights and is demanding capable responses: Where can resources come from? An agenda of change needs to be developed.

Agenda 2030 needs to be the route for the future. The only border that we have is the sustainability of the planet and not borders of states. Through understanding this, the urgent need to support each other becomes clear. Another problem is the segmentation of functional bodies, which must be overcome. The world needs a new multilateral architecture and instruments. The EU and LAC need to look for mechanisms that aim further in this direction.

Disciplines such as Philosophy, Sociology and Anthropology have recently been a fertile ground for looking for some answers that allow us to think about multilateralism architecture. Dystopia, for example, is one of the concepts that relates to moving forward and working with a positive agenda. In this regard, the international community faces the opportunity to evaluate the difficulties brought by COVID-19 and the crisis of multilateralism through the need of searching for a new horizon.

Josep Borrell (High Representative and Vice-President of the European Commission) quoted by Edita Hrdá: *“Multilateralism is the only effective way to face a threat which no country can cope with on its own and which affects us all.”*



## EU-LAC WEBINAR ABOUT COVID-19 A NEW MULTILATERALISM IN THE COVID-19 ERA



MONDAY, 18 MAY 2020  
17:00 - 18:30 (CEST)

LIMITED AVAILABILITY  
PRIOR REGISTRATION

\*THE PANELISTS WILL SPEAK IN SPANISH  
AND/OR ENGLISH WITHOUT INTERPRETATION

### OPENING



**Edita Hrdá**  
Managing Director for the Americas - European External Action Service



**Mauricio Escamero**  
Ambassador Head of the Mission of Mexico to the EU - PPT CELAC



**Luis Felipe López-Calva**  
Regional Director for Latin America of the United Nations Development Programme - UNDP



**Kristin Lang**  
Head of Division for Lending for Latin America and the Caribbean of the European Investment Bank



**Antoni Estovadeordal**  
Representative of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) Office in Europe



**Jorge Pizarro**  
Senator of Chile & Co-President of Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly - EUROLAT



**Javi López**  
Member of European Parliament & Co-President of Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly - EUROLAT



**Monica Hirst**  
Researcher at the State University of Rio de Janeiro - IESP/UERJ & Professor at the Universidad Torcuato Di Tella



**Anna Ayuso**  
Researcher of the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs - CIDOB

### PANELISTS

Opening: Paola Amadei, Executive Director of the EU-LAC Foundation

Moderator: Bernabé Malacalza, Researcher at the National Council of Scientific and Technical Research - CONICET/Universidad Nacional Quilmes

For the recording of the webinar: <https://player.vimeo.com/video/420210078>

# IV EU-LAC WEBINAR:

## SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF PANDEMICS

25 May 2020 - 17:00 (CEST)

The inaugural session featured participation from Paola Amadei, Executive Director of the EU-LAC Foundation, Claudia Gintersdorfer, Head of Americas Regional Division at the European External Action Service (EEAS), and Ambassador Mauricio Escanero, Head of the Mission of Mexico to the European Union and Representative of the Pro Tempore Presidency of CELAC.

Ramón Torrent, President of The Observatory of Relations between the European Union and Latin America (OBREAL) was the moderator. The panel comprised: Joy St John, Executive Director of the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA); Antonella Cavallari, Secretary-General of the Italian-Latin American Institute (IILA); Esther Rodríguez, Coordinator of the Projects Office of the Carlos III Health Institute in Spain; María Alejandra Davidziuk, Coordinator of the Argentine-European Union Liaison Office in Science, Technology, and Innovation of the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation of Argentina (MINCYT), and Gustavo Cabrera Rodríguez, Director General of Technical and Scientific Cooperation of the Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation (AMEXCID).

The webinar was structured around the following question: How can we foster a cooperative network of scientists and academic experts from different disciplines that can support international health cooperation initiatives and institutions and that extends beyond the current crisis?

### Past regional responses and scientific cooperation

The pandemic has shed light upon the importance of facing global challenges through cooperation as well as upon the necessity of being able to count on a structured response built around multilateral endeavours that can prevent improvisation in the face of imminent issues. As the following subsections show, there were many actions taken by different institutions and governments in both regions. On the European side, there are the Italian-Latin American Institute (IILA) and the Carlos III Health Institute in Spain. In the LAC region, the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA), the Argentine-European Union Liaison Office in Science, Technology, and Innovation of

the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation (MINCYT), and the Technical and Scientific Cooperation of the Mexican Agency for International Development Cooperation (AMEXCID) have also cooperated with different actors and themes.

### **The European Context**

The EU identified the need to invest in personalised medicine prior to the pandemic. The Union has therefore built global alliances in this field, with LAC one of its major partners. EULAC PerMed, a multidisciplinary project that aims to extend cooperation in policy and research in Personalised Medicine between the EU and LAC, began operating in early 2019. Its objective is to bridge the two regions around efforts related to personalised medicine, from fostering mutual understanding of what personalised medicine is, as well as how to adapt and implement it in different health systems.

Another example of on-going scientific cooperation is presented by IILA. The Institute generates networks and connects institutions that work with topics in common. IILA has some 200 agreements, which are developed with international organisations, universities and research centres from various parts of the world. These agreements are promoted through meetings, conferences, and seminars. Additionally, specific networks are created, as in the case of the Italian-Latin American Alliance for the Promotion of Gender Equality.

### **Latin America and the Caribbean Context**

CARPHA is a CARICOM institution, responsible for building the capacity of member states to prevent diseases and promote health and wellness through leadership, partnership, and innovations in public health. The institution has benefited from cooperation with the EU, in the 11th EDF ZOMBDI Project, which had the overall objective of improving the public health of the Caribbean population through a reduction in mortality associated with Zika and other mosquito-borne diseases. With a strong investment in joint research, appropriate health planning and resource allocation for children and families affected by Congenital Zika syndrome, among other actions, the Caribbean is now a zone free of transmission for the Zika virus. A great effort was also put into community engagement.

AMEXCID has a key role in the matter of scientific cooperation. This decentralised organisation is the result of the Law on International Cooperation for Development of Mexico and was conceived as an organisation that can coordinate activities with civil society, academia, and the private sector in the pursuit of projects that can improve life conditions. International cooperation has been a central priority of Mexico's foreign policy since 2019. This country, which holds the Pro Tempore Presidency of CELAC, seeks out regional scientific cooperation as the axis to structure both the principles of foreign policy and the sum of the principles of scientific development, taking

the mandate of the 2030 agenda, specifically through coordination of international cooperation policy, analysis, and the evaluation and implementation of projects.

When it comes to international cooperation in the face of the pandemic, Mexico has divergent priorities as both a giving and a receiving country. Before COVID-19, a challenge Mexico faced alongside the trends of interregional migration related to the spreading of diseases at its borders. In the past, strategies were developed which did not prove to be effective, as opposed to what the country and the region needed, thus leading to the question of whether each country needs to have its own infrastructure. This was the state of affairs when COVID19 arrived and therefore Mexico was not prepared with the scientific infrastructure.

Nonetheless, scientific cooperation on other topics between the two regions does exist and was both accelerated and further developed due to the pandemic, resulting in the emergence of new instruments and mechanisms. For instance, in cooperation with the Robert Koch Institute (Germany), Mexico is exploring the possibility of creating an institute that would help to identify and study tropical diseases. Further examples are found in the following section.

### **Scientific and technological cooperation in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic**

Researchers and the scientific community overall have a primary role to play, both in dealing with the current COVID-19 crisis and with the post-pandemic. On the one hand is the importance of researching the coronavirus, its diagnoses, treatment and prevention, and especially the development of a vaccine. On the other hand, there is the scientific analysis to understand the crisis, anticipate its impact, and inform the decisions of public authorities. One element that facilitated this process was the scientific cooperation networks already in existence, which paved the way for a more rapid collective response.

#### **The European actions**

One relevant case of dealing with the pandemic is found in the Coronavirus Global Response Pledging Conference, convened by the presidency of the European Commission, which has collected 7.4 billion euros to date. Alongside this outcome, the Horizon 2020 - the biggest EU Research and Innovation programme - has also financed numerous projects through calls for proposals, which are open to international partners, namely universities and research centres.

Within the context of this structured response by the EU, the Caribbean region was the recipient of 8 million euros from the European Development Fund, of which 5 million were used to support the response to COVID-19, for instance through laboratory equipment and training in quarantine and isolation procedures.

Initiatives to facilitate international cooperation can also be found. One such is the EUvsVirus Hackathon, whereby twenty-one thousand innovators from 141 countries have identified over a hundred innovative solutions to face the COVID-19 crisis. Although this was intended as a short-term response, it has the potential to pave the way to a longer-term collaboration.

### **Latin America and the Caribbean actions**

From the perspective of a state, we should highlight the early response of the Argentinian government to help prepare a working strategy, create health centres, generate technological advances, and raise awareness of the pandemic in the population. Considering that a major hurdle that this strategy faced related to the high levels of poverty, a common issue in the LAC region, this response had a dual focus: (i) To reach these citizens and enable them to isolate in a realistic and sensible way and (ii) to provide economic support to those dependent on informal work.

Amongst the benefits of this early response is the creation of a COVID-19 unit, which coordinates the work of institutes and universities. It has three principal objectives: (i) To develop new, fast COVID-19 tests; (ii) To put at the service of the Ministry of Health the capacity of at least twelve centres in the country to implement the diagnosis and accelerate recovery times and, (iii) To stimulate lines of research in different disciplines to provide knowledge of potential epidemic scenarios.

All these national actions have only been possible with regional and international initiatives. MINCYT cooperated with other organisations to work with UNESCO around the discussion of open science as an essential tool for international cooperation; with MERCOSUR there was the approval of the financing of biomedical projects with over 16 million dollars; in CELAC, the constitution of a network of virologists; the Latin American centre of biomedicine; a specific call for scientific research projects related to COVID-19; and recently, Argentina and Cuba resumed discussions within the framework of developing vaccines and pharmaceuticals.

Concerning CELAC, Mexico, with the support of Argentina, is preparing the 8th CELAC-EU Meeting of Senior Officials in Science, Technology, and Innovation, with Ambassador Escanero being one of the major promoters. The EU-CELAC Joint Initiative on Research and Innovation (JIRI-SOM) was long affected by a lack of political will, but it is now making progress. The Initiative highlights the necessity of having strong cooperation between the policy makers and the scientists in order to make assertive decisions.

The main objective is to increase mobility and ensure that agendas related to health advance more significantly despite lockdown. Webinars have proven to be a useful tool to this end, promoting the infrastructure, and above all incorporating innovations. Considering all the above, it is possible to assert that cooperation within the framework

of health is ongoing. In this sense, the opportunity that the pandemic presents is to reinforce established contacts and progress and put them at the service of new and sustainable proposals.

### **Major global challenges: International health and scientific cooperation beyond the pandemic**

Similarly to international cooperation, networks should also be improved: They need to have closer links with scientists, politicians, civil society, and public servants. Moreover, continuous funding for cooperation and work on prevention is also required. Scholarships are an important tool in different sectors, for the training of officials and students.

A balanced share of resources is crucial in order to have effective cooperation, through programmes that are sustainable throughout, for instance Horizon 2020 and the subsequent Horizon Europe. However, these programmes ought to be more open and inclusive, where different actors with distinct perspectives can participate in the production of scientific cooperation and the presentation of results to specialised communities and societies.

For the next CELAC high-level meeting, it is necessary to build upon the cooperation with the EU in the framework of the bi-regional political dialogue, adapted to the challenges posed by regional fragmentation and the implications for the scenario related to the pandemic. An analysis of the common themes that are the strengths of LAC as well as of viruses and bacteria needs to be revisited and updated to face the implications of COVID-19.

Based on this, it is important to acknowledge the structural problems that exist in LAC, but also to recognize its capacities that allow the region to negotiate with its counterpart, the EU. For this to occur it is imperative to keep investing in a homogenous position within the LAC region. It is essential to have infrastructure capacity, for instance, to develop vaccines or produce them in the region and that each of the South and Central regions - with CELAC's leadership - generate the conditions of bi-regional and multilateral cooperation. The Pacific Alliance is one strategy, with Chile, Colombia, Peru and Mexico as the main axes, but also engaging in projects such as the Dry Canal in Central America and an early warning system for meteorological phenomena in the Caribbean.

Working as 'recipient' or 'provider' is ruled out by the necessity of working together. The exchange of countries' experiences assists the recovery of traditional scientific knowledge, through community knowledge and assets, as well as high-level scientific development created by technological infrastructure and innovation.

This re-launching of regional and interregional alliances is based not only on territory but also on themes, and serves the purpose of identifying common agendas with the aim of also strengthening resilience.

This scenario leads to three questions that have to be answered:

1. Looking to the future is it possible to continue organising EU and LAC scientific cooperation based on a specific problem/project or do we need a permanent platform?
2. If it is a platform, can it be limited only to government officials, or must it include all actors involved in scientific cooperation?
3. Finally, which instruments can be utilised?

Concerning the development of a platform for cooperation between the two regions, this must be rethought and re-analysed. The EU has valuable instruments at its disposal, but several are not applicable to the LAC region. For a considerable time, bi-regional cooperation was focused on projects with the possibility of exploring and deepening these into themes. However, if the work is only carried by projects, a short-sighted view of the problem is maintained. In that sense, both regions need to think on a long-term basis to further develop the partnership.

In the absence of solid regional institutionalism, stronger cooperation amongst the Latin American and the Caribbean countries would foster the means of engaging, in an intelligent and conscious manner, with the EU institutions and their available platforms and projects.

Should there be an underlying assumption that the pandemic will linger for as long as there is no vaccine, the response entails an opportunity to include multisectoral elements with perspectives from different sectors as a means to look beyond the solution to the health crisis itself. This way, better prevention and preparation can be achieved should emergencies arrive, through cooperation. The means to reinforce this stem from financing research but also from encouraging networks for the exchange of information and experience on further challenges (e.g. climate change).

Given that this pandemic also arose from the relation societies have with the environment, whereby the usage of natural resources without consideration for the consequences is a prime factor, any approach to the recovery needs to include a critical analysis and, for this purpose, the green deal stands out as a suitable tool. For this end, the participating institutions are willing to work and cooperate.

A major challenge of the scientific process and of knowledge itself that will be central in forming a response and restructuring international cooperation is the transmission of results in a rapid and effective way. Additionally, the limitations posed by language

barriers hamper the presentation of these outcomes (for instance scientific articles that need to be written in English in order to be published). Part of these limitations can be solved by rationalisation, for instance the Colegio de México seeks to facilitate the publication of articles written in Spanish. However, this solution is for a specific nucleus and therefore the challenge of being able to count on information and knowledge from around the world and at any time remains. The most popular and common form of knowledge needs to be addressed and targeted.

If endeavours to create and systematise platforms are to be successful, two institutional problems need to be solved: (i) there are overlapping levels of cooperation. Those levels have their logic, dynamics, and nature, but they ought to be structured. For this to be accomplished, organisers who can 'connect what is needed to be connected' are essential. (ii) Acknowledge the various different actors engaged and their status in this cooperation. The EU has various competences which are sometimes divergent from those encountered at State level, mostly the federal States. Things that may seem evident to a country or group of countries may not be evident to the EU and vice versa. Therefore, platforms structured at the State-Union level are needed as well for they could provide a multisectoral approach that assists actors to better understand each other. This is extended to the interregional level. The EU and CELAC, from their shared values and aspirations, can and should have a leadership role in favour of strengthened cooperation, affirmed Ambassador Escanero.

*"The task of social scientists should be how we work on transmitting to the rest of the community-region, or continent, in practical, appropriate and immediate language all the scientific results that can be generated by an important work or project (...) cooperation will be play its part, but the challenge is the transmission [of this information]"* Gustavo Cabrera Rodríguez (AMEXCID)

*„We need to have intelligent bi-regional cooperation that can be translated into concrete results for our countries“* María Alejandra (MINCYT)



## EU-LAC WEBINAR ABOUT COVID-19

EU-LAC SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF PANDEMICS



MONDAY, 25 MAY 2020  
17:00 - 18:30 (CEST)

LIMITED AVAILABILITY  
PRIOR REGISTRATION

\*THE PANELISTS WILL SPEAK IN SPANISH  
AND/OR ENGLISH WITHOUT INTERPRETATION

### OPENING



**Claudia Gintersdorfer**  
Head of Americas  
Regional Division -  
European External  
Action Service (EEAS)



**Mauricio Escanero**  
Ambassador  
Head of the Mission of  
Mexico to the EU - PPT  
CELAC

### PANELISTS



**Antonella Cavallari**  
Secretary-General of  
the Istituto Italo-  
Latinoamericano  
(IILA)



**Gustavo Cabrera**  
Director-General of  
Technical and  
Scientific Cooperation  
AMEXCID  
Representative of the  
Government of Mexico  
(PPT CELAC)



**Joy St John**  
Executive Director  
of the  
Caribbean Public  
Health Agency  
(CARPHA)



**Esther Rodriguez**  
Coordinator of  
Projects Office  
Instituto de  
Salud Carlos III



**Maria Alejandra Davidziuk**  
Coordinator of the Liaison  
Office in Argentina -  
European Union for  
Science, Technology and  
Innovation at MINCYT

Opening: Paola Amadei, Executive Director of the EU-LAC Foundation  
Moderator: Ramon Torrent, President of the OBREAL-global Observatory

For the recording of the webinar: <https://player.vimeo.com/video/422701671>

# V EU-LAC WEBINAR: PANDEMIC AND INFODEMIC: EXPERIENCES OF JOURNALISTS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION, LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

15th June 2020 16:00 - 17:45h (CEST)

The webinar was structured around the following questions: (i) How have you perceived the events around the pandemic in the other region? (ii) How do you see the epicentre of the pandemic changing from Europe to Latin America? (iii) What information did you appreciate or lack and what good practice did you find in the field of journalism? (iv) Did you act in existing collaborative networks or did you activate new ones in the face of the pandemic and in what way did you participate as journalists? (v) How could media strategies be improved to combat the pandemic in this crisis? and (vi) From your perspective, how would you address the relationship between lockdown, misinformation and the circulation of fake news through social networks?

The inaugural session was held by Paola Amadei, Executive Director of the EU-LAC Foundation, Claudia Gintersdorfer Head of the America's Division at the European External Action Service (EEAS), Ambassador Mauricio Escanero, Head of Mission of Mexico to the European Union/representative of the Pro Tempore Presidency of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) in charge of Mexico, both in the capacity of Co-Presidencies of the Board of Governors of the EU-LAC Foundation and Hilde Hardeman, Head of the European Commission's Service for Foreign Policy. The webinar was moderated by Juan de Oñate from the Association of European Journalists and Carlos Malamud from the Elcano Royal Institute.

The participating panellists were Ángel Badillo from the Elcano Royal Institute in Spain, Wesley Gibbings from the Association of Caribbean Media Workers in Trinidad and Tobago, Tom Hennigan from the Irish Times in Brazil, Adriana León from the Instituto Prensa y Sociedad in Peru, Tatiana Mora, an independent journalist in Chile, Óscar Schlenker from Deutsche Welle in Venezuela and Helene Zuber from Der Spiegel in Germany.

## **Journalism in the EU and LAC in the face of COVID19 - different regions, distinct strategies**

COVID-19 turned into a pandemic and triggered a global health, social and economic crisis never seen before in which some countries are being affected more than others.

Around the world COVID-19 led to a tsunami of information. People in every country have been watching the news on television, reading newspapers and looking for information online, as well as in social media. The sharing of knowledge and information during a pandemic is certainly necessary and useful, but it has also led to a lot of problems and challenges. “Infodemic” is a new word, which was created by the general director of the World Health Organisation (WHO). This Infodemic has been as serious as the pandemic itself and has further reinforced it.

Because of the different starting points of COVID-19 in the distinct regions, there has also been a difference in defence mechanisms: By following the development in Asia and in Europe, countries in Latin America already knew about the effects COVID-19 would have. The strategies of the different regions for confronting the pandemic are therefore very diverse. Different approaches are also seen amongst Latin American countries. In Nicaragua, Brazil and Mexico we can identify negationist behaviour that goes against what science says. Countries such as Uruguay, Costa Rica and Paraguay have taken the pandemic seriously and implemented successful measures at the very beginning of the crisis.

In Europe, too, a parallel can be drawn between impact and behaviour in the face of the pandemic. Spain, France, Italy and the United Kingdom were the countries most affected at the beginning of the pandemic because of the delay in taking containment measures. Sweden, on the other hand, followed another path. But also, an authoritarian trend needs to be recognized in countries such as Hungary and Poland. We may further note that Europe suffered a few weeks of egoism and lack of solidarity at the beginning of the pandemic, a fact recognised by the European Commission itself. But the member states were then able to correct the course of action and began broad regional cooperation.

Due to COVID-19 the population in Spain became more polarised. Everyone saw what they wanted to see and was consuming the media they chose. There was a decrease in people’s income due to COVID-19. But the consumption of information increased immensely, and the media selected their clients and gave them what they wanted to hear.

At the beginning of the pandemic in Germany there was the idea that COVID-19 was not worse than a flu, which attacks the population every year. This perception changed at the beginning of March, when public life was cancelled and people started working from home.

Then false information started to pop up around the world. The President of the United States, Donald Trump, used his channels for disinformation and the President of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, has adopted his attitude. Official campaigns therefore had to be checked for false information.

Chile has been alarmed from the start by what was happening out there. Many criticisms of authorities have arisen because of the social protests that have been taking place since 2019. It is essential to have transparency of information; if this is not guaranteed, people lose confidence in the government, causing polarization. In Chile the state is not paternalistic and civil society did not have to struggle with a lack of information.

Peru's strategy has been quite different: In Peru disinformation is pursued and punished with six-year jail terms. The government insists that correct information should come from official sources. This leads to questions and concerns, as well as protests, because official information can also be disinformation and needs to be questioned. In Peru the president only wanted to share official information. This denotes paternalistic governance and a hijacking of news by the government.

Media and journalists have been important for receiving information and consequently confronting the issues of the threat of COVID-19 for the Caribbean. One of the biggest challenges in confronting the virus has been the structure, as the region consists of small and fragile economic states. The economy of the islands is dependent on tourism, fishing, agriculture and in some states on the energy sector. This means that the pandemic had a huge impact on the regional economy. The local media enterprises have therefore also suffered, and advertising revenues have fallen between 15-70%. Some media presses saw the need to turn to digital.

In the Caribbean, disinformation linked to COVID-19 came alongside nine elections this year. The result was that five elections were problematic, because of the difficulty of the question of presence and the use of virtual means. COVID-19 shows the need for the strengthening of virtual platforms, as well as online election campaigns. Until now the Caribbean has seen successful management of the pandemic, but now the number of cases is increasing it is becoming a big challenge. This highlights the difficulty for islands closing their borders. The challenge of journalism is the interpretation of information. Furthermore, the news in the Caribbean has been dominated by the State. There is a vibrant civil society and resilient political opposition. The latter has not always responded based on data, which the State has the control of. In the State of Dominique there exists a state monopoly of the press, which leads to a weakening of private media.

In Brazil the situation is critical, as the central government seems to be more concerned with saving the economy than saving lives. COVID-19 has intensified what was already a political and institutional crisis. Furthermore, the media and journalists have become a target for the central government and its supporters as they are talking about the health situation. Serious attempts to restrict information can be seen. The central

government is hiding the actual number of cases of infection and deaths. In addition, part of the media is co-opted by the government and traditional information channels are being attacked. This is a critical time for Brazil and a hard time for its press. This situation has worsened since the COVID-19 crisis began.

Venezuela was one of the first countries to begin quarantining. It has started to hide other problems that were already present such as migration, water and gas shortages. Venezuela has long had to fight misinformation, as well as lack of information. A huge challenge lies in informing the population that does not have access to the internet about the gravity of the situation and the containment measures. Reliable sources can only be accessed through social media. In Venezuela the media is kept quiet by the government. Due to the pandemic, a lot of migrants are having to go back to Venezuela. The consequences are yet to be seen.

### **Difficulties for journalism, misinformation and the circulation of fake news**

The lack of knowledge and the pace with which the virus spread led to an understandable social preoccupation in society. This became further reinforced through the media, which was publishing and comparing information and news at a fast pace and without a filter. On the one hand this was good information and on the other hand it allowed fake news, rumours and conspiracy theories to appear. We were used to receiving fake news from Russia and China, which can be understood as part of their policy strategy, but since the beginning of the pandemic it was starting to come from everywhere.

Disinformation therefore became a huge topic. The consequence of bringing information to society without a filter was that a lot of information was false and led to a polarization of people. In addition, in many cases, through social networks (including more private ones like WhatsApp) people have been sharing what sounds good, which has been incomplete or even false information.

Two lines of disinformation can be identified. On the one hand, disinformation that came from outside (especially from China and Russia) and on the other hand disinformation from inside, which is a consequence of polarization: a defence of interests.

Furthermore, disinformation is also created by references from the other side of the world. From the viewpoint of Latin America, Europe, during the pandemic, was living in the future. The pandemic outbreak happened in the EU before the virus came to LA. This led to some journalists using the information as references to create new disinformation. In addition, it cannot be forgotten that governments have also published disinformation. This shows that there needs to be a review of information which comes from the State as well.

Countries have different problems with disinformation. Some have lied and hidden information such as Nicaragua and Brazil, but the government of Peru also did not have the correct information, since it has not been counting the deaths correctly and thus is not providing access to the right information. Journalism in times of COVID-19 is also challenging for journalists: How can you access information if you cannot go out on the street and the information is on the streets?

In addition, the life of journalists in Latin America is not easy and can even be quite dangerous. A lot of journalists have to face persecution and COVID-19 is definitely reinforcing this situation.

The high amount of information paralleled the fact that people were also consuming a greater amount. This led to the publishing of news that people wanted to hear. Therefore, a lot of questions have arisen during the pandemic: How accurate is the public information? What information is missing? What are collaboration networks and how can they be improved?

It is remarkable that COVID19 was called the Chinese flu at the beginning. There is a parallel with the Spanish flu, which did not come from Spain in the first place but started in the First World War in which the Spanish did not participate. This has fed a prejudice against some countries. It is the work of a journalist to check the information and data before publishing something, in order to prevent fake news. This is a big responsibility.

### **Improvements and future collaboration of journalism**

COVID-19 has shown that a shared duty, not only during the pandemic but also in the future, is to make people aware of false information and expose the sources of it.

Specifically, in this pandemic the correct information needs to be available for all in order to save values, protect societies and even save lives. Joint forces are needed and lessons learnt need to be shared in order to confront the pandemic. The guidelines from the EU Commission should be adopted: It has called for concrete action, identification of misleading content, communication to get the facts right and to cooperate and promote transparency and accountability of online platforms of information. Freedom of expression, pluralism and democratic debate is essential. Furthermore, citizens need to be informed and invited to participate in an informed and democratic debate. The preservation of an independent view of journalism is important and the exchange of information contributes to the needs of citizens across the globe.

The crisis also brings a learning effect for the journalists. They understand better what their duty is. This needs to be applied wisely when it comes to the climate change emergency.

This crisis that goes alongside the Infodemic shows the importance of reconfirming, comparing and questioning data that is offered to the public – whether it is from the governments or from private media. There are different sources available which should be used and compared. The pandemic has affected every part of society, as well as the media and journalists directly.

**EU-LAC WEBINARS ABOUT COVID-19**  
**PANDEMIC AND INFODEMIC: EXPERIENCES OF JOURNALISTS**  
**IN THE EUROPEAN UNION, LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**  
 MONDAY, JUNE 15TH, 16:00-17:45h CEST

**OPENING**  
 Edita Hrdá  
 Managing Director for the Americas  
 European External Action Service  
 Mauricio Escanero  
 Ambassador  
 Head of Mission of Mexico to the EU  
 PPT CELAC  
 Hilde Hardeman  
 Head of Service for Foreign Policy Instruments  
 European Commission

**LIMITED AVAILABILITY  
 PRIOR REGISTRATION**

**PANELISTS**  
 Ángel Badillo (Spain)  
 Eicano  
 Royal Institute  
 Wesley Gibbings (Trinidad and Tobago)  
 Association of Caribbean Media Workers  
 Roberto Da Rin (Italy)  
 Reuters  
 Tom Hennigan (Ireland)  
 Irish Times  
 Adriana León (Peru)  
 Instituto Prensa y Sociedad  
 Tatiana Mora (Chile)  
 Independent journalist  
 Óscar Schlenker (Venezuela)  
 Deutsche Welle  
 Helene Zuber (Germany)  
 Der Spiegel

Opening: Paola Amadè, Executive Director of the EU-LAC Foundation  
 Moderators: Carlos Malamud, Senior Analyst at Eicano Royal Institute and Juan de Oñate, Director of the Association of European Journalists

For the recording of the webinar: <https://vimeo.com/429336563>

# VI EU-LAC WEBINAR: TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE ERA OF COVID-19

29 June 2020 at 16:00 (CEST)

The webinar was structured around the following guiding questions: (i) What are the main Covid-19 lessons that we can take to face climate emergencies? (ii) How can plans and investments for economic recovery be climate-friendly and aligned with the principles of the Paris Agreement? and (iii) What are the opportunities for collaboration between LAC and the EU in building a more sustainable and resilient future?

The inauguration session was held by Paola Amadei, Executive Director of the EU-LAC Foundation; Ambassador Mauricio Escanero, Head of the Mission of Mexico to the EU – PPT CELAC; Claudia Gintersdorfer, Head of Americas Regional Division at the European External Action Service (EEAS), and Felice Zaccheo, Head of Unit Regional Operations Latin America and the Caribbean at the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DEVCO) of the European Commission.

Tania Guillén, Climate Service Centre Germany (GERICS), was the moderator. The panel was comprised by: Lara Lázaro-Touza, Senior Analyst at Elcano Royal Institute; Ismo Ulvila, Expert at the Directorate-General for Climate Action of the European Commission; Graham Watkins, Acting Chief Climate Change Division at the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB); Horst Pilger, Head of Sector at the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development of the European Commission/ EUROCLIMA+; and Colin Young, Executive Director of the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC).

## **Past developments, challenges and lessons from Covid-19 to face environment emergencies**

The world was not prepared for the health crisis, as it is not prepared to face climate change. In the case of COVID-19, the virus spread happened rapidly and affected all countries, which reminded us that we only have a “common house” and we are all connected.

The topic of climate change stresses the importance of multilateral cooperation and coordination because it is not an issue that each country can face on its own. Just as the virus does not know borders, neither do the challenges of climate change.

Several countries based their actions to cope with the Covid-19 pandemic on scientific information but each has different circumstances to face the crisis. Nonetheless, what all countries must invest in is on the preparedness for cases of natural disasters. Therefore, the prevention of the climate tragedy is a key endeavour of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The climate crisis is evident at the present moment and not a future topic. The scientific community urges countries and organisations to act upon it immediately. During a recent Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) meeting, a crucial difference between climate change and the Covid-19 virus was stressed: for climate change, there is no vaccine whereas for the pandemic, we expect to overcome it once there is an immunisation. Even without disregarding all the economic consequences of the pandemic that will take time to overcome. The climate change crisis is a long-term one, which entails that our actions now will have an impact on future generations.

The effects of this crisis are observable in both regions. In LAC these include droughts and floods, for instance in Central America, as well as more acute tropical storms in the Caribbean and glacial meltdown in South America. In Europe, last spring and summer have been extraordinarily dry, which accounts for the third year of drought in the region. This is just to mention some examples.

In the Caribbean, the pandemic arrived at a time when the region is most vulnerable: the hurricane season, which is expected to be above normal this year. In this context, countries must now incorporate COVID-19 protocols into the hurricane preparedness plans: The logistics of shelters managers must consider social distance and appropriate hygienic measures, including wearing masks. This is now parallel to the on-going climate shocks, namely hurricanes and floods, which are already threatening the food and water security along with damaging the infrastructure of the region.

The response to these two crises exceeds the fiscal space available in most Caribbean countries. Even in a non-pandemic year, the region is severely impacted by natural disasters: Belize climate-related disaster last year cost the equivalent of 7% of the annual GDP and Hurricane Maria devastated Dominica, just to mention a couple of cases. Indeed, the region had not fully recovered from the 2008-2010 financial crisis, partially given the constant natural disasters.

In only three months, COVID-19 has brought the economies of the Caribbean region to exhaustion. It had a major impact due to the lockdown in several countries, paralysing tourism and other economic activities, especially services. Governments have been forced to undertake extraordinary spending and relocation of the national budget to

provide livelihoods and strengthen health systems to deal with the pandemic. The result is that the public financing in the region is being narrowed and fiscal space has disappeared. Caribbean countries need urgent financial assistance and access to concessional credits, independent of their middle-income status or GDP per capita.

Without such a coordinated international response, the region's ability to respond to these challenges will be severely undermined, with serious implications for the people and the region's attainment of sustainable development.

Despite the constant worldwide challenges, significant work has been done. The EU has been dealing with sustainability and the transition to other energies for twenty years. This had a great impact on the EU economy: Since 1990 the carbon gas emissions decreased by 25% while the EU's economy increased by almost 60%, which is the famous „decoupling“. In this sense, it is a great deal to invest in a sustainable economy. There were millions of jobs created, the improvement of efficiency in the European companies, investment in research, and the development of manufacturing processes. This shows that investing in a sustainable and competitive policy generates employment and prosperity.

In the cooperation sphere, there is EUROCLIMA+: The EU flagship programme on environmental sustainability and climate change with the Latin America region. Albeit it was launched ten years ago with a reduced budget for the first seven years (ca. 16 million euros), during the last three years it has been raised up to 140 million euros. This reflects both that the programme is relevant but also that this topic has gained importance in recent years. The programme has been focusing on two main strains of operation: Call for proposals in six sectors (mainly with actions on the ground) and dialogue with countries to assist in the formulation and/or implementation of climate policies.

Regrettably, there is a risk of reduction in climate spending from the countries due to the pandemic. This might affect the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)<sup>3</sup>, in the sense; they will not be revised in the time frame expected or in such an ambitious fashion. Some reasons are that Covid-19 makes it more difficult to gather the correct data, to meet with representatives and make decisions, and the whole communication becomes more difficult.

While both regions need to deal with the unprecedented pandemic, the environmental component needs to advance. Otherwise, there is a risk of facing a more complex situation. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) affirmed in its last report, that in order to fulfil the objectives of the Paris Agreement, countries need to take urgent actions, making rapid transitions in all sectors of the economy, especially the energy one. All must be under the criteria of equity, justice, cooperation, and joint work between government and citizens.

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3 Related to the Paris Agreement (2015), NDCs "embody efforts by each country to reduce national emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change". UNFCCC Website. Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

In this context, the COVID-19 crisis provides a guide on the actions needed to face global warming. The outcome is positive, as the case of the reduction in carbon emission in Italy and the consequent improvement in air quality has shown.

### **Possibilities for economic recovery to be climate-friendly/green and aligned with the principles of the Paris Agreement**

The current context entails the opportunity for governments to show that they can address challenges by building more inclusive and resilient societies for the health and well being of the citizens.

The European Commission, under its new mandate, set several priorities before the outbreak of COVID-19 and number one was the European Green Deal for the coming years. For the first time, climate change is at the core of the Commission's agenda. At the European level, there were 42 proposals to improve climate action until the summer of 2021, but with the pandemic's arrival, it was necessary to reformulate the proposal. Despite the pandemic, the most ambitious objective was kept: to make Europe the first carbon-neutral continent by 2050.

LAC only emits 8% of the global green gases' emission, similarly to the EU. However, the region is disproportionately affected by climate change, due to geographic, socioeconomic conditions in addition of being one of the most unequal regions of the world. The Caribbean and Central America are severely hit by climate change. Several countries have small economies and suffer from climate conditions, especially extreme weather conditions, as mentioned before.

The challenge for the region is, therefore, promoting a green recovery that is inclusive and leaves no one behind. Time limitations are a major topic. To maintain the objectives and primary goals and reduce global warming to 1.5, the LAC region has only eleven years to make the transition. This means that a green recovery from Covid-19 must be part of the plan, one of its key elements.

The crises are not happening simultaneously, but they are linked and show consequences on a global level: health, economic, and social areas. As it occurs, there is a need for incentive packages. However, there is no sufficient clarity on how green they are and will be. The visible examples are on one hand the USA, with the denial of climate change and, on the other hand China, whether it will follow its compromise with the Paris Agreement.

The EU has been using the slogan "build back better"<sup>4</sup> and encourages its partners to do the same. Thus, the recovery of the COVID-19 must consider the effects of climate change. Besides building better there is a need for building forward. Among the initia-

<sup>4</sup> The Build Back Better is a program that was first defined and officially used in the UN Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

tives, there is the “Next Generation EU”, with 750 thousand million euros dedicated to a sustainable recovery. These unprecedented stimulus packages are a window of opportunity to redirect financial flows and adjust to the objectives of the Paris Agreement.

According to a recent study from Oxford Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment, after the 2008 financial crisis only 16% of all incentive packages were assigned to the green recovery. The analysis indicates that until now - from the first packages of the current crisis - just 4% were green. This is an opportunity to see which packages have better behaviour, not only for the environment but also for the ones to recover jobs faster. The study also indicated that all investments in renewable energy infrastructure have significant long-term multipliers.

An option to make the recovery climate-friendly is to implement a clear green conditionality to funding. In other words, the companies and industries that are going to receive public funds need to have sustainable and green verifiable objectives.

Since the situation is not the same in the two regions, it is essential to take into account some specific issues: In the LA case, it is important to note that 80% of its population lives in the cities, and this needs to be considered. The region is marked by inequalities, thus, making sure resilient communities are developed is a priority.

The future scenario is very challenging for LA: the International Financial Institutions estimates negative GDP growth of -9.3% for the region. The IDB predicts in “the worst-case scenario”, a loss of 17 million formal jobs and 23 million informal ones in the region. This has never happened before, so any plan needs to be real and pragmatic about this. In that sense, every solution that emerges will be country-specific and in some cases, city-specific, given the distinct realities among them.

It is important to understand the two phases in this crisis: rescue and recovery. Rescue includes the emergency packages, social protection; cash transfers to people that do not have jobs, maintaining jobs, and the proper implementation of fiscal policies. This has been the focus so far. The IDB committed around 22 billion dollars and the IMF circa 50 billion. There was little space for green actions in there.

In the recovery phase in LA, the objectives are the same: better health systems, social protection, jobs, and liquidity. But now it is needed to add economic growth and connections. The themes such as long-term mitigation, resilience, dealing with pollution, biodiversity, and investment in education and training centres continue in the forefront as well.

Infrastructure and services is key, especially to provide them for the underserved populations, so that they can become more resilient. Renewables and electric mobility are cost-effective, so we must invest in them. There is also the need to think about and find solutions to food security, supply chains, and circular economy, because they make the world a more resilient place.

However, for these things to be accomplished and last, we need to have a couple of things fixed: Change policy, increase the efficiency of fiscal components, avoid evasions of taxes, spend better, and use the tax system to drive incentives forward.

### **Opportunities in the EU-LAC partnership to build a more sustainable and resilient future**

The leadership within climate change is fragmented since two of the main actors of the Paris Agreement – China and the US – are not engaging anymore. This brings us to the need of having stronger networks regarding more distributed climate leadership.

From the EU side, there are great networks and partnerships, such as The High Ambition Coalition, the Ibero-American Network of Climate Change Offices and the EUROCLIMA+ programme. The latter is doing an important job in terms of dissemination of climate policies at the international level and could be a way of improving and increasing ambition. Thus, cooperation is needed in terms of ideas („ideational cooperation“). Additionally, the EU needs to engage in an activated financial level, not only through international climate assistance but also through programmes such as the EU Sustainable Finance Action Plan and the recently published taxonomy, which shows which projects are aligned with climate objectives.

It would be beneficial to produce information in terms of a green recovery plan to guide the decisions and communications of G7, G20, and the COP26 that was postponed. Even though the latter was postponed to 2021 and there is a lack of political capital and less financial resources, we must acknowledge the great support from the citizens for a green recovery.

Despite the pandemic, the EU already had an earlier commitment to tackling climate change, as demonstrated by the EC presentation of the European Green Deal in December 2019. This commitment includes not only Europe but also foreseen cooperation actions with other regions such as LAC. When choosing the path of green recovery, it is possible to attract and guide investors, businesses, workers and consumers towards a more sustainable world.

There has been a lot of cooperation, as a great example of EUROCLIMA+, but there still exists space for more. The EU is now in the setting of the new programme 2021-2027. This is certainly an opportunity to move towards a clear identification of the priorities. The fight against climate change remains; it only must be reframed under the current situation.

When we look at all that in the global context and especially in LAC, there is quite a lot of convergence in what the EU has done and what could also be done in LAC. Mainly when the regulatory framework is being developed over the long term. This is a signal

to investors, what kind of goals and what kind of regulations we are going to have between now and 10, 30 or 50 years. Considering that the private investments made today will still be there for us in 2050 if we talk about investment cycles of 30, 50 years. The issue of foresight and trust, in the EU's experience, is paramount. If the countries want to continue with the goal of the Paris Agreement (from 2 degrees to 1.5 degrees), almost all the money (95%) must come from private investors.

The EU stands ready to engage with partners around the world on ways to direct investments to environmentally sustainable economic activities. Not by exporting its standards but sitting down together to forge global standards. What does this mean? It means to take into consideration alliances and partnerships. Therefore, the EU remains committed with LAC region where it has a longstanding tradition. Both regions have teamed very well in the past and need to continue to do so in order to build green alliances for a better world, not only for us but the future generations.

EUROCLIMA+ is also working with ECLAC. Since the programme operates in demand drive, with the pandemic it did not have a lot of activities yet. The programme needs to ensure that, whenever a country launches an economic stimulus package, it includes the climate change aspect. This situation is also an opportunity to work towards strengthening the dialogue within the region. Since each country starts to prepare its response package, there is a chance to compare and exchange lessons. The programme is relatively flexible to adapt to the evolving world. It works with 18 LA countries. So far, the Caribbean is a bit of a problem, given the different funding it receives from the EU. With the new proposal of the Commission, there is a chance to change it and include all LAC countries under the same financing.

From the Caribbean side, despite all the challenges and fragilities that were presented in the first section, the region is determined to keep the joint bid of climate ambition alive. It remains resolute in leading the way in climate action, even during the pandemic. For the region, the issue of climate change is always an existential one.

The ambitious innovation of the Caribbean was demonstrated by the government of Belize as chair of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) when it convened a virtual and ambitious forum that brought together over a thousand participants, including prime ministers, ministers, UN agencies, and international donors. The forum succeeded in maintaining the momentum required for climate action, although the pandemic is causing some delays in the development of updated and ambitious NDCs. The members' states of SIDS are determined to submit and revise their NDCs in 2020. The government of Suriname has already led the way in this regard. To be successful, however, urgent additional support is needed to support NDCs and the implementation plans.

Implementing the Green Deal and the Covid-19 response will be a great challenge in Latin America, but there is a strong commitment from the EU to continue working with both regions. When we look at the EU and LAC together, it is almost a "third member of the Convention's parties" to the Climate Change Convention. Jointly we have the

great political weight to take the agenda forward. Even if the pandemic brought a new dimension to tackle climate change it has not to change the ultimate objective.

The question of how LAC countries can enhance their ambition and action when they are not having the resources and means to implement the previously established NDCs. This is not easy to answer, but there are many possibilities.

It is no short-term solution, but a challenge of decades. It is key to use information, to compare, use stakeholders' consultations, and understand things together. Include the private sector into the discussion, i.e. public-private partnerships and green bonds. Governments can implement changes to financial systems since we cannot talk if we cannot finance the changes.

Again, only the cooperation between the government actors of the two regions will not be enough. It is critical to have investments from governments, the private sector, and other partners. NGOs have been for a long time talking about sustainable futures and recovery. Now the multilateral banks joined the discussion and it is time to also engage the ministers of finance. Everyone must work together to move sustainability in the future forward. It is a huge challenge and it will not happen unless we are all looking towards the same vision. This can happen if we join forces and funds from different areas but also with the actions of distinct groups of actors.

*“Latin America is a region with many inequalities, with many problems. But it is also a region of ideas, it is a region of joy and energy, we must keep that part also for ambitious climate action. We have seen examples of cooperation; one example is the EU-LAC Foundation”* Tania Guillén.

**EU-LAC**

**EU-LAC WEBINARS ABOUT COVID-19  
TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE  
IN THE ERA OF COVID-19**

MONDAY, JUNE 29th, 16:00-17:45h CEST

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- Mauricio Escanero  
Ambassador  
Head of Mission of Mexico  
to the EU  
PPT CELAC
- Claudia Gintersdorfer  
Head of Americas  
Regional Division  
European External Action Service
- Felice Zaccheo  
Head of Unit Regional Operations  
Latin America and the Caribbean  
Directorate-General for  
International Cooperation and  
Development  
European Commission

**PRIOR REGISTRATION**

**PANELISTS**

- Tania Guillén  
Moderator  
Researcher,  
Climate Service  
Centre Germany
- Lara Lózarou-Touza  
Senior Analyst,  
Elcano Royal  
Institute
- Ismo Ulvila  
Expert,  
Directorate-General  
for Climate Action,  
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Commission
- Graham Watkins  
Acting Chief,  
Climate Change  
Division,  
Inter-American  
Development Bank
- Horst Pilger  
Head of Sector,  
Directorate-General for  
International Cooperation  
and Development,  
European Commission  
EUROCLIMA+
- Colin Young  
Executive Director,  
Caribbean Community  
Climate Change Centre

Opening: Paola Amadei, Executive Director of the EU-LAC Foundation

\*THE PANELISTS WILL SPEAK IN SPANISH AND/OR ENGLISH WITHOUT INTERPRETATION

For the recording of the webinar: <https://vimeo.com/433939087>

## CONCLUSION

The global crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed several socio-economic weaknesses that already existed in both regions and which have been deepened by the health emergency. One of the main topics raised in the webinars was the question of inequality between countries and within countries which the bi-regional partnership had to face. The effective way to tackle these critical issues is through new forms of international cooperation, global solidarity and renewed multilateralism. Responses to the crisis are stimulating creative solutions and adjustments to existing institutional structures. Considering the global nature of the current health crisis and other emerging crises, such as climate, the global public goods approach seems to be increasingly important.

The key is to acknowledge all the existing inequalities when addressing the way out of the COVID-19 crisis. In this sense, both regions should invest in social protection programmes and assist the most vulnerable groups. It is important to keep the commitments of the 2030 sustainable development agenda and not to leave anyone behind. Countries should be able to count on the necessary resources (financial, technological, knowledge, etc.) to create more resilient societies for the wellbeing of the population. Since countries now have very divided societies, they need to promote social cohesion. There is a unique opportunity to pull resources together and take joint projects forward, in the direction of a more sustainable world, but this matter has to be addressed immediately. Otherwise there will be irreversible consequences.

COVID-19 is a global issue. No country can address this problem by itself, so international cooperation is crucial. The current crisis has highlighted the importance of the network of information and permanent platforms of cooperation. This is very evident in scientific cooperation, but it must be applied in all instances. To have collaborative programmes, strong networks and continued funding is essential to implementing long-lasting changes in our regional institutions. The idea of “receptor” and “provider” of aid is outdated, and the pandemic has shown different forms of multi-dimensional cooperation (south-north, north-south, east-west etc.). There is not a “one size fits all”-approach and, therefore, there must be a common institutional space where ideas are discussed, analysed and recommended to achieve the best possible outcomes.

The above is crucial to confront further upcoming challenges as well as the ongoing climate change emergency. The COVID-19 pandemic seems to provide many lessons to be learned when dealing with major and global challenges. Besides governmental actors, private investors need to be involved. Multi-sector and multi-actor approaches offer the opportunity for joint actions and more effective solutions.

Another urgent topic is to address the fiscal issue, especially in the LAC region. If the countries are to invest in social programs and guarantee minimal conditions to their citizens, they need money from both the “response” phase and the recovery and

investment one. Therefore, it is key that the region has sources from which it can receive money, but which will not lead to a debt crisis.

Moreover, the infodemic, which appeared simultaneously with the pandemic, has shown the danger and difficulties of disinformation and thus, the need to check information for evidence and truth. However, this is not only the duty of governments but also of journalists and of the consumers of media themselves. Therefore, freedom of expression, pluralism, and democratic debate need to be guaranteed. A well-informed society can best respond to global challenges.

As this series of webinars has shown, many actors are enthusiastic and willing to collaborate. They have knowledge, experience, and ideas to advance the cooperation between the EU and LAC. It is and will continue to be one of the most important objectives of the Foundation's work, to connect actors who are willing to participate in the partnership and raise awareness in countries that have not yet discovered the potential of the strategic partnership between both regions. In addition, it is crucial to widen bridges, facilitate contacts and spaces for dialogue and strengthen networks between political, economic, and social actors from both regions in order to address the current crisis and prevent future ones.

The way the crisis is confronted will determine how the world will be structured afterwards. The existing bi-regional association is a great tool with the ability to confront challenges and develop better societies towards a more cooperative and sustainable world. It must be understood that some challenges need to be faced globally and borders should not therefore be obstacles.

#### **How to find the EU-LAC Foundation's work**

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## **EU-LAC Foundation**

The European Union – Latin America and Caribbean International Foundation (EU-LAC Foundation) was created in 2010 by the Heads of State and Government of the European Union (EU) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) member states. Its Members are the Member states of the EU and CELAC as well as the EU itself. The Foundation is a tool of the EU-LAC partnership and its activities feed into the intergovernmental dialogue, in line with the bi-regional Action Plan.

The EU-LAC Foundation was entrusted with the mission of strengthening and promoting the strategic bi-regional relationship, enhancing its visibility and fostering active participation of the respective civil societies.

