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EU-Central America Dialogue Sessions New Partnerships for Development Palacio Bolívar, Panama City, 1-2 June, 2022 Conceptual Note V25.05.2022

Background

The mandate of the EU-LAC Foundation is to work closely with all its members to promote partnership and dialogue on priority issues of the strategic agenda between the European Union (EU) and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), as well as to foster constructive inputs for governments, academia, and civil sectors.

To this end, the Foundation generates proposals and provides platforms where high-level experts can exchange information on best practices, promote coordination and cooperation between member states and their authorities and civil society, and obtain appropriate and up-to-date information and policy recommendations.

Central America celebrated 200 years of independence in 2021. On this occasion, the EU-LAC Foundation worked with several Central American governments, and in particular with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Panama, to hold a series of events to reflect on the republican experiences and democratic processes in Central America, as well as on the development and pending transformations in the region.

That year, the Central American Integration System (SICA) celebrated its 30th anniversary, a process that seeks to make Central America a region of peace, freedom, democracy and development, based on the respect, protection and promotion of human rights. In January 2022 Panama assumed the Pro Tempore Presidency (PPT) of SICA, promoting five priority pillars, namely: social integration, democratic security, institutional strengthening, climate change and comprehensive risk management and economic integration.

The EU's commitment to the Central American integration process is far-reaching and one of its main pillars is the EU-Central America Association Agreement signed on 29 June 2012, the first 'region-to-region' agreement signed by the EU. This agreement is based on three complementary and equally important pillars, namely political dialogue, cooperation and trade, which reinforce each other and multiply their effects to support economic growth, democracy and political stability in Central America.

During 2021, the EU-LAC Foundation and the Fundación Carolina developed a mapping study of the association agreements between the two regions,

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identifying to what extent they contribute to a better international insertion, and in the face of the transitions to be undertaken in the EU and Latin America in aspects such as sustainable development, digitalisation, and social cohesion.

In the case of Central America, the three pillars of the agreement have developed unevenly since it was signed, which reduces its potential impact. Although the trade pillar¹ has been provisionally operational since 2013 because it can work with the mandate received by the Commission and the ratification of the six Central American signatories, the political and cooperation pillars are still pending ratification (Caldentey, 2022). The full study will be published in May and will be disseminated during the event in Panama.

In its Multiannual Programme 2021-2027, the EU will continue its intense cooperation to address shared challenges such as climate change, digital transformation and inclusive and peaceful development, as well as support the integration process, including SICA and the Secretariat for Central American Economic Integration (SIECA), and the implementation of the Association Agreement, among others.

General Objectives

The overall objective of the EU-Central America Dialogue Sessions is to provide a platform for renewed political and technical dialogue with a view to strengthening and giving visibility to the bi-regional partnership, while discussing and proposing ways to jointly address outstanding development challenges in the framework of sustainable post-pandemic recovery. The following aspects will be central to these sessions:

- Emphasising economic, social, and institutional resilience.
- Pursue institution building, knowledge exchange and planning.
- Strengthening partnership, cooperation, and funding.

Participants

The target audience are policy makers from Central American and EU countries (including civil servants from different ministries, parliamentarians and representatives of embassies in the region), representatives of international and multilateral organisations (including UN agencies, multilateral development banks and cooperation agencies), representatives of the private sector (including chambers of commerce from both regions) and civil society, experts and academics.

¹ The results of the mid-term evaluation report suggest that, although there has not been a significant increase in trade flows between the two regions, the trade agreement consolidates the European market as the third market of origin and destination of exports and imports for Central America and has encouraged a greater exchange of goods and services of European companies with Central America.

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Format, Date and Location

The EU-Central America Dialogue Sessions will be held on the **1st and 2nd of June** at the **Palacio Bolivar** in **Panama City**.

In parallel, the event can be followed on the channels and social networks of the EU-LAC Foundation and the Government of Panama.

Results

A report of the discussions will be prepared and shared with the participants, as an input to the process in each of the countries and for the bi-regional dialogue.

Activities proposed in the framework of the EU-Central America Dialogue Sessions

The Dialogue Sessions will cover the following cross-cutting issues for the bi-regional agenda:

- The elements and approaches that make up the new cooperation agenda in the face of growing global challenges.
- The shared agenda towards the future by fostering a digital, green and just transition and cooperation in science and innovation.
- The necessary cooperation on risk management, resilience and preparedness for future disasters and pandemics.
- Financing at the service of the EU-Central America Partnership.

In this context, a multi-stakeholder dialogue is proposed to discuss the prospects for development strategies in Central America, as well as the types of cooperation and tools that can effectively help Central American countries to overcome pending development challenges and, at the same time, advance in a sustainable post-pandemic recovery.

1. *Prospects for EU-Central America relations: a commitment to the future*

The EU and Central America have maintained close cooperation in recent years.² However, the current scenario for progress on the SDGs in the sub-region is challenging, with significant downside risks. The main threats are the return of

² The Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI) and the EU are partners in the implementation of blended finance projects under the Latin America Investment Facility (LAIF), together with Germany's KfW Bank. SICA also receives EU support to implement its Recovery, Social Reconstruction and Resilience Plan through the EUROsociAL+ Programme. In recent years, the EUROsociAL+ Programme has contributed to promoting integrated disaster risk management in Central American countries, from a cross-sectoral approach, increasing resilience and adaptive capacity to reduce socio-economic and environmental vulnerability. The EU's Adelante Programme has supported triangular cooperation projects such as the Entrepreneurship and Business Development in Mesoamerica Project, developed with the Colombian Presidential Agency for International Cooperation.





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political instability in some of the countries, high vulnerability to climate change and biodiversity loss. The COVID-19 crisis has further exacerbated inequalities and undermined economic prospects.

The economic and social vulnerability of Central American countries, a middle-income region in transition to development with significant structural weaknesses, has been hit hard by the health, social and economic crisis. Moreover, the pandemic came at a time when countries in the region have begun to exit from official development assistance (ODA)³ but remain [caught in development traps](#) in the areas of production, social inclusion, institutions, and the environment (OECD et al., 2019). These factors highlight the need to advance on two parallel fronts: the strengthening of multidimensional measurement tools to understand national and regional issues; and the use of innovative cooperation tools to enable countries in the region to move forward in the face of growing and more complex global challenges. In this context, it is therefore essential to rethink new development and international cooperation strategies, metrics on current challenges, modalities, instruments, and forms of financing, deepening thematic partnerships that make balanced use of these cooperation mechanisms (OECD et al., 2021).

According to the concept of Development in Transition (DiT), developed by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), together with the European Commission and the Development Centre of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "international cooperation should be oriented to the specific needs of countries and address structural development gaps, contributing to the generation of regional and global public goods". This is multilateral and multi-level cooperation that includes a wide range of actors⁴, modalities, tools, and financing instruments⁵ to support knowledge sharing, capacity building and the delivery of the transfers needed to overcome development traps.

This framework needs to be advanced, both in its approaches and its metrics, so that both regions can jointly address global and shared challenges. More technical cooperation must be put at the service of national, regional, and global reform and transformation ambitions. In this regard, there is an opportunity to enhance the bi-regional relationship through agreements already signed or under negotiation. These not only strengthen bi-regional trade but can improve the quality of employment and its social function, the transfer of technology and the transition to an environmentally sustainable model.

³ Bahamas, Barbados, Chile, St. Kitts and Nevis, Trinidad and Tobago and Uruguay have been removed from the list of potential ODA recipients. Antigua and Barbuda and Panama would graduate in 2022.

⁴ Horizontal, regional, South-South, North-South, South-North and triangular cooperation etc.

⁵ Climate change funds, blended finance, debt-for-environment swaps, domestic resource mobilisation, among others.

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2. *EU-Central America cooperation: modalities, instruments, and financing to face global challenges.*

The new development agenda that the pandemic has awakened is also an opportunity for Central American countries and for bi-regional relations, which inevitably implies the revitalisation and strengthening of regional cooperation and integration initiatives.⁶ The green pact and the digital transition are important focal points for international cooperation, becoming drivers of change, productivity, and inclusion in Central America.

Europe's strategy to exit the crisis is based on transforming its economic model through an instrument that aims at sustainability, digitalisation, and resilience. These aspects are also key to the bi-regional strategy, and the construction of instruments to favour them will result in broad benefits for both regions.

These processes commit the public policies of the Central American nations and must be accompanied by cooperation and financing mechanisms - bilateral and multilateral - that, on the one hand, approach and respond to the concrete demands of the nations and communities, and on the other, that innovate and establish new paths in the face of the gravity of the current context. In this perspective, dialogue between regions with similar interests contributes to foster joint work initiatives.

3. *Exchange on risk reduction, planning and cooperation in the face of future pandemics and disasters intensified by climate change*

The tragic events of 2020 and 2021 have shown that pandemics and disasters, mainly those intensified by climate change, have increased vulnerability and destruction in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean. In Central America, the human and material losses caused by tropical storms, the earthquake in Haiti and the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic have urged the UN to issue new calls for increased assistance for societal recovery and to combat problems such as food insecurity - affecting 15 per cent of the population - and migration. In Europe, floods in Germany and northern Europe, forest fires in Mediterranean nations, extreme temperatures in several countries, among others, have had a significant human, social and productive impact.

These catastrophes in turn create further disruptions, such as population displacements, production losses, epidemics and climate refugees, in addition to other disruptive climate-related phenomena such as El Niño and La Niña. The pandemic has also reduced institutional capacities to address disaster risk management and preparedness planning by reducing budgets, weakening

⁶ Central American cooperation networks, platforms and integration institutions activated response strategies to deal with the immediate impacts of the pandemic. Within the framework of SICA, a Regional Contingency Plan was developed to deal with COVID-19 and the COVID-19 Regional Observatory was launched.

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institutions, limiting technical and financial assistance, and generally distracting or impeding planning actions.

These developments challenge the resilience and institutions of our societies and people and call for a common approach to risk reduction and management, while providing a powerful and ominous backdrop to current and future national and international policies around climate change and the SDGs. In this sense, exchanges and cooperation on these issues have also taken a back seat to the pandemic.

The EU and LAC have kept the issue of risk prevention and management as an item on the bi-regional agenda, as reaffirmed, among others, in December 2020 in the [Joint Communiqué of the EU27 - Latin America and the Caribbean Informal Ministerial Meeting](#), where the need to promote resilience to climate and disaster risk and joint strategies for risk reduction and increased preparedness and resilience, including access to finance, was emphasised.

The EU is the main source of cooperation with Central America and the Caribbean on green transformation, including risk prevention. Valuable initiatives are taking place that can be socialised to improve their use, such as the Disaster Risk Reduction projects of the EUROCLIMA+ Programme, the operations led by the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI) with the EU, the KfW Bank and the Latin American Investment Facility (LAIF),⁷ or the "Hackathon for Copernicus Central America: Prevention and Reduction of Disaster Risk" carried out in 2022 by CABEI, the EU and SICA (22.03-03.04).

The EU is also an important partner in UN agencies, such as the WFP and the UNDRR. These entities play a leading role both in emergency assistance operations and in initiatives to anticipate emergencies through projects aimed at increasing preparedness and resilience in governments and communities.

Disasters and pandemics are also a national security issue. The EU Council in the strategy "A Compass for Security and Defence" adopted on 21 March emphasises that climate change and disasters affect the European "security environment" and are "sources of instability and conflict around the world". It also states that "global health crises can have far-reaching geopolitical consequences". In line with this, the Council announced that month that it will participate in negotiations for an international agreement on the prevention, preparedness and response to future pandemics promoted by the United Nations. Beyond the negotiating process, this opens a framework for further cooperation on health, and other key SDG issues.

⁷ Among others: in December, 2021 CABEI and the EU agreed a non-refundable financial contribution agreement for EUR 4.9 million for technical assistance for natural disaster management and climate change adaptation, the first EU blending project led by CABEI. In October 2020, CABEI and KfW signed a loan for US\$100.0 million under the Emergency COVID-19 Support and Preparedness Programme.

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Within this framework, there is the challenge of striking a balance between investing in preparedness and resilience and disbursing humanitarian assistance and reconstruction, which requires entities, including cooperation organisations, to contemplate greater and more adaptive financing schemes.

4. *Scientific cooperation as a platform for a new transition*

In the face of the Covid-19 pandemic and the increasingly palpable consequences of climate change, the fundamental role played by science and its interface with technology and innovation to address the unprecedented challenges and upheavals facing the world was once again evident, which, in turn, underlines the potential of bi-regional cooperation in this thematic area, to achieve a fair, inclusive, equitable and sustainable development of our societies.

Cooperation in science and innovation represents a commitment to the future, involving as central elements broad sectors of youth and academia with a view to bridge educational and technological gaps. To this end, cooperation and technical assistance through concrete experiences and funding contribute to national agendas and a long-term dialogue between the EU and Central America.

The EU-Central America Dialogue Sessions will be held parallel to the “International Forum on Youth and Employment”. This event aims to foment initiatives and strategies to further youth employment and strengthen the post-pandemic recuperation, through the exchange of lessons learnt from the policies adopted by the Central American governments to face the pandemic and allow for their recuperation. This Forum is co-organised by SISCA, SICA, EUROsociAL+, the International Labour Organisation, UNDP and others.

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PROGRAMME (V 25.05)

European Union-Central America Dialogue Sessions

Wednesday, 01.06	
08:00 – 08:30 (30')	Registration
08:30 – 09:15 (45')	Inauguration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Leire Pajín, President of EU-LAC Foundation ○ Chris Hoornaert, Ambassador of the EU in Panamá. Representative of the European Co-Presidency of the Board of Directors of the EU-LAC Foundation ○ Marcelo Lucco, Ambassador of Argentina in Panama in Representation of the current Presidency of CELAC ○ Josep Borrell, High Representative of the UE (Pre-recorded message - tbc) ○ Federico Bonaglia, Deputy Director of the Development Centre of the OECD ○ Elena Montobbio, Director for Central America, ILO (Pre-recorded message) ○ María Inés Castillo, Minister of Social Development in Panamá ○ Doris Zapata, Minister of Labour, and Workforce Development of Panama ○ Erika Mouynes, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Panama
9:15 – 9:40 (25')	Conference: The keys to revitalising the post-pandemic regional strategic partnership and the new world order. José Antonio Sanahuja, Director of Fundación Carolina
09:40 – 10:00 (20')	Discussion with the participants
10:00 – 10:15 (15')	Coffee break
FIRST SESSION: “Prospects for EU-Central America relations: a commitment to the future”	
10:15 – 11:15 (60')	Panel 1: Pending development challenges in Central America and metrics for a new international cooperation agenda Rapporteur: Lianne Guerra, Policy Advisor, OECD Development Centre Moderator: Ana Luisa Castro Novey, Vice Minister of Multilateral Affairs and International Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Panama Panelists: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Federico Bonaglia, Deputy Director of the Development Centre of the OECD ○ Felice Zaccheo, Head of Unit, European Commission DG INTPA (VIRTUAL) ○ Sebastián Rovira, Economic Affairs Officer, CEPAL
11:15 – 11:30 (15')	Questions and Comments
11:30 – 12:30 (60')	Panel 2: Association Agreements as a Restructuring Element of a New Cooperation Agenda



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	<p>Rapporteur: Lianne Guerra, Policy Advisor, Development Centre of the OECD</p> <p>Moderator: Rita Da Costa, Head, Development in Transition, Development Centre of the OECD</p> <p>Panelists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Pedro Caldentey, Senior Researcher, Development Institute, Loyola University Andalucia ○ François Roudié, EU Ambassador to El Salvador and to SICA ○ Francisco Lima Mena, Secretary General of SIECA ○ José Antonio Sanahuja, Director of Fundación Carolina ○ Pelayo Roces-Fernández, Officer, Directorate General for International Partnerships (DG-INTPA), European Commission (VIRTUAL)
12:30 – 12:45 (15')	Questions and Comments
12:45 – 14:00	Lunch
SECOND SESSION: “EU-Central America cooperation: modalities, instruments, and financing to face global challenges”	
14:00 – 15:30 (90')	<p>Panel 3: Contributions and inputs from EU-Central America cooperation: towards a just digital transition</p> <p>Rapporteur: Adriana Caicedo, Policy Analyst, Development Centre of the OECD</p> <p>Moderator: Sebastián Nieto Parra, Economist, Development Centre of the OECD</p> <p>Panelists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Luis Ricardo Oliva Ramos, Administrator of National Authority for Government Innovation (AIG) ○ Ana Margarita Reyes, Deputy Administrator of the Maritime Authority and Technical Secretary of the Logistics Cabinet of Panama ○ Maryleana Mendez, General Secretary, Inter-American Association of Telecommunications Companies ASIET ○ Mauricio Agudelo, Specialist, CAF ○ Anita Zettina, Secretary General, SISCA
15:30 – 15:45 (15')	Questions and Comments
15:45 – 16:00 (15')	Coffee break
16:00 – 17:30 (90')	<p>Panel 4: Contributions and contributions of EU-Central America cooperation: towards a just green transition</p> <p>Rapporteur: Adriana Caicedo, Policy Analyst, Development Centre of the OECD</p> <p>Moderator: Itza Broce, Director of International Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs</p> <p>Panelists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ François Roudié, EU Ambassador to El Salvador and to SICA ○ Moisés Merida, Director of Development Partnerships AGEXPORT ○ Alexandre Staff Varela, Representative for Latin America, European Investment Bank (EIB) (VIRTUAL)

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Francesco Chiodi, Coordinator of the Social Protection and Employment Policies Area, EUROsociAL+ Programme ○ Fernando Quevedo, General Manager for Central America, Mexico, Panama, Dominican Republic and Haiti at the Inter-American Development Bank (BID).
17:30 – 17:45 (15')	Questions and Comments
17:45 – 18:00 (15')	Closing
18:00 – 20:00	Cocktail

Jueves, 02.06	
THIRD SESSION: “The EU-Central America cooperation on risk reduction, planning and cooperation for future pandemics and natural disasters intensified by climate change”	
08:30 – 09:00 (30')	Registration
9:00 – 9:30 (30')	<p>Discussion on the challenge of preventing the risk of future pandemics and disasters in the current context</p> <p>Moderator: Alonso Brenes, Director de la Red de Estudios Sociales para la Prevención de Desastres en Latinoamérica y el Caribe (LA RED)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Jones Cooper Seferlis, Secretary General and Viceminister in charge, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Panamá ○ Leire Pajín, President of the EU-LAC Foundation
9:30 – 9:45 (15')	Questions and Comments
9:45 – 10:45 (60')	<p>Panel 5: How to build resilience through good practices?</p> <p>Rapporteur: Alonso Brenes, Director de la Red de Estudios Sociales para la Prevención de Desastres en Latinoamérica y el Caribe (LA RED)</p> <p>Moderator: Giancarlo Soler Torrijos, Deputy Director of International Organisations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs</p> <p>Panelists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Claudia Griselda Herrera, Executive Secretary of CEPREDENAC/SICA ○ Kyung-nan Park, Deputy Regional Director, Latin America & The Caribbean, WFP ○ Alberto Sierra, Chief of the Regional Logistics Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (CLRAH) of Panama ○ Maite Rodríguez, Executive Director, Fundación Guatemala ○ Carlos Moreno Medina, Head of Office, Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI) ○ Alvaro de Vicente, Head, Latin America and the Caribbean, ECHO-European Commission
10:45 – 11:00 (15')	Questions and Comments
11:00 – 11:15 (15')	Coffee break

11:15 – 12:15 (60')	<p>Panel 6: How to empower public policies for disaster readiness and future pandemics risk in Central America?</p> <p>Rapporteur: Alonso Brenes, Director de la Red de Estudios Sociales para la Prevención de Desastres en Latinoamérica y el Caribe (LA RED)</p> <p>Moderator: Miguel Guzmán, Programme Manager, EU-LAC Foundation.</p> <p>Panelists:</p> <p><u>Topic Preparation and Resilience</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Marlon Cárdenas, Advisor, DRR Programmes and Climate Change Focal Point at UNDRR ○ Jeannette Fernández, Team Leader for Disaster Risk Reduction, UNDP <p><u>Topic Gender</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Guillermina Martin, Gender Policy Specialist, UNDP Gender Policies <p><u>Topic Public Policies</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Claudia Griselda Herrera, Executive Secretary, CEPREDENAC/SICA <p><u>Topic Role of Civil Society</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Rosa Montañez, Executive Director, Fundación Natura
12:15 – 12:30 (15')	Questions and Comments
12:30 – 14:00	Lunch
FOURTH SESSION: “Scientific cooperation EU-Central America as a platform for a new transition”	
14:00 – 15:00 (60')	<p>Panel 7: EU-Central America Scientific Cooperation as a platform for a new transition</p> <p>Rapporteur: Claudia Pineda, International Consultant</p> <p>Moderator: Carla Ramirez Paz, Director, International Economic Relations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs</p> <p>Panelists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Signe Ratso, Deputy Director-General for Research and innovation (DG-RTD), European Commission ○ Luis Telo da Gama, Secretary General, CYTED-SEGIB ○ Claudia Romano, Manager, Uruguayan Agency for International Cooperation - AUCI ○ Katherine Caballero, Coordinator of the Centre for Innovation and Technology Transfer, Panama ○ Rodney Delgado Serrano, National Director of Space Sciences of the Technological University of Panama - Copernicus Programme and the benefit of Earth observation (VIRTUAL)
15:00 – 15:15 (15')	Questions and Comments
15:15 – 16:00 (45')	Coffee break
16:00 – 16:45 (45')	<p>Conclusions and Suggestions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Session 1: Lianne Guerra ○ Session 2: Adriana Caicedo ○ Session 3: Alonso Brenes ○ Session 4: Claudia Pineda



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ International Forum of Youth and Employment: Alberto Mora
16:45 – 17:30 (45')	Closing <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Leire Pajín, President of the EU-LAC Foundation○ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Panama○ Juan Manuel Santomé, Director of the EUROsociAL+ Programme○ Anita Zettina, General Secretary, SISCA○ Federico Bonaglia, Deputy Director of the Development Centre of the OECD

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