

POLICYBRIEF

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Interregional Human Rights Cooperation Between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean: Challenges and Opportunities

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Highlights

1. Despite the complex and multifaceted nature of relations, the European Union (EU) and Latin America/Caribbean (LAC) share an aligned framework of values including democracy, rule of law, and a preference for multilateralism that demonstrates strong potential for an impactful partnership to promote human rights globally. However, strengthening collaboration on human rights issues is not yet a strategic priority.
2. There is immense, untapped potential for cooperation between the EU and LAC on human rights advocacy and policy at the multilateral level. Enhancing the existing partnership significantly could maximize influence on the world stage.
3. This policy brief aims to identify specific opportunities and structural challenges to improving EU-LAC human rights cooperation, with an emphasis on ties between the EU and Brazil.
4. Through systematically reviewing existing literature and interviewing diplomats and civil society members, it provides targeted recommendations on how to bolster the EU-LAC human rights partnership moving forward.

Introduction

Relations between the European Union (EU) and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) are multi-dimensional (trade, political cooperation, security, environmental, human rights, etc.), and they are characterised by multi-faceted cooperation channels (Gratius 2012; Sanahuja 2015; Dominguez 2015). A prominent example of this complexity is the EU-LAC cooperation in the field of human rights, as it does not only take place at the bilateral and interregional levels but also in multilateral forums (i.e., UN Assembly, UN Human Rights Council). However, cooperation in this field has remained vastly unexplored, as there is a predominance of a monothematic discussion in the inter-regional and bi-lateral summits on the ratification of trade agreements, such as the ongoing EU-MERCOSUR (Southern Common Market) negotiations (Luciano 2022; Ayuso et al. 2018; Haider and Batalla 2020).

This is not only due to interest in facilitating inter-regional trade, but it also reflects the fact that trade is an area where the European Commission has notable autonomy to negotiate and advance EU-LAC relations. Thus, the discussions of inter-regional EU-LAC relations are sensibly influenced and, consequently, it becomes more difficult to further invest in other areas of cooperation, such as human rights.

This policy brief seeks to explore the untapped opportunities and the structural challenges of EU-LAC cooperation in the field of human rights. In an increasingly polarised world, it is remarkable that the European and the LAC region share a similar value framework (promotion for peace, democracy, human rights, and multilateralism at the global level), which plays a significant role in their partnership. The affinity of the LAC region for the same value framework, aligned with the contemporary challenges of this century (climate change, migratory crisis, democratic backsliding), makes them ideal partners at the multilateral level (i.e., UN Assembly, UN Human Rights Council). For example, since both regions are dealing with intra-regional migratory crises - the Venezuelan refugee crisis in the LAC region and the refugee crisis from African countries such as Libya, Egypt, Niger, Sudan, Chad and Ethiopia in Europe - it would be fruitful to engage in further cooperation. In particular, this should be achieved when it comes to facilitating the exchange of good practices and information regarding the protection and promotion of the human rights of migrants and refugees.

Nonetheless, both regions have been struggling to effectively promote and protect human rights internally, and, consequently, externally as well. The domestic democratic and human rights backsliding in both regions (i.e., Bolsonaro in Brazil and Orban in Hungary) has drawn concerns and

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criticism from the international community. For example, in 2020, during the second cycle of the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations, two countries in the LAC region were among the 15 countries receiving the most recommendations from their peers to improve human rights protection internally. In the case of the EU, in recent years, there has been an increase in cases of discrimination and intolerance towards minorities, especially anti-Muslim violence, and discrimination towards refugees. Despite the grim outlook of human rights protection in the EU and the LAC region, cooperation in human rights has yet to be regarded as a priority. But, if there is untapped potential in human rights cooperation, how can the EU-LAC partnership in human rights be improved?

While there is significant room for advancing EU-LAC cooperation in human rights, some structural challenges

hamper its potential. The findings of this policy brief convey that there are three main structural challenges. First, one can distinguish different visions regarding human rights protection in conflicts, leading to diplomatic tensions and hampering coordination and cooperation at the global level. Second, the current dynamics of the EU-LAC dialogue in the field of human rights are unbalanced, creating difficulties in communication and in installing an effective dialogue. Third, the distinct realities and challenges in the field of human rights in both regions can undermine their mutual support.

To tackle these challenges and enhance cooperation, this study proposes five policy recommendations. The recommendations focus on improving the dynamics of the existing human rights dialogues (bi-lateral and inter-regional); advancing the active participation of the parliamentary and organised civil society dimension in human rights, which improves multidimensionality and legitimacy to these dialogues; investing in policy dialogues at the inter-regional level; and, finally, in providing exchange of good practices and information through triangular cooperation.

The main focus of this analysis is the case of EU-Brazil relations, particularly its Human Rights Dialogue. There are two reasons to choose this focus: first, Brazil is one of the LAC countries within which this initiative has been the most regular (since 2007); second, Brazil has an influential role as a regional power in Latin America and, therefore, in the development of inter-regional dialogues and discussions (i.e., EU-CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) and EU-

MERCOSUR). To this end, four semi-structured interviews were conducted, both with Brazilian diplomats regarding the dynamics of the EU-Brazil Human Rights Dialogues (HDR) and with members of organised civil society, especially from the EU-LAT Advocacy Network, the only civil society organisation in Brussels that is wholly dedicated to inter-regional human rights cooperation. In addition, this policy brief is based on a systematic overview of the scholarly discussion on the EU-LAC political dialogues and cooperation in human rights.

European Union and Latin American and the Caribbean inter-regional relations: the different levels of communication

EU-LAC cooperation began to develop and gain strength with the enlargement of the European Economic Community to

Portugal and Spain in the 1980s (Sanahuja 1999; Freres 2000). During the period between the 1980s and the early 2000s, EU-LAC relations were mainly characterised by their inter-regional relations and cooperation between regional institutions, reflected in the signature of the frameworks for cooperation agreements, namely with MERCOSUR (the Southern Common Market) (1995) and with the Andean Community (1996) (Gratius 2013; Doctor 2015; Luciano 2022). Regarding inter-regional relations, it is essential to highlight the EU-CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) summits – that began in 2012 – as one of the main cooperation channels. The importance of these summits is related to CELAC being the only regional group speaking on behalf of the whole region. In contrast, other LAC regional organisations concern sub-regional groups, such as MERCOSUR or SICA (Central America Integration System). In this sense, the bi-annual EU-CELAC summits and meetings of foreign ministers constituted one of the leading institutional channels of the EU-LAC relation (Müller et al. 2017).

However, during the early 2000s, there was a significant shift in the EU's foreign policy towards the LAC region. The concept of strategic partnerships emerged as a means for the EU to establish relations with 'like-minded and strategic partners' (European Commission, 2016, 43), which are considered as global actors with the capacity to influence international norms and help the EU pursue the consolidation of 'effective multilateralism' (Blanco 2016; Ferreira-Pereira and Vieira 2016; Renard 2016). In the case of Latin America, the EU chose to establish strategic partnerships with individual LAC countries, namely Brazil (2007) and Mexico (2008), and on the inter-regional level with CELAC (2011). Of the three strategic partnerships, Blanco & Luciano (2018) have elected the EU-Mexico Strategic Partnership as the most successful. Indeed, it has demonstrated a greater level of cooperation and dialogue, while the EU-Brazil and the EU-CELAC strategic partnerships have lagged comparatively. Nonetheless, the new political scenario in the region - namely in Brazil - has garnered enthusiasm for reviving these bilateral and inter-regional strategic partnerships. In the case of Brazil, the recent election of Lula da Silva gathered support from European leaders, as his government is perceived to have a more like-minded normative and diplomatic stance with the EU than his predecessor. In the case of CELAC, the launch of an upcoming EU-CELAC summit in July (which has not taken place since 2017) displays a willingness - from both sides of the ocean - to revive this partnership.

During the last ten years, EU-LAC relations have also been marked by various alternative channels of inter-regional cooperation concerning climate change, social policy, and human rights (Luciano 2022; Ayuso and Gratius 2021). In this respect, it is essential to highlight the EU flagship programmes, which are cooperation mechanisms on the bilateral level between the EU and LAC individual countries. For example, EuroCLIMA+ is an interregional programme for climate change and sustainable development, EUROsociAL concerns social development, and EL PACCTO seeks to contribute to security and justice in Latin America by supporting the fight against transnational organised crime. Additionally, these issues are widely discussed in its parliamentary dimension, within the Euro-Latin American Assembly (EuroLat), as well as dialogues with and (within)

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organised civil society. Therefore, political dialogue and cooperation is characterised by its multi-dimensional (various pillars of cooperation) and multi-faceted nature (distinct, although overlapping, levels of communication).

EU-LAC cooperation in human rights: a multi-tier dialogue

An example of how the different levels of cooperation in EU-LAC relations are often intertwined is the field of human rights. Nevertheless, given the predominance of the executive actors (government representatives) in this cooperation, the primary dimension is embedded within the EU bilateral relations with individual LAC countries through the EU HDR initiative. In these meetings, both counterparts meet to discuss the challenges faced in each region and the possible exchange of recommendations, good practices, and information. The second level concerns discussions related to inter-regional relations, especially within the EU-MERCOSUR free trade agreement, which have stirred debates on the consequences of protecting and promoting human rights in MERCOSUR countries, namely in Brazil. Likewise, cooperation in human rights is also widely discussed in EU-CELAC summits, where both counterparts acknowledge their solid commitment to promoting and protecting human rights in their cooperation.

The third level is interconnected with the latter, as it

concerns the parliamentary and organised civil society dimension, namely in EuroLat. EuroLat is a multilateral, joint Parliamentary Assembly where members of national and regional parliaments from both regions meet regularly to adopt resolutions and recommendations addressed to the EU-LAC Summit and the institutions devoted to developing the partnership. This parliamentary dimension constitutes an essential component of the legitimacy of interregional cooperation as it allows for the continued participation of civil society (Müller et al. 2017). The assembly comprises four standing committees, one of which is dedicated to political affairs, security and human rights. This committee is responsible for matters related to political dialogue within relations of Euro-Latin American integration bodies (including the EU-CELAC Summit, the ministerial conferences, the EU-LAC Foundation, the Council of Ministers and the European Commission), UN agencies and bodies, the Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB), and other international organisations. One of the principal axes of discussions of this committee refers to the responsibility to ensure respect for the promotion and defence of human rights, democratic principles, and good governance. In addition, the EU-LAC cooperation in human rights encompasses dialogues and cooperation in civil society forums and its related activities around the summits (i.e., EU-CELAC Civil Society Forum, EU-LAC Forum on Social Cohesion), as well as meetings with organised civil society (i.e., EU-LAT Advocacy Network, EU-

LAC Working Group). Nevertheless, the EuroLat Assembly has been the preferred channel of communication in this regard (Müller et al. 2017; Luciano 2022).

Finally, the fourth level refers to the global projection of this inter-regional relation. Both regional groups represent slightly more than a quarter of the total members of the UN, and together they could have a significant influence in the adopted resolutions in the UN assembly. In effect, this global partnership in human rights shows the potential to form alliances at multi-lateral forums, namely in the UN Human Rights Council.

Decentralisation and limited local power, capacity, and resources

Common EU-CELAC declarations have underlined that Latin America and the EU are natural partners as they share key values such as democracy, human rights, and peace (EU-CELAC, 2015). In the next section, I will analyse the opportunities for further cooperation in the field of human rights at the inter-regional level and the potential of the EU-LAC global partnership in the multilateral forums (i.e., the UN Human Rights Council).

Level of Cooperation	Channels
Bilateral	EU-Brazil and EU-Mexico Strategic Partnerships; Human Rights Dialogue (EU-Brazil Human Rights Dialogue)
Interregional	EU-MERCOSUR; EU-CELAC; EuroCLIMA+ Eurosocial EL PAacto
Interparliamentary	Euro-Latin American Assembly; EU-LAT Advocacy Network; EU - CELAC Civil Society Forum; EU-LAC Working Group within the European Parliament; EU-LAC Forum on Social Cohesion
Global / Multilateral	United Nations Assembly; United Nations Human Rights Council

Table 1: Different levels of EU-LAC cooperation and their respective channels

Source: Author's elaboration, based on Luciano (2022) and Haider et al. (2020)

Overlooked territory: EU-LAC cooperation in the promotion of the human rights of migrants and refugees

At the inter-regional level, both regions within the last decade have faced particularly challenging migratory crises, which have tested their abilities to manage large fluxes of refugees coming from neighbouring countries (Nolte et al., 2020). In the case of the EU, in 2015 there was a large influx of refugees from Syria, and in the LAC region mainly with Venezuelan refugees. While the EU has experienced some difficulties in regulating the arrival of migrants successfully and in recognising refugees, LAC countries, namely Brazil, have been regarded as a positive example of the implementation of progressive legislation on the broad concept of recognising refugees, and contributing to the protection of human rights in migratory crisis (Acosta and Sartoretto, 2020; Zapata and Wenderoth, 2021). Given this common challenge, albeit with varying degrees of complexity, EU-LAC cooperation and dialogue could facilitate an exchange of good practices on recognising the rights of refugees and migrants. Thus, this enhanced cooperation could contribute to enhancing a human rights-based approach in migratory crises.

Moreover, due to their historical relations, the EU and the LAC region share a high level of fluctuating migratory movements. The migratory trend is asymmetrical due to the increase of LAC migrants to European countries (IOM, 2015; ICMPD, 2022). Between 2002 and 2007, LAC immigrants represented around 10% of registered immigration in Europe (IOM, 2020).

According to the European Agency for Asylum, in 2022, Colombia and Venezuela ranked 3rd and 5th place as nationalities that most requested asylum, together accounting for 13% of all applications in the EU (EAA, 2022). As a consequence, the precarious migratory situation has led to an increase in the number of irregular migrants, as well as cases of human trafficking between LAC and the EU. Therefore, it is becoming increasingly evident that migration and the effective protection of the human rights of refugees and migrants present significant challenges to policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic.

Confronted with shared challenges in migration and the adequate protection of refugees and migrants' human rights, the EU and LAC could highly benefit from an increased inter-regional dialogue in this field. Therefore, more inter-regional

dialogue could enhance coordination in multilateral forums, such as the International Migration Review Forum.

The potential of a global partnership

Confronted with the challenges faced by the international liberal order, the 'Atlantic Community' (the United States and the EU) is struggling to hold its international influence (Ayuso et al. 2018). Consequently, its fundamental common values are being called into question. Beyond impacting the continuance of the international liberal order, it also impacts the EU's relations with the countries from the Southern Hemisphere. Despite this, the Latin American region continues to share a strong affinity and identification with promoting liberal values: promotion for peace, democracy, human rights, gender equality, respect for international law, and the promotion of multilateralism at the global level. According to the "Latin America - European Union: views, agendas and expectations" survey, carried out by Latinobarómetro, Nueva Sociedad and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in 2021, 57% of LAC societies perceive the European Union as a world leader in human rights defence and the promotion of world peace.

On the one hand, it is crucial for the EU to invest in partnerships with like-minded international actors, especially in times of contestation. On the other hand, for the LAC region, due to its cultural approximation and identification, the EU offers a differential aspect compared to other international actors such as China or Russia. For example, while China and

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Russia prefer to resort to bilateral instruments of cooperation, the EU and LAC both opt for regionalism and multilateralism as essential instruments to reach objectives and establish partnerships in human rights. In this sense, the LAC region is an important strategic partner to the EU and vice-versa.

Given this affinity, enhanced EU-LAC coordination in multilateral forums, such as in the UN Human Rights Council, could result in leading initiatives in the human rights regime. Yet, these countries made 48% of the recommendations in the first nine years of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR)

mechanism, representing a considerable weight in influencing decisions. For instance, the protection and promotion of the rights of migrants and refugees is potentially a good entry point to enhance cooperation at the international level, as both regions are world leaders in recognising the political rights of migrants (emigrants and immigrants) (Calderón Chelius, 2003; Bauböck, 2005; Escobar, 2007; Pedroza, 2013).

The structural challenges of EU-LAC cooperation in the field of human rights

Despite the existing array of opportunities and potential for a global partnership in promoting human rights, EU-LAC relations face particular structural challenges that may hinder this cooperation. Its potential has primarily been studied by scholars (Ayuso and Gratius 2015; Ayuso et al. 2018; Haider et al. 2020; Ayuso & Gratius 2021), however, a

Broadly speaking, Brazil's foreign policy is firmly rooted in the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention, while the EU favours strong enforcement and compliance mechanisms

reflection on its structural obstacles is equally needed, as it remains largely understudied. For example, Ayuso et al. (2018) and Nolte (2023) have reflected on the abundance of rhetorical declarations in the political dialogue between EU-CELAC relations. Still, developing a convincing institutional framework that translates a common agenda in human rights has yet to be possible. For instance, despite several mentions of the shared commitment towards human rights in the 2015 EU – CELAC Action Plan, no focus areas have been activated yet (Wouters and Müller 2022). Given that both regions share a similar value framework and have significant potential to enhance their cooperation in human rights, how can the EU-LAC partnership in human rights be improved?

The potential of a global partnership

In inter-regional relations - and especially in bilateral relations of EU-Brazil - both counterparts are often said to share a sense of commitment to the same values and the promotion of human rights (Council of the European Union 2014; 2019). However, political reality is much more nuanced than political declarations. One may observe fundamental divergences and distinct sensitivities in the understanding of human rights and global governance between the EU and countries from the

LAC region, namely Brazil. A recurring tension in this relation is due to disparities between Brazil's different interpretations of the appropriate level of interference in internal affairs and the most appropriate instruments to defend democracy and human rights in situations of conflict. Broadly speaking, Brazil's foreign policy is firmly rooted in the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention, while the EU favours strong enforcement and compliance mechanisms (Luciano & Müller 2022). In multilateral forums, such as the UN Human Rights Council, there has been a gap between Brazil's position and that of the EU, namely reflecting divergences on how to address human rights issues (Saraiva 2017; Ayuso et al. 2018; Luciano & Müller 2022).

The most obvious example is the contestation of the norm Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and the proposed change Responsibility while Protecting (RwP). In 2011, the Brazilian delegation to the United Nations presented a concept note proposing RwP to the UN Security Council, which contested the norm R2P, adopted in 2005. For the Brazilian delegation, the mission in Libya had gone far beyond its R2P-based Security Council mandate and was, in fact, more concerned

about ousting the Gaddafi regime than protecting civilians - a view also voiced by several other emerging powers, notably India and South Africa (Avezov 2013; Stefan 2017). This tension has also become visible with the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. The recently elected Brazilian president, Lula da Silva, has adopted a 'non-aligned, non-indifferent and non-interventionist' stance, which the Brazilian government sees as strict neutrality in the conflict, and a call for de-escalation and peaceful solutions (Gurmendi 2023; de Lima 2023; Rodrigues 2023). Nevertheless, the Brazilian stance is more nuanced. On the one hand, Lula has called Russia's invasion of Ukraine 'a historic mistake' and his government recently voted in support of a UNGA resolution calling for a lasting peace in Ukraine in line with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, agreeing with the EU's position. On the other hand, Lula da Silva has publicly refused to send military support to Ukraine or join in Western sanctions against Russia, and he criticised the EU and the United States for their active military support to Ukraine.

Brazil's position on the war, much like the contestation of R2P, stems from Latin America's long history of non-interference and anti-imperialism (Fortin, Heine & Ominami 2023). As such, LAC countries seek the concept of 'active

non-alignment' (ANA) in this matter, an approach which refuses to align automatically with one or another of the major powers involved but not excluding taking a stance on specific international issues, as Brazil has recently done (Stuenkel 2023; Nolte 2023; Mijares 2022). The distinct stance of Brazil in this conflict has recently spurred concern among EU officials about Lula's rhetoric (Vela 2023) and the future of this bilateral cooperation. The different positions concerning the contestation of R2P, and now in the conflict, demonstrate a lack of compatibility of visions in human rights protection in conflicts. Consequently, identifying a coherent and common agenda for human rights at international forums may become difficult.

Human Rights Dialogue or monologue?

In EU-LAC relations, the two main channels where human rights cooperation takes place are at the level of bilateral relations (i.e., EU-Brazil HDR) and the level of its parliamentary and civil society dimension (i.e., EuroLat Assembly standing committee in human rights, EU-LAT Advocacy Network, EU-CELAC Civil Society Forum, EU-LAC Forum on Social Cohesion). At both levels, there is a common tendency for one-sided dialogue, often transformed into a monologue.

Concerning the bilateral channel, interviews with Brazilian diplomats reveal their dissatisfaction with the dynamics of the EU-Brazil HDR. The dialogues are an initiative of the EU to raise awareness and discuss the common (or different) issues regarding human rights that each partner faces. This dialogue seeks to be an opportunity for a peer-to-peer "wide-ranging exchange of views" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil 2021) on human rights topics and human rights developments at multilateral levels, such as the UN Human Rights Council. The HRD meetings are co-chaired by senior officials on both sides (e.g. the EU Special Representative for Human Rights and a senior official such as a minister or diplomat of Brazil), and the goal is to achieve an exercise of balance and exchange of good practices which might help one another. However, there is frequently a disproportionate focus on the issues and recommendations from the EU side to Brazil, not vice versa (Luciano & Müller 2022). In interviews with Brazilian diplomats, it was often mentioned that, despite their expressed concern about issues regarding the discrimination of minorities - a shared struggle between both sides - a lack of interest from the EU to discuss in depth such issues was repeatedly perceived. This results in a prescriptive

exercise for the EU, felt by Brazilian diplomats as lecturing with a paternalistic tone. This demonstrates a structural disequilibrium in these dialogues, where the EU tends to opt for a strategy of blaming and shaming and does seem interested in discussing its own issues regarding human rights (i.e., discrimination of minorities, such as the Roma people or of the LGBTQ+ community).

A similar tendency is observed in channels from civil society and within the parliamentary dimension. For example, the EU-LAT Advocacy Network aims to raise political awareness and communication of the human rights struggles within the LAC region in EU institutions. Nevertheless, it frequently engages in a unilateral discussion, where the European networks and NGOs discuss and communicate to the European institutions about LAC problems rather than the other way around. Thus, a reciprocity of concerns and dialogue does not exist. This situation is heavily due to the fact that many civil society members from the LAC region are not knowledgeable about the functioning of EU institutions, and, consequently, they are often faced with an 'EU jargon' barrier in communication. Moreover, this situation has worsened because of the increased strict measures to outside EU members given the corruption scandal "Qatar Gate" within the European Parliament. According to one of the interviewees, the tightening of access measures to non-EU civil society members contributes to the confinement of the civil society space in EU institutions, which may hinder meaningful discussions about EU-LAC inter-regional cooperation, especially concerning human rights. In April of 2023, the EU-LAC CSOs group, together with other civil society organisations, made a public statement, addressed to the HR/

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VP, for the call to human rights-centred EU-LAC relations: *"In the forthcoming Joint Communication, as well as in the lead-up to and during the EU-CELAC Summit, the EU and its member states should send a clear political signal of their commitment to human rights and ensure a comprehensive, robust and strategic approach to some of the most pressing human rights situations in the region."*

Additionally, while in previous editions of the EU-CELAC summits, there were spaces solely dedicated to its dialogue with civil society to discuss such issues related to human

rights (e.g. the EU-CELAC Civil Society Dialogue), this year, the space has significantly been reduced. As mentioned in a joint open letter from the members of the EU-LAC Working Group (an informal platform that brings together European networks and organisations for the EU-CELAC summit): “CSOs were not consulted in any way in the drafting process of the EU-CELAC Roadmap 2022-2023 “Renewing the bi-regional partnership to strengthen peace and sustainable development”, and will only be taken into account in an activity called “EU-CELAC Youth and Civil Society Dialogue Week” (EU-LAC WG, 2023). The disinterest in fuelling dialogue with non-executive actors at the EU-LAC level is detrimental to effectively discussing a common human rights agenda.

Blind spots: different realities need diversity

When analysing EU-LAC cooperation in human rights, it is crucial to weigh in on the structural differences stemming from the distinct realities in each region. The EU and LAC regions may face similar struggles related to migration crisis, but they have very distinct struggles concerning the promotion of socio-economic, cultural and environmental rights (Grugel and Fontana 2018; Wouters and Müller 2022).

On the one hand, the LAC region faces distinct issues related to the abuse by the military and security forces in Colombia, censorship of media in Mexico and Central America, and political violence and environmental crimes in the Brazilian Amazon rainforest. On the other hand, the EU is confronted with issues related to terrorist attacks and discrimination of minorities (i.e., refugees, Roma people, islamophobia).

As LAC and EU countries have fundamentally distinct realities, specific policies – coming from an inexperienced perspective – may actually reinforce and enhance the root causes of the human rights struggles. Moreover, by not addressing the differences in human rights issues in this cooperation, one may argue that it may increase and reinforce the aforementioned tensions in drafting a common agenda. For example, the lack of acknowledgement of distinct sensitivities, and consequently different visions of human rights, could contribute to the existing tensions between the EU and Brazil concerning the concept of the R2P norm.

Conclusion & recommendations

In conclusion, despite the potential for more interregional cooperation and a global partnership in human rights, dramatic structural challenges still need to be addressed. Without addressing these issues, going beyond political declarations and achieving a formal common agenda in

human rights will continue to be difficult. In this sense, this policy brief conveys five recommendations to address the structural challenges and enhance the EU-LAC partnership in human rights at the multilateral level:

1. To improve the balance of human rights dialogues in bilateral discussions. In the EU-Brazil human rights dialogue, Brazilian issues raise disproportionate concerns. These dialogues should be balanced by ensuring to address common concerns in human rights at the bilateral level (i.e., protection of human rights defenders), but also by facilitating communication at the parliamentary level with Latin American civil society.
2. To invest in policy dialogues concerning human rights at the inter-regional technical level. The interregional cooperation could benefit from creating a specific flagship program for the promotion and protection of human rights at the inter-regional level, conducted by an EU-CELAC partnership. The program could facilitate the exchange of good practices and information concerning the promotion and protection of migrants’ and refugees’ rights and possibly create a joint monitoring system in both regions to guarantee that migrants’ rights are protected. By strengthening and increasing the regularity, policy dialogues can help to delineate common struggles and an agenda in the field of human rights.
3. To nurture more regular dialogues with the parliament and civil society members (i.e., Euro-Lat Assembly) in the field of human rights. For example, as with the recently-held EU-CELAC summit, it is important to hold more regular meetings with EuroLat, and with civil society members, and to include them in the drafting process of the EU-CELAC Roadmap 2022-2023. For the time being, civil society has not been involved and the EuroLat Bureau Meeting only delivered its message a fortnight before the summit.
4. To facilitate triangular cooperation in the field of human rights. The distinct realities in the field of human rights can be a significant obstacle to advancing a common agenda. In this sense, the EU and LAC institutions could take a leading role in facilitating triangular cooperation in the field of human rights through workshops and the exchange of information with other international partners that may face similar struggles.
5. To coordinate recommendations at the Universal Periodic Review of the UN Human Rights Council. An alliance between like-minded states in Europe and LAC would not only increase the chances of positive change in the enjoyment of human rights in the region of LAC and in Europe but also in countries in other regions of the world.

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Interviews

1. Brazilian Diplomat (March 2023) ‘EU-Brazil Human Rights Dialogue’. Interviewed by Maria Martins and Gustavo Müller [in person, Brussels]
2. Brazilian Diplomat (March 2023) ‘EU-Brazil Human Rights Dialogue’. Interviewed by Maria Martins and Gustavo Müller [in person, Brussels]
3. Brazilian Diplomat (March 2023) ‘EU-Brazil Human Rights Dialogue’. Interviewed by Maria Martins and Gustavo Müller [in person, Brussels]
4. EU official (April 2023) ‘EU-Brazil Strategic Partnership’. Interviewed by Maria Martins and Gustavo Müller [Cisco Meetings]
5. EU-LAT Advocacy Member (March 2023) ‘EU-LAT Network in EU-LAC cooperation in human rights’[in person, Brussels]

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