

Social Cohesion in the EU-Latin America/Caribbean strategic partnership

What is social cohesion?

Social cohesion means the fight against poverty, inequality and social exclusion. Social cohesion has become a major field of cooperation for the EU-LAC partnership, since the 3rd EU-LAC Summit held in Guadalajara in May 2004 also with the adoption and since then implementation of the Eurosocial programme.

Social cohesion is a main priority policy for the EU in its relation with Latin America. To this end the Commission / EU has regular and specific dialogues with its Latin American partners on social cohesion and it has prioritized social cohesion in all its aid and development cooperation programmes, with the region, with the sub-regions and individual countries in Latin America.

The objective of social cohesion was also recognized as a shared goal and priority area of the relations between the two regions, at the EU-Latin America and Caribbean Summit of Heads of States and Governments at Vienna (May 2006).

In preparation of the EU-LAC Summit in Vienna and for the first time, a High Level EU-LAC Forum on Social Cohesion was held in Brussels in March 2006 which discussed the efforts to combat social inequality, poverty and exclusion in Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union. The forum focused on the need for integrated strategies for social cohesion, the development of cooperation programmes and mobilization of public policies in support of social cohesion.

The EU-LAC Heads of State and Government in Vienna (May 2006) welcomed the initiative of periodically organizing Social Cohesion Fora to stimulate dialogue and cooperation between the two regions (which is reflected in the Vienna Declaration, paragraph 38).

The EU-LAC Forum on Social Cohesion was held on 23/25 September Santiago de Chile.

In the European Union's Social Policy Agenda (COM (2000) 379), social cohesion is defined as an objective: "To prevent and eradicate poverty and exclusion and promote the integration and participation of all in economic and social life."

Growth is not enough!

Concern about social cohesion has highlighted the multi-dimensional nature of poverty. We can no longer measure welfare solely in terms of per capita GDP. Growth may be a necessary condition for development but it is not a sufficient condition.

High per capita incomes in the European Union and in certain Latin American and Caribbean countries (relative to other developing countries) do not necessarily mean lower levels of inequality or poverty. Just as important as income are access to education, healthcare, basic infrastructure such as drinking water, decent jobs and participation in political and social life. The inability to find a role in society, the poor political representation and the lack of access to justice have all too often been overlooked as exclusion factors.

Identity and marginalisation

Using an approach based on social cohesion makes it easier to identify by what mechanisms people come to be marginalised.

Exclusion is often reinforced by open and more subtle forms of discrimination on grounds of gender, race, social status, ethnic origin etc. Geographical location can also strongly influence levels of social inclusion; national cohesion can be threatened when regional inequalities within a country become more pronounced.

An understanding of identity and individuals' backgrounds provides an essential insight into marginalisation. It is part of the process of building social cohesion.

The state and its responsibilities

The state has a fundamental role to play in guaranteeing a degree of social cohesion. While it must not ignore the need for macro-economic stability and sound public finances, the state can make the tax system fairer and more progressive. It can change the way public money is spent to achieve greater redistribution and repair holes in the social fabric (i.e. exclusion). It can also promote social cohesion by focusing on delivering higher levels of social protection for all.

Measures to foster participatory democracy are also a crucial part of strengthening social cohesion. It is essential that, alongside representative democracy, the public is involved in decision-making through consultation with civil-society organisations.

Why is social cohesion at the heart of EU-ALC relations? Latin America and the Caribbean: the new challenge of social cohesion

It is widely thought that Latin America and the Caribbean have little chance of achieving sustainable growth without tackling the causes of the social exclusion that affects large numbers of people in those countries.

It is true that many LAC countries have made significant progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, such as universal access to primary education. However, the poverty that affects more than a third of the population is reflected in the poor figures for infant mortality, access to drinking water and vulnerability to infectious diseases.

It is universally acknowledged that the region is the least egalitarian on the planet. Glaring inequalities are found throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, in terms not just of revenue but also of land, education and access to credit.

It is not just a matter of inequalities between individuals; there is a marked geographical aspect to inequality in these countries. Within individual countries, different regions are developing at different paces. Only some regions have adequate infrastructure, access to markets and qualified labour that is capable of taking advantage of world markets and reaping the benefits of globalisation.

These inequalities reinforce the exclusion of certain groups, already discriminated against on grounds of gender, age, ethnic origin, social status, race, disability, disease or some other characteristic. These people badly need better political representation at national, regional and local level to break out of the vicious circle of economic, social and political exclusion.

These sources illustrate how wide a consensus there is on the need for action to promote social cohesion in Latin America and the Caribbean:

- The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) "Inequality, Exclusion and Poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean: Implications for Development", IDB, 2003, presented at the seminar on 5 and 6 June 2003
- United Nations: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) Social Cohesion and the possibilities of reaching the Millennium Development Goals José Antonio Ocampo, Secretary General of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
- World Bank: [Inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean: Breaking with history](#)

Europe's experience

The European Union is also finding it increasingly hard to maintain its level of social cohesion. A substantial proportion of EU citizens have incomes that are less than 60% of the national median income. There are persistent inequalities in income and in the regional distribution of employment. The number of ways into poverty are growing rapidly.

In response to these problems, the EU's Heads of State and Government formulated a global strategy against social exclusion and poverty at the European Council meeting in Lisbon in March 2000. The strategy highlights objectives such as:

- the creation of good-quality, stable jobs,
- modernisation of economic structures
- strengthening of social cohesion.

The European Commission's website has a page on social cohesion in Europe and the Lisbon strategy

Since the 1970s EU regional policy has also attempted to increase the level of economic and social cohesion between different regions in the Member States.

Site on regional policy

Exchange of experience between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean: working towards social cohesion

The EU's past experiences in promoting social cohesion provide an instructive example for cooperation with the Latin American and Caribbean countries and can help them to develop their own ways of tackling inequalities, exclusion and poverty.

The EU has to offer:

- a multitude of approaches that work and positive experiences (a variety of social-protection arrangements, education systems and ways of fighting discrimination and exclusion etc) from various parts of the EU;
- recent experience with coordinating different Member States' policies on social exclusion and poverty, and the benefits of working together at European level;
- tried and tested methods, developed as part of its regional policy, for helping certain regions whose development is lagging behind to catch up with the others.

The European Commission: from analysis to action

A growing concern in the 1990s

Social cohesion has become a growing concern in the partnership between the European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean. On 23 October 1995, the Commission, announced a number of ways in which it wanted to strengthen the EU-LAC partnership in the period from 1996 to 2000 - (*COM (1995) 495*). The need for action to tackle poverty and social exclusion was identified as a major priority for development cooperation with Latin America.

Following the first EU-LAC Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1999, the Commission again highlighted the persistence of social inequalities and the need for action in this region "with the most unequal distribution of income" (*COM (2000) 670*).

With its LAC partners, the European Union has chosen social cohesion as a priority theme for the EU-LAC summit held in Guadalajara (Mexico) in 2004. Both parties were clearly determined to transform their shared concern into specific commitments and to fight effectively against the poverty, inequality and exclusion that afflict both regions. This approach was confirmed at the Vienna summit (2006).

A priority for moral, economic and political reasons

For two decades, Latin America and the Caribbean were preoccupied with macro-economic adjustments and democratisation but the political changes observable in certain countries show that the need to achieve greater social cohesion is now firmly established as a political priority on both sides of the Atlantic. Tackling social inequality and creating a more inclusive society is now a moral, economic and political priority:

- Morally speaking, misery and exclusion are contrary to basic values of human dignity and human rights.
- Economically, social inequalities prevent whole sections of society from contributing to growth through consumption, savings and investment. Numerous studies have shown the negative relationship between inequality and growth.
- Lastly, politically, inequalities and exclusion weaken democracy and threaten peace and stability.

Coordinated action with the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB)

On 16 May 2002, the European Commission signed a memorandum of understanding with the IADB, to serve as a legal basis for joint initiatives. It identifies social justice and poverty as the central issue. Accordingly, social

cohesion has been chosen as the first theme for cooperation. On 5 and 6 June 2003 the biggest lender (the IADB) and the biggest donor (the European Commission) organised a joint seminar on social cohesion in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean. The event provided valuable insights into the problem and produced ideas on how governments and the international community might set about taking up the new challenge.

- Seminar of 5 and 6 June 2003: documents et presentations
- Memorandum of understanding between the European Commission and the IDB

A Joint Commitment at the Guadalajara Summit (May 2004)

On 7 April 2004, The European Commission issued a Communication on "Commission's objectives in the framework of the relations between the European Union and Latin America, in view of the 3rd Summit of Heads of State and Government of the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean to be held in Guadalajara (Mexico) on 28 May 2004. See: COM(2004) 220

In that Communication, Social Cohesion appears as the first priority of the European Commission for the 3rd EU-LAC Summit.

In the Guadalajara Summit declaration, the Heads of States affirmed that: "We stress that poverty, exclusion and inequality are an affront to human dignity, and that they weaken democracy and threaten peace and stability. We reiterate our commitment to attain the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 and underline our determination to build fairer societies by strengthening social cohesion, especially bearing in mind the principle of global common responsibility."

More: http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/lac/guadalajara/decl_polit_final_en.pdf

EUROSociAL : The European Commission cooperation Programme in the field of Social Cohesion

To show that it is serious about this new focus on social cohesion, the European Commission, when it was programming the EU financial contribution to regional cooperation with Latin America, made provision for a bi-regional programme worth €30 million for social-cohesion measures in 2004. The programme has been launched at Guadalajara in May 2004. It includes a dialogue and the pooling of experience in framing and carrying out policies designed to reduce social inequality.

The programme aims to increase public authorities' capacity to formulate coherent policies to tackle social inequalities by identifying the people most affected by it. The programme is funding a large number of measures, such as:

- training for the administrations in Latin-American countries and exchanges with administrations in EU Member States;
- organisation of seminars;
- dissemination activities for Governments in the region;
- measures to promote dialogue amongst Latin American Governments, and between them and EU Member States' Governments.

International organisations active in this field are also involved in the programme: UNDP, IDB, ILO.

More information on EUROsociAL on the Europeaid website:

- /europeaid/projects/amlat/eurosociAL_en.htm

After its first networks' meeting held in June 2006 in Cartagena de Indias (Colombia), EUROsociAL organized a second international networks' meeting in Antigua (Guatemala) on 25-28 June 2007. The objective was to promote an open and participate debate in relation to the accumulated experience and the cooperation possibilities that public administrations in Latina America and Europe can follow to advance in the promotion of social cohesion. At this occasion, the meeting focused on the issues of "Equality, State and Citizenship". Since its launch, the programme has worked with more than 300 public institutions of both regions, mobilizing more than 1.500 persons.

Organisation of a High Level Conference on Social Cohesion on 27-28 March 2006 in Brussels, in the run-up to the Vienna Summit (May 2006)

A high-level conference organised by the European Commission was held in Brussels on 27 and 28 March to discuss efforts to combat social inequality, poverty and exclusion in Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union. The Commission and ministers from both sides of the Atlantic debated social cohesion policies and exchange their experience on the subject. More than 200 representatives of civil society, business, trade unions, international organisations and universities attended the event.

Organisation of the first EU-LAC Forum on Social Cohesion on 23/25 September 2007 in Chile in the running up of the Lima Summit (May 2008)

More: http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/lac/events/sc/index_en.htm

Working Group on Social Cohesion (EC, IMF, WB, IDB)

Creation of a Working Group on Social Cohesion

On May 8, 2006, the European Commission (EC), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB), and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) met in Washington DC to discuss collaboration and coordination with a view to fostering social cohesion in Latin America and the Caribbean. Hosted by the IDB, the meeting established a Working Group on social cohesion between the four institutions.

The participants at the meeting reaffirmed the need for increased social cohesion in the region to bolster sustainable development and growth. They agreed that the objective of the Working Group will be to identify promising approaches in the area of social cohesion, review policies and operational experience, and examine potential sources of synergy. The participants also agreed that while individual definitions of social cohesion may vary, the broad approach suggested reflects priorities for all four institutions.

Activities: The Working Group, thus, will foster coordination among the institutions for the promotion of social cohesion in the region. It is intended as a platform to exchange knowledge and experience, share social analyses and methodologies, including possible indicators, and assess, on a pilot basis, the relevance and effectiveness of programs and projects in promoting social cohesion.

Dissemination and communication: The Working Group may organize or sponsor workshops or seminars and assist in the preparation of possible high-level meetings on social cohesion as an objective of development in the region. Other methods of outreach, including possible links to social cohesion issues on the participating institutions' web sites, may be considered.

Organization: The Working Group is scheduled to meet twice a year, supplemented by virtual discussion as needed. It will have an annually rotating chair: in 2006, the IDB, followed by the WB and the EC in 2007 and 2008, respectively.

The Working Group met in Washington DC in the fall of 2006 and on 22 of June 2007.

Meeting of the Working Group on Social Cohesion in Brussels on 1 July 2008

More: http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/la/docs/summary_social_cohesion_wg_1_july_08.pdf

Vienna Summit (May 2006)

A priority reaffirmed at the Vienna Summit

The Heads of State of both regions declared: "We underscore that social cohesion, which constitutes the foundation of more inclusive societies, remains a shared goal and key priority of our bi-regional strategic partnership. The promotion of social cohesion is intended to build more inclusive societies by giving everyone the chance to have access to fundamental rights and employment, to enjoy the benefits of economic growth with equity and social justice and thereby play a full role in society. We will continue to give social cohesion a high priority in our bi-regional cooperation and assistance programmes such as EurosociAL and will also continue to promote exchanges of experiences between our countries and regions".

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