

REPORT

High-Level Dialogue: 'Foundations for a Bi-Regional Pact of Care between Latin America, the Caribbean, and the European Union'

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Executive Summary

On 14th March 2024, the EU-LAC Foundation, UN Women, and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), in partnership with the Global Alliance Care, the National Institute of Women of Mexico (INMUJERES), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the Ministry of Equality of Spain, organised the **High-Level Dialogue "Foundations for a Bi-Regional Pact of Care between Latin America, the Caribbean, and the European Union"** in New York, taking advantage of the presence of high-level authorities at the 68th session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The high-level dialogue aimed to provide a space for authorities and representatives from countries, international organisations, and civil society from both regions to exchange perspectives on a closer cooperation between Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and the European Union (EU) regarding care, based on the various elements included in the Bi-Regional Pact of Care, presented at the [65th Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean](#) on 11 October 2023 in Santiago, Chile.

Participants in the dialogue expressed their support and commitment to the Bi-Regional Pact initiative, highlighting it as a significant opportunity to strengthen cooperation and collaboration between both regions and to defend multilateralism. To move the Pact initiative forward, they agreed on the importance of:

- Strengthening collaboration between European, Latin American, and Caribbean parliaments to advance legislative reforms and give greater legitimacy to the care agenda.
- Involving civil society organisations and feminist movements in the Bi-regional Pact, as they have historically driven the care agenda and positioned the demands of care recipients and providers.
- Considering the particularities of cultural and social contexts and the diverse realities of care, recognising the importance of community care and a territorial and intercultural approach, especially for LAC.
- Seeking financing to advance the Bi-Regional Pact's objectives jointly and linking the care agenda to economic and fiscal policies.
- Move towards a more horizontal and symmetrical cooperation among and within the countries of both regions, acknowledging the contributions of the Global South and considering the particularities of global care chains.

The dialogue was attended by over 100 in-person participants and more than 170 individuals who followed the event online.



Welcome Segment

At the event's inauguration, **Ana Redondo, Minister of Equality of Spain**, shared some proposals such as the [Joint Responsible Plan](#) of the Ministry of Equality, which aims to create professional care scholarships to facilitate the conciliation of families with children under 16, promote employment, and certify non-formal care experience in collaboration with communities and autonomous cities. She also mentioned projects for the equalisation and extension of paid maternity and paternity leave and to expand the public offer of educational services for the 0 to 3-year-old age group, as measures to promote the conciliation of personal and family life. She concluded her intervention by mentioning Spain's proposal to have a public network of social services that considers the situation of people with disabilities and allows for addressing the demands of care workers. Additionally, she mentioned a three-step roadmap to advance the implementation of the Pact:

- Establishing a shared and common methodology for both regions to develop a diagnosis with systematised data on the care situation.
- Having a decalogue of good practices that can be interesting and replicable in the countries of each region.
- Create a bank of ideas and projects to test that may have positive medium and long-term results and be replicated and incorporated into the public policies of the countries.



The President of the EU-LAC Foundation, Leire Pajín, thanked all the allied organisations for their joint work and highlighted the common challenges among both regions that require rethinking and transforming welfare and care systems. She emphasised that care often falls on women, exacerbated by the pandemic, which has made labour relations even more precarious. She also stressed the need for care systems to achieve economic and social efficiency, but also for reasons of social justice and gender equality, and the opportunity they represent for job creation and economic growth. She presented the Bi-regional Pact initiative as a necessary bi-regional policy instrument to place the care agenda at the heart of the strategic partnership between LAC and the EU and to find instruments for financial cooperation. In Leire Pajín's words, "in recent years we have worked on the what and now we have to talk about the how, how are we going to advance [in the care agenda] and how do we finance it".

The inaugural segment also included **Stella Ronner-Grubačić, Ambassador for Gender and Diversity at the European External Action Service (EEAS) of the European Commission**, who recalled that gender equality is a priority for the EU, both internally and with other parts of the world. "We want to lead by example, and we believe that gender and diversity inclusion in all our policies and external actions is essential to have a lasting and sustainable impact," she said. She noted that for the EU, LAC countries are key partners in the care agenda, as they share a historical commitment to social rights, social justice, human rights, and gender equality, and also face challenges in the field of care. In her speech, she also emphasised that cooperation is especially important in the current context of cascading crises and disregard for equality and human rights by powerful and important actors.

Nadine Gasman Zylbermann, President of the National Institute of Women, Mexico, in the opening session, thanked the allied organisations for the Bi-regional Pact initiative and feminist organisations for their fight for the recognition of care work. She celebrated the perseverance of women from LAC and the EU in the face of challenges and stressed the importance of making women's work in the field of care visible. Thus, she showed great enthusiasm for the evolution of the care agenda and the Bi-regional Pact initiative:



"Talking about care did not exist 10 years ago, only among feminists. However, the Buenos Aires Commitment in Latin America and the Caribbean has allowed us to put another narrative on care, a narrative that allows us a change of a civilizational paradigm. In this sense, it is essential to make these pacts to work together." Nadine Gasman.

Presentation of the Birregional Pact for Care

Next, **María Noel Vaeza, Deputy Director of UN Women for Latin America and the Caribbean**, and **Lucía Scuro, Social Affairs Officer at ECLAC**, presented the proposal for the Bi-regional Pact of Care, highlighting the growing importance of care as a central theme in the political agenda, both nationally and regionally. They highlighted Spain's impetus during its presidency of the Council of the European Union and Colombia's role in the CELAC-EU 2025 Summit to continue making progress in joining political efforts and strengthening bi-regional cooperation in the field of care. María Noel Vaeza highlighted indigenous community care as an innovative aspect of LAC. Lucía Scuro recalled that the [Montevideo Strategy](#), the regional political commitment adopted at the CRM held in 2016, recognises the sexual division of labour as a structural knot of inequality that must be overcome. Both stressed that the Bi-regional Pact, which places the sustainability of life and the planet at the centre, is a pioneering initiative that responds to the common needs to develop comprehensive care policies and systems that ensure gender and social co-responsibility, that take into account migratory movements, that are linked to monetary and fiscal

policies, and that seek to professionalise the sector in order to advance towards a care society as a horizon and a path to sustainable recovery. Additionally, the Pact has the potential to contribute to a renewed multilateral international system, with rules that reduce asymmetries and imbalances between and within countries.



“This initiative is pioneering in promoting dialogue and cooperation between the two regions to overcome the gender division of labour. This Bi-regional Pact contributes to a renewed multilateral international system, with rules that reduce asymmetries and imbalances between and within countries in order to move towards a more productive, inclusive and sustainable future”. Lucía Scuro.

Dialogue Panel

Interventions by representatives of LAC and EU countries

The main dialogue panel, moderated by the President of the EU-LAC Foundation, Leire Pajín, included interventions by **Antonia Orellana, Minister of Women and Equity of Chile**, who pointed out that the importance of closer collaboration between the two regions lies in legitimising efforts to confront threats to movements that fight for gender equality. In addition, she shared two main concerns to be taken into account in the Bi-regional Pact:

- Addressing the extreme targeting of care support services, which has so far generated competition between populations in more precarious situations.
- Recognise the diversity of care models and caregivers and the importance of providing public care services that recognise this diversity, including conciliation and support schemes for unpaid caregivers, formalisation and professionalisation of the sector, and recognition of diverse family structures, such as single female-headed households.

Chiara Adamo, Head of Unit for Gender, Human Rights and Democratic Governance, DG INTPA of the European Commission, stressed that there are many points in common between the EU and LAC. For example, that societies on both sides of the Atlantic are ageing, that there are still challenges associated with informal work, especially in terms of unpaid care, and that societies are characterised by an unfair division of labour. She



considered that now would be a good time to develop a shared agenda on care, especially after the COVID pandemic, which was a major wake-up call. She also highlighted that there are ambitious political commitments on both sides of the Atlantic through the European Care Strategy and the Buenos Aires Commitment, as well as programmes already in place such as the [EUROSociAL](#) programme, the [RedCUIDAR+](#), the [Inter-American Model Law on Care](#), which puts both regions in an excellent position to develop a common agenda and learn from each other. She also announced the future launch of the [Team Europe Initiative \(TEI\) "Inclusive and Equal Societies"](#) in the coming weeks and months, earmarking 60 million euros to support care economies and just societies, among other objectives, which represents an excellent opportunity to explore future collaborations.

Dolores Balderamos Garcia, Minister of Human Development, Families and Indigenous Peoples' Affairs of Belize emphasised the need for collaborative efforts in resource mobilisation and the implementation of pilot projects on care, respecting the cultural contexts of each country. She showed Belize's commitment to promoting the Bi-regional Pact of Care by sharing experiences, best practices and lessons learned and by seeking Bi-regional frameworks and common procedures so that countries can integrate the objectives and strategies into their national plans. She highlighted the need to provide care supports and services throughout the life cycle, offering health, child development, education and social services, without forgetting community care and gender co-responsibility.

Diana Marcela Gómez Correal, Vice-Minister for Women, Ministry of Equality and Equity of Colombia reiterated her commitment to promote the Bi-regional Pact at the national level, making the National Care System a reality, and at the international level, in view of the EU-CELAC Summit planned for 2025 in Colombia, so that care is declared a fundamental and collective right and progress is made in the financing of the systems. She went on to mention some important aspects for making progress on the Bi-regional care pact:

1. Identify successful experiences around care around the [5Rs of care](#) (recognise, reduce, redistribute, reward and represent):
 - Identify successful experiences of care around the 5Rs of care (recognise, reduce, redistribute, reward and represent).
 - Build information systems for monitoring and evaluation of policies.
 - Strengthen local and territorial care processes and promote community-based care, which is a particularity of LAC countries.
 - Respect cultural experiences and differences from an intersectional and intercultural perspective, respecting the cosmovision's of the communities.
 - Promote care practices from the local and territorial level and promote community care, this being a particularity of LAC countries.
 - Promote practices of care for the planet such as the defence of the territory and the mitigation of climate change.
 - Advance cultural transformations to overcome the sexual division of labour and redistribute responsibility for care work.
 - Advance structural reforms of the pension, health, and labour systems to link the care agenda.





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- Consider the specific situation of precarious care work performed by migrant women in the Global North and internally displaced women.

Aina Calvo Sastre, Secretary of State for Equality and the Eradication of Violence against Women of Spain, recognised the importance of Euro-parliamentary spaces in guiding towards a common objective and the defence of multilateralism. She acknowledged with admiration the processes of community and local care and the creation of networks and empowerment to complement the provision of public services when they are insufficient. With a view to the EU-CELAC Summit 2025, she raised the challenge of recognising the decision-making participation of the third sector and non-governmental organisations, such as those led by indigenous women, who play an active leadership role in the field of care.

Ana Leticia Aguilar Theissen, Presidential Secretary for Women of Guatemala, highlighted the challenge of positioning the care agenda in a country where the governance of public policies and the social welfare state are still under development. She emphasised that addressing the issue of care is highly revolutionary and political, and although it has been discussed in Central America for more than 35 years, it is only now being placed on the public agenda. For her, the care agenda is a multifaceted issue, both political and technical, which dialogues with debates about governance and the resolution of the sexual division of labour. She noted Guatemala's commitment to the Bi-regional Pact and to consider care as a state policy. Finally, she mentioned the need for support and technical assistance to advance in the field of care, especially from countries that have made progress in this regard.

María Inés Castillo, Minister of Social Development of Panama, emphasised that the care agenda is an issue that affects all genders and, in this sense, lamented the low presence of men in the audience. She advocated for greater participation of government institutions responsible for economic and financial policies, in addition to financing banks. She mentioned the need to map EU and LAC actors such as the Social Integration Council of SICA for the exchange of good practices and lessons learned. She highlighted the importance of having legislative frameworks, such as the [law to create a comprehensive care system in Panama](#), and the importance of involving parliaments, both from Latin America, the Caribbean and European Union, such as the [Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly \(EuroLat\)](#), in this process, in addition to increasing the participation of more men to avoid setbacks.

Gloria Ann Thomas, Minister of State responsible for Social Development and Gender Affairs of Grenada, expressed her commitment to the Bi-regional Pact and highlighted the importance of finding sources of financing for the care agenda. She emphasised the importance of acting together, negotiating as a bloc, to achieve the best results in the implementation of the pact. She spoke about the importance of care work and ensuring decent conditions and training options, as well as the inclusion of male workers in the care sector. She urged ministries of women's affairs and social affairs to continue to push for addressing the care agenda and highlighted the need to review legislative frameworks to support care policies and programmes.

Interventions by representatives of multilateral organisations

The dialogue also included the participation of representatives of multilateral organisations. **Almudena Fernández, Chief Economist for LAC at UNDP**, highlighted the opportunity presented by the Bi-regional Pact as an alliance that can drive significant advances, and reaffirmed UNDP's commitment to implementing it in order to recognise care as an essential human right, an area of investment, and an engine of economic growth: unpaid domestic and care work is crucial for the economies of the ALC region, [representing on average 21% of GDP, with](#)



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[women contributing to more than 70%](#). She referred to the [UNDP's global human development report](#), which poses global stagnation, and the need to seek closer areas of cooperation such as through the Bi-regional Pact.

Emanuela Pozzan – Senior Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination Specialist, International Labour Organisation (ILO), mentioned the challenge of conceptualising the care economy as a complex issue that raises doubts and requires collaboration among different actors. She noted the commitment to the Bi-regional Pact in the run-up to the EU-CELAC Summit in 2025, which is an important tool for Bi-regional cooperation to make care a priority on the political agenda, especially given the challenge that many LAC countries will be going through electoral processes in 2024. She mentioned the need to promote decent work in the care sector, following the ILO's labour and gender equality standards, as well as professionalisation and training through the [Inter-American Centre for Knowledge Development in Vocational Training](#) and better remuneration for care workers.

Carlien Scheele, Director of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)¹, noted that while in some EU countries a more equal distribution of care responsibilities during the period of confinement has been observed, gender inequalities persist in the type of care activities, with women taking on intensive care tasks, while men contribute more passively to care. Furthermore, she emphasised the socio-economic costs of unpaid care, which affect women to a greater extent, limiting their employment opportunities, work-life balance, and career development: according to the [latest EIGE survey](#) data, more women than men, and especially mothers of young children, had to reduce their working time due to care or had less time for their career or studies. As potential solutions for the Pact, she stressed the need for investment:

- Ensure that the objectives of the [Work-Life Balance Directive and the EU Care Strategy](#) are meaningfully reflected in the EU's long-term budget, as well as in monitoring and evaluation processes, to ensure their effectiveness.
- Set ambitious targets at EU level to encourage greater coverage of long-term care services at national level.
- Adopt specific measures to challenge traditional gender roles and actively promote the equal sharing of care responsibilities and the equal participation in paid work of women and men in all their diversity.
- Undertake strong funding and investment mechanisms to ensure continued commitment.
- political will and concrete action to achieve gender equality in care.

Interventions by civil society representatives

In addition, representatives of civil society intervened. **Juana Del Carmen Britz, President of the International Federation of Paid Domestic Workers (FITH)**, highlighted the crucial role of care workers, as well as the role of organised civil society in promoting the care agenda and advocating for the rights of care workers. She mentioned the precarious conditions faced by domestic workers in Europe: "In Europe they face precarious conditions, low wages, and lack of access to social security and protection schemes." She pointed out that one of the priorities of the Bi-regional Pact should be the recognition of domestic workers as care workers and urged the ratification of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 189 in countries that have not yet done so (she mentioned Guatemala and Honduras).

¹ Carlien Scheele had to leave the dialogue before she could intervene. In order to present a comprehensive summary of the dialogue in this report, a summary of her intervention has been included.





Friné Salgueiro, Representative of the 'Braiding Care Network' and Director of the Simone de Beauvoir Leadership Institute (ILSB), expressed her support for the proposed Pact and emphasised the need for representativeness and diversity in the care agenda, which has been burdened with an urban and white bias, recognising that women in the peripheries and precarious places are the most affected and bear the greatest responsibility for care. She highlighted the challenges for European institutions to maintain their commitment to continue building on the European Care Strategy, the risk of returning to familist discourses and stakes in care in the EU, and the risk of privatisation of funding opportunities such as the [Global Gateway](#). She emphasised the global care chains and the demands of social and feminist movements following the principle of "nothing about us without us". She acknowledged that it is these movements and civil society that are the main drivers for advancing the care agenda from a feminist and rights-based perspective and that they can contribute to designing the "how" of policies and systems by generating evidence and learning communities. Moreover, she argued that it is important that this Pact promotes new schemes of collaboration and cooperation that are more horizontal and circular, recognising the contributions from the Global South and overcoming Eurocentric logics of knowledge and construction.

Andrea Costafreda Quesada, Program Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, Oxfam Intermón, highlighted the relaunch of EU-ALC relations as an opportunity to position the care agenda in the Bi-regional partnership and the primordial role of EU Member States in taking a more protagonist role considering the commitment assumed through the European Care Strategy. She mentioned that the Bi-regional Pact represents an opportunity to build a progressive agenda between both regions and to rethink a more symmetrical, less Eurocentric, and more horizontal cooperation policy between both regions based on shared interests and learnings from the Global South. She identified uncertainty in Europe as a challenge, a more conservative Europe that could limit the transformation towards a more inclusive care agenda; commitment to the European care strategy and relevant national laws; and the need to convince political actors about the importance of the care agenda in the geopolitical context of both regions. To advance the commitment of the Bi-regional Pact, she proposed concrete steps such as a preparatory meeting for the EU-CELAC summit to be held in Colombia in 2025; the creation of a gender working group in CELAC that incorporates the care agenda; establish concrete bi-regional cooperation instruments from the EU; and the formation of a coalition of governments interested in promoting the Pact, with active participation of civil society and the feminist movement.

Concluding remarks

Leire Pajín, President of the EU-LAC Foundation, concluded the dialogue by urging authorities and country representatives to join efforts to strengthen collaboration and cooperation between the two regions in the field of care through the Pact initiative. She reaffirmed the EU-LAC Foundation's commitment to continue building alliances through the EU-LAC International Women's Network and weaving commitments for gender equality.

Ana Moreno, Technical Secretary of the Global Alliance for Care, emphasised the importance of mechanisms such as the Global Alliance for Care, which integrates more than 170 members, to efficiently advance the care agenda. She emphasised leading by example, highlighting the role of LAC as an example of leadership for other regions and urged participants to join the Global Alliance for Care.



"In the area of care, it has become clear that the countries of the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean have done a lot. But more needs to be done. That is why in addition to the 5Rs of recognising, reducing, redistributing, rewarding and representing care, we must add two more R's: resources and resilience". Ana Moreno.



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Resources and publications

Agreements adopted during the 65th meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, 11-12 October 2023: https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/events/files/23-00947_mdm.65_agreements_adopted.pdf

Buenos Aires Commitment 2022: <https://conferenciamujer.cepal.org/15/en/documents/buenos-aires-commitment>

Declaration of civil society organisations, networks and platforms and trade unions from Latin America and the Caribbean and the European Union adopted at the "EU-Latin America and the Caribbean Forum: Partners for Change" 13-14 July 2023, Brussels: <https://coordinadoraongd.org/2023/07/declaracion-de-la-sociedad-civil-de-america-latina-caribe-y-ue-tras-el-foro-ue-lac/>

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European Care Strategy 2022: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&furtherNews=yes&newsId=10382#navItem-relatedDocuments>

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Roadmap UE-CELAC 2023-2025: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/es/press/press-releases/2023/07/18/declaration-of-the-eu-celac-summit-2023-17-18-july-2023/>

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Video of the event: <https://www.facebook.com/eulacfoundation/videos/di%C3%A1logo-de-alto-nivel-bases-para-un-pacto-birregional-por-los-cuidados-ue-alc/436567998947469/>

