Multilateralism and international cooperation for development are inherent features of the external action of the European Union. The commitment of Member States in the search for common answers to the global challenges related to the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda is evident in the ecological and digital transition, migration management, security and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In its relations and cooperation with Latin America and the Caribbean, the different phases of regional programmes such as EUROsociAL, COPOLAD, EUROCLIMA and EL PAcCTO have made it possible to confirm the relevance of such instruments and their contribution to the creation of concrete and integrated solutions to the challenges of social cohesion, drug policies, climate change and the fight against transnational organised crime.

These programmes have been characterised by an innovative mobilisation of the knowledge of the Spanish and European public sector, the articulation of links between national, regional, bi-regional and international problems and their capacity to implement comprehensive public technical assistance in promoting public policy processes and the strengthening of institutions in Latin America and the Caribbean.

FIIAPP has implemented many of these regional programmes, inspiring and enriching them with its methodologies and approaches and helping to build a wealth of knowledge that should be valued for its capacity to nurture future actions both in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and in other regions.

With its extensive experience, FIIAPP would like to share a series of reflections and recommendations for the strengthening of this type of cooperation and its consolidation in the new EU agenda for the next period 2021-2027 with its partners and stakeholders.

This document summarises this internal FIIAPP reflection process that was triggered by the EU’s external evaluations of its regional programmes. We have therefore sought to highlight the aspects that we consider most relevant in a highly schematic and concise way that may be useful to perfect a cooperation model that obtains results which has proven to be a valuable instrument for our efforts to ensure that no one is left behind.

Anna Terrón
Director of FIIAPP
THE RELEVANCE AND IMPORTANCE OF REGIONAL PROGRAMMES

The COVID-19 crisis will undoubtedly represent a turning point in contemporary societies. Its causes, responses and dramatic consequences will lead humanity to rethink many of the premises that have guided it during this most recent time of great change.

Within such a perspective, it is important to extract all this learning and the lessons learned in order to continue to advance as societies and guarantee a present and future that leaves no one behind, truly structured around the planet, people, prosperity, peace and cooperation.

This is not a matter of sectoral or topical opportunism. If something can be drawn from this and other recent crises, it is the need for common answers to common problems, and, above all, a commitment to multilateralism and the importance of greater and better international cooperation for development.

It is precisely this context that underpins the relevance and importance of EU–LAC regional cooperation programmes – a relevance based on it being a joint response to common and multidimensional problems, a situation that would allow, for example, the formulation and implementation of immediate response actions and support for health systems as outlined in Team Europe.

The #TEAMEUROPE initiative is the European Union’s strong response designed to meet the emerging needs of partner countries, strengthening their institutions, cooperating and working hand-in-hand in the fight against COVID-19 and its consequences. As is the case with regional programmes, it is part of the necessary joint work between European institutions, Member States and their implementing agencies.

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1 Disclaimer: “Regional cooperation” or “bi-regional cooperation” is used in this document in the sense of multi-country cooperation (with all or some of the countries of the same region). It does not refer to cooperation with Regional Organisations, which in all cases are very rare and operationally weak in LAC.
Verification of the prevalence in LAC of structural deficiencies that do not allow a response to the traditional challenges of development and the new risks of contemporary societies, and in the face of which the importance of strengthening the State and institutions is also revalidated in order that no one is left behind in the countries of the region.

Regional programmes thus acquire particular importance due to their capacity to obtain high-impact results through the adherence of the countries concerned to policies, standards and principles agreed on a bi-regional basis, and which have become a good example of soft power due to their ability to influence, incorporate and/or maintain complex issues or problems (gender, environment etc.) on national agendas. These are aspects which were not always a priority for governments, and which are more difficult to deal with through the instruments of bilateral cooperation.

This importance is reinforced by almost two decades of technical cooperation in the generation of inter-governmental dialogues and articulation of public policies (country-based round tables). Such experience can and is being adapted to the COVID round tables as mechanisms to strengthen the European response to the pandemic in partner countries and strengthen the EU’s political dialogue through policy dialogue.
THE STRATEGIC CHARACTERISTICS AND OPERATIONAL ADVANTAGES OF REGIONAL PROGRAMMES

In the last 20 years, regional cooperation programmes have become a tool for revitalising and strengthening the strategic partnership between the EU and LAC.

In their multi-country connotation, these programmes have not only contributed to an improvement in LAC’s policies for social cohesion, drugs, climate change, and the fight against organised crime, but have also promoted and highlighted the values and interests of the EU, through public diplomacy carried out by the European administrations in the different exchange and technical assistance actions with Latin American countries.

Experience in the management of regional programmes has revealed a number of strategic characteristics and operational advantages, including:

The search for joint solutions, the grouping of cooperation preferences and the generation of commitments to provide coordinated responses that articulate the connections between multidimensional problems of a national, regional, bi-regional, and international nature.

The importance of spaces for dialogue on public policies and platforms for generating inputs for high-level bi-regional political dialogue. Spaces that also materialise in multi-country cooperation based on the exchange and learning in LAC of the experiences and lessons learned from the public administrations of the member states.

The mobilisation of key stakeholders for alignment with the New European Consensus on Development in tune with the 2030 Agenda, the EU-CELAC bi-regional agenda and the inter-American agenda.

The application of innovative implementation approaches, among them the “whole of government approach”, which recognises the multi-dimensionality of development problems and promotes the joint work of the ministries, administrations and agencies that offer public services relating to a series of development topics or sectors, in order to achieve common objectives.

The connection of national/regional dynamics (LAC), whose twin path allows a greater integration of the region (strengthening of networks, elaboration of common policies and shared guidelines and protocols) inspiring national policies (triangular cooperation) that in turn encourage regional dialogue.

The orientation to results, in other words, the generation of concrete changes in the public policies of the countries in the region based on the emulation between peers who learn and replicate the experiences of other countries with advances in the different thematic areas of regional cooperation.

The innovation and application of a dialogue-based methodology on policies that pays special attention to the needs, interests and priorities (the so-called “demand”) of the partner countries, favouring greater result achievement.
The methodology of country-based round tables that focus on a sectoral problem and the response of a programme (also sectoral) or on a complex and multidimensional problem (e.g., Coronavirus) with multi-sectoral responses.

The agreement and creation of incentives that facilitate the recognition and incorporation into national agendas of issues and problems that a priori may be considered non-priority (gender, environment, inequalities, drug policies etc.).

The consolidation of a form of multi-country cooperation that facilitates peer learning and the multi-country handling of bi-regional challenges that demand responses which transcend bilateral spheres (transnational organised crime, judicial cooperation, migration management, climate change adaptation and mitigation).

Positioning of the values and experience of the EU in the different processes of improvement and strengthening of democracy and generation of conditions for a better functioning of Latin American economies (social and regional cohesion, human rights, economic and commercial integration etc.)

The multi-country approach to regional programs makes it possible to work with “big” countries, which have difficulties in terms of the bilateral agenda, complementing the scarce resources assigned to advanced cooperation countries.

The existence of these regional cooperation programmes, and their established mechanisms for dialogue on policies at the intra-regional and bi-regional levels, allow the reconstruction of a Euro-Latin American political agenda, introducing among its objectives the function of stimulating the secretariat of EU-LAC sectorial dialogue mechanisms, which are already in informal construction at an intermediate level of policy makers.

Creation of shared values in a European-Latin American space for the benefit of multilateral governance and internationalisation of our own European administrations.
INNOVATIONS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF REGIONAL PROGRAMMES THAT INCREASE VALUE

The flexibility of regional programmes provides room for improvement, innovation and the testing of both approaches and methodologies.

To this end, FIIAPP has introduced a series of improvements, both proactive and reactive, correcting certain identified weaknesses, including:

The incorporation of gender as an approach and/or line of work in practically all the programmes managed by the Foundation. Similarly, the universalist focus of the policies in which it works has been reinforced with a series of actions specifically directed at a population in a situation of (or at risk of) social exclusion.

The orientation to demand has been reinforced with specific country-based round tables to be able to incentivise the demands of partner countries towards the promotion and/or strengthening of those policies with a greater impact on inequality and insecurity.

The development and implementation of a specific technical cooperation between the European and Latin American public sector that guarantees the combination and interdependence of national and multi-country responses for joint work in the implementation of the agendas agreed in the bi-regional and regional forums.

This innovation has materialised in a three-fold approach to high-impact cooperation: national approach to design and implement prioritised policies jointly between the partner country and the EU through country dialogue; multi-country approach for joint work between groups of countries that are at the same level of development; and regional approach to support the implementation of the agendas agreed in the regional forums.

Faced with the difficulties of regional and sub-regional integration processes, joint responses have been strengthened through sectoral networks that enable the harmonisation of criteria and the promotion of coordinated actions in LAC and between this region and the European Union.
**HOW DO THEY WORK?**

- Through the implementation of comprehensive public technical assistance for the promotion of public policy processes and the strengthening of institutions.
- Through the mobilisation of knowledge of the Spanish, European and Latin American public sectors and peer learning.
- From an approach based on the demand from partner countries and orientated towards change results and the improvement of public policies.

The creation or strengthening of networks, the dynamics of learning and exchange of experiences from each programme have facilitated the promotion of pioneering initiatives of regional and triangular cooperation.

Bilateral (national) impact has been strengthened through the creation and implementation of country-based round tables, not only as spaces for ministerial and institutional coordination to enable the execution of the programmes themselves at a national level, but also as platforms for coordination and complementarity with the rest of the cooperation community and their member states.

Regarding the limitations of the monitoring and learning systems, progress has been made in terms of the systematic incorporation of knowledge management and the measurement of results.

**AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT REGARDING FORMULATION AND FUTURE EXECUTION**

In the 2021-2027 scenario, some improvements were identified in the formulation and execution of regional programmes.

Regarding formulation, it would be advisable to reaffirm the multidimensional approach to sustainable development. Cooperation should prioritise addressing major problems, major reforms and materialise the treatment of regional (and national) challenges with a policy mix, through groups that work from a dynamic and flexible approach to inter-sectorality and policy coherence, resulting in the inclusion or treatment of other issues that have not been considered.

It is important that the political dialogue and regional programmes focus on the choice of priority strategies and reforms and, based thereon, a better structuring of the demand of partner countries can be generated from a more selective selection, effective and high-impact reform and the improvement of policies that allow generating multidimensional solutions to the problems of the region.
Regional (theme-based) programmes could collectively serve these major strategically identified reforms.

It is advisable to create greater coordination and complementarity between regional programmes and the different modalities of reimbursable and non-reimbursable financial cooperation.

In particular, the establishment of links and mechanisms that make the specific financing of the implementation of the policy reforms possible and introduce a renewed logic of financial cooperation that is structured and orientated within the framework of the reforms of policies promoted by European technical cooperation, including cooperation from regional programmes.

Additionally, we should also consider other strategic issues, including:

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Improve the selection and targeting of demand for high-impact policy change and reform.
- Prioritise policy changes and reforms from multidimensional, cross-cutting approaches, not only from sectoral perspectives.
- Strengthen country-based and regional round tables and European-Latin American networks as spaces of coordination, complementarity, and policy coherence.
- Position technical cooperation and the support for policy reforms as a generator and driver of financial cooperation ("policy first").

The need to establish more powerful forums for political dialogue between the EU and LAC, both sectoral and topical, that can guide the policy dialogues addressed in the programmes and which in turn can provide valuable input to nurture the political dialogue.

Participation of regional programmes in the preparation and monitoring phases of the cooperation budget, including participation in the formulation and implementation of other thematic or sectoral instruments.

It is important to note that not all countries in the region share the graduation approach promoted by the OECD DAC. Regardless of this, despite what is advocated in some proposals, the role that the most advanced countries of the region can play in triangular cooperation should never replace the actions of European practitioners or the added value of their management, as well as European knowledge and experience, which should be guaranteed in all programmes.
Consideration should be given to establishing results-orientated monitoring and evaluation systems on which all regional programmes can converge in order to show the consolidated impact.

Regarding the future execution of the programmes, the experience and relational assets and results of the programmes managed by FIIAPP should be strengthened and institutionalised, in particular those related to policy dialogues and their accompaniment through country-based and sector round tables and multi-country networks.

It would also be convenient to advance in the institutionalisation of the complementarity between regional programmes and their cooperation instruments, through meetings, programmes, and inter-sectoral actions, such as the COVID-round tables.

The joint action of all the programmes to structure and address complex, traditional and emerging problems should be explored in greater depth, following the example of the COVID-round tables.

Structure the EU’s medium-long-term response to the consequences of COVID-19 in the region with a Team Europe approach that promotes an inclusive and green way out of the socio-economic crisis, based on new social pacts and the promotion of redistributive tax policies.

Finally, it is important to work in a structured way between the agencies of the Member States and the Commission services in a more inclusive European-Latin American cooperation which mobilises all European knowledge for development.

The very logic of the “single” instrument for foreign action administered by different Commission services and the initiatives to improve policy coherence, such as the recent creation of mechanisms such as the external coordination group (EXCO) in the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy present an opportunity to involve the sectoral services of the Commission, the EU agencies and the theme-based work networks between administrations of the Member States in the execution of the programmes in a structured way, allowing a better identification of relevant practices from the whole of the EU.