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EU-LATIN AMERICAN RELATIONS

A Return to Multilateralism

Author: Beaumont NICHOLAS

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Rue Montoyer, 25
1000 Brussels
Belgium

Web: www.iedonline.eu

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper will analyse EU-Latin American relations in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic itself has had a dramatic impact on both regions and multilateral relations between them. This paper will consider the core themes of EU-Latin American relations from a European perspective, alongside the various impacts of COVID-19 crisis on Latin America and ways in which the pandemic has impacted upon a number of key policy areas. It will focus on trade and investment, economic and social reform, and human rights, the environment and security as key areas of mutual interest between the EU and Latin America. It argues that the future of EU-Latin American relations should aim to address each of these policy areas in a unified way, given their fundamental interconnectedness and importance in allowing the EU and Latin America to build a future relationship based on shared values, global governance and multilateralism.

Short bio

Nicholas Beaumont is an independent researcher with a background in EU-Latin American relations. Having been a Schuman trainee in the Directorate-General for External Policies in the Latin America Unit of the European Parliament, he has significant experience of conducting research on European and Latin American affairs. He is currently conducting research for a number of different institutions with a focus on foreign policy and international development, both in the Americas and around the world.



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Acronyms

COHA – Council on Hemispheric Affairs

EEAS – European External Action Service

EU – European Union

FIDH – International Federation for Human Rights

HRW – Human Rights Watch

ICG – International Crisis Group

IISS – International Institute for Strategic Studies

ILO – International Labour Organisation

LAC – Latin America and the Caribbean

OCCRP – Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project

OECD – Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

UNCTAD – United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

UNIDO – United Nations Industrial Development Organisation

WHO – World Health Organisation

WTO – World Trade Organisation



Introduction

The following paper will look to analyse and understand core issues for the future of EU-Latin American relations. With relations between the two regions having been founded on a set of shared values, notably the importance of democracy, respect for human rights, and commitments to political and economic relations based on multilateralism and dialogue, this paper will look at the state of these relations in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, it will consider the impact of the pandemic on European trade and investment in Latin America, the importance of achieving economic and social reform across the region, and security issues that underlie a number of problems with regards to human rights and environmental justice in Latin America (Moffett, 2015). It will lay out the key ways in which the EU can look to help Latin American states and institutions overcome the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, impacts that have acted to consolidate a number of issues faced by the region even prior to the current crisis situation, and will offer specific policy recommendations to the EU based on promoting the shared values that lie at the centre of past, present, and future EU-Latin American relations.

EU-Latin American Relations before the Pandemic

The EU and Latin America have long been close partners, with a history of multilateral relations. Since 1999, with the first bi-regional summit held in Rio de Janeiro, a strategic political and economic relationship has existed, building on a long-shared history and deeply embedded cultural ties (Roy, 2012). In recent years, these relations have, from the perspective of the European Union, been subject to a degree of political renewal. Since 2017, three political and legislative resolutions have been passed by the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Council, that encompass the Union's collective commitment to the future of the EU-Latin American relations (Tvevad, 2020). On 13 September 2017, the European Parliament passed a resolution with commitments "to strengthen and give more coherence to the EU's links with LAC" (Tvevad, 2020; 5). The European Parliament highlighted that the relationship between the two regions was founded on "historical and cultural ties human contacts and strong trade and investment flows, but also shared values and common principles regarding democracy, respect for human rights... and a shared commitment to a global governance based on multilateralism and dialogue" (Tvevad, 2020).

In a similar vein, on 16 April 2019, the European Commission outlined in their Joint Communication on the EU's relations with LAC, with their main goals being a commitment to a "stronger and modernised bi-regional partnership" in four policy areas; partnering for prosperity, democracy, resilience, and effective global governance (European Commission, 2019; Tvevad 2020). While broadly similar to the Parliament's resolution, the Commission "declared interest in deepening relations with the LAC countries and regional groups and remaining a 'stable and reliable' partner for the region... It undertakes to work towards a 'more strategic' EU political engagement and to step up efforts to reinforce the partnership with the countries or regional groups 'willing to do more' to further common goals" (Tvevad, 2020; 10). At the time of its publication, the Joint Communication aimed to address three geopolitical changes in the region; the rise of China's influence in LAC; the change to the USA's traditional role in the region; and the 'new challenges' faced by LAC, notably the new demands of a digitalised economy and the effects of climate change on the region (Tvevad, 2020). For its part, the Council of Ministers endorsed the Joint Communication, its strategy and its policy priorities, albeit giving a central position to "the



promotion of democracy, the rule of law and the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”, clearly referencing the ongoing situation vis-à-vis fundamental rights in countries such as Venezuela and Nicaragua in the region (Tvevad, 2020; 17).

From the above, a few conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, a base assumption of European policy towards Latin America is that the two regions have a mutual commitment to certain shared values, notably upholding democracy and the rule of law, protecting human rights, and working together to achieve mutual political, economic and social benefits. Secondly, there is a high degree of political coherence and cohesion between the core Institutions of the EU with regard to the future priorities of European external policy towards Latin America. These core aims are a commitment to multilateralism between the two regions, the defence of human rights and fundamental freedoms, the promotion of democracy and the rule of law, and an economic partnership based on mutual prosperity. Thirdly, whilst these priorities were formulated prior to the global pandemic, they remain central to the future of EU relations with Latin America, as will be shown in the following.

The Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Latin America

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has had a catastrophic effect on many countries in Latin America. After the Far East and Europe, Latin America rapidly became the global epicentre of the crisis. Although the region is home to just eight percent of the world’s population, by mid-June Latin America was experiencing half of the world’s new coronavirus deaths (Stott & Schipani, 2020). Not only has the region experienced extremely high rates of infection and death due to COVID-19, in many countries these have come alongside economic, political and social crises that have been attributed to the pandemic situation.

The impact of COVID-19 on Latin America comes in the wake of varied governmental responses throughout the region. In Brazil, President Jair Bolsonaro denied the severity of the crisis and refused to implement quarantine restrictions on a national level, which has resulted in over 5 million confirmed cases and 166 699 deaths as of 19 November 2020 (WHO, 2020). In Peru, despite President Martín Vizcarra’s swift and early response to the pandemic, which saw a national lockdown, a military-enforced curfew and extensive economic support for vulnerable members of society, numbers of cases stand at over 800 000 in a relatively small population of 32 million. Experts suggest that this is largely due to high levels of economic informality which offer little protection to the vast majority of workers in the country (Chacaltana, 2020). In Mexico, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, AMLO, relaxed lockdown measures before COVID-19 cases had peaked, after initially having a ‘feeble’ response in the face of the severity of the crisis (Felbab-Brown, 2020). In El Salvador, the government of Nayib Bukele has been accused of implementing an authoritarian regime and undermining Salvadoran democracy by using lockdown and quarantine measures to limit the civil liberties and democratic freedoms of its population (Margolis, 2020).

From an economic perspective, Latin American countries, like many economies around the world, are set to experience significant downturns. According to the World Bank, regional economic activity is set to plunge by 7.2% due to the effects of the pandemic, with larger regional economies being more heavily affected; Brazil’s economy is set to reduce by 8%, Mexico’s by 7.5%, and Argentina’s by 7.3% due to lockdowns, reduced investment, and supply chain disruption (World Bank, 2020). The region as a whole is projected to be the most economically hard hit



globally, with a projected reduction in GDP of almost 8%. According to the ILO, some 34 million Latin Americans lost their jobs due to the crisis, with Latin America being the region that saw the greatest reduction in working hours in the world, with an estimated loss of 20.9% in the first three quarters of 2020 (the global estimate in working hour contraction is 11.7%) (ILO, 2020). Within this data, those who work in the informal sector, which makes up close to 60% of the workforce in Latin America, were particularly hard-hit. Indeed, whilst some informal workers in the region, especially those in poor and extremely poor households, are able to benefit from social assistance programmes, many more do not receive this type of support or any form of social protection (Basto-Aguirre et al., 2020). In Latin America and the Caribbean as a whole, 40% of workers are not protected, a figure that increases to 65% for informal workers (Basto-Aguirre et al., 2020).

From a social perspective, certain demographic groups are more vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic than others, with women and indigenous people having been particularly affected. Across the region, women make up the majority of frontline workers, so are more likely to be exposed to the virus. At the same time, they are more likely to be employed in unstable jobs, earn less than men, and are less likely to benefit from social security and healthcare (UNDP, 2020). Furthermore, across the region, levels of gender-based violence across the region rose during the pandemic, reaffirming the gendered impact of the pandemic in Latin America (Estefanía & Ordoñez, 2020). At the same time, indigenous people are also particularly vulnerable. Accounting for approximately 8% of the region's population, indigenous groups represent 14% of people living in poverty and 17% of people living in extreme poverty (de Dios, 2020). Given this, these communities are particularly susceptible to the impact of the virus, from a public health, economic and social perspective.

Trade and Investment

With regard to economic relations with Latin America, the EU is a key partner in terms of trade and investment in the region. The EU has signed free trade, association, and political and cooperation agreements with 27 of the 33 LAC countries (European Commission, 2019)¹, and political agreement was reached on 28 June 2019 for a free trade agreement with Mercosur states (Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay) which has yet to be ratified. These agreements set the basis upon which economic relations are formed between the two regions. Economically speaking, the EU is the third largest trading partner with Latin America, with trade in goods having increased from EUR 185.5 billion in 2008 to EUR 225.4 billion in 2018 (European Commission, 2019). Similarly, European foreign direct investment (FDI) stock amounts to EUR 758 billion, which is more than the total of European investment in China, India, Japan and Russia combined (EEAS, 2020). Up until 2020, the EU had set aside EUR 3.6 billion in grants for bilateral and regional development programmes and over EUR 1.2 billion in humanitarian assistance (European Commission, 2019). This financial aid contributed to a variety of human rights projects in Latin America, notably assisting indigenous groups, women and girls, and displaced people and refugees in the region. As part of its 'Team Europe' funding to support partner countries' responses to the pandemic, the EU has mobilised EUR 927 million for Latin America and the Caribbean, which equates to 7% of the total funding to be allocated (UNIDO, 2020).

¹ All countries in the region except Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela. Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay would be covered by the Mercosur agreement if it were to be ratified.



Trade relations between the two regions are a central mechanism by which the EU looks to promote other policy priorities and core values amongst its international partners, including human rights, the rule of law, and democratic stability. Indeed, a key tenet of European trade policy is the fact that international trade is, at its core, welfare enhancing, poverty reducing, and can contribute to strengthened democracies (Rodríguez, 2009). Since the 1990s, “the EU has developed a sophisticated array of instruments to promote [its core values] in its external trade policy”, notably through specific human rights, rule of law and democratic clauses within bilateral free trade agreements (Velluti, 2016). Alongside trade, human rights guidelines, bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, a generalised system of preferences and technical and financial assistance instruments are core mechanisms by which the EU looks to promote its core values around the world through its external action policy (Egan & Pech, 2015). For example, with the ratification of its free trade agreement with Colombia, the EU was able to “gain a new capacity to influence Bogotá regarding a number of its internal issues (such as ongoing human rights violations) by utilising trade as a kind of economic weapon” (COHA, 2013). The prevalence of human rights, rule of law and democracy conditionalities within European trade and association agreements with Latin America partners shows not only the importance of these values to the EU, but also the importance of trade as a key tool to extend European soft power in the region.

That having been said, global reductions in economic and trade outputs have impacted on the EU’s ability to achieve its policy priorities through trade and investment. From this perspective, the economic downturn has seen a reduction in the interregional flows of goods and services. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) indicate a reduction in the global trade in services of 30% in the second quarter of 2020, a more dramatic drop than after the financial crisis in 2008 (WTO, 2020). Similarly, WTO data shows that the second quarter of 2020 saw a 14.3% decline in global goods trade and projects a 9.2% decline in the trade of merchandise for 2020 (WTO, 2020). At this point, no comprehensive data analysing the decline in EU-Latin American trade relations is available, however based on the economic impact of the pandemic and global trends indicating a reduction in trade flows globally, it is reasonable to presume that there has been a drastic reduction.

In this context, reduced trade represents a reduction in the EU’s capacity to influence Latin American partners in order to promote its core values. As such, a return to pre-pandemic trade relations between the two regions should be a priority. However, this is but one side of the coin. European trade relations with Latin American partners prior to the pandemic were arguably very limited in their capacity to promote European core values, by reducing human rights violations and protecting the rule of law. To once again take the example of Colombia, at the time of the ratification of the free trade agreement in 2012, civil society groups in Colombia and international organisations claimed that ratification would represent a justification of the government’s violation of human rights up until that point (FIDH, 2012). Although the claim by the EU is that trade relations with a third country would provide European actors with a greater capacity to address human rights violations in that third country, as outlined above, the case of Colombia is indicative of the failure of this approach. Indeed, human rights abuses have, by all accounts, been on the rise in Colombia in the last few years, in spite of the ratification of the EU’s trade relations with that country (HRW, 2020).

Moving forward, the EU does have an opportunity to utilise the potential of a future trade deal to protect its interests in the region. Currently, the trade deal between the EU and Mercosur (Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina) is yet to be ratified. A key sticking point is Brazil’s commitment to protecting the Amazon rainforest from future deforestation, something that the



incumbent Brazilian President is staunchly against. Protection of the Amazon is central to the EU's commitment to achieving its climate goals. As such, guaranteeing the future security of the Amazon should be a priority that is not overlooked in future European trade policy in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Economic and Social Reform

There are two key aspects of economic and social reform that are pressing issues for the region as a whole in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, those being labour formalisation and reduced inequality. Facilitating social and economic reforms in these areas should become a policy priority for EU multilateral relations with Latin America, given that reduced inequality and economic informality would not only increase the EU's ability to achieve its external policy aims in Latin America, but would also have a tangible positive impact on peoples' lives in the region.

Labour informality is a feature of many economies in Latin America and has been for many years. Currently, the levels of informality are high across the region, with close to 60% of workers being considered informal across the region (Basto-Aguirre et al., 2020). Moreover, 58% of informal workers are considered to live in economic vulnerability, with between US\$5.5 to US\$13 per day, or in poverty, with less than US\$5.5 per day (Basto-Aguirre et al., 2020). High levels of informality can negatively impact a variety of different aspects of the economy, including reduced productivity, reduced competitiveness, with informal firms not complying with regulations and thus gaining advantages over formal counterparts, and reduced tax income and social security provision (OECD, 2019).

The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted those who work in the informal sector. With lockdown restrictions implemented, many informal workers could neither earn a living nor were supported by social security safety nets. Whilst many informal workers across the region do receive some benefits from non-contributory social assistance programmes, such as conditional cash transfers, almost 40% of workers are not supported by any safety nets. Furthermore, informal firms, who have little to no liquidity and therefore have a negligible capacity to deal with prolonged economic shocks for long, are at a higher risk of bankruptcy, which in turn could have a heavy long-term impact on economies across the region in terms of jobs and productivity (OECD, 2020). To address this, a number of governments made the decision to reopen their economies before numbers in cases had flatlined. However, this in turn has placed millions of informal workers at risk of catching the coronavirus, workers who also have reduced access to healthcare benefits covered by social security.

Closely related to the issue of informality is the issue of inequality. Indeed, according to the ILO, "[c]ombating informality is key to governments' efforts to reduce inequality and social exclusion" (ILO, 2020). Around three-quarters of Latin American people are classified as being low or low-middle income, whilst 30% of people in the region live below the poverty line. On top of this, the richest decile of the population owns 71% of the region's wealth (Sandin, 2020). Certain social groups are more affected by inequality. As mentioned previously, indigenous people are particularly affected by inequality in the region, and the high levels of gender inequality sees women excluded from economic and social opportunities, as well as disproportionately affected by gender-based violence.

To overcome labour informality and to help reduce inequality, a number of so-called 'development traps' need to be overcome across the region. These include increasing productivity,



re-establishing trust in regional governments and institutions, reducing vulnerability through job and social security, and moving towards an environmentally sustainable economic model (OECD, 2019). The issue stands, however, in that these development traps are self-reinforcing. For example, “[w]ith respect to the social vulnerability and productivity traps, the vulnerability associated with informal jobs is largely a by-product of low levels of productivity that characterise LAC countries” (OECD, 2019; 117). As such, in order to overcome one trap, all must be addressed simultaneously in a meaningful way. In this regard, EU policy that aims to facilitate economic and social reform by reducing levels of labour informality and socio-economic inequality must promote productivity, trust in institutions, environmental sustainability and increased social protections at the same time. In this sense, the EU should identify the particular ways in which these four phenomena impact upon its partners in the region and formulate specific policies to help regional governments and institutions to overcome these issues.

Human Rights, the Environment and Security

Human rights, climate and security are intrinsically linked in Latin America, with each having been negatively impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. Even prior to the health crisis, certain countries in the region had experienced a deterioration in their domestic security situation, which in turn negatively impacted upon the protection of human rights and environmental standards in those countries. However, the pandemic gave the opportunity for illicit organisations across the region to consolidate their control over communities and territory in a variety of countries, which in turn have seen a weakening of the state and human rights protections.

There are currently five active conflicts in Latin America (Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Honduras, and Mexico) which, even prior to the coronavirus pandemic, contributed to a degradation of the human rights and environmental situations in the region (IISS, 2020). Unlike many regions in the world, a defining characteristic of all conflicts in Latin America are that they are not between international actors; that is to say, they are all internal or internalised conflicts that play out in a domestic context. In each country, conflict is closely related to organised crime. During the course of the pandemic, criminal organisations were able to consolidate their position in these countries, albeit in different ways. In Brazil, criminal organisations implemented quarantine restrictions during the pandemic, after President Jair Bolsonaro downplayed the severity of the virus and refused to apply lockdown measures. In doing so, various criminal groups were able to acquire greater control over communities who live in locations in which they operate (OCCRP, 2020). Similarly, in Colombia, armed groups violently enforced lockdown measures, something that reflects the Colombian state’s “long-standing failure to establish a meaningful state presence in remote areas of the country, including to protect at-risk populations” (HRW, 2020). In Central America Mexico, there have been reports of cartels distributing social welfare by providing food and supplies to populations who have not benefited from social security during the quarantine, a practice known as ‘narco-philanthropy’. Whilst this has benefited some people, analysts suggest that this activity is predominantly aimed at providing the cartels with increased legitimacy and control over the territory in which they operate (ICG, 2020).

These outcomes have impacted directly on human and environmental rights in Latin America, a continuation of negative trends experienced in recent years. Indeed, environmental and human rights violations have been on the increase. In the case of the former, criminal activity related to deforestation and illegal agricultural activities has seen the rights of numerous



indigenous populations violated. In Brazil, the Amazonas region has experienced a dramatic increase in illicit deforestation by criminal organisations, who have taken the opportunity to make the most of President Bolsonaro's lax stance vis-à-vis climate change and environmental protection. In Colombia, criminal organisations have committed human rights violations against social leaders and human rights defenders, who have made efforts to defend their communities and territories from exploitation. In particular, this has manifested itself in reprisal killings and violence against individuals and communities that have looked to prevent the criminal organisations from using land to produce narcotics (HRW, 2020). In part, this is indicative of the failure of the current Colombian government to meaningfully implement the peace agreement negotiated by their predecessors, however it is also suggestive of the limited scope of the state to counter human rights violations. Lockdown measures in both countries have allowed criminal organisations to further their control over remote territories and communities, thus reducing the capacity of government and non-governmental organisations to protect people and places that are key with regards to environmental protection.

In Central America and Mexico, in spite of the so-called 'narco-philanthropy', the pandemic has had a significant negative impact on human rights in the region. On top of expanding the control of gangs and cartels in a number of countries, a recent report has highlighted a change in the activity of these organisations in the region. Whilst homicide rates initially dropped, since lockdown measures were lifted, so too have rates of violence increased, as opposing gangs have battled to consolidate control over territory that was secured during the lockdown. Rates of extortion have once again increased, both amongst communities that benefited from handouts from gangs during quarantine and amongst migrant populations, who were particularly vulnerable to exploitation even prior to the lockdown (ICG, 2020). The challenge of protecting human rights, which was a troubling prospect prior to the pandemic, has arguably been consolidated, given the weakening of the state and the strengthened position of criminal groups over contested communities and territories. Indeed, the long-term economic impact of the pandemic could result in increased poverty and inequality, a reduced capacity of the state to police its territories, and a strengthened organised crime. In turn, this will continue to have a negative impact on human rights and the environment across the region.

The EU has a long-standing tradition of facilitating conflict resolution around the world. With unique expertise and tools, it therefore is in a unique position to address regional conflict and insecurity, which in turn would help to address issues related to human rights and environmental protection in the region. In this regard, the EU should actively commit to offering its mediating and conflict resolution expertise to regional partners in Latin America in order to help resolve conflict in the region. Furthermore, it should make the promotion of peace a priority in its relations with Latin American partners who are experiencing conflict and insecurity.



Recommendations

On the basis of the shared values and ties between the European Union and Latin America, the following policy recommendations are offered in order to improve future multilateral relations aimed at promoting mutual prosperity, human rights and the rule of law, democratic values, and a shared commitment to global governance.

Trade and Investment

- There is uncertainty over when trade and investment relations between the EU and Latin America will return to pre-COVID levels. In this regard, the ability of the EU to protect human rights, enhance welfare and promote the rule of law in Latin America through trade is limited and may well remain so for the foreseeable future. As such, the EU should evaluate other mechanisms through which it can directly promote its values in Latin America through soft-power mechanisms, notably through continued development funding, increased political engagement with regional partners, and direct engagement with human rights and civil society organisations in Latin America. In doing so, the EU can identify key areas in which it can continue to promote and protect the core values shared by Latin American partners.
- Sustainable development is a key goal for the EU. As such, this should be a central tenet of future EU trade and investment policy. In particular, the ratification of the EU-Mercosur trade agreement should only be done on the guarantee that, firstly, there are specific clauses that protect the Amazon region from current and future deforestation, and, secondly, that the trade agreement only includes goods and services that are fully sustainable (i.e. that do not utilise or benefit from unsustainable practices such as deforestation or the use of previously forested land).
- Through its pre-existing trade agreements, the EU should prioritise facilitating sustainable development in Latin America. Latin America has historically fallen into a number of regionally specific development traps which continue to reduce the region's capacity to achieve sustainable development. In part, this manifests itself in that Latin American economies remain predominantly peripheral economies that produce products that are exported to more developed, predominantly northern economies. The EU, through trade and investment, should target areas that will help Latin American countries overcome these development traps, namely through diversifying regional economy beyond production. The EU should do this even if it is not the economically or financially most viable option in the short-term, given the importance of sustainable development goals for the future of both regions.
- The EU has never cancelled a trade agreement or political association agreement with a third partner on the basis of human rights violations, limitations to the rule of law, or reduced democratic relations. Whilst this is not surprising, as conditionalities related to these areas in EU international agreements are primarily symbolic, the EU should be more willing to take actions against third partners who break these clauses due to the importance of these purported values to the EU. The EU should formulate a toolbox of external actions, as well as a mechanism to determine which actions should be enacted, if and when conditionality clauses are broken in trade and association agreements. This toolbox should be devised through interaction with third partners in order to have a mutually recognised and understood



framework and in order to emphasise the importance of human rights, rule of law and democratic conditionalities in international agreements.

Social and Economic Reform

- Social and economic reform, that specifically targets labour informality and regional inequality, underpins the capacity for Latin American governments to reduce human rights violations, achieve sustainable development and increase regional security and stability. The EU should specifically engage with its regional partners, both at the international, national and sub-national level, in order to identify meaningful ways in which the EU can facilitate social and economic reform, through reducing inequality and labour informality. There has been a significant amount of work analysing the country- and region-specific ways in which inequality and informality interact within one another, some of which has been explored in this paper, which the EU should utilise in its policy-making process regarding socio-economic reform

Human Rights, the Environment and Security

- The relationship between human rights, the environment and international security issues has been elucidated here. However, this relationship does not significantly permeate EU policy decision-making on these issues. As such, the EU should explore more readily the interaction of these different areas in their human rights, environmental and security policies. In doing so, the EU should formulate a policy that considers these issues collectively, rather than independently of one another.
- The EU has a strong track record of supporting conflict resolution processes around the world. As such, it should directly utilise this expertise in the Latin American context. As shown in this paper, conflict resolution in Latin America is highly complicated, however would allow the EU to achieve its goals with regards to protecting human rights and promoting sustainable development and environmental protections. Conflict resolution processes should incorporate environmental justice considerations, as suggested in the preceding recommendation.
- Social and economic reforms related to labour informality and regional inequality are limiting factors on the EU's ability to facilitate human rights promotion, environmental protection and conflict resolution. The EU should integrate an understanding of the ways in which inequality and informality affects these other areas and use this to direct both external action policy-making processes and political and economic engagements with Latin American partners.



Conclusions

The above policy brief has considered a number of closely related issues that will be fundamental to the future of EU-Latin America relations in the future. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of issues have been compounded. With reduced economic activity and trade, the economic prosperity of both regions has taken a significant hit, as has the EU's capacity to proactively influence positive change in the region through trade and investment. The importance of overcoming informality and inequality in the region has once again been shown to be fundamental in achieving much needed economic and social reform, with the poorest and most vulnerable people in Latin America suffering the most acute health, social and economic implications of the pandemic. Finally, the specific relationship between human rights, the environment and security has highlighted the need to renew efforts to achieve peace across the region, with criminal organisations having been able to compound their capacity to oppose states and governments in a number of different countries.

It should be noted that the areas considered in this paper are not unrelated. Indeed, social and economic justice, human rights, security and the rule of law, democracy, and environmental justice cannot be considered in isolation from one another. That is to say, to be meaningfully committed to achieving one area requires that one is committed to achieving in all areas. As such, future research should look to analyse how to incorporate aspects that are missing from the core values shared between the EU and Latin America. Specifically, how can the two regions commit to meaningfully reducing inequality, both globally and within their two respective regions.



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