

# REGIONAL COOPERATION

## Comparative advantages of the EU-LAC programmes

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### BI-REGIONAL COOPERATION\* BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN: THE COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGES OF THE REGIONAL PROGRAMMES

The regional programmes (RP) are promoting **new partnerships** between the European Union and the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) through a wide range of cooperation tools based on knowledge exchange, peer learning, public technical assistance and policy dialogue, working with public administrations and institutional networks and supporting regional forums. The RP have contributed to achieving their objectives on three levels:

**On a Latin American country level**, the regional programmes have shown they are capable of **improving the institutional capacity** of the Latin American countries in their public policy design and management cycle, through five types of action:

- Promoting the **incorporation** and/or maintenance of **complex** issues or problems (gender, inequalities, environment etc.) on national agendas, which have not always received sufficient attention from LAC governments and which are harder to promote through bilateral cooperation instruments.
- Modernising the **institutional architecture** and promoting **policy coherence** through policy **dialogue mechanisms** and multi-level and multi-actor interagency **coordination**.
- Increasing **equality through public services and policies** by promoting their universality and accessibility.
- Promoting **regulatory frameworks** that encourage good governance, gender equality, increased social cohesion, the safety of people and companies and the quality of the environment.
- Improving the **effectiveness and efficiency of their public administrations** by strengthening programming, execution, monitoring and evaluation procedures, as well as through participation, transparency and accountability mechanisms.

To address these objectives at a national level, the regional programmes are based on comparative advantages with respect to bilateral cooperation – their ability to generate **greater incentives for change**, fostering debate and collective reflection, the exchange and knowledge of successful experiences, and mutual learning between peer institutions.

\* Explanatory note. The terms “regional cooperation” and “bi-regional cooperation” are used in this document in the sense of multi-country cooperation (with all or some of the countries from the same region). These terms do not refer to cooperation with regional organisations, with whom coordination and complementarity is sought regarding actions.

**On a regional and bi-regional level**, the regional programmes allow a **harmonised response** that coordinates national actions with those of other countries in the region and beyond, as well as with EU institutions:

- The regional programmes focus the agenda relating to the values and interests shared between the LAC and the EU on specific issues that contribute to bringing both regions closer in international forums, **benefitting multilateral governance**.
- The modus operandi of the regional programmes show scrupulous **respect for countries' needs and sovereignty**. However, such programmes have been particularly important due to their ability to obtain high-impact results through **the adherence of Latin American countries to shared policies, standards and principles\*\***, which foster the construction of similar legal, institutional and procedural frameworks, that subsequently promote bottom-up regional consultation and integration.
- They have supported and promoted Latin American and Euro-Latin American **institutional networks**, making it possible to generate significant **relational capital** and a relationship of trust and mutual respect between people and public institutions from the two regions.
- They are also useful in setting up learning and consultation mechanisms between hundreds of European and Latin American **institutions** in which thousands of public employees from both regions take part, fostering the **internationalisation** of the European and Latin American administrations.

### **On a European level**

- In all or most of the regional programmes, a number of member states participate in their management. These are Team Europe initiatives, **with the Latin American countries being offered different models for applying the single** *acquis communautaire* and not those pertaining to a single country or agency.
- The regional programmes give great visibility to the EU and Europeans, **promoting EU standards** (which, on many occasions, do not coincide with the agendas of third-party countries and other international cooperation bodies such as the Multilateral Development Organisations).
- The programmes and their established mechanisms for dialogue on policies at the intra-regional and bi-regional levels allow the reconstruction of a European-Latin American political agenda, introducing among their objectives the **stimulation and coordination of services for EU-LAC sectoral dialogue mechanisms**, which are already in informal construction at an intermediate policy-maker level.
- With their attention on the priorities and interests of the countries (demand approach), these regional programmes have great potential to transfer principles relating to European cooperation to the regional level and put them into practice at a national level, including a policy first approach among technical assistance (knowledge) and European financial cooperation (funds), **a hugely beneficial combination between the two** in which the goals to be achieved are first defined, and then the instruments and funds required to achieve them, not the other way around.

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\*\* In many cases, these are promoted by the EU but agreed on a bi-regional basis. The regional programmes have made it possible to support the implementation of the agendas agreed upon in regional forums (for example, the Forum of Ministers of the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean) and European forums (e.g. in the field of security and justice, the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime/Cybersecurity and data protection policies).