

LUMORA FOUNDATION

Strengthening Societal Cooperation between India and Europe

The role of civil society in education culture and community health

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Executive summary

The durability of the strategic partnership between India and Europe depends on intergovernmental agreements and economic relations finding practical expression in society. Universities, cultural organisations, specialist health institutions and civil society organisations can broaden the partnership's implementation capacity. This requires accessible and accountable mechanisms that turn international contacts into sustained cooperation.

The EU–India Joint Statement of 27 January 2026 identifies education and people-to-people ties as important enablers of the strategic partnership and records agreement to launch an Education and Skills Dialogue. This provides a policy basis for strengthening societal cooperation within bilateral relations. [1]

Limited field observations from Lumora Foundation's participation in iBRICS 2026 suggest that access to high-level international networks does not, by itself, produce viable social partnerships. Realising opportunities in education, culture and health requires suitable institutional matches, jointly identified needs and resources for project preparation.

This paper's central recommendation is to develop an approach to societal cooperation that complements existing India–Europe relations. It should combine sectoral dialogue, small joint pilots and independent evaluation of results. Rather than creating a large new bureaucracy, it should strengthen the capacity of existing institutions to work together.

1 The policy problem

Strategic partnerships do not reach communities automatically. Political commitment and economic opportunities may not be sufficient for a university to develop a joint education programme, a cultural organisation to undertake reciprocal creative work, or a community health organisation to access reliable information.

The central policy question in this paper is how to support the transition from establishing international relationships to developing joint implementation.

Lumora's field observations illustrate the importance of that transition. Ashish Kumar K. Joshi's assessments focused on cooperation opportunities in education, health, research and technology, while Ruchi Balooni emphasised the relationship-building capacity of culture and the performing arts. These observations do not constitute research representative of India–Europe relations as a whole. They nevertheless raise a question relevant to policy design: under what conditions can interest across different sectors become a sustainable joint programme?

Three implementation barriers should be considered in addressing this question.

Institutional matching

An organisation's international visibility may not demonstrate its ability to implement a particular project. Partners' expertise, target groups and responsibilities need to be aligned.

Project preparation

Needs assessment, joint work planning and budget development take time. A lack of support at this stage may prevent viable ideas from progressing to application or implementation.

Access and continuity

Differences in language, travel costs, digital access and administrative capacity may affect participation. These conditions should be addressed during design so that cooperation is not confined to organisations with strong international connections.

These barriers are this paper's policy assessment. Their prevalence and relative importance across sectors should be tested through needs assessments before the proposed pilots begin.

2 A European perspective and principles for cooperation

For an Estonia-based civil society organisation, cooperation with India should be developed consistently with human rights, democratic participation, transparency and a rules-based international order. Dialogue and societal partnerships should make clear how these principles will be upheld in practice.

The EU–India Joint Statement also identifies democracy, human rights, pluralism and the rule of law among the principles underpinning the partnership. This paper situates its proposed model of societal cooperation within that framework. [1]

Observations from international platforms such as iBRICS can help identify counterparts and areas for cooperation. The direction of Lumora's policy recommendations is nevertheless determined by the public benefit of proposed activities and their consistency with a European institutional perspective, rather than by an event's geopolitical identity.

Reciprocity should also guide joint programmes. European and Indian partners should participate together in identifying needs, producing content and evaluating results. Working arrangements should draw on expertise from both sides rather than relying on one-way knowledge transfer.

3 Priority areas for cooperation

Education and youth

Education cooperation should include mobility opportunities alongside the preparation and support services that enable participants to use them. Joint skills programmes, educator exchanges and youth projects should be designed with language preparation, intercultural learning, participant support and accessibility measures.

Lumora recommends complementary roles for universities and civil society organisations. Universities can provide academic content and quality assurance, while youth organisations can contribute participant outreach, mentoring and the identification of societal needs.

Culture and creative cooperation

The value of cultural relations extends beyond mutual promotion to joint production and lasting professional relationships. Programmes in which artists, cultural professionals and young people create content together can establish relationships that continue beyond individual events.

The European External Action Service's approach treats international cultural relations as a means of supporting trust, co-creation and civil society participation. [2]

Reciprocal artist programmes, joint workshops and cultural heritage education can be prioritised on this basis. Participants' intellectual property rights, remuneration and voice in the presentation of cultural content should be integral to programme design.

Community health

Community health cooperation can be developed around health literacy, preventive health education and access to reliable information. Initial programmes should address the needs of a defined target group and be prepared jointly with qualified health institutions.

Civil society can contribute community outreach, accessible content and participant feedback. Responsibility for clinical assessment and medical services should remain with appropriately qualified institutions. Programme success should be assessed through changes in access to information and understanding, alongside the number of people reached.

4 Policy options

Option	Potential contribution	Main limitation
Events and networking	Access to counterparts and agenda setting	Does not ensure that contacts become joint implementation
Separate individual projects	Rapid responses to specific needs	Learning, continuity and institutional connections may remain limited
Coordination and pilots through existing institutions	Connects partner selection, preparation and evaluation	Requires clear responsibilities and coordination resources

Lumora recommends the third option. Under this model, sectoral discussions identify a specific need; suitable partners develop a small pilot; and results inform decisions on continuation or expansion. Not every initiative needs a new platform or permanent secretariat.

5 Actionable policy recommendations

1 Bring implementing institutions into existing dialogues

Relevant public institutions and diplomatic actors should gather the experience of universities and civil society organisations through regular consultations on education, culture and community health. Each discussion should address a defined implementation problem, with recommendations and responses recorded in a traceable form.

2 Design small and accessible support for project preparation

Funding organisations should consider supporting joint needs assessments and pilot preparation within suitable programmes. Institutions can then test their capacity to work together before making substantial

implementation commitments. The output of preparation support should be an executable work plan rather than a general declaration of partnership.

3 Start with pilots of limited scope

Possible pilots include a joint skills module in education, a reciprocal creative workshop in culture, or a health literacy activity for a defined community group. Each pilot should have one principal problem, a clear target group and a measurable outcome. Decisions to scale up should be based on evaluation of the pilot.

4 Include the financial and practical conditions of participation in budgets

Implementing organisations should not treat language support, accessibility, travel and participant assistance as incidental additions. These are core design elements that enable people in different circumstances to participate. Digital access needs should be assessed separately when online participation is used.

5 Assess partnership quality before visibility

Partner selection should prioritise expertise, implementation capacity, transparency and relationships with the target group. Responsibilities, decision-making, resource use and ownership of results should be defined in writing. Personal contacts can initiate cooperation; continuity should be established between institutions.

6 Measure success through societal outcomes

Numbers of events, participants and signed documents indicate activity. Evaluation should also examine acquired skills, the use of jointly produced content, changes in access to information and institutions' capacity to sustain cooperation. Limitations should be published alongside positive results.

6 Implementation and evaluation

The proposed approach can initially be tested with a limited number of partners over a one-year evaluation period.

Joint needs and institutional capacities should be identified during the first three months; pilots should then be implemented; and results and costs should be assessed together at the end of the year. Participant perspectives should be collected at the outset and after implementation to determine whether activities addressed the intended need.

Three questions should guide decisions on continuation: Did the pilot achieve the intended change? Did partners strengthen their capacity to work together? Was the result reasonable in relation to the resources used and the burden on participants?

Repeating an activity solely for visibility is not recommended when these questions cannot be answered.

7 Conclusion

Strengthening the societal dimension of the India–Europe partnership requires institutions in education, culture and health to be able to work together. International contacts can initiate this process; lasting results depend on identifying joint needs, supporting project preparation and evaluating implementation.

Lumora Foundation recommends an approach that complements existing institutional relationships, is tested through small pilots and is assessed against public benefit. It supports cooperation consistent with European principles while recognising the reciprocal contribution of Indian and European partners to knowledge, experience and decision-making.

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Methodology and publication note

This paper combines a qualitative assessment of the EU–India Joint Statement and the European External Action Service’s approach to cultural relations with field observations from Ashish Kumar K. Joshi and Ruchi Balooni at iBRICS 2026. The field inputs are observations by two representatives at one event; they are not presented as generalisable research findings. The recommendations constitute Lumora Foundation’s independent policy assessment.

This publication does not speak on behalf of any public authority, the EU, NATO, BRICS or the event organisers. Participation in an international event does not imply geopolitical affiliation or an official representative mandate.

This is Issue No. 02 of the Lumora Policy Paper Series, following the NATO policy publication issued as No. 01 in July 2026. The English and Turkish editions present the same policy content.

References

[1] European Council. India–EU Joint Statement and Towards 2030 Joint Comprehensive Strategic Agenda. 27 January 2026. In particular, paragraphs 4, 25 and 26 of the Joint Statement. Accessed 5 October 2026.

[EU–India Joint Statement](#)

[2] European External Action Service. Our approach to public diplomacy and international cultural relations. 2 December 2025. Accessed 5 October 2026.

[EEAS approach to international cultural relations](#)

[3] Lumora Foundation. iBRICS 2026 post-mission field inputs submitted by Ashish Kumar K. Joshi and Ruchi Balooni. Non-public institutional source; not quoted directly.