

India Chapter

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In collaboration with



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Institutional presentation by the Mayor of Barcelona Jaume Collboni Cuadrado

INDIA Chapter has been created to strengthen ties between Barcelona and India, a country that has become one of the most significant players on the global stage, and to gain a deeper mutual understanding of each other. With a population of over 1.4 billion, a constantly growing economy and an increasingly influential presence in global governance, India has become a key player in defining the main political, economic and environmental challenges of the twenty-first century.

For Barcelona, strengthening ties with India is an opportunity for collaboration in areas in which our city has positioned itself as a leader: sustainable urban development, smart mobility, digital innovation, logistics, business internationalisation, higher education and cultural exchange. It also encourages us to take a broad and strategic look at the diversity, scale and vitality that distinguish that country.

This document, which would not have been possible without the invaluable work, collaboration, and guidance of Casa Asia, has been drawn up in accordance with a cooperation strategy born from the combined efforts of Barcelona City Council, relevant stakeholders from the Barcelona Metropolitan Area and the active engagement of the Indian community living in our city. This alignment of views and experiences has made it possible to develop a framework for mutual understanding, a shared set of goals and a firm wish to work together to make progress for the mutual benefit of both societies.

Barcelona has always grown through openness, dialogue and an outward-looking attitude. Strengthening ties with India and its cities, institutions, community and people expands our alliances, enriches our collective learning and enhances our ability to innovate, adapt and help to build a more thriving, balanced and compassionate world with hope and determination.



Executive Summary

2.1 Introduction

Since the early twenty-first century, India has undergone a significant transformation that has solidified its position as a key player in the global arena. Nowadays, **no analysis of international politics is complete without India**, whose rise is a crucial factor in international relations. Furthermore, **it has become an essential strategic partner** with whom a deep understanding and a specific strategy must be developed. Barcelona has had limited relations with India to date. This chapter examines our current ties and proposes ways to improve them.

INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE

Over the last few years, India has increased its role in global politics with a **clear commitment to multilateralism**. It has actively contributed to the revitalisation of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and is a member of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) alongside the United States, Australia and Japan. In addition, it has been a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) since 2017, and it hosted its summit of heads of state in 2023. These actions bear witness to its **increasingly prominent role** in Asia, a continent that is becoming a global hub, and its **ability to negotiate bilateral agreements and solidify economic and geopolitical alliances**.

India's G20 presidency in 2023 showed the world its **leadership and ability to secure international consensus** with the inclusion of the African Union, the launch of the Global Biofuels Alliance and the Global Initiative on Digital Health, as well as the push for reforms in multilateral banks and digital infrastructure. Beyond the G20, India drives global

initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance, the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure and the Green Credit Initiative recently launched at COP28, reaffirming the country's **leadership in the energy and climate transition**.

ECONOMIC RISE

India has seen **sustained economic growth** with **the development of key infrastructure** and a strong **commitment to digitalisation**. With its young population, **productive capacity and internal consumption, coupled with its investment in talent**

– especially in the field of IT – it is currently one of the world's leading economic forces. This progress is driven by initiatives such as Make in India, Smart Cities Mission and the National Infrastructure Pipeline. Its entrepreneurial ecosystem stands out with over 127,000 startups and 110 unicorns, bolstered by programmes such as Startup India, India Stack and Digital India, which foster **technological inclusion throughout the country**.

In addition, sectors such as the **bioeconomy**, fuelled by innovation and sustainability, account for 4.25% of the country's GDP, solidifying India's position as a global bioproduction hub.



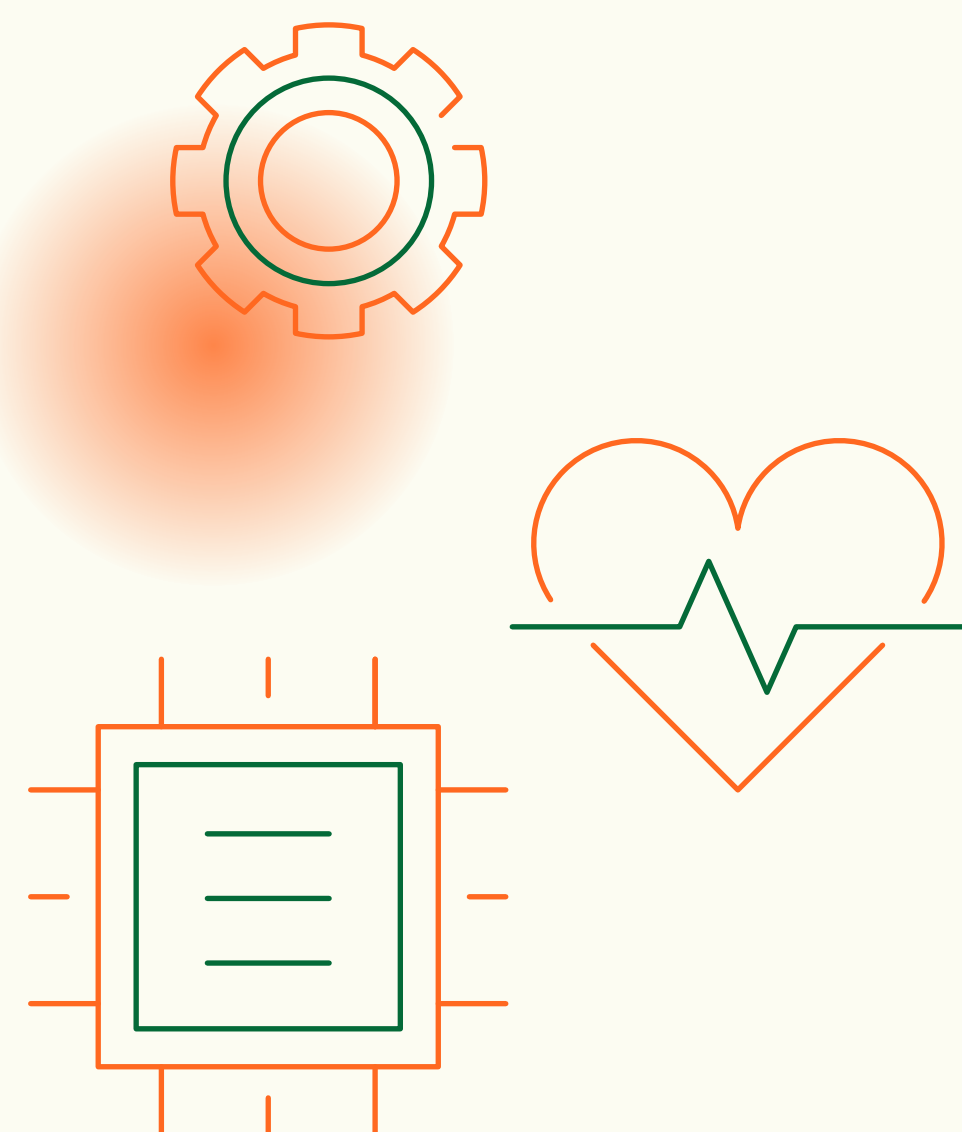
HUMAN CAPITAL

Boasting a young demographic with an average age of around 28.8, India has become as a **significant source of global talent**. Many of its professionals seek opportunities overseas. Its talent excels in the fields of **technology, engineering and healthcare**, with 34% of graduates specialising in STEM fields and a total of 2 million new STEM graduates per year. According to the 2022 Science and Engineering Indicators report drawn up by the US National Science Foundation (NSF), India is the third largest producer of knowledge in these areas. Furthermore, it is responsible for 16% of the world's artificial intelligence and big data talent and boasts the highest number of medical schools in the world. Europe is becoming an increasingly important destination for this talent, with Indian citizens accounting for almost 25% of all European Blue Cards granted in 2022.

CULTURAL APPEAL

India boasts a remarkable amount of **soft power** through its rich cultural heritage, which includes **yoga, spirituality, its cuisine, Bollywood films, its cultural diversity and its democratic government**, a model for developing countries. It ranks sixth in the world for number of UNESCO Heritage of Humanity sites, highlighting its cultural and historical importance. Its achievements include the UN's designation of 21 June as International Day of Yoga, Bollywood's international success and the popularisation of traditional dances such as Bhangra. The promotion of Indian culture abroad, overseen by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), helps further establish its international impact.

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2.2 The European and Spanish framework for relations with India

EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK

Key milestones in EU-India relations

- **1962:** Establishment of diplomatic relations between the EEC and India.
- **1993:** Joint Political Statement, which broadened cooperation beyond trade and launched yearly meetings of ministers.
- **1994:** EU-India Cooperation Agreement, providing a legal framework for bilateral relations.
- **2004:** Strategic Partnership based on shared values and multilateralism.
- **2007:** Start of negotiations for a free trade agreement (suspended in 2013 and resumed in 2021).
- **2017:** Partnership on Smart and Sustainable Urbanisation.
- **2018:** EU Strategy for India.
- **2020:** EU-India Roadmap to 2025 and Connectivity Partnership in the fields of energy, transport and digitalisation.
- **2021:** First meeting of leaders of India and the 27 EU member states; resumption of trade negotiations and start of discussions on investment.
- **2022:** Sixtieth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations.
- **2023:** First EU-India Trade & Technology Council, with a record €120 billion in bilateral trade.

- **2024:** Trade agreement with EFTA (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland).

The future EU-India free trade agreement, which is at an advanced stage of negotiation, will play a key role in solidifying trade relations amid geopolitical tensions.

SPANISH FRAMEWORK

Diplomatic relations between Spain and India were first established in 1956, with the opening of the Spanish embassy in New Delhi, and have since been reinforced through eleven treaties, 31 MoUs and two joint declarations. The cooperation between the two countries includes three joint committees in the fields of economy, defence and technology, as well as **regular dialogue on politics, security and tourism matters**. Spain has an **embassy in Delhi, a consulate in Mumbai**, honorary consulates and sector-specific offices; and **India has an embassy in Madrid, a consulate general in Barcelona** and an honorary consulate in Tenerife.

The bilateral relationship is further reinforced by initiatives such as the **Spain-India Forum and the India-Spain CEOs Forum**.

The **Spain-India Dual Year 2026**, which focuses on culture, tourism and artificial intelligence, was announced during Spanish President Pedro Sánchez's official visit to India in October 2024, coinciding with the sixtieth anniversary of the establishment of relations between the two countries. Agreements on customs cooperation and investment and MoUs on railway and cultural matters were signed. The Indian Minister of External Affairs' visit to Spain in January 2025 further strengthened this robust relationship. **Barcelona City Council supports these agreements and goals**, bolstering its commitment to bilateral cooperation both domestically and at the European level.

2.3 The international dimension of Indian cities

India is a federation of **28 states and eight union territories**, each with a separation of powers between the central and state governments. Local governance is regulated by the **73rd (rural)** and **74th (urban)** Constitutional Amendments of 1992, which increased municipal autonomy. The 74th Amendment, relating to urban structure, is of particular significance for Barcelona.

As regards cities, the **74th Amendment** defines three types of **urban local bodies (ULBs)**: **municipal corporations (nagar nigam)** for cities with over one million inhabitants, municipalities (nagar palika) for those with under one million and **nagar panchayats** for areas undergoing the rural-to-urban transition.

The most important roles in municipal corporations are the **mayor**, a political leader with representative and ceremonial functions, and the **municipal commissioner**, a high-ranking official with full executive and management powers appointed by the state. Under this model, there is a **strong separation between political representation and administrative control**, making the governance of Indian cities very different from that of their European counterparts.

KEY INSTITUTIONS IN THE FIELDS OF URBAN MANAGEMENT AND CITY DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA

India has **various key institutions that formulate and implement urban policies**, especially in relation to governance, sustainable development and infrastructure.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs spearheads national programmes such as the Smart Cities Mission. The National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA) and think tanks such as the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) and the Centre for Urban and Regional Excellence (CURE) act as bridges between research and urban practice and partner in the international arena.

The All India Institute of Local Self-Government (AIILSG) and the Association of Municipalities and Development Authorities (AMDA), which foster training and collaboration among municipalities and authorities throughout the country, feature prominently in local governance and capacity-building.

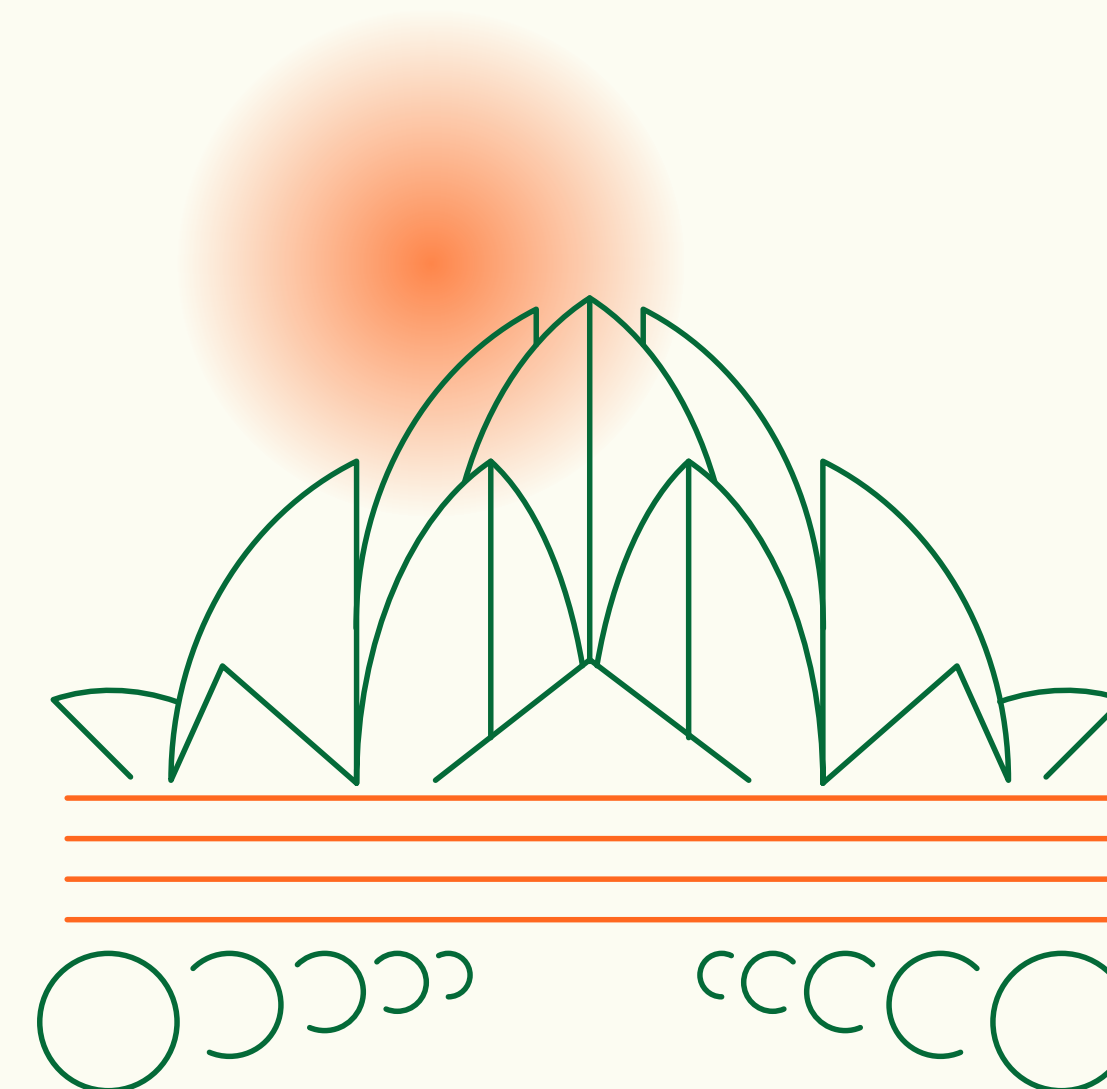
Locally, in **Mumbai**, the Mumbai First initiative focuses on sustainable development and urban infrastructure, and the Urban Design Research Institute (UDRI) operates in the fields of housing, transport and inclusion. In **Hyderabad**, the Hyderabad Urban Lab (HUL) conducts applied research and carries out urban initiatives. In **Bangalore**, the Bangalore Political Action Committee (B.PAC) advocates for governance and quality of life; The Urban Vision focuses on urban design and sustainability; and the Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy promotes infrastructure and citizen participation. These organisations facilitate cooperation with international cities such as Barcelona.

CITY NETWORKS AND INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCES FOR SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

India participates in global networks and alliances to tackle climate change and advance sustainable urban development, although there is the potential to increase its involvement. The most significant

international networks are **C40**, which focuses on climate change, whose members include Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore and Ahmedabad; **ICLEI**, which focuses on sustainable urban development; and the **Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy**, whose efforts are targeted at climate resilience and lowering emissions.

Other initiatives include **UCLG**, which advocates for international representation and the Sustainable Development Goals; the **Resilient Cities Network**, which develops resilience strategies, whose members include Pune, Surat and Chennai; and the **Metropolis** network, which promotes metropolitan cooperation with cities such as Hyderabad, Bhopal and New Delhi. Despite the country's uneven involvement, these networks offer chances for Barcelona to strengthen its ties with India in these areas.



2.4 India-Barcelona relations

INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

Holding institutional missions focused on innovation, technology and sustainable urban development has been the key to strengthening ties between Barcelona and India. However, follow-up has been limited.

Some of the most notable missions are the 'Business Bridge' mission carried out in 2005, the 2008 reverse mission to attract technology companies, the official visits carried out by the President of the Generalitat in 2013 and mayor Xavier Trias in 2014, and the 2022 mission to Bangalore focusing on the digital and technology sectors.

A Letter of Intent with the Delhi Development Authority and an agreement with Barcelona Regional were signed in 2010, albeit with no tangible results.

Casa Asia and the **Consejo España-India Foundation** have been the driving force behind cultural, economic and diplomatic exchanges, including programmes involving Indian leaders and the Spain-India Forum. The opening of the **Consulate General of India in Barcelona in 2024** gave the country's diplomatic office full consular status.

TRADE RELATIONS

From its offices in Mumbai and Delhi, ACCIÓ helps Catalan businesses to operate in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.



The **maritime connections** between India and Barcelona include **six direct routes** for container and car shipping services. One particularly noteworthy initiative is the **Port of Barcelona's** 2023 mission to Mumbai to enhance port cooperation and support Maritime India Vision 2030 with projects worth \$8.9 billion across twelve ports.

The **future signing of the EU-India free trade agreement** will open up opportunities to increase trade and investment in a competitive environment for Catalan companies. Catalonia has 80 subsidiaries of 64 companies in India, while 67 subsidiaries of 48 Indian companies operate in Catalonia in **key areas such as mobility, smart cities, ICT, life sciences, sustainability and machinery**.

There are currently **no direct air routes between Barcelona and India**. This is both a challenge and an opportunity to improve connectivity and facilitate trade, investment and travel.

Fira de Barcelona has a representative in India and promotes participation in events such as the Smart City Expo World Congress and World Food India by attracting exhibitors, ministers and high-ranking officials.

TOURISM

With 28.2 million departures in 2023, more than before the pandemic, Indian tourism is experiencing **sustained international growth**, and

Spain is one of the fastest-growing European destinations for this market. The average expenditure per tourist in 2023 was €2,340, with a total of €584 million. In 2024, this rose to average expenditure of €2,608 and an average stay of 7.3 nights. MICE tourism and the bleisure (business and leisure) segment account for a significant portion of this, and the impact of Bollywood has sparked further interest in Spain.

Catalonia is the top destination for Indian tourists in Spain, with 114,626 visitors in 2023, 43,497 of whom visited Barcelona, up 155% since 2019. Most travel takes place between April and July, although off-season tourism is on the rise. Indian tourists value culture, history and independent travel, which has boosted the FIT (Free Independent Tourist) segment in the city.

BARCELONA'S INDIAN COMMUNITY

Barcelona has a large Indian Community that is a key component of the local social and economic fabric. In 2023, the city was the home to 62% of all Indian residents in Catalonia (8,013 people). Indian culture and integration are promoted by various organisations, including the Indian Culture Centre, the Indali Foundation and the Nupura Centre of Performing Arts, in collaboration with Casa Asia. Significant cultural celebrations, such as International Day of Yoga, Diwali, Holi and Ugadi, are held in Barcelona.

ACADEMIC RELATIONS

Academic mobility from India has experienced significant growth as a result of student interest and institutional agreements. A total of 1.3 million Indian students were studying abroad in 2022,

although **few of them in Barcelona**. The prestige of schools such as IESE and ESADE attracts Indian MBA students.

A **Memorandum of Understanding between CRUE** (Conference of Rectors of Spanish Universities) and AIU (Association of Indian Universities) for academic exchange and research collaboration was signed in 2024; and **Alianza 4 Universidades (A4U)** (which includes the Autonomous University of Barcelona and Pompeu Fabra University) establishes agreements in engineering, biotechnology and economics.

CHALLENGES

Despite the progress made, Barcelona-India relations still face challenges. The **lack of direct flights** restricts connectivity and opportunities for trade and tourism, but a future direct air link between the two regions is in the cards. Furthermore, **administrative differences**, driven by the predominant role of the central and state governments, lead to lower municipal autonomy in India and hinder direct cooperation between cities.

Other contributing factors are the **lack of resources in many Indian cities**, which restricts their ability to take part in international networks, and the **complex bureaucracy** involved in developing projects, exacerbated by frequent **changes in interlocutors**.

Working with India requires a medium-term approach, as it entails **long administrative procedures, cultural differences and, as a rule, long waits for returns on investment**, all of which **require reliable long-term local partners**.

2.5 Main recommendations for action

GOAL 1 Promotion of mechanisms to attract Indian talent

India is a source of highly qualified professionals in sectors of high strategic value for Barcelona, which can boost local competitiveness and the development of new technologies.

Recommendations:

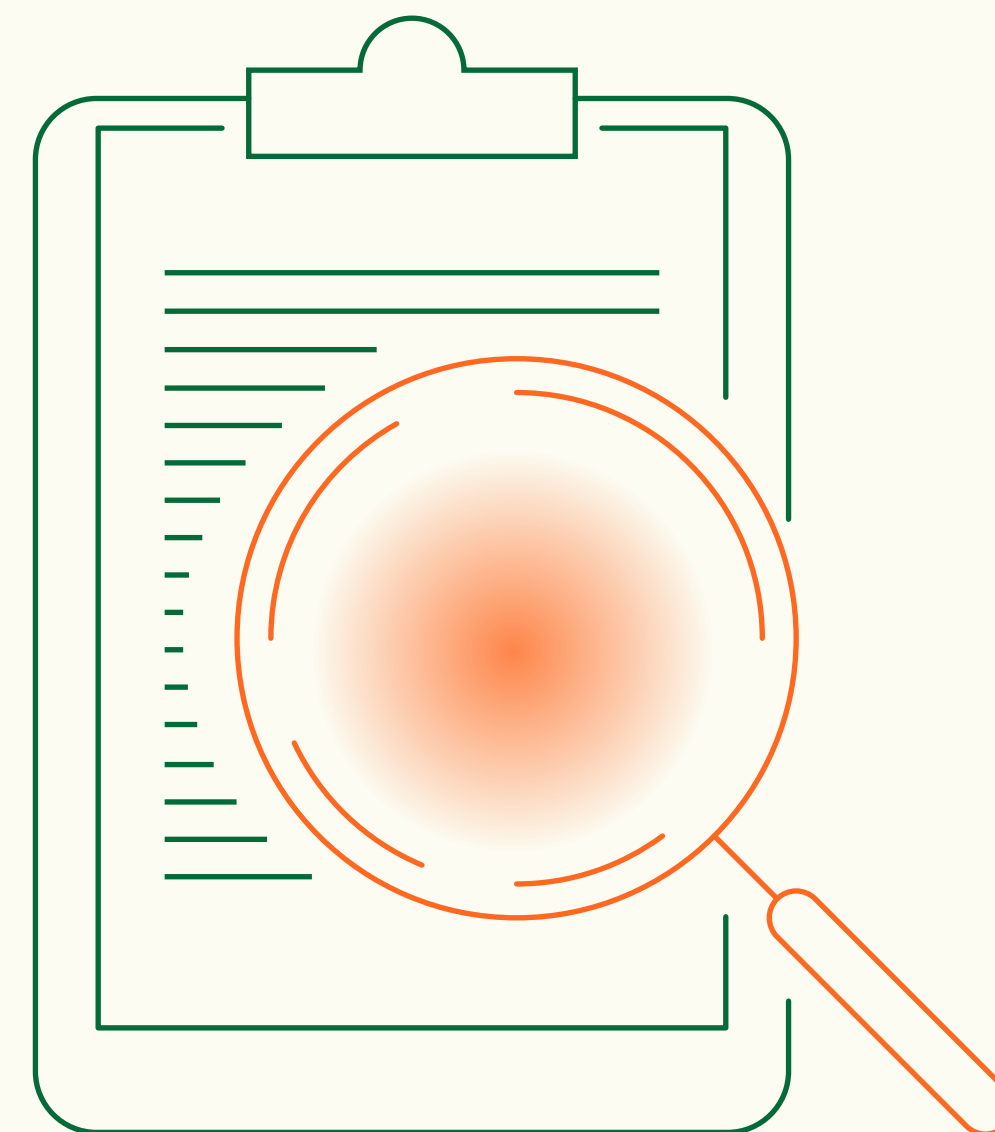
- **Holding a meeting between the City Council and top Indian companies** in Barcelona to fully understand the Indian professional community and its needs and talent acquisition methods.
- **Encouraging Indian professionals to take part in programmes** such as Digital Talent (Mobile World Capital) and Welcome IT Day.
- **Building ties with Indian students and alumni** so they can serve as a bridge between Barcelona, India and other countries of residence.
- **Making the procedures for Indian professionals wishing to settle in Barcelona and adjust to the city easier** by tailoring programmes such as the International Welcome Desk and International Community Day to their needs.
- **Considering partnering with initiatives such as Skill India** to attract qualified workers through its networks and training centres.

GOAL 2 Collaboration in the field of biotechnology

The biotechnology sector offers significant opportunities for cooperation between Barcelona and India, fuelled by rapid growth and the two countries' innovative ecosystems. Their combined strengths make it possible to establish strategic partnerships and carry out joint projects in the fields of biomedicine, biopharma and digital health. Recommendations:

- **Monitoring emerging hubs** in Pune, Ahmedabad and Bhubaneswar, as well as boosting collaboration with established centres such as Hyderabad and Bangalore.
- **Taking part in fairs** such as Global Bio-India to publicise what Catalonia has to offer and attract investors.
- **Establishing ties with key organisations**, such as BIRAC, and innovation centres, such as the Bangalore Bioinnovation Centre and the ICT Mumbai Biocluster.
- **Fostering cooperation between science parks**, such as the Barcelona Biomedical Research Park and the Barcelona Science Park and the biotechnology parks of the National Biotechnology Parks Scheme.
- **Involving the Indian ecosystem in BioSpain** to reinforce the international dimension of the event and Barcelona's role as a leading partner.
- **Strengthening ties with Indian institutions working in the field of neuroscience**, such as the Centre for Brain Research in Bangalore and the Sunita Sanghi Centre at IIT Mumbai, in line with local research into neurodegenerative diseases.

“Identifying specific synergies between Indian cities and Barcelona is crucial to lay the foundations of effective collaboration.”



GOAL 3 Participation in international city network programmes operating in India

International city networks provide effective platforms for increasing cooperation between India and Barcelona in sustainability and urban development matters:

- **C40**, where Barcelona shares areas of interest with several Indian cities, such as air quality and the green transition.
- **ICLEI**, through initiatives such as the 100% Renewable Cities Network and the Eco Mobility Alliance, which focus on the energy transition and sustainable mobility.
- The **Urban Ocean Initiative** of the Resilient Cities Network, in which Barcelona could take part in a mentoring capacity to reduce marine pollution and promote the circular economy.

GOAL 4 Promotion of collaboration with Indian cities and entities whose interests align with those of Barcelona

Identifying specific synergies between Indian cities and Barcelona is crucial to lay the foundations of effective collaboration, which also requires an understanding of the country's governmental dynamics. Areas of shared interest, such as high-impact economic projects, sustainability, climate action, infrastructure and skills development, must be identified, and alternative counterparts must be considered, as city-to-city diplomacy is not yet fully established. To do this, we propose the following recommendations:

- **Identifying the key organisations in each city** (urban development authorities, municipal corporations and governing bodies) to facilitate more tailored collaboration.
- **Considering collaborating with the federal states** given their influence on the consolidation of initiatives.
- **Contacting think tanks and public-private entities** operating in the field of urban transformation, particularly at the local level, in cases in which establishing direct links with Indian cities presents significant challenges.

GOAL 5 Support for Barcelona's Indian community and its cultural diversity

The Indian diaspora is a key component of Barcelona's cultural, social and economic fabric. Further integrating this community would enrich the city, help to create new opportunities for exchange and boost its international profile. This community's diversity should also be acknowledged in order to design suitable initiatives. To achieve this, we have the following proposals:

- **Increasing municipal involvement in key Indian celebrations** (Diwali, International Day of Yoga), and considering adding Ratha Yatra to the official calendar.
- **Encouraging children of Indian families attending school in Barcelona to learn Hindi**, in accordance with the principles of interculturality and the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights.
- **Supporting family reunification** to balance the current gender imbalance in the Indian community.

- **Promoting film as a cultural tool** by supporting Indian film shootings and the screening of Indian film series in Barcelona, and considering the option of hosting international events such as the IIFA Awards in Barcelona.
- **Using Indian cuisine as an opportunity for cross-cultural exchange** by including it in forums such as the Gastronomic Forum Barcelona.
- **Encouraging cultural exchange** between our local human tower builders (castellers) and the *govindas* of Mumbai and Pune.
- **Promoting the practice of cricket** in collaboration with the Catalan Federation and local clubs to foster integration and acknowledge Indian's sporting tradition.

GOAL 6 Collaboration in the field of logistics and trade fairs

The main institutions in the logistics sector (mainly ports, but also airports), coupled with Barcelona's significant trade fair operations, play a crucial role in strengthening trade relations, attracting investment and professionals and enhancing the city's international standing. To achieve this, we have the following proposals:

- **Exploring synergies between the Port of Barcelona and Indian ports**, particularly Mumbai, in the fields of decarbonisation and sustainability.
- **Using Barcelona's leadership in port automation and digitalisation** for exchanges and collaboration.
- **Encouraging Indian ports to take part in key Port of Barcelona events**, such as Smart Ports.

- **Seizing the opportunities emerging from the India-EU Connectivity Partnership.**
- **Increasing Indian participation in Fira de Barcelona events**, such as the Smart Cities World Congress and Alimentaria, and taking advantage of Indian delegations' attendance at international events such as Mobile World Congress and Integrated Systems Europe to hold strategic meetings with City Council and other entities.
- **Pushing for direct flights between Barcelona and India** through the Air Route Development Committee (CDRA).

GOAL 7 Attraction of Indian tourists

India's growing middle classes and young demographic have turned the country into a growing tourism market with promising future prospects and the potential for more sustainable tourism in the city. In order to attract more Indian tourists and leverage this growth, we propose the following recommendations:

- **Focusing on sectors such as MICE and wedding tourism**, which are key to the Indian market and offer significant potential.



- **Pushing for the introduction of a direct air route between Barcelona and India.** This is a high priority for the Air Route Development Committee and would have a positive impact on tourism.
- **Using the power of film,** particularly Bollywood, to attract Indian tourists in view of its impact in past shootings, and international strategies such as the use of tourism ambassadors or film-themed tours.
- **Taking advantage of the Spain-India Dual Year 2026** as a platform to boost Indian tourism, strengthen cultural and trade ties and boost Barcelona's profile.

GOAL 8 Collaboration with regard to startups

India's vibrant startup ecosystem is solidifying its position as a leading hub for innovation and entrepreneurship, mirroring Barcelona's position as southern Europe's leading innovation hub. This opens up numerous opportunities for synergies, collaboration and mutual gain. To achieve this, we propose the following recommendations:

- **Fostering cooperation between Indian and Barcelona startups** through initiatives such as StartUp India and local platforms.
- **Encouraging Indian startups to take part in programmes** such as Catalonia Open Challenges, and promoting the Barcelona & Catalonia Startup Hub to foster connections between ecosystems.
- **Partnering with Indian incubators to organise international hackathons** such as the Smart India Hackathon, and encouraging Indian participation in European events such as HackUPC to attract talent and strengthen networks.

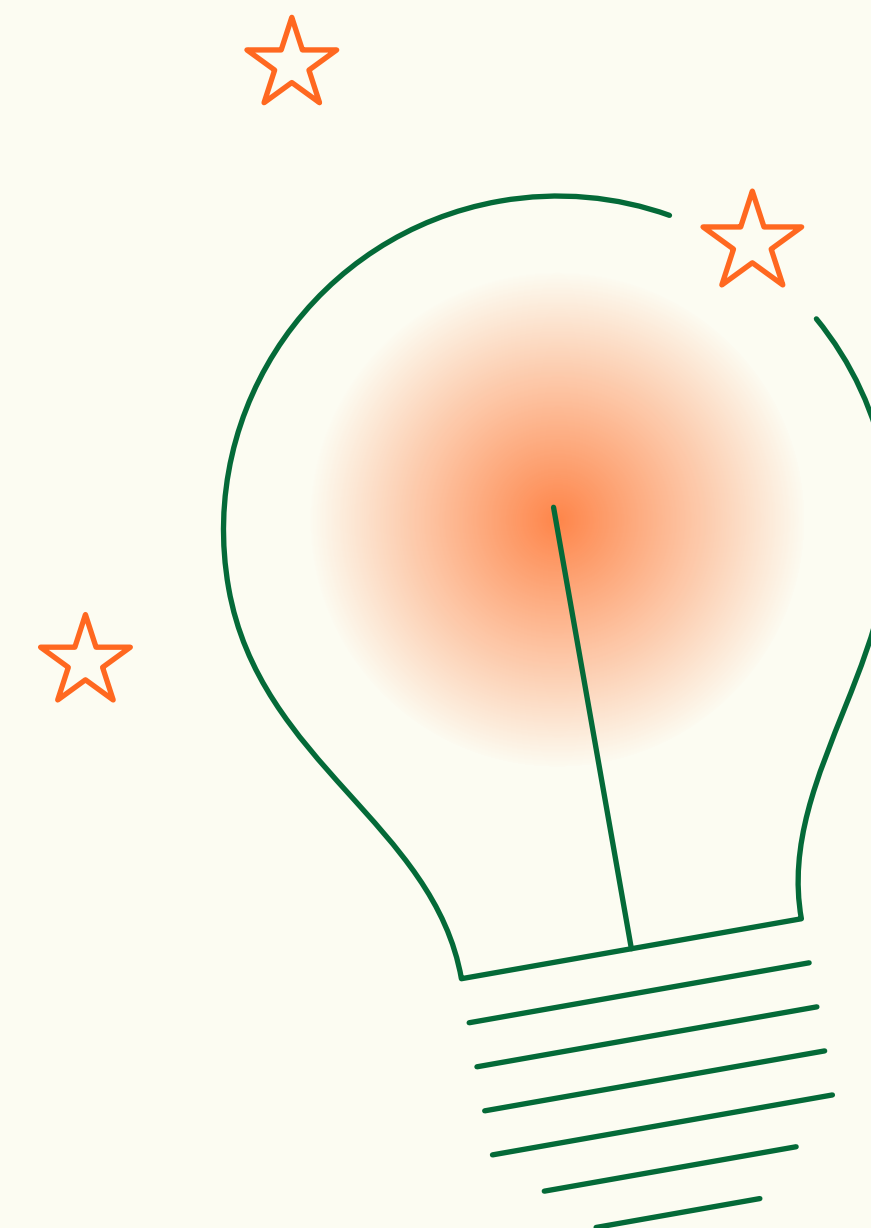
- **While Indian investment in Catalonia remains limited, increasing it warrants serious consideration.** Our combined strengths in fields such as the life sciences and digital technology provide an ideal framework for attracting investment and valuable partnerships.

GOAL 9 Academic and research mobility programmes

Barcelona already has a robust academic and research ecosystem with a place on the international stage. India, with its current boom in several fields, offers fertile ground for strategic partnerships. Recommendations:

- **Using existing agreements,** such as the one reached between CRUE and AIU, to foster student, teaching staff and researcher exchanges.
- **Launching joint master's degrees** through the Erasmus Mundus programme.
- **Encouraging participation in European programmes,** such as Horizon Europe and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, to carry out joint projects and attract Indian postdoctoral researchers.
- Taking advantage of the current international landscape to **establish Barcelona as a high-quality education destination** for international students, capitalising on the tightening of visa policies in countries such as Canada, Australia and the US.

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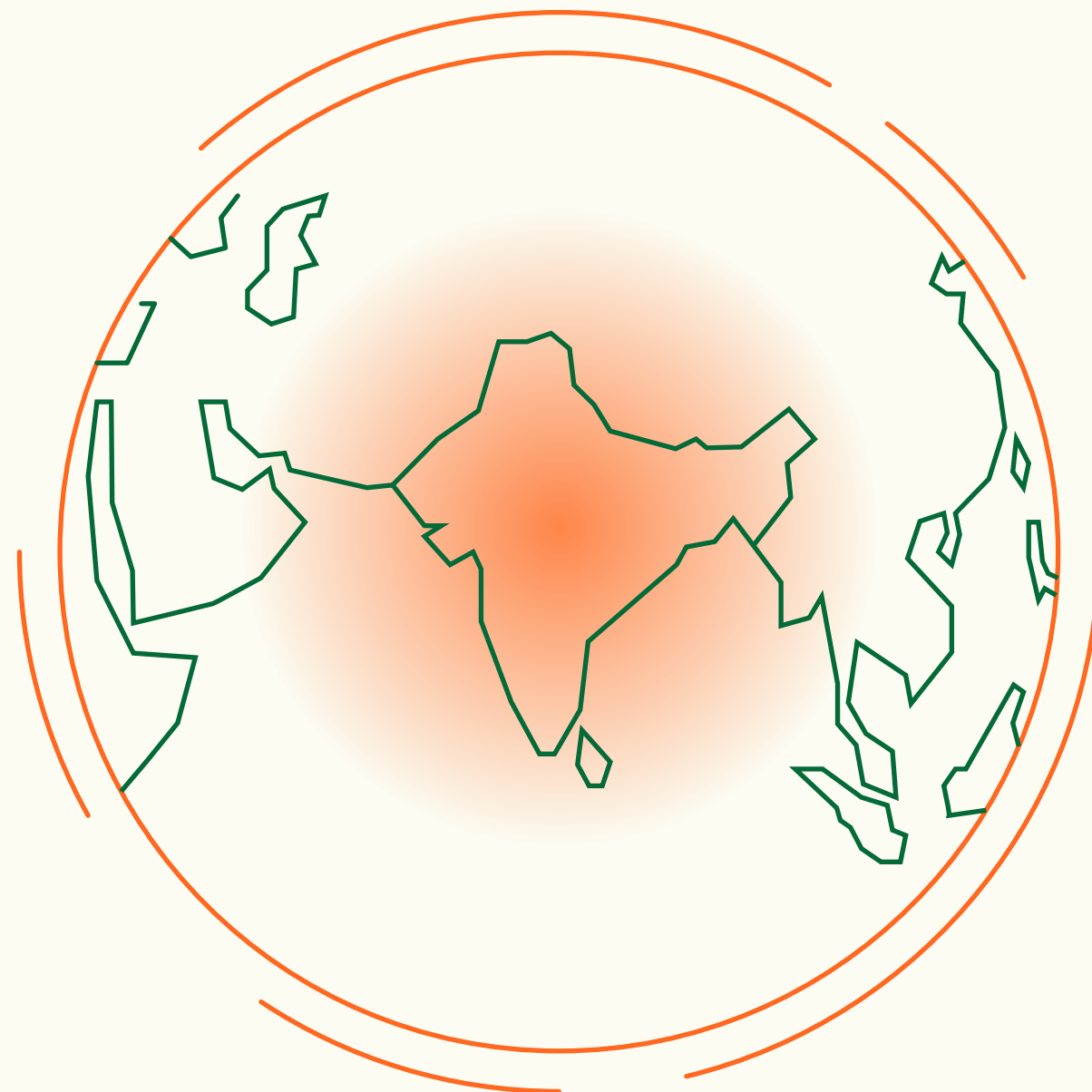


WHY INDIA?

03



Since gaining independence from the British Empire on 15 August 1947, the establishment of India as an independent country has been based on **three basic components**: Rabindranath Tagore's ideas on education, Mahatma Gandhi's idealism and spirituality and Jawaharlal Nehru's secular ideas and foreign policy.



Tagore introduced an educational approach aimed at producing citizens educated through the study of science and artistic expression and openness to other cultural and religious traditions. Gandhi introduced ideal concepts of non-violence, equality among all human beings and morality in politics. Nehru's contribution related to concepts of secularism, tolerance for all religious expressions and ethical behaviour and cooperation in international relations.

However, even the finest ideals are not a guarantee of success. For years, India's progress was constrained by **three significant hindering factors**: a statist vision involving a heavily regulated and protectionist economy that curbed economic growth; low-key foreign policy, mainly restricted to the Indian subcontinent; and a lack of strategic vision for India's 'soft power'.

India's substantial transformation since the early twenty-first century has enabled it to overcome previous constraints on its progress and emerge as a highly significant player on the world stage. At present, no discussions of international politics are complete without including India.

3.1 International importance

In recent years, India has become a desirable partner for other countries, which are aware of its potential to tip the scales of global power dynamics. Its steadfast **commitment to multilateralism** is also worth noting. In the Indian Ocean, it was responsible, along with Australia and Indonesia, for reviving the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) in the early 2000s. In the Indo-Pacific, it is a member of the Quad, which also includes the United States, Australia and Japan,

and whose work centres on emerging technologies, quality infrastructure and global health.

In 2017, it became a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, which includes Russia, China and the Central Asian republics (among other countries), and in 2023 it hosted the organisation's summit of heads of state.

Against this backdrop, the new Trump administration in the US is reshaping India's role as a key player in world geopolitics amid Asia's increasing prominence as a new global hotspot. This new role was reflected in the recent Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) meeting amidst the United States' increased tariffs on India. Despite this, these tensions have also sparked the negotiation of potential new bilateral trade deals and paved the way for broader economic and geopolitical partnerships between India and other international partners, solidifying its growing importance.

India's significance was also reflected in its presidency of the G20 summit in 2023, the year when the group was joined by the African Union, the Global Biofuels Alliance and the Global Initiative on Digital Health were established, and reforms to the multilateral development banks and digital infrastructure were discussed. These advances highlighted India's ability to help reach a consensus and spearhead the international agenda. India has also driven very significant global initiatives beyond the G20, such as the International Solar Alliance and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure. More recently, at COP28, it presented the Green Credit Initiative as an alternative to traditional carbon credits, reasserting its ambition to lead the energy and climate transition.

3.2 Economic rise

The foundations of today's economic growth

– economic stability, structural reforms, infrastructure investment and the digitalisation of the economy – were laid in the early twenty-first century. In addition, India has more varied drivers of growth than other countries, and importantly, the country's growth is not built solely on exports. On the contrary, 70% of its growth has been driven by internal consumption, with substantial contributions from government spending and investments, coupled with the potential of international trade (it was ranked the eighth largest importer and ninth largest exporter in 2023). Thanks to this favourable environment, India has made quick and significant strides in its global position. The World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index (2020) now ranks India 63rd out of 190 economies, a substantial improvement since its 142nd ranking in 2014.

All this explains why the country boasts such a **strong macroeconomy**, with annual growth of 6% over the past decade (except in 2019 and 2020). It is one of the world's fastest-growing economies. The World Bank projects growth figures of over 6.3% in 2026, and the country has been ranked the world's fifth largest economy since 2021. With a GDP of \$5 trillion, higher than Japan and Germany, it is poised to become the third largest global economy in the next few years.

The country's **main assets** are exports of services, particularly in the field of IT, which includes major companies such as Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys, HCLTech and Wipro. It also benefits from factors such as a young demographic, its capabilities as a manufacturing hub, the digital transformation it is currently undergoing and the

expansion of its middle class. This sets the stage for opportunities in a country that overtook China as the world's most populous in 2024.

Over the past ten years, India has introduced a variety of **key economic policy initiatives**. The **Make in India** initiative launched in 2014 seeks to position the country as a global design and manufacturing centre, encourage foreign investment and foster innovation across 27 sectors, including the manufacturing industry (with areas such as the pharmaceutical industry, biotechnology and food processing) and the services sector (with areas such as tourism, hospitality and legal services).

In addition, two key initiatives in the field of sustainable urban development were launched in 2015. The **Smart Cities Mission**, which seeks to turn 100 cities into smart urban hubs, is one of India's flagship initiatives. This includes improving infrastructure (such as water and electricity supply, mobility, housing and health and education services) with replicable models that can later be used in other cities. The **Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation** similarly seeks to improve the infrastructure of cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants by providing basic services such as water, sewage and transport and creating green areas to make them more liveable and accessible.

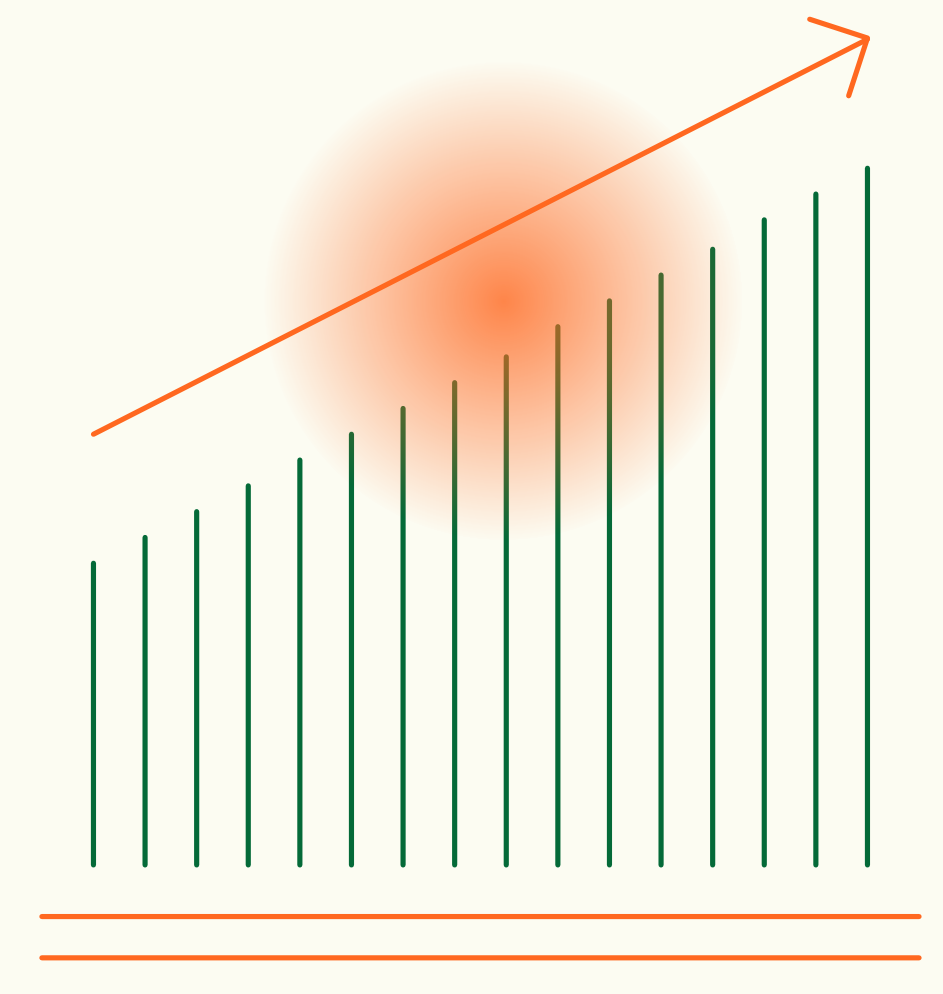
Furthermore, the country's **startup ecosystem** has evolved considerably over the past decade. According to Forbes India, the country had over 127,000 startups and 110 unicorns in September 2024, forming an ecosystem that attracted over \$150 billion in investments between 2014 and 2024. The **Startup India** programme was launched in 2016 to increase the country's entrepreneurship and innovation capacity by creating a favourable

environment for startups through simpler regulations, tax incentives and access to funding. The programme also focuses on international collaboration, especially through Startup Bridges, which are agreements with various countries to foster cooperation and joint project development. There are currently agreements in place with twenty countries, including Portugal, Italy and Sweden, although Spain has yet to reach one.

One of the projects that has most benefited India's infrastructure development is the **National Infrastructure Pipeline** (2020-2025), which has a budget of \$1.4 billion and seeks to improve road, rail and urban development infrastructure. As for funding, the budget is made up of 39% central government funds, 40% from the federal states and 21% from the private sector.

The country has also made significant efforts in the field of digitalisation, with projects such as **India Stack**, which seeks to establish a single software platform for the entire population. The project includes a number of services, such as digital identification, payments and data governance based on the Aadhar architecture, which collects personal data and biometric information from 95% of the country's population. Other initiatives, such as **Digital India**, also promote digitalisation and technological inclusion across the country.

“It is one of the world's fastest-growing economies. The World Bank projects growth figures of over 6.3% in 2026, and the country has been ranked the world's fifth largest economy since 2021. With a GDP of \$5 trillion, higher than Japan and Germany, it is poised to become the third largest global economy in the next few years.”



Finally, the bioeconomy has also experienced trailblazing growth, going from being worth \$10 billion in 2014 to \$165.7 billion in 2024. It aims to reach \$300 billion by 2030 and already accounts for 4.25% of the country's GDP. Driven by innovation, sustainability and inclusion, India seeks to position itself as one of the world's leading bioproduction centres through initiatives such as BioE3 and the National Biopharma Mission, as well as by boosting bioagriculture and bioenergy. The Department of Biotechnology, acting through its Global Innovations Directorate, is spearheading international cooperation efforts with twenty-one active bilateral agreements. Its collaboration with the EU in the Horizon Europe programme is particularly worth mentioning in this regard. The Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC), a public agency founded in 2012 to foster entrepreneurship in the biotech industry by establishing funding, infrastructure and mentoring programmes and a network of 95 bioincubators, has supported the growth of over 8,500 startups in the industry. The Indian bioeconomy is divided into four segments – BioIndustry (48.1%), BioPharma (35.65%), BioAgri (8.24%) and BioServices (8.02%) – and is one of the main production sectors in the Make in India strategy.

3.3 Human capital

India has positioned itself as one of the main sources of **talent worldwide**. With an average age of 28.8, its population is notably younger than those of most developed countries. Against this backdrop, many Indian citizens have gone abroad in search of opportunities, leading to one of the largest diasporas in the world.

Indian professionals demonstrate exceptional skills in sectors related to technology, engineering

and healthcare. According to a report by the Center for Security and Emerging Technology, 34% of India's graduates specialise in STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), with around two million of them graduating in these fields every year.

The 2022 Science and Engineering Indicators report drawn up by the US National Science Foundation (NSF) ranked India the third largest producer of knowledge in these areas in 2020. Furthermore, the country produces 16% of the world's artificial intelligence and Big Data talent and boasts the highest number of medical schools in the world.

A growing number of these professionals are moving to Europe, attracted by its job prospects and standard of living. In 2022, nearly 25% (19,896) of the 81,851 Blue Cards applied for by non-EU professionals were granted to Indian applicants.

3.4 Cultural appeal

India has significant **soft power** capabilities expressed through practices such as yoga (in 2014 the United Nations designated 21 June International Day of Yoga), the country's spiritual traditions and cuisine, the success of Bollywood films, its diverse regional cultures and the democratic model it presents for developing countries. It is also the country with the sixth-highest number of UNESCO Heritage of Humanity sites, proof of its cultural significance and historical legacy.

The **Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)** plays a key role in the promotion of Indian culture abroad.

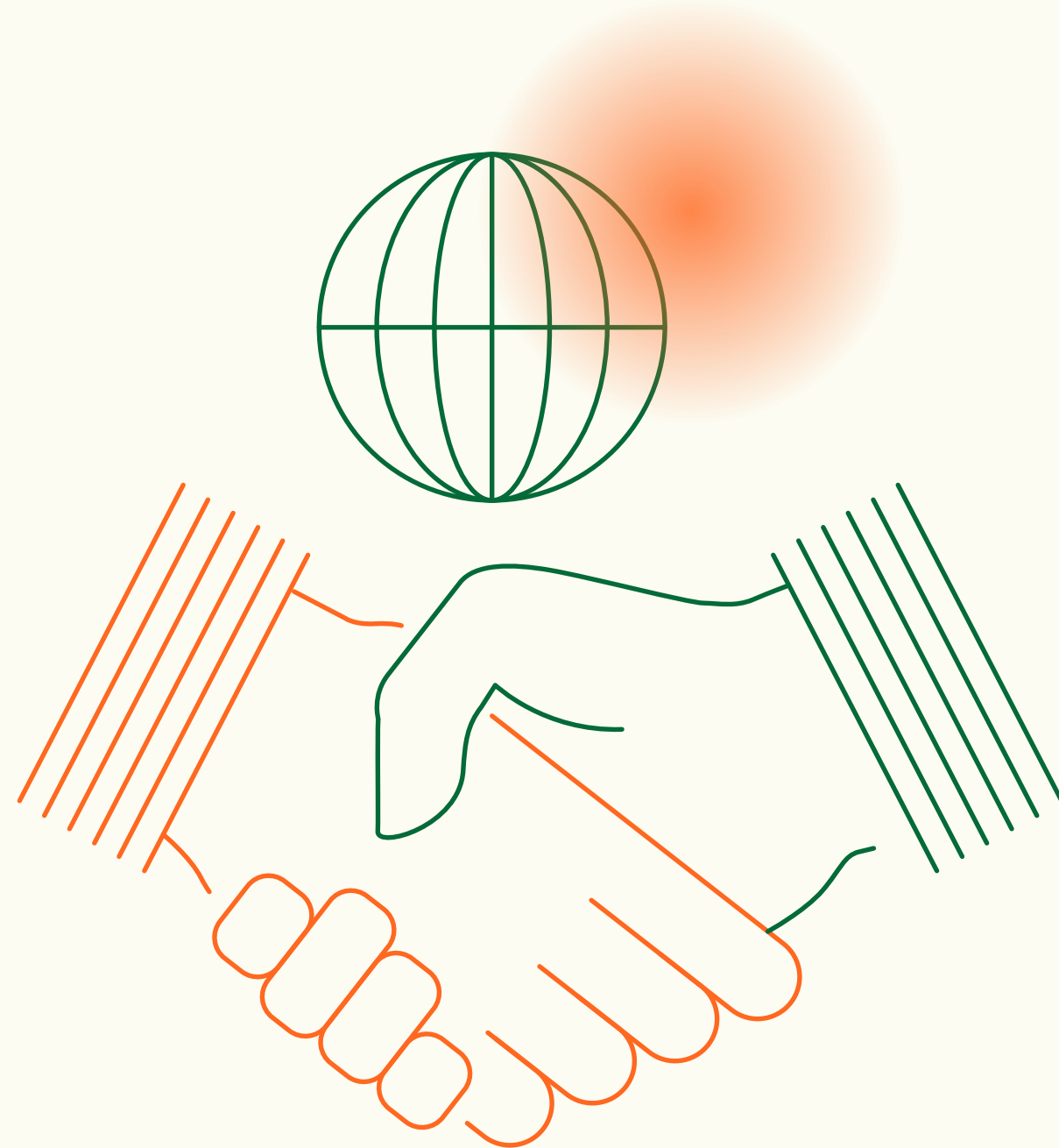


THE EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK FOR RELATIONS WITH INDIA

04



Relations between India and the European Union (EU) are founded on shared values and principles such as democracy, the rule of law, multilateralism and respect for a rules-based international order. This partnership, which dates back to the 1960s, when **India was among the first countries to establish ties with the European Economic Community**, has evolved into a strategic alliance that benefits both parties.



The two global powers **share many values** and **face common challenges**, and they cooperate in many areas, including trade, investment, climate change, science and technology, digital transformation, connectivity and agriculture. In the current geopolitical climate, the EU **places increasing value on its relationship with India**, acknowledging its role as a key strategic partner for a stronger international order and the promotion of sustainable, balanced development.

In view of this, **the EU and India decided to elevate their partnership to a new level** by releasing a joint communication (in October 2025) on the new EU-India strategic agenda to deepen cooperation in priority areas, broaden cooperation in emerging sectors and improve coordination mechanisms. The new strategic agenda proposed revolves around the pillars of **prosperity and sustainability, technology and innovation, security and defence, and connectivity and global issues**, with **horizontal enablers** to boost skills mobility, mutual understanding and the institutional architecture underpinning this partnership.

The main milestones in EU-India relations are:

- **1962: Establishment of diplomatic relations between the European Economic Community and India**
- **1993: EU-India Joint Political Statement**
This helped expand bilateral relations into other areas beyond trade and economic cooperation through annual meetings of ministers and greater political dialogue.
- **1994: EU-India Cooperation Agreement**
This established the legal framework for bilateral relations and boosted political and economic cooperation.

- **2004: Strategic Partnership** based on shared values and a commitment to multilateralism and a rule-based trading system.
- **2007: Start of negotiations for a free trade agreement**, although these were interrupted in 2013.
- **2017: Joint Declaration on a Partnership for Smart and Sustainable Urbanisation.**
This partnership fostered collaboration between cities and regions in key areas such as water supply, waste management, climate action, transport and housing.
- **2018: EU Strategy on India.**
- **2020: EU-India Roadmap to 2025**, which further strengthened its strategic partnership, particularly in relation to smart and sustainable urbanisation.
- **2020: EU-India Connectivity Partnership**, which focused on cooperation in sectors such as energy, transport, digitalisation and innovation, underscoring the significance of India's role as a geopolitical partner of the EU.
- **2021: First meeting of leaders** between India and the European Union.
It was attended by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the leaders of the EU's 27 member states.
- **2021: Resumption of negotiations for a free trade agreement:** These were the negotiations that had started in 2007 but been interrupted in 2013. There have been seven rounds of talks in this latest stage, most recently in February 2024. Talks on an investment protection agreement also started at this time.
- **2022: 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the European Union and India.**

- 2023: First EU-India **Trade and Technology Council**
The aim was to increase bilateral trade, which reached a record figure of €120 billion in 2022. The Council focused on increasing the strategic commitment in trade and technology matters, thus strengthening the relationship between the parties.
- 2024: **Trade agreement with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA)**, which is made up of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. This agreement seeks to foster more trade and investment between the EFTA member states and India and is a reflection of the latter country’s increasing openness to foreign trade and investment.

The future free trade agreement between the EU and India is becoming a key factor in the consolidation of their bilateral relations. The talks, which could wrap up as soon as in late 2025, have been driven by the current international economic landscape of uncertainty and geopolitical tensions, all of which has heightened the parties’ wish to build closer ties and establish a stronger trade cooperation framework.

EU programmes play a significant role in bilateral relations with India. The **International Urban and Regional Cooperation (IURC) Asia and Australasia** programme, which entered a new phase in early 2025, is particularly worth noting in this regard. Its aim is to advance urban diplomacy as a way to foster development and decentralised cooperation between cities and regions by pairing cities and identifying shared challenges within the framework of Europe’s foreign strategy. Specifically regarding India, in the previous edition of the project, which was carried out between 2021 and 2024, fourteen Indian cities were paired with eleven European counterparts. Notable pairings in Spain include

Albacete-Gangtok for collaboration in solid waste management and Murcia-Solapur in the field of wastewater treatment and the use of technology to detect water leaks.

In line with the EU’s international commitments, such as the EU Indo-Pacific Strategy, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, the new phase of the project will focus on innovation and take into account the unique features of urban areas to make tangible changes. It will be implemented in 2025 and will be carried out over 36 months with the participation of at least four Indian cities.

To date, this new phase has included the start of the **thematic grouping** stage, in which participating cities and regions go from bilateral pairings to multinational thematic cooperation. Weekly online meetings focusing on specific urban and regional issues are being held from September to early November and will culminate in a global thematic networking event in Barcelona during the Smart City Expo World Congress 2025. The cooperation is organised into six urban clusters (Urban Innovation, Climate Adaptation, Urban Regeneration and Social Cohesion, the Circular Economy, Strategic Sectors, and Mobility and Transport) and four regional clusters (Industrial Modernisation, the Energy Transition, Agri-food and the Blue Economy). This makes it possible to share knowledge and launch **joint pilot projects** with scalable models and measurable results to boost practical innovation between Europe and the Indo-Pacific region.

2.1 Collaboration between indian and european cities

Few European cities are twinned with Indian cities. In the EU, most of them are located in Germany, Denmark or Belgium.

2.2 Spanish framework

Diplomatic relations between Spain and India, initially focused on official visits, were first established in 1956 with the opening of the Spanish embassy in New Delhi. The first bilateral trade and economic cooperation agreement was signed in 1972. A total of eleven treaties, 31 MoUs and two bilateral declarations have been signed since then.

COLLABORATION BETWEEN INDIAN AND EUROPEAN CITIES

COUNTRY	CITIES	AREAS OF COLLABORATION	TYPE OF AGREEMENT
Germany	Stuttgart – Mumbai	The economy, academia, culture, urban planning, sustainability	Twinning, Federal Agreement (2015)
	Coimbatore – Esslingen	Health, education	Twinning (2016)
	Bremen – Pune	Education, culture, health, water treatment	MoU (1998, 2003)
Denmark	Aarhus – Udaipur	Water management and use	MoU (2016)
	Aalborg – Tumakuru	Smart and sustainable cities	Agreement (2019)
	General	Green Strategic Partnership, Smart Cities Mission	Joint Action Plan (2021-2026)
Belgium	Leuven – New Delhi	Culture, education, innovation, academia-industry-government alliances	MoU (2017)
Spain	Valladolid – Ahmedabad	Smart cities, urban planning, university exchanges, culture, heritage	Twinning (2017), Friendship Agreement (2008)
United Kingdom	Birmingham – Pune	Food, nutrition, malnutrition	MoU (2016), University Agreements (2024)

The relationship between the two countries is managed by three joint committees that deal with matters relating to the economy, defence and technology. They also hold regular discussions in the fields of politics, security and tourism.

In terms of diplomacy, Spain has an embassy in Delhi, which includes a consular section, and a Consulate General in Mumbai. In addition, it has the following assets: two Economic and Commercial Offices in Delhi and Mumbai; a Ministry of the Interior; a Defence Attaché Office; a Ministry of Education; and a Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, all of them in Delhi. It also has a Tourist Office in Mumbai. There is also a branch of the Cervantes Institute and a Centre for the Development of Industrial Technology (CDTI) office in the capital.

In addition, Spain has honorary consulates in Bangalore, Chennai, Kathmandu, Colombo and Male (Maldives), all of them under the aegis of its embassy in India.

Inside India, Spain, Germany, France and the United Kingdom are affiliated with the Europe West Division of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs.

India's institutional presence in Spain, in turn, includes its embassy in Madrid, an honorary consulate in Tenerife and a consulate general in Barcelona since 2024.

In addition to these formal structures, bilateral relations are enhanced by initiatives such as the Spain-India Forum (organised by the Consejo España-India Foundation) and the India-Spain CEOs Forum.

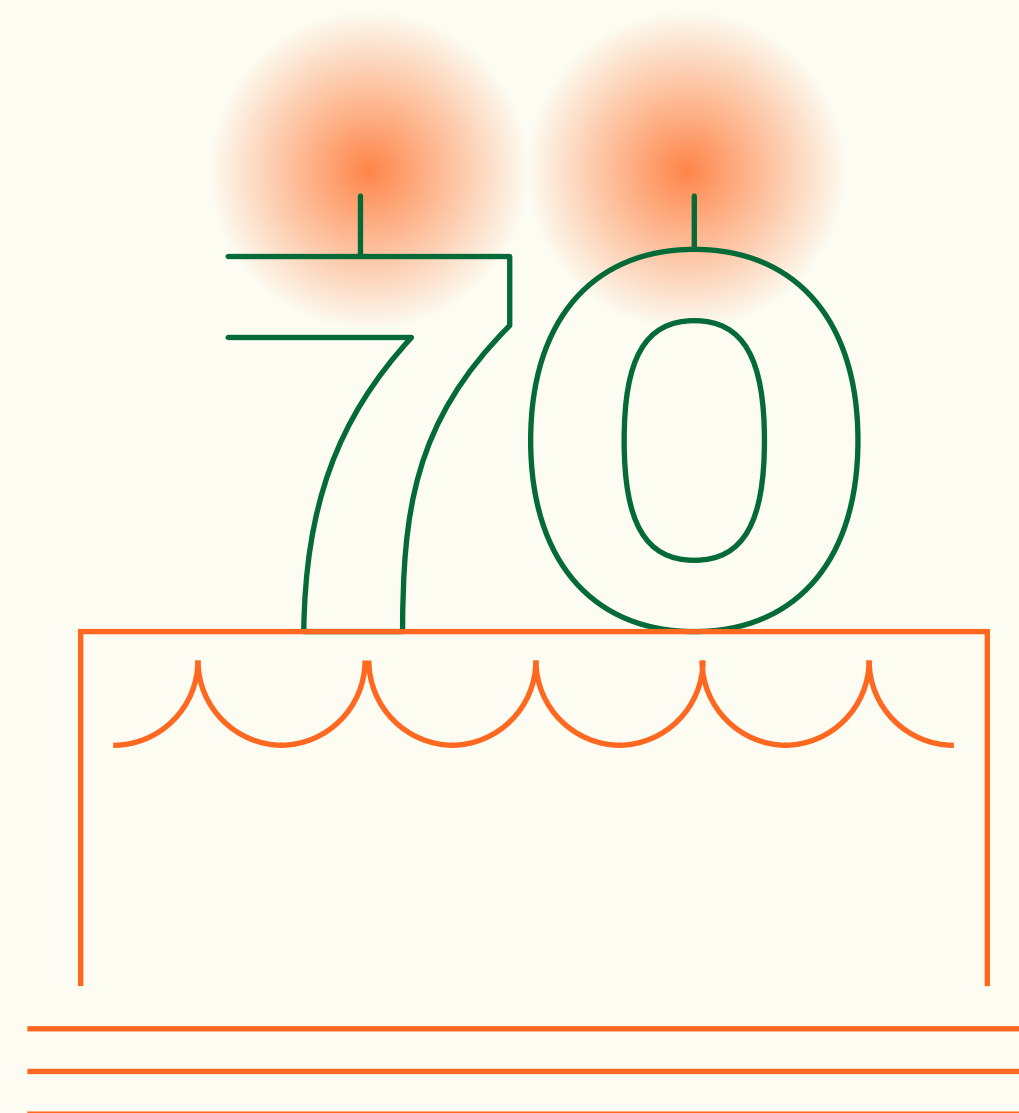
Celebrations to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the start of diplomatic relations

between Spain and India will be held in 2026. In connection with this, during the official visit to India of Pedro Sánchez, Prime Minister of the Spanish Government, in October 2024, both countries agreed to designate that year as the Spain-India 'Dual Year', with a particular emphasis on culture, tourism and artificial intelligence.

A joint declaration providing a roadmap for enhanced bilateral relations in the next few years was signed on this visit to replace the one signed in 2017. Significant agreements on customs cooperation and the facilitation of investments, as well as MoUs on railways and culture, were also signed. Barcelona City Council is fully aligned with the strategic agreements reached between Spain and India, in line with Spain's and Europe's priorities in this area.

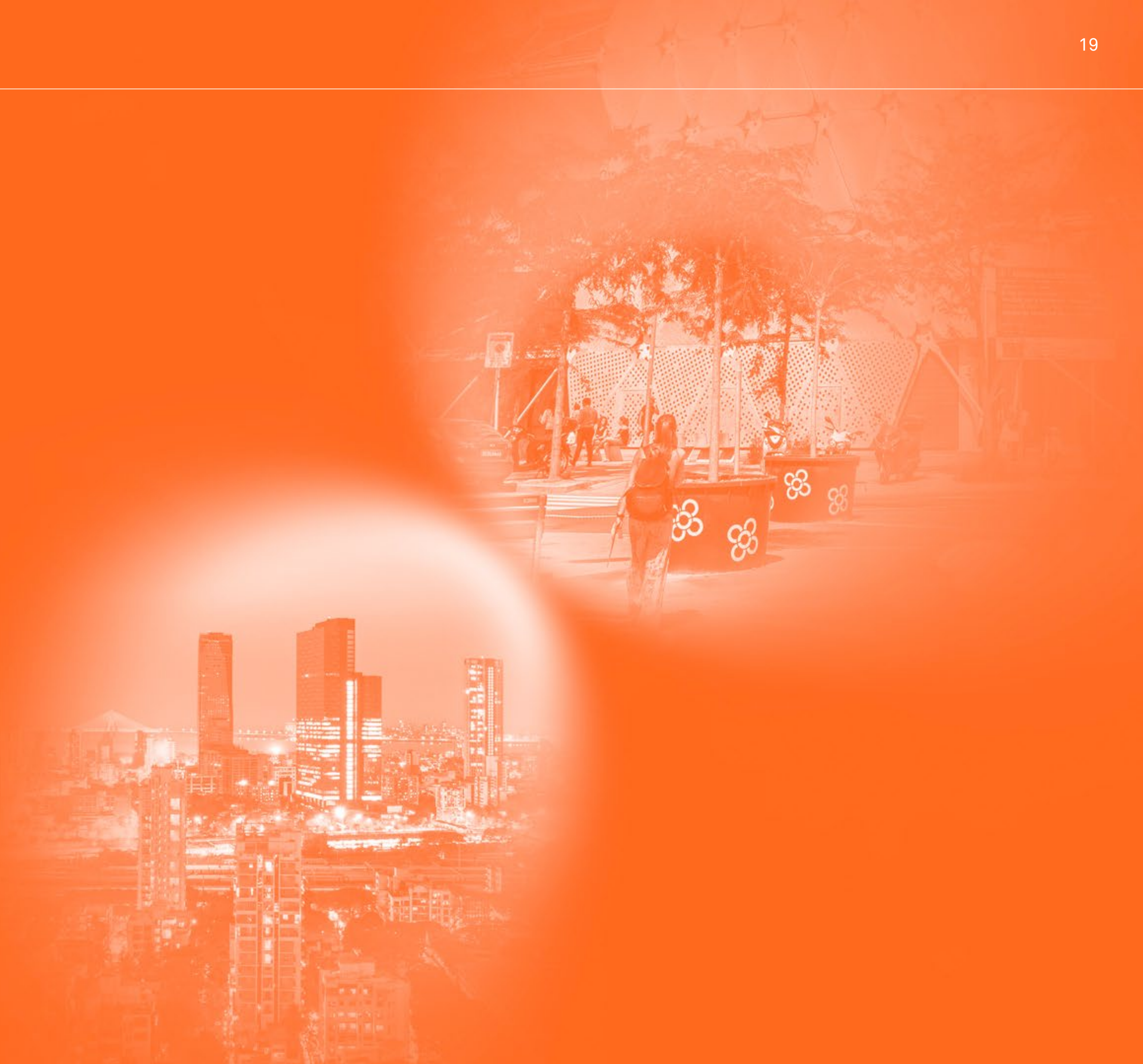
The official visit to Spain paid by the Indian Minister of External Affairs, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, in January 2025 emphasised the momentum and robustness of the relationship between the two countries.

“Celebrations to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the start of diplomatic relations between Spain and India will be held in 2026.”

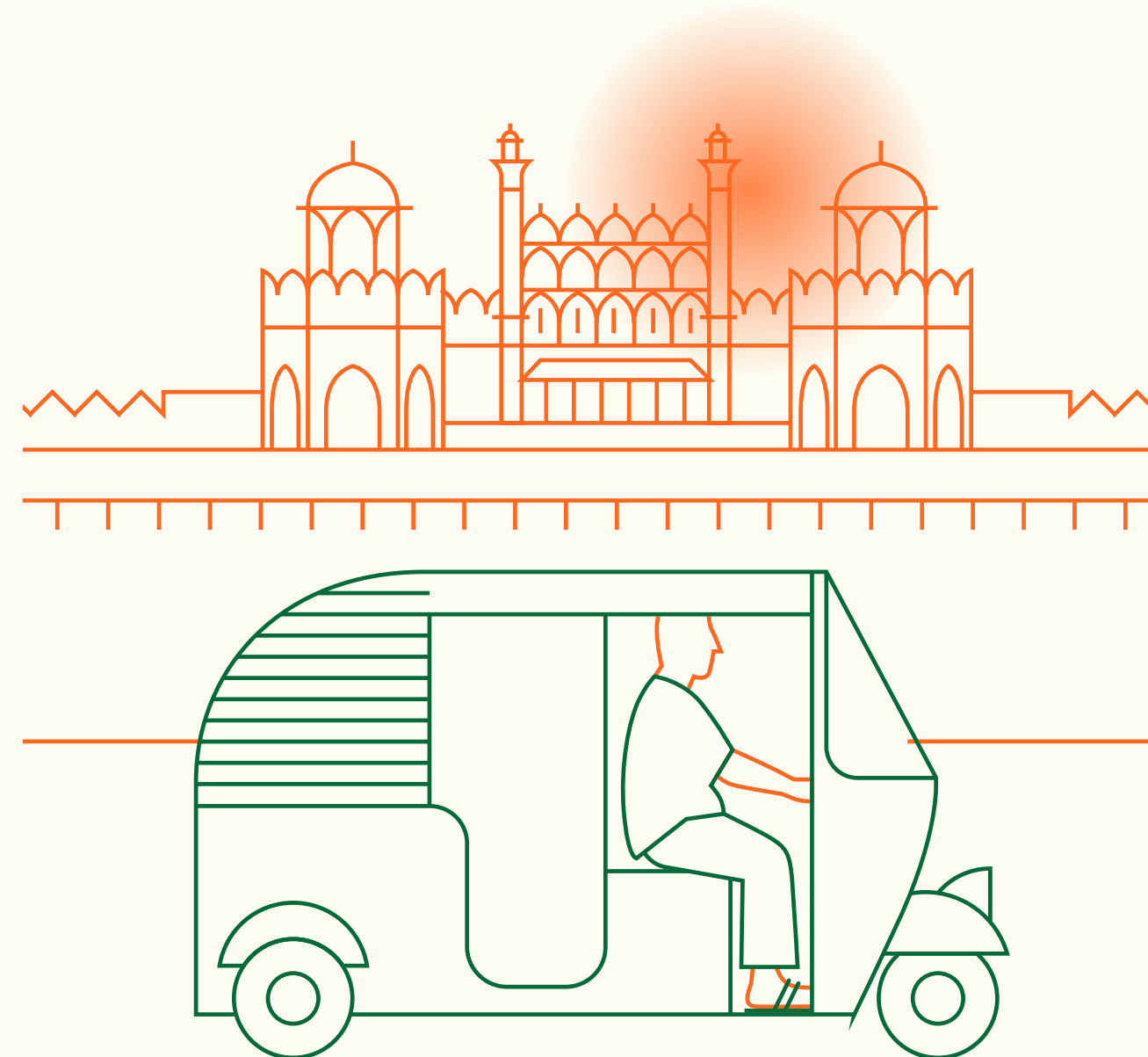


THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION OF INDIAN CITIES

05



India's federal structure is an **intricate network of relationships** involving both the country's central government and its federal states, cities and other sub-national bodies. While **foreign policy falls primarily within the central government's remit**, in recent decades sub-national entities have shown a growing interest in building direct connections with international parties. From India's standpoint, rather than being a natural extension of traditional diplomacy, this **paradiplomacy primarily stems from an economic need**.



It is important to acknowledge that the Indian federal system is **heavily centralised**. Under the formal division of powers, the central government wields significant power, prompting India to be labelled a 'quasi-federal' system.

Despite this, **Indian cities exert significant influence on the international arena** by participating in cross-border economic activities and attracting foreign direct investment (FDI), as well as through their ethnic, cultural and linguistic connections with other countries. However, **direct cooperation with cities or other sub-national bodies is not always straightforward**.

This is why it is crucial to understand the **institutional structure and governance mechanisms** and the **forms of international cooperation** already developed by these entities. It should also be noted that, in addition to cities, **a range of sub-national stakeholders** (such as non-governmental organisations and research centres and both governmental and independent think tanks) **also exert significant influence** and contribute to forging international ties.

5.1 Federal system

India has two types of top-tier administrative entities: the federal states and the union territories.

The country is made up of **28 federal states and eight union territories**, including the National Capital Territory of Delhi.

Some key factors in the country's state-based organisation have an impact on local government. Each **federal state** has its own directly elected

government headed by a **Chief Minister**. The central government is represented in each state by a governor appointed by the President of India to serve as the constitutional head of state. States can enact laws and decide on the roles of local governments, which allows them to set their own criteria for the classification of urban and rural areas, leading to variations in administrative structures and practices.

The **union territories** are managed directly by the central government, often through an administrator known as the **lieutenant governor**. Some of these territories, such as Delhi, Jammu and Kashmir, as well as Puducherry, have their own legislative assemblies and elected governments, which gives them greater autonomy.

It should also be noted that India is a vast federal country with vast cultural and economic diversity, which significantly affects its local governance systems. As a result of all this, Indian cities have very different government structures from those of European cities.

5.2 Governance of Indian cities and their powers in the international arena

Local governance in India is divided into two main categories, rural and urban, each with different institutions and functions.

- The **panchayati raj**, responsible for rural matters, are regulated by the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution.
- **Urban local bodies**, responsible for urban areas, are regulated by the 74th Amendment.

Both amendments were passed in 1992 to enhance local governance and encourage the public to get involved in decision-making. This system seeks to empower local governments to manage community affairs and bring the administration closer to the public.

5.2.1. URBAN LOCAL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

It is essential in this document to take a closer look at urban local governance structures. The 74th Amendment to the Indian Constitution establishes three types of urban entities:

- **Nagar panchayat:** These entities oversee towns with populations of 12,000 to 40,000 that are transitioning from rural to urban. They are appointed by the government of the state.
- **Municipalities (nagar palika):** These entities are in charge of cities of under one million inhabitants. They have a president, a vice-president and councillors elected by the people.
- **Municipal corporations (nagar nigam):** These entities govern cities with populations of over one million by managing both basic services and urban development projects.

The most prominent roles in these entities, with the responsibilities described below, are:

Mayor
Political president of a municipal corporation
Position: Political head of the municipal corporation

Appointment: Elected by the elected members of the municipal corporation (or elected directly in some states)

Length of term: 1-5 years (varies between states)

Powers:

- Primarily ceremonial and symbolic in most states
- Chairs corporation meetings
- Represents the city at official events

Authority: Limited executive powers; unless empowered by state laws, this is typically a symbolic role

Municipal commissioner

Position: Administrative head of the municipal corporation

Appointment: Appointed by the government of the state

Length of term: At the discretion of the government of the state

Powers:

- Full executive authority over the municipal government
- Carries out the elected council’s decisions
- Oversees departments (e.g., sanitation, water supply and roads)
- Draws up budgets, enforces laws and manages personnel

Authority: Full executive powers

Councillors

Elected representatives of different districts

Large cities, such as **Delhi**, **Mumbai** and **Bangalore**, also have **Metropolitan Region Development Authorities** headed by high-ranking officials that

work hand-in-hand with the government of the state to advance orderly urban development. There are also **Urban Development Authorities**, which manage larger areas, and **Municipal Development Authorities**, which focus on specific municipalities.

Very large cities, such as the **Mumbai** Metropolitan Region, are segmented into several local governments. **Mumbai** is made up of nine corporations and nine municipal councils, as well as the **Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority**, which coordinates the urban development of the vast metropolitan area. This framework leads to more effective governance tailored to the city’s needs.

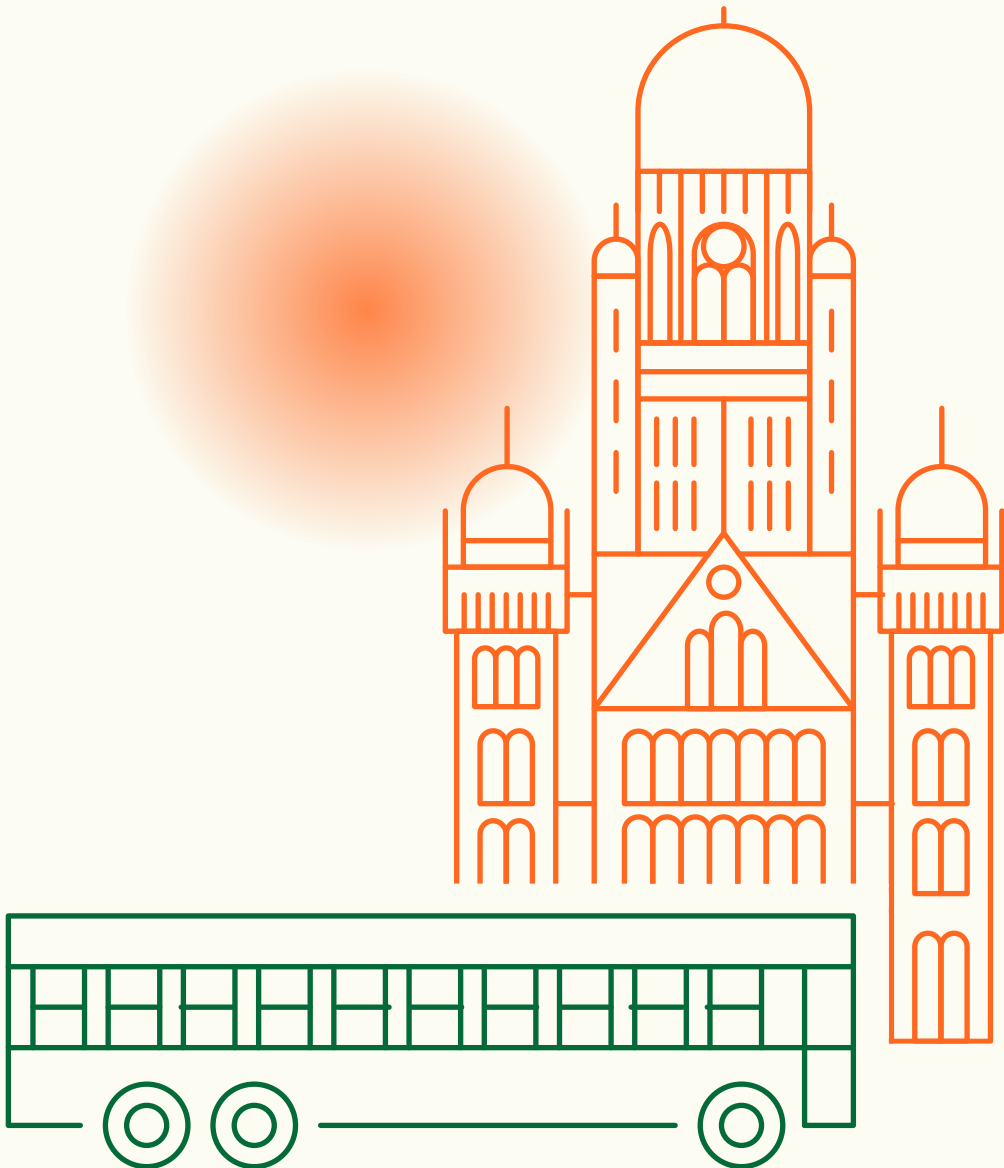
5.2.2. POWERS IN THE FIELD OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The **municipal corporations’** powers in the field of international relations vary between states, which in turn leads to differences between cities. Major cities, such as **Calcutta**, **Chennai**, **Mumbai** and **Bangalore**, are better equipped to engage with international organisations.

Not all municipal corporations have international relations departments. As a result, their involvement in this field is restricted or supported by the central and state governments, which undertake some of the management of foreign relations at the sub-national level.

Despite this, these entities are gaining an increasingly significant role in the **internationalisation** of Indian cities, although they are still behind their European counterparts in this respect. Under the Modi administration, internationalisation efforts, particularly those seeking to attract foreign investment and trade, have become more formalised in recent years.

“Very large cities, such as the Mumbai Metropolitan Region, are segmented into several local governments. (...) This framework leads to more effective governance tailored to the city’s needs.”





5.3 Key institutions in the fields of urban management and city development in India

The national institutions that work in collaboration with Indian cities are fundamental in understanding the inner workings of the country, as they play a key role in shaping and carrying out public policies at both local and municipal levels.

Their approach to areas such as urban governance and sustainable development not only mirrors the government's priorities but also influences cities' socioeconomic development. These institutions operate in both government and non-government spheres.

GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

The **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs** designs and implements policies on housing, urban development and infrastructure. It promotes sustainable cities and manages key initiatives, such as the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana affordable housing programme, the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation and the Smart Cities Mission. It works together with state and municipal governments and other stakeholders to carry out urban policies at the national level.

The **National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA)** is a leading urban think tank backed by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs that specialises in research and capacity-building in urban development and management. Its primary aim is to link research with practical applications in urban planning matters, and it cooperates with 23 international organisations (including think tanks,

UN programmes and universities) to achieve its goals.

The **All India Institute of Local Self-Government (AIILSG)** seeks to enhance local governance in the country through skills acquisition, research and advice on urban management matters, working in close collaboration with the central government. It works with local governments and communities to improve urban management by training officials and promoting best practices. It also holds seminars and conferences to discuss and spread ideas on urban matters.

The **Association of Municipalities and Development Authorities (AMDA)** provides a platform for the exchange of ideas on urban planning and development among local development authorities throughout the country. The association thus addresses the interaction between the state, municipal bodies and these authorities.

NON-GOVERNMENT ENTITIES

There are also several local non-governmental organisations that may be of interest to Barcelona City Council. A few of them are listed below, although there are many others.

In Mumbai, **Mumbai First** works on improving the economic and social infrastructure, with a particular focus on quality of life in cities and sustainability. Against this backdrop, in 2017 it spearheaded the project 'Preparation for an EU-India Sustainable Urbanisation Partnership' together with ACCIONA Ingeniería. This included technical visits from Indian representatives to European cities such as Barcelona to learn about innovations in smart cities. The **Urban Design Research Institute (UDRI)**, in turn, focuses on inclusion and research in areas such as

housing and transport and has previously worked in association with the Institute for Advanced Architecture of Catalonia.

In Hyderabad, the **Hyderabad Urban Lab (HUL)** is a non-profit organisation that combines research and action. It carries them out through three programmes: the HUL School to develop new urban theories, the Khidki Collective to reflect on places and stories, and the Urban Observatory to address cities' pressing needs through data and interventions.

In Bangalore, the **Bangalore Political Action Committee (B.PAC)** is a non-profit institution that works to improve urban infrastructure, governance and quality of life in the city, with a particular focus on good governance and sustainability practices. In the same city, **The Urban Vision** seeks to inspire excellence in urban planning through best practices in urban planning and design.

Also in Bangalore, the **Janaagraha Centre for Citizenship and Democracy** aims to improve the quality of life in city centres by developing infrastructure and services and encouraging citizen participation.

The Delhi-based **Observer Research Foundation (ORF)** is a leading think tank in the sphere of policy research and analysis across various fields, including foreign policy, the economy, the environment and urban planning in particular. It collaborates with international partners and excels in organising top-tier forums and discussions, such as the Raisina Dialogue, which brings together world leaders in the fields of politics, business, civil society and the media every year. Also in Delhi, the **Centre for Urban and Regional Excellence (CURE)** works with local communities from over fifteen cities to drive inclusive urban development.

5.4 City networks and international alliances for sustainable urban development

Indian cities' involvement in various global networks and alliances is part of their international strategy to tackle the challenges of climate change and promote sustainable urban development. However, to date their presence in the large international associations of cities has been limited and insufficiently representative, suggesting that there is substantial potential for growth in this area.

The **C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group**, known as C40, is a global network of almost 100 cities working together to fight climate change and promote sustainable urban development. The Indian cities in this group are Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore and Ahmedabad, and they work on areas such as water security and air quality. Even though it is not a member of the group, in 2022 Pune received recognition for its use of electric buses to improve air quality.

ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability works with over 2,500 local governments across 125 countries to promote environmental, economic and social sustainability. Its Indian members, 31 municipal corporations and the National Capital Territory of Delhi, work together on matters such as eco-logistics, eco-mobility, the recording of carbon emissions and solid waste management.

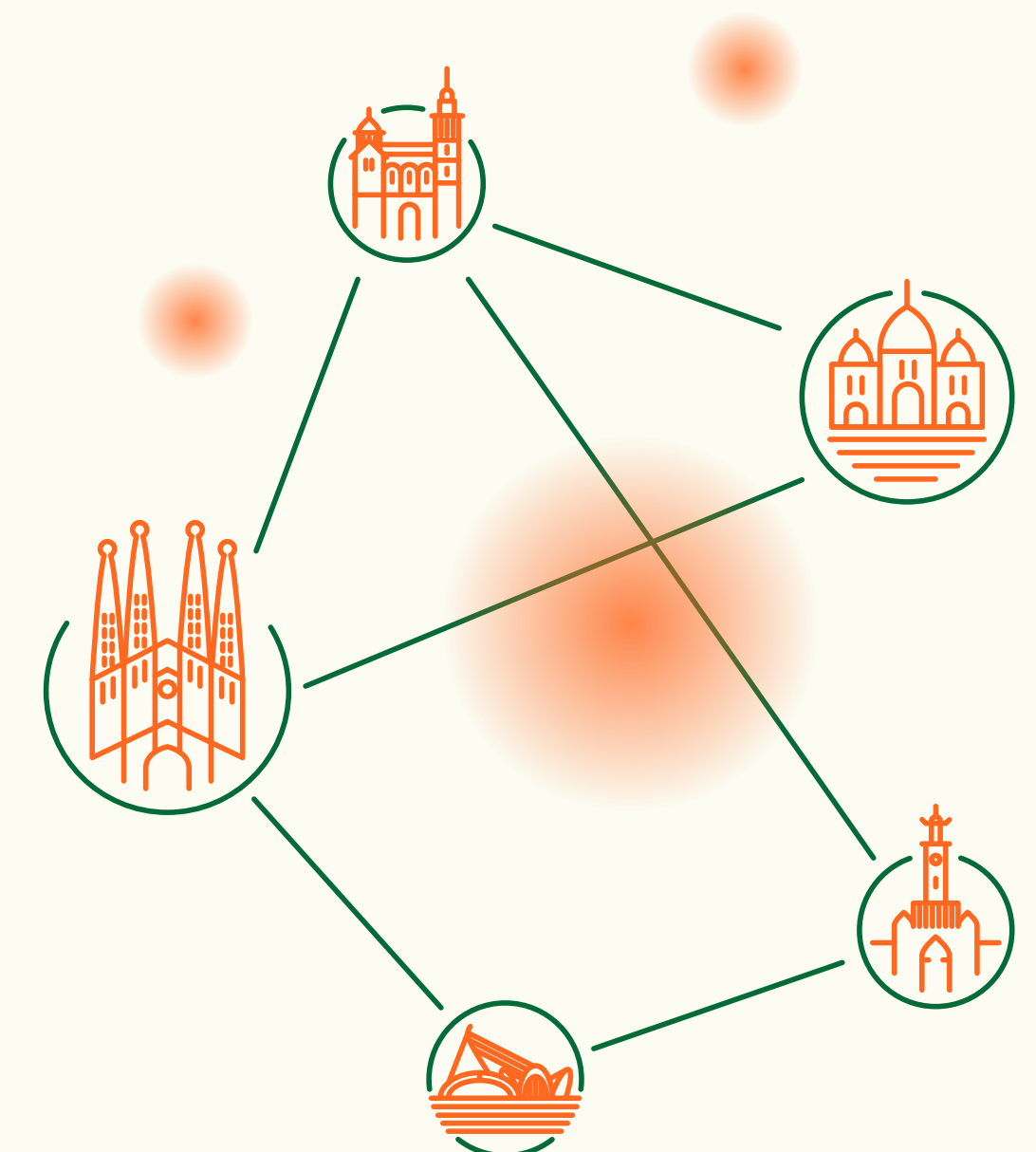
The **Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy**, in turn, is the world's largest alliance of cities committed to sustainable energy and the fight against climate change. Through it, cities pledge to reduce emissions, increase climate

resilience and ensure fair access to sustainable energy. Its members include 31 Indian cities.

UCLG (United Cities and Local Governments) supports local and municipal governments, promotes their international presence and advances the Sustainable Development Goals. Its decentralised structure is organised by region, with the Global Secretariat office located in Barcelona. In India, UCLG operates through the UCLG ASPAC region, which carries out initiatives in the Asia-Pacific region. From 2000 to 2004, UCLG undertook a significant campaign in India in collaboration with the World Bank. It also engages in technical collaboration at the municipal level, coordinated through the All India Institute of Local Self-Government.

The **Resilient Cities Network** assists cities in preparing for and adapting to the challenges of climate change by developing resilience strategies. Each city has a Chief Resilience Officer tasked with overseeing this strategy. Barcelona and the Indian cities of Pune, Surat and Chennai are some of its members.

Finally, the Barcelona-based **Metropolis** city network seeks to increase cooperation among metropolitan cities to tackle urban issues and improve quality of life. In 2014, it held its World Congress in Hyderabad. Other cities in the network include Bhopal and New Delhi through the National Institute of Urban Affairs, although they have little active involvement.

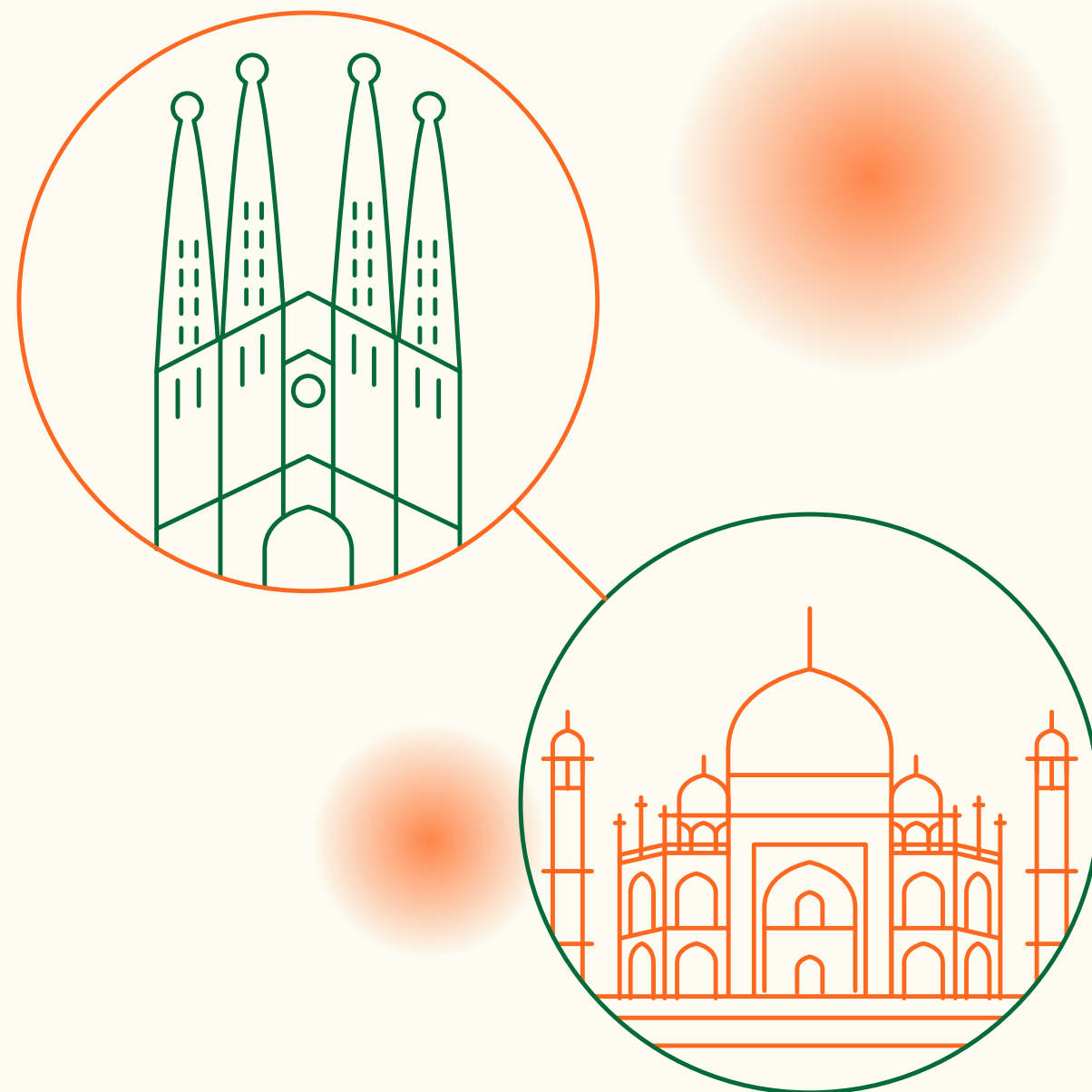


INDIA-BARCELONA RELATIONS

06



Relations between Barcelona and India have become established as a **broad and strategic relationship** based on **shared interests** in the fields of innovation and business and cultural cooperation. This dynamism became apparent with the opening of the new Consulate General of India in Barcelona in 2024. This milestone highlights **not only Barcelona's increasingly significant role in the field of diplomacy and business but also its wish to strengthen its ties to one of the world's most dynamic countries.**



Examples of bilateral exchange can be found in several areas, including **research and development cooperation, knowledge transfer, the promotion of culture and the implementation of urban sustainability initiatives.** Barcelona's **significant Indian community**, the fourth largest of the city's Asian communities, plays an active role in the city's business, cultural and social spheres, strengthening these ties. The combination of these dimensions (institutional, economic, technological and community) makes Barcelona a **key player in India's international operations** and **opens up strategic opportunities** for the city in an ever more interconnected world.

6.1 Starting point

6.1.1. INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS

At the **institutional level**, institutional missions have proven effective in opening up opportunities in the country. Barcelona's institutional relations with Indian cities are not starting from scratch, although they have been limited in the past due to difficulties identifying suitable counterparts and developing specific measures.

Barcelona-India relations have been fostered over time through a series of official visits and missions.

- In 2005, the then-mayor of Barcelona, Joan Clos, led the **'Business Bridge' to India** mission, which included visits to strategic cities such as Delhi, Bangalore and Mumbai.
- This was followed in 2008 by the **reverse mission, 'Barcelona Bridging Opportunities to India'**, which sought to attract Indian technology companies.

- In 2013, the **President of the Generalitat, Artur Mas, went to India on an official visit** to promote cooperation and investment.
- In 2014, **mayor Xavier Trias presented Barcelona's metropolitan model at the 11th Metropolis World Congress** in Hyderabad.
- In 2020, Barcelona welcomed the **Minister of Urban Administration of Chhattisgarh** to discuss urban cooperation matters.
- More recently, in 2022, **a visit was made to Bangalore to discuss the digital and technology sectors**, attesting to both parties' wish to increase their strategic collaboration, especially in the fields of innovation, technology and sustainable urban development.

In terms of agreements, the Delhi Development Authority and Barcelona City Council signed a Letter of Intent in 2010. A specific agreement was also reached with the public urban development agency Barcelona Regional for the renovation of historical areas in Delhi the same year, albeit with no tangible results.

Two organisations have been fundamental in the development of these relations: Casa Asia and the Consejo España-India Foundation.

- **Casa Asia**, a public diplomacy institution based in Barcelona, has worked tirelessly to strengthen bilateral ties through cultural, economic and social initiatives.

- The **Consejo España-India Foundation** has been instrumental in organising programmes:
 - The Indian Leaders programme, in which players from key sectors are invited to Spanish cities, often Barcelona, to learn about projects underway in them.
 - The Spain-India Forum, an important public diplomacy platform whose next edition is set to take place in Barcelona in 2025.
 - The Spain-India Report 2020, which sought to reinvigorate bilateral collaboration in areas such as trade, science, technology, tourism and culture.

The opening of the Consulate General of India in Barcelona in 2024 was a significant milestone, as it gave the country's honorary diplomatic office full consular status for the first time since 1968.

6.1.2 TRADE RELATIONS

In the field of trade relations, there are several institutions with a presence in India. **ACCIÓ** has a representative office in Mumbai whose operations cover India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

As for **maritime trade connections**, there are six direct routes between India and Barcelona, five container services with a 31-day transit time between Mundra and the Port of Barcelona and a fortnightly car service that can also accommodate containers.

In 2024, there was a total of 2.26 million tonnes of traffic between the Port of Barcelona and India (down 2% from the previous year). Of this, 57% was exports and imports, that is, trade between India and the Port of Barcelona, and the rest was transshipment traffic bound for other countries.

In 2024, container traffic with India was close to 100,000 TEU (up 2% compared to the previous year). Of the total, 56,830 TEU (also 57%) was exports and imports (not counting transshipments), and imports accounted for 57% within this segment, thus reflecting a trade deficit.

In 2023, container traffic for imports/exports was fairly balanced, while in 2024 there was an increase in imports from India.

In 2023, the Port of Barcelona undertook a mission to Mumbai to strengthen ties between business leaders from both countries and solidify relations between the two ports. This collaboration was formalised through a partnership setting out a framework for collaboration in areas such as port administration and decarbonisation. This initiative also supports Maritime India Vision 2030, an ambitious programme under which \$8.9 billion has been granted to 963 projects in twelve of the country's ports. By achieving a strategic position, the Port of Barcelona aims to forge a robust partnership with India to benefit from the many contracts arising from this vision.

As for the **transport sector**, there are currently no direct air routes between Barcelona and India, which could hinder the development of economic relations to some extent. However, this is both a challenge and a strategic opportunity to improve connectivity and facilitate trade and investment flows and travel between the two territories. **Fira de Barcelona**, in turn, has a representative in India operating from Pune. In addition to Indian exhibitors, events such as the Smart City Expo World Congress (SCEWC) have successfully attracted Indian ministers and other senior officials with high-level agendas in the city. The Smart Cities Expo India held in Jaipur in 2018 attracted 7,500 attendees and over 100 delegates from Indian

cities. Future editions in Delhi, Goa, Bangalore and Kerala are being considered, although discussions are still underway. Fira de Barcelona has also taken part in international exhibitions held in India, such as World Food India 2023 in New Delhi, which was organised by the Ministry of Food Processing Industries. In addition, third-party events held at the Fira, such as the Mobile World Congress and Integrated Systems Europe, bring large numbers of Indian professionals to the city every year.

In business, there are 80 subsidiaries of 64 Catalan companies operating in India, according to data provided by ACCIÓ. In turn, 67 subsidiaries of 48 Indian companies have operations in Catalonia. The main sectors of interest for Catalan companies in India mirror Barcelona's own interests: mobility, smart cities, life sciences, environmental technologies and sustainability, ICT, machinery and capital goods. Exports to India accounted for 0.6% of all exports from Catalonia, while imports from India accounted for 2% of all Catalan imports in 2024.

The forthcoming signing of the free trade agreement between the European Union and India presents a window of opportunity to increase trade relations between Catalonia and this Asian country. Reducing tariffs and regulatory barriers will improve market access and attract investment, providing Catalan companies with a more competitive and stable framework to increase their presence in strategic sectors.

6.1.3 TOURISM

With a growing interest in exploring the world, Indian tourists are increasing their footprint in the global tourism sector. According to the Indian Ministry of Tourism, over 28.2 million Indian nationals left their country in 2023, exceeding the pre-pandemic figure of 26.9 million in 2019.

According to the report *India Market Insights: Outbound & Inbound* drawn up by Mabrian in 2024, that year Spain saw a 3.8% increase in tourists from India and was one of the fastest-growing European destinations. In 2023, Indian tourists spent an average of €2,340, almost twice the general average in Spain (€1,277). That same year, total spending reached €584 million, higher than the pre-pandemic levels of 2019 (€394 million). The number of arrivals also set an all-time record at 249,883 visitors, higher than the 2018 figures. The relative weight of **MICE** (meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions) tourism is worth highlighting, as it accounted for 38% of all trips from India to Spain in 2022, according to data from FRONTUR. In 2024, Indian tourists in Spain spent an average of €2,608 per person and stayed an average of 7.3 nights, more than in 2019. A total of 229,745 Indian tourists were responsible for a total expenditure of €578.5 million.

According to data from the Catalan Tourist Board, in 2023 Catalonia was the autonomous region with the highest number of Indian tourists (114,626 visitors). Barcelona welcomed 43,497 tourists, making it the most visited city, a 155% increase since 2019. In the first quarter of the year alone, Catalonia welcomed 28,000 visitors from India. This success is largely due to **bleisure** (business + leisure) travel and **MICE** tourism, as well as to the wedding market.

Most visitors from India travelled between April and July, during school holidays, accounting for 51% of trips, although there was also an increase in off-season travel. Typical Indian tourists in Barcelona are interested in culture and history and prefer travelling independently. This has given rise to a growth in the **FIT** (Free Independent Tourist) sector compared to tourists from other Asian areas. Furthermore, Bollywood has had a significant influence on tourism. For example, the number of Indian tourists visiting Spain tripled in 2011, following the release of the film *You only Live Once*, which was partly filmed in Barcelona and the Costa Brava.

6.1.4 BARCELONA'S INDIAN COMMUNITY

The majority of Indian expatriates in Spain live in Barcelona, where they have established a community made up of several groups. In 2023, the Barcelona Metropolitan Area had 8,013 Indian residents, not including Spanish citizens of Indian or partially Indian descent. This accounts for 62% of Indian residents in Catalonia and 2% of all foreign residents in Barcelona.

As of 1 January 2025, there were 10,487 Indian citizens living in Barcelona, 43% of them in the districts of Ciutat Vella and Sants-Montjuïc.



Based on country of origin, 11,395 individuals – 68% male and 32% female – appear in the municipal register of residents.

The Indian community is thus the twelfth largest group in Barcelona and the third largest Asian community (behind the Pakistani and Chinese communities and slightly ahead of the Filipino community).

An increase in the number of **Indian professionals** in Spain and Catalonia has also been noted. A total of 4,345 work permits were granted to Indian professionals in Spain in 2023, almost 50% of them were in Catalonia, indicating a significant concentration of these professionals in this region compared to the rest of the country. Recent **improvements to the work visa application process** are likely to result in more professionals arriving from India, presenting an excellent opportunity to attract qualified talent from that country.

As regards the **preservation of Indian culture** abroad, the **Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)** plays a key role, particularly in Indian migrant communities. In Catalonia, **Catalunyaar** is an online information portal and a channel for the exchange of information between India and Catalonia that is actively involved in organising cultural events with the Indian community in this region. Important organisations in Barcelona include the **Indian Culture Centre (ICC)**, which focuses on the inclusion of Indian communities in Catalonia and Barcelona from the points of view of culture and education, the **Indali Foundation** and the **Nupura Centre of Performing Arts** which is both a dance studio and helps organise bilateral events between Spain and India. These organisations often design their events in collaboration with Barcelona City Council, the Generalitat, the Indian Embassy in Spain and Casa Asia.

There are also other smaller cultural associations, such as the Barcelona-based **Bengali Cultural Association in Spain**, the **Association of Malayalees in Barcelona** and the **Telugu Association Barcelona**, which hold their own events, often in collaboration with the ICC. The **Sikh community**, originally hailing from Punjab, meets at the gurdwara in Raval, the primary place of worship for around 500 regular followers. Its activities include a daily community kitchen (*langar*) and the observance of important festivals such as Vaisakhi and Nagar Kirtan.

One of the most noteworthy Indian festivals in Barcelona is the **International Day of Yoga**. Organisers of the event, which takes place in several Spanish cities, include not only independent dance and yoga studios but also the Indian Embassy, the India Centre for Cultural Relations, city councils and other local organisations. However, it should be noted that it has not been held with an institutional approach in Barcelona since 2022.

Another important festival is **Diwali**, the Festival of Lights, which is celebrated in the city with support from the same organisations and in collaboration with Casa Asia, and often involves lectures and concerts. The festivals of **Holi** and **Ugadi** are also becoming increasingly important on Barcelona's calendar of cultural events.

The date of 15 August should also be noted, as this is when India commemorates its independence, which was declared in 1947. In the past, celebrations have been held in collaboration with the ICC.

Furthermore, the Ratha Yatra or Chariot Festival, which features a procession and cultural displays, has been held in public spaces in Barcelona for years. Other significant Hindu festivals in the city include

Janmashtami (August) and Durga Puja (October). The Sikh celebrations organised by the Gurudwara Gurdarshan Sahib Ji temple community in Ciutat Vella also stand out for their traditional value.

Cricket holds a special place in Indian culture. In Barcelona, this global connection is evidenced by the recently created BarcelonaT20 league, which is organised by the Catalan Cricket Federation with support from the Sports Federation Union of Catalonia (UFEC) and the Catalan Sports Council. The league, which is held from August to September, features well-known players from the Indian subcontinent and is slated to make Barcelona a new cricket hub in Europe, enhancing cultural ties with this community.

The Criquet Jove youth league, which has been promoted by City Council since academic year 2009/10, has gradually grown and evolved into a city-wide initiative with support from the Barcelona Interculturalitat and Convivim Esportivament programmes. As a result of this growth, a proposal to create a cricket ground was made in the 2020 participatory budget. The proposal enjoyed widespread popular support and was finally approved with a budget of €1.6 million. The cricket ground is already in operation.

Barcelona's diverse Indian community provides a rich reflection of the country, which is similarly known for its diversity. However, the absence of a central body to coordinate efforts may hinder their ability to increase integration and promote their culture in the city.

6.1.5 ACADEMIC RELATIONS

The **number of Indian students** deciding to study abroad has grown exponentially in recent years, driven by fierce competition for university places in their country and the value placed on qualifications from foreign universities and educational institutions. According to estimates by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, in 2022 1,325,000 Indian students were studying overseas, including 1,383 in Spain.

The best **business schools in Barcelona**, which include IESE and ESADE, have many Indian students in their Master of Business Administration programmes, primarily due to their high positions in world rankings and fierce competition for places in management schools in their own country (especially the Indian Institute of Management). These institutions are funded by the central government and have sites in 21 cities across India.

Relations between Indian and Spanish universities, in turn, have experienced a significant boost following the signing of an MoU between the Conference of Rectors of Spanish Universities (CRUE) and the Association of Indian Universities (AIU) in June 2024. The association encompasses the top Indian universities (both public and private), as well as research centres. The agreement provides for teaching staff and student exchanges between Indian universities and Spanish universities affiliated with CRUE, as well as for the development of joint research programmes. The following universities in Barcelona are members of CRUE: Abad Oliba University, the Autonomous University of Barcelona, the International University of Catalonia, the Open University of Catalonia, the Polytechnic University of Catalonia, Pompeu Fabra University and Ramon Llull University.

Finally, the **Alianza 4 Universidades (A4U)** alliance, whose members include the Autonomous University of Barcelona and Pompeu Fabra University, has partnered with India after signing several collaboration agreements with universities in that country in the fields of engineering, biotechnology, IT, economics and humanities.

6.2 Challenges

The development of institutional relations with India is not without its challenges.

One of the main ones in terms of direct connections is the **lack of direct flights between Indian cities and Barcelona**, which limits the ability to take advantage of existing opportunities.



The **differences in local government practices** between Indian cities and Barcelona, which have already been mentioned above, also pose a challenge. In India, the existence of commissioners in charge of key decisions and the fundamental role of sub-national governments hinder direct interaction with cities. This **dependence on the central government** prevents cities from devising independent strategies that do not align with central government guidelines.

In addition, many Indian cities **lack the necessary capacity and resources to effectively engage with international networks**. There are several reasons for this, including a lack of interest in exchanging best practices and possible administrative barriers involving the payment of fees. Furthermore, the considerable scale and complexity of many of these cities leads to the perception that engaging in these networks may not be beneficial for them.

The difficulties establishing relations between Barcelona and Indian cities are due to both the **high complexity of projects with India**, which often make progress slow and involve frequent changes in interlocutors, and Barcelona's budget constraints. Previous initiatives, such as the 'Bridging Opportunities' programme, were unable to continue after their launch, which hampered cooperation. Furthermore, the Port of Barcelona and ACCIÓ lack the necessary resources and personnel to sustain an ongoing presence in India.

This is compounded by the fact that **India is a complex market that requires work in the medium term**. Catalan companies face challenges such as a lack of infrastructure, bureaucratic hurdles and frequent changes in government, which can hinder sustained collaboration and deter investors. Furthermore, investments in India are generally made after an extended period, projects can be

delayed due to interactions with government authorities and cultural differences and non-matching expectations, as well as the need to find reliable partners, can pose further barriers.

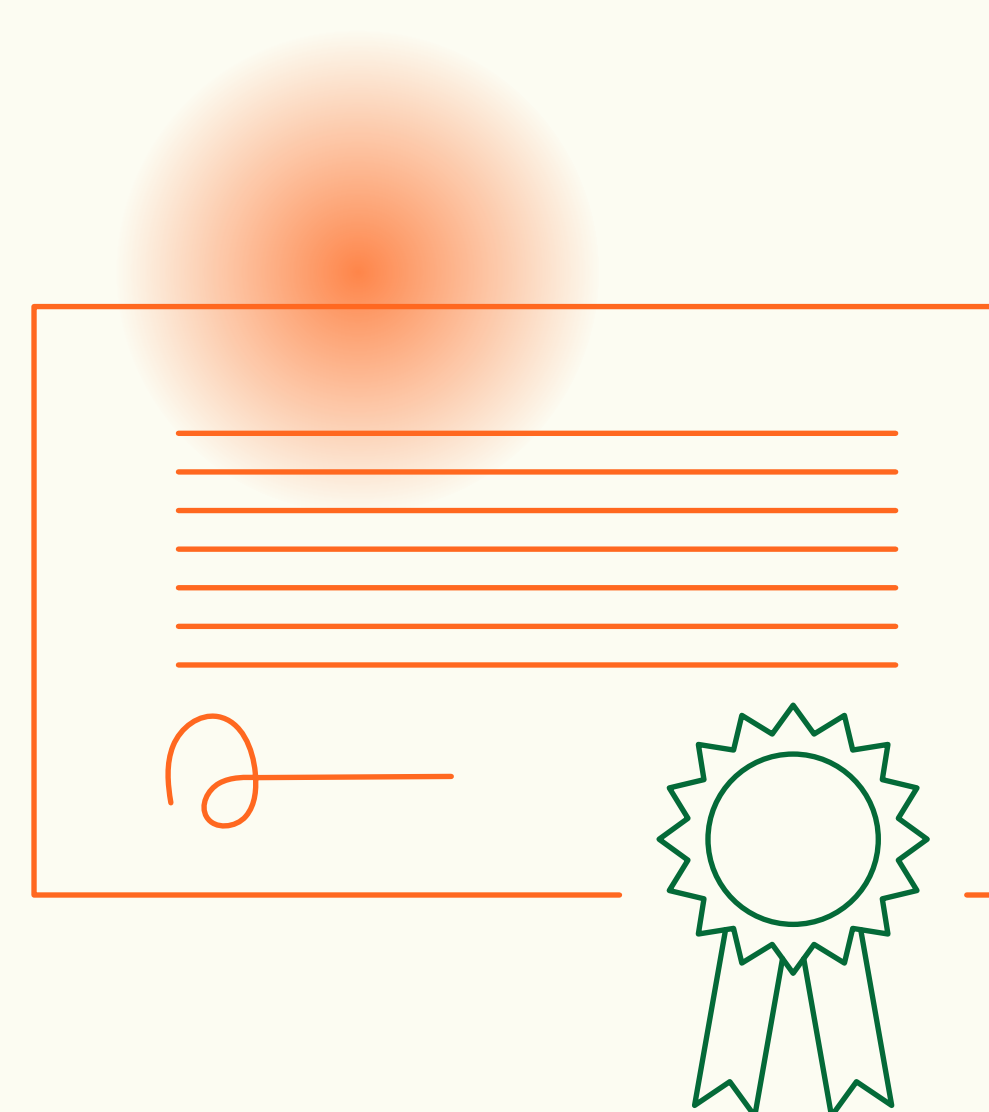
6.3 Main recommendations for action

GOAL 1 Promotion of mechanisms to attract Indian talent

India produces highly qualified professionals in key sectors such as **engineering and IT**. Attracting this talent to Barcelona can stimulate innovation, boost local competitiveness and foster the development of new technologies while meeting the demand for the professional profiles needed to drive the city's growth. Several Indian companies based in Barcelona, such as HCLTech, a provider of IT solutions for the banking industry, are particularly keen to hire Indian talent. There are also several multinationals in the city actively recruiting Indian workers, especially engineers.

Barcelona's appeal to expatriates lies in its high quality of life and relatively affordable prices, resulting in a significant potential for savings compared to other major cities. Furthermore, rising salaries in these sectors make Barcelona particularly appealing to Indian citizens wishing to pursue their careers abroad. These professionals help strengthen economic ties with India and facilitate cooperation on bilateral projects between Barcelona and India, yielding economic benefits in the long term.

“Attracting this talent to Barcelona can stimulate innovation, boost local competitiveness and foster the development of new technologies while meeting the demand for the professional profiles needed to drive the city's growth.”



Boosting existing mechanisms to attract international talent from both the private sector and City Council and collaborating with Indian programmes that send Indian professionals to work abroad will boost Barcelona's ability to attract the talent it needs.

>> Recommendations:

- Holding a meeting between **City Council and major Indian companies operating in Barcelona** (approximately 8-10) will make it possible to develop shared interests, understand their talent attraction strategies and gain a deeper understanding of the community of highly qualified Indian professionals in the city.
- Encouraging **Indian professionals to take part** in programmes such as Digital Talent (organised by Mobile World Capital) and Welcome IT Day (coordinated with Barcelona City Council), both of which are aimed at attracting international talent.
- Considering synergies with **Indian students who have studied in Barcelona**, to serve as a bridge to boost relations between the city and their place of residence, especially through the Indian alumni associations set up by business schools such as IESE and ESADE, which boast hundreds of members.
- **Helping Indian professionals settle in Barcelona** through the Barcelona International Welcome Desk, particularly as regards visa procedures and other bureaucratic processes. Using Barcelona International Community Day as a platform to foster the integration of this community, particularly its professionals, through their participation as attendees, speakers, exhibitors or even hosts.

- Considering getting involved in Indian initiatives such as ‘**Skill India**’, created by the Indian Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, which seeks to make the country the world capital of talent and skilled labour. The International Skills Centre Network, a network of schools developed under this initiative, helps Indian workers move overseas.

GOAL 2 Collaboration in the field of biotechnology

Biotechnology, a strategic sector undergoing rapid growth in both territories, is a natural connection point between Barcelona and India. In India, it is becoming one of the pillars of the economy, and its influence is expected to increase significantly over the next few years. In Catalonia, **this sector accounts for around 7.6% of GDP**, with Barcelona as its main hub thanks to the large number of top-tier companies, startups, universities, hospitals and research centres in the city.

Barcelona has positioned itself as **southern Europe’s science and health capital** and is widely viewed as a leader in clinical trials, scientific output and knowledge transfer. Furthermore, Barcelona City Council has made biotechnology and health sciences one of the six strategic pillars of its **Science and Innovation Plan**, with a particular focus on research into neurodegenerative diseases.

This position is bolstered by strategic projects such as **Fraunhofer CAT**, the German bioengineering and healthcare network’s first Spanish facility; the **CaixaResearch Institute**, which is set to become an international leader in the field of immunology and translational medicine; and the **Ciudadella del Coneixement**, which will transform

the Ciutadella park into a world-class centre in the fields of biomedicine, biodiversity and scientific dissemination.

In this context, Barcelona is emerging as a **European biotechnology and digital health hub** with significant potential for collaboration with international innovation hubs such as India, where the growth of technology parks, incubators and research centres offers new opportunities for strategic partnerships and joint projects.

>> Recommendations:

- **Monitoring emerging biotechnology hubs in second-tier cities**, such as Pune, Ahmedabad and Bhubaneswar, which are starting to show great vitality and could become strategic partners in the medium term. In view of their innovative ecosystems, established centres such as Hyderabad (a key centre for vaccines) and Bangalore should also be considered for possible future collaborations.
- Taking part in **specialised fairs and conferences in India**, such as Global Bio-India, can be very useful in publicising what Barcelona’s biotechnology industry has to offer, facilitating contacts with strategic partners and attracting international investors.
- **Collaborating with strategic organisations such as BIRAC** is particularly important. This agency plays a key role in promoting international partnerships and coordinating global events in the biotech industry.
- Establishing **direct links between science and technology parks in the two regions** would increase collaboration and enable joint innovation and knowledge transfer projects to



be established. Barcelona’s leading facilities, such as the **Biomedical Research Park** and the **Barcelona Science Park**, attract a large proportion of investments in the BioRegion of Catalonia. In India, the **Department of Biotechnology of the Ministry of Science and Technology** has been promoting the development of **biotechnology parks through the National Biotechnology Parks Scheme** for years, and its growing network already encompasses over a dozen significant hubs, including **Genome Valley in Hyderabad**, which specialises in biopharma and the vaccine industry growth phase; the **Biotech Park in Lucknow**; the **Chhattisgarh**

Biotech Park; and the **Guwahati Biotech Park** in Assam; as well as industrial biotechnology parks in Jammu and Kashmir and the **Kolkata Biotech Park**.

- Promoting **links with Indian research and innovation centres**, such as the Bangalore Bioinnovation Centre or the ICT Mumbai Biocluster, would open up new avenues for collaboration on projects with an international dimension. **Encouraging Indian participation in BioSpain** would help to increase the global scope of the event, whose main focus is currently Europe and

America. BioSpain, a cutting-edge biotechnology event, is held in Barcelona in collaboration with City Council and provides a strategic platform for connecting the Catalan BioRegion to international players. Involving the Indian ecosystem in this forum would help establish Barcelona as a preferred partner for Indian companies, institutions and investors in this sector.

- Considering Barcelona's significant focus on **research into neurodegenerative diseases**, building closer ties with Indian institutions that are already working in this area, such as the Centre for Brain Research in Bangalore or the Sunita Sanghi Centre of Aging and Neurodegenerative Diseases at IIT Mumbai, would be beneficial.
- Once strategic projects being carried out in Barcelona, such as the **CaixaResearch Institute** and the **Ciutadella del Coneixement**, have become fully operational, they can serve as the **main platforms for forging ties with Indian counterparts** and take the lead in strengthening international biotechnology alliances.

GOAL 3 Participation in international city network programmes operating in India

Collaborating through international city networks provides Barcelona with an effective avenue to establish ties with Indian cities and projects and thus facilitate access to specific local initiatives.

Aligning itself with these networks would enable Barcelona to leverage existing synergies and collaborate on matters of high priority for both parties. India is already an active member of several of these networks, which sets a sound

foundation for cooperation. Making use of these shared areas of interest maximises opportunities for collaboration and boosts the likelihood of success in joint projects, particularly considering the history of complex issues in the parties' bilateral cooperation.

>> Recommendations:

- Barcelona shares areas of interest with several Indian cities through the **C40** network. Its areas of specialisation, such as air quality, the green transition and sustainable public transport, present promising opportunities for a productive collaboration between Indian cities and Barcelona. Its shared interest in joint initiatives with Chennai is particularly worth noting in this regard.
- As for **ICLEI**, Barcelona could join initiatives such as the 100% Renewable Cities Network, which supports the transition to renewable energies, and the Eco Mobility Alliance, which includes several Portuguese and German cities as well as Indian ones in the field of sustainable mobility. In addition, Barcelona and several Indian cities are members of the Cities With Nature partnership, a platform that fosters cooperation for more sustainable urban development.
- Barcelona could also take part in the Urban Ocean Initiative of the **Resilient Cities Network** in a mentoring capacity. This programme, which includes Latin American and Asian cities – four of them in India – focuses on reducing plastic pollution in the oceans by exchanging good practices and developing waste management and circular economy capabilities.
- Together with networks such as ICLEI and C40, in the **World Resources Institute** the WRI Ross

Center for Sustainable Cities is involved in various initiatives in Indian cities, such as the TUMI E-Bus City Network and the UrbanShift programme, which Barcelona could take part in.

GOAL 4 Promotion of collaboration with Indian cities and local entities whose fields of action are aligned with the interests of Barcelona City Council

Cooperating with Indian cities requires a tailored approach that takes each city's governance, culture, economic potential and development goals into account.

India's federal states also play a key role in funding and carrying out local projects.

Indian cities have a particular interest in the following areas:

- Developing projects with a particular **economic impact** in the city.
- **Sustainability and climate action:** Renewable energy, waste management and environmental protection initiatives may be suitable areas for cooperation.
- Development of **infrastructure**: India is making significant investments in urban infrastructure such as roads, public transport and eGovernment.
- Development of **skills**: With their young demographics, many Indian cities are focusing on skill development programmes to train their workforce.

Furthermore, think tanks and other municipal entities operating in various cities and regions take a more specific approach targeted at local issues, which enables closer and more practical collaboration at the municipal level. Participating in joint initiatives with think tanks in different Indian cities and federal states would give Barcelona access to a wider range of knowledge and projects, bolstering its presence in the country and promoting the exchange of ideas and best practices.

>> Recommendations:

- Identifying **suitable organisations**, such as urban development authorities, municipal corporations and city governing bodies, is key to collaboration.
- In addition to engaging with local governments, contact at **federal state level** can help make the proposed collaboration initiatives more effective.
- As establishing direct links with Indian cities is not always easy, it is advisable to consider contacting **think tanks and public-private entities** working on the transformation of cities, particularly at the local level.

GOAL 5 Support for Barcelona's Indian community and its cultural diversity

Barcelona's Indian community is characterised by its remarkable diversity, which is reflected in its dozen or so formal and informal associations, usually grouped by geographic origin, ethnicity, language or religion. This diversity, though culturally enriching, hinders the community's ability to act as a single group in terms of representation.

In addition to increasing its internal cohesion, fully integrating this community would yield substantial benefits for the city. Its rich cultural tradition, business practices and entrepreneurial spirit would contribute to Barcelona's economic vitality and cultural exchange. This would foster diversity, mutual understanding and cross-cultural networks, to the benefit of both the Indian community and Barcelona society.

Supporting India-related activities in Barcelona, such as festivals and cultural events, could also be an interesting avenue for building closer ties with the country. In addition to celebrating India's rich cultural legacy, such events could create opportunities for exchange and the promotion of Barcelona as an international destination. The involvement of the Indian community in Barcelona's cultural life could help integrate the community and increase mutual understanding. This could lay the groundwork for future collaboration in different areas, such as business, education and technology.

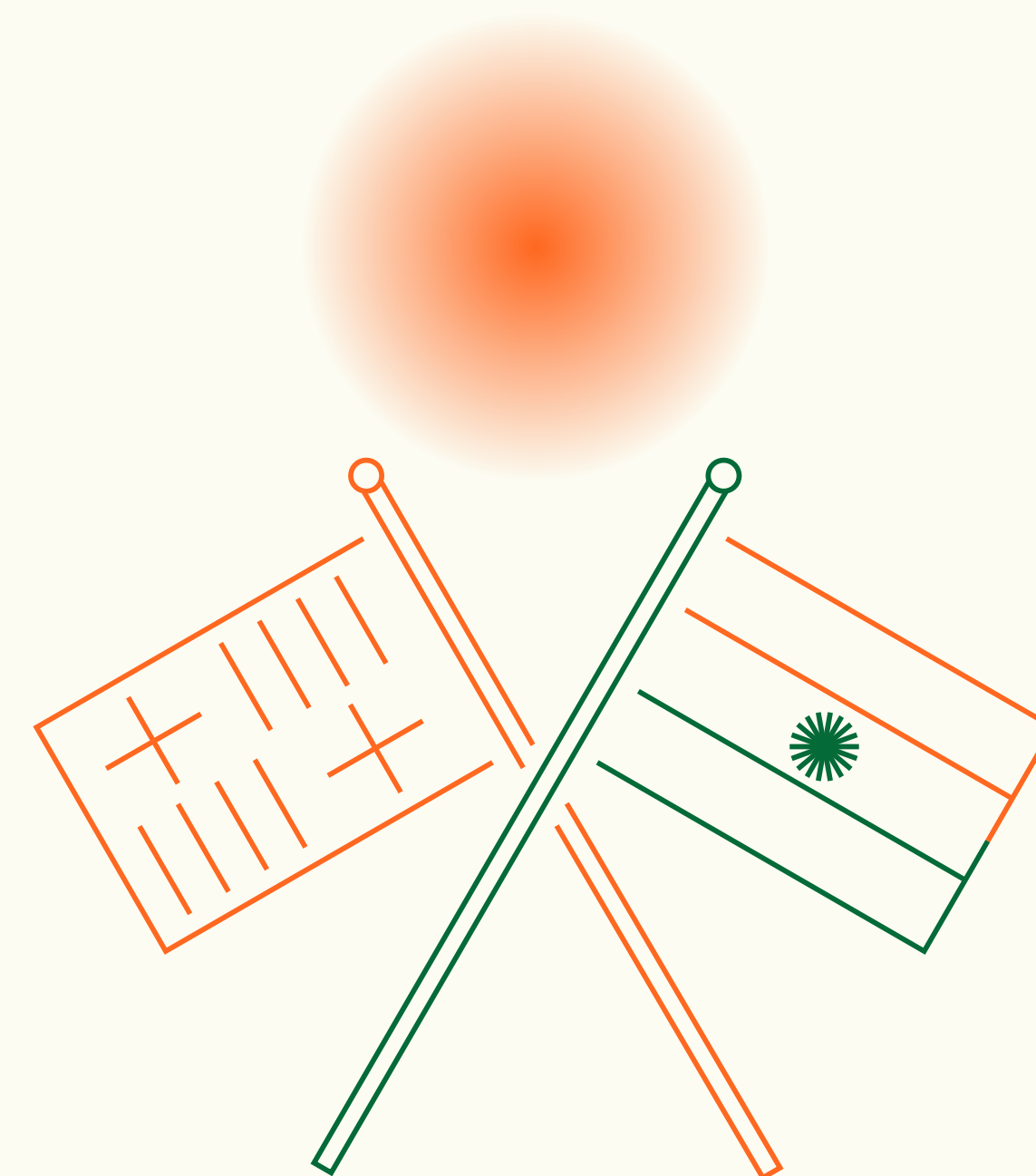
>> Recommendations:

- Increasing City Council's support and involvement in celebrations such as International Day of Yoga and Diwali, and considering including other festivities.
- Exploring the feasibility of holding an Indian festival in Barcelona coordinated by the various Indian communities and associations on a culturally significant date, as this could unite the Indian community and create a setting for cultural exchange with Barcelona's residents. The Namasté France festival held in Paris in 2023, organised by the Indian Embassy in Paris in collaboration with the Indian Ministry of Culture to commemorate 25 years of relations between the two countries, could serve as a model. In

addition, **grants from the Indian Ministry of Culture** could be sought for joint proposals involving various associations.

- **Supporting the learning of Hindi** in Barcelona, especially for children of Indian-born parents who already go to school in Barcelona, as a way to learn the family language and maintain ties with their family's country of origin, in line with the principles of interculturality and the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights adopted in Barcelona.
- In light of the gender imbalance among Indian residents in Barcelona, we **recommend easing the family reunification process for Indian people** living in Barcelona so that their spouses and children can join them in our city.
- Adding the Ratha Yatra or Chariot Festival to Barcelona's official calendar of festivities.
- Exploring the potential of film as a way to connect Barcelona and India, taking advantage of the city's appeal for filming and exploring options for screening Indian film series. The city's substantial Indian community makes it ideal for shooting films, which would also boost tourism. Barcelona is emerging as a budding location for Indian film productions, as exemplified by the recent shooting of *One Night in Barcelona* and other projects by production companies such as AB Film Productions. Furthermore, the city could support the screening of Indian film series and become a prime European location for filming and premières of films for the international market.

“In addition to increasing its internal cohesion, fully integrating this community would yield substantial benefits for the city. Its rich cultural tradition, business practices and entrepreneurial spirit would contribute to Barcelona's economic vitality and cultural exchange.”



- Assessing the opportunities that might arise from a proposal to hold Indian film events with international appeal in Barcelona. One possible option, for instance, could be the **International Indian Film Academy (IIFA) Awards ceremony**, the most prestigious event in the Indian film industry, which alternates between Indian cities and international locations. It is worth noting that the seventeenth edition of this event took place in Madrid in 2016. It attracted over 673 million viewers via audiovisual platforms and was attended by over 500 international journalists, which significantly boosted the city's international profile.
- Using the **culinary connection** between Barcelona and India, both of which have food at the centre of their cultures, can strengthen cultural ties and facilitate mutual understanding. For example, the Barcelona Gastronomic Forum and other leading culinary events could be used as a platform to highlight India's rich culinary tradition.
- Leveraging the human tower-building connection between Catalonia's *castellers* and the *govindas* of Mumbai and Pune to promote exchanges and knowledge about these two human tower-building traditions.
- In view of Barcelona's **sports background** and the significant role of sports such as cricket and field hockey in the Indian community, cricket should be promoted in Barcelona through City Council in collaboration with the Catalan Cricket Federation and local teams. This would help to promote Indian culture and facilitate the Indian community's integration in the city.

GOAL 6 Collaboration in the field of logistics and trade fairs

The country's investment in upgrading and expanding its ports presents a significant opportunity to generate synergies for a more efficient movement of goods between India's major ports and the **Port of Barcelona**. As well as improving infrastructure, such upgrades would optimise supply chains, leading to faster and more effective transactions.

With its 7,500 km coastline, twelve national ports and 217 ports under federal state management, there are many opportunities for collaboration with India. With around 95% of India's trade being done by sea, the maritime industry is a key sector for the country. This makes the Port of Barcelona an invaluable strategic ally. Its location, concentrated logistics infrastructure and excellent connectivity, coupled with the presence of industrial clusters in the fashion, chemicals, electronics and automotive industries, are of keen interest to India. This became evident in the Port of Barcelona's business

mission to Mumbai in October 2023, where it proved to be a very valuable partner for Indian companies' entry in Europe and North Africa.

Under these circumstances, the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) could further strengthen maritime trade relations between Spain and India. This project, which is part of the G7 Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, was announced at the 2023 G20 summit and is designed to boost trade connectivity between India and Europe through the Persian Gulf.

In addition, **Fira de Barcelona's** experience organising international trade fairs makes it a valuable asset for logistics initiatives. It can support trade exchanges and boost the profile of companies from Barcelona in India, serving as a bridge between local companies and key players in the Indian market.

>> Recommendations:

- One of the main areas for collaboration between the Port of Barcelona and its Indian counterparts is **decarbonisation and sustainability**. As seen from Maritime India Vision 2030 and documents such as the 2023 Harit Sagar Green Port Guidelines, India is seeking to reduce carbon intensity and create a sustainable ecosystem in its major ports. In particular, the Port of Mumbai stands out for its proactive approach to the development of decarbonisation policies and its openness to establishing alliances with external parties.
- The Port of Barcelona's **automation and digitalisation** experience can also provide a model for upgrading Indian ports. Through training and consulting programmes, the Port of Barcelona can share its knowledge of cutting-edge technologies and digital optimisation processes, two areas

in which it has achieved significant progress in improving operational efficiency and lowering management times. This collaboration could help Indian ports to put in place more advanced practices in line with global digitalisation and automation standards.

- Along the same lines, it would be beneficial to encourage the involvement of Indian port representatives, as has been done with other Asian ports, such as Busan, in Port of Barcelona-driven events such as **Smart Ports: Piers of the Future**, an event in which the Port of Busan already takes part.
- Initiatives such as the **India-EU Connectivity Partnership**, signed in 2021, foster infrastructure connectivity, including cooperation in port-related matters, to ensure sustainable and resilient trade and transport links. This framework not only benefits India and Europe but can also improve Barcelona's strategic position as a key logistics hub in the region.
- Increasing Indian participation in **Fira de Barcelona** trade fairs as both visitors and exhibitors is an effective way to increase awareness and knowledge of Barcelona in India. Boosting Indian participation at events such as the Smart Cities World Congress and Alimentaria would help to boost Barcelona's international profile and expand trade networks. Furthermore, the presence of high-ranking Indian government officials and delegates attending major fairs such as the **Mobile World Congress** or **Integrated Systems Europe** could be used to hold parallel programmes and meetings with representatives of City Council and other entities.



GOAL 7 Attraction of Indian tourists

Although domestic tourism accounts for the majority of tourism in India, making it the world's second-largest domestic market with 2.51 billion trips, international travel is still on the rise. **Over 31 million Indian citizens travelled abroad in 2024, placing the country among the top ten sources of tourists**, and this is expected to exceed 41 million in 2029, making India **one of the world's fastest-growing sources of tourists**. The rapid growth of international tourism undertaken by Indian nationals can be explained by factors such as the emergence of online booking platforms and travel agencies, changing lifestyles, the perception that travelling to far-off destinations such as Europe signals personal success, the influence of social media and better domestic connectivity thanks to an increase in the number of airports and air routes.

Barcelona's cultural offerings, infrastructure and general appeal make it an ideal destination to attract tourists from that country, which is considered a premium market. Marketing Barcelona as a tourist destination in India would clearly help to stimulate the country's burgeoning interest in the city and foster the development of deeper trade and cultural relations with India.

Indian tourists bring a fresh and enriching perspective to the city's cultural life, fostering the development of stronger cultural ties. Furthermore, this interaction can open up opportunities for joint initiatives in cultural events and festivals, enhancing bilateral relations and leading to greater mutual understanding between the two regions.

>> Recommendations:

- Holding events to promote Barcelona by combining synergies between **Barcelona City Council and Barcelona Tourism** in future missions to India could increase the number of visitors from that country coming to our city.
- The Indian **MICE and wedding tourism** segments have particularly high growth potential for Barcelona. In the case of MICE tourism, Indian companies, particularly in technology sectors, are very keen to increase their presence in Europe. In the case of wedding tourism, **families allocate substantial budgets for weddings**, so many European cities are trying to attract tourists in this segment.
- Establishing **a direct air route between Barcelona and India** would trigger a significant increase in the number of Indian tourists arriving in the city, as it would make travel to Barcelona quicker and easier. The Air Route Development Committee (CDRA) has set the establishment of an air route with Delhi as one of its top five priorities for 2024-2025.
- **Collaborating with the Bollywood industry** to attract Indian tourism can be a highly effective strategy. In addition to attracting Indian film productions, in recent years Bollywood has been used as a platform to promote Indian tourism in different parts of Europe. For example, Switzerland has adopted strategies involving the use of Bollywood stars as tourism ambassadors, as well as film-themed tours and visits. Barcelona could consider similar approaches, harnessing the potential of the film industry to boost its appeal to Indian tourists.

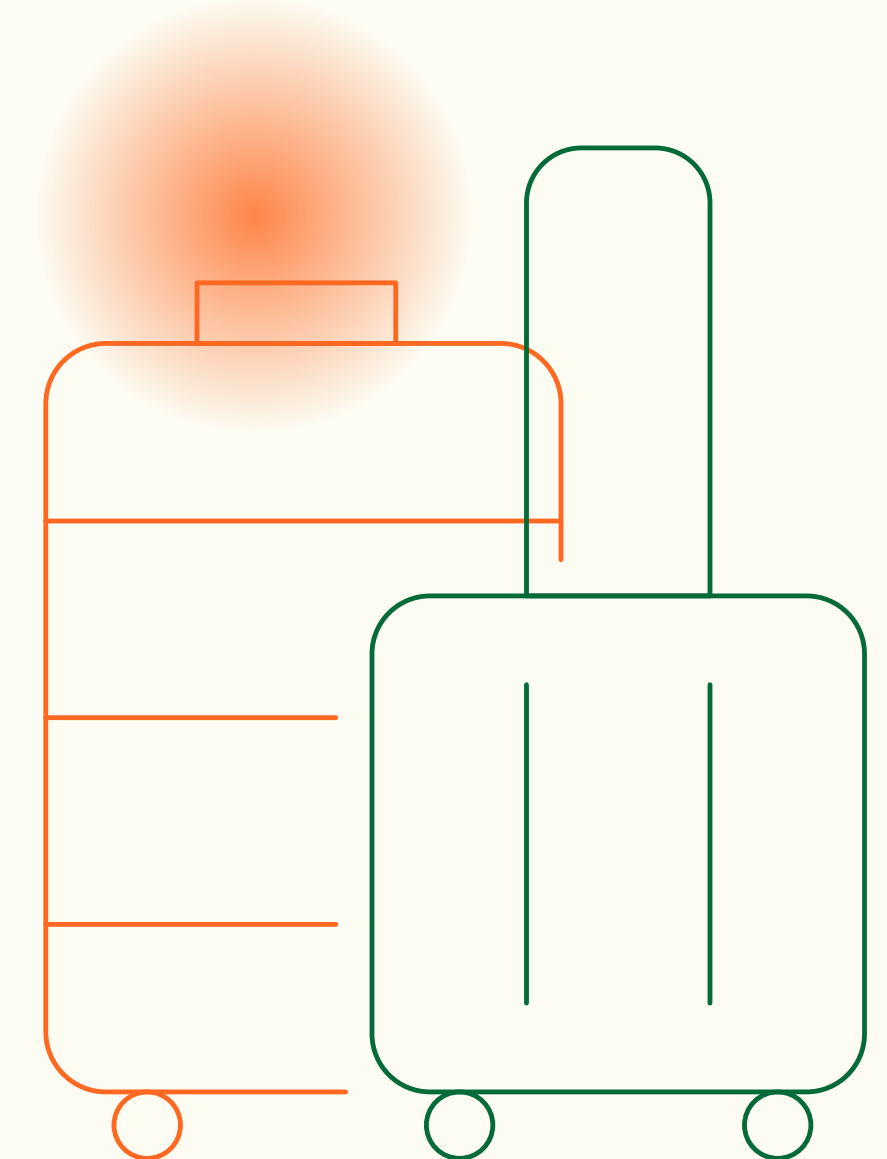
- The inclusion of tourism as one of the specific areas for promotion during the Spain-India Year, which will take place in 2026, could provide an opportunity for promotional activities aimed at attracting Indian tourists to Barcelona.

GOAL 8 Collaboration with regard to startups

With a **vibrant ecosystem** that promotes technology and entrepreneurship, India is now one of the world's leading powers in the field of startups. As a growing European startup and technology hub, Barcelona can leverage this momentum by collaborating with Indian firms and incubators, expanding the local ecosystem internationally towards Asia.

Taking part in joint initiatives with Indian startups can facilitate access to international networks and opportunities. Furthermore, such collaborations can give Barcelona's entrepreneurial ventures access to a steady stream of emerging innovations, new ideas and investments, thereby boosting its own startup ecosystem. Indian startups have a unique perspective and innovative solutions in areas such as technology, fintech and healthcare. Partnering with these startups benefits Barcelona not only in terms of new technologies and disruptive approaches but also by expanding its global network of contacts. This access can accelerate the growth of startups in Barcelona and strengthen its position as a European startup leader.

“Over 31 million Indian citizens travelled abroad in 2024, placing the country among the top ten sources of tourists, and this is expected to exceed 41 million in 2029, making India one of the world's fastest-growing sources of tourists.”





>> Recommendations:

- **StartUp India**, an initiative devised by the Indian government to develop its startup ecosystem, has a significant international component aimed at fostering cooperation among startups worldwide. It might be a good idea to consider joining forces with incubators, accelerators and other players in Barcelona to encourage collaboration among startups.
- Another possibility would be to encourage Indian startups to participate in the **Catalonia Open Challenges** platform, which promotes open innovation through collaboration among startups, companies and government authorities to roll out joint projects. Promoting the Barcelona & Catalonia Startup Hub initiative among potential investors and startups from India could also be an effective mechanism for connecting the two regions' startup and investor ecosystems.
- Collaborating with Indian incubators in **organising international hackathons** (intensive coding events in which professionals and students work together to tackle technical challenges in a short time) provides a valuable platform for attracting talent and strengthening innovation networks. India stands out in this area with its Smart India Hackathon, one of the largest events of its kind worldwide held by the country's Ministry of Education. The aim is to get students involved in solving everyday problems and to foster innovation and critical thinking by working with industry experts and government bodies to find practical solutions. This example bears witness to India's clear desire to develop its young people's potential and produce innovative ideas, suggesting that encouraging them to take part in European hackathons, such as Barcelona's HackUPC, which reached its tenth edition this year,

may be an excellent opportunity to attract talent and facilitate the exchange of ideas in the field of technology.

- The European Union has also promoted cooperation with India in innovation matters in recent years. One example of this is the **EU-India INNOCENTER** private initiative, which was funded by European funds through Horizon 2020 and has equipped startups and entrepreneurs with the tools and resources needed to launch and grow their businesses in both markets, supporting their entry strategies and facilitating the development of a local network.
- Although Indian investment in Catalonia is still limited, its expansion over the next few years should be considered a strategic challenge. India has significant strengths in sectors such as the life sciences and digital technology, two areas in which its capabilities and priorities are closely matched with those of Barcelona and Catalonia. This synergy provides an ideal framework for attracting investment projects and establishing high added-value partnerships.

GOAL 9 Student and researcher mobility programmes

In recent years, Barcelona has emerged as a leading centre for research internationally. The city has a sophisticated infrastructure and highly prestigious institutions whose researchers can benefit from exchange and collaboration programmes with Indian universities and research centres. In addition to enhancing Barcelona's appeal as a desirable academic destination for Indian students and researchers, this cooperation would increase the city's access to a global

network of experts and resources, which would, in turn, bolster its international standing.

Beyond bilateral agreements or specific agreements between individual research institutions, attention should be paid to funding calls for programmes with India. For example, in 2023-2024 the Horizon Europe EU-India co-funding mechanism issued eleven funding calls in fields including artificial intelligence and data, climate change, transport and health.

>> Recommendations:

- The recent **agreement between CRUE and the Association of Indian Universities** establishes a collaborative framework for creating partnership agreements between Barcelona's CRUE-affiliated universities and their Indian counterparts, which should enable exchanges of students, teaching staff and researchers.
- The **Erasmus Mundus** programme is an excellent opportunity both to establish joint master's programmes between Indian and Barcelona universities (Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Programme) and to encourage Indian students to study at the city's main universities. In 2023, 174 Erasmus Mundus scholarships to study in Europe were awarded to Indian students.
- European programmes for researchers, such as Horizon Europe and access to EU funding through the European Research Council and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, provide an outstanding opportunity to foster academic collaboration between India and Barcelona. In 2023, the Indian government proposed a co-funding strategy to **encourage Indian initiatives to apply for funding under the Horizon programme. Furthermore, the Marie**

Skłodowska-Curie Actions award grants to postdoctoral researchers from India (among other countries) to conduct research in a European group for a maximum of two years, or to European researchers wishing to carry out a research stay of up to two years in India. It also provides Indian institutions with opportunities to take part in doctoral training networks and staff exchange consortia.

- Globally, the top education destinations for Indian students, such as **Canada, Australia and the US, are putting restrictions in place on the number of international students** they are willing to admit or tightening the requirements for obtaining visas and associated benefits. According to *The Economic Times*, these actions are likely to reduce the number of Indian students studying in these countries by around 125,000 over the next few years. This **is an opportunity to attract Indian students to other destinations, such as Barcelona.**

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