

EU-India cooperation on health

In line with the EU-India Strategic Partnership of 2004 and the EU approach to global health, the EU and India have long-standing cooperation on health. The focus is on health research and innovation, public health and health security, as well as regulatory convergence. Often called the 'world's pharmacy', India significantly shapes global health outcomes due to its health diplomacy and its large share of the global population. While interests converge in numerous health-related areas, intellectual property rights (IPRs) have been a point of tension between the EU and India, with global implications.

India – A global health player

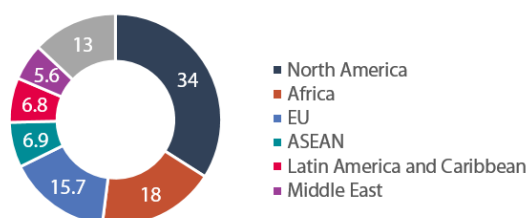
India, which provides healthcare for its over [1.4 billion](#) population, is in charge of safeguarding the human health and health security of an entire subcontinent. In addition, the country plays a role in advancing health outcomes worldwide through health diplomacy, in particular in what is widely referred to as 'the global south'. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, India [committed](#) at least US\$100 million to bilateral health projects in south and south-east Asia and [Africa](#). During the pandemic, the country exported a global share of [2.3 %](#) of COVID-19 vaccine doses, including donations through their own 'Vaccine Maitri' (Vaccine Friendship) [initiative](#) and multilaterally through the [COVAX facility](#). The country's performance in health both at home and globally therefore largely shapes global capability to achieve [health-related](#) United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and address global health threats.

Importantly, the country pro-actively shapes the debate on global health in multilateral fora, including on the global health architecture. For example, as the current holder of the **G20 presidency**, India is leading discussions on [three G20 health priorities](#): (i) health emergencies, prevention and preparedness, and response; (ii) strengthening cooperation in the pharmaceutical sector; and (iii) digital health innovations and solutions to aid universal health coverage. In addition, during the COVID-19 pandemic, India and South Africa sponsored the [proposal](#) to waive several sections of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property ([TRIPS](#)) on COVID-19 products and technologies. In parallel, the country has been active in co-crafting the World Health Organization (WHO) [Pandemic Treaty](#) and co-shaping amended WHO International Health Regulations ([IHRs](#)).

India plays an important role in the global pharmaceuticals and vaccine industry, and is the largest producer and exporter of generic medicines. In terms of volume, its generic drugs account for 20 % of global generic

drug exports. India supplies over half of Africa's requirement for generics, around 40 % of generic demand in the United States and around 25 % of all medicine in the United Kingdom. The country is also the **main vaccine exporter to developing countries** (its vaccines amount to [81 %](#) of developing country vaccine imports). India's [pharmaceutical sector](#) amounts to [roughly US\\$50 billion](#) and is the [3rd largest](#) in the world in volume and 14th largest in value. The sector has been growing annually and the government [hopes](#) to drive its value up to US\$65 billion by 2024 and US\$120- US\$130 billion by 2030. However, the sector is heavily [dependent](#) on [China](#) for key active pharmaceutical ingredients (API) – chemicals responsible for the

Figure 1 – Major Indian pharmaceutical export destinations in 2020 (%)



Source: [IBEF](#), 2022

therapeutic effect of drugs. To address this dependency, the government has adopted several policies aimed at boosting [local manufacturing](#) and exports and facilitating [research and development](#), among other things, and is [considering moves towards](#) the [diversification](#) of supply chains.



EU-India cooperation on health

In line with its global health [strategy](#), the EU aims at fostering health partnerships with third countries. The EU and India have cooperated on health for more than two decades and their partnership has consolidated over time. The COVID-19 pandemic further increased convergence in the public and global health agenda. In July 2020, during the 15th EU-India Summit, the partners endorsed a [roadmap to 2025](#) for the EU-India Strategic Partnership, to guide and strengthen joint action, including in health. Research and innovation in health, public health and health security as well as regulatory convergence are listed as priority areas for cooperation.

The EU and India are working together to address **common public health challenges**, such as communicable and non-communicable diseases, and antimicrobial resistance ([AMR](#)). Several co-organised [events](#) on AMR in veterinary medicine, animal health and the environment have created opportunities to enhance cooperation between the two countries. In parallel, during the EU-India Leaders' [meeting](#) of 8 May 2021, the partners also highlighted the aim to collaborate in better preparing and responding to global health emergencies and advancing global health security, including by strengthening and reforming the WHO. They also agreed to cooperate on resilient medical supply chains, vaccines and APIs, on the application of internationally recognised good manufacturing standards to ensure high product quality and safety, as well as in research and development.

As for **health research and innovation**, the [Agreement](#) for Scientific and Technological Cooperation signed in 2001, and renewed for the third time on 17 May 2020 for a further five years, governs cooperation between the EU and India. It [operates](#) through the EU-India joint funding schemes, largely under the EU's largest research and innovation programme, Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe. Under these schemes, India's [Ministry of Science and Technology](#) has established joint calls with the European Commission's Directorate-General for Research and Innovation in areas of mutual interest, and both parties fund their participating nationals. Under Horizon 2020, they collaborated in research on [tuberculosis](#), [flu vaccines](#), HIV/AIDS, malaria, and neglected tropical diseases, strengthening healthcare systems, and promoting universal health coverage. Under the new Horizon Europe programme, the partners prioritise cooperation on [brain disorders](#) and pandemic [preparedness](#) and [response](#). Several joint [calls](#) were [published](#) in these two areas. India and the EU also aim at strengthened cooperation in health research in multilateral fora, such as the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations ([CEPI](#)).

In line with the EU-India Strategic Partnership roadmap, the two sides are working towards **regulatory convergence** in health. Since 2006, the partners engage in regulatory dialogue through the EU-India Joint Working Group on Pharmaceuticals, Biotechnology and Medical Devices. This collaboration is based on the 1994 [Cooperation Agreement](#) on Partnership and Development. The EU [supports](#) India in applying international standards. Under the consultation and cooperation mechanism, the EU supports India's efforts to strengthen its pharmacovigilance system.

India and the EU are also important **trade partners** – around a third of APIs sold in the EU come from India, while close to a third of India's medical devices imports are from the EU. As both partners strive to [reduce](#) their high dependence on Chinese APIs and other health goods, health cooperation is mutually [beneficial](#).

Intellectual property rights – A challenge for a common agenda

While both partners work towards their shared goal to strengthen and reform the WHO, their stance on IPRs diverges. India has long advocated weaker rules on patent protection of medical goods to ensure the availability of lifesaving medicines. This culminated in its joint proposal with South Africa on the TRIPS waiver on COVID-19 goods, which received global [support](#), but the EU opposed, proposing a different [option](#). The World Trade Organization (WTO) subsequently [adopted](#) only a [partial waiver](#). Numerous stakeholders still [aim](#) at a broader [waiver](#). The issue [persists](#) – with some WHO members, including India, [attempting](#) to [shape](#) the [Pandemic Treaty](#) and the [amended](#) IHRs to [provide](#) for more flexible rules. At the bilateral level, IPRs and market access issues, including on pharmaceuticals, are likely to [continue](#) challenging the relaunched negotiations on an EU-India free trade agreement ([FTA](#)), as the patent protection for pharmaceutical products has long been a major [contention](#) in EU-India trade relations. A European Parliament [resolution](#) of 5 July 2022 encouraged the partners to 'find swift solutions', without compromising on content.