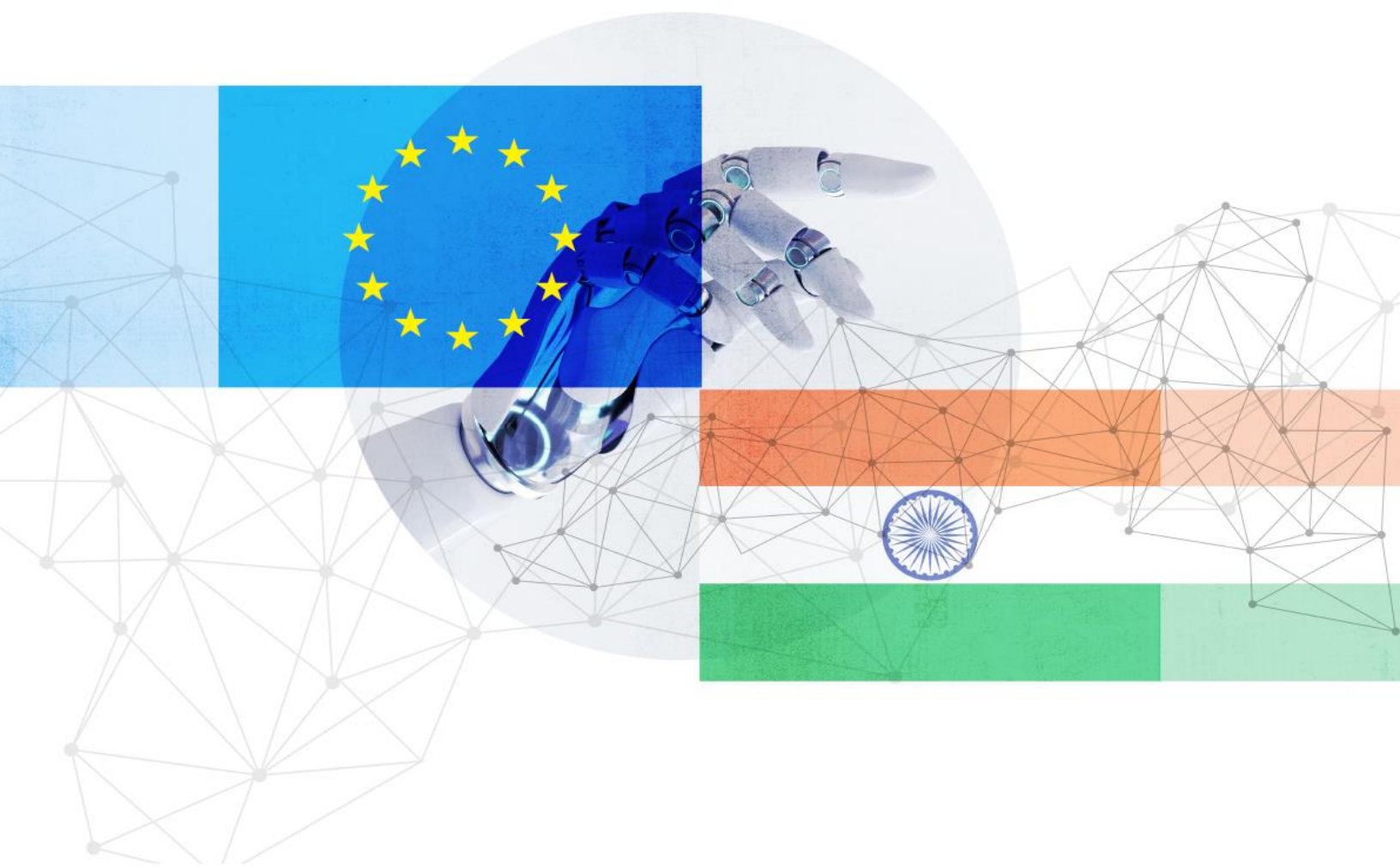




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Why the EU and India Must Shape AI Together

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Across both Brussels and New Delhi, governing artificial intelligence has become a question of political economy as much as of technology policy. Choices about regulatory design, infrastructure access, and standards will determine which actors capture AI's gains, which bear its risks, and which retain the capacity to govern it at all. Right now, those choices are being made largely within a framework defined by US and Chinese interests. Yet for all the energy spent in the US-China AI rivalry, one of the most promising partnerships in global AI governance is the one emerging between the European Union and India.

This article examines the foundations, opportunities, and challenges of EU-India AI cooperation. It argues that shared strategic vulnerabilities, complementary institutional strengths, and recent multilateral milestones have created a window for Brussels and New Delhi to deepen their collaboration and exert meaningful influence on the wider architecture of global AI governance.

Complementary Strengths and Shared Constraints

The EU and India bring distinct but complementary strengths to AI governance. The EU AI Act is the world's first comprehensive, risk-based legal framework for artificial intelligence, establishing a benchmark for how democracies can balance innovation with accountability. The EU brings institutional depth, a rights-based regulatory tradition, and a powerful single market of 450 million people that gives its standards global weight¹. The European AI Office, the General-Purpose AI Code of Practice, and significant public investment in sovereign computing capacity all reflect a

¹ European Parliament and Council of the European Union, Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence (Artificial Intelligence Act), Official Journal of the European Union, 12 July 2024. See also: European Commission, 'The AI Act', <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/regulatory-framework-ai>

coherent industrial and governance vision. Whether this institutional architecture will prove sufficient to govern an increasingly fast-moving landscape remains an open question. Taken together however, they signal an ambition to move beyond reactive regulation toward anticipatory and structured governance of AI.

India's context is equally powerful. With 1.4 billion people, one of the world's largest and youngest workforces, and one of the fastest-growing digital economies, India aims to be a leading producer of AI-based applications and frameworks which account for the diversity and complexity of large populations. The success of this vision however will depend on resolving persistent deficits in domestic compute infrastructure and contextually relevant datasets. The India AI Mission with a budget outlay of ₹10,372 crore (EUR 934 million) over five years, represents the most explicit statement yet of India's ambition to shape AI development². Further, India's Digital Public Infrastructure stack, from Aadhaar, the world's largest biometric identity system to the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), represents arguably the most far-reaching state-led deployment of digital public goods globally, and could be the potential foundation for pioneering AI use-cases serving populations at the margins of the formal economy, and driving renewed interest into deploying digital public infrastructure³.

These respective strengths coexist with structural vulnerabilities that need closer scrutiny. The EU risks being caught between the massive scale of the raw compute power of US hyperscalers and the cost competitiveness of state-subsidised Chinese AI systems. India, despite its digital prowess and momentum, faces the challenge of matching the resources being deployed by US and China for building sovereign compute infrastructure and high-quality, locally-contextualised datasets needed to train AI models domestically. Both find their strategic autonomy constrained by a global AI infrastructure landscape in which compute capacity, foundation model

² Government of India, Prime Minister's Office, 'Cabinet Approves Ambitious IndiaAI Mission to Strengthen the AI Innovation Ecosystem', Press Release, 7 March 2024, pmindia.gov.in. The mission's total outlay is ₹10,371.92 crore over five years, implemented by IndiaAI, an Independent Business Division under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).

³ Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), Government of India, 'India's Digital Public Infrastructure', 2023. Aadhaar, administered by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), has over 1.3 billion registered individuals. The Unified Payments Interface (UPI), operated by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), processed over 100 billion transactions annually by 2024. See also: World Bank, G20 Policy Recommendations for Advancing Financial Inclusion and Productivity Gains Through Digital Public Infrastructure, 2023.

development, and proprietary datasets remain heavily restricted and concentrated in the United States and China.

Beyond the US-China Prism

The 2025 Paris AI Action Summit, signed by both India and EU member states, called for AI that is "*open, inclusive, and ethical*". The framing broadened the conversation beyond safety alone, to encompass equity and inclusion⁴. The shared philosophy that AI governance must balance safety with equity, and must be genuinely multilateral is a powerful starting point. The momentum did not stop there. The AI Summit's Delhi Declaration, endorsed by 91 countries including all EU member states, cemented the shared shift in thinking: from AI as a risk to be managed, to AI as an opportunity to be equitably accessible for all⁵.

Both the EU and India have compelling reasons to ensure the global AI governance architecture is not simply a product of US or Chinese unilateralism. The recently concluded EU-India Free Trade Agreement, which brings digital trade provisions including privacy and market access, directly into the frame of AI governance, provides institutional scaffolding⁶. What is needed now is to fill that scaffolding with substantive, operational cooperation on AI. This combination of structural dependency, shared values, ambitions and vulnerabilities create a strong foundation for cooperation.

⁴ French Presidency, 'Statement on Inclusive and Sustainable Artificial Intelligence for People and the Planet', AI Action Summit, Grand Palais, Paris, 11 February 2025, elysee.fr. The statement explicitly identifies 'ensuring AI is open, inclusive, transparent, ethical, safe, secure and trustworthy' as a core priority, and was signed by over 60 countries.

⁵ Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), Government of India, 'More countries join the New Delhi Declaration on AI Impact', Press Information Bureau, 24 February 2026, pib.gov.in. The declaration was initially endorsed by 88 countries and organisations, rising to 91 following subsequent accessions by Bangladesh, Costa Rica, and Guatemala. See also: Brookings Institution, 'Sovereignty, Safety, and Scale: Takeaways from the India AI Impact Summit', March 2026, brookings.edu

⁶ European Commission, 'The EU and India conclude landmark Free Trade Agreement', Press Release, 27 January 2026, ec.europa.eu. Negotiations for the EU-India Broad-based Trade and Investment Agreement began in 2007, stalled in 2013, and were relaunched in July 2022. The agreement was announced at the India–EU Summit, Hyderabad House, New Delhi, 27 January 2026.

Five Levers for EU-India AI Cooperation

Lever 1: Regulatory convergence and standards

India's November 2025 AI Governance Guidelines, released by MeitY, adopt a deliberate, pro-innovation, "light-touch" posture: voluntary principles, a risk classification system tailored to the Indian context, and a whole-of-government coordination architecture anchored in the AI Governance Group and a new AI Safety Institute⁷. The EU's AI Act, by contrast, establishes binding obligations, conformity assessments, and significant penalties for high-risk applications. However, this difference is not necessarily a barrier to cooperation. Both frameworks share foundational commitments to risk-based classification, human oversight, transparency, and the protection of vulnerable groups. Those shared foundations are the right place to begin building interoperability.

The second meeting of the EU-India Trade and Technology Council (TTC), held in New Delhi in February 2025, committed both sides to deepening cooperation between the European AI Office and India AI Mission, including on large language models and AI for the common good⁸. The January 2026 EU-India Summit, which concluded the landmark Free Trade Agreement, further formalised a joint R&D mandate on human-centric AI systems and created a direct institutional link between the European AI Office and India's National AI Mission⁹. These are significant institutional anchors. The immediate priority should be to operationalise them: the EU AI office and the India AI mission should have a concrete annual work programme, with defined deliverables on shared risk taxonomies, and mutual recognition of conformity assessment results

⁷ Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), Government of India, 'India AI Governance Guidelines: Enabling Safe and Trusted AI Innovation', November 5, 2025, New Delhi. The guidelines were unveiled by the Principal Scientific Adviser, Prof. Ajay Kumar Sood, and introduce an AI Governance Group (AIGG) for national coordination, a Technology and Policy Expert Committee (TPEC), and an AI Safety Institute (AISi) as the core research and testing body for AI safety and standards. The framework adopts a "whole-of-government" architecture with a voluntary, risk-based orientation and explicitly positions itself as a precursor to the India AI Impact Summit 2026. See: psa.gov.in/ai-mission-initiatives

⁸ European Commission, 'Key outcomes of the second EU-India Trade and Technology Council', digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu, 28 February 2025. The TTC's Joint Statement committed both sides to deepening cooperation between the European AI Office and India AI Mission, including on large language models (LLMs) and AI for human development, and welcomed the interoperability of digital public infrastructures. See also: European Commission, 'EU and India deepen strategic engagement: second Trade and Technology Council', digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news, 28 February 2025.

⁹ European Commission, 'EU and India deepen strategic engagement: second Trade and Technology Council', digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu, 28 February 2025; and European Commission and Government of India, 'Towards 2030: A Joint EU-India Comprehensive Strategic Agenda', endorsed at the 16th EU-India Summit, New Delhi, 27 January 2026, ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_26_224

for low- and medium-risk AI applications. Joint participation in ISO/IEC technical committees on AI, where both partners are active, offers a near-term vehicle for translating bilateral alignment into standards with genuine multilateral reach.

The Hiroshima AI Process (HAIP) offers a second, equally important site for strategic coordination. The EU is a G7 participant whose AI Act was directly shaped by the HAIP Code of Conduct¹⁰. India is a full member of the HAIP Friends Group, which as of March 2026 comprises 66 countries. The Friends Group, launched in May 2024, reflects a genuine effort to extend the HAIP's reach beyond the G7, and India's participation is a welcome signal of its commitment to multilateral AI governance¹¹. That said, the process's foundational documents, the International Guiding Principles and the Code of Conduct, were agreed among G7 members in December 2023, before the Friends Group existed¹². As the HAIP matures from norm-setting into implementation, there is a natural opportunity to revisit its governance architecture and create more structured channels through which Friends Group members can contribute to the evolution of the framework, not only its adoption. The EU, as a G7 participant with a deep bilateral relationship with India, is well placed to make that case from within. In parallel, the two sides should coordinate their positions ahead of each HAIP cycle: India's experience deploying AI at population scale in a lower-income context is analytically distinct from the G7 consensus and would add significant depth to the framework's guidance on risk in diverse deployment environments.

A related opportunity lies in regulatory cooperation. India's White Paper on Techno-Legal AI Governance, released in January 2026 by the Office of the Principal Scientific Advisor to the Government of India (PSA), while recommendatory in nature, advances what it calls a "law-plus"

¹⁰ The Hiroshima AI Process was launched at the G7 Hiroshima Summit in May 2023 and its Comprehensive Policy Framework, including the International Guiding Principles and Code of Conduct for organisations developing advanced AI systems, was endorsed by G7 leaders in December 2023. The HAIP Friends Group Action Plan 2026 was adopted at the second in-person Friends Group meeting, Tokyo, March 2026. See: soumu.go.jp/hiroshimaaiprocess/en; IAPP, 'Understanding the Hiroshima AI Process'. March 2026.

¹¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 'Prime Minister Kishida's attendance at the Side Event on Generative AI at the OECD Ministerial Council Meeting', 2 May 2024. The official list of Friends Group members as of that date confirms India's participation alongside 48 other countries and regions. The group has since grown to 66 countries. See: soumu.go.jp/hiroshimaaiprocess/en/supporters.html

¹² Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 'Advancing the Hiroshima AI Process Code of Conduct under the 2024 Italian G7 Presidency', October 2024. CSIS records that members of the European Parliament involved in drafting the EU AI Act stated that the HAIP Code of Conduct directly inspired certain provisions, including Article 52 governing transparency obligations for general-purpose AI models. Active discussion exists over whether HAIP compliance could confer presumption of conformity with the EU AI Act's codes of practice for GPAI models. European Commission, 'Commission welcomes G7 leaders' agreement on Guiding Principles and a Code of Conduct on Artificial Intelligence', 30 October 2023.

model: governance embedded directly into AI systems by design, combining baseline legal safeguards, sector-specific rules, technical controls, and institutional mechanisms across the full AI lifecycle¹³. This approach is in-principle closer to the EU's own direction of travel than India's light-touch framing might suggest: the EU AI Act already requires conformity by design for high-risk systems, and the European AI Office's Code of Practice for general-purpose AI models is moving toward embedding governance obligations into training and deployment pipelines. Considering this convergence, a joint EU-India technical working group, convened under the TTC and co-chaired by the European AI office and the India AI Mission should be tasked specifically with mapping these points of regulatory convergence, identifying where mutual recognition or equivalence arrangements are feasible, and producing a public-facing annual report. Working together on achieving greater transparency would help build market confidence in both jurisdictions and reduce the compliance costs currently for firms operating across both regulatory environments.

Lever 2: AI for public good

India has made AI adoption and AI for social good a central priority under the India AI Mission, with AI for Economic Growth and Social Good featuring as a prominent theme at the India AI Impact Summit 2026. The clearest evidence of what this looks like in practice is India's Digital Public Infrastructure stack, which represents arguably the most far-reaching state-led deployment of AI-enabled public services globally. Another example of this is in healthcare: The Strategy for Artificial Intelligence in Healthcare (SAHI), released in February 2026, documents AI infrastructure already operating at population scale: 282 million telemedicine consultations on the e-Sanjeevani platform and AI-assisted TB diagnostics that produced a 27% reduction in adverse outcomes¹⁴.

The EU's October 2025 Apply AI Strategy is oriented toward the same challenge from a different starting point: accelerating AI adoption in healthcare, the public sector, and strategic industries in

¹³ Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser (OPSA), Government of India, 'Strengthening AI Governance Through Techno-Legal Framework', White Paper No. 2 in the Series on Emerging Policy Priorities for India's AI Ecosystem, released 23 January 2026. The paper was prepared with inputs from the iSPIRT Foundation and the Centre for Responsible AI, IIT Madras, following a high-level roundtable on 22 December 2025. It advances a "law-plus" model that embeds governance into AI systems by design, combining baseline legal safeguards, sector-specific regulation, technical controls (watermarking, privacy-enhancing technologies), and institutional mechanisms including the AIGG and AISI. The paper explicitly positions effective implementation as the critical prerequisite for any AI governance framework. See: psa.gov.in/CMS/web/sites/default/files/publication/AI-WP_TechnoLegal.pdf

¹⁴ Government of India, Press Information Bureau Research Unit, "Transforming Healthcare Delivery Through Artificial Intelligence," February 13, 2026, <https://static.pib.gov.in/WriteReadData/specificdocs/documents/2026/feb/doc2026213788701.pdf>

contexts where state institutions need to build deployment confidence at scale.¹⁵ The two approaches are complementary. India brings deployment experience and population-scale data; the EU brings accountability frameworks, algorithmic audit methodologies, and civic AI literacy infrastructure. A bilateral AI for Public Good programme, co-developed through existing summit commitments¹⁶, could structure an exchange of technical standards, governance protocols, and deployment lessons across healthcare AI, agricultural productivity tools, and public administration.

AI for social good also has a critical labour dimension, and it is one where both partners have much to offer each other. NITI Aayog's October 2025 Roadmap on AI for Inclusive Societal Development identifies roughly 490 million informal workers, around 90 percent of India's labour force, as largely excluded from the gains of AI deployment¹⁷. Its proposed *Digital ShramSetu* mission addresses financial insecurity, limited market access, skills deficits, and low productivity through AI, blockchain, and immersive learning tools. The EU has directly relevant experience through the European Social Fund and Digital Europe Programme in funding AI-enabled upskilling for workers in low-productivity transitions. A joint initiative piloting voice-first, multilingual AI tools for informal workers would sit at precisely the intersection of inclusion, digital infrastructure, and governance that both partners have identified as a shared priority.

Lever 3: Data governance, cross-border flows and infrastructure

Both the EU and India have strong data governance frameworks. The EU's GDPR and India's Digital Personal Data Protection Act share a consent-based, rights-first orientation. Yet cross-border data flows between them remain technically cumbersome and legally uncertain. As of early 2026, no formal adequacy decision under GDPR Article 45 exists for India, and in April 2025 the

¹⁵ European Commission, 'Apply AI Strategy', COM(2025), October 2025. The strategy promotes AI adoption in healthcare, mobility, the cultural and creative sectors, and the public sector, and introduces three priorities on workforce AI literacy as part of a stakeholder-driven, sector-specific flagship approach. See: digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/ai-talent-skills-and-literacy

¹⁶ Both the second EU-India TTC Joint Statement (28 February 2025) and the 'Towards 2030' Comprehensive Strategic Agenda (27 January 2026) explicitly commit both sides to joint projects harnessing AI for human development and the common good, and to working toward the interoperability of their respective Digital Public Infrastructures. See footnotes 14 and 21.

¹⁷ NITI Aayog, 'AI for Inclusive Societal Development: Roadmap on AI for India's Informal Workforce', October 2025, niti.gov.in. The Roadmap was produced with contributions from Deloitte South Asia and an Expert Council including representatives from Salesforce India, Microsoft Research India, and Piramal Foundation. It identifies 490 million informal workers, roughly 90 percent of India's labour force, as the primary target population for inclusive AI deployment, and proposes Mission Digital ShramSetu as a national technology-driven initiative to address financial insecurity, limited market access, skilling deficits, inadequate social protection, and low productivity. The Roadmap envisions deployment of voice-first AI interfaces, smart contracts, and demand-driven micro-credentials by 2035.

European Data Protection Supervisor declined to authorise a data transfer to India from an EU institution, citing unresolved implementation gaps in the DPDPA framework¹⁸. The DPDPA's Data Protection Board has yet to become fully operational, and the Digital Personal Data Protection Rules notified in 2025 are still being implemented. These gaps are surmountable, and their resolution should be treated as a shared priority.

The EU should formally initiate a pre-adequacy dialogue with India, modelled on the structured process that preceded adequacy decisions for Japan and South Korea, and linked to a clear roadmap with defined benchmarks: full operationalisation of the Data Protection Board, independent oversight mechanisms, and proportionality safeguards for government access to personal data. In parallel, the two sides should negotiate sector-specific data sharing arrangements for healthcare AI and climate research, using existing Standard Contractual Clauses as a legal bridge while the adequacy pathway matures¹⁹. This sequenced approach would unlock significant AI innovation potential in the near term while anchoring India's data governance evolution to a credible international standard. It would also demonstrate, in concrete terms, that the privacy-versus-innovation trade-off is a false choice when governance is well designed.

The data governance conversation cannot be separated from a deeper structural question: who controls the infrastructure on which AI is built. The PSA's December 2025 White Paper on Democratising Access to AI Infrastructure identifies a concentration risk that is common to both partners: compute capacity, high-quality datasets, and enabling tools remain largely controlled by a small number of large firms and major urban centres, limiting equitable participation across geographies and economic strata. The Paper explicitly frames access to compute, data, and model ecosystems as a shared national resource rather than a commercial product, and recommends a DPI-style approach to AI infrastructure, building directories, metadata standards,

¹⁸ European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS), decision disclosed April 2025, declining authorisation for the European Investment Bank to transfer contact data to India under GDPR Article 46, citing the absence of enforceable data subject rights and effective legal remedies in India's then-unenforced DPDPA framework. See: Mitra Subramanian and Mihika Mukherjee, 'The Adequacy Dilemma: India's DPDPA and the GDPR', Observer Research Foundation, June 2025, orfonline.org. See also: TM Partners, 'Data transfers to India', February 2026, noting that the DPDPA and its 2025 Rules had not yet been operationalised pending establishment of the Data Protection Board.

¹⁹ Under GDPR Article 46, in the absence of an adequacy decision, data transfers may proceed subject to Standard Contractual Clauses (SCCs) or Binding Corporate Rules. The European Commission's adequacy track under Article 45 has been granted to 15 countries to date; India is not among them. A pre-adequacy dialogue mechanism, analogous to those used with Japan (adequacy granted 2019) and South Korea (adequacy granted 2021), provides the most viable pathway given the structural convergence between the DPDPA and GDPR, conditional on India's full operationalisation of the Data Protection Board and independent oversight. See: dpdpa.com, 'India-EU Data Adequacy Under DPDPA and GDPR', February 2026

access protocols, and consent-based federated data flows that allow collaborative AI development while preserving data sovereignty²⁰. The EU's AI Continent Action Plan, adopted in April 2025, converges on a similar logic: through AI Factories, AI Gigafactories, and Common European Data Spaces, Brussels is attempting to redistribute AI infrastructure access across member states and reduce dependence on non-European cloud and compute providers²¹. Two major democracies grappling with the same infrastructure concentration problem, from different economic positions, have a compelling shared interest in developing interoperable standards for open, federated AI infrastructure. A bilateral working group on AI infrastructure interoperability, with a mandate to develop shared technical architectures for dataset access, compute exchange protocols, and model ecosystem standards, would be a natural extension of the TTC's existing work programme. The IndiaAIKosh national dataset repository, which had onboarded over 5,700 datasets across 20 sectors by December 2025, and the EU's developing sectoral data spaces for health, manufacturing, and climate, represent complementary assets that could be connected through exactly this kind of shared architecture.

Lever 4: AI safety and frontier governance

The governance challenge facing both the EU and India is not unique to any one application of AI, but it is sharpest at the frontier: as AI systems become more capable and more autonomous, existing regulatory frameworks struggle to keep pace. The EU AI Act was designed for a landscape that has already shifted²². India's November 2025 Governance Guidelines

²⁰ Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser (OPSA), Government of India, 'Democratising Access to AI Infrastructure', White Paper No. 1 in the Series on Emerging Policy Priorities for India's AI Ecosystem, Version 3.0, 29 December 2025, psa.gov.in. The paper defines democratising access as making compute, datasets, and model ecosystems available and affordable to a wide set of users beyond large firms and major urban centres. It identifies three key enablers: expanding access to high-quality representative datasets, providing affordable and reliable computing resources, and integrating AI with Digital Public Infrastructure. It proposes a DPI-style architecture for AI infrastructure, building shared directories, metadata standards, access protocols, and consent-based federated data flows. As of December 2025, IndiaAIKosh had onboarded 5,722 datasets and 251 AI models across 20 sectors from 54 entities.

²¹ European Commission, 'AI Continent Action Plan', COM(2025) 123, April 2025, commission.europa.eu/topics/competitiveness/ai-continent_en. The Plan is structured around five pillars: computing power and infrastructure (including at least 19 AI Factories and up to 5 AI Gigafactories across EuroHPC); data access (Common European Data Spaces for health, manufacturing, climate and other sectors); strategic AI adoption; skills and talent; and regulatory simplification. The Plan explicitly targets reduction of EU dependence on non-European cloud and data centre infrastructure and mandates European-led consortia for Gigafactory projects to preserve strategic sovereignty. The budget for the Digital Europe Programme 2025-2027 supporting implementation is €3.2 billion.

²² Prof. Hung-Yi Chen, 'AI Governance and Regulation 2026: A Complete Guide to Global Frameworks', March 2026, noting that the EU AI Act was negotiated before the proliferation of agentic AI systems and that its provisions on liability, human oversight, and incident reporting were not designed for multi-step autonomous agents. The governance gap creates challenges in liability attribution, oversight calibration, and cross-border accountability. See: hungyichen.com. See also: Partnership on AI, 'Six AI Governance Priorities for 2026', February 2026, identifying agentic systems as a priority governance challenge requiring controlled testing environments and multi-stakeholder iteration before frameworks are scaled.

acknowledge explicitly that governance frameworks for rapidly evolving AI capabilities remain a work in progress. Both partners are, in effect, building the plane while flying it.

AI safety, understood broadly as the set of practices, standards, and institutional mechanisms that ensure AI systems behave reliably and accountably, is an area where neither jurisdiction has a complete answer, and where collaboration is more productive than parallel development. The questions are the same on both sides: how should governance obligations be embedded into AI systems by design rather than applied as post-hoc compliance? How should human oversight be calibrated as AI systems take on more consequential tasks? How should liability be attributed when an AI system causes harm through a chain of decisions no single actor controlled? How should incident data be shared across borders to enable collective learning without creating regulatory overhead?

India brings the perspective of a jurisdiction deploying AI at extraordinary scale across diverse socioeconomic conditions, where failure modes and edge cases emerge at a frequency and variety that controlled testing cannot replicate. The EU brings a mature regulatory architecture, a developed body of conformity assessment practice, and significant investment in red-teaming and evaluation methodologies. A formal EU-India Dialogue on AI Safety and Frontier Governance, could serve as an avenue to work together. Its mandate should be forward-looking: developing shared frameworks for human oversight proportionate to capability and risk, agreed principles for incident reporting that enable cross-border learning, and a joint research agenda on evaluation methodologies for increasingly capable AI systems. As AI capabilities continue to develop, including at the frontier, having institutional channels already in place between two major democratic jurisdictions will matter considerably more than building them after the fact.

Lever 5: Skilling and talent mobility

Workforce development carries the most durable long-term consequences of any dimension of AI cooperation. The IndiaAI Mission's FutureSkills pillar is building domestic AI talent at scale, with over 30 Data and AI Labs established across Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities and a mandate to expand the pipeline of AI graduates and doctoral researchers²³. The EU, through its Digital Education

²³ Government of India, IndiaAI Mission, 'IndiaAI FutureSkills', indiaai.gov.in. The FutureSkills pillar aims to increase the number of graduates, postgraduates and PhD scholars in AI and establish Data and AI Labs in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities under the FutureSkills initiative. As of early 2026, over 30 Data Labs had been established pan-India.

Action Plan, the AI Act's Article 4 AI literacy requirements, and its Apply AI Strategy, has developed institutional expertise in large-scale AI upskilling and sectoral deployment training²⁴. These are complementary capabilities that should be connected rather than developed in parallel silos.

The institutional infrastructure for this is already partially in place. The European Legal Gateway Office, launched in New Delhi on 18 February 2026 and announced by President von der Leyen at the 16th EU-India Summit, is the first EU initiative of its kind in any partner country. It will connect Indian ICT professionals, students, and researchers with EU employers and higher education institutions across all 27 member states²⁵. This is a meaningful step. The recommendation is to build on it by extending the Legal Gateway's remit explicitly to AI-specific roles and skills: establishing a dedicated AI talent corridor that includes mutual recognition of AI credentials and certifications, joint doctoral and postdoctoral research fellowships anchored in IIT-EU university partnerships, and a structured reverse exchange programme that enables European AI governance practitioners to embed in Indian public sector deployments. Such a programme would help counter the current pattern in which Indian AI expertise flows disproportionately towards the United States²⁶, building instead a bilateral talent relationship that strengthens both partners' AI capabilities while deepening the human networks that make governance cooperation durable over time.

There is a further dimension to the skilling agenda that merits separate treatment: AI literacy for governance practitioners and policymakers, as distinct from technical AI talent. The PSA's Techno-Legal White Paper is explicit that effective implementation of any AI governance framework depends not just on regulatory design but on the institutional capacity to apply it, a

²⁴ European Commission, Digital Education Action Plan 2021–2027, COM(2020) 624 final, September 2020. The Plan sets out ambitions for high-quality, inclusive, and accessible digital education and training across EU member states, with specific provisions on AI literacy.

²⁵ European External Action Service (EEAS), 'Launch of the European Legal Gateway Office pilot', New Delhi, 18 February 2026, eeas.europa.eu. The office was launched by Executive Vice-President Henna Virkkunen and India's Minister of External Affairs Dr S. Jaishankar. It was announced by President von der Leyen at the 16th EU-India Summit on 27 January 2026 and forms part of the 'Towards 2030: a Joint India-European Union Comprehensive Strategic Agenda'. The Gateway operates through three pillars: a Gateway Office in India, a Support Office in Brussels, and a digital one-stop hub. It is the first initiative of its kind established by the EU in any partner country. See also: ICMPD, 'EU opens European Legal Gateway Office in India', icmpd.org

²⁶ Stanford University Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence (HAI), 'AI Index Report 2026', April 2026. The report records India as having the largest net outflow of AI research talent of any country in 2025, at -16.9, more than double Canada's -7.1 and Germany's -2.4, and describes the relationship between India's AI talent loss and the United States' gains as a "near mirror-image relationship." India ranked second globally in total number of AI researchers and developers (after the United States), with a pool of approximately 50,000 AI professionals. See: hai.stanford.edu/ai-index

capacity that requires policymakers, regulators, and public sector officials to understand AI systems well enough to make consequential decisions about them²⁷. The EU AI Act's Article 4 requirement for AI literacy among providers and deployers makes the same point for the private sector. Both jurisdictions are, in effect, wrestling with the same governance capacity deficit: technical norms are advancing faster than the institutional competence needed to apply them. The Government of India has established three national AI Centres of Excellence in healthcare, agriculture, and sustainable cities, with a fourth on AI in education announced in the Union Budget 2025, and plans for five National Centres of Excellence for Skilling in collaboration with global partners²⁸. These centres are exactly the kind of institutional infrastructure through which a joint EU-India AI governance literacy programme could be anchored. The practical vehicle for this is a structured curriculum for AI governance practitioners, co-developed by leading research institutions on both sides and delivered through existing bilateral academic partnerships.

Navigating the Challenges

The prospects for EU-India AI cooperation cannot be assessed without a clear-eyed account of the frictions and asymmetries that complicate it. The question of technology sovereignty i.e, who controls critical AI infrastructure, and under what legal frameworks, is one that every nation is grappling with, not just India or Europe. As AI becomes embedded in public services, financial systems, and national security, governments across the world are asking legitimate questions about resilience, accountability, and the terms on which they engage with global technology providers. These represent legitimate questions of governance design rather than protectionism in disguise, and addressing them requires institutional frameworks that can accommodate differing conceptions of sovereignty without sacrificing interoperability.

²⁷ Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser (OPSA), Government of India, 'Strengthening AI Governance Through Techno-Legal Framework', White Paper No. 2 in the Series on Emerging Policy Priorities for India's AI Ecosystem, released 23 January 2026. The paper was prepared with inputs from the iSPIRT Foundation and the Centre for Responsible AI, IIT Madras, following a high-level roundtable on 22 December 2025. It advances a "law-plus" model that embeds governance into AI systems by design, combining baseline legal safeguards, sector-specific regulation, technical controls (watermarking, privacy-enhancing technologies), and institutional mechanisms including the AIGG and AISI. The paper explicitly positions effective implementation as the critical prerequisite for any AI governance framework. See: psa.gov.in/CMS/web/sites/default/files/publication/AI-WP_TechnoLegal.pdf

²⁸ Government of India, Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser, 'AI Mission and Initiatives', psa.gov.in/ai-mission-initiatives. The Government has established three AI Centres of Excellence in healthcare, agriculture, and sustainable cities in New Delhi. The Union Budget 2025-26 announced a fourth Centre of Excellence for AI in education with an outlay of ₹500 crore. Plans are in place for five National Centres of Excellence for Skilling in collaboration with global partners, to equip youth with industry-relevant AI expertise in support of the 'Make for India, Make for the World' vision (accessed May 2026).

The recently concluded EU-India Free Trade Agreement which was nearly two decades in the making now brings digital trade provisions, including privacy and market access, directly into the frame of AI governance. How these provisions are implemented in the years ahead could either deepen or complicate the cooperation this partnership needs.

From Dialogue to Deliverables

Trust in AI must be built not just through technical safeguards, but through shared governance architectures that reflect shared values. The EU and India represent nearly two billion people and have both the credibility and the responsibility to help shape that architecture.

The next chapter of cooperation should be defined by concrete deliverables: a bilateral AI standards working group, a data adequacy pathway, a joint initiative on AI for government, and a coordinated voice in multilateral forums from the OECD to the G20.

Realising this potential will require both partners to accept that effective AI governance is a public good whose production demands sustained institutional investment, not periodic declarations. The credibility of the EU-India axis in global AI governance will ultimately rest not on the breadth of its stated ambitions but on the specificity and durability of its commitments.

About the Author

Urmi Tat is a digital public policy professional specialising in digital governance, artificial intelligence policy, and international technology cooperation. She is an EU–India Young Leader (2026–27) under the European Union Delegation to India and a former US–India AI Fellow with the Observer Research Foundation America. Her professional experience includes serving as a trade negotiator for the United Kingdom, working on strategic policy initiatives with the India Semiconductor Mission, and as a researcher for the Centre for Air Power Studies, Indian Air Force. Her research and writing examine the intersection of emerging technologies, public policy, and the India–Europe strategic relationship.

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