



EUNIC Strategic Framework 2025-2029

Vision

EUNIC builds a collective international cultural relations approach amongst its members, to strengthen trust and understanding internationally through culture. EUNIC advocates for the role and recognition of culture as core component of international relations.

International cultural relations – maintaining connections in turbulent times

The past years have been extremely volatile, against a backdrop of ever-changing geopolitics. Authoritarian threat challenges the international rules-based order. Conflict and climate crisis are a direct threat to human and natural life. Power imbalances and inequalities in global wealth, trade, and resources are increasing and much of the world remains in post-pandemic recovery from Covid-19. Crises of trust in public institutions and democratic process are experienced in many regions. Europe's role in the world is under scrutiny. Public funding cuts threaten the existence of human centred investment and development.

Despite the complexity of this external environment, EUNIC's active international cultural relations initiatives support hope based, creative, and collaborative responses to such challenges, demonstrating "culture's role in turning global challenges into opportunities"¹. EUNIC offers a platform for a practice-based and values-led approach to culture in external relations as a means for Europe to remain strong and united in turbulent times.

In parallel the last years have seen an increased role for culture in many multilateral fora, from the European Union to the G7, G20, and the United Nations. International cultural relations have been recognised and promoted in numerous international agreements, statements, and commitments, which includes highlighting the power of international cultural relations to "renew and broaden bilateral and multilateral cooperation and enable dialogue and solidarity within and between countries"², and the vital role of artistic creativity for the "functioning of democratic societies"³.

Our mission

EUNIC – European Union National Institutes for Culture – is the European network of national-level organisations engaging in international cultural relations. Together with our partners worldwide, we bring to life cultural collaboration in more than 100 countries through a network of 140 clusters⁴, drawing on the experience of our members from all EU Member States and associate countries.

EUNIC advocates a prominent role of culture in international relations and is a strategic partner of the EU in this field. EUNIC is a platform for knowledge sharing and capacity building amongst our members and partners.

Our values and principles

EUNIC's work is deeply rooted in the principles of international cultural relations, a values-led approach seeking to stimulate collaboration and striving to create mutually beneficial relations based on respect, solidarity, and commitment to cultural diversity. We strive to build and maintain fair partnerships by practising mutual listening and learning and by engaging in co-creation and joint capacity building with a commitment to cultural and civil society actors.⁵

EUNIC unites both governmental and non-governmental organisations, with diverse mandates and operational realities, in one community of practice. As a leading and diverse network of international cultural relations actors from Europe, we recognise our positionality in a global context and the importance of balancing local needs, contexts, and realities in partner countries and our members' needs and interests.

EUNIC stands for a cross-cutting approach to culture. The diverse and specialist expertise and activities of our members individually and as the network span over broad definitions of culture. EUNIC therefore embodies a transversal understanding of culture, which includes (but is not limited to) longstanding experience in the arts, creative industries, multilingualism, tangible and intangible cultural heritage, youth, gender, diversity and inclusion, sustainable development, cultural tourism, digital culture, and development cooperation.

¹ G7 Culture Ministers, [Naples Declaration "Culture, common good of humanity, common responsibility"](#) (2024).

² UNESCO, [World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development, MONDIACULT 2022, Final Declaration](#).

³ UN Special Rapporteur in the field of Cultural Rights, ["Report on the contribution of cultural initiatives to creating and developing right-respecting societies"](#) (2018).

⁴ As of December 2024.

⁵ Council of the EU, [Work Plan for Culture 2023-2026. Section \(d\) of the Work Plan, devoted to the cultural dimension of EU external relations, emphasises the EU's "bottom-up approach rooted in civil society"](#).

A strategic partner

In 2026 EUNIC will celebrate 20 years of its existence. Over this time, the network has steadily grown in scope, scale, and ambition thanks to the commitment of our members and team. As a network we have become a key interlocutor and strategic partner of the EU.

As from 2025 the European Commission is developing a new comprehensive strategy framework for the EU's cultural engagement, this gives an opportunity to strengthen the international dimension to this engagement and raise the visibility, leadership, and resourcing of the EU's commitment to international cultural relations. In that process EUNIC plays a proactive active role in supporting the European Commission, European Parliament, and Member States. EUNIC can contribute its vast insight and connections to global civil society and cultural actors into these policy reflections.

This Strategic Framework is designed to be the guide for the network over the period 2025 until 2029. Rather than a static plan, it is aimed as a flexible and living document that may evolve in response to rapidly changing global developments.

Objective 1: EUNIC is a doing network; day to day around the globe we create people-to-people collaborations through culture.

EUNIC clusters will become increasingly efficient, dynamic, and impactful, platforms for collaboration bringing together the country offices, institutes, and embassies of EUNIC members. Clusters will expand and deepen their local partnerships, as long-standing and structural allies of local civil society and cultural actors across the globe. This makes EUNIC uniquely placed to strengthen international cultural relations by the following actions:

- In close collaboration with their partners, clusters co-create and implement concrete international cultural relations projects that are based on the principles of international cultural relations and fair and mutually beneficial partnerships.
- Clusters co-create strategies and partnership models tailored to local realities, involving local civil society and public sector actors, as well as European and international organisations. These strategies are designed to stay current.
- Particular attention is given to building strategic partnerships with the European Commission, EU Delegations, and European Commission Representations, creating a mutually beneficial link between practice and policy. EUNIC strives to ensure that EU funding is accessible to a wider range and diversity of EUNIC members and other cultural actors, and we will intensify our work in Sub-Saharan Africa in the period 2025-2028 with the support of DG International Partnerships of the European Commission.
- Partnerships and projects developed through the network strategically link to globally relevant topics and international agreements, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, making concrete the cultural dimension to contemporary global issues.

Vision of success

- Local civil society and cultural actors, as well as a growing number of EUNIC members, have increased access to new partnerships in international cultural relations, and together they engage in meaningful and sustainable cross-border collaborations that are based on what is locally relevant.
- EUNIC clusters have increasingly focused on what is impactful but also feasible and desirable. Member headquarters and the EUNIC office keep continual attention and give active strategic steer to how to strengthen and support visions of success for clusters.

Objective 2: EUNIC is an advocating network; we support the European Union to develop a prominent role as an international cultural relations actor.

EUNIC is the only European network fully dedicated to cultural relations and in respect of subsidiarity has become a key interlocutor of the EU focus on culture in external relations. The network has established itself as a recognised and trusted partner of the EU in its strategic approach to international cultural relations⁶ and will support the EU in advancing its engagement as an international cultural relations actor, through the following actions:

- EUNIC continues to support the EU in the conception, delivery, and coordination of its continued commitment to international cultural relations by working in close cooperation with the European External Action Service and its Delegations worldwide, a broad range of Directorates-General of the European Commission and the European Parliament, as well as Member States represented in the Council. To that end, EUNIC remains actively engaged in structured Member State expert groups and policy consultations, as well as in day-to-day contact with the institutions. We advocate intensified international cultural relations actions within EU priority areas such as enlargement and the Mediterranean.
- EUNIC increasingly links on the ground experience of human centred people-to-people international cultural relations work with policy making, raising the expertise of our members from 29 countries and the direct voice of civil society partners from the countries where we are active.

⁶ "Culture is an essential asset for the EU in its international relations and EUNIC is our indispensable partner."
- Stefano Sannino, Secretary General of the European External Action Service (September 2022).

- The flagship programme European Spaces of Culture has established itself as one of the prime strategic funding instruments to bring the international cultural relations approach to life and is recognised by the EU as main driver for innovation in fair and balanced partnerships in international cultural relations worldwide. The aim is to establish the programme as permanent instrument to support international cultural relations initiatives.

Vision of success

- EUNIC has contributed to a fully-fledged EU strategy for international cultural relations and a firm positioning of culture in the EU's external policy, which includes more robust coordination among EU institutions and coordination with Member States.
- EUNIC has provided a compelling evidence base of practice which has contributed to funding for culture maintained through EU services beyond DG Education and Culture that is accessible to a greater number of EUNIC members and their partners.
- European Spaces of Culture is established as long-term funding instrument in the EU's future Multiannual Financial Framework (post-2027), offering an increased number of EUNIC members access to participate in international cultural relations worldwide.

Objective 3: EUNIC is a learning network: together we create peer-to-peer capacity building opportunities and a platform for strategic reflections.

Against a backdrop of constant evolutions in the global cultural landscape and shifting geopolitics, EUNIC will strengthen itself as a community of practice amongst its members and partners, defending the independent voice of the cultural sector, bringing in high-level practitioners' perspective from our membership and culture sector partners, deepening the human relations between the leadership of our members, and keeping proactive and equipped on evolving topics and global developments. This will be achieved through the following actions:

- We will deepen the network's peer learning and knowledge exchange and transfer on fundamental practice such as fair collaboration in international cultural relations and on key topics such as safeguarding freedom of creative expression⁷, sustainability and climate action, supporting international cultural relations in fragile contexts, combatting misinformation, and understanding new technologies including Artificial Intelligence.
- EUNIC and our members will develop new knowledge sharing workshops on topics vital to the future of international cultural relations. EUNIC offers a mobility scheme where a bigger plurality of members can learn more concretely about each other's strengths, challenges and collaborative needs. EUNIC continues to commission research on areas where our members seek to further their literacy and implementation. Greater strategic connections between these three actions and greater co-curation with/among our members will enhance the outcomes of this capacity building and its advocacy potential.
- We will strengthen internal communications to enable members to make the most of the network and boost external communication to better and more widely tell the story of our mission, work, and its outcomes.

Vision of success

- The inclusive and peer-learning space within the network has been strengthened at different levels, with an increased number of members involvement in knowledge sharing and valorising more the insights and perspectives of the diversity of the network's workforce.
- The transversal value of international cultural relations has increased visibility and profile known at global level.
- A greater awareness and utilisation of the network as a key platform for high-level strategic exchange on the evolution of the practice of international cultural relations and greater use of the network for deeper exchange on issues affecting our work, providing a depoliticised and safe space as an independent membership association.

To achieve our collective goals, EUNIC members commit to:

- Further developing concrete tools together to enable member colleagues to collaborate across organisational boundaries and beyond the promotion of their national cultural and bilateral relations.
- Proactively bringing in strategic insights and diverse perspectives into the collective reflection and actions of the network, broadening the plurality of members engaged in and benefitting from EUNIC's advocacy work.
- Maintaining active and frank dialogue with their networks about contributing proactively to the success and dynamic of EUNIC clusters.
- Adequate funding to support the cultivation of a shared international cultural relations approach through the Cluster Fund as well as EU and other third party supported thematic or geographical funds.
- Robust internal and external communications (from the EUNIC office as well as within member organisations), able to serve the complexity of EUNIC's work to show the network's complementary strength and its plural voice in advocacy.

⁷The Council calls to take measures to uphold and protect artistic freedom and the rights of artists globally, including the right to create without censorship or intimidation. (para 18) Council of the EU, [Conclusions on At-Risk and Displaced Artists](#) (2023).