

THE EUROPEAN UNION AS AN ENABLER OF INTERNATIONAL FILM RELATIONS

Core Problem

The cultural action of the European Union (EU) beyond its borders is framed by the Joint Communication Towards an EU Strategy for international cultural relations (ICR; European Commission, 2016), which places long-term trust-building through mutually beneficial and equal cooperation (not only among professionals but also with audiences) at the core of the EU's global cultural action. However, the practical ties between this policy and initiatives to support the film industry – European and otherwise – beyond the EU's borders remain incipient. An exception lies in the annual European Union Film Festivals (EUFF), although REBOOT's research also shows that there is scope to strengthen EUFF's ties with ICR. At the same time, European and non-European film professionals repeatedly call for increased opportunities to exchange knowledge, co-produce, and better engage with their audiences, echoing the principles behind the ICR framework.

This policy brief makes policy proposals to strengthen the links between the EU's film policy, both internal and external, and the EU's International Cultural Relations. This would strengthen the impact and sustainability of both policies, maximising public investment, and reinforce their ability to respond to the needs of film professionals in Europe and beyond. At the same time, it would also support the production and distribution of independent film in Europe and abroad, increasing the circulation of unique stories that reflect multiple world views.

The policy proposals are organised around the following dimensions: co-productions, film festivals, skills/knowledge exchange and capacity development, diplomatic activities and European film funding schemes.

Methodology

This policy brief results from findings from several REBOOT resources: the report on the LUX Audience Award & European Film Festivals (D3.1; Lähdesmäki et al, 2025) and concomitant policy brief (Ramadani et al., 2025), the report on the mapping and EU law of institutional models for the promotion of the EFI (D3.5; Vlassis et al, 2025), the report on the framings and strategies of cinema professionals (D4.1; Rossato Fernandes et al. 2025), and the report on international understanding of the European film industry (D4.4; Dâmaso et al, 2025). The brief combines and adapts policy recommendations made in some of these reports (D3.1 and D4.4) and insights connected to ICR that emerge from other reports (D3.5 and D4.1). Altogether, it reflects the views of more than 1000 stakeholders.

Regarding report D3.1, its aim was to understand the rationale and organisational challenges behind the EU Film Festival (EUFF). It drew on desk research, feedback from

organisers in 27 countries collected by Cineurope in 2023, and qualitative content analysis of semi-structured interviews with 19 interviewees representing European External Action Service (EEAS) officials and festival organisers in eight non-EU countries hosting the festival in 2023. This research was translated into a policy brief (Lähdesmäk et al., 2025). As for report D3.5, it mapped institutional models for the promotion of the EFI and was divided into several parts. Part A aimed to understand the institutional promotion efforts of national film industries in eight EU Member States (MS). The study drew on extensive desk research and 72 semi-structured interviews with European film professionals conducted between September 2023 and November 2024. Report D4.1 aimed to understand how European film professionals perceive competitiveness, how they interact with international markets, and what challenges and opportunities the film industry faces. It resulted from a survey distributed across European countries, which collected 432 responses between November 2024 and February 2025, and 37 in-depth semi-structured interviews with EU film professionals, conducted between January and August 2024. Moreover, participant observation was conducted during the 77th edition of Locarno Film Festival in 2024. Finally, report D4.4 on the international understanding of the European film industry is based on data collected through 99 semi-structured interviews with key informants conducted from December 2023 to July 2025, and a common international survey conducted across six international markets, which collected 425 valid responses between November 2024 and March 2025.

Discussion

These reports reveal several common challenges shared by EU and non-EU stakeholders (ranging from film professionals, cultural and film institutes to film festival organisers and EU delegations), which can be addressed with the collaborative framework that characterises International Cultural Relations. Although such challenges overlap, they are presented separately for analytical reasons.

Co-productions are highly valued by film professionals and other industry stakeholders, who highlight their cultural, industrial and financial benefits. However, the data indicate the need to adapt them to recent and ongoing changes in the film industry caused by technological advances and market dynamics such as the increasing power of international streamers. This requires both structural and financial readjustment of existing public policies and support. Furthermore, countries from the Global South have fewer financial and industrial resources to participate in co-productions and this requires an approach that is tailored to their needs and particularities. Additionally, information on co-productions is fragmented and

difficult to understand, and the procedures for carrying out co-productions are often overly bureaucratic.

As for film festivals, a challenge that was commonly mentioned by stakeholders relates to the participation of European professionals in non-European festivals and vice versa due to insufficient funds. This is combined with the high screening fees charged by sales agents, which significantly limit the presence of European films in regions such as South America. Furthermore, independent producers, both from within and outside the EU, struggle to gain visibility at major festivals. With regard to festival design, professionals from EU and non-EU countries alike believe that the number of side events should be increased and that these should focus on dialogues that foster collaboration and encourage professional networking. Another important issue was raised by South African professionals: the marginal positioning of non-European pavilions at European film festivals. When it comes to festival communication and evaluation, increased emphasis on values such as inclusivity, diversity, and representation is needed. Finally, the cultural and social benefits of festivals are not always evaluated, especially through non-market indicators.

Regarding the exchange of skills/knowledge and capacity development, respondents identified fragile or insufficient distribution channels that promote cultural exchange inside and outside the EU as a top challenge and priority. Moreover, the lack of an overarching framework for distribution and promotion is seen as hindering the internationalisation of independent films.

Concerning audience engagement, the need to enable film professionals and organisations to invest in long-term audience building with specific groups (such as the youth) was also identified. Finally, other issues with negative impact across the supply chain were also highlighted, such as the significant barriers that non-EU professionals face in accessing EU archives.

EU diplomatic activities are valued and considered essential to support international cooperation. However, EU stakeholders highlighted the limited funding and institutional capacity to focus on such work and the need for increased coordination between EU Member States as well as greater alignment of funding programmes. Non-EU professionals from the Global South recognised the importance of EU frameworks for cultural cooperation but emphasised the need to include non-EU professionals in strategic decisions. Moreover, the need for greater cooperation between EU and non-EU public streaming platforms was raised.

Finally, stakeholders call for distribution and promotion to be recognised as an important component of the film industry. The need for this change is evident in the fact that European film funding schemes dedicated to distribution have been abandoned and that the scope of existing European networks does not always include distribution and promotion.

Implementing the following Policy Recommendations would address these challenges and needs.

Policy Recommendations

Co-productions

Co-production agreements and funding

- **Reinforce existing funding available to support international co-productions, including with third countries:** International productions need funding for promotion and distribution to increase their availability and visibility in European and non-European countries (D4.4). Funding should encourage collaboration and prioritise small-scale projects with local professionals (D3.1).
- **Update international co-production agreements:** Co-production agreements enable the internationalisation of films and provide an opportunity to share knowledge. Non-European professionals believe these agreements should be updated to reflect changes in the industry, such as shifts in market dynamics and the increasingly dominant presence of streaming services (D4.4).
- **Develop common funding schemes, legal agreements, and professional networks of cooperation to strengthen EU/non-EU co-productions:** EU professionals emphasise the need for reinforced institutional support for co-productions with non-EU countries. The EU could develop institutional partnerships to facilitate such collaborations (D4.1).
- **Lower thresholds of co-production financing requirements:** Respondents from the Global South state repeatedly that co-production financing requirements are too high to be met by national budgets. Lowering such thresholds could increase the number of co-productions with Global South partners (D4.4).

Information about co-productions and their implementation

- **Lower bureaucratic burdens:** International co-production agreements should be simplified and standardised into clearer procedures. Moreover, assessment of co-production collaborations could be made on the basis of artistic and technical contributions, rather than solely financial ones. In addition, procedures should be more flexible for countries facing political and financial instability (D4.4).

- **Consolidate and make information accessible in a dedicated website:** Information about co-production agreements is scattered across different websites and provided in multiple languages. Foreign film professionals find it hard to access comprehensive detailed information about the legal, financial, and technical requirements necessary to access the agreements. This represents a problem especially for industry newcomers, who need this information for the first time and are unfamiliar with the technical requirements of co-productions. To address this issue, the EU could create a cohesive website that is easy to access and to understand and offer it in multiple languages (D4.4).

Film festivals

Access to film festivals by European and non-Europeans film professionals

- **Support the participation of EU film professionals in non-EU festivals and market events.** This would make it easier to build networks with professionals from non-EU film industries and help establish or strengthen ties with local audiences (D4.4).
- **Reinforce and widen existing funding towards the participation of non-European film professionals:** According to interviewees, funding to participate in festivals is either only available to very few participants or does not fully cover their expenses. To ensure more international participation in European film festivals, the EU could establish dedicated funding for professionals from selected international markets (D4.4).
- **Create funding schemes to cover or subsidise screening fees for selected European films, allowing them to take part more easily in international film festivals outside Europe:** This would allow festival organisers in South America to select EU films based on their quality and audience appeal and to not be as constrained as they currently are by the high fees demanded by sales agents (D4.4).
- **Improve two-way exchange:** Support the establishment of agreements between EU and non-EU film festivals/markets. This would strengthen the selection of EU/non-EU local films at non-European/European film festivals, creating new distribution channels for such films and promoting cultural exchange (D4.4).
- **Increase funding for Cineuropa and EU Delegations:** The EU could increase funding for Cineuropa and EU Delegations to promote cultural diversity globally through a higher number of films in the former's repository and at EU Film Festivals, and to cover costs in low-income markets (D3.1).

Film festival design

- **Strengthen dedicated workshops and events in co-production forums and markets:** Film festivals provide opportunities to expand professional networks. The EU could provide funding to festival organisers to increase the number of workshops and events dedicated to international co-productions. Moreover, funds could be allocated to invite more European and foreign financiers to attend small to medium-sized festivals (D4.4).
- **Support networking events at film festivals:** Respondents describe festivals as an important platform to connect professionals with the industry (D4.1). Establishing strong networks could help in developing coordinated strategies and foster knowledge exchange.
- **Develop tailored audience engagement:** Develop strategies to engage both existing and new audiences, particularly when they include film students and other film experts, and adapt the festivals' design to reflect these engagement goals (D3.1).
- **Revise the positioning of non-European pavilions in European film festivals:** Respondents deem the presence of an African pavilion in European film festivals as very important. However, they also describe it as often being located in a marginal place, reflecting unbalanced treatment for European and non-European film professionals. To address this issue, European film festivals could rearrange the location of non-European pavilions (D4.4).
- **Strengthen opportunities for two-way exchanges and highlight side events of the EUFF:** Refocus the design of the EUFF to more effectively and systematically foster two-way exchanges between EU and non-EU film professionals, by:
 - Transforming side-events into dialogues that would support co-learning, collaboration and co-productions, and using films as a platform to discuss shared challenges;
 - Reinforcing support for visits by non-EU professionals to EUFF and to European festivals;
 - Supporting the screening of non-EU films at EUFF and at film festivals in Europe to promote balance and inclusion (D3.1).

Film festival communication

- **Communicate EUFF objectives continuously:** To foster consensus and a sense of shared ownership, highlight mutuality, and avoid instrumentalism, the EUFF should clearly communicate its objectives to EU Member States and other stakeholders (D3.1).

- **Reinforce diversity and representation in the communication materials of the EUFF and other film festivals:** Ensure that communication materials align with societal values such as inclusivity and diversity. (D3.1).
- **Focus on shared values:** Emphasis should be placed on shared values rather than on “EU values” to avoid the perception of a neo-colonial approach (D3.1).

Film festival evaluation

- **Consider broader indicators in film festival implementation and monitoring:** To avoid a short-termist analysis of data collected, incorporate non-quantitative and non-market indicators to measure cultural and social outcomes of the EUFF. This also applies to the evaluation of the implementation of other film festivals and in Cineuropa’s collection of information (D3.1).

Skills/knowledge exchange and capacity development

- **Provide greater support to independent arthouse European and local exhibitors of European and non-European film by:**
 - Supporting independent arthouse film exhibitions in Europe and non-European markets with joint skills/knowledge exchange and/or capacity development schemes;
 - Strengthening local exhibition rights of European films;
 - Increasing MEDIA funding for dubbing and subtitling and extending it to non-EU exhibitors (D4.4).
- **Invest in marketing and long-term audience building from an early stage by:**
 - Developing cultural programmes aimed at non-European youth combining European and non-European film screenings (D4.4);
 - Supporting marketing and audience engagement strategies tailored at multiple and diverse groups from an early stage of the production process (D.4.1).
- **Reinforce international promotion efforts through dedicated support to international sales agents by:**
 - Promoting the planning of a film's commercial exploitation from the moment of its conception (D4.1);
 - Promoting relations between European producers and international sales agents (for example, through the organisation of forums) so that the marketing strategy for a film is thought of and defined at the early stages of the project (D4.1; D4.4).

- **Increase support for the distribution of EU/non-EU co-productions within and beyond the EU.** While co-productions allow films to circulate across the participating countries, there is no overarching European framework guiding distribution and promotion strategies on an international and global scale (D4.1)
- **Facilitate access to film archives by non-European stakeholders:** Several non-European respondents describe difficulties in accessing European archives due to high access fees. The EU could recommend that national archives reduce access costs for film professionals and organisations from low- and middle-income countries (D4.4).

Diplomatic activities

- **Include non-Europeans in film funding evaluation committees:** Some respondents pointed out that decisions on funding for collaborations between the Global South and the EU are made by people who are unfamiliar with the local culture. Including non-European film professionals on the evaluation committee could ensure more informed decisions (D4.4).
- **Develop new partnerships among publicly managed windows of exhibition:** Strengthening collaboration between the bodies that manage public exhibition windows in non-European countries could increase European films circulation (D4.4).
- **Develop new partnerships among publicly managed streaming services:** Similarly, respondents from various case studies highlighted the need for more cooperation between publicly operated non-European streaming platforms such as CineAr Play (Argentina), Nuestro Cine MX (Mexico) and Tela Brasil (Brasil) and their European counterparts. Such cooperation would strengthen the exchange of European and non-European titles and open up new exhibition opportunities for both sides (D4.4).
- **Support increased coordination between EU and Member States (MS) funding schemes:** When there is alignment between EU transnational audiovisual goals and national foreign priorities, reinforce existing support to allow for stronger coordination of EU and MS activities celebrating shared values (MS, EU, non-EU countries) and cultural diversity (D3.5).
- **Frame the EUFF within broader public diplomacy efforts:** Place more emphasis and provide clearer guidelines for festival organisers on the international cultural relations approach in the implementation of the EUFF (D3.1).

European film funding schemes

- **Revive film programmes dedicated to distribution and exhibition:** Given the growing challenges in distributing and screening European films, the EU could consider restoring the Europa Cinema Mundus programme, which supported film programming between MEDIA and non-MEDIA member countries, or the MEDIA Mundus programme, which offered funding for distribution, promotion, and co-production with non-European countries (D4.4). Besides funding, such programmes should also include training and networking opportunities to help international distributors combine local market expertise with innovative release strategies and make better use of the funds provided.
- **Develop coherent cross-border film circulation strategies:** EU film professionals describe fragmented approaches to distribution, promotion, and marketing efforts that are linked to their national contexts. The EU could address this issue by supporting the development of common strategies to reinforce the international circulation of a selected number of European and non-European independent films (D4.1).
- **Expand networks such as European Film Promotion (EFP):** respondents described the limited scope of EFP in relation to the challenges facing the EFI (D4.1). Its expansion could create institutional capacity to implement the previous recommendation.

REBOOT resources

D4.4: Dâmaso, M., Niutta, A., Vargas Miranda, I., Albornoz, L. A., García Leiva, M.T., Rossato Fernandes, M., Vlassis, A., Behlil, M., Doğu Erdede, R., Akçalı, E. (2025). The Framings and Strategies of Cinema Professionals. Report on International Understandings of the European Film Industry. Developed by the Horizon Europe project REBOOT (Reviving, Boosting, Optimising and Transforming European Film Competitiveness – REBOOT), funded by the European Union’s Horizon Europe Research and Innovation programme under Grant Agreement No. 101094769.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16744614>

D4.1: Fernandes Rossato, Marina, Vlassis Antonios, Bissot Pauline, Solenn Houard (2025): The Framings and Strategies of Cinema Professionals. Report on “International Market” in the European Film Industry, funded by the European Union’s Horizon Europe Research and Innovation programme under Grant Agreement No. 101094769.

<https://orbi.uliege.be/bitstream/2268/335660/1/REBOOT%20D4.1%20-%20FINAL.pdf>

D3.1: Lähdesmäki, T., Hiltunen, K., Dâmaso, M., Behlil, M., Akçalı, E., & Doğu Erdede, R. (2025). Report on the Lux Audience Award & European Film Festivals. Developed by the Horizon Europe project REBOOT (Reviving, Boosting, Optimising and Transforming

European Film Competitiveness – REBOOT), funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe Research and Innovation programme under Grant Agreement No. 101094769.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17241275>

Ramadani, G., Chatziefrimidou, A., Sarikakis, K., Sganga, C., Turan, P., Lähdesmäki, T., Dâmaso, M., Hiltunen, K., ERDEDE, R. D., Akcali, E., Behlil, M., Albornoz, L. A., García Leiva, M. T., Vargas Miranda, I. M., Biltereyst, D., Ramos Arenas, F., Willems, E., & Caballero Ruiz de Martín-Esteban, L. (2025). Policy briefings deriving from WP2-5 M24. The REBOOT Project (Reviving, Boosting, Optimising and Transforming European Film Competitiveness – REBOOT), funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe Research and Innovation programme under Grant Agreement No.101094769.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14778271>

D3.5: Vlassis, A., Bissot, P., Houard, S., Dâmaso, M., Niutta, A., García Leiva, MT., Albornoz, L. A., Vargas Miranda, I., Andriopoulou, I., Turan, P., Pilo, P., Glowacki, M., Mikucki, J., Hiltunen, K.

(2025). Promotion of the EFI at the international level: Institutional and policy models across the

EU Member States. In: Vlassis, A. Psychogiopoulou, E, Kandyla, A. and Sarikakis, K. (Eds.).

(2025). Final report on the mapping and EU law of institutional models for the promotion of the

EFI. Developed by the Horizon Europe project REBOOT (Reviving, Boosting, Optimising and Transforming European Film Competitiveness – REBOOT), funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe Research and Innovation programme (Grant Agreement No. 101094769).

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15781266>

References

European Commission (2016). Joint Communication from the European Union and the High Representative "Towards an EU strategy for international cultural relations. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=JOIN%3A2016%3A29%3AFIN>.

Disclaimer

This document is part of the outputs of the *Reviving, Boosting, Optimising and Transforming European Film Competitiveness - REBOOT* project, which received funding from the Horizon Europe programme of the European Union under the Grant Agreement No. 101094769.

© 2026, REBOOT Consortium. All rights reserved. Licensed to the Horizon Europe under conditions.

Licence



This document is authorised under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC-BY 4.0) unless otherwise noted. Reproduction and distribution of the material for research, educational or other non-/ commercial purposes is permitted without the authorisation of the rights holders, provided the source is properly acknowledged.

Please see: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Citation

Please cite this report as follows:

Dâmaso, M., Niutta, A., Vlassis, A., Fernandes, M. R., Albornoz, L. A., Vargas Miranda, I., García Leiva, M. T., Lähdesmäki, T., Hiltunen, K., Erdede, R. D., Behlil, M., & Akçalı, E. (2026). The European Union as an Enabler of International Film Relations. In K. Sarikakis & S. Haslauer (Eds.), *Policy briefings deriving from WP2-5 M36* (pp. 61–71). The REBOOT Project (Reviving, Boosting, Optimising and Transforming European Film Competitiveness – REBOOT), funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe Research and Innovation programme under Grant Agreement No.101094769. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18258831>

Contact

Website: www.thereboot-project.eu

Email: reboot.2023@univie.ac.at

REBOOT Contributors

