



European  
Commission

# EUROPEAN HERITAGE LABEL GUIDELINES FOR CANDIDATE SITES



Culture

## **EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

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## What are the objectives of the European Heritage Label?

The European Heritage Label is one of the most valuable EU initiatives to strengthen European citizens' sense of belonging to the Union. The **European Heritage Label** celebrates and supports European heritage sites that have a symbolic European value and have played a significant role in the history, culture of Europe and/or the building of the European Union.

Launched in 2006 as a joint initiative by European national governments ("intergovernmental European Heritage Label initiative"), the **European Heritage Label** was geared up in 2011 as a European action through the DECISION No 1194/2011/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 November 2011. The **European Heritage Label** awards sites that are carefully selected at the **national and European level for their symbolic value and for the activities they offer to raise awareness of their role in the history and culture of Europe** and/or the building of the European Union.

With the attribution of the **European Heritage Label**, selected heritage sites will become part of a **network of sites that have shaped the history of Europe**.

Spanning from the dawn of civilisation to the Europe of today, these sites invite visitors, especially young people, to discover all types of cultural heritage from a European perspective. **The European Heritage Label is the very first EU-initiative aiming at bringing EU people together around their shared heritage and enhance their knowledge of the European Union.** The European Heritage Label contributes to strengthening **European people' sense of belonging to the European Union**, in particular that of **the youth**, based on shared values and elements of European history and cultural heritage, as well as an appreciation of **national and regional diversity**. The action also contributes to strengthening mutual understanding and intercultural dialogue. **The European Heritage Label focuses on the sites' symbolic value and raising the profile of sites that have played a significant role in the history and culture of Europe and/or the building of the Union.**

Every two years according to the [Decision No 1194/2011/EU](#) of 16 November 2011 establishing a European Union action for the European Heritage Label, **candidate sites for the European Heritage Label are invited to submit a project application for the attribution of the label**. The implementation of which is to begin by the end of the designation year at the latest. The project should include activities aiming to raise awareness of the European significance of the site.

It will also include **educational activities**, especially for young people, which increase the understanding of the common history of Europe and of its shared yet **diverse heritage and which strengthen the sense of belonging** to a common space. In addition, candidate sites should submit a **work plan to allow for an evaluation of their operational capacity** to carry out the proposed project.

## What is the purpose of this document?

These Guidelines are based on [Decision No 1194/2011/EU](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 November 2011, establishing the **European Heritage Label**.

The guidelines aim at providing applicants with;

- Information on the eligibility of a site
- Information on the overall application process
- Information on the European Heritage label
- Information for sites awarded the label

### **Last update of this document: July 2022**

Working documents and information about the EHL are available at; <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/cultural-heritage/initiatives-and-success-stories/european-heritage-label/application-process-of-the-european-heritage-label>

For further information, please write to [EAC-EUROPEAN-HERITAGE-LABEL-COORDINATION@ec.europa.eu](mailto:EAC-EUROPEAN-HERITAGE-LABEL-COORDINATION@ec.europa.eu)

## Can my site apply for the European Heritage Label?

The **European Heritage Label** is open to sites in the **25 Member States** that participate in the action: *Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain*. As a result, only sites located in those 25 Member States are eligible for the European Heritage Label. This also applies to **transnational sites**, where all participating sites without exception must be located in one of these Member States.

According the Decision 1194/20211/EU, for the purpose of the European Heritage Label, “**sites**” means *monuments, natural, underwater, archaeological, industrial or urban sites, cultural landscapes, places of remembrance, cultural goods and objects and intangible heritage associated with a place, including contemporary heritage*.

In the case of cultural goods and objects, as well as intangible heritage, there should be a clear link of such heritage sites with a physical space in which the **project** for the European Heritage Label as indicated above is implemented. Access for the widest possible audience should be ensured.

***For more information on the different types of sites, and the different types of applications, see section 6.***

## How are the sites selected?

The selection of the **European Heritage Label** sites is a two-step process.

### 1. Pre-selection at national level

Member States participating in the **European Heritage Label** action are responsible for the pre-selection of sites. Heritage sites may submit applications to their countries [National coordinator](#).

Each Member State may pre-select up to two sites under each Selection, each Member State establishes its own procedures for the pre-selection of sites, as well as its own selection calendar.

Candidate sites should use the **application forms made available by the Member States** for single, national thematic and transnational site applications. This form should be filled in by all **candidates and sent to the National coordinator** responsible for pre-selection of sites at national level.

Member States should transmit the application forms for pre-selected sites to the Commission **by 1 March of the year of the selection procedure**.

Application forms should be submitted **in the language(s) used for the pre-selection at national level, provided that it (they) is (are) among the 24 EU official languages**. In addition, with a view to a more efficient selection process by the independent experts, **the application forms should also be submitted in English**.

***For all questions concerning the pre-selection procedure, candidate sites should contact the National Coordinator in their Member State.***

### 2. Selection at European level

The final selection of sites is carried out by a **European panel of independent experts under the responsibility of the European Commission**. The European panel evaluates the applications based on the overall and specific objectives of the action and criteria for the attribution of the Label. If necessary, on behalf of the European panel, **the Commission may ask candidate sites for further information regarding the application**.

The European panel issues a report on the pre-selected sites with recommendations for the attribution of the label.

After the submission of the report, the Commission designates the sites to be awarded the label, having due regard to the recommendation of the panel.

Candidate sites should note that, under the [Decision No 1194/2011/EU](#), the European panel has until the end of the selection year to submit its report to the European Commission. Therefore, the **designation for the European Heritage Label by the Commission takes place early in the year following the selection**. In other words and as an example, for the **2021 Selection, the European Commission will formally nominate the sites to receive the Label in early 2022**.

Candidate sites that are not selected for the attribution of the European Heritage Label, **may reapply during the following years**.

If a site is selected, the label is **granted indefinitely**, as long as the site continues to **meet the criteria of the label**, and that the site respects the project and work plan submitted with the application for the label.

## The European panel of independent experts

A panel of independent experts exists to **carry out the selection and the monitoring at Union level**. It ensures that the criteria for the attribution of the European Heritage Label are properly applied by the sites across the Member States.

The panel consists of **13 members** appointed by the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission and the Committee of the Regions. The members of the European panel serve for a term of three years.

It is forbidden for applicants to contact a member of the European Panel.

The Commission **does not allow any contacts** between the European Heritage Label sites and the members of the panel on issues linked to the European Heritage Label without prior authorisation.

## What is the required for my site to be awarded the label?

Sites must submit an application form for review before the site can be awarded with the European Heritage Label.

The attribution of the European Heritage Label is based on the following criteria:

- (a) The **symbolic European value** of a site and its **significant role in the history and culture of Europe and/or the building of the Union**;
- (b) The **project** proposed for the European Heritage Label;
- (c) The submitted **work plan**, which evaluates a sites operational capacity deliver on the promised project in relation to the European Heritage Label.

The applications of candidate sites are judged based on the following elements:

- (a) The candidate site must have a **symbolic European value**<sup>1</sup> and played a **significant role in the history and culture of Europe and/or the building of the Union**;

**The candidate sites must demonstrate one or more of the following:**

**1. their cross-border or pan-European nature;**

As regards their cross-border or pan-European nature, candidate sites should demonstrate how their past and present influence and attraction extends beyond the national borders of a Member State.

**2. their place and role in European history and European integration, and their links with key European events, personalities or movements;**

As regards European movements, these can include inter alia *cultural, artistic, political, social, scientific, technological or industrial* movements that are relevant at European level and include a number of European countries.

**3. their role in the development and promotion of the common values that underpin European integration.**

Candidate sites should demonstrate that they have made a significant contribution to the development and promotion of one or more of these common values.

The common values that underpin European integration are described in detail in the [Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union](#).

**4. the project proposed for the European Heritage Label;**

Candidate sites for the Label must submit a project for the European Heritage Label, the implementation of which is to begin by the end of the designation year at the latest. The project must include all of the following elements:

- raising awareness of the **European significance of the site**, in particular through appropriate information activities, signposting and staff training;
- organising **educational activities**, especially for young people, which increase the understanding of the common history of Europe and its shared yet diverse heritage and which strengthen the sense of belonging to a common space;

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<sup>1</sup> Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union states that "*the Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. The values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.*"



- promoting **multilingualism and facilitating access** to the site by using several languages of the Union;
- taking part in the **activities of networks of labelled sites** in order to exchange experiences and initiate common projects;
- raising the **profile and attractiveness of the site on a European scale**, by exploiting the opportunities offered by new technologies and digital and interactive means and by seeking synergies with other European initiatives.

The organisation of artistic and cultural activities that fosters the mobility of European cultural professionals, artists and collections, stimulates intercultural dialogue and encourage links between heritage, contemporary creation, and creativity is welcomed and encouraged whenever the specific nature of the site allows this.

### **5. The work plan permitting to evaluate their operational capacity to carry out the project in relation to the European Heritage Label.**

Candidate sites for the Label must submit a **work plan** that demonstrates that the sites have the **operational capacity** to implement the proposed projects. All the following elements will be considered in assessing the candidate sites' work plan:

- ensuring the **sound management of the site**, including defining objectives and indicators;
- ensuring the **preservation of the site and its transmission to future generations** in accordance with the relevant protection regimes;
- ensuring the **quality of the reception facilities** such as the historical presentation, visitors' information and signposting;
- ensuring **access for the widest possible public**, inter alia, through site adaptations or staff training;
- according special attention to young people, in particular by granting them privileged access to the site;
- promoting the site as a **sustainable tourism destination**;
- developing a **coherent and comprehensive communication strategy** highlighting the European significance of the site;
- ensuring that the management of the site is as environmentally friendly as possible.

Applicants must have the operational capacity to deliver their project. In the application form, candidate sites are asked to demonstrate their capacity by submitting:

- A **one-page operating budget statement** for the overall management of the site (conservation works excluded), including annual running costs, communication costs, cultural, educational, research, networking activities costs. It should also identify the principal sources of income available to the site;

- A **one-page statement on their organisational structure** and human resources allocated to the implementation of the project.

In the application stage, the project and the work plan **must feature a long-term vision of how the candidate sites** intend to highlight its European significance as well as a short and long-term series of activities to highlight the site's European significance.

As the European Heritage Label is attributed on a permanent basis, the site's project and work plan **should be regularly updated and adjusted over the years in the light of evolving circumstances**, as part of the Monitoring on a regular basis provided for in the [Decision No 1194/2011/EU](#)

## What are the different types of site applications?

The **European Heritage Label** can be awarded to **three types of sites**:

- **Single site**: a 'site' as defined in section 3 submits an application;
- **National thematic site**: several sites, located in the same Member State, that collectively focus on one specific theme and submits a joint application;
- **Transnational site**: several sites, located in different Member States, that collectively focus on one specific theme and submit a joint application, **or** one site located on the territory of at least two Member States submits an application.

Application forms should be submitted in the language(s) used for the pre-selection at national level, provided that it (they) is (are) among the 24 EU official languages. Additionally, a copy of the application form should be submitted in English to speed up the selection process of the European panel of Independent experts.

When a national thematic or a transnational site is selected for the attribution of the label, the label is awarded to the national thematic or transnational site as a whole and under a common name.

If a transnational site meets all the criteria, priority is given to that site during the selection.

### National thematic sites

In order for a national thematic site to be eligible for the attribution of the European Heritage Label, it should **comprise a reasonable number of participating sites**. Moreover, it should comply with all of the following conditions:

- **demonstration of the European added value** of a joint application compared to individual applications;

- **demonstration of a clear thematic link** between the individual sites;
- **full compliance with the criteria for the attribution of the European Heritage Label** by each participating site;
- designation of one of **the participating sites as the site coordinator for the national thematic site**, and single contact point for the Commission;
- application under a common name that should be concise and may not include the names of the individual sites.

Applications for national thematic sites follow the same general procedure as for single sites. They are pre-selected by their Member State within the limit of maximum two sites per selection year.

Candidate sites will fill in the application form for national thematic sites. The application form is in three parts:

**Part 1** "Identity and Description": the site coordinator completes this section

**Part 2** "Specific information about each partner-site": this section is completed in by each partner-site separately.

**Part 3** "The Joint Application": the site coordinator completes this section

The site coordinator will collect all the contributions and submit the national thematic site application form to the national coordinator to be considered for pre-selection at national level.

Whenever a national thematic site is selected, the European Heritage Label is given to the **national thematic site as a whole under its common name**, and not to the participating sites individually. **Each of the participating sites has the right to display the European Heritage Label plaque at its premises**, with the plaque clearly indicating the common name of the national thematic site. This has to be taken into account for all communication activities, at both European and local level, to avoid any risk of confusion. Particular attention will be paid to this aspect as part of the Monitoring on a regular basis provided for in the [Decision No 1194/2011/EU](#).

## Transnational sites

Each participating site in a transnational site should be located **in one of the Member States participating in the action**. Transnational sites should clearly demonstrate the **benefit of a joint application by participating sites compared to single applications**.

In order for a transnational site to be eligible for the attribution of the European Heritage Label, it should comply with all of the following conditions:

- each site must comply with the criteria of the European Heritage label listed in section 5;

- one site is designated as the site coordinator, which will be the single contact point for the Commission. If one site is located in multiple Member States, there are two options: **either a single national organisation is designated as the overall site coordinator, or a single transnational body is designated as the site coordinator** and one of the Member States must take leadership and responsibility for the pre-selection and monitoring process;
- application under a **common name** that should be concise and must **not include the names of the individual sites participating in the transnational site** (unless the applicant is a single transnational site);
- demonstration of a clear thematic link between the participating sites.

Applications for transnational sites should follow the same procedure as for single sites. They are pre-selected by the Member State of their site coordinator, within the limit of the maximum two sites that this Member State can nominate per selection year (note that the other participating sites should not be counted for the quotas of their Member State).

Consultations between the sites participating in a transnational site must involve all the relevant national coordinators from an early stage.

**Candidate sites will fill in the application form for transnational sites.** The application form is in three parts:

**Part 1** "Identity and Description": this section is to be filled in by the site coordinator;

**Part 2** "Specific information about each partner-site": this section needs to be filled in by each partner-site separately.

**Part 3** "The Joint Application": this section is to be filled in by the site coordinator;

The site coordinator will collect all the contributions and submit the transnational site application form to the national coordinator to be considered for the pre-selection at national level.

If a transnational site is pre-selected by a Member State, it must be proposed by this Member State on behalf of the other Member States, once those Member States have given their agreement. All the application forms, including the cover form must be submitted to the Commission jointly by the national coordinator of the Member State of the coordinator site.

If a transnational site and a single site both meet the criteria of the EHL with the same level of quality, priority is given to the transnational site in the selection at the European level.

If a transnational site is selected, the European Heritage Label will be given to the transnational site as a whole under a common name and not to the participating partner-sites individually. In other words, if the **European Heritage Label is given to a transnational site comprising 5 participating partner-sites, then one**

**Label will be given to the transnational site and not 5 Labels to 5 individual partner-sites.** Each of the **5 partner-sites** has the right to display the **EHL plaque at the entrance, but the plaque should clearly indicate the common name of the transnational site.** This should be taken into account for all communication activities, at both European and local level, to avoid any risk of confusion. Particular attention should be paid to this aspect during the monitoring process.

## Monitoring processes

Each site awarded the label is **monitored on a regular basis** in order to ensure that it continues to meet the criteria for the attribution of the Label and that it respects the project and work plan submitted with the application. Monitoring of sites awarded the label takes place **every four years** in accordance with the calendar in Annex 1.

Member States are responsible for the monitoring of all the sites located within their jurisdiction. The Commission will provide a **common monitoring form** for the Member States to ensure a standardized monitoring process. The National Coordinators should collect all the necessary information from the sites, fill in the monitoring form and submit it to the Commission **before 1<sup>st</sup> March** of the monitoring year.

Monitoring of transnational sites is the responsibility of the National Coordinator in the Member State of the site coordinator. In cooperation with the site coordinator, the National Coordinator should collect the necessary information from all the sites participating in the transnational site, including those located outside the respective territory. This information should be synthesised and included in the monitoring form.

The European Panel examines the Monitoring forms and issues a **report on the state of the sites awarded the label**, including recommendations to be taken into account for the following monitoring period if necessary.

## Withdrawal or renunciation of the European Heritage Label

If the panel finds that a site no longer meets the criteria or that it no longer complies with the project and operational capacity submitted in its application, it can launch a **procedure leading to the withdrawal** of the Label from the site. This procedure is in two stages, which can last up to 18 months each:

- In the first stage, the European panel should **initiate a dialogue with the Member State concerned with a view to facilitating the necessary adjustments to the site.** Whenever the panel judges that the adjustments

have been made or sufficient guarantees have been given, it may decide to close the procedure.

- If, **18 months after the beginning of the dialogue, the panel judges that the necessary adjustments have not been made, it may decide to launch a second stage of the procedure.** In this second stage, the panel should formally notify the Commission of the problems encountered with the site. The notification should be accompanied by a statement of reasons and a set of practical recommendations on how to improve the situation. If, 18 months after reception of the notification, the practical recommendations have not been implemented by the site, the European panel should issue a recommendation to the Commission to withdraw the Label from the site.

The Commission should then formalise the withdrawal of the Label in the course of the following designation procedure. The site must return to the Commission the plaque bearing the logo of the European Heritage Label.

The same procedure should apply in the case of national thematic sites and transnational sites. The abovementioned **dialogues should be held with the Member State** of the site coordinator. If the European panel recommends the withdrawal of the Label from a national thematic site or a transnational site, this withdrawal should apply to the national thematic site or the transnational site in its entirety. However, in exceptional cases where the coherence of national thematic site or the transnational site is not undermined, the European panel may recommend limiting the withdrawal to the participating site concerned.

Throughout this procedure, all contacts between the European panel on the one hand and the site in question and the relevant national coordinator on the other must take place **via the Commission and the national coordinator** in order to ensure effective coordination.

A site that has been designated under the European Heritage Label may at any time decide to **renounce the Label voluntarily**. In this case, it must notify the National Coordinator of its decision by letter. The National Coordinator must in turn inform the Commission of the renunciation by forwarding a copy of the letter. The Commission should formalise the renunciation in the course of the following designation procedure. The site must return to the European Commission the plaque bearing the logo of the European Heritage Label.

## **Communication concerning the European Heritage Label**

The European Commission and the European Heritage Label sites share the responsibility for communication and information concerning the Label and ensuring its visibility at European level.

Communications and marketing elements are gathered in the **online European Heritage Label toolbox** – a resources centre for European Heritage Label Stakeholders.

Heritage sites awarded the European Heritage Label are required to give prominence to the **logo of the European Heritage Label** on all their publications, posters, programmes and other products realised by the site.

The Commission ensures the visibility of the European Heritage Label at European level, in particular by **maintaining a specific website** with general information on the European Heritage Label and the network of heritage sites awarded the Label.

**Find out more** <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/cultural-heritage/initiatives-and-success-stories/european-heritage-label>

## Networking between European Heritage Label sites

Heritage sites attributed the Label will be part of the **network of European Heritage Label sites**, providing opportunities for networking, exchange of good practices and experience, peer learning activities, and a favourable ground for initiating cooperation and common projects.

## Budget available for the European Heritage Label

The European Heritage Label has a symbolic value. **The budget earmarked under Creative Europe programme for the European Heritage Label as a special action covers the cost for implementing the action at European level**, including the European panel of independent experts, communicating information concerning the European Heritage Label and ensuring its visibility at Union level and foster networking activities between the sites awarded the European Heritage Label.

**European Heritage Label sites are encouraged to explore, where appropriate, the possibility of seeking financial support from EU programmes and funds.**

A mapping of such funds for Cultural Heritage is shared by the Commission on a regular basis and via the **European Commission CulturEU guide**: <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/funding/cultureu-funding-guide>

## Contact

- For additional information or general questions about the application process, please contact the [National coordinator](#) in your Member State.
- For very specific questions, you may also contact the European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, at [EAC-EUROPEAN-HERITAGE-LABEL-COORDINATION@ec.europa.eu](mailto:EAC-EUROPEAN-HERITAGE-LABEL-COORDINATION@ec.europa.eu)





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