

EUROPEAN HERITAGE LABEL
GUIDELINES
FOR CANDIDATE SITES



EUROPEAN
HERITAGE LABEL



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1. Context

The objectives of the European Heritage Label (EHL) are to strengthen European citizens' sense of belonging to the European Union, in particular that of young people, based on shared values and elements of European history and cultural heritage, as well as an appreciation of national and regional diversity, and to strengthen mutual understanding and intercultural dialogue. The Label gives European citizens new opportunities to learn about our common yet diverse cultural heritage, about our common history and about the values and the role of the EU.

The European Heritage Label is given to sites which have a strong symbolic European value and which highlight the common history of Europe and the building of the European Union (EU), as well as the European values and human rights that underpin the process of European integration.

The rules and procedures of the EHL are laid down in a legal text: [Decision No 1194/2011/EU](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council. Candidate sites are recommended to read it, on top of these guidelines. Candidate sites can contact their National Coordinator in their country for any question concerning their participation in the EHL and the pre-selection procedure at national level. Check [the list of national coordinators](#).

The selection of sites takes place in two stages. Sites must first be pre-selected at national level. The final selection is then carried out at European level by a panel of independent experts under the European Commission's responsibility.

To receive the Label, sites shall seek to attain the following objectives:

- (a) highlighting their European significance;
- (b) raising European citizens' awareness of their common cultural heritage, especially among young people;
- (c) facilitating the sharing of experiences and exchanges of best practice across the Union;
- (d) increasing and/or improve access for all, especially young people;
- (e) increasing intercultural dialogue, especially among young people, through artistic, cultural and historical education;
- (f) fostering synergies between cultural heritage on the one hand and contemporary creation and creativity on the other;
- (g) contributing to the attractiveness and the economic and sustainable development of regions, through cultural tourism in particular.

2. The EHL compared to other initiatives in the field of cultural heritage

The European Heritage Label requires candidate sites to submit a project highlighting and presenting their European dimension to a European audience; candidate sites are also required to demonstrate that they have the operational capacity to carry out this project. The main focus of the EHL is not on the preservation of the sites, which should be guaranteed by existing protection regimes to ensure their transmission to future generations.

It is essential that candidates keep the specificity and distinctive nature of the EHL in mind, compared to other recognitions in the area of Heritage, when considering the relevance of an application or when filling in their application form. It is, however, possible for a site already designated by the UNESCO or the Council of Europe or any other initiative in the field of cultural heritage to apply for the EHL as well, provided that it falls within into the criteria of the EHL.

3. Who can participate?

3.1 Definition of sites

The definition of 'sites' used in the EHL is a broad one. It includes: natural, underwater, archaeological, industrial or urban sites, monuments, cultural landscapes, places of remembrance, cultural goods and objects and intangible heritage. For all these categories, contemporary heritage (which includes recently built sites or those which have played a specific role in recent European history) may also be covered. In the case of cultural goods and objects, as well as intangible heritage, there must be a link to a clearly identifiable physical space in which the information and educational activities will be carried out.

A site can be a 'single site' or a 'transnational site' or a 'thematic site'.

National thematic sites are several sites, located in the same Member State, which focus on one specific theme in order to submit a joint application.

Transnational sites can be either

- several sites, located in different Member States, which focus on one specific theme in order to submit a joint application. The theme may be freely chosen by the sites, but it must have a strong symbolic European value.

or:

- one site located on the territory of at least two Member States. This category can potentially cover all sites which encompass or cross a border between two or more Member States, such as a bridge, a battlefield, a token of the past division of Europe or of the former internal borders of the EU, an archaeological site which pre-dates the drawing of national borders, etc.

3.2 Geographical scope

Participation in the EHL is open to Member States on a voluntary basis. In 2016, the following 24 Member States had confirmed their participation: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia and Spain.

As a result, only sites located in those 24 Member States are eligible for the EHL. This also applies to transnational sites, where all participating sites without exception must be located in one of these Member States.

4. Selection criteria'

The Label is given on the basis of three criteria:

1. the **symbolic European value of a site**;
2. the **project** proposed to promote its European dimension;
3. the **operational capacity** to implement the project or **work plan**.

More precisely, the applications of candidate sites are assessed on the basis of the following elements:

(a) A candidate site for the Label must have **a symbolic European value** and must have played a significant role in the history and culture of Europe and/or the building of the Union.

It must therefore demonstrate **one** (or more) of the following:

(1) its cross-border or pan-European nature:

By explaining how its past and present influence and attraction extends beyond the national borders of a Member State and why it is significant at European level.

(2) its place and role in European history and European integration, and its links with key European events, personalities or movements;

European movements 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) its place and role in the development and promotion of the common values that underpin European integration.

By describing to what extent the site has significantly contributed to the development and / or promotion of one or more of these values. 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." The common values that underpin European integration are also described greater in detail in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

- (b) Candidate sites for the Label must **submit a project**, the implementation of which is to begin during the designation year (i.e. the year after the selection of the site at European level). For each item, the activities, the target group and the partners must be identified, along with an implementation timeline. The project should include all of the following elements:
- (1) raising awareness of the European significance of the site, in particular through appropriate information activities, signposting and staff training.
 - (2) 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.
 - (3) promoting multilingualism and facilitating access to the site by using several languages of the Union;
 - (4) taking part in the activities of networks of labelled sites in order to exchange experiences and initiate common projects.
 - (5) 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.

Artistic and cultural activities which foster the mobility of European culture professionals, artists and collections, stimulate intercultural dialogue and encourage links between heritage and contemporary creation and creativity are to be welcomed whenever the specific nature of the site makes this possible.

The application must mention if the site has received other international recognition such as the European Union Cultural Heritage Prize / Europa Nostra Award, the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe, the UNESCO World Heritage List, the Member State's Tentative List for World Heritage, the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, the Natura 2000 list of natural heritage sites or any other international recognition;

- (c) Candidate sites for the Label must **demonstrate** that they have the **Operational Capacity** to implement the proposed project, through all of the following elements:

- (1) ensuring the sound management of the site, including defining objectives and indicators.

The application should describe the overall management plan and any development plan for the coming years;

- (2) ensuring the preservation of the site and its transmission to future generations in accordance with the relevant protection regimes.

The application should outline its current protection scheme and any future plan. It should list all relevant legal, regulatory, planning or institutional status of the site

- (3) ensuring the quality of the reception facilities such as the historical presentation, visitor information and signposting;
- (4) ensuring access for the widest possible public, for example through site adaptations or staff training.

The application should mention if the site is accessible to the public and describe the opening hours;

- (5) paying special attention to young people, in particular by granting them privileged access to the site;
- (6) promoting the site as a sustainable tourism destination;
- (7) developing a coherent and comprehensive communication strategy highlighting the European significance of the site;
- (8) ensuring that the management of the site is as environmentally friendly as possible.

As regards the criteria concerning the project and the operational capacity, each site is assessed in a proportionate manner, taking account of its characteristics.

While the first category of criteria (the symbolic European value of a site) is about what a site is and is therefore about the permanent features of a site, categories b and c refer to a specific project and the operational capacity that are either already in place at the time of the application or that the candidate sites commit themselves to implement if they receive the EHL.

The 'project' and the 'operational capacity' must encompass at the same time a long-term vision of how a site intends to highlight its European dimension as well as a short- and medium-term series of activities to give concrete expression to that vision. As the Label is given on a permanent basis, the activities need to be regularly updated and readjusted over the years in the light of evolving circumstances.

The implementation of the project and the operational capacity are to begin during the designation year (i.e. one year after the selection year of the site) at the latest; assurances of their effective implementation are expected at the selection stage.

The specific provisions for transnational and national thematic sites are considered under section 6.

5. How are the sites selected?

The selection of the European Heritage Label sites is carried out in two stages.

5.1 Pre-selection at national level

Member States are responsible for the pre-selection of sites. No site can participate in the final selection procedure at EU level unless it has first been pre-selected at national level. In each Member State, a preselection of **maximum of two sites** per selection year is possible (see calendar in Annex).

In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, each Member State establishes its own procedures for the pre-selection of sites, as well as its own calendar. Member States must transmit the application forms for pre-selected sites to the Commission by no later than 1 March of the year of the selection procedure. The Commission expects to receive the application forms in the language(s) used for the pre-selection at national level, provided that it (they) is (are) among the 24 official EU languages. In addition, with a view to a more efficient selection process, it is essential for the Commission to receive an English version of the application forms as well.

For all questions concerning the pre-selection procedure, candidate sites must contact exclusively the National Coordinator in their own country.

5.2 Selection at EU level

The final selection of sites is carried out by a European panel of independent experts under the European Commission's responsibility. It assesses the application forms on the basis of the objectives and criteria of the action. If necessary, the panel may ask, via the Commission, for further information from the candidate sites and visits to the sites may also be organised. Visits shall however remain the exception rather than the rules.

Every selection year, the European panel shall prepare a report which shall be transmitted to the Commission at the latest by the end of the year. It shall include a recommendation for the Label designation and shall also contain a brief evaluation of all the pre-selected sites, giving reasons for selecting them or not. Candidate sites have no right of appeal against the European panel's recommendation.

Early in the year following the selection procedure the Commission shall formally designate the sites which are to receive the Label, taking due account of the panel's recommendation. Candidate sites which are not selected may submit new applications for pre-selection at national level in subsequent years.

6. National thematic sites and transnational sites

6.1 National thematic sites

To be eligible, a national thematic site should comprise a reasonable number of participating sites. Moreover, it should:

- demonstrate the European added value of a joint application compared to individual applications;
- show a clear thematic link between the individual sites;
- ensure that each individual site fully complies with the application criteria;
- designate one of the participating sites as the site coordinator for the national thematic site, and single contact point for the Commission;
- apply 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 procedure as for single sites. They are pre-selected by their Member State within the limit of maximum two sites per selection year. Each participating individual site shall fill in a separate application form. The site coordinator must also fill in the ad-hoc cover form and must submit all forms together to the national coordinator.

Whenever a national thematic site is selected, the 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 EHL plaque at the entrance, 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 shall be paid to this aspect during the monitoring process.

6.2 Transnational sites

Each participating site in a transnational site must be located in one of the Member States participating in the action. Transnational sites have to demonstrate very clearly the added value of a joint application by participating sites compared to single applications.

In order to be eligible, a transnational site shall:

- ensure that each participating site complies fully with the criteria;
- designate one of the participating sites as the site coordinator of the transnational site and the single contact point for the Commission. In the case of one site located in two or more Member States, there are two options: either the site is managed jointly by different organisations in the various Member States concerned and one of these organisations must be the site coordinator, or it is managed by one single transnational body and

- one of the Member States must take leadership and responsibility for the pre-selection and monitoring process;
- apply under a common name that should be concise and must not include the names of the individual sites participating in the transnational site;
- in the case of several sites focusing on one specific theme, clearly demonstrate the thematic link between the participating sites.

Applications for transnational sites shall 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 shall 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.

Each participating site shall fill in a separate application form. The site coordinator must also fill in the [ad-hoc cover form](#) for transnational sites and submit all the forms together to its national coordinator.

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 shall be given to the transnational site in the selection at the European level.

If a transnational site is selected, the Label will be given to the transnational site as a whole under its common name and not to the participating sub-sites individually. In other words, if the Label is given to a transnational site comprising 5 participating sub-sites, then one Label will be given to the transnational site and not 5 Labels to 5 individual sub-sites. Each of the 5 sub-sites has the right to display the EHL plaque at the entrance, but the plaque shall clearly indicate the common name of the transnational site. This shall be taken into account for all communication activities, at both European and local level, to avoid any risk of confusion. Particular attention shall be paid to this aspect during the monitoring process.

7. Application form

Candidate sites must use the [application form](#) prepared by the European Commission. This form shall be filled in by all candidates and sent to the national coordinator responsible for pre-selection at national level.

8. Monitoring of sites

The European Heritage Label is given to sites on a permanent basis provided that they continue to meet the criteria and that the project and operational capacity they submitted in their application for the selection are still relevant and in line with the long-term vision they put forward. Hence, each site shall be monitored on a regular basis.

Member States are responsible for monitoring all sites located on their territory. The National Coordinators shall collect all the necessary information from the sites and prepare a report every four years in accordance with the calendar in Annex. This report shall include a sub-section for each site using the [template of the monitoring form](#).

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 shall collect the necessary information from all the sites participating in the transnational site, including those that are not located on its own territory. This information shall be synthesised in one section of the report as mentioned above.

The European Panel shall examine all information and issue a report on the state of the sites designated under the European Heritage Label; it shall include recommendations to be taken into account for the following monitoring period as appropriate.

If the European panel establishes 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 said site. This procedure shall be carried out in two stages, which can last up to 18 months each:

- In the first stage, the European panel shall initiate a dialogue with the Member State concerned with a view to facilitating the necessary adjustments to the site. Whenever the European 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 European 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 European panel shall formally notify the Commission of the problems encountered with the site. The notification shall 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 shall issue a recommendation to the Commission to withdraw the Label from the site.

The Commission shall 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 shall apply in the case of national thematic sites and transnational sites. The abovementioned dialogues shall 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 shall 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.

9. Renunciation of the Label

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 shall 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.

10. The European panel of independent experts

The selection and monitoring at EU level are carried out by a European panel of independent experts, composed of 13 members appointed by the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission and the Committee of the Regions.

To avoid any risk of conflict of interest, it is not permitted for candidate sites, labelled sites or Member States to contact a member of the panel directly on any issue linked to the EHL without going through the Commission.

11. Communication

The European Commission and the labelled sites share responsibility for communication activities concerning the Label.

The Commission is ensuring the visibility of the Label at European level, in particular by setting up and maintaining a specific website with general information on the labelled sites and an entry-point for the websites of all the labelled sites. Two plaques

– a small and a big one – are delivered to each site and to be put up at the entrance of sites, [EHL logo should also be visible on all communication material](#).

A site receiving the Label will have increased visibility, since it will be integrated into the EU's communication and promotion strategy for the European Heritage Label. All labelled sites shall be invited to attend the annual conference of site managers; they will also benefit from networking opportunities and peer learning.

On its side, a labelled site must raise its profile on a European scale by exploiting the opportunities provided by new technologies and digital and interactive means and by seeking synergies with other European initiatives; it must promote itself as a sustainable tourism destination and develop a coherent and comprehensive communication strategy highlighting its European significance. All these elements are part of the criteria for the EHL and shall be evaluated by the European panel during the selection procedure, as well as during each monitoring procedure.

Once a site has been designated under the Label, it is of course obliged to use the EHL logo for all its communication and promotion activities.

12. Networking

One of the main benefits for sites in receipt of the Label will be the opportunities to participate in networking activities reserved for labelled sites. The Commission invite all the site managers to participate in an annual conference to foster the sharing of experiences and peer learning, and to provide a favourable ground for initiating common projects.

13. Financing by the EU budget

The EHL budget covers the costs of running the initiative at EU level, namely the costs incurred by the European panel of independent experts, the European communication strategy, networking activities and the human resources within the Commission needed to support the action. There is no direct funding for sites in receipt of the Label. Labelled sites may, however, apply for support from other programmes of the European Union.

Annex: Calendar

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| 2017 | Selection procedure. The Commission must receive the applications by 1 March 2017 at the latest. |
| 2018 | Evaluation of the label |
| 2019 | Selection procedure. The Commission must receive the applications by 1 March 2019 at the latest. |
| 2020 | Monitoring procedure. The Commission must receive the monitoring reports by 1 March 2020 at the latest. |
| 2021 | Selection procedure. The Commission must receive the applications by 1 March 2021 at the latest. |
| 2022 | – |
| 2023 | Selection procedure. The Commission must receive the applications by 1 March 2023 at the latest. |
| 2024 | Monitoring procedure. The Commission must receive the monitoring reports by 1 March 2024 at the latest. Evaluation of the label |
| 2025 | Selection procedure. The Commission must receive the applications by 1 March 2025 at the latest. |
| ... | ... |