16. About the Europa Web Guide

The Europa Web Guide is the official rulebook for the European Commission's web presence, covering editorial, visual, regulatory and technical aspects. It describes to DGs and Executive agencies how to plan, design, build, maintain and archive their websites.

To ensure the coherence, relevance and cost-effectiveness of the Commission's overall web presence, in line with the decisions on Synergies and Efficiencies, this guide contains both mandatory rules and guidelines based on best practice and industry standards that are highly recommended.

Rules

EU domain and subdomains

The most significant rule is to host all Commission owned websites in the europa.eu domain, in line with the decision of the EU institutions from 2005 (decision of the Secretaries General and Annexe 2 - In French only - PDF).

The EU institutions decided to create a dedicated subdomain on the '.eu' internet domain for their web presence called "europa". They ruled out the use of second-level domains directly under the '.eu' domain arguing that this confirmed their will to offer the public a simple, unique access to all information on the European Union published by the Institutions. They also wanted to combat the hostile, abusive use of addresses suggesting an official second-level domain URL relation with the EU institutions.

The use of the Europa web domain also helps users to understand that they are visiting an authentic EU website.

Branding

Depending on the communication need and the target audience, websites owned by the Commission are either EU or EC branded.

- **EC branding**: websites concerning the Commission's activities
- **EU branding**: websites with content that goes beyond the activities of one single EU institution.

URL structure

The European Commission, Parliament and the Council agreed on common rules for the europa.eu domain and subdomains. The web address is a guarantee of trustworthiness and reliability. It provides a coherent structure for the domain and a good user experience.

- **EC branded websites** are hosted on a 4th level domain under the 3rd level: ec.europa.eu
- **EU branded websites** become either a 4th level domain site under their theme subdomain (e.g. campaign.europa.eu) or a 3rd level domain under europa.eu.

URL names must follow rules dictated by user experience such as avoiding acronyms, capital letters, chained multiple words and foreign language, etc.

Site category

To ensure the editorial coherence and a clear architecture of its web presence, the Commission divided its websites into categories, based on the communication needs and their relation to the two main websites, called core sites, respectively the Commission' site: https://ec.europa.eu and the inter-institutional EU website: https://europa.eu. Other websites are either standardised or harmonised, rules and design templates depend on the category.

Visual identity

The visual identity of the web presence is based on the Commission's official Visual Identity charter. For coherence and transparency reasons, it is vital to correctly implement it.

To ensure the visual coherence across websites there are several mandatory design elements per type of branding and site category. Design rules and templates are available with explanations in the Europa Component Library (ECL).

Accessibility

The Commission is committed to making sure that as many people as possible are able to use its websites and online tools. Commission websites and mobile apps are required to comply with the Web Accessibility Directive. In line with the Directive, the technical standard they must meet is EN 301 549 v2.1.2, which closely follows level 'AA' of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) version 2.1. Owners of Commission websites and tools are responsible for making sure they meet these standards. The Europa Web Guide provides advice and tips on how to do this.

Corporate solutions

Whenever possible, corporate IT solutions must be used for reasons of cost-efficiency or security. One of the main elements of this offer is the Europa Web Publishing Platform, which provides state of the art, off the shelf software as service. Its use results in economies of scale for the creation of websites and saves time. Other corporate tools facilitate web publishing in the EC: OP archiving services, EuropaSearch, Europa Analytics, Webtools, EUSurvey, A V Portal, Web Streaming portal. More information is in DIGIT's catalogue.

Data protection

The European Commission is subject to the related EU Regulation's legal obligations described in Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 concerning the protection of personal data, therefore its websites need to be fully compliant.

Intellectual property rights

The Reuse literary (articles/studies/reports/etc. or excerpts thereof) or artistic (photos/graphs/drawings/etc.) works created within the European institutions or bodies published on EC websites are subject to the "Reuse guidelines – Using Creative Commons licenses for the distribution and reuse of Commission documents" (EU login required). Third party works published on EC websites should hold the adapted copyright or legal notice.

Archiving

The websites of the EU institutions, agencies and bodies are archived 4 times per year. Website owners can ask for ad hoc archiving when they revamp or take a website offline.

Requests procedures

To ensure that the creation of a new website or the revamp of an existing one are in line with the existing rules and guidelines, all Commission services must strictly observe the web request procedure: file the request with DG Communication, at the beginning of a project, before committing any budget or starts any development. DG Communication will assess the request against the requirement and allocate the relevant web address. The procedure can take up to 25 working days.

Guidelines

Beyond the mandatory rules, the Guide contains many recommendations and information to help you provide state of the art web communication and to ensure harmony and authenticity of the European Commission's web presence.

Architecture and navigation

The Commission's web presence is user-centered. The section on Architecture and navigation explains how to structure information to make it findable.

Design recommendations

On top of the mandatory design elements mentioned above, the Europa Web Guide makes an inventory of web design principles key to the Commission's web presence, such as being inclusive and designing for multiculturalism. Respecting these principles helps ensure a coherent, user-centered online experience for our users.

Content guidelines

The content guidelines explain the different types of content used for EC websites. In addition to a definition, templates help content editors structure the information. This section also provides useful information regarding the current style guide, language policy, web writing guidelines and Translation services

Search engine optimisation (SEO)

Serious Search engine optimisation starts at the content design phase. Following content guidelines is the first step to content SEO. This section offers recommendations regarding the creation of hyperlinks as well as guidelines to avoid ranking loss when migrating a website to a new location. It also offers information on Europa Analytics and technical SEO.

Contact and support

The Europa Web Guide is under the responsibility of the Europa Web Communication Unit (B3) within DG Communication.

The Europa Web Guide is the successor of the Information Providers' Guide. If you are interested in older rules and guidelines, you can visit the archived IPG (EU login required). You can study the changes in between the two with the help of the change log (EU login required).

For any questions, queries, comments or feedback, please email Comm Europa Management.