

03. EC branded harmonised websites

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Introduction

European Commission services should develop and use EC branded standardised websites for their online communication as much as possible. In exceptional circumstances, where a standardised website cannot accommodate a service's specific communication needs, it is possible for a Commission service to develop an EC branded harmonised website instead. Harmonised websites allow for greater flexibility in terms of website design and development. The instances when a harmonised website can be considered are given below as well as the rules on their development.

Background

Harmonised sites host specific content that answers a particular communication purpose:

- **Campaign website:** A temporary, online communication endeavour dedicated to promoting a single or several thematically linked activities, initiatives, services or products. The website may form the online part of a broader campaign, communicated by other channels such as print and social media.
- **Event website:** Similar to a campaign website, an event website's sole purpose is to advertise a specific or repeatedly occurring activity that is open to the public, organised and/or hosted by the European Commission. The website can be temporary and provide information about an event before, during and after it takes place. It can be complemented by a campaign. Event websites are only allowed for large and complex events which cannot be accommodated by the events content type.
- **Blogs:** These are regularly updated websites dedicated to publishing general features and news items about specific European Commission activities, from an individual perspective or corporate (DG-Agency-managed) newsletter/magazine.
- **Network websites:** Network websites are websites or platforms set up and managed by the European Commission (as a service provider) to encourage and facilitate interaction among a specific, non-EC target audience.
- **Internal policy websites:** Websites providing information on internal working methods of the EU institutions, standards and guidelines. Resources for institutions' employees, partners and service providers.
- **Partnership websites:** when the European Commission shares the ownership of a website with one or several non-EU institution(s), it is a partnership website. The European Commission and its partners co-decide on the content and cooperate in terms of budget, maintenance and management of the website. As a result, the design is based on an agreement between partners.

Sites that do not directly match any of these categories will be analysed by DG COMM who will define the applicable rules and guidelines.

Rules

URLs

According to Europa domain rules, EC branded harmonised websites are hosted on the 3rd level domain of the Commission (ec.europa.eu), following the [URL structure](#).

Exceptionally, where a site is jointly owned with a third party, it may be hosted outside the 'europa.eu' domain. The address should be decided on with the third party, with preference given to the top-level domain '.eu'. DG Comm must validate this choice

Ownership

All content on EC websites is under the responsibility of one or more Commission Departments.

[Site owners](#) must

- get [DG Communication's approval](#) (EU login required) before starting a web project
- take responsibility for the content of their site(s)
- ensure compliance with all applicable Europa Web Guide rules

Creation and revamp

Creation and revamp of harmonised websites must be approved by DG Comm B3 through the [revamps and new websites](#) procedure.

Content

The content must follow the [writing guidelines](#) and be translated according to the [language policy](#).

Breadcrumbs

Rules

The first element of the breadcrumb must always be labelled 'Home' and must link to the homepage of the actual site where the current user page is located. The home page is followed by its child pages, e.g. Home > 1st level of the website > 2nd level > page title.

Usability testing has proven that it is better to put the label 'Home' rather than the name of the site because it is:

- shorter
- more easily recognisable
- clearer

Exceptions: if a small site is integrated into a larger site - for technical reasons, for example - the first element of the breadcrumb may link to the homepage of the larger site.

Design

EC branded harmonised websites must follow [general rules on logos and icons](#) and specific [EC branded harmonised websites design rules](#).

They must comply with [accessibility rules](#).

Development

The use of the [Europa Web Publishing Platform](#) for harmonised sites depends on the specific website requirements and needs to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Legal aspects

Harmonised websites must comply with [Privacy, security and legal notices](#).