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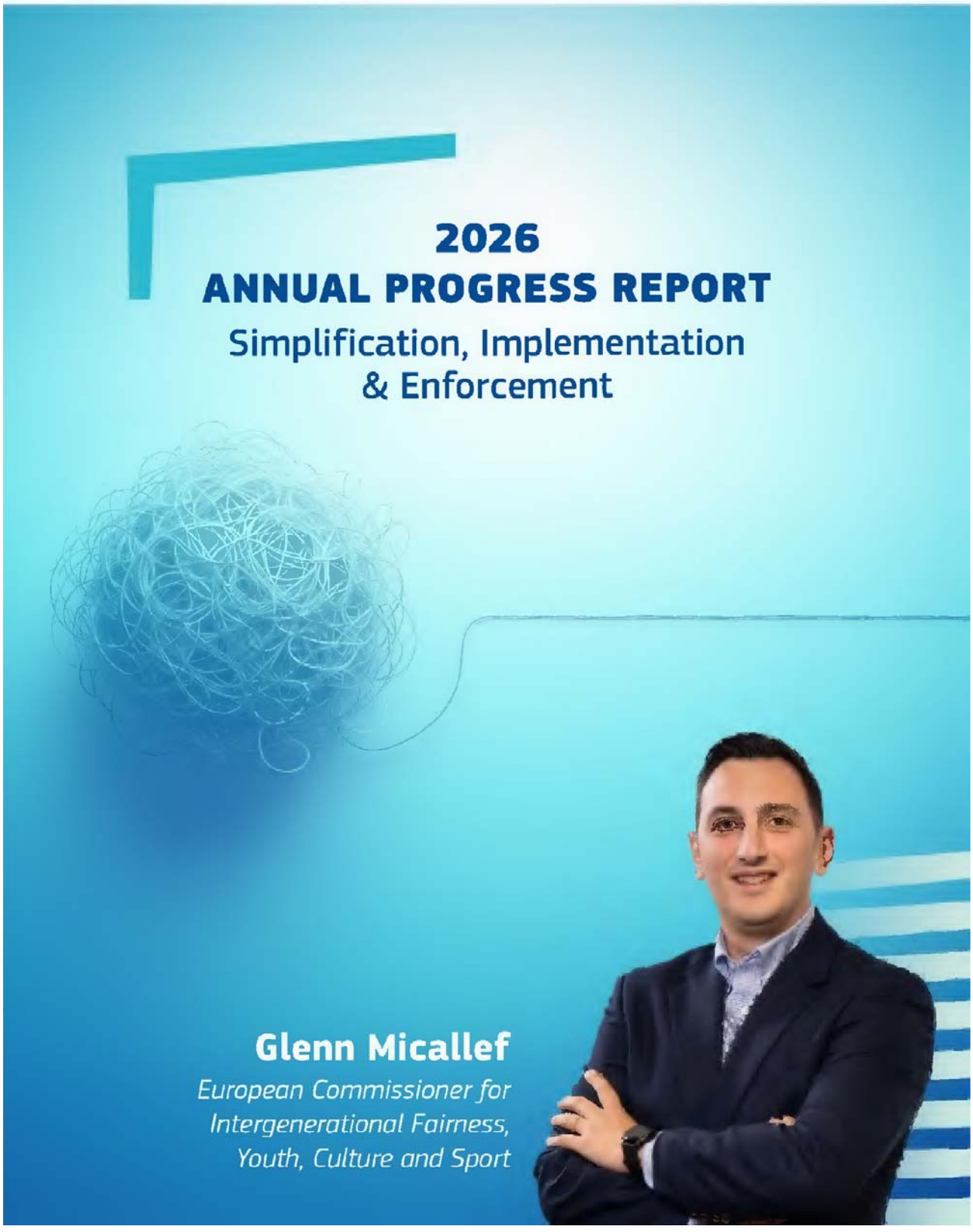


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European Commission

# 2026 ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

## Simplification, Implementation & Enforcement






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## 1. Introduction

This report outlines the key developments in the simplification, implementation and enforcement of Union law and policies in areas under my responsibility as Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport. The report covers the period from 1 August 2025 to 31 July 2026. It presents how EU policies and programmes have been leveraged to empower young people and promote participation in culture and sport. The report also identifies implementation challenges, lessons learnt and good practices that help align national measures with EU-level objectives, support convergence between Member States and contribute to the long-term resilience and cohesion of the European Union. In line with the priorities set out in the Commission Communication on implementation and simplification: A simpler and faster Europe (COM(2025)47 final of 11 February 2025)[1], it highlights how ongoing efforts in my portfolio contribute to reducing administrative burden and improving delivery on the ground, thereby reinforcing trust in Union action.

For the purposes of this report, the programmes covered by my portfolio, as set out in my mission letter[2], include the culture strand of Creative Europe, the European Solidarity Corps, and the youth and sport strands of the Erasmus+ programme managed under the responsibility of Executive Vice-President Roxana Mînzatu.

## 2. Executive Summary

Under my leadership, the EU continued its efforts to deliver meaningful policies for young people, culture and sport, making them more accessible, coherent and easier to implement.

During the reporting period, the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC) introduced new simplification measures that helped reduce administrative burden and improve access to its programmes and support services, including through broadening accreditation schemes, simplified grant models such as the expanded use of lump sums and cascading grants, as well as reduced application and reporting requirements. Evaluations continued to inform our work, notably when it comes to developing the next (2028-2034) generation of EU programmes.

During the reporting period, a report on the interim evaluation of the Creative Europe 2021-2027 programme and final evaluation of the 2014-2020 cycle[3] was published. The evaluations confirmed the relevance of the programmes and highlighted the progress made in simplifying and improving processes for participating organisations. The report also pointed out the need for further improvements in accessibility, proportionality and user-friendliness, with an annex listing potential simplification and burden reduction measures for the future.

Additionally, our action was also focused on supporting implementation, helping citizens and organisations alike with improving their impact on the ground. We brought tangible benefits, such as expanding helpdesk capacity, and introducing an eAgreement on the European Youth Portal, allowing prospective volunteers to sign their contract directly online. Organisations and businesses in the cultural and creative sectors received support in avoiding frequently made errors potentially leading to ineligibility. In the area of sport, the visibility of our annual awards was improved by merging two formats.

Another important dimension of this work was ensuring consistent dialogue with stakeholders. During the reporting period, I engaged in three Implementation Dialogues seeking feedback on our current rules and programmes. These Dialogues form an important source of inspiration for our simplification and implementation efforts, with several measures described in this report directly addressing stakeholders' requests.

[1] A simpler and faster Europe: Communication on implementation and simplification. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52025DC0047

[2] Mission letter of Commissioner Glenn Micallef: https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/c8b8682b-ca47-461b-bc95-c98195919eb0_en?filename=Mission%20letter%20-%20MICALLEF.pdf

[3] Commission evaluates a decade of Creative Europe: https://culture.ec.europa.eu/whats-new/news/commission-evaluates-a-decade-of-creative-europe



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As for enforcement, no infringement procedures were initiated in the policy areas under my responsibility during the reporting period. DG EAC will remain responsive to concerns raised by EU citizens regarding potential breaches of Union law.

Looking ahead, we will continue to implement the simplification and implementation agenda. As for Creative Europe, further measures will simplify grant management and improve access for small and first-time applicants.

## 3. Delivering Results: Key Measures

### A. Simplification and costs savings

Further simplification measures were introduced during the reporting period to support the management of the **European Solidarity Corps** by National Agencies. In addition to the streamlined annual reporting exercise, these included a simpler budget structure for indirect management and the use of technical approvals instead of formal amendments to contribution agreements for certain budget items. These measures resulted in a reduction of the number of amendments by an estimated 40-50% compared with the start of the 2021-2027 cycle.

**Creative Europe** has continued its simplification efforts, with a focus on improving the accessibility and user-friendliness of the programme for applicants and beneficiaries. These efforts build on earlier measures, positively recognised by the programme's interim evaluation for the 2021-2027 cycle and final evaluation for the 2014-2020 cycle[4], published on 17 December 2025. These highlighted progress in reducing administrative burden and improving access to funding, including through the wider use of lump sums, simplified reporting requirements and the increased use of cascading grants. During this reporting period, particular attention was given to streamlining procedures and making requirements more proportionate to the size and capacity of participating organisations. Building on previous reforms, further improvements were introduced to application and reporting processes, notably under Culture Moves Europe, while guidance and support for applicants were reinforced through the Creative Europe Desks. In 2026 and 2027, cascading grants will continue to play an important role in facilitating access to EU funding for smaller organisations and individuals through lighter and more flexible procedures.

### B. Implementation

During the reporting period, implementation work under my portfolio focused on turning stakeholder feedback into more accessible, practical and better-supported EU actions in youth, culture and sport.

At the 26 June 2025 **Implementation Dialogue on the Youth Policy Toolbox**[5], stakeholders called for simpler registration for European Solidarity Corps participants. Since, the registration form was improved, and registrants are now using two-factor authentication, a mandatory step strengthening EU login security, aided with a video tutorial. In this reporting period, the **European Youth Portal**[6] was enhanced with user-friendly functions, including a simple **eAgreement for participants**, allowing volunteers to sign their contract directly through the European Youth Portal.

Guidance and practical support to **Creative Europe** applicants and beneficiaries continued to be strengthened during the reporting period, contributing to more accessible and user-friendly implementation of the programme. Creative Europe Desks[7] remained an important first point of contact for organisations seeking support on calls, eligibility conditions, application requirements and project development. Their support to applicants, including

[4] Evaluation on the interim evaluation of the Creative Europe programme 2021-2027 and final evaluation of the Creative Europe programme 2014-2020: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A52025SC0418&

[5] Implementation Dialogue on the Youth Policy Toolbox, 26 June 2025: https://youth.europa.eu/news/first-implementation-dialogue-micallef_en

[6] European Youth Portal: https://youth.europa.eu/home_en

[7] Creative Europe Desks: https://culture.ec.europa.eu/resources/creative-europe-desks



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practical guides and peer learning activities, contributed to more consistent and accessible guidance for potential beneficiaries.

Further efforts were made under **Culture Moves Europe**[8] to simplify participation procedures and improve the user experience for individual artists, cultural professionals and hosting organisations. Application and reporting requirements were made clearer and more proportionate, helping reduce administrative burden while preserving the collection of essential programme data. After each call, the application portal was reviewed to address difficulties encountered by applicants and the frequently asked questions received. Adjustments were made particularly to prevent the most common errors leading to ineligibility. These improvements have contributed to a gradual increase in the eligibility rate of applications from less represented countries, from 69% to 86%. Work also continued to improve the visibility and usability of programme data through more integrated reporting tools and public dashboards.

The **Implementation Dialogue on Creative Europe Culture Cooperation Projects**[9], held on 18 September 2025, informed broader simplification work under the programme. Stakeholders noted several challenges related to the application process, while also expressing their interest in simpler and more proportionate grant management. Action was taken on the latter, with the extension of the use of lump sums to new Creative Europe calls, as reported in the previous chapter of this report. The extension covered the special call supporting the cultural and creative sectors in Ukraine, launched under the 2025 Annual Work Programme, and the call for support to the European Heritage Label, launched under the 2026 Annual Work Programme.

I also hosted an **Implementation Dialogue on the European Heritage Label**[10] on 22 April 2026, in preparation for the forthcoming revision of its legal basis. The discussion focused on the practical implementation of the action, including governance, reporting, communication, cooperation mechanisms and ways to strengthen the visibility and impact of the label while keeping administrative requirements proportionate. As a concrete follow-up, DG EAC published an article on European Heritage Label sites on the European School Education Platform on 1 July 2026[11], also included in the July 2026 Education Newsletter for Teachers, helping to promote the label among teachers and connect it more directly with school education communities.

The merger of the #BeActive and #BeInclusive EU Sport Awards into a single #BeActive EU Sport Awards format illustrates how implementation in the sport field has been streamlined to improve visibility for initiatives promoting sport and physical activity across Europe.

On 26 May 2026, as part of the preparatory work for the new strategic vision for sport, I hosted a **Youth Policy Dialogue on the European Sport Model** to gather young people's views on challenges in sport and possible EU-level solutions. Participants called in particular for continued strong support for sport through the Erasmus+ programme to make it more accessible to a wider range of potential beneficiaries, and for greater involvement of young people in the governance of sport organisations.

On 23 June 2026, I hosted an **Implementation Dialogue on the European Week of Sport**[12]. The discussion focused on the practical implementation of the initiative, including coordination, funding and support needs, visibility, partner involvement, data collection and reporting, and ways to strengthen the campaign's reach and impact while keeping administrative requirements proportionate.

[8] Culture Moves Europe: https://culture.ec.europa.eu/culture-moves-europe/home

[9] Implementation Dialogue on Creative Europe Culture Cooperation Projects, 18 September 2025: https://culture.ec.europa.eu/event/implementation-dialogue-with-commissioner-glenn-micallef-on-creative-europe-culture-cooperation-projects

[10] Implementation Dialogue on the European Heritage Label, 22 April 2026: https://culture.ec.europa.eu/whats-new/events/implementation-dialogue-with-commissioner-micallef-on-the-european-heritage-label

[11] European Heritage Label sites: from ancient ruins to modern movements, European School Education Platform, 1 July 2026: https://school-education.ec.europa.eu/en/discover/news/european-heritage-label-sites-ancient-ruins-modern-movements

[12] Implementation Dialogue on the European Week of Sport, 23 June 2026: https://sport.ec.europa.eu/whats-new/events/implementation-dialogue-on-the-european-week-of-sport-with-commissioner-glenn-micallef



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## C. Enforcement

No infringement procedures were initiated in the policy areas under my responsibility during the reporting period. My services remained responsive to concerns raised by EU citizens regarding potential breaches of Union law, by replying to complaints in the area of sport and culture.

The Europa webpage on infringement cases, pre-infringement dialogues and transposition[13] provides up-to-date statistical information on the Commission's enforcement activities and Member States' compliance with EU law, including trends per policy area, topic and Member State.

## 4. Way forward

The envisaged streamlining of certain activities in the **2027 Erasmus+ Annual Work Programme** will further align the programme with Commission priorities and prepare the transition towards the post-2027 programme. Applicants would benefit from more streamlined and less fragmented funding opportunities within the overall available budget.

The next year will also likely see the final stages of negotiations for the post-2027 programme, with programme implementation starting later. The **proposed Erasmus+ Regulation for the 2028-2034 cycle**[14] puts forward structural simplifications. Through the proposed integration of the European Solidarity Corps, the future programme would bring all EU opportunities for young people under one programme and offer a single-entry point to EU funding for young people and those working with them, across the EU and beyond. This structural simplification was also endorsed by the Council of the European Union in its Partial General Approach adopted in May 2026.

Additional efforts will be made to ensure **better proportionality between grant levels and administrative requirements**. This includes further simplifying grant management, improving access for very small projects under Small-scale Partnerships by lowering entry-level grant amounts, and exploring the use of the 'very low value grant' category under the recast Financial Regulation. The Commission will also explore the possibility of awarding cascading grants with lighter administrative requirements, building on the approach used during the European Year of Youth 2022. Finally, funding rules will be further harmonised and aligned across sectors to offer participating organisations a simpler and more accessible project implementation experience.

Looking ahead, the proposed **AgoraEU** programme for the period 2028-2034[15] would provide an opportunity to further advance simplification efforts, including through more common or aligned rules, simpler application and reporting procedures, wider use of simplified forms of funding, financial support to third parties and multiannual grants. The revision of the legal basis for the **European Heritage Label** would seek to simplify the monitoring of labelled sites and reduce the burden on applicant sites through a two-step selection procedure. The new legal basis for the **European Capitals of Culture** after 2034 would aim to provide more targeted support for applicant and designated cities, strengthen cooperation and knowledge-sharing between cities, and support communication efforts more, thereby improving the accessibility, quality, visibility and citizens' awareness of the initiative. For **Creative Europe**, the cap on the participation of organisations introduced in the 2025 European Cooperation Projects call will be maintained for the 2026 call, but this time this rule will not concern the associate partners. This should help increase opportunities for smaller and first-time applicants, while keeping the programme accessible to a broad range of organisations across the cultural and creative sectors.

[13] Europa webpage on infringement cases, pre-infringement dialogues and transposition : https://ec.europa.eu/implementing-eu-law/home/en

[14] Proposal 2025/0022 (COD) for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 July 2025: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52025PC0549

[15] Proposal 2025/0550 (COD) for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 July 2025: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52025PC0550



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Following the Implementation Dialogue on the **European Heritage Label**, future work will be considering how the label has evolved over the past 15 years, while helping citizens connect with Europe's shared cultural heritage. This work will focus on developing clearer governance, better support for labelled sites and a monitoring process that is better suited to the maturity and diversity of the sites. Further follow-up will also aim to strengthen the educational dimension of the label, including by raising awareness among teachers. This will include exploring the development of lesson material, with the aim of making them available through the European School Education Platform and supporting their use in formal education settings.

Follow-up to the 26 June 2025 Implementation Dialogue on the Youth Policy Toolbox is informing the preparation of the upcoming **EU Youth Strategy** and future youth funding instruments. This work will focus on recognising young people, youth workers and youth organisations as implementers and co-creators, improving access for organisations working with rural youth and young people with fewer opportunities, and simplifying funding and guidance. **Erasmus+** and the **European Solidarity Corps** will remain key tools for professional development, capacity-building, quality enhancement and recognition of non-formal learning, including through **Youthpass** and the **European Training Strategy**.

The forthcoming **Communication on a strategic vision for sport in Europe** will further connect the **European Sport Model**[16] with young people's expectations and stakeholders' practical implementation needs, as voiced in the dialogues held during this reporting period. Follow-up will focus on strengthening good governance, safeguarding athletes' rights and well-being, volunteering, participation and inclusion in sport, while supporting effective dialogue with stakeholders in the sport sector. This will help ensure that the European Sport Model remains a framework for good governance and solidarity, and a practical tool for promoting active lifestyles, youth participation and shared European values.

DG EAC will also continue to contribute to ongoing discussions within the Commission's wider simplification agenda on possible future measures to make EU support for citizens, smaller organisation and stakeholders in youth, culture and sport more proportionate and easier to access, including through simpler procedures for smaller grants, and simpler application and reporting requirements.

Together, these initiatives will help ensure that future EU action in youth, culture and sport is less administratively burdensome, more coherent and more responsive to the needs identified by citizens, beneficiaries and stakeholders. Across the portfolio, the focus will be on turning dialogue and evidence into practical improvements that strengthen participation, inclusion and the visible impact of EU action on the ground.

[16] European Sport Model: https://sport.ec.europa.eu/sport-in-the-eu/the-european-sport-model





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## Annex: examples

**1. Creative Europe Desk France: The Archipelago of Cooperation**

The Creative Europe Desk France published *The Archipelago of Cooperation: A Guide to Successful European Cooperation Projects*[17], a practical guide designed to help organisations navigate the application process and better understand the requirements for successful European cooperation projects. This type of support is particularly relevant for smaller or less experienced organisations, as it helps translate programme rules into practical guidance, reduces the complexity of the application process and supports broader access to EU funding opportunities.

**2. Creative Europe Public Dashboard**

The consolidation of Creative Europe data in a public dashboard[18], released in April 2026, provides a more complete and more accessible overview of supported cultural projects and programme results. Bringing together verified information, visualisations and key figures, the tool makes Creative Europe data easier to explore and use. This improves transparency for beneficiaries, stakeholders, policymakers and citizens, supports evidence-based monitoring, and makes the impact of EU cultural support easier to identify and communicate.

**3. European Heritage Label Youth Advisory Board**

The European Heritage Label Bureau is supporting youth participation amongst others through the Youth Advisory Board[19], established during this reporting period to bring together volunteers under 30 to collaborate with the Bureau and engage with labelled sites. The Board helps ensure that the initiative remains responsive to young people and connects heritage, civic education, cultural project management, communication and community outreach.

**4. Creating the #BeActive EU Sport Awards**

During this reporting period, the #BeActive and #BeInclusive EU Sport Awards were merged into the new #BeActive EU Sport Awards. This created a clearer and more coherent format to recognise initiatives promoting sport and physical activity across Europe. The new format reduces fragmentation between award schemes and simplifies communication by aligning the awards with the broader #BeActive campaign and the European Week of Sport.

[17] The Archipelago of Cooperation: A Guide to Successful European Cooperation Projects: https://www.relais-culture-europe.eu/ressources/decouvrez-notre-guide-larchipel-de-la-cooperation

[18] Creative Europe Public Dashboard: https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/eacdashboard/sense/app/9ae190a0-f1c2-49f2-95a2-3afbb5f5ad53/sheet/8209f229-bca1-43e3-92e9-2dab3c885818/state/analysis

[19] Call to join the Youth Advisory Board of the European Heritage Label Bureau: https://ehl-bureau.eu/en/join-the-youth-advisory-board-of-the-european-heritage-label-bureau/



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