



# **Évora**

# **European Capital of Culture 2027**

**Second Monitoring Meeting**  
**Report by the ECOC Expert Panel**

**Virtual Meeting, June 2025**

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**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

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## Table of contents

|                                               |    |
|-----------------------------------------------|----|
| Introduction.....                             | 4  |
| Attendance .....                              | 4  |
| Report and presentation from Évora 2027 ..... | 5  |
| Main facts from the progress report .....     | 6  |
| Introduction.....                             | 6  |
| Contribution to the Long-Term Strategy .....  | 6  |
| Cultural and Artistic Content .....           | 7  |
| European Dimension .....                      | 7  |
| Outreach .....                                | 7  |
| Management.....                               | 8  |
| Capacity to Deliver .....                     | 8  |
| Letter from the minister .....                | 9  |
| Panel enquiries.....                          | 9  |
| Contribution to the Long-Term Strategy .....  | 9  |
| Cultural and Artistic Content .....           | 9  |
| European Dimension .....                      | 10 |
| Outreach .....                                | 10 |
| Management.....                               | 10 |
| Capacity to Deliver .....                     | 10 |
| Conclusions and recommendations .....         | 11 |
| Recommendations .....                         | 11 |
| Overall Conclusion .....                      | 12 |
| Next steps .....                              | 12 |

## Introduction

This report follows the virtual meeting on 18 June 2025 between the panel and the team of Évora 2027, one of the two European Capitals of Culture (ECoC) in 2027. Évora was designated as European Capital of Culture in March 2023 by the Ministry of Culture of Portugal based on the recommendation in the panel's selection report<sup>1</sup>.

This report of the second monitoring meeting is addressed to the Évora 2027 team and will also be published on the European Commission's website<sup>2</sup>.

## Attendance

Panel members:

Toni Attard  
Jelle Burggraaff  
Else Christensen-Redzepovic (rapporteur)  
Suzana Faro (national expert)  
Suvi Innilä (chair)  
Erni Kask  
Hrvoje Laurenta  
Tanja Mlaker  
João Seixas (national expert)  
Jorge Cerveira Pinto  
Matthias Ripp

For Évora 2027:

Mayor of Évora Municipality  
Évora 2027 Association:  
CEO  
Executive Director  
Artistic Director  
Financial Director  
Communications & Outreach Director  
Architect, Cultural Heritage Public Institute  
Digital Coordinator  
Monitoring and Evaluations coordinator

Also in attendance were observers from the European Commission (Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture) and the Bureau for Cultural Strategy, Planning and Assessment ("GEPAC"), under the Ministry of Culture of the Portuguese Republic.

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<sup>1</sup><https://culture.ec.europa.eu/latvia-and-portugal>

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

## Report and presentation from Évora 2027

Prior to the second monitoring meeting the team of Évora 2027 submitted a report on the progress of preparations since the first monitoring meeting in September 2023.

The mayor of Évora warmly welcomed the panel and opened his address by expressing the city's pride in having secured the title of European Capital of Culture for 2027.

He began by outlining the municipality's leadership in developing the ECoC application and coordinating preparations up until the formal establishment of the Évora 2027 Association in October 2024. He emphasised that this collaborative effort had laid the groundwork for the success of the bid and reiterated the municipality's continued commitment to supporting the Association and ensuring the full realisation of the project in accordance with the bidbook and the core concept of *vagar*.

Looking ahead, the mayor informed the panel of the upcoming municipal elections in October 2025, which will bring a change in leadership due to his completion of the maximum number of terms. Despite this transition, he voiced his confidence in the continuity of support for Évora 2027. He attributed this confidence to several factors: the unanimous backing of the Strategic Plan for Culture by all political parties, the broad consensus within the local and regional community, and his personal relationships with the leading mayoral candidates—all of whom have affirmed their support for the project.

He also highlighted the importance of European cooperation, pointing to the formal partnership signed with Liepāja, Latvia, another ECoC city for 2027. This collaboration has led to cultural exchanges and joint projects, including the successful February 2025 concert at the newly renovated Salão Central, which featured the Liepāja Women's Choir performing alongside local ensemble Cantares de Évora.

The mayor then turned to the financial and infrastructural aspects of Évora 2027. He broke down the municipality's responsibilities into two components: intangible and material. On the intangible side, he noted that a funding protocol signed in 2023 between the national government and the municipality had secured state funding, which has already been transferred to the Évora 2027 Association. While the municipality's initial funding commitments have been met, he acknowledged some current uncertainties, which are being addressed through negotiations with the Association and a forthcoming meeting with the new Minister of Culture.

Regarding material investments, he provided a detailed overview of completed projects, including the Salão Central, Teatro Garcia de Resende, the city's sports stadium, the Almendres Cromlech heritage site, and improved pedestrian access from the railway station to the historic centre. He outlined projects currently underway or planned with PRR (Recovery and Resilience Plan) support, such as

the EPAC building, Convento dos Remédios, the Photographic Archive, and the redevelopment of Rossio square. He also cited municipal investments in facilities such as the Casa dos Bonecos. He acknowledged that two major projects—the Cultural Centre and the new National Centre for Contemporary Dance—are still awaiting funding, but stressed that alternative solutions have been identified and included in the project’s contingency planning.

In conclusion, the mayor assured the panel that despite remaining challenges and uncertainties, the Municipality of Évora is fully committed to fulfilling all obligations outlined in the selection Bidbook. He reiterated that both the city’s leadership and its community are united in their support for Évora 2027, and that the necessary political will, financial mechanisms, and cultural vision are in place to ensure its success.

## Main facts from the progress report

The following is a brief summary of the main facts from the progress report and follows largely the six selection criteria.

### Introduction

Since being awarded the European Capital of Culture title, Évora 2027 has undergone a period of reorganisation and renewed momentum. Following delays linked to leadership transitions, institutional restructuring, and procurement challenges, the Évora 2027 Association became fully operational in October 2024. With a new Executive Director and Artistic Director now in place, and a growing team building capacity across all strategic axes, the delivery of the title year is back on track. This progress report reflects both achievements and ongoing challenges, organised according to the six ECoC criteria.

### Contribution to the Long-Term Strategy

Évora 2027 is anchored in the city’s broader development strategy, Évora 2030, and aligns with regional (Alentejo 2030) and national policy frameworks, particularly in culture, education, and sustainability. The vision of *vagar* – promoting slowness, depth, and reflection – remains central and is seen as a transformative tool to shift mindsets and governance models, especially in a low-density, ageing region like Alentejo.

The “Change” programme, a capacity-building initiative involving 14 municipalities, is a cornerstone of Évora 2027’s long-term legacy. It aims to train professionals across sectors to incorporate cultural strategies into local development. Through partnerships with the National Plan for the Arts, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, and local universities, Évora 2027 is embedding cultural practice into broader systems of education, health, and civic engagement. The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework is being developed in line with the bidbook and European Commission expectations. Internal preparatory work has begun, and the process to select an external M&E partner is underway, with implementation expected from September 2025 onwards. Indicators will be based on the Theory of Change and contribute to evaluating impact at local, regional, and European levels.

## Cultural and Artistic Content

A central effort of the past year has been the review and refinement of the artistic programme. The Artistic Director, appointed in early 2025, undertook a comprehensive reassessment of the bidbook proposals, resulting in a more streamlined and strategically coherent programme. Of the original 198 projects, 171 remain in the portfolio: 27 were restructured, 16 new ones were added, and 16 were withdrawn.

The artistic vision continues to revolve around *vagar*, but it now integrates new thematic layers reflecting global and European challenges, such as peace, climate emergency, and democratic fragility. The programme emphasises interdisciplinarity, artistic research, and multi-venue formats across the Alentejo region.

Project contracting is ongoing, with 50 contracts expected to be signed by July 2025 and the remainder by September. Four Open Calls will be launched between September and December 2025 across the following streams: Artistic Programme, Community, Emerging Artists, and Youth. These are designed to invite local, national, and international participation and to respond to topics such as care, land, silence, time, and hospitality.

Infrastructure is being adapted to support the programme, including modular and mobile solutions. The Salão Central, already active, is a flagship venue. The full programme will be publicly presented in September 2026.

## European Dimension

International collaboration remains a defining feature of Évora 2027. Over 90% of confirmed projects include one or more international partners, spanning 26 EU countries and several others. The team has strengthened ties with previous and future ECoCs, notably Liepāja 2027 (Latvia), with whom Évora has signed a formal cooperation protocol. Joint activities have included co-productions and artistic residencies.

Évora is also engaged in projects with European institutions and networks such as Ars Electronica (Austria), iMAL (Belgium), Biennale de la danse de Lyon (France), and the Teatro della Pergola (Italy). Programmes like “Seeds of Peace” and “Walking Arts” explore European identities and values through the lens of conflict transformation and shared heritage.

The European dimension is embedded not only through partnerships but also in themes and methodologies – including co-creation, cross-border mobility, and dialogue on contemporary European challenges. The team is currently mapping partnerships by country and theme, in preparation for a more detailed dissemination and monitoring framework.

## Outreach

Engaging diverse communities remains a central ambition. The Participation Programme is being structured around civic dialogue, co-creation, and cultural mediation. More than 100 engagement activities have already taken place across the 14 municipalities, involving cultural agents, schools, NGOs, and civic associations.

A key initiative is “The Voice that Matters,” which ensures ongoing dialogue with local communities, especially those in rural and socially vulnerable contexts. The programme explicitly includes LGBTQ+ populations, migrant communities, and

people with disabilities, and is supported by cultural mediators trained through the “Change” initiative.

The youth programme, “Generation 2027,” will launch in autumn 2025 as an inclusive advisory platform to engage young people in programming and decision-making. While inclusion indicators are not yet in place, they are currently being developed alongside the M&E framework to ensure that outreach efforts can be measured and improved over time.

A network of mediators, in partnership with the National Plan for the Arts, is being prepared to act as bridges between the cultural offer and local schools and communities.

## Management

Following institutional changes and the formal creation of the Évora 2027 Association in October 2024, significant progress has been made in team recruitment and organisational development. The Executive Director and Artistic Director are now in place, supported by a growing team expected to reach 29 staff members by September 2025. The Board of Directors includes representatives from the Municipality of Évora, the Alentejo Regional Coordination Commission, and the Ministry of Culture.

Financially, the project is backed by an overall budget of €49.5 million. Protocols signed between the Municipality and the national government guarantee €39 million in state funding, including €5 million from the *Comunidade Intermunicipal do Alentejo Central*. €34 million has been transferred to the Association already, while the €5 million remaining are currently under negotiation and should be released soon. The remaining €10,5 million guaranteed by the Municipality have not yet been transferred to the Association and are still under discussion between the two entities.

Municipal funds covered the pre-operational phase, and remaining funding commitments are under discussion with public and private stakeholders.

A Communications Director has been appointed, and an international marketing and communications strategy is in development, to be rolled out by autumn 2025. Procurement procedures, staffing, and coordination mechanisms have all been restructured to allow for more agile decision-making.

## Capacity to Deliver

Several capital projects outlined in the bidbook have been completed or are in progress. Completed investments include the Salão Central, Teatro Garcia de Resende, Almendres Cromlech heritage site, a pedestrian link between the station and historic centre, and sports infrastructure. Other venues, including the EPAC building and Convento dos Remédios, are being funded through the national PRR mechanism.

Some venues originally foreseen in the bidbook remain unfunded or delayed – notably the Cultural Centre and the National Centre for Contemporary Dance. In these cases, the team has identified alternative solutions such as repurposing existing spaces (e.g. the Arena) or using temporary venues. The Association is also preparing contingency strategies to deal with delays, including “B lists” of adaptable projects and portable infrastructure.

Administrative and logistical delivery is a growing concern due to compressed timelines and procurement constraints. Nevertheless, the team is actively

managing risks and scaling operational capacity to meet delivery deadlines by 2026.

## Letter from the minister

The presentation of the Évora 2027 progress planning concluded with the reading of a letter from the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport, in which the Minister reaffirmed the Portuguese Government's full political and institutional commitment to Évora 2027 as a national strategic priority. He underlined that Évora 2027 is not merely an honorary title but a transformative opportunity for the city, the Alentejo region, and the country, with the potential to attract cultural projects and investment. The letter stressed the alignment of the initiative with the Programme of the XXV Constitutional Government, which emphasises the enhancement of public space, the strengthening of the cultural sector, and the international promotion of the region. The Minister concluded by expressing the government's readiness to collaborate closely with all stakeholders to ensure the success of Évora 2027, reaffirming its importance at the highest political level.

Following this thorough presentation of Évora 2027's progress planning, the panel sought clarification on the following points of the six selection criteria:

## Panel enquiries

### Contribution to the Long-Term Strategy

The panel enquired about the clarity of alignment between the Évora 2030 Vision, the Alentejo 2030 strategy, and ECoC objectives. The team responded that all strategic cultural plans are aligned, and Évora's cultural strategy supports SDGs. However, the panel noted a lack of visible communication and documentation.

The panel asked whether a Monitoring and Evaluation team had been established, as this was promised in the first monitoring report. The team responded that internal Monitoring and Evaluation work has started, and an external partner will be contracted by September 2025.

The panel requested concrete examples of immediate impacts from the preparation phase. The team mentioned the "Change" capacity-building programme and engagement with national foundations and municipalities, indicating growing civic participation.

The panel asked for clarification on long-term partnerships between the cultural, business, and education sectors. The team cited cooperation with the National Arts Plan and technology park enterprises, but lacked specific names and details.

### Cultural and Artistic Content

The panel enquired how the new Artistic Director is shaping the programme's artistic vision. The team responded that the AD reviewed every project for legacy value and introduced new thematic priorities such as peace and migration within the "Vagar" concept.

The panel asked about the timeline for contracting, noting that 85% of projects remain in pre-contracting. The team replied that all contracts will be signed by September 2025 and the full programme will be announced in September 2026. The panel questioned the team's capacity to manage four major open calls within a tight timeframe. The team stated that each call would be handled by specialist staff and that outreach was underway, including artist meetings and a Vagar Academy.

The panel asked about the partnership with the National Arts Plan. The team confirmed its integration into the ECoC programme and stressed the need to include youth voices.

### European Dimension

The panel asked for an overview of confirmed international partnerships. The team referred to collaborations with Ars Electronica, iMAL, Biennale de la danse de Lyon, and a range of ECoCs such as Liepāja and Tartu. However, some partnerships mentioned were not verifiable.

The panel asked about Évora's participation in EU-level or multi-city initiatives. The team mentioned involvement in Interreg and bilateral projects but did not provide a comprehensive list.

The panel asked who in the organisation is responsible for international cooperation. The team indicated this is a shared responsibility between the CEO, Executive Director, and Artistic Director.

### Outreach

The panel asked how success in reaching marginalised communities will be measured. The team described planned initiatives with migrant communities, LGBTQ+ populations, and rural outreach, but offered no metrics.

The panel asked about the impact of leadership changes on community trust. The team responded that trust-building is ongoing through initiatives such as 'The Voice that Matters' and cultural mediation.

The panel enquired about Generation 2027. The team stated it will become fully operational by autumn 2025 as an inclusive advisory body.

### Management

The panel asked how team capacity will be scaled and skills retained. The team stated the staff will increase to 29 by September 2025 and outlined onboarding, well-being programmes, and job-shadowing.

The panel asked for a breakdown of in-house versus outsourced productions. The team confirmed 92% are outsourced and 8% internally produced.

The panel sought clarity on the €49 million budget, including the €9 million gap. The team cited a protocol for €10.5 million signed with the government and municipal support, with further contributions to be finalised by year-end.

The panel asked whether political changes might jeopardise support. The team responded that cross-party consensus is in place, with a letter of support from the Ministry of Culture, which was read aloud during the presentation.

### Capacity to Deliver

The panel enquired about the status of key infrastructure projects. The team reported that seven venues are funded under the PRR and due to be completed by August 2026; temporary venues are available if needed.

The panel asked how the team would manage if funding for the remaining €18 million in projects falls through. The team responded that contingency plans are in place, including project prioritisation and scaling.

## Conclusions and recommendations

The panel appreciates the progress made so far by Évora 2027 despite the challenges. The panel also positively acknowledges the strong commitment to Évora 2027 from the city, regional and national partners.

However, the panel wishes to draw attention to the following recommendations:

### Recommendations

#### Recommendation 1

Clarify and communicate the alignment between Évora 2030, Alentejo 2030, and ECoC objectives to ensure strategic coherence. This should be supported by the rapid operationalisation of the monitoring & evaluation framework, including defined milestones, responsibilities, and measurable indicators.

#### Recommendation 2

Reinforce long-term partnerships with clearly identified stakeholders across cultural, business, educational, civil society, and governmental sectors. This includes embedding cultural mediation, engaging civil society across diverse domains, and formalising cooperation with the National Arts Plan.

#### Recommendation 3

Urgently consolidate and enhance the European dimension by building on existing projects and international collaborations that already demonstrate strong European partnerships. Given the limited time available, prioritising these ready-to-activate initiatives is essential. Establish a dedicated coordinator or unit for international partnerships, ensure systematic tracking, and embed European relevance firmly into project selection criteria.

#### Recommendation 4

Strengthen outreach and public engagement by launching Generation 2027, enhancing inclusion strategies, and ensuring transparent communication with local communities. The full marketing and communications strategy should be finalised and implemented by autumn 2025.

#### Recommendation 5

Accelerate delivery of the programme by finalising Open Calls and contracting processes, while building internal capacity and considering external support where needed. Avoid bottlenecks by streamlining administrative functions and ensuring numbers of staff to be in line with the complexity of the projects.

#### Recommendation 6

Secure full public and private funding commitments by the end of 2025 and maintain financial transparency. Establish and regularly review contingency plans

covering political, financial, and infrastructure-related risks, including prioritisation of scalable or relocatable projects.

### **Recommendation 7**

Prioritise legacy planning across all programme strands. Emphasise the role of infrastructure in cultural transformation, with specific attention to heritage regeneration in line with Évora's UNESCO World Heritage status. Ensure that infrastructure investments serve both immediate and long-term cultural goals.

### **Recommendation 8**

Maintain structured progress updates to the panel and consider organising interim monitoring sessions every four months to facilitate ongoing dialogue, assess developments, and offer timely guidance.

## **Overall Conclusion**

Évora 2027 has made notable progress since the first monitoring meeting, particularly in building its core team, refining the artistic programme, and establishing partnerships at national and international levels. The association has demonstrated resilience and adaptability in addressing early delays caused by leadership changes and administrative restructuring. The appointment of the Executive and Artistic Directors, as well as the gradual operationalisation of core mechanisms such as monitoring, open calls, and communications, mark important turning points.

Nevertheless, the panel notes with concern the compressed implementation timeline and the number of key tasks still pending at this stage, particularly around contracting, funding finalisation, infrastructure delivery, and meaningful community and European engagement. The commitment from public authorities, including national-level political support, provides a strong foundation, but must now translate into accelerated delivery on all fronts.

Besides the important financial questions still to be resolved — which underline the substantial nature of the commitments laid out in the bidbook, seen as a *de facto* contract between the City Council and the European Commission — the panel highlights the importance of engaging civil society organisations across economic, social, educational, environmental and institutional spheres, alongside citizens, for both participatory and outreach purposes.

The panel further stresses the relevance of the ECoC legacy beyond 2027 in multiple dimensions, as this was core to the city's selection. In this context, the infrastructure programme takes on particular importance, especially regarding heritage regeneration, as Évora is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Finally, the panel wishes to acknowledge the strong and focused efforts of the team and notes with appreciation that Évora 2027 is on the right track. It is clear that the team is knowledgeable and committed to what needs to be done, which is both reassuring and promising for the road ahead. Prioritising the already started

team building efforts in terms of skills, knowledge and well-being can build a strong foundation to enhance the implementation efforts.

## Next steps

The panel remains available for questions and advice, through the Commission services.

In addition, the panel considers that it will be important to carry out an *in situ* visit to Évora still in 2025 and following the municipal elections in October. Such a visit should offer a three-dimensional understanding of the ongoing progress, provide an opportunity to engage directly with the city and the delivery team, and allow the panel to offer further guidance and support where appropriate.

The Commission will call for a third and final monitoring meeting at the end-2026 where the panel will make a recommendation to the Commission on whether to award the Melina Mercouri Prize to Évora 2027.

The panel would like to thank the mayor of Évora and the Évora 2027 team for a very informative discussion and looks forward to the next developments of their European Capital of Culture project.

(Signed) all attending panel members

