

Photography Contest

Revised Concept Note — May/June 2026

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MOVING HERITAGES

Gen Z Perspectives on Ethiopia: Yesterday and Today

With a special focus on the cities of Harar and Dire Dawa

"One must be absolutely modern."

— Arthur Rimbaud, *A Season in Hell*, 1873

■ Notice to candidates and partners

This edition of the competition extends its geographic scope to the entire Ethiopian territory. Harar and Dire Dawa remain the founding cities and the venue for the exhibition; candidates from other regions of the country are now fully invited to submit their work under the "Ethiopia" category.

Context

In the continuous and ephemeral flow of images circulating on social media — in Ethiopia as elsewhere — certain photographs produced by members of Generation Z (aged 18–25) reveal an urgent need for representation in a constantly changing world. While many of these images rarely extend beyond the private sphere of their creators, others are more carefully crafted and tend — or aspire — to the status of artworks. Free and critical, they seek to deconstruct visual norms while sweeping aside dominant narratives, illustrating young people's aspiration to express personal stories, to tell — or to invent — their own history.

In Ethiopia, this vast corpus of images circulates and regenerates continuously across the most widely used platforms: TikTok, Instagram, Telegram, WhatsApp, Reddit and Facebook. It reveals a diversity of approaches, stances and visual languages in which references to Ethiopian identity — its codes, signs and symbols — are omnipresent. On national television channels broadcasting a profusion of music videos by contemporary artists, not a single one — whatever the musical style (pop, rap, reggae, techno, modern jazz) — fails to make reference to traditions, practices and customs rooted in collective memory. This demonstrates how powerfully heritage functions as an identity marker in Ethiopia.

The Concept

This competition invites participants — young amateurs, students, artists, and image professionals — to explore, through a documentary or artistic approach, how Generation Z reclaims the tangible and intangible heritage of Ethiopia in all its geographic and cultural diversity.

Originally conceived around the cities of Harar and Dire Dawa, the competition now extends its scope to the entire Ethiopian territory. Harar and Dire Dawa remain the founding and emblematic cities of this inaugural edition: Dire Dawa, a modern city born with the Franco-Ethiopian railway, and Harar (Jugol), a millennia-old fortified city listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, together constitute an exceptionally rich visual terrain. They remain at the heart of the exhibition framework and the main prize categories.

But Ethiopia does not end in the East. From the high plateaus to the Great Rift Valley, from the ancient kingdoms of Axum and Gondar to the border markets of the Ogaden, from Lake Tana to the forests of Kaffa, every region of the country holds heritage assets — natural, architectural, living, intangible — that a generation's gaze can capture, question, and reinvent.

What We Are Looking For

Candidates are invited to adopt a creative and/or journalistic approach that highlights the connections and interactions between youth and:

- **Tangible heritage** — architecture, urban and rural spaces, artworks, costumes, jewellery, hairstyles, traditional foods, crafts, historic infrastructure...
- **Living and intangible heritage** — rituals, performing arts, music, dance, artisanal know-how, oral traditions (Xeer Issa, Oromo gadaa, Somali poetry...), major religious and festive celebrations (Shuwalid, Timkat, Mesqel, Irreecha...), commemorations of founding national events (Adwa, etc.)
- **Natural heritage** — protected landscapes, national parks, Rift Valley lakes, mountain forests, remarkable geological sites — wherever they are inhabited, celebrated or reinterpreted by young people.
- **Interactions between youth and heritage** — between past and present, tradition and transformation, collective memory and individual expression.

This is not a postcard competition. We are looking for personal, creative and meaningful images — images that carry the voice, emotions and vision of their creator.

Competition Structure — Two Geographic Categories

Category A — Founding Cities: Harar & Dire Dawa

Open to photographers working specifically on the cities of Harar and Dire Dawa. This category forms the historical core of the inaugural edition and carries the main prizes (1st, 2nd and 3rd place).

Category B — Ethiopia

Open to all photographers residing in Ethiopia who wish to document heritage assets — tangible, intangible or natural — in any region of the country, following the same thematic framework as Category A. The best works in Category B will be recognised with an Ethiopia Prize (see regulations) and included in the collective November 2026 exhibition.

Note to candidates from the founding cities:

The five candidates who submitted their work before the opening of the expanded national category compete fully within Category A, with all associated benefits. The geographic expansion does not alter their status or the evaluation criteria applied to their works.

Objectives

This competition aims — if not to fully capture this creative energy — at least to open a space where the visual and narrative dynamics of still photography intersect with questions of heritage (in all its forms), its transmission, transformation and reinterpretation.

- Showcase emerging Gen Z talent at national scale
- Encourage creative and documentary photography
- Explore how heritage is transmitted, transformed and reinvented by youth
- Create a meeting point between youth, photography and heritage, beyond the major cities
- Build a lasting photographic gallery at AEF Dire Dawa, as part of the Bicentennial of Photography 2026–2027

Format and Photographic Styles

While the main theme requires capturing and highlighting the interactions between Generation Z and heritage, the format, type, style and genre of photography are freely chosen by the candidate: street photography, black & white, portrait, urban or natural landscape, studio photography, reportage, still life, abstract, contemporary or conceptual photography.

All devices are accepted, including smartphones.

Beyond the Competition

The Alliance Éthio-Française (AEF) will also work to identify, among the candidates, promising young talents — emerging artists and photographers — and to support them, in partnership with the Cultural Cooperation and Action Service of the French Embassy, in their projects and training: professional development support, assistance in producing an exhibition, internships.



Show us how heritage moves through your gaze.

All of Ethiopia • Generation Z • 1st Edition, 2026