

2024 EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

Contribution of the French Hiking Federation

To the attention of the candidates for the European elections and the hiking associations of the European Ramblers Association,

As an active member of the European Ramblers Association and one of its vice-presidents, the French Hiking Federation expresses its shared ambition with the ERA to promote walking and hiking.

Our approach aims to generate interest and support among candidates for the European elections by demonstrating the importance of active mobility for the future of Europe and Europeans. We want to offer concrete solutions to improve public policies in the EU, to promote the decarbonisation of mobility, the fight against climate change and the improvement of health and well-being.



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Preamble

The 2024 European elections focus on critical issues for the future of Europe and Europeans. Environmental concerns and their social consequences call for urgent action to combat climate change and protect ecosystems. Promoting health and well-being, developing sustainable mobility and resilient cities must be an absolute priority to combat sedentary lifestyles and address today's social, climate, energy and economic challenges.

At a time of populist retreat, it is necessary to give new impetus to a more human Europe that supports Europeans; a more open Europe that allows links to be forged between cultures while respecting their diversity; a more lively Europe that offers its inhabitants the opportunity to reach out to others beyond borders and cultural or linguistic differences.

The French Hiking Federation is fully committed to the recognition of these issues through its activities in various fields such as sport and the promotion of physical activity, health, education, tourism, environmental protection and the attractiveness of local towns and villages. Together with the European Ramblers Association, of which it is one of the vice-presidents, and with all the members of the ERA, the French Hiking Federation wishes to express its ambitions loudly and throughout Europe in order to use walking and hiking as tools for improving European public policies.



ERA·EWV·FERP

The **European Ramblers Association**, or **ERA** (French: **Fédération Européenne de la Randonnée Pédestre**; German: **Europäische Wandervereinigung**) was founded in 1969 to promote hiking, the development of paths and the benefits of walking, and to encourage the exchange of good practices in these areas.

Today, the ERA has 64 member organisations in 33 European countries. Of these, 57 are full members and 7 are associated members. Since 2019, the ERA has developed a strategic plan based on 6 axes which include:

- 1 – The European Paths (E-Paths) :** The ERA is fully involved in the creation of European routes, known as the “E-Paths”. These routes connect European countries from the North Cape to Crete and from the Atlantic Ocean to the Carpathians and the Black Sea, with a total of 75,000 km on 12 paths. These routes allow hikers to discover the diversity of European landscapes and cultures.
- 2 – The Leading Quality Trails or LQT-BE :** The ERA promotes quality labels in European tourism, including the LQT-BE. These paths have been certified by experienced hikers and offer variations to suit all levels, from day walks to 50 km trails.
- 3 – Cooperation with European bodies :** The ERA establishes and maintains cooperative relationships with European bodies. This makes it possible to influence policies and decisions relating to hiking and paths at a European level.

For a sustainable Europe: walking to meet the challenges of decarbonisation

The European Union must support the development of transport networks in order to facilitate connections between Member States and between European countries. Decarbonisation of the transport sector is a crucial issue.

Since the Paris Agreement, EU Member States have decided to commit to achieving carbon neutrality by 2050, which will necessarily require **a reduction in net greenhouse gas emissions** in every sector of the economy. The **European Green Deal** sealed this commitment and proposed a particularly ambitious interim target to reach this goal, calling for a 55% reduction in EU emissions (compared to 1990).

Air quality is also at the heart of climate concerns : the European Environment Agency points out that in 2021, 97% of the EU's urban population was exposed to concentrations of particulate matter (PM2.5, the most harmful air pollutant) above those recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO). In addition 300,000 people die prematurely each year in Europe because of air pollution¹.

The **transport sector** is particularly affected by these issues because of its heavy reliance on fossil fuels. Today, it is one of the two sectors with the highest emissions of greenhouse gases in the EU and a major contributor to the pollution caused by fine particulate matter.

Given the slow progress in this area, **the development of active mobility**, especially walking – the second most used mode of transport in France (all modes included) after the car – seems to be a relevant solution to progress towards decarbonisation in Member States.



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¹ Source : Air pollution in the EU: facts and figures

Our proposals

1 – To develop a strategic document that properly implements walking as a source of decarbonisation at European Union level. It should:

- Draw up a list of all objectives within the EU's competence that could benefit from increasing the modal share of walking.
- Identify EU political and financial instruments which are already used or should be used to increase the share of pedestrian mobility in the transport system.

2 – Fully integrate walking into public policies on everyday mobility by encouraging States to:

- Develop new pedestrian infrastructure: public spaces, footbridges, pedestrian crossings, benches, fountains, toilets and other amenities.
- Implement programmes to change behaviour through large-scale communication campaigns (video and radio clips, posters) and outreach to the population, especially in schools (creating walking safety in addition to driving safety).

3 – Encourage the exchange of good practices between Member States on pedestrian infrastructure, pedestrian safety and well-being and related awareness-raising campaigns.

- Designate an organisation or programme responsible for collecting and sharing existing walking resources between Member States.
- Work with existing programmes and organisations on active mobility at European level.

4 – Ensure close monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of European objectives and public policies in this area.

- Establish a working group and indicators to monitor the progress of the policies.



As part of its commitment to urban walking, the French Hiking Federation is part of the [Place aux piétons](#) “Room for pedestrians” collective.

Place aux piétons is composed of three other associations: the [Club des villes et territoires cyclables et marchables](#), [Rue de l'avenir](#) and [60 millions de piétons](#).

Its aim is to promote walking as a mode of transport in its own right. It presents the common demands of its member associations to the public authorities in order to make French towns and villages walkable.

In particular, the collective has enabled the publication of two Walkable Towns Barometers and the organisation of two successful events to promote walking: the Urban Walking National Conferences in Marseille in 2021 and Reims in 2023.

At the European level, other associations take part in these actions in various territories, such as [Tous à pied](#) (“All on foot”) in Wallonia and the Brussels region, which also published a “pedestrian barometer” in 2023.

For a more active Europe: using walking and hiking to support public health policies

According to the “Eurobarometer” survey of September 2022 on sport and sedentary lifestyle, 45% of respondents in the EU say they “never do any physical activity or sport” and one in three Europeans does not meet the recommended minimum levels of physical activity². The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated this phenomenon.

However, according to a report by the WHO and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and

Development (OECD)³, regular physical activity⁴ could prevent the onset of several diseases (cardiovascular disease, diabetes), improve Europeans’ well-being and mental health, and save an estimated 10,000 lives a year.

Increasing physical activity among sedentary Europeans could also benefit the economy, as it could “generate 1.7 € in economic benefits for every euro spent”⁵, an average saving of 0.6% of the EU health budget, or almost 8 billion euros per year in purchasing power parities.



Our proposals

1 – Encourage Member States to set up programmes to promote active mobility, adapted to different contexts:

- For daily or leisure commuting: going to school, university, work or hiking.
- As part of the healthcare system for patients suffering from physical or mental illness, temporary or long-term.

2 – Launch promotional campaigns at European level to inform and raise awareness of the health benefits of sport at all ages.

- Focus these campaigns on the importance of exercise and the practice of outdoor sports in particular.

3 – Encourage EU countries to increase training of medical, health and sports professionals on health sports issues.

² Source : New WHO/OECD report: increasing physical activity could save the EU billions annually

³ « Step up! Tackling the burden of insufficient physical activity in Europe » published in February 2023 by the WHO and the OECD with EU funding. <https://www.oecd.org/fr/publications/step-up-tackling-the-burden-of-insufficient-physical-activity-in-europe-500a7601-en.htm>

⁴ The WHO recommends at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity per week. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/physical-activity>

⁵ According to Michele Cecchini, head of the OECD’s public health programme. <https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/17-02-2023-new-who-oecd-report--increasing-physical-activity-could-save-the-eu-billions-annually>

For a more open Europe: developing walking and hiking activities on an international and supranational scale.



Europe's position on the international stage is essential to maintain the EU's leadership and to ensure higher standards of environmental protection and working conditions in its multilateral cooperation.

Europe must continue its policy of openness by facilitating cultural, sporting and environmental

exchanges throughout the world. Hiking is a particularly relevant activity in this respect: it implies a sympathetic and human approach to territories and their culture. Hiking is open to all, regardless of age, social status or sporting ability.

In addition, the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund aim to support projects on the European territory – and in line with the objectives

relating to green modes of transport in the European Parliament's 2021 Regulation – to develop “smart, safe, sustainable, intermodal and climate-resilient TEN-T”⁶. Thus, the Cohesion Fund and the ERDF can be used for investments in infrastructure and access to services, including hiking paths considered as tourism infrastructure.

⁶ EU Parliament Regulation of 24 June 2021 relating to the ERDF and CF chapter 1. : art. 3. 1) c) i) ; art. 5. 1) a)&c) ; art. 6. 1) b)

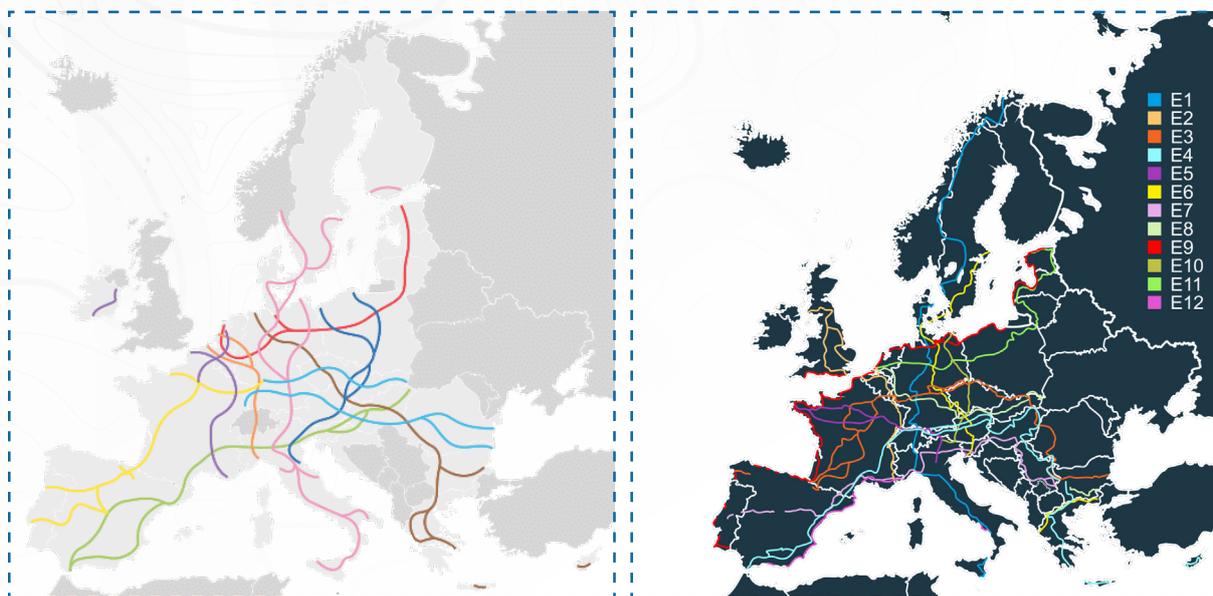
Our proposals

1 – Support international cooperation to develop hiking around the world and export European expertise abroad.

- **Strengthen exchanges between European and foreign hiking organisations** such as **CARP**⁷ (African Hiking Confederation), **FIRAPE**⁸ (Ivorian Hiking Federation) and **Rando Québec**: develop exchanges of good practices, joint events and exchange programmes for hikers in order to strengthen international links and encourage the sharing of expertise.
- **Facilitate the sharing of knowledge and resources with foreign governments** to establish waymarked routes, provide training and promote hiking.

2 – Support the development of trans-European walking routes to strengthen links between nations and encourage cultural and sporting exchanges. These routes, such as the E⁹, could offer hikers a unique experience and showcase the diversity of landscapes and cultures they pass through.

3 – Actively participate in the development of the ERA's E-Paths in the idea of completing the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) in accordance with the objectives of the European Parliament's Regulation of 24 June 2021 relating to the ERDF and the Cohesion Fund¹⁰.



TRANS-EUROPEAN TRANSPORT NETWORK TEN-T (LEFT)¹¹

E-PATHS NETWORK

⁷ Confédération Africaine de la Randonnée Pédestre

⁸ Fédération Ivoirienne de Randonnée Pédestre et du Bien-Être

⁹ The E⁹, also known as the European Coastal Path, is the longest coastal path in the world, running 10,092km from Portugal through the Baltic States.

¹⁰ op. cit.

¹¹ Map by Enekorga, Wikipedia contributor, created February 2021 https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/6/67/Trans-European_Transport_Network.svg/450px-Trans-European_Transport_Network.svg.png

For a more attractive Europe: walking and hiking as tools to promote European heritage and culture



Tourism accounts for 10% of the European Union's GDP¹² and is one of the key sectors of the European economy. Moreover, according to the World Tourism Organisation, the European Union received 49% of the world's incoming tourists in 2021¹³.

Promoting education and cultural diversity must also be at the heart of Europe's ambitions. The Erasmus+¹⁴, DiscoverEU¹⁵ and Creative Europe¹⁶ programmes are already in line with this objective, offering young people the opportunity to explore the European territory in all its diversity of heritage, culture and language.

However, according to data on

overtourism from the website Vie Publique¹⁷, the effects of tourist pressure have a negative impact on cultural heritage, local life and the environment.

These programmes should therefore be more focused on the ecological and digital transition and be open to all young people, regardless of their financial resources or social background.

¹² Fact Sheets on the European Union – Tourism <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/126/tourism>

¹³ Data available on WHO website <https://www.unwto.org/tourism-data/global-and-regional-tourism-performance>

¹⁴ Erasmus+ programme

¹⁵ DiscoverEU | European Youth Portal

¹⁶ About the Creative Europe programme - European Commission

¹⁷ From the Vie Publique website, 11 July 2023, «Overtourism: what impact on cities and the environment?»

<https://www.vie-publique.fr/eclairage/24088-le-surtourisme-quel-impact-sur-les-villes-et-sur-lenvironnement>

Our proposals

1 – Encourage ERA members to participate in Erasmus+ mobility programmes by prioritising environmental initiatives:

- Developing exchange projects related to path preservation through Erasmus+ to raise participants' awareness of the environment and involve them in maintenance activities across Europe.
- Organise Erasmus+ workshops on climate change, biodiversity and alternative and sustainable sporting events to promote responsible social practices.
- Encourage collaboration between **Erasmus+** beneficiaries and local players to find innovative solutions to regional environmental challenges, such as reforestation, protecting local wildlife and monitoring air and water quality.

2 – Promote European heritage through hiking

- Appreciate the commitment of ERA members to the preservation of historic paths, natural monuments and certified European heritage sites.
- Participate in the creation of themed hiking tours that showcase the artistic and cultural resources of European Capital of Culture cities.
- Support a **European Year¹⁸ of Walking** to promote the benefits of walking and raise awareness of nature preservation through themed hikes and cultural events.

3 – Actively promote sustainable hiking practices

- Share good practices that reduce the environmental impact of hiking, such as reducing water consumption or using biodegradable products, in training sessions or by sharing official documents in tourist offices.
- Encourage the use of public transport or car sharing to reach the starting point of the paths.



The **Fédération française de la randonnée pédestre (FFRandonnée)**, the French Hiking Federation, is a state-approved organisation, delegate

of the French Ministry of Sport, and works to develop hiking activities thanks to its 110 committees (departmental and regional) and 3,500 clubs throughout France. With its 250,000 members, it is the third French federation for outdoor sports.

As part of its mission, it develops community life, promotes sport, tourism and leisure activities and manages 226,500 km of waymarked paths (including the GR®) thanks to more than 8,000 volunteer trailblazers. It facilitates the discovery and protection of the environment and biodiversity, offers well-being and health activities and defends the interests of walkers and hikers.

In addition, the Federation actively participates in the development of the territory and access to nature through the waymarking, maintenance, digitisation and promotion of waymarked paths, in particular the Long Distance Footpaths (Grande Randonnée, GR®). Through various cooperation projects, it extends its influence throughout the world, strengthening its presence and impact beyond national borders.

