



VIA
FRANCIGENA
road to Rome

Cultural route
of the Council of Europe
Itinéraire culturel
du Conseil de l'Europe



European Association of the VIA FRANCIGENA

STRATEGIC PLAN

2023-2025



"To increase the attractiveness of the Via Francigena (and the Via Francigena routes) in order to make walkers more aware of the historical uniqueness of the itinerary and its international dimension"

**To make the Via Francigena known,
to make her popular.**

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Cover image: Via Francigena leg VF37, variant towards Proceno (Latium, Italy)

Image on this page: Via Francigena leg VFS11, from Bourg St. Pierre to the Great St. Bernard Pass (Valais, Switzerland)

Introduction

Building on the positive experience of the strategic plan 2020-2022, our European Association has prepared the strategic plan 2023-2025, a very important three-year period because we will celebrate 30 years since the VF was awarded the certification of 'Cultural Route of the Council of Europe' (1994-2024) and in 2025 the Roman Jubilee will take place.

The 30th anniversary celebrations will allow us to reflect on the journey made and what lies ahead. In these thirty years, the world has changed a lot (30 years ago there was no Internet!) and a Route like the VF responds well to the signs of change: it is sustainable, responsible, it networks people and local communities, it generates economy, it enhances cultural heritage.



In these thirty years, the VF has contributed to improving an idea of the world by showing that things can be changed and that the future is in our hands, in our actions, and goes through our ideas. Jacques Le Goff writes in this regard: *"... A road is not content to live of the past or even the present, it somehow sends a signal for the future - a testimony to its importance - and other signals may come from the Via Francigena, which has been recognised as a major Cultural Route by the Council of Europe (2004). A road like this lives in time, it combines slowness with longevity."*

The objectives for the three-year period 2023-2025 are in continuity with the previous three-year period. I recall four of them: to increase the VF's international attractiveness and popularity; to increase the number of associated territorial communities in order to make the EAVF network stronger and stronger; to celebrate 30 years of the VF's certification and the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe Programme; to cultivate the VF's candidacy for UNESCO.

Our organisation, too, has obviously evolved and is going through a phase of maturity and change. The great march *'Via Francigena. Road to Rome 2021. Start again!'* (June-October 2021) held to celebrate 20 years of EAVF greatly enhanced our international reputation and allowed us to meet directly with the 715 local communities along the route from Canterbury to Santa Maria di Leuca and several thousand people. It has given impetus to the revival of sustainable tourism in the so-called 'minor' territories of the VF and the enhancement of its cultural heritage, leading to rediscover the pride of the local communities crossed.

The 2023-2025 work planning is intended to be the starting point around which we can develop our activities, measure ourselves continuously, monitor the achievement of the goals we have set ourselves, and on this ask for the support of the EAVF member administrations and pilgrims.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Massimo Tedeschi'.

Massimo Tedeschi

President, European Association of the Via Francigena



via
Francigena



Work Methodology and Macro-Objectives

The updating of the Strategic Plan for the three-year period 2023-25 took place through a participatory process involving the EAVF working group (staff and external collaborators) and EAVF members, right from the stage of identifying common strategies and objectives.

Numerous discussions took place, in person at General Meetings and on an online platform with members of the Bureau. The data were collected thanks to the significant contribution of 69 member municipalities and 29 friend associations, which answered the questionnaire proposed by EAVF in autumn 2022. These are the priorities that emerged: **alerts on the route (88%); communication and promotion of the VF (57%); research and sustainability issues (36%); monitoring the flow of walkers (33%); planning (23%); governance (16%)**. The international network of pilgrims who follow us on social media also provided contributions, insights, and suggestions for improvement.

The **macro-objectives**, in line with the macro-strategies defined in the Strategic Plan 2020-2022*, are the result of the synthesis and participative work carried out by this association network. Important ideas were offered, for example, by the participatory workshops "*Together, let us imagine the Via Francigena of tomorrow*" organised by the Community of Communes of Béthune-Bruay (Pas-de-Calais) held in Allouagne on 18 November 2022.

The macro-objectives are accompanied by qualitative and quantitative **indicators** to measure their progress, strengths and weaknesses. They are as follows:

- 1) Monitoring of the official route and cooperation with territorially competent actors
- 2) Governance and strengthening of a common identity
- 3) Communication, event organisation and animation
- 4) Monitoring pilgrim and cultural tourist flows
- 5) Research, culture, and sustainability

* Macro-strategies defined in the Strategic Plan 2020-2022: 1) Improved accessibility to information about the itinerary, 2) Lobbying resulting in increased priority of European, national and regional public institutions of the VF as an engine of local development, 3) Increased incentive for walkers to choose the Via Francigena, 4) Increased awareness of being members of the Via Francigena and of its added value, 5) Increased valorisation of the cultural and natural assets along the Via Francigena, 6) Increased satisfaction of walkers, 7) Infrastructures with the result of facilitated usability and accessibility of the Via Francigena for all.



II. Work Methodology and Macro-Objectives

Monitoring of the official route and cooperation with territorially competent actors

Responds to the following macro-strategies:

1 - Improved accessibility to information about the itinerary.

7 - Infrastructures with the result of facilitated usability and accessibility of the Via Francigena for all.

A 3200 km European route such as the VF is an exceptional open window on the territories it crosses. History, heritage, traditions, all elements that define it as a cultural route to be presented, explained and shared for the enrichment of those who live and travel it.

Monitoring the management of the route - signposting, reception, safety and accessibility - is an increasingly important task, to be managed together with the entire network of actors along the VF. EAVF's task is to make all stakeholders, starting with the local authorities, understand the importance and the driving effect generated by the route. Awareness of responsibilities and competences on local paths is still scarce, a situation that is aggravated by the high costs of ordinary and extraordinary maintenance, of waste management along the paths, of maintaining a minimum level of safety, especially on asphalt roads, road crossings and roads for mixed use. It is essential, therefore, to formulate

bodies in charge (e.g. the FFR in France) and local associations in route management and territorial animation.

EAVF intends to play the role of collector of the various requests and reports from pilgrims regarding the usability of the walk, thus informing the local authorities, local associations and economic operators offering services for walkers. Once the walking route has been structurally consolidated, the hope is that this will also be the case for the cycling route, given the growing public interest in this medium.

Hospitality is the other key element for the future of the VF: a 'pilgrim' welcome at each stage, which is complemented by a tourist welcome. The "VisitVieFrancigene" platform becomes the container in which to grow the reception offer, improving it both quantitatively and qualitatively by adding new services (e.g. a booking system).

INDICATORS: *alerts on the route; variants assessed and approved; number of pilgrim and tourist accommodations registered in the VisitVieFrancigene circuit and new services; cooperation agreements with entities in charge of route maintenance; definition of the official cycle route.*

Image: Via Francigena leg VFE01, from Canterbury to Shepherdswell (Kent, England)



II. Work Methodology and Macro-Objectives

Governance and strengthening of a common identity

Responds to the following macro-strategies:

2 - Lobbying resulting in increased priority of European, national and regional public institutions of the VF as an engine of local development.

4 - Increased awareness of being members of the Via Francigena and of its added value.

Our European Association responds first and foremost to its members - municipalities, unions of municipalities, provinces, regions of the four countries - who support it. An almost daily confrontation takes place with pilgrims from all over the world; with local communities, whose inhabitants are important ambassadors of the territory; with the world of associations and cultural and economic operators; with the network of universities. The complexity of the VF also implies a confrontation with other Cultural Routes, with national and European institutions, with private partners, thus maturing, through the habit of dialogue with multiple interlocutors, an organic vision of the valorisation of the route. We can speak of a VF

After 22 years, EAVF has become an international example of route management, the result of an awareness that has matured over time and is still being adapted and developed. At the basis, there remains the intuition of those 34 far-sighted mayors and local administrators who founded the Association back in 2001, whose development today rests firmly on that foundation stone. Being part of this network means making commitments, including economic ones, to support the functioning of the operational structure and its activities at an institutional and promotional level in the 4 countries (England, France, Switzerland, Italy).

In 2007, EAVF obtained the Council of Europe's qualification as "*réseau porteur*" of the VF, i.e. the entity responsible for the preservation and development of the route.

Important memoranda of understanding have been signed with the other two Roman pilgrimage routes (Via Romea Germanica and Romea Strata), with the ecclesiastical world (Diocese of Piacenza and Diocese of Ugento Santa Maria di Leuca), with railway companies (Trenitalia and Trenord) and bus companies (FlixBus). There are agreements with national and local business associations (Confartigianato italiana, Piacenza province business associations), with private companies in the banking sector (Banca Generali Private), clothing (Ferrino), qualified sports equipment (Garmont) and gastronomy (Consorzio del Parmigiano-Reggiano and Consorzio del Prosciutto Toscano).

In 2017 EAVF created Francigena Service S.r.l. (of which it is the sole shareholder), an operational structure that supports EAVF's more strictly associative activities with services of an entrepreneurial nature aimed at users of the VF and those operating in the territories crossed or in the paths networked with the Vie Francigene. It is an operational arm that, in these first six years, has proved indispensable for the economic balance and for the provision of services to members and to many realities operating in the territories.

EAVF works on the continuous improvement of the brand identity and the homogenisation of communication across the European path and in the national and international reference areas.

INDICATORS: *number of EAVF members, number of friend associations, number of sponsored projects, good practices collected, number of activated private partnerships, brand identity management.*



II. Work Methodology and Macro-Objectives

Communication, event organisation and animation

Responds to the following macro-strategies:

3 - Increased incentive for walkers to choose the Via Francigena.

6 - Increased satisfaction of walkers.

The VF is increasingly known internationally and carries a very positive reputation: it stands for European humanist values, cultural heritage, intercultural dialogue, nature and the outdoors, spiritual research, local communities, sustainable tourism and rural development.

Communication plays a decisive role in this, just as it is becoming increasingly necessary to protect the VF emblem, namely the **(registered) yellow pilgrim symbol** that represents the identity of the European route: it is precisely this logo that accompanies walkers along the entire route and unambiguously identifies the VF. The entire communication system must thus revolve around the official pilgrim, both for signage and for promotional campaigns for the development of the route.

The task of the communication is to foster a direct connection between the VF and the destination: Rome. In 2021, on the occasion of EAVF's 20th anniversary, the pay-off "*Road to Rome*" was introduced. The bundle of paths that characterises the VF represents the roads leading to Rome, the point of arrival and point of departure for those travelling to Monte Sant'Angelo, the ports of Apulia, and the Holy Land.

In 2021-2022, EAVF's communication channels expanded and became a multiplier of contacts aimed at different targets. The aim is now to intensify communication on the various channels - from institutional channels to the website and app, from the biannual magazine to social media, from educational tours to the creation of promotional videos, from the production and collection of photographs to participation in trade fairs, from the blog to community management.

EAVF and FS s.r.l. are able to organise institutional events - such as EAVF general assemblies, forums, states-general, scientific meetings - and to manage territorial animation events very well - thematic festivals, 'I Love Francigena' days, fam trips with international bloggers.

INDICATORS: *viefrancigene.org website accesses and statistics, VF official App downloads, EAVF social media statistics (Facebook, Road To Rome community, Instagram, Twitter, Youtube, LinkedIn), "Via Francigena and the European Cultural Routes" official magazine statistics, EAVF newsletter statistics, I Love Francigena group hikes, participation in national and international tourism fairs, organisation of events linked to the VF and EAVF.*

Image: Via Francigena leg VFF01, from Calais to Wissant (Hauts-de-France, France)



II. Work Methodology and Macro-Objectives

Monitoring pilgrim and cultural tourist flows

Responds to the following macro-strategies:

6 - Increased satisfaction of walkers.

The VF is in need of an **observatory** that can collect and return statistical data on which, among other things, to base public and private investments. Tuscany Region in 2021 updated the 2015 IRPET (Regional Institute for Economic Planning of Tuscany) study on the economic impact on small Tuscan municipalities crossed by the VF. The update also confirms the important result of 2015, i.e. that the accommodation facilities (all) of the municipalities crossed by the VF recorded an increase in overnight stays (+49%) in the decade 2010/2019, double the regional average increase (+23%). VF tourism drives the maintenance, opening and re-opening of various services useful to walkers and residents alike. The IRPET study is a valid example to be used on a European scale.

Data collection will be able to provide information on the flow of pilgrims during the journey and in the places of destination, such as the arrival in St. Peter's Square or the destinations in Puglia, such as Monte Sant'Angelo, Brindisi, Santa Maria di Leuca. It is planned to identify a number of reference places along the route to collect data of those who pass along the VF with their credential. It is precisely the pilgrim's passport tool that is one of the most important indicators for obtaining information on VF frequentation (origin, kilometres travelled, departure and arrival stages, average expenditure): today, more than 100 points along the VF distribute the EAVF credential; the objective is to expand the network, even in countries outside the VF.

Finally, the **app**, a tool appreciated by pilgrims and also useful for monitoring. It is planned to be implemented from 2024 with the inclusion of technological functions capable of providing precise information on the flow of walkers.

INDICATORS: *analysis of annual sales of pilgrim credentials, increase of distribution points; activation of regional checkpoints to record flows of walkers and pilgrims.*

Image: Via Francigena leg MSA05, from San Giovanni Rotondo to Monte Sant'Angelo (Apulia, Italy)



II. Work Methodology and Macro-Objectives

Research, culture, and sustainability

Responds to the following macro-strategies:

5 - Increased valorisation of the cultural and natural assets along the Via Francigena.

It is necessary to start with the history and the origins of the VF and then decline them in their multiple aspects: cultural, touristic, architectural, landscape, religious, economic, social, anthropological. This is the objective of the research about the VF. On the other hand, research is one of the main criteria on which the Council of Europe's evaluation is based to measure the growth and development of a Cultural Route. EAVF is committed to consolidating its international network of researchers and scholars. The celebration of the 30th anniversary of the certification of the VF as a Cultural Route will also focus on interdisciplinary research to analyse the evolution of the route over the years and, at the same time, to look to the future, as taught by Jacques Le Goff.

The UNESCO candidacy of the VF looks precisely in this direction with the aim of enhancing the cultural heritage along the VF and promoting and protecting its fruition.

The work of the scientific committee will have to be carried out in synergy with the other two roads to Rome, with which EAVF hopes for broad cooperation in order to create a **European Network of the Vie Romee** by developing joint project activities.

In the field of research, with the European Horizon project "rurAllure" (1.1.2021-31.12.2023), in which EAVF is a partner and in which the three roads to Rome already collaborate, important work has been carried out to catalogue and census, also digitally, the cultural, museum and spa heritage along the VF with the aim of creating an **atlas of the VF**.

Erasmus programme activities continue to offer students and recent graduates the chance to gain work experience in other countries.

EAVF intends to characterise its action with the **principle of sustainability**, sharing good practices in the environmental, socio-cultural and economic fields. Walking is in itself a zero-impact slow tourism experience that puts people in contact with nature, villages, the environment, heritage: all EAVF projects and activities will be marked by the principle of sustainability.

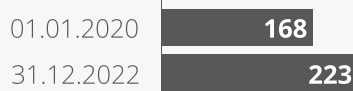
INDICATORS: *International Scientific Council activities, UNESCO candidacy of the VF, renewal of certification (2023) of the VF as a "Cultural Route of the Council of Europe" and of EAVF as a VF réseau porteur, sustainable tourism practices.*



III. Results of the main indicators related to the 2020-22 strategic plan

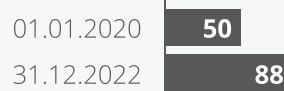
EAVF MEMBERS

+ 55 in 3 years

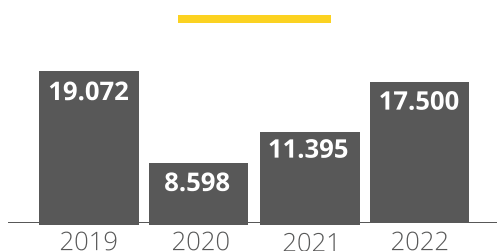


EAVF FRIEND ASSOCIATIONS

+ 38 in 3 years

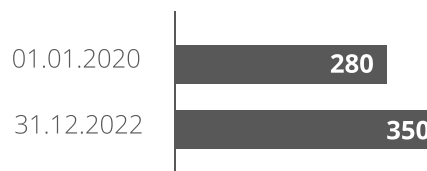


OFFICIAL EAVF CREDENTIALS SOLD (each year)

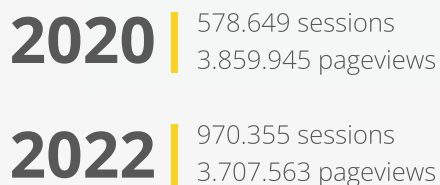


ACCOMMODATIONS SUBSCRIBED TO THE VISITVIEFRANCIGENE NETWORK

+ 70 in 3 years

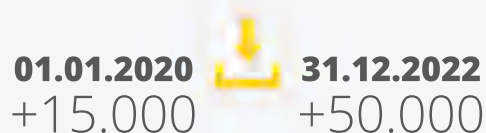


ANNUAL WEBSITE STATISTICS WWW.VIEFRANCIGENE.ORG



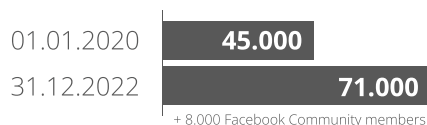
TOTAL DOWNLOADS OF THE OFFICIAL VF APP

+ 35.000 in 3 years



FOLLOWERS EAVF FACEBOOK PAGE

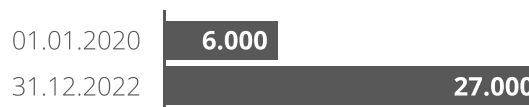
+ 34.000 in 3 years



+ 8.000 Facebook Community members

FOLLOWERS EAVF INSTAGRAM PROFILE

+ 21.000 in 3 years



NUMBER OF PROJECTS SUPPORTED BY EAVF (EACH YEAR)

+ 40 compared to 2020





IV. Qualitative and quantitative macro-objectives & indicators 2023-25

1

Monitoring of the route and cooperation with competent actors.

Indicators:

- Alerts on the route.
- Evaluated and approved route variants.
- Number of pilgrim/tourist accommodations subscribed to the VisitVieFrancigene network.
- Cooperation agreements with entities in charge of the maintenance of the Route.
- Mobility Plan.
- Definition of the official cycle route.

2

Governance and strengthening of a common identity.

Indicators:

- Number of EAVF members and friend associations.
- Number of projects supported by EAVF.
- Collection of best practices.
- Number of activated private partnerships.
- Registered Trademark and Brand Identity Management.

3

Communication, event organisation and animation.

Indicators:

- Website access and statistics - www.viefrancigene.org.
- Downloads of the official Via Francigena App.
- Statistics of the Facebook page and community, Instagram profile, Youtube, LinkedIn.
- Statistics of the official EAVF magazine.
- Statistics of the monthly newsletter.
- I Love Francigena walking events.
- Participation in national and international trade fairs.
- Organisation of events related to the Via Francigena and EAVF.

4

Monitoring pilgrim and cultural tourist flows.

Indicators:

- Statistical analysis of annual credential sales.
- Activation of a registration system for walkers and pilgrims.

5

Research, culture, and sustainability.

Indicators:

- International Scientific Council Activities.
- UNESCO candidacy.
- Renewal of the certification as a Cultural Route of the Council of Europe.
- Sustainable tourism practices.



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viefrancigene.org



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4. BOURGOGNE-FRANCHE-COMTÉ (FR)

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6. CANTON DU VALAIS (CH)

7. VALLE D'AOSTA (IT)

8. PIEMONTE (IT)

9. LOMBARDIA (IT)

10. EMILIA-ROMAGNA (IT)

11. LIGURIA (IT)

12. TOSCANA (IT)

13. LAZIO (IT)

14. CAMPANIA (IT)

15. BASILICATA (IT)

16. PUGLIA (IT)



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