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# Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe Certification Cycle 2023-2024

Regular evaluation:

**VIA FRANCIGENA**

Independent expert report

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



## Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe Certification cycle 2023-2024

### Independent expert report

#### VIA FRANCIGENA

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*\* The opinions expressed in this independent expert report are those of the author, and do not engage the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe.*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Executive summary (1 page) .....	4
2. Introduction .....	5
3. Main Body Evaluation .....	6
4. Conclusions and recommendations .....	14
5. References .....	20
6. Appendix 1: Schedule of field visits and interviews with network management and members .....	20
7. Appendix 2: Expert assesement checklist .....	21

## 1. Executive Summary (1 page)

The Via Francigena route is managed by the Network association - the European Association of the Via Francigena (EAVF), founded in 2001 by 34 local organisations along the Italian route of the Via Francigena, based on the journal of Archbishop Sigeric. In 2023, the EAVF will bring together 239 local authorities and 92 non-profit organisations in England, France, Switzerland, and Italy, as well as more than 400 private actors in the hospitality, accommodation, tourism, and technical equipment sectors. The very considerable increase in its membership reflects its dynamism and the effectiveness of its governance.

An application process for the Via Francigena to become a UNESCO World Heritage Site was initiated in 2010 and resumed in 2015, leading to the Italian section being included on the Tentative List in January 2019. The preparation of the application has contributed to the consolidation of the route.

The compliance of the theme with the eligibility criteria for themes, priorities for action, networks, and the guidelines for use of the Via Francigena logo is beyond doubt. The Via Francigena is one of the best structured and organised routes, characterised by a well-identified route that is supported by official bodies; an increasingly complete network of institutional actors (regions) that support the project and are able to make the necessary investments to ensure that the routes and their use are safe and inclusive for all sections of the public; a dense network of local actors who are active all along the route, implementing cultural and heritage projects for a variety of local and tourist audiences; road markings and signs along the route, thanks to the coordination and involvement of the regions concerned.

Almost all the recommendations made in the last two evaluations have been satisfactorily addressed. However, several points still need to be improved:

- Organise regular meetings and activities by the Scientific Committee, and work in a truly coordinated way with the Committee, as these studies carried out would support the network's projects.
- Create, or consolidate, a system of self-reporting by members, over and above the list of best practices currently being drawn up.
- Systematise documentary support to facilitate EAVF's work in managing and coordinating members' activities;
- Continue to consolidate the relationship with England and work actively with the French and Swiss national committees to improve the balance between countries on the route.
- Initiate one or two strategic cultural actions, serving as a strong identity and cultural signature for the route.

Expert summary conclusions		
	Yes	No
The theme complies with criteria listed in Resolution CM/Res(2013)67, <b>I. List of eligibility criteria for themes.</b>	X	
The Cultural Route complies with the criteria for actions listed in Resolution CM/Res(2013)67, <b>II. List of priority fields of action.</b>	X	
The Cultural Route complies with the criteria for networks listed in Resolution CM/Res(2013)67, <b>III. List of criteria for networks.</b>	X	
The Cultural Route implements the Guidelines for the Use of the logo" <b>Cultural Route of the Council of Europe</b> ".	X	

## 2. Introduction

The Via Francigena route is managed by the Network - the European Association of the Via Francigena (EAVF), founded in Fidenza (Emilia-Romagna) on 7 April 2001 by 34 local organisations along the Italian route of the Via Francigena, based on the diary of Archbishop Sigeric (990 AD). In 2023, the EAVF will bring together 239 local authorities and 92 non-profit organisations in England, France, Switzerland, and Italy, as well as more than 400 private actors in the hospitality, accommodation, tourism, and technical equipment sectors. The Via Francigena was awarded "Cultural Route of the Council of Europe" certification in 1994. The EAVF has its own operational structure in the legal form of a "limited liability company" (Francigena Service S.r.l.), whose aim is to support institutional activity with entrepreneurial activities and services.

The Via Francigena, the long route between Rome and north-west Europe, has served a variety of roles since the 8th century and throughout the Middle Ages: military route, trade route and one of the main pilgrimage routes of Christianity. Throughout its history, it has served as a link between different cultures and traditions from one part of Europe to another, and as such, as part of the European constitution. Today, the Via Francigena is a 3200 km route that crosses Europe from Canterbury to Rome, and on to Santa Maria di Leuca in Puglia. It offers a cultural, natural, and spiritual walking and cycling experience.

The route crosses 5 countries (United Kingdom, France, Switzerland, Italy, and the Vatican) in 145 stages. According to the Via Francigena Association, it takes 5 months to cover the entire route on foot. However, most of the 50,000 people who walk the Via Francigena today do so in shorter sections, lasting around 7 days, so they can take advantage of the local resources along the route (natural and cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible). More and more pilgrims, hikers, visitors, and tourists are using part of the route, which is enjoying growing recognition. The Route offers opportunities for slow tourism, for staying in local accommodation, mostly in rural areas, but also in small and medium-sized towns, and for tasting local gastronomic products.

The application process for the Via Francigena to become a UNESCO World Heritage Site, initiated in 2010 and resumed in 2015, has continued in recent years, with the Italian section being included on the Tentative List in January 2019. The second phase to define the European feasibility study for the application involving England, France, Switzerland, Italy, and the Holy See was concluded in 2019-2020. As part of this study, a candidate strategy was drawn up, including a general proposal for the route as a whole, in which it will be emphasised that its various sections can be individually, and at different times, candidates for UNESCO's World Heritage List, while unquestionably retaining the universal value of the Via. In 2022, the regions of Tuscany, Valle d'Aosta, Piedmont, Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna, Liguria and Lazio, and the Italian Ministries of Culture and Foreign Affairs have signed a memorandum of understanding for the continuation and promotion of the UNESCO application. The compliance of the theme with the eligibility criteria for the themes, the priorities for action, the networks, and the guidelines for use of the logo are beyond doubt, and lead to the conclusion that the "Cultural Route of the Council of Europe" certification should be renewed.

Several strengths were identified by the experts in previous regular evaluations (Pierre Frustier, Alessia Mariotti), and deserve to be emphasised once again: A dense network of local actors who are active all along the route, implementing cultural and heritage projects for a wide range of local and tourist audiences. The route has been marked out and signposted thanks to the coordination and involvement of the regions concerned. In addition, the points of concern raised by the previous evaluator during the 2019-2020 cycle have been satisfactorily addressed.

### **3. Main Body Evaluation**

#### **3.1 Cultural Route Theme**

##### **3.1.1 Definition of the theme of the route**

The Via Francigena (VF) celebrates Europe's shared cultural heritage as an expression of cultural diversity and identity, establishing a single route from a network of roads. According to the Association's statutes, the Via Francigena follows the route of Archbishop Sigeric, recognised as a "Great Cultural Route" by the Council of Europe. Variants of the Italian and European Via Francigena with destinations to Rome, Jerusalem and Santiago de Compostela may be added to this main route.

Derived from the "Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe Programme", officially launched in 1987 with the "Declaration of Santiago de Compostela", the VF identifies pilgrimage as a way of rediscovering Europe's roots.

The EAVF is working hard to develop new forms of sustainable tourism along the VF in an inclusive way (for all publics), with the participation of all those involved along the route (local and regional authorities, dioceses, hospitality and restaurant industry, associations and their volunteers, private companies providing tourism and walking services, etc.).

##### **3.1.2 Historical and cultural context**

From the 7th century until the cult of Santiago de Compostela began in the 10th century, Rome was the main destination for Christian pilgrims. From 1300, with the proclamation of the "Holy Years" and the granting by the Pope of a plenary indulgence to sinners who undertook the pilgrimage to Rome, the VF route reached its peak, with tens of thousands of users every year. The VF became the main communication route between northern and southern Europe, used by pilgrims, merchants and soldiers alike. It had a particularly important trade function, bringing goods from the East to the markets of northern Europe. The intensity of trade encouraged the development of other alternative routes, all of which led to Rome. The existence of the route and the intensity of its functions has also led to urbanisation and the development of urban agglomerations all along its route. The VF is thus a backbone for Europe, not only historically one of the most important pilgrimage routes (along with Compostela and Jerusalem), but also a constituent route of the European area through the multiplicity of flows of people, goods, and ideas.

The VF fell into oblivion from the 18th century onwards but was "rediscovered" in the 1970s and 1980s, thanks also to the rediscovery of the Pilgrim's Way to Santiago de Compostela. Preparations for the anniversary of the year 2000 and World Youth Day have stimulated studies and publications on the VF, as well as local initiatives, such as the one undertaken in 1993 by the Italian Department of Tourism in collaboration with several Italian regions through which the route passes.

In 1994, the VF was recognised as a "Cultural Route of the Council of Europe". In 2001, 34 local authorities along the Italian route of the VF, based on Sigeric's diary (990), signed in Fidenza the constitutive act of what is now called the European Association of the Via Francigena (EAVF), to which 239 European municipalities, provinces and regions now belong (2023). The growth in the number of member municipalities is a clear sign of the vitality of the VF. Since 2007, the EAVF has been recognised by the Council of Europe as the network responsible for overseeing and promoting the VF in its entirety. The steps taken by UNESCO to have the VF recognised as a World Heritage Site not only contribute to the recognition of the VF, but also to its development and structuring.



### **3.1.3 Council of Europe values represented by the theme**

The VF represents the values of the Council of Europe: tolerance, respect for others, freedom, democracy, and solidarity. The EAFV promotes transnational cultural cooperation and uses its actions to enhance the cultural, social, and linguistic contribution of the countries through which the VF passes. The extension of the VF to Santa Maria di Leuca in southern Italy supports intercultural and interreligious dialogue as part of a policy of Euro-Mediterranean integration. The EAVF is a party to three fundamental conventions of the European Community: the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Rome, 1950), the European Landscape Convention (Firenze 2000) and the Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (2005).

## **3.2 Fields of action**

### **3.2.1 Co-operation in research and development**

The EAFV has a Scientific Committee made up of many members: researchers, universities, and research centres. It was launched during the 3rd Forum of the Via Francigena (in Monteriggioni, in January 2016). Alma Mater Studiorum-University of Bologna (UNIBO), and several of its structures and institutions, such as the Centre for Advanced Studies in Tourism (CAST), located in Rimini, is the main actor of the Committee. It is also chaired by a renowned academic specialising in cultural routes and pilgrimage routes, Professor Fiorella Dallari (geographer). The Laboratory of European Cultural Routes of the CAST, located at the Campus of the Alma Mater Studiorum-University of Bologna in Rimini, also plays a significant role, under the leadership of Professors Patrizia Battilani and Alessia Mariotti. Several other academics, particularly Italians, take part in the Committee, representing a range of disciplines: history, geography, architecture, tourism, heritage, marketing, and food industry. The Committee now has 25 members (universities, institutions, public bodies, and experts).

Other universities, particularly Italian ones (University of Parma, University of Florence, University of Molise, University of Salento, European University of Rome. French, English, Swiss, German, and Spanish universities are also taking part in the work of the Scientific Committee. In addition to the universities, other actors, such as regional agencies, are listed as members of the Scientific Committee. However, it would be useful to specify the functions and roles of these various members.

In terms of research activity, the EAVF is participating in the European Horizon 2020 project *urAllure* - enhancement of heritage sites near European pilgrimage routes, which brings together 15 European partners, including 8 universities working on pilgrimage. However, the proposal made in the context of the previous evaluation for periodic coordination with the Scientific Committees of the other routes projects leading to Rome - the *Romea Germanica* and the *Romea Strata* - on common issues does not seem to have been followed up.

### **3.2.2 Enhancement of the memory, history, and European heritage**

Several VF projects highlight the European heritage:

- The current UNESCO World Heritage listing project, whose arguments develop the various heritage aspects of the Route in detail.
- On a different scale, the EAVF also runs projects such as "I Love Francigena", an annual series of events aimed at promoting the VF cultural route and highlighting the natural cultural heritage along the route.

- In addition, the rurAllure project has raised the international profile of European cultural routes and provided a platform for the organisation of several activities as part of a festival to celebrate the union between the world of routes, culture and spirituality, gastronomy and wine, and the promotion of the region. Initiatives include the rurAllure photo competition (2nd edition in 2023), which aims to give a voice to pilgrims on their way through Europe.

- The VF Festival is also a way of connecting VF to another cultural route of the Council of Europe; 2023 was the opportunity to present the Route of Saint Olav Ways through Norway.

- The "Stop and Taste" initiative is also worth mentioning as an example of how to showcase local gastronomic heritage. The aim is to integrate the Via Francigena with the areas it passes through and the quality food and wine products that characterise them. The Via Francigena crossing in the Parma region invites tourists and pilgrims into the realm of Parmigiano Reggiano. The initiative organised by Parmigiano Reggiano is aimed for tourists and pilgrims travelling along the Cultural Route of the Council of Europe. The "Stop and Taste" initiative, organised by the Parmigiano Reggiano Consortium, the European Via Francigena Association, Studio Guidotti and the municipalities of Fidenza, Medesano and Berceto, is part of the "Sosta & Gusta" project designed to give pilgrims the chance to find out more about the goodness and unique characteristics of this world-famous Italian excellence. The project encourages visits to local dairies, which welcome visitors and explain the different stages of processing. Pilgrims are invited to taste the cheese, its different maturities and biodiversity (Vacca Rossa, Vacca Bruna, Bianca Modenese, Montagna, Halal and Kosher) without deviating from the route. Mapping and digital tools have been put in place to help visitors discover the area and its land.

### **3.2.3 Cultural and educational exchanges for young Europeans**

Previous regular evaluations had recognised this as an area requiring further efforts on the part of the route. Since the 2019-2020 evaluation by Alessi Mariotti, several initiatives have been implemented during the period 2020 - 2023 and others are planned for the period 2023-2026.

- Firstly, the EAVF (project coordinator) obtained funding from the Erasmus+ programme "FORREs.T. - FOsteR an euRopEan identity through the Trainees mobility" programme (2019-2021). The project, which aims to train young students from 13 secondary schools in 5 Italian regions at the end of their course of study, allowed the mobility of 70 Italian students from the tourism, marketing and business information systems sectors in France, the UK and Spain (25 students in France, 20 students in the UK and 25 in Spain) for 62 days. Following on from this, 'FORREs.T. 2.0 - FOsteR an euRopEan identity through the Trainees mobility' (2020-2022) enabled the mobility of 100 Italian graduates in the tourism, marketing and information systems sectors - living along the Via Francigena in the north and south of Italy, in France (40), the UK (20) and Spain (40). In both cases, FORREs.T. and FORREs.T. 2.0, the aim is to enrich vocational training with international work experience.

- The VET Erasmus project on vocational education and training (2021-2028) provides 122 days of mobility for young Italian school-leavers in the fields of tourism, marketing and business information systems living along the Via Francigena. The project aims to enable young people to travel to France, Spain, and Albania to enrich their vocational training by taking part in work placements.

-The EAFV's collaboration with several universities enables and encourages the hosting of trainees at the association's headquarters.

- In 2021-2022, the EAVF has also launched the "Io bambino. Great pilgrim" project aimed at primary school children and summer centres. The project aims to introduce schoolchildren to the history of the Francigena route through educational meetings and stories."



### **3.2.4 Contemporary cultural and artistic practice**

The EAVF reports on a number of cultural and artistic initiatives. The following are some examples:

- The artistic project "Homeless, Fearless, Borderless: the nomadic life of Ciriaca+Erre". Since April 2022, the Italian-Swiss artist Ciriaca+Erre has been living the life of a nomad and pilgrim, returning to inhabit the planet as her home. She left her hometown and headed for Africa, giving birth to her latest performance, which combines art and life: "2 years, 2 weeks, 2 days, Homeless Fearless Borderless".

- We should also mention the documentary film about the journey on foot along the Via Francigena, released in 2022. The film honours the memorable four-month walk through England, France, Switzerland, and Italy on Sigeric's historic route, to mark the 20th anniversary of the European Association of the Via Francigena.

- The artistic and cultural activities do not seem to match up to the ambitions and potential of the cultural route. Furthermore, the evaluator's remarks remain relevant for the current phase of the evaluation: a concentration of cultural and artistic activities in Italy, a difficulty for the EAVF in ensuring the quality monitoring of activities, beyond maintaining the archive of initiatives for which the route gives its backing, is that of not always having the framework of the quality of the actions carried out by the members and their correspondence with the criteria of the programme.

### **3.2.5 Cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development**

It could be said that the VF is itself a product of sustainable development. Its secular existence and the slow shaping of its natural, economic, and social environment along the way is an indicator of its sustainability. Today, the VF is developing an eco-responsible form of tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts.

The VF supports travel in rural areas, thereby stimulating local economies and cultures, including in regions crossed by mass tourism. It encourages slow tourism that is respectful of the environment, almost carbon neutral, favouring contact with local habitats and communities and promoting the wealth of local produce.

The "Stop and Taste" initiative presented in point 3.2.1. is a representative example of the strategic choices made to encourage slow tourism (and slow gastronomy - slow tourism/slow food). The data on tourist arrivals between 2018-2019 (before the interruption caused by the pandemic) also confirms the fact that these tourism initiatives have been well received.

However, the VF faces the inherent difficulties of a long journey that brings together different initiatives and in which the stakeholders are unequally involved. It is difficult to guarantee the overall quality of the route, and the unequal commitment of the local authorities also means that the route is more or less well maintained. These inequalities are also apparent in the services and accommodation on offer along the route.

## **3.3 Cultural Route Network**

### **3.3.1 Overview of institutional /legal structure of the network**

The network is an association registered in Fidenza (Emilia-Romagna, Italy) on 7 April 2001. Its headquarters are located there. The network has two other operational headquarters in Piacenza (Emilia-Romagna, Italy) and Champlitte (Bourgogne-Franche-Comté, France).

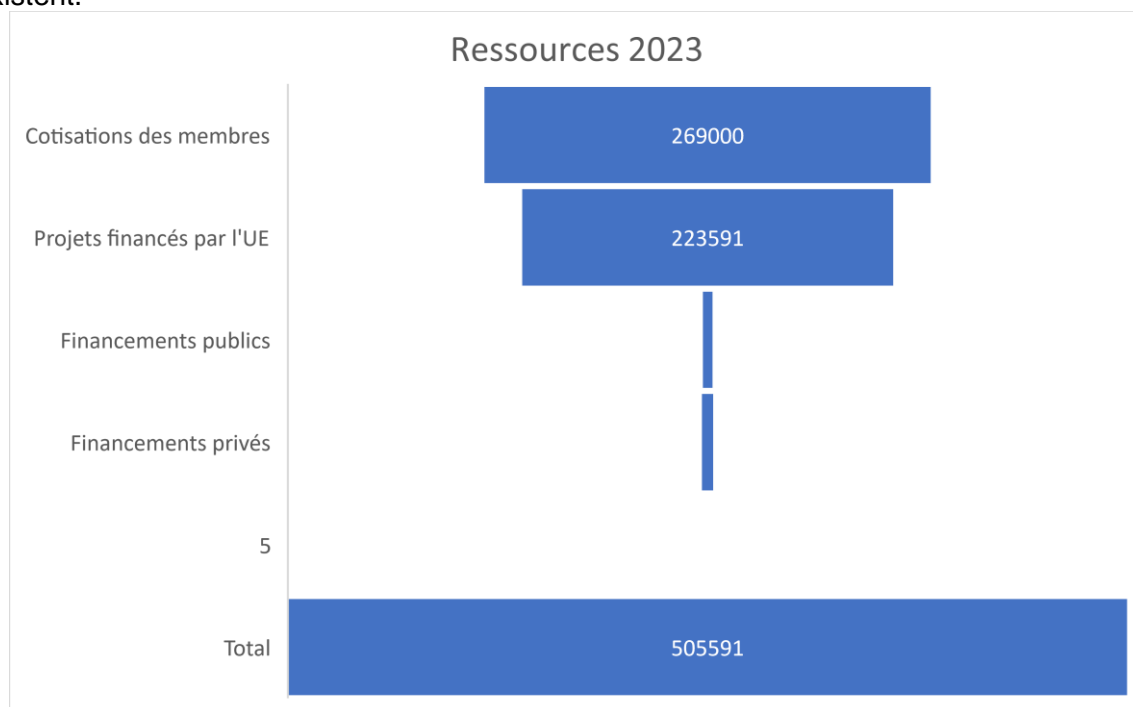
A subsidiary, Francigena Service s.r.l, manages the technical and commercial work. This "commercial branch" generates profits that are reinvested directly in recruiting staff to work for the network in Italy and France.

### 3.3.2 Overview of the financial situation of the network

The network's financial situation is good. For 2023, the network's main resources will be derived from two sources: members' subscriptions (€269,000) and EU-funded projects (€2,236,000).

The very large number of members ensures ongoing and regular funding.

Public and private subsidies are very low, and sponsorship and crowdfunding are non-existent.



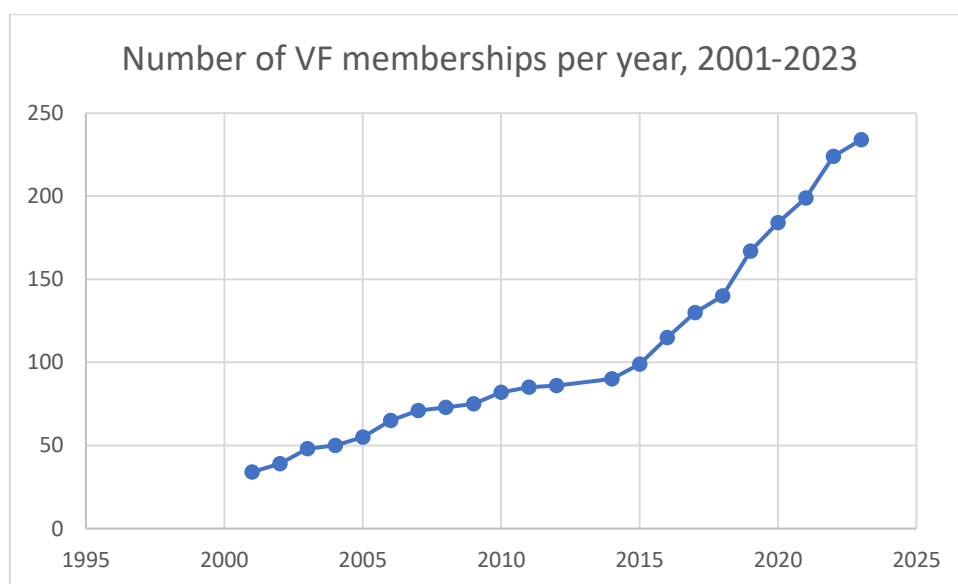
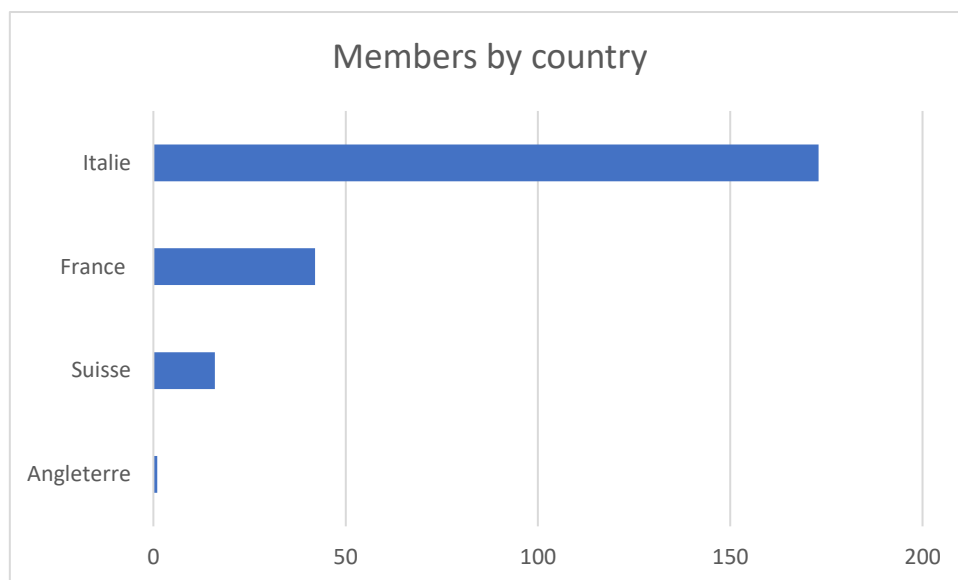
It should be pointed out that an increase of around 30% in contributions has been planned from 2024 onwards, in the context of an overall healthy situation and considered favourable for this type of measure. It is estimated that this increase will generate a surplus of around €60,000, which can be devoted to human resources.

### 3.3.3 Current composition of the network by country and type of member

The Excell file submitted with the evaluation file lists 232 members, and the website 239, testifying to the continued growth and vitality of the route.

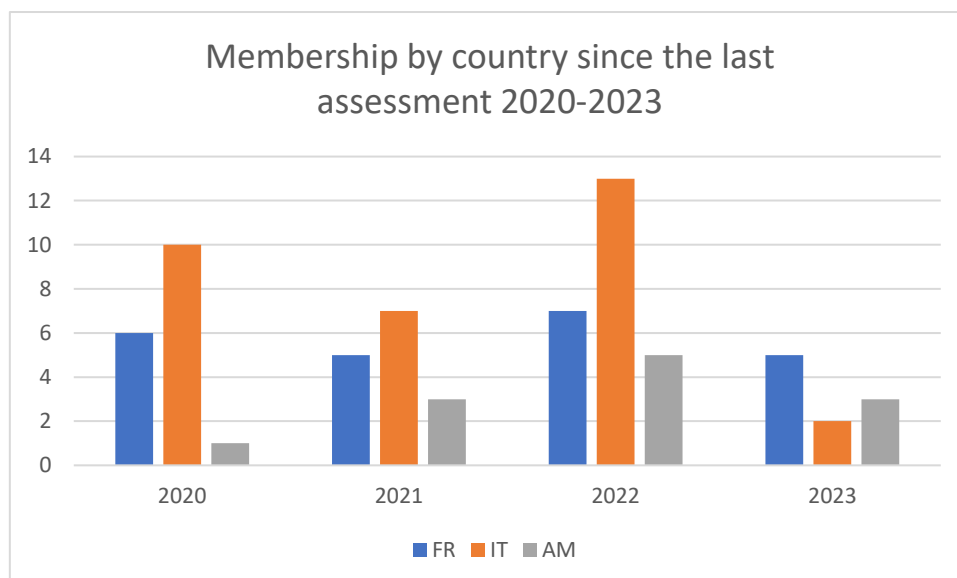
Current network members include :

- 199 Municipalities
- 4 agglomeration communities or communes
- 1 metropolis
- 4 provinces
- 4 regions



### 3.3.4 Network extension since last evaluation

The network has been growing significantly for several years now. While the Excell file submitted with the evaluation file lists 232 members, 158 members were identified in the file submitted for the previous regular evaluation in September 2019.



### 3.3.5 Strategy for the network extension in the three years to come

All the local and regional authorities located along the VF route are eligible to become members of the EAVF (according to the statutes: The association's membership is open to Italian municipalities, provinces, regions and mountain communities, as well as to all public entities constituted in accordance with the laws of the various States and on the basis of the principles established by the European Union, in the territories stipulated in article 2: Great Britain, France, Switzerland, Italy and the Vatican. Other geographical areas, referring to variants of historically documented routes leading from Europe to the city of Rome, southern Italy, or Jerusalem, may be included as well).

The list of potential members includes no fewer than 521 members. 283 in France, 179 in Italy, 57 in Switzerland and 1 in the United Kingdom.

The membership procedure requires the local or regional authority to apply for membership after deliberation within its own decision-making bodies (for the application for EAVF membership, approval of the EAVF statute and the amount of the annual subscription). Then a membership form is sent to the EAVF. The EAVF General Assembly then officially ratifies the membership, which is considered definitive once the annual fee has been paid.

In conclusion, with regard to the members of the VF, their distribution by country and their evaluation, we can only note the great dynamism of the network and the considerable and continuous increase in the number of local authorities associated with the route. This represents a guarantee for the maintenance and signposting of the routes in the future, as well as a greater involvement of civil society.

The previous evaluation by Alessia Mariotti recognised the great amount of work that had been done since the last evaluation on the French section, following the evaluation carried out by Pierre Frustier. In her own report, she suggested continuing the work to promote the route and its activities in France and Switzerland, but also asking for greater commitment from the Vatican State, which could be done more in the future.

### **3.4 Communication tools**

#### **3.4.1 Current state of communication tools developed by the network (graphic charter, communication materials, logo, communication channels, signposting, maps, etc.)**

The EAVF's graphic identity is based on the logo and identity created by the architect Gianluca Sgalippa.

The logo is used in all online and offline communication documents. In 2021, a subtitle "road to Rome" has been added below the logo. The stylised image of the pilgrim, used extensively along the route and displayed at all the network's key locations, is highly distinctive and widely publicised. The EAVF's graphic identity is based on the logo and identity created by the architect Gianluca Sgalippa.

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This is very visible on a very large number of sites, and in a very "capillary" way.

In her previous report, Alessia Mariotti recommended that, in the menu at the top of the page, next to "contacts" and "about us", there should be "easier access to a page dedicated to the Council of Europe's routes programme, with a precise indication of the activities that the route contributes to the various priorities for action". This recommendation has not been followed to the letter. However, the Internet site is particularly clear and refers to the network's territorial projects. Alessia Mariotti suggested that the EAVF ask new partners to fill in a form in which they indicate which programme strand/priority they plan to invest in. This could be developed further as part of the next mandate.

#### **3.4.2 Compliance with the Guidelines for the Use of the Logo “Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe”**

The EAFV complies very well with the guidelines in all its promotional and communication media, whether printed and audiovisual documents, its website, events organised or promotional articles, both by the network and by its individual members.

## **4. Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **4.1. List of eligibility criteria for themes**

There is no doubt that the theme of the Via Francigena is fundamentally and profoundly representative of European values. In recent years, and since the previous evaluation, the network behind the cultural route has continued its systematic and meticulous work in the countries where it is based. It has been able to involve regions, local authorities, town halls and civil society in the project. The central backbone of the route is being built up and consolidated, gradually linking the various elements together. The practice of pilgrimage is still strong, and the way in which the theme has been built up means that increasingly broad and inclusive values can be associated with it. Walking is a practice that infuses the route and brings together an entire range of other ethical values and practices, or those linked to a quality of life and being. Walking is more than just a pilgrimage; it is inclusive, intergenerational, and accessible to everyone.

### **4.2. List of priority fields of action**

The network's activities and actions are rich and diversified. In terms of the Scientific Committee, the network needs to relaunch the activities of its Scientific Committee, which has not met in recent years, even though it is made up of several high-level scientific figures. Efforts have focused more on formal exchanges with the other routes (Via Romea Strata, Via Romea Germanica). The participation of universities could be clearly strengthened.

Via Romea Germanica). The participation of universities could clearly be strengthened.

In terms of enhancing the memory, history and heritage of Europe, the Via Francigena is carrying out an in-depth, capillary work, well connected to local initiatives. The UNESCO World Heritage project has clearly provided an opportunity to reflect on the values underlying the actions undertaken and the general narrative that should characterise them.

Exchanges between young Europeans have improved a great deal over the last few years, but it is certain that several new initiatives could be launched to go beyond those linked to training and internships.

In terms of contemporary cultural and artistic practice, the network of AEVF members has launched initiatives to varying degrees, depending on the availability of funds and human resources. However, the VF has now reached such a level of maturity that we expect to see more structured cultural and artistic initiatives, organised in a more concerted way across several territories, more in line with the reputation of the route and, soon, its inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage list. This structuring of the route (its use, its reputation, its visibility, its communication, etc.) through strong and widely identifiable artistic and cultural actions seems to be within the reach of the network today. This is not in any way to call into question the actions and initiatives emanating from the various fields - on the contrary. It's more a question of going beyond simply picking and choosing these initiatives, to give a boost to a limited number of major structuring initiatives for the route as a whole.

As regards tourism, it is clear that the VF is performing well. However, this success is unequal depending on the different sections. In the same way as below, for arts and culture, what is now expected is a move upmarket in all aspects of the product. The tourism product is already of high quality and seems to meet the expectations of tourists and visitors. Tourism as practised in the VF is almost by definition respectful of the natural and social environment. But the potential of my VF is immense and there is plenty of scope for further work on diversifying tourism products. By way of example, the work that has been done on Parmesan cheese could be done for other emblematic products from the regions we pass through.



It should be pointed out that these recommendations are inspired by the high quality of the route and its governance. They should not be seen as recommendations inspired by negative performance, but on the contrary by what is currently perceived as the Route's potential.

#### **4.3. List of criteria for networks**

All the criteria for the networks are managed by the governance of the route. From an administrative point of view, the EAVF operates in an efficient, well-oiled, and inclusive manner, allowing all members of the network to be involved. This is reflected in the way the General Meetings are organised, to take just one example: they rotate (between countries and locations) and are inclusive. Governance is highly operational, and the association's secretariat is recognised as effective.

The Via Francigena is in good shape and has significantly improved on the points identified in the previous evaluation as "improvable".

The recommendations for the coming years are to consolidate and systematise self-reporting for members, in order to improve "quality control" of the route, and to evaluate each member's contribution to the network. The very large number of members (compared with other CoE routes) and their rapid growth over the next few years means that the network will have to think hard about the "right" reporting format and the methodology used to collect the data and make it available to as many people as possible.

#### **Recommendations taken into account from the previous evaluation:**

The following is a detailed list of all the recommendations made by the previous evaluator, together with the network's responses to them over the last few years.

*Broaden and differentiate the skills of the members of the Scientific Committee, drawing on possible synergies with the other route projects leading to Rome (Romea germanica and Romea Strata).*

Several exchanges have taken place over the last three years to strengthen the relationship between the 3 routes, at the initiative of Fiorella Dalari, chair of the VF Scientific Committee. In particular, the EAVF has been responsible for the communication work package of the Euralux European project, which has led to the discussion and drafting of a series of scientific documents on this issue.

*Strengthening relations with the Vatican and promoting a growing role for religious communities in supporting the reception of pilgrims;*

On 10-11 September 2021, as part of the 20th anniversary of the VF, an agreement was signed between the 3 Via Romea and the Vatican General Secretary. This agreement marks the political commitment of the Vatican and the 3 Via Romae to work together for the joint promotion of the 3 Roman roads. The VF has also improved the conditions for welcoming pilgrims to Rome (collaboration with the Fabbrica di san Pietro; a section of the website dedicated to pilgrims and the Vatican; the pilgrim's Mass has also been introduced). The Vatican has also set up a pilgrim monitoring system, data which is communicated to the VF. Contacts have also been made with the regions of Lazio and Galicia, with the collaboration of the ministries in Spain, with a view to signing an agreement, symbolically scheduled for March 2024 at the Vatican.

*Building a self-reporting system for new members*

A number of actions have been taken in response to this recommendation. For example, the October General Meeting is designed as a forum for exchange between members, with half a day devoted to presenting experiences and good practices. From 2021, a system for collecting good practices (i.e. in terms of sustainability) has been set up. A call has been launched to members and friendly institutions. The collection of 120 practices collected in this way will be displayed on the network's website. At the General Meeting, a prize will be awarded to the local authority with the best practice.

*Improvement of the site regarding the integration of information concerning the CoE programme;*

Following the recommendation, a page has been created on the programme, more specifically on the programme on the EAFV website.

*- Broaden and differentiate the skills of the members of the Scientific Committee, also by drawing on possible synergies with the other route projects leading to Rome (Romea germanica and Romea Strata);*

Considerable work has been done over the last 3 years to consolidate collaboration with Romea Germanica and Romea Strata. Since June 2022, this work with the Via Germanica has been slowed down due to the lack of an identified contact in this network. For the Via Romea Strata, the VF regularly attends their AGM (and vice versa, the VRS at the VF). Collaboration is also taking place within the framework of the Via Scientific Committees. In October 2023, a joint meeting was held on the prospects for collaboration between the three routes, with registration to the university network scheduled for 2024.

*- Investing in the creation of a network of universities linked to the route, both for research and development and for youth exchanges.*

An important collaboration has begun with the University of Parma. Professors from this university have joined the list of scientific members of the network. This collaboration is also part of the preparation of the UNESCO application.

In addition, work has been ongoing for the last 4 years on ERASMUS youth programmes. A budget of €140,000 has been allocated, in particular for the mobility of young people (Ireland, Spain, Albania, in connection with Via Egnacia). This measure mainly concerns young people from secondary schools in the VF.

*- Training network members*

An activity plan has been drawn up for 2023, with the aim of communicating more effectively about the label. Work is also being carried out with new members. The new logo will be launched next year (2024). This communication work is seen as important, especially for small municipalities, which do not always have in-depth knowledge of the ins and outs of CoE routes.

The issue of more equitable representation of the other countries in the network, currently unequally represented by Italy, has given rise to several initiatives in recent years. These are particularly important, and it is in this direction that the network's future actions should be channelled.

For England: the General Meeting was organised for the first time in 2022 in Canterbury, a local authority that is particularly keen to be part of the VF network, given that the VF is also a link with Europe. Canterbury's participation is instrumental in the future application of the City

of Dover, the second English municipality on the Sigeric route. Relations initiated with the ports of Calais and Dover have enabled the VF to be highlighted at this crossing point. Relations have also been established with the Via Britannica, a 160 km route from London to Canterbury. The 30th anniversary in 2024 will provide an opportunity to organise events aimed at consolidating the relationship with England (e.g. an event planned at the British Library, where Sigeric's travel diary is kept). An agreement was also signed with the English publishing house Cicero, which led to the publication of 3 guidebooks (Canterbury Lausanne, Lausanne-Siena and Siena-Rome). This initiative has had a major impact on English-speaking hikers.

For France and Switzerland: Structuring of the Committee of the Route made up of 8 departments and 3 regions which have created an informal network directly linked to the EAVF, to develop products with visibility in France. This measure aims to consolidate France's place in the VF in order to balance the gap between France and Italy. This initiative is based on the model of Switzerland, which has created a Switzerland - Via Francigena association, which has increased the number of VF members in Switzerland. This structuring by country enables national members to meet more often and encourages the development of national initiatives in line with the network's objectives.

CRITERIA		Recommendations previous evaluation 2019-2020	Has the route addressed the recommendation since the last evaluation?		Recommendations current evaluation 2023-2024
			YES	NO	
<b>I. Cultural route theme</b>			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>II. Priority fields of action</b>	<b>Cooperation in research and development</b>	Broaden and diversify the skills of the members of the Scientific Committee, drawing on possible synergies with the other Route projects leading to Rome (Romea germanica and Romea Strata).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	The collaboration with Via is set to continue over the next few years.
		Invest in the creation of a network of universities linked to the Route, both for research and development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	This objective has been partially achieved. The network of universities must have a real scientific presence and become the

		purposes and for youth exchanges.			"head of the network" in interdisciplinary research related to Via Francigena.
		Identify areas for research in various fields to support EAVF's actions	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
		To train network members in the contents of the programme and to give them responsibility for certain actions/priorities for action.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
					It seems important to continue efforts to ensure that all the countries crossed by the Route are represented as fairly as possible. The Italian identity of the Route, important in itself, must be enriched by the presence of other countries. Consolidating the presence of England as one of the starting points.
	<b>Enhancement of memory, history, and European heritage</b>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	<b>Cultural and educational exchanges for young Europeans</b>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	<b>Contemporary cultural and artistic practice</b>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

	<b>Cultural Tourism and Sustainable Cultural development</b>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>III. Cultural Route Network</b>	To strengthen the relationship with the Vatican and promote a growing role for religious communities in supporting the hosting of pilgrims.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
<b>Communication tools</b>	Setting up a self-reporting system for new members to evaluate their contribution to the network and the programme's activities.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Continue these efforts with the aim of setting up a genuine self-reporting system, going beyond the identification and promotion of good practice. This implies developing a genuine self-reporting grid, establishing criteria, and setting up a system for circulating information resulting from self-reporting.	
	Improvement of documentary supports to facilitate the work of EAVF in the management and coordination of members' activities.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	This work, which is already well launched, needs to be developed systematically and continuously in the future.	
	Improvement of the site with regard to the integration of information concerning the CoE programme.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			

## **Summary of recommendations :**

- Organise regular meetings and activities for the Scientific Committee, and work in close collaboration with the Committee as to support the network's projects by studies undertaken by the SC.
- Create or consolidate a system of self-reporting by members, in addition to the record of good practice currently being drawn up.
- Systematise documentary support to facilitate EAFV's work in managing and coordinating members' activities;
- Continue to consolidate the relationship with England and work actively with the French and Swiss national committees to improve the balance between countries on the route.
- Initiate one or two strategic cultural actions, serving as a strong identity and cultural signature for the route.

## **5. List of references**

All the documents submitted by the route as part of the regular evaluation were read and analyzed.

A number of additional documents were provided by VF at the expert's request:

Strategic Plan of the Via Francigena ([AEVF Piano-Strategico\\_FRA\\_reduced.pdf](#) ([viefrancigene.org](#)))

[L'inizio di un cammino comune tra Via Rome Strata, Francigena e Germanica - Via Francigena](#) ([viefrancigene.org](#))

Best practice report 2021-2022

List of scientific publications from the European rurAllure project and project results

MoU with the three "roads to Rome": Francigena, Germanica, Strata (signed in 2021)

## **6. Appendix 1: Schedule of field visits and interviews with network management and members**

A visit to Calais was organised on 19 October 2023. It provided an opportunity to discuss the activities and initiatives of a common key on the route, actions undertaken locally, the relationship with the hosting of pilgrims before the crossing into England, and local development and signposting efforts in relation to the route.

In terms of places visited, it was possible to go to Notre Dame de Calais and its gardens, the official starting point of the Via Francigena on the European continent. In the afternoon, it was possible to follow part of the VF route - departure from the new port, Notre Dame, Town Hall, Belfry, credencial validation point, tourist office.



The tour continued with a visit to the Calais dragon, the seafront, the youth hostel, and a drive along the coast on the Via Francigena route to Cap Blanc Nez.

The visit was organised by Dominique Darré, deputy mayor of Calais, and Arnaud Hamy, head of the town's heritage and tourism development project, with whom an in-depth discussion took place on all the route's projects in the town and region, as well as in relation to England.

A meeting was also held with the director, Luca Bruschi, on 29 November 2023, at which all the information from the field and from the copious dossier submitted for the regular evaluation was put into perspective.

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## **7.Appendix 2: Expert assessment checklist**

# EXPERT ASSESSMENT CHECK-LIST

QUESTIONS			Yes	No	
3.1 THEME	1	Does the theme of the Route represent a common value (historical, cultural, or heritage) to several European countries?	1		
	2	Does the theme of the Route offer a solid basis for youth cultural and educational exchanges?	1		
	3	Does the theme of the Route offer a solid basis for innovative activities?	1		
	4	Does the theme of the Route offer a solid basis for cultural tourism products development?	1		
	5	Has the theme been researched/developed by academics/experts from different regions of Europe?	1		
3.1 FIELDS OF ACTION	3.2.1 Co-operation in research and development	6	Does the Route offer a platform for co-operation in research and development of European cultural themes/values?	1	
		7	Does the Route play a unifying role around major European themes, enabling dispersed knowledge to be brought together?	1	
		8	Does the Route show how these themes are representative of European values shared by several European countries?	1	
		9	Does the Route illustrate the development of these values and the variety of forms they may take in Europe?	1	
		10	Does the Route have a network of universities and research center working on its theme at the European level?	1	
		11	Does the Route have a multidisciplinary Scientific Committee?	1	
		12	Does the Scientific Committee work on its theme at the European level?	1	
		13	Does the Scientific Committee carry out research and analysis of the issues relevant to its theme and/or activities on the theoretical level?	1	
	14	Does the Scientific Committee carry out research and analysis of the issues relevant to its theme and/or activities on the practical level??	1		
	3.2.2 Enhancement of the memory, history and European heritage	15	Do the Route activities take into account and explain the historical significance of tangible and intangible European heritage?	1	
		16	Do the Route activities promote the values of the Council of Europe?	1	
		17	Do the Route activities promote the brand of the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe?	1	
		18	Does the Route work in conformity with international charters and conventions on cultural heritage preservation??	1	
		19	Do the Route activities identify, preserve, and develop European heritage sites in rural destinations?	1	
		20	Do the Route activities identify, preserve, and develop European heritage sites in industrial areas in the process of economic restructuring?		1

		21	Do the Route activities valorize the heritage of ethnic or social minorities in Europe?		1
		22	Do the Route activities contribute to a better understanding of the concept of cultural heritage, the importance of its preservation and sustainable development?	1	
		23	Do the Route activities enhance physical and intangible heritage, explain its historical significance, and highlight its similarities in the different regions of Europe?	1	
		24	Do the Route activities take account of and promote the charters, conventions, recommendations and work of the Council of Europe, UNESCO and ICOMOS relating to heritage restoration, protection and enhancement, landscape and spatial planning (European Cultural Convention, Faro convention, European Landscape Convention, World Heritage Convention, ...)?	1	
	3.2.3 Cultural and educational exchanges for young Europeans	25	Are the youth exchanges (cultural and educational) planned to develop a better understanding of the concept of European citizenship?	1	
		26	Are the youth exchanges (cultural and educational) planned to emphasize the value of new personal experience through visiting diverse places?	1	
		27	Are the youth exchanges (cultural and educational) planned to encourage social integration and exchanges of young people from different social backgrounds and regions of Europe?	1	
		28	Are the youth exchanges (cultural and educational) planned to offer collaborative opportunities for educational institutions at various levels??	1	
		29	Are the youth exchanges (cultural and educational) planned to place the emphasis on personal and real experiences through the use of places and contacts?	1	
		30	Are the youth exchanges (cultural and educational) planned to set up pilot schemes with several participating countries?	1	
		31	Are the youth exchanges (cultural and educational) planned to give rise to co-operation activities which involve educational institutions at various levels?	1	
	3.2.4 Contemporary cultural and artistic	32	Do the Route's cultural activities promote intercultural dialogue and multidisciplinary exchange between various artistic expressions in European countries?	1	
		33	Do the Route's cultural activities encourage artistic projects that establish links between cultural heritage and contemporary culture?	1	

		34	Do the Route's cultural activities encourage innovative cultural and contemporary art practices* connecting them with the history of skills development?	1	
		35	Do the Route's cultural activities encourage collaboration between culture amateurs and professionals via relevant activities and networks creation?*	1	
		36	Do the Route's cultural activities encourage debate and exchange - in a multidisciplinary and intercultural perspective - between various cultural and artistic expressions in different countries of Europe?	1	
		37	Do the Route's cultural activities encourage activities and artistic projects which explore the links between heritage and contemporary culture?	1	
		38	Do the Route's cultural activities highlight the most innovative and creative practices?	1	
	3.2.5 Cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development	39	Do the Route's cultural activities link these innovative and creative practices with the history of skills development?***	1	
		40	Do the Route's activities (relevant to sustainable cultural tourism development) assist in local, regional, national and/ or European identity formation?	1	
		41	Do the Route's activities (relevant to sustainable cultural tourism development) actively involve 3 major means to raise awareness of their cultural projects: print, broadcast, and social media?	1	
		42	Do the Route's activities promote dialogue between urban and rural communities and cultures?	1	
		43	Do the Route's activities promote dialogue between developed and disadvantaged regions?	1	
		44	Do the Route's activities promote dialogue between different regions (south, north, east, west) of Europe?	1	
		45	Do the Route's activities promote dialogue between majority and minority (or native and immigrant) cultures?	1	
		46	Do the Route's activities open possibilities for co-operation between Europe and other continents?	1	
		47	Do the Route's activities draw decision makers' attention to the necessity of protecting heritage as part of the sustainable development of the territory?	1	
		48	Do the Route's activities aim to diversify cultural product, service and activities offers?	1	
		49	Do the Route's activities develop and offer quality cultural tourism products, services or activities transnationally?	1	

		50	Do the Route's activities develop partnerships with public and private organisations active in the field of tourism?	1	
		51	Did the network prepare and use tools along the Route to raise the number of visitors and the economic impacts of the Route on the territories crossed?	1	
3.3 NETWORK		52	Does the Route represent a network involving at least three Council of Europe's member states?	1	
		53	Was the theme of the Route chosen and accepted by the network members?	1	
		54	Was the conceptual framework of the Route founded on a scientific basis?	1	
		55	Does the network involve several Council of Europe member states in all or part of its projects?	1	
		56	Is the network financially sustainable?	1	
		57	Does the network have a legal status (association, federation of associations, EEIG,...)?	1	
		58	Does the network operate democratically?	1	
		59	Does the network specify its objectives and working methods?	1	
		60	Does the network specify the regions concerned by the project?	1	
		61	Does the network specify its partners and participating countries?	1	
		62	Does the network specify the fields of action involved?	1	
		63	Does the network specify its overall strategy in the short and long term?	1	
		64	Does the network identify potential participants and partners in Council of Europe member states and/or other world countries?	1	
		65	Does the network provide details of its financing (financial reports and/or activity budgets)?	1	
		66	Does the network provide details of its operational plan?	1	
		67	Does the network append the basic text(s) confirming its legal status?	1	
3.4 COMMUNICATION		68	Does the Route have its own logo?	1	
		69	Do all partners of the network use the logo on their communication tools?	1	
		70	Does the Route have its own dedicated website ?	1	
		71	Is it the website available in English and French?	1	

		72	Is it the website available in other languages?	1	
		73	Does the network use effectively social networks and web 2.0?	1	
		74	Does the network publish brochures on the Route?	1	
		75	If yes, are the brochures available in English?	1	
		76	If yes, are the brochures available in French?	1	
	For the Council of Europe's certified Cultural Routes :	77	Is the title of “Cultural Route of the Council of Europe” present on all communication materials (including press releases, webpages, publications, etc.)?	1	
		78	Is the certification logo present on all communication materials?	1	
		79	Is the certification logo used in accordance to the guidelines for its use (size and position,...)?	1	
		80	Are the logos (Cultural Route + certification logo) provided to all the members of the Route?	1	
		81	Does the Council of Europe certification logo appear on road signs/ boards indicating the cultural route?	1	
	SCORE				79