

HIKE4ALL: six routes, one shared vision of inclusion



Elena Dubinina - European Association of the Via Francigena, HIKE4ALL project coordinator

1. What are your impressions, emotions, and special memories of the first Hike4All event?

It was a really emotional experience for me. The first event of the project took place in Italy along the Via Francigena, and I was very pleased to see it attracted over 200 participants and so much attention, which proves the importance of the project topic. I felt a lot of joy from the participants and their families, and there was such a positive atmosphere throughout the day. I was also very touched by the stories shared during the conference — they were often very personal and inspiring, and they made me look at hiking in a completely different way.

2. The word “inclusion” has many different meanings. Which aspects of inclusion do you and/or your partners’ activities focus on the most?

For the European Association of the Via Francigena, inclusion is really about making the experience of the route accessible and enjoyable for everyone — no matter their age, physical condition, or social situation. We all come with different abilities and backgrounds, but everyone should have the chance to experience the Via Francigena in their own way. In this project, we focused especially on people in wheelchairs, as well as visually impaired and deaf participants and their families. It is a very meaningful activity for us, and something we truly want to continue developing and improving in the future.

3. Which aspects will you focus on more in the near future? How do you think Hike4All will be useful?

In the near future, we would really like to continue and strengthen the work we have already started, especially by working more closely with the Region of Piemonte, which has been doing important work in developing accessible sections of the Via Francigena. We would also like to imagine setting up an annual conference dedicated to inclusion and accessibility, prepared together with associations representing people with disabilities. It could become a regular moment to share experiences, good practices, and keep improving together. As for Hike4All, I think it will be very useful as a starting point that helps build connections, raise awareness, and create momentum around these topics.

4. Please briefly tell us who you are, who you represent, and something about your walks and projects.

I am Elena Dubinina, I work as a project developer and manager at the EAVF and I coordinate the Hike4All project. Walking routes are not just part of my job, they are something I truly care about and try to live in my everyday life. I really believe that everyone should be able to enjoy walking, in their own way and at their own pace, and this is exactly why this project means so much to me.

Guro Vistad - Association for the Cultural Route of the St. Olav Ways, Norway

1. The word “inclusion” has many different meanings. Which aspects of inclusion do you and/or your partners’ activities focus on the most?

We chose to include Back in the Ring as a key partner in our activities. It is a Norwegian non-profit organization working with social inclusion and rehabilitation, using yoga and mental training to support people facing challenges such as substance abuse, incarceration, or difficult life situations in rebuilding their lives. A distinctive element of their approach is the use of pilgrimage along the Pilegrimsleden – the St. Olav Ways. Each year, participants undertake long-distance walks, combining physical challenge with silence, reflection, and daily group conversations. This journey serves as a powerful tool for personal growth, helping participants develop resilience, self-awareness, and a renewed sense of purpose and belonging. Highlighting this perspective on inclusion was an important priority for us within the Hike4All project. The event took place along Borgleden, one of the routes within the Pilegrimsleden – St. Olav Ways in Norway. Borg Diocese and the Borgleden Regional Pilgrim Centre acted as local organizers of the event.

2. Which aspects will you focus on more in the near future? How do you think Hike4All will be useful?

As part of the Hike4All project, we continue to focus on how to engage more people—especially those facing social challenges or vulnerabilities—in using nature in general, and pilgrimage trails in particular, as resources for physical and mental health, as well as personal growth. The potential for rehabilitation is especially relevant and of great interest to us. In this context, Back in the Ring is a key actor. They contribute valuable insights by generously sharing both personal stories from participants and the purpose, methods, and experiences of their work.

3. Please briefly tell us who you are, who you represent, and something about your walks and projects.

I am Guro Vistad, currently serving as Acting Director of the National Pilgrim Centre of Norway, as well as providing administrative support to the Association for the Cultural Route of the St. Olav Ways. I am involved in the Hike4All project through the Association, which is one of its partners. I am also an enthusiastic walker myself, and through my work I regularly witness the powerful impact that walking—whether along pilgrimage routes or in nature more generally—can have on people. I hope that Hike4All will contribute to new activities and the exchange of best practices, helping make these valuable experiences accessible to even more people.

Martina Janochová - European Cultural Route of Saints Cyril and Methodius, Czech Republic

1. You took part in the first experience of the Hike4All project. What are your impressions, emotions, and special memories?

The opening event of the project, held in the foothill yet already spring-fresh town of Ivrea, was a wonderful experience for me. The place has its own charm and offers a wide range of cultural, sports, and tourist activities. I only regret that due to other obligations I couldn't take part in the entire program, such as the full walk to Bollengo or the castle visit. Among the most powerful moments for me were the theatre workshop, the Italian hospitality and friendliness, and the strong sense of unity among the people involved in the HIKE4ALL project, which highlights accessibility and inclusion on European routes. I especially remember the words of one speaker in a wheelchair—his name was Danilo—who said: "Nothing is impossible. It's all about finding the right solution." I am very grateful for the opportunity to see trails from the perspective of people who are disadvantaged but highly motivated. It was a very formative experience for me.

2. The word "inclusion" has many different meanings. Which aspects of inclusion do you and/or your partners' activities focus on the most?

We want to focus on sharing experiences related to the accessibility of trails and heritage sites, both from the perspective of their operators and from disadvantaged tourists. We were inspired by what we saw in Italy. For example, we have arranged a lecture by a visually impaired pilgrim who started walking the Cyril and Methodius Route in the Czech Republic about three years ago. Through this experience, she found new guides and friends, and an entirely new world of endless possibilities opened up to her. It is great that she is also willing to share her story with the media and public. We would also like to present the positive effects of forest therapy, which is suitable for everyone, and invite people to a music therapy experience—a pipe organ concert in the basilica in Velehrad.

3. Which aspects will you focus on more in the near future? How do you think Hike4All will be useful?

I believe it is very important to promote the experiences of disadvantaged people and motivate others—including the general population—to be active on the trails. Being in nature has undeniable benefits, and an added value is learning about cultural heritage through experience. I personally walk our trails several times a year and can see that there are still many gaps in accessibility and inclusion. HIKE4ALL helps bring attention to these issues in Central Europe and encourages positive change.

4. Please briefly tell us who you are, who you represent, and something about your walks and projects.

My name is Martina, and I have been working for about 13 years for the Cyril and Methodius Route. I aim to connect people from several European countries through the theme and activities of this cultural route. That is why I always welcome the opportunity to learn from other similar networks, such as Via Francigena. I believe that cultural dialogue is something that is missing in today's society—not only speaking, but also listening with respect to others. The HIKE4ALL project is helping to change that.

Carlos Fernández Martínez - Fundación Camino Lebaniego, Spain

1. You lived the first experience of Hike4All project. Your impressions, your emotions, your particular memories

This first HIKE4ALL event has had two important elements for me: we have met for the first time in person the entire consortium, which reinforces our confidence as a team and strengthens the personal relationships that will be essential to develop the project. Also, we have been able to contrast the complexity of the organization of an inclusive event of these characteristics, experiencing the result of great work carried out by the partners of Via Francigena. These two aspects have shaped an intense experience, but that has allowed us to enjoy the events and the people who have participated to the fullest. Ivrea is a wonderful city, and the people are very welcoming and close.

2. The word "inclusion" has many different meanings. What aspects of inclusion do you and/or your partners' activities focus on most?

From my point of view, inclusion is to take into account all people and their specific situations in all public or private activities, with or without some type of disability. The participation and access of all those who decide so must be considered without barriers of any kind. That means that whatever my personal situation, I can decide to participate or not without anyone deciding for me. No one should tell me what my limits are, I set those limits. Taking into account this concept applicable to any person and situation, it is necessary to qualify: Not everything can be accessible. For example, a mountainous path of high difficulty will only be within reach of a few, who have previously prepared for a long time to be able to make that itinerary. It is not possible, nor advisable, to eliminate barriers by acting on elements of the natural environment with irreversible loss of natural resources. But it is possible to carry out actions that allow universal access. There are already numerous technical elements that allow it, we just have to look for the right type and time to transform something inaccessible into something that we can all experience. All improvements in infrastructure and services, in any scope and scale, are always beneficial for the entire population, the benefit is universal.

3. And on what aspects will you focus more in the next future?

From the Camino Lebaniego Foundation we try to gradually introduce in all areas of our management the aspect of inclusion and accessibility. It is not easy to change inertia when it comes to public sector actions, but we are moving forward little by little. In each event, in each rehabilitation, in each possibility of action we try to incorporate concrete measures: improvements in access to hostels and public buildings, adapted signage, accessible documentation. It's not easy and it's not always possible, but we tried. From the perspective of the European projects in which we are involved, we always incorporate the perspective of inclusiveness.

4. Tell us who you are and represent and something about Camino Lebaniego

I am the manager of European projects at the Camino Lebaniego Foundation. The Foundation belongs to the public sector of the Regional Government of Cantabria, in northern Spain. We depend on the Regional Ministry of Tourism. The Camino Lebaniego is a pilgrimage route that is part of the network of Caminos de Santiago del Norte, declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2015. This route of the Camino Lebaniego was used by pilgrims going to Santiago de Compostela who passed through the Monastery of Santo Toribio in Liébana to visit the largest preserved piece of the Cross of Jesus Christ, the Lignum Crucis.

Ilgın Tufan and Hüseyin Eryurt - Culture Routes Society, Türkiye

1. You took part in the first experience of the Hike4All project. What are your impressions, emotions, and special memories?

The kick-off meeting in Ivrea was important because it was the first time all project partners met face to face. Since Hike4All is an international and multi-country project that we will work on together for the next year, these meetings are very valuable for building strong collaboration and team spirit. Beyond the coordination aspect, it was also inspiring to experience the project's first inclusive activity together. Walking alongside groups with different physical disabilities for the first time gave us a deeper understanding of accessibility and inclusion in practice, and this experience will definitely help us while planning the next stages of the project. Ivrea itself also added a special layer to the experience. As a UNESCO industrial heritage city, it was fascinating to discover its history and explore the Olivetti factories during the final day of the programme.

2. The word "inclusion" has many different meanings. Which aspects of inclusion do you and/or your partners' activities focus on the most?

In Hike4All, inclusion means creating activities together with many different vulnerable groups. These may include people with visual, hearing, or physical disabilities, individuals with intellectual disabilities, or socially excluded groups who may struggle to reconnect with society. What makes the project meaningful is that it encourages us to think about inclusion from many different perspectives. It is not only about physical accessibility, but also about creating safe and welcoming spaces where everyone can participate and feel connected.

3. Which aspects will you focus on more in the near future? How do you think Hike4All will be useful?

One of the long-term goals of the project is to encourage businesses and stakeholders along cultural routes to think more about accessibility and inclusion. In the short term, the focus is on successfully organising the project activities. In Türkiye, the project will work together with ZİÇEV and involve children with intellectual disabilities in nature walks in Eğirdir. Through cooperation with local partners and the municipality, the project can also help raise awareness among local governments and communities about inclusive outdoor experiences.

4. Please briefly tell us who you are, who you represent, and something about your walks and projects.

Within the Hike4All project, Ilgın Tufan and Hüseyin Eryurt are responsible for the coordination of the project on behalf of Türkiye's Culture Routes Society. The organisation was established in 2012 to protect Türkiye's existing cultural routes, support the creation of new ones, and promote best-practice standards for their development. Cultural routes are seen not only as walking paths but also as tools for cultural understanding, sustainable tourism, and community connection.

Christophe Staf - Templars Heritage Route European Federation, France

1. You took part in the first experience of the Hike4All project. What are your impressions, emotions, and special memories?

Taking part in this Hike4all event was an unforgettable experience on a human level: on the one hand, during the workshops, with the incredible stories shared by those on stage; and on the other, through the enriching conversations with participants of all nationalities during the walk. Once we left Ivrea, the walk allowed me to discover some truly unforgettable landscapes. It was an incredible human experience.

2. The word “inclusion” has many different meanings. Which aspects of inclusion do you and/or your partners’ activities focus on the most?

As part of our activities, we place a strong emphasis on inclusion by promoting equal access to culture, as well as to sports and hiking, particularly through the HIKE4ALL project. We are especially committed to making our initiatives accessible to people with disabilities (physical and/or mental), as well as to young people, students, and families. Our goal is to offer opportunities for sporting and cultural discovery that are open to all audiences. This approach involves listening carefully to each individual’s specific needs and adapting accordingly in order to ensure fair participation and a meaningful experience for everyone.

3. Which aspects will you focus on more in the near future? How do you think Hike4All will be useful?

As part of the HIKE4ALL project, we will focus particularly on the practical aspect by offering an inclusive walk along a trail certified “Tourism & Disability.” We have also partnered with relevant organizations to ensure that people with disabilities can be welcomed in the best possible conditions, with appropriate supervision and suitable equipment. In this context, HIKE4ALL serves as an important driver for creating synergies between stakeholders in culture, tourism, and sport, as well as healthcare and social care institutions and associations, particularly in the field of disability sports. Finally, this project will help highlight best practices in inclusion and may pave the way for long-term collaborations through similar initiatives.

4. Please briefly tell us who you are, who you represent, and something about your walks and projects.

Christophe Staf: member of the TREF, representing the Federation during the event in Italy. Mr. Staf is the initiator of the Beaucéant Project, the first digital encyclopedia dedicated to the Order of the Temple and other religious and military orders. Camille Aubrun: Project Officer for “Cultural Routes and Labels” within the Cultural and Educational Development Department of the Aube Archives and Heritage Directorate. The Project Officer supports the TREF in preparing its application to obtain the “Council of Europe Cultural Route” label. On November 6, 2026, the TREF will organize an inclusive walk as part of the HIKE4ALL project. This walk will take place in the Parc naturel régional de la Forêt d’Orient on a trail certified “Tourism & Disability.” Other activities will be offered throughout the day, including guided discovery tours of local flora, environmental awareness sessions, and introductions to disability sports, among others.