



# Accessible Greenways from European perspective

Dominika Zaręba  
Paulo Rodrigues  
**EUROPEAN GREENWAYS ASSOCIATION**





Greenways are communication routes reserved exclusively for non-motorised journeys, developed in an integrated manner which enhances both the environment and quality of life of the surrounding area.

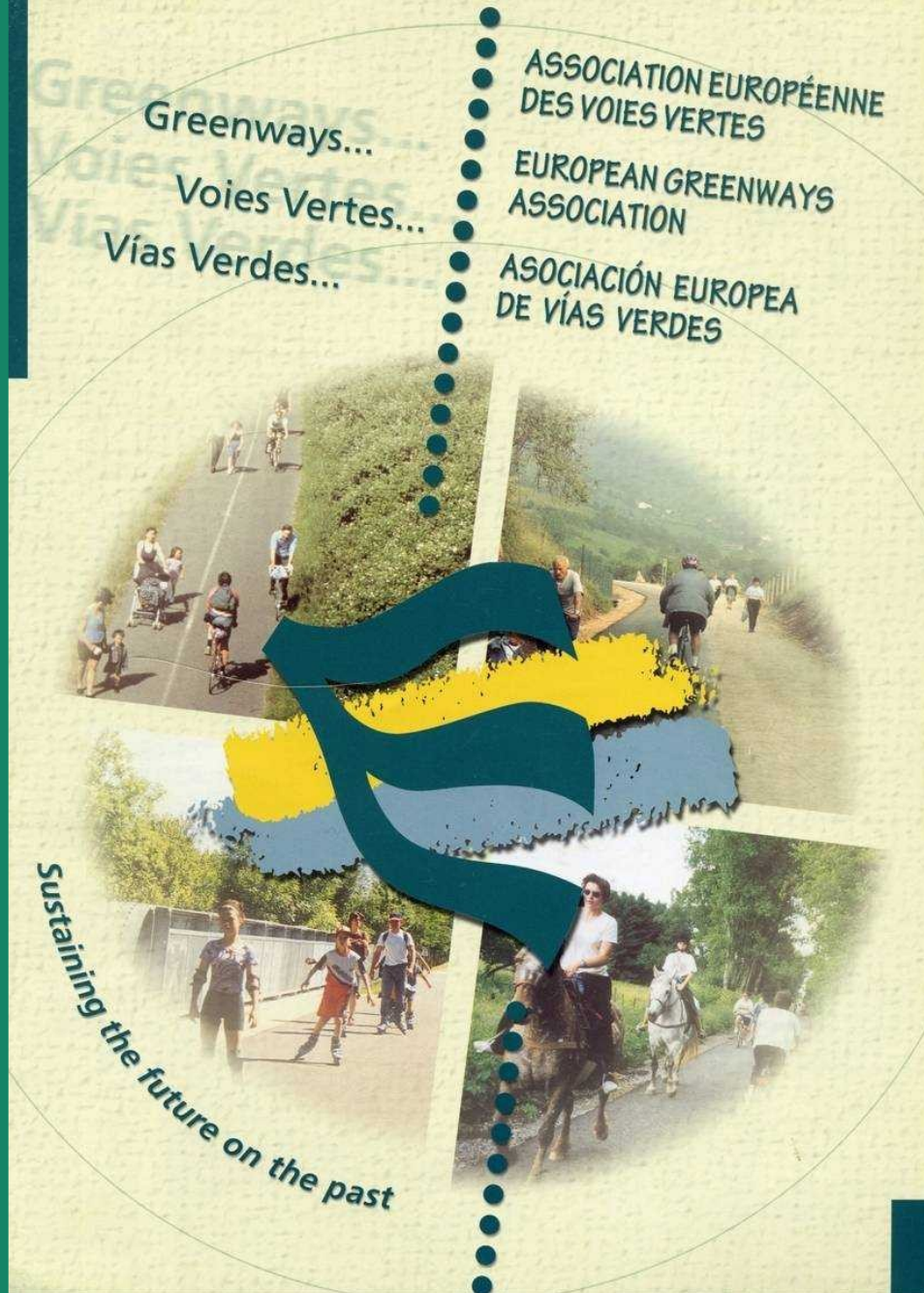
These routes should meet satisfactory standards of width, gradient, and surface condition to ensure that they are both user-friendly and low-risk for users of all abilities, accessible for all.

*Lille Declaration, 12th September 2000*

By reusing disused or “recycled” infrastructure—such as former railway lines, towpaths, and historic heritage trails, including industrial heritage—they respond to increasing social demands, including access to nature and culture, ecotourism and active tourism, healthy outdoor leisure, and sustainable mobility, while contributing to the fight against climate change.







## The European Greenways Association (EGWA) was created in 1998 in Namur, Belgium.

Siège exécutif – General Secretary: Fundación de los Ferrocarriles Españoles, C/Santa Isabel, 44 · E – 28012 Madrid – Spain

Siège social: rue Van Opre, 97, 5100 Namur – Belgium







ASSOCIATION EUROPÉENNE DES VOIES VERTES  
EUROPEAN GREENWAYS ASSOCIATION  
ASOCIACIÓN EUROPEA DE VÍAS VERDES

17 countries

50 Members, 4 Honorary Members



**3 Colleges:** National Authorities / Regional Authorities / NGOs

**PORTUGAL:** 3 Full Members - INFRAESTRUTURAS DE PORTUGAL IP PATRIMONIO - GESTÃO DE ECOPISTAS

/ COMUNIDADE INTERMUNICIPAL MINHO - LIMA / COMUNIDADE INTERMUNICIPAL ALENTEJO CENTRAL – CIMAC

4 Associate Members - MUNICÍPIO DE VILA POUCA DE AGUIAR / CÂMARA MUNICIPAL DE VALENÇA / MUNICIPIO DE MONTEMOR-O-NOVO

/ COMUNIDADE INTERMUNICIPAL VISEU DÃO LAFÕES



# National Greenways Program



30,000 kilometres of greenways in Europe, of which around 20,000 kilometres are developed on former railway lines, representing only about 20% of all disused railway lines.



# Portugal - Ecopistas exemplary program

The program ECOPISTAS started in 2001. 500 kilometres of greenways currently in use, out of a total of 1,000 kilometres of abandoned railway lines.





## EGWA Main Activities

- European Greenways Award
- Conferences, Webinars, Events
- Insights: Best Practices Guides, Publications, Interviews
- Research & Collection of data / European Greenways Observatory
- European projects (eg. Greenways4Tour, Greenways Product, Greenways Outdoor, Greenways4ALL, Greenways Heritage, OurWay)
- Information exchange, networking, cooperation, expertise
- EU Lobbying and Partnerships



## Greenways

Enhancing heritage for walking and cycling, for locals and tourists alike.



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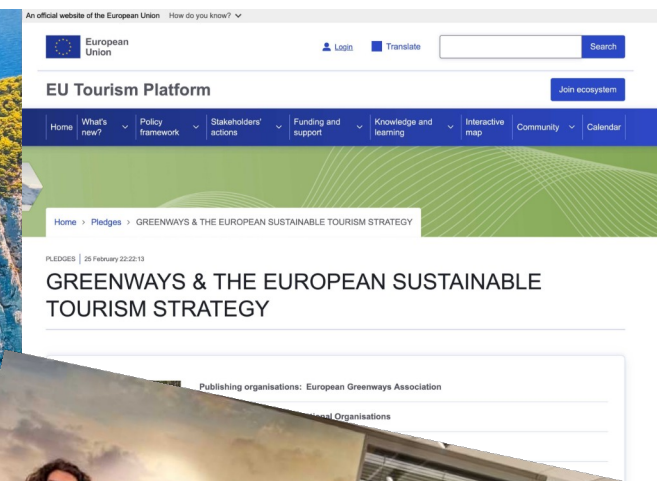
# European Greenways Award





# Towards Transition Pathway for Tourism and the European Sustainable Tourism Strategy

- EGWA takes part in the "Together for the EU Tourism T4T Expert Group - Subgroup: **Green Transition**
- Targeted consultation on the European Sustainable Tourism Strategy – **the Strategy will be launched at the end of 2026**
- Young representatives of EGWA took part in the Youth Policy Dialogue with the European Commissioner for Sustainable Transport and Tourism, Apostolos Tzitzikostas
- **Cycling tourism, sustainable mobility and accessible tourism will be important targets of the Strategy**





# Targeted consultation on the European Sustainable Tourism Strategy



## Others

In addition to the challenges listed in the consultation document, the following points are also relevant:

- *Adoption to climate change:* Climate adaptation measures, including nature-based solutions, can strengthen the resilience of tourist areas.
- *Safeguarding biodiversity and natural habitats:* It is essential to preserve the long-term attractiveness and ecological health of European destinations.
- *Better spatial planning:* Uncoordinated tourism growth can have negative effects (e.g., on biodiversity), which require better spatial planning.
- *Sustainable Food:* To tackle the negative effects of food consumption (e.g., food waste) and enhance its positive impact (incl. local value creation).
- *Promote safe and accessible transport by expanding cycling, walking, and wheeling infrastructure—especially greenways on disused railways and canal towpaths.* With only 20% of Europe's potential 150,000 km greenway network developed, further integration of these routes into transport systems will support decarbonization, reduce congestion, extend the tourism season, and diversify rural tourism.





# How Greenways contribute the European Sustainable Tourism Strategy?

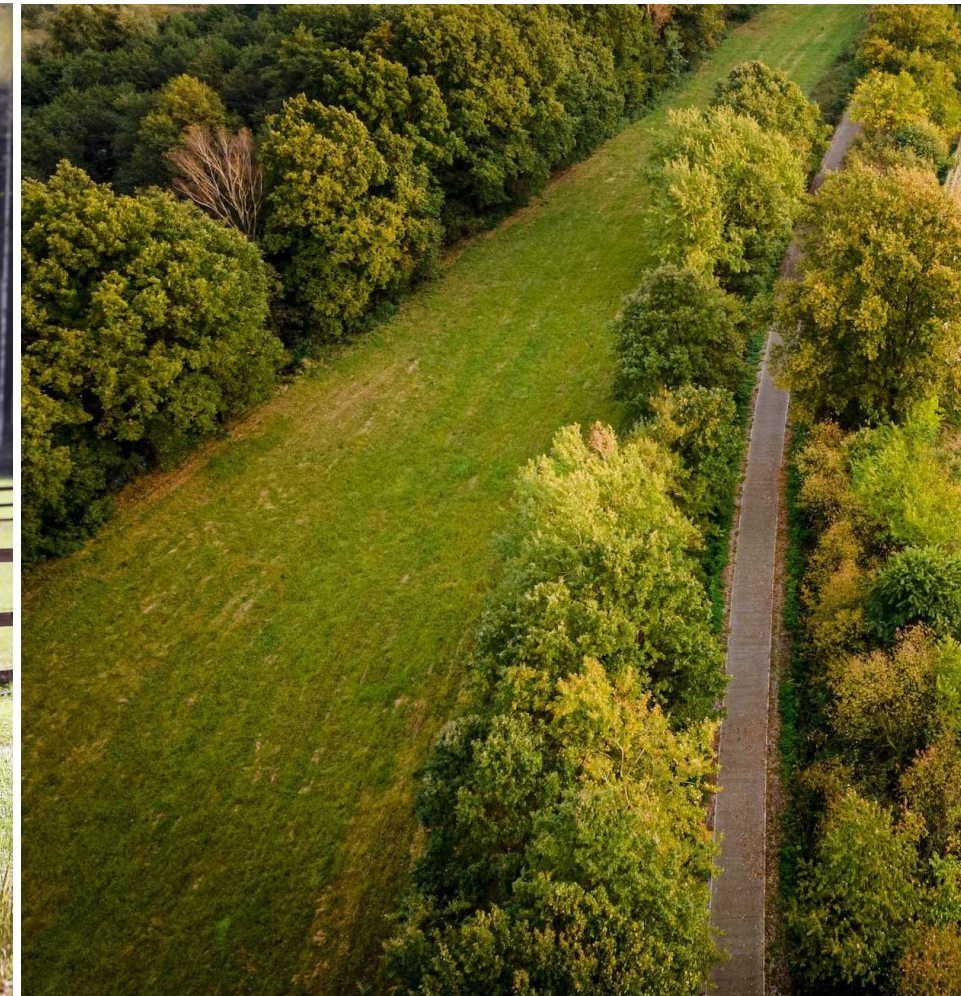
Greenways provide green infrastructure for sustainable transport, travel, and mobility for all.





# How Greenways contribute the European Sustainable Tourism Strategy?

Greenways help address climate mitigation and environmental protection.





# How Greenways contribute the European Sustainable Tourism Strategy?

Greenways support green transition in tourism sector and support local entrepreneurship based on the heritage.





# How Greenways contribute the European Sustainable Tourism Strategy?

Greenways strengthen local communities and promote the inclusion of women, youth, and disadvantaged groups.

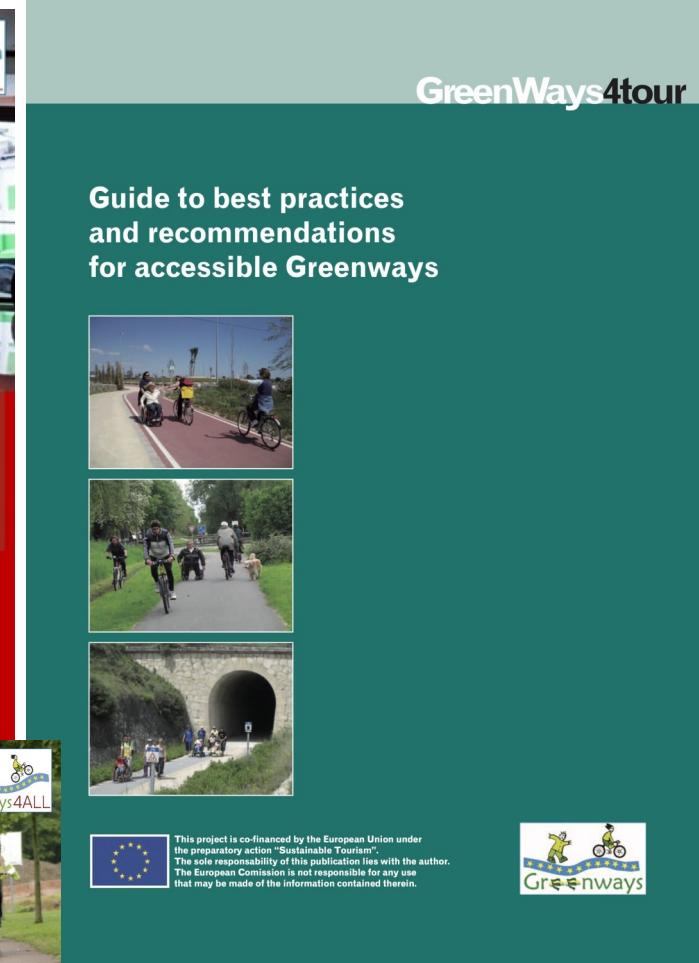




# Accessible Greenways – Standards and methodology

Greenways are among the most inclusive forms of sustainable transport and outdoor recreation. Developed primarily along disused railway corridors, canal towpaths, and river valleys, they typically feature gentle gradients, continuous routes, and separation from motorized traffic. These characteristics make greenways particularly suitable for a wide range of users, including cyclists, pedestrians, families with young children, older adults, and people with disabilities.

**Accessibility should therefore be considered a fundamental quality of greenway development rather than an optional enhancement.**





# GREAT WESTERN GREENWAY IRELAND, COUNTY MAYO

Ireland's first greenway. 48.5 km-long walking and cycling trail along the coast, described as the heartbeat of the Wild Atlantic Way. It meanders around the eastern and northern shores of Clew Bay in County Mayo.

**European Greenways Award Winner  
(Green Transition category) 2025**







# GREAT WESTERN GREENWAY

## ACCESSIBILITY FEATURES

- **Gentle railway gradients:** The trail follows an old railway line, completely avoiding sudden steep inclines or strenuous climbs.
- **Firm, smooth terrain:** The surface is made of highly compacted gravel and smooth asphalt, providing a stable path for wheelchairs, handcycles, and strollers.
- **100% traffic-free:** The entire route is completely off-road, creating a safe and predictable environment for individuals with sensory or physical disabilities.
- **Flexible entry points:** Multiple accessible trailheads in Westport, Newport, Mulranny, and Achill allow users to easily join or leave the path for shorter, manageable trips.
- **Step-Free Connectivity:** The majority of the route features completely step-free access.
- **Massive Bogland Boardwalk:** On its extension toward Cashel on Achill Island, the trail features Ireland's widest boardwalk. Built to cross fragile, untouched peatlands, it provides an ultra-wide, flat, secure deck that opens up wild coastal landscapes to users of all abilities.
- **Accessible accommodation** options
- **On-Demand Adaptive Trikes:** Families can use the STEED app to instantly unlock specially adapted tricycles via a smartphone QR code scan.





# SIERRA GREENWAY

## SPAIN, ANDALUSIA

The [Vía Verde de la Sierra](#) in Andalusia, Spain, spans 36.5 kilometers between Puerto Serrano and Olvera. Built over a historic, unused railway line, it is widely considered one of Europe's premier barrier-free routes.

**European Greenways Award Winner  
(Green Transition Category) 2023**





# SIERRA GREENWAY – ACCESSIBILITY

## FEATURES

- **Segmented Adapted Stretches:** The greenway features six specific stretches optimized for people with reduced mobility or intellectual disabilities.
- **Gentle Railway Slopes:** Because no trains ever ran on the prepared railway tracks, the terrain keeps a highly restricted, flat, or slight, virtually non-existent gradient.
- **Integrated Tunnel Lighting:** The trail passes through 30 tunnels. The longest ones are fully equipped with automated, integrated lighting systems.
- **Accessible Infrastructure & Parking:** All six adapted stretches feature designated, signposted parking spaces for vehicles with disability placards.
- **Specialized Bike Rentals:** Four of the trail's primary hubs offer adapted bike rental services, providing handcycles and specialized tricycles.
- **Accessible Experiences:** The Zaframagón Nature Reserve visitor center – located right along the path – is fully accessible. It features a modern, real-time video surveillance system so all travelers can closely observe the resident griffon vulture colony.





# RAVeL NETWORK

## WALLONIA, BELGIUM

This extensive network comprises over 1,550 km of flat, smooth paths built on former railway lines and towpaths. It is completely reserved for non-motorized users, offering step-free, highly safe travel for people using wheelchairs, families, and cyclists.

**European Greenways Award Winner  
(1<sup>st</sup> Prize Excellence category) 2021  
First rail-to-trail network in Europe**





# RAVeL NETWORK – ACCESSIBILITY

## FEATURES

- **Ultra-Low Gradients:** Because the majority of the network utilizes historic railway structures and riverbanks, the terrain is incredibly gentle. The routes maintain a maximum slope gradient of just 2%.
- **Smooth, High-Quality Pavement:** Infrastructure updates focus heavily on laying down solid, predictable paths. The network prioritizes continuous asphalt or concrete surfaces wherever possible.
- **Seamless Architectural Design:** To accommodate wheels of all types, the Walloon Region has systematically removed physical barriers.
- **Absolute Separation from Motor Vehicles:** Being 100% car-free and off-road, it creates a highly predictable environment free from the noise, safety hazards, and disruptions of standard traffic, which benefits travelers with physical, visual, or sensory impairments.
- **Strategic Modular Itineraries:** The network is split cleanly into broad regional arteries and smaller local routes. Stages are mapped out to link town hubs that offer special services – such as adapted parking, accessible train stations, and specialized bike rental hubs – allowing users to plan single-day excursions tailored exactly to their physical endurance levels.





# Accessible Greenways – European References

- [European Accessibility Act](#)
- [Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities up to 2021-2030.](#)
- **European Sustainable Tourism Strategy** (to be launched in 2026) – **includes inclusive tourism**

Accessibility improvements and the introduction of accessibility standards along the greenways contribute to making natural and cultural heritage more accessible to people with disabilities, ensuring that these benefits are inclusive and reach all segments of society.





## Photos - archives of EGWA Members and Partners:

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