



CIPRA

Via Alpina Youth – responsible bivouacking

Call to action & points to think
about



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Responsible Bivouacking

Bivouacking has long been part of alpine mountain culture as a low-impact and temporary form of overnight stay. In recent years, it has gained renewed relevance, particularly among young people seeking affordable, nature-based, and self-determined access to the Alps.

This development presents both opportunities and risks:

- bivouacking can foster environmental awareness and social inclusion,
- yet unmanaged practices may increase pressure on sensitive Alpine ecosystems.

This paper builds on the Yes We Camp whitepaper and its “call to action & points to think about” and places the concept of responsible bivouacking in direct relation to the Alpine Convention, with a particular focus on the nature protection protocol. It demonstrates that responsible bivouacking can operationalize the objectives of the Alpine Convention by translating international legal principles into concrete, user-oriented practices in the alpine space.

The Alpine Convention and its nature protection protocol establish a comprehensive framework for the long-term protection and sustainable development of the Alpine region.

“The objective of this Protocol is to lay down International laws, implementing the Alpine Convention and also taking the interests of the local population into account, in order to protect, care for and, to the extent necessary, restore nature and landscape, in such a way as to ensure the lasting and widespread functional efficiency of the ecosystems, the landscape conservation elements and wild animal and plant species together with their habitat, the regenerative ability and lasting productivity of natural resources, and also the diversity, specificity and beauty of the natural and rural landscape; and also, in order to encourage cooperation between the Contracting Parties for these purposes.”

Nature protection protocol, objective

This objective emphasizes ecosystem integrity, biodiversity conservation, landscape quality, and sustainability, while explicitly integrating social considerations. **Responsible bivouacking aligns with this integrated approach by promoting low-impact use, respect for ecological limits, and shared responsibility among Alpine users.**



« Communication & education to strengthen biodiversity »

We wish for a better respect of nature and biodiversity. And we have the will to have more community-based criticism of wrong behaviour, meaning that the hikers' community would correct each other if they see an inappropriate behaviour in nature.

A central point of convergence between responsible bivouacking and the Alpine Convention lies in education and communication. Young people involved in the Yes We Camp process stress the importance of awareness-raising, guidance, and environmental education as prerequisites for responsible behavior in the mountains.

We ask for:

- **awareness campaigns** on the ecological impacts of bivouacking and how to behave in the mountains
- **more environmental education**, especially in primary schools, to **improve the understanding of the importance of respecting nature and biodiversity** of citizens from a very young age. Students will not be the only ones to benefit from this, but also their parents and families will be informed and involved.
- **more funds should be available to organizations willing to raise awareness** on nature conservation and encourage more people to visit the mountains in a respectful way

These measures directly support the preventive conservation approach embedded in the Alpine Convention.

By fostering understanding and voluntary compliance, responsible bivouacking contributes to maintaining the “functioning of ecosystems” and the “regenerative capacity of natural resources” as required by the nature protection protocol.



« A COMMON SET OF BIVOUACKING REGULATIONS »

We wish for an unified regulation for bivouacking all over the Alps.

It is hard sometimes to obtain the right information about whether or not it is possible to bivouac, especially if it is in a foreign country and foreign language. Despite being a difficult goal to reach, it would still be desirable.

The Alpine Convention places strong emphasis on cross-border cooperation and coordinated action.

“The Contracting Parties undertake to cooperate particularly for: map surveying, drawing the boundaries and then managing and controlling protected areas and other natural and rural elements of the landscape worthy of protection, interconnecting a network of biotopes, defining landscape models, programmes and/or plans, preventing and rebalancing damage to nature and the landscape, systematically monitoring nature and landscape, scientific research, and any other measure for protecting wild animal and plant species, their diversity and their habitat, and for defining the relevant comparable criteria to the extent that this is necessary and functional.” Art. 3(1) Nature Protection Protocol / International cooperation

We ask for:

- **harmonisation of bivouacking regulations within Alpine countries - and ideally over the whole Alpine area.** The rules can, in fact, vary between regions of the same country. Having common rules would already improve consistency and offer much more clarity.
- **more specific regulations**, not only in countries, but to certain areas as well, such as fragile natural reserves or protected areas, that deserve even more attention and care. These are places where bivouacking should be forbidden in order to protect biodiversity.
- **more clarity and more resources on bivouacking rules and authorized locations to spend the night in the mountains.** One of their desires for the future would be to have an interactive map showcasing regulations in all Alpine regions.

Regulatory coherence increases legal clarity and user compliance, reducing unintentional violations and strengthening acceptance of conservation measures.

« REGULATED ACCESSIBILITY TO MOUNTAIN ACTIVITIES »

We are eager to have better access to the mountains, in terms of transport and financial means.

The excessive motorised traffic is a threat to nature in general, especially when considering the delicate and precious biodiversity of mountain landscapes.

Public transport would help in regulating and containing such traffic, still allowing some form of tourist experience.

“The Contracting Parties undertake to preserve, manage and, where necessary, to extend the existing protected areas, in keeping with their protective function, and also to define, where possible, new protected areas. They shall take all appropriate measures to avoid impairing or destroying these areas.” Art. 11(1) Nature Protection Protocol

By steering bivouacking away from highly sensitive zones and towards more resilient areas, responsible practices reinforce the protection objectives set out in the Protocol.

We ask for:

- **regulations on restricted areas** would also have to comply for traffic. Regional governments and municipalities should be in charge of closing certain roads, in order to preserve the natural state, and encourage soft mobility: walking and cycling, as the two main practices.
- **making bivouacking accessible for everybody**, f.ex. by a sort of gear-sharing for the community, where mountain equipment is accessible to young people and can be rented for a limited amount of time. High prices of bivouacking equipment is one of the main obstacles for many to practice mountain activities.

The Alpine Convention does not pursue protection through exclusion. Instead, it aims to balance conservation with sustainable and socially equitable use of the alpine space. Young participants emphasise that access to bivouacking should not be limited to those with financial means or private transport. When combined with education and clear regulation, increased accessibility supports sustainable use rather than environmental degradation. It aligns social inclusion with environmental responsibility, reflecting the holistic spirit of the Alpine Convention.



« RESPONSIBLE USAGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA »

It is important to protect hidden places.

There is a silent rule in the hiking community that perhaps should be spread further : isolated places need to be kept so for that exact reason that makes them so beautiful and idyllic.

We ask for:

- **stopping sharing hidden places on social media.** It can be damaging because it calls too much attention and risks destroying the beauty of such isolation. This can result in over tourism, loss of biodiversity and an overall damage to the natural landscape.
- **using social media and GPS tracking responsibly,** remembering that everybody can all make a difference with small actions.

Conclusion

Through education, regulatory clarity, respect for protected areas, and socially equitable access, **responsible bivouacking can contribute directly to the convention's objectives of ecosystem protection, international cooperation, and sustainable use of the Alpine landscape.**

Rather than viewing bivouacking solely as a management problem, **responsible bivouacking recognises it as an opportunity to engage the next generation in living the values of the Alpine Convention through everyday practice. In doing so, it strengthens both environmental protection and societal support for Alpine conservation policies.**



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« Yes, we Camp »

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