

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIPS

In 1932, the IAAF established a special committee to evaluate the feasibility of a European Athletics Championships. The following year, the Federation Council appointed a permanent European Committee, which met for the first time in Budapest on January 7, 1934. The first European Championships began in September of that same year in Turin. The 50 km race walk made its debut there, won by Latvian Jānis Daliņš in a race involving eight athletes representing six nations.

Until 2010, the event was held every four years, with the sole exceptions of the 1969 and 1971 editions. Starting that year, European Athletics introduced a biennial schedule; However, the race walk has remained held every four years, with the exception of the recent edition in Rome 2024. The women's race walk was introduced in Stuttgart 1986 with the 10 km event, won by Spain's Mari Cruz Díaz, who still holds the record for the youngest gold medalist in the history of the European Championships, at the age of 16 years and 306 days. In that same race, Norway's Kjersti Tysse Plätzer finished eleventh at just 14 years and 220 days. In the men's race walk, the record for the youngest ever to win a European title belongs to East German Roland Wieser, winner in Prague 1978 at 22 years and 116 days. The oldest champions to win gold are the Ukrainian (then Soviet) Vladimir Golubnichiy, who won the 20 km in Rome 1974 at 38 years and 93 days, and the Greek Antigoni Ntrismpioti, who achieved a historic double in the 20 km and 35 km in Munich 2022 at the age of 38 years and 152 days.

In the overall medal table for the men's race walk at the European Championships, Frenchman Yohann Diniz holds the record for titles won in the 50 km, thanks to three historic consecutive gold medals obtained between 2006 and 2014. Other prestigious athletes with three medals to their name include Italian Abdon Pamich, twice gold (1962 and 1966) and once silver (1958) in the 50 km; East German Christoph Höhne, winner of the same haul (gold in 1969 and 1974, silver in 1971) in the same distance; and Spaniard Francisco Javier "Paquillo" Fernández, winner of two golds (2002, 2006) and one bronze (1998) in the 20 km. Completing the list of multiple medalists with three podium finishes are Soviets Vladimir Golubničij (gold in 1974, silver in 1966, and bronze in 1962 in the 20 km) and Veniamin Soldatenko (gold in 1971, silver in 1978,

and bronze in 1969 in the 50 km). Also with three medals, but without ever having graced the top step of the podium, is East German Peter Selzer, who in the 50 km collected a silver (1969) and two bronzes (1971, 1974).

The women's continental medal table is led by Italian Anna Rita Sidoti, with three podium finishes in the 10 km: two golds (1990, 1998) and a silver (1994). Russian Elena Nikolaeva, Greek Antigoni Ntrismpioti (winner of two gold medals in 2022), and Italians Erika Alfridi and Antonella Palmisano, the latter of whom became European champion in the 20km at the home edition of Rome 2024, boast two medals each. They are joined by Spain's María Pérez, who boasts two continental titles: gold in the 20km in Berlin 2018 and gold in the newly created half-marathon walk in Birmingham 2026. Finally, with two medals to her name, both silver, is Poland's Katarzyna Zdziebło, who finished second in both the 20km in Munich 2022 and the marathon walk in Birmingham 2026.

In the men's race walking medal table at the European Championships, Spain leads the way with 9 gold, 6 silver, and 6 bronze medals. The Iberian nation is followed by the Soviet Union (USSR), which boasts the most overall podium finishes with 6 gold, 9 silver, and 8 bronze medals, and East Germany (DDR), with 5 gold, 5 silver, and 4 bronze medals. Italy shares third place in terms of number of titles, with 5 gold, 3 silver, and 5 bronze medals in the men's race walking.
In the women's race walking, Italy leads the nation rankings with 4 gold, 5 silver, and 3 bronze medals, followed by Russia, in second place with 3 gold, 3 silver, and 1 bronze. Spain rounds out the top spot, in third place with 3 gold, 2 silver, and 1 bronze. Considering both sectors, 25 nations managed to win a medal.

The walkers with the most appearances in the history of the European Championships are Spain's Jesús Ángel García Bragado (with seven appearances from 1994 to 2018) and Portugal's João Vieira, who has equaled his seven appearances between 1998 and 2026, having missed only the 2022 and 2024 editions.
Italy's Abdon Pamich, who competed regularly from 1954 to 1971, has six appearances. The circle of faithful walkers closes with a group with five appearances total, consisting of Spain's Miguel Ángel López, Sweden's Perseus Karlström, Germany's Christopher Linke, Poland's Grzegorz Sudoł, and Greece's Alexandros Papamichail.

In the women's category, the all-time record for longest participation belongs to Portugal's Inês Henriques, who racked up six actual participations over a twenty-year period, from 2002 to 2022. Behind the Portuguese record holder, a prestigious trio of walkers, composed of Norway's Kjersti Tysse Plätzer, Spain's María Vasco, and Italy's Antonella Palmisano, stand at five overall appearances.

The best times set in the history of the European Championships in the men's category are set by Spaniard Francisco Javier Fernández in the 20 km, with a time of 1:18:37, set in Monaco 2002. Over the classic 50 km distance, the record belongs to Frenchman

Yohann Diniz, who clocked an exceptional 3:32:33 in Zurich 2014. In the 35 km, introduced in the 2022 edition of Monaco, the reference time is held by Spaniard Miguel Ángel López with 2:26:49. The new road events of the half marathon and the marathon walk, introduced to the official programme in Birmingham 2026, have the inaugural records set by Spaniard Paul McGrath (1:23:23) and Italian Massimo Stano, who won the title in 2:56:49, respectively.
In the women's race, the historic record in the 10 km – a distance no longer included in the technical programme – belongs to Finland's Sari Essayah, winner in Helsinki 1994 in 42:37. The 20 km record belongs to Spain's María Pérez, gold medalist in Berlin 2018, in 1:26:36, while in the 35 km, Greece's Antigoni Ntrismpioti holds the record with a time of 2:47:00 set in Munich 2022. In the only edition held over the 50 km distance (Berlin 2018), Portugal's Inês Henriques set the European mark at 4:09:21. Finally, the official debuts in Birmingham 2026 have set new championship records for Spain's María Pérez in the half marathon (1:30:06) and Italy's Sofia Fiorini in the marathon walk (3:15:11).

Cases of doping have also been reported in the European Championships' race walking events, leading to the rewriting of finishers' rankings, particularly following anomalies in the biological passport. The first person to be disqualified in the history of the event was Soviet Vladimir Shaloshik, who initially finished third. A massive review followed at Barcelona 2010, resulting in sanctions against three Russian athletes and one Ukrainian. The disqualifications included Russian Stanislav Yemelyanov (original winner of the 20 km race) and Ukrainian Ruslan Dmytrenko (twelfth), as well as Russians Sergei Kirdyapkin, who did not finish the 50 km race, and Olga Kanishkina, who was stripped of her gold medal in the women's race.
Three exclusions also characterized the 2014 Zurich edition: the men's 20 km finish line was stripped of Russian Alexander Ivanov, who finished second, and Ukrainian Nazar Kovalenko, who finished fourteenth, while Russian Mikhail Ryzhov, who originally finished fourth, was removed from the 50 km finish line. The most recent revisions date back to Berlin 2018, when Czech athlete Anežka Drahotová, who finished second in the 20 km, and Ukrainian athletes Alina Tsviliy and Vasylyna Vitovshchyk, who finished second and fifth in the 50 km, respectively, were penalized for doping violations (second). The most recent case concerns Hungarian Viktória Madarász, who was disqualified from the 20 km at Rome 2024, where she finished twenty-sixth.

In terms of technical rigor, the severity of the judges reached its historic peak in three specific editions of the European Championships. In the men's 20 km, the record for disqualifications belongs to Munich 2002, where six athletes out of 29 starters were disqualified, equal to 20.7% of the competitors. Over the longer 50 km distance, the most severely affected edition was Helsinki 1994, with five disqualifications out of 34 starters (14.7%). The 1994 Finnish event also holds the lowest record in the women's

sector (then held over 10 km): there, the judges disqualified five athletes out of a field of 33 participants, accounting for 15.2% of the total.

Another crucial indicator of physical exertion and environmental conditions is the dropout rate. The highest number of withdrawals in the men's 20 km race was recorded in Rome 2024, with six athletes forced to retire. The all-time record for withdrawals, however, belongs to the 50 km marathon in Athens 1982: in an edition affected by the stifling heat, 11 walkers out of 24 starters withdrew, representing 45.8% of the start list. Among the women (over the 20 km distance), the peak was in Barcelona 2010, with five withdrawals out of 22 athletes.

Before the introduction of the women's section, the highest turnout was recorded in Prague 1978, with 65 athletes representing 16 nations. In modern times, the most attended edition was Berlin 2018, which, thanks in part to the historic debut of the women's 50 km race, saw 113 athletes (both men and women) line up at the start, representing 21 national federations. The figures remained at similar levels at the most recent edition, Birmingham 2026, where the total number of athletes competing in the four road races was 109, representing 21 nations.

