

Announcement

## Western Balkan Regional Gathering of Pastoralists

25-26 April 2026 | Shkodër, Albania

Given the global momentum under IYRP 2026, the shared challenges and rich heritage of pastoralism in the Western Balkans, a **Regional Gathering of Pastoralists in Shkodër on 25-26 April 2026** offers a strategic opportunity to strengthen pastoralist resilience, voice, and sustainability. It can catalyze regional cooperation, inform policy, mobilize funding, and help ensure that pastoralists are recognized as key partners in sustainable land-use, grazing resources management, ecosystem conservation, climate adaptation, and cultural heritage protection. The following sections are worth reading to understand and comprehend the full contexts.

### 1. Pastoralism in Western Balkans

The pasturelands in Western Balkan region, especially in Albania, Montenegro, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Bosnia & Herzegovina and Serbia, hold ecological, cultural, and economic significance, yet they are increasingly under pressure from environmental degradation, socio-economic change, and governance challenges. These lands not only supply food, fiber, and ecosystem services but are deeply embedded in local culture and livelihood strategies. The Western Balkans have significant pastoralist populations or traditions (transhumance, seasonal grazing, common pasture lands), but these communities face multiple challenges.

### 2. Why Regional Gathering in the Western Balkans?

#### a. Shared Challenges across the Region

- *Land tenure & access to pasture:* Many pastoralists depend on communal or traditional grazing lands. Laws or policies may not adequately recognize customary or transboundary rights, leading to uncertainty and conflict over land, pasture, water.
- *Transhumance and Mobility:* Mobility (seasonal migration, transhumance) is often essential for pastoralist adaptation to variable climates. Climate change is increasing the rate of extreme weather (drought, heat, scarce grazing), making mobility and water access even more critical.
- *Policy invisibility / marginalization:* Pastoralists are often under-represented in decision-making, in national or regional policy, and their voices are not fully heard in land-use planning, environmental regulation, or rural development programs.
- *Hostile market:* Pastoralist value-chains (for livestock, milk, wool, artisanal products) often suffer from weak infrastructure, poor value-chain integration, or lack of access to markets. Modern market imposes alien standards on the shepherds to produce matching quality products, which become hard to comply with.
- *Cultural heritage & knowledge loss:* Transhumance, seasonal grazing patterns, traditional knowledge of pasture management, biodiversity protection, and customary governance systems are part of the cultural fabric. Globalization, urban migration, tourism, demographic changes and state disenfranchisement threaten them.

#### b. Opportunities & Strategic Advantages of a Regional Gathering

- *Peer learning and networking:* A gathering allows pastoralists from different Western Balkan countries to share experiences, strategies, innovations. For example, how to negotiate pasture rights, manage grazing sustainably, cope with climate stress, add value to their products.
- *Strengthening pastoralist organizations & coalitions:* Bringing together pastoralist groups, NGOs, researchers, academics, and authorities regionally can foster stronger, more unified advocacy and collaboration. It helps build a regional support group in line with IYRP's RISGs Europe.
- *Informing policy & raising visibility:* A regional gathering can generate region-specific policy recommendations, bring visibility to pastoral livelihoods at national and regional levels, contribute to aligning national legislation with international frameworks (e.g. IYRP, FAO, UNCCD) that support sustainable rangelands and pastoralism.
- *Influencing government attitudes:* The voices raised by shepherds from different corners of all the countries will fuel to strengthen the advocacy and lobbying with the government ministries and institutions. Intended changes in the attitudes of government apparatus will dilute numerous issues confronted by the shepherds.
- *Mobilizing funding and support:* With an event in April 2026 aligned with IYRP 2026, attention from donors, governments, and international agencies is heightened. A regional gathering can help attract resources — technical, financial and manpower — for pastoralist training, infrastructure (water, veterinary services, markets), restoration of degraded pastures, and so on.

### **3. Expected Outcomes**

A well-organized Regional Gathering should aim for outcomes such as:

- A regional *DECLARATION* or set of policy recommendations for Western Balkan pastoralism (on land tenure, mobility, market access, climate resilience, preservation of cultural assets, and protection of traditional knowledge of shepherds).
- Strengthening capacity of pastoralist groups to document and advocate for their rights, protect traditional ecological knowledge, and engage with pastures' conservation.
- Partnerships formed between pastoralist communities, academia, government bodies, NGOs, trade networks, and potential donors.
- Proposals or project outlines for investment in pastoral infrastructure (water resources, vet services, value addition, internet, affordable transport, cooperatives), climate adaptation (fodder innovations, grazing planning), cross-border cooperation where applicable.
- Increased awareness among policymakers, media, and public about the importance and challenges of pastoralism in the Western Balkans.
- Ensuring pastoralist communities are included in national / regional policy agendas contributes directly to multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): no poverty, zero hunger, gender equality, climate action, life on land, etc.
- Cultural identity, heritage, and community cohesion — especially important in mountainous, less-connected areas — benefit from gatherings that validate pastoralist life and inter-community relations.

### **4. Expected Number of Participants**

About 6000 people are expected to take part, belonging to shepherd communities, marginalized groups, NGOs, academia, student groups, government and other stakeholders.

## 5. Pre-Gathering, During Gathering and Post-Gathering Events

- a) Pre-Gathering:
  - i. Constitution of Organizing Committee and Teams, and Preparatory Meetings
  - ii. Roundtable and Side Events in ICOALS Conference
  - iii. Perspective Building Workshops
  - iv. Formation of Local/National Groups
  - v. Signature Campaign
  - vi. Bilateral Dialogue – Ministry / Shepherds’ Delegation
  - vii. Public Hearings
- b) During Gathering:
  - i. Speeches / Voices
  - ii. Human Chain
  - iii. Cultural Activities
  - iv. Food Sharing
  - v. Western Balkan Declaration
  - vi. Meeting Ministers, Supreme Court, and High Institutions and submitting the Declaration
  - vii. Posting Declaration across the world
- c) Post-Gathering:
  - i. Preparation for Global Gathering
  - ii. Participation in Global Gathering
  - iii. Follow up Activities

## 6. Contacts of Key Members of Organizing Committee

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