



CIPRA Lauren Mosdale

1. WHAT IS THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF RANGELANDS AND PASTORALISTS?

The International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP 2026) is a United Nations–designated international year aimed at raising global awareness of the critical importance of rangelands and pastoralist communities for food security, biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, and sustainable livelihoods, and will be managed by FAO during the whole 2026.

The IYRP 2026 working group, has evolved into the [Global Alliance for Rangelands and Pastoralists \(GA4RP\)](#), which will continue beyond 2026. The Global Alliance aims to recognise and promote the indispensable benefits that rangelands provide: supporting the livelihoods and socio-ecological resilience of hundreds of millions of people, conserving biocultural diversity, restoring degraded lands, fostering sustainable food systems, and advancing effective climate action.

Although rangelands cover more than half of the Earth’s land surface and support the livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people, they remain among the most undervalued and misunderstood ecosystems. Pastoralists—who manage these landscapes through mobile and extensive grazing—play a key role in maintaining soil health, biodiversity, water cycles, and carbon storage, particularly in fragile environments such as drylands and mountain regions.

The GA4RP seeks to:

- **Recognise and value pastoralists** as stewards of land and providers of public goods
- **Promote sustainable rangeland management** and climate adaptation
- **Strengthen pastoral livelihoods and food systems**
- **Improve policies, governance, and investment** affecting rangelands
- **Give visibility to pastoral knowledge, cultures, and mobility**

By bringing together pastoralist communities, researchers, civil society, governments and international organisations, the GA4RP provides a unique global platform to translate knowledge into policy action and ensure that pastoralism is recognised not as a marginal or outdated practice, but as a future-oriented solution to some of the world’s most pressing environmental and social challenges.

2. WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES FACING EUROPEAN PASTORALISM TODAY? AND MORE SPECIFICALLY IN THE ALPS?

Pastoralism sustains **biodiversity-rich grasslands**, supports **climate adaptation**, prevents **wildfires and natural hazards**, and maintains **cultural landscapes**, particularly in mountain regions such as the Alps. Yet current policy frameworks often fail to reflect its mobility, multifunctionality, and public benefits

European pastoralism—and Alpine pastoralism in particular—is under pressure from **economic, social, environmental, and political forces**. Yet, it remains essential for Biodiversity conservation, Climate adaptation, risk prevention cultural heritage and rural livelihoods

The key challenge today is not whether pastoralism has a future, but **whether policies, markets, and society will allow it to continue and evolve**.



3. OUT OF THE 12 THEMES THE IYRP WILL BE ADDRESSING, WHICH DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE THE MOST IMPORTANT IN EUROPE? AND MORE SPECIFICALLY IN THE ALPS?

While all 12 IYRP themes are relevant, **four are particularly critical in the European—and especially Alpine—context**, due to their urgency, cross-cutting nature, and policy relevance.

1. Land Access, Mobility, and Governance

European pastoralism depends on seasonal mobility, communal land, and access to high-altitude pastures. Land fragmentation, loss of commons, and restrictive land-use planning increasingly threaten transhumance. In the Alps, lifestyle changes and tourism development (e.g. ski resorts) have led to the abandonment of traditional common rangeland and forest management. The resulting decline in grazing is accelerating forest encroachment, increasing natural hazards, and reducing biodiversity.

2. Economic Viability and Fair Value Chains

Despite its high public value, pastoralism remains economically fragile. Market prices rarely reflect ecosystem services or cultural heritage, while Alpine pastoralists face higher costs due to terrain, climate, and infrastructure constraints.

3. Human–Wildlife Coexistence

In countries where they had disappeared for more than one century, the return of large carnivores represents one of the most acute challenges for European pastoralism. In the Alps, dense human activity overlaps with wildlife habitats and grazing areas, with predation affecting not only incomes but also mental health and social cohesion.

4. Generational Renewal and Social Recognition

European pastoralism is rapidly aging, with insufficient generational replacement. Pastoral work is socially undervalued, often isolated and physically demanding. Without renewal in the next decade, centuries of traditional knowledge, sustainable practices, and productive grazing landscapes risk disappearing.

Cross-cutting theme: Climate Change Adaptation

Pastoralism is both highly affected by climate change and part of the solution. In the Alps, warming is occurring faster than the European average. Well-managed grazing strengthens ecosystem resilience, reduces climate risks, and helps prevent wildfires. Video : [Role of ruminants for Climate Change Mitigation](#)

Conclusion

In Europe—and particularly in the Alps—the most important IYRP themes are those that enable pastoralism to continue to exist: **secure land and mobility, economic viability, fair coexistence with wildlife, and generational renewal**. Without progress on these priorities, the remaining IYRP themes risk remaining theoretical. The Alps are both a high-risk region and a key testing ground for innovative pastoral policies that could inspire the rest of Europe.



4. FOR THE 2027 SUMMER GRAZING SEASON, WHICH WILL FOLLOW THIS YEAR OF PASTORALISM, WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE HAPPEN FOR LIVESTOCK FARMERS AND SHEPHERDS?

From a social perspective, I would like to see greater public awareness of the essential environmental role played by pastoralists, leading to increased social recognition and respect. I would also like to see stronger valorisation of the high quality and added value of mountain and pastoral meat and dairy products.

From a legal and economic perspective, I would like to see fair CAP payments specifically adapted to extensive grazing systems; stronger support for local processing and short supply chains; legal protection and restoration of traditional transhumance routes; formal recognition of communal and public grazing land; and the reintegration of grazing into the management of protected areas.

From a socio-environmental perspective, I would like to see adequate and stable funding for wildlife prevention measures, fair and efficient compensation mechanisms, and the meaningful inclusion of pastoralists and other local actors in wildlife governance and decision-making processes.

Regarding generational renewal, I would like to see pastoralism recognised as skilled, future-oriented work, alongside significant improvements in access to land and housing for young people, and strengthened support for training, apprenticeships, and pastoral schools.

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