LIFE ShepForBio

3rd International Conference

Shepherds of Sustainability: Ecosystem Services & Pastoral Practices

23-24 September 2026

Firenze, Italy

Report

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1. Introduction

The third international conference of the LIFE ShepForBio project took place on 23-24 September 2026 at Palazzo Bastogi, Florence, Tuscany, Italy. Jointly organised by D.R.E.Am. Italia (Italy) Euromontana (France), Regione Toscana (Italy) and Rete Appia (Italy), it brought together approximately 100 participants from across Europe to exchange knowledge and perspectives on the future of pastoralism and its contribution to biodiversity conservation and sustainable rural development.

Following two appointments in Florac, France and Lugo, Spain, the Florence conference provided a new opportunity to bring together shepherds and pastoral practitioners, researchers, public authorities, policymakers, students and representatives of European Pastoral networks and Shepherds Schools. The 2026 edition was particularly significant as it took place within the framework of the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists, highlighting the global importance of pastoral systems and their role in maintaining healthy ecosystems and contributing to biodiversity conservation and the resilience of rural communities.

The first day explored the links between pastoralism and biodiversity and climate change, as well as its contribution to climate resilience, sustainable land management and protected natural areas. Discussions also addressed ecosystem services, generational renewal, innovation, training and cultural heritage, alongside current policy developments and challenges, including the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the Nature Restoration Regulation.

The second day focused on training and the future of European Pastoral Schools. Participants exchanged with students and representatives of Shepherd Schools from across Europe. An interactive workshop explored the current and potential role of Pastoral Schools, and how training could respond to pastoral life. A dedicated session was on the “Effective representation of the pastoral sector concerns and how shepherds could represent themselves in policymaking while balancing participation with the daily demands of their work.. Overall, the conference provided valuable input for the ongoing work of the LIFE ShepForBio project.

Participants

The event involved 100 participants representing NGOs, pastoral schools, research institutes, natural parks, chambers of agriculture, public institutions and farmers and shepherds. The latter were mainly from Spain, Italy, Denmark and Albania.



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2. Day 1

Welcome and introduction

Following the welcome of the project's technical coordinator, Tommaso Campedelli (D.R.E.Am. Italia, LIFE ShepForBio), the opening session featured presentations on the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP) 2026, the role of pastoralism in European policies, and the importance of supporting pastoral communities, with the contribution of Francesca Pasetti Bombardella, Co-Chair of the European Regional Support Group of the Global Alliance for Rangelands and Pastoralists (GA4RP), presented the main activities and achievements of the IYRP 2026, and Leonardo Marras, Councillor for Agricultural Policies of the Region of Tuscany, who expressed the Region of Tuscany's support for the LIFE ShepForBio project.



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Session 1: Pastoralism and Climate Change



The session explored the complex relationship between pastoral systems, greenhouse gas emissions, land use and climate resilience. It began with an opening keynote by **Pablo Manzano** (BC3 Basque Centre for Climate Change, Spain), highlighting the importance of considering the full ecological context of livestock production, including the role of grazing in ecosystems, and the distinction between natural and anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions. Overall, the presentation underlined that pastoralism should not be considered inherently positive or negative from a climate perspective. Its contribution depends on the type of livestock system, land-use context and management practices. Sustainable pastoralism, however, can contribute to balancing environmental, social and economic objectives, particularly where grazing helps maintain biodiversity-rich landscapes and prevents land abandonment. The full presentation is available here.

Projects and initiatives on pastoralism and climate change followed by discussion

The session then presented two EU projects illustrating practical approaches to strengthening the environmental and climate resilience of pastoral systems. **Antonello Franca** (CNR Sassari, RETE APPIA, Italy) presented the SUREPASTOR project, which explores how innovation can strengthen the environmental and socio-economic resilience of agropastoral systems in the Mediterranean. The project involves 10 pilot sites across Italy, Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt and builds on research into how the environmental performance of multifunctional pastoral farms can be assessed. The full presentation is available here.

André Mota ((Viseu Dão Lafões Intermunicipal Community & LIFE Landscape Fire, Portugal) presented the LIFE Landscape Fire project, completed in 2024 in the fire-prone Viseu Dão Lafões region. The project explored grazing and prescribed burning as cost-effective tools for fuel management and wildfire prevention, while supporting the conservation of pastures and their associated biodiversity. It also trained municipal staff in 14 municipalities on grazing planning and spatial management, and trained professionals in prescribed burning and fire analysis. The full presentation is available here.

Q&A and discussion

The presentations were followed by a lively discussion on the role of shepherds and pastoral management in responding to changing environmental and economic conditions. Several key considerations emerged from the discussion:

- Grazing, land use and emissions: the environmental impact of livestock should be considered in relation to both emissions and the role of grazing in shaping landscapes, managing vegetation and contributing to biodiversity conservation;
- Changing pastoral systems: the increasing sedentarisation of livestock, compared with traditional seasonal movements, can concentrate grazing pressure in more limited areas and affect vegetation dynamics, pasture condition and ecosystem functions;
- Role of shepherds: actively managing where, when and how intensely animals graze is essential to maintaining healthy pastures and avoiding both undergrazing and excessive grazing. Shepherds' knowledge of animals, vegetation and local environmental conditions remains central to this process;
- Innovation and affordability: tools such as virtual fencing can provide greater flexibility in managing livestock and grazing areas, but their adoption depends on their relevance, accessibility and affordability for farmers. Participants stressed that innovation should respond to farmers' actual needs and economic conditions;
- Innovation beyond technology: participants also highlighted that innovation does not necessarily need to be technological. New organisational models, cooperation and collective approaches can offer practical and cost-effective ways of adapting pastoral management;
- Managed and regenerative grazing: appropriately managed grazing can support pasture recovery, maintain open landscapes and limit shrub encroachment and vegetation accumulation, potentially contributing to wildfire prevention in fire-prone areas;
- Territorial context: the environmental and economic effects of grazing depend on local ecological, land-use and socio-economic conditions. Grazing practices and support measures therefore need to be adapted to the specific characteristics of each territory.

Finally, the discussion stressed the need to consider the long-term effects of agricultural policies, including the relationship between production costs, market prices and the economic sustainability of pastoral activities.

Session 2: Pastoralism and Biodiversity

Zsolt Molnár & **Marianna Biró** (HUN-REN Centre for Ecological Research, Hungary) explored the relationship between pastoralism and biodiversity, focusing on pastoralists' ecological knowledge, the effects of grazing on vegetation, and the role of pastoral communities in maintaining biodiversity-rich landscapes. Their contribution highlighted how livestock selectively graze different plant species, with

insights into vegetation dynamics that may not be captured through conventional research. Grazing's effects depend indeed on how, where and when grazing takes place, as well as on the characteristics of the habitat and species concerned. The full presentation is available here.

The pastoralists **Sara Esposito** and **Anna Sterling** highlighted the importance of strengthening pastoralists' representation, with insights from their participation in the Kathmandu global gathering of pastoralist women, where a Global Network was established. Their message focused on the importance of creating governance processes that recognise pastoralists not only as beneficiaries or stakeholders, but as active contributors to the policies and practices affecting pastoral landscapes.

Projects and initiatives on pastoralism and biodiversity

The session then presented two initiatives illustrating different approaches to restoring and maintaining biodiversity-rich grassland habitats through pastoral management. **Carina Greiff** (Länsstyrelsen Östergötland & LIFE RestoRED, Sweden) presented the LIFE RestoRED project. The project responds to the long-term decline of grazing animals in Sweden and the resulting under-management of habitats that historically depended on continued grazing. Among others, project outcomes stressed the crucial role of human management and cooperation with farmers and landowners. The full presentation is available here.

Ivan Budinski (BIOM Association & Mosaic of LIFE/Dinara back to LIFE, Croatia) presented BIOM's experience with the Karst grassland restoration in Croatia, drawing on the Dinara back to LIFE project (2020–2023) and its continuation through Mosaic of LIFE (2025–2030). Among the projects' key lessons, successful landscape restoration requires early stakeholder involvement, long-term management, a landscape-wide approach, the scaling up of proven methods and reliable field data. The full presentation is available here.



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Q&A and Discussion

The presentations were followed by a discussion on how biodiversity restoration can be combined with viable pastoral activities and long-term landscape management. Participants highlighted the importance of combining scientific evidence with the knowledge and experience of people working directly on the land. The discussion particularly emphasised:

- Combining scientific and pastoral knowledge: official data should be complemented by observations and practical knowledge from farmers, shepherds and other land managers;
- Distinguishing undergrazing from overgrazing: the effects of grazing depend on intensity, timing, livestock species, habitat characteristics and management objectives;
- Strengthening pastoral education and knowledge transmission: agricultural and pastoral training can play an important role in maintaining and transferring knowledge needed for biodiversity-friendly grazing;
- Ensuring long-term cooperation with pastoralists: restoration measures need to be designed together with the people who will ultimately manage the landscape;
- Adapting grazing to local conditions: grazing regimes should reflect local ecological characteristics and the specific objectives of habitat restoration;

- Supporting voluntary cooperation: the Croatian experience showed the value of early involvement and voluntary agreements with farmers. Mixed grazing can also offer advantages because different livestock species have different grazing patterns;

- Recognising different governance contexts: the Swedish experience differs in that County Administrative Boards have a specific responsibility for maintaining grazing in certain habitats.

Overall, the discussion reinforced that biodiversity restoration, and pastoral activities need to be addressed together. Successful restoration depends not only on ecological measures, but also on the availability of grazing animals, the involvement of farmers and pastoralists, appropriate funding and incentives, and the capacity to ensure long-term management.

Roundtable discussion. How can the post-2027 Common Agricultural Policy and the Nature Restoration Regulation support and promote extensive grazing practices?

Moderated by **Guillaume Corradino**, Director of Euromontana, the roundtable explored how the post-2027 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the implementation of the Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR) can contribute to viable extensive livestock systems and the restoration and long-term maintenance of Europe's grasslands. The outcomes of the XIV European Mountain Convention and the Sallanches Declaration worked as a starting point for the conversation.

Attention was given to the Declaration's messages for the EU, which highlight the different dimensions that need to be considered when developing policies for pastoral and extensive farming systems.. **A central message is that policies must put people and their work at the heart of efforts to ensure the environmental, social and economic sustainability of these systems.** Key priorities include fair compensation for ecosystem services, adapted agricultural policies, generational renewal and better policy coordination to preserve biodiversity and grasslands while ensuring the long-term economic viability of farming.

The roundtable discussion was organised around two complementary dimensions, discussed by two separate groups of experts:

1. Making agricultural and nature restoration policies work together through better coordination, evidence and governance;

2. Translating policy objectives into practical measures that support extensive grazing and the farmers and shepherds who maintain these landscapes.

Group 1 focused on aligning agricultural and nature restoration policies through better coordination, evidence and governance, gathering the following perspectives:

- **Enrico Mezzacapo** (DIRPOLIS, Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies) contributed an academic and policy perspective on the links between agricultural and environmental policies.

- **Federica Luoni** (LIPU – BirdLife Italy) represented the environmental perspective, focusing on habitats, agriculture and nature restoration.

- **Andrea Hagyo** (European Commission Joint Research Centre) provided insights from the JRC's analytical work on environmental farming practices and the evidence needed to inform policy implementation.

- **Gennaro Giliberti** (Tuscany Region, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development) brought the perspective of regional agricultural governance, with a focus on policy implementation at territorial level.

- **Bilena Hyseni** (Albanian National Forest Agency) contributed a perspective from Albania on pastoral governance and the management of extensive grazing systems.



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Group 2 focused on translating policy objectives into practical measures that support extensive grazing and the farmers and shepherds who maintain these landscapes, with the following viewpoints:

- **Jacopo Goracci** (Rete APPIA) represented small and medium-sized livestock farms, highlighting the practical challenges faced by extensive breeders.

- **Mattia Bertocchi** (ERSAF) contributed experience in regional land management and LIFE projects, particularly regarding the role of technical intermediaries and bottom-up approaches.

- **Luca Colombo** (FIRAB) brought expertise in organic farming, knowledge exchange and training.

- **Sándor Kecskeméti** (Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture) contributed a national policy perspective, particularly on the links between agricultural policy, climate change and nature restoration.

Group 1 – Making the CAP and the Nature Restoration Regulation work together: policy, evidence and governance

The discussion focused on strengthening alignment between the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR), ensuring agricultural funding contributes to restoration objectives, improving the use of scientific evidence, and balancing environmental ambition with flexibility and the needs of extensive livestock farming.

Enrico Mezzacapo (DIRPOLIS, Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies) noted that while the NRR sets restoration objectives, no general obligation ensures CAP funding contributes to them. Stronger policy alignment is needed to deliver environmental benefits without weakening ambition through CAP simplification.

Federica Luoni (LIPU – BirdLife Italy) emphasised the need for clear, shared targets and collaborative policy design to better align the CAP with restoration objectives. She highlighted the importance of national strategies that provide common direction while allowing regional flexibility, suggesting CAP funding to support farms in developing grazing management plans for extensive livestock systems.

Gennaro Giliberti (Tuscany Region, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development) underlined the multiple functions of pastoralism. Extensive grazing can provide environmental and territorial services, including landscape management, which should be recognised and adequately supported where they contribute to restoration objectives.

Bilena Hyseni (Albanian National Forest Agency) added a perspective from Albania, where many pastures are publicly managed by municipalities. Her intervention highlighted the importance of governance arrangements that recognise and maintain pastoral systems, rather than addressing administrative obstacles in isolation.

Andrea Hagyo (European Commission Joint Research Centre) pointed to the lack of EU-wide data on pastures and the contribution of extensive livestock farming to nature restoration and ecosystem services as an obstacle to designing well-targeted measures. However, defining and collecting such data remains a significant challenge

Group 2 – From policy to practice: enabling viable grazing and grassland management

The second group focused on the practical conditions required to make extensive grazing viable and ensure that environmental ambitions translate into workable measures for farmers and shepherds.

Jacopo Goracci (Rete APPIA) proposed an **"extensive livestock-proofing" approach**, whereby new policies would be assessed against the realities of extensive and pastoral farming before being introduced. He stressed that existing rules, particularly on animal welfare and biosecurity, can be difficult to implement in extensive grazing systems, creating disproportionate burdens that threaten their viability. Such regulations risk accelerating the disappearance of these farming models by pushing them towards intensive, standardised production systems. He therefore called for farmers and local stakeholders to be involved in policymaking from the outset, ensuring that practical knowledge and local realities guide regulatory design.

Mattia Bertocchi (ERSAF) also emphasised the importance of bottom-up approaches and co-creation. Grazing plans can bridge biodiversity objectives and pastoral practices, with technical intermediaries helping public authorities and farmers develop measures that are both environmentally effective and practically feasible.

Luca Colombo (FIRAB) highlighted the importance of combining formal education with practical learning through projects and exchanges between farmers. He also stressed the need for tools that connect farmers, institutions and citizens, helping to improve understanding of pastoralism and its contribution to the wider public interest.

Sándor Kecskeméti (Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture) highlighted climate change as a connecting issue between agricultural policy and nature restoration. Sándor also stressed that regulations need to account for local conditions and allow farmers to adapt their practices.

Across both groups, discussion highlighted several key messages and priorities for future EU action, reflecting the need to better align policies with the realities of pastoral and extensive farming. When each speaker was asked to summarise their position with a key message, the following points emerged:

Agricultural funding is needed to contribute to restoration, without weakening environmental ambition through simplification or cuts to direct payments.

Co-creation with farmers and stakeholders is essential to align the CAP with restoration objectives, supported by shared targets, national strategies and regionally adapted measures, such as CAP-funded grazing management plans.

Extensive grazing provides benefits beyond food production, including landscape management and ecosystem services, which should be recognised and supported through appropriate policies and funding.

The lack of EU-wide data on pastures and their contribution to restoration and ecosystem services hinders targeted measures, although collecting such data remains challenging.

EU objectives should provide a common framework while allowing regions to adapt solutions with farmers and pastoralists involved in their design. Farmers need appropriate tools and knowledge to implement policy objectives, rather than being left to do so on their own.

Nature restoration can strengthen climate resilience and support extensive livestock farming by improving water availability and pasture conditions.

Also, in identifying priorities for future EU action, participants pointed to four complementary needs:

- Stronger recognition of pastoral systems and their environmental contributions;
- Better alignment between agricultural and restoration objectives;
- More practical biodiversity measures;
- Greater integration of scientific evidence into policy design.

Overall, participants stressed that aligning agricultural policy with nature restoration requires effective implementation, adequate support and recognition of extensive grazing's role in maintaining grasslands. Restoration and pastoral viability should be pursued together, with farmers and pastoralists receiving the financial, technical and training support needed to deliver environmental objectives.

3. Day 2

Welcome and introduction

The second day of the conference opened by turning attention to the future of pastoralism and the role of younger generations. The discussion explored the structural, social and cultural challenges that can make pastoralism increasingly difficult to pursue as a livelihood, while also considering how to ensure the continuity of pastoral knowledge and practices.

The Global Declaration of Young Pastoralists and the Global Pastoralist Gathering of the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists 2026


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The keynote speaker, **Tamara Mitrofanenko** (UNEP Vienna Programme Office, Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention), illustrated the Global Declaration of Young Pastoralists, launched in Madrid in April 2026 after two days of joint efforts by participants from across Africa, Arctic, Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and the Americas. Her intervention also highlighted several challenges faced by young pastoralists, including land fragmentation, administrative barriers, declining youth engagement, loss of traditional knowledge, negative social stereotypes, and gender inequalities. The full presentation is here. The discussion then turned to the role of pastoral schools and their potential contribution to the future of pastoralism. Through the LIFE ShepForBio project, the work is moving towards a stronger European network of pastoral schools, building on the experience and needs identified across different countries.

Ellen Martine Heuser (European Shepherds Network & Hyrdeskolen på Lystbækgaard, Denmark) reported on the Global Pastoralist Gathering that took place in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, on 15 August 2026 ahead of COP17. Here, pastoralists from around the world gathered to voice their priorities and recommendations, ultimately summarised in a General Pastoralists' Declaration, Women Pastoralists' Declaration and Youth Pastoralists' Declaration, reflecting priorities identified through pastoralist-led discussions in Mongolia and regional processes held around the world.

Interactive workshop: proposals for the future of European pastoral schools

Beatrice Bellavia (Euromontana & LIFE ShepForBio) recalled the main 2026 events organised within the project framework to give greater visibility to shepherd schools, including the DG AGRI Lunchtime debate "Pastoral Schools and Generational Renewal in Europe", the XIV EMC workshop "The role of pastoral schools beyond education". The intervention then focused on the key insights from the EU-wide condition of pastoral schools, while stressing **their current role beyond education**, encompassing community support, generational renewal and networks promotion, among others.

After a first round of introductions from the participating pastoral schools and initiatives across Europe, stressing the **diversity of pastoral training models**, the participants reflected on other actual or potential schools' roles, launching a wider discussion on challenges and available resources. The aim was to **foster connections between more established actors and representatives of regions seeking**

to integrate pastoral education into their local contexts. A couple of seats were left empty to allow the audience members to join the panel.

Contributions brought together students, teachers, practising shepherds and territorial representatives. Speakers represented: **Escola de Pastores Alvão & LIFE Maronesa** (Marco Fernandes, Portugal); **Calascio Shepherd School** (Tommaso Campedelli); **LIFE ShepForBio School of Shepherds** (Giulia Pier Martiri and Edoardo Meroni, Italy); **Escuela de Pastores de Andalucía** (Veronica Cruz, Francisco Javier Miralles, Davinia Gonzalez, Spain); **Hyrdeskolen på Lystbækgaard** (Ellen Martine Heuser and Julie Ragnhildsdatter, Denmark); **Adad Malore – Albania Mountain Development** and a delegation of pastoralists (Martine Wolff, Hoxha Meshrik, Voka Selman and Hafuz Domi, Albania); **Retezat National Park** (Lucia Cușnir, Romania); and the Erasmus+ KA220 **Transhumances** Project (Anna Morera & Alessio Lasina, DEAFAL Italy).

- **Marco Fernandes** (Escola de Pastores Alvão & LIFE Maronesa) explained that the school works mainly with cattle and goats and trains participants not only to become shepherds, but also to act as landscape managers.
- **Martine Wolff** (Interpretation Centre for Pastoral Culture QIKB Albania) illustrated the difficult situation in Albania and called for a joint effort from other realities. The shepherds **Hoxha Meshrik** and **Voka Selman** explained their daily reality, challenges and aspirations.
- **Julie Ragnhildsdatter** (Hyrdeskolen på Lystbækgaard) presented the school's curriculum and training approach. Denmark currently has no formal vocational training system for shepherds, while many traditional pastoral practices have disappeared. The initiative therefore aims to rebuild these skills while improving the recognition and working conditions of shepherds.
- **Lucia Cușnir** (Retezat National Park) presented an initiative working with shepherds in a protected area, with a particular focus on social isolation and the economic and social sustainability of pastoral communities.
- **Veronica Cruz** (Escuela de Pastores de Andalucía) presented the experience of the school, which has been working on pastoral training for around ten years. A key role of the school is to build a network around students, providing support not only during training but also during the initial years of their professional activity
- **Tommaso Campedelli** (Calascio Shepherd School & LIFE ShepForBio School of Shepherds) highlighted the fragmented situation of pastoral training in Italy. Several initiatives and projects have emerged in recent years, including LIFE-funded activities, the Calascio school and regional initiatives, but they differ significantly in their duration, funding and geographical scope.
- **Anna Morera** (DEAFAL) presented Project Transhumances, an Erasmus+ initiative connecting pastoral schools across countries, including Spain and Türkiye, to develop a training pathway for shepherds.



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The workshop then invited participants to reflect on gaps in current pastoral schools and their future role.

- **Davinia Gonzalez** (Escuela de Pastores de Andalucía) stressed the need for stronger professional networks, emotional support and facilitation to enable exchanges across languages and pastoral traditions. **Veronica Cruz** (Escuela de Pastores de Andalucía) underlined the role of experienced shepherds as mentors who share practical knowledge while fostering a sense of belonging to a wider pastoral community.
- **Marco Fernandes** (Escola de Pastores Alvão & LIFE Maronesa) presented the Portuguese approach, which combines academic teaching from veterinarians, biologists and other professionals with training led by experienced shepherds. Each mentor supports one or two students, allowing them to gain practical experience with different livestock and pastoral systems.
- **Anna Morera** (DEAFAL) similarly stressed the value of learning alongside shepherds in the field. However, as not all practitioners have the skills or inclination to teach, facilitators can help bridge the gap between experienced shepherds and students.
- **Zsolt Molnár** (HUN-REN Centre for Ecological Research, Hungary) noted that "the real innovation is human", arguing that traditions should not simply be reproduced but adapted to changing conditions. Learning to read and understand the landscape is essential to this process.
- **Tommaso Campedelli** (Calascio Shepherd School & LIFE ShepForBio School of Shepherds) shared the results of the school: 15 of 23 students trained over three years had gone on to establish a farm or work on another farm. However, ensuring long-term continuity remains a challenge. Matchmaking platforms connecting aspiring shepherds with farms could help support this transition.

- The sustainability of Shepherd Schools themselves was also raised by **Francesca Pasetti (IYRP2026)**, who suggested offering further training after the initial curriculum, including in complementary activities such as wool production and processing.
- **Campedelli** (Calascio Shepherd School & LIFE ShepForBio School of Shepherds) stressed that public funding and institutional recognition are essential and should guarantee the continuity of school operations, which is not the case with individual projects that are of too short a duration . Shepherd Schools provide a service that benefits society as a whole and should be supported accordingly. Potential funding sources include cohesion policy and the European Social Fund, alongside stronger cooperation with public authorities and local administrations.
- **Edoardo Meroni** (LIFE ShepForBio School of Shepherds) called for greater outreach and communication to strengthen connections between pastoral communities and society, while **Daniela Masotti** (Regione Lombardia, ERSAF) highlighted opportunities to engage with other land users and tourism.
- However, **Giulia Pier Martiri** (LIFE ShepForBio School of Shepherds) cautioned against relying too heavily on tourism and called for stronger links between Shepherd Schools and formal education. Educational farms and activities in schools could help children understand food production, agriculture and the relationship between grazing, land management and biodiversity. She also stressed that extensive grazing does not automatically benefit biodiversity: appropriate management is essential.
- **Ellen Martine Heuser** (Hyrdeskolen på Lystbækgaard), representing the Danish experience, highlighted the benefits of reconnecting children and young adults with nature, including wellbeing and resilience. **Martine Wolff** (Interpretation Centre for Pastoral Culture QIKB Albania) similarly argued that pastoral education should begin early, sharing examples of initiatives that bring children to pastures to learn alongside shepherds. She also highlighted opportunities for schools to collaborate internationally on issues such as fire prevention and species protection.
- **Julia Ragnhildsdatter** (Hyrdeskolen på Lystbækgaard), noted difficulties related to land access and traditionally male-dominated working environments.
- **Massimo Biagini** (Shepherd) illustrated the value of intergenerational knowledge through the story of an experienced shepherd who cared for his family's flock following his father's accident. His account showed how close observation and daily experience enable shepherds to anticipate animal health problems and make informed management decisions.

Overall, participants broadly agreed that pastoral schools need **stable, long-term funding to sustain their operations** and should act as multifunctional hubs, extending beyond training to:

- Training and mentorship, combining technical education with practical knowledge;
- Knowledge transmission and innovation, connecting traditional practices with new approaches;
- Professional and social support, helping newcomers access networks, land, employment and other opportunities;
- Territorial and environmental management, recognising shepherds as landscape managers and contributors to biodiversity and wildfire prevention;
- Outreach and awareness, bringing pastoralism closer to schools, communities and wider society;
- Networking and cooperation, connecting pastoral schools and practitioners across Europe.

This broader role also points to the need for stronger public recognition, sustainable funding and continued cooperation between schools. Rather than replacing existing training systems, a European network could help pastoral schools share practices, strengthen their visibility and collectively address common challenges.

Building effective representation of the pastoral sector's concerns

The second workshop, organised and moderated by **Greta Semplici** and **Tommaso Campedelli** (RETE APPIA) and introduced by **Pablo Manzano** (Pastoraméricas), explored how to strengthen the representation of pastoralists' concerns and ensure their consistent involvement in decision-making and advocacy processes.

Pablo Manzano highlighted that effective representation must come from pastoral communities themselves, ensuring that pastoralists retain control over their own voices, while also stressing the need for practical support, such as financial assistance, temporary replacement services on farms and organisational support, to enable their meaningful participation in decision-making processes.

The discussion started from a central question: why do pastoralists struggle to make their voices heard? Participants identified several interconnected barriers:

- Limited time and mobility: pastoral work makes participation in meetings, consultations and international forums difficult.
- Administrative burden: excessive bureaucracy absorbs time and resources and can prevent pastoralists from engaging in policy processes.
- Fragmentation: the sector is dispersed across territories and organisations, making it difficult to develop common positions and coordinated advocacy.
- Limited recognition: the economic, environmental and social contributions of pastoralism, including ecosystem services, remain insufficiently recognised.
- Weak institutional trust and political influence: participants highlighted difficulties in being heard by authorities and a perceived imbalance of power between pastoralists and other stakeholders.
- Communication barriers: language, access to information and limited opportunities for face-to-face exchange can further restrict participation.
- Social and professional challenges: stereotypes, low remuneration, demanding working conditions and generational renewal also affect the sector's ability to organise collectively.

Nunzio Marcelli (RETE APPIA) reflected on the experience of pastoralism in Italy, highlighting the long-term decline of the sector and the difficulties created by agricultural policies and the distribution of CAP support. His contribution stressed the importance of ensuring that policy instruments support active pastoral production rather than speculative or land-based interests.

The experience of the Associazione Pastori Lombardi, presented by **Daniele Salvodelli**, showed how grassroots organisations can create new channels for representation. The association was established because pastoralists felt that their concerns were not being adequately represented. Bringing shepherds together and establishing dialogue with regional authorities helped create a direct channel for raising sectoral concerns. The experience of the Lombardy shepherds' association demonstrated

the importance of starting with small groups, gradually building trust, developing concrete activities and establishing collective decision-making processes without necessarily requiring unanimity.

The main conclusion was that pastoralists need a stronger and more coordinated collective voice, but that this should build on existing organisations and initiatives rather than create parallel structures.

Participants also stressed the need for a multi-level system of representation, connecting local, regional, national and European organisations, while ensuring that representatives remain accountable to pastoral communities. **In this context, RETE APPIA was identified as a potential platform for strengthening coordination among existing associations and supporting the development of a broader national representative structure.** The discussion also raised the possibility of developing a National Strategic Plan for Pastoralism to address common challenges, including access to grazing land, infrastructure, predator management and economic support. Finally, participants emphasised the importance of combining greater public visibility of pastoralism with concrete legislative, financial and administrative proposals.

Participants identified three immediate priorities:

1. Connect and map existing actors: create a clearer overview of pastoral organisations and initiatives and strengthen links between them.

2. Build a common voice: establish a coordination or working structure able to identify shared concerns, develop common messages and represent them consistently.

3. Strengthen dialogue with decision-makers: create regular channels connecting pastoralists with public authorities and other relevant stakeholders at local, national and European levels.

The discussion therefore pointed towards a step-by-step approach to collective advocacy: first connect existing actors and improve communication; then identify shared priorities; and finally translate these into coordinated advocacy and policy proposals.

4. Conclusion

The Third International Conference of the LIFE ShepForBio project brought together a diverse range of pastoralists, researchers, public authorities, practitioners, pastoral schools and European networks to reflect on the current **challenges and future opportunities for pastoralism in Europe**.

Across the two days, discussions consistently highlighted the multifunctional role of pastoralism and the importance of recognising and supporting the people who maintain pastoral systems. Shepherds and pastoralists are not only beneficiaries of environmental and agricultural policies, but **active managers of landscapes and holders of valuable ecological and practical knowledge**. Their involvement in research, restoration initiatives and policy development is therefore essential. Greater recognition, adequate remuneration and appropriate working conditions are needed to ensure that these functions can continue in the long term.

During the first day, the discussions highlighted the **need for policies that are better adapted to pastoral realities**. The future CAP, the Nature Restoration Regulation and the EU Livestock Strategy should be better coordinated and provide practical, proportionate and territorially flexible support. Participants stressed that achieving environmental objectives should not result in additional disproportionate administrative burdens for pastoralists. Instead, policies should provide the financial,

technical and institutional conditions that enable pastoral systems to remain viable.Echoing the Sallanches Declaration, discussions also emphasised the **need to use public funding more effectively**, ensuring that direct payments support active farmers and pastoral work rather than primarily generating income for landowners. This support should be complemented by investment in housing, public services and social infrastructure, particularly in mountain areas, to provide the living and working conditions needed to sustain pastoral livelihoods. Policies should therefore create the financial, technical, social and institutional conditions that enable pastoral systems to remain viable.

The second day particularly highlighted the **potential of pastoral schools as multifunctional hubs** for training, professional support, knowledge transmission, networking and territorial management. While pastoral training systems differ considerably across Europe, many face similar challenges related to continuity, funding, recognition and coordination. **Stable, long-term funding is essential to sustain their operations**, retain staff and maintain support for pastoralists beyond individual project cycles Strengthening cooperation between existing schools and initiatives, including through a European network, could help address these shared challenges while respecting national and regional specificities.

Finally, the conference underlined the importance of strengthening the **collective representation of the pastoral sector**. Rather than creating parallel structures, participants emphasised the need to connect existing organisations, develop common priorities and establish more regular channels of dialogue with decision-makers.

Annex I – Links to projects and initiatives mentioned

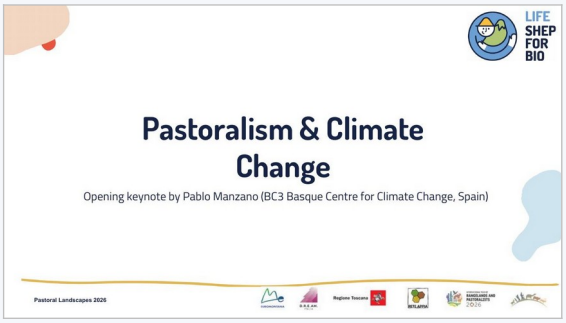
The table below collects the links to the projects, initiatives, networks and policy documents referred to in this report, grouped by theme.

Project / initiative	Link
LIFE ShepForBio project and related events	
LIFE ShepForBio Project page – D.R.E.Am. Italia	https://dream-italia-euprj.eu/life/lifeshepforbio/
3rd International Conference "Pastoral Landscapes 2026" – programme Florence, 23–24 September 2026	https://dream-italia-euprj.eu/en/life-shepforbio-third-international-conference-pastoral-landscapes-2026-here-is-the-program/
1st International Conference – report Florac, France (2023)	https://dream-italia-euprj.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Report-Florac-2023.pdf
2nd International Conference – report Lugo, Spain (2024)	https://dream-italia-euprj.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2nd-International-conference-report_LUGO_180924.docx.pdf
DG AGRI Lunchtime debate "Pastoral Schools and Generational Renewal in Europe" – report 3 June 2026	https://dream-italia-euprj.eu/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/DG-AGRI-lunch-debate_Pastoral-Schools-and-Generational-Renewal-in-Europe-_03062026_report.pdf
XIV EMC workshop "The role of pastoral schools beyond education" – report 1 July 2026	https://dream-italia-euprj.eu/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/XIV-EMC-workshop_Pastoral-Schools_01072026_report.pdf
EU-funded projects presented	
SUREPASTOR Antonello Franca (CNR Sassari, RETE APPIA)	https://surepastor.unifi.it/
LIFE Landscape Fire André Mota (Viseu Dão Lafões Intermunicipal Community)	https://youtu.be/iumEnvtk004
LIFE RestoRED Carina Greiff (Länsstyrelsen Östergötland)	https://www.liferestored.se/om-projektet/
Dinara back to LIFE (2020–2023) Ivan Budinski (BIOM Association)	https://dinarabacktolife.eu/en/
Mosaic of LIFE (2025–2030) Ivan Budinski (BIOM Association)	https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/life/publicWebsite/project/LIFE24-NAT-HR-Mosaic-of-LIFE-101202651/habitat-restoration-grassland-birds-conservation-status-improvement-and-promotion-of-nature-based-solutions-through-resilient-mosaic-mediterranean-landscape
LIFE Maronesa Marco Fernandes (Escola de Pastores Alvão)	https://lifemaronesa.eu/
Transhumances (Erasmus+ KA220) Anna Morera & Alessio Lasina (DEAFAL)	https://urgenci.net/transhumants-on-the-move/
Pastoral schools and training initiatives	
LIFE ShepForBio School of Shepherds Italy	https://dream-italia-euprj.eu/en/life-shepforbio/shepherdschool/
Calascio Shepherd School Italy	https://www.slowfood.it/scuolapastoriziacalascio/
Escola de Pastores Alvão & LIFE Maronesa Portugal	https://lifemaronesa.eu/life-wolflux-3/
Escuela de Pastores de Andalucía Spain	https://escueladepastoresdeandalucia.es/es
Hyrdeskolen på Lystbækgaard Denmark	https://www.lystbaekgaard.dk/hyrdeskolen
Adad Malore – Albania Mountain Development Albania	https://adadmalore.al/

Project / initiative	Link
Retezat National Park Romania	https://www.retezat.ro/
Networks, alliances and pastoralist gatherings	
International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP) 2026 FAO	https://www.fao.org/rangelands-pastoralists-2026/about/en
Global Alliance for Rangelands and Pastoralists (GA4RP) IYRP 2026 coalition	https://iyrp.info/
European Shepherds Network Europe	https://shepherdnet.eu/
RETE APPIA Italian network for pastoralism	https://retepastorizia.it/
Associazione Pastori Lombardi Lombardy, Italy	https://maraea.it/siti_partner/associazione-pastori-lombardi/
Pastoraméricas Pablo Manzano	https://pasteursdusahel.wixsite.com/websi
Kathmandu Global Gathering of Pastoralist Women – report Nepal, May 2026	https://iyrp.info/sites/default/files/documents/Kathmandu-Report_FINAL_030626.pdf
Policy frameworks, declarations and global processes	
Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) post-2027 European Commission	https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/cap-post-2027-next-eu-budget_en
Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR) European Commission	https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/nature-and-biodiversity/nature-restoration-regulation_en
XIV European Mountain Convention Euromontana	https://www.euromontana.org/xiii-european-mountain-convention-home/
Sallanches Declaration Euromontana	https://www.euromontana.org/securing-the-future-of-extensive-livestock-farming-and-pastoralism-in-mountain-areas/
Global Declaration of Young Pastoralists Madrid, April 2026	https://iyrp.info/sites/default/files/documents/Declaration-ENG-Young-Pastoralists-short-version.pdf
Ulaanbaatar Declarations – General, Women and Youth Pastoralists' Declarations Global Pastoralist Gathering, Mongolia, August 2026	https://iyrp.info/sites/default/files/2026-08/Ulaanbaatar_Declaration_2026_Final-1.PDF
UNCCD COP17 Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia	https://unccdcop17.org/?lang=en
Carpathian Convention UNEP Vienna Programme Office	https://www.unep.org/regions/europe/our-branches-europe/vienna-office-and-secretariat-carpathian-convention

Annex II – Master Slides

The Master Slides projected during the two days of the conference can be consulted online. Each deck brings together all the presentations of the day.



Day 1

Wednesday 23 September 2026
213 slides

Open the Master Slides – Day 1



Day 2

Thursday 24 September 2026
62 slides

Open the Master Slides – Day 2

Overview of the topics

Day 1, 23 September. The first day opened with welcome words from the organisers and the Region of Tuscany, followed by an overview of the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists 2026: its coalition, the global gatherings of young and women pastoralists and the road to UNCCD COP17. The morning then turned to pastoralism and climate change, with Pablo Manzano's keynote on livestock, greenhouse gas emissions and the ecological role of grazing, and with two projects working on the resilience of agropastoral systems and on grazing as a tool for wildfire prevention (SUREPASTOR and LIFE Landscape Fire). In the afternoon, Zsolt Molnár and Marianna Biró showed what ecologists can learn from herders and how grazing shapes biodiversity, before grassland restoration experiences from Sweden and Croatia (LIFE RestoRED, Dinara back to LIFE and Mosaic of LIFE). The deck closes with Euromontana's introduction to the roundtable, from the Sallanches Declaration to the post-2027 Common Agricultural Policy and the Nature Restoration Regulation.

Day 2, 24 September. The second day was dedicated to young pastoralists and pastoral education. Tamara Mitrofanenko presented the Global Declaration of Young Pastoralists and the work on pastoralism carried out under the Carpathian Convention. The slides then follow the interactive workshop on the future of European pastoral schools, with contributions from schools and initiatives in Portugal, Denmark, Romania, Albania, Spain and Italy, and a reflection on the role schools play beyond training. The last part covers the workshop on the representation of the pastoral sector, with the participants' views on why shepherds struggle to make their voices heard and how collective action could be organised.