

BAKU DECLARATION

on the Recognition, Safeguarding, and Transmission of the Heritage of Pastoralist Transhumance

This Declaration is an outcome of the expert conference “Transhumance Landscapes of Global Importance” held in Baku, Azerbaijan, on 23-24 June 2025, within the framework of the ICOMOS World Heritage Transhumance Initiative. The conference was kindly hosted by the State Tourism Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Context

Inspired by centuries-old pastoralist transhumance practices in the mountain and semi-arid regions of Azerbaijan, where seasonal migrations of transhumant pastoralist communities have shaped landscapes, livelihoods, and cultural expressions, the Government of Azerbaijan has committed to safeguarding, sustaining, and transmitting these traditions. This commitment is exemplified inter alia by the inscription of the “*Cultural Landscape of Khinalig People and ‘Köç Yolu’ Transhumance Route*” on the World Heritage list in 2023. Hosted by the State Tourism Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the expert conference on Transhumance Landscapes of Global Importance brought together scholars, experts and institutional representatives from various sectors, disciplines and different global regions to promote cross-sectoral discussion on pastoralist transhumance as a sustainable cultural-social-ecological system.

The Baku Declaration builds on the rich discussions, insights and contributions of participants: the ICOMOS project team and core experts, keynote speakers, poster authors, national representatives and representatives of the IUCN, FAO, the Carpathian Convention and the 2026 International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists Global Alliance.

The key topics of the conference discussions included the contribution of pastoralist transhumance to socio-economic parameters and natural ecosystems; the provision and sustainability of ecosystem services; how some of its cultural traditions and embedded knowledge might have the potential to justify global significance for their tangible expressions on landscapes; and the challenges associated with its safeguarding.

The Baku Declaration is a call to action for all actors in the complex and multi-layered governance networks across all countries to sharpen their focus on understanding and valuing the heritage of pastoralist transhumance and how it has shaped landscapes and

societies. It also calls on them to embrace the rich diversity of its inherent knowledge systems and landscape expressions, to recognize the key culture-nature benefits these systems deliver, and to support efforts to ensure the documentation, safeguarding and transmission of transhumance knowledge, skills, innovations and the landscapes it has shaped to future generations, while balancing sustainability with associated pressures and trade-offs, and to support initiatives aimed at identifying landscapes that may hold global importance.

Guiding Framework

Recalling the principles enshrined in:

The UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972);

The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003);

The UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005);

The UN Convention on Biological Diversity (1992);

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992);

The UN Convention to Combat Desertification (1992);

Affirming the goals and targets of:

The Policy Document on Climate Action for World Heritage (2023) and the Policy Document for the Integration of a Sustainable Development Perspective into the Processes of the World Heritage Convention (2015);

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (2022);

The FAO Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems Programme;

The ICOMOS IFLA Principles Concerning Rural Landscapes as Heritage (2017);

The ICOMOS International Charter on Cultural Routes (2008);

The ICOMOS International Charter for Cultural Heritage Tourism (2022): Reinforcing cultural heritage protection and community resilience through responsible and sustainable tourism management;

The ICOMOS International Charter and Guidance on Sites with Intangible Cultural Heritage (2024);

The UN Resolution on designating 2026 as the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (A/RES/76/253, 2022);

The IUCN World Conservation Congress Resolution 86 (2020): “Strengthening mutual benefits of mobile pastoralism and wildlife in shared landscapes”

and other international agreements and policy documents pertaining to the sustainable use of land and natural resources, supporting cultural diversity and rights.

Definitions, Key Parameters and Heritage Features of Pastoralist Transhumance

Definition

Pastoralist transhumance is a human-led animal husbandry practice based on mobility and extensive grazing, aimed at ensuring long-term feed and water availability and ecological regeneration within and across territories. It results from millennia of interaction and adaptation between humans, grazing animals and their environment, leading to deep embedment in social, cultural, economic and ecological systems.

Key parameters

The key parameters of pastoralist transhumance relate to the largely seasonal mobility of people and grazing animals within defined and interconnected spatial areas; the associated knowledge and socio-organisational structures that support that mobility; as well as adaptability and resilience. They also include imprints of the transhumance process on landscapes; the intangible bonds between communities and their grazing animals within the areas in which they live and move; and, in some landscapes, the attachment of animals to the place where they were weaned.

Many communities that practice pastoralist transhumance are linked by communal practices and the common use of land, which allows them to share natural and cultural resources and agree on optimal routes and migration times. These processes are often long-standing and underpinned by customary rights and traditional institutions of governance. Rights to access common lands¹ and rights of way enable pastoralist transhumance systems to flourish and can therefore be seen as crucial enabling parameters.

Recognizing the traditional participatory institutions of governance and local management of common lands are critical steps to securing associated rights to land and other resources and safeguarding the key parameters of pastoralist transhumance heritage.

Heritage Manifestations

The intangible cultural heritage of pastoralist transhumance encompasses traditional ecological knowledge of the environment, *inter alia*, astronomy, weather forecasting, animal behaviour, sustainable natural resource use, and adaptive practices. Transhumant pastoralist communities have created a wealth of cultural expressions and worldviews, reflected in languages and oral traditions, music, dance, festivals, crafts, foodways and gastronomy, among others.

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¹ Common land is taken here to mean the land over which certain people or communities have common rights, such as the right to graze livestock.

behaviour, sustainable natural resource use, and adaptive practices. Transhumant pastoralist communities have created a wealth of cultural expressions and worldviews, reflected in languages and oral traditions, music, dance, festivals, crafts, foodways and gastronomy, among others.

The transmission of traditional knowledge and skills within and between the communities and generations, whether through day-to-day practice, apprenticeship, or a combination of formal and customary methods of knowledge sharing, is an essential part of sustaining pastoralist transhumance and its social, economic and environmental benefits.

Pastoralist transhumance has shaped the cultural identity of communities, exerting a profound influence on their social structures, division of labour, and value systems. The division of labour between migration points in many transhumance systems has provided opportunities for women and children to take responsibility for aspects of herding, dairying, and other activities, influencing social structures at the most basic level. Transhumant pastoralists in many regions have historically been the custodians of their surrounding environment, landrace breeds, and plants.

Due to its dynamic character, transhumance has historically contributed to the negotiation of administrative or political boundaries. This way of life, with its seasonal splitting of households, also reflects stability within a wider society and a degree of tolerance between communities. The complex cohabitation strategies enable reciprocal relationships between transhumant pastoralists and agricultural communities, integrating pastoralism with other cultures, land uses, and resource management practices. The role of traditional governance institutions and structures has been instrumental in shaping these relationships and the decisions arising from them, such as arrangements for the use of pastures, transboundary movement, trade of goods, and the transfer of knowledge and know-how.

The tangible manifestation of pastoralist transhumance is expressed most clearly through the impact and influence of grazing animals, particularly on rangelands (the very genesis of which is often tied to the introduction and maintenance of seasonal grazing). Repeated seasonal passages and retreats of animals and humans over extended periods can dramatically shape large-scale landscapes, just as the reduction or abandonment of pastoralist transhumance can lead to the degradation of rangelands through a lack of maintenance. At a macro level, these landscapes, particularly upland areas, can come to be associated with a sense of identity or even ideas of beauty and quality of life.

At a micro level, grazing areas may consist of seasonal pastures, watering places, salt licks, shelters for different types and ages of animals; they may also host temporary human settlements. Migration routes are often associated with specific communities and encompass drove roads, indistinct pathways, feeding and watering points, shelters, sacred places and other infrastructure that constitutes tangible heritage associated with pastoralist transhumance.

Pastoralist transhumance landscapes, in their varied forms across territories and places, can be perceived as a distinct, albeit subtle, imprint within the chronological and functional layers in space. Archaeological evidence of these material manifestations can reflect and illustrate the processes of ancient pastoralist transhumance and the ways in which current practices have evolved.

Outputs and Benefits of Pastoralist Transhumance

Throughout history, transhumance has served as the key livelihood system for many pastoralist communities, increasing the productivity of the home farm and the seasonal pastures. It has supported the food security of both transhumant and sedentary communities that benefit from their animals and the plurality of ecosystem services. The mobility strategy of transhumant pastoralists has been driven by ecological contexts and economic demands, orienting communities' adaptation through the development of specific skills and mindsets, which has led to a sense of unity and identity. However, it has also been impacted by the ebb and flow of empires and changes in political and economic systems, along with their preferences for food and other commodities. In some regions, the animal products of transhumant pastoralist communities became key trade goods that contributed to wealth generation.

The seasonal mobility patterns of pastoralist transhumance have often contributed to shaping, sustaining and preserving endemic vegetation and biodiversity, while maintaining and regenerating critical habitats for wildlife. Pastoralist transhumance, through its distinct forms, ensures ecological balance and addresses trade-offs through its mobility strategies, rotational grazing and resting, and diversified livestock herding based on local breeds.

Above all, this form of pastoralism contributes to the development of open-grazed landscapes and pastures, valued in some places for their contribution to cultural identity and their inspirational beauty.

Some of these know-how systems and knowledge-nurturing processes may have the capacity to be recognized as exceptional in the context of human history, having shaped cultural landscapes that could also be considered to hold the potential for demonstrating global importance.

Threats and Affecting Factors

In recent centuries, at different times and rates across the world, the continuity of pastoralist transhumance has been affected by the lack of awareness and a long-standing bias against pastoralists and their practices. It has also been impacted by other factors, including rural-to-urban migration and diminished generational renewal, industrialisation of food systems, dismantling traditional governance institutions and structures and changes in land use. Environmental factors such as climate change and the increasing intensity and frequency of natural hazards and extreme weather events further contribute to its current vulnerability. Movement and grazing patterns have often been constrained by fragmented

political and administrative borders. Pressures to settle transhumant pastoralist communities and to fix boundaries through formal designations and standardized policy regulations often fail to account of the intrinsic dynamism of pastoralist transhumance livelihood systems. Some seasonal pastures have been designated solely for their landscape and 'natural' qualities, rather than their cultural associations, and are now managed with limited awareness that they have been rendered semi-natural and biodiverse through pastoralist transhumant practices. In some cases, strict wildlife protection strategies have viewed grazing animals—and, by extension, their caretakers—as incompatible with conservation goals.

Changes in land tenure, the encroachment of grazing areas for incompatible uses, and new developments all further restrict transhumant pastoralist communities' access to vital resources. In many remote rural areas, even in developed countries, a lack of access to the means of production and basic services, such as healthcare and education, has contributed to rural abandonment. In other regions, demographic pressure has often led to excessive use of resources and social conflicts. Nevertheless, pastoralist transhumance remains the ultimate strategy for survival in the face of extreme events, and many among the world's poorest communities continue to depend on it for their food security.

On the other hand, in recent decades, the advent of sustainability policies has contributed to growing recognition of pastoralist transhumance as a sustainable way of living. Interest in transhumance heritage has also increased, resulting in several significant international designations. Nevertheless, pastoralist transhumance and its heritage remain underrepresented in many policy arenas and academic research fields, lacking a comprehensive global understanding, particularly in heritage fora. Alongside the need for research, identification, and valorisation of both tangible and intangible transhumance heritage and its regional representation, for example, through its inclusion in existing global designations, there is a pressing need to develop enabling environments, adequate policy frameworks, and suitable programmes for conservation, monitoring, and the sustainable transmission of heritage of pastoralist transhumance. The ultimate objective of these efforts should be to maintain the vitality of the processes that shape pastoralist transhumance and its material heritage.

Recommendations

Recognizing:

- that pastoralist transhumance is a millennia-old practice rooted in seasonal mobility which embodies the cultural value of its traditional knowledge systems, particular practices and the landscapes it has created across expansive areas of the globe;
- that pastoralist transhumance makes an enduring contribution to a wide variety of sustainable land management processes, cultural and biological diversity, and critical ecosystem services;

- that transhumant pastoralist communities remain marginalized in policy discourse and decision-making processes, and that their knowledge, agency, and socio-economic needs often remain inadequately addressed;
- that pastoralist transhumance cultural landscapes are underrepresented in heritage and conservation frameworks, and that persistent conceptual ambiguities surrounding nomadism, mobility, and pastoralism continue to hinder policy formulation,

We, the participants gathered in Baku, at the conference ‘Transhumance Landscapes of Global Importance’, hereby underscore the urgent need for inclusive, adaptive and gender-responsive governance mechanisms and stronger interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary engagement, and call upon professionals, institutions, authorities, and organisations at local, national, regional and international levels to take concerted action to safeguard the heritage of pastoralist transhumance.

Inter alia, to:

- o *Recognise the social, economic, cultural and environmental values and benefits of pastoralist transhumance, and the material and intangible heritage of the landscapes and ecosystems it has shaped in various parts of the world;*
- o *Acknowledge the vulnerabilities of pastoralist transhumance in the face of human-induced and natural threats and the need to develop adequate strategies for monitoring, preservation and sustainable transmission of transhumance heritage;*
- o *Adopt an inter-and transdisciplinary approach that reflects the complex environmental, economic, cultural, social, and ecological dimensions of pastoralist transhumance;*
- o *Implement inventories and studies to understand the key parameters and features expressing the values of pastoralist transhumance, as a foundation for tailored conservation approaches focused on the sustainable transmission of local characteristics of transhumance heritage;*
- o *Establish enabling environments, legal frameworks, and policy measures to promote the recognition and ensure the safeguarding of the material and intangible cultural heritage of pastoralist transhumance;*
- o *Ensure dialogue and synergies with relevant national, regional, and international instruments, including but not limited to regional conventions, national and sub-national instruments supporting coordinated policy that relies on co-creation of knowledge and promotes action;*
- o *Develop suitable monitoring and conservation programmes and indicators, collaboratively with transhumant pastoralist communities, to reflect the dynamic*

character of pastoralist transhumance heritage, and to accommodate and promote the continuation of seasonal mobility, tenure security, customary rights, common land uses, property and governance systems;

- *Respect the agency and rights of transhumant pastoralist communities and ensure their equitable representation in the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of policies that affect their livelihoods, landscapes, and cultural identities;*
- *Build the capacity of transhumant pastoralist communities to advocate for and defend their culture, rights and ways of life;*
- *Ensure the participation of transhumant pastoralist communities in all relevant fora, institutions, and governance and decision-making processes essential for sustaining their mobile way of life;*
- *Secure transhumant pastoralist land rights, maintaining their flexibility and adaptability, and integrate these rights, as well as the communities' needs and knowledge systems, into land use and spatial planning, environmental, cultural heritage and agricultural policy, educational and legal frameworks;*
- *Promote the co-creation of knowledge between transhumant pastoralist communities, researchers, land planners and other stakeholders to develop appropriate tools for managing and safeguarding transhumant landscapes;*
- *Support the vitality of transhumant pastoralist communities through improved access to basic services, production inputs, and markets, with full respect to their specific traditional methods and practices;*
- *Enhance the identification and preservation of national and transboundary networks of pastoralist transhumance routes.*
- *And to conserve and reinforce the visibility, dignity, and sustainability of pastoralist transhumance landscapes and their communities in a rapidly changing world.*

Adopted at the expert conference “Transhumance Landscapes of Global Importance” held in Baku, Azerbaijan, on 23-24 June 2025.