



BASHKIA  
LEZHË



BASHKIA  
MIRDITË

# JOINT DECLARATION

## 4th Albanian Rural Parliament



# Rural Albania on the Path to the EU through partnerships, reform and cohesive territorial development

HOST MUNICIPALITIES:

**Municipality of Lezha and Municipality of Mirdita**

25-27 March 2026



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## Introduction

We, the 300 participants of the 4th Albanian Rural Parliament, gathered on 25-27 March 2026 in the host municipalities of Mirdita and Lezha, representing rural communities, farmers, civil society organisations, Local Action Groups (LAGs), public institutions, local authorities, academia, businesses and development partners, reaffirm our shared commitment to a stronger, more resilient and more inclusive rural Albania on its path towards the European Union.

The 4th Albanian Rural Parliament took place at a decisive moment for the country. As Albania advances in the EU accession process, agricultural and rural development can no longer be treated as a sectoral or peripheral issue, but rather as a strategic dimension of the country's economic, social and territorial transformation. Rural areas sustain a significant share of Albania's food production, cultural heritage, natural resources and social cohesion, yet they continue to face economic fragmentation, depopulation, territorial inequalities, limited capacities and insufficient access to services, markets and decision-making processes. Therefore, Albania's path towards the EU must translate into concrete reforms that strengthen rural communities, enhance competitiveness, protect natural resources and create fair opportunities for farmers, women, youth and local actors.

This Declaration is based on the discussions held during the three days of the 2026 National Rural Parliament, as well as on the conclusions and recommendations emerging from the seven Rural Talks, which brought together hundreds of local and national stakeholders to address the key challenges and opportunities for rural development. The dialogue focused on inclusive rural development and the LEADER approach, sustainable agriculture and the green transition, empowerment of rural women, knowledge, innovation and digitalisation, sustainable rural economies and short value chains, family farming, and the heritage of transhumance as a strategic asset for the future of rural territories.

Through this Declaration, we call upon the Government of Albania, the Parliament, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) and other institutions responsible for agriculture, food systems, rural development and European integration, as well as local self-government units, the private sector, academia and development partners, to take concrete action to ensure that rural transformation becomes a national priority. Investment in rural areas cannot be regarded solely as a sectoral policy, but as a prerequisite for territorial cohesion, food security, the protection of natural and cultural heritage, and the successful advancement of Albania's European integration process.

The messages and recommendations presented in this Declaration therefore represent the collective voice of rural communities and a concrete contribution to the formulation of public policies that enable rural Albania to grow, compete and prosper within the European family.

# THEMATIC ISSUES OF THE 4TH NATIONAL RURAL PARLIAMENT AGENDA

**Inclusive and integrated rural development** represents a key priority for Albania at this stage of its development, reflecting the need to address interconnected challenges such as territorial inequalities, continued outmigration from rural areas, fragmented economic development and the limited participation of local communities in decision-making. At the same time, the EU integration process and alignment with the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the implementation of IPARD III provide a concrete opportunity to advance new development models based on integrated, inclusive and community-led approaches. The LEADER approach/Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) provide a proven framework for empowering local actors, strengthening cooperation among public authorities, the private sector and civil society, and developing territorial strategies that respond to the real needs of communities. However, significant challenges remain, including limited local capacities, weak institutional coordination, insufficient inclusion of young people, women and vulnerable groups, and the absence of effective mechanisms for territorial cooperation. In this context, inclusive rural development represents an important opportunity to stimulate economic growth, strengthen social cohesion and accelerate Albania's European integration process.

**Sustainable agriculture and the green transition** represent a strategic priority for Albania at this stage of its development and within the broader context of EU accession. Beyond its environmental dimension, this transition is directly linked to the competitiveness of the agricultural sector, food security, the economic viability of farmers and social cohesion in rural areas. While European policies such as the Green Deal, the Farm to Fork Strategy and the CAP provide a clear direction towards more sustainable food systems, Albania faces deep structural challenges that make this transition complex, including fragmented farms, weak integration into value chains, informality, insufficient investment and limited capacities to comply with required standards. At the same time, there is considerable potential for developing higher-value sectors, strengthening market linkages and adopting more sustainable practices, as demonstrated by ongoing initiatives that connect production, innovation and markets. This highlights that Albania's green transition is not merely an obligation arising from EU approximation, but a real opportunity to transform the agricultural sector towards a model that is more productive, competitive and sustainable. This transformation requires coordinated policies that place farmers at the centre, strengthen value chains and connect environmental objectives with the economic and social development of rural areas. It also requires support for farmer organisation, fairer contractual relationships and collective investments in storage, cooling and processing infrastructure, as essential conditions for a green transition that is practical, affordable and fair for farmers

**The empowerment of rural women** is a strategic priority for Albania's rural development and EU integration process. Women constitute a significant share of the agricultural workforce and contribute daily to production, processing, household economies and the resilience of rural communities. Yet their contribution often remains invisible and insufficiently supported, while women continue to face structural barriers in accessing land, finance, markets, services and decision-making processes. Low levels of land ownership, limited participation in support schemes and a high burden of unpaid family work demonstrate that rural women are still not recognised as equal economic actors. This is not merely an issue of gender equality, but a direct challenge to agricultural competitiveness, sustainable rural development and social cohesion. In the context of alignment with EU policies, particularly the CAP, LEADER/CLLD, the Gender Equality Strategy and the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas, Albania has both the opportunity and the responsibility to develop more inclusive policies that move rural women

from the position of beneficiaries to that of decision-makers, entrepreneurs and co-creators of local development. The empowerment of rural women is therefore a prerequisite for a fairer, more productive and more sustainable rural future.

**Knowledge, innovation and digitalisation** are becoming strategic prerequisites for the future of rural development in Albania. In a sector still characterised by very small and fragmented farms, limited access to reliable advisory services, insufficient market information and institutional services that often remain difficult for farmers to access, digital public services have the potential to play a transformative role. They can bridge information gaps, strengthen trust in official guidelines and create stronger links between farmers, markets and public institutions. Tools such as the Farmer Portal should therefore be understood as part of a broader reform agenda aimed at modernising agricultural services, strengthening administrative capacities and preparing Albania for EU-aligned systems in agriculture and rural development. This is particularly important in the context of EU accession, where Albania is expected to strengthen digital and statistical systems, interoperability and data reuse, simplify administrative procedures and align with the EU acquis, including requirements related to IPARD III and future CAP-related systems. However, digitalisation will only deliver meaningful results if it responds to the real needs of farmers: reliable information on support schemes, markets, collection points, weather conditions, agricultural calendars, phytosanitary advice and practical farm management. The challenge is not simply to create a digital platform, but to ensure its usability, trustworthiness, inclusiveness and long-term institutional sustainability, particularly for small-scale farmers, women, young people, remote communities and users with limited digital skills. If built around farmers' realities and supported by functional public institutions, advisory services and local facilitators, the Farmer Portal can become a strategic instrument for a more transparent, inclusive and EU-oriented rural development model.

**A sustainable rural economy and stronger short value chains** represent a strategic pathway for Albania's rural development, particularly in a context where small-scale farmers face fragmented production, weak bargaining power, limited market access and difficulties in capturing the true value of their products. Strengthening short value chains is not merely a matter of promoting local trade, but a policy instrument for increasing farmers' incomes, supporting local economies, promoting quality products and building stronger connections between producers, consumers, tourism and the territory itself. In the context of European integration, this agenda is closely aligned with the priorities of the CAP, which supports farmers, sustainable food production, rural development, environmental protection and investment in rural areas. For Albania, the opportunity lies in developing functional models of cooperation, local processing, direct marketing, agritourism and territorial branding. However, this requires targeted policies and investments that strengthen farmer organisation, quality standards, infrastructure, logistics and access to finance. Only by reconnecting local production with markets, territories and consumers can the rural economy become more competitive, more inclusive and more resilient.

**Family farming** remains a cornerstone of rural livelihoods, food security and territorial sustainability in Albania. This is particularly significant in a country where small farms constitute the majority of the agricultural structure and where rural families continue to sustain food production, preserve traditions, maintain landscapes and support local economies. Yet the full potential of family farming is constrained by land fragmentation, demographic decline and rural outmigration, limited access to finance, technology, markets and advisory services, as well as insufficient recognition of the role played by women and young people within family farms. Within the framework of the United Nations Decade of Family Farming (2019-2028), Albania has the opportunity to move beyond viewing family farming as a traditional sector requiring support for survival, and instead recognise it as a

strategic driver of sustainable rural development, resilient food systems, natural resource stewardship and social inclusion. This agenda is also directly linked to the country's EU accession process, as alignment with European policies on rural development, food security, environmental sustainability and stronger value chains requires more targeted support for small and family farms. The development and implementation of a National Action Plan for Family Farming should therefore serve as a strategic policy instrument to strengthen the economic position of farming families, improve their access to public support and markets, and place family farming at the centre of a fairer, more competitive and more sustainable rural development model.

**The heritage of transhumance** represents a strategic asset for Albania's rural development, linking pastoral traditions, sustainable management of mountain landscapes, cultural identity and local economies. At a time when rural areas face depopulation, the loss of traditional practices, increasing pressure on natural resources and the weakening of mountain economies, transhumance should be viewed not only as intangible cultural heritage but as a living development model capable of contributing to sustainable livestock farming, rural tourism, quality local products and biodiversity conservation. In the context of European integration, this issue is directly connected to policies on rural development, cultural heritage protection, sustainable natural resource management and the valorisation of territorial economies. The main challenge is that these practices risk remaining unsupported by public policies, disconnected from markets and largely invisible within development strategies. For this reason, the recognition, protection and valorisation of transhumance should become a political priority to connect heritage with economic development, strengthen pastoral communities and build bridges between Albania's rural traditions and the European vision for sustainable rural development.

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In this context, the participants of the Albanian Rural Parliament emphasise that addressing these priorities requires not only political commitment but also concrete, actionable and measurable interventions. The recommendations that follow are intended to guide institutional action and strengthen cooperation among stakeholders in order to make rural development more inclusive, more equitable and more closely aligned with Albania's European future.

We firmly believe that without a new policy vision for rural development, Albania risks losing some of its most valuable territorial, human and natural capital. We therefore call for rural development to be recognised as a national priority and as an integral component of the country's European Union accession process, placing rural communities at the centre of reforms, investments and public decision-making.

## KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Declaration of the 4th Albanian Rural Parliament conveys seven key messages and strategic recommendations that should guide reforms, investments and policy dialogue for rural development in the period 2026-2030.

### **1. Rural development cannot be achieved without the active participation of local communities. LEADER/CLLD should be institutionalised as a national instrument for territorial development, local democracy and Albania's European integration.**

Inclusive rural development cannot be delivered through isolated projects or top-down interventions alone. Albania needs to transform the LEADER/CLLD approach into a genuine public policy instrument that empowers rural communities, strengthens local partnerships and connects territorial development with the country's EU accession process.

The message to policymakers is clear: without territorial animation, local capacity building, functional LAGs and community-led Local Development Strategies, LEADER risks remaining merely a formal concept. Properly implemented, however, it can become one of the most effective tools for strengthening local democracy, fostering economic diversification, promoting social inclusion and ensuring sustainable rural development.

#### **Recommendations:**

- To enable the effective implementation of the LEADER approach /CLLD in Albania, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, in cooperation with municipalities, civil society and development partners, should institutionalise the LEADER approach as a core public policy instrument through a clear legal, institutional and financial framework.
- To enable the establishment of functional territorial partnerships, public institutions and local stakeholders should support the creation and operation of LAGs through territorial animation, capacity development and the meaningful participation of farmers, women, youth, businesses and civil society organisations.
- To enable rural development that reflects the real needs and opportunities of rural territories, municipalities, LAGs and local communities should prepare participatory Local Development Strategies through transparent bottom-up processes focused on economic diversification, innovation and social inclusion.
- To ensure that LEADER contributes to both European integration and sustainable rural development, the Government of Albania and development partners should establish sustainable financing, technical assistance and monitoring mechanisms in frame of the LEADER measure implementation within IPARD, the CAP and future EU rural development instruments.

### **2. The green transition will succeed only if farmers are placed at the centre of public policies, supported through knowledge, finance, technology and fair access to markets.**

The green transition in agriculture cannot be expected from farmers without providing them with the knowledge, quality inputs, tailored financing, effective institutional support

and market opportunities required to make that transition viable. If Albania aims to build a more sustainable agricultural sector aligned with European standards, public policies must move beyond generic support schemes and focus on practical interventions that reduce costs, improve quality, strengthen traceability and help farmers produce in a safer, more competitive and environmentally responsible manner. In this process, support for producer groups, fair contractual arrangements with buyers and collective investments in post-harvest infrastructure are essential to improve quality, strengthen farmers' bargaining power and increase the share of value retained by producers.

#### **Recommendations:**

- To enable more sustainable and knowledge-based agricultural production, the MARD, research institutions and advisory services should strengthen technical support for farmers through practical guidance on soil analysis, seed and planting material selection, and the sustainable use of agricultural inputs.
- To enable a credible and secure green transition, responsible institutions should strengthen the control and monitoring of agricultural inputs through effective inspection, standardisation and traceability systems.
- To enable farmers to absorb the costs of transitioning towards more sustainable practices, the Government and financial institutions should develop more effective support schemes through targeted subsidies, tailored financing instruments and support for mechanisation and technological upgrading.
- To enable a more competitive agricultural sector aligned with EU standards, public institutions, municipalities and value-chain actors should promote regional production specialisation through territorial assessments, product certification and stronger market linkages for farmers.

### **3. There can be no sustainable rural development without the economic, social and political empowerment of women engaged in agriculture and rural development. Rural women must be recognised as equal actors of development rather than merely beneficiaries of public policies.**

The empowerment of rural women should not be treated solely as a social or gender equality issue, but as a prerequisite for sustainable development, economic security and European integration. The effective implementation of women's existing rights, including property rights, access to finance, services, skills development and decision-making, is essential for transforming their potential into a driver of economic and social development in rural communities. Public policies should be based not only on new programmes, but also on the full implementation of the existing legal framework on gender equality, property rights, economic inclusion and social protection for women in rural areas.

#### **Recommendations:**

- To enable the economic empowerment of rural women, the Government, financial institutions and support programmes should increase women's access to finance through dedicated grants, tailored credit schemes and support measures for women-led farms and businesses.
- To enable genuine economic equality in rural areas, responsible institutions should ensure the recognition of women's ownership of agricultural land through joint property registration, legal counselling and the linkage of support schemes to the documentation of property rights.

- To enable women's participation in employment, entrepreneurship and local development, municipalities and public institutions should strengthen social services and rural infrastructure through childcare facilities, kindergartens, transport services, healthcare services and support for family care responsibilities.
- To enable the transition of rural women from unpaid work to the role of economic actors and decision-makers, educational institutions, advisory services and rural development programmes should provide vocational training, agricultural advisory support, digital skills, entrepreneurship support and opportunities to participate in local decision-making processes through programmes that are accessible to women and girls in rural areas.

#### **4. Digitalisation must bring farmers closer to public services, markets and information, making administration simpler, more transparent and more accessible to all.**

Digitalisation in agriculture should not be viewed merely as the creation of platforms and applications, but as a broader reform of rural governance. The Farmer Portal has the potential to become a strategic instrument for transparency, access to services, administrative simplification and alignment with EU standards, provided that it is designed around farmers' realities. Without digital infrastructure, digital skills, trust in institutions, human support mechanisms and sustainable maintenance, digitalisation risks creating a new divide between farmers and public services.

##### **Recommendations:**

- To enable the Farmer Portal to function as a genuine instrument of rural governance, responsible institutions should ensure access to technology, digital infrastructure and practical support for farmers through targeted investments in rural areas and field-based assistance.
- To enable broad and trusted use of digital services, the Ministry of Agriculture, municipalities and advisory services should strengthen farmers' digital skills through practical training, local assistance points and community-based intermediaries.
- To enable a meaningful simplification of farmers' interactions with public administration, the Government should integrate key agricultural procedures into the Farmer Portal, including subsidy applications, land registration, production declarations and access to official information.
- To ensure that digitalisation remains sustainable and aligned with EU standards, public institutions should guarantee system maintenance, regular updates and inter-institutional coordination through clear mandates, defined responsibilities and effective monitoring mechanisms.

#### **5. Farmers must retain a greater share of the value they create. Strengthening short value chains is essential for building a more competitive, resilient and territorially embedded rural economy.**

A sustainable rural economy cannot be built if farmers remain the weakest link in the market. Short value chains should be recognised as a strategic policy instrument to increase farm incomes, reduce dependence on intermediaries, strengthen local markets and reconnect

agricultural production with consumers, tourism and local territories. Public policies must simultaneously address climate resilience, irrigation, agricultural inputs, land ownership, production costs, subsidies, advisory services and farmers' representation. Without such interventions, rural development risks remaining fragmented and inequitable.

### **Recommendations:**

- To enable farmers to capture a larger share of the value generated by their production, the MARD, municipalities and market actors should support short value chains through local markets, fair contracts, collection points, agritourism initiatives and direct producer-consumer linkages.
- To enable a rural economy that is more resilient to climate shocks and rising costs, the Government and local authorities should invest in irrigation systems, protective infrastructure and cost-reduction mechanisms through targeted financing, fair fiscal policies and dedicated support schemes for small-scale farmers.
- To enable the production of higher-quality, safer and more competitive products, responsible institutions should strengthen input control, agronomic monitoring and agricultural advisory services through effective inspection systems, extension services and technical guidance for farmers.
- To enable fair and inclusive value chain development, the Government should address land fragmentation, weak farmer representation and unequal access to support measures through land reform, farmer organisation and transparent subsidy mechanisms.

## **6. Family farming remains the foundation of food security, rural vitality and territorial cohesion. Public policies must support family farms in moving from survival to development and competitiveness.**

Family farming should not be viewed as a remnant of a traditional model, but as a strategic foundation for food security, the rural economy, territorial management, and the social vitality of rural Albania. The sustainable development of Albania's rural areas should be based on strengthening family farming as a key pillar of the agricultural economy, while recognizing its contribution to food provision, environmental stewardship, local economic development, and the social vibrancy of rural communities.

If Albania aims to achieve meaningful alignment with the EU CAP, public policies must support family farms in transitioning from subsistence-based production towards a more productive, formalized, organized, sustainable, and market-oriented model. In this process, Albania's preparation for the CAP must take into account the specific characteristics of its agricultural structure, particularly the predominance of small family farms and the fragmentation of agricultural land, which require tailored policies and targeted support measures. This calls for reliable data, farm registration systems, land registration, functional advisory services, cooperation among farmers, climate resilience measures, and dedicated support for young people in agriculture.

### **Recommendations:**

- To enable more equitable and targeted policies for family farming, the MARD and responsible institutions should establish a unified farm data system through the Farm Register, linked to the Cadastre, ARDA, municipalities and the Land Parcel Identification System.

- To enable the formalisation and sustainable growth of family farms, the Government should complete land registration and fully implement the legal framework governing agricultural land use, including clear deadlines for land ownership certificates, secondary legislation on agricultural leasing and registration of family farm managers.
- To enable family farms to transition from subsistence production to market participation, advisory services, municipalities and support programmes should strengthen knowledge transfer, cooperation and market integration through AKIS, farmer cooperation structures, agritourism contracts, territorial branding and producer cooperation models.
- To enable generational renewal and climate resilience in family farming, the Government, municipalities and financial institutions should establish dedicated measures for young farmers and climate risk management through agricultural start-up schemes, local tax incentives, resilient technology packages and agricultural insurance mechanisms.

## **7. Transhumance is both a living heritage to be preserved and a strategic asset for biodiversity, mountain economies, rural tourism and the European identity of rural Albania.**

Transhumance contributes to biodiversity conservation, sustainable pasture management, the production of territorially distinctive products, the development of rural tourism and the vitality of mountain communities. The loss of transhumance would mean the loss of traditional knowledge, the degradation of rural landscapes and the weakening of local economies. For this reason, transhumance should be integrated into national policies on rural development, environmental protection, cultural heritage and European integration as a strategic priority rather than being regarded as a practice of the past.

### **Recommendations:**

- To enable the survival and revitalisation of transhumance, the Government of Albania should establish a National Programme for Transhumance through its integration into policies on rural development, biodiversity, cultural heritage and climate adaptation.
- To enable sustainable pasture management and the preservation of traditional migration corridors, national and local institutions should invest in the rehabilitation of pastures, routes, water resources and supporting infrastructure through dedicated funding and long-term management plans.
- To enable the economic viability of transhumant livestock systems, the MARD and ARDA should establish dedicated support schemes for shepherds and mountain farms through differentiated payments, support for mountain shelters, social protection measures and veterinary services.
- To enable transhumance to generate greater income and employment opportunities in rural areas, public institutions, municipalities and local organisations should connect transhumance with agritourism, traditional products and territorial brands through promotion, certification and the development of local value chains.

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## NATIONAL PRIORITIES FOR ACTION (2026-2030)

To support the transformation of rural areas and accelerate Albania's European integration process, the 4th Albanian Rural Parliament calls upon national and local institutions to pursue the following strategic priorities during the period 2026-2030:

1. Nationwide implementation of the LEADER/CLLD approach, through the establishment and financing of LAGs across rural Albania as the principal instrument for community-led territorial development.
2. Development and implementation of a National Family Farming Programme. Adoption of a dedicated policy and financing framework to strengthen family farms, in line with the United Nations Decade of Family Farming (2019-2028) and the National Action Plan.
3. A National Programme for the Empowerment of Women in the Agri-Food Sector, aimed at increasing women's access to ownership, finance, entrepreneurship, markets, training and decision-making through measurable targets and dedicated support measures.
4. A National Programme for AKIS and the Digital Transformation of Agriculture, including the reform of agricultural extension and knowledge transfer services in line with the European AKIS model, and the development of the Farmer Portal as an integrated platform for information, applications, advisory support and public services.
5. A National Programme for Green Transition and Climate Resilience, prioritising investments in irrigation, land management, disaster risk reduction, sustainable use of agricultural inputs and climate adaptation.
6. Formalisation of Agricultural Land and Farm Consolidation, accelerating land registration, addressing farm fragmentation and creating conditions for investment, cooperation and enhanced competitiveness.
7. Development of Short Value Chains and Local Markets, supporting farmer organisation, local markets, traditional products, on-farm processing and direct producer-consumer connections.
8. A National Programme for Rural Youth, creating dedicated instruments for employment, entrepreneurship, innovation and the return of young people to the rural economy.
9. A National Programme for the Protection and Development of Transhumance, recognising transhumance as a strategic national asset for biodiversity, mountain economies, rural tourism and cultural heritage through a dedicated action plan.
10. A National Partnership for Rural Development, establishing a permanent mechanism for dialogue and cooperation among public institutions, local authorities, farmers' organisations, civil society, academia and the private sector for the implementation and monitoring of rural development priorities.

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The 4th Albanian Rural Parliament reaffirms that rural development must remain a national priority and a key pillar of Albania's European integration process. The implementation of the recommendations and priorities included in this Declaration requires sustained political commitment, effective inter-institutional coordination and broad partnerships among public institutions, local authorities, farmers' organisations, civil society, academia, the private sector and development partners.

The Albanian Network for Rural Development and the partners of the Albanian Rural Parliament will continue to facilitate policy dialogue, monitor progress in addressing these priorities and contribute to creating an enabling environment for a more competitive, inclusive and sustainable rural Albania on its path towards membership in the European Union.