



Report of the 10th meeting of the Permanent Sub-group on LEADER and CLLD

Online meeting, 22 February 2022

Introduction

- 9.30 - 9.35** **Note:** Presentations can be directly accessed by clicking on the links provided.
- Welcome and Introduction**
Antonia Gamez Moreno, DG AGRI
- Antonia Gamez Moreno, DG AGRI** welcomed participants to the meeting and introduced herself as the new head of DG AGRI unit D1 "Rural areas and networks". Unit D1 develops and manages networking activities linked with the CAP Strategic Plans at the EU level. It is directly responsible for management of entities put in place to support these networking activities for the EU CAP Network, its governance process and its constituent parts, Lot 1 (currently ENRD Contact Point), Lot 2 (EIP –AGRI support facility) and Lot 4 (logistics and communication). D.1 is also responsible for the implementation of the Commission Communication on the Long-term vision for rural areas (LTVRA) and manages the Broadband Competence Offices (BCOs) Support Facility. Sub-group members were encouraged to participate fully in the various sessions which contributed to the [agenda for the day](#).
- 9.35 - 9.50**
Update on the CAP regulatory framework relating to LEADER – Margaret Bateson-Missen, DG AGRI and Iwona Lisztwan, DG AGRI
- Margaret-Bateson Missen** introduced her unit (B3 Social sustainability) which operates within a new directorate B created for economic, social, and environmental sustainability within DG AGRI. Unit B3 within it includes responsibility for LEADER. The Member States (MS) are now still implementing the LEADER measures within the current Rural Development Programmes (RDPs), extended by EURI and transition funds to 2021-2022. Preparations of the new local development strategies under the CAP Strategic Plans (CSPs) post 2023 are ongoing or just beginning still under the current RDPs. The Commission is currently assessing the draft CSPs submitted by MS and letters of observations are scheduled to be sent by the end of March (these will also be published online and available for all to read). Ms Bateson-Missen also underlined the importance of EU LEADER networking for continuous improvement of LEADER implementation and to demonstrate the added value of the approach – an important aspect also expected to be reinforced by the forthcoming European Court of Auditors (ECA) report on LEADER.
- Iwona Lisztwan's** presentation on the [LEADER intervention in CAP post 2023](#), summarised the key components of the regulatory framework. She underlined that the CSP implementing regulation referred explicitly to the added value of LEADER as an element required to be described in CSPs. It is essentially in improved social capital, local governance and enhanced project results compared with non-LEADER delivery. This focus on added value will be reinforced by the forthcoming ECA report on LEADER. The added value of LEADER comes from the full implementation of all the principles of the LEADER method and the Commission is assessing these in the CSPs. The streamlining of the delivery mechanisms is also important, and LAGs should focus on their core functions as described in the Regulation. If LAGs were expected to perform additional tasks, sufficient resources should be assured so that they can do enough core work, especially animation and capacity building. It was noted, simplified cost options were recommended as the default.

9.50 - 10.30

Update on implementation of LEADER in the current programmes, the preparatory activities (under Transition Regulation) and the indicative timetables for first calls for post 2023 – Iwona Lisztwan, DG AGRI

Iwona Lisztwan's [presentation](#) focused on the implementation of LEADER measures in rural development programmes 2014-2022 and preparatory activities for the first calls for post 2023.

MS are still implementing LEADER measures in the current period 2014-2022. This reflects the additional EURI and transition regulation funds allocated, which has increased the overall budget of EUR 6.7 bn by another EUR 1.5 bn, which has to be used by the end of 2025.

The Commission observed that in almost all cases the preparatory support for Local Development Strategies (LDSs) was included by MS in the current RDPs and not in the CSPs. This was considered a positive development in making the transition between programming periods smoother.

Regarding financial implementation, the amount paid by the end of 2021 is EUR 3.7 bn (an execution rate of 44%). Based on the annual implementation report as of the end of 2020 the commitment rate is 62%, but there are significant variations across the MS.

The number of transnational and interterritorial projects reported is smaller than the overall number of LAGs, which means that some LAGs still need to be encouraged to pick up the cooperation activities.

The timing and organisation of the first calls for LAGs under the new period will depend to some extent on the other ESIF funds since the legislation gives a deadline of 12 months from the adoption of the last programme concerned for the LAGs to be selected and become operational. A special article allows RDP funds to participate in the first calls for multi-fund strategies before the CSPs are adopted.

Member State presentations

LEADER in Finland 2023-2027, Laura Jänis, Finnish Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry

There will be no gap between LEADER in the current period and [LEADER in Finland in 2023-2027](#). Laura Jänis emphasised that there would be no overlapping between the programming periods – the implementation of the current LDS would be completed by the end of 2022, and the new strategies would start in 2023. The preparation process started in 2016 and LAGs and strategies will be selected in a two-phase application process. The first round took place in 2021 and the second round will take place in spring 2022. LDSs should be submitted by mid-summer and the implementation of the approved ones will start in 2023. The evaluation criteria to be used for the selection of LAGs was developed together with groups. It is a clear and transparent points system based on criteria that examines all the LEADER principles. As this will have an impact on the LAGs' budgets, work still needs to be done to reflect and balance the system to ensure it is not overcomplicated. Several issues are being discussed in Finland including demographic change and its weakening effect on LAGs due to low populations in some regions (which may bring about the need to merge some LAGs); and how LEADER can support social enterprise and non-profit organisations in view of the relevant state aid rules.

Alecsandra Rusu, Managing Authority NRDP

[The LEADER programme in Romania](#) includes 237 LAGs covering 92% of the territory of the country. The commitment rate is at 80% of the LEADER budget and 60% of the budget has been paid out. The total number of LEADER projects is approximately 9 000. For the transition period, LEADER has EUR 128 m from the EAFRD, of which EUR 123 m will be used by LAGs to continue their operations and EUR 4 m will be used for preparatory support for the new programming

LEADER Austria
Transition period
and CSP, Christa
Rockenbauer-
Peirl, Federal
Ministry of
Agriculture,
Regions and
Tourism

period. The Managing Authority (MA) will launch the calls for preparatory support in April 2022. In the next programming period Romania will allow multi-funded strategies and ESI funds can be included in the LDS for specific operations and initiatives.

In [Austria](#), the transition budget has been allocated to the 77 Austrian LAGs in 2021, using the same criteria as in 2015 along with the budget performance review. There was variation in amounts between LAGs. A small element, 5% of the budget was withheld at National level. The MA considers that it will have enough flexibility to use all funds by the end of the programming period. To avoid any overlap between the programming periods, the MA is in the process of defining a cut-off date for the last calls for projects before the selection of new LAGs. This will ensure that it is only payments from the current RDP that will continue, after the new LAGs have been selected. Preparatory support for the existing LAGs will be funded by the current RDP. LAGs have a two-stage process with feedback from the MA and selection committee allowing for improvements. New LAGs will start in July 2023. New issues considered through LEADER include a thematic topic on climate protection and adaptation; gender balance will be considered at project selection, and the lump sum option will be used. A multi-funding « light » approach will include cooperation with the European Social Fund.

Update on LEADER
implementation in
Poland, Beata
Rodak, Polish
Ministry of
Agriculture and
Rural
Development

In her [update on LEADER implementation in Poland](#), Beata Rodak informed participants that preparatory support would come from the current RDP. A set lump sum amount will be paid to all LAGs irrespective of size. It will be a competitive process where new LAGs and existing LAGs will compete to have their LDS selected. The planned launch for the preparatory support is March 2022. For the selection of LDSs, Poland plans to launch a call for proposals in October and close it at the end of November 2022, the full process will take six months and will be completed by May 2023. Poland will apply multi-funded CLLD, using the EAFRD, the ESF and the ERDF. Separate application processes will be launched under the Fisheries Fund. CLLD in Poland is implemented regionally with regional selection, consequently developing the competition documentation for the 16 Voivodeships poses a specific challenge. Poland also introduces an appeals procedure for this period. The selection committees will be appointed by the Voivodeship board with the same composition as in the previous period. The application documentation will be ready by June 2022 for all interested applicant LAGs.

Q&A

Answering a question regarding **official EU deadlines relating to the completion of current RDPs**, Iwona Lisztwan (DG AGRI) confirmed that the only legal requirement from the EU level relates to the completion of expenditure under the current programmes until the end of 2025. The Commission has set no official deadlines on commitments, this is an obligation at the national level. One main issue was how to separate the running cost of current and new LDS, the Commission was in the process of developing a tool to monitor the situation.

A question was raised about the **competition process and budget allocation in Poland**, Beata Rodak (MA, Poland) confirmed the plan was to use the same competitive method as used from the beginning of the current programming period. The methodology was publicised more than 10 months in advance. The

	<p>budget allocation will depend on the number of LAGs meeting the selection criteria, their size and whether they will use mono or multi-fund LDSs.</p> <p>Following a question on the composition of LAG funding in Finland, Laura Jänis (MA, Finland) confirmed that the allocation would include 43 % EU funds, 37% national funds, and 20% from the municipalities of the LAG areas.</p>
<p>10.30 – 10.40 Update on the state of play of the implementation of LEADER transnational cooperation – Peter Toth, ENRD CP</p>	<p>Peter Toth (ENRD Contact Point) provided a summary, of transnational cooperation (TNC) updating members on the ENRD website content which is based on the System for Fund Management in the European Union (SFC) data relating to TNC. The number of LAG users who manage their own profiles in the ENRD website is steadily increasing (currently 813 LAGs). The summary paper on the ENRD website on cooperation with third countries, has recently been updated and now includes links to LEADER projects being implemented in Turkey. Member State TNC managers were invited to update the ENRD Contact Point with any changes in their contact details.</p> <p>In total 164 approved TNC projects were reported in the SFC with the majority including partners from two EU MS. In terms of choice of partner MS, the priority partners are still neighbouring countries for most EU MSs, however, the number of projects with partners from non-neighbouring countries is increasing. The current selection of approved TNC projects includes some projects with third country partners from North Macedonia, Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, China, Canada and Turkey.</p>
<p>Q&A</p>	<p>Juha-Matti Markkola (National Rural Network, Finland) referred to the challenges posed to transnational cooperation by differences in rules applied in different MSs and how this hindered Local Action Groups' efforts to develop transnational cooperation projects. He asked whether there were any relevant discussions in the ENRD or in the EC on streamlining TNC rules.</p> <p>Peter Toth replied referring to the collection of information on the ENRD website relating to TNC rules in different MS and regions (cooperation landscape, fact sheets) and emphasised that the ideal situation would be if these rules were harmonised between MS. The existing sources of information, good practices, sharing and exchanging of information between MS could be useful.</p> <p>Ms Lisztwan added that transnational cooperation projects represent the LEADER principle 'cooperation' and observed that the number of cooperation projects was not enough. The Commission will look again into the difficulties behind cooperation, as cooperation is an obligatory feature of LEADER method, and each LAG would be required to plan at least one transnational or interterritorial cooperation project during the coming period.</p>
<p>ENRD Contact Point LEADER support activities and lessons learnt</p>	
<p>10.55 – 11.20 Summary of results of the LEADER needs assessment survey</p>	<p>Susan Grieve presented the results from the LEADER needs assessment launched in early January 2022. The ENRD received 42 responses from the LEADER Sub-group members that covered 25 Member States.</p> <p>The survey looked at networking and thematic support needs from the ENRD; expectations and experiences of EU-level networking; and good practices, methods, and tools to share. Survey respondents ranked 'demonstrating the added value of LEADER', 'efficient delivery mechanisms across the whole LEADER</p>

– Susan Grieve,
ENRD CP

chain’, ‘support the preparing the CAP Strategic Plans’, and ‘LEADER getting smarter’ as the most useful areas for EU-level networking.

Networking support for capacity building for LAGs in relation to motivation, meeting and event facilitation, communication and animation were seen to be very important, but thought most appropriate at National level, or in combination with the EU level, not EU level on its own.

The most useful areas of EU-level networking on LEADER – future expectations related to benefits for LEADER stakeholders -were seen to be ‘sharing models for successful procedures’, ‘clarification of EU rules on LEADER’ and ‘sharing best practice examples to inspire LAGs’.

The most beneficial areas of EU-level networking support - based on past experience of LEADER stakeholders from the ENRD were events, working groups or thematic groups, the ENRD website, and enabling contacts with peers from other MS. Looking ahead survey respondents would like to see more physical and virtual events and thematic group discussions. Participation in EU level networking, for members who represented organisations, was limited most by time pressure, whereas the main barrier to participation for LAGs was the limited language options.

Q&A

When questioned on the need for data for monitoring and evaluating LEADER’s added value **Iwona Lisztwan** replied that MS dialogue was ongoing on ways of collecting simple, local level data to demonstrate the contribution of LEADER’s added value. Types of data suggested included the composition of the LAGs, the partners and operations.

Kristiina Tammets (Estonia) described efforts to simplify LEADER rules and the Paying Agency’s ambition to achieve extensive simplification. She asked other MS representatives to share examples of simplification relating to simplified cost options, transnational cooperation and monitoring and evaluation.

Laura Janis emphasised the importance of peer-to-peer exchanges, for instance on the allocation and calculation of LAGs’ running costs.

Iwona Lisztwan called participants’ attention to the need for a step-by-step approach which examined all LEADER principles and how these were applied across all LAGs in the EU. The Commission understood the differences between LAGs and the need to ensure that all LAGs across the EU perform well and implement all features of LEADER method.

11.20 – 11.50
Planned ENRD
activities relating
to LEADER,
including the
LEADER Thematic
Group – Peter
Toth, ENRD CP

Peter Toth (ENRD CP) presented the [planned ENRD CP support activities](#) related to LEADER/CLLD up to the end of 2022. These include the planned updates and review of the partner search and LAG database, and an interactive forum to be launched on the new website of the EU CAP Network. A key activity for the year is the ENRD LEADER Thematic Groups. The first Thematic Group focuses on “Making the seven LEADER principles work in practice for all LAGs under the CAP Strategic Plans”. A second Thematic Group may look at demonstrating and enabling added value in LEADER. Possible further activities may include up to two LEADER workshops (with indicative themes related to youth and smart villages) and ‘clinics’ on specific themes. These will be based on stakeholder demand.

Q&A

Frank Bartelt (MA, Germany) underlined the challenges involved in developing a useful monitoring and evaluation framework and proposed a workshop could be organised by ENRD on this theme. **Hartmut Berndt (BAG LAG, Germany)**

emphasised that LEADER's added value was based on activating people 'on the ground' and emphasised the difficulties associated with measuring this adequately. In defining the added value of LEADER, Mr Berndt questioned who had the appropriate criteria to define this. He warned of the limitations of data in assessing the added value of LEADER and called for more focus on the bottom-up approach. Any monitoring and evaluation framework needs to be simple (emphasising that any further complexity introduced in LEADER would likely reduce local people's participation in it).

Iwona Lisztwan confirmed that it was the role of the LEADER community to discuss the LEADER principles and its added value and emphasised the role of the ENRD thematic groups in this respect. Regarding the monitoring and evaluation framework, DG AGRI was looking at how best to arrange the discussion about it either through ENRD or the Evaluation Helpdesk. Ms Lisztwan reassured members of the LEADER Sub-group that the data requirements would be very simple and basic.

Several **Sub-group members** highlighted important forthcoming youth related initiatives, asking if the ENRD was following developments related to the European Rural Parliament on Youth and other initiatives organised on this topic and aimed to create synergies between these.

Results of the evaluation support study of LEADER

11.50 – 12.15

Results of the
"Support study to
the evaluation on
the impact of
LEADER on
Balanced
Territorial
Development" -
Janet Dwyer and
Katarina
Kubinakova

DG AGRI commissioned an external evaluation support study to assess the impact of LEADER on the balanced territorial development (carried out by Countryside and Community Research Institute – CCRI). **Eduardo Serrano (DG AGRI)** explained that the support study - undertaken between October 2020 and October 2021 by CCRI, University of Gloucestershire, ADE and ÖIR, with core support also from CREA, Italy - focused on the current period. Mr Serrano added that the support study would provide inputs for the final evaluation of LEADER by the Commission which would include useful findings and recommendations to consider for the future. **Janet Dwyer and Katarina Kubinakova (CCRI)** [presented](#) the results of the support study to the evaluation of LEADER in balanced territorial development including the various study components and recommendations. The full study is available [here](#).

Summary and next steps

12.15 – 13:00

Antonia Gamez
Moreno, DG AGRI

Antonia Gamez Moreno thanked participants for their activity during the meeting. Ms Gamez reminded members of the Sub-group that in this period LAGs are still busy implementing the current programmes including the funding added under the Transition Regulation/EU Recovery Instrument. Most MS have already submitted their CSPs, and the Commission is now finalising their assessments. She noted that when checking CSPs the Commission makes sure that all the LAGs fully implement the LEADER method (all seven principles) as detailed in the legislation and analyses the scope of LEADER operations to verify that LEADER added value can be demonstrated. The Commission also analyses the delivery mechanism, to make sure that all core functions have appropriate

resources, for instance animation. Regarding the networking support needs for LEADER, findings from relevant surveys confirm the Commission approach and the importance of LEADER added value and efficient delivery mechanisms. In conclusion Ms Gamez emphasised the importance of up-to-date contact details and asked members of the LEADER Sub-group to provide any updates to DG AGRI.