

LEADER Thematic Group ‘Making the seven LEADER principles work in practice for all LAGs under the CAP Strategic Plans’

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About this document: This background document provides a summary of selected information sources relevant to the theme of the ENRD’s LEADER Thematic Group “Making the seven LEADER principles work in practice for all LAGs under the CAP Strategic Plans” with the purpose providing a common knowledge base and reference point for the members of the Thematic Group. This document does not constitute official guidance to Member States or reflect the official position of the European Commission. The document is also not intended to replace policy papers, regulations, opinions, analyses, reports, or other official documents relating to the subject.

Introduction

Member States are continuing with the implementation of LEADER under the 2014-2022 programming period rules. At the same time, Member States are programming and designing national implementing rules, procedures, and guidance for the selection of Local Action Groups (LAGs) and the selection and implementation of Local Development Strategies under CAP Strategic Plans post 2023. In the new post 2023 performance framework, Member States have more flexibility in developing their own LEADER/CLLD delivery systems. However, within this, there is a need to ensure that all the LAGs (and other actors in the delivery chain) act in accordance with all the seven principles of the LEADER/CLLD method as stipulated in Regulation (EU) 1060/2021. To this end, ENRD has established a Thematic Group 'Making the seven LEADER principles work in practice for all LAGs under the CAP Strategic Plans'.

The following sections of the document summarise selected relevant information sources with the purpose of providing a common knowledge base and reference point for the members of the Thematic Group.

- [Section 1](#) summarises the information provided in the expression of interest for this Thematic Group.
- [Section 2](#) describes some key considerations for each of the seven LEADER principles.
- [Section 3](#) summarises some of the relevant findings / lessons learnt about the LEADER principles from previous ENRD work.
- [Annex 1](#) supplements Section 3 with key questions to consider for each of the seven LEADER principles.
- [Annex 2](#) summarises key conclusions of selected evaluations of LEADER relevant to the practical implementation of the LEADER principles.
- [Annex 3](#) briefly describes the legislative framework.
- [Annex 4](#) lists useful links to additional resources.

1. Summary of the Thematic Group expressions of interest

LEADER principles to improve

Based on responses submitted to the expression of interest for this ENRD Thematic Group, the following order of importance of the LEADER principles can be established - in terms of the priority to improve their practical implementation: bottom-up approach (i.e., understood as led by local action groups), innovation elements in the local context, local action groups, cooperation, networking, local development strategies, subregional territories.

Factors blocking the practical implementation of LEADER principles

Two main groups of factors blocking the full practical application of LEADER principles were identified by respondents. These are 'internal' factors – related to the LAG and its territory, and 'external' factors – related to the LEADER delivery chain or the wider political context. The most important blocking factors described by these respondents relate to administrative burden (bureaucracy, controls, rules, criteria, long procedures), limited understanding of LEADER principles (both at the LAG level and in the delivery chain – by Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies), the limited recognition of the role of LEADER and of LAGs in local development, and limited engagement of local stakeholders in LEADER. Some respondents also quoted political factors, limited resources, and lack of coordination in the delivery chain as important factors. Some important factors mentioned by respondents are listed below:

- systemic resistance to decentralisation that involves actors outside public administration,
- disappointment of active stakeholders due to limited opportunities for their participation,

- excessive bureaucracy, fear of making mistakes and being sanctioned, limited trust from national and European bodies,
- LAGs are not the responsible implementation bodies of their strategies – project and payments are approved and executed by others,
- LAGs select projects by ‘territory-specific’ criteria versus ‘unitary verification’ by Paying Agency,
- European Commission recommends LAGs can develop Local Development Strategy (LDS) measures differently from the Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) versus auditors claiming that projects selected by LAGs do not comply with the RDP,
- procedure for LEADER projects similar to those projects financed through a national scheme – this limits innovation,
- scarce consideration of the real role of LAGs in the context of systemic development (not only in rural areas),
- usual suspects engaged in LEADER – challenge of broadening the network of LEADER stakeholders participating,
- better area selection criteria needed for better and more coherent programmes,
- political influence by local municipalities on partnership,
- interpretation of what is innovation at the local level should be the LAG’s task – not that of the regional authorities,
- management mechanisms cause progressive loss of added value of LEADER – exponential growth of transaction costs.

2. Key considerations for each of the seven LEADER principles

The summaries below are informed by the Thematic Group expressions of interest and the LEADER Toolkit of the ENRD. They provide a possible starting point for discussions in the Thematic Group.

1. **Subregional areas:** The subregional area is characterised by social and functional cohesion. It is the basis for the development of the local partnership and the strategy. Cases of non-implementation of this principle may occur when (a) a LAG territory covers a region and crosses its boundary, or (b) the selection of LAGs follows purely top-down criteria (LAGs are designated in a top-down manner with no consideration for bottom-up local processes and the cohesion of their territories in economic, cultural, environmental, or historical terms). Practical questions of implementation of this principle may address how to identify the ‘right’ criteria for selecting LAGs, how to achieve ‘critical mass’ and avoid both ‘oversized’ or ‘too small’ LAGs, how to reflect ‘LAG size’ (coverage in population and territory) in the allocation of resources to LAGs.
2. **Local Action Groups¹ composed of representatives of public and private local socioeconomic interests in which no single interest group controls the decision-making:** When local partners form a partnership, they become active partners in the development of the territory – in Local Action Groups, these active partners need to represent the diverse socioeconomic interests in the territory. ‘Non-implementation’ of this principle may arise when the setting up of LAGs is overly influenced by political factors (local, regional, or national) and the LAG is overly dominated by some specific local socioeconomic interest or stakeholder group (e.g., public sector dominance is experienced in some Member States) which may be prevalent in LAG territories suffering from depopulation, low level of civil society or economic activity. This may make it difficult for LAGs to operate as real public-private partnerships focusing on the development of integrated solutions for local challenges. Operating the LAG as a public-private partnership also requires good local governance, ensuring the balanced representation of various local socioeconomic interests, sufficient capacities from LAG staff, and a good understanding of the partnership from local stakeholders

¹ Further details described in Article 33 of Regulation (EU) 1060/2021

and elected representatives of the LAG. Another important factor in setting up effective LAGs is trust in and understanding of the role of the LAG by national authorities (Managing Authority, Paying Agency) to enable the LAG to act as a local development office / agency and not merely be limited to performing as an administrative unit.

3. **Community-led Local Development Strategies² (LDS):** Local Development Strategies aim to capitalise on creating links between various sectors of the rural economy and relevant development actions. Cases of 'non-implementation' of this principle may arise when LDS are not developed with the involvement of the local population within the LAG territory, i.e. the LDS is not developed using a participatory approach. This may negatively affect the integrated and multi-sectoral nature of the strategy and can lead to some relevant local socioeconomic interests not being represented in the strategy. When LDS themes are defined through a top-down approach (e.g., LDSs limited to a predefined set of themes or RDP / CAP SP measures by the Managing Authority) the local strategies are not community-led and do not fully reflect local needs. Effective application of this principle also requires that the LDSs have strategic orientation towards the objectives most important for the local population within the LAG territory.
4. **Networking:** Networking links up rural stakeholders, not only within the LAG territory, but also at regional, national, and international level. Networking has extended to non-rural partners with the introduction of CLLD and can be a driver for innovation, building capacities, developing peer support, and sharing knowledge. One of the key factors that determines whether a LAG can participate in networking is whether it has the resources and capacities to do this.
Excessive administrative burden can force LAGs to focus on administrative procedures related to local projects and severely limit their ability to create and participate in local, regional, national, or international networks. Challenges to networking also relate to the involvement of not only professional LAG staff or elected representatives, but also other local stakeholders. Lack of knowledge about the benefits of networking or lack of initiative may also limit networking activities. Networking capacities in LEADER can also be enhanced through capacity-building and networking support provided by National Rural Networks and the level of such support can influence the level of networking for some LAGs.
An important function – and benefit – of networking could be the breaking down of existing 'silos between policy, research, and practice', at the same time this is challenging activity which requires sufficient resources.
5. **Bottom-up management (bottom-up approach):** In LEADER, local people are entitled to drive the development of their territory and define a development pathway according to their needs. The implementation of this principle can be severely limited by excessive top-down regulation of the LAG and the LDS. At the local level, the LAG manager and the LAG Board need to ensure a sufficient level of local stakeholder involvement both at the design and implementation phases of the LDS. The LAG's 'health status' - in terms of openness to local stakeholders, balanced representation of various local interests, and local governance - plays a crucial role in ensuring that this principle is implemented.
Limited LAG resources for animation activities can have a negative effect on the implementation of the bottom-up approach at the LAG level. Limited understanding of the importance of participation and involvement in LAG processes by local actors can also 'block' the implementation of this principle. When only the most active local stakeholders are involved and hard-to-reach, marginalised, or vulnerable groups have no or very limited 'say' in LAG processes and LDS design/ implementation that is another indication that the implementation of the bottom-up principle requires improvement.
6. **Innovative features in the local context:** Innovation in LEADER is about bringing new solutions to local problems within the LAG territory. It involves creating the right local conditions for innovation, seeking out and developing new solutions, assessing the risks associated and implementing the new solutions. Non-implementation of this principle occurs when the LDS do not contain innovative elements or the implementation of these is severely blocked.

² Further details described in Article 32 of Regulation (EU) 1060/2021

There are several practical aspects of this principle that need consideration including whether a common understanding (definition?) of this principle is shared by beneficiaries, LAGs, managing authorities and paying agencies, to what extent the LAG needs to promote – or create – innovation in its territory and whether the resources allocated to it are sufficient. Several factors can block the implementation of this principle, two of the most often cited include (a) the selection of project based on local innovation criteria versus their rejection (by the managing authority or paying agency) based on ‘standard’, national or regional criteria, and (b) the LAG’s innovation capacities being overly limited by excessive administrative burden.

Local innovation can also be limited by too narrow local definitions of it by the LAG, e.g. not considering social innovation and focusing only on technological, investment-related aspects of innovation.

7. **Cooperation with other territorial actors:** Cooperation enhances networking in the sense of involving people in a joint project – interterritorial or transnational – which brings tangible benefits as well as new perspectives and knowledge into the LAG territory. LAG engagement in cooperation activities may be limited by the complexity of relevant rules, the lack of understanding of the potential benefits of cooperation, the lack of LAG capacities for cooperation due to excessive administrative burden. Differences between relevant rules applied by regions (within a Member State) and Member States (in a transnational cooperation setting) can also make cooperation between LAGs difficult. Relevant questions for cooperation can relate to how LAG capacities for cooperation can be increased, in what way can the understanding of the rules and benefits of cooperation be increased, and how to create relevant rules that are simple enough to facilitate cooperation.

3. ENRD lessons learnt

In addition to the sources described below, the **LEADER Toolkit** (latest update introduced in the 2014-2020 programming period) provides detailed information on the practical implementation aspects of LEADER in sections dedicated to the [explanation of LEADER/CLLD and its principles](#), [implementing LAGs and local strategies](#), [the LEADER delivery system](#), [communication across the LEADER delivery chain](#), [guidance on the design and implementation of local strategies](#).

ENRD Local Action Group survey (2017)

- **Importance of LEADER principles:** Based on 631 responses to this section of the survey from LAG representatives, the top-3 LEADER principles considered ‘essential’ or ‘important’ are the bottom-up approach, the local public-private partnerships, and the area-based Local Development Strategies (LDS). Networking, multi-sectoral, and innovative approaches also feature strongly (with more than 65% of respondents considering them ‘important’ or ‘essential’).
- **Implementation of LEADER principles:** Most LAGs think they can ‘fully’ implement local public-private partnerships, area-based local development strategies, and the bottom-up approach – while more than 40% of respondents have some difficulty implementing multi-sectoral LDSs, cooperation projects or innovative approaches.
- Regarding the **practical aspects of LEADER implementation as seen by LAGs**, responses indicate that LEADER implementation locally / by the LAG is limited by project application procedures, RDP level procedures and regulations, the level of bureaucracy and administrative burden (both on LAGs and project holders), and administrative and reporting requirements affecting the LAG’s animation and other development activities.
- The types of **LEADER effect** that have been considered (very) important but difficult to achieve by at least 56% of LAG respondents include: innovative solutions to local problems, improving local community social capital and cohesion, mobilising local / endogenous resources (human, physical, financial), and strengthening economic linkages among local actors.

LEADER Innovation Practitioner-Led Working Group (2017-2018)

The work of the ENRD's LEADER Innovation PWG (with 44 members from 19 EU MS) was summarised in a [working document available on the ENRD website](#). The working document underlines that the “concept of ‘LEADER innovation’ embraces all and any ‘innovative elements in the local context’” and thus narrow, top-down definitions are not applicable. The PWG found that in the specific local-rural contexts ‘LEADER innovation’ plays out through the design and implementation of the Local Development Strategy (LDS).

The degree to which the ‘innovative features in the local context’ can be translated into LEADER implementation is influenced by both external and local factors. In terms of **local factors**, LAG capacities for animation of the territory and mobilising the innovation potential locally are as important as the ‘local innovation culture’ (covering the attitude and previous experiences of local stakeholders – including that of the LAG Board – towards innovative approaches, and the local communities’ level of trust in the LAG). **External factors** include the LEADER delivery chain and how communication and coordination mechanisms within this affect the LAG’s ability to introduce and implement innovative approaches.

Attitudes matter – **lack of trust, fear of failure and risk-aversion** have been identified as very important non-regulatory elements negatively affecting the innovative potential of LEADER. Risk-aversion is one of the main reasons contributing to **gold-plating** (“additional administrative obligations on top of the minimum requirements set by the ESIF regulatory framework”³) which in turn leads to more administrative burden, negative impact on project quality and innovation, increased cost of controls, and **‘voluntary gold-plating’ by LAGs**.

To summarise, the **four key types of factors** that affect to what extent the ‘innovative elements in the local context’ can be realised in practice are (1) the need for a common understanding of what this LEADER principle means at all levels of the LEADER delivery chain, (2) understanding of the functions and controls in relation to innovation in LEADER, (3) improving the innovation ‘culture’ both at the LAG level and in the LEADER delivery chain – a generally less risk-averse attitude and increase of trust and better communication from beneficiary through the LAG to the MS authorities’ level, (4) simplification of relevant rules and procedures, generally leading to reduced administrative burden which in turn frees up capacities for animation, building trust, and ‘nurturing’ innovation locally. Further information on LEADER innovation is available [here](#).

LEADER Cooperation Practitioner-Led Working Group (2017)

In addition to sharing examples of good practice, various templates, and improving the definition of joint actions and common costs, the LEADER Cooperation PWG (with 46 members from 20 EU MS) also ‘mapped’ and described the key components for an ‘ideal’ TNC process. The main added value of cooperation projects is bringing relevant knowledge, new methods, and experience into the implementation of the LDS and contribute to the development of the territory in this way. **Integrating cooperation into the LDS** benefits LAGs by making them ‘think early’ and plan their cooperation activities in conjunction with their relevant local development objectives and avoid participation in cooperation schemes less relevant for local needs. **LAGs are ‘best placed’ to select cooperation projects** according to benefit their territories, stakeholders most. By the very nature of these projects, **exchange of information between Member States about relevant TNC rules is essential – harmonisation of cooperation rules** could benefit all participating Member States and reduce the ‘administrative’ costs of cooperation originating from different rules in different Member States.

³ [Research for REGI Committee: Gold-plating in the European Structural and Investment Funds](#)

Potential cooperation partners should have access to **sufficient preparatory support** to explore the feasibility of a particular cooperation idea – such **‘exploratory’ activities** should be eligible for support if the LAG can clearly demonstrate its intention to develop a cooperation project. Ideally, cooperation projects should enable **not only LAGs, but other local stakeholders to participate** as well. The most important factors contributing to the practical implementation of the cooperation are: (1) integration of cooperation into the LDS, (2) preparatory support for cooperation, (3) exchange of information about TNC rules in Member States, (4) coordination – or harmonisation – of TNC rules in Member States. Further information and other useful outcomes of the LEADER Cooperation PWG are described [here](#).

LEADER Reflection Group (2018)

The LEADER Reflection Group was set up on the initiative of DG AGRI to review LEADER implementation experience and evidence to contribute to the development of proposals for the future of LEADER and enable effective implementation. The Group of experienced and informed LEADER practitioners developed practical, evidence-based proposals that addressed eleven main sets of issues related to LEADER implementation, including those related to the implementation of the LEADER principles. A summary of these proposals was presented at the [ENRD Workshop on LEADER Simplification](#). Some key points relevant to LEADER principles are summarised below (the presentation is available [here](#)):

- Multisectoral integration: the group highlighted that multisectoral integration can be eroded by increasing focus on agriculture, impacted by the lack of wider awareness of LEADER and its potential, and the need for prioritisation while maintaining multi-sectoral integration,
- Innovation: key aspects identified include the question of defining innovation, the impact of administrative burden on innovation, the limitations posed by funding rules, and the fact that the misunderstanding of possible failure may lead to risk aversion,
- Area: key factors identified relates to the size of the LAGs (if too small, it leads to fragmentation, while some areas may be too large - to manage), and the impact of pre-defined territories, structures on specifying LAG territories,
- Local Development Strategy: key factors relating to the LDS related to possible funding gaps between programming periods, the need for clear deadlines for selection of LAGs, the positioning of the strategy between local and higher political objectives, and the need to improve the strategic focus of the strategies,
- Partnership: the main elements identified here related to inclusivity, ownership that can be limited by restrictive eligibility rules and the inadequacy of vertical partnerships to ensure the delivery of the method,
- Cooperation and networking: the importance of common definitions, information exchange, integration of these into the LDS have been emphasised among other factors,
- Bottom-up: the importance of local decision-making and trust was emphasised for this principle, regarding impacts on its implementation, some factors including standardised project selection, complex processes, audits and sanctions, and formal requirements were discussed.

Annex 1: Key questions to consider for the discussion of the seven LEADER principles

The following questions relate to the LEADER principles as outlined under Article 31, paragraph 2. of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060. **Note:** Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 is referred to as the CPR. Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 is referred to as CSP regulation.

LEADER principle	Questions to consider
Subregional areas	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How is this principle translated into practice in your Member State? 2. The EU regulatory requirement relating to minimum-maximum population of a LAG territory has been removed. Are there any minimum-maximum population thresholds set in your Member State? 3. If yes, on what basis have these been defined? 4. How does your Member State ensure that economic/social/cultural/environmental and other aspects of territorial cohesion are fully considered when selecting LAGs? 5. How are rural-urban linkages considered in selecting LAGs in your Member State?
Local Action Groups	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the main challenges relating to setting up LAGs as genuine public-private partnerships in your Member State? 2. What are the best ways to ensure that no single interest group dominates decision-making in the LAG at the stage of selecting LAGs and during the implementation of the LDS? 3. How can the interests of women, youth, elderly, and vulnerable and hard-to-reach social groups be represented in the LAG? 4. What methods exist to maintain the 'openness' of the LAG (a) at the level of decision-making, (b) in terms of involvement of the local population, (c) in terms of selection of project proposals? 5. To what extent are LAGs recognised in your Member State as 'local development agencies' with a strong role in animating and facilitating local development? How is this reflected in the way resources and specific tasks are allocated to LAGs?
Local Development Strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does your Member State ensure that LDSs address the diverse development needs of various sectors of the rural economy and society? 2. How does your Member State ensure that LDSs are developed with the involvement of the local population? 3. Is there any top-down limitation / definition regarding the main themes / strategies orientation of LDSs in your Member State? 4. How does your Member State ensure that LDSs are in line with strategic objectives defined in relevant regional or national development strategies? 5. Are there any mechanisms in your Member State to ensure that LDSs address key challenges and EU strategic objectives related to the broad themes of digitalisation, climate change, and sustainability (e.g., Farm to Fork Strategy, Smart Villages, European Green Deal)?

LEADER principle	Questions to consider
Networking	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do LAGs in your Member State have sufficient resources and capacities to engage in networking at local, national, and EU levels? 2. How does the National Rural Network in your Member State support the networking of LAGs? 3. Is the difference between networking and cooperation recognised in rules and relevant guidance provided in your Member State? 4. Is networking between LAGs and non-conventional partners (research institutes, universities, other local development initiatives such as Smart Villages, local food communities, etc.) encouraged and supported in your Member State? How is this done in practice? 5. How are the benefits and results of networking disseminated in your Member State to facilitate mutual learning between LAGs?
Bottom-up approach	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The 'bottom-up approach' is not explicitly mentioned among the LEADER/CLLD principles (it is only part of the preamble to the CSP regulation – in paragraph (93). Does this influence how this principle is considered in setting up the LEADER delivery system in your Member State? 2. What mechanisms are in place to ensure that local people have a leading role in designing and implementing the LDSs? 3. How are LAGs enabled to maximise local participation and involvement? What are the best ways to do this? 4. What mechanisms should be put in place to ensure the right level of coordination and communication between LAGs and managing authorities? 5. Are there any good practices of monitoring and improving LAG governance?
Innovative features in the local context	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does your Member State ensure that 'the local context' is respected when making decisions about the innovative character of LEADER interventions (when LAGs select projects, when Managing Authorities or Paying Agencies carry out the verification of eligibility, approval)? 2. Are there any specific methods applied by your Member State to develop or improve the innovative capacity of LAGs? 3. What are the most effective ways to facilitate innovation at the level of the LAG / in the LDS? 4. Is the link between the simplification of LEADER implementation and the potential for innovation in the local context recognised in your Member State? What does it mean in practice? 5. Is the role of networking, cooperation, and capacity-building in improving LAGs' capacity for innovation understood in your Member State? What does it mean in practice?
Cooperation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is done in your Member State to make cooperation with other territorial actors simple for LAGs? 2. Is cooperation fully integrated in LDSs in your Member State (not only selection of cooperation projects, but also specific budget for cooperation)? 3. What mechanisms exist to ensure that cooperation brings real benefits and tangible results to the LAG territories involved in it? 4. What is the role of the NRN in your Member State in relation to increasing LAG capacities for cooperation?

Annex 2: Relevant regulatory framework

A short summary of the relevant regulatory framework is presented below. Note: Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 is referred to as the CPR. Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 is referred to as CSP regulation.

Theme	Regulatory reference and short summary
Definition of LEADER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Article 3, point (15) (CSP Regulation): Refers to the definition of community-led local development as in the CPR Article 77, point 1(b) (CSP Regulation) lists LEADER under the ‘Cooperation’ measure type
LEADER principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Article 31, paragraph 2. (CPR) states that LEADER/CLLD is focused on subregional areas, led by local action groups representing public and private local socioeconomic interests with no single interest group controlling the decision-making, implemented through local development strategies, and supportive of networking, accessibility, innovative features in the local context, and cooperation
Community-led Local Development Strategies (LDS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Article 32 (CPR): Obligatory elements of the LDS include the description of the area and population covered, community involvement process for developing the LDS, analysis of development needs and potential, objectives, measurable targets and planned actions, management, monitoring and evaluation, the capacity of the LAG to implement the LDS, the financial plan including allocation from each Fund the LDS uses. It is the responsibility of the MA to ensure that LDSs contain the above obligatory elements, define criteria for the selection of LDSs, set up a committee for this selection and approve the LDSs selected by the committee – within 12 months of the date of the decision approving the programme (for multi-funded strategies, within 12 months of the approval of the last programme concerned)
Local Action Groups (LAGs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Article 33 (CPR) defines relevant provision for local action groups (LAGs). LAGs should be inclusive (of local stakeholders), are responsible for designing and implementing the Local Development Strategies and can either take the form of a legally constituted common structure or designate a lead partner- for administrative and financial functions. Tasks to be performed exclusively by LAGs include capacity-building for local actors, developing selection procedures and criteria with no conflict of interest and no single interest group controlling selection decisions, calls for proposals, selecting local projects, defining the amount of support, presenting the selected proposals for final verification of eligibility for approval (to the body responsible for this, e.g., MA, PA), monitoring and evaluation of the LDS. Those LAGs that perform tasks not listed among their exclusive tasks (for instance, tasks of the managing authority or paying agency) should be identified as intermediate bodies. Local Action Groups may be beneficiaries and can implement operations under the Local Development Strategy. For this there is a need for separation if functions (i.e. LAGs cannot select their ‘own’ projects)
Funding for LEADER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Article 31, paragraphs 3-5. (CPR): in case local development strategies are supported from more than one Fund, these paragraphs describe the managing authorities’ responsibilities re’ joint calls and joint monitoring committees, selection of the Lead Fund, the requirement that the rules of the selected Lead Fund apply to the local development strategy, and that decisions and

Theme	Regulatory reference and short summary
	<p>management verifications are to be made by the competent authority of the Lead Fund</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Article 34 (CPR): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ support for CLLD covers capacity building and preparatory actions related to the design and implementation of the (local) development strategies (this is eligible support regardless of subsequent selection of the (local development) strategy), ○ implementation of operations (including cooperation and their preparation), ○ and animation, management, monitoring and evaluation of the LDS (the support for these cannot exceed 25% of the total public contribution to the (local development) strategy) ▪ Article 77, paragraph 4, point (a) (CSP Regulation): support for eligible costs related to preparatory support and implementing selected strategies (as defined in Article 34 of the CPR) can only be granted as an overall amount (<i>i.e. covering the costs of the cooperation and the costs of the operations implemented</i>) ▪ Article 77, point 4. (b) (CSP Regulation): ‘investment-type’ operations implemented under LEADER must comply with rules and requirements set out in Article 73 of the CSP regulation (relates to defining ineligible investments and support rates for specific types of investments) ▪ Article 77, point 7. (CSP Regulation): the limitation of support for seven years by Members does not apply to LEADER ▪ Article 91, point 3. (b) (CSP Regulation): the maximum EAFRD rate can be up to 80% of the eligible public expenditure for preparation and implementation of LEADER ▪ Article 92 of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115: the minimum EAFRD allocation under the CAP Strategic Plan to LEADER is 5%
Networking of Local Action Groups – description in CAP Strategic Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/2289, ANNEX I “Presentation of the content of the CAP Strategic Plan in section 4.4 relating to the CAP network refers to the description of the networking of Local Action Groups under LEADER / community-led local development
Added value of LEADER, multi-funding, lead fund – description in CAP Strategic Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/2289, ANNEX I “Presentation of the content of the CAP Strategic Plan, section 5. Description of the interventions – in sub-section (f) (ii) requires a description of the expected added value of LEADER and how the principles are applied, and a description of whether more than one fund will be used to support LEADER - and the lead fund

Annex 3: Selected evaluations⁴

[EVALUATION of the impact of the Common Agricultural Policy on territorial development of rural areas. SWD/2021/0394 final \(Commission Staff Working Document\)](#)

This evaluation assessed the extent to which CAP instruments and measures have contribution to balanced territorial development in rural areas. According to the evaluation, LEADER encourages the participation of rural society in its own development, with many Member States having reported “increased participation of the rural population through various activities organised by the LAGs, both in design and implementation of LDSs. In most of the rural areas with LEADER coverage, LAGs cover between 20000-80000 people. LEADER is mentioned as being important in terms of having a positive impact on social inclusion and being highly relevant for the provision of social services. Respondents of the consultation on the long-term Vision for the EU’S rural areas consider LEADER as the most effective CAP measures for supporting local communities. Complex, lengthy, and difficult implementing processes, the obligation of having to bear the costs of investment up-front, and the long times for approval of projects and receiving payments are emphasised by beneficiaries and can reduce LEADER’s – and other Pillar II measures – accessibility to socially and economically disadvantaged beneficiary groups. Achieving a balance between animation and administrative activities is a problem common to several Member States – and this often hinders innovative projects that could benefit the local communities.

[Evaluation of LEADER by the Countryside and Community Research Institute](#)

The evaluation of the impact of LEADER on balanced territorial development (carried out by CCRI and [presented](#) at the 10th LEADER/CLLD Subgroup meeting) focused on effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence of LEADER with other instruments and EU added value. The evaluation demonstrated that LEADER succeeds in involving different types of local stakeholders in local development. There is strong evidence of networking between LAGs across the EU and some national level networking between LAGs overall. The evaluation shows that local animation activities are limited by inadequate resources. Case studies show that there are issues with participation in some hard-to-reach communities, but overall, LEADER enabled the participation of local stakeholders that would otherwise not be involved. There is strong evidence for the positive impact of cooperation between LAGs and Managing Authorities on LEADER delivery. Recommendations include the use of guidelines, clear definition of roles, regular dialogue between different levels in the LEADER delivery chain, and the enabling of LAGs to apply flexible measures to address local challenges. Regarding the role of cooperation, the evaluation concludes that transnational cooperation can be critical to lead innovation in LEADER.

[Guidelines. Evaluation of LEADER/CLLD](#)

These guidelines prepared by an Evaluation Helpdesk working group emphasise that the LEADER method is made up of the combined application of the seven LEADER principles and states that one single principle could hardly work to its full potential if the other principles are not applied. The document recognises the importance of the RDP / LEADER delivery mechanism and its potential effect on the implementation of the LEADER method (“to the full extent of its seven principles”), and recommends assessing the delivery mechanism (“rules, procedures, and individual delivery steps”) and whether it allows for the (full) implementation of the LEADER method. The document also advises against isolating the CLLD/LEADER

⁴ A link to other evaluation publications related to LEADER (also at EU Member State level) is presented in the Annex.

principles from each other and not considering them as a coherent whole within the LEADER method and emphasises that its added value comes from the application of the LEADER principles.

Annex 4: Useful links

- ✓ [LEADER LAG implementation survey 2017](#) (EU-level and MS-level results reports)
- ✓ [46 case studies on LEADER implementation](#)
- ✓ [EU Rural Review 29 – on LEADER achievements](#)
- ✓ [LEADER Toolkit – Working on the LEADER delivery system](#)
- ✓ [LEADER Toolkit – Implementing LAGs and local strategies](#)
- ✓ [LEADER Toolkit – Improving communication across the CLLD delivery chain](#)
- ✓ [LEADER Cooperation page](#) including the ‘[Summary of proposals of the LEADER Cooperation PWG](#)’
- ✓ [LEADER Innovation page](#) including practical examples of LEADER innovation and the summary document of LEADER Innovation PWG discussions ‘[Innovation in the LEADER delivery chain](#)’
- ✓ A collection of [LEADER/CLLD evaluation publications](#) on the ENRD website
- ✓ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021SC0394&qid=1639409279528>
- ✓ COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT. [EVALUATION of the impact of the Common Agricultural Policy on territorial development of rural areas. SWD/2021/0394 final](#)
- ✓ [LEADER - 30 years and preparing for the future: Delivering LEADER’s unique added value](#) (notes of the discussion on local development strategies and local partnerships)
- ✓ [A selection of LEADER evaluation publications from the ENRD Website](#)
- ✓ Guidance on Community-Led Local Development for Local Actors (August 2014) – available in 23 EU languages from https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld_en under the heading “EU Guidance and legislation”
- ✓ Focus groups on the implementation of LEADER (2007-2013 programming period):
 - [FG1 - Implementation of the bottom-up approach of LEADER](#)
 - [FG2 - Preserving the innovative/experimental character of LEADER](#)
 - [FG3 - Implementation of the “cooperation measure” in LEADER](#)
 - [FG4 – Better Local Development Strategies](#)