



ELARD – European LEADER Association for Rural Development

www.elard.eu

ELARD is an international non-profit making association (AISBL) that was set up to improve the quality of life in rural areas and to maintain rural populations through sustainable, integrated local development. ELARD advocates spreading the philosophy of the LEADER/CLLD method at local, national and international levels.

ELARD was founded in 1999 in Belgium.



ELARD members

Currently, more than 2,200 local action groups (LAGs) from 26 European countries are involved either through their national or regional networks. ELARD members come from Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Georgia, Czech Republic, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.

ELARD network's main expertise and interests

Over the last 20 years, the European LEADER Association has been engaged in implementing the bottom-up LEADER rural development approach throughout Europe, and we are ready to provide support and know-how, including the following:

- To establish local action groups and draft local development strategies;
- To arrange trainings and mentoring support to develop the capacity of LAGs and local stakeholders in drafting and implementing local development strategies;
- To establish and strengthen regional and national LEADER and rural development networks and assist them in policy work at a national level;
- To collect data from stakeholders and deliver analysis and surveys;
- To strengthen transnational cooperation between EU Member States, neighbourhood countries and countries outside of Europe (Africa, Asia, Latin America);
- To provide Europe-wide expert group know-how on rural development;
- To participate in various project teams and consortiums, e.g. Horizon 2020, European Commission neighbourhood programmes, and other programmes launched by the European Commission, international development organisations and national governments.

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ELARD Partnership and participation

- ELARD is a member of the European Rural Parliament and the European Countryside Movement.
- In policy design, ELARD works closely with the European Parliament, European Commission, European Committee of Regions, European Economic and Social Committee, and the European Network for Rural Development.
- ELARD participates in various working groups such as the Civil Dialogue Group for Rural Development (European Commission, DG AGRI), Structured Dialogue Group for ESI Funds (European Commission, DG REGIO), Rural Networks Assembly, Rural Networks Steering Group and the LEADER/CLLD sub-group.

Research and policy work

In order to communicate the needs and statements of local action groups, ELARD collects and analyses data from its member countries and disseminates position papers to contribute to EU and national level rural development policy making.

ELARD's surveys and publications are available here:

elard.eu/leader-clld/publications

ELARD's own positions and supported positions are available here:

elard.eu/positions/

ELARD's activities outside of the European Union

ELARD and its members cooperate actively with partners outside of the European Union that are interested in integrating LEADER methodology into their rural development policies. We have worked with partners in Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Turkey and the Balkan countries, as well as in Latin America, Africa and, since 2017, in China.

Across countries, ELARD and its members have provided guidance, training and mentoring support at national and local levels on the establishment of local action groups, drafting local development strategies, implementing project calls and evaluating results. Our experience has proven that LEADER and LEADER-inspired approaches can make a significant contribution to enriching local democracy and resource allocation through their transparent, inter-sectoral, participatory and bottom-up decision-making models.

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Recent ELARD projects

elard.eu/projects

Strengthening Rural Development Models in Georgia, EU-funded project

The project was implemented in partnership with Mercy Corps (lead partner), CARE and PIN, and its aim was to contribute to the reduction of poverty through integrated, sustainable and participatory rural development in Georgia. ELARD's main task was to contribute to the establishment of the network of Georgian local action groups and to support the network in drafting policy recommendations at state level.

The project was implemented in 2017–2019 and had a total budget of €1,333,330.

EU-funded project to organize European Rural Parliament

ROAD aims to demonstrate the importance of rural communities working together and sharing information. The European Rural Parliament is a cooperation project between the three European rural networks: PREPARE Partnership for Rural Europe, ERCA (European Rural Communities Alliance) and ELARD.

The task of ELARD in this project was the implementation of the LEADER/CLLD for Citizens and for the European Union sub-project. Within the framework of the ROAD project, ELARD conducted two surveys – “Survey on best practice in CLLD using ERDF and ESF” and “Survey on simplification practice in LEADER/CLLD”.

The project was implemented in 2018–2019 and had a total budget of €150,000.

Participatory Integrated Community Development in China

A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between ELARD and the China Association for International Exchange of Personnel (Ministry of Science and Technology) in 2018 in order to support preparatory activities for establishing local action groups and drafting local development strategies in China.

The preparatory actions are ongoing and have a total budget of €253,000.

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LEADER approach

The LEADER methodology was specially designed to help rural areas tackle area-based challenges by identifying innovative solutions and building linkages across sectors.

The acronym "LEADER" is derived from the French phrase Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale, which translates as "links between the rural economy and development actions".

As of 2020, LEADER method implementation has been active in the European Union countries for the past 29 years, along with many practices outside of the EU. There are more than 2,500 LAGs, which cover 80% of the European territory and more than 30% of its population. Altogether, more than 40 billion euros have been invested to date through LEADER method via national rural development plans (including public and private funding).

LEADER approach methodology is based on the following key principles:



- Bottom-up: local actors design the strategy and choose the actions;
- Area-based: taking place in a socially homogeneous and functionally cohesive territory, often characterised by common traditions, a local identity, a sense of belonging or common needs and expectations;
- Public-private partnership: LAGs are balanced groups involving public, civil and private sector actors, which can mobilise all available skills and resources;
- Innovation: LAGs introduce new ideas and methods;
- Integration: links between economic, social, cultural and environmental actions, multi-sectoral approach;
- Networking: facilitates learning among people, organisations and institutions at local, regional, national and European levels;
- Cooperation: among different stakeholders, in order to share experiences and involve new knowledge;
- Horizontal approach: horizontal management by involving different stakeholders.

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