



European Leader Association  
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## PRESS RELEASE

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### ***Report on the Long-Term Vision: A first recognition for LEADER-CLLD and a future to build with rural areas***

**On March 27th, the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI) has published a report, entitled “The long-term vision for the EU’s rural areas: key achievements and ways forward”, which outlines the progress made so far under the EU’s long-term rural vision, but also highlights the outcomes delivered since 2021 and shares ideas for future work. This report marks a step forward in the implementation of the long-term vision for the EU’s rural areas and the recognition of rural territories in European policies.**

After presenting the nine actions completed so far, among the thirty planned across a range of EU policy areas to support stronger, more connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas and communities, the report looks at the future and presents ideas and questions for reflection on how EU policies and supports could be enhanced in the future.

It is without appeal that the European Commission itself recalls not only the essential role played by LEADER-CLLD to empower rural communities and respond to the multiple rural needs, but also highlights its inadequate financial allocations. Indeed, the report stresses that *“amounts assigned to LEADER (EUR 7.7 bn total financial allocation for 2023-2027) did not increase compared to the previous period. With a rural population coverage increased from 61 to 65% and decreased contributions from other interventions, LEADER-CLLD is expected to do more with less”*.

*“At ELARD, we believe that LEADER-CLLD is way more than just a financing tool, but a true rural development program with its own fundamentals. LEADER has already proved its added-value and effectiveness. The special report of DG AGRI “Evaluation support study of the costs and benefits of the implementation of LEADER-CLLD” even demonstrated it. LEADER-CLLD is already doing a lot and can do more with adequate resources and conditions. We have been continuously asking for a reasonable reliable financial resource for rural development by local actors, and it is crucial that it is taken into account for the post-2027 programming period”* says Thibaut Guignard, President of ELARD.

In the report, the European Commission also highlights that strong and sustainable engagement and commitment at Member States, regional and local level is essential in view of the goals of the rural vision by 2040. Contributions of stakeholders and dialogue with the Institutions remain however of high importance, when reflecting on how to enhance support for rural areas in the future.

*“We are delighted to see that the European Commission is strongly considering proposals and reflections from EU institutions and bodies, stakeholder organisations for preparing the EU’s post-2027 budget. The actions of the European Rural Parliament and the outcomes from the main events of the rural pact, in which ELARD has intensively participated, are finally recognized. Our European federation will continue to take part of the discussions and share recommendations to increasingly anchor rural areas at the heart of the European policies”* adds Thibaut Guignard.

Indeed, ELARD’s recommendations are listed in the report among the contributions retained by the European Commission, namely : to allocate a higher share of financial resources to the instruments dedicated to local rural development, notably LEADER and community-led local development (CLLD) ; to improve financial support to rural areas by either creating a dedicated EU fund or by strengthening multi-fund approaches ; to create a programme for LEADER and CLLD under direct management directly accessible to participants, e.g. local action groups (LAGs) ; to simplify the procedures and requirements for beneficiaries with limited administrative capacity to access funds ; and to use LAGs to also build local capacities and networking.

*“Taking our recommendations into account is an important first step, but it should not be left without follow-up. Without concrete actions for the next 2027 programme, rural development and LEADER remain on hold in an evolving geopolitical context while Europe need rural areas more than ever. LEADER is ready to be the main transformation-method for rural development all over Europe, if the recommendations are implemented”* concludes Thibaut Guignard.

With this in mind, European LEADER networks welcome the Report and the next steps the European Commission is committed to take in its reflections on the future policies for rural areas and communities and will continue its engagement in the rural pact to respond to the questions raised in the report.

*For more information about DG AGRI’s report: [European Commission, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, The long-term vision for the EU’s rural areas: key achievements and ways forward, 2024](#)*

## The LEADER approach

*LEADER (Liaison Between Actions for the Development of the Rural Economy) is a European rural development programme. Created in 1991 as a complement to the first pillar of the CAP in order to support the transformation and diversification of rural areas, it now is a cross-cutting axis of its second pillar. The LEADER programme, with a minimum budget of 5% from the EAFRD, is the only European programme dedicated to supporting rural development projects. It supports projects that are part of a local strategy for the development of rural areas, developed and supported by a Local Action Group (LAG). These groups bring together public actors (ex. elected representatives of local authorities) and private actors (ex. companies, cooperatives, or associations). It allows local actors to define priorities and actions at their level (bottom-up approach), rather than having ready-made measures imposed on them.*

## ELARD

*ELARD is a European association that represents nearly 2,600 Local Action Groups (LAGs) from 29 countries, including countries in the European Union's neighbourhood, which have adopted and implement the LEADER methodology for local development by local actors.*

*We are actively working to make the LEADER approach better known among European decision-makers in order to guarantee its funding in European rural development policies. We support actor-led local development and represent the interests of LAGs to national governments and European institutions.*

*Since 1 January 2023, ELARD has been chaired by the French network, Leader France, which actively worked, during the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2022, to promote the place of rural areas in European policies. The French Presidency of this European network is an opportunity for France, at the initiative of the programme in the 1990s, to promote LEADER and, more broadly, local development by local actors.*

### Contact :

**ELARD Aisbl at LEADER France Association**

*Mairie de Plœuc-L'Hermitage Place Louis Morel 22 150 Plœuc-L'Hermitage*

*Tél : (+33) 06.61.48.02.03*

**Thibaut.guignard@elard.eu**

**www.elard.eu**