



PRESS RELEASE

A stronger future for rural Europe: petition calls for urgent action on LEADER/CLLD

Brussels, 31 March 2025 - Today, rural development organisations, Local Action Groups (LAGs), and citizens across Europe have launched a petition calling on the European Commission to reinforce LEADER/CLLD as a key pillar of EU rural policy and funding in the next multiannual financial framework (MFF). With this, they demand for LEADER/CLLD to be recognised as a horizontal tool for territorial cohesion and that a dedicated, ring-fenced budget be secured across relevant EU funds in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), beyond the Common Agricultural Policy alone.

At a time when rural areas, whether they are coastal, insular, remote, mountainous or internal, face increasing challenges—ranging from economic stagnation to demographic shifts and digital exclusion—the petition urges EU policymakers to secure long-term financial stability for LEADER/CLLD, expand its role beyond agriculture, and strengthen its position as a participatory governance tool for territorial cohesion and democratic engagement.

“For over 30 years, LEADER/CLLD has empowered rural communities by enabling them to design and implement solutions tailored to their needs. However, funding uncertainties and administrative obstacles now threaten this vital tool,” said Piotr Sadłocha, President of ELARD (the European LEADER Association for Rural Development). “With this petition, we are calling on the European Commission to ensure that participatory rural development remains at the heart of EU policies.”

A more coherent approach to rural development

One of the key takeaways from our discussions was the need for greater coherence in how rural areas are supported at the EU level. For the first time, the reform of Cohesion Policy is being guided alongside CAP, the blue economy, and European territorial cooperation. Could this be an opportunity to rethink how rural development is structured within the EU?

At ELARD, we have traditionally focused our advocacy towards agricultural policies, ensuring that LEADER remains a strong pillar of CAP. However, we recognise that rural development extends far beyond agriculture—it is about economic diversification, social cohesion, youth retention, and climate adaptation. The EU’s Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) calls for an integrated approach, but navigating the complexity of multiple funds remains a challenge for many Local Action Groups (LAGs).

Key demands of the petition

- Ensure stable and sufficient financial support for LEADER/CLLD by securing a stronger budgetary allocation in the next MFF.
- Expand LEADER/CLLD beyond the Common Agricultural Policy to integrate it into cohesion policy, the Just Transition Fund, and digitalisation initiatives.





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- Simplify multi-fund implementation through a harmonised regulatory framework for LEADER/CLLD across all EU funds, with unified rules for financial management, auditing, and reporting.
- Recognise LAGs as key territorial governance actors, essential for crisis response, digital and green transitions, and countering disinformation in rural areas.
- Strengthen LEADER/CLLD in candidate and neighbouring countries as a tool for democratic engagement and social resilience.

Advocacy efforts underway

In parallel with the petition, representatives of the initiative have reached out to key European Commission decision-makers, including Vice-President for Cohesion and Reforms, the Commissioner for Budget and Administration, and the Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development. Letters have been sent outlining concrete recommendations for the integration of LEADER/CLLD across multiple EU funds, financial stability for LAGs, and reducing red tape.

“We welcome the ongoing discussions on the next MFF and are fully committed to contributing our expertise,” added Mr. Sadłocha. “We have formally requested meetings with the Commissioners to discuss how LEADER/CLLD can continue to drive innovation, social cohesion, and sustainable rural development across Europe.”

Join the movement

The petition is open to all individuals, organisations, and policymakers who believe in the power of community-led local development to build a stronger, more resilient rural Europe.

To sign the petition and learn more about the campaign, visit [this link](#).

For media inquiries, interviews, or further information, please contact:

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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 in every Member State supports innovative 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 30 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 and to showcase it as the solution it can become to the many challenges rural areas face. We support actor-led local development and represent the interests of LAGs to national governments and European institutions.

Since 1 January 2025, ELARD has been chaired by the Polish network of Local Action Groups, Polska Sieć LGD.

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