



Safeguarding LEADER-CLLD in the 2028–2034 MFF

Do 90% of rural residents no longer count?

The European Commission's legislative package for the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028–2034 introduces a new *European Fund for Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion, Agriculture and Rural, Fisheries and Maritime, Prosperity and Security* ("the Fund"), consolidating CAP, Cohesion, ESF+, EMFAF and other instruments into single *National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRP Plans)*.

While simplification and flexibility are welcome, several elements of the draft Fund Regulation, CAP Regulation and ERDF/Cohesion Fund Regulation risk undermining the effectiveness of LEADER and Community-Led Local Development (LEADER-CLLD). The following advocacy points identify necessary amendments.

1. Secure ring-fenced resources for LEADER-CLLD

- **Issue:** Unlike the 2021–2027 period (Art. 92 Reg. 2021/2115: 5% EAFRD for LEADER), the proposed regulations contain no ring-fencing. Consolidated funding under the new Fund increases the risk of LEADER-CLLD being underfinanced.
- **Implication:** Without guaranteed allocations, Member States could deprioritise LEADER-CLLD in NRP Plans, leading to patchy and unequal territorial coverage
- **Amendment request:** Reinstate a minimum allocation for LEADER-CLLD in the Fund Regulation. Instore a Rural Target, as proposed by the Commission, equivalent to 30% of NRPPs, with 30% of this Rural Target being dedicated to community led development initiatives such as LEADER-CLLD, Smart Villages or other forms of local cooperation.

2. Build a framework for the Rural Target

- **Issue:** the Commission proposed the introduction of a Rural Target in NRPPs. While we welcome this introduction, it needs to be clearly framed to avoid misuse.
- **Implication:** without a clear framing, large sectoral interventions such as transport, energy or employment programmes, could be partially tagged as rural, without demonstrating genuine rural development impact. And if everything can be partially tagged as rural, nothing is strategically rural.
- **Request for framing:** we recommend that NRPP guidance should:
 - Apply strict conditions to sectoral measures partially assigned to rural spending
 - Require Member States to clearly distinguish between investments merely located in rural areas and interventions specifically designed to address rural challenges
 - Ensure transparent justification of pro-rata rural allocations
 - Investments implemented under Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) should not be tagged as contributing to the rural target.

[More on this in our 10.02.2026 press release.](#)





3. Require minimum strategic ambition for LEADER-CLLD

- **Issue:** LEADER-CLLD is mandatory under the CAP, and we are asking that it is made mandatory across funds (or chapters), but this should not become a box-ticking exercise. LEADER-CLLD should not only be included but should also be assessed on its development logic, not only on its budget share.
- **Our request:**
 - NRPPs should explain the role of LEADER-CLLD in addressing national rural challenges, and how it complements sectoral rural measures while preserving local leadership
 - LEADER-CLLD programmed only at a symbolic or technical level should be considered insufficient in strategic terms, even if formally compliant.

4. Clarify the relationship between CLLD and LEADER

- **Issue:** Articles 74, 76 and 77 Fund Regulation inconsistently treat LEADER as either a form of CLLD under CAP or as a separate instrument.
- **Implication:** Risk of divergent national implementation and fragmentation.
- **Amendment request:** Clarify in Article 74(1) Fund Regulation that “*LEADER constitutes the CAP-specific form of CLLD*” to ensure consistency of rules and use the form LEADER-Community Led Local Development (LEADER-CLLD) in all documents and art 22 (2) (h) (i) remove “*as well as LEADER as referred to in Article 77 [LEADER]*”

5. Guarantee CLLD across cohesion, social and maritime policies

- **Issue:** The proposed ERDF and Cohesion Fund Regulation (Recital 9, Art. 5) emphasises integrated *urban* development, omitting rural areas beyond urban-rural linkages. The ESF Regulation likewise makes no provision for community-led approaches in employment, skills or social inclusion policy, and the Maritime/Fisheries Regulation is silent on participatory territorial tools for coastal communities.
- **Implication:** In all three cases, the application of LEADER-CLLD is left to Member State discretion, creating risks of fragmented and unequal territorial coverage. Rural, coastal and peripheral regions could be excluded from community-led approaches, while funding concentrates in urban and peri-urban areas.
- **Amendment request:** Amend Article 5 ERDF/Cohesion Fund Regulation and the corresponding provisions of the ESF and Maritime/Fisheries Regulations to include a binding obligation for Member States to apply LEADER-CLLD in rural, coastal and disadvantaged areas, modelled on Article 18 of the CAP Regulation.

6. Restore LAG competences

- **Issue:** Article 76(3) Fund Regulation removes key LAG tasks currently listed in Art. 33(3) Reg. 2021/1060 (preparing calls, fixing support levels).
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- **Implication:** LAGs reduced to technical intermediaries, losing their strategic leadership role.
- **Amendment request:** Amend Article 76(3) Fund Regulation to restore full LAG competences, identical to those in Art. 33(3) Reg. 2021/1060.

7. Apply simplified financing consistently

- **Issue:** Article 77 Fund Regulation introduces mandatory simplified cost options (SCOs) and lump sums, but scope unclear (LEADER only or all CLLD).
- **Implication:** Multi-fund LAGs could face dual rulebooks, undermining simplification.
- **Amendment request:** Clarify that SCOs and lump sums apply across all CLLD instruments, not only CAP-funded LEADER.

