

LEADER and multi-funded CLLD

Workshop

The workshop provided the opportunity to exchange experiences and the main challenges for the implementation of multi-funded CLLD at the Managing Authority /Paying Agency and operational level; as well as discussing practical solutions. An overview of multi-funding across the EU was shared during the workshop and ideas were gathered on how to best utilise multi-funded Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) in the future programming period.

Welcome messages and introduction to the day



Andrej Hafner (Deputy Director General, EAFRD Managing Authority, Slovenia) welcomed participants to Ljubljana and emphasised the importance of rural development for Slovenia and the active role of Local Action Groups (LAGs) in strengthening access to public services, sustainable mobility, rural tourism and other key areas of local development. In the 2014-2020 programming period, approximately 1 500 projects were supported through multi-funded CLLD (MFCLLD) LAGs. Mr. Hafner also stressed the importance of the bottom-up approach of multi-funded CLLD for the integration and participation of rural population. CLLD continues in the 2023-2027 programming period, in which all Slovenian LAGs will use EAFRD in combination with ERDF.



Mario Milouchev (Director CAP Strategic Plans II, DG AGRI) thanked the Slovenian colleagues for their support in the organisation of this event and reiterated the importance of an inclusive approach that involves all stakeholders in CLLD. He welcomed representatives of DG AGRI, DG REGIO, and DG EMPL. Mr. Milouchev referred to the exponential growth of LEADER - both in the territory covered and the number of LAGs - in the past 30 years and the contribution of LEADER in supporting the transition of rural areas to become stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous. This could be possible if multi-funding is used more, for which purpose the European Commission (EC) introduced several simplifications related to the use of the Lead Fund and joint calls for local strategies. However, it seems that **the use of ESIF funding for LEADER in rural areas in the period 2023-27 is less than expected.**

The possibility of LAGs being beneficiaries of support from other funds was mentioned as being available also in those Member States that have not programmed MFCLLD. He called on participants to share

Event Information

Date: 18-19 October 2023

Location: Ljubljana, Slovenia (and field visits to Local Action Groups in surrounding area)

Organisers: The event was co organised by the EU CAP Network CAP Implementation Contact Point (CAPI CP), the Slovenian Managing Authority and DG AGRI.

Participants: 86 participants from 21 EU Member States including Managing Authorities, National Networks, LAG Networks, European organisations, the European Commission, Local Action Groups and researchers.

Outcomes: Discussed practical solutions for improving the use of multi-funded CLLD, in the current (2023-2027) and next programming period.

Web page: https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/events/workshop-leader-and-multi-funded-clld_en

their experiences and discuss how they can do more and better for rural areas with the application of MFCLLD, and expressed the willingness of the EC to listen and understand what needs to be done at local, Member State and EU levels.

Overview of the use of multi-funds LEADER/CLLD in CAP Strategic Plans

Stefan Kah (Independent Consultant) provided an overview of multi-funded CLLD in the EU in the 2014-2020 and current 2023-2027 programming period. MFCLLD was defined as more than one fund used under the same Local Development Strategy. **In the 2014-2020 programme, MFCLLD was used by 19% of all LAGs** - in 15 Member States with ERDF, the fund most used in combination with EAFRD. The great diversity of approaches to MFCLLD is detailed in his presentation. **In the 2023-2027 programming period**, the number of Member States applying MFCLLD decreased from 15 to 10. However, the number of MFCLLD LAGs will potentially increase from 624 up to 891 in this period. In the current programming period, the ESF+ appears to be the fund most used in combination with EAFRD. Estonia, France (one region) and Romania have introduced MFCLLD in the current programming period. Other MSs such as Poland have extended its use, while 7 stopped using it altogether.



The benefits of MFCLLD go beyond the additional funding and include a wider range of eligible activities, new and broader networks, multi-sectoral themes and more innovation. However, they can only be fully capitalised on if some conditions are met in terms of quality governance and sufficient amounts of funding allocated to CLLD strategies which justify an extra administrative effort. Mr Kah concluded that multi-funded CLLD appears more common in eastern Europe and less developed regions. This seems to be due to two favourable conditions: a common set-up/common body in charge of CLLD, as well as sufficient amounts of EDRF and ESF funds.

Panel discussion - sharing experiences of challenges of multi-funding

Representatives of various EC Directorates General and Member State Managing Authorities (MAs) discussed the greatest potential added value of MFCLLD and their expectations related to the workshop.



Iwona Lisztwan (DG AGRI) cited the multiple added values of CLLD that can be realised in improved local governance, better projects, new networks and more innovation - all of which can also be translated into and further enhanced by the use of MFCLLD. The use of multi-fund is not only about more funding but about **extending the local networks**, especially start-ups, innovations and research and learning new ways of handling local issues (for example in social dimensions). An additional, but equally important, added value of using MFCLLD is the growing awareness about rural voices in a wider context of territorial governance and development. The Commission has a concern about the lesser use of multi funds approach in this period and is keen to understand the reasons.



Merja Haapakka (DG REGIO) explained that the Regional fund joined the CLLD approach in 2014, and the pooling of resources is one of the main advantages of MFCLLD. In addition to this, **MFCLLD LAGs can serve as one-stop-shops for local development**, which requires new capacities to manage other funds, links urban and rural with a combination of target group and territorial approaches (ESF + and ERDF). Some of the complications of MFCLLD were mentioned, as well as the possibility that they can be overcome with adequate political will and resources.



Mathilde Prilleux (DG EMPL) explained that, from the perspective of social policy, **MFCLLD can have the benefits of empowering target groups** and advancing social inclusion (including vulnerable groups) and social innovation. The potential of LAGs, inherent in the way they operate through the bottom-up approach, and the involvement of stakeholders was also emphasised.



Jacques Sauvestre (Deputy Director of the Regional Managing Authority, Nouvelle Aquitaine, France)

explained their approach to MFCLLD in a video interview. The region, the largest in France with a diverse territory with 12 departments, introduced a single, common system of **MFCLLD based on three pillars (strategies, action plans, operations)**. The system ensured simplicity with a single call for projects and a single paperless application management system. Joint preparatory support was provided to all 54 potential CLLD territories in the region. Each of these 54 local territories will be covered by one single CLLD LAG, which will have the possibility to combine rural, urban and coastal development where appropriate.



According to **Beata Rodak (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Poland)**,

they have become a "victim of their own success" as the coverage of MFCLLD has increased from two regions in 2014-2020 to 10 in the 2023-2027 programming period. The main experience of MFCLLD in Poland was that it was **mind-opening**. The administrative challenges of creating common rules and procedures for managing MFCLLD in 10 regions were shared. In Poland, the eligibility criteria are strictly based on fund-specific rules, while all other **national procedures**¹ can be common. There is one monitoring committee for MFCLLD and some steps have been taken towards the harmonisation of IT systems.



Ivana Kasparova (Ministry of Regional Development, Czechia)

emphasised the need to respect the LEADER principles. All the LAGs in Czechia implementing MFCLLD in 2023-2027 using EAFRD, ERDF, ESF+ follow the LEADER principles, but with **extended funding and scope of operations**. There is also the need for Cohesion funds to contribute to CLLD, as the majority of LAGs are in rural areas. The role of the MA is focused on coordination. In Czechia having MFCLLD based on LEADER principles helps to create a positive image of rural areas; and rural policies should be based on local knowledge. The main added value of LEADER/CLLD is in stabilising local development by going beyond political election cycles of 4 years.

Panel members expressed their wish to learn more about MFCLLD and the roles and capacities that are required at local, regional, Member State and EU-level level through the workshop. There was a desire to understand how MSs can absorb funds and why there seems to be a move to mono funds in this current programming period, particularly for ESF+. Understanding how we can go further in building capacity at administrative and operational levels was also key.

¹ The relevant document is the one marked 'Tekst ujednotlicony' (Consolidated Text)



Exploring the reasons for not using (lesser) use of multi-funded LEADER/CLLD



Tjitte de Vries (Chairman of the National Network, Sweden) explained that, in spite of the fact that the MFCLLD concept worked well in Sweden – both in co-ordination and for LAGs – an analysis found that the majority of projects implemented through it could have been funded from EAFRD, while different requirements (for example for reporting) under the different funds led to **high administrative costs** relative to rather small amounts of ERDF and ESF funding engaged. The solution could be either **simpler regulations or one regulation for all the funds** in the form of a special regulation for LEADER/CLLD.



Ioanna Triantafyllidou (Ministry of Rural Development and Food, Greece) talked about how Greece applied MFCLLD (EAFRD, EMMF and ESF) in the previous programming period and the reasons for not programming it in the 2023-2027 period. Delays in the approval of MFCLLD strategies, different guidelines, rules and IT systems for each fund, and different calls for projects complicated the implementation of MFCLLD in Greece. Important elements of the solution could be **a common regulation and national legal framework for all funds** under MFCLLD, coupled with one MA/one PA and a unified IT system.



Michael Fischer (National Network, Austria) spoke about the experience in **Tyrol**, where 10 LAGs covering the whole federal province, use the funding combination of EAFRD-ERDF-Interreg, coupled with the **Lead Fund (EAFRD)** in the 2023-2027 period. Additionally, one LAG in Karinthia uses the combination of EAFRD and INTERREG. The success of the approach in Tyrol is attributed to simple rules, “in-house communication and co-ordination” among the funds and shared decision-making. Adequate time was dedicated to the introduction of MFCLLD which was not a radical transformation, but more of a process.



Laura Janis (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Finland) explained that MFCLLD is considered complicated in Finland due to the existence of a different set of rules for the different funds. While there are no MFCLLD LAG strategies in Finland, fisheries and rural LAGs work closely together, rural LAGs can be beneficiaries of other funds and their area can include small towns. Finland also has a **CLLD roundtable** – this is a strategic national-level working group involving stakeholders also from the regional and local levels.

The Slovenian model of multi-funded CLLD for 2023-2027



Alina Cunk Perklič (Head of CLLD working group, Ministry of Agriculture, Slovenia) and **Marjeta Jerič (Rural Development and Structural Policy Division, Managing Authority, Ministry of Agriculture, Slovenia)** explained that LEADER-like approaches date back to the 1990s in Slovenia, with the evolution of rural development moving closer in focus to territorial approaches and rural development over the years. The LEADER approach formally started in 2007, with the decision to introduce MFCLLD in 2014 being taken jointly by all the stakeholders involved. The most important element of this implementation system is the **CLLD Committee for Coordination at the national level**, which also prepared all the **guidelines for the LAGs**. LAGs hold regular workshops to discuss problems at an operational level and the implementation process. Full harmonisation of the procedures was not possible due to fund-specific rules, and the Lead Fund was only used for the running costs and animation. MFCLLD was successful in the 2014-2020 period due to the relevant national legal framework, support documentation, communication and simplifications including the use of simplified cost options. In 2021-2027, MFCLLD continues with 3 funds (EAFRD, ERDF, ESF+) and the ‘one stop shop’ for MFCLLD is the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food. **A common national regulation**, common selection procedure and criteria for MFCLLD strategies is the basis of implementation.

Multiple short presentations of multi-funded CLLD examples for the afternoon workshops - national/regional/local levels



Alina Ioana Baba (LAG Napoca Ponorissum, Romania) related her experiences in designing a multi-funded CLLD strategy for the first time. **Integrating ESF+ into the Local Development Strategy** will enable the LAG to involve youth more in local development and intervene on a wider range of social, economic and environmental issues. The importance of reducing administrative burden and bureaucracy associated with the funds was emphasised and ERASMUS was cited as an example of a support tool with simple rules, accessible for youth. The role of capacity building and guidance from the national level was also reiterated. At local level there are **different stakeholders with diverse needs**, which are impossible to address only with rural funds. What CLLD allows is to have broader interventions and strategies at territorial level.


Jan Dražský Florian (National LAG Network, [Czechia](#))

described the experiences of Czech LAGs with MFCLLD and their prospects for 2023-2027. He emphasised the role of good networking at the national level, a **multi-level governance framework** in which the MA is open for communication with LAGs and provides guidance and coordination rather than excessive control through regulation. The National LAG Network in Czechia has representatives in the permanent workings of each MA associated with the MFCLLD funds and each MA has a dedicated contact person who works with the National LAG Network. These mechanisms enable Czech LAGs to work successfully with three funds in the framework of four operational programmes.


Vivia Aunapuu Lents (Ministry of Social Affairs, [Estonia](#))

explained that Estonia is introducing multi-funded CLLD for the first time with a high level of enthusiasm and expectations from all stakeholders. MFCLLD covers their whole rural territory through 26 LAGs and includes ESF+ and EAFRD funding. **Umbrella projects** (i.e. LAGs implementing small projects) are eligible for funding under both EAFRD and ESF+ with the ESF+ component being programmed under social innovation. The coordination between the funds and MAs is an important task due to the different rules applicable to the different funds.


Elena Hadjinicolova (Ministry of Agriculture, [Bulgaria](#))

explained that the experiences with the MFCLLD in Bulgaria have generally been positive. Challenges relate to the harmonisation of rules and simplification of procedures. Currently, the coordination unit responsible for the coordination of all funds and all matters concerning the other 4 MAs is situated at the Council of Ministers. However, for the next programming period (2023-2027) the intention, as written in the BG CSP, is to have the EAFRD as the **Lead Fund** and the central management to be performed by the CSP MA (Ministry of Agriculture and Food). The coordination unit shall remain in the Council of Ministers. It will not interfere in the process but will have monitoring functions. This is the current plan. However, it is still under consultation with the rest of the Managing Authorities. The overwhelming majority of LAGs will implement MFCLLD with higher budgets, including a 2% allocation to MFCLLD which comes from all the operational programmes that are non-EAFRD funded. The territory covered by MFCLLD strategies and the number of LAGs implementing these will significantly increase as compared to the 2014-2020 programming period.


Roxana Iacob (Integrated Territorial Instrument (ITI) of the Danube Delta, [Romania](#))

talked about the integration of five Romanian LAGs and their strategies in the ITI Danube Delta during the 2014-2020 period. LAGs covered the whole territory of the ITI which had a budget of €1.3 billion. **The inclusion of LAGs** in this mechanism was beneficial as it improved coordination between different funds and development initiatives, promoted territorial dialogue, while it ensured that specific needs of the LAG territories were met.

Parallel group discussions

Workshop 1 focused on the Managing Authority and Paying Agency level and examined coordination between the funds. The main messages from **Workshop 1** related to the need for more **coordination of the funds both at EU level and at national level**. There needs to be an awareness that time and resources should be devoted to co-ordination, and the capacities built within the MAs of all funds involved in MFCLLD. More clarity about the application of the **Lead Fund** is requested. Participants suggested improvements would include unified systems, harmonised regulations (e.g. national level regulation for all funds involved in MFCLLD) and one single IT system for applications and projects across the funds. Other notable elements mentioned were building trust among institutional stakeholders and the **need for a compulsory minimum (%) ring-fenced allocation of all funds to CLLD**.

In **Workshop 2**, the focus was on the **local/operational level** and how LAGs can make CLLD work. In Workshop 2, participants emphasised the role and capacity of LAGs in addressing the impacts of global issues at the local level and the role of MFCLLD in enhancing the resources and capacities available for this. For MFCLLD to work for LAGs and beneficiaries, clear and simple rules for all stakeholders, improved coordination at MS and EU levels among the institutions responsible for the specific funds, the **use of simplified cost options** for all funds, and improving awareness of the positive effects of using MFCLLD are essential. To increase understanding and facilitate further simplification, a need was identified for **coordination committees/groups at EU and national level**. Including auditors in these groups would increase their awareness and understanding of the added-value of multi-funding.



Closing Panel – First ideas on how to improve/increase the use of multi-funding



Mario Milouchev praised the richness of the workshop in terms of ideas offered and discussed MFCLLD in conjunction with the Long-term Vision for Rural Areas and the importance of being aware of rural communities' needs.

MFCLLD can play a strong role in ensuring comparable levels of services in rural areas and **making sure that rural areas are not 'left behind'** in development. Among the initial takeaway messages from the workshop, Mr Milouchev mentioned participants' ideas relating to an **EU regulation on CLLD** acknowledging that this relies on political will. He quoted the good examples of a **national regulation on CLLD** as adopted in Poland and Slovenia. Additionally, he mentioned ring-fencing either by using a minimum scale of other funds for CLLD in one regulation or cross-referencing to ring fencing in all regulations. **Harmonisation of rules and improved coordination** between fund management bodies at MS and EU levels was seen to be important, noting that more clarification is needed on the use of the Lead Fund. LAGs being eligible as beneficiaries of other funds and initiatives, as well as working in partnership with ITIs in the context of broader territorial development, were also mentioned as examples of actual practices to consider.



Alina Cunk Perklič thanked the EU CAP Network and DG AGRI for organising the workshop in Slovenia and underlined the importance of building on earlier lessons learnt from the previous period – a practice they applied when developing their MFCLLD system. Referring to the importance of **communication between all levels**, she mentioned that in-depth communication and consultation between all stakeholders regarding policy improvements and their feasibility in rural areas in Slovenia started more than 8 years before and is still ongoing.



Maria Jose Murciano (REDR, Spain) appreciated the constructive discussion and emphasised that the capacities of LAGs to make life better in rural areas should be fully utilised, using **LAGs as toolboxes** to manage different funds and keeping in mind that policy solutions should serve rural people and not certain companies or institutions. She underlined the ELARD proposals relating to the strengthening of the role of MFCLLD – through making it mandatory or through introducing much needed simplifications – to ensure that there is **more funding available for rural development** and the key role of LAGs and the bottom-up approach in this process.



Juha-Matti Markkola (National Network, Finland) expressed the need for maintaining open discussion at EU and national levels about MFCLLD. He quoted the example of the **CLLD innovation camp** organised in Finland and called for similar meetings involving all levels. He promoted **“Encouraging other funds to go local”** with simple procedures and the possibility of ring-fencing.



Filippo Chiozzoto (CREA, Italy) considered **coordination at MS and EU levels** as key prerequisites of success for MFCLLD. To meet the needs of rural communities and small businesses, simplification should be part of the CLLD 'package'. Mr Chiozzoto emphasised the importance of strengthening **data collection and data analysis**, as well as how the added value of CLLD is communicated.

Stefan Kah (Independent Consultant) explained that multi-fund means both multi-sectoral and multi-level policy implementation. Thinking of **CLLD as a method** and not as a territory is important. More involvement from the programme management levels of all funds is key. It is also important to find formats in which the conversation about MFCLLD can be broadened and involve more people to enable all CLLDs to **'talk to each other'**, for instance in the format of CLLD seminars, done in the past including multiple DGs. Finally, he mentioned that a background paper on MFCLLD is in progress and will be finalised and circulated after the integration of the findings of this workshop.

Travelling workshops

Participants visited 'LAG Barje' and 'LAG The Capitaland countryside-hand in hand' where they saw how multi-fund LEADER strategies work in practice by visiting both EAFRD and ERDF funded projects. A full description of the projects visited and information on the LAGs' Local Development Strategies is available in the [resources section](#) of the event webpage.