

# EU LEADER Approach to Integrated Area Development and Rural Prosperity in North Macedonia



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## Introduction

Agriculture and rural development are a necessity for socio-economic development of the Republic of North Macedonia. Rural areas have a particular significance in the overall process of development, in terms of demographics, economic growth, social progress and environment, prompting the state to focus on creating policies and measures that enable agriculture development and sustainable rural development in line with the European Union's Common Agriculture Policy. Rural development is the "second pillar"[1] of EU Common Agriculture Policy (CAP), contributing to sustainable development of rural areas through different programmes that also include the LEADER approach/ Community-Led Local Development (LEADER/CLLD).

The LEADER initiative is an innovative approach within the EU's rural development policy, intended to support rural development projects initiated at local level and aimed at revitalizing rural areas and creating new jobs. It represents a model of balanced area development in rural environments through cooperation of all three sectors – public, private and civil society, by applying the "bottom-up"[1] approach, wherein local actors participate in strategy decision-making and priority-setting in their respective local area, with a focus on participation of women and youth from rural environments in creating and implementing local development strategies.

## LEADER approach for sustainable rural development

The word LEADER is an acronym in French language for "Liaison entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale", which translates as "Relations between activities and economic development in rural areas". It represents an innovative approach that stimulates equitable and joint participation of all stakeholders in decision-making processes and implementation of activities aimed at rural development, which contributes to better local governance.[3] LEADER is a tool for stimulating entities living in rural areas to investigate new ways of development through joint work and cooperation and to utilize their goods, to the greatest extent, in addressing challenges they are facing. In that, LEADER contributes to better quality of life in rural areas, both for agricultural families and for the broader rural population.[4]

The LEADER approach is based on 7 key features:[5]

- 1: Area-based local development strategies;
- 2: Bottom-up approach;
- 3: Public-private partnership: The local action groups (LAGs);
- 4: Innovations;
- 5: Integrated and multi-sectoral activities;
- 6: Networking;
- 7: Cooperation;

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[1] [https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/rural-development\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/rural-development_en)

[2] [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/content/1-bottom-approach\\_en](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/content/1-bottom-approach_en)

[3] Konečný O.(2019) The LEADER approach across the European Union: One method of rural development, many forms of implementation.

[4] The LEADER approach: A basic guide, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, ISBN 92- 79-02057-9

[5] The LEADER approach: A basic guide.



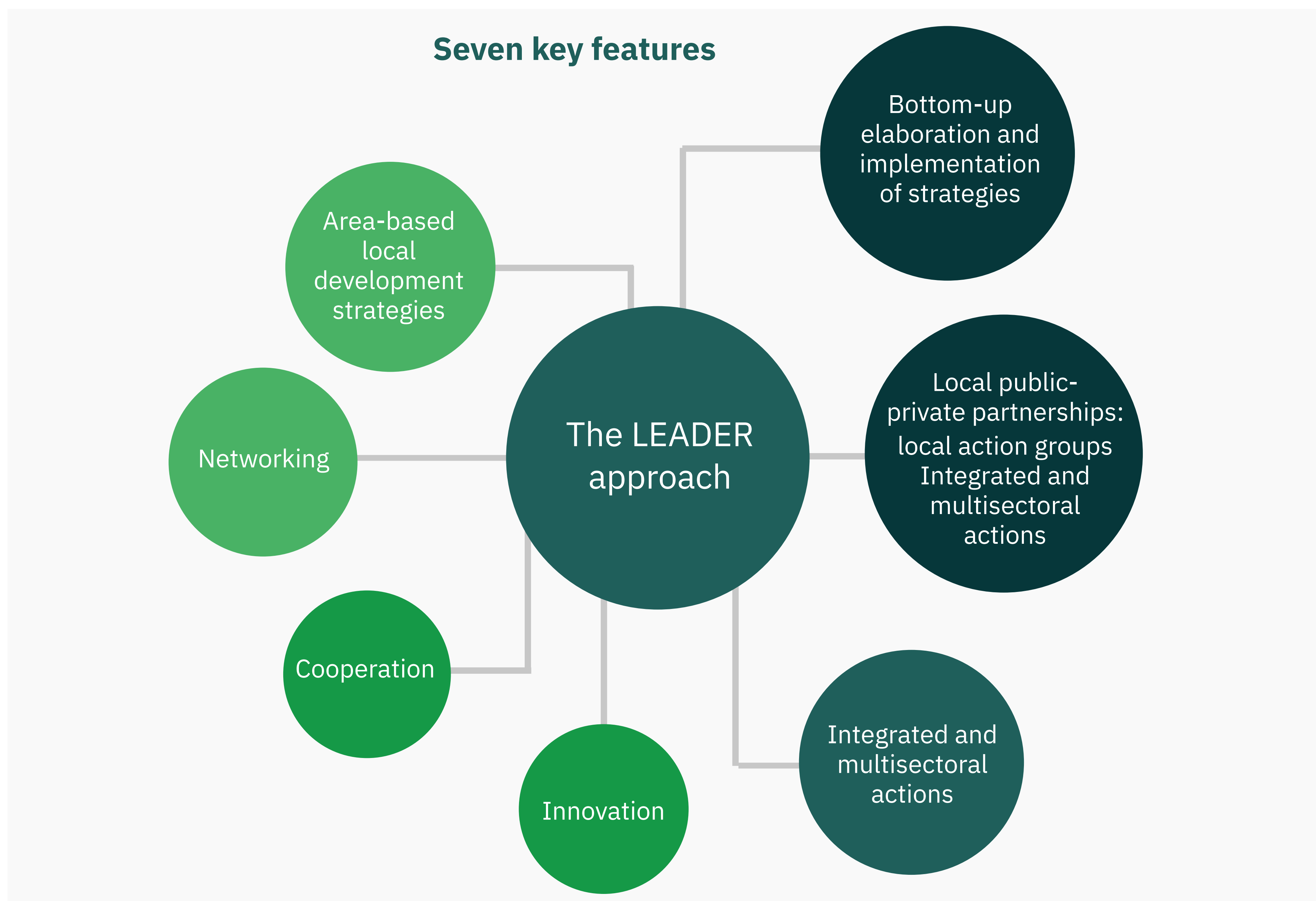


Figure no.1: Seven key features of the LEADER approach

The key concept behind this approach is reconsideration of differences that exist among rural regions and possibilities for engagement of the public sector, private sector and the civil society in development of rural areas by using their endogenous potential; by implementing integrated, multi-sectoral activities; and by promoting innovation, networking and cooperation.

This approach connects local actors in rural areas through public-private partnerships, the so-called local action groups (LAGs) that have the task of identifying and implementing local development strategies and have autonomy in decision-making and capacity to re-evaluate locally available resources. LAGs are unique by participation of different actors in decision-making and involvement of women in policy-creating and decision-making processes, thereby promoting gender equality and gender mainstreaming at local level.[6]

The LEADER initiative started in 1989 as instrument of the European Community for promotion of international cooperation, with official start of implementation in 1991, in order to improve developmental potential of rural areas by implementing local initiatives, exchanging experience and knowledge, and multiplying good practices in other rural communities.

From 1991 to present, a total of five LEADER generations are implemented. In its experimental phase LEADER I[7] for the period 1991-1993, this initiative covered 217 areas in designated disadvantaged rural regions. This limited focus on disadvantaged rural areas was also applied under LEADER II[8] in the period 1994-1999, when the number of LAGs increased to around 900. In the period 2000-2006, LEADER +[9] covered all types of rural areas and recorded a total of 1,153 local action groups.

[6] ENRD EC Europe, LEADER Toolkit, Implementing LAGs and Local Strategies

[7] [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld/leader-toolkit/leaderclld-explained\\_en](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld/leader-toolkit/leaderclld-explained_en)

[8] [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld/leader-resources/leader-historical-resources/leaderII\\_en](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld/leader-resources/leader-historical-resources/leaderII_en)

[9] LEADER experiences - lessons learned and effectiveness of EU funds for rural development.pdf



The LEADER approach was mainstreamed during its fourth programming period, LEADER Axis[10] in the period 2007-2013, when it was made integral part of the EU rural development policy, covering 2,416 rural territories in all member-states. In this period, LEADER becomes mandatory component of national rural development programmes in EU member-states, with minimum budget allocations (5% in EU-15 and 2.5% in EU-12, i.e. new member-states with the exception of Croatia, which joined the Union in 2013).

During the financial period 2014-2020, applicability of the LEADER approach was further expanded into Community-Led Local Development/LEADER[11] in rural, fisheries and urban areas, and underway is implementation of LEADER/CLLD for the period 2021-2027.[12]

Title	Period	Type of programme	Number of LAGs	Total public budget (EU + national)	Number of member-states
LEADER 1	1991-1993	community initiative	217 LAGs in disadvantaged rural areas	1.2 billion EUR	EU 12
LEADER 2	1994-1999	community initiative implemented through 102 national/regional operational programmes	906 LAGs in disadvantaged rural areas	5.37 billion EUR	EU 15
LEADER+ [13]	2000-2006	community initiative	1153 LAGs in all rural areas	5.1 billion EUR	EU 15+10
LEADER Axis	2007-2013	Mandatory RDP /axis 4 measure (5%, 2.5% for new member-states)	2402 LAGs in all rural areas	8.9 billion EUR	EU 25+2
CLLD/LEADER	2014-2020	Mandatory RDP measure 19 (5%)	2536 LAGs financed by ERDF (with or without co-funding by ERDF and ESF) and 352 LAGs financed by EMFF	9.8 billion EUR	EU 27+1

Table no. 1: Development history of the LEADER approach

[10] [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/uploaded-files/leader1\\_kjasinska.pdf](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/uploaded-files/leader1_kjasinska.pdf)

[11] <https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/clld-eafrd.pdf>

[12] [https://media.voog.com/0000/0041/5573/files/ELARD\\_position-LEADER\\_CLLD\\_2021-2027.pdf](https://media.voog.com/0000/0041/5573/files/ELARD_position-LEADER_CLLD_2021-2027.pdf)

[13] [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld/leader-resources/leader-historical-resources/leaderII\\_en](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld/leader-resources/leader-historical-resources/leaderII_en)



In the course of time, the LEADER approach has evolved in terms of quality and quantity, but also in terms of territories covered, number of local actors directly involved in this approach, number of development strategies prepared and quality thereof, movement of financial support, etc.

In the context of rural development, LEADER is implemented according to national and regional rural development programmes (RDP)[14] of each EU member-state, co-funded by the European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development,[15] while in the programming period 2014-2020, the LEADER approach was expanded under the broad term of Community-Led Local Development, supported by three additional EU Funds[16]: European Maritime and Fisheries Fund[17], European Regional Development Fund[18] and European Social Fund.[19] In the period 2014-2020, financial support for LEADER from national rural development programmes of EU member-states ranges around 5.5% in Austria, 6.26% in the Netherlands, etc.[20]

Today, LEADER has a central role for sustainable development of rural areas not only in EU member-states, but also in candidate countries for EU membership, under the joint priority goal: equitable territorial and sustainable development.

### **LEADER approach in the Republic of North Macedonia**

Implementation of the LEADER approach is a necessity for sustainable rural development in the Republic of North Macedonia given that rural areas account for 88.7% of the entire territory of the state, including 62 municipalities with 985,000 residents or 47.3% of the total population.[21]

The hierarchy of strategic documents that govern implementation of the LEADER approach in the country includes: 1) Strategy on Agriculture and Rural Development,[22] [23] 2) IPARD II programme [24] (IPARD III underway)[25] 3) strategy and/or programme documents of other ministries or governmental bodies, most of which are competent for regional development, local government and civil society.

Introduction of the LEADER approach is stipulated under Articles 87, 88 and 89 of the Law on Agriculture and Rural Development in compliance with the EU regulation.[26] This provides the basis for creation of policy framework on implementation of the LEADER approach under the National Strategy on Agriculture and Rural Development.

The institutional and legal setup of support for implementation of the LEADER programme is established through the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy[27] as the key competent body and its organizational units: 1) departments tasked with programming (i.e. those holding the role of management bodies), and 2) payment agency,[28] as the executive body tasked with financial management of the rural development policy.

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[14] [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/food-farming-fisheries/key\\_policies/documents/rpd-factsheet-austria\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/food-farming-fisheries/key_policies/documents/rpd-factsheet-austria_en.pdf)

[15] [https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key\\_policies/common-agricultural-policy/rural-development](https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key_policies/common-agricultural-policy/rural-development)

[16] [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld\\_en](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/leader-clld_en)

[17] [https://ec.europa.eu/oceans-and-fisheries/funding/emfaf\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/oceans-and-fisheries/funding/emfaf_en)

[18] [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/funding/erdf/](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/funding/erdf/)

[19] <https://ec.europa.eu/esf/home.jsp>

[20] [https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key\\_policies/common-agricultural-policy/rural-development/country](https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key_policies/common-agricultural-policy/rural-development/country)

[21] MAFWE, 2017 Annual Agriculture Report, pg. 34, available at: <http://www.mzsv.gov.mk/cms/Upload/docs/GZI-2017.pdf>

[22] NATIONAL STRATEGY ON AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT 2014-2020

[23] NATIONAL STRATEGY ON AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT 2021-2027

[24] IPA RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME, 2014-2020

[25] IPARD III programme, consolidated 20.09.2021

[26] "Official Gazette of RM" no. 49 from 12.04.2010, Law on Agriculture and Rural Development

[27] <http://www.mzsv.gov.mk/>

[28] <http://www.ipardpa.gov.mk/>



Under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), [29] the Republic of North Macedonia has an opportunity for financial and technical support in implementation of EU integration reforms according to agreements signed between North Macedonia and the European Commission: Framework Agreement and Sector Agreement (IPARD), which regulate the EU financial support for the country on the legal basis of providing funding in the area of agriculture and rural development. These agreements regulate issues related to agriculture and rural development through the IPARD programme and regulate local development according to the LEADER approach. IPARD programme [30] includes eight sector support measures, divided into two sets of measures. IPARD measure 5 concerning “Implementation of local development strategies – LEADER approach” is part of the second set of measures, which also includes advisory services, agro-environmental measures and organic agriculture services. [31] IPARD programme underlines importance of the measure related to implementation of local development strategies – LEADER approach, but the state has still not implemented any LEADER measures with pre-accession assistance available under IPARD.

Introduction of the LEADER approach in the country started long time ago, through donor projects [32], [33] aimed at supporting the decentralization process, ensuring equitable territorial development and active involvement of women and youth in processes for policy creation on sustainable local community development, which also included establishment of many local action groups. Established LAGs are guided by regulatory documents that are in line with practices from EU member-states, but have not been recognized by MAFWE because secondary legislation on recognition of LAGs and development of local development strategies were adopted in 2013 [34] [35].

Incentivising LAG initiatives for local community economic development and designing measures that arise from identified community needs are part of the National Strategy on Agriculture and Rural Development 2014-2020. That period also marked the start of preparations for the “LEADER approach” measure in the National Programme for Rural Development, as preparatory period for accreditation of the LEADER approach under IPARD programme. Although the National Programme for Rural Development in Macedonia anticipates incentives for LAGs, an open call for interested parties was not announced for four consecutive years, as a result of the absence of LAG Registry at MAFWE, intended to record LAG partnerships that fulfil the minimum criteria.

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[29] [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/enlargement-policy/overview-instrument-pre-accession-assistance\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/enlargement-policy/overview-instrument-pre-accession-assistance_en)

[30] IPARD II programme\_MKD.pdf

[31] <https://ipard.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/SECTORAL-AGREEMENT.pdf>

[32] USAID, Small Business Expansion Project, available at: <https://www.usaid.gov/macedonia/fact-sheets/small-business-expansion-project>

[33] MAASP, Phase II, funded by SIDA (Swedish International Development Agency)

[34] “Official Gazette of RM” no. 40 from 14.03.2013, Rulebook on Detailed Conditions for Enlistment of Local Action Groups in the Registry, Enlistment Procedure, Necessary Documents and Method of Record Keeping

[35] “Official Gazette of RM” no. 40 from 14.03.2013, Rulebook on the Content and Methodology for Development of Local Development Strategies for Rural Areas and Method of Their Approval.





Figure no.2: Map of local action groups and LAG initiatives in the Republic of North Macedonia

In May 2018, MAFWE issued enlistment decisions for 13 LAGs that fulfil minimum criteria to obtain the status of local action groups and be entered in the Single Registry of Local Action Groups at the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy.[36] They are:

- LAG Agro Leader
- LAG Pelagonija
- LAG Vardar Leader
- LAG Aber 2015
- LAG Skardus
- LAG Tikvesh Vine Valley
- LAG Osogovo Fox
- LAG Plachkovica
- LAG Belasica – Ograzhden
- LAG Bojmija
- LAG Malesh Pijanec
- LAG Bregalnica
- LAG Polog Centar

These LAGs operate in six planning regions: Polog, Pelagonija, Vardar, Northeast, East and Southeast, covering 46 municipalities and more than half of the country’s territory. All LAGs are founded according to features of the LEADER approach, with secured participation of women and youth in decision-making bodies, and have local development strategies according to EU recommendations. [37]

[36] Open call no.01/18 for enlistment of local action groups (LAGs)

[37] ENRD EU 2016, LEADER Local Development Strategies (LDS): Guidance on Design and Implementation



After having introduced the Registry of LAGs, MAFWE focused on securing national funding for support to local action groups under measure 412: “Establishment of Local Action Groups” and measure 413: “Implementation of Local Development Strategies in Rural Areas” from the National Programme for Rural Development.[38] The conditions for use of funds (40% advance payment and 60% payment of funds after implementation of activities/investment approved under LAG’s annual operation plan) are not adequate to the financial situation of local action groups and under these conditions the measure cannot support local action groups and stimulate implementation of local development strategies in rural areas, having in mind the fact that payment of funds by the IPARD Agency for implementation of activities lasts for more than 180 days.

From their establishment to present, for most part, LAGs are left without technical and financial support from national programmes and without support from respective local governments, but continuously work on animating the rural population, developing capacity of all local actors in respect to creation and implementation of integrated development strategies by combining resources, knowledge and skills, and by involving women and youth, with the ultimate goal of utilising the existing endogenous potential for attainment of local rural development goals according to the local development strategy.

In order to align regulatory documents and local development policies with the EU regulations, and in order to enable networking and cooperation among LAGs, in 2018 a number of them formed the Network of Local Action Groups. In 2021, LAG Network started formal cooperation with the Network of Local Action Groups in the Republic of Austria and the Network of Local Action Groups in the Republic of Serbia, in order to share knowledge and good practices, and provide mutual support for implementation of the LEADER approach.[39]

MAFWE and its bodies development the “LEADER approach” measure for accreditation under IPARD programme 2021-2027,[40] with adequately designed procedures for measure implementation, calculations for necessary allocation of funds, as well as manuals and other documents necessary for implementation of this measure. The ex-ante evaluation[41] of IPA Rural Development Programme 2021-2027 indicated positive assessment for measure 5: “Implementation of Local Development Strategies – LEADER Approach”. In particular, the IPARD LEADER measure will provide support for: training and capacity building of approved local action groups (LAGs), animation of potential users in individual territories of LAGs; running costs of LAGs; financing small-scale projects; and promoting cooperation among regions in the country and local partnerships established with other countries. The possibility for securing additional support to finance large-scale projects from national funds will be made available to developed LAGs that fulfil certain preconditions and in compliance with local development strategies.

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[38] Open call no. 03/2019 for submission of applications for funds under 2019 Programme for Financial Support to Rural Development.

[39] <https://www.lagsnetwork.mk/>

[40] [https://ipard.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/draft-IPARD-III-PROGRAMME\\_consolidated\\_041121.pdf](https://ipard.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/draft-IPARD-III-PROGRAMME_consolidated_041121.pdf)

[41] Ex-ante Evaluation of the IPARD III programme 2021 – 2027, Republic of North Macedonia



According to the proposed IPARD III programme 2021-2027, financial support for the LEADER measure is expected to become available for LAGs in 2024.

	Total eligible cost	Public expenditure					
		Total		EU contribution		National contribution	
Year	EUR	EUR	%	EUR	%	EUR	%
2021	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2022	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2023	266.667	266.667	100%	240.000	90%	26.667	10%
2024	333.333	333.333	100%	300.000	90%	33.333	10%
2025	566.667	566.667	100%	510.000	90%	56.667	10%
2026	600.000	600.000	100%	540.000	90%	60.000	10%
2027	666.667	666.667	100%	600.000	90%	66.667	10%
Total	2.433.333	2.433.333	100%	2.190.000	90%	243.333	10%

Table no.2: Indicative financial plan for the IPARD LEADER measure[42].

Until the IPARD LEADER measure is accredited and starts implementation, support is planned with measures under the National Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (M412 and M413) and the IPARD measure for technical assistance. The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy of the Republic of North Macedonia has anticipated funding for measure 412 and measure 413 for LAGs under 2021 Programme for Financial Support to Rural Development,[43] but the open call for funding is still not announced.

### SWOT analysis for development and implementation of LEADER/CLLDS approach

In order to diagnose current status of the LEADER approach and position of local action groups, in the period October-November 2021, the LAG Network - in cooperation with its members, i.e. local action groups - used the SWOT tool (strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats) to analyse the legal framework and concept of the LEADER programme, as well as the situation with local action groups, as baseline for assessment of needs and opportunities for implementation of the LEADER measure “Local Development Strategies and Sustainable Development of Local Action Groups”.

The overall goal of this analysis is to provide insight and knowledge not only in respect to addressing shortcomings related to establishment of local action groups and ensuring their functionality and sustainability, but also to support design and implementation of the LEADER approach.

[42] Ibid.

[43] 2021 PROGRAMME FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT



<b>S</b>	<b>Strengths:</b>
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- Developed human capacity and established processes for implementation of IPARD programme;
- 13 LAGs established and enlisted in MAFWE's Registry, with good territorial distribution and enhanced human capacity for implementation of the LEADER approach;
- LEADER measure implemented under the National Programme for Rural Development;
- Knowledge, capacity and local development strategies created by LAGs;
- Established legal framework for implementation of the LEADER approach;
- New LAG partnerships established.

<b>W</b>	<b>Weaknesses:</b>
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- Lack of coordination among institutions;
- Lack of continuous funding for running costs of LAGs;
- Lack of knowledge about the role of municipalities in respect to operation of LAGs;
- National Network for Rural Development is still not established;
- Slow accreditation process for the LEADER measure under IPARD.

<b>O</b>	<b>Opportunities:</b>
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- Draft LEADER measures prepared for IPARD III programming period;
- Funds for LAGs secured under IPARD measure for technical support to strengthen capacity of LAGs;
- Financial support for approved LAG projects secured under the National Programme for Rural Development;
- Underway is general animation of the local population;
- Municipalities demonstrate interests to assume a proactive role in and to support LAG development strategies;
- Existence of LAG Network to support the process for implementation of the LEADER approach, establishment of LAGs and implementation of local development strategies;
- Underway is establishment of the National Network for Rural Development.

<b>T</b>	<b>Risks:</b>
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- Insufficient support for implementation of LEADER/CLLDS and for establishment of LAGs under the National Programme for Rural Development;
- Failure to adjust LEADER measures according to IPARD programme;
- Lack of continuous support for running costs of LAGs;
- Political influence from municipal governments and local elections;
- Slow accreditation process for new measures under IPARD programme, including the LEADER measure, which negatively affects progress of the LEADER process.



## Concluding observations

As multi-sectoral approach that involves broad spectrum of areas and stakeholders, the LEADER approach is based on the EU's rural development policies, enabling participation, equitable territorial development and socio-economic progress of rural areas. Implementation of the LEADER approach in the Republic of North Macedonia is still facing numerous challenges that slow down implementation of the LEADER approach as bridge between local and national actors and the EU institutions.

Based on research and analyses conducted in respect to current preparedness for implementation of the LEADER programme in the Republic of North Macedonia, the following conclusions are inferred:

- » The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy has established a legal framework for introduction of the LEADER programme pursuant to eponymous programmes of the European Union. Nevertheless, additional provisions are needed to separately regulate creation and implementation of local development strategies, as well as proactive efforts to accelerate the accreditation process of the LEADER measure under IPARD. The slow process will create a gap in funding, negatively affecting sustainability of LAGs, and there is possibility for some of them to be disbanded, causing loss of resources invested in implementation of the LEADER approach thus far.
- » LAGs do not have the status of legal entities. At the moment, only legal form for registration of local action groups is association for rural development. Single Registry of LAGs can be opened only after accreditation of the relevant measure under IPARD. At the moment, this registry is established by MAFWE, but the measure is not accredited, which could lead to a process in which all registered LAGs would have to "take the road of re-registration", causing financial burdens to the already poor financial capacity of LAGs.
- » At national level, there are still no measures for financial support to LAGs that are defined according to LAG potentials and dynamics.
- » Low promotion of the LEADER approach in all three sectors in the society that slows down the process of LAG development, as well as establishment and operation of LAGs on the entire territory of the country.
- » Unrecognized need for establishment of LAGs and support to the LEADER approach on the part of decision-makers, especially at local level, resulting in lack of support from local governments in respect to providing necessary infrastructure and technical conditions for work of local action groups.
- » Absence of measures intended for support of local government budgets for implementation of the LEADER approach in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy.
- » There is no continuous support for LAG initiatives in the process of their creation, i.e. animation of local population, building partnerships, creating LAG internal documents, creating local development strategies, implementing projects, etc.
- » Significant results are observed in implementation of LAG's local development strategies, including many successful stories on socio-economic development in rural areas across the country, which are based on the LEADER approach.



## Recommendations

01

Regulatory framework that integrates provisions of the LEADER approach, including:

- legal basis for establishment of LAGs;
- content of Community-Led Local Development Strategy;
- LAG responsibilities and functions;
- local partnership agreement;
- territory and participation of actors in the partnership;
- procedures, decision-making within LAGs and financial procedures;
- transparency (reports, information, etc.).

Establishment of the legal framework that integrates the LEADER approach can be achieved with special provisions in the Law on Agriculture and Rural Development that integrate above-enlisted documents and ensure alignment of this law with the EU regulations.

02

Introducing the LEADER measure in IPARD III

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy, as the institution responsible for introduction of the LEADER measure in IPARD III, should make proactive efforts to finalize the accreditation process for this measure.

03

Creating measures for financial support to LAGs

In order to ensure operation of LAGs until the start of support through the LEADER measure under IPARD III, in cooperation with other relevant institutions, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy should create measures for financial support to LAGs. Measures 412 and 413 under the National Programme for Rural Development intended for support to LAGs should be revised by setting conditions and criteria for use of these measures on the basis of existing potential among LAGs.

04

Local governments to create measures for technical and/or financial support to LAGs

Local self-government units, as partners in establishment of LAGs, should provide technical and/or financial support to ensure sustainability of LAGs.

05

Strengthening cooperation between public, private and civil sector at regional level

Implementation of rural and regional development policies needs to facilitate communication among stakeholders from all three sectors, ensuring horizontal and vertical communication and transparent participation of all representatives from all sectors in the processes for creating local development strategies and adopting strategic documents. Creating local development strategies should be led by skills and expertise of local stakeholders, local authorities, community and civil society organizations, in consultation with the broad local rural population that will identify strategic priorities and will provide basis for developmental initiatives specific to this programme.



06

Capacity building for local stakeholders from the public, private and civil society sector  
The LEADER measures under the National Programme for Rural Development and the IPARD measure for technical assistance can be used to support public-private partnerships, i.e. local action groups (LAGs) and creation of local development strategies at subregional level. The capacity-building process should include training programme for local interested parties about the LEADER approach, role and operation of LAGs, creation of strategic documents, principles of decision-making and project management.

07

Establishing dialogue and cooperation between MAFWE and LAG Network  
Having in mind that the National Rural Network is still not formed in the Republic of North Macedonia, anticipated to serve as support mechanism for establishment and operation of LAGs, the LAG Network is founded on LEADER principles and implements activities to support local action groups and share good practices between LAG networks and LAG initiatives in the region and EU member-states, as key steps for successful implementation of the LEADER approach and development of rural communities in the country and the region. It is of vital importance for the LAG Network to be involved in establishment of the national framework for support to rural development through the LEADER approach, which anticipates clear roles for public-private partnerships and provides continuity in activities of LAGs.



