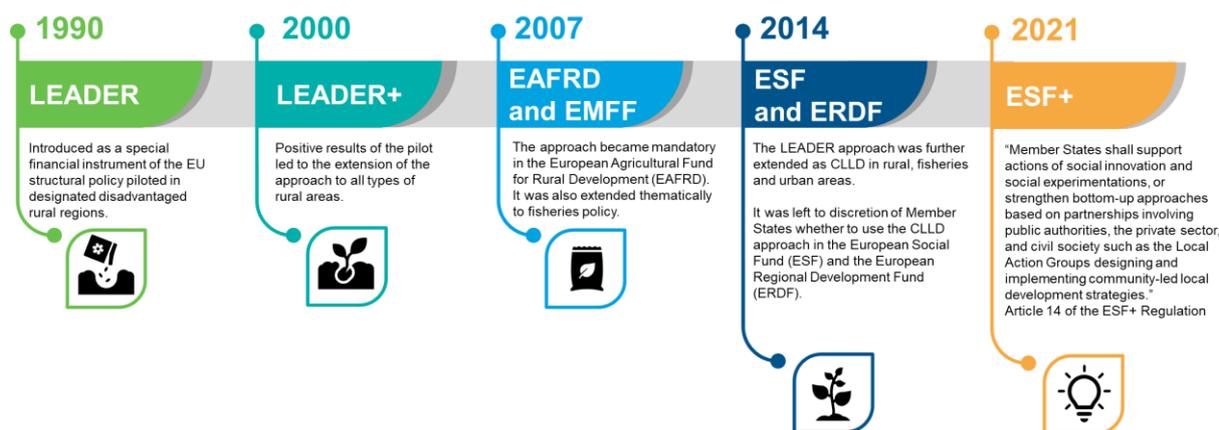




Summary Report  
**ESF Transnational Cooperation Platform**  
**Community of Practice on Social Innovation**  
**Workshop on Community-led Local Development with a focus on the innovative component**  
12-13 April 2021, online

The workshop<sup>1</sup> explored and exchanged perspectives on using the community-led local development (CLLD) approach in the European Social Fund (ESF) and how it can promote social innovation.

CLLD is a bottom-up approach in which public funds support the activities of Local Action Group (LAG) partnerships that address local needs and challenges in an integrated and holistic way. The concept was well established in the EU funds before it became a new feature of the ESF in the 2014-2020 programming period. The ESF+ will also support the use of CLLD approach.



The workshop was part of the work of the Community of Practice on Social Innovation which agreed to prepare a report on the use of CLLD in ESF with a focus on CLLD practices with an innovative component.

### The added value of CLLD in ESF

One of the main advantages of CLLD is that it allows Local Action Groups to **address the specific needs of local communities**. CLLD is able to develop tailored approaches that respond to the needs of citizens in different locations, e.g. rural, urban and coastal communities and communities close to international borders who might have different expectations and social problems to those located in the middle of a country.

<sup>1</sup> The workshop, organised by the Transnationality Team on behalf of the European Commission, was attended by 58 participants who represented managing authorities, intermediate bodies as well as EU-level stakeholders from the following countries: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

Workshop participants had the opportunity to hear about different CLLD projects and how they respond to local needs. **This video** showcases four CLLD projects that are co-funded by different EU instruments:



### **Enerterre – Fighting against energy poverty**

This project promotes the voluntary renovation of traditional houses for the benefit of people in fuel poverty. The initiative brings together resources such as people's skills, time, local materials, etc. A key element of this approach is that volunteers carry out the renovation work under the supervision of building professionals.

*Project in Neuilly-la-Forêt (France) funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)*



### **One step ahead: how to prepare children for life after the orphanage**

This project supports young people leaving institutional care through a children's home in Nechanice that helps them to integrate into everyday life and the rural community. The project connects young people to potential employers in the region, provides guidance and helps them to develop the practical skills necessary for their lives outside of institutional care. The partnership's holistic approach has helped children to find a job and housing, and to settle down within the community.

*Project in Nechanice (Czechia) funded by the European Social Fund (ESF)*



### **Falkenberg Food Days**

Falkenberg Food Days is an annual festival promoting food entrepreneurs and local raw materials. The events include:

- inspiration rounds for food producers and food creators,
- a food party with food cooked from local ingredients by local chefs, accompanied by entertainment, and
- a food fair for people in the food business and food lovers.

*Project in Falkenberg (Sweden) funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)*



### **Diversifying cockle picking**

The aim of this project was to promote the work of cockle pickers. One of its first actions was the purchase of a small, refrigerated van to transport cockles in appropriate conditions to a centre a purifier had been installed. As soon as the basic conditions were in place to start purifying their cockles, the shellfish gatherers could begin promoting and selling their produce.

*Project in Anllóns (Spain) funded by the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF)*

CLLD initiatives, developed at the sub-regional level, are particularly **beneficial for small, rural communities** that may be hard to reach with standard ESF approaches by project providers.

In urban areas CLLD can help promote social cohesion and social inclusion by **addressing the needs of isolated and fragmented target groups** not prioritised otherwise. Urban CLLD activities can also help to attract volunteers and foster trust between them and target groups.

CLLD can also have a significant (positive) impact on local people by building the potential of local communities by engaging with target groups in the design and implementation of the activities. Involving target groups in decision-making processes can make them feel empowered and included. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that **positioning the CLLD approach as a principle can help improve local peoples' attitudes towards the European Union**.

Another added value of CLLD initiatives is **trust** and the close personal connections generated between Local Action Groups, beneficiaries and target groups. These close relationships can lead to a **better diagnosis of needs and increased participation of target groups in activities** (see box 1).

### **Box 1. Integrated actions for disadvantaged people in the territory of the Local Action Group "Colinele Iaşilor" (Romania)**

This project aims to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion in marginalised communities in north-east Romania. The initiative aims to support 250 people who live in low-income households and face severe material deprivation. Half of the target group are children (primary and secondary school students), and the other half are unemployed adults.

Activities for children include assessment and social assistance through information sessions, psychosocial counselling and emotional support, socialisation and leisure activities. Furthermore, the project also aims to promote education and reduce the risk of early school leaving by providing educational counselling and extracurricular educational activities.

Actions organised for adults focus on professional guidance, vocational training, entrepreneurial training and business advice. Moreover, representatives of the target groups can apply for microgrants to start their own businesses. The Local Action Group aims to finance ten start-up businesses (non-agricultural) with a maximum value of approximately EUR 23,000 each.

The project 'Integrated actions for disadvantaged people' is being implemented over two years, from November 2020 to November 2022.

## **The social innovation aspect of CLLD**

The ESF+ Regulation defines **social innovation** as:

“

an activity that is social both as to its ends and its means and in particular an activity which relates to the development and implementation of new ideas concerning products, services and models, that simultaneously meets social needs and creates new social relationships or collaborations between public, civil society or private organisations, thereby benefiting society and boosting its capacity to act.”  
(ESF+ Regulation)

Participants had different definitions of 'social innovation'. They learned about Tidd and Bessant's "4Ps of innovation" concept, which can be a helpful framework for analysing the social innovation aspects of CLLD. The framework identifies four interconnected and mutually reinforcing areas of social innovation.

## CLLD and the 4Ps of innovation



### Product:

Use of a product around which activities are developed, e.g. community centre, one-stop-shop, job cafés, fairs, etc.



### Process:

Involvement of different stakeholders, use of new methodologies – group processes, co-production, experimentation and testing.



### Position:

Citizens, local people and particular groups of citizens at the centre of activities – place-based approaches, tailored to particular needs.



### Paradigm:

Institutionalisation of new models and methodologies for addressing access to employment, social inclusion, etc., within organisations and at the policy level.

New partnerships with **non-traditional stakeholders** can help **generate new ideas** tailored to specific local needs. The CLLD initiatives can also help **bridge accessibility gaps in social services** and improve the dynamics of local communities, including a sense of belonging to the area, strengthening local relationships and improving satisfaction with a community as a place to live.

CLLD also offers opportunities to stimulate social innovation (e.g. in minority groups) and **build social creativity** and supporting the **transfer of ideas by sharing** practices between different managing authorities and Local Action Groups. Several participants suggested that wider sharing of inspiring practices could help Local Action Groups prioritise and select initiatives within their Local Development Strategies.

Participants agreed that, to foster social innovation ESF Programmes need to provide **space to experiment**, to take risks and, if necessary, to fail without financial consequences.

## Key challenges and solutions in implementing CLLD

During the workshop, one of the working group discussions centred on common challenges and solutions in implementing CLLD within the ESF. Participants raised similar issues around the following four themes:



**Administrative and regulatory barriers**



**Building sustainable partnerships**



**The complexity of managing different funds**



**Developing integrated CLLD approaches**

Most participants described **administrative complexity** in implementing CLLD as an issue. Implementing small projects was deemed as complex and costly as large projects, which acts as a deterrent for less experienced and small beneficiaries from applying for ESF funding. Implementing CLLD approaches generates high administrative costs for managing authorities, given the large number of small projects that are selected and monitored. Participants pointed this out as one of the reasons why not all Member States introduced CLLD in the ESF during the current programming period. Czechia and Poland, and other countries, have used **simplified costs options to reimburse the activities**

**and administrative costs** of running a project. This approach could offer a way forward to encourage take-up of small projects and reduce the administrative burden for managing authorities and beneficiaries. Managing authorities have also set up **dedicated CLLD units to provide support to beneficiaries** in applying and implementing ESF projects (e.g. through guidance, workshops and training, contact points assisting beneficiaries in complying with ESF requirements).

Participants identified another challenge: the gap between high-level programming and local realities. As the programming of EU funds often takes place at the national level in a top-down way, it is not easy to relate this to the implementation experience of Local Action Groups on the ground. This gap affects trust, accountability and a feeling of ownership. Encouraging close cooperation with Local Action Groups and frequent meetings (both online and on-site) is one solution used by managing authorities to understand local needs better.

Participants provided the following examples of the support offered to Local Action Groups (LAGs):



Participants mentioned **the complexity of managing different funds** as creating another set of challenges. In the 2014-2020 programming period, the ESF was one of four funds available to Local Action Groups, accompanied by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). In many Member States, a mutual learning process across these different funds has led to important adjustments in the implementation of CLLD. This collaboration across managing authorities (see box 2) aims to make all funds more accessible to Local Action Groups by harmonising rules and terminology used by the funds. Participants view this positively, as clear and unified communication across different funds are essential to ensure take-up by Local Action Groups.

### **Box 2. Initiatives to coordinate multiple funds**

Czechia set up a CLLD chamber which includes representatives of managing authorities of different funds and relevant stakeholders. The group of around 25 people meets monthly to discuss coordination of the funds, share experiences and good practices.

In Poland, the Marshal of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie region appointed a plenipotentiary for the coordination of CLLD. The plenipotentiary was authorised, among other things, to allocate tasks related to the coordination of CLLD and resolve any disputes between organisational units dealing with CLLD matters. In the region, meetings were organised every six months with representatives of the Marshal's Office and Local Action Group management boards to discuss the state of implementation of Local Development Strategies, the performance of individual projects and selection of projects by Local Action Groups.

To ensure shared objectives, participants suggested that **Local Action Groups should be involved in the programming of the funds to define the types of financed interventions and they should be consulted on the design of calls**. Managing authorities may need to update and adjust CLLD guidelines to respond to **changing local needs throughout the programming period**, as demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants also noted that multi-level, multi-fund Local Development Strategies require **sustainable partnerships**. However, too many partnerships have a short-term perspective which leads to institutional knowledge gaps. Member States support matching partners with different expertise to widen the thematic coverage of partnerships and potential access to target groups (see box 3).

### **Box 3. Initiatives to strengthen partnerships at local level**

In the United Kingdom, the city of Hull organises awareness-raising and capacity-building workshops before launching a call. Dedicated events follow the workshops to match experienced lead organisations with junior partners.

Greece holds stakeholder workshops to connect existing CLLD beneficiaries with ESF partners, while Czechia relies on preparatory focus groups to publish calls that address the needs of partnerships.

The final discussion focused on **integrated CLLD approaches** that counteract silos of expertise, fragmented project management and short-term partnerships.

Participants expressed a desire for long-term collaboration across and beyond programming cycles. They suggested starting with comprehensive consultations at the programming stage to identify potential synergies between the funds available for Local Action Groups.

Experimentation should be encouraged at all levels to reach out to 'unusual' partners, who could fuel innovation. For example, in Local Action Group interactions with private partners, public administration actors should stress the mutually advantageous principles of corporate responsibility and environmental, social and governmental impact, which have changed business in recent years.

Some workshop participants complimented Portugal for making social innovation a national policy priority. Other participants pointed out that real innovation, by its very nature is unexpected, therefore cannot be planned. It was emphasised that, even if genuine CLLD-led innovation arises from the bottom-up, ESF managing authorities can still create the conditions for the success of CLLD.



Future exchanges within the Community of Practice on Social Innovation could focus on: urban Local Action Groups, multi-fund approaches, and matching supply and demand through better partnerships in ESF+.