

# LEADER and smart villages implementation: state of play

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# Key points:

1. Implementation of LEADER in Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) 2014-22
2. Implementation of LEADER and Smart villages in CAP Plans - update
3. Policy updates:
  - Pact for Eastern Border Regions and role of LEADER/CLLD in it
  - Fight against disinformation and reinforce integrated information space
  - LEADER: Communicating the EU to the citizen - practice

# Key figures on LEADER in RDP 2014-22\*

**8.34 billion  
EUR**



**83,285 jobs  
created  
(inc 38,319 for  
women)**

**211,470  
projects**



**60% of EU  
rural  
population**

**2,728 Local development  
strategies**

Till end 2024, based on AIR



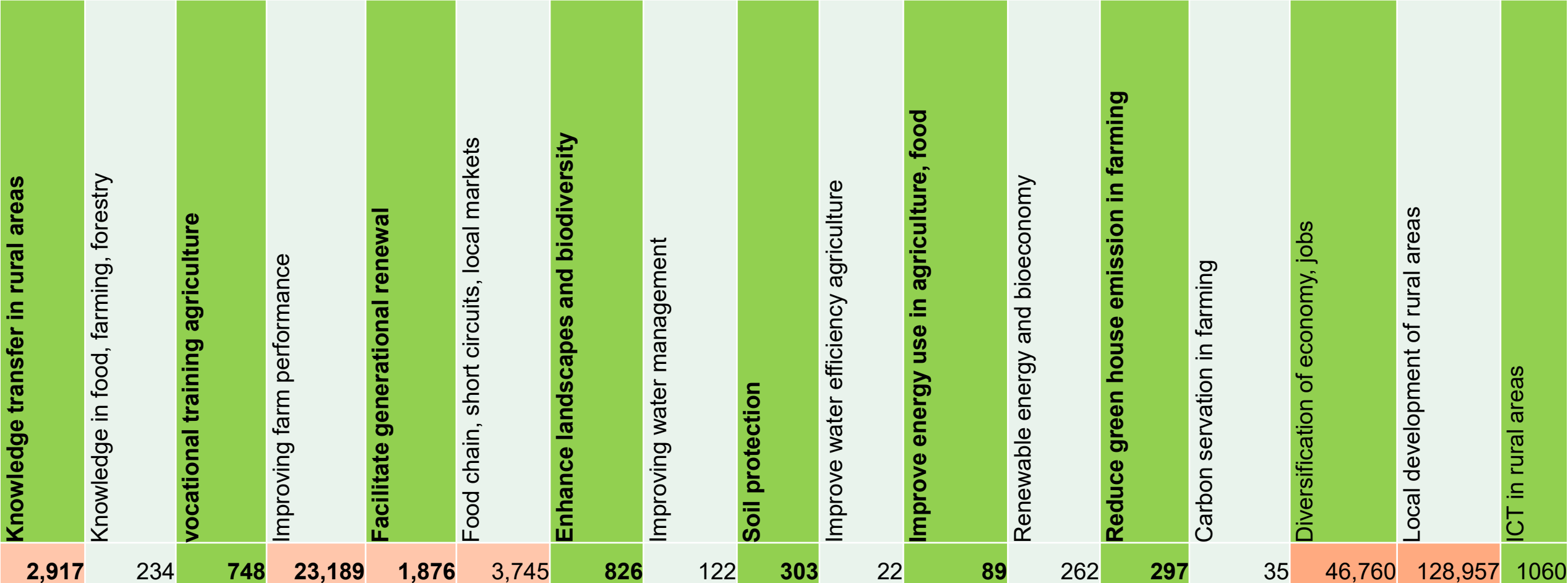
# What are LEADER projects doing? (RDPs 2014-22)

(nr of projects per priority, by end 2024) – [see it in detail online](#)

	D1a	D1b	D1C	D2A	D2B	D3a	D4a	D4B	D4C	D5A	D5B	D5C	D5D	D5E	D6A	D6B	D6C	
	Knowledge transfer in rural areas	Knowledge transfer agriculture, food and forestry	vocational training agriculture	Improving farm performance	Facilitate generational renewal	Food chain, short circuits, local markets	Enhancing landscapes and biodiversity	Improving water management	Soil protection	Improve water efficiency in agriculture	Improve energy use in agriculture and food sector	Renewable energy and bioeconomy	Reduce green house emission in agriculture	Carbon conservation in farming	Diversification of economy, jobs	Local development of rural areas	ICT in rural areas	
AT													1				4781	
BE VL				97		6	4	20	7	14						331		
BE WAL		4		1	8	1	11	11	5			4	2			28	45	4
BG		55	13	1	300	4	40			1			7		1	174	613	6
CY																29	42	
CZ		2		5	5260		643			247						3374	4336	
DE		310	8	25	33		80	116				13	29	5	2	551	20378	32
DK																	3127	
EE		60	2	3	30	2	25	2		1		10	8		1	633	4402	
ES		739		110	33		1568	120	4		6	40	95	249		11413	12874	453
FI																	9432	
FR		147	4	2	86		101	43	3			9	14	1		1361	18104	26
GR																	3405	
HR				2801		55	7									17	585	
HU																	12501	
IE		1003															2670	101
IT total		111	46	153	3515	188	375	508	30	30		2	41	13	30	5529	5113	55
LT		75		113			96						27			921	1463	
LU																	125	
LV		390					161									1659	2595	
MT																	294	
NL																	637	
PL							82									15509	13448	254
PT					9181	0	385										1283	
RO		21	2	67	1899	1609	100		56		10	1	5	3		2565	5240	75
SE			32	17	43	3			17	10			18	22		636	1449	10
SI			127	154		8	67	6			6	3	16	3	1	261	15	44

# What are LEADER projects doing? (RDP)

(nr of projects per priority till end 2024 – **211,470 projects in total**)

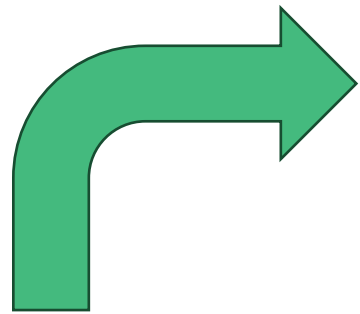


# LEADER and Smart Villages in CAP Plans 2023-27

- 316 million EUR disbursed on LEADER (requests from all MS except of BG, SK, PT, EL, MT)
- Results of a quick survey on the progress of LEADER implementation (Feb 2026)

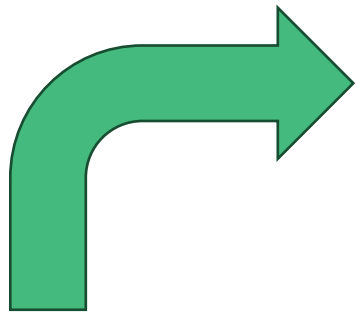


# LAGs at work to implement their strategies 2023-27... but some delays (1)



## PAYMENTS OF RUNNING COSTS TO LAGs

All LAGs paid at least once	DE, EE, LV, SE, LU, AT, DK, RO, HU, BE-FL
Some payments	FI, ES, PT, LT (advances: ES)
No payments	BG, EL



## CONTRACTS WITH LAGs

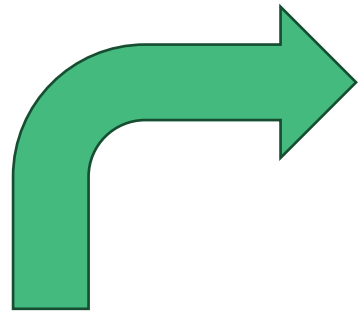
All LAGs contracted	FI, DE, LV, SE, LU, PT, AT, DK, RO, HU, BE-FL, EL, LT
Some contracts pending	BG, ES
No LAGs contracted	EE**

## SELECTION OF LAGs

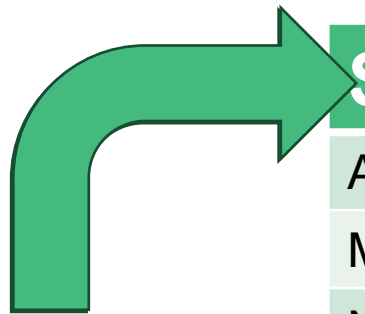
All LAGs selected	FI, DE, EE, LV, SE, BG, ES, LU, PT, AT, DK, RO, HU, BE-FL, EL, LT
Not all LAGs selected yet	
No LAGs selected	



# LAGs at work to implement their strategies 2023-27... but some delays (2)



PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION	
All LAGs	FI, DE, EE, LV, SE, LU, AT, DK, BE-FL
Some do	ES, EL and most do in HU, LT
No LAGs implement	BG, PT, RO



SELECTION OF PROJECTS BY LAGs	
All LAGs selected projects	FI, DE, EE, LV, SE, LU, AT, DK, BE-FL
Most LAGs did	HU, LT and some did in ES, RO, EL
No LAGs selected projects yet	BG, PT

## LAUNCH OF CALLS BY LAGs

All LAGs launched at least one	FI, DE, EE, LV, SE, LU, AT, DK, RO, HU, BE-FL, LT
Some calls	ES, PT, EL
No calls	BG



# Survey results for Smart Villages

(Subgroup on LEADER and territorial development – 4th meeting)

- 16 responses, 14 Member States (8 MAs, 6 LAGs, 3 NN)
- 5 CSPs (AT, BE-Flanders, FI, LV, SE) are well advanced (projects selected or completed) and 2 CSPs (LT, RO) are on the process (open calls, selection)
- Examples of projects:
  - digital platform to increase the rental rate in association buildings, preparedness projects to increase local engagement and civil preparedness in villages (FI)
  - new methods to mobilise residents and strengthen local initiatives, renovating vacant apartment buildings into energy-efficient housing for newcomers and local specialists, establishment of business hubs in former schools, implementation of smart lighting and public infrastructure, and the creation of the first rural energy communities. (LV)
- Interest for inter-territorial and transnational cooperation projects on Smart Villages (BE-Flanders, LV).



# Issues to be considered...

- The concept is gaining **increasing interest at local level**, particularly within LEADER Local Action Groups.
- 543 LEADER LAGs have included smart villages in their local development strategies ([Search LAG Directory | EU CAP Network](#))

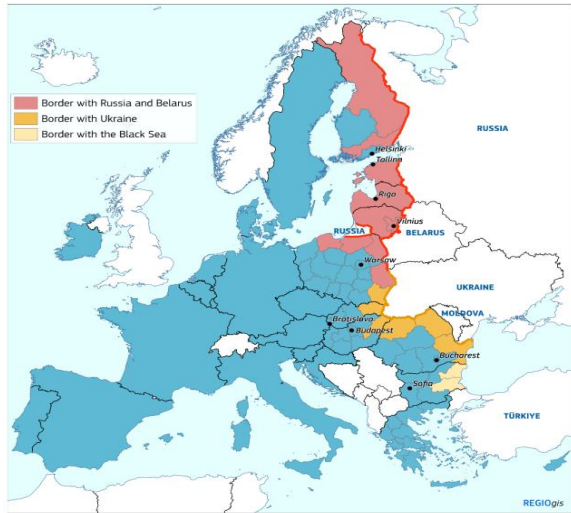
## **BUT IT SEEMS TO BE A LONG & DEMANDING PROCESS**

- Need for special supporting activities by LAGs to local communities for implementing SV
- Need to collect qualitative information on smart villages strategies and projects implementation within LEADER
- Need for more capacity-building, networking activities & guidance

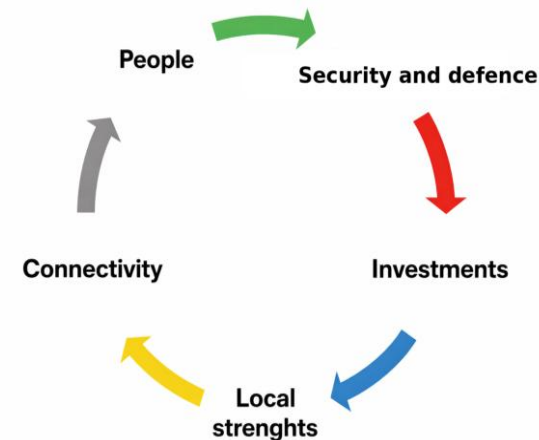
*LATVIA: National Recognition Sign "SV" is organized annually since 2021 as a continuation of LEADER TNC project. Every other week SV representatives meet to discuss and build their capacity in online meetings "Smart Wednesdays" and other networking and capacity building events are organized by LAGs, Latvian Rural Forum, and Latvian NN. (Survey)*

- R.40 values (APRs 2023-2024): not yet promising, but in the APR 2025 more results are expected.





## Pact for Eastern Border regions – recognition of the role of LEADER/CLLD



**Eastern Border regions: crucial to EU security but vulnerable (for social, economic, demography and safety) – EU stepping up with support**

**People – regions are as strong as the communities living there**

“The Commission will

promote **community-led local development initiatives**, including LEADER, engaging the population in local decision-making and finding solutions tailored to the specific regional needs, including youth retention and access to quality services for all;

Bolster efforts to address risks posed by **FIMI (Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference)**, particularly acute in EBR, including through EDMO and CAP Network in relation to rural communities

# IMPACT

## An Interreg Mechanism for Promoting Active Communities and Territories

IMPACT is a two-year European Commission-funded initiative to strengthen community-led local development (CLLD) in cross-border regions.

## See it – try it!

Example: Pilot project “CLLD-oriented facilitation of cross-border planning across the Polish-Lithuanian Functional Area” within the Resilient Borders initiative. Main outcome is an agreement signed between the EGTC and the LAGs operating in the cross border area (Suwalsko-Sejneńska LAG (PL), LAG Vilkaviškis (LT), LAG Kalvarija (LT), LAG „Dzūkija“ Lazdijai (LT)).



# Combating Disinformation and strengthening information integrity: why?

- President von der Leyen calls to “**take further action to address the targeted spread of disinformation in rural areas**” - in rural areas ‘news deserts’ can let disinformation thrive.
- **Eurobarometer** (May 2025): 73% of EU citizens regularly encounter disinformation, and 86% agree that its rapid spread poses a major threat to democracy.
- The EU’s agricultural policy is a target of **disinformation and Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI)** with narratives exploiting domestic grievances among farmers and rural communities to undermine trust in the EU.
- Technique is to employ **emotive narratives** (e.g. ‘war on farmers’, ‘rural decline’, ‘cultural loss’, ‘betrayal’), often adapted to national contexts, or combined with conspiracy tropes.
- Commonly amplified by **Kremlin-aligned media**, influencers, or protest groups
- Often combining fake and real news: based in real events but distorts the legal provisions or draws simplified conclusions.
- Policy uncertainty post-2027 CAP creates **vulnerabilities** and can be **weaponised**





# Combatting Disinformation and strengthening information integrity – **how?**

Wider European Democracy Shield – in which DG AGRI will be:

1. **Monitoring disinformation:** weekly “Fighting the fallacies”, EDMO fact-checking briefs, monitoring news

2) **Balancing the Narrative:** Countering Misconceptions & Promoting a Factual Account

Resource: [Answers to your questions: EU's common agricultural policy.](#)

[EU budget 2028-2034](#)

Cooperation with local news/journalists

3) **Supporting Fact-checkers and fostering a multiplier network**

Raising awareness of rural communities, promoting media literacy, involving current networks such as CAP Networks and **LEADER networks**

Start here: [Tackling disinformation | EU CAP Network](#)

# Combating Disinformation and strengthening information integrity – what can LEADER LAGs and Networks do?

LEADER networks are **important multipliers** in local rural communities with trust built over the years

**2700 LAGs and 120,000+ members of LAGs in rural Europe is a big potential**

What to do for now?

- build you own **awareness** of disinformation and **strengthen information integrity** – follow factual sites and information channels, learn about disinformation techniques
- organise **trainings in digital literacy** for rural communities/local - multipliers
- networks to organise and provide **trainings to LAGs**: on disinformation, information integrity, especially on matters related to rural communities/CAP





# Communicating the EU LEADER: bringing the EU to the (rural) kitchen table And in practice?

Added value of LEADER – trust is part of social capital

Trust in the EU, too

Trust in the EU is generally lower in rural areas than urban

Rural Observatory analytical paper on trust of 2 December 2025

Visibility of EU emblem when EU funding provided to projects

Wider communication: LAG's websites, social media, meetings –  
attention needed

How else do LAGs “bring the EU to the rural kitchen table”?





# Communicating the EU LEADER: bringing the EU to the (rural) kitchen table And in practice?

Figure 5. Trust in the EU in EU-27 Member States by degree of urbanisation (spring 2024).

