

Subgroup on LEADER and territorial development

4th meeting - 25-26 February 2026

Brussels

Day 1 - 25 February 2026

Welcome and introduction

The Chair, **Antonia Gamez Moreno (Head of Unit D1, DG AGRI)** welcomed members to the 4th meeting of the Subgroup on LEADER and territorial development (SoLTD). She described the objectives of the meeting, which related to policy updates on LEADER, Smart Villages (SV), the next Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF), the CAP and the current policy, and updates on LEADER implementation and networking from the members. The Chair also emphasised the opportunities for networking and exchanges, as well as the opportunity for members to discuss LEADER priorities for the next Annual Work Programme (AWP) of the EU CAP Network.



Short policy framing (DG AGRI, Unit B3)

Maria Gomez-Zamalloa Gafo (Head of Unit B3, DG AGRI) affirmed LEADER's important role in rural development and provided an overview of LEADER achievements in the previous programming period, progress made under the CAP Strategic Plans (CSPs), and proposals for its future.

Based on data from the end of 2024, in the 2014-2022 programming period LEADER contributed to rural development with 211 000 projects and created more than 83 000 jobs, addressing the social, economic and environmental dimensions of rural development.

In the framework of the CSPs, EUR 300 million have already been spent and many Local Action Groups (LAGs) in the EU have published at least one call for projects. The implementation of SV has also been launched in several Member States (MSs).

Ms. Gafo highlighted the changing policy context, with **security** being higher on the agenda, as also demonstrated by the recent adoption of the Pact for Eastern Border Regions by the European Commission (EC) and relevant actions to counter **disinformation** in rural areas. LEADER LAGs, supported by National CAP Networks (NNs), can have a strong role in ensuring **community resilience**, strengthening **social capital** and trust at local, regional, national and the EU level, as well as addressing disinformation.

New and increasing challenges provided the context for the next MFF proposal. Important developments include the proposal on the rural target from the non-ring-fenced CAP and Common Fisheries policy funds, representing EUR 48.7 bn in the framework of the next programming period. This amount can be considerably higher if increased with the potential amount of loans from the Catalyst Europe Programme. The rural target will be comprised of a consistent agenda of measures addressing rural areas with strong synergies across the different policy areas; also supporting the 'Right to Stay' principle.

Update on LEADER implementation (DG AGRI)

DG AGRI representatives provided a joint presentation with updates on LEADER implementation.

Iwona Lisztwan (Unit B.3) shared data on LEADER implementation under the Rural Development Programmes (RDPs), based on end of 2024 figures. Noteworthy facts include that LEADER had covered 60% of rural areas, created more than 83 000 jobs, and brought Europe closer to citizens in rural areas.



Ms. Lisztwan highlighted that LEADER support had been linked to all six Priority Areas within the RDPs through EUR 8bn of actual EU funds spent. The most important priority areas covered by LEADER projects were local development, diversification, and improving farm performance.

Concerning CSPs, a short survey to identify progress (with responses from 16 MSs) showed that LAGs have now been selected in all responding MSs, with contracts signed with LAGs and calls launched in 13 of them. In some MSs, no payments have been executed yet, but systems are in place (for more details, please see the presentations on the [event page](#)).

Maria Christina Makrandreou (Unit B.3) focused on Smart Villages (SV) and LEADER. Each MS has its own approach and focus (ranging from digital platforms to addressing energy issues or improving entrepreneurship). Some MSs (e.g. Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Finland, Latvia and Sweden) are quite advanced, while in others calls for projects are ongoing. The interest in SVs is demonstrated by the 543 LAGs in the EU CAP Network [LAG Directory](#) that selected this as one of the priority strategic themes. In general, more capacity building and networking is needed regarding SVs and LEADER.

Szabolcs Zöldréti (Unit F.1) presented the role of LEADER in fighting disinformation. Disinformation is an issue – not only in these regions – due to its systemic, emotionally powerful nature that can be adapted to individual MS contexts. According to Eurobarometer, more than 86% of EU citizens agree that disinformation poses a major threat to democracy. The European Democracy Shield launched by the EC aims to address these issues. DG AGRI monitors and counters disinformation and promotes factual accounts.



The LEADER community, with over 120 000 LAG members representing different sectors, makes LAGs important multipliers who can raise awareness of the issues, build capacities (e.g. through digital literacy training) and “bring the EU to the kitchen table”, whilst giving more visibility to the role of EU support to rural areas and communities.

Iwona Lisztwan (B3) also briefly presented the Pact for Eastern Border Regions and the role of LEADER community therein.

During a Q&A session, members who asked about the reasons for the delays in implementing LEADER in some MSs were reassured by DG AGRI representatives that these types of issues were discussed at the annual review meetings with MSs.

The lower levels of trust in the EU in rural areas were partly attributed to the presence of disinformation ‘on the ground’. The EC initiatives to strengthen networking and dialogue with stakeholders were also emphasised, as were the joint responsibility of all stakeholders involved in the ‘European project’ to defend Europe against disinformation and deteriorating trust in the EU. LEADER stakeholders are encouraged to pay more attention to EU visibility and communication (e.g. via their social media or websites).

Questions were asked about the inclusion of LEADER and CLLD in the rural target in all MSs. The details of the rural target are being discussed at the EC level, as well as in the European Council and by MSs. It is possible that a specific target and rules will be set to diminish the risk of diluting the rural target from its original objective (focusing on the real needs of rural areas in a strategic approach). However, this also depends on MSs’ involvement in the policy discussions.

Responses from Local Action Groups and MSs - Community, democracy and fair information - reflections and examples from the LEADER Community

Anita Selicka (Latvian Rural Forum) presented the activities of Eastern Border Region LAGs in Latvia for crisis preparedness, community resilience, and fair information. After the COVID crisis, when trust in public institutions dropped in Latvia, the Latvian Rural Forum was asked to organise consultations in rural areas. One of the results was that people’s trust in ‘the Right to Stay’ and in public institutions was strongly linked with access to services, such as healthcare, education, transport, but also with being involved at community level. LAGs and local communities are key for preparedness and resilience in Latvia’s Eastern border regions, particularly in the Latgale region, where regional per capita GDP is considerably lower than the national average. Since Russia started its war on Ukraine, Latvian NGOs and LAGs started being involved in the work of the Civil Protection Commissions, and even invited to national-scale military defence exercises – a clear recognition of the local NGOs’ potential for activating and involving local residents. Coordination between the local and national level has become stronger, the role of local communities in mobilising and participating in civil protection is increasingly recognised, while LAGs have been implementing thousands of micro-projects related to preparedness and local resilience.



Juha-Matti Markkola (National Network, Finland) explained how **Finland** – a territory that is 95% rural and with 4 000 villages – adopted a comprehensive security model involving the whole of society. Vibrant and resilient rural communities are essential parts of this model, which at the national level applies the '72-hour concept', whereby every household is prepared for 72 hours of disruption. The Finnish Village Association is implementing the local **preparedness** project at the national level, while LAGs have been implementing 272 local projects linked with preparedness and resilience. These projects include elements such as investment in power packs, village radios, first aid training, building local networks, upgrading community centres or village houses, and other activities. SVs are also important in this respect – they make local communities more vibrant, innovative and prepared.

Virginija Setkiene (Lithuanian Rural Communities Association) described LAGs' initiatives related to preparedness in Lithuania. Here, since the start of the war in Ukraine, the rural population has been affected by 'hybrid attacks' as well as some extreme climate events, and crisis preparedness has become part of the public discourse. Lithuanian LAGs contribute to crisis preparedness in several ways, including through networking and knowledge exchange, training organised at local level on civil defence and community resilience, joint investments with local municipalities in collective security structures, and even supporting the production of freeze-dried food products by rural enterprises.

The future: LEADER and the MFF

DG AGRI representatives **Martin Van Driel (Unit A.1)** and **Iwona Lisztwan (Unit B.3)** updated members on the future of LEADER in the new MFF. The EC Proposal on the next MFF and the CAP, launched in July 2025, includes a ring-fenced amount for agricultural income support as well as a non-ring-fenced part. Two later letters from the EC President (in November 2025 and January 2026) added further elements to the policy discussions, respectively the **rural target** and the **flexibility frontloading mechanism**.

The rural target can be financed from the non-ring-fenced amount and include all measures that are linked to code O2 (designating 'rural areas') in the performance regulation; however, there are no regulatory provisions as to what will be specifically included in the rural target. In this context, the regional check will be an important mechanism to ensure that all regional authorities are properly consulted in the preparation of the national and regional partnership plans (NRPPs).

The flexibility frontloading mechanism may allow for a certain percentage of the non-ring-fenced amount to be planned for agriculture and rural development. Work on the proposals is ongoing in several working parties of the European Council, while the EU Parliament has created a joint committee to coordinate the negotiations, but has not yet started discussing the proposals. Several details, including on the rural target, potential transfer of some articles from the NRPP regulation to the CAP regulation, and others, are still to be discussed. One of the elements that have already been moved from the NRPP to the CAP Regulation is the article on the CAP networks. A final vote in the EU Parliament is scheduled for December 2026.

Funding for LEADER will come from the non-ring-fenced part of the CAP budget. LEADER is referred to in two regulations – NRPP and CAP – which is similar to the situation in the current programme (with the Common Provisions Regulation and the CAP regulation). In the proposals, LEADER remains obligatory (at least in rural areas with specific disadvantages) for all MSs, while Smart Villages will be 'voluntary'. The programming of wider multi-sector CLLD/LEADER is explicitly referred to in the proposal for the budget tracking regulation. The full LEADER method is retained, and its scope will not be limited to farmers only, but will relate to the wider territorial, social, economic, environmental, and digital transition of rural areas, as well as to building social capital. The tasks of LAGs are largely retained. The proposals aim to achieve more integration and synergies with other policy areas, while retaining the LEADER method, but do not include ring-fencing. While the negotiations on the proposal and legal texts are ongoing, the EC has started thinking about the CAP recommendations for MSs, including on the aspect of rural development and LEADER for the next programming period.

In the ensuing **Q&A** session, Subgroup members asked for clarifications and commented on various aspects of the proposals.



Questions were raised on Article 20 (National contribution to estimated costs) of the NRPP regulation. It was clarified that the minimum national contribution rate to estimated costs of the measures includes private/own funding as well as national public funding. In this framework, the minimum 15% national contribution to measures in less developed regions could be complemented with up to 85% EU contribution. Article 20 of the NRPP regulations will be further discussed, as part of the discussions on co-financing rates.

Members asked about the possibility of funding LEADER/CLLD LAGs from other (non-rural) policy fields, considering the potentially decreasing support from the CAP for LEADER. There were also questions on higher proportion of funding from Cohesion Policy spent on urban areas, compared to rural areas, and the lack of obligatory CLLD (in the NRPP).

The idea of making CLLD obligatory under the NRPPs was not part of the original proposal.

It was clarified that in the framework of the single fund within the next programming period, MSs and the Commission will need to find the appropriate balance between support for rural and urban areas.

The possibility of using funding from the current programming period for the preparation of Local Development Strategies (LDSs) for the next period can be clarified at the working party discussions, as part of the ongoing consultations.

EU CAP Network activities

Peter Toth (EU CAP Network) presented various activities of the EU CAP Network in support to LEADER, including the LAG Directory, tools to facilitate transnational cooperation (TNC), LEADER good practices, an online platform launched for Subgroup members, and the informal meetings on LEADER for MAs. Past events as well as upcoming events were described, including the planned EU CAP Network workshop on LEADER and social resilience and the participation of the EU CAP Network at [LINC2026](#) (the annual gathering of LEADER LAGs) in Latvia.

He stressed that the LAG Directory and information in the TNC factsheets can only be kept up to date with the active participation of MS MAs, NNs, and LAGs.

New EU CAP Network resources, such as the [web page on disinformation and media literacy](#) and [a briefing on LEADER and social capital](#) were also presented. The EU CAP Network encourages members to share good practice examples and ideas for publications (e.g. the LEADER Newsletter).

Dea Cordt Kragh (Managing Authority, Denmark) shared her experience with the informal meetings for MAs, appreciating that general meetings provided an opportunity for sharing implementation updates, while focus meetings provided an opportunity for more in-depth discussion of priority topics identified by the MAs.

Marjeta Jeric (Managing Authority, Slovenia) commented on the [EU CAP Network's workshop on the use of Simplified Cost Options \(SCOs\) in the CAP](#), noting the challenges relating to SCOs (e.g. data availability) and their planned obligatory application under LEADER in the future. She emphasised that SCOs would remain a relevant topic and similar events could be repeated to facilitate further exchanges in the future.

Klaus Ehrlich (RURALTOUR) summed up his experience with [the first meeting of the EU CAP Network's Thematic Group on Farm Diversification](#), noting that the percentage of farmers involved in on-farm diversification activities varied by MS. Mr. Ehrlich also talked about the relationship between diversification and the need to keep people 'on the land', finding the right approach to and focus of diversification, the important role of advisory services, and women and young people as driving forces of diversification.

Professor Elena Pisani (University of Padua, Italy) provided further details about the recently published EU CAP Network briefing on [how LEADER builds social capital](#). Social capital is a building block of social resilience, and, based on empirical evidence of LEADER's ability to produce added value in terms of social capital, a new level of understanding and operationalisation is needed. The briefing clarifies relevant concepts and describes activities and areas of intervention for different actors to boost social capital and trust. LAGs are able to start positive cycles revolving around trust, cooperation, networks,

and local investments, transforming individual beneficiaries into cooperation networks, and turning isolated ideas into coherent local strategies. It was emphasised that local development could be viewed through the economic / quantitative angle, but also as a story of connections among people.



Linked to the theme of social capital and social resilience, **Marie Permingeat (EU CAP Network)** introduced a short pulse survey aimed at gathering Subgroup members' perspectives on social resilience, to help define the focus of the planned EU CAP Network workshop on LEADER and social resilience. Based on the responses, the majority of Subgroup members associate social resilience in the context of LEADER with the 'ability to adapt and transform over time' or the 'capacity to cope with shocks and crises.' More detailed questions will be shared with Subgroup members in a follow-up survey.

The **Q&A** session offered a space for further clarifications.

Professor Pisani explained that demonstrating the added value of LEADER and LAGs (including in terms of social capital produced) should be based on measurable and comparable EU-level indicators, focusing on a selected group of highly relevant ones. Comparable indicators are important for assessing the functioning of the policy. MSs can decide to use additional indicators, however, comparability at the EU level is an important consideration. Consequently, indicators such as the 'level of volunteerism' may be relevant in one MS, but less important in others, partly due to varying legal definitions of 'volunteer' work in different MSs.

Translating added value or social capital produced into monetary / funding terms has its risks, as it may imply the ranking of LAGs; however, each LAG operates in a locally specific context, has different levels of 'social capital endowment', and the important aspect is not the current level of social capital, but progress from the baseline. The capacity to increase social capital, and the financial definition of resources for that, are two different aspects. Trust – an essential component of social capital – is based on one's expectations in relation to the behaviour of institutions and other stakeholders, and the basis of this expectation is prior experience with institutions and other stakeholders. Lower levels of trust in institutions in rural areas can be examined from this aspect. Simple indicators, such as networking effect or participation in decision-making, can be sufficient to illustrate social capital. [The guidelines for the evaluation of the added value of LEADER](#) provide further details on these.

It was emphasised that the central idea of a LEADER LAG was not necessarily expressed purely by the number of projects, but rather by its local added value in making territories more resilient or increasing social capital locally.

Subgroup members also asked about the possibility of extending the online interactive tool and informal meetings offered by the EU CAP Network to non-Subgroup member LAGs and other LEADER stakeholders.

Peter Toth explained that such initiatives had been launched based on earlier suggestions from the Subgroup. Members were reminded of, and encouraged to join, the interactive platform which had started its pilot phase only, while the informal meetings were originally requested as an exchange platform to enhance networking for Managing Authorities (MAs).

Inspirations from members: LEADER, Smart Villages and other initiatives

Stefan Niedermoser and Wolfgang Berger (LEADER FORUM, Austria) presented the results of the TNC project 'Our Common Future', that aimed to tell the story of the future of LEADER from the perspective of LAGs. The project included a survey of more than 400 LAGs to find out about relevant local priorities and other key issues in the participating MSs.

Trust emerged as a key element to ensure the success of LEADER, and needs to work both ways - from rural stakeholders and LAGs towards institutions, authorities, and the EC, and from these institutions to local rural stakeholders. According to the responses, LAGs prioritise economic diversification, infrastructure development, tourism, cultural heritage, and capacity building to empower local communities. Key obstacles to local development are limited resources and excessive regulation and bureaucracy. Overall, the survey confirmed LEADER's role as the most important citizen-focused EU policy instrument capable of responding to the current triple challenge (ecological, economic, social), and reinforced the conclusions of the [EC study 'The geography of EU discontent and the regional development trap'](#) regarding the role of place-based policies in escaping the regional development trap. To strengthen this role of LEADER, 'Our Common Future' recommends restoring the links between local actions for the development of the rural economy (as per the original LEADER acronym). This has the potential to reduce inequalities, understand innovations at the local level, and reengage hard-to-reach groups, ultimately bringing Europe closer to the citizens.

Roberta Ciaravino (CREA - CAP Network, Italy) talked about NN support to SVs and specific good practices in Italy, where support to SVs is based on two complementary CAP interventions and implemented as a regional approach as well as by individual LAGs. Overall, 469 SV strategies are expected across Italy, with more than half of the Italian LAGs having included at least one action in their local strategies related to SV. Community projects and several interterritorial cooperation initiatives also focus on SV, with central themes reflecting local priorities such as rural tourism, food systems, social and economic inclusion, and environmental sustainability. The Italian CAP Network supports these processes mainly through

its Smart Rural Hub Collaborative Laboratory, designed to build LAG capacities for planning and implementing SV strategies. Good practices include community projects focusing on social farming, experiential tourism, culture, development of community assets, and energy, as well as a transnational cooperation project involving Italian, Irish, and Finnish LAGs.

Marina Celada Carmona and María Antúnez García (Managing Authority, Spain) shared updates about LEADER support activities in Spain. Here, one of the roles of the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture is facilitating dialogue between regional MAs and national and regional networks. Coordination takes place through regular meetings in different regions of Spain, project visits (every six months), and a LEADER MA group meeting held every three months. A major LEADER event is scheduled for June 2026. The Ministry compiled an overview of different applications of SCOs in the regions, in order to share all relevant information. The Spanish CAP Network organised an [event for exchanging experiences on LEADER cooperation](#) and supported the development of a LAG map including all the 253 Spanish LAGs.



In the **Q&A** session, questions by Subgroup members clarified that in Spain the methodologies for calculating SCOs are the responsibility of the regional MA, and not the national MA, due to the regional system in the country.

Clarifications on the results and conclusions of the 'Our Common Future' project highlighted that those results challenged Austrian LAGs; however, the LAG network, the NN and the MA were all involved in communicating these and the new vision for their joint work in rural areas through offline, online, and personal communication channels and meetings.

The Hungarian MA explained the implementation of SVs in **Hungary**. Based on initial implementation experiences, their CSP was modified to include SVs as part of LEADER, to strengthen its cooperation element. Calls for applications are scheduled for summer 2026, with LAGs as beneficiaries of relevant support. The recently launched EU CAP Network thematic cluster on LEADER and Smart Villages for National CAP Networks is led by the Hungarian NN.

In addition, the representative of Polish LAGs and ELARD talked about their positive experiences with the application of lump sums.

The session was completed by an update about the activities of the [Rural Pact Support Office](#) by **Enrique Nieto (Rural Pact Support Office - RPSO)**, who noted the importance of the Long-term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) in providing a framework for the RPSO activities. The Rural Pact aims to amplify the voices of rural stakeholders through members from all EU MSs and non-EU countries. The RPSO creates spaces for stakeholders to exchange with increasing focus on informing and inspiring the design of the future NRPPs. RPSO organises support activities such as good practice webinars, thematic clusters, policy labs, and exchange platforms on various themes, including rural competitiveness, generational renewal, integrated territorial development, SVs and LEADER. Other ongoing activities include the collection of good practices, a monthly newsletter, and a magazine to give voice to rural stakeholders. A new activity for the RPSO is outreach to national partners, including national LEADER networks in MSs, to act as 'multipliers'.



Closing the meeting

Antonia Gamez Moreno (Head of Unit D.1, DG AGRI) closed the first day thanking participants for the fruitful and rich discussion, reminding members of the main agenda points for Day 2, and encouraging continued informal networking.

Day 2 - 26 February 2026

Introduction to Day 2 (DG AGRI)

Antonia Gamez Moreno (Head of Unit D.1, DG AGRI) welcomed Subgroup members to Day 2 of the meeting and reminded them about the more participative nature of the day's programme, with a focus on developing topics for the upcoming Annual Work Programme (AWP) of the EU CAP Network.

Strategic priorities identified by the EU CAP Network's Assembly - Sharing experiences from the LEADER Community

Introduced by **Susan Grieve (EU CAP Network)**, this session focused on representatives of the LEADER community sharing practical examples linked to the strategic priorities identified by the EU CAP Network's Assembly.

Urszula Zelazny (Poland) talked about Smart villages and youth engagement in Poland, where LAGs are using various approaches, such as micro-funding for youth projects, training in leadership skills, and social, cultural and educational activities.

Examples of smart initiatives that involve young people in addressing real local needs include setting up community libraries, promoting youth involvement in the local volunteer fire-fighting team, or setting up a local reduce-reuse-recycle centre. Interterritorial cooperation of four LAGs from western Poland helped set up a civic resilience network for crisis preparedness. TNC also has a strong role, with the notable example of the Youth Communication Academy, implemented with the involvement of LAGs from Poland and Czechia. [\(link to her presentation\)](#)

Christa Rockenbauer Peirl (Managing Authority, Austria) and **Michael Fischer (Austrian National Network)** described activities related to [mainstreaming gender equality](#) in Austria. These include a thematic working group of the CAP Monitoring Committee for the strategic promotion of gender equality in agriculture, and ensuring that relevant objectives are embedded in the implementation of the Austrian CSP. In the context of LEADER, a pilot project with LAG Hermagor helped with the first steps of integrating gender equality into a Local Development Strategy (LDS). Based on the findings of the pilot, the LDS was updated, and results were upscaled and disseminated to other LAGs in Austria. Relevant guidance documents were also prepared for this purpose, as well as online courses for self-study on the subject. The Austrian NN developed a model to ensure lasting impacts beyond the completion of single projects, which identified six key factors - from understanding problems to disseminating project results - and organised a webinar to discuss and disseminate the conclusions of this work.

Elena Schubert (DG AGRI, Unit B.3) introduced the [Women in Farming Platform](#), which was launched by the EC on 8 March 2026. Its main objective is to enhance and increase the participation of women in farming through knowledge exchange, networking, and the facilitation of mentoring by more experienced women farmers through a collaborative online workspace.

Matteo Gerosa (SMART ERA, project manager) presented [the SMART ERA project](#), a HORIZON Europe-funded initiative involving 25 partners from ten European countries in working together to improve the well-being, resilience, and innovation capacity of rural communities through piloting and developing smart solutions to local problems. The project employs a combination of technological/digital solutions, policy solutions, and business models, co-creating Smart Innovation Packages (SIPs) with the local partners and communities involved. The pilot phase supported 11 projects which will begin implementation in March 2026, and a call for four more regions to join the project is being prepared. Peer-to-peer learning, study visits and workshops are integral parts of the project, and a policy toolkit is being prepared to help local stakeholder develop SIPs.

Mia Lundqvist (Swedish Leader Association) explained that rural readiness and crisis preparedness are important topics in Sweden, as demonstrated by the ['Ready to be counted' initiative](#) by the Swedish NN, and by several local LAG initiatives which aim to strengthen rural communities' preparedness. The NN's initiative involved its members and 40 Swedish LAGs in presenting and showcasing how they can contribute to crisis preparedness in Sweden. Central themes included food, energy and cooperation, and various initiatives were disseminated through articles, podcasts, livestreams and social media. Swedish LAGs use umbrella projects to provide small-scale funding for local initiatives to strengthen crisis preparedness based on local needs.

Most LAGs organise workshops and meetings to put together an inventory of local assets important for resilience and to raise awareness of the need for crisis preparedness. Reflecting on the various interventions, the Chair noted the diverse types of potential crises and challenges that local communities need to face and mentioned that these were not only limited to situations arising from the geo-political context but also linked to issues such as climate events or depopulation.

Interactive session to identify potential LEADER topics for the 2026/2027 Annual Workplan of the EU CAP Network based on the Assembly's strategic priorities

Susan Grieve and Peter Toth (EU CAP Network) introduced the interactive session. They explained that the Subgroup meeting is a stage in the process of developing the EU CAP Network's AWP for 2026-27 and offers members an opportunity to contribute by developing specific and actionable topics, based on the strategic priorities identified by the Assembly. Inputs collected from EU CAP Network Subgroups will feed into a reflection and alignment by DG AGRI policy units, followed by a drafting phase and final validation by the EU CAP Network Steering Group and DG AGRI in May 2026.

The interactive session allowed Subgroup members to identify priority topics. These were mainly related to **strengthening the LEADER and CLLD approach and its implementation in rural areas.**



Subgroup members proposed to achieve this by facilitating broader networking and better communication among EC Directorates-General, ministries, academics, audit, as well as local stakeholders, developing communication and networking tools, collecting best practices, and reducing bureaucracy.

Key topics proposed included: increasing the level of trust between relevant stakeholders at all levels, aiming for a high-level understanding of LEADER and its positive impacts, as well as identifying the 'Right to Stay' as the starting point towards the 'Wish to Stay'. Other topics proposed were a better understanding of social capital and LEADER's role in creating, maintaining and communicating it; as well as developing methods, tools, handbooks or training materials for LAGs, in particular focusing on youth and women's involvement and empowerment for strengthening rural communities.

Securing the future of LEADER and working with the 'Right to Stay' concept were broad themes relevant for most topic proposals. Innovative ways of telling 'the LEADER story', using podcasts and other communication tools, were also proposed.

David Lamb (EU CAP Network) closed the session, drawing members' attention to the online interactive platform set up by the EU CAP Network to facilitate their networking, and reminded participants about the 'LEADER and social resilience' workshop on 16-17 June 2026.

AOB, summary and closing the meeting

Subgroup members shared updates on their key upcoming activities.

ELARD and the Polish Association of Local Action Groups is organising a LEADER Congress for 300 participants in Poland, in October 2026. Further details will be communicated later.

The **European Federation of Rural Tourism (RURALTOUR)** is organising its 9th European Congress in Croatia, in May 2026. The event will focus on new tourism products, new approaches and rural youth.

Luis Chavez (Minha Terra, Portugal) called the attention of the EU CAP Network to potential overlaps with topics addressed by the RPSO and the possibilities for more coordination.

Antonia Gamez Moreno (Head of Unit, D.1, DG AGRI) thanked Subgroup members for their contributions and engagement and reassured participants that coordination between EU level activities were constantly reviewed by her Unit as they are responsible for both the EU CAP Network and the Rural Pact. She expressed her appreciation for the diverse and rich information shared and for members' engagement throughout the two days, and concluded with the encouragement to continue networking.



Funded by
the European Union