



European Leader Association
for Rural Development
Brussels, www.elard.eu

FRENCH
PRESIDENCY
2023-2024



2024 ACTIVITY REPORT

ELARD

EDITO

Dear colleagues,

This booklet marks the end of the French Presidency of our federation, ELARD – two years filled with initiatives and challenges. Under our leadership, we strengthened the technical team and placed networking and advocacy for rural policies at the heart of our priorities.



Today, ELARD stands as an indispensable partner for European decision-makers in implementing policies that benefit rural areas.

There were many highlights during this period. The organisation of the 2024 European LEADER Congress in Poitiers demonstrated our commitment to cooperation and innovation. This event brought together hundreds of participants to exchange on projects, partnerships, and concrete approaches to rural development. Its success further reinforced our influence, including our invitation to the Strategic Dialogue on Agriculture with President von der Leyen.

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who contributed to this momentum: our staff, the active members of the Council, and local teams, particularly Leader France, for their support. Thanks to you, our federation has risen to the challenges and positioned itself as a key player in European rural development.

Let us continue to defend the values and practices that drive our movement. Long live LEADER, long live ELARD!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Guignard'.

Thibaut Guignard



Head office of the French presidency
Mairie de Ploëuc-L'Hermitage - Place Louis Morel
22150 Ploëuc-L'Hermitage

ELARD in 2024

- 33** members (29 European countries and beyond)
 - +** *LEADER Netwerk Vlaanderen*
 - 1** European LEADER Congress on Cooperation
 - 3** General Assemblies: Paris, Brussels and online
 - 9** Council Meetings
 - 1** Position paper 2024 ELARD Declaration on the Future of CLLD within European policies
 - 2** Press releases
 - Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture: a groundbreaking consensus and pathway for rural development
 - Report on the LTVRA: a first recognition for LEADER-CLLD and a future to built rural areas
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- **Policy & advocacy work**
 - **Representation**
 - **Networking**
 - **Cooperation**
 - **Project**
 - **Direct financial support from French ministries**

ACTIVITIES

Along the year, ELARD has been active in the following fields :



Policywork:

- Promoted the philosophy and principles of LEADER-CLLD as tool and approach in local development
- Strengthened joint ELARD position on LEADER-CLLD
- Raised awareness at European level and engaged stakeholders on the ground
- Supported EU politics in favour of rural development
- Contributed in institutional dialogues on the future of rural-related policies after 2027



Representation

- Raised the voice of LAGs in policymaking at EU level
- Confirmed ELARD as a reference in the rural development ecosystem - strong participation in EU working groups and forums;



Networking

- Bridged cooperations between LAGs throughout Europe and beyond
- Welcomed new members and supported the creation of new networks



Cooperation

- Provided an in-person forum for cooperation
- Launched online cooperation platform

POLICY AND ADVOCACY WORK

Building on our efforts from 2023, we continued advocating at the EU, national, and regional levels for:

- **Strengthening the role of LEADER-CLLD in European policies**
- **Recognising Local Action Groups as key partners for rural development and ensuring their more integrated involvement in governance and policymaking**
- **Expanding financial resources available for LEADER-CLLD**
- **Simplifying the regulatory framework and improving working conditions for LEADER-CLLD implementation**
- **Ensuring greater consistency in the rights and processes involved in developing new Local Development Strategies.**

In October, we reaffirmed our commitment to vibrant, resilient rural communities and outlined key priorities for the post-2027 programming period, in our **2024 ELARD Declaration on the Future of CLLD within European policies.**

Building on the Tartu and Brussels Declarations, we emphasized the urgent need to tackle ecological, economic, and social challenges through a localized approach through:

- **Dedicated funding:** advocating for increased financial resources for CLLD-LEADER within the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), ensuring rural communities receive targeted support.
- **Empowerment of local stakeholders:** highlighting the pivotal role of Local Action Groups (LAGs) in addressing rural challenges through bottom-up, community-led strategies.
- **Streamlined governance:** Calling for simplified administrative processes to reduce bureaucratic barriers and enhance the efficiency of rural development programmes.

For more details, read the [full declaration](#).

Launch of the Youth Community



We successfully launched the LEADER Youth Community, aiming to empower young people in rural areas across Europe. The initiative kicked off with its first online welcome event, engaging participants to discuss innovative ideas for sustainable rural development. The community continues to grow, with elections for its Steering Committee, a first session dedicated to Youth at the ELARD Congress on Cooperation in October 2024.

Through a collaborative platform, the community supports youth engagement in community-driven projects, policy dialogues, and decision-making processes that shape their hometowns and regions. This community enables youth to connect, share ideas, and gain the skills to participate in meaningful transformation.

Young people throughout Europe can join as participants, mentors, or supporters to contribute to this dynamic network and advocate for rural transformation.



Presentation of the Youth workshop at the congress [here](#).

More information about the Youth Community [here](#).

Report on the Long-Term Vision: A first recognition for LEADER-CLLD and a future to build with rural areas

In April 2024, ELARD highlighted the European Commission's report on the Long-Term Vision for EU Rural Areas. The report recognised the significant role of LEADER/CLLD in rural development, despite limited financial resources. ELARD advocates for better funding and simplified procedures for LAGs as key to strengthening rural policies post-2027 and reinforces its commitment to embedding rural priorities in EU policies and supporting sustainable development initiatives across Europe. As a member of the Rural Pact Coordination Group ELARD is strongly pushing for a link between the LTVRA and LEADER-CLLD.

[Find the press release here](#)

SEPTEMBER PRESS RELEASE

Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture: A Groundbreaking Consensus and Pathway for rural development

ELARD took part in the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture and Food, in partnership with key EU institutions to shape the future of EU agriculture and rural development. The eight-months long work achieved a groundbreaking consensus on the critical role of rural areas in sustainable development and the need for cohesive policies post-2027. Key outcomes included the recognition of the LEADER approach as vital for inclusive, bottom-up rural development and the alignment of CAP objectives with the Green Deal, emphasizing innovation, sustainability, and climate action. Stakeholders also underscored the importance of young farmers and digitalization for the resilience of rural communities.

[Find the press release here](#)

PROJECTS FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT: from EKEP to ELARD Knowledge Hub

This year, our Knowledge and Exchange Platform (formerly known as EKEP) was revamped and is now the ELARD Knowledge Hub.

Further to the ongoing seven projects (RECAH, Renoverty, Cowork4Youth, FLIARA, DIGIMEDFOR, EC4Rural and Rustik), the ELARD Knowledge Hub has started working on one new project: COM4LGD.



The Communities for Local Green Deals – COM4LGD project recognizes the intersection of the climate and environmental crisis with the social and political polarisation that EU citizens are currently faced with. The innovative solution we propose for a sustainable, just, democratic and inclusive future for the EU is a focus on local community development, climate and sustainability action, community organising, advocacy, and cooperation between citizens and local governments covering all 27 member states.



REPRESENTATION in EU bodies

Now clearly identified as main stakeholder in Community-Led-Rural Development, ELARD is represented in a certain number of forums where it is asked to provide its expertise and input from grassroots members.

- **European Rural Parliament** : co-founder of the ERP. This year focused on supporting national rural parliament throughout the capitalising on learnings from the 5th ERP and starting preparing the 6th - to be held in Scotland in 2025! The group also prepared a mid-term event, to take stock of the last months before the 6th event.
- **EU CAP Network** : ELARD is a member of the EU CAP Network steering group, General Assembly and, LEADER and territorial development subgroup. By actively participating in those groups, ELARD is bringing forward the voice of all of its members directly to the EU table and helping drawing a comprehensive picture of rural Europe.
- **Civil Dialogue groups** : ELARD is participating to three civil dialogue groups put together by the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development. Those regard Quality and Promotion, Climate and environment, and CAP Strategic Plans and horizontal matters.
- **Rural Pact Coordination Group** : ELARD is a member of the Rural Pact Coordination Group, which is the governance body of the European Rural Pact. The main work of this group is to steer and develop the Pact, and encourage learning and actions in rural areas.
- **Strategic Dialogue on the future of Agriculture**: ELARD was one of the 29 organisations invited to take part of this Dialogue. An unexpected conceptual consensus for the future of EU agriculture, with concrete guidelines and recommendations, was reached enabling to publish and adopt a final report. ELARD actively advocated for the significant role rural areas and their communities play, and for the inclusion of rural development while shaping the future of EU agriculture.

MAIN EUROPEAN EVENTS

Our office makes a point in participating and representing ELARD at EU events. This ensures to push forward the visibility of LEADER-CLLD and have a weight when it comes to negotiating and helping drawing the future settings of the approach at EU level. For instance, this year, we have participated in:

- **April 2024 - Online Conference / Course Online on EU integration for Ukrainian municipalities:** Organised by C4c Cities United 4 Ukraine, ELARD gave a presentation, together with DG AGRI, during the module « EU Thematic programs boosting cooperation on local level », and more precisely on “Cooperation opportunities for rural areas within LEADER program, Local Action Groups in the EU”.
- **June 2024 - LINC Conference (Romania):** LINC is an international conference focusing on cooperation and offering the opportunity to share european experiences while organising several activities.
- **June 2024 - Youth LEADER Forum (Finland):** Organised by EU CAP Network together with the Finnish National Network, it was the 1st opportunity to bring together motivated young people from rural areas and people connected with LEADER at local level, together with organisations and administrations at regional, national and EU level. Many activities, brainstorming workshops, presentations and projects visits took place during these days. Following this, ELARD put together the Youth in LEADER community.
- **October 2024 - The 2024 Week of European Regions and Cities (Brussels):** ELARD organised a political workshop “Unlocking potential: LEADER & EU financial initiatives - bridging divides and empowering communities”.

MAIN EUROPEAN EVENTS

- **October 2024 - Meeting with the Finnish Delegation (Brussels):** a meeting was organised with ELARD and Finnish LAGs managers, authorities as well to present the organisation, but also to tackle cooperation, funding, projects.
- **Rural pact webinars:** ELARD attended good Practice Webinars such as 'Rural communities tackling climate change', "Youth participation in policymaking", "Bringing the Rural Pact closer to citizens", "Enhancing rural mobility through local action" , and Policy Labs
- **COTER Commission, Committee of the Regions - Functional areas' role in strengthening Cohesion Policy seminar (Hungary)**
Bringing LEADER-CLLD forward on a broader scene, our president defended the approach in this seminar on Cohesion Policy

INTERNAL MEETINGS

Internally ELARD held at least 12 meetings (Council meetings, General Assemblies and members meetings). These internal meetings are guiding the work of the presidency.

Extraordinary General Assembly online (February 2024)

On the 2nd of February, an online extraordinary General assembly was organised online, in order to vote and adopt the new statutes at the notary office.

General assembly in Paris (March 2024)

A General Assembly was held in Paris on 21 March at the Assemblée nationale, hosted by French Member of Parliament Marc Le Fur. The gathering began the evening before with a dinner aboard a traditional riverboat, offering a scenic cruise along the Seine.

The General Assembly agenda covered key topics, including advocacy, activity reports, Knowledge Hub projects, budget matters, the organisation of the 2024 European LEADER Congress, and many other upcoming actions.

In addition to the internal meeting, an afternoon workshop provided a platform for members to discuss key challenges at the national level, explore how ELARD can better support them, and identify ways to increase LAG involvement.

To conclude the event, participants enjoyed a guided tour of the Assemblée nationale, an iconic institution, including a visit to the hemicycle.



General assembly in Brussels (December 2024)

As the last event organised by the French presidency of the network, this General Assembly gathered all members at the heart of Brussels on the 4th of December.

It was the opportunity to elect a new President, Piotr Sadłocha from the Polish Network of LAGs, as well as a new Council and Vice-Presidents. New members were also welcomed. Indeed, Flanders, represented by the LEADER Network Vlaanderen joined ELARD.



The General Assembly meeting provided an opportunity to review the past year and address pressing issues, including the LEADER logo. The day also featured a members' meeting, where participants received updates on the Our Common Future Project and discussed strategic directions for the coming years.



2024 EUROPEAN LEADER CONGRESS

On October 2nd and 3rd, the second European LEADER Congress took place, in Poitiers, France. Following the 2023 successful event, this year's edition was dedicated to Cooperation. The aim of the event was to connect, find partners or projects, get ideas and feedback from experts.

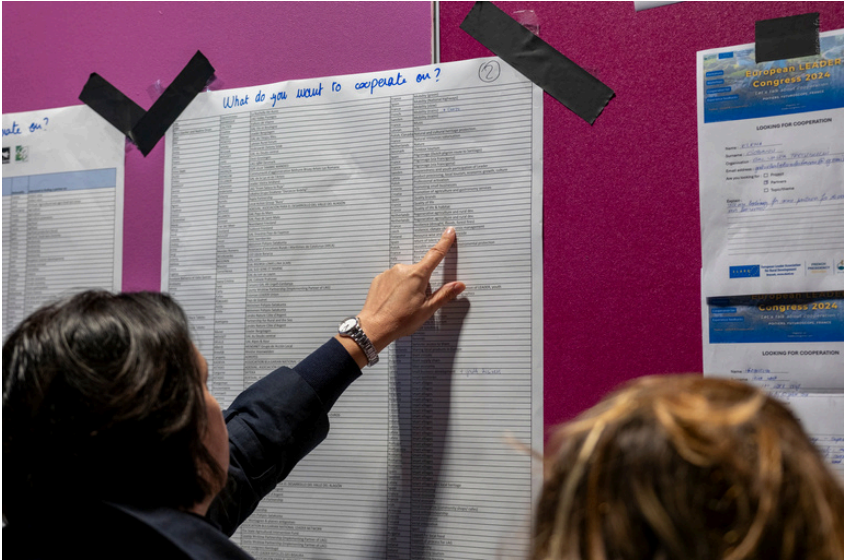
Over 440 participants from all over the European union and beyond gathered to participate into hands on sessions about the do's and don'ts of cooperation projects, the life cycle of cooperation, how to cooperate with countries that are not part of the EU, how to get the best out of your partnership for instance. Participants shared their experience, advised each other, and connected beyond the regular links they can create on their territories thanks to the Cooperation Fair.

High level speakers, experts, politician leaders and EU institutions representatives answered once more to the invitation, showcasing the importance of Cooperation within the LEADER program.

After introductory speeches by ELARD president, Mr. Thibaut Guignard, representatives from the Poitiers area, the Nouvelle-Aquitaine Region and Roberto Berutti, member of the Cabinet of the Commission's commissioner for agriculture and rural areas, took place the ceremony for the best cooperation projects of the 2014-2020 programming period.

On day 2, 12 parallel sessions took place to exchange best practises on some topics aforementioned such as practical aspects of cooperation for the period 2021-2027, cooperating with countries that are not part of the EU, things to do and to avoid while setting-up and implementing cooperation projects for instance. More political discussions also took place such as how LEADER cooperation is contributing to the EU rural vision. This second day was also driven by the Cooperation Fair where several activities were proposed: participants gathered by cooperation topics around roundtables to find ideas, projects and partners.

A helpdesk was also set up where participants could ask any kind of questions to experts. A wall for cooperation was also organised and more than 70 Local Action Groups advertised projects and found project partners



2024 EUROPEAN LEADER AWARDS

The competition aimed at rewarding the best cooperation projects of the 2014-2020 programme and highlight concrete achievements funded by the LEADER 2014-2020 programme. More than 30 projects, representing 20 countries and 189 partners were put forward.

The results and the winners were announced during the 2024 European LEADER Congress in Poitiers, France, Belgium, October 2nd.

4 prizes were then awarded :

- The People's Choice Award, which gathered more than 4 000 votes throughout Europe ;
- 3 Jury's Choices Award.

Tierra Minera, which aims at rehabilitating former mining regions and that unites 6 LAGs from four Spanish provinces won the People's choice award.

The three winners of the Jury's Choices Award are:

- 1st: 5StarNature, gathering 4 countries (Finland, Spain, Estonia and Italy).
- 2nd: Flourishing Destinations
- 3rd: Boergondische Buren, strengthening cross-border cooperation between farmers, local producers, entrepreneurs, and communities in the border region between Belgium and the Netherlands.







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