



Meeting for Fisheries Community-Led Local Development Managing Authorities and National Networks

Online, 20-21st October 2020

Report

Participants 45 people from 18 Member States representing Managing Authorities (MAs), Intermediate Bodies (IBs) and National Networks responsible for Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) financed under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF); representatives of DG MARE, FARNET and FAME Support Units

Organiser FARNET Support Unit (FSU) at the initiative of the European Commission

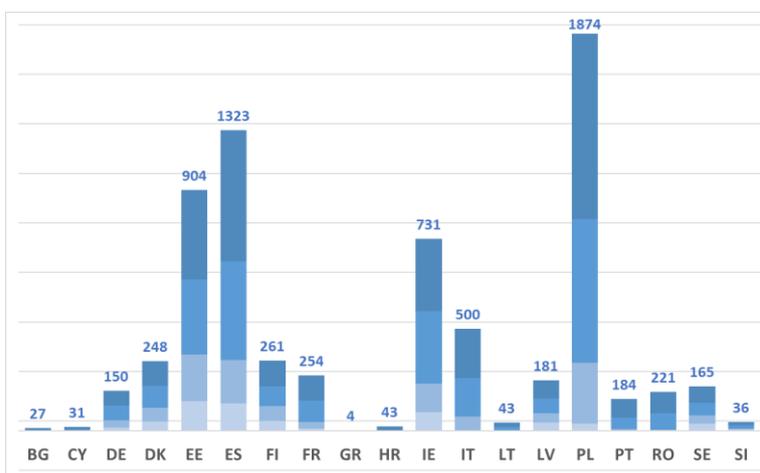


Introduction and state of play of CLLD Implementation

The participants were welcomed by DG MARE and the FSU. **Valerie Tankink**, recently appointed as Head of Unit in charge of CFP and Structural Support, Policy Development and

Coordination said DG MARE envisages CLLD to have a strong role in the EMFF proposal for the next funding period (2021-2027) because it is a flexible tool that can adapt to the needs of the community and boost innovation. She stressed the importance of starting work on the new period as soon as possible, to ensure a smooth transition and avoid delays. The negotiations of the next period's legislation are still on-going, but the national programmes and delivery systems should be ready as soon as the basic regulations are adopted.

According to data received by the FSU in early October, implementation is going at full speed in all EU MSs implementing fisheries CLLD, with over 7300 projects already approved across the EU.



In response to the FARNET survey at registration, more than 50% of respondents

indicated they were hoping to have all the UP4 budget committed by the end of 2021, although a vast majority said expenditures will still be possible until December 2023. Several MAs are planning to have the next generation of FLAGs operational by mid-2022, but most respondents expect this to happen in 2023.

Three MS representatives shared their views and thinking on the transition to the next period:

Inese Mjadeleca from Latvia said FLAGs are expecting to be operational until 2023, as the MA has recently allocated additional funding to UP4 and running costs are covered by EAFRD. FLAG selection is planned to take place in 2022 so they can start operations in 2023.

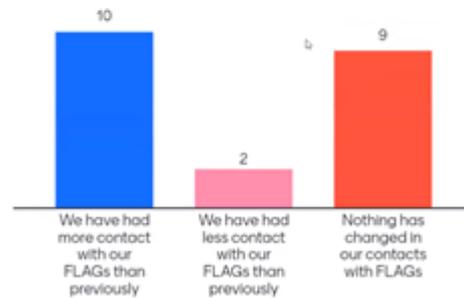
Esperanza Martínez from Galicia (Spain) explained the Galician MA intends to extend the contract with FLAGs (initially signed until end-2020) to allow them to operate until December 2022. The call for strategies will be launched while current FLAGs are still operational, as in the previous period. Strategies will be officially approved after programme adoption, expected by 2022.

Nevena Todorova from Bulgaria explained that CLLD implementation in Bulgaria was delayed at the start but is now speeding up and should be completed by end-2023. Discussions with FLAGs on the next period have already started. The next generation of FLAGs will be operational within one year of programme adoption, to avoid a funding gap the MA is planning to launch preparatory support.

Some MAs are already working on the next programme but may not be able to launch the call for FLAGs until the EU legislation is finalised, which is expected sometime in 2021. This may be of concern to some MSs, such as Finland, where FLAGs have already used up nearly all of their running costs and project budget.

A Mentimeter poll at the start of the meeting showed that contact between MAs and FLAGs has not deteriorated, in spite of the COVID-related restrictions; some MAs and NNs are using this as an opportunity to have more interactions with FLAGs than before.

Since the start of the COVID-19...



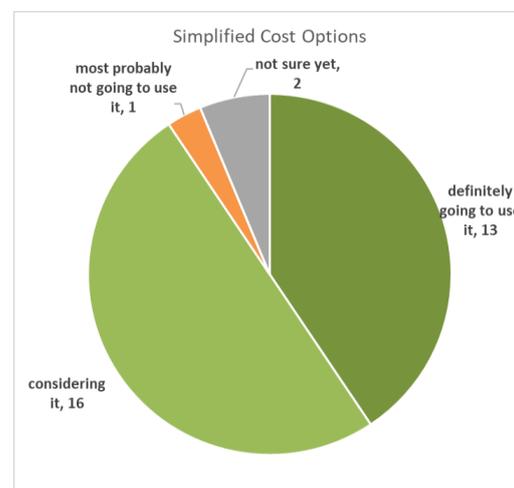
Adapting delivery tools and solutions

Urszula Budzich-Tabor reminded participants about some tools and practices available to improve delivery in the next funding period, based on the FARNET Guide for Managing Authorities on '[Delivering CLLD effectively](#)'. She also showed the results of the registration questionnaire concerning the use of innovative delivery tools and practices. Most participants expressed interest in using Simplified Cost Options (SCOs). A large number of respondents are also planning to simplify access to finance by packaging national co-financing with EU funding and considering advance payments. Several MAs and IBs suggested that they might use umbrella projects and other ways of facilitating access for small-scale beneficiaries. Participants continued the discussion of some of these tools in working groups.

WG 1: Simplified Cost Options (SCOs)

Participants collected positive and negative aspects of the use of SCOs for running costs and animation and for projects within the local strategy. The potential positive aspects identified in the discussion included:

- lower administrative costs
- reduced bureaucracy and administrative burden
- lower error rates
- less risk of project failure
- more security for beneficiaries
- more focus on results, not just properly spending the money can make the funding more interesting for small-scale investments.



Among potential negative aspects, participants mentioned the following:

- large differences in costs between different regions/parts of the country,
- danger of fraud or deception,
- risk of projects getting too much or not enough funding,
- difficulties with calculating the costs up-front (a large database of projects needed, preparatory studies would need to start soon).

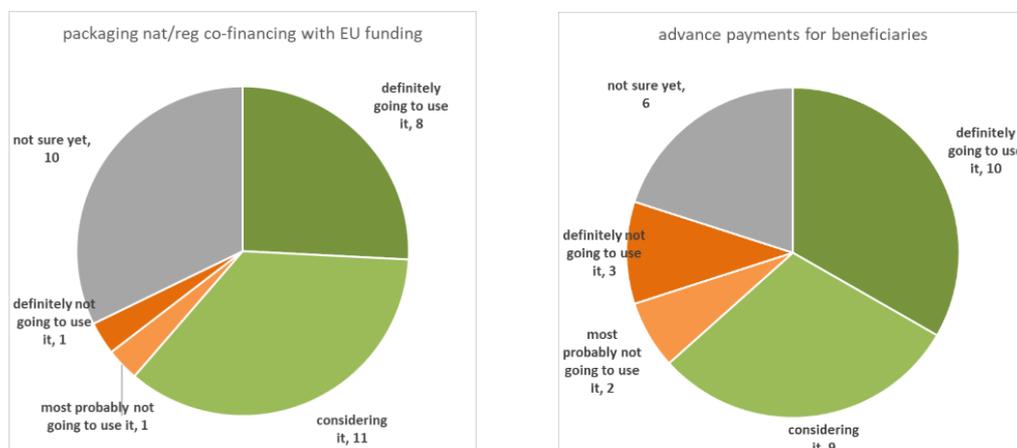
Some participants pointed out that access to good quality data and clear definition of success criteria are of key importance and that introducing SCOs is a process that requires a change of mindset by key actors in the administration. A potential question to be clarified later is whether SCOs can be applied for transnational cooperation projects.

The FAME Support Unit has identified some MSs already using SCOs, not only for running and animation costs but also for projects, including draft budgets (e.g., SE). FAME intended on publishing a working paper on this theme.

WG 2: Facilitating finance

The discussion focused on two ways of facilitating access to funding for CLLD beneficiaries, i.e. packaging national/regional co-financing with EU funding and enabling advance payments.

The majority of MSs have mechanisms in place that allow the total public support (EMFF as well as national) to be made available to FLAGs up-front. This is usually arranged at national level (e.g. in Spain), in Scandinavian countries the national contribution is often provided by the municipality. One issue that needs to be kept in mind is that many projects run for more than one year, and while EU funding is allocated for seven years, most national, regional and local budgets are planned annually, and it is difficult to reconcile these different time scales.

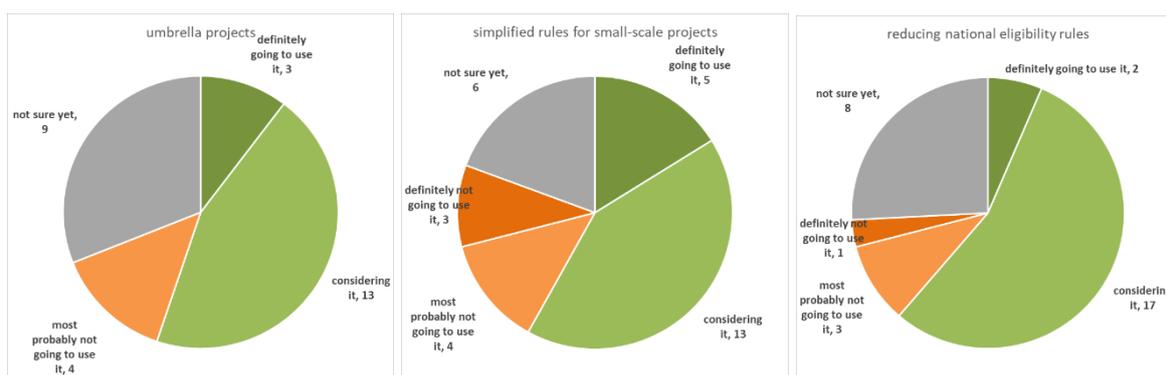


Advance payments are foreseen by several MSs using the national budget, sometimes they take the form of guarantees which enable project promoters to receive preferential credit from the banking sector. Other solutions include specialised organisations, e.g., the Rural Development Foundation in Estonia which facilitates access to up-front financing for projects. While advance payments seemed a major issue in previous periods (starting with LEADER), exchange and networking between stakeholders have helped to find solutions adapted to the national context.

WG 3: Easier access for small-scale actors

In addition to SCOs, a number of other tools can be used to enable small-scale beneficiaries to access EMFF funding, for example umbrella projects, simplified application forms and procedures for small projects and reducing the number of additional rules (on top of EU ones).

Some MSs are already using umbrella projects in the current period: e.g., in Poland, they are considered a good tool for small-scale beneficiaries, while in Sweden they are used for targeted support on a specific theme (e.g., youth). However, it is important to remember, when designing umbrella projects, not to put too much administrative burden on the FLAGs.



Several MSs are planning to reduce the number of national rules and/or to develop simplified forms and procedures for small-scale beneficiaries. However, many participants stressed that small-scale fisheries sector might not be able to benefit from support even under simplified rules, without a significant outreach and animation effort from the FLAG.

Promoting FLAG Cooperation

At the start of the session **Jean-Pierre Vercruysse** from the FSU presented key reasons for FLAG cooperation and most of the common forms of cooperation projects. **Marta Edreira Garcia** then showed the latest figures for cooperation projects received from MAs. This was followed by three examples:

- A transnational cooperation project from the Baltic Sea basin concerning seals and cormorants, presented by **Esko Taanila** from [South Finland FLAG](#).
- A national cooperation project of Slovenian inland FLAGs on joint promotion of fisheries products, presented by **Dušan Jesenšek** from the [Soča Valley FLAG](#).

- The process of organising a call for FLAG cooperation projects at the national level by **Cornelia Mihai** from the Romanian MA.

Some points raised in the discussion/chat:

- There are significant differences between MSs concerning the number of cooperation projects; some of them are linked with the different approaches of reporting projects (as a single operation or separately for each participating FLAG), others with the fact that in some MSs the procedures for cooperation were put in place with a big delay or not launched at all.
- In the next programme period, cooperation remains a mandatory element of CLLD, but the draft EU legislation no longer envisages the possibility for the MA to organise calls for cooperation projects – they will have to be selected by the FLAGs in the same way as all other projects.

Facilitating quality projects

An introductory presentation by FSU outlined some key features of quality projects. For example, projects that:

- respond to a real need at local level in an inclusive way,
- build on local natural and human resources,
- bring a change to the local economy, environment, community skills, social well-being,
- contribute to long-term improvements in an innovative way,
- offer value for money, justifying the public investment,
- complement other local projects, build synergies, encourage cooperation.

Participants in working groups identified those features of quality projects that were most important from their perspective and indicated which of them FLAGs were good at achieving and for which further work was still needed.

Based on this discussion, it seems FLAGs are particularly good at:

- making a positive impact at the local level (bringing about a real change in practice),
- generating projects that involve a transfer of knowledge.

In some MSs they are also effective in:

- supporting projects that involve different stakeholders,
- strengthening local competitiveness,
- responding to a real need,
- generating resources that can be invested back in the community.

Features at which most FLAGs still need to work on include:

- contributing to long-term improvements and sustainability after project lifetime,
- clear ownership to guarantee the sustainability of project results,
- joined-up thinking, not isolated activities,
- inclusive character,
- innovative approaches that are not reduced too much in order to fit in the administrative system.

Participants also started to explore the possibilities of establishing criteria and indicators that would help to verify the quality of projects. Representatives of FAME encouraged MAs to use the common indicators and data collected in Infosys, but also to brainstorm with FLAGs how certain impacts can be captured: qualitative methods of analysis may be needed.¹

¹ For example, [methods](#) developed to analyse the impact of LEADER on quality of life could be useful.