



BRAČ DECLARATION

for the Future of LEADER-CLLD and the Development of Resilient and Attractive Rural, Coastal, and Fisheries Areas

Starting from the fundamental principles of local democracy, decentralization, and participatory governance on the ground,

Aware of the historical and social responsibility for preserving identity, demographic survival, and the overall vitality of Croatian territories,

Guided by the fundamental constitutional provisions of the Republic of Croatia and the treaties of the European Union that guarantee the harmonious development of regions, the reduction of territorial inequalities, and the strengthening of cohesion,

Recognizing the invaluable contribution that local communities make to the overall stability, sustainability, and preservation of natural and cultural heritage,

Emphasizing the firm determination to embed the voice and authentic needs of citizens into the very foundations of future European and national development policies,

we, the representatives of Local Action Groups (LAGs) and Local Action Groups in Fisheries (FLAGs) from across the Republic of Croatia, gathered through their umbrella network organizations in Supetar on the island of Brač, on September 18, 2026, hereby proclaim and adopt the text of the declaration as follows:

In the Republic of Croatia, across **97% of the national territory** where **2.5 million inhabitants** reside, **56 Local Action Groups (LAGs) and 23 Local Action Groups in Fisheries (FLAGs)** operate. Established as non-profit legal entities based on **LEADER-CLLD principles**, they represent a proven and effective instrument for realizing fundamental European values, implementing public policies, and achieving the multifaceted development of local communities.

Inspired by the principles of the Tartu Declaration of 2016, the Brussels Declaration of 2023, the ELARD Declaration of 2024, and the conclusions of the international conference of the LEADER-CLLD Thematic Working Group of the National CAP Network "The Future of



Rural Area Development Post-2027" (Tuheljske Toplice, 2026), we, the representatives of local action groups (LAGs and FLAGs) from across the Republic of Croatia and our umbrella network organizations, gathered in Supetar on the island of Brač, reaffirm and unequivocally confirm our commitment to building a more cohesive, participatory, and solidary Europe – a **Europe closer to its citizens**.

Faced with historic demographic, economic, environmental, and geopolitical challenges at national and European levels, we express our full readiness for further and persistent engagement in creating vital, sustainable, and resilient rural, coastal, and fisheries communities dedicated to co-shaping Europe's future.

A development approach that springs from real local needs and endogenous potentials of the community is needed today more than ever. These precise principles are embodied by LEADER-CLLD, whose recognized added value must maintain the status of an indispensable pillar of development at both European and national levels.

While the future Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) is being discussed, the following points are essential for shaping future EU policies aimed at the development of our local communities:

1. Strengthening and Expanding LEADER-CLLD Instruments

LEADER-CLLD must permanently remain an integrated, binding, and priority instrument for the implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP).

This mechanism guarantees that agricultural and fisheries policies are not implemented solely through narrow sectoral measures, but through a comprehensive territorial approach that intertwines economic, social, environmental, and cultural objectives. Such an approach directly contributes to strengthening territorial cohesion, more efficient use of public funds, active involvement of local stakeholders in defining development priorities, and the generation of new economic opportunities, thereby creating sustainable and resilient local communities.

Furthermore, it is necessary to promote LEADER-CLLD as a cross-sectoral tool within remaining European policies. The LEADER-CLLD methodology needs to be systematically integrated into the cohesion and social policies of the European Union, and particularly into instruments with a distinct territorial dimension. This fully values the contribution of this mechanism to social cohesion, social innovations, participatory governance, and the effective



implementation of integrated territorial strategies, thereby achieving a synergistic and holistic response to the development challenges of rural, coastal, and fisheries areas

2. LAGs and FLAGs as Strategic Actors in Managing Integrated Local Development

Formal and institutional recognition of LAGs and FLAGs as key, autonomous actors in local development is decisively demanded, alongside the allocation of expanded authority and sufficient technical and financial capacities. It is precisely through the institutional action of local action groups that development processes are ensured to unfold through a harmonious connection of the economy, society, heritage, and environmental preservation.

In order to ensure the democratic nature of the process, LAGs and FLAGs must, through their network organizations, be institutionally and obligatorily included in all phases – from creation and programming to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation – of European and national policies and programs, including structured participation in the drafting and implementation of National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs).

3. Ensuring a Fair and Protected Financial Allocation for LEADER-CLLD Implementation

Stable, legally protected, and sufficient budgetary resources are demanded for the 2028–2034 financial period, maintaining an overall level of funding comparable to the current period to guarantee the continuity of LAG and FLAG operations and the unhindered implementation of local development strategies.

Shaping an integrated approach to overcoming the demographic or specific needs of areas, with a special emphasis on areas facing particular disadvantages, is a constitutional and civilizational obligation to strengthen economic, social, and territorial cohesion for the purpose of reducing regional inequalities. Therefore, the integration of LEADER-CLLD into other European policies and an allocation of **at least 360 million euros are demanded**, applying the principle of proportionality regarding population size, territorial scope, and the specific needs of local communities.

4. Radical Reduction of Bureaucracy and Introduction of Simplified Cost Options

Existing administrative burdens and rigid procedures stifle innovation and slow down the dynamics of development on the ground. It is an imperative to urgently approach the simplification of funding mechanisms to return the focus to concrete, measurable, and tangible results.



LEADER and CLLD are a unique instrument. An expansion of the original powers of local action groups, harmonization of implementation methodologies, and a genuine simplification of management and control systems are demanded. Mechanisms of simplified financial tools (such as lump sums and flat rates) must be applied to the maximum extent throughout the entire process of allocating funds via LAGs and FLAGs.

5. Protection of Rural, Coastal, and Fisheries Areas and the Role of Local Action Groups

The population of rural, coastal, and fisheries areas, through the LEADER-CLLD methodology and the work of LAGs and FLAGs, must be enabled the right to remain – quality public services, decent living conditions, and generational renewal.

A clear European rural objective must be defined, with a special emphasis on areas facing particular disadvantages. A mandatory impact assessment ("rural proofing") of all policy decisions (EU, national, and regional) on rural, coastal, and fisheries areas is demanded. The active inclusion of LAGs and FLAGs through their network organizations in conducting "rural proofing" on the ground is demanded to ensure territorial cohesion.

Final Commitment

From Supetar on the island of Brač, in the Republic of Croatia, we address this Declaration to all institutions – European, national, regional, and local – as a historical call to action and shared responsibility.

The future and stability of Europe are inextricably intertwined with the survival of its local communities. There is no more cohesive, resilient, or sustainable Europe without prosperous, demographically vibrant, and dynamic rural, coastal, and fisheries areas capable of building their own future.

We call upon the state authorities of the Republic of Croatia and the institutions of the European Union to weave these fundamental principles without delay into their upcoming strategic documents and the forthcoming programming period, guaranteeing the right of local communities to progress in a sustainable, fair, and inclusive future.