

KEY OUTCOMES OF THE CONFERENCE

CLLD

— PROSPEROUS COMMUNITIES: OPPORTUNITY FOR A SHARED FUTURE 28+



March 31
—
April 1
2025

**Local Action Groups as a Key Partner
of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
in Small Municipalities and Regions,
and the Future Role of LAGs in EU Cohesion Policy**



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CLLD — PROSPEROUS COMMUNITIES: OPPORTUNITY FOR A SHARED FUTURE 28+

<https://www.esfcr.cz/conference-clld>

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On April 1–2, 2025, more than 300 participants gathered at the [National Agricultural Museum](#) in Prague, Czech Republic. The attendees included representatives from leading Czech and European institutions, as well as international guests from over ten EU and non-EU countries.

The central theme of the conference was **Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) within the Operational Programme Employment (OPE) and the Operational Programme Employment Plus (OPE+)**.

The event was held under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and other government departments. It provided a formal platform for key stakeholders and practitioners to engage in discussions regarding the future direction of CLLD. An accompanying programme was held on March 31, 2025, featured site visits to exemplary projects implemented by the Local Action Groups (LAGs) [Brdy-Vltava](#) and [Posázaví](#).

The conference focused primarily on the **role of Local Action Groups (LAGs) projects in promoting social inclusion and employment activation** at the local level. It also fostered a dialogue on the use of multi-fund financing mechanism and its strategic importance for multidisciplinary rural development, emphasizing the synergies between rural economic revitalization, community empowerment, social capital enhancement, and environmental sustainability. Throughout the conference, strong expressions of support were voiced, accompanied by clear policy recommendations and concrete examples of projects that are transforming rural areas for the better. The event provided a valuable platform for the exchange of good practices and inspiration, as well as for strengthening collaboration and networks among institutions and organizations, including governmental departments responsible for policy development and legislation, and representatives of the European Commission (EC). All participants are united in pursuing a common goal — fostering **prosperous, cohesive communities and ensuring quality of life EVERYWHERE**. The capacity of Local Action Groups (LAGs) to connect local stakeholders, engage in strategic planning, and respond flexibly to current social and economic challenges positions them as key partners in promoting sustainable and inclusive development in the Czech Republic. **LAGs act as essential partners to municipalities, bridging the gap between institutions and citizens; they are drivers of innovation and facilitators of support services for vulnerable populations who often face barriers in accessing assistance independently.**

Main Objectives of the Conference:

- » To present the role of Local Action Groups (LAGs) as key local actors in implementing social agendas and preventing social exclusion at the community level.
- » To discuss the importance of supporting multidisciplinary approaches in rural areas and multi-fund solutions at the territorial level.
- » To define recommendations for Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) in the new programming period 2028+ at both national and European levels.

Organizers: The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in close cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Regional Development, and the National Network of Local Action Groups.

Participants: Minister of Labour and Social Affairs Marian Jurečka, Minister of Agriculture Marek Výborný, Minister for Regional Development Petr Kulhánek, senior officials and responsible representatives from Czech ministries including Labour and Social Affairs, Agriculture, Regional Development, the Environment, Industry and Trade; international guests from [European Commission](#) institutions, including the Directorates-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, and for Agriculture and Rural Development; representatives of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); the European LEADER Association for Rural Development ([ELARD](#)), including its President; the European Network for Rural Development ([EU CAP Network](#)); Local Action Groups from the Czech Republic as well as from Sweden, Estonia, Poland, Romania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Slovakia; economist and member of the Czech National Economic Council (NERV) Petr Zahradník; regional representatives, mayors, academics from domestic and foreign universities, experts from relevant fields, and other engaged stakeholders.

SUMMARY OF KEY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2028+ PROGRAMMING PERIOD FOR THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND THE EU

THE SIGNIFICANT ROLE OF LOCAL ACTION GROUPS (LAGs) AND CLLD IN BUILDING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES AND IN COHESION POLICY AS A PLACE-BASED APPROACH

- In the Czech Republic, Local Action Groups (LAGs) are key actors in building **resilient, competitive, and sustainable communities**—communities that promote wellbeing. Through their activities, they contribute to **equalizing living conditions „everywhere“**, aligning with the objectives of EU Cohesion Policy and playing a crucial role in regional development.
- The **bottom-up principle** applied by LAGs strongly reflects with the need to foster strong, resilient, and competitive communities—one of the main takeaways from the conference. This approach directly addresses current **demographic trends and societal developments**, where the state's limited capacity to provide care for vulnerable groups increasingly requires supplementation through **community-based support**, mutual aid within neighbourhoods and families, strengthened **preventive measures**, and **volunteering**. In this context, the role of LAGs—based on their **established and continuously developing capacities**—is indispensable.
"Based on data and strategies, we can understand territories in all their complexity. And because we are close to people, we have both a sense for the details and a bird's-eye view."
 (Lucie Winklerová, Manager for Community Programmes and Education, LAG Frýdlantsko)
- The key strengths of LAGs and the CLLD instrument lie in their ability to **coordinate stakeholders and thematic areas at the local level**, apply a **holistic approach** to solving territorial challenges, and implement **strategic planning**. Rather than competing, LAGs actively **cooperate and network**, which creates ideal conditions for sharing **good practices** and **experiences**.



"The role of Local Action Groups will become even more important in the future, despite reduced funding through Cohesion Policy programmes. This makes high-quality strategic planning, sound decision-making, and more effective use of territorial capital even more essential. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs intends to deepen its cooperation with LAGs in the coming years." (Marian Jurečka, Minister of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic)

- **Integrated** and **place-based** approaches should become a fundamental principle, automatically applied in the implementation of **Cohesion Policy**. These approaches must be compatible with thematic concentration, results-oriented frameworks, and funding mechanisms, rather than being residual or marginal methods of utilizing EU funds. Each region has distinct conditions and needs, requiring tailored, context-specific approaches.

"Cohesion Policy should be as little blanket and universal as possible; it must respect the uniqueness of territories and the principle of subsidiarity. The integrated approach should not become an afterthought once majority approaches to managing Cohesion and Common Agricultural Policy funds are fulfilled... Although the areas where LAGs are active may be similar, each story is unique. Reflecting local conditions is a key determinant of the relevance of any activity." (Petr Zahradník, economist and member of the National Economic Council of the Government of the Czech Republic)

RECOMMENDATION:

Introduce integrated and place-based approaches into European legislation for the 2028+ programming period as one of the fundamental principles for the implementation of Cohesion Policy.



MODEL OF MULTI-FUND, MULTISECTORAL AND INTERMINISTERIAL CLLD

- The role of Local Action Groups (LAGs) in building strong communities is enabled by **multi-fund financing** of CLLD — continuation of this approach in the 2028+ programming period is both **necessary** and **essential**. By combining resources from various Operational Programmes, including support from the Common Agricultural Policy, LAGs can more effectively address complex rural development challenges — from social inclusion to environmental measures.

"If there is one thing the Czech Republic excels at, it is the role of LAGs and the LEADER/CLLD method; we are a flagship of the European Union..." (Radim Sršeň, Deputy Minister for Regional Development)

- The **multidisciplinary nature of Local Action Groups** (LAGs) and the resulting **synergistic effects** contribute to increased **efficiency** in resource utilization and cost savings, which is especially important considering the reduced funding expected for the Czech Republic in the 2028+ programming period.
- The Czech Republic has **successfully implemented the multi-fund CLLD approach across two programming periods**. Based on experience from the previous period, the implementation model for 2021+ was simplified, particularly regarding the CLLD Strategies and the implementation framework within the OPZ+. During the 2021+ period, five operational programmes from five different ministries are integrated into the multi-fund approach, with all 180 LAGs utilizing multi-fund financing for their projects. The Czech Republic is regarded as a **good practice example of multi-fund CLLD at the European level** and remains open to sharing experiences with both EU and non-EU countries, as well as cooperating in the preparation of CLLD for the next 2028+ programming period at the European level.

"In the academic world, when I meet people from Europe at conferences or universities, we are very well known for having a multi-fund approach that works very effectively." (Ondřej Konečný, Dean of the Faculty of Regional Development and International Studies, Mendel University in Brno)

RECOMMENDATION:

Maintain multi-fund, multi-sectoral, and interministerial financing of CLLD in the Czech Republic in its current scope in the next programming period. Promote and disseminate this model of multi-fund, multi-sectoral, and interministerial CLLD at the European level.



ROLE OF LOCAL ACTION GROUPS (LAGs) IN THE FIELD OF SOCIAL INCLUSION

- LAGs are **key actors in implementing social inclusion agendas in small municipalities and remote areas of the Czech Republic**. They represent significant local capacities by conducting outreach and fieldwork, facilitating prevention, and strengthening community and family ties. By building human and social capital, they effectively and flexibly complement public policies and their instruments. This constitutes crucial support considering demographic trends and the rising care costs.

"In the Czech Republic, the majority of rural areas are covered by Local Action Groups.

Three quarters of LAGs are already involved in the Operational Programme Employment Plus (OP Employment Plus), and their number is expected to grow in the upcoming calls. We are currently piloting the expansion of the CLLD instrument into urban environments."
(Renáta Kučerová, Head of CLLD and ITI Project Department, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs)

- Within OPE and OPE+, LAGs can implement a full range of activities, selecting interventions according to their strategies and local needs. With funding from the European Social Fund and through their involvement in CLLD, LAGs contribute to improving the quality of life for all inhabitants, for example, by providing **social work in small municipalities**, enabling mayors to better fulfil their caregiving responsibilities toward their citizens. LAGs also engage, especially in cooperation with schools, in **prevention and multidisciplinary support for at-risk children**, including psychological and therapeutic assistance. They create **employment and entrepreneurship opportunities** in rural areas, supporting (self-)employment and stabilization of persons with multiple disadvantages. Furthermore, LAGs assist **informal caregivers** and promote **volunteering** as an alternative, safe, and innovative community-based source of support. LAGs contribute to the development of **home palliative and hospice care**, play a crucial role in **community work and fostering intergenerational understanding**. Local needs assessments carried out by LAGs provide an essential basis for community-based social services planning.

"The work of LAGs allows us to reach people directly, because many problems simply can't be addressed solely at the level of ministries, regional governments, or municipalities."

(Martina Štěpánková, Director General for EU Funds and International Cooperation, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic)





- LAGs serve as **knowledge-based entities** and potential **innovation brokers** within the territory for MoLSA and other ministries. Through their work, they actively contribute to the development of social inclusion agendas. Many LAGs pilot, develop, or implement innovative approaches and tools—for example, so-called “work crews” for individuals facing multiple disadvantages, including people with addictions. Other examples include the concept of shared social worker for small municipalities, or initiatives such as worker-owned cooperatives and recovery clubs for young people with mental health conditions. It is important to strengthen both horizontal connections—such as sharing good practices and innovative approaches among LAGs—and vertical ones, where effective practices rooted in local knowledge flow bottom-up from LAGs to municipalities, then to intermediate authorities and finally to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, ensuring effective information exchange.

"Across the Czech Republic, we have not only passionate individuals but also true professionals - I'd like to stress that- who are forging new paths. They're succeeding in reaching communities that require trust before letting anyone in, and once that trust is built, incredible things start to happen." (Petra Zdražilová, Director General for Family Policy and Social Services, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs)

- Effective coordination and enabling synergies at the governance level of the various programmes involved in CLLD are essential. An interesting initiative with strong potential to **strengthen interdisciplinary connections** is the **combination of energy advisory services with social work**. Incorporating environmental topics is viewed as an appealing way to encourage young people to return to rural areas while also promoting intergenerational dialogue. Other key “bridging” themes include social farming, support for vulnerable children as previously mentioned, and more.

RECOMMENDATION:

Strengthen both vertical and horizontal communication channels and mechanisms for information exchange among LAGs, municipalities, regional authorities, and ministries. It is equally important to continue developing the thematic expertise of LAGs in social inclusion, thereby enhancing their capacity as knowledge hubs and innovation brokers.

ROLE OF LOCAL ACTION GROUPS (LAGs) IN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORTING RURAL AREAS



- **The integrated territorial approach** and **the principle of subsidiarity** (addressing challenges at the most appropriate governance level) are fundamental to strategic territorial development and for tailoring public policies to the specific needs of **functional areas**.
 - According to the OECD, the human-centred approach constitutes the core framework for **rural wellbeing**. It is structured around three pillars: ECONOMIC (enhancing productivity and competitiveness), SOCIAL (readiness to address demographic change and the adoption of social innovations), and ENVIRONMENTAL (facilitating the transition to a low-carbon economy). Advancing the social pillar requires improving the quality and accessibility of digital infrastructure and digital skills, as well as ensuring stable service provision. Equally vital is the development of “silver economy” services to support the ageing population, fostering social innovation to address societal challenges, and developing targeted programmes for youth and newly arrived residents.
- *"The Ministry of Agriculture has long supported the development of rural areas and rural communities... The strength and resilience of rural regions may hold strategic importance in the future, not only for the Czech Republic but for Europe as a whole. Therefore, this area is also highlighted in the European Commission's strategic document, the Vision for Agriculture and Food, which outlines the key framework for the future direction of the Common Agricultural Policy."* (Marek Výborný, Minister of Agriculture)
- The role of Local Action Groups (LAGs) in regional development in the Czech Republic is highly significant. The Czech Republic is the first EU Member State to incorporate the role of LAGs into national legislation via the Regional Development Support Act.
- "I regard LAGs as essential actors in regional development, delivering substantial added value to local areas. The Ministry of Regional Development will continue to provide support to LAGs throughout the upcoming programming period. CLLD is firmly embedded in the Czech Republic's negotiating position for the 28+ programming framework."* (Petr Kulháněk, Minister of Regional Development)

RECOMMENDATION:

Integrate CLLD and LAGs as key instruments for achieving resilient rural areas, communities, and rural wellbeing into relevant strategic documents and programming frameworks for the 28+ programming period.



THE CLLD INSTRUMENT AT THE LEVEL OF EUROPEAN COMMISSION DIRECTORATES-GENERAL

- The **European Commission (EC) and the European Social Fund (ESF)** aim to reinforce CLLD and territorial approaches.

"From the perspective of the European Commission and the European Social Fund, our goal is to strengthen community-led local development and, more broadly, territorial approaches in the Member States. The Czech Republic is an example of good practice in this area — you can share your experience at the European level, and we at the European Commission will support you in doing so." (Simona Pulbere, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion)

- The EC is also reinforcing territorial approaches in its **Vision for Agriculture and Food**.

"The European Commission states in the Vision for Agriculture that territorial approaches genuinely deliver results. They will be further reinforced, and we will build upon this foundation. LAGs represent a valuable form of social capital that should be leveraged — they are key to building social capital, improving communication, and strengthening resilience... LEADER has existed for over 30 years — and it has not grown old." (Iwona Lisztwan, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development)

- **LEADER/CLLD is fundamentally about people and collaboration.** It attracts specific profiles of people — those who think beyond bureaucratic constraints and stand outside traditional policymaking structures. While it may appear easier to allocate large sums to large investment projects, and CLLD may seem more complex from this perspective, it is important to advocate for its effectiveness and transformative impact at the local level. CLLD has significant added value that cannot be readily quantified. There is a **need for enhanced capacity building** from the EC towards **Managing Authorities (MAs)** of ESF and ERDF programmes.

"When LEADER was extended to fisheries, there was investment in capacity building. But this was not the case with the ESF and ERDF. We need to learn how to do this. Not everyone understands it — not everyone gets out of their office and into the field. As a result, MAs are often unfamiliar with the principles on which LEADER (CLLD) operates." (Urszula Budicz-Tabor, Rural Pact).

- Ongoing **efforts to simplify procedures** are still hampered by concerns over audits. Yet, CLLD is built on long-term **trust** between stakeholders and citizens at the local level, grounded in transparency, participation, and the responsible use of public funds for the benefit of local communities.

RECOMMENDATION:

Continue to strengthen territorial approaches at the EU level. Enhance capacity building by the European Commission towards ESF and ERDF Managing Authorities. Further simplify the administrative framework for CLLD.

FURTHER STEPS AND FOCUS AREAS:

- » Apply the outcomes and recommendations from the conference in the preparation and negotiation of relevant strategic documents for the 28+ programming period, such as the Cohesion Policy Strategic Framework 28+ in the Czech Republic, the Regional Development Strategy 28+, and others.
- » Continue focusing on evaluating the benefits and added value of the CLLD instrument.
- » Strengthen communication, knowledge transfer, and the articulation of local needs across relevant policy agendas, including improved vertical links between LAGs and specialised departments of ministries, regional authorities, Labour Offices, and municipalities.
- » Enhance cooperation with universities and research institutions in the area of CLLD, particularly regarding data, evaluation, and innovation.
- » Foster inter-ministerial cooperation within the CLLD framework to ensure synergies between projects and measures and strengthen the potential for multi-fund, interdisciplinary and interministerial solutions.
- » Promote the key outcomes of the conference at the European level during the preparation of the 28+ programming period.
- » Cooperate closely with the European Commission and all relevant Directorates-General involved in CLLD, inviting EC representatives to events related to CLLD at both national and EU levels, including study visits to LAGs and supported projects; share good practices, initiate networking for ESF and REGIO.
- » Similarly, collaborate on disseminating the outcomes of the conference and the Czech multi-fund CLLD model with other relevant European stakeholders – including through the Rural Pact, CAP Network, ELARD, Members of the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions, and other Member States implementing CLLD.
- » Support the establishment and functioning of a European CLLD-U (CLLD-Urban) Network, focused on knowledge exchange, capacity building, and policy advocacy.



PHOTOGALLERY FROM THE PLENARY SESSION



PHOTOGALLERY FROM THE PLENARY SESSION



KEY OUTCOMES OF THE CONFERENCE

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EXPERT PANELS ON CLLD AND LAGS ACTIVITIES



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Multi-Fund Financing Within Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) and Its Importance for Rural and Community Development, Strategic Territorial Planning Based on Local Knowledge and Interconnection Between Local Stakeholders and Thematic Areas, Recommendations for the New Programming Period 2028+

Abstract

Key benefits of CLLD, good practices of multi-fund financing and integrated approaches to territorial development in the Czech Republic — synergies and complementarities, specifics of rural and community development support, local needs and resources, measurement of impacts and qualitative incomes, recommendations for the future programming period 2028+.

Context, Background, and Discussion Objectives

In the Czech Republic, we build upon over a **decade of experience** with multi-fund financing of CLLD. The main benefits of CLLD and Local Action Groups (LAGs) include in-depth local knowledge, strategic planning, long-term trust and collaboration, flexibility, an innovative approach, community building, and efficient resource allocation with synergy. The model of CLLD project implementation within separate operational programmes managed by different managing authorities (MAs) has proven effective, with CLLD strategies including a common conceptual framework alongside individual programme-specific frameworks. Our model operates on a **partnership** and **open dialogue**, with regular coordination meetings. **Capacity building** and **facilitation** are fundamental, not only for LAGs but also for MAs, mayors, and other relevant stakeholders. **Process and impact assessment** serves as a basis for further development and piloting innovations (e.g. CLLD-URBAN). **At the EU level**, cooperation aimed at strengthening the capacity of MAs in Member States and facilitating the **networking of CLLD initiatives involving European Social Fund (ESF) and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)** would be highly beneficial. Consideration should also be given to the possible introduction of **mandatory** multi-fund financing for CLLD.

Moderated by

Radim Sršeň

Panelists

- Markéta Dvořáková / LAG Brdy-Vltava, Director
- Ondřej Konečný / Chairman of LAG Brána Vysočiny, Dean of the Faculty of Regional Development and International Studies, Mendel University in Brno
- Martina Štěpánková / Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Director of the European Funds and International Cooperation Section
- Lidija Pavić-Rogošić / Member of the European Economic and Social Committee
- Urszula Budzich-Tabor / Rural Pact Support Office
- Marion Eckardt / ELARD Knowledge Hub, LAG Halland (Sweden), Director





Summary of the Discussion

- There will be growing pressure to ensure more effective targeting of increasingly limited funding. Calls for proposals will become more specific and focused on concrete needs, moving away from blanket support measures. In this context, LAGs play a crucial role, as they are well-placed to **pilot innovative approaches through smaller-scale projects**. It is also desirable that such innovations be replicated or transferred internationally. LAGs represent a valuable instrument to support this transition.
- The limited support from the European Commission (EC) for multi-fund CLLD may be attributed to a preference for a more centralised approach, as well as a lack of trust in the ability of local actors to address challenges effectively and concerns regarding their expertise. It is therefore essential to **promote and disseminate examples of good practice**.
- Students need greater exposure to real-life practice. It is important to **motivate and inspire young people** to engage in this sector by **linking academic education with practical, hands-on experience**.
- The CLLD approach is key to the sustainable development of communities. Civil society contributes new ideas and fosters active citizen engagement. Development cannot occur in isolation — **all sectors must cooperate. They cannot develop in parallel but need to progress in synergy**.
- **Rural development** involves not only **DG AGRI** but also **DG REGIO** and **DG EMPL**.
- **Multi-fund financing** represents the most democratic approach, as it enables the decentralisation of resource allocation. Effective inter-ministerial cooperation is essential. The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) supports the proposal that multi-fund CLLD should become **mandatory**.
- Although rural development is frequently cited as a priority, progress remains insufficient. For this reason, ELARD has launched a [petition](#). There is a growing call to introduce [rural proofing](#) and [youth testing](#).
- The future of rural areas: The [Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas](#) remains relevant and should not be replaced, as it continues to represent a goal we strive to achieve. LAGs are essential in this regard. The [Rural Pact](#) is a voluntary commitment — a declaration of intent without a dedicated budget or legislative tools to ensure its implementation. **LAGs have consistently played a significant role within the Rural Pact**: they are trusted, deeply embedded in their communities, and serve as a voice for local populations.
- Although allocating large funds to major investment projects may be simpler, CLLD may seem more complex from this perspective. Nevertheless, it is important to demonstrate that CLLD is effective, and drives change at the local level. It provides **significant added value** that cannot be easily quantified. Therefore, evaluation is essential.
- **LEADER/CLLD is fundamentally about people and cooperation**. It attracts specific types of individuals who do not possess a bureaucratic mindset and who stand apart from traditional policies.
- There is a need for the **EC to strengthen capacity building for CLLD directed at the MAs of ESF and ERDF programmes**.
- Efforts to **simplify processes** are often hindered by **concerns related to audits**. CLLD relies on long-term **trust** within the territory, which also serves as a form of “oversight” to ensure the proper use of entrusted funds for the benefit of residents.
- **Combining investment and non-investment projects** is essential to achieving a synergistic effect — it functions as a unifying element of activities, multiplying the overall impact.

Conclusions

- CLLD may appear complex and “small-scale” in terms of funding, but it is crucial to demonstrate that **it works** — showing added value that cannot always be quantified.
- A lack of understanding among officials can also be a factor - LEADER/CLLD cannot simply be comprehended from behind a desk; it requires **field visits** to demonstrate how LAGs operate in practice.
- It is important **to prove the added value** of LEADER/CLLD to policymakers, officials, and auditors - this also presents a challenge for the academic community. Evaluation is essential.
- **Engaging young people** — we need to cultivate the next generation of rural “developers.”
- LEADER/CLLD is not solely a matter of agriculture; it addresses cross-sectoral challenges — **cooperation between ministries and a multi-fund/multi-sectoral approach are necessary also in other Member States** (in addition to the Czech Republic).



- Combining funds is important, especially given the decreasing availability of resources; it is necessary to **seek and complement funding with additional sources** such as private funding, volunteering, etc., to achieve **multiplier effects**.
- The contribution of LEADER/CLLD to the **Rural Pact** is significant — LAGs are synonymous with the Rural Pact, and their role is substantial.
- **Simplification** should be based on trust rather than control.
- It is desirable for the **EC to strengthen capacity building for MAs** within the ESF and ERDF frameworks.
- Rural areas should be supported not only in words but also in actions, e.g. through initiatives like the ELARD petition — emphasizing the importance of **rural proofing** and **youth testing**, as well as strengthening the **urban-rural linkages**.





Contribution of Local Action Groups (LAGs) to Social Inclusion – Social Work from the Perspectives of Regions, Municipalities, and Target Groups

Abstract

The involvement of LAGs in promoting social inclusion represents a win-win approach that is beneficial for all stakeholders. Presentation of LAG activities in the field of social work: examples of functionally established cooperation with regions and municipalities; Examples of support provided to mayors of small municipalities and their communities, emphasizing the "client-centred" approach. Provision of social work "as close to the individual as possible," including early outreach for vulnerable individuals and case management. Community-based social services planning – the role of LAGs in mapping social needs, capacity building of small municipalities to deliver social work, and facilitating coordination and networking.

Context, Background, and Discussion Objectives

The goal of supporting Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) through LAG projects financed by ESF+ is to support **capacity building of small municipalities and communities to ensure that care for their citizens is grounded in and developed from the bottom up** – i.e., from their local environment, where problems and needs are best known and where the most effective responses can be made. An effective support system should operate primarily starting from the family level, through the community or municipality, then the regional level, and only subsequently at the state level. This principle assumes that the state should intervene only when other levels of support fail or lack sufficient capacity.

The aim of the discussion is to **share good practices, added value, and benefits of LAG projects in strengthening the delivery of social work, especially in small municipalities and remote rural areas**; to identify opportunities, potential, and possible related risks. The outcome should be the establishment of functional and effective cooperation among all involved actors in the territory – from local communities through municipal authorities to regional and state institutions. Such cooperation is essential to ensure timely, professional, coordinated, and sustainable support for citizens.

Moderated by

- **Melanie Zajacová**, the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Head of the Department of Social Work

LAGs presenters

- Pavel Goby, **LAG Posázaví**, CHOPOS Community of Municipalities - Social Work Coordinator
- Hana Drábková Sobková, **LAG Opavsko**, Methodologist
- Jana Hronová, **LAG Západní Krušnohoří**, City of Chomutov - Head of the Community Planning Center



Panelists

- Daniel Štěpánek / the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Department of Social Work
- Jaroslava Šibravová / Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Section of Family Policy and Social Services
- Monika Hanzelyová / South Bohemian Region - Regional Coordinator of the Social Services Planning Process
- Alexander Olah, [LAG Západní Krušnohoří](#), Project Coordinator
- Martina Sedláčková, [LAG Třeboňsko](#), Project Coordinator
- Martin Vtípil, [Municipality of Hlinsko](#)
- Eva Tořová, [Municipality of Staré Hamry](#), Mayor

Summary of the Discussion

- **The social work system within public administration** currently struggles to effectively reach residents in remote locations. Municipalities with extended powers (ORP) often become involved in cases too late due to limited capacity and funding for further development (e.g., early outreach for clients, supervision, etc.).
- **Clients often do not know whom to turn to for help and lack trust in municipal authorities**; LAGs serve as informal intermediaries in delivering support.
- LAG projects enable social workers greater flexibility; they are mobile (equipped with vehicles), **can respond more promptly to needs**, maintain closer contact with people, and have a broader overview of the territory. Visibility and cooperation are crucial for **building trust** among clients and municipal leaders.
- Social workers involved in LAG projects are not required to fulfil all the requirements expected of municipal social workers (e.g., administrative tasks related to public administration). This raises concerns about differences in working conditions (including financial compensation) and potential rivalry. A suitable solution appears to be **harmonizing working conditions** for all social workers to ensure a fair and effective working environment.
- It is essential **to establish collaboration and clearly define roles** to avoid overlaps or tension among social workers operating in the area; they must be aware of each other's activities.

- **Mayors of small municipalities welcome the assistance of social workers involved in LAG projects**, who help them navigate the system and refer clients to specialized services and appropriate support.
- **Shared social workers** in LAG projects help connect municipalities, support local support networks, and foster cooperation.
- Mayors want to address people's situations but are overwhelmed by other responsibilities, often lacking relevant expertise or understanding of why they should financially contribute to social work or the provision of social services. **Mayors need methodological support** - including individual contact, explanations of benefits, and involvement in community-based social service planning.



Conclusions

- Support must be available in the field as close to people as possible, so that their needs can be effectively met. Early outreach is crucial – it is essential to provide systemic support for early outreach activities, as people often do not know about available services or are unaware of their existence; therefore, it is necessary to deliver this information to them. LAGs play an important role in this process.
- It is desirable to **harmonize working conditions** of social workers employed by municipal authorities and those financed through LAG projects. Ensuring adequate financial compensation and proper equipment for social workers is essential.
- **Mayors care** about their citizens and want to address their situations but often do not know how to proceed — **they need methodological support** and therefore welcome assistance from LAGs. Small municipalities should also contribute financially to the provision of social work.
- **LAGs act as a bridge between the community and the system** — they know the local environment, strengthen communication and information sharing among all stakeholders in the area, are skilled at networking, and build trust. Thanks to this trust, cooperation between actors is fostered, enabling community engagement (participation). It makes it possible to **return to people and their needs**.
- **Community-based social service planning** is also a suitable tool, where LAGs can act as neutral mediators/facilitators between citizens, local governments, and service providers.
- **LAGs have the potential to become a "service-oriented" support for municipal authorities** – assisting in identifying funding sources and helping address specific community issues, as well as initiating planning processes focused on people's needs.





Utilization of the potential of Local Action Groups (LAGs) in piloting and implementing legislative changes in the area of support for families with children at risk

Abstract

The potential of LAGs to coordinate support for vulnerable families with children in relation to upcoming legislative changes in this field. Psychosocial support for children, parents, and teachers – the role of LAGs in needs assessment, community networking, and prevention. An effective approach to early identification of at-risk children and families, and the provision of timely assistance. Support for children's wellbeing and mental health, including the involvement of schools and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Context, Background, and Discussion Objectives

Prevention and early detection of problems affecting a child and their family is **always more cost-effective** than addressing issues at a later stage. **The availability of supportive services** for families starting from pregnancy reduces the risk of family breakdown and the placement of children into substitute care. In many municipalities, community or family centres have been established as natural places where children and families can find support. **Coordination** and cooperation among various service providers working for the benefit of children and families is crucial for the effective use of these services.

The goal of the discussion was to explore the role of LAGs in coordinating activities that support at-risk children and families, to assess the importance of early and effective support for children's physical and mental well-being, and to demonstrate the potential of **LAGs to take on a coordinating role** in this area at the local level, in relation to upcoming legislative changes.

Moderated by

- [Lenka Felcmanová](#), Society for All (SOFA), Chairwoman and Co-founder

Panelists

- Ferdinand Hrdlička, Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports, Commissioner for Wellbeing
- Petr Pabian, Early Care Platform, Coordinator of the Advocacy Team for Early Care
- Štěpán Bolf, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Department of Care Transformation for Children At Risk

LAGs presenters

- Michaela Zelenková / LAG Šipka, [Project](#) Coordinator / Anna Marie Houšková, Fokus Vysočina, Project Partner
- Petra Martinů / [LAG Poličsko](#), CLLD-Strategy Manager
- Jana Krutská & Petra Přílučková, LAG Říčansko, [Project](#) Managers / Lucie Procházková, Director of Parish Charity Mnichovice, Project Partner
- Marie Kaštylová, Portimo, , Head of the [Team around the child](#), Project Partner of LAG Zubří země
- Aneta Malounková, LAG Boskovicko, [Project](#) Coordinator and Community Worker



Summary of the Discussion

- "A school is a workshop of humanity..." – John Amos Comenius.
- **The school is a space where children should be primarily prepared for personal and civic life, and only subsequently for professional life.** The themes of student well-being and children's mental health are being embedded as cross-cutting priorities within the revised Framework Educational Programmes in the Czech Republic. These efforts are supported by steps to establish a sustainable funding framework and to institutionalize key support staff roles in schools—such as school psychologists, special education professionals, and school social pedagogues. Additionally, resources are being allocated to fund mental health support teams (example of good practice: [Mobile Multidisciplinary Mental Health Teams](#)). Interdisciplinary (inter-ministerial) cooperation should be embedded in law. Work with families must be comprehensive and coordinated.
- Early intervention and prevention are key factors for success ([Early Care: the most cost-effective social investment](#)). **Support starting from pregnancy and early childhood is both more effective and more economical than intensive care provided later in life.** This provides a solid foundation for integrating early care into standard practice. Examples of effective early care models: [OMAMY Programme](#), [Multidisciplinary Early Support Model in the Vítkov Region](#), [Position of a health-social worker in the hospital for early detection of at-risk children](#).





- The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs [project](#) focuses on **unifying approaches to at-risk children**—establishing an optimal model along with basic standards, processes, and procedures for multi-sectoral cooperation, and developing a unified communication strategy for stakeholders and the public regarding social and legal protection of children. Support for children's participation in the decision-making processes of child protection services, and an effective system of professional support for staff.
- Thanks to the implementation of Local Action Plans for education development, LAGs have **established close cooperation** with schools, which are crucial for the early identification of children's issues. The topics addressed include mental health among teachers (danger of burnout – they need to be supported) and the prevention of bullying and violent behaviour among children.
- LAGs assess local situation both in terms of community needs and the availability of services. This enables them to evaluate potential risks in the area—not only in the field of mental health and wellbeing. **The support they provide is localized, based on in-depth local knowledge, and helps to identify service gaps.** LAGs also collaborate with the private sector, which can contribute additional resources to the region.
- The new legislation should establish the coordinating role of municipal authorities. **LAGs have demonstrated strong readiness to assume this role. Effective coordination of interdisciplinary cooperation and local stakeholders is essential;** ideally, each territory should designate the most suitable coordinating actor, based on the local context.

Conclusions

- **Connecting** professionals, and ensuring exchange of information, reduces service gaps and overlaps — coordination of interdisciplinary cooperation should be led by the most suitable actor in the territory.
- **Case management** is a key approach to supporting children and families.

- **Early intervention** is crucial and starts with supporting children's attendance in kindergartens, including coverage of childcare in nurseries.
- Motivating families to **engage their children in preschool education** and working with expectant parents helps with early problem detection and **building parental skills**.
- **Thanks to CLLD projects funded by the ESF/ESF+**, LAGs have developed and now hold a significant coordinating role. They guide local stakeholders toward agreements — who will intervene, when, and how. Coordination is effective because LAGs connect actors from different sectors and professions. **Coordinators** serve as links between services and families, ensuring early and effective interventions. This role needs to be systematically implemented - clearly defined, **legally anchored**, and sustainably funded, in cooperation with LAGs.
- LAGs have acquired substantial expertise through their activities and, thanks to their knowledge of local needs and available services, **identify service gaps** in the area.
- **The role of LAGs in prevention and support of families** is crucial. Cooperation in identifying at-risk families—to prevent child endangerment, avoid removal of children from their birth families, and provide prompt responses to various crisis situations. Activities aimed at effective psychosocial support for children and families. Strengthening communities to address specific issues.



Wellbeing of Communities and the Role of LAGs in Preventing Social Exclusion (Community Work and Community Activities)

Abstract

Key role of LAGs in supporting community wellbeing and intergenerational ties. Prevention of social exclusion through community activities and community work (prevention is always more cost-effective than relying social services). Mapping, understanding, and utilizing available local resources. Supporting intergenerational dialogue within the community. Development of community work and cooperation among local stakeholders.

Context, Background, and Discussion Objectives

A cohesive community that understands its needs and resources is better able to resist potential negative external influences. Support and coordination of **community activities** are essential. The need for **intergenerational dialogue** and solidarity, as well as the importance of well-functioning communities and the integration of technology into everyday life, will increase as the senior population in the Czech Republic grows. Support for activities that connect different generations will be necessary to maintain **social harmony**.

LAGs have mapped their territories in terms of **community needs**, especially those of socially disadvantaged groups. They have also identified **community resources** such as active residents, local entrepreneurs, nonprofit organizations, and others. LAGs serve as natural coordinators of local activities across various sectors, generating many positive effects, often beyond the initially intended outcomes.

The goal of the discussion is to share good practices from LAG projects focused on **community work** and **community/intergenerational activities**, which serve as important tools for addressing the needs of residents and building open, resilient communities.

Moderated by

Markéta Dvořáková, LAG Brdy-Vltava,
Director



LAGs Presenters

- Petra Pavlíková, [LAG Krajina srdce](#), Coordinator of Material and Food Assistance
- Kateřina Bernardová, Pavlína Morávková, [LAG Podchlumí](#), Project Coordinator, Community Worker
- Michal Arnošt, [LAG Sv. Jana z Nepomuku](#), Project Manager
- Zdeňka Krůpová, [LAG Zubří Země](#), Project Manager
- Petra Andrýsková, [LAG Bystřička](#), CLLD Strategy Manager
- Zuzana Syslová, [LAG Most Vysočiny](#), Project Coordinator
- Eva Vašáková, [LAG Hradecký venkov](#), Project Coordinator

Summary of the Discussion

- The greatest resource of a community is the needs of its members. These can include needs arising from material or financial hardship, as well as the need to feel useful and give meaning to one's life. It is essential to respect the hierarchy of needs — if someone's basic needs are not met, active engagement for the benefit of the community cannot be expected. The role of LAGs is crucial in **mapping** these **needs** and in setting up and coordinating activities within the community to create a synergistic effect.
- We must be able to respond to emerging situations (e.g., the outbreak of war in Ukraine) and be **flexible** in the assistance we offer.
- For the collection and distribution of **material aid**, it is important to engage social networks, build communication, and share stories and emotions connected to the community. Donors' trust is established through sustained efforts and well-structured feedback on how the aid is working in the field. Cooperation with all local stakeholders, facilitated by LAGs, is essential to strengthen the impact and benefits of community activities. **Schools play a crucial role** in identifying families at risk.
- Engaging and **activating** community members is a **long-term process**. Ideally, it starts with mapping the needs of children, which gradually involves adults as well. Co-creating spaces for shared activities helps to unite and activate the community. It is important to collaborate with other community members and participate in various events, including their organization.



- The topic of **intergenerational dialogue** will become increasingly important as the aging population grows. Community workers must consciously and systematically connect generations through organized activities and consistently communicate this vision. Such activities contribute to **community cohesion**. **Young people can help seniors** use new technologies in their daily lives. Involving kindergartens and elementary schools in senior clubs has also proven successful. Municipalities already trust LAGs and support their activities. A cohesive community can support its members in times of need.





Conclusions

- **Mapping community needs and resources** within the LAG territory is essential—to be aware of both those who require help and support, and those who need to feel useful. Matching demands and supplies lead to **sustainable solutions**.
- Through **cooperation** among stakeholders and local coordination, support can be targeted accurately and effectively. This involves collaboration across sectors and themes (education, social services, environment, energy, etc.). Solutions created through collaboration address a broader range of needs than those developed in isolation.
- Supporting the involvement of the **entire community (all generations)** is crucial. An active community is more resilient and can, to some extent, meet the needs of its members independently.
- **Mutual understanding** fosters openness and reduces fears, helping the community better manage current and future challenges.

The Role and Potential of LAGs in Volunteering and Civic Engagement, and in Support for Informal and Shared Care

Abstract

The meaning of volunteering, forms of volunteering, related legislation, and the potential of LAGs in developing volunteering. How volunteering can be used to improve the social situation of caregivers and their families. Volunteering connected with informal and shared care, including homesharing and other alternatives. Palliative care provided in the client's natural environment.

Context, Background, and Discussion Objectives

Volunteering as an alternative, safe, and innovative source of community support, especially when professional care capacities are insufficient. Given demographic trends in society, the demand for volunteering is expected to increase. The distinction between informal (e.g., neighbourly help) and formal volunteering in rural areas, and their connection with informal and palliative care in various forms. Barriers to and future vision for these types of volunteer activities.

Moderated by

- [Markéta Heroutová](#), Silesian Diakonia, Head of the Brno Branch



Panelists

- Magdaléna Zemková, Head of Social Services, Česká Třebová
- Petr Adamus, Head of Volunteering, ADRA Czech Republic
- Martina Macurová, Head of Centre for Community Organizing Central Bohemia, and Home-sharing Guide
- Olga Starostová, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, project: Support and improvement of the quality-of-care services and work-life balance

LAGs Presenters

- Martina Sedláčková, Methodologist and [Project](#) Coordinator & Lucie Řehořová, Social worker, LAG Třeboňsko.
- Tereza Modráková, [Project](#) Coordinator, LAG Brána Brněnska & Eva Fialová, Community Worker and Volunteer Coordinator, Charity Tišnov, Project Partner
- Ludmila Hegerová, [Project](#) Coordinator, LAG Sedlčansko
- Marie Homolková, [Project](#) Coordinator, LAG Pošumaví.

Summary of the Discussion

- As the population ages, a greater level of social support will be needed, for which the system is currently unprepared. It will be necessary to find creative and accessible solutions, combine various support models, involve **volunteers**, and rely on **informal caregivers**.
- It is important that vulnerable individuals have the "freedom of choice" regarding the type of support they receive. This relates to the **sustainability** of formal social services, the support of volunteer activities, and a greater emphasis on **"visibility" of informal caregivers**, ensuring their dignified and financially sustainable inclusion in the system (securing adequate income for informal caregivers).



- Community support is becoming increasingly necessary. The key questions include **how to reach potential volunteers**, how to engage the younger generation, and what the reasons are for the current lower interest in volunteering (challenge: awareness programs introduced already in elementary schools, and the possibility to enrich university admission portfolios with volunteer work).
- LAGs have varying experience with volunteering, and the level of volunteer involvement differs. Some cause it requires a certain level of expertise.
- **Homesharing** as an innovative form of “volunteering” for children with intellectual disabilities and their families. Differences and commonalities with traditional forms of volunteering. Core values include safety, respect, partnership—while maintaining trust, sustainability, adequate competencies, cooperation, and responsibility. All involved parties benefit: parents, the child/person with an intellectual disability, and the host.
- Discussion on the current legislative framework of volunteering, with regard to the document “Concept of Volunteering in the Czech Republic until 2030”, approved by the Czech government, which mentions the role of LAGs in developing volunteering in small towns and municipalities.
- **Palliative care** as an essential field bridging social and healthcare services for individuals in the terminal stage, as well as those with life-threatening diagnoses. Emphasis on interdisciplinary cooperation, the natural environment, medical options, psychological aspects, and more. The primary focus is on providing the quality of life at the terminal stage of illness and to ensure a dignified care provided by professional staff, including family members.
- LAGs have a deep understanding of the “field” in which they operate. When involving communities in addressing urgent issues, natural (historically rooted) differences tend to emerge (border regions vs. the rest of the country). Thanks to their close ties with local communities, LAGs have a greater potential to gain trust.
- The presented examples show that various forms of volunteering take place within LAG projects. In some cases, formal volunteering is successfully implemented through community involvement and professional organizations (e.g., the Good Heart Home project), especially where organizations experienced in **volunteer recruitment** operate in the region. A functional alternative is **informal volunteering**, which takes the form of **spontaneous help among neighbours, extended families, or support groups** (challenge – ensuring sufficient professional preparation of volunteers and motivating them to provide care beyond their own families or close ones).



Conclusion

- Strive to **maintain a continuous spectrum of support for vulnerable individuals** — ranging from formal social services in all forms (residential or outreach services), through community involvement via volunteering, to improving the conditions of informal caregivers (enhancing their visibility, financial support, and recognition).
- **Seek alternative, safe, and innovative forms of support**, getting inspiration from successful international models (e.g., homesharing, shared community housing, etc.).
- Initiate discussions and **promote social responsibility** (e.g., community engagement in addressing the needs of vulnerable groups, corporate and individual social responsibility, education and awareness-raising among children and youth, recognition of volunteer experience in university admissions portfolios, etc.).
- Reflect on the **"Concept of Volunteer Development in the Czech Republic until 2030"**, work toward integrating volunteers into the social care system, and effectively motivate young people to embrace responsibility and solidarity. This includes systematic (including financial) support for organizations that work with volunteers.
- **Emphasize social issues** that are both urgent and essential for the future — including the sustainability of social services, volunteering, informal care, homesharing, palliative care, and bridging social and healthcare services, etc.
- **Strengthen collaboration between LAGs and other organizations** providing care to people in need within the regions. Foster mutual awareness, cooperation, and support for projects based on partnership.



The Role and Good Practices of Local Action Groups (LAGs) in Promoting Socially Responsible Employment, Strengthening LAGs' Capacities to Apply Existing and Emerging Employment Tools and Approaches, and Utilizing These as Opportunities to Address Rural Employment Challenges

Abstract

Searching for and creating employment opportunities in rural areas, including self-employment and entrepreneurship — tools and measures, cooperation, coordination, and networking. Employment of people with multiple disadvantages in the labour market — characteristics of the target group and approaches to employing and stabilizing them. Tools used in LAG projects such as transitional jobs, work crews, business and employment cooperation (BEC), and their linkage to other measures like integrated employment, social entrepreneurship, or social farming. Ongoing and anticipated changes in the labour market, the role of LAGs, and the design of LAG projects in the upcoming programming period.

Context, Background, and Discussion Objectives

Support for rural employment – creating jobs and promoting entrepreneurship through cooperation, supportive tools, and networks.

Employment of people with multiple disadvantages in the labour market – exploring ways to integrate these individuals into the labour market and stabilize their employment while addressing their specific needs. **The future direction of LAGs in the field of support of employment.** Identifying additional gaps that LAGs can address, considering ongoing and anticipated changes in the labour market.

Moderated by

- [Gustav Charouzek](#), LAG Královská stezka, Director, CLLD-Strategy Manager

LAG Presenters

- Petra Martinů, [LAG Poličsko](#) and Ferdinand Raditsch, NGO [Květná zahrada](#)
- Petra Kucinová, [LAG Šumperský venkov](#) and Ivo Škrabal, [BEC Cooperative](#)
- Gustav Charouzek, [LAG Královská stezka](#) Michaela Vrbová, [LAG Horní Pomoraví](#)

Panelists

- Anna Brabcová / Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Director of the Department of Labour Market Integration
- Vlastislav Hlaváč / Czech Labour Office, Director of the Děčín Branch
- Lenka Ouředníčková / Rubikon Centrum, Director of Innovations and Development
- Eliška Hudcová / Charles University, Department of Social Work
- Petra Martinů / LAG Poličsko, CLLD-Strategy Manager
- Ferdinand Raditsch / NGO Květná Zahrada, Director, LAG Poličsko Project Partner
- Ivo Škrabal / BEC Cooperative, Chairman, LAG Šumperský Venkov Project Partner

Summary of the Discussion

- The **rural labour market** differs from urban areas: there are fewer job opportunities, poorer transport accessibility, and longer commuting distances, especially in border regions; seasonal jobs are common (agriculture, tourism). Similar to urban areas, precarious work and a lack of flexible employment options are also prevalent.
- **Social farming** can be seen as an opportunity for rural areas. It enables the employment of people with social or health disadvantages, as well as those with low qualifications.
- Successful mapping, identification, and creation of job opportunities in rural areas depend on the **cooperation of key actors** – regional branches and contact offices of the Czech Labour Office, municipalities, employers, NGOs, and LAGs.
- When placing disadvantaged individuals in the labour market, it is important to understand their specific needs for long-term employment integration. A key factor is **job sustainability** – positions must make economic sense for employers, and **active support for employers** is also essential.





- The Labour Office achieves greater efficiency through **informal cooperation** (with employers, NGOs, municipalities, and LAGs), local knowledge, and coordination of various departments (e.g., social aid and job placement). However, the Active Labour Market Policy (ALMP) remains relatively rigid – support from the Labour Office ends as soon as the individual starts a job, which represents a systemic limitation. **Integrated employment** represents a key mechanism for revising ALMPs; it is more **accessible** than social entrepreneurship and can initiate further systemic changes.
- It is necessary to provide support for those who are unable to succeed in the open labour market – including **stabilisation and continued assistance through low-threshold employment opportunities** (e.g. municipal social enterprises, employment in **work crews**, or **transitional jobs**).
- **Non-profit employment agencies**, such as the RUBIKON Centre, offer free services and have a well-established network of employers. They provide guarantees for job candidates, support them during the adaptation process, and raise employer awareness in the field of inclusive employment.
- The BEC (Business and Employment Cooperative) model for supporting **(self-)employment** enables individuals to start their entrepreneurial activities under the legal and operational framework of a cooperative (as cooperative employees) during the initial phase. Approximately 30–40% of participants go on to establish their own businesses, while others receive support in finding employment on the open labour market. Combining this with transitional jobs has proven particularly effective. This foreign innovation is well-suited for further dissemination among LAGs.
- **The annual cost per unemployed person in the Czech Republic is approximately 300,000 CZK.** In Anglo-Saxon countries, this figure ranges from 800,000 to 1 million CZK, including impacts on health, family, and wellbeing. There is a need to invest much more in prevention — a long-term investment that pays off for the state.
- The current system does not adequately respond to the evolving needs of the labour market. It is essential to **disseminate proven good practices from LAGs to higher levels of governance**, where they can be implemented on a broader and more systematic scale. Facilitated community-led advocacy, capacity building of LAGs, strengthened partnerships, and resilient communities are key factors for sustainable and effective employment support.
- In the field of employment services, there is still a lack of targeted measures for the most vulnerable groups facing multiple disadvantages in the labour market, who struggle to find and maintain long-term employment in the open labour market. This is an area where the **potential of LAGs can be effectively utilized — for example, through low-threshold, community-based employment and stabilisation of these individuals.**

Conclusions

- **Preventing problems** before they escalate is more efficient and cost-effective than dealing with their consequences later.
- Focus on **strengthening cooperation between the Labour Office, municipalities, employers, NGOs, and LAGs**.
- In addition to implementing integrated employment, **support is also needed for stabilization and low-threshold employment** (e.g., municipal social enterprises, work crews, community-based employment, transitional jobs — utilization of LAGs' potential)
- **Support for micro-entrepreneurship and trial entrepreneurship** (e.g., the dissemination of the BEC cooperative model through LAGs).
- Support and development of **social farming in rural areas**.
- **Dissemination of proven good practices, capacity building of LAGs, strengthening partnerships, and fostering resilient communities** (e.g., training of integration/psychosocial workers or case managers).
- **Strengthening the role of LAGs** as key actors — coordinators, motivators, facilitators, drivers of change and providers of informal collaboration in the territory.





Capacity Building of Local Action Groups (LAGs) and the Integration of Community Work and Individual Social Work with Prevention of Energy Poverty

Abstract

Energy counselling and prevention of energy poverty, linked with community work or individual social work/debt counselling. Connection to the newly established Social Climate Fund.

Context, Background, and Discussion Objective

Education and counselling in the field of energy poverty have their own principles and specific characteristics, including specific target groups. It is closely linked with community and social work, debt counselling, and the establishment of energy communities. The aim of the discussion was to identify the main challenges we face regarding energy poverty in rural areas and to present both proven and pilot approaches to addressing these challenges. It also aimed to demonstrate how actors from different fields—such as **the energy sector, social work, community work, and LAG coordinators**—can **be connected**, and to emphasize the importance of finding a **common language**. We are seeking ways to **reduce the gap** between those who have **access to resources** and those who do not. Energy poverty is not only about technology but also about **equality of opportunities** and **social cohesion**.

Moderated by

- Iva Černá, LAG Pomalší, IROP and Expert Worker for ESF+

Panelists

- Barbara Halířová, Trainer and Methodologist for Debt Counseling
- Zuzanna Matěchová, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Innovation Project Prevention of Energy Poverty, Field Coordinator –
- Edina Ocsko, Consultant, Expert for European Regional Development
- Petr Chroust / LAG Opavsko, Director

LAG Presenter

Markéta Pošíková, ředitelka, [LAG Podlipansko](#)

Summary of the Discussion

- **A facilitated meeting between two teams—energy experts and social workers**—crucial for mutual understanding, as different professions use different specialized vocabularies and perceive specialized/professional issues differently. It is important to find common ground where we can support each other—for example, how to technically implement a system for the municipality to provide surplus energy to a vulnerable group, ensuring the solution is both acceptable to the group and feasible for the municipality. So far, targeting energy poverty prevention has been less effective with social work clients and more

focused on community work participants, whose social disadvantages are less severe. An **energy-social dictionary** is being processed—a collection of terms from both energy experts and social workers to facilitate mutual understanding.

- Rural regions in Central and Eastern Europe are more vulnerable to energy poverty (due to poorer access to education, employment, and available energy sources, as well as the aging population). Villages strive to reduce their dependence on large energy suppliers and achieve self-sufficiency – with **Renewable Energy Communities (REC)** serving as a key tool.
- **Technological and social innovations – Smart Villages** – use of blockchain technology for local energy communities – **example: Stanz, Austria** – local energy trading easily transferable via applications.
- Energy poverty is a very sensitive issue; it is important to find **solutions that do not stigmatize the affected residents** and to design support in a way that fosters cooperation—community members support each other, for example through the existence of a solidarity fund.
- **The advantage of LAGs in addressing energy poverty** lies in their long-term and strategic involvement in the territory. In many areas, they have already gained trust, are able to connect stakeholders, and invest in processes leading to solutions. However, they cannot solve the problem alone – other stakeholders must also be involved. LAGs have the potential for greater engagement in this topic.
- People affected by energy poverty often live in inadequate conditions with high energy costs. They cannot be effectively supported without systemic changes, such as adequate income and housing. While they may know how to save energy, education is especially important if their type of housing changes, as practicing energy-efficient behaviour in energy-inefficient housing is challenging.



- **How to identify disadvantaged residents at risk of energy poverty** — it is important to involve **multidisciplinary teams** and multiple decision-making levels. LAGs are driving progress in addressing this issue while also enhancing their competencies through the integration of various topics and mutual collaboration.
- **How to talk about energy so that people truly take ownership of the issue**—it's not just about reducing energy costs, but **actively engaging people in the topic**. This involves working with electricity and water meters, utility bills, and water flow meters, as well as adapting the language so that everyone can understand. It's important to avoid judgment, listen attentively, and ask questions. This also connects to the broader systemic context.
- High expectations for **community energy**—however, it will take a long time for people to truly embrace it. Acceptance depends on how developed the region is; in the poorest areas, it is currently difficult to communicate this concept. LAGs can **initiate the process and sustain it for decades**—as environmental, social, and energy-related changes take time to become widely accepted (as, for example, with the habit of sorting waste).
- How to communicate to the public that **people threatened by poverty or living in poverty deserve support** — avoiding stigmatizing people by suggesting they are to blame for their situation. This issue increasingly affects the lower middle class and a growing part of the general population, making **early interventions essential**.
- Within European projects, the **“sandbox” tool** provides a safe environment to test innovative procedures and methods on a limited scale before they are implemented in practice.





Conclusions

- One of the key strengths of LAGs lies in their **multidisciplinary approach**—they can respond quickly to challenges by mobilising broad teams that work closely together, both in offices and directly in the field. However, LAGs cannot tackle these challenges alone; it is essential to engage other local stakeholders, such as social service providers and volunteers.
- It is essential to **communicate about energy in a clear and understandable way**—empowering people to take part in the changes affecting their lives, so they can take control and organise their lives more independently.
- **Collaboration between social workers and energy experts within LAGs** can be challenging but is achievable—especially through regular, facilitated meetings that help bridge disciplinary and communication gaps.
- We cannot expect quick or comprehensive solutions immediately — for instance, involving people from highly marginalised areas in community energy projects is difficult. At this stage, it may be more feasible to **start with those facing milder forms of social exclusion**.
- The “sandbox” method allows for **experimental** testing of solutions without being constrained by existing legislation. These “laboratories” create a safe, controlled environment where challenges can be addressed in innovative ways—beyond the limits of conventional frameworks and established practices.

Capacity building of Local Action Groups (LAGs) and integration of community work with environmental issues

Abstract

Environmental protection as a component of community activities implemented by LAGs. Opportunities to engage young people in environmental community actions aimed at developing solutions for environmental protection, promoting children's mental health, and preventing stress. The social impacts of climate change adaptation.

Context, Background, and Discussion Objectives

Eco-anxiety is not just an invention of the “snowflake” generation. It's a real emotional response with the potential for long-term impact on future generations. It's time to take the concerns of young people seriously — even if they differ from mainstream ideas of what is considered important or relevant. During the discussion, members of **Generation Z** had the opportunity to speak. Today's youth face numerous challenges — from the climate crisis and uncertainty about the future to feelings of disconnection and a lack of meaningful involvement in decision-making processes. What does the climate crisis mean to young people? How do they perceive their role in society, and what opportunities do they have to participate in solving problems — not only at the global level but especially in their own local communities? How can environmental activities serve as a tool to strengthen community bonds and foster a deeper connection to the places where we live? The younger generation can be a powerful driver of positive change — if we give them trust, support, and the space to act.





Moderated by

- Iva Černá, LAG Pomalší, IROP Manager and Expert Worker for ESF+

Panelists

- Eliška Víravová / Greenfluencer
- Lenka Lejčková / LAG Kraj živých vod, Community Coordinator
- Bohuslav Binka / philosopher and psychotherapist, guarantor of the Environmental Studies study program at the Department of Environmental Studies, Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University

Summary of the Discussion

- **Generation Z and Climate Change** – It's important to encourage intergenerational dialogue and avoid framing climate change as an issue exclusively affecting Generation Z. Climate-related concerns influence many of their decisions — from everyday choices such as shopping habits to major life decisions like whether to have children or where to live.
- **How to talk about climate change** – It's a complex and sensitive topic. Ideally, the message should come from someone who shares the same values as the audience. Being open and curious about different perspectives helps us see things from angles we might not have considered and can also spark curiosity in others. Rather than overwhelming people with negative messages, it is more effective to emphasise positive examples and good practices — especially when communicating via social media.
- How to encourage **young people to return to rural areas – participation** is key. Start with children by giving them opportunities to engage in school and community life. There are many inspiring initiatives, such as student forums and Mini LEADER (a program providing funding for youth-led projects), that allow young people to influence their surroundings. To attract students back to rural areas, it's essential to offer opportunities — for example, the [Expats 2.0](#) project in the Karlovy Vary Region organizes meetups for people who have left the region (in Prague or Plzeň) and connects them to job opportunities back home. This is a form of **“rural marketing”** — it's important to promote not only ourselves but also our home region. A great example is greenfluencer Eliška Víravová, who showcases what village life can offer. Often, young people simply lack information about the opportunities rural areas provide.

Conclusions

- Feeling **eco-anxiety** is a normal response to the current environmental challenges.
- **Climate change needs to be communicated across generations** — It's a difficult topic, and when discussing complex issues, it's important not just what you say, but who you're speaking to — considering their attitudes, values, fears, perceptions, and current situation. This led to the idea of improving LAGs' communication skills in this area, with a clear demand to the National Network of LAGs for training on how to effectively talk about such complicated topics.
- **How to encourage young people to return to rural areas** — participation is key. Start with children, give young people opportunities to take part in decision-making, empower them to influence their communities, and support **students in returning home**.

Innovative and Creative Approaches by Local Action Groups (LAGs) to Solving Local Problems; Examples of Piloting LAG Innovations in Local Contexts; Further Potential of LAGs as Drivers of Innovation in Their Territories; and the Integration of LAG Activities with CLLD in Urban Areas.

Abstract

Presentation of innovations, their piloting, implementation, and dissemination through LAGs within CLLD projects supported by the ESF and ESF+; innovative approaches in community activities. Integration of research and innovation in public spaces and the role of LAGs in fostering local-level innovations. New perspectives on linking LAG and CLLD-U (CLLD-Urban) activities, connections with the Rural Development Programme and the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Smart Villages concept.

Context, Background, and Discussion Objectives

We are already a quarter of the way into the 21st century, yet our mindset often remains rooted in the 20th century. What needs to be done to ensure a good quality of life in the Czech Republic? How can LAGs contribute to this, and how do the conditions for a good life impact competitiveness? Can LAGs act as coordinators of local development? How can multi-fund financing support this, and what steps should LAGs take to adequately prepare for the changes in the 2028+ programming period?



Moderated by

- Rut Bízková, Innovation and Research Consultant

Presenters

- Petra Formánková, LAG Splav
- Michaela Zelenková and Marie Houšková, LAG Šipka
- Monika Smetanová, LAG Krajina srdce

Panelists

- Roman Haken / Centre for Community Organizing (CpKP) Central Moravia, Director
- Lukáš Trčka / Technological Innovation Centre, Executive
- Patrik Reichl / JINAG - South Moravian Agency for Public Innovations, Director
- Lenka Petráková / LAG Český Sever, ESF+ Manager
- Monika Smetanová / LAG Krajina Srdce, Chairwoman

Summary of the Discussion

- Innovations in the public sector do not fundamentally differ from those in business; however, they differ in the way they are shared. **In the public sector, competition should be replaced by cooperation**, and the replication of new solutions is desirable. This is how innovations can spread across regions through LAGs.





- For the development of regions, towns, and municipalities (through 2035), we must primarily consider demographic changes and how to **ensure adequate services—especially in rural areas**—if the current trend of “young people moving to cities and the elderly remaining in rural areas” continues.
- Example of new practice: The LAG Krajina srdce surrounds the city of Tábor (with over 25,000 inhabitants) and covers parts of both the South Bohemian and Central Bohemian regions. A new CLLD-U initiative is being developed in Tábor, expanding opportunities for cooperation between the city and surrounding rural areas **across municipal and regional boundaries**.
- In the context of the Czech Republic, **CLLD-U is an innovation** — it has not been supported here before. This presents a great opportunity for community development throughout the entire country, regardless of the division between municipalities, rural areas, and cities. At the same time, it creates conditions conducive to the development of local democracy.
- It is remarkable how the **“European” perspective on rural areas** has evolved – initially focusing on agriculture, then on rural areas in general, and more recently **(currently) on local development**.
- The example of JINAG – working to support the development of the South Moravian Region – innovation brokers identify regional needs and assist in meeting them. Needs vary across different parts of the region, and there is great potential for cooperation with LAGs; however, it should not be automatically expected that LAGs will “ensure” innovative local development.
- **Cooperation between LAGs and the research sector** is essential – exploring new solutions by leveraging research capacities within the regions. Researchers, especially those at regional universities, can receive research requests originating from their regions, thereby addressing real-world problems. This creates mutual benefits for both parties through the funding directed into research.
- The necessity of **“penetrating” innovations into local areas** – cooperation between research organizations and LAGs is currently a weak spot, as new solutions do not reach those who could benefit from them. This poses a challenge for LAGs.
- For cooperation between regional innovation centres and LAGs, guidance can be found, for example, in the “Smart Villages” methodology (developed by Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem in collaboration with LAGs) – which outlines the role of **innovation brokers**.
- The dissemination of innovations necessarily requires better **networking**, both **horizontal-ly** (among LAGs) and **vertically** (with regional and national levels) — not only for replicating new solutions and sharing good practices, but also as a channel for providing feedback “to Prague” — about what is actually happening in the regions, how decisions from central government are being implemented, and how they should be adjusted based on experiences gained at the regional level.
- International networking of LAGs also brings new opportunities and **impulses for innovations—both within our country and abroad**. Extensive promotion of innovations and new solutions is essential.
- A key challenge for innovation in local development is the long-term decreasing reliability of public services, partly due to demographic changes.

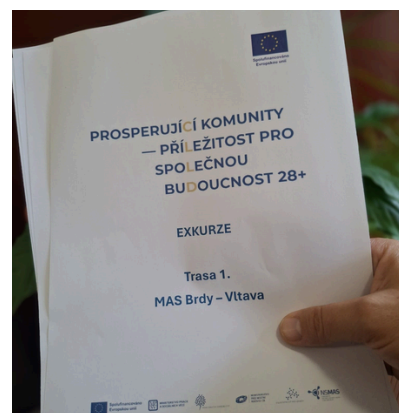
- There is a need to develop a system that improves **support for innovation**.
- Experience from LAGs: “newcomers to villages and towns” — people are not only moving to cities but also to smaller towns and villages, as remote work becomes more common, and they expect a higher quality of life there. While these expectations are met, they often miss the community and civic life.
- Opportunities – activities for children and students: [Hackateen](#) for pupils (JINAG), and school parliaments to promote democratic development.
- **Multi-fund financing** for LAGs, already implemented in our country, **is an innovative approach** in the European context. It requires further development and improvement.
- The vision for LAGs beyond 2035 is for them to be self-sustainable in their activities, including community development within their areas of operation, support for local philanthropy, and the fostering of democracy.

Conclusions

- **Intensive cooperation among regional development actors** — universities, regional innovation centers, and LAGs — brings great opportunities for innovation development; real problems in the regions can thus find real solutions.
- It is essential to **strengthen networking of LAGs**, both within the National Network of LAGs and internationally, as well as territorial linkage and synergy between CLLD and CLLD-U.
- **Multi-fund financing** offers space to strengthen the role of LAGs as **significant actors in sustainable local development**. Looking ahead (post-2035), a major challenge will be ensuring the self-sustainability of LAGs **in their own activities**.

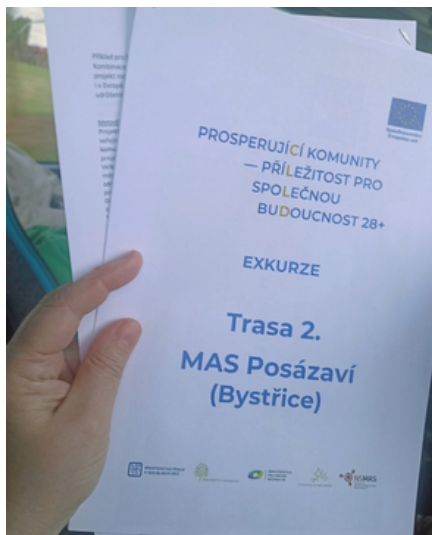


PHOTOGRAPHS FROM EXCURSIONS TO LAGS PROJECTS



Excursion MAS Brdy Vltava

PHOTOGRAPHS FROM EXCURSIONS TO LAGS PROJECTS



Excursion [LAGs Posázaví](#)