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IMPACT OF M19 LEADER FUNDING ON RURAL AREAS IN THE NORTH-EAST REGION OF ROMANIA

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to analyze the effects of funding provided through Measure 19 – LEADER on rural development, with particular emphasis on the North East region. By supporting Local Action Groups, the LEADER approach plays a key role in carrying out Local Development Strategies, fostering economic diversification in rural areas, enhancing infrastructure, and safeguarding cultural heritage. The study compares the performance of the measure between the 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 periods, highlighting the increased efficiency of resource allocation in the recent phase due to the introduction of additional sub-measures (19.1, 19.3). The results show that the funding provided has generated jobs, stimulated entrepreneurship and strengthened social cohesion. The study emphasizes the necessity of consistent monitoring and ongoing support for enhancing the operational capacity of Local Action Groups (LAGs). The findings suggest that Measure 19 – LEADER acts as a driving force for sustainable rural development by encouraging active participation of local communities and promoting solutions adapted to local needs, thereby making a substantial contribution to the goals of the Common Agricultural Policy and to the broader sustainable development of rural areas.

Key words: *LEADER, M 19, rural development, Local Action Groups, North East Romania*

INTRODUCTION

The LEADER approach represents a key instrument for Romania, fostering both economic and social progress in rural regions, while helping to bridge the gap between urban and rural areas and advancing social inclusion (Ciobanu & Vladu, 2024) [4]. Aligned with the objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy and the National Rural Development Programme (NRDP), LEADER supports the growth of local communities by offering tailored solutions that reflect the specific needs and priorities of each territory (Turek-Rahoveanu A. & Turek-Rahoveanu M.M., 2013) [21]. Its added value stems from empowering local initiatives that address challenges identified within communities and transform them into targeted, practical actions that contribute directly to sustainable rural development (Staic & Vladu, 2021a) [18]. Moreover, LEADER has a notable influence on intervention area DI 6B, improving the quality of life in rural areas by enhancing infrastructure and boosting their overall attractiveness (Creangă et al., 2022) [5]. Its innovative approach, support for cross-cutting initiatives and encouragement of community involvement are central pillars of the measure's success, and the projects supported promote the diversification of non-agricultural economic activities, the development of local infrastructure (including broadband), increased social inclusion and the preservation of cultural heritage (Special Report LEADER, 2023) [6].

LAGs are concrete tools that turn local potential into reality, facilitating the economic, social and cultural development of LEADER territories (Turek-Rahoveanu, 2012) [20]. They ensure the active involvement of communities, the creation of partnerships, knowledge transfer and the implementation of innovative solutions to local challenges. LEADER thus becomes a catalyst for sustainable rural development with positive effects on the whole community.

The LEADER measure contributes significantly to the cross-cutting objectives by supporting local initiatives that integrate environmental, climate and innovation dimensions (Brezuleanu et al., 2024) [2]. Thus in the period 2007-2013, measure 41 focused on the implementation of local development strategies through investments in rural infrastructure, support to SMEs and diversification of the rural economy, with a strong emphasis on the formation and functioning of LAGs (measure 431) and on cooperation (measure 421), all within a limited budgetary framework (RNDR Evaluation Study, 2022) [14].

In the 2014-2020 period, support was expanded and diversified by the introduction of sub-measures 19.1 (preparatory support), 19.2 (implementation of local strategies), 19.3 (national and transnational cooperation) and 19.4 (operating and animation expenditure), and the activities financed included public consultations, the creation of local strategies and the financing of projects proposed by the development strategies. Benefiting from a considerably increased budget, this phase signaled a shift from the initial establishment of Local Action Groups (LAGs) toward broadening the influence of the LEADER initiative in rural areas, while also encouraging innovation through transnational cooperation and integrated development projects (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2019) [8]. In this context, the paper seeks to examine the financial impact of implementing Measure 19 – LEADER on rural development in Romania, with particular attention given to the North-East region.

The study investigates how the funding allocated to the Local Action Groups contributes to increasing the quality of life, diversifying the rural economy, preserving the cultural heritage and developing infrastructure in local communities, thus the objectives of the paper aim to:

-comparing the performance of the implementation of LEADER measures in the period 2007-2013 compared to 2014-2020, in order to identify differences in the efficiency of the use of resources;

- assessing the economic impact of the M19 LEADER measure, by analyzing the financial indicators and results achieved in the 2014-2020 programming period;

- analyze the regional distribution of approved projects and their effects on less developed areas.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study aims to assess the effects of funding allocated through Measure 19 – LEADER on rural development, with a particular emphasis on the North-East region of Romania. The analysis is based on several key categories of data, including financial and operational information provided by the Agency for Rural Investment Financing (AFIR), such as budget allocations, funding requests, signed contracts, and disbursed payments under sub-measures 19.1, 19.2, 19.3, and 19.4. In addition, the study considers outcome indicators reported by Local Action Groups (LAGs), including the number of approved projects, beneficiaries reached, and the measurable impact on rural communities. The research also incorporates strategic documents such as the National Rural Development Programmes (NRDP) for 2007–2013 and 2014–2020 [8], alongside relevant European regulations and rural development strategies. A mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative analysis is employed to evaluate the impact of funding under Measure 19 – LEADER (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Status of submitted projects 2007–2013 and 2014–2020) [11, 12]. The quantitative method involves descriptive statistical analysis, assessing the measure's performance through indicators such as project selection rate, completion rate, amount of payments made and financial efficiency (Brezuleanu, 2017) [3]. Data are also compared between the 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 programming periods in order to identify performance differences and evolutionary trends, while the regional distribution analysis examines how projects and funds have been distributed between less developed and more developed regions (Viziteu, 2022) [22].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

2013

In Romania, the implementation of LEADER principles and Local Action Groups started in the period 2007-2013 through the National Rural Development Program, and between 2011 and 2012, 163 LAGs were selected, covering approximately 142,000 km², representing about 63% of the eligible territory and about 58% of the population targeted by LEADER (Alecu et al., 2015) [1]. For the next programming period, it is intended to extend the coverage of LEADER to the entire eligible territory, through a smaller number of LAGs compared to the previous period, thus this approach aims at a balanced territorial development, ensuring the critical mass necessary for the effective implementation of strategies, as well as optimizing the running costs (Staic &Vladu, 2021b) [19].

As a general principle of complementarity, the ERDF and the ESF, through the DLRC-POR instrument, will finance local development actions in urban areas with populations of more than 20,000 inhabitants. In parallel, the EAFRD will support the work of LAGs in rural areas and small towns with less than 20,000 inhabitants, thus the funding of the LEADER initiative through the PNDR will be provided from the funds allocated through the EAFRD (Staic &Vladu, 2020) [17].

In the 2007-2013 programming period, the short duration of the selection call for broadband infrastructure investments in rural areas, caused by the obligation to sign the financing contracts by June 30, 2014 and the limited time for project implementation until the end of the programming period, led to the rejection of some technical projects and applications for funding due to the failure to meet the technical requirements or eligibility criteria. In the current programming period, Local Action Groups (LAGs) are no longer constrained by the strict time limitations that characterized previous cycles, which enables them to incorporate broadband infrastructure projects into their local development strategies (Brezuleanu et al., 2024) [2]. Lessons learned from the implementation of the PNDR 2007–2013 period underscore the importance of financing initiatives that leverage local resources and emphasize territorial specificity, thereby preserving the innovative and bottom-up nature of the LEADER approach (National Network for Rural Development, 2024) [15, 16].

Measure 41, titled "Implementation of Local Development Strategies," was designed to support integrated territorial projects aimed at enhancing the competitiveness of the agriculture and forestry sectors, protecting the environment, improving rural landscapes, and fostering economic diversification and a better quality of life in rural communities.

The implementation of Measure 41 has demonstrated significant progress in rural development through the selection of 163 LAGs in two sessions (2010 and 2012), with a total value of projects of over 453 million euro, supporting integrated local strategies, however, in 2013, although 1,964 projects were contracted, they represented only 20.67% of the PNDR target of 9,502 projects, and the actual contracted value of 69.9 million euro was only 23.61% of the allocated budget (National Network for Rural Development, LEADER, 2023) [15, 16].

According to the data reported by the 163 LAGs, the results indicate a significant coverage of the territory, with 78.34% of the target area and a population covered of 72.34% of the target.

Table 1. LAGs results 2007-2013

Indicator	Result obtained	Target foreseen	Achievement percentage (%)
Total area covered (km²)	142,267 km²	181,600 km²	78.34%
Total population in the territory (persons)	6,770,589 persons	9,360,000 people	72.34%
Total number of members in LAGs	6,942 members	5,285 members	131.35%
Number of private partners and NGOs in LAGs	5,103 partners	3,213 partners	158.82%
Number of projects contracted	2,040 projects	9,502 projects	21.47%

Source: According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR, 2024), the report on the status of submitted projects for the 2007–2013 programming period [11].

The number of LAG members exceeded the target, reaching 131.35% of the target, and the private partners and NGOs involved achieved an impressive 158.82% of the target. However, the number of contracted projects represents only 21.47% of the target of 9,502 (Table 1).

By the end of 2013, 12 contracts were terminated at the request of the beneficiaries and 7 contracts were finalized (4 in measure 411,121. 2 in measure 413,312 and 1 in measure 413,322), but due to the low number of finalized projects, the outcome indicators on jobs created and beneficiaries developing innovative activities have not been calculated and will be reported in future evaluations, according to the frequency set by the CMEF.

Measure 421 "Implementation of cooperation projects", in 2013 the first 6 projects were submitted under this measure, with a total public value of 77,834 thousand euro, but by December 31, 2013 their selection or contracting had not been carried out.

Measure 431 - sub-measure 431.1 "Building public-private partnerships", phases 1 and 2 of the sub-measure involved the organization of training courses for the LEADER approach, structured in four batches, each covering two development regions:

- Lot I: North-East (Bacău, Botoșani, Iași, Neamț, Suceava, Vaslui) and South-East (Brăila, Buzău, Constanța, Galați, Vrancea, Tulcea) regions.
- Lot II: South-Muntenia (Argeș, Călărași, Dâmbovița, Giurgiu, Ialomița, Prahova, Teleorman) and Bucharest-Ilfov regions.
- Lot III: South-West (Dolj, Gorj, Mehedinți, Olt, Vâlcea) and West (Arad, Caraș-Severin, Hunedoara, Timiș).
- Lot IV: North-West (Bihor, Bistrița-Năsăud, Cluj, Sălaj, Satu-Mare, Maramureș) and Center (Alba, Brașov, Covasna, Harghita, Mureș, Sibiu).

For the implementation of these activities, the total amount allocated, including the value of the contracts, was 1,704,000 thousand euro, thus the implementation of the phases of the sub-measure on the LEADER approach demonstrates a well-defined structure and a logical progression in preparing and supporting local actors for rural development.

The regional distribution of the approved projects shows a significant concentration in region 3 South Muntenia Targoviste, which has the highest share, representing 23.76% of the total number of projects, reflecting an active involvement and a considerable volume of local initiatives in this region, and region 7 Center Alba Iulia follows with a share of 19.80%, also indicating a high level of participation and absorption of available funds. In contrast, region 8 Bucharest Ilfov registers the lowest share of only 0.99% (Table 2).

Table 2. Regional distribution of approved projects

Region	Number of approved projects (M431.1)	Public value - thousands of euro
1 North-East Iasi	16	684,933
2 South East Constanta	8	308,740
3 South MunteniaTargoviste	24	1,101,705
4 South West Oltenia Craiova	6	179,489
5 West Timișoara	7	247,737
6 North-West Satu Mare	19	820,173
7 Center Alba Iulia	20	833,238
8 Bucharest Ilfov	1	25,970
Grand total	101	4,201,985

Source: According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR, 2024), the report on the status of submitted projects for the 2007–2013 programming period [11].

By the end of 2013, for measure 431.1, phases 1, 2 and 3, total payments of 4,850.505 thousand euro were made, of which the EAFRD contribution amounted to 3,880.404 thousand euro. The largest share of payments was directed to the preparation of LAG selection dossiers, amounting to EUR 3 193.188 thousand euro (65.83% of the total public contribution), highlighting the importance of this process in selecting and preparing LAGs for the implementation of local development strategies. The EAFRD contribution for this action amounted to 2,554.550 thousand euro, and for general training, payments amounted to 1,122.834 thousand euro, representing 23.15% of the total, with an EAFRD contribution of 898.267 thousand euro, reflecting the efforts made to prepare local actors in the LEADER approach. Payments for the specialized training of LAG representatives were lower, totalling 534.483 thousand euro (11.02% of the total), with an EAFRD contribution of 427.586 thousand euro, demonstrating a support focused on strengthening the skills of the groups already formed. The regional distribution of approved projects (committed amounts) as well as payments made are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Value of projects approved and paid per measure M431.1

Region	Amount approved (million euro)	Value paid (million euro)
North-East Iasi	1.20	0.82
South-East Constanța	0.60	0.51
South MunteniaTargoviste	0.24	0.18
South-West Oltenia Craiova	0.25	0.24
West Timișoara	0.31	0.24
North-West Satu Mare	0.68	0.60
Center Alba Iulia	0.82	0.68
Bucharest Ilfov	0.06	0.03

Source: According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR, 2024), the report on the status of submitted projects for the 2007–2013 programming period [11].

By the close of 2013, the measure had recorded substantial progress toward meeting its physical and financial objectives, despite a limited number of early terminations. Specifically, 10 contracts were cancelled at the request of beneficiaries. Nevertheless, a total of 104 contracts were successfully completed—4 during Phase 1, another 4 in Phase 2, and the remaining 96 in Phase 3—reflecting a concentrated effort on implementation and project completion during the final phase. In terms of physical targets, 181 actions (training sessions and strategies developed) were supported, representing an execution rate of 70.70% against the target of 256 actions, indicating good progress but with potential for improvement in reaching the full target. In financial terms, the execution rate was remarkable, reaching 87.69%, with payments made amounting to 4,850,505 thousand euro out of the total allocation of 5,531,676 thousand euro. This achievement reflects an efficient use of available resources. By the end of 2010, the contracts finalized under the measure have demonstrated significant progress in achieving the output indicator targets. As regards general training, a total of 1,578 persons successfully completed the training actions within the 64 sessions organized in phase 1. Compared to the NRDP target of 1,640 people, this represents an achievement rate of 96.2%, which indicates a performance close to the set target. For the specialized training of LAG representatives, 300 persons successfully completed the training during the 16 sessions organized in phase 2. This result fully reaches the NRDP target of 300 people, marking a 100% achievement.

Measure 431.2 "Local action group operation, skills acquisition and territorial animation"

By the end of 2013, Measure 431.2 demonstrated significant progress in contracting and implementing projects. In the first session, 25 contracts were signed in 2011, and the remaining 56 LAGs were contracted in 2012, reaching a total amount of 42.665,605 thousand euro for this session. In the second selection session, 6 contracts were signed in 2012 and the remaining 76 contracts were finalized in 2013, totalling a public value of 22.467,237 thousand euro. By the end of 2013, cumulative payments totalled 16,317.895 thousand euro, of which the EAFRD contribution was 14,665.384 thousand euro, representing a financial execution rate of 28.33% of the total allocation of 57,603.143 thousand euro. In the same year, payments made amounted to 12,283.715 thousand euro, with an EAFRD contribution of 10,832.913 thousand euro, reaching an execution rate of 21.32% of the allocation (Table 4).

Table 4. Payments made, by type of event

Component	Payments made (thousand euro)	Share of public contribution (%)	EAFRD contribution (thousand euro)
Component b - Studies on the areas concerned	565.35	3.46	507,344
Component b - Information provision measures	387,033	2.37	350,812
Component b - Staff training	611,405	3.75	553,431
Component b - Promotional events	558,404	3.42	504,155
Component b - Animation actions	58,654	0.36	49,483
Component a - Running the LAG - Other	14,195.7	86.99	12,749.64

Source: According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR, 2024), the report on the status of submitted projects for the 2007–2013 programming period [11].

U According to the data on the implementation of the two components, Component a - LAG operation absorbed the largest share of the funds, with total payments of 14,195.702 thousand euro, representing 86.99% of the public contribution paid, and the EAFRD contribution for this component was 12,749.644 thousand euro, emphasizing the importance of allocating resources for advances and operating expenses, essential for the LAGs' operability.

nder Component b - Training and territorial animation after LAG selection, resources were distributed among different types of activities:

- Training of staff involved in local strategies recorded the highest payments of 611.405 thousand euro, representing 3.75% of the public contribution, reflecting the emphasis on training local actors.
- promotional events, with payments of 558,404 thousand euro (3.42%), and studies on the areas concerned, with 565,350 thousand euro (3.46%), supported communication and territorial analysis activities.
- animation actions, with a smaller amount of 58,654 thousand euro (0.36%), supported local dynamization.
- measures aimed at providing information on the local development area and strategy received 387.033 thousand euro, representing 2.37% of the public contribution.

Implementation of the LEADER Axis 2014-2020

LEADER facilitates the development and implementation of local strategies tailored to the specific needs of communities, emphasizing the use of local resources and innovative approaches. Through the projects funded, LEADER supports both basic infrastructure such as broadband networks and related actions such as digital literacy or collaborative platforms, helping to better connect local needs with existing opportunities (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, LEADER (2023-2027), 2023) [9, 10].

Local Action Groups (LAGs) serve a vital role as facilitators in reinforcing local governance, fostering cooperation among public institutions, private stakeholders, and community members. The distinctive value of the LEADER approach stems from its support for innovative, community-driven initiatives that address locally identified challenges while promoting integrated and sustainable development. The experience accumulated thus far highlights the importance of financing actions that harness local potential and preserve territorial uniqueness, thereby aligning with the goals of the Common Agricultural Policy and the National Rural Development Programme (NRDP) through the continuous adaptation of strategies to evolving community needs.

Measure 19 - Support for local development LEADER (DLRC), is an essential strategic instrument for the revitalization and development of rural areas, responding directly to multiple identified needs, such as poverty reduction, preservation of local heritage, improvement of infrastructure and access to ICT, increasing employment and developing collaboration between rural actors, and the implementation of the measure through the four sub-measures (sM19.1 - preparatory support, sM19.2 - implementation of strategies, sM19.3 - cooperation, sM19.4 - operation and animation) allows the adaptation of solutions to the local specificity.

Local Development Strategies (LDS) implemented through LEADER are an essential tool for the revitalization and development of rural territories. These strategies target areas with a population of between 10,000 and 100,000 inhabitants, including communes and small towns, with a specific adaptation for the Danube Delta, where a minimum threshold of 5,000 inhabitants is accepted, thus these limitations ensure a critical mass of actors involved and a balance between local needs and opportunities.

Table 5 shows the allocations for measure M19 - Support for LEADER Local Development (DLRC) in the period 2014-2020.

Of the five categories presented, the major allocations are concentrated on the less developed regions, with a total planned contribution of 632,473,306 euro (about 98% of the total), in line with Art. 59 para. (3) lit. (In contrast, regions whose GDP per capita exceeds 75% of the EU average (Art. 59 para. (3) lit. (b)) received only 8,826,365 euro

(1.37% of the total) and financial instruments below EURI (Art. 59 para. (4) lit. (ea)) attracted a specific allocation of 26,168,700 euro, contributing to post-pandemic economic regeneration.

Table 5. Allocations M19 - Support for LEADER local development (DLRC)

Types of regions and allocations	Applicable rate EAFRD 2014-2022 (%)	Rate of financial contribution (%)	Financial instruments under the responsibility of the managing authority - Art. 59 para. (4) lit. (d)	Total planned Union contribution (euro)
Art. 59 para. (3) lit. (a) - Less developed regions, outermost regions and small Aegean islands	83.45%	0.00	0.00	632,473,306.00 (6B)
Art. 59 para. (4) lit. (e) - Operations financed from funds transferred to the EAFRD	100%	0.00	0.00	0.00 (6B)
Art. 59 para. (3) lit. (b) - All regions whose GDP per capita GDP exceeds 75% of the EU average GDP	74.29%	0.00	0.00	8,826,365.00 (6B)
Art. 59 para. (4) lit. (a) - LEADER local development measures	89.74%	0.00	0.00	0.00 (6B)
Art. 59 para. (4) lit. (ea) (EURI - NGEU) - Less developed regions & outermost regions	100%	0.00	26,168,700.00	26,168,700.00 (6B)

Source: European Investment Bank, SWECO, t33, University of Strathclyde – EPRC, Spatial Foresight, &infeurope, 2017 [7].

The applicable EAFRD rate varies between 74.29% and 100%, indicating flexibility in the use of funds for different types of regions, however, categories without planned contributions (e.g. Art. 59 para. (4) lit. (e)) indicate a non-existent use in some areas.

Measure M19 under LEADER 2014-2020, focusing on local development placed under community responsibility (DLRC), had a significant impact on rural development, targeting both preparatory support and implementation and cooperation through LAGs, thus 239 Local Action Groups were selected, covering a population of 9,610,132 people, reflecting a broad extension of the program in the 2014-2020 period (Table 6).

Table 6. Planned result indicator(s) 2014-2022

Title of the measure	Indicator name	Value	Of which financed by EURI
Measure 19 – Support for Local Development under the LEADER approach is aligned with Article 35 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, promoting initiatives that are led by local communities (DLRC – Development Locally Led Community).	Number of Local Action Groups (LAGs) selected	239.00	0.00
Through Measure 19, LEADER supports community-based development efforts, in line with the provisions of Article 35 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, under the framework of Community-led local development (CLLD).	Total population covered by the selected LAGs	9,610,132.00	0.00
The financial assistance offered via Measure 19 is rooted in the principles of participatory local development, as established in EU Regulation No 1303/2013, Article 35, and encourages active community involvement.	Total public funding allocated for preparatory support (Measure 19.1) – expressed in EUR	5,780,460.66	0
According to Article 35 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, Measure 19 provides a mechanism for implementing local strategies through community-led development, placing decision-making in the hands of local actors.	Total public funding for the implementation of operations under the Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) strategy (Measure 19.2) – in EUR	582,107,743.66	26,168,700.00
Community-Led Local Development (CLLD), supported by Measure 19 of the Rural Development Programme, is based on the legal framework set out in Article 35 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013.	Total public funding for the planning and execution of cooperation activities by LAGs (Measure 19.3) – in EUR	10,530,274.11	0
Measure 19 reinforces participatory rural development by empowering communities to design and implement local strategies, following the guidelines established by Article 35 of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013, which underpins the LEADER approach.	Total public funding dedicated to administrative and animation costs of LAGs (Measure 19.4) – in EUR)	142,550,547.65	0

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR) (2023). LEADER 2023-2027 [9].

In financial terms, the total public expenditure for the whole measure was structured as follows: preparatory support (19.1):5.78 million euro (0% EURI funding), implementation of operations (19.2): 582.1 million euro, of which 26.17 million euro funded from EURI, LAG cooperation (19.3): 10.53 million euro (0% EURI), operation and animation (19.4): 142.55 million euro(0% EURI) (SWOT analysis NSP V3, 2022) [13].

The majority of funds were allocated to the implementation of local strategies (19.2), accounting for 76% of total expenditure, while the operation and animation component (19.4) absorbed 18.7% of the budget, supporting the operational work of LAGs, and preparatory assistance (19.1) and cooperation (19.3) had smaller but essential contributions to project preparation and development.

The analysis shows a strategic allocation of funds to maximize the impact on rural communities, however, only 26.17 million euro was funded through the EURI, which underlines a limited use of this mechanism under the measure. The programme has demonstrated efficiency in mobilizing resources, but monitoring the effects remains essential to maximize results. The analysis of the implementation of sub-measures 19.1, 19.2 and 19.4 in 2016 is presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Status of projects submitted for LEADER in 2016

Sub-measure			Sub-measure 19.1	Sub-measure 19.2	Sub-measure 19.4
Projects submitted		No.	180		
		Value (euro)	2,435,307		
Projects selected		No.	175		
		Value (euro)	2,379,233		
Contracted projects	Contracted projects (ongoing and completed)	No.	164		168
		Value (euro)	2,224,725		52,629,069
	Completed projects	No.	138		
		Value (euro)	1,893,401		
	Terminated projects	No.	9		
		Value (euro)	122,482		
Projects transferred through the transition procedure	Contracted projects (ongoing and completed)	No.		2,260	
		Value (euro)		40,362,948	
	Completed projects	No.		793	
		Value (euro)		21,223,172	
	Terminated projects	No.		49	
		Value (euro)		290,757	
Payments made			1,961,693		3,735,603
Payments made (transition)				22,350,804	

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR) (2024). Status of submitted projects 2014-2020 [12].

Sub-measure 19.1, dedicated to the preparation of local development strategies, had a high success rate in 2016, out of 180 projects submitted, 175 were selected and 164 were contracted, reflecting an efficiency of over 90%. Out of these, 138 were finalized and only 9 were terminated, indicating good implementation, and the amount of payments made for this sub-measure was 1,961,693euro, highlighting an efficient use of resources.

Sub-measure 19.2, oriented towards the implementation of actions in the framework of local strategies, was implemented exclusively through the transition procedure, with 2,260 projects transferred, amounting to 40,362,948 euro, in addition, 793 finalized projects amounted to 21,223,172 euro, which denotes a significant impact on rural areas. The sub-measure 19.4, which supports the functioning and animation of Local Action Groups, recorded a total value of contracted projects of 52,629,069euro, although there were no terminated or finalized projects, payments made of 3,735,603euro indicate the start of implementation.

In 2017, the implementation of the NRDP through sub-measures 19.1, 19.2 and 19.4 made significant progress in supporting local development and rural communities (Table 8).

Table 8. Status of projects submitted for LEADER in 2017

Sub-measure			Sub-measure 19.1	Sub-measure 19.2	Sub-measure 19.4
Projects submitted		No.	180	834	
		Value (euro)	2,435,307	51,371,554	
Projects selected		No.	175	209	
		Value (euro)	2,379,233	10,281,239	
Contracted projects	Contracted projects (ongoing and completed)	No.	164	209	239
		Value (euro)	2,224,725	10,281,239	69,849,325
	Completed projects	No.	151		
		Value (euro)	2,072,523		
	Terminated projects	No.	9		
		Value (euro)	122,482		
Projects transferred through the transition procedure	Contracted projects (ongoing and completed)	No.		2,203	2
		Value (euro)		39,849,781	311,041.7
	Completed projects	No.		1,597	
		Value (euro)		32,342,609	
	Terminated projects	No.		106	
		Value (euro)		703,603.1	
Payments made			1,975,01593	2,982,700	30,957,366
Payments made (transition)				30,697,735	

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR) (2024). Status of submitted projects 2014-2020 [12].

Under sub-measure 19.1, in 2017, 180 projects were submitted, 175 were selected and 164 contracted, representing an implementation rate of over 90%, of which 151 were finalized and only 9 were terminated, with payments made of 1,975,015euro. Submeasure 19.2, had 834 projects submitted, but only 209 were selected and contracted, with a total value of 10,281,239 euro, and through the transition procedure, 2,203 projects were transferred and 1,597 of them were finalized, worth 32,342,609 euro, however, 106 projects were finished, indicating some difficulties in implementation. Sub-measure 19.4, contracted 239 projects with a total value of 69,849,325 euro, although payments made amounted to 30,957,366euro, no project was finalized, which underlines the need for more rigorous monitoring.

Table 9. Status of projects submitted for LEADER in 2018

Sub-measure			Sub-measure 19.1	Sub-measure 19.2	Sub-measure 19.3	Sub-measure 19.4
Public allocation PNDR 2014-2020 (euro)			1,990,183	495,598,466.1	16,987,679	123,013,164
Projects submitted		No.	180	5,080	36	
		Value (euro)	2,435,307	287,480,540.8	116,559	
Selected projects		No.	175	3,828	15	
		Value (euro)	2,379,233	227,721,985.8	59,952,87	
Contracted projects	Contracted projects (ongoing and completed)	No.	164	3,818		239
		Value (euro)	2,224,725	227,170,349.5		69,970,187
	Finalized projects	No.	161	196		
		Value (euro)	2,196,372	13,154,605.46		
	Terminated projects	No.	9	10		
		Value (euro)	122,482	487,077.5		
Projects transferred through the transition procedure	Contracted projects (ongoing and completed)	No.		2,188		2
		Value (euro)		39,582,677.7		311,041.7
	Finalized projects	No.		1,831		
		Value (euro)		34,898,919.32		
	Terminated projects	No.		121		
		Value (euro)		964,929.5		
Payments made			1,975,015	72,062,431.95		50,457,524
Payments made (transition)				32,630,212.13		39,201.31

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR) (2024). Status of submitted projects 2014-2020 [12].

In 2018, the execution of sub-measures 19.1, 19.2, 19.3, and 19.4 reflected a high level of involvement in rural development initiatives, while also revealing certain difficulties in bringing projects to completion (Table 9).

Under sub-measure 19.1, in 2018, 180 projects were submitted, 175 selected and 164 contracted, of which 161 were finalized and only 9 terminated, reflecting efficient implementation and payments made amounted to 1,975,015 euro, consolidating the progress made in previous years. Sub-measure 19.2, this sub-measure was much larger in scale, with 5,080 projects submitted and 3,828 selected, with a value of 227,721,986euro, of which 3,818 projects were contracted and 196 completed, with payments made totaling 39,582,678 euro and relatively few projects terminated (121), indicating an ongoing implementation process but with a need to accelerate towards completion.

Sub-measure 19.3, component A, focusing on cooperation activities of Local Action Groups, had only 36 projects submitted and 15 selected, none of which were contracted, and sub-measure 19.4 with 239 contracted projects amounting to 69,970,187 euro, with payments made of 50,457,524 euro, with no completed projects, which highlights an incomplete implementation and the need for improved monitoring.

The implementation of sub-measures 19.1, 19.2, 19.3 and 19.4 in 2019 reflected varied progress in rural development (Table 10).

Table 10. Status of projects submitted for LEADER in 2019

Sub-measure			Sub-measure 19.1	Sub-measure 19.2	Sub-measure 19.3 - Component A	Sub-measure 19.3 - Component B	Sub-measure 19.4
Public allocation PNDR 2014-2020 (euro)			1,990,183	495,598,466.1	16,987,679		123,013,164
Projects submitted		No.	180	7,338	57	9	
		Value (euro)	2,435,307	404,527,895.9	203,264	1,271,633	
Selected projects		No.	175	6,206	55		
		Value (euro)	2,379,233	355,652,826.8	193,297.4		
Contracted projects	Contracted projects (ongoing and completed)	No.	164	6,147	51		239
		Value (euro)	2,224,725	352,139,067.6	171,433		70,250,525.08
	Finalized projects	No.	161	1,295	38		
		Value (euro)	2,196,372	77,932,466.31	125,954		
	Terminated projects	No.	9	59			
		Value (euro)	122,482	3,217,157.31			
Projects transferred through the transition procedure	Contracted projects (ongoing and completed)	No.		2,014			2
		Value (euro)		38,826,108.01			311,041.72
	Finalized projects	No.		1,857			2
		Value (euro)		36,085,828.19			311,041.72
	Terminated projects	No.		295			
		Value (euro)		1,722,999.19			
Payments made			1,975,015	168,606,400.5	94,745.83		60,766,825.06
Payments made (transition)				32,843,278.81			39,201.31

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR) (2024). Status of submitted projects 2014-2020 [12].

In 2019, sub-measure 19.1 demonstrated a steady performance with 180 projects submitted, 175 selected and 164 contracted, of which 161 finalized and only 9 terminated, confirming an efficient implementation, and payments made totaling 1,975,015 euro, a similar level to previous years, indicating stability in the pace of implementation. Sub-measure 19.2 had an intense activity, with 7,338 projects submitted and 6,206 selected, representing a contracted value of 355,652,827 euro, however, out of 6,147 contracted projects, only 1,295 were finalized, which highlights difficulties in implementation, despite a significant economic impact reflected by total payments of 168,606,401 euro.

Component A of sub-measure 19.3 made modest progress, with 57 projects submitted, 55 selected, 51 contracted and 38 completed, and payments made amounting to 94,746euro, while Component B did not show any notable activity, with no projects contracted or completed. Sub-measure 19.4 supported the functioning of Local Action Groups with 239 contracted projects amounting to 70,250,525 euro, but payments made of 60,766,825 euro were not associated with finalized projects, indicating delays in execution. In 2020, the implementation of the NRDP 2014-2020 demonstrated intense activity and significant utilization of available funds under sub-measures 19.1, 19.2, 19.3 and 19.4 (Table 11).

Table 11. Status of projects submitted for LEADER in 2020

Sub-measure			Sub-measure 19.1	Sub-measure 19.2	Sub-measure 19.3 - Component A	Sub-measure 19.3 - Componenta B	Sub-measure 19.4
Public allocation PNDR 2014-2020 (euro)			1,990,183	495,641,759.2	16,987,679		123,013,164
Funding applications submitted		No.	180	8,040	69	42	
		Value (euro)	2,435,307	435,681,744.9	260,439	9,095,054	
Selected funding applications		No.	175	7,132	69	30	
		Value (euro)	2,379,233	402,409,965.7	260,438.9	6,488,413	
Contracts/ Funding Decisions	Contracts/Funding Decisions (ongoing and finalized)	No.	162	6,998	62	25	478
		Value (euro)	2,209,131	393,789,990.3	222,783.4	1,013,050	99,750,304.79
	Finalized Contracts/Funding Decisions	No.	161	3,089	50		239
		Value (euro)	2,196,372	170,908,068.2	166,429		70,107,404
	Terminated contracts/financing decisions	No.	11	134	4		
		Value (euro)	138,076.3	8,189,289.44	19,966.66		
Contracts/ Funding Decisions transferred through the transition procedure	Contracts/Funding Decisions (ongoing and finalized)	No.		1,937			2
		Value (euro)		38,274,222.74			311,041.72
	Finalized Contracts/Funding Decisions	No.		1,871			2
		Value (euro)		36,745,016.04			311,041.72
	Contracte/Decizii de finanțare reziliate	No.		372			
		Value (euro)		2,271,685.05			
Payments made			1,975,015	252,084,104.8	116,988.9		77,288,330.75
Payments made (transition)				33,039,511.01			39,201.31

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR) (2024). Status of submitted projects 2014-2020 [12].

In 2020, sub-measure 19.1 maintained steady progress with 180 applications submitted and 175 selected, of the 162 contracts signed, 161 were finalized and only 11 were terminated, reflecting efficient implementation. The payments made, amounting to 1,975,015euro, confirmed continued progress compared to previous years. Sub-measure 19.2 recorded the highest activity with 8,040 applications submitted and 7,132 selected, totaling 435,681,745 euro, and out of the 6,998 contracts signed, 3,089 were finalized and payments made amounted to 252,084,105euro, underlining a considerable economic impact on rural areas.

In sub-measure 19.3, component A had 69 applications submitted and selected, of which 62 were contracted and 50 finalized, with modest payments of 116,989 euro, while component B had less activity, with 42 applications submitted, 30 contracted and 25 ongoing, but no finalized projects. Sub-measure 19.4 supported 478 contracts amounting to 99,750,305 euro, of which 239 have been finalized and payments made of 77,288,331 euro reflect progress.

CONCLUSIONS

The research emphasizes the beneficial effects of funding provided under Measure 19 – LEADER, showing that it plays a vital role in advancing sustainable rural development. This is achieved through the implementation of Local Development Strategies that promote economic diversification, enhance infrastructure, and help safeguard cultural heritage. An important element of this approach is the strengthening of Local Action Groups' institutional capacity, particularly through the development of public-private partnerships and the encouragement of innovative projects. As a result, the process has deepened community engagement, fostered social cohesion, and contributed to improving living standards in disadvantaged rural areas. The comparative analysis of performance between the 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 periods emphasizes the increased efficiency of resource allocation in the recent phase, thanks to the introduction of additional sub-measures such as 19.1 (preparatory support) and 19.3 (cooperation), and from the economic point of view, the projects carried out have generated jobs, stimulated entrepreneurship and facilitated access to basic services.

In the North-East region, the equitable distribution of funds and the strategic selection of projects have contributed to reducing territorial disparities, however, challenges identified include slower project implementation in some sub-measures and limited use of some financial instruments, thus to maximize impact, rigorous monitoring of implementation and continued support to LAGs' operational capacity is recommended.

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