

3. Country profiles: CLLD implementation by Member State

Most of the information provided in the following country profiles comes from the direct contact of the FSU team with MAs, NNs and FLAGs and has the cut-off date of 31 March 2020. For countries where available, this information will be later complemented with Infosys figures when the data is made available by the FAME Support Unit (cut-off date 31/12/2019), using graphics to represent progress with both implementation and project objectives.

Bulgaria



Total public budget for fisheries CLLD	17.9 M€
Total CLLD budget committed by 31 March 2020 (%)	5.1 M€ (26.7%)
Total CLLD budget spent by 31 March 2020 (%)	2.5 M€ (6.9%)
Average budget per FLAG (total public)	2.2 M€
No. of FLAGs selected by March 2020	9
Date FLAGs selected	8 FLAGs December 2017, 1 FLAG in May 2019
Type of selection process	Two-stage
No. of projects selected/approved by 31 March 2020	19
Difference from 31 March 2019	+19
National Network	Yes, became operational in December 2019
Can FLAG implement multi-funded strategies?	No

Implementation progress

2019 has been an important year for the Bulgarian programme which has finally progressed with implementation. FLAGs have started to submit their prepared calls for projects to the MA in spring 2019, with the MA launching the first project calls in the summer. The first FLAG projects were approved by the MA in early 2020. A capacity-building meeting took place in June 2019 and the FSU participated in a technical meeting between the MA and FLAGs in November 2019. Both events were linked to issues with implementation. The National network also became operational in 2019. The contract for the support unit contractor for the National Fisheries Network (NFN) was signed in November 2019, and the network became operational shortly afterwards.

Problems encountered, issues to be addressed

Implementation challenges relate to slow project selection and approval processes. The first FLAG calls for projects were only launched in June 2019, and the first projects were approved by the MA in early 2020. This lengthy six-month delay is due to high levels of bureaucracy in the Bulgarian system. The MA has made efforts to mitigate these delays and the concerns raised over its administrative capacity to cope with checking the eligibility of the project proposals in a timely manner. Improvements have been made but the situation requires further monitoring. The MA and FLAGs must learn from the mistakes made and substantially improve the design and the implementation of fisheries CLLD in the next programming period.

The National Fisheries Network (NFN) Support Unit's activities were put in place in November 2019 after a delay of several years. Unfortunately, the launch of the NFN Support Unit is not expected to support the MA in terms of implementation and an adequate working relationship between the service provider and the FSU, MA and FLAGs has yet to be achieved. An uneasy relationship between the MA (and FLAGs) and the contractor has been observed, which undermines any useful activity regarding the networking for FLAGs. This is an ongoing and problematic situation and efforts have to be made to remedy the situation.

Croatia



Total public budget for fisheries CLLD	29.2 M€
Total CLLD budget committed by 31 March 2020 (%)	Data not available
Total CLLD budget spent by 31 March 2020 (%)	Data not available
Average budget per FLAG (total public)	2.1 M€
No. of FLAGs selected by March 2020	14
Date FLAGs selected	December 2017
Type of selection process	Two-stage
No. of projects selected/approved by 31 March 2020	1
Difference from 31 March 2019	+1
National Network	Yes, but only partly operational
Can FLAG implement multi-funded strategies?	No, but some FLAGs have close connections with LEADER LAGs

Implementation progress

The speed of implementation in Croatia remains slow. FLAGs were only able to start launching calls for projects in late spring 2019, and only one project (which falls under preparatory support) has been approved by the MA. Despite the delays in implementation, the FLAGs remain committed and there have been several informal exchanges, facilitated by the National Network which is now partly operational.

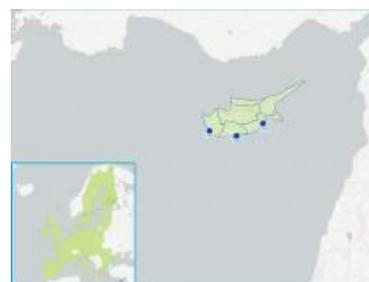
The MA has opted for a National Network chaired and managed formally by the FLAGs themselves, but all funding decisions rest with the MA. The main networking opportunity in 2019 was the 'SEE LEADER' conference in November, organised by the Croatian LEADER network. Both the MA and the FSU were present. Since attending the LEADER event, FARNET proposed that the MA hosts a similar national event on fisheries CLLD at some point in 2020. Following slow progress in organising this national event, the FSU proposed the MA as host of the FARNET transnational seminar for the Mediterranean and Black Sea, set to take place in late 2020, with the intention of giving impetus to the MA in progressing with its national event. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been little progress.

Problems encountered, issues to be addressed

Although national legislation is now in place, FLAGs lack specific support and guidance from the MA, which is continuously short staffed. There has been no designated contact person for CLLD/UP4 in the MA since September 2019, which has impacted on progress and slow implementation. It would appear as though the MA does not really feel responsible for the implementation of UP4, and instead places all of the responsibility on the FLAGs. More specific support (and pressure) needs to be provided by the FSU and DG MARE to ensure progress, and to ensure the functional networking and capacity building of FLAGs. The FSU has not received any specific information from the MA with regards to the impact COVID-19.

The National Network contacted the FSU in April 2020 with questions related to legal interpretation which were answered in consultation with DG AGRI. This did not have any negative consequences on the implementation, according to the MA.

Cyprus



Total public budget for fisheries CLLD	7 M€
Total CLLD budget committed by 31 March 2020 (%)	2.5 M€ (35%)
Total CLLD budget spent by 31 March 2020 (%)	0.7 M€ (9%)
Average budget per FLAG (total public)	2.3 M€
No. of FLAGs selected by March 2020	3
Date FLAGs selected	November 2016
Type of selection process	Two-stage

No. of projects selected/approved by 31 March 2020	13
Difference from 31 March 2019	+11
National Network	Yes, and operational (the MA fulfils this function)
Can FLAG implement multi-funded strategies?	No, but all FLAGs also manage Leader funding (under separate strategies)

Implementation progress

In the first years, implementation was slow, and it has been gradually picking up in 2019-2020. All three FLAGs have now launched calls for both public and private sector. The private sector schemes are supporting processing and marketing sector and investments for fish taverns. The MA is expecting significant progress in contracting and payments to beneficiaries by the end of 2020. No cooperation projects have been approved as yet, but seven such projects have been submitted and are under evaluation.

Problems encountered, issues to be addressed

While there have been no major issues with implementation, the budget committed and spent in Cyprus is still primarily attributed to FLAG running costs (1.4 M€ and €524,000 respectively), and as such, progress on projects is still slow. FLAGs are not going to implement special measures due to the COVID-19 situation, but the private sector schemes already announced are expected to help the sector through the crisis.

Denmark



Total public budget for fisheries CLLD	8.8 M€
Total CLLD budget committed by 31 March 2020 (%)	6.3 M€ (72%)
Total CLLD budget spent by 31 March 2020 (%)	2.8 M€ (32%)
Average budget per FLAG (total public)	0.88 M€
No. of FLAGs selected by March 2020	10
Date FLAGs selected	May 2016
Type of selection process	One-stage
No. of projects selected/approved by 31 March 2020	239

Difference from 31 March 2019	+57
National Network	Yes, in place
Can FLAG implement multi-funded strategies?	No; 7 FLAGs are also LAGs but manage separate strategies for each Fund

Implementation progress

Overall implementation is proceeding well, and preparation for the next programming period is under way. However, FLAGs would like administration to be simplified in the next period. The MA and NN have put in place a series of workshops involving a few FLAG representatives to develop ideas and suggestions on how administrative procedures can be simplified.

Problems encountered, issues to be addressed

There are good informal exchanges between FLAGs and the MA/NN who organise regular meetings. However, meetings tend to only focus on delivery issues as opposed to thematic discussions. The FSU has had several exchanges on the low number of cooperation projects in Denmark, and while the MA and NN have taken some suggestion on board in their reflection for the next programming period, the situation in the current period is not expected to change given that the programme is now 72% complete.

FLAGs have not reformulated their Local Development Strategies in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, they are providing support to local fisheries communities by relaying national COVID-19 schemes aimed at helping local businesses and fishers to reach the help and support they need. Such schemes in Denmark are accessible due to extensive media coverages and a national PR initiative. National schemes in Denmark available to fishers and other small-scale business (which CLLD in Denmark mostly supports) can apply for aid including deadline extensions for taxes and credit schemes, payroll compensation for employees (up to 75% of staff wages), and compensation for fixed business expenses including rent and amenities.

Estonia



Total public budget for fisheries CLLD	30.9 M€
Total CLLD budget committed by 31 March 2020 (%)	20.4 M€ (66%)
Total CLLD budget spent by 31 March 2020 (%)	13.9 M€ (45%)
Average budget per FLAG (total public)	3.5 M€

No. of FLAGs selected by March 2020	8
Date FLAGs selected	December 2016
Type of selection process	One-stage
No. of projects selected/approved by 31 March 2020	905
Difference from 31 March 2019	+386
National Network	Yes, and operational
Can FLAG implement multi-funded strategies?	No

Implementation progress

Implementation in Estonia ran smoothly in 2019. The unification of some municipalities has resulted in many communities acquiring services that previously only the bigger municipalities could provide. While many fisheries communities have benefited from these changes, in some cases it has slowed down the progress of operations led by some of the smaller municipalities, mainly due to the process of transferring legal rights to the newly formed entities.

There was an EMFF budget reallocation in 2019, meaning that the new total public budget for fisheries CLLD is about €30.9 million (an increase of €3 million). The additional funds have been allocated to five of the eight FLAGs in Estonia. FLAGs were selected for additional funding if they had committed at least 40% of their original budget (as of December 2018). These FLAGs had turned down several project applications due to lack of funding, highlighting a strong interest in fisheries CLLD in Estonia. By the end of March 2020, €20.4 million (66%) of the total budget had been committed, €13.9 million (45%) of which had been paid to beneficiaries. In preparing for the next programming period, in 2019, the MA organised a series of workshops with FLAGs.

The National Network has continued in its good work of previous years, organising annual FLAG meetings in 2019 and 2020, and a third International Baltic Sea Fisheries Forum in May 2019. The NN has also continued to offer technical support to FLAGs, translating FARNET material (e.g. guides) when necessary.

Problems encountered, issues to be addressed

There have been no specific problems with implementation in Estonia. However, some concerns have been raised about the skills of FLAGs in relation to the management of their local development strategies. While local development goals are being achieved, some FLAGs are performing better than others. The MA aims to give targeted support to underperforming FLAGs through thematic workshops and the sharing of good practices.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had minimal impact on implementation. There have been some issues related to administration which FLAGs have counteracted by taking meetings online and extending deadlines. Local fishing communities have remained resilient to the pandemic, putting a lot of effort into cooperative efforts such as joint online marketing initiatives to maintain sales during this crisis. Fishers have adopted selling via social media networks and online sales sites, something that was not widespread in the sector before the pandemic.

Finland



Total public budget for fisheries CLLD	€9.4 M€
Total CLLD budget committed by 31 March 2020 (%)	7.4 M€ (79%)
Total CLLD budget spent by 31 March 2020 (%)	4.2 M€ (45%)
Average budget per FLAG (total public)	0.94 M€
No. of FLAGs selected by March 2020	10
Date FLAGs selected	July 2016
Type of selection process	One-stage
No. of projects selected/approved by 31 March 2020	220
Difference from 31 March 2019	+50
National Network	Yes, and in place
Can FLAG implement multi-funded strategies?	No, but FLAGs usually cover the area of several LAGs and are managed by one of them

Implementation progress

As reported in 2019, most FLAGs have exhausted most of their budget for the current reporting period. This is due to the timely implementation of FLAG local development strategies. €7.4 million was committed by 31 March 2020, nearly 80% of the total public budget, of which nearly half has been spent (€4.2 million). FLAGs, therefore, have to reject a number of project proposals. This shortage of funding has led to the MA considering the future of fisheries CLLD and the possibility of it being encompassed under the EAFRD programme instead of the EMFF. A multi-fund approach is also being considered. In January, the FSU attended a meeting between the MA and FLAGs which focused on this matter and which was largely positive. FLAGs being able to select projects related to private businesses was raised as a solution for them to receive more funding in the next period.

The role of NN coordinator has been withdrawn and will not be replaced. Instead, the MA plans to install a Communications Officer who will act as a coordinator for both the fisheries NN and the National Rural Network (NRN).

Problems encountered, issues to be addressed

In general, implementation has progressed well and there have been no specific issues as reflected in the budget committed and spent figures. One problem that persists is the 25% limit for FLAG administration and animation costs which still need to be addressed. In 2019, the Rural Resources Institute Finland (Luke)

evaluated the MA and FLAGs. Issues identified in this evaluation included the lack of a simple process for co-operation projects between areas. Also raised were challenges related to lack of clarity (and communication) in the role of FLAGs in relation to other actors in the fisheries sector. FLAGs not being able to fund business-related projects is central to this disconnect.

The FSU has not received any specific information from the MA with regards to the impact of COVID-19. However, some FLAGs have been supporting stakeholders in cooperative efforts to shorten supply chains in an effort to mitigate the impact of the pandemic is having on imports.

France



Total public budget for fisheries CLLD	45.2 M€*
Total CLLD budget committed by 31 March 2020 (%)	8.2 M€ (18%)
Total CLLD budget spent by 31 March 2020 (%)	3.2 M€ (7%)
Average budget per FLAG (total public)	2 M€
No. of FLAGs selected by March 2020	23
Date FLAGs selected	May 2017
Type of selection process	Two-stage
No. of projects selected/approved by 31 March 2020	241
Difference from 31 March 2019	+139
National Network	On standby since the NN Coordinator left in 2019 and has yet to be replaced
Can FLAG implement multi-funded strategies?	No, but some are led by Pays which also manage LEADER

**This does not reflect the performance reserve that France "lost" in 2019: the 6% reduction has not been entered in Infosys nor does it reflect an expected reduction linked with the mobilisation of Measure 33 in response to Covid-19.*

Implementation progress

CLLD implementation is progressing in France with the number of local projects selected by the FLAGs standing at 416 at the end of March 2020. However, the delivery system continues to be slow and only 241 of these projects are formally approved by the relevant region. Moreover, only 188 are entered in France's IT system, Osiris. Still, this represents a fair increase in approved projects from this time last year

(from 102 to 241 approved projects) and, with 23 FLAGs in place, implies an average of around 11 projects per FLAG.

In terms of commitment of budget and spending, based on the 188 projects entered in the system, only around 18% of France’s CLLD budget has been committed (a total commitment of €8,248,595, of which just €3,118,938 has been spent). Once the reductions to the CLLD budget mentioned above are integrated, and the projects in the pipeline processed, commitments will be closer to 50% of the total budget.

However, the level of implementation varies significantly from one region to another and while the delivery system is, on paper, the same in each region, in practice some regions manage to turn around projects much more quickly than others. For example, in Region Sud, the two FLAGs have selected 16 projects, only eight of which have been approved by the region and in Brittany, of the 49 projects selected by the eight FLAGs only 20 - not even half - have yet been approved. At the other end of the scale, the four FLAGs in Nouvelle Aquitaine have selected 87 projects, of which 76 have been approved by the region.

Problems encountered, issues to be addressed

There is a recognition by the MA and certain regions that the delivery system needs to be improved in the 2021-27 period and, with support from the FSU, discussions have started to explore how to make the system lighter and more efficient.

This issue has not been helped by the loss of the national network coordinator in October 2019 who was put in place very late (2018) but by 2019 was starting to have a positive impact on communication between the FLAGs, IBs and MA, and subsequently on implementation.

With regards to the current situation linked to Covid-19, CLLD is affected to different degrees in different regions. However, the regions have been informed by the MA that they are to re-direct funds towards Measure 33 and it is likely that on top of the 6% reduction linked to the performance reserve in 2019, FLAG budgets may be cut again.

Germany



Total public budget for fisheries CLLD	24.6 M€
Total CLLD budget committed by 31 March 2020 (%)	12.1 M€ (59%)
Total CLLD budget spent by 31 March 2020 (%)	4 M€ (20%)

Average budget per FLAG (total public)	0.85 M€
No. of FLAGs selected by March 2020	29
Date FLAGs selected	October 2016
Type of selection process	One-stage
No. of projects selected/approved by 31 March 2020	150
Difference from 31 March 2019	-*
National Network	Only activities organised by the regional MAs
Can FLAG implement multi-funded strategies?	No, but in some regions FLAGs are managed by LAGs

**In light of the COVID-19 crisis, the MA has been unable to contact the regional authorities for an update on projects selected and has therefore not indicated how many new projects have been selected.*

Implementation progress

The speed of implementation in Germany continues to differ between regions. Difficulties persist for many FLAGs in being proactive with their relatively small budgets, and also, in integrating with their respective LEADER groups which have considerably higher budgets. Specifically, in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, only a few projects have been approved due to a strict interpretation of national rules which resulted in FLAGs intervening with the regional minister. Progress has since been made. In Lower Saxony, the one FLAG in the region is performing very well, and has benefited from an increased UP4 budget following an OP modification in 2019.

Despite long discussions between the regional MAs and the emergence of several possibilities, the establishment of a FLAG network is yet to materialise. However, networking events organised by the regional MAs with the help of a FLAG host have taken place. This included meetings in Saxony (for the inland FLAGs) and Lower Saxony which took place in July and November, respectively. In these meetings, discussions on implementation issues took place at national level for the first time. The next meeting for coastal FLAGs will take place in November 2020 in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania.

Greece



Total public budget for fisheries CLLD	70.5 M€
Total CLLD budget committed by 31 March 2020 (%)	11.6 M€ (16%)

Total CLLD budget spent by 31 March 2020 (%)	3.5 M€ (5%)
Average budget per FLAG (total public)	2.1 M€
No. of FLAGs selected by March 2020	33
Date FLAGs selected	October 2016
Type of selection process	Two-stage
No. of projects selected/approved by 31 March 2020	0
Difference from 31 March 2019	0
National Network	No, there has been no progress with the NN as yet
Can FLAG implement multi-funded strategies?	Yes, 31 of the 33 FLAGs do so

Implementation progress

The start of implementation in Greece was extremely slow due to the complexity of the process of making FLAGs IBs. This has now been finalised and all the FLAGs are working on their calls, separately for public and private projects. A draft (or model) of each type of call (public and private) is developed nationally by the MA to ensure conformity with national law, and then each FLAG's call (once the model has been adapted to the local context) has to be checked by the MA before it can be launched.

For the public calls this process has progressed over 2019, and there are now 14 public calls that have been approved by the MA and launched by FLAGs (a total amount of €8 million), and a further six calls have been approved but not yet launched (for nearly 3 M€). Work on the private calls is underway at the MA level (using distance meetings with other stakeholders where necessary), the model is going to be sent to the FLAGs and public agencies for last comments shortly. The MA encourages the FLAGs to meanwhile go ahead with the preparatory work, to avoid further delays once the draft call is ready. Some cooperation projects are already underway, and they undergo a different procedure (approval by MA not FLAGs). However, formally none of them has been approved yet.

Problems encountered, issues to be addressed

The implementation process in Greece continues to lag behind, with no projects formally approved by March 2020 (although the MA is expecting the first public projects to be approved still in May), and the only commitments and expenditures cover FLAG running costs and animation. Approval of public calls by the MA took longer than expected, apparently, some FLAGs did not understand that certain parts of the model call cannot be changed, so numerous corrections were needed.

The launch of public call took longer than expected due to a number of reasons. Elections in Greece played a role. Changes of personnel in the local authorities, briefing of the new persons by the FLAGs on the public projects proposed by the previous authorities and new consultations between the FLAGs and the new persons led to delays. Solving technical issues (authorising FLAGs to have access to the electronic system to launch the calls) by the Ministry also took more time than expected.

It is hoped that the public sector will shortly be able to start implementing projects. Some FLAGs initially noted a certain reluctance from municipalities to apply for CLLD funding, but this does not seem to be a general issue. The deadline for public calls was extended by two months due to the COVID-19 crisis.

The preparation of private calls is still with the MA, who wanted to simplify the procedure but the agency for state aid insisted on approving the draft call – this appears to be a better solution than the state aid agency having to approve 33 FLAG calls separately.

Some FLAGs are anticipating more demand for projects than their budgets can address and are requesting additional funding. The MA is not sure it will be possible to find such additional funding (although an unofficial request has been made), because all the unused EMFF funding should be reallocated to address the COVID-19 crisis.

The fishing sector is not yet strongly affected by the crisis (except for the time when they were not allowed to go fishing), however, this may become a serious problem over the summer. Aquaculture producers are more affected, they lost their export markets (mainly Spain and Italy) and are asking government support to buy fish feed. Some FLAGs are trying to take COVID-19 into account already now, e.g. modifying public calls to equip medical stations in villages, however, they are not yet able to support the private sector since the calls are not ready.

There have been some discussions concerning the preparation of the post-2020 funding period, but until now there have been no major consultations involving the FLAGs.

Ireland



Total public budget for fisheries CLLD	12.1 M€
Total CLLD budget committed by 31 March 2020 (%)	12.1 M€ (100%)
Total CLLD budget spent by 31 March 2020 (%)	7.3 M€ (60%)
Average budget per FLAG (total public)	1.7 M€
No. of FLAGs selected by March 2020	7
Date FLAGs selected	November 2016
Type of selection process	Two-stage
No. of projects selected/approved by 31 March 2020	731
Difference from 31 March 2019	+159
National Network	Yes, in place since 2015
Can FLAG implement multi-funded strategies?	No

Implementation progress

Implementation continues to go well with all FLAGs still receiving a high level of applications. Significant progress has been made in speeding up eligibility checks with the recruitment and training of three new staff within the IB.

To date, there has been limited progress on the establishment of a National Network support unit and limited appetite from FLAGs for cooperation projects. The one-year cycle of the Irish programme does not lend itself to cooperation projects, which from experience, and by their very nature, take longer to develop than local ones.

Problems encountered, issues to be addressed

FLAG meetings have continued, virtually, during the COVID-19 outbreak, thanks to groundwork that was put in place prior to the outbreak (e.g. meeting papers being available electronically) but there was almost no activity on the ground during this period.

FLAG project approvals are still in progress for 2020 as there has been a delay due to the COVID-19 crisis and the fact that the FLAG budgets are nearly fully committed. The IB is trying to secure extra funds for project approvals for 2020 but due to COVID-19 this is more difficult as excess funds have been diverted to the 'tie-up' scheme which supports fishers impacted by their inability to work over the last months.

Italy



Total public budget for fisheries CLLD	84.9 M€
Total CLLD budget committed by 31 March 2020 (%)	45.7 M€ (53%)
Total CLLD budget spent by 31 March 2020 (%)	18.8 M€ (22%)
Average budget per FLAG (total public)	1.5 M€
No. of FLAGs selected by March 2020	53
Date FLAGs selected	December 2017
Type of selection process	One-stage
No. of projects selected/approved by 31 March 2020	453
Difference from 31 March 2019	+205

National Network	Yes. Started in 2017, budget 2 M€, 4 FTE
Can FLAG implement multi-funded strategies?	No, except for in the Puglia region

Implementation progress

With the exception of one FLAG in Sicily, all FLAGs are now operational and have committed budgets. The preparation of the next programming period has started at national level through a FLAG meeting which took place in October 2019. The National Network distributed a report on the meeting to the intermediate bodies (IBs) and FLAGs unable to attend. The NN has committed to producing a similar report for every future national meeting. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, some FLAGs, those with smaller budgets, have decided to change their LDS, shifting budgets foreseen for cooperation activities towards more core FLAG working areas.

Problems encountered, issues to be addressed

Differences in procedure and capacity between the IBs of the 15 regions remains a bottleneck for the implementation of the programme. As such, commitment levels vary substantially between regions: 16% (Lazio) and 68% (Emilia-Romagna), as do spending levels: 8% (Puglia) and 38% (Emilia-Romagna). With an average spending level of 22%, the impact of the programme for many regions remains rather limited at this stage of the implementation process.

Problems persist in terms of lengthy project approval procedures and delays in payments. Part of the problem is that the MA does not take responsibility in guiding the IBs, insisting that the IBs find their own solutions. The NN continues to organise three national events a year, supporting the MA and the IBs with delivery issues. However, there has been no news about the two sub-networks (Adriatic and Mediterranean) that were established in 2018.

The working relationship between the FSU and the MA/NN has become increasingly complicated over a prolonged period of time, hampering the support offered by the FSU on implementation. There are low levels of trust in the FSU and its support is often received with a sense of criticism as opposed to inspiration or advice. Despite many attempts at developing more informal exchanges with the MA/NN, the FSU has been kept at a distance.

The NN has taken up an active role to support the IBs and FLAGs in this crisis. Ongoing digital meetings with small groups of regions were organised to exchange information on the national schemes and to inspire the FLAGs with project ideas. Several FLAGs are carrying out context analysis for identifying the new needs of the FLAG area and prepare their proposals for LDS to be adapted. Several regions have temporarily changed the procedures for speeding up payments, allowing for paying up to 80% based on a dossier with photograph proof (postponing project visits until travelling is allowed).

Surprisingly the COVID-19 outbreak, as mentioned above, has resulted in a positive reaction by the NN being more actively involved with the IBs and FLAGs. Until now, the FSU has not been invited and only very superficially been informed about the NN activities since COVID-19, however the sense of urgency and need for assistance of the territories has turned into a more positive attitude, providing an

opportunity to the FSU to build up a better relationship and organise webinars in a new positive relationship.

Latvia



Total public budget for fisheries CLLD	15 M€
Total CLLD budget committed by November 2019 (%)	8.5 M€ (67%)
Total CLLD budget spent by November 2019 (%)	4.5 M€ (39%)
Average budget per FLAG (total public)	2.5 M€
No. of FLAGs selected by March 2020	6
Date FLAGs selected	March 2016
Type of selection process	Two-stage
No. of projects selected/approved by 31 March 2020	165
Difference from 31 March 2019	+58
National Network	Yes, and operational
Can FLAG implement multi-funded strategies?	Yes, with the EAFRD

Implementation progress

There has been a continued good level of cooperation between FLAGs, the NN, MA and paying agencies ensuring implementation during 2019. All projects are administered electronically (submission of the project proposals, payment claims, checklists, communication with beneficiaries) which reduces the administrative burden on the MA. As of November 2019, €8.5 million had been committed (67%), and €4.5 million had been paid to beneficiaries (39%).

Several cooperation projects have been approved so far, including a transnational cooperation project on the diversification and promotion of Baltic Sea fish products with partners in Latvia, Finland, and Poland.

Discussions on the next programming period between FLAGs and the MA/NN began in the last quarter of 2019. During the last FLAG meeting in October 2019, FLAGs were informed by the MA that a continuation of current FLAG activities is foreseen in the next programming period. However, a greater focus will be placed on ecology, innovation, and the circular economy.

Problems encountered, issues to be addressed

In early January 2020, the MA met with FLAGs to discuss implementation issues related to a lack of FLAG funding in comparison to the number of proposals received. Also, an issue is that the maximum amount of funding allowed for a single cooperation project is too small to involve several FLAGs. Resulting from the discussions, the MA agreed to amend regulations allowing FLAGs to apply for additional funding (up to €152,000) to help with implementation. Additional funds were also made available for cooperation projects (up to €152,000). Further discussions are expected on potential amendments to the OP which would see an increased budget for UP4; funding redistributed from other Union Priorities. While this is positive news for CLLD generally, FLAGs are concerned as to whether there is sufficient capacity to administer the increased funding.

The impact of COVID-19 on implementation has been minimal. FLAG calls for projects are being organised online, as are consultations with potential beneficiaries. With regards to the latest EMFF amendments relating to sectoral support through the crisis, everything that the regulation provides is available for the Latvian fishing communities. Additionally, at national level further support instruments are also available which include tax exemptions, and temporary wages for employees and for entrepreneurs who have previously paid taxes.

Lithuania



Total public budget for fisheries CLLD	12.2 M€
Total CLLD budget committed by November 2019 (%)	2.1 M€ (22%)
Total CLLD budget spent by November 2019 (%)	1 M€ (10%)
Average budget per FLAG (total public)	1 M€
No. of FLAGs selected by March 2020	12
Date FLAGs selected	December 2017
Type of selection process	Two-stage
No. of projects selected/approved by 31 March 2020	35
Difference from 31 March 2019	+17
National Network	Yes, and operational
Can FLAG implement multi-funded strategies?	Yes, with the EAFRD

Implementation progress

All 12 Lithuanian FLAGs are operational. As of the end of 2019, a total of 34 CLLD projects had been approved, an increase by 70% compared to 2018. However, FLAGs still complain that national paying agency takes too long to evaluate applications. Nevertheless, the discussions initiated between FLAGs,

MA, and the paying agency in 2019 to speed up implementation have reduced certain administrative barriers inherent to national legislation and eliminated duplications, speeding up the selection and approval process. In November 2019 (more recent information is not available), the total committed budget was still low at 22% (€2.1 million), with payments even lower at 10% (€1 million). As of March 2020, the MA began an interim evaluation of CLLD implementation. FLAGs that have shown good implementation results could receive a performance framework reserve, which would allow them to launch additional calls for applications by the end of 2020.

Problems encountered, issues to be addressed

While there is good momentum in implementation, communication between FLAGs, the MA and the payment agency could still be improved. A key issue in the progress of implementation relates to the Klaipėda FLAG which lacks efficiency. Klaipėda is the largest FLAG in Lithuania in terms of budget as it represents 20% of the total fisheries CLLD budget. The Klaipėda FLAG is yet to select any projects, despite some calls having been made, which significantly impacts the overall implementation of the national programme. The MA plans to impose sanctions on Klaipėda FLAG and may even revoke some of the FLAGs budget, funds which would be reallocated across UP4 or perhaps other Priorities subject to approval from the Commission.

FLAGs report receiving few applications from local actors. Reasons include natural restrictions (i.e. cod quotas), funding difficulties in terms of applicants being unable to obtain loans for match-funding, and administrative difficulties (e.g. the lack of an accessible online application process).

Regarding the National Network, a new coordinator was appointed at the end of 2019. This appointment was the third change in this role over a six-month period, making it difficult to maintain the momentum and progress on network activities initiated in the first half of 2019.

The impact of COVID-19 on implementation has been minimal. The MA has provided teleworking rules for FLAGs and the collection of local project applications and all FLAG calls have been moved to a virtual platform. As a result of COVID-19 situation, FLAGs are concerned that the paying agency has decided to extend its time frame for assessing applications, originally set at three months. Due to this extension, delivery and implementation could be delayed in 2020.

Poland



Total public budget for fisheries CLLD	93.8 M€
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Total CLLD budget committed by 31 March 2020 (%)	55 M€ (58%)
Total CLLD budget spent by 31 March 2020 (%)	42 M€ (45%)
Average budget per FLAG (total public)	2.6 M€
No. of FLAGs selected by March 2020	36
Date FLAGs selected	May 2016
Type of selection process	One-stage
No. of projects selected/approved by 31 March 2020	1621
Difference from 31 March 2019	+514
National Network	MA fulfilling this function
Can FLAG implement multi-funded strategies?	Yes, (11 FLAGs have EMFF+EAFRD and 1 FLAG has all 4 Funds)

Implementation progress

After initial delays, the implementation of fisheries CLLD in Poland is progressing well, and the number of projects continues to be the highest in the EU. The demand for projects remains high, with most of the funding going to socio-cultural and diversification projects. Beneficiaries appreciate the wide accessibility of advance payments.

A number of FLAGs have received additional funding in 2019, between 8 and 15% of their budgets. The selection of these FLAGs was carried out by the MA on the basis of information received from regional authorities about progress in project selection, percentage of funding used etc. However, a clear communication of the process to all the FLAGs was neglected, and many FLAGs complained about its lack of transparency.

FLAGs are quite active in cooperation, especially national, but there are also some transnational projects. Approximately €800.000 has been committed to cooperation projects so far.

Problems encountered, issues to be addressed

CLLD implementation in Poland is burdened with excessive detail and administrative rigidity. Therefore, many FLAGs and beneficiaries are primarily concerned with meeting the formal requirements, rather than developing innovative ideas – a possible exception being cooperation projects.

A big concern for fisheries communities is lack of clarity about the future of CLLD – there have been rumours that UP4 will not be continued in the next period in Poland and they have not been fully clarified yet. The Polish government is making progress with preparations of CLLD under other Funds and carrying out discussions with stakeholders, but the EMFF MA is not continually active in these discussions. It is possible that CLLD under EMFF will follow different implementation rules from those of the other Funds.

The networking activities were carried out by the MA until mid-2018, but since then FLAGs have not had the opportunity to meet and exchange. A meeting supported by the FSU was planned in April 2020 but

cancelled due to the COVID-19 restrictions. The situation is complicated by high rotation of staff in charge of CLLD in the MA.

The situation of fisheries as a result of COVID-19 varies greatly between regions. Many inland fishermen and fish farmers are currently managing to find markets for their products, but will be strongly affected if the restrictions continue into the summer – especially in places attractive to tourists. No specific aid targeting fisheries has been foreseen, but the Polish government is planning to use the measures foreseen under the recent modification of the EMFF Regulation (e.g. temporary cessation, aquaculture payments). However, most of the EMFF funding available in Poland has already been committed and not much will be available to address the crisis.

The implementation process has almost stopped at the beginning of the COVID crisis, as regional authorities were not sure how to proceed and most of their staff were on leave. The situation is slowly stabilising, and the government is preparing a new law which would allow beneficiaries to submit their applications and payment claims electronically. However, the legislative process is slow, and it is not clear when such legislation will be in place. Many beneficiaries, especially from tourism and gastronomy, are afraid of not being able to meet the targets foreseen in their co-financing agreements (e.g. number of jobs created etc.); the decision to relax these requirements is delegated to regional authorities, but the MA is encouraging regional IBs to allow a modification of contracts without punishing beneficiaries.

Portugal



Total public budget for fisheries CLLD	41.2 M€
Total CLLD budget committed by 31 March 2020 (%)	21 M€ (51%)
Total CLLD budget spent by 31 March 2020 (%)	8.5 M€ (16%)
Average budget per FLAG (total public)	2.6 M€
No. of FLAGs selected by March 2020	15
Date FLAGs selected	December 2017
Type of selection process	One-stage, but separate in the Azores.
No. of projects selected/approved by 31 March 2020	142
Difference from 31 March 2019	+23
National Network	No, but support is envisaged to an informal FLAG network
Can FLAG implement multi-funded strategies?	Yes (ESF and ERDF), but not in the Azores

Implementation progress

After a late start to the implementation of the 12 FLAGs on the mainland, considerable progress has been made during 2019. More than half of the project applications received by the MA were about tourism (not necessarily fisheries-related), and numerous projects related to cultural heritage. Projects under these two themes account for up three-quarters of all FLAG projects. Projects related to short supply chains, local products, reinforcement of the competitiveness of SSFC, qualification and innovation remain scarce. The three FLAGs selected in the Azores at the end of 2017 were only able to launch their first call for projects at the beginning of 2019.

The networking activities of FLAGs remain at very low level partly due to the lack of ambition of the FLAGs, partly due to the fact that the MA is not offering any kind of forum to the FLAGs, invoking that they are overloaded with the administration of the implementation of UP4. In order to avoid similar shortcomings, the FSU has offered to organise a debate on the future CLLD implementation in 2020.

Problems encountered, issues to be addressed

No major issues were observed during the reporting period.

Romania



Total public budget for fisheries CLLD	44.9 M€
Total CLLD budget committed by 31 March 2020 (%)	33.9 M€ (68%)
Total CLLD budget spent by 31 March 2020 (%)	10.9 M€ (22%)
Average budget per FLAG (total public)	1.7 - 2 M€ for 21 FLAGs, 9.55 M€ for FLAG Delta
No. of FLAGs selected by March 2020	22
Date FLAGs selected	16 FLAGs in 2016, and 6 FLAGs in 2017
Type of selection process	Two-stage
No. of projects selected/approved by 31 March 2020	192
Difference from 31 March 2019	+117

National Network	Yes, operational as of the beginning of 2019.
Can FLAG implement multi-funded strategies?	No

Implementation progress

Over this reporting period, implementation has increased substantially when compared to previous years. In 2019, the NN also became operational and appears to be effective. The FSU has continued with its ongoing liaison work with the FLAGs, MA, DG MARE and the FLAG association in line with the agreed implementation action plan.

During the reporting period, 154 calls were opened for funding applications from the EMFF programme, of which 21 were opened by the MA (for all EMFF priorities) and 133 by the FLAGs for CLLD projects. In total, 192 projects were approved by MA by the end of March 2020.

The documentation related to (national) cooperation projects was finalised and approved in September 2019 by the MA and the Ministry of Rural Development and Agriculture. The first cooperation call was launched in February 2020, with a deadline of April 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the deadline was postponed to June 2020. To date, there are three cooperation projects under development, involving about half of the 22 FLAGs. In order to monitor the efforts of the FLAGs to meet the performance indicators, MA has conducted several meetings and an evaluation process of FLAG performance was launched in December 2019 - January 2020 involving the FLAGs selected under the first call. (In May - June 2020 the same process will involve the FLAGs selected under the second call).

Problems encountered, issues to be addressed

The pace in which FLAGs select and send projects for approval still varies despite the progress made in 2019. The slowest FLAGs in terms of implementation are in Constanta County, where, of December 2019, three out of the five existing FLAGs had not approved a single project, with one FLAG having selected just one project. Through the coordinated support of the MA and the FSU, the situation is being remedied and it is estimated that these groups will be able to move forward with their implementation in 2020. As a consequence, to these delays, the Black Sea coastline now lags behind similar areas in other MS, not benefiting from existing opportunities for fishing, aquaculture, and related activities. Also, none of the Constanta County FLAGs are involved in cooperation projects at national level (currently being defined) or transnationally. This issue will be taken into consideration in terms of the support provided by the MA and FSU in 2020.

Another challenge is the low interest of many FLAGs for the (national) cooperation projects, although they have constantly called for the opening of this line of projects and the fact that they were consulted during the elaboration of the guidelines in a participatory process. The main problem seems to be the fact that the coordinating FLAG has control over all the expenses and acquisitions involved in the implementation of the project, generating implicitly a low level of trust in the newly created partnership. These grievances of the FLAGs are currently being discussed at the MA level, and final decisions will be made by the end of May 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic did not have direct negative consequences on the UP4 implementation. Until now, the only measure taken was that all contracts were suspended for two months (15th of March - 15th of May), due to the emergency situation and quarantine. Also, measures on direct support to fishermen during the pandemic will be discussed with MC members at the upcoming meeting (most likely in early June 2020, online). FLAGs are represented by the two FLAG federations who are voting members in the MC.