

Armenia adopts the LEADER approach



The European Union supports rural communities in [Armenia](#) in setting up LEADER initiatives. In December 2021, five Local Action Groups (LAGs) were born in the provinces of Lori and Tavush.

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This took place in the framework of local workshops, where committed local public sector, business and civil society representatives of nearby villages and small towns made a bottom-up decision on the territorial delineation of their future partnership-based local rural development activities.

The new LAGs are now starting to work on their local rural development strategies, shaping their organisations and management, and will implement their first local projects in a year's time.

Background

The five new-born Armenian LEADER Local Action Groups in Lori and Tavush were set up with European Union support, under the [Local Empowerment of Actors for Development \(LEAD\) Programme](#).

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LEAD was launched following the entry into force of the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in spring 2021, and is implemented in cooperation with the Government of the Republic of Armenia.

The LEAD programme addresses the development challenges related to Armenia's growing territorial disparities by promoting inclusive and sustainable socio-economic development, leading to improved quality of life in the three northern regions of Armenia. The €14.6 million four-year programme comprises three projects. Two of them, in Shirak Region (LEAD4Shirak) and in Lori and Tavush Regions (LEAD4Lori and Tavush) will adapt the EU LEADER method, which has been tried and tested over 30 years. It will support community-driven local/rural development initiatives carried out through partnerships between local authorities, the private sector and civil society. The third project focuses on empowering Armenian migrant workers, returnees and their family members by mobilising remittances and investing in local development and job creation across Armenia.

LEAD4Shirak is co-financed by the Austrian Development Cooperation and implemented by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA). However in the Lori and Tavush Regions, LEAD is implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in partnership with the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) and in close cooperation with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure in Armenia. At the national level, the project aims to improve the capacity of the relevant ministries and other bodies and develop policy mechanisms for the sustainability of the LEADER approach in Armenia.



At local level, the initiative aims to pilot the European LEADER approach by supporting locally driven rural development to reinvent rural areas, create local businesses, jobs and better living conditions. The project is to help local rural people in Lori and Tavush: men, women, youth, and elderly and citizen groups, including minorities, to play an active role in inclusive, resilient and sustainable local development in the long term. This happens through building trust and self-confidence, developing entrepreneurial attitudes and encouraging a sense of group cohesion within communities and between regions. The backbone of the LAG activities is the strong partnership between different stakeholders (public, private, civil society), which eventually leads to cross-sectoral, multi-stakeholder cooperation based on economic, social, cultural and other commonalities.

In its first year, LEAD was complemented by some important measures to tackle the socio-economic crises caused by the global pandemic.



Lori and Tavush - the target Armenian regions in the high Caucasus

Lori and Tavush are two neighbouring northern regions, covering more than a fifth of Armenia's territory along its borders with Georgia and Azerbaijan. Both have unique natural resources and a wide range of cultural and historical assets, and are located high in the beautiful mountains of the [Caucasus](#). But they suffer from weak economic diversification and limited access to markets, especially in the more remote parts. Both are on the list of regions with the highest poverty and unemployment rates in the country.

Lori has about 220,000 inhabitants², of whom; 41% are villagers. Lori is located in the north of the country and borders the Republic of Georgia. Ethnic diversity covers Armenians (97%), Russians (1.5%), Greeks (1.0%), and Yazidis and Kurds (0.5%). Winter in Lori is cold and snowbound, while summers are mild. The area is rich in mineral resources, including copper, gold, silver and stone. The region's economy is based on industry, but the lack of investment and modernisation

² <https://armstat.am/file/doc/99527618.pdf>

after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the devastating earthquake in Spitak in 1988, resulted in most of the industrial assets of the region being ruined. The majority of the agricultural businesses are small. Due to market, socio-economic and climate change problems, an increasing proportion of the arable land is not cultivated. The poverty rate is 36.2%. The urban areas are highly dependent on large mining and industrial companies. The main factor influencing poverty is the high level of unemployment. Thanks to tourism development interventions in recent years, based on Lori's very rich historical assets and natural resources, the sector's contribution to the regional income is rising.

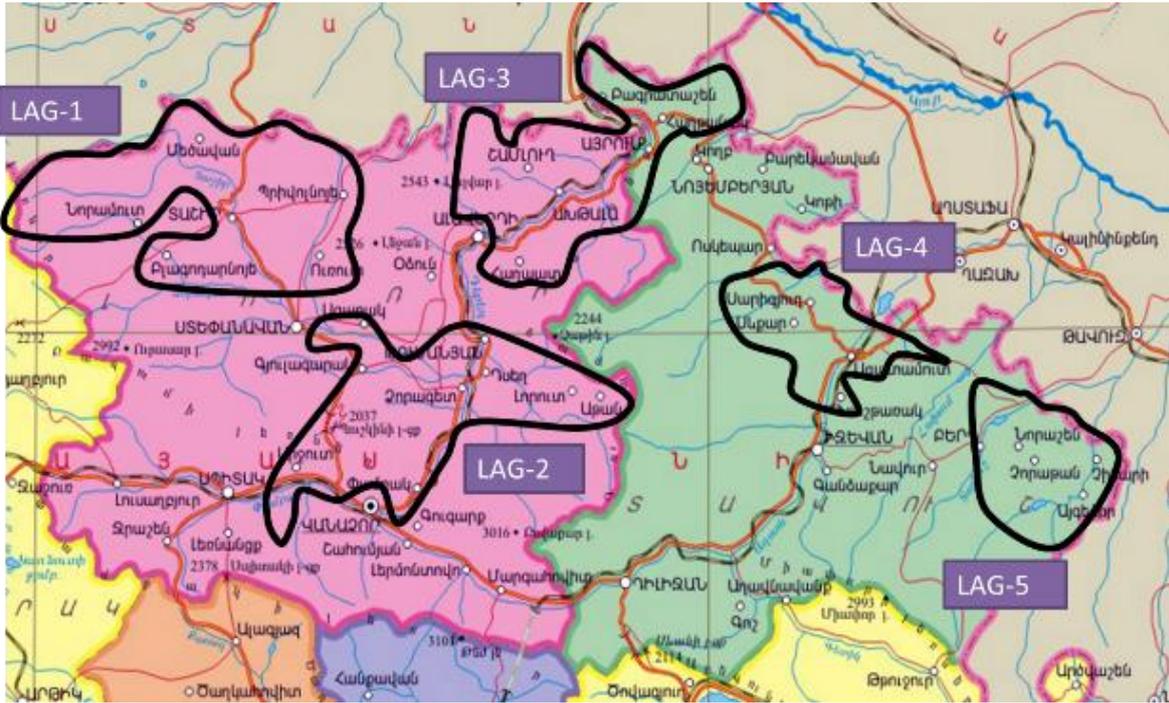
About 60% of the 120,000 inhabitants of Tavush live in tiny mountain villages, and 45 out of 61 settlements in the region are classified by the government as border communities. Tavush Region borders the Republic of Georgia in the north and the Republic of Azerbaijan in the east. 352km of the 400km international border is with Azerbaijan. In Tavush, as in the rest of the country, women are over-represented in informal, seasonal and precarious employment. The share of women in agricultural non-formal employment is 82%. Regional ethnic and cultural diversity covers Armenians (97.1%), Yazidis and Kurds (1.3%), Russians (0.5%) and smaller numbers of Ukrainians, Assyrians and Greeks.

LEADER initiatives in Lori and Tavush

The implementation of the LEADER approach in Lori and Tavush began with a local awareness campaign, community mobilisation and community coaching to strengthen the involvement of a wide range of local stakeholders in the integrated and participatory development paradigm. The goal of the community coaching process is to make all targeted local groups active in development, ensure their voice and make their development ideas visible.

After a half-year preparatory process, five local LEADER initiatives have been formed by dedicated representatives of the local authorities concerned, village leaders, farmers, local entrepreneurs, local institutions (school, kindergarten, library, etc.) and some from the civil society. The five LAGs cover about 30% of the total population of the two regions.

The five LAG territories



The five Local Action Groups and their territories

LAG of the Lori Plateau (*'LAG-1' on the map*) The Lori Plateau is a high plain in the north of the Lori region, between the Bazum, Javakhk and Virahayots mountain ranges, through which the Dzoraget, Tashir, Urut and Gargar rivers flow. It is 30km long and 18km wide. The gentle plateau is 1,400-1,600m above sea level, and is crossed by picturesque and wild gorges, some of which are deeper than 180m. The maximum height of the nearby mountains is 3,196m (Mount Achkasar). The climate is temperate, the average temperature in January is -4°C, in July 16°C, the annual precipitation is 700-800mm, and the growing season lasts 60-150 days. The landscape is steppe, with high-mountain meadows; there are small forests in some places.

The leading sectors of the economy are animal husbandry and dairy farming, cultivation of potatoes, wheat, barley, legumes and fodder crops, beekeeping and poultry farming, cheese-making and light industry (textiles and carpets). There is traditional grape, pomegranate and fig production.

The village communities in the LAG show geographical, cultural, and economic similarities and some cultural diversity: there are settlements with their own religion, minority villages (Yezidis, Molokans, Russians), and others where displaced people live. The LAG covers the territory of four communities including 26 villages, 17 of which have fewer than 500 inhabitants. The total number of inhabitants of the territory is about 17,000.

LAG in Tumanyan, Pambak and Gyulagarak (*'LAG-2' on the map*). The Pambak-Tumanyan micro-region has a close link to the Vanadzor-Tbilisi highway. Most LAG settlements are located along the Yerevan-Tbilisi railway line and all are included in the Pambak and Debet river basins, into which the Martz river flows. The altitude is about 850-1,500 metres above sea level, the climate is temperate, the average temperature in January is -10°C, in July 22°C, and the annual precipitation is 850mm. The so-called Dendropark area is located in the administrative area of Gyulagarak municipality. It is located along with the Gargar river, in the Dzoraget river basin. The Dzoraget river that runs through Lori region is the only river suitable for rafting in the country. This terrain is foothills; the climate is cold in winter and cool in summer. The historical "Tormakadur" old village ruins, as well as the Hnevank monastery, are located in Gyulagarak. The "Sochut" children's sanatorium and Sochut arboretum are located at an altitude of about 1,450 metres above sea level. There is a huge forest garden in a 35-hectare area of arboretum, around which are 17.5 hectares of natural forests. The area is considered as a recreation area and has an excellent opportunity for the development of resort.

32 villages (16 of which have fewer than 500 inhabitants) and a small town, Tumanyan, have joined the LAG of about 24,000 inhabitants. The two main agricultural activities are berry and fruit growing (apple, peach, plum, walnut, etc.) and animal husbandry, dairy and meat production, and beekeeping. Collection of wild berries and herbs are common activities. Most of the communities cultivate potatoes, and many villages are involved in wood processing. The settlements surrounded by forest are rich in tree species (walnut, oak, quince, ash, hornbeam, wild pear, apple, etc.), berries (blackberry, rosehip, hawthorn, etc.), as well as honey bushes and medicinal herbs. The orchards are located on the flat areas near to the river. The LAG area has favourable conditions for tourism development, e.g. the Kobayr monastic complex with churches and khachkars. Traditions are common; settlements near the Debed river basin called themselves as a 'Motkor area'.

LAG of Alaverdi, Akhtala, Shnogh and Noyemberyan (*'LAG-3' on the map*). The LAG crosses the regional border and unifies Alaverdi and Akhtala and Shnogh communities in Lori, and Noyemberyan municipality in Tavush Province, at the northeast of Armenia. The main common geographical feature is that they are all located in the Debed river basin. Potential economic/trade accesses include the railway line crossing the territory, the highway at Ayrum and the Bagratashen customs post on the border with Georgia. The territory has significant natural and historical-cultural resources. Some villages are inhabited by unregistered ethnic minorities and others by refugees or currently displaced people. There are villages whose main activity is fruit and berry production and others which rely on animal husbandry and dairy/meat production. Some of the settlements are located in mining-industrial zones. Most of the inhabitants arrived from Azerbaijan in the 1980s. The LAG covers four communities and 27 settlements (12 of which have fewer than 500 inhabitants) including three small towns. The number of inhabitants is about 24,000 (about 14,000 in Lori and 10,000 in Tavush.)

The Alaverdi municipality is notable for its mining industry, as well as for its abundance of historical and architectural monuments. It sits at an altitude of 750-1700m above sea level with very steep slopes. The climate is mild. Haghpat is world-famous for its historical and architectural values. In particular, Haghpatavank has a unique structure and is registered on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Akhtala is among the centres of non-ferrous metallurgy in Armenia. In the rural parts of the municipality cattle breeding, horticulture, and agriculture, especially grain and flour production are typical.

The Shnogh municipality is located in the eastern part of the Gugarats mountain range, covered with valleys and hills. The forests surrounding the village are rich in valuable wood, wild fruits, berries, and fodder. Bear, wolf, and jackal are common in the forests and the river is rich in wild fishes. The territory has a significant natural value and tourism potential.

From Noyemberyan consolidated municipality only the Ayrum area takes part in this LAG. Ayrum connects the LAG territory to the Bagratashen-Alaverdi and Bagratashen-Noyemberyan highways. The maximum temperature is +40°C, the minimum is +1°C, and the average annual precipitation is 500mm. The municipality is located on 375-500 m above sea level. Ayrum town is mainly industrial, but in the rural parts of Ayrun, horticulture and fruit processing are developed. Olives, peaches, grapes, pomegranates, figs, etc. grow in this climate. Some villages specialise in dairy cattle breeding.

LAG in Ijevan in Tavush region (*'LAG-4' on the map*). The LAG area is located in the central part of Ijevan region. The LAG territory, located in the Aghstev River basin, covers 16 settlements with about 20,000 inhabitants. The area is dry, with mild, dry summers. The average temperature in July is +20°C to +26°C, the maximum temperature is +38°C, and the winter is moderately cold – the average temperature in January is -6 to -12°C. The minimum temperature is -30°C. The annual precipitation is 350-450mm.

Most of the LAG settlements are located in a mining-industrial zone (Bentonite factory). Some tobacco collection and drying points work seasonally. In the area there are large greenhouses, a flourmill and a large dairy farm. Rural people are engaged in viticulture, fruit production, vegetable growing, grain and fodder crops, tobacco growing, as well as animal husbandry. Spiritual-cultural

sites in the territory include Makaravank, Tsrviz monastery, Saint Davit and Vardan churches, Zoravar, Vardan's tree etc. One of the key problems of the territory is water resource management.

LAG in bordering villages in Berd (*'LAG-5' on the map*). The LAG area is located in the eastern part of the Berd municipality with about 13,000 inhabitants. The territory is located at an altitude of 700-1,200 m above sea level, in the basin of the rivers Tavush, Khndzorut and Aghnja.

All settlements are considered as border villages with Azerbaijan. The area has a mild, temperate, subtropical climate. The average temperature in January is -6-8°C, in July +14-18°C. The average daily temperature does not fall below -5°C. The average annual precipitation is 700-800mm. The last spring frosts take place from March 20 to April 1, and the first autumn frosts take place from November 10 to 20. Such climatic conditions contribute to the expansion of subtropical crops (figs, pomegranates, persimmons, kiwis, etc.).

In the lower parts of the area horticulture, tobacco growing, fodder production and animal husbandry, including cattle, sheep, pigs, poultry and beekeeping, are developed. The area is rich in vineyards, orchards of apples, pears, plums, mulberries, cherries, figs, pomegranates, quinces, and persimmons. People prepare wine and dried fruits. In the highest parts of the area (Norashen) legumes, beans, lentils, and peas are grown. There are two big factories in the area: "Tavush textile" produces mainly gloves, while "Eco-Garden" specialises in canning. "Tavsho Hatik" Cooperative works on legume cultivation, packing and sale. There are large areas of wild strawberries that have an abundant yield. Valuable herbs grow in the forests including thyme, mint, motherwort, chamomile, plantago and sage. The forests are rich in oak, beech and hornbeam, fruit and nut trees (quince, pear, apple, walnut and hazelnut) and berry bushes like hawthorn, rosehip, barberry and blackberry.

Perspectives

After the other neighbourhood countries in [the Black Sea region](#) (Georgia and Moldova), the implementation of the LEADER approach also started in Armenia in 2021.

The LEAD programme has supported local projects to mitigate the impact of COVID in Lori and Tavush: for example the purchase of sewing machines to increase women's income or increasing local bakery capacity.

But the joint development of the local communities has just started in the diverse and unique rural areas of Armenia, high in the mountains where people need special development solutions. That is why this first introduction is primarily about the place – the place to be developed for everyone living there!

More information:

<https://www.facebook.com/EULEAD4LoriTavush>

<https://twitter.com/LEADLoriTavush>

<https://bit.ly/33byll6>

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