

Summary of STRATEGY FOR COMMUNITY-LED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT of LAG "Kichika – Madan - Rudozem" for the period 2023-2027

The main objective of the Strategy for Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) of LAG "Kichika – Madan - Rudozem" for the program period 2023 - 2027 is **the achievement of sustainable upward development in the territory of the LAG, based on the full utilization of local potential and leading to an increase of the life quality and well-being of its residents.**

Priority № 1. Development of the local economy, competitiveness and innovation in enterprises.

The priority consists of 2 specific objectives as follows:

Specific objective 1. Development of the non-agricultural sectors of the local economy.

The specific objective will be achieved with the implementation of measure 1 "Investments for non-agricultural activities" (*STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL AREAS/SPDARA*), which is financed by the European agricultural fund for rural development (*EAFRD*).

Specific objective 2. Increasing competitiveness and innovation in enterprises.

The specific objective will be achieved through the implementation of Measure 2 "Development and strengthening of capacity for scientific research and innovation and the introduction of modern technologies" (*PROGRAMME "COMPETITIVENESS AND INNOVATION IN ENTERPRISES"/PCIE*), which is financed by the European Regional Development Fund (*ERDF*) and Measure 3 "Promoting the transition to a circular and resource-efficient economy", which is financed by the ERDF.

Priority № 2. Improvement of living conditions, development of administrative capacity, popularization of the Strategy for CLLD and cooperation.

The priority consists of 2 specific objectives as follows:

Specific objective 3. Improvement of the state of basic public services and small-scale infrastructure on the territory of the LAG.

The specific goal will be achieved with the implementation of measure 4 "Investments in basic services and small-scale infrastructure on the territory of LAG "Kichika – Madan - Rudozem"(SPDARA), which is financed by the EAFRD.

Specific objective 4. Strengthening of the administrative capacity, popularization of the strategy for CLLD and the implementation of cooperation activities.

The specific objective will be achieved with the implementation of measure 5 "Management, monitoring and evaluation of the strategy and its promotion" (SPDARA) and measure 6 "Preparation and implementation of cooperation activities" (SPDARA), which are financed by the EAFRD.

Priority № 3. Improving of the environment.

The priority consists of 1 specific objective as follows:

Specific objective 5. Improvement of waste management and preservation and maintenance of biodiversity on the territory of the LAG.

The specific objective will be achieved with the implementation of Measure 7 "Increasing awareness of practices and behavior in relation to sustainable consumption, circular economy, waste monitoring as well as information and explanatory campaigns for stakeholders and the population" (Programme Environment) and Measure 8 "Improving the protection and preservation of nature, biological diversity and environmentally friendly infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reduction of all forms of pollution" (Programme "Environment"), which are financed by the ERDF.

Priority № 4. Improving the quality of education.

The priority consists of 1 specific objective as follows:

Specific objective 6. Improving the quality of education on the territory of the LAG.

The specific objective consists in the implementation of Measure 9 "Creating conditions for access to education by overcoming demographic, social and cultural barriers" (Programme "Education"), which is financed by the ESF+.

Financial plan including the planned funds from each fund and each of the funding programs:

| 6. Financial plan including the planned funds from each fund and each of the funding programs: | | | |
|---|---|--------------------------------------|----------|
| <i>Code of the measure</i> | <i>Name of the measure</i> | <i>Total for the strategy period</i> | |
| | | <i>leva</i> | <i>%</i> |
| | Measures financed by the SPDARA 2023-2027 (EAFRD) | | |
| Measure 1 | „Investments for non-agricultural activities“ | 2 000 000 | 25,23 |
| Measure 4 | Investments in basic services and small-scale infrastructure on the territory of the LAG "Kichika – Madan - Rudozem" | 2 000 000 | 25,23 |
| Measure 6 | „Preparation and implementation of cooperation activities“ | 300 000 | 3,78 |
| Measure 5 | „Management, monitoring and evaluation of the strategy and its promotion“ <i>(Up to 25% of the funds of the line "Total funds for the strategy, financed by the EAFRD)</i> | 1 433 333 | 18,08 |

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|-----------|--|-----------|-------|
| | TOTAL FUNDS FOR THE STRATEGY FINANCED BY THE EAFRD | 5 733 333 | 72,32 |
| | Measures financed by the PHRD 2021-2027 (ESF+) | | |
| | Measures financed by the PCIE 2021– 2027 (ERDF) | 1 200 000 | 15,14 |
| Measure 2 | „Development and strengthening of capacity for scientific research and innovation and the introduction of modern technologies“ | 600 000 | 7,57 |
| Measure 3 | "Promoting the transition to a circular and resource-efficient economy" | 600 000 | 7,57 |
| | Measures financed by the Programme Education 2021– 2027 (ERDF, ESF+) | 900 000 | 11,35 |
| Measure 9 | „Creating conditions for access to education by overcoming demographic, social and cultural barriers“ | 900 000 | 11,35 |
| | Measures financed by the Programme Environment 2021– 2027 (ERDF) | 94 873 | 1,20 |
| Measure 7 | „Increasing awareness of practices and behavior in relation to sustainable consumption, circular economy, waste monitoring as well as information and explanatory campaigns for stakeholders and the population“ | 40 853 | 0,52 |
| Measure 8 | „Improving the protection and preservation of nature, biological diversity and environmentally friendly infrastructure, including in urban areas, and reduction of all forms of pollution“ | 54 020 | 0,68 |
| | TOTAL FOR PROJECTS TO THE STRATEGY FOR COMMUNITY-LED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT (CLLD): | 7 928 206 | 100 % |

The Strategy for Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) of LAG "Kichika – Madan - Rudozem" for the program period 2023 - 2027 consists of one main strategic goal - "The achievement of sustainable upward development on the territory of the LAG, based on the full utilization of the local potential and leading to an increase of the quality of life and well-being of its residents", which should be achieved through the implementation of 4 priorities and 6 specific objectives. For their achievement in the Strategy is foreseen the implementation of 9 measures financed by the European agricultural fund for rural development, the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund +, through the Strategic Plan for the development of agriculture and rural areas, Programme "Competitiveness and Innovation in the enterprises", Programme "Environment" and Programme "Education".

Through the implementation of this measures complex, multi-sectoral development will be achieved in the territory of the LAG "Kichika – Madan - Rudozem" with high added value, which will lead to an improvement in the well-being of the population and a minimization of negative demographic processes.

For the objectives' implementation and priorities of the strategy, the LAG will implement a set of activities for the management and promotion of the Strategy for CLLD, which are the basis of the COMMUNITY-LED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT approach and which are attributed to all LAGs in Art. 33 paragraph 3 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060.

In accordance with the provisions of the cited regulation, during the implementation of the Strategy for CLLD, the LAG will carry out the following main activities for the implementation of the strategy:

- Carrying out informational activities - from the Strategy approval during the entire period of its implementation. The local community will be informed daily about the work and initiatives of the LAG (regarding the implementation of the Strategy, the opening of calls for project proposals, their evaluation, the conclusion of contracts, etc.);
- Carrying out trainings - LAG will strive constantly to increase and strengthen the administrative capacity of both its members and the local community - in terms of the preparation and implementation of projects to the Strategy;
- Conducting consultations - LAG will provide daily consultations to local residents who are interested in the possibilities for applying with project proposals to the Strategy for CLLD;
- The LAG will define non-discriminatory and transparent procedures for the selection of project proposals, based on the selection criteria laid down in the Strategy for CLLD and agreed with the local community. Project selection procedures will not allow conflicts of interest to occur and will ensure that none of the groups representing specific stakeholders have control over selection decisions. The procedures will comply with the principles of maximum transparency and impartiality;

- For the recruitment of project proposals, the LAG will prepare and publish invitations for the opening of calls for project proposals. Before each of these acceptance of project

proposals, the LAG will carry out a wide awareness of the local population about the upcoming opening of the respective call;

- The LAG will also carry out the selection of the operations, determine the amount of support and present the project proposals to the MA (and State Fund Agriculture/SFA in the case of projects by EAFRD), which is responsible for the final eligibility check before their approval;

- In the process of implementing the Strategy for community-led local development, the LAG will track the progress of achieving the goals of the strategy, and this progress will be discussed at meetings of the Management Board and the General Assembly of the LAG and will be presented to the local community through the LAG website, information events, special meetings, etc.;

- The LAG will also carry out ongoing evaluations of the strategy implementation, as well as a final evaluation. The purpose of these evaluations is obtaining the up-to-date information on the stages of implementation of the Strategy for community-led local development and studying the need for possible changes in its content. The evaluations will be used to make relevant decisions on the part of the LAG authorities so that the Strategy to be implemented to the maximum benefit of the local population. The results of the monitoring of the progress of achieving the goals of the Strategy and of its evaluation will be communicated in a timely manner to the local residents on the territory of the LAG and to the managing bodies of the programme that participate in the financing of the strategy;

- The LAG will establish contact with other LAGs from the country and the EU in order to create fruitful cooperation for the exchange of experience, good practices, innovations, etc., which will help the development of the territory

- The LAG will carry out activities to popularize the Strategy for community-led local development and local identity.

Compliance of the strategy with the Integrated Strategy for Territorial Development of the South Central Region

The Strategy for Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) of LAG "Kichika – Madan - Rudozem" is prepared in accordance with the main strategic documents for development at the local, regional and national level. This includes the National Development Program "Bulgaria 2030", the integrated development plans of Madan and Rudozem municipalities and the Integrated Territorial Development Strategy of the South Central Planning Region, which includes the territory of LAG "Kichika – Madan - Rudozem".

With the Integrated Strategy for Territorial Development of the South Central Region, the Strategy complements and partners at all levels. The vision that defines the framework of the Integrated Territorial Strategy for the Development of the South Central Region is *"South Central Region - an attractive place for living, business and tourism, with better conditions for communication and preserved natural and cultural heritage"*. Thus, the main strategic objective of the Strategy for CLLD, which is *"Achieving sustainable upward development in the territory of the LAG, based on the full utilization of local potential and leading to an*

increase of the life quality and well-being of its residents", is in accordance with the vision of the territorial strategy.

Priority 1 of the Strategy for CLLD "Development of the local economy, competitiveness and innovation in enterprises" envisages activities for the development of the local economy and is in line with Strategic Priority 1 "Strengthening the competitive positions of the South Central Region through investments in growth factors" of the Integrated territorial strategy for the development (ITSD) of the South Central region. It includes Specific Objective 1.1 "Innovation, technological development and growth", in which are included activities for promoting the stimulation of innovative SMEs, stimulation of startups, including in technological productions and services, which corresponds to Specific Objective 2 "Increasing competitiveness and innovation in enterprises" of the Strategy for CLLD.

Specific objective 1.2 "Improving the business environment and stimulating entrepreneurship" of ITSD includes support activities for the provision of services aimed at the development of the entrepreneurial ecosystem, and improving elements of the business environment that represent barriers to the growth of SMEs, investment marketing, providing mechanisms for providing services to potential investors, organizing and holding events/shows abroad with the aim of attracting investors, etc. , being in accordance with Specific Objectives 1, 2 and 4 of the Strategy, which are oriented towards activities in support of the economy on the LAG territory and cooperation with the LAG of the country and other countries of the European Union. In addition to the description of Specific Objective 1.2 of the ITSD, it is written that *"The support will be implemented through the approach of integrated territorial investments (ITI) and community-led local development (CLLD).*

Specific objective 1.3 "Good education, new knowledge and professional development" includes activities for expanding equal access to quality preschool and school education, covering all children in the education system, including children from vulnerable groups in education, reduction of early school leaving and increasing the educational level of the population, increasing the applicability of school education to achieve professional realization, creating conditions for obtaining new skills, etc. These activities are in full compliance with Priority 4 "Improving the quality of education" of the Strategy for CLLD and, accordingly, with Specific objective 6 "Improving the quality of education on the territory of the LAG".

Specific objective 1.4 "Development of competitive sectors based on local resources" of ITSD envisages activities to stimulate agriculture and tourism. Due to the geographical, natural and climatic conditions of the territory of the LAG "Kichika – Madan – Rudozem", the agriculture has not been developed on a scale to make a significant contribution to the economy, being solely for its own needs. Therefore, in the Strategy is not foreseen support for agricultural activities. The Strategy for CLLD foresees support for non-agricultural activities, which include tourism activities based on local potential, which is in accordance with the Integrated territorial strategy for the development of the South Central region.

Strategic priority 2 "Improving the social and ecological environment of the SCR" of ITSD is in accordance with Priority 3 "Improving of the environment" of the Strategy for CLLD. Specific objective 2.2 "Construction of environmentally friendly infrastructure. orientation towards a greener, low-carbon economy" of ITSD envisages activities for the optimization of the waste management system, the collection and treatment of waste will be optimized and modern technologies for separate collection, pre-treatment, composting of biodegradable waste will be implemented in order to increase of the quantities of recycled waste and stimulation of reuse. Also planned are green investments and protection of the rich biological diversity of the South Central region. In this way, there is full compliance of Specific objective 5 "Improving of waste management and preservation and maintenance of biodiversity on the territory of the LAG" of The Strategy for CLLD with specific objective 2.2 of ITSD.

Strategic priority 3 "More balanced territorial development and reduction of inequalities in the South Central region" is in line with Priority 2 "The living conditions improving, development of administrative capacity, popularization of the Strategy for CLLD and cooperation" of the Strategy. Specific objective 3.2 of the ITSD envisages activities for the development of the urban and rural environment, as well as "implementation of ITI and CLLD", which is in full compliance with Specific Objective 3 of the Strategy. Specific objective 3.3 of the ITSD envisages cooperation activities, which is in line with Specific objective 4 of the Strategy.

The Strategy for Community-Led Local Development and Integrated territorial strategy for the development are two strategic documents developed for the development of the respective territories, which for the territory of the LAG "Kichika – Madan - Rudozem" are in full compliance and complementation, which will lead to multi-sectoral development of the territory and improvement of the well-being of its population.

The Strategy for community-led local development of LAG "Kichika – Madan - Rudozem" contributes to the achievement of the objectives of all funding programmes:

Strategic plan for the development of agriculture and rural areas 2023-2027;

Programme "Competitiveness and innovation in enterprises" 2021 - 2027;

Programme "Environment" 2021– 2027;

Programme "Education" 2021– 2027.

Description the application of the EU horizontal principles according to Art. 9 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 in the strategy implementation:

Applying the horizontal principles of the EU in the implementation of the Strategy for Community-Led Local Development:

1. In the Strategy for Community-Led Local Development implementation, the LAG "Kichika – Madan - Rudozem" guarantees the respect of fundamental rights and the observance of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.
2. LAG "Kichika – Madan - Rudozem" ensures that equality between men and women, mainstreaming the principle of gender equality and taking into account the social aspects of gender are taken into account and are encouraged throughout the entire preparation process,

implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of the Strategy for Community-Led Local Development for programming period 2023-2027.

3. LAG "Kichika – Madan - Rudozem" will take the necessary steps to prevent any discrimination based on gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, during the preparation, implementation, monitoring, the reporting and assessment of the Strategy for Community-Led Local Development for programming period 2023-2027.

In particular, the accessibility for people with disabilities is taken into account and ensured throughout the entire process of preparation and implementation of the Strategy for CLLD for programming period 2023-2027.

4. The objectives of the Strategy for CLLD for programming period 2023 - 2027 are being pursued in accordance with the objective for promoting sustainable development referred to in Article 11 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, taking into account the aims of the United Nations for sustainable development, the Paris Agreement and the principle of not causing significant harm.

The objectives of the Strategy for Community-Led Local Development for programming period 2023-2027 are pursued in full respect of the acquis of the Union in the field of the environment.

The activities for the Strategy preparation are financed under project: BG06RDNP001 -19.610-0046 "Preparatory activities for the strategy development for the period 2023-2027 of LAG "Kichika – Madan - Rudozem", financed under Sub-Measure 19.1. "Assistance for preparatory activities" to Measure 19 "Community-led local development" of the Rural Development Programme for the period 2014-2020, co-financed by the European agricultural fund for rural development, Grant Contract №PД 50-59/ 20.03.2023.

The preparation process of the Strategy for Community-Led Local Development of LAG "Kichika – Madan - Rudozem" was carried out in full transparency and in compliance with the main principle of the approach COMMUNITY-LED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT - "bottom up". The local residents were duly notified for the upcoming events, with aim of their mass participation in them.

A large number of residents from the LAG territory took part in the events, and their ideas, opinions and suggestions were taken into account in the Strategy preparation. This happened, on the one hand, in the form of a survey of residents' opinions and attitudes, and on the other hand, during the held informational, educational, explanatory and public discussion events. All groups of interested parties are fully included in the process of preparing the strategy through participation in the conducted surveys, informational and consultative meetings and public discussions. The local institutions participated in the process by providing up-to-date statistical information needed for preparation of the analyses and studies to the Strategy.

Description of the monitoring and evaluation system:

In order to track the progress in the implementation of the activities and the results of applying the Strategy for Community-Led Local Development, the LAG will implement a system for ongoing monitoring and evaluation. This system includes all monitoring and evaluation activities:

- Ongoing collection of data on the monitoring indicators and updating of indicators;
- Summarization and analysis of the collected data on the monitoring indicators - at least once a year;
- An external operational evaluation related to operational or strategic issues in the implementation of the Strategy for CLLD as a whole or individual priorities or measures, if necessary;
- External interim evaluation, if necessary;
- Follow-up evaluation in the last year of the Strategy for CLLD implementation.

The main purpose of the ongoing monitoring and evaluation system is to continuously monitor the implementation process of the Strategy for CLLD and the changes in the environment in order to timely analyse the progress, quality and problems in implementation, and take timely corrections if necessary.

The planning and implementation of ongoing monitoring and evaluation activities is the responsibility of the LAG Team. The conduct of the external operational, interim or follow-up evaluations is planned and supported by the LAG Team and performed by external independent evaluators.

The LAG will monitor the progress and quality of the implementation of the local development strategy using financial indicators, output indicators, result indicators.

The information for financial indicators, output indicators and outcome indicators will be collected for each project and will be summarized by measures, priorities and for the Strategy as a whole. This information will be updated regularly after a change occurs (for example, conclusion of a new contract, submitted payment request, or completion of contract performance).

For collection of the information for the output indicators and for the result indicators, a section with target values of the indicators will be included in the application request: general for the strategy and specific for the project. After the contract conclusion, the beneficiary will collect information on the actual implementation of the indicated indicators. The reliability of the submitted information by the beneficiary will be checked by the LAG Team.

The monitoring and evaluation system envisages the following types of external evaluations of the Strategy for CLLD:

- An external operational evaluation of specific operational or strategic issues is conducted if it is necessary for the purposes of preparing the Annual Progress Report or for an in-depth study of certain aspects of the Strategy for CLLD implementation. The decision for conducting such assessment is made by the MIG's Board of Directors.

- An external interim evaluation is conducted only if it is necessary to change the strategy or when significant problems arise in the implementation of the strategy, therefore its specific objectives and methods are determined before the start of implementation. Each mid-term evaluation should assess the progress in the implementation of the measures based on the output indicators and the result indicators, to draw conclusions and recommendations for improvement of performance. The decision for conducting an external mid-term evaluation is taken by the Board of Directors of the LAG.
- For assess the overall implementation of the strategy, at the end of its implementation, an external ex-post evaluation will be carried out. It assesses the use of resources, efficiency and effectiveness of implementation, impact and sustainability based on the comparison of achievements with predetermined objectives. It is also assessed the contribution of the strategy for CLLD to the implementation of the objectives of the financing programmes and the horizontal policies of the Community. On the basis of the evaluation, the factors determining the success/failure of the implementation of the strategy for CLLD and the lessons for planning and implementation of other similar programmes for the development of the territory are derived. The evaluation is made in the year of completion of the Strategy implementation and, if possible, after the completion of the all contracts implementation.

All evaluation reports are approved by the LAG's Board of Directors and published on the website.

The LAG prepares an annual report on the implementation of the strategy for CLLD, as well as other reports, analyses, references and others in connection with the implementation of the strategy, required by the MA. The annual reports are prepared by January 30 and submitted for approval by the LAG's Management Board.

By February 15 of each following calendar year (after the strategy approval), the LAG submits to the MA an annual report for reporting the implementation of the strategy for CLLD.

Preparing a report includes:

- analysis based on monitoring of the indicators for the duration of project activities, implementation of the set financial indicators, publicity and awareness, set and implemented results for each project;
- analysis of the process of application and implementation of projects by beneficiaries to the LAG;
- risk analysis in the implementation of projects, creation of a risk register at the start of each project, preventive actions taken and risk prevention;
- balanced implementation of the measures for the period.

The annual report includes a description and analysis of the environment and progress in implementing the goals and activities of the strategy, the monitoring and evaluation activities of the strategy.

Procedure for changing the Strategy for Community-Led Local Development

At the end of each year from the strategy implementation, on the basis of the annual progress report and the mid-term evaluation of the strategy applying, the Board will evaluate the strategy implementation by years, measures and the spent funds and, as a result of this evaluation, will

make proposals for renewal of the strategy. The proposals for the strategy renewal will be presented to the General Assembly of the LAG for approval. The procedure for the strategy renewing/updating can be in terms of its financial parameters; regarding the procedures for the strategy implementation; upon change of eligibility conditions, defined in the measures by the MA or the regulations for their implementation; upon change in the applicable regulations. The above-mentioned changes are carried out after the approval of the relevant Managing Authority, preceded by a Decision of the collective supreme body of the LAG for a change in the approved strategy for CLLD, and this change is reflected in the agreement for the strategy implementation between the LAG and the MA of the financing programmes.