



## THE CONTRIBUTION OF LOCAL ACTION GROUPS TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN ALBA COUNTY, ROMANIA

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**Abstract:** This paper analyzes the relevance of the LEADER approach and the role of Local Action Groups (LAGs) in supporting the sustainable development of rural areas in Alba County, Romania. In Alba County, LAGs cover an area of 3,584.27 km<sup>2</sup> and serve a population of 97,791 inhabitants, organized into four groups. The aim of the study is to highlight how these participatory structures contribute to the revitalization of rural areas through financial support provided under the Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan 2023–2027 (CAP SP 2023-2027), tailored to local needs and territorial specificities.

### Introduction

According to the EU CAP Network, over 2,600 Local Action Groups (LAGs) are set to become operational in 2023, implementing the LEADER approach through area-based Local Development Strategies. These strategies will guide the use of LAG funding to support bottom-up development initiatives focused on innovation, collaboration, and networking at the local level. In Romania, a total of 246 LAGs have been selected for the 2023–2027 programming period, reflecting the country's continued commitment to supporting rural development through community-led initiatives and tailored local strategies.

The funding of rural areas through LAGs plays a crucial role in supporting sustainable local development, enhancing territorial cohesion, and ensuring that the specific needs of small communities are addressed through locally designed and implemented solutions.

### • Material and method

For this paper, we applied the desk research method, which involved the review of specialized literature and official documents relevant to the implementation of Local Action Groups (LAGs), considering that Romania is in its third programming period of accessing EU funds for community-led local development. The analysis focused in particular on Alba County, within the Centre Region, aiming to explore how LAGs in this territory are financed and how they contribute to rural development under the 2023–2027 programming framework.

### • Results and discussions

The territorial configuration of the LAGs also allows the inclusion of administrative units from neighboring counties. In this context, two of the LAGs operating in Alba County also include territories from Mureș and Sibiu counties, extending the total covered area to 2,279.08 km<sup>2</sup> and the population to 98,261 inhabitants.

It was observed that the four LAGs operating exclusively within Alba County serve a smaller population compared to the two LAGs that include predominantly localities from Alba County along with areas from Mureș and Sibiu counties. This difference can be partly attributed to the mountainous regions of Alba County, which are more sparsely populated and less densely settled.

Alba County is also represented in the territory of a LAG where Sibiu County holds the majority—namely the ASOCIAȚIA GAL Mărginimea Sibiului, which includes the locality of Șugag from Alba. At the level of Alba County, the largest population among the active Local Action Groups is found within the Asociația GAL Țara Secașelor Alba – Sibiu, which covers a total of 54,327 inhabitants, reflecting a significant territorial and demographic scope within the LEADER framework.

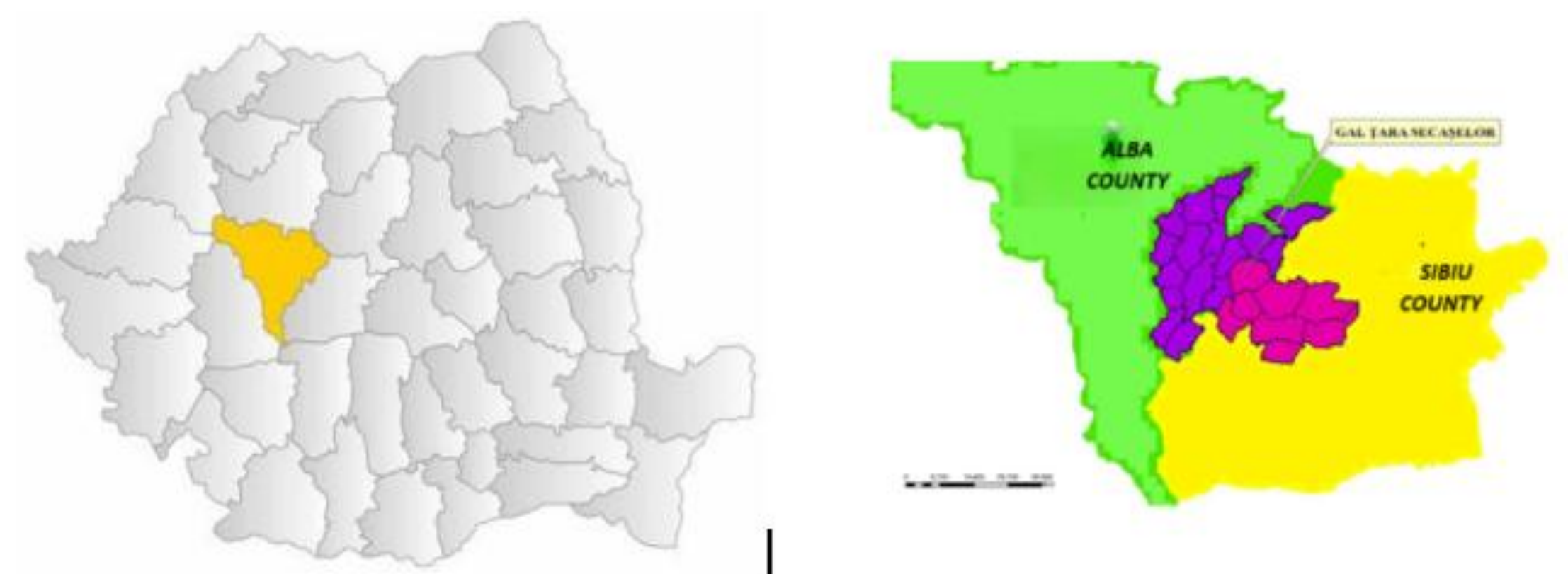


Figure 1. Alba County, Romania, Secașelor Country LAG

### • Conclusions

In Alba County, Romania's Centre Region, the implementation of Local Action Groups has made notable strides in responding to the specific challenges and development priorities of rural communities. The funding provided through SP CAP 2023-2027 plays a vital role in empowering rural communities, supporting local development initiatives, and reducing territorial disparities by channeling resources directly to locally identified priorities.