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EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY NETWORK (ESPN)

National strategies to fight homelessness and housing exclusion

Romania

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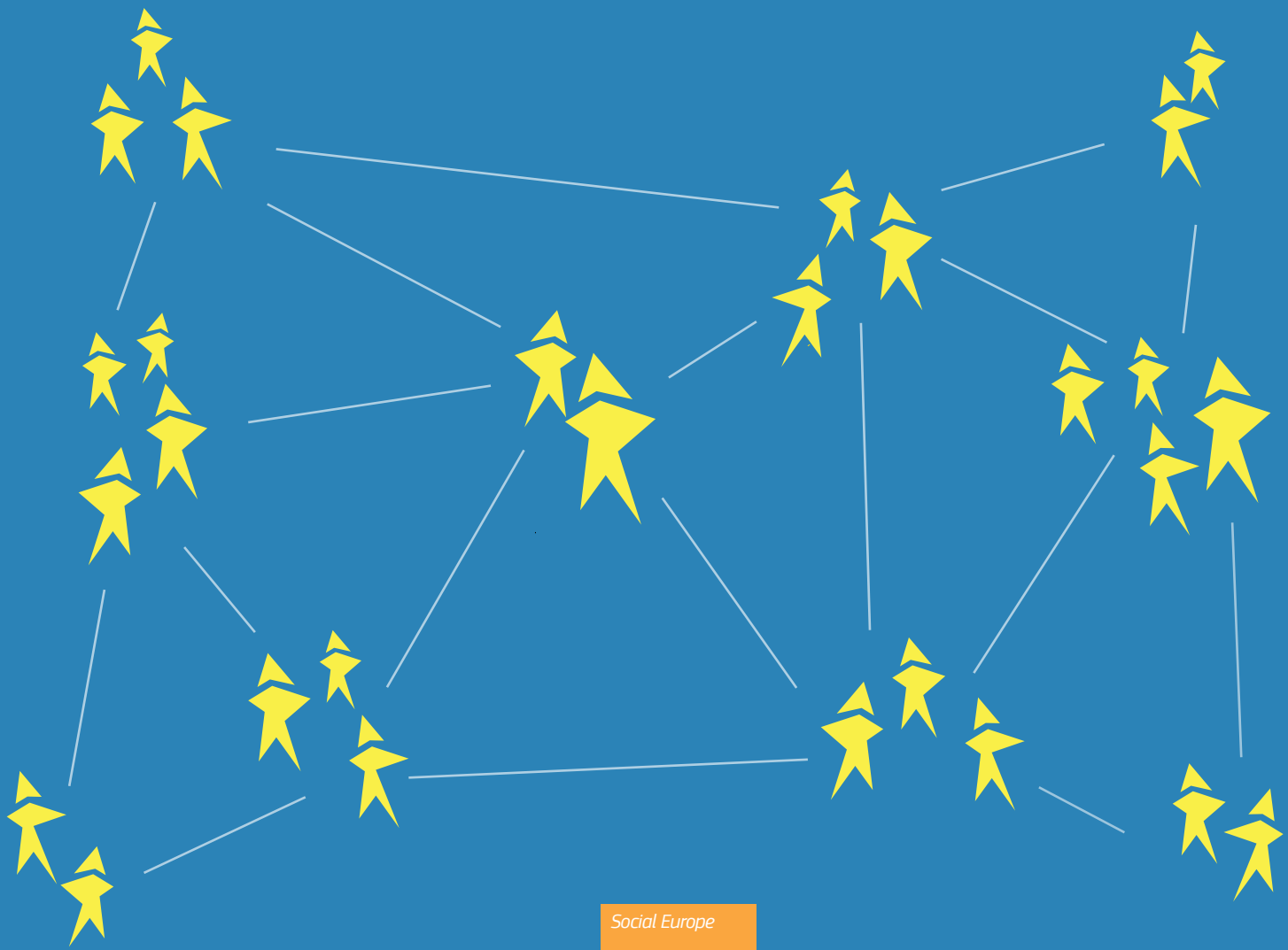

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European Social Policy Network (ESPN)

ESPN Thematic Report on National strategies to fight homelessness and housing exclusion

Romania

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Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

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The ESPN brings together into a single network the work that used to be carried out by the European Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion, the Network for the Analytical Support on the Socio-Economic Impact of Social Protection Reforms (ASISP) and the MISSOC (Mutual Information Systems on Social Protection) secretariat.

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Summary

Homelessness in Romania became visible in the 1990s, with the emergence of the street children phenomenon. Since then Romania has made some efforts to acknowledge homelessness and to provide a legal framework for programmes and services targeting homeless and vulnerable groups. The legal definition of homelessness (law 292/2011 on social assistance) covers all of the ETHOS[1] Light categories, with the exception of people living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing, who are not explicitly defined as homeless although they could be covered by the broad category of those 'unable to pay rent'. Social services addressing homelessness are regulated by the social assistance law, and social housing programmes by the law on housing (L114/1996).

However, homelessness and the risks of housing exclusion increased and diversified at a far faster pace than the policy responses to this growing and dynamic social reality. Rough sleepers were estimated in 2009 at about 15,000 nationwide, with a high concentration (88%) in big cities and municipalities, especially Bucharest with approximately 5,000 (of whom at least a quarter were children and young people aged below 35). While the available data do not allow an accurate assessment of the dynamics of the phenomenon, service providers agree that the profile of homeless people on the streets has changed over recent decades. The share of young adults growing up on the streets has increased, and two new categories of homeless people have emerged: the elderly (due to real estate scams) and entire families (due to evictions). Many of these are ethnic Roma. These changes signal a shift in the causes of homelessness from individual reasons (e.g. drug addiction, family violence and breakdown, divorce, and death of a family member) to structural reasons (mass evictions due to property repossessions, lack of housing support policies, and insufficient social housing stock). A new form of housing exclusion has emerged, transforming homelessness into a collective and segregated reality – marginalised communities and informal habitats, rooted in the post-communist economic realities but consolidating and growing due to the lack of a housing strategy. The number of people living in these communities is by far outgrowing the number of people on the streets – about 165,000 people lived in non-conventional dwellings according to the 2011 census (see Table A2 in the Annex), and twice as many in marginalised urban communities in insecure and precarious conditions (World Bank, 2014b).

Despite the fact that a legal definition of homelessness has been put in place, and the need for emergency-response and remedial social services to address homelessness acknowledged in some of the national strategies, no consistent and strategic policy approach to homelessness and housing exclusion has been developed yet. Public housing and, in particular, access to social housing has been regulated since 1996 (L114/1996); but in the absence of an integrated and strategic approach to housing (the national strategy on housing[2] has still not been approved two years after it was drafted), this legislative framework has become obsolete. Currently local authorities are not provided with the means and incentives to behave as an active and fair actor in developing, managing, improving and allocating public housing. In fact, Romania has a significant shortage in regard to the social/public housing stock (2% of the housing stock) and investment in social housing during recent decades has been rather meagre. This has worsened the consequences of evictions, leaving entire communities without housing options.

The development of both emergency-response services and in-depth preventive and reintegration services targeting homeless people was driven by the availability of European Union (EU) funds between 2007 and 2013. Currently, the sustainability of social services is at risk, as their provision depends on local funding, which is scarce, unpredictable and discretionary (due to a defective system of financial decentralisation). In addition, a system of housing costs support is almost entirely missing, thus putting

[1] European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion.

[2] MRDPA (2017).

low-income families at risk of eviction and leading to the deterioration of the (social) housing stock.

Amending the obsolete legal framework, adopting a national strategy in regard to housing and homelessness, and putting a system of coherent housing benefits in place all become crucial to addressing the structural causes of homelessness.

1 The nature and extent of homelessness and housing exclusion

In Romania, homelessness, housing exclusion and the social services targeting homelessness are defined under the social assistance law (L292/2011) and the laws regulating public housing (L114/1996, L143/2017).

According to the social assistance law (L292/2011) homeless people are defined as 'a social category of single people or families who, due to singular or cumulative social, medical, financial-economic or legal reasons or to an emergency situation, (a) are living on the street or, temporarily, with friends or acquaintances, (b) are unable to support rental payments or are at risk of eviction, and (c) are residing in institutions or prisons which they are expected to leave within two months, without a residency or stable address' (art.6.z). The Directorate for the Evidence of Population (GEO 97/2005) defines a person with no residence as a person who cannot provide proof of legal residence, has no ultimate place to live, or is temporarily living with someone who is unwilling to legalise their living arrangements.

The legal definitions explicitly include: people living rough (operational category 1, ETHOS Light); those in temporary or emergency accommodation for roofless people (categories 2 and 3); people in institutions/prisons (category 4); and people living temporarily in conventional housing with family or friends (category 6). People in non-conventional dwellings (category 5) are not covered by the Romanian legal definition, but those unable to support the costs of rent or who are at risk of eviction are defined by the law as homeless (Table A1 in the Annex).

The ***national strategy on social inclusion and poverty reduction for 2015-2020***[3] specifically refers to homeless people as a vulnerable group and identifies interventions which are considered a priority in regard to them. However, the strategy does not provide any definition of 'homeless' or 'street children', although these groups are the object of several measures; the strategy merely draws on the social assistance law for definitions. The ***draft national strategy on housing*** (which was finalised in 2017 but has not been approved yet by the government) reviews all legal definitions of homelessness, people without a legal residence, precarious housing, precarious living conditions, and inadequate living conditions (see also Table A3 in the Annex), and provides a relatively comprehensive picture regarding the characteristics of the vulnerable groups considered to be at risk of housing exclusion.

No official document, law or strategy provides an operational definition of the homeless or of those at risk of housing exclusion, and, as a consequence, no official statistics on these people are available. How to assess and monitor the 'inability to pay rent' or the 'risk of eviction' can be a challenge, just as it is to assess the size of the homeless population living rough across the country.

Available data. The scarce data available indicate about 15,000 people living rough[4], of whom 5,000 are estimated to live in Bucharest[5]. Most attempts to estimate the extent of the phenomenon are based on administrative data reported by city halls/public social service providers or data collected by non-government organisations (NGOs) about the number and profile of their beneficiaries. Thus, only a few studies are grounded in

[3] Ministry of Labour and Social Justice (2015).

[4] An estimate by the Research Institute for Quality of Life, based on a 2004 survey.

[5] Figures provided by Samusocial Romania (an NGO providing services to the homeless) and Doctors without Borders, based on a 2008-2009 survey (Samusocial, 2010).

representative samples, and produce reliable estimates. Save the Children Romania has conducted five surveys in order to assess different facets of child and youth homelessness (1998, 2002, 2003, 2009, 2014). The 2009 study was carried out in three big cities – Bucharest, Brașov and Constanța – and identified about 1,400 children and young people (aged under 35) living on the streets, of whom a little over 1,000 were in Bucharest. In 2014, the study was carried out in Bucharest and identified 1,113 children and young people living rough. In addition, according to the 2011 census, there were around 165,000 people living in non-conventional dwellings (that is, in institutions or in informal settings)[6].

Dynamics, sources and profile of homelessness. According to the survey carried out by Save the Children Romania in Bucharest in 2014, about 42% of homeless children and young people (under 35) had been living on the streets for more than 10 years. The shortage of affordable housing (low stock of social housing, high market rents, increasing costs of electricity and heating) favoured the emergence of new pathways into homelessness; young people leaving residential institutions at the age of 18, and families breaking up or unable to support housing costs are more prone to end up on the streets. Failure to make regular mortgage payments emerged as a significant risk of homelessness, especially after 2009 in the aftermath of the economic crisis. On top of these, and among the most important reasons for the increase in homelessness and marginalisation[7], are real estate scams and the restitution of nationalised houses, leading to forced evictions. Evictions determined the emergence of new, urban (at the peripheries of the cities and around rubbish dumps) marginalised/informal communities, associated with housing segregation and increased risks of chronic marginalisation and social exclusion (see Ministry of Labour and Social Justice (2015), but also Blocul pentru Locuire (2019) on the dynamics of forced evictions).

For example, in 2009 the study carried out by Save the Children Romania identified the main cause of child and youth homelessness to be family breakdown and adverse events, including loss of housing and evictions (35%), followed by lack of access to housing for children leaving public residential childcare institutions on reaching the age of 18 (23%). In 2014, the main pathway to homelessness among children and young people in Bucharest (Save the Children, 2014) was running away from home or leaving residential public institutions (either by being thrown out or leaving with the approval of the family). The proportion was higher among those living permanently on the streets: 73% compared with 48% among those living only temporarily on the streets (during the daytime mostly).

Over half of the children and young people living on the streets came from large families with separated parents (if parents had ever been present), family breakdown being a major reason for ending up homeless. Other reasons – such as being evicted together with the family, leaving the public childcare system at the age of 18 or losing the house after the death of a parent/parent's partner – were cited by 27% of the young homeless people living permanently on the streets, and by 52% of those living temporarily on the streets (Save the Children, 2014, p.17). Overall, 58% of street children and young homeless people in Bucharest were, in 2014, living permanently on the streets. There was also a significant difference between the population living permanently and temporarily on the streets in regard to gender: 65% of those living permanently on the streets were boys/men while 54% of those living temporarily on the streets were girls/women.

Living on the streets is concentrated in big urban settings (Briciu, 2014); in 2013-2014 about 95% of the roofless were living in urban areas, and 88% of these were in big

[6] The 2011 census registered only 1,542 roofless people, 10 times less than the estimate from the Research Institute for Quality of Life survey in 2004, and at least 3 times less than the estimates provided by local public authorities (Ministry of Labour and Social Justice, 2015, p.62).

[7] While there are no clear data on the increase in homelessness and marginalisation, a series of reports point to the increased number of evictions, especially after 2009 (Blocul pentru Locuire, 2019) and the increase and consolidation of marginalised urban communities (World Bank, 2014b).

cities. One third of the people living on the streets were located in Bucharest (Ministry of Labour and Social Justice, 2015).

An analysis of the files of over 1,000 beneficiaries of the services provided by the Samusocial foundation between 2006 and 2008 revealed that the adult homeless population of Bucharest was predominantly male (73%) and middle-aged (52% aged 30-49) (Samusocial, 2010). Of all adult homeless people, 65% had no identity papers. This was almost 3 times higher than the 23% estimated for children and young people in Bucharest (Save the Children, 2014, p.20). According to another report, a little over two thirds of the latter had previously lived in Bucharest, while less than a third had come from other cities (Briciu, 2014).

The profile of homeless people in Bucharest has changed since the early 1990s. According to an interview with one of the psychologists of the Samusocial foundation[8], street children have slowly been replaced by ***young adults who grew up on the streets***; and a new class of ***elderly homeless people*** is emerging, due to a large number of cases in which people were tricked into handing over their property in return for certain services (the Samusocial estimates that 19% were victims of real estate scams[9]). The number of homeless people increased as well, according to the NGOs involved in service provision, with more and more ***families living on the streets***. According to Casa Ioana, one of the most important NGOs providing services to homeless women, families are the fastest growing segment of the homeless population[10]. The longer families live on the streets, the harder it is for them to regain stability and to overcome the long-lasting effects on children in regard to education and health. The lack of political interest in this highly vulnerable group, which is smaller than other vulnerable social groups, has made homelessness a chronic problem.

Among the homeless, and especially among the victims of eviction, an important group is the ethnic ***Roma*** population. While 61% of the Roma population live in rural areas and only 39% in urban ones[11], urban living is a real challenge for almost all Roma families (according to a 2011 regional Roma survey, reported in: World Bank, 2014a, p.15-16). Many Roma families live in social housing, and 54% of these (compared with 39% in rural areas) cannot afford to pay the rent, thus facing a high risk of eviction. In addition to this, 56% of the Roma population live in segregated communities, with a predominance of ethnic Roma (see Table 1 for details on Roma living conditions).

[8] Victor Badea, for Dilema Veche website in 2010. Reported at: https://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/la-singular-si-la-plural/articol/oamenilor-strazii-li-se-ofera-prea-putin-ajutor-interviu-cu-victor-badea-psiholog-la-organizatia-samusocial.

[9] See the data on the reasons for adult homelessness, Cauzele pentru care persoanele adulte fara adapost sunt in strada, http://www.samusocial.ro/media/statistici-cifre

[10] http://casaioana.org/en/about-family-homelessness.

[11] Official data indicate about 250,000 Roma living in urban areas, while unofficial estimates point to about 800,000, out of an estimated total population of 1.8 to 2.2 million Roma (according to World Bank, 2014a).

Table 1: Housing conditions among Roma population and their non-Roma neighbours, Romania 2011 (%)

	Roma %	Non-Roma neighbours %		Roma %	Non-Roma neighbours %
Living in very precarious conditions or very bad neighbourhoods	30	5	Overcrowding	66	25
Urban living in flats of very low quality, marginalised communities, improvised/temporary camps of very low quality and inadequate infrastructure	40-45	20	Small dwellings: with 1-2 rooms	57	32
Rural inadequate living	33		Access to basic utilities		
Living in extremely deteriorated housing			Electricity	86	98
- Urban	33		Kitchen in the dwelling	62	90
- Rural	25		Toilet inside the house	17	43
Living in refugee camps or improvised shelters			Outside toilet	82	75
- Urban	4		Running drinking water in the house	17	34
- Rural	1		No single source of drinking water	10 urban 4 rural	<2 urban and rural

Data source: Data from 2011 regional Roma survey, reported in World Bank (2014a)

The housing segregation of vulnerable groups, due to factory shut-downs in mono-industrial areas in the 1990s and an inability to cope with increasing housing costs and evictions in urban areas, has led to the emergence of significant ***marginalised communities*** in Romania. Marginalised communities are defined as those with low human capital, low formal employment and a high incidence of precarious housing conditions (for details on the indicators used to assess marginalisation in rural areas compared with urban ones, see World Bank, 2017, p.24, Table 1). In the absence of any policy intervention and coherent strategy, these communities have undergone a process of crystallisation and stabilisation, with long-term negative consequences for their inhabitants.

Two major World Bank studies on Romania (2014b; 2016) identified 343,000 people living in marginalised urban communities, and 564,000 people living in marginalised rural communities. Marginalised communities are present across 264 cities and Bucharest, out of 320 cities in Romania, and across 992 rural communes[12]; that is, about 35% of all the communes in Romania. 2.5% of the urban housing stock and 5.2% of all rural dwellings are home to marginalised communities. Some of these communities, such as the former

[12] Rural administrative units, comprising one or more villages.

workers' colonies and improvised neighbourhoods, can easily be considered unsanitary and precarious, and can be labelled as temporary shelters, while others – such as the formerly modernised social housing neighbourhoods and historical buildings, can be classified as inadequate living conditions (for a typology and description of these communities see Boxes A1 and A2 in the Annex).

Similar to the profile of homeless people living on the streets, the inhabitants of these communities are younger, have significantly lower levels of education and more health problems compared with residents of non-marginalised communities; and most of their income is derived from informal activities, due to low formal employment opportunities. Also similar to those living on the streets, many of the inhabitants of marginalised communities have no identity papers and/or legal residency, and therefore have little or no access to basic social services such as education, healthcare or employment services.

Concluding, the number of homeless people living on the streets grew between 1995 and 2015 (Paraschiv, 2015) and the share of people becoming homeless due to structural causes (evictions due to property restitutions, incapacity to pay bills and/or mortgage costs) increased along with these. The number of families on the street grew and so did the number of people who had been on the street for a long time, indicating that homelessness became a chronic phenomenon with increasing structural roots. The most significant at-risk groups were Roma, elderly people, children leaving public residential childcare institutions, children in large families facing separation or divorce, and persons/families facing eviction. An additional at-risk category were the residents of marginalised communities and informal settings; some of these can be considered homeless despite the restrictive legal definition of homelessness, which basically excludes any quasi-permanent living arrangement, irrespective of its legal status, housing security and conditions.

2 Relevant strategies and policies tackling homelessness and housing exclusion

The ***draft national strategy on housing*** (MRDPA, 2017) addresses housing vulnerabilities and the risk of housing exclusion, and stipulates the need to identify an operational methodology which would permit the monitoring of any policy intervention in regard to housing; it proposes using the EU 'severe housing deprivation' indicator, along with one of its components – the 'overcrowded household' indicator – for monitoring and assessing housing policies targeting the most vulnerable groups[13]. In 2017, the proportion of people living in severe housing deprivation in Romania was 17%, more than 4 times the EU-28 average (4%); and 47% of the Romanian population (EU-28: 16%) were living in overcrowded households, by far the highest rate across Europe.

The ethnic Roma population and young people, along with other groups such as single elderly people, large and single-parent young families, are identified by the draft housing strategy as the most vulnerable groups. In addition to these, marginalised communities and people living in informal settings are considered to be at significant risk of housing exclusion, thus requiring special policy attention (MRDPA, 2017).

[13] The EU 'severe housing deprivation' indicator measures the percentage of the population living in a dwelling which combines:

'overcrowding' (i.e. the household does not have at its disposal a minimum number of rooms equal to: a) one room for the household; b) one room per couple in the household; c) one room for each single person aged 18 or more; d) one room per pair of single people of the same gender aged 12-17; e) one room for each single person aged 12-17 and not included in the previous category; and f) one room per pair of children under 12 [Eurostat, SILC, iilc_livho06a; see: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Overcrowding_rate]); ***and***

poor housing quality (i.e. the dwelling exhibits at least one of the following three housing deprivations: a leaking roof; no bath/shower and no indoor toilet; and darkness [Eurostat, SILC, ilc_lvho05; see: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Severe_housing_deprivation_rate]).

The draft document proposes two key objectives, as follows.

a) Increasing the public housing stock. This key objective (objective 5 of the operational plan) calls for both the acquisition/rehabilitation of older buildings and the construction of new social housing, with a specific emphasis on social housing for evicted tenants from formerly publicly owned houses (a distinct programme with dedicated financing). However, there is no budget or financing source allocated to this objective.

b) Improving the housing conditions of vulnerable groups (those lacking secure tenure and/or living in insalubrious conditions). This key objective (objective 4) comprises three measures. Two of these are based on housing upgrading: i) modernising housing in marginalised communities (complementary with other regional operational programmes, under the financial axes for supporting the economic and social regeneration of disadvantaged communities in urban areas); and ii) developing a national plan to support local authorities in improving housing conditions for those with lower-than-average income levels who own their houses but who are living in precarious conditions ('insalubrious conditions'). The third measure refers to subsidies/vouchers for addressing housing costs (rent and utilities) for low-income families, but the legal and operational framework for this measure is not provided.

In addition to these two objectives, a component of the objective on housing safety and the risks of natural disasters is dedicated to the relocation of people living in informal settings that are exposed to natural risks.

As there is no approved housing strategy, homelessness and the risk of housing exclusion are primarily addressed by the ***national strategy on social inclusion and poverty reduction*** for 2015-2020[14]. Similar to the draft strategy on housing, this strategy focuses on social housing and on improving the affordability and quality of the existing housing stock – as the main solution to the risks of both homelessness and housing exclusion. Other proposed/mentioned intervention strategies refer to: a) improving emergency responses (i.e. increasing the number of night shelters/temporary shelters/shelters for victims of domestic violence, developing special shelters for children, and increasing health and food services provided directly on the street); b) strengthening general preventive and support services for various vulnerable categories, such as victims of domestic violence, drug addicts, former offenders, and young people leaving public childcare institutions at age 18; c) adopting urban regeneration programmes in order to solve the issue of illegal/informal settings; and d) stopping illegal evictions.

Finally, when it comes to the strategy's operational plan for the entire period covered, only two objectives stand out, as follows.

1. Reducing the number of street children/homeless children by: (a) preparing specific support programmes aimed at increasing the social integration chances of children exiting the public childcare system at age 18; and (b) developing a systematic database and integrated measures to cope with the needs of street children.

2. Consolidating the capacity to intervene directly on the streets, alongside developing in-depth services for both early prevention of homelessness and the social reintegration of homeless people. This last objective includes a series of measures, such as: monitoring of homelessness dynamics; consolidating emergency responses on the streets and reducing the number of new cases; and developing long-term integration programmes. Thus, the proposed measures only fall under the category of preventive or remedial specialised social services.

[14] Ministry of Labour and Social Justice (2015).

The risks of housing exclusion, associated with precarious and insecure housing, are the object of a consistent, but unfortunately less operational, set of measures in the ***national strategy for social inclusion of Roma ethnic citizens for 2015-2020***. Among these, the most important are: a*)* the rehabilitation of existing buildings in public ownership (as 30% of Roma households live in inadequate conditions and/or in dwellings which are not connected to basic utilities); b) the development of a programme of urban regeneration, and of an adequate methodology to pursue this, in order to eradicate the insalubrious habitats in marginalised Roma communities and to develop infrastructure in communities where Roma predominate; c) the development of a strategic framework of urban social and local integration, in accordance with the EU financing line aimed at reducing urban poverty; d) offering systematic support to informal Roma communities to register their land and clarify their tenure status; and, finally e) the development of the social housing stock combined with a fair allocation process, which would allow non-discriminatory access to housing for the Roma population without an income.

The ***government's programme for 2018-2020***[15] also acknowledges the need to intervene and improve the living conditions of Roma communities, most of which are characterised by extreme poverty, and contains promises to: a) solve problems related to tenure status (ownership of land and dwellings); and b) implement rehabilitation programmes in the Roma community in order to ensure access to electricity, drinking water, sewers, gas and refuse collection. The programme does not make any further references to policy interventions, besides the need for a diagnosis of social service demand by the most vulnerable groups (including homeless people, young people leaving public childcare institutions, ex-offenders, victims of evictions, and people dependent on drugs).

Concluding, the objectives formulated by the most important national strategies focus either on adequate housing provision (development of public housing, upgrading of marginalised communities and prioritisation of access to rehabilitation programmes and allocation of social housing) or on increasing emergency interventions on the streets targeting homelessness. The need for in-depth social services for both preventing homelessness and socially reintegrating homeless people is acknowledged, but it remains rather under-defined and un-operationalised. In addition, only very few measures draw on social benefits for increasing the affordability of housing as these are expected to be part of the minimum insertion income, which was approved in 2016 and its implementation delayed several times (the latest deadline for its implementation being 2021).

While responsibilities for these rather general measures are clearly assigned to different institutional actors, indicators and targets are missing almost entirely; and, if present, they lack any baseline reference values and underlying demand-based analysis. Finally, none of these objectives is accompanied by a clearly defined funding mechanism.

Overall, the lack of adequate finance mechanisms and a defective system of financial decentralisation of all social services (without the specification of an adequate income source), represented a significant barrier to carrying out effectively any of the proposed objectives. Very few services are financed directly from the state budget (mostly those which are part of the so-called 'multi-annual national interest programmes'). All service providers, both public and private, can obtain subsidies from the state budget, but the share of subsidies is in many cases rather low[16]. Thus, local/county-level authorities have the main financial responsibility for the development of networks of specialised services. Financing mechanisms and allocation processes are not transparent; they are hard to monitor and assess, and they remain mostly at the discretion of local authorities, depending on political support and will or the financial and administrative capacity of local authorities.

[15] Government of Romania (2018).

[16] According to the statistical data provided on a quarterly basis by the Ministry of Labour and Social Justice (http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/transparenta/statistici/buletin-statistic).

Most of the programmes targeting homelessness (needs assessments, preventive or emergency social assistance services) have been supported by EU funds. Some important systematic studies have been carried out using these funds: a diagnosis of the housing situation in Romania (World Bank, 2015); an analysis of informal settings (MRDPA, 2015); the methodological foundation and analyses of marginalised urban and rural communities (World Bank, 2014b and 2016); and many other surveys and assessments of beneficiaries/rough sleepers carried out by the NGOs providing services to homeless people. EU funds also made possible the establishment of a national interest programme on 'ending the social exclusion of homeless people' during 2007-2013, which permitted the opening and financing of 50 emergency centres in all major cities in Romania (benefiting around 10,000 people). Social reintegration centres were developed during this period, providing a wide range of services from art therapy for children to employment services, training courses and health education. The private sector benefited from EU funding as well, and many NGOs provided a series of diversified services between 2007 and 2012, some of which stopped as soon as the funding ended (on the variety of social services, see Paraschiv, 2015).

The lack of an adequate, sustainable and predictable financing strategy for any policy intervention targeting homelessness (from investment in social housing to social services and housing benefits) forced institutional actors and service providers to rely, almost entirely, on external funding, mainly EU funding sources. This had its disadvantages, as all the efforts and political attention were concentrated on homelessness during the previous financing cycle (2007-2013), with basically no visible effects after 2015. In regard to homelessness and housing exclusion, maybe even more so than in other areas of social protection, EU funds and financing directions guided policy developments, instead of supporting and supplementing the funding of nationally set priorities. The consequence of this reversed, funding-driven policy development process is its lack of sustainability and fragmentary character.

For 2014-2020 EU funds are available mainly through the regional operational programme, under the financing of two priority axes – development of social and sanitary infrastructure (axis 8) and economic and social regeneration of vulnerable communities (axis 9). Both axes target public housing/infrastructure construction and rehabilitation, and axis 9 is focused more on local action groups targeting vulnerable communities. While both axes benefited from generous allocations (around 1 billion Euros together), the absorption rate for the entire regional operational programme is extremely low, with an effective absorption rate of 0.87% and a current absorption rate of 0.96% (as at August 2018[17]). All of the EU investment in social housing, administered by the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration (MRDPA), is channelled through this operational programme. However, these funding sources support only tangible investments.

Homeless people are addressed within the operational programme on human capital (OPHC), axis 4 'Social inclusion and poverty reduction', along with a few other vulnerable groups. The programme offers support for the development and provision of, and access to, integrated services such as: temporary residential services; psycho-socio-medical services; reintegration in the educational system; employment services (counselling, active measures, training, accompaniment services); and innovative solutions to the provision of basic social services. Accompanying services will be limited to those supporting effective measures that prevent homelessness and encourage the socio-professional reinsertion of homeless people. These services are provided within the framework of the investment priority relating to the socio-economic integration of marginalised communities and will target both less developed and relatively developed communities. The operational programme on administrative capacity will support measures to increase the capacity of local actors which provide integrated services. In 2019, the first integrated community-based services are expected to be piloted in 139 selected marginalised communities over a period of 28 months, using EU funds within the

[17] https://www.startupcafe.ro/bani-europeni/fonduri-absorbtie-programe.htm.

framework of the OPHC. The programme is jointly run and coordinated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Justice, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education, and is aimed at creating inter-disciplinary teams.

Another EU funding source used to target homeless people directly, by providing them with basic goods (mostly through night and temporary shelters), is the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD). Approximately 6 million Euros were approved for 2014-2020 for providing material goods directly to homeless people through the operational programme for the aid of disadvantaged people. The absorption rate for the programme is unknown.

Summarising, the objectives set by the national strategies that directly tackle homelessness and housing exclusion are either focused on: a) increasing the housing stock and/or improving housing conditions for vulnerable/poor groups; or b) providing emergency services to those already on the streets. Prevention of homelessness, by concentrating on at-risk groups (Roma; children from broken families; young people coming out of public childcare institutions; single and dependent elderly people; and marginalised communities) is only formulated in very general terms and at an abstract, 'yet-to-be-documented' level. Finally, none of the measures subsumed under these objectives is associated with concrete outcome indicators, assigned budgets or even specified financing mechanisms.

Since 2014, which represents the starting point for most national strategies, not much has been done. First, a national strategy in the field of housing is missing; the 2017 draft has still not been approved and, despite many reports emphasising the shortcomings of the current legislation on housing and the prevention of housing exclusion, no legislative amendments have been made. Thus, current programmes still have a series of shortcomings (among which financing mechanisms are the most important barriers to development) and are grounded in a relatively obsolete legislation.

Finally, there is some evidence that bigger and wealthier municipalities have not only adopted their own intervention strategies based on the national ones, but also tried to implement them; and some of these local authorities have even developed complex and in-depth responses to homelessness. This is the case for Bucharest (and all its six sectors).

Monitoring indicators are largely missing, and not even a system of assessing demand for various types of interventions is in place. For example, systematic data regarding the demand for, and provision of, social housing stock are missing (for a definition of all public housing types targeted at homeless people and those at risk of housing exclusion, see Table A3 in the Annex). In 2015 the MRDPA estimated that in urban areas there was a demand for 67,100 dwellings, and a supply of 28,317 dwellings (about 2% of the total housing stock) (MRDPA, 2015, p.23). Of these, 5,602 social dwellings (including 'necessity' and support housing; see Table A3) were built between 1996 (when the programme started) and 2014; and 3,895 additional dwellings have been finished for evicted persons/families due to property restitution. Overall, these represent only one third of the existing stock. Finally, implementation of a pilot programme for the construction of dwellings for Roma communities was also slow: out of the 300 housing units promised in 2008, about 231 were 'under different stages of construction' in 2016, according to the National Agency for Housing[18]. According to Partida Romilor Pro-Europa[19], 2014 was the first year when a budget was allocated to the programme.

It is impossible to assess the effectiveness of these programmes as long as there are no data available on demand, investment and annual budgets for them; not even the MRDPA, which administers the programmes, provides data on these. According to the MRDPA, demand is currently estimated based on the number of families/persons requesting or applying for social housing, while the number of people at risk of eviction is

[18] http://www.anr.gov.ro/docs/Site2016/evenimente/Comunicate/20160302Comunicat.pdf.

[19] http://www.partidaromilor.ro/bani-pentru-construirea-de-locuinte-sociale-pentru-romi.

largely unknown (MRDPA, 2015). However, not all those eligible and in need of social housing apply for it, as many city halls discourage applicants due to a chronic shortage of social housing.

What have been the reasons, besides the lack of adequate financial strategies, for this massive failure of all programmes targeting homelessness? There is a public debate (see Box A3 in the Annex) about the reasons why access to public housing is failing to solve the problems of the population at risk of housing exclusion. Local authorities proved: a) to be legally constrained in their capacity to invest in and develop the social housing stock (thus many NGOs and coalitions are fighting for amendments to the legislation, which seems to be too restrictive in this respect); b) to have too much discretion in regard to setting additional eligibility criteria and priorities in allocating the public housing stock (in the absence of any national strategic guidelines), resulting in systematic bias in the processes of rehousing people and allocating social housing, and leading to discrimination and further geographical segregation; and c) to be unable to manage social housing by helping/incentivising people to overcome their financial problems, resulting in further evictions[20].

A second major reason for the failure to prevent homelessness is the lack of a national strategy to guide action, provide assessment methodologies and a legal framework for supporting sustainable housing strategies for vulnerable groups. Some programmes for rehabilitating and regenerating informal urban communities emerged under the regional operational programme, but in the absence of an approved national strategy these programmes are rather isolated, and their effectiveness remains unclear. Systematic data regarding these projects at the national level are entirely missing, and even the demand for them, and scale of the effort required, remains unknown.

The development of social services (emergency responses to homeless people on the streets, preventive social services and reintegration services for homeless people) stagnated after 2014, and the amount of provision fell slightly. There are not enough data to provide a more comprehensive assessment of the trends in these services. As a general conclusion, specialised and in-depth services are still scarce and in high demand. A possible reason for the failure to address these strategic objectives is the lack of adequate and sustainable funding, and of coordination mechanisms between institutional actors in charge of the various components of social services.

Perhaps one of the few steps forward was the thorough diagnoses of urban and rural marginalised communities (World Bank 2014b, 2016, 2017) and of informal settings (MRDPA, 2015) in Romania. Parallel with these, efforts have been made by various NGOs to promote the need to legally recognise the state of 'informal living', despite the debate around possible intervention strategies (see also Section 3)[21]. The shift in priorities towards communities and community-level integrated interventions favours a community-centred approach to housing improvement.

While the national strategies emphasise the need to make housing not only decent but also affordable, programmes aimed at increasing the capacity of vulnerable people/families to cope with the costs of utilities are still non-existent. In 2014, households in the poorest income decile spent at least 43% of their total disposable income on housing (rent/mortgage payments) (MRDPA, 2015, p.22). The only social benefit granted specially to compensate for housing costs is the heating aid, offered for four months each year during the cold season. Data show that in 2014 in urban areas, 63% of those in social housing found it hard to pay their rent and utility bills, with the result that many ended up being evicted (MRDPA, 2015, p.21).

[20] Blocul pentru Locuire, apel catre Senatul Romaniei, https://bloculpentrulocuire.ro/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/apel-catre-senatorii-și-deputații-din-Parlamentul-României.pdf.

[21] Locuireinformala.ro, an initiative of the partnership between PACT, MKBT: MakeBetter, GAL Reșița, Asociația DEP Bumbești Jiu și Grupul de Inițiativă Valea Corbului on the one hand, and Blocul pentru Locuire, a decentralised group of foundations, NGOs and initiatives, on the other.

3 Analysis of the current patterns of service provision and challenges in implementing Romania's responses to homelessness and housing exclusion

Romania's direct and indirect approach to homelessness and housing exclusion is a mix of housing-led programmes (social/'necessity' housing development and rehabilitation/regeneration of precarious living areas) and emergency-response services. While preventive services and in-depth support services are emphasised in the national strategy for social inclusion and poverty reduction, these are not mainstreamed and tend to be offered only by local authorities that are financially and administratively better off. Housing benefits, as a means of both preventing housing exclusion and enabling access to affordable adequate housing, are limited to heating benefits granted during the cold months. Thus, their power to provide adequate protection is low.

Most of the NGOs and coalitions for housing rights support a house-led, housing-first approach and agree on the need to both: a) increase the social housing stock, along with the rehabilitation of both privately and publicly owned housing stock in marginalised and/or informal communities; and b) make housing affordable for the most vulnerable groups, especially the Roma population. They lobby for accessible and affordable, secure and non-precarious, housing. Some are more concerned about informal settings, which cumulate insecurity with precarity[22], while others are more concerned about the availability of adequate social housing and about fair access to (re)housing by homeless people and those facing the risk of eviction.

Social housing. Three types of public housing are available for homeless people or those at risk of housing exclusion: social housing, 'necessity' housing and support housing (see Table A3 in the Annex). While 'necessity' and support housing are targeted at specific groups – that is, respectively, those whose dwellings are being rehabilitated or demolished, and those who lost their home due to inability to pay their mortgage – social housing is targeted at a wider population. According to the housing law (L114/1996), individuals/families can benefit from social housing if they: a) did not sell a property after 1990; b) do not hold any private real estate property; c) did not benefit from any subsidies for the construction of a house; and d) are not tenants of other publicly owned housing. Beneficiaries of social housing have to have an income per capita lower than the average national income and to belong to one of the following categories: 1) people/families who are victims of eviction from nationalisedbuildings taken into public ownership which have been/will be transferred to their original owners; 2) young people under 35; 3) young people leaving public childcare institutions at age 18; 4) people with disabilities; 5) invalidity pensioners; 6) old-age pensioners; 7) veterans; 8) heroes of the 1989 revolution; and 9) politically persecuted people. No prioritisation criteria are available at a national level, with the exception of victims of forced evictions due to property restitution. People in the latter category are the target of a programme on guaranteed social housing (GEO74/2006, approved by L84/2008) which is under the responsibility of the MRDPA. However, its effectiveness was, and continues to be, low. Thus, prioritisation criteria in allocating social housing are at the discretion of local authorities.

However, as a recognition of the fact that the Roma population is the most vulnerable group in regard to housing, a national pilot programme for the construction of 300 dwellings for Roma communities (GD 1237/2008) has been approved, which is under the responsibility of the National Agency for Housing and the National Agency for Roma. The programme had no pre-defined allocated budget and no financing requirements. As a consequence, in 2016, eight years after its adoption, only 231 dwellings were 'under different stages of construction', according to the National Agency for Housing.

Two additional housing-led programmes are available for young adults (aged under 35). The first one refers to the construction of public dwellings for young adults, with the

[22] See website of research/information platform on informal housing at: http://locuireinformala.ro/?lang=en.

possibility of selling these to the tenants after one contractual year (L152/1998 and GD162/2001, under the National Agency for Housing). The programme is targeted at young people who have never held or sold a real estate property. The second one – the 'first house' programme – facilitates access to credits for young people (aged under 35) through state guarantees for buying or building a house.

Two important programmes for ***improving housing conditions***, as part of the prevention of housing exclusion, are in place as follows.

- Programmes of urban regeneration of marginalised communities (under the regional operational programme, financing axes 8 and 9, and under the broader legislative framework regarding urban regeneration, GEO 27/2008 and L242/2009); these programmes fall under the responsibility of local authorities for planning and execution and under the methodological responsibility of the MRDPA.
- Programmes for improving the thermal efficiency (e.g. insulation, improvement of heating systems, modernisation of pipes) of residential dwellings built before 1990 (OUG18/2009). The programme falls under the responsibility of local authorities and the MRDPA. 80% of the costs are supported by either local authorities (30%) or state budget (50%). Persons or families who cannot contribute their part of the costs are eligible for subsidies from local budgets.

These programmes partially substitute for the lack of a comprehensive housing benefit system. ***Housing benefits*** are limited to heating aids granted during the cold months to families on low incomes. The level of the benefit depends on the level of income (according to 11 income brackets) and type of heating fuel/system (regulated by L416/2001 regarding the minimum income guarantee, and further through GEO 70/2011 and GD 920/2011); these are paid from the state budget, and local authorities are responsible for the means-testing procedure and approval process.

During 2007-2013, ***emergency-response and social reintegration services*** developed at a significant pace due to substantial EU funding opportunities. According to the social assistance law (L292/2011), homeless people are entitled to preventive social services against social exclusion (along with people with no income/low income, convicted persons or victims of human trafficking) (art. 56.1). Further, the law stipulates that services for homeless people are meant to ensure temporary accommodation for a determined period of time, along with counselling and insertion/social reintegration services according to individual needs (art.57). The main social services provided within this framework are as follows.

- **Assistance and social reintegration residential centres for homeless people**, mostly under the responsibility of local authorities but some run by NGOs or by the county-level Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection. Each centre has its own rules regarding admission procedures and the maximum length of stay. Most of these allow beneficiaries to spend between one and two years in residence. In 2017 the number of these centres was 27 with an overall capacity of about 1,000 places, slightly less than in 2016 (Table A4 in the Annex).
- **Residential centres for assistance to the victims of domestic violence**, of which some are emergency centres while others are recovery centres; the number of licensed services, in 2017, was 42, among which there were twice as many emergency centres as recovery centres (Table A5 in the Annex).
- **Residential centres for young people in difficult situations**, of which some include a prevention component and are aimed at young people leaving public care institutions at age 18 (multi-functional centres). Another type of residential centre for young people is the transitional centre, which offers temporary shelter and emergency support. In 2017, 47 centres were licensed, of which 33 were multi-functional centres and 14 transitional ones (Table A5 in the Annex).
- **Night shelters** – these are the most common form of emergency services granted to homeless people, with a monthly average of about 2,000 beneficiaries

(Table A4 in the Annex); most of these are run by local authorities, and fewer than 20% of the beneficiaries are provided for by shelters run by NGOs; in 2017 an average of 40% of the annual operating budgets of NGO-run shelters came from local budgets (according to the Ministry of Labour and Social Justice).

- **Day centres for information and counselling of homeless people** – these are in high demand, but their number is rather low, falling from 4 centres in 2016 to 1 centre in 2017 with an average of 16 beneficiaries (see Table A4 in the Annex).
- **Day centres for social reintegration** have shared the same fate, as their number fell from 9 in 2016 to 2 in 2017 (Table A4 in the Annex) with only 1 centre being licensed (Table A5 in the Annex).
- **Street intervention services** are also scarce. In 2017, 2 mobile teams and 3 social ambulances (with 400 beneficiaries each month) were operational; these services were offered by local authorities/Bucharest municipality, and only one mobile team was licensed (Table A5 in the Annex).

First, there is a slight difference between the number of effective service providers and the number of licensed services (Tables A4, A5 and A6 in the Annex). For example, the number of night shelters that provided services during 2017 exceeded the number that were actually licensed (see Tables A4 and A5 in the Annex). In 2017, 3 social ambulances provided services to homeless people, yet none was licensed. These differences suggest that the accreditation (as a prerequisite for licensing) and licensing processes might be difficult and costly (in terms of money, time and procedures) and sometimes these processes can become important barriers to service provision. Second, the number of (licensed) centres, and their capacity, has fluctuated slightly from one year to another (see Tables A4 and A6 in the Annex), thus indicating instability of provision, usually the result of unstable and unpredictable financing. Most residential services are concentrated in urban areas and are provided by public agencies, while all services targeting homeless people, regardless of whether they are residential, day centres or mobile street interventions, are located in urban areas (see Table A5 in the Annex). Most of these are publicly provided.

The ***prevention services*** currently provided only tangentially/indirectly address housing exclusion, as these are mostly focused on: a) prevention of domestic violence; b) prevention of drug abuse; and c) prevention of marginalisation of young people leaving public childcare institutions (multi-functional centres). Prevention services have a weak role in regard to housing.

The ***support services for reintegration***, which are supposed to accompany the homeless even after a temporary or permanent housing solution has been identified, and to make sure that the beneficiary regains control over their life, are scarce (provided only by a few municipalities), costly and of unassessed effectiveness.

The main actors in charge of both the development, management and allocation of the social housing stock as well as with the provision and/or coordination of providers of social services, are the local authorities, through their public social assistance services. According to the social assistance law, local authorities are responsible for creating, organising and managing services for homeless people (art. 58). Local authorities have the authority to organise services, but their legal requirements are limited to offering: a) 'adequate and custom-tailored social services' to children, elderly people and people with disabilities who are living on the streets; and b) a temporary shelter to people living on the streets (rough sleepers) during the winter months. Services to homeless people/rough sleepers can take, according to the same law, the form of: a) mobile intervention teams on the streets or social ambulance services; b) night shelters; and c) residential centres for temporary accommodation (art. 59). In addition to these, local authorities can create multi-functional centres (offering temporary accommodation), aimed at preventing homelessness and promoting social integration among young people exiting public residential childcare institutions.

In fact, the number of NGOs/private actors providing services is lower than the number of public providers (Table A5 in the Annex). The number of beneficiaries of public service providers tends to be higher than that of beneficiaries of private service providers; thus, in 2017, only 10-30% of beneficiaries were receiving services from private service providers (Table A5 in the Annex). Social service providers are accredited and licensed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Justice; thus the ministry has a certain methodological control over the services in terms of their organisation, required expertise and quality standards. But besides this, local authorities are responsible for coordinating and monitoring the activity of social services providers.

Furthermore, social services providers are mainly funded from local budgets (with co-financing from the state budget, according to needs) and can impose symbolic charges on homelessness beneficiaries for some of the services. NGOs receive subsidies from the state budget as well, but an important part of their expenditure is covered by local budgets. In 2017, 30-50% of the annual budgets of NGOs providing services to homeless people was covered from local budgets. This puts their development and sustainability at risk, especially in smaller communities, because of their lower financial and administrative capacity.

Thus, local authorities play a very important role in the development, planning, provision and financing of social services for homeless people, as well as in the process of improving, increasing and allocating the social housing stock (along with the MRDPA, which is actively involved in the financing of, and approving development plans for, social housing). In the absence of a national strategy in regard to housing and the prevention of homelessness, local authorities act mostly without any strategic framework, within a very general legal framework. Some of the county-level general directorates for social assistance and child protection develop specific strategies for the county; but these are in the field of poverty reduction and social inclusion in general, and lack a consistent and systematic approach to housing.

The effectiveness of both housing programmes and services to homeless people is hard to assess, as there are no clearly defined monitoring indicators; the Ministry of Labour and Social Justice provides only sporadically some data on the average number of beneficiaries of social services and their total annual budget (see Table A4 in the Annex). Some service providers have accumulated important experience and diversified their activities and programmes in order to target specific segments of the homeless: women (Casa Ioana), children (Parada) or adults (Samusocial). Other NGOs actively militate and lobby for policy amendments, such as as CasiAcum!, Blocul pentru Locuire (a coalition of many foundations/associations/NGOs), PACT and Habitat. However, their stories remain untold at an institutional level, thus reducing the likelihood of those that are successful to be mainstreamed.

Generally, all prevention services in regard to housing exclusion perform poorly – mostly because of their complexity and institutional inter-dependency. The laws on social marginalisation and social assistance, and all the national strategies (regarding children, young people, elderly people, people with disabilities, Roma, or social inclusion) acknowledge, one way or another, the need for prevention; but they do not provide an effective legislative, financial and cooperation framework to stimulate the development of these services.

The current re-focus on integrated community services could be a starting point for the development of complex prevention services, as long as communities could ensure financial stability and attract professional resources for these services. Currently, the financing mechanisms and leverage available to local authorities are inadequate, leading to inequality of opportunities and structural and geographical disparities.

The ineffectiveness of ***prevention mechanisms in regard to evictions*** and rehousing support has been, and continues to be, an important issue in Romania. Many marginalised communities/informal settings are the result of the restructuring of the national economy (e.g. shutting down big industrial plants in mono-industrial areas) after

1989. However, these communities continued to grow, and new ones developed as a result of forced evictions. The low level of protection of tenants in publicly owned housing was the result of a combination of lack of political will, low administrative capacity and an insufficient social housing stock. Prevention of evictions is also largely ineffective due to the low stock of public housing, and an obsolete and rigid legislative framework regulating the construction and acquisition of social housing. Access to the private rented market is poor, and only a few local authorities decide to cover (partially or entirely) the rents of various vulnerable groups[23]. Flexible support to improve the affordability and security of housing, thus preventing forced evictions, is mostly non-existent and there is no sound national programme or policy which can offer integrated housing support to vulnerable groups. Based on a conservative estimate, between 2001 and 2017 about 36,000 people were the victims of forced eviction (Blocul pentru Locuire, 2019).

The main cause which is structurally limiting the possibility of addressing effectively issues related to homelessness is the lack of social housing stock. Living on the streets without shelter or living in an informal/marginalised community in an improvised shelter bears the same consequences: no formal residence, no or limited access to benefits or social services, and, finally, no access to employment. People living on the streets or in informal living conditions face multiple barriers to finding employment, and the longer the state of homelessness the bigger the challenge to accessing employment without long-term help. Another significant barrier to reintegration is the lack a consistent housing benefit system, including rent subsidies. On top of these, the scarcity of in-depth counselling and mentoring services for homeless people makes successful outcomes improbable and accidental. The financial decentralisation of all programmes and services targeting homeless people or those at risk of housing exclusion results in unpredictable and discretionary support from the state budget for both investment in social housing and preventive social services.

The lack of a national strategy, obsolete and incomplete legislation, and the significant financial decentralisation of housing programmes, have over the last 15 years increased the barriers to non-discriminatory access to affordable, secure and adequate housing for many vulnerable groups, especially for the Roma poor population. The main pathways to improve access to housing are presented in Table A7 (in the Annex).

During the last five years, serious efforts have been made to extend the definition of vulnerability to housing exclusion and homelessness to marginalised and informal communities (Boxes A1, A2 and A3 in the Annex). In Romania, homelessness and housing exclusion tend to take on more and more of a collective character, as marginalised and informal communities increase at a faster pace than the number of people living on the streets. Pathways to exit collective informal living can be far more challenging. Thus, many NGOs have lobbied actively during recent years for the amendment of the legislation on housing and the legal recognition of marginalised communities and informal settings. The rather restrictive definition of homelessness does not take into account people living in informal communities (without a legally defined status, thus without a legal stable residence). Precarious (improper) housing conditions are defined by the law too broadly, covering a variety of housing situations (from improvised to conventional dwellings) for which the minimum requirements stipulated in the law on housing (L114/1996) for new buildings are not respected. Thus, redefining homelessness and housing exclusion to include marginalised and informal communities as major at-risk groups could be an important step in shaping an effective policy intervention strategy in regard to access to housing.

From a broader regional perspective, these trends towards the 'collectivisation' of homelessness are not unique. But what could become an important interventional innovation is a methodology for identifying marginalised communities, which grants a higher capacity to local authorities to ground and prioritise interventions as well as an

[23] The city hall of sector 6 Bucharest decided to grant housing benefits covering the rent of all vulnerable groups which are renting on the free market, up to 900 Lei/month (approx. 190 Euros).

important framework for monitoring housing programmes (World Bank 2014b, 2016, 2017).

Most important weaknesses in regard to housing policies in Romania

- The absence of clearly defined policies in the field of housing (old, obsolete legislative framework and no national strategy) and a rudimentary operational definition of homelessness and housing exclusion.
- The short supply of public/social housing.
- Weak in-depth preventive and remedial social services.
- The lack of a social housing benefit system.

Priorities for improvement

- The development of a national strategy to guide and coordinate the discrete efforts of various institutional actors and NGOs is essential.
- The amendment and enrichment of the legislative framework regulating public/social housing, and the redefinition of insecure, minimal, precarious and improper housing conditions as well as of housing exclusion (risks) are essential in order to open up financing and intervention opportunities.
- The development of a package of possible/desirable intervention programmes/tools in order to improve housing conditions in marginalised and informal communities could create an important legal reference framework for any regional/local initiative; and could also be a means of preventing homelessness.
- Investment is needed in social housing and in targeted, integrated social services in order to prevent homelessness and housing exclusion.
- There needs to be a rethinking of financing mechanisms and financial leverages, in order to increase the sustainability of service development and investment in public housing.
- A comprehensive housing benefit system should be developed, in order to improve affordability and prevent the deterioration of housing conditions.

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Annex

Table A1: ETHOS LIGHT categories defined as homeless in Romania

Operational category		Living situation		Definition	Defined as homeless in Romania
1	People living rough	1	Public space/external space	Living on the streets or in public spaces without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters	Yes
2	People in emergency accommodation	2	Overnight shelters	People with no place of usual residence who move frequently between various types of accommodation	No: the definition mentions 'temporarily living with friends or acquaintances' but not overnight shelters. The legal definition includes all persons/families unable to support rent costs or at risk of eviction.
3	People living in accommodation for the homeless	3 4 5 6	Homelessness hostels Temporary accommodation Transitional supported accommodation Women's shelter or refuge accommodation	Where the period of stay is time-limited and no long-term housing is provided	Partially: 3.3 not explicitly mentioned; 3.4 explicitly mentioned in regard to temporary accommodation offered by social networks (i.e. friends, acquaintances); 3.5 and 3.6 not explicitly mentioned. However, the legal definition includes all persons/families unable to support rent costs or at risk of eviction.
4	People living in institutions	7 8	Healthcare institutions Penal institutions	Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing No housing available prior to release	4.7 partially: the definition does not explicitly refer to healthcare institutions, but to any type of institution that the person is supposed to leave within two months 4.8 yes: explicitly mentioned (2 months prior to release)
5	People living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing	9 10 11	Mobile homes Non-conventional buildings Temporary structures	Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the person's usual place of residence	No: the definition does not explicitly refer to such a situation, it just mentions the person's incapacity to pay the rent or to buy a dwelling (see Table A3)
6	Homeless people living temporarily in conventional housing with family and friends (due to lack of housing)	12	Conventional housing, but not the person's usual place of residence	Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the person's usual place of residence	Yes

Table A2: Latest available data on the number of homeless people in Romania

Operational category		Living situation		Most recent number	Period covered	Source
1	People living rough	1	Public space/external space	15,000 of which 5,000 in Bucharest 1,113 children and young people (up to age 35) in Bucharest	December 2008-November 2009 2014	*Samusocial Foundation* and *Médecins Sans Frontières* survey, http://www.samusocial.ro/despre-noi/servicii/ Save the Children (2014)
2	People in emergency accommodation	2	Overnight shelters	1,997 on average	January 2017-December 2017	Ministry of Labour and Social Justice, Social Assistance Statistical Bulletin, available at: http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/transparenta/statistici/buletin-statistic/5124
3	People living in accommodation for the homeless	3 4 5 6	Homelessness hostels Temporary accommodation Transitional supported accommodation Women's shelter or refuge accommodation	979 on average, in Assistance and Social Reintegration Residential Centres for Homeless People (3.4)	January 2017-December 2017	Ministry of Labour and Social Justice, Social Assistance Statistical Bulletin, available at: http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/transparenta/statistici/buletin-statistic/5124
4	People living in institutions	7 8	Healthcare institutions Penal institutions	Available data only on the number of licensed units	2017	
5	People living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing	9 10 11	Mobile homes Non-conventional buildings Temporary structures	165, 000 (0.9% of the total number of households) (referring to all three living situations)	20-31 October 2011	NIS, Romania: National Census of the Population and Housing stock: http://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-2
6	Homeless people living temporarily in conventional housing with family and friends (due to lack of housing)	12	Conventional housing, but not the person's usual place of residence	n.a.		

Table A3: Legal definitions for homelessness and housing exclusion in Romania, by categories defined in the Romanian legislation and in national strategies

Homeless people (*persoane fără adăpost*)*	This definition includes roofless and houseless persons as well as 'a social category of singles or families which, due to singular or cumulative social, medical, financial-economic, or legal reasons or to an emergency situation, a) are living on the street or, temporarily, with friends or acquaintances; b) are unable to support a rental or are at risk of eviction; c) are residing in institutions or penitentiaries, from where they are expected to leave within 2 months, and do not have a residency or stable address'	Law on social assistance (L292/2011)
Street children (*copiii străzii*)	No specific definition provided by legislation (framework laws and national strategies) Save the Children operates with the following definition: 'Street children and youth are those persons who stay permanently or only a certain amount of time during the day on the streets (including, in a broader sense, also improvised shelters, sewers, abandoned vehicles or buildings) and who pursue, alone or in groups, a way to earn their existence through legal or illegal activities. These persons do not benefit of an optimal level of protection from parents (if these are living or the relationship with these is maintained) or any other dedicated institution'.	Save the Children (2014), p.6
Person without a residence (*persoana fara domiciliu*)	A person who has no stable residence mentioned on their identity card, i.e. who is staying temporary to someone else's place. The person who hosts somebody for more than 15 days is legally bound to declare this situation. However, this does not happen sometimes, or the property status of the host is uncertain.	GEO 97/2005
Dwelling with improper living conditions (*locuinta cu conditii improprii*)	Defined as an improvised dwelling or a residential building which does not meet the minimum requirements stipulated by the housing law (L114/1996)	The definition is provided by the draft strategy on housing (2017), p. 79, based on the stipulation of the law on housing (L 114/1996)
Precarious living (*locuire precara*)	Only mentioned in regard to the beneficiaries targeted by social services	Methodological norms for the implementation regarding the quality of social services (L197/2012)
Specialised/improvised living spaces or camps for victims of natural disasters	Only mentioned by the strategy as an intervention measure in the case of natural disasters, without a proper operational definition	National strategy for civil protection (EO 547/2005)
Precarious and unsanitary dwellings	Those living in improvised shelters, recreational vehicles, mud houses, abandoned cars or buildings, parks	Order no 770/192/2007 for approving the methodology for filling out the standard forms and for data collection regarding the drug addiction treatment request

Social housing (*locuinta sociala*)	A public dwelling which is allocated with subsidised rent to persons or families with an economic situation which does not allow these to buy or rent a dwelling on the free market (art.2.c). The rent cannot exceed 10% of the disposable income of the family.	L 114/1996
Necessity housing (*locuinta de necesitate*)	The dwelling which is destined for the temporary accommodation of families whose dwellings became unusable due to accidents or natural disasters, are in the process of rehabilitation or are demolished due to public utility works (art 2.f).	L 114/1996
Support housing (*locuinta de sprijin)*	A dwelling which is at most 100 sqm, and which is rented out to families or persons who were evicted due to the failure to pay the mortgage and who cannot afford to pay a rent or buy a dwelling at a free market price. These are rented out for a maximum of 5 years, with the possibility of extension.	L 143/2017
Marginalised communities (*comunitati marginalizate*)	Marginalised communities are those who score low on three important dimensions: human capital, formal employment and housing[24]. For urban communities, human capital is assessed based on three indicators: a) proportion of population with at most primary and/or lower secondary education; b) proportion of population with disabilities, chronic diseases or medical conditions which impair their daily activities; and c) the proportion of children aged 0-17 in the entire population. For rural communities, only educational attainment level is considered. Formal employment dimension considers the proportion of population aged 15-64 that is not formally employed and not in education, while housing refers to the proportion of dwellings without access to electricity, proportion of overcrowded households, and proportion of dwellings not in private property (housing instability) (p.24: Table 1).	World Bank (2017)
Informal settings (*asezari informale*)	Informal settings are defined as groups of dwellings, mostly emerging on the outskirts of the cities or villages, using illegal the land, or, if the land usage is legal, they do not respect, at least partially, the construction authorisation, if there is any. Another situation is the lack of access to the municipal basic infrastructure or to basic living conditions, thus putting the safety and health of the residents at risk (Draft Strategy on Housing, 2017, p.87).	URBAN-INCERC, 2013 (Analiză privind aşezările informale din România – evaluarea situaţiei actuale în vederea formulării unor reglementări şi instrumente de intervenţie)

* The exact translation would be 'people without a shelter/roofless', although the definition includes also those who are houseless.
Data source: Romanian legislation and other strategic reports.

[24] The identification of marginalised communities is based on the analysis of 2011 census sectors with a population of more than 50 people. Overall, in urban areas, of the 50,299 census sectors, 1,139 have been assessed as marginalised.

Box A1: Profile and typology of urban marginalised communities

Urban marginalised communities are located in 264 cities and Bucharest, out of 320 cities in Romania. A total of 343,000 people are living in these marginalised communities, that is 3.2% of the total urban population and 2.6% of the urban households. Further, 2.5% of the total housing stock belongs to these marginalised communities. Four important types of marginalised urban communities have been identified: a) the ghetto-type or former workers' colonies; b) improvised neighbourhoods/so-called 'mahalale'; c) modernised and upgraded social housing; and d) central, historical buildings

Ghetto-type communities are mostly old, low comfort level apartment buildings (constructed before 1990) with mostly one single room (of 9 to 15 sqm) without access to utilities or with limited access due to the lack of utility payments. Most of the inhabitants are cut off from the basic infrastructure. The most important issues for the inhabitants are: 1) the inability to pay their utility bills; 2) the fear of being evacuated due to failure to pay bills; and 3) the low social capital/bad neighbourhoods.

'***Mahalale' or improvised living neighbourhoods*** are embedded on old neighbourhoods of houses and mainly consist of rudimentary and improvised houses (made of mudbricks, cardboard and plastic with a rudimentary wood structure). These neighbourhoods are territorially more extended and placed around a riverbed or former railroad trails. These communities have no access to infrastructure, with at most a water tap for the entire community. Their inhabitants are very poor, mostly but not only Roma, and many of them ended up in these communities after losing their dwellings due to a failure to pay utility bills for a long time. The main problems with which the inhabitants of these communities are confronted are extreme poverty, improper/inadequate housing and a lack of identity papers/real estate property papers. Because of this latter issue, most of the people living in these neighbourhoods are 'administratively invisible' and not able to request any social assistance.

Modernised and upgraded social housing refers to all those neighbourhoods consisting of either old social housing which has been modernised and their infrastructure upgraded or that which has been newly built through integrated investment and social programmes. These communities are very well connected to utilities and benefit from a new and modern infrastructure; but the main problem within these communities is the inability of those who are eligible for social housing to pay the utility bills (in some cases even the electricity bill exceeds the entire households' income). Most of these communities are segregated physically from the rest of the city or built on the outskirts of the city. Many of its inhabitants are the victims of former forced evacuations. These communities have a limited access to employment opportunities.

A last type of marginalised communities is to be found in the ***historical/old city centres*** where buildings were taken into public ownership during the communist regime. Many of the buildings still have an uncertain ownership status, while some belong to the city hall and are rented out as social houses. Besides their central position, these neighbourhoods offer very precarious living conditions and are usually inhabited by mixed communities (old people, Roma people living illegally etc.). These communities have no strong ties and are fractured into small nuclei.

Data source: World Bank (2014b).

Box A2: Profile and typology of rural marginalised communities

In ***rural areas***, marginalised communities are distributed across 992 communes, representing about 35% of all communes in Romania, and about 12% of all Romanian villages. These comprise 564,000 people, about 6.2% of the total rural population, and 5.3% of all rural households. 5.2% of all rural dwellings are to be found in marginalised communities. Within marginalised rural communities, the proportion of children is high (34%) compared with non-marginalised communities (22%), while that of elderly people is low (13% compared with 19%). Also, the proportion of single mothers is higher, and the proportion of teenage mothers (aged 13-17) is 3 times higher (4.6% compared with 1.3%) than non-marginalised communities. About 80% of the population has a low level of education (has at most completed 8 grades) (compared with 45% in non-marginalised communities), and 35% have completed at most primary education (compared with 8%). The proportion of young people not in employment, education or training rises to 51% (compared with 23%), and the proportion of those not employed in formal activities and not in education increases to 83% (compared with 54%). In fact, the proportion of non-formal employment among Roma women in marginalised rural communities reaches 95% (see also World Bank, 2016, p.28: part 1 fig.2, and Annex 1, Table 3).

Half of rural marginalised communities are Roma communities (so-called *tiganie, rudarie or mahala*), while the other half are mixed or non-Roma communities. Other communities consist of locals who used to work before 1990 in a factory that has been closed, and only very few communities are new or emergent communities. Most of the communities (about 90%) are old and stable communities; these are also the most marginalised ones as well.

Houses – improvised or mudbrick houses – offer precarious living conditions, with 5% without electricity and over 70% (88% of Roma marginalised rural communities) without access to running water. The most important issue faced by its inhabitants is the lack of official papers (for housing but also identity documents) and the lack of employment opportunities. These living areas are more exposed to flooding and landslides.

The first type of rural communities, the ***geographically isolated*** ones, are preponderantly found in the north-east part of Romania (especially in Vaslui county). These are smaller, mostly ethnic Romanian communities, with very weak connections to the outside world, and only an unpaved road that connects them to nearby villages, which is mostly unusable during the cold season. Access to drinkable water is limited, if it exists at all, and school attendance very low (even when school buses are available, roads are not usable most of the times). Inside these communities, roads are narrow, thus mostly not accessible to ambulances or firefighters.

The second type of rural marginalised communities, those on the ***outskirts of well connected villages*** (well represented in Calarasi county, south-east region), are characterised by the fact that public roads and infrastructure end where these begin. These are mostly known as *Roma* communities, with greater physical access to social services, yet with a low utilisation of these. School participation is low, despite the physical proximity of schools, due to discrimination and lack of basic resources (such as clothing and school supplies). Due to their closeness to well connected villages access to employment is greater, and most of the population is able to find occasional work. The Roma population tends to live in more extended rural marginalised communities, as opposed to ethnic Romanian communities, which tend to be smaller.

Data source: World Bank (2016).

Table A4: Emergency intervention services for homeless people provided by NGOs: number of services, average number of users per month, capacity of services and beneficiaries of private providers (% of the total number of beneficiaries), Romania 2016-2017

2016	Number of centres	Average number of monthly beneficiaries (persons)	Capacity (number of persons)	Beneficiaries of private services providers, as percentage of total average number of beneficiaries (%)
Assistance and social reintegration residential centres for homelessness	29	877	1,183	21
Night shelters	40	1,690	1,939	12
Day centres for social reintegration	9	454	488	8
Street intervention – mobile team	–			
Day centres for information and counselling of homeless	4	50	89	22
Street intervention – social ambulance	1	321		0
2017	**Number of centres**	**Average number of monthly beneficiaries (persons)**	**Capacity (number of persons)**	**Beneficiaries of private services providers, as percentage of the total average number of beneficiaries (%)**
Assistance and social reintegration residential centres for homelessness	27	979	1,011	30
Night shelters	48	1,997	1,938	19
Day centres for social reintegration	2	72	72	31
Street intervention – mobile team	2	61		0
Day centres for information and counselling of homeless	1	16	20	0
Street intervention – social ambulance	3	400	-	0

Data source: Ministry of Labour and Social Justice, Statistics, Social Assistance Annual Bulletin 2016-2017, available at: http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/transparenta/statistici/buletin-statistic.

Table A5: Number of licensed social services for homeless people and homelessness prevention by residential area and type: Romania 2017

	Total	Urban			Rural		
		All	Public	Private	All	Public	Private
Residential centres for assistance to victims of domestic violence	**42**	**39**	26	13	**3**	1	2
Emergency centres	**28**	**26**	17	9	**2**	1	1
Recovery centres	**14**	**13**	9	4	**1**	0	1
Residential centres for young people in difficult situations	**47**	**42**	27	15	**5**	3	2
Multifunctional centres	**33**	**29**	20	9	**4**	3	1
Transition centres	**14**	**13**	7	6	**1**	0	1
Residential care and assistance centres for the homeless	**57**	**57**	39	18			
Residential assistance and social integration/reintegration centres for the homeless	**26**	**26**	18	8			
Night shelters	**31**	**31**	21	10			
Information and coordination day centres for street children)	**1**	**1**	1				
Counselling day centres for prevention and fight against domestic violence	**10**	**9**	2	7	**1**	1	0
Day centres for information and counselling	**4**	**4**	3	1			
Day centres for social integration/reintegration	**1**	**1**	0	1			
Mobile teams targeting homeless people	**1**	**1**		1			
Social ambulance – for homeless people	**0**						

Data source: Ministry of Labour and Social Justice, Statistical Bulletin 2017, Social Assistance, available at: http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/transparenta/statistici/buletin-statistic.

Table A6: Number of licensed social services for homeless people and homelessness prevention: Romania 2016-2017

	2016	2017
Residential centres for assistance of victims of domestic violence	**39**	**42**
Emergency centres	26	28
Recovery centres	13	14
Residential centres for young people in difficult situations	**36**	**47**
Multifunctional centres	26	33
Transition centres	10	14
Residential care and assistance centres for the homeless	**54**	**57**
Residential assistance and social integration/reintegration centres for the homeless	29	26
Night shelters	25	31
Information and coordination day centres for street children)	**2**	**1**
Counselling day centres for prevention and fight against domestic violence	**10**	**10**
Day centres for information and counselling	**4**	**4**
Day centres for social integration/reintegration	**0**	**1**
Mobile teams targeting homeless people	**0**	**1**
Social ambulance for homeless people	**0**	**0**

Data source: Ministry of Labour and Social Justice, Statistical Bulletin 2017, Social Assistance, available at: http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/transparenta/statistici/buletin-statistic.

Box A3: Informal communities – an overview of the debate

It is estimated that at least 64,000 families, that is 200,000 people, are currently living in informal settings (estimations are based on the responses from the local authorities, with a response rate of about 50%, data according to the project 'No man's Land' (PACT Foundation, 2018). Most of these are Roma. These are the invisible people, living in no man's land.

One of the most well-known examples[25], and a place which has generated many debates, initiatives and interventions is Pata-Rât[26], an area on the outskirts of Cluj municipality, next to the city rubbish dump It is a setting comprising 300 families, which was born as a result of multiple evictions from the city centre. Evicted families were poor and mostly Roma. Another example is Valea Corbului (Calinesti commune, Arges county), a place which was born as a result of a relocation process initiated by the state more than 60 years ago and forgotten by the state since[27].

The coalition for informal living (*Locuireinformala.ro)* advanced in October 2018 a legislative proposal supported by a group of parliamentarians[28] to amend the law regarding territorial structuring and urbanism (L350/2001) and to promote a new law on informal living settings. In February 2019 the amendment passed the Senate, waiting for the vote in Parliament. The proposal is aimed at legally recognising the phenomenon of informal living, developing an action plan to identify communities and possible intervention strategies, and prioritising these in accordance with other national strategies and the government's programme. The proposal has been criticised by the partnership Blocul pentru Locuire[29] on the ground that the initiative does not increase the responsibility of the state, but only partially solves or improves living conditions for inhabitants. 'Social housing now!' is one of the most active members of the partnership; it militates for changes which put public provision of adequate and secure living first and for clarifications regarding legal property rights on land and houses. While the two coalitions have different approaches in regard to the steps to be taken in order to bring informal living onto the political and policy agenda, both coalitions support and lobby for systematic interventions in order to protect the inhabitants of informal settings, increase their access to social services, and create the basis for their social reintegration.

[25] https://www.rri.ro/ro_ro/locuintele_informale-2579666.

[26] http://patacluj.ro/about-pata-rat/?lang=en.

[27] While there is a multitude of informal communities, some of these made the object of a thorough analysis as those located in Pata-Rat (Cluj municipality, Cluj county), Resita municipality (Caras-Severin county), Bumbesti city (Gorj county), Valea Corbului (Calinesti, Arges county), Ferentari (Bucharest, sector 6); see also PACT Foundation (2018).

[28] https://senat.ro/legis/PDF/2018/18L721EM.pdf; http://locuireinformala.ro/?page_id=721&lang=ro.

[29] http://artapolitica.ro/2019/01/25/despre-recunoasterea-locuintelor-informale.

Table A7: Pathways to accessible, non-discriminatory, affordable and adequate housing in Romania

Accessibility	(a) Fostering the development of social/public housing sector in accordance with the actual demand, by: a. identifying sustainable financial mechanisms (which are not entirely relying on local budgets and which create predictability in regard to funding, allowing local authorities to carry out effective planning); b. allowing the acquisition of land/houses on the open market (thus modifying the law on housing L114/1996); c. making public housing construction part of the social economy and opening legal possibilities for volunteering and beneficiaries' participation. (b) Legalising informal living by: a. clarifying land/housing ownership for those living for many years/generations without legal proof of ownership; this is extremely important in case of vulnerable groups without access to legal representation and for whom uncertain tenure status leads to housing insecurity and lack of access to basic social services; b. granting access to infrastructure and basic utilities. (c) Amending the law on housing in order to restrict eligibility to vulnerable groups with lower income levels; the current law grants, in principle, access to everyone belonging to one of the vulnerable groups specified by the law (see above, Section 2) who has an income per capita lower than the average national wage (about 70% of the population will be eligible based solely on this criterion). (d) Improving the allocation process by allowing less discretion for city halls to impose arbitrary or discriminatory eligibility criteria; a certain amount of discretion, if within a framework of national priorities, could be welcomed, but this should not benefit the stereotypes of needy groups held by those in charge of the allocation. (e) Making evictions legally conditional upon rehousing in adequate conditions; while there is a law that emphasises priority access to social housing for those being evicted due to repossession of property and forced relocations, this does not guarantee access to adequate housing. This is also the case for those being evicted illegally, or due to their failure to support utility bills, rent or mortgage payments.
Non-discrimination	(f) Prioritising access: the law on housing provides wide eligibility criteria without discrimination. A national strategy is needed which would agree on social priorities in the allocative process; these have to be tailored so as not to systematically exclude the Roma population from the priority list, based on their lack of formal employment. (g) Tackling segregation of precarious living: this is crucial, as segregation – as shown by the various profiles of marginalised communities in Romania – leads invariably to social exclusion and 'collective homelessness'.
Affordability	(h) Defining clearly (by law) utility payment responsibilities/accountabilities, so that debts cannot be extended to future tenants or residential associations. Legal responsibilities for housing costs have to be individualised and clarified, along with default strategies. (i) Enhancing the capacity to pay bills through a mix of housing benefits/subsidies and support/conditionalities to increase the probability of a sustainable work-related income (e.g. effective personalised counselling and

	conditioning benefits upon enrolment in employment programmes and education); the purpose is to help people pay their bills and regain control over their lives. The current heating aids are not sufficient to cope with the inability of a growing share of the population to support housing costs. Time-limited housing subsidies, tailored so as to address specific hardships of households at certain moments, could be a transitional response to this unmet need. (j) Granting immediate access to income support/housing benefits even for those living in informal settings, until further interventions, based on easy-to-measure indicators.
Adequacy	(k) Increasing the capacity of local authorities to manage social housing: addressing maintenance and rehabilitation needs, and incentivising residents to protect and take care of their living environment. (l) Preventing disconnections from public utilities and granting access to all public utilities for those living in public or informal settings. (m) Initiating programmes to support the improvement and rehabilitation of dwellings for all those living in precarious conditions – by tax deductions, subsidised credits, subsidies and free-of-charge services for those on low incomes. (n) Breaking up/desegregating marginalised communities where possible or upgrading these by providing access to infrastructure, utilities, basic social services and adequate housing conditions. (o) Developing a more complex legal framework in regard to housing standards, which can reflect realistically the rehabilitation opportunities for the older social housing stock and rural settings. Currently, some minimum standards for new buildings are set through the law on housing, but there are not enough sensible standards (outside the law regulating standards for social services) for non-precarious housing; these have to become part of the assessment indicators for housing policies.