

## Emerging policy for SSH recognition and reduction

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Romania has a legal framework, a set of institutions, and resources focused on the disadvantaged social groups. However, only few of these instruments are targeting the housing sector. The political, administrative and legislative system in Romania needs to develop policies regarding the sub-standard housing (SSH). In general terms, it can be argued that an effective collaboration between the sector of social protection and the housing sector remains to be built.

The topic of SSH and extreme poverty is not well represented in the public debate therefore nor reflected in the political agenda. The general level of knowledge is that of a superficial journalistic approach and the results of the little research that has been done remain exclusively in the academic field. Research institutions are not efficiently used by the Government Structures to conduct surveys of the existing situation.

### 1. The Romanian case

The housing stock in Romania is around 8.2 million units (2006) for 21,6 million inhabitants (380 dwellings / 1000 inhabitants). The average household size is three persons and the living area surface is 15m<sup>2</sup>/person. After the fall of the communist regime, the privatization process increased with 27% the privately owned units of the total housing stock and only 2.7% of the stock has remained social rental housing.

Two thirds of the existing housing stock was built after 1960. The biggest part of the stock built during the communist regime consists of multi storey housing: 72% of total housing buildings in urban areas. These buildings suffer from poor thermal insulation and ongoing deterioration. More than 50% of the stock – realized between 1950 and 1985 needs considerable efforts for rehabilitation in view of minimizing the energy loss, while a smaller percentage – built before 1947 – is highly exposed to earthquake risk.

In Romania some 30000 dwellings were completed in 2004, in 2006 the number grew to some 39000. This is 1.7 housing completions per 1 000 inhabitants. The EU25-average is 4,8. The vast majority of new construction is single family houses and condominiums. New rental construction is almost inexistent.

The data of the 2002 census proves the extreme housing poverty (characterized by sq m/person situated between 3.1 and 3.5 sq m/person covers 930.000 people

- In this category you can find households made of:
- One family nucleus (about 82.5%) 767.250 people
- Two family nuclei (about 15,9 %) 147.870 people
- Three family nuclei (about 10,3%) 95.790 people

- There is a group of approximately 24,800 people for which the poverty indicator is placed around 1.5 sq m/person.
- Approximately 13,000 people live in improvised or “emergency” buildings, as the census calls them – it is similar to the homeless situation.

## 1.1 housing typology – categories at risk

### Informal settlements

There are two types of informal settlements requiring different approaches: new developments and historically constituted areas. There is no legal framework for legalizing informal settlements. Evictions and social exclusion is leading to a visible growth of the first category. Every town and a large number of communes have now one or many informal settlements as satellites, peri-urban settlements or ghetto-like enclaves.

### Poor rural dwellings

The lack of territorial planning and technical competences and the lack of control in rural areas led to the development of dwellings in hazard areas and to the use of materials and construction techniques which do not meet even by far norms and regulations. A major part of these dwellings are unacceptable from sanitary and structural risks reasons. In many cases they are situated in remote areas with very difficult access to health services and schools.

Rural poverty is slowly decreasing due to the latest general improvement of economic conditions in Romania. This process is leading to visible inequalities and chaotic development.

### Housing stock built after currently unacceptable norms

These are former socialist developments (former worker dormitories, multi-family housing) of the '50s and early '60s with very small rooms, very poor insulation, and deficient sanitary conditions. These collective housing buildings of reduced standard have inflexible plans. The majority of them are at the end of their life span and in need of heavy refurbishment or comprehensive plans of demolition.

The prefabricated panel buildings are still connected to district heating. But the heating web is partly in a poor condition. The rapid privatisation has made rehabilitation very difficult. Most of the new owners have faced serious financial problems concerning the maintenance of their own dwelling. Under these circumstances, the owners have been either no longer interested in the rehabilitation of their residential unit, or gave up the idea of improving their living conditions because of their inability to cover rehabilitation costs.

In addition to the poor conditions of the interior, the neighborhoods lack urban services (garbage collectors, water and heating supply, public transportation, leisure facilities, etc) and are often affected by the presence of pollution.

## Historical Buildings

Nationalized during the communist regime, these buildings have been used as social housing and never benefited of modernization and upgrade measures. In the last 17 years, in the long retrocession process, they have been abandoned by the municipalities and by some of the owners. Many of these buildings are occupied by illegal tenants.

## 1.2 Social Groups at Risk

### Ethnic groups

Romania has the largest Roma population in Europe, estimated between one and a half and two million inhabitants. Out of this, 80% are in poverty and many of the Roma communities are living in illegal conditions. Other ethnical minority groups do not have housing problems or if, they are an exception. However, research has still to be done by using a more precise methodology for assessing the possible discrimination.

### Age groups

Old people are particularly at risk regarding housing conditions especially if they are located in rural areas or in old buildings in historical centers. There are also homeless children affected by the lack of shelter. Young families with children are a category that has been addressed by some programmes but in terms of numbers and of targeting the most disadvantaged level there are very few results.

Another fragile group is represented by the young people who grew up in orphanage centers and who have to leave them at the age of 18.

### Immigrants

The number of immigrants is not significant in Romania, the conditions in the transit centers are good and the integration of foreigners does not lead to visible housing problems.

### Victims of eviction

There are no valid figures regarding the number of people affected by eviction and there is a wide variety of situations regarding the results of the process. We can only assert that evictions lead to a significant growth of the informal settlements affected by SSH and that the process is still ongoing.

## 2. The experience of Romania in fighting SSH

In general terms, it can be said that there is no specific experience for fighting SSH as such, but there are housing policies measures and social protection measures that can bring a contribution to the prevention and the reduction of the SSH. It can also be argued that some housing policy measures during the communist regime and after 1990 have had some negative effects on the housing stock weakening (for instance, the massive privatization of the collective housing units without clear rules about the management obligations of this stock, the forced sedentarisation of the Roma population in the '70s).

## 2.1. Political recognition of the existence of SSH and operative structures

There is no serious public debate about SSH. Despite its size and severity, the political actors see it as a marginal problem. Even though there are institutions dealing with poverty issues there are no specialized directions or services in the public administration for combating SSH. There are no operative connections between various levels of power in terms of specialists or personnel in charge for the matter.

## 2.2. Legal Framework

Regarding the building codes, the sanitary norms and the safety measures, substandard housing is **partially defined** in various laws and norms. Sub standard can be defined by the Housing Law in terms of utilities, equipment and minimal service. In this respect a large part of the Romanian housing stock is sub standard.

There is no direct definition of measures to be taken for a dwelling that not only that does not meet any standards but is inhabited in an improper manner. The Housing Law 114/1996 defines briefly social housing and emergency housing but do not differentiate them in terms of usage or building norms. The minimum surface is defined in regards with European average and not with the local situation. In other words, this particular provision of the law is acting as an obstacle for the development of a social housing stock in Romania by raising the standards beyond the needs of the inhabitants and of the economical strength of the fund providers.

### The Romanian Legislation and programs concerning the disadvantaged groups and quality of housing:

- Law nr. 47/2006 stipulates the organization and functioning of the National Agency for Social Services subordinated to the Ministry of Labour, Family and Equality of Chances, as a specialized legal body, with the purpose of creating an administration system of social services.
- December 2005: National Strategy of Development of Social Services approved by the Government: fighting against poverty and achievement of social inclusion of vulnerable groups and constitution of the social services at home and the qualitative and quantitative increase of the integration in residential institutions of the persons in difficulty
- The Governmental Ordinance 522/2006: *The National Strategy of improving the Roma situation*: community development, health, housing, justice and public order, and education.
- The Government of Romania and Roma National Agency: The plan of measures of the Decade of Inclusion of the Roma – **Housing field**
- *The Program of Social Inclusion in Romania* is part of the partnership concerning social inclusion signed by the Romanian Government and European Union in 2005, and stipulates the improvement of the living conditions and the social inclusion for the disadvantaged groups. Included in the country partnership in order to fulfill the commitments from (JIM) Common Memorandum of social inclusion signed by the Government of Romania with the European Union in July 2005,

stipulates the improvement of the living conditions and the social inclusion for some of the most disadvantaged categories of population.

- The Governmental Ordinance nr. 74/2007: ensuring social housing units to the evicted tenants from the dwellings retrocessed to the owners from before nationalisation process.
- The Governmental Ordinance nr.125/2004 and 280/2007 regarding the establishment of some special measures of refurbishment of some blocks of dwellings situated in urban areas declared as disadvantaged.

### 2.3. Survey and assessment of SSH

Data is gathered through the National Census of Population and Houses. The last one was conducted in 2002 and the next one is in preparation for 2009. Dwellings are visited by operators and raw data are collected using a template. Equipment and general appliances presence in the household is included in the survey.

Romania faces the consequences of the lack of legal framework and the institutions for intervention measures in cases of housing related crisis exposing inhabitants and other citizens to health and security risks (mental illness problems of the residents, structural instability of buildings, pests' infection, etc).

### 2.4. Research

A more precise approach for definition and recognition of substandard housing has been done by various research studies but, even those conducted for the government have no more than the status of academic, informative research. The scientific debate is confined within a small circle of researchers and few academic courses are delivered regarding the subject matter.

The studies already financed by the Ministry of Development, Public Works and Housing:

- Housing Typologies of Roma Population 2005
- An electronic system for reporting social housing need, 2004

At the moment, the Ministry of Development, Public Works and Housing is designing (with several teams of experts) the following studies and methodologies concerning housing:

- Implementation in the Romanian housing legislation of the European standards
- Definition methodology concerning the substandard housing
- Methodology for national and local survey system concerning housing
- Local Housing Plan Methodology for elaboration and implementation of the local housing policy
- Refurbishment Methodology for the physical and social disadvantaged areas
- Methodology for the legalization of the informal settlements

## 2.5. Institutional bodies

After the decentralization process (L.339/2004), Romania faces a difficult situation regarding the sharing of responsibility between the central and the local level of public administration in the housing sector. The government has a major part of the funding. However, the decision has to be local, and the local level is characterized by a lack of expertise and understanding. Therefore, the funds are rarely and inefficiently used. These problems are caused also by the fact that the intermediate level – county level (department) – is a very problematic one in terms of assuming responsibilities regarding need assessment, planning and control.

Romania is a part of JIM (Joint Inclusion Memorandum) but there are no specific measures or plans related to housing as a part of this framework.

CASPIS – Anti Poverty Commission and Promotion of Social Inclusion is a governmental structure under the authority of the Prime Minister uniting representatives of various ministers, trade unions, local authorities, academics, civil society, missions in Romania of the World Bank, UNDP, and UNICEF. Since 2005, the activities of the Commission have not been visible and, at the moment, there is no political commitment expressed in a national plan for fighting the poverty and the social exclusion.

**There is a major need for measures for fighting SSH because of the important number of inhabitants facing this situation, of the general poor quality of the housing stock, and the still very weak institutional responsibility for social protection of the fragile social groups living in poverty and indecent housing conditions.**

## 3. Potential transferability and application conditions

### How to build up a preventive policy against substandard housing in Europe?

Prevention is a key problem as substandard housing is not only the result of social exclusion but also a cause for it. Various cases should be addressed with different policies, in a comprehensive, specialist driven manner. The approach should be flexible and, in some details, should allow experiments and a creative approach. A very important thing is to have the problem in the public debate and to keep it on the political agenda regardless of the ideological orientation of the parties in power.

### 3.1. Definition of SSH

The evaluation of both dwellings and environments should be defined according to the level of poverty and other social characteristics of the groups or individuals assessed. At the bottom level it is possible to have a unified set of criteria, at the top it should be defined by every society and accepted by local social actors.

### Minimum housing standards

Minimum standards in Romania for surface are exceeding the national average and it is obvious that, by imposing them, the legislator followed the objective of improving the general level of housing comfort and not of combating SSH.

### 3.2. Legal and institutional frameworks

Considering that fighting against SSH is a complex and highly professionalized activity, and that local authorities in Romania do not have the technical and managerial capacities to cope with the existing problems, it can be stated that the French centralized approach is appropriated for the Romanian situation.

### 3.3. Specific requirements for housing typologies

The definitions and standards should include a variety of situations and the general requirements should also allow to some extent a particular solution.

### 3.4. Ownership and SSH

It is absolutely necessary to clarify property aspects whenever they are in conflict with inappropriate living conditions and/or the public interest. Measures should be both restrictive and supportive and housing belonging to owners in condominiums be dealt according to the type of problem related to SSH and to other general norms and regulations.

## ANNEX

## The Romanian Legislation and programs concerning the disadvantaged groups and quality of housing

- **Issue by the Ministry of Labour, Family and Equality of Chances of the draft of Governmental Ordinance regarding the organization and functioning of National Agency of Social Services**  
Law nr. 47/2006 stipulates the organization and functioning of the National Agency for Social Services subordinated to the Ministry of Labour, Family and Equality of Chances, as a specialized legal body, with the purpose of creating a unitarian system regarding the administration of the process of awarding social performances.
  
- **The Government approved, in the meeting of 22nd of December 2005, the National Strategy of Development of Social Services.**  
According to the Strategy, in the process of fighting against poverty and achievement of social inclusion of vulnerable groups, the efficiency of social groups will be focus on.  
  
The priorities in action concern the constitution of the social services at home and the qualitative and quantitative increase of the integration in residential institutions of the persons in difficulty.
  
- **Strategy of the Romanian Government for improving the condition of the Roma and The Plan of the Action in the Roma Inclusion Decade - Housing sector**  
The Governmental Ordinance 522/2006 The National Strategy of improving the Roma situation: communitarian development, health, housing, justice and public order, and education.
  
- **The Government of Romania and Roma National Agency : The plan of measures of the decade of inclusion of the Roma – Housing field**
  
- **The Program of Social Inclusion in Romania**  
This program is part of the partnership concerning social inclusion signed by the Romanian Government and European Union in 2005, and stipulates the improvement of the living conditions and the social inclusion for the disadvantaged groups.  
Included in the country partnership in order to fulfill the commitments from (JIM) Common Memorandum of social inclusion signed by the Government of Romania with the European Union in July 2005, stipulates the improvement of the living conditions and the social inclusion for some of the most disadvantaged categories of population.

- **The Governmental Ordinance nr. 74/2007** regarding the ensuring of the social housing for the tenants who have been evacuated or are about to be evacuate from the retroceded dwellings to the former houseowners.
- **The Governmental Ordinance nr.125/2004 and 280/2007** regarding the establishment of some special measures of refurbishment of some blocks of dwellings situated in towns from the disadvantaged areas.

In this moment, the Ministry of Development, Public Works and Housing designed several methodologies concerning housing:

- Implementation in the Romanian housing legislation of the Europeans standards
- Methodologies concerning the substandard of housing
- Methodology of achievement of a national and local survey system concerning housing
- Methodology to design the Local Housing Plan
- Methodology to refurbish the physical and social disadvantaged areas
- Methodology for the legalization of the informal settlements