



# VOLUNTARY SUBNATIONAL REVIEW

2023



Localizing the  
UN Agenda 2030 Sustainable  
Development Goals in Romanian  
municipalities and communes

Association of Communes of Romania

Romanian Municipalities Association

# **Voluntary Subnational Review 2023**

## **Localising the UN Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals in Romanian municipalities and communes**

Bucharest  
2023

This report was prepared by the Romanian Municipalities Association (AMR) and the Association of Communes of Romania ([ACoR](#)) with the support of the World Organization of Cities and Local Authorities ([UCLG](#)) and the Network of Associations of Local Authorities from South-Eastern Europe ([NALAS](#))

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## List of abbreviations

ACoR	Association of Communes of Romania
AMR	Association of Municipalities in Romania
CLRACE	Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe
CoR	Committee of the Regions
COVID-19	The new coronavirus; viral respiratory syndrome caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)
DSD	Department for Sustainable Development
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ECMR	European Council of Municipalities and Regions
EIB	European Investment Bank
EU	European Union
Eurostat	European Statistical Institute
FLAR	Federation of Local Authorities from Romania
GD	Government Decision
GEO	Government emergency ordinance
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NAH	National Agency for Housing
NALAS	Network of Associations of Local Authorities from South-East Europe
NBR	National Bank of Romania
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NIP AS	<i>Anghel Saligny</i> National Investment Program
INS	National Institute of Statistics
NRRP	National Recovery and Resilience Program
NS	I don't know (variant answer to the questions in the questionnaire)
NSDSR 2030	National Sustainable Development Strategy of Romania 2030
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PHC	Population and housing census
RO	Romania
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SDL	Local development strategy
SIDU	Integrated Urban Development Strategies
TAU	Territorial Administrative Units
UCLG	World Organization of Cities and Local Authorities
UE 28	Member States of the European Union between 2007-2019
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
VNR	Voluntary National Review
VSR	Voluntary Subnational Review (local)
WB	World Bank

## **Foreword: Association of Communes of Romania**

The Association of Communes of Romania (ACoR) has 2,267 member municipalities (out of a total of 2,862) from all counties of Romania, covering the entire territory of the country and representing, in a unitary manner, the interests of local elected officials and civil servants from the communes of Romania. Therefore, in its capacity as a promoter of the development of rural areas, ACoR supports the sustainable and balanced development of its members, subscribing to the principle "no one will be left behind", a principle included in the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. I must also stress that one of the fundamental beliefs of ACoR remains the preservation of local values, which is also one of the targets subsumed to the SDG.

In fulfilling these wishes, considering the impact that municipalities have in the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda 17 SDGs at the local level in Romania, as well as the importance of preparing, for the first time in our country, a review of the achievement of these objectives, in February 2023, we initiated the research that materialised in this review. The research focused equally on the role of communes, as well as that of municipalities, in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN Agenda 2030 at the local level in Romania, being carried out by the Association of Communes of Romania in partnership with the Romania Municipalities Association.

As a result of our initiative, Romania becomes the 26th state that will present a Review on the local implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations in Romania, a review to which experts from the international structures involved (the World Organization of United Cities and Local Authorities - UCLG and the Network of Associations of Local Authorities from Southeast Europe - NALAS), as well as on the part of the Department for Sustainable Development within the Government of Romania have contributed. In making this first Voluntary Subnational Review, we considered the need for collaboration and permanent monitoring of the set of indicators assigned to each objective as a valuable tool for sustainable development.

In this context, I am pleased to highlight the collaboration that ACoR has with DSD and for other topics of shared interest that concern the successful implementation of some of the measures included in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan - Component 14 Good Governance, such as, for example, "strengthening coordination at the Government Centre through an integrated and coherent approach to initiatives in the field of climate change and sustainable development". ACoR provides full support for fulfilling this measure, the target of which is to train 2,000 civil servants qualified to fulfil the function of "experts in sustainable development" in public institutions at the central and local levels by 2025. The commune's members of ACoR are interested in supporting the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations Organization in Romania. In this review, you will find successful projects implemented at the local level and examples of Good practices relevant to their area of responsibility.

Emil Drăghici  
President of ACoR



## **Foreword: Romanian Municipalities Association**

Fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to ensure an inclusive, equitable, prosperous and sustainable future requires the involvement of all social actors. Local authorities in Romania play a vital role in fulfilling the objectives set in Agenda 2030.

The actions of the municipalities constantly highlight their concern for the sustainable development of the localities, for finding the best solutions to support the citizens and ensuring European-level public services provision.

As a result of the initiative of the World Organization of Cities and Local Authorities (UCLG) to submit to the United Nations an annual review summarising the voice and deeds of local governments regarding the SDGs and their implementation and to support local government associations in carrying out subnational reviews (Voluntary Subnational Reviews - VSR), the Romanian Municipalities Association (AMR) and the Association of Communes of Romania (ACoR) were engaged in the development of the first voluntary subnational review in Romania. The results of this review also contribute to the elaboration of the Voluntary National Review (VNR) carried out at the level of each country, including Romania.

The municipalities integrate the SDGs into local development policies and strategies and generate partnerships with stakeholders, civil society, businesses and academia so that an integrated approach leads to the exploitation of resources and more significant expertise to achieve sustainable development.

Romanian municipalities constantly commit to the 17 SDGs and the 169 targets. The good practices of AMR member municipalities are highlighted annually in areas such as quality education and youth; health and well-being; social cohesion and solidarity; public transport and urban mobility; green economy and just transition; investments and urban regeneration of public spaces; cultural, tourist and sports promotion; energy efficiency; digital transformation and institutional resilience; participatory local governance; promoting and supporting entrepreneurship and economic growth. By acting in these directions, the AMR member municipalities prove the inclination of actions at the local level towards the fulfilment of the SDGs and the development of communities in the long term.

Emil Boc  
President of AMR

## Executive summary

The VSR 2023 was developed by the associations of municipalities and communes of Romania - AMR and ACoR - to contribute to implementing the 2030 Agenda and the Voluntary National Review 2023 (VNR).

It analyses the national strategy and the institutional framework for sustainable development in Romania (NSDSR 2030) and the degree of localisation of these strategies. The VSR explores the contribution of communes and municipalities to implement a selected set of SDGs (1, 3 to 7, 9 to 13, and 16) through local initiatives. It also recalls the structural territorial inequalities that characterise the country.

The data collected indicates that the degree of understanding of the SDGs, the national (NSDSR 2030) or the European strategies regarding sustainable development is still relatively low within local administration (more than half of all respondents). According to the data collected, there are significant differences in the integration of the SDGs in strategic planning at the local level (SDL or SIDU). A substantial part of the communes and municipalities do not have SDL/SIDU in force - almost two out of five communes and more than a quarter of the municipalities-; on the opposite side, SDGs are an integral part of SIDU/SDL for about a fifth of the municipalities and communes. The causes are most likely related to the low administrative capacity, including bureaucratic obstacles.

As basic needs still need to be covered satisfactorily, municipalities and communes prioritise SDG 6, water and sanitation, followed by SDG 7, clean and affordable energy and SDG 9, road development and maintenance. SDG 11, sustainable cities, the main area of responsibility of municipalities and communes, is only ranked in 4th place; Therefore, even if the report identifies good practices for almost all SDGs, it contains a higher number of projects related to SDGs 6, 7, 9, as well as SDG 4 (modernisation of schools), waste collection and management (SDG 11.6), as well as social care (SDG 1). Projects related to green transition - SDG 12, responsible consumption and production, and SDG 13, climate change - present a lower level of prioritisation.

Indeed, urban or local development strategies are designed according to the guideline requirements of the financing instruments (national or European) and are not always well aligned with the SDGs and environmental issues. Increasing the number of municipalities and communes that adopt integrated urban and local development strategies and plans aligned with the SDGs and climate change mitigation and adaptation is essential. At the same time, regional inequalities have reduced very little in the last decade. Achieving better synergies between two policy objectives, sustainable development and reducing territorial inequalities, remains challenging for Romania. Finally, the lack of disaggregated data at local levels makes it difficult to plan and assess progress at the levels of municipalities and communes.

In its recommendations, the VSR calls for joint actions of AMR and ACoR and the national Department for Sustainable Development (DSD) to spread the word concerning the NSDSR and the SDGs. It proposes urgent measures to strengthen the finances and capacities of local governments, integrate SDGs in local plans - including SDG 11 and environmental goals-and



contribute to the reduction of territorial inequalities. AMR and ACoR should be effectively involved in the different phases of public consultation and elaboration of the national investment programs or the strategic documents related to the European Commission programs (partnership agreement, operational programs for the European funds).

# 1. Introduction

## 1 1. About AMR and ACoR

The Romanian Municipalities Association (AMR) is an associative structure of local public administration authorities (local government) of Romanian municipalities. It was established in 1990 to promote and protect the common interests of local government and to serve and manage public needs on behalf of and for the welfare of local communities. Currently, AMR includes all 103 municipalities in Romania and the 6 districts of the Municipality of Bucharest, totalling 109 members. According to the provisional results of the 2021/2022 population and housing census (RPL), municipalities total approximately 8.08 million people, equivalent to 42.42% of the total population of Romania<sup>1</sup>. AMR is a founding member of the Federation of Local Authorities in Romania (FALR) and participates in the Committee of the Regions (CoR), the European Council of Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (CPLRE). AMR is a member of the Association of European Cities and Regions for Culture "Les Rencontres" and the Association of Agencies for Local Democracy (ALDA).

The Association of Communes of Romania (ACoR) was founded in 1997 as a local government association with communes as its members. ACoR carries out public utility activity in the general interest of local communities in Romania, its service having been recognised by GD no. 156/2008. There are 2,267 commune members of ACoR out of the 2,862 existing communes at the national level. ACoR pursues the unitary representation of the members' interests in the relationship between the central and European institutions. ACoR has been a member of the Federation of Local Authorities in Romania (FALR) as of 2001, a full member of the Council of Municipalities and Regions of Europe (CCRE/CEMR) as of 2006, of the Network of Associations of Local Authorities in South-East Europe (NALAS) since 2009 and of the Council of Local Authorities in Romania and Republic of Moldova (CALRRM) since 2012. According to the provisional results of the 2021/2021 RPL, the population of the communes totals around 9.11 million people, accounting for 47.8% of the total population of Romania.<sup>2</sup>

## 1 2. About UCLG and NALAS

The World Organization of Cities and Local Governments (United Cities and Local Governments, UCLG) is a global network of cities and local, regional and metropolitan authorities and associations. Established in 2004, it is the largest organisation of sub-national authorities globally, with over 240,000 members from 140 UN member states. UCLG perceives itself as the united voice and global advocate of democratic local autonomy and represents *de facto* more than half of the world's population in seven regions of the world map: Africa, Asia-Pacific, Eurasia, Europe, the Middle and Far East, Latin America and North America.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Institutul Național de Statistică, Primele date provizorii pentru Recensământul Populației și Locuințelor, runda 2021, 2022, <https://insse.ro/cms/ro/content/recens%C4%83m%C3%A2ntul-popula%C8%9Biei-%C8%99i-locuin%C8%9Belor-runda-2021-rezultate-provizori>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.uclg.org/en/organisation/about>

The Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS) brings together 13 associations representing approximately 9,000 local authorities in South-East Europe, directly elected by the 80 million citizens of the region. In 2005 NALAS became an officially registered association with its seat in Strasbourg, France. NALAS was established with the support of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.<sup>4</sup>

### ***1 3. Municipalities and Communes in Romania***

Under the Constitution of Romania, art. 3 paragraph (3), "The territory of Romania is organised, from an administrative point of view, into communes, cities and counties. According to the law, some cities are declared municipalities." These are called territorial-administrative-units (TAU) by law. The Public Administration in TAUs rests on decentralisation, local autonomy, and deconcentration of public services.<sup>5</sup> Public administration authorities representing local autonomy in communes and cities are the elected local councils and the elected mayors. Local councils and mayors are autonomous administrative authorities and solve public affairs in communes and cities. The county council is the authority of the public administration to coordinate the activity of the communal and city councils to provide public services of county interest. According to the Administrative Code (GO 57/2019), local government have local administrative and financial autonomy, which concerns the organisation, operation, competence and attributions of local government, as well as the management of resources that, according to the law, belong to the commune, city, municipality or the county, as the case may be. Local autonomy guarantees local government the right, within the limits of the law, to take initiatives in all areas except for those expressly given in the competence of other public authorities.

The Administrative Code defines the commune as the basic administrative-territorial unit that includes the rural population united by a community of interests and traditions, comprised of one or more villages, depending on the economic, social-cultural, geographical and demographic conditions. The commune organisation ensures the rural local communities' economic, social-cultural and household development. The communes may include several rural localities called villages, which do not have legal standing. In Romania, communes differ from urban settlements based on three cumulative criteria: (1) low population density, (2) specific occupation (predominantly agricultural) and (3) specific social-cultural relations (customs, traditions, the propensity of interpersonal relations).

The *city* is the basic administrative-territorial unit declared as such by law, based on the fulfilment of the criteria provided by the legislation on the development of the national territory. The city comprises residential, industrial and business areas, with multiple utility infrastructures, administrative, industrial, commercial, political, social and cultural functions intended to serve a population from a geographical area wider than its administrative limits, usually located around cities. The cities are administrative-territorial units comprising at least one urban locality and may also include rural localities, traditionally referred to as dependent villages.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.nalas.eu/about-us/>

<sup>5</sup> According to articles 120-122 of the Constitution.

The *municipality* is made up of residential areas, industrial and business areas, with multiple utility infrastructures with administrative, industrial, economic, political, social, cultural and scientific functions intended to serve a population from a geographical location wider than its administrative limits of usually located in an area larger than the town. Administrative-territorial subdivisions can be created in municipalities whose delimitation and organisation are according to the law. The city of Bucharest - the capital of Romania – is organised into 6 administrative-territorial subdivisions called districts.

*The county* is the administrative-territorial unit comprising communes, cities, and, as the case may be, municipalities depending on the geographical, economic, social, and ethnic conditions and the cultural and traditional ties of the population, declared as such by law. With one exception, all counties include at least one municipality.

Currently, the territory of Romania is organised into 103 municipalities (among which the municipality of Bucharest with its 6 territorial administrative subdivisions), 216 cities, 2,862 communes and 41 counties.<sup>6</sup> Considering that the VSR proposes to analyse the location of the SDGs at the level of communes and municipalities in Romania, we must stress that these territorial administrative units only have specific competencies set forth by the Administrative Code in the fields covered by the 17 SDGs.

Romania is a unitary state with no regions as administrative-territorial units. Instead, there are eight development regions. Each development region groups several counties, except the Bucharest-Ilfov development region, which includes the capital and a county that, until 1990, functioned as its subdivision. The function of the developing regions is to constitute the institutional framework in the field of EU regional policies, especially in terms of accessing structural and cohesion funds. Development regions are not administrative-territorial units; they do not have legal personality and function according to Law No. 315/2004 on regional development in Romania. In each development region, there is an agency for regional development - ADR, a non-governmental, non-profit, public utility body with a legal personality, which operates in the field of regional development, with the role of EU funds management authority.

## **1 4. What is the Voluntary Subnational Review?**

An essential step in reaching the targets in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of the UN is reporting progress and identifying any barriers encountered. The VSR is a tool that local and regional authorities can use to report on their overall achievements and any obstacles, opportunities and challenges they face in implementing the SDGs at the subnational level in their countries. VSRs are an initiative launched by UCLG in 2020. By the end of 2022, regional and local authorities in 14 countries representing 165,000 local authorities have elaborated VSRs. In 2022, regional and local authorities in 10 countries developed VSRs. They constitute an essential contribution to Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). VSRs aim to contribute to strengthening the SDGs' localisation and increase regional and local authorities' commitment to the 2030 Agenda and other global commitments. The impact of VSRs proved essential; in each country that produced such a review, the national governments introduced

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<sup>6</sup> According to law no. 2/1968 regarding the administrative organisation of the Socialist Republic of Romania territory, republished with the subsequent amendments and additions.

or integrated references from the VSR into the VNR. This Voluntary Subnational Review is the first such review produced at the level of Romania through the joint effort of AMR and ACoR, which have a solid commitment to achieving the SDGs in Romania, intended to support the efforts of the Romanian Government in the preparation of the Voluntary National Review (VNR) for 2023.

VSR analyses the efforts of local governments in Romania to align the SDGs with local development plans and presents an assessment of the extent to which institutional environments enable the localisation of the SDGs – which includes evaluating the means of implementation available to support these localisation processes. Thus, VSR aims to strengthen the dialogue between communes and municipalities in Romania, their associations, the Government of Romania and international institutions.

## 2. Methodology

AMR and ACoR initiated the first Voluntary Subnational Review (VSR) in Romania regarding the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN 2030 Agenda. In developing the work methodology and drafting this review, AMR and ACoR received support from UCLG and NALAS experts, including by attending international workshops where valuable exchanges of experience and information took place with experts involved in drafting the voluntary subnational reviews in other countries. Also, a constructive dialogue took place with the team in charge of the Voluntary National Review (VNR), 2023 edition, from the Department for Sustainable Development (DSD) of the Government of Romania.

The review rests on a methodology structured on three components, according to the UCLG Guidelines on the development of VSR:<sup>7</sup>

1. quantitative research: a sociological survey based on a questionnaire;
2. qualitative research: good practices or successful projects;
3. secondary analysis of statistical and census data.

### **2 1. Drafting process of the Voluntary Subnational Review**

The review was drafted from January to May 2023. The working calendar and methodology were developed in January 2023. The realisation of quantitative research in the form of a sociological survey based on a questionnaire allowed the collection and primary analysis of qualitative and quantitative data from Romanian communes and municipalities regarding two major thematic categories, (1) the SDGs and (2) the policy and enabling environment, with the following specific research objectives:

- identifying the contribution of communes and municipalities to the implementation of some of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (1, 3-7, 9-13, 16) relevant to the area of responsibility of local government in Romania, i.e. communes and municipalities; at the same time, this specific objective allows for the measurement of the extent to which municipalities and communes carried out projects that could be included to the UN SDGs framework, regardless of their degree of knowledge or formalisation in local development strategies;
- perceptions, opinions, and social representations of the representatives of communes and municipalities regarding the most important development objectives at the local level; this allowed the achievement of a hierarchy (ranking) of SDGs from the perspective of the development needs of communes and municipalities;
- perceptions, opinions, and social representations of the representatives of communes and municipalities regarding the policy and enabling framework regarding the SDGs at local level; the drafting of questionnaire items in this category was based on a document proving guidelines for voluntary (local) subnational reviews authored by the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs<sup>8</sup>, as well as questionnaire items used on

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<sup>7</sup> United Cities and Local Governments, *Guidelines for Voluntary Subnational Reviews* (Barcelona: UCLG, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> UN: Department for economic and social programs, "Global Guiding Elements for Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) of SDG implementation," [https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/GlobalGuidingElementsforVLRs\\_FINAL.pdf](https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/GlobalGuidingElementsforVLRs_FINAL.pdf)



the basis of these guidelines in the Norwegian VSR<sup>9</sup>; this objective focused on the following: the information, knowledge, and awareness of mayors and city hall employees in municipalities and communes regarding the existence of the SDGs and NSDSR 2030; whether SDGs are formally integrated in the SIDU/SDL; the extent to which municipalities and communes pursue the implementation of the SDGs, even if they are not aware of them; participation in the events organised by DSD and other events regarding SDGs; the procedure for monitoring the progress in reaching the NSDSR targets;

- perceptions, opinions, and social representations of municipalities and communes' representatives regarding the means of implementation and the structural barriers concerning SDGs at the local level;
- perceptions, opinions, and social representations of municipalities and communes' representatives regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

The questionnaire was pre-tested in January 2023. The resulting version featured 107 questions, including two open questions, through which qualitative and quantitative (factual) data were collected. The data from the sociological survey regarding the implementation of the SDGs deemed as relevant for the area of responsibility of the municipalities and communes only provide general informative nature, namely whether TAUs have or have not carried out projects associated with the development objectives, without other details. Statistical data on the degree of implementation of the SDGs in Romania are available in VNR. Some of the questions were addressed either only to municipalities or only to communes. The target population of the quantitative research included all the territorial administrative units (TAUs) of the municipality type (109, including the districts of Bucharest) and all the communes (2,862). Considering the atypical character of the respondents - legal entities, more precisely, representatives of TAUs, communes or municipalities - and their relatively small number, the total population sampling was conducted. As a result, invitations to take part in the survey were sent to all AMR-affiliated municipalities (109) and all ACoR-affiliated communes (2,267). The survey data collection method was computer-assisted self-interviewing. The time duration to complete the questionnaire was about 10 minutes.

The purpose of including good practices in the VSR is to showcase the contribution of municipalities and communes to the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda SDGs, especially in situations where there are no aggregated statistical or administrative data at the local level regarding SDG indicators and targets. AMR and ACoR collect information about good practices or successful projects at the local level as a base for information exchanges between their members and to grant awards. The cases chosen for this review were a challenging selection among the many successful projects. It was necessary to supplement the data collection about best practices based on a research instrument - a short questionnaire. To cover the SDGs selection for the VSR, i.e. those relevant to the area of responsibility of municipalities and communes.

Secondary data analysis sought to cover the quantitative side of SDG implementation at the local level but in a manner complementary to the VNR. As such, to avoid content overlap with

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<sup>9</sup> Anne Romsaas, ed. *Voluntary Subnational Review - Norway. Implementation of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals in Norwegian Local and Regional Government* (KS (The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities), 2021)

the national indicators set for SDG targets and objectives developed by the DSD and INS, we sought to use only those statistical or census data that allow us to have an overview of territorial development inequalities by rural/urban breakdown - the communes cover almost all of the rural part, the municipalities form the overwhelming majority of the urban part of Romania - and on the order of magnitude of some social problems related to the selected SDGs.

## 2.2. Data collection

The data collection interval ranged from February to March 2023. The resulting sample totalled 609 respondents, of which 70 were from municipalities, and 539 were from communes. The response rate was 64.2% for municipalities (70 out of 109 AMR affiliates) and 23.7% for municipalities (539 out of 2,267 ACoR affiliates). The sample includes 64.2% of municipalities and 18.8% of all communes compared to the target population. We emphasise that the response rate is very high for municipalities, whereas for communes, it is higher than for surveys that cover the adult population.

**Table 1. Municipalities: differences in the sample distribution versus population distribution (%)**

province*	municipalities categories by population						total
	>300,000	>200,000	100-200,000	50-100,000	20-50,000	<20,000	
1 Transylvania	1.9	1.4	1.3	1.6	0.9	-0.4	6.7
2 Banat	1.8	0.0	0.9	0.4	0.4	0.0	3.5
3 Muntenia	0.0	0.0	3.8	-0.0	-0.7	0.0	3.1
4 Moldavia	0.0	3.0	-1.0	0.3	-0.4	0.0	1.9
5 Dobruja	0.0	-3.2	0.0	0.4	-0.2	0.0	-2.9
6 Oltenia	0.0	-3.0	0.0	0.2	-0.4	-0.7	-3.9
7 Bucharest-Ilfov	0.3	-6.2	-2.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	-8.3
total	4.0	-8.0	2.5	3.0	-0.4	-1.1	

Although the municipalities' subsample shows a very high overall response rate, it varies by type of municipality according to historical province and size (**Table 1**). The lower response rate for the Bucharest Municipality, the capital of Romania, as well as for the historical provinces of Dobruja and Oltenia, especially their large municipalities, produced some underrepresentation of these areas, as well as of the broader category of municipalities between 200,000 and 300,000 inhabitants. Conversely, the high response rate from the historical provinces of Transylvania, Banat, and Muntenia led to some overrepresentation of these areas. For communes, the sample over-represents medium-sized communes (between 3-5,000 inhabitants) and, to a lesser extent, those between 5-10,000 inhabitants. Small and very large municipalities are, on the other hand, underrepresented. All provinces are well represented at the geographical level, except for Oltenia (**Table 2**). The higher or lower response rates in some categories of communes than in others trigger over- and underrepresentation, just like for the municipalities. The two subsamples feature a good sample size for municipalities and a reasonably good one for communes. Geographic coverage and size category are satisfactory for municipalities and reasonably good for communes. The differences concerning the relative structure of the municipalities' populations and, respectively, communes are minor and do not produce major unbalances of the subsamples. The VSR analyses the data obtained through the sociological survey employing descriptive statistics, providing a solid basis for general observations.

**Table 2. Communes: differences in the sample distribution versus population distribution (%)**

province*	communes categories by population					
	<1,500	1,501-3,000	3,001-5,000	5,001-10,000	>10,001	total
1 Transylvania	-1.0	-0.4	0.5	2.0	-0.1	1.1
2 Banat	-0.2	-0.3	0.7	-0.2	-0.8	-0.8
3 Muntenia (Greater Wallachia)	-0.2	-1.3	2.8	-0.6	-0.8	-0.1
4 Moldavia	-0.1	0.1	0.7	1.5	-0.4	1.9
5 Dobruja	0.2	0.2	0.5	0.8	0.4	2.0
6 Oltenia (Lesser Wallachia)	-0.6	-0.8	-0.8	-0.4	-0.1	-2.7
7 Bucharest-Ilfov	0.0	-0.1	0.0	-0.8	-0.5	-1.3
total	-1.9	-2.5	4.4	2.3	-2.3	

We sought for the selection of successful projects to be as diverse as possible geographically and by types of localities so that smaller TAUs or those further away from large cities since their voice is less often heard in surveys or reports. The data collection for the good practices collected by AMR and ACoR on an ongoing basis took place in February-March, and the one based on the best practices short questionnaire took place in April 2023. If the number of beneficiaries of development projects was specified, it was also added to the good practice presentation. The VSR features only those development projects relevant to SDGs and associated targets and - essential aspect - included in the area of responsibility of the municipalities and communes, as it results from the legislative framework, especially the administrative code and the local government finance law. We emphasise that a selection was made comprising some SDG targets as localised at the national level, according to NSDSR and some of the UN Agenda SDG targets, which we considered highly relevant for the activity of municipalities and communes. However, the latter are not necessarily included in the national-level SDGs.<sup>10</sup> The targets associated with each SDG may be different at the national level compared to the targets of the 2030 Agenda because UN member states that implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the UN General Assembly Resolution in 2015, may localise the SDGs targets depending on their level of development. Simply put, the targets associated with the SDGs localised in Switzerland or Norway, countries at the top of the UNDP ranking on the human development index, will be different from the SDGs targets localised in Yemen or Guinea, countries at the bottom of the UNDP ranking on the human development index. The RO or UN reference placed before the numerical code of the target shows if that target belongs to the localised SDGs in Romania or the UN 2030 Agenda SDGs.

The selection of good practices also emphasises the commitment to sustainable development and the activities related to the 2030 Agenda, which is present at all levels of the Romanian state, including at the local government level, i.e. municipalities and communes. Moreover, the good practice cases shed light on the flexibility and potential for solutions and innovation within local governments in accordance with their financial and human needs and resources.

<sup>10</sup> The Romanian localized SDGs are available on the *Sustainable Romania* website at <http://agregator.romania-durabila.gov.ro/indicatori.html>, section national indicators; the UN Agenda 2030 SDGs are available at <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>, with targets and indicators section for each SDG.

### 3. Territorial development inequalities in Romania

*Leaving no one behind* is one of the universal values on which the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was developed and constitutes its "central, transformative promise".<sup>11</sup> Therefore, we cannot separate the analysis of sustainable development processes at the local level from the picture of territorial (or regional) development disparities or inequalities. As we will see in this section, this fact is highly relevant for Romania.

Romania is one of the European Union (EU) member states with the highest economic and social inequalities. We should also emphasise that the high level of income inequality remains relatively constant despite economic growth measured by GDP. Since it acceded to the EU in 2007, Romania has consistently ranked in one of the first two places among member states regarding the share of the population at-risk of poverty indicator, around 22-24% (**Figure 1**).<sup>12</sup> The high level of poverty in Romania results from the transition to a market economy during the 1990s and early 2000s<sup>13</sup>, as well as the historical development gaps compared to Western Europe.<sup>14</sup> Regarding the standard of living, economic progress is observable by the decrease in the share of the population at-risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE indicator, **Figure 1**). This decrease does not rest on the decline in income inequality but on the reduction of material deprivation through the global improvement of the population's standard of living (higher real income, sustainable household goods). Other indicators also underline the constant nature of income inequalities. Romania ranks among the EU member states with the highest income inequality index (the ratio between the upper and lower quintile, S80/S20). In 2021, the value of the income inequality index was 7.14 (**Figure 1**). Romania ranks second in the EU, at a marked difference from the EU-20 average of 3.83.<sup>15</sup> This review must stress the high level of the Gini coefficient of income inequality<sup>16</sup> (**Figure 1**), as well as the low level and modest efficiency of vertical redistribution policies in Romania (through taxation, social transfers, and subsidies), as shown by the fact that "the level of the Gini coefficient is reduced in Romania by only 33% (...), one of the lower levels in the EU".<sup>17</sup>

<sup>11</sup> UN SDG. *Leave No One Behind*, <https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda/universal-values/leave-no-one-behind>

<sup>12</sup> Eurostat, "At-risk-of-poverty rate by poverty threshold, age and sex - EU-SILC and ECHP surveys," (2023), cod date online: ilc\_li02

<sup>13</sup> Regarding the transition, the strategy it was acted upon, and its overall results, see in Cătălin Zamfir, *O analiză critică a tranziției. Ce va fi "după"? [A critical analysis of the transition. What is going to be "after"?]* (Jassy: Polirom, 2004), ———, "Spre o nouă teorie a tranziției [Towards a new theory about the transition]," in *România la răscruce: opțiuni pentru viitor [Romania at crossroads: options for the future]*, ed. Iulian Stănescu and Cătălin Zamfir (Bucharest: Pro Universitaria, 2015), pp. 15-44, Vladimir Pasti, *Noul capitalism românesc [The New Romanian Capitalism]* (Jassy: Polirom, 2006) and Florin Georgescu, *Capitalul în România postcomunistă [Capital in post-communist Romania]*, vol. I-III (Bucharest: Romanian Academy Press, 2018).

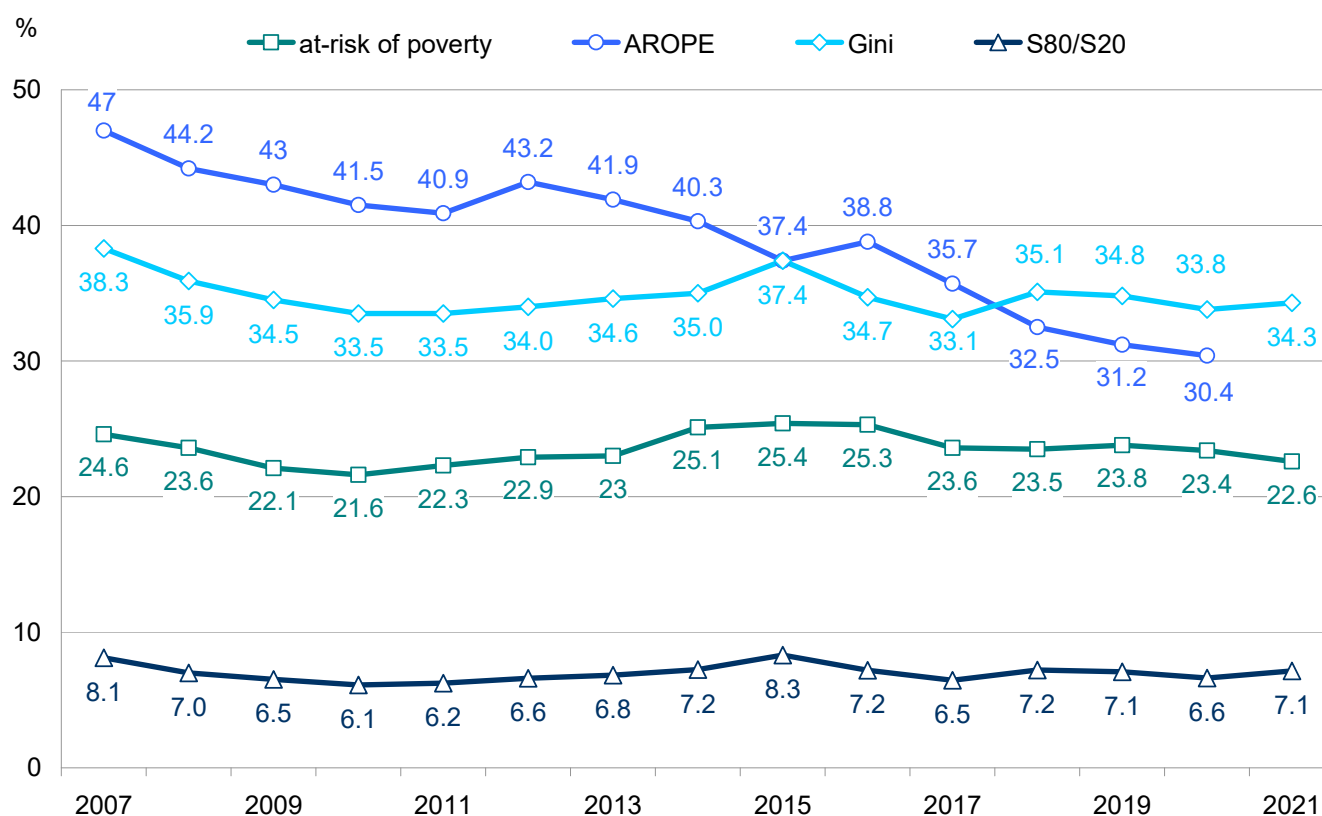
<sup>14</sup> Cătălin Zamfir, *Istoria socială a României [Social History of Romania]*, II ed. (Bucharest: Romanian Academy Press, 2019).

<sup>15</sup> Eurostat, "Income quintile share ratio S80/S20 for disposable income by sex and age group - EU-SILC survey," (2023), cod date online: ilc\_di11

<sup>16</sup> ———, "Gini coefficient of equivalised disposable income - EU-SILC survey," (2023), cod date online: ilc\_di12

<sup>17</sup> Florin Georgescu, *Capitalism și capitaliști fără capital în România [Capitalism and capitalists without capital in Romania]*, vol. I-II (Bucharest: Romanian Academy Press, 2021), p. 537.

**Figure 1. The share of the population at risk of poverty, at-risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE), income quintile share ratio, and Gini index, 2007-2021**



Source: Eurostat [ilc\_li02] for poverty risk, [ilc\_peps01] for AROPE, [ilc\_di11] for S80/S20 and [ilc\_li02] Gini index

Territorial (or regional)-level inequalities are in conjunction with vertical inequalities. As a global indicator of the economy, GDP data shows significant disparities at the county level (the lowest level of aggregation at which data are available). A strong correlation is observed (**Figure 2**) between the GDP/capita index (national level = 100) and the urbanisation level of the counties (coefficient of correlation  $r=0.80$ , coefficient of determination  $R^2=0.65$ ). Also, the difference between the heavily urbanised counties, especially the capital (Bucharest municipality), and the rest of the country is very large. The dynamics of economic disparities in the territorial profile are revealed using the indicators regarding the dispersion of GDP/capita at the county level during 1995-2020<sup>18</sup> (**Figure 3**). Similar to income inequality, the growth of territorial-level economic disparities or inequalities is observed during the transition to capitalism in the 1990s and early 2000s, followed by a stabilisation starting in the mid-2000s and a marginal decrease in the second part of the 2010s.

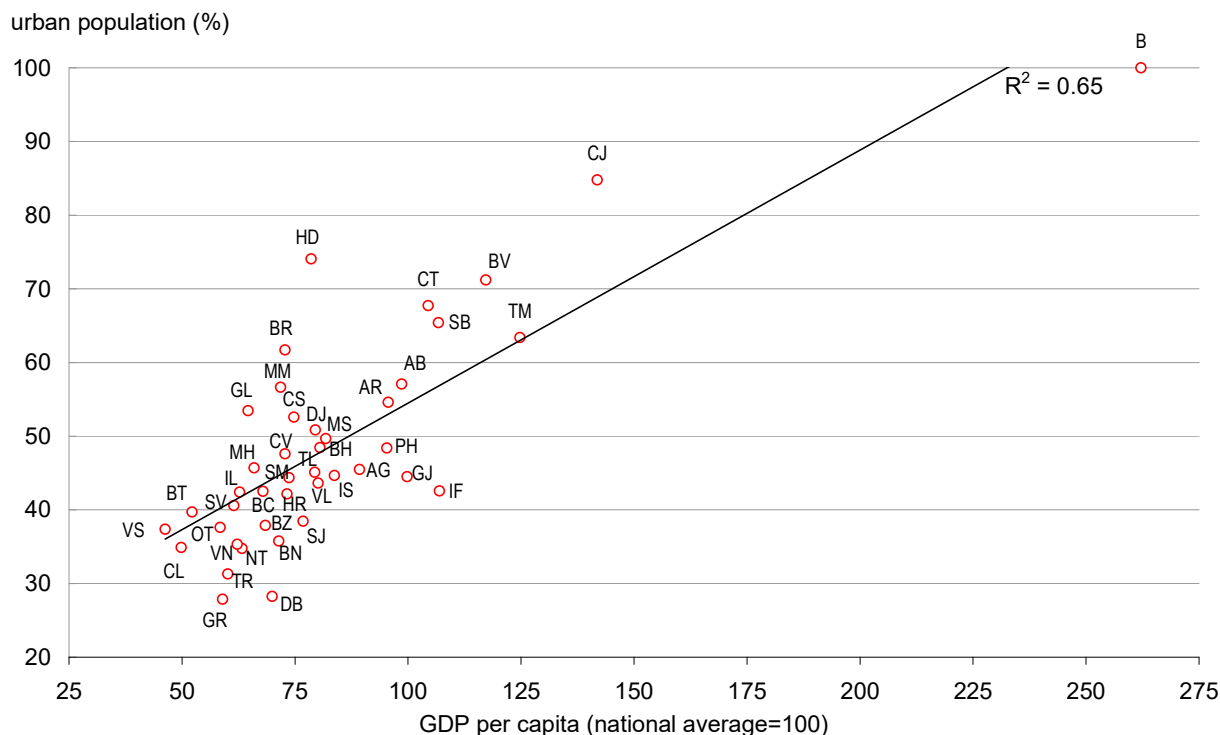
The composite index of sustainable development, calculated at the TAU-level by the Research Centre for Sustainable Development of the University of Cluj<sup>19</sup> based on 90 indicators using

<sup>18</sup> The ratio between the county-level TAU with the largest GDP/capita versus the one with the lowest GDP/capita, the ratio between the upper quintile (S80) and the lowest quintile (S20, 20% of the counties that have the lowest GDP/capita), the ratio between the top decile D1 and the lowest decile D10 (top 10% of counties ranked by GDP/capita versus the lowest 10%), as well as the standard variation of GDP/capita at county level.

<sup>19</sup> Research Centre for Sustainable Development, "Romania SDG," (2023), <http://ccdd.centre.ubbcluj.ro/ro/sdg-index>

census (2011), statistical, and administrative data, shows a variation at county level similar to that of the GDP/capita index (**Figure 4**). Updating the composite index with the 2021/2022 census data will allow us to capture the progress made in terms of living conditions of the population, particularly the connection of rural homes to networks providing running water, sewage, and natural gas.

**Figure 2. GDP/capita index and the share of urban population at the county level (2020)**



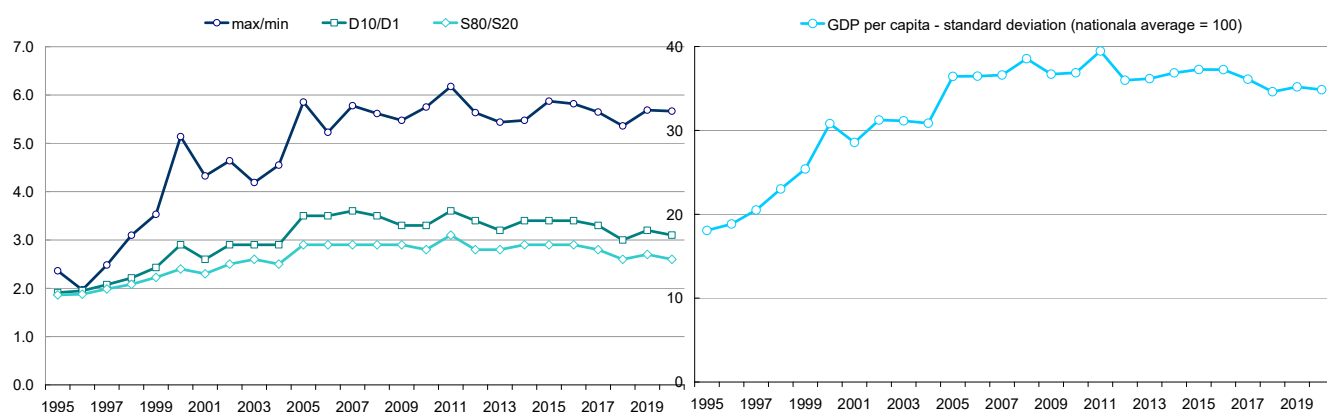
Source: authors' calculation based on INS-Tempo database [CON103C, CON103I, POP106A]

Territorial inequalities regarding salaried income are, broadly speaking, similar to those in terms of GDP/capita (**Figure 5**). There are striking differences between the highly urbanised areas or counties (Bucharest-Ilfov, Cluj, Timiș and Sibiu), on the one hand, and the overwhelming majority of counties, on the other hand. One of the significant sources of this inequality consists in the preferential localisation of the economic activity of large companies (corporations), usually with foreign capital, with a high degree of technology, knowledge and complexity, likely to generate high gross added value, in these areas, able, in turn, to support higher wages and consistent profits.<sup>20</sup> In other words, inequalities in the territorial profile regarding economic activity and wage income rest on the degree of polarisation or concentration of the equity capital stock of enterprises in the real economy.<sup>21</sup>

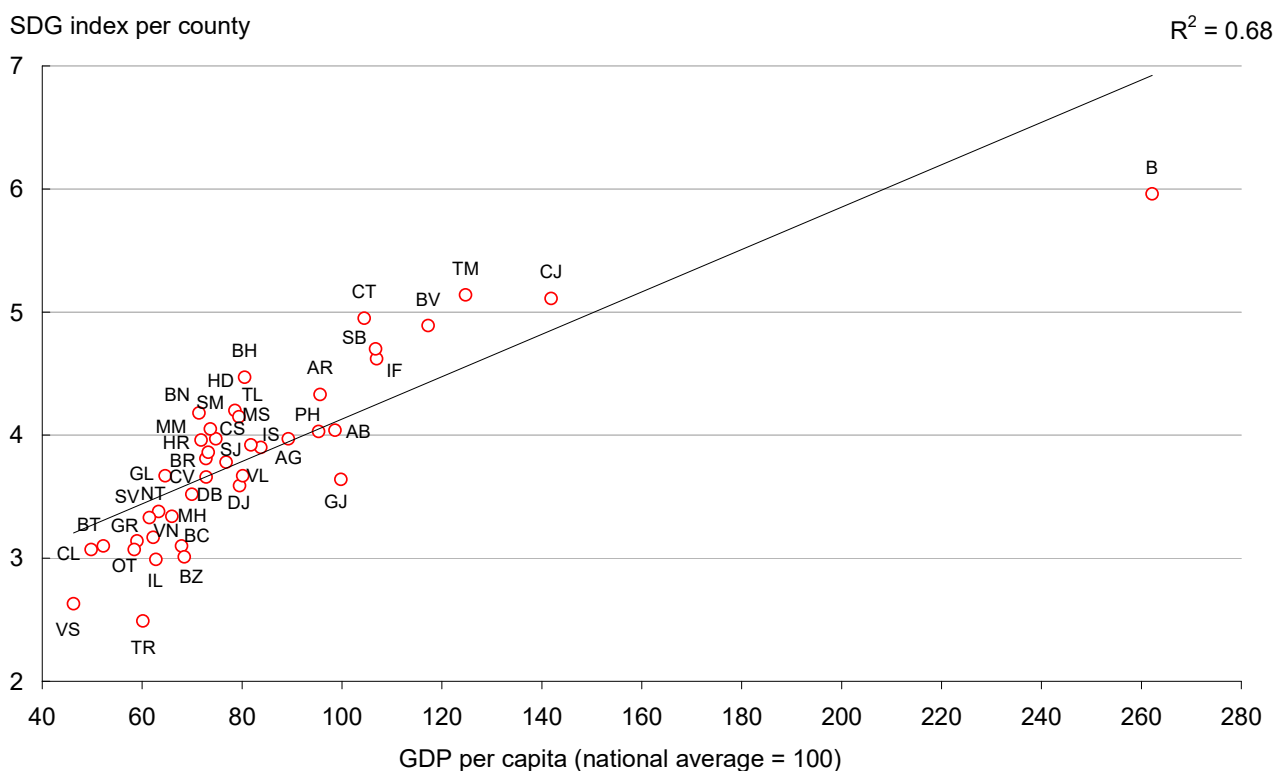
<sup>20</sup> Georgescu, *Capitalul în România postcomunistă* [Capital in post-communist Romania], pp. 84-97.

<sup>21</sup> —, *Capitalism și capitaliști fără capital în România* [Capitalism and capitalists without capital in Romania], pp. 166-188.



**Figure 3. GDP/capita county level variance 1995-2020**

Source: authors' calculation based on INS-Tempo database [CON103C, CON103I]

**Figure 4. GDP/capita index and SDG index at the county level**

Source: authors' calculation based on INS-Tempo database [CON103I, POP106A]

The risk of poverty also varies by territory/region and rural/urban residence. "Poverty is a predominantly rural phenomenon. 75-78% of people at-risk of poverty in Romania live in rural areas".<sup>22</sup> Within the rural population, which is 46-48% of the total population<sup>23</sup>, slightly more

<sup>22</sup> Iulian Stănescu, "România rurală în noul capitalism: marile probleme ale dezvoltării [Rural Romania in the new capitalism: major development issues]," in *România rurală în noul capitalism: 1990-2020 [Rural Romania in the New Capitalism]*, ed. Iulian Stănescu and Flavius Mihalache (Bucharest: Pro Universitaria, 2022), pp. 42-43.

<sup>23</sup> Ponderea populației rurale a fost de 46,2% la recensământul populației și locuințelor din 2011 și de 47,8% la recensământul populației și locuințelor din 2021 (date provizorii).

than a third is in at-risk of poverty.<sup>24</sup> We note that both proportions have remained relatively constant since joining the EU in 2007.

At the level of the development regions, there are disparities related both to their level of urbanisation and to their geographical positioning (**Table 3**). The regions closer to the Western border and those closest to the capital have lower poverty and material deprivation rates. Based on the 2011 census micro-data - the lowest aggregation level was the census sectors, i.e. at the sub-locality level - atlases of marginalised rural<sup>25</sup> and urban<sup>26</sup> areas were made. According to the atlases, 6.2% of the rural and 3.2% of the urban populations live in marginalised areas.<sup>27</sup>

**Table 3. The population at risk of poverty and the risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) at the regional level**

region	rural population (%)	AROPE (%)			at-risk of poverty (%)		
	2020	2018	2019	2020	2019	2020	2021
Romania	46.2	32.5	31.2	30.4	23.8	23.4	22.6
South Muntenia	60.4	36.3	36.5	32.6	26	23.4	23
North East	58.0	44.7	47.1	41.4	41.1	35.6	35.6
South West Oltenia	53.6	42.2	38.9	38.7	31.6	32.7	30.5
North West	47.5	22.3	19.3	18.5	14.7	15.5	14.1
South East	46.8	40.3	40.1	43.2	31.1	32.6	30.5
Centre	42.7	24.4	24.4	27.2	21.2	21.9	20.2
West	39.3	22.1	21.9	25.0	14.7	20	20.7
Bucharest-Ilfov	11.4	21.4	14.0	12.6	2.9	2.4	2.9

Sources: authors' calculation based on INS-Tempo database, POP106A, SAR102D, SAR114B

Subjective data collected through the questionnaire-based sociological survey (**Figure 6**) presents a dynamic slightly different from that of the objective data regarding inequalities in the territorial profile (**Figure 3**). At the level of representatives of communes and municipalities, the most common opinion is that inequalities have increased, followed at a short distance by the view that they have remained the same. This perception likely reflects the difference between the statistical reality and the one felt at the local level. The cost of living standard crisis strongly influences the latter due to higher inflation, fuelled by the

<sup>24</sup> Horia Mihai, "Sărăcia și excluziunea socială [Poverty and social exclusion]," in *România rurală în noul capitalism: 1990-2020 [Rural Romania in the New Capitalism: 1990-2020]*, ed. Iulian Stănescu and Flavius Mihalache (Bucharest: Pro Universitaria, 2022), p. 220.

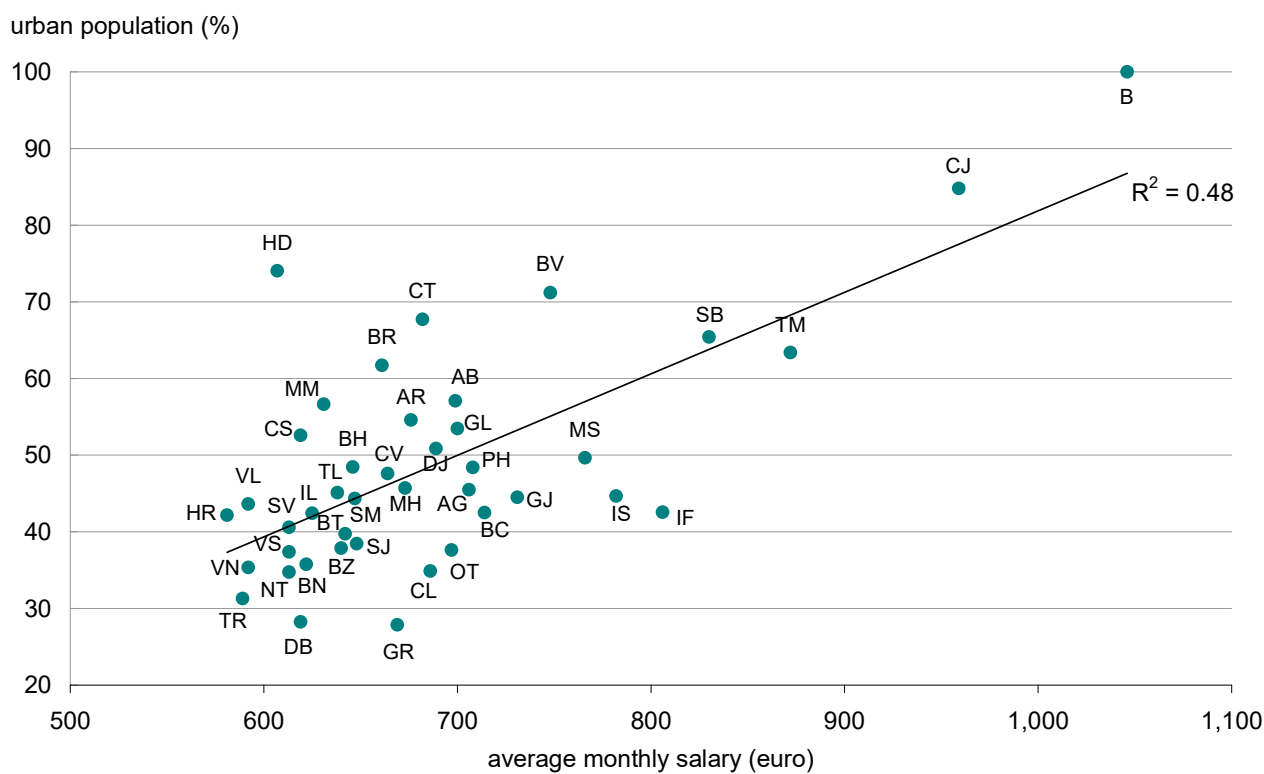
<sup>25</sup> Emil Teșliuc, Vlad Grigoraș, and Manuela Sofia Stănculescu, eds., *Atlasul Zonelor Rurale Marginalizate și al Dezvoltării Umane Locale din România [Atlas of Rural Marginalised Areas and of Local Human Development in Romania]* (Bucharest: Ministry of Labour, World Bank, 2016). Marginalized rural areas are defined as "compact inner locality zones (census sectors) inhabited by persons with disproportionately low human capita, few formal jobs, and with improper housing, as compared to people living in other rural areas", pp. 18-19.

<sup>26</sup> Rob Swinkels, ed. *Atlasul zonelor urbane marginalizate din România [Atlas of marginalised urban areas in Romania]* (Bucharest: Ministry for Regional Development and Public Administration, 2015).

<sup>27</sup> Teșliuc et. al. (coord.), *op. cit.*, p. 277.

liberalisation of energy prices, which was felt throughout the EU starting from 2021, including in Romania.<sup>28</sup>

**Figure 5. Average monthly net salary at the county level, 2022**



Source: authors' calculation based on INS-Tempo database [POP106A], county monthly statistical bulletins 1-12/2022

Hungarians and Roma are the most important ethnic minorities in Romania (**Table 4**). The Hungarians, who are slightly decreasing as a share of the population, present a socio-economic situation very similar to that of the Romanians. The occupational and educational structure of ethnic Hungarians is comparable to that of Romanians. The most significant part of the Hungarian population is concentrated in some counties in Transylvania, among which we find Cluj County, ranking 2nd in Romania in terms of the GDP/capita index, but also the counties of Harghita and Covasna, predominantly rural and located in lower-middle areas in terms of regarding GDP/capita and average net salary.

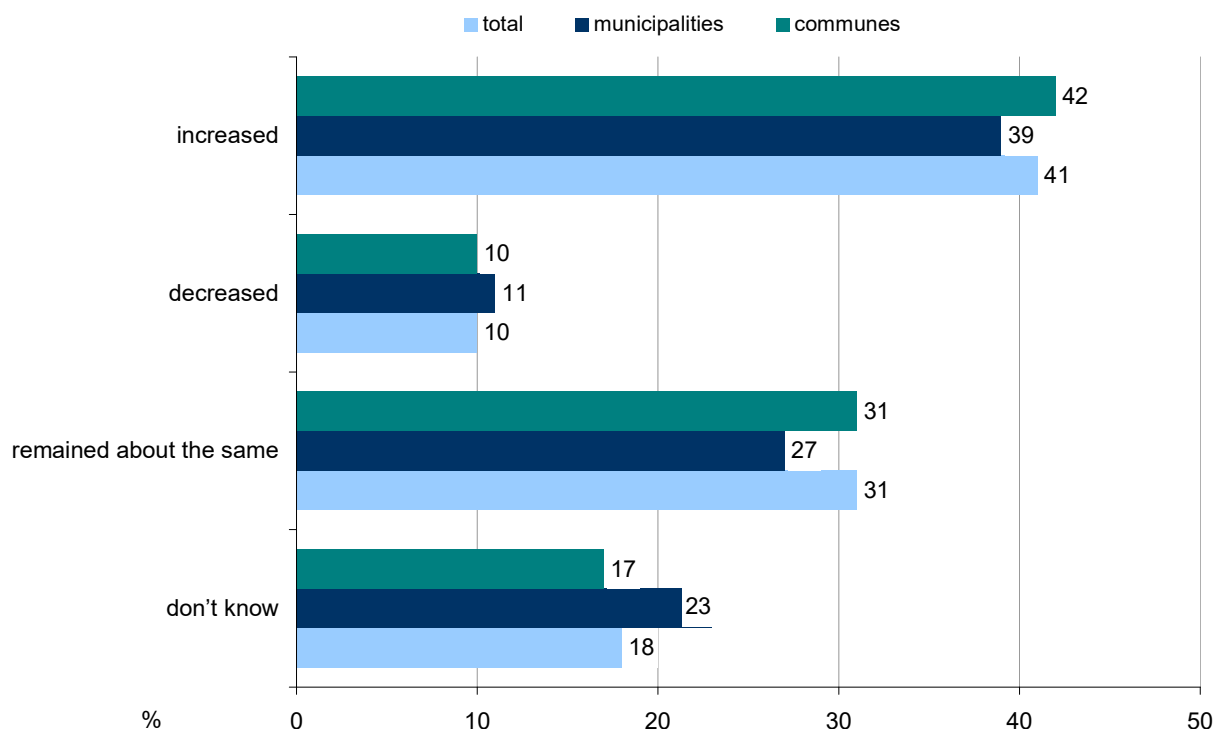
**Table 4. The population of Romania by ethnicity based on census data (%)**

	1992	2002	2011
Romanians	89.5	89.5	88.9
Magyars	7.1	6.6	6.5
Roma/Gypsies	1.8	2.5	3.3
Germans	0.5	0.3	0.2
other	1.6	1.1	1.1

Sources: 1992, 2002, and 2011 population census data

<sup>28</sup> Annual inflation in Romania was 5.05% in 2021 and 14.49% in 2022, according to National Bank of Romania monthly bulletin 3/2023.

**Figure 6. In your opinion, have the territorial inequalities (among the different areas, regions, urban/rural breakdown or types of territorial administrative organisation) in Romania increased, decreased or remained about the same in recent years?**



The Roma population is growing as a share of the population due to natural growth and especially the increase in self-identification at the census. The Roma population in Romania is predominantly rural (63%) and young (44% between 0-11 years), according to the 2011 census. The occupational and educational structure of the Roma population is different from that of other ethnic groups. It indicates the magnitude of the socio-economic problems most of the Roma face.<sup>29</sup> As a result of the precarious socio-economic situation and the risk of poverty or social exclusion, the Roma population is considered part of the vulnerable groups. Although the official statistical reports on social inclusion indicators, including AROPE and the risk of poverty, do not include data by ethnicity, numerous sociological pieces of research have shed light on the numerous social problems affecting the Roma minority, among which we mention poverty, the low level of education and employment, poor living conditions, reduced access to healthcare, social exclusion and even discrimination.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Ionuț Anghel, "Evoluția situației socioeconomice a minorității rome din mediul rural [Dynamic of the socio-economic situation of the Roma minority in rural areas]," in *România rurală în noul capitalism: 1990-2020 [Rural Romania in the New Capitalism: 1990-2020]*, ed. Iulian Stănescu and Flavius Mihalache (Bucharest: Pro Universitaria, 2022), pp. 248-257.

<sup>30</sup> Elena Zamfir and Cătălin Zamfir, eds., *Țigani în ignorare și îngrijorare [Gypsies between ignorance and concern]* (Bucharest: Alternatives, 1993), Cătălin Zamfir and Marian Preda, eds., *Romii în România [The Roma in Romania]* (Bucharest: Expert, 2002).

## **4. Sustainable development in Romania: policies, documents, and the area of responsibility for municipalities and communes**

The section includes an overview of the framework and public policy documents regarding sustainable development in Romania at the central level and the level of municipalities and communes. The final part provides an overview of the area of responsibility of local public authorities, especially municipalities and communes. The weight of local budgets in the general consolidated budget illustrates Romania's financial decentralisation level. This category includes all public revenues and expenses in Romania.

Romania adopted the first national sustainable development strategy in 1999 with the assistance of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)<sup>31</sup>. In 2001, Romania was the first country to ratify the Kyoto Protocol.<sup>32</sup> With the start of negotiations for EU accession in 1999, sustainable development became an intrinsic part of Romania's legal and institutional structure. Romania's EU accession Treaty of 2005 and other programmatic documents adopted during the pre-accession period provide Romania's commitments to implement and promote the principles of sustainable development. According to the Treaty, the community acquis generates obligations for Romania regarding sustainable development. After accession, the National Strategy for Sustainable Development was revised and updated.<sup>33</sup> As a member state of the UN and the EU, Romania pressed its adherence to the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the Resolution of the UN General Assembly in 2015. In this context, Romania adopted a new Development Strategy for Sustainable Development of Romania (NSDSR) 2030, establishing the national framework for supporting the 2030 Agenda and implementing the set of 17 SDGs.<sup>34</sup>

### ***4 1. National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Romania - 2030***

The National Strategy for the Sustainable Development of Romania - 2030 (NSDSR) presents the concept of sustainable development, according to the programming documents of the UN, the EU and Romania, and sets the national targets for each of the 17 SDGs, respectively Horizon 2020 for the expected measures and Targets 2030 for the rational phasing of the efforts aimed at achieving this goal. Developed under the auspices of the Department for Sustainable Development (DSD), the NSDSR presents the decisions to ensure the operational framework for implementing and monitoring the achievement of the Strategy's concrete objectives and targets. In June 2022, the Romanian Government adopted the National Action Plan to implement NSDSR 2030,<sup>35</sup> which proposes actions to consolidate and expand the governance framework for sustainable development to promote the principles and values of the strategy. The action plan includes a package of 22 measures subsumed under the 4

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<sup>31</sup> GD 877/2018 regarding the adoption of the National Strategy for the sustainable development of Romania 2030.

<sup>32</sup> Law 3/2001 for ratifying the Kyoto Protocol at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, adopted on December 11, 1997.

<sup>33</sup> GD 1460/2008 for approving the National Strategy for Sustainable Development - Horizons 2013-2020-2030.

<sup>34</sup> GD 877/2018 regarding the adoption of the National Strategy for the sustainable development of Romania 2030.

<sup>35</sup> GD 754/2022 for the amendment and completion of GD 877/2018 regarding the adoption of the National Strategy for the sustainable development of Romania 2030.

Priority Action Directions: 3 with a transversal character to facilitate the implementation of the NSDSR 2030 and one including specific actions for monitoring progress in achieving the NSDSR 2030 targets based on national sustainable development indicators. The implementation period is until 2030.

## **4 2. Local development strategies (communes) and integrated development strategies (municipalities)**

The local development strategies (SDL) represent mandatory medium-term planning tools that presuppose visions of development achievable by fulfilling the objectives and established measures that were adopted by the vast majority of communes in Romania to access the funds related to the multiannual financial programming of the EU 2007 -2013<sup>36</sup> and 2014-2020. As instruments of non-reimbursable EU funding, the operational programs established rules aiming at the facilitation and consolidation of development placed under the community's responsibility. For the adoption of Local Development Strategies, the local governments established Local Action Groups (LAGs), which bring together different interested parties (especially NGOs, individuals and entrepreneurs) who define the local strategy, decide which projects could best contribute to achieving the objectives of development, to closely follow their implementation through the established monitoring and evaluation processes, which allow measuring the results.

Integrated Urban Development Strategies (SIDU) are planning tools that respond to local development needs and ensure the development vision's long-term continuity. At the normative level, the strategies help local administrations become aware of the main problems/aspects of the community, formulate future priorities, and, in particular, identify the investments they need to make to access external financing and development. Most municipalities and cities in Romania have adopted the practice of developing Integrated Urban Development Strategies (SIDU), capitalising on the role of these strategies in local planning. Initially, this instrument was introduced as a condition for some cities to access certain EU funds.<sup>37</sup> The local governments developed a large part of the SDL and SIDU with the help of European funding.

We observe a wide variety regarding the level of integration of the SDGs into SDL or, as the case may be, SIDU (**Figure 7**). Significant minorities of communes and municipalities do not have SDL/SIDU, or their representatives do not know that there is an SDL or SIDU in force or that SDGs are part of their development strategies and plans: the proportion is almost two out of five communes and, respectively, slightly more of a quarter for municipalities. A starting point to understand this situation is that for the city hall, the practical purpose of the respective documents is to attach them to the application for specific programs with national or EU funding. Therefore, an explanatory hypothesis for the large share of communes and municipalities that do not use such a strategic planning document is related to the low administrative and/or financial capacity. In other words, the salary level that city halls can

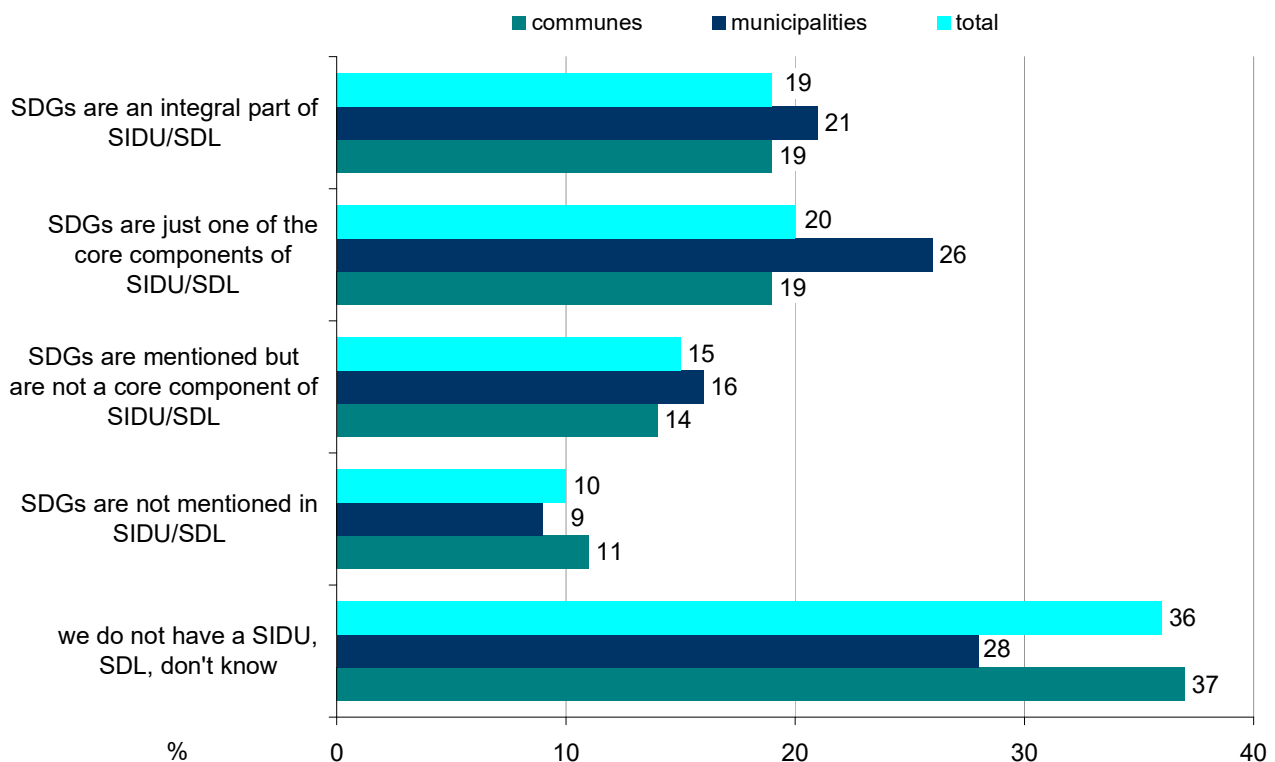
<sup>36</sup> Rob Swinkels and colab., *Instrument de intervenție integrată. Strategii de integrare a comunităților urbane marginalizate [Integrated intervention instrument. Strategies for inclusion of urban marginalised communities]*, (World Bank, 2013).

<sup>37</sup> GD 1575/2022 for approving the National Integrated Urban Development Strategy for resilient, green, inclusive and competitive cities 2022-2035 - urban policy of Romania.



offer is insufficient to attract people with high skills and experience in development policies or public policies and/or the city hall budget does not allow for such positions. Another hypothesis relates to the dependence of city halls with low financial capacity on the local development funds from the government (such as NIP *Anghel Saligny*) and on the EU funds for rural or regional development. In other words, these municipalities can commit capital expenditures (investments) in development projects only to the extent that they can access such sources of financing. In this situation, the list of eligible projects for financing becomes, in fact, the "strategy". At the opposite pole, the SDG is an integral part of the SIDU/SDL for about a fifth of the municipalities and communes; for another fifth of the communes and fourth of the municipalities, SDGs are just one of the important components of SIDU/SDL. Only about 10% of the municipalities and communes have SDL or SIDU that do not mention the SDGs. We should view the subjective data on SDG integration in SIDU/SDL cautiously because SDG integration may be overestimated due to conformist responses. Of course, content analysis of all SDL/SIDU would provide objective data regarding the integration of SDG in SIDU/SDL. Still, such an approach goes far beyond the methodological framework of this study.

**Figure 7. To what extent are SDGs (localised in NSDSR 2030) part of the Integrated Sustainable Development Strategy (SIDU) or the Local Development Strategy (SDL) of your locality?**



For the future, better integration of the UN 2030 Agenda SDGs into development strategies at the local level is desirable. Achieving such an objective requires interventions at both the micro and macro levels. The micro level refers to strengthening administrative capacity at the municipal and commune city hall level, especially by increasing human capital. For example, based on a partnership between AMR, ACoR and the government's sustainable development department, a training program for specialists in the field of sustainable development could be designed. In this way, the training program will lead to better integration of the SDGs into SDL/SIDU and strengthen the planning and policy-making capacity public of TAUs. The macro level consists in enhancing the position of the 2030 Agenda as the strategic reference

framework during the development/design process of investment programs at central government level or of the strategic documents concerning the EU multiannual financial framework in the relationship with the European Commission (partnership agreement, operational programs through which European funds) or exceptional transitional programs like NRRP. In turn, this would imply a higher involvement of DSD in the planning activities within the Romanian Government and, above all, a more robust level of institutional dialogue with AMR and ACoR in the phases of elaboration and public consultation of the programs above.

### ***4 3. Institutional framework and aria of responsibility of municipalities and communes concerning SDGs localisation***

Because this VSR aims to analyse the SDGs' localisation in Romania's communes and municipalities, we must stress that these TAUs only have certain powers established by the Administrative Code and special laws in the fields covered by the 17 SDGs.

The Administrative Code regulates the competencies of municipalities and communes, respectively, of local councils and mayors.<sup>38</sup> Thus, local councils have:

- duties regarding the economic-social and environmental development of the territorial administrative unit (approve the budget, set local taxes and fees, endorse the budget for investments of local interest, approve the strategies regarding the economic, social and environmental development of the TAU, ensure a favourable environment for the establishment and/ or business development, including by capitalising on the existing heritage, and by making new investments that contribute to the fulfilment of regional and local economic development programs, ensures the completion of the works and takes the necessary measures to implement and comply with the provisions of the commitments assumed by Romania as a member state of the EU in the field of environmental protection and water management for services provided to citizens),
- responsibilities regarding the administration of the public and private domain of the TAU (decide on how to administer the goods and services from their patrimony, approve spatial planning and urban planning documentation),
- ensures the required framework for the provision of public services of local interest (provides the infrastructure or material endowment) regarding education; social services for children protection, and also for the protection of the persons with disabilities, the elderly, of families and other persons or social groups in need; healthcare; culture; youth; sports; public order; emergency situations; environmental protection and restoration; the preservation, restoration and enhancement of historical and architectural monuments, parks, public gardens and nature reserves that are their property; urban development; records of persons; bridges and public roads; community services of public utilities of local interest (public lighting, local public passenger transport, sewerage and wastewater treatment, sanitation, water supply, rainwater collection, sewerage and drainage, natural gas supply, heating; emergency services such as lifeguard, lifeguard and first aid, social-community administration activities; social housing and other housing units owned by the territorial-administrative unit or under its administration; valuing, in the interest of the local community, the natural

<sup>38</sup> The public administrative authorities of communes, cities and municipalities are the local councils as deliberative powers and the mayors as executive powers ensuring the execution of the local council decisions.

resources within the administrative-territorial unit; supports the activity of religious cults. Municipalities and communes have shared competencies with the government regarding public policies and most of the public services that citizens benefit from, especially those with a significant impact on the quality of life: healthcare, education and social care. For example, the municipalities and communes only provide the necessary infrastructure for developing these services and do not have competencies regarding the policy and financing of healthcare or the curriculum nor the level of salaries in education. Other powers are shared with the county councils. In water supply and sewerage, wastewater collection and treatment, the management of these services belong to the regional operators, subordinated to the county councils.

**Table 5. Municipalities and communes in the general government expenses budget**

		2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
total	euro billion, current prices	69.2	77.9	87.7	93.4	109.7
central government	%	54.2	54.3	58.2	57.5	58.3
social insurance (pensions)	%	19.7	19.2	19.4	19.7	18.3
local government	%	17.8	17.9	17.0	16.8	16.4
share of communes	%	30.5	34.6	32.8	32.2	30.1
share of municipalities	%	40.2	39.5	40.0	41.5	43.3
other	%	8.3	8.6	5.4	6.0	7.0

Sources: authors' calculation based on Statistical Yearbook of Romania 2019-2023, BNR Monthly Bulletins 2019-2023, Ministry of Development, Public Works, and Administration data available at [http://www.dpfbf.mdrap.ro/sit\\_ven\\_si\\_chelt\\_uat.html](http://www.dpfbf.mdrap.ro/sit_ven_si_chelt_uat.html)

The territorial-administrative units (TAUs) in Romania are financed from their revenues (local taxes and fees, part of the income tax), shared amounts from some central budget revenues (especially VAT), subsidies received from the central budget, and other revenues. For example, the share of own revenues from local taxes and fees was 22.4% for communes and 22.3% for municipalities in 2022. Therefore, in the budget execution, TAUs are dependent to a large extent on the shared amounts from central budget revenues (VAT, income tax), subsidies, as well as accessing funds for local and regional development financed by the EU and the central government. Under these conditions, EU funds had and continue to have a considerable role in implementing local development objectives and projects.

The structure of total public expenditures provides an essential picture of the relationship between central and local authorities and the area of responsibility regarding public policies and welfare provided to citizens. During 2018-2022, the local budget share was between 16% and 18% of the total public expenses in Romania (**Table 5**). This share is significantly below the 2021 EU average of 23.5% of public revenues and 23.25% of public expenditures.<sup>39</sup> Regarding this difference, we must consider that, compared to many EU member states, Romania is not a federal but a unitary state. As such, the number of administrative levels is smaller because the regional (or *land*) level is missing. On the other hand, part of the revenues and expenses of local government in Romania are actually borne from the state budget and transferred to local budgets only for making final payments. Of the total of 16-18% of public expenses for local government, the municipalities got about two-fifths (39.5-43.3%),

<sup>39</sup> OECD, *Subnational governments in OECD countries: Key data (brochure)*, (Paris: OECD, 2021), [www.oecd.org/regional/regional-policy](http://www.oecd.org/regional/regional-policy)

and the communes about a third (30.1-34.6%). The rest of the public expenses budget for local government was allocated to townships and county councils.

**Table 6. Municipalities and communes in the general government capital expenses**

		2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
total	euro billions, current prices	5.1	6.3	6.9	6.9	8.2
central government	%	30.1	26.4	25.3	23.6	25.7
local government	%	53.9	60.6	56.2	54.1	47.1
share of communes	%	53.3	58.3	53.5	53.7	50.3
share of municipalities	%	27.9	24.9	24.1	24.3	28.8
National Roads Company	%	8.4	8.5	12.4	16.0	20.8
other	%	7.7	4.5	6.1	6.3	6.5

Sources: authors' calculation based on the Ministry of Development, Public Works, and Administration data available at [http://www.dpfbf.mdrap.ro/sit\\_ven\\_si\\_chelt\\_uat.html](http://www.dpfbf.mdrap.ro/sit_ven_si_chelt_uat.html)

Local government has a higher share in total government capital expenditures than in total government expenditures (**Table 6**). This fact is significant, considering that the financing of investment projects, highly relevant for implementing the SDGs, is carried out through this category of expenses. The share of the local capital expenditure budget varied considerably during 2018-2022, from almost three-fifths in 2019 to less than half in 2022. Nevertheless, local budgets have, by far, the highest share in total capital expenditures. Within the share of local government capital expenses, the percentage of communes is over half and of municipalities around a quarter. The rest belong to townships and county councils.

## 5. SDGs objectives and targets: evaluation of progress

This chapter constitutes the central part of the Voluntary Subnational Review 2023. The first part presents the level of information and knowledge regarding the SDGs at the municipal and commune city halls level, according to survey data. The second part seeks to highlight which of the SDGs presents a higher priority for municipalities and communes when it comes to their representative's options. The third part includes an overview of all relevant SDGs for the area of responsibility of municipalities and communes. Also, this VSR allocated more space to those SDGs and associated targets that either present a high level of priority from the perspective of the representatives of municipalities and communes or are in the area of responsibility of local authorities to a large or very large extent.

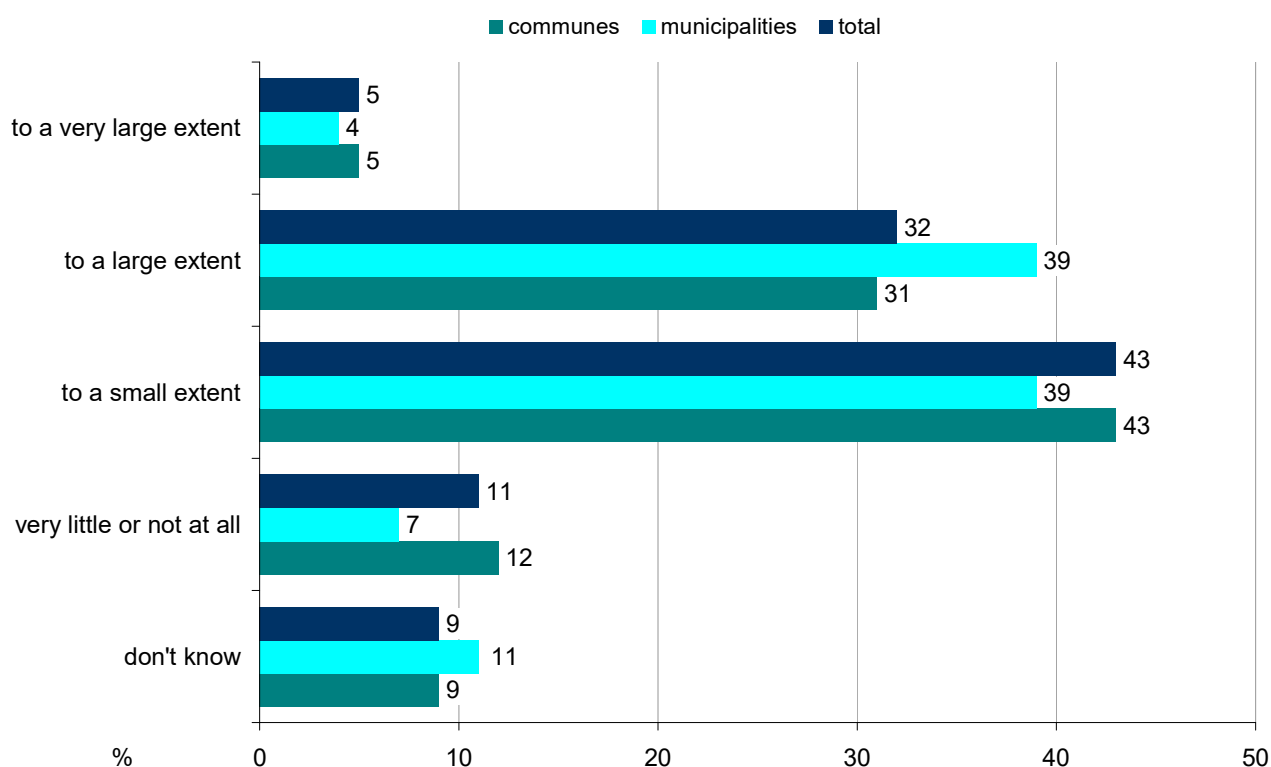
Within each selected SDG, this VSR will present:

- objective data aggregated at the level of municipalities and communes regarding the degree of achievement of the targets or an indicator regarding the stage of the development problem subsumed by the respective SDG; these data, which come from censuses or statistical surveys, will be presented only to the extent that they are available at the desired level of aggregation and without using the set of indicators of VNR 2023, to avoid overlapping with the respective document;
- subjective data regarding the projects carried out by the municipalities and communes regarding the respective SDG, according to the data from the sociological survey based on the questionnaire;
- cases of good practices or successful projects, illustrative both for the overwhelming majority of development projects carried out by municipalities and communes, as well as for newer trends opened by innovative projects; this VSR illustrates several Good practice cases for the SDGs with a high level of priority for municipalities and communes and/or which are primarily or very much in their area of responsibility; a small but essential part of the Good practices cases was more difficult to associate with a specific target related to the SDGs because they correspond to an integrated approach, targeting one or more targets related to one or more SDGs.

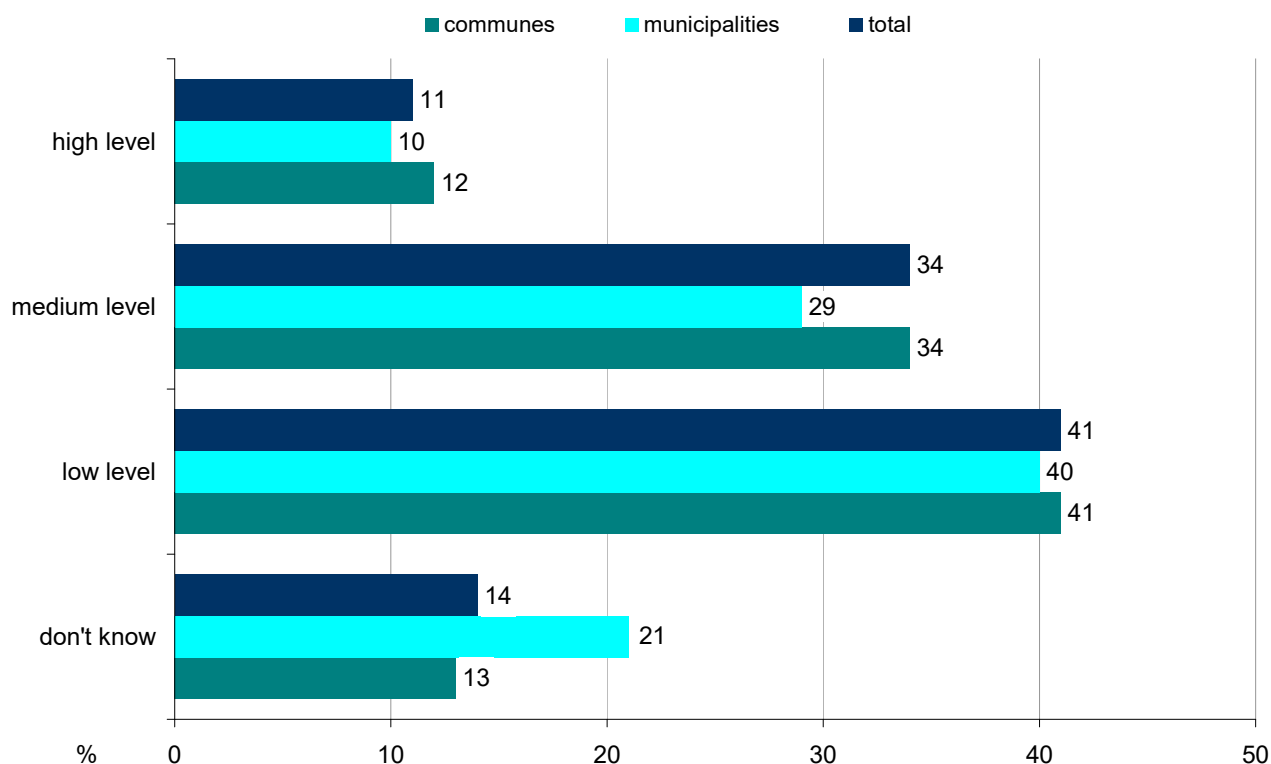
### ***5 1. SDGs: level of awareness and knowledge***

The level of information and knowledge regarding the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development reflects the degree of localisation of the SDGs at the level of municipalities and communes. At the level of the mayors, despite the progress achieved, there is a lack of information, and there is still a lot of room for improvement in this regard. According to the evaluations of the representatives of the municipalities and communes, only about two-fifths of the mayors in Romania are informed to a large and very large extent about the 2030 Agenda and half are informed to a small extent or a very small extent or not at all (**Figure 8**). The situation is similar regarding the level of knowledge of SDGs across the employees in city halls. Most of them, about two-fifths, have a low level of knowledge, and only one-tenth have a high level of knowledge, according to the data collected through the sociological survey based on questionnaires (**Figure 9**).

**Figure 8. To what extent are the mayors of Romania's municipalities, cities and communes informed about the UN 2030 Agenda SDGs?**

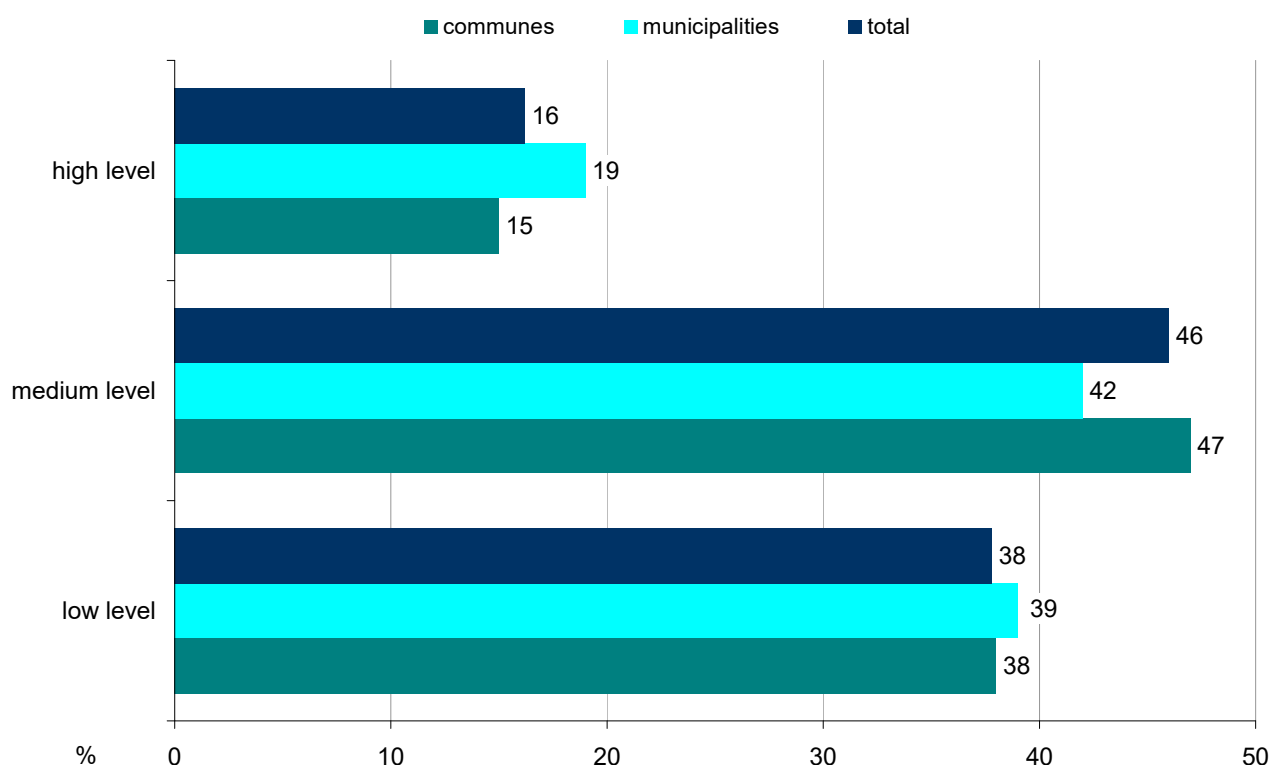


**Figure 9. Eight years since the UN 2030 Agenda came into force, how would you evaluate the level of knowledge of the city hall employees about the SDGs?**

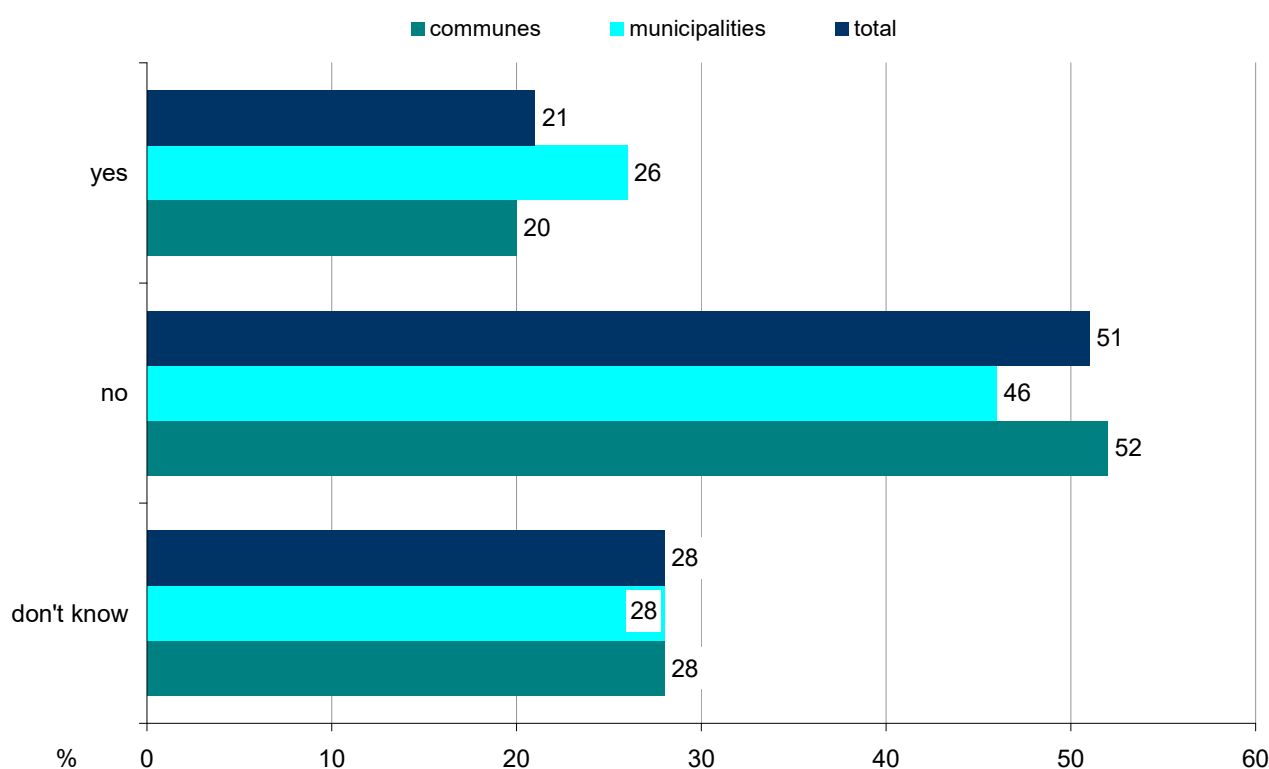




**Figure 10. Please evaluate the knowledge level in your city hall regarding the National Strategy for Sustainable Development of the Government of Romania NSDSR 2030 (2018)**



**Figure 11. Does your city hall use local procedures for monitoring the progress in reaching the NSDSR targets (reports, sets of indicators)?**



The local public administration employees know the National Strategy for the Sustainable Development of Romania - 2030 (NSDSR) better than Agenda 2030. According to the evaluations of representatives of municipalities and communes, slightly less than half of the

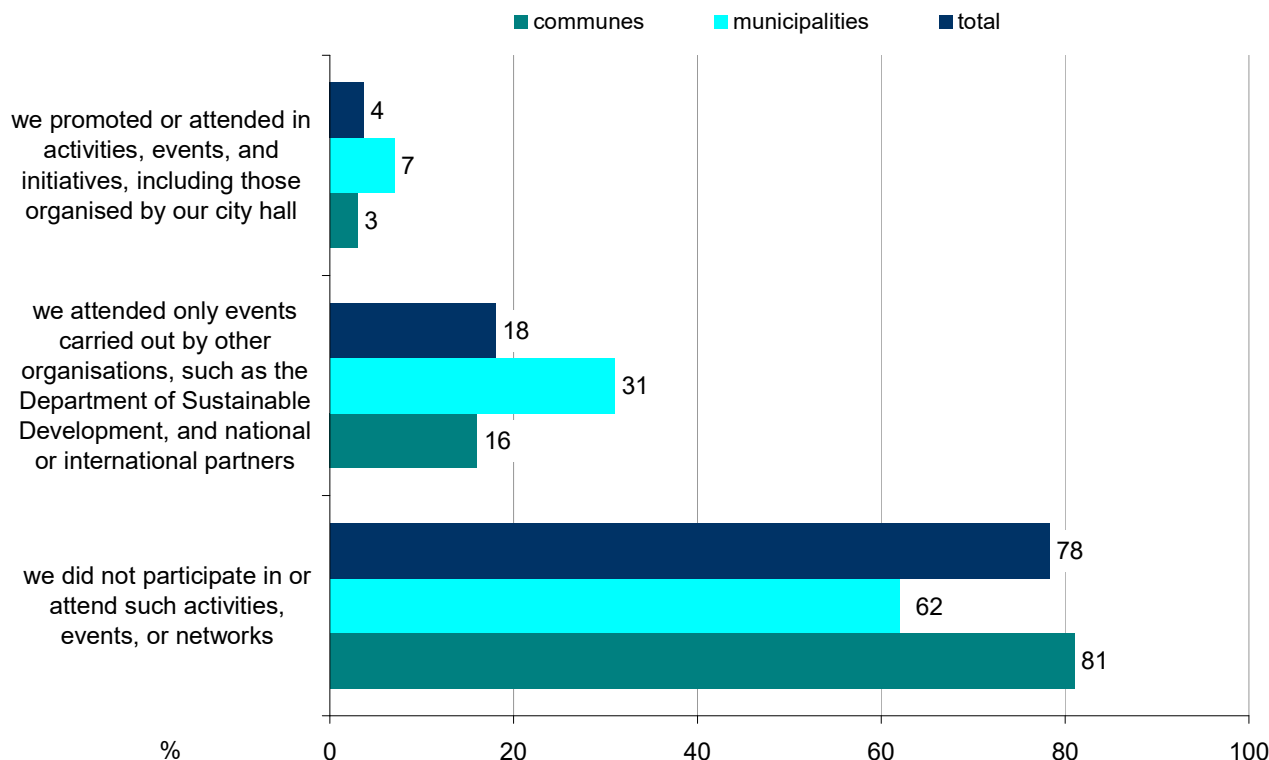
employees would have an average level of knowledge, almost two-fifths a low level and the rest a high level (**Figure 10**).

The relatively low level of knowledge regarding the 2030 Agenda, NSDSR, as well as the extent to which the SDGs are part of the SIDU/SDL, are also reflected in the low proportion of the use of mechanisms for monitoring at the local level of the progress in achieving the targets of the NSDSR (**Figure 11**). On top of this fact, we must also consider the modest level of availability of aggregated data at the TAU level, especially for municipalities, as well as the objective limitations related to administrative capacity, respectively the extent to which the level of salaries that city halls can offer is suitable to attract public policy specialists capable of working with such data.

**Table 7. In recent years, have city hall employees attended the following events of the Sustainable Development Department of the Romanian Government?**

	communes (%)			municipalities (%)		
	yes	No	DK	yes	no	DK
regional debates (in Tg. Mureș, Iași, Craiova, Cluj-Napoca) (2022-2023)	10	71	19	3	57	40
Sustainable Development Nuclei Network (21.7.2020)	3	78	19	3	63	34
Sustainable Romania project launch conference (3.12.2019)	8	77	15	15	63	22

**Figure 12. In recent years, has your city hall promoted or attended activities, initiatives, events or networks to increase the knowledge of SDGs?**



The relatively low level of participation in the events organised by the Department for Sustainable Development also explains the modest level of knowledge at the local government level regarding Agenda 2030 and NSDSR (**Table 7**). As a result, municipal and commune mayors perceive SDGs to a small extent as belonging to their activity, especially at the level of

public policy planning. This is also reflected by the fact that approximately three-fifths of municipality mayors and four-fifths of commune mayors did not promote or participate in concrete activities, initiatives, events or networks to increase knowledge regarding the UN 2030 Agenda SDGs (**Figure 12**). This fact likely results from the crowding-out effect of local and regional development programs financed by national and European funds. In other words, the level of information and knowledge regarding government and European programs at the level of municipalities and communes is so essential for the strategic framework of policies at the local level that the SDGs are too little known.

From the above, it appears that the level of information and knowledge regarding the UN 2030 Agenda SDGs and their assumption at the local government level in Romania, including municipalities and communes, must be improved. One way to achieve this goal would be to launch training/qualification programs on sustainable development for employees in municipalities and communes, especially those with a role in public policy planning and project management, carried out through a partnership between DSD, AMR and ACoR.

## ***5 2. Prioritisation of SDGs by communes and municipalities***

Municipalities and communes propose numerous development objectives. To capture their variety and hierarchy, the representatives of the city halls identified via the questionnaire-based survey the three most important objectives at the level of the respective municipality or commune. The results are surprising on several levels. First, there is an SDG hierarchy (ranking) similarity between the municipalities and communes both in terms of the first option (the most important development objective) and total options (the results that include all the answers). Thus, within the first option (**Table 8**), SDG 6 water and sanitation occupies a detached 1st place with almost two-thirds of the options for communes and slightly more than half for municipalities. SDG 7 clean and affordable energy occupies the second position with about a quarter of the options for communes and almost two-fifths for municipalities. The third position goes to SDG 9 industry, innovation, and infrastructure. When looking inside the SDGs at the level of targets, we notice that for SDG 9, we have only one target mentioned, namely the asphaltting of roads of local interest and streets, while the scores obtained for SDG 6 and 7 accumulate several targets (**Figure 14, Figure 16**). The differences in the distribution of answers between municipalities and communes for SDG 6 and 7 come from a somewhat reduced need at the level of municipalities to expand water and sewerage networks (SDG 6), a natural fact considering the proportion of the population already connected to these networks in the urban environment as opposed to the rural environment (**Figure 22**). Also, at the municipal level, there is a greater need for thermal rehabilitation of residential and public interest buildings, which are much more numerous and larger in the urban environment than in the rural one, as well as a lesser need to expand the distribution network of natural gas, much more developed in urban areas than in rural areas.

Secondly, there is a similarity between communes and municipalities regarding the first two SDG targets mentioned: establishing or expanding the running water and sewerage networks (**Figure 14, Figure 16**). We expected to find these two targets at the top of the options at the level of the communes, but it is a surprise at the level of the municipalities. Most likely, the urgent need to expand access to public utilities for some border neighbourhoods or (former) villages that belong to them, respectively the connection to utilities of new residential areas for large municipalities, where the demand for housing from the population is at a high level explains this result.

**Table 8. The most important SDG at the local level - first choice**

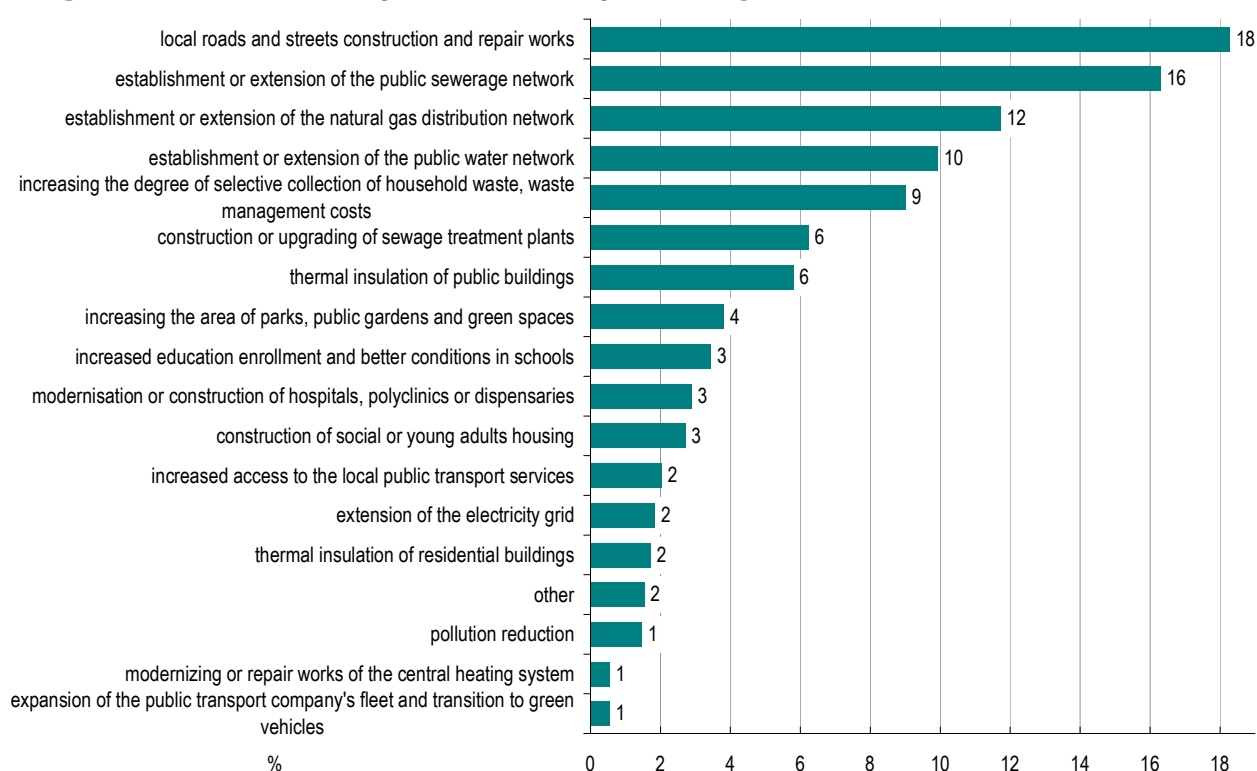
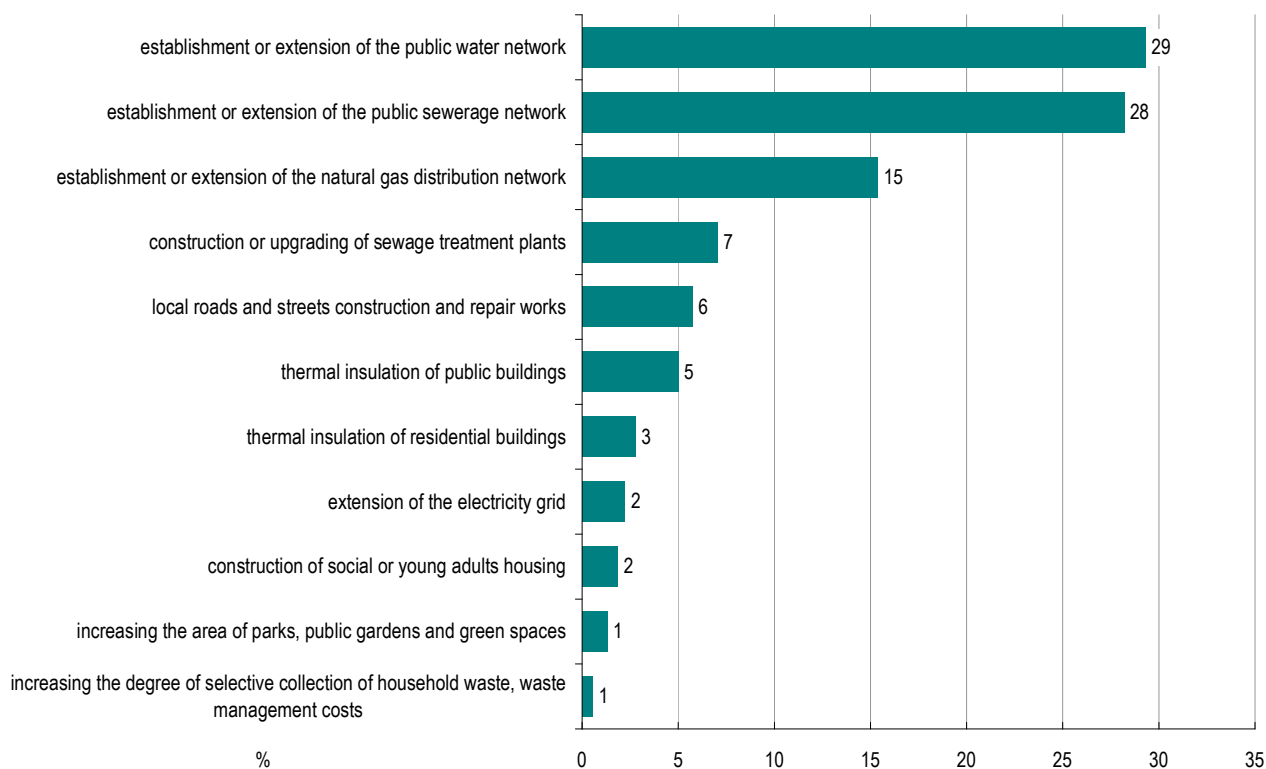
SDG	communes (N=539)		municipalities (N=70)	
	rank	Per cent	rank	Per cent
6 water and sanitation	1	64.9	1	52.9
7 clean energy and sanitation	2	25.6	2	38.6
9 industry, innovation and infrastructure	3	5.8	3	8.6
11 sustainable cities and communities	4	3.2		
other		1.2		

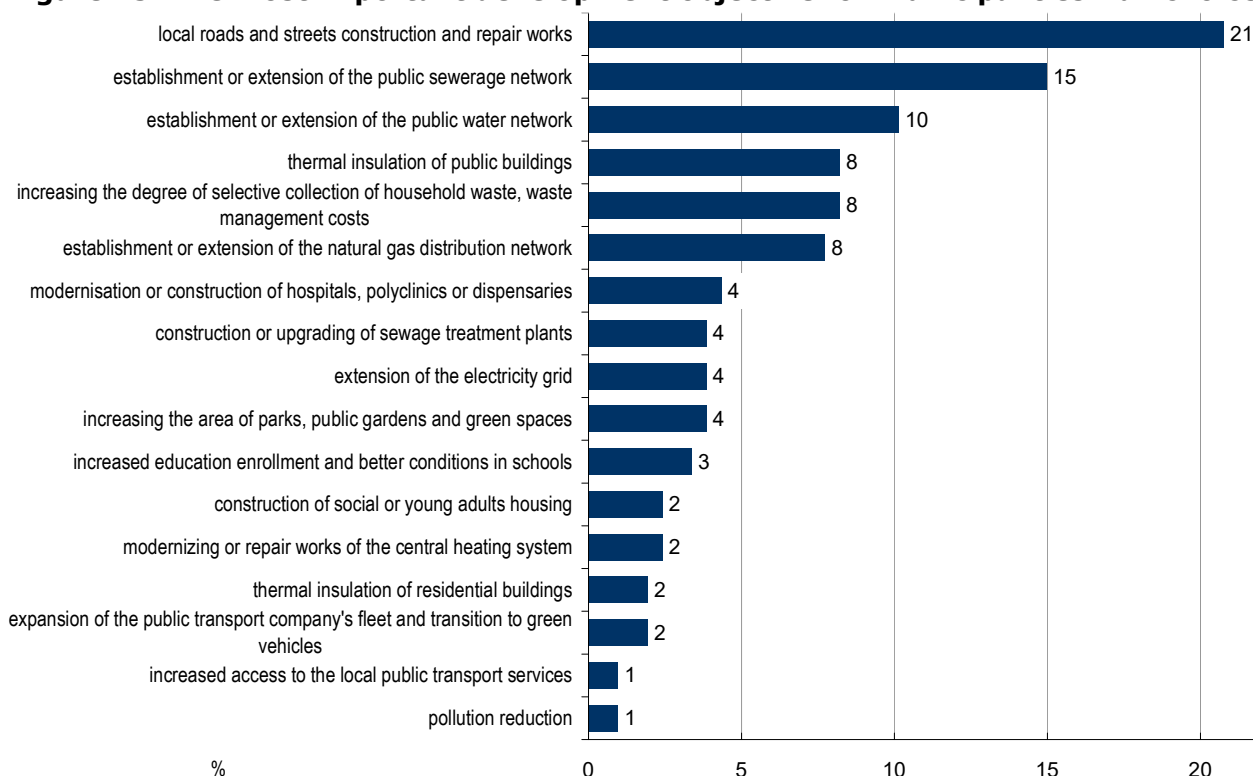
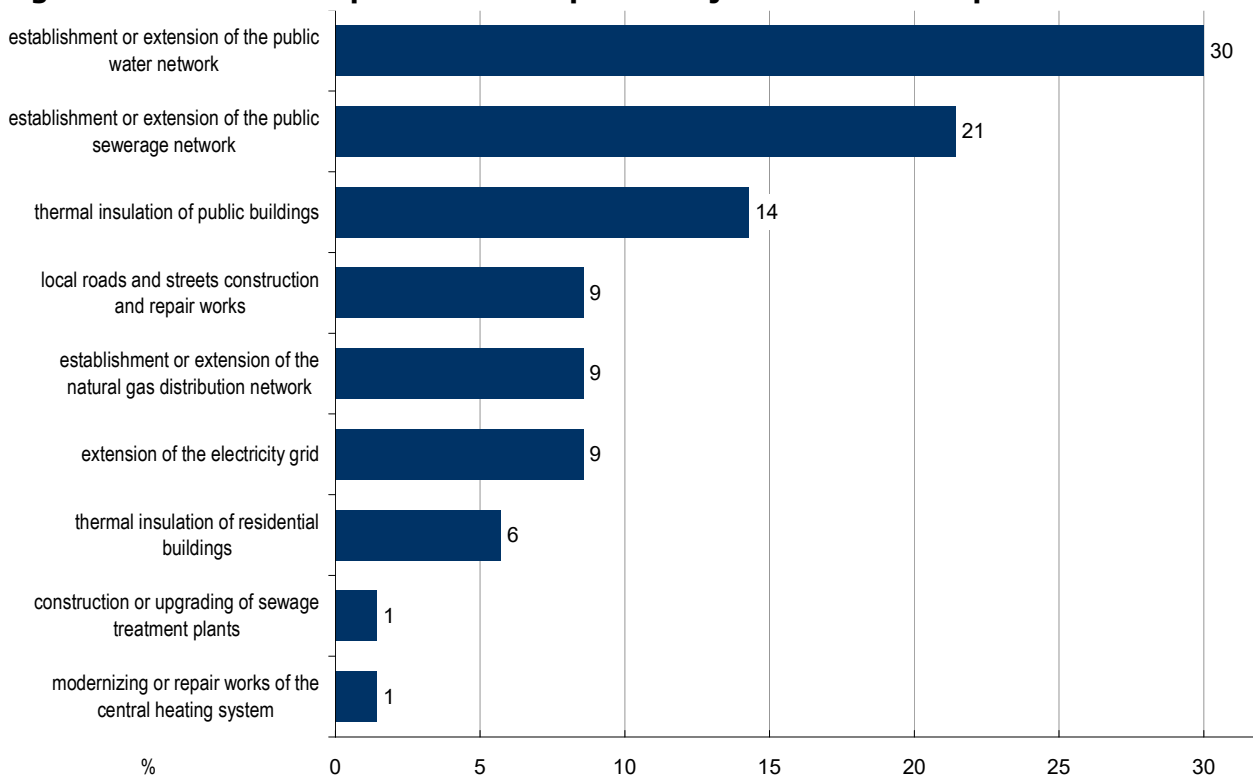
The hierarchy and distribution of SDG on total responses are also similar between municipalities and communes (**Table 9**). Unlike the answers regarding the first option, the distribution of the answers on the first three groups of SDGs is more even, but the order remains the same: SDG 6, SDG 7 and SDG 9. Also, if for SDG 6 and SDG 7 the total percentages include more targets related to the development objectives, in the case of SDG 9 there is only one target: asphaltting of roads of local interest and streets (**Figure 13, Figure 15**). Moreover, this is also the sustainable development target that received the most significant number (and weight) of responses at the level of municipalities and communes. In other words, we observe a substantial differentiation in the distribution of responses on targets (subcategories) of sustainable development goals between the first and total options. If expanding or establishing a water and sewage network closer to basic human needs is first in the first option category, asphaltting of roads of local interest and streets ranks first in the total options category.

**Table 9. The most important SDG at the local level - all choices**

SDG	communes (N=1,619)		municipalities (N=201)	
	rank	Per cent	rank	Per cent
6 water and sanitation	1	32.5	1	29.0
7 clean energy and sanitation	2	22.2	2	26.1
9 industry, innovation and infrastructure	3	18.3	3	20.8
11 sustainable cities and communities	4	10.1	4-5	8.2
12 responsible consumption and production	5	9.0	4-5	8.2
4 quality education	6	3.5	7	3.4
3 good health and well-being	7	2.9	6	4.3
other		1.5		

Another general observation formulated in the previous sections relates to the low prioritisation of targets associated with SDG 11 Sustainable cities and communities and 12 Responsible Consumption and Production at the level of municipalities and communes in Romania. In other words, sustainable development targets related to reducing pollution, green transition, promoting public transport, housing construction, increasing the areas of green spaces and parks, and waste management are less important for local public authorities in Romania. All of this refers to Romania's general level of development and, above all, the development gaps compared to Western Europe, which is also found in the priorities of local public administrations regarding development directions and public investments.

**Figure 13. The most important development objective for communes - all choices****Figure 14. The most important development objective for communes - first choice**

**Figure 15. The most important development objective for municipalities - all choices****Figure 16. The most important development objective for municipalities - first choice**

## 5 3. Progress and good practices



### 5 3.1. SDG 1: No poverty

#### RO 1.1 Eradication of extreme poverty for all citizens

Reducing poverty and fighting against social exclusion are public policy objectives to a much greater extent within the area of responsibility in Romania of the central government and county-level local government than in the area of responsibility of municipalities and communes. The central government develops social policies, especially regarding social benefits and ensures their financing, while a substantial part of social services is in the area of responsibility of the county councils, especially child protection services. Public social care services operating at the level of municipalities and communes developed unevenly due to territorial differences in financial and administrative capacity (human resources) and the importance placed on social care. In other words, affluent municipalities and communes have developed social care services and/or outsourced them through NGOs. In contrast, the less developed municipalities and communes, with a modest or precarious financial capacity (own revenue), face significant difficulties in providing social services. Inequalities in the provision of social services rest on territorial development inequalities (see Chapter 3). The higher financial resources of the municipalities allow for a higher level of involvement compared to that of the communes in fighting against poverty and social exclusion by providing social care (

**Figure 17**). Nevertheless, the low percentage of municipalities, less than a fourth, that have a functional social canteen (**Figure 28**) and the fact that only about half of the municipalities have developed services for the care of homeless people (

**Figure 17**) highlights the need for the development of social services at the local level - a most critical service for people experiencing deep material deprivation.

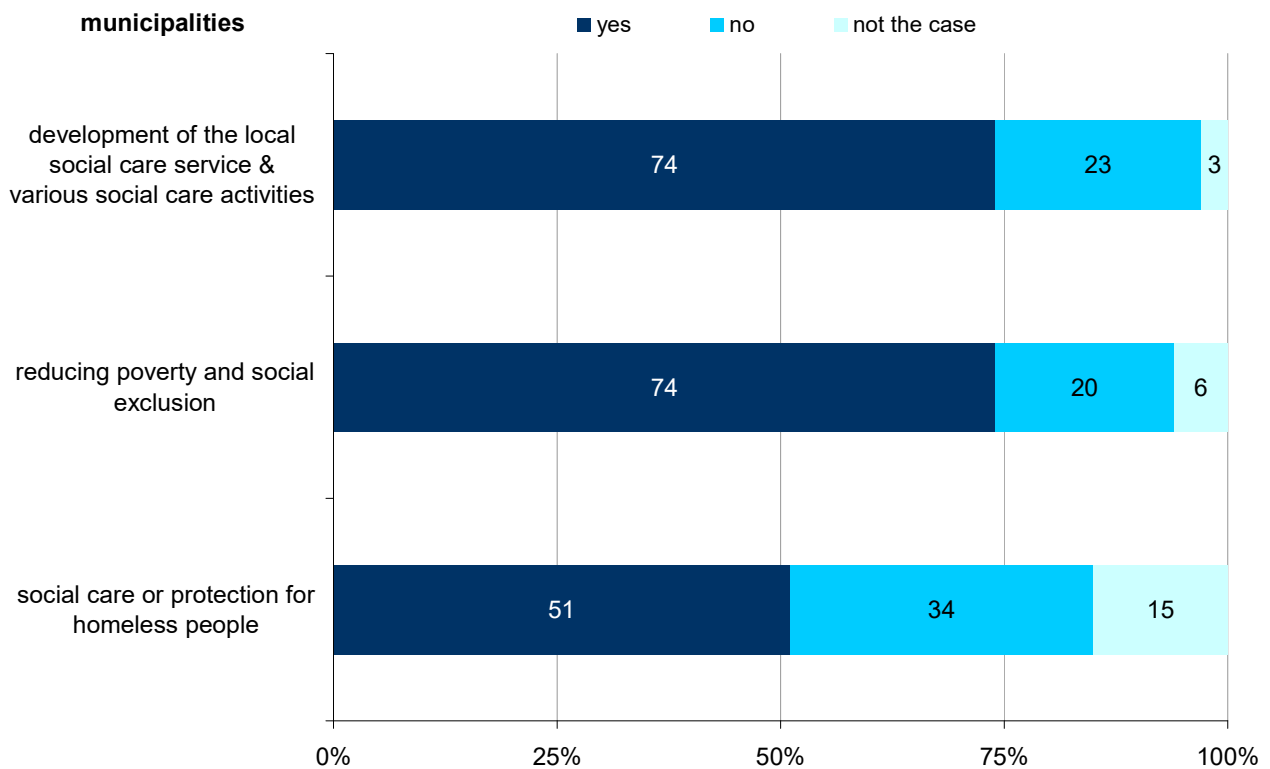
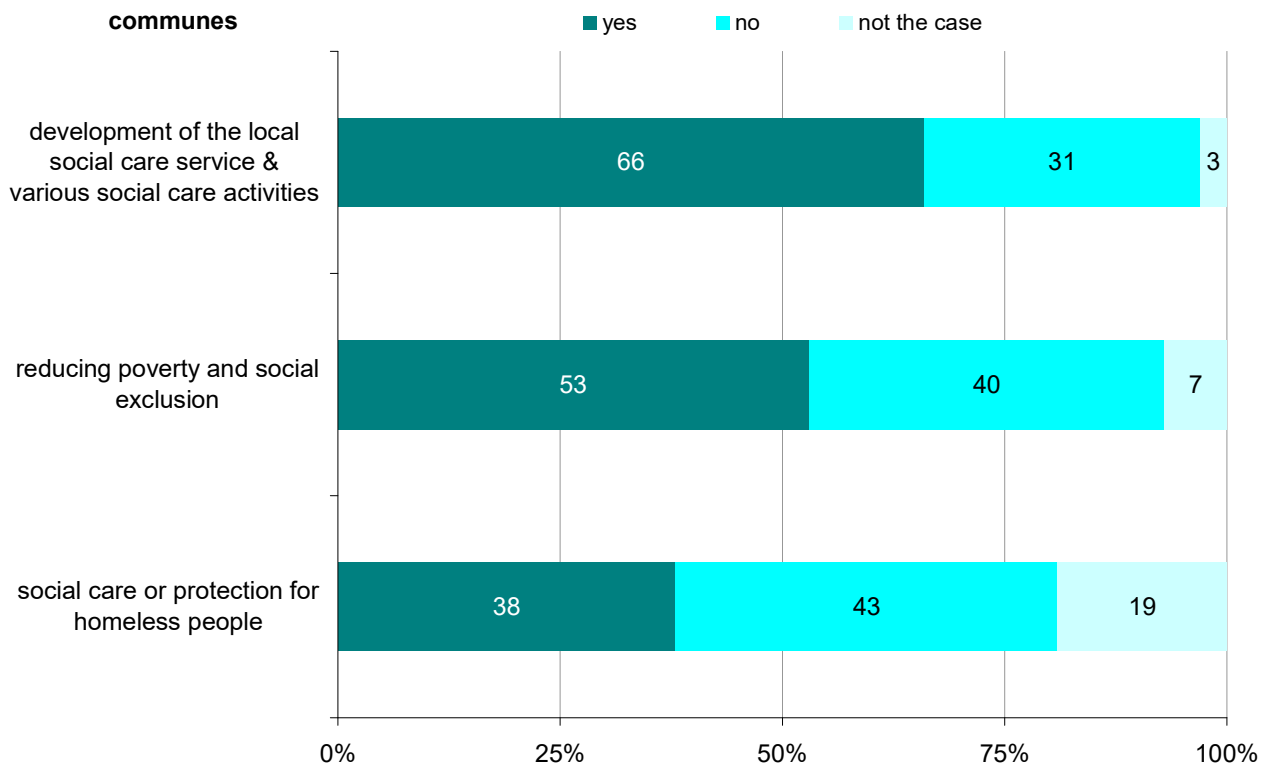
**UN Target 1.4.** By 2030, ensuring that all men and women, especially the poor and vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources as well as access to basic services, the right to own and control land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, suitable new technologies and financial services, including microfinance.

#### Good practices

**Zalău** municipality: the project Designing a day Centre for children in Zalău by changing the destination of the district heat station no. 17, achieved by rehabilitating and consolidating the district heat station no. 17 (see the picture on page 41), in which a maximum number of 100 children/day, of which 50% come from the marginalized urban community, benefit from cultural-recreational services after school hours.

**Figure 17. [SDG 1] For the past 8 years, has your city hall carried out development projects regarding the following...?**







The project *A Chance for the Elderly* was carried out by the Romanian National Red Cross Society, Sălaj Branch, in partnership with the Municipality of Zalău, through which a home care unit and a day-care centre for the older people called *Second Family* were established, with the specific objectives to the number of people belonging to vulnerable groups by providing social, medical and socio-professional services appropriate to particular needs.



**Vulcan** municipality: The project *People Trained for the Future of Vulcan* aims to partially solve the problems of employment, education and access to services, including social services for the people from marginalized urban areas through:

1. the development of social services and licensed socio-medical services in the form of social services provided in the community, intended for adults, a daycare centre for children from families in difficulty, assistance and homecare for older people designed for 740 adults at risk of marginalization;
2. increasing the education level of 80 children in marginalized urban areas, totally or partially from the territory of the municipality, by providing them with complex educational services;
3. increasing the qualification level, the chances of finding a job, and employment opportunities through active measures and professional training activities for 390 people from marginalized urban areas;
4. awareness of the risk of the emergence or existence of a situation of marginalisation through specific anti-discrimination activities offered to 740 people;
5. improving the situation of identity and property documents for people at risk of poverty and marginalization by issuing such documents for their use.



### 5 3.2. SDG 3: Good health and well-being

In Romania, there are substantial differences in the population's health status by type of residence, i.e. urban versus rural. The average life expectancy is about three years less in rural areas than in urban areas, and infant mortality is almost a third lower in urban areas than in rural areas. (**Table 10**). Beyond individual choices regarding lifestyle and nutrition, these differences in health outcomes also come from unequal access to healthcare services. To illustrate this, approximately 90% of doctors work in urban areas (**Table 10**), while around 47% of the population resides in rural areas.

**Table 10. Life expectancy, infant mortality, and physicians - urban/rural breakdown**

	2018	2019	2020	2021
life expectancy (years)				
Total	75.8	75.9	76.1	75.1
Rural	74.2	74.2	74.4	73.6
urban	77.1	77.2	77.4	76.3
infant mortality rate (number of infant [before 1 year] deaths for 1,000 live births)				
total	5.8	5.5	5.6	5.2
rural	7.3	7.1	6.8	6.5
urban	4.7	4.2	4.5	4.2
physicians (%)				
rural	9.4	9.0	...	...
urban	90.6	91.0	...	...

Sources: Statistical Yearbook of Romania 2022, INS, *Activitatea unităților sanitare în 2018, 2019* [Activity of health units in 2018, 2019]

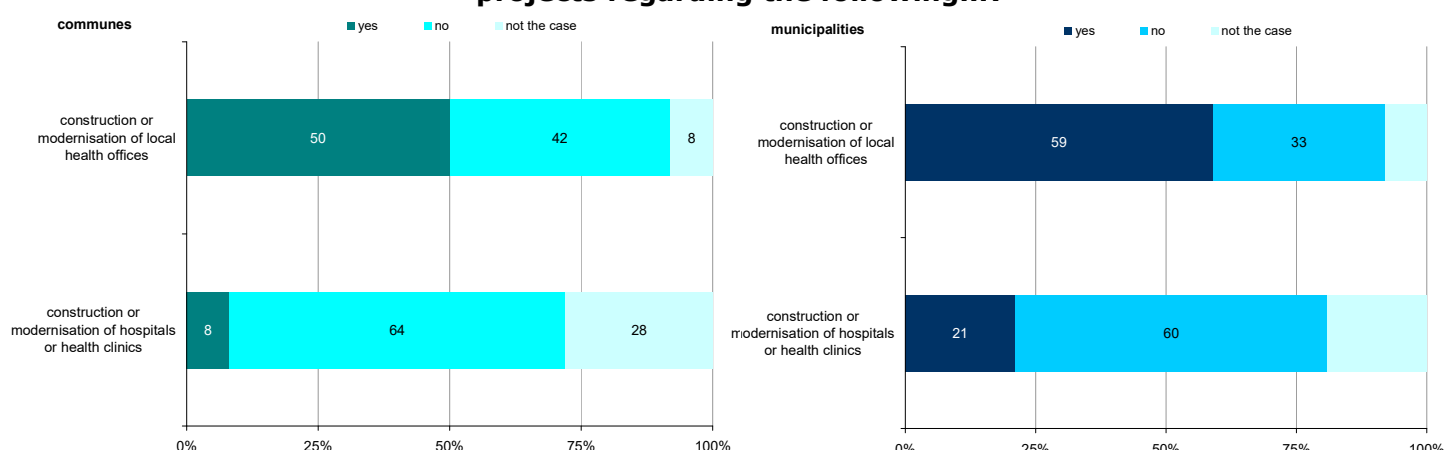
Beyond the concentration of the healthcare system in large cities, the inequality of access to healthcare services rests on economic and social inequalities (see Chapter 3). The health system in Romania is organised in the form of a state health insurance system, to which only insured persons and caregivers have access, i.e. persons in salaried employment and equivalent types of income, pensioners, children, and other categories with no income from economic activities (students or people on some social benefits, including unemployment insurance benefit). People without health insurance have access only to emergency care in certain hospitals. In addition to the public system, there is a private, for-profit health system, including for people with private healthcare insurance. Chronic underfunding of the public health system fostered the growth of the private health sector and continues to do so. For this reason, as well as informal payments in the public health system, there are numerous situations of formal and informal exclusion from the public health sector. Therefore, access to

healthcare services in Romania largely depends on the person's income, wealth, and place of residence.<sup>40</sup>

**RO Target 3.1** Ensuring universal access to information, education and counselling services to promote prevention and adopt a risk-free lifestyle.

In Romania, the area of responsibility regarding the healthcare system is concentrated mainly at the central level. Most hospitals operate under the subordination of the county councils and the Ministry of Health (especially the emergency units). Municipalities and communes are responsible for maintaining hospitals, polyclinics and human dispensaries on their territory, which are not administered by county councils or the Ministry of Health. As a result, healthcare as a policy area at the level of municipalities and communes deals with modernising human dispensaries, including in the form of socio-medical centres, used by general practitioners and, to a much lesser extent, by specialised practitioners (**Figure 18**). Especially for communes, a modernised dispensary is essential for the availability of general practitioner services or recruiting one.

**Figure 18. [SDG 3] For the past 8 years, has your city hall carried out development projects regarding the following...?**



### Good practices

**Moinești** municipality: As part of the *Community Medicine in Moinești* project, the Directorate of Social Care (DAS) created a map of poverty that aims to ensure an accurate x-ray, by area and streets, of all cases in risk situations in terms of healthcare, social protection and education, as well as to bring medical services within reach of these categories of people by strengthening the community medical care component. In partnership with UNICEF, Moinești has developed an integrated community centre served by two medical assistants, two social assistants, a healthcare mediator and a school mediator. The qualitative result is the increased access of the population at risk of social exclusion to socio-medical services in the community. In addition to the medical assistants, social assistants and the health mediator, other specialists such as a doctor, speech therapist, psychologist, physiotherapist, educator and staff with various specialisations will also come to support the vulnerable groups in the community. The integrated community centre serves a broader area, including nearby towns and

<sup>40</sup> Zamfir, *Istoria socială a României [Social History of Romania]*, pp. 217-219.

municipalities. Two key aspects give the innovative element that such an approach brings to the community: the integrated nature of the medico-social services provided for vulnerable groups and the expansion of the service area of such essential services to the surrounding urban and rural areas.

Commune **Cumpăna**, Constanța County: The establishment of a multifunctional socio-medical care centre provides the necessary prerequisites for the development of social services, which will allow, through reorganisation and efficiency, the improvement of the conditions for the provision of primary and specialised social care services for all categories of people and families in situations of risk at the commune level. The centre features an information event hall, an information office, a legal advice office, a cloakroom, a warehouse, a lecture hall, a meeting room, a psychological counselling office, a group of socio-medical counselling/information office, a social counselling office, a counselling and orientation office psycho-pedagogical, educational counselling office, individual psychological counselling office, group psychological counselling room, Tele assistance support office for older people.



**UN Target 3.8** Achieving universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health services and access to essential medicines

### Good practices

**Hunedoara** municipality made significant investments intended exclusively for the municipal hospital, which aimed both at equipping the hospital with state-of-the-art medical equipment, furniture, and sanitary materials, as well as its energy efficiency (a mono-bloc hospital, with an external surface of over 15,000 square meters), equipping it with an MRI machine, setting up an interventional cardiology department that will save hundreds of lives a year, expanding and modernising the Emergency Reception Unit and building a block of flats intended for health specialists. The municipality of Hunedoara established a local action group (LAG *Urban Corvinia*) which attracted and implemented 13 social projects starting in 2021, benefiting 13,800 citizens from marginalised urban areas (approximately 20 per cent of the municipality's population). The city hall of Hunedoara is the only one in the county and among the few city halls of municipalities that are not the seat of the county but support a medico-social unit intended for older people.

Commune **Zănești**, Neamț County: the *Human Dispensary Modernisation and Endowment* project in Zănești Commune, Neamț County, pursued the implementation of EU legislation and policy regarding the development of the necessary infrastructure to raise the standard of living of the citizens of the commune by increasing the quality of services specific to a human dispensary. The investment positively impacts the health status of the population in the area by ensuring optimal conditions regarding consultations provided by family doctors.





### 5 3.3. SDG 4: Quality education

**UN 4.1** By 2030, ensure that all girls and all boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education that leads to relevant and effective learning outcomes.

**UN 4.2** By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early development, care and pre-primary education so they are ready for primary education.

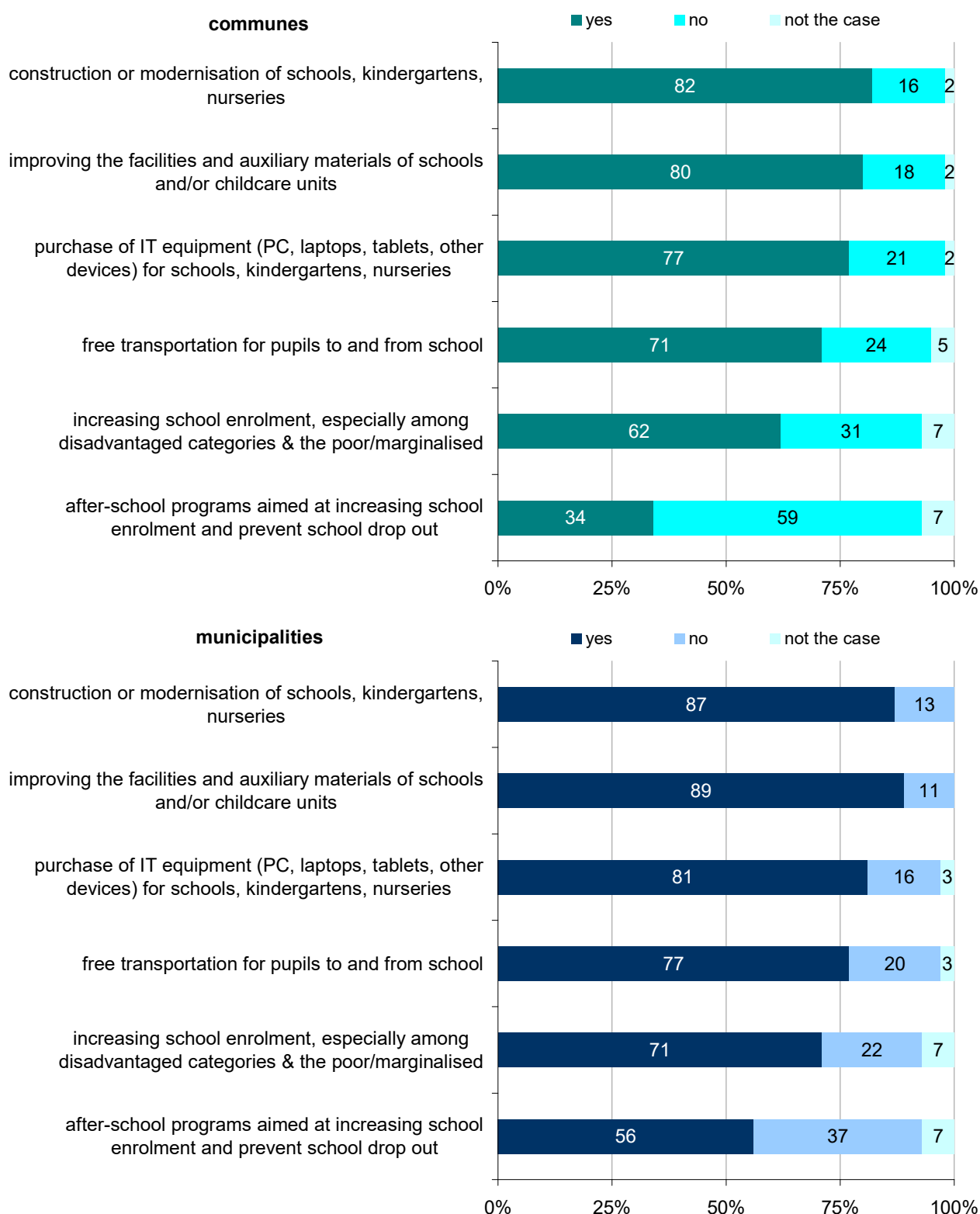
Decreased access to pre-university education, low graduation rates, and reduced quality are significant challenges for the education system in Romania. Between 2018 and 2021, the education system did not include over a tenth of 11 to 14 years olds and almost a quarter of 15 to 18 years olds.<sup>41</sup> The abovementioned issues have systemic causes and fall under the central government's area of responsibility. As such, the education system in Romania leads to the perpetuation and deepening of economic and social inequalities - including territorial and regional level human capital inequalities (see also chapter 3) - rather than to their reduction.<sup>42</sup>

The area of responsibility of the municipalities and communes includes the financial support for operating expenses of the educational units, their rehabilitation, maintenance and material endowment, and the provision of student transport. As such, the qualitative improvement of school resources - physical infrastructure, especially their rehabilitation, and endowment of educational units - are significant areas of local budget capital investments (**Figure 19**). The fight against early school leaving and dropping out, especially for students from disadvantaged, at-risk poverty categories, is a critical challenge. For municipalities and communes, the main policy initiatives in this regard aim to introduce after-school programs or daycare educational services, especially for early childhood education and care. Although desired by parents, these programs entail very high costs; only municipalities and communes with increased financial capacity (i.e. own revenues) can support such services outside of pilot projects financed by the central government. The examples of good practices featured in this section include initiatives to increase school participation or projects regarding kindergartens with extended hours and nurseries (daycare services), for which there is a far greater demand from the working population than the supply. Some of these projects are part of the newer trend to improve the energy performance of buildings in the context of the green transition.

<sup>41</sup> Statistical Yearbook of Romania 2019-2022, chapter 8 Education, table 8.6

<sup>42</sup> Sebastian Țoc, *Clasă și educație. Inegalitate și reproducere socială în învățământul românesc* [Class and education. Inequality and social reproduction in the Romanian education system] (Bucharest: Pro Universitaria, 2018).



**Figure 19. [SDG 4] For the past 8 years, has your city hall carried out development projects regarding the following...?**



## Good practices

**Mediaș** municipality: establishing a new nursery school was part of the *Preschool Education project, a premise for community development in Mediaș*. The project's objective was to support parents to return to work, where 73 children between 0-2 years will benefit from preschool education services (at least 22 will be Roma; at least 11 from rural areas). The project aims to increase the level of preparation for school, facilitate access to preschool education, reduce the risk of school dropout and parents' understanding of the need for education for their children's future, reduce the number of preschool children belonging to vulnerable families who do not attend the early education system by 73 people; increasing the level of education of 73 parents regarding the harmonious development of the child and the importance of their participation in the education system from an early age; strengthening the professional competences of the teaching staff in fields related to pedagogy and early education.

Commune **Gugești**, Vrancea County. The Commune Gugești built a kindergarten with a standard program and afterschool, the commune's first "after school" centre. The direct beneficiaries are children of preschool age and primary school pupils who benefit from better conditions of education and supervision. Educational activities occur in two shared rooms and two rooms for the after-school program, with modern furniture, a large playground, and recreational activities in the shared indoor space.



Commune **Mireșu Mare**, Maramureș County. The construction of a kindergarten with an extended schedule, worth almost 1 million lei, co-financed from EU funds, meets the growing demand for child daycare services from parents that work in the urban area of Baia Mare municipality. The project's novelty is the underfloor heating system, which reduces the running costs of the building and reduces the illness risk for preschool children.



**RO 4.3** Ensuring that all students acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promoting a culture of peace and non-

violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and the contribution of culture to sustainable development.

### Good practices

Comune **Smârdan**, Galați County: *SmârdanEco Summer 2022* is an innovative program that aims to promote the benefits of selective waste collection, recycling and care for the environment in Smârdan commune, Galați County. The program involved children from the community by organising a contest in which they, in teams of three, made and uploaded original clips about the three components of the program to an online platform. The project stimulated children's spirit of collaboration and competitiveness, encouraged the use of technology for valuable purposes and promoted education and care for the environment. The results were remarkable, with a significant increase in the amount of recyclable waste collected and a decrease in municipal waste.

**Moinești** Municipality: The Annual Ecological Calendar Project, running ongoing awareness events, information and volunteering actions for the young generation such as *the ABC of Selective Collection* - the spring edition and the autumn edition, *Ecomărtișor* - an exhibition with the sale of spring trinkets made of recyclable material, using the funds for social purposes, the annual "Ecoattitude Month" campaign, conducted by volunteers from public institutions, educational institutions, economic agents, greening days across the municipality and the seminar "Moinești collects Selectively" - partnership with the Moinești Municipal Emergency Hospital, the "Forest Month" project, event-campaigns, the ECO summer school, and partnerships with educational institutions.

**Buzău** City Hall started a project called the *Circular School*, with the primary objective of educating students about waste management. The outcome of the project was a guide with Good practices. Junior school no. 11 from Buzău is the first 100% eco school unit and Romania's first „circular school”. The school uses natural resources while reducing loss and costs:



rainwater is collected and reused; photovoltaic panels produce electricity; waste is collected selectively in 7 fractions. The water used in the student toilets comes from the accumulated rainwater reserve and the water tank reserve that the unit must have and use in the event of a fire. The didactic greenhouse, built in the schoolyard, uses collected rainwater irrigation and compost. The students learn the biological cycle of plants, from planting to harvesting; the project utilises some varieties of vegetables and aromatic plants produced at the Buzău Vegetable Research Station, such as Syrian tomatoes, cucumbers, eggplants, and peppers, but also basil and thyme. The school's power comes from the photovoltaic panels placed on the building. The energy produced and not consumed, especially during the holidays, will be fed into the national electricity grid, bringing money to the school budget.

The project is part of *the Strategy for the transition to the circular economy Buzau 2020-2030*, the first strategy developed at the local level in Romania. The municipality of Buzău stands out through other projects in the field of education, such as the pilot project *Finnish-inspired classes*, which provided the opportunity to experience Finnish alternative pedagogy to more than 2,000 children from six primary schools and nine kindergartens in the public education system, as well as a to 24 teachers and 31 educators. This method stimulates children to develop their creativity, curiosity and critical thinking to acquire new skills and abilities. Children are encouraged to express their opinions and express them openly (**RO 4.6**). The project *Meritas Buzău - the centre of excellence in dual-technical education*, hosted by D. Filipescu High School, aims to train in trades locally. Students graduating from the 8th grade can register to learn a future job, receiving a series of unique advantages at the regional level; (**RO 4.8**). Expanding the network of community lifelong learning centres by the local authorities; the continuation of companies' co-interest in supporting the enrolment of employees in such programs).

**UN Target 4.5** By 2030, eliminating gender disparities in education and ensuring equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for vulnerable people, including people with disabilities, indigenous populations and children in vulnerable situations.

**RO 4.1.** Reducing the rate of early leaving the educational system

### Good practices

**Turda** municipality: The innovative projects *CEPS Turda* represents the first mobile school in Romania - a European project implemented to reduce and prevent school dropouts and promote equal access to education. Carried out between May 2018 - April 2022, the program consisted of organising "after school" programs, including catering for primary school pupils, tutoring classes for secondary school students, integrated "second chance" program, kindergartens summer camps, parent counselling development of local mechanisms to support the educational process and "mobile school" actions - an innovation in Romania. One thousand seventy students benefited from the project's activities, including catering services and financial support (scholarships).





Comune **Pianu**, Alba County: the project *Integrated school inclusion measures in mountain villages*. The Pianu City Hall, in partnership with the Alba Iulia, Support the Children Association, the CERESS Alba Association and through collaboration with the secondary schools in the Pianu and Săsciori communes, implemented the project that targeted 740 preschoolers, preschoolers and students from the Pianu and Săsciori



communes and 65 teaching staff from the same area. Five hundred sixty-nine members of the target groups benefited from services, both through the fixed and mobile units supported by the project - nursery school, school campus, kindergarten groups with extended hours, "after school" program, socio-education, the rural school inclusion network, training program for teaching staff, etc. Several actions took place with the aid of mobile units and caravan-type interventions in the rural areas: the mobile team for the identification and enrolment of children in the early education system; the cart with games and toys; setting up in Recea a priority area for early education; school inclusion caravan through socio-educational animation; mobile unit to support quality education.

**RO Target 4.5** Modernising the education system by adapting teaching-learning methodologies to the use of information technologies and increasing the quality of the educational process.

### Good practices



Commune **Căbești**, Bihor County: project *Căbești - Smart School* consisted in transforming the school into a modern institution with all the necessary facilities for educating the children of the community. Currently, the school in Căbești has modern furniture, smart tablets, a mobile IT laboratory with 20 Chromebooks, a charging station, a library with new equipment, and various thematic workshops.

Commune **Ciugud**, Alba County. The Ciugud Smart School project rehabilitated the school building from 1938 entirely and reorganised it so all students from the commune could study there. In addition to rehabilitating the building, the project involved the implementation of intelligent solutions for lighting and air conditioning and an intelligent building control system. It is the first "smart" school in rural Romania, (re)opened in 2019.



**Target RO 4.6** Organization of professional and technical education in campuses specially designed and equipped; the training of well-qualified teaching staff; developing a curriculum

according to the requirements of the labour market through the development of partnerships, some with the business environment.

### Good practices

Commune **Cumpăna**, Constanța County: *The construction project of a school campus for basic training in tourism and food* by establishing a new school campus belonging to the core of technical and professional education of Cumpăna School Group. The project objective was to increase the future attractiveness of the educational infrastructure of Cumpăna town, both for students and for highly qualified teachers, to set a quality academic core at the local level that corresponds to the economic development trends of the area. The beneficiaries were the students of the *Nicolae Dumitrescu* Technological High School - 600 students (grades V-XII), the teaching staff and 120 students, mainly those who come from other localities in the countryside considering that they benefit from the housing facility of the newly built boarding house and canteen.



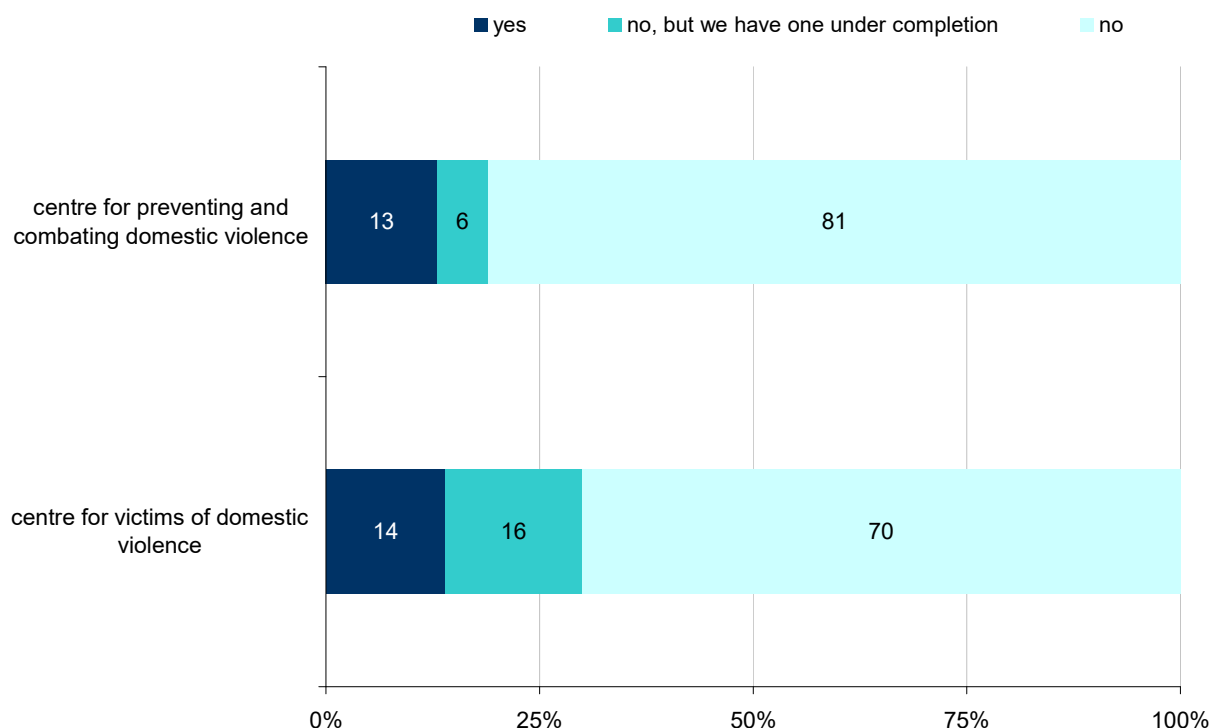


### 5 3.4. SDG 5: Gender equality

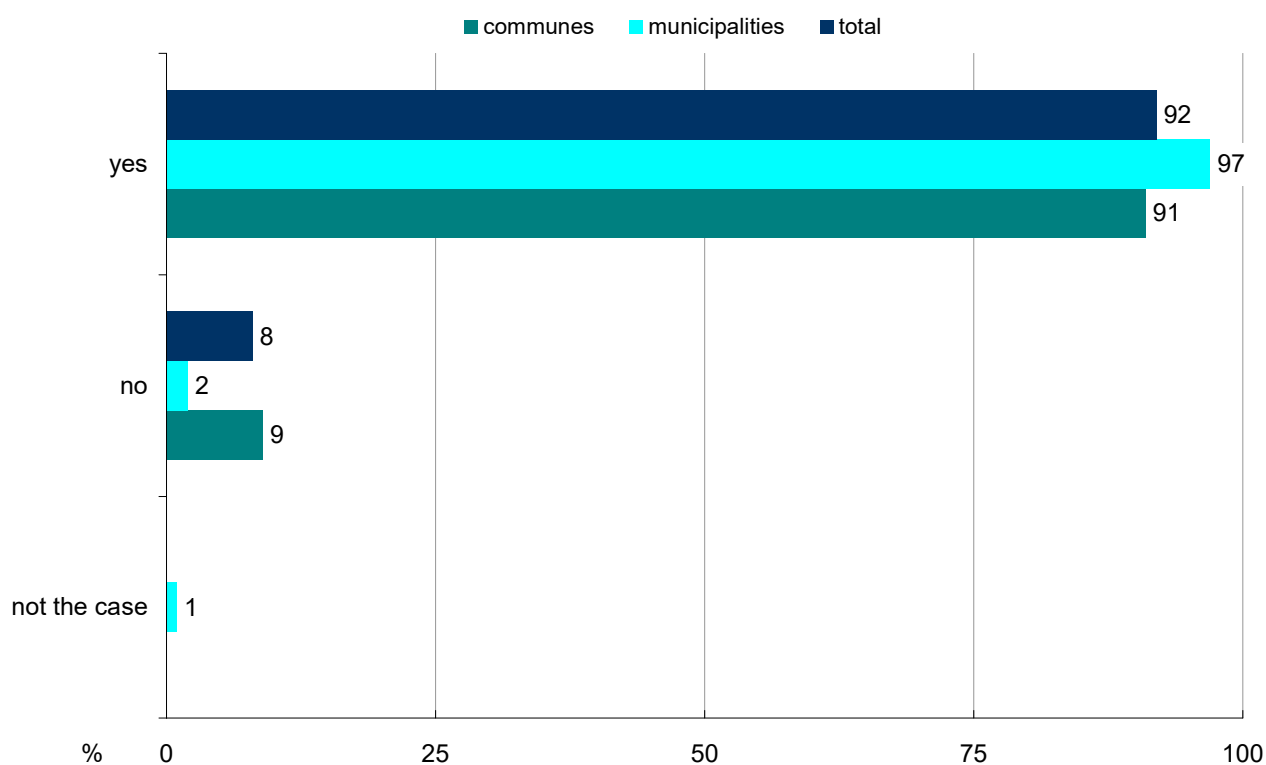
**UN/RO 5.2** Elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking, sexual exploitation and other types of exploitation

The area of responsibility of local government regarding this SDG relates to social services for victims of domestic violence, which are provided only in municipalities. These services' low level of coverage is an issue (**Figure 20**). The lack of funding is based, most likely, on the fact that the available EU funds did not finance the construction or overhaul of such centres. Conversely, the inclusion of projects for fighting discrimination among the eligible activities of EU funds has increased the number and territorial coverage of such projects at the local level, especially for municipalities (**Figure 21**).

**Figure 20. [SDG 5] Do you have in your municipality...?**



**Figure 21. [SDG 5] For the past 8 years, has your city hall carried out development projects regarding anti-discrimination projects of any kind (age, gender, sex, disabilities, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, economic status, or anything else)**



### Good practices

**Bucharest District 3** City Hall, through the General Directorate of Social Care and Child Protection (DGASPC) District 3, organised actions to combat and condemn all forms of violence against women on the occasion of the International Day to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls in 2022. DGASPC District 3 specialists organised under the motto "We have the right to safety and a life free of violence", a campaign to inform the community about the rights of victims of domestic violence and the services offered by the department. During the campaign, DGASPC District 3 distributed informative materials (leaflets, bookmarks, posters) in polyclinics, family doctors' offices, hypermarkets, schools, etc. From the materials distributed, victims of family violence and the community of District 3 learn that they can call an emergency number when they are victims or witnesses of a form of abuse to receive immediate support, but also about how they can access the services of the Shelter for Victims of Family Violence St. Mary. In this shelter, the domestic violence victims will benefit from accommodation and food, access to medical assistance, legal advice for obtaining the restriction order, and social and psychological advice for a period between 5 to 60 days and, in particular situations, 180 days.

**UN 5.5** Ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal leadership opportunities at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

Regarding the target within the goal above on the proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments and (b) local administrations, the available data show low participation of



women in political life in Romania (**Table 11**), especially in comparison with European Union the average. In the parliament elected in 2020, the share of women is 20%, significantly lower than the EU average of 33%. The gap is smaller for county councils, namely 20.2% in Romania compared to the 29.4% EU average.<sup>43</sup>

**Table 11. Women in the national parliament and local government**

	national parliament	commune mayors	municipalities mayors	county councillors
women share (%)	20	5,8	4.6	20.2
no. of women	93	166	5	...

Sources: ACoR and AMR data for communes and municipalities, *European Institute for Gender Equality* data for the national parliament and county councils

In Romania, the legal framework does not provide gender quotas for legislative and local elections. On the other hand, the Electoral Bureau rejects the lists of candidates for legislative elections if they have no women at all, and some political parties have promoted voluntary gender quotas. Also, the share of women among elected officials at the central and local levels influences the amount of public funding political parties can receive. As for mayors - for which the electoral system is direct voting with first past the post - there is an even lower share of women, 5.8% for communes and 4.6% for municipalities.

<sup>43</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality, "Power indicators in Romania," <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2022/domain/power/RO>



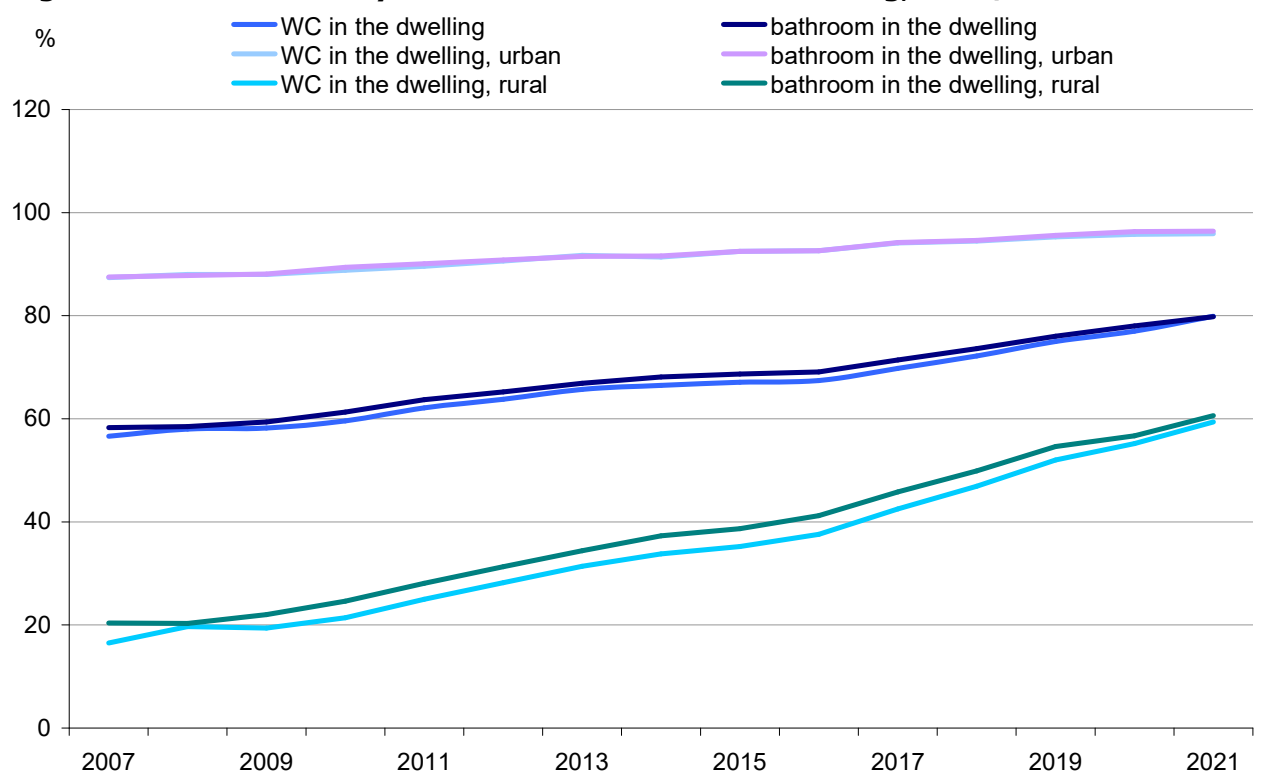
### 5 3.5. SDG 6: Clean water and sanitation

**RO 6.3** Connecting the households of the population in cities, communes and compact villages to the drinking water and sewerage network in a proportion of at least 90%

**RO 6.4** Increasing access to drinking water for vulnerable and marginalised groups

**RO 6.6** Achieving access to adequate and fair sanitary and hygiene conditions for all, paying special attention to those in vulnerable situations.

**Figure 22. Households by bathroom and WC in the dwelling, rural/urban breakdown**

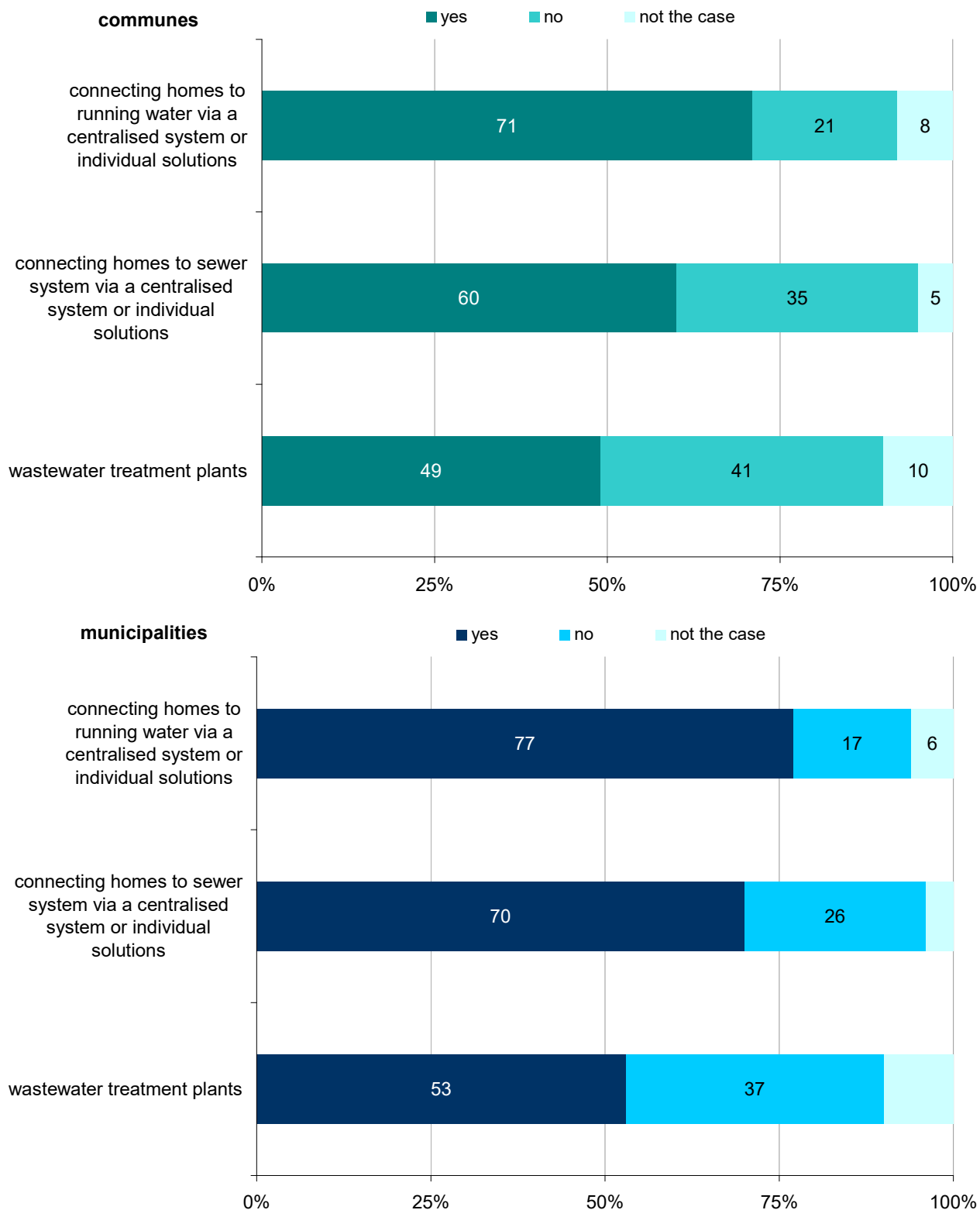


Sources: INS-Tempo database [CAV1020]

Increasing the population's access to running water and sewage is one of Romania's most significant achievements over the last 30 years, especially since EU accession in 2007 (**Figure 22**). Although there is a significant difference between urban and rural areas, the progress is remarkable. Nevertheless, Romania remains in last place in the EU for this indicator, considerably from the second last.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Iulian Stănescu, "Condițiile de viață: utilitățile publice de interes local [Living conditions: local public utilities]," in *România rurală în noul capitalism: 1990-2020 [Rural Romania in the*

**Figure 23. [SDG 6] For the past 8 years, has your city hall carried out development projects regarding the following...?**



In 2021, about two-fifths of the rural population did not have a bathroom or sanitary unit inside the home. At the national level, the share of the people benefiting from running water and sewage from public networks or individual solutions was 80%, below the target of 85% included in the EU accession treaty. As a result, the continuation of progress will require priority and substantial financing to expand local public utilities, especially in communes. The ranking of these investment objectives in the order of importance confirms this statement: in the first two places as the first option for a development problem or project for both communes and - surprisingly - municipalities (**Figure 14, Figure 16**).

The importance of water and sewage networks and wastewater treatment plants as investment objectives appear in **Figure 23**. The surprising results are at the municipal level. Although most of the urban population's households are connected to the water and sewage networks, expanding these networks is of comparable importance for municipalities compared to communes. This fact likely rests on the need to repair and expand these networks, in line with the increase in housing stock in some municipalities. The cases of good practices presented in this section feature projects initiated and carried out by municipalities and communes that are apart from the large-scale water and sewerage projects run by regional (county) utility companies owned by county-level local government (county councils).

### Good practices

Commune **Vama Buzăului**, Braşov county: the project for the construction of the sewerage network, of connections, gutters, riverside accesses and sidewalks in the villages of Dălgheu, Vama Buzăului and Acriş, which included the following works: household sewerage network measuring 27,800 m in length; household gravity sewage network 3,584 m; sewerage network under pressure, sewerage connections and drinking water connections, gutters for draining rainwater measuring 16030 m; trenches paved with concrete and with road plates, sidewalks in the length of 15,737 ml; riverside accesses in the number of approx. 715 pcs.; access bridges totalling 2,717 ml, 16 sewage pumping stations, under-crossings of rivers/streams/roads by pumping or gravity.

Commune **Cumpăna**, Constanţa County: the project for the expansion of the water supply and household sewage networks in the commune aimed to extend the public infrastructure of water supply by approximately 5.9 km and domestic sewage by about 6.7 km on various streets in the locality. The project has provided increased access for the population to safe services from a qualitative and quantitative point of view in an environmentally friendly way.



Commune **Niculeşti**, Dâmboviţa County: The project *Extending the water supply system in Niculeşti commune, Dâmboviţa County* and *Extending the domestic wastewater collection, transport and purification system* were a continuation of the initial investment project that ended in 2012. The projects ensure a high coverage in terms of the population's access to the sewage network and drinking water supply system; this project is currently completed with a new ongoing investment to ensure 100% coverage.

Consequently, 85% of the administrative-territorial unit surface coverage was reached, providing access to the sewage network and drinking water.

Commune **Brastavățu**, Olt County: The project *Centralized water supply system projects in the village of Crușovu, Brastavățu commune, Olt County*, built a distribution network of 8,150 m. The water utility occupies an area of 2,200 square meters and includes the chlorination station and the pumping station; The project *Expansion of the water supply network in the village of Crușovu* extended the water supply network with another 3,802 meters of pipe and 150 connections to solve the problem of the water requirement in dry seasons in the locality by supplementing the flow at the Source and building a water intake up to the operating water management; *Centralised system of sewage and domestic wastewater treatment* aimed at reducing the impact of domestic wastewater on the environment by minimising the discharge of untreated domestic wastewater into natural discharges and reducing groundwater or surface water pollution by absorbing/dumping wells in households. The centralised system avoids the evacuation of wastewater in the watercourses without prior treatment to increase comfort and achieve the optimal hygienic-sanitary framework for the population. The project also built a *Water network in Brastavățu village, Brastavățu commune, Olt County*, which solved the problem of drinking water resources availability in the locality.

Commune **Sucevița**, Suceava County: The project *Water and sewage networks in Sucevița Village, Sucevița commune*, aimed to increase the quality of life of the commune's inhabitants and protect the environment.





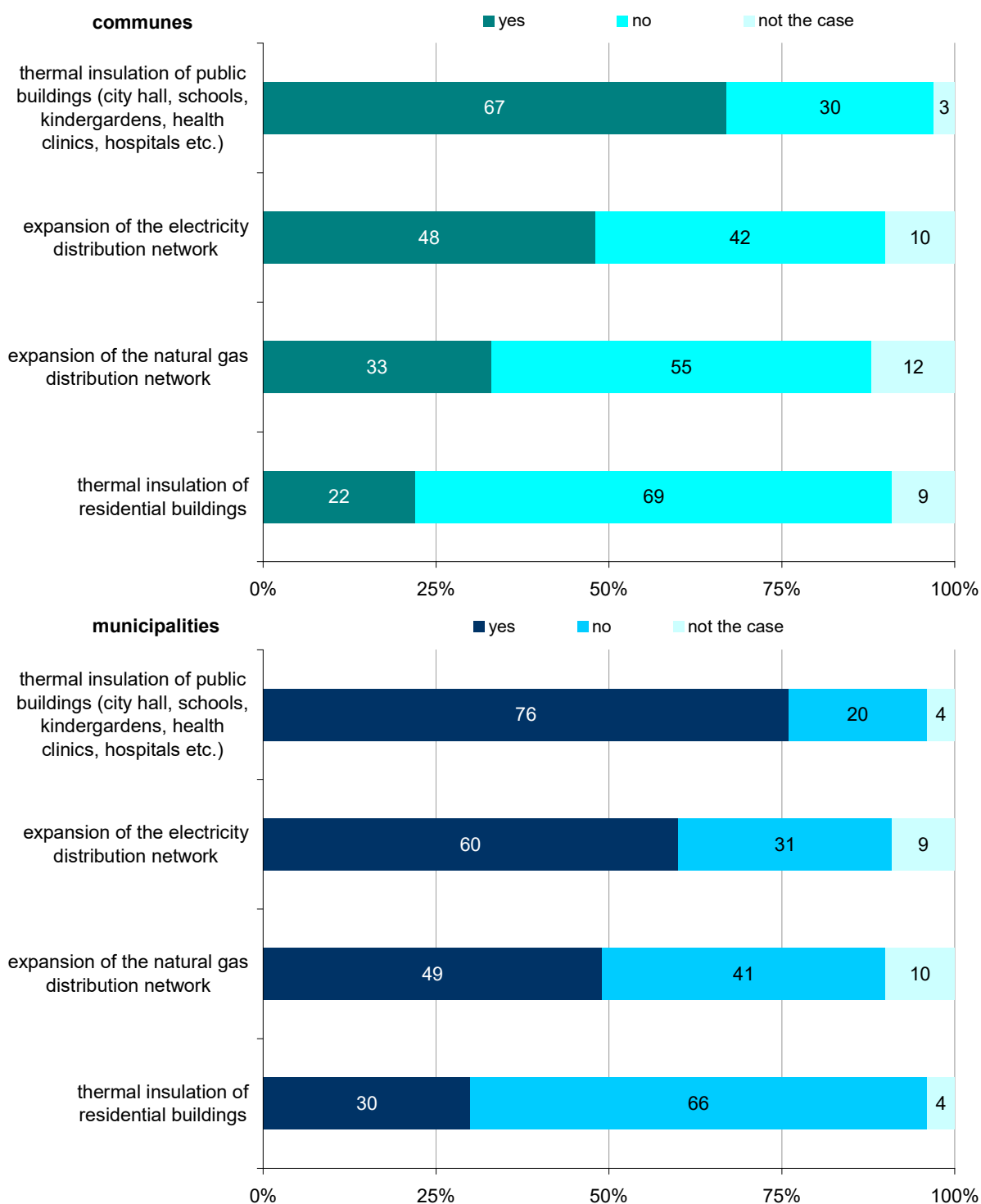
### 5 3.6. SDG 7: Affordable and clean energy

Policy development and energy regulation fall under the responsibility of the central government. The price liberalisation policy for electricity, heat, and natural gas, decided at the EU level and implemented at the national level, leads to declining living standards for most of the population in Romania and other EU member states. The most vulnerable people at risk of energy poverty in Romania are the same as those at risk of poverty, the overwhelming majority of which are in rural areas (see also Chapter 3). The social protection mechanism of the population's households against the risk of energy poverty is developed and financed at the central government level. The main policy areas for municipalities and communes cover the expansion of the natural gas distribution network and, to a much lesser extent, the electricity distribution network, reducing the operating costs of public-owned buildings (educational and health units, offices of city halls and other local public services) through thermal rehabilitation. In addition, large municipalities have access to programs that provide funding for the thermal rehabilitation of residential buildings. The start of the green transition added to the above list the transition to non-polluting means of transport, based on renewable energy, for the vehicles owned by city halls, including those of their local public transport companies. The good practices cases showcase all these areas of action concerning SDG 7.

**RO 7.1** Expanding the transmission and distribution networks for electricity and natural gas to ensure the access of domestic, industrial and commercial consumers to safe energy sources at acceptable prices.

Expanding electricity and natural gas distribution networks is a priority at the level of communes and municipalities.<sup>45</sup> It is somewhat surprising and interesting that the municipalities have carried out such programs to a greater extent, even though the need for utility network connections is much higher in communes. The possible explanations relate to the much higher financial capacity of the municipalities, the proximity to the existing networks and the need to expand these networks to keep up with the housing construction in large urban agglomerations.

<sup>45</sup> According to the RPL 2011 results, the share of homes connected to the natural gas distribution network was 45.3% at national level (74.8% urban, 9.7% rural); 99.6% of urban dwellings and 98% of rural dwellings had an electrical installation.

**Figure 24. [SDG 7] For the past 8 years, has your city hall carried out development projects regarding the following...?**

### Good practices

In the municipality of **Râmnicu Vâlcea**, over 1,100 households will be connected to the natural gas distribution network. The investment amounts to 24.6 million lei and will be carried out in the next two years with national funding through the National Investment Program Anghel Saligny. Through this investment, the natural gas distribution network in the municipality will expand by 36 kilometres to 60 streets in several neighbourhoods.



Commune **Niculești**, Dâmbovița County: the project *Establishment of natural gas distribution in the villages of Niclești, Movila and Ciocănari*, belonging to the commune of Niclești, Dâmbovița County, commissioned in 2022 the completion of 18 km of natural gas distribution network covering 90% of the area of the town.

Commune **Valcău de Jos**, Sălaj County. The city hall created a regional urban planning plan (RUP) in 2008, dismantled roads and carried out projects to expand the distribution networks of running water and electricity (partially) for a community of 150-160 Roma households (approximately 700 people) from the village of Valcău de Sus. In 2023, works are underway to expand the sewerage and electricity distribution networks.

**RO 7.4** Increasing the share of renewable energy sources and low-carbon fuels in the transport sector (electric vehicles), including alternative fuels.

### Good practices

**District 3 of Bucharest** municipality equipped the District 3 General Directorate of Local Police with 35 electric cars for the patrol crews. Through the ECO project, the Local Police of District 3 have 75% of the vehicles for the patrol crews entirely ecological.

The city hall of **Brașov**: *Always close - electric vehicle charging stations in the parking lot of your neighbourhood!* is a project that uses innovative concepts and technologies to create a network of charging stations for electric vehicles in the municipality, connected to the public lighting system. The project has a multidimensional approach, including both fast charging stations (50-100 kW) located on the main arteries of the city and a network of "mesh" type stations with several nodes, i.e. charging points with average power (22 kW AC), to extend the coverage and reach the goal of having charging stations in the parking lot in neighbourhoods, close to homes. A charging station with average power (22 kW) represents at most 20% of the cost of a fast station (50/100 kW) and can be powered by the city's public lighting system, making the project very cost-effective.



The municipality of **Sibiu** entirely renewed the local public transport company's fleet to reduce CO2 emissions. In the last four years, Sibiu City Hall and the transport operator have purchased 119 new buses, half of which are ecological (compressed natural gas or electric). The fleet's renewal allowed them to configure the routes intelligently to cover the frequencies and the city,



including the new neighbourhoods. Another project of Braşov Municipality was The Green Line of public transport in the historical centre - a solution adapted to the specific area of Sibiu. The historical centre of Sibiu is an architectural complex of great value for which the Sibiu City Hall makes significant financial efforts for preservation and maintenance. Sibiu City Hall has expanded the pedestrian areas in stages, reducing car traffic and parking spaces. Sibiu City Hall created the Green Line of public transport in the central area, operated by electric minibuses. The size of the minibuses allows access even to the narrow streets of the historic centre. Since the launch of the Green Line in August 2021 and until August 2022, almost 198,000 trips took place with these minibuses.



**RO 7.5** Ensuring a stable and transparent regulatory framework in the field of energy efficiency to attract investments.

The thermal rehabilitation of residential collective housing (condominium blocks) represents a priority direction. Still, only large municipalities with access to European financing or funding from international financial institutions can implement this measure (**Figure 24**). Significant discrepancies exist between a relatively small group of municipalities, with excellent results, and the rest of the localities. In contrast, the rehabilitation of buildings of public interest is the most widespread project category within this SDG (**Figure 24**) due to the available funding and the relatively small number of such buildings, especially in communes.

### Good practices

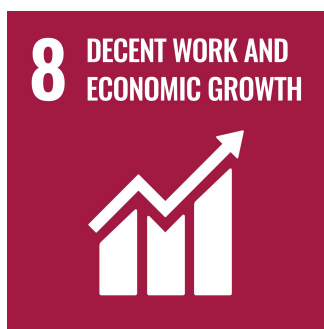
**District 1 of the Bucharest Municipality** thermally rehabilitated 90% of the housing blocks built before 2006, respectively 958 blocks of flats in the last 13 years. We note that District 1 has a lower proportion of blocks and a higher proportion of houses than the other sectors in Bucharest. Most of the blocks of flats in the Municipality of Bucharest exist on the territory of **District 3**. District 3 recently rehabilitated 1,616 blocks out of the existing blocks and scheduled the rest for 2023 and the following years.

The *KINETIC project* of **Sector 6 city hall** aims to overcome the existing challenges of transforming a demo area into PED (Positive Energy Districts) through an integrated, participative, inclusive, and multidisciplinary approach. The project provides an innovative PED feasibility study, and will adapt state-of-the-art energy solutions to local contexts. Likewise, the project is ment to guide energy-related activities and relevant planned investments.

Sector 6 participates in the project with the Demo Zone - the Drumul Taberei neighbourhood - where the community, specialists, and authorities will develop and assume a shared vision. The project will use the latest technologies in the field of energy efficiency and the latest multimedia platforms for consultation and feedback transmission. The goal pursued is represented by overcoming the barriers between industry, decision-makers, users/community and the urban environment, as well as approaching the concept of Energy Positive Neighborhoods in a participatory, inclusive and multidisciplinary way. Public lighting modernisation projects through the energy efficiency of public lighting systems with remote management elements are widespread in Romania, covering most municipalities and numerous communes. Significant modernisations of the public lighting systems were carried out in most municipalities but also in communes, among which we mention IC Brătianu commune (Tulcea), Pianu commune (Alba), Vlădeşti commune (Argeş), Băcia commune (Hunedoara), Brastavăţu commune (Olt), Suceviţa commune (Suceava), Peceneaga commune (Tulcea), Găgeşti commune (Vaslui) and other 370 communes that started public lighting modernisation projects in 2022 through the program of the Environment Fund Administration.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ministerul Mediului, Apelor şi Pădurilor and Administraţia Fondului pentru Mediu, *Raport privind utilizarea Fondului pentru Mediu în anul 2022 [Report on the usage of the Environment Fund in 2020]*, (Bucharest, 2023), [www.afm.ro/main/informatii\\_publice/raport\\_anual\\_utilizare/raport\\_privind\\_utilizarea\\_fm\\_2022.pdf](http://www.afm.ro/main/informatii_publice/raport_anual_utilizare/raport_privind_utilizarea_fm_2022.pdf)



### 5 3.7. SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth

The central government's responsibility includes social policies, especially those regarding labour relations, and economic policies, especially industrial policies, to foster sustainable and inclusive economic growth. At the level of municipalities and communes, the development of policies aimed at creating stable and well-paid jobs based on productive activities with high gross added value, able to ensure a standard of living that stimulates remaining in the country instead of emigrating depends on whether TUAs own land close to the communication routes. This aspect is vital because the local governments can build industrial parks or create (micro-)industrial zones on these lands. Such (micro)industrial zones are essential for increasing financial revenues and the ability to support commune-level projects from own funds or co-finance more EU-funded projects. In other words, industrial zones are a starting point for a virtuous development circle. Municipalities and communes support creativity, innovation and tourism by organizing cultural-sporting events and enhancing cultural-historical heritage. The best practices in this section will illustrate the above courses of action.

**RO 8.2.** Promoting development-oriented policies that support productive activities, the creation of decent jobs, entrepreneurship through start-ups, creativity and innovation, and that encourage the formalization and growth of micro, small and medium enterprises, including through access to financial services.

#### Good practices

The municipality of **Sfântu Gheorghe** is the only one in the country that has carried out several *de minimis* programs to support businesses, namely: *De minimis aid program through which we reimburse part of the tax on buildings owed by SMEs in Sfântu Gheorghe*; *The Covid de minimis aid programme supporting the SMEs affected by the COVID-19 pandemic*, offering grants up to 50% to reimburse part of the investments made by the applicants; *De minimis programme to help SMEs located in the Industrial Park of Sfântu Gheorghe*, which is a *de minimis* aid program to support new greenfield investments and a *de minimis* program to support innovative ideas.

The municipality of **Câmpia Turzii** initiated a reindustrialization project. The result of this project is the Câmpia Turzii industrial park (photo). The erection of the 10 hectares industrial park, which took place on the former industrial area and the Reif Industrial Zone, resulted from the local administration efforts of urban replanning. The reindustrialization of Câmpia Turzii Municipality began in 2016.



The urban replanning generated a 100 million euro private investment for building the largest refrigerated warehouse in Transylvania, a production facility for furniture industry components, a high-capacity power plant, and "greenfield" type production halls. The location of the municipality was another strong point in attracting investors. Câmpia



Turzii is located in North-western Romania, close to the A10 and A3 highways, as well as a main railway line, favouring Western European FDI's location in manufacturing. Investments in the industrial park led to more jobs available in Câmpia Turzii and, consequently, to higher revenues for the municipality. In addition, the number of unemployed citizens commuting to other areas of Cluj County has decreased.

Commune **Ciugud** (Alba County) opened an industrial area for "greenfield" type investments where more than 45 companies operate that have created more than 1,000 jobs. The companies that have invested here benefit from an area with a well-defined zoning plan and "at the gate" utilities and social facilities for employees, including transport and a modern kindergarten. The industrial area (photo) represents the driver of the commune development providing over 80% of the local administration's income. On this basis, Ciugud attracted EU projects worth 40 million euro, the equivalent of 12,000 euro



per inhabitant. Located in the functional urban area of Alba Iulia Municipality (10 km away), Ciugud has benefited from the connection to the natural gas distribution network and excellent transport connections - the IV European railway corridor- the A1 and A3 highways.

**RO 8.4** The achievement of long-term competitive tourism, the development of agritourism, ecotourism, rural, spa and cultural tourism and the improvement of Romania's image as a tourist destination.

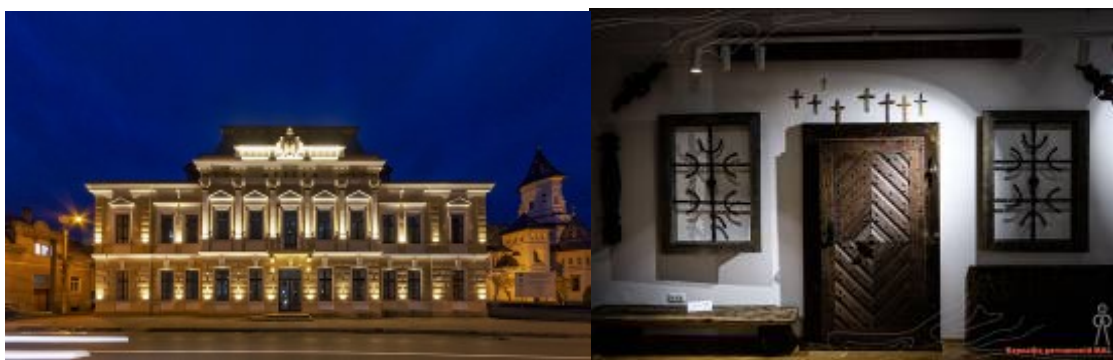
### Good practices

**Sighișoara Municipality:** part of the UNESCO World Heritage, the medieval fortress of Sighișoara is a point of attraction for tourists from all over the world who come to discover its charm described in chronicles and recreated in modern times in the most unexpected ways. The most attractive and important event held in Sighișoara are events such as: *Armonia Cetății*, *Sighisoara Medieval festival*, *ProEtnica* interethnic festival, *Sighisoara Blues Festival*, *Brass Band Festival*, *National Festival of Medieval Theatre for Youth*.



In 2022, the first edition of the *Sighișoara Citadel Armonia Festival* took place, an outdoor classical music event. The *Sighisoara Blues Festival* is the only prestigious cultural event of this kind in the country, it takes place every February. The last editions took place outdoors, in the Citadel Square. Being a cultural event with international participation, the festival aims to promote the blues, being organised by the Sighișoara Blues Hospital Cultural Association in partnership with the Sighișoara City Hall. *The National Festival of Medieval Theatre for Youth* organised by the Sighișoara Children's Club in which a medieval tent camp and a parade of medieval costumes are held. The *Sighișoara Medieval Festival* takes place at the end of July every year. In 2022, it brought together over 8,000 lovers of medieval art.

In the **Câmpulung Moldovenesc** municipality the flagship cultural institution of the city is the Wood Art Museum (photo below). Thanks to the rehabilitation, modernisation and endowment project, the museum today brings together an impressive collection, unique in Romania, focused on woodworking. The reopening of the museum brought with it a consistent cultural agenda, featuring temporary exhibitions, events, launches, screenings or concerts - 16,679 visitors from June 2021 to June 2022.



The success story of the new *Rarăul* ski slope, inaugurated in December 2018, continued the tourism promotion of the municipality, and proof of this is the data regarding the occupancy rate in the city during the ski season. A major and complex investment in the field of tourism



in Moldova worth 15 million euro, the slope has a length of 2,850 meters, medium difficulty and is equipped with a gondola lift. The *Road of Rural Houses* project is the first urban tourist route that connects the most relevant examples of traditional architecture within a radius of five kilometres around the city.

The largest European event of its kind, the Bucovinene Meetings International Folklore Festival (next photo) is organised annually, from May to October, in four countries: Poland, Hungary, Ukraine and Romania (Câmpulung Moldovenesc), motivating the young generation Bucovina to enthusiastically take over and continue the tradition, but contributing substantially to increasing interest in Bucovina and Romania as tourist destinations. The festival is unique in Europe and its main purpose is to present the richness of the Bucovina folk culture in its multicultural aspect, reviewing the artistic formations that present the Bucovina song, game, music, port and customs. Having an itinerant development, the festival demonstrates the important place that culture occupies in the process of understanding and knowledge, mutual respect, tolerance in coexistence and good neighborliness between different ethnic groups.



Commune **Ciceu**, Harghita County. *Ábel Harghita Resort* is the first smart resort in Europe. The tourists complex is supported by technologies investments, ecological solutions and compliance with the principles of sustainable development. The defining investment principles of the complex aim at the development of ecological and sustainable tourism. Estimates regarding the employed workforce are positive, with the creation of jobs in distribution units, restaurants and services.







### 5 3.8. SDG 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure

**RO 9.1** Modernizing and developing quality, reliable, sustainable and strong infrastructure, including regional and cross-border infrastructure, to support economic development and people's well-being, with a focus on broad and equitable access for all.

Although the vast majority of municipalities and communes have carried out projects regarding the modernisation or asphaltting of roads of local interest and streets, which are in their area of responsibility in recent years (**Figure 26**), with notable progress, much remains to be done (The District 4 City Hall has also built a new multi-storey parking lot (park & ride concept) with a capacity of 300 places for the *Tudor Arghezi* metro station.

**Figure 25**). The pace of completion of asphaltting and modernisation, especially for municipalities (**Table 12**), can hardly cope with existing needs, especially regarding the roads and streets whose road surface has reached the end of its useful life. Although there are no statistical data at the commune level, it is expected that the proportion of the length of communal streets and roads that require asphaltting and modernisation will be even higher, considering the inequalities of development between urban and rural areas (see chapter 3). At a general level, the asphaltting or modernisation of local roads ranks first on the agenda of communes and municipalities in Romania when all problems or development projects considered important for TAU are taken into account (**Figure 13**, **Figure 15**).

**Table 12. Modernised streets in municipalities and towns**

	2018	2019	2020	2021
share in total streets (%)	69.0	70.5	71.1	72.0
Length (km)	21,780	22,355	22,682	23,019

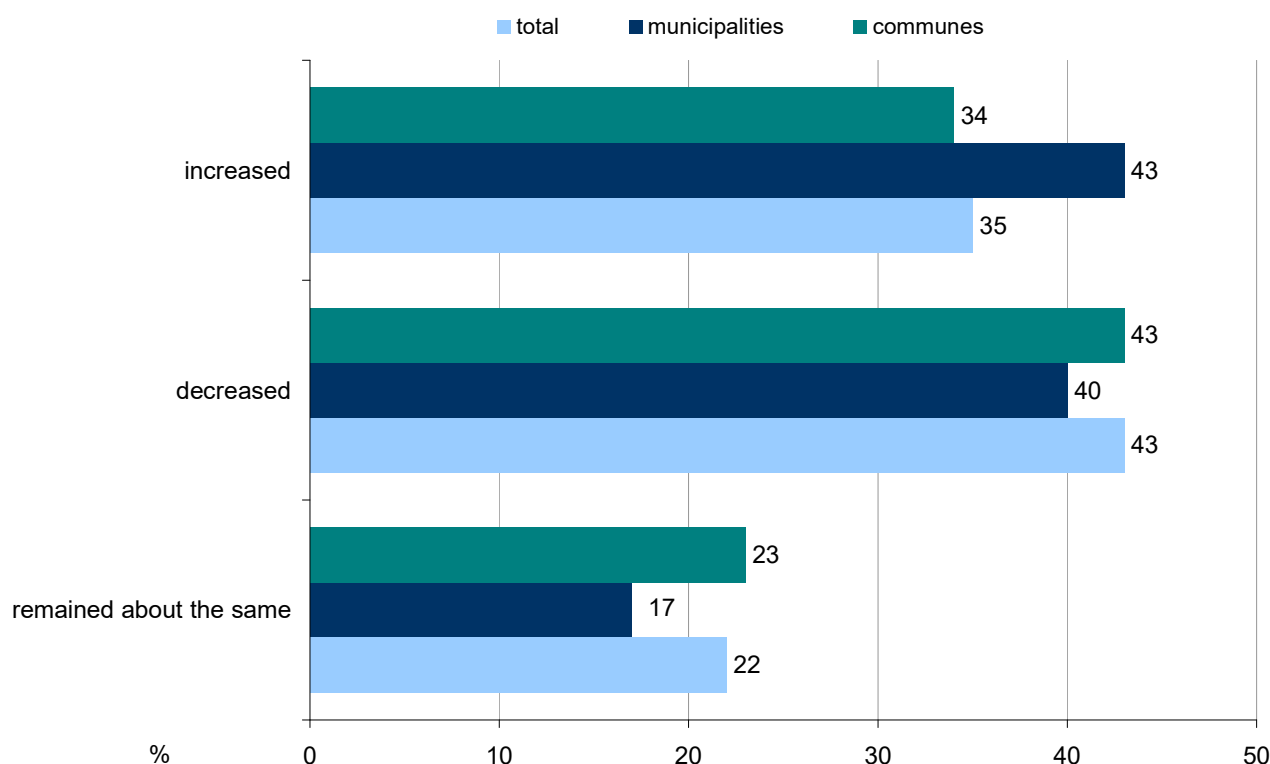
Sources: INS-Tempo database, matrixes GOS 104A, 105A

#### Good practices

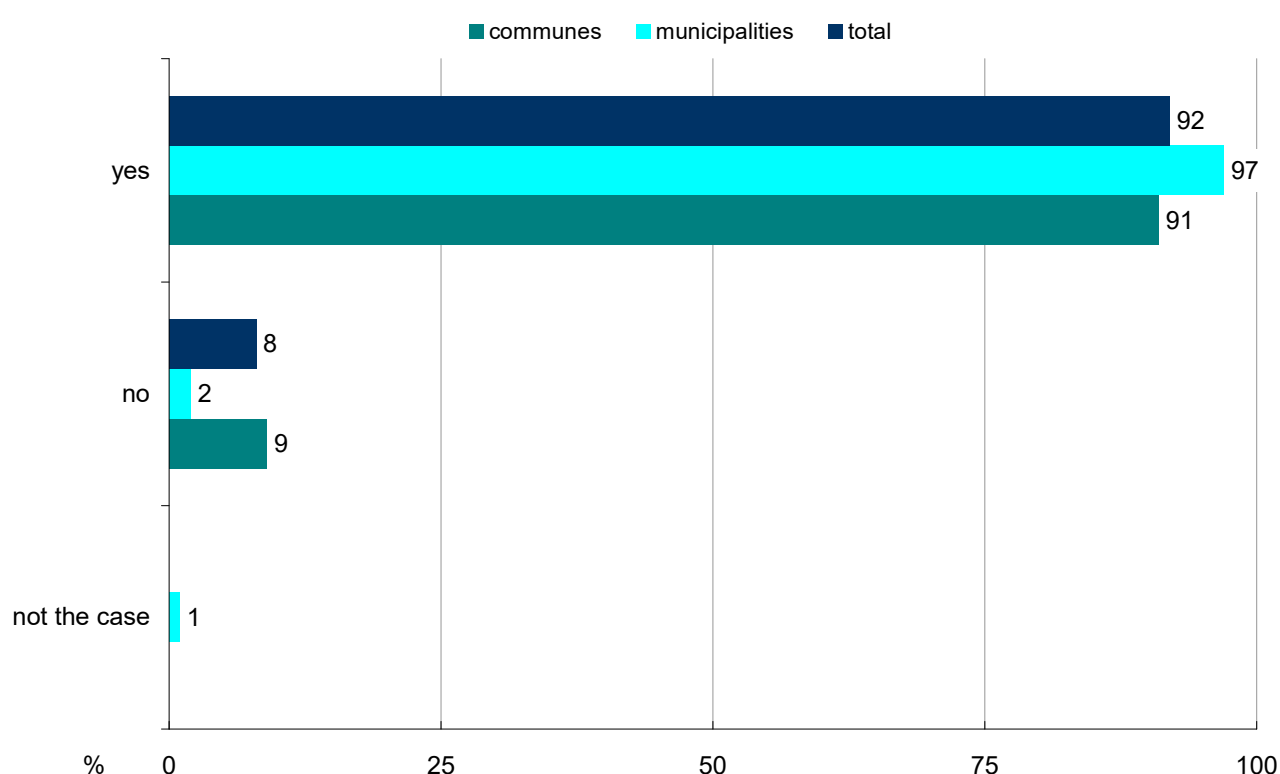
**District 4 of Bucharest Municipality** completed the construction of a new metro station, *Tudor Arghezi* (an area of over 15,000 square meters), equipped with five pedestrian access areas, seven escalators and seven elevators for people with disabilities, as well as a tactile directional carpet for people with visual impairments disabilities. The surveillance system features 70 video cameras and other safety measures for passengers. The District 4 City Hall has also built a new multi-storey parking lot (park & ride concept) with a capacity of 300 places for the *Tudor Arghezi* metro station.



**Figure 25. Compared to past years, did the length (in km) of local roads (administered by the commune or municipality) that require modernisation, repair works or paving increase, decrease or remain about the same?**



**Figure 26. [SDG 9] For the past 8 years, has your city hall carried out development projects regarding modernisation, repair works or paving of local roads administered by the city hall?**



Commune **Pianu**, Alba County: the *Valea Recii forest road modernisation project 2017-2022*. Forest roads are essential for sustainable forest management, ensuring the complex utilization of all forest products, minimizing the impact on environmental factors. The modernisation of the forest roads in the locality was required due to the need for safety and quality of life reasons. Through the modernisation of the roads envisaged by this project, road traffic reduction in the locality was pursued and achieved, the environment was improved and the sources of pollution were reduced by a new smooth surface that lowers noise pollution and air pollution; traffic safety improved; lower negative effects of traffic on social life in the locality; lower operating and maintenance costs; better environment protection by lower mechanical and gas pollution; improved people and goods mobility and the balance between different ways of transport. The works consisted of asphaltting a forest road, rehabilitating bridges and gutters for fluidizing rainwater runoff.



Commune **Tureni**, Cluj County. Modernisation of the unpaved streets of the commune improved the housing and working conditions for the citizens of the commune, fostered economic and tourist activities, improved the quality of the environment and reduced pollution. Through this project, the roads in the commune were paved, providing residents access to their homes in the village of Comșești and to two communal roads in the village of Tureni, and 32 access bridges to the properties of the citizens of the commune were modernized.



Commune **Zănești**, **Neamț County**: The modernisation of the road infrastructure in Zănești commune, Neamț county (2021) aimed at preventing and mitigating the effects of natural risks caused by extreme weather phenomena. The modernisation of the roads improved access for the emergency crews, it provided communication routes on which road traffic can proceed in safe conditions, the provision of measures for the protection of the environment by reducing the dust, noise and air pollution levels, and ensuring the drainage of free water, reducing the car accident rate and ensuring optimal conditions for children to go to school in comfortable and safe conditions.



Commune **Nereju**, Vrancea County: the project *Rebuilding and consolidating the forest road border DJ 205 D bordering Covasna County, Nereju commune, Vrancea County*, completed in 2022, ensures the exploitation and care of the trees in the area and provides intervention access way in case of fire or natural disasters. The project *Modernisation of DC106 Nereju Păvălari*, which connects the villages of Nereju, Sahastru and Păvălari, used by approximately 2,500 inhabitants.



## RO 9.2 Improving road safety

### Good practices

*Innovation and Safety in Public Transport: Implementation of Anti-Collision Systems on Buses and Trams in the Iași Municipality.* The installation of anti-collision systems on 140 buses and 150 trams aimed to prevent accidents by detecting obstacles and other vehicles on the route, warning drivers and applying brakes if necessary. The system also includes external detection elements controlled by artificial intelligence, which scan real-time traffic participants such as cars, motorcycles, bicycles, and pedestrians. Objectives: increasing safety in public transport both for passengers and for vulnerable categories such as cyclists and pedestrians and reducing the number of accidents, improving the efficiency and attractiveness of public transport by reducing the risks associated with blind spots and improving the behaviour of drivers.

Municipality of **Buzău**: the first intelligent traffic management system and adaptive traffic management system that handles a multimodal corridor with median public transport lanes. The system allows efficient traffic management through an adaptive monitoring and control system that uses real-time data to optimize traffic flows. The system also includes intelligent technologies for active prioritisation of public transport, which allow better predictability in displaying the arrival times of transport vehicles at stations. The implementation of this system brings significant benefits to the city by reducing traffic congestion and waiting times, improving road safety, increasing the efficiency of public transport and implicitly reducing pollution.



### 5 3.9. SDG 10: Reduced inequalities

In Romania, reducing economic and social inequalities is a public policy goal in the responsibility of the central government in an overwhelming proportion. While local government can intervene to a very small extent to reduce income or wealth inequalities, it can provide support to people at risk of poverty or social exclusion mainly through social services and by processing applications for some social benefits for people or households in risk of poverty or social exclusion, which are financed by the central government. It should also be noted that in Romania there are no data on income or wealth inequality aggregated at local level. The available data cover only income inequality and come either from statistical surveys (aggregated at national or regional level) or from administrative data (employment contracts, tax returns databases). The latter, however, are incomplete and fragmentary due to fact there is no income taxation system based on individual or household income tax returns and there is no clear consolidated fiscal data per taxpayer regarding assets of natural persons, especially real estate.<sup>47</sup>

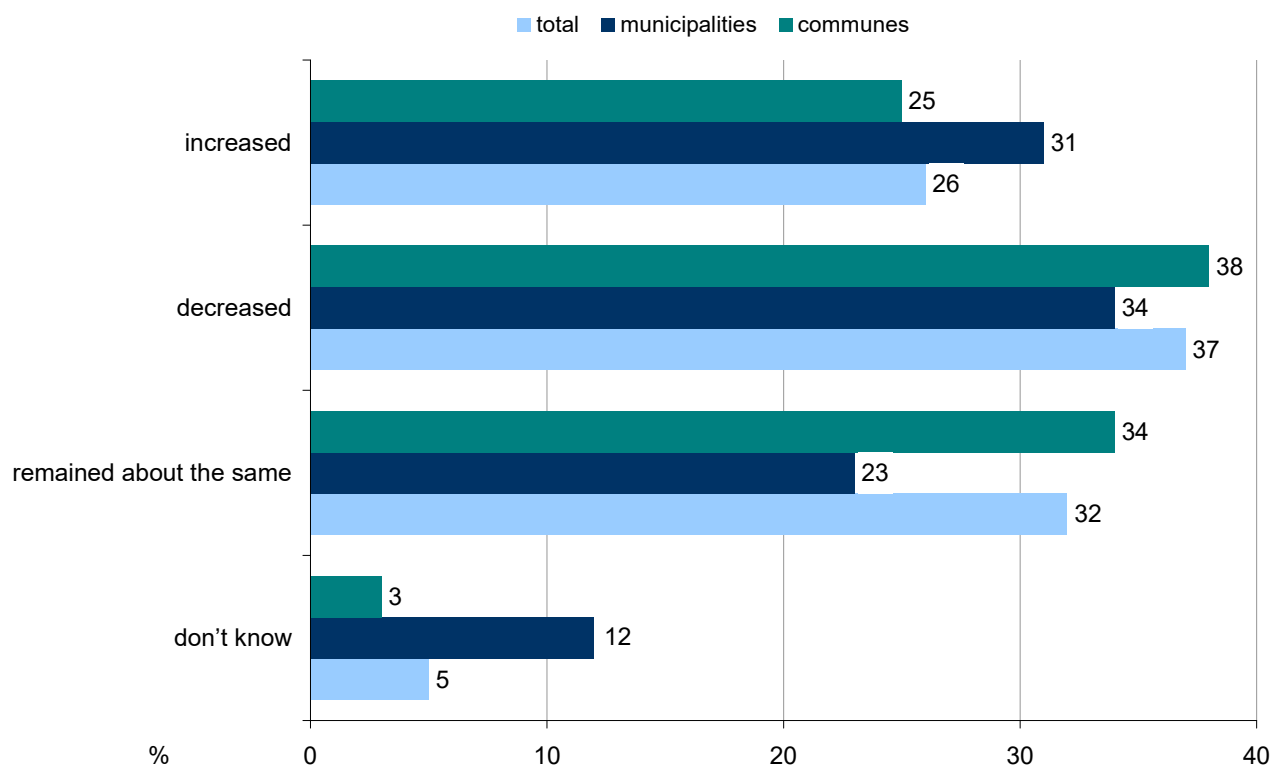
As can be seen from the chapter 3 Territorial development inequalities in Romania, economic and social inequalities are not only of the vertical type, i.e. of wealth, income or outcome, but also of the territorial type. Moreover, the share of the population at risk of poverty is relatively constant (**Figure 1**), despite the robust economic growth of the last decade. The territorial breakdown of poverty also shows few or no signs of change (**Table 3**). Despite the massive financial allocations for local development through national funds and for regional and rural development through EU funds, economic and social inequalities have reduced very little in the last decade and a half (**Figure 3**). In addition, there is a strong correlation between GDP/capita and the index of sustainable development at county level (**Figure 4**). As such, achieving a synergy between sustainable development policies and the objective of reducing territorial inequalities remains a challenge or an open problem for Romania.

Regarding the social services that can compensate to some extent for income inequalities, we note their unequal territorial coverage. As a rule, in the capital and in the county seat municipalities of heavily urbanized counties (**Figure 2**) more robust social care services were developed at the local government level. Even so, meal centre (social canteens, soup kitchens) coverage is surprising low at municipal level (**Figure 28**). Most likely, only large municipalities have the financial capacity to support such an important service for people at risk of poverty

<sup>47</sup> Georgescu, *Capitalul în România postcomunistă [Capital in post-communist Romania]* , pp. 409-507.

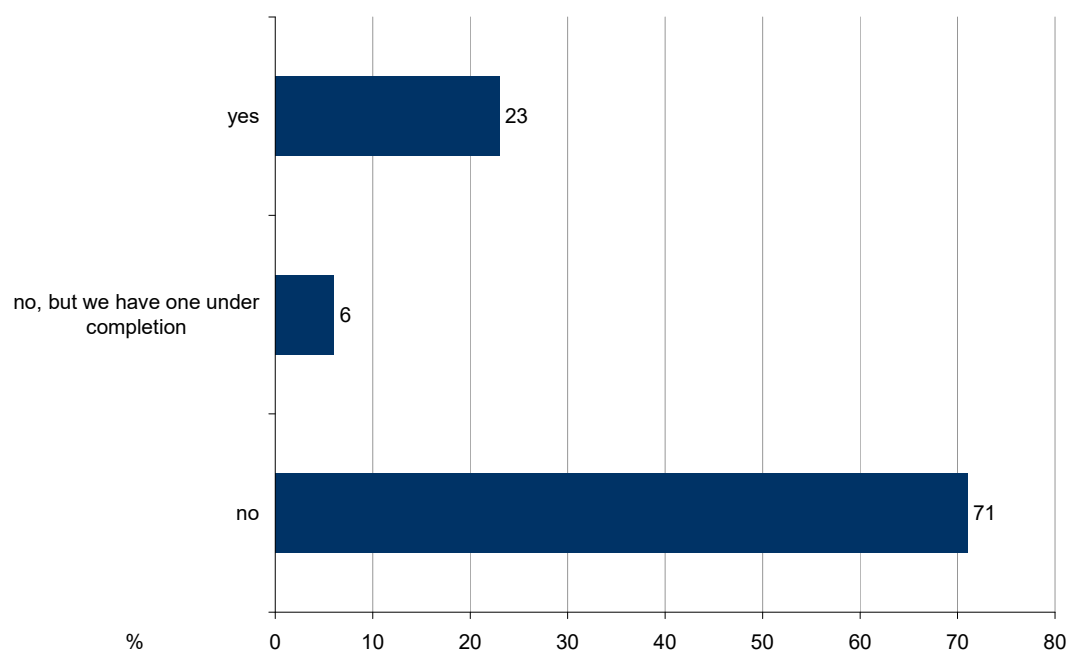
who also face severe material deprivation or situations of social risk, such as the case of homeless people.

**Figure 27. In your opinion, compared to 2018, the financial situation of households in your commune or municipality is better, worse or has it remained about the same?**



Representatives of communes and municipalities have divided opinions regarding the standard of living dynamic in their locality. Opinions differ, but a plurality view the financial situation of the households as less good than before the Covid-19 pandemic (**Figure 27**).

**Figure 28. Do you have in your municipality a meal centre (social canteen, soup kitchen)?**





**RO 10.3** Reducing discrimination by providing support to human rights non-governmental organizations of.

### Good practices

In the **Satu Mare** municipality, the City Hall and the Directorate of Social Care, together with the non-governmental organizations from the third sector, have established an intervention network in solving social care cases. Following the cooperation between Satu Mare City Hall, the Directorate of Social Care and 7 NGOs during the COVID 19 pandemic, elderly people over 65 years of age, without relatives, were identified; a telephone line was then established in order to support them to ensure the purchase of basic necessity food and medicine, with the help of mobile teams that travelled to requests and also collected donations. The [www.impreunasm.ro](http://www.impreunasm.ro) platform was designed, so that the activities carried out jointly with the NGOs can continue, also providing relief for Ukrainian war refugees.

On the social care platform, the following services are available in Romanian and Hungarian: notification and request for help, a module launched for the first time "I know someone who needs help", the volunteer mode "I want to help" as well as useful information for



vulnerable people. In order to make aid activities more efficient, each NGO is included in a database with the beneficiaries they have in mind, so as to avoid the overlap of social care services in the future, and retain the effectiveness levels and professional standards as high as possible.





### 5 3.10. SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities

Among all SDGs, this SDG is the most closely related to the area of responsibility of local government. Although varied, the public goods and services included in this SDG are highly relevant for the well-being and quality of life of citizens at the local level: adequate housing and living conditions, public transport, urban planning, prevention of risk situations (earthquakes, emergency situations), parks and green spaces, air quality and pollution reduction, as well as protecting cultural heritage.

One of the most important findings of this review refers to the prioritisation or ranking of the various needs and development projects connected to SDGs by the representatives of the municipalities and communes in Romania (**Table 9** *Error! Reference source not found.*). Although SDG 11 deals with, by content, the core areas of responsibility of municipalities and communes, it ranks only in 4th place, at an considerable distance from SDG 6 (water, sewerage, wastewater treatment), SDG 7 (gas and energy networks electricity, thermal rehabilitation, heating, ecological vehicles) and SDG 9 (roads of local interest and streets). Most likely, this fact is related to the general level of development of Romania. In other words, basic needs such as access to running water, sewage, roads and paved streets are still not covered at a satisfactory level for the great majority of citizens. Only when these needs will be met to a satisfactory degree for the great majority of the population, the needs corresponding to a higher level, such as those related to SDG 11, will be able to occupy a central position. As Romania makes progress regarding sustainable development, we expect that the needs and development projects covered by SDG 11 will become even more important for citizens and decision-makers at local level. This idea is based on the theory on the dynamics of social problems put forward by Cătălin Zamfir, according to which "a central/manifest social problem, after exhausting its ability to be significantly reduced through effort, is passed to latency" and "the transition of a problem from a preliminary stage in a higher stage occurs due to the accentuation of adverse problems, the increase of internal/external pressure, the appearance of new opportunities for action to solve the respective problem".<sup>48</sup> In the case of SDG 11, it appears likely that the importance of related public services and goods will increase at the level of municipalities and communes in Romania and due to the pressure from the climate crisis and the increasing EU funding opportunities through NRRP and European funds focused on green transition. In this section focused on SDG 11, the emphasis will be placed on projects that function as are good practices in that they preview this change in the ranking of development needs and projects at the level of municipalities and communes.

<sup>48</sup> Cătălin Zamfir, "Dezvoltarea socială: câteva elemente teoretice [Social development: some theoretical issues]," in *O nouă provocare: dezvoltarea socială [A New Challenge: Social Development]*, ed. Cătălin Zamfir and Laura Stoica (Jassy: Polirom, 2006), pp. 21-22.

**RO 11.1** Ensuring access to adequate living conditions for all citizens

The scope of action by the local government in Romania regarding the problem of housing and access to housing for young people or social housing is severely limited by the policy of massive withdrawal of the state from the construction of housing for sale or rental.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, approximately one third of the municipalities tried to carry out projects regarding the construction of social or youth housing or projects in collaboration with the National Agency for Housing (NAH). NRRP features a grant scheme with eligible funding of 100% of the project value for the construction of nZEB plus housing for young people or service housing for health or education specialists working in the respective commune. All municipalities, cities and communes are eligible for the grant scheme (**Figure 29**).

**Good practices**

**Zalău** Municipality carried out the rehabilitation of the block of social housing (C3, built in 1979 as a workers' dormitory). The housing project for young people for rent, which was carried out in the Dumbrava Nord district and was financed through the ANL program aimed to build 503 housing units in blocks flats with six and ten levels, along with a kindergarten, nursery, swimming pool, stadium, multipurpose hall, sports field, household platforms, green spaces, protective curtains and other complementary functions. The project features several stages, out of which stage I with 100 housing units was completed.



**RO 11.3** Ensuring access to safe, affordable and sustainable transport systems for all, especially by expanding public transport networks, paying particular attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, people with disabilities and the elderly.

In Romania, projects regarding the modernisation of public transport services and the transition to ecological vehicles register a gap in timing and outcomes, as well as a lower priority compared to Western Europe. Municipalities have carried out fewer projects of this type for several reasons: financing programs were introduced later compared to Western Europe, the order of magnitude of the financial allocations needed for the modernisation of public transport in relation to local budgets, the preponderance of individual transport to the detriment of the public in the urban culture of the last decades, and, last but not least, a lower priority given to the green transition in Romania compared to most of the EU member states, both among the population, decision-makers, and opinion-makers.

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<sup>49</sup> During 2015-2021 the share of new housing from public funds was less than 3% of the total, with annual values of less than 2,000 units, even less than 900 in 2019, cf. the Statistical Yearbook of Romania 2021, section 5.3.

The purchase of electric or hybrid vehicles was boosted only in recent years by European funded programs, both structural and NRRP. It is expected that the availability of financing will lead to the strengthening of this trend, although the gaps with Western Europe will persist. The prevalence of the option for individual transport to the detriment of public transport is also observable in the low interest of decision-makers to increase the use of public transport, despite the persistent major traffic problems in large cities. The construction of bicycle paths is another action under this target, the dynamics of which is also highly dependent on funding from European sources (**Figure 29**).

### Good practices

**Arad** municipality has implemented in the last three years 9 mobility projects aimed at increasing the attractiveness of public transport (modernisation of infrastructure, tram stations and depots, renewal of the trams and buses fleets, digitalization of payments), expansion of the bicycle path network, alongside a bike-sharing system, encouraging micromobility solutions, parking management and expanding pedestrian areas. From 2006 until now, the tram infrastructure (consisting of 67,720 km of single track) has been rehabilitated up to 70%. Arad also has the largest network of bicycle paths in the country, with a length of over 150 km in both directions. The bicycle network covers approximately 80% of the city. In the last 3 years, 33 new means of transport were purchased, of which 28 green. The number of means of transport that people with disabilities can use climbed to 40. Alternative mobility is also promoted by encouraging modern micro-mobility solutions - starting in 2021, 600 electric scooters were put into circulation and through awareness campaigns aimed at encouraging the use of the means travel alternatives: the *Arad Green Alive* campaign (Jan. 2021 - Jan. 2022), the *Diverse and Attractive Pedestrian Spaces in Arad* campaign (August 2021), the European Mobility Week and World Car-Free Day, starting from 2012, the Arad Cycling Cup, the Bekescsaba-Ara-Bekescsaba super-marathon.



**Sibiu** municipality: *Sibiu Bike City - Smart Bike Sharing System*. The project involved the implementation of an automated bike-sharing system that includes 49 stations located in the important areas in the city and in close to public transport stations, to facilitate intermodal exchange. The system offers 540 mechanical smart bicycles and 12 smart tricycles for seniors and people with disabilities. The integrated hardware and software infrastructure for management and communications related to the bicycle rental system is another strong points of this project. It features multiple technologies used for the first time in Romania for this type of smart-city solution, such as the use of electricity generated by photovoltaic panels, the use of a modular and adaptable solutions, the use of virtual stations, rental through a mobile application by scanning QR code and with cards that can be integrated with the Sibiu public transport system, web portal for managing user accounts, etc. In just 7 months after its launch, the system registered 12,000 users and over 68,000 fares, totalling approximately 400,000 km of bicycle rides, distances that that could have been travelled by car, thus leading to less pollution in the municipality.

In recent years **Galați** City Hall has made important investments to modernize the public transport fleet and infrastructure: new and modern trolleybuses, the first hybrid buses, and also the first new trams in 40 years. The total stands at about 105 new and modern vehicles. The expansion and simplification of the public transport network was achieved by redesigning

the network configuration, increasing the frequency and simplifying the routes, developing green transport, replacing the old tram tracks and contact network. The achieved results included increased accessibility for all people, especially for people with special needs, i.e. tools for people with disabilities (visual and tactile assistance systems), ensuring better physical accessibility in areas of waiting and in vehicles (for example, for buggies, prams, wheelchairs, walking frames).

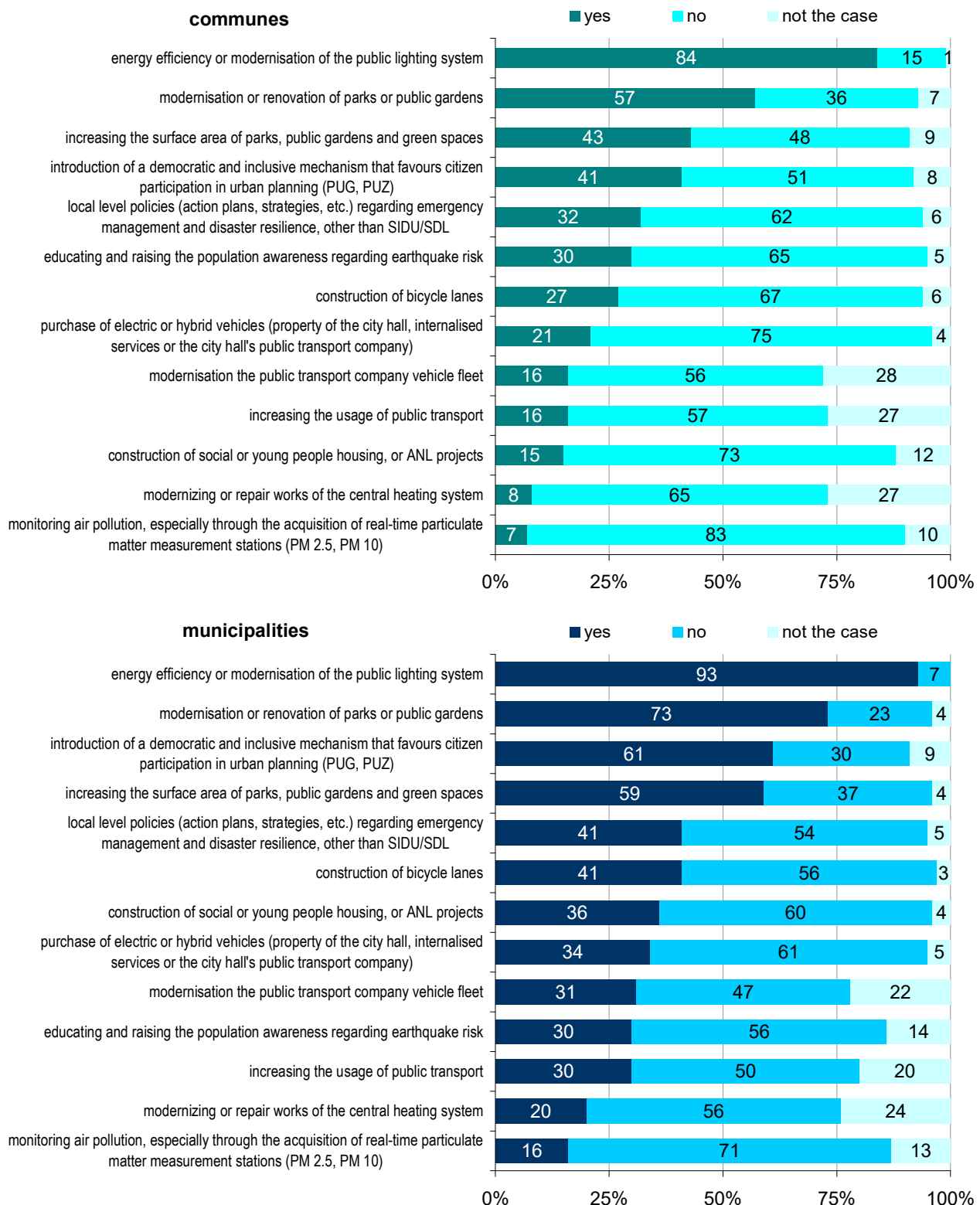
In **Bucharest** municipality, The Intercommunity Development Association for Public Transport Bucharest-Ilfov (ADI-TPBI) developed the *Smart & Green Mobility Integrated ITS System project for the Bucharest-Ilfov region - passengers information services in public transport stations*. The general objective of the project is to digitalize passenger information services in stations in order to increase the attractiveness of public transport through integration and interoperability of the public transport system, reducing emissions and improving the quality of the services delivered to the public. The investment provides for the modernisation of the public transport system by installing equipment to display information in real time, both visual and audio, in 1,615 key public transport stations, creating a uniform visual identity for all public transport stations.

**UN 11.3** By 2030, strengthening inclusive and sustainable urbanization and the capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable planning and management of human settlements in all countries.

According to the data from the sociological survey, the majority of municipalities and a substantial minority of communes have introduced a democratic and inclusive mechanism, which favours the participation of citizens in urban planning, especially regarding the development of zoning regulations (**Figure 29**). However, the desire for an inclusive and sustainable urbanization faces major challenges in Romania. According to Cătălin Berescu, the dominant territorial development model in Romania "is that of cities with vast hinterlands, which concentrate all significant activities in a limited territory and which use the adjacent territory as a bedroom space and for other secondary activities at a minimal level and without the prospect of becoming settlements with a complex social life." These new forms of localities, "perceived as intermediate, as errors or oddities of the transition period and as secondary products of development, are, however, long-term presences." In other words, the negative effects of the prevailing territorial development model will manifest themselves in the long term. The perspective is "generalized suburbia (...): an annex entity, which will generate an "American" way of life, with problems adapted to Romanian specificity, including a devastating impact on territorial development"<sup>50</sup>. This American way of life "is highly energy-intensive, highly dependent on the hydrocarbon usage, which makes the green transition more difficult, culturally and economically".<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Cătălin Berescu, "Procese de urbanizare a ruralului și de suburbanizare a centrelor urbane regionale [Processes of rural urbanisation and suburbanisation of regional urban centres]," in *România rurală în noul capitalism: 1990-2020 [Rural Romania in the New Capitalism: 1990-2020]*, ed. Iulian Stănescu and Flavius Mihalache (Bucharest: Pro Universitaria, 2022), pp. 338-339.

<sup>51</sup> Stănescu, "România rurală în noul capitalism: marile probleme ale dezvoltării [Rural Romania in the new capitalism: major development issues]," p. 49.

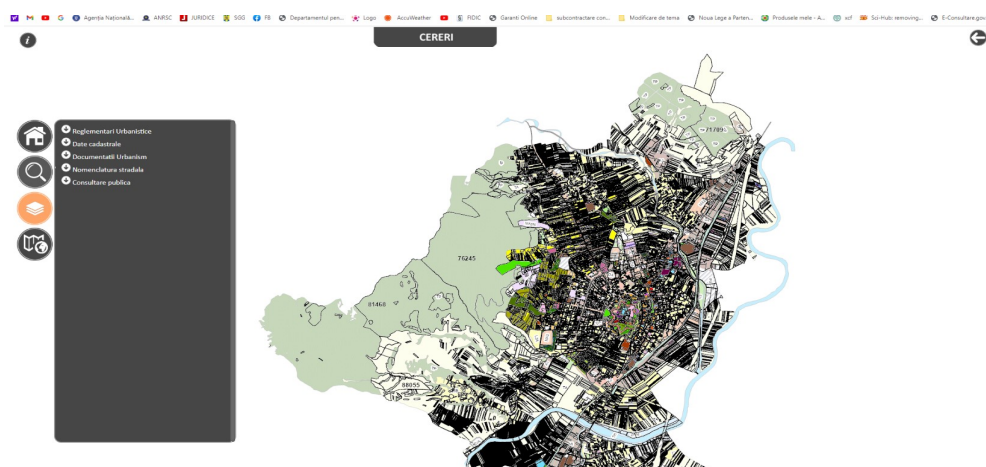
**Figure 29. [SDG 11] For the past 8 years, has your city hall carried out development projects regarding the following...?**

**RO 11.4** The development and implementation of a general program of spatial planning and territorial development in correlation with sector strategies at the national level by applying the concept of polycentric and balanced spatial development, which would support territorial cohesion.

In Romania, zone planning and land development is largely left to market forces. Urban planning and zoning rules are rather lax and are not always enforced. An attempt to promote some balance in the sense of a balanced spatial development is through the recent legislation on metropolitan areas, which group large urban agglomerations, usually county seat municipalities with a larger population and communes located in the functional urban area. Almost a third (31%) of the communes that took part in our study declared that they are part of an associative form at metropolitan level (**Figure 35**).

### Good practices

The urban planning app issued by **Alba Iulia** municipality is an interactive platform that collects, processes, and automatically generates urban planning data from for regulations approved by Local Council Decisions and for property registered in the land registers with updated geometry. This application is intended for citizens, architects, real estate agencies and all investors interested in quickly finding out what zoning rules and restrictions are applicable for different buildings or functional areas. Among the advantages of the platform is the possibility to automatically generate, in real time, information documents on urban planning rules for different buildings, whose geometry is entered in the land register database, submitting applications for the issuance of urban planning certificates, viewing zoning documentation approved in the area of the Alba Iulia municipality, and the consultation of the database regarding the Historical Monuments and the protected built areas within the city area.



In addition, citizens can view urban planning documents directly on this platform and can see on an interactive map the projects subject to the consultation procedure. The platform allows online consultation of the restrictions placed on buildings by certain technical-building networks (i.e. gas and electricity).

### RO 11.5 Educating and making the population responsible for seismic risk situations

A minority of less than a third of the municipalities and communes declared that they had carried out projects of this type. About two-fifths of the municipalities claim that they have adopted policies at the local level, other than those through SIDU or SDL, regarding the management of emergency situations and disaster resilience. Although the share of municipalities and communes that have made efforts to educate and make the population responsible for seismic risk situations is appreciable, there is still a lot to be done (**Figure 29**).



## Good practices

AMR and the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations endorsed the Natural Disaster Insurance Pool (PAID) initiative that aimed to increase the number of homes covered by a mandatory home insurance against natural disasters and launched the public interest information campaign to promote housing insurance, with the approval of the National Audiovisual Council. Along with this campaign, there are also local actions with strong impact for the residents of the respective areas, which led to an insurance coverage level above the national average. Two important examples are provided by cities of Braşov and Arad. In the former, the City Hall carried out a targeted mass mail information campaign about housing insurance in 2022. The result is that the Braşov municipality has PAD coverage degree of almost 40%, double the national average. In Arad, the City Hall organised an information campaign in partnership with the local police. The result was an increase in coverage from around 16% to over 20% in less than a year.

**RO 11.6.** Reducing the effects that air pollution has on human health and the environment by paying special attention to air quality

The rehabilitation or modernisation of central heating systems was carried out by only by a fifth of the municipalities, although the problems associated with these systems lead to major issues for the quality of life (lack of access to hot running water and heating), as well as for the municipal budget due to the need to cover for energy losses due the poor condition of the network and arrears to suppliers. The low share of municipalities with such projects derives from the proportion of municipalities that still have such systems. In previous decades, many municipalities abandoned these systems in favour of so-called individual solutions. The sustainability and pollution problems of the latter have only just begun to make themselves felt at the level of public policies. On the other hand, energy efficiency works and/or modernisation of public lighting were carried out by a huge majority of municipalities and communes. The availability of financing, including from European funds, enabled many such projects (**Figure 29**).

## Good practices

**Galaţi Municipality:** *Equipment for scanning urban trees to determine their health and integrity.* The project provided for the purchase of an ultrasound tomograph/scanner with 24 sensors for assessing the health status of trees in the city. The equipment can detect decaying parts inside the trunk, identify tree diseases, and provide technical data on the stability of the tree and its resistance to wind and storms. By using this equipment, cutting of high-risk trees can be prioritized and unnecessary cutting of low-risk ones can be avoided, increasing the efficiency of non-invasive analysis.

**Iaşi Municipality:** *Iaşi Digital* is a data-driven platform that integrates multiple relevant datasets on transport and air quality in Iaşi. It is the first initiative in Iaşi to integrate and display city-wide air quality data using an open-source network of sensors. Thus, users can monitor the level of pollution in real time and take measures to protect their health and improve the quality of life.



**RO 11.7** Substantial reduction in the number of deaths and illnesses caused by hazardous chemical products from air, water and soil contamination.

Like the green transition, the reduction of pollution appears much lower on the agenda of opinion-makers, decision-makers, and, as a consequence, the population of Romania compared to other EU member states. This fact is also illustrated by the small proportion of municipalities - less than one sixth - that sought to purchase the necessary equipment for monitoring air pollutant emissions, especially PM 2.5 and PM 10 (suspended particle) measurement stations (**Figure 29**). The lack of progress regarding this target appears worrying, especially if we consider the fact that the cost for the acquisition of these stations is not problematic. Court of Justice of the European Union ruled that Romania systematic failed to reduce pollution in large urban agglomerations (Bucharest, Iași, Brasov, Timisoara, and Cluj), including for exceeding the limit values for PM 2.5 and PM 10. The European Environment Agency has published data on the level of pollution in large European cities in 2021-2022 based on the annual average level of PM 2.5 suspended particles. There are only 19 large municipalities in Romania, including the capital in the Europe-wide ranking. The rest of the county seat municipalities in Romania do not appear in these statistics because they were not included in the urban audit of the European Commission, they do not have PM 2.5 level monitoring stations or the measurement of the PM 2.5 level is insufficient. Among the 19 municipalities in Romania, the air quality was assessed as being at a fair level in 3 municipalities, at a moderate level in 7 municipalities, and poor in 9 municipalities, including the capital, Bucharest municipality (**Table 13**).

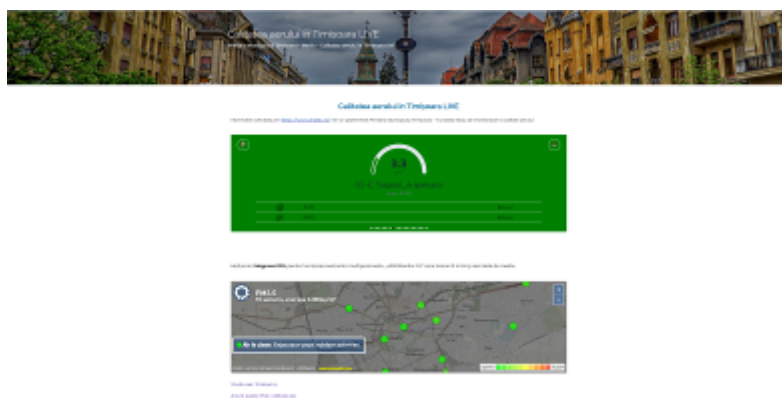
**Table 13. Air quality in municipalities in 2021 and 2022**

no. of municipalities	PM 2.5 (µg/m <sup>3</sup> ) annul mean concentration		
	fair (5-10)	moderate (10-15)	poor (15-25)
	3	7	9

Source: European Environment Agency, *European city air quality viewer*

### Good practices

**Timișoara** municipality, in partnership with the Eta2u Air Quality Monitoring Foundation, installed 16 new air quality monitoring stations. The 16 stations measure "atmospheric temperature and humidity, respectively PM 2.5 and PM 10 pollutant concentrations". With the help of these stations, the municipality can quickly identify polluters in the city and, at the same time, warn the people of Timișoara. Since the data is public and updated in real time, the people of Timișoara can form a correct picture of pollution and see if the measures taken by the City Hall lead to an improvement in air quality.



**Bistrița Municipality:** the Green Line project for public transport using means of transport with electric motor or low pollution standard involved the purchase of 10 SOR 9.5 type electric buses with electric motor, 10 slow charging stations and 2 fast charging stations. This project uses the most modern electric buses with a 200 km range that will be used on the longest route on the west-east axis of the city of about 20 km, with an average frequency of 12 minutes compared to the current line that has a frequency rate of 20 minutes. In parallel, a bicycle track was built along the entire length of the route.



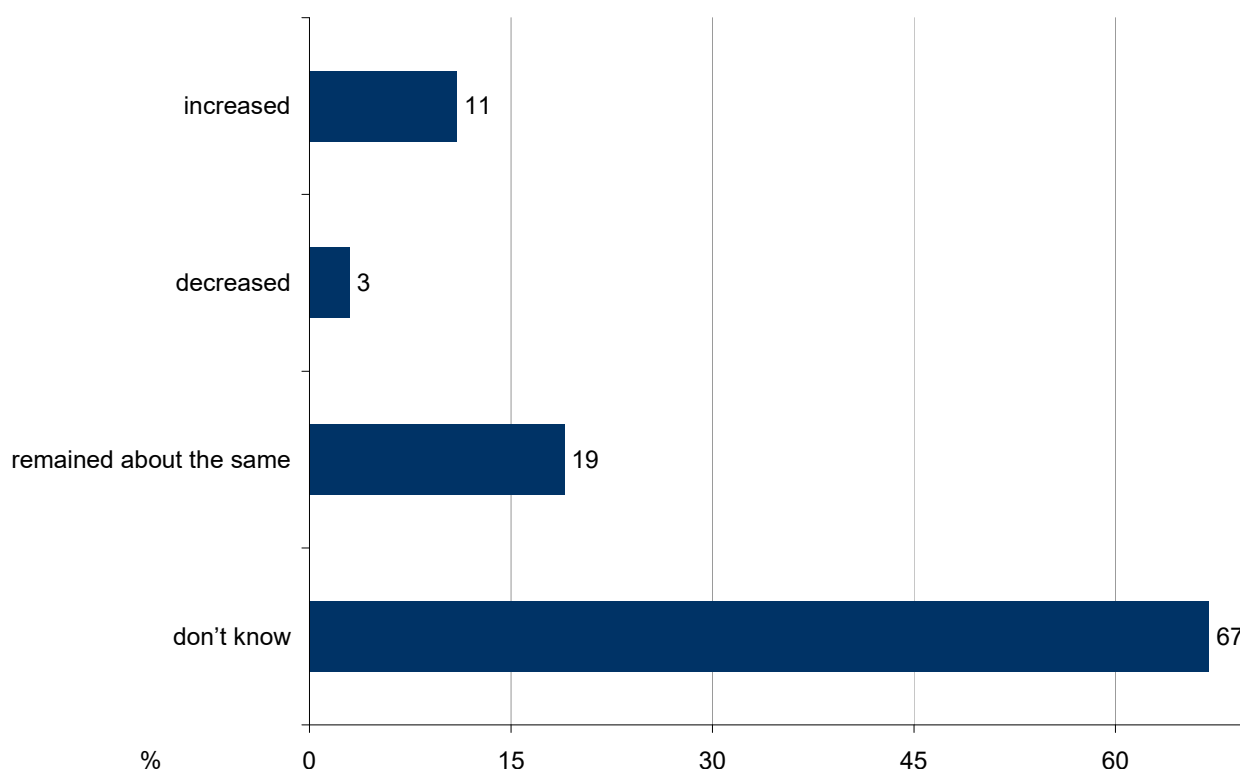
**RO 11.8** Consolidation of efforts to protect and safeguard cultural and natural heritage, landscape elements in urban and rural environments.

As far as green spaces are concerned, the emphasis is rather on the modernisation of existing parks and green spaces than on the expansion of their area, especially for municipalities. Almost three-quarters of the municipalities in the sample carried out projects to modernize or renovate public parks and gardens (**Figure 29**). On the other hand, only about 10% of the municipalities in the sample experienced an increase in the total area of green spaces (**Figure 30**). Although the total urban population of Romania is decreasing by number of inhabitants, it was by 2.8 million people higher in 2002 than in 1968, when the limits (borders) of administrative areas, including of the municipalities were issued, which are still in force.<sup>52</sup> As such, under the increasing pressure due to the demand for civil constructions (housing, office and commercial buildings), the options of the municipalities to increase the green spaces are very limited or non-existent because territorial administrative units do not own land within the limits they could change its destination into green spaces. During the deindustrialization of the 1990s and 2000s, the lands of former state owned industrial enterprises would have been a solution for conversion to green spaces, but they entered the commercial circuit and were replaced by commercial centres, office or residential buildings.<sup>53</sup> Municipalities also lost green spaces as a result of the restitution of properties confiscated or nationalised by the former communist regime. In many cases, these properties changed their destination from green spaces or parks to lands on which residential or office buildings or commercial spaces were built.

<sup>52</sup> The preliminary data of the RPL 2021/2022 indicate a total urban population of 9.94 million people, cf. the National Institute of Statistics, "First provisional data for the Population and Housing Census, round 2021 [2021 Census provisional data],"; for the total urban population of Romania since 1968 see Statistical Yearbook of Romania 1969.

<sup>53</sup> For an illustration of this process in the capital of Romania, see Georgescu, *Capitalul în România postcomunistă [Capital in post-communist Romania]*, pp. 623-626.

**Figure 30. Compared to 2018, has the total area of green spaces in the public and private domain of the municipality increased, decreased or remained about the same? (municipalities only)**



### Good practices

Jora Park and Zăvoi Park in Roman Municipality are two projects that led to the redevelopment of some hectares of land into parks and other children facilities. Roman municipality has a modern architectural complex, unique for Romania - the pedestrian area Ștefan cel Mare. Here, a major redevelopment project is nearing completion, comprising also of an amphitheatre with a stage on which movies can be projected on the water curtain (photo group below).



In recent years, **Craiova** Municipality has emphasized the revitalization and valorisation of cultural and business tourism through: the development of the cultural tourism and sports infrastructure (the construction of the only stadium in Romania for athletics only, certified by the IAAF for the organization of international competitions, with a capacity of 5,000 seats), the construction of a football stadium (4th place in the world, in 2018, for the originality of the project), the redevelopment of the old city centre, the rehabilitation and transformation of



green spaces, the rehabilitation of cultural institutions, the completion of spaces intended for large-scale events such as the polyvalent hall or the summer theatre in Romanescu Park, the construction of the largest aquatic leisure complex in Oltenia province (photo group on the next page).



**Râmnicu Vâlcea** municipality carries out an extensive urban regeneration program that also targets the redevelopment of green spaces. The new Știrbei Vodă park (photo below), which is located in the Splaiului Independenței area, was developed through a project with EU funding. As a result, the green area of the Râmnicu Vâlcea municipality was enriched by 9,392 square meters by the conversion of the abandoned lands in the area into green spaces, pedestrian paths, tracks for cyclists, playgrounds for children, equipment for outdoor sports, equipment play for children's abilities. The park is connected to the current Zăvoi Park, recently redeveloped, following an extensive modernisation project of the Zăvoi stadium.



The Radu Șerban Municipal Cultural Centre organizes numerous cultural events with the support of **Caracal** City Hall: the *Ștefan Iordache* National Theatre Festival, the *Radu Șerban* National Light Music Festival - an exceptional musical event in the life of the city in which the great composer was born, the Festival of Theatre and Short Film for Youth fest - a generous meeting of young people with young people, with Theatre and film and, above all, with the spectators, the National Folklore Festival *De dor, de primăvară* which aims to discover and promote vocal soloists and folk music instrumentalists who come from among children and young people, the discovery and promotion of authentic folk music and songs, The FestKids

Children's Theatre Festival, the Comedy Festival, the PROTOGENES National Youth Illustration Show, the *Romanian Călușul Mănesc International Folklore Festival* - the traditional competition of the *Călușuri*, which also includes the participation of at least one ensemble from another country and which reached year 2019 at the 50th edition. At the same time, there are the folk port parade, demonstrations of virtuosity, a symposium, exhibitions, book launches and performances by large folk ensembles from the country.





### 5 3.11. SDG 12: Responsible consumption and production

**ONU 12.5** By 2030, significantly reducing waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse.

More than three-quarters of communes and more than four-fifths of municipalities carried out projects regarding the monitoring of the amount of waste and the degree of selective collection of household waste, as well as educating and empowering the population regarding the selective collection of household waste (**Figure 31**). The need for such projects derives from Romania's limited progress in terms of waste management. According to a 2022 European Commission report, Romania has the highest landfill rate in the EU and a low recycling rate.<sup>54</sup> Concerning the infringement procedures (lack of implementation of EU law) regarding waste management stated by the European Commission, Romania has registered some progress. Their number of active environmental infringement cases against Romania has decreased from an all-time high of 20 cases at the end of 2014 to just 2 cases at the end of 2021.<sup>55</sup>

## Good practices

**Suceava Municipality:** unique waste collection system in Romania. For both individual housing and in condominium (blocks of flats), a number of 200 underground collection platforms were built or redeveloped, out of which 100 public underground platforms with a collection capacity of 11 cubic meters, (6 cubic meters for the wet fraction and 5 cubic meters for the dry fraction) and 100 semi-underground public platforms with a collection capacity of 9 mc, (6 mc for the wet fraction and 3 mc for the dry fraction). For real estate developers who build

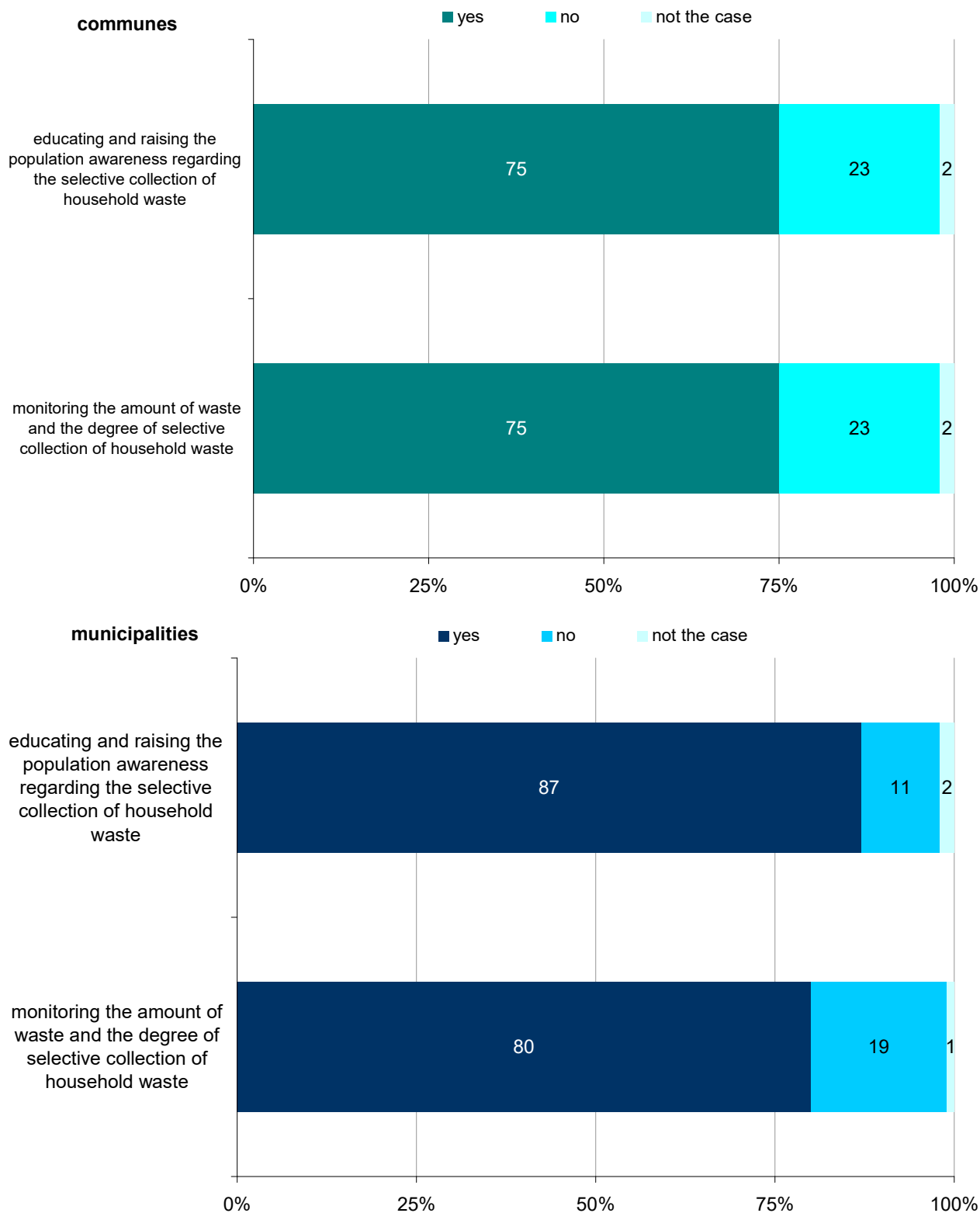


<sup>54</sup> Teodora Ion, "Comisia Europeană a publicat a treia evaluare a punerii în aplicare a politicilor de mediu: România este vizată de 17 proceduri de infringement și a înregistrat progrese limitate în principalele domenii," [www.caleaeuropeana.ro/comisia-europeana-a-publicat-a-treia-evaluare-a-punerii-in-aplicare-a-politicilor-de-mediu-romania-este-vizata-de-17-proceduri-de-infringement-si-a-inregistrat-progrese-limitate-in-principalele-domen/](http://www.caleaeuropeana.ro/comisia-europeana-a-publicat-a-treia-evaluare-a-punerii-in-aplicare-a-politicilor-de-mediu-romania-este-vizata-de-17-proceduri-de-infringement-si-a-inregistrat-progrese-limitate-in-principalele-domen/)

"Environmental infringements interactive map,"  
<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiaWZlbnRlcjYyMzS0MTIxLWIZyY2MtNzFIYWQ5NzJlZDVhIiwidCI6ImIyNGM4YjA2LTUyMmMtNDZmZS05MDgwLTcwOTI2ZjhkZGRiMSIsImMiOi9>

condominium housing, strict rules regarding the management of municipal waste by their future tenants were established through the documentation for issuing building permits.

**Figure 31. [SDG 12] For the past 8 years, has your city hall carried out development projects regarding the following...?**



Commune **Jucu**, Cluj County. The construction of a manure storage platform in the village of Jucu de Sus for the integrated control of nutrient pollution, which results in the proper storage



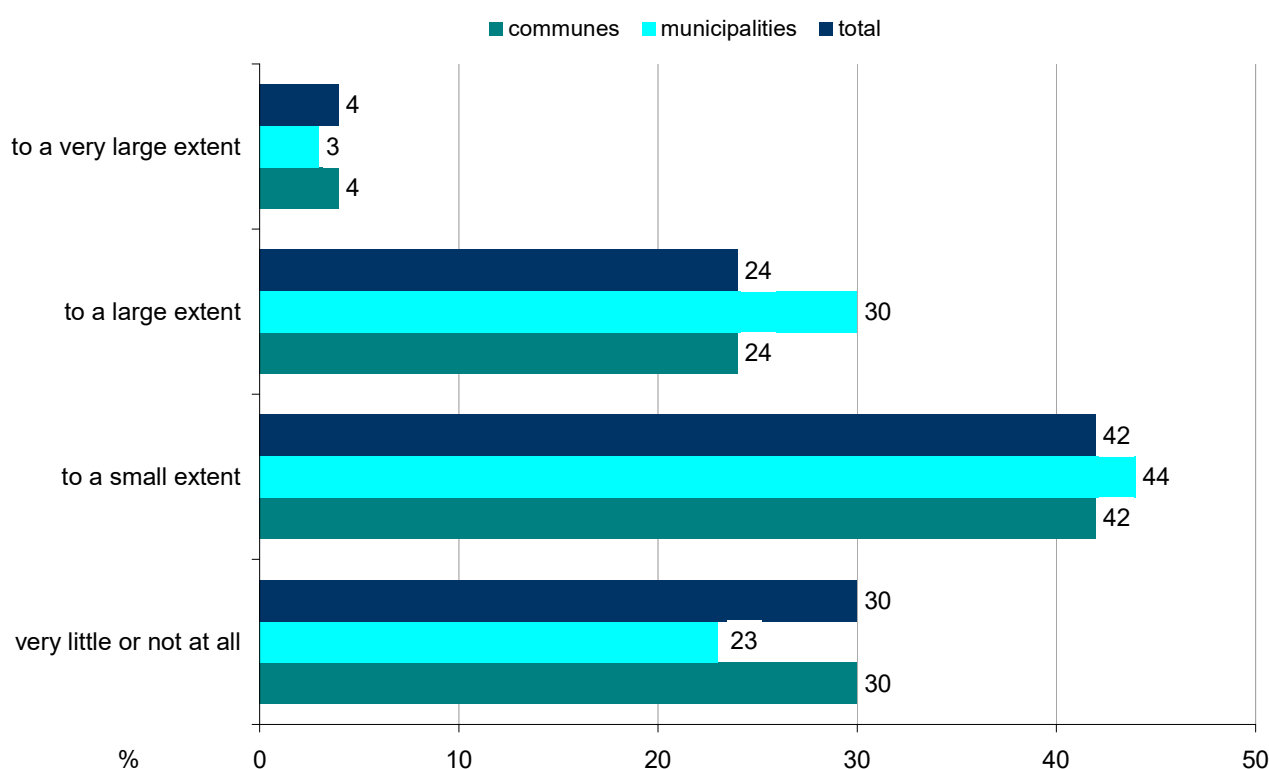
of manure, the prevention of the penetration of nitrogen from the composition of manure into the soil and groundwater, the utilization of manure of compost, and the use of compost as fertilizer.

Comune **Brastavățu**, Olt County: the construction of a communal manure storage and management platform, completed in 2021, to decrease nutrient pollution, associated with appropriate manure management activities through its optimal use in agriculture, designed to store the collected manure from households and small and medium-sized farms, which will be sent to compost and later on usage on farmland as organic fertilizer.

**RO 12.7** Implementation of sustainable green public procurement practices, in accordance with national priorities and European policies.

The data collected through the sociological survey indicate that approximately two-thirds of municipalities and three-fourths of communes use the green criteria in public procurement documentation to a small extent or not at all (**Figure 32**). Therefore, the usage of green criteria in public procurement by municipalities and communes is in its early stages.

**Figure 32. To what extent do you use green criteria in the public procurement of the municipality/commune, as featured in the green public procurement guide of the Ministry of the Environment or those set by the European Commission?**



### Good practices

City hall of **Braşov** municipality organised the procurement procedure for the supply and distribution of fruits, vegetables, milk, dairy products, and bakery products - Romania's School Program. In the tender documentation, it was requested that the products be chosen, mainly, depending on the quality of the product and on the basis of the lowest price, the percentage being 60%-40%, to come from reliable sources, mainly from local producers, and to either ecological products, aiming to bring about a change in public food, boosting environmental sustainability and local agricultural entrepreneurship.



**Baia Mare** municipality and **Miercurea Ciuc** municipality have ecological cleaning products and services according to the Guide on ecological public procurement in 2021. **Bucharest** and **Bucharest District 1** municipalities purchased ecological paper. The communes Grația, Borș, Galănești, Ciorăști, Satu Mare, Valea Ierii, Runcu and the municipalities Baia Mare, Bucharest, Bucharest Districts 1, 3, and 4, Constanța, Galați, Slatina, Timișoara, Deva, Alexandria, Roman, and Râmnicu Vâlcea have purchased in the last 4 years green vehicles, either with low emissions or electric, according to the guide on ecological public procurement.



### 5 3.12. SDG 13: Climate action

**RO/ONU 13.3** Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning.

The still low priority given to the green transition in Romania and the level of awareness of the climate crisis is also shown in the low proportion of TAUs that have run programs to raise awareness of the population on this topic - less than a third of municipalities and about a sixth of communes. It seems obvious that more needs to be done in this direction, especially given the availability of programs that fund such projects for local government. The low level of prioritisation of the green transition and the climate crisis is also observable from the low proportion of municipalities and communes that have adopted policy documents on this topic, other than the general approaches in SIDU or SDL (**Figure 33**).

#### Good practices

In Romania there are 60 municipalities that have signed the *Convention of Mayors for Energy and Climate*: 1. Aiud, 2. Alba Iulia, 3. Arad, 4. Buzău, 5. Bacău, 6. Baia Mare, 7. Bistrița, 8. Botoșani, 9. Brașov, 10. Bucharest, 11. District 2, 12. District 1, 13. Sector 4, 14. District 3, 15. Sector 6, 16. Caransebeș, 17. Călărași, 18. Cluj-Napoca, 19. Constanța, 20. Craiova, 21. Deva, 22. Drăgășani, 23. Făgăraș, 24. Galați, 25. Gheorgheni, 26. Giurgiu, 27. Huși, 28. Iași, 29. Lugoj, 30. Timișoara, 31. Moinești, 32. Focșani, 33. Petroșani, 34. Oltenția, 35. Oradea, 36. Piatra Neamț, 37. Pitești, 38. Ploiești, 39. Reșița, 40. Roman, 41. Roșiorii de Vede, 42. Râmnicu Vâlcea, 43. Sibiu, 44. Satu Mare, 45. Sebeș, 46. Sf. Gheorghe, 47. Sighișoara, 48. Slatina, 49. Slobozia, 50. Suceava, 51. Săcele, 52. Târgoviște, 53. Tulcea, 54. Tg. Jiu, 55. Tg. Mureș, 56. Tg. Secuiesc, 57. Tecuci, 58. Vaslui, 59. Zalău, 60. Miercurea Ciuc.

Râmnicu Vâlcea municipality is part of the Covenant of Mayors from 2008. The Municipality of Râmnicu Vâlcea was awarded three times, in 2019, 2020 and 2021, the distinction of Partner of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, within the European Week of Local Democracy project.

**RO 13.4** Intensification of Romania's efforts to achieve the transition to a "green" economy, with low carbon dioxide emissions, resilient to climate change and to integrate climate change adaptation measures in vulnerable economic, social and environmental sectors, in accordance with EU policies.

### Good practices

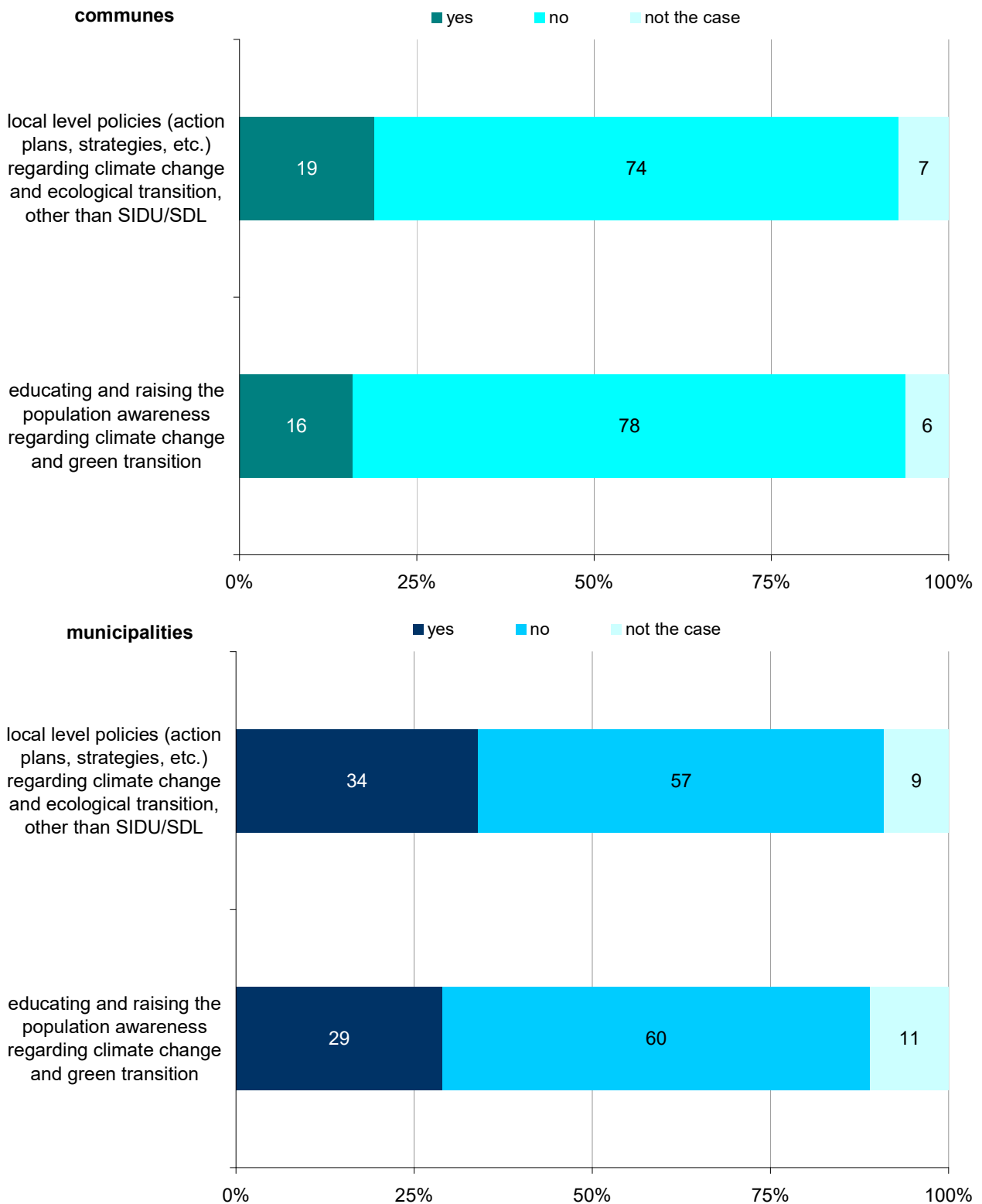
**Cluj-Napoca** municipality is among the 53 cities from 21 European countries whose applications were designated as winners in the NetZeroCities program.<sup>56</sup> The Pilot Cities Program is a starting point in the journey of European urban communities to become sustainable by reducing their own carbon footprint. Cluj together with the other urban communities will test innovative solutions to reach the decarbonisation target specified in the application and to inspire other cities to become climate resilient. The implementation time of the initiatives is two years, during which follower cities will have the opportunity to learn from good practices and the challenges from the implementation of some actions so that they can replicate similar solutions. Cluj-Napoca came up with a proposal to create a plan for residential neighbourhoods without carbon emissions through Digital Twin technology. Cluj-Napoca is one of the 100 cities that have undertaken to become climate neutral through the Mission 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030. **Bucharest District 2** and **Suceava** are the other two municipalities in Romania that are part of the mission.



<sup>56</sup> Pilot cities total receive financing of up to 32 million euro through the Horizon 2020 programme

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**Figure 33. [SDG 13] For the past 8 years, has your city hall carried out development projects regarding the following...?**





### 5 3.13. SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions

Bringing public services as close as possible to the citizen and facilitating communication through the introduction of online services, digitalisation, and development of various apps is an important feature of local government in Romania, especially at municipal level. Citizens enjoy information and services in a shorter time, without the need for physical travel. At the same time, bureaucracy is reduced. The survey data and the good practices illustrate these steps to make the activity of local government more efficient and closer to the citizen. In many ways, these developments in local government also became good practices for central government.

**RO 16.6** Ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels

#### Good practices

Sighișoara municipality: *Participatory local governance*. The City Hall of Sighișoara has introduced the concept of Participatory Budgeting. It developed the online platform <https://implicat.sighisoara.org.ro>. All meetings of the Sighișoara Local Council are broadcast live on the City Hall Facebook page and streamed on its YouTube account. The civic sector and businesses are part of all the events that the City Hall organizes, providing support and volunteers. The City Hall website [www.primariasighisoara.ro](http://www.primariasighisoara.ro) has been changed in terms of interface and functionality, precisely for easier access to information for citizens.



**RO 16.7** The development of efficient, responsible and transparent institutions at all levels

#### Good practices

Communes Șofronea, Chișineu-Criș, and Lipova, Arad County, Aluniș and Ațintiș, Mureș County, Densuș and Brad municipality, Hunedoara County, municipality Alba Iulia and commune Ciugud, Alba County, comune Jucu, Cluj County, Pitești municipality, Argeș County, developed the *City Health* app through which residents will be able to report directly to the city hall the problems they encounter in their communities. They will also be able to be consulted

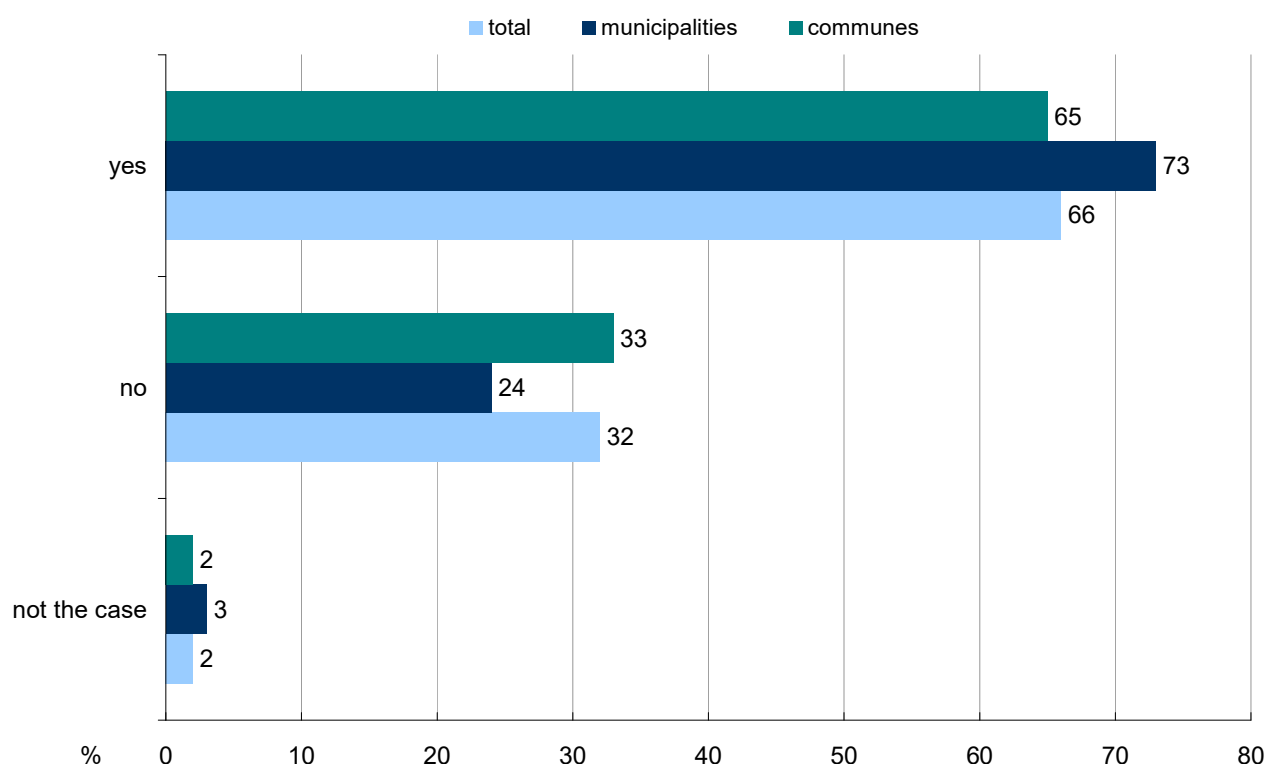


in real time in relation to administrative decisions and will have access to a news and information channel about local developments and events.

**RO 16.8** Professionalization and improvement of the activity of all central and local government institutions, especially the departments that come into direct contact with citizens, for the provision of prompt and civilized services; expansion and generalization of internet services (on-line).

Large majorities - about two-thirds of communes and three-fourths of municipalities – have carried out digitalisation projects regarding public services offered in the last 8 years (**Figure 34**). This data showcases the dynamism regarding online public services in the local government in Romania.

**Figure 34. In the past 8 years had the city hall carries put projects regarding public services?**



The effect of public services digitalization is visible by and large through the number and share of online interaction with citizens. For communes, the average number of online interactions with citizens for various requests, complaints, petitions, and hearings was already very close to that of face-to-face interactions, according to data from the sociological survey (**Table 14**).

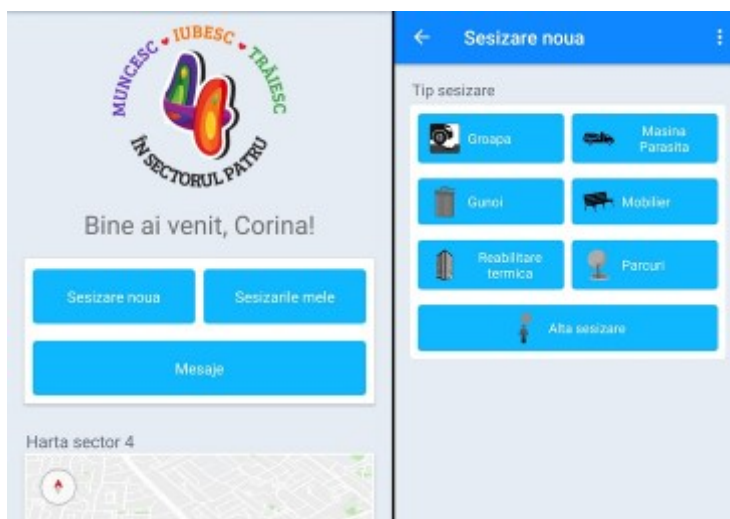
**Table 14. Total number of face-to-face and online requests, reports, petitions and audiences from citizens in 2022**

	face to face	online
communes	391	350
municipalities	2,042	662

## Good practices

**Călărași** municipality developed *Avansis Online* – online services in the relationship with citizens. The online platform offers citizens, through dedicated sections, access to the following services: authentication and registration section, services access section, tax certificate application, tax certificate issuance, filing the car tax return, communication mode with inspectors assigned to resolve pending requests. The platform can promptly take requests over the Internet, 24/7. The citizen is informed automatically, through email messages, about the process as a whole, necessary documents, next steps, requests for clarifications, processing stage, etc. The implementation of the platform leads to the shortening of the time spent by an official to solve a request by eliminating the majority of contact points at the counter with the taxpayer, automating the necessary information during the request and automating a significant part of the request processing flow. The city hall has also implemented *Avansis Mobile* - the integrated mobile app for managing the relationship between the city hall and taxpayers. Through the application, the citizens will be able to pay their local taxes, request and browse documents or make appointments with the local administration and subordinate services. The city hall can send citizens messages of public interest at the local level, directly on the phone.

**Bucharest District 4** Municipality made available to citizens a mobile app that aims to be a useful tool both for District 4 residents and for those in transit or who need to interact with the district administration. The application led to the facilitation of communication between citizens and the city hall of District 4, to the decrease of the number of written petitions and to the reduction of the number of problems solved at the counters of the local authority, being accessible to users regardless of their



experience regarding the use of technology. In 2020, of the approximately 16,000 notifications that were made through the application, more than 90% were resolved in a very short time. He also created a list of the most common types of complaints, with the first being the ones to the local police, regarding the abusive occupation of parking space, cars abandoned on the public domain or disturbing the public peace. On the 2nd and 3rd places, respectively, there were notifications related to investments and notifications related to the assignment of a parking space in District 4.

Roman municipality carried out projects for digital transformation and institutional resilience. These projects included an electronic platform for the integrated management of public administration activities, *Pentru Roman* - the mobile application for notifications, a transparent platform for voicing opinions regarding the quality and integrity of public services, an online programming computer system for scheduling the release of identity documents and civil marriage ceremonies, a video monitoring system, the online payment system for local taxes and fees, and the system management of queues and waiting times (photos below).

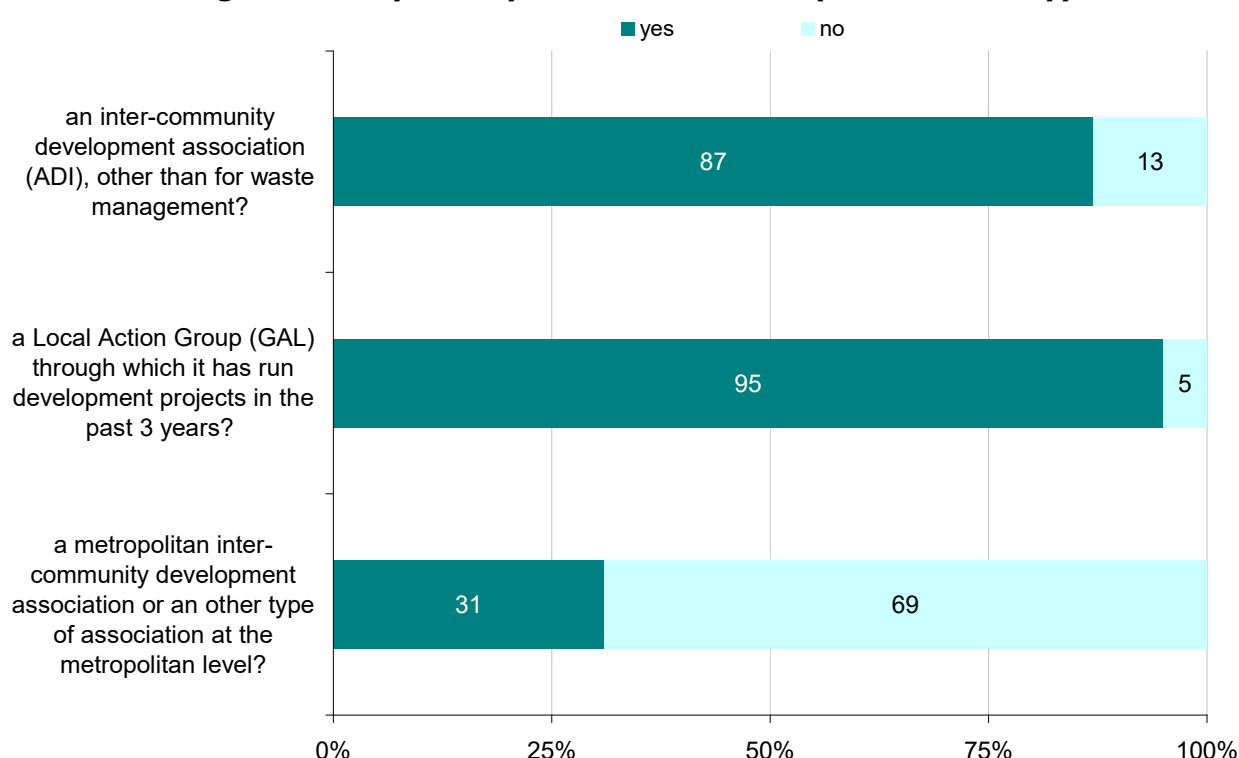


The *Iași Open City* project was developed by the Iași city hall. The project aimed to improve the efficiency, transparency, and accessibility of public services through the use of information and communication technology. It consists of three portals: the new Iași City Hall portal, electronic services, and Open Data. The portals offer services such as checking the status of issued applications/documents, reporting public issues, online payment of local fees and taxes, online scheduling, and participatory budgeting. The Open Data portal opens up government data, promoting transparency and accountability. The project uses advanced technologies such as data analysis, process automation, and artificial intelligence to improve the efficiency and transparency of the governing processes at local level.

## 6. Means of implementations and barriers

The main instruments in support of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda SDGs at the level of municipalities and communes relate, first of all, to their administrative and financial capacity. These are closely followed by the available sources of funding from outside the TAU, the most important of which are the programs (grant schemes) at the national or EU level. The subjective data regarding administrative capacity (**Figure 36**) show a predominance of positive evaluations (rather good and good) for both municipalities and communes in a proportion of over three quarters. The proportion of positive evaluations (rather good and good) regarding financial capacity is much lower, about one third of municipalities and communes (**Figure 37**). According to a plurality, about two fifths, the financial capacity is satisfactory. For the representatives of almost a fourth of the municipalities and a little less than a third of the communes, the financial capacity is rather less poor or less good.

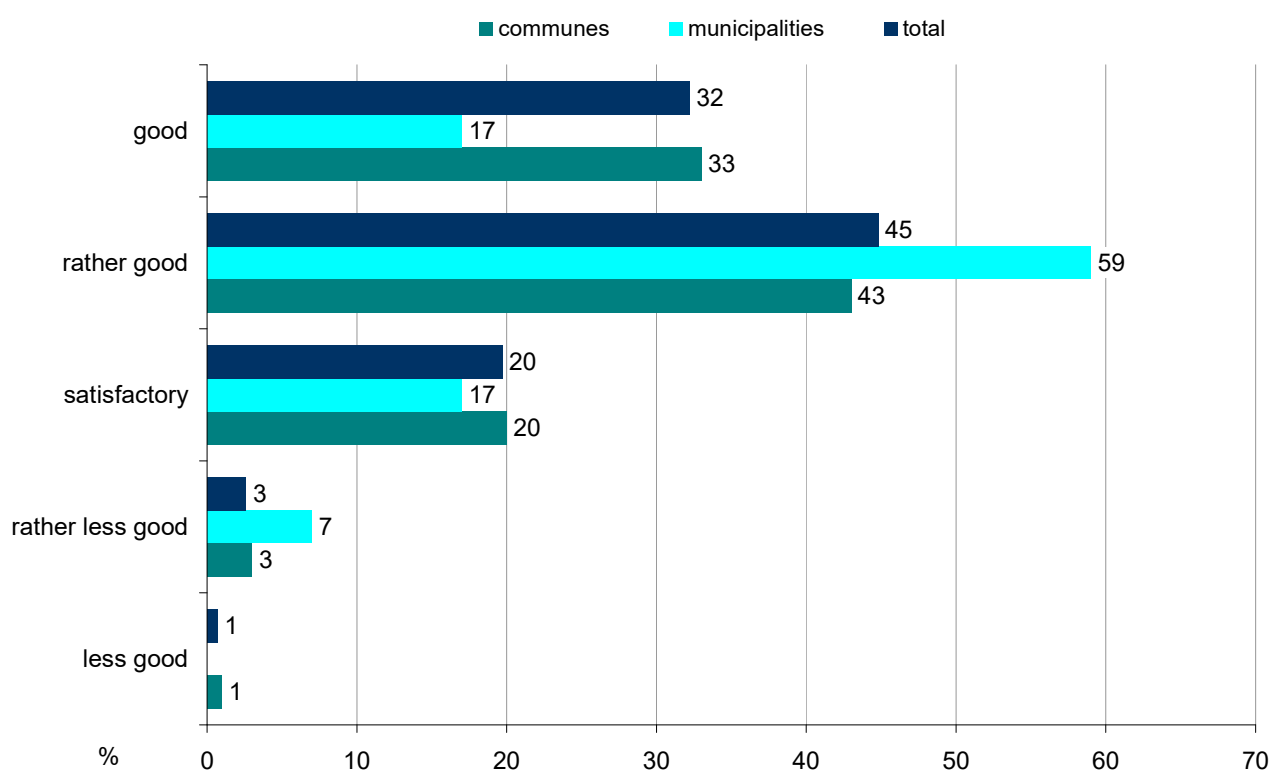
**Figure 35. Is your city hall member of...? (communes only)**



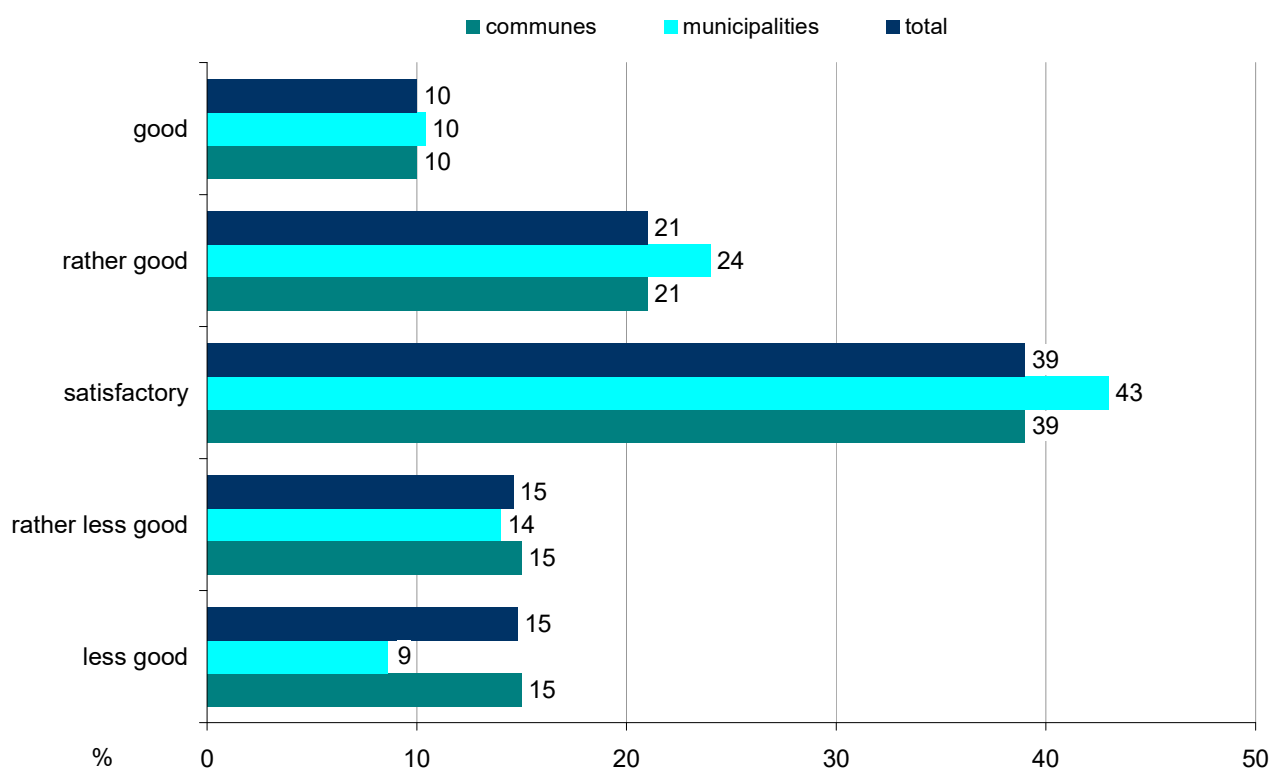
A way through which communes can strengthen their financial capacity for delivering investment projects and public services to citizens or strengthen their administrative capacity to run projects consists in inter-communality (**Figure 35**). A large majority of communes are part of Local Action Groups (LAG), which are a form of partnership at territorial level that groups representatives of the public, private, and civic sectors with the aim of carrying out rural development projects. The LAGs are financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Local Development. An overwhelming majority of communes are part of Intercommunity Development Associations (ADI), other than those formed at the level of each county for integrated waste management. ADIs allow the association of TAUs for the joint provision of some public services or the joint realization of some development projects. Metropolitan areas are another associative form with an important potential that is more recent. It functions as an inter-communal development association that group a varying number of communes around a

larger municipality. Almost a third of the communes in our survey sample are part of metropolitan areas.

**Figure 36. Please evaluate de administrative capacity of the city hall in your commune or municipality**

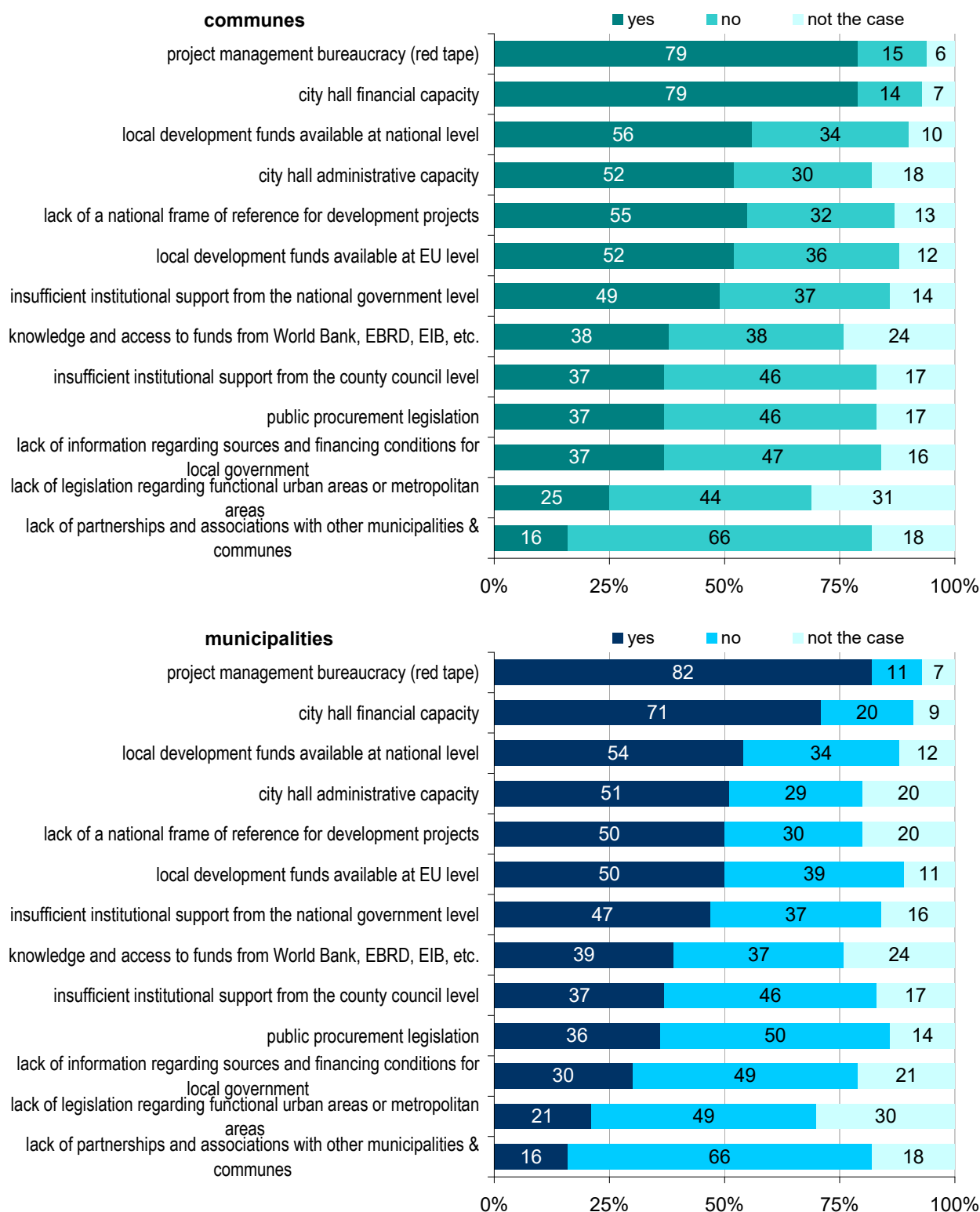


**Figure 37. Please evaluate de financial capacity of the city hall in your commune or municipality**



The evaluations of the representatives of municipalities and communes on factors or structural barriers that stand in the way of sustainable development projects are very similar in terms of the order of magnitude and their ranking. (**Figure 38**).

**Figure 38. Which of the following are structural barriers against sustainable development projects in your locality?**



The two main barriers are, by far, the bureaucracy associated with project management (the documentation required by the contracting authority, especially in projects with European funding) and the financial capacity of the city hall. In most cases, this refers to the share of



the administration unit's own revenues, from local taxes and fees, as opposed to the revenues from the broken down quotas from taxes collected by the central government and allocated through a balancing formula to each TAU (see the section *Institutional framework and area of responsibility of municipalities and communes concerning SDGs localisation*), as well as the size of the local budget. If for communes the two barriers are statistically equal, for municipalities the financial capacity is somewhat less perceived as a structural barrier.

The second category in the ranking of answers groups a series of structural barriers that were perceived as such by slightly more than half of the municipalities and communes. Here we find the amount of funds available from the central government for development projects (*Anghel Saligny* type programs), the administrative capacity of the city hall, the lack of a national reference framework for development projects, and the amount of EU funds available for development projects.

Other less important structural barriers include support from the national government, viewed as insufficient by almost half of the representatives of the municipalities and communes, the knowledge and access to the funds available through IBRD, EIB, EBRD, the legislation on public procurement, the lack of information on funding sources and conditions, and support for from county level local government (**Figure 38**).

## 6 1. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic reached Romania in January 2020. In March, a state of emergency was declared, which lasted for 60 days. By the magnitude of the loss of human lives<sup>57</sup>, the decrease in economic activity, the erosion of solidarity and social trust<sup>58</sup>, the pandemic left deep and lasting effects in Romanian society.

Although the national government managed the public health crisis, including measures to prevent the spread of the new coronavirus and mitigate its effects, measures to support the economy, social protection and the standard of living support for households, as well as the COVID-19 vaccination campaign, the impact of the pandemic on public services and the need for measures at the local level were also felt at the level of municipalities and communes.

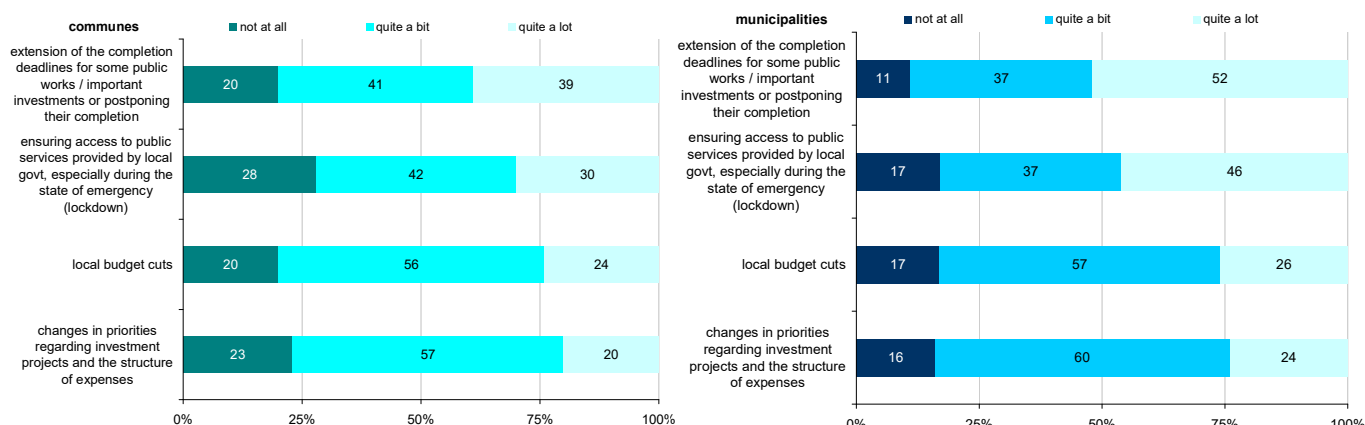
According to their representatives of municipalities and communes, the main negative effect of the pandemic at the level of local government was the extension of execution deadlines for some public works or the postponement of their execution. It is notable that a little more than half (52%) of municipalities were quite a lot affected by this problem, an appreciably higher share than that of the communes which were quite a lot affected (39%). Most likely, the difference comes from the higher degree of complexity of the public works managed by the

<sup>57</sup> World Health Organisation, "Romania: WHO Coronavirus Disease," (2023), <https://covid19.who.int/region/euro/country/ro>. According to data reported by national authorities to the WHO, Romania registered over 68,000 deaths and over 3.38 million confirmed COVID-19 cases.

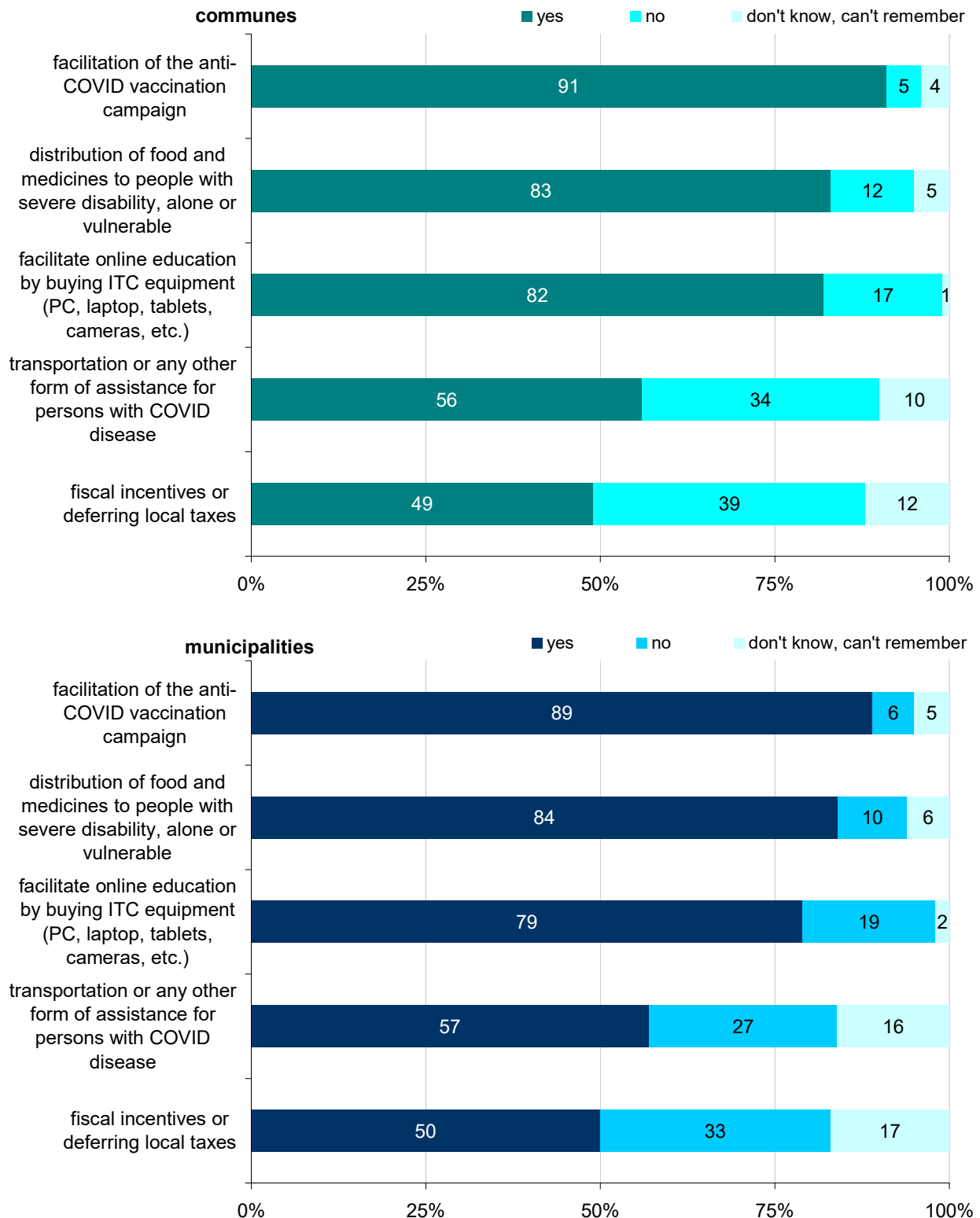
<sup>58</sup> Iulian Stănescu and Mihai Dumitru, *Pandemia Covid-19 și vaccinarea: reprezentări sociale [COVID-19 pandemic and vaccination: social representations]*, (Bucharest: RIQL, 2021), <http://bibliotecadesociologie.ro/download/stanescu-iulian-dumitru-mihai-2021-pandemia-covid-19-si-vaccinarea-reprezentari-sociale-bucuresti-iccv>

municipalities. Ensuring the population's access to public services, especially during the state of emergency, was the second largest problem reported by the representatives of municipalities and communes. Also in this regard, there is a higher level of fairly affected municipalities (almost half, 46%) than communes (less than a third, 30%). Cuts in the local budget affected quite a lot only about a fourth of the municipalities and communes. Also, a fourth of the municipalities and a fifth of the communes were quite often faced with the need to change the priority of investments and the structure of the local budget (**Figure 39**).

**Figure 39. To what extent has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the city hall regarding the following dimensions or activities?**



The activities carried out by local governments at the level of municipalities and communes to fight against the spread of the pandemic and support the population, especially people infected with the new coronavirus or at-risk of poverty or social exclusion, included the following, in descending order (**Figure 40**): facilitating the anti-COVID-19 vaccination campaign (about 90%), distributing food and medicine to immobilized, alone or vulnerable people (over four fifths), facilitating online education by purchasing IT equipment for local educational units (about four fifth), providing transport or any other form of assistance for infected people (over half) and offering fiscal facilities or deferrals regarding the payment of local taxes (about half).

**Figure 40. During the COVID-19 pandemic, did the city hall carry out or not the following measures and activities?**

## 7. Conclusions and recommendations

The Voluntary Subnational Review (VSR), 2023 edition, was conceived as a working tool and basis for future actions to increase knowledge and ownership the UN 2030 Agenda by local authorities in Romania, municipalities and communes, as well as for better localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the public policy development process.

VSR 2023 is the first review of its type in Romania, a result of the joint effort of AMR and ACoR, which have a solid commitment to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Romania, and is also intended to support the work of the Department of Sustainable Development (DSD) of the Government of Romania for the Voluntary National Review (RNV), 2023 edition.

### **The need to increase the level of information and knowledge regarding the SDGs**

The degree of localisation of the SDGs at the level of municipalities and communes in Romania is also observable in the level of information, knowledge and awareness of their importance in responding to the needs of local communities. The collected data shows that the degree of knowledge and awareness of the Agenda 2030 SDGs and of the national (NSDSR 2030) or European strategies regarding sustainable development is relatively low (only more than half of all respondents). For example, three-fifths of municipal mayors and four-fifths of commune mayors did not promote or participate in concrete activities, initiatives, events or networks to increase the SDGs level of knowledge and awareness. Despite the progress made, there needs to be a better level of information and knowledge regarding the 2030 Agenda at municipalities and communes' level in Romania. The report identifies the need for a paradigm shift in the approach of local authorities for an efficient and sustainable response to the current multiple challenges and to accelerate the green transition, reducing the carbon footprint, preventing the loss of biodiversity, reducing inequalities in terms of opportunities, improving and protecting nature and the environment, providing affordable and adequate housing, adapting the workforce to the challenges generated by the green transition.

Most likely, this fact also results from the crowding out effect of local and regional development programs financed by national and European funds. In other words, the level of information and knowledge regarding government and European programs at the level of municipalities and communes is so vital for the strategic framework of local policies that the SDG level of knowledge and ownership is too low. Therefore, knowledge and ownership of the SDGs in local government in Romania, including regarding means of implementation, must be considerably increased through concrete measures. Joint actions of AMR, ACoR and DSD are needed to popularise the NSDSR and the importance of the UN 2030 Agenda SDGs through several events, debates and popularisation of good practices, to strengthen the capacity of multi-level governance for greater coherence and cohesion between sustainable development policies. Another way to achieve this objective consists in the participation of staff from the local government in the professionalization program in sustainable development carried out by the DSD so that the SDGs are better integrated into the SDL/SIDU and the planning and development capacity of public policies of TAU with an emphasis on the sustainable development of local communities to be strengthened.

### **Towards a better localisation and ownership of the SDGs in public policy instruments**

According to the collected data, there is a wide variety regarding the level of integration of the SDGs in the strategic planning documents at the local level (SDL or SIDU). A significant part of the communes and municipalities either do not have SDL/SIDU in force or have no knowledge about SDGs integration in SDL/SIDU - almost two out of five communes and more than a quarter of the municipalities fit in this category; another 10% openly admit that SDGs are not featured in SDL/SIDU; at the opposite end, SDGs are an integral part of SIDU/SDL for about a fifth of the municipalities and communes. The causes are most likely related to the low administrative capacity, including the human resource that the city halls can hire, as well as the dependence of the city halls with low financial power on the available funding programs. The development objectives and projects featured in local strategies (SIDU/SDL) are highly dependent on their framing according to national or European level funds. Therefore, urban or local development strategies are drafted rather based on the financing programs (national or European) guidelines and local needs than according to the Agenda 20230 SDGs framework.

Increasing the level of commitment to the SDGs - visible also through integration in the local strategies - requires micro and macro-level interventions. Those at the micro level deal with increasing administrative capacity of municipalities and communes, especially local public policies development with an emphasis on sustainable development. In this sense, one of the recommendations of this review consists in supporting local public authorities to increase the number of municipalities and communes that develop integrated urban development strategies and local development strategies aligned with the SDGs and with targets regarding climate change mitigation and adaptation. The macro level deals with increasing the participation of AMR and ACoR in the drafting and public consultation stages regarding national investment programs at the national government level or the strategic documents negotiated with the European Commission concerning the EU multiannual financial framework (partnership agreement on EU funds, operational programs financed by EU funds), as well as a higher involvement of DSD in the planning activities of the national government.

### **The prioritisation of the SDGs at the level of municipalities and communes in Romania is in line with the general level of development of the country**

One of the most important findings of this review deals with the prioritisation of various needs and SDG related projects by the representatives of municipalities and communes in Romania. The data collected regarding the most important development needs and issues of municipalities and communes revealed surprising, even counterintuitive, results. In global evaluations, SDG 6 Water and sanitation (water, sewage, wastewater treatment) ranks as the most important SDG, followed by SDG 7 Clean and affordable energy (gas and electricity networks, thermal rehabilitation, district heating, ecological vehicles). On the other hand, the highest ranked SDG target is the asphaltting of roads of local interest and streets, which is part of SDG 9. Although SDG 11 (housing and adequate living conditions, public transport, town planning and urban planning, preventing emergency situations, parks and green spaces, air quality and pollution reduction, as well as the protection of cultural heritage) deals with, by content, the core areas of responsibility of municipalities and communes, it ranks only in 4th place, at an considerable distance from the first ranked SDG. Also, SDG 12 Responsible consumption and production features a low level of prioritisation. Another surprisingly counterintuitive result relates to the similarity in the answers of municipalities and communes regarding the ranking (prioritisation) of SDGs, with the caveat that the ranking score on some

SDGs that deal with essential public services, such as water and sanitation, are lower for municipalities than for communes.

Most likely, the SDG ranking in the global evaluations of the representatives of municipalities and communes is based on the general level of development of Romania. Added to this is the lack of knowledge (know-how) regarding how innovation, the circular economy and green public procurement can be concretely integrated into the development strategies of local communities. In other words, basic needs such as access to running water, sewage, roads and paved streets are still not covered satisfactorily for most citizens. Only after these needs will be met, needs corresponding to a higher level, such as those related to SDG 11, will occupy a central position. In other words, as Romania makes progress regarding sustainable development, the needs and objectives covered by SDG 11 will gain priority for citizens and decision-makers at local level. At the same time, we expect an increase in the importance of SDGs 11, 12, and 13 for municipalities and communes in Romania due to the pressure of the climate crisis and as financing programmes strongly linked to the green transition become more widely available.

### **Progress and good practices unevenly distributed among the SDGs**

Progress in implementing the SDGs at the local level is difficult to quantify in most cases due to the lack of aggregated data at the level of municipalities and communes. The best data regarding the achievement of the targets associated with the SDGs at local level in Romania are featured in the 2023 VNR. This review provides qualitative and quantitative data regarding the involvement of municipalities and communes in development projects at local interest related to the UN 2030 Agenda SDGs, regardless of the knowledge level about it. Good practices have been identified for all SDGs. Still, we notice a higher level of involvement and a much broader selection base for projects related to water, sewerage and natural gas networks, asphaltting or modernisation of local roads and streets, construction or modernisation of schools, kindergartens and nurseries, improvements and repairs to educational buildings, public lighting modernisation, monitoring of the amount of waste and the degree of selective waste collection, as well as social care. These areas are where the local government area of responsibility in Romania and the available national and European funding overlap. In general, the good practices in this review showcase the common approach regarding development projects at the level of municipalities and communes. Secondly come the good practices dealing with the more recent trend towards green transition related projects (energy-efficient buildings, electric means of transport, selective collection of waste). Of particular interest is the municipalities and communes openness and dynamism about digitalising public services. The recommendation of this review on these issues is to strengthen the capacity of local authorities to collect data aggregated at municipality and commune level as to contribute to the localisation of national statistics and indicators and to support the elaboration of data-driven national and local development strategies. Implementation of this measure will also lead to better benchmark sustainable development goals and targets.

### **Territorial development inequalities in Romania remain relatively constant, despite progress at the level of municipalities and communes**

Many of the development problems faced by municipalities and communes have structural causes. Despite economic growth and massive financial allocations via national funds for local development and EU funds for regional and rural development, we notice that territorial



economic and social inequalities, including territorial inequalities, have reduced very little in the last decade and a half. Also, there is a strong correlation between GDP/capita and the index of sustainable development at the county level. As such, achieving a synergy between local sustainable development policies and reducing territorial inequalities remains a challenge or an open problem in Romania. In this sense, one of the recommendations of this study consists in strengthening the role of local authorities in the implementation of social policies to identify better and target the disadvantaged population at risk of marginalisation.

**Main barriers: bureaucracy and financial capacity of the city hall**

The two main barriers are, by far, project management bureaucracy (the documentation required by the contracting authority, especially in EU funded projects) and the financial capacity of the city hall. The amount of funds available at the national or European level for local development projects was less mentioned by the representatives of the municipalities and communes. The association between municipalities (inter-municipality) is an important support tool for local development projects. It is also necessary to improve the financing of local authorities to strengthen their capacity to promote sustainable local development and accelerate the reduction of territorial inequalities.

## **7 1. Recommendations**

1. Supporting local public authorities to increase the number of municipalities and communes that develop integrated urban development and local development strategies aligned with the SDGs and climate change mitigation and adaptation targets. This can be achieved through the development of tools at AMR and ACoR level for the localisation and implementation of the SDGs to encourage and train the mayors of municipalities and communes for the strategic use of the SDGs in local development policies.
2. Joint actions of AMR, ACoR and DSD to popularise the NSDSR and the importance of the UN 2030 Agenda through several events, debates, and popularisation of good practices to strengthen the capacity of multi-level governance for greater coherence and cohesion between sustainable development policies.
3. Strengthening the administrative capacity of local public authorities regarding implementing the SDGs at the local level through the participation of management staff from municipal and commune city halls, especially those who (also) work in public policy planning and project management, in the professionalization program for sustainable development run by DSD.
4. The promotion of participatory mechanisms to encourage the involvement of citizens and civil society in elaborating local development plans and the development of local partnerships. Thus, the cooperation and dialogue between the public administration, businesses, academia and the third sector to promote sustainable development will facilitate partnerships for projects that aim to encourage and localise the SDGs as well as the exchange of specific interdisciplinary knowledge to integrate plans and measures into local strategies for stimulating the circular economy, sustainable waste

management, increasing energy efficiency and the degree of use of green public transport.

5. Sustainable development cannot be separated from economic, social and territorial cohesion. Romania greatly needs to reduce the territorial disparities inequalities between different regions or areas. We especially include rural areas, those impacted by the industrial transition associated with the green transition, and with high level of depopulation. We recommend strengthening the role of local authorities in implementing social policies to better identify and target the disadvantaged population categories and at risk of social exclusion and/or marginalisation. Also, this review recommends achieving better synergy in Romania between sustainable development policies and reducing economic and social territorial inequalities as a policy objective.
6. Improving the financing of local authorities to strengthen their capacity to promote sustainable local development and to accelerate the reduction of territorial inequalities.
7. Strengthening the institutional capacity to collect and produce statistical data disaggregated at municipal and commune level to contribute to the localisation of national indicators regarding sustainable development and to support the elaboration of national and local development policies and data-driven strategies.
8. Strengthening the involvement of associative structures of municipalities and communes in Romania, AMR and AcoR, in monitoring and coordinating the implementation of SDGs at local level is essential.

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