INTEGRATED ACTION PLAN

Towards ending homelessness in Timisoara

ROOF PROJECT

There is no change where there is no action

PRESENTATION OF CONTEXT AND PROCESS

City context and definition of the initial problem/ policy challenge

Timisoara is the largest city in the west part of Romania (and 3rd largest in Romania), one of Romania's main industrial, commercial, financial and academic centres. It is part of a less developed region and counts 319,000 inhabitants (according to 2011 National Census) and a continuously growing population.

Timisoara is a multicultural city; it was part of the Hungarian, Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian Empires and was inhabited by a mix of Romanians, Hungarians, Germans, Serbs and other ethnics. Timisoara is known for being the first Romanian city to revolt against the communist regime and the main square was the stage for the beginning of the Anti-communist Revolution. The exit from communism and the transformation of the city is still present.

The city was heavily industrialized during the Communist times. It continues to be an industrialized city, old industries being replaced by new ones in the automotive sector and by IT industries. Timisoara is among the first five economically developed cities from the country, with very low unemployment rate and low poverty rates. In the last years the economic growth brought also a rise in the cost of living and housing cost are a heavy weight on most people, mostly the ones on social benefits.

Timisoara likes to innovate and be the first in doing things: in 1869 Timisoara introduced public transport with horse-drawn trams, Timisoara was the first city in Europe and second in the world, after New York, to use electricity to illuminate its streets, Timisoara was the first city in Romania free from the communist regime.

DSA Timisoara is a public local agency set up by Timisoara Municipality and fully owned by the city authority. DSA Timisoara provides social assessment and case management services, social benefits and social services for over 7,000 citizens annually. The social services are provided in 14 facilities organized as residential care, day care, home care and community services.

14 social services provided by DSA Timisoara are financed from the local budget. 22 social services provided by 8 NGOs are partially financed from the local budget.

No income or low income people can acssess some national benefits including: minimum income, family allowances and heating subsidy, all based on income level. People with disabilities are elegibile for disability benefits (the amounts varies depending on the severeness of ilness) and for minimum pensions.

There are four general hospitals, three with emergency units, one unit for mental health emergencies and 2 Centres for Mental Health. People don't need health insurance for emergency services and for some chronic infectious diseases (TBC, HIV). Pregnant woman and children also don't need insurance to access medical services. Minimum income and disability beneficiaries have state covered health insurance.

Timisoara has a Local Strategy for Development of Social Services (2017-2022). One of its objectives is to "*Ensure a fast and eficient intervention for homeless people and to develop the system's capacity for social integration and early intervention*".

In 2021 Timisoara's Local Council approved the city's Social Diagnosis - a complex analysis carried out by by DSA Timisoara regarding the current state of affairs in the local social field.

Among the recommendations concerning homeless people are: finding ways to increase the social housing stock, prioritizing people with multiple vulnerabilities for social housing, developing social services for people with complex social problems (disabled, institutionalized), promoting Housing First approach as a way to end homelessness in Timisoara, developing residential care for dependent people, easing the bureaucracy and nondiscrimination for housing access.

HOUSING

High costs of living in Timisoara makes it very dificult for one person receiving minimum wage, disabilities benefits, social benefits, minimum pension or working half time to support himself/herself. This challenge is directly related to the fact that there are not enough social houses for people that cannot afford to rent a house on the free market.

minimum wage

305 €

minimum/ social pension

165 €

200 €

rent for one studio apartment

disability benefits

75 €

disability benefits (severe illness)

100 €

Timisoara municipality administrates a number of 1519 public houses (including social houses, public houses and public houses for young) with an estimated annual budget of 3.3 million €. The Social Houses Ofice is responsible for managing the social houses stock. Most if it is in bad shape and is absolutely non-suficient for the amount of requests. Also, there is no control over quality, with small apartments being occupied by many people. The criteria for recieving a social house don't include a history of holemessness.

99% private housing stok

1% social housing stok

Being a developed city, Timisoara attracts mostly internal but also external migration. Many people come to Timisoara in search for a job, but not all of them mange to earn enough money to cover their rent, utilities and food expenses and end up living with friends, extend family or, in the worst case, on the streets.
Also people with multiple vulnerabilities (disabilities, mental health issues, addictions, former institutionalised, living in poverty) don't have access to houses and many of them end up living on the streets or in shelters.

National housing programs in place: "First House" - Governmental Programme for young people (25-35) to help them buy houses with a lesser interest and advance. National Agency for Housing builds houses for young and rents them at smaller prices than on the private renting market. There is no criteria regarding income, being homeless, being social excluded to access the existing programs. The programs are mainly targeted for people with a median or higher income.
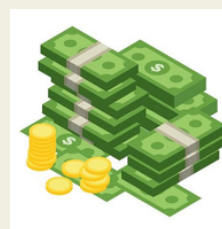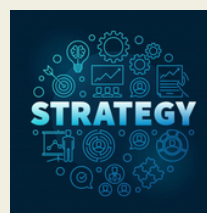
Local housing policies: disabled people do not have to pay the rent in public housing.

Main challenges related to housing:

No approved National or Local Strategy for Housing.

Not enough public/social housing units.

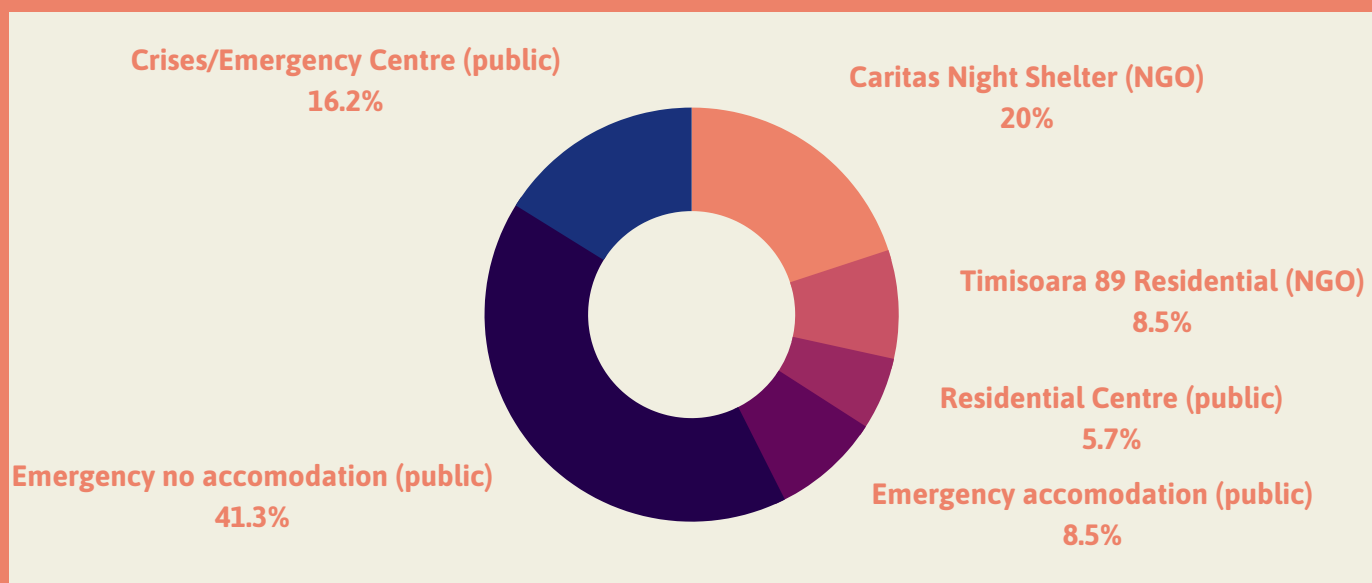**No rent subsidy for vulnerable people (national or local level).**

HOMELESSNESS

The Romanian Social Assistance Law uses the following definition of the homeless person.

- People who live on the streets
- People who temporary live with friend or acquaintances
- People who don't have the possibility to rent a house or are at risk of eviction
- People who live in institutions or penitentiaries and are going to leave them in two months period and don't have a domicile or residence

In 2018 DSA estimated a number of 1500 homeless people living in Timisoara: around 350 were using services provided by local NGOs and over 1000 were using services provided by the Department of Social Assistance. There are no clear data on people living in temporary/non-conventional structures or living tolerated by friends or family.

DSA Timisoara provides an emergency winter shelter also for non-residents (maximum 3 months accommodation and services), one residential centre (maximum 2 years accommodation), emergency intervention unit and a triage unit. It also provides 100 portions of daily meal for homeless. Two local NGOs are providing one night shelter and one residential centre, social services financed from the local budget and monitored by DSA Timisoara.

Crises/Emergency Centre (public)
16.2%

Caritas Night Shelter (NGO)
20%

Timisoara 89 Residential (NGO)
8.5%

Residential Centre (public)
5.7%

Emergency accomodation (public)
8.5%

Emergency no accomodation (public)
41.3%

Number of homeless people receiving social services (services providers' statistics)

Timisoara signed the Pledge to the European Pillar of Social Rights with a commitment to principle 19: Housing and assistance for homeless. The Pledge states that Timisoara aims to further develop services for homeless with emphasis on emergency intervention and increasing accommodation capacity by placing mobile houses resulting in an increase of 25% of homeless people receiving accommodation.

There is no national or local strategy regarding homelessness.

Specific objectives of the social services local strategy include: to decrease the number of homeless people by gradually shifting from emergency services to long term integration programs; to decrease the number of people living in the streets by programs aimed at preventing house loss (especially for extremely vulnerable groups like elderly, disabled, substance abusers and people with low income or no income); to promote interventions centred around housing issues when working with people released from prison, young adults leaving the child protection system, people leaving hospitals, domestic violence victims and drug addicts.

As for data, there is a general lack of data accuracy, no common method among organisations and often no sharing of data between organisations. Also, many beneficiaries avoid giving data or hide some of it (like income).

- homeless people living on the streets: available data about people that are referred by the Local Police or Medical Services to receive basic help (shower, clothes, food) from public local social services
- people in emergency situation and in accommodation for the homeless: data is collected by the DSA Timisoara (public local social services provider) and by local NGOs providing shelters for the homeless
- There is no access to registration of people recovered in institutions, but some of them might be willing to provide the data based on a partnership agreement
- no data is available on people living in unconventional dwellings, or with friends and family

Currently the general approach to homelessness is mainly emergency and staircase model. The main services (public and private) are offering shelter for most of the homeless people from Timisoara together with tailor-made assistance provided by multidisciplinary teams.

Main challenges related to homelessness:

Poverty which makes it impossible to rent a house, especially if working on minimum wage, ill, disabled (multiple vulnerabilities).

Lack of knowledge on Housing First and strog staircase approach.

No approved National or Local Homeless Strategy/Local Plan and no national programmes to finance housing options.
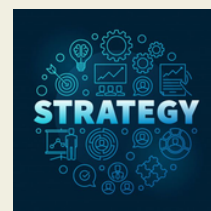
Lack of data regarding homeless people that don't access social services and lack of qualitative data regarding homeless.

URBACT LOCAL GROUP

ROOF project is a great opportunity to unite forces and bring public and private organizations together to end homelessness in Timișoara.

ORGANISATION	TYPE OF ACTIVITY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL ASSISTANCE	municipality welfare and social services
HOUSING DEPARTMENT	municipality public and social housing
TIMIȘOARA '89 FOUNDATION	social services (NGO)
SPERANTA FOUNDATION	social services (NGO)
CARITAS FEDERATION	social services (NGO)
PENTRU VOI FOUNDATION	social services (NGO)
LOCAL EMPLOYMENT AGENCY	gouvernamental agency
WEST UNIVERSITY OF TIMIȘOARA	education
TIMIȘOARA ARCHIEPISCOPACY/PHILATROPHY FOUNDATION	charity and social services
MUNICIPALITY AND COUNTY EMERGENCY HOSPITAL	health
MUNICIPALITY AND COUNTY POLICE	public order
TIMIȘOARA PENITENTIARY	correctional facility

The ULG's aim was to develop a strong partnership between local authorities (two municipality departments), public agencies (local employment agency, public order agencies), health sector (two hospitals), NGOs and charities, university. All the stakeholders are involved in delivering services, or in working on increased knowledge and policies for homeless. The ULG members are interested in solutions for reducing/ending homelessness in our city.

The main objective of the ULG was to bring around the table the different interests at stakes and different perspectives to frame problems related to homeless and housing, agree policy priorities, design concrete solutions so as to address these problems in the most efficient way.

The ULG members meet regularly. The meetings are convened by the ULG coordinator from the Department of Social Assistance. If there are significant changes in the national or local situation or news that need to be shared, ULG coordinator or ULG members can ask for ad hoc meetings. One positive change brought by the COVID-19 situation was the opportunity for the ULG members to participate at the transnational meetings.

ULG is involved in establishing local objectives, deciding on Small Scale Actions and participating at their implementation, in co-producing IAP based on the knowledge, experience, lessons drawn from participating in transnational meetings, workshops and seminars at local and network level.

ACTION PLAN

Objectives, actions and schedule

Objective I
To reduce, by 70%, the number of homeless people in Timisoara, by 2030.

ACTIVITY 1	RESULTS	RESPONSIBLE RESOURCES	TIME
Promoting Housing First approach as the most efficient method to deal with homeless people with complex social needs	All homeless people with complex social needs (long time homelessness, mental health issues/disability, substance abusers, history of institualisation) will have access to HF	Municipality of Timisoara Department of Social Assistance Timisoara **Resources: national and local budget, EU funds**	2030

Risks	Risk mitigation
Resistance to change from local stakeholders (homeless social services providers public and private, local politicians, public servants)	Increase knowledge on Housing First approach (present other countries experiences, present the scientifically proven benefits and the approaches' economic viability, trainings)
Lack of financial resources to implement HF approach	Advocacy for HF to be financed at national and local level. Housing First projects financed by EU funds.

European Union
European Regional Development Fund

URBACT
Driving change for better cities

ROOF
Ending homelessness

Objective I

To reduce, by 70%, the number of homeless people in Timisoara, by 2030.

ACTIVITY 2	RESULTS	RESPONSIBLE RESOURCES	TIME
Collaboration with the Municipality's Housing Department aiming to increase the homeless access to social housing stock, including introduction of new criteria (eg. homelessness) to be prioritized for social housing, implementing projects together	Homelessness will be introduced among the criteria for receiving social house 1 project implemented together with the Housing Department	Municipality of Timisoara Department of Social Assistance Timisoara Housing Department **Resources: national and local budget, EU funds**	2025

Risks	Risk mitigation
Difficulties in communication and collaboration with the Housing Department	Identifying persons interested in the topic. Collaboration on clear tasks/on specific projects.
National Housing Law (which has some unrealistic criteria for prioritizing social housing requests)	Advocacy for National Housing Law modification (a law from 1996) which needs to be updated according to present housing challenges

Objective I
To reduce, by 70%, the number of homeless people in Timisoara, by 2030.

ACTIVITY 3	RESULTS	RESPONSIBLE RESOURCES	TIME
Exploration and implementation of innovative housing projects for vulnerable population with private funding or EU funded projects.	2 projects, with private funding, implemented by NGOs/charities and providing housing for people with complex social needs (former institutionalised, disabled, homeless)	Speranta Foundation - community living service "Un Loc" Timisoara Archiepiscopacy **Resources: private funds, EU funds**	2025

Risks	Risk mitigation
The project/s will not be viable/sustainable economically speaking	Promotors will identify additional funds from the community/EU funds

Objective I
To reduce, by 70%, the number of homeless people in Timisoara, by 2030.

ACTIVITY 4	RESULTS	RESPONSIBLE RESOURCES	TIME
Support for no/low income citizens that don't have access to housing with rent subsidies from the local budget	150/year low income citizens will receive rent subsidies for renting a house on the private market	Municipality of Timisoara Department of Social Assistance Timisoara **Resources: local budget**	2025

Risks	Risk mitigation
The political representatives will not agree with the rent subsidies for low income citizens	Explaining the economic benefits (on health, social, correctional, public order systems) of preventing homelessness. Finding allies among political representatives. Presenting the idea as a joint public-private initiative.
Not enough money in the local budget for the subsidies request	Advocacy for rent subsidies from the national budget and/or a National Programme to support low income citizens for housing access.

Objective II

To improve the local homelessness policies through a better understanding of the homelessness phenomenon in Timisoara.

ACTIVITY 1	RESULTS	RESPONSIBLE RESOURCES	TIME
Collecting quantitative and qualitative data on different categories of homeless by using a methodology commonly agreed by different stakeholders (social, medical, correctional, public order)	1 methodology for data collection on homeless 1 partnership between multiple stakeholders for data collection on homeless 1 annual report on homeless data	Department of Social Assistance Timisoara Hospitals Public and private social services providers Public order institutions and correctional facilities **Resources: local budget**	2025

Risks	Risk mitigation
Data protection laws	The methodology will take into consideration data protection
Not all stakeholders will be interested in joining the partnership	Presenting the strong points of having accurate data both for local homelessness policy and future collaborations and projects.

Objective II
To improve the local homelessness policies through a better understanding of the homelessness phenomenon in Timisoara.

ACTIVITY 2	RESULTS	RESPONSIBLE RESOURCES	TIME
Organizing annual street counts to have a better picture on homeless living on the streets.	1 street count/year 1 partnership with the University 1 annual report on street count results	Department of Social Assistance Timisoara West University of Timisoara **Resources: local budget**	2025

Risks	Risk mitigation
Data protection laws	The street count methodology will take into consideration data protection
Mistrust and homeless being reticent on offering information	Good training for participants at the street counting

Objective III
To raise awareness on housing and homelessness issues through advocacy.

ACTIVITY 1	RESULTS	RESPONSIBLE RESOURCES	TIME
Advocacy actions to change the Housing Law and to prioritize the most vulnerable citizens for receiving social houses	1 advocacy campaign/year 1 changed law	Department of Social Assistance Timisoara West University of Timisoara NGOs Citizens **Resources: local budget**	2025

Risks	Risk mitigation
Lack of time and lack of skilled people involved in advocacy actions	Finding advocacy and rights groups with expertise in advocacy to associate with

Objective III
To raise awareness on housing and homelessness issues through advocacy.

ACTIVITY 2	RESULTS	RESPONSIBLE RESOURCES	TIME
Advocacy actions for a National Housing Strategy, National Homelessness Strategy and National Action Plans and financing programmes	1 advocacy campaign/year 1 National Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan 1 National Housing Strategy and Action Plan	Department of Social Assistance Timisoara West University of Timisoara NGOs Citizens **Resources: local budget**	2025

Risks	Risk mitigation
Lack of time and lack of skilled people involved in advocacy actions	Finding advocacy and rights groups with expertise in advocacy to associate with

Objective III
To raise awareness on housing and homelessness issues through advocacy.

ACTIVITY 3	RESULTS	RESPONSIBLE RESOURCES	TIME
Advocacy actions at local level to raise awareness on housing and homelessness issues	2 advocacy campaigns/year 1 website	Department of Social Assistance Timisoara West University of Timisoara NGOs Citizens **Resources: local budget**	2025

Risks	Risk mitigation
Lack of time and lack of skilled people involved in advocacy actions	Finding advocacy and rights groups with expertise in advocacy to associate with

ACTION PLAN

Small Scale Actions (SSA)

Timisoara decided to join the ROOF network because, like in many other European cities, homelessness is more and more present and we wanted to learn new ways towards ending it. The network saw the Housing First approach as the most effective way of ending homelessness especially when working with people with complex social needs. During the transnational meetings we could see good examples of how this approach is used in more than half of the cities from the ROOF network to successfully improve the life of vulnerable people and take them out of homelessness.

Romania and Timisoara were not familiar with the Housing First approach and most of the URBACT Local Group members never heard of it relying on staircase model to work with homeless.

Considering all these we decided that we need to use the Small-Scale Actions to gain more knowledge on Housing First approach and to learn to communicate better inside and outside our organizations.

Based on our renewed knowledge we will proceed on drawing an accurate and achievable Integrated Action Plan, advocacy for the Housing First approach at national and local level, adapt the Housing Frist approach to our city context and have in the next few years more and more interventions targeting homeless based on this approach.

Our main actions were:
- organizing a communication training with 30 participants (employees of the ULG organizations) to improve our communication skills both internally (with work colleagues, internal teams) and externally (with other organizations, members of the public). Some of the participants will become advocates for Housing First and we need them to be pest prepared to communicate relevant messages inside the professional community and for the general public;
- translation of the Housing First Guide Europe in Romanian (with approval from Housing First Europe Hub), printing of 50 copies of the Guide, distribution of electronic and printed copies to all ULG members and to other interested parties

- organizing training sessions with the help of the Housing First Europe Hub. The Hub provided two days training sessions where ULG members got an introduction to Housing First, learned more about the daily practice of Housing First, got instructions on how to develop an action plan to start Housing First in a city or a region and how to creatively search for housing solutions in order to start a Housing First project. 21 professionals, members of ULG, working with homeless or at risk of homelessness people enthusiastically joined the training and gave very positive feedback. When asked what they learned, the answers were: 'what does Housing First mean', 'a new model of social services for homeless people', 'how can we raise funds for implementing HF', 'there is hope for former institutionalized homeless people to be able to live more independently', 'Housing First is an approach that provides permanent, affordable housing as soon as possible for people and families facing homelessness, and then provides the support services and connections to community support that people need', 'what are the challenges of this concept', 'housing is a fundamental human right and therefore should not be denied to anyone, even if they are abusing alcohol or other substances', 'models of HF implementation in other cities', 'how can we find resources for the implementation of Housing First in Timisoara', 'individualized and customer-oriented support'. About 80% declared that they are interested in starting a Housing First project in their community.
- web page on Housing First to advocate for the approach and to make available for the local, regional and national stakeholders all the knowledge we accumulated during the ROOF project

ACTION PLAN

Framework for delivery

The main objective of Timisoara's Integrated Action Plan is to reduce the number of homeless by 70% until 2030. It is an ambitious objective considering the local context, the fact that we are merely starting to gain knowledge on Housing First approach, the lack of strategies and financing regarding homelessness and housing on national level, the challenges faced by vulnerable population in relation to housing on local, national and European level. In the same time, by participating in the ROOF network we could see the effectiveness of Housing First approach, we had the opportunity to learn more about it due to Small Scale Actions, and most important we had could see that almost all the cities started from a very close point to where we are now and succeeded with determination, advocacy and audacity.

To design successful local policies, strategies, action plans, projects and to measure success we need accurate and complex data on homelessness. That is way another important objective for our Integrated Action Plan is to draw a common methodology regarding data and to implemented this methodology through a partnership between interested organization at local level and also to start to implement annual street counts, all these by 2025.

Given the specific national and local context we need strong advocacy actions to achieve our goals. The ROOF network is doing a very good job on advocacy at European level, but all these actions need to have an national and local impact. We need strong support from local and national political representatives, civil society and professional communities to move things towards ending homelessness. A strong advocacy system need to be put in place and functioning by 2025.

The Municipality and Social Assistance Department will have a central role in implementing the Integrated Action Plan. The contribution and skills of the other stakeholders (member of the ULG) will be equally important and they will be responsible or partners in implementing most of the actions. Attracting new and skilled partners locally, nationally and internationally will be very important especially when talking about advocacy.