

The Romanian delegation to the UNECE Ministerial Meeting on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management

6th October

16:00-18:00 - *Speeches by Ministers and heads of delegation*

Speech by Mr. Marin ȚOLE, state secretary, Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration, Romania

Distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank UNECE for organizing this timely event that addresses the issue of affordable, adequate and resilient housing. It is my great pleasure to speak in front of all the experts gathered here today to discuss the importance of reaching better housing policies in the UNECE region.

Sustainable housing is increasingly recognized as a key policy area by national governments. Delivering quality housing while addressing environmental and economic efficiency goals requires evidence-based analyses to support policy design and implementation. To that end, the study #Housing2030 builds up strong arguments on the long-term connection between building affordable housing and creating livable cities.

Today's meeting represents a major opportunity for national governments to join efforts in addressing critical housing issues, among which I would like to mention:

- housing costs that represent a heavy burden on household budgets,
- housing shortage in the most sought-after urban areas,
- poor-quality housing in declining rural areas and in less well-off urban neighborhoods, and
- housing insecurity in informal settlements.

These items make housing a complex policy area that requires an interdisciplinary approach and cross-sectoral cooperation to meet the challenge of delivering sustainable housing.

Romania features persistent housing demand-supply imbalance, with overcrowding in the major urban centers that face soaring housing costs and accelerated urban sprawl, whereas medium and smaller towns are losing population and have to cope with derelict and empty houses.

Overall, the housing sector in Romania registers striking inequalities and deprivation. All urban agglomerations hide poverty pockets, spatially segregated communities affected by housing deprivation, low employment and educational attainment. Housing unaffordability is strongly linked to poor households living in the worst conditions and spending a higher share of their income on housing expenses.

Romania is the EU country with the highest rate of housing deprivation. Poor and marginalized groups, in both urban and rural areas, face serious challenges in the housing sector, including low quality housing, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of tenure security, particularly in the case of informal settlements.

However, not all those having difficulties accessing an adequate home are spatially concentrated, which raises the point that housing policies need to be both spatially targeted but also to address the specific needs of different categories of vulnerable households.

It is in this context that urban policies need to better integrate land use and planning decisions with the needs of functional urban areas. The central policy objective of this governance approach is meant to counterbalance the traditional piecemeal locality-by-locality development that paved the way for urban sprawl pressures that have been unfolding at the city outskirts.

National and subnational governments have an essential role in prospecting and tackling the housing needs. They can respond by making sure that adequate land for residential use is available for market-generated supply of housing. Authorities can also intervene in housing supply, developing on their own, or supporting low-cost/limited profit developer schemes so as to make sure that housing is affordable also to income groups that cannot afford to rent or purchase from the free market.

In addition, authorities could intervene by stepping-up the renovation of existing housing stock and leading urban regeneration programs to increase the livability of inner city neighborhoods. However, all such measures require first and foremost sound territorial evidence, as well as adequate regulatory and institutional frameworks.

Looking ahead, this session of UNECE Ministerial Meeting on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management can make a valuable contribution to advancing the work on designing and delivering better housing policies with the purpose of upholding more sustainable and inclusive growth.

The study #Housing2030 is a major stepping stone in providing actionable policy advice to ensure access to affordable and healthy housing for all, while reducing the impact of the sector on the environment. In light of this, we are committed to working with UNECE, Housing Europe and UN-Habitat in stepping-up efforts towards more sustainable and inclusive housing policies based on multiple lines of evidence.

Thank you.