BOOK REVIEW

STĂNCULESCU, M. (ED.), MARIN, M., BULIGESCU, B., BLAJ (NECULAU), G. (2017). SERVICIILE SOCIALE ÎN ROMÂNIA - STARE DE FAPT ŞI PROVOCĂRI: SERVICIILE DE LOCUIRE SOCIALĂ, BUCUREŞTI: EDITURA PRO UNIVERSITARIA

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The book *Serviciile sociale in Romania – stare de fapt si provocari: Serviciile de locuire sociala (Social Services in Romania – current status and challenges: Social housing services)* deals with an important social problem that is directly related to the current debate on monitoring the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Charter of Fundamental Rights (right to housing assistance, art. 34.3). The European programming documents state that "*access to social housing or housing assistance of good quality shall be provided for those in need*" (European Pillar of Social Rights. Right to housing and assistance for the homeless, principle 19). One of the latest study on social housing, "The Third Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe"[2] (2018) confirms "*the existence of another Europe: a Europe not merely ignored but also misunderstood, not just despised but also forgotten - a Europe of the homeless*", with children in the frontline of homelessness in Europe. In this respect, the study contributes to an in-depth monitoring on the right to social housing in Romania. Yet, the book does not exclusively focus on the national status/ situation, but provides a framework for a comparative perspective with other EU Member States. The European context is described by analyzing the social housing policies in Europe, social housing policies/

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[2] Available here: https://www.feantsa.org/en/report/2018/03/21/the-second-overview-of-housing-exclusion-in-europe-2017

schemes, beneficiaries of social housing as well as schemes for allocating social housing in Europe and Romania.

The book is organized in four chapters. The first chapter introduces the topic by discussing the right to adequate housing as a fundamental human right. The second section presents the social housing policies in a comparative perspective in Europe and Romania. The third chapter is about the local government perspective on social housing policies, with a focus on available strategies and funds. The fourth section presents several concluding remarks.

One of the most interesting sections in the book is the empirical work on the criteria and associated scoring for allocating social housing in seven large cities in Romania. Romania is part of the countries with a residual/ targeted approach concerning social housing, although, by law, the income is not an eliminatory threshold for accessing a social housing. The income threshold is so high, that eligibility to social housing is not in fact conditioned by the income level, conclude the authors. The empirical study conducted in seven large cities in Romania also show that the income criterion is significantly differentiated from one locality to another. Therefore, different local councils operationalize in significant different ways the criterion on income.

Furthermore, the authors make use of a secondary analysis of data on the *Status of Social Housing Survey*, conducted in all urban localities (2014) with the support of the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration and the World Bank. The survey shows that the needs for social housing identified by local authorities are not matched by the corresponding strategic and budgetary planning at local level. In addition, in the few cases in which it exists, the strategic planning process is disconnected from the budgetary planning process. Size of locality and development/ poverty level significantly differentiate local housing policies in various urban municipalities, in the sense that the situation is considerably better in large municipalities (over 50 thousands inhabitants) with a high fiscal capacity. The local authorities included in the survey identify financial issues as the main problems in the maintenance of social houses stock. The financial problems either relate to considerable debts of the tenants, or to insufficient funds at the local budget. Only 5% of the surveyed urban municipalities state they have no problem in maintaining the existing stock.

One of the most important concluding remark of this report relates to the policy integration and coordination mechanisms at national level: in Romania, the social housing policies are neither integrated, nor coherent/ coordinated with other social policies, especially with the ones for poverty reduction and social inclusion promotion. This finding applies to various other important social problems in Romania. It is also related to the sectorial disaggregation between the ministries/agencies/ departments with a responsibility in this field – the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration, the Ministry of Labour and Social Justice. The situation is no better at the local level – the social housing stock is managed by structures of the municipality with no communication or coordination mechanisms with the Social Assistance Public Services (SPAS). The lack of policy coordination mechanisms has been repeatedly outlined in various reports/ studies/ strategies in Romania and yet, no efficient policy response has been put in place.

In a nutshell, the book places Romania in a European perspective, showing on the one hand, common challenges and on the other hand, potential solutions to ensure effective national social housing policies. It is a useful starting point to understand the status of social housing policies in Romania and of basic characteristics of Romanian public administration, especially in terms of policy making, coordination and implementation. Nevertheless, the book fails to integrate the voice of beneficiaries of social housing. Their perspective, most likely in the form of a qualitative study, could bring new insights to this topic and would significantly refine the policy solutions for local and central relevant decision-makers.