

**INTERSESSIONAL PANEL OF THE UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION  
ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT (CSTD)**

**Geneva, Switzerland  
17-19 November 2021**

**Contribution by Romania**

**to the CSTD 2021-2022 priority theme on “Science, technology and innovation for  
sustainable urban development in a post-COVID world”**

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## **PRIORITY THEME 2: STI for sustainable urban development in a post-COVID world**

*Input by the Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration of Romania for the paper to be presented at the Commission on Science and Technology for Development:*

On the matter of concrete challenges that Romania has encountered in the transition towards sustainable urban development, it should be mentioned that this leap from urban policy as usual is an ongoing process in our country that requires a cross-cutting approach to make cities productive, inclusive, and liveable.

The way towns and cities in Romania have developed in recent years creates significant challenges for the future. This includes the extensive process of suburbanization, poorly controlled sprawl of growing metropolitan areas, and the resultant congestion and pollution impacts, as well as rising housing costs.

Romania is one of the few countries in the European Union without a clear urban development policy. Even though the urban population has declined over the past years, the built-up area has expanded, and the urban footprint of cities and their surrounding municipalities has continually grown, often without coherent planning. This has led to major difficulties in managing infrastructure and public services across administrative boundaries, including public transport, road maintenance and upgrading, as well as other basic services. Facilities fostering innovation tend to be concentrated in and around large cities and are mostly linked to university centres. On the contrary, less dynamic towns, some of which even have rural characteristics, remained largely disconnected from productive and innovation hubs and ill-served by secondary infrastructure.

Regarding the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on sustainable urban development, Romanian cities and towns were not spared the effects of the pandemic on most areas that ranged from health services, municipal finances, exposure of the poor and vulnerable urban communities and the strain on business growth and job creation opportunities.

To meet these challenges, the Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration is currently setting up the first Urban Policy of Romania. The Urban Policy represents an essential framework for establishing the connection between the dynamics of urbanization, demographic changes and the overall process of national development. A broad array of policy objectives and associated measures were identified for the effective attainment of a) green and resilient b) competitive and productive c) just and inclusive d) well-governed cities.

Building on the logic of the resilient recovery, the Urban Policy of Romania promotes the reconsideration of policy choices that address inequalities and local capacities while emphasizing a green, inclusive recovery. In this view, Romanian cities should rebuild based on “a new approach to urban spaces that takes better account of different needs and shifts from a logic of mobility to one of accessibility to basic amenities and services”. Key concepts such as the “circular economy”, the “localization of the Sustainable Development Goals”, “tactical urbanism” and “the 15-min city” are all taken into consideration into the first Urban Policy of Romania to help achieve better quality of life by enhancing economic activity, providing quality living environments, improving job opportunities and well-served business locations.

In terms of STI, the Urban Policy upholds the following measures to meet the sustainable urban development objectives:

- national and subnational governments should support the close collaboration between high-tech industries and traditional industries to nurture innovation by setting up funding schemes which encourage these matchings;

- to create actual impact, the Urban Policy of Romania emphasises the need to understand that innovation is not connected to single events, but it is dependent on ecosystems of discovery, engineering, and transformation (upgrading traditional industries using key enabling technologies such as IT&C or biotechnology). An innovative city is dependent on its ecosystem (companies, research institutions, clusters, start-ups). As such, an innovative city should create mechanisms to stimulate entrepreneurial discoveries;
- as smart city projects and approaches are quite different, it is difficult for cities to find the best options for their needs. Smart city projects tend to be quite technical and cities do not always have the capacity to capitalize on acquired solutions. Therefore, having a central institution providing assistance to cities aiming to either become smart cities or even to implement smart city projects, would ensure a clearer approach of this concept.