

1 Introduction to the protection of civic space in Romania

This chapter provides an overview of Romania's commitment to protecting and promoting civic space. It discusses the government's strategic vision for civic space and accompanying institutional arrangements. It also examines challenges, including low democratic participation and trust, social inequalities and discrimination, pressures on the information and media landscape, and low levels of digitalisation affecting access to online civic space.

1.1. Setting the scene: Romania's strategic vision for civic space

Romania is in the process of developing a strategic vision for the protection and promotion of civic space as part of its national open government agenda. During the OECD fact-finding mission, government representatives emphasised the importance for Romania of developing a comprehensive strategy for effective engagement with citizens and civil society, including a mechanism to engage with them at the central and local levels.¹ There was broad consensus among interviewees on the need for such a strategy to develop the capacities of civil society actors, strengthen the relationship between civil society and the government and develop a genuine partnership as a means of building trust and achieving better governance in Romania.

Romania has certainly made progress through a series of reforms over the past decades, and its vision of the future is partially reflected in a variety of national strategies established by the government in recent years. In July 2022, Romania adopted its sixth and most recent Action Plan for the Open Government Partnership (OGP) for 2022-24 (hereafter the “OGP Action Plan”) (OGP, 2022^[1]), which includes detailed commitments relating to the improvement of the procedure for granting public utility status to civil society organisations (CSOs), fostering increased transparency and participation in public budgeting practices and achieving greater balance between men and women in public decision-making processes (OGP, 2020^[2]). That said, evidence shows that initiatives which aim to foster open government are still designed and implemented in a scattered and isolated manner, without building the critical mass needed to create a shared government vision.

The Constitution of Romania guarantees the civic freedoms that underpin protected civic space, notably freedoms of expression (including freedom of the press) (Article 30), peaceful assembly and association (Articles 39 and 40) as well as the right of access to information (Article 31), privacy rights (Articles 26-28) and equality and freedom from discrimination (Articles 4 and 16) (Ministry of Justice, 1991^[3]). The constitution explicitly foresees different forms of citizen participation, ranging from the sharing of information to co-operation in matters pertaining to policy and law making (Articles 102, para. 2 and 141), to situations where citizens may, under certain conditions, engage in legal drafting themselves (Article 74). These matters are regulated in further detail in legislation, notably Law 544/2001 on Free Access to Public Information, Law 52/2003 on Decisional Transparency in Public Administration (including a methodology for its implementation, adopted in June 2022), Law 367/2022 on Social Dialogue and Law 248/2013 on the Economic and Social Council, with the latter two laws regulating citizen participation processes via dedicated civic bodies established for this purpose.

In addition, Romania has introduced legislation regulating associations, stakeholder participation, peaceful assemblies, and access to information, to name a few, which further protect key aspects of civic space. The government has also developed strategies to address poverty and exclusion, aiming to better integrate minority groups such as the Roma community and persons with disabilities, in addition to combatting xenophobia and hate speech, as well as gender discrimination and domestic violence (see the section on equality and non-discrimination in Chapter 3).² Moreover, the General Secretariat of the Government (hereafter “General Secretariat”) has issued guiding documents and organised training sessions for civil servants to improve co-operation with civil society and enhance stakeholder participation in decision-making, promote open government literacy and increase trust in public institutions, primarily as part of implementing OGP action plans. Digital platforms have been established to share information with civil society and to facilitate consultations and other forms of stakeholder participation. At the local level, certain municipalities have likewise developed digital platforms and related guidance to enhance communication and collaboration with stakeholders, ensure greater transparency of the local administration and operationalise participatory governance.

The above-mentioned sixth OGP Action Plan and its predecessors may, in some ways, be seen as precursors to the ongoing process of designing the country's first fully-fledged Open Government Strategy. The plan was prepared by the National Coordinating Committee of the OGP, which is likewise responsible

for co-ordinating and monitoring its implementation. This body comprises an equal number of representatives of the public administration and civil society. As part of the previous 2020 OGP Action Plan, the General Secretariat implemented, among others, a commitment to the field of civic space, which focused on “co-ordinating the management of innovative processes to streamline participation in public administration decisions” (Government of Romania, 2020^[4]).³ This key commitment and its implementation focused on developing a co-ordination mechanism under the General Secretariat to support central public authorities in managing innovative processes needed in the public sector with the purpose of interacting with civil society in a more meaningful and efficient way. In order to implement the commitment, the General Secretariat, with the support of the OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation (OPSI), developed and published two documents in 2021, namely *Analysis of the Evaluation of Central and Local Public Administration Practices the Decision-making Process and Ensuring Access to Information of Public Interest* (General Secretariat of the Government, 2021^[5]) and a *Guide to an Innovative Approach to Citizen Involvement in Decision-making* (OGP, 2021^[6]). As a next step, Romania is currently working with OPSI to build its innovative capacity, including in relation to new forms of participation. The interim assessment report, *Strengthening the Innovative Capacity of the Government of Romania* (OECD, 2022^[7]), will be followed by the development of an action plan and establishment of an innovation lab.

In partnership with the Ministry of Justice and the Authority for the Digitalisation of Romania (ADR), the General Secretariat is in the process of implementing the *Capacity Building in the Field of Public Governance – A Coordinated Approach of the Centre of the Government of Romania* project financed by the Norwegian Financial Mechanism within the Local Development, Poverty Reduction and Increased Inclusion of Roma programme, which is in turn financed by European Economic Area (EEA) and Norwegian Grants 2014-2021. This aims to increase the capacity for centre-of-government co-ordination through a coherent and structured approach, in line with the government’s reform agenda. As part of the project, Romania is benefitting from an OECD *Open Government Review*, which intends to provide the country with an evidence-based analysis of the governance of its open government strategies and initiatives, based on the ten provisions of the OECD Recommendation of the Council on Open Government, to which Romania adhered in 2020 (OECD, 2017^[8]). The Review, to be published in 2023, will help to take stock of the last several years of implementing open government reforms, improve mechanisms to facilitate the implementation of key reforms and support Romania in developing the aforementioned national Open Government Strategy in 2022-23. This OECD *Civic Space Review* should thus be read in conjunction with the OECD *Open Government Review of Romania* (OECD, forthcoming^[9]), which provides an in-depth assessment of open government reforms in the country.

This overarching Open Government Strategy – which aims to overcome the previously limited impact of open government initiatives in Romania – will include a dedicated component on engaging civil society in public decision-making.⁴ Crucially, the civil society component (Box 1.1) will be informed by the findings in this *Civic Space Review* and will aim to “improve the government’s capacity to create the necessary conditions for a robust civil society, to coordinate and engage more effectively with civil society, and to streamline civic engagement, with a view to more socially inclusive, responsive, coordinated and predictable policy and decision-making”.⁵ Thus, Romania’s commitment to strengthening collaboration with civil society as part of its open government commitments aims to yield a transformative paradigm shift for civic participation and public governance across the country.

Box 1.1. Supporting civil society engagement in decision-making

Based on the findings and recommendations in this *Civic Space Review*, the OECD supported the General Secretariat in initiating discussions on a country-owned policy framework for engaging civil society more effectively in decision making in 2022.¹ Two workshops were held by the OECD with government (e.g. ministries, independent oversight bodies) and CSO representatives in Bucharest, Romania, on 29-30 September 2022, to begin discussions about the strategy and its implementation. The sessions focused on issues to be addressed in an overarching vision statement and potential short-, medium- and long-term objectives, in addition to identifying possible concrete actions, responsible actors, timelines and performance indicators for an implementation roadmap. Following the workshops, the OECD will continue to support the drafting process led by the General Secretariat (OECD, 2022_[10]).

1. Initially Romania intended to develop two separate strategies – one on civil society involvement in decision making and another on open government – as part of two separate projects. In late 2022 the General Secretariat made a strategic decision to effectively merge the two, to develop an Open Government Strategy with a civil society component.

Source: OECD (2022_[10]), “Workshops on preparing a strategy and implementation roadmap for civil society involvement in decision-making in Romania: Draft outcome document”, Unpublished, OECD, Paris.

1.1.1. Institutional arrangements and main actors with a mandate related to the protection of civic space

Several key institutions are responsible in law for overseeing different dimensions of civic space in Romania. The General Secretariat, a structure with legal personality that is subordinated to the Prime Minister, has a general co-ordinating role within government. It is also responsible for strategic planning and the establishment of action plans at the governmental level (Ministry of Justice, 2020_[11]). In addition, the General Secretariat “elaborates and implements policy in the fields of open government, transparency and access to information of public interest, [as well as] public consultations, and increases the operational capacity of non-governmental organisations” (Ministry of Justice, 2020_[11]). As such, it plays a key role with respect to policy making on civic space issues and is the driving force behind the *Civic Space Review* and the forthcoming Open Government Strategy discussed above. Notably, in June 2022, the centre of government in Romania was restructured with a dual structure now consisting of the General Secretariat and the Chancellery of the Prime Minister. The Chancellery is considered the “political” arm of the centre of government while the General Secretariat acts as the “technical” arm (OECD, forthcoming_[12]). Interviews with government representatives highlighted the Chancellery’s potential as an institution that could give additional weight and high-level support to Romania’s ambitions in promoting civic space, in collaboration with the General Secretariat.⁶

The Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity is also an important actor in this field, as it collaborates and maintains an ongoing dialogue with trade unions and employers’ organisations, with other professional associations, as well as the media and civil society in general in its field of activity (Ministry of Justice, 2020_[13]). The main aim of such collaboration is to share information and improve the existing legislative framework relevant to both sides. The Ministry of Justice is generally responsible, among other things, for the proper functioning of the judicial system and for “ensuring the conditions for the achievement of justice as a public service, the protection of the rule of law and the rights and freedoms of citizens” (Ministry of Justice, 2022_[14]). Given its competency to draft normative acts within its field of activity (Ministry of Justice, 2009_[15]), the Ministry of Justice, in collaboration with the General Secretariat, led a joint working group that discussed amending Government Ordinance No. 26/2000 on Associations and Foundations in 2018-20. The ministry is also a key institutional player, as it maintains a public register of CSOs, namely the National

Register of Legal Entities without Patrimonial Purpose (Associations, Foundations and Federations) (Ministry of Justice, 2000^[16]).⁷

In addition to the above government bodies, other ministries and state bodies also play key roles in the protection and promotion of civic space in their specific areas of work, particularly regarding policy making, the drafting of legislation and the execution of fundamental rights. Notably, Law 52/2003 on Decisional Transparency in Public Administration (Ministry of Justice, 2003^[17]) sets out requirements and procedures for state bodies to follow when consulting on draft laws with CSOs and the public, and when involving civil society in governmental decision-making processes. Another means to achieve more regular input and dialogue with respect to draft normative acts, in particular, is the consultation mechanism involving the Economic and Social Council (Ministry of Justice, 2015^[18]), which acts as an advisory body to the Romanian parliament and government. This council is autonomous and established explicitly to achieve a tripartite dialogue at the national level between employers' organisations, trade unions and representatives of non-governmental associations. The government and parliamentary deputies or senators are obliged to consult with the council on draft normative acts, which is composed of 45 members nationally representing employers' confederations, trade union confederations and associative structures of civil society (Ministry of Justice, 2015^[18]).

At the local level, public administration authorities are required by law to organise public consultation processes for the draft acts they initiate (Ministry of Justice, 2003^[19]). Moreover, according to the Administrative Code (Ministry of Justice, 2019^[20]) and the Law on Social Dialogue (Ministry of Justice, 2022^[21]), local public authorities may set up extra advisory councils and working groups, as needed, in certain areas of activity, whereby recommendations from citizens and stakeholders may be debated and incorporated into their work. Both central and local public administration authorities grant non-reimbursable financing to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for their activities (Ministry of Justice, 2005^[22]) but also through various other mechanisms such as the financing of social services, youth, cults or ethnic groups.

The Institution of the People's Advocate (national ombudsman) plays a vital role in safeguarding civic space. As an autonomous and independent national institution for the promotion and protection of human rights (Ministry of Justice, 1997^[23]) within the meaning of the Paris Principles relating to the Status of National Institutions adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UN, 1993^[24]), its aim is to defend the rights and freedoms of individuals in their relations with public authorities. As a body that is independent of the executive, it helps ensure accountability among public bodies by investigating cases of alleged rights abuses. The National Council for Combating Discrimination fulfils a similar role in the areas of equality and non-discrimination (Ministry of Justice, 2000^[25]).

With regard to the media, the National Audiovisual Council is an autonomous public authority under parliamentary control that functions as a guarantor of the public interest in the field of audio-visual communication (Official Gazette of Romania, 2002^[26]). The council regulates all broadcast media and serves to "monitor the editorial content of broadcasters and take measures in cases of infringement" (CNA, n.d.^[27]).

1.2. The changing role of civil society in Romania

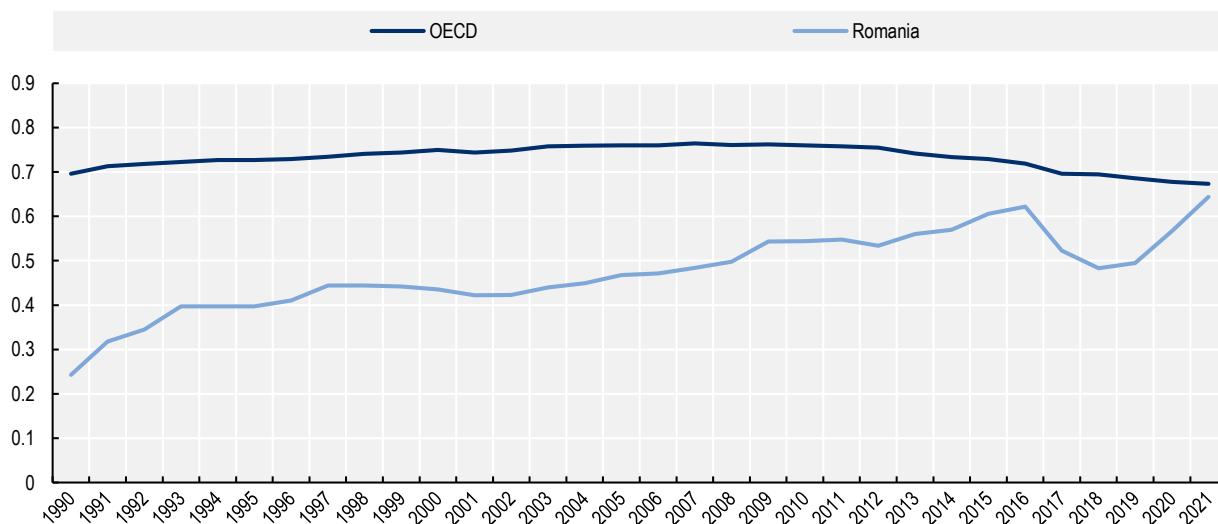
Any discussion of the protection and promotion of civic space in Romania must recognise the country's historical context and the changing relationship between the state and civil society over recent decades. The civil society sector was historically weak and was further hampered during the communist period (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022^[28]). During the Ceaușescu regime (1965-89), unlike other countries in the region, Romania "had no human rights groups, independent unions, environmental groups, or other entities" that international donors and governments could support during the Cold War years (Rossi, 2012^[29]). Moreover, Romanian dissidents were isolated from the main transnational coalitions against

authoritarianism – which included Czech, Hungarian and Polish dissidents – in the East European region (Rossi, 2012^[29]).

It was only after the fall of Ceaușescu in 1989 that civil society began to emerge as a formalised group of stakeholders who could engage with the government (Bădescu, 2010^[30]). During the 1990s, members of these newly formed groups gained new skills, such as creating and developing sustainable and independent organisations, making strategic plans and building partnerships, raising funds from domestic and foreign sources and recruiting volunteers (Bădescu, 2010^[30]). Nevertheless, in the early 2000s, most CSOs lacked human and financial capacities in most areas and operated mainly at the local level, focusing on small-scale projects (Parau, 2009^[31]). Romania’s accession to the European Union (EU) in 2007 led to consolidation of the sector (Cuglesan, 2020^[32]). Indeed, many civil society representatives interviewed during the OECD fact-finding mission remember the time of EU accession as a golden era when civil society and the government operated largely in tandem and when civil society benefitted considerably from EU and other international support, in terms of both funding and capacity building.⁸

The first incarnation of the modern Romanian state was a democracy but was dominated by a relatively small political and economic elite, which only partially represented wider societal interests (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022^[28]). Progress on democratisation has, however, strengthened considerably since the early 1990s, as illustrated by the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Liberal Democracy Index, with a slight regression observed between 2016 and 2019 (Figure 1.1). Figure 1.1 demonstrates that civil liberties, the rule of law, independence of the judiciary and effective checks and balances between branches of government have continuously improved, although they still lie below the OECD average (0.67) with a score of 0.64. The 2021 World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law Index has similar findings but notes that, compared to other countries in the EU and the European Free Trade Area and North America, there are fewer limitations and checks on government, in addition to more corruption and less open government; Romania thus ranks 41st out of 139 countries assessed (WJP, 2021^[33]).

Figure 1.1. Romania’s performance in the V-Dem Liberal Democracy Index, 1990-2021



Note: V-Dem asks, “To what extent is the ideal of liberal democracy achieved?” with scores ranging from low to high (0-1), “0” being worst and “1” being best. According to V-Dem, the liberal principle of democracy “emphasises the importance of protecting individual and minority rights against the tyranny of the state and the tyranny of the majority. The liberal model takes a ‘negative’ view of political power insofar as it judges the quality of democracy by the limits placed on government. This is achieved by constitutionally protected civil liberties, strong rule of law, an independent judiciary, and effective checks and balances that, together, limit the exercise of executive power. To make this a measure of liberal democracy, the index also takes the level of electoral democracy into account” (2021^[34]).

Source: V-Dem Institute (2021^[34]), *Liberal Democracy Index, Romania*, https://www.v-dem.net/data_analysis/VariableGraph/ (accessed on 14 June 2022).

Romania has since reformed its state institutions with increasing assistance and guidance from the EU, with new administrative structures and more resources benefitting the entire country, even though infrastructure in rural areas remains partly underdeveloped (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022^[28]). According to the European Commission (EC) and other observers, Romania appears to generally comply with EU legislation, although concerns remain regarding the implementation and enforcement of legislation (EC, 2022^[35]; 2021^[36]; Cuglesan, 2020^[32]). The frequent use of emergency ordinances in law making also poses a problem, as the use of such mechanisms means there is often no time for meaningful consultations with stakeholders and civil society or for adequate parliamentary oversight (for further details, see Box 6.8 on regulation by emergency ordinance and its effects on citizen⁹ and stakeholder participation in Chapter 6).

As far as the civil society sector is concerned, more than 120 000 CSOs are currently included in Romania's National Register for Associations and Foundations operated by the Ministry of Justice,¹⁰ although it is unclear how many of these are active, as no recent official figures are available. Furthermore, there are several datasets on the CSO sector available from different sources, from the National Register to the National Institute of Statistics, with no one repository that combines the data to provide an accurate overview. Thus up-to-date, consolidated data on the number and types of organisations in operation, the sectors and activities covered, and the amount of government funding to support the sector are unavailable. A 2017 report prepared by the CSO Civil Society Development Foundation (FDSC, 2017^[37]) indicated that of 88 650 CSOs registered in the above-mentioned national register in 2015, 42 707 were active at the time.¹¹ Key sectors where CSOs work include sports and related activities, education, social assistance, financial activities, agriculture and animal care, consulting, healthcare, culture and mass media, and trade and energy (World Bank, 2020^[38]). While paid employment positions in the civil society sector are scarce, with most CSOs relying on volunteer work (CMON, 2020^[39]; Elbers and Grigore, 2019^[40]), employment figures in the sector are relatively stable. Overall, civic involvement and volunteering have grown rapidly during the last decades, mostly in urban areas, although the numbers in Romania remain below the average levels in the EU (Lambrou and Dobre, 2020^[41]).

A survey of over 280 CSOs and more than 30 local government authorities conducted by the World Bank in 2020 showed that individual and company donations are the main funding sources for CSOs, followed by EU and international foundations, with public funding playing a minor role (World Bank, 2020^[38]). At the same time, despite progress in terms of developing the sector overall, many organisations struggle to make their voices heard in public debates. Evidence suggests this is due to insufficient funding exacerbated by a lack of capacity to engage with state and international funding processes, which many find overly bureaucratic (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022^[28]). During the OECD fact-finding mission, CSOs thus confirmed that a lack of sustainable funding and lengthy and burdensome registration proceedings remained among their top concerns. They also noted that consultation of CSOs in decision-making processes remains uneven across public administration (see the section on low democratic participation and trust in Chapter 6).¹² Despite the robust legal framework described above, existing consultation processes are viewed as rigid, are marked by low levels of participation, and tend to focus largely on consultations of formalised stakeholders and less on involving individual citizens in decision making (although there are more promising practices at the local level: see the section on strengthening participation at the local level in Chapter 6).

V-Dem's Civil Society Participation Index, which measures the extent to which CSOs are regularly and routinely consulted by policy makers, as well as other indicators such as how widely citizens are involved in CSOs, finds that Romania has had slightly lower scores than OECD Members and EU member states on average over the last decade (V-Dem Institute, 2021^[34]) (see Figure 6.1 in Chapter 6).

1.3. Key challenges ahead to strengthen civic space in Romania

The OECD's civic space lens is broad (see Chapter 2) and indicates that while Romania's forward-looking vision and concrete plans to strengthen its civic space are commendable, it faces wide-ranging challenges, many of which are related to the ongoing consolidation of its democracy.¹³

At the outset of the *Civic Space Review*, the General Secretariat highlighted the following as being the most pressing current obstacles for the government in strengthening civic space and open government more broadly:¹⁴

- non-uniform application of the legal and procedural framework for public consultation processes
- a need to improve the current legal framework and strengthen use of the e-consultation platform¹⁵ by central and local public administration authorities
- non-standard proactive disclosure of information of public interest and non-uniform application of legal and procedural frameworks on access to information
- non-uniform application of the legal and procedural frameworks for granting public funding to NGOs
- a general lack of co-ordination of open government policies and strategies at the central level of government.¹⁶

International rankings related to civic space also offer an overview of Romania's comparative standing and provide insights into areas for improvement (Box 1.2).

Box 1.2. Romania's international standing: A snapshot of global rankings related to civic space

- **Freedom House 2021 Freedom in the World index:** Romania is rated “free” with a score of 83 out of 100.¹
- **World Justice Project 2021 Rule of Law Index:** Romania ranks 41st out of 139 countries.
- **CIVICUS:** Romania ranks as “narrowed” in 2022.²
- **Article 19 Freedom of Expression:** Romania ranks as “less restricted” and 44th out of 161 countries in 2021.³
- **Reporters Without Borders (RSF) 2021 World Press Freedom Index:** Romania ranks 48th out of 180 countries, with a score of 75.09 out of 100.
- **V-Dem 2022 Liberal Democracy Index:** Romania ranks 44th out of 179 countries.
- **United Nations 2020 E-Participation Index:** Romania ranks 46th out of 193 places.
- **Transparency International 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index:** Romania scores 45 out of 100, giving it a ranking of 66 out of 180 places.⁴

1. Freedom House classifies countries as free, partly free or not free.

2. CIVICUS uses the following classifications: open, narrowed, obstructed, repressed and closed.

3. Article 19 classifies countries as open, less restricted, restricted, highly restricted and in crisis.

4. Transparency International scores range from 0-100, with 100 being the best score.

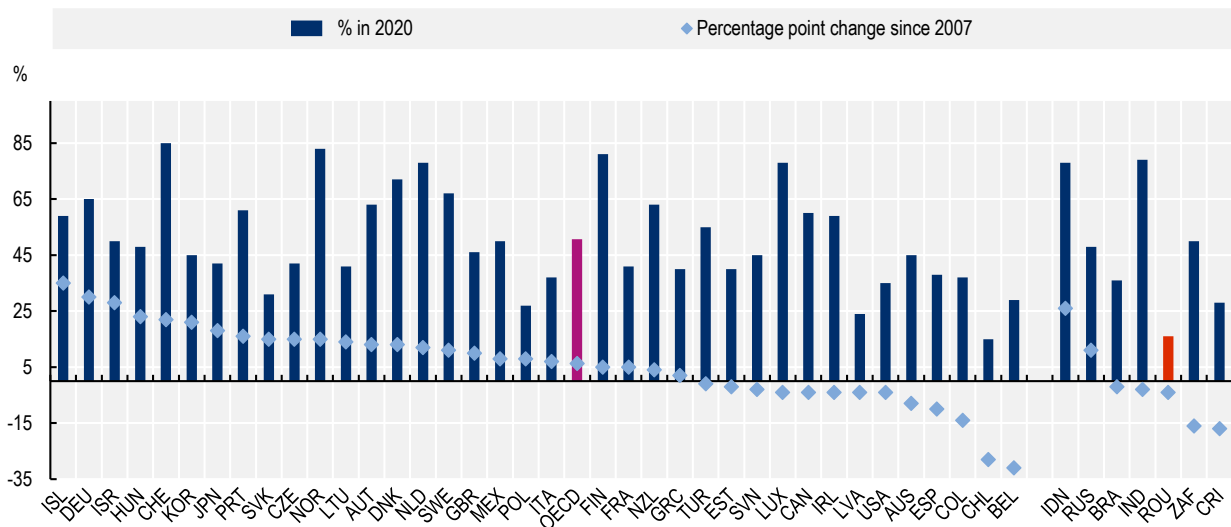
Source: OECD (2021^[42]), *Government at a Glance 2021*, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/1c258f55-en>; CIVICUS (n.d.^[43]), *Romania Country Profile*, <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/romania/> (accessed on 15 June 2022); Freedom House (2022^[44]), *Freedom in the World 2022 - Romania*, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/romania/freedom-world/2022> (accessed on 15 June 2022); WJP (2021^[33]), *WJP Rule of Law Index - Romania*, <https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/country/2021/Romania/> (accessed on 15 June 2022); Article 19 (2021^[45]), *The Global Expression Report 2021: The State of Freedom of Expression Around the World*, <https://www.article19.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/A19-GxR-2021-FINAL.pdf>; RSF (2022^[46]), *Romania*, <https://rsf.org/en/country/romania> (accessed on 29 April 2022); V-Dem Institute (2022^[47]), *Democracy Report 2022: Autocratization Changing Nature?*, https://v-dem.net/media/publications/dr_2022.pdf (accessed on 15 June 2022); WEF (2019^[48]), *The Global Competitiveness Report 2019*, https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_TheGlobalCompetitivenessReport2019.pdf; Transparency International (2021^[49]), *2021 Corruption Perceptions Index*, <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021> (accessed on 15 June 2022); EIR (2021^[50]), *Democracy Index 2021: The China Challenge*, <https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2021/>; UN (2020^[51]), UN E-Government Knowledgebase, <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/Data-Center>.

Taking the above into consideration, the fact-finding mission identified four overarching challenges for strengthening civic space in Romania moving forward: low voter turnout and low trust between government and civil society; high levels of social inequality and discrimination affecting particular groups; pressure on access to information and the media landscape; and low levels of digitalisation affecting civic space, both online and offline.

1.3.1. Low democratic participation and lack of trust between the government and civil society

Low voter turnout in elections, coupled with declining levels of confidence in the national government, present key challenges for Romania and these have been aggravated by frequent changes in government over the last five years. Using data from the World Gallup Poll, the OECD's *Government at a Glance 2021* (2021^[42]) found that confidence in the Romanian government fell from 20% in 2007 to 16% in 2020. By comparison, the average confidence rate in national government among OECD Members is 51%, with a 6.3 percentage-point increase from 2007 (Figure 1.2). Romania also experiences relatively low voter turnout at the polls, namely 31.8% in 2020 parliamentary elections and 51.2% in 2019 presidential elections (International IDEA, 2022^[52]). On average, EU countries had 66.8% voter turnout in their most recent parliamentary elections and 56.39% in their presidential elections, for those with such a system (International IDEA, 2022^[52]).

Figure 1.2. Confidence in national government across OECD Members and Romania, 2007 and 2020

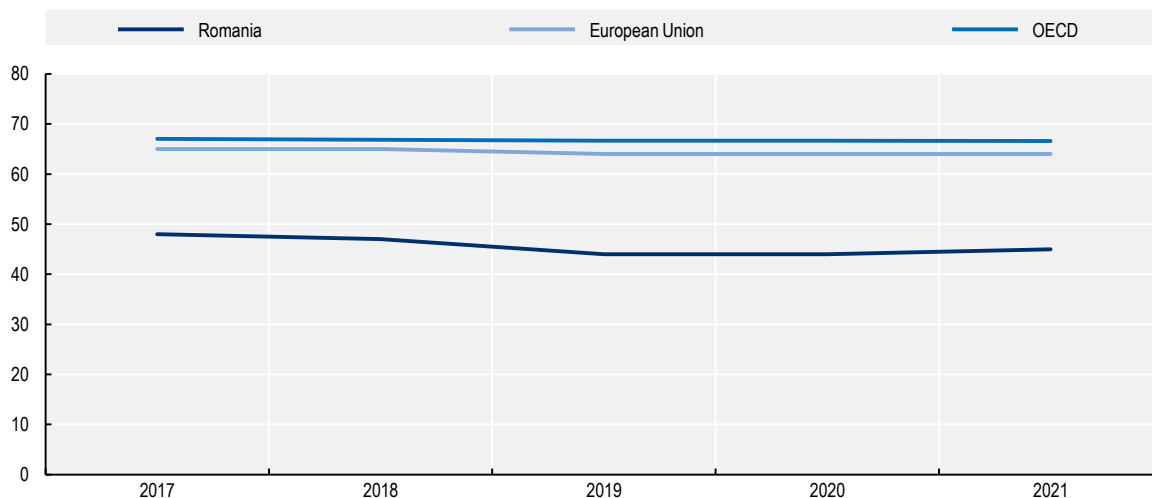


Source: OECD (2021^[42]), *Government at a Glance 2021*, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/1c258f55-en>.

Despite ongoing democratic reforms described above, many citizens still feel that policy making in Romania is “crafted and captured by vested interests” and that reforms undertaken to enter the EU were relatively superficial, failing to address systemic problems (Brookings Institution, 2018^[53]; Popescu-Zamfir, 2022^[54]). Observers have placed the declining trust in public authorities within a wider context, noting general challenges to democratic consolidation in Romania and pointing to a wider reversal of democratic progress in many post-communist East European countries (Iftimoaei, 2013^[55]; EIU, 2021^[50]).

Corruption continues to be perceived as widespread, despite ongoing efforts to combat it in the public sector (OECD, 2022^[56]; EC, 2021^[36]), and Romania is currently ranked 66th out of 180 countries in the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (2021^[49]) (Figure 1.3). A recent 2022 Special Eurobarometer on Corruption shows that 72% of respondents in Romania still consider corruption to be widespread (just above the EU average of 68%) and 46% of respondents feel personally affected by corruption in their daily lives (24% average in the EU) (EC, 2022^[57]). Such longstanding perceptions have led to significant demonstrations and protests over a perceived lack of public sector accountability, most recently in 2017-19 (Lambriu and Dobre, 2020^[41]). In a positive step, the National Anti-Corruption Directorate was established in 2002 as a prosecution office specialising in high-level corruption cases and the government has developed multiple anticorruption strategies, most recently in 2021 (Official Gazette of Romania, 2021^[58]). However, the effectiveness of the directorate, and thus of the fight against corruption, was hampered by the dismissal of the chief prosecutor in 2018 (considered unjustified by the European Court of Human Rights in 2020 (2020^[59])) and by legislation establishing a separate prosecutorial structure for offences within the judiciary (Selejan-Gutan, 2019^[60]; EC, 2020^[61]; Venice Commission, 2018^[62]).¹⁷ The effects of this can still be felt today, even though the separate prosecutorial structure was later dismantled and the Venice Commission, in a recent opinion, noted that currently there seems to be no political interference in the work of the directorate (Venice Commission, 2022^[63]).¹⁸ In a recent analysis, the Council of Europe Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) found that Romania’s compliance with its recommendations on reducing corruption remains “globally unsatisfactory”, however (GRECO, 2021^[64]). To identify and address such shortcomings, Romania is undertaking an ongoing OECD *Public Integrity Review* (OECD, forthcoming^[65]).

Figure 1.3. Romania's performance in the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, 2017-21



Note: Scores range from 0-100, with 100 being the best score. The Corruption Perceptions Index ranks 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption.

Source: Transparency International (2021^[49]), *2021 Corruption Perceptions Index*, <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021> (accessed on 15 June 2022).

The overall lack of trust in government extends to the civil society sector. Many of the CSOs interviewed during the OECD fact-finding mission praised the close and fruitful co-operation and partnership that existed with the government during and immediately after EU accession in 2007 but felt that such collaboration, as well as their capacity to influence policy making and service design and delivery, had decreased since this time.¹⁹ In particular, the relationship suffered during the terms of previous governments in 2018 and 2019, which were seen as engaging in legal and policy activities to limit civic space (Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa, 2022^[66]). Currently, many interviewed CSOs do not feel sufficiently consulted or engaged in the development of policies and legislation, stating that they are often excluded from such processes or involved at a late stage when it is no longer possible to have an impact. Another concern relates to the manner in which consultations are organised and implemented; they are widely perceived as a box-ticking exercise to implement relevant legislation, but without the necessary understanding among public officials of the value or potential benefits of the exercise. Thus, while a raft of legislation and processes exist to involve citizens and stakeholders in decision-making processes, these laws and policies tend to be implemented in a legalistic manner, which can work against more frequent and innovative forms of participation. This has led to a lack of trust in laws and law-making processes and institutions (see Stakeholder perceptions of participation practice in Chapter 6). CSOs indicate that they are often not given sufficient time to review draft policies or laws and that recommendations are rarely implemented in final documents, with little or no explanation as to why.²⁰ On the other hand, government officials – who follow relevant legal frameworks carefully but often as a formality – expressed disappointment at the perceived lack of interest in consultations or engagement from civil society at national and local levels²¹ (see Making participatory practices more effective and inclusive in Chapter 6).

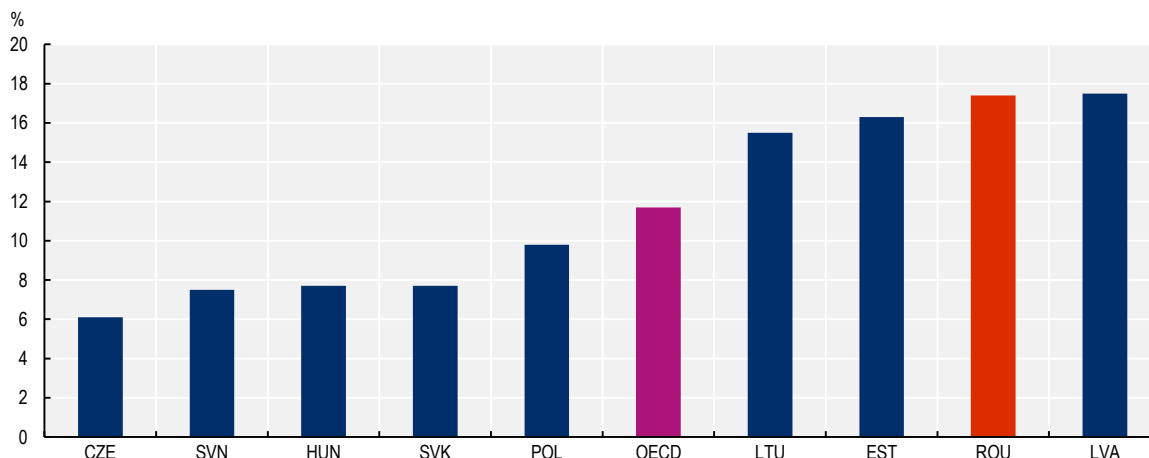
Both government officials and civil society representatives stated that communication was at times marked by a lack of real engagement and an unwillingness to compromise. This has led to frustration on both sides and acts as an obstacle to constructive dialogue on key policy areas.

1.3.2. Social inequalities, discrimination and social exclusion

Social inequalities, discrimination and perceptions of exclusion or marginalisation can all affect people's ability and willingness to engage with public institutions. Levels of education, income and health, as well as socio-economic status and place of residence, can all affect levels of trust. Socio-economic inequality can negatively impact both citizens' ability and willingness to engage with governments, despite those with low socio-economic status often being acutely affected by public policies, particularly in the social sector, and public services. For example, the OECD *How's Life 2020: Measuring Well-being* report finds that, in 20 out of 24 OECD Members, people with lower levels of education are less likely to vote (OECD, 2020^[67]). Research shows that disempowerment, resulting from severely constrained options and life choices, is a core feature of poverty and is connected to social and institutional maltreatment, among other hidden dimensions (ATD Fourth World; University of Oxford, 2019^[68]). People with low socio-economic status experience social exclusion, may have less awareness of their rights, have access to fewer channels through which to exercise said rights, and generally face greater obstacles in engaging with their governments and shaping their societies. Governments thus have an important role to play in empowering these citizens and ensuring that their voices are heard on an equal basis with others, as part of engaging with citizens, strengthening democratic participation and fostering people-centred governance.

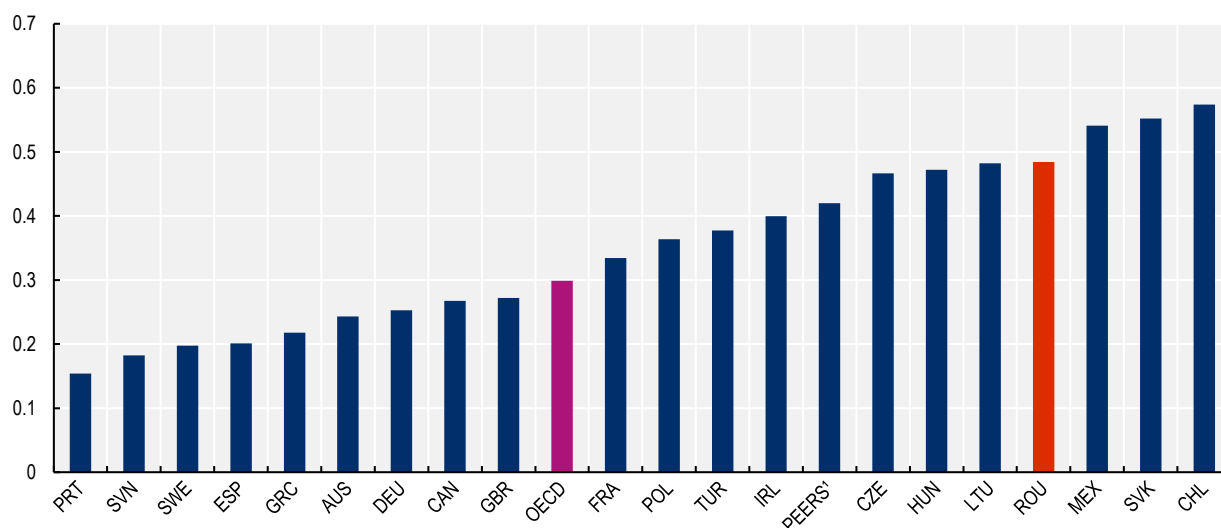
In Romania, poverty remains comparatively high and regional disparities in living standards and economic opportunities are large and widening, as in many EU countries (Figure 1.4). That said, Romania experienced impressive economic growth before the COVID-19 pandemic. In less than 20 years, it reduced the gap in the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita to the OECD average by half, from close to 70% to around 35% (OECD, 2022^[56]). Moreover, the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion fell to 30% in 2020, from around 50% 13 years before (OECD, 2022^[56]). Despite this, regional disparities persist and are much higher than the OECD average, as economic growth primarily benefits urban areas (OECD, 2022^[56]) (Figure 1.5).

Figure 1.4. Poverty remains elevated, 2018



Source: OECD (2022^[56]), *OECD Economic Surveys: Romania 2022*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/e2174606-en>.

Figure 1.5. Regional disparities per GDP in Romania and selected countries, 2019



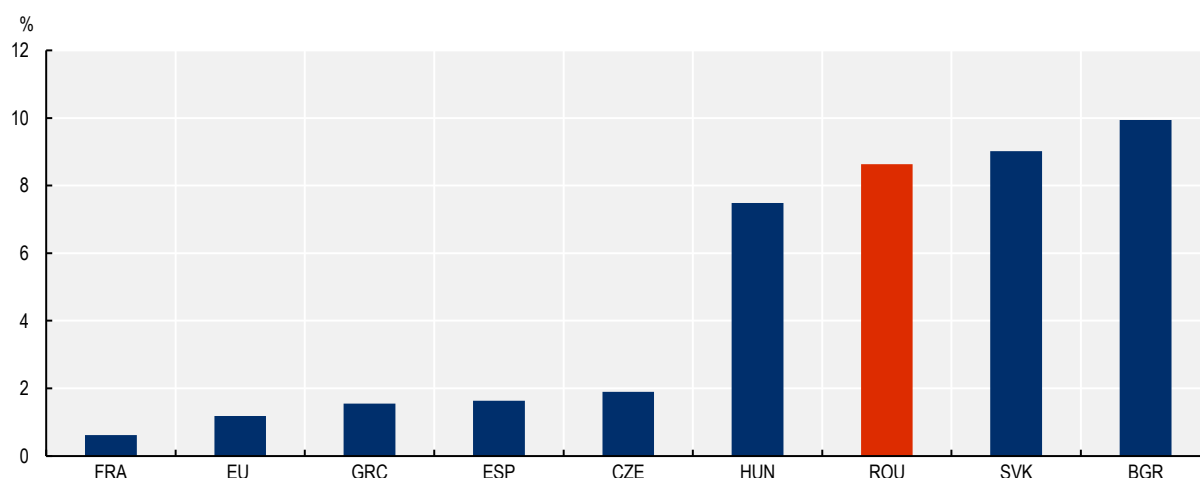
1. PEERS consists of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland and the Slovak Republic.

2. The unit of measurement refers to the coefficient of variation in each area, with higher scores signifying greater regional disparities.

Source: OECD (2022^[66]), *OECD Economic Surveys: Romania 2022*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/e2174606-en>.

The most recent *OECD Economic Survey* in Romania notes that while Bucharest and many other cities have become “hubs of prosperity and innovation”, poverty remains widespread in rural areas and that this has been aggravated by the COVID-19 crisis, particularly in marginalised communities (2022^[66]). The EC (2020^[69]) also noted in 2020 that despite an average growth of around 5% in the preceding 3 years, inequality is increasing. Moreover, rapid income growth has been accompanied by increasing disparities in income and inequality of opportunity (EC, 2020^[69]).

The Romanian government’s National Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction for the Period 2022-2027 (hereafter the “Anti-Poverty Strategy”) acknowledges the improvement in recent years, but notes that within the EU, Romania has consistently been among countries with the highest proportion of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion (Government of Romania, 2022^[70]). The Anti-Poverty Strategy further notes that in employment, there are significant disparities between men and women, as well as between urban and rural areas (to the detriment of the latter) and depending on the level of schooling. In terms of education, the strategy indicates that the high percentage of young people at risk of poverty or social exclusion is correlated with a persistently high early school dropout rate, predominantly in rural areas, noting that around 4 out of 10 15-year-olds in education are considered to be functionally illiterate (Government of Romania, 2022^[70]). The risk of poverty is exceptionally high for families with children, people with low work intensity, low education levels or with disabilities, as well as members of the Roma community. Romania has a large Roma population compared to other countries in Europe (Figure 1.6 and Box 1.3), accounting for an estimated 8.32% of the overall population of approximately 19 million, according to the latest available data (EC, n.d.^[71]).²²

Figure 1.6. Romania is among the EU countries with the largest Roma population, 2012

Note: The presented shares represent the average of different estimates for 2012.

Source: OECD (2022^[56]), *OECD Economic Surveys: Romania 2022*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/e2174606-en>.

Box 1.3. Romania's Roma minority

The Roma minority in Romania is considered to be among the largest in Europe (EC, 2021^[72]), and is the second-largest ethnic minority after the Hungarian community (OECD, 2022^[56]). Despite some progress over the last decade, poverty and exclusion have been particularly prevalent in Roma communities, affecting most aspects of everyday life (see the section on improving the inclusion of ethnic minorities, including the Roma community in Chapter 3). The at-risk-of-poverty rate decreased from 84% in 2011 to 70% in 2016 but remains three times higher than the average in Romania (OECD, 2022^[56]). Labour market participation of Roma is also significantly weaker in Romania than in other OECD Members in Central and Eastern Europe, especially for women. The differences in outcomes between Roma and non-Roma in employment, housing, healthcare and education¹ are striking, as illustrated in Table 1.1. The prevalence of poverty among the Roma population is exacerbated by their relatively high geographical concentration in deprived and rural areas, where high-quality public services are missing (OECD, 2022^[56]). Political representation of the Roma community is also low.

Table 1.1. Selected socio-economic indicators for the Roma community compared to the Romanian population, 2016

	Roma community (%)	Total Romanian population (%)
At-risk-of-poverty rate	70	25
Employment rate	28	53
Employment rate, women	13	44
NEET rate – neither in employment nor in education or training, youth aged 16-24	63	18
Dropout rate from education	77	16
Share of households living without a toilet, bathroom and shower inside the dwelling	80	31
People who do not seek healthcare when needed	42	25

Note: The employment rate definition slightly differs for the Roma population: it includes all persons in Roma households aged 16 years or over. For the total population, the measure includes all persons aged 15 and over.

Source: OECD (2022^[56]), *OECD Economic Surveys: Romania 2022*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/e2174606-en>.

The Government of Romania acknowledges the vulnerability of the Roma minority and has had national strategies in place for their inclusion since 2011 (Government of Romania, 2022^[73]). However, progress has been limited, according to the EU and civil society (FRA, 2021^[74]; EC, 2021^[72]; 2019^[75]; Government of Romania, 2022^[73]). In addition, up-to-date socio-economic data are unavailable on ethnic minorities in Romania, which limits the ability to monitor this particularly vulnerable group (EC, 2021^[72]).

According to the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) (2021^[74]), the Roma minority is subject to discrimination in most EU member states, including Romania. Likewise, a survey issued by the Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy in 2020 found that in Romania, seven out of ten people did not trust the Roma population (with trust much higher for other minorities such as the German, Hungarian and Jewish communities, but somewhat lower for immigrants). Furthermore, two out of three Romanians believe that Roma are dangerous (IRES, 2020^[76]).

Reflecting these challenges, Romania was one of five countries, along with Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and the Slovak Republic, for which the European Council adopted country-specific recommendations on Roma inclusion (FRA, 2019^[77]). CSOs in Romania have since criticised the absence of an evaluation of the implementation of Roma inclusion strategies and reported an increase in discriminatory language by national and local politicians, and in media reporting (EC, 2019^[75]). In a positive development, Romania was the first country in the EU to adopt legislation (Law No. 2/2021) aimed explicitly at combatting antigypsyism, in 2021 (FRA, 2021^[74]).

Note: Further, the Roma Inclusion Strategy (Government of Romania, 2022^[73]), referring to a 2018 comparative study, noted that two-thirds of Roma had not graduated or completed secondary education, a share five times higher than that of the rest of the population. The same study indicated that half of Roma persons with low education (having completed no more than eight grades) either did not know how to write or had great difficulty writing (Government of Romania, 2022^[70]). The government's Anti-Poverty Strategy also pointed out that, based on data collected by the EU FRA in 2016 and Eurostat, almost two-thirds of Roma young people were not in education or the labour market, with the percentage of excluded Roma girls and women significantly higher than that of boys and men. The reasons cited were high poverty rates, social exclusion, a low share of formal education, poor housing conditions, discrimination and institutional racism. In schools, the strategy referred to the segregation of Roma in separate schools and classes and low expectations and prejudice among teachers (Government of Romania, 2022^[70]).

Source: OECD (2022^[56]), *OECD Economic Surveys: Romania 2022*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/e2174606-en>; FRA (2019^[77]), *Fundamental Rights Report 2019*, <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2019/fundamental-rights-report-2019>; FRA (2021^[74]), *Fundamental Rights Report 2021*, https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2021-fundamental-rights-report-2021_en.pdf; EC (2021^[72]), *Country Report Non-discrimination: Romania 2021*, <https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5492-romania-country-report-non-discrimination-2021-1-34-mb>; EC (2019^[75]), *Civil Society Monitoring Report on Implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategy in Romania: Focusing on Structural and Horizontal Preconditions for Successful Implementation of the Strategy*, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2838/219177>; IRES (2020^[76]), *The Perception of Roma during the COVID-19 Pandemic*, https://ires.ro/uploads/articole/ires_agentia-impreuna_perceptia-romilor-in-timpul-pandemiei-covid-19_2020.pdf; Government of Romania (2022^[73]), *National Strategy for the Inclusion of Romanian Citizens Belonging to the Roma Minority 2022-2027*, <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocumentAfis/255081>; Government of Romania (2022^[70]), *National Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction for the Period 2022-2027*, <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocument/254234>.

Longstanding social inequalities are thus prevalent in Romanian society, as evidenced by the government's findings (2022^[70]), international reports, and feedback from state and civil society representatives during the OECD fact-finding mission.²³ Roma, in particular, continue to perceive themselves as victims of persistent social exclusion and discrimination on ethnic grounds in multiple areas of life, notably employment, education, housing, healthcare and other public or private services. This is of particular concern as it prevents Roma people themselves from participating in decision making on matters that affect them and acts as a significant obstacle to civic space in Romania becoming more inclusive. The situation for other minority groups, notably the Hungarian and Jewish communities, is also marked by a lack of implementation of legislation strengthening their rights as minority (Huszka, 2021^[78]; Costachie, Weckmüller and Lixandrescu, 2019^[79]) and by discrimination and hate speech, respectively (although Romania recently introduced legislation to raise awareness of Jewish history and the Holocaust in schools) (Ministry of Justice, 2021^[80]). Hate speech in public discourse and on the Internet is a widespread problem

in general, targeting a broad spectrum of persons including minorities (see the section on raising awareness of hate speech and seeking long-term solutions in Chapter 3).

Different areas of inequality and exclusion in Romania are often interlinked: thus, the urban/rural divide is connected to a larger school dropout rate in rural areas, as it is to the gap in income (Vasilescu, 2018^[81]). Notably, employment rates are lower and unemployment rates are higher for people from the poorest regions but also for those from rural areas and small cities and for specific vulnerable categories, such as the Roma community, disabled persons and people with low levels of qualifications. High numbers of youth not in employment, education, or training, primarily among Roma (77% of women and 52% of men, with higher employment levels in rural areas) and disabled people (60%), are thus at risk of social exclusion and perpetuating existing patterns of exclusion in the future (Vasilescu, 2018^[81]). Further inequalities exist in access to health services between rural and urban areas, where again, Roma people are affected disproportionately.

To address some of these inequalities, the government has, in addition to the Anti-Poverty Strategy, recently adopted a new *National Strategy for the Inclusion of Romanian Citizens Belonging to the Roma Minority* (Government of Romania, 2022^[73]). In 2021, it introduced a *National Strategy for Preventing and Combating Anti-Semitism, Xenophobia, Radicalisation and Hate Speech* to respond to related challenges, particularly on social networks and especially targeting Romanians who are perceived to have a different ethnicity, religion, language or culture (Government of Romania, 2021^[82]).

At the same time, there are worrying trends in Romania that merit attention as they undermine societal trust (see the section on equality and non-discrimination in Chapter 3). Numerous strategies to improve the plight of minority or otherwise disadvantaged groups such as disabled persons, the Roma community and women have existed for many years, without notable improvements in the lives of these groups, denoting a noticeable gap between theory and practice. Notably, while strategies to remedy the situation of the Roma community have existed for more than five years, the limited available data suggest that the overall situation for this community has not improved (Box 1.3) and that hate speech against this group has intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the government (2021^[83]). Civil society representatives interviewed during the OECD mission noted that the development of these documents is rarely based on accurate or up-to-date data and that there is an absence of effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms which would help to improve initiatives over time.²⁴

Civic freedoms for disabled persons, women, and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) community are further areas of concern. Persons with disabilities continue to suffer multiple forms of exclusion from employment, healthcare services, and political and social life more generally, according to interviewed CSOs who also reported less awareness and motivation in the public sector to combat gender inequality than previously.²⁵ The LGBTI community, while enjoying legal protection such as equal age of consent and protection against hate crimes (Norocel and Baluta, 2021^[84]), continues to experience discrimination and targeted hate speech, including due to a recent flurry of proposed legal reforms aimed at diminishing the rights of this group. Romania ranked 26th out of 27 EU countries for LGBTI rights protection in practice in 2022 (Rainbow Europe, n.d.^[85]). Additionally, while approaches to gender equality have progressed over the last decades, paternalistic attitudes continue to prevail (Băluță and Tufiş, 2021^[86]) and a lack of balanced representation in central and local public bodies (2019^[87]) and gender-based violence (OECD, 2019^[88]) remain issues.

The above creates a situation where a variety of disadvantaged or marginalised groups feel excluded from broader society and are less able to participate in public life, with a detrimental impact on civic space.

1.3.3. Pressure on access to information and the media sector

Ensuring access to information is crucial to protecting and promoting civic space. The forthcoming *OECD Open Government Review of Romania* shows that the country faces several challenges in this regard,

particularly related to implementation of the Law on Free Access to Public Information (OECD, forthcoming^[9]). According to the Centre for Law and Democracy (n.d.^[89]), the law on access to information (ATI) has several weaknesses, including the absence of an external appeals process and difficulties in enforcing sanctions for violations of the law. Challenges also remain in responding to requests in a timely manner. According to the Balkans and Caucasus Transeuropa Observatory, while the law indicates that simple requests must be answered in 10 days, many public bodies “exploit the ignorance of the applicant” by using the upper limit of 30 days as their deadline in practice (2017^[90]). The European Commission has also noted that some public bodies use data protection rules as a justification to limit ATI, by stating that sharing requested information would be in violation of the GDPR (2021^[91]). However, progress has been made in regard to both the legal frameworks and the implementation of ATI in recent years, with recent positive amendments in 2022 aiming to standardise and improve reactive and proactive disclosure of information at national and local levels. The General Secretariat also monitors how central and local government authorities apply relevant legislation and prepares related monitoring reports and recommendations, which have led to improvements (see the section on access to information in Chapter 4).

ATI underpins and reinforces other civic freedoms, including the right to freedom of expression. Freedom of expression is adhered to, with people in Romania generally able to express their opinions without retribution. At the same time, Article 19’s *2021 Global Expression Report* (2021^[45]), looking at, among other things, the space for individuals to express and communicate, post online, march, research and access information, has indicated that these freedoms may be somewhat hampered in Romania (see the section on promoting freedom of expression in Chapter 3).

Regarding freedom of the press, as in other countries, the economic crisis in 2008-09 and the emergence of social networks have affected mainstream media, leading to fewer outlets, lower circulation and less investigative journalism (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022^[28]). The government provided support including anti-crisis economic subsidies but, overall, the media sector is now seen as weaker and more prone to clientelism than before, which negatively impacts citizens’ capacity to obtain quality information and protect themselves from mis- and disinformation (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022^[28]).²⁶ Small and regional media outlets find it increasingly difficult to survive, with many relying on any available government funding, which can impede their autonomy. The RSF 2022 World Press Freedom Index indicated ongoing challenges in the sector, including pressure from media owners, opacity regarding media funding and media ownership, growing harassment or violence against journalists and mistrust in the media fuelled by misinformation campaigns (RSF, 2022^[46]).

CSOs interviewed during the fact-finding mission also noted some cases of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs), typically initiated by the private sector or influential public sector entities with the aim of silencing journalists, undermining their reputation and draining their financial resources. This trend has also been identified in the OECD report, *The Protection and Promotion of Civic Space: Strengthening Alignment with International Standards and Guidance* (OECD, 2022^[92]). The overall media landscape is thus considered to be under pressure due to external interference and lacking transparency and independence overall (see the section on freedom of the press in Chapter 4).

1.3.4. Online civic space and digitalisation

Governments increasingly recognise the transformative nature of the Internet as an open platform that facilitates and grants new opportunities to interact with citizens in innovative ways. An enabling environment where citizens, journalists and civil society actors can access information, express their views, operate freely, and thrive without fear of arbitrary or unlawful intrusion or interference in their online activities, is crucial for civic space. Several obstacles to online civic space remain in Romania, including low Internet coverage, connectivity and usage in many households, with a sharp rural-urban divide that excludes those without digital literacy and access to technology. Bridging digital divides – defined by the

OECD as “the gap between individuals, households, businesses and geographic areas at different socio-economic levels with regard both to their opportunities to access information and communication technology (ICT) and to their use of the Internet for a wide variety of activities” – requires more than merely providing Internet access to all citizens (OECD, 2001^[93]). Education and skills are also needed for people to use ICT effectively. Romania has improved the situation in recent years with initiatives from both the government and civil society. The Presidency of Romania, for example, introduced the Educated Romania project, which includes specific targets on “ensuring basic digital skills for both teachers and students” (Radio Romania International, 2021^[94]). In addition, as part of the EC 2021-27 Digital Education Action Plan and its Recovery and Resilience Plan, Romania committed to promoting lifelong digital education for all citizens (EC, 2021^[95]). CSOs have also contributed, with one example being the Foundation for Digital Education, which provides access to programming courses and digital workshops to children in rural and disadvantaged communities (Business Review, 2021^[96]).

As an EU member state, Romania has stepped up its digitalisation efforts in recent years and is committed to digital government reforms (see the section on ongoing initiatives and programmes for digitalisation in Chapter 4). The 2020 *National Strategy on Digital Agenda for Romania* (Government of Romania, 2014^[97]) is the main framework outlining Romania’s ambitions for digital transformation and identifies upskilling citizens’ ICT skills as a core priority. However, despite a range of strategies and initiatives on digital government, interoperability and open data, Romania still faces significant barriers in several areas. Currently, it ranks last of all EU member states in the 2022 edition of the *EU Digital Economy and Society Index*, with low scores in digital public services and citizen use of e-government initiatives in particular (EC, 2022^[98]). Romania is currently undertaking an OECD *Digital Government Review* to identify opportunities for improvement (OECD, forthcoming^[99]). Improving its international standing regarding digitalisation is another priority of the *Recovery and Resilience Plan for Romania* (European Commission, 2021^[100]) and will be key to ensuring protected civic space online.

1.4. Conclusion

Moving forward, the medium- to long-term challenge for Romania is to proactively build trust between public officials and the civil society sector to enhance and deepen collaboration, begin to transform their strained relationship, and foster vibrant civic space for a more fair, inclusive and accessible society for all Romanians. This will require a cultural shift within the public sector, moving from a technocratic, legalistic approach to participation focused almost solely on applying minimum rules set out in relevant legal frameworks to a more holistic understanding of the benefits of open government policies and practices, including citizen and stakeholder participation in policy and law making. This *Civic Space Review* and Romania’s accession process to the OECD provide a unique opportunity to focus national efforts on monitoring civic space, stemming negative trends and beginning to transform policy making into a more open, inclusive and people-centred process with benefits for democratic governance and society as a whole (OECD, 2022^[101]). In the short term, and in light of plans to develop an Open Government Strategy with a dedicated civil society component, continued dialogue across the public administration will be essential to establish a common understanding of the added value and potential impact of enhanced co-operation. It will also be crucial to develop a cross-government consensus on next steps to implement Romania’s vision for its civic space and for enhancing the involvement of civil society in decision making.

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Notes

- ¹ Interviews with government representatives, February-July 2022.
- ² Some of these strategies such as those on gender equality and domestic violence, and on promoting the rights of persons with disabilities, have expired since being adopted, with new versions pending adoption as of March 2023.
- ³ The 2021 action plan continued the efforts of the Romanian government to enhance civic participation and improve consultation.
- ⁴ The Open Government Strategy is being developed in parallel by the government as part of a separate EU-funded project, *Enhancing Policy Coherence, Transparency and Coordination at the Centre of Government*, also with OECD support.
- ⁵ Information provided by the Government of Romania in a background document for the *Civic Space Review of Romania*, November 2021.
- ⁶ Interview with government representatives, March 2023.
- ⁷ Associations and foundations acquire legal personality in Romania by registering with local courts and the relevant information, as well as any changes, need to be communicated to the Ministry of Justice, which updates the main register.
- ⁸ Interviews with CSOs, February-July 2022.

⁹ Throughout the Civic Space Review, citizen is used in the OECD's civic space work in the sense of an inhabitant of a particular place, not in the sense of a legally recognised national.

¹⁰ The register can be found at <https://www.just.ro/registrul-national-ong/>.

¹¹ One recent CSO analysis, which has not been published or verified, estimated that 52 000 CSOs were active at the end of 2021. Information received from a CSO in October 2022.

¹² Interviews with government representatives and CSOs, February-July 2022.

¹³ According to the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index 2021, democracy has somewhat declined in Romania since 2007, following a general trend worldwide (EIU, 2021^[50]). In the Democracy Index, Romania ranked 61st out of 167 countries assessed globally; the country scored high on electoral processes and pluralism and low on political culture, which reflects a loss of confidence in democracy and weakened attachment to democratic institutions. A separate source, the 2019 Sustainable Governance Indicators from Bertelsmann Stiftung, ranked Romania 38th out of 41 countries assessed in the EU and OECD when evaluating the quality of democracy in the country, noting tensions between the government and civil society (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2019^[102]).

¹⁴ Background information provided by the Government of Romania.

¹⁵ The e-consultation platform, an online consultation platform on pending draft normative acts, established in 2019, can be found at <http://e-consultare.gov.ro/w/>.

¹⁶ Background information provided by the Government of Romania.

¹⁷ During interviews conducted during the OECD fact-finding mission, civil society representatives felt that these activities had threatened the independence of the judiciary, as they had weakened a previously strong anticorruption body by removing its head and by passing new legislation which called into question its mandate and created legal uncertainty.

¹⁸ Interviews with government representatives and CSOs, February-July 2022.

¹⁹ Interviews with CSOs, February-July 2022.

²⁰ Interviews with CSOs, February-July 2022.

²¹ Interviews with government representatives, February-July 2022.

²² According to data from the National Institute of Statistics in 2021, significant ethnic groups include the Hungarian community, accounting for 6.5% of the population, and the Roma community, accounting for 3.3% of the population (National Institute of Statistics, n.d.^[103]).

²³ Interviews with CSOs, February-July 2022.

²⁴ Interviews with CSOs, February-July 2022.

²⁵ Interviews with CSOs, February-July 2022.

²⁶ Misinformation refers to false or inaccurate information not disseminated with the intention of deceiving the public. Disinformation refers to false, inaccurate or misleading information deliberately created, presented and disseminated to deceive the public.



From:
Civic Space Review of Romania

Access the complete publication at:

<https://doi.org/10.1787/f11191be-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2023), "Introduction to the protection of civic space in Romania", in *Civic Space Review of Romania*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/5155b965-en>

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