



First Look Solutions S.A.

Socioeconomic Baseline Study

460.8.4 MW Vifor Wind Farm, Buzău County, Romania

15 September 2023

Project No.: 0667256

460.8.4 MW Vifor Wind Farm, Buzău County, Romania

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Socioeconomic Baseline Study

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

Name	Description
APIA	Payments and Intervention Agency for Agriculture
ASF	Family Support Allowance
ATU	Administrative Territorial Unit
CLO	Community Liaison Officer
CNPP	National House of Public Pensions
DN	National Road
E&S	Environmental and Social
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EC	European Commission
ERM	Environmental Resources Management
ESIA	Environmental and Social Impact Assessment
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ILO	International Labour Organization
INSSE	National Institute of Statistics
KII	Key Informant Interview
LAU	Local Administrative Unit
MII	Minimum Inclusion Income
NAPSI	National Agency of Payments and Social Inspection
NRRP	National Recovery Resilience Plan
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
OHL	Overhead Transmission Line
PATJ	The development plan of the county territory
PIL	Project Information Leaflet
RSI	Reference Social Indicator
SEBS	Socioeconomic Baseline Study
SEP	Stakeholder Engagement Plan
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
VAT	Value Added Tax
VMG	Guaranteed Minimum Income

WHO	World Health Organization
WTG	Wind Turbine Generator

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context

The present document is the Socioeconomic Baseline Study (SEBS) prepared for the 460.8 MW Vifor Wind Farm (hereafter referred to as “the Project”), located in Buzău County, Romania.

The Project comprises of 72 wind turbine generators (WTGs) grouped in six sub-projects, located within the territory of Gherăseni, Smeeni, Luciu and Costești and Țintești communes. The wind farm is to be constructed on pasture land, secured via voluntary agreements with the local councils of each administrative territorial unit. No relocation of built structures will be required for the construction of the wind farm and the closest habitable buildings are located at about 600 m from the WTGs.

The Project area partially overlaps two Natura 2000 sites - ROSCI0259 Valea Călmățuiului and ROSPA0145 Valea Călmățuiului. Most of the Project’s territory is covered by dry and salt steppes, and pastures.

The Project will be implemented by First Look Solutions S.A. as the Project Company (development, construction, and operation). Low Carbon and Rezolv Energy contribute to the Project development, finance, construction, and operation, as Projects’ Sponsors (hereafter collectively referred to as “the Client”).

According to the Romanian regulations, environmental permitting is required for the Project.

The Project development started with wind assessment and first design of the wind farm, in 2010. Before the Client acquired back in July 2020 the development rights to the Project, Vifor Wind Farm comprised seven sub-projects, which separately followed the national permitting procedures.

Vifor Wind Farm currently comprises five sub-projects, one for each administrative area, which have separately followed the national urban planning and environmental permitting procedures. Permitting of the six sub-projects was initially done in 2010-2012, with updates in 2017. The Project re-permitting has been initiated in 2021 and is currently ongoing. The latest design update dates May2023.

The construction phase is currently scheduled to begin in October 2023 and is currently estimated to last for about 18 months. The estimated operation period of the Project is 30 to 35 years. After this period, the Project will enter the decommissioning or repowering phase.

The Client is seeking to finance the Project based on international project finance. At current stage of development, the Project qualifies as Category A according to the Environmental and Social (E&S) policies of major international finance institutions, commercial banks, and export credit agencies signatory to Equator Principles¹. The Category A Projects are

¹ The Equator Principles represents a risk management framework adopted by financial institutions, for determining, assessing and managing environmental and social risks in project finance.

characterized by potential significant adverse environmental and social risks and / or impacts that are diverse, irreversible, or unprecedented.

To access international finance, Category A projects require identification and assessment of associated E&S impacts based on an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA).

This SEBS aims to primarily inform the ESIA process and the development of the topic-specific management plans, in compliance with the Applicable Standards.

This SEBS describes the key socioeconomic and health conditions relevant to the Project Social Area of Influence (AoI). These have been identified based on a combination of desktop information and primary data collected during the social field survey activities conducted by ERM during April, May and July 2023.

This document is also intended to:

- provide a basis for the identification of the changes that the project might cause on the current socio-economic conditions;
- increase the Project team's understanding of the societal context and needs of the local communities in the Project Social AoI;
- inform the development of effective stakeholder engagement activities and a strategic community development approach, to support efforts to acquire and maintain a 'social license' for the Project throughout its lifecycle.

1.1.1 Structure of this report is the following:

- Section 2: Social AoI presents the methodology for defining the study area for the characterisation of the socioeconomic and health conditions;
- Section 3: Government and Administration describes current political and administrative set up at national, county and local level;
- Section 4: Planning and Development describes planned strategic development at different levels as well as key spatial planning strategies or plans as these can related to the Project;
- Section 5: Demographics provides a description of the population distribution in the AoI and well as trends in migration and population change;
- Section 6: Land Use and Ownership describes the different types of land uses as well as the land ownership structure;
- Section 7: Economy and Employment describes the main economic activities and employment sectors at the regional and local levels; Livelihood Activities describes the main livelihood activities in the AoI with a focus on land cultivation and animal husbandry activities;
- Section 8: Infrastructure and Public Services identifies and describes the main infrastructure and services including access and quality in the AoI;
- Section 9: Education and Skills describes the education attainment and skills levels at the regional and local levels where available, as well as the education infrastructure in the area;
- Section 10: Community Health and Safety present an overview of the public health situation in the AoI;
- Section 11: Security presents an overview of the main security issues;
- Section 12: Human rights context presents the relevant institutional framework as well as those aspects which are relevant to the Project in the context of an European Union Member State;

- Section 13: References;
- Appendix A presents the Public Information Leaflet;
- Appendix B presents the list of meetings conducted by ERM during the Social Field Survey of to gather information for the development of this report.

2. METHODOLOGY

This Section provides an overview of the methodology used to prepare the SEBS, including the definition of the Project's Social Area of Influence and the process of primary and secondary data collection. The methodology is based on the guidance provided in the EBRD PR1. It also takes into account all the relevant environmental and social aspects included in PR's 2 through 8, and the IFC EHS Guidelines for Wind Energy (World Bank Group, 2015).

2.1 Social Area of Influence

The development of the Project will have direct and indirect effects on the socioeconomic conditions over different geographic areas. These range from the immediate area around the Project components such as wind turbines, access roads, electrical cables, and substation, to the whole of Buzău County.

As outlined by the requirements of major international finance institutions, only impacts over which the Client has control or influence are considered.

The Project activities will also potentially indirectly affect the socioeconomic conditions (mostly through the economic and workforce employment impacts) at the regional, national, and international level; however due to their low significance, those indirect impacts are not included in the SEBS and are only considered for cumulative impacts assessment.

Accordingly, the Project Social Area of Influence (Social Aol) has been defined as follows:

- the indirect Social Aol (considered as study area for the desktop data review) includes the entire Buzău County, where the Project site is located. This also includes Buzău Municipality (main urban centre and the seat of the county, having the same name as the county). The larger area could be experiencing economic and employment impacts as a result of the Project implementation through employment of workforce and supply of goods and services, also considered for cumulative impacts;
- the direct Social Aol, also understood as the study area for the socioeconomic qualitative baseline data collection field survey – see Figure 2-1. The Direct Social Aol, hereinafter referred to as Social Aol, comprises:
 - settlements impacted by land take for the Project components: substation, access roads, turbine foundations and crane pads, underground electrical cables – all land plots required by the Project belong to the administrative territorial units of Costești, Gherăseni, Smeeni, Luciu and Țintești communes²;
 - settlements that could be affected by potential temporary environmental impacts during the construction phase and long-term during operations, such as noise, shadow flicker, etc. located in a 2 km buffer from the WTGs³.

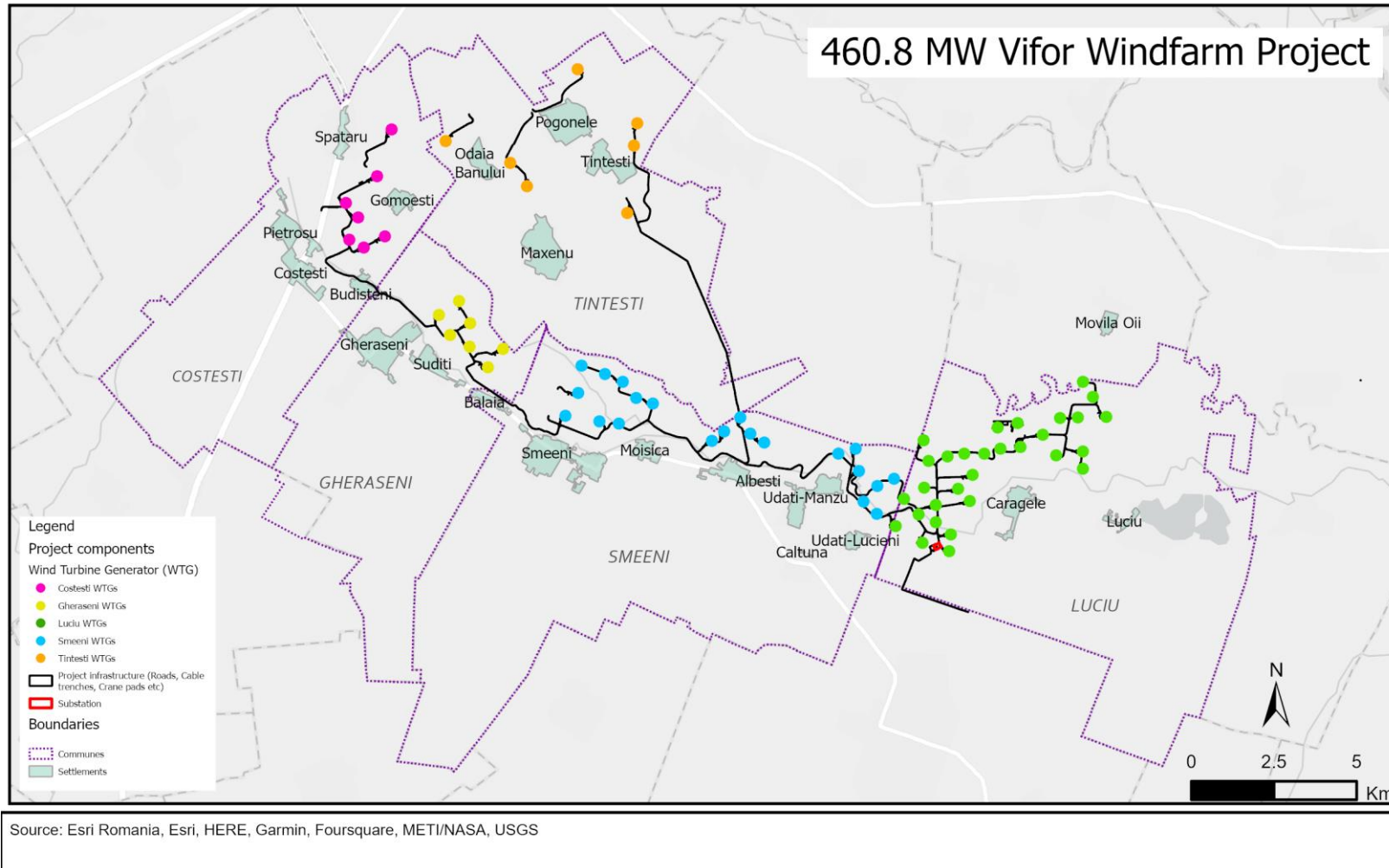
² According to the Romanian Administrative Code, the commune is defined as the administrative territorial unit consisting of one or several villages characterised by rural population joined by interests and traditions and organised depending on the socioeconomic, cultural, and geographic conditions.

³ Note: Groșani Village, part of Costești Commune and Călțuna Village, part of Smeeni Commune, are the only settlements located outside the 2 km Environmental Aol, yet are included in the Direct Social Aol. Additionally, the settlement of Movila Oii, part of Cîlîba Commune, is partly located in the 2 km environmental buffer. No land acquisition or economic displacement impacts are anticipated in this settlement, as well as no effects of noise and shadow flicker are expected. Therefore, the settlement is considered in the Study as part of the indirect Aol, subject to the further desk study.

Note that settlements impacted by increased road traffic are considered in the Traffic section in the ESIA – please refer to relevant sections in the assessment for more details.

Table 2-1 below provides a more detailed identification of impacted settlements.

Figure 2-1 Direct Social Area of Influence (Social Aol)



Source: ERM, 2023

Table 2-1 Settlements in the Project's Direct Social Aol

County (Județ)	Administrative Territorial Unit (ATU)	Settlement	Urban (u) or Rural (r)	Located in the 2 km Environmental Aol	Relevance for the Project
					Vicinity to Project components
Buzău	Costești Commune	Costești	r	Yes	Seat of commune located approximately 1.3 km from the nearest WTGs and 550 m from the planned underground cable lines connecting individual turbines with the central substation.
		Budișteni	r	Yes	The N part of the village is located at 750 m from nearest WTG, while the planned underground transmission line for the Project runs next to an existing road crossing the northern part of the settlement.
		Gomoești	r	Yes	The NW and SW parts of the village are located within 1 km buffer zone, with the NW tip of its boundary situated 650 m from the nearest WTG.
		Groșani	r	No	The E part of the village located within 2 km buffer zone, approximately 1.7 km from the nearest WTG. No direct environmental impacts expected, yet socio-economic impacts will impact entire commune.
		Pietrosu	r	Yes	Nearest residential areas are located approximately 900 m from WTGs. The southeaster tip of the settlement is directly neighbouring the planned underground transmission lines.
		Spataru	r	Yes	The S part of the village is located 700 m from the WTGs and 450 m from the nearest underground transmission line.
	Gherăseni Commune	Gherăseni	r	Yes	The N part of the village is located 700 m from the nearest WTGs and 275 m from the cable line.
		Sudiți	r	Yes	The SE part of the settlement is located 600 m from the underground cable route, while the nearest WTG is placed 700 m from the village's N boundary.
	Smeeni Commune	Smeeni	r	Yes	The N part of the village borders the transmission cable route and is located approximately 750 m from the nearest WTG.
		Bălaia	r	Yes	The underground transmission line route crosses the N part of the village, while the nearest WTG is located approximately 600 m from the settlement.
		Moisica	r	Yes	The underground cable line is situated 400 m from the N tip of the village's boundary and the nearest WTG is located 800 m from the NW part of the settlement.
		Albești	r	Yes	The N part of the village is located 200 m from the cable route and 750 m from the nearest WTG.
		Călțuna	r	No	As the village is located outside of the 2 km buffer zone, no direct environmental impacts expected; yet socio-economic impacts will impact entire commune.
		Udați-Lucieni	r	Yes	The N part of the village is located 750 m from the nearest WTG and transmission line route.

County (Județ)	Administrative Territorial Unit (ATU)	Settlement	Urban (u) or Rural (r)	Located in the 2 km Environmental Aol	Relevance for the Project
					Vicinity to Project components
		Udați-Mânzu	r	Yes	The E part of the village is located approximately 700 m from the nearest WTG, while the N tip of the settlement's boundary crosses the planned transmission route.
	Țintești Commune	Țintești	r	Yes	The N-W part of the village is located approximately 650 m from the nearest WTG. The underground cable line is situated 170 m from the N house of the village.
		Pogonele	r	Yes	The N part of the village located approximately 1.1 km from the nearest WTG. The underground cable line is situated 100 m from the N part of the village.
		Odaia Banului	r	Yes	The N-W part of the village is located approximately 650 m from the nearest WTG.
		Maxenu	r	Yes	The N part of the village located approximately 1.3 km from the nearest WTG and the underground cable line.
	Luciu Commune	Luciu	r	Yes	The W tip of the village's boundary located less than 1.5 km from the nearest WTG.
		Caragele	r	Yes	Potential impacts associated with construction of the overhead transmission line. The SW part of the village is located approximately 1.6 km from the central power collection substation. Additionally, the S part of the settlement is situated 300 m from the underground transmission line route, while the nearest WTG is placed 900 m from the W boundary of the village.

Source: ERM, 2023

2.2 Data Collection

2.2.1 Secondary Data Collection

The desktop data collection process comprised review of information primarily from the following sources:

- Published literatures sourced from websites / governmental data portals, academic and research institutions, social organizations, etc. Most recent data (2022) was used when available, with data from the previous years being presented in cases where up-to-date information was not available.
- Online Government databases and statistical information, in particular the Romanian National Institute of Statistics.
- Satellite imagery (including archives available through Google Earth).
- Reports published by multilateral organisations, such as the European Commission, Eurostat, International Labour Organisation (ILO), United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the World Bank and World Health Organisation (WHO).

The collected desktop information was mainly used to obtain contextual socioeconomic and health information at different territorial unit levels, as applicable. The results informed the primary data collection, detailed below.

2.2.2 Primary Data Collection

A socioeconomic and health baseline qualitative data collection field survey was undertaken by ERM between 16 March – 26 July 2023 in the Project area.

This included key informant interviews and focus group discussions and field observations and ground truthing in the settlements of the Social AoI.

The meetings were organised in collaboration with the newly appointed Community Liaison Officer (CLO) for the Project, who attended the meetings with the elected representatives and local farmers.

The primary goal of these activities was to collect baseline information on perceived socioeconomic and health factors and engage around key potential risks and opportunities associated with the Project.

A Project Information Leaflet (PIL) was elaborated and distributed to local stakeholders in Romanian for information and comment – see Appendix A. Additionally, dedicated maps for each ATU were developed to support engagement with farmers and other stakeholders engaged.

Out of the 58 participants in these meetings, 18 were women (approximately 31%). See Table 2-2 below:

The meetings consisted of:

- Key Informant Interview (KII) with relevant stakeholders (elected community representatives and civil servants in charge with agricultural, social assistance or planning departments, health and education professionals and policemen).
- Focus groups discussions with farmers in Costești and Gherăseni and with beneficiaries of the Day Elderly Centre in Smeeni.

Data collected during these meetings was integrated in the sections of the Socioeconomic Baseline Study (SEBS), as appropriate.

The number of men and women interviewed for baseline data collection are shown in Table 2-2 below, and the list of the stakeholders are included in *Appendix A* to this SEBS.

Figure 2-2 Stakeholder meetings



1 – Meeting with farmers and Mayor in Costești Commune; 2- Meeting with farmers and Mayor in Smeeni Commune; 3- Meeting with Manager of Day Care Center for Elderly in Smeeni, and some beneficiaries; 4 - Meeting with farmers and Commune Hall workers in Luciu Commune; 5 - Discussion with Manager of Hospital in Smeeni 6- Meeting with farmers and Mayor in Gherăseni; 7- Discussion with Social Assistant and Agricultural Register Representative in Luciu Commune; 8- Discussion with Social Assistance workers in Smeeni Commune; -; 9 - Discussion with Teacher form Highschool in Costești;;

Source: ERM, March – April 2023

Table 2-2 List of stakeholders interviewed

Administrative Teritorial Unit (ATU)	Gender	Civil servant	Education professional	Farmer	Health professional	Pensioner	Policeman	Grand Total
Costești	Female	1	1					2
	Male	4		4				8
	Total	5	1	4				10
Gherăseni	Female	1	1					2
	Male	2		7			2	11
	Total	3	1	7			2	13
Luciu	Female	3						3
	Male	3	1	3	1			8
	Total	6	1	3	1			11
Smeeni	Female	5			1	2		8
	Male	2		4				6
	Total	7		4	1	2		14
Țintești	Female	3						3
	Male	2		5				7
	Total	5		5				10
Grand Total		26	3	23	2	2	2	58

Source: ERM 2023

An additional goal of the local engagement was to build on the local knowledge to refine stakeholder identification for the Project, resulting in a more comprehensive stakeholder identification and Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) preparation. Additionally, a community grievance mechanism was established, in partnership with local authority representatives. Grievance boxes were set up in each Commune Hall.

Further feedback was collected on past engagement, along with suggestions for improving engagement in the following Project phases.

2.3 Limitations

The main limitations of this studies are the following:

- Disaggregated figures (population, age and gender structure, numbers of people receiving social assistance, number and types of vulnerable households, key economic sectors and percentage of population involved, figures of population

engaged in waged labour, number of people formally engaged in agriculture and receiving funding, health condition of the population etc.) could not be obtained at settlement level, but it was presented at the administrative unit available, as appropriate.

- The previous demographic census was conducted in Romania in 2011 and is the only source of data disaggregated at settlement level. Most of the quantitative statistical data provided by the Romanian National Institute of Statistics – ‘Institutul Național de Statistică’ (INSSE) covers key aspects such as demographics, workforce, and unemployment at the administrative unit level. Additionally, up to date statistical data on informal economy and seasonal migration was not available.
- Qualitative information included in this baseline was collected through engagement with stakeholders and thus might represent the perceptions and views of the interviewed persons.
- Only a limited number of land users from each ATU were engaged in the KII. Significantly more land users will be impacted directly and indirectly during the project implementation.

3. GOVERNMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

3.1 Government structure

3.1.1 Overview

As a democratic country, the state government in Romania is divided into the three independent powers defined by the separation of powers system: legislative, executive, and judicial. The government of Romania constitutes of the President, Prime Minister, and the Parliament; while its judiciary system is represented by the High Court of Cassation and Justice, and the Constitutional Court. The fundamental governing document of Romania, establishing the structure of the government, is the Constitution of Romania, as revised in 2003.

Since 2007 Romania is a member of the European Union, currently in the process of joining the Schengen area. Romania is also a founding member of the International Labour Organization.

3.1.2 Governmental organisation

Romania is a semi-presidential republic. The President is elected for a five-year representative, for maximum two terms. The Romanian Parliament is bicameral consisting of the Chamber of Deputies (*Camera Deputaţilor*) and the Senate (*Senatul*), elected for a four-year term.

The administrative structure in Romania is constituted by central and local administrations, as described in Chapter 3.2 of the Constitution.

The Government is the public authority of executive power that functions based on the vote of confidence granted by Parliament, ensures the achievement of the country's domestic and foreign policy and that exercises the general leadership of public administration. The Government is appointed by the President of Romania based on the vote of confidence granted to the Government by Parliament (Romanian Government Website). The Prime Minister leads the Government and coordinates the activities of its members, in compliance with their legal duties. The working structure of the Government is composed of the Prime Minister's Office, Secretariat - General of the Government, departments and other similar organizational structures with specific tasks set by Government Decision.

Framework Law no. 195/2006 on decentralization, revised by Government Emergency Ordinance no. 42/2016, establishes the principles, rules, and institutional framework, which regulates the administrative and decentralization process and establishes own and shared competencies for the different levels of government.

3.1.3 Governance structure

At the intermediate (county) and local (communes, towns, municipalities) administrative level, the government structure consists of self-governing Mayors and County Councils (*Consiliul Judeţean*) or Local Councils (*Consiliul Local*). The representatives are elected by community for a four-year term.

The central government has the right to issue legal acts that need to be followed by local authorities, and it appoints a prefect to represent the central authority at local level, with the

power to oppose and block local administration's unlawful or unconstitutional actions (considering local government's autonomy).

The county representatives are responsible, amongst others, for governance of cultural institutions, administration of public health units, and management of road infrastructure in cooperation with central public administration. The communes, municipalities, and towns' own competences include community health care, management of water supply and sewage system, and administration of local public transport.

Additionally, the civil society is represented by various non-governmental organisations, which can have a form of associations (minimum 3 members) or foundations (minimum 1 member). These legal entities often function to provide activities for general purposes on behalf of local communities, without patrimonial purpose. For instance, within the Buzău County, the Buzău Community Foundation operates, focusing on the areas of community interest, such as education, health, and the social inclusion of Roma people. The main aim of the Foundation is to develop local resources and to support the transformation of the County⁴.

Representation of women in governance is limited, moreso in rural areas. An independent study in 2020 showed that slightly over 20% of the candidates in local elections were women; the figure is only 10% for important and directly elected offices like mayors (BTI Romania Country Report).

3.2 Administrative structure

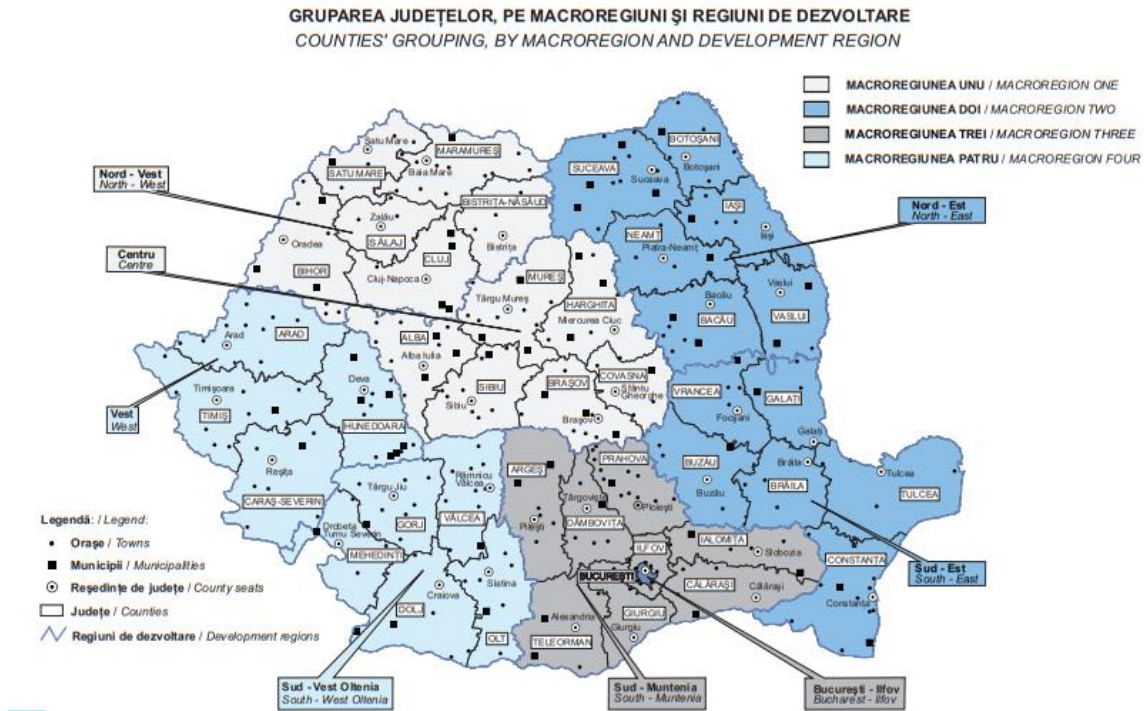
3.2.1 National overview

The country of Romania is divided into four macro-regions, as depicted in Figure 3-1. According to the Constitution, Romanian territory is further organized administratively into 41 Counties (*in Romanian "Județe"*), at the intermediate level, while Communes, Towns and Municipalities (Cities) form the local administrative level. The status of Municipality ("*Municipiu*" in Romanian) is given to larger towns, but it does not give their administrations any greater powers. The capital city of Bucharest is considered both as a county, and as a municipality.

Below communal or town level, there are no further formal administrative subdivisions. However, communes are divided into villages (which have no administration of their own).

⁴ Source: <https://www.buzaumedia.ro/stiri-din-buzau/3-organizatii-din-buzau-dedicat-educatiei-sunt-finantate-cu-245-000-de-lei-prin-programul-fondul-pentru-un-viitor-mai-bun-in-comunitati/>

Figure 3-1 Administrative division of Romania



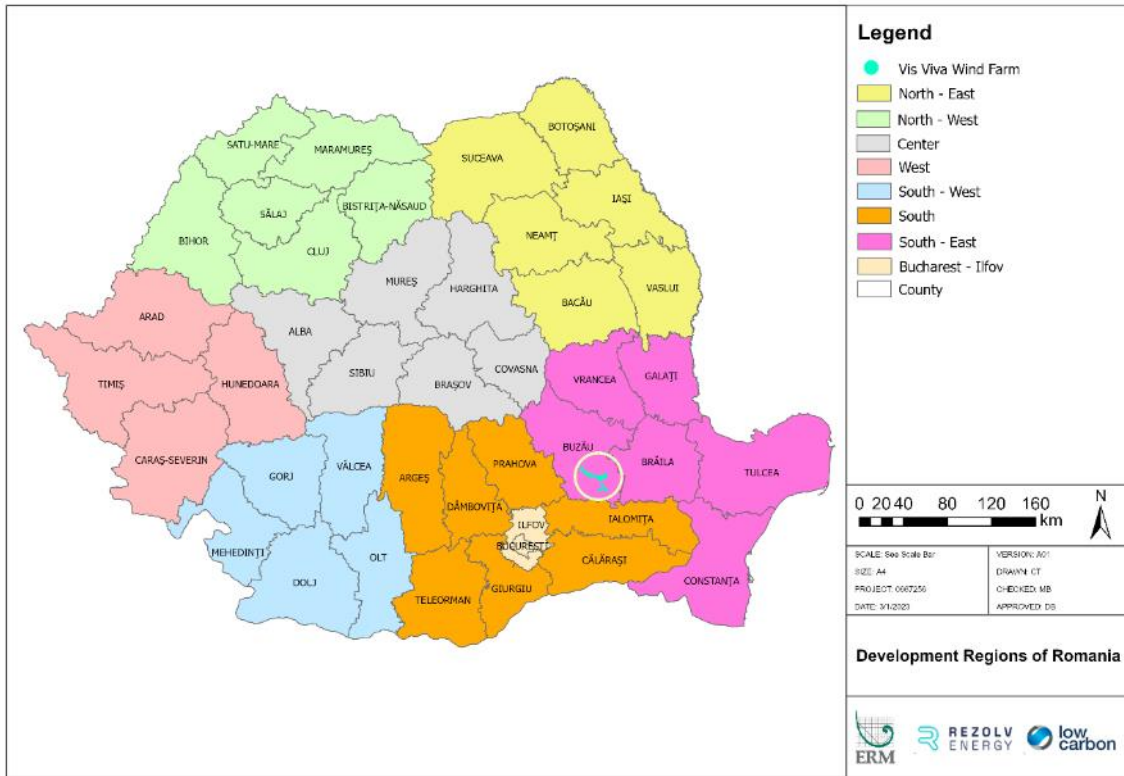
Source: INSSE, (Romanian Yearly Statistical Yearbook 2022)

3.2.1.1 EU specific territorial classification

The Regional Development in Romania Act (No. 315/2004) establishes the institutional framework for regional development policy in Romania, its objectives, the competences of the development Regions and the specific instruments of regional development policy.

The Regional Development Act divides the Romanian Territory into eight development Regions – see Figure 3-2 for details. The development Regions are not administrative-territorial units and have no legal status (Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration, 2021). They exist to co-ordinate regional development and access European cohesion funds.

Figure 3-2 Development Regions of Romania



Source: ERM, 2023

The NUTS classification (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) is a hierarchical system for dividing up the economic territory of the EU for the purpose of:

- collection, development and harmonisation of European regional statistics;
- socio-economic analyses of the regions;
- framing of EU regional policies (Regions eligible for support from cohesion policy have been defined at NUTS 2 level) (Eurostat, 2023).

In Romania, the NUTS classification overlaps, in part, with the territorial administrative classification described above:

- NUTS I level: four macro-regions (*in Romanian "macro-regiune"*), used for accessing European development funds. The Project is located in Macro-Region 2 (which integrates South-East and North-East Development Regions);
- NUTS II level: eight development regions, including South-East Region, where the Project is located;
- NUTS III level: 41 counties and one municipality (Bucharest, the national capital) reflecting Romania's official administrative-territorial structure. The Project is located in Buzău County;
- LAU I level: not used, as territorial units associations have not been identified yet;
- LAU II level: 217 cities and 103 municipalities (for urban areas), and 2,856 communes (for rural areas).

Table 3-1 below provides an overview of the administrative organisation of Romania, from macroregional to local level.

3.2.2 County overview

The Buzău County is located in the southeaster part of the country, covering an area of 6,101 km². It belongs to the South-East Development Region. The county consists of 82 communities, 3 towns and 2 municipalities (including the capital city - Buzău Municipality), and 475 villages.

3.2.3 Social Aol administration

Table 3-1 **Error! Reference source not found.** below summarises the administrative and development classifications of the settlements where the Project is located. These will be further referenced in the following sections of the SEBS.

Table 3-1 Administrative structure of the Aol

Macro-region (NUTS I)	Region (NUTS II)	County (NUTS III)	Municipality/ Commune (LAU II)	Settlement	Urban (u) or Rural (r)
2	South-East	<i>Buzău</i>	Gherăseni Commune	Gherăseni	r
				Sudiți	r
			Smeeni Commune	Smeeni	r
				Albești	r
				Bălaia	r
				Căltuna	r
				Moisica	r
				Udați-Lucieni	r
				Udați-Mânzu	r
				Luciu Commune	Luciu
			Caragele		r
			Costești Commune	Costești	r
				Budișteni	r
				Gomoești	r
				Groșani	r
				Pietrosu	r

				Spătaru	r
			Țintești Commune	Țintești	r
				Pogonele	r
				Odaia Banului	r
				Maxenu	r

Source: ERM, 2023

4. PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Romania is a member state of the European Union, so there are a series of development strategies starting from the European level to the national, county, and local level. Table 4-1 below presents the situation of the development strategies.

Table 4-1 Key strategic development actors and documents

Level	Key actors	Key documents
EU level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Commission European 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
National level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Government of Romania ■ Department of Sustainable Development ■ Relevant ministries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Romania's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (2021) ■ Romania's Energy Strategy 2019-2030, with a view to 2050 ■ National Strategic Plan for Agriculture (2023 – 2027) ■ Sustainable transport strategy for the period 2007-2013 and 2020, 2030
Regional level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Regional Development Agency (South-East Region) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Regional Development Strategy (2021 – 2027) for South-East Region Romania (Association of Regional Development Agencies in Romania, 2023) ■ Regional Smart Specialization Strategy for South-East Region 2021-2027 Romania

Level	Key actors	Key documents
		(South-East Regional Development Agency, 2023)
County level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Buzău County Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Strategy for transition to the circular economy in Buzău Municipality 2020 – 2030 (Municipality Buzau, 2023) ■ Buzău County Strategy for the Development of Social Services 2022-2027 and the Action Plan for 2022 (Buzau District Council, 2022)
Local level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Local Councils of Luciu, Costești, Gherăseni, Smeeni and Țintești 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Țintești Local development strategy (2021 – 2027) ■ Costești Local development strategy (2021 – 2027) ■ Smeeni Local development strategy (2021 – 2027) ■ Gherăseni Local development strategy (2021 – 2027) ■ Luciu Local development strategy (2021 – 2027)

Source: ERM, 2023

5. DEMOGRAPHICS

5.1 National level

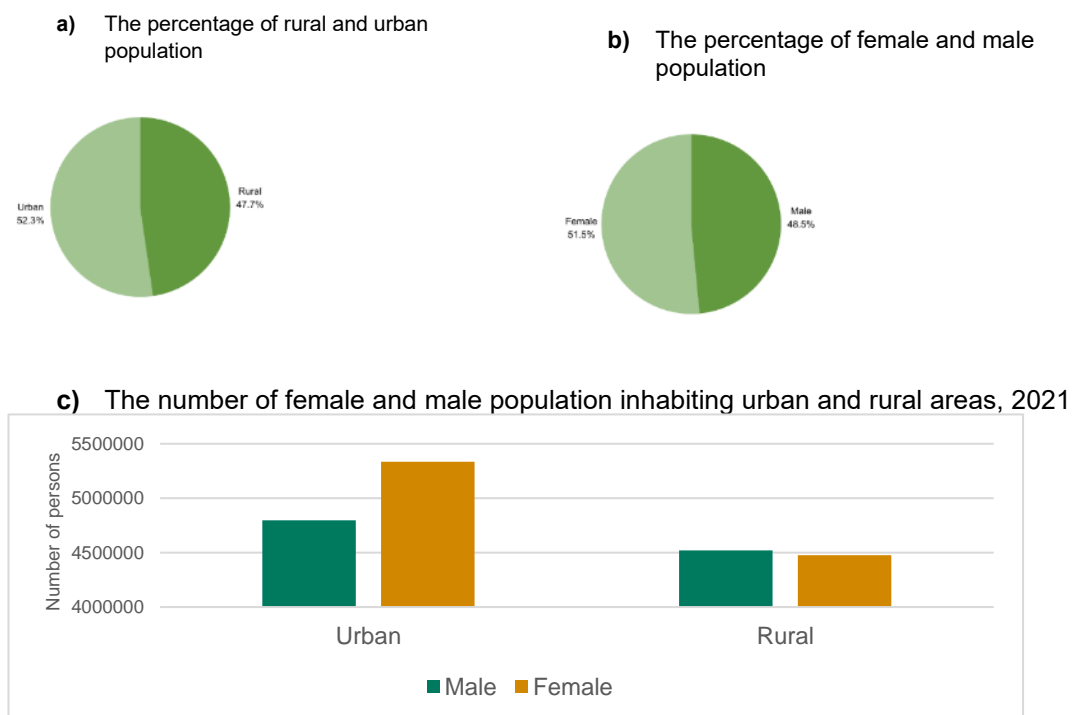
Romania had a total population of approximately 19 million people in 2021 when the last Census was conducted and experienced a population decline of about 5.1% compared to the previous census conducted in 2011((National Statistics Institute of Romania, 2023)⁵.

The population decrease was mainly caused by low fertility rate, high emigration, and relatively short life expectancy.

According to National Statistics Institute of Romania (2023) in 2021 the population was predominantly urban (52.3%, Figure 5-1a) and relatively balanced from a gender perspective (48.5% male, 51.5% female, Figure 5-1b). Nevertheless, the gender inequalities in population number was more distinguishable in urban than in rural areas (Figure 5-1c).

Compared to 1990 data, in 2021 the number of people in rural area increased from 45.7% to 46.2% (National Institute of Statistics of Romania, 2022), which may be partially explained by general population decrease in the country.

Figure 5-1 The overview of main demographic indicators in Romania in 2021



Source: ERM 2023, based on INSSE Tempo Online

Table 5-1 below highlights the key demographic indicators for Romania. The percentage of people living in urban settlements in 2021 was lower than the indicator for the European Union (53% in Romania compared to 75 % in EU in 2021). In addition, however the birth rate is higher than the European

⁵ Note: Romania conducted its latest census in 2022, formally scheduled for 2021 and postponed for 2022 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

average, Romania experienced much stronger population decline in the recent 10 years, compared to the EU average.

The population density of Romania in 2022 was 81.6 inhabitants/ km². This is a lower value than the EU average population density of 109 inhabitants/ km² (Eurostat, 2022). At EU level, there was an increase in the population density in around two thirds of the Member States, however Romania (96 to 82) and Lithuania (55 to 45) had the largest decreases in the last decade.

Table 5-1 Key Human Development Indicators for Romania

Human Development Indicator	2011	2021	EU average 2021
Urban population (%)	53.4%	53.0%	75%
Birth rate (crude, per 1000 people)	9.7	10.1	9.1
Population growth rate (compared to 2011)	N/A	-5.1	-0.1
Average age (years)	40.3	42.3	44.1

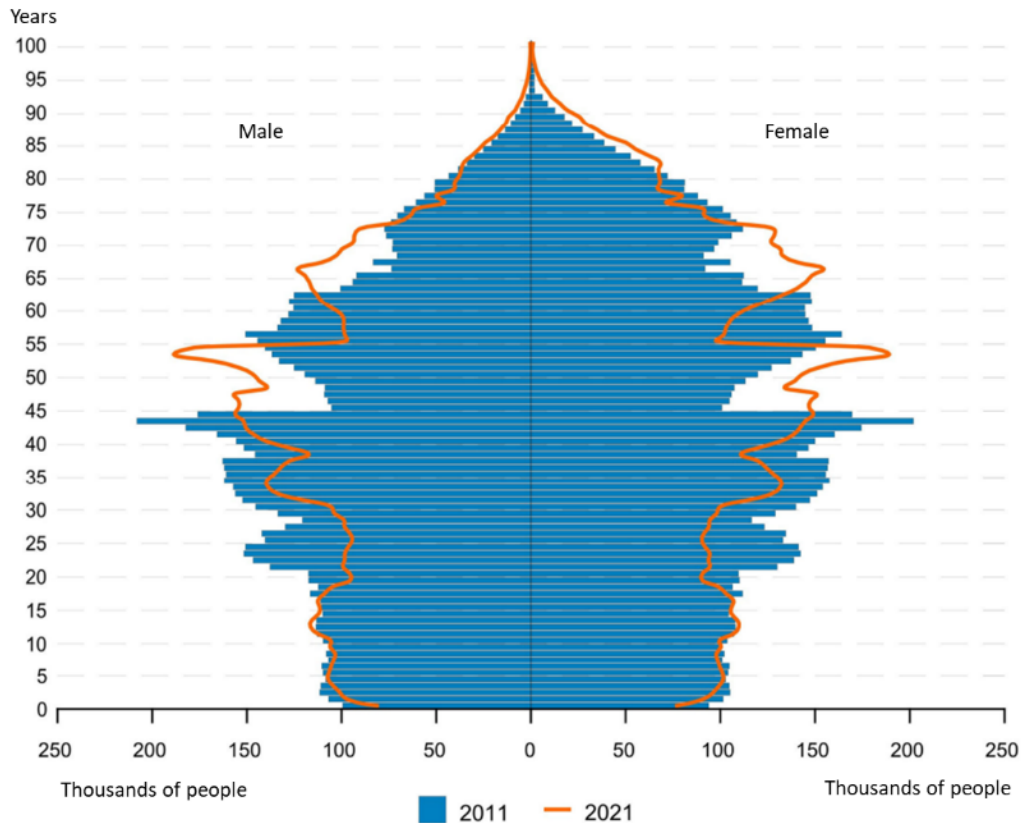
Source: (Eurostat, 2023) (World Bank Open Data, 2021)

The average age of the population residing in the country has grown from 40.3 years in 2011 to 42.3 years in 2021 (National Institute of Statistics of Romania, 2021); this average age is a characteristic of countries with an “adult and aging” population, and it is lower than the EU average (44.1 in 2021).

The female population had an average age of 44 years old (July 1st, 2021), 3.4 years older than the male average age. In 2021, 25.8% of the population consisted of people above 60 years.

Figure 5-2 below illustrates Romania’s population breakdown by age groups, according to the 2021 census. The largest groups are represented by the working-age population between 50 and 54 years old, followed by the 40-44 and 45-49 age groups.

Figure 5-2 Romania age structure pyramid in 2021



Source: (National Institute of Statistics, 2021)

The natality rate in 2021 was 8.4 births per 1000 individuals in urban areas and 9.6 births per 1000 individuals in rural areas. Female population showed a mortality rate of 14.2 deaths per 1000 individuals, while the mortality rate for male population in 2021 was 16.3 deaths per 1000 individuals. Also, the mortality rate for rural population in 2021 was higher than in urban areas: 17.4 and respectively 13.6 deaths per 1000 individuals.

5.1.1 Migration and population change

Romania experienced the highest emigration rates among the EU countries since 1990. The country went through several migration waves because of the political regime change in 1989. The subsequent integration in the EU led to an increasing number of Romanian citizens emigrating to EU countries. Emigration has become a major social and economic phenomenon in Romania, the population of which has fallen from 21.7 million in 2001 to 19.1 million in 2021.

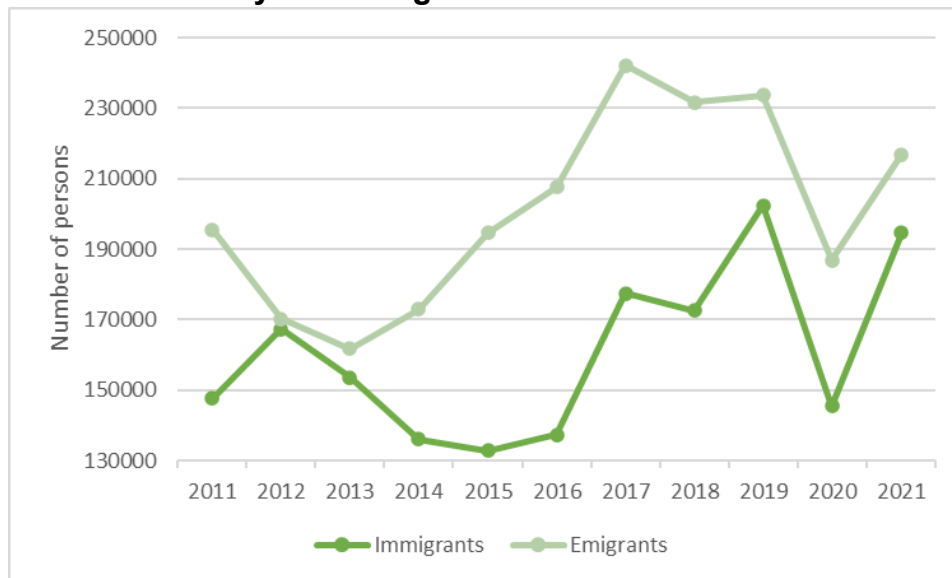
Approximately 201.7 thousand people emigrated from Romania in 2021 (54% female), and about 4.5 million Romanians live today outside the country's borders. About 65% of people who emigrated in 2021 were between 20 and 54 years old (National Statistics Institute of Romania, 2023). Romanians emigrated in 2021 mostly to the UK, Germany, and Italy (National Institute of Statistics of Romania, 2022).

The rate of people migrating internally from urban to rural areas in 2021 was higher (11.6 / 1000 inhabitants) than vice versa (6.8 / 1000 inhabitants). This can be related to the pandemic, increased life costs in urban areas, and other factors as well.

Additionally, the ongoing war in Ukraine impacts the migration statistics in Romania, with over 100,000 refugees from Ukraine registered in Romania since the armed conflict erupted in 2022.

A 10-year trend (2011-2021) in emigration and immigration flows is depicted in Figure 5-3 below. Some fluctuation in the number of migrating people in Romania is visible, however, in general an increasing trend in immigration and emigration can be distinguished.

Figure 5-3 Emigrants and immigrants flow between 2011 and 2021 determined by the change of usual residence



Source: ERM 2023, based on INSSE Tempo Online

Alongside the permanent and long-term migration, an important seasonal emigration phenomenon is also occurring and producing socio-economic and cohesion issues. Further information needs to be collected on population groups, industries and main countries of destination.

Workforce immigration is increasing, estimated to be 100,000 workers in 2023, required to cover the deficit in certain industries (e.g., construction).

5.1.1.1 Religion, Ethnicity and Language

Based on the preliminary statistical results from the 2021 census, Romanian is the native language for 91.6% of the population, while 6.3% of the inhabitants speak Hungarian as a mother language. Romani language is native for 1.2% of population and 0.2% speak Ukrainian as their mother tongue.

The main religion of Romania is Orthodox Christianity (85.3% of the population), according to the 2021 census results. 4.5% of people practice Roman-Catholic religion, 3.0% Reformed, 2.5% Pentecostal. 0.7% people practice Greek-Catholic, 0.6% Baptist, 0.4% Islam, 0.4% Adventist. 0.9% of population declared themselves atheists or agnostics.

5.1.1.2 Ethnicity

In Romania, most of the population are Romanians (77.7%) whilst the rest are Magyars (5.3%) or Roma (3%). The remaining ethnicities are minority ethnic groups from neighbouring EU countries. Ethnic groups for which over 20 thousand people were registered during the 2021 census are Ukrainians (45.8 thousand), Germans (22.9 thousand) and Turks (20.9 thousand).

5.2 Buzău County

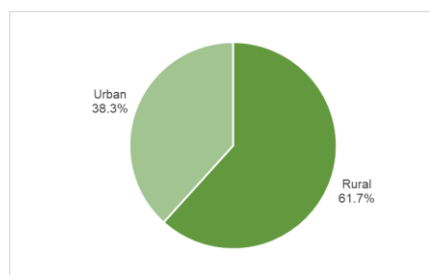
5.2.1 Overview

Based on the preliminary results of the 2021 census, the total population of Buzău County was about 403,868 people (51.1% female and 48.9% male, Figure 5-4b), showing a population decline of about 10.5% compared to the previous census conducted in 2011.

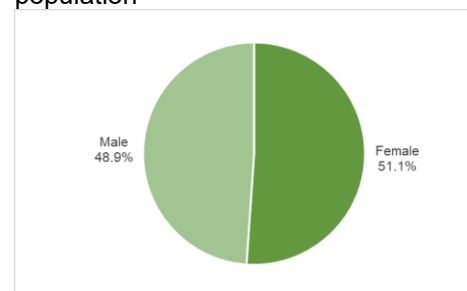
Approximately 38.3% of the population was urban and 61.7% was rural (Figure 5-4a). The average age of the residing population in Buzău is 44.4 years, and 29.6% of the residents are above 60 years old.

Figure 5-4 The overview of main demographic indicators in Buzău County in 2021

a) The percentage of rural and urban population



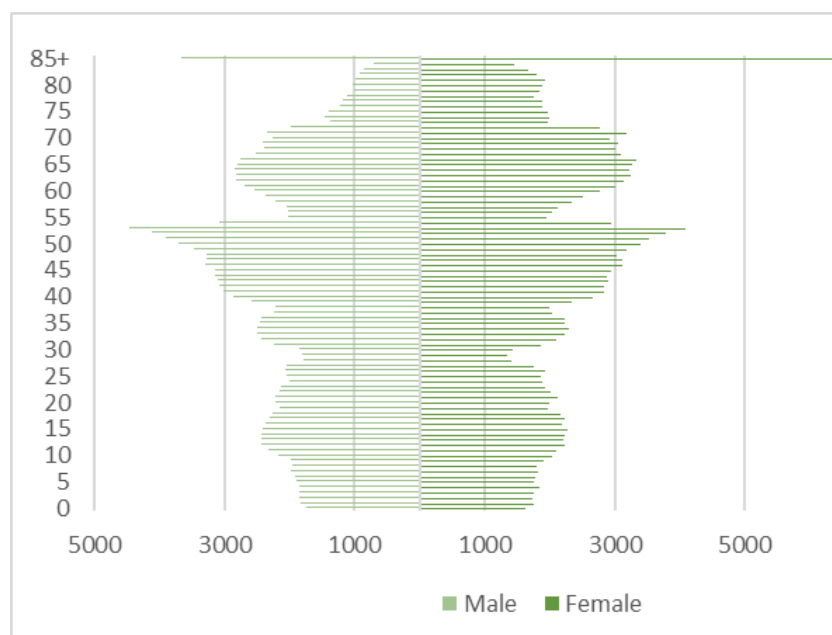
b) The percentage of female and male population



Source: ERM 2023, based on INSSE Tempo Online

The age pyramid in Buzău County indicates that in 2021 the largest population group was economically active, between 50 and 55 years old (Figure 5-5), which corresponds to the results at the national level (Figure 5-2). Overall, women in Buzău County tend to live longer than men.

Figure 5-5 Age pyramid in Buzău County in 2021



Source: ERM 2023, based on INSSE Tempo Online

The key human development indicators for Buzău County show low changes in the percentage of urban population and birth rate in 2021, compared to 2011. These two indicators, however, remain much below the national average (Table 5-2).

Table 5-2 Key Human Development Indicators for Buzău County

Human Development Indicator	2011	2021	Romania Average, 2021
Urban population (%)	38.6%	38.3%	53.0%
Birth rate (crude, per 1000 people)	7.8	7.7	10.1
Population growth rate (compared to 2011)	N/A	-10.7	-6.3
Average age (years)	-	44.4	42.3

Source: ERM, 2023, based on INSSE Tempo Online

The average age of the population residing in Buzău County was 44.4 years in 2021 (National Institute of Statistics of Romania, 2011), higher than the national average. In the ranking of counties by average age, Buzău County ranks 36th out of 41. The female population had an average age of 46.5 years old (July 1st, 2021), 2 years more than the male average age. Urban population is only slightly younger on average (44.1 years) than rural population (44.6 years). The demographic aging index (expressed as a number of elderly people aged 65 and over per 100 young people under 15 years old) in Buzău County in 2021 was 152.4 elderly people per 100 young people, 31.2 higher than the national average (121.2 elderly people per 100 young people).

The natality rate in Buzău County in 2021 was 7 births per 1000 individuals in urban areas and 8.3 births per 1000 individuals in rural areas. The mortality rate for rural population in 2021 was higher than in urban areas: 23.2 and respectively 16.7 deaths per 1000 individuals. The most recent data for mortality rate by sex is from 2020 (National Institute of Statistics of Romania, 2021), and it shows a mortality rate for female population of 13.0 deaths per 1000 individuals, and respectively 14.8 deaths per 1000 individuals for male population.

5.2.2 Migration and population change in Buzău County

In a national context of high emigration rates, Buzău County experienced population migration phenomena as well. Cca. 5,000 persons emigrated temporarily from the country in 2021, compared to cca. 400, who emigrated permanently (INSSE⁶). Out of those who migrated temporarily, men in rural area represented the largest group; the largest group that permanently migrated in 2021 was

Local media reported in 2022 that approximately 100 Ukrainian refugees were registered in Buzău County, mostly mothers with children and elderly women who were hosted in Buzău City (Gazeta Buzoiana, 2022).

⁶ Source: INSSE Tempo Online POP320C, POP 309E

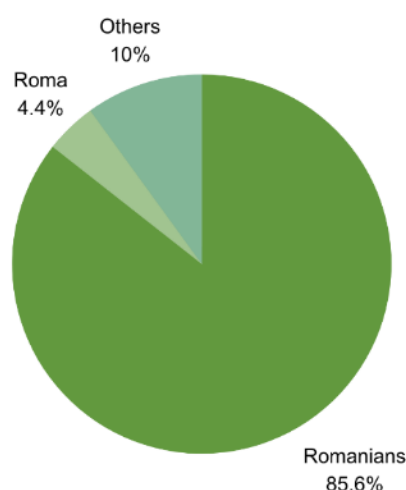
5.2.3 Language, Ethnicity and Religion

Based on the preliminary statistical results from the 2021 census, Romanian is the native language for 98.3% of the population in the County (National Institute of Statistics of Romania, 2021).

85.6% of people in Buzău County are Romanians, followed by 4.4% Roma, according to the 2021 preliminary census results (Figure 5-6). Other ethnic minorities in Buzău include Magyars, Ukrainians, Germans, Lipovans, Bulgarians, Greeks, Italians, Jews, Polish, Albanians, and others (National Institute of Statistics of Romania, 2021).

Regarding the religious association, in 2021 98.2% of Buzău County's population belonged to the Orthodox Church, followed by 0.6% of Pentecostal and 0.4% of Adventists. Other religions in the county are practiced, such as Roman-Catholic, Reformed, Greek-catholic, Baptist, Islam, Unitarian, Jehovah, Evangelism, Old Calendar Orthodox, Evangelical Lutheran, Serbian Orthodox, Augustine Evangelist, Evangelist Roman, Mosaic Faith, and Armenian Apostolic Church. 379 people were atheists and 138 agnostics, according to the 2021 census preliminary results (National Institute of Statistics of Romania, 2021).

Figure 5-6 Main ethnicities in Buzău County in 2021



Source: ERM, 2023, based on INSSE Tempo Online

5.3 Social Aol

The five administrative units in the project Aol vary in size and population.

Smeeni has a population of approximately 5,800 inhabitants. In opposition, Luciu commune has a population of approximately 2,600 inhabitants.

A population decreasing trend is evident within the communes, in line with the national and county demographic developments. Costești Commune, located closest to Buzău city has the smallest population decline in the Social Aol - see Table 5-3 and Figure 5-7 below for more details.

Table 5-3 Population numbers in the Social Aol (2011, 2021)

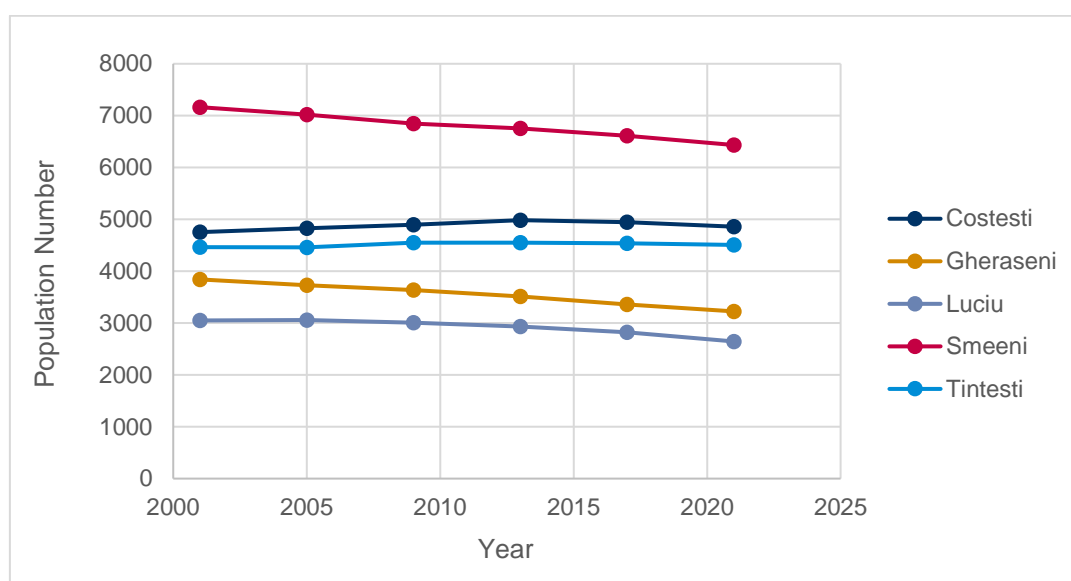
Municipality/ Commune (LAU II)	Settlement	Population / settlement (2011)	Total Population (2011)	Total Population (2021)	Demographic change 2011/2021	
	Gherăseni	2,912	3,456	3,079	-377	-10.9%

Municipality/ Commune (LAU II)	Settlement	Population / settlement (2011)	Total Population (2011)	Total Population (2021)	Demographic change 2011/2021	
Gherăseni Commune	Sudiți	544				
Țintești Commune	Țintești	696	4,518	4,197	-321	-7.1%
	Pogonele	1,537				
	Odaia Banului	121				
	Maxenu	2,164				
Smeeni Commune	Smeeni	3,247	6,649	5,806	-843	-12.7%
	Albești	889				
	Bălaia	219				
	Călțuna	565				
	Moisica	359				
	Udați-Lucieni	389				
	Udați-Mânzu	981				
Luciu Commune	Luciu	2,004	2,911	2,591	-320	-11.0%
	Caragele	907				
Costești Commune	Costești	1,559	4,817	4,493	-324	-6.7%
	Budișteni	521				
	Gomoești	252				
	Groșani	67				
	Pietrosu	1,204				
	Spătaru	1,214				

Source:
ERM
2023,
based
on
INSSE
Census
Data

Note: Data available at settlement level dates from 2011, when the previous population survey was conducted in Romania. The 2021/2 census is currently being processed. Preliminary demographic results at Administrative Territorial Unit (ATU) level were published in December 2022 and complete results are expected to be published by December 2023.

Figure 5-7 Demographic trend in the Project's Direct Aol, per commune in 2021



Source: ERM 2023, based on INSSE Tempo Online

The gender ratio is relatively balanced in all communes. Although the Study area is defined by a strong majority of Orthodox Christian Romanians, a relative larger Roma minority is present in settlements closer to Buzău city (close to Costesti Commune) and in Luciu commune.

For more information on the demographic statistics, see Table 5-4 below. Data is provided for 2011.

Table 5-4 Gender, Ethnicity and Religion in Vifor Project's Social Aol (2011)

Administrative Territorial Unit (ATU)	Costești Commune	Gherăseni Commune	Smeeni Commune	Țintești Commune	Luciu Commune
Population (no.)	4,817	3,456	6,649	4,518	2,911
Population density per km ²	85.4	63.0	62.0	62.6	30.7
Gender distribution					
% females	50.21%	48.67%	50.08%	50.07%	48.63%
% males	49.79%	51.33%	49.92%	49.93%	51.37%
Ethnic composition					
Romanians	88.18%	95.54%	95.26%	91.66%	91.45%
Roma	6.97%	1.71%	1.34%	4.69%	6.53%
Other (incl. Unknown)	4.75%	2.69%	3.4%	3.63%	N.A

Religious domination

Orthodox Christians	94.71%	97.11%	96.45%	95.55%	97.70%
Other	0.48%	-	0.14%	0.78%	0.10%
Unknown	4.75%	2.06%	3.40%	3.63%	2.03%

Source: ERM 2023, based on information provided by the [National Institute of Statistics](#) (National Institute of Statistics of Romania, 2011)

6. LAND OWNERSHIP AND USE

6.1 Land ownership

6.1.1 National level

Land reforms restructuring the land ownership structure were implemented starting 1945 by the communist regime in Romania. These focused first on liquidating properties of big landowners through expropriation of approximately 1.47 million ha, out of which 1.1 million ha were given to the peasants.

In this way, individual land ownership of under 3 ha increased significantly, while ownership of over 50 ha dropped considerably. The collectivization of farmland started in 1949. Unlike the model applied in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, collectivization in Romania was not achieved by mass liquidation of wealthy peasants, starvation, or agricultural sabotage, but was accomplished gradually and often including significant violence and destruction employed by cadres, or Party representatives.

The end of 1989 marks the beginning of transition from a centralised economic system to the market economy. The land restitution process (including agricultural and forestry land) conducted by the state beginning in 1990 resulted in most of the land becoming privately owned, with plots generally being less than two ha.

The following key concerns regarding land ownership in Romania are to be noted:

- *Land property fragmentation:* Traditional inheritance practices decrease the size of plots owned by every generation. This hinders the owner's ability to farm intensively, lower production costs and increase agricultural output. Additionally, owners sometimes own separate parcels of land, which makes it difficult to consolidate and farm. Additionally, owners of land plots may have moved within or outside Romania which adds obstacles to the process of registering land or consolidating certain plots.
- *Land property registration:* Land plots are in many cases held without clear registration and property records are not adequately maintained. Cadastral records are sometimes missing or not updated, and the process of measurement and registration takes time. Lack of cadastre registration which makes it more difficult to implement farming incentives, develop the land market and raise the interest of local farmers to develop and grow. Luciu Commune is the only ATU fully cadastered, in the other ATUs the process is ongoing.
- *Minority property rights:* Similar to access to education and employment, the exercise of property rights may be problematic for Roma communities.

To address some of the issues above, the Government intends to elaborate and implement a Rural Code, which will support the land consolidation process. Under Law 175/2020 on new rules for the free sale of agricultural land – *extra-muros* (Romanian, *extravilan*) - there are three basic rights to land:

- the right of ownership (freehold);
- various usage rights (lease, usufruct, superficies);
- rights under a concession.

This law mainly aims at the right of pre-emption to the sale of agricultural land. In addition, the resale of *extra-muros* agricultural land before the completion of a period of eight years following purchase will entail the payment of an additional tax, calculated based on the difference between the selling price and the purchase price (Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2020).

As a result, some landowners usually lease their lands to companies or agricultural associations, or in some cases leave them uncultivated. As a result, the current tendency in Romania is that the smallest holdings are reducing in number, this being counterbalanced by the growth of the number of agricultural holdings with 50 hectares or more.

Table 6-1 Land ownership for selected land use at national level in Romania

Type of ownership	Agricultural land		Forest land	
	area	% of total area	area	% of total area
Public property of the state	59,678	0.46%	3,350,000	51.38%
Public property of the administrative units	214,616	1.67%	980,000	15.03%
Private property of the administrative units	577,867	4.52%	744,000	11.41%
Private property of individuals	11,283,735	88.17%	1,274,000	19.54%
Private property of legal entities	664,104	5.18%	172,000	2.64%
Total	12,800,000	100%	6,520,000	100%

Sources: ERM, 2023, based on Forest info: INF, 2012; WB, 2014; Agricultural info: General Agricultural Census, 2020

6.1.2 County level

In Buzău County, cca. 97% of the agricultural area is privately owned, including arable land, pasture or other uses – see Table 6-2 below for details.

Table 6-2 Land fund area by usage, ownership form, Buzău County, 2014

	Total Surface (ha)	Private ownership
TOTAL	610,255	79.89%
Total Agricultural Area, out of which:	402,346	96.76%

Arable land	257,719	96.90%
Pastures	90,053	96.03%
Meadows	29,877	96.39%
Vineyards and vine nurseries	14,360	98.73%
Orchards and fruit tree nurseries	10,337	97.92%
Total Non-agricultural land, out of which:	207,909	47.24%
Forests and other forest vegetation	163,432	48.92%
Land covered with waters, ponds	10,707	15.17%
Land covered with buildings	16,354	85.71%
Ways of communication and railways	8,784	0.24%
Degraded and unproductive land	8,632	30.24%

Source: ERM 2023, based on INSSE data (Tempo Online)

6.1.3 Social Aol

In the ATUs where the Project is to be implemented, the percentage of private land reflects the County allocation.

Table 6-3 Private land ownership in the Project's Social Direct Aol

Administrative Territorial Unit (ATU)	Total land area (ha)	Private Property	Private land as % of total land area
Țințești Commune	7,197	6,440	89.5%
Costești Commune	5,710	5,378	94.2%
Gherăseni Commune	5,142	4,868	94.7%
Luciu Commune	8,674	7,126	82.2%
Smeenii Commune	10,458	10,091	96.5%

Source: INSSE Tempo Online, 2014 data

Table 6-4 Private ownership by type of land use, Social Aol

	Costești	Gherăseni	Luciu	Țintești	Smeeni
Total, out of which:	94.2%	94.7%	82.2%	89.5%	96.5%
Total Agricultural area, out of which:	99.0%	99.9%	88.4%	97.7%	99.1%
Arable land	98.8%	99.9%	82.7%	97.2%	99.7%
Pastures	99.3%	100.0%	99.5%	99.7%	95.7%
Meadows	100.0%	100.0%	N/A		100.0%
Vineyards and vine nurseries	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100%	100.0%
Orchards and fruit tree nurseries	N/A	N/A	100.0%	N/A	N/A
Total Non-agricultural land, out of which:	27.2%	58.6%	26.3%	37.1%	45.2%
Forests and other forest vegetation	N/A	56.9%	7.1%		100.0%
Land covered with waters, ponds	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%		0.0%
Land covered with buildings	83.9%	100.0%	90.0%	98.1%	92.1%
Ways of communication and railways	0.0%	0.0%	3.1%		0.0%
Degraded and unproductive land	0.0%	0.0%	94.3%	0.0%	0.0%

Source: ERM 2023, INSSE Tempo Online, AGR101B, 2014 data

6.1.3.1 Gender aspects in relation to property rights in Romania and the Project area

As per the Romanian Constitution, the right to private property is guaranteed for all (Constitution of Romania, Article 44). Legally, men and women have equal rights in Romania, including property rights. ERM's key stakeholder interviews conducted in April – May 2023 with local farmers and relevant civil servants confirmed that access to property or inheritance rights by women is not an issue of concern. Several of the houses in the villages in the Aol, including associated land, were owned by women.

6.2 Land use

6.2.1 National level

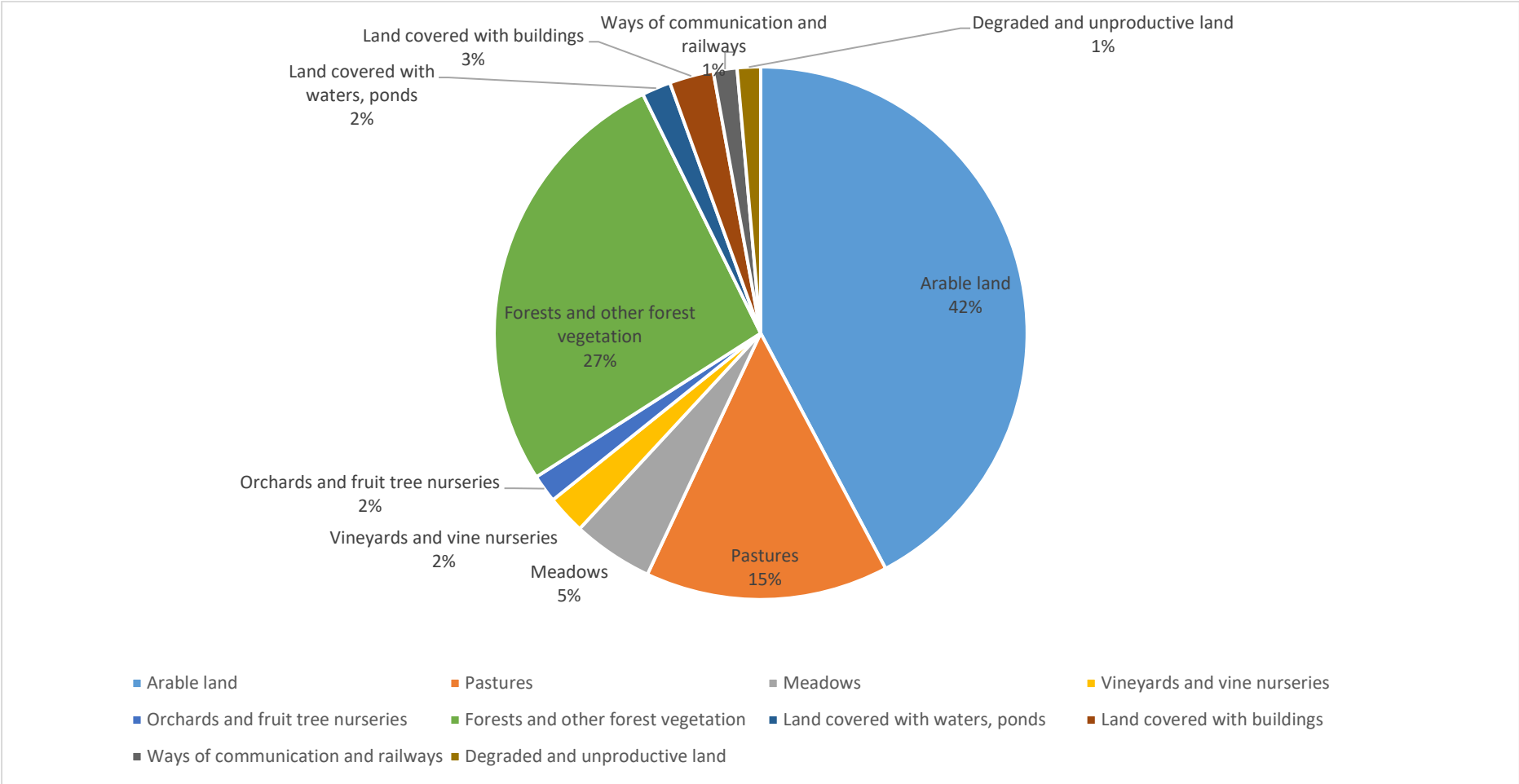
Land fund - the country's area - consists of arable land, natural pastures and hayfields, wine and fruit plantations, forests and other forest vegetation land, constructions, roads and railways, waters and ponds, other areas.

Table 6-5 Land fund area by usage, ownership form, Romania (2014)

	Surface (ha)	Private ownership
Total	23,839,071	73.37%
Total agricultural area, out of which:	14,630,072	93.64%
Arable land	9,395,303	95.16%
Pastures	3,272,165	87.17%
Meadows	1,556,246	97.49%
Vineyards and vine nurseries	209,417	96.53%
Orchards and fruit tree nurseries	196,941	95.40%
Total non-agricultural area, out of which:	9,208,999	41.16%
Forests and other forest vegetation	6,734,003	39.45%
Land covered with waters, ponds	831,495	11.75%
Land covered with buildings	758,285	79.67%
Ways of communication and railways	389,795	18.40%
Degraded and unproductive land	495,421	72.71%

Source: INSEE, Tempo Online AGR101B, 2014 data

Figure 6-1 Land use by type, Romania, 2014



Source: INSEE, Tempo Online AGR101B, 2014 data

Based on the provisional results of the 2020 General Agricultural Census, the utilised agricultural area was 12763 thousand ha. Over the last 10 years, since the 2010 General Agricultural Census, the agricultural area has dropped 543 thousand hectares (4.1%). In 2020, the arable land and the permanent crops increased by 3.1% and by 10.4%, respectively, while the area covered by pastures and hayfields was down approximately 17.4% from 2010, according to INSSE (National Institute of Statistics, 2020).

6.2.2 County Level

Buzău County follows the national ratio in terms of arable, pasture and forest land.

Details of land use by type at Buzău County level in the 2010 – 2021 period are presented in Table 6-6 below. The significant decrease of the areas occupied by vineyards and orchards is mainly due to the change of ownership, the aging of the local population, and drought.

The decrease in areas of river floodplains and marshes is mainly due to the channelling works of the rivers in the plain areas of Buzău County, to reduce the occurrence of floodings and slight increases in other land uses, as agricultural land or built environment.

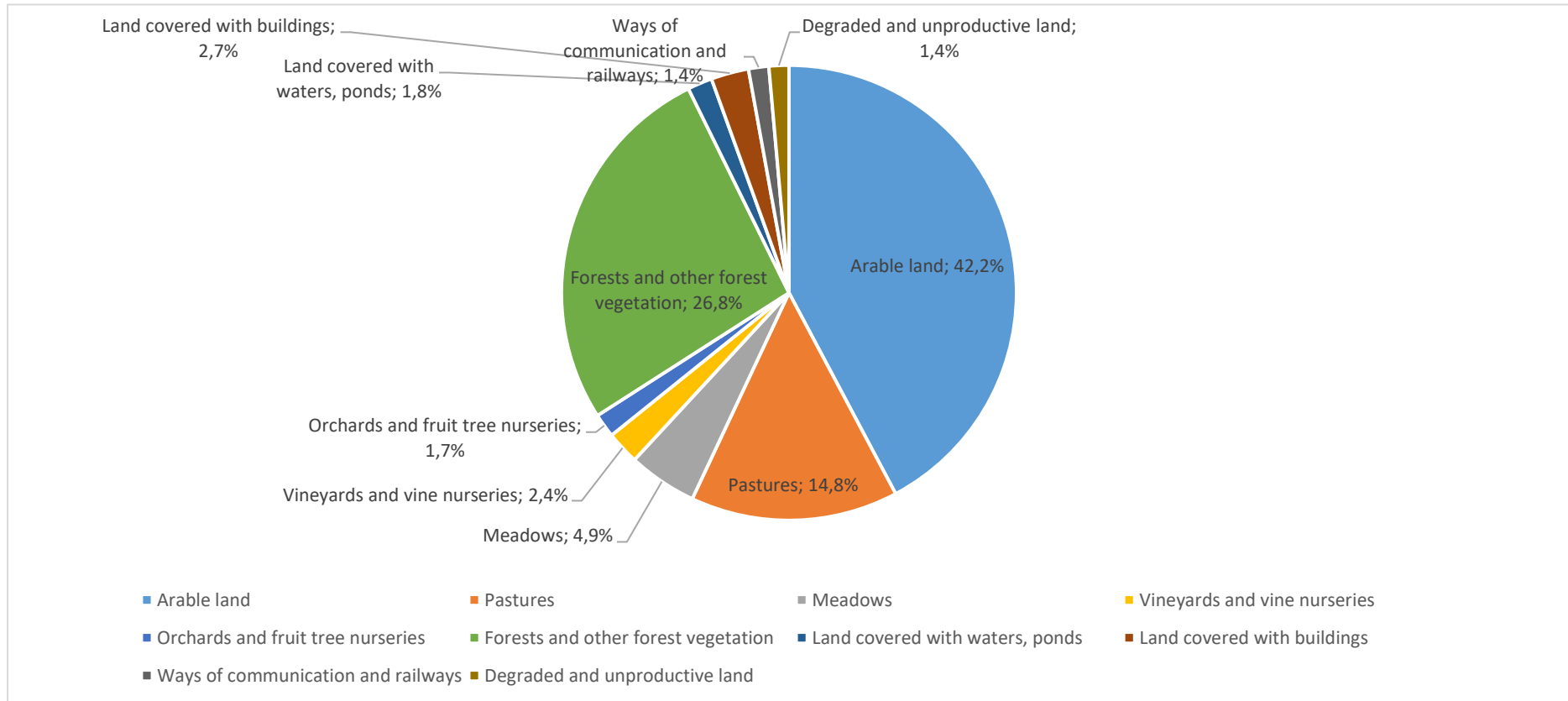
Table 6-6 Land use by type, Buzău County

Land use in Buzău County	Total area (ha)			Trends in land use	
	2010	2014	2021	% (2021 vs 2010)	trend
Agricultural land (ha)	401,854	402,346	400,979	- 0.22%	→
- arable	258,641	257,719	259,648	+0.05%	→
- pastureland	89,044	90,053	87,207	- 2.06%	↘
- meadows	28,913	29,877	32,370	+1.12%	↗
- vineyards	14,536	14,360	13,013	-10.47%	↓
- orchards	10,720	10,337	8,740	-18.46%	↓
Non-agricultural land (ha)	208,401	207,909	209,276	+1.01%	↗
- forest and other areas with forest vegetation	163,968	163,432	16,799	+1.01%	↗
- water courses and marshes	11,417	10,707	10,707	-6.22%	↘
- built up area	15,909	16,354	16,854	+1.03%	↗

- road and railways	8,888	8,784	8,784	-1.17%	↘
- degraded and unproductive land	8,219	8,632	8,632	+1.05%	↗
Total area Buzău County (ha)	610,255	610,255	610,255	0.00%	→

Source: ERM 2023, based on 2010, 2014, 2021 data provided by Buzău County Agriculture Directorate

Figure 6-2 Land use by type in Buzău County



Source: INSEE, Tempo Online AGR101B, 2014 data

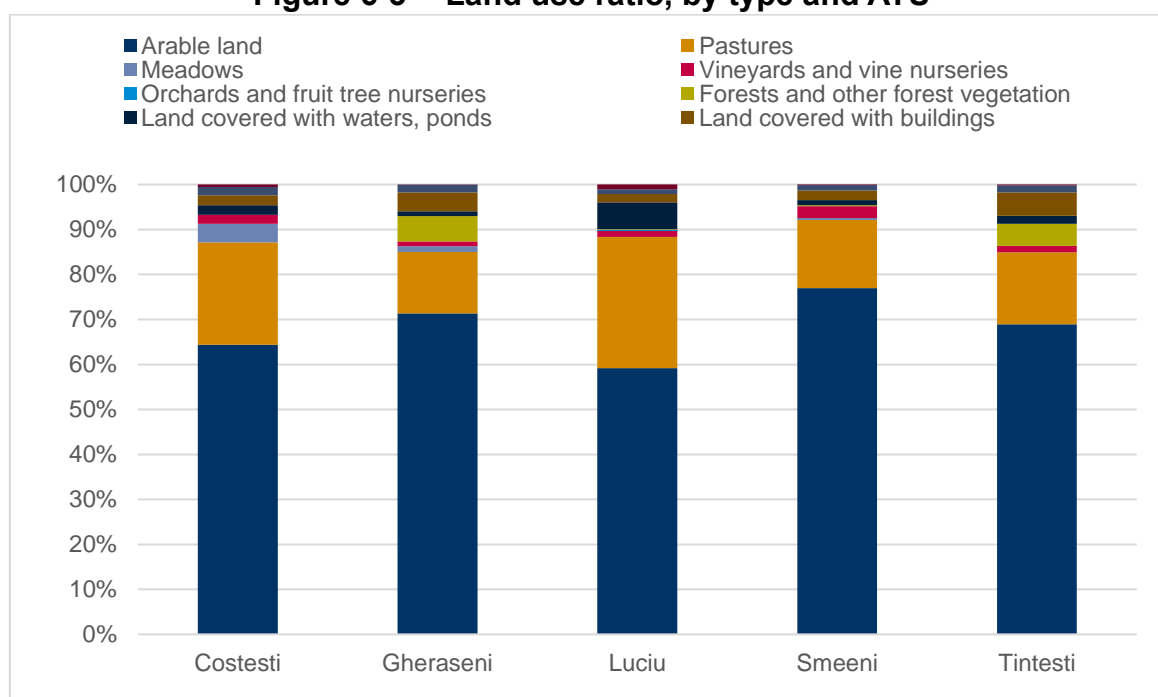
6.2.3 Local level

The land use in the Social Aol is characterized by the following:

- all the settlements have a marked rural character;
- across the Direct Aol the arable land represents the major land use, followed by pastures and forest, in different ratios;
- forest areas and forest plantations have only limited areas, mainly due to the steppe character of the region and expansion of agricultural activities since in the past century.

See Figure 6-3 and Table 6-7 below for more details on the allocation of uses in each commune.

Figure 6-3 Land use ratio, by type and ATU



Source: INSEE, Tempo Online AGR101B, 2014 data

Table 6-7 Land use allocation by type in the Social Aol

	Costești		Gherăseni		Luciu		Țintești		Smeeni	
	Total surface (ha)		Total surface (ha)		Total surface (ha)		Total surface (ha)		Total surface (ha)	
Total Surface, out of which	5,710	100.0 %	5,142	100.0%	8,674	100.0%	7,197	100.0%	10,458	100.0 %
Total Agricultural Area, out of which:	5,327	93.3 %	4,493	87.4%	7,798	89.9%	6,216	86.4%	9,958	95.2%
Arable land	3,677	64.4 %	3,670	71.4%	5,135	59.2%	4,961	68.9%	8,050	77.0%
Pastures	1,298	22.7 %	703	13.7%	2,530	29.2%	1,150	16.0%	1,584	15.1%
Meadows	236	4.1%	64	1.2%		0.0%	-	-	49	0.5%
Vineyards and vine nurseries	116	2.0%	56	1.1%	127	1.5%	105	1.5%	275	2.6%
Orchards and fruit tree nurseries		0.0%		0.0%	6	0.1%	-	-		0.0%
Total Non-agricultural land, out of which:	383	6.7%	649	12.6%	876	10.1%	981	13.6%	500	4.8%
Forests and other forest vegetation		0.0%	290	5.6%	14	0.2%	355	4.9%	16	0.2%
Land covered with waters, ponds	122	2.1%	54	1.1%	519	6.0%	127	1.8%	120	1.1%
Land covered with buildings	124	2.2%	215	4.2%	160	1.8%	371	5.2%	228	2.2%

Ways of communication and railways	107	1.9%	87	1.7%	96	1.1%	117	1.6%	126	1.2%
Degraded and unproductive land	30	0.5%	3	0.1%	87	1.0%	11	0.2%	10	0.1%

Source: INSEE, Tempo Online AGR101B

7. ECONOMY, EMPLOYMENT AND LIVELIHOODS

7.1 National accounts

7.1.1 Gross Domestic Product

Romania has a diversified, free market economy since early 1990, with a large market size and a skilled labour force and a sustained year-on-year increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), albeit not in a fully sustainable way, as pointed out by the European Commission (EC) in Romania's 2022 Country Report (European Commission, 2022).

The economic growth Romania experienced in the last decades was demand-driven and boosted by expansionary fiscal policy, which resulted in growing current account deficits and macroeconomic imbalances, points out the EC.

Gross domestic product (GDP) is a measure for the economic activity. It is defined as the value of all goods and services produced less the value of any goods or services used in their creation.

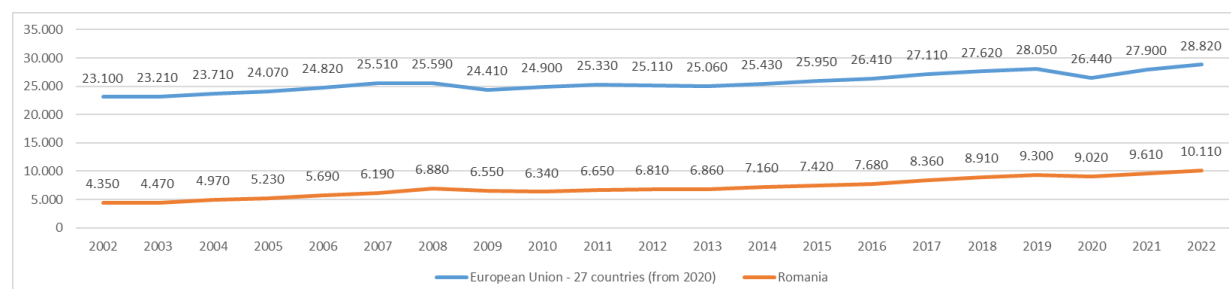
Table 7-1 Gross Domestic Product of Romania (RON)

	<i>Million lei current prices</i>		
	2019	2020	2021
Gross value added (GVA)	962,377	967,600	1,073,061
Taxes on products	101,524	100,100	115,095
Import duties (customs duties)	2,313	2,060	3,212
Subsidies on products	-2,419	-2,979	-3,965
Gross domestic product (GDP)	1,063,795	1,066,781	1,187,402
Gross domestic product per inhabitant (RON)	54,851	55,361	62,089
Gross national income	1,048,202	1,050,018	1,162,368

Source: INSSE, Romanian Statistical Yearbook 2022

The real GDP⁷ per capita in 2022 in Romania represented 35% of the EU average, according to EUROSTAT (Eurostat, 2022).

Figure 7-1 Real GDP per capita in Romania and EU 27 (EUR)



Source: ERM 2023, based on EUROSTAT data

⁷ Note: The indicator is calculated as the ratio of real GDP to the average population of a specific year..

Agriculture and industry show a decreasing trend in their share in Romania's GDP in the last decade, while the service sector expanded, moving towards an economic structure more similar to Central and Western European countries – see **Error! Reference source not found.** below for details.

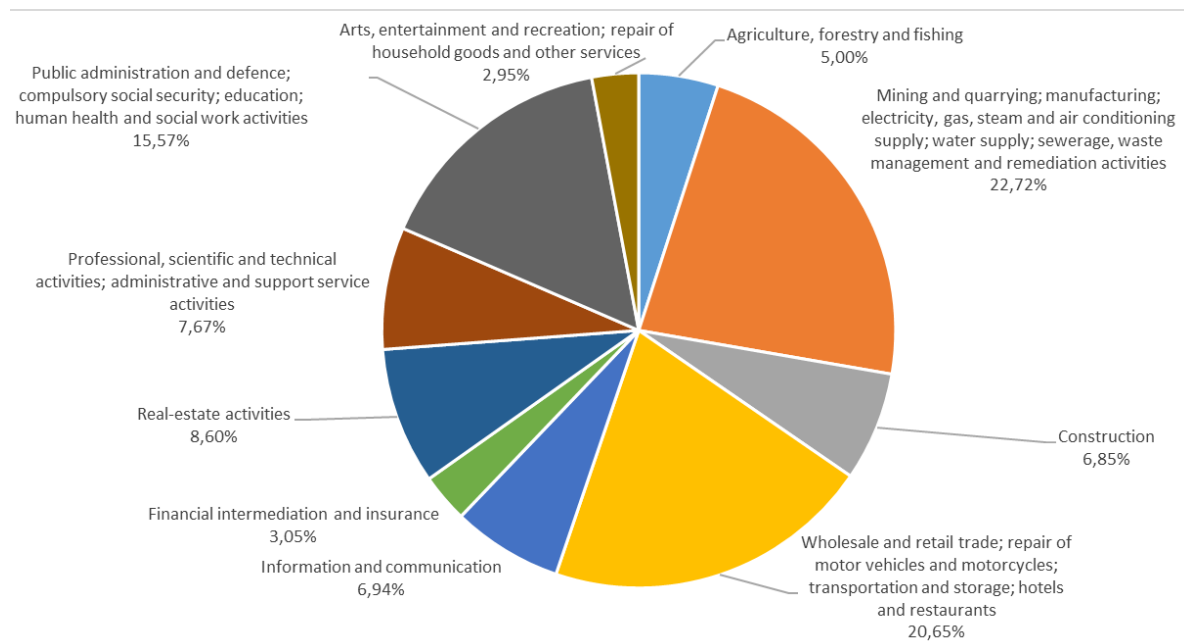
Primary sector includes mining, agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries and aquaculture, and forestry. Agriculture accounted for less than 5% of the GDP contributions in 2021, down from 6% in 2011 and 12.6% in 2004.

Secondary sector in Romania contributed with more than 27% to the national GDP in 2021 and is focused on energy resources and power and on labour-intensive manufacturing, including food processing, textiles and wood processing. Construction sector accounts for 6.85% of the national economy.

The tertiary, Services sector, represents the largest economic sector in Romania and include provision of services to other businesses as well as to final consumers.

Figure 7-2 below outlines the share of each of the main economic activities in the Gross Value Added (GVA) for 2021, by category of resources (INSSE, 2021).

Figure 7-2 Gross Value Added in 2021 by category of resources



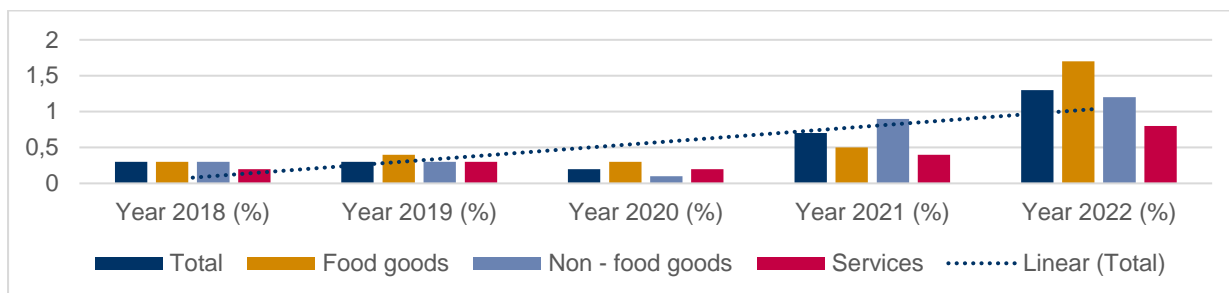
Source: ERM 2023 based on INSSE data (National Institute of Statistics of Romania, 2022)

7.1.2 Inflation and Exchange Rate

Annual inflation accelerated to 16.4 percent in December 2022, led by soaring electricity, gas, and central heating prices (up 39.7 percent), while food prices were up by 22.1 percent, according to The World Bank (The World Bank , 2022).

Data provided by INSSE (National Institute of Statistics, 2023) in May indicated that the average rate of change in consumer prices over the last 12 months (May 2022-April 2023) as compared to the previous 12 months (May 2021-April 2022) is 15.0%. Despite the capping of gas and electricity prices for households with lower average monthly consumption until September 2023, rising food and energy prices disproportionately harm the poor and vulnerable households. See Figure 7-3

Figure 7-3 – Monthly average inflation rates for categories of purchased goods and services



Source: ERM 2023, based on information provided by the National Institute for Statistics

The reference annual average exchange rate of the national currency with euro and USD are represented in Table 7-1 below.

Table 7-1 Annual average exchange rates of the Romanian national currency with euro and USD

Exchange rate	2019	2020	2021
Lei / euro	4.7452	4.8371	4.9204
Lei / USD	4.2379	4.2440	4.1604

Source: (Romanian National Bank, 2023)

7.1.3 Taxation and Government Revenues

7.1.3.1 Overview

The most important tax obligations for Romanian citizens are the income tax, the local taxes and dues (i.e. buildings, owned land, means of transport) and other taxes and property takes, like agricultural tax, tax for leased land, stamp duties on inheritance and other stamp duties.

In Romania, tax structure is characterised by low revenue and high reliance on consumption taxes.

Tax burden on labour is low, with a less progressive taxation system compared to other EU countries. Government revenues in Romania are less than 30% of GDP, compared with and EU average of 40%. Property and capital are taxed at a low rate compared to labour (European Commission, 2022).

Income tax contributions are included in Table 7-2 below.

Table 7-2 Income tax contributions (2023)

Contributions and income tax	Employee	Employer
Income tax	10%	N/A
Health insurance contribution	10%	N/A

Social (Pension) insurance contribution	25%	N/A
Work insurance contribution	N/A	2.25%
TOTAL	45 %	2.25 %

7.1.3.2 VAT and exchange rates

The VAT rates are set by the Government, although the EU set the broad rules for use of the standard, higher rate and reduced rates. Companies are directly responsible for determining and charging the correct VAT rates.

The standard VAT rate is 19%.

The standard VAT rate is applied to all supplies of goods and services (including imports) that neither qualify for an exemption (with or without credit) nor for a reduced VAT rate – see Table 7-3 for an overview of the reduced VAT rates applied.

Table 7-3 Romania VAT rates

Rate	Type	Goods or services
19%	Standard	All other taxable goods and services
9%	Reduced	Foodstuffs; pharmaceutical products; hotel accommodation; water supplies; soft drinks; some agricultural supplies; etc.
5%	Reduced	Social housing; books (excluding e-books); newspapers and periodicals; admission to cultural events; admission to sporting events; admission to amusement parks; hotel accommodation; restaurants and catering services (excluding some alcoholic beverages); take-away food; bars, cafes, and nightclubs (excluding some alcoholic beverages); Residential properties
0%	Zero	A range of activities, including the supply of services in relation to banking, finance, and insurance, medical, welfare, and educational related activities if performed by licensed entities intra-community and international passenger transport, and others.

Source: ERM 2023

7.1.3.3 Taxation of agricultural activities

Within certain thresholds specifically set by the Romanian legislation, the income from agricultural activities is tax exempt.

The fixed income quota may be reduced if natural calamities are affecting more than 30% of production surfaces. In case of agricultural income determined on a fixed income quota basis (income norms), the individuals have the obligation to submit the annual return by 25 May of the year in which the income is to be obtained to estimate the income tax, pension insurance, and health insurance contributions (capped) due on such income.

7.1.3.4 Environmental taxation

With a smaller proportion attributed to transport and pollution taxes, environmental taxation is largely driven by energy taxes (European Commission, 2022).

While fossil fuel subsidies have been steadily decreasing since 2016, the climate risk to public finances due to uninsured assets is assessed as low-medium by the European Commission.

7.1.3.5 Local authorities' revenues

From a fiscal perspective, local authorities are rather acting as spending agents on behalf of central Government, with a 30% higher reliance on grants and subsidies than the EU27 average, rather than independent administrative units. In opposition, tax revenue is less than half the EU27 average (European Commission, 2022).

The public taxes for renewable projects include the building permit tax (1% of the total investment amount) made as a one-off payment upon receiving the building permit, followed by ongoing taxation of profit and labour during the construction and operation of the Project.

7.1.3.6 Government investment

Romania developed a National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) in response to the COVID19 challenges, which was approved by the European Commission in 2021.

Out of the total budget 29.2 billion Euro, Romania allocated 41% for climate objectives, including funding of renewable energy generation, among other energy system reform objectives.

7.2 Employment and income

7.2.1 National context

According to INSSE, the structure of money income at national level in 2021 (Romanian Yearly Statistical Yearbook 2022) was the following:

- 73.8% from gross salaries and other salaries rights;
- 20.5% income from social benefits;
- Income from independent non-agricultural activities 1.9%;
- Income from agriculture 1.7%;
- Other income 2.1%.

7.2.1.1 Employment

In 2021 Romania had a total active population of 8.2 million in 2021, while employees total approximately 6.6 million people (Romanian Yearly Statistical Yearbook 2022).

The employment rate for the working age population of Romania was 61.9% in 2021, increasing by 1.7% following the pandemic onset in 2022, however remains lower than the EU average of 73.1% in the same year. Moreover, it is to be noted that this rate includes the informal sector and underground economy. Out of the total number of employees in 2021, 4,2 million only were in direct, full-time employment in the month of October (National Statistics Institute of Romania, 2023).

The trends of previous years in terms of gender and residence area continue, resulting in a higher employment rate for men (71.1% as compared to 52.5% for women) and for residents

of urban areas (67.2% compared to 55.5 % in rural areas). See Table 7-4 below for more details.

The gender difference in labor market participation in Romania is one of the largest in the European Union, after Malta and Greece. Female labor participation is 61.3% in Romania, compared with the 67.3% EU average. This is a consequence of the lower retirement age for women, which was the norm under communism, as well as the over-representation of women in informal sectors and household work, especially in rural parts of the country (BTI, 2022).

Women are not disadvantaged in education and are even overrepresented in higher education (the ratio of girls to boys enrolled in tertiary education is 1.2), but they may end up earning less than men while working in similar jobs.

Table 7-4 Population by participation in the economic activity, by sex and area (2021)

	Thousand persons					
	Economically active population	Employment*	Unemployed**	Activity rate***	Employment rate***	Unemployment rate**
Total	8,214.7	7,755.5	459.2	65.6	61.9	5.6
By sex						
Male	58.52%	58.28%	62.57%	75.6	71.1	6
Female	41.48%	41.72%	37.43%	55.3	52.5	5.0
By area						
Urban	57.78%	59.11%	35.34%	69.6	67.2	3.4
Rural	42.22%	40.89%	64.66%	60.8	55.5	8.6

*Including military staff and assimilated and the persons working in informal sector and in underground economy

** According to the international definition (ILO = International Labour Office): *Unemployment refers to the share of the labor force that is without work but available for and seeking employment.*

*** Calculated for the working-age population (15-64 years).

Source: ERM 2023, based on INSSE data (National Institute of Statistics of Romania, 2022)

Nationally, 54.9% of the civil employment is in services, followed by 24.2% in industry, 11.1% in agriculture and 9.8% in construction.

7.1% of the rural population is represented by unpaid family workers, followed by 20% self-employed. Gender wise, more women (4.7%) than men (1.8%) are unpaid family workers.

The unemployment rate was 5.6% in 2021, lower than the EU average of 7%.

Largest unemployment is registered for the youth (15-24 age group) residing in rural areas, at 23.8%, compared to urban youth unemployment rate of 20.9%. Unemployment rate for the 25-34 age group is also high, being approximately 2% higher than the 45-54 age group.

Rural unemployment remains higher than urban unemployment rates across all age-groups, by approximately 5% for the 25-23 age group and 4% for the 35-44 age group.

7.2.1.2 Salary earnings

The current minimum gross salary/month, valid starting with January 2023, is 3,000 Lei (1 Euro ≈ 5 Lei). As an exemption, for the employees from construction field, the minimum gross salary is 4,000 Lei. In 2022, Romania had a Purchasing Power of 8,017 Euro, 51% lower than the European average (16,344 Euro) (GfK, 2022).

Average gross and net nominal monthly earnings for men and women remain relatively aligned, with women earnings slightly lower. In 2021, the average gross monthly earnings were 5,576 Lei for men and 5,490 Lei for women and net nominal monthly earnings were 3,493 Lei for men and 3,331 for women.

The largest average gross nominal earnings were recorded for the following activities of the national economy:

- Information and communication (10,809 Lei);
- Financial intermediation and insurance (9,204 Lei);
- Public administration and defence (8,827 Lei);
- Human health and social assistance (6,870 Lei).

On the other side of the spectrum, sectors with the smallest average gross nominal earnings are represented by:

- Hotels and restaurants (3,111 Lei);
- Construction (4,369 Lei);
- Agriculture (4,400 Lei).

7.2.1.3 Social benefits

Social assistance

Social assistance benefits are a form of supplementing or substituting the individual/family income obtained from work, to ensure a minimum standard of living, as well as a form of support in order to promote social inclusion and increase the quality of life of certain categories of persons whose social rights are expressly provided by law.

The main types of social assistance benefits provided for vulnerable groups in Romania are outlined in Table 7-5 below.

Table 7-5 Social assistance system of Romania (2023)

Target	Benefits
Preventing and combating poverty and the risk of social exclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Guaranteed Minimum Income (VMG, currently at less than the equivalent of 50 EUR/ month); ■ Family support allowance (ASF, calculated for every child); ■ Aid for home heating (maximum 250 Lei/month for gas and maximum 320 Lei/month for wood) ■ Emergency aid supported by the state budget.
Child and family support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ State allowance for children; ■ Placement allowance; ■ Allowance for child's growth; ■ Insertion incentive; ■ The monthly allowance for accommodation leave.

People with special needs

- Rights granted to persons with disabilities in accordance with Law no. 448/2006;
- Complementary personal budgets granted monthly to people with disabilities;
- Monthly HIV/AIDS food allowance;
- The monthly allowance granted to persons with severe and accentuated disabilities;
- The monthly caregiver allowance for people with visual disabilities;
- Monthly food allowance for children with disabilities such as HIV/AIDS.

Source: (National House of Public Pensions, 2023)

Unemployment benefit and all social benefits related to the Reference Social Indicator (RSI) increase from 1 March 2023, following the 13.8% increase in this indicator. Thus, the value of the RSI increases from 525.5 lei in 2022 to 598 lei in 2023.

Financial social assistance is provided for families and singles whose income is below the monthly level of the Minimum Guarantee Income⁸ (VMG) of 598 Lei.

The active population in receipt of this support must prove they are registered as people looking for a job and must provide monthly community work, under the coordination of the Mayor. Refusal to accept suitable employment within a 50 km radius determines cancelation of benefits.

Additionally, Family Support Allowance is a form of support for low-income families.

In the light of increasing energy poverty, a heating aid for heating with wood, coal and petroleum fuels, with electricity or natural gas was introduced by Law 226/2021.

The 2022 Country Report for Romania issued by the EC confirms social transfers having a very low impact on poverty reduction, half the EU average in 2020. Romania's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) will allocate 24.8% of its total budget to tackling social challenges, and among them Minimum Inclusion Income (MII) Reform, aiming at integrating two means-tested streams: Social Aid (Guaranteed Minimum Income - VMG) and Family Support Allowance (FSA). The MII is to be implemented by January 2024 (European Commission, 2023).

Pensions

In the Romanian public pension system, the amount of old-age pension is calculated on the basis of the contribution period achieved along the applicant's career and the level of income that was used to calculate social insurance contributions, and the value of a pension point.

⁸ Note: Established by emergency ordinance. Monthly Amount of Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMV) is established by reference to the social reference indicator ISR whose value is established by law to 598 Lei

According to the National House of Pensions, the amount of the pension is determined by multiplying the average annual score achieved by the insured by the value of a pension point:

$$\text{Pension amount} = \text{Annual average score} \times \text{Pension point value.}$$

See Table 7-6 below for details on of the pension point increase since 2021.

Table 7-6 Pension point in Romania

2021	1,442 Lei
2022	1,586 Lei
2023	1,785 Lei

Source: (National House of Public Pensions, 2023)

Romania had a total number of 4.78 milion pensioners in January 2023, according to The National House of Public Pensions (National House of Public Pensions , 2023). This represents 22% from a total population of 21.9 million persons (National Institute of Statistics , 2023).

In January 2023, approximately 1.02 million pensioners (approx. 4.7% of the total population) were beneficiaries of the Minimum Guaranteed Social Pension, compared to 1.2 million in 2021, benefitting from an average of 423 Lei /month. Adding to them are a total of 116,062 Farmers pensioners with social indemnity, with an average state support of 303 Lei/ month.

Table 7-7 Public pension system of Romania (2023)

	NUMBER OF PENSIONERS	AVERAGE MONTHLY PENSION (Lei)
State pension, total out of which:	4,601,852	2,003
Social indemnity – state system	1,029,805	423
Farmer pensions, total out of which:	179,272	803
Social Indemnity -Farmers system	116,062	303

Source: The National House of Public Pensions (CNPP, 2023)

7.2.2 Social Aol

7.2.2.1 Employment

Employment at county level

In 2021, the active population of Buzău County was approximately 134,000 people and included 82,000 people in employment, according to the Buzău County 2022 Statistical Yearbook (National Institute of Statistics, 2022).

25,700 people are engaged in agriculture, however less than 5% of them were employed in this sector in 2021.

Table 7-8 includes the total number of employees in the County in 2021 according with INSSE data. Manufacturing sector has the largest employment base, followed by Trade, with a relatively balanced distribution across genders.

Following sectors are Human Health and Education, where more of 80% of the employed population is represented by women and Construction and Agriculture, where most jobs are occupied by men.

Table 7-8 Employees in 2021 in Buzău County by gender and sector of the economy (2021)

Economy sector CANE Rev.2	Total number of employees	Male	Female
C Manufacturing	22,840	52.8 %	47.2%
G Wholesale and Retail Trade; Repair of Motor Vehicles and Motorcycles	17,375	41.6 %	58.4%
Q Human Health and Social Work Activities	7,377	18.6 %	81.4%
F Construction	6,748	87.4 %	12.6%
P Education	6,120	18.6 %	81.4%
A Agriculture, Forestry And Fishing	4,170	72.4 %	27.6%
H Transportation and Storage	4,082	80.6 %	19.4%
O Public Administration and Defence; Compulsory Social Security	3,771	46.0 %	54.0%
N Administrative and Support Service Activities	3,724	65.0 %	35.0%
E Water Supply; Sewerage, Waste Management and Remediation Activities	2,947	73.2 %	26.8%
I Accommodation and Food Service Activities	2,881	37.2 %	62.8%
M Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities	1,921	53.9 %	46.1%
K Financial and Insurance Activities	860	25.5 %	74.5%
J Information and Communication	800	58.0 %	42.0%
D Electricity, Gas, Steam and Air Conditioning Supply	742	80.1 %	19.9%
R Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	719	37.1 %	62.9%
B Mining and Quarrying	610	85.2 %	14.8%
S Other Service Activities	513	53.6 %	46.4%

Economy sector CANE Rev.2	Total number of employees	Male	Female
L Real Estate Activities	336	62.5 %	37.5%

Source: INSSE, Tempo Online FOM105F

A general downward trend can be observed in the unemployment rate in Buzău County for both male and female, and total. A notable exception is 2020, when the start of the COVID-19 pandemic had immediate effects on the local labour market – see Table 7-9 below for details.

In 2021, the unemployment rate was reduced to levels lower than 2019, and the trend continued in 2022, when a 5.4 unemployment rate was registered. The female unemployment rate was less than 2% lower than the male unemployment in 2018, however the gap decreased to 0.5 % difference in 2022.

Table 7-9 - Unemployment rate by gender in Buzău County

Year	Total	Male	Female
2018	7.3	8.2	6.2
2019	6.6	7.3	5.8
2020	7.9	8.6	7
2021	5.7	6	5.3
2022	5.4	5.6	5.1

Source: ERM 2023, based on information provided by the National Institute for Statistics

Employment in the direct Social Aol

In the Aol, the number of employed people (wages employment) presents a relatively stable trend between 2017 and 2021, with a limited negative variation in 2020, since number of people employed started to go up again – see Figure 5-7 and Table 7-10 for more details.

The total number of employees is larger in Costești and Smeeni, reflecting the larger population. Luciu Commune has the highest % of unemployed population (12%), while Costești has the smallest rate registered.

Costești Commune, and Spătaru Village in particular, are located at 9 km of Buzău city and attracted several companies that located their facilities in the area in the last decade.

Key informant interviews confirmed that workers are commuting to Buzău City from Gheraseni, Smeeni and Pogoanele City.

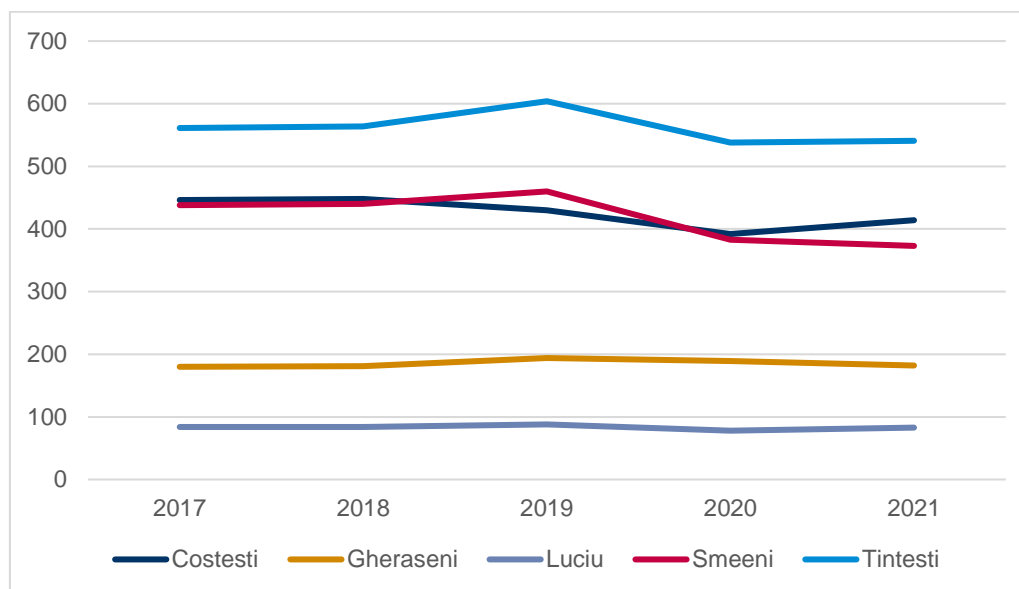
On the other hand, Luciu commune is located at approximately 35 km from Buzău, implying commuting challenges for residents in terms of cost and time required; furthermore, the number of registered companies in Luciu is very low compared to the other larger administrative units. A large number of the employed population from Luciu (approx. 100 persons) commute to Cilibia Commune working to CocoRico⁹, a poultry processing plant, while an estimated 200 people from Țintești commute for work to Buzău. Many community members temporarily migrate for work and return with income they invest in their living conditions

⁹ More info: <https://cocorico.ro/>

Tintesti houses a relevant waste recycling company.

Main employment sectors include the public sector - administration, education and health and the private sector - mainly manufacturing, construction, commerce, transport and agriculture companies present in the local area.

Figure 7-4 Average number of employed people per ATU (2021)



Source: Source: ERM 2023, based on information provided by the National Institute for Statistics

See Section 7.3 below for details of the economic actors present locally. Additionally, people are commuting for work to Buzău City, across the AoI, but in particular in Costești and Smeeni.

Gender and age group disaggregated data will become available at the end of 2023, when the detailed 2021 Census results will be published by the National Institute for Statistics.

Table 7-10 Number of employed and unemployed persons by ATU (2021)

Administrative Territorial Unit (ATU)	Costești Commune	Gherăseni Commune	Smeeni Commune	Țintesti Commune	Luciu Commune
Total Population (2021)	4,875	3,242	6,480	4,518	2,659
Average number of employees (2021)	414	182	373	541	83
Average number of registered unemployed (2021)	80	64	160	113	196
Average number of registered unemployed (2022)	75	59	101	124	141

Source: Source: ERM 2023, based on information provided by the National Institute for Statistics

Unemployment in the direct Social AoI reflects the national and county trends and is decreasing year on year following 2022.

In terms of gender, the communes also reflect the larger context, with registered male unemployment being significant larger for men than women – see Table 7-11 for a more detailed view of the unemployment rate by gender in each ATU in 2021 and 2022 and Table 7-12 below for more details on the numbers of unemployed people registered in the ATUs in 2022, by gender.

Table 7-11 Share of registered unemployed at the end of the month in the total labour resources, by gender and ATU (2021)

Administrative Territorial Unit (ATU)	Total		Male		Female	
	2021	2022	2021	2022	2021	2022
Buzău County	3	2.8	3.4	3.2	2.5	2.4
Țințești	4.1	4.6	5.2	5.6	3.1	3.5
Costești	2.6	2.5	2.9	2.9	2.3	2
Gherasani	3.3	3.2	3.6	4.1	3	2
Luciu	12	8.6	14	10.6	9.5	6.1
Smeeni	4	2.6	4.8	2.8	3.2	2.3

Source: Source: ERM 2023, based on information provided by the National Institute for Statistics

Table 7-12 Unemployment by ATU and gender (2022)

Administrative Unit	Total	Male	Female
Țințești	124	78	46
Costești	75	46	29
Gherasani	59	42	17
Luciu	141	95	46
Smeeni	101	59	42

Source: Source: ERM 2023, based on information provided by the National Institute for Statistics

7.2.2.2 Pensions

Buzău County had over 26% state pensioners of its total population in 2023, compared to the 22% national ratio. To that, 7.82% of people add as farmer pensioners, according to the The National House of Public Pensions (CNPP).

Table 7-13 Public pension system of Buzău County (2023)

	Number of Pensioners	% of Total County Population	Average Monthly Pension (Lei)
State pension, total out of which:	106,429	26.36%	1724
Social indemnity – state system	7,871	1.95%	817

Farmer pensions, total out of which:	31,575	7.82%	449.10
Social Indemnity -Farmers system	5,146	1.27%	274.16

Source: The National House of Public Pensions (CNPP, 2023)

7.2.2.3 Social Assistance for low-income groups

In Buzau County, there were 7,685 beneficiaries of the VMG support in April 2023, representing 1.9% of the total population of 403,807 persons, according to National Agency for Payments and Social Inspection (National Agency for Payments and Social Inspection, 2023).

Selected social benefits allocated in the Social Aol are included in Table 7-14 below. The smallest share of persons benefitting from Guaranteed Minimum Income (VMG) is recorded in Costești. Luciu has the highest rate of social assistance provided.

Table 7-14 % of selected social benefits recipients in the Social Aol (2023)

Administrative territorial unit	Beneficiaries						Population
	Guaranteed minimum income (VMG) (National Agency for Payments and Social Inspection, 2023)		Heating aid ¹⁰		Family Support Allowance (ASF) (National Agency for Payments and Social Inspection, 2023)		
Costești	69	1.43%	550	11.38%	32	0.66%	4,834
Gherăseni	40	1.28%	413	13.17%	34	1.08%	3,137
Smeeni	158	2.47%	Not available	N/A	73	1.14%	6,387
Luciu	145	5.56%	615	23.60%	69	2.65%	2,606
Țintești	110	2.43%	474	10.49%	72	1.59%	4,518

Source: ERM 2023, based on ANPIS and INSSE data

¹⁰ Note: KII conducted during the field survey undertaken by ERM between 16 March – 05 April 2023 in the Project area. See Appendix A for a more detailed summary of key topics covered.

7.3 Livelihoods

7.3.1 Main livelihood in the Social Aol

Given the rural character of all territorial administrative units (ATU), the main livelihood activity confirmed by KII in the Aol is agriculture, practice at both economic and subsistence levels.

In Buzau County, the number of people engaged in agriculture in dropped from 53,000 in 2017 to 25,700 in 2021 (Buzau 2022 Statistical Yearbook), reflecting the both the demographic trends and the increasing automation of farming activities, among other factors.

Less than 5% of the total people that were engaged in agriculture in 2021 were also earning a salary. This results in most farmers being self-employed or unpaid domestic workers, which is increasing the risk of poverty and exclusion.

The livelihood is diversifying, with the development of tertiary sector, in terms of health services, education services, commerce, along with commuting for work to Buzau City. Equipment and accessories manufacturing, energy production are becoming part of the local economy, whilst retail, commerce, construction and trade are expanding.

Additionally, public administration and health and education sectors provide jobs for local people in most part, although workers from outside the ATUs could commune in the Aol.

Pensioners represent a larger share of the population and face particular challenges, in particular farmers pensioners.

No tourist accommodation is available in the direct Social Aol. Hotel and guest houses are available in Buzau City and in the NW part of the County, in Sarata Monteoru Resort (approx. 20 km by road from Costesti). Spataru Forest is declared a national park and could attract tourists from Buzau, however only one guest house is advertising online.

7.3.1.1 Agriculture

Agriculture sector includes all agricultural outputs: crop production, animal production and agricultural services.

Agriculture represents an important livelihood activity for Romania, albeit its limited contribution to the country GDP. The employment rate for the rural working age population of Romania was 55.5% in 2021.

In 2021, the crop production represented 71.2 % of the total agricultural output, followed by animal husbandry with 27% and agricultural services with 1.8%. See **Error! Reference source not found.** below for more details.

Crop production includes cultivation of cereal, fruit and vegetables, technical crops, fodder, etc. Major agricultural regions are represented by the Romanian Plain (in the South and East of the country) and the Western Plain (in the West), where ample arable land is available. Transylvania (in the centre of the country) and North-East Region are predominantly dedicated to animal husbandry as they do not benefit from significant arable capacities.

Romania had in 2021 2,887,067 agricultural holdings (31% from total EU holdings). According to Eurostat¹¹, there were more than twice the number of farms in Romania as the next Member State in 2020; as there were 1.3 million farms in Poland (the equivalent of 14.4 % of the EU total), with 1.1 million farms in Italy (12.5 %) and 0.9 million in Spain (10.1 %).

¹¹ Source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Farms_and_farmland_in_the_European_Union_-_statistics#Farms_in_2020

In 2020, the value of the total output of the sector dropped by 9.5% compared to 2019, in the light of the disruptive effect of the COVID19 lock-down. The sector recovered in 2021, with a year-on-year increase of 27.6%. Crop production generated 71.2% of the total output of the sector.

Table 7-15 Output of the agricultural branch

	2019	2020	2021
Thou lei (current prices)			
Total	89,989,063	81,400,417	103,878,603
Crop production	62,967,346	52,806,967	73,961,894
Animal production	25,228,818	26,757,020	28,024,814
Agricultural services	1,792,899	1,836,430	1,891,895
Structure (%)			
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Crop production	70.0	64.9	71.2
Animal production	28.0	32.9	27.0
Agricultural services	2.0	2.2	1.8
Agricultural output indices (previous year = 100)			
Total	96.2	84.6	114.3
Crop production	94.4	78.5	122.2
Animal production	99.2	98.8	99.8
Agricultural services	132.3	98.8	99.3

Source: Source: ERM 2023 based on INSSE data¹²

Crop production

Crop production of cereals (corn, wheat, barley), vegetables and fodder represent the key crops in Buzau County, that in 2021 placed the County on number 11 in the County in terms of cultivated surface (Buzau 2022 Statistical Yearbook).

This County allocation is reflected in the direct Social AoI, where the Project is to be implemented.

Smeeni Commune has the largest share of arable land (77.0%) of its total surface and Luciu commune, at the other side of the spectrum, with 59% of its total surface occupied by arable plots – see Section 6.2.3 above for more details on land use allocation. In this context, crop production is the main livelihood activity in the AoI, confirmed by the KII conducted during the ERM Field Survey.

The majority of the land is cultivated with cereals (corn, sunflower, wheat), with more limited areas dedicated for vegetables cultivation (tomatoes, potatoes) and watermelons, due to the limited surfaces benefitting from irrigation¹³ - see **Error! Reference source not found.** below for an overview of main crops cultivated, according to the information provided by KII and included in the 2021 - 2027 Local Development Strategies developed for each ATU.

Table 7-16 Main crops in the AoI

ATU	Main crops
Costești	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ corn, wheat, sunflower, rapeseed ■ vegetables: peas, barley, potatoes, onions
Luciu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ corn, wheat, sunflower, rapeseed ■ limited tomatoes crops (less than 10 acres)
Țintești	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ corn, sunflower ■ vegetables, potatoes,
Gherăseni	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ corn, wheat, sunflower, rapeseed, alfa alfa ■ vegetables: tomatoes, potatoes

¹² Source: https://insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/field/publicatii/statistical_yearbook_of_romania_book-edition2022.pdf

¹³ Note: according to the Buzau County 2022 Statistical Yearbook, only 3% of the total arable

ATU	Main crops
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Vineyards
Smeeni	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ wheat, corn, barley, canola, sunflower and millet ▪ vegetables

Source: ERM 2023, based on data provided by KII

Cereal production is dominated by larger farmers, although there are small farmers cultivating one to three ha of land also, according to the Agricultural Registry representatives in each commune, interviewed during the ERM Field Survey. Many of the owners of smaller land plots are leasing land to the larger farmers in exchange of land rent or produce.

All cultivated arable land benefits from subsidies, averaging 1,300 RON (equivalent of 260 Euro) per ha per year, depending on the type of crop. Subsidies are paid by the National Agency for Payments in Agriculture (APIA) and a teledetection

Cereal farmers sell their produce to traders in most part, with larger farmers investing in storage capacities.

Vegetable production is conducted at a smaller scale, due to lack of land improvements (a.i. irrigation) and higher workforce requirements. In Gheraseni, however, it is strongly represented. The surface cultivated with vegetables was over 174 in 2020 (Gheraseni Commune SDL 2021 – 2027).

Many of the more labour-intensive ones like tomatoes, the work is conducted by the extended family to a very large extent. In some families, the younger generation is actively contributing to the farming family business, whilst in others they decide to take on studies and other opportunities in the Buzau City or elsewhere, leaving their ageing parents unable to maintain the scale of farming activities.

Limited Liability Companies – in Romanian SRL and Associations are usually cultivating surfaces over 100 ha of land, Authorised Natural Persons – in Romanian PFA – are cultivating surfaces over 50 ha. Natural persons who apply for subsidies registered as farmers with the Agricultural Registry of the ATU they belong and with APIA – the The Agency for Payments and Intervention for Agriculture. Additional forms of ownership are Family Enterprises and Individual Service Provider. The same type of ownership applies for animal husbandry activities, outlined below.

Animal husbandry

Animal husbandry also a key livelihood in the Aol, practiced economically and also as a subsistence activity.

Most of the large farmers also cultivate arable land and produce required fodder. The community at large, however, practices animal husbandry as a secondary or primary livelihood activity. It includes sheep, cows, goats, pigs and birds and processing (sheep milk cheese).

Number recorded for sheep and cows using the pastureland varies across the Aol – see Table 7-18 below.

Table 7-17 Estimated number of sheep and cows per ATU

ATU	Cattle	Sheep
Țintesti	628	2637
Costesti	50	4,000
Gheraseni	30	3,000

Luciu	200	8,000
Smeeni	556	15,000

Source: ERM 2023 Field Survey and LDS

Several KII included discussions on the fact that the pastureland is providing the required nourishment for only three months (Apr – Jun) in the last few years, due to registered drought and that some shepherds may not supplement sufficiently leading to concerns for animal welfare.

For this activity, same as for crop production, available workforce was an issue during the KII. With the generations, fewer young persons continued to be involved in this activity and currently shepherds are usually coming from the mountain areas. Continuity of work is becoming problematic in this case and older farmers are deciding to quit maintaining their herds.

There is an Animal Breeders Association in Luciu only – but the need for such Associations to be created was mentioned by the other ATUs representatives during the ERM Field Survey. The pastureland of the Comune is leased in its entirety

In Gheraseni, the KII indicated that two out of the 12 sheepfolds currently leasing pastureland from the Commune announced they will not continue in the next year. 281 ha of pasture are currently assigned to the 12 sheepfolds (ranging from ca. 7.5 ha to ca. 34 ha), with 100 ha of pasture remaining unassigned, due to unattractiveness of the sector and lack of association.

The Agency for Payments and Intervention for Agriculture (APIA) allocates subsidies of cca. 200 – 250 Eur /ha of permanent pasture outside the stabulation period (15 Nov until the week before Orthodox Easter - next is 05 May 2024).

APIA implements sanctions if the land is not managed in line with the Payment Claims made by 1st of March and 15th of May for the respective agricultural year:

- if more than 30% deviation is resulting from APIA's monitoring, all subventions are denied for 3 years, for all categories;
- if less than 30% - then the amount of subvention deduction is calculated based on the undeclared area.

According to the information collected during ERM Field Survey, several animal farmers are estimated to be impacted by the Project.

Considering the above on financial penalties, lack of clarity on the exact surfaces disturbed by the Project and incorrect declarations prior to 15 May could potentially result in significant financial damages for the farmer. KII held with farmers and civil servants stressed the need to engage APIA effectively in approaching this topic in the context of the the Project construction phase.

As mentioned already, the lease contract of the permanent pasture land is renewed on an annual basis, thus the land surfaces temporarily required for construction and permanently during operation (WTG foundations and crane pads, internal roads) and can be removed by the Local Councils from the lease contracts. See Table 7-18 below for an overview of current status of the permanent pastureland leased to the farms in the AoI and potentially overlapping with the Project's construction corridor.

Accidental damage issues were not a concern raised during KII. There was a general understanding of the need to have the complete coordinates (construction start and schedule, detailed design, contractors mobilised) in order to plan the process in more details.

Table 7-18 Estimation of pastureland lease status

ATU	Concession contract for public pasture
Țințești Commune	2 cattle farm associations; contracts for sheep and cattle grazing with 4 farmers
Costesti Commune	5 sheepfolds
Gheraseni Commune	4 sheepfolds
Luciu Commune	Luciu Animal Breeders Association
Smeeni Commune	124 animal breeders

Source: ERM 2023 Field Survey

Beekeeping

According to (ANARZ), there were 1,360 authorised beehives in Buzau County in 2022, placing Buzau on the second place in the country in terms of beekeeping activity, following Valcea county with 2,318 beehives.

Cca. 300 hives were reported in the Costesti General Urban Plan – PUG (2015), and cca. 300 hives were reported in the Țințești Local Development Strategy 2021-2027. Beehives were observed by ERM throughout the Aol, however more detailed information on the sector is recommended as the Project progresses.

Figure 7-5 Beehives observed in the Gheraseni



Source: ERM Field Survey

Forestry and fishing

Wood harvesting was not reported to be done extensively. Spataru Forest and Bradeanu Forest, both protected. Gheraseni forested area was also not mentioned as a livelihood source.

Recreational sport fishing is managed by the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Agency (ANPA). In 2023, the general fishing prohibition applies from 09 April – 07 June, with additional restrictions applied for certain species.

According to the ANPA, recreational sport fishing activities in the Aol can be carried out along the entire length of Călmațui river (on the territory of Costești, Gherăseni, Smeeni and Luciu communes) and its affluents. Smeeni Commune included actions regarding fishing

development in its 2021 – 2017 Local Development Strategy: setting up fishing platforms on the suitable fishing location on the River and organisation of fishing events and competitions.

In Luciu Commune is registered one of the biggest fish farms in the Buzău County, of around 359 ha. However, it dried up almost entirely in recent times and it now covers only 20 ha, according to the representatives of the local administration interviewed during the ERM Field Survey.

KII interviewees mentioned that the fishing activity is very limited, particularly during the past few years due to drought, and is conducted for recreation purposes.

Vulnerable groups may be engaged in firewood harvesting and subsistence fishing (secondary, when available), however this is subject to further engagement and study.

Hunting was not mentioned as a livelihood activity during the KII, however there is potential for bird hunting, and secondarily for rabbits, which may be practiced as a complementary subsistence activity by some community members.

7.3.1.2 Manufacturing

The largest manufacturer in terms of number of employees is located in Costești and is a non-domestic cooling and ventilation equipment manufacturer. Additional industrial equipment manufacturers are present in Costesti and a bread manufacturer in Smeeni – see details below.

Table 7-19 Key manufacturing companies in the Aoi

ATU	Company name	Type	No. Of employees (cca. 2021)
Țintești			
Costești	CAPACITY PROCOM S.R.L.	non-domestic cooling and ventilation equipment	30
	HORECO SERVICE SRL		12
	PANOSOL POWER SRL	Equipment	10
Smeeni	PROZIT PATIPAN TRADITIONAL SRL	bread	10

Source: ERM 2023, based on publicly available information

7.3.1.3 Commerce

Local markets are active in the area. The retail sector includes small commercial or service units and ensure the daily supply of the population in the area (food and beverages, bank and postal office, hardware stores).

The trade sector is in development in Costesti Commune and Spataru village in particular.

7.3.1.4 Health, education and public sector and other services

The health sector is represented by medical services (human and veterinary dispensary), social services (day centre for the elderly, home for the elderly), beauty salons, craft services (carpentry, shell making, tailoring), tourism, restaurants, entertainment (halls for events, restaurants, bars), services in the field of utilities (water, sewage, electricity), household waste collection services.

V H SECURITY SRL is a security company based in Costesti with over 10 employees in 2021, according to publicly available financial information.

7.3.1.5 Construction

The construction sector of the County is well represented.

Construction materials includes production of concrete prefabs for turnkey structures, electrical and road infrastructure, car windshields, bituminous membranes, self-adhesive tapes, PVC membranes, cement products, concrete, concrete articles, and plaster (District Council Buzau, 2020).

Several construction supply stores are active in the Aol (Costesti, Gheraseni).

Construction works also are a relevant livelihood activity. Civil works including road rehabilitation, gas and water systems are ongoing in the Aol, involving local and national companies.

Construction companies with over 10 employees active in the Aol in 2021 included:

- Costești Commune: PASCON CONSTRUCȚII CIVILE ȘI INDUSTRIALE SRL, with cca. 41 employees;
- Smeeni Commune: DAVID & CARLA CONFORT S.R.L.: 12 employees.

The sector is gaining an increasing relevance as Transelectrica recently constructed a new 400 kV line and the A7 Buzau-Focsani Motorway works started and are expected to be finalised in 2024.

7.3.1.6 Transport

Transport sector is also present in the Aol, for both goods and passengers.

Passenger transport companies are present in Gheraseni Commune:

- Trans Express SRL, with 32 employees in 2021¹⁴;
- Rizea R G SRL, with 15 employees in 2021¹⁵;
- Sampion SRL, with 5 employees in 2021¹⁶.

7.3.1.7 Energy

Renewable energy production capacity of Romania is 6,364 MW in May 2023, according to Transelectrica, the national grid operator¹⁷.

Finance for new energy projects from renewable sources is allocated through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) and the Modernization Fund¹⁸, with production capacity estimated to increase threefold by 2030.

¹⁴ Idem.

¹⁵ Idem.

¹⁶ Idem.

¹⁷ Source: Transelectrica, <https://www.transelectrica.ro/web/tel/sistemul-energetic-national>

¹⁸ Note: The Modernisation Fund is a programme from the European Union to support 10 Member States to meet 2030 energy targets by helping to modernise energy systems and improve energy efficiency. Source: <https://modernisationfund.eu/governance/member-states/>

In the Aol, all local authority representatives confirmed interest in attracting investment in renewable energy production, intention noted in all the Local Development Strategies for 2021 – 2027 developed by the five ATUs.

Additionally, a 2.25 MW photovoltaic power plant is currently being installed in Costesti – see Figure 7-6 below.

Figure 7-6 Photovoltaic power plant in Costesti



Source: ERM Field Survey

Gheraseni Local Council is also working with a Romanian investor to develop a photovoltaic installation on a 6 ha arable land plot, via a concession contract in participation ¹⁹.

More information on this is available in the ESIA – see Cumulative Impact Assessment section.

7.4 Poverty and social exclusion

Certain societal groups face severe poverty in Romania, continuing to have one of the highest shares of people at risk of poverty in the EU, with one in three Romanians struggling to make ends meet. Values vary across sources, but the EC highlights the relatively high and stable share of the rural population at risk of poverty: 38.9% vs. 18.7% in the EU (EC, 2022 Country Report).

In 2021, the Gini coefficient²⁰ for the EU was 30.1 %. In 2021, the highest levels of inequality in terms of disposable income in the EU were experienced in Bulgaria (39.7 %), Latvia (35.7 %), Lithuania (35.4 %) and Romania (34.4 %).

The undeclared workers, the self-employed in agriculture, Roma, persons with disabilities, older people and the homeless are among the worst affected and are facing a level of risk above the EU average. Child poverty increased from 40% in 2019 to 41.5% in 2020.

¹⁹ Source: Gheraseni County Council: <https://www.primariagheraseni.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/ANEXA-HCL-nr.-42.pdf>

²⁰ Note: The Gini coefficient measures the extent to which the distribution of income within a country deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. A coefficient of 0 expresses perfect equality where everyone has the same income, while a coefficient of 100 expresses full inequality where only one person has all the income (EUROSTAT)

Access to essential and social services remains insufficient, with significant rural-urban and regional disparities, with social transfers having a very low impact on poverty reduction, half the EU average in 2020.

For the Roma population in particular, initiatives for effective integration into the labour market and for effective coverage by public services are limited.

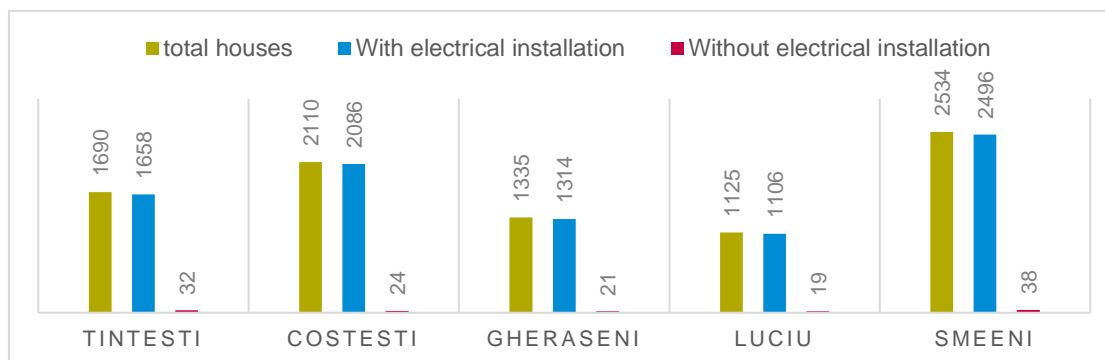
8. INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC SERVICES

8.1 Power supply

8.1.1 Electricity

All settlements in the Social Aol benefit from electricity, with most householdes connected to the centralised power supply according to the KII. A limited number of householdes in each ATU were reported by the Buzau County Council in 2020 as not being connected.

Figure 8-1 Electrical installation in the direct Social Aol



Source: Development Plan of the County territory Buzău (District Council Buzau, 2023)

All ATUs benefit from public lighting.

8.1.2 Heating and cooking

Most of the householders in the Aol use solid fuel (wood and coal) for heating in winter. Smeeni village benefits from natural gas supply and there are plans in place to develop a Smart Gas Distribution System connecting all other settlements in Smeeni and Gheraseni Commune (including both Gheraseni and Suditi villages). Costesti Commune administration also have plans in place to introduce gas supply systems.

Cooking is done mostly via Liquefied Petroleum Gas tanks. Additional means include firewood stoves and electric appliances.

8.2 Water supply and sanitation

The water needed to feed the Gherăseni system comes from the underground source, through a catchment front made up of 3 drilled wells from which a flow rate of about 7.8 l/s is taken. Due to the high content of iron in the water, in the treatment station, next to the dyeing station, there is also a deferrization station. The treatment plant was put into use in 2009 and is reported by the local authority representatives as being in good working condition.

Luciu has a centralized water supply system supplied from an underground source, through a catchment front made up of a drilled well . Water treatment is done with the help of a treatment station located within the water household. A centralised sewage system was implemented in Luciu settlment only in 2022, Caragele settlment does not benefit from a centralised wastewater collection system. Țintestești is supplied with well water only.

Figure 8-2 Water treatment station in Luciu Commune



Cragale, Luciu Commune - Sewage treatment plant system

Source: ERM Field Survey Apr – May 2023

Smeeni benefits from a centralized water supply system in a centralized system in the entire commune. The water supply is carried out from the underground source, through a drilled well from which a flow rate of about 6.4 l/s is taken. The source benefited from a rehabilitation and modernization process and is currently in good working order. Water is distributed to consumers by pumping, an electric pump with a capacity of 8.3 l/s. In the municipality of Smeeni, the degree of connection of the population to the water supply system, at the level of 2013, is estimated at 23% of the total registered population. Centralised sewerage system is present in Smeeni settlement only. Water treatment and centralised wastewater collection systems are still to be extended to the other settlements.

Costești has a water supply network in a centralized system operating in Costesti and Pietrosu settlements. The centralised water supply system for Spataru village is under development. No centralised sewerage system is currently available in the commune.

In the lack of a centralised wastewater collection system, waste water is managed by each household with the help of septic tanks, raising environmental and health concerns.

Hand dug wells were observed by ERM throughout the Social AoI. KII mentioned that wells are used for irrigation of gardens and crops. KII confirmed that during summer months water shortages are becoming an issue.

Tintesti has potable water supply but not sewage system.

- Water supply and sewage is not available in Tintesti; 6 m deep dug wells and septic tanks are used by the local population. Projects regarding these matters are currently developed by the local authority. Only 80% of the households benefit from indoor toilets.

8.3 Waste Management

Buzau County is still to implement an Integrated Waste Management System, in line with the legal requirements. A Waste Management Masterplan for the County was developed in 2021 and includes details on the waste management framework in the County. All five ATUs are part of the Intercommunity Development Association for Integrated Waste Management 'ADI ECO BUZĂU 2009'.

Solid waste is managed directly by the local councils in the case of Smeeni, Costesti and Gheraseni communes. Dedicated companies manage solid waste collection in Luciu. Hazardous waste from sanitary units in the Aol is managed by specialised companies, in line with the legal requirements.

Selective collection bins are used by Costesti, Gheraseni, Smeeni. For Luciu commune, there are no separate collection points and no existing infrastructure at the collection point; there is only the yellow bag in which paper/cardboard waste, plastics, tetrapacks, metal are to be deposited and collected (District Council Buzau, 2023).

The main sorted materials are paper, cardboard, plastic, glass, metals, and wood. There are three waste sorting stations on the territory of Buzău county, as follows:

- Vadu Pasii RER sorting station, with a capacity of about 40,000 tons/year;
- Beceni sorting station, capacity of about 500 tons/year;
- Cislau sorting station capacity of about 500 tons/year

Waste appears to be inadequately managed across the Aol, in particular at the fringes of the settlements and on the side of roads, where various amounts of plastic and construction waste can be observed.

See Figure 8-3 below for some examples.



Spătaru Village, Costești Commune – waste sorting bins



Budișteni Village, Costești Commune – waste thrown on the pasture



Gherăseni - waste thrown on the pasture

Figure 8-3 Waste management issues in the Aol

8.4 Housing and accommodation

Housing in the Aol presents a high degree of variation between newly built detached housing and poor housing conditions for the more vulnerable groups – see Figure 8-4 below for details.

Housing stock in the Social Aol is in private property. In 2021, the following number of houses was reported by (National Institute of Statistics , 2023) for the Aol:

- Țintesti: 1,692
- Costesti: 2,218
- Gheraseni: 1,355
- Luciu: 1,126
- Smeeni: 2,545

In terms of new houses, there are over 100 houses finalized each month, with a larger proportion of houses being constructed in the rural area of the County. Out of a total of 494 new houses built in 2022 in Buzau County, 66% were built in rural areas (National Institute of Statistics, 2023)

The housing stock consists largely of detached brick houses with one or two storeys and with variable front and back gardens. In Smeeni, blocks of flats are also present.

Figure 8-4 Housing in the Social Aol



House in Luciu



House in Budișteni, Costești Commune



House in Costești



House in Sudiți, Gherăseni Commune



House in Țintești Commune

8.5 Telecommunications

Most connections in the telecommunication networks in Romania are done via mobile phone and the internet, while the land line phone networks use is decreasing (National Institute of Statistics , 2021). In the Aol, postal services are complementing telecommunication. The nearest postal post office is in Buzău.

8.5.1.1 Fixed and mobile phone communication

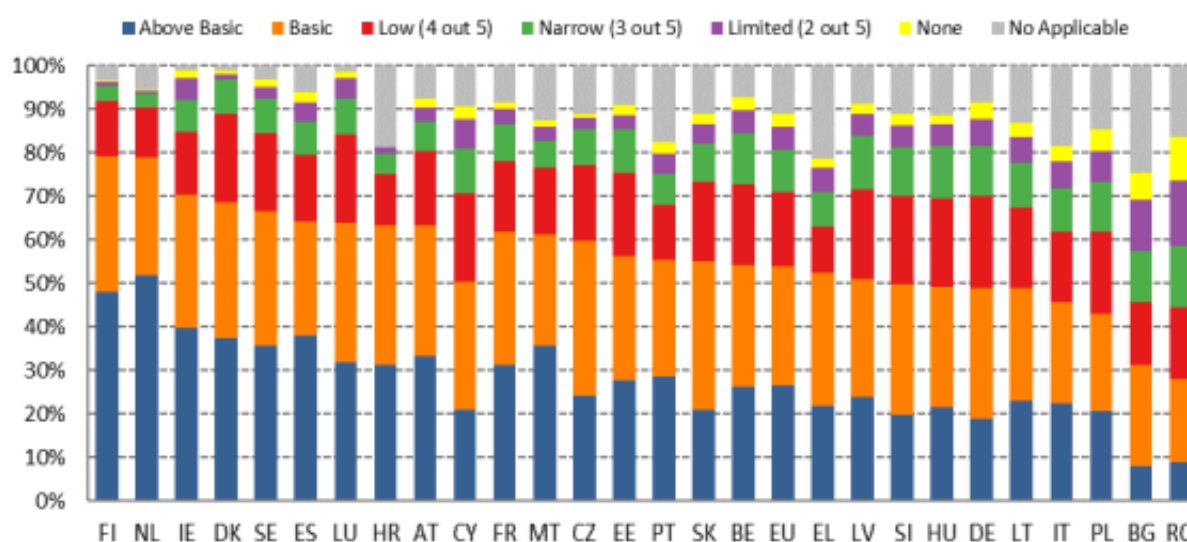
Mobile connectivity issues are still prevalent in more remote rural areas which still face very poor or no signal reception. However, the reception in the Social Aol is very good.

8.5.1.2 Internet

Internet access has become a key concern during 2020 with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, when school activities were transferred online, raising significant challenges for children and youth in the Aol, particularly in rural settlements.

In the EU, while 87% of people (aged 16-74) used the internet regularly in 2021, only 54% possessed at least basic digital skills. The Netherlands and Finland are the frontrunners in the EU, while Romania and Bulgaria are lagging - Figure 8-5.

Figure 8-5 - Digital Skills (% internet users), 2021



Source: Community survey on ICT usage in Households and by individuals (Eurostat, 2021)

Bulgaria (84%) and Greece (85%) had the lowest rate of internet take-up among Member States, but both together with Cyprus, Romania, Slovenia, and Lithuania have swiftly expanded by 15-20 percentage points in the proportion of households with internet subscription over 2016-2021.

In 2021, about 8 out of 10 households in Romania (80.8%) have access to the Internet at home. In urban areas, 86.9% of households are connected to the Internet, and in rural areas only 73.1% of households. The lowest shares are recorded by the South-East (76.2%), South-Muntenia (77.1%) and South-West Oltenia (77.4%) regions, according to INSSE (National Institute of Statistics, 2021).

9. EDUCATION AND SKILLS

9.1 National overview

While educational system has improved in Romania in the last 20 years, there are still substantial gaps in access for those in rural areas, as well for those affected by poverty and social exclusion.

Those with lower educational attainment are exposed to long-term unemployment, poverty, poor health, social exclusion, and higher crime rates, accelerating growing socio-economic discrepancies between urban and rural areas in Romania (F.Varga, 2022).

Nationally, the adult literacy rate was 98.9% in Romania in 2021, being slightly higher for males (99.1%) and lower for females (98.7%). In 2021, only 50% of population aged 16-19 had basic or above-basic digital skills (Publications Office of the European Union, 2022).

There are number of challenges regarding the Romania's education system and the 2022 Education and Training Monitor for Romania (Publications Office of the European Union, 2022) lists the most pressing of them:

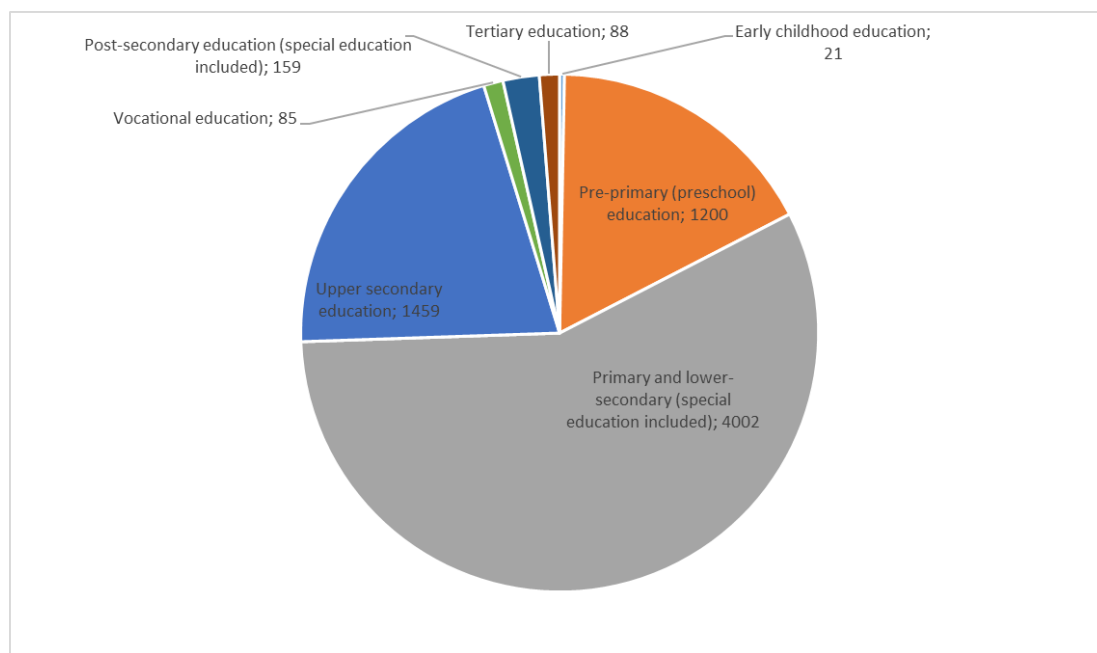
- reduced public expenditure on education at a level of 3.7% of GDP in 2021, compared to 5% of GDP at the EU level.
- the highest percentage of early leavers from education and training in the EU, with very limited progress recorded since 2012. In 2021, Romania had the highest percentage of young people (15 – 29 years of age) not in training or employment (NEET) in the EU, recorded for women at 26.3%; Romania was followed by Italy, with a 25% rate of women NEET in the same year. The NEET rate for men was 14.6% in Romania, much lower than that recorded by Italian men (21.2%) (Eurostat, 2022).
- very low exposure of vocational education and training (VET) graduates to work-based learning;
- inadequate infrastructure and low participation (78.2% vs an EU average of 93%) in early childhood education and care. In 2021, only 27% of Roma children were enrolled in early education (EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2022).
- poor educational outcomes, including high illiteracy and a lack of skills in interpreting and analysing data among students;
- unequal access to quality education, with 79% of Roma children aged 0-17 at risk of poverty, causing educational disadvantage based on socioeconomic and minority background. When it comes to access to education, the Roma remain the most disadvantaged minority population in Europe. According to the National Roma Integration Strategy (2019), 68% of Roma children tend to drop out of school early. Overall, over 80% of out-of-school children are Roma and at least 18% of Roma children are uneducated.

9.1.1 Education infrastructure

The education infrastructure of Romania presents a relatively stable status between 2019 and 2021 – see Source: *INSSE Tempo Online SCL101C*

Table 9-1 below for details. The numbers of units increased slightly for pre-primary, primary and lower education and for vocational levels.

Figure 9-1 Distribution of education units in Romania (2021)



Source: INSSE Tempo Online SCL101C

Table 9-1 Education units in Romania, by level of education (2021)

	Year 2019	Year 2020	Year 2021
Total	7,001	6,970	7,015
Early childhood education	28	23	21
Pre-primary (preschool) education	1,175	1,153	1,200
Primary and lower-secondary education	3,896	3,899	3,904
Special primary and lower-secondary education	98	99	98
Upper secondary education	1,468	1,461	1,459
Vocational education	81	83	85
Post-secondary education (special education included)	164	162	159
Foremen's vocational	1	1	1
Tertiary education	90	89	88
Public tertiary education	55	54	53
Private tertiary education	35	35	35

Source: INSSE Tempo Online SCL101C

9.1.2 Educational attainment

According to INSSE (National Institute of Statistics, 2022) in 2020 there were approximately 5.8 million of school-age persons (0 – 23 years), representing about 25% of the country's population. Out of them, only 71.8 % were enrolled in education, with major gaps recorded for early age education for both genders.

School dropout in primary and lower secondary cycle is 1.3% for male and 1.1% for female students. Abandonment rates are much higher in rural areas (1.8 % for primary education and 1.5% for secondary education) than in urban areas (1.0% for primary and 0.6% for secondary).

According to EUROSTAT (Eurostat, 2021), Romania had in 2021 the lowest share of people with higher education in the 25 - 34 age group, with 16.8% compared to 49.2% in Ireland. Out of all tertiary education degree graduates in 2021, 27% are business, administration, and law graduates, followed by 18% who graduated an engineering, manufacturing or construction profile. Only 4% of all graduates studied Agriculture and veterinary science (INSSE, 2022 Statistical Yearbook).

9.1.3 Workforce skills

There is also a substantial mismatch of skills in Romania. It is predicted that the high-skilled labour force will increase in Romania between 2018 and 2030 by 60%. However, changes in the labour market have already been observed with decreasing share of the skilled agricultural workers and increasing importance of professionals (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 2020). Such developments may have an impact on economy and skillset of regions with dominant rural landscape.

The vocational education can be obtained in Romania at the upper secondary and the post-secondary level. Although overall there is more male students in the vocational education and training (VET; 54.78% in 2019 in upper secondary education), they tend to dominate in the technical fields, while females enrol in courses on natural resources and environmental protection. The vocational education in Romania faces challenges of underfunding and high drop-out rate, combined with unequal access for children from rural and poor communities (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, 2022).

Additionally, an adult vocational training is provided in Romania through private and public entities. In 2020 there were 570 190 people enrolled in the continuing vocational training courses, of which 44.6% were female. In general, the participation in lifelong learning in Romania decreased in recent years from 1.5% in 2014 to 1.0% in 2020, despite the country's target to reach a level of 10% participation by 2020.

Romania's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (2021) sets out key elements for a fair green transition, including investments made to integrate energy-efficiency technologies into educational infrastructure, including in disadvantaged areas. This includes building a network of "green schools" (ensuring a balance between rural and urban areas) and 10 integrated campuses for vocational education and training (EC 2022 Country Report for Romania). As the EC points out, there is a risk that the transition will give rise to labour shortages in the greening sector of energy production.

One of the initiatives to address this challenge is the Renew Academy (Renew Academy, 2023), a Professional Training and Counselling Academy for Renewable Energy Sources, implemented by WIND POWER ENERGY SRL and co-financed by the European Social Fund through the Human Capital Operational Program 2014-2020. The general objective of the project is represented by "increasing the participation in continuous professional training programs of 700 employees from less developed regions, especially for those with a low level of qualification and people over 40 years old, respectively from disadvantaged rural areas".

9.2 Education infrastructure in the Social Aol

9.2.1 Education infrastructure

Buzau County also presents a stable trend in terms of number of school units available in the county between 2019 and 2021, recording two less upper secondary units in 2021 compared to 2019 and gaining one more vocational training unit in 2020 compared to 2019 – see Table 9-2 for more details.

Table 9-2 Education units in Buzau County

	Year 2019	Year 2020	Year 2021
Total	148	150	148
Early childhood education and Pre-primary (preschool) education	16	16	16
Primary and lower-secondary education	94	96	95
Upper secondary education	30	29	28
Vocational education	2	3	3
Post-secondary education (special education included)	6	6	6
Tertiary education	4	4	4

Source: Buzau Statistical Yearbook 2022 (National Institute of Statistics, 2022)

There are three tertiary education options offered by faculties within the Buzau Unit of 'Dunarea de Jos' University from Galati: Sport, Law, and Agriculture diplomas.

Vocational paths offered in the county include agriculture, mechanics, environmental protection, tourism. Additional to the public education providers, private adult training agencies provide a wide range of professional training, including a 20-week course for electricians in construction (The Professional Qualification and Training Center, 2023).

In the direct Social Aol, pre-school, primary and lower secondary education is available in all communes. In Romania, there is a minimum number of 12 students for allowing the formation of a class, thus the education services are concentrated in the larger settlements in the Direct Aol.

All villages' seats of the commune benefit from pre-school, primary and lower secondary education. Free-of-charge transportation is offered to all students in settlements without schools (a.i. Sudiți village from Gherăseni Commune, Bălaia, Moisica or Udați Mânzu in Smeeni Commune or Gomoești and Groșani villages in Costești commune.

Upper secondary education is available in Smeeni commune:

- Vocation path:
 - Agricultural Highschool Smeeni, Smeeni with two specialties: veterinarian technicians and agricultural mechanic.

See Table 9-3 below for more details on the distribution of education units across the direct Social Aol.

Many of the graduates from lower-secondary cycle who decided to follow the theoretical path opt for highschoools in Buzau City, as confirmed by the KII from Costesti and Gheraseni. Also, the three high schools in the direct Aol attract students from the surrounding ATUs also.

Table 9-3 Number of education units in the direct Social Aol, by level

Source: INSSE Tempo online data and KII

Administrative Territorial Unit (ATU)	Settlement	Education Level				
		kindergartens	primary education	lower-secondary	upper secondary	vocational education
Gherăseni Commune	Gherăseni	1	1	1	0	0
	Sudiți	0	0	0	0	0
Țintești Commune	Țintești	1	1	0	0	0
	Pogonele	0	0	0	0	0
	Maxenu	1	1	1	0	0
	Odaia Banului	0	0	0	0	0
Smeeni Commune	Smeeni	1	1	1	0	1
	Albești	1	0	0	0	0
	Bălaia	0	0	0	0	0
	Călțuna	1	0	0	0	0
	Moisica	0	0	0	0	0
	Udați-Lucieni	1	1	1	0	0
	Udați-Mânzu	0	0	0	0	0
Luciu Commune	Luciu	1	1	1	0	0
	Caragele	1	0	0	0	0
Costești Commune	Costești	1	0	0	0	0
	Budișteni	1	0	0	0	0
	Gomoiești	0	0	0	0	0
	Groșani	0	0	0	0	0
	Pietrosu	1	0	0	0	0
	Spătaru	1	0	0	0	0

See Table 9-4 below for more details on the number of enrolled students in each ATU, by level of education.

Table 9-4 Enrolled population in the direct Social AoI, by level of education and ATU (2021)

Administrative Territorial Unit (ATU)	Total	Children in kindergardens	Pupils enrolled in primary education	Pupils enrolled in lower-secondary education	Pupils enrolled in upper secondary education	Pupils enrolled in vocational education
ȚINTEȘTI	420	107	168	145	313	0
COSTESTI	493	93	186	214	0	0
GHERASENI	262	58	101	103	0	0
LUCIU	262	55	107	100	0	0
SMEENI	858	172	258	253	125	50

Source: INSSE Tempo Online SCL103D

The educational facilities are mostly in good shape and provide the required setting for the educational activities, albeit financial support for extra-curricular activities was mentioned to be deficient, resulting in a very limited exposure of children to educational and cultural activities outside the school perimeter.

Additional funding is required for outdoor sport facilities, across the direct Social AoI and for all education levels.

All schools provide social scholarships for students from low-income families and merit scholarships. In Luciu commune, approximately 100 social scholarships (approximate value of 40 EUR/ month) are provided – representing 40% of the total student population.

Additionally, school supply vouchers (approximate value of 100 EUR/ twice of year) are offered to low-income families.

Figure 9-2 Education facilities in the direct Social Aol (2023)



Secondary School Costești



Secondary School Gherăseni



Secondary School Smeeni



Smeeni- playground next to kindergarten

Source: ERM Field Survey, Apr – May 2023

9.2.2 Education attainment

Details about the education attainment in the direct social Social Aol were not available at the time this SEBS was conducted, but they will become available at the end of 2023 when the detailed census results will be published by INSSE.

The Key Informant Interviews (KII) highlighted the following:

- Financial support (social scholarships, family support allowance (ASF)) are provided conditionally to the student's attendance to classes, so parents are motivated to send the children to school;
- Seasonal migration is widely spread and impacts on the educational process, as some parents take the children with them and thus are interrupting the educational cycle;
- The schools are working together with the Town/ Commune halls to address high risk cases, including addressing domestic violence and child protection;

- Cases recorded of early pregnancy during the lower secondary cycle (ages 12 -16) in low income families;
- Poverty is a stronger risk factor for school abandonment than ethnicity, with school drop-out cases recorded for both Roma and Romanian student population.
- Childcare is deficient, with no early years services available in the direct Aol. After-school activities were reported only in Costesti and are organised by a local teacher on a voluntary basis.
- Smeeni Highschool is providing a hot meal for their high-risk students.

For 2023/2023 school year, the Government continues with its campaign to fight school abandonment, strengthened by the National Plan for Resilience and Recovery (PNRR) funding. The Buzau County School Inspectorate included the following unites in the direct Social Aol on the list of eligible institutions for school abandonment support and funding:

- Secondary School Costesti (includes primary);
- Secondary School Luciu (includes primary);
- Smeeni Agricultural High School;
- Kindergarten and School in Tintesti.

10. COMMUNITY HEALTH AND SAFETY

10.1 National overview

Romania has a universal healthcare system, with free access to healthcare services based on social health insurance.

Romanian citizens, as well as people with permanent or temporary residence, have the right to access public healthcare services, and private facilities.

According to Law 95/2006 on the health reform, updated 2023, the social health insurance represents the main system of financing the healthcare system and to ensure basic services for the insured persons.

Key population categories who benefit from social health insurance are:

- taxpayers to the social health insurance system;
- registered unemployed persons and recipients of social support (VMG and ASF);
- pensioners, based on their pensions;
- husband, wife and parents with no income, dependent on an insured person; disabled people;
- pregnant women;
- persons who are on medical leave for temporary work incapacity;
- children up to the age of 18, and students up to the age of 26, if they are students;
- persons in preventive detention or in penitentiary units;
- the monastic staff of recognized cults;
- personnel of the voluntary emergency services;
- persons with refugee status, as recognized by the state.

Romanian and EU citizens without paid health insurance have the right to free emergency medical assistance.

First contact with the healthcare system in Romania is made at the family doctor and medical units. In rural areas, some people do not have regular access to medical services due to lack of permanent medical staff and the high costs of medicines and transport.

The European Commission's *State of Health 2022* Country Profile for Romania (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2021) highlights the key characteristics of the health system in Romania for the year of 2021, presented below.

Life expectancy at birth in Romania increased by more than four years between 2000 and 2019 (from 71.2 to 75.6 years)²¹, but remained among the lowest in the EU, at almost six years below the EU average. There is a marked gender gap, with women living almost eight years longer than men.

Cardiovascular diseases are the leading causes of mortality while lung cancer is the most frequent cause of cancer death. Mortality from treatable causes is the highest in the EU and

²¹ Note: It declined temporarily by 1.4 years in 2020 due to the impact of COVID-19.

more than double the average across EU countries, with main causes of preventable mortality are ischaemic heart disease, lung cancer and alcohol-related diseases.

Overweight, obesity and smoking rates among adolescents are high, and have been growing steadily over the past two decades. Breast cancer screening in Romania was 9% in 2019 (compared to 58% the EU average).

On average, more than one third of adults in Romania reported engaging in episodic, heavy alcohol consumption at least once a month; this is marked by a significant gender gap in heavy drinking, with more than half of men (53 %) reporting such behaviour but fewer than one in five women (18 %) reporting the same.

Health spending in Romania increased in the last decade but remains the second lowest in the EU as a whole – both as a share of GDP and per capita. About 44 % of health spending was allocated to inpatient care in 2019, which is the highest proportion among EU countries. Out-of-pocket payments are above the EU average and are dominated by outpatient pharmaceutical costs.

The addressability of health services refers to the choice the patient makes to go to the doctor or not; the reasons are various (income, level of education), being influenced by accessibility (existing means of transport, the existence of dispensaries or medical offices, the schedule of doctors in the locality, etc.) (District Council Buzau, 2020).

In terms of occupational health and safety, according to EUROSTAT (Eurostat, 2022), in 2020 Romania had a 3.0 incidence rate per 100 thousand people employed, compared to 1.7 the EU average. At EU level that year, more than a fifth of all fatal accidents at work in the EU took place within the construction sector.

10.2 County overview

10.2.1 Health infrastructure

According to the 2021 and 2022 Buzău County Statistical Yearbooks, in the County there were 7.1 doctor specialists per 10 000 inhabitants in 2019 and 7.3 in 2019, with a relatively stable number of family and specialty doctors and specialised nurses available in the County.

Health infrastructure at county level is detailed in Table 10-1 below. A slight decrease in independent family doctors can be observed since 2016. In support of family doctors, there are 66 Community Nurses in the Buzau County.

Table 10-2 Main health infrastructure in Buzău County by ownership, 2016, 2018, 2020

Major health infrastructure, state-owned,	2016	2018	2020
Buzău County			
Hospitals	5	5	5
Medical dispensaries	4	4	4
School dentistry units	11	13	13
Pharmacies and local pharmaceutical units	10	10	10
Medical laboratories	30	32	33
Major health infrastructure, private,	2016	2018	2020

Buzău County			
Hospitals	2	3	3
Medical dispensaries	4	4	4
Independent family doctors and medical units	223	216	206
Independent dentistry units	171	175	182
Independent specialized medical units	158	183	190
Pharmacies and local pharmaceutical units	158	164	175
Medical laboratories	23	26	27

Source: ERM, 2023, using data of the Buzău County Statistical Yearbook, 2021

Emergency care is provided by Buzău County Emergency Hospital, public sanitary unit subordinate to the Buzău County Council. Wards can operate as continuous or day hospitalization, for acute and chronic patients, ensuring conditions for medical investigations, treatment, accommodation, hygiene, nutrition, and prevention of nosocomial infections, according to the norms approved by order of the Minister of Public Health.

Wards with doctors on call include:

- anesthesia and intensive care
- general surgery
- imaging-radiology
- healthcare
- neonatology
- neurology
- obstetrics-gynecology
- orthopedic
- otorhinolaryngology
- pediatrics
- SMURD emergency reception unit

Social services infrastructure includes residential and non-residential centres for children, the elderly, people with disabilities and victims of domestic violence. In 2022 there were 48 active centres for children, 30 centres for the elderly, four dedicated for people with disabilities and 3 centres for the victims of domestic violence (National Agency for Payments and Social Inspection, 2022) .

10.2.1.1 *The leading causes of death*

The main causes of death maintain their ratio between 2018 and 2021 in most cases. The main cause of death is represented by the diseases of the circulatory system, accounting for 56% of all deaths reported in 2021. Following cause of death at county level is the Neoplasm (16% of deaths recorded in 2021 and dropping from 2018).

Respiratory diseases had a threefold increase since 2018, being the main cause of death for approx. 15% of deaths recorded in 2021.

Table 10-3 Main causes of death in Buzău County (2018 – 2021)

Cause of death	Year 2018	Year 2019	Year 2020	Year 2021
Total	6,932	6,859	7,338	8,348
Infectious and parasitic diseases	0.32%	0.42%	0.70%	0.37%
of which: Tuberculosis	0.10%	0.12%	0.16%	0.13%
Neoplasm	19.95%	19.35%	18.62%	16.08%
Endocrine, nutritional, and metabolic diseases	1.49%	1.27%	1.61%	1.40%
of which: Diabetes mellitus	1.37%	1.14%	1.46%	1.27%
Mental disorders	0.23%	0.34%	0.15%	0.28%
Diseases of the nervous system, diseases of the eye and adnexa, diseases of the ear and mastoid process	1.50%	1.94%	1.76%	1.11%
Disease of the circulatory system	58.17%	57.12%	56.58%	56.22%
of which: Ischaemic heart diseases	12.07%	11.52%	11.13%	11.01%
of which: Cerebrovascular diseases	20.24%	18.97%	18.34%	17.38%
Disease of the respiratory system	5.84%	7.23%	10.08%	14.79%
Disease of the digestive system	6.36%	5.99%	6.11%	5.49%
Disease of the genitourinary system	2.01%	1.98%	1.38%	1.46%
Pregnancy, childbirth, and puerperium	N/A	N/A	0.01%	0.01%
Certain diseases originating in the perinatal period	0.14%	0.17%	0.07%	0.11%
Congenital malformations, deformations, and chromosomal abnormalities	0.12%	0.04%	0.04%	0.05%
Injury, poisoning and other consequences of external causes	3.40%	3.78%	2.55%	2.25%
Other causes	0.48%	0.36%	0.35%	0.38%

Source: *INSSE Tempo Online POP206C*

The mortality rate in 2021 was 20.7 deaths per one thousand inhabitants in Buzău, with a marked difference between urban mortality rate (16.7) and rural mortality rate (23) (National Institute of Statistics, 2021).

10.2.2 Occupational health and safety

The number of work-related accidents has been decreasing in Buzău County, from 67 cases in 2017 (out of which 8 were fatal) to 51 cases reported in 2021 (out of which 3 were fatal) (National Institute of Statistics, 2022).

10.3 Direct Social Area of Influence

10.3.1 Health Infrastructure

The medical infrastructure in the social direct Aol is relatively satisfactory, with more extensive services provided in Smeeni.

The KII confirmed that most people are travelling to Buzău for accessing specialised health care and conducting medical investigations.

Each ATU has dedicated family doctors and medical nurses, which represent the first contact with the medical health system. The doctors are mainly located in the villages seat of the commune only.

Alongside the family doctors, in Costesti and Luciu community nurses are available for providing basic consultations and health support in the communities. The community nurses are spending most of their time traveling to patients, servicing the vulnerable patients that are not able to travel. In Costesti Commune, where a larger Roma population is residing, a dedicate Roma mediator is complementing the health staff locally, providing front line basic support and facilitation of medical activities.

Table 10-4 Health infrastructure in the direct social Aol

ATU	Family doctors' office	Community nurse	Pharmacies	Specialist treatment	Dentist	Hospital/ Clinic
Costești	two in Costesti and one in Spataru	one + one Roma Mediator	two in Spataru and one in Costesti	-	one - Spataru	-
Luciu	one in Luciu	one	one in Luciu	-	-	-
Țintesti						2 medical centres in Tintesti and Maxenu
Gherăseni	two in Gheraseni	-	three in Gheraseni	-	-	-
Smeeni	two in Smeeni and one in Udati Lucieni	-	three in Smeeni and one in Udati Lucieni	Smeeni: Pneomology and Pediatrics		Smeeni Hospital for Chronic Diseases. First aid only.

Source: ERM Field Survey Apr – May 2023

Elderly care infrastructure is also present in the Social Aol:

- Elderly care - permanent centre in Costesti. The Centre is managed by the Local Council and has a staff of 20 and 42 beneficiaries;
- Elderly care permanent centre (managed by The General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection Buzău) and daily care elderly centre in Smeeni (managed by the Smeeni Local Council);

See Figure 10-1 for examples of health infrastructure observed in the Aol.

10.3.2 Local challenges

The need for additional infrastructure, staff, and funding to address the challenges posed by the aging local population was mentioned by all local authorities' representatives. The existing facilities are insufficient, yet funding and capacity to extend the network are very limited.

Figure 10-1 Health Infrastructure in the Aol



Smeeni Hospital



Ambulance on call in Luciu



Day-care centre for elderly in Smeeni



Old foster care centre in Costești



Source: ERM 2023 Social Field Survey

11. SECURITY

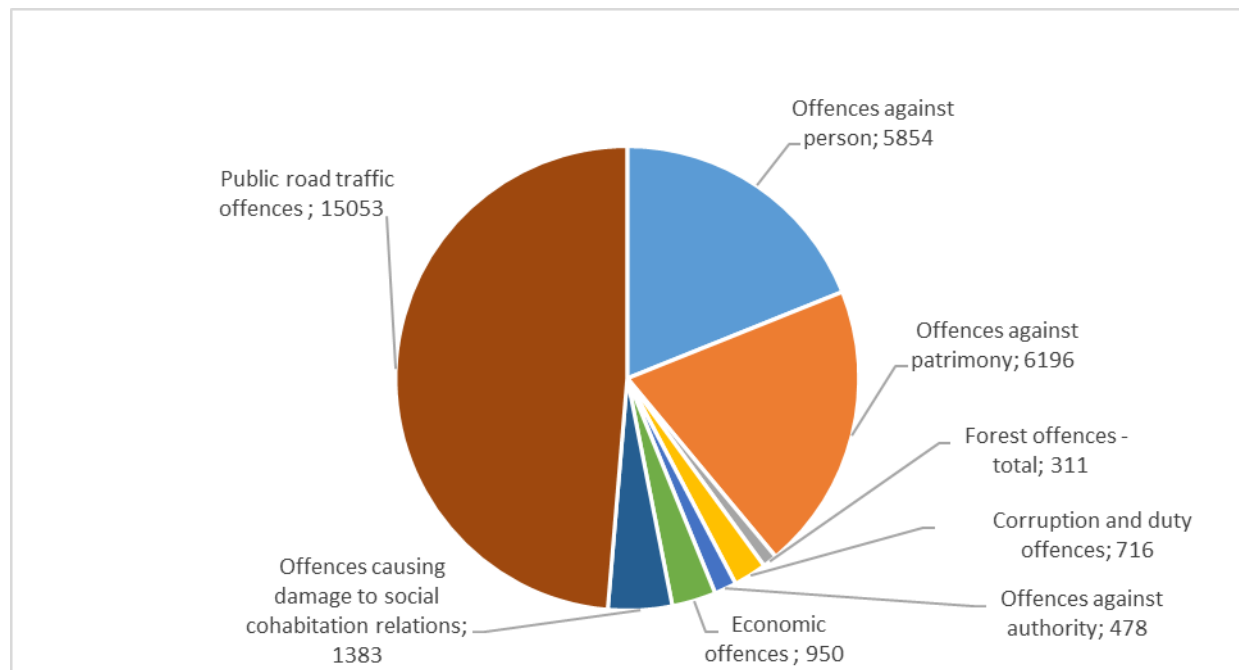
11.1 National Overview

11.1.1 Crime rate

In Romania, crime rate went down in 2020 due to COVID19 lockdown effects and increased in 2021 at 1,835 crimes per 100 thousand persons, up from the 2019 rate of 1,819 (INSSE, 2022 Statistical Yearbook).

Out of the 35,317 persons who received a who received a final conviction by means of a court decision, 85% where men and 15% where women, according the INSSE. In terms of type of crime, public road traffic offences were the most prevalent, followed by offences against patrimony and offences against persons – see Figure 11-1 below for more details.

Figure 11-1 Final convictions by means of a court decision, by type of crime (2021)



Source: ERM 2023 based on INSSE (2022 Romania Statistical Yearbook)

11.1.2 Emergency situations

Heavy snow in winter and extreme drought in summer have been confirmed by KII to cause impacts. Snow-covered roads make access problematic in winter. Extreme drought adds challenges to vegetation management, increasing fire risk, according to local media reports.

11.1.3 Human trafficking

In 2022 Romania maintains its status of country of origin for victims of human trafficking, vulnerable due to poor living conditions or lack of opportunities (Directorate for Investigating Organized Crime and Terrorism, 2023).

In 2021, there were 488 identified victims of 2022 trafficking in persons (378 sex trafficking, 42 labor trafficking, 68 unspecified), a decrease from 596 in 2020. Of the 488 victims, 171 were children (decreasing from 255 in 2020) (US Department of State, 2023).

In terms of labor trafficking, adults and children are subject to labor trafficking in agriculture, construction, hotels, manufacturing, and domestic service, as well as forced begging and theft in Romania and other European countries.

Due to increasing emigrant workforce in the past years, emigrant labour practices in Romania are a key of concern.

11.1.4 Public acceptance of renewable projects

Romania has been the scene of several cases of civic protests against development of energy projects, but none of them so far has had as object a renewable energy project (wind farm, solar plant, biogas station) except the case of several micro and small hydropower plants located in protected areas.

Public support for renewables in Romania is the highest among 10 EU countries (United Kingdom, France, Germany, Spain, Poland, Italy, Czech Republic, Greece, Romania, and Bulgaria), according to recent survey by YouGov commissioned by European Climate Foundation in 2021 (European Climate Foundation , 2021).

82% of surveyed Romanians would accept to live near an onshore wind farm, compared to the much lower 62% average in other countries. Additionally, Romanians have overwhelmingly declared themselves willing to generate their own wind and solar electricity and considered that public authorities should provide knowledge and finance to support them in this action.

11.2 Direct Social Area of Influence

In some of the communes, CCTV systems are installed by the Mayorality, supporting with prevention and management of crime locally. In Gheraseni, the CCTV is covering the main roads and public institutions. In Smeeni and Luciu, CCTV was reported at the school only by the KII.

Theft was not raised as a key concern, nor other types of crimes, excerpt traffic.

During the interviews, speeding was noted as a frequent issue, raising safety risks to the local population, particularly in settlements crossed by European, National and County Roads.

Alcohol consumptions was reported to be an issue by KII, in some cases leading to violence or traffic accidents.

Domestic violence has been reported by the Social Assistance departments representatives interviewed, but not as a prevalent issue in their perception. Cases reported include violence against the elderly, against children and against women, however the reported incidence according to KII is very low – 1-2 cases per year.

Several traffic accidents are mentioned in local media, some of them caused by alcohol. For example, in 2018 a tractor mechanic driving under the influence of alcohol collided with a minibus. The collision resulted in 12 fatalities (Observator News, 2018). Field observations by ERM confirmed that the public roads are used by people on bikes, tractors, and carriages, along the heavy transportation that marks the national road DN2C connecting the ATUs of the Social Aol.

Prostitution was not confirmed as an issue locally by the stakeholders interviewed.

An issue that has become increasingly more prevalent in Romania and has penetrated to social direct Aol is gambling. ERM could observe several gambling parlors in Pogoanele and in the extended project area.

Figure 11-2 Traffic conditions in the Aol



School pick-up in Costești, Costești Commune



Two men biking in Gherăseni Commune



Traffic conditions entering Smeeni Commune



Horse carriage in Gherăseni

12. HUMAN RIGHTS CONTEXT

This section provides an overview of the human rights context in Romania. It includes aspects such as the level of enjoyment of human rights in the country, the existing legal frameworks (including international conventions), in the protection of human rights. Understanding the broader human rights context is of relevance as this can provide insights into potential human rights risk factors in the Social Aol of the project.

12.1 International Framework

Romania has ratified most of the main international instruments for the protection of human rights, including eight of the ten fundamental Conventions and all priority governance Conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO) , as well as most of the International Human Rights Treaties.⁹⁷

A full list of the human rights conventions and treaties signed and/or ratified by Romania is included in Table 12-1 below:

Table 12-1 Human Rights Conventions and Treaties

Human Rights Instruments (Date into force)	Ratification/Accession Status
ILO Fundamental Conventions	
Forced Labour Convention, 1930	Ratification/Accession: 1957
Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948	Ratification/Accession: 1957
Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949	Ratification/Accession: 1958
Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951	Ratification/Accession: 1957
Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957	Ratification/Accession: 1998
Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958	Signature/Accession: 1973
Minimum Age Convention, 1973 <i>Minimum age specified: 16 years</i>	Ratification/Accession: 1975
Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999	Ratification/Accession: 2000
Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1982	Not ratified
Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention” of 2006	Not ratified
ILO Governance Priority Conventions	
Labour Inspection Convention, 1947	Ratification/Accession: 1973
Employment Policy Convention, 1964	Signature/Accession: 1973
Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969	Signature/Accession: 1975
Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976	Signature/Accession: 1992
International Human Rights Treaties	

International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination	Ratification / Accession: 1970
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1753)	Signature: 1968 Ratification/Accession: 1974
Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights	Ratification/Accession: 1993
Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty	Signature: 1990 Accession: 1991
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women	Signature: 1980 Accession: 1982
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination	Ratification / Accession: 1970
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women :1753	Signature:2000 Ratification/Accession: 2003
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights	Signature: 1968 Accession: 1974
Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment	Signature: N/A Ratification/Accession: 1990
Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment	Signature: 2003 Ratification/Accession: 2009
Convention on the Rights of the Child	Signature: 1990 Accession: 1990
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict	Signature: 2000 Accession: 2001
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography	Signature: 2000 Ratification/Accession: 2001
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure	Signature: 2012 Ratification/Accession: N/A
Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance	Signature: 2008
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	Signature: 2007 Accession: 2011
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	Signature: 2008 Ratification/Accession: N/A
Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights :	Not ratified
International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families	Not ratified

Source: ERM

12.2 European Framework

The European Convention of Human Rights, adopted in 1950, has been ratified by the 47 Council of Europe member countries. All 27 EU member states are parties to the convention.⁹⁸ In 2000, the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of Europe proclaimed the European Union (EU) Charter of Fundamental Rights. This document sets out the fundamental rights and freedoms recognised by the European Union.

The EU is based on the rule of law: every action taken by the EU is founded on treaties that have been approved voluntarily and democratically by all EU member countries. The European Commission, Parliament and Council all have a role to play in ensuring that new EU legislation and policies, or revisions of existing laws, comply with the standards set out in the Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

To ensure that the EU and EU law are subject to the same standards as member states, the Treaty of Lisbon (2009) sets out the obligation for the EU Union to accede to the convention and the rights, freedoms and principles detailed in the charter became legally binding on the EU and on member states when implementing EU law.

The aims set out in the EU treaties are achieved by several types of legislative acts, including regulations, directives, recommendations, and opinions that go into more detail about the goals that the Member States have agreed on in the treaties. A “directive” is a legislative act that sets out a goal that all EU countries must achieve, and it is up to the individual countries to decide how.⁹⁹

The EU has passed several landmark directives to protect specific aspects of fundamental rights, such as the Employment Equality and Directive and the Citizens' Rights Directive.

To date the EU counts hundreds of directives on gender equality, labour and discriminations which are still under implementation in Romania described as follows.

12.3 National Regulations

Romania is a constitutional Republic with a democratic, multiparty parliamentary system.

The country has ratified most of the international and European human rights treaties. Under article 20 of the Constitution of Romania: *Constitutional provisions on civil rights and freedoms shall be interpreted and applied in agreement with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with the covenants and the other treaties Romania is a party to.*¹⁰⁰ In case there are differences between the covenants and treaties on fundamental human rights to which Romania is a party and the domestic laws, international regulations shall prevail, except where the Constitution or domestic laws contain more favourable provisions.¹⁰¹

Starting from these principles, Romania has been acting internationally for the establishment of strong institutions to defend human rights. Alongside the EU partner states, in 2006 Romania contributed to the setting up of the UN Human Rights Council. Romania was elected as a member of the Council for a two-year term between 2006 – 2008, and for a three-year term between 2011-2014. Between June 2007 and June 2008, this country was the first EU member state to hold the presidency of the Human Rights Council since its creation.¹⁰ Currently, Romania is taking part as an active member in the Human Rights Council, for another term between 2023-2025.¹⁰³

The Romanian Institute for Human Rights (IRDO), established by Law no. 9/1991, represents the first national institution for human rights created in Romania after the collapse of the communist regime in 1989. This body was set up to answer the concerns of the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which through numerous resolutions and recommendations encouraged the creation and

development of independent national institutions with specific responsibilities. Its creation filled the existing gap between the legislative provisions and promotion of human rights.¹⁰⁴ The IRDO ensures a better understanding of human rights issues, of the way in which these rights are guaranteed in member countries of the UN, OSCE, the Council of Europe and the EU, informing the international institutions about the ways in which human rights are promoted, respected or else violated in Romania. Additionally, IRDO is an associate member of the European Network of National Institutions for Human Rights, since 2013

12.4 Relevant Human Rights Categories represented in national legislation

This section provides an overview of the situation in the country, on the most relevant human rights to the Project and vulnerable groups of the Project Area, as identified in the scoping report Sections 6.3 and 7. The Human Rights categories are provided in Table 12-2 below, referencing related national legislation.

Table 12-2 Relevant Human Rights categories and national legislation

Human Right Category	National Legislation	Triggered IFC PS
Non-discrimination	<p>Provided under the Romanian Constitution: “equality and non-discrimination”: These provisions are implemented in practice by specific non-discrimination legislation adopted in 2000 through delegated legislation, namely the Governmental Ordinance 137/2000 (or 2000 Anti-discrimination Law), amended subsequently in 2002, 2003, 2004, 2006 and three times in 2013 to enhance transposition of the Directive 2000/43/EC and the Directive 2000/78/EC.</p> <p>The 2000 Anti-discrimination Law is enforceable nation-wide, and it is complemented by relevant provisions found in ground-specific legislation such as legislation regarding the rights of persons with disabilities (defined by the Romanian legislation as ‘persons with handicap’) or in legislation regulating particular areas such as laws on equal opportunities for men and women, the Criminal Code, and the Labour Code¹⁰⁶</p> <p>The Anti-discrimination Law introduces a mixed system of remedies for civil and administrative minor offences, which can be pursued separately or simultaneously.¹⁰⁷</p> <p>The Constitution of Romania under Article 16, guarantees the equality of citizens before the law and public authorities, without any privilege or discrimination. Access to a public office or dignity, civil or military, is granted to persons whose citizenship is only and exclusively Romanian, and whose domicile is in Romania. Every person is entitled to bring cases before the courts for the defence of his legitimate rights, liberties, and interests. The exercise of this right may not be restricted by any law.¹⁰⁸</p>	IFC PS-2 (12, 15-17)
Collective bargaining and Freedom of association	<p>The Romanian Constitution under Article 37.1. protects the right of association of all citizens to freely associate into political parties, trade unions and other forms of association. Under Article 38.5 the right to collective labour bargaining and the binding force of collective agreements is protected.</p> <p>According to Article 7 in the Labour Code: The employees and employers may freely associate to defend their rights and professional, economic, and social interests. Additionally, within the main rights and obligations of the</p>	IFC PS-2 (13-14)

	employee, the right to collective and individual bargaining is clearly stated. 109	
Forced Labour and Modern Slavery	<p>The prohibition of any form of forced labour is part of the Constitution at Article 42 and the Criminal Code Article 212, which criminalises the act of compelling a person to work against their own will or into forced or compulsory labour.</p> <p>Article 4 of the Labor Code also addresses the topic of forced labour and prohibits any work or service imposed on a person under threat or for which they did not freely express their consent.</p>	IFC PS-2 (22)
Human Rights in the Supply Chain	<p>On February 23rd 2022, the European Commission presented its proposal for a law on corporate sustainability obligations - the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD). European member countries agreed on an EU-wide supply chain law in December 2022. Next steps are expected in May 2023.</p> <p>The EU CSDDD requires companies operating on the territory of the European Union to carefully manage social and environmental impacts along their entire value chain, i.e. including direct and indirect suppliers, their own operations, as well as products and services. The aim is to ensure compliance with applicable human rights standards and environmental protection in the pursuit to promoting more sustainable global economy and do no harm to people and the environment.¹¹¹</p> <p>After the proposed CSDDD Directive comes into force, presumably to be adopted in late 2023 or early 2024, Romania is expected, as an EU Member Country to issue transposing legislation and ensure the enforcement thereof within two years.</p>	IFC PS-2 (27-29)
Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making, and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters - Aarhus Convention	<p>Article 31 of the Constitution regulates the person's right to access information while article 34 stipulates the right to health and article 35 stipulates the right to a healthy environment.¹¹²</p> <p>Romania also ratified the Aarhus convention in 2000. According to article 11 of the Constitution, international treaties ratified by Romania are part of the national legal order.</p>	IFC PS-1 (25-36)
Right to clean environment and access to resources	<p>Provided under Romanian Constitution 35 Article: "The State recognizes the right of everyone to a healthy environment and ecologically balanced", and establishes the duty natural and legal persons have to protect and improve the environment.</p> <p>To meet legal commitments entered internationally, Romania has ratified a number of 36 governmental and ministerial treaties in force in environmental protection and water management. EU environmental acquis covered over 450 directives, regulations and decisions, which are horizontal legislation and sectorial legislation on environmental protection.¹¹³</p>	IFC PS 3
Healthy working environment and Social insurance	<p>Relevant laws and government decisions include Law no. 62/2011 regarding social dialogue; Law no. 263/2010 on public pension system, where the right to social security is guaranteed by the state and is exercised, under the conditions of this law, through the public pension system and other social security rights; Law no. 319/2006 on health and safety at the workplace;</p> <p>The territorial labour inspectorates have duties in the field of labour relations and labour health and safety, their main objectives include controlling the manner in which the legal provisions are observed regarding labour relations, labour safety and health, protection of employees working</p>	IFC PS-2 (23: OHS)

	<p>in special conditions and legal provisions regarding health insurance and workers' rights. ¹¹⁴</p> <p>As for Occupational Health and Safety (OHS), the legislation hierarchy is a three layer structure with Constitution and Labour Code at the top, the Law no 319 of 2006 on Safety and Health at Work and the Methodological Norms for its application in the middle level and a larger base of Government Decisions that have more detailed provisions at the bottom. The Law on Safety and Health at Work provides the main legal framework for OHS. The Government Decisions are, in general, transpositions of different EU Directives on different OSH matters such as types of hazards, protective or work equipment, among others.</p>	
Disability Rights	<p>The rights of disabled people are provided under the Romanian constitution and the Law no. 448/2006 Regarding the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Disabled Persons. ¹¹⁵</p> <p>The law regulates the rights and obligations of disabled persons granted for the purpose of social integration and inclusion. According to Article 4 in the Law, all the legal representatives in charge of promotion, observation and guarantee of the rights of disabled persons, shall ensure their application, established according to the provisions of the European social Chart, adopted in Strasbourg on 3rd of May 1996, ratified by Law no. 74/1999, and to the other internal and international documents in this field.</p> <p>According to Art. 78, Law no. 448/2006, disabled persons may be employed according to their professional background and labour capacity. All public or private employers having at least 50 employees, shall hire disabled persons representing at least 4% of the total number of employees. Not performing under this obligation is a subject to financial penalties. ¹¹⁶</p>	IFC PS-1 (12), PS-2 (15)
Migrant workers	<p>Official statistics show a steady increase in the number of third-country nationals (TCNs) in the country, observed in the period between 2013 and 2020. The increase is mostly due to the increase in the number of migrant workers.</p> <p>Relevant legislations on the topic on migrant workers include Emergency ordinance no 194/2002 on the regime of aliens in Romania , as the regulatory framework for the entry, stay and exit of foreigners. It also defines their rights and obligations, as well as specific measures to control immigration; Law no. 122/2006 on asylum, establishes the legal status of aliens who are applying for protection in Romania and of persons granted subsidiary or international protection; and the government decision no. 1.521/2006 to approve the methodological norms for the enforcement of Law no 122/2006 that regulates the rights, obligations and assistance for asylum seekers and persons granted protection.²²</p>	IFC PS-2 (as vulnerable categories of workers, 11, 15,)
Gender Equality	<p>The Constitution provides for protection on equal rights between men and women at the workplace, stating that men and women should be provided with equal pay for equal work.</p> <p>Law No.211/2004 protects victims from sexual violence, Law No.217/2003 covers domestic violence and intimate partner violence. The Romanian law on the prevention and fight against domestic violence was revised in 2012, expanding the definition of violence as well as the rights of victims.</p> <p>According to Government Ordinance 137/2000 republished in 2014 concerning preventing and sanctioning all discrimination forms, without any discrimination, each person who performs work must benefit from good working conditions, social protection, health and safety at work, with respect for their dignity and personal beliefs.</p>	IFC PS-1 (12), PS-2 (15)

Sexual harassment at work is a form of discrimination (Law 324/2006 Anti-discrimination Law, Article 2(5)) and is also defined in the Criminal Code, punishable by prison from three months to two years or fine.

Source: ERM 2023

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APPENDIX A PROJECT INFORMATION LEAFLET

Beneficiile Proiectului

- Contribuții la bugetele publice locale, rezultate din contractele de concesiune și taxe locale pentru Consiliile Locale ale comunelor Țințești, Costești, Gherăseni, Luciu și Smeeni
- Acces gratuit la infrastructura rutieră dezvoltată pentru Proiect (drumuri agricole, podete peste canale și poduri peste Călmățui)
- Locuri de muncă temporare și permanente disponibile pentru membrii comunității
- Bunurile și serviciile vor fi achiziționate la nivel local, acolo unde este posibil, pentru a sprijini creșterea economică locală
- Un program de investiții comunitare care urmează să fie dezvoltat în colaborare cu autoritățile locale și alți parteneri locali
- Contribuție la angajamentele României de producere a energiei regenerabile

Următorii pași

Investitorii au inițiat o Evaluare a Impactului Social și de Mediu (ESIA) pentru Proiect, care este elaborată cu sprijinul consultanților locali și internaționali. Când va fi finalizată, ESIA va fi pusă la dispoziție pentru consultare și comentarii.

În acest fel, ne vom asigura că Proiectul respectă cele mai înalte standarde internaționale și va lua în considerare sugestiile și întrebările tuturor părților interesate.

Contactați-ne

Scopul nostru este de a construi un Proiect durabil și de a contribui la dezvoltarea locală, în parteneriat cu autoritățile locale și cetățenii.

Vă vom ține la curent cu privire la evoluția Proiectului și ne dorim să colaborăm cu dumneavoastră pentru a ne asigura că opiniile și viziunea dumneavoastră sunt reflectate în procesul de evaluare a impactului Proiectului.

Contactați-ne pentru a ne comunica orice sugestie, întrebare sau plângere aveți cu privire la Proiect. De asemenea, puteți depune un formular de reclamație în cutia dedicată instalată la primăria locală.

Persoana de contact: Petrică Bodnar, Responsabil pentru Relația cu Comunitatea

Mobil: +4(0) 752 243 522/ **E-mail:** vifor@rezolv.energy

APPENDIX B LIST OF MEETINGS DURING SOCIAL FIELD SURVEY

Date	Stakeholders met
27 March 2023, Costesti Commune Hall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Costesti Commune Mayor ■ Costesti Commune Vice Mayor ■ Farmers ■ Urbansim Department in Costesti ■ Social Worker in Costesti ■ Agricultural Register Department in Costesti ■ Teacher and Local Council member
29 March 2023, Luciu Commune Hall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Luciu Commune Mayor ■ Luciu Commune Vice Mayor ■ Secretary of Luciu Commune Hall ■ Framers ■ Vice-President of Association of Animal Breeders in Luciu ■ Principal of Gymnasium Luciu ■ Community Medical Assistant ■ Social Assistance Department of Luciu Commune ■ Agricultural Register of Luciu Comune
30 March 2023, Smeeni Commune Hall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Smeeni Commune Mayor ■ Smeeni Commune Secretary ■ Cadastre and urbanism department of Smeeni Commune ■ Social Assistance Department of Smeeni Commune ■ Smeeni Hospital Manager ■ Commune Hall representative, responsible for managing the Day Care Centre for Elderly in Smeeni ■ Beneficiaries of the Day Care Centre for Elderly in Smeeni ■ Farmers ■ Members of the Local Council
4 April 2023, Gheraseni Commune Hall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Gheraseni Commune Mayor ■ Gheraseni Commune Vice Mayor ■ Local Police

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Farmers ■ Social Assistance Department in Gheraseni ■ School Principal of Gheraseni Gymnasium
27 July 2023, Tintesti Commune Hall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Tintesti Commune Mayor ■ Framers using the pastureland leased for the Project. ■ Agricultural Register Department in Tintesti ■ Social Assistance Department in Tintesti

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