

## HOUSING INEQUALITIES REGARDING THE INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN ROMANIA

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**ABSTRACT** – The emergence and evolution of informal settlements in Romania are the result of a complex of historical and socio-economic factors and of some territorial planning policies dating from the socialist and post-socialist period. The lack of appropriate legislative instruments regarding urban planning, estate restitution and the weak control of the civil engineering department in conjunction with the policy of imposed sedentary life for the Roma population dating from the 50's and 60's generated multiple forms of territorialisation of the informal settlements and pronounced dynamics of this phenomenon at national level. The study shows the housing inequalities regarding the informal settlements in proportion to the place of residence, the access to the technical and urban utilities, the defining elements of the social profile of the inhabitants and the legislative and institutional framework that generated the emergence and the current evolution of this territorial phenomenon.

**Keywords:** informal settlements, housing inequalities, Roma communities, illegal settlements, housing exclusion

### INTRODUCTION

The industrialization of habitation construction in the context of socialist systematization of the national territory and the post-socialist socio-economic restructuring, in conjunction with a legislative vacuum, led to the emergence of housing inequalities on a territorial level. These are analyzed from the perspective of the social stratification research (Zhao, Jianhua, 2014). Access to housing of sufficient space and quality has been a central element in social stratification in urban environment (Logan et al., 2002). Furthermore, the qualitative aspects of the living conditions are dependent on the social ones, especially on the socio-economic profile of the resident population.

The spatial differences regarding the features of the habitations are analyzed in detail from a territorial point of view (Nee, 1991; Youqin, Leiwen, 2009; Si-Ming, 2012).

The majority of the professional studies approach the problematic of inequalities according to the features of the housing and the factors that determine various changes in relation to these (Robinson et al., 1985; Fitzgerald, Winston, 2007; Flint et al., 2012; Foster, Kleit, 2015). The European specialized literature analyzes the housing inequalities from the viewpoint of two dimensions: tenure and housing well-being (Filandri, Olagnero, 2014, p. 1). Norris and Shiels (2007) propose a typology of inter-country variations in housing conditions in relation to housing tenure systems, finance and subsidy systems, construction systems and trends, and governance arrangements,

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what are the implications of these inequalities for the EU and how they can be addressed. Certain aspects of housing inequalities are the object of scientific concern of some researchers who integrate them into a complex methodology of the study of territorial disparities (Schwab, Stoian, 2009; Ancuța, 2010; Ianoș et al., 2013).

The analysis of informal settlements aligns with the recent and future concerns of various international organisations whose main target is to identify methods and devices of intervention for the improvement of the life quality of various classes of socially excluded people. The Vienna Declaration (2004) and the Post-2015 Development Agenda: *Setting the Stage!* enacted in 2013 by the United Nations General Assembly tackle the problematic of adequate habitations as a component of every person's right to a standard of decent living, laying a special emphasis on the informal settlements.

In 2007, the Working Group on Roma Housing within the Ministry of Development, Public Works and Housing started the first researches and discussions on the identification, analysis and resolution of the technical and legal aspects concerning this typology of human establishments, and this endeavour later materialized into a research project titled: "Analysis of informal settlements in Romania – *assessing the current situation and the formulation of rules and tools of intervention*".

In Romania, the informal settlements concept is mentioned by Mionel (2012, p. 25; 2013, p. 91). In territorial context, informal settlements can be defined as groups of houses usually developed at the outskirts of urban or rural localities, where the lands are legally or illegally occupied and the buildings are unauthorized or respect the building permits only partially, and whole main characteristics are lack of access to the basic urban infrastructure, inappropriate housing conditions, etc., jeopardizing the safety and the health of the occupying population.

The emergence and the evolution of the phenomenon of informal settlements in Romania are the result of a complex of historical and socio-economic factors and of some policies of territorial planning dating from the socialist and the post-socialist period.

The lack of appropriate legislative instruments regarding urban planning and the development of the national territory, estate restitution and the weak control of the civil engineering department in conjunction with the policy of imposed sedentary life for the Roma population dating from the 50's and 60's, generated multiple forms of territorialisation of the informal settlements and pronounced dynamics of this phenomenon.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study of housing inequality is based on sociological methods of quantitative, as well as qualitative research. Therefore, the main method of quantitative research is represented by the questionnaire funded by the Department of Regional Development and Public Administration. It was conducted within the research project entitled "*Analysis on the Informal Establishments in Romania – the Evaluation of the Current Situation for the Enunciation of Regulations and Instruments of Intervention*" and implemented within the 3,186 administrative and territorial units in Romania in 2013. Of all these units, 52.88% completed the questionnaire, while only 18.33% declared the existence of at least one of the six types of informal establishments on their administrative territory. The current study offers a series of results and the authors were directly involved in defining, assessing the typologies and analyzing the informal settlements in Romania. Field observation is the quantitative method used in the research elaboration, to which the research of urban planning documentations and the legislation in this area are added.

The mapping of the informal settlements in Romania in the guise of theme maps was done through the aggregation of the statistic information acquired by means of elaborating the questionnaire, not only within every informal establishment identified, but also within every administrative and territorial unit. For a better representation, the unit of analysis was considered the administrative and territorial unit to the detriment of the identified informal settlement.

In the case of the administrative and territorial units with a single informal settlement, we elaborated the values of every variable registered in its case.

In the case of the administrative-territorial units (ATU) where two or more informal settlements were identified, the data were aggregated depending on the level of measurement of the

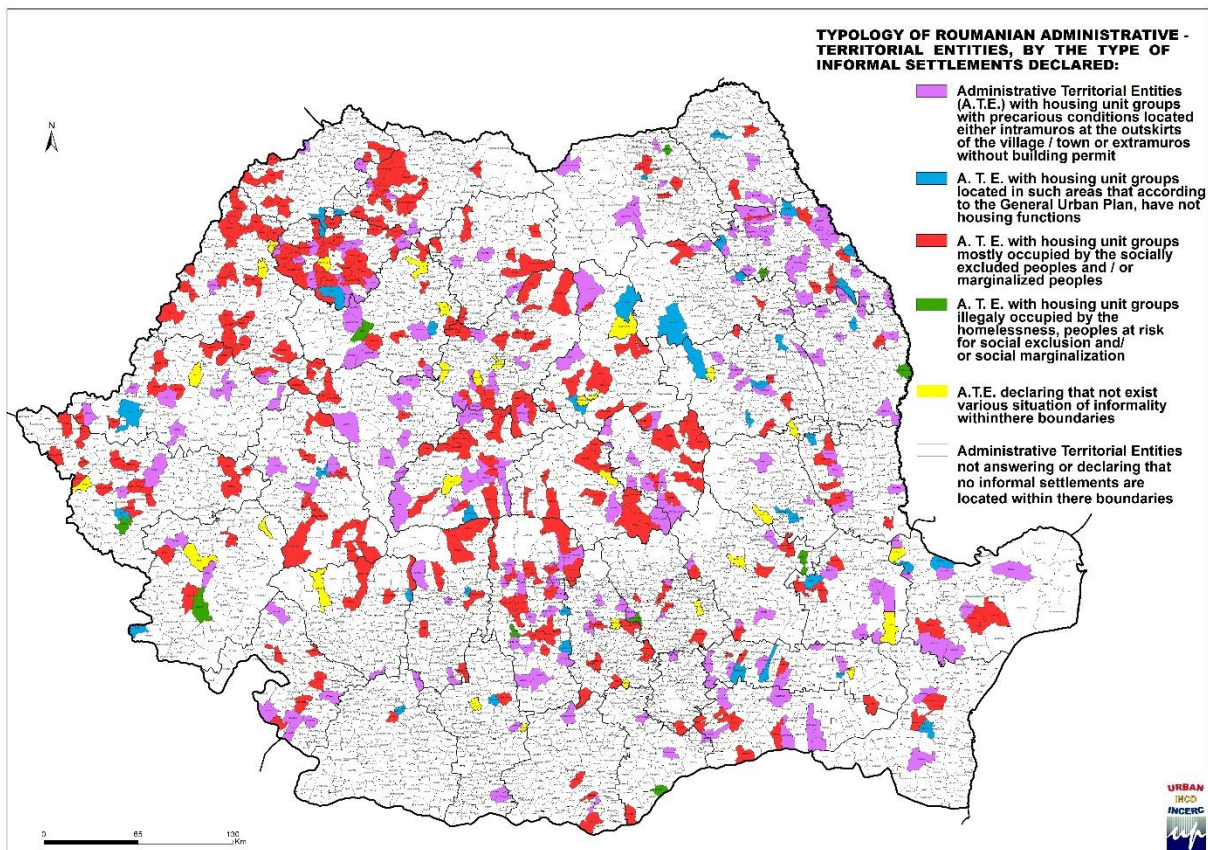
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analysed indicators (variables). Thus, for numerical continuous variables (e.g. number of families or dwellings), data were aggregated by summing up the particular values for each informal settlement within a certain ATU. For non-numerical variables (ordinal or nominal) in most of the cases data were aggregated at ATU level using the modal value occurring among the corresponding informal settlements.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Field research led to the identification in Romania of four categories of morphogenetic informal settlements, based on their morphologic and social characteristics and their localization within localities (Figure 1):

- 1) Groups of habitations with inappropriate conditions, built either within incorporated areas, at the outskirts of urban or rural localities, or outside the incorporated areas, without licence to build and later inserted into incorporated areas by means of urban planning documentations;
- 2) Groups of habitations situated outside the incorporated areas, in regions which, according to the urban planning documentations, have functions which exclude habitation; part of this category are the groups of habitations situated in areas with landfalls, floods, industrial regions, heaps of debris, spoil dumps, within the protection and security areas of circulation and urban networks (electricity, gas, telecommunications) and transport pipelines (natural gas, mineral oils);



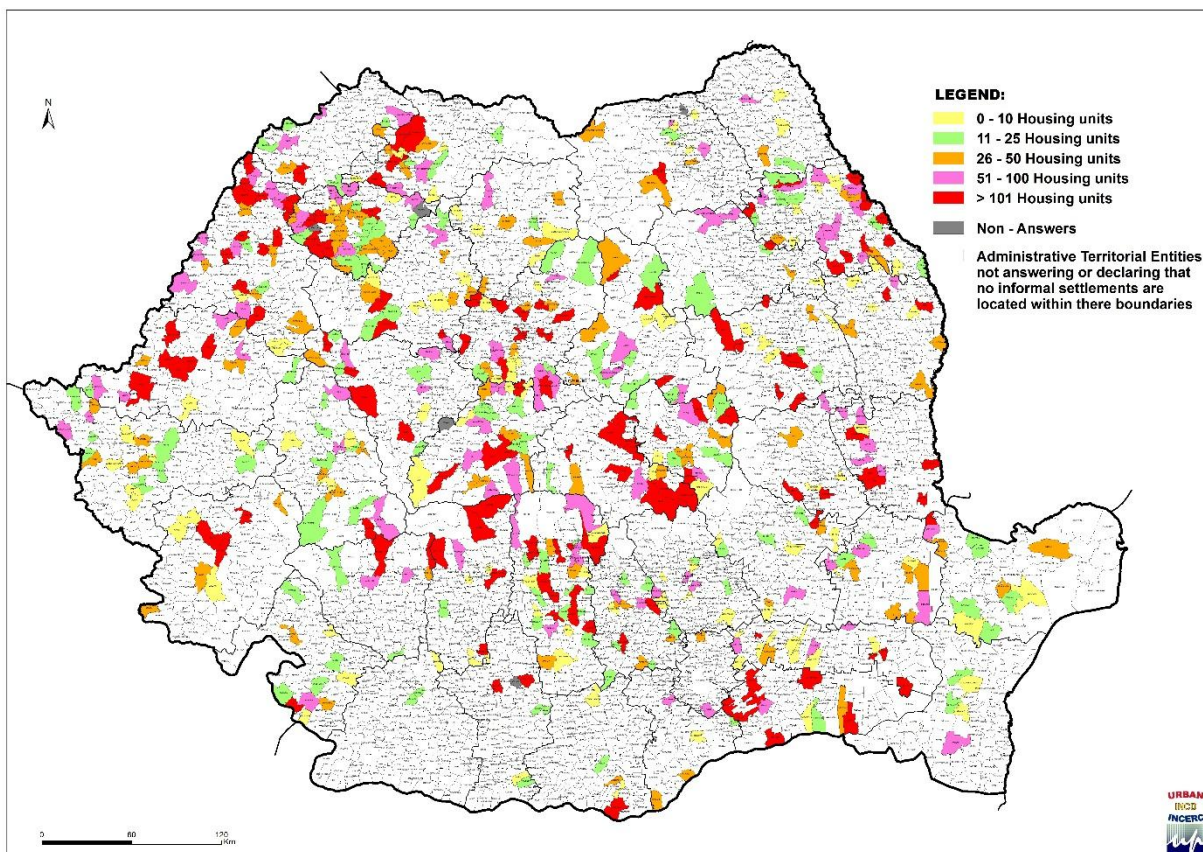
**Figure 1.** *Typology of Romanian administrative-territorial units by type of informal settlements declared in 2014*

Source: Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration questionnaire processing

- 3) Groups of habitations illegally built and in majority occupied by categories of persons running the risk of social exclusion and/or marginalisation. In this category are: groups of habitations of the Roma communities usually built at the outskirts of localities, without licence to build, as a result of the policy of imposed sedentary life in the 50's and 60's; groups of habitations situated near the cesspools of localities; groups of habitations for the workers' colonies (initially of a temporary character, later becoming permanent), built for the accommodation of workers involved in the execution of water works, various exploitations (coal-bearing, metal-bearing, etc.) or of employees of the great (iron and steel, etc.) works; groups of habitations illegally built in protected areas or regions (Natura 2000 sites, nature reserves, etc.); groups of habitations emerged as a result of the forced sedentary life imposed on the Roma in the 50's and 60's;
- 4) Habitations legally built (e.g. inherited property, disused property, etc.), usually having an uncertain legal situation and illegally occupied by groups which are socially vulnerable (persons of Roma ethnicity, etc.).

In the 1,198 informal settlements identified within this study, 49,338 habitations are registered at national level and 63.492 families live in them. Within an administrative and territorial unit, two informal settlements have been identified on average, and their territorial distribution within a county varies fractionally (between 1 and 3 informal settlements within an administrative and territorial unit).

An informal settlement gathers 41 habitations, but this average registers significant variations from one county to another (from 11 habitations per informal settlement in Dolj County to 161 habitations in Neamţ County) (Figure 2).

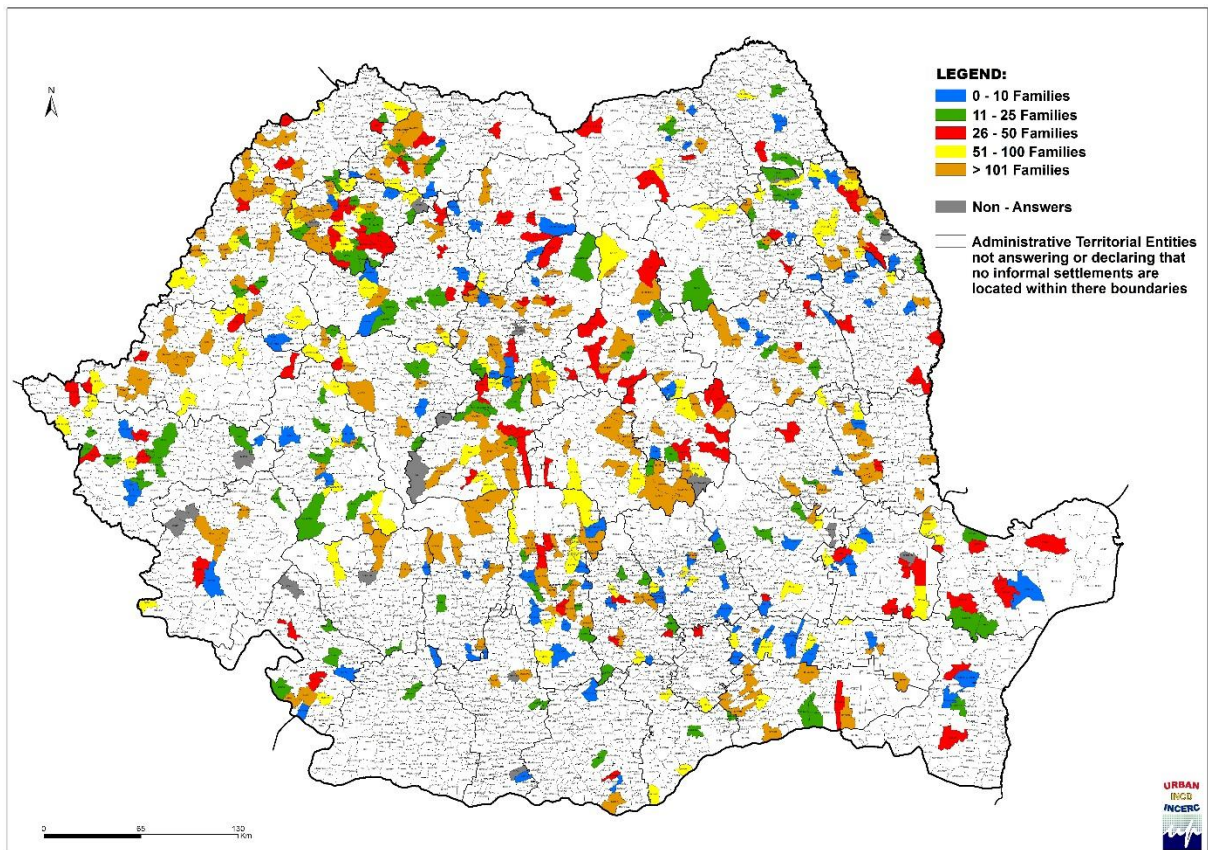


**Figure 2.** *Estimated number of dwellings within informal settlements in Romania, in 2014*  
 Source: Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration questionnaire processing



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A number of 53 families live, on average, in informal settlements within a locality. As in the case of the number of habitations, variations registered from a county to another are relatively great: from 211 families per informal settlement, average which was registered in Braşov County, 146 families in Neamţ County or 104 families in Galaţi County, to 11 families per informal establishment in Dolj County (Figure 3). Generally, a habitation within an informal settlement is occupied by a single family.



**Figure 3.** *Estimated number of families within informal settlements in Romania, in 2014*  
Source: Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration questionnaire processing

Most of the informal settlements identified within this study are situated in the rural setting. From the total of 1,198 informal settlements, 953 (approximately 80%) are situated in the rural localities and 245 (approximately 20% of the total amount of identified locations) in the urban localities. 36.1% of the families and 34.4% of the habitations of informal settlements are concentrated in urban setting, while, in the communes the balance of the families is approximately 63.9% and that of the habitations is of 65.6% from the total amount of families/ habitations of the informal settlements.

The differentiations registered within the two settings of residence are a consequence either of the rate of response to the applied questionnaire, superior in the case of communes, or of the significant balance of rural localities within the national network of administrative and territorial units.

The superior rate of concentration of families and habitations within informal settlements from the urban setting compared to the statistics from the rural setting can be highlighted within an administrative-territorial unit, as well. Thus, in approximately half of the towns and municipalities of Romania, an informal settlement comprises over 100 habitations and families while, in approximately 40% of the communes, the dimension of an informal establishment does not exceed 25 habitations and

families. Type 3 of informal settlements is preponderant within the two settings of residence, scoring a balance of approximately 63% in the urban setting and approximately 37% in the rural setting, where the balance for the first type of habitations is significant. The groups of habitations thus studied are also distinguished by differentiations of an ethnic nature of the resident population. 70.9% of the population occupying these establishments in the urban settings are of Roma ethnicity, compared to the ones in the rural settings where the balance is 59.2%. The opportunities that towns can offer, especially the large ones, with a highly developed economy, attract groups of underprivileged persons, deprived of a decent dwelling and constant incomes.

The abusive occupation of the government's premises, without any title deed, to which the unauthorized construction of habitations is added, is a permanent practice of the population that occupies the informal settlements. A significant percent of them do not have an identity card and documents for their lands and buildings and therefore cannot be registered by the financial organizations and the public authorities for the payment of taxes and local contributions. The majority of habitations are situated within incorporated area, at the outskirts of localities. If in the urban setting 77.7% of the habitations are located in this area, in the rural setting the percentage is smaller, of 66.3%. The situation of the localization of the habitation groups outside the incorporated area, with proceedings launched for their introduction within the incorporated area, is nationally spread in proportion of 9.6%.

An example of good practice is represented by the undertaking of Avrig Town Hall, which, together with the Prefecture of Sibiu County, has launched a wide project of putting the persons who are resident in these types of establishments in possession of land.

Moreover, the dynamics of the phenomenon in Avrig Town was stopped by the local authorities who forbade the emergence and the development of other establishments by limiting the area of the allotments with special destination in allotments of maximum 1000 square meters and granting the title deed either on the basis of Law 15/2003 regarding the free attribution of lands to young people up to the age of 35 years old for the construction of habitations, either by direct sale, or by a concession of 49 years, with a moderate annual rent of 0.01 RON/square meter.

The constructions from the ACH Workers' Colony were made by Hidroconstrucția near the E68 European road on the occasion of the open building yard for the building of Săcădate Dam in 1985. The water works were finished in 2002, when the shacks were sold to the occupying persons, brought from Transilvania (Covasna, Braşov), Oltenia and Moldova. Currently, the ACH colony or "The Cardboard Town" is comprised of roughly 208 families and is provided with electricity and sewage. The habitations are informal due to their localization in the protection and security area and

near the railway and European road situated in close proximity. In the meantime, the Town Hall of Avrig has provided access to the basic technical-urban infrastructure.

42% of the informal settlements identified in Romania were built before 1990 and 39.6% between 1990-2012. The shares registered by 1990, 44.7% in the urban setting, were relatively equal to those from the rural setting, where a percentage of 41.4% was registered.

After 1990, as a result of the legislative vacuum, the restructuring of the national economy and the Roma demographic growth, the balance of the illegal habitations built in the rural setting has grown compared to the urban setting. The predominant building material of the



**Figure 4.** *Illegal housing unit within Gârcini informal settlement, Săcele Town*

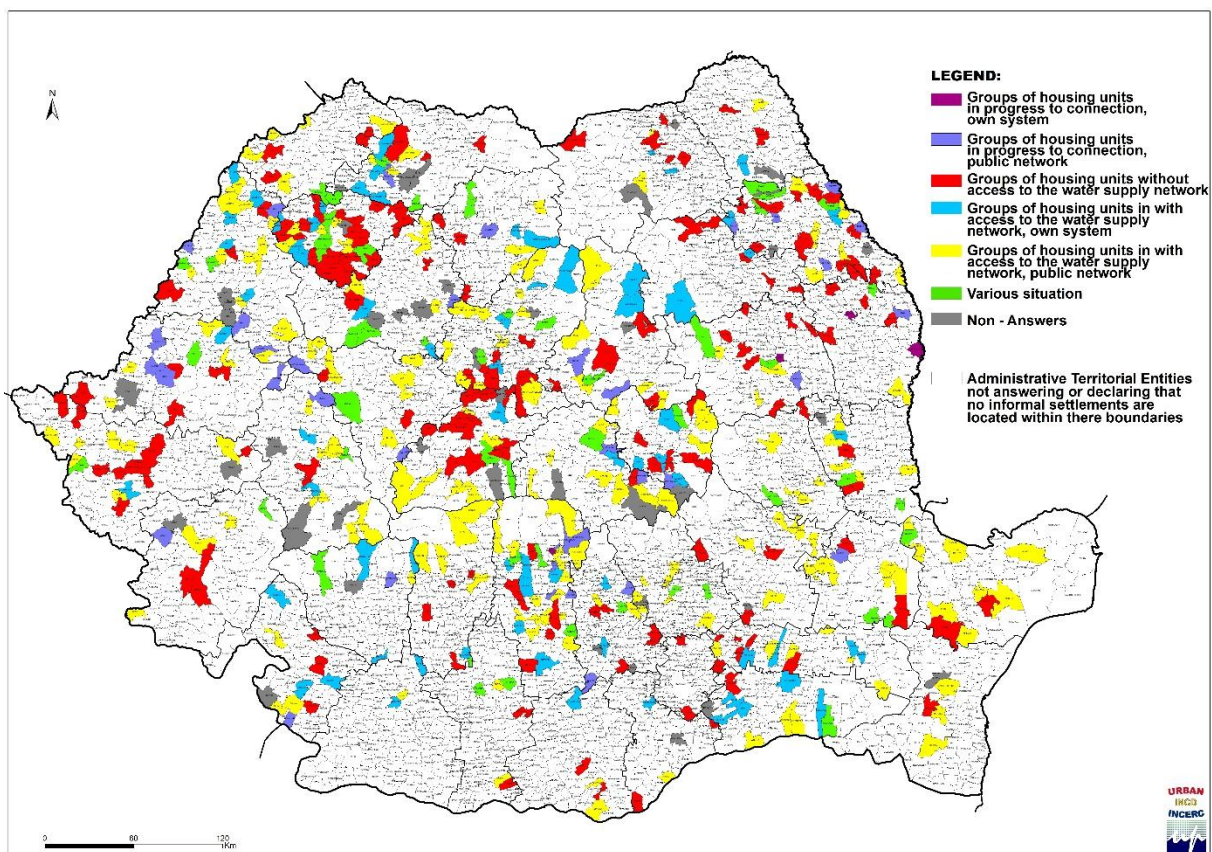
Source: Vălceanu, 2014



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outer walls of these habitations is timber or clay brick (40.2%), while 36.2% of the habitations are built of bricks, stone or BCA. In 17.3% of the cases, the outer walls are built of wood or logs and only 1.9% of reusable materials. In many cases, like the Gârcini neighbourhood from Săcele municipality, Braşov County, where the largest density of Roma population from Europe is concentrated, the habitations, usually made up of one room, are built of wooden material illegally cleared from the local stock of wood (Figure 4).

A share of 74% of the groups of identified establishments is supplied with electricity from the public network. The theft and/or commerce with electricity are widely spread practices in the case of the majority of informal settlements. The low access that the population of the informal establishments has to the public utilities represents one of the main problems that these persons are facing, and which widely contributes to the precarious conditions of the habitation and life quality. The lack of running water is the main dysfunctional feature of the quality of living in over 31.1% of the groups of habitations studied at a national level, while a percentage of 35.9% of these are reported to be connected to the public water network and in 7.3% of the cases there are future chances of connection (Figure 5).



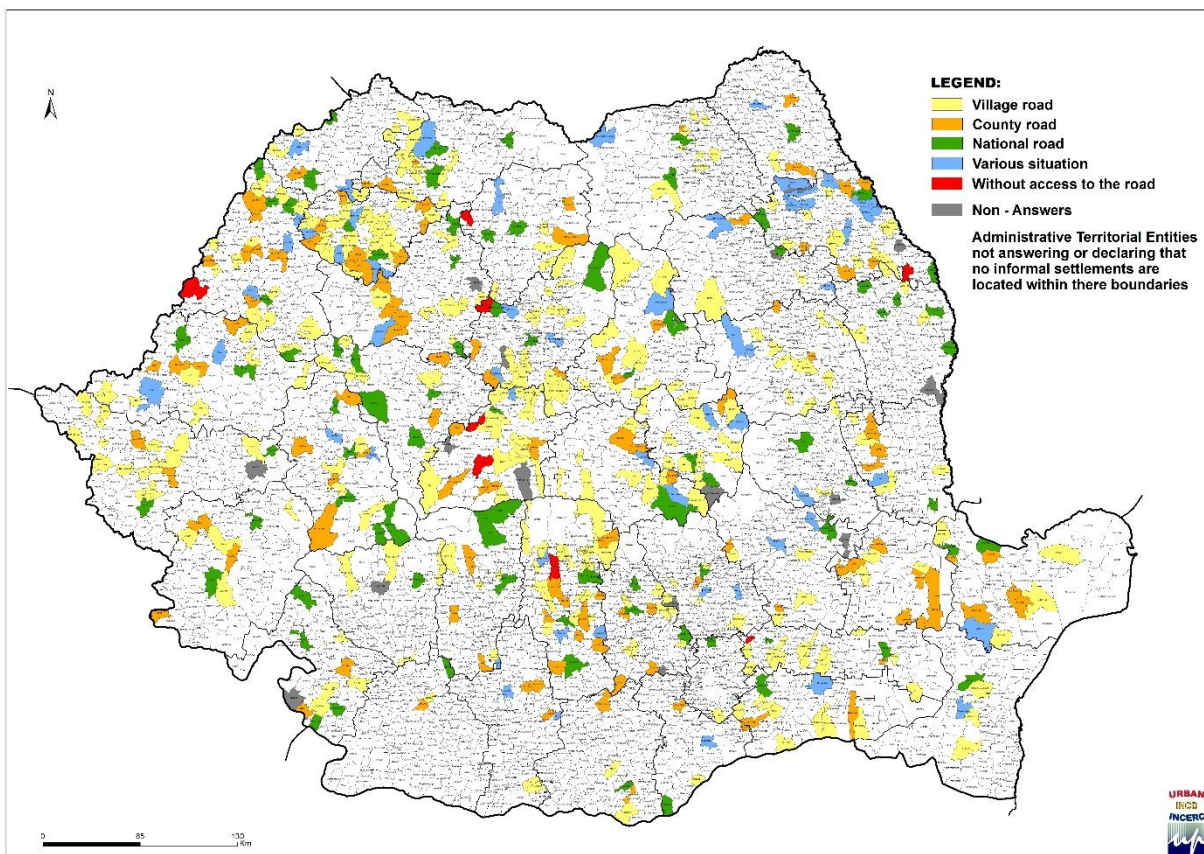
**Figure 5.** Access of informal settlements to water supply network in Romania, in 2014

Source: Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration questionnaire processing

In 16.9% of the groups of analyzed habitations, the population provides for its running water from their own systems (fountains, draw wells, public springs, etc.). The restricted access that the groups of analyzed habitations have to the public network constitutes a defining particularity of the precarious living conditions. A percentage of 62.5% of the establishments are not connected to the public sewage network, while only 7% of the establishments have access to this type of network.

Only 4.8% of the establishments have any perspective of connection on short and medium term. Such a situation is generated either by the high costs of the embranchment to the public networks of water and sewage supply, or the localization of the establishments in areas that do not allow the provision of a basic urban infrastructure (hill or mountain areas, vulnerable to various natural hazards).

The structural funds financing the development of networks of water and sewage supplies have not solved the aspects generated by these disparities, the population preferring to resort to their own systems due to the high costs. The connection to the public network of gas supply is provided for 10% of the informal settlements, while 72.5% of these groups of habitations are deprived of this urban utility. Accessibility to the transportation network is one of the defining particularities of the informal settlements. For 52% of the identified establishments, the nearest road of access for the majority of the studied population is a communal road or a local road of access, while in 24% of the cases the population has access to a county road. National highways are accessible to the population of 18% of the establishments, while in 2% of them, the inhabitants do not have access to the road (Figure 6).



**Figure 6.** Access of informal settlements to technical infrastructure of transport by category of existing roads in Romania

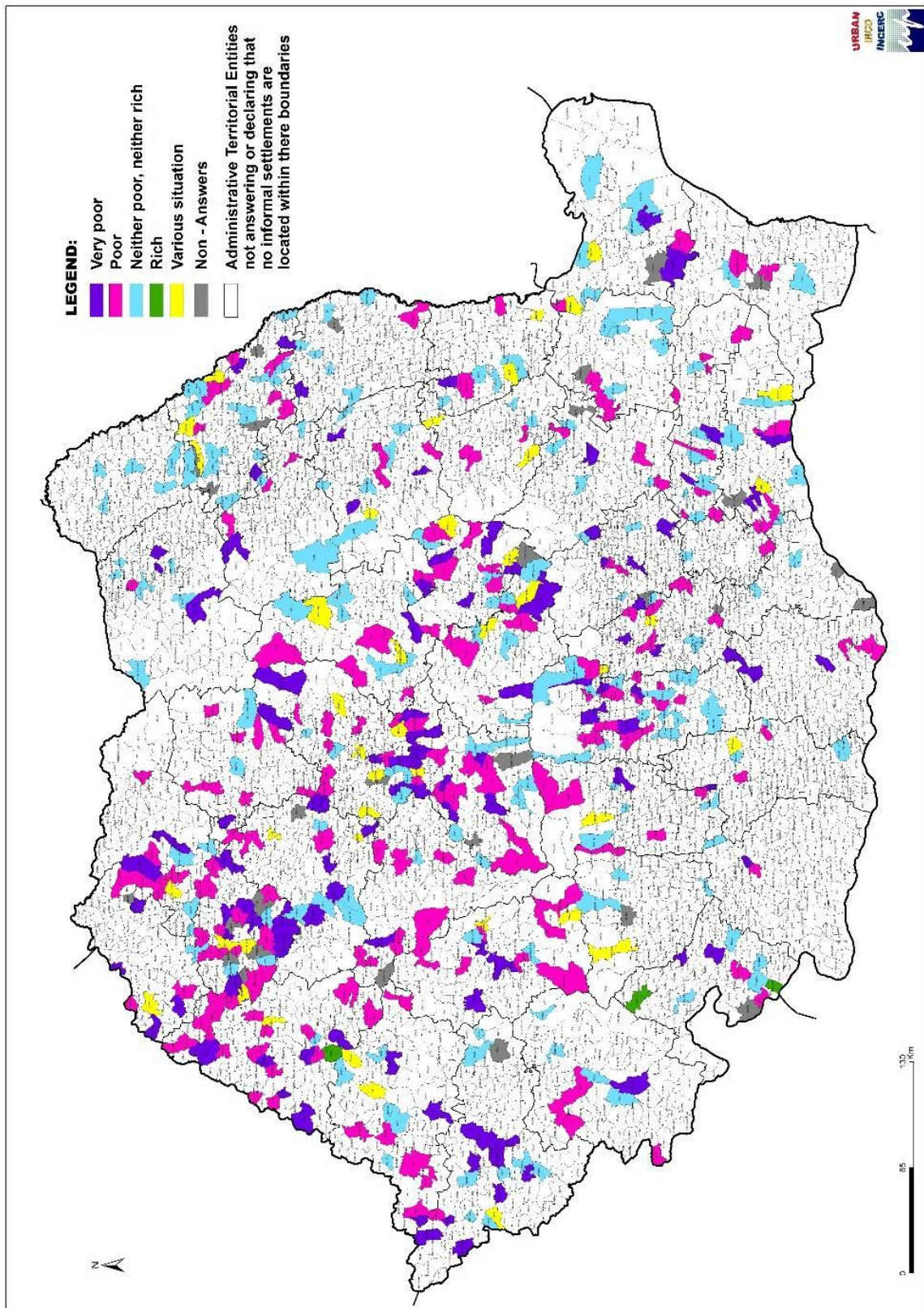
Source: Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration questionnaire processing

The authorities' perception on the population's standard of life is that approximately 57% of the persons coming from the informal settlements are poor and very poor, and in 36% of the cases, the population is neither rich, nor poor (Figure 7).

In most of the cases, the incomes originate either from the allowances for supporting underprivileged families, compensations for parenting, and government allowances for children or from the minimal income.



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**Figure 7.** Perception of local authorities related to the quality of life of the occupants of informal settlements in Romania, in 2014

Source: Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration questionnaire processing

Poverty, as a socio-territorial phenomenon, is concentrated in proportion of 69.8% at the level of type 3 of the informal settlements. Conflicts between neighbours and thefts from houses and cars are the main problems regarding the security of the resident population in 10.4% and in 10% of the cases, respectively. The inadequate depositing of garbage is a characteristic of the living behaviour in the majority of types of informal settlements, especially in the case of type 3.

The insalubrious character of habitations, the low accessibility to the technical-urban network, the social exclusion of the resident population and mainly the precarious nature of living within its boundaries are the main features of the informal establishments under analysis – a component of the socio-spatial morphology of the administrative units in Romania.

The lack of policies for social integration in conjunction with the lack of funds or their inexistence for the control of this phenomenon is accelerating its dynamics on a territorial profile, against the public central and local authorities' incapacity to react.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The analysis of the particularities of the spatial and social morphology of the informal settlements confirms the diversity of territorialisation forms and, implicitly, of the living inequalities specific to this type of habitation in Romania. The insanitary habitat specific to the majority of the informal settlements identified at a national level, on the one hand, and the precariousness of the access to the social infrastructure, on the other hand, shows the precarious quality of the habitation and living conditions.

The growing trends of this phenomenon are calling for the acknowledgement of its extent and facets by the central and local public actors and the initiation of endeavours to solve the situation by means of making legislative and territorial planning instruments accordingly adapted.

The pronounced demographic dynamics of the Roma population in conjunction with the social problems generated by the extreme poverty, the deprivation of the right to a decent habitation, the lack of education, the lack of access to medical services, etc. are calling for the adoption of socio-professional integration policies with the target of improving the habitation conditions.

The inclusion of the problem of the informality of settlements in the political agenda must be the main objective of the main public actors with the aim of improving the quality of life.

The unequal distribution of the particularities of the habitation conditions specific to the type of establishments under analysis also calls for the advocacy of financing the habitation infrastructure for the persons coming from the underprivileged communities. The new commitments regarding public administration and territorial governance must be oriented towards improving habitation conditions at a national level. Ensuring a legal and institutional framework concerning habitation is one of the objectives of Romania's National Reform Programme and must be part of underlying the national strategy in this field and of a legislation adapted to the habitation inequalities identified within the informal settlements with the final aim of a sustainable, uniform and inclusive territorial development.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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