

Last chance: How to strengthen the final Romanian energy and climate plan

LIFE PlanUp

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Legal notice

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Executive summary

Building on the assessments of the draft National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs) and the European Commission recommendations, this publication series aims to support EU Member States in implementing the Commission recommendations for selected measures in the transport, buildings and agriculture sectors.

The last chance: how to strengthen the final Romanian energy and climate plan briefing matches key measures in the Romanian draft NECP with the relevant recommendations of the European Commission and suggests additional policies and solutions that will help strengthen the final NECP, especially in the transport, agriculture and building sector.

The decarbonisation of the transport sector in Romania will require significant investments and a structural shift. Stopping the influx of second-hand diesel cars from western EU countries is crucial to significantly reduce pollution from cars in Romania. Actions at national and EU level are urgently required to tackle this issue. Financial measures and incentives should also be boosted in order to incentivise the uptake of electric vehicles and develop the required charging infrastructure.

The residential sector accounts for 40% of the EU's energy consumption, offering great potential for energy efficiency and consequently for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Restructuring national funding schemes to make investments in building renovation more affordable would encourage more thermal rehabilitation works and improve energy efficiency in buildings. Gathering data on buildings emissions should be improved in order to monitor the state of national building stock and develop a sound and economically viable renovation plan.

With regard to agriculture, the majority of measures outlined in the draft Romanian NECP focus on climate adaptation. However, agriculture emissions in Romania are some of the largest in the EU and need to be properly addressed. More focus should be put on spreading low-emission farming practices, such as reducing the use of fertilisers, reducing livestock farming and providing more support to organic farming.

In Romania, there is still an excessive centralization of administrative decisions in the fields of energy and climate, which does not sufficiently take into account the views of local and regional authorities (LRAs), civil society organisations (CSOs) and other stakeholders (e.g. energy agencies). The Romanian government should therefore set up a permanent working party for a multi-level coordination of energy and climate policies that includes LRAs, CSOs and other stakeholders such as energy agencies.

Transport

The decarbonisation of the transport sector in Romania will require significant investments and a structural shift. However, the measures included in the draft plan do not provide adequate details or even strategies for possible development in this direction.

The draft NECP does not identify a specific decarbonisation target for the transport sector. However, it does include a 17.6 % target for renewable energy share in the sector.

One of the main pillars of the Romanian NECP relies on the “reduction of energy poverty and **accelerated electrification of transport**”.

Key policy measures to reduce pollution from transport include more support for research, establishing common standards and developing the necessary **infrastructure for electric and hybrid cars**.

Between 2005-2016, the energy consumption in the transport sector was on the increase. The main trends were: a significant increase in the consumption of compliant biofuels for the calculation of the renewable energy share; an upward trend in the consumption of electricity from renewable sources in road transport and a small increase in the consumption of electricity from renewable sources in rail transport.

Although renewable energy in both road and rail transport is predicted to spike towards 2030, in absolute numbers it represents a rather modest increase.

Measure 1 - Development of low-carbon transport

European Commission recommendation:

“Transport emissions, the largest effort sharing sector, are projected to increase with existing measures. Romania aims at achieving a share of 17.6 % renewable energy in the transport sector. Electromobility is supported via fiscal incentives, as is the case for hydrogen and gas in transport. Scope and impact would be welcome.”

How to implement the recommendation given the national context:

There is a clear need for measures to avoid pollution from second-hand diesel cars in Romania. These are regularly imported to the country (and other Central and Eastern European countries), transferring the problem of toxic pollution to less affluent regions. While the EU should take measures to limit the flow of old polluting diesel cars in a way that protects the environment and public health and is in line with Single Market regulations, Romania should take measures to protect its citizens via fiscal and financial policies.

One straightforward option would be to make use of the Directive 2007/46/EC on type-approval of new vehicles. Under this directive, the Romanian government could consider adopting an immediate ban on the registration, sale, entry into service or circulation of new and second-hand vehicles. This could target in particular diesel cars that do not comply with type approval for, among others, their impact on public health and the environment. Article 29 of Directive 2007/46/EC allows Romania to refuse to register or authorize the sale or entry into service on its territory of new vehicles for a maximum of six months if such vehicles are deemed to seriously harm the environment or public health.

Moreover, the Romanian government should carefully assess the impact of the influx of second-hand diesel vehicles on the country's air quality, as well as the potential negative impact that exceeding limit values in certain cities or regions would have. This way it would be able to make a concrete plan on how to tackle second-hand car pollution and adopt effective protection measures.

Romania should then review the various measures available to achieve the desired level of protection, including those specific to used diesel vehicles, as well as more general measures against any diesel vehicle that emits beyond certain emission limits.

Among financial measures, schemes and incentives that should be adopted are:

- Economic incentives for using environmentally friendly transport through price instruments;
- A plan for establishing public charging networks for electric cars, as well as for encouraging private investment to develop infrastructure through a stimulus mechanism;
- Tax reductions and exemptions for the purchase and use of electric or hybrid vehicles - especially for company fleets;
- Regulations to support agents interested in investing in

- electromobility infrastructure;
- Attractive tariffs for new electrical applications such as electric mobility, reflecting the current purchase cost and system costs;
- High and strict environmental taxes to limit the purchase of used, polluting vehicles;
- Pollution tax to reduce GHG and NOx emissions caused by imports of old cars

In terms of electrification of transport, Romania should align rail transport with the principles and measures set out in the Commission's White Paper - "Roadmap for a single European transport space". This means reducing GHG emissions from transport by 60% by 2050, compared to 1990. The Romanian rail network is too large for current traffic and for national financial resources. The network itself and the management culture of the railway companies require radical restructuring and modernisation, in order to provide attractive services for customers. This requires substantial infrastructure investments, financed through European structural and investment funds, as well as hiring managers with experience in managing commercial railway companies.

Parking fees are another market-based measure that offers potential for reducing emissions cost-effectively. Moreover, the measure could provide a revenue stream that could facilitate some of the investment measures outlined above. Establishing parking rates, together with the elaboration and implementation of stricter parking regulations, could be considered as a more cost-effective and easier solution for urban agglomerations.

Another important measure to promote the uptake of greener vehicles is establishing charging stations for electric and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles. The Romanian government has already launched a programme that aims at installing both fast and slow charging public stations for electric vehicles. This programme brings about CCS (Combined Charging System), one of several competing charging plug (and vehicle communication) standards for direct current fast charging.

The government should pursue this programme more thoroughly and increase its budget to widen its coverage. The correct implementation of this programme will have positive impacts on the way authorities design local policies related to mobility in urban areas, which in turn will also lead to the increased uptake of EVs and positive behavioural change in urban transport.

Measure 2 - Development of alternative fuel infrastructure

European Commission recommendation:

“The plan mentions the need for developing the recharging and refueling infrastructure and further incentivizing the uptake of alternative fuels. Including details on how policies and measures on alternative fuels will be developed in the future in terms of scope, and expected impact would be welcome.”

How to implement the recommendation given the national context:

In terms of R&D for sustainable transport, incentives for the National Hydrogen and Fuel Cell Center (CNHPC) should be upheld. This center coordinates research in the field of generation, storage and use of hydrogen in fuel cells. The institute aims to support: converting hydrogen into energy, gas-to power; technologies for the storage of energy to obtain the parameters to create power-to-gas plants; hybrid technologies for the storage of energy – lithium-ion programme; development of “clean” propellers for mobility – “H-mobility” programme. Full support for this center is therefore paramount to the development of alternative fuel infrastructure.

With regard to investments in infrastructure, installing slow chargers on existing parking spots is one solution that would address Romanian urban charging needs. At the same time, it is also crucial to offer some public charging in cities for the residents that do not have access to home charging and for other EV drivers entering the city.

Public authorities and grid operators should work together to bring electricity to the highways by establishing rest areas where the electricity supply has been upgraded to the medium voltage grid or using innovative solutions such as batteries as buffers to save costs. This can be done

already today when new fast charging sites are created, in particular when they are greenfield projects.

National and/or regional authorities together with private stakeholders should carefully monitor the usage of the network (in particular in the events of congestion) and increase the number of fast chargers available along the highways to go beyond the minimum requirements when relevant.

Beyond public spaces, more charging infrastructure is needed in apartment buildings. To promote equal access to e-mobility, special attention should be paid to buildings in low income areas, favoring slow charging, which is the primary source of cheap energy. Also, due to affordable electricity and the increased supply of second-hand electric vehicles, e-mobility will benefit most those that drive long distances to their workplace, which includes lower income citizens that live in sub-urban areas and outskirts.

Finally, a modal shift is needed to complement measures such as installing additional charging infrastructure. This means that cities should regard mobility as more than just a question of managing car traffic. In fact, they should limit the number of cars in cities by reducing parking spots in order to free up space for other usages, including cleaner new (micro) mobility services, e.g. electric scooters and bikes.

Buildings

The building sector accounts for 40% of the EU's energy consumption, offering great potential for energy efficiency and consequently for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Considering that in Romania there are approximately **8.1 million homeowners** and **4.85 million homes**, the potential for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the residential and commercial sectors is considerable. The energy intensity of the building sector in Romania is eight times higher than that of the EU 15, due to the inefficiency of centralized heating and the lack of thermal insulation of most homes (apartments).

Direct greenhouse gas emissions from the buildings sector in Romania decreased in the last three decades. In 2016 they were 8% lower compared to 1990. This decrease is mainly due to demographic developments. There are fewer people inhabiting living spaces in Romania, as the country lost around 4-5 million people in the last three decades. Consequently, there is less living space needing heating. Also, energy performance of the built environment has improved and the shift between heating sources (especially between coal-based district heating and individual gas heating) brought about emission reductions.

The Romanian draft NECP does not include a specific GHG reduction target for the buildings sector but does provide data on final energy consumption for heating and cooling for the residential sector.

Energy performance of buildings standards was developed as part of the implementation of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive. A detailed analysis has been carried out by the Coalition for Energy Savings, identifying further energy savings potentials due to the implementation of Art. 7 of the Energy Efficiency Directive (EED) as well as the EcoDesign Regulation and CO2 standards in transport.

Measure 1 - Increase energy efficiency in buildings via regulatory instruments and support schemes

European Commission recommendation:

“The draft plan presents a list of regulatory and non-regulatory measures addressing energy efficiency. Some general information is presented relating to policies and measures for buildings that could be implemented as part of its long-term renovation strategy. More details in the final plan would be useful given the significant contribution to the EU’s 2030 energy efficiency target of a cost-effective transformation of existing buildings into nearly zero-energy buildings.

...The draft plan foresees training measures for energy efficiency in buildings (rehabilitation)

...It is unclear whether the included policies are firmly planned or identified as potential measures or objectives. Addressing these issues in the final plan would allow a better understanding of Romania’s approach to energy efficiency policy.”

Promoting energy efficiency in buildings and in major urban infrastructure systems is the guiding principle in the Romanian draft energy and climate plan.

Older and poorly maintained buildings and other key urban infrastructure use much more energy than newer buildings and systems. Changes to housing regulations will naturally lead to improvements, as older buildings are replaced by newer ones, for which energy efficiency requirements are more stringent. However, strong economic incentives that promote the rehabilitation of existing buildings and reduce energy losses or general energy consumption exist and should be better implemented.

In many cities in Romania, central heating systems providing heating and hot water to houses and large residential and commercial buildings are inefficient. The systems used for the production of thermal / hot water and distribution networks are so outdated that up to 28% of energy is wasted before it reaches the final consumer. Their upgrade and maintenance should be a priority.

Other main systems of water supply infrastructure, domestic water and solid waste collection also need upgrading to meet EU-wide performance requirements and to address issues of poor system performance.

“Green buildings principles” need to be applied for new building projects all over the country:

- A. Energy Efficiency & Green Energy Using “Bio-Climatic Design” principles:** installing a superior “building envelope” with significantly improved insulation and better doors and windows as well as more efficient heating, ventilating, and air conditioning or natural ventilation. Using green energy – either on the home itself or through specifying this contractually with energy suppliers – will help reduce or eliminate fossil fuel derived energy.
- B. Bio-Climatic Design: lighting, shading and more:** Applying “bio-climatic design” principles means that the orientation of the building and placement of windows and skylights is carefully thought through in order to ensure shade from the summer sun and collection of winter sun. Indoor lighting is designed to ensure a safe, and warm environment with a minimum amount of energy use. Designs that ensure natural daylight enters the building in the summer contribute to a “Green Home”.
- C. Other Green Design principles:** Green Homes are designed to be durable to minimize repairs and heavy construction work if future needs change. Applying the principles of the circular economy not only will take into consideration embedded energy but will potentially lower the building emissions along its lifespan. Smart design allows for different uses of the home as a family’s needs change or new owners arrive with different needs. Green building principles require better planning and “integrated design” of the different disciplines to

ensure optimal results, to maximize the use of space, to avoid costly construction mistakes, and to minimize waste in the building process.

How to improve the plan given the national context:

1 Funding should be affordable

There are several funding programmes in the European Union that Central and Eastern European countries (e.g the EIB programmes) could benefit from more than they currently are. One of the reasons for the low level of use of these funds by Romania are the complex bureaucratic procedures. Moreover, the required national co-financing contribution to European programs can sometimes reach 50%, which is often a major problem, especially for countries still struggling with economic and financial slowdown. Simplifying these procedures and adapting the levels of co-financing required could largely solve the problem.

Another important issue is the difficult procedures for accessing and managing European projects at national level. Currently in Romania, the development of European projects requires the involvement of at least three local and governmental authorities, which often leads to temporary paralysis of the process. Further simplification and streamlining of such procedures would help Romania access and develop more projects funded by the EU.

2 National programs should be better adapted to market conditions

The program of thermal rehabilitation of housing in Romania was (re) launched in 2010 (Government's Ordinance no. 69 / 2010) in a new form that introduces state guaranteed loans and subsidized interest rates up to 100% for residential buildings built before 2000.

Homeowners can loan up to 90% of the value of the thermal rehabilitation works, the repayment period of the loans being of maximum five years.

According to government information, the value of the credits is 1850 euros / room in the case of multi-family buildings and a maximum of 7400 euros / room in the case of single-family buildings.

This volume of investments is relatively large for the purchasing power of most homeowners and the loan repayment period is too short (e.g. in the

Czech Republic and Germany the repayment period of similar loans is 10-15 years).

All this represents a major problem for both local banks and homeowners. The short credit period involves too high monthly rates which generally exceed the value of the resulting energy savings and are unrealistic for the Romanian market. This problem is accentuated by the reluctance of homeowners to apply for loans.

Given the need to overcome the problem of upfront cost, an Energy Service Companies (ESCO) scheme might be introduced in order to apply energy contracts to refurbishment of homes and allow for payback via savings.

Another possibility would be coupling the loans with European and national funds to co-finance part of the investments. This co-financing method is used in the Italian scheme “*Conto Termico*”, where direct financing is made for up to 50% of the cost of the technologies and can be coupled with existing national funding schemes.

3 Provide clearer CO₂eq. emission data

Currently, there is little data on the existing buildings and their potential for increasing energy efficiency and reducing CO₂ emissions. This makes it difficult to develop a clear vision for decarbonising the building sector and programmes for exploiting the full potential of energy savings to that effect.

A better knowledge of the existing situation and the potential of energy savings can help define realistic and economically viable repayment periods for the investments.

The national investment schemes should be based on life cycle cost assessments and on the optimal cost of measures to increase the energy performance of buildings.

4 Ensure quality thermal rehabilitations that optimize the economic and environmental benefits

It is essential that the thermal rehabilitation programs of buildings be carried out as efficiently as possible. The economic, social and environmental benefits must be considered from the design stage.

The implementation of thermal rehabilitation measures in buildings must be done under quality technical conditions. In this regard, it is important to have certification schemes for the materials used, such as thermal insulation materials and windows.

The National Institute for Research and Development in Construction, Urbanism and Sustainable Territorial Development (URBAN-INCERC) is the responsible authority for quality control and for collecting data on buildings in Romania.

Incentive schemes should be based on such certifications and quality controls. Financial support should be provided to households that apply specific criteria to refurbishment (i.e. energy efficiency, renewable energy etc) and the amount should be linked to the amount spent and the amount of fossil energy/CO₂ avoided.

4 Transfer of successful practices and innovative schemes

In addition to the European funds, there are other opportunities to finance measures to increase the energy performance of buildings such as the Green Investment Schemes successfully used in the Czech Republic. Similar innovative financing schemes are being implemented in Germany by the state-owned development bank KfW and in the United Kingdom (the “PAYS” system).

Agriculture

According to the Greenhouse Gas Inventory of Romania, in 2010 the agriculture sector was responsible for 14% (almost 17 000 Gt CO₂eq) of the country’s total greenhouse gas emissions. This exceeds the regional and EU average, which is around 10%. Nitrogen (N₂O) emissions account for the largest proportion (52%) of total CO₂ eq. emissions from agriculture, followed by methane emissions which account for the remaining 48%.

N₂O emissions result from the production and storage of zootechnical fertilizers and, secondly, from agricultural soils (especially due to denitrification followed by the application of inorganic fertilizers or zootechnical fertilizers).

Domestic livestock is the main source of CH₄ emissions from agriculture, both from enteric fermentation and from the management of zootechnical fertilizers. It is also likely that the continued use of open pit latrines in many rural areas and rural households in Romania contributes to CH₄ emissions. Certain N₂O and CH₄ emissions result from the burning of agricultural residues on the ground (this being also another source of NO_x and CO₂ emissions).

The low share of carbon dioxide in the total emissions of the agricultural sector in Romania is mainly due to the high percentage of subsistence farming, which is experiencing difficulties in becoming mechanised.

Although it has a relatively high share of total greenhouse gas emissions, the intensity of emissions from agriculture is close to the EU-28 average, with 2.27 tonnes CO₂eq to 1000 euro added value for the agricultural sector.

European Commission assessment:

“For agriculture, some potential future emission reducing policies are included in different scenarios. Most policies focus on climate adaptation. The NECP draft plan outlines some policy objectives for the LULUCF sector and describes the LULUCF flexibility that could be used if LULUCF credits were generated and needed for compliance under the ESR10 (up to of 13.2 Mt CO₂eq for the period 2021-2030) without indicating whether Romania intends to use it or not.

While the draft plan does not set additional national targets for reducing GHG emissions, it describes strategic objectives for different sectors under the National strategy on climate change and economic growth based on low-carbon emissions for the period 2016-2030. Climate adaptation is mentioned under six operational objectives in the draft plan, including three of the energy dimensions.

The draft NECP does not include explicit adaptation goals or objectives, despite the fact that the climate change strategy has adaptation as a general objective.”

How to improve the plan given the national context:

- 1** Promote knowledge transfer and advisory services on climate change issues among farmers

The transfer of information and knowledge, the training and acquisition of skills, as well as consultancy services for farmers must also take into account aspects of reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the different activities and aspects of the agricultural sector.

This can be done by promoting practices and technologies that track carbon sequestration, methods of setting up building envelopes, as well as by identifying renewable energy sources.

The government could evaluate the impact of these measures by determining how many farmers benefited from knowledge transfer and consultancy services on climate change issues.

2 Support investments for farm modernization

Investments in the modernization of agricultural holdings aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions should, in particular, take into account the production of methane and nitrogen oxide.

Investments should therefore be encouraged in the creation of facilities and the purchase of modern equipment for the storage and application of manure.

Investments aimed at increasing the energy efficiency of farm buildings, as well as the production and use of small-scale green energy, using biomass and biogas, as well as other renewable sources, i.e. photovoltaic, should also be promoted.

The result of this investment can be evaluated by determining the number of farms that benefit from the aid and the public spending for investments to contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in the agricultural sector.

3 Promote low-carbon agricultural practices

There are a few crucial changes that are required in the agriculture sector in order to significantly reduce its emissions.

Chemical fertilizers should be forbidden and the use of organic fertilizers should be limited. Moreover, the number of animals on permanent grassland should be reduced as doing so would contribute to reducing greenhouse gas and ammonia emissions from agriculture.

At the same time, the use of crops with high capacity to fix nitrogen in the soil should be encouraged as they help reduce GHG emissions.

Supporting organic farming will also contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Studies show a reduction in carbon footprint per tonne of food produced from organic farming over conventional farming due to the abandonment of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. While organic farming contributes to environmental protection, it also produces higher value-added produce.

4 Promote carbon sequestration in agriculture

The incorporation of the vegetal mass in the soil on the agricultural lands where green crops are established, contributes to carbon sequestration which helps reduce emissions. The result can be quantified by monitoring the surfaces on which green crops were established, as well as by quantifying the amount of plant biomass resulting from afforestation.

Transparency and public participation

The European Commission does not provide a specific recommendation to Romania on how to improve transparency and public participation in the preparation of its final NECP. Romania organized a public consultation prior to submitting its draft NECP to the EC, as well as another one after the submission.

Romania obliges local authorities in municipalities with more than 5 000 inhabitants to prepare energy plans. However, the national government does not provide them with the necessary means and tools to carry this task out effectively, resulting in the delivery of few and often low-quality plans.

There is also a lack of coordination between the energy policies adopted by local and regional authorities (LRAs) and the national level, and the role of LRAs in achieving the national objectives is not properly considered and defined.

Additionally, there is still an excessive centralization of administrative decisions in the fields of energy and climate, which does not sufficiently take into account the views of LRAs, civil society organisations (CSOs) and other stakeholders (e.g. energy agencies).

How to improve the plan given the national context:

Romania should set up a permanent working party on the multi-level coordination of energy and climate policies that includes LRAs, CSOs and other stakeholders such as energy agencies.

The permanent working party could be managed by the Romanian Authority for Regulation in the Energy Sector (ANRE). Its main objective should be to improve the collaboration on energy and climate planning across the different governance levels. CSOs are associated with the aim to incorporate the views of the public and also mobilize citizens for energy and climate action.

This governance structure would also identify the barriers for LRAs in developing ambitious and effective energy plans, and devise support means and tools to address them. Moreover, the permanent working party would propose regional and local energy targets that contribute to the fulfilment of the national targets. These targets would be included in future NECPs and could be set e.g. on energy efficiency and renewable energy, where the EC has recommended Romania to substantially increase its ambition.

Conclusions

Some of the key measures in the Romanian draft NECP, especially in the transport sector, have the potential to set the country on the right pathway to lower its emissions and improve energy efficiency. However, as the European Commission also points out in its assessment, these measures should be improved, better detailed and flanked by complementary actions that would ensure their effectiveness.

In the transport sector, for example, incentives for the purchase of electric vehicles should be complemented with the required investments in infrastructure but also with policies aimed at reducing the influx of heavily polluting second-hand cars.

In order to boost thermal renovations of buildings, a more affordable and just financing scheme is necessary. Better data collection and the application of best practices from neighbouring countries would also contribute to reducing emissions from buildings and improving energy efficiency.

Agriculture should be given a more prominent role in the final NECP, especially with regard to its climate mitigation potential. Priority should be given to increasing knowledge transfer among farmers, promoting good practices, and enhancing land's carbon sequestration potential.

Equally important for the overall success and robustness of the plan is a more inclusive development process. The Romanian government should do much more to involve stakeholders in decision-making. This can be done in particular by setting up a permanent working party on the multi-level coordination of energy and climate policies that includes LRAs, CSOs and other stakeholders such as energy agencies.



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