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Project title:

The development of the innovative educational method of
ACCESSIBLE tourism in Central Europe

Accessible tourism in Romania – research papers, statistics and legal environment

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Introduction

Accessible tourism, often referred to as inclusive or disability-friendly tourism, has emerged as a significant focus within the global travel industry, aiming to provide equal travel opportunities for individuals with disabilities. In Romania, a country rich in natural beauty, historical sites, and cultural treasures, the accessibility of travel and tourism services for disabled persons has gained increasing attention. This introduction delves into the situation of disabled individuals in Romania concerning their access to travel and tourism services, shedding light on the challenges they face and the efforts being made to enhance their travel experiences.

Romania boasts a diverse array of attractions, from the picturesque landscapes of the Carpathian Mountains to the medieval castles and fortified churches that dot its countryside. However, the realization of the potential of Romanian tourism lies not just in its attractions but in the inclusive nature of its travel services. The ability to explore and enjoy these destinations should be open to all, regardless of their physical abilities.

Despite the beauty and allure of Romanian destinations, disabled individuals often encounter obstacles when seeking to engage in travel and tourism activities. Inadequate infrastructure, lack of accessible accommodations, limited transportation options, and insufficient awareness of the needs of disabled travelers contribute to these challenges. Such barriers not only restrict disabled individuals' ability to experience the country's cultural and natural wonders but also hinder the growth of an inclusive tourism industry.



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1. Research papers published in Romania about the situation of access of disabled persons to tourism services

Pașcalău-Vrabete and Băban (2018) focus on the experiences of individuals with mobility impairments in terms of disability and inclusion/exclusion, as well as their identity formation and efforts to challenge disabling societal constructs in the context of post-socialist Romania. The research involved a phenomenological analysis of 11 semi-structured interviews, leading to the identification of five major themes: feeling different, redefining normality, being perceived as part of a 'different regnum,' facing physical barriers, and grappling with the impact of the past while envisioning a desired future.

The participants' narratives emphasize the urgency of challenging medical-productivist perspectives of disability at the social, individual, and institutional levels. The study underscores the crucial role people with disabilities play in promoting such transformative social changes.

The prevailing medical model of disability and the influence of capitalist pressures for productivity have led to concerning disparities between the legal framework in Romania concerning the inclusion of people with disabilities and the actual social and architectural reality. Additionally, the perceptions and experiences of people with disabilities in this context remain largely unexplored. Despite legislation promising protection against discrimination and ensuring unrestricted access to education, employment, and participation, the people with mobility impairments they interviewed shared a different reality. The participants described facing a situation where they are reduced to their perceived 'defective' bodies, marginalized, and misunderstood due to negative social attitudes and physical barriers in the environment.

This study underscores the urgency of examining, comprehending, and embracing the discourses put forth by the social model of disability and the independent living movement within Romanian society and institutions. There is a crucial need to further explore and incorporate these perspectives to drive positive changes and promote inclusivity for individuals with disabilities.

Oreian and Rebeleanu (2016) present a comprehensive examination of the social economy's role in facilitating the socio-professional integration of individuals with disabilities. It analyzes an institution that has successfully established social economy structures, with a particular emphasis on the functioning of its protected units. Moreover, the study delves into the gender-specific aspects of employability for individuals with mental disabilities, while also highlighting the influence of the institution's services on their ability to secure and retain employment.

The initiatives carried out in the field of social economy leverage the resources and skills of individuals with special needs within an organized setting. In Romania, the most notable social economy entities for disabled individuals are the protected units, where income and financial independence are generated through the sale of goods and services. Furthermore, the profits earned are reinvested within these units to enhance product and service quality and create new job opportunities for beneficiaries.



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In essence, the social economy serves as a complement to the efforts made by duty bearers in facilitating the professional integration of people with disabilities. It enables their access to the job market by adapting workplaces to accommodate their specific needs and abilities.

The social tourism and accessibility

The new tourism market of the future is a market segment called social tourism. Social tourism has been created to make travel tourism accessible to consumer groups such as disadvantaged people and people with disabilities. The aim is to improve accessibility and availability of travel options, which in fact creates opportunities for new business development (Mihaela, 2019).

The aim of social tourism is to make tourism activities accessible to the most disadvantaged groups, so one of its important branches is tourism for people with disabilities. In this way, social tourism actually represents a humanistic approach to tourism. The existence of social tourism in a country is also closely related to economic development, thus the attitude towards people with disabilities in a country is closely related to social and economic development (Simon et al., 2017).

In Romania, since the early 2000s, a number of social tourism programmes have appeared, which are also closely linked to social policies at the national level (Simon et al., 2017). According to a study by Simon et al. (2017), it can be generally stated that social tourism, including tourism for people with disabilities, is at a low level in Romania. This mainly means that the pool of tourism opportunities in the country is under-dimensioned compared to the real needs of the population categories that benefit from tourism activities at lower prices. At the same time, statistically there is a lack of complete information on social tourism, including tourism data for the disadvantaged. The tourism associations that run social tourism programmes do not have annual analyses of participation data, participating businesses, accommodation, venues, number of tourists, etc., so we cannot get a realistic picture of how many people from disadvantaged groups are currently benefiting from existing but scarce opportunities at national level (Simon et al., 2017).

James Bowtell, in his study (Bowtell, 2015, pp. 203-204), points out that Europe is expected to see a large increase in demand for accessible tourism. This means that we need to be prepared for this growing demand, as only a very small proportion of the market currently meets the needs of accessible tourism. The UNWTO, a specialized agency of the United Nations, has been working in recent years to transform tourist destinations into accessible destinations (Mihaela, 2019).

A study by D. Mihaela (2019) provides a detailed overview of accessibility tourism efforts in Romania in recent years. Since 2013, Motivation Foundation Romania has been providing certified training courses for professionals based on the curricula developed by the World Health Organization (WHO). At the same time, it has created the first online platform, a national map of accessible places, where public institutions, places of entertainment and leisure, accommodation and facilities and their surroundings can be found. The map is available at www.accessibil.org and is designed for people with disabilities. The map can also be used by tourism operators who want to develop tourism services for people with disabilities (Mihaela,



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2019). Another initiative of Motivation Foundation Romania is the assessment of the accessibility of buildings, which allows a building to obtain an accessibility mark from the State Office of Inventories and Trademarks. Among the few tourism and hospitality service providers, it is worth highlighting that the Băile Felix complex and the Royal Courtyard in Piatra Neamţon meet the accessibility criteria (Mihaela, 2019).

There are now 2 phone apps for people with disabilities in Romania, one of which is a map of accessible places to access via the phone app. The app is called Accessibility Map. The other phone app is MotivActiv, which provides up-to-date information for people with disabilities by publishing articles and news.

Nowadays, the number of people with disabilities is increasing in Romania (and worldwide), which is reason enough for people with disabilities to be given special attention by different segments of society, such as service providers (including tourism), entrepreneurs and researchers. Babaita (2014) researched the specific field of tourism in Romania that deals with the issue of tourism for people with disabilities. In her research, she highlights the need to develop a social model for people with disabilities, which has not yet been formulated in the tourism literature. The aim of her questionnaire survey was to find out whether Romanian society is open and ready to accept this new segment, i.e. whether the needs of consumers with special needs are taken into account in the tourism market. The research examined the attitudes of Romanian society towards this issue, namely the attitudes and behaviour of people without disabilities towards people with disabilities. In addition, the research was aimed at exploring the reasons that lead to negative feelings towards persons with disabilities (reticence or indifference) (Babaita, 2014).

The main conclusion of her research is that the majority of people with disabilities are accepted in Romanian society and support the integration process. In addition, respondents believe that, as in all modern societies, there should exist in Romania a system that provides certain material benefits and psychosocial assistance to these persons. It also highlights the fact that, although progress has been made in removing certain barriers to transport, there is still much to be done in terms of access to accommodation, restaurants and attractions, and that the participation of people with disabilities in tourism programmes is limited. According to research participants, there is a need to promote the participation of people with disabilities in tourism (Babaita, 2014).

In another article on social tourism, Dumitru and Negricea (2011), we can read about the evolution and the definition of social tourism, the international organisations of social tourism, the specificities of social tourism in general and, finally, the main advantages of the development of this type of tourism.

Erdeli et al. (2011) summarizes the difficulties and changes over time in Romanian spa tourism. The study delves into how the industry has transformed from its communist roots to the post-communist era. Despite being significantly impacted by the major political and socio-economic changes following the 1989 Revolution, this industry continues to thrive alongside emerging forms of tourism that cater to the preferences of modern leisure consumers. They emphasize that the National Pension and Other Social Insurance Funds have a vital role in facilitating social tourism by providing subsidized or complimentary spa treatment vouchers to retired individuals and disabled adults. The special Spa Social Tourism Program, run by the national pension fund and the social insurance fund for individuals affected by work accidents



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and occupational diseases, caters to retired and disabled people. The program distributes "free vouchers" for retired individuals with disabilities and "subsidized vouchers" for other retired individuals.

The responsible tourism and the access of disabled persons

Văduva et al. (2021) analysed the main obstacles that exist today by studying the international literature on accessible tourism, and made some suggestions for improving this tourism activity, taking into account the recommendations of the World Tourism Organization. In their study, they highlight the need to raise awareness of the need for accessibility at world level.

As already mentioned in the previous literature references, the study by Văduvã et al. (2021) shows that the demand for accessible tourism services is increasing, mainly due to the growing number of people with disabilities (reaching 1 billion people worldwide in 2019). This has led to the creation of international symbols, but there are still many problems in the field of accessible tourism. These may be environmental (participation in activities in tourist destinations, lack of communication), infrastructural (accessibility of buildings, transport, booking facilities) or social (attitudinal barriers, low level of specific training for accessible tourism) (Văduva et al., 2021).

The World Tourism Organization's guide "Inclusive recovery guide to the socio-cultural impacts of Covid-19 on people with disabilities" highlights the dissatisfaction of travellers with disabilities with official tourism information on accessibility. A study by Văduva et al (2021) on the specific circumstances of tourists with disabilities also shows that tourism in this area is still in its infancy, with much to be done to make more tourism services accessible to people with disabilities. However, advocates of accessible tourism believe that it can be done by improving accessibility of facilities, improving transport, accessibility of attractions and destinations, and cooperation between stakeholders (Văduva et al., 2021).

The study by Văduva et al. (2021) makes recommendations for better implementation of accessible accessible tourism. These recommendations include: the creation of public-private partnerships, international cooperation, human resources training, improving accessibility to destinations by diversifying transport systems, adapting transport modes, and diversifying attractions and destinations. They also stress the importance of making more destinations accessible to people with disabilities and of promoting this type of niche tourism (Văduva et al., 2021).

The main objective of the article by Butnaru (2010) is to identify the challenges faced by customers, especially those with disabilities, when choosing a tourist accommodation. In addition, the article seeks to highlight measures and solutions aimed at eliminating these obstacles. The author addresses the following issues:

- Mentality - a barrier in dealing with clients with disabilities
- Physical - architectural barriers encountered in a tourist accommodation structure
- Welcoming guests with locomotor disabilities



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- Meeting clients with hearing disabilities
- Meeting visually impaired customers
- Removing barriers to customer service. Standards for increasing quality services of a tourist accommodation
- Architectural requirements to accommodate people with disabilities

As it is well noticed in the study mentioned above, unfortunately these barriers exist in rural tourism, some are independent of the tourism industry, being the effect of the policy of the respective country, others depend on the perception of the manager of the accommodation tourist agency, tourist area, the term hospitality.

Tudorache et al. (2017) presented the challenges encountered in applying European Tourism Indicators System (ETIS) in the context of Brasov county, situated mostly in the Romanian Carpathians. ETIS was configured initially with a total of 27 core indicators and 40 additional (optional) indicators. There are four indicators within group C Inclusion / Accessibility, dealing with the problem of the inclusion of disabled persons in tourism:

C.3.1 Percentage of commercial accommodation establishments accessible for people with disabilities/participating in recognized accessibility information schemes

C.3.1.1 Percentage of destination served by public transport that is accessible to people with disabilities and people with specific access requirements

C.3.2 Percentage of tourist attractions that are accessible to people with disabilities and/or participating in recognised accessibility information schemes

C.3.2.1 Percentage of visitors satisfied with the accessibility of the destination for those with disabilities or specific access requirements

The study of Tudorache et al. (2017) reveals that the process of selecting ETIS indicators is adaptable and should align with each destination's unique characteristics, considering stakeholders' needs, relevant information, and the availability of data. Implementing the ETIS system in a tourist destination not only serves as a valuable tool for monitoring economic, social, and environmental performance at the destination level but also provides responsible actors with an effective management tool.

The accessibility infrastructure and services for disabled persons in Romania

Tecau et al. (2019) wrote about issues regarding the intention of responsible tourism to increase the accessibility of tourist destinations for children with disabilities and their families. The aim was to identify



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and analyze the obstacles encountered by families with disabled children during their tourism experiences. They carried out a qualitative research via focus group interviews, with a total of 32 participants, specialized in the education of disabled children and regular schools where these children are studying (managers, specialists and parents/foster parents). Among the very valuable results, we can highlight these:

- In Romania, according to all the participants, typical tourists, authorities, and tourism employees are not adequately prepared to exhibit ideal behavior towards people with disabilities and their families. This emphasizes the necessity for increased sensitivity in their interactions with these groups, as well as the need for specialized training for the staff involved. The respondents consider that the main cause of this behavior resides in the fact that Romanian people are not used to seeing people with disabilities in the public space. All the research participants agreed that families with disabled children do not feel comfortable in public spaces, and their children are avoided by the other children.

- the participants in this study expressed that Romania has some hotel chains that have taken measures to eliminate physical barriers by providing access ramps, adapted rooms, and bathrooms for people with disabilities. However, the costs of staying in these hotels often surpass the financial means of families with disabled children. Only a limited number of budget-friendly hotels offer suitable accessibility and accommodations for these families. According to the participants, the most challenging aspect is ensuring easy access to tourist attractions for children with disabilities. One instance shared by a mother with a child having multiple diseases highlighted the issue. During a family vacation organized for families with disabled children at a seaside hotel, although the hotel provided proper facilities for the group, reaching the beach posed a major challenge. The 500-meter pathway leading to the beach was unsuitable for smooth movement, making it nearly impossible for families to access the beach. Consequently, many families ended up spending their entire holiday confined to the hotel premises.

- Regarding the possibilities of diminishing the attitude barriers, the participants in the sample stated that a society's level of civilization is reflected in its treatment of individuals with special needs. The process of inclusion depends on both the mindset of those facing difficulties and the attitudes of others. Thus, negative attitudes and mentalities can be transformed through the dissemination of information.

When asked whether they think that others should be educated about certain aspects to foster acceptance of people with disabilities, the respondents shared numerous ideas, which can be categorized into three groups: rational appeals, emotional appeals, and appeals related to human rights. Some participants argued that rational arguments should be emphasized, as people need to understand that not having a disability presently does not guarantee the same situation in the future.

- the final question of the study was finding opportunities to use virtual reality (VR) in order to help families with disabled children to identify and to avoid physical barriers in tourism activities. All respondents mentioned that they use the Internet, including tools like Google maps, touristic forums, and websites, to plan their travels. The specialists unanimously agreed that Virtual Reality (VR) technology could provide more accurate visual details about various locations, which aligns with the findings from the group of parents. The use of VR platforms benefits people with special needs and their families, as it offers precise



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information about different destinations. The potential applications of VR technology in benefitting children with special needs were identified as follows: simulating travel by car, train, or airplane to help them get accustomed to the sensations of these transportation means and the experience of being in a crowd beforehand, and allowing them to become familiar with tourist destinations before their actual visit, which can reduce stress caused by unknown situations. Regarding accommodations, respondents indicated that the most essential information to be tested using VR includes accessibility to the accommodation, the condition of the accommodation itself, access to bathrooms, and accessibility to various tourist attractions. All participants agreed that accommodations offering the option to test conditions through VR are preferred over those that do not offer this possibility.

The primary finding of this study is that in Romania, there is a lack of sufficient preparation among authorities, tourists, and employees to include atypical tourists, such as disabled children and their families, in tourism activities. Comparing the results to previous studies mentioned in the analysis, this research unveiled that the participation of families with disabled children in tourism activities is limited in Romania. Cultural and economic factors, such as low family income, are considered the main reasons behind this limitation.

In Romania, attitudinal barriers pose significant challenges, arising from both individuals with disabilities (where having a disabled child is still perceived as a source of shame for many families) and society at large. The society is not adequately prepared, educated, or empathetic towards accommodating individuals with disabilities, contributing to the difficulties they face in engaging in tourism activities.

Regarding physical barriers, the findings indicate that although there have been improvements in accessibility, the sample members still perceive the presence of such barriers for disabled individuals.

The authors also concluded that genuine change in societal attitudes towards people with disabilities can only be achieved through education. Consequently, incorporating topics aimed at improving attitudes towards disabled individuals in the primary school curriculum could serve as an impetus for attaining the UN's sustainable development goals.

Regarding the use of VR technology, it has the potential to bridge the gap between pre-visit perceptions of a tourist destination and the actual experience on-site. VR can assist children and parents in immersing themselves in the destination, identifying facilities and obstacles, and gaining a more accurate representation of the places they plan to visit.

Munteanu et al. (2014) investigate competitive strategies that can be adopted by hotel managers in resorts on the Black Sea coast of Mamaia, Romania, taking into account consumer expectations and best practices in the tourism industry. Among other important infrastructure and service elements, they pointed out that facilities for tourists with disabilities can be found in four sampled hotels as follows: either the rooms are adequately equipped for these people, or there is adequate wheelchair access in the hotel surroundings and public areas, and there is ramp access to different buildings of the hotel complex. Iaki is the only Romanian hotel in the sample with facilities for people with disabilities.



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About the accessibility of tourism in Romania, there is another article treating this problem, written by Rabontu (2018). It claims to examine the level of development of tourist facilities catering to individuals with disabilities in both accommodation and catering establishments, considering the growth of inclusive tourism on a national and international scale. It employs research methods to analyze the existing statistical data pertaining to this topic. After a statistical data analysis, the author concludes that in Romanian tourism the accessibility of people with disabilities is at very low level. The limited number of rooms designated for individuals with disabilities in Romania indicates the lack of interest among tourist accommodation units in catering to this steadily expanding population segment. The main reason for this is the substantial investments required to adequately equip accommodation, restaurant, and entertainment facilities, as well as the need to upgrade infrastructure and transportation means. Only few places have the necessary facilities to ensure access for people with disabilities.

A research (Tecău, 2017) was conducted with the primary aim of confirming the need for a software platform in Romania to help people with disabilities to navigate accessible and safe tourist routes and facilities. Using a focus group method, the research sought to identify safety issues that may affect persons with disabilities or their companions while travelling. According to the opinion of the interviewed subjects, people with disabilities would like to go on excursions, and the majority of them have a greater need for such experiences, so a software product could help to ensure travel safety and information communication. The respondents highlighted the need to organise an information campaign for the members of the society to raise awareness of the problems faced by people with disabilities when travelling, thus sensitising people to this issue.

The group discussion method was also used to highlight the safety fears that people with disabilities may have when travelling: the main fears are related to transport and travel (conditions of transport, reliability of timetables, lack of street lighting, ramps, asphalt markings, audible street signs), lack of adequate accommodation, access to first aid points, access to different places to eat, access to shopping points, including certain tourist attractions. However, again in this research, the lack of trained professional staff emerges as one of the real sources of fear. In addition, it is important to mention that in Romania today, most people with disabilities cannot afford expensive travel, as their standard of living is generally lower (Tecău, 2017).

According to the research article published by Tecău (2017), a gathering platform could help a lot in encouraging people with disabilities to travel by showing them the spaces available to them in safe conditions, thus excluding destinations that are inaccessible or that could be dangerous for tourists with special needs. The concept should involve a range of organisations, such as government departments, ministries, public administrations, educational establishments, hotels and restaurants.

The study by Cernaianu-Sobry (2011) focuses on people with disabilities, including sports tourism, in two countries, Romania and France. In the study published in 2011, the authors' research revealed that in Romania the majority of hotels, transport, facilities and tourist sites are not accessible to people with disabilities. At the same time, the law is quite different, according to Article 21 of the Romanian Law



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448/2006: 'The competent authorities of the public administration are obliged to facilitate access for people with disabilities to cultural values, heritage and tourism, sports and leisure activities'.

The study also reveals that one of the main problems in Romania is that tourism workers do not have adequate knowledge in this field and, as a consequence, do not provide appropriate services for people with disabilities. The main conclusion of the study, published in 2011, is that there is a lack of government policies and strategies to promote accessible tourism, a lack of qualified staff and a lack of services and programmes for people with disabilities and persons with disabilities. In addition, it is important to note that there is a lack of official information in Romania on holiday opportunities for people with disabilities. At the same time, the authors stress that insufficient financial resources limit access to tourism and sports activities for people with disabilities (Cernaianu-Sobry, 2011).

Despite Romania's abundant natural and anthropogenic resources, if the Romanian tourism infrastructure is not adapted to people with disabilities, this market segment and business opportunity will remain untapped (Cernaianu-Sobry, 2011).

The study by Simon et al (2018) assesses the existence of camps for students in Romania, including facilities for people with disabilities. The data of the study show that there are basically a shortage of places for such camps at the national level (4,600 boarding places in 2017), while there were 1,600 boarding places registered for children with disabilities.

For example, on the coast, in the county of Constanta, there were only 236 boarding places in camps for children with disabilities in 2017 (Simon et al.,2018).

Epuran et al (2020) conducted qualitative research to identify the main barriers faced by people with disabilities in Romania when travelling, especially when travelling for tourism. The results of the research showed that people with disabilities like to and do travel for tourism purposes, but that they usually inevitably encounter obstacles during their trips. The majority of the respondents in the survey prefer the Romanian coast (the destination visited by more than half of the respondents).

The short survey conducted in Brasov county shows that the problems of people with disabilities are still not given much attention. The research also highlights that people accompanying disabled people also face difficulties due to a lack of information about tourist destinations. Accessibility problems are particularly faced by people with physical and mobility impairments, such as location, accessibility of different tourist attractions and access to public transport (e.g. lack of space for wheelchairs or lack of ramps) (Epuran et al., 2020).

Their results show, which is also clear from many other studies, that people with disabilities in Romania need better information before visiting and that it would be worthwhile to introduce new technologies to help better inform the target group about the accessibility and description of potential tourist destinations. The importance of providing adequate and detailed information is also underlined by the need to prepare and inform people with disabilities in advance before travelling, which could be helped in the future by introducing new technologies at the planning stage of the trip, so that they can be better informed in advance (Epuran et al.,2020).



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Another very important element is the fear of people with disabilities when travelling, which is due to the lack of knowledge of people working in tourism units and the attitudes of non-disabled people towards people with disabilities. At the societal level, the lack of tolerance in Romania creates security fears, which seems to be a real problem in this country. Therefore, there is a need for education of the whole population in order to promote tolerance towards people with disabilities, which is also often found in the literature (Epuran et al., 2020).

Brătucu and colleagues (2016) conducted a study on tourists' perceptions of tourist destinations in Brasov County in terms of accessibility for people with disabilities. The respondents in this study also mentioned the following as the biggest problems: accessibility of destinations for people with disabilities, access to transport, inadequate infrastructure and problems with facilities.

In their previous research, Bratucu and co-authors (2015) have already highlighted that it would be recommended to improve accessibility for people with disabilities in destinations, such as the introduction of bus services that allow wheelchair access and easier access to tourist attractions and accommodation (Brătucu, Chițu and Demeter 2015).

The study by Babaita (2012) reveals, through a survey of 60 sample hotels (in the cities of Arad and Timisoara), the extent to which the infrastructure of hotels is adapted to the needs of tourists with disabilities, and insights into the opinion of hotel managers on the travel opportunities for people with disabilities.

The hotel managers interviewed were not familiar with this market segment and most of them do not adapt their services to this target group. The majority of hotel managers believe that their staff are not sufficiently prepared for this market. According to the survey, more than 50% of managers believe that governmental and non-governmental organisations do not sufficiently cater for these individuals. In terms of infrastructure, the research highlighted that the majority of hotels have designated special parking spaces and entrance ramps for people with disabilities, but there are gaps in other infrastructure (Babaita, 2012).

Babaita et al (2011), examining the barriers to tourism for people with disabilities in Romania, state that Romanian society does not provide sufficient assistance to people with disabilities in Romania, but there is also a problem with respect for fundamental rights.

Yet, from their questionnaire research, when asked whether it is important to integrate people with disabilities into society, the majority of respondents agree.

However, the research also shows that more than 90% of respondents would not be bothered by the presence of people with disabilities in hotels, so there is an openness on the part of society to allow this segment to benefit from tourism services (Babaita et al., 2011).

Crismariu's (2017) study highlights the growing interest in accessible tourism in Romania in recent years and the growing importance of this market. However, for the time being, awareness raising and early stages are taking place in the country. In fact, the aim of the awareness phase is to raise awareness of the



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importance of accessible tourism in the relevant sectors among businesses and public administrations. In the early phase, the aim is to lay the groundwork in this area, such as training the right staff and formulating the principles and actions that will be needed in the development phase.

The analysis (Crismariu, 2017) also shows that the first organisations interested in the development of accessible tourism in Romania have started to appear. In Romania, the study mentions 3 key actors registered in ENAT (European Network for Accessible Tourism): the Motivation Romania Foundation, ADR - Regional Development Agency and Sano Touring travel agency. Sano Touring is a Romanian travel agency specialised in accessible tourism that has been operating since 2015 and aims to attract foreign tourists with special needs to the country.

The services offered by the agency are: selected and tested tourist programs, tours, medical treatments (spas, which are important for tourism for all) and recreational programs. For these programmes, the travel agency will provide suitable transport, accommodation, guides, public transport, restaurants with such facilities, and qualified staff who are familiar with your needs. In Romania, the main places contributing to the provision of accessible tourism in the category of spas are: Félix Baths, Covasna Baths, Spa of Covasna, Spa of Sovata, Eforie Nord resort of the Black Sea.

Accessibility in tourism is an important pillar of sustainable transport and is now central to tourism policy (Bordeianu, 2015). In his study, Bordeianu (2015) found that in Romania, legislation on disability is not well understood, and the legislation is uncertain and not well enforced in practice. It can be said that the majority of people working in the tourism sector are unaware of accessibility. In fact, this means that even today in East-Central Europe, the majority of tourism workers and tourism enterprises have a superficial knowledge of how to develop accessibility for their business (Bordeianu, 2015), but on the other hand, they do not consider it important enough.

To make progress on this issue, Romania would need real measures for people with disabilities and people with reduced mobility in everything related to tourism, public buildings and transport (Bordeianu, 2015). The Motivation Foundation Romania aims not only to inform people with disabilities, but also to develop a system to control buildings. For this purpose, they created the so-called Motivation Accessibility Brand. This accessibility audit, which is divided into three parts: controlling access to outdoor spaces (parking, driveways and entrances), controlling access to indoor spaces (indoor movement, space for wheelchair manoeuvring, toilets) and other facilities available according to the specificities of each site (e.g. Based on this, the assessment is basically divided into three categories: accessible, moderately accessible and inaccessible. As of June 2013, Motivation Foundation Romania has assessed 796 buildings in Romania (60% of which are hotels, restaurants, cultural or entertainment venues). Of these, only 205 were accessible, 229 partially accessible and 362 inaccessible (Bordeianu, 2015, pp. 47). Considering that there are thousands of accommodation facilities in Romania, the above statistics suggest that around half of them are completely inaccessible for wheelchair users.

In 2016, the Sano Touring association launched the website AccessibleRomania.com, which provides information on accessible accommodation, food and beverage services and tourist sites for people with special needs in Romania and abroad (Visionary Analytics, 2021). However, according to a study by the European Commission (2021), the actual conditions should be carefully checked for each destination



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because, as the study says, "for example, hotels marked as accessible on Booking.com are often in reality only partially adapted for wheelchair users, and in the case of restaurants the most common problem is lack of space in the restrooms. Museums and cultural venues need to adapt to all types of disability, not only in terms of infrastructure (parking spaces, ramps, flooring) but also in terms of the activities on offer (descriptions, adapted lighting, special programmes for the mentally disabled, etc.)." In order to overcome these problems, the Sano Touring agency carries out careful field surveys and, on the basis of these surveys, produces accessible guides such as the "Accessible Romania" and "Accessible Bucharest" publications.

Recognizing the importance of accessible tourism and the empowerment of disabled individuals, Romania has started taking steps to improve the situation. Efforts include the development of accessible accommodations, transportation services, and the promotion of inclusive travel experiences. Various organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, are working to raise awareness, provide training, and advocate for policy changes that support the rights and needs of disabled travelers.

The accessibility of travel and tourism services for disabled individuals in Romania remains a work in progress. By addressing the challenges and investing in accessible infrastructure, Romania has the potential to become a more inclusive and welcoming destination for travelers of all abilities. This exploration of accessible tourism literature in Romania sets the stage for a deeper understanding of the current situation and the ongoing efforts to ensure that disabled individuals can explore and enjoy the country's treasures with ease and dignity.

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2. Statistics: disabled people in Romanian society

Looking at the population of Romania in the light of statistical data, it can be seen that there has been a significant decrease in the population over the last thirty years, mainly due to two main factors: the high emigration of young workers in search of better livelihoods, and the gradual ageing of the population, which is not only a problem in Romania but also in most European countries. Between 1992 and 2022, the country's population will have decreased by 16.4%, resulting in a population of only 19,053,815 in 2022 (Figure 1.). In numerical terms, this percentage decrease reflects the fact that the country's population has decreased by an average of 124,682 people per year over the period under review. In parallel with the gradual decrease in Romania's population, the analysis of statistical data has shown that the number of people with a disability registered in the country has gradually increased over the last thirty years (Figure 1.).

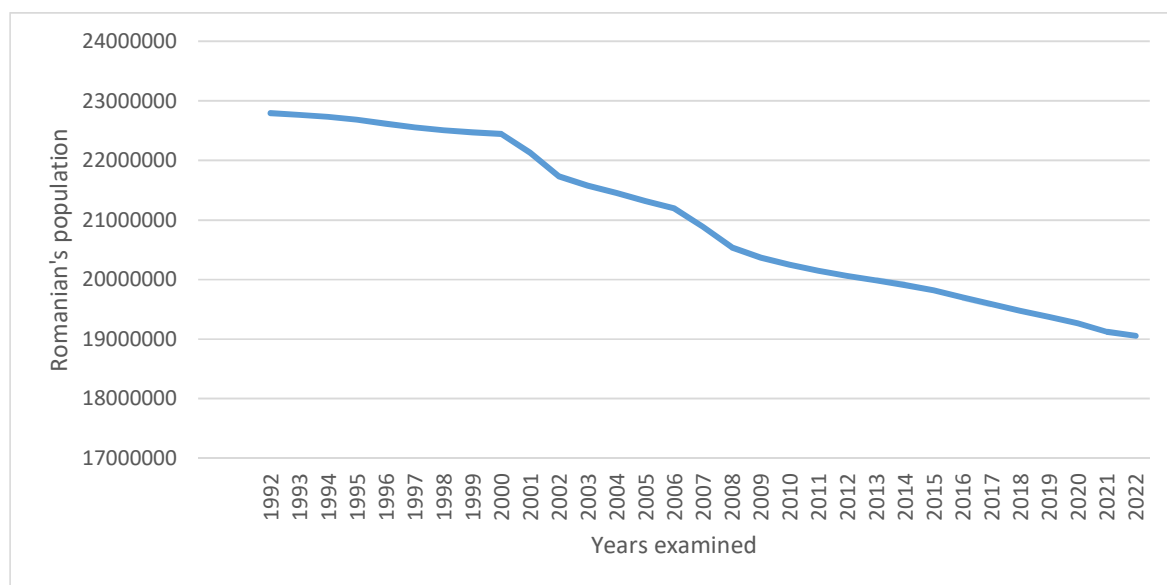


Figure 1.: Changes in the population of Romania between 1992 and 2022

Source: Own editing based on INS data

The number of people living in Romania who are registered as having a disability has gradually increased over the last thirty years. In 1992, only 74,000 people in the country were recorded as having some form of disability (Figure 2.). The majority of these persons, 88%, were adults and the remaining 12% were children with some type of disability. The number of persons with various disabilities showed a gradually increasing trend until 2022, when the number of persons affected in the country reached almost 886,950 (Figure 2.). This corresponds to 4.46% of population. Of this number of persons, 91.4% were adults and, consequently, children with some type of disability registered in the health register accounted for the remaining 8.6%. From the above figures, it can be concluded that the number of persons with a disability



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as a proportion of the Romanian population is moving in the opposite direction to the decreasing trend of the country’s population. In the thirty years review, the country’s population has decreased by 16.41%, while at the same time, in the same period, the number of persons with disabilities has increased from 74,053 to 886,950 in 2022, which is approximately a twelvefold increase over the last thirty years, so that, on average, the number of persons with disabilities in the country has increased by 27,096 per year (Figure 2.).

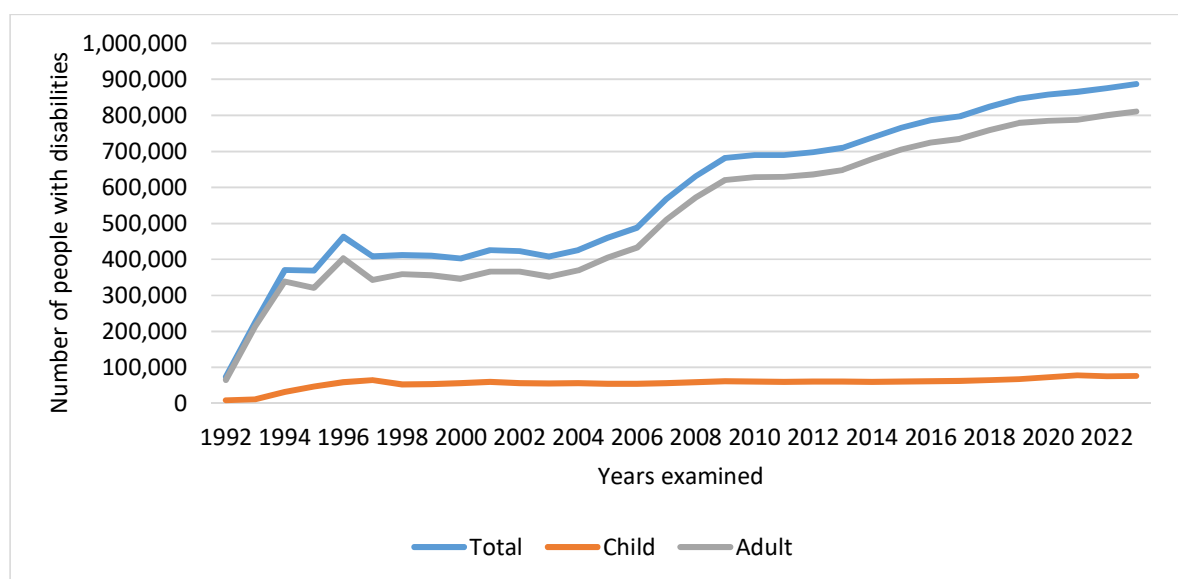


Figure 2.: Changes in the number of disabled persons in Romania between 1992 and 2022

Source: Own editing based on ANPDPD data

Bearing in mind that the highest proportion of persons with various disabilities in Romania is accounted for by persons living with mental health problems, it is also relevant to note that the number of persons dying from mental illness has changed significantly when looking at the time period 2008-2021. Based on the data of the Romanian National Institute of Statistics, it can be concluded that in the first three years of this period, there was a slight increase in the number of deaths of persons with mental illnesses, as the number of persons affected increased by 25 between 2008 and 2010 (Figure 3.). From 2021 onwards, there was a significant decrease in the number of deaths of persons with mental illnesses, as it dropped to 321 persons in 2025, a 48% decrease compared to 2010. From the aforementioned year 2025 until 2019, no significant increase in the number of persons dying from mental illnesses was observed, but a large increase occurred in the years 2020 and 2021, mainly due to the infections associated with the Covid-19 pandemic and as a result of limited health care capacity. By the aforementioned year 2021, the number of persons dying from mental illnesses reached 470 persons (Figure 3.).



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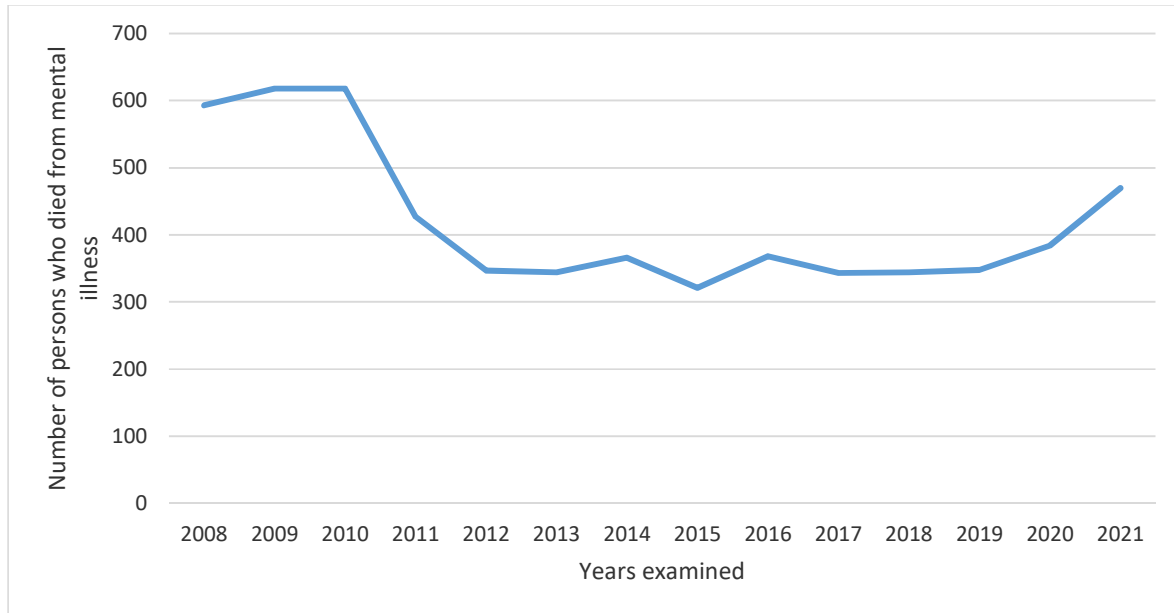


Figure 3.: Changes in the number of persons who died from mental illness in Romania between 2008 and 2021

Source: Own editing based on INS data

Looking at the time interval between 2009 and 2019, the data of the Romanian National Institute of Statistics show that the number of persons in need of care among adults has stagnated between the starting point and the end point of this period. On the contrary, it can be observed that from 2008 to 2012 the number of persons in need of care gradually increased (Figure 4.). At the beginning of the period under review, the National Authority for Persons with Disabilities registered 19,423 persons in Romania, the number of which increased to 26,922 persons in 2012 (Figure 4.). After 2012, the year with the highest value, there is a large decrease in the data, as the number of adult persons in need of care decreased to 18,755 in 2013, which is a lower value than at the beginning of the period under study. Subsequently, there was a slight increase in the number of persons in need of care, with only 20,693 persons registered in Romania as persons in need of care according to the National Authority for People with Disabilities by 2016, followed by a slight decrease, reaching 19,468 persons by 2019 and then falling to 18,760 persons by 2023.



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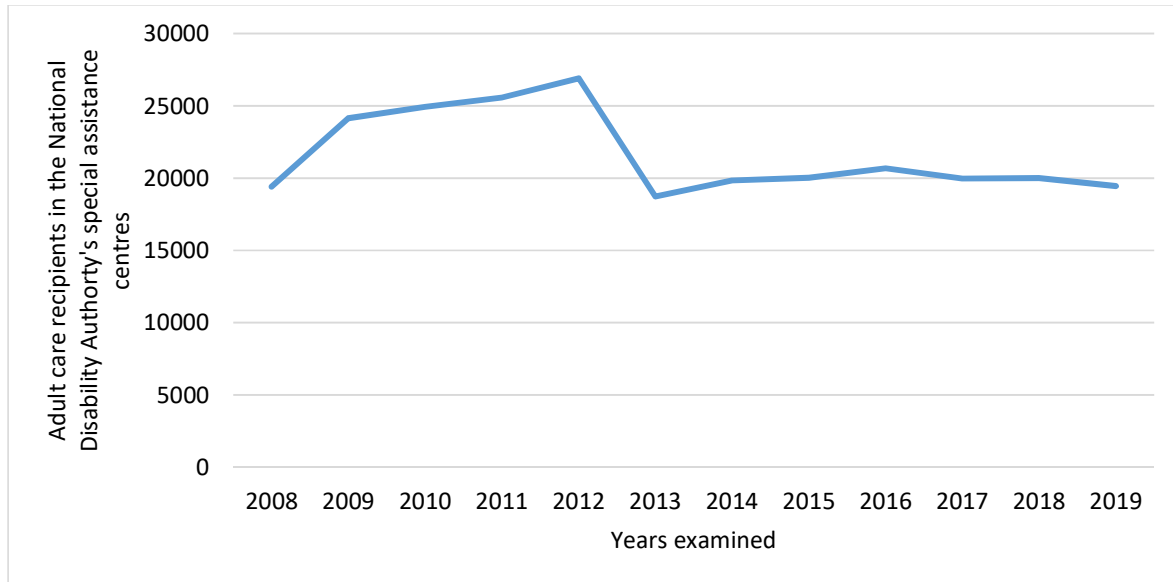


Figure 4.: Changes in the number of adults who need special assistance in Romania between 2008 and 2019

Source: Own editing based on INS data

Out of these nearly 887,000 people, only 18,760 persons were registered in Romania in 2023 spending their daily lives in different institutions, due to the fact that they live with some type of disability (Figure 5.). At the national level, 10.64% of the number of registered persons live with a physical disability, 52.50% with a mental disability, 17.43% with an intellectual disability and its side effects, while the remaining 19.43% live with an impairment of hearing, vision and other diseases (Figure 5.).

Looking at the Transylvanian counties, a similar distribution can be observed on average. The number of persons in need of institutional care in 2023 was highest in Mures county, with 906 persons, representing 0.17% of the county's population, followed by Sibiu county with 660 persons, also representing almost 0.17% of the county's population. Looking at the counties in Transylvania, the number of persons with some type of disability in institutional care in 2023 was lowest in Covasna county, with only 59 persons, representing 0.29% of the county's population. Bearing these figures in mind, it can be concluded that the number of persons with major problems requiring institutional assistance represents a low proportion of the population of each county (Figure 5.).



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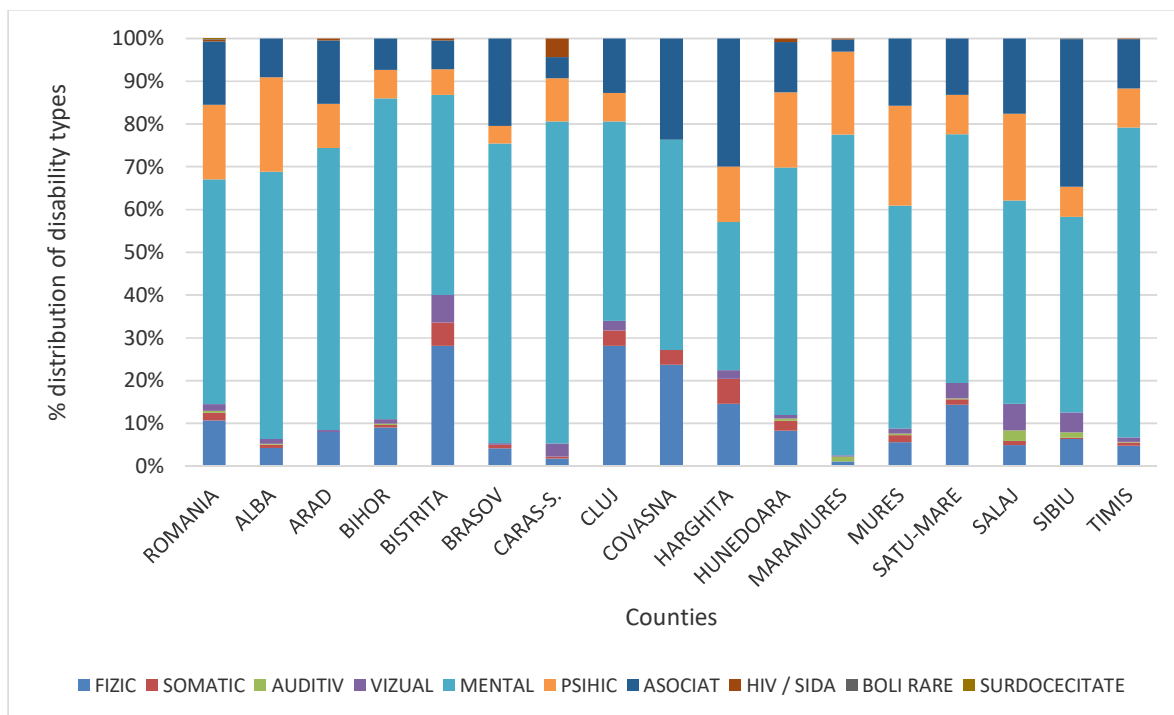


Figure 5.: Distribution of disability types in Transylvanian counties in 2023

Source: Own editing based on ANPPDP data

Between 2008 and 2019, there has been a significant increase in the number of institutions responsible for the care of adults with disabilities in Romania, as shown by data from the Romanian National Institute of Statistics. At the beginning of the period under study, in 2008, there were only 343 institutions specialised in the care of adults with disabilities (Figure 6.). The number of these institutions increased until 2012, when it reached 564. This has a significant correlation with the number of persons in need of care, as the same trend change between the two variables can be observed between 2008 and 2012 (Figure 6.). In the year 2013, the number of adult care facilities mentioned above experienced a large decrease, as there was a 30.5% decrease in the number of facilities. Following that year, a gradual upward trend was observed between 2014 and 2019, resulting in 503 facilities responsible for the wellbeing of adults with disabilities by the end of the period under review in 2019 (Figure 6.).



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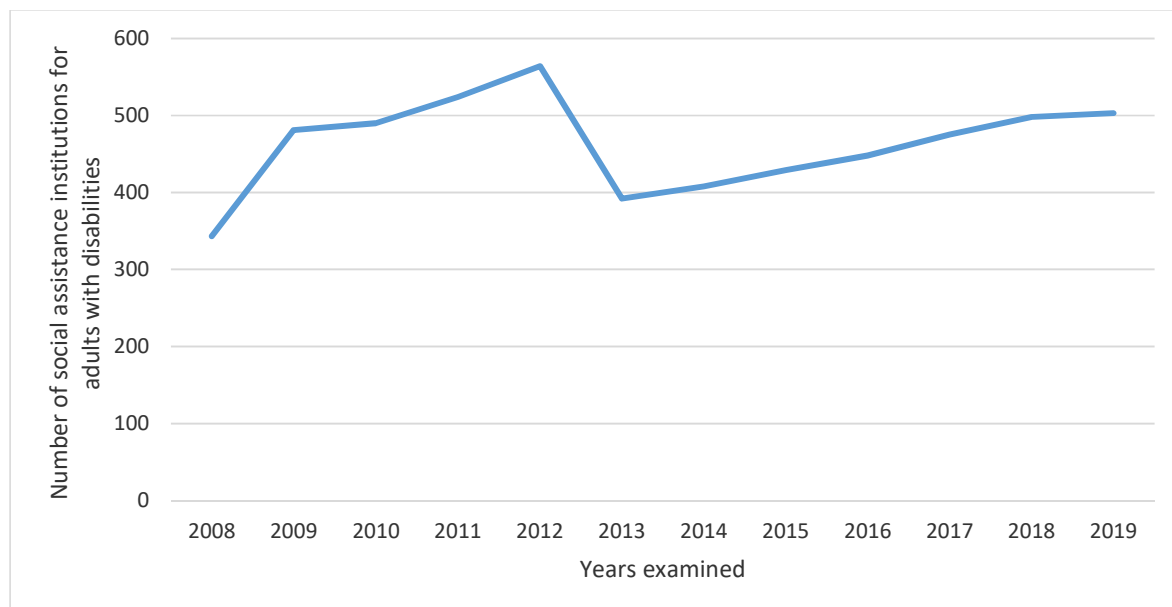


Figure 6.: Changes in the number of social assistance institutions for adult with disabilities in Romania between 2008 and 2019

Source: Own editing based on INS data

In the light of these figures, it can be said that, overall, the number of people with some form of disability registered in the country is increasing as the population countries to decline. The number of persons registered as having a disability of some kind will reach 886,950 in 2022, but only 2.12% of this number will require institutionalised care, mainly persons who require constant attention and care in their daily lives. At the national level, 52.50% of the persons in need of institutional care have mental health problems, 17.43% have intellectual problems and their side effects, while the remaining 19.43% have other problems, hearing impairment, visual impairment and other illnesses. Data from the Romanian National Institute of Statistics show that the number of persons with mental illnesses represents the largest share of the total number of persons with disabilities registered in the country who need institutional assistance. In this context, it is important to note that there has been a large decrease in the number of deaths from mental illness between 2010 and 2015. In 2010 618 persons with mental disabilities died, while the number of such persons decreased to 321 in 2015. Between 2019 and 2021, there is again an upward trend in the number of deaths related to mental illness, which is mainly due to side effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. National statistics show that the number of persons in care in the various social assistance institutions shows a trend of change in line with the change in the number of persons in care in these institutions. This co-movement may be due to the capacity constraints of these institutions, as it is possible that out of a total of almost 887,000 people with disabilities registered in the country, there are some



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who would also need institutional care because of their problems, but who cannot be accommodated because of overcrowding.



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3. Romanian legal environment for people who live with disabilities

The main official body dealing with disabled people rights and facilitations is the National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities - <https://anpd.gov.ro>

The main topic in Romanian legislation is de-institutionalisation.

Romania has committed to take all necessary measures to ensure the integration of all persons with disabilities into the community, including those living in long-term residential institutions, by providing places of residence freely chosen by persons with disabilities, as well as access to a wide range of health services.

From 2023 onwards, local authorities will monitor the status of achievement of key performance indicators on an annual basis.

The nationally planned targets linked to the KPIs are

- 1: By 30 June 2026, at least 32% of institutionalised adults with disabilities will be supported to deinstitutionalise and implement the independent living pathway;
- 2: by 30 June 2026, the percentage of institutionalised adults with disabilities is reduced to 32% of the total number of people supported in the residential system at the end of 2020;
- 3: between 1 July 2026 and 31 December 2030, the percentage of adults with disabilities in institutions will be reduced by 10% of the total number of people supported in the residential system on 30 June 2026.

Legislation

I. Law no. 221 of 2010 the "National Anti-Discrimination Council Act," is a significant piece of legislation in Romania aimed at combating discrimination and promoting equal opportunities. The law was enacted on May 19, 2010, and it plays a crucial role in safeguarding the rights of various marginalized and vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities.

II. Law no. 7 of January 2023 - de-institutionalisation

III. Law no. 448 of February 2006 - Fundamental Rights of Persons Living with Disabilities (Methodology of Application DECISION no. 268 of 14 March 2007)

IV. Decree no. 189/2013 - Approval of the Technical Regulation Standard on the Adaptation of Civil Buildings and Urban Space to the Individual Needs of People with Disabilities, Indicative NP 051-2012 - Revision NP 051/2000

V. Law 232/2022 on the accessibility requirements for products and services



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I. Key points about Law No. 221/2010:

Purpose: The primary purpose of Law No. 221/2010 is to establish the legal framework for preventing and combating discrimination in Romania, including discrimination based on disability.

- **Scope:** The law covers a wide range of areas, including employment, education, healthcare, social protection, access to goods and services, and participation in public life.
- **Prohibition of Discrimination:** The law explicitly prohibits discrimination on various grounds, including disability. It mandates that individuals and institutions must treat others equally and without discrimination.
- **National Anti-Discrimination Council:** The law establishes the National Council for Combating Discrimination (CNCD), which is an independent public authority responsible for enforcing the provisions of the law and addressing discrimination complaints.
- **Sanctions:** The law provides for sanctions and penalties for acts of discrimination. These may include fines, injunctions, and other measures intended to rectify the situation.
- **Complaint Procedures:** Law No. 221/2010 outlines the procedures for filing discrimination complaints with the National Council for Combating Discrimination.
- **Positive Measures:** The law allows for positive measures to be taken to promote equal opportunities and combat discrimination, including measures to support persons with disabilities.
- **Awareness and Education:** The law encourages educational and awareness-raising activities to promote tolerance, diversity, and equal treatment.

III. Key points about Law no. 448 of February 2006 - Fundamental Rights of Persons Living with Disabilities (Methodology of Application DECISION no. 268 of 14 March 2007)

According to Art. 6 persons with disabilities are entitled to

- a) Health care - prevention, treatment and rehabilitation;
- (b) education and vocational training
- c) employment and job adaptation, vocational guidance and retraining;
- d) social assistance, i.e. social services and social benefits;
- (e) housing, personal living environment, transport, access to the physical, information and communication environment
- (f) leisure, access to culture, sport, tourism**
- (g) legal assistance



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(h) tax relief

(i) assessment and reassessment through home visits by members of the Assessment Committee to non-removable persons every two years.

Article 7

(1) The promotion and enforcement of the rights of persons with disabilities shall be the primary responsibility of the authorities of the local public administration where the person with a disability resides or is domiciled and, subsidiarily or complementarily, of the authorities of the central public administration, civil society and the family or the legal representative of the person with a disability.

Article 21 - Culture, sport, tourism

(1) The competent authorities of the public administration are obliged to facilitate the access of persons with disabilities to cultural values, heritage, tourism, sports and leisure objectives.

(2) In order to ensure the access of persons with disabilities to culture, sport and tourism, public administration authorities are obliged to take the following specific measures;

(a) promote the participation of persons with disabilities and their families in cultural, sporting and tourist events;

b) Organise cultural, sporting and leisure events and activities in cooperation or partnership with public or private legal entities;

c) Ensuring conditions for the practice of sports by persons with disabilities;

(d) To support the activities of sports organisations of persons with disabilities;

(e) provide, both inside the buildings and in the outdoor areas of cultural, tourist, sports and leisure facilities, specific adaptations for the following types of disability, without this list being exhaustive

(i) for persons with locomotor disabilities and reduced mobility: ramps and/or, where appropriate, electronic or automated access systems, lifts or elevators

(iii) for the hearing impaired: visual warning systems and electronic amplifiers for hearing aids

(iv) for the mentally handicapped and people with learning disabilities: sign language guidance systems;

f) To provide at least one toilet accessible to people with disabilities inside the buildings related to cultural, tourist, sports and leisure objectives or, where appropriate, in the outdoor areas related to them.

(on 18-05-2023, Paragraph 2 of Article 21, Section 4, Chapter II was supplemented by Paragraph 3, Article I of LAW No. 96 of 12 April 2023, published in the OFFICIAL MONITOR No. 322 of 18 April 2023)



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(3) The disabled child and the accompanying person have the right to free admission to shows, museums, artistic and sports events.

(4) Adults with disabilities shall be entitled to free admission to shows, museums, artistic and sporting events as follows

(a) the adult with a severe or acute disability and the accompanying person shall be admitted free of charge;

(b) adults with moderate and slight disabilities shall be entitled to tickets under the same conditions as pupils and students.

(5) The amounts of the entitlements referred to in paragraphs (1), (3) and (4) shall be borne by the State budget, through the budget of the Ministry of Culture and National Identity, the National Agency for Sport*), local budgets or, where appropriate, the budget of public or private organisers.

4. Key points of Decree no. 189/2013 in Romania pertains to the approval of a Technical Regulation Standard that addresses the adaptation of civil buildings and urban spaces to the individual needs of people with disabilities. Specifically, it approves the Indicative NP 051-2012, which is a revision of NP 051/2000.

Here's a breakdown of the key components:

- **Technical Regulation Standard:** The Technical Regulation Standard is a set of specific technical guidelines and requirements established by the government to ensure that civil buildings and urban spaces are accessible and adapted to meet the needs of people with disabilities.
- **Adaptation of Civil Buildings:** This refers to making physical adjustments to buildings to accommodate individuals with disabilities. This can include the installation of ramps, elevators, wider doorways, accessible bathrooms, and other modifications to improve accessibility.
- **Adaptation of Urban Space:** This focuses on making public areas and spaces within a city or town more accessible. It involves considerations like constructing wheelchair-friendly sidewalks, installing ramps at pedestrian crossings, and creating accessible parking spaces.
- **NP 051-2012:** This is the specific set of technical regulations that outline the requirements for adapting civil buildings and urban spaces for people with disabilities. It is a revised version of the NP 051/2000 standard.
- **NP 051/2000:** This is the previous version of the technical regulation standard for adapting civil buildings and urban spaces. The revision in 2012 likely involved updates, improvements, or clarifications to better address the needs of individuals with disabilities.

The aim of this decree and the associated technical standards is to ensure that buildings and urban environments in Romania are designed and constructed in a way that promotes accessibility and inclusivity for all citizens, including those with disabilities.



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Other acts:

1. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 13 December 2006 and opened for signature on 30 March 2007. Romania signed it on 26 September 2007 and ratified it through Law no. 221 of 2010.

2. The National Strategy for the prevention of institutionalization of adults with disabilities and acceleration of the deinstitutionalization process for the period 2022-2030 has been approved by the Government through Decision no. 1543/2022.

Approves the National Strategy for the prevention of adults with disabilities being institutionalised and for the acceleration of the deinstitutionalisation process between 2022-2030, as described in Annex*, which is an integral part of this Decision.

3. In addition, Government Decision No 1.444/2022 approves the Data Collection and Monitoring Mechanism for implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and amending some normative acts. Draft Order No. 1914/29/09/2022 aims to amend and supplement the Annex to Order No. 762/1992/2007, which approves the criteria for determining the degree of disability 5 from a medical-psycho-social perspective. The document adheres to conventional academic formatting, including regular author and institution formatting, and uses a formal register to avoid colloquialism, contractions, or informal expressions. Additionally, the text ensures objectivity by excluding subjective evaluations, bias, figurative or ornamental language, and filler words. Finally, precision in vocabulary and grammatical correctness are ensured, with specific technical terms used when conveying precise meaning and free from grammatical and spelling mistakes.

4. Draft Order No. 1914/29/09/2022 aims to amend and supplement the Annex to Order No. 762/1992/2007, which approves the criteria for determining the degree of disability 5 from a medical-psycho-social perspective. The objective and logical structure of the document is maintained through clear and concise language, with technical term abbreviations explained upon first use.

5. Order No. 847/2021, approved on 23 September 2021, outlines the procedure for the authorisation of protected establishments.

- Pursuant to Law 448/2006, an authorized sheltered enterprise is a legal entity, either public or private, that possesses its own management, **in which no less than three disabled individuals must be employed, representing at least 30% of the total number of employees**, and their combined worked hours account for no less than 50% of all worked hours of the entirety of the employees, and any configuration of conducting an economic operation by an individual possessing a disability

certification. 6. DECISION No 268 of 14 March 2007 (*updated*) for the approval of Methodological Rules for the application of provisions of Law no. 448/2006 on protecting and promoting the rights of persons with disabilities (updated until 29 November 2012*) Article 8a.



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Free spa treatment tickets for disabled adults will be granted in accordance with the State Social Insurance Budget Act for the current year, subject to an annual agreement between the National Authority for Individuals with Disabilities and the National House for Pensions and Other Social Insurance Rights. It should be noted that on 15-02-2010, Art. 8 was amended by paragraph 2 of Art., thereby establishing a definite limit on the total number of tickets available. I of DECISION No. 89 from 5 February 2010, which was published in OFFICIAL MONITOR No. 103 from 15 February 2010.

Conclusions:

Relevant issues for tourism activities:

Severely disabled adults may receive social assistance based on supporting documents or by application.

This assistance comes in the form of **free interurban transport via any train** type up to the cost of an interregio IR train with a 2nd class reservation, or by bus or river transport vessel for a total of 24 journeys per calendar year. Alternatively, a fuel discount of 1500 lei is available.

- For adults with accentuated disabilities: 12 free interurban journeys per year are available by train, bus, or river transport, limited to the cost of a second-class inter-regional (IR) train ticket with a reservation. A fuel discount of 750 lei is also available. In addition, all urban public transport lines offer free surface transportation, and a monthly metro pass with an unlimited number of journeys is provided.

- **Access to public service buildings**, such as cultural institutions, should be facilitated for people with disabilities.

This can be achieved through the implementation of Braille signs and clearly visible shapes.

Accommodation facilities should also be designed with accessibility in mind.

Additionally, free bathing passes should be provided to individuals with disabilities and their companions.

Funding may be provided from the local and central budget for disabled individuals and their companions to participate in educational, cultural, and sporting activities as well as competitions and seminars. This includes transportation and accommodation within the budget staff limitations, participation fees, and entry fees to museums and auditoriums abroad. Please note that this information pertains to disabled individuals and their accompanying persons only.

- Additional amenities for tourism activities in Romania, as per the local regulations:

- **Complimentary spa vouchers**

- Reserved parking spaces in public areas for individuals with disabilities or their authorized representatives



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- **Exemption from toll fees when using the national road network with a valid vignette**
- **Discount on fuel expenditure when travelling by car**
- Unrestricted access to educational programs, regardless of age, disability type, and educational requirements.
- The standard retirement age for employed individuals is being reduced.
- free or partially subsidised access to cultural, sporting and leisure events at national and European level in Slovenia, Cyprus, Belgium, Italy, Estonia, Finland, Malta on the basis of the European Disability Card

The law grants rights and facilities, but it remains to be seen whether such rights are upheld by public institutions and private entities. Adequate infrastructure and equipment are in place to ensure accessibility and enable events.