

# ROMANIA STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE WHEELCHAIR SECTOR 2018 – 2022

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## **Table of contents**

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>I. Executive summary</b>                                  | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>II. Critical assumptions</b>                              | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>III. Description of the strategic plan</b>                | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>1. Mission</b>  | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>2. Vision</b>   | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>3. Goals</b>  | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>4. Areas of focus and objectives</b>                      | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>5. Resources needed to achieve the goals</b>              | <b>12</b> |
| <b>IV. Organizational structure</b>                          | <b>12</b> |
| <b>V. Sustainability. Opportunities to generate revenues</b> | <b>13</b> |
| <b>VI. Conclusion</b>  | <b>14</b> |

## **ACRONYMS**

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| <b>ISWP</b> | <b>International Society of Wheelchair Professionals</b>                  |
| <b>MRF</b>  | <b>Motivation Romania Foundation</b>                                      |
| <b>WHO</b>  | <b>World Health Organization</b>  |
| <b>NGOs</b> | <b>Non-governmental organizations</b>                                     |
| <b>NHIA</b> | <b>National Health Insurance Authority (in Romania)</b>                   |
| <b>CHIA</b> | <b>County Health Insurance Authority (in Romania)</b>                     |
| <b>NAPD</b> | <b>National Authority for Persons with Disabilities (in Romania)</b>      |
| <b>WSTP</b> | <b>Wheelchair Services Training Package</b>                               |
| <b>ICF</b>  | <b>International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health</b> |

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**The content is the responsibility of Motivation Romania Foundation and does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the International Society of Wheelchair Professionals.**

## **I. Executive summary**

### **1. Context**

People with personal mobility impairments requiring appropriate wheelchairs, services, environment accessibility, and support for good quality of life, education, employment and community (re)integration face many challenges within the Romanian context. A situational analysis “**Romanian wheelchair sector needs assessment**” has been conducted by Motivation Romania Foundation with support from the International Society of Wheelchair Professionals (ISWP). The areas covered by the research relate to legislation framework, level of need, funding, access to wheelchairs and wheelchair services, in-country providers, formal education and training, existing research and stakeholder perspectives. Findings revealed an underfunded and poorly managed wheelchair service delivery scheme and a medically focused welfare system, which appears to provide low-level wheelchair products without adequate processes from referral to follow up and management to ensure individual needs adequately met.

There are between 110,000 and 297,000 people need and/or use a wheelchair living in Romania. There is a legislative move towards equality, human rights and a universal model approach. Evidence suggests that current wheelchair service delivery takes a medical model perspective with little consideration for social or life style needs. Low-level wheelchair products when funded can only be replaced every five years. These include mostly orthopedic-type manual wheelchairs, purchased with the state subsidy or received through donations. Wheelchair products are provided at low cost and do not include a comprehensive assessment to ensure that individual needs are met. Companies contracted by government to supply wheelchairs do not appear adequately trained to provide appropriate wheelchairs as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2008). Given that the current system is product rather than process driven indicates a lack of understanding among policy makers as to the importance of providing the right wheelchair to meet individual needs.

### **2. Strategic plan purpose**

The purpose of this strategic plan is to professionalize and build the capacity within the wheelchair sector in Romania.

### **3. Process**

The development of the strategic plan is based on a comprehensive review of the existing policies, legislation, products and services, funding and education framework.

Situational analysis of the wheelchair sector in Romania highlighted a number key issues, which need to be addressed. Key issues include:

- Limited statistical data and research evidence about the people who need and/or use a wheelchair.
- Small public subsidy for a wheelchair every five years and poor possibilities for additional funding.
- Wheelchair prescription not including a proper assessment based on individual needs.
- Lack of trained professionals

- Lack of Wheelchair Service Training Package (WSTP) specific subjects integrated into courses content within the programs of higher education, non-formal education on wheelchair provision existing to a very small extent (with Motivation Romania as the sole training provider).

These findings are presented in more detail within the “Romanian wheelchair sector needs assessment” report.

Given these results, an overall vision, goals and specific objectives emerged to provide opportunities for strategic intervention to ensure improvement of the situation for wheelchair users in Romania.

#### 4. Goals

The strategic plan is framed within four areas requiring development when working towards of appropriate and sustainable wheelchair services to meet users’ needs.

The **‘advocacy’** area focusses on the need for education and awareness among stakeholders and the general public on the importance of appropriate wheelchair services in order to influence necessary changes in the system.

The **‘education and training’** area aims at enabling third level academic institutions to educate and train professionals in the area of wheelchair service provision processes as well as offering opportunities for continuing education.

The **‘wheelchair services delivery infrastructure’** area sets out specific objectives to create professional guidelines to build sustainable wheelchair services and to improve the quality of the service provision.

The **‘research’** area designs actions to better understand levels of need and improve evidence and statistics about wheelchair users living in Romania.

## II. Critical assumptions

The accomplishment of the Strategic Plan goals depends largely on the political and socioeconomic contexts. Stakeholder and government engagement, open and effective communication channels, a high performance management are primary vehicles for successfully implementing the strategic plan and tackling the main challenges.

The current government requires further information to increase an understanding as to the importance of allocating additional funding to develop appropriate wheelchair services. This is indicated by the fact that in October 2016, the government decreased the amount of subsidy for a wheelchair from 300 USD to 263 USD, without factoring in service delivery costs.

Moreover, the decision-makers at different levels (i.e. Minister of Labor, Minister of Health, President of NAPD, president of NHIA) have changed regularly in the last few months, making it difficult to establish and maintain a consistent relationship with key governmental counterparts in order to influence wheelchair sector at policy level. Thus, the success of the Strategic Plan also relies on the critical assumption that the government will be more stable and changes in the leadership of the key governmental bodies will not occur so frequently.

The financial resources are a key element to carry out the Strategic Plan. At this time, in Romania there is no possibility to access funding from the government. So, the only opportunities are represented by non-reimbursable funds, donations and sponsorships.

Therefore, another critical assumption for the success of the Strategic Plan would be that international donors would continue to make funding available for supporting development projects in the disability sector in general and the wheelchair sector in particular.

Currently there are legal facilities that allow companies and individuals to support NGO activities: for example through the sponsorship law or the 2% law (people may make voluntary contributions of 2% to an NGO or a charity of their choice from their income tax), but these laws could be changed by the Government at any time.

In these circumstances, the approach of the strategic plan should consider the following key issues:

- Actively involve government and stakeholders during the process of establishing an entity to implement the plan; ask for their input about organization mission and Strategic Plan;
- Create and promote the image of the entity and its mission;
- Involve officials of the government and public institutions, including civil servants who permanent posts in government, if political changes occur;
- Ongoing assessment of progress and risks and adjust the Strategic Plan;
- Informing all stakeholders on progress and results of the plan implementation.

### **III. Description of the strategic plan**

#### **1. Mission**

The overall mission of the strategic plan is to professionalize and build capacity of the wheelchair sector in order to develop sustainable services in Romania.

#### **2. Vision**

People with personal mobility impairments have access to appropriate quality wheelchair services.

#### **3. Goals**

1. Raise awareness among the stakeholders and general public as to the importance of developing appropriate wheelchair services to support the health, wellbeing and participation of wheelchair users.
2. Raise awareness at a government and societal level to ensure public spaces are accessible to wheelchair users.
3. Improving the access to good quality wheelchairs and wheelchair services.
4. Establish an education and training competency framework for wheelchair professionals to provide appropriate wheelchair services.
5. Conduct a comprehensive review of needs of people who use wheelchairs in Romania to generate an in-depth understanding of the issues to be addressed from a social, economic, environment and political standpoint.

#### 4. Areas of focus and objectives

| <u>Advocacy</u>  |  |
|--|--|
| <u>Goal 1</u> – Raise awareness among the stakeholders and general public as to the importance of developing appropriate wheelchair services to support the health, wellbeing and participation of wheelchair users  |  |
| 2018 – 2019  | 2020 – 2022  |
| <b>Objective 1:</b><br>To inform and educate stakeholders as to the importance of appropriate wheelchair services and users' needs   | <b>Objective 1:</b><br>To inform and educate general public of the users' needs  |
| <b>Strategy:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Present the findings of the current review to stakeholders within seminars</li> <li>2. Organise official communication and meetings with decision makers of Ministry of Health / NHIA / CHIA with particular focus regarding information changes of officials occur</li> <li>3. Write correspondence letters, e-mails to decision makers</li> </ol> | <b>Strategy:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Carry out public awareness campaign</li> <li>2. Develop public events (sports, shows, exhibitions)</li> <li>3. Provide information sessions on WHO 8 steps among future professionals (faculties)</li> </ol>  |
| <b>Objective 2:</b><br>To establish a stakeholders' support network  | <b>Objective 2:</b><br>To review the national scheme to provide wheelchairs based on specific criteria to appropriately meet the needs of children, adults and older people (e.g. increase the amount of subsidy for purchasing a wheelchair, reduce the time for getting a new subsidy as appropriate; the cost of wheelchair services to be subsidized by the state) |
| <b>Strategy:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Involved key stakeholder in common projects (applying to international funders, if possible)</li> <li>2. Organize exchange visits with authorities that developed wheelchair services in other countries</li> <li>3. Provide information sessions on WHO 8 steps to wheelchair suppliers and private insurance companies</li> </ol>                 | <b>Strategy:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Engage with officials of public authorities (e.g. letters, e-mails, meetings)</li> <li>2. Understand the lived experience of wheelchair users (e. g. storytelling, case studies, interviews with users)</li> </ol>  |

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | 3. Work with public authorities to develop new legislation and procedures in relation with wheelchair services based on evidence research   |
|  | <b>Objective 3:</b>   |
|  | To provide to wheelchair users the necessary support to deal with their situation   |
|  | <b>Strategy:</b>  |
|  | 1. Offering to wheelchair users information based on established criteria related to: products, wheelchair services, home accessibility, social services, rights, legislative provision, legal advice based on established criteria |
|  | 2. Education and training on living skills of wheelchair users for health wellbeing, including independent living skills, advocacy and psychological support  |

| <u>Advocacy</u>  |  |
|--|--|
| <u>Goal 2</u> – Raise awareness at government and societal level to ensure public spaces are accessible to wheelchair users. |  |
| 2018 – 2019  | 2020 – 2022  |
|  | <b>Objective 1:</b>  |
|  | To review the legislation on accessibility of public space and its implementation                        |
|  | <b>Strategy:</b>   |
|  | 1. Information and awareness campaigns   |
|  | 2. Work with social inspection authorities to increase the assessment of the legislation implementation. |
|  | 3. Provide users with information on how to access the complaint system currently available.             |



4. To work with local authorities to ensure that people with personal mobility impairments are included in the reception committees of new buildings.

| <u>Wheelchair services delivery infrastructure</u>  |   |
|---|---|
| Goal 3: - Improving access to good quality wheelchairs and wheelchair services                                  |   |
| 2018 – 2019   | 2020 – 2022   |
| <b>Objective 1:</b><br>To provide necessary evidence to support legislative change and development              | <b>Objective 1:</b><br>To develop a quality system for wheelchair services based on the recommendations in the research   |
| <b>Strategy:</b><br>1. Conducting a research aiming to set quality and cost guidelines for wheelchair services. | <b>Strategy:</b><br>1. To engage with the authorities and stakeholders to develop a quality system (e.g. guidelines for: quality, cost, procedures, differentiated funding according to the needs of the users) |
|   | <b>Objective 2:</b><br>To improve the quality of wheelchair services provision  |
|   | <b>Strategy:</b><br>1. Work with CHIA to implement the quality system (e.g. set up a system based on WHO Guidelines, early intervention services developed at hospital / family physician level)                |

| <u>Education and training</u>  |   |
|--|---|
| <u>Goal 4</u> – Establish an education and training competency framework for wheelchair professionals to provide appropriate wheelchair services   |   |
| 2018 – 2019  | 2020 – 2022   |
| <b>Objective 1:</b><br>To increase continuing education of the professionals in the area   | <b>Objective 1:</b><br>To establish professional education programmes in the area of wheelchair services at university level  |
| <b>Strategy:</b><br>1. Organizing national conferences on wheelchair services subjects<br>Exploring the possibility to get accreditation of the WSTP course (“assessment technician”) from professional associations (as tuition based course) | <b>Strategy:</b><br>Engage with universities to look at integrating WSTP and ICF subjects into the curricula  |
|  | <b>Objective 2:</b><br>To increase the number of trained staff within the wheelchairs service delivery sector   |
|  | <b>Strategy:</b><br>1. Work with wheelchair service providers to establish the role of trained “assessment technician”<br>2. Involve the wheelchair sector to ensure that staff working with wheelchair users are trained on WSTP |

| <u>Research</u>  |  |
|--|--|
| <u>Goal 5</u> - Conduct a comprehensive review of needs of people who use wheelchairs in Romania to generate an in-depth understanding of the issues to be addressed from a social, economic, environment and political standpoint |  |
| 2018 – 2019  | 2020 – 2022  |
| <b>Objective 1:</b><br>To develop a better understanding and knowledge as to level of need within the wheelchair sector  | <b>Objective 1:</b><br>To improve evidence and statistics about wheelchair users |

**Strategy:**

1. Collecting additional data related to wheelchair users needs and the existing services
2. Review of national regulations and statistics related to wheelchair users and statistics
3. Survey among wheelchair providers
4. Engage with academic institutions nationally and internationally to assist with research projects

**Strategy:**

1. Introduce “user of wheelchair” item into the data collected by the public institutions and creating an information flow allowing centralization of information
2. Make a request to the National Statistics Institute to produce statistics on wheelchair users and services
3. Work with public stakeholders to establish a system to collect specific information
4. Conduct new research and collect relevant data in the wheelchair sector (i.e. effects of secondary injuries)

## **5. Resources needed to achieve the goals**

Such an ambitious Strategic Plan to professionalize and build the capacity of the wheelchair sector in Romania requires a time interval of at least five years and substantial funding for the proposed measures, in our view. It would also depend very much on the willingness and support existing at policy level. It would entail commitment and expertise from all categories of stakeholders, in areas such as research, lobbying, readiness to understand and listen to the opinions of others, advocacy, change procedures and practices.

The most common resources needed to achieve all the goals are related to:

- Office space;
- Office rent and utilities
- Equipment, communication, transportation
- Human resources, funding for salaries
- Funding for organizing meetings, seminars, conferences
- Funding for awareness campaigns, public events
- Funding for research

## **IV. Organizational structure**

In order to ensure the achievement of the strategic plan goals an operating structure should be set up. A new not for profit NGO founded by wheelchair users along with a taskforce of key stakeholders would be the most effective way to implement the plan. This is a way to promote self-advocacy by the wheelchair users and enable co-design of services and supports required.

Therefore, the advocacy objectives for the first two years will be achieved during the process of the new NGO development with the opportunity to get the support of the key stakeholders. Specific actions need to be undertaken in this view, as follows:

- Identifying at least 5 persons (users and non-users), specialists in wheelchair services to found the new organization;
- Organizing meetings with key stakeholders, informing them on the new approach and getting their informal support;
- Preparation for the legal registration of the new organization and its setup (meetings of the co-founders for the agreement of mission and objectives, structure, composition of board and control body etc.)
- Development of procedures and regulations, getting the necessary accreditations for the organization;
- Establishing cooperation with relevant stakeholders.

It is recommended that Motivation Romania Foundation to provide consultancy services on a regular basis to the newly created organization during the first two years.

With regard to the taskforce of key stakeholders, the following organizations should be involved in the development of the wheelchair sector in Romania:

**At local level:**

- Wheelchair users and their families and support network
- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as service providers, think tanks, self-advocacy
- local authorities, as public social services providers; they are authorities at local / county level responsible for funding basic / specialized social services for children and adult persons with disabilities and social benefits; institutions under the coordination of the Local / County Council

**At county level:**

- County Health Insurance Authorities (CHIA), as authorities responsible for managing the National Fund of Social Health Insurance. The CHIA are decentralized at county level from the NHIA, institution under the coordination of Ministry of Health
- Wheelchair suppliers, as private companies that import and distribute wheelchairs
- Wheelchair service providers, as private or non-profit organizations that provide wheelchair services (actually Motivation Romania is the only one wheelchair service provider in Romania)

**At national level:**

- Ministry of Health
- National Health Insurance Authority (NHIA)
- National Authority for Persons with Disabilities (NAPD), as the main central authority in the protection of rights of persons with disabilities in Romania, institution under the coordination of the Ministry of Labor and Social Justice
- Professionals / associations of professionals
- Universities
- private insurance companies
- Wheelchair Service Training Package (WSTP) providers (Motivation Romania)

**At international level:**

- World Health Organization (WHO)
- Other international organizations

Many of these organizations were represented at the stakeholders' meetings organised in May 2017 where they shared knowledge and awareness was generated among participants in establishing appropriate wheelchair provision in Romania. They worked together to identify and prioritize issues regarding the current status of wheelchair provision in Romania. This resulted in a draft list of actions for future initiatives incorporated within this Strategic Plan.

## **V. Sustainability. Opportunities to generate revenues**

Due to the existing economic and political context in Romania, our estimations show that in the next few years' financial investment by government or other funding sources will be limited for wheelchair products and services. In addition, Romanian policy makers require further information to fundamentally change the policy focus and allocate additional funding with the view of developing appropriate wheelchair services. Advocacy initiatives for change at a policy level involving key policy makers and offices of civil servants at a government level is a key priority of this five year strategic plan. Providing in-depth evidence based information regarding the impact that personal mobility impairments has for individuals (for a consistent category of the population) and society (in terms of social and health expenditures and other indirect costs) is essential. Such advocacy initiatives require resources to effectively communicate and raise awareness as to the

importance of appropriate wheelchair service provision and the need for government action. Within the current Romanian context, ensuring funding for this strategic plan is a considerable challenge. During the next five years, until a shift is made in public policies, revenue-generating opportunities are limited. International grants represents a potential source for development funding, in addition to opportunities for the new organization to offer consultancy services and raise contributions from individuals and companies. These would be preliminary steps, working towards securing commitment from the public authorities, to assume responsibility for political and financial oversight of wheelchair service provision in the longer term.

Below is a description of potential sources of revenues.

| Type of revenue source                             | Products / services                                  | Potential customers   | Comments   |
|--|--|---|--|
| Contract services                                  | Consultancy services                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Public organizations;</li> <li>- Private organizations</li> <li>- Wheelchairs providers</li> </ul> |  |
| Non-reimbursable funds                             | Projects<br>International support and consultancy    |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Medium probability</li> <li>- Potential funding sources: European funds, USAID, EEA grants</li> </ul> |
| Contributions under the 2% law and sponsorship law | Contributions from private individuals and companies |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Limited potential, low probability</li> </ul>   |

## VI. Conclusion

In order to professionalize and build the capacity of the wheelchair sector in Romania, an ambitious strategic plan is necessary. The strategies included here will work to bring the wheelchair service delivery processes in our country closer to meet WHO guidelines and UNCRPD, to appropriately meet the needs of persons with personal mobility impairments as a basic human right. Its implementation will very much depend on the stakeholders' willingness to change the current situation and embrace wheelchair service provision as an important issue, which needs to be addressed within public health and social policies.

This five-year strategic plan seeks to build the foundations for sustainable development, with the long-term view that the Romanian government establish a new government entity to develop a sustainable wheelchair service provision system with oversight supported by legislation and continual investment.