



CLUJ MANIFESTO FOR

HOUSING JUSTICE

FOR ALL



“We mobilize and demand a significant fund of social-public housing, independent of the profit logic, and the regulation of the housing, rent and energy market.”

We demand 50% non-profit housing public funds by 2050 (15% by 2030). We demand that 25% of what local developers build becomes public good. We demand regulation of the housing market, rents and energy. We ask for adequate incomes to cover the costs of housing so that these costs do not exceed 20% of income. We ask for a legal ban on forced evictions and for the authorities to provide adequate housing for vulnerable groups. We act in solidarity, deconstructing capitalist myths about the market and housing, encouraging the political imagination for another possible world without exploitation, racism and homophobia.

We are people with different occupations who study or work in Cluj and try to live in this city. We met on 11 June 2023 with local, national and international activist groups at a Transnational Assembly for Housing Justice. We discussed the housing problems in our cities and their causes, we formulated ideas to solve the housing crisis and we decided that in the coming months, including during the coming election year, we will organise and put housing as we understand it on the political agenda. Among the sources that inspired us were the Cluj movement for housing justice Căși Sociale ACUM! (Social Housing NOW!)

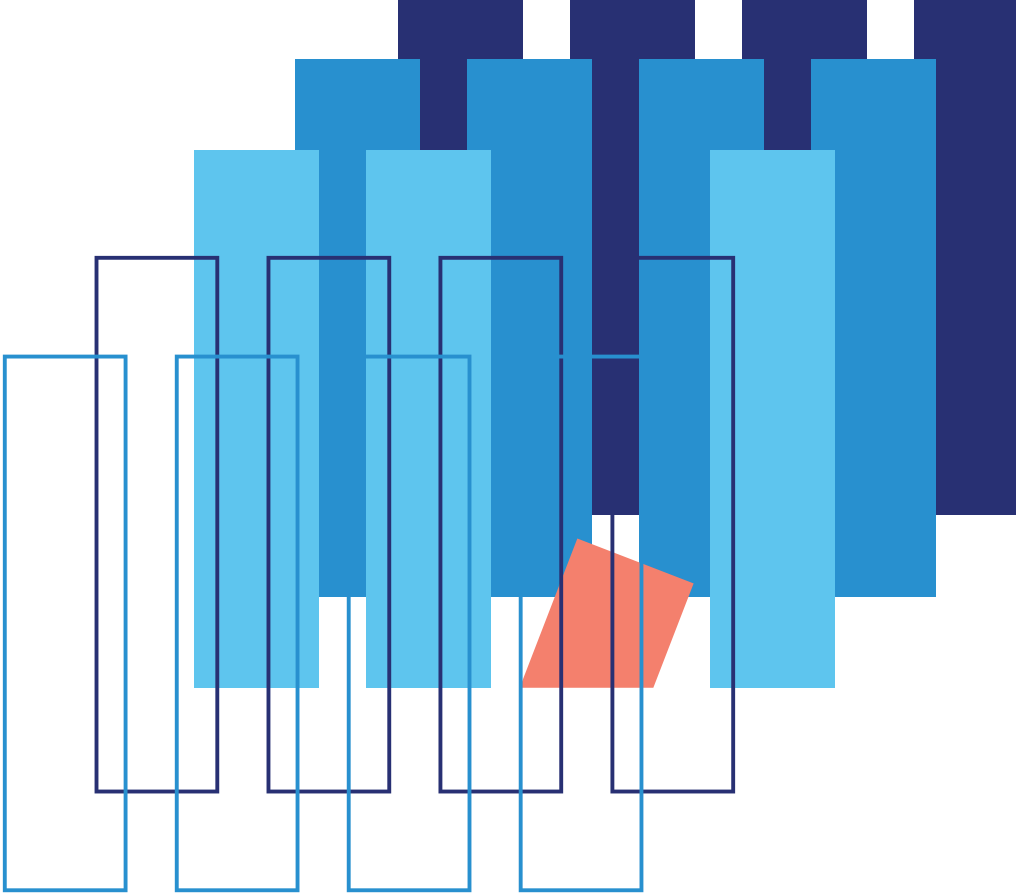
WHY DO WE NEED THIS MANIFESTO IN CLUJ?

“We are told to leave the city if we don’t like the fact that living here is too expensive.”

The housing crisis in Cluj is long-standing. Between 2015 and 2019, 15,587 housing units were completed in the city, all with private funds, while the number of people with residence in the city (with a Cluj ID) increased by only 3,420. **Not a single social house has been built by the City Council** during this period, when almost all former industrial platforms became sites for new real estate developments. In 2015, the average price per square metre in this city was 956 euros, and in 2019 it went up to 1,590 euros/sqm. The increase continued, so that in May 2023 it reached 2,450 euro/sqm. Developers expect a profitability margin of around 30% .

In 2020, of the 192,829 individuals who owned a residence, 46,078 owned more than one; or **13,230 owned three or more residences**. As regards legal persons, 4,262 legal persons owned at least one household, of which 263 owned more than 10 households and **45 owned more than 50 households each**. According to some estimates, the percentage of those living in private rental accommodation in Cluj is 15%. It is estimated that 20-30% of the houses are purchased for investment purposes, and the city is heavily promoted as a city worth investing in.

In fact, Cluj has become a city from which more and more young people at the beginning of their careers or elderly people are forced to leave precisely because they do not have enough income to pay the high costs of housing. Cluj proves that **the market is not the solution to housing needs, but part of the problem**, a key factor in the (re)production of the housing crisis, because it works in favour of profit and capital accumulation. Cluj shows that chaotic urbanism means overcrowding, suffocating traffic and pollution of all kinds, creating residential areas without adequate social and transport infrastructure.



Today, in the year 2023, we are all in a very critical period. The cost of living has exploded. Skyrocketing house prices are doubled by the explosion of utility and food prices, while incomes have stagnated. More and more people fall into poverty and are forced to leave cities like Cluj.

The Romanian government is primarily concerned with increasing company profits and treats demands for higher pay or price regulation with contempt. We maintain that a decent living needs decent incomes and decent housing. The right to a decent living in Romania is a constitutional right. Maintaining high housing and living costs when the workers in all economic sectors are not adequately paid violates the constitutional rights of those living in Romania.

HOUSING ISSUES

“Housing has become a financial asset, our social needs and rights remain unfulfilled.”

The state supports private production of private housing and the housing market and does not aim to meet people’s housing needs or respect everyone’s right to adequate housing.

Lack of social-public housing

- The number of social and other public housing is very low because there is no political will to create such housing.
- The City Council estimates the need for social housing at most on the basis of applications submitted annually, but the number of applications does not reflect the real need for social housing, but the fact that the number is decreasing because those who need social housing give up applying since they lose hope of receiving it.
- Applicants for social and public housing are waiting up to 20 years for allocation.
- The city does not have a multiannual plan for social housing and is not obligated to fulfil its responsibility in this area. Neither the minimum number of social and public housing units that should exist in the locality nor the number of years in which applicants should receive such housing is established.
- Applicants for social housing in the town are not united, they do not know each other, they are pushed by the town hall into a permanent competition for the few existing social housing units allocated each year.
- The criteria for access to social housing are not fair, including the age of the application or residence (address on the ID card).
- Many people who study or work in the city are not eligible for social housing because they are not residents of the city and are pushed into the private rental market or forced to borrow for life from banks, and then have to pay interest that doubles the loan.

Skyrocketing prices in the housing market

- Access to adequate housing is almost exclusively through the market, while affordable housing relative to people's incomes is entirely absent from the market.
- There is a huge difference between housing prices and the incomes of those who need housing to live in.
- At the same time, comparisons are being made between the increase in the national average income (a figure that says nothing about how many people are on that income) and the increase in the average house price in order to justify this increase.
- Market prices are not regulated, so developers speculate on housing demand. They claim that prices are only rising because of the discrepancy between supply and demand, ignoring the fact that 'demand' includes buying for investment or short-term rental purposes and 'supply' is about maximising profit.

Unregulated private rentals

- Private rents are not regulated. Rental contracts are not formalised either, so they often do not protect tenants' rights.
- Private rents are not capped, which leads to their continuous increase at the landlords' convenience. High rents are imposed on the market, even if the rented accommodation is not adequate and its quality or location does not reflect its market value.
- Tenants do not organise for their rights, have different landlords, do not know each other and do not motivate each other to make claims on their rights.

Empty buildings and the festivalisation of the city

- There are many buildings that have been empty and/or unused for many years, including state-owned buildings, while thousands of people live in inadequate or homeless conditions.
- There are also less and less spaces for independent culture in the city and very few spaces for public sociality or where activities can take place independent of the logic of the market or the obligation to consume.

- Touristification and festivalisation of the city creates demand for short term rentals (ApartHotel, AirBnb) that are completely unregulated, with effects on the general price of the private rental market.

Urban regeneration increases land and house prices

- The market value of land and buildings in areas undergoing urban regeneration is rising thanks to these programmes. The upgraded areas prepare for future wealthy residents and put pressure on modest or poor households to leave these areas.

Persistence of forced evictions and housing areas with underdeveloped infrastructure

- The actual number of evictions from public or private housing is not known because there are no institutions keeping records of them. Also, social or private tenants often leave their homes before being evicted by their landlords.
- Forced evictions, which leave evictees without a suitable housing option, are often carried out by bailiffs and become violent also due to the presence of law enforcement agencies such as the gendarmerie and local police.
- There are no procedures and measures in place to effectively prevent forced evictions. Instead of preventing them, the municipality sues those it wants to evict in the name of protecting property, and is not interested in the human and social aspects of evictions.
- Representatives of the judiciary in Romania do not assess evictions from the point of view of the social and human effects, only from the perspective of property protection.
- In ghettoised areas or informal settlements in the city, there is a lack of infrastructure in terms of utilities, roads and public transport, which adds to the poor housing and environmental pollution in the areas where these settlements are located.

Structural, institutional and everyday racism and homophobia

- Roma people are more vulnerable to urban development for profit because of racism that operates structurally, institutionally and in everyday life.
- Also, due to homophobia, LGBTQ persons and couples are excluded from housing.
- At the same time, those living in inadequate areas or conditions are inferiorised and criminalised.
- Those who claim housing rights and belonging to the city are stigmatised. Therefore, other city residents do not join them for fear of being stigmatised too.

Capitalist myths about the market and housing as merit

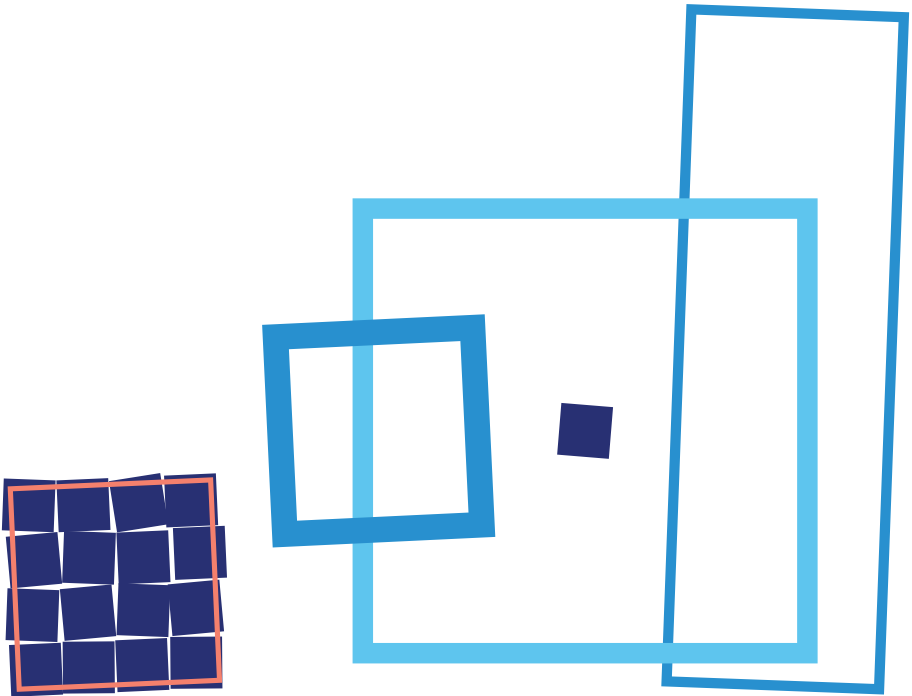
- Residents are turned into subjects who have to prove that they deserve to live in the city where they study or find a job. They must also show that they are competitive and can work hard enough to afford to pay the prices demanded in the housing market or to be eligible for housing loans.
- The myth that the private sector is the solution to housing problems, a myth that discourages us from seeking alternatives, is heavily promoted.
- The self-regulatory market narrative, as a false argument against the need for regulation through state intervention, is prevalent. So is the presentation of housing problems as natural problems, not as outcomes arising directly from political decisions or housing policy.
- Students are given the illusion of social mobility, of their ability to pay the costs of market housing. They are discouraged from discussing the social aspects of their lives, including the difficulty of securing adequate affordable housing.

Lack of political organisation on housing

- The political organisation of people on the issue of housing needs and rights is weak. Even though many people know that it is difficult to pay housing costs, they don't think they could change anything and are ashamed to admit their problems in public, or feel guilty because they

cannot pay housing costs.

- In their demands, the unions do not make the link between pay and housing demands, even though employees spend a large part of their pay on housing.
- Class solidarity on housing issues is difficult because some employees are homeowners, others are renters, and in some cases working class people may acquire a second home which they rent out.
- Housing does not appear on political party agendas and discourses on housing are articulated through right-wing ideologies that naturalise the housing market.



OUR DEMANDS

“We won’t quit until we get what we want!”

The housing crisis is caused by the predominance of market access to housing and the logic of profit. That is why solutions must be based on a system of housing production and distribution that responds to people’s social needs.

Increasing the number of social-public housing units, including affordable housing for students

- A significant increase in the number of social-public housing so that their share of the total housing stock reaches 50% by 2050, ensuring their distribution according to actual local needs. We call for 15% public non-profit housing stock by 2030.
- Obligation for public administration authorities to build a stock of social-public housing according to the real needs in the city and to ensure that applicants have effective access to housing at least two years after the first application.
- Creating a special budget for the construction of public social housing, fed by special taxes on real estate transactions and on the profits made by real estate developers/investors and banks on real estate loans.
- Establishing a structure within public administrations responsible for planning, implementing and monitoring the development of public social housing.
- Establishing state-owned construction companies to build social-public housing on a non-profit basis, reducing production costs.
- Socialising the stock of public housing by creating tenants’ associations or cooperatives to participate in decision-making on the management of public housing.
- Transfer 25% of the apartments built by developers to public ownership, making them a public good managed by the municipality together with tenants’ associations or housing cooperatives. 10% of what is built by private developers to become a public good by 2030.
- Expropriation of buildings that have been unused for more than five years and their inclusion in the stock of social-public housing.

- Turn unused public buildings into social-public housing or community housing.
- Change the eligibility criteria for public social housing so that people who are studying or working temporarily (without residence) in the locality are also entitled to public housing.
- Ensuring that students have access to public social housing or state and university subsidised hostels so that the number of places covers the real needs of students.

Regulation of the housing market, rents and energy

- Regulate the number of privately owned homes to stop property speculation.
- Regulate the price of housing.
- Capping and regulating private rents, ensuring that the cost of rent does not financially overburden tenants (not exceeding 20% of their income), under transparent contracts of at least five years.
- Special regulation of short-term rents so that they do not contribute to the general increase in rents in the city.
- Capping and regulating electricity and gas prices.
- Ensure universal access to water.
- Protecting the tenants in areas undergoing urban regeneration programmes so that those living there do not have to move due to rising rents.

Adequate income to cover housing costs

- Cover from minimum income a decent minimum consumption basket, a good part of which is spent on housing costs (rent, bank payments, utilities, home improvements).
- Housing costs should not exceed 20% of people's income.

Ban and prevent forced evictions, improve housing conditions for all

- Ban by law forced evictions, meaning all evictions that leave evictees without adequate alternative housing.
- Improve living conditions for people living in informal settlements (transport, roads, sanitation, utilities).

- Implement solutions for informal settlements that respect the rights of those living there.

Eliminating racism and housing exclusion of LGBTQ persons and couples

- Implement mechanisms to sanction and eliminate racism against Roma, refugees and immigrants that make it difficult for them to access adequate housing.
- Implement mechanisms to sanction and eliminate homophobia and exclusion from housing for LGBTQ persons and couples.



WHAT WE DO TO MAKE OUR ACTIONS COUNT

“Everyone must act at the same time!”

Our actions aim to raise awareness and mobilise. We want to know more about housing problems and their causes. We will put pressure on decision-makers to realise more public social housing.

Civic education to increase the capacity to act in solidarity

- Encouraging a spirit of community and solidarity to support each other for all those who cannot afford to buy or rent adequate housing on the market.
- Civic self-education to raise awareness that providing adequate and affordable housing for all, according to their income, is a matter of political decision.
- Shame campaigns aimed at policy makers who do not implement measures to secure housing rights, but also at property developers who make huge profits from exploiting people’s housing needs.

Empowering people to deconstruct capitalist myths

- Debunking capitalist myths that turn housing into merit and an object of competition between people.
- Debunking capitalist myths that profits earned from investments and real estate transactions and loans are income that naturally goes to investors, developers and bankers.
- Demonstrate the neoliberal arguments in favour of private property, according to which Romanian citizens have a (supposed cultural) preference for private property or private rental housing, as if the alternative of social-public rental housing could not even exist.
- Debunking the myths that housing prices will fall if more housing is built in the private sector and if urban planning regulations become more permissive.

Encouraging political imagination for another possible world without exploitation, racism and homophobia

- Popularising ideas of housing as a basic need and universal right, and that social-public housing must meet adequate housing standards. At the same time, according to Romanian housing law, people with incomes below the national average income who do not own a home are eligible for social housing.
- Popularise the idea of providing adequate affordable housing for all as part of building a society free from exploitation, dispossession, racism and homophobia.

Organising actions systematically

- Systematically organised civic assemblies on housing (for instance monthly or bi-monthly) at neighbourhood level, where people can share their housing problems and prepare joint public actions whenever needed.
- Connecting neighbourhood initiatives into a local and national movement for housing justice, as well as connecting with housing movements in other countries through permanent communication, parallel actions, joint actions organised at strategic times and places, reciprocal visits and participation in transnational events.
- Examples of joint actions: collective support for people at risk of eviction; expressing dissatisfaction with the appearance of buildings in the neighbourhood that do not comply with height or distance regulations; participation in local council meetings; organising street demonstrations at least twice a year with housing demands; daily human chain around the town hall of those on the waiting list for social housing (for example when applications are submitted or selection results are announced); summer camps, urban festivals on housing.
- Symbolic occupation of vacant spaces to convey the political message of the need for adequate housing for all.

