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National strategies to fight homelessness and housing exclusion

Cyprus

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**ESPN Thematic Report on
National strategies to fight
homelessness and housing
exclusion**

Cyprus

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Contents

- SUMMARY 4
- 1 THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING EXCLUSION..... 5
 - 1.1 Definition of homelessness and use of ETHOS Light categories in Cyprus 5
 - 1.2 Most recent evidence on homelessness and housing exclusion (extent and trends)..... 6
 - 1.3 Profile of homeless population 7
- 2 RELEVANT STRATEGIES AND POLICIES TACKLING HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING EXCLUSION 8
 - 2.1 The guaranteed minimum income 8
 - 2.2 Victims of domestic violence and human trafficking 10
 - 2.3 Housing support to asylum-seekers..... 11
 - 2.4 Other policies: the Estia scheme..... 11
 - 2.5 Adequacy of funding mechanisms and the role of EU funds..... 12
- 3 ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT PATTERNS OF SERVICE PROVISION AND CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING CYPRUS’ RESPONSES TO HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING EXCLUSION ... 12
 - 3.1 Weaknesses of the current framework in Cyprus 15
 - 3.2 Priorities for improvement 15
- REFERENCES 17
- ANNEX 18
 - Table A1: ETHOS Light categories defined as homeless in Cyprus..... 18
 - Table A2: Latest available data on the number of homeless people in Cyprus..... 19

Summary

Homelessness and housing exclusion (HHE) are infrequent in Cyprus. The rarity of the problem is the main reason explaining why HHE has never been prioritised in the social policy agenda. As a result, HHE is not systematically documented and monitored, with very few and scattered data regarding the number and profile of homeless persons. The lack of data drastically impedes the analysis of the problem and the formulation of appropriate policies.

The policy framework is also characterised by an absence of a national strategy that could effectively coordinate fragmented policies and the regional initiatives which sporadically surface (as the problem of HHE is indeed rare but not non-existent). The regulatory framework is also insufficient, as there is no official national definition of homelessness in the legislation or in any official document. The ETHOS¹ typology has not been formally adopted, nor has any version of it been applied at the national or the regional level. Finally, there are no monitoring mechanisms available. Suffice to say that these operational deficiencies severely limit the visibility of the problem, reduce public awareness and hinder the effective implementation of policies.

Recent evidence on HHE indicates an escalation of the problem, with the number of homeless persons increasing in some areas between 2015 and 2017, possibly due to the recent steep increases in residential prices and rents. The lack of information does not allow the robustness of this trend to be verified or reliable conclusions to be drawn about the profile of homeless persons. However, the government has responded positively by announcing an increase in the level of the housing allowance.

HHE in Cyprus is mainly combated through general poverty-reduction policies and, in particular, through the guaranteed minimum income (GMI). Under this scheme, recipients may receive a housing allowance. Eligibility covers not only renters but also households who face difficulties in paying off their mortgage. Additionally, a new scheme, called Estia, is currently being implemented, aimed primarily at protecting the primary residence of debt-overburdened households. Although these policies serve wider goals, they are useful in limiting the incidence of HHE too.

However, support services to persons at risk of HHE is a policy area that is not adequately developed, and is characterised by fragmentation. There are several shelters providing temporary and/or emergency accommodation to vulnerable groups. Two shelters are currently operating, one in Nicosia and one in Paphos, providing, among other services, accommodation to victims of domestic violence; and another state shelter for women will start to operate soon. There is also a shelter for victims of human trafficking. Furthermore, Social Welfare Services (SWS) may offer temporary/emergency accommodation to homeless persons until a better solution is provided.

Useful initiatives are also planned at the regional level. Currently, the Council of Community Volunteerism of Germasogeia in the district of Limassol is planning the implementation of one of the first temporary accommodation centres for homeless people in Cyprus. The homeless centre 'Solidarity' will provide temporary accommodation to persons at risk of HHE. The basic purpose will be to provide first-aid relief services and psycho-social support to people without secure housing who are living on the streets, in abandoned buildings or in improvised shelters. In the second stage, the centre will target their reintegration into society. In addition, the Municipality of Limassol is planning to operate a service centre for supporting vulnerable adults, aimed at providing first-aid and social support services to adults at risk of HHE.

Overall, the policy framework in Cyprus is characterised by several weaknesses such as: lack of information and monitoring mechanisms; lack of a national strategy, or at least a strategic approach to fighting HHE; and inadequate welfare benefits (i.e. low level of

¹ European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion.

housing allowance). However, there is much scope for improvement, with the first necessary steps being the design of a national strategy, the collection and dissemination of information on HHE, and the implementation of activities for raising social awareness.

1 The nature and extent of homelessness and housing exclusion

Acute forms of HHE, such as street children or homeless people sleeping rough, are very rare social phenomena in Cyprus. According to the Pancyprian Welfare Council (2004) the historically minimal levels of homelessness in Cyprus can be explained in terms of a number of cultural, historical, political and economic factors such as: the vibrant economy; deep-rooted traditional values which place a high value on housing and secure accommodation; families' preference for land and housing investment; strong informal networks; strong religious values; and a series of housing policies that have actively promoted and subsidised home-ownership.

The only experience in Cyprus of homelessness dates back to 1974 after the Turkish invasion, which led to the occupation of the northern part of the island. The war led to the expulsion of almost 200,000 Greek Cypriots from the occupied area, who flocked to the southern part of the island and had to temporarily reside in barracks, public buildings, shacks, tented camps or in relatives' homes (Pancyprian Welfare Council, 2004). The acute housing problem of 1974 was effectively addressed by the combined efforts of the voluntary sector, informal family networks and the implementation of public policies. The national objective became to ensure adequate housing for every family, and especially displaced families (i.e. those displaced from their homes by the war) as well as large families, low-income families and persons with disabilities.

The development of land and housing schemes, together with the provision of easy access to long-term loans, decisively contributed to high levels of home-ownership among the Cypriot population. They also promoted the long-term objective of housing policy in Cyprus, which was to ensure good-quality housing for all Cypriots; while at the same time informal networks and philanthropy contributed to almost eliminating the incidence of homelessness and rooflessness.

It is clear that against this socio-economic background the design of comprehensive strategies for combating homelessness and housing exclusion has never been prioritised, while occasional incidences of homelessness are neither officially documented nor treated in a consistent way. However, as argued in this report, there is currently evidence of an increasing incidence of housing exclusion, which calls for the adoption of more systematic policy approaches.

1.1 Definition of homelessness and use of ETHOS Light categories in Cyprus

The Republic of Cyprus clearly guarantees the right to decent living and access to social protection for all (article 9 of the Constitution of Cyprus). Furthermore, the right to decent living is effectively safeguarded by The Guaranteed Minimum Income and Other Social Benefits Law of 2014 (henceforth the GMI law). Although the law recognises the right to decent accommodation by providing the right to a housing allowance to cover the basic housing needs of entitled persons (GMI law), homelessness is not defined or explicitly mentioned in the legislation.

Homelessness has only very recently been recognised as a significant social policy issue in Cyprus. As a consequence, its conceptualisation and documentation in national policy-making is at an embryonic stage. For example, the 2014 National Social Report only mentions that 'Homelessness and housing exclusion are rare phenomena in Cyprus and in the rare cases of homeless people immediate actions are taken by the responsible authorities for the provision of adequate services' (Republic of Cyprus, 2014, p. 11),

while there is no reference to homelessness or housing exclusion in the 2019 Cyprus National Reform Programme (Republic of Cyprus, 2019).

Importantly, the policy framework is characterised by the lack of an official definition of homelessness and an agreed framework for formulating appropriate interventions. The ETHOS typology has not been formally adopted, nor has any version of it been applied at the national or the regional level. These operational deficiencies severely limit the visibility of the problem, also obfuscating the application of policies.

Perhaps the only attempt to provide an operational definition of homelessness comes from a very recent initiative of the Council of Community Volunteerism of Germasogeia² to build a temporary accommodation centre for the homeless, according to which: 'The definition of homelessness is complex and includes cases of persons without secure house or persons who live in rough conditions... homeless persons are defined as all those persons who live legally³ in the country and are deprived of or have insecure access to adequate owned or rented housing which fulfils all the necessary requirements and has the basic water and electricity amenities. Homeless persons are particularly those persons who live rough on the street, in temporary facilities or are temporarily hosted in the homes of relatives as well as those who live in inappropriate accommodation.' (Municipality of Germasogeia, 2018, p. 3)⁴.

As a consequence of the lack of official definitions, homelessness is vaguely understood in policy and social debates as rooflessness, insecure housing or simply living in appalling housing conditions. The rarity of these phenomena in the past allowed them to be addressed in an ad hoc manner. However, recent instances of HHE (driven by several factors, the most important of which is an increase in rental prices) call for more systematic approaches, something which appears to have been recently recognised by policy-makers.

1.2 Most recent evidence on homelessness and housing exclusion (extent and trends)

The study of HHE in Cyprus is severely constrained by an acute lack of data. This issue has been already highlighted by the very few existing studies of HHE in Cyprus (Pancyprian Welfare Council, 2004; Pashardes, 2009), which do not provide any quantitative evidence of the problem. Thus, this report can be considered as the first attempt to provide a provisional quantification of HHE in Cyprus.

Currently, the only statistically visible operational category of the ETHOS Light typology is found in relation to the women's shelters in Nicosia and Paphos operated by the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family (SPAVO). Table A2 in the Annex presents the latest available data (2017) for this category. In December 2018, the Minister of Labour submitted to Parliament data on the number of homeless persons. The figures were presented to the House Interior Committee during its discussions on the social effect of soaring rent prices and in reply to an earlier request by MPs of the Green Party. Although these data refer generally to 'homeless persons', which does not allow a categorisation in terms of the ETHOS Light typology, they are valuable in providing an estimate of the current state of the problem in Cyprus. These figures were circulated in the press and are presented in Table 1.

According to this evidence, although the level of HHE is still very low in Cyprus, there are indications of its intensification, especially in certain areas. Overall, the number of

² Germasogeia is a municipality located in the district of Limassol.

³ Except for the provision of very urgent care, the centre will not provide accommodation to undocumented migrants.

⁴ Table A1 in the Annex has been compiled on the basis of this definition. However, it should be noted that, at the time of writing this report, the homeless centre has not launched its operations and this definition has not been applied in practice. Thus, the information in Table A1 should be read with the appropriate caution.

homeless persons who received some kind of help from SWS increased from 29 cases in 2015 to 129 cases in 2017. The problem appears to have become more intense in the district of Nicosia (49 cases were reported in 2017 compared with none in 2015), Limassol (13 cases in 2015, 24 in 2017) and Larnaca (4 cases in 2015, 40 in 2017). The majority of homeless persons have received economic support from SWS (figures in parentheses in Table 1).

Table 1: Number of homeless persons supported (in parentheses, number who received economic support) by Social Welfare Services per district in Cyprus, 2015-2017

District	2015	2016	2017
Nicosia	0 (0)	1 (1)	49 (43)
Limassol	13 (12)	21 (16)	24 (8)
Larnaca	4 (3)	21 (14)	40 (21)
Paphos	6 (0)	6 (4)	15 (3)
Famagusta	3 (3)	0 (0)	1 (1)
Total	26 (18)	49 (35)	129 (76)

Source: Media reports citing SWS.

The problem appears to have further increased in some areas in 2018. In Limassol, the number of homeless persons was recorded at 70 between April 2017 and April 2018⁵. This development might be associated with the steep increases in residential prices and rents which have been observed in this area during recent years (Andreou and Pashourtidou, 2019). It should be noted that the problem of rising rents is not only observable in the district of Limassol. According to the latest available data, flat and house rental prices increased by 18% and 17.7% respectively between the second quarter of 2017 and the second quarter of 2018. That said, the housing cost overburden rate⁶ was only 2.8% in 2017, well below the EU28 average (10.3%). Among persons living in poor households, the rate reached 10.3% in 2017; again, well below the EU28 average (37.9%)⁷. Nevertheless, it should be noted that these figures refer to 2016 incomes and housing costs. Our expectation, after inspecting the current situation in the housing markets, is that the housing cost overburden rate for Cyprus is set to deteriorate.

1.3 Profile of homeless population

The only sources of information regarding the profile of homeless people come from documents of the Municipalities of Limassol and Germasogeia (Municipality of Limassol, 2019; Municipality of Germasogeia, 2018). Although this information cannot be considered as accurately reflecting what pertains in other regions, it is still valuable. According to the Municipality of Limassol (2019), homeless persons are usually European citizens aged 40-55, facing considerable difficulties in managing normal life activities such as searching for a job or claiming their rights. Some of the reported cases are related to alcohol/drug addiction or psychological problems, or are characterised by severe lack of social and/or other skills.

⁵ Own information after communicating with officers of the Municipality of Limassol.

⁶ The housing cost overburden rate measures the percentage of the population living in a household where total housing costs (net of housing allowances) represent more than 40% of total disposable household income net of housing allowances.

⁷ Eurostat online database (code: tessi163). Data accessed on 23 April 2019.

Additionally, during recent years, there have been cases of persons or families who were threatened with eviction or were evicted and forced into temporary homelessness. The combination of relatively high levels of unemployment, low wages, inadequate housing allowances and expensive rents creates the risk of housing exclusion for a number of low-income families or persons in the district of Limassol, resulting in situations of families sleeping in cars, or in other inappropriate places, as temporary solutions until they are able to find proper shelter (Municipality of Limassol, 2019). There are also cases of asylum-seekers, refugees or beneficiaries of subsidiary protection who are hosted in the houses of friends or relatives until they find their own accommodation. This, sometimes, results in extreme cases of overcrowding (e.g. 10-12 persons living in a small apartment)⁸.

In brief, according to the Council of Community Volunteerism of Germasogeia (Municipality of Germasogeia, 2018) the basic risk factors for homelessness are:

- long-term unemployment
- expensive rents in combination with inadequate housing allowances
- age (elderly people with low pensions and lack of support from their families)
- being an unmarried mother without a job or shelter
- being single
- being an asylum-seeker or refugee.

2 Relevant strategies and policies tackling homelessness and housing exclusion

The particular socio-economic background of Cyprus is the main reason explaining why the design of comprehensive strategies for combating HHE has never been prioritised in the country. As a result, the policy context in Cyprus does not include any national or regional strategic approaches for addressing HHE. This means that HHE is mainly addressed through broad strategies against poverty and social exclusion, along with a small number of regional initiatives geared towards meeting local needs in an ad hoc manner. The basic policy through which poverty and social exclusion are addressed, including extreme manifestations of poverty such as homelessness, is the GMI scheme. Alongside the GMI, there are also local initiatives as well as policies supporting specific population groups in urgent need of accommodation.

2.1 The guaranteed minimum income

The locomotive of poverty reduction in Cyprus is the GMI scheme. The aim of the scheme is to ensure a socially acceptable minimum standard of living for all persons and families legally residing in Cyprus whose economic resources are insufficient to meet their basic and special needs. GMI is provided in the form of a top-up cash benefit whose entitlement depends on fulfilling a number of complex criteria as set by the relevant legislation⁹. However, article 11 of the GMI law enables the provision of support to persons in extraordinary need even if they do not satisfy the eligibility criteria set by the law. Specifically, article 11 provides that: 'Irrespective of the provisions of the legislation, the Minister may provide assistance to a person who does not receive a monthly minimum guaranteed income and is in a particularly urgent situation as a result of personal circumstances or as a result of an unexpected or extraordinary situation. The Minister may decide the payment of an amount to meet the specific needs of the person without the need for a full investigation in relation to that person...'. This is a very

⁸ Similar problems have also been reported in UNCHR (2018).

⁹ A detailed analysis of the scheme is found in Koutsampelas (2016).

important provision of the law with respect to HHE, as homelessness fits easily into what is regarded as 'extraordinary need' by the law, which means that a homeless person may receive GMI support on the basis of article 11 alone¹⁰.

The monthly GMI amounts correspond to a subsistence basket. In 2019, these amounts are the following:

- €480 for the applicant
- €240 for their spouse and for each member of the family aged over 14 and
- €144 for each member of the family aged under 14.

On top of this basic benefit, GMI beneficiaries receive a housing allowance to cover their housing needs, which are assessed separately. The level of the housing allowance varies according to the family type and the living area occupied by the recipient. The living area standard is 55m² for a single person or couple and increases with the number of dependants, as well as taking into account other factors such as the presence of persons with disabilities in the household and the gender of children. Separate rates by district have been adopted reflecting differences in housing prices. The housing allowance is also given to households who have financial difficulties in repaying their home loan. Table 2 shows the maximum monthly amount of the housing allowance per type of family unit.

Table 2: Housing allowance in Cyprus (maximum monthly amounts), 2019

Family unit type	Nicosia/Limassol /Famagusta	Larnaca	Paphos
Single or couple without children	€154	€134.75	€96.25
Couple/single parent with 1 child	€224	€196	€140
Couple/single parent with 2 minor children of same sex	€224	€196	€140
Couple/single parent with 2 adult children	€280	€245	€175
Couple/single parent with 1 adult child and 1 minor child	€280	€245	€175
Couple/single parent with 1 adult child and 2 minor children of different sex	€280	€245	€175
> for each person with disability	+ €70	+€61.25	+€43.75
> larger families (for each additional child or 2 additional minor children of same sex)	+ €56	+€49	+€35

Source: Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance.

Note: The monthly housing allowance cannot exceed the above amounts; however it can be lower.

Table 3 provides official statistics on the number of housing allowance recipients and the annual amount per recipient in 2017 and 2018. In 2017, 6,055 family units received the allowance. This figure amounts to about 1 out of 5 GMI recipient units. The number of recipients fell in 2018 by 6.4%, reaching 5,666 units. Finally, the annual amount per recipient was €1,742 in 2018 – only a marginal increase compared with 2017.

¹⁰ In cases of homelessness, SWS may also offer temporary accommodation in a hostel and/or other support to the homeless person while procedures for receiving GMI support are activated in parallel.

Table 3: Number of recipients and average amount of housing allowance, Cyprus 2017-2018

	2017	2018	% change
Number of recipients (family units)	6,055	5,666	-6.4
Number of recipients of housing allowance as % of total GMI recipients	18.9	18.9	
Average annual housing allowance per recipient (family units)	€1,727	€1,742	+0.9

Source: 2019 Cyprus National Reform Programme (NRP).

Although we have no further evidence about the profile of these recipients, it can be argued that they were at risk of HHE, which was mitigated by the GMI scheme. A criticism of the housing allowance regards its adequacy. The response of the government was to announce an upward revision of the allowance. However, the size of the increase is not yet known; thus, we are not in position to assess if the GMI support will be adequate to ensure decent housing.

2.2 Victims of domestic violence and human trafficking

Victims of domestic violence and human trafficking are particularly vulnerable groups who might be in urgent need of accommodation. Their needs are addressed through separate initiatives which are mostly organised by non-government organisations (NGOs).

SPAVO is an NGO that aims to support and protect victims of domestic violence. As well as providing information, psychological support and legal assistance, it operates two shelters (one in Nicosia and one in Paphos) that serve as secure temporary hosting facilities for women and children who face physical and emotional dangers in their familial environment. It should be further noted that SPAVO has a multidimensional role which consists of supporting women through counselling, training volunteers, raising awareness among the public, identifying gaps in the legislation and submitting proposals for developing comprehensive policies against domestic violence.

Another contribution of SPAVO is in providing data¹¹ on domestic violence. In 2013, SPAVO handled 1,684 cases. The number of cases remained constant between 2013 and 2017; but of the 1,680 cases in 2017, 548 were new, while the number of women asking for shelter increased threefold (from 78 to 215). In 2017, the total number of women accommodated in the Nicosia and Paphos shelters was 29 and 11 respectively, along with 30 and 10 children; the average overnight stay was 34.9 days in Nicosia and 36.5 days in Paphos.

According to SPAVO statistics, the overwhelming majority of victims (almost 90%) were female, with most of them living with their perpetrator and having children with him. The majority of the perpetrators were Cypriot citizens. In more than 88% of the cases the violence was reoccurring, with the majority of the cases involving physical violence. The second most important type of violence was psychological, followed by sexual violence accompanied by either psychological or physical violence or both. The rate of psychological violence increased among young victims, with this type of violence being the most prominent form of abuse in this age group. Unemployment was reported as a main reason fuelling domestic violence, with one third of the cases citing it. The support

¹¹ Available at: <https://www.domviolence.org.cy/en/statistika>.

of SPAVO has helped in these cases mainly through their helpline and counselling meetings and in a smaller proportion by providing victims of domestic abuse with shelter.

Further measures are anticipated in relation to combating domestic violence. A national action plan to prevent and combat violence in the family has been approved by the Cabinet Council (Decision No 82.656 in 25 May 2017) for the years 2017-2019. The new plan recognises the gender dimension of violence in the family and promotes a victim-centered approach to fighting the problem. Accordingly, an advisory committee on preventing and combating domestic violence was created, with one of its first accomplishments being Cabinet's approval on 24 January 2019 of a proposal by the Minister of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance for the creation of 'The Woman's Home'. This decision is the outcome of efforts by the advisory committee to coordinate within one structure the activities of all relevant services supporting and protecting female victims of violence.

Finally, another issue of concern is the protection of victims of trafficking. Victims of trafficking receive financial, psychological and social support including shelter by NGOs in coordination with the pertinent authorities. Services are also provided to victims through a state shelter for female victims. Moreover, in 2019, SWS developed and introduced a standard referral form to improve the identification and referral of potential victims of trafficking through a national referral mechanism (Republic of Cyprus, 2019).

2.3 Housing support to asylum-seekers

Asylum-seekers are not eligible for the GMI. However, they are entitled to separate financial assistance including a rental allowance. The rental allowance is set at €100 per month for single persons and couples and increases with the number of dependants, but cannot exceed a maximum of €200 per month (without further adjustment for large families). Beneficiaries have to provide all the necessary rental documentation to SWS and the rent is then directly paid to the landlord. Due to their financial hardship, the inadequacy of welfare provision and the current condition of the housing market, asylum-seekers have difficulties in finding decent accommodation and tend to stay in small, overcrowded apartments, often sharing the rent with friends or relatives (UNHCR, 2018). This means that an unknown number of asylum-seekers belong to the sixth operational category of the ETHOS Light typology (homeless people living temporarily in conventional housing with family and friends). They also face difficulties in meeting the demands of landlords as, in many cases, they are treated with suspicion. In general, their access to decent housing is the main challenge for their integration.

2.4 Other policies: the Estia scheme

The recent economic recession in Cyprus has partly shifted the focus of housing policy, driving policy-makers to deal with the increasing number of households facing difficulties in keeping up with their mortgage payments. To protect these households, the government approved a plan for protecting the primary residence of borrowers, called Estia. The goal of the scheme is to arrive at a socially acceptable solution with regard to the problem of over-indebted households, among which there are many families with children (Ministry of Finance, 2018). Among other criteria, the maximum income threshold for participating in the scheme ranges from €20,000 per annum for single applicants to €60,000 for couples with four or more dependent members. The Estia scheme will be administered by a state body and its maximum cost has been estimated at €815 million over 25 years (European Commission, 2018).

Although the goals of the scheme are wider (i.e. protecting over-indebted households, reducing the percentage of non-performing loans and increasing the efficiency of the banking sector), it also operates as a mechanism for preventing HHE – a particularly valuable one in the aftermath of a severe economic recession.

2.5 Adequacy of funding mechanisms and the role of EU funds

Historically, the long-term objectives of housing policy in Cyprus were to promote home-ownership and good-quality housing for all Cypriots. Past spending on housing policies reflects the pursuit of these objectives. In 1992, housing expenditure accounted for 11.5% of total public social expenditure, and by 2001 this figure had further increased to 12% (or 1.7% of GDP) (Pancyprian Welfare Council, 2004). As these goals were achieved, spending on housing policies eased, approaching the EU average. In 2016, Cyprus spent about 0.3% of GDP on housing benefits, 0.2 percentage points below the EU28 average¹².

In this context, families' access to permanent housing is promoted by several housing schemes organised by the Cyprus Land Development Corporation (CLDC). The CLDC acquires land, separates it into plots and allocates it for the construction of residences. Long-term loans are provided to families, giving priority to low- and middle-income families, single-parent families and families having a member with disabilities. The CLDC provides 20-25% cheaper housing than the market price and has helped about 5,000 families since its establishment. There are also programmes organised by the Welfare and Rehabilitation Service for Displaced Persons (WRSDP) of the Ministry of Interior. The WRSDP was established after the Turkish invasion of 1974 to address the refugee problem that had then arisen and provides assistance to displaced persons. The housing schemes provided include rent subsidies, provision of units in specific housing estates, provision of land for self-building and grants for the purchase or construction of an apartment¹³.

Although significant funding has been invested in promoting permanent housing for families, many fewer resources are allocated in combating HHE. For example, according to the evidence presented in Table 3, the average annual amount per recipient was €1,742 in 2018 (or about €10 million in total) – a rather low level given the condition of the current housing market. Indeed, the level of the housing allowance (see Table 2) was calculated in 2014 following a study of basic housing costs in Cyprus. As the housing allowance has remained stable since 2014, while rents have substantially increased since then, it can be argued that the housing allowance is not adequate to ensure decent housing to all recipients. However, a new study has recently been conducted by the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance aimed at revising upwards the level of the allowance. According to a recent announcement by the ministry, it was expected that the housing allowance would be revised upwards in May 2019.

Another point that ought to be highlighted is the lack of social rental housing policies targeting vulnerable groups, something that appears to be essential in view of the rapid increases in property and rental prices in Cyprus. Finally, EU funding has not yet played any role in enhancing HHE policies in Cyprus.

3 Analysis of the current patterns of service provision and challenges in implementing Cyprus' responses to homelessness and housing exclusion

Support to persons at risk of HHE in Cyprus is provided by the state, the local authorities and NGOs. The state has a central and multi-faceted role, while local authorities and a number of NGOs also have an important role in the provision of services that are valuable to persons at risk of HHE. Nevertheless, the lack of a national strategy on homelessness, or at least of a strategic approach, means that there are a number of

¹² Eurostat online database, code: spr_exp_gdp.

¹³ A detailed description (in Greek) of the programme and the relevant law can be found at: http://www.moi.gov.cy/moi/moi.nsf/page47_gr/page47_gr?OpenDocument and http://www.cylaw.org/nomoi/enop/non-ind/2005_1_46/index.html.

varied policies, which sometimes work in an uncoordinated way, as well as local initiatives which occasionally sprout in an effort to address local needs. Finally, the implication of the lack of monitoring mechanisms is that policies are implemented only when the problem becomes visible, rather than action being taken proactively in a systematic manner.

In general, it can be argued that the goal of containing HHE is in practice achieved by policies which serve wider aims such as poverty prevention and providing debt relief to households. In a similar way, past policies promoting secure and good-quality housing among Cypriot households (e.g. providing easy access to long-term housing loans and subsidisation of home-ownership) have contributed to a large degree to the very low levels of HHE which have been historically observed in Cyprus.

This does not mean that there is no space for developing specific responses to HHE. On the contrary, the analysis of the available evidence shows that there are still pockets of HHE in Cyprus, possibly increasing in recent years, which can be eradicated through the adoption of HHE-focused approaches and the development of comprehensive strategies.

Indeed, there are new initiatives at the regional level which appear to be linked to the need to reinforce the effectiveness of the current responses to the increasing problems of access to accommodation. This problem is more acute in the district of Limassol, thereby motivating the local authorities there to plan the establishment of one of the first temporary accommodation centres for homeless people in Cyprus as well as the introduction of a service centre for vulnerable adults including homeless people. These planned responses are expected to strengthen the current provision of services in the country.

The homeless centre 'Solidarity' will be located in the municipality of Germasogeia in the district of Limassol, with the mission to provide temporary accommodation to adults and children at risk of HHE. The basic purpose is to provide first-aid relief services and psycho-social support to people without secure housing, living on the streets, in abandoned buildings or in improvised shelters. In the second stage, the centre will aim at their rehabilitation and smooth reintegration into society. The centre will provide a temporary stay of 30 days to people who are in a state of housing crisis, also caring for their basic needs such as food and clothing. In parallel, a personalised action plan for their reintegration will be developed in cooperation with other governmental agencies.

The centre is designed to host 24 persons. Homeless people will be referred to the centre by the SWS or the police¹⁴. The claimant will have to be self-sufficient and a medical opinion will be sought from a public hospital that they are not suffering from chronic or communicable diseases or mental illness. The centre will provide services to homeless people, excluding:

- people with mental illnesses (they will be referred to psychiatric services);
- former prisoners with certain types of criminal offences (i.e. sexual abuse or child pornography);
- patients in the final stage of life (in these cases hospitalisation is required);
- patients with communicable diseases;
- alcoholics, and drug addicts not involved in any drug rehabilitation programme;
- elderly people who are not self-supporting with chronic incurable diseases or dementia who, in that case, should be referred to long-term care centres or hospitals; and
- foreigners subject to arrest warrants for deportation.

¹⁴ The admission process will be activated immediately after the person is identified or referred: the person will have to fill an application form, and a questionnaire which will be used for a social research report.

Besides temporary accommodation, the centre is expected to provide several other services to homeless people such as: referring them to other social protection agencies; helping them to find employment; providing essential goods; offering group and individual counselling; and raising awareness among the public. The main financing resource of the centre will be the state aid scheme¹⁵, while it is expected that part of the financing will come from donors, philanthropic events and EU funds.

In addition, according to the Municipality of Limassol (2019), a service centre for supporting vulnerable adults is planned to operate, aimed at providing first-aid and social support services to persons at risk of HHE, such as persons who have no safe place to stay, live on the streets or in self-made shelters, or have been evicted. The service centre is also expected to have a coordinating role on issues concerning the homeless people of the city by: referring them to other support services; cooperating with NGOs and the SWS; raising public awareness; and identifying and documenting homelessness in a systematic manner. Although, strictly speaking, these two planned centres cannot be defined as innovations in the provision of homelessness services, they are novel and praiseworthy efforts in the policy context of Cyprus.

Taken together, the analysis in this report may be encapsulated by the SWOT¹⁶ analysis of the current policy framework for combating HHE presented in Table 4. This analysis might be useful as a very first step for planning effective interventions. In brief, policy-makers in Cyprus should build on the strengths of: a) the vibrant economy, which creates employment opportunities as well as fuelling public resources; b) the low levels of HHE, which make the problem manageable; and c) the existence of strong social ties, which act as an informal welfare network. At the same time, policy-makers should minimise weaknesses such as the lack of information, while also building monitoring mechanisms and, most importantly, designing a national strategy on homelessness. The level of welfare benefits should also be increased.

Furthermore, policy-makers can seize a number of important opportunities for improvement such as: exploiting knowledge already existing in other contexts for fighting HHE; raising awareness so as to build social consensus in favour of integrated policies against HHE; and finally exploiting the use of EU funds for financing new initiatives. Last but not least, the problem of housing affordability should be counteracted.

Table 4: SWOT analysis of the policy framework on HHE in Cyprus

Strengths	Weaknesses
Vibrant economy	Lack of data
Strong social ties	Lack of monitoring mechanism
Low level of HHE	Lack of a national strategy
	Inadequate level of welfare benefits
Opportunities	Threats
Exploit knowledge from EU members with more advanced approaches in fighting HHE	Housing affordability
Raise awareness	
Potential use of EU funds	

¹⁵ Under the state aid scheme, NGOs and local authorities that fulfil certain criteria may receive financial aid for the development of social programmes. In 2017, 155 organisations received state aid for the operation of 241 social programmes with a total budget of approximately €7.5 million (Republic of Cyprus, 2019).

¹⁶ Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats.

Based on the above, in the final two sub-sections we elaborate further on the weaknesses of the current framework and highlight priorities for improvement.

3.1 Weaknesses of the current framework in Cyprus

Our analysis has identified the following four main weaknesses which ought to be addressed.

- **The need to consistently measure HHE**

HHE is not systematically measured and documented in Cyprus. The lack of data does not allow for a thorough analysis of the problem, and it impedes the formulation of evidence-based policy. The development of indicators of HHE based on the relevant international experience is necessary for an analysis of the current situation and the underlying factors associating with it. The public availability of data on HHE could also help raise public awareness and facilitate the development of preventive policies. Towards this end, the ETHOS Light typology provides an excellent point of departure for improving the measurement of homelessness in Cyprus, with the additional benefit of facilitating comparisons and transnational exchanges of policies and practices on homelessness.

- **The need to define HHE**

It is important to formulate an official national definition of HHE. The adoption of an official definition would have several benefits, such as contributing to the acknowledgement and recognition of the multi-dimensional nature of HHE, as well as enabling the design of comprehensive policies that reflect the dynamic nature of the problem of homelessness. Formally defining HHE would also contribute to a better understanding of the meaning of adequate, secure and decent housing among policy-makers, practitioners, philanthropists and the wider public.

- **Lack of monitoring mechanisms**

Although Cyprus does not face an acute problem of HHE, it is important to build a systematic approach to monitoring the extent and profile of HHE. Systematic monitoring of the problem is important in order to allow timely action prevent it worsening further. The collection of information should include qualitative and quantitative data on the profile of persons at risk of HHE. Factors associated with HHE should also be included in the monitoring process, such as living conditions, age, gender, health status and ethnicity – as well as aspects relevant to HHE such as the availability and affordability of housing and access to employment, healthcare and education. In addition to that, better usage of the typical EU indicators on housing (housing cost overburden, overcrowding rate, severe housing deprivation, etc.) should be made in official documents as well as in the design of policy.

- **Inadequate level of welfare benefits**

This issue has been addressed in Section 1.2 and there is no need to reiterate the points here. On the positive side, the government has already committed to increase the level of the housing allowance, although it is not known to what extent.

3.2 Priorities for improvement

- **Design of a national strategy for homelessness**

There is evidence that a growing number of EU states are developing strategies, or at least are moving towards more comprehensive and integrated approaches, in fighting HHE (Frazer and Marlier, 2009). This is probably the result of an increasing recognition that the adoption of strategic approaches has a strong

potential to reduce HHE over time (Pleace et al., 2018). On that basis, Cyprus needs to formulate and adopt its first national strategy on homelessness with the aim of moving from the current status quo of fragmented and uncoordinated policy responses to long-term proactive solutions for eradicating homelessness. Towards this end, Cyprus might benefit considerably from the exchange of information with other countries more experienced in addressing HHE and the collective knowledge of international organisations with relevant expertise. In particular, the FEANTSA toolkit for developing an integrated homelessness strategy (FEANTSA, 2006) may provide a useful starting point for developing an integrated strategic approach to eradicating HHE.

- **Raising social awareness**

It is important that HHE, as a term, gains recognition and status in both social and political debate. This will contribute towards building a social consensus for adopting comprehensive measures against HHE. The raising of awareness may also help to create a respectful image of homeless people so as to eliminate intolerance and indifference against them.

- **Potential use of EU Funds**

It is clear that there is scope for utilising EU funds in order to promote the above-stated objectives.

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Annex

Table A1: ETHOS Light categories defined as homeless in Cyprus

Operational category		Living situation		Definition	Defined as homeless in Cyprus
1	People living rough	1	Public space/ external space	Living on the streets or in public spaces without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters	Yes (Municipality of Germasogeia, 2018)
2	People in emergency accommodation	2	Overnight shelters	People with no place of usual residence who move frequently between various types of accommodation	Yes (Municipality of Germasogeia, 2018)
3	People living in accommodation for the homeless	3	Homeless hostels	Where the period of stay is time-limited and no long-term housing is provided	Yes for 3, 4, 5 and 6 ¹⁷ (Municipality of Germasogeia, 2018)
		4	Temporary accommodation		
		5	Transitional supported accommodation		
		6	Women's shelter or refuge accommodation		
4	People living in institutions	7	Healthcare institutions	Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing No housing available prior to release	No
		8	Penal institutions		
5	People living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing	9	Mobile homes	Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the person's usual place of residence	Yes for 9,10 and 11 (Municipality of Germasogeia, 2018)
		10	Non-conventional buildings		
		11	Temporary structures		
6	Homeless people living temporarily in conventional housing with family and friends (due to lack of housing)	12	Conventional housing, but not the person's usual place of residence	Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the person's usual place of residence	Yes (Municipality of Germasogeia, 2018)

¹⁷ Women who are victims of domestic violence might be accommodated for a very short period in the centre if there is an urgent need for a short stay. At the same time, they will be referred to other services and shelters so as to be offered specialised services (see Section 2.2 in the report).

Table A2: Latest available data on the number of homeless people in Cyprus

Operational category		Living situation		Most recent number	Period covered	Source
1	People living rough	1	Public space/ external space	n/a	n/a	n/a
2	People in emergency accommodation	2	Overnight shelters	n/a	n/a	n/a
3	People living in accommodation for the homeless	3	Homeless hostels	n/a	n/a	n/a
		4	Temporary accommodation	n/a	n/a	n/a
		5	Transitional supported accommodation	n/a	n/a	n/a
		6a	Women's shelters (SPAVO)	40 women and 49 children	- average time in Nicosia shelter 34.9 nights - average time in Paphos shelter 26.5 nights (data for 2017)	SPAVO Statistics 2017
		6b	Refuge Accommodation	n/a	n/a	n/a
4	People living in institutions	7	Healthcare institutions	n/a	n/a	n/a
		8	Penal institutions			
5	People living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing	9	Mobile homes	n/a	n/a	n/a
		10	Non-conventional buildings			
		11	Temporary structures			
6	Homeless people living temporarily in conventional housing with family and friends (due to lack of housing)	12	Conventional housing, but not the person's usual place of residence	n/a	n/a	n/a

