

The Living Conditions of Asylum-Seekers in Cyprus



Nicosia, 2018



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Foreword

In the process of its accession to the European Union in 2004, the Republic of Cyprus adopted national refugee legislation and established the requisite asylum procedures for the effective implementation of the law. UNHCR is, indeed, pleased to have had the opportunity to closely cooperate with and support the authorities in these efforts.

With asylum procedures well in place and, by and large, functioning, the issue of the reception conditions of asylum-seekers has come increasingly to the fore in recent years. The key consideration for UNHCR, as the UN agency mandated to provide international protection to refugees and to seek durable solutions for their problems, is that asylum-seekers should enjoy an adequate standard of living while waiting for a decision on their asylum application. It is essential to enable asylum-seekers to sufficiently sustain themselves during the asylum process not only out of respect for their rights but also to ensure a fair and effective asylum procedure.

It also requires stressing that the basic reception services provided during the asylum procedure constitute the first point of reference for the potential refugee. As asylum-seekers already bear an emotional and psychological burden as a result of the traumatic experience of departure and flight, their ability to integrate rapidly and satisfactorily into the host community after their acceptance as refugees depends on this initial stage. It is, therefore, in the best interests of both the host society and asylum-seekers and refugees to promote a reception policy with a long-term perspective - a policy designed to minimize isolation and separation from host communities and that is based on giving asylum-seekers as much autonomy as possible.

There is a number of different reception models at the EU level that the Republic of Cyprus can follow, or combine flexibly various elements of these models. What is essential is that the combined effect of the various measures taken by the Government ensures, at a minimum, the basic dignity and rights of asylum-seekers are protected in conformity with international and EU standards. These measures include: adequate reception conditions upon arrival, information and advice, freedom of movement, appropriate accommodation, adequate means of subsistence, employment, access to education, medical care and special arrangements for groups with specific needs.

It is with the above considerations that UNHCR commissioned the University of Nicosia to carry out an analytical study on the living conditions of asylum-seekers in the Republic of Cyprus. The study identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the existing legislative and administrative frameworks and describes the state of their implementation. It offers a series of recommendations for a way forward.

Much of the information contained in this study has come from some 600 asylum-seekers who were directly consulted by the researchers, government sources and documentation provided by independent experts and refugee-assisting non-governmental organisations.

The views expressed in the study are necessarily those of the authors and their sources. UNHCR hopes, however, that this study will constitute a solid point of reference for the national authorities, non-governmental organisations and other interested actors involved in refugee assisting programmes in the country.

Nicosia, 10 May 2018

Damtew Dessalegne, UNHCR Representative in Cyprus

Executive Summary

The main scope of the study, commissioned by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Cyprus, is to understand and critically assess the living conditions of asylum-seekers in Cyprus, in order to suggest an integrated approach in tackling, with greater flexibility and effectiveness, the problems asylum-seekers face during their stay in Cyprus until their legal status is processed by the competent authorities. Asylum-seeker and refugee policy remains a contentious issue in contemporary Cyprus, as recent policy changes in this area have been implemented which impact asylum-seekers' living conditions. It is our hope that this report will provide the Government, UNHCR, parliamentarians, concerned civil society actors, key commentators and the wider community with a clear understanding of the issues faced by asylum-seekers that arise from their reception experiences when they arrive in Cyprus.

The research study aims to address the situation concerning asylum-seekers' living conditions in Cyprus from the perspective of national, European Union (EU) and international standards. The report provides an independent assessment of the situation in both law and practice and is based on critical analysis of research data deriving from asylum-seekers themselves, governmental officials and NGO professionals through a mixed methods research design. The study explores and critically evaluates the current living conditions of asylum-seekers in Cyprus experience in cities, rural areas and at the Reception and Accommodation Centre of the Republic. The principal areas of study identified by the research team after consultation with UNHCR are as follows: Social welfare assistance and the voucher system, housing, health, education, and employment.

The study explores the literature at the national level and examines the balance of responsibilities and relationships between the interested parties and governmental procedures and reveals the main obstacles influencing the current conditions of asylum-seekers within the general framework of immigration policy. It is clear that the process of providing unified quality reception conditions and services is hardly ever a simple and straightforward process. The research focuses on identifying areas that influence current practice. It is argued that the active participation of asylum-seekers needs to include a definition of the fundamental mission, a shared vision, and a strategy to achieve those requirements and desired outcomes through the use of several organizational and supportive models. Thus, a conceptual roadmap has been developed and put forward as an outcome of the research.

The research study has two methodological segments: quantitative and qualitative. Regarding the quantitative research, the participants were selected based on a specially designed statistical sample. The sampling method utilized was proportional, stratified random sampling, in which the opinions and perceptions of participants were studied. The questionnaire was administered to 600 participants; however, 511 participants fully completed the questions, and the remaining 89 participants withdrew from the process. The data analysis is illustrated and presented in nine thematic categories representing the most

essential elements. Specifically, the findings are categorized in Demographics, Social Welfare Services, Accommodation, Kofinou Reception Centre, Health, Education, Employment, Legal Rights and Obligations and Participation and Social Inclusion.

The qualitative aspect of the research included semi-structured interviews with three main groups of participants: (i) professionals from related State agencies and ministries; (ii) NGO professionals who are working in a wide spectrum of immigration issues, including with asylum-seekers and (iii) asylum-seekers living in and outside of the Reception Centre. The aim of carrying out the interviews was to allow the research team to study in-depth the experiences, opinions and knowledge the interviewees already have. In total, 77 interviews were held. The qualitative research analysis indicates a vast similarity with the survey results, which further strengthens the validity and authenticity of the research design and results.

The current study reveals the problems, thresholds and triggers, along with the challenges and opportunities that professionals and their organizations, as well as asylum-seekers themselves currently face in Cyprus. The analysis of the Cypriot reception situation for asylum-seekers demonstrates that the material reception conditions and social welfare assistance have considerable limitations. For example, it was emphasized that the voucher system is problematic, time consuming and inadequate, and that there is a lack of comprehensive personalized needs assessment. An additional major difficulty identified was the long waiting period before asylum-seekers would be granted the right to work, as well as the employment sectors they were restricted to thereafter. The constraints faced by asylum-seekers regarding their access to psycho-social support services were also verified. The findings of the interviews from both groups, professionals and asylum-seekers, indicate the need to develop alternative strategies of service delivery management, which could significantly improve the quality of services offered.

The recommendations comprise a combination of measures to be further discussed and adopted by multiple stakeholders:

- Government level: policy-makers from the central government
- Public services
- Civil society: any NGO, formal and informal group that has a special interest in helping the target group
- Local authorities: municipalities responsible for providing an extensive range of services in predefined geographical areas

The report provides several conclusions and a list of recommendations for the relevant national authorities and civil society regarding the main areas analysed. The research results illustrate the need to develop strong multi-agency partnerships at strategic and operational levels, which would respond systematically to the interwoven and often complex needs of asylum-seekers. Guidance and appropriate resourcing is needed to facilitate asylum-seekers' access to social care, housing and employment, based on established criteria for local residents, such as the cost of living and the poverty threshold, and by recognizing individuals' rights and the increased vulnerability of those with particular health needs.

Introduction

The European Union (EU) has experienced in recent years the influx of high numbers of refugees, mainly from the Middle East and Africa, due to political changes and protracted conflicts. To respond to those demands, the Member States have systematically worked to introduce a Common European Asylum System (CEAS). The overall intention is to streamline and harmonise the national asylum systems in matters such as procedural standards, reception conditions and developing criteria for qualifying an individual as a refugee.

Cyprus, as an EU member, has aligned its national legislation on refugees with the relevant European directives. Although the asylum application process has been clarified, delays in decision-making on individual applications have been observed, along with particular problems regarding the reception of asylum-seekers and the integration of those accepted as refugees into local society.

The present study argues that, despite the existence of certain limitations, identifying asylum-seekers' current needs and living conditions in Cyprus is central to effectively guaranteeing their fundamental rights. More specifically, priority should be given to the following areas: social benefits and housing as a form of monthly support; health and access to services; education and vocational training, including for unaccompanied children and adults; employment and access to the labour market; provision of psycho-social support; legal information regarding their rights according to the Geneva Convention of 1951 and asylum status in the European context, and social inclusion and participation into the local society.

The research, however, will not only point out the limitations and gaps. Considering how best to understand the challenges that arise, a fine line is drawn between recognizing the policy structures already in place and suggesting policy amendments to facilitate the concurrent diverse needs that may emerge. It is anticipated that the corresponding bodies in the domains of asylum and migration can use the experience and results gained by this research study to join forces, know-how and experiences in order to apply a more flexible, effective and integrated approach to tackling the problems faced by asylum-seekers in Cyprus.

The present report begins by examining key elements and characteristics of the living conditions of asylum-seekers, including a critique of the various conceptions of social inclusion and minimum standards of reception. This analysis reveals some of the underlying tensions within the existing asylum policy and practice, which explain the internal contradictions and gaps between the purported aim of promoting human rights and possible shortcomings in the institutional framework. Finally, the present report explains the data collection process followed and analysed with regard to trustworthiness and authenticity. It subsequently presents the fieldwork findings by capturing the perceptions, thoughts and experiences of a large number of professional stakeholders and asylum-seekers. It raises different views and reveals critical dimensions that need to be acknowledged at a later stage where suggestions for improvements will have to be made. The concluding chapter of the report reflects on the current findings and highlights a number of policy recommendations to fulfil the paradigm shift from a reactive to a proactive national asylum policy.

Chapter 1: Understanding the Issues

1.1. Introduction

The reception and inclusion of asylum-seekers in Cyprus has received extensive attention over the past years. In the last decade, several changes have been initiated to legal, policy and institutional frameworks. Despite some signs of attempting to provide quality services, several areas are still considered problematic, mainly because Cyprus has not constructed an established policy framework regarding the inclusion of migrants in general, or of asylum-seekers more specifically. Therefore, this is an area that remains relatively unexplored, and many knowledge gaps still exist for which research initiatives are necessary in order to build solid evidence for policy-making, intervention, planning and practice implications. This present report attempts to fill these gaps with the utilization of a mixed-methods research design. The research process involved collecting both quantitative and qualitative data at roughly the same time; assessing information using parallel constructs for both types of data; separately analysing both types of data; and comparing results through procedures such as a side-by-side comparison in a discussion, transforming the qualitative data set into quantitative scores, or jointly displaying both forms of data. For example, the research team gathered qualitative data to assess the personal experiences of asylum-seekers while also gathering data from survey instruments measuring the quality of their living conditions. The two types of data provided validation for each other, and also created a solid foundation for drawing conclusions and suggesting recommendations.

The central analysis will explore the existing balance of responsibilities and relationships between the interested parties and government procedures. Looking at the main obstacles influencing asylum-seekers' current living conditions in Cyprus within the general framework of immigration policy, it is clear that the process of providing unified, quality services to actively include asylum-seekers is rarely a simple, straightforward process; it usually has several distinct phases, beginning with the need to provide services and to analyse the key issues involved. However, the present study does not attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of all the issues, but rather focuses on identifying areas that influence the current practices, and professionals' work-framework and organizational culture. The intention is to highlight the promised outcomes and offer a critical review of the main issues. The illustration of those issues will form a more coherent understanding of the current conditions and lead to the development of relevant research questions.

1.2. Material Assistance

The legal framework surrounding the material reception conditions of asylum-seekers is constituted from various international, European and national legal instruments, each of which makes specific provisions. The EU Reception Conditions Directive establishes that "Member States shall ensure they provide an adequate standard of living for applicants ('to

lay down minimum standards for the reception of asylum-seekers¹), which guarantees their subsistence and protects their physical and mental health” (Article 17(2)1). The provision of all or some of the material reception conditions and healthcare can however be made subject to the condition that applicants do not have sufficient means to have a standard of living to maintain their health and to enable their subsistence.

The Social Welfare Services (SWS) are responsible for assessing and covering the reception conditions for asylum-seekers, as it is declared in the Cyprus Refugee Law (2000 with the last amendment in 2016). The SWS are mandated to perform an initial assessment of whether an asylum-seeker has sufficient resources to cover the basic and particular needs of his or her household, thus securing an adequate standard of living. The application form for the provision of material reception conditions and the general information provided to the applicants indicates a set of eligibility requirements, the level of assistance, and reasons for the termination of material assistance.

The SWS first examine the possibility of placing asylum-seekers in the Reception Centre (see section 1.3) upon their application for assistance. If placement is impossible, usually due to lack of availability, the SWS have the responsibility of processing applications and addressing asylum-seekers’ needs, including the allocation of an allowance, which also includes housing expenses.

Due to the lack of housing capacity at the Reception Centre, the majority of asylum-seekers reside in shared houses or apartments, which they are expected to find on their own and subsequently provide all the necessary rental documentation to the SWS. For those cases, the maximum amount of material assistance for asylum-seekers is capped at €735 for a family of 4 or more members; for an individual it caps at EUR320. The rental allowance is set at €100 for single persons and couples. It is increased to €150 for a family of three and can reach up to a maximum of €200 for families of four and above, without any further adjustment. Rent is directly payable to the landlord upon the submission of necessary documentation (e.g. confirmation from the Inland Revenue Department). An additional amount is paid in vouchers for food and clothing, which can be redeemed at specific shops located in different cities. Finally, a small amount is given in direct payment.

The material assistance as described in the Refugee Law (2000 with the last amendment in 2016) is far from sufficient to cover the standard cost of housing in Cyprus. Such inadequacy clearly emerges when looking at the difference between the rental allowances given to indigent socially excluded groups and to asylum-seekers, and undermines the obligation to ensure dignified living conditions for asylum-seekers. Similar financial differentiations

¹ Council Directive 2003/9/EC of 27 January 2003 laying down minimum standards for the reception of asylum-seekers, available online at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2003:031:0018:0025:EN:PDF>, article 1.

between the two groups are also evident in the allowances for daily expenses, food and clothing.

Another major insufficiency of the Refugee Law (2000 with the last amendment in 2016) is the fact that there is no risk assessment for destitution, neither during the examination of the application for assistance nor before a decision is issued to terminate assistance. In practice the sufficiency and adequacy of resources that can ensure a dignified standard of living are not considered. For example, if an applicant secures employment, the provision of material reception conditions is immediately terminated without taking into account whether the remuneration is sufficient to cover the basic and/or special needs of applicants and their family members. This is very different from the Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI), which is not suspended when the recipient begins working, but rather will be adjusted to ‘top-up’ the recipient’s income, should the salary being earned from paid employment be lower than the GMI entitlement of the individual or family.

Administrative delays in examining applications and granting assistance also impact the living conditions of asylum-seekers. Delays seem to persist due to various administrative difficulties, including staff shortages and lack of adequate resources and of efficient processes to implement the newly amended Reception Conditions framework. In practice, most delays have to do with issuing rent subsidies and the allowance to cover electricity, water and minor expenses.

1.3. The Reception Centre

The Kofinou Accommodation and Reception Centre was constructed in 2004. The original capacity of 80 people has been increased to 400 since September 2014; actual numbers vary depending on the composition of the residents’ families (Drousiotou and Mathioudakis, 2015). The AIDA report points out several areas that need to be addressed (Drousiotou and Mathioudakis, 2017). For example, single women and traumatized individuals are placed in the Reception Centre under the same conditions as the other residents. The only differentiation made among residents is that single men and single women stay in different rooms in distinct sections, while families each have their own living quarters. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) Report (2016) notes the efforts that have been made to provide suitable reception conditions, including a new medical centre, full catering, as well as kitchens for those who wish to cook for themselves, a library, common rooms, and a play area for young children. However, the Centre’s remote location prohibits asylum-seekers from accessing the job market or even interacting in any meaningful way with local people and the wider society.

Furthermore, the room size leaves minimum personal space for each individual. Single residents share their rooms (up to four people per room), while families do not share their rooms with others. Single men and women have separate toilets/bathrooms in three detached buildings (Drousiotou and Mathioudakis, 2015). The same report highlights several complaints from residents about shortages of personal hygiene supplies as well as about insects and snakes appearing in the premises, due to the rural location of the Centre.

1.4. Voucher Scheme

In 2013, the government decided that people seeking asylum in Cyprus should be supported with vouchers as opposed to cash. A new asylum support system was put in place and asylum-seekers were provided with vouchers that were only redeemable in certain stores, and for which change in cash or vouchers could not be given. The philosophy was for asylum-seekers to receive 'basic benefits', such as food, accommodation, heating, clothing, and healthcare, as well as household consumables, as it was discussed in Parliament. However, it is questionable how 'basic personal needs' can be fulfilled as long as people's inclusion into social, economic and cultural life is kept to minimum.

The scheme caused immeasurable suffering and discrimination to this vulnerable group in society. The ECRI Report on Cyprus (2016) indicates that there are certain problems related to the new system of payment in kind (rental allowance and vouchers instead of financial support) for asylum-seekers. For example, only small-sized shops, which often have higher prices than larger supermarkets and do not carry all types of items, were entitled to register to provide goods to asylum-seekers. Furthermore, some of these shops are not accessible by many asylum-seekers due to their location.

Wong, et al., (2017) indicate that the system of coupons is, in most cases, insufficient to cover recipients' basic needs, largely because of the high cost of living. In Cyprus, a number of administrative difficulties have been identified since vouchers have been put in use in the last four years:

- The current voucher scheme prevents people from shopping in the best value shops and markets.
- People who use vouchers also may spend more for their shopping (percentage analogy) than other shoppers because they are prevented from receiving any change.
- The limited number of shops which currently participate limit asylum-seekers from accessing foods appropriate to their culture and/or religious beliefs.
- Shops may be located quite far away from where they live and therefore they have also to walk long distances to use their vouchers, as they may not have cash to pay for bus tickets.
- People feel humiliated when they present their vouchers in shops whilst others in the queue have money or when they cannot purchase the items they need.
- A mistrust from the side of the State is displayed as they don't allow them to spend their money at their own discretion.
- Delays in receiving vouchers occur almost each month; to add to this, the vouchers expire by the end of each calendar month, and therefore recipients are unable to regularly buy fresh products or save vouchers for the following month.
- There is an absence of a person-centred approach for vulnerable individuals, such as elderly or disabled people, as they receive no additional assistance to help them meet their additional costs and needs (e.g. special dietary needs).

- There is no assessment of the payments that should be made for exceptional needs or should be provided for extraordinary cases such as health problems and disabilities.
- The value and amount of the vouchers is not consistent with the current cost of living and this has not been updated since 2013, even though the prices of goods are adjusted annually.

1.5. Social Welfare and Assistance

Both the EU Reception and Qualification Directives have emphasized the need to secure the right of asylum-seekers to social assistance, where such assistance must cover basic as well as any special needs of vulnerable persons. However, in practice, asylum-seekers' access to social assistance has been hindered by policies which do not determine the special needs of vulnerable individuals. The recently established Minimum Guaranteed Income Law attempts to close this gap. The current practice contradicts the recent amendments of the Refugee Law (2000 with the last amendment in 2016), which clarify the State's obligation to assess a person's special needs upon arrival, and its obligation to provide special reception conditions.

Asylum-seekers are not entitled to other social benefits granted to nationals, such as those provided by the Ministry of Finance, including child benefits, which are proportionate to the number of dependent children in the household. In addition, asylum-seekers are excluded from receiving the birth benefit or the child benefit given to single mothers. Furthermore, they cannot apply for student grants that are given to nationals who secure positions in universities. Asylum-seekers are also excluded from receiving grants and benefits from the Department for Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, which includes various schemes aimed to help disabled persons, such as: a special allowance for visual impairment; mobility allowance; financial assistance schemes for the provision of technical means and other aids and care allowance schemes for paraplegic and quadriplegic persons.

Another controversial issue which can jeopardize the welfare of an asylum-seeker and his or her family is that coverage of material conditions by the SWS is terminated when an asylum-seeker is deemed 'willfully unemployed'; this occurs after being referred to a job by the employment office, which the person subsequently rejects, regardless of the reason. Such reasons may include not being able to immediately take up work because of having to relocate, or because of a lack of available, accessible and affordable means of transportation. Furthermore, the lack of comprehensive childcare hampers many asylum-seeking parents' or guardians' willingness or ability to take up full-time employment.

Thus, the inclusion of asylum-seekers into local society is threatened by the aforementioned obstacles; it can be argued however that in fact this is due to institutional discrimination on the basis of a person's country of origin.

1.6. Psycho-social Support

Many people seeking asylum have experienced significant trauma in their country of origin and their journey may also have been hazardous. Psycho-social support is necessary for many asylum-seekers to be able to start rebuilding their lives and to restore their confidence. The SWS constitute the competent authority that should provide such services. When asylum-seekers need psychiatric evaluation or treatment, they are referred to the Mental Health Services to receive psychological support and the necessary assistance.

At this point it is important to define the term 'psycho-social' as a combination of psychological and social factors that are responsible for a person's well-being. The current approach places emphasis on providing effective psycho-social support to people with difficulties rather than focusing on the psychological aspects of their health and well-being. However, there is no formal scheme or assessment procedure to identify their needs. Psycho-social support is provided on an ad hoc basis by the frontline SWS professionals or by NGOs and volunteers at their discretion. As such, a number of weaknesses have been identified. For example, the quality and comprehensiveness of the support provided are under question due to differences in administration policies, unequal resources among the agencies, as well as the absence of a holistic supportive network.

1.7. Employment

Individuals seeking asylum have qualifications, skills and relevant work experience that can benefit the local community and the wider economy. Providing them the opportunity to access the labour market is important to facilitate their participation into the host country, whilst at the same time to restore their own well-being and self-sufficiency. The right to work and related rights – such as equal pay for equal work and the provision of a dignified standard of living – are fundamental human rights based on international legal frameworks (Phillimore *et al.*, 2006; Phillimore *et al.*, 2003).

Asylum-seekers in Cyprus are allowed and encouraged to access the labour market six months after lodging their asylum application (UNHCR, 2016). However, their access to employment opportunities is limited to certain sectors, based on 2008 administrative regulations. Those sectors are considered unattractive to the local population and often offer low pay.

In recent years, several major obstacles to asylum-seekers' access to employment have been observed. Their monthly compensation is relatively low as they are considered unskilled workers. The majority of the sectors in which they can be employed are often located in remote rural areas, and they may face difficulties travelling to these workplaces. Even if they use low-cost transportation (e.g. public buses), their monthly income does not cover travel expenses (Drousiotou and Mathioudakis, 2015). Furthermore, asylum-seekers' inability to communicate effectively either in Greek or English often impedes their efficient communication with Labour Office officials, as well as potential employers (Drousiotou and Mathioudakis, 2015). Last but not least, employers in the agricultural and farming sectors very often demonstrate lack of interest and refuse to employ asylum-seekers. In fact, many

employers in these sectors often prefer to employ third-country nationals who arrive in the country with an employment permit and are authorized to work for a period of up to 4 years (Drousiotou and Mathioudakis, 2015).

The inability of asylum-seekers to access employment for several months creates a gap in their employment history, negatively affecting their prospects when they seek to establish professional networks. It can also have a psychological (as well as a reputational) impact on asylum-seekers (Mestheneos and Ioannidi, 2002), with the lack of employment (and in some cases subsequent poor societal inclusion) making them less active or mobile in seeking employment, even once they are legally able to so (Dumper, 2002; Feeney, 2000).

1.8. Access to and use of Healthcare Services

There is relatively little evidence relating to access to and use of healthcare among migrants in Cyprus. Whilst many asylum-seekers arrive in Cyprus in relatively good physical health, health problems can rapidly develop whilst they are in the country (AIDA, 2015). Health services directed towards asylum-seekers are still, too often, focused on vaccinations and infectious diseases (AIDA, 2015). Barriers identified include inadequate information, particularly for newly arrived asylum-seekers who are unfamiliar with the healthcare system in Cyprus and insufficient support in interpreting and translating for people with limited knowledge of the English or Greek languages. The lack of access to reliable public transportation for asylum-seekers is also an obstacle preventing them from accessing health services. Lack of clear information about treatments which they are entitled to, and which are free to them, is another obstacle observed. These barriers appear to affect individuals who have been in Cyprus for longer periods, as well recent arrivals (Phillimore et al. 2010; Johnson 2006).

Furthermore, asylum-seekers in need of specialized healthcare which is unavailable at public medical institutions in Cyprus are not eligible for sponsored specialized medical care abroad, even where permanent disability is a foreseen risk. The 'Scheme for financial aid for health services not offered in the public sector' is available only to Cypriots and other EU nationals, with no due consideration to the rights of asylum-seekers. Only exceptional cases have been granted such aid, all of whom were minors.

It is also critical to note that asylum-seekers' health can significantly deteriorate because of the loss of family and friends, social isolation, loss of status, culture shock, uncertainty, racism, hostility, housing difficulties, poverty and loss of independent choice and control over their circumstances. Some health issues of asylum-seekers may overlap with those of other disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in Cyprus; however, there are physical and mental health issues specific to asylum-seekers, which, coupled with the impact of going through the difficult asylum process, places these individuals at risk of deprivation and discrimination (Laban *et al.* 2004).

Moreover, asylum-seekers are generally at risk of mental health problems, which are strongly related to general health and developmental concerns. Stressful experiences before being

forced to flee, especially witnessing violence, are known to be important risk factors for seeking asylum. The number of traumatic experiences and the experience of living in a refugee camp have been shown to be associated with the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health problems, such as anxiety disorders. The life circumstances endured after being forced to flee seem to be even more important for long-term mental health. The number of stressful events after arrival, experiences of discrimination, lack of stability and limited access to participate in the host society are prognostic of psychological problems, even eight to nine years after arrival (Grey & Young, 2007).

1.9. Education

The right to education is enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus and is afforded to all residents in its territory. Children have the right to study in public educational institutions, irrespective of their residence status, nationality, or their parents' origins. The Refugee Law (2000 with the last amendment in 2016) stipulate that all asylum-seeking children have access to education under the same conditions that apply to Cypriot citizens, immediately after applying for asylum and no later than three months from the date of submission of the asylum application. The policies and regulations of schools apply equally to all students. Public primary and secondary education is free for all children, and the language of instruction is Greek.

The Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) has given priority to education as the most efficient way to achieve social, financial, spiritual and cultural development. It has adopted intercultural education which aims at enriching all students' knowledge about other cultures and at exploring global values as well as rejecting stereotypes and prejudices. MOEC has also developed, in collaboration with the Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights, the code of conduct against racism and guide for management and recording of racist incidents as part of the school environment (Papamichael and Zembylas, 2015).

Since 2015, the MOEC has implemented the *DRASE* program (Actions for School and Social Integration) which aims to provide services to 15% of the student population in about 100 public schools (kindergartens, primary schools, middle schools, high schools and technical schools) by 2018. The DRASE program aims to ensure the welfare and support of economically weaker students and strengthen social cohesion by reducing the risk of social marginalization and exclusion by improving learning outcomes, and by reducing school failure, delinquency and dropout rates.

Despite the considerable efforts of the MOEC during the last few years, the participation of asylum-seekers in education is rather limited and ineffective for asylum-seekers under 18 years, who are entitled to free access to primary and secondary education. The obstacles include the following:

- It is the responsibility of the applicants who have dependent adolescent family members with them to enroll their children in the local educational system. The State's obligation in this process has not been clearly defined.
- Due to the language barrier, asylum-seeking children cannot actively participate in the primary and secondary educational systems. They are accepted as 'observers'. While on the one hand this provides them with the necessary time to adapt to the new environment, they are very likely not to receive the appropriate attention required, or be able to actively participate in class. The DRASE programme attempts to partially fill this gap and to prepare pupils to be able to equally participate in school life.
- Conflicts with other students.
- Absenteeism without a valid reason.
- Difficulties in adapting to the new learning environment and teaching methods.
- Limited relationships between parents and the school community.
- Racism.

Asylum-seekers over the age of 16 face great difficulties in accessing educational activities in general. They have access to language lessons offered by municipalities in cooperation with NGOs and funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). However, these programmes are usually offered in big cities, which can exclude people living in suburbs or rural areas. As regards access to tertiary education, asylum-seekers can enter either public or private universities, although few, if any, asylum-seekers do so mainly because of the language barrier, as well as the cost (for the case of private universities).

1.10. Conclusions

In conclusion, it appears that asylum and migration is a relatively unexplored area in terms of social research in Cyprus, even though as a social phenomenon it has been apparent for at least the last two decades. The literature review discussed the living conditions of asylum-seekers in Cyprus in terms of welfare, health, education, employment and accommodation based on bibliographical resources, state documents and national reports to EU institutions. The main conclusion arising from this discussion is that asylum-seekers are deprived from what is assumed to be equal access to the above mentioned important pillars. Similarly, the main obstacles of their limited access are analysed with the intention to more deeply understand the current situation. Although Cyprus is aligned to the relevant EU directives for asylum and reception conditions, the target group is experiencing severe limitations in their living conditions because several obstacles have not been effectively tackled.

These obstacles occur in a repetitive mode. The most important of these obstacles, which urgently needs to be managed is first and foremost the level of social assistance destitute asylum-seekers receive from the State. Asylum-seekers need and deserve access to a wide range of flexible, seamless, high quality and holistic support services that respond to their needs and expectations. A variety of services and personal welfare entitlements are available to asylum-seekers; however the State provides them inefficiently and ineffectively (AIDA, 2017; UNHCR, 2016). The issue of whether inter-organizational coordination and

collaboration can be achieved has come to the fore as pressures have increased to integrate services.

Secondly, asylum-seekers are excluded from the national Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI) scheme; they are instead provided assistance in-kind and/or through vouchers and a small amount of cash to be used for utilities and other expenses. The voucher system is perceived as problematic, and in fact causes more problems than those that it intends to solve.

An additional obstacle which has been identified through the literature review is the range of difficulties originated by the lack of cultural mediation services across sectors, which would be extremely helpful for asylum-seekers tackling daily life. In addition, an absence of a comprehensive plan to accommodate both the generic and specific needs of asylum-seekers characterizes the current social policy, which is mainly implemented by the SWS.

The restrictions on employment policy also negatively impact the living conditions of asylum-seekers, as they cannot find jobs related to any experience and qualifications they may have gained from their countries of origin. Regarding healthcare services, although free access is granted, several barriers exist due to inadequate information and insufficient support in interpreting and translating for people with limited knowledge of the English or Greek languages. Translation services are only available at the main state agencies, such as the Asylum Service and Alien and Immigration Police Unit. Finally, language difficulties and the lack of language training as well as the absence of any dedicated Vocational and Educational Training for asylum-seekers prevents them from accessing the main services necessary to reach even a basic standard of living. Despite the considerable efforts of the MOEC during the last few years, the participation of asylum-seekers in education is rather limited and ineffective for asylum-seekers under 18 years.

Chapter 2: Discussion of the Research Findings

2.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the data analysis of both the survey questionnaire results and the semi-structured interviews with asylum-seekers and professionals. The quantitative results are presented in graphs and tables and are on a Cyprus-wide scale indicating participants' overall satisfaction regarding the asylum reception conditions. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilized to code and present the data collected from the survey, while a qualitative data analysis software was employed for the qualitative data.

The participants were selected based on a properly designed statistical sample. The statistical method which was used was proportional, stratified random sampling, in which the participants' opinions and perceptions were studied. The questionnaire was administered to 600 participants, however, 511 fully completed the questions, while the rest left several questions unanswered, or withdrew from the process.

The qualitative data was gathered from three main groups of participants: public servants from related state agencies and ministries; NGO professionals who are working in a wide spectrum of immigration issues, including with asylum-seekers; and asylum-seekers living in and out of the Reception Centre. In total, 77 interviews were held, and although the intention was to have equal numbers of professionals and asylum-seekers, one public organization declined to participate, whilst another participated by allowing only one senior manager to express the organization's view in the discussion.

The data analysis is illustrated and presented in nine thematic categories, which represent the most important elements during the reception process of asylum-seekers in Cyprus. Specifically, the findings are categorized as follows: Demographics; Social Welfare Services; Accommodation; Kofinou Reception Centre; Health; Education; Employment; Legal Rights and Obligations and Inclusion and Social Participation.

2.2. Demographics

The current study included 511 participants, 340 men and 169 women, and two additional participants who did not indicate their gender. The mean age of the participants was 29 years.

Table 1: Marital Status

Living with spouse/partner	10.3%
Living with spouse and children	18.7%
Living with parents	3.4%
Living with relatives	2.2%
Living with friends	15.5%
Single	43.1%
Single mother	3.0%
Separated	1.2%
Widowed	0.8%
Divorced	1.8%

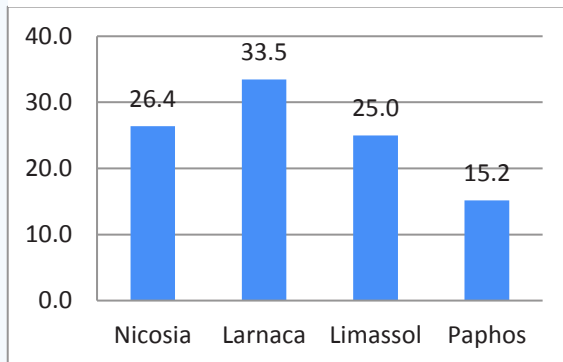
Table 2: Country of Origin

	N	%
Syria	121	23.5
Somalia	65	12.6
Cameroon	62	12.1
Congo	27	5.3
Nigeria	26	5.1
Gambia	24	4.7
Palestine	22	4.3
Egypt	15	2.9
Iran	8	1.6

The participants have been in Cyprus for an average of about two years and five months. There was an effort to ensure the sample included a range of family and marital statuses (Table 1). It is worth noting that a considerable percentage of individuals (19%) have vulnerable family members to consider, while other participants also belong to high risk sub-groups (e.g. single mothers and widows).

Most of the participants are from Syria, while there are many participants from sub-Saharan Africa as well. The increased numbers from these specific areas can be explained by armed political conflicts, extreme poverty and unstable socio-economic conditions (Table 2).

Figure 1: Where do you live at present?



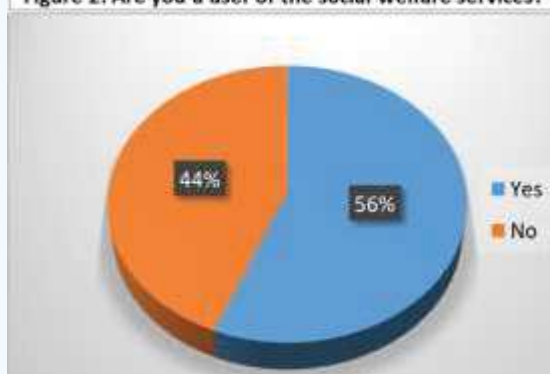
With respect to the place of residence, 33.5% of the participants indicated Larnaca, 26.4% Nicosia, 25% Limassol and 15.2% Paphos.

Regarding their educational levels and academic qualifications, the sample was comprised of people who had all completed compulsory (secondary) education. Almost all of the participants had graduated from primary and secondary educational systems. In particular, 74% of the participants had completed basic educational training and 42.4% had pursued further studies and had completed higher education. It is important to mention that it is quite possible that due to the continuing unstable situations in their home countries, most had dropped out of, or had withdrawn from, the educational system due to external environmental factors.

Regarding their educational levels and academic qualifications, the sample was comprised of people who had all completed

2.3. Social Welfare Services (SWS)

Figure 2: Are you a user of the social welfare services?



This section illustrates asylum-seekers' levels of satisfaction with the Social Welfare Services (SWS). In particular, the aim is to indicate possible problematic areas (barriers and obstacles) during the service provision process. The main focus areas are: (1) to identify barriers during the SWS provision process; (2) to assess specific services, such as the voucher and coupon system, that are essential to satisfy asylum-seekers' basic needs, and (3) to enquire

about asylum-seekers' overall satisfaction with SWS.

The results provide feedback on the service delivery process. The majority of the sample (56.1%) claims benefits from the SWS, as opposed to 43.9% who did not receive any assistance from the SWS. These results break down the negative stereotype that asylum-seekers come to Cyprus to claim benefits. It can also be argued that the protective network is not sufficient to provide supportive services to those in need.

A major issue of concern is the provision of social benefits and the variety of support that is allocated to asylum-seekers.

The vast majority (80.7%) of respondents had only received vouchers and coupons, and 59.5% had received only financial support. In particular, the respondents mentioned the application they have to fill in for a monthly public allowance from the SWS. Very few replied that they had received psycho-social support services (7.5%) and general information (7.4%) about the life and conditions in Cyprus. Nevertheless, a significant finding is the very small

Table 3: Kinds of support

	%
Financial Support	59.5
Material Support	8.1
General information	7.4
Vouchers/Coupons	80.7
Housing Support	45.6
Psychosocial Support/ Counseling	7.5
Family Support	0.7
Food bank	14.6

percentage (0.7%) that received family support services when they asked for them. It can be argued therefore that the SWS are predominantly used to providing financial support rather than psychological or family support. This finding contradicts the philosophy of the SWS, which aims to enhance the financial as well the psycho-social welfare of vulnerable groups. In addition, despite the focus of the SWS on financial support, as we will discuss below, these services are inadequate for covering even the basic needs of asylum-seekers in Cyprus.

2.3.1. Voucher System

Table 4: Voucher System

	Answers in %				
	1	2	3	4	5
To what extent are you satisfied with the coupon system?	26.1	31.0	23.8	13.0	6.1
Do you receive the coupons on a steady monthly basis?	22.0	19.2	20.0	15.6	23.2
Are you satisfied with the quantity of the products you get?	33.6	25.3	22.1	11.9	7.1
Are you satisfied with the quality of the products you get?	29.9	27.5	25.5	10.8	6.4
Does the coupon system allow you to choose what kind of food or products you want?	35.8	19.8	19.4	11.9	13.1
Do you have to pay extra money in cash on top of coupons?	39.3	17.5	13.9	8.3	21.0
Do you feel embarrassed to use them?	27.6	15.0	17.7	8.5	32.1

Note. The scale that participants employed to answer the questions was the following: 1 = Not at all, 2 = Little, 3 = Somewhat, 4 = Sufficiently, 5 = Very much

Table 4 above demonstrates the participants' overall satisfaction with the voucher system. According to the literature review, there is much criticism about the voucher system, and the results yield an overall negative satisfaction, indicating that, at the Cyprus-wide level, there is a low level of satisfaction among beneficiaries of this system.

We can see that 57.1% (i.e., 26.1 + 31) indicated little or no satisfaction with the coupon system, while only 19.1% were sufficiently or very satisfied with the coupon system. We can also see that 58.9% of the participants indicated that they were a little or not at all satisfied with the quality of the products they could get. Moreover, 40.6% indicated that they were quite embarrassed about using coupons.

In addition, an attempt was made to examine whether participants' responses to the questions above varied across different cities. Our statistical analysis which was based on the average scores of participants indicated that there was no great differentiation or deviation across the cities. The detailed analysis is presented in Annex Table A1.

Information gathered from the interviews further reinforce our statistical findings. A professional pointed to the problems being symptomatic of wider institutional failure:

They haven't established a proper accounting and management system. The system depends on two employees. In case they are sick or on annual leave, everything is delayed... How is it possible without a computerized system to cope with the increasing numbers? [NGO Professional]

Acknowledgement of the difficulty to cope with the expenses of daily life was emphasized from several frontline workers. They also stressed the difference of monthly allowances given to Cypriots who are below the poverty threshold, and to asylum-seekers:

... the total amount for a single asylum-seeker- is €320. How is it possible for someone to live with that money and pay the bills compared to a Cypriot beneficiary of Minimum Guarantee Income who may receive double the amount for the same needs? [NGO Professional]

Questions were raised about the practical value of vouchers, and the philosophy under which such a system is being promoted:

The implementation of the system was done in the wrong way. I do not know which procedures were followed and who tested it in advance... For example, they selected only micro-business stores to serve them... Who do you want to help? The local store owners or the people/shoppers? But when you get €100 in vouchers, and you buy €40 at the end of the day because the prices of goods are doubled and tripled, it does not suit me. I want to have €100 vouchers and I want to go to [a huge super market] to buy goods of €110 worth at the end of the day. The voucher system should not be established to serve the micro-businesses. [Public officer]

An attempt to provide a logical explanation about the rationale of the voucher system was provided by another professional:

The rationale behind the voucher system was to combat the abuse of the asylum system. There is no bonus system that creates conditions for abuse or for people who should not be on the system to participate in it. [Public officer]

However, as the conversation shifted to the daily difficulties faced by asylum-seekers, the same officer acknowledged the inability of the SWS to fulfil their overall purpose, that is to protect vulnerable persons:

Now, in its practical application, some major difficulties have been identified for people who use it... there are too many needs that the voucher system cannot cover... especially when you have children. [Public officer]

Moreover, the lack of fulfilment of asylum-seekers’ basic needs creates social conditions which cultivate frustration, anger, discrimination and inter-ethnic tensions.

2.3.2. Emergency Financial Support

Apart from the above, an additional problematic area that the survey findings revealed is the provision of emergency financial support from the SWS. As illustrated in the diagram the majority of the participants (77.6%) have not received this service. Those who have received emergency support (22.44%) are noticeably dissatisfied with the service.

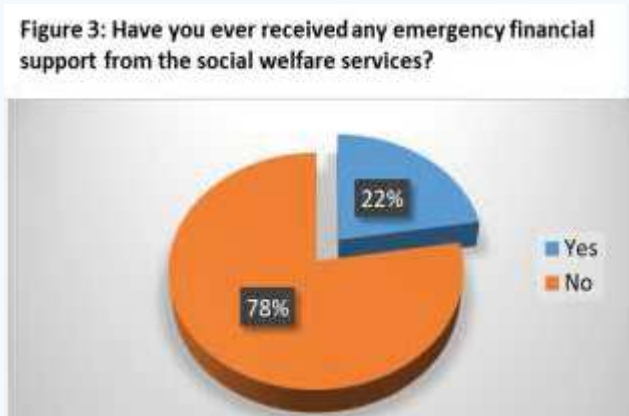


Table 5 below illustrates the respondents’ dissatisfaction with this service. In particular 71.5% indicated they were “not at all” satisfied with the emergency support, since most of the participants (78.2%) could not secure their basic needs with the amount provided.

Table 5: Levels of Satisfaction with Emergency Financial Support

	Answers in %				
	1	2	3	4	5
To what extent are you satisfied with the emergency support?	37.6	33.9	12.7	10.9	4.8
Was the money you received enough to fulfil your first month’s basic needs?	53.8	24.4	9.4	9.4	3.1

Note. The scale that participants employed to answer the questions was the following: 1 = Not at all, 2 = Little, 3 = Somewhat, 4 = Sufficiently, 5 = Very much

The interviews held with professionals revealed that they felt sympathy or despair for asylum-seekers and their low quality of life. They characteristically said that:

I have a view for everyone since I worked with people living at the Centre and people who do not. Talking about the people who live outside, it is argued, and I believe it, that they cannot survive with the money they receive and the coupons.

Frontline professionals pointed out that although the conditions for living in the Reception Centre are not adequate, at least the residents' basic needs are 'secured':

It's not easy to live outside the Centre with limited money and minimum provision of services... At least those who live in the Reception Centre, even though the life is not easy, they have more comforts. Their basic needs are fulfilled while they have access to various services or someone to advocate for their rights. [Public officer]

2.3.3. Food Banks

As depicted in Figure 4, the research revealed another important finding in relation to the information about services available and specifically about the availability of food distribution centres. Most of the SWS users (76.1%) had not received any information about the availability of food banks and therefore they have never received any food from them.

Figure 4: Have you ever received food from a food

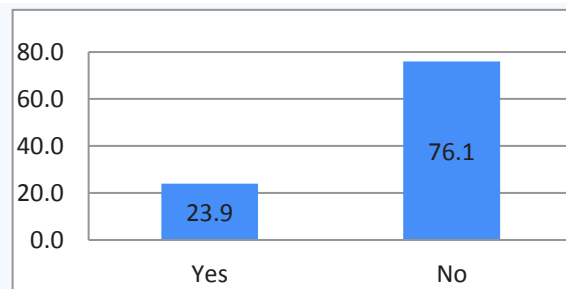
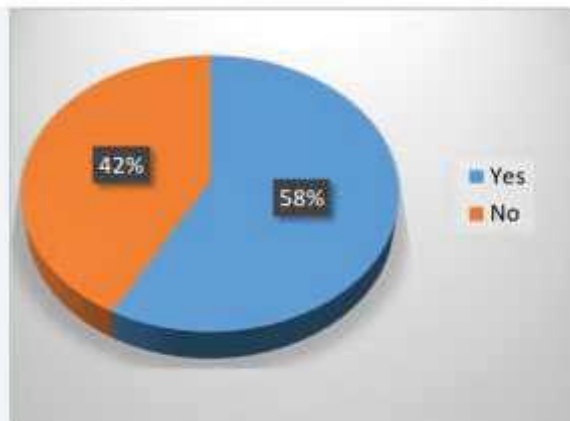


Figure 5: Do you ever feel you do not have enough food?



available resources within the community.

From previous tacit experience, it was assumed that many asylum-seekers, due to their restrictive legal status that does not allow them to work, cannot satisfy basic needs, such as having enough food. The findings of the study support the hypothesis. The survey results, as illustrated in Figure 5, show that nearly 60% of the participants have experienced lack of food. Therefore, it is clear that there is a need to provide better information about the existing food banks and

To corroborate the above finding, 58% (13.8%+29.8%+14.7%) of the participants indicated that they experienced a food shortage at least once a week (Table 6). This specific need must be attended to immediately. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, physical survival is the most important basic need that has to be satisfied in order for a person to be able to proceed to be motivated to achieving other higher level needs.

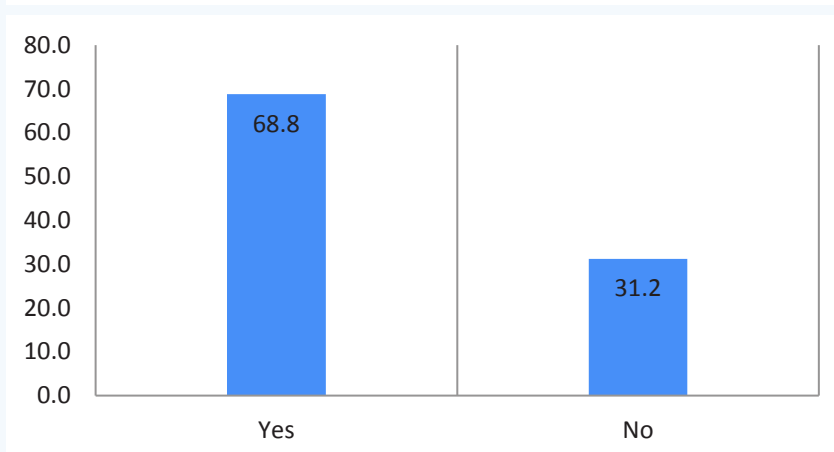
Table 6: Frequency of food shortage

Every day	13.8
Several times a week	29.8
Once a week	14.7
Several times a month	
Every month – rarely	14.2

2.3.4. Awareness of the Social Welfare Services

The majority (68.8%) of participants were fully aware of what social welfare services are provided to asylum-seekers. However, it is quite possible that others have informed them about those services. Specifically, the sample indicated that NGOs (54.5%), friends (49.2%) and the UNHCR (22.5%) respectively had informed them about the available services, as well as about their legal rights and responsibilities.

Figure 6: Are you aware of the social welfare services provided to asylum-seekers?

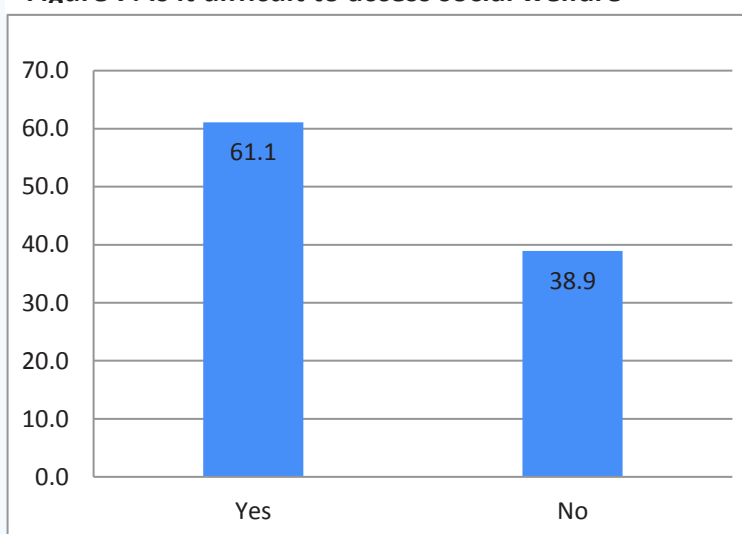


2.3.5. Access to Social Welfare Services

However, while participants are aware of the services they are entitled to receive, their access to them can vary greatly. It appears that the majority of the participants have faced difficulties in accessing the SWS, as shown in Figure 7.

In particular, the four barriers that have been identified are the application procedures, the waiting period to receive a valid answer, communicating with SWS personnel, and the availability of social workers. These difficulties are indicated and analysed in Table 7 below.

Figure 7: Is it difficult to access social welfare



Filling out relevant application forms at the social welfare office was identified by 61.2% as being difficult. The second most significant difficulty cited by the research participants is the long waiting period to know if the SWS have accepted their application, with 59.2% reporting

Table 7: Difficulties faced when accessing SWS

	%
Applying for welfare (Filling forms, procedures)	61.2
Waiting for a valid answer (that you are allowed to receive money)	59.2
Communicating (language)	55.3
Finding social welfare workers available	32.4

that they experienced significant delays in waiting for an answer. One possible consequence of this delay is that negative feelings may intensify in turn leading to impulsive or inappropriate behaviour. This is further impacted by the language barrier. Communicating with social welfare officers is difficult for 55.3% of the respondents. Lastly, 32.4% of the participants indicated that there were no available social workers to provide services to them.

It is clear that there are some major concerns about the effectiveness of social welfare service provision. Notably, a considerable proportion of participants (53.4%) said that they are not at all satisfied with SWS. Alarming, 67.9% claimed that workers' behaviour towards asylum-seekers is 'somewhat' to 'not good at all'. The overall results in this section indicate that SWS's role has certainly failed the majority of individuals in our research sample group.

Table 8: Levels of Satisfaction with Social Welfare

	Answers in %				
	1	2	3	4	5
To what degree are you satisfied with the social welfare services?	23.3	30.1	30.3	10.6	5.7
How would you describe the behaviour of the Social Welfare Officers toward you?	15.4	21.2	31.3	19.2	12.9

Note. The scale that participants employed to answer the questions was the following: For the first question: 1 = Not at all, 2 = Little, 3 = Somewhat, 4 = Sufficiently, 5 = Very much, and for the second question: 1 = Not good at all, 2 = Not good, 3 = Average, 4 = Very good, 5 = Extremely good

2.4. Accommodation

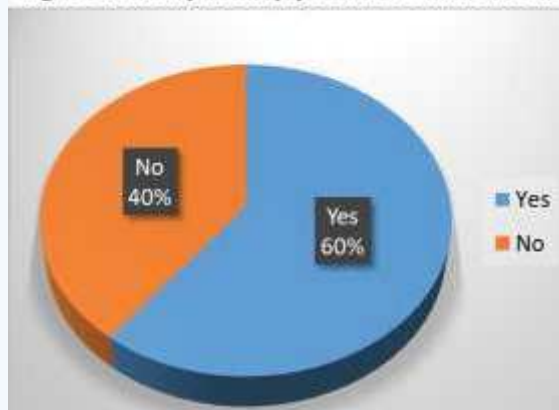
An important finding related to the accommodation needs of asylum-seekers is that 82.5% of the participants indicated that they live in a house, apartment or room, and only 17.5% reside at the Kofinou Reception Centre. An additional finding is that, due to financial difficulties, asylum-seekers tend to stay in small, overcrowded houses or apartments, and in order to save money, they choose to share the rent with friends. Therefore, the majority of the sample (64.4%) expressed their dissatisfaction with their living arrangements.

Moreover, it was revealed found that on average three people share a two-room house, while 65.6% of the participants said that either they or their friends pay the rent. A smaller

proportion of the participants (34.4%) said that the social welfare services pay the rent (See Annex Table A3).

2.4.1. Seeking Accommodation

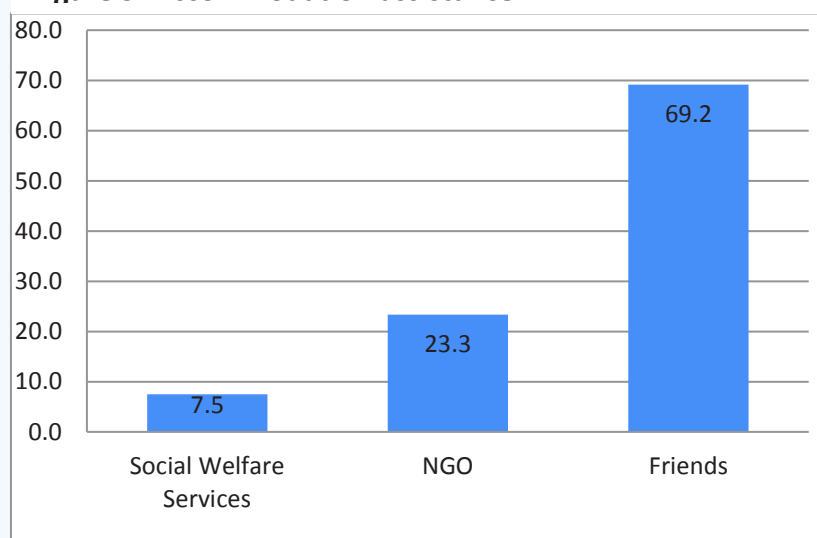
Figure 8: Did anyone help you find accommodation?



Most of the participants (60.5%) have requested assistance to find and secure accommodation. A little over a third (39.5%) managed to secure accommodation on their own. Usually, obstacles such as communication difficulties, inadequate information services, and reluctant landlords prevent asylum-seekers from finding accommodation on their own. The vast majority of the participants (92.5%) replied that they turned to their friends and NGOs for assistance in order to secure accommodation, and only

7.5% said that the SWS had assisted them.

Figure 9: Accommodation assistance



The overall results are rather disappointing in terms of utilization of the existing formal networks. The conclusion is that participants' informal social systems (i.e. NGOs and friends) are filling the gaps that governmental services create. The findings reveal the profound inability of the SWS to assist asylum-seekers with their housing needs. Factors such as the

huge workload and the fact that the governmental services are understaffed prevent effective services from being delivered. Moreover, when participants choose to live outside of the Kofinou Reception Centre, further obstacles are created, such as financial burdens, overcrowding, as well as dependency upon social welfare benefits.

Housing in a city can significantly impact asylum-seekers' ability to integrate with locals. Often, asylum-seekers have to choose to live in areas where housing is of poor quality, as this is all they can afford. Social services, both state and NGOs, are under pressure to locate any accommodation options for asylum-seekers, and it is acknowledged that a failure to do so could lead to the formation of ghettos in certain urban areas. Research participants from the target group reported that the rental cost of an apartment is a factor in deciding which area an asylum-seeker will live, due to the limited subsidies they receive from the State.

Additionally, participants reported that asylum-seekers tend to stay too long at the Reception Centre because they cannot afford to live independently in private rented accommodation. This leads to prolonged isolation from the local society. Reductions in social welfare benefits can restrict asylum-seekers' abilities to pay for housing in the longer term, which can accentuate segregation problems in the future. For example, with no model of a fair distribution of asylum-seekers based on the number of inhabitants already living in a given municipality, it is expected that segregation problems will appear as asylum-seekers are not evenly dispersed into local communities. It is worth mentioning that Cypriot municipalities and local actors, such as housing co-ops, NGOs, local churches, and other organizations, have limited involvement in planning and finding suitable locations and solutions for housing asylum-seekers.

All of the asylum-seekers who were interviewed in the first research phase described their poor accommodation conditions.

I live with other people... in a room in old Nicosia... The current living conditions, obviously, are not good. (Asylum-seeker, single)

The main difficulty is that, although rents have increased over the years, asylum-seekers still receive the same amount:

The money they give us does not allow us to find a good house. We get only 100 euros, and to get a good house is around €200-300. (Asylum-seeker, single)

Another interviewee highlighted specific difficulties with the current living conditions:

My living conditions are bad... however it's very difficult to find something else without having money. The major problem is the toilet. It is an external toilet... Many people use it... sometimes they don't flush, sometimes water comes out... if you don't flush the toilet you don't keep it clean, you can get any form of disease. (Asylum-seeker, single)

Their dissatisfaction with their living conditions raised a common question of looking for alternative places which would fulfil their expectations of acceptable standards of housing:

...but how I will look for a better one... when you want to relocate you need money to relocate and if you see a better house for a better condition you don't have the money how will you? So I'm just forced to stay where I am because I don't have the amount of money to look for a house. [Asylum-seeker, single]

Growing xenophobia among landlords as well as complicated administrative procedures with public authorities leaves many asylum-seekers in great distress. Respondents said that they have not received the best quality service from their landlords. The asylum-seekers interviewed stated that they do often delay paying their rents, but the main reason is the systematic delay from the SWS of the rental allowance:

My landlord threat[en]s me that he would throw me out of the room. Why? The welfare does not pay him and it is my problem... where to go when you don't have money? [Asylum-seeker, single]

A person with a family described a more stressful situation in which the financial limitations he currently faces led him to decide to go to the Reception Centre to secure at least the minimum standards of accommodation:

I only received an emergency support: 620 euro. We are a family of five persons. By the time I received it, I was looking for a house or a flat but I could not find anything. Everything was too expensive. And the money was not enough for that. I spent the money but did not find any accommodation. That is why I came here to Kofinou. [Asylum-seeker with a family]

2.5. Kofinou Reception Centre

The temporary Reception Centre in Kofinou does not constitute an attractive residence among the available options for accommodation. Even though the Kofinou Reception Centre can accommodate a certain number of asylum-seekers, the research shows that the majority of participants opted to stay there after they had exhausted all other viable options. More specifically, 59.1% were

Table 9: Reasons for staying at the Reception Centre

	% who answered yes
I was instructed to stay there	59.1
I didn't have anywhere to stay	44.0
I couldn't afford to rent a house/apartment/room	49.4
My friends also stay there	5.7
I feel secure	13.8
I have free food	5.7

instructed to stay there, 44% did not have anywhere else to stay and 49.4 % could not afford to rent a place on their own. On the other hand, only a very small percentage of the research sample responded positively that they were willing to reside at the Reception Centre.

An additional, significant finding emerging from this survey is asylum-seekers' length of stay at the Centre. Half of participants (50.5%) replied that they have resided at the temporary Reception Centre for one year or more; 19% said that they had been residing there between 6 and 12 months, and 30.5% of the sample answered 1 to 6 months. The above results challenge the notion of temporary residence, and raise questions about the procedures and internal regulations in relation to the duration of stay at the Centre. Moreover, asylum-seekers' prolonged stays at the Centre interfere with their ability to meaningfully participate in the host society.

Although the Reception Centre received heavy criticism from the media and civil society, several professionals argued that residents there have more benefits than those who strive for a livelihood in the local society. One interviewee from the target group attempted to explain the frustration they faced with the welfare system:

I think some times are good... other times are not good... they try to do their best to provide the food, house... maybe it is the cheques they give... when you go to the welfare and don't see cheque coupon... people automatically complain as it is very frustrated... you are the government... you are helping the people... . [Asylum-seeker, single]

2.5.1. Assessment of the Kofinou Reception Centre

The Reception and Accommodation Centre at Kofinou is the only reception centre for asylum-seekers in Cyprus and was established in 2004. It consists of prefabricated structures that are mobile and temporary, with rooms to accommodate between 2 to 4 persons. Families are housed in those units with two rooms (one two-room unit for each family) and share an ensuite bathroom/toilet. More space is given to larger families. Residents often complain about the Centre's hygiene conditions, the lack of personal space, not having enough hot water throughout the day and other shortages.

Table 10: *Elements at the Kofinou Reception Centre*

	Answers in %				
	1	2	3	4	5
Buildings	8.0	5.0	20.0	17.0	50.0
Room size and comfort	8.2	12.2	14.3	21.4	43.9
Hygiene/sanitation	6.0	6.0	15.0	21.0	52.0
Food	6.9	8.9	25.7	20.8	37.6
Kitchen facilities	8.1	11.1	13.1	24.2	43.4
Geographical location	9.1	5.1	26.3	24.2	35.4
Professional support	9.3	8.2	15.5	17.5	49.5
Child-friendly environment	11.2	8.2	19.4	27.6	33.7
Personal safety/security	12.2	13.3	28.6	18.4	27.6
Recreational/sport activities	15.2	11.1	16.2	25.3	32.3
Relations with other residents	18.4	30.6	23.5	12.2	15.3
Participation in decision-making	11.2	9.2	9.2	21.4	49.0

Note. The scale that participants employed to answer the questions was the following: 1 = extremely good, 2 = Very Good, 3 = averagely, 4 =Not good, 5 = Not good at all

The research study participants were asked to assess and grade a number of elements in order to investigate the Reception Centre further. Most of the elements have been graded as 'not good at all'. For example, about 50% of the respondents indicated that the buildings and facilities were neither comfortable nor functional. Moreover, there are significant hygiene issues, as 73% of the participants said that the Centre does not comply with basic standards of cleanliness and can cause health risks. Furthermore, 67.6% stressed that the facilities are 'not good' or 'not good at all'. It is of utmost importance to mention that the Centre is located in a remote rural area, and is isolated from major cities. Even though transportation services, such as a bus route, have been introduced, it is questionable whether residents are able to travel easily to other parts of the island. Regarding the geographic location, the scores are negative, with 59.6% of the respondents saying that it is 'not good' or 'not good at all'. Another important issue that arises from the findings is the fact that 61.3% characterized the Reception Centre as not being a child-friendly environment. In addition, a finding worth

mentioning is the lack of professional support (67%) at the premises, which relates to asylum-seekers' inability to participate in the decisions related to their accommodation.

The research participants' responses indicate that there are serious issues with the living conditions in the Kofinou Reception Centre. The major problems are with the infrastructure and the lack of hygiene. These issues raise questions about how adequately the Centre is running and being managed. In addition, it is clear that the location of the Centre is not optimal, as it is isolated from major cities that are inaccessible to residents of the Centre. In addition, we found that the groups who had stayed for '6-12 months' and '1 year or more' experienced greater dissatisfaction than those who had stayed in the Centre for less than six months. A more detailed analysis can be seen in Annex Table A2.

The statistical data is further verified by the information gathered in the interviews. A public officer acknowledged the Centre's shortages:

Certainly the infrastructure of the Centre can be significantly improved... damages can be repaired. It needs better maintenance of infrastructure, or slightly change their shape to better serve the needs of residents. Surely, the Centre needs more space for entertainment and sports. Certainly a general playground must definitely be created.... There is also a need to create an additional playground for children's entertainment. Right now we have many children staying at the Centre. [Public officer]²

Another public officer, who has also visited several reception centres abroad, pointed to certain advantages the Centre in fact has:

I think the Kofinou Reception Centre is an average reception centre compared to other European centres. I have visited a number of them; I have seen centres with much better infrastructure and others whose conditions are much worse. Surely it takes several feasible improvements. I think living in the Centre is good enough. [Public officer]

Another professional pointed to several gaps that have often been observed that preserve a negative atmosphere:

We have problems with things that are essentials, such as baby milk.... People do not get their monthly allowance on time. Also the management of the Centre is left behind; it is inadequate. And those are basic problems.... [Public officer]

They acknowledged that for them the Reception Centre provides minimum but appropriate standards of reception and accommodation, which of course could be improved in the near

² UNHCR has provided the means for two children's playgrounds to be installed at the Centre, in collaboration with the Asylum Service, as well as outdoor gym equipment for adults. The installation was completed in December 2017.

future. However, public officers' experiences and opinions are not in agreement with asylum-seekers' experiences.

A single person living at the Reception Centre who has to share accommodation facilities said:

Rooms are very small; four people in each room. They are so small. [Asylum-seeker, single]

Moreover, he mentioned that the quality of facilities is below any acceptable standards:

In general, everything is not good. Toilets [and] showers are very dirty, no hot water for shower. Usually we take a cold shower and it's very hard. [Asylum-seeker, single]

Complaints were also raised about the general infrastructure:

Buildings are not bad, but need to be repaired. Sometimes doors are almost broken and windows do not close very [well]. [Asylum-seeker with family]

More interviewees referred to the hygiene issue as one of the main problems authorities have to look at:

Hygiene is the main problem in Kofinou. It is an unbelievable shame. It's like 50-60 years ago. Sanitation is very bad in the toilets. [Asylum-seeker, single]

Reflecting on the criticism about the living conditions at the Reception Centre, both professionals and asylum-seekers were asked to suggest ideas to improve the current situation. One resident pointed to the need to upgrade and in fact reactivate the management office. He compared the Centre's daily operation to a functioning family:

The office is like the head of the camp. It is like the father of the family. And it is responsible for everything to be improved or not. My opinion is to reorganize the situation of the system at the camp. [Asylum-seeker with family]

Based on the treatment they receive from various agencies, like the SWS, asylum-seekers sometimes feel that government officials interpret public policy in their own subjective ways, which leads to inconsistent treatment towards persons of concern. Many respondents believed that they are denied important information about certain services, such as when officials instructed them to move to the Reception Centre, they were not told why, where it was located or how long they were going to stay there. One person said:

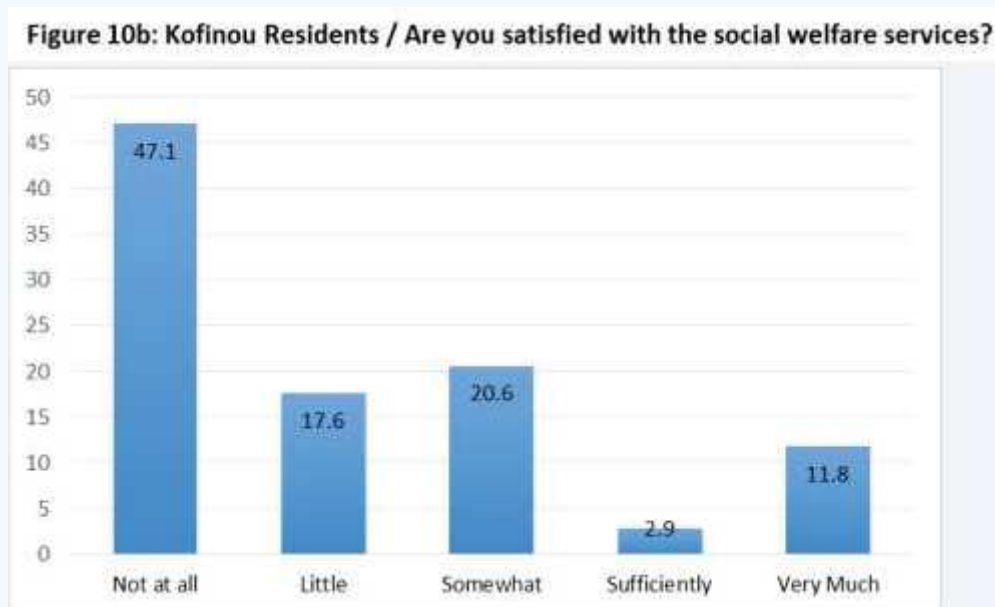
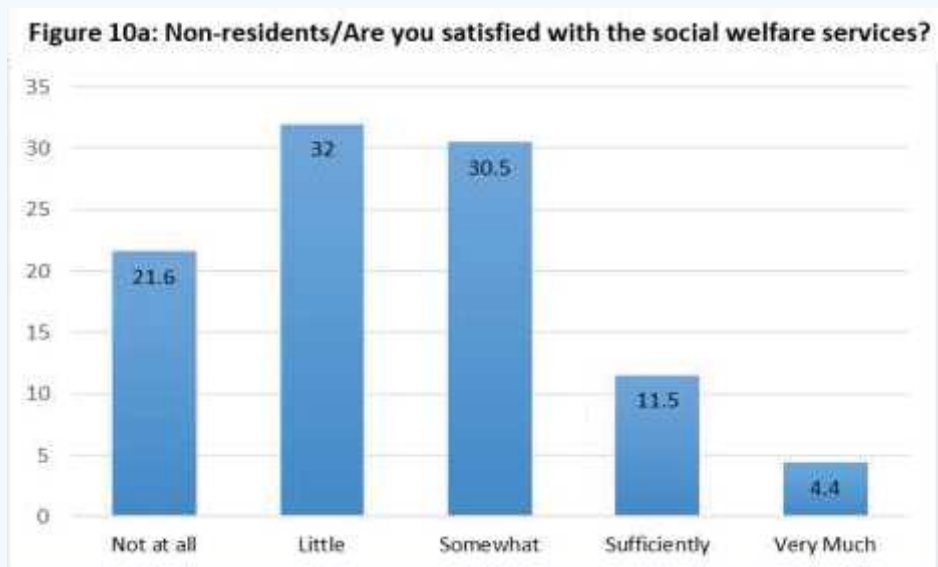
When I came here, I told them [Immigration Office] that I was in prison in Iraq and I had been treated very badly, and I showed them signs on my body and at least I should be treated better. I asked the Welfare Office to help me. Me not money me nothing, Mr J... told go to the Camp. [Asylum-seeker, single]

An additional problematic area identified by the interviewees was that their financial aid comes from the SWS, and sometimes it arrives in the post after a long delay of up two or three months with no explanation or notification from the welfare officers:

We are informed from other people when to expect the cheque, not from the Welfare people. [Asylum-seeker with family]

2.5.2. Kofinou Reception Centre and Social Welfare Service Satisfaction

Apart from the above findings, an effort was made to examine whether participants living in the Kofinou Reception Centre and those living outside the Centre differed in their levels of satisfaction with the SWS, and the behaviour of the social welfare officers toward them. For this purpose, the scores for Kofinou residents and non-residents were analysed as shown in the graphs below.

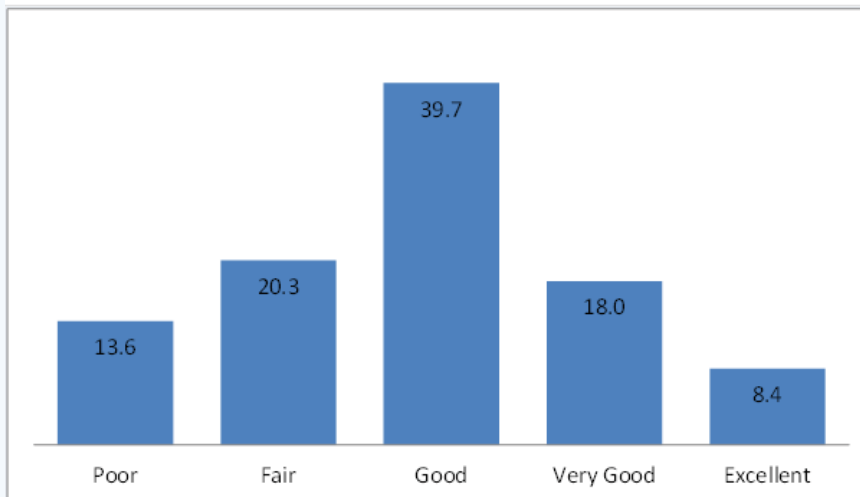


The majority of Kofinou residents appeared to be dissatisfied with the SWS, and they also indicated dissatisfaction with the behaviour of social welfare officers towards them. However, the findings do not differ greatly from the participants who reside outside of Kofinou. Based on the above findings, there is a need to rethink the Reception Centre’s overall operation, infrastructure and its internal regulation. A further question is to what extent the current situation of the Kofinou Reception Centre is sustainable for properly accommodating and meeting the needs of asylum-seekers.

2.6. Health

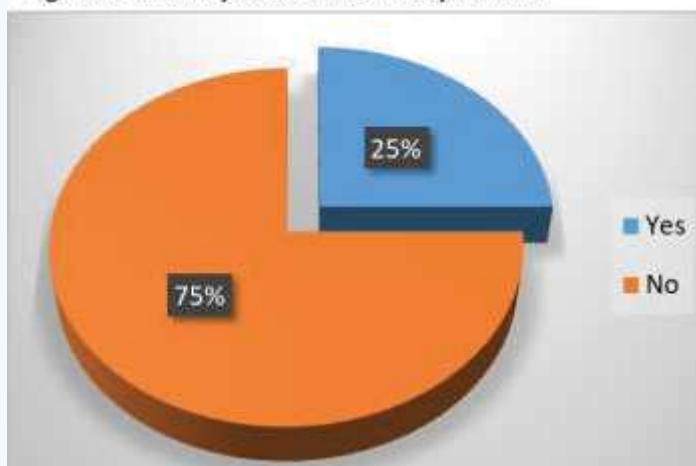
The research also examined participants’ health levels as well as their experiences interacting with the national health services. As presented in Figure 11 below, participants’ answers are distributed somewhat equally, with, 13.6% of the participants answering ‘Poor’, 20.3% ‘Fair’, 39.7% ‘Good’, 18% ‘Very good’ and 8.4% ‘Excellent’. Based on the findings, the overall health of asylum-seekers interviewed could be characterized as average.

Figure 11: In general terms, how would you say that your health is?



The majority of the sample (53.2%) said that they had accessed healthcare services, while 43.4% said they had never used them. Only 3.4% answered that they were unaware there were any health services.

Figure 12: Have you ever been hospitalized?



hospitalized.

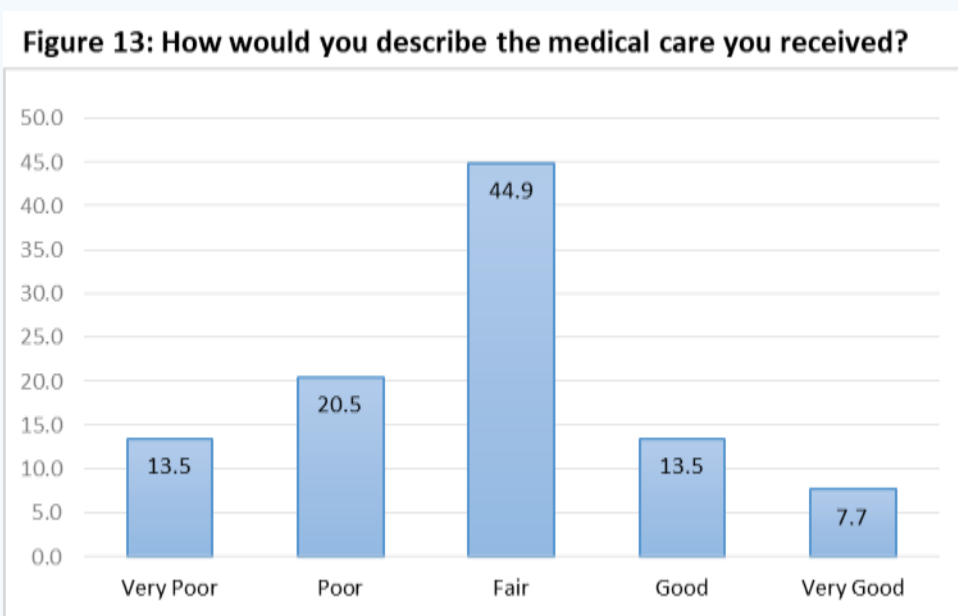
2.6.1. Visiting a doctor and hospitalization

When the participants were asked how many times they had visited a doctor in the last 12 months, they answered on average 3.5 times, indicating that asylum-seekers were able to access to healthcare services.

In addition, as we can see from Figure 12, the majority of the sample (75%) had never been hospitalized for any reason, whereas 25% had been

2.6.2. Assessment of Healthcare Provision

The participants' satisfaction with the medical care they had received when hospitalized was also assessed. As we can see from the graph below, 13.5% of the participants answered that the care was 'Very Poor', 20.5% 'Poor', 44.9% 'Fair', 13.5% 'Good' and 7.7% 'Very good'. Thus, around one in three were not satisfied with the medical care they received, and only a small minority indicated high satisfaction.



2.6.3. Difficulties when visiting doctors in hospital

According to the results shown in Table 11, it appears that communication constitutes a major challenge when participants interact with healthcare professionals. A remarkable percentage of the participants (70.5%) indicated language issues as a major difficulty.

Table 11: Difficulties with health services

	% who answered yes
Language issues	70.5
Attitude issues	16.6
Understanding of medical issues	37.6

Therefore, we can conclude that the lack of interpretation services in hospitals creates major obstacles during the service delivery process. Moreover, understanding the various medical terms and issues regarding the participants' health is a noteworthy difficulty that is inextricably related to the language barrier. Compared to previous findings, the opinion that healthcare professionals had problematic attitudes when addressing their patients remained at low levels (16%).

The above difficulties that participants faced may, to a considerable degree, be due to poor admission and time-consuming processes in hospitals. More specifically, there is a long waiting list for scheduling an appointment to see a doctor; there is a long waiting time in the emergency unit and there are significant communication barriers in the admissions process. All of these factors contribute to creating a negative experience when participants seek medical care.

Table 12: *Levels of satisfaction with the healthcare system*

	Answers in %				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Are you satisfied with the health care you received?	12.5	19.6	28.1	25.1	14.7
2. Do you feel confident that if you have a health problem in the future, you will be able to find appropriate treatment?	13.4	21.5	32.8	19.4	12.9
3. Do you think that people living in Cyprus are generally treated differently by health professionals (for example, doctors, nurses, dentists) because of their ethnicity?	20.4	16.8	31.0	19.0	12.8

Note. The scale that participants employed to answer the questions was the following: 1 = Not at all, 2 = little, 3 = somewhat, 4 = sufficiently, 5 = Very much

In Table 12 below we can see participants' responses with respect to their levels of satisfaction with the healthcare system. We can observe that about one in three were dissatisfied with the healthcare they had received. In addition, more than one in three indicated that they would not feel willing to utilize the healthcare system. Finally, nearly 40% believed that they were not treated equally due to their ethnicity.

However, compared to other governmental agencies, the findings on healthcare are nonetheless somewhat positive. One major obstacle to be highlighted from the results is asylum-seekers' inability to communicate with healthcare workers. Throughout the interviews, asylum-seekers repeatedly noted that they are often not able to access their full rights to healthcare because Cypriot health professionals lack cultural understanding and knowledge of torture, trauma and violence. This lack of knowledge may result in asylum-seekers not receiving specialized care for the experiences they have gone through. Overall this lack of knowledge and clear information hinders a person's recovery and ultimate ability to participate in society. It is critical to note that the target group tends to differentiate the quality of medical services from the administrative procedures within the system:

I'm very satisfied with attitudes of medical staff. I'm so happy for the healthcare I receive.

A person whose wife is a regular visitor of the health expressed his satisfaction with the quality of health services they had received so far:

I'm very satisfied with the healthcare system. And my wife is pregnant and is using the healthcare. And it's more than good. It's very good. The only problem is the referral from one hospital to another hospital and it's very difficult for us to go from one hospital to the other. And the appointment system is not good. They give us an appointment at 10 am and they see us at 1:00 pm.

The language communication difficulties were further elaborated upon by asylum-seekers who were interviewed:

There is language problem. We do not understand the medical terms and other issues that the doctor tells us.

Public officers confirmed the communication difficulties between medical staff and asylum-seekers:

The only obstacle is the translation... When we have organized requests, we have a translator. The other thing we have asked too many times is the need for cultural mediators and not for just translators. [Public officer]

Another person from health services referred to the need to train medical staff:

We need training on such matters, and our doctors need to attend to...to be able to approach the asylum-seeker on the basis of his/her culture, religion, and on the basis of his / her specific needs. [Public officer]

Adequate information about their rights is another issue that was revealed through the study. It seems that although the visits to hospitals are free of charge for asylum-seekers who are entitled to the relevant health card, many of them are not aware of it. In addition, at the hospitals there is no provision of information about their rights:

If you are sick now you have no money to go to hospital. If you go to hospital they ask money, what can you do?

Many asylum-seekers, and even professionals in the field, are not aware that asylum-seekers can apply to the Ministry of Health for free access to the hospitals. Even those who do apply for a medical card wait for months to receive it. According to interviewees:

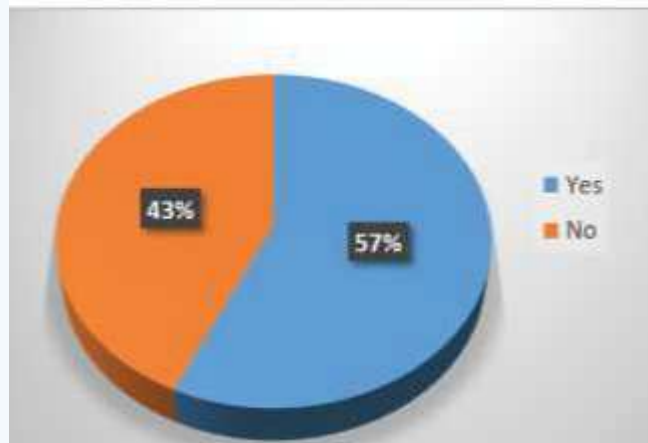
... [W]e may wait for two months for the medical card to arrive.... [I]t is valid for only three months. I use it for only one month before it is expired.

Some interviewees complained that although there are Citizen Service Centres in every city, asylum-seekers are not allowed to use them and their applications are sent to the central offices of each service they need, such as the Ministry of Health for medical cards, making the overall process more cumbersome and difficult.

2.7. Language Courses

It is clear that a great number of asylum-seekers are facing vital communication difficulties and language barriers upon arrival in the country. In almost each thematic section of the present study, the language barrier was mentioned as a problematic factor. In this section, the aim is to identify the existing available opportunities to learn the Greek language. To begin with, a majority of participants (57%) were aware of the Greek language courses available to them, while an important percentage (43%) was unaware that such courses existed.

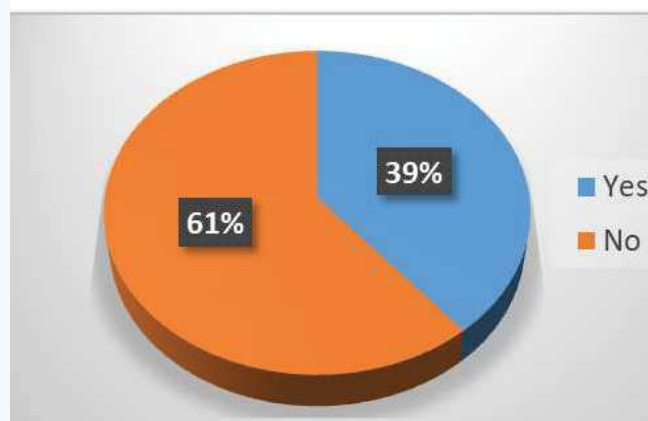
Figure 14: Are you aware of any available Greek language lessons that you can attend for free?



2.7.1. Attendance at Language Courses

Of the participants who are aware of available Greek language courses, the vast majority (61%) have never attended any of them, while 39% of respondents had the opportunity to participate in such courses. This finding raises further questions about the effectiveness and the availability of these courses.

Figure 15: Did you attend any of these courses?



2.7.2. Satisfaction Levels with Greek Language Courses Attended

The satisfaction scores of the participants who attended a Greek language course were distributed between 'Not at all' to 'Sufficiently'. In particular, in answering questions 1 and 2 (Table 13), the participants indicated moderate to sufficient satisfaction. Regarding question

Table 13: *Satisfaction Levels with Greek Language Courses Attended*

	Answers in %				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. To what extent are you satisfied with the teaching system?	19.5	13	21.3	26.6	19.5
2. Are you satisfied with your learning progress?	17.8	17.2	23.3	25.2	16.6
3. According to your knowledge, are you allowed to enroll?	25.3	20.8	20.1	21.4	12.3

Note. The scale that participants employed to answer the questions was the following: 1 = Not at all, 2 = Little, 3 = Somewhat, 4 = Sufficiently, 5 = Very much

3, some 45% of the participants replied that they believed they were not allowed to enroll in these courses and 20% of the sample was somewhat aware as to whether they were allowed to or not.

One significant conclusion is that there is a lack of proper information about the Greek language courses available to asylum-seekers in Cyprus. Moreover, the interviewees pointed out the importance of education for employment as well as inclusion in society. In order to access the labour market, relevant skills and competences are essential. Many asylum-seekers have skills gaps – including language skills – which present a challenge to their smooth access to the labour market. For those asylum-seekers with relevant skills, competences and qualifications, these may not be formally or *de facto* recognized in the country in which they have arrived. There are various challenges associated with asylum-seekers' education, training and qualifications.

The majority of asylum-seekers interviewed associated education with learning the Greek language, citing it as a major barrier to being able to communicate with Cypriots.

Many employers do not speak any other language than Greek... to get you to the job you need to understand what they say to you...

Some noted that the lack of Greek language lessons prohibits asylum-seekers from getting a job:

Another reason that I cannot find a job it's the language. For example, they want you in a car wash or petroleum station the owner of that place will require from you to speak the language.

An interviewee complained about the limited number of opportunities to learn Greek:

I went to the labour officer to register myself... Unless I bring them a paper that I'm going to a place to learn Greek, they will not accept me. But where can I go, as all available courses do not accept more people now?

When the discussion shifted to asylum-seekers' children, their parents expressed concerns about the level of education the children would potentially achieve:

It is very difficult to catch the education system for asylum-seekers... we need to start from the early beginning. I'm not sure if the teachers help the students to progress... if they explain everything for them, from the alphabet.

Another raised the issue of having the opportunity to attend vocational courses to help them become skilled workers to actively contribute to society:

But there should be some short courses, vocational courses, Greek and English courses to build our skills or learn new skills to be ready for the market when we are recognized, to be [an] asset for society.

For those refugees and asylum-seekers who already possess qualifications, a barrier to entering the labour market in many countries is that those qualifications have not been certified or the skills recognized.

There are well-established procedures for the recognition of degrees and other educational skills. However, procedures take time and effort, even when all the necessary documents can be provided in their original (or certified original) form.
[Public officer]

Along with this issue is the lack of an established system to certify asylum-seekers' years of professional experience due to the absence of formal qualifications, i.e. for technical professions.

2.7.3. Level of Greek Language

Even though some participants had the opportunity to attend Greek language courses, the majority of them said that their level of Greek had not improved. A significant number characterized their Greek language level as very poor. Only a very small percentage (5%) of the participants had attained a good knowledge of the Greek language.

Table 14: *Level of Greek Language*

	Answers in %				
	1	2	3	4	5
What is the level of your Greek language now?	46.1	28.5	20.2	3.7	1.6

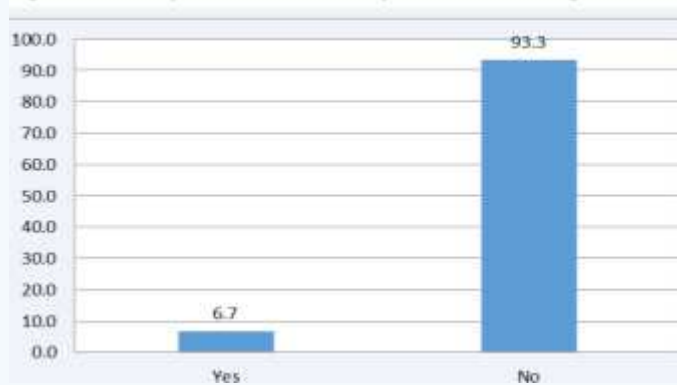
Note. The scale that participants employed to answer the questions was the following: 1 = Very poor, 2 = Poor, 3 = Average, 4 = Sufficient, 5 = Excellent

2.7.4. Vocational Training Courses for Particular Skills

Beyond the issue of language acquisition, 93.4% of participants indicated that there were not any additional learning opportunities, such as vocational training, in order to acquire new skills.

It is clear that there is a shortage of tailored Greek classes for asylum-seekers, and the information that asylum-seekers do receive about existing classes has been poor. Thus it is necessary to introduce formal, systematic language courses at local and national levels in order to help asylum-seekers overcome language and communication barriers.

Figure 16: Have you ever attended any vocational training courses?



2.8. Employment

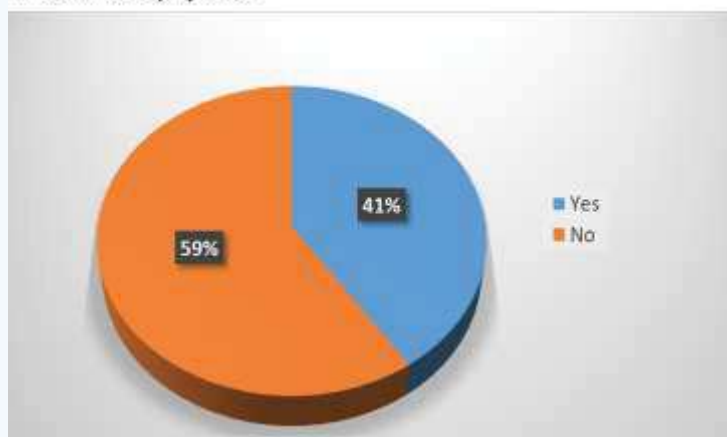
This section presents asylum-seekers' satisfaction levels in relation to their access to the labour market. In particular, the aim is to indicate possible problematic areas, barriers and obstacles that they face when attempting to exercise their rights and duties vis-à-vis employment. The primary aim is to examine:

1. The barriers encountered during the labour office service provision process;
2. The overall levels of satisfaction in relation to labour office services.

A family member who was interviewed mentioned that without their payment and without a job it is very difficult to pay their rent, bills, or buy food for his family:

The welfare not always fulfil our needs and we are feeling scared. We are scared from Iraq and we still feel scared from welfare officers. [Asylum-seeker with a family].

Figure 17: Did you ever receive any information about your rights and obligations in relation to employment?

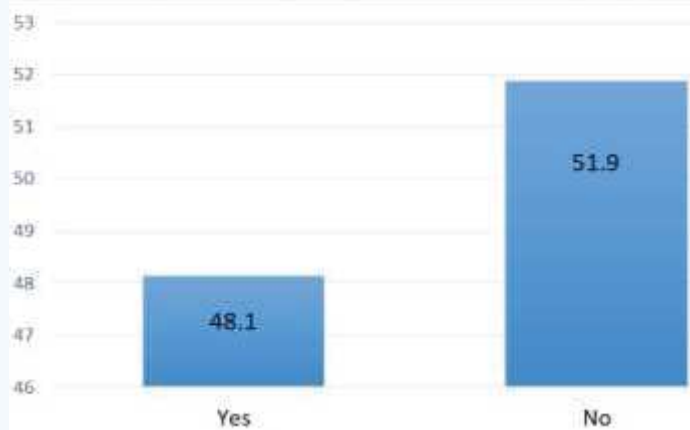


The findings in this section provide significant information about asylum-seekers' access to the labour market. Among the most significant findings is the lack of proper information about employment. A total of 40.6% of the interviewees answered that they had received information, whereas the majority of the participants (59.4%) were unaware about their rights and obligations regarding employment.

2.8.1. Are You Registered With the Labour Office?

When asked whether they were registered with the labour office, the majority of the participants (51.9%) responded 'No', while 48.1% answered 'Yes'. This can be explained in relation to the length of stay they in Cyprus. In addition, there is general confusion among

Figure 18: Are you registered with the the labour office?



asylum-seekers about their eligibility to access the labour office. According to the legislation, asylum-seekers are allowed to seek employment six months after submitting their asylum application. However, in practice there are various preventative obstacles, such as rejection from employers and time-consuming bureaucratic procedures.

2.8.2. Is it Difficult to Access the Labour Office?

A significant 40% of the study's participants faced some kind of difficulties when accessing the labour office. As shown in Table 15 below, it is evident that the main difficulties the participants face involved filling in application forms (50.6%), waiting for a response from the labour office (50.8%) and communicating because of language barriers (55%). Once again, communication is indicated as a major barrier and it should be examined as a main area of focus and concern.

Table 15: Difficulties accessing the labour office

	% who answered yes
Application (Filling forms, procedures)	50.6
Waiting for an answer (that you are allowed to work)	50.8
Communication (language)	55.0
Availability of labour officers	29.5

Furthermore, Table 16 below illustrates that participants indicated average to low satisfaction with the process of service delivery in the labour office, and they rated the attitudes of the

Table 16: Levels of satisfaction with the labour office

	<i>Answers in %</i>				
	1	2	3	4	5
To what degree are you satisfied with the services at the labour office?	26.1	26.1	30.7	12.9	4.2
How would you describe the attitude of the labour officers toward you?	22.3	17.7	36.4	16.3	7.4

Note. The scale that participants employed to answer the questions was the following: For the first question: 1 = Not at all, 2 = Little, 3 = Somewhat, 4 = Sufficiently, 5 = Very much, and for the second: 1 = Not good at all, 2 = Not good, 3 = Average, 4 = Very good, 5 = Extremely good

labour officers toward them as average. Although the majority of the respondents in the study did not have serious difficulties with labour officers, 52.2% of all respondents replied that they were not satisfied with the services provided. The major concern of 22.3% was that the labour officers' behaviour towards service users was not good at all.

The Public Employment Service was also criticized by asylum-seekers, some of whom shared their personal experiences:

The lady who is responsible for the asylum-seekers... I don't know sometimes she is rude... Once she even said, 'Why are you coming every day? You are not supposed to be here every day.'

Another person who went over there to ask for a job received a similarly negative response:

Why don't you find a job on your own?

Hidden racism and discrimination was also noticed:

Sometimes our colour is the problem to them. But I have to accept. I try to face my life. Yes, sometimes our colour is the problem. They don't give us attention.

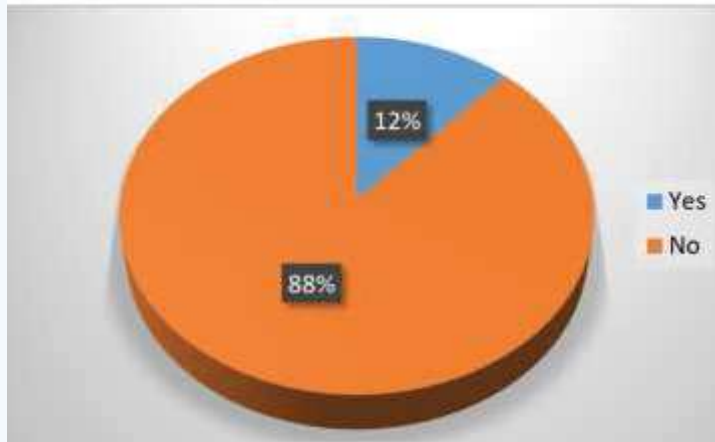
Some interviewees also raised concerns about the kind of jobs offered to them without consideration for the qualifications they may have. It is difficult for asylum-seekers to understand why the jobs they can apply for legally are limited to certain sectors only. One participant said:

I am electrician. How can I go to a farm (to work)? I don't understand.

2.8.3. Do you presently work?

At the time this research study was conducted, the vast majority of the eligible participants (88.3%) were unemployed. A very limited percentage (11.7%) of the participants answered that they had accessed the labour market. Overall, our findings suggest that participants faced severe difficulties in entering the labour market. The lack of transportation, inability to communicate, as well as the lack of interest from employers impede

Figure 19: Do you presently work?



asylum-seekers' access to the services offered by the labour office. As a consequence, many remain unemployed and they base their subsistence on the support they receive from the SWS. Yet, this support is insufficient and the asylum-seekers interviewed expressed the difficulties they have in securing their subsistence. These issues can be alleviated by taking measures that would rapidly assist asylum-seekers to join the labour market. In addition, the system could improve by creating and providing easy access to professional orientation courses. These courses would be designed to provide asylum-seekers with the necessary skills to participate effectively in the Cypriot labour market.

An NGO professional raised a valid point about how the first six months following an asylum-seekers' arrival could be used more meaningfully:

Going back to that for the first six months they cannot work. Within this time, training and employment programs could be offered. There are no such programs. After six months of what is done with the asylum service, they say that if they find work they have to leave Kofinou Centre regardless of their salary. Whether €250 or €500. Where will you go with that money? The other is that these six months, if there were some professional training to learn some things ... so they can then get into work areas if they do not have some basic knowledge. There is a huge gap in the employment issue.

In the same context, a public officer raised the importance of offering educational programmes:

Language learning may have to be made compulsory, as in other European countries. There may be things in language, skill issues, other European countries offering HE, or various training programs.

2.8.4. Eligible Employment Sectors

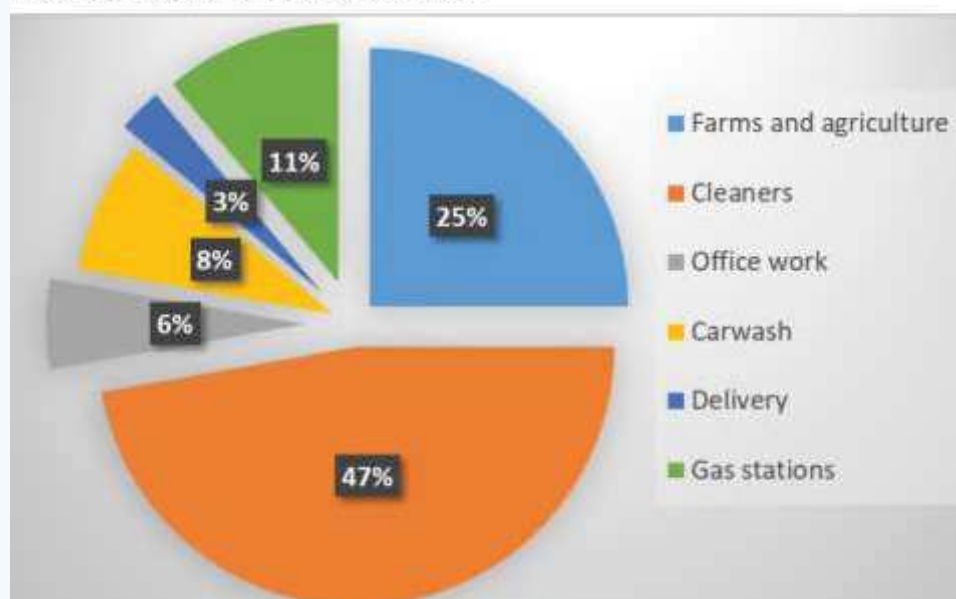
From the available employment sectors, the participants are mostly employed as cleaners (47.2%) and farmhands (25%). A very limited number from the sample have managed to find work in offices, at car washes and gas stations, or in delivery services.

Table 17: *Eligible employment sectors*

	% who answered yes		
	Total	Men	Women
Farms and agriculture	25.0	36.4	7.1
Cleaners	47.2	22.7	85.7
Office work	5.6	9.1	0
Carwash	8.3	13.6	0
Delivery	2.8	4.5	0
Gas stations	11.1	13.6	7.1

Farming and domestic work are not appealing to the Cypriot labour force, and perhaps that is the main reason that asylum-seekers are allowed to be employed in these specific sectors. However, because many of the asylum-seekers have attained high levels of education and skills before arriving in Cyprus, they can be employed in non-manual work sectors and contribute to the economy more productively. It is our recommendation that the system should provide asylum-seekers with additional opportunities to work in a broader range of sectors than the ones they are currently allowed access to.

Figure 20: *Eligible employment sectors*



In a similar vein, a public officer mentioned that restrictions to accessing employment should not exist:

I am a supporter of let the people to work... not have so many restrictions; I see many people who want to work, but cannot. [Public officer]

2.8.5. Average Income and Satisfaction of Needs

The average monthly income participants interviewed receive is approximately €386.59. According to the results in Table 18, a great number of participants (75.6%) could not fulfil their needs and were in a very difficult financial predicament. The restrictions that accompany asylum-seekers' legal status significantly delays the social inclusion process. It is important to note that by accessing the labour market, asylum-seekers will have the opportunity to interact with the local population; they will informally learn the language; they will gain self-confidence and most importantly they will not have to rely on social welfare benefits.

Table 18: *Monthly Income / Needs Satisfaction*

	<i>Answers in %</i>				
	1	2	3	4	5
How does your monthly income satisfy your overall needs?	55.4	20.1	18.0	3.6	2.9

Note. The scale that participants employed to answer the questions was the following: 1 = Not at all, 2 = Little, 3 = Somewhat, 4 = Sufficiently, 5 = Very much

Including asylum-seekers into the labour market is essential for them to adapt to life in the local community, as well as to maintain their dignity. A UNDP Report (2015) argues that although work increases the opportunities for their effective inclusion, the results tend to be poor, which was also confirmed by the interviewees. Employment remains perhaps the most underdeveloped as well as the most important aspect for asylum-seekers to improve their living conditions. The main challenges identified were as follows: legal and administrative barriers limiting or restricting access to the labour market; a lack of institutional support or poor resourcing of available support; low labour market demand (as a result of high unemployment in the country or a low demand for low-skilled labour); a lack of language skills; low level of education, as well as issues to do with the recognition of existing qualifications; insufficient social inclusion programmes; discrimination and poor cultural adjustment.

2.9. Legal Rights and Obligations

It was commonly acknowledged that asylum-seekers have to face frequent racial discrimination and social exclusion when trying to settle in Cyprus, but they must also try to navigate through a complicated administrative system that handles their registration in the system and the related support services. According to the study's participants, asylum-seekers must understand the administrative system and be prepared to wait months or even years to eventually receive their full status, which costs money that most of them do not have. People in this situation end up turning to charities and NGOs for material, legal, emotional and psychological help during this prolonged period of waiting.

Regarding the legal rights and obligations that accompany the legal status of asylum-seekers, our enquiry looks at the following main areas of concern:

1. Provision of accurate information
2. Sources of information
3. Barriers and difficulties

Table 19: *Awareness of legal rights*

	Answers in %				
	1	2	3	4	5
To what degree are you aware of your legal rights?	24.3	26.9	25.8	16.9	6.0

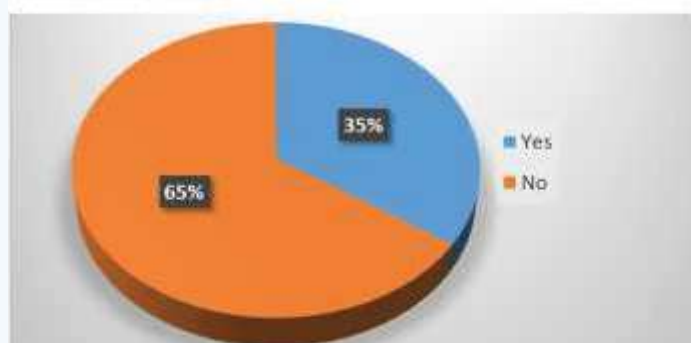
Note. The scale that participants employed to answer the questions was the following: 1 = Not at all, 2 = Little, 3 = Somewhat, 4 = Sufficiently, 5 = Very much

At first glance, the results are rather disappointing regarding participants utilizing the existing formal networks. Only a limited number of participants (6%) are fully aware of their legal rights. A large number of participants (51.2 %) are either a little or not at all informed about their legal rights and obligations.

2.9.1. Being Informed about Rights

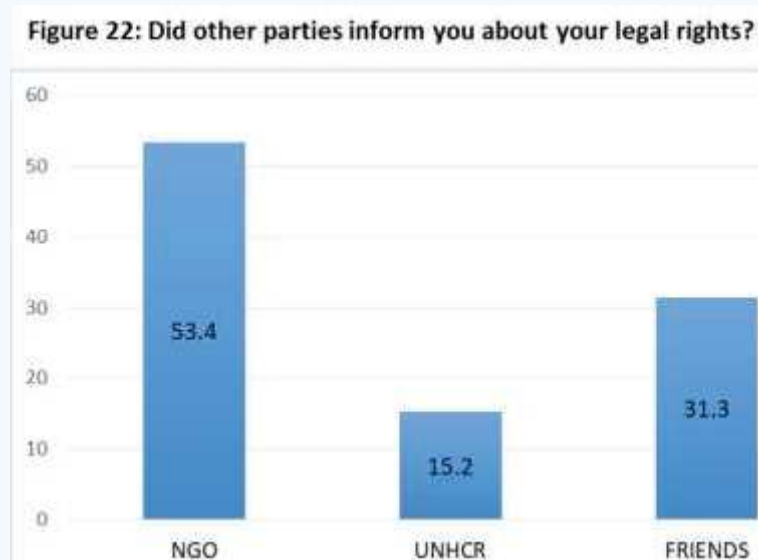
The majority of the interviewees (65.47%) replied that they were not informed about their legal rights from any governmental service. Conversely, only 34.5% received information on this topic. This is a significant indication that an intervention has to be made in this critical and sensitive area. When asylum-seekers arrive in Cyprus, they do not get accurate or adequate information from the state representatives regarding their legal rights.

Figure 21: Upon your arrival in Cyprus, did any public agencies inform you about your rights?



Sources of information about legal rights

Asylum-seekers interviewed cited NGOs as their main source of information regarding their legal rights (54.5%), as well as their friends (49.2%) and the UNHCR Office (22.5%). These significant findings indicate that informal networks are filling a major gap.



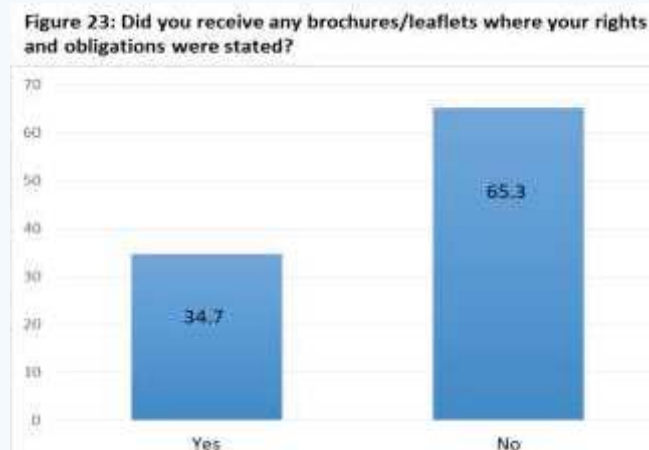
As shown in Table 20 below, participants indicated that they received information mostly about their legal rights (81.5%), housing (51%), employment (44%), and Greek lessons (41%). Notably, asylum-seekers received this important information from non-governmental resources: informal networks such as NGOs, and through word of mouth from friends.

Table 20: Provision of information about legal rights

<i>Information</i>	<i>% who answered yes</i>
Asylum Legal Rights	81.5
Health	45.0
Employment	43.9
Housing	50.9
Education	37.4
Social Benefits	35.1
Psycho-social support	33.9
Learning English/Greek Language	40.9

2.9.2. Information Leaflets about Rights and Obligations

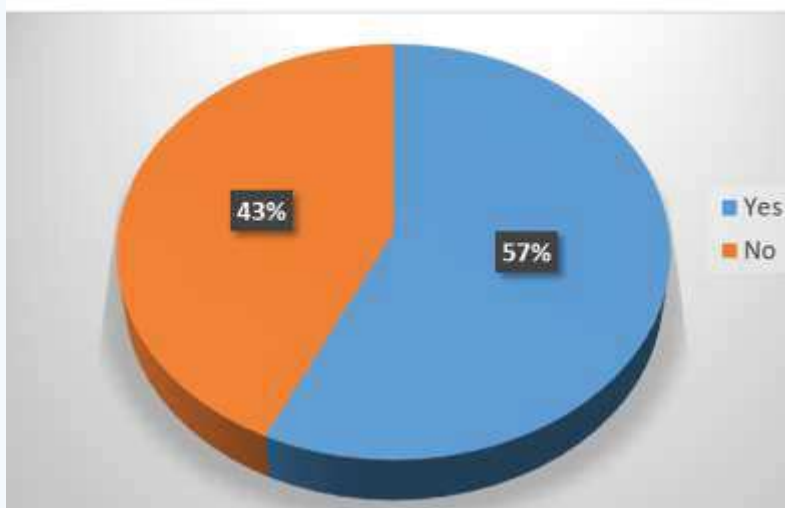
Formal governmental networks argue that information is available (e.g. leaflets); however the research indicates this is not the case. When asked whether they received any documents explaining their rights and obligations, 65.3% of asylum-seekers answered that they had not received any documents. Only 34.7% replied that they had been given informational brochures and leaflets.



2.9.3. Interview at the Asylum Service for Protection Status

When participants were asked if they had attended an interview at the Asylum Service for protection status, those who answered 'Yes' (57%) had been in Cyprus for an average of about two years and six months, while those who answered 'No' (43.2%) had been in Cyprus for an

Figure 24: Did you attend an interview at the asylum service for protection status?



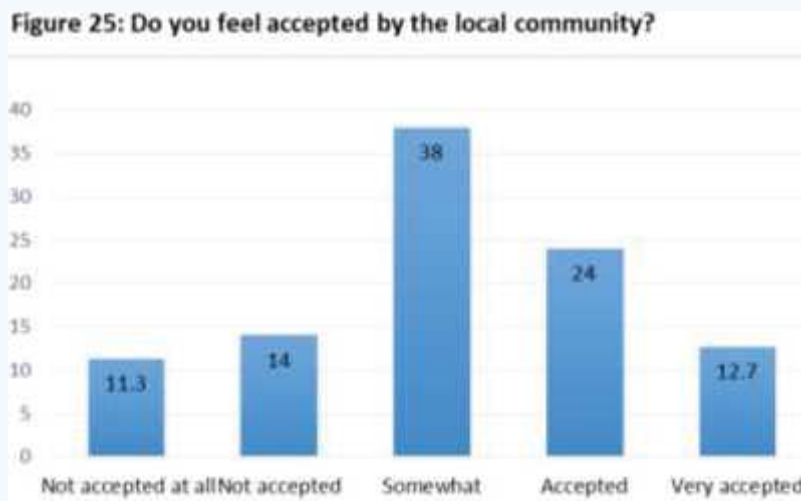
average of about two years and five months. The results demonstrate a significant delay. It is important to highlight that a large percentage (43%) of them have been asylum-seekers for approximately two and a half years. This finding constitutes a major concern, since this specific legal status, as already indicated, is associated with numerous restrictions and imposes a number of challenges. There

is not any definitive evidence that Cyprus has established a multilateral social inclusion system to assist asylum-seekers' temporary residence and at the same time to support their smooth transition into the local society if they are granted international protection.

To summarize, the results indicate a slow, bureaucratic system, through which a number of other consequences can be observed, such as frustration, poverty, negative feelings and increased expenditures for the State. Provision of information is an area that has been heavily criticized in recent years, and although better performance has been achieved, many issues remain. This is another area for policy planners to concentrate on to promote relative strategies for fast-track procedures.

2.10. Participation and Social Inclusion

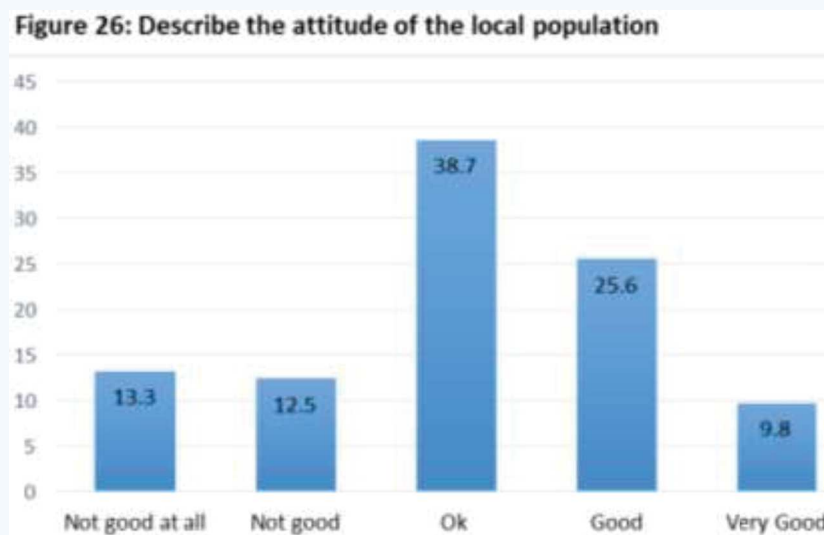
This section examines asylum-seekers' feelings, ideas and thoughts towards the local community, and the opportunities they have to interact with Cypriot people. The findings indicate that the perception of the research group is quite positive about the local community. Through interacting with locals, the participants experienced more positive feelings. In particular, 36% felt accepted and 38% had moderate feelings of acceptance. However, a significant percentage (25%) of the participants, which constitutes one-quarter of the research sample, did not share the same positive feelings.



One important contributing factor towards the positive feelings expressed might be the participants' frequent interaction with local NGOs. Additionally, there is currently a large-scale, EU co-funded project promoting equality and respect for differences, including skin colour, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Within the framework of this campaign, various activities have been organized in order to promote asylum-seekers' participation in and interaction with the local population.

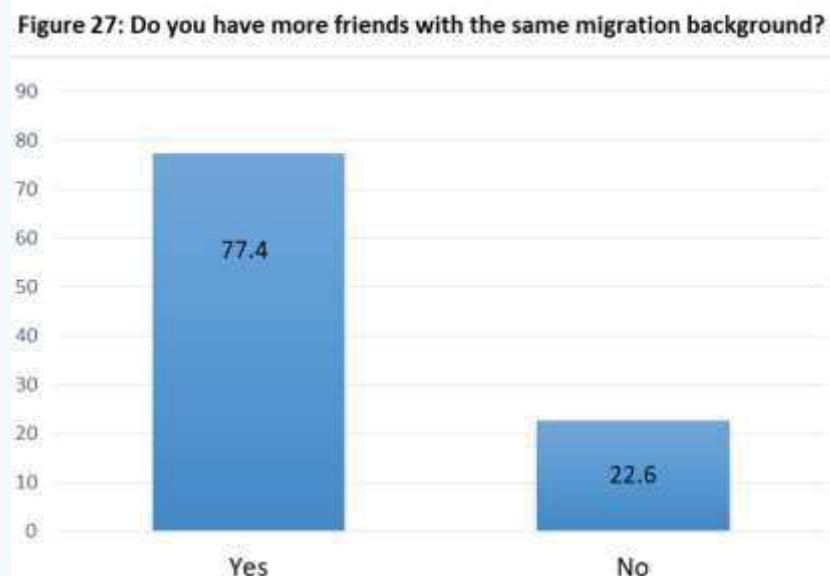
2.10.1. Attitudes of the Local Population

In a similar vein, participants were asked to share their feedback on the attitudes of the local population, based on their experience. The respondents said they found the local population had moderate to positive feelings towards them. The results illustrate that 35.4% (aggregation of answers 'good and very good') of the participants believed that the local population exhibits a somewhat positive attitude towards them.



2.10.2. Social Groups of Asylum-seekers

When asked if they had more friends from the same place of origin, the majority (77.4%) from the research group replied 'Yes', whereas only 22.6% replied 'No'.



the research group replied 'Yes', whereas only 22.6% replied 'No'. Although this needs further exploration, an option might be to employ people from the same regions as those that asylum-seekers originate from as cultural mediators within NGOs in order to strengthen the service provision process. For example, interpretation services could be delivered by trained professionals

who are recognized as refugees, and who have had similar experiences to the asylum-seekers' experiences. While some argue that objectivity might be at stake, nonetheless, with proper systematic training, it has been proven that interpreters can acquire the necessary skills to

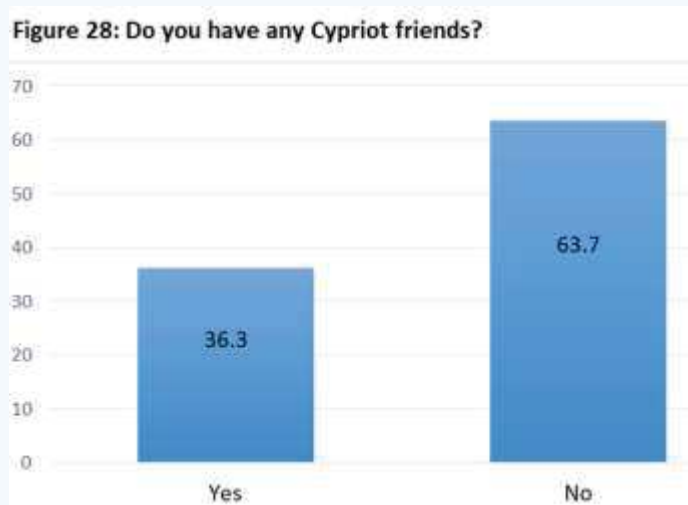
control their emotions, remain objective and simultaneously demonstrate techniques such as empathy in order to gain interviewees' trust.

When discussing the level of interaction with local people, the research participants admitted that it is generally limited or selective, although they feel that they are accepted by the people with whom they do communicate:

I feel very friendly and happy with them. They are very friendly, they treat me well. Sometimes we meet in the hospital or anywhere outside the camp, they are so generous people and friendly. (Asylum-seeker, single)

2.10.3. Friendships with Locals

When asked whether they have any Cypriot friends, just over one third (36.31%) of the research group replied 'Yes'. Even though the majority of participants (63.7%) have not made any Cypriot friends, there is a noticeable percentage of asylum-seekers who sought to create social networks with the local population.



One other factor that needs to be considered is to what extent the participants are willing and open to create social relations with cultures other than their own. It was observed that participants mostly choose to have more friends from the same cultural and ethnic background; for instance, an individual from Cameroon will more likely seek to befriend other Cameroonians.

Overall, the majority of asylum-seekers indicated that they did not have any Cypriot friends. One reason cited for this finding is that the current system lacks the mechanisms to provide asylum-seekers with opportunities for regular and meaningful social interactions with locals. In general, our findings suggest a lack of social inclusion policies, which may result in the social isolation of asylum-seekers.

It is apparent that due to the lack of an organized reception system, people feel safer living in areas where there is a higher proportion of people from their own or neighboring countries:

I live in area with high concentration of people from several African countries. But our neighbours are good. I don't have any problems with them. (Asylum-seeker, single)

2.10.4. Changes Required for Adapting to Life in Cyprus

A major aspect to consider when planning strategies to improve the reception conditions of asylum-seekers is the obstacle of communication. As seen in Table 21 below, the majority of the participants (81%) indicated that learning Greek is the most important factor that will ease and facilitate their ability to participate more actively and meaningfully in life in Cyprus.

Table 21: Changes required while adapting to the community

	% who answered yes
Learning the language	80.9
Following the new laws and rules	52.9
Getting accustomed to the local food	16.4
Befriending Cypriots	44.3
Getting Cypriot citizenship	63.2
Changing your name to a Greek one	11.1

As shown in Table 21, a relatively large number of participants (53%) said that being law-abiding citizens and befriending Cypriots (44%) were also important factors in feeling accepted and adapting to life in Cyprus. However, a significant number of respondents (63%) said they considered getting Cypriot citizenship as being an important factor in adapting to life in Cyprus.

With respect to social inclusion and participation into the local community, our results suggest that the areas needing improvement are events to bring the local population in contact with asylum-seekers and refugees; access to the labour market; access to education and vocational training; access to a wider variety of jobs and orientation and language courses to assist with becoming familiarized with Cypriot culture and the Greek language.

In the interviews, participants expressed a combination of disappointment and frustration as a result of the lack of participation and social inclusion opportunities available:

It's like they [the government] make their dreams and destiny to die down. I would like the government to ingrate us into the system. (Asylum-seeker with family)

Regarding the statement 'Cyprus has a well-organized system concerning asylum-seekers', 47% of the respondents expressed a negative opinion, and only 8.4% of the respondents gave a positive answer.

Public officers also agreed with the lack of mechanisms for social inclusion:

I think the issue of integration is a little untouchable. I do not think there are any particular programs for membership. We rely on NGOs. The vacuum is serious. [Public officer]

Another interviewee acknowledged that there is a gap in planning for the inclusion of asylum-seekers and refugees into the local society:

I think that we are fully behind in the integration of adults, whether individuals, families or couples. And there are also bad steps on the part of the state because there are no integration processes, pushing them to the benefits rather than to the labour market. We need a lot of work on this area. [Public officer]

These statements illustrate the current situation regarding the way the state handles this important matter. The issue of the inclusion of applicants of international protection seems not to be a priority of the State at the moment, although most of the participants said that there is no strategic plan for it. However, it is not only the government which has a moral and legal obligation to support asylum-seekers' participation into society; employers, charities, associations, community-based organizations and trade unions all have a role to play as well. For example, various stakeholders could organize mentorship programmes, developing a method to appraise asylum-seekers' skills, language training, or common cultural activities.

In contrast, one professional interviewed believes that a certain level of inclusion has been achieved:

They do not live isolated. They live mixed. Do you see ghettos anywhere? There is no such thing. No group is socially excluded. Take for example your neighborhood, your apartment building, the place you are in; take the proportion of the population. I think it is easy to reach a conclusion. That is, we see who will deliver the food you ordered, who serves us in restaurants and shops, i.e. society, you will see them everywhere, and you will not see locals working in these areas. I think this is one of the elements of social inclusion. [Public officer]

An asylum-seeker who has recently applied for asylum in Cyprus suggested that opportunities should be given to talented, educated and skilled asylum-seekers:

I have some friends who are vets, some are nurses. I was an English teacher in my country. The government should give an open room to asylum-seekers to exploit their talents, their knowledge. [Asylum-seeker, single]

Similar feelings were also expressed by both groups of interviewees, which leads to the conclusion that if the State decides to review which sectors asylum-seekers are allowed to work in, many of them will grasp those opportunities to begin rebuilding their lives, becoming self-sufficient and stop depending on social benefits.

In a similar vein, another asylum-seeker interviewed argued about the necessity of providing asylum-seekers with additional opportunities:

If the system can integrate asylum-seekers they could boost the economy, the development of the country. Many asylum-seekers are out there, have a lot of potential. Give them the chance to achieve their goals. [Asylum-seeker, single]

There is agreement among professionals and asylum-seekers about the difficulties the latter group faces. Although some negative voices still exist, it is important to note that both groups perceive asylum-seekers' living conditions as very difficult.

Although some professionals acknowledged that there are dishonest asylum-seekers who merely exploit the system, this is not the norm for most asylum-seekers, and those interviewed asked for understanding and better evaluation by governmental agencies. A serious concern expressed by some respondents in this study was that they were not treated as Palestinians because they had come from Iraq, although they claimed that all their documents verify their nationality. There were instances when they felt helpless and asked for greater understanding from the Cypriot authorities:

We worry about the destiny and the rights of our children. We are getting old; we don't worry about our future. [Asylum-seeker with family]

Similar feelings were also expressed by single asylum-seekers:

I do not know my future. Maybe tomorrow, in one month they tell me go outside Cyprus. [Asylum-seeker, single]

It also became evident that there was a certain amount of ignorance among asylum-seekers in Cyprus regarding their rights and their obligations or how the system in Cyprus works in general; asylum-seekers are unaware for example that that Cypriot citizens also receive social welfare cheques late, and it is not a matter of discrimination but rather of bureaucratic procedures within the various government agencies.

2.11. Conclusions

A wide ranges of barriers and living difficulties were identified within the research fieldwork. First and foremost, asylum-seekers are influenced to a great extent by the social welfare system, which the State implements. This system was developed during the recent financial crisis, which has coincided with political and institutional tensions increasing as the victims of wars and massacres have been forced to flee, and seek to build their lives anew in the EU. As Sainsbury (2006) states, an "immigration policy regime" or "incorporation regime" regulates the inclusion in, or exclusion of asylum-seekers from society. It "*consists of rules and norms that govern immigrants' possibilities to become a citizen, to acquire residence and work permits, and to participate in economic, cultural and political life.*" (Sainsbury 2006, 230).

The social welfare office's current role during the reception process for asylum-seekers can be characterized as ambiguous and inadequate, while their social interventions rather contradict their norms and values. Even though their mission is to provide psycho-social support and to enhance the well-being of asylum-seekers, the provision of services towards asylum-seekers leaves much room for improvement. It appears that the interviewed population faces great difficulties in accessing social welfare services. The results raise major concerns about the effectiveness of the social welfare services in terms of the behavior of staff, and their approach towards asylum-seekers.

Another important finding from the results is the lack of a clear strategy in terms of the accommodation of asylum-seekers. Most asylum-seekers live in small, overcrowded houses, apartments and rooms due to their limited financial resources. As mentioned above, the voucher system and emergency financial support are inadequate to satisfy asylum-seekers' accommodation needs. In particular, in order to save money, asylum-seekers choose to share rent with others. Therefore, on average, three participants share a two-bedroom house. Stories were also noted about temporary first accommodation within informal social networks in an attempt not to stay on the streets, due to the lack on behalf of the state to secure proper accommodation.

It was also clearly identified that the temporary Reception Centre at Kofinou cannot accommodate the numbers of asylum-seekers present on the island, never mind meet their psycho-social needs. According to the results, one could argue that it has failed to achieve its purpose as a Reception Centre. A noteworthy concern is the fact that the Centre is not an attractive residence compared to other available accommodation options. The results have shown that the majority of participants stayed at the Reception Centre only after they exhausted all other possibilities. Even more concerning is the fact that the term 'temporary' does not apply: a high percentage of participants have been residing at the Centre for one or more years. Furthermore, the dreadful living conditions, its isolated geographical location, the non-child-friendly environment and the lack of available professional support causes asylum-seekers to look for alternative accommodation elsewhere.

Another conclusion with long-term ramifications is the sustained restriction of labour market access for asylum-seekers, who must wait at least six months before applying for jobs and receive very little benefits during that time, and even once they become gainfully employed. The vast majority of the interviewed population does not work, and there is confusion in general regarding their rights and eligibility to access the labour market. According to the legislation, asylum-seekers are allowed to be employed six months after they initially submit their asylum application. However, in practice there are various obstacles, such as communication barriers, rejection from employers and time-consuming bureaucratic procedures. Other obstacles include potential employers' lack of knowledge on their rights; insufficient language skills; lack of certificates and diplomas to certify specialized skills and residence at the Kofinou Reception Centre, which is located in a remote area with few job opportunities and limited transport and access to other areas.

The level of services provided to asylum-seekers also contributes to the low quality of life participants described throughout the study. Furthermore, interviewees said that even though they did not face any major difficulties accessing the labour office, they are not satisfied with the services they receive there. Their major concern is the negative attitude and behavior of the labour officers towards asylum-seekers. Interviewees also demanded that more employment sectors be available to them. A number from the sample have attained high education levels before being forced to flee, but they cannot use their knowledge to benefit themselves, their families and the country in which they are now residing. Not having the right to work makes asylum-seekers reliant on State welfare, which only confirms public

stereotypes that asylum-seekers are simply a drain on the public resources and do not contribute to society (Gibney 2011). Granting earlier access to the labour market would promote asylum-seekers' social inclusion, dignity and self-reliance, preserve their existing skills and give them a head start in the integration process, should they be granted refugee status. Furthermore, for the host Cypriot society, more employed asylum-seekers would mean increased tax revenues, saving public expenses of accommodating and supporting them, and reduced illegal work practices (UNHCR 2011).

Practical restrictions were also identified in accessing healthcare. Even though participants expressed positive thinking regarding their access to and quality of healthcare services, they pointed to a significant obstacle, which is related to the inability to communicate in Greek, a factor that constitutes a major challenge when participants interact with healthcare professionals. The lack of interpretation services at hospitals creates major obstacles during the service delivery process.

Moreover, the interview analysis reveals that although there are established laws and regulations (at both national and EU levels) on immigration issues, it seems that asylum-seekers are not aware of them and government officials are, for some reason, reluctant to disclose the necessary information. As a result, many asylum-seekers have to go through unofficial networks of friends to learn about their rights and obligations in Cyprus. However, this situation may cause them to take up to five months to be able to gain access to basic services. In addition, delays in service provision could mean they are without financial assistance or access to healthcare for several months. Cultural barriers were identified to be related to diverse ways of viewing difficulties and the role of the care providers and public services vis-à-vis asylum-seekers. Furthermore, two structural barriers were mentioned more than once. First, services dealing with asylum-seekers' specific needs were considered inadequate, particularly the availability of information about their rights and the proper support for asylum-seekers to rebuild their lives. Second, the lack of access to employment and education causes asylum-seekers to be fully dependent on benefits and philanthropy. In the short term, thousands of asylum-seekers are impoverished or nearly destitute because they receive the bare minimum, or less than the bare minimum, of social benefits.

To conclude, even though major improvements have been made to asylum-seekers' social inclusion process, the results indicate that Cyprus has not managed to establish an effective system to assist and support asylum-seekers while they await decisions on their legal status. On the contrary, the system can be characterized as slow and bureaucratic, out of which many other consequences arise, such as frustration, poverty and negative feelings. It is apparent that the majority of participants are confronted daily with serious difficulties and barriers to sustaining their livelihoods.

The interpretation of both the findings and interviewees' discussions can be used to enrich a conversation on developing concrete proposals for asylum policy planning and daily practice. These findings will be used in the next chapter to construct a roadmap for the participation and social inclusion of asylum-seekers living in Cyprus.

Chapter 3: The Way Forward

This chapter presents a number of policy recommendations in order to fulfil the paradigm-shift from a reactive to a proactive national asylum policy. The recommendations comprise a combination of measures, to be further discussed by several stakeholders, which would attempt to raise a multidimensional intervention. The distinct types of entities are classified into six main categories:

- Ministerial level;
- Public services at the departmental level;
- Voluntary organizations: any NGO and formal or informal group that has a special interest in helping the target group;
- Local authorities: municipalities and communities that are responsible to provide an extensive range of public services in pre-defined geographic areas;
- Beneficiaries: the asylum-seekers themselves as human capital utilizing their own resources.

It is anticipated that a coherent and effective national asylum policy, following an open public consultation, would be the most desirable option. However, this is difficult to achieve given the current political climate and prevailing social conditions. Thus, smaller bottom-up steps at the local level in combination with top-down EU-level efforts may be a more pragmatic approach that might eventually lead to an effective, proactive and fair national asylum policy in the future.

The policy recommendations stemming from the present study are clustered in seven overarching themes:

- Policy review and asylum management;
- Information and communication;
- Social assistance;
- Expansion of employment policy system;
- Introduction of housing policy;
- Increase of educational and VET opportunities;
- Coordination and inter-agency collaboration.

Each key stakeholder must reflect on the above main areas and react to the current conditions by adopting a position that a more effective reception and inclusion strategy could be achieved. It is essential to begin a review and monitoring process to assess the satisfaction of the beneficiaries as well as to evaluate the services themselves. Open, reflective dialogue and assessment exercises have to be initiated as these can set the parameters for later innovations and thus significantly contribute to the shaping of policy on asylum and migration.

Although Cyprus has adopted the notion that the participation and inclusion of immigrants into Cypriot society should be a clear active path, the entire process is still problematic. Such

changes in thinking and in the decision-making model would result in better opportunities to improve the processes that shape the asylum and migration landscape in Cyprus.

The recommendations point to a number of dimensions which, together, constitute a supportive network approach.

1. Policy Review and Asylum Management

1.1. Ministerial level

- Comprehensively review the entire reception process for asylum-seekers based on impact assessment.
- Review the existing procedural difficulties relating to the processing of asylum applications.
- Update the national strategic plan for asylum and migration based on contemporary issues.
- Involve a wide range of experts in reshaping the asylum system.
- Introduce quality assurance mechanisms for existing procedures, in particular those related to the asylum application process and the provision of material conditions.
- Adhere to EU rules.

1.2. Public Services (Departmental level)

- Assess the effectiveness of existing asylum procedures and rules as they are followed at the departmental level, based on thorough impact assessments.
- Assess the practical implications of regularly modifying asylum rules.
- Develop a comprehensive operational plan for the Asylum Reception Centre.
- Employ a management team to operate the Asylum Reception Centre, based on goals, criteria and objectives achieved.

1.3. Voluntary Organizations

- Review and facilitate the matching of needs, demands and available services.
- Undertake a mediator role between asylum-seekers and the state.
- Understand and critically interpret the framework and standards set out by the State aiming to improve them for the benefit of asylum-seekers.
- Identify the principal protection challenges in their respective area of interest and suggest initiatives that could be made at national and/or regional levels.
- Introduce services that enable asylum-seekers to self-organize and develop their own sources of support.

1.4. Local Authorities

- Adopt an urban design strategy to place/relocate asylum-seekers within the local community.
- Provide feedback and concrete proposals to the central government about the living conditions of asylum-seekers in their areas, along with any segregation phenomena.
- Prevent refugees' segregation in certain neighbourhoods or areas.
- Prioritise support to vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied children, asylum-seekers with mental and physical health issues, women, single parents and the elderly.
- Provide services through community organizations, which will include asylum-seekers as facilitators and decision-makers.

1.5 Beneficiaries

- Seek for training and technical support to create associations and groups to advocate for their rights.
- Seek for advocacy training sessions to be aware of their rights and set up common forms for streamlined processes and complaints.
- Undertake a more meaningful role in organizing themselves and devising community-based solutions.

2. Information and Communication

2.1. Ministerial level

- Introduce relevant legislation to secure efficient provision of information and communication channels with the relevant stakeholders and beneficiaries.
- Introduce transparency systems for information provision.
- Set up a mechanism to ensure quality of interpretation services and qualified interpreters whose services will afterwards be used at asylum interviews.
- Set up electronic platform, where all relevant information for asylum-seekers regarding provision of benefits and services will be displayed (and regularly updated) in several languages.
- Work closely with transit countries having as a priority the prevention of the operation of people-smuggling networks.

2.2. Public Services (Departmental level)

- Introduce transparency about asylum procedures, and explain them in writing in different languages.

- Introduce an information mechanism through which all asylum-seekers will receive the same information about their legal rights and obligations through official channels upon their arrival in Cyprus in a format and language they are able to understand.
- Enhance communication and sharing of information with various stakeholders.
- Set up collaborative networks with the participation of statutory and non-statutory organizations and lead professionals.
- Set up interpretation services to ensure proper communication between the applicant and the authorities at every step of the process, including application, examination, and appeal stages.
- Employ interpreters on a permanent basis at various government agencies, including the labour offices, SWS offices, and hospitals who speak languages that asylum-seekers are able to understand and communicate in.
- Train interpreters or set up an accreditation system for them.
- Review the existing operational procedures in the area of access to information and legal assistance.
- Keep detailed track of the identities of asylum-seekers in the country to introduce relevant intercultural trainings for professionals.

2.3. Voluntary Organizations

- Activate and train people to work as interpreters and cultural mediators for new arrivals.
- Explore the idea of a collaborative network in which organizations share ideas and undertake different implementation actions towards a comprehensive supportive network.
- Set up advocacy services for asylum-seekers.
- Advocate for asylum-seekers' rights to access information in various public departments.
- Identify and protect the principal data protection challenges for asylum-seekers.
- Offer English and Greek courses all year around to improve the level of communication with the local population.

2.4. Local Authorities

- Set up local collaborative networks to inform and assist asylum-seekers in need.
- Set up a virtual space where information about asylum and migration issues is available in various languages. Otherwise they can point to UNHCR's 'HELP' platform, <http://help.unhcr.org/cyprus>
- Offer English and Greek courses to enhance the level of communication with the local population.

2.5. Beneficiaries

- Volunteers to receive training to become appropriate interpreters and cultural mediators.
- Establish formal and informal groups to welcome and support newcomers by providing accurate and useful information.

3. Material Support and Social Assistance

3.1. Ministerial level

- Review the effectiveness and social impact of the heavily criticised voucher system, as it cannot meet asylum-seekers' most basic monthly needs.
- Review the effectiveness of the existing system of the provision of social assistance.
- Introduce public dialogue for the implementation of reception and social inclusion processes for asylum-seekers.
- Construct a strategic plan for the active social inclusion of asylum-seekers.
- Introduce a transparent system with simplified procedures, so the beneficiaries will be aware of the kind and quantity of support they will receive.

3.2. Public Services (Departmental level)

- Review the policy of voucher systems in specified shops (location of stores, higher prices and limited types of available items to purchase).
- Establish an appropriate mechanism to systematically issue the coupons on a specific monthly date.
- Provide comprehensive support to new arrivals; provide humane service, mindful of fulfilling duty of care.
- Set up an Independent Legal Aid organisation to support asylum-seekers' rights.
- Provide appropriate psycho-social support to handle current difficulties and support asylum-seekers to transition into living in the local society within a few months of arrival.
- Provide services for the treatment and rehabilitation of torture and trauma survivors.
- Provide psycho-social support services for asylum-seekers living in the community.

3.3. Voluntary Organizations

- Promote effective communication, including readily available and effective interpretation services, with an understanding of both the cultural and service contexts.
- Advocate to increase individuals' choices and access to appropriate services so as to empower them.

- Define roles and levels of participation as providers of specific integrated actions for asylum-seekers.
- Set up social inclusion activities, such as multicultural events and skills acquisition workshops.
- Promote and support legal assistance as independent organizations.
- Explore the option of establishing a Legal Aid Hotline to provide legal information, referral to other relevant services and appointments for face-to-face legal service provision.
- Provide assistance in lodging complaints for unreasonable delays in the process of examining asylum applications.

3.4. Local Authorities

- Define and clarify roles as service providers for the material support and social assistance.
- Develop ‘mainstream’ support services independently of short-term funding.
- Set up local information points to guide the beneficiaries for different services they may require.
- Set up mechanisms to link ‘personal integration’ with measures that promote wider ‘community cohesion’. An example could be involving both long-term residents and newcomers in drawing together and implementing a ‘community support plan’.
- Provide a community space, free of charge, where different social groups and migrant communities can interact.
- Develop local integration policy and inclusion programmes for asylum-seekers.

3.5. Beneficiaries

- Develop formal and informal social networks to assist newcomers
- Create migrant community organisations to advocate and assist the improvement of quality of services provided.

3.6. Asylum Reception Centre at Kofinou

- Employ management quality assurance criteria for the Centre’s daily operation.
- Employ a qualified management team to operate the Centre.
- Review the concentration of population to an accepted minimum space, where common open space is limited.
- Have the Reception Centre function as an information, training and transitional facility to enable asylum-seekers to learn about daily life in local community settings in terms of jobs and accommodation, as well as about social welfare benefits, language skills, vocational skills and legal rights and responsibilities.

- Set up short vocational courses to help prepare asylum-seekers to enter the labour market.
- Engage suitably qualified persons to conduct a nutrition audit to ensure that the food served at the Reception Centre meets the required standards for all, including children, pregnant and breastfeeding women, and the needs of those with medical conditions, such as diabetes.
- Improve the Centre's hygiene conditions in collaboration with the residents.
- Set up a sports facility area.
- Set up additional activities for children (e.g. homework club, art club, sports club).
- Review the eligibility criteria for the Reception Centre to maintain a friendly environment for all residents, with the particular needs of families and children in mind.

4. Expansion of Employment Policy System

4.1. Ministerial level

- Review the sectors of economic activity in which asylum-seekers are allowed to work, based on national workforce reports and labour needs.
- Review the waiting time from when asylum-seekers submit their asylum application to when they are allowed to work; decrease the period to one month.
- Review the possibility of initiating subsidized working positions for asylum-seekers to gain work experience in the Cypriot environment.
- Introduce publicly funded not-for-profit jobs which can bring symbolic returns to the society.

4.2. Public Services (Departmental level)

- Simplify the registration procedures at labour offices.
- Translate the necessary employment forms into languages other than English and Greek.
- Introduce vocational short courses for asylum-seekers who are waiting for their applications to be processed.
- Introduce qualification recognition processes.
- Introduce flexible skills assessment and possibilities for modular qualifications.
- Subsidize jobs for asylum-seekers combined with schemes such as language tuition, skills development and job application training.
- Offer collaborative services at multiple locations and from multiple agencies.

4.3. Voluntary Organizations

- Inform asylum-seekers about employment opportunities.

- Set up short courses giving support for job interview preparation and transition into the Cypriot work environment.
- Set up a database for matching employers with potential asylum-seeker employees³.
- Introduce social labour jobs for asylum-seekers.

4.4. Local Authorities

- Develop a comprehensive plan for employing asylum-seekers in several sectors within the municipalities; initiate entrepreneurship schemes.
- Create social labour jobs for asylum-seekers.
- Create subsidized jobs which will be combined with schemes such as language tuition, skills development and job application training.
- Set up short vocational orientation courses.

4.5. Beneficiaries

- Advocate for the introduction of both short- and long-term professional training courses to develop skills and expertise that will allow asylum-seekers to enter into the work-force.
- Participate in several training courses to gain new technical and soft skills that are required to seek for a job.
- Advocate for the commitment of public and voluntary organisations to the well-being of asylum-seekers.

5. Introduction of Housing policy

5.1. Ministerial level

- Develop early warning housing capacities to prepare adequate space for newcomers.
- Increase the current monthly amount for rent of €100 to cover the minimum standards for decent and humane shelter; an immediate review is necessary to align housing benefits with market prices.
- Financial assistance should go beyond humanitarian aid and seek to create incentives for both asylum-seekers and the local population. Strategic investments in the areas where asylum-seekers are hosted can be mutually beneficial.
- Ensure minimal living conditions and avoid marginalizing the target group by actively involving social actors and municipalities.

³ A very good example is the mobile-friendly website of UNHCR, 'HelpRefugeesWork, which attempts to assist job-seeking refugees and potential employers to come into contact with one another for the purpose of finding vocational training opportunities and work opportunities.

- Introduce council housing schemes in collaboration with local municipalities.
- Create a system of population distribution quotas for every municipality and local community in Cyprus as seen in the examples of Sweden and Finland within a context of social inclusion in order to avoid ghettoization in certain urban areas.
- Review the concentration of population to an accepted minimum space, where common open space is limited.

5.2. Public Services (Departmental level)

- Develop a monitoring mechanism to calculate the housing needs for asylum-seekers.
- Simplify the registration procedures for housing of asylum-seekers.
- Set up incentives for both the local authorities and private sector to build social houses for people in vulnerable conditions.
- Initiate schemes that allow the long-term renting of buildings/flats for asylum-seekers.

5.3. Voluntary Organizations

- Set up fora and platforms with information of available accommodation for asylum-seekers.
- Organise groups of local volunteers to search for available accommodation for asylum-seekers.
- Advocate for asylum-seekers' rights to decent and humane accommodation.

5.4. Local Authorities

- Introduce a housing policy for asylum-seekers.
- Review alternative funding schemes from both national and European funds that can assist the development of accommodation in a long-term urban development plan.
- Adopt an urban design strategy to relocate asylum-seekers within the communities.
- Provide a community space, free of charge, where different social groups and migrant communities can interact.
- Design and implement social inclusion activities for asylum-seekers.
- Prevent refugees' segregation in certain neighbourhoods or areas.
- Adopt an urban design strategy to relocate asylum-seekers within the communities.
- Prioritise support to vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied children, asylum-seekers with mental and physical health issues, women, single parents and the elderly.

5.5. Beneficiaries

- Self-organise to provide information about available accommodation facilities.
- Advocate for humane and appropriate accommodation conditions.

6. Increase of Educational and VET Opportunities

6.1. Ministerial level

- Comprehensively review existing procedural difficulties in creating different age categories in the national educational system.
- Redesign the education process for asylum-seekers to learn Greek throughout the year.
- Support educational initiatives in Adult Education.
- Have mandatory Greek and English courses during the first six months of arrival in Cyprus, to develop a moderate level of language skills.
- Introduce VET policy scheme for asylum-seekers based on market needs and cultural sensitivity.
- Provide subsidized educational opportunities to those who are interested in continuing their tertiary education. For example, UNHCR and the University of Nicosia have recently signed an MoU to provide increased opportunities for refugees to access tertiary education.⁴

6.2. Public Services (Departmental level)

- Introduce quality assurance systems and monitoring mechanisms for learning achievements of asylum-seekers.
- Ensure dissemination of information about education opportunities in various languages.
- Train teachers in Greek as a second language instruction.
- Place refugee teachers/teaching assistants in classrooms to support those pupils with language and interpretation needs.
- Keep detailed track of asylum-seekers' registration and early dropout rates.
- Set up summer school induction courses.
- **Home-school liaison:** Create a position or mechanism which will link the school with the parents and support them to seek proper education for their children.
- **Support Teachers:** Place refugee teachers/teaching assistants in classrooms from the same linguistic and cultural backgrounds as new asylum-seeking pupils coming into a school.

⁴ UNHCR and the University of Nicosia Conclude a Partnership Agreement, available online at: <https://goo.gl/KfAf8e>, and at <http://bit.ly/2GkMFfp>

- **Emotional support:** Asylum-seeking children need to feel safe and to be supported in getting settled in school with the involvement a dedicated expert staff.⁵
- **‘Friendly’ school environment:** Effectively monitor and address racism and bullying; schools must maintain an ethos of inclusion, respect, and diversity built into the curriculum.
- **Welcoming schools:** Ensure good welcoming and induction programmes, even mid-way through the year, as well as afternoon activities and adult education courses.
- Establish a mechanism to accredit prior and experiential learning.
- Introduce VET programmes in combination with language learning.

6.3. Voluntary Organizations

- Assist asylum-seekers and refugee families on the school admission process.
- Advocate for persons who can liaise between home and school.
- Advocate for the necessity for all asylum-seekers to be taught Greek.
- Support parents to register their children in schools during the first period of arrival.
- Set up homework support clubs for the children, ideally in mixed groups with local children.

6.4. Local Authorities

- Create a mechanism for advising and assisting asylum-seekers and refugee families on the school admission process.
- Support children with afternoon activities and homework clubs.
- Set up Greek and English courses for asylum-seekers at different levels.
- Introduce courses focused on Cypriot culture and civilization.

6.5. Beneficiaries

- Act as mediators among families and the school.
- Involve long-term migrant residents from similar background to help students with homework
- Undertake initiatives to organise schools lessons in the native language of children

⁵ UNHCR Cyprus’ report gives a cohesive set of suggestions and proposals on how to improve the educational integration of refugees in Cyprus. See Refugee Education in Cyprus: Challenges and Opportunities, available online at: <https://bit.ly/2GAGwMD> (accessed on 23/03/2018)

7. Coordination and Interagency Collaboration

7.1. Ministerial level

- Comprehensively review existing procedural difficulties in creating different age categories in the national educational system.
- Establish a special sector or department which will be responsible for campaigns on the benefits of integrating asylum-seekers into local society.
- Amend legislation to consider collaborative efforts among various stakeholders as compulsory.
- Give appropriate levels of funding to NGOs to enable them to provide comprehensive and continuous quality services.
- Promote a bottom-up open discussion and shared responsibilities and programmes.

7.2. Public Services (Departmental level)

- Establish consultation processes with various stakeholders.
- Sign MoU with a range of stakeholders based on interagency protocols.
- Provide extensive training to social care professionals with emphasis on cultural issues.
- Design and implement coordinated efforts which will be published and disseminated across a wide audience.
- Employ methods for engaging with and involving a diverse range of asylum-seekers to develop appropriate services.

7.3. Voluntary Organizations

- Advocate for asylum-seekers' equality and diversity and put measures in place to ensure that the group receives a fair and just response.
- Promote policies for social inclusion and support the self-sufficiency of asylum-seekers.

7.4. Local Authorities

- Organise local collaborative networks.

7.5. Beneficiaries

- Engage and work in partnership with local community and/or NGO organizations to assist newcomers to understand the norms of local societies.

Appendices

Table A1: Beneficiaries' scores across different cities

<i>Questions</i>	<i>Nicosia</i>	<i>Larnaca</i>	<i>Limassol</i>	<i>Paphos</i>
	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)	M(SD)
To what extent are you satisfied with the coupon system?	2.36 (1.17)	2.39 (1.31)	2.70 (1.09)	2.33 (1.0)
Do you receive the coupons on a steady monthly basis?	2.76 (1.47)	3.41 (1.54)	2.97 (1.28)	2.69 (1.30)
Are you satisfied with the quantity of the products you get?	2.28 (1.16)	2.22 (1.41)	2.69 (1.19)	2.38 (1.12)
Are you satisfied with the quality of the products you get?	2.23 (1.08)	2.27 (1.35)	2.63 (1.10)	2.70 (1.18)
Does the coupon system allow you to choose what kind of food or products you want?	2.46 (1.38)	2.37 (1.54)	2.0 (1.54)	2.97 (1.42)
Do you have to pay extra money in cash on top of coupons?	2.32 (1.51)	2.59 (1.11)	2.72 (1.33)	2.86 (1.59)
Do you feel embarrassed to use them?	2.94 (1.62)	3.55 (1.64)	2.51 (1.30)	2.50 (1.54)
Are there certain places you would not use them?	3.67 (1.43)	4.08 (1.53)	2.97 (1.42)	3.2 (1.56)

Note: The mean is denoted as 'M' and the standard deviation as 'SD.'

The table above provides an overview of the average (M) and the standard deviation (SD) in relation to beneficiaries' overall satisfaction for this particular service provision.

Table A2: Elements at the Kofinou Reception Centre

	<i>1-6 months</i>	<i>6-12 months</i>	<i>1 year or more</i>
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Buildings	3.37 (1.24)	4.42 (1.17)	4.11 (1.30)
Room size and comfort	2.79 (1.13)	4.26 (1.32)	4.27 (1.14)
Hygiene/sanitation	3.48 (1.28)	4.26 (1.19)	4.41 (1.06)
Food	3.04 (1.17)	4.16 (1.16)	4.07 (1.18)
Kitchen facilities	3.07 (1.38)	4.21 (1.35)	4.18 (1.09)
Geographical location	3.22 (1.34)	4.16 (1.34)	3.85 (1.13)
Professional support	3.27 (1.53)	4.37 (1.30)	4.16 (1.09)
Child-friendly environment	3.19 (1.49)	4.05 (1.39)	3.80 (1.17)
Personal safety/security	2.65 (1.19)	3.47 (1.26)	3.78 (1.25)
Recreational/sport activities	3.04 (1.53)	3.84 (1.46)	3.61 (1.29)
Relations with other residents	2.27 (1.28)	2.79 (1.39)	3.00 (1.26)
Participation in decision-making	3.23 (1.50)	4.37 (1.25)	4.16 (1.24)

Note: Higher scores indicate more dissatisfaction.

The table above provides an overview of the participants' scores for the different elements of the Kofinou Reception Centre for groups of residents divided by their duration of stay.

Table A3: Details about accommodation space

Questions	Average number
In case you live in/rent a house/apartment/room, how many rooms does it have?	Mean = 2.12, SD = 1.19
In case you live in/rent a house/apartment/room, how many people stay with you?	Mean = 3.10, SD = 2.04

The table above provides an overview of the average (M) and the standard deviation (SD) in relation to the questions about housing.

Table A4: *Level of Satisfaction with Social Welfare Services*

	<i>Kofinou</i>	<i>Non-Kofinou residents</i>
	M (SD)	M (SD)
To what degree are you satisfied with social welfare services?	2.15 (1.37)	2.45 (1.08)
How would you describe the behaviour of the social welfare officers toward you?	2.47 (1.34)	2.96 (1.21)

Note: Lower scores indicate less satisfaction.

The table above provides an overview of the average (M) and the standard deviation (SD) in relation to the participants' satisfaction with the welfare system.

Summarizing Interviewees' Points per Thematic Category

Groups of Interviewees' Opinions	Social Welfare/ Vouchers/ Quality of life	Psychosocial Support	Housing	Education	Health	Employment	Legal Rights	Inclusion & Social Participation
Asylum-Seekers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited amounts Very difficult to live on Very basic coverage of needs Fear for DSWS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not helpful Difficulty to recognize particular needs Some professionals care and some not Lack of real communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not good Cannot find something better Xenophobic landlords Delays in paying rents by DSWS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No skills Language difficulties No availability of Greek lessons No availability for vocational courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generally satisfied Language difficulties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not satisfied Offered unsuitable jobs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not aware of their rights Not aware of laws Friends inform each other NGOs are another info point for them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disappointment Frustration Work restrictions do not allow social inclusion
Professionals (public and NGO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ineffective and inefficient Unreliable 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unable to certify degrees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health staff need training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vocational training should be offered Restrictions to work should not exist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information is available, but not always comprehensible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No of social inclusion mechanisms in place No strategic planning

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