

**The public benefits of poverty and misery
 for asylum seekers and persons with humanitarian protection status in Cyprus**

KISA condemns the decision taken by the Council of Ministers on 18 July laying down the public benefits for asylum seekers and persons with temporary status for humanitarian protection in Cyprus from now on as racist, inhumane and degrading for people entering Cyprus in order to request and receive international protection.

According to the decision, the amounts set for asylum seekers are as follows:

Public assistance to persons seeking asylum/ under humanitarian protection status, as per the decision of the Council of Ministers and voted by the House of Representatives				
	Clothing, footwear, food (in vouchers) A	Water, electricity, phone, and other personal expenses B	Rent (it will be paid directly to the proprietor) C	Total
1 person	€150	€70	€100	€320
2 persons	€225	€95	€100	€420
3 persons	€300	€130	€150	€580
4+ persons	€375	€160	€200	€735

KISA believes that the levels of benefits as set by the Council of Ministers cannot ensure decent living conditions to asylum seekers, as it is impossible for one or two people to secure housing with €100, three people with €150 and four or more persons with €200. Furthermore, it is impossible for a person to meet his / her everyday and basic human needs with just €5, including the cost of food, clothing and footwear. It is obvious that these amounts not only do not ensure decent living conditions, but not even the basic human needs of food, clothing and housing.

Furthermore, KISA condemns the fact that following the populist, racist and nationalistic statements of public officials, the government did not conduct a study to assess the best possible way for the best possible provision of material reception conditions to asylum seekers. Instead, it simply rushed to adopt the most undignified and degrading method, which has been deemed as illegal in other EU Member States. The absence of any assessment calls into question whether vouchers are expected to cost less than benefits, apart of course from all other multiple problems that this system will create and the violation of the dignity of asylum seekers.

Moreover, apart from the fact that the government is proposing such a complex and costly to manage system, without even developing the necessary mechanism for its implementation, the creation of a system for providing and exchanging vouchers to cover the material reception conditions of asylum seekers may lead to the creation of a black market for the purchase of coupons and the increase of corruption, which Cyprus, as known to all, already suffers from.

Finally, it is noted that the amount of public benefits was initially determined arbitrarily and without the appropriate expertise by the Social Welfare Services and was submitted for approval by the Council of Ministers. The amount of public benefits (€320) for a person is simply unacceptable and inhuman. For example, the minimum amount for decent living in Cyprus, below which a person is considered to be in direct risk of poverty, is nearly three times higher (€900). In this context and on the basis of the government decision, asylum seekers in Cyprus will now be living in conditions of real poverty and misery.

The provisions of the decision of the Council of Ministers also violate both the Constitution of Cyprus and EU law, in particular the European Directive on the material reception conditions of asylum seekers and the Directives for combating discrimination, a fact which is likely to lead the Republic of Cyprus to a conflict with the European Union and to legal proceedings before the European Court of Justice. This is more than obvious through the comparison between the amount of public benefits to asylum seekers and the corresponding amounts of public benefits to other people with international protection, Cypriot and EU citizens.

Public assistance to Cypriot/EU citizens						
	Basic needs A+B	Rent C	Diapers D	Kindergarten E	Disability benefit F	Total
1 person	€452	€226				€678
Each dependent person aged 14+	€226	€339				€1017
Each dependent person aged 14–	€135,60	€293,80				€881,40
Each baby			€41			
Each toddler				€40		
Each person with disabilities					€226	

In this context, KISA believes that the amendment of the law and the redefinition of the amounts of benefits to asylum seekers constitute a racist, inhumane and illegal measure, which is directed against a very small and vulnerable social group, composed only of 200 persons, who are being subjected to complete social rejection, marginalization and survival in conditions of poverty and misery. Worse still, these political decisions seem to constitute a systematic effort to burden the most vulnerable groups, mainly migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, with the most adverse consequences of the economic crisis in Cyprus. An effort that essentially leads to nowhere, but to the strengthening of the offensive and unacceptable social phenomena of xenophobia, discrimination and racism. Finally, these policies are paving the way for turning against all vulnerable social groups, because ultimately what they succeed is to reduce and suspend social welfare measures in particular and the very idea of the welfare state in general.

KISA Steering Committee

