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## Status Report of Senior Citizens Residence and Elderly Nursing Homes in the northern part of Cyprus

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## **1. Introduction**

The United Nations research on ageing shows that the world's population is ageing rapidly with each passing year (UN, 2017).<sup>1</sup> According to this report, the world population over the age of 60 is as high as 13%. The population of northern Cyprus has been growing old with the same rapidity for the past two decades. According to general censuses in 1996 and 2006, the population aged over 60 in northern Cyprus was 10%, whereas it became 12% in 2011 (General Census 2011). According to projections by the 'State Planning Organization' (SPO, 2017), the population over the age of 60 had risen to 13% in 2016, indicating that northern Cyprus now has a very old population.

The ageing population not only affects the economy and social structure of countries but also brings with it many social responsibilities for the governments. The most important of these responsibilities is the construction of suitable accommodation for the elderly, such as senior citizens' residences and nursing homes where the elderly can be housed at an affordable price. In the northern part of Cyprus, families can no longer find time to take care of their elderly relatives due to changing socioeconomic conditions, while the elderly are living longer. On the other hand, the governments, neither became aware of this serious social change that has been taking place for the last two decades, nor they made any attempts to improve the conditions of elderly nursing homes. To begin with, even the most basic laws which regulate and control the elderly nursing homes do not exist. Hence, there is lot of confusion in terminology regarding nursing homes and residences as well as lack of management and supervision of these places in north Cyprus.

Currently, the care of elderly people and mentally ill patients have become a crisis in North Cyprus. In terms of the rights of the elderly and the rights of mentally ill patients, urgent measures should be taken before this crisis deepens further, and above all, laws and statutes should be enacted. Under the Grow Civic Programme, the "Elderly and Mental Health Rights" project aims to examine the existing system, present the problems of nursing homes, and propose possible solutions to the problems.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/ageing/>

## **2. Differences between a senior citizens' residence and an elderly nursing home, and necessary legal regulation**

Senior citizens' residences and elderly nursing homes are the places where the elderly stay for a fee. Although these places serve the same purpose, they differ from each other. This difference is unknown to most of the public in north Cyprus and the senior citizens' residences and nursing homes are used in the same way. However, there is a big difference between senior citizens' residences and nursing homes. The senior citizens' residences are places where seniors are well enough to do things for themselves, while nursing homes are places where people are dependent on care and support in their daily life due to ageing.

While there is no need to have full-time medical staff in senior citizens' residences, in nursing homes, the presence of elderly who often have health problems makes it mandatory for full-time medical staff. For this reason, it is essential that elderly nursing homes are regulated tightly and they are supervised and controlled more frequently than senior citizens' residences.

On the contrary, in the northern part of Cyprus, there exists only the 'Senior Citizens' Residence Act No. 71/1989', which regulates only senior citizens' residences. There is no law regulating nursing homes. The law regulating senior citizens' residences came into force 20 years ago, but there is still no legal framework regulating nursing homes, therefore, no such facility currently opened in north Cyprus has been opened under a law. Due to legal loopholes and gaps, current nursing homes are opened under municipalities and they are treated the same as any other workplace. This naturally creates difficulties and uncertainties in the implementation, operation, and supervision of nursing homes.

The existing 'Senior Citizens' Residence Act No. 71/1989' is inadequate and insufficient for this sector. Due to its outdated status, it has become an impossible legal framework to be enforced under today's circumstances. Lapta Senior Citizen's Residence – only citizen's residence opened – does not comply with many articles and rules of this law. This suggests that even the government is running its own senior citizen's residences illegally and has not attempted to fix it.

For example, according to act 'No. 71/1989', no bedridden elderly and mentally ill patients are allowed to stay in the Lapta Senior Citizens' Residence, but there are patients who are bedridden and mentally ill residing there. This is because there are no other places for disadvantaged and sick elderly to stay, many of whom are abandoned. While the government should, as a priority, open nursing homes for poor, elderly and chronic mentally ill people, it

instead passed the ‘Senior Citizens’ Residence Act’ in 1989 and opened the Lapta Senior Citizen’s Residence. Many elderly people and patients who should be in a nursing home were placed in this facility because of the lack of a state-owned nursing homes.

This practice, which disregards the law and does not take into account the needs of society, has never been corrected for 30 years since it was passed. Successive governments have not allocated any budget to open a nursing home, nor have they created any projects with outsourced funding.

As a very new development, despite the lack of budget and legal regulation, the ‘Ministry of Health’ opened a nursing home in Kalkanlı in January 2019, called Kalkanlı Living Home (Kalkanlı Yaşam Evi). Although there is a great need for this in the community, the uncertain legal status of this newly opened nursing home is financed with short-term donations, showing that the government is still not seriously addressing these issues and cannot go beyond short-term electoral investments.

### **3. Housing needs for chronic mental health patients**

In the northern part of Cyprus, not only the elderly in need of care, but also individuals with chronic mental illnesses – such as schizophrenia – also face serious care and housing problems. Patients who have mental illnesses at an early age are often cared for at their home by their parents and other family members. When the parents of these patients are no longer able to care for them, there are no other care facilities in north Cyprus where these patients can live long-term and continue with their treatments. The existing ‘Senior Citizens’ Residence Act No. 71/1989’ states that mental health patients cannot be accommodated in senior citizens’ residences. As mentioned above, there are no alternatives for these patients, so despite being in violation of the law, these patients are mostly housed in senior citizens’ residences and private nursing homes.

The ‘Barış Mental and Neurological Diseases Hospital’ is the only hospital in north Cyprus for the mental, and neurological disorders, and belongs to the state. When mental health patients are referred to this hospital, they receive inpatient care. These patients are generally expected to be discharged after one month of medical treatment. Patients who do not have any immediate family members to take care of them have been allowed to stay in the hospital long-term because there is no other alternative place for them to stay. Thus, the 90 beds capacity hospital is resided long term by about 60 patients.

In recent times the hospital management began to refer these patients to nursing homes, to reduce the number of long term patients at the hospital. In an attempt to solve its own problem, the hospital management began this practice in December 2018. Unfortunately, no attempt was made to provide a permanent solution to the problems of accommodation and care of chronically mentally ill patients. They tried to send these patients to senior citizens' residences, even though it was not legal, however the government should have built suitable places for these patients and produced long term solutions to their housing and care rights. Although it is known to be contrary to the existing senior citizens residence act, these patients have been directed to the newly established state owned Kalkanlı Living Home, as well as private nursing homes.

It has been brought to our attention that the 'Social Services Department' contacted private nursing homes owners in a bid to home chronic mental health patients that do not wish to be placed in the Kalkanlı facility. Through conversations with the private nursing home owners, it was learned that except one private nursing home, all nursing homes responded negatively to these requests. Nursing homes that responded negatively are giving their reasons as below.

The first reason is the responsibility that nursing homes are forced to take for these patients. After being removed from 'Barış Mental and Neurological Diseases Hospital' and placed at the elderly nursing homes, the government was not committed to supporting the nursing homes or the patients. The nursing homes would not be given any support by the Barış State Mental hospital, in terms of helping the patients with mental illnesses to adjust their new environment, to follow up their illnesses, or to adjusting their medication. Hence all responsibility would be left to the nursing homes.

The second important reason is financial. Since these patients cannot work, they receive an allowance of 1,400 TL from the 'Social Services Department', which is well below the minimum wage. The cost of nursing homes is between 1,700 TL and 2,900 TL, and accepting these patients would be not only a responsibility but also a financial burden for them.

These experiences have shown us that chronic mental patients in the northern part of Cyprus do not have long term care homes to stay permanently. The only alternative is senior citizens' residences, but this alternative is against the existing laws. For people with mental disorders such as schizophrenia, which require continuous drug treatment and rehabilitation, their parents and relatives look after them for many years. When their parent and relatives cannot

look after them any longer, there is no long term care facilities for these patients in north Cyprus where they can spend the later years of their lives.

#### **4. Observations and detections about the government's senior citizens' residence and nursing homes**

##### **4.1 Lapta Senior Citizens' Residence**

The first and only senior citizens' residence home in north Cyprus was opened by the state in Lapta in 1976. After 1974, the building, which is located in a large plot of land by the sea, was taken under the state administration and it was converted into a senior citizens' residence. After many years, the old building was in danger of collapsing due to lack of necessary maintenance and repair. In 2009, the government announced in the media that it had allocated funds to build a new senior citizens' residence on the same land, and had begun developing the project. Nevertheless, there was no progress in the project, following this announcement.

In 2011, the building was closed down, because it contained asbestos and was also in danger of being demolished as it was flooded after a severe storm. As the government did not build the new senior citizens' residence building that it had promised in 2009, it became necessary to rent another building to house the elderly. The Ayia Anastasia Hotel in Lapta was rented and elderly was moved to their new place. Before 1974 Ayia Anastasia Hotel was an old monastery where it was located at the top of the mountains in Lapta. After 1974 this monastery was transformed into a hotel. This place, which was rented temporarily at first, has been used as a senior citizens' residence since 2011, and the promised senior citizens' residence of the state had not been built. Press reports revealed that the elderly took a long time to adapt after being transferred from the seaside location to the monastery at the top of the mountain.

Ayia Anastasia, which is still being used as the Lapta Senior Citizens' Residence, was owned by the Evkaf Foundation after 1974. The Evkaf Foundation leased this place to a private person for an exceedingly small amount of rent, and this individual later leased Ayia Anastasia back to the government at an extremely high fee of £5,800 a month.

Since 2009, the new "senior citizens' residence building" promised to the public by every government has failed to go beyond the project stage. The elderly who were temporarily placed in the Ayia Anastasia Hotel remain in the same place today, and the government continues to pay £5,800 each month. If we calculate the total rent paid since 2011, the government has so

far paid around half a million pounds to a private person. With this rent coming out of the government's budget, a senior citizens' residence could have been built by now.

### **Current problems of the Lapta Senior Citizens' Residence:**

Lapta Senior Citizens' Residence is a nursing home with all the positive and negative characteristics of a government institution. The senior citizens' residence, which has a capacity for 45 people, can only accommodate 29 due to structural problems. It has a total of 29 employees, including 10 carers who work in shifts, 3 nurses, 1 physiotherapist, 5 cleaners, 4 kitchen employees, 3 security guards, 2 gardeners and 1 manager. When we compare the total number of elderly and the number of staff working here, it turns out that 29 staff are looking after 29 elderly people, which, as reflected in other government institutions, represents a higher labour force than necessary.

It is known that disadvantaged and forlorn elderly citizens can stay in the facility without paying a fee, but those with the financial means should pay 60% of the minimum wage. Although this regulation seems fair, the issue that is widely discussed among the public is that from time to time this regulation is abused, and people who are in a good financial position can stay without paying any fee if they have acquaintances and contacts.

In recent years, due to the recession, the government's budget has also begun to shrink. The already narrow budget of Lapta Senior Citizens' Residence has decreased to a palpable degree, to the extent that many urgent needs – such as the repair and purchase of white goods and purchase of beds – are met by collecting donations from the public due to lack of money in the government budget.

Some of the elderly residents living in the Lapta facility are healthy enough to care for themselves but others are elderly and patients with illnesses such as Alzheimer's disease, schizophrenia, or are bedridden, and cannot take care of themselves and require constant care. In addition to these patients and the elderly, there are disabled people who are not necessarily elderly but should be under the protection of the government. It is planned that these younger people with disabilities should be housed in the facility that the government has begun to build and has not yet been able to complete, it is not yet clear when construction of this place will end.

Looking at the people staying at the Lapta Senior Citizens' Residence, it is apparent that this facility is not a senior citizens' residence, but a nursing home. Since no one knows this

difference, Lapta Senior Citizens' Residence is a senior citizens residence just by name, while it serves as a nursing home for anyone.

Lapta Senior Citizens' Residence is not suitable for elderly care and shelter due to its location. Located on the mountainside in Lapta, this senior citizens' residence does not have its own ambulance, and it is far from hospitals and the city center. Therefore, in emergency situations, such as the elderly being referred to the hospital or the calling of medical staff from the hospital, it is life threatening for the patients who live and are cared for there.

## **4.2. Kalkanlı Living House**

Kalkanlı Living House opened in January 2019. This is the government's only care home facility, opened under the 'Ministry of Health'. A former empty and idle hotel in Kalkanlı, was opened as a nursing home by the decision of the 'Council of Ministers'. Although this nursing home appeals to an important need of the people, it is likely to become a tangle of problems in the future, especially after the government changes, since it was opened before its legal and financial infrastructure was prepared.

It is known that there is a regulatory law on "senior citizens' residences" in north Cyprus, but there is still no law for regulating the "nursing homes". The existing 'Senior Citizens' Residence Act' is both outdated and not applicable to care homes. Before opening a new care facility, the government should have prepared the legislation for care homes and opened the Kalkanlı Living Home under that legislation. Hence, like all other nursing homes operating in the private sector, Kalkanlı Living House is not regulated under current laws and it is unclear which ministry it comes under.

In addition to the legal deficiencies, it is not clear whether Kalkanlı Living Home has a sustainable financial structure. The budget of this nursing home, which was opened to take care of disadvantaged elderly and patients, depends on how much the state can allocate to this nursing home, and whether its income and expenses are in balance will determine whether this nursing home will survive. According to the information shared in the media, this facility was opened with donations from various institutions and organizations, and the government failed to provide financial support to this nursing home.



Kalkanlı Living Home, which already cares for about 40 elderly people, has now taken a great responsibility for these patients and their families. The government has an obligation to make the financial structure of this newly established nursing home sustainable.

### **4.3 Bülent Ecevit Rehabilitation Center**

Bülent Ecevit Rehabilitation Center (BERC) began to operate under the name of ‘Chronic Diseases Hospital’ under the ‘Ministry of Health’ in 1988. The hospital, which was established to serve the elderly and homeless people in need of care, was moved to the new building in Gönyeli in 2004 and was renamed Bülent Ecevit Rehabilitation Center. BERC, which has a modern structure with numerous activity rooms, a living room, and dressing, doctor and physiotherapy rooms, currently looks after 48 patients at full capacity. The total number of staff is 33, including 9 nurses and 23 carers. Laundry, dining, and cleaning needs are provided as a purchase of services from the private sector.

## **5. Observations and detections about elderly care homes in the private sector**

There are 6 elderly nursing home in the private sector. Four of them are in Famagusta and 2 of them are in Nicosia. We can list these nursing homes as follows.

1. Özen Nursing Home
2. Ayışığı Nursing Home
3. Meros Nursing Home (later closed down)
4. İkincibahar Nursing Home
5. Ece Nursing Home
6. Sınırüstü Public Trust Elderly Nursing Home

All nursing homes mentioned above have been visited by the Elderly Rights and Mental Health Association and discussions were held with their owners (detailed information about each care home has been given in the Appendix).

Since there is no law regulating nursing homes, nursing homes opened in the private sector are opened under municipalities with a business permit. The infrastructure standards that these nursing homes must have are not clear. In addition, it is not clear under which ministry, for how often and on what basis they are regulated.

According to the current system, nursing homes are opened as small businesses under their local municipalities and are also inspected by them. According to information received from employees of these municipalities, municipalities inspect only the kitchens of the nursing

homes, but nothing else, as if nursing homes are restaurants or a hotels. They only get inspected by the ‘Ministry of Labour and Social Services’ or the ‘Ministry of Health’, only when a complaint comes from the public.

### **Status of nursing homes**

To date, there has not been any study or research carried out about private nursing homes operating in the northern part of Cyprus. The government does not have any statistical information about nursing homes or about the elderly and patients that are staying there. There is a great lack of information, while the information available is not always correct.

Non of the nursing homes have websites, and it is not possible to access any information online about nursing homes except for some of the activities they occasionally share on social media. In the press, there is only scandalous information about nursing homes. Scandalous news is generally reported to the press by the relatives of the patients about the death or injury of an elderly person living in a nursing home as a result of an accident, or due to negligence. These accusatory news also indicate that the nursing homes are illegal, and are not properly monitored by the government. The relevant ministries of the government either do not respond to such news, or do not raise the issue again, after giving very short and general statement to the press that the relevant nursing home will be checked.

In our discussions with the Turkish municipalities of Nicosia, Famagusta and Iskele, we were told that, some of the nursing homes should be closed down due to lack of proper care for the elderly. Nevertheless, due to absence of alternative places to accommodate and care the elderly, municipalities are letting these nursing homes to continue serving the elderly . The capacity of all nursing homes in the private sector is limited and they all reached to full capacity. Although Kalkanlı Living Home, which was opened by the ‘Ministry of Health’ last month, brought relief in this regard as an alternative, its’ distance to all other regions except Güzelyurt is seen as a disadvantage by patients and their families. It is not easy, and it is not right, to move the elderly and the sick to places far from their families. Therefore, families who wish to visit their loved ones frequently thus prefer to put them in the closest private nursing homes.

### **Physical infrastructure of nursing homes:**

Only 2 of the 6 nursing homes visited – the Sınırüstü Public Trust Elderly Nursing Home and Meros Elderly Nursing Home – were purpose built as nursing homes. The other 4 were built as family homes or resident apartments and later converted into nursing homes.

Some of the private nursing homes, although their buildings are not suitable to be used as nursing homes, try to make their buildings suitable for the elderly through a variety of additions. However, these buildings are in many ways unsuitable for the accommodation and care of the elderly.

One nursing home is in a three-story apartment building. An elevator was later installed in the apartment for the elderly. The other three nursing homes are single-story houses. These houses were built as family homes, therefore their rooms are small and can only take 1 or 2 people. However, it was observed that these nursing homes placed 3 or 4 people in every room instead of 1 or 2 people. Hence, the elderly have no private areas of their own. Since the buildings of these nursing homes were built as family homes in the past, even if with this tight fitting, the capacity of the nursing homes is around 18-20 elderly people. Also these nursing homes have no room for expansion since they were originally built as family homes, not nursing homes.

Another problem is that, in most nursing homes, there is not enough bathrooms and toilets. In some nursing homes there is no separate bathroom facilities for men and women. Common areas such as TV rooms are limited. One nursing home's dining table is in the hallway, while the balcony has been closed off and turned into a bedroom. None of the nursing homes have a central heating or cooling system, and rooms are heated with air conditioning units in each room. There is no ventilation system in bathrooms and toilets or other areas of the building, so it is noted that all nursing homes have a heavy smell.

### **Elderly and patients in nursing homes:**

In all 6 private nursing homes in north Cyprus, there are bedridden elderly in need of care, physically disabled elderly, young patients with Down's syndrome and individuals with chronic mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia, and alzheimer's patients are all taken care of under one roof. For nursing homes, it is difficult both financially and emotionally to care for such a mixed population of patients/elderly people of all ages, and it also brings many responsibilities to the nursing homes. Chronic patients who do not have a place to stay or have families to look after them are often housed in nursing homes for the rest of their lives, as there is no restrictive law to prevent them from staying in nursing homes, except for infectious diseases. Such patients are usually disadvantaged patients whose only income is social assistance money from the state.

In the future, when a law is drafted for nursing homes, if the law contains a condition that prevents chronic mental patients from being accommodated in nursing homes, the government will need to create other places where these patients can live because currently the government has no place to accommodate mentally ill individuals, and the existing Bülent Ecevit Chronic Diseases hospital is full. When the elderly nursing home law is passed, the condition of patients living in these nursing homes (schizophrenia, autistic, manic depressive and so on) should be considered. Although it is heard from time to time that the government has a project to build a facility next to Ercan Airport, it is said that this facility has not been able to finish for many years due to budget problems of the government. There is also not much information on this subject.

### **Status of personnel in nursing homes:**

While the government's Lapta facility has the same number of permanent staff as the elderly residents, the number of personnel in nursing homes in the private sector is far below what it should be. When we look at medical staff, there are no full-time nurses in all but one nursing home. Nursing homes without medical staff said they called nurses or doctors when needed.

Considering that most of the elderly people staying in nursing homes are bedridden, have high blood pressure or diabetes, schizophrenia or other serious conditions, there should be at least one full-time nurse there and these patients should be checked frequently by a doctor. Many nursing homes cannot provide these health services because they are expensive. Nursing homes have indicated that sometimes they have asked for a doctor from public hospitals and the 'Ministry of Health', but their requests were not met positively. Although most of the elderly living in elderly nursing homes are under social security or social welfare support, or disadvantaged, they can be treated for free in public hospitals, but it is very difficult for nursing homes to transport these patients to hospitals due to both lack of personnel and suitable private vehicles. An arrangement on this issue can ensure that doctors in the public hospitals (such as psychologists, internal diseases and dentists) can regularly visit elderly nursing homes.

Elderly nursing homes must be staffed 24 hours a day. Due to a lack of staff, personnel have to work for more than 8 hours, so 2 shifts are performed instead of 3. Carers working in nursing homes are usually untrained/unqualified with little other employment prospects, and usually from the most disadvantaged groups in the community. Some nursing homes also have foreign

carers. In short, nursing homes do not choose their recruitment based on certain criteria. It is also said that the personnel working in nursing homes sometimes earn below the minimum wage, and are even deprived of their social insurance and provident fund investments. In addition to the aforementioned financial and physical burdens, these personnel are under heavy psychological burden. It takes patience and effort to deal with the elderly and mentally ill people in need of care every day. For this reason, in addition to easing the financial and work burden of the personnel working in nursing homes, psychological support should be provided for them.

### **Income and expenses of nursing homes:**

All but one of the six private nursing homes were established by women entrepreneurs. It has emerged from the interviews that the entrepreneurs who established the nursing homes, entered this sector without having any relevant experience and without conducting a feasibility study. These nursing homes, which opened under the leadership of women entrepreneurs, emerged as a reaction to a need felt in society. Many of them do not have accountants and they manage their own accounts, and often with unprofessional methods.

In our interviews, we found that most nursing homes are in financial difficulties, with some of them having debts to various institutions and organizations. Some of these debts belong to government institutions (such as debts to the ‘Social Security Department’ or electricity bills) and some of them to private individuals and banks. Although the perception that nursing homes are highly profitable is widespread in society, even in government institutions, our various visits to nursing homes have not provided any evidence to support this view. In fact, in our visits we discovered that nursing homes compromise on quality due to financial difficulties. It is observed that the biggest expenses are personnel expenses, so they try to manage with the least possible number of personnel, and even without nurses. Half of the nursing homes must pay rent or pay a loan to the bank because they have built their own buildings.

These private nursing homes do not receive any government support since they are established as private businesses, and the only income they receive is the monthly fee they receive from their customers. The lowest monthly nursing home fee was found to be around 1,000 TL and the highest monthly fee was around 2,900 TL. (See Appendix). These fees are not high fees according to today’s conditions. Due to competition, nursing homes kept their fees low for

many years despite the rising inflation. Instead, the nursing homes tried to cut their expenses as they could not afford the costs that increased with inflation. However this reflected negatively on the elderly and the sick. Savings made are: deductions from kitchen expenses (such as less fruit, vegetables, meat and chicken consumption), personnel expenses (reducing the number of staff) and other similar expenses (such as reducing the use of doctors and medicines), which means lowering the quality of elderly care.

A large proportion of the monthly expenses of elderly nursing homes are fixed. These expenses include rent, staff salaries, kitchen expenses, electricity and water bills. Their monthly income is mostly limited to the amount patients can give. Since many of the elderly and patients staying in the nursing homes are disadvantaged and without a family, they receive money from the 'Social Services Department' and have a small salary well below the minimal wage. Although these salaries do not cover the cost of monthly care, many nursing homes admitted patients with these salaries in the past. Due to the increasing cost of living and financial difficulties, elderly nursing homes stated that they are no longer accepting elderly people who receive salaries from the 'Social Services Department' and have no other income. This means that elderly and patients who are too poor to be cared for in the private sector must either be cared for in government nursing homes, or they have to supplement their social welfare salaries in order to be cared for in private nursing homes. The nursing homes stated that the 'Social Services Department' had ordered private nursing homes to take such patients, even though the private nursing homes did not want to take them. This means that the government deflects its own financial responsibility to the private sector, which means that private nursing homes subsidize the government. Therefore, elderly nursing homes, which have to balance income and expenses, also reduce their expenses by cutting the basic needs of the elderly, such as nutrition and care.

Since most nursing homes are small, they have no means of increasing their income through increasing the number of elderly they care for. Therefore, their income is always more limited than their expenses. In addition, donations are made from time to time to the nursing homes, but it is not clear how consistent these donations are. Since nursing homes are not transparent about this issue, the amount of donations and the share of donations in total income is unknown.

Two nursing homes that do not currently own their own buildings have stated that they want to build their own nursing home buildings, and that they have applied to the 'Development

Bank' for this purpose, but their applications have not been accepted. This is because the construction of elderly nursing home is not on the 'State Planning Organization' list, so this sector does not have the right to receive incentives or long-term government loans.

## **6. Summary of Problems and Suggestions for Solutions**

### **6.1. Problems Related to the Public Sector and Recommendations**

#### **Legal issues:**

- In the northern part of Cyprus, the government needs to develop social policies for the care of elderly, poor and chronic patients in need of care. Above all, the government urgently needs to prepare and enact a nursing home law to regulate and monitor the nursing homes that these citizens stay in. Senior citizens' residences and nursing homes in both the Republic of Cyprus and Turkey are processed together under one law, and according to this law, senior citizens' residences and nursing homes are located under the Ministry of Labour and Social Security.
- The current 'Ministry of Health' opened the Kalkanlı Living Home, as if elderly care were under the 'Chronic Hospitals Law'. This has put the already complex sector into an even more intractable complexity. Nursing homes, together with senior citizens' residences, should be under the 'Ministry of Labour and Social Security', not the 'Ministry of Health'.

#### **Financial problems:**

- The budgets of the state owned Lapta Senior Citizens' Residence, and Bülent Ecevit Rehabilitation Center, are shrinking a little more every year and it is not sufficient for their needs. Kalkanlı Living Home does not even have a budget, so it is not clear what the patients and elderly people who are being looked after there will encounter in the future. It is imperative that the government's financial responsibility and policy in this area is clarified.
- The rent of the Lapta Senior Citizens' Residence building is very high. The time has come for the government to look for cheaper alternatives. While the annual budget of the Lapta facility is severely limited and there is no budget even to buy meat for elderly, it is not acceptable for the government to pay a private individual as high as 5,800 pounds a month.

- If the elderly people or individuals with chronic mental disorders, who receive a salary from social services, are not able to stay in public nursing homes, and if they are to be accommodated in private nursing homes, all the expenses of these disadvantaged people in private nursing homes should be covered by the government. Currently, the private sector has been forced to pay government financial responsibilities and this has financially weakened the private nursing homes. If nursing homes in the private sector have a strong financial structure, these nursing homes can give better services and the risk of closure will be reduced. At the moment, the government makes the private sector nursing homes pay for the public sector expenses. This puts the private sector nursing homes in an even weaker and riskier position.

#### **Housing problem of mental health patients:**

- In north Cyprus, the housing needs of patients with chronic mental disorders have always been ignored. According to the existing ‘Senior Citizens’ Residence Act’, it is against the law for these patients to live with other elderly patients. However, no places have been specified for these people to live, when their parents or families are not able to care for them. Necessary legal arrangements can be made to ensure that individuals with poor mental health can stay in the same nursing homes with other elderly people, in separate rooms, and under doctor control. This can prevent them from being excluded from society. This is in fact the current situation, but since the current law does not allow people with mental disorders to stay in nursing homes it creates an illegal situation, and it should be corrected. In addition, the state can develop projects and build facilities for chronic patients who are not mentally well.

## **6.2. Problems Related to the Private Sector and Recommendations**

In our one-on-one discussions with nursing homes, their most important problems can be summarized as follows:

- **Financial problems**

Private nursing homes have for a long time kept their monthly care fees at low levels due to competition among themselves. Another reason for this is that people living in nursing homes are generally from the lowest-income segment of society. Retired elderly with better means are usually brought carers from abroad (usually from Turkmenistan) and they got looked after in



their own homes. For these reasons, nursing homes adjusted their fees by considering the income of the poor elderly and the care fees of other nursing homes. The elderly care fees of nursing homes have always been below the minimum wage.

Since the buildings of many nursing homes are small, their care capacity is around 20 elderly on average. With the existing infrastructure, it is not possible for nursing homes to increase their capacity by accepting more elderly people in their facility, and thus increase their income. This situation is the most important factor limiting the income level of nursing homes. For an average capacity of 20 elderly, and the current care fees of the nursing homes, we can see that it is not possible to look after elderly at the expected standards. It is inevitable that private nursing homes will compromise on quality of care they provide while trying to make all their spending in the most economical way. The elderly capacity of the two purpose-built nursing homes is around 40-50. Along with the capacity problems of the nursing homes, there are difficulties in finding qualified personnel such as care givers, nurses, cleaners and cooks. Therefore nursing homes have serious difficulties when they need to increase the number of their employees or when they need to replace some of their current employees.

- **Management and administration**

It has been observed that private nursing homes are generally established and run by women entrepreneurs as small family businesses. Due to their very small size, these nursing homes do not have professional management staff. The founder of nursing homes also plays roles such as administrator, accountant, cook, nurse, and carer, but many have no university degrees. It has come to our attention that the nursing home owners, who must work long hours even over the weekends and who can never go on vacation, are exhausted, both financially and mentally. In fact, several nursing homes owners have said they would close their nursing homes if there was another alternative for the elderly. A nursing home's owner said, "Running an elderly nursing home is difficult in every way, I haven't been on vacation for ten years. Sometimes I want to close it, but there is no other place we can put our elderly. So we must keep going. We are relieved that the government has opened the Kalkanlı care home because when we want to close, we will be able to show our elderly an alternative place." These findings shows us that it is necessary to add a proviso to the nursing home law, when it is drafted by the authorities, that nursing homes must have professional management staff rather than managed

solely by its' owner. Also they should be required to have relevant experience and professional background.

- **Staff**

Private nursing homes employ less staff than necessary due to financial difficulties. The nursing homes work with two shifts, but some employees complained that their preferences in morning or evening shifts are mostly ignored. Some employees also mentioned that they work longer than eight hours which is illegal.

The training of carers working in nursing homes is generally not good enough for the care of the elderly and the patients. To provide more comfortable care for patients with serious health problems such as Alzheimer's and schizophrenia, carers working in nursing homes should attend various short-term seminars and training programs. These training programs can be provided by expert psychologists and from the field of geriatrics under either government or EU-funded projects.

- **Illegality and the role of the government**

Private nursing homes have not been opened under law and, even if they have come up in scandalous news from time to time, they provide a very important service to society. Since the government has not developed social policies for 40 years and has not made the necessary investments, it does not have the capacity to take care of the old and sick. If there were no private nursing homes, hundreds of low-income families today couldn't find a place to accommodate their elderly and sick.

It should be among the government's priorities to solve the problems of nursing homes, which are established without any contribution from the government and provide a crucial service to the community by looking after the elderly and sick that the government needs to care for.

The first step the government must take is to set the essential standards required for nursing homes and to enact a nursing home law that serves these standards. The government should create incentives for private nursing homes that fail to meet these standards to take loans and build buildings to a standard appropriate for the elderly. Currently, the state does not have any incentives for private nursing homes, nor does it work on their problems.

Not only disadvantaged elderly and sick, but also many individuals which the government has the obligation to care for – with conditions such as Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, schizophrenia, and similar mental illnesses – today stay in private nursing homes because the state has only one rehabilitation center with a capacity of 44 people. This capacity is certainly not enough for a population of 300,000 people in north Cyprus. Furthermore, for elderly and people with conditions such as Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s and schizophrenia, caregivers in private nursing homes must be trained.

Cooperation between the government and the private sector is vital in order to make the necessary investments for elderly care and to use the resources more effectively in the northern part of Cyprus whose population is increasingly ageing. The state is obligated to provide care primarily for the needy, orphans, disadvantaged and chronic patients, not the elderly who can care for themselves. Therefore, nursing homes, and not senior citizens’ residences, must open. In this context, the name of “Lapta Senior Citizens’ Residence” should be changed to “Lapta Elderly Nursing Home” and the poorest and needy elderly and patients should be taken there. The building of this nursing home should be built on its own land which is by the sea, and to serve a wider community in the region. Opening nursing homes for elderly people who can take care of themselves should be left to the private sector.

The confusion in terms of concept and authority in the elderly care service sector has become more complex with the newly opened Kalkanlı Living Home by the Ministry of Health. First, this place is not clear whether it is a senior citizens’ residence, a nursing home or a hospital for people with chronic diseases. The government should decide what Kalkanlı Living Home is, clarify its legal status and arrange its budget accordingly.

### **6.3 Future studies**

No scientific studies have been conducted on the current social condition and care of elderly and mentally ill individuals in north Cyprus. The most important reason for this is the lack of data. The government should also encourage scientific research by collating statistical data that will shed light on the development of social policies.

There is no statistical information available about the types and numbers of chronically ill patients with mental disorders. Because of the stigma that exists in society, the individuals and their families who are mentally ill, prefer to remain silent. They do not make a public effort to get the government to implement policies and practices to address the needs of these people.

There is a need for a social movement that will create awareness in society to destroy this unnecessary sense of shame that families carry. It is extremely crucial to develop projects that will help and guide people from all levels of society to accept rather than reject individuals with mental health problems.

It is necessary to collect statistics such as the profile of elderly people staying in nursing homes, their total number, and the number of elderly people cared by foreign carers in their own homes. Also research must be conducted to investigate where elderly people want to be cared for, the wages they can pay for, and the most importantly, their satisfaction of the elderly care services must be investigated. In addition, it is necessary to develop programs with social content in order to increase public awareness about the elderly care, and to encourage citizens of north Cyprus to contribute in this field.

## ANNEX

### **Government Senior Citizens' Residence and Nursing Home**

#### **Lapta Senior Citizens' Residence (Lapta Huzurevi):**

Founder:	Government
Manager:	Sibel Karaca
Phone number:	0392 821 8519
Address:	Lapta, Ayia Anastasia Hotel, next to Hill top Restaurant
Capacity:	45 capacity – there are 29 patients; more male patients
Personnel status:	29 staff (10 shift carer, 3 nurses, 1 physiotherapist, 5 cleaners, 4 kitchen guards, 3 security guards, 2 gardeners, 1 manager)
Health status of the elderly:	There are 4 bedridden elderly, but other patients also could not take care of themselves. There are Alzheimer's, schizophrenia, high blood pressure and diabetes patients.
Monthly maintenance fee:	60% of the minimum wage.
Founded:	Founded in 1976, moved to its current location in 2011

#### **Bülent Ecevit Rehabilitation Center (Bülent Ecevit Rehabilitasyon Merkezi):**

Founder:	Government
Manager:	Cansel Öztekiner
Head Nurse:	Hatun Ayer
Phone number:	2231734/ 2239073
Address:	Gönyeli
Capacity:	It has 44 patients capacity and currently it has 46 patients.
Personnel status:	
Health status of the elderly:	There are bedridden elderly, disabled, Alzheimer, schizophrenia, high blood pressure and diabetics patients.
Monthly maintenance fee:	300 TL for disabled people under the government donation, 650 TL from those who receive social security salary.
Founded:	Founded in 1988, it has been at Gönyeli since 2004

## **Kalkanlı Living Home (Kalkanlı Yaşam Evi):**

Founder:	Government
Manager:	Şebnem Benat
Phone number:	0548 857 5717
Address:	Kalkanli
Capacity:	There are 50-100 patients and elderly
Personnel status:	26 carers, 6 nurses, 1 administrator and 3 security guards
Health status of the elderly:	There are bedridden elderly, Alzheimer's, schizophrenia, high blood pressure and diabetics patients.
Monthly maintenance fee:	If they receive a salary from the Social Services Department, it is 500 TL, if not a monthly fee of 1000 TL is charged.
Founded:	January, 2019

## **Elderly care homes in the private sector:**

### **1. Özen Nursing Home (Özen Bakım Evi):**

Founder:	Maryam Ozkutube
Phone number:	0533 888 20 44
Address:	Narlik Street behind Yasam Hospital, Famagusta
Capacity:	20-21 people
Personnel status:	4 carers, 1 manager, they will bring nurses if necessary.
Elderly health:	2 bedridden elderly, 1 Alzheimer's, 1 schizophrenia patient
Founded:	2010
Monthly fees:	1000, 1500, 1700 TL according to income.

## **2. Ayışığı Nursing Home (Ayışığı Bakım Evi):**

Founder:	Biray Şenyiğit (transferred to Biray Şenyiğit after being founded by Ece Balcı)
Phone number:	0533 831 3303
Address:	Tuzca mah. Ataç street (Vocational High School for Girls) no:2 Famagusta
Capacity:	1st Branch 15 people, 2nd branch 9 people, all women
Personnel status:	Neurology specialist visits once a month, internal specialist visits once a week, has 1 nurse, and 4 patient care technicians.
Elderly health:	Has 3 bedridden, 1 schizophrenia patient and 1 Alzheimer's.
Monthly fee:	2000 TL, extras like incontinence pads and medicine are the family's responsibility.

## **3. Public Trust Elderly Nursing Home (Halk Vakfı Yaşlı Bakımevi):**

Founder:	Melek Dogan
Founded:	2009
Phone number:	0533 865 7395
Address:	Sınırüstü- Iskele
Capacity:	There are 50 beds – 38 patients
Staff situation:	1 nurse, 1 cleaner, 1 cook, 5 carers
Health status of the elderly:	Bedridden, schizophrenia sick, physical disabilities, and healthy elderly patients
Monthly fee:	1700 TL, private room 1900 TL

## **4. İkinci Bahar Nursing Home (İkinci Bahar Bakım Evi):**

Founder:	Sharife Alibaba
Founded:	2009
Phone number:	225 66 69

Address: Ali Hodja street Hamitköy-Nicosia  
Capacity: 35 and up -35 people  
Staff situation: 11 full-time carers- They do not have medical staff They will call them when needed  
Elderly health: Bedridden patient, diabetes, high blood pressure, schizophrenia and Alzheimer's patient  
Monthly fee: 2,900 TL

### **5. Meros Elderly Nursing Home (Meros Yaşlı Bakımevi):**

Founder: Ayse Passenger  
Founded : 2012  
Phone number: 0392 366 9955  
Address: On the Larnaca road, Beşevler –Famagusta  
Capacity: 27 people- It has 26 patients 13 female, 13 male  
Personnel Status: It has 7 cares; medical staff comes only when needed  
Health status of the elderly: 3 Alzheimer's, 1 bedridden, diabetics , high blood pressure  
Monthly fee: 1700 TL

### **6. Ece Nursing Home (Ece Bakımevi):**

Founder: İlhami  
Founded: 2005  
Phone number: 228 4149, mobile tel: 0533-8369986  
Address: Tomruk street no:9 Kucukkaymaklı Nicosia  
Capacity: 18 people  
Staff status: There are 6 carers  
The health of the elderly: bedridden, Alzheimer's,  
Monthly fees: 2,500 TL