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POLICY BRIEF 02

SUSTAINABLE LOCATION STRATEGIES FOR CITIZENS' SERVICES

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POLICY BRIEF 02

SUSTAINABLE LOCATION STRATEGIES FOR CITIZENS' SERVICES

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Across Europe, the strategic location of Social Services of General Interest (SSGIs) is increasingly seen as key to advancing territorial cohesion, social equity, and inclusive development. The location of Citizens' Service Centres (CSCs) and Citizens Centres (CCs) plays a critical role in ensuring equitable access to essential services, regional cohesion, and climate-conscious planning in Cyprus. This Policy Brief presents findings from the TWIN2EXPAND project, which analysed accessibility to these Centres across national, regional, and local scales. While most are reachable by car, access by walking, cycling, and public transport remains limited—especially in underserved urban and rural areas. To address these disparities, the brief offers concrete, evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and planners to improve the reach, inclusivity, and sustainability of Social Services of General Interest (SSGIs).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The location of Social Services of General Interest (SSGIs) such as the Citizens' Service Centres (CSCs) and Citizens Centres (CCs) in the case of Cyprus, is fundamental to ensuring equitable service delivery, fostering regional cohesion, and advancing Cyprus transition to a more sustainable future. This brief presents key findings from the TWIN2EXPAND project, based on spatial analysis of current and proposed CSC and CC locations at national, regional and local scale to assess population coverage and accessibility by soft mobility -walking and cycling-, public transport, and private vehicles.

The results show that while CSCs and CCs are relatively accessible by car, many cannot be reached via public transport and, in urban areas, accessibility by walking or cycling is limited. To create resource-efficient infrastructure, future citizen services' must be located where they serve most people. Strategic placement is essential to promote sustainable modes of transport, maximizing positive health impact and minimizing negative environmental impact. Furthermore,in rural areas, strategic placement is essential to avoid deepening urban-rural inequalities.

This brief is intended for policymakers, local authorities, and urban planners, offering evidence-based guidance to ensure that future decisions on CSC and CC locations support resource-efficiency mobility, social equity, and long-term territorial cohesion across Cyprus.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE POLICY BRIEF

[1] **Strategically located Citizens Services are essential for delivering inclusive, efficient, and responsive public services across urban and rural regions** - especially as populations grow, urbanize, and face increasing mobility and climate challenges.

[2] **Citizens Services must be recognized as part of critical civic infrastructure, supporting not only administrative efficiency but also social equity, territorial cohesion, and quality of life.**

[3] **Many CSC, and CCs in the Cypriot context currently have easier access by car than other means of transport which affects both equality and sustainability.** Locating Citizens Services in areas that are walkable, transit-connected, and serve dense populations is a key strategy to reduce carbon emissions, improve service uptake, and support the shift toward sustainable urban mobility.

[4] **Expanding CCs in regional hubs can support population retention in rural areas and sustainable decentralization**, but prioritization of locations that meet accessibility and sustainability goals is essential.

[5] **Evidence-based spatial planning and cross-sectoral collaboration between urban planning, transport, and public administration are critical to ensure that Citizens Services serve the largest possible number of communities and places, especially those who have no or limited access to private transport.**

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KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- CREATE RESOURCE-EFFICIENT INFRASTRUCTURE, WHERE THEY SERVE THE GREATEST NUMBER OF PEOPLE.
- IN RURAL AREAS, TARGETED DECENTRALIZATION IS ESSENTIAL TO AVOID DEEPENING URBAN-RURAL INEQUALITIES.
- PRIORITIZE CITIZENS SERVICES LOCATIONS THAT PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE MODES OF TRANSPORT, (WALKING, CYCLING AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT)
- ALIGN CITIZENS SERVICES LOCATION PLANNING WITH SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT STRATEGIES.
- ENGAGE LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS TO CLARIFY THE IMPACTS OF PROPOSED DESIGN INTERVENTIONS, PRIORITISE KEY ISSUES AND TEST ALTERNATIVE SCENARIOS TO INFORM FUTURE DECISION-MAKING AND IMPROVEMENTS.
- USE AN EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACH BASED ON GEOSPATIAL ANALYSIS TO IDENTIFY, ASSESS AND PRIORITIZE CITIZENS SERVICES LOCATIONS.

INTRODUCTION

Across Europe, the strategic location of public service infrastructure has become central to advancing resource-efficiency, territorial cohesion, social equity, and inclusive development [1]. As urbanisation continues and mobility patterns evolve, equitable access to Social Services of General Interest (SSGIs) – such as Citizens' Service Centres (CSCs) and Citizens Centres (CCs) [2] – is increasingly recognized as a key metric of spatial justice and effective governance. International frameworks, including the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the New Urban Agenda, and the Territorial Agenda 2030, underscore the importance of proximity to essential services, particularly for vulnerable and underserved populations. Yet, despite broad policy consensus, the alignment of service locations with actual population needs and mobility conditions could be further improved.

This policy brief addresses this gap in the Cypriot context by evaluating the spatial performance of existing and proposed CSCs and CCs through a multi-scalar, evidence-based approach. Using geospatial analysis and accessibility metrics, it assesses how well these centres serve diverse population groups across urban and rural settings (Figure 1). The goal is to inform strategic location planning that ensures more equitable, efficient, and user-oriented public service delivery across Cyprus.

[1] OECD (2025), Shrinking Smartly and Sustainably: Strategies for Action, OECD Rural Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/f91693e3-en.

[2] In Cyprus, Citizens' Service Centres (CSCs) and Citizens' Centres (CCs) serve as centralized administrative hubs designed to consolidate and streamline public services. Operating on a «one-stop-shop» model, these centers allow citizens to access a comprehensive range of administrative services from a single location, thereby eliminating the need to visit multiple government departments. CSCs are located in the main urban centres, while CCs form a decentralised network designed to extend government services to regional and rural areas, often by using existing post-office infrastructure.

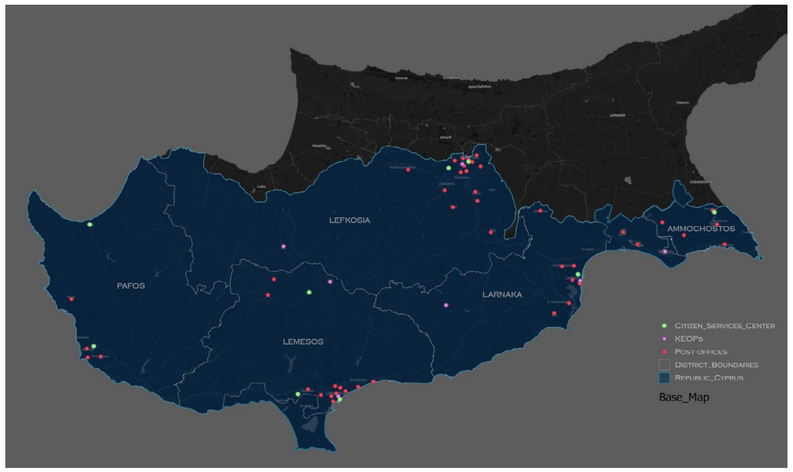

Figure 1: Mapping the locations of existing CSC, CC and Post Offices in National scale

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BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Cyprus faces the dual challenge of ensuring equitable access to essential administrative services and minimizing carbon emissions from travel. Internationally, the **New Urban Agenda** established that integrated land-use planning must ensure that all residents can reach core services – health , education, mobility and administrative centres – within their daily routines, linking spatial decisions to social inclusion and resilience (United Nations, 2016). Similarly, **UN SDG** emphasizes measurable access targets (e.g. the proportion of the population within walking distance of public transport and basic services) as a means of reducing spatial inequalities and fostering sustainable urban-rural linkages (United Nations, 2015). **Indicator 11.2.1** defines "convenient access" to public transport as being within 500 m of a low-capacity system (e.g., buses, trams) or 1 km of a high-capacity system (e.g. metro, train), with an explicit equity focus through disaggregated reporting [3]. **Target 11.a** calls for strengthened "national and regional development planning" to foster positive urban–rural linkages and balanced territorial development.

At the European level, the **Territorial Agenda 2030** - "A future for all places" provides a people-centred, place-based approach, aligning cohesion policy with the **European Green Deal** (European Commission, 2019) and **SDG 11**. It defines territorial cohesion as promoting a "balanced and harmonious development between and within countries, regions, cities and municipalities," and calls on policymakers to "strengthen the territorial dimension in EU policies" using tools such as territorial impact assessments and pilot actions in functional areas. The agenda, therefore, underlines that access to public services of general interest, including social services, must be monitored and improved across all places, urban or rural contexts (European Commission, 2021). Complementing the Territorial Agenda 2030, the **EU Quality Framework for Services of General Interest** (COM(2011) 900) distils five key dimensions that all Services of General Interest (SGI) must meet:

→ **Accessibility** (geographical and economic),
→ **Continuity** (stable provision),
→ **Affordability**,
→ **Adaptability** (user-orientation and participation), and
→ **Transparency**

[3] Lin, Z., (2022) SDG Indicator 11.2.1 Metadata: Access to Public Transport, UN Human Settlements Programme. Kenya. https://coilink.org/20.500.12592/b0sf8w

The **EU's Action Plan** on Sustainable Land Use and Nature-Based Solutions (Part of the Pact of Amsterdam's Urban Agenda, 2018) calls for compact, liveable cities underpinned by efficient land-take and the integration of green infrastructure to co-locate services and natural assets. It recommends indicators on land-take and the use of functional-urban-area cooperation to mitigate urban sprawl, ensuring service hubs like CSCs are embedded in dense, multifunctional urban fabric to minimise travel distances and carbon impacts. **The Third Biennial Report on Social Services of General Interest** (SWD(2013) 40) highlights the need for territorial-coverage indicators—for instance, the number of social-care facilities per 1000 inhabitants by region—and calls for monitoring service deserts and under served areas in rural and peripheral regions. (European Commission, 2013).

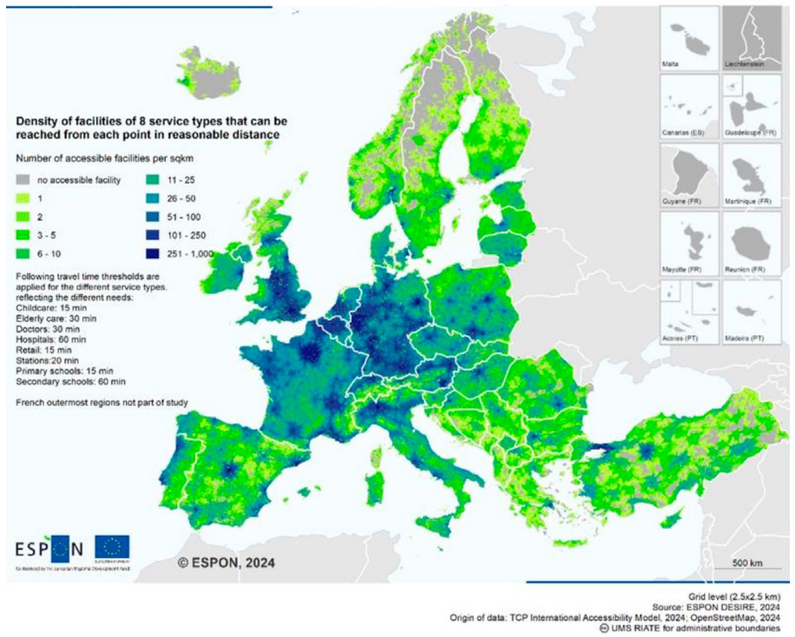

Figure 2: Demsity of Facilities in a reasonable distance, ESPON, (2024)POLICY BRIEF, Delivery of services of general interest in lagging regions and areas with special needs, Final version.

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CASE STUDY:
CITIZENS' SERVICES IN CYPRUS

In Cyprus, Citizens' Service Centres (CSCs) and Citizens' Centres (CCs) are the primary access points for government services for citizens. The main urban centres (CSCs) are known locally as KEP (Κέντρα Εξυπηρέτησης του Πολίτη), while the more recent, decentralized model (CCs), known as KEPO, has been introduced to extend government services to regional and rural areas, often by operating from existing local infrastructure of post offices. Given their central role in public life, the location of these centres is of paramount importance as it directly influences how easily and equitably citizens can interact with public administration and various offered social services.

In the context of Cyprus's sustainability goals, locating CSCs based solely on vehicle access is no longer viable. This study, commissioned by the Ministry of Transport, Communication and Works in collaboration with Cyprus Post, explored how existing and proposed CSC locations perform in terms of population coverage and accessibility by low-emission transport modes, to optimize accessibility for populations at various distances, aiming to promote sustainable development and equitable service distribution through evidence-based planning.

Through spatial analysis of existing and potential new locations for citizen services, CSC and CC, the study explored how much of the population can reach the services from their homes at different scales: the national scale, the scale of communities' clusters outside urban areas, and the scale of the urban area of Nicosia. Figure 3 and 4 shows how the national scale analysis identifies the areas and the amount of the population which are underserved at various scales.

The overall strategy proposed by the Cyprus Post is to contribute to the sustainable development of the countryside through decentralization and the provision of more and better services to support quality of life, retain the existing population and create the conditions to attract new inhabitants. One key mechanism to achieve this is the operation of CCs in regional rural post offices in a way that brings government services as close as possible to rural citizens. While the ideal solution may be for all regional post offices to operate as KEPOs, this study aims to provide the evidence regarding which areas should be prioritized and which locations are most effective for service provision to streamline decision making, especially if the conversion of all post offices into CCs is not cost effective or viable from an economic perspective, and to inform how the process should be implemented in order to achieve the greatest population coverage as soon as possible.

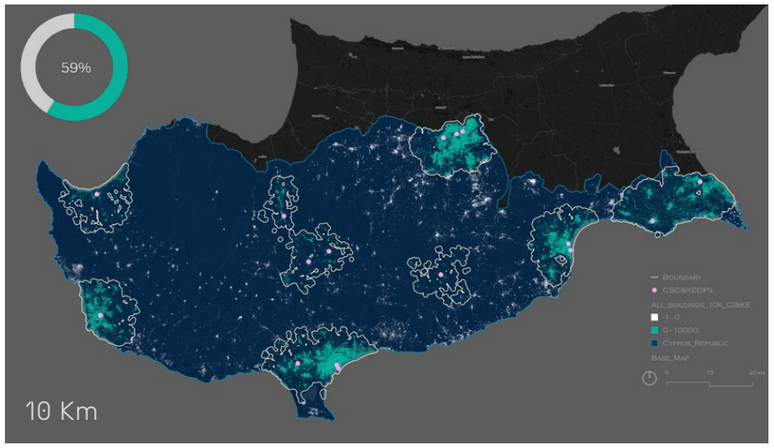

Figure 3: The national scale analysis reveals that the KEPs and KEPOs together serve 59% of the population at a 10Km distance

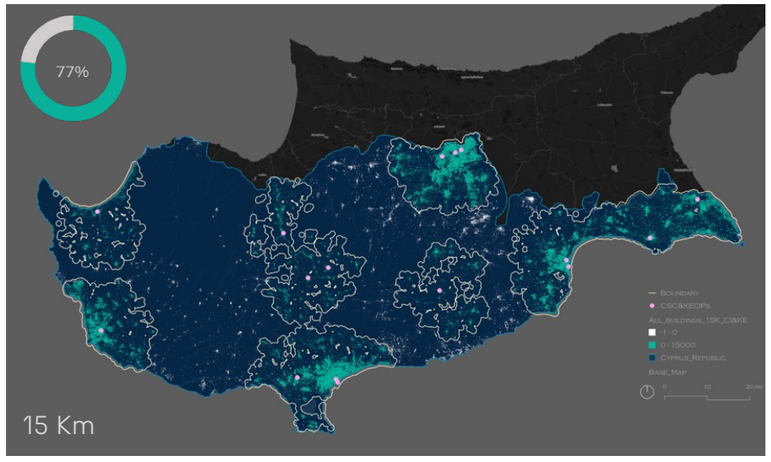

Figure 4: The national scale analysis identify underserved areas even at 15km radius

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METHODOLOGY

The analysis employed a spatial methodology using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to evaluate the accessibility of Citizens' Service Centres (KEPs, KEPOs) and post offices across Cyprus. A geo-database was constructed integrating six key datasets:

[1] **service center locations** with detailed attributes sourced from official websites geocoded via OpenStreetMap API Key and checked manually;

[2] **population data** from Eurostat's 2021 census at 1km² resolution, interpolated to a finer 100m² scale;

[3] **road networks** divided into motorized (nationwide) and non-motorized (Nicosia-focused) models;

[4] **bus routes and stops** in GTFS format, cleaned and linked via Python scripts to avoid double counting;

[5] **buildings' data** from the Cyprus cadastral service, primarily using the most recent photogrammetry dataset (BU3), supplemented by BU1/BU2 where necessary.

Spatial analysis and visualizations were conducted using QGIS to existing and proposed services locations, utilizing the **Space Syntax methodology** [4] with the **Place Syntax Tool** (PST) plugin [5] employed to calculate Attraction Reach— i.e. how many people have access to a service centre within specified threshold distances, based on actual road network paths (see Figure 5). Overlaps between catchment areas were manually resolved to avoid double-counting, ensuring accurate population reach value.

Although accessible built density analysis (how much floor area is accessible from a service location within a threshold distance) was also performed, findings confirmed close alignment with population data, with exceptions noted in high-activity non-residential zones. For the public transportation analysis, we calculated how many people can walk 250 meters to reach a bus stop that is connected to a route that goes directly to the service center. The insights provided through this kind of analysis can support more precise, demand-responsive location strategies. The methodology is summarised in Figure 6.

[4] Space Syntax Methodology is a science-based & human-focused modelling approach to the planning & design of buildings & urban places. Includes a set of techniques for analysing spatial layouts and human activity patterns in buildings and urban areas, grounded on a set of theories linking space and society. (https://www.spacesyntax.online)

[5] Place Syntax Tool (PST) is an open-source plugin for space syntax and accessibility analysis in QGIS (available at www.smog.chalmers.se)

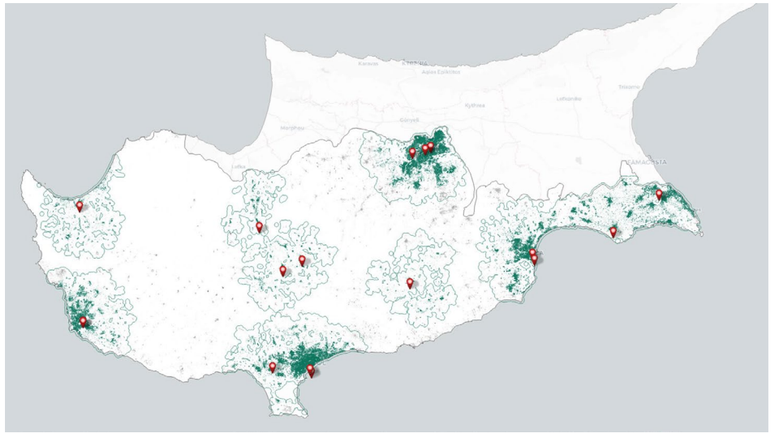

Figure 5: Access to a service centre within specified threshold distances, based on actual road network paths

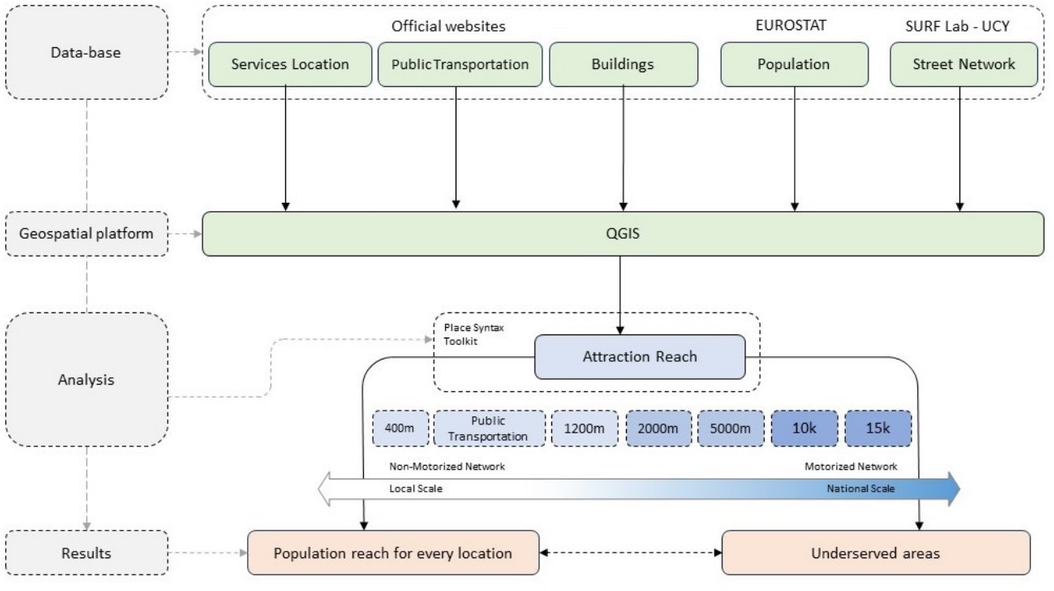

Figure 6. Methodology diagram

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KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

The analysis showed that at the national scale, the current population coverage by service center and by post offices is satisfactory: 77% of the population can reach a service centers within 15Km of their residence and 89% can reach a post office within 15Km. The areas that are underserved (Figure 7) include rural and semi-mountainous regions south-west of Nicosia, coastal areas between Larnaca and Limassol, and between Limassol and Paphos, as well as mountainous areas of the Paphos district, and the coastal area around Kato Pyrgos.

Generally, in rural and mountainous areas, public transport linking villages directly and even indirectly to service centers is limited (in many cases service is infrequent and requires changing lines). Service is marginally better in semi-rural areas nearer to urban areas and in coastal areas. Nevertheless, only a few thousand residents outside cities can effectively reach a service center by public transport at the threshold that we set (400m distance to and from a bus stop). Future public transport provision should be better aligned with service centers' locations

Overall, public transport access to CSCs remains limited in all urban areas analysed and nearly all rural areas, underscoring the need for better alignment between service location planning and transit infrastructure. For instance 5% of the population in Nicosia district have access to all CSCs in the district. Laranca is only 3%, same as Limassol, while Paphos is 14%. These findings underscore the need for integrated planning between service infrastructure and sustainable mobility systems.

Together with stakeholders, the project tested a range of spatial scenarios for new Citizens' Service Centres (CSCs) in Nicosia and Citizens Centres (CCs) across the island, assessing the performance of potential and existing locations. These scenarios were evaluated using multiple criteria, including population reach, built density, and accessibility at varying distances and by different modes of transport—walking, cycling, public transport, and private cars. Tables 1, 2 and 3 summarise this comparative analysis, enabling direct comparisons between current and proposed locations.

The results reveal how significantly different site choices can affect service coverage. For example, as shown in Figures 8 and 9, a new location in Agios Athanasios would reach 224,760 people, covering the entire Limassol urban area as well as clusters of communities to the north and east of the city (Figure 8). In contrast, placing a centre in Episkopi would reach only 137,377 people and serve a more limited area, primarily to the city's northwest Figure 9).

In Nicosia, there is currently one CSC in Engomi. Adding a CSC in the city centre would be beneficial at all scales, particularly for access by public transport and, locally, by walking and cycling. As shown in Figure 10, comparing the performance of the CC that previously operated on

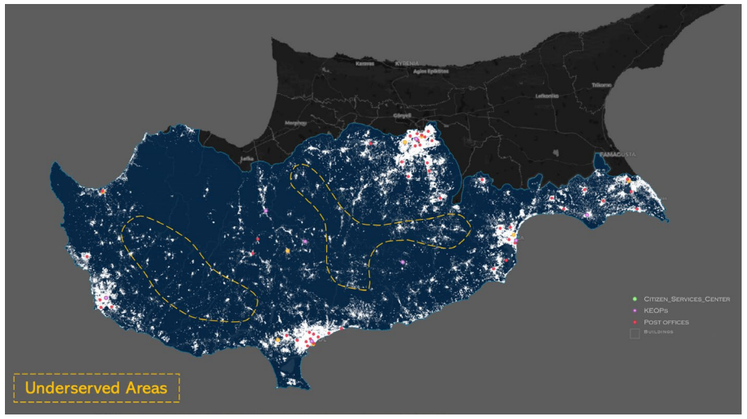


Figure 7. Underserved Areas: rural and semi-mountainous regions south-west of Nicosia, coastal areas between Larnaca and Limassol, and Limassol and Paphos, mountainous areas of the Paphos district, and the coastal area around Kato Pyrgos.

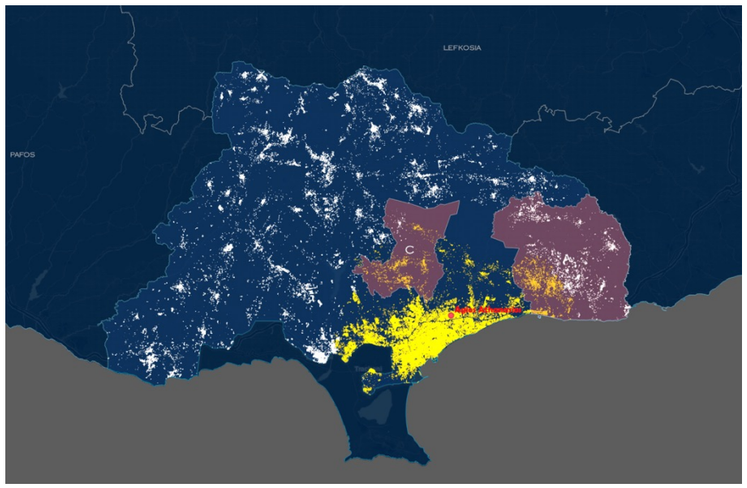


Figure 8: Population reached (15Km) by a proposed new location in Agios Athanasios in Limassol (reached population are the buildings in yellow, A,C, and F are clusters grouping a number of local communities).

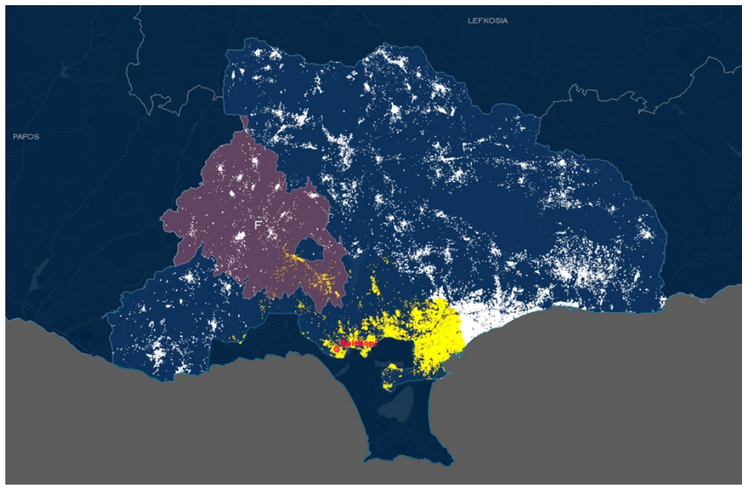


Figure 9: Population reached (15Km) by a proposed new location Episkopi in Limassol (reached population are the buildings in yellow, F is a cluster grouping a number of local communities).

Makariou Avenue with a potential new location in Pallouriotissa reveals that, although population reach is similar, the walkable coverage areas differ significantly. A centre in Pallouriotissa would not serve residents within the historic city walls at walking distance. Additionally, as indicated in Table 1, the existing CSC in Engomi is not accessible by public transport.

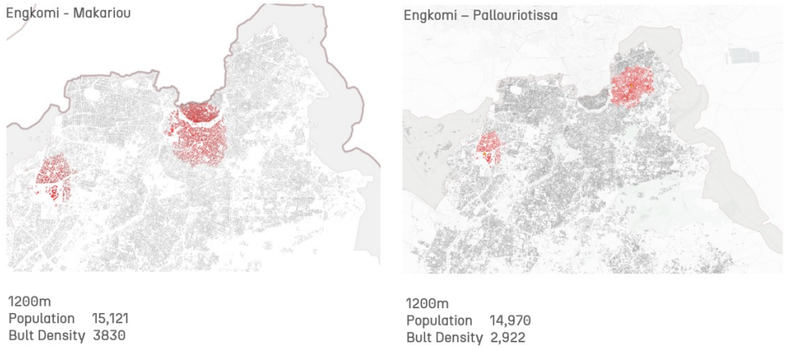


Figure 10: Comparing the performance of the CC that previously operated on Makariou Avenue with a potential new location in Pallouriotissa

Adding peripheral locations across the southern part of the city in Latsia and Lakatamia, additionally to existing and more centrally planned locations, would provide access to almost all residents in the city and additional benefits in terms of service provision to surrounding areas (Tables 2 and 3).

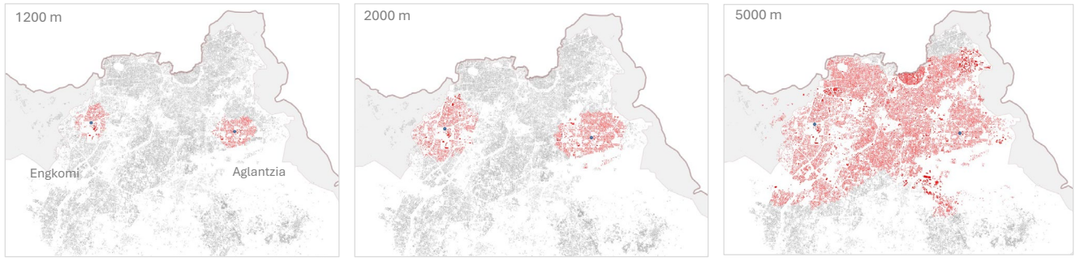
Lastly, among the scenarios tested, the establishment of six new service centers, ideally in the villages of Malounta, Peristerona or Kokkinotrimithia, Dali, Zygi or Maroni, Pissouri, and Omodos, could significantly expand coverage and increase the population reached across the country. However, several additional factors must be considered, including the availability of resources, both financial and otherwise, as well as the anticipated impact of government service digitization. In particular, many mountainous areas are difficult to access due to challenging terrain and limited road infrastructure. These regions also tend to have low population density, making permanent service centers less feasible. In such cases, alternative models, such as mobile units, part-time operations, or automated service points, may offer more practical and cost-effective solutions.

By assessing different scenarios, the analysis can inform the strategy to achieve maximum accessibility in the longer term. This kind of spatial evidence provides a strong basis to:
[A] identify new locations strategically, drawing on the relative performance of existing ones;

[B] plan mitigation or improvement measures for underperforming sites, such as adapting public transport routes or enhancing active mobility infrastructure to ensure more inclusive access to citizen services.

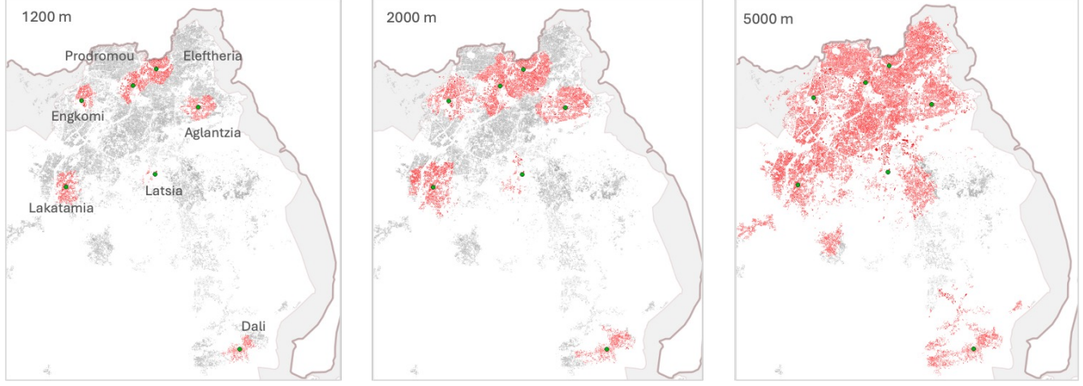
Location	400m	1200m	2000m	5000m	Public Transport
	Population	Population	Population	Population	Population
Engkomi	435	3890	12,739	88,064	0
Makariou	887	11,231	31,213	142,037	27,701

Table 1. Existing and Pre-existing Situation: Population reached by Engkomi and Makariou.



Location	400m	1200m	2000m	5000m	Public Transport
	Population	Population	Population	Population	Population
Engkomi	435	3,890	12,739	88,064	0
Aglantzia	696	6,632	18,295	96,693	9,350

Table 2 / Figure 11. Scenario 1: Population reached by Engkomi and Aglantzia S3



Location	400m	1200m	2000m	5000m	Public Transport
	Population	Population	Population	Population	Population
Engkomi	435	3,890	12,739	88,064	0
Aglantzia	696	6,632	18,295	96,693	9,350
Dali	235	2,430	5,574	12,603	5128
Prodromou	538	6,880	25,050	143,583	65,342
Eleftheria	622	8,000	26,861	136,997	201,225
Latsia	35	275	955	45,856	12,564
Lakatamia	598	6176	17195	67620	7588

Table 3 / Figure 12. Scenario 3: Population reached by Engkomi, Aglantzia S3, Plateia Eleftheria, Latsia S1 and Lakatamia, plus the CCs in Prodromou and Dali.

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POLICY IMPLICATIONS

To support national sustainability targets and ensure equitable access to services, CSCs and CCs location strategies need to take into consideration the following:

[1] Create resource-efficient infrastructure: Prioritise citizens service location where they serve the greatest number of people, while anticipating Urban Shifts. Citizens' Services must be sited for long-term accessibility.

[2] Support Rural Sustainability: Strategically selected citizens' services locations in regional hubs for targeted decentralization to reduce travel distances, boost local economies, and improve retention, while avoiding deepening urban-rural inequalities.

[3] Design for soft Sustainable Mobility: In urban areas, Citizens' Services should be located within walking or cycling distance for most residents and along key public transport routes, promoting sustainable modes of transport.

[4] Coordinate with Mobility Plans: Align Citizens Services location planning with sustainable mobility and public transport strategies. Citizens' Services planning must be linked to public transit development to avoid mismatches between service reach and transport access.

[5] Build on Evidence: Public authorities should formally adopt EBDP as a standard requirement for planning all Social Services of General Interest (SSGIs). This involves leveraging spatial analysis, transport modelling, and demographic data to test and compare location alternatives before decisions are finalized. By embedding this approach in national planning strategies, Cyprus can ensure that infrastructure projects are validated to meet clear goals for equity, accessibility, and sustainability, thereby delivering more resilient and effective solutions.

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CONCLUSIONS

The location of Social Services of General Interest is not merely a logistical concern, it is a matter of equity, sustainability, and the effectiveness of public service delivery. As Cyprus confronts the challenges of urbanisation, climate adaptation, and demographic shifts, it is essential to strengthen and refine existing strategies for locating CSCs and CCs. This Policy Brief shows that enhancing access to current centres and planning future ones must go hand-in-hand with sustainable mobility policies and spatial equity goals.

To avoid deepening territorial disparities, future planning for Social Services of General Interest must be informed by spatial and demographic evidence, aligned with land-use and mobility strategies, and attentive to the needs of underserved urban and rural communities. Prioritising accessibility for all—especially vulnerable groups—will ensure that Social Services of General Interest are delivered in ways that are both inclusive and future-oriented

ABOUT THE TWIN2EXPAND PROJECT

TWIN2EXPAND is a research project that aims to enhance the research excellence in the field of Evidence-Based Design and Planning (EBDP) at the University of Cyprus (UCY). The project seeks to address urban challenges and opportunities in Cyprus, which is a unique context for EBDP research due to its climate and history, while performing research and testing spatial models in diverse contexts. The project is coordinated by UCY and involves advanced partners from Europe with long-standing experience in EBDP: University College London (UCL), Chalmers University of Technology in Gothenburg, Politecnico di Torino (PoliTo) and Space Syntax Limited

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