

Contemporary Homelessness in Malta: Quantitative Research



Dedication

To all individuals, families and children who experienced the trauma of homelessness and/or rooflessness in the hope that one day, homelessness and rooflessness will be eradicated.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all past and current service-users who participated and shared their story for the purpose of this research.

Moreover, we would like to show our gratitude to the member organisations of the Platform Against Homelessness and all other Organisations and Entities which are tirelessly working towards eradicating homelessness and rooflessness.

We would also like to thank the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector, which manages the Voluntary Organisations Project Scheme 2021 (VOPS) funding.

Forward

In Malta, the situation of homelessness is different from other countries abroad where, one can easily see homeless and roofless people sleeping rough on the streets, gardens, and doorsteps. In Malta, we seldom see people sleeping in the streets; however, YMCA Malta, and other organisations working in the social sector, are aware that homelessness is on the increase. In 2019, YMCA Malta launched Y' Visible service catering for the roofless where 44 roofless individuals were reached during that particular year and another 67 roofless individuals were reached and supported in 2021.

Even though homelessness is on the increase, Malta still does not have official statistics showing how many individuals and families are homeless. The official numbers, to date, do not portray the real situation.

Contemporary Homelessness in Malta: Quantitative Research was carried out with the support of several organisations and entities, some of which also forms part of the Platform Against Homelessness that YMCA Malta launched in 2020 during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. This research aims to create and suggest a framework to count the homeless population in Malta and also publish official and more up-to-date statistics about homelessness and examine the major contributing factors which lead to homelessness in Malta.

This research focused on poverty and social inclusion as a relevance addressing issues of marginalization and encouraging people's awareness and commitment to tackling the issue of homelessness and the so-called 'invisible' population for a more inclusive society. Many people living in Malta still do not believe that there are people who experience homelessness in Malta. YMCA Malta wishes to recommend further research on homelessness to implement change in the local and national policy frameworks, to assist increase capacity building of other organisations working in the social sector, and place homelessness on the national agenda.

We are at a stage whereby starting a serious debate on a national level about the issues homeless individuals and families especially children are facing is a must and a peril to the society of tomorrow if this is not tackled.

Anthony Camilleri
YMCA Malta CEO

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1. Contemporary Homelessness in Malta:
Quantitative Research
Supplementary Qualitative Research Report

1.1 Abstract

This study forms part of the research project titled 'VOPS 09/2021 - Contemporary Homelessness in Malta: Quantitative Research'. In supplementing a quantitative exercise through which the number of people who are currently 'homeless' and residing in shelters in Malta are counted, this document provides some deeper insight into three dimensions of homelessness: conditions that may lead to homelessness, the role of support networks in reducing and mitigating the effects of homelessness, and experiences of everyday life as a homeless person in Malta. In exploring these dimensions, the paper draws upon both narratives of present and past YMCA Malta clients and some ethnographic observations and experiences of the author.

1.2 Introduction

1.2.1 Project Background

This study forms part of the research project titled 'VOPS 09/2021 - Contemporary Homelessness in Malta; Quantitative Research'. Whilst the project primarily involved 'counting' those categorised as homeless in contemporary Malta through quantitative methodologies, semi-structured interviews and ethnographic methods were also used to supplement the primary results with some further insight about how homelessness in Malta is 'lived' and navigated.

This qualitative study is based on six (6) interviews, conducted during a series of visits to homeless shelters, residences, and facilities on separate dates during January and February 2022. The six interviewees are either currently homeless and reside in one of the shelters that were visited or have been homeless and resided in one of the shelters in the past.

The brief study was carried out to better understand some of the more nuanced dimensions of homelessness in contemporary Malta. Whilst this phenomenon undoubtedly requires more time and resources to be fully explored and unpacked through ethnographic research, this exercise provides the opportunity to qualitatively explore three dimensions related to this subject.

First, conditions and circumstances that may lead to homelessness. In other words, those factors that either cause or contribute to the incidence of homelessness in Malta. Second, the role of support networks in both reducing homelessness and mitigating its effects where it occurs. Here, a consideration of various types of support networks - from family, to NGOs, to state - is useful as these may all play important roles in prevention and rehabilitation. Third, the realities, experiences, and challenges of everyday life as a homeless person in contemporary Malta.

1.3 Research Method

1.3.1 Interviews

Each interview was forty-five (45) minutes long, and each research participant was taken through a structured but flexible agenda attached to this document as Appendix 1.

All interviews were conducted 'in the field', within YMCA Malta residences, offices, or 'hubs' that participants were familiar with. For the researcher, this provided the opportunity to

observe some day-to-day activities at these locations and have conversations with YMCA Malta staff members and professionals about their activities. In this way, the researcher could not only gain some insight about the 'condition' of homelessness from YMCA Malta clients and past clients, but also about how YMCA Malta and other entities are mitigating it through their work and operations.

1.3.2 The Interviewer

One interviewer and a YMCA Malta professional (social worker, psychologist, or other professional), were present at each interview. The interviewer:

- Has an extensive experience in the field of market or user research;
- Holds a PhD in anthropology;
- Can communicate clearly in English and Maltese.

1.3.3 Ethical Considerations

Because of the nature of the phenomenon being studied, ethical issues needed to be anticipated and addressed during the fieldwork phase of this project. Before each interview, participants were presented with an information and consent sheet that is attached to this document as Appendix 2. In presenting this sheet to each participant, the researcher:

- Ensured that the objectives of this research and of all stakeholders involved in this research were clearly and fully disclosed and explained to participants;
- Committed himself to safeguarding personal information through which participants may be identified by any third party, including by omission and/or replacement of all identifiable information from/in texts where the researcher refers to the participant;
- Obtained fully informed and written consent from participants to allow the researcher to use their narratives and experiences for the purposes of this research.

These ethical principles have been followed throughout the fieldwork and writing processes of this study. Therefore, all personal information through which research participants may be identified has been either omitted or changed (ex. participant names have been replaced with pseudonyms). Some places and locations (ex. YMCA Malta Head Office) are directly referred to, first because the role of these locations in this study is self-evident, and second because referring to them directly should not compromise any of the principles outlined above.

1.3.4 A Note on Writing Style

The main text in this document draws upon three components of the research or 'fieldwork' process. First, the six interviews through which the researcher learned about things such as causes of homelessness and what it means to be homeless in contemporary Malta from present and past YMCA Malta clients. Second, conversations between the researcher and YMCA Malta professionals, which were often about the history of YMCA Malta, how the organisation operates, and its role in mitigating homelessness in Malta. Third, the researcher's own observations as he spent time at YMCA Malta shelters and offices as well as in other locations where he accompanied YMCA Malta staff during their work.

The result of drawing upon these three components of fieldwork is an ethnographic text which, at times, becomes a first-person narration of the researcher's experiences and reflections during fieldwork. In this way, the text not only presents participant narratives that reveal some nuances of homelessness, but also describes the researcher's own experience as he becomes briefly immersed in and 'exposed to' this phenomenon.

1.4 Results

1.4.1 Changing Capital

As I approached the YMCA Malta Head Office front door in Merchants Street on the afternoon of the 31st of January 2022, I felt rather disoriented. I had not been this far down this street in some years, and I kept trying to reconcile the Valletta that I was experiencing with the Valletta that I could remember.

I used to be familiar with the YMCA Malta premises during the early to mid-2000s, when it occasionally served as a meeting spot for university students. Particularly for those students who, like me, were reading for undergraduate degrees that at the time were considered 'unconventional' at the University of Malta: anthropology, philosophy, and courses in the social sciences that were less popular than the long-established law, medicine, and architecture university courses.

We affectionately referred to the centre in Maltese as il-YMCA (literally translated to 'the YMCA') and recognised it as a spot where us misfits who had little interest in networking with 'big men' of the future at grand university soirées could congregate on Friday nights. We would occasionally attend small events that were held in a section of the building. Other times, a few cups of cheap wine on the pavement just outside the centre would warm us up for the rest of

our night, which we would usually spend roaming the streets of Valletta. Back then, nightspots in the capital were scarce, and even Republic Street felt empty and desolate when the coffee shops closed for the day.

Like the rest of Malta, Valletta has changed a great deal over the past twenty years. Many parts of the capital have either been restored or altogether restructured, and gentrification has brought with it a more polished surface: sophisticated 'eateries', corporate 'hubs', and vigorous trade and activity during both day and night.

As I found out that January afternoon, lower Merchants Street, and il-YMCA itself, are no exception in this sense. The dusty green and white 'YMCA Centre' sign that used to mark the entrance to the premises has been taken down. Inside, a clean and organised reception area is set up with a welcome desk, chairs, and a table on which free leaflets and booklets with information about YMCA Malta and other related local organisations are neatly sorted. Staff members are attending to different matters calmly and in a way that suggests they are used to the space and to performing their tasks. Whilst the place retains just enough of its 'rustic' character from the noughties to evoke some nostalgia, it looks and feels significantly more organised, modernised, and sanitised.

As I waited for my first interlocutor, sitting on one of the chairs and flicking through one of the pamphlets, I wondered whether homelessness as a 'state of being' in Malta had changed with the YMCA Malta Centre and the rest of Valletta. I assumed that, also in view of the reinvigoration of the immediate urban environment that followed an economic boom, the homelessness problem in Malta should be a limited and temporary one. I would soon learn that my assumption was wrong. The glossy new surface of Malta, Valletta, il-YMCA, and my own echo chamber has an underbelly that is grimy and that at times is a direct result of processes of gentrification that have become an inevitable part of everyday life.

1.4.2 Becoming Homeless: Some Causes of Homelessness

My previous naivety with respect to homelessness in contemporary Malta partially stems from the fact that I grew up relatively sheltered in a Maltese middleclass family. Together with the fact that I had only ever come in direct contact with homeless and roofless people when I spent time living in England, this contributed to my perception that in Malta causes of homelessness can be easily avoided, or at least mitigated.

However, as I learned from my interlocutors, the reasons for which one becomes homeless may be highly specific to individual circumstances in the first instance and change with historical conditions in the second. In other words, they are equally dependent on individual behaviours and choices on the one hand and on broader socio-economic conditions that

impact access to wealth and education on the other.

This in turn makes homelessness a reality that is all but impossible to counteract through any simple 'blanket' policy or strategy. Furthermore, as I shall be illustrating briefly, it may be experienced during one specific life stage of hardship, by individuals who have led otherwise 'normal' lives. Following my discussions with YMCA Malta clients and staff, I was able to identify three categories or types of conditions that may result in homelessness.

The first type involves early life experiences that, as described by Nina and Julia below, are marked by a lack of stable access to wealth, education, and familial or other support networks. This may in turn contribute to problematic behaviours like substance abuse, which over time have negative impacts on financial and living conditions. In the cases of both Nina and Julia, this series of conditions and behaviours significantly contributed to 'becoming' homeless:

"I had a difficult childhood... I was in an orphanage being taken care of by nuns, but I was never settled, and I was always causing trouble... when I lived with relatives for a time, I was abused by them, so I ended up back in an institution... I used to escape from everywhere and I got severely punished for it... from then onwards I just moved from one institution to another, sometimes ending up in the streets and being taken up by people who knew me or my friends... I developed a drug problem, and I had to go to rehab to kick it and be allowed in a shelter or home... after that I moved into a shared flat that was taken care of by another local organisation and I started working... eventually I moved into a YMCA residence..." (Nina, Past YMCA Malta Client)

"I did not have an easy childhood... my father passed away when I was very young, so my mother had to take care of me on her own... our life was difficult... when I was twelve, I started keeping bad company and I started using drugs... I used every drug back then and I got addicted, and I ended up working on the streets as a prostitute to maintain my habit... eventually I ended up in prison... I did a rehab programme and once I got out of prison, I moved into a YMCA residence to make sure I don't end up in the environment that I was in before..." (Julia, Current YMCA Malta Client)

The second category is characterised by unforeseen events and conditions that occur later in life (ex. during early or late adulthood) and, as described to me by Kat and Sonya below, effectively disable one's access to wealth and adequate housing.

In the case of Kat, becoming estranged from her mother in her late teens, whilst she was expecting her first child and when she was not able to fully support herself meant that she became homeless. In the case of Sonya, an abusive relationship forced her out of a home that

she shared with her ex-partner and children. Whilst she was able to support herself and her children for a time, a leg injury eventually kept her from being able to work and from earning enough to pay rent and make a living.

“My childhood was not bad; I’d say it was normal... but then I got into some trouble, I fell out with my mother, and I couldn’t stay with her any longer... I had some support from other relatives, but I had nowhere to go and stay long term and I was also expecting a baby at the time... YMCA took me in at one of their residences...” (Kat, Past YMCA Malta Client)

“I did not have an easy life, but I wouldn’t say my childhood was bad... as I grew up, I went through rough periods where I was working very long hours to support myself and my children as best as I got... I fell out with my ex-partner because he was controlling and abusive... I could not live with him any longer and I decided that I’d rather be on the street than with him... so I took my children and tried to work as best as I could for years, but I got injured from working too much and I could not keep up with all the manual labour I was doing... I ended up having to move out of the flat I was in at the time, and came here at YMCA with my daughter...” (Sonya, Current YMCA Malta Client)

The third type of conditions involves a lack or loss of financial means to subsist. Unlike for the second type of conditions described above, this loss is not necessarily preceded by traumatic or other life events but may instead happen suddenly when one’s source of income or money for adequate housing either becomes insufficient or is altogether cut.

“I had a normal childhood and up to a certain point I was supported well by my family... I wasn’t one who had any big problems until I came to a point where I could not pay rent any more... I tried to work as much as I could, but it wasn’t enough to make ends meet, and that is how I ended up here at YMCA...” (Matt, Current YMCA Malta Client)

These three types of conditions are not necessarily exclusive but may instead overlap. Those who experience traumatic events that result in homelessness later in life would not necessarily have experienced privilege during childhood, problematic behaviours may be the main cause of failure to subsist, and so forth. However, as my interlocutors’ narratives show, each of these conditions may occur on its own and lead to or contribute to homelessness.

1.5 Support Networks

Notwithstanding the fact that my interlocutors went through different experiences that

resulted in homelessness, they all shared one similar view: that stable support networks are essential to both avoiding and 'recovering' from being homeless. Here, three types of support networks were mentioned.

The first type of network consists of family, kin, and friends whose consistent support may serve to prevent homelessness. These networks not only serve to provide material support (ex. financial) but also moral support that is formative (ex. education). Matt, Nina, and Julia here attribute their homelessness and problematic behaviours to the absence of this type of support:

"As long as I was getting some financial support from my family, I was ok... now I broke off contact with almost all members of my family..." (Matt, Current YMCA Client)

"I would have had a much better life had I been taught the difference between good and bad when I was younger, but I have never had parents or relatives who tried to teach me..." (Nina, Past YMCA Malta Client)

"The people I surrounded myself with were not good for me... they were bad company... now that I am currently recovering from my addiction and problems, I don't keep in touch with any of them and made some new friends who I socialise and have fun with while staying clean... having good friends is very important..." (Julia, Current YMCA Malta Client)

The second type of support network consists of individuals who are active within mitigative structures (ex. homeless shelters, soup kitchens). This network includes members of staff and professionals, but also other homeless persons who are, for instance, residents at the same shelter. The network of workers and professionals is particularly important as it provides psychological and moral support and sets a 'structure' for development in terms of, for instance, finding a stable job and gradually becoming independent. Shelter residents may also sustain each other in unexpected ways: a mutual state of vulnerability may lead to the establishment of close ties that one may not have experienced outside of the home. This type of support is exemplified in the cases of Bonnie and Kat below:

"YMCA allow you to keep your family with you when you go into their shelters, and that is important especially when you have kids... in the shelter you also feel better, because you meet people who have been through worse things than you have..." (Bonnie, Current YMCA Malta Client)

"YMCA's support during my time at the shelter was essential for me to become better, find a job, and move out of the shelter... they helped me learn new things, they

sent me to courses, and eventually helped me to settle in a stable job... today I can support myself and my family thanks to the process of growth that I went through during my time at the shelter..." (Kat, Past YMCA Malta Client)

The third type of support network consists of professionals (social workers, counsellors, and so forth) who follow homeless persons during - but more importantly after - their time within shelters and rehabilitation programmes. These become particularly important in cases where homelessness was compounded by behavioural issues such as substance abuse, as in the cases of Julia and Nina below:

"I still speak to my social worker regularly and I will keep doing it, it's very important to keep in touch with someone like that, it helps you stay clean and on the good path..." (Julia, Current YMCA Malta Client)

"I live on my own today, but I come here at YMCA and speak to my counsellor regularly... I find it useful to talk to someone who knows what you've been through..." (Nina, Past YMCA Malta Client)

These narratives illustrate the degree to which support networks are valued as central to mitigation of homelessness. They also suggest that whilst the absence of support networks may not necessarily result in homelessness, providing and stabilising these networks when they are absent is central for the gradual resolution of key issues that contribute to homelessness.

1.6 The Duality of Homelessness

As one may discern from the discussion and narratives above, being homeless does not only imply the absence of adequate housing. Rather, it is a state of being that is often preceded by a series of conditions and behaviours that culminate in a loss of resources.

Moreover, quite apart from a lack of material resources, a homeless person must navigate some complex issues including shame, particularly within the small social and cultural context of Malta.

The process of mitigation and gradual shift towards independence, however, also involves the positive development of skills, character, and resilience that are necessary for long term-plans to be formed and executed. These two sides of homelessness as a state of being are reflected in the statements below:

“I’m here and I get along with the other residents, I cook, I keep myself busy without a problem... I also work now and have been able to keep a stable job so I’m planning for the future and I’m trying to learn how to better manage my money... my plan is to move out soon, once I manage to obtain my own living space through social housing...” (Julia, Current YMCA Malta Client)

“You just have to keep fighting against life’s adversities and do what you can... over here I’m well, I’m sheltered with my daughter... I get along with the other residents and I’m grateful for the help YMCA has given me... I recently found a job and have been making some money, I’m just taking it day by day...” (Sonya, Current YMCA Malta Client)

“You have to keep learning and moving forward because homelessness is a process, had I not been homeless I wouldn’t have learnt what I know today... I used to feel ashamed to tell anyone that I was living in a shelter, only some of my close friends knew this... but today I am not ashamed to say it because I look at it as a process that I had to go through to become better...” (Kat, Past YMCA Malta Client)

Further evidence for this duality and contrasts that characterise homelessness is presented in Section 2.5, the final ethnographic section of this document where I present an account of my visit to a soup kitchen accompanied by YMCA Malta staff members, on my second day of fieldwork.

My aim here is to describe my experience, but also to provide an alternative view of the ‘gentrified’ Valletta that I describe in the first ethnographic section of this text (Section 2.1). Here, therefore, I am inviting the reader to consider two sets of dualities. First, affluent ‘modern’ Malta versus a less attractive and more problematic underbelly – in this text exemplified by my experience of a gentrified Merchants Street in ‘upper’ Valletta and the soup kitchen in ‘lower’ Valletta. Second, the challenges of being homeless versus the resilience and hopeful optimism that structures like YMCA Malta and the Soup Kitchen facilitate.

1.7 The Underbelly

I spent most of my second day of observation with George, Beth, and Gina, who are all professionals occupying different roles at YMCA Malta. We had planned to visit the soup kitchen in the lower area of Valletta, where a free hot meal is served daily at lunchtime to anyone who might need it. The congregation of those who make use of this service, George told me, usually consists of individuals who come from different parts of Malta and who are on the

brink of poverty.

We made our way down St. Ursula Street and came to the entrance of the soup kitchen: a large wooden door that leads into a large corridor, where a volunteer is greeting those walking in. The kitchen is situated within the premises of the Church of St. Mary of Jesus (Ta' Ġiežu) that is taken care of by Franciscan friars.

On one side of the corridor leading to the kitchen and dining area, a plaque sculpted by a local contemporary artist commemorates the tragic death of one hundred and ten boys that occurred in the same spot the 11th of February 1823. The boys had been crushed to death in a narrow passage when it was overcrowded with people rushing in for free bread distributed by the Franciscan caretakers during a period of famine.

On the one hand, the location feels imbued with symbolic and religious meaning, on the other it has clearly been restructured to host brand new facilities including, apart from the kitchen itself, a locker room and showers that may be used by those who need them.

As we walked into the dining area, I was immediately struck by the number of people present. Most of the tables and chairs that were set up in the long room were taken up by, as I estimated, a total of between thirty and forty people. In part because of my lack of familiarity and foresight with respect to local homelessness and poverty, I had assumed that most of those present would likely be foreign nationals. I could immediately see that I was wrong; most of those grouped at the tables were clearly Maltese people who were familiar with the place and each other.

We were greeted by Father Peter, the Franciscan who runs the kitchen, and he invited us to sit down at one of the tables at the front of the room that were reserved for kitchen staff and volunteers. As Father Peter shared a word with George, a volunteer brought us coffee, which he got from a large dispenser from which other cups were being filled. All around us, volunteers of different ages were actively preparing more coffee, food, and drinks for those present. There was no palpable tension or animosity between all those present. Father Peter and the volunteers related to all attendees without commiseration - they shared jokes and laughed together.

Everything felt cheerful and communal, much like how one would expect a factory or school canteen to feel. The only moment of silence came as the food was being served, when Father Peter requested everyone's attention for a few seconds of collective prayer and a short speech. The atmosphere went from solemn to jovial again, as he directed it. A birthday cake was brought out for one of the volunteers as all of those present sang and cheered.

The food itself, baked pasta or Imqarrun, looked homely and appetising, and the only reason for which I politely refused when a volunteer offered me a helping is that I do not eat meat. This only made me more aware of the luxuries of my echo chamber: often, my choice is between what to consume and what not to consume. For most of those present, the choice is usually between whether to consume or not consume at all.

As the members of YMCA Malta staff accompanying me were approached by a group of young people who needed a referral to a foodbank, I thought about how easy it is to ignore or altogether miss this underbelly for the more attractive surface, despite it being a persistent reality that these people must contend with daily.

Appendix 1 – Interview Guide

Quantifying Homelessness in Malta – Semi-Structured Interview Guide

General Notes:

- i. All research participants must give their informed consent to participate in this study. The research information sheet and consent form are to be presented and explained to each participant before interview sessions begin.
- ii. These questions should only serve as reference points for the interview. The interviewer should allow a conversation to develop and progress naturally and be prepared to ask questions that are not included in this guide and may be related to other issues raised by the interviewee.

Section 1: Conditions & Circumstances

1. You are currently a client within a residence that provides services for homeless persons. Do you identify as a homeless individual, and if yes, how do you interpret this identity and state of being?
2. Tell me your story. How did you get here? Interviewer's Note: Probe for anecdotes about the 'origins' of homelessness for participant, focus on remote past here.
3. What are the main challenges that keep you from moving away from the residence and becoming fully independent? Interviewer's Note: Find out more about why the participant remains 'homeless' here, why other options (ex. social housing) are not working for him/her, and whether homelessness is a condition that involves cycles (ex. like addiction with recovery, relapse, etc, - staff may also provide insight here).

Section 2: Support Network

4. Do you have any type of support network outside the residence? Interviewer's Note: Prompt for support from family, friends, but also peers who may be in a similar situation.
5. Do you feel that more support from the local 'system' or institutions (state, employment agencies, housing departments, etc.) would help you to become more independent?
6. What type of support, foundations, and institutions may be established to reduce the incidence of homelessness in Malta? Interviewer's Note: Probe for ways in which further support/structures may lead to a reduction in occurrence.

Section 3: Life as a Homeless Person

7. Describe a typical day in your life. How do you spend your time, and which parts of your routine would you change if you could?
8. Do you feel stigmatised, looked down upon, or disadvantaged in the eyes of others because of your status as a homeless person?
9. Do you feel 'connected' (ex. through a sense of kinship) to other homeless persons?
Interviewer's Note: here probe for a sense of mutual vulnerability that may strengthen relations between one homeless person and another, and for any evidence of moral economies.

Section 4: Concluding Remarks

10. Finally, is there anything else that you think I should know about homelessness in Malta?

Thank you, close.

** ** *

Appendix 2 – Participant Information Sheet & Consent Form

Research Participant Information & Consent Sheet (In-Depth Interviews)

Name of Research Agency: Marketing Advisory Services Name of Contracting Authority: YMCA Malta

Introduction

I am John Micallef, and I am currently working on this research project for the local independent market research agency Marketing Advisory Services, which was in turn commissioned by YMCA Malta. The primary aim of this research is to quantify homelessness, in other words to 'count' the total amount of those defined as homeless persons in Malta at this time. As part of the same study, however, I am approaching and speaking to persons like yourself, to better understand the condition of homelessness in Malta.

The purpose of this sheet is to inform you, prior to giving your signed consent to participate in the project, about the purposes of this research and your role as a participant. Please let me know if anything is not clear, and I will explain further.

Purpose of the Research

I would like you to help me learn about the topic of homelessness in Malta, through sharing your impressions, views, and experiences. I would like you to tell me about your previous and present experiences as a homeless person: how and when you became homeless, the challenges that are posed by this condition, and how you address these challenges. I would also like to learn more about the reasons because of which one may remain homeless over a long period of time.

Voluntary Participation and Right to Withdraw

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. I am aware that, given the sensitivity and nature of the research topic, I may be asking you to share some personal and confidential information with me, and that you may at times feel uncomfortable talking about the subject of interest. You can choose to participate or not to participate, choose to not answer any of my questions, or ask me to omit certain information that you provide me with from the research report that I shall write up following our conversation.

Procedures

During your participation, we will be talking about homelessness in Malta, and I will be asking you questions about this topic. I shall be taking some notes of your answers. I shall then refer to my notes in writing up my final report, which will be seen by other members of the research team at Marketing Advisory Services and YMCA Malta.

It is important for you to know that your identity will not be revealed to anyone else, at any point of this exercise. In the final report, I will be using your impressions, insights, and experiences in illustrating my analysis of homelessness in Malta, but I shall not be revealing your real name or any of your personal data to third parties, at any time. In this way, I bind myself to respect and protect the confidentiality between you as a research participant and myself as a researcher.

Duration

The research will take place over one (1) month, between January 2021 and February 2021.

Who to Contact?

If you have any questions, you can ask them at any time. You may contact me via email address jmicallef@marketingadvisoryservices.com or telephone number 27013002, at any point should you require further clarifications about the research.

You may also contact Therese Cini Sarreo at YMCA Malta, via email address therese.ymca@gmail.com or telephone number 27674278.

Agreement to Participate

I, _____, confirm that I can read and write in English and/or Maltese, have read the information presented above, and voluntarily agree to participate in research about homelessness in Malta as described.

Signature: _____

ID Card No.: _____

Date: _____

2. Contemporary Homelessness in Malta:
Quantitative Research
Quantifying Homelessness - Quantitative Report

2.1 Overview

2.1.1 Aims

The main objective of this study was to quantify homelessness in contemporary Malta by providing a 'snapshot' of the number of residents across local homeless shelters during a specific period. To achieve this, Marketing Advisory Services (MAS) engaged in a collaborative exercise with several shelters to carry out a census of residents in these locations between the 17th of January 2022 and the 14th of February 2022.

A second objective of this research was to provide some insight into circumstances and processes that may lead or contribute to the phenomenon of homelessness in contemporary Malta. This second dimension was explored both through quantitative methods (Section 3 of this document) and more closely through a qualitative ethnographic study of which results are being presented separately.

2.1.2 Method

Residents and regular frequenters of the homeless shelters were 'counted' through the Capture-Recapture method. Through this method, individuals who were present at these shelters between the 17th of January 2022 and 14th of February 2022 were recorded as part of the 'fixed' local homeless population.

Each homeless shelter submitted the required data to MAS. All data was filtered and anonymised by each of the respective shelters before being sent to MAS.

A total of twenty-three (23) organisations that offer services to counter or mitigate homelessness were approached and given access to the data collection tool that was designed by MAS. Out of these, fourteen (14) shelters/services actively participated in the project. Most of the other nine (9) organisations that were approached did not participate in this study because whilst they provide mitigative services for homeless persons, they do not administer shelters.

2.2 Results

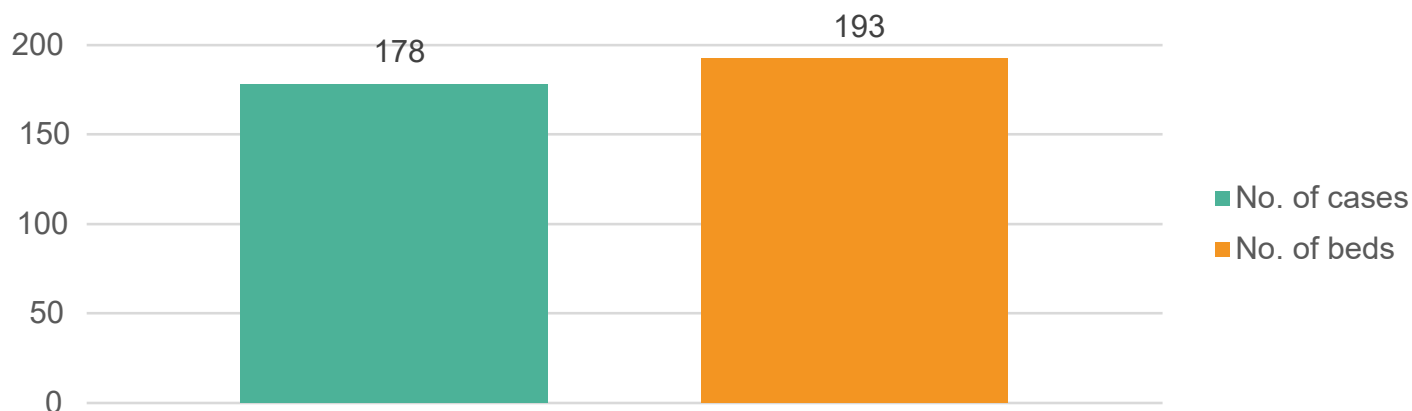
2.2.1 Number of Cases & Shelter Capacity

A total number of 178 individuals and 58 accompanying children aged between 0 and 16 years were recorded as residing at one of the participating shelters during the data collection period.

This number includes adults and children who were taken in as residents on their own but excludes children who were registered when accompanied by adults. Specific data about children accompanied by adults is presented in Section 4 below.

The overall occupancy rate of the participating shelters during the data collection period was over 80%, with more than half of these shelters operating at full capacity.

Figure 1 - Shelter Cases vs Number of Beds



Please note that one case moved from one shelter to another during the data collection period and some shelters had a turnover of cases during this time period whereby they had more cases than they had beds.

Besides these cases, there were an additional 11 cases of roofless individuals that were recorded by service providers but are not accounted for in the above numbers but during this period they did not make use of any shelter facilities. These cases ranged between 17 and 67 years of age and were recorded in various localities around the greater harbour area (Southern and Northern harbour districts).

2.2.2 Note of Seasonality

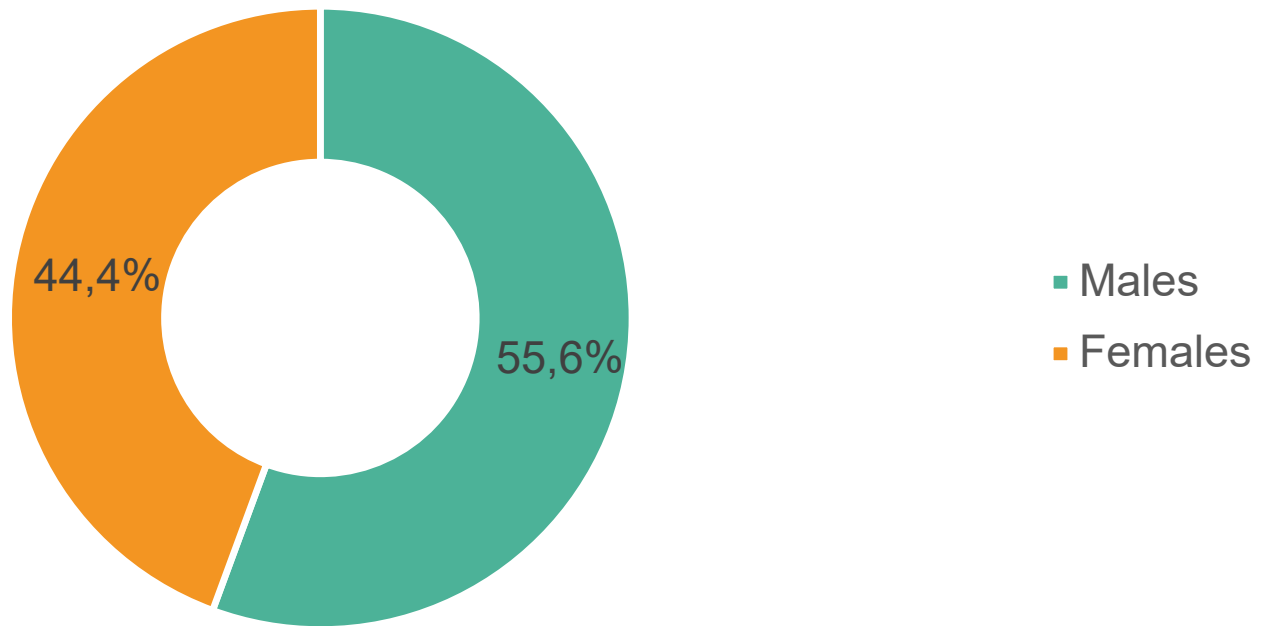
The shelters were also asked whether they noted any changing patterns in the number of clients that may be attributed to seasonality. Generally, shelter representatives observed here, there are no direct impacts of seasonality on number of residents at the participating shelters.

2.2.3 Shelter Residents Demographics

2.2.3.1 Gender

During the data collection period, more males than females were registered as residents within the shelters (Figure 2).

Figure 2 - Gender of homeless individuals (n=178)



2.2.3.2 Age

The overall average age of individuals recorded through this research was 37.5 years. The average age of females was 40.5 years, whereas that of males was 35.1 years.

The majority (52 individuals) of residents registered during this period were between the ages of 25 and 34 years (Figure 3).

Figure 3 - Resident count by age bands (n=178)

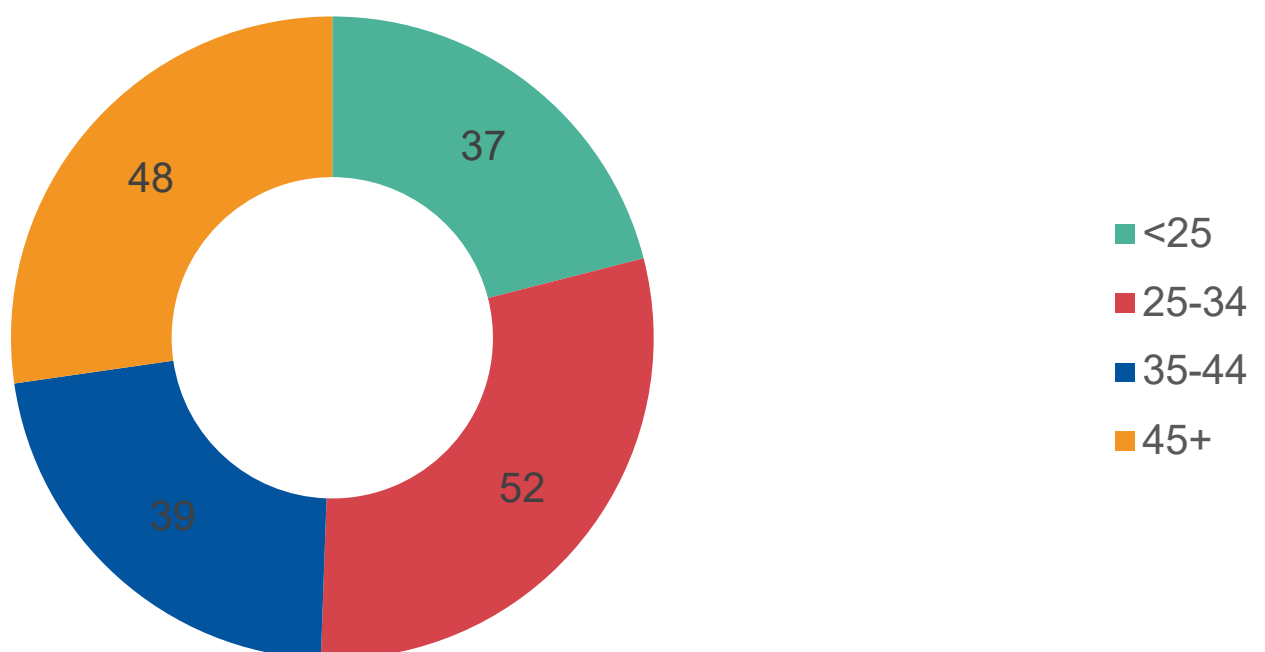


Figure 4 further details the ages of all 178 individual residents that were registered in shelters during the data collection period.

Figure 4 - Male & female count by age (part 1) (n=178)

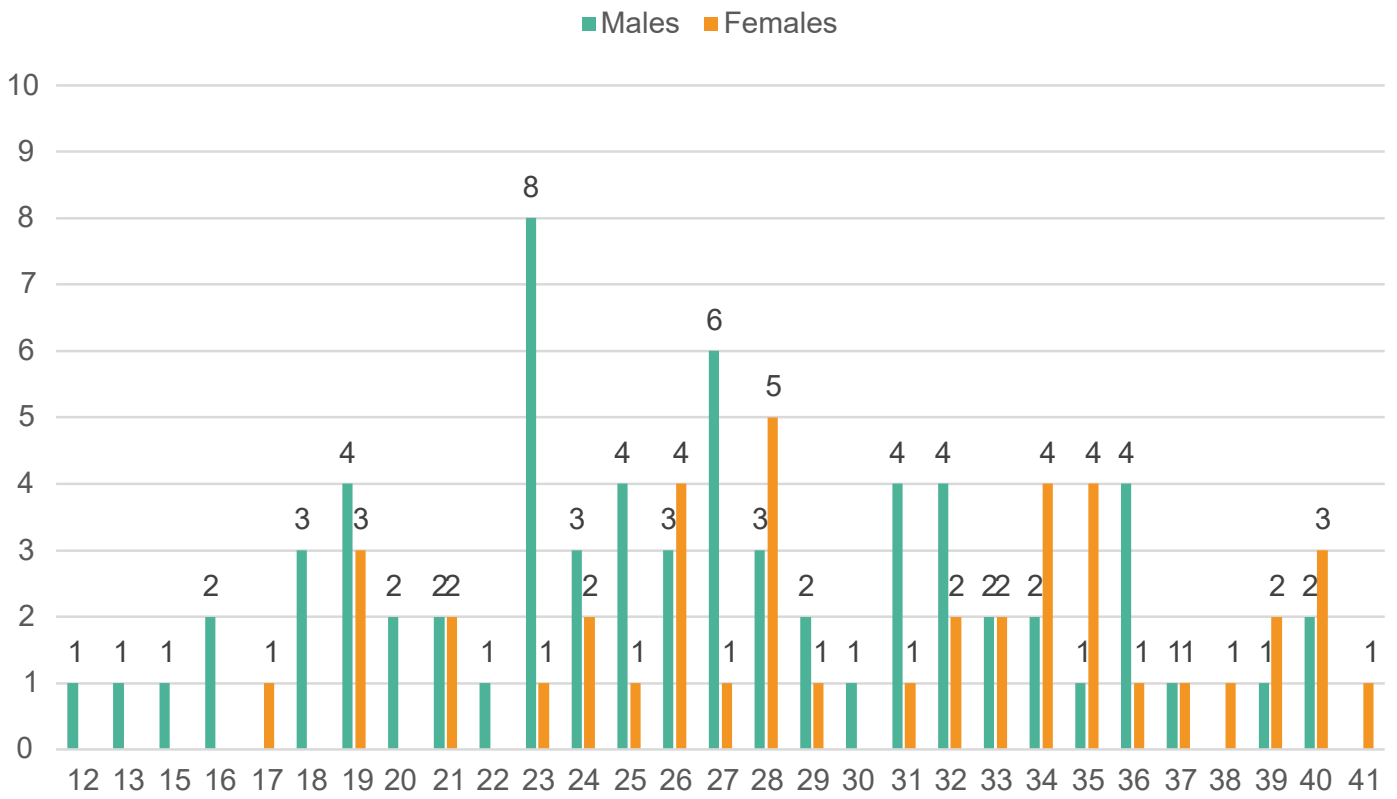
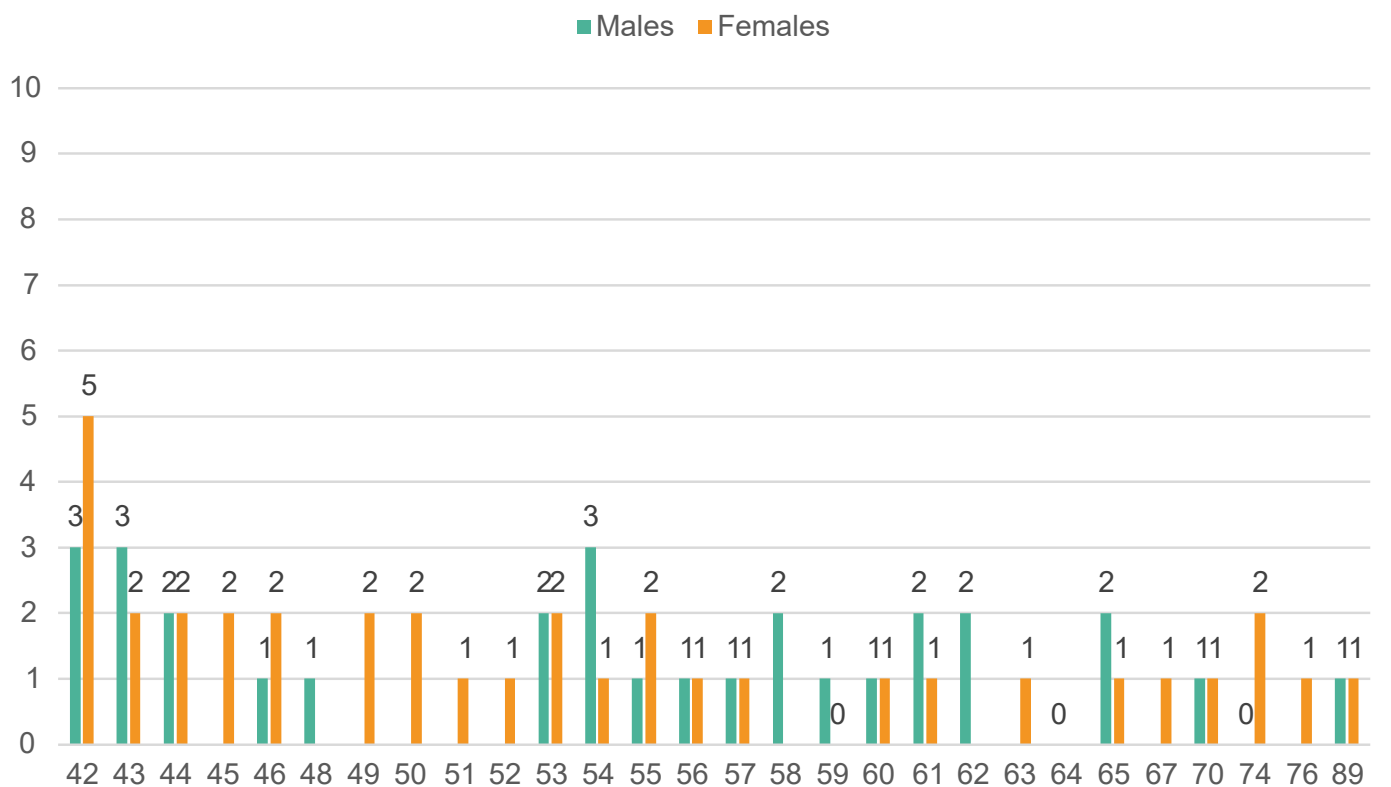


Figure 5 - Male & female count by age (part 2) (n=178)

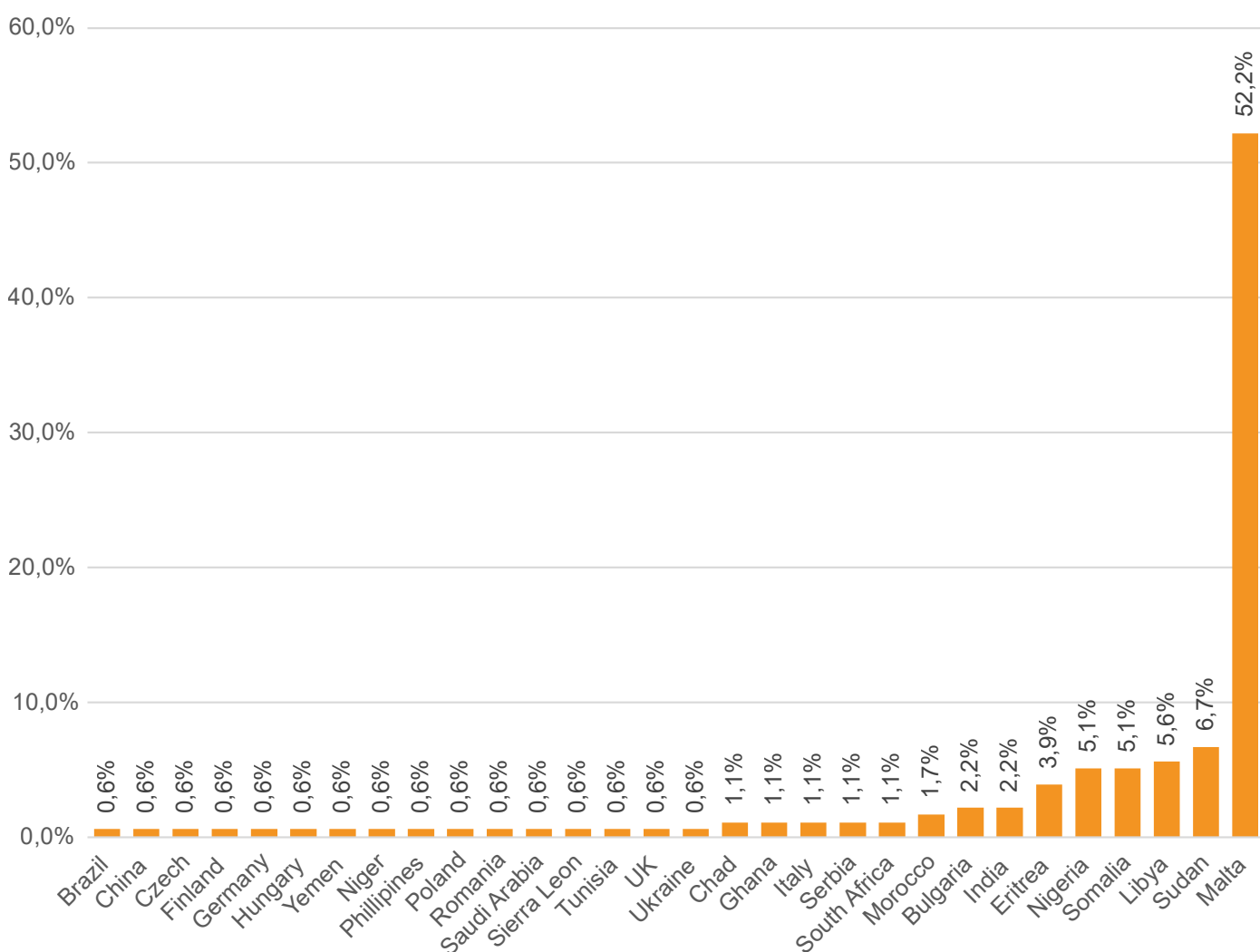


2.2.3.3 Nationalities

Figure 6 presents the nationalities of individuals recorded throughout this study.

The majority (52.2%) of residents were Maltese, whereas 26.4% of residents originally come from countries in Central and Northern Africa (6.7% from Sudan, 5.6% from Libya, 5.1% from Somalia, 5.1% from Nigeria, and 3.9% from Eritrea). Other countries of origin include India (2.2%), Morocco (1.7%), and European countries namely, Bulgaria (2.2%), Serbia (1.1%), and Italy (1.1%).

Figure 6 - Resident count by nationality (n=178)



2.3 Reasons for Homelessness

Figure 7 shows the leading cause of homelessness for the majority 36.5% of residents is 'Financial Problems', followed by 'Mental and Psychological Health' for 24.7% of residents, and 'Domestic Violence' for 23.6% of residents. These were registered as the three foremost reasons for which individuals recorded through this study sought the services of homeless shelters. Other significant reasons included 'Family Issues' (13.5%), 'Housing Problems' (12.4%), and 'Immigration' (10.7%).

Interesting to note that while male respondents tend to give an average of 1.5 reasons per case for homelessness, females on average give 2.5 reasons per case.

With respect to reasons for homelessness vis-à-vis gender, Figure 8 shows how, for females, 'Domestic Violence' is the leading cause of homelessness at 50.6%, followed by 'Financial Problems' at 49.4%, and 'Mental and Psychological Health' at 34.2%.

In the case of males as evidenced in Figure 9, the leading cause of homelessness is 'Financial Problems' at 26.3%, 'Loss of Job' at 22.2%, 'Immigration' at 18.2%, and 'Mental and Psychological Health' at 17.2%.

With respect to reasons for homelessness vis-à-vis age groups as outlined in Figure 1, 'Financial Problems' were cited by a significant 44.7% of individuals who are aged between 35-44 years old and 40.4% of individuals who are between 25-34 years old. 'Mental and Psychological Health' was cited as a reason for homelessness by a significant majority of 47.9% of residents who are 45 years old or older. 'Housing Problems' were also cited by 22.9% of individuals who are 45 years old or older. 'Immigration' was cited as a cause by 19.2% of respondents who are between 25-34 years old, whereas 'Termination from Previous Shelter' was cited by 15.4% of this same age cohort.

With respect to reasons for homelessness vis-à-vis nationality as set out in Figure 11, 'Domestic Violence', 'Mental and Psychological Health', and 'Financial Problems' were cited by 49.5%, 41.9%, and 37.6% of Maltese residents respectively. The same reasons were cited by 33.7%, 5.8%, and 34.9% of non-Maltese residents respectively. A significant 25.6% of non-Maltese individuals cited 'Loss of Job' as a reason for homelessness.

Figure 7 - Reasons for homelessness (general n=178)

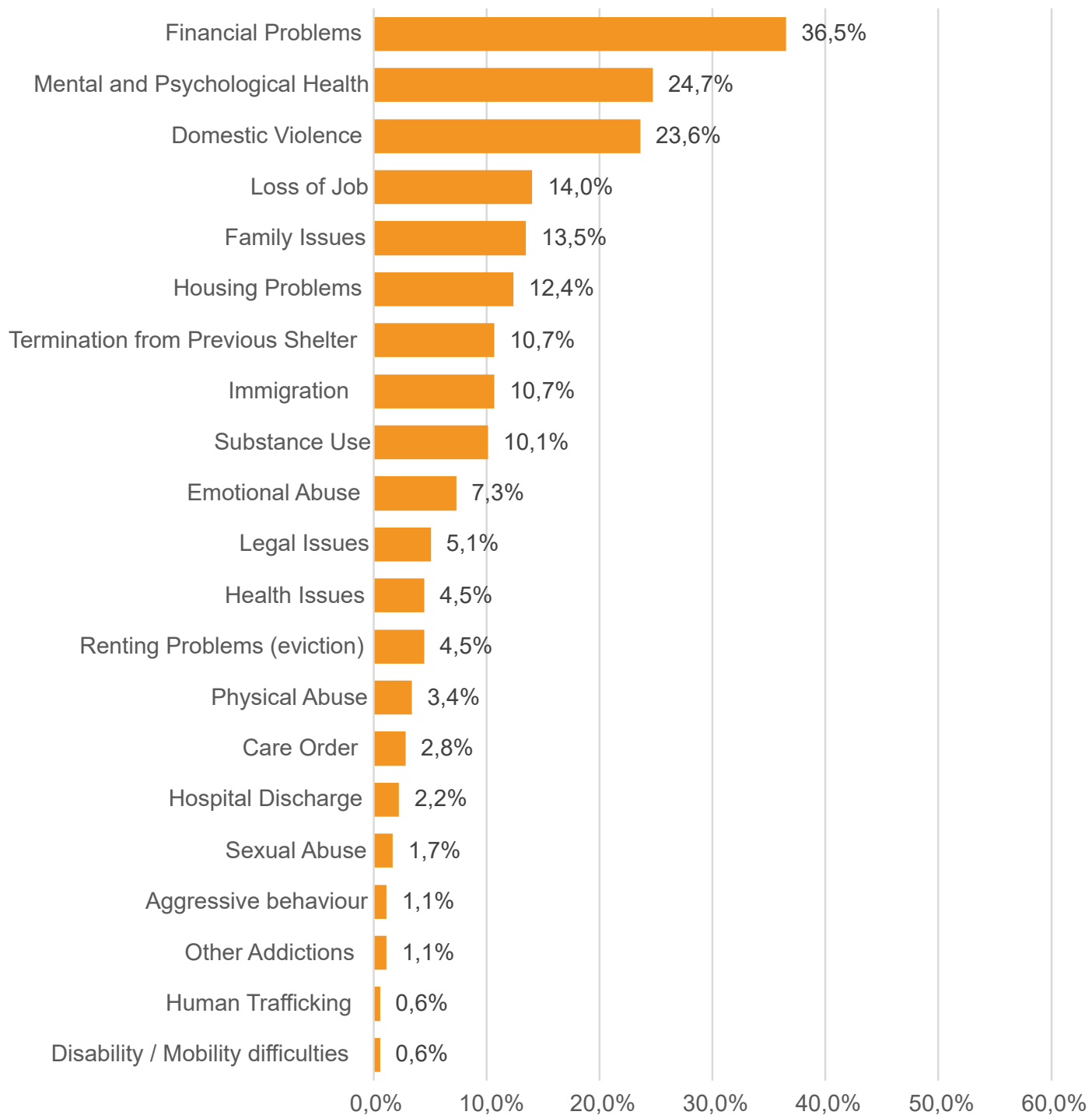


Figure 8 - Reasons for homelessness (Females n=79)

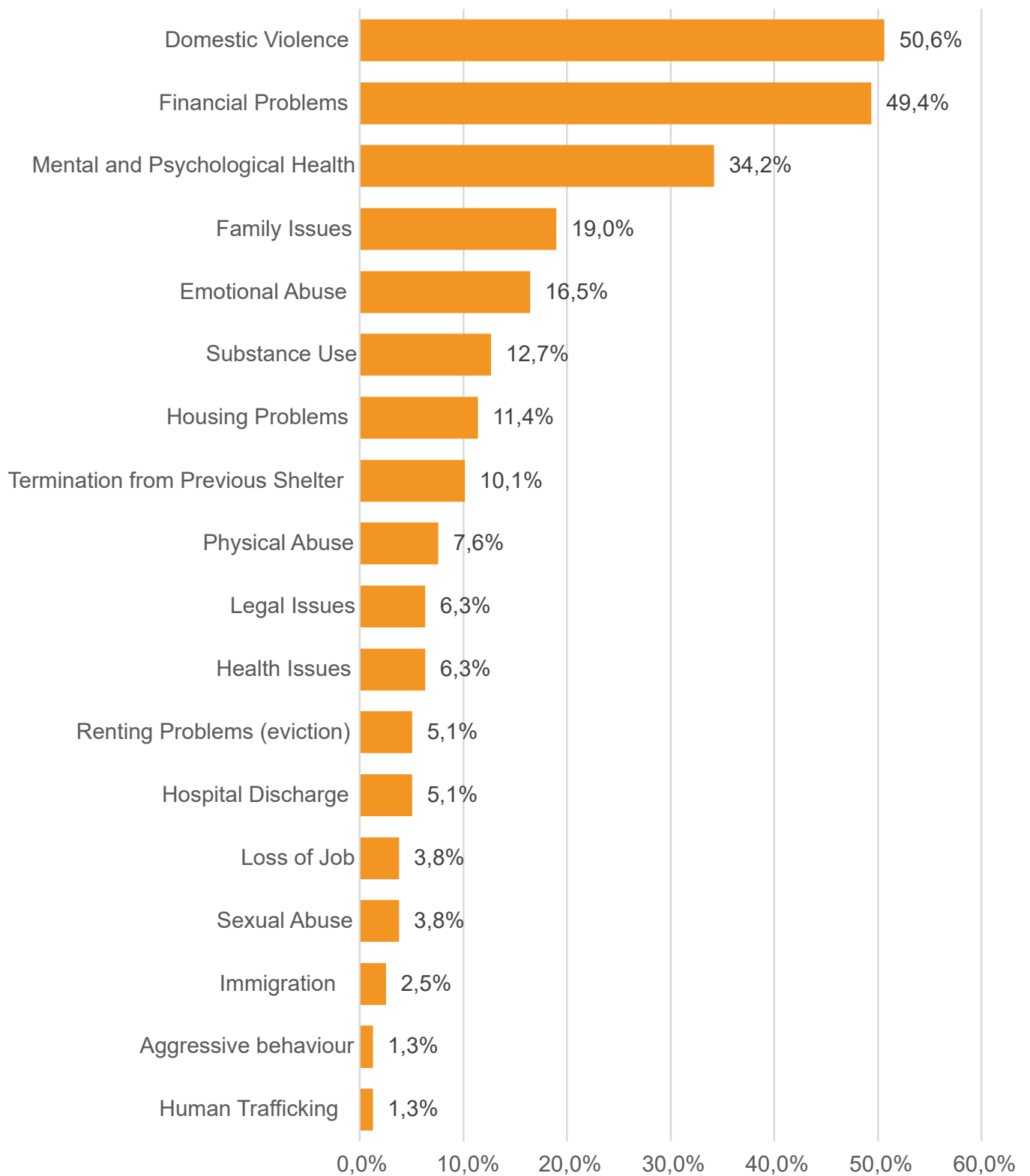


Figure 9 - Reasons for homelessness (Males n=99)

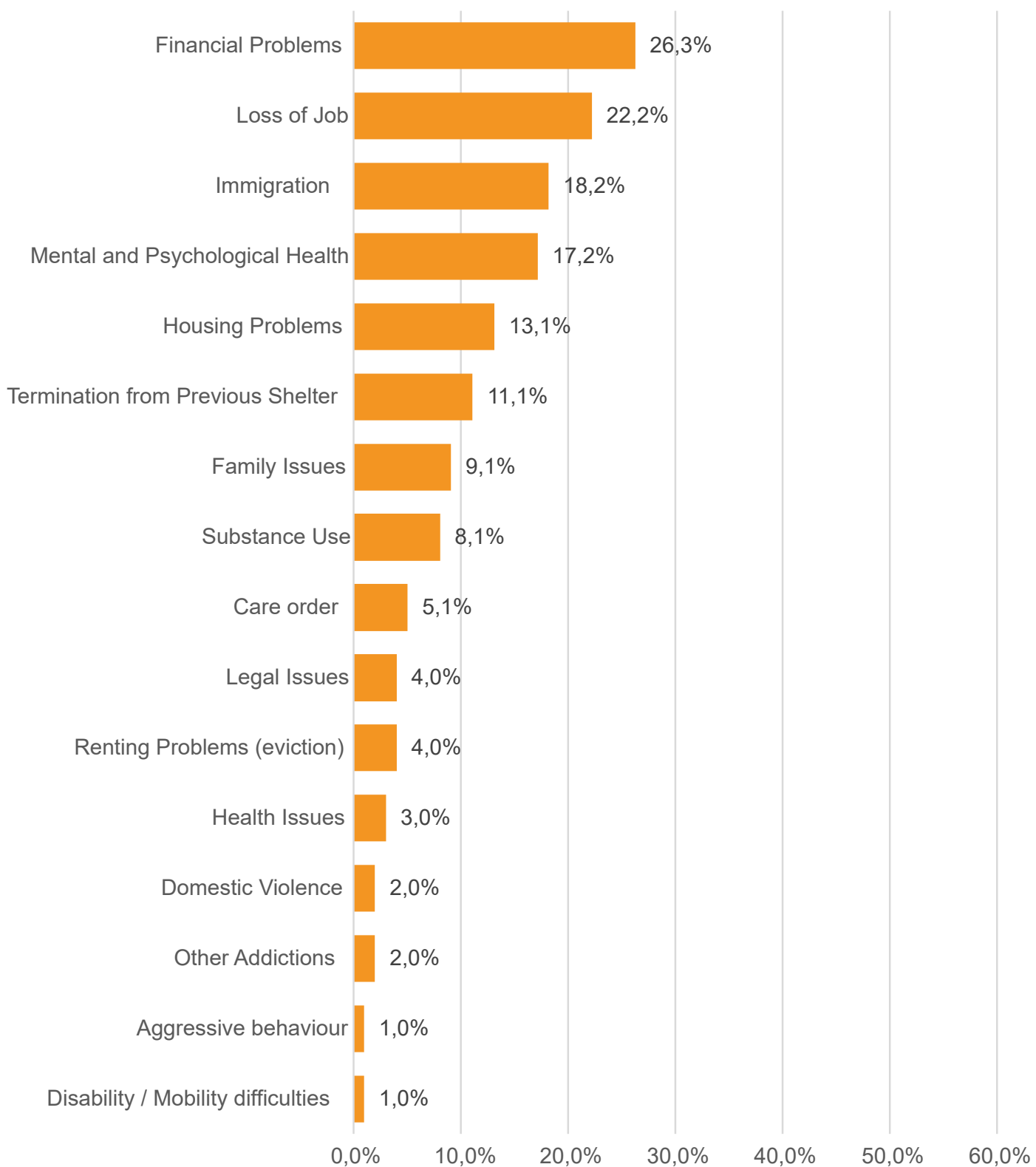


Figure 10 - Top 10 reasons for homelessness by age groups (n=178)

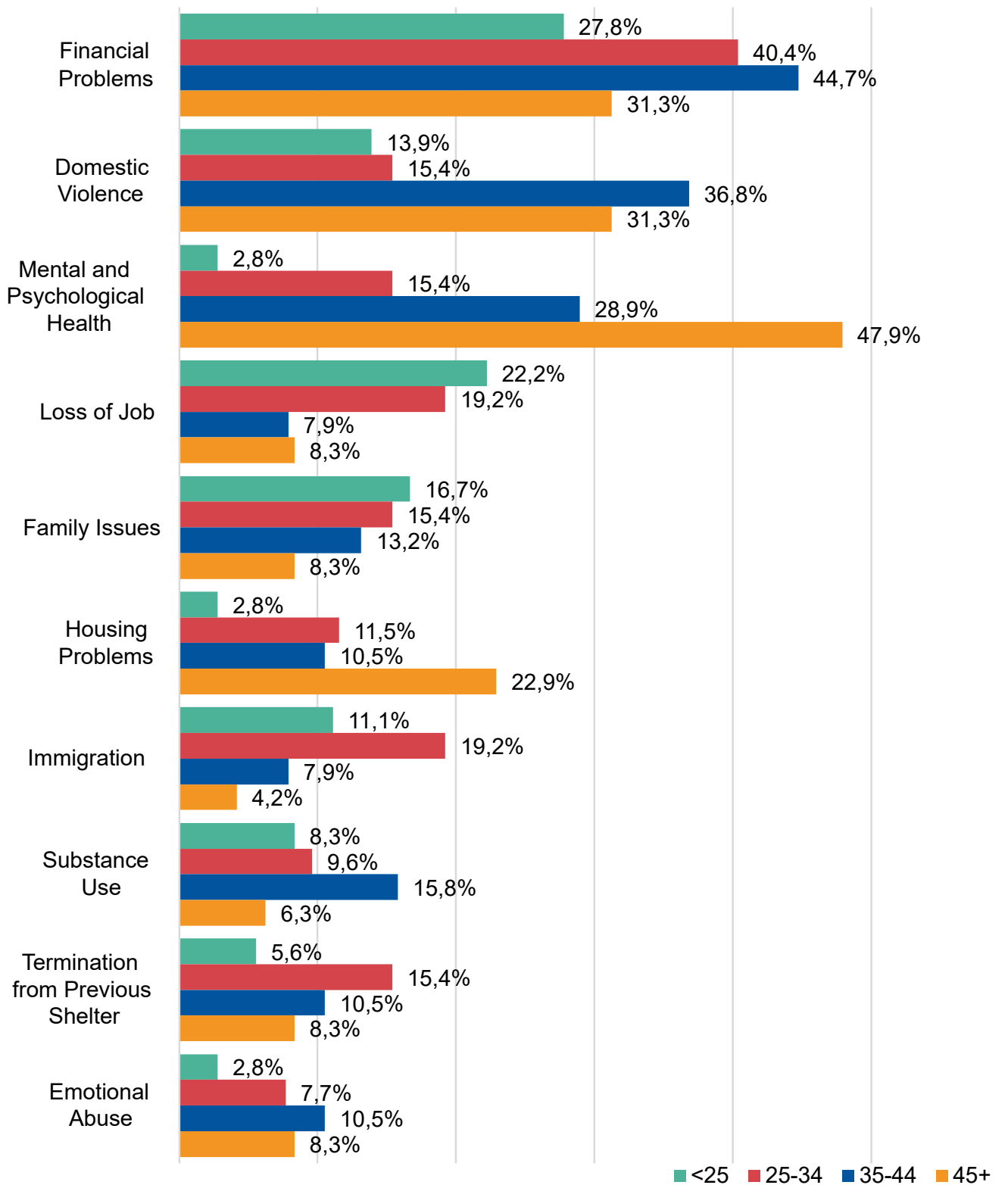
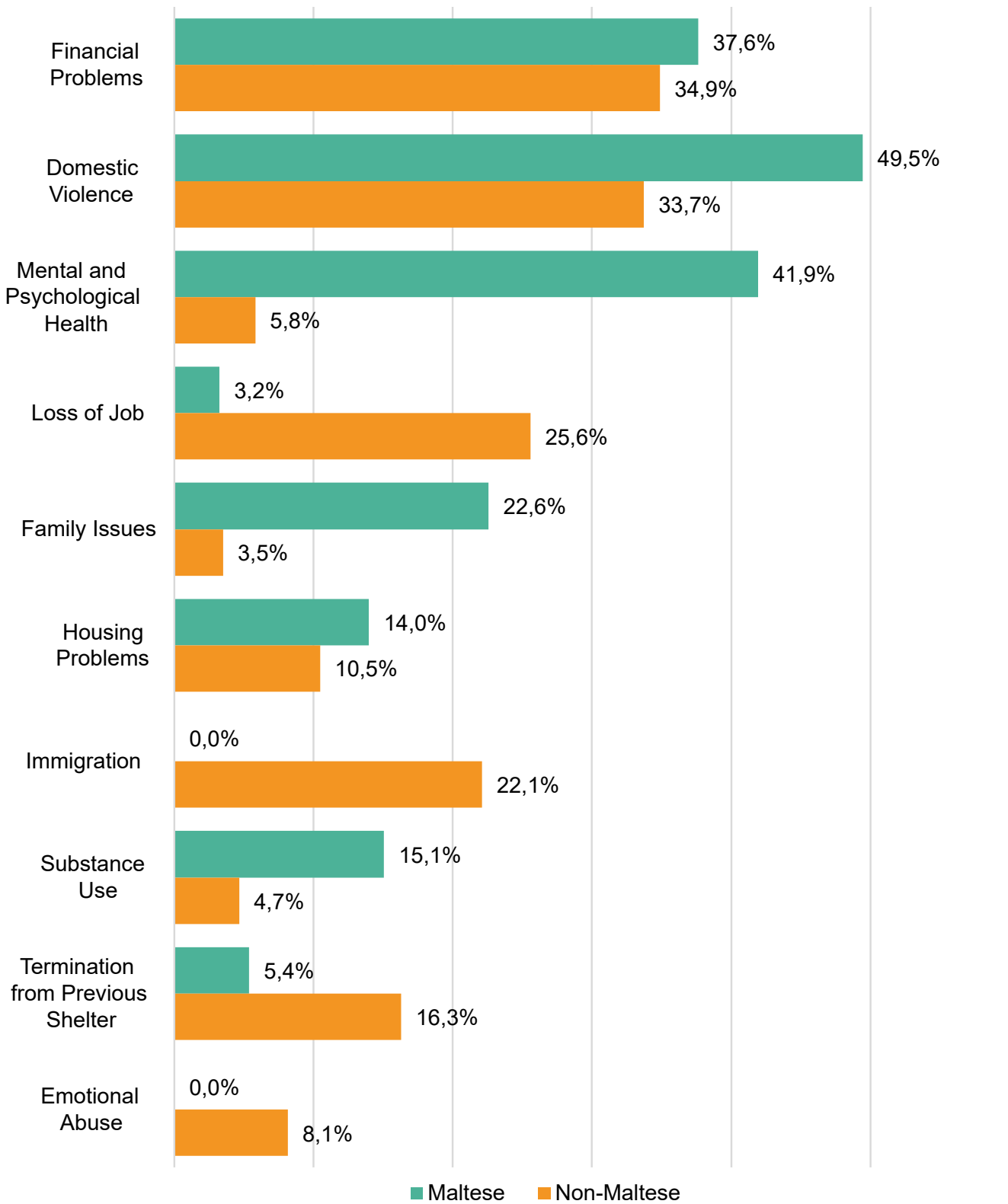


Figure 11 - Top 10 reasons for homelessness by nationality (n=178)



2.4 Accompanying Children

In addition to the 178 individuals referred to above, fifty-eight (58) children aged 0 to 16 years were registered as shelter residents accompanying adults during the data collection period.

Figure 12 shows the ages of these children (n=57 since the age of one child was not submitted), which when analysed result in the average age of 5.4 years (4.6 years for males and 6.0 for females).

These children were accompanying 30 adult individuals, whose average age was 37 years. The largest number of accompanying children for a single adult individual were 6.

With respect to nationality, Figure 13 shows that 56.7% of adult residents with children were Maltese. Furthermore, as Figure 13 outlines, the leading reasons for homelessness cited by these residents were 'Financial Problems' at 40.0% and 'Domestic Violence' at 33.3%.

Figure 12 - Ages of accompanying children (n=57)

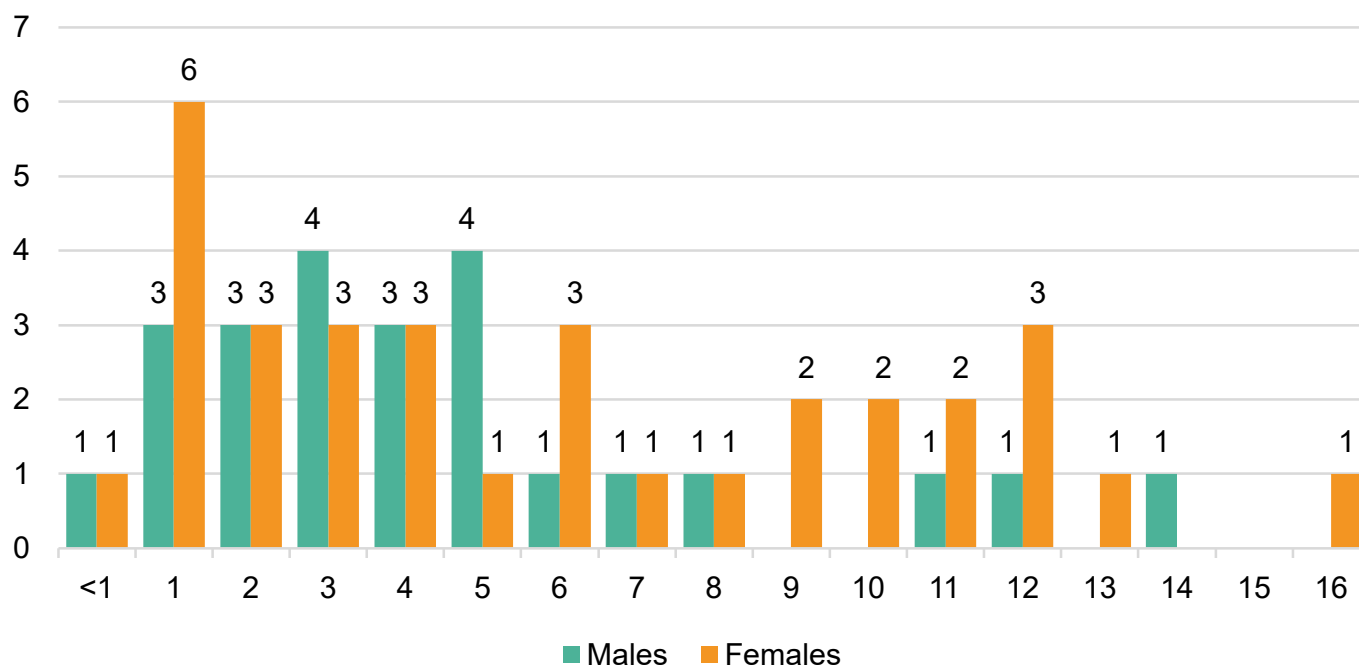


Figure 13 - Percentage of adults with accompanying children who were Maltese vs non-Maltese (n=30)

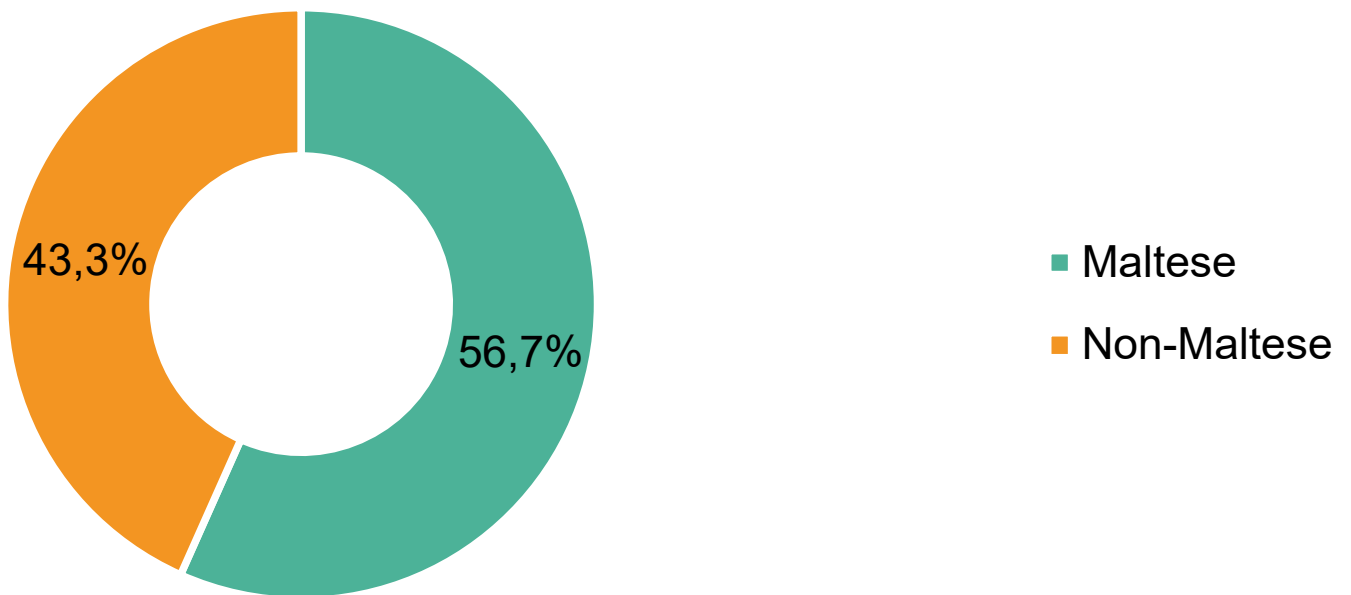
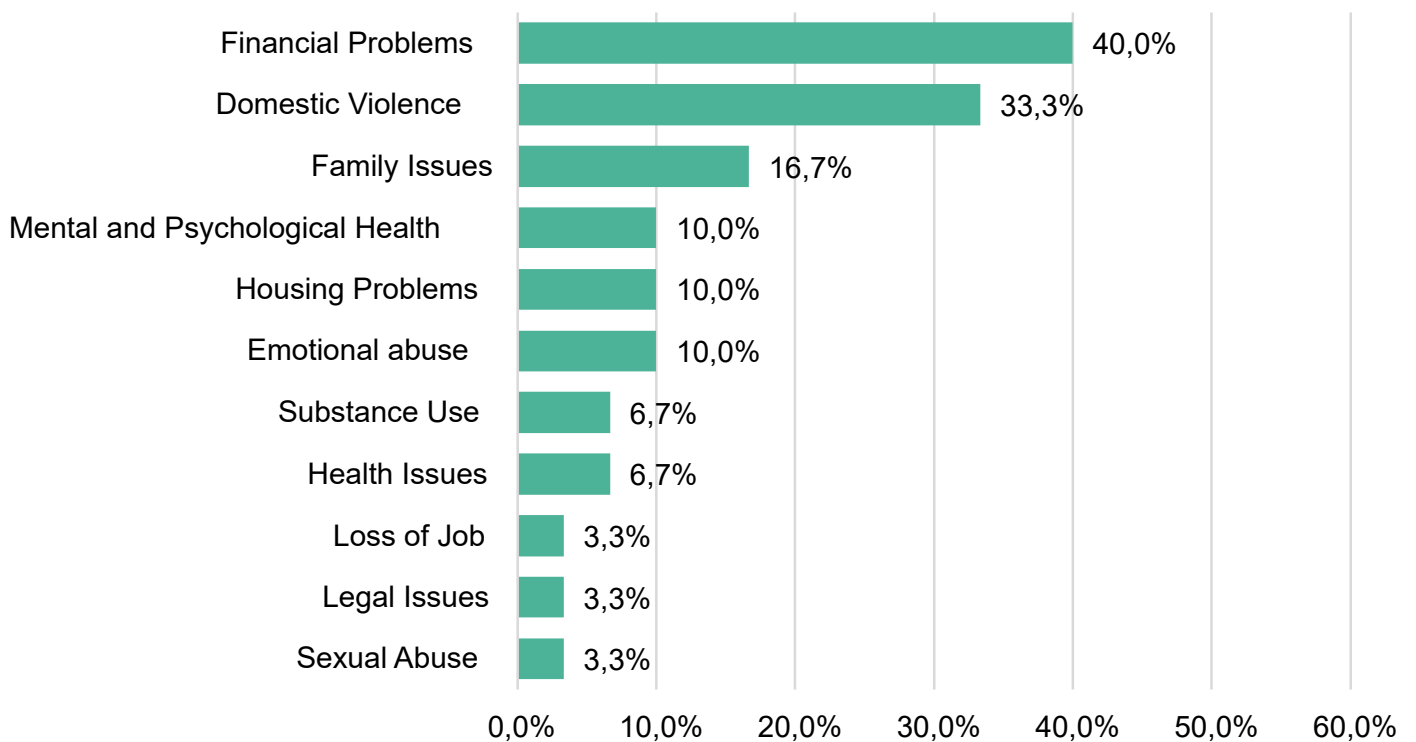


Figure 14 - Reasons for homelessness for individuals with accompanying children (n=30)



3. Platform Against Homelessness

Proposals for the wellbeing of service-users experiencing homelessness and the removal of service barriers

Endorsed By (in alphabetical order):

Dar Frate Jacoba

Dar Hosea

Fondazzjoni Caritas Malta

Fondazzjoni Dar il-Hena

Fondazzjoni Sebħ

Kopin

Life Network Foundation Malta

St Jeanne Antide Foundation

The Good Shepherd Sisters - Dar Merħba Bik Foundation Malta

The Malta Trust Foundation

YMCA Malta

3.1 Issue 1: No Address

Many people who are roofless or homeless in Malta try to improve their situation by engaging in employment whilst trying to save money to improve their living conditions. Many people try to improve their situation by themselves, without becoming dependent on the state or without the upheaval of moving into a shelter. However, without moving into a long-term shelter, an individual or family who is homeless has no way of acquiring an address which limits their access to the following:

- i. Being able to apply for social housing (although the housing application specifies that people who are homeless are given priority);
- ii. Being able to apply for social security benefits;
- iii. Being able to apply for an ID card;
- iv. Being able to apply for employment opportunities;
- v. Being able to have a vote for the correct district (those without an ID card remain without a vote).

When an individual or family becomes homeless, they are stripped of their home, possessions, and identity. This in itself can be traumatic. All efforts should be made to ensure that their identity is protected and that they still have equal opportunities to access services and improve their situation without making them dependent on the state or institutions where unnecessary.

3.1.1 Proposal

The Platform proposes that an alternative is provided for individuals and families who are currently homeless or without access to a fixed address. This option could incorporate a P.O. Box address or an alternative address. This address should not highlight the service user's homelessness situation and should be a dignified option. For instance, a shelter's address should not include the shelter's name. The alternative should not include the name of an organisation or service to ensure sensitivity to the person's situation.

Additionally, the Platform proposes that the requirement for a current address is removed from the Application for Alternative Accommodation within the Housing Authority, considering that this client group is among those most in need of this service.

3.2 Issue 2: Electoral Registry

Many people seeking refuge in shelters are often at risk of violence. Their current location should remain private both for their and sometimes their family's safety, but additionally because it is their basic right to confidentiality. In the electoral register, which is now also available online, people living in shelters can clearly be identified, with confirmation of their address and with their ID card numbers. This can be detrimental information in the hands of a perpetrator. The choice to share with an employer or family member that someone lives within a shelter, should be their own, and the accessibility of this information risks removing the individual's choice in this situation.

3.2.1 Proposal

Although it is understood that this information is required for the electoral registry, perhaps an alternative can be provided whereby:

- i. Vulnerable individuals remain safe in their place of refuge
- ii. Sensitive data is only accessible to employees of the Electoral Commission Malta
- iii. Exclusion of information for the general public
- iv. Address to be removed and just the locality remains visible

3.3 Issue 3: Amendments to Housing Authority Application for Alternative Housing

Those who are most in need of alternative housing are those who are currently homeless, including roofless people experiencing hidden homelessness or alternatively institutional or transitional homelessness. The application for social housing acknowledges that this client group should be prioritised for housing, yet the application requires that the service user list their current address. As people experiencing homelessness generally do not have access to a current address, this creates a barrier for them to be able to apply for social housing. This also often encourages people to enter shelters to gain an address, thus promoting dependency when not always necessary. Additionally, service users experiencing domestic violence may be in desperate need of social housing and may choose to remain in an abusive situation in lieu of alternative accommodation. Listing their current address on a housing application might further put them in harm's way as the perpetrator may become aware of the person's intention to leave.

Whilst experiencing homelessness, the amount of personal belongings that the person can carry with them is limited. The situation becomes even more problematic as persons experiencing homelessness or rooflessness often move from one place to another, leaving them with minimal stability. Whilst in this state of survival, without even one's basic fundamental needs being met, lengthy procedures for renewing housing applications may be far from possible.

3.3.1 Proposal

Whilst it is understandable that the Housing Authority has its procedures in place and a list of information which it requires from its applicants, the below suggestions take into consideration the realities of people who are homeless or roofless and still uphold procedures:

- i. The requirement for a current address should be removed from the social housing application or alternatively the application should be allowed to proceed with the person writing 'homeless';
- ii. Domestic violence and human trafficking cases should be given the same option as above whereby the service user can still access this service without the provision of an address. This could be included in the social work report which is also a prerequisite of the application to explain the absence of an address. For example. The option of a PO Box, the option of a postal address of a relative or friend, contact with the social worker etc;
- iii. When the service user has changed their address, the creation of an 'Address Change' form would make the process much easier than having to collect all of the required documents once again. This could have a time bar should the question of income be questionable.

3.4 Issue 4: Need for a National Definition for Homelessness

For far too long, the issue of homelessness has faded into the shadows, further pushing away individuals and families experiencing this vulnerable situation to go into hiding and be ashamed to come forward and seek assistance. As a nation, we have an obligation to acknowledge this social issue, which begins with defining homelessness. Having a national definition of homelessness and rooflessness creates awareness, enables services and professionals to be sensitive to who may be experiencing homelessness, and creates a foundation for quantifying how many people are struggling with homelessness and what solutions are needed. Such definition would also ensure that the services created or launched in the future have a solid basis and an informed policy. Hence the available services would truly address the needs of those who experience the trauma of homelessness and/or rooflessness.

3.4.1 Proposal

The Platform Against Homelessness Malta, defines homelessness as a state whereby a person of any age, nationality or gender is experiencing:

- i. Rooflessness (visible homelessness) whereby they do not have a roof over their heads, are 'sleeping rough' or on the streets;
- ii. Hidden homelessness whereby the person may have a roof over their heads however does not have adequate or humane living conditions. These include people who are:
 - a. 'Sofa surfing' - moving from one place to another with instability
 - b. Living with family or friends
 - c. Living in inhabitable buildings
 - d. Squatting or living in illegal occupation of premises
 - e. Living in garages
 - f. Living in cars
 - g. Living in insecure and inadequate housing
 - h. Living in hostels or hotels
 - i. Living in severe overcrowding
- iii. Transitional or Institutionalised homelessness whereby they are living in an institution or temporary housing as they lack the option of returning to a premises that is their home or because upon release from an institution they also lack the option of living independently. These include people who may be living in:
 - a. Homeless shelters
 - b. Domestic violence shelters
 - c. Elderly care homes
 - d. Children's homes
 - e. Maternity shelters
 - f. Detention centres
 - g. Open reception centres
 - h. Migration facilities
 - i. Correctional facilities
 - j. Rehabilitation centres and programmes

- k. Addictions rehabilitation programmes
- l. Medical Hospitals and centres
- m. Mental Health Hospitals and centres
- n. Living in other transitional housing

Persons who are homeless may experience chronic, transitional or episodic homelessness and therefore a time frame should not be a prerequisite to considering someone to be homeless.

4. Bios of the Research Team

4.1 Daniel Abela (Managing Director)

Daniel is the company founder and managing director of Marketing Advisory Services. His managerial experience and marketing background, together with his innovative thinking has proven to be essential to the company's success.

Daniel has over 24 years of experience in the field of marketing and holds a Diploma in Marketing from the London City College, UK. He has held several managerial positions with some of Malta's leading companies until 1997, when he set up his own research and marketing firm - Marketing Advisory Services.

The firm consults local and international blue-chip clients including Coca-Cola, Unilever UK, Vodafone, Procter & Gamble, Hamleys, Added Value UK, Magro Borthers, Malta Maritime Authority, Malta Government, Allied Newspapers, amongst others. Daniel was also instrumental as a strategic consultant on the privatization of Malta's largest marinas, from the initial stages of putting the bid together, negotiations with Government, raising finance and subsequent planning of the management of the marinas.

4.2 Elaine Grech (Associate Marketing Consultant)

Elaine Grech is a resident assistant lecturer in Marketing at the University of Malta and is currently a PhD student at the same university. Her current research focuses on the use of gamification, whereby the product or service offering is enhanced by incorporating engaging elements that are typically found in games to non-game contexts. She is interested in the effect of gamification on the customers' experience, particularly on customers' engagement, motivation, and behaviour.

Over the past ten years, she has been responsible for a wide range of market research projects in various industries, including the FMCG market, telecommunications, finance, and educations. She has also contributed to the development and implementation of marketing communications plans and supported a number of clients to benefit from EU funding programmes.

4.3 John Micallef (Social Anthropologist)

John is the in-house social anthropologist. In 2019, he earned his PhD in Anthropological Science from the University of Malta with a thesis about the consumption of 'club drugs' (Ecstasy and Cocaine) amongst youths in contemporary Malta. John specialises in ethnographic methods and research of Maltese and European culture, consumer habits and behaviours, identity, and the social dimensions of medicine and health. Over the past ten years, John has gained extensive experience in the field of marketing, producing key reports and insight for many of our clients. John also currently occupies a post of part-time lecturer in Social Anthropology at the University of Malta.

4.4 Oliver Saliba (Senior Market Research Executive)

Oliver holds a bachelor's degree in Psychology and a master's degree in Creativity and Innovation from the Edward de Bono Institute (University of Malta). Oliver has joined the Market Advisory Services team in 2015 and specialises in the fields of Creativity, Innovation, Organisational climate, Organisational leadership, Social and Organisational Psychology. Over the past five years, he has been involved in several research projects in the fields mentioned above. He is currently reading for a PhD in Innovation at the University of Malta with an approved thesis title: 'Cognitive aspects of Innovation Assimilation'.

4.5 Katia Cortis (Market Research Executive)

Katia holds a Bachelor of Commerce degree in Accountancy and Marketing from the University of Malta. She now also holds a Master of Science in Strategic Management and Marketing at the same university, whose dissertation title was 'Identifying Consumers' Emotional Attachment to Brands Using Teal-Time Experience Tracking'. Katia has recently joined Marketing Advisory Services and has been working on conducting quantitative analysis and preparing presentations for the clients.

4.6 Naomi Thornley (Administration Executive/Junior Research Executive)

Naomi holds a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Business Enterprise from the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology. Her dissertation title was 'The Effectiveness of Store Window Displays in Retail Stores on Consumers: A Study in the Fashion and IT Electronic Industries'. Naomi has recently joined Marketing Advisory Services and has been working on administrative duties and coordinating data collection.

5. Bios of the YMCA Malta Team

5.1 Anthony Camilleri (Chief Executive Office & National General Secretary)

Anthony Camilleri is currently the Chief Executive Officer of YMCA Malta and also represents the organisation as National General Secretary worldwide in the YMCA movement. He has been working at YMCA Malta for the past 14 years in several positions. He has a degree in Psychology, a postgraduate diploma in Counselling with Children and Young people, a Master's in Gestalt Psychotherapy and currently reading his Doctorate in Gestalt Psychotherapy. He serves as a Juvenile Court Assistant and President of the Malta Association for Psychotherapy. He published research works on 'The Perception of Intimacy amongst Gestalt Psychotherapists', 'The Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on Quality of Life in Malta', and last year he published the book 'Hajti hija Għazla' that depicts the real lived experience of homeless individuals prior to they sought help and assistance from YMCA Malta.

5.2 Therese Cini Sarreo (Operations & Administration Manager)

Therese holds a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) Degree in Social Policy from the University of Malta. In 2021, she graduated with an MBA Degree from the London School of Commerce Malta with a dissertation titled 'Gender Bias in the Recruitment of Academics in Nordic Countries'. Therese has worked in the social sector for the past 14 years, ten of which at the YMCA Malta, where she held various positions within the organisation. She has also authored the book 'Home Is...' which was published by YMCA Malta.



The YMCA Movement was founded in England by George Williams in 1844, while in Malta, YMCA was founded in 1976. Our organisation is a non-government organisation, a non-profit, voluntary and ecumenical movement seeking to promote the vision to build a more just society.

YMCA Malta has been working in the field of homelessness for several years, operating and providing residential accommodation to homeless individuals, families and children.

At Dar Niki Cassar, YMCA Malta provides sheltered accommodation and holistic support to vulnerable individuals and families, including children experiencing homelessness. Through this residence, YMCA Malta supports up to 34 individuals on a daily basis as they prepare for independent living. The Residential Course in Independent Living is provided through Dar Niki Cassar to people of all ages, genders, and nationalities, whereby we promote cultural humility and diversity where people may have become homeless for a number of reasons that are supported holistically.

At Y' Communal Home, YMCA Malta provides communal accommodation to individuals and families, including children, as a second stage shelter in a bid to reduce loneliness, encourage independent living and eradicate homelessness. This house caters for 14 individuals daily, living semi-independently whilst benefiting from constant support from our multidisciplinary team, providing them with 'Programm Kisbet Serhan'.

Whilst the focus of our residential facilities is services that provide shelter and a care programme with the ultimate aim being reintegration into society, the third residential facility that YMCA Malta runs provides temporary independent living for families that experience homelessness after a long period of time living independently. In this residential facility, they are supported by our multidisciplinary team to move back into society within a short timeframe.

YMCA Malta embarked on a collaboration with the Ministry for Social and Affordable Accommodation and the Housing Authority on opening its fourth residential Y'Communal Home, Dar Simon Soler, a semi-independent communal living for elderly persons and persons with disability. The facility is currently in the refurbishment stage.

YMCA Malta is in its final stages of opening a Y'Reintegration Unit - the fifth residential service. 'I Can - I Will Programme' that will be offered from this residence focuses on exiting homelessness into secured accommodation.

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