



# Athienou

**Country:** Cyprus

**Inhabitants:** 7,000

**Type of area:** Remote, border

**Governance:** Local elected mayor

**Administrative level:** LAU as single settlement/ municipality



## About Athienou

Athienou taking part in the LAG 'Larnaca and Famagusta Districts Development Agency' with an area of approximately 6,400 hectares is the municipality with the largest administrative territory in Cyprus, it belongs administratively to the Larnaca District. The municipality is located in the interior of the island between Larnaca and Nicosia in the buffer zone between the Republic of Cyprus and the non-government-controlled areas (NGCAs).

Athienou's development has been impacted by its border position, and the municipality has been struggling to upgrade its living standards under adverse conditions. Nevertheless, utilising its strengths, the municipality has developed into an important area of rural development with a semi-urban character.

**The economy of Athienou is strongly agricultural** and shows highly developed sectors of animal husbandry, agriculture, and processing of agricultural products. In particular, the area hosts about 35% of the total livestock activity of Cyprus and some of the largest cattle breeding units. In addition, it has **an organised industrial area**, but also demarcated zones for **crafts** and **livestock activities**. At the same time, the area has a rich **cultural tradition** and great **historical, architectural and religious heritage**, as it displays remarkable archeological sites, excellent examples of buildings of Mesoorite architecture specific in the region (two-storey buildings that had very high walls and an internal courtyard ) and numerous churches. Social cohesion is one of the strong points of the municipality that helps to counteract local depopulation. The biggest problem of Athienou is the environmental nuisance from the sewage and the smells of the animals, i.e. the conflict of land use for residential development vs. intensive livestock farming. Retaining young people and attracting new residents to the currently isolated area, is also a major challenge.

## Smartness of Athienou



Athienou is characterised by a variety of economic and cultural activities, active inhabitants, and **strong social cohesion**. Athineou has been in a challenging position due to its location at the EU external border / area between the the areas north of the Green Line/Buffer.

Athienou's approach represents an **inspiring social innovation** that shows how a peripheral rural community has started to address local problems connected with the isolation of the area and taken the provision of various local services into "its own hands", through a strong culture of volunteerism.

Athienou has a long tradition of volunteerism: The innovative Municipal Council of Volunteers (MVC) was established more than 50 years ago and evolved ever since, to mobilise the social potential of the local community, harnessing the energy and capacity of local volunteers. Athienou is planning to strengthen further the volunteerism tradition through **the use of new digital technologies in the near future** (such as the development of e-care and e-health services).

Furthermore, the municipality aspires to increasingly introduce **new environmentally friendly** practices. As a first step, the street lightening was changed to LED technology in the village and there are future plans for the establishment and promotion of the waste management system, electric car charging points, and smart solutions for light controllers and smart parking sensors

1 On the island, EU law is suspended in areas not under the effective control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus'



# The Smart Journey of Athienou

## Establishing the Council of Volunteers and basic social services



Athienou has been relatively isolated from the major cities on the island and many people looked to local providers to solve their social service needs, including the municipality, the church and other local associations. A culture of volunteerism emerged, in order to overcome local isolation and give assistance to people in need (especially elderly people). A **Municipal Council of Volunteers (MCV)** was established in 1970 to help coordinate interventions.

In 1983, the MCV established the **Kleanthios Elder House**, which is a care service for older people that goes beyond a typical old people's home, combining volunteerism and high infrastructural standards (accessibility) and new modern facilities (local accessible meeting rooms, restaurant, etc.).



In 2012, the MCV oversaw the construction of a new building to house the Elder House and the Constantineleoneion Centre for Adults.

Both the Elder House and the Center for Adults services are managed by a committee, constituted by volunteers and elected people (see further details under governance), which have responsibility for the social policy management for each service. The MCV also created a **Social Welfare Council**, which has the goal to provide economic and any other kind of help to local inhabitants and families based on evaluation of needs in collaboration with governmental authorities. Volunteers also govern the Social Welfare Council and the President is always the Mayor of Athienou.

1970

Title of initiative: **Municipal Council of Volunteers**  
OVERALL BUDGET: € 450.000 (yearly running cost)  
Public funds : € 200.000, Central Government  
Private fund: € 50 000  
Other fund: 200.000 from donations and subsidies  
Duration: 1970- ongoing



In 2001, the MCV established the **Constantineleoneion Centre for Adults**, which offers - based in large part on volunteer work - high-quality services to meet the **needs of vulnerable adults** (over eighteen years old) in terms of social and daily living needs, daily entertaining activities, healthy food, and reduced social exclusion. Services supported by volunteers include gardening, sports and entertainment.



2012

Title of initiative: **Construction of a new modern building to house the Elder House and the Constantineleoneion Centre for Adults**  
Overall Budget: € 2.100.000  
EU fund: € 1.680.000 (EAFRD, RDP 2007-2013 - Axis 3)  
Private fund: € 420.000  
Duration: 2011 - 2012



Developing tourism



With the aim of boosting touristic activities the building with a cheese and diary factory was fully restored, and converted to a museum where a representation of the traditional way of producing cheese (halloumi) has been made and the restoration of the traditional flour mill has been carried out.

Title of initiative: Restoration of a listed building and an old cheese factory and operation as an exhibition place  
OVERALL BUDGET: € 550.000  
EU fund: : € 440.000, (EAFRD, RDP 2007-2013)  
Private fund: € 110.000  
Date: 2011



Title of initiative: Maintenance and restoration of the traditional flour mill  
OVERALL BUDGET: € 450.000  
EU fund: : € 360.000, (EAFRD, RDP 2007-2013)  
Private fund: € 90.000  
Date: 2011

2011

Creation of youth center



Title of initiative: Youth Polycentre  
OVERALL BUDGET: € 140.000  
EU Fund : € 112.000 (EAFRD, LEADER, RDP 2007-2013)  
Private fund:€ 28.000  
Date: 2015

The need to create the Youth Polycenter arose because in Athienou there were no other suitable infrastructures, which could house creative activities for young people.

This project was fundamental for the revitalisation and improved the quality of life of the residents. It offers numerous creative and entertainment opportunities (including socialising, networking, event organisation concerts, studying, etc.) for the young people of the area.

2015

Environmental friendly community



1500 energy-intensive lighting with LED technology were installed. Through this solution the municipality aimed to achieve significant saving of energy and resources for Athienou, improving also the street lighting and reducing the environmental and visual pollution.

Title of initiative: Replacement of energy intensive lightening fixtures)  
OVERALL BUDGETt: € 217.000  
EU funds: € 217.000  
(Loan by the European Investment Bank)  
Date: 2019

2019

The "Pay as you throw" waste management system is to be introduced to reduce waste disposal and to increase recycling and composting bringing not only environmental but also economic benefits for citizens. Electric vehicles' charging points will be created contributing to their further use and to reducing the use of polluting vehicles. With the implementation of light controllers and smart mobility the services level to the citizens will be upgraded, developing Athienou as an environmentally friendly municipality.

2023





## In Focus: Socially more resilient community



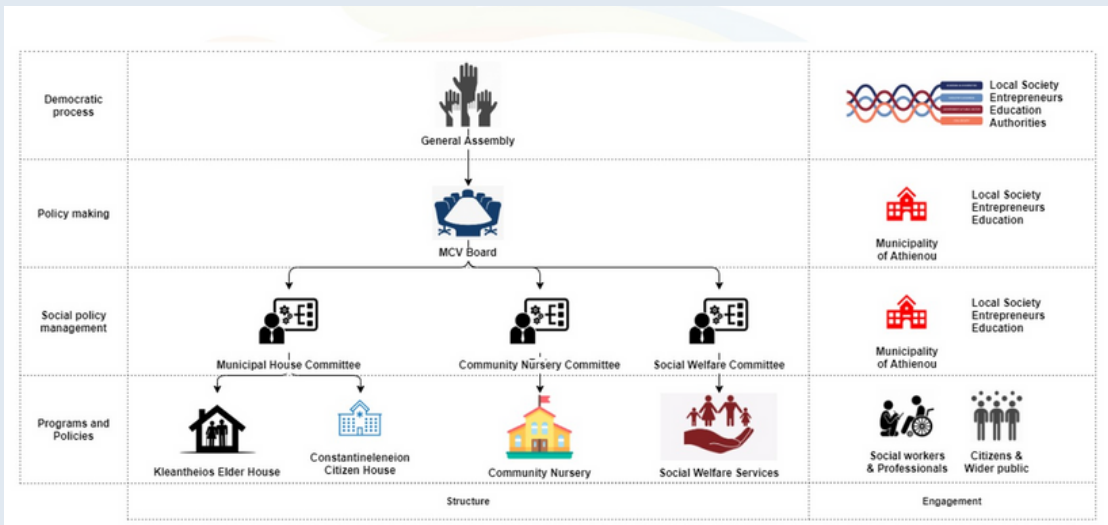
### Goal:

Athienou due to its challenging history and geographical location suffers from isolation and seeks to find solutions in the volunteering collaboration between its citizens. The Municipal Council of Volunteers mobilises the social potential of the local community to address local needs and harnessing the energy and capacity of local volunteers. The organisation's goals for the future are to identify further social needs within the municipality and to establish the necessary social programmes to tackle the challenges identified through the engagement of the community members in the development.

### Experience to date:

A basic innovative aspect of the Municipal Council of Volunteers (MCV) is the close collaboration of the volunteers and the (local and national) authorities. Volunteers with their activities managed to gain the recognition of the authorities and

### Organisation of the MCV



have become part of the national mechanisms and considered as a main partner of the Social Welfare Services (the national body responsible for social welfare programmes). The second innovative aspect is the coordinated approach to social problems, where all the issues are managed by a single Volunteering Council (MCV). This has also created the basis for collaboration between people of different generations.

The strategic goals of the MCV are to: i) **identify the social needs** within the municipality and establish the necessary social programmes to tackle them; ii) **engage the community members** in the development; and iii) **raise awareness and educate the public** regarding the social needs and programmes. Public consultations, regular meetings, promotional and educational activities are just some very useful tools for achieving those goals.

The MCV is comprised of around 50 members, including representatives of around 20 organised associations of the municipality, such as political parties, the church, sports, youth, entrepreneurs and parents' associations. The MCV is an umbrella council for four programmes (see above), each one with its own committee of volunteers, supporting the staff in their own tasks. Programmes' staff varies, according to the local needs, and include directors, nurses, caregivers, cleaners, teachers for kids etc. (on an average 20 people).

*"The MCV's goal is part of our vision for Athienou: to become a prosperous European area, a municipality with a local identity and international recognition, a municipality with prospects and opportunities. A creative, attractive, "smart", friendly and accessible municipality, which focuses on people and the environment. Socially sensitive, responding to the needs of its people, offering them a high quality of life"- Kyriakos Kareklas, Mayor of Athienou*

### Next steps:

The MCV has the strategy to use new technologies (e.g. e-care and e-health services) to improve its programmes and facilities, given the available resources. Volunteers are always active to identify social problems that might arise from modern challenges and to address these through a joint effort of community members.





**Local governance (public sector):** Athienou is a municipality (at Local Administrative Level LAU 2) with an elected mayor & municipal council. Mayors are elected directly by the citizens and they are the executive authority of the municipalities. The mayor presides over all council meetings, Administrative Committee meetings and any other Municipal Committee. Municipal Councils are the policy-making bodies of the municipalities and they are also elected directly by the citizens, but separately from the mayor. Mr Kyriakos Kareklas is the Mayor of Athienou since 2018. The next elections for local authorities in Cyprus are scheduled for the May of 2024.

**Local community (civil society):** There are many civil society organisations active in Athienou, representing and giving voice to the great majority of local people. Political parties, active at local level, farmers' associations, youth councils, the church, schools and students boards have been active in the society, participating in municipality committees and the Municipal Council of Volunteers. The Municipal Council of Volunteers (MVC) - a public-private partnership - was established in 1970 and since then mobilises the social capital of the local community.

**Businesses:** The people in Athienou are characterised by their love for their place, the hard work and the hospitality. Local businesses are mostly linked to the production and selling of local products, such as the traditional local bread, the traditional sweet offered to the weddings called „athienitiko loukoumi“, traditional cheese etc.

**Research (scientific sector):** Athienou has built strong relationship with regional, national and international stakeholders, connected to research and innovation. As a result, the municipality participates in many public programmes, implementing very interesting and innovative projects, connected to the Local Strategy and Vision (e.g. YOUROPE under the Programme of Europe For Citizens, Global Education Goes Local, in cooperation with the Future Worlds Centre, URBAN GreenUP, under Horizon, FIESTA, under the Intelligent Energy Europe etc.).



Community engagement process

The operation of the Municipality of Athienou as well as the culture of volunteerism of the local society ensure the participation, interest and engagement of the local population.

In addition to the operation of the MCV, which is an important example of participation and contribution to the quality of life in the municipality, the municipality itself operates various sub-committees in various thematic fields, in which the participation of civil society is important and remarkable. Sub-committees such as those on youth, culture and environment are examples.

These committees with all the other local associations, active in the community, are all part of the puzzle, and give to the local people the strength and the opportunity to be engaged in the life of the community.

Consultation meetings and conferences are also an example of participation of the local community at the decision making level, offering the step to voices to be heard.

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Further information:

Smart Rural 27 village profile of Athienou: <https://www.smartrural27.eu/village/municipality-of-athienou/>  
Municipality website: [www.athienou.org.cy/en/](http://www.athienou.org.cy/en/)