Cyprus | Reception Capacity

30 September 2021

Overview

Since 2015 Cyprus has been receiving an increasing number of refugees, particularly from neighbouring Syria. This increase intensified in 2018, with a 72% increase over the previous year and saw a further surge of 65% in 2019 stretching the limited reception structures of the country. By contrast, between January and December of 2020 some 7,176 new asylum applications were made in Cyprus, while from January to September 2021 some **8,605 new asylum applications** were lodged, ranking Cyprus as the first asylum receiving country, per capita, among EU Member States.

Overall, some **16,990 persons' applications for international protection were pending at the Asylum Service** at the end of September 2021, while **another 6,019 cases were pending at the International Protection Administrative Court (IPAC)** as at end September 2021. Some **15,322 persons** are registered as having been granted international protection between 2002 and the end of September 2021; the majority of these are subsidiary protection beneficiaries.

The significant increase in the number of arrivals have led to an overstretching of the already limited reception structures of the country. Newly asylum-seekers are faced with multiple challenges with regards to their first reception and subsequent transition to the community, such as in ensuring affordable housing, employment or state aid support, and access to language and vocational training. The asylum examination procedures, which on average take up to five years, further exacerbates the difficulties faced by asylum-seekers.

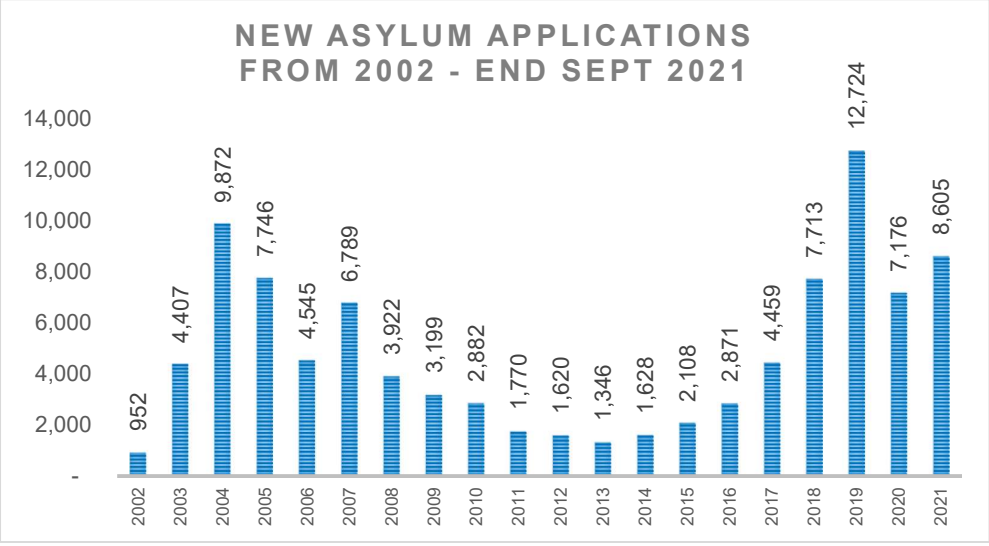

Figure 1: New Asylum Applications in Cyprus by year from 2002 through to the end of September 2021

The top ten countries of origin of new asylum-seekers in Cyprus from January to end September 2021 are: Syria, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Cameroon, Nepal, Somalia and Sierra Leone.

	2013		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021 (JAN-JUNE)	
Total Applicants in Year	1,246		1,728		1,560		3,055		4,582		7,761		13,259		7,094		5,555	
Breakdown by countries of origin																	Cases	Persons
Syria	562	45.10%	983	56.89%	1008	64.62%	1248	40.85%	1805	39.39%	2007	25.86%	2,602	19.62%	1,738		1,059	1350
Egypt	143	11.48%	82	4.75%	75	4.81%	109	3.57%	268	5.85%	407	5.24%	500	3.78%	177		96	96
Bangladesh	106	8.51%	69	3.99%	48	3.08%	137	4.48%	287	6.26%	637	8.21%	1,270	9.58%	566		204	204
Vietnam	83	6.66%	80	4.63%	126	8.08%	155	5.07%	357	7.79%	415	5.35%	529	3.99%	143		42	42
Pakistan	54	4.33%	68	3.94%	122	7.82%	217	7.10%	191	4.17%	587	7.56%	1,187	8.95%	490		320	326
Sri Lanka	50	4.01%	49	2.84%	53	3.40%	75	2.45%	140	3.06%	278	3.58%	385	2.90%	112		53	55
Somalia	43	3.45%	21	1.22%	66	4.23%	224	7.33%	118	2.58%	104	1.34%	166	1.25%	113		306	316
India	36	2.89%	81	4.69%	90	5.77%	205	6.71%	446	9.73%	883	11.38%	1,508	11.37%	1,112		505	509
Philippines	34	2.73%	39	2.26%	51	3.27%			87	1.90%	128	1.65%	143	1.08%	40		19	19
Iran	22	1.77%	34	1.97%	27	1.73%			82	1.79%	208	2.68%	339	2.56%	66		35	58
Afganistan	6	0.48%	1	0.06%	11	0.71%			3	0.07%	2	0.03%	4	0.03%	14		55	68
Russia	8	0.64%	10	0.58%	9	0.58%			12	0.26%	20	0.26%	43	0.32%	9		2	2
Palestine					95	6.09%			62	1.35%	119	1.53%	100	0.75%	12		4	4
Stateless					65	4.17%			0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0		0	
Iraq					55	3.53%	92	3.01%	56	1.22%	370	4.77%	57	0.43%	17		5	7
Cameroon					21	1.35%	72	2.36%	111	2.42%	507	6.53%	1,181	8.90%	632		414	416
Georgia					17	1.09%	18		86	1.88%	395	5.09%	1,594	12.02%	262		54	61
Democratic Republic of the					17	1.09%			3	0.07%	83	1.07%	299	2.26%	386		607	613
Nigeria					15	0.96%			78	1.70%	117	1.51%	386	2.91%	374		587	590
Nepal					14	0.90%			76	1.66%	172	2.22%	324	2.44%	331		317	319
Turkey													122	0.92%	63		18	18
Guinea													108	0.81%	114		141	148
Lebanon													65	0.49%	34		3	3
Jordan													55	0.41%	10		3	3
Republic of the Congo																	43	43

Figure 2: Asylum applications in Cyprus with country of origin breakdown from 2013 to end June 2021.

Kofinou Reception Centre for Applicants of International Protection

The Kofinou Reception Centre only has a 400-bed capacity. The vast majority of asylum-seekers and refugees in Cyprus live in urban areas. *© UNHCR Cyprus*

The sole State-run reception centre, located in the village of Kofinou some 40km from Nicosia, was expanded in 2014 to have a 400-bed capacity. The Centre has been operating at its maximum capacity since January 2016.

Since the onset of the pandemic, the centre was further expanded, with a fenced area adjacent to the main camp, to host more asylum-seekers who were referred there from the first reception centre at Kokkinotrimithia or from the community.

Efforts have been made over the years to provide suitable reception conditions, including a medical centre, full catering, as well as kitchens, common rooms, and a

play area for young children. Ongoing problems with infrastructure and limited access to language and other programmes and services continue to be addressed in an effort to further improve the quality of life for residents at the Centre.

Persisting challenges relate to the Centre's remote location coupled with the limited transport facilities to town that tend to impede the residents' employment opportunities, their interaction with the local population and integration efforts in general. More and targeted on-site activities could further improve the daily lives of the residents making their time at the Centre more pleasant and productive. Enhanced social services and psychosocial counselling would in addition help to better address the needs of vulnerable persons and ensure their smooth transition from the Centre to the community, including upon the granting of international protection.

UNHCR donated in December 2018 a 9-seater mini-bus to the Asylum Service to support efforts to improve the living conditions of the residents at the centre, their access to services given the remote location of the centre and improve their integration into society. *© UNHCR Cyprus*

First Reception Centre at Kokkinotrimithia

The reception centre located in Kokkinothrimithia, on the outskirts of Nicosia, was originally established in 2014 as a tented facility of a 350-person capacity with EU funding to help deal with increased arrivals from Syria and was envisaged only to provide 72-hour emergency accommodation to newly arrived asylum-seekers.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the camp has received all newly arrived asylum-seekers and has been operating as a long-term reception facility. Asylum-seekers are allowed to exit the camp and live in the cities after quarantine, registration and interview and if they have a valid address in Cyprus – a requirement that is difficult to meet as they are not allowed to leave the camp to find accommodation.

The centre hosts some 900 persons in a combination of tents, prefabricated shelters, and various quarantine areas for new arrivals. Among them there are some 100 children of whom around 80 are unaccompanied. The average duration of stay is 37 days for adults and 76 days for unaccompanied and separated children (UASC).

While the centre has been significantly decongested and currently operates within capacity, further action is required to improve living conditions; asylum-seekers continue to live in prefabricated units and tents, without adequate access to electricity, sanitation or shade / heating. Asylum-seekers are permitted to exit their respective residential section only upon being called for an interview by the various governmental and other agencies working in the camp.

Better protection of vulnerable groups is also required, including measures to ensure adequate segregation of UASC and single women from the rest of the residents in the safe zones and the quarantine areas. An additional safe zone to host some 200 UASC is under construction and is expected to be completed soon, aiming to improve the living conditions and protection of the UASC. Enhanced and more timely access to guardians should also be ensured for the UASC while efforts are made to transfer the children in shelters outside the centre as quickly as possible.

UNHCR provides technical advice to ensure adequate reception conditions are met, including advice to address exploitation risks for children and women at the camp. To that end, UNHCR and its main NGO partner, have physical presence at the camp to conduct vulnerability assessments, though with limited access. UNHCR continues to advocate for a comprehensive response, including the mobilization of trained social workers, psychologists, interpreters, cultural mediators and lawyers for the provision of psychosocial assistance, orientation and legal information. UNHCR has also donated blankets, plastic sheets, family tents, refugee housing units camp beds, benches, a shaded area for cover during food distribution and other non-food relief items aiming to address come of the needs.

Cameroonian and Congolese women and girls residing at the Kokkinotrimithia first reception centre receive individual bars of soap donated by Unilever in the context of its partnership with UNHCR during the COVID-19 global pandemic. *© UNHCR Cyprus*

Urban living for the majority of asylum-seekers

The vast majority of asylum-seekers live in the towns and cities; as affordable accommodation is becoming increasingly scarce, however, many are moving to more rural areas where access to services and employment opportunities are harder to come by. Many live in rented private accommodation, but many are left homeless or at risk of homelessness and destitution. This is due to a number of factors, such as the employment policy that applies to asylum-seekers, which is not conducive to their integration into the labour market; the amount of the state aid granted to unemployed asylum-seekers that is less than the Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI) granted to other destitute groups of the population, including unemployed citizens and refugees; the surge in the rent prices caused by an increase in the demand for rented accommodation; and the prolonged period for the examination of asylum applications.

Increasing numbers of asylum-seekers are at risk of homelessness. They rely on charities for food and access to basic facilities or live in inappropriate and overcrowded spaces.

Sectors of the economy in which asylum-seekers can work have expanded, but finding a job remains problematic for most asylum-seekers due to language barriers and red tape.

State aid consists of rental allowance, food, clothing and footwear allowance and utilities allowance that are now provided digitally in the form of cash-based allowance. Despite the positive change in the legal framework however, many asylum-seekers continue to face obstacles in accessing the basic banking services required in order to access their monthly allowance and are therefore exposed to the risk of destitution.
Furthermore, the total monthly allowance for asylum-seekers remains well below the GMI that applies to recognised refugees and subsidiary protection beneficiaries. See Figure 3 below.

The GMI allowance provides a basic income to the applicant of EUR480 per month. In addition to this amount, there is an allowance for spouses (EUR240) and for children under age 14 (EUR144) or for children over age 14 and up to age 28 (240), as well as a rental allowance, which is calculated based on various criteria, and according to a specific formula.

Number of persons in the household	Food, clothing and footwear	Allowance for electricity, water and minor expenses	Rental allowance	Total amount of assistance granted
1	€186	€75	Nicosia €100 Limassol €100 Famagusta €100 Larnaca €100 Pafos €100	Nicosia €361 Limassol €361 Famagusta €361 Larnaca €361 Pafos €361
2	€279	€100	Nicosia €200 Limassol €218 Famagusta €146 Larnaca €174 Pafos €146	Nicosia €579 Limassol €597 Famagusta €525 Larnaca €553 Pafos €525
3	€372	€140	Nicosia €290 Limassol €317 Famagusta €211 Larnaca €252 Pafos €211	Nicosia €802 Limassol €829 Famagusta €723 Larnaca €764 Pafos €723
4	€465	€170	Nicosia €290 Limassol €317 Famagusta €211 Larnaca €252 Pafos €211	Nicosia €925 Limassol €952 Famagusta €846 Larnaca €887 Pafos €846
5 and more	€558	€200	Nicosia €364 Limassol €397 Famagusta €265 Larnaca €315 Pafos €265	Nicosia €1,122 Limassol €1,155 Famagusta €1,023 Larnaca €1,073 Pafos €1,023

Figure 3: Material Reception Conditions for asylum-seekers in Cyprus, now provided as cash-based assistance

Asylum processing

UNHCR advocates for the implementation of fair, effective and quick procedures for examining asylum-seekers' applications. This is to everyone's interest as the asylum system should be preserved for those needing international protection.

As part of its work to improve the quality of asylum procedures, UNHCR has provided guidance to the Asylum Service in addressing the backlog. In particular, UNHCR advocates for the adoption of an effective screening mechanism and accelerated procedures to quickly decide on applications from persons who are in need of international protection as well as on applications with unfounded claims, in accordance with the **Fair and Fast Policy Document** [https://www.refworld.org/docid/5b589eef4.html].

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Recent News

Take a look at our recent series of portraits by Sebastian Rich with accompanying stories of individual refugees living in Cyprus. Meet some of the Syrian refugees living in Cyprus: [https://www.unhcr.org/cy/2021/03/18/syria-refugee-crisis-globally-in-europe-and-in-cyprus-meet-some-syrian-refugees-in-cyprus/]

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