

Cyprus | Integration Capacity

30 September 2022



Wasif Almady, 34, is a stateless Palestinian who fled to Cyprus for a peaceful life away from persecution and the sectarian violence that erupted in Iraq in 2003. His son Hilbert Ibrahim is named after the influential German mathematician David Hilbert. Wasif lives in Cyprus as a subsidiary protection beneficiary with his wife, their two children and his mother. He published book in mathematics that has been distributed to local Universities in Cyprus and included in the 2017 Bulletin of Cyprus Bibliography. He currently works at the Kofinou Reception Center as a translator. In his quest for stability and security for himself and his family, Wasif applied for Cypriot citizenship in 2017; his application was rejected three years later. Wasif has appealed the refusal of his naturalization application hoping to have the decision overturned. Till then the family's future will hang in the balance.

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Overview

Since 2015 Cyprus has been receiving an increasing number of refugees, particularly from neighbouring Syria. Some **16,301** persons are registered as having been granted refugee or subsidiary protection status between 2002 and the end of September 2022. With significant numbers of people afforded international protection in Cyprus in recent years (some **11,520** persons since 2015 alone), the need for greater assistance and support to help them integrate has become more apparent.

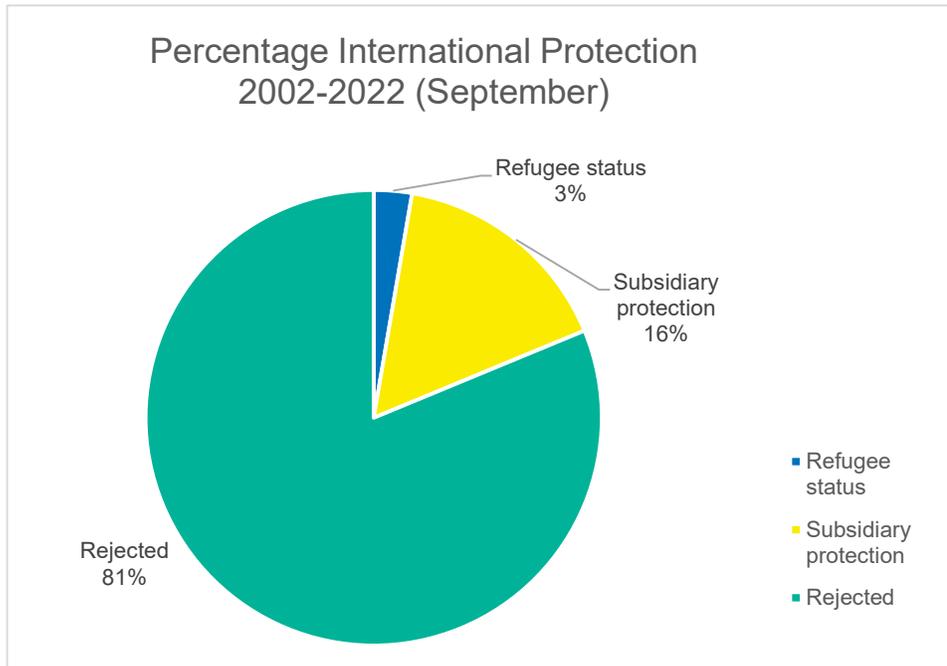


Figure 1: Percentage of International Protection Beneficiaries in Cyprus – Refugee status and Subsidiary protection status – versus rejections of asylum applications from January 2002 through end September 2022

In addition, an increase in the numbers of asylum applications has been ongoing and intensified in 2018, with a 72% increase over the previous year stretching the limited reception structures of the country. By the end of 2019 the upward trend continued with the lodging of some 12,720 new asylum applications. By contrast, from January through December 2020 some **7,176** new asylum applications were lodged, while from January to the end of 2021 some **13,235 new asylum applications** were lodged in Cyprus. In the first three quarters of 2022, some **16,705** new asylum applications have been made. Overall, some **27,725 persons' applications for international protection were pending** at the Asylum Service at the end of September 2022, while another **8,013 persons' appeals** were pending at the International Protection Administrative Court (IPAC).

The integration of refugees

Due to the forced nature of their flight and their experiences, refugees – compared with migrants – will often have specific needs that have to be met in order to support their integration into the host society. It is therefore important that the specific needs of refugees are recognised in national integration policies and practices, including those of particular groups such as women and children.

UNHCR considers that, though there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to integration, there are a number of broad goals of integration that apply across countries. These include efforts to enable refugees to reach and develop their full potential; to protect their human rights; reduce their marginalization; and foster social cohesion and harmonious coexistence.

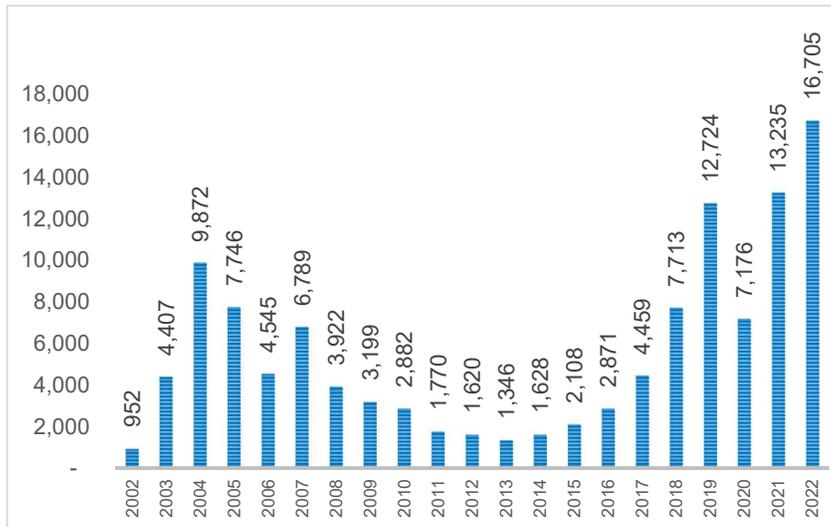


Figure 2: New Asylum Applications in Cyprus by year from 2002 through to the end of September 2022.

Access to education, employment, decent housing, family reunification and to public services – on a basis equal to national citizens, and in a non-discriminatory way – are the key ingredients of integration in any society. There is also evidence that participation in the democratic process, and in the formulation of integration policies and measures, supports the integration of refugees.

Effective integration also requires that reception policies for asylum-seekers are designed to promote social inclusion. While it is not UNHCR’s position that the full range of integration programmes for refugees should be extended to asylum-seekers, it is in the best interests of both the host society and asylum-seekers and refugees to promote a reception policy designed to minimize isolation and separation from host communities through effective programmes targeting language and vocational skills development, decent housing and support to find employment.

To be successful, integration has to be pursued not only across different policy areas but also within an inter-agency framework that brings together all concerned societal actors: the refugees, relevant State institutions, civil society organizations, business leaders, refugee community associations, faith-based organizations and the media. Mainstreaming integration policies and measures is equally important in all relevant policy portfolios and levels of government and public services.

The role of the local authorities is also crucial in addressing the challenges faced by newly arrived refugees and migrants. While national policies establish a broad policy framework, it is local authorities who are faced with the often daunting task of translating them into action and finding practical solutions. UNHCR’s Bureau for Europe commissioned and developed in collaboration with the Migration Policy Group a handbook to give practical guidance to local actors and to further inspire them to include refugees. The tool, **Effective inclusion of refugees: Participatory approaches for practitioners at the local level** [<https://www.unhcr.org/61f7be2c4>], was created in collaboration with local authorities, service providers, civil society and refugee led organizations across Europe and was tested in several countries.

Integration in Cyprus remains one of the most challenging areas of the national asylum system. The development of a national integration strategy for refugees has become a pressing need during the past years due to the onset of the conflict in Syria and the ensuing refugee crisis, and the increasing number of refugees arriving in Cyprus, especially since 2014.

The first country integration plan was adopted for the period 2010-2012, aiming for the integration of migrants in general, whilst a new strategy for integration has been under development by the government for the past few years. Over the years, UNHCR has offered recommendations to enhance the integration prospects of refugees in Cyprus, including during the process for the drafting of the new national integration plan. A number of suggestions and recommendations made by UNHCR during the consultation phase have been taken into consideration. A new plan was concluded in 2021 [<https://tcnintegration.com.cy/en/ongoing-integration-plan/>] but is still under review and has yet to receive final approval.

The new National Integration Plan for Third-Country Nationals includes 30 proposals, in eight main areas including housing, education, employment and vocational training to be implemented during the programming period 2021 – 2027. Meanwhile, efforts have been made to implement smaller scale integration projects under the EU's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) since 2014. UNHCR has also submitted proposals to the European Funds Unit, to be considered for the first round of calls in 2022 under the Asylum and Migration Fund. UNHCR has proposed the inclusion of an early, accessible and comprehensive **Civic Learning and Orientation Program** to be implemented in all districts. The Program was also presented by UNHCR to the Mayor of Pafos following tensions in the wider district between local and refugee communities.

Through UNHCR's participatory discussions with refugees and asylum seekers, government counterparts and civil society, the early access to comprehensive civic learning and orientation programs has transpired as one of the most important unmet needs in regard to integration. UNHCR and partner NGO the Cyprus Refugee Council, with the support of Civil Society Advocates, have provided guidance and support to organized groups of international protection beneficiaries wishing to register their organizations with the relevant authorities. An application is currently pending for the registration of the first Syrian, refugee-led organization in the Pafos district. Furthermore, UNHCR is planning the first **Financial Inclusion Workshop** in Cyprus to be held in October 2022. The Financial Inclusion Workshop aims to gather financial service providers, relevant ministries and regulatory bodies, NGOs and refugees to enhance access to financial services through information and advocacy, establishing linkages, sharing good practices and identifying and addressing access barriers.

In 2018, UNHCR published the report **Towards a Comprehensive Refugee Integration Strategy in Cyprus**: [<http://bit.ly/2FJFvVK>] which includes an overview of the current integration challenges in Cyprus and specific recommendations based on good practices applied elsewhere. The report was the result of the works of the Integration Task Force, which was formed by UNHCR in 2016 to help in the development of policy and practice in this area. The Task Force comprised of refugee associations, government authorities, local authorities, civil society organizations, refugee community associations and business community representatives.

Since 2019, UNHCR has held annual integration conferences to bring together relevant stakeholders to discuss the main challenges in integration. In December 2019, UNHCR held

its first annual Integration Conference in Nicosia, under the title **The Integration of Refugees in Cyprus – Opportunities and Challenges** [<http://bit.ly/2Z7L3jL>] attended by 100 participants, including members of the refugee community, NGOs, government, local authorities, educational institutions, media and others. The conference focused on refugee participation and social inclusion as well as the opportunities available by new integration initiatives and projects. The following two conferences took place online. In December 2020, UNHCR's **Second** Annual Integration Conference [<https://bit.ly/3AZMiUN>] tackled the integration process in Cyprus and the impact of misconceptions about refugees. In December 2021, UNHCR's **Third** Annual Integration Conference [<https://bit.ly/3oodjMV>] highlighted the role of local authorities in enhancing social inclusion, as well as the power of the individual in society.

Enhanced self-reliance through employment

Across Europe and in Cyprus, refugees constitute a growing segment of the workforce. Their integration into the labour market promotes a win-win situation: businesses can better meet their staffing needs by benefiting from the cultural and human capital held by refugees, while refugees can more quickly become self-sufficient contributors to the economy. Moreover, through a more diverse workplace, societies become more inclusive and tolerant. HRW is an



innovative and free web service aiming to connect job-seeking refugees with potential employers and with organizations interested in providing job skills training opportunities. HRW is an initiative of the UNHCR Office in Cyprus, in collaboration with its NGO partner, the Cyprus Refugee Council. HRW brings motivated refugee job-seekers in contact with potential employers and training providers in Cyprus in an easy and efficient manner, reaching out to more than a hundred of companies and

hundreds of job-seekers with a refugee background.

UNHCR's partner NGO the CyRC has produced the **Employability of Refugees in Cyprus – A skills profiling report** [<https://bit.ly/3Aox8tH>]. The information presented in this report was collected between 2019-2021, utilizing data from the **HelpRefugeesWork** platform and input from the community. The report and accompanying "Joint Statement - Working together for refugee integration" has been shared with major stakeholders and respectable companies that actively contribute in promoting diversity in the workplace and foster labour inclusion.

UNHCR Cyprus has forged important partnerships with academic institutions to enhance education and self-reliance prospects for refugees. In June 2017 UNHCR Cyprus and the University of Nicosia signed a **Memorandum of Understanding** aiming to provide increased opportunities for refugees to access tertiary education. [<http://bit.ly/2ETD4hu>] Similarly, in September 2019 UNHCR concluded a **Partnership Agreement** with the European University of Cyprus [<http://bit.ly/2nCHLpN>].

In response to UNHCR's call for pledges in the **Global Refugee Compact**, the **University of Cyprus**, one of the two State universities, granted two MBA scholarships in 2019-2020. The scholarships, granted to a Palestinian and a Ghanaian, covered 70% of the fees; one of

the two scholars was also granted accommodation in the University's halls. In addition, as of 2019, the School of Greek Language of the University of Cyprus offers a number of scholarships to refugees. Since 2019, 118 refugees in Cyprus have been granted scholarships to attend Greek language classes in the intensive and non-intensive programs of the University free of charge.

The **Occupational Therapy Programme** of the European University of Cyprus launched in February 2019 a pioneering program for refugees and asylum-seekers aiming at facilitating their integration in the local society. [<https://bit.ly/3L6I7LN>]

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency created the **Help Platform** for refugees and asylum-seekers in Cyprus [<https://help.unhcr.org/cyprus/>]. The Help Platform is an important source of information for refugees and asylum-seekers and therefore a useful tool for their integration. On this website there is information in English, Arabic and French about the rights and duties of refugees and asylum-seekers in Cyprus, as well as information about where to seek help and integration support information, including access to education and other programmes.

Family Reunification and Naturalisation

Integration is affected by the limited possibilities for family reunification. The overwhelming majority of international protection beneficiaries, who are granted subsidiary protection status, are excluded from family reunification rights. Family reunification remains inaccessible to beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, that make up 80% of international protection beneficiaries in Cyprus. For recognized refugees, administrative and procedural obstacles towards achieving family reunification persist. Maintaining family unity for international protection beneficiaries in Cyprus has also been problematic, in particular for parents of different nationalities with children born after the arrival in Cyprus of the parent who has been granted refugee status. Furthermore, access to long-term residence and naturalization is expected to be further restricted by amending legislation pursued in 2021, excluding access to naturalization of asylum seekers and subsidiary protection beneficiaries, who amount to 80% of international protection beneficiaries in Cyprus.

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