

8 February 2024

Cyprus is one of Europe's frontline states and since 2015 has been faced with an increasing trend of mixed migration arrivals. In 2022 some **21,565** new asylum applications were made. In 2023 some **11,617 persons** applied for asylum in the Republic of Cyprus (RoC).

As at end December, there are some **26,599 persons'** applications pending decision at the Asylum Service. Another **5,073 persons'** appeals are pending at the International Protection Administrative Court (IPAC).

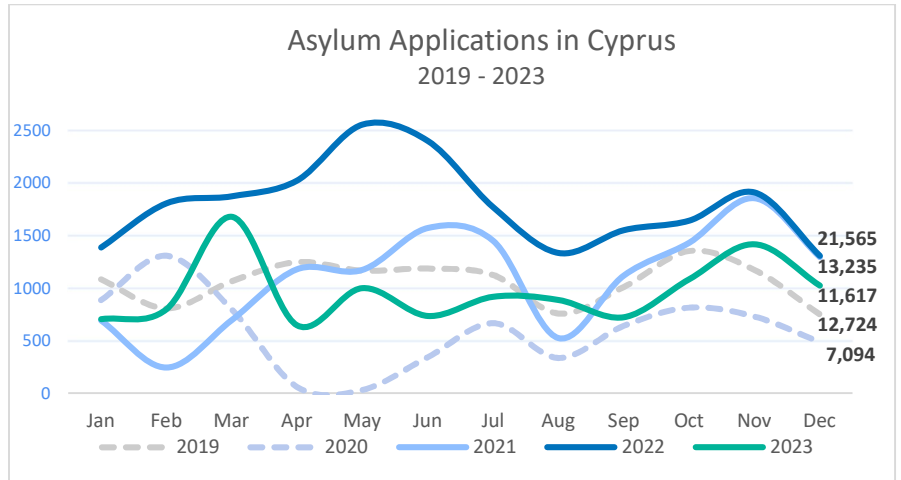
There are some **19,498 persons** currently registered as international protection beneficiaries in Cyprus, of whom **3,265** have been granted refugee status, and **16,233** are subsidiary protection beneficiaries.

Up until 14th Jan 2024, some **20,127 refugees from Ukraine** have applied for Temporary Protection in the RoC.

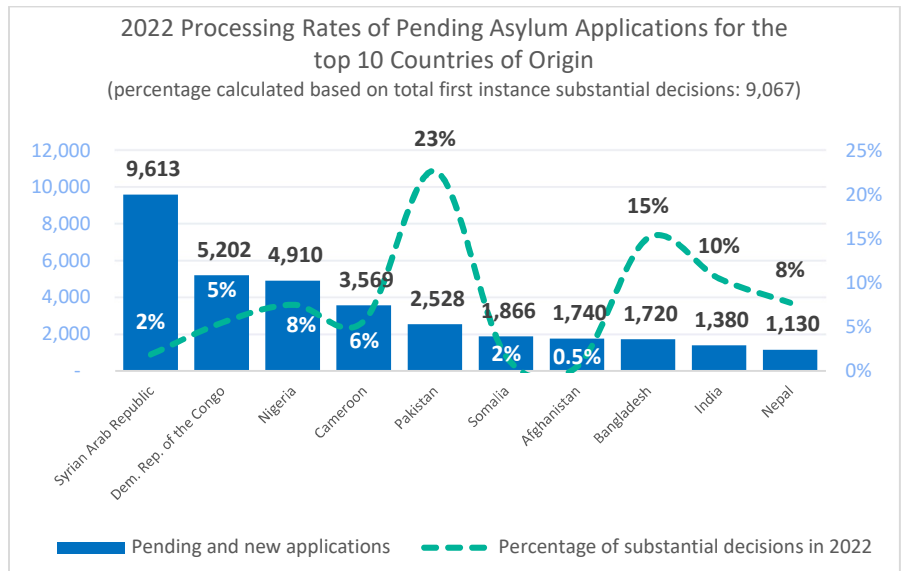
Asylum processing

UNHCR advocates for the implementation of fair, effective and fast 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 the asylum procedures, UNHCR provides 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.



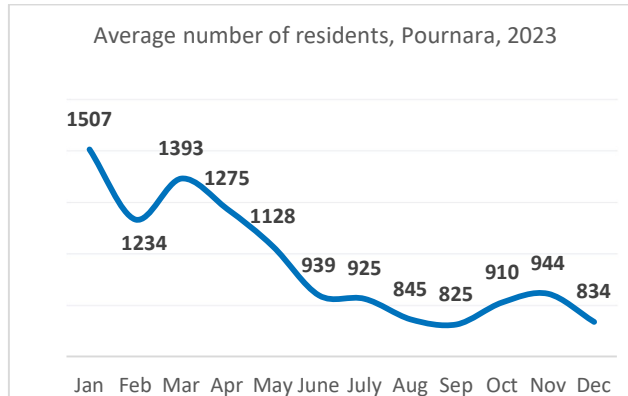
The significant increase in the number of arrivals have led to an overstretching of the already limited reception structures of the country. Newly arrived asylum-seekers are faced with multiple challenges with regards to their first reception and subsequent transition to the community, such as in ensuring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



*For more information see UNHCR's paper: [Effective processing of asylum applications: Practical considerations and practices](https://www.refworld.org/docid/6241b39b4.html) [https://www.refworld.org/docid/6241b39b4.html]

First Reception Centre (Pournara) in Kokkinotrimithia

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



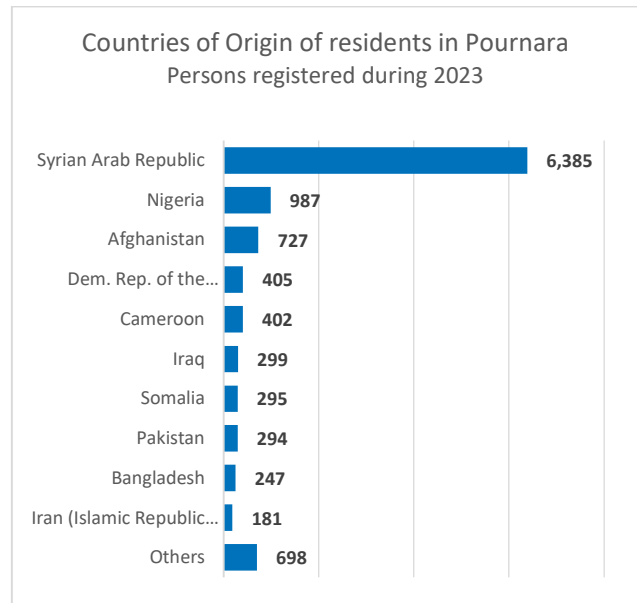
Today, the centre comprises of pre-fabricated housing and tents and has an official capacity of 1,000 persons. Since 2020, the centre has received all newly arrived asylum-seekers, including families with children as well as unaccompanied children, and has been operating as a long-term reception facility. Asylum-seekers are allowed to exit the camp and live in the cities after they complete the initial registration procedure, 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. In 2022, the centre was operating considerably beyond capacity, with up to 2,000 to 3,000 residents at times. In 2023, the number of residents has decreased. IOM Greece started the construction for the expansion and refurbishment of the centre in June 2023. The first phase is expected to be completed in March 2024. This action is expected to raise the capacity of the centre from 1,000 to 3,000 persons.

The centre is not suitable for long-term stay as it lacks adequate infrastructure, is in a remote location, and outbreaks of violence are recurrent. High-security fencing around the perimeter of the centre was completed at the beginning of June 2023.

Unaccompanied children reside at Pournara in precarious conditions for several months without access to education. As at end December 2023 some **222** unaccompanied children were residing in the centre. Due to limited capacity, approximately half of children were residing in the Safe Zone and the other half in the main camp. The sanitation facilities in the Safe Zones improved over the past year with the assistance of the Watershed NGO.

With the shelters for unaccompanied children operating at full capacity, the welfare services have adopted some interim measures to accommodate the children in hotels, which however lack in various regards, including freedom

of movement, access to education and recreational activities. Semi-independent living programs have also been developed with EU funding. However, children who reach the age of 18 are requested to leave the programs without meanwhile having acquired the means to live independently in the community. It is notable that the unaccompanied children who reside at the shelters once they attain the age of 18 are also required to move into independent living without support to help them integrate into the community.



UNHCR and its main NGO partner have physical presence at Pournara to assist the authorities in ensuring adequate reception conditions for asylum-seekers and vulnerable groups. To that end, UNHCR conducts vulnerability assessments; informs the authorities of the daily challenges; provides advice to address exploitation risks for children and women at the camp and assists in finding solutions for issues that vary from medical needs to information provision to the asylum-seekers and their transition into the community. At the end of 2021 until mid-2022, UNHCR employed a camp management expert who proposed solutions for the improvement of infrastructure and for faster and more efficient asylum processes in the camp. UNHCR also recommended that emergency preparedness plans are adopted for a possible sudden influx, while longer term improvements are pursued in Pournara. Meanwhile, UNHCR has 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.

Kofinou Reception Centre for Applicants of International Protection

The sole state-run reception centre is located in a remote area of the village of Kofinou with a capacity of approximately 600 persons. Kofinou hosts families with children, single women and single men. The centre is a model of good management with an on-going effort to further improve infrastructure and services. This is

evidenced by the recent refurbishment and extension of the centre, which saw the capacity of the centre double. Accessibility for persons with disabilities have been improved and sports and leisure areas are forthcoming. In addition, the centre is currently undergoing further renovations, which, once completed will increase its capacity by an additional 100 persons.



UNHCR has donated among others, trees, housing units and playground equipment to improve the living conditions for the residents at the Kofinou Reception Centre.

Urban living for the majority of asylum-seekers

Most asylum-seekers live in the towns and cities. Some live in rented private accommodation, but many more are left homeless or at risk of homelessness and destitution. Since 2017 homelessness has been on the rise 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 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.

Sectors of the economy in which asylum-seekers can work are limited mainly to low-skilled jobs. Also finding a job in those sectors remains problematic for most asylum-seekers due to language barriers and red tape. Access to the labour market for asylum-seekers will be further restricted as of September 2023. While asylum-seekers are currently allowed to work, one month after they submit their asylum-claim, a circular was enacted at the beginning of 2023 providing that as of September 2023 asylum-seekers will be allowed to work nine months after they submit their asylum claim.

State aid is in the form of cash-based allowance and consists of rental allowance, utilities and food and clothing. Many asylum-seekers continue to face obstacles in opening basic bank accounts that are required in order to access their monthly allowance, hence they are exposed to the risk of destitution. Furthermore, the total monthly allowance for asylum-seekers (Euros 361 per applicant to

cover rent, utilities and food) remains well below the Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI) that applies to recognised refugees and subsidiary protection beneficiaries. The GMI allowance provides a basic income to the applicant of EUR480 per month, an additional 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. For more details about the material reception conditions provided to asylum-seekers, visit our **Help Platform**: <https://bit.ly/3PoQ830>



Increasing numbers of asylum-seekers are at risk of homelessness, and even those who find accommodation are living in squalid conditions.

© UNHCR Cyprus

Centre at Limnes

The centre at Limnes was established in 2021 to host failed asylum-seekers coming directly from Pournara and pending deportation as well as asylum-seekers who are part of voluntary return or relocation programs. The centre is in a remote location with no local bus to the main towns for to access services, including the appeal court that is based in Nicosia. The funding for refurbishment was availed by the European Commission in 2022 and residents have been transferred to the reception centre in Kofinou pending the completion of the renovation works.