

Cyprus | Integration Capacity

30 September 2020



Volunteers like Rehab offer their time at community-led organisations such as the Learning Refuge in Pafos that provide important support to refugees and asylum-seekers as they try to integrate into the host community while struggling with rebuilding their lives in a new country.

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Overview

Since 2015 Cyprus has been receiving an increasing number of refugees, particularly from neighbouring Syria. Some 13,210 persons are registered as having been granted refugee or subsidiary protection status between 2002 and the end of September 2020. With significant numbers of people afforded international protection in Cyprus in recent years (some 8,545 persons since 2015 alone), the need for greater assistance and support to help them integrate has become more apparent.

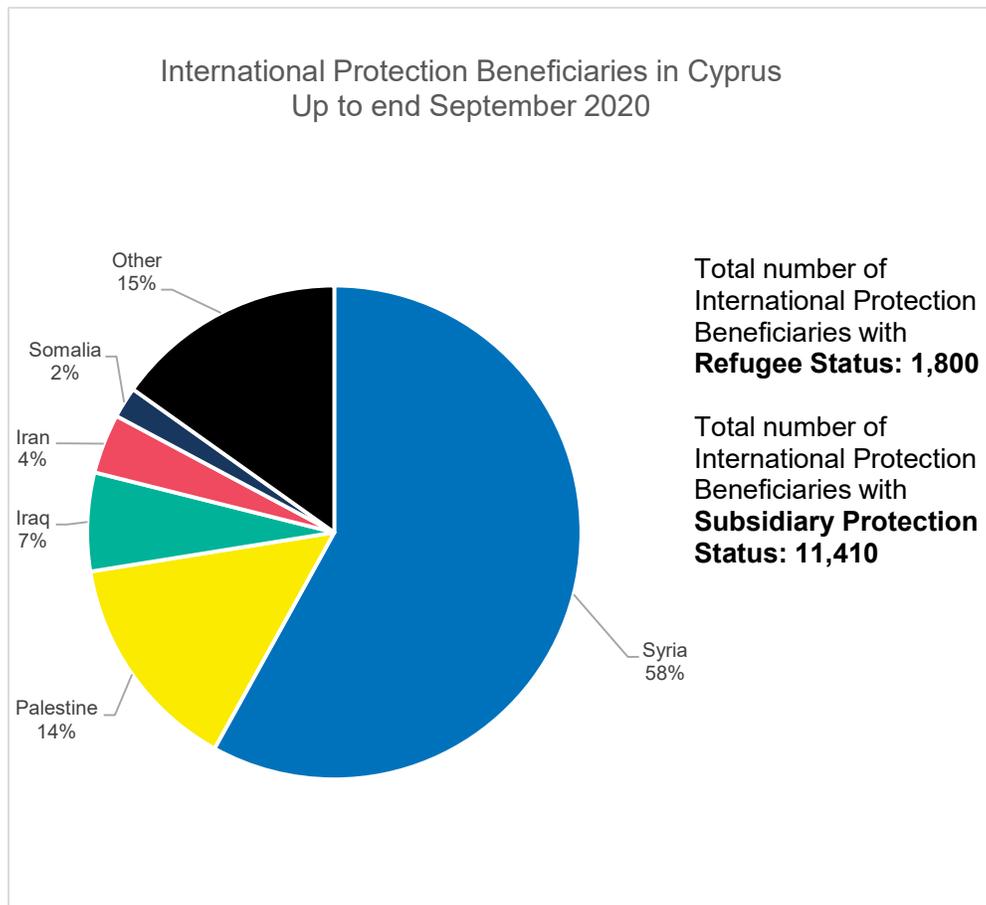


Figure 1: Breakdown of International Protection Beneficiaries by country of origin from January 2002 till September 2020

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. From January to September 2020 some 5,015 new asylum applications were lodged in Cyprus. Overall, some 19,560 applications for international protection were pending at the end of September 2020.

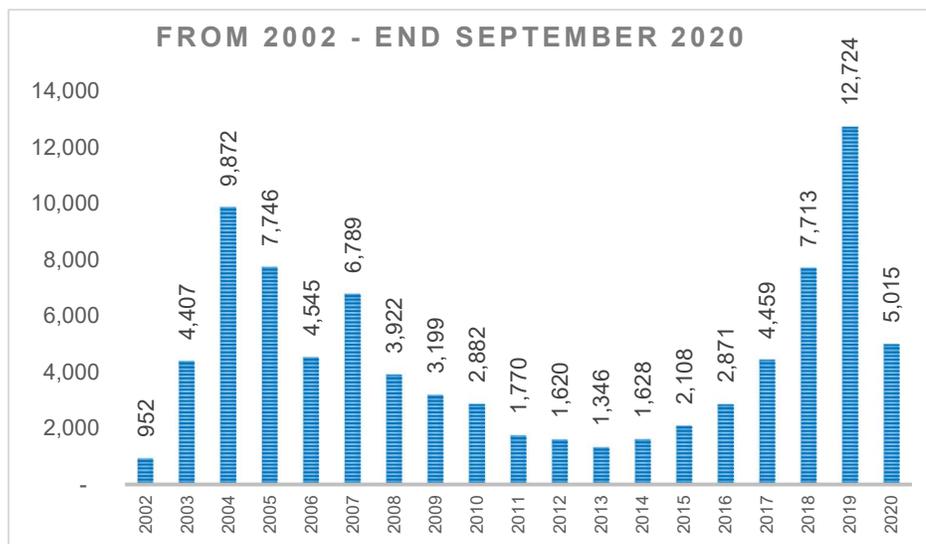


Figure 2: New Asylum Applications in Cyprus from 2002 through to the end of September 2020

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. 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.

Integration in Cyprus remains one of the most challenging areas of the national asylum system. 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. The national integration plan for third-country nationals is expected to materialize in the last quarter of 2020 and 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 offered recommendations at discussion groups as well as in writing throughout the process leading to the drafting of the national integration plan and further comments are expected to be submitted before it's concluded.

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.

In 2016, the UNHCR Office in Cyprus took the initiative of establishing the Integration Task Force to contribute to the development of a national integration strategy, which in turn would help in the development of policy and practice in this area. The Task Force consisted of refugee associations, government authorities, local authorities, civil society organizations, refugee community associations and business community representatives. It was co-chaired by the Asylum Service with the participation of key government departments, refugees and refugee-assisting NGOs.

The findings and recommendations resulting from the Task Force were compiled in the 2018 report **Towards a Comprehensive Refugee Integration Strategy in Cyprus**: [https://www.unhcr.org/cy/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2018/07/Integration_Report_2018.pdf]. The report includes an overview of the current integration challenges in Cyprus and specific recommendations based on good practices applied elsewhere.

In December 2019, UNHCR held its first annual Integration Conference in Nicosia, under the title **The Integration of Refugees in Cyprus – Opportunities and Challenges** [<https://www.unhcr.org/cy/2019/12/20/unhcr-cyprus-first-integration-conference-results-in-public-call-to-action/>] 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. Overall, there was consensus that there is an urgent and ever-increasing need for a multi-stakeholder approach to integration, and for both the government and civil society to work collectively to enhance and promote the integration of refugees. Working to tackle inadequate access to basic rights and services, and enabling the participation and inclusion of refugees in the

decision and policy-making process, were largely acknowledged to be crucial components of this effort.

UNHCR has also submitted its proposals to the European Funds Unit to be considered for funding during the 2021-2027 programmatic period, including on shared housing, vocational training, day-care, social connectedness, refugee participation, interpretation services, and provision of legal services.

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.



Enabling refugees to enter the labour market means they can become financially self-sufficient and socially integrated sooner, while contributing with their skills and knowledge to the benefit of the local economy.

UNHCR Cyprus supports employability of refugees through the **HelpRefugeesWork** platform [<https://www.helprefugeeswork.org/>]. 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. So far some 100+ companies have registered as well as more than 400 job-seekers with a refugee background, while more than 130 applications are shortlisted. All services provided by HRW, both to job-seekers and employers, are free of charge.

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. [<https://www.unhcr.org/cy/2017/06/20/unhcr-university-nicosia-enter-partnership-agreement/>] Similarly, in September 2019 UNHCR concluded a **Partnership Agreement** with the European University of Cyprus [<https://www.unhcr.org/cy/2019/09/27/press-release-unhcr-and-the-european-university-cyprus-conclude-a-partnership-agreement/>].

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://www.unhcr.org/cy/2019/03/19/collaboration-of-the-occupational-therapy-program-of-the-european-university-of-cyprus-and-the-unhcr-office-in-cyprus/>]

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.

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