

Cyprus | Reception Capacity

30 September 2020

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 the end of September 2020 some 5,015 new asylum applications were made in Cyprus, which ranks as the first asylum receiving country, per capita, among EU Member States.

Overall, some 19,560 applications for international protection were pending at the end of September 2020. In addition, some 13,210 persons are registered as having been granted refugee or subsidiary protection status between 2002 and the end of September 2020.

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.

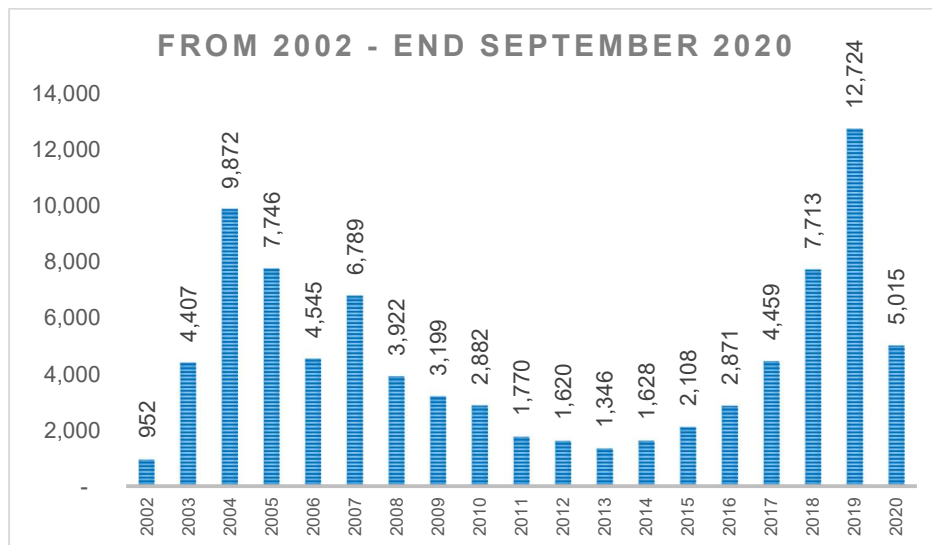


Figure 1: New Asylum Applications in Cyprus from 2002 through to the end of September 2020

The top ten countries of origin of new asylum-seekers in Cyprus from January to September of 2020 are: Syria, India, Bangladesh, Cameroon, Pakistan, Nepal, Iran, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria and Egypt.

	2015		2016		2017		2018		2019	
Total Applicants in Year	1560		3055		4582		7761		13259	
Breakdown by countries of origin										
Syria	1008	64.62%	1248	40.85%	1805	39.39%	2007	25.86%	2602	19.62%
Egypt	75	4.81%	109	3.57%	268	5.85%	407	5.24%	500	3.78%
Bangladesh	48	3.08%	137	4.48%	287	6.26%	637	8.21%	1270	9.58%
Vietnam	126	8.08%	155	5.07%	357	7.79%	415	5.35%	529	3.99%
Pakistan	122	7.82%	217	7.10%	191	4.17%	587	7.56%	1187	8.95%
Sri Lanka	53	3.40%	75	2.45%	140	3.06%	278	3.58%	385	2.90%
Somalia	66	4.23%	224	7.33%	118	2.58%	104	1.34%	166	1.25%
India	90	5.77%	205	6.71%	446	9.73%	883	11.38%	1508	11.37%
Philippines	51	3.27%			87	1.90%	128	1.65%	143	1.08%
Iran	27	1.73%			82	1.79%	208	2.68%	339	2.56%
Afganistan	11	0.71%			3	0.07%	2	0.03%	4	0.03%
Russia	9	0.58%			12	0.26%	20	0.26%	43	0.32%
Palestine	95	6.09%			62	1.35%	119	1.53%	100	0.75%
Stateless	65	4.17%			0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Iraq	55	3.53%	92	3.01%	56	1.22%	370	4.77%	57	0.43%
Cameroon	21	1.35%	72	2.36%	111	2.42%	507	6.53%	1181	8.90%
Georgia	17	1.09%	18		86	1.88%	395	5.09%	1594	12.02%
DRC	17	1.09%			3	0.07%	83	1.07%	299	2.26%
Nigeria	15	0.96%			78	1.70%	117	1.51%	386	2.91%
Nepal	14	0.90%			76	1.66%	172	2.22%	324	2.44%

Figure 2: Asylum applications in Cyprus with country of origin breakdown from 2015 to 2019.

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 Kokkinotrimithia, 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 centre has been expanded with a combination of tents, prefabricated shelters, and various quarantine areas for new arrivals.

Due to the COVID-19 measures, it currently serves as a first reception centre for an average of up to 3-4 months to newly arrived and homeless asylum-seekers, including children. Asylum-seekers are allowed to exit the camp 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.

UNHCR provides technical advice to ensure adequate reception conditions are met, including advice to address exploitation risks for children and women at the camp. UNHCR has also donated blankets, plastic sheets, tents, refugee housing units and other non-food relief items aiming to cover the needs of some 3,400 persons. Most recently through UNHCR's partnership with Unilever, some 1,000kg of individually wrapped soap bars were also donated in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.



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.



© UNHCR/Béla Szandelszky
 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>].

CONTACT US

Emilia STROVOLIDOU, Assistant Public Information Officer, Nicosia - Cyprus

Email: strovoli@unhcr.org | **Tel:** +357 22 359057 | **Mobile:** +357 99 832614

LINKS

Country Office Website: www.unhcr.org/cy

Social Media:

Facebook & Twitter [@UNHCRcyprus](https://www.facebook.com/UNHCRcyprus)

Recent News

Refugee volunteers in Cyprus reach out to communities during COVID-19

Lockdown | 30.04.2020 [<https://www.unhcr.org/cy/2020/04/30/refugee-volunteers-in-cyprus-reach-out-to-communities-during-covid-19-lockdown/>]

Operational Portal | Mediterranean Situation

<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean>