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ANNUAL REPORT 2022 ON MIGRATION AND ASYLUM IN CYPRUS

NATIONAL REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION

The main challenge for Cyprus in 2022 was the management of the massive influx of asylum applicants. Having reached the highest number of applicants for international protection ever, relevant authorities were opposed to multilevel challenges.

The reception conditions, the acceleration of the asylum procedures, as well as the efficiency of returns-initiated actions, among other topics, called for strengthened cooperation and efforts on a national and European level. Diverse legislative deeds regarding international protection were executed, and the Voluntary Solidarity Mechanism (VSM) helped in relocating a significant number of applicants. Moreover, the special reception needs of vulnerable groups were addressed.

Cooperation and multilevel governance seemed to be the key elements for the reception of thousands of Ukrainian refugees and the successful application of the temporary protection directive.

Efforts were also made in order to facilitate legal migration in regards to both highly qualified and low-skilled domestic workers, among others, with a new Strategy for Attracting Business and Talent in Cyprus as well as an amendment in legislation targeting enabling more families to employ migrant domestic workers.

An important milestone in terms of integration and conclusion was set up in November 2022 with the submission of the AMIF National Programme for the Programming Period 2021–2027. Also, the five intercultural regional networks, which were established in 2021 in the framework of the Intercultural Cities project "Building structures for intercultural integration in Cyprus," continued their work at the local level. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education, in cooperation with the Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus, intensified their efforts for the better and early integration of migrant children.

During 2022, Cyprus took further decisive steps towards fulfilling the technical criteria required by the European Commission for joining the Schengen zone and also

strengthened further cooperation with the European authorities with common aid to better protect borders and combat irregular migration and smuggling.

An important Memorandum of Cooperation between national authorities was signed in order to support Cyprus efforts to effectively combat trafficking and protect the victims. In addition, a relevant awareness-raising campaign has been launched.

Last but not least, with an agreement on the standard operation procedures for returns signed between the Ministry of Interior and the European Commission, which also includes the involvement of Frontex and EUAA, a milestone was set for returns and reintegration.

1. OVERVIEW OF ASYLUM AND MIGRATION DEVELOPMENTS

In order to improve reception, asylum procedures, integration, and the efficiency of returns, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed on February 22, 2022, between Mr. Nicos Nouris, Minister of Interior, on behalf of the Republic of Cyprus, and Mrs. Ylva Johansson, Commissioner for Home Affairs, on behalf of the European Commission, for the management of migration flows in Cyprus. The Memorandum was also co-signed by the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), Frontex, and Europol in the presence of the President of the Republic of Cyprus, Mr. Nicos Anastasiadis, and Mr. Margaritis Schinas, Vice-President of the European Commission. The MoU includes Cyprus' Migration Action Plan, with specific actions.

Further, the new Procedural Regulation (Amendment No. 4) on the Operation of the Administrative Court of International Protection of 2022 was published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Cyprus on September 16, 2022 (No. 4150). The new Regulation, among other things, (a) introduced a structure to the procedure where the applicant has to apply to the Court for his right to remain by adding a deadline and a specific template; (b) changed the current procedure of the Asylum Service's legal representation in front of the Administrative Court of International Protection by the Attorney General's Law Office of the Republic only in cases of inadmissible applications and applications from safe country of origin applicants; and (c) introduced an obligation of appearance for the applicant in front of the Court in any stage of the judicial procedure, regardless of whether the applicant is represented by a lawyer or not.

2. RESPONSES TO THE INFLUX OF PERSONS FLEEING THE WAR IN UKRAINE

The Council of Ministers endorsed the decision of the European Council for the implementation of the Temporary Protection Directive for Ukrainian Refugees.

A hotline was created to assist Ukrainians with any questions or queries relevant to school and higher education. In addition, all relevant information was communicated to the Ukrainian-Cyprus Friendship Association and other volunteer organisations through the Ukrainian embassy in Cyprus. Further, all the necessary and related documents (which include an application for registration to a public pre-primary school, a guide for completing the registration, a school uniform description, and general information for the school year) were translated into Ukrainian and became easily accessible via the Ministry's website.

In order to facilitate the submission and on-the-spot examination of the applications, the Asylum Service of the Ministry of Interior has posted asylum officers at all District Immigration Offices of the Police (Larnaca, Paphos, Limassol, and Famagusta). Officers of the Immigration Police and of the Civil Registry and Migration Department have also been appointed in order to apply a one-stop-shop approach for the speedy processing of the applications. In Nicosia, the applications are processed at the premises of the Asylum Service, while an online system has also been established for the facilitation of this process. Decisions on applications for temporary protection are taken on the same day of submission. The Civil Registry Department issued biometric resident permits within three days of the granting of temporary protection status.

Furthermore, the EUAA Operating Plan for Cyprus has been amended in order to allow the provision of support for the efficient management and examination of the applications for temporary protection.

At the same time, the Deputy Ministry of Tourism has been providing accommodation at a number of hotels for Ukrainian nationals who have no place of residence, while a helpline has been established on a 24-hour basis.

Those who do not fall under the categories defined in the Council Decision were advised to seek an alternative residence permit (relevant information is available on the websites of the Civil Registry and Migration Department and of the Asylum Service under the link Frequently Asked Questions) or they can enter the asylum procedure.

Those who receive temporary protection status have immediate access to healthcare, welfare allowances, the labour market, and education. The Ministry of Education has established a plan to receive Ukrainian children in Cypriot schools and facilitate their integration. Students from Ukraine have been warmly welcomed in schools in Cyprus. For the facilitation of the process of introducing the students to the Cypriot school environment, a hotline was created to assist Ukrainians with any questions or queries relevant to school and higher education. In addition, all relevant information was

communicated to the Ukrainians in cooperation with the Cyprus Friendship Association and other volunteer organisations through the Ukrainian embassy in Cyprus. In addition, all the necessary and related documents were translated into Ukrainian and became easily accessible via the Ministry's website.

Ukrainian refugees with temporary protection status are entitled to financial support granted by the Social Welfare Services. This applies to Ukrainian nationals who came to Cyprus following the Russian invasion on February 24, 2022, and to Ukrainian nationals who were in the country for tourism purposes up to three months before the invasion. In addition, Ukrainian citizens who reside in Cyprus but do not fall into the above two categories can also apply for financial support, considering they have obtained a temporary protection permit from the Civil Registry and Migration Department (CRMD).

TPD beneficiaries also have free access to employment, subject to the conditions determined by the regulatory and institutional framework in each profession. They also have access to educational programmes, vocational training, and employment programs. The Public Employment Services (PES) of the Department of Labour offer all job seekers who have access to the labour market, including Ukrainian refugees, assistance in finding employment through registration, job search services, and placement services, which include vocational guidance, counseling, and referrals to training programmes and job vacancies.

As of August 2022, the Ministerial Council has approved the "Rent Subsidy Scheme" for displaced persons from Ukraine who have obtained temporary protection status and are temporarily accommodated in hotel units. The rent subsidy amount is equivalent to the Guaranteed Minimum Income and generally for Welfare Benefits Law, is proportional to the number of household members and the province of residence, and is paid directly to the owner. In addition, the Ministerial Council approved a monthly financial assistance of €102 for early childhood care for children aged up to 4 years and 8 months, provided that the parent or guardian is working.

3. LEGAL MIGRATION

A new strategy for attracting business and talent in Cyprus was set into force on January 2, 2022. The new strategy cancels existing quotas for third-country nationals employed in managerial or specialised positions at companies of foreign interest operating in Cyprus. Companies can freely employ any number of highly skilled third-country nationals without undergoing a market test, under some conditions regarding qualifications and salary thresholds. Eligible companies will have to commit to investing 30% of their total personnel in Cypriot and EU nationals in a five-year timeframe. The new strategy also encourages family reunification. More specifically, spouses of highly skilled third-country employees can now benefit from free and direct access to paid employment under family reunification without having to undergo a market test. The volume of applications submitted to the Civil Registry and Migration

Department has been more than double in 2022, in comparison to 2021. This increase is attributed to the expansion of the strategy and the war in Ukraine.

Additionally, an amendment to the Aliens and Immigration Law (Cap. 105) regarding the issuance, modification, or renewal of a single permit has been set into force on July 20, 2022. The third-country national applicant must hold a valid passport or other travel document, the validity of which, on the date of submission of the application, will be at least six (6) months after the expiration of the validity of the permit requested. The abovementioned prerequisite of requested proofs and their validity has also been applied in regards to the residence permit for family reunification purposes and the blue card for working purposes for third-country nationals.

Also, a revision to the criteria and related fees for the employment of domestic workers was set into force in July 2022 with the aim of facilitating citizens in terms of the procedures for the employment of domestic workers as well as the reduction of the existing fees. The purpose of this revision was to simplify the procedures for issuing and renewing residence permits. The previous criteria were replaced with new ones, which also include income criteria and are determined according to the family status of the employer. The four new categories of eligible employers are (a) families, (b) single-parent families, (c) single individuals, and (d) persons over 65 years old. In addition, the special needs of vulnerable people are taken into account. The new fees are linked to the type of temporary residence and employment permit requested and not the years of residence, as was previously the case. Each residence permit issued can be valid for one to three years.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Labour, Welfare, and Social Insurance revised the decree regarding the employment of third-country national students. The revised decree expands the sectors and professions in which students can be employed, including the hotel sector, the food industry, ward assistants, and assistants in health clinics.

Supplementary, the electronic registration of commencement of employment via the ERGANI System was initiated in September 2022 (9/2022). Through this new process, inspectors have a clear picture of every new job, the terms of employment (salary, bonus, etc.), and proceed to risk assessment for possible violations of legislation.

4. INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

The following amendments have been achieved in Cyprus in the field of international protection in 2022.

- A new procedural regulation (amendment) (No. 4) on the operation of the Administrative Court of International Protection was established. The new Regulation, among other things, (a) introduced a structure to the procedure where the applicant has to apply to the Court for his right to remain by adding a deadline and a specific template; (b) changed the current procedure of the Asylum Service's legal representation in front of the Administrative Court of International Protection by the Attorney General's Law Office of the Republic only in cases of inadmissible applications and applications from safe country of origin applicants; and (c)

introduced an obligation of appearance for the applicant in front of the Court in any stage of the judicial procedure, regardless of whether the applicant is represented by a lawyer or not.

- The Refugees (Amendment) Law of 2022 (L. 178(I)/2022). The amendment law was voted for the purpose of better harmonizing the national legislation with Article 14(2)(b) of Directive 2013/32/EU on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection (recast).
- Drafting of a bill amending the Cyprus Refugee Law has commenced by the Law Commissioner in cooperation with the Asylum Service (to be completed in 2023).

Concerning relocation and resettlement, following the set-up of the Voluntary Solidarity Mechanism (VSM), Cyprus commenced the relocation exercise in August 2022, and until the 29th of January 2023, 2870 people were offered relocation, out of whom 2552 consented to participate and completed a relocation interview (89%). Out of those 2552 who gave their consent, 2243 people were eligible to be matched to a pledging Member State (88%). Out of the eligible candidates, 160 were family units, and 414 people had some type of vulnerability. The top three citizenships of eligible applicants were Syria (1119; 50%), Afghanistan (680; 30%), and Iraq (120; 5%). 377 candidates were accepted until January 2023 by Member States, and among others, 48 candidates were transferred to Germany in December 2022. In addition, IOM started engaging in relocations from Cyprus to other EU Member States in the autumn of 2022.

In regards to family reunification, the Asylum Service has set up a procedure by which they assess the protection needs of family members of beneficiaries of international protection, and if it is decided that there are protection needs, a new decision is issued granting international protection, which includes the names of the family members. In cases where family members do not fall under the scope of international protection (e.g., spouses), they receive a special permit, based on humanitarian reasons, issued by CRMD. This specific special permit provides the right to remain, the right to labour (with the approval of the Department of Labor), and the right to free medical care in public medical institutions. Moreover, there are no additional criteria, such as family income or private health insurance.

5. MINORS AND OTHER VULNERABLE GROUPS

Emphasising the special needs of minors and other vulnerable groups, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the vulnerability assessment and related actions were being drafted in cooperation with EUAA. In addition, a new project was launched with the aim of upgrading the "Limnes" accommodation center, which will include safe zones targeted to accommodate vulnerable persons except unaccompanied minors.

In addition, two "safe zones" were created at the Pournara First Reception Centre: one zone for vulnerable women and single mothers with minors up to 12 years old, and one zone for minor girls.

With regard to unaccompanied minors, the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare and IOM continued operating a transition to adulthood program for unaccompanied minor children with the aim of facilitating the transition to adulthood for those minors.

6. INTEGRATION AND INCLUSION

A final version of the AMIF National Programme for the Programming Period 2021–2027 has been submitted to the European Committee for approval in November 2022. Its implementation will include specific projects that promote integration.

Further, in the framework of the project "Building structures for intercultural integration in Cyprus," which is being implemented by the Intercultural Cities Programme and the European Commission's Directorate General for Structural Reform Support, in partnership with the Civil Registry and Migration Department of the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Cyprus, local authorities, NGOs, and migrant organisations had the opportunity to be part of the integration process. All integration stakeholders contributed through the five intercultural regional networks to the integration of migrants in a range of areas, including participation, education, cultural and social life, urban planning, business, access to the labour market, anti-discrimination, and multilingualism. The five intercultural regional networks, which were established in 2021 and in which all integration stakeholders, local authorities, NGOs, and migrant organisations participate, did an analysis of the current integration situation in their region using the Intercultural Cities Index, developed by the CoE. Moreover, the five intercultural regional networks developed their own regional intercultural integration strategy, including specific actions to be implemented.

In addition, with the aim of integrating more children, enabling pre-primary schools, and enabling them at an early age to learn Greek as a second language, non-permanent staff enrolled in 52 pre-primary schools under the EU-funded DRA.S.E.+ program for the school year 2022-2023. The non-permanent staff work as second teachers in the classrooms. Moreover, the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute organised online seminars. The seminars concerned: a) the cooperation of the kindergarten teacher and the teacher's assistant in the context of differentiated teaching; and b) the tools and materials that can be used in teaching Greek as a second language in the kindergarten.

During the reporting year, the number of primary schools offering support classes in Greek increased to 92. In these schools, classes of Greek as a second language run in parallel with the school schedule. The language classes are taught by permanent or non-permanent staff employed under the DRA.S.E.+ EU-funded project. The above-mentioned project is also implemented in secondary education for the reporting period. A number of higher, technical, and vocational education schools are equipped with non-permanent staff employed as second teachers in the classrooms.

Also, the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute organised online and face-to-face training activities for teachers concerning a) the reinforced teaching for groups of pupils in

and/or outside the classroom and b) the reinforced teaching for pupils with migrant backgrounds.

7. BORDERS, VISA AND SCHENGEN

As of 2019, Cyprus submitted a declaration of readiness for Schengen evaluation. During 2022, it has been evaluated in 5 of the 6 evaluation areas (excluding the SIS/SIRENE (Schengen Information Systems) area). It is expected that in the coming years, all the technical criteria required by the European Commission will be fulfilled. "The Law on the Operation and Use of the Second-Generation Schengen Information System (SIS II) Law 2020" was ratified in February 2022.

Moreover, during 2022, several action plans to remedy the deficiencies identified in the 2021 evaluation of Cyprus on the application of the Schengen acquis in the fields of police cooperation and external borders have been sent to the European Commission and the Council of the EU. The Commission has assessed the adequacy of the Action Plans on both external borders and returns in May 2022 and concluded that they are both adequate and sufficiently introduce remedial actions to address the deficiencies identified during the evaluation missions.

Also, in order to combat irregular migration, Joint Operation Focal Point Air ran for a consecutive year at Larnaca and Pafos International Airports by deploying additional Frontex specialists. Additional operational support by Frontex was also provided to Sea Operation Ledra 2022 with the deployment of experts and specialists at the Pournara Reception Centre, District Immigration Departments, and the Headquarters of the Aliens and Immigration Unit.

Further, in February and March 2022, the Deputy Ministry of Research, Innovation, and Digital Policy published two calls for tenders for 'The provision of services for the implementation, maintenance, and operation of the National ETIAS Information System of the Republic of Cyprus (CY-ETIAS)', as well as for 'The provision of services for the implementation, maintenance, and operation of the new National Visa Information System of the Republic of Cyprus (new CY-VIS)', in order to operate the national ETIAS information system, contribute to the harmonization of external border controls, and comply with EU regulation.

8. IRREGULAR MIGRATION INCLUDING MIGRANT SMUGGLING

During 2022, the number of illegal migrants and asylum seekers dramatically increased. Support from EU counterparts was provided to the Cyprus authorities. The operational support from competent EU agencies such as Frontex and EUAA was enhanced with the deployment of additional experts to contribute to the efforts to combat irregular migration and migrant smuggling.

During the Frontex Operation, JO Ledra continued providing operational and technical support to the authorities of the Republic of Cyprus in relation to issues such as debriefing, screening, detection of false and falsified travel documents, etc. In 2022, a total of 71 experts from different member states were deployed in the operation.

Additionally, a Europol operation has been activated in Cyprus in order to assist local authorities with issues in relation to intelligence for facilitation networks involved in smuggling human beings. The number of officers deployed at the operation varies from 2 to 4 on a permanent basis.

Cyprus Authorities also hosted Frontex Joint Operation "Focal Point Air" at Larnaca Airport with the deployment of approximately 31 experts and 12 experts at Paphos Airport from different member states who assisted in the procedures of detection of false or falsified travel documents as well as the second line checks.

Further, Cyprus Police has enhanced patrolling activities in the areas where, based on risk analysis, illegal crossings of migrants supported by facilitators have occurred. It also established a sub-directorate of the Aliens and Immigration Unit (AIU) for the surveillance of the Green Line and the management of irregular migration.

Moreover, since the visa liberalisation for Georgia, Cyprus authorities have been dealing with a high number of Georgian nationals abusing their lawful stay or applying for asylum. Therefore, border guards reinforced the checks at the first line for visa liberalisation citizens.

TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

A Memorandum of Cooperation between the Police and the Social Welfare Services for the referral, handling, protection, and briefing of potential and recognised victims of trafficking was signed in January 2022 by the Ministry of Justice and Public Order and the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare. The Memorandum is particularly important because it supports the government's efforts to effectively combat trafficking and to

protect the victims by systematising the cooperation of the two sides and strengthening the framework for the protection and support of the victims.

The memorandum clearly defines the responsibilities and obligations of the two sides regarding the referral and briefing of the victims of trafficking. The actions to be taken by the competent services for their identification, specialised evaluation, strengthening, and support in conditions of security and trust, both during the process of identification of victims and during the trial of a trafficking case, are systematically recorded until the return of the victims to their countries of origin. The memorandum also includes special provisions for the treatment of minor victims.

In addition, an awareness-raising campaign with the theme "Now You Know" ("ΤΩΠΑ ΞΕΠΕΙΣ" in Greek). <https://www.toraxereis.com/> was launched with the aim of informing the public of the criminal liability that exists when using or demanding sexual services from persons who are victims of THB. The campaign followed an amendment to the Anti-Trafficking Law that makes the use of such services an offence of strict liability.

Also, the Office of Combating THB continued to operate a four-digit hotline (1497), through which information and complaints concerning human trafficking matters can be forwarded to the police. Additionally, since September 2022, the THB platform has been operating for online reports regarding human trafficking. The platform is linked to the Cyprus Police website and is monitored on a daily basis by members of the Office of Combating THB. Further, in the context of EUROPOL's Joint Actions, the Office for Combating Human Trafficking participated in four European Action Days.

Moreover, during 2022, members of the Police Office of Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and other police officers attended a total of 11 training programs and seminars on trafficking issues held by CEPOL. A number of additional trainings from related public bodies, universities, and international organisations were also implemented during the reporting year. In addition, 16 lectures were delivered by the Office of Combating Trafficking in Human Beings during training seminars on trafficking in human beings in Cyprus and abroad.

9. RETURN AND READMISSION

An agreement on the standard operation procedures for returns has been signed by the Minister of Interior, Mr. Nicos Nouris, and Mrs. Beate Gminder, Deputy Director-General at the European Commission. For the first time, an agreement as such has entered into force in Cyprus, in which Frontex and EUAA are also involved.

Moreover, the Republic of Cyprus and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) reached an agreement on the implementation of an operational action plan for returns. The two parties agreed that the latter would send additional return experts and experts on the verification of documents of third-country nationals. The agency shall also conduct regular paid return flights and provide technical support for the upgrading or development of the system for managing migration flows and

returns. Therefore, two Frontex Operations, the “Pre-Return Activities (PRA) FOA” and “Return Activities FOA 2022,” are operating to assist in return processes.

Further, a Returns Coordination Office was established at the Ministry of Interior to adequately respond to the needs and procedures. All competent authorities involved in the field of returns are operating within the same premises. The aim of this new development is to overcome any bureaucratic procedures and enhance return operations.

The efforts lead to the first success quotes. During 2022, Cyprus had reached a record for returns on a national and European level. From January 1, 2022, until December 31, 2022, Cyprus has operated 4630 returns, with most of them (80%) being voluntary returns. Among them, eight (8) Joint Operation Return Flights departed for Congo, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nigeria.

In addition to the EU readmission agreements on which Cyprus has been based to operate returns, such as those with Pakistan and Bangladesh (SOPs), a number of readmission agreements and/or implementation protocols have also been proposed on a bilateral level, namely:

- Migration and mobility agreement with the Republic of India
- Readmission agreement with the D.R. Congo
- Readmission agreement with the Republic of Vietnam
- Readmission agreement with the Republic of Nepal
- Implementation Protocol with the Republic of Pakistan

In 2022, Cyprus participated in Frontex’ Joint Reintegration Services. Through the project, reintegration support was offered to returnees to 52 countries, both in cash and in kind. Also, Frontex deployed seven return counselors to Cyprus. They conducted 1212 interviews and counseling sessions, thus promoting voluntary returns.

Also, with the support of Frontex, three identification missions from the DR Congo to Cyprus happened in 2022. More than 100 people were interviewed and identified as citizens of the DR Congo by officials of the General Directorate for Migration (Direction Générale des Migrations, DGM).

Further, in July 2022, a mission from Pakistan to Cyprus took place in order to install access to the Pakistani Readmission Platform (RCMS). All readmission requests are now submitted electronically via RCMS.

EMN ANNUAL REPORT ON MIGRATION AND ASYLUM

NATIONAL REPORT PART 2: ANNEXES

Methodology

The collection of information consisted primarily of desk research (use of data already available or published, including national statistics, legal texts, reports etc.), complemented, when necessary, by interviews conducted with different stakeholders in the field of migration, asylum and integration, depending on the topical issues aroused of the respective publications.

Public servants from the Ministry of Interior, as well as the other Ministries, contributed as experts in their field, to all of the CY EMN NCP outcomes, tasks and developments' provision of information, when needed.