

# EMN ANNUAL REPORT 2020 ON MIGRATION AND ASYLUM IN CYPRUS



## 1 INTRODUCTION

In accordance with Article 9(1) of Council Decision 2008/381/EC establishing the EMN, each EMN NCP is required to provide an annual report describing the migration and asylum situation and developments in the (Member) State as well as statistical data.

### 1.1 SCOPE OF THE EMN ANNUAL NATIONAL REPORT ON MIGRATION AND ASYLUM 2020

The EMN Annual Report on Migration and Asylum 2020 will cover the period 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2020.

### 1.2 STRUCTURE

To this aim, these common specifications are for the production of the EMN Annual Report on Migration and Asylum 2020. To meet the requirements of both COM and the Member States, in terms of both information requirements and timeliness, the reporting process for 2020 has again been split into two separate activities:

- The National Report (Part 1) and Statistics Annex
- The National Report (Part 2)

# ANNUAL REPORT 2020 ON MIGRATION AND ASYLUM IN CYPRUS NATIONAL REPORT (PART 2)

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The year 2020 has been a year of major developments in asylum and migration in Cyprus yet a year of urgent implementation of policies related to health of the population this report is referring to. The increasing migration flows in Cyprus as well as the necessity of amelioration of the services provided and the sustain solutions on tackling the workload in the asylum field, led to notable developments. Therefore, an action plan was adopted to holistically manage growing migration flows. The plan targets actions on declaring as manifestly unfounded asylum applications concerning a safe country of origin; shorter reviewing periods of asylum applications, immediate issuance of a deportation order when a manifestly unfounded application is rejected; and stricter criteria for the enrolment in private colleges.

Moreover, an amendment of the Constitution and three additional bills were passed in September, which update asylum and immigration laws respectively. The main changes included a shorter period for submitting an appeal before the Administrative Court for International Protection (from 75 days to 30 days, and 15 days for manifestly unfounded cases) and the possibility for the asylum service to issue a return decision/deportation order simultaneously with the rejection of an asylum application.

In the field of TCNs who are arriving in Cyprus for study purposes, the new academic year in September 2020, introduced modifications and new stricter criteria for the enrolment of third-country nationals in private colleges in order to eliminate the phenomenon of virtual students. The new measures include restricting the number of admissions of foreign students, stricter checks on students' academic qualifications with regard to the minimum knowledge of English and a bank certificate for the possibility of reimbursing the amount of tuition fees for the student's first year of study in Cyprus.

This report will describe the policies and measures implemented during 2020 in the fields of asylum and migration. Emphasis will be given in a number of actions towards the identification of vulnerable groups, the introduction of the Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs), the support received by European bodies in the area of reception and the co-funded projects that have been implemented to support the competent authorities on their operation. It will also outline the measures of support that have been set-up in order to adequately respond to the outbreak of Covid-19 and the direct consequences that might occur in the reception centers of the country where asylum seekers are residing.

The aim of this report is to provide objective, reliable and comparable information to the reader, regarding notable developments occurred in 2020 within the asylum and migration fields in Cyprus.

## 1 LEGAL MIGRATION

During the reporting period, a major development occurred regarding the residence permits given for study purposes in Cyprus. The misuse of the student status between students and researchers, was considered as one of the major factors that led to the increased number of asylum applications in Cyprus. Therefore, in September 2020, the following measures had been imposed in order to diminish this misuse aiming on restriction of the number of admissions of foreign students to colleges, up to 120% of the authorised capacity of each college. The Ministry of Interior shall examine applications 2 times a year without differentiating the authorised capacity. If, for example, a college can enrol 200 students on the basis of the capacity approved by the Ministry of Education, that can be done in division per the whole academic year thus to enrol 100 in the autumn and another 100 in the spring semester.

In addition, knowledge of English has become a prerequisite that can be assessed by stepping up checks on students' academic qualifications with regard to the minimum knowledge of English, by conducting interviews with students who do not hold international certificates of knowledge of English, with a view to ascertaining whether they are able to complete their curriculum successfully. In addition, a bank certificate request has been made obligatory for the possibility of reimbursing the amount of tuition fees for the student's first year of study in Cyprus. The provision of a previous Ministerial Decision that each student must transfer part of the amount of the tuition fees of EUR 3000 to the College's account before issuing the entry permit is also applicable. Within this frame, audits of higher education schools have been strengthened and carried out by the Ministry of Education. Finally, a student's work permit is granted only for work as part of a traineeship which forms part of their curriculum or for work related to their field of study.

## 2 INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION

During the reporting period, the competent authorities proceeded with a number of legal and policy developments aiming to tackle the misuse of the asylum procedures and the huge backlog of asylum applications. In addition, the amendment of the Cyprus Refugee Laws aimed to the efficient application of accelerated procedures on applications not meeting the criteria for provision of international protection (e.g. economic migrants, nationals from safe countries of origin etc.) Therefore, on 10 March 2020, the Council of Ministers approved an extended national list of safe countries of origin, which included the following countries: Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Ghana, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Philippines, Nepal, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Senegal, Gambia, Egypt, Nigeria.

On a legislative yet policy level, the amendment of the Cyprus Refugee Law on the introduction of accelerated procedures on abusive applications and introduction of the time limits for bringing proceeding before the Administrative Court of International Protection was marked as an important development within the asylum procedures. This amendment distinguishes between the ordinary procedure and the accelerated procedure for dealing with an asylum application. In particular it draws attention to the fact that the action against the final decision of the Asylum Service must be brought within 1 month in the case of the ordinary procedure, as opposed to 15 days from notification of the decision in the case of the accelerated procedure.

In addition, the Standard Operation Procedures (SOPs) were drafted and simultaneously implemented at the Pournara First Reception Center. The SOPs are developed with the support of the European Commission and all competent authorities (Asylum Service, Social Welfare Services, Health Services, Civil Registry and Migration Department, Civil Defence etc.) A case management was also introduced as an alternative to detention, in combination with the obligatory report to a police station. A dedicated case management-based alternative to detention project initiated its implementation by Cyprus Refugee Council a local NGO.

Yet a number of policy developments continued their operation. Notably, the support provided by EASO experts who continued to deliver support at the District Immigration Offices of the Police and the 'Pournara' First Reception centre for the timely registering and lodging of asylum applications.

A number of co-funded projects have also been implemented in order to tackle the influx of migration flows and the additional burden in the asylum system. Notably, an AMIF co-funded project is setting up a Centre for assessing applications of international protection in close proximity to the Pournara Reception Centre. This should speed up the process of examining the application for asylum for residents at the Pournara Centre. In late 2020 a project Grant Agreement was signed (Emergency Assistance AMIF project) in order to provide emergency funding to the Law Office to clear asylum applications before the Administrative Court of International Protection. The project "Strengthen the existing structures and operational capacity of the Social Welfare Services to cope with the rapidly increasing numbers of asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors" was first implemented in year 2020. This is an Emergency Assistance AMIF project with the Grant Agreement signed in late 2019. Finally, on 28 July 2020 a Grant Agreement was signed for an AMIF Emergency Assistance project titled "Support of Cyprus' Asylum Service and Civil Registry and Migration Department ". The project aims to support, in terms of personnel Cyprus' Asylum Service and Civil Registry and Migration Department, in order to enhance both the asylum and the return procedures.

In the outbreak of Covid-19, a new adjustment was implemented in both Reception Centres 'Pournara' and 'Kofinou' for new arrivals. A quarantine area was created thus to eliminate the risk of infection among the population. EASO experts continued to operate in both centres providing the necessary support as agreed.

Relocation has also been a topic of extended work and support on behalf the Cypriot authorities. Relocation of persons shall facilitate the workload of asylum applications and the adequate management of the increasing numbers of TCNs arrivals in the country. Under the auspices of a co-financed AMIF project, 30

vulnerable persons (among them 15 unaccompanied minor asylum seekers) were relocated to Finland. The relocated persons were mainly of Somali, Cameroonian and Congolese nationality.

### 3 MINORS AND OTHER VULNERABLE GROUPS

During the reporting period, Cyprus continued to receive an increased number of migrants. Therefore, the strategic development on this topic was deemed necessary as to adequately respond to the flow taking into consideration the vulnerability of accompanied and unaccompanied minors requesting asylum.

Vulnerability experts (from EASO and the Asylum Service) have been posted at the Reception Centres for the better and timely identification of vulnerable persons and UAMs. At the same time Social Welfare Officers have been posted at the 'Pournara' First Reception Centre, where a safe zone for vulnerable persons has been constructed following the EASO guidelines.

For the timely registration of asylum applications, EASO registration experts have been posted at the District Immigration Offices of the Police and the 'Pournara' First Reception Centre. Moreover, relevant SOPs were drafted concerning the procedures to be followed at 'Pournara' centre in regards to vulnerable persons including UAMs.

In addition, in terms of detecting and continuously supporting vulnerable people, the Social Welfare Services have secured direct funding from the European Commission under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund's Emergency Assistance Folder for a project entitled «Strengthen the existing structures and operational capacity of the Social Welfare Services to cope with the rapidly increasing numbers of asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors». Within this framework 42 Social Welfare Officers have been employed and a number of them are placed at the Receptions Centers (Pournara and Kofinou) to cover asylum seekers needs, including detection of trafficking victims and monitoring vulnerable people. Yet, for the identification of human trafficking victims, Cyprus Police applies the Manual for the Identification of human trafficking victims. The identification Manual has been revised, to include guidelines for children victims of human trafficking and it is being used by all Police Officers, especially front-line officers. During pre-settled Action Days against Child Trafficking, members of the Anti-trafficking Police Office conducted interviews on minor presumed victims all over Cyprus.

The reception of (unaccompanied) minors has also been set as a priority among the local actors in order to adequately respond to the high influx of migrants and the vulnerability of minors. Therefore, a safe zone for vulnerable persons including UAMs has been constructed at 'Pournara' First Reception Centre. Social Welfare Services Officers are posted at the site to monitor the progress and support persons in need. Moreover, two co-funded projects started in 2020 aiming to support vulnerable applicants on a socio-psychological and legal level. A grant agreement for the "Open Reception Centre for Unaccompanied Minors of Third Country Nationals" was signed on 9 January. The project has a 28-month duration, a total budget of € 1 000 000 and is co-funded by AMIF. The project aims at financing the operation of the reception centre, as well as providing social, psychological and legal support, rehabilitation services and access to educational activities for unaccompanied minors. A second grant agreement was signed in February for the "Open Reception Centre for Vulnerable Persons Applying for International Protection", a project with a 22-month duration, a total budget of € 900 000, also co-financed by AMIF and providing similar services as to vulnerable asylum seekers. Moreover, for the transition to adulthood of unaccompanied minors legally residing in Cyprus, a new project, financed by national budget, titled "Creating Semi-Independent Housing Structures for Hosting Unaccompanied Children Over 16 Years" initiated its operation in April 2020. The project is managed and implemented by IOM Cyprus in partnership with the Social Welfare Services of the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance of the Republic of Cyprus. The project aims to ease the difficult transition to adulthood for unaccompanied migrant children in Cyprus through semi-independent housing and other support.

Finally, as already mentioned, relocation has also been a topic of extended work and support on behalf the Cypriot authorities aiming to adequately respond to the influx of migrants without neglecting any vulnerability of the minors and other groups. Within this framework 15 unaccompanied minor asylum seekers, were relocated to Finland under the relocation mechanism.

#### 4 INTEGRATION

On 15 October 2020, the first edition of the new National Plan on the Integration of Migrants for the years 2020-2022 was published, followed by a public consultation on the new Plan. At the end of 2020 the draft of the Integration Plan was being revised taking into consideration public and stakeholder comments, so as to be finalized and presented to the Ministry of Interior for approval and subsequently to be submitted to the Council of Ministers. The National Plan on the Integration of Migrants is a major development as it will update Cyprus' integration policy. Last time an Action Plan was drafted was back in 2010. Once adopted by the Council of Ministers, the National Action Plan for integration, could be a stakeholder's compromise based on best examples of other member states and the basis on which to design future integration policy.



## 5 CITIZENSHIP AND STATELESSNESS

On 13 October 2020, the Council of Ministers approved the proposal by the Ministers of Finance and Interior for the abolition of the current Investment Programme (Cyprus' investor citizenship scheme), as of 1 November 2020. The proposal highlighted the long-term weaknesses, as well as the abusive exploitation of the provisions of the Cyprus Investment Programme.

## 6 BORDERS, VISA AND SCHENGEN

In terms of border control measures/management, Cyprus authorities established the national strategy for Integrated Border Management (IBM) based on Article 3 of EU Regulation 2019/1896, which includes horizontal issues such as human rights, training and education, research and innovation, as well as other 11 components such as border control measures, risk analysis, and so on. All relevant authorities will build or adjust their strategies appropriately in order to achieve the targets of each of the abovementioned components.

In addition, despite the outbreak of COVID-19, a number of teleconferences were organized by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency concerning the implementation of the Entry/Exit System (EES), in which experts from the Information Technology Department of the Cyprus Police participated.

Furthermore, in the framework of a bilateral agreement between the authorities of the Republic of Cyprus and Lebanon, the Cyprus Police developed an operational cooperation for the protection of the maritime borders. The agreement includes training, information exchange, and field visits.

## 7 IRREGULAR MIGRATION INCLUDING MIGRANT SMUGGLING

With regard to irregular migration as a result of visa liberalisation, since visa liberalisation for Georgia nationals, Cyprus authorities confront with the phenomenon of a high number of Georgian national abusing their stay or applying for asylum. Therefore, border guards reinforce the checks at first line for visa liberalisation citizens. Moreover, Frontex operation "Focal Point Air" is been hosted at Larnaca airport including the deployments of Georgian Police experts who assist in the process of preventing illegal migration from flights arriving from Georgia. In addition, the framework of Frontex Joint Operation "Coordination Points Air 2020" that took place in Kutaisi/Georgia, the deployment of 3 Cypriot experts under the profile of secondary line officers and advanced level document officer was scheduled. However, the deployments were cancelled due to Covid-19. The target of the operations was to prevent illegal migration from Kutaisi to other member states.

Regarding the misuse of legal migration channels by third-country national students and researchers, as of September 2020, the following measures have been imposed in order to avoid misuse of the student status: 1) Restricting the number of admissions of foreign students to colleges to up to 120% of the authorised capacity of each college The Ministry of Interior will examine applications two times a year without differentiating the authorized capacity. If, for example, a college can enrol 200 students on the basis of the capacity approved by the Ministry of Education, it will be able to enrol 100 in the autumn semester and another 100 in the spring semester; 2) Stepping up checks on students' academic qualifications with regard to the minimum knowledge of English by conducting interviews with students who do not hold international certificates of knowledge of English with a view to ascertaining whether they are able to complete their curriculum successfully; 3) Request a bank certificate for the possibility of reimbursing the amount of tuition fees for the student's first year of study in Cyprus. The provision of a previous Ministerial Decision that each student must transfer part of the amount of the tuition fees of EUR 3000 to the college's account before issuing the entry permit is also applicable; 4) Strengthening audits of higher education schools carried out by the Ministry of Education; 5) A student's work permit is granted only for work as part of a traineeship that forms part of their curriculum or for work related to their field of study.

Moreover, in the framework of Advanced Level Document Officer (ALDO) training, organized by Frontex in the Netherlands, one officer from the Cyprus Police participated in February 2020. It should be noted that another ALDO training course in the Netherlands, as well as other training programs planned to take place in Cyprus by Frontex experts, were cancelled due to COVID-19.

In respect of combating the facilitation of irregular migration (smuggling), since August 2019 and during 2020, a Frontex operation has been activated in Cyprus under the name "Focal Point Sea." The operation provides operational and technical support to the authorities of the Republic of Cyprus in relation to issues such as debriefing, screening, the detection of false and falsified travel documents, etc. In 2020, 25 experts from different member states were deployed for the operation. Also, a Europol operation has been activated in order to assist local authorities with issues related to intelligence on facilitation networks involved in human smuggling. The number of officers deployed at the operation varies from 2 to 4 on a permanent basis. Furthermore, Cyprus authorities participated in Frontex's joint operation "Focus Point Air" at Larnaca Airport with the deployment of five experts from different member states who assisted in the procedures for the detection of false or falsified travel documents as well as the second line checks. In September 2020, the Chief of Police decided on the establishment of the "Team for the Prevention of Illegal Migration," which consists of four experts. Additionally, Cyprus Police has enhanced patrolling activities in the areas where, based on risk analysis, illegal crossings of migrants supported by facilitators have occurred. On top of that, in order to prevent an irregular stay, the Aliens and Immigration Unit of the Cyprus Police coordinates operational activities randomly and targeted in order to detect migrants residing illegally in Cyprus and to proceed with their voluntary or forced return.

In order to prevent irregular migration, Cyprus established cooperation with the following third countries:

a) The Western and Southern Mediterranean countries (i.e. Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya,

Morocco, Mauritania Palestine\*, Syria and Tunisia); b) The Eastern Partnership countries (i.e. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine); c) The Western Balkans countries (i.e. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia); d) Countries in the African Atlantic coast (e.g. Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ivory Coast etc.).

Conducive to monitoring and identifying irregular migration routes, since April 3, 2019, the Aliens and Immigration Unit has been coordinating an operational activity in Cyprus in which Europol Guest officers are deployed. To be more specific, the abovementioned guest officers are proceeding with secondary security checks of migrants in order to gather information concerning the modus operandi and routes followed by migrants to travel to Cyprus. Furthermore, since August 14, 2009, Frontex has been hosting Frontex guest officers, particularly screeners, debriefers, travel document experts, interpreters, and information management officers, in an attempt to obtain as much information from migrants as possible concerning irregular migration routes, modus operandi, etc. In addition, the Aliens and Immigration Unit proceeds with the analysis of the collected data in order to identify the modus operandi and routes followed by migrants and their facilitators, as well as the hotspots where crossings between the checkpoints of the Green Line occur. Also in September 2020, the Chief of Police will decide on the establishment of the "Team for the Prevention of Illegal Migration," which consists of four experts



## 8 TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

The Republic of Cyprus is taking part in the OSCE Financial Investigation into Trafficking in Human Beings pilot project. The basic idea behind the project is to lay the groundwork for greater cooperation between law enforcement agencies, financial investigators, and banks, which can lead to strong evidence to identify traffickers and victims, support prosecutions, and assist courts in confiscating illicit funds and compensating victims, as well as prevent the misuse of the financial services industry by traffickers.

Furthermore, in order to provide information on assistance and support to national victims from third countries, the police and the social welfare services are working on the development of a 24/7 dedicated hotline for VOTs and for intelligence gathering on human trafficking.

In addition, training and awareness-raising actions were fulfilled as follows in order to contribute to the identification of victims of human trafficking:

- By the Social Welfare Services: On February 19, a seminar was organized by the Social Welfare Services to train frontline Social Welfare Services officers and staff dealing with human trafficking victims (a total of 30 trainees) for early detection and referral of cases of trafficking and exploitation of persons. The seminar included training on the main provisions of the legislation, the indicators for detection of victims, and the National Referral Mechanism.
- By the Mental Health Services: The Mental Health Services have created in December 2019 a specialized unit called the "Centre for Specialized Mental Health Evaluations," where all the assessments requested by the Police for victims of trafficking are forwarded, among other requests. The center was located at the beginning in the Nicosia General Hospital, and since October 2020, it has run on a pan-professional basis, offering services in all four districts. The personnel consist of clinical psychologists who receive regular training by the MHS for the specialized assessment tools that are required in order to increase their expertise.
- By the Police:

DATE OF TRAINING	TITLE	ORGANIZED BY	TRAINEES	COMMENTS
2-4/09/2020	victim identification and handling of THB cases	Anti-Trafficking Police Office	Members of the Anti-Trafficking Police Office and the Crime Investigation Department (CID)	
22-25/09/2020	Human Trafficking	Anti-Trafficking Police Office	86 members of Crime Prevention Unit (CPU), Immigration, Drug Law Enforcement Unit	
22-25/09/2020	Human Trafficking	Police Academy	Members of the 'Mennogia'	

			Detention Center	
23/09/2020	Rights of domestic workers	Police Academy	Head of the Anti-Trafficking Police Office	
24/09/2020	Human Trafficking	'Purnara' Camp Reception Centre	Head of the Anti-Trafficking Police Office	Presentations Delivered by the Head of the Anti-Trafficking Police Office
9, 12, 15, 16, 19, 20 & 29/10/2020	Human Trafficking	Police Academy	New recruiters of the Cyprus Police	Presentations Delivered by the Head of the Anti-Trafficking Police Office
3/11/2020	Mental mapping and analysis of THB cases by digital means	Anti-Trafficking Police Office	All members of the Anti-Trafficking Police Office	
16/11/2020	Human trafficking	Ministry of Labor, Welfare and Social Insurance	Executives of private employment agencies	Presentation delivered by a member of the Anti-Trafficking Police Office
29/12/2020	Human trafficking	Police Academy	New recruiters of the Cyprus Police	Online presentation delivered by the Head of the Anti-Trafficking Police Office

### Measures on cooperation between national authorities

In terms of detecting and continuously supporting vulnerable people, the Social Welfare Services have secured direct funding from the European Commission under the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund's Emergency Assistance Folder for a project entitled "Strengthen the existing structures and operational capacity of the Social Welfare Services to cope with the rapidly increasing numbers of asylum seekers and unaccompanied minors». Within this framework, 42 social welfare officers have been employed, and a number of them are placed at the reception centers (Pournara and Kofinou) to cover asylum seekers needs,

including the detection of trafficking victims and monitoring vulnerable people. Since July 2020, the Anti-trafficking Police Office has adopted the Special Assessment Form for presumed victims of trafficking. The completion of this form allows for transparency concerning the formal identification of the victims. The form is evaluated before a final decision is made on whether a person is a victim of trafficking or not. This special assessment form is based on key indicators for each form of exploitation to identify potential victims.

As it concerns the cooperation with third countries regarding training and awareness raising, the Cyprus Police continue to participate in the EMPACT Operational Action Plan for THB, which is under the umbrella of COSI and coordinated by Europol. This is an ongoing action and concerns the EU priorities to combat human trafficking, focusing on organized criminal groups that act in Southeast and Southwest Europe. Under the EMPACT Operational Action Plan, the Anti-Trafficking Police Office participates as a partner in the project EMPACT "Chinese THB," financial investigation, and asset recovery. During 2020, the Republic of Cyprus has been negotiating with Colombia, Oman, and Saudi Arabia on a draft agreement on cooperation in combating organized crime, including trafficking in human beings. Also, the Ministry of Justice and Public Order has drafted an agreement on cooperation in preventing and combating trafficking in human beings exclusively to negotiate with the countries of origin of victims of trafficking.

Moreover, during the reporting period, the Cyprus Police conducted several cooperative international investigations on human trafficking. Europol and Interpol channels of communication are constantly used for the exchange of information on potential suspects and victims and on cases under investigation. In all cases where European countries are involved or related to, relevant contributions and exchanges of information are conducted through the Europol National Unit via SIENA. Cooperation with third countries is conducted through Interpol's National Bureau. Where necessary, European and international arrest warrants are issued. During the reporting period, one European investigation order was executed and one investigation order was issued. In addition, the Anti-trafficking Police Office continues the Joint Investigation of a high-profile case of human trafficking with the purpose of committing crimes through sham or forced marriages with the Polish and British authorities. Under this umbrella, members of the Anti-trafficking Police Office participated in operational meetings with the Polish and British authorities. A joint investigation team has been set up under the supervision of EUROJUST by the above-mentioned three countries. The case is still under investigation. On top of that, during the period under review, the Anti-trafficking Police Office participated in a new case, related mainly to forced marriages and forgeries that may result in human trafficking. An online operational meeting has already taken place, and representatives from Spain, Portugal, Romania, Germany, the United Kingdom, Cyprus, and Europol also participated. To this purpose, a significant number of investigations have been conducted by the anti-trafficking police office. The case is under investigation.

Over and above that, during the reporting period, the Anti-trafficking Police Office participated in two action days within the framework of the implementation of actions in the EMPACT Operational Action Plan for THB. The action days focused on labor exploitation in the agricultural sector and child trafficking. With regards to the exploitation in the agricultural sector, eight (8) persons were identified. Two (2) persons were identified as VOTs, and two (2) suspects were prosecuted regarding a human trafficking case for labor exploitation. Moreover, during Action Days against Child Trafficking, members of the Anti-trafficking Police Office conducted interviews on minor presumed victims all over Cyprus.



## 9 RETURN AND READMISSION

The aim of the Cyprus Policy is to apply a humane and effective return approach, as it is considered a vital part of the migration policy. The policies are developed by the Ministry of Interior and are considered to be stable and consistent. The return rate is enhanced mainly by the adequate cooperation and coordination between all national competent authorities and European and international organizations, such as IOM, UNHCR, and Frontex, for the implementation of administrative decisions and measures to carry out the return of irregular migrants. The priorities during 2020, among others, primarily lay on promoting voluntary returns, operational aspects of the return, implementing relative Directives and Recommendations in this field, building relationships with diplomatic representations, interviewing the persons subject to return by police members, providing financial incentives, etc.

Since October 2020, there has been a newly created return office within the Civil Registry and Migration Department, with co-funding through the EMAS Fund of AMIF. The Return Office is responsible for the return policy and the coordination of all relevant authorities (Police, Asylum Service, and Law Service) in order to enhance the return procedures for irregular TCNs.

Based on the provisions of Directive 115/2008, the Cyprus authorities concentrated their efforts on the voluntary return of migrants residing illegally on the island. In particular, it was managed to launch a number of voluntary return flights as follows:

- Return operation with Frontex cooperation to Georgia on May 26, 2020, where 107 Georgian were repatriated
- Return operation with Frontex cooperation to Georgia on July 30, 2020, where 167 Georgians were repatriated
- Return operation Frontex cooperation to Georgia on 11/9/2020, where 114 Georgians were repatriated
- Return operation Frontex cooperation to India on October 30, 2020, where 106 Indians were repatriated.
- Furthermore, two online Frontex training programs, "FAR (Frontex Application for Returns)," took place on June 9 and 10, 2020, at the Headquarters of the Aliens and Immigration Unit. The FAR application is part of the IRMA platform (Integrated Return Management Application), which provides support for the operational activities in the area of returns. In total, eight members of A&IU and two officers from the Civil Registry and Migration Department of the Ministry of Interior attended the program.

In the meantime, during the 2020 Schengen Evaluation, discussions on return issues took place. Field visits to both international airports took place for the evaluation of the procedures concerning the return at the airports. Also, during 2020, the Cyprus authorities established the IBM National Strategy, whose provisions include the issue of returns as a significant component.

In regard to assisted voluntary returns (AVR), due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was decided that the period of voluntary return, even though it shouldn't exceed thirty (30) days, could be extended in the case of compelling reasons. In this context, the text of the Return Decision/Letter for the Voluntary Return of the TCN was amended in order to accommodate the consequences of the closure of airports in March 2020 and to include the clause that if the thirty (30) days fall within the period of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) restriction of movement measures, this period will begin to apply once the said measures are lifted. With the opening of the airports, this was amended in order to include a reasonable extension to this deadline as some TC airports were closed or there was limited availability of air travel. In September 2020, a grant agreement was signed to renew Cyprus' Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration program until June 30, 2022. International Organization for Migration, Cyprus Office, will implement this project, which is co-funded by AMIF and Cyprus. The project has a total budget of € 1.2 million and includes assistance for both voluntary returns and reintegration of the returnee into his or her country of origin.

With respect to forced return and detention, during 2020 and bearing in mind the difficulties caused by the outbreak of pandemic Covid-19 and in particular the lack of flights and difficulties in the communication with countries of origin, Cyprus Authorities decided to enhance voluntary return flights in order to avoid detention of migrants due to the fact that the date of their possible return could not be ensured. Consequently, other alternative measures were followed instead of the apprehension and detention, in order to manage their return:

- Case management in combination with the obligatory report to a police station has been introduced. A dedicated case management-based alternative to detention project is implemented by a local NGO, i.e., the Cyprus Refugee Council.
- Activities undertaken at national level to support the implementation of EU readmission agreements in 2020 (implementing protocols, cooperation with third countries to encourage implementation), by completing the table and providing any additional relevant information: The Republic of Cyprus has gained access to the RCMS of Georgia. Also, a bilateral implementation protocol with Georgia is pending, and we will take relevant actions to have it concluded asap.
- A bilateral implementation protocol with Ukraine is in the works, and the relevant actions will be taken as soon as possible.
- The RCMS Sri Lanka is launched. The Republic has gained access and will be able to use it if Readmission Requests are submitted.
- A testing phase of RCMS implementation took place. Cyprus has accessed the testing RCMS of Bangladesh.

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**EMN ANNUAL REPORT ON MIGRATION AND ASYLUM**

**NATIONAL REPORT PART 2: ANNEXES**

**ANNEX A: METHODOLOGY**

**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.

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