

# Stakeholder Partnerships for the Integration of Migrants - INTEgreat

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## Country Report Cyprus by Synthesis

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## Section I. Public Policies Analysis

### 1. Context

#### 1.1. Brief description of the national law regarding asylum seekers, refugees, and other people under international protection

Stateless person: A Stateless person and a refugee are both in need of international protection. Being stateless does not necessarily imply persecution. According to the report “Protecting Refugees” (UNHCR, 2017) “statelessness is often a root cause of forced displacement. [...] When stateless persons are also refugees, they are covered by the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and international law”.

Asylum seeker: According to the Cypriot law, an asylum seeker “that has entered Cyprus illegally shall not be liable to punishment solely because of his illegal entry or stay, provided that he/she presents himself/herself without undue delay to the authorities” and explains the reason of its illegal entry (UNHCR, 2017). They can also contact UNHCR in Cyprus or any other organisation that provides legal assistance.

Asylum seeker (unaccompanied minor): If the asylum seeker is an unaccompanied minor, the authorities that receive the application must notify the Chief Executive who will then notify the Director of the Department of Social Welfare Services which will act as the guardian.

The Refugee Law (2000 with the last amendment in 2016) specifies that all “asylum-seeking children have access to education under the same conditions that apply to Cypriot citizens”, directly after applying for asylum. The language of instruction is Greek and primary and secondary education is provided for free to all children.

Refugee: According to Article 1A of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees a refugee is someone who “is outside his or her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of persecution because of his/her race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution.”

Persons with Subsidiary Protection Status: Individuals with subsidiary protection have immediate access to employment. there are no restrictions regarding their employment in particular sectors or occupations of the labour market.

#### 1.2. The recent history in Cyprus regarding the recent humanitarian and refugee crisis and commissions/boards/groups specially created to deal with it.

The Government of Cyprus is UNHCR’s key partner in its efforts to ensure the protection of asylum-seekers and refugees. UNHCR has built upon its partnerships with several Government ministries especially with ministry of interior, foreign affairs, justice, education and labour and social affairs. It has also established partnerships and relations with relevant Parliamentary committees, the Ombudsman, the Office of the Child Commissioner and other. UNHCR Cyprus

is a funding-based agreement with two NGOs: the Cyprus Refugee Council (CyRC) and SOS Children's Village.

CyRC is an NGO that provides free legal and social advice to asylum seekers and refugees in Cyprus while 'SOS Children's Village' is a Turkish Cypriot NGO that helps UNHCR address the protection needs of asylum-seekers arriving from the North part of the island.

Cyprus Red Cross Society provides humanitarian assistance and support as well as medical, psychosocial and other services to migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees.

Caritas offers legal and social advice, counselling and assistance to the same group.

"Hope for Children" CRC Policy Centre works for the promotion and protection of the rights of children. Together with the State Social Welfare Services, they run a reception centre for asylum-seeking unaccompanied children in Nicosia.

OASIS is a voluntary community group in Larnaca that supports refugees and asylum-seekers in Cyprus. They offer food baskets on Mondays and provide Greek language and English language classes for free. In addition, they have a Social Café meeting every Wednesday morning.

Kofinou We Care - Volunteers' Support supports the community of the Kofinou Reception Center with different activities with other people.

mi-HUB (Migrant Information Centres) help migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees to feel protected, safe, informed and supported. mi-Hub has offices in the four major cities of Cyprus and their staff can offer advice on a wide range of issues (University of Nicosia, 218).

Over the past few years, the Aware Campaign gives prominence to the life of refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants and promotes acquaintance and fellowship with them.

The Saint Paul's Anglican Church in Nicosia provides resources and community support to those in need, including refugees and asylum-seekers.

Agapi is a voluntary organization in Limassol that supports people in need, including refugees and asylum-seekers in Cyprus. Agapi hosts a Migrant Centre and a Charity Shop and provide food and clothes to families.

KISA offers free information, support, advocacy and mediation services to migrants and refugees and victims of trafficking and racism.

Local NGOs and other organisations are implementing projects that are focused on the social integration of asylum-seekers and refugees. Some of these organisations have been providing courses to asylum-seekers and refugees (Greek language courses, ICT education, courses for the development of soft skills).

### **1.3. Analysis of the current integration framework of the Republic of Cyprus**

#### **Migration Pillars**

To describe the current situation in the Republic of Cyprus, it is necessary to describe the "migration cycle" in order to clarify how migrants, refugees and asylum seekers enter the Republic of Cyprus.

These are:

- Entry by legal means
- Legal residence
- Integration or voluntary departure

In a broader scope, the migratory chain of the Republic of Cyprus or the migration pillars include the period from the day the migrant enters the host country until the last stage, when the beneficiary can be considered as a person with rights of access and equal participation in the public life of the Republic of Cyprus.

**First pillar:** Entry into the RC: To manage the entry of flows into the host country, the first pillar is divided into legal and irregular entry. Regarding legal entry, two main stages in the mapping of migratory flows can be identified, following a consecutive order:

1. Entry from approved entry points
2. Screening of legal migrants

The main entry points of the flows are the airports of Larnaca and Paphos, as well as the ports of Larnaca, Limassol, Latchi and Paphos, which are located in these areas and are under the control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus [under the Law "The Aliens and Immigration Law (KEF.105) ")] it shall apply that "The Council of Ministers may declare by notification in the Official Gazette of the Republic any port of the Republic as an approved port for the purposes of this Act."

The actors involved in the verification of legal migration documents are as follows:

- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus and in particular the Consular Authorities, where according to the Law "The Aliens and Immigration Laws (KEF.105220 (I) /2002)" it applies that "Subject to the provisions of Article 8, no person shall enter the Republic without a passport and any person acting in this manner shall be considered as a prohibited immigrant".
- The Civil Registry and Migration Department of the Republic of Cyprus, where applications relating to the Migration Section of the Department are submitted at specific locations.
- Aliens and Immigration Service where the application for Visa Extension - Category C is submitted as a request to that Service. The types of entry visa policies relating to immigration are divided into the following categories: a) Visa issued on arrival/at the Border - Category C, b) Visa extension - Category C, and c) Long-stay visa - Category D.

**Second pillar:** Legal residence: In the first stage, a residence permit can be issued for the purposes of employment, education, family reunification (except for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection), long-term or permanent residence, tourism and holding refugee status. The

competent authority for the issue of an employment permit is the Civil Registry and Migration Department for the first issue and renewals, and then for the issue of residence and work permits. Permits are granted to all non-Cypriots employed by legal entities or self-employed in Cyprus. Also, EU Citizens may enter the Republic of Cyprus without a work contract and seek employment for a period of 4 months before applying to the Civil Registry and Migration Department to obtain a Certificate of Registration.

Third pillar: Integration or voluntary departure: The final stage of the migration cycle is departure or integration into the country of residence. Departure can be divided into the following stages: the last stage of entry or integration into the country of origin.

1. Voluntary Departure
2. Assisted Return
3. Deportation

In the first case, the departure of the migrant usually takes place when he/she is residing legally and wishes to return to his/her country of origin. According to "The Law on Aliens and Immigration (KEF.105- 153(I)/2011)" for the return decision an appropriate period of time for voluntary departure is between 7 and 30 days. The departure of the person may be carried out based on the use of his/her personal resources or with the employer covering the costs.

In the second case, the main actors involved in assisted return of the migrant are the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The IOM, through its Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme, provides information and counselling services, procurement of travel documents, safe travel arrangements and support for reintegration in the country of origin.

In accordance with the above, the Aliens and Immigration Service acts towards the direct support of migrants and asylum seekers, for their effective repatriation.

#### **1.4. Legal dimension of migration in the Republic of Cyprus**

The successive waves of migrants that have been arriving in the Republic of Cyprus have created the need for legislation with long-term objectives, which will allow for the orderly integration of migrants by promoting:

- Tolerance of all forms of diversity.
- Prevention of racism.
- The creation of an environment of peaceful coexistence between the beneficiaries and the Cypriot society.
- The reduction of social exclusion.

According to the Cyprus Constitution and under Article 28 (1) "All persons are equal before the law, the administration and the judiciary and are entitled to equal protection and treatment". In accordance with Article 28 (2) of the Constitution, the enjoyment of economic, cultural, and social rights is safeguarded without discrimination. It is also

provided that all persons shall enjoy the rights and freedoms without direct or indirect discrimination against any person based on race, community, religion, sex, political or other reason, ethnic or social origin, birth, colour, social class or any other ground, except where the Constitution declares. All articles relating to human rights contained in Part II of the Cyprus Constitution (Articles 6-35) and the rights granted by the European Convention on Human Rights must be exercised in a non-discriminatory manner.

The basic laws governing the Republic of Cyprus, which are directly related to the immigration and refugee issue are "The Law on Aliens and Immigration Chap. 105" and "The Refugee Law of 2000 (Law 6(I)/2000) EU, Part I(I), No. 3383, 28/1/2000". More specifically, the "Aliens and Immigration Act Cap. 105" explicitly mentions and defines all the content governing the immigration phenomenon. By giving an interpretation of the concept of "alien" (Article 2), it defines the procedures for staying in the Republic of Cyprus. In more detail, based on Article 18 "Procedure for granting an immigration permit in the Republic to a long-term resident in the first Member State other than the Republic", it states that:

- (1) A long-term resident in a first Member State other than the Republic shall, within three months of his arrival in the areas controlled by the Government of the Republic or before leaving the first Member State, apply to the Director for an immigration permit.
- (2) The application shall be submitted in the form prescribed by the Director, on payment of the appropriate fee prescribed for the issue of an identity card with biometric data in accordance with the provisions of the Population Registry Act and shall be accompanied by (the following) supporting documents as required by the case.

Also, the "Refugee Law of 2000 (Law 6(I)/2000) EU, Part I(I), No.3383, 28/1/2000", according to Article 2, unless a different meaning follows from the text, "applicant" means a foreigner who has applied for recognition as a refugee and this status is valid for the period from the date of the application until the final decision on this application, "foreigner" means a person as, defined in the Law on Aliens and Immigration.

### **1.5. Legal dimension of asylum policy in the Republic of Cyprus**

The legal foundation for asylum in the Republic of Cyprus stems from International Conventions, European Regulations and European Directives. Cyprus has ratified a number of international conventions, such as the Geneva Convention of 28 July 1951, which was ratified on 16 May 1963. At the same time, the "Refugee Law of 2000 (Law 6(I)/2000) EU, Part I(I), No.3383, 28/1/2000", which was ratified on 9 July 1968, is the cornerstone of the Cypriot legislative framework, in terms of the alignment of the Republic of Cyprus with European and international law. In those already ratified by the Republic of Cyprus, provisions guaranteeing rights to all,

irrespective of origin or gender and independent of whether they are nationals, immigrants or foreigners.

## 1.6. Governance

A list of the public authorities that intervene in each stage of the procedure is shown below:

- Application at the border: Aliens and Immigration Unit, Police
- Application on the territory: Aliens and Immigration Unit, Police
- Dublin procedure: Asylum Service
- Accelerated procedure: Asylum Service
- Refugee status determination: Asylum Service
- Administrative appeal: Refugee Reviewing Authority
- Judicial appeal: International Protection, Administrative Court
- Onward appeal: Supreme Court
- Subsequent application (admissibility): Asylum Service

The Asylum Service, a department of the Ministry of Interior, is responsible for the first instance examination of asylum applications, including the examination of the Dublin Regulation criteria. In addition, the Asylum Service is responsible for the management of the reception centres (Kofinou and First Registration at Kokkinotrimithia), as well as the overall coordination on issues related to asylum, asylum seekers and persons under international protection. It is also the authority which issues relative regulations for this purpose. However, in practice, the Asylum Service has never taken up in full this coordination role and regulations have never been issued.

Beyond support staff, the Asylum Service includes the Director, one senior coordinator, 11 administrative officers and 15 asylum officers recruited under a four-year contract. From the 26 officers, approximately half of them are caseworkers also dealing with other issues such as Dublin, unaccompanied children, trafficking, emergency arrivals etc. The other half are dealing with EU matters, statistics, tenders, reception etc.

In the course of 2018, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) deployed a total of 49 different experts in Cyprus, of which 12 Member State experts and 37 locally recruited (“interim”) experts. At the end of 2018, 6 caseworkers supported the Asylum Service. Toward the end of the year, EASO initiated recruitment procedures to recruit interim officers locally for the examination of asylum applications in order to limit the number of caseworkers deployed from other EU Member States; the caseworkers took up duties in February 2019. According to statistics for the period 1 January 2019 to 30 June 2019, 14 Member State experts and 33 interim experts had been deployed in Cyprus. According to EASO’s 2020 Operating Plan, 25 caseworkers were employed in 2019 and this is expected to increase to 60 in 2020.

In most cases, the Asylum Service decides independently without interference from the Ministry of Interior. However, from time to time the Minister of Interior will have input in setting the policy for asylum seekers from specific countries of origin such as when there is an influx of asylum seekers from a country in conflict (i.e. Iraq, Syria). There have rarely been cases where the Minister of Interior has inquired about individual cases and requested them to be given priority or special attention.



The asylum procedure in Cyprus is a single procedure whereby both refugee status and subsidiary protection status is examined. In accordance with the Refugee Law, an asylum application is addressed to the Asylum Service (Department of the Ministry of Interior) and is made and lodged at the Aliens and Immigration Unit (Department of the Police) of the city in which the applicant is residing. One such office exists in each of the five districts in Cyprus (Nicosia, Limassol, Larnaca, Paphos, Ammochostos). In 2020, it is expected that all applications of new arrivals will be lodged at the First Registration Reception Centre in Kokkinotrimithia.<sup>14</sup> In cases where the applicant is in prison or detention, the application is made at the place of imprisonment or detention. For people in detention, asylum applications are received directly within the detention facilities, while for people in prison who have requested to lodge an asylum application, the Aliens and Immigration Unit will be notified and will send one of their police officers to receive the asylum application.

A high percentage of asylum seekers enter Cyprus from the areas not controlled by the Republic of Cyprus (RoC), at the north of the island, and then cross the “green line” / no-man’s land to the areas under the control of the RoC. The “green line” is not considered a border, and although there are authorised points of crossing along it, these are not considered official entry points into the RoC. A certain number may enter at legal entry points and then apply for asylum, whereas about half of applicants are persons already in the country who have entered and stayed under other statuses such as domestic workers, students etc. and apply for asylum when their initial residence permit has expired.

When persons present themselves to the Aliens and Immigration Units, stating the intention to apply for asylum, they are often given appointments to return on another day to submit the application. The period before the appointment varies depending on the influx of refugees and the city. In some instances, it has been two weeks but at times has reached two months. During this time, persons have no proof that they intended to apply, however rarely are there reports of this leading to the arrest of the persons concerned. Towards the end of 2018 a new practice was implemented by which documents titled “Verification of intention to submit application for asylum” were issued to persons who expressed such intention, but the Aliens and Immigration Unit did not have the time to proceed with the lodging of the application. However, the practice has not been applied holistically and only applies to persons residing temporarily at the First Registry Reception Centre in Kokkinotrimithia and some cases in Paphos.

The above practice has mostly ceased during 2019 except for asylum seekers in Pafos. All new arrivals who have entered irregularly and present themselves to the Immigration in Nicosia are sent to the First Registry Reception Centre from where they will be taken to the Immigration in Nicosia to lodge applications. In 2020, and upon completion of the Centre, the aim is for all asylum seekers that have recently arrived in the country to be transferred to the Centre. However, in efforts to take protective measures against Covid-19 in early March 2020, and before completion of construction, all new arrivals in the country are being referred to the Centre and are not allowed to leave. This has led to a rise in the number of persons in the Centre to approximately 700 without the infrastructure in place to host such a number, especially for a long duration and where such persons are being de facto detained. However, it seems that Syrian asylum seekers were allowed to leave, the justification being that they have relatives or friends

that can provide accommodation. After strong reactions from asylum seekers in the Centre, the Asylum Service started allowing 10 persons per day to leave, giving priority to vulnerable persons and women but only if they could present a valid address. In view of the obstacles in accessing reception conditions, identifying accommodation is extremely difficult unless they are in contact with persons in the community.

However, given the announcement concerning the development of closed centres and measures due to Covid-19, it is unknown how long persons will remain in the Centre.

Once an application is lodged by the Aliens and Immigration Unit, it is registered in the common data system which is managed by the Asylum Service and fingerprints are taken. A person is considered an asylum seeker from the day the asylum application is lodged up to the issuance of the final decision and enjoys the rights associated with the asylum seeker status. Persons holding the “Verification of intention to submit application for asylum” are not considered to have lodged the application and do not have access to all rights attached to an asylum seeker status.

### **Local Authorities**

The public authorities recognise that the role of local authorities is becoming particularly important, not only because of the Agenda for Sustainable Development, which highlights the importance of local plans to reduce social inequalities, but also because of the need to adopt a three- pronged integration policy, which will follow the applicant from his/her legal entry into the country of residence until his/her full integration.

Local Authorities and other local actors could act as catalysts for the contact between the host society and migrants, as municipal authorities have a better knowledge of the local culture and its traits, because migrants and other target groups are active and establish relationships at the local level.

In Cyprus at the regional and municipal level, local authorities are taking a very active role in the integration of TCNs. Municipalities offer social support services such as counselling, psychological support, daycare for children aged 5-12, as well as information services, seminars, and intercultural events. Over the years, around 15 municipalities across the island have taken part in the integration programme by local authorities’ project, either as project coordinators or as project partners.

### **Civil society**

There is no consultative body on migrant integration in Cyprus. However, NGOs do take part in the Monitoring Committee of the AMIF National Programme 2014-2020, the latter being periodically revised to address the latest migration and integration challenges. The committee meets at least once a year, also to monitor the progress of the national programme under AMIF.

Otherwise, civil society organisations in Cyprus mainly offer legal and social support, provide integration services, conduct research, and raise awareness on issues affecting migrants and refugees. Several informal volunteer groups have also been established recently to support refugees and asylum seekers with finding employment and organising recreational activities.

## Section II. Literature analysis

### 2. Integration dimensions of interest for the INTEgreat project in Cyprus

Main legislative acts relevant to asylum procedures, reception conditions, detention, and content of protection:

1. Refugee Law 2000 (6(I)/2000)
2. Aliens and Immigration Law (Cap.105)
3. Rights of Persons who are Arrested and Detained Law 2005 (163(I)/2005)
4. Legal Aid Law 2002 (165(I)/2002)
5. Advocates Law (Cap.2)
6. General Administrative Law Principles Law 1999 (158(I)/1999)
7. Law on the establishment and operation of the Administrative Court 2015 (131(I)/2015)
8. Law on the establishment and operation of the Administrative Court for International Protection 2018 (73(I)/2018)
9. Civil Registry Law 2002 (141(I)/2002)
10. The Minimum Guaranteed Income and the General Provisions on Social Benefits Law 2014 (109 (I) / 2014)
11. Council Regulation (EC) No 866/2004 on a regime under Article 2 of Protocol No 10 of the Act of Accession as last amended by Council Regulation (EC) No 587/2008 (OJ L 163/1)

Main implementing decrees relevant to asylum procedures, reception conditions, detention, and content of protection:

1. Ministerial Decision 140/2019 pursuant to Article 12Btris of the Refugee Law
2. Ministerial Decision 228/2019 pursuant to Article 9Θ(2)(a) of the Refugee Law
3. Ministerial Decree 297/2019 pursuant to Article 13A(1A) of the Refugee Law
4. Ministerial Decree Κ.Δ.Π. 308/2018 pursuant to Article 9Θ(1)(b) of the Refugee Law
5. State Medical Institutions and Services General Regulations 2000-2013
6. Medical Institutions and Services (Regulations and Fees) 1978-2013

**Asylum Law:** The Cypriot Refugee Law of 2000 complements the law on foreigners to provide better protection for refugees. It was last amended in 2016 to align with the revised EU directive 2013/32/EU on asylum procedures and the EU directive 2013/33/EU on reception conditions. In 2017, the Cypriot parliament also approved the agreement between the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) and Cyprus regarding UNHCR's operations in the country.

**Integration law:** Cyprus does not have a self-standing integration law.

**Citizenship law:** The Civil Registry Law states that TCNs can acquire Cypriot citizenship after 7 years of legal residence (or 5 years if they are the parents of Cypriot citizens). Migrants can also acquire citizenship if they have been married to a Cypriot national for more than 3 years and

have lived in the country for at least 2 of them. Amendments introduced in 2011 and 2013 also allow for the naturalisation of non-Cypriot investors even if the latter do not fulfill the the above criteria.

**Anti-discrimination law:** Several legislations combatting discrimination in Cyprus are applicable to migrants. The Equal Treatment in Employment and Occupation Law of 2004 addresses discrimination on the ground of race and ethnicity in the field of social protection, medical care, education, and access to services. The Equal Treatment in Employment and Work Law is also applicable. The Law Fighting Racial and Other Discriminations combats all types of discrimination related to racial or ethnic origin.

## 2.1. Employment/Work

Experiences:

Up until the end of 2018, asylum seekers had to wait 6 months to get the necessary work permit to be able to work in some manual labour jobs in areas such as animal farming, agriculture, car washing etc. In 2019, the waiting period for getting the necessary papers to work in these fields was reduced to a month.

According to the professionals working with asylum seekers, the categories of work that are available to asylum seekers are limited to heavy labour jobs that pay very low wages. These jobs are often located in remote areas, and it is not easy for them to travel there. If asylum seekers, deduct the money they need to cover local transportation from their salary, they are often left with a very small amount of money. Some asylum seekers often decide to leave their work as they are treated poorly by their employers.

According to the law, there are no limitation in the areas of work that refugees are allowed to work. However, a lot of professionals when they contact employers to inform them about the work profiles of refugees, they feel that they are not aware that they are allowed to work in any field without any limitations in terms of working papers.

Needs:

- There is a general lack of awareness about the employment rights of asylum seekers and refugees.
- Asylum seekers should have more options in terms of the categories or fields of job they can do.
- Both asylum seekers and refugees do not have enough opportunities to participate in training or courses that will help them update their skills.

Problems/difficulties:

Asylum seekers usually receive very low wages and work in unhealthy conditions. The remuneration they receive from working in agriculture or animal farming is insufficient to cover the basic needs of a family. Sometimes they must take accommodation at they place they work and that often leads to splitting up the family or must be available for 24/7.

Most of the employers who employ people in agriculture or animal farming prefer third-country nationals as they have papers that allow them to work there for 4 years. Hiring an asylum seeker is considered risky as they do not know when they will leave. Furthermore, they usually avoid hiring women for these types of jobs. Usually, the jobs available for asylum seekers are in remote rural areas and they start very early in the morning (e.g., 4:00-5:00). Getting there by bus is quite difficult. Furthermore, they do not get an allowance that will cover the cost of the travel.

The jobs available for asylum seekers, are manual jobs that require a lot of physical strength or stamina. However, many asylum seekers are in a very good health condition since some of them had to escape a difficult situation (e.g., war). Moreover, there is a great number of asylum seeker women that were victims of human trafficking, and they are not in the best health condition to work, both physically and mentally.

### **Solutions:**

Most of them suggested that the job categories available for asylum seekers should expand and should take into consideration the health issues they face upon arrival. They have also suggested that there be more trainings and workshops that will help asylum seekers or refugees to update their professional skills. This will facilitate their access to jobs that better match their skills and background.

They have also suggested that the waiting period for acquiring a work permit that allows them to work specific fields should be reduced. In 2019, the waiting period for getting the necessary papers to work in these fields was reduced from 6 months to one month. Moreover, they have suggested that asylum seekers should have an allowance for local transportation, or they should be able to use local transportation for free.

Lastly, companies should be informed about the employment rights of the refugees as they are not aware that they do not need specific work permits to work in any type of job.

## **2.2. Housing**

### **Experiences:**

Reception centres can only host a small amount of people. If there is no room there, they receive an allowance that will help to cover a small percentage of the rent. They also receive an allowance that will cover electricity and running water. The allowance they receive for rent is very small compared to the prices of the current job market. As mentioned above, rent was increased up to 45% compared to 2015. Since they are not allowed to work while getting the rent allowance, they share small apartments with a large number of people.

Moreover, there are many occasions that the rent allowance arrives on time and that leads to other issues. Landlords are discouraged to let asylum seekers rent their places as they do not know when they will receive their money. Asylum seekers do not receive an additional allowance that covers the rent deposit that they have to pay on the first month. This sees many asylum seekers living in unhealthy conditions without running water or beds while others are homeless.

There is a gap between the last rent allowance and the time they receive the work permit papers. After the sixth month, asylum seekers are given a work permit to work in specific fields, however these papers do not usually arrive on time and asylum seekers have to find a way to pay for rent. When it comes to the facilities at the receptions, they have mentioned that they are not in a good a condition.

Needs:

- Rent allowance and electricity allowance should arrive on time.
- A rent allowance that matches the rent prices of the current market.
- Social services should make sure that there is running water and electricity at the asylum seekers homes.

**Problems/difficulties:**

As mentioned above, landlords avoid taking in asylum seekers because there is no guarantee that they will pay rent on time. There is a gap between the last rent allowance (asylum seekers) and the time they receive the work permit papers. The reception center can only host a small amount of people and the building conditions are not satisfactory. The rent allowance is very low which makes it very difficult for the asylum seekers to find a place where they can have the basics (bed, running water, electricity).

**Solutions:**

- Increase of rent allowance.
- Improve the facilities of the reception centre.
- Find better incentives for the hotels that are asked to host asylum seekers.
- Make sure that they receive a rent allowance until they get a work permit.

## 2.3. Education

**Experiences:**

- Asylum seekers can take part in trainings for professional development, but they are not allowed to take part in formal education (secondary, higher education).
- Refugees and individuals with subsidiary protection, can register in any form of education.

**Needs:**

Since asylum seekers are not able to apply to enter a university until their status is processed, they should have at least the opportunity to validate their skills in the meantime or take part in informal trainings to update their skills.

Refugees are allowed to participate in formal education, but the validation procedure of their current skills is very complicated, and they should have the opportunity to validate their knowledge through different means.

**Problems/difficulties:**

Some of the asylum seekers have to wait for years until they get their application finalised and they feel as their skills cannot be put into use. They want to find a way to validate their skills so that when they get their status, to put their knowledge and skills into use.

Refugees are coming from different parts of the world with different educational systems and qualifications. When they decide to update their knowledge or validating their existing knowledge and skills, they must go through a lengthy procedure which sometimes doesn't recognise their qualifications.

In terms of informal trainings and workshop, most of them are focused on soft skills, management skills or Greek language learning while leaving other important skills out. There are many asylum seekers and refugees who would like to participate in course that will update their technical skills.

#### **Solutions:**

Asylum seekers and refugees should have more options in terms of learning opportunities and informal training. There should be more funding for NGOs and other organisations that work with asylum seekers and refugees for conducting workshops on technical skills. Refugees should have alternative options for validating their skills and knowledge.

## **2.4. Healthcare**

#### **Experiences:**

- Upon registration of an asylum seeker to the system, they receive a health card, and they have the same rights with the locals in using the national healthcare system.

#### **Needs:**

- There is a need for better awareness regarding their healthcare rights as asylum seekers.
- There is a need for better assistance in explaining their health issue to the healthcare professionals.
- Those who need psychological support should be able to have it for free.
- Problems/difficulties
- Since many of the migrants do not speak English very well and they cannot express with accuracy what they feel to the doctor, or they cannot understand what the doctor has told them to do as a remedy.
- Some of the asylum seekers were also victims of human trafficking and are afraid or embarrassed to ask for medical attention.
- Many of asylum seekers have suffered of physical pain before or while escaping, and they have several health care issues that are not easy to identify.
- Some of the asylum seekers did not receive proper education about several gynaecological issues.

## Solutions:

Healthcare material should be translated in several language and should be used to assist asylum seekers and refugees with the explaining what they feel or understanding what they have to do to heal or improve their health care.

Victims of human trafficking should be encouraged to seek medical attention right away and have access to psychological support.

Workshops on healthcare for women should be available for free in different areas.

## 2.5. Social connections

### Mixed relationships vs. isolation

Most asylum seekers do not hang out with locals. Most of them hang out with people of the same community or mixed with asylum seekers and refugees who come from a similar background. There are some that live in isolation (mostly those who are homeless or live in remote areas).

### Attitudes of natives towards asylum seekers and refugees

Most asylum seekers and refugees feel that locals do not treat them in an equal manner and sometimes they stare at them awkwardly. Sometimes they call them names and they do not let them be in the same place (e.g., restaurants) with the locals. Asylum seekers help their fellow natives with issues related to food, housing, and other.

### Safety feelings, attitudes, and related incidents

Most of the asylum seekers and refugees feel safe in Cyprus. However, there are incidents of employers threatening to call the police or report them as a form of control.

Occasionally, there are incidents between asylum seekers of different nationalities.

## 2.6. Tools developed in public policies to fight discrimination

**Anti-discrimination:** The Republic of Cyprus has adopted anti-discrimination legislation since 2004 and has established the Office of the Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights (Ombudsman) whose responsibilities include the examination of allegations of discrimination.

Likewise, the Ministry of Education has introduced an anti-racism policy that is now implemented in all state schools in Cyprus.

The Cypriot Constitution contains a general anti -discrimination provision which corresponds to Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

Additionally, it specifically prohibits discrimination against any person on the ground of belonging to one or the other community. Age, disability, and sexual orientation are not covered by the Constitution. Cyprus has also ratified most major international conventions on discrimination.



In 2000 the Law on the rights of persons with disabilities came into force on, including the right not to be discriminated against.

On 01.05.2004 four new laws came into force transposing the two anti-discrimination Directives:

- a law amending a previously enacted law on disability, 57(I)/2004,
- the law transposing the Employment Directive, 58(I)/2004,
- the law transposing the Race Directive 59(I)/2004 and
- the law appointing the Ombudsman as the Equality Body empowered to investigate complaints of discrimination 43(I)/2004.

## 2.7. Problems and obstacles faced by the target group in the access to services in Cyprus

The main problems and obstacles that migrants face to access services in all dimensions are:

- There is a lack of awareness of the rights of refugees and asylum seekers both by these people themselves and the public.
- Many asylum seekers do not know the difference between the term 'asylum seekers' and 'refugee'.
- Regarding healthcare services, although free access is granted, several barriers exist due to inadequate information and insufficient support in interpreting and translating for people with limited knowledge of the English or Greek languages.
- The Language barrier is a generic problem in services, resources, and information since a lot of the time either the target group don't speak Greek or English or some of the people in the services can't speak well English.
- Procedures to access certain services are sometimes difficult to be understood by the target group and thus it takes them a long time to conclude any application.
- The target group a lot of the time feel isolated and do not have the social resources outside of their family ties or fellow countrymen/women.
- The legal status is also causing barriers in access some public services.

## 2.8. Main approach to migrants' integration in Cyprus

In 2021 Cyprus finalised a comprehensive National plan for the integration of migrants to serve as a reference document for state integration policies, as well as to delineate the overall priorities the state would seek to address. The plan also sets the parameters for project financing for the new EU programming period, 2021-2027.

The national plan was developed following an open consultation process with migration and integration practitioners, civil society organisations, government agencies and services, national authorities and migrants themselves.

Following that process, eight priority axes for integration were formulated:

- interventions related to the recognition and certification of migrants' knowledge and skills.

- interventions related to the training of migrants and other target groups.
- interventions aimed at raising awareness among migrants, host societies and those involved in the integration process.
- interventions that facilitate migrant access to the welfare state.
- protection of the rights of vulnerable groups of migrant and refugee background.
- interventions to support the integration process through ongoing counselling.
- development of supportive tools for integration.
- establishment of a management mechanism.

## Integration programme

There is no mandatory, overarching integration programme in Cyprus. However, several projects aiming to promote the integration of TCNs have been implemented to support migrants. They provide information services, as well as training and education opportunities. Additionally, multiple programmes seek to raise awareness and understanding among the host population and specific groups such as employers, journalists, public officials and other on issues of migration.

The priorities of the new integration policy may be focused on:

- The integration of beneficiaries and applicants for international protection who reside in the country and will remain in the country after the recognition of their protection.
- Status with a view to their integration into Cypriot society.
- Strengthening the role of local authorities as an integral part of integration policies and as a key mechanism for the implementation of local integration plans.
- Raising awareness among the host society and the wider public opinion on the importance of integration of third country nationals.
- The development of a common, horizontal coordination framework that will guide the actions of all stakeholders.
- Reducing the disparity in the access of migrants and refugees to the welfare state in the RC.
- Providing them with a high level of training to enable their integration into the host society and the labour market.
- The establishment of an integration framework for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.
- Monitoring the progress of beneficiaries within the RC, with a view to establishing a holistic framework for integration.

The above-mentioned priorities were formulated according to the needs and priorities of the new National Strategy. Based on the SWOT, research, and the review of all the literature on the migration and refugee issue in the RC, those could be summarised in the following:

- Lack of information about the migrant profile: The absence of a holistic profiling system hampers the management of flows and their rapid integration in the country of residence.
- Lack of a legal system for integration: While there is a legal framework for migration, the same is not true for the integration of migrants. The legal framework should be

modernised based on the EU's 2030 objectives and the multicultural integration model that most Western countries will follow in the 2050 horizon.

- Lack of high-quality training for the administrative and managerial staff who meet migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers: The presence of racist phenomena from the host society towards migrant groups and vice versa reduces the cases of peaceful coexistence of cultures and integration of flows in the country of residence.
- Lack of an advisory support mechanism for migrants and refugees: a framework will need to be put in place to allow information about the welfare state of the country of residence to leak out. At the same time, the absence of a system for the provision of information on migrants' information on the situation in the country. In addition, the lack of psychosocial support for groups with a migrant or refugee background leads to more instances of ghettoization and xenophobia.

## Relevant integration programs implemented in Cyprus

### RaCIP - Raising Capacity for Inclusive People Engaged in Private Sponsorship

RaCIP will enhance capacity building for organisations operating Private Sponsorship (PS) schemes\* or otherwise engaged in community-based support to refugees' integration. The project will feature several pilot schemes aimed at scaling up existing PS and strengthening community-based efforts by experimenting PS initiatives in the Member States involved.

Two goals inspire this action: boosting the capacities of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and local communities and promoting the active involvement of refugees in their integration process.

The partnership consists of organizations from Italy, Greece, Cyprus, France, and Portugal. It is funded by the EU's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) for the period 2020-2023.

Link to the program: <https://www.racip.eu/>

### Mums@Work

The Project Mums@Work is a two-year project funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund of the European Union and it aims at enhancing the social integration and the employability of Migrant Mothers.

Through its design, the project provides tailor-made support to migrant mothers as the main long-term beneficiaries, working with them on a case-to-case basis so as to respond flexibly to individual situations, requirements and personal outlooks.

The counselling sessions are aimed at facilitating social integration of migrant mothers and opening avenues for labour market orientation, whereas the work experience opportunities will bring migrant mothers closer to the labour market and economic integration.

### WINGS: Social and Economic Empowerment of Migrant Women

The WINGS project aims to support the social and economic empowerment and inclusion of migrant women through dedicated high quality learning opportunities; build capacity and

enhance competences of adult educators/trainers; stimulate migrant women's participation in civic and social life; promote tolerance, mutual understanding, and social cohesion.

The project aspires to influence policy solutions that are centred around immigrants, and particularly migrant women. The partnership consists of organizations from Italy, Greece, Cyprus, Spain, Malta, and the Netherlands. It is funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union for the period 2020-2022.

Link to the organisation: <https://wingsprojecterasmus.eu/>

### **DIGI-PATH: Promoting the Integration of Migrants at Local Level Through Digital Skills**

Digi-Path has a primary objective to foster the successful inclusion and participation of TCNs and their family members in the host EU country's civic and social life providing equal access to information and services that will increase their well-being.

Digi-Path brings together six partners from Germany, Cyprus, Belgium, and Greece. Digi-Path is a project funded by the Erasmus+ programme, for the period of 2020 – 2022.

Link to the program: <https://digipathproject.eu>

### **INFORMER - Integration for Female Migrants**

There is a strong link between refugees' employment and their social network. Within this context, the INFORMER project objectives are to:

- support the economic and social integration of migrant women,
- support the capacity of migrant women to interact and feel at ease in their social environment and their participation to social and political life at local level and/or
- support migrant women moving into work and facilitate their sustainable labour market integration.

The partnership is comprised by institutions from the United Kingdom, Sweden, Italy, Greece, Belgium, and Cyprus. It is funded by the Erasmus+ programme for the period 2020-2023.

Link to the program: <https://www.informerintegration.com/>

### **MESI: Migrant Entrepreneurship for Social Inclusion**

The MESI project aims to develop a training curriculum and an e-course specifically designed to tackle the educational and training needs of migrants by equipping adult education professionals, trainers and professionals with the tools needed for engaging migrants in entrepreneurial initiatives as well as increasing their participation in such activities.

The curriculum is expected to increase the participation of migrants in the socio-economic life and involvement of migrants in educational programmes.

The project is coordinated by Krinova Incubator, Sweden, and brings together organisations from Cyprus, Denmark, Italy, and Germany.

Link to the program: <https://mesi-project.eu/>

### **What2Dolf: Effective guidance for successful integration of foreign communities through language acquisition**

WHAT2Dolf is to help newly arrived foreigners, migrants and refugees to get oriented in the host-country economic, education, social and other systems, thus preventing their social exclusion or heavy dependency on their ethnic community.

Migrants will improve their knowledge of the thematic areas selected by the consortium regarding the local system in partners' countries.

In addition, migrants will be provided with a useful glossary and video tutorials that will support their communication and interaction in the local language. Finally, migrants will be more confident in how to find solutions for specific problems they might face while trying to organize their life in a new country.

Link to the program: <https://www.whattodoif.eu/site/>

### **MEDICE - Migrant Women as Healthcare Mentors**

This Erasmus+ project aims to facilitate the access of migrant women and their children to the healthcare services in five European countries by developing innovative language learning tools related to healthcare issues.

The two-year project brings together organisations from Iceland, Czech Republic, Poland, Cyprus, and the United Kingdom.

Link to the program: <http://mediceproject.eu/>

### **Migrant Information Centre (MiHub)**

MiHub operates in 4 cities in Cyprus and serves as a one-stop-shop for assistance, support, and information to migrants.

Link to the program: <https://mihub.eu/en/>

### **Mathaino Ellinika**

A project offering Greek-language lessons and mediation services to migrant students attending schools around Cyprus. The project is specifically designed to meet the needs and expectations of TCN students, helping them to elevate their capacity to speak, read and write in Greek. Furthermore, it has trained migrant mediators who serve as the link between schools and migrant families, offering support to ensure effective communication between them.

Link to the program: <https://mathainwellinika.com/el/about>

## **2.9. Initiatives**

An initiative of the education ministry and the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute promotes the social and educational integration of TCNs in schools. through the empowerment of teachers and the improvement of relationships between schools and parents (active in the 2017-2018 period).

## Existing national tools for Civic Education (CE) training

Online resources:

- The project Lingua+ aims to support the linguistic integration of migrants by providing tools to language teachers through different methodologies and practices embedded into socio-cultural interplay.

Website: <http://linguaplusproject.eu/>

- IEUME is a 2-year Erasmus+ KA2 Project that aims to support the integration process of people with a migrant background through innovative educational tools. The educational resources that will be developed will cover topics such as EU Institutions, Access to Rights, Political Culture and Civic Participation, Employability and Cultural Heritage.

Website: <https://www.ieume.com/>

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