December 2024

The Republic of Cyprus (RoC) is one of Europe's frontline states. From 2015-2023 it was faced with increasing trends of mixed migration arrivals. The numbers of new asylum applications saw a sharp decrease in 2024, as compared with the trends over the last three years. In **2024**, some **6,777** new asylum applications were made.

From 2002 until the end of 2024, some **23,300 persons** have been granted international protection in the RoC, of whom approximately **4,600** have been granted refugee status, and **18,700** are subsidiary protection beneficiaries.

Up until end December 2024, some **24,341 refugees from Ukraine** have applied for Temporary Protection in the RoC.

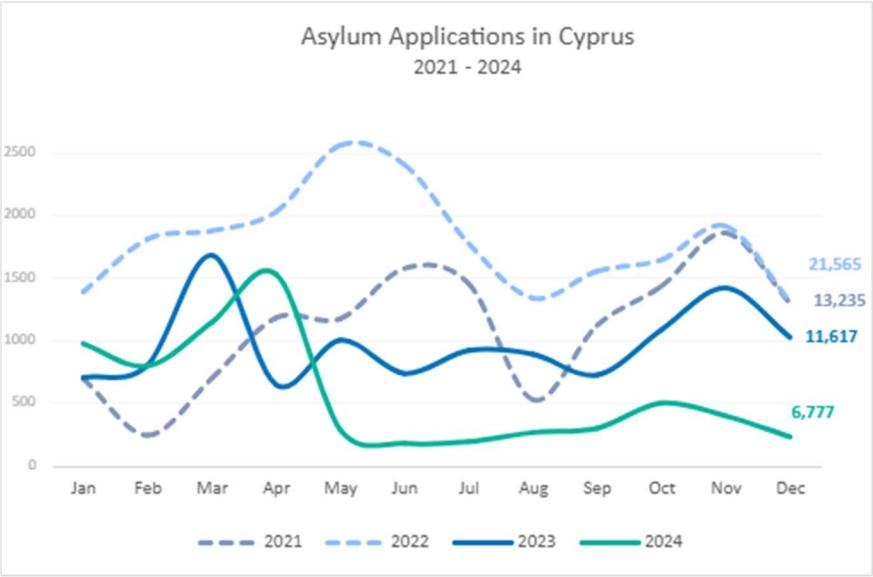
Asylum Processing

Asylum examination procedures take up to three years on average, exacerbating the difficulties already faced by asylum-seekers. As at end December 2024, approximately **20,500 persons'** applications are pending at the Asylum Service and **6,900 persons'** appeals are pending at the International Protection Administrative Court (IPAC)

UNHCR advocates for fair, fast and effective procedures for examining asylum applications, preserving the asylum system for those in need of international protection.

As part of its work to improve the quality of the asylum procedures, UNHCR provides guidance to the Asylum Service in addressing the backlog. For more information see:

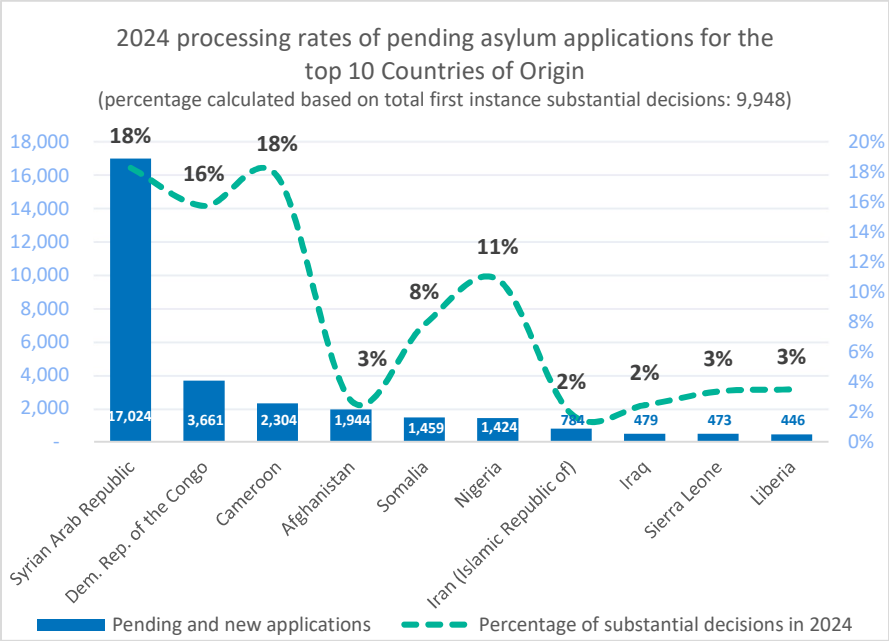
Effective processing of asylum applications: Practical considerations and practices [https://www.refworld.org/policy/opguidance/unhcr/2022/en/124059]



The vast majority of Syrians seeking asylum in the Republic of Cyprus receive subsidiary protection status. See the latest **Statistics** [https://www.unhcr.org/cy/publications/] on our website for more data.

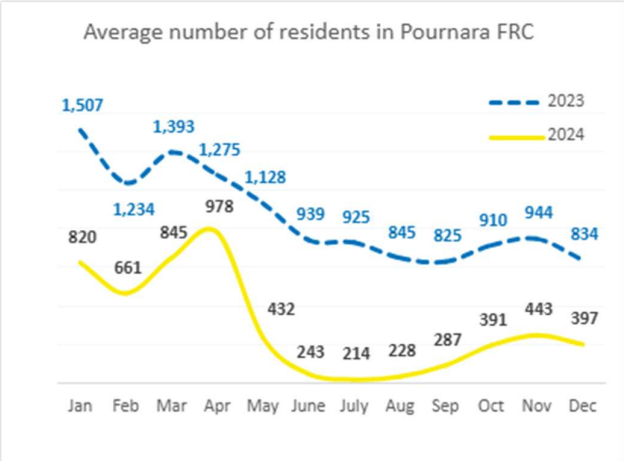
The policy introduced by the Government on 15 April 2024, suspending the processing of asylum claims by Syrians, has left them in legal limbo and dependent on state aid for housing and subsistence.

Meanwhile, after the fall of the Assad regime, Cypriot authorities report a steady flow of Syrians approaching them to request the withdrawal of their asylum applications.



First Reception Centre (Pournara) in Kokkinotrimithia

The Pournara First Reception Centre is located in Kokkinothrimithia, at a remote location on the outskirts of Nicosia. It was originally established in 2014 as a tented facility with a 350-person capacity with EU funding to help deal with increased arrivals from Syria. It was envisaged only to provide 72-hour emergency accommodation to newly arrived asylum-seekers.

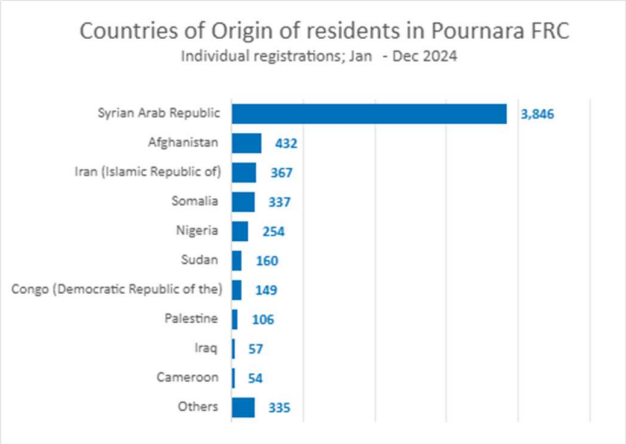


Today, the Centre comprises pre-fabricated housing and tents, and has an official capacity of 1,000 persons. High-security fencing around the perimeter of the Centre was completed at the beginning of June 2023.

Since 2020, the Centre has received all newly arrived asylum-seekers, including families with children, as well as unaccompanied children, and has been operating as a long-term reception facility. Asylum-seekers are allowed to exit the camp and live in the cities after they complete the initial registration procedure, and if they have a valid address in Cyprus – a requirement that is difficult to meet as the opportunities to leave the camp to find accommodation are extremely limited. In 2022, the Centre was operating considerably beyond capacity, with up to 2,000 to 3,000 residents at times. Since 2023, the number of residents has decreased. IOM Greece started the construction for the expansion and refurbishment of the Centre in June 2023. The first phase was completed in the first quarter of 2024, and the second phase of the works is currently underway. Once completed, the capacity of the Centre is expected to increase from 1,000 to 2,800 persons.

Given the decrease in the overall numbers of arrivals to the RoC, the numbers of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) residing at Pournara have also decreased during 2024. As at end December 2024 some **55 UASC** were residing in the Centre. Due to the current capacity of the Centre, UASC reside within the Safe Zones. The sanitation facilities in the Safe Zones were recently improved with the assistance of the Watershed NGO. Currently, on average, UASC reside at Pournara for one to two months, without access to education.

With the shelters for unaccompanied children operating at full capacity, the welfare services have adopted some interim measures to accommodate the children in hotels. These, however, lack in various regards, including freedom of movement and access to education and recreational activities. Semi-independent living programs have also been developed with EU funding. However, children who reach the age of 18 are requested to leave the programs without meanwhile having acquired the means to live independently in the community. It is notable that the unaccompanied children who reside at the shelters, once they attain the age of 18, are also required to move into independent living without support to help them integrate into the community.



UNHCR and its main NGO partner have physical presence at Pournara to assist the authorities in ensuring adequate reception conditions for asylum-seekers and vulnerable groups. To that end, UNHCR conducts vulnerability assessments; informs the authorities of the daily challenges; provides advice to address exploitation risks for children and women at the camp and assists in finding solutions for issues that vary from medical needs to information provision to the asylum-seekers and their transition into the community. At the end of 2021 until mid-2022, UNHCR employed a camp management expert who proposed solutions for the improvement of infrastructure and for faster and more efficient asylum processes in the camp. UNHCR also recommended that emergency preparedness plans are adopted for a possible sudden influx, while longer term improvements are pursued in Pournara. UNHCR has donated various items to Pournara, including blankets, plastic sheets, family tents, refugee housing units, camp beds, benches, a shaded area for cover during food distribution and other non-food relief items.

Kofinou Reception Centre for Applicants of International Protection

The sole state-run Reception Centre is located in a remote area near the village of Kofinou with a capacity of approximately 600 persons. Kofinou hosts families with children, single women and single men. The Centre is a model of good management with an on-going effort to further improve infrastructure and services. This is

evidenced by the recent refurbishment and extension of the Centre, which saw the capacity of the Centre double. Accessibility for persons with disabilities have been improved and sports and leisure areas are forthcoming. In addition, the Centre is currently undergoing further renovations, which, once completed will increase its capacity by a further 100-150.

Recent improvements at the Kofinou Reception Centre provide for better conditions for residents. © UNHCR Cyprus

UNHCR has made donations to improve the living conditions for the residents at the Kofinou Reception Centre, including trees, housing units and playground equipment.

UNHCR has physical presence at the Kofinou Reception Centre to offer integration support and individual counseling to the residents.

UNHCR has also established communication with a network of employers eager to hire refugees, leading to employment referrals and jobs for a number of qualified residents.

As a result, **60 residents** have found jobs and/or accommodation and **195 refugees were registered** on the **HelpRefugeesWork** platform so far this year.

Urban living for the majority of asylum-seekers

Most asylum-seekers live in the towns and cities. Some live in rented private accommodation, but many more are left homeless or at risk of homelessness and destitution. Since 2017 homelessness has been on the rise due to a number of factors, such as the employment policy that applies to asylum-seekers, which is not conducive to their integration into the labour market; the amount of state aid granted to unemployed asylum-seekers that is less than the Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI) granted to other destitute groups of the population, including unemployed citizens and recognized refugees; the surge in rental prices caused by an increase in the demand for rented accommodation and the prolonged delays in the examination of asylum applications.

Employment

Sectors of the economy in which asylum-seekers can work are limited mainly to low-skilled jobs. Moreover, finding a job in those sectors remains problematic for most asylum-seekers due to language barriers and red tape. Access to the labour market for asylum-seekers has been further restricted as of September 2023, following a circular that was enacted earlier in the year providing that as of September 2023 asylum-seekers will be allowed to work *nine months* after they submit their asylum claim, as opposed to the *previous one month* regulation.

State aid

State aid is in the form of cash-based allowance and consists of rental allowance, utilities and food and clothing. Many asylum-seekers continue to face obstacles in opening basic back accounts that are required in order to access their monthly allowance, hence they are exposed to the risk of destitution. Furthermore, the total monthly allowance for asylum-seekers (Euros 361 per applicant to cover rent, utilities and food) remains well below the Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI) that applies to recognised refugees and subsidiary protection beneficiaries. The GMI allowance provides a basic income to the applicant of EUR480 per month; an additional allowance for spouses (EUR240); for children under age 14 (EUR144); for children over age 14 and up to age 28 (EUR240), and a rental allowance, which is calculated based on various criteria, and according to a specific formula. For more details about the material reception conditions provided to asylum-seekers, visit our **Help Platform**: https://bit.ly/3PoQ830

Increasing numbers of asylum-seekers are at risk of homelessness, while many who do find accommodation are living in squalid conditions. © UNHCR Cyprus

Centre at Limnes

The Centre at Limnes was established in 2021 to host failed asylum-seekers coming directly from Pournara and pending deportation, as well as asylum-seekers who are part of voluntary return or relocation programs. The Centre at Limnes is in a remote location with no local bus to the main towns for access to services, including the appeal court that is based in Nicosia. The funding for refurbishment of the Centre at Limnes was availed by the European Commission in 2022. Residents have meanwhile been transferred to the Kofinou Reception Centre, pending the completion of the refurbishment.