January 2026

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 previous three years. In **2025 the trend continued to decrease**, with some **2,835** new asylum applications made.

From 2002 until the end of 2025, some **24,000 persons** have been granted international protection in the RoC, of whom approximately **5,100** have been granted refugee status, and **18,900** are subsidiary protection beneficiaries.

According to EUROSTAT, there are some **24,620 Ukrainian beneficiaries of Temporary Protection** in the RoC, as at the end of November 2025.

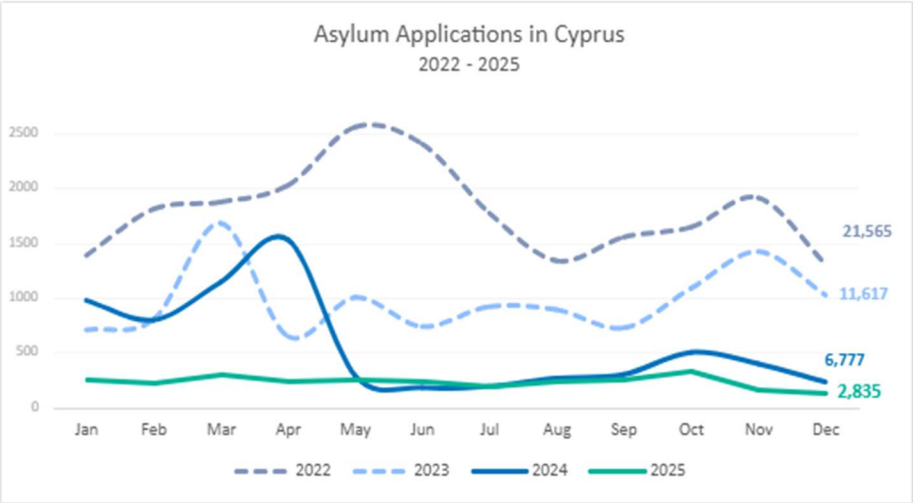
Asylum Processing

Asylum examination procedures take up to three years on average, exacerbating the difficulties already faced by asylum-seekers. As at end December 2025, some **15,777 persons'** applications are pending at the Asylum Service, and some **7,370 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.

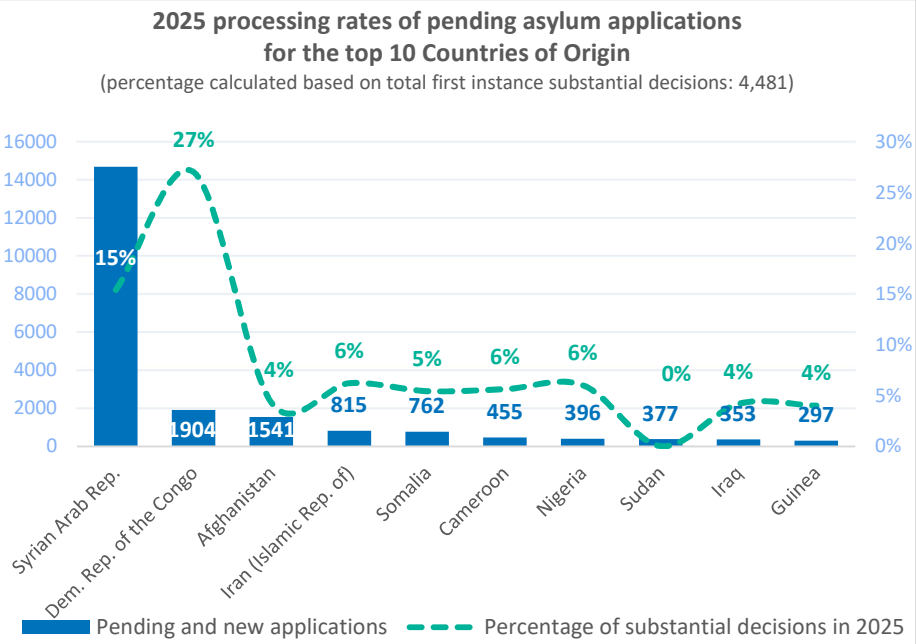
As part of its work to improve the quality of the asylum procedures, UNHCR provides guidance to the Asylum Service in addressing the backlog. For more information see:

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



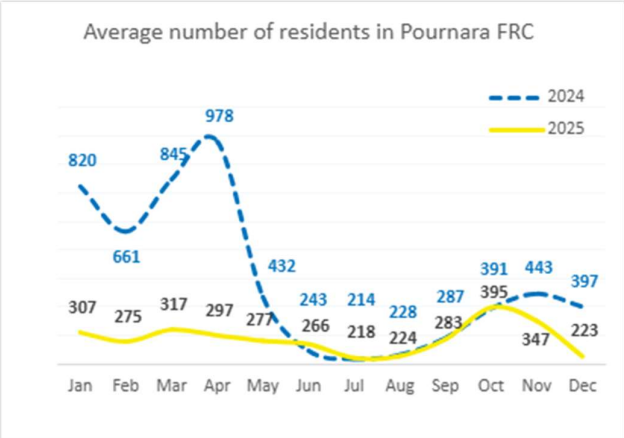
Syrians remain the largest group of asylum applicants in Cyprus *See our statistics for the latest figures. Following the 14 April 2024 suspension of Syrian asylum processing, newly arrived Syrians were required to stay at Kofinou, with those in the community losing state aid support while facing a nine-month work ban. Processing resumed in May 2025 and by the end of November, 52 Syrian asylum-seekers were granted refugee status, 37 subsidiary protection and 505 were rejected. Cyprus continues to operate voluntary return schemes, with authorities reporting about 2,400 returns and some 4,100 registrations for departure by August 2025.*

A UNHCR survey in early 2025 https://www.unhcr.org/cy/media/unhcr-cyprus-report-intentions-and-persectives-refugees-syria-cyprus-2025 found that although 11% hoped to return to Syria in the future, only 2% intended to do so within a year. UNHCR stresses that all returns must be genuinely voluntary and sensitive to the protection needs of women and children.



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.

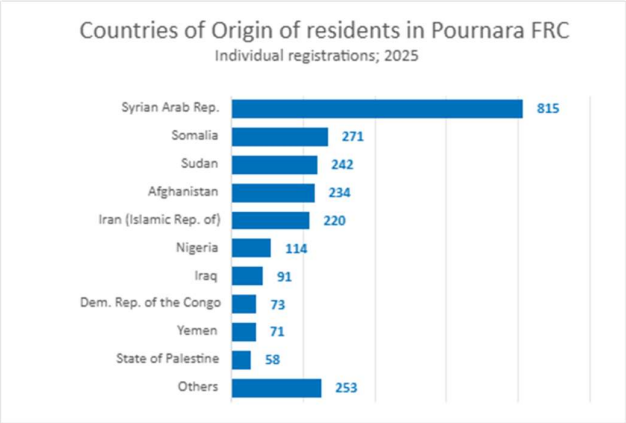


Today, the Centre, with high-security fencing around its perimeter, comprises prefabricated housing and tents, and has an official capacity of some 1,400 persons. Pournara was originally designed as a short term, emergency facility, but since 2020 it has been used for longer stays.

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.

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 since 2024. As at end December 2025 some **18 UASC** were residing at the Centre. UASC reside within designated Safe Zones in the Centre, provided there is capacity. The sanitation facilities in the Safe Zones have been improved. Currently, on average, UASC reside at Pournara for one to two months, without access to education.

Upon their release from the Centre, UASC are placed in State-run and NGO-operated shelters. Children closer to adulthood are placed in semi-independent living programs that have been developed with EU funding; when these children reach the age of 18, they are requested to leave the programs. Unaccompanied children who reside at the shelters, once they attain the age of 18, are also required to move into independent living without adequate support to help them integrate into the community. Enhanced access to reception conditions, education, recreation or assistance to transition to adulthood is needed for these children.



UNHCR is physically present 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. Over the years, UNHCR has proposed solutions for the improvement of infrastructure; for faster and more efficient asylum processes in the camp and emergency preparedness plans 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. The Centre is composed of prefabricated units, and its capacity was doubled between 2023 and 2024, resulting in significant improvements in living conditions and service provision. Kofinou hosts families with children, single women and single men.

In addition to adequate housing, meals, basic medical care, educational activities and recreational opportunities, residents receive free bus cards and a cash allowance. Ongoing challenges include gaps in information provision and counselling, as well as limited prospects for moving from the Centre into the community due to strained reception conditions countrywide. As a result, many individuals remain in the Centre for prolonged periods, increasing the risk of institutionalisation and hindering their integration. In addition, the center continues to have limited transport connections to nearby towns. Additional psychosocial support is required to meet the needs of vulnerable residents and to facilitate smooth transitions to independent living.

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 is present at the Kofinou Reception Centre and offers integration support and individual counseling to the residents. This support includes encouraging residents to register on the **HelpRefugeesWork** platform that was set up by the UNHCR Country Office in Cyprus, in collaboration with our NGO partner, the Cyprus Refugee Council. Additionally, UNHCR has established communication with a network of employers eager to hire refugees, leading to employment referrals and jobs for a number of residents of the Kofinou Reception Centre.

Urban living for the majority of asylum-seekers

The vast majority of asylum-seekers in Cyprus 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, and asylum-seekers are 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 bank accounts that are required in order to access their monthly allowance; further exposing them to the risk of destitution. Moreover, 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://help.unhcr.org/cyprus/.

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. The new multipurpose centre at Limnes is expected to finish soon, and will host approximately 1,600 persons, including in pre-deportation detention.