



## Migration Profile CYPRUS

### Executive summary

Cyprus is an island in the eastern Mediterranean to the south of the Anatolian peninsula. It is divided de facto into two parts: the Greek Orthodox-majority Republic of Cyprus (59% of the territory), and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (36%), with a Muslim population; there is a buffer zone between the two.

Situated directly west of the Syrian coast and positioned to be a gateway to Europe from the north (Turkey), the east (Syria, Lebanon and Israel) and the south (Egypt), Cyprus has been subject to major waves of migration for years. In 2017, it was the third European country in terms of emigration rate and the second in terms of immigration rate. In 2019, it was the country with the highest number of asylum seekers in relation to its population, with most coming from Syria, India, Bangladesh and Pakistan and constituting 4% of the total population. In recent years, the political division of the state has also played an increasingly important role: the majority of asylum seekers reach the Republic of Cyprus (the southern portion of the island) via the northern areas occupied by Turkish troops, crossing the so-called “Green Line”, or using Turkey's visa-free regime to cross the border and then coming to the island state by sea.

The “Green Line” separates the Greek south from the Turkish north controlled by an administration recognized by Turkey alone, which in turn does not recognize the government of the Republic of Cyprus and effectively excludes the island state from the EU-Turkey agreements on migrants. The reception system (with the overcrowded Kofinuo and Kokkinotrimithia centres) is also managed by the Greek Cypriot authorities and the administration of the capital. However, asylum seekers are often stranded in the north for years awaiting asylum in the Republic of Cyprus.

In addition, there are 228,000 internally displaced persons (2019), victims mainly of the conflict and violence that followed the occupation of the northern part of the island in 1974 by Turkish troops; the clashes caused a mass displacement of Greek Cypriots to the south and Turkish Cypriots to the north. This separation is also evident in the management of human trafficking, with the Republic of Cyprus meeting the standards required for the elimination of the phenomenon, while the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus continues to be an area of impunity with migrants among the most vulnerable groups, especially as regards the exploitation of labour.

## Country Profile

### I. Basic information

Cyprus is an island state in the eastern Mediterranean, located south of the Anatolian peninsula, a short distance from the coast of Syria. Its capital is Nicosia. The Presidential Republic has a land area of 9 250 km<sup>2</sup>, divided de facto into two parts: the Republic of Cyprus comprising 59% (5 895 km<sup>2</sup>) of the island's surface area and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus covering the remaining 36% (3 355 km<sup>2</sup>). (The other 4% is a buffer zone, the "Green Line", controlled by the United Nations.) Its coasts extend over 648 km and it has two mountain ranges, the Kyrenia and the Troodos where we find Mount Olympus (1,953 m), the highest peak of the island. The island state has a Mediterranean-subtropical climate.

Cyprus has been a Member State of the European Union since 1 May 2004 and of the Commonwealth since 13 March 1961. The country has a population of 1,266,676 inhabitants (2020), with 91 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> and a growth rate of 1.15%; the life expectancy at birth is 79 years (76 for men and 82 for women).

According to the last census of 1960, the majority of the population are Greek Cypriots (78%), followed by 18% Turkish Cypriots, while the remaining 4% is made up principally of Armenians plus some other ethnic groups. The official languages are the Cypriot dialect of Greek, spoken mainly in the Republic of Cyprus, and Turkish, spoken mainly in the north. Among the minority languages used are Armenian (spoken by about 3,000 people), Cypriot Arabic (spoken by just under a thousand people) and Kurbetcha (spoken by the Roma population living in the northern parts of the country).

The Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities also maintain distinct identities through two official religions: Greek Orthodox in the Greek part and Islam in the Turkish part. The predominant religion is Christian-Orthodox, representing 80% of the population, while Islam is practiced by 18% of the total population. The remaining 2% is made up principally of Maronites, the Armenian Church, Hindus and Buddhists.

The GDP per capita is USD 26 389; the Cypriot economy is 80% service oriented (business support, tourism, transport, finance), 17% manufacturing (food, paper, chemical-pharmaceutical, oil refining, textiles), while agriculture contributes about 3% of GDP (main products: grapes, potatoes, citrus fruits, cotton).

### II. International and internal migration

Situated directly west of the Syrian coast and positioned to be a gateway to Europe from the north (Turkey), the east (Syria, Lebanon and Israel) and the south (Egypt), Cyprus has been subject to major waves of migration for years. In 2017, it was the third European country in terms of emigration rate and the second in terms of immigration rate. In 2019, it was the country with the highest number of asylum seekers in relation to its population.

According to data provided by the Migration Data Portal, in mid-2019, the State recorded 191,900 international migrants, 16% of the total population, with a net migration (estimated between 2014-2019) of 25,000 immigrants, of which 55.6% were women and 44.4% men. Of these, the majority were between 20-64 years of age (80%), while 10.8% were under 19 and 8.8% were over 65. According to data provided by the Cyprus Institute of Statistics, in 2018 there were 23,442 long-term immigrants, those who arrived in Cyprus to settle there or for temporary employment for at least one year (compared to 21,306 in 2017), while there were about 15,340 emigrants that year (compared to 15,105 in 2017). The main destination country for these emigrants is Greece, due to its strong cultural and linguistic links with Cyprus; emigrants also go to the United Kingdom, Sri Lanka and Russia, followed by Bulgaria and Romania.

The EU-Turkey Agreements of 2016 on migration have transformed Cyprus into a preferred destination on the migratory route, thanks also to its proximity to the Syrian coast. Today, the island is the European state that hosts the largest number of refugees proportionally: 13,259 out of a total of 850,000 inhabitants, about 4% of the total population. Numbers are constantly increasing, with a year-over-year 50% increase in the migratory flow in 2017 compared to 2016 and 69% in 2018.

Finally, the political division of the country also increases migratory flows. Turkish troops occupy the northern part of the island, which caused 40% of the population to displace from that area to the southern part. Moreover, asylum seekers arrive on national territory through the north. In recent years, the majority of them have reached the island in the areas occupied by Turkish troops and then proceeded south into the Republic of Cyprus, crossing the so-called "Green Line." Another contributing factor is Turkey's visa-free regime that allows asylum seekers to cross Turkey and then proceed by sea to Cyprus. 8,500 asylum seekers from 2015 to 2018, and 3,000 in 2019 alone, crossed the border between the north administered by Turkey and the Republic of Cyprus.

### **III. Emigration and qualified migration**

According to EUROSTAT data for 2017, the Presidential Republic of Cyprus ranked second in the European Union with an average of 18 emigrants per 1,000 inhabitants that year, second only to Luxembourg (23 emigrants per 1,000 inhabitants). Moreover, in 2018, according to the National Bureau of Statistics, the number of emigrants (Cypriots or foreigners who had spent at least one year on the island state) increased slightly to 15,340 from 15,105 in 2017. Of these, 4,859 were migrants with citizenship of another European state, 9,089 were non-EU citizens and only 1,157 were Cypriots, most of them young migrants faced with a youth unemployment rate of 22.4% compared to the general population unemployment rate of 10.4%. This shows that young people were the most affected by the economic crisis and yields another significant percentage: the youth unemployment rate is higher for young graduates (25%) than for groups with lower skills (22%), due to both the high number of tertiary level graduates and a skills gap in the country.

The main destination countries for emigration from Cyprus are the United Kingdom, especially for young people (11,471 in 2013), Australia, the United States, Turkey and Greece. Finally, remittances currently represent 2.4% of national GDP according to Migration Data Portal; and 2.9% of respondents in a 2020 national survey expressed a desire to emigrate.

#### **IV. Forced migrations (internally displaced, asylum seekers and refugees)**

In 2018, Cyprus, with a 70% increase in political asylum applications compared to 2017, ranked first among the European countries for the highest number of applicants per capita. There were 7,761 new applications for international protection, most of them from Syria, India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. These numbers almost doubled in 2019, with 13,259 applications for political asylum (of which 2,870 were from unaccompanied minors). Of these, 61.3% received a negative response, 34.31% were granted subsidiary protection and 4.39% (147 applicants) were granted definitive refugee status. Again, the majority of applicants came from Syria (2,602), followed by Georgia (1,594), India (1,508), Bangladesh (1,270), Pakistan (1,187) and Cameroon (1,181), where violence in the English-speaking regions of the country has resulted in more than half a million displaced persons.

What makes the situation even more complicated is the division of the island by the so-called “Green Line” which separates the Greek south from the Turkish north, which is controlled by an administration recognized by Turkey alone. Thus, since the north is regarded by the Republic of Cyprus as its own territory occupied by Turkish troops, the authorities in Nicosia neither recognize nor communicate with that administration, which, in turn, does not recognize the government of the Republic of Cyprus, effectively excluding the island state from the EU-Turkey agreements on migrants. This lack of communication is used by asylum seekers to enter the northern part and then cross the 180-kilometre border, theoretically patrolled by the UN but with several weak points, and seek asylum in the southern part. The reception system is managed by the Greek Cypriot authorities and the administration of the capital. Nevertheless, given that once on the island, asylum seekers are denied travel abroad, they are often stuck in the north for years waiting for asylum in the Republic of Cyprus. On the territory of the latter, there are the reception centre in Kofinuo (350 places), one of the largest centres in Europe in relation to the size of the country, and the first reception centre in Kokkinotrimithia, which are both overcrowded. In addition, there are the Menoyia Detention Centre (with a capacity of 128 people), the short-term detention centres at Larnaca and Paphos airports and the Kokkinotrimithia Centre which operates as a reception centre where newly arrived asylum seekers are confined for health and identification checks for up to 72 hours.

In recent years, Cyprus has also been experiencing an increase in the arrival of unaccompanied minors. In 2018, there were 260 applications for political asylum by unaccompanied minors, 73.7% of whom were male and 3.9% under the age of 14. Of these, 39% (100) came from Syria, 24% (65) from Somalia and 13% from Cameroon. In 2019, the number increased further with 535 unaccompanied minors seeking international protection; but an age assessment determined that 194 of these were in fact adults.

Finally, according to data provided by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, in December 2019 there were 228,000 internally displaced persons caused by conflict and violence in the island state. These are mainly linked to the clashes that followed the 1974 occupation of the northern part by Turkish troops, which caused a mass displacement of Greek Cypriots to the south and Turkish Cypriots to the north. Current estimates state that 300 people will be displaced in the future by earthquakes and tsunamis.

## **V. Victims of human trafficking**

According to the US Department of Homeland Security's Trafficking in Persons report of 2019, Cyprus fully meets the requirements and standards required for the elimination of trafficking in human beings. There has been an increase in trials of traffickers and prevention measures as well as protection for children, for example, with the opening of a children's home offering support services to trafficked children. That said, prosecutions take too long, hampering victim support measures.

In 2018, 30 suspected traffickers were prosecuted, 27 of them for sexual exploitation and 3 for labour exploitation. Along with a limited number of fellow nationals, most victims were foreigners, mainly from Eastern Europe, Vietnam, India and Sub-Saharan Africa. Organized as a destination country for human trafficking from several European countries, sexual exploitation in Cyprus takes place mainly in private apartments and hotels, with traffickers recruiting victims with false hopes of marriage or work as barmaids and/or hostesses. On the other hand, the exploitation of migrant workers has been increasing in recent years. They are mainly from Asia with India, Nepal, Philippines and Sri Lanka among the most vulnerable groups. They are recruited by traffickers through employment agencies that provide them with a short-term work permit which, once expired, makes them subject to coercion, threats and withholding of pay and documents. In this regard, reports issued by the European Council's Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) include a request to the Government of Cyprus to strengthen the supervision of private employment agencies with targeted inspections of those known for illegal employment and/or trafficking in human beings. Furthermore, despite the efforts of the Ministry of Justice - there is an anti-trafficking unit, the Police Academy has properly trained and prepared staff, there are special programs in cooperation with several NGOs - insufficient work is done to identify victims at the Kofinou Reception Centre where, according to the Government and some NGOs, there were 48 asylum seekers who were potentially victims of trafficking in 2018.

The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, unlike the Republic of Cyprus, does not meet the requirements and standards required for the elimination of human trafficking and continues to be a place of impunity for this crime. Indeed, the Turkish authorities have no data concerning legislative efforts on trafficking in human beings, nor have they made available social, economic and psychological assistance services to victims or police training and preparedness to improve identification of victims. Indeed, in the northern part of the country, victims who come mainly from Central Asia, Eastern Europe and Africa are sexually exploited in nightclubs authorized

and run by the Turkish Cypriot administration itself, which receives revenue from them in the form of taxes that counter the fight against human trafficking. Particularly vulnerable groups, especially in terms of labour exploitation, include migrants whose work permits in the Republic of Cyprus have expired and who cross into Turkish Cypriot territory as a result.

## **VI. National legal framework**

The legal framework governing migration issues includes the Law on Foreigners and Immigration of 1952, which regulates aspects of their stay on national soil, including their entry and eventual departure. In 2017, Parliament approved an amendment to this law, bringing it into line with international law and the European Directive 2014/36/EU on seasonal workers as well as the European Directive 2014/66/EU on intra-corporate transfers.

The Cypriot Refugee Act (2000) enhanced protection for this category. This legislation stipulates the right of refugees to access education and, in particular, provides for access to all levels of the education system in the case of minors and the possibility of obtaining recognized school certificates and diplomas and/or degrees in the case of refugees of legal age. In addition, this law provides adult refugees with the opportunity to participate in employment training opportunities as well as practical work experience. This legislation was then amended in 2016 to align with the reformed Directive 2013/32/EU on political asylum procedures and Directive 2013/33/EU on reception conditions.

The lack of a fully-fledged law on the integration of refugees and immigrants into Cypriot society has been addressed by several Action Plans in this regard. The first Action Plan for the integration of third-country nationals legally residing in Cyprus was introduced in 2010-2012 with the aim of facilitating the integration of legal migrants, including refugees and those granted subsidiary protection. Following the increase in migration flows, a new Action Plan was introduced in 2014-2016 to maximize the benefits of legal migration by redefining labour market needs, promoting the integration of migrants into Cypriot society and limiting the creation of ghettos. Finally, a new Action Plan is currently (2020) expected to be adopted to address the growing number of political asylum seekers in the country.

Finally, with regard to the legal framework on human trafficking, the main reference legislation is Law 60(I)/2014 which criminalizes trafficking in sex and labour with sentences of up to 10 years imprisonment for crimes involving adult victims and up to 20 years imprisonment for those concerning child victims. Victims are thus protected from possible sanctions related to their illegal entry and stay on national soil as well as deportation. This legislation provides victims with access to medical and psychological assistance services and programmes provided by the state and a number of NGOs for their rehabilitation.

Law 60(I)/2014 is also in line with the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, including several provisions for cases where children are involved, such as stricter sanctions and special measures and methods for child victims of human trafficking. Finally, this

legislation provides for access for victims to education and the possibility to testify in court through video-recorded statements.

## **VII. Principal actors**

### *The State*

The Ministry of the Interior is the primary government body involved in all aspects related to migration and political asylum. The Ministry of the Interior also deals with the integration of migrants and refugees, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Education's Cyprus Educational Institute, which is particularly active with the Turkish Cypriot minority and the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Security which prepared the Employment Strategy for Third-Country Nationals, for example. Finally, the authorities at regional and municipal level are also actively involved in the integration of third-country nationals: in recent years, 15 municipalities have taken part in the project "Integration Programme of Local Authorities for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals into Cypriot Society". A specific department of the Ministry of the Interior dealing with immigration permits and the relevant administrative elements is the Department of Civil Registry and Migration.

With regard to procedures specifically related to political asylum applications, the Asylum Service, a department of the Ministry of the Interior, is responsible for the first instance quality control of asylum applications as well as the management of the Kofinou and Kokkinotrimithia reception centres and the general coordination of international protection issues. Applications are then filed with the Immigration and Aliens Unit (Police Department), which is present in each of the five districts of the island state.

### *The Catholic Church*

Caritas Cyprus is one of the protagonists of the Catholic Church's work on the island Cyprus, and has always been particularly active and focused on refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons. A member of Caritas Internationalis since 1979, its headquarters are in the capital Nicosia. It provides humanitarian and social support to migrants and refugees through various programs and projects and a dedicated Migrant Sector funded largely through its partnership with CRS (Catholic Relief Services). In 2018, for example, Caritas Cyprus provided assistance to 1,393 individuals, 94% of whom were migrants from non-European countries: 63.5% were political asylum seekers, followed by 13% refugees and/or individuals with subsidiary protection, 9.5% domestic workers and farmers and 8.5% other categories such as international students and rejected asylum seekers. As such, the Migrants Sector provides assistance to thousands of migrants and refugees mainly through its Centres in Nicosia and Larnaca, where migrants have a space to socialize with others on weekdays, access legal and health care services and learn new languages (English and Greek). Also in the capital, Caritas Cyprus has shelters that provide temporary emergency accommodation for migrant women and men with children: the men's shelter has up to 12 beds and the women's shelter can accommodate up to 9 women and 4 children. Finally, there is the Learning Refuge in Pathos which offers a safe place

for families and children to make friends and play in peace, with language classes for adults and fun activities for children such as gardening and art.

Due to the geographical location of Cyprus as the crossroads between Europe and the Middle East, Caritas Cyprus is a member of Caritas MENA whose members deal mainly with migration, education, development, women's empowerment, human trafficking and peace-building, as well as Caritas Europe. According to a report published by the latter on the accessibility and adequacy of services offered to combat poverty and promote social inclusion in different European countries, the conditions of asylum seekers in Cyprus are rapidly deteriorating because the number of arrivals on the island state has outstripped the government's capacity to cope with them. For this reason, one of the recommendations that emerged from this report is an invitation to Cyprus to speed up the political asylum procedures in order to have decisions taken within six months of the application being made and not after years, as is currently the case.

#### *International organizations*

Among the organizations working actively in Cyprus, we find first and foremost the International Organization for Migration, of which the island state has been a member since 1974. However, the organization's work on national soil began much later, in 2015, when it opened its office in Nicosia. IOM maintains close cooperation with the government authorities in Cyprus such as the Minister of the Interior and the Minister of Health. Its projects include voluntary return and reintegration, relocation, integration, access to services and the fight against xenophobia and discrimination.

The island state has also been a member of the UNHCR since 1974, when the then UN Secretary-General appointed a UN High Commissioner as coordinator of humanitarian assistance in Cyprus. One of its current main objectives is to assist the Government of Cyprus to redefine and further improve legislation and political asylum procedures in order to develop a refugee protection system in line with international standards.

#### *Other organizations*

There are many non-governmental organizations working in the area of migration and political asylum as well as in the fight against human trafficking. The Cyprus Red Cross, for example, has been operating on national soil since 1950 and was officially recognized by the International Committee of the Red Cross in 2012. Its objectives include assisting individuals and communities to respond effectively to emergencies, in times of peace and war, without discrimination based on race, gender, religion or political belief.

KISA (Movement for Equality, Support, Anti-Racism) another important NGO, works in the areas of migration, political asylum, racism, discrimination and human trafficking. Its Migrants and Refugees Centre provides free assistance, support and mediation services to migrants, refugees and victims of trafficking as well as ethnic minorities. Recognized at the European level, this organization has carried out and still works on the implementation of European

programs as well as research projects on behalf of and/or in collaboration with European agencies, NGOs and other organizations such as the IOM and the British Council.

Also doing important work are: the Cyprus Refugee Council (focused on refugees, asylum seekers, detainees and victims of trafficking with the aim of providing quality services to individuals and communities); Hope for Children (with social assistance services for unaccompanied minors and shelters for foster families); Cardet (particularly with regard to the implementation of integration programs); and MiHub (with its four information centres supporting the inclusion of migrants in local communities). Finally, there is also the work of volunteer organizations such as the Dignity Centre in the capital Nicosia which has three facilities for asylum seekers and refugees to offer them support and assistance, including language courses, sewing, cooking and many other services to help them feel integrated and able to rebuild their lives.

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