

ASYLUM SEEKERS, REFUGEES  
AND ANTI-TRAFFICKING IN  
CYPRUS

Fezile Osum - Human Rights Platform  
Anti-Trafficking and Refugee Rights  
Programme Coordinator  
fezile@ihpcy.eu



# ISSUE 1: ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

## Previous Recommendations:

- Cyprus received **10 recommendations** regarding asylum seekers and refugees in the last cycle.
- Among these were one recommendation to **enhance the early identification of vulnerable asylum seekers** (Azerbaijan), one on **tackling homelessness** (Germany), and another one on **advancing their economic security** (Sweden).

## ISSUE 1: ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

### Developments:

- The duration of stay of asylum seekers in Pournara Reception Centre **decreased from several months to around 26 days for adults.**
- The authorities **improved** the reception conditions and **accelerated** the procedures with the centre and **recruited** more staff. The identification of vulnerabilities also **improved.**
- **'Safe zones'** introduced for unaccompanied minors in reception centres.

## ISSUE 1: ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

### Challenges:

- Since 2020, push-backs at land and at the sea persist. The push-backs at the checkpoints leave asylum seekers **stranded in the buffer zone**. Asylum seekers stay in tents, without access to their basic rights. They also fear to end up in the non-controlled areas, where they will face detention and deportation.
- Recently, a Kurdish asylum seeker endured **10 months** in a tent as a result of being denied entry to controlled areas despite many lobbying efforts.

# ISSUE 1: ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

## Challenges:

- The **unaccompanied minors may spend up to several months** in reception centres, due to lack of capacity in the shelters.
- Reception standards remain **below adequate levels**, exposing asylum seekers to the risk of **homelessness** and **destitution**.
- The majority of asylum seekers live in the community and are often **extremely poor**.
- Inadequate and delayed responsiveness to the needs of individuals who are vulnerable to GBV, human trafficking, and torture.

# ISSUE 1: ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

We recommend Republic of Cyprus to:

- **Immediately stop push-backs at the sea and the checkpoints.**
- **Strengthen the capacity of the Social Welfare Services to ensure early assistance and support for all vulnerable asylum-seekers.**
- **Provide meaningful financial support and advance employment options for asylum seekers to ensure they have access to decent housing.**

## ISSUE 2: ANTI-TRAFFICKING

### Previous Recommendations:

Cyprus received **23 recommendations** regarding anti-trafficking in the last cycle.

Among these, 6 recommendations focused on establishing a **comprehensive national action plan** (Nicaragua, Israel, Vietnam, Georgia, Bahrain), 3 recommendations on **improving victim identification efforts** (Spain, Belarus, Azerbaijan), with another specifically targeting **collaboration with the Turkish Cypriot community to eradicate human trafficking** (Australia).

## ISSUE 2: ANTI-TRAFFICKING

### Developments:

- Cyprus had a national action plan for anti-trafficking covering between 2019-2021. **Another action plan is recently announced** for the period between 2023–2026.
- Over the past two years, **13 cases** related to human trafficking have been tried in Cyprus and more than **30 people** have been convicted.
- **The Management Unit for Victims of Trafficking in Persons** began its operation recently at the Nicosia shelter, with 20 trained officers offering **personalised services** to the victims of trafficking.



## ISSUE 2: ANTI-TRAFFICKING

### Challenges:

- Majority of victims are **recruited and trafficked in the north** and cross to the government controlled areas to seek for protection, they face challenges due to authorities citing jurisdictional issues and a lack of evidence to support their cases.
- The Human Trafficking Unit in the Police fails to understand the latest human trafficking trends in the areas not effectively controlled by the RoC and prejudiced against certain groups of victims arriving from the northern part of Cyprus.

## ISSUE 2: ANTI-TRAFFICKING

### Current challenges:

- There is **no collaboration** between the two sides to combat human trafficking or to protect victims, despite the **Bi-Communal Technical Committee on Crime and Criminal Matters**.
- When the authorities **fail to identify** the victims, **they mostly apply to asylum**, to regularize their stay in the RoC, although this is mostly not their legal status.

## ISSUE 2: ANTI-TRAFFICKING

We recommend Republic of Cyprus to:

- **Examine the operation of the bi-communal Technical Committee on Crime and Criminal Matters, clearly mandate them on anti-trafficking and provide them with expertise and technical assistance.**
- **Ensure that the Anti-Trafficking Unit staff receives regular information regarding the trafficking trends in the non-controlled areas of the RoC, while intensifying the victim identification rates.**

# CONCLUSION

THANK YOU!

Fezile Osum - Human Rights Platform

Anti-Trafficking and Refugee Rights Programme Coordinator

[fezile@ihpcy.eu](mailto:fezile@ihpcy.eu)