

Work Package II: Conceptual framework and Co-Created Training Scheme for covering mental health needs of migrants and refugees.

Country Profile

Country: CYPRUS

Responsible Partner: *Cyprus University of Technology (CUT)*



Cyprus International
Institute for Environmental
and Public Health

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1. Migrant and refugee demographic characteristics

Cyprus is an island located in the Eastern Mediterranean, covering a total area of 9251 km². According to the Statistical Service of Cyprus (2019), the total population is 888,000. Currently, there is a growing number of recently arrived refugees and adult migrants. In 2002 the Government of the Republic of Cyprus, took over refugee protection responsibilities from UNHCR. From January through to the end of September 2022, some 16,705 persons have applied for asylum (Country Report Cyprus: Asylum Information Database., 2021). Based on the EMN annual report 2021 on Migration and Asylum, 69,120 registered refugees and migrants entered the borders of Cyprus (Eurostat, 2022 ; Country Report Cyprus: Asylum Information Database., 2021). Currently there are 27,725 applications pending at the Asylum Service and another 8,013 appeals pending at the International Protection Administrative Court (IPAC). As of now, there are 16,301 persons registered as refugees or subsidiary protection beneficiaries. In addition, some 110 refugees under UNHCR's mandate reside in the northern part of the island (Eurostat, 2022).

From January to September 2022, 665 unaccompanied/separated children (UASC) applied for asylum in the Republic of Cyprus. Another 396 applied in 2021; 451 in 2020; 565 in 2019; 259 in 2018; 221 in 2017; and 220 in 2016. Almost half of the 3000 applicants were from Syria. Children with refugee or protected status are not recorded separately; however, 117 unaccompanied minors were accounted for in 2016 (Gravani, Hatzopoulos, & Chinas, 2021). Based on the latest reports, from January to September 2022, some 665 unaccompanied/separated children applied for asylum. The majority of these children arrived by sea, with origin from the Syrian Arab Republic ("Cyprus-Fact sheet Sept 2022" , 2022; "Europe Accompanied, Unaccompanied and Separated © UNICEF - LESVOS MISSION Overview of Trends January to December 2021", 2021). In addition, the table below presents the actual number of unaccompanied children hosted in each shelter as of the end of 2020 (this is the latest information since data were not provided for 2021) (Country Report Cyprus: Asylum Information Database., 2021).

Unaccompanied children in shelters in 2020			
Shelter	City	Number of residents	Capacity
Male Youth Home (HfC)	Nicosia	35	42
Male Youth Home (HfC)	Larnaca	Not operating	25
Male Youth Home (HfC)	Larnaca		20
Female	Larnaca	19	20
Female	Limassol	11	20

Cyprus possesses a crucial place geographically. As a crossroad between Europe, Asia and Africa, migrants and refugees come from all these 3 continents, resulting in a huge variety of the origin of refugees and migrants. More specifically, the top countries of origin of new asylum-seekers in Cyprus through September 2022 were: Syria, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Somalia, Cameroon, India, Nepal, as well as Ukraine. (Gravani, Hatzopoulos, & Chinas, 2021). Almost half of the 3000 asylum applicants were from Syria (Gravani, Hatzopoulos, & Chinas, 2021)

2. Factors affecting the psychological wellbeing of migrant/refugee population

There are several factors that affect the psychological wellbeing of migrant and refugee populations. Based on a field observational study which was conducted in a refugees' camp in Cyprus, researchers observed a higher level of self-blame among migrants and refugees who were rescued when part of their families was left behind. As a result, an immediate danger and intense emotions (e.g., anger) were born, developing beliefs that Cyprus has nothing to offer to them, when at the same time feeling "trapped" in an island increased those feelings (CODECA, 2022; BPtK, 2021).

In some of the key literature and policy papers concerning refugees in Cyprus, such as the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2014–2020 (Directorate General for European Programmes, Coordination and Development (DGEPCD), n.d.), the Education and Training Monitor: Cyprus, and the policy paper on the integration of students with migrant background to the Cyprus Educational System (Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC), 2016), there is a striking absence of any substantial reference to adult migrants or to the notion of multiculturalism, intercultural education, or the integration of non-native adult learners, which are in the leading factors that affect the psychological wellbeing.

Furthermore, an analysis of the Cypriot social integration strategy and reception conditions for migrants shows that there are some considerable constraints in relation to the official policies, which reduce the likelihood of setting the foundations for the creation of an intercultural country (CODECA, 2022). As a result, the mental health of migrants and refugees is affected since the sense of security is low. In addition to that, the process to access the labour market is not straightforward for migrants in Cyprus. Applicants and beneficiaries of international protection, non-EU nationals and EU nationals, enter the labour market with different procedures (CODECA, 2022) which are more complicated and limited.

It has also become evident that there are no formal governmental strategies or mechanisms in place to promote social integration. When it comes to accessing services and becoming self-oriented, newly arrived migrant groups usually face problems which in time minimize their chance of meaningful interaction with their host societies (CODECA, 2022; Country Report Cyprus: Asylum Information Database., 2021).

3. Mental health difficulties

Unfortunately, in Cyprus, there are no official data from epidemiological studies available regarding the prevalence of mental disorders amongst refugees, but expert experience suggests a high demand for services among this population. (BPtK, 2021)

There are main cultural differences concerning mental health difficulties. Specifically, applicants and beneficiaries of international protection, as well as non-EU nationals (low skilled workers), are facing important hindrances and restrictions compared to other migrant groups (EU nationals and highly skilled migrant workers). It can be argued that, this results in these groups not developing a feeling of belonging. There are certain gaps and omissions that prevent active participation in the society, thus increasing the likelihood of the phenomenon of social exclusion and isolation. (CODECA, 2022)

4. Mental health services

The public mental health sector under the supervision of the Central Mental Health directory of the Ministry of Health is responsible for providing the therapeutic care of refugees in Cyprus. (BPtK, 2021) Currently, there is only one institution offering specialized psychological support to victims of abuse, torture and trauma. The Future Worlds Center operates these support programs through funds of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for the Victims of Torture (Country Report Cyprus: Asylum Information Database., 2021). Residents of the Kofinou Center, the main reference center for newly arrived migrants and refugees, receive psychological and sociological counseling once per month.

There is a provision for part of the budget of each Ministry, including the Ministry of Health, for emergencies, which may bear the cost for the mental health care of refugees. Also, the European Coordination Section of the Ministry of Health has received funds from the European Union for the care of asylum-seekers/refugees. The burden falls for the government to fund it via its health care plans. (BPtK, 2021)

5. Legislation regarding the use of mental health services

Currently, there is only one NGO, the Cyprus Refugee Council, offering specialized social and psychological support to victims of torture and gender-based violence, operating through the funds of United Nations Voluntary Fund for the Victims of Torture (UNVFVT) and the EU. During 2021, 118 persons received relevant services. (Country Report Cyprus: Asylum Information Database., 2021)

The legal framework that has been set-up to regulate migrant flows dates from the British Colonial era: Law 13 of 1952, covering aspects of their residence, such as entry, stay and departure. The main laws that regulate the residence of migrants and refugees in Greek Cypriot territory, following European and international standards, define education as one of the basic rights of these populations (Gravani, Hatzopoulos, & Chinas, 2021). The national legal framework for refugees provides restricted benefits

during the first 15 months of their sojourn in Germany, as regulated in §§ 4 and 6 of AsylbLG (Asylum Seekers Benefits Act).

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