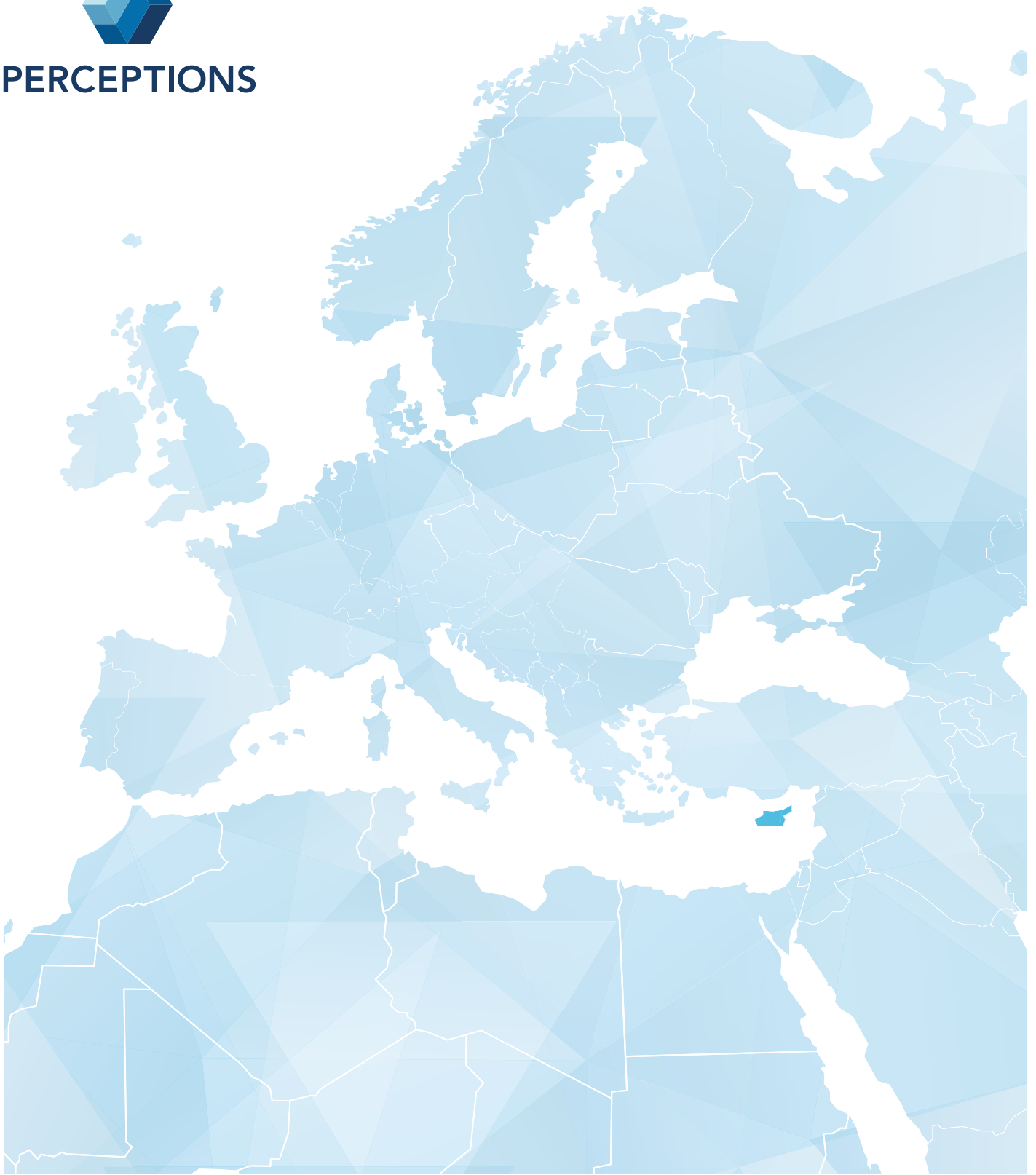




PERCEPTIONS



Cyprus

PERCEPTIONS
Country Report

PERCEPTIONS RESEARCH:

Literature, studies, projects, stakeholders, solutions, tools and practices

DISCLAIMER:

Disclaimer: This report is based on desk-research conducted between 2019 and 2022 and covers major development between the period of 2015-2019. For more updated information on the country profile, please check the additional institutional links at the end of the document.



This project has received funding from the European Union's H2020 Research & Innovation Programme under Grant Agreement No 833870.

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a) Geographical map

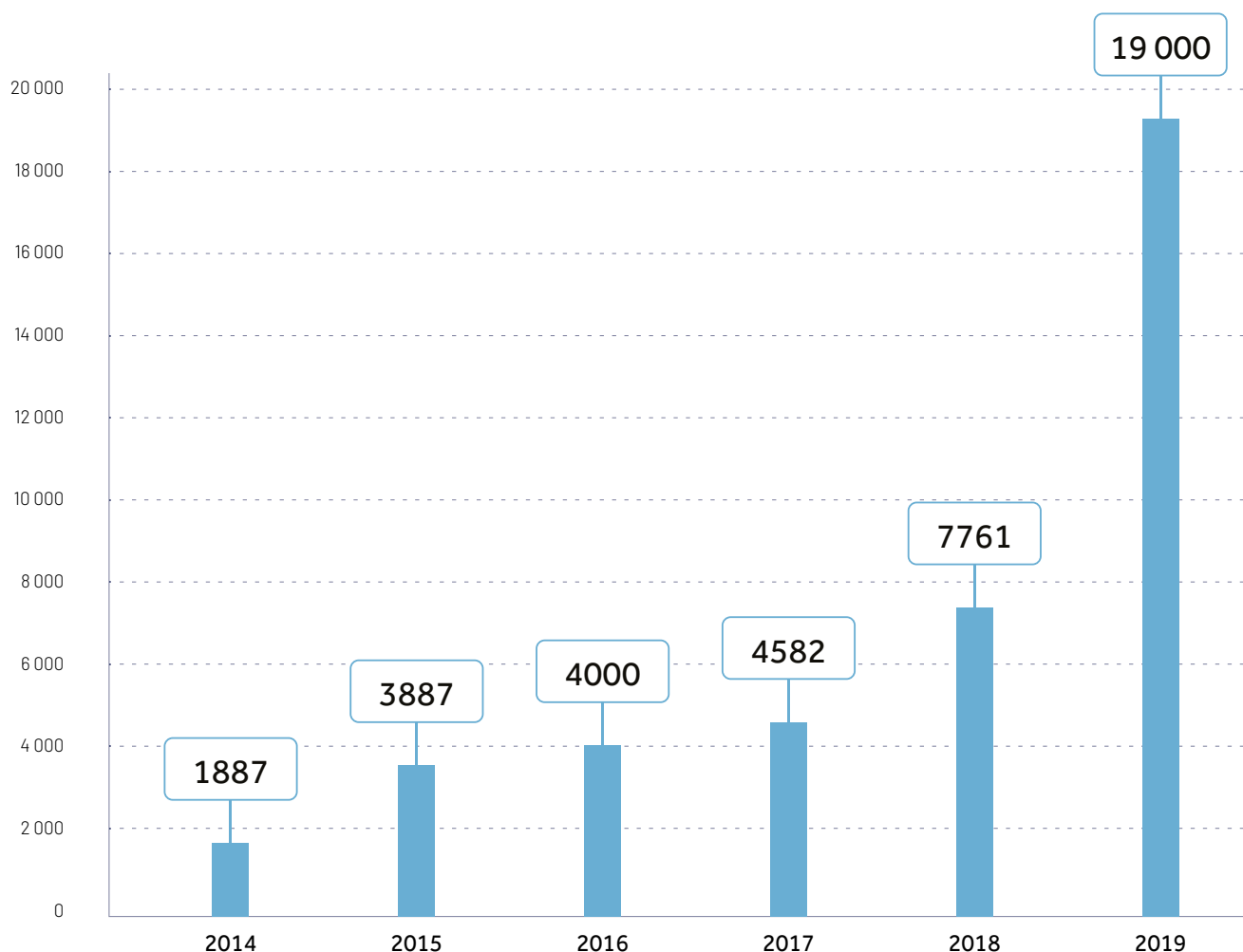


b) Short summary

Within the Government of the Republic, border control is the responsibility of the Aliens and Immigration Unit of the Cyprus Police. So far, the Kofinou Reception Center remains the only Government-operated reception center but has been used at maximum capacity in the past two years.- This has resulted in high levels of urban displacement and homelessness faced by newly arrived and even established migrants in Cyprus. Regarding integration, the UNHCR and other NGOs have pushed the Cypriot authorities to establish an action plan that is yet to be implemented. Between the years 2003-2007, Cyprus received asylum seekers from Bangladesh, Pakistan, Ukraine, and Iran due to civil wars and conflicts in these areas, marking the first initial rise in asylum claims in Cyprus. Though there are underlying seeds of xenophobia and racism, these have mostly not yet come to fruition. The rise in the numbers of asylum seekers has captured the attention of the Cypriot local population nationally, this has resulted in local community interest in supporting the newly arrived (UNHCR, 2018b). In March of 2020, the Council of Ministers announced some measures intended to help manage the growing numbers of asylum seekers in Cyprus.

c) Facts & figures

Number of asylum applicants in Cyprus from 2014 to 2019



c) Full document

Institutional setting

The Republic of Cyprus is a Presidential republic located in the eastern Mediterranean and is the third largest island following the Italian islands of Sicily and Sardinia. Following the end of British colonial rule, Cyprus gained its independence on the 16th of August of 1960. Intercommunal tensions between the majority Greek Cypriots and the minority Turkish Cypriots characterized the years following independence. Despite the deployment and continued presence of a UN peacekeeping force, Turkey left the island tragically divided after a military intervention in 1974 that displaced over one-third of the island's entire population. Since then, a substantial number of Turkish troops remain on the island, which became part of the European Union in 2004. The southern part of Cyprus is under the control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus. While the northern part is administered by Turkish Cypriots, it is not recognized by any country other than Turkey and the EU's rules and regulations, the 'acquis communautaire', remains suspended there (CIA World Fact Book, 2020). Trade and crossings over the "Green Line" that separate the two sides have been possible since 2003; many asylum seekers enter the Republic irregularly after arriving somewhere north of the "Green Line".

Within the Government of the Republic, border control is the responsibility of the Aliens and Immigration Unit of the Cyprus Police. It conducts necessary checks on foreigners as provided by the Aliens and Immigration Law, provides for the security of the Republic of Cyprus, primarily at the entry and exit points of the Republic (airports and seaports). Issues relating to immigration and international protection are managed by the Civil Registry and Migration Department of the Ministry of Interior (CRMD). The Asylum Service of the Ministry of Interior was established in 2004 and "coordinates and supervises the operation and management of reception and accommodation centres for applicants of international protection and their families according to the Refugee Law" (Asylum Service Republic of Cyprus, n.d.). So far, the Kofinou Reception Center remains the only Government-operated reception center but has

been used at maximum capacity in the past two years.- This has resulted in high levels of urban displacement and homelessness faced by newly arrived and even established migrants in Cyprus (UNHCR, 2018a). In response to the increase in the number of asylum applicants and the pressure to improve the haphazard reception process, a First Registration Reception Centre was opened in Kokkinotrimithia in 2019, intended to better manage the large number of arrivals by concentrating the registration and medical procedures required for an asylum application. While this centre improved some aspects of reception, most asylum seekers leave without adequate information or access to accommodation and services. As a result of this limited governmental support, civil society organisations have been offering humanitarian, legal and social support. They also provide integration services, conduct research and raise awareness on issues affecting migrants and refugees.

Regarding integration, the UNHCR and other NGOs have pushed the Cypriot authorities to establish an action plan that is yet to be implemented. As such, the integration of migrants is done with little to no preparation of both the newly arrived and the local communities. This, coupled with the linguistic communication barriers several newly arrived migrants face (many of which are from francophone and Arabic speaking countries of origin) creates additional threats and challenges for migrant integration (UNHCR, 2018a).

Short migration overview

Cyprus has an extensive history of migration and forced displacement, having experienced two waves of migration in its recent history. The first wave was linked to large-scale emigration of Cypriots abroad in the early twentieth century in search of better standards of living. In addition, between 1960 and 1975, especially following the Turkish invasion of the island in 1974, Cypriots emigrated to countries such as the UK, the United States and Australia. However, in the 1990s, due to improved economic circumstances, this trend

has been reversed and Cyprus employs many EU and third-country nationals. It also imports labour to work in sectors of the economy where there are labour shortages, for example in homes and on farms.

Between the years 2003-2007 Cyprus received asylum seekers from Bangladesh, Pakistan, Ukraine, and Iran due to civil wars and conflicts in these areas, marking the first initial rise in asylum claims in Cyprus. The accession of Cyprus to the European Union in 2004 also contributed to the increase in the number of EU citizens migrating to Cyprus for work and improved living conditions. Greece especially has a strong connection to Cyprus due to the cultural, linguistic and religious commonalities between the two countries. The 2011 financial crisis and the resulting economic downturn, however, resulted in outflows from Cyprus; illustratively, in 2015, Cyprus experienced the highest rate of emigration in the EU.

Key development since 2015

During the so-called refugee 'crisis' of 2014, 1.887 new asylum applications were submitted and over 2.000 new applications were filed in 2015. The demographic composition of Cyprus has changed because of incoming migration flows with over 12% of the resident population originating from other EU countries and 7% from third countries (Crepaldi & Pepe, 2019). Over the past years, Cyprus has also witnessed a consistent rise in the number of people seeking refuge and/or asylum. In 2018, the numbers of asylum applicants almost doubled from 4.582 in 2017 to 7.761 by the end of 2018 (Droussiotou & Mathioudakis, 2019). In 2019, the numbers of first-time asylum applicants seemed for double for the third year in a row to around 19.000 applicants, of which 12.258 were first time applicants (Droussiotou & Mathioudakis, 2019). In a population of approximately 1 million, this keeps Cyprus in the position of being the country with the highest number of asylum applications per capita in Europe (Droussiotou & Mathioudakis, 2019). The flows arriving in Cyprus and the rise in the numbers can be attributed to various factors such as the ongoing conflict in Syria and the lack of routes to get to mainland EU. However, it should be noted that in 2019, Syrian nationals constituted only 25% of all asylum applicants. In 2019, other

important countries of origin of asylum applicants included Georgia, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Cameroon (Droussiotou & Mathioudakis, 2019). Another important factor is the lack of a comprehensive migration policy and lack of access to long-term solutions for many migrants in Cyprus. Close to 50% of asylum applications are submitted by persons who have already been in the country on student and work visas. Furthermore, the increase in flows from West African countries, due to ongoing conflicts, poverty and trafficking have also contributed to the rise in the number of applicants but also the of vulnerable cases especially survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. Overall the Cypriot community has had a mixed response to the increase of asylum seekers in Cyprus.

Though there are underlying seeds of xenophobia and racism, these have mostly not yet come to fruition. The rise in the numbers of asylum seekers has captured the attention of the Cypriot local population nationally, this has resulted in local community interest in supporting the newly arrived (UNHCR, 2018b). In March of 2020, the Council of Ministers announced some measures intended to help manage the growing numbers of asylum seekers in Cyprus. Some features of the announced plans include shortening the review period of asylum applications and shortening the time allotted for appeal before the court. The implementation of many of these measures is still pending largely due to the Covid-19 crisis (Droussiotou & Mathioudakis, 2019).

For more information, see:

IOM Cyprus:

<https://cyprus.iom.int/>

Ministry of Foreign Affairs Cyprus:

<https://mfa.gov.cy/>

Interior Affairs Cyprus:

<http://www.cyprus.gov.cy/portal/>



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