

Migrant Centers Full at year-end in 2021 while Covid 19 pandemic persists, and irregular arrivals continue

According to CODECA NGO providing services at First Registration Reception Center Pournara in Kokkinotrimithia, Cyprus, a total of 12,305 first arrivals have been registered in 2021 (January–December), which is 57% increase from the total reported in 2019 and 362% from the total reported in 2017.

On 31 December 2021, the Asylum Service counted a total number of 2,185 migrants and refugees accommodated at this center - a figure almost 3 times the center's capacity with hardly a possibility to keep quarantine and isolation spaces separate from the rest of the camp population – and 307 residents at Kofinou Reception and Accommodation Center. Furthermore, according to the Minister of Interior quoted in an interview at the Cyprus News Agency on 22 December, the Government of the Republic of Cyprus 'had to move yesterday (21/12) 585 persons who were Covid -19 contacts of positive cases to the Limnes Reception Center for International Protection'. The decision was made to overcome, he explained, problems of overpopulation at the First Registration Centre Pournara, health related problems and infrastructure problems. As this was an emergency measure, the registration of those persons is therefore ongoing. According to Codeca NGO previously in November there were more transfers of rejected asylum seekers to Limnes who bring the current residents in Limnes to 633. Only 3 persons out of that total are rejected asylum seekers. Finally at the end of the year 44 unaccompanied minors resided at IOM semi-independent housing, out of which 32 had at least their first vaccination. The main routes of arrivals to Cyprus continued in 2021 to be the northern part of Cyprus by land (10,583) and from Turkey, Syria, Lebanon by sea (1,727). According to the Police Aliens and Immigration Unit only 721 of those arriving by boat were landed sea arrivals in the Republic of Cyprus. As regards boat arrivals recorded in 2021 to arrive in the Republic of Cyprus by sea an increase of 76% compared to those recorded in 2019 by the same Police unit.

Nationality composition consisted of 26% of total residents in First arrival center nationals of the Democratic Republic of Congo, 19% from Nigeria, 12% from the Syrian Arab Republic, followed by Somalia (10%), Pakistan (9%), Cameroon (6%), and others (18%). Most were adult males (74.7%), some were adult females (17%) and the remaining 1019 were children (8.3%). From 8.3% of children, 5.7% were boys and 2.6% were girls. Unaccompanied children for 2021 were 659 in total. 542 (4.4%) were boys and 117 (1%) were girls. At the end of the year a circa 300 unaccompanied minor children were still in Pournara camp divided in two safe zones, one for boys and one for girls and single mothers.

IOM collects data from the Government of the Republic of Cyprus and CODECA NGO. [Read More](#)

AVRR Information Session at Kofinou Reception and Accommodation Center for Applicants of International Protection November in 2021

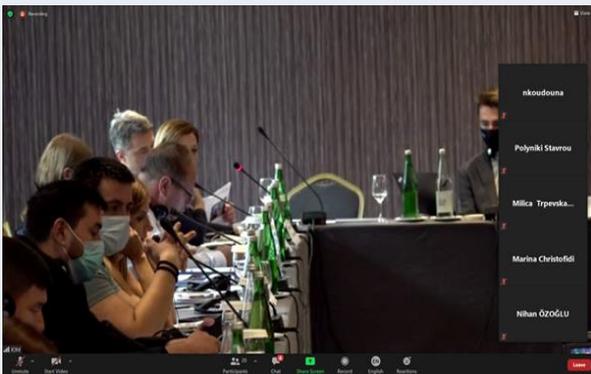


On 24th November, IOM staff members held an AVRR information provision session at Kofinou Reception and Accommodation Center for Applicants for International Protection, aiming at providing accurate and updated information to the staff regarding the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration programme. IOM Cyprus AVRR team was kindly welcomed by the staff working at the Centre.

After the presentation, IOM staff members had the chance to exchange views and answer questions about several aspects of the programme as well as in relation to the current situation at the Centre and the needs of the residents.

IOM continues to work with local and international stakeholders to safeguard the protection of migrants and access to information and services. The AVRR program is co-funded by the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund and the Republic of Cyprus.

Regional Conference on Alternatives to Immigration Detention in the Western Balkans



IOM - the UN Migration Agency organized on the 15th and 16th of September 2021, the first Regional Conference on Alternatives to Immigration Detention in the Western Balkans under the auspices of the regional IPA II project "Regional Support to Protection Sensitive Migration Management in the Western Balkans and Turkey - Phase II", funded by the EU and jointly implemented by IOM, Frontex, UNHCR and EASO in Belgrade, Serbia.

The Regional Conference aimed to elevate discussions on immigration detention and alternatives to the regional level in the Western Balkans and enable the exchange of knowledge with relevant national and international experts.

The IOM Cyprus Head of Office, IOM Project assistant and Ms Poliniki Stavrou, from the Social Welfare Services of the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare in Cyprus, presented an alternative care model and the arrangements for unaccompanied migrant children, giving the example of the current practices in Cyprus of the "Semi-Independent Living" programme. IOM Greece also spoke about the IOM run voluntary return centre.

IOM highlighted Human Rights in the Field of Returns at Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund Committee and the EMN annual conference

As part of the Sixth Meeting of the Monitoring Committee for the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund, which was held on Tuesday, 30 November 2021, IOM Cyprus was invited to highlight the Assisted Voluntary Returns (AVR) and Reintegration Programme. The presentation was delivered by the Head of Office, who referred to the results of the programme.

Ms. Xenophontos Koudouna mentioned that over 1000 migrants were helped by AVRR programme until today, to return to more than 20 countries of origin including families and vulnerable migrants, such as migrants with health issues and unaccompanied children. The main countries of origin of the beneficiaries who have returned were Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Iraq, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Cameroon, Nigeria, Egypt. IOM remains ready to assist the government of Cyprus to implement AVR, in safety and with dignity.

IOM Cyprus HoO further participated in a panel at the EMN Cyprus annual conference entitled 'Human Rights in the Field of Returns', organized on 17th December 2021. The conference aimed to emphasize the topic of returns, which has been set as a priority for the 2021 migration policy, under the spectrum of human rights. At the conference, the contribution of professionals, representatives of the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), covered the topic of returns in compliance with the human rights' doctrine from an international point of view.

IOM Cyprus' Head of Office participated in the second part which focused on the local level. She reminded that the Global Compact for Migration, adopted by the majority of UN is consistent with target 10.7 of the SDGs for a safe, orderly and regular migration, the importance of the rights-based approach, the revamped IOM Return, Readmission and Reintegration (RRR) strategy, the sustainability of returns through the reintegration component and best interest determination when returning UMCs.

International Migrants Day 18 December 2021

UN Secretary-General Mr. António Guterres in his message on this year's International Migrants Day, he pointed out that we recognize the contributions of migrants across the world in the face of many struggles including the COVID-19 pandemic. Migrants continue to face widespread stigmatization, inequalities, xenophobia, and racism. It is an opportunity to advance efforts to ensure the full inclusion of migrants as we seek to build more resilient, just, and sustainable societies by managing borders humanely, fully respecting the human rights and humanitarian needs of everyone and, ensuring that migrants are included in national COVID-19 vaccination plans. This means recognizing the value of pathways for regular entry for both migrants and host countries. It also means addressing the underlying drivers behind migration, including deep inequalities, and combatting human smuggling and trafficking in people.

In addition, the SG said that on this International Migrants Day, let us reaffirm our commitment to safe and dignified migration.



Finally, IOM Director General Mr. António Vitorino is calling for collective efforts and commitment to create policies that maximize the potential of migration, "We must renew our commitment to establishing and reinforcing legal, humane channels for migration that balance and protect both national sovereignty and the human rights of people on the move."

Approximately 281 million people were international migrants in 2020, representing 3.6 percent of the global population.



On International Migrants' Day, IOM's Cyprus office HoO was a guest speaker on a news show on Sigma TV station and spoke about this year's International Migrant Day theme, 'Harnessing the potential of human mobility'. Ms. Xenophontos Koudouna pointed out that Migrants contribute with their knowledge, networks, and skills to build stronger and more resilient communities among others through social security contributions to pensions, and therefore their integration is of great importance including their role in the labor force. She highlighted IOM's cooperation with Hope for Children in helping unaccompanied migrant children's access to services.

Acknowledgments

- On the occasion of Christmas, the local cultural association in the district of Limassol, Palmos, donated clothing items to the Unaccompanied Migrant Children, hosted in the Semi-Independent Living Facilities. This is a great example that local communities support unaccompanied migrant minors in Cyprus.

- After the call from IOM's Cyprus office HoO Ms. Xenophontos Koudouna to donate clothing to the children of the program during a radio Politis program, the response from the audience was exceptional. Many people offered various items for the benefit of the beneficiaries of the program, including Gnomi Integrated Communications agency, which offered clothing items to the Unaccompanied Migrant Children, hosted in the Semi-Independent Living Facilities.