



SOMRA

Intellectual Output 1

Executive Summary

Cyprus



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein. Project Number: 2020-1-UK01-KA204-079165

The SOMRA project – Supporting meaningful Occupations for Migrants, Refugees, and Asylum seekers – offers an innovative approach to tackling climate change and refugee crises, by engaging refugees, asylum seekers and migrants (MRAs) in meaningful occupations that transform them into environment role models with a sustainable impact in their new and previous home.

To achieve this, the SOMRA project will facilitate:



Findings for the holistic study report were collected via desk and in-field research – interviews with MRA groups, professionals working with MRAs and NGO (non-governmental organisations) representatives.

NGOs in Cyprus

According to the 2018 annual report of the Office of the Commissioner for Volunteerism and Non-Governmental Organisations, there were about 6,300 registered unions and clubs. However, this does not reflect the size of organised civil society in Cyprus, since most of these organisations have been inactive. According to the latest data from the Ministry of Interior, about 2000 associations and clubs have been deleted. Therefore, an estimation of the current number of associations today is around 4,000. In 2017, the Cyprus parliament adopted new legislation on the registration and functioning of associations and foundations. Detailed description of the procedure and all necessary documents to set up an NGO in Cyprus can be found [at https://ngo-sc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/BOOKLET-Associations-Law-Apr2018-ENG.pdf](https://ngo-sc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/BOOKLET-Associations-Law-Apr2018-ENG.pdf).

There are various NGOs in the environmental sector and NGOs that are offering support to MRAs based on their needs. The main NGO network in Cyprus is the Pancyprian Volunteerism Coordinative Council (<http://www.volunteerism-cc.org.cy/Default.aspx>). It was created based on the need for coordination amongst the voluntary organisations, development of policy for the voluntary sector social policy consultation with the voluntary sector, and cooperation with governmental authorities.

Supporting structures in Cyprus:

<p>The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)</p> <p>Safeguards the rights and well-being of refugees all over the world.</p>	<p>International Organization for Migration (IOM)</p> <p>Supports the government of Cyprus through the implementation of the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme.</p>	<p>The Cyprus Refugee Council (CyRC)</p> <p>Safeguards, supports and advocates for the rights of vulnerable groups in Cyprus, promoting their effective integration into the host society.</p>
<p>The Asylum Service of the Ministry of Interior</p> <p>As the competent authority, it receives and examines asylum applications.</p>	<p>Civil Registry and Migration Department (CRMD)</p> <p>The main mission of the CRMD is citizens' service for all matters falling into its competencies.</p>	<p>HelpRefugeesWork</p> <p>An online platform that brings motivated job-seeking refugees into contact with employers and training providers in Cyprus.</p>
<p>KISA</p> <p>NGO focused on the fields of Migration, Asylum, Racism, Discrimination and Trafficking, and it includes awareness-raising of the Cypriot society.</p>		

Main environmental NGOs in Cyprus:

Name	Mission
<p>Federation of Environmental Organisations of Cyprus (FEO)</p>	<p>FEO is a network of 20 Non-Governmental Organisations in Cyprus that are active in the areas of the environment, health and culture. One of the main activities of the FEO is informing, sensitising and mobilising the citizens in matters of the environment and sustainable development.</p>
<p>Terra Cypria—the Cyprus Conservation Foundation</p>	<p>Its overall aim is to promote environmental awareness and sustainability through pressure and environmental education, as well as through programs that promote conservation, environmental protection and research.</p>
<p>BirdLife Cyprus</p>	<p>BirdLife Cyprus works to protect wild birds, their habitats and wider biodiversity in Cyprus, through research, monitoring, lobbying and conservation and awareness-raising actions.</p>
<p>Friends of Akamas</p>	<p>Its original purpose was to promote the establishment of a National Park in the area of Akamas, at the Northwest corner of the island. The organisation expanded its scope to include other environmental and cultural matters and has played an active role in matters such as water management, renewable energy, protection of archeological sites, and more.</p>
<p>Friends of the Earth Cyprus</p>	<p>The goal of Friends of the Earth is to raise awareness on the importance of preserving the natural environment and to campaign for solutions to environmental and social problems by promoting sustainable policies.</p>
<p>Enalia Physis Environmental Research Center</p>	<p>Its purpose is to conduct and promote environmental research in marine, freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems.</p>
<p>The Cyprus Centre of Environmental Research and Education (CYCERE)</p>	<p>CYCERE aims to contribute in environmental conservation by adopting and promoting strategies in environmental education, environmental research and information.</p>

Let's Make Cyprus Green	Let's Make Cyprus Green is dedicated to raising public awareness of the negative impact on our environment caused by human activities – especially excessive waste and the wider problems caused by plastic consumption.
Ecological Movement Cyprus	The Ecological Movement of Cyprus is an environmental NGO founded in 1989. It focuses on environment, ecology and culture.

Main NGOs working with MRAs in Cyprus:

Name	Mission
Caritas Cyprus	The work of Caritas Cyprus is done through local parish initiatives as well as cross-island programs that focus on migrants, local needs, and youth engagement.
KISA	KISA's action is focused on the fields of Migration, Asylum, Racism, Discrimination and Trafficking, and it includes awareness-raising of the Cypriot society as well as lobbying in order to influence the legal and structural framework, the policies and practices in these fields.
Cyprus Refugee Council	The Cyprus Refugee Council focuses exclusively on issues related to refugees and asylum seekers as well as other inter-related issues. The independent entity with the name 'Cyprus Refugee Council' is the first NGO in Cyprus to focus primarily on refugees.
Wellspring Association	Wellspring Association offers individual support for survivors of human trafficking, asylum seekers, refugees and women from otherwise vulnerable backgrounds.
Cyprus Stop Trafficking	Cyprus Stop Human Trafficking is an NGO that provides aid and assistance victims of human trafficking.
Association of Recognized Refugees	The Association of Recognized Refugees aims to identify refugees in Cyprus and provide a platform in which they can practice their skills and also be a useful person in the Cypriot society.
Hope for Children	Hope for Children works on humanitarian and development policy relevant to the defense and promotion of children's rights.
Nicosia Municipality Multifunctional Foundation (Polidinamo)	Nicosia Municipality Multifunctional Foundation supports vulnerable population groups such as immigrants, children, and elderly people, and provides counselling services, psychological support and guidance to individuals and families. It also collaborates with public and other services, local committees, voluntary and charitable organisations and persons, having similar aims with those of the foundation.
Mi-HUB Migrant Information Centers	Mi-HUB are Migrant Information Centers which help vulnerable migrants, including asylum-seekers and refugees, across Cyprus feel protected, safe, informed and supported so that they are able to move forward with their lives.
Kofinou We Care – Volunteers' Support	Kofinou We Care - Volunteers' Support is a platform created to coordinate volunteers from all over the island, independent volunteers and NGOs, who want to help and support the residents of Kofinou Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers and Refugees.
OASIS	OASIS is a voluntary community group in Larnaca that supports refugees and asylum-seekers in Cyprus. They offer Greek language and English language classes for free, as well as food baskets on Mondays. In addition, they have a Social Café meeting every Wednesday morning.

Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers (MRAs) - Definitions

A person seeking asylum; is who flees their home, arrives in another country, whichever way they can, makes themselves known to the authorities, and submits an asylum application, has a legal right to stay in the country while waiting for a decision.

A refugee: has proven that they would be at risk if returned to their home country, has had their claim for asylum accepted by the government, has permission to stay in the UK either long term or indefinitely.

According to Eurostat, Cyprus exhibited the second largest rate for emigration relative to the size of the country population in 2019, with a number of 20 emigrants per 1,000 people. In 2018, the population from the 28 EU Member States (excluding Cypriots) amounted to 114,536, accounting for 13.2% of the country's population. At the same time, the citizens coming from third countries (outside the EU), reached 34,632, occupying 4% of the total population of Cyprus.

Barriers for MRAs to set up an NGO

MRAs in Cyprus have to adapt to the host country and also face various challenges and barriers. A few examples of the needs and gaps in Cyprus are the following:



Employment process. The jobs that are available to MRAs depend on their status. For example, asylum seekers face more challenges when it comes to the jobs that are available to them since they can only work in specific categories. Even when migrants apply for a job, the process cannot go further since employers require the yellow slip, which they might not have obtained yet. Having support to get a job would subsequently help them receive the yellow slip and insurance number.

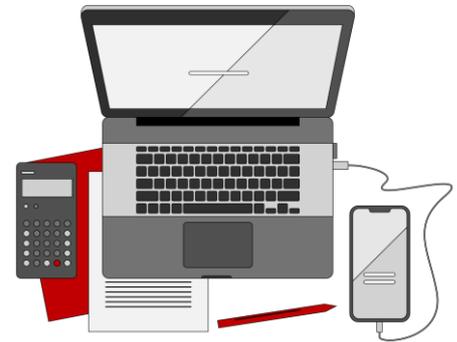
Welfare and material reception conditions. The opportunities, needs, and challenges of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers can differ significantly based on their status. Although migrants receive assistance through various allowance schemes that cover food and housing, the material reception conditions need to improve. Better material reception conditions would help individuals have a “decent life” and not worry about “making ends meet”.





The narrative around migration and refugee crisis. The challenges are not limited only to survival, welfare, and job opportunities. A serious challenge is how the broader community thinks of and behaves towards migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. The majority of people in the host country do not see MRAs as equals and people who have rights. Changing the mindset of people when it comes to migration and the refugee crisis and making people see MRAs as people who have their value needs to be stressed further.

Joining an NGO in Cyprus. The option of creating or joining an NGO as an employee is not equal across migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. It depends on the status of the individual and whether they have the right to freedom of association. People who are recognised as refugees or have subsidiary protection have the same rights as Cypriot citizens. Therefore, they can volunteer or join an NGO following the usual procedure as the Cypriot citizens do. Interested individuals should visit the website of the NGO that they wish to be a member and they can submit their application form.



Volunteering. When it comes to volunteering, fewer barriers are present compared to joining an NGO as a director or employee. Not many or strict criteria exist regarding volunteering. The most frequent requirements include: willingness to learn and work as part of a team, high degree of professionalism and the ability to follow instructions, respect and diligence, good time management, and a personable manner.

Right to work

The criteria and procedure for granting work permits to third-country nationals were established in 1991. An essential precondition in employing foreign workers is that the employer must prove that he/she was unable to fill the important position with a Cypriot or a European citizen. The criteria for employing third-country nationals according to the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance, are:

- Non-availability of suitably qualified local personnel to satisfy the specific needs of the employer.
- Saving and better use of the local labour force.
- The provision of specific expertise.
- The terms and conditions of employment of foreigners should be the same as those for Cypriots.
- Where the hiring of a third-country national who has special skills and knowledge that cannot be found in the native workforce is a better fit, the employer must nominate a Cypriot who will be trained during the period of the foreigner's employment.

Asylum seekers. Asylum Seekers have access to the labour market one month after the date of the submission of their application for international protection in specific sectors and occupations according to the relevant Decree of the Minister of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance as follows: Other than the Collective Agreement of Agriculture and Animal Farming, which regulates salaries at €455 (gross) per month, the listed occupations are not regulated. Accommodation and food may be provided by the employer. The salary may increase up to €769 per month if the employee is considered to be skilled for the position, or if there is a specific agreement with a trade union.

Refugees. Section 21B of the Cyprus Refugee Law provides that the person who is recognised as a refugee receives equal treatment as the citizens of the Republic as regards wage-earning employment. In other words, refugees have the same rights as Cypriot citizens to employment; hence there are no restrictions to any particular sector, and there is no need for the Labor Department to approve and stamp a contract of employment between an employer and a recognised refugee.

Persons with Subsidiary Protection Status. According to the amendment to Article 19 of the Refugee Law, beneficiaries of subsidiary protection have, as in the case of recognised refugees, immediate access to employment upon the date they are granted the aforesaid status. In particular there are no restrictions regarding their employment in particular sectors or occupations of the labour market. Also, the Labor Department does not need to approve and stamp a contract of employment between an employer and a person with subsidiary protection status.

Conclusion

Cyprus exhibits a high emigration rate in proportion to its population. Various bodies and NGOs offer significant support to MRAs, from food to advocacy. As the interviews have shown, various needs and gaps exist in Cyprus that need to be addressed. More actions are necessary to address the barriers and gaps that MRAs face for the welfare of MRAs and their integration in the local community.

Although, most needs and gaps may be similar between countries, there are also some differences. In addition, different individuals, or groups of individuals of MRAs will have different needs depending on their situation. Some of the main gaps and needs include successful integration into the society, racism from the community, language, lack in monetary aid and others.

Asylum seekers need more support and resources dedicated to them. This is the group that is the most restricted; not being able to work, being strictly monitored, low monetary aids can affect their mental, physical, and social well-being. Often the asylum process can take years which means that they cannot fully feel like they are part of the society, as well as the uncertainty of their application for asylum.

One thing everyone can do is volunteer. Either by being part of local community activities or a bigger organisation. As well as aiding integration into the community, volunteering allows people to gain new skills and increase their confidence. In many cases, confidence is what people need to get started. There

are many organisations that take up volunteers in the environmental, animal and working with elderly and youth sectors.

A major issue is the lack of information about how migrants can get involved in voluntary work for NGOs. Language barriers is one of the main factors. Migrants, refugees, or asylum seekers who want to get involved with an NGOs need to actively ask NGOs how they could get involved. This is because NGOs often do not specifically search for migrant volunteers but are happy when they want to get involved as they are a great asset to NGOs.

