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UPR Pre-session 46 - Draft Statement

State under review: Republic of Cyprus (RoC), Fourth Cycle (covering periods between 2019 and 2023)

Human Rights Platform is a consortium of rights-based civil society organizations (CSOs) in Cyprus, working on various human rights areas. The Platform was established in 2021 by five leading organizations in Cyprus, with the primary aim to conduct monitoring and reporting of human rights violations.

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Asylum Seekers and Refugees

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).

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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.

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Current challenges

- Push-backs of boats at the sea and at the Green Line continued since 2020. Asylum seekers are stranded in the buffer zone, waiting in tents for months, with no access to their basic rights such as asylum, health, accommodation and education. Additionally, they face the risk of returning to the areas that are not under the effective control of the Republic of Cyprus (RoC), where they will be detained, brought before the court, imprisoned and deported to their countries or origin.

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- Most recently, an asylum seeker of Kurdish origin was trapped in the buffer zone for around 10 months. He has been living in a tent since December 2022 and even went on a hunger strike for a short period of time. The RoC authorities repeatedly denied his entry to the effectively controlled areas.

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- The unaccompanied minors may spend up to several months in reception centres, due to lack of capacity in the shelters.
- The majority of asylum seekers live in the community and are often extremely poor.
- Inadequate and delayed identification and responsiveness to the needs of individuals who are vulnerable to GBV, human trafficking, and torture.

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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.**



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Anti-Trafficking

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).

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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.

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Current challenges

- Most of the victims are recruited via the northern part of Cyprus, where loose and unfair migration policies and inadequate controls are present. When 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, and most recently the victims from Nigeria and Cameroon, since they have an outdated belief that the trafficking victims from the areas not effectively controlled by the RoC are merely from the Eastern European countries.



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- 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, which facilitates the police collaboration between the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. The Committee dealt with over 1000 cases since it was first established in 2009, but none of them were concerning human trafficking.
- When the authorities fail to identify the victims, they mostly apply to asylum, in order to regularize their stay in the RoC, although this is mostly not their legal status. With the increase in the number of asylum seekers throughout the past few years, the needs of the trafficking victims are never taken into account once they are within the pool of the high number of asylum seekers.

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Recommendations

- **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.**

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Conclusion

