

CYPRUS AND THE CHALLENGE OF RISING MIGRATION INFLOWS: CONTRIBUTING FACTORS AND IMPLICATIONS

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Introduction

This article focuses on the rise in migration inflows in the government controlled areas of the Republic of Cyprus that demonstrates the highest number of first-time applicants relative to the population among the EU's member-states. It examines the external factors that contribute to the rise in asylum seekers, such as Cyprus's close proximity to the centres of the migrations crisis, Turkey's hybrid warfare and the current EU migration arrangements. It also analyses the role of internal factors, such as resource restrictions and the limitations in the Cypriot asylum system that affect Cyprus's ability to react efficiently to this challenge. Finally, this article presents the economic and demographic implications caused by this development.

Globalization, the EU and migration

The ongoing globalization process seems to be highly associated with that of migration. As Castles points out¹ one of the most crucial dimensions of globalization is a rapid transformation and intensification in cross-border flows of both tangible and intangible assets, such as finance and trade, ideas and knowledge, cultural products and people. In this context, these forms of exchange between countries, regions and continents tend to not only reinforce each other, but also to increase interdependence. While factors such as international and domestic inequalities, population growth and violent conflicts have been identified as the drivers that escalate migration, there is also a wide consent, that globalization has facilitated migration in ever-bigger numbers among geographically distant areas.²

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¹ Stephen Castles, "Understanding global migration: A social transformation perspective," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, (2010), 1565-1586, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2010.489381>

² Mathias Czaika and Hein de Haas, "The globalization of migration: Has the world become more migratory?," *International Migration Review*, vol. 48, no. 2 (2015):283-323

Yet, as global migration patterns tend to become more complex, the influence of these globalization processes is not the same for all categories of migrants. In this context, projections indicate that the proportion of migrants' vis-à-vis the world population will continue to grow, stressing that a change between the rations of irregular and regular migration is expected due to factors such as climate change and the fourth industrial revolution.³

A number of consecutive immigration waves have turned Europe into a region of net immigration since the mid-20th century. The drivers of this development are numerous.⁴ In this context, European states have been interested in low and high skilled workers, offering migrants economic and social prospects to cope with their ageing population. Yet, developments that are more recent have increased the share of irregular and regular migration towards Europe. Since the 2015 migration crisis, the EU has come to be one of the most attractive destinations for migrants. This migrant pressure has followed three particular routes, with the key being the Eastern Mediterranean route, in which migrants from Syria cross from Turkey and enter the EU. The EU has taken measures to cope with this issue and has implemented a migrant deal with Turkey in 2016, reducing the number of irregular arrivals from this route.⁵

Turkey's hybrid warfare

Turkey, nevertheless, has been exploiting this humanitarian issue, as part of its hybrid warfare with the aim to produce controlled crises.⁶ According to the model of hybrid warfare, actors utilize their instruments of power against the adversary's perceived weaknesses in order to generate synergistic effects.⁷ In this context, it is argued that the utilization of hybrid warfare by states results to an increase in the strategic use of ambiguity to weaken the decision-making procedures of the rivals.⁸ This goes hand-in hand with the use of non-military means of state power, along with the use of force or the threat of force. Cyprus is particularly affected by Turkey's hybrid warfare and its attempt to exert

³ Khalid Koser, 2018, "International migration: A canary in the coalmine of globalisation, "The Graduate Institute Geneva, accessed October 29, 2020,

<https://globalchallenges.ch/issue/3/international-migration-a-canary-in-the-coalmine-of-globalisation/>

⁴ Migration Data Portal, 2020, "Migration data in Europe," accessed November 3 2020,

<https://migrationdataportal.org/regional-data-overview/europe>

⁵ European Council and Council of the European Union, 2020, "EU migration policy," accessed October 29, 2020, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/migratory-pressures/>

⁶ Paul Antonopoulos, 2020, "Former intelligence officer: Migration crisis against Greece was Turkish hybrid war," accessed October 29, 2020,

<https://greekcitytimes.com/2020/04/09/former-intelligence-officer-migration-crisis-against-greece-was-turkish-hybrid-war/>

⁷ Erik Reichborn-Kjennerud and Patric Cullen, 2016, "What is Hybrid Warfare", Policy Brief 1/2016, Norwegian

Institute of International Affairs, accessed October 27, 2020,

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep07978.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A078d65a705387c281fb3cfd9fb2db6cf>

⁸ Andrew Mumford and Jack McDonald, October 2014, "Ambiguous Warfare", Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre.

pressure via controlled crises. It has close proximity with Turkey whose troops continue to illegally occupy the northern territory of the island since 1974.

The factors that contribute to the rise in migration inflows in Cyprus

Close proximity to the centres of the migrations crisis

In population terms, Cyprus is the EU's third smallest member-state, after Luxembourg and Malta. This creates specific restrictions in terms of human and financial resources that limit Cyprus's ability to respond efficiently to contemporary challenges. The island is located in the Eastern Mediterranean and therefore has close proximity to the centres of the refugee crisis in the region, such as Lebanon and Syria. Table 1 demonstrates data on the total population in Cyprus since 2010 along with specific features regarding its composition.

Table 1: Total population in the government controlled areas of the Republic of Cyprus: Greek Cypriots vs other nationals 2010-2019

	Total population	Cypriots		Other nationals		Other	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
2010	819.140	625.636	76,4	188.472	23,0	5.032	0,6
2011	839.751	640.633	76,3	193.943	23,1	5.175	0,6
2012	862.011	655.664	76,0	200.313	23,2	6.034	0,7
2013	865.878	658.834	76,0	200.842	23,2	6.202	0,7
2014	858.000	660.435	77,0	191.587	22,3	5.978	0,7
2015	847.008	664.337	78,4	176.693	20,9	5.978	0,7
2016	848.319	669.460	79,0	172.808	20,3	6.051	0,7
2017	854.802	674.939	79,0	173.791	20,3	6.072	0,7
2018	864.236	677.092	78,3	181.369	21,1	5.775	0,6
2019	875.899	684.976	78,2	185.528	21,2	5.395	0,6

Source: Eurostat 2020

In particular, there has been a rise (6,9%) in the population of Cypriots since 2011 (an increase of 64.340). Yet, according to table 1 the percentage of non-Cypriots has been steadily over 20%. Other studies⁹ have demonstrated additional trends regarding the population of Cyprus that are attributed to the economic crisis: a constant decrease in birth rates and a continuously ageing population. In fact, compared with the EU average, Cyprus's total fertility rate was 1,4 in 2016 and 1,3 in 2018.¹⁰ These developments indicate that the Cypriot population is under pressure. This pressure is expected to be further increased in the following years, considering that Cyprus is located in an unstable region with neighboring countries who are much bigger in terms of population. Thus, further worsening on the demographic situation is likely to occur due to the protection offered by Cyprus to asylum seekers based on EU standards and laws.

Table 2 demonstrates data on the asylum applications that have been filed in Cyprus since 2002. It shows that a first significant rise in refugee arrivals was noted immediately prior and post the accession of Cyprus to the EU. This was accompanied by a second major rise in refugee arrivals since 2015, which continues to disproportionately affect Cyprus. According to Eurostat,¹¹ a sharp decline in asylum applications is evident in the rest of the EU member-states, especially since the second quarter of 2019, which can be associated with the COVID-19 emergency measures.

Yet, this was not the case with Cyprus, which demonstrated the highest number of first-time applicants relative to the population among the EU's member-states. In fact, during the second quarter of 2020 Cyprus demonstrated 989 first-time applicants per million population, followed by Slovenia and Greece that had 441 and 376 respectively. In contrast, Hungary, Poland and Estonia had the lowest rates of applicants in the EU per million population. A closer examination reveals that out of the 27 EU member-states, a mere 11 have over 1% share in the new asylum applicants in the second quarter of 2020.¹² Cyprus is the smallest of these countries in terms of population, which creates additional restrictions exacerbating the pressure exerted on its asylum system. The rising numbers of the pending cases verify that the Cypriot asylum system does not have the capacity and the structures to cope with this increased demand.

⁹ Andreas Theophanous and Alexia Sakadaki, "The economic crisis and the demographic challenges" (in Greek), Center for European and International Affairs, University of Nicosia, (October 2015), accessed October 21, 2020, https://cceia.unic.ac.cy/wp-content/uploads/Policy-Paper_6-2015.pdf

¹⁰ Statistical Service, 2018, "Demographic statistics," accessed October 21, 2020, [https://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/All/70008808DEA438F8C2257833003402FB/\\$file/Demographic_Statistics_Results-2018-EL-291119.pdf?OpenElement](https://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/All/70008808DEA438F8C2257833003402FB/$file/Demographic_Statistics_Results-2018-EL-291119.pdf?OpenElement)

¹¹ Eurostat, 2020, "First-time asylum applicants down by almost 70% in Q2 2020," accessed October 20, 2020, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20200922-1>

¹² Ibid

Table 2: Asylum applications in the government controlled areas of the Republic of Cyprus 2002-2019

Year	Total Applications	Rejections	Refugee Status	Supplementary Protection Status	Pending Cases
2002	952	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.
2003	4.407	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.
2004	9.872	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.
2005	7.746	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.
2006	4.545	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.
2007	6.789	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.
2008	3.922	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.	n. a.
2009	3.199	3.325	49	1.287	1.797
2010	2.882	2.032	31	370	2.390
2011	1.770	2.559	53	1	1.203
2012	1.620	1.240	80	10	1.228
2013	1.246	633	33	124	1.634
2014	1.728	309	53	941	1.773
2015	2.936	473	200	1.384	1.557
2016	4.582	676	204	1.091	1.827
2017	4.459	1.209	224	1.026	3.843
2018	7.761	1.260	191	1.011	8.502
2019	13.648	2.053	147	1.149	17.171

Source: UNHCR 2019, Asylum Service 2020

Limitations in the Dublin III regulation that sets-up migration at the EU level

Cyprus's case also demonstrates the limitations and shortcomings in the current legal and institutional framework-The Dublin III regulation-that regulates migration at the EU level. This system determines the member-state responsible for examining an asylum application based on the first point of irregular entry to the EU.¹³ Therefore, it puts increased pressure to countries that are closer to the centres of the migration crisis, like Cyprus, Italy and Greece.

The Dublin III regulation and its mechanisms have proven inadequate in coping with the large-scale arrival of migrants and asylum seekers. For this reason, the European Commission has announced its intention to revise the current asylum mechanisms. The President of the European Commission, Ursula Von der Leyen proposed reforms to the Dublin III regulation taking into consideration that the

¹³ European Commission, 2016, "Country responsible for asylum application (Dublin)," accessed October 19, 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum/examination-of-applicants_en

pressure in the European borders varies from country to country. In this context, she specifically announced that the new migration governance system: *"will have common structures on asylum and return and it will have a new strong solidarity mechanism."*¹⁴

The new Pact on Migration and Asylum that brings changes to the EU's migration governance system was presented to the European Parliament and Council in September 2020.¹⁵ For the time being, the two institutions are examining the proposal and as soon as it is adopted it is expected to affect this issue.

Migration as part of Turkey's hybrid warfare

Cyprus's attempts to cope with the migrant inflows are affected by Turkey's decision to utilize this issue as part of its hybrid warfare. Turkey has signed a migrant deal in 2016 with the EU, agreeing to stop new sea or land routes for illegal migration from Turkey to the EU as well as to cooperate with neighboring states and the EU on this issue.

Yet, Turkey has been using this humanitarian crisis as a leverage vis-à-vis the EU, with the Turkish President often threatening that migrants and refugees will be poured into Europe.¹⁶ Moreover, Turkey does not implement this deal vis-à-vis Cyprus, creating a loophole. In fact, it has been utilizing specific aspects of hybrid warfare, such as non-military means, to exert additional political pressure over Cyprus, Greece and the EU.

As a result, an increasing number of migrants has been attempting to reach the EU, by crossing over to Cyprus from Turkey either by boat or by plane. These migrants and asylum seekers-to their vast majority-have irregularly crossed the green line from the occupied part of Cyprus into the government controlled areas. Since 2016, the European Commission has reported data on this development in its reports on the implementation of Council Regulation (EC) No 866/2004. Table 3 is based on the most recent report-sixteenth report-and depicts the situation.¹⁷ According to the same report, the main countries of origin of irregular migrants in 2019 were Syria (2.000), Cameroon (1.126), Bangladesh (953), Pakistan (950) and Nigeria (328).

¹⁴ INFOMIGRANTS, 2020, "EU chief vows to replace Dublin rule for asylum seekers," accessed October 22, 2020, <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/27380/eu-chief-vows-to-replace-dublin-rule-for-asylum-seekers>

¹⁵ European Commission, September 2020, "A fresh start on migration: Building confidence and striking a new balance between responsibility and solidarity," accessed March 2, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_1706

¹⁶ Diana Rayes, 2020, "Amid an Unfolding Humanitarian Crisis in Syria, the European Union Faces the Perils of Devolving Migration Management to Turkey," Migration Policy Institute, accessed March 16, 2021, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/amid-humanitarian-crisis-syria-eu-faces-perils-devolving-migration-third-countries>

¹⁷ European Commission, 2020, "Sixteenth report on the implementation of Council Regulation (EC) No 866/2004 of 29 April 2004 and the situation resulting from its application covering the period 1 January until 31 December 2019," accessed October 22, 2020, <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2020/EN/COM-2020-239-F1-EN-MAIN-PART-1.PDF>

The fact that Turkey does not recognize the Republic of Cyprus further worsens the situation. This simply means that there is no possibility of returning these migrants and asylum seekers to Turkey, once their case has been processed.

Table 3: Number of irregular migrants that crossed the green line since 2016

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019
Irregular migrants (n)	1.499	1.686	4.451	7.409

Source: European Commission 2020

Limitations to the Cypriot asylum system

Migration is commonly associated with desired and undesirable developments. Desired migration effects include contributing to the local labor force and especially in sectors where there is a need of labor force, such as low skilled jobs, and offering a solution vis-à-vis EU's ageing population.¹⁸ Undesirable migration effects include increasing job competition and the cost of service provision, such as health care and education.

Internal factors affect Cyprus's attempts to cope with the migrant inflows, due to the important limitations of the its asylum system. In fact, Cyprus does not have the capacity and the structures to cope with this enlarged demographic demand. Therefore, this increased influx is stretching Cyprus's reception system further slowing down the existing procedures and even increasing the possibility of a humanitarian crisis due to resource constraints.

On the other hand, applicants who are abusing the system cause additional problems. These persons have arrived to Cyprus based on domestic laws as well as international regulations and agreements regulating their arrival and stay. In other words, these are already in the island having previously entered and stayed under other statuses such as domestic workers and students, contributing to the local economy. Yet, as soon as their initial residence permit is close to expiration, they apply for asylum.¹⁹ This practice further deteriorates the situation, causing additional limitations to an already insufficient system.

As the financial situation of the island is affected by the implications of the pandemic, stricter limitations in available human and economic resources are established. Therefore, Cyprus's recourses and capabilities are not inexhaustible potentially affecting its capacity to offer this kind of support.

¹⁸ UNCHR, 2019, " Labour integration for refugees in Cyprus beneficial for society and economy," accessed November 3, 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/cy/2019/06/11/labour-integration-for-refugees-in-cyprus-beneficial-for-society-and-economy/>

¹⁹ The Asylum Information Database and the European Council on Refugees and Exiles, 2020, "Cyprus: Short overview of the asylum procedure," accessed October 29, 2020, <http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/cyprus/short-overview-asylum-procedure-0>

Conclusions

This article focused and presented a very challenging issue: the rising migration inflows in Cyprus. In this context, the interaction of various external and internal factors that trigger migration has been presented, associating them with the ongoing globalization process. External factors include Cyprus's close proximity to the centres of the migration crisis and limitations to Dublin III regulation that regulates migration to the EU. For the time being, a new EU migration governance system is under adoption by the European Parliament and Council, which is expected to affect the situation. Turkey's role in this process is very important, since it exploits a humanitarian issue, such as migration, as a part of its hybrid warfare. This is something that needs to be taken into account by the EU and its member-states, especially since Erdogan often threatens to let migrants stream into Europe.

Internal factors include limitations to the Cypriot asylum system that does not have the capacity and the structures to cope with this enlarged demand as well as applicants who are abusing the system causing additional problems. These internal factors worsen the situation, jeopardizing the positive contributions of migrants to the Cypriot society and economy.

Besides the positive input of migrants to the Cypriot society and economy, the rising migration inflows in Cyprus create a number of economic and demographic implications. These indicate clearly that Cyprus that does not have the size and the necessary capacity to response to this challenge for a prolonged period.

In fact, Cyprus's reception system is severely affected by the rising migration inflows and procedures have become even slower, increasing the possibility of a humanitarian crisis due to resource constraints.

For these reasons, it is imperative that new measures must be taken by the government of Cyprus to increase the efficiency of the asylum system. Yet, without proper support from the EU, the situation runs the risk of becoming worse. Therefore, the EU must demonstrate its solidarity on this issue in the form of technical and financial assistance as well as in assisting in the relocation of some of the asylum seekers in other member-states.