

Coronavirus pandemic in the EU – Fundamental Rights Implications

Country: Cyprus

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1 Measures taken by government/public authorities

1.1 Emergency laws/states of emergency

Provide information on emergency laws/declarations of states of emergency, including actions taken by police to enforce them and court rulings concerning the legality of such measures. Please include in particular information on developments relating to the protection of the right of association/demonstration; for example, with respect to the public gatherings that took place concerning the death of George Floyd, or other such events.

No state of emergency was declared in Cyprus during the pandemic. A number of restriction measures adopted in previous months were gradually being lifted, starting from 21 May onwards.

On 5th June, the Ministry of Health decreed that:¹

- Gatherings of persons in houses and public assembly places is allowed, provided that the people being assembled do not exceed 10 persons per house/group, including under-age children.
- Mass events, congregations, demonstrations, parades, concerts, fairs and festivals in both public and private spaces were still prohibited.

On 19th June a new order was issued abolishing many of the restrictions applicable in the previous phase.² As of 24 June, the gatherings of persons in houses and public spaces is allowed, provided that the safety and health guidelines of the Ministry of Health are permitted. Gatherings in houses and public spaces, are permitted provided they do not exceed 75 persons for indoor spaces and 150 persons for outdoor spaces.

However, gatherings, demonstrations, parades, music concerts in public and private spaces, as well as open-air fairs and festivals continue to be prohibited.³ Anti-racist mobilisations carried out by anti-fascist autonomous groups protesting against the country's immigration policies and in particular the situation at the Pournara camp, were declared unlawful by the police who issued fines of €300 to the participants.⁴ Complaints against this practice were filed at the Independent Authority for Investigating Complaints and Allegations against the Police. Anti-racist mobilisations by the main opposition party AKEL were however not declared unlawful and no fines were issued to any participants.⁵ An anti-immigration demonstration in Limassol carried out on 24 May only days before the anti-racist demonstration was also not declared unlawful nor did it result in the imposition of any

¹ Cyprus, Official Gazette, The Infectious Diseases Law, Cap. 260, Regulations pursuant to section 6(a), (b), (c), (d), (e) and (f), [R.A.A. 254/2020](#), No. 5297, 5 June 2020.

² Cyprus, Official Gazette, The Infectious Diseases Law, Cap. 260, Regulations pursuant to section 6(a), (b), (c), (d), (e) and (f), [R.A.A. 265/2020](#), No. 5302, 19 June 2020.

³ Cyprus, Official Gazette, The Infectious Diseases Law, Cap. 260, Regulations pursuant to section 6(a), (b), (c), (d), (e) and (f), [R.A.A. 254/2020](#), No. 5297, article 2.10, 5 June 2020.

⁴ Consultation with the NGO 'Aeriko', one of the organisers of the anti-racist demonstration of 31 May 2020, 5 June 2020; Consultation with two of the demonstrators who were fined, 5 June 2020.

⁵ Consultation with member of the Central Committee of the opposition party AKEL, 20 June 2020; Dialogos (2020), '[Μεγάλη αντιρατσιστική συγκέντρωση στην πλατεία Ελευθερίας \(εικόνες\)](#)', 19 June 2020.

fines.⁶ According to the police, a case was still under investigation for the offence of violating the Infectious Diseases Law and the relevant decrees in respect of this demonstration.

On June 30 the Minister of the Interior announced that his ministry is preparing letters for the dissolution of NGOs who have not been registered, expressing discontent over NGOs who criticised the government's immigration policy and who play a 'negative role on immigration'.⁷ The Minister referred to two NGOs, without naming them, who reported Cyprus abroad with allegedly unfounded complaints of human rights violations inside the refugee camps, for soap shortages and for alleged detention of minors at the Pournara centre.⁸ The Interior Minister added that it is disturbing for NGOs to defame their country abroad relying on unfounded allegations, merely because they disagree with the government's immigration policy.⁹ The Minister referred to a report of the Council of Europe regarding NGOs with references to Cyprus, expressing concerns over the fact that, according to the report, some NGOs are susceptible to funding from terrorists.¹⁰

On the before the above statements by the Minister, two migrant and refugee support NGOs, namely the Cyprus Refugee Council and Caritas Cyprus, had expressed concerns over the inhumane conditions at the Pournara camp, pointing out that the situation is in violation of EU and national law, adding that this development "exhibits a loss of our humanity at a time where solidarity is needed more than ever, especially to keep everyone safe."¹¹ On 22 June UNHCR had reported to Parliament that conditions at the Pournara camp were unacceptable, that unaccompanied children prior to age assessment were detained in mixed spaces with adults and that some children had reported sexual abuse from adult detainees.¹² UNHCR reported that the presence of unaccompanied children in the closed camp was also verified by the Social Welfare Services who took 47 children under their care as Guardians, on the eve of the parliamentary session. The Interior Minister reported to Parliament that they were only 'alleged children' pending age determination. The Child Ombudsman submitted a written statement to Parliament stating that whenever there is any doubt as to whether a person is a minor or not, the benefit of such doubt must always be given to the person who alleges to be a minor. Pending the results of age determination, said the Child Ombudsman, the person who alleges to be a child must be treated as a child and enjoy the rights afforded to all children, including the right not to be detained under any circumstances. Quoting a Council of Europe report on unaccompanied minors, the Child Ombudsman pointed out that the risks for a child wrongly placed in a camp with adults are much higher than the potential abuse of the benefits afforded exclusively to children by adults falsely claiming to be children.¹³

⁶ Consultation with participants, 2 June 2020.

⁷ Tomaras, A. (2020), '[Λουκέτο σε ΜΚΟ που δεν έχουν εγγραφεί στο μητρώο](#)', 30 June 2020.

⁸ Tomaras, A. (2020), '[Λουκέτο σε ΜΚΟ που δεν έχουν εγγραφεί στο μητρώο](#)', 30 June 2020.

⁹ Tomaras, A. (2020), '[Λουκέτο σε ΜΚΟ που δεν έχουν εγγραφεί στο μητρώο](#)', 30 June 2020.

¹⁰ Tomaras, A. (2020), '[Λουκέτο σε ΜΚΟ που δεν έχουν εγγραφεί στο μητρώο](#)', 30 June 2020.

¹¹ Knews (2020), '[NGOs raise alarm over inhumane conditions at overcrowded migrant camp: Some 700 migrants and refugees have been locked inside the Kokkinotrimithia camp, Cyprus Refugee Council and Caritas Cyprus say](#)', 29 June 2020.

¹² Vasiliou V. (2000), '[Πουρνάρα: «Όταν έφευγα, παρακαλούσαν να μείνω»](#)', *Phileleftheros*, 23 June 2020.

¹³ Commissioner for the protection of the rights of the child (2020), Σημείωμα Επιτρόπου, για τη συζήτηση στην Κοινοβουλευτική Επιτροπή Ανθρωπίνων Δικαιωμάτων και Ίσων Ευκαιριών μεταξύ Ανδρών και Γυναικών, '[Η κατάσταση που επικρατεί στο κέντρο προσωρινής φιλοξενίας αιτητών ασύλου στην Κοκκινотριμιθιά](#)', Press release, 22 June 2020.

1.2 Measures affecting the general population

1.2.1 Social distancing

Focus on:

- *Lifting of stay at home restrictions, and measures/rules for general physical distancing when in public or at home.*
- *Enforcement and penalties.*

On 5th June, the Ministry of Health decreed the following:¹⁴

- The operation of nightspots, discos, entertainment venues, music and dance venues, cinemas, theatres, indoor performance areas and children's indoor playgrounds would remain closed. However, the enterprises were permitted to carry out administrative work behind closed doors that does not involve serving the public, provided the hygiene regulations at force are observed.
- Public and private preschool premises, kindergartens, nurseries, children's clubs, all-day and summer schools, as well as schools of special education and training could open, subject to the guidelines of the Ministries of Health, Education and Labour.
- Sports championships were permitted without spectators and without the use of changing rooms, subject to observing the guidelines of the Ministry of Health and the Cyprus Sports Organization.
- The operation of the following enterprises is allowed, subject to the guidelines of the Ministry of Health: Malls, multi-stores and retail enterprises, catering services at both indoor and outdoor areas within these outlets, cinemas, theatres and outdoor performance venues, children's outdoor playgrounds.
- Indoor and outdoor catering services are allowed, including restaurants, hotels, tourist accommodation, taverns, cafeterias, pizzerias, pubs, snack-bars, bars, coffee-shops, canteens, refectories of schools, sports clubs, cultural clubs, associations, societies, provided
 - The service of the public is exclusively provided through the use of tables and chairs, subject to the guidelines of the Ministry of Health.
 - Bars will not serve the public, their function being limited to the preparation of food or drinks by the employees.
 - The operation of children's playgrounds in indoor areas of catering enterprises is prohibited.
- As of 13 June, indoor and outdoor sports venues including gyms, dancing and other schools and sports would open, without the use of changing rooms. Also, themes parks, water sports and casinos.
- Employees must wear protective face masks in all indoor areas of private enterprises serving the public, in offices of the public sector and local governance that serve the public, at retail shops, construction sites, barber and hairdressing salons, beauty centres and tattooing studios, at catering enterprises, children's playgrounds, casinos, libraries, museums and historical sites, cinemas, theatres and performance venues. The employers are under a duty to provide the face masks and gloves for their employees.
- The use of face mask is compulsory for both employees and passengers on buses and other means of transport

¹⁴ Cyprus, Official Gazette, The Infectious Diseases Law, Cap. 260, Regulations pursuant to section 6(a), (b), (c), (d), (e) and (f), [R.A.A. 254/2020](#), No. 5297, 5 June 2020.

- Visits to hospitals and to care homes for old or disabled persons are permitted only by appointment and subject to approval from the director.

On 19th June a new order was issued abolishing many of the restrictions applicable in the previous phase.¹⁵ As of 24 June 2020, the limitations of 10 persons for mass gatherings and 50 people in indoor spaces or 100 in outdoor spaces were abolished. The maximum number of persons for gatherings (physical presence in the same premises/installation regardless of indoor or outdoor space) was set at 75 persons indoors or 150 persons outdoors, however a mass gathering is not allowed simultaneously in the indoor and outdoor spaces. Mass gatherings mean, amongst others, weddings, christenings, music concerts, festivals, private assemblies in houses and any other form of mass gathering. In the case where social gatherings take place in houses, the permanent residents thereof are counted and the health protocols must be upheld.¹⁶ The operation of indoor playgrounds was allowed as of 24 June.

1.2.2 Education

Focus on:

- *Steps to reopen educational institutions (schools, third level and kindergartens). Include any specific measures aimed at children from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds.*
- *Measures to protect students and staff as they return to educational institutions (e.g. related to physical distancing, shift patterns, health and hygiene, etc.).*

Elementary schools and gymnasiums

Primary schools and gymnasiums continued to operate in June until the end of the school year on 26th, following the precautionary measures issued by the Ministry of Health, which included the installation of alcohol based solution at every classroom entrance, the daily cleaning of the school building and disinfection of high touch surfaces and restrooms, the airing of the building and classrooms, physical distancing by students and teaching staff, only one student to be seated at each desk at a distance of one metre between desks, avoiding sharing pencils, pens and other objects, avoiding contact with persons with symptoms, prohibition of drinking water straight from water faucets, regular hand washing for at least 20" before eating and before and after using toilet, monitoring of student gatherings during breaks, students were encouraged to bring food from home to avoid overcrowding around the canteen.¹⁷

In the evening of Sunday 14 June, all schools dispatched SMS messages to parents informing them that all students would have to return to school and that distant education classes would stop with immediate effect. This included students belonging to vulnerable categories or who had family members in vulnerable categories and who were up until then attending distant education classes from home. This announcement followed a measure announced 48 hours earlier from the Ministry of Finance, which required parents responsible for the care of their children aged up to 15 years or their

¹⁵ Cyprus, Official Gazette, The Infectious Diseases Law, Cap. 260, Regulations pursuant to section 6(a), (b), (c), (d), (e) and (f), [R.A.A. 265/2020](#), No. 5302, 19 June 2020.

¹⁶ Cyprus, Press and Information Office (2020), '[Arrangements for maximum number of persons at social gatherings in houses and public spaces](#)', Press release, 22 June, 2020

¹⁷ Cyprus, Ministry of Health (2020), '[Precautionary measures against Covid-19 for schools](#)', Press release, 29 April 2020.

children with disabilities to return to work.¹⁸ The Finance Ministry's announcement had led to reactions from workers' organisations who advised their members to bring their children to work if they had nowhere else to leave them.¹⁹

Graduation ceremonies took place in most schools with distancing measures.²⁰

Special education and kindergartens

Schools of special education re-opened on 9 June. The Ministry of Education asked parents to contact the school to coordinate arrangements on protection measures.²¹ The arrangements included a request to parents of children with disabilities to fill out and submit a special form provided by the school on their children's state of health. The form requires information about the child's state of health with an attached medical certificate and a recommendation from the child's doctor as to whether school attendance for the particular child is recommended or not. The form also requires parents to acknowledge the contents of the health protocol that must be followed at school and to take responsibility for 'the risks that may potentially arise'. Depending on the information supplied in this form, the Special Committee decides whether the child with disabilities will be permitted to return to school or not. The same form was requested of all children attending special education schools or using the services of escorts in integrated schools or other children with serious problems of 'health and adjustment' to fill up a document to enable the assessment of their children by a special committee.²²

The requirement to fill up this form as a prerequisite for children with disabilities to return to school led to several reactions of parents who argued that the requirement amounts to discrimination and infringement of the children's right to education

The Pancyprian Federation of Associations of Parents with Special Needs POSYGOPEA issued a statement calling on parents to complete and sign the document to facilitate the assessment of their children by the Special Committee set up for this purpose.²³ Not all parents' associations agreed with the federation's call to comply with the Ministry's request to complete the special form. The Pancyprian Organisation of Parents and Friends of Children with Brain and other Paralysis 'Agalia Elpidas' issued a statement that form is a blatant discrimination against children with disabilities and a violation of the right to education, pointing out that the Federation does not represent them.²⁴

¹⁸ Cyprus, Ministry of Finance (2020), '[Κατάργηση ειδικών ρυθμίσεων Κατηγορίας Β του καταλόγου των ευπαθών ομάδων και εργαζομένων γονέων που έχουν την ευθύνη φροντίδας παιδιών ηλικίας μέχρι 15 ετών ή παιδιών με αναπηρία ανεξαρτήτως ηλικίας](#)', Circular No. 1623, 12 June 2020.

¹⁹ Workers Union Isotita (2020), Press release 13 June 2020.

²⁰ Reporter (2020), 'Την ανακοίνωση ΥΠΠΑΝ για τις τελετές αποφοίτησης, χαιρετίζει η Παγκύπρια Συνομοσπονδία Γονέων Μ.Ε.', 12 June 2020; Consultation with Pancyprian Confederation of Parents' Associations, 13 June 2020.

²¹ Cyprus, Ministry of Education (2020), '[Ανακοίνωση του Υπουργείου Παιδείας αναφορικά με την επαναλειτουργία των Ειδικών Σχολείων](#)', Press release, 3 June 2020.

²² Cyprus, Ministry of Education, 'Λειτουργία της Ειδικής Επιτροπής για τα παιδιά των ειδικών μονάδων και με εξυπηρέτηση από ειδικό συνοδό σε συνεργασία με μέλη της Συμβουλευτικής Επιστημονικής Επιτροπής Λοιμοξιολόγων του Υπουργείου Υγείας', Press release, 25 May 2020.

²³ Sigmalive, '[ΠΟΣΥΓΟΠΕΑ: Οι γονείς παιδιών στα Ειδικά Σχολεία να συμπληρώσουν το Έντυπο](#)', 6 June 2020.

²⁴ Agalia Elpidas (2020), Press release, 9 June 2020.

The re-opening of kindergartens was also scheduled for the same day.²⁵ A health protocol of three children for every ten square metres of classroom was set initially.²⁶ By 12 June, this protocol was withdrawn for private kindergartens, which were permitted to operate with the numbers foreseen by the general legislation.²⁷ A professor of epidemiology and member of the government's advisory scientific committee on Covid-19 told the media that she was surprised by the decision of the Ministry of Education as regards the private kindergartens, stating that the scientific committee was not consulted on this. The Association of Private Pre-school Education reported that the government's decision to permit the pre-Covid mode of operation of private kindergartens may be attributed to the fact that private kindergartens also work through July and August and the measures for supporting private business have finished.²⁸

Migrant unaccompanied children

UNHCR reported that many unaccompanied migrant children living in shelters, who were attending technical schools before the outbreak of the pandemic, were able to connect with their schools and follow distant education classes during the pandemic, through computers supplied by UNHCR. Unaccompanied children who were attending Greek language classes at government institutions were unable to continue with their education because these classes were not offered through the distant education programs. Francophone unaccompanied children were also unable to access Greek language classes even after the schools re-opened, because the classes were offered in combination with English and not with French.²⁹

1.2.3 Work

Focus on:

- *Steps for specific sectors/the general population to return to work and measures to protect employees in the workplace (physical distancing, health and hygiene, shift patterns, etc.). Please include any specific measures aimed at people in precarious work.*
- *Ending of furlough/short-time work programmes for specific sectors/the general population.*

Unemployed in the post-lockdown period

Six days before the end of June the government announced a fresh packet of support to employers, employees and unemployed persons, excluding 35 economic activities. This phase covered the period 13-30 June. The schemes were budgeted at €150m and will cover an estimated 50,000 of beneficiaries.³⁰

The 35 areas of economic activity excluded from the support schemes are supermarkets, telecommunication companies, banks, insurance companies, doctors, nursing services, care homes for old people, pharmaceutical companies, pharmacies, traders in medical products, bakeries, retail trade, wholesale trade of electrical, shoes clothing, perfumes, cosmetics, carpets, furniture, petrol

²⁵ Cyprus, Ministry of Education (2020), '[Ανακοίνωση του Υπουργείου Παιδείας αναφορικά με την επαναλειτουργία των νηπιαγωγείων](#)', Press release, 3 June 2020.

²⁶ Cyprus, Ministry of Education (2020), '[Ανακοίνωση του Υπουργείου Παιδείας σχετικά με τη φοίτηση παιδιών στα νηπιαγωγεία](#)', Press release, 3 June 2020.

²⁷ Cyprus, Ministry of Education (2020), '[Ανακοίνωση του Υπουργείου Παιδείας σχετικά με τη φοίτηση στα νηπιαγωγεία](#)', Press release, 12 June 2020.

²⁸ Reporter (2020), '[Αδειάζει Προδρόμου η Κολιού-«Δεν ρωτηθήκαμε για την αλλαγή στα νηπιαγωγεία»](#)', 15 June 2020.

²⁹ Consultation with UNHCR and the Cyprus Refugee Council, 30 June 2020.

³⁰ In-Cyprus (2020), '[New conditions for state support schemes](#)', 24 June 2020.

stations, construction sites. Road construction, vets, lawyers and accountants, hairdressers, beauticians, sports activities, trade unions and other associations, funeral homes, flower shops, IT services, lotteries and betting offices, immovable property services and cleaning. The criteria for excluding these areas of economic activity are not clear and were not explained; some of them had been working throughout the lockdown, like supermarkets and doctors, whilst others were the first that were ordered to shut down and only allowed to reopen recently, such as the hairdressers and sports gyms.³¹

The new support schemes carry a number of differences compared to the schemes of the previous months. Under the new package, state funds are paid to the employer instead of being sent directly to the beneficiaries, as previously. Previously, in the case of companies where employees received part payment from the employer and part from the state, the employer paid the social insurance corresponding only to the amount paid by the employer. Now the employer will be obliged to pay social insurance for the full amount. In the event of a conviction of supplying false information the penalty is a fine of up to €40,000. Hotels and tourist accommodation businesses must offer 'attractive prices' for local tourism, in cooperation with the deputy ministry of tourism.³²

Unemployed persons who have exhausted their entitlement to unemployment benefit, which is 156 days for each interruption of occupation,³³ are eligible for a special unemployment grant provided they are not, at the same time, receiving sick leave, maternity leave, paternity leave, pension or any other grant from the special schemes of the Ministry of Labour. The grant is a lump sum of €360 for one month.³⁴

Statistics issued from the Cyprus Statistical Service indicate that pressure on salaries and benefits in many professions started from the first phase of the Covid-19 crisis. During the first quarter of 2020, the cost of labour was increased by a mere 0.8% compared to the previous quarter, which essentially means it remained at the low levels of 2013 when the first economic crisis surfaced, with the collapse of the banking sector in Cyprus. The number of unemployed persons was increased in May by 3,984 persons compared to February before the outbreak of Covid-19, i.e. from 25,620 to 29,604. After correction of the data following seasonal fluctuations, the total number of unemployed persons was increased by 12,273 persons, i.e. from 21,809 to 34,082.³⁵ Some of the sectors most badly hit are the following:

- *Accommodation and catering services:* This is the economic activity with the lower salaries and the sector where salaries are expected to be affected most, since many hotels remained closed. In May the number of registered unemployed persons rose to 9,293 whilst before the pandemic there were only 1,563 vacancies.
- *Administrative and support services:* There are currently 1,211 registered unemployed persons and 208 vacancies.
- *Commerce:* 5,162 unemployed persons and 906 vacancies.

³¹ In-Cyprus (2020), '[New conditions for state support schemes](#)', 24 June 2020.

³² In-Cyprus (2020), '[New conditions for state support schemes](#)', 24 June 2020.

³³ Cyprus, Ministry of Labour, '[Guide to unemployment benefit](#)' (Οδηγός επιδόματος ανεργίας), undated.

³⁴ Cyprus, Law on special measures adopted by the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance for addressing the pandemic of Covid-19 of 2020 ([Ο περί έκτακτων μέτρων που λαμβάνονται από το Υπουργείο Εργασίας, Πρόνοιας και Κοινωνικών Ασφαλίσεων για την αντιμετώπιση της πανδημίας του ιού COVID-19 Νόμοι του 2020](#)), Decision under article 7,8,9,10 and 12, Regulatory Administrative Act no. 273, 23 June 2020.

³⁵ Ergatiko Vima (2020), '[Έντονες πιέσεις σε μισθούς και θέσεις εργασίας λόγω κορωνοϊού](#)' 29 June 2020.

- *Factories:* The monthly salary cost dropped by 0,2% in the first quarter suggesting that the activity was negatively affected from the first stage of the outbreak of the pandemic. There are 1,700 registered unemployed and 876 vacancies.
- *Other services:* There are 632 registered unemployed and 175 vacancies before the pandemic.
- *Construction:* There are 1,611 unemployed and 1,052 vacancies
- *Water treatment and provision, sewage management:* There were 100 registered unemployed and 37 vacancies.
- *Arts and entertainment:* There are 658 registered unemployed and 77 vacancies.
- *Media and communication:* There are 624 registered unemployed and 131 vacancies.³⁶

Vulnerable groups and parents return to work

On June 12, the Finance Ministry announced that the special measures applicable to vulnerable groups and parents responsible for the care of their children aged up to 15 years or their children with disabilities irrespective of age would cease by midnight of the same day.³⁷ Under the regulations applicable until that date, persons classified as vulnerable were to remain at home and carry out tasks assigned to them, whilst those for whom distant work was not feasible due to the nature of their duties or because they did not want to work long distance became eligible for a sick leave. These arrangements were terminated on 12 June.

The parents of children with disabilities or children aged until 15 years could make use of their right to annual leave according to the applicable contract terms.

The workers' union 'Isotitia' issued a press release expressing its opposition to the measure which was forcing parents without warning either to commit a crime by leaving their children alone or to leave their children with the grandparents risking their lives or to take them to work. The union criticized the fact that the measure was announced without warning or consultation giving the workers no time to make arrangements for their children, and forcing parents to make use of their annual leave as a measure to reduce the number of persons eligible to payments from the support scheme.³⁸ The Finance Ministry's announcement was also criticised by the main opposition party AKEL, accusing the Government of deciding unilaterally, suddenly and arbitrarily, ignoring the problems caused to workers, society and public health.³⁹ The workers' union has filed complaints with the Commissioner for Administration and Protection of Human Rights and the Commissioner for the Protection of the Rights of the Child alleging violations of labour rights and children's rights.⁴⁰

³⁶ Ergatiko Vima (2020), [‘Έντονες πιέσεις σε μισθούς και θέσεις εργασίας λόγω κορωνοϊού’](#) 29 June 2020.

³⁷ Cyprus, Ministry of Finance (2020), [‘Κατάργηση ειδικών ρυθμίσεων Κατηγορίας Β του καταλόγου των ευπαθών ομάδων και εργαζομένων γονέων που έχουν την ευθυνη φροντίδας παιδιών ηλικίας μέχρι 15 ετών ή παιδιών με αναπηρία ανεξαρτήτως ηλικίας’](#), Circular No. 1623, 12 June 2020.

³⁸ Workers Union Isotita (2020), Press release 13 June 2020.

³⁹ Dialogos (2020), [‘ΑΚΕΛ: Ένδειξη παντελούς αδιαφορίας η περικοπή του επιδόματος σε εργαζόμενους γονείς’](#), Statement by the party spokesperson 15 June 2020.

⁴⁰ Workers Union Isotita (2020), Press release 13 June 2020.

1.2.4 Access to justice

Focus on:

- *Steps to lift restrictions previously imposed on court proceedings and any strategies to deal with case backlog or increased litigation due to COVID-19 measures (e.g. criteria to prioritise certain types of cases/disputes).*
- *Continued use of remote hearings and videoconferences within court proceedings despite the lifting of restrictions (e.g. for which proceedings).*

Courts in Cyprus became fully operational as of May and there were no new measures adopted in June. The processing of the backlog of cases is continuing with the observation of health protocols, whilst the Supreme Court encourages judges and members of the judicial service to use electronic means of processing the cases before them, pending the adoption of an interim or full e-justice system.⁴¹ The Supreme Court asked judges to use their discretion in deciding in favour of granting legal costs where legal documents are filed electronically, where legal work is performed without the lawyer being present in court and where cases are rejected or withdrawn without the presence of both litigants.⁴² The Supreme Court instructed that pending the adoption of the e-justice system, the court must instruct about the presence or absence of a lawyer and about whether the lodging of documents can be made electronically or not.⁴³

1.2.5 Freedom of movement

Focus on:

- *Steps to reopen borders/lift restrictions on freedom of movement to and within the EU, including rules or restrictions applying to certain categories of people (e.g. citizens; ‘essential workers’). Please mention what requirements are in place for various categories of people to enter country (e.g. negative COVID-19 test result and/or obligation to self-isolate etc).*
- *Changes to asylum application procedures (e.g. lifting of temporary suspensions or restrictions on procedures) or available statistics on numbers of asylum applications (e.g. being much lower than for same period in previous years due to travel restrictions).*

Borders

On 5th June, the Ministry of Health decreed that entry into Cyprus is permitted to persons irrespective of nationality from 9 till 19 June from countries in lists A and B which are constantly updated based on a risk assessment, as announced by the Ministry of Health from time to time provided the passengers undergo a Covid-19 test with a negative indication valid maximum 72 hours before departure. Repatriating Cypriot citizens or permanent residents of Cyprus may travel to Cyprus and carry the Covid-19 test upon arrival, the cost of which is borne by themselves and remain in self-isolation until the issue of the result. Persons arriving in Cyprus and diagnosed positive to Covid-19 will remain in quarantine and follow the medical protocol of the Ministry of Health. The entry into Cyprus, subject to presenting a negative Covid-19 test of no more than 72 hours, is permitted to persons on a special permit from the Ministry of Transport, members of crews of commercial aircrafts of rigging platforms carrying drilling ton the EEZ, of cruise ships or pleasures boats, passengers of pleasure boats from countries not falling under categories A and B provided they have not docked at

⁴¹ Cyprus Supreme Court (2020), [Circular No. 132](#), 24 June 2020.

⁴² Cyprus Supreme Court (2020), [Circular No. 132](#), 24 June 2020.

⁴³ Cyprus Supreme Court (2020), [Circular No. 132](#), 24 June 2020.

any their port or they have docked only in the ports of the countries of categories A and B, subject to taking a test upon arrival and remaining on board until the result is issued, commercial vessels, persons implementing special projects on approval from the competent Ministry and candidates of Military Schools of Greece.⁴⁴

On 19th June a new order was issued abolishing many of the restrictions applicable in the previous phase.⁴⁵ The new order provided that as of 20 June, the entry into Cyprus is permitted regardless of nationality, to persons from countries in categories A and B. The categories are constantly updated based on a risk assessment. The following conditions will apply:

- Passengers from category A countries will not be required to undergo a COVID-19 test.
- Passengers from category B countries will be required to present documentary evidence that they have undertaken the COVID-19 test at a certified laboratory with a negative result, valid 72 hours prior to their departure.
- Passengers from category B countries, where the authorities of the country evidently do not provide a testing service, may carry the test upon their arrival and pay the cost themselves. They must remain in compulsory self-isolation until the result is issued.
- Cypriots and non-Cypriots lawfully and permanently residing in Cyprus, entering Cyprus from category B countries, may undertake the test upon arrival to Cyprus, covering the cost themselves and remaining in compulsory self-isolation until the result is issued. If diagnosed positive to COVID-19, they must remain quarantine and follow the medical protocol of the Ministry of Health.
- Persons from countries not under Categories A and B, if they are Cypriot citizens residing permanently in Cyprus, persons residing lawfully in Cyprus, persons regardless of nationality, whose presence in Cyprus is approved by a competent medical organ due to their professional or scientific capacity, in order to strengthen the effort to combat the Coronavirus pandemic, patients, regardless of nationality, who have received treatment at an approved private or public hospital in Cyprus which is advisable to continue, and first degree relatives residing lawfully in the Republic and/or financially active persons (wife, children, parents) for the purpose of family reunification, subject to a Covid-19 test with negative indication valid 72 hours prior to departure or taking the test upon arrival and paying the cost and remaining at a place designated until the result is issued and thereafter remain in self-isolation for 14 days. Those diagnosed positive to Covid-19 remain in quarantine for 14 days and follow the medical protocol of the Ministry of Health.

Asylum procedure

Although the Interior Ministry had informed UNHCR that as of 21 May onwards they would start accepting and processing asylum applications, UNHCR reported that there was no consistent approach in receiving or processing applications and in practice very few applicants were given access to the asylum procedure from 21 May onwards until end of June. The last available statistics regarding asylum concern the month of April; no statistics are available yet for May and June.⁴⁶ Whilst the Asylum Service claims that it can now accept new applications, the Cyprus Refugee Council reported that several prospective applicants were denied access to the procedure because the Interior Ministry

⁴⁴ Cyprus, Official Gazette, The Infectious Diseases Law, Cap. 260, Regulations pursuant to section 6(a), (b), (c), (d), (e) and (f), [R.A.A. 254/2020](#), No. 5297, 5 June 2020.

⁴⁵ Cyprus, Official Gazette, The Infectious Diseases Law, Cap. 260, Regulations pursuant to section 6(a), (b), (c), (d), (e) and (f), [R.A.A. 265/2020](#), No. 5302, 19 June 2020.

⁴⁶ Communication from the Asylum Service to the FRANET contractor, 1 July 2020.

did not have space to accommodate the new applicants. The immigration authorities told prospective applicants that they would be allowed to register only if they would agree to be placed into quarantine but since there was no space for them to be accommodated in the Pournara camp they could not be registered. The Asylum Service informed UNHCR that by 21 June, there were 90 people in different locations without any status or support, whom the immigration authorities had refused to register because of Covid-19 measures. Access to reception conditions, including health and welfare, presupposes registration, therefore the inability to register also means that persons remain without any type of support, facing extreme poverty and health risks.⁴⁷

2 Selected issues emerging during the COVID-19 crisis

2.1 Impact of measures on particular groups

Select the three most relevant groups from the following:

- *persons with disabilities,*
- *homeless people,*
- *older people,*
- *women,*
- *Roma and Travellers (Note – for those countries requested to collect additional data on the impact of COVID-19 on Roma – Service request No 33 (Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Ireland, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Hungary, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Sweden), information submitted on Roma for Bulletin 4 should not be exactly duplicated in this additional data collection; however, a summary of main points concerning the Roma can be included in your submission for this Bulletin – to ensure that, where appropriate, any major developments in your Member State concerning this group are reported in Bulletin 4. The same approach applies regarding information supplied on asylum seekers/refugees).*
- *Detainees (including measures on early release or alternatives to detention)*
- *or another group not listed that have emerged in your country as facing particular challenges - before selection, this should be discussed with FRA.*

Asylum seekers: Closure/detention in the Pournara camp

UNHCR and the NGO Cyprus Refugee Council reported that, upon the outbreak of the pandemic, the Interior Ministry decided to transfer all asylum seekers living in hostels paid by the government into the closed camp of Pournara.⁴⁸ The justification unofficially given was that they had information that the hostel residents did not conform to health protocols for protection against Covid-19. The NGO reported that the police essentially forced all asylum seekers to be transferred to the Pournara camp without offering any explanation or given the opportunity to collect their belongings from their place of residence. According to UNHCR, many instances amounted to racial profiling, as persons of African origin were targeted, some of whom were not even hostel residents; from outset of the pandemic up until June, the police would apprehend them from the street on the basis of their race, without information as regards their status or place of residence. Some people were put into the police vehicle whilst on their way to or from their jobs and others from their way to or from the Social Welfare Services. Persons of African origin were also removed from private accommodation which they had been renting, under circumstances which caused concern to their landlords, who communicated with the NGO to express their discontent over the fact that the police would enter private homes without

⁴⁷ Consultation with UNHCR and the Cyprus Refugee Council, 30 June 2020.

⁴⁸ Consultation with UNHCR and the Cyprus Refugee Council, 30 June 2020.

permission. Some persons were transferred to Pournara even though they had not yet submitted asylum applications, because the immigration was not accepting applications for registration. UNHCR collected the personal stories of the people forcibly transferred to Pournara from private accommodation in the community and submitted them to the Asylum Service, requesting their release. There was no response to this request by end of the month. The Asylum Service denies the allegations of UNHCR, arguing that only homeless persons were apprehended and transferred to Pournara. The Asylum Service also stated that all asylum seekers staying in hotels were proven to have violated the restriction measures and were therefore also transferred to Pournara.

The NGO Cyprus Refugee Council and UNHCR expressed concern over the fact that the closure practices adopted during the pandemic and the expansion of the closed camps suggest that the government has no integration plans for migrants and refugees and that the policy goal appears to be closure and exclusion.⁴⁹ Once inside the closed camps, the residents are only given food and a small bottle of water daily. Contrary to the Kofinou camp which is open to NGOs, financed by the integration funds and the residents are given a small grant monthly, the Pournara camp is high-security, financed under a different funding line and is classified as an emergency centre, albeit closure can last for several months and the conditions are significantly worse than a prison or a detention center.

Persons with disabilities: Pandemic austerity v. independent living

The Pancyprian Confederation of Disability Organisations KYSOA raised concerns that the austerity agenda, as a means of addressing the economic crisis resulting from the pandemic, is impacting negatively on the long term project of de-institutionalisation and independent living of persons with disabilities. The Confederation highlighted the fact that the imperative need for independent living became more obvious in the past few weeks, when half of the victims of the pandemic in Europe were persons in closed institutions and homes, fully dependent, without rights and forgotten both by the state and society. Persons with disabilities and chronic illnesses were the first to have to lock themselves in the house in order to preserve their health and that of their family members and were more negatively affected by the impact of isolation, the rise in domestic violence, the degradation of health care, the lowering of their income, the suspension of operation of essential services to them, the educational inequalities and the increasing poverty and unemployment. In order to address these, the Confederation is submitting a comprehensive proposal for the implementation of the right of persons with disabilities to independent living. The claims and recommendations put forward include the calculation and adoption of measures for the coverage of the actual cost of disability and the cost of welfare and development of a comprehensive legislative framework for the implementation of an adequately funded deinstitutionalisation strategy through the reallocation of funds currently expended on institutionalisation, premised upon respect of the dignity of persons with disabilities and chronic illnesses.⁵⁰

The impact of Covid measures on persons with disabilities

The Confederation of Organisations for Persons with Disabilities KYSOA reported a significant deterioration in access to welfare for persons with disabilities. The category affected most adversely were persons with intellectual disabilities although other categories also experienced a reduction and in some cases termination of welfare benefits. Persons with intellectual disabilities who participate in

⁴⁹ Consultation with UNHCR and the Cyprus Refugee Council, 30 June 2020.

⁵⁰ Dialogos (2020), '[ΚΥΣΟΑ: Όχι στο άλλοθι της λιτότητας για μη υλοποίηση δικαιωμάτων αναπήρων](#)', 7 May 2020.

the state program of supported employment, operated by the same governmental department which also manages welfare benefits, received amounts of €30 to €50 for two months through procedures which the Confederation described as humiliating. Almost all the hundreds of persons with intellectual disabilities employed under the program of supported employment, earning wages of €1,8 to €3 per hour, were forced to stay at home for two or more months during the Covid-19 lockdown, on the justification that they belonged to a vulnerable category. During this period, no salary was paid to them by their employers.⁵¹

The Confederation reported that the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance issued a circular encouraging persons with disabilities who were forced and refrain from work during lockdown, to apply for the loss of wages benefit, without explaining that this will lead to a reduction of their Minimum Guaranteed Income. Those who applied, received benefits which were often equal to one third of the amount subsequently deducted from their Minimum Guaranteed Income, leading to the loss of income which was crucial for their subsistence. Other persons with disabilities reported to the Confederation that their Minimum Guaranteed Income was suspended during lockdown without any warning or explanation up until the time of writing.⁵²

Many persons employed under the state programme of supported employment were informed by their escorts that the application for a benefit for loss of wages during lockdown was a trap and would lead to deductions of amounts much higher than the benefit or even indefinite suspension of their Minimum Guaranteed Income. As a result, they refrained from applying for this benefit. Many of the persons with intellectual disabilities who returned to work after the lockdown received only 50 % of their salaries whilst others had their employment terminated on the justification that the workspace is limited or that the circumstances developed in the post-Covid 19 period led to a reduction to their volume of work and there was no longer any work for them to perform.⁵³

The Confederation reported that during lockdown the Social Welfare Services searched the files of persons with disabilities who were public benefit receivers for decades and now receivers of the Minimum Guaranteed Income in order to identify cases where the Minimum Guaranteed Income could be terminated. The result was the unlawful termination of the Minimum Guaranteed income to persons with disabilities and their families without any explanation or warning, including pensioners with disabilities who were classified as 'willingly unemployed', persons with disabilities whose child was in paid employment for a short period of time in 2019 or persons with disabilities who allegedly changed address without informing the authorities.⁵⁴

The situation of working women during the pandemic

A journalistic survey conducted in June shows that the pandemic hit working women significantly worse than men for a variety of reasons having to do with stereotypes at home and at work and the type of jobs that attract mainly women, who at the same time took responsibility for additional household chores and extra responsibilities for the care and education of the children. For the purposes of this survey, the journalist interviewed working mothers whose responses were consistent with the findings of the survey conducted by the Boston Consulting Group,⁵⁵ according to which

⁵¹ Communication via e-mail with Confederation of Disability Organisations KYSOA, 6 July 2020.

⁵² Communication via e-mail with Confederation of Disability Organisations KYSOA, 6 July 2020.

⁵³ Communication via e-mail with Confederation of Disability Organisations KYSOA, 6 July 2020.

⁵⁴ Communication via e-mail with Confederation of Disability Organisations KYSOA, 6 July 2020.

⁵⁵ [Krentz M.](#), [Kos E.](#), [Green A.](#), [Garcia-Alonso J.](#) (2020), '[Easing the COVID-19 Burden on Working Parents](#)', *Boston Consulting Group*, 21 May 2020.

women spent on average 65 hours per week in unpaid work during lockdown, which is one third more than men. The pandemic weighed more heavily on women in a number of ways including the increase of domestic violence, lower salaries as some women were forced to give up some of their paid work in order to undertake unpaid work at home, since the lockdown keeping at home the entire family created a high volume of household work. The hours of unpaid house work doubled for women; two thirds of the women who participated in the survey responded that they were concerned about their mental health, compared to only one half of the men who expressed similar concerns. The Women's Office of the trade union Pancyprrian Confederation of Labour PEO raised concerns about the fact that:⁵⁶

- The pandemic and the increased unpaid work in the care of the house, the children and the elderly posed obstacles in women's professional lives.
- At the same time, during the pandemic women were at the front line of serving the public, since the vast majority of workers in the health care sector and retail shops are women, who were forced to work and at the same time find ways to care for and protect their families.
- Women form the majority of workers in flexible forms of employment, with seasonal, part time, uninsured work as a result of which their share of in the support schemes available to affected workers during the pandemic and the amount of benefits received was lower than other workers and, in some cases, non-existent.
- Migrant women faced a particularly hard situation as many did not have a supportive environment nor access to the government schemes available during the pandemic. Many had to seek help in order to secure food for themselves and their children.

The survey included interviews with a number of working women who reported their experiences during the pandemic as particularly stressful.

- A teacher who was also a mother reported having experienced stress and fear and for struggling to find time to assist both her children at home and her students at school. The long hours of preparation of material for distant education and assessment of her students could only be afforded to her work after her own children went to bed, so that she would not deprive them of her company and care given the fact that her children had been deprived of their school environment, friends and grandparents.
- A woman working in a retail shop whose operations were suspended during the pandemic reported fear and insecurity because her husband's work was also suspended and the benefit which she was expecting from the government scheme never reached her. Her repeated efforts to contact the authorities to enquire about this benefit did not yield results as she was unable to speak to the person in charge. After the lockdown she was not asked to return to work and she fears she will be unable to find work in the current environment.
- A woman working as a cashier in a supermarket and a mother of two school children, had to work throughout the pandemic. She was afraid that if she had asked to stay at home this would impact on her possibilities of returning to her post after the pandemic. She lived in fear of catching Covid-19 at work and transmitting it to her family. Her husband was also forced to continue working and she was forced to ask relatives and friends to look after her children when the school was closed.

⁵⁶ Michael, A. (2020), '[Η πανδημία έπληξε περισσότερο τις εργαζόμενες γυναίκες](#)', Ergatiko Vima, 25 June 2020.

- A public sector worker and a mother of three small children who was permitted to work from home reported having difficulties to combine work with the care of her children who were constantly seeking her attention and needed her assistance with distant education.⁵⁷

Single parents: informal work and absence of state support

The Pancyprian Association of Single Parent families reported that single parents were particularly hit by the pandemic and yet remained invisible to policy makers throughout the lockdown.⁵⁸ The social distancing measures made it impossible for them to leave their children to a relative or a friend of a professional in order to do necessary chores or go to work. Most single mothers work in the informal sector, because their responsibilities at home do not allow for a full-time job schedule, with afternoon working hours and shifts. Before the pandemic, many used to work from home as beauticians, nail artists, hairdressers or tailors. With the outbreak of the pandemic they were left without work and without any type of state support because there were no support schemes for the uninsured workers. Despite pleas to the Minister of Labour to include in the plans an extra scheme for the single parent family, The Labour Ministry did not foresee any scheme for this category and did not request budget from Parliament for support to single parents in the informal market. There was no time to apply for the government minimum income because processing the applications takes several months under normal circumstances and much longer when governmental services were effectively brought to a standstill because of the lockdown. For the single parents, there is no other income in the family and the loss of livelihood without any state support led many to extreme poverty, their only support coming from initiatives of NGOs and private initiatives in the form of food and supermarket coupons. In many cases the single mothers did not receive the alimony payment from their former partner because they had also stopped working. The Pancyprian Association of Single Parent families estimates that there are approximately 30,000 single parent families in Cyprus but only about 10,000 of them receive the single parent benefit because of the several stringent conditions of eligibility foreseen in the law.⁵⁹

2.2 Xenophobic speech, acts of harassment and violent attacks

- *In reference to Bulletin #1 where these issues were addressed, please report incidents of xenophobic speech, acts of harassment and violent attacks against specific minority groups on the grounds of race or ethnic origin during the reporting period and on any key developments since you last reported on this issue.*

The Covid-19 crisis and the new measures adopted by the government towards migrants and refugees, alongside with the public debate preceding the adoption by the Council of Ministers of a new migration policy,⁶⁰ gave rise to a number of instances of xenophobic discourse in the media. On 17 May the Journalistic Ethics Committee issued a decision against the TV Channel Sigma TV for a TV interview with the Interior Minister during which the interviewing journalist stated that the numbers of migrants are such that Cyprus cannot bear them and did not react when the Interior Minister said that migrants and refugees do not come to Cyprus out of their own initiative but they are directed

⁵⁷ Michael, A. (2020), [‘Η πανδημία έπληξε περισσότερο τις εργαζόμενες γυναίκες’](#), Ergatiko Vima, 25 June 2020.

⁵⁸ Consultation with President of the Association of Single Parent Families, 30 June 2020.

⁵⁹ Consultation with President of the Association of Single Parent Families, 30 June 2020.

⁶⁰ Cyprus, Ministry of the Interior (2020), [‘Ολοκληρωμένη μεταναστευτική πολιτική και πολιτική ασύλου’](#), 18 June 2010.

from Turkey, leaving the impression that this is a fact. The TV Channel stood by the journalist, responding to the Committee that the positions expressed were in agreement with the channel's views.⁶¹ The TV Channel is at the same time a beneficiary of EU funds for migrant integration, managed by the Interior Ministry,⁶² having received funding of 1,3 million Euros for TV programs on gastronomy.⁶³ On the same date, the Journalistic Ethics Committee also issued a decision against the newspaper Alethia for an article naming migrants as 'the third Attila' and falsely printing that the number of asylum seekers in Cyprus are 43,000. The Committee found that the article contained hate speech prohibited by law. The newspaper responded to the decision justifying its conclusions on statements made by the Interior Minister.⁶⁴ The Journalistic Ethics Committee does not have power to impose sanctions, its mandate being limited to the investigation of complaints and publishing of decisions.

2.3 Infringement of privacy and/or data protection rights

- *In reference to Bulletin # 1 and Bulletin #2 where these issues were addressed, please describe instances of infringement of privacy and/or data protection rights related to the pandemic during the reporting period and on any key developments since you last reported on this issue.*

One of the issues that surfaced during the general health emergency created by the pandemic was access to the medical files of a patient for specialist doctors and other health professionals, given the social distancing measures and the fact that unnecessary visits to hospitals and health centres were discouraged. In response to a media article regarding the prohibition of access to medical files of patients registered on the public health system by other health professionals, like physiotherapists or speech therapists, the Data Protection Commissioner stated that although other health professional ought to have access to certain basic information from the patients' files, the national health system records do not allow partial access; it only allows access to either the entire medical record of a patient, or nothing. The Commissioner added that there are technical solutions available which must be considered by the public health organisation as regards the architectonic structure of the records in order to satisfy the needs of health professionals and facilitate the best possible health service to patients, without jeopardizing the protection of personal data. The Commissioner recommended that a system be put into place so that the general doctor issues an electronic referral to a specialist, attaching thereto the data needed by the specialist, such as C-rays, MRI results etc. or reconstruct the records in such a way so that the specialist has access only to parts of the patient's medical history, as authorized by the general doctor.⁶⁵

The only available contact tracing app in Cyprus⁶⁶ is voluntary and stores data only on the user's device with no automatic transmission to any other device or platform; only the user can

⁶¹ Sigmalive (2020), ['Η απόφαση της Επ. Δημοσιογραφικής Δεοντολογίας για το «Μεσημέρι και Κατι»](#), 17 May 2020.

⁶² Cyprus, Ministry of the Interior, European Funds Unit, ['Η εκπομπή του ΣΙΓΜΑ που ανοίγει την πόρτα του πολιτισμού μέσω της γαστρονομίας'](#), 17 April 2016.

⁶³ Dialogos (2020), ['Σκάφη και χορηγίες για εκπομπές μαγειρικής στο Sigma με τα ευρωπαϊκά κονδύλια για το μεταναστευτικό'](#), 7 March 2020.

⁶⁴ Agathocleous, T. (2020), ['Η «δίκη» της «Αλήθειας»](#), Omegalive, 2 June 2020.

⁶⁵ Cyprus, Commissioner for the Protection of Personal Data (2020), ['Πρόσβαση άλλων επαγγελματιών υγείας σε φακέλους ασθενών του ΓΕΣΥ'](#), Press release, 24 June 2020.

⁶⁶ For more information, please see the product webpage [here](#).

choose when and how to export the data and to whom it will supply it.⁶⁷ There were no concerns raised as regards data protection issues arising from its use.

2.4 Spread of disinformation online

- *In reference to Bulletin #1 where these issues were addressed, please describe measures taken to counter the spread of disinformation online, during the reporting period and on any key developments since you last reported on this issue.*

There were no developments in this field. Although no serious incidents of on-line spread of disinformation was reported, the subject was debated in a series of on-line programs⁶⁸ and the University of Nicosia published on-line a guide on how to fact-check information.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ The privacy policy of the app is available [here](#).

⁶⁸ See for instance the program 'Science Hoaxes' on the personal website of a biologist, [here](#);

⁶⁹ The guide is available on the website of the University of Nicosia, [here](#).