

# Return as Infrastructure. The Cyprus Case (Online Article)

## Historical Note

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## Content

### Return as Infrastructure. The Cyprus Case

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Cyprus is often depicted as a peripheral context within the EU. Yet what is currently happening on the island is revealing of broader transformations in European migration governance. As a small state with high return rates and an evolving asylum system, Cyprus offers a view of how policy shifts are being translated into practices.

Recent developments make this clear. A new pre-removal detention centre has just been (partially) opened in Limnes,[1]while at EU level, the return framework has been reinforced, with a vote that regresses from fundamental rights, enabling deportations to third countries, weakening the suspensive effect of appeals, broadening detention grounds and allowing return decisions even where removal is not realistically feasible.[2]

These processes are not independent. They point to (yet another) change that hardens migration governance, one in which returns are central, not only as the legal outcome of an asylum application, but as an operational priority that is being materially supported.

The direction at the EU level is explicit. The return regime already establishes return as the default outcome following a final negative asylum decision. More recent developments intensify this orientation by prioritising “efficiency”, and enforceability. What emerges is a system that is increasingly restrictive and oriented toward removals.

The Cypriot case shows this trajectory in concrete terms. In 2025, the overall rejection rate for asylum application was 93.11%, only 6.89% of the overall cases resulted in protection.[3] This means that a significant proportion of applicants become subject to return procedures in the island. Deportation orders have increased in recent years,[4] accompanied by more frequent police operations, targeted raids, and a broader push to accelerate administrative processing.[5] Institutionally, this shift has been reinforced through the creation of a dedicated working group tasked with reviewing deportation files and removing administrative bottlenecks.[6] Returns have become a central organising principle of the system.

Returns in Cyprus take voluntary (through the Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) programme)[7] and forced forms. The distinction between these categories is often blurred in practice. While voluntary return schemes have been promoted through financial incentives, many of those who choose to

return do so after exhausting all legal options.

At the level of discourse, returns are framed primarily in terms of efficiency, control, and deterrence. Government narratives emphasise the need to manage migration flows, enforce decisions, and maintain order.[8] Media representations often focus on numbers, arrests, and operations.[9] What remains absent from most framings are questions related to long-term integration options and structural inequalities. The emphasis on efficiency obscures the social and human consequences of policies, particularly as more people are placed in situations of prolonged uncertainty, isolation, and exclusion.

To understand how these dynamics operate, it is necessary to move beyond policy and look into the spatial organisation of the system. Returns are not only produced through law and administrative decisions. It is also produced through space.

If one traces the asylum process in Cyprus, it becomes evident that it unfolds across a series of interconnected sites: reception centres, administrative offices, detention facilities, and urban environments where people attempt to navigate precarious living conditions. These sites form a spatial chain through which people are processed, sorted, and channelled.

Within this chain, camps play an important role. Camps are often presented as temporary and humanitarian spaces. They function as key nodes in the governance of mobility. They are sites where people are registered, categorised, and subjected to varying degrees of control. They are also spaces of waiting, where time is extended and access to rights is uneven.[10] Importantly, they prepare people for what comes next, whether that means continued uncertainty, integration, or return.

In Cyprus, the asylum system currently revolves around several key sites:

Pournara First Reception Centre, where registration and initial processing take place. Kofinou, an accommodation centre for a limited number of individuals classified as vulnerable. Menoyia detention center, until recently, the main facility for detaining people subject to return procedures. And a newly rebuilt and expanded facility in Limnes.

Limnes is particularly significant when talking about returns. It has been designed to function both as an accommodation centre and as a pre-departure/detention facility. At the level of spatial organisation, it brings together reception and return within a single site. This is not a minor adjustment, but a structural shift. It potentially reduces the distance (both spatial and procedural) between the moment of rejection and the execution of removal.

The development of Limnes has been underway for several years, supported by both national authorities and EU funding mechanisms.[11] Its promotion has presented it as an improvement in the management of migration, but this framing obscures the extent to which it consolidates a highly controlled environment.[12]

The location of Limnes reinforces its role within a broader territorial configuration. The new camp is situated in the Larnaca district and in close proximity to other key sites, including Kofinou camp and the Menoyia detention centre. This creates a cluster of migration control infrastructures, where different stages of the process are spatially concentrated. The site is not entirely new but builds on previous uses, now significantly expanded and formalised. The scale of this expansion is notable. The pre-departure detention section alone is expected to accommodate around 800 people, a substantial increase compared to the 128 places available at Menoyia detention center.[13] The accommodation section adds capacity for around 1000 people.

The expansion increases the system's capacity to hold, sort, and process individuals. It stops people

from going to urban centers, it reduces the gap between decision and removal and it allows for a streamlined transition from rejection to return. Limnes, therefore, should not be understood simply as an extension of reception capacity. It is an infrastructure specifically oriented toward facilitating returns. It materialises a shift in the system, aligning spatial design with policy.

From this perspective, Cyprus appears to be preparing for broader EU policy directions. The infrastructures being developed on the island anticipate and enable the implementation of increasingly enforcement-oriented return frameworks.

This raises important questions.

What does it mean for a migration system to be organised around the acceleration of returns? How does the expansion of detention and pre-removal infrastructures reshape access to protection? And within such a structured and tightly managed system, what space remains for contestation, negotiation, or resistance?

Return is not only decided. It is built, spatialised, and operationalised.

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[1] <https://cyprus-mail.com/2026/03/30/new-migrant-centre-in-limnes-partially-opened>

[2] <https://ecre.org/ecre-statement-european-parliament-vote-on-the-return-regulation>

[3] <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/cyprus/statistics/>

[4] <https://med-ma.eu/migration-data/cyprus/returns-cy/>

[5] <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/69874/cyprus-intensifies-migration-enforcement-operations>

[6] <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/69427/cyprus-emphasis-on-returns-as-eu-presidency-takes-shape>

[7] [https://www.mip.gov.cy/mip/asylum/asylumservice.nsf/CA69B0FCF3AD987AC2258B0B002E908F/\\$file/Ενημερωτικό%20έντυπο%20για%20Επιστροφές%20για%20Υπηκόους%20Τρίτων%20Χωρών.pdf](https://www.mip.gov.cy/mip/asylum/asylumservice.nsf/CA69B0FCF3AD987AC2258B0B002E908F/$file/Ενημερωτικό%20έντυπο%20για%20Επιστροφές%20για%20Υπηκόους%20Τρίτων%20Χωρών.pdf)

[8] <https://cyprus-mail.com/2026/03/12/government-seeks-faster-deportations-of-irregular-migrants>

[9] <https://cyprus-mail.com/2025/12/21/dozens-arrested-in-nationwide-operation-targeting-illegal-stay>

[10] See <https://rm.coe.int/1680afb22c> and <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/cyprus/reception-conditions/housing/types-accommodation/>

[11] <https://in-cyprus.philenews.com/local/contract-for-construction-of-new-limnes-reception-centre-to-be-signed-on-tuesday/>

[12] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ePWkSGv4qaE>

[13] <https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/countries/europe/cyprus/detention-centres/1242/menoyia-me>

[nogeia-immigration-detention-centre](#)

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