



EU State Suspends Syrian Asylum Applications Amid Surge in Boat Migrants

Description

EU : In a written statement, the Cypriot government said the suspension is also partly because of ongoing efforts to get the European Union to redesignate some areas of the war-torn country as safe zones to enable repatriations.

The drastic step comes in the wake of Cypriot President Nicos Christodoulides' visit to Lebanon earlier week to appeal to authorities there to stop departures of migrant-laden boats from their shores. The request comes in light of a 27-fold increase in migrant arrivals to Cyprus so far this year over the same period last year.

According to Cyprus Interior Ministry statistics, some 2,140 people arrived by boat to EU-member Cyprus between Jan. 1 and April 4 of this year, the vast majority of them Syrian nationals departing from Lebanon. In contrast, only 78 people arrived by boat to the island nation in the corresponding period last year.

On Monday, Christodoulides and Lebanese caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati called on the European Union to provide financial support to help cash-strapped Lebanon stop migrants from reaching Cyprus.

Just days prior to his Lebanon trip, the Cypriot president said that he had personally asked EU Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen to intercede with Lebanese authorities to curb migrant boat departures.

Although the EU should provide "substantial" EU support to Lebanon, Christodoulides said any financial help should be linked to how effectively Lebanese authorities monitor their coastline and prevent boat departures.

Lebanon and Cyprus already have a bilateral deal where Cypriot authorities would return migrants attempting to reach the island from Lebanon. But Cypriot Interior Minister Constantinos Ioannou has said that Lebanon is refusing to hold up its end of the deal because of domestic pressures.

Lebanon – which is coping with a crippling economic crisis since 2019 – hosts some 805,000 U.N.-

registered Syrian refugees, of which 90% live in poverty, the U.N.'s refugee agency says. Lebanese officials estimate the actual number is far higher, ranging between 1.5 and 2 million. Many have escaped the civil war in their country which entered its 14th year.

Ioannou this week visited Denmark, Czechia and Greece to drum up support for a push to get the EU to declare parts of Syria as safe. Doing so would enable EU nations to send back Syrians hailing from those "safe" areas.

The Cypriot interior minister said he and his Czech and Danish counterparts to draft an official document for the EU executive to get a formal discussion on the Syrian safe zone idea going.

Additionally, Ioannou said he and his Czech counterpart agreed on a sending joint fact-finding mission to Syria to determine which areas in the country are safe.

However, U.N. agencies, human rights groups, and Western governments maintain that Syria is not yet safe for repatriation.

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