

## SECRETARIAT / SECRÉTARIAT

SECRETARIAT OF THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS  
SECRÉTARIAT DU COMITÉ DES MINISTRES

COMMITTEE  
OF MINISTERS  
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Date: 02/02/2026

### DH-DD(2026)180

Documents distributed at the request of a Representative shall be under the sole responsibility of the said Representative, without prejudice to the legal or political position of the Committee of Ministers.

Meeting: 1553<sup>rd</sup> meeting (March 2026) (DH)

Communication from NGOs (KISA, EuroMed Rights and the Centre d'Etudes en Sciences Sociales sur les Mondes Africains, Américains et Asiatiques (CESSMA)) (23/01/2026) in the case of M.A. and Z.R. v. Cyprus (Application No. 39090/20).

Information made available under Rule 9.2 of the Rules of the Committee of Ministers for the supervision of the execution of judgments and of the terms of friendly settlements.

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Réunion : 1553<sup>e</sup> réunion (mars 2026) (DH)

Communication d'ONG (KISA, EuroMed Rights et le Centre d'Etudes en Sciences Sociales sur les Mondes Africains, Américains et Asiatiques (CESSMA)) (23/01/2026) dans l'affaire M.A. et Z.R. c. Chypre (requête n° 39090/20) [**anglais uniquement**]

Informations mises à disposition en vertu de la Règle 9.2 des Règles du Comité des Ministres pour la surveillance de l'exécution des arrêts et des termes des règlements amiables.

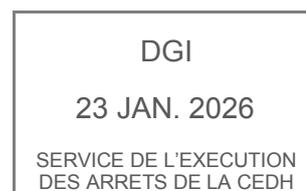
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**DGI - Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law**

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**Sent by e-mail**

23 January 2026

Submission by *KISA*, *EuroMed Rights* and the *Centre d'Etudes en Sciences Sociales sur les Mondes Africains, Américains et Asiatiques (CESSMA)* pursuant to Rule 9.2 of the Committee of Ministers' Rules for the Supervision of the Execution of Judgments, on the implementation of *M.A. and Z.R. v. Cyprus* (Application No 39090/20), Judgement 08/10/2024

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**A. Executive Summary**

1. In line with Rule 9 of the Rules of the Committee of Ministers for the supervision of the execution of judgments and of the terms of friendly settlements, **KISA, EuroMed Rights and CESSMA** hereby present a communication regarding the execution of the general measures in judgment of the European Court of Human Rights (hereinafter the Court) concerning the case of *M.A. and Z.R. v. Cyprus (Application No 39090/20)*. As a coalition of national and regional human and refugee rights organizations and a research institution, these organizations have been closely monitoring pushback practices from Cypriot authorities since September 2020.
2. The case concerns the Syrian applicants' interception at sea by the authorities and their collective and summary return to the Lebanese authorities in 2020, without an examination of their asylum claims or individual circumstances, exposing them to treatment prohibited under Article 3 of the Convention due to their living conditions in Lebanon and the risk of indirect refoulement to Syria. The Court also found that the Applicants did not have an effective domestic remedy with an automatic suspensive effect at their disposal to challenge this treatment, in violation of Article 13 of the Convention. In addition, the Court found that the treatment by the Cypriot Port and Marine Police during the two days the applicants remained on the boat amounted to degrading treatment in violation of Article 3.
3. The government submitted its Action Plan concerning **M.A. and Z.R. v. Cyprus** on 16 September 2025. It argued that all necessary general and individual measures have been properly taken and

that the examination of the case should be closed or, in the alternative, the case should be examined under the standard procedure as they reported tangible progress in the implementation of the decision.

4. In the opinion of **KISA, EuroMed Rights and CESSMA**, the Committee of Ministers should not discontinue the examination of the implementation of the judgement of the Court and supervision should remain under the enhanced procedure because –
  - a. The Government of Cyprus did not present convincing evidence that the judgement is implemented. The Navkatis plan as presented by the Government neither addresses all the relevant issues which had led to violation of the Applicants’ rights, nor does it provide relevant evidence, leaving the Government’s assertion that everything has been solved by now – unsubstantiated.
  - b. Not only collective expulsions and push backs at sea continue to be carried out on a regular basis by Cypriot authorities with the use of different methods, it has further expanded to land “borders” (green line) in manifest disregard of the ECtHR’s findings and the GVT’s obligation to remedy the situation;
  - c. More and more individuals become victims of their rights violations – similarly to the applicants’ case, having no effective remedy at their disposal to stop that illegal practice or to benefit from redress.

#### **B. Comments on the Government Submissions /Action Plan**

5. The Government claims that the revised Navkratis Plan of 2024, is capable of addressing the shortcomings in the treatment of the Applicants of the case, which were found to be in violation of the Convention. However, the Government provides a very general description of the revised Navrkatis Plan, the details of which remain unknown. Before closing the implementation procedure the Committee has to have sufficient information to make positive conclusions that collective expulsions and push backs at sea ended and that protection from refoulement, procedural and substantial, access to asylum procedures and effective remedies is available to migrants wishing to apply for asylum. The information provided in the next part of these submissions prove that this is not the case.
6. Moreover, according to the Government’s submissions the plan provides for the acts that need to be carried out in situations where irregular migrants **enter** the territory of Cyprus. It should be clarified whether the plan covers the **treatment of migrants at sea or only when they reach Cypriot territory**. The general description given by the Government points more to the treatment of asylum seekers and migrants once they reach the territory rather than their treatment when they

are intercepted at sea. In particular, it does not seem to cover the situations similar to the applicants' case, where they were intercepted at sea and where their human rights violations started. As long as the description remains general and vague, its actual implementation remains unpredictable, and the practice cannot be seen as complying with the ECtHR judgment.

7. On the basis of the policies and practices followed by the Government of Cyprus after October 2024 when the Court delivered its judgement, described in the next part of these submissions, it is suggested that the plan does not address the treatment of migrants at sea, whether in Cypriot territorial waters or international waters when search and rescue operations take place, in accordance with the obligations arising under the Convention, international and EU law.
8. The Government provides statistics in relation to the **incidents** treated in accordance with the "Navkratis Plan" during the years between 2022 – 2025 in a very general way and does not provide any information on how these migrants were treated. It is noted that according to the Government the revised "Navkratis Plan" entered into force in 2024 as a measure to implement the decision of the Court, but the Government claims that incidents going as back as 2022 were treated in accordance with this plan.
9. In addition, no information is provided in relation to each incident, at least those that follow the judgment of the court, and in particular, whether search and rescue operations were initiated or if those were related to migrants arriving spontaneously to the territory or if the migrants were rescued and subsequently admitted on the territory and filed asylum applications. The Government provides only a general number of incidents and number of persons involved while Navkratis plan has proven its inefficiency in practice as the incidents described in the next part of these submissions clearly illustrate a very different picture than the one described by the Government.
10. Finally, the Government claims that in view of the adopted revised Navkratis Plan and the fact that migrants arriving by sea in the Cypriot territorial waters are received by the authorities and taken to the First Reception Centre Pournara, where they have the right to file an application for international protection, no other measures are necessary to comply with the Court's finding of the above violations. There is no reference however, to the remedy available, in case the above plan is not properly implemented for any reason and when migrants may be found in a similar situation such as the Applicants in the above mentioned case.

## **C. Continued policies and practices and legislative gaps in violation of the Court's Judgment and the Convention**

### **C.1 Ongoing pushback incidents and collective expulsions:**

11. According to publicly available credible information referred to below, the Government of Cyprus did not only fail to take any action to implement the judgement of the Court, but has adopted policies and practices which either circumvent or directly violate it. Moreover, the Government expanded such practices which are applied not only in sea, but also on land, by obstructing access to asylum and protection to migrants arriving through the green line, in violation of Article 3 of the Convention.
12. More specifically, between May and November 2024, migrants who crossed the Green line between the non- government controlled areas and the government controlled areas to seek asylum, were not given access to asylum procedure and reception conditions and were pushed back in the buffer zone where they remained stranded for months in inhumane and degrading conditions before being allowed access to the asylum procedures and only after they filed an interim order under Rule 39 of the Rules of the Court.
13. During that period, persons remained trapped in the Buffer Zone. According to a report by the UN Secretary General to the UN Security Council, a total of 142 asylum-seekers, including 35 minors, some of them as young as 9 months old became stranded in the buffer zone from 15 May 2024 on, after the Cypriot government decided to deny them access to asylum procedures and push them back into the buffer zone area.<sup>1</sup>
14. In October 2024, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights O'Flaherty expressed concern about the situation of migrant and asylum-seeking people stranded in the buffer zone and allegations of summary returns at sea<sup>2</sup>. Legal action was taken before the International Protection Administrative Court (IPAC) for omission of the Cypriot authorities to allow access to asylum procedures. These cases continue pending before the IPAC and have not been litigated yet. In addition, a group of asylum seekers filed an application for interim measures with the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) under Rule 39<sup>3</sup>. The ECHR requested the Cypriot government to

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Security Council. (3 January 2025). Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (S/2025/6). <https://docs.un.org/en/s/2025/6>

<sup>2</sup> Council of Europe, *Cyprus: Commissioner O'Flaherty expresses concern about the situation of migrant and asylum-seeking people stranded in the buffer zone and allegations of summary returns at sea*, 23 October 2024, available [here](#).

<sup>3</sup> The application to the ECHR was made by KISA and the Italian Non-Governmental Organization "Rule 39 Initiative"

provide information on whether the asylum seekers had access to asylum procedures in Cyprus and whether they are at risk of indirect refoulement<sup>4</sup>. Once people have entered the Buffer Zone from areas in the north not under the control of the ROC, a return to the north is often not an option, as there is no asylum system in place in those areas. Instead, individuals' risk being arrested and returned to Türkiye, where they may be forcibly returned to their country of origin.<sup>5</sup>

15. Beginning in September 2024, the Republic of Cyprus started gradually transferring asylum seekers from the buffer zone to accommodation and reception centres. On 14 November 2024, the last individuals remaining in the Buffer Zone were allowed to enter areas controlled by the Republic of Cyprus<sup>6</sup>, because of the Interim Order filed to the Court. In relation to that case Joined Applications No 32295/24 and 5455/25 are currently pending before the Court and the Government was requested to reply to the Questions of the Court.
16. However, at the time, Cyprus's Deputy Minister of Migration and International Protection stated that asylum seekers would not be given access to asylum procedures and that the Government did not consider asylum seekers arriving through the buffer zone its own responsibility<sup>7</sup>. In fact, despite allowing access to asylum applications for those migrants, the Cypriot authorities did not examine their applications (with the exception of 1 application which was rejected) and they try to relocate them to other countries while in the meantime they remain in Limnes Reception Centre, feeling insecure. Taking into account the above position of the Deputy Minister of Migration and International Protection there is no certainty on how migrants arriving through the Buffer Zone are treated.
17. As regards incidents at sea, the UN and international and national civil society organizations have continued to monitor problematic practices in territorial and non-territorial waters, as well as in the buffer zone. During the period from 2020 until 2024 various incidents of interception of migrants at sea and push backs were reported according to publicly available information<sup>8</sup>. These

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<sup>4</sup> Politis, *Strict deadline for Christodoulides government from ECHR after communication game and threats of deportation of asylum seekers* 19 November 2024, available in Greek [here](#).

<sup>5</sup> AIDA (15 March 2025) *Country Report on Cyprus – Update on 2024*, <https://ecre.org/aida-country-report-on-cyprus-2024-update/> p. 24

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Security Council. (2025, January 3). Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (S/2025/6). <https://docs.un.org/en/s/2025/6> , p. 2

<sup>7</sup> Reporter (16 November 2024) *In Kofinou, the immigrants who were in the Dead Zone – The Government is not afraid of any appeals to the ECtHR*, <https://www.reporter.com.cy/article/1143078/stin-kofinou-oi-metanastes-poy-itan-sti-nekri-zoni-den-fobatai-tychon-prosfygs-sto-edad-i-kybernisi> (accessed 30 October 2025).

<sup>8</sup> A full list of those incidents is attached as Annex 1.

submissions concentrate on incidents of pushbacks after July 2024 and in particular after the delivery of the judgement of the Court.

18. The Border Violence Monitoring Network (BVMN) correlated openly available reports of pushbacks carried out by Cypriot authorities with automatically transmitted vessel tracking data from vessels identified as belonging to Cypriot authorities. BVMN's research, which goes back to incidents as far as October 2024, suggests that Cypriot authorities have continued their practice of unlawful pushbacks both in territorial and international waters<sup>9</sup>.
19. According to UNHCR Cyprus, nine boats arrived in Cypriot waters from both Lebanon and Syria during the first ten months of 2025. Out of these nine boats, five boats were intercepted and pushed back in 2025: two boats in March,<sup>10</sup> two in May<sup>11</sup> and one in August,<sup>12</sup> carrying a total of 160 persons. To the best of knowledge of UNHCR Cyprus, the passengers were all Syrian nationals. Three of the boats were reportedly returned directly to Syria and two to Lebanon and then onwards to Syria (in March).
20. UNHCR Cyprus also recorded seven dead and 12 missing in connection to a pushback incident on 14 March 2025. Three boats with approximately 80 Syrian nationals, including women and

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<sup>9</sup> Cyprus continues its pushbacks in spite of M.A. & Z.R. v Cyprus, 17 January 2026, BVMN  
<https://bordertviolence.eu/reports/cyprus-continues-its-pushbacks-in-spite-of-m-a-z-r-v-cyprus>.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.alphanews.live/cyprus/pyrovolousan-tis-varkes-apokalyptiki-martyria-gia-push-backs-st-anoichta-tis-kyprou/>  
<https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/63453/cyprus-two-survivors-and-at-least-seven-dead-after-migrant-boat-capsizes>

<sup>11</sup> On 11 May, around 12:00, a Facebook post by 'Unified Rescue' reported that the passengers were handed over to the Syrian Coast Guard by the Cypriot Coast Guard. [https://x.com/alarm\\_phone/status/1921082401515512313](https://x.com/alarm_phone/status/1921082401515512313). At 14:58 on 11 May, Alarm Phone posted on X that the authorities had informed them they had "collaborated with the Syrian Coast Guard and returned the passengers to Syria."  
[https://x.com/alarm\\_phone/status/1921307872660459630](https://x.com/alarm_phone/status/1921307872660459630)

For both 10 and 11 May:

[https://www.ant1live.com/kypros/koinonia/632396\\_epibebaiosi-yfypoyrgoy-stis-plirofories-ant1-gia-tin-epistrofi-metanaston](https://www.ant1live.com/kypros/koinonia/632396_epibebaiosi-yfypoyrgoy-stis-plirofories-ant1-gia-tin-epistrofi-metanaston)  
<https://www.philenews.com/kipros/koinonia/article/1582922/apoklistiko-i-siria-dechete-piso-metanastes-pou-katefthinonte-paranoma-pros-tin-kipro/>  
<https://www.politis.com.cy/politis-news/cyprus/936255/fotografies-apo-ta-pushbacks-sti-syria-pou-ta-vaftisame-erevna-kai-diasosi>

<sup>12</sup> <https://crg-news.com/2025/08/14/%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%B7%D9%88%D8%B3-%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89-%D9%82%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%B5-%D8%AB%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B3%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B1/>  
[https://x.com/alarm\\_phone/status/1955601541119058413](https://x.com/alarm_phone/status/1955601541119058413)

children, had departed from Tartous, Syria, and reached Cypriot waters.<sup>13</sup> According to UNHCR Cyprus, those on board had neither been allowed to disembark on land, nor to access asylum procedures.<sup>14</sup> Instead, these boats were pushed back by Cypriot authorities.<sup>15</sup> One boat carrying 21 Syrians capsized some 15km off the coast of Cyprus on 16 March due to large waves.<sup>16</sup> The Cypriot SAR operation rescued only two individuals on 17 March while some of the persons on the boat are still missing.

21. In relation to the deadly incident of 16 March 2025, Alarm Phone informed the Cypriot authorities by mail as early as in the evening of 15 March 2025 at 22:11 CET and by phone at 23:00 CET, requesting the launch of a search and rescue operation. The Cypriot authorities said that they were investigating the case and refused to share any details on the situation or their actions. Alarm Phone considers that they did not act promptly to initiate a search and rescue operation leading to the drowning of most of the migrants on the boat<sup>17</sup>. Alarm Phone's findings are confirmed by CIREN (Cyprus Investigative Reporting Network) in their report published on 30/12/2025 on the same incident highlighting many inconsistencies over the narrative of the Cypriot authorities as to the actions taken to save lives at sea after they were informed by Alarm Phone<sup>18</sup>. No official investigation by the Cypriot authorities as to the effectiveness of the actions taken by the Cypriot authorities so as to save human lives, has taken place.

22. The public statements of the Cypriot government in relation to the above incident point towards a worrying misinterpretation of the Court's judgment in MA and ZR v. Cyprus. The Cypriot justice ministry's position on the matter was that the three boats which the UNHCR had said had been pushed back, were in fact located by the police in Syrian territorial waters at the time and were

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<sup>13</sup> UNHCR (18 March 2025), "UNHCR concerned about reports of pushbacks of Syrians", Press Release, <https://www.unhcr.org/europe/news/press-releases/unhcr-concerned-about-reports-pushbacks-syrians> (accessed 21 October 2025).

<sup>14</sup> Cleaver, T., (20 March 2025), "Justice minister, UNHCR spar over migrant pushback claims", Cyprus Mail, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2025/03/20/justice-minister-unhcr-spar-over-migrant-pushback-claims> (accessed 21 October 2025)

<sup>15</sup> UNHCR (18 March 2025), "UNHCR concerned about reports of pushbacks of Syrians", Press Release, <https://www.unhcr.org/europe/news/press-releases/unhcr-concerned-about-reports-pushbacks-syrians> (accessed 21 October 2025).

<sup>16</sup> Alarm Phone issued an alert based on reports from relatives. A SAR operation on 17 March found two survivors and seven bodies. <https://cyprus-mail.com/2025/03/18/search-continues-for-survivors-on-capsized-boat>

<sup>17</sup> Preventable deaths: many people lost their lives or went missing after a shipwreck off Cyprus March 28, 2025 <https://alarmphone.org/en/2025/03/28/preventable-deaths-many-people-lost-their-lives-or-went-missing-after-a-shipwreck-off-cyprus/>

<sup>18</sup> CIREN, Surviving a Shipwreck, Drowning in the System, 30/12/2025 <https://ciren.cy/investigation/surviving-a-shipwreck-drowning-in-the-system/>

warned not to proceed towards Cypriot waters<sup>19</sup>. This means that the Cypriot Coast Guard apprehends boats of migrants in international or Lebanese or Syrian waters and pushes them back where they came from, in violation of their obligations under the Convention and the case law of the Court (*Hirsi Jamaa and others v. Italy*)

23. The rhetorics coming from high state officials once again confirms the Government's non-compliance with the state's obligation under Article 46 of the Convention. For example, the Deputy Minister of Migration and International Protection, in the context of other push back incidents, such as the pushback of Syrians to Tartous in Syria mentioned above, publicly stated on 13/05/2025<sup>20</sup> that-

- a. "the Cyprus-Syria bilateral agreement on search and rescue, allegedly in force since 2009 , was activated so that the authorities of the two states can cooperate, coordinate their efforts for the safe rescue and disembarkation of those rescued"
- b. "the International Conventions provide for an obligation of states to rescue people from danger at sea. But they do not provide that the rescuing state must accept them into its territory. [...] While an inflatable boat is sinking, we will not deal with an asylum claim at that time. We will save people."
- c. "Under international law, the rescuing country has no obligation to take the rescued into its territory. The rescue took place further closer to the Syrian coast. So under the agreement for the search and rescue, the disembarkation had to take place at the nearest safe port. [...] international law and international jurisprudence [...] says that return takes place when a person is within the territory of a state and is removed either to another state or, if at sea, to the sea, where his or her life is in danger. This did not happen. Because no life was endangered"

24. The above-mentioned statements run counter the Government's obligation to comply with the Court's judgement, the Convention and international law and illustrate the Government's lack of political will to do so. Not only the Government does not accept its obligations under the non-refoulement principle and Article 3 of the Convention as per the case law of the Court, but it continues to rely on bilateral agreements with the countries of origin of migrants and/or allegedly safe third countries to send back migrants, in a complete disregard of the judgement of the Court which had set out the standards for those type of bilateral agreements, such as the agreement with

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<sup>19</sup> Cleaver, T., (20 March 2025), "Justice minister, UNHCR spar over migrant pushback claims", Cyprus Mail, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2025/03/20/justice-minister-unhcr-spar-over-migrant-pushback-claims> (accessed 21 October 2025)

<sup>20</sup> <https://soundcloud.com/politis1076/proini-epitheorisi-nikolas-1>

Lebanon. In addition, it is obvious that the Government does not recognize its obligations arising from the non-refoulement principle of customary international law as this has been endorsed by the Court in its interpretation of Article 3 of the Convention.

## **C.2 Access to effective remedy**

25. As regards access to an effective remedy no legislative or other measures have been taken by the Government to ensure that persons facing violations of their right to seek asylum and protection from collective expulsion and refoulement have a remedy, independently of their location and circumstances, when this access is denied.
26. It should be noted that Cyprus was found to be in violation of Article 13 in conjunction with Article 3 of the Convention in the case of *M.A v Cyprus*, 41872/10, Judgment 23.7.2013 because a recourse against a deportation order before the Administrative Court, did not have automatic suspensive effect.
27. To comply with the above judgement, the Establishment and Operation of the Administrative Court Law of 2015 (131(I)/2015) was amended in 2021 to provide for an automatic suspensive effect of recourses challenging a deportation order or a return decision only when the following requirements are fulfilled-
  - a. the recourse includes as a ground that the act is incompatible with the principle of non-refoulement, as provided for in an international convention or in European Union law or in Cypriot law, and/or an allegation of a violation of Article 2 and/or Article 3 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and/or Article 7 and/or Article 8 of the Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus and/or Article 2 and/or Article 4 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and
  - b. the applicant serves the recourse for annulment to the Ministry of the Interior, the Civil Registry and Migration Department and/or the Attorney General of the Republic.
28. The above provisions, are not in our opinion capable of addressing the violations of Article 13 of the Convention found by the Court for the following reasons:
  - a. A recourse would have an automatic suspensive effect only when a deportation or return decision is issued whilst in the case of the Applicants no such order or decision was issued or served to them.
  - b. It does not cover denial of entry or denial of access to asylum procedures and subsequent collective expulsion and push backs.

- c. Recourses are now submitted **only** electronically through the I-Justice system, which is accessible, as far as non- lawyers are concerned, only by persons legally residing in Cyprus because of the relevant technological modalities
- d. The recourse has to be submitted in Greek and on a specific template
- e. It has to be served to the attorney general or the immigration authorities
- f. No legal aid is provided unless the persons concerned prove to the judge possibilities of success of his/her case in person
- g. By the time the person concerned, or their lawyer manage to submit the case and by the time the case is allocated to a judge, the illegal actions may be already concluded.

29. In view of all the above, the provisions already in place as regards the automatic suspensive effect of a recourse do not comply with Article 13 and cannot be considered in line with the judgement of the court.

#### **D. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS**

30. In the light of the above, KISA, EuroMed Rights and CESSMA conclude that legal gaps, policy and practice remain at odds with the government's obligation to implement the Court's judgment and that Navkratis revised plan is not capable of ensuring compliance with the judgment of the court. On the contrary, it looks like Navkratis Plan legitimises continued collective expulsions and push backs at sea and cannot be considered as part of the required general measures following from the judgment *MA and ZR vs Cyprus*.

31. KISA, EuroMed Rights and CESSMA thus request on the Committee of Ministers to:

- a) Continue the supervision of the general measures under the enhanced procedure;
- b) Request the Cypriot government to provide:
  - the full text and details of Navkratis plan so that the Committee will be able to establish whether the revised plan complies with Cyprus's obligations arising from the decision of the Court.
  - Accurate and detailed information about the co-called Navkratis plan, detailing in particular a complete list of changes made in July 2024
  - The Search and Rescue (SAR) agreement, the memorandum of understanding between Cyprus and Lebanon, as well as between Cyprus and Syria
  - Operational guidelines or protocols governing patrol and interception procedures at the Buffer Zone.

c) With regards to **ongoing pushback incidents**, request the Cypriot government to provide evidence of:

- Documentation of sea operations including location information on the following dates (mm/dd/yyyy): 10/11/2024, 11/14/2024, 03/14/2025, 05/09/2025, 05/10/2025, 06/11/2025, 08/10/2025

**KISA-Action for Equality, Support, Antiracism**

**EuroMed Rights**

**Jill Alpes**

**Centre d'Etudes en Sciences Sociales sur les Mondes Africains, Américains et Asiatiques  
(CESSMA)**

## **Pushback incidents 2020**

### **March**

A boat carrying 175 Syrians, of whom 69 were children, was intercepted by the coast guard due to the COVID measures.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/3/30/cyprus-pushes-syrian-refugees-back-at-sea-due-to-coronavirus>

<https://philenews.com/koinonia/eidiseis/article/901717/sta-katechomena-oi-115-prosfygs-proti-fora-efarmozei-politiki-apothisis-i-kd>

### **June**

A boat carrying 30 people was intercepted by the coast guard due to the COVID measures.

### **July**

A boat carrying 10 Syrians was intercepted by the coast guard due to the COVID measures.

<https://cyprus-mail.com/2020/07/31/migrants-abandon-boat-slip-back-into-republic-on-foot/>

### **August / September 2020**

243 persons on 6 different boats were pushed back / deported to Lebanon.

There were additional reported attempts of boats trying to depart Lebanon. One such boat was rescued by UNFIL after being at sea for 7 days and 3 persons lost their lives, including a young child, while 14 remained missing at sea.

<https://cyprus-mail.com/2020/09/30/human-rights-watch-claims-cyprus-illegally-pushing-back-migrant-boats/>

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/09/29/cyprus-asylum-seekers-summarily-returned>

### **Associated Press**

Rights group: Cyprus pushed back migrants, ignored claims | September 29, 2020

<https://apnews.com/article/europe-middle-east-cyprus-immigration-0fb02cb798617804407486024c050436>

### **DW**

Refugee pushbacks by Cyprus draw attention from EU, UN

<https://www.dw.com/en/refugee-pushbacks-by-cyprus-draw-attention-from-eu-un/a-54908678>

### **InfoMigrants.net**

Human Rights Watch accuses Cypriot authorities of pushbacks to Lebanon | 30.09.2020

<https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/27651/human-rights-watch-accuses-cypriot-authorities-of-pushbacks-to-lebanon>

## **Washington Post / AP**

Rights group: Cyprus pushed back migrants, ignored claims | 29.09.2020

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/courts\\_law/rights-group-cyprus-pushed-back-migrants-ignored-claims/2020/09/29/922ed092-022e-11eb-b92e-029676f9ebec\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/courts_law/rights-group-cyprus-pushed-back-migrants-ignored-claims/2020/09/29/922ed092-022e-11eb-b92e-029676f9ebec_story.html)

## **Daily Sabah**

Greek Cyprus pushes back migrants, uses violence, rights watchdog reports | 29/09/2020

<https://www.dailysabah.com/world/europe/greek-cyprus-pushes-back-migrants-uses-violence-rights-watchdog-reports>

**The 961** (leading digital English news and media website catered to the Lebanese audience)

HRW: Cyprus Marine Police Threatened And Beat Migrants From Lebanon | 1.10.2020

<https://www.the961.com/cyprus-police-beat-migrants-from-lebanon/>

## **Middle East Monitor**

Cyprus accused of summarily returning refugees, as Greece charges aid workers with espionage | 29.09.2020

<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200929-cyprus-accused-of-summarily-returning-refugees-as-greece-charges-aid-workers-with-espionage/>

## **ReliefWeb**

Chypre : Expulsion sommaire de demandeurs d'asile en provenance du Liban | 29.09.2020

<https://reliefweb.int/report/cyprus/chypre-expulsion-sommaire-de-demandeurs-d-asile-en-provenance-du-liban>

## **December 2020**

Attempt to pushback a boat with 38 persons from Syria was carried out, however due to unsafe conditions the boat was allowed to reach shore.

## **Pushback incidents 2021**

### **January**

08/01/2021

A boat with 26 Syrians attempted to approach Kato Pyrgos, Paphos. According to media reports the coast guard provided the boat with food and fuel and did not allow it to approach the shore.

<https://cyprus-mail.com/2021/01/08/migrant-boat-turned-away-given-supplies/>  
<https://www.philenews.com/koinonia/eidiseis/article/1097436/i-limeniki-apetrepse-tin-prosengisi-plotiaroy-me-metanastes>

## May

16/05/2021

A boat carrying 63 Syrian nationals, including 23 children and 16 women reached the territorial waters of the Republic of Cyprus on 17 May. The boat was reportedly prevented from landing and consequently returned to Lebanon on 18 May 2021.

<https://www.philenews.com/koinonia/eidiseis/article/1193062/piso-ston-libano-epestrepsan-atypoi-metanastes>

<https://politis.com.cy/politis-news/kypros/piso-ston-livano-metanastes-poy-entopistikan-sto-kavo-gkreko-den-epitrapike-i-eisodos-stin-dimokratia/>

## June

23/06/2021

A boat carrying 58 men women and children was pushed back in Cape Greco area and returned to Lebanon with CyPol escort and in collaboration with the Lebanese authorities, according to Police spokesperson.

<https://www.philenews.com/koinonia/eidiseis/article/1225095/epistrefoyn-libano-oi-metanastes-poy-eftasan-sto-k-ggreko>

<https://cyprus-mail.com/2021/06/24/migrant-boat-spotted-off-cape-greco-3/>

<https://knews.kathimerini.com.cy/en/news/another-refugee-boat-pushed-back-in-cyprus>

## July

The below information was gathered either from the press and/or other private individuals:

23 July, a boat which sailed from Lebanon carrying 50 persons, was reportedly intercepted and returned to Lebanon.

25 July, a boat which sailed from Lebanon carrying 70 persons, was reportedly intercepted and returned to Lebanon.

28 July, sailed from Lebanon carrying 17 persons, was reportedly intercepted and returned to Lebanon.

<https://cyprus-mail.com/2021/07/29/cyprus-to-return-migrants-from-lebanon/>

## August

**23/8/2021: Two boats, one from Lebanon and one from Syria**

<https://apnews.com/article/europe-middle-east-syria-lebanon-migration-214ef51c716dfa2d3692d36d9b6feb48>

23/08/2021 two boats were pushed back to Lebanon, resulting in two instances of family separation.

On the first boat 75 persons, including women and children, were pushed back to Lebanon after being kept at sea for three days. A heavily pregnant woman and a seriously ill man were eventually admitted

to the territory due to their urgent medical condition. However, they were separated from their spouses and young children who were not permitted to disembark or subsequently reunite with them under family reunification procedures.

<https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20211003-in-cyprus-migrant-parents-decry-separation-from-children>

<https://knews.kathimerini.com.cy/en/news/shocking-details-emerge-after-pushback-in-cyprus>

<https://in-cyprus.philenews.com/governments-treatment-of-syrian-pregnant-refugee-woman-described-as-inhuman/>

<https://www.philenews.com/eidiseis/paraskinio/article/1301293/to-apolesthen-metro-sto-metanasteftiko-zitima>

<https://cyprus-mail.com/2021/09/20/minister-a-no-show-at-mp-drilling-over-divided-family/>

Minister's statement after no-show at the parliamentary committee summons to address the matter of the separated family:

<https://www.pio.gov.cy/%CE%B1%CE%BD%CE%B1%CE%BA%CE%BF%CE%B9%CE%BD%CF%89%CE%B8%CE%AD%CE%BD%CF%84%CE%B1-%CE%AC%CF%81%CE%B8%CF%81%CE%BF.html?id=22819#flat>

<https://www.sigmalive.com/news/local/829998/erevnes-gia-atomo-pou-voutikse-stin-thalassa-apo-varka-anoixta-tou-kavo-gkreko?fbclid=IwAR0uIYGqvr3pqzAzCMtdjDjgcXQ83GbMqCkBrdn0-vtNQZYDvLZf0EtL7RI>

<https://www.sigmalive.com/news/local/829793/anakopikan-dyo-skafi-me-paratypous-metanastes-se-kavo-gkreko-kai-paralimni?fbclid=IwAR2oVq0KbX4wGWF3Izca5vMvYlmg9rIJJVazMsVJ274d9Pb3LQ7YzeUSPA>

<https://www.alphanews.live/cyprus/dyo-skafi-me-peran-ton-50-paratypon-metanaston-se-kavo-gkreko-kai-paralimni>

On the second boat there were 17 men, who sailed from Syria. Eight jumped from the boat in their effort to prevent their return to Syria. All but one were returned to the boat and returned to Lebanon. The one person is still missing at sea.

On 25/08 the media reported that the missing person has not yet been found and the search was ongoing: <https://cyprus-mail.com/2021/08/25/search-continues-for-migrant-who-jumped-overboard/>

## September

On 22 September, two boats which sailed from **Syria**, one carrying 16 persons and another one carrying 9 persons, were returned to Lebanon. The Lebanese authorities, after establishing that they had no links to Lebanon, decided to return them back to Cyprus.

## November

A boat with 62 Syrian and Lebanese nationals ( 13 Lebanese nationals – 3 women, 8 children and 2 men and 49 Syrian nationals - 8 women, 15 children and 26 men) which sailed from Lebanon reached the coast of Cyprus on 8 November and were prevented from reaching the shore. They later sent an SOS

signal and were assisted to the shore on 9 November but not granted access to the asylum procedures. They were kept outdoors at the Paphos harbour for two days without access to shelter or minimum reception conditions. On the third night the boat departed again (11 November) towards Italy. After another 10 days at sea, the boat finally managed to reach Apulia, Italy.

<https://cyprus-mail.com/2021/11/11/61-irregular-migrants-spend-night-in-boat/>

<https://cyprus-mail.com/2021/11/11/migrant-boat-in-paphos-takes-off-intercepted-at-sea-by-authorities/>

<https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/43959.aspx>

According to information provided by a Syrian Subsidiary Protection Beneficiary, a boat carrying 14 male Syrian nationals sailed from Tartous towards Cyprus, including his brother and his 16 year old nephew, was intercepted and remained at sea for three days. The boat reportedly returned to Tartous.

This report could be referring to the same incident: <https://apnews.com/article/business-middle-east-lebanon-turkey-migration-de9dec51cf71403556b14527ec747b8d>

## **Pushbacks 2022**

### **June**

A boat carrying 174 persons was intercepted by the Cypriot coastguard. A heavily pregnant woman and her husband were brought ashore, while the rest of the passengers were provided with food and fuel and continued their trip towards Italy. Due to bad weather near Crete and Karpathos in Greece, they were rescued by a ship sailing under Maltese flag and they were eventually allowed to disembark on the island of Kos.

<https://cyprustimes.com/koinonia/apovivastikan-egkymonoysa-kai-syzygos-synechizei-gia-italia-to-ploiario-me-metanaste,s-pic/>

### **July**

A boat carrying 49 persons (24 men, 9 women and 16 children) was intercepted off the coast of Paphos. They were brought ashore and remained at the port of Paphos for two days, after which they were returned to Lebanon by a private boat, chartered by the government, escorted by the Cyprus coast guard.

[https://twitter.com/alarm\\_phone/status/1545002257166508032](https://twitter.com/alarm_phone/status/1545002257166508032)

<https://www.kathimerini.com.cy/gr/kypros/entopistike-barka-me-metanastes-anoikta-tis-pafoy>

<https://politis.com.cy/politis-news/cyprus/496638/xylini-barka-me-49-metanastes-anoikta-tis-pafoy-anekepse-i-limeniki>

<https://riknews.com.cy/el/article/2022/7/9/sto-libano-me-idiotiko-skaphos-epstrepsan-khthes-bradu-oi-saranta-ennea-metanastes-2017648/>

### **August**

120 persons, including women and children, were identified off Cyprus territorial waters. The boat was led to the shore and was subsequently returned to Lebanon with Cyprus Police escort.

## September

177 persons, 110 men and 69 women and children, who were on board of a vessel off shore the port of Larnaca, were rescued after an operation organised by the Joint Rescue Coordination Center (Larnaca). They were all returned to Lebanon.

<https://www.cna.org.cy/en/article/3859965/about-177-migrants-rescued-at-sea-in-cyprus>

Media reported that Cyprus assisted in the rescue of some 300 persons on board a vessel that departed from Lebanon and was trying to reach Italy. The passengers were safely transferred to the Marshall Islands-flagged vessel Paolo Topic, which had been in the vicinity, and continued to its original destination of Istanbul, Turkey, where the PoCs disembarked.

<https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/cyprus-helps-rescue-300-migrants-aboard-italy-bound-90194542>

<https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/43475/cyprus-rescues-hundreds-of-migrants-at-sea-plans-to-disembark-in-turkey>

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/2166151/middle-east>

## October

A boat carrying 8 persons from Lebanon and Palestine which departed from Lebanon was intercepted in Cypriot territorial waters. The boat was returned to Lebanon.

## 2023

### July

73 Syrian nationals, including nine women and eleven children, were rescued 12 nautical miles off the coast of Cape Greco due to the bad weather conditions. All passengers were reportedly returned to Lebanon by a barge, where they were reportedly kept in the bilge for 12 hours without any access to fresh air or daylight and with insufficient access to hygiene facilities.

[https://www.sigmalive.com/news/local/1131418/me-parevasi-ioannou-piso-sto-livano-i-psarovarka-me-tous-73-metanastes%20https://reporter.com.cy/article/2023/7/30/725311/astunomikoi-epanaprothesan-metanastes-me-rumoulko-plotion/?fbclid=IwAR1IsGYbdPZVLCca\\_jXImESQn3rhhBOILyoaubHPqwk2bU\\_wEgWD87lizxl](https://www.sigmalive.com/news/local/1131418/me-parevasi-ioannou-piso-sto-livano-i-psarovarka-me-tous-73-metanastes%20https://reporter.com.cy/article/2023/7/30/725311/astunomikoi-epanaprothesan-metanastes-me-rumoulko-plotion/?fbclid=IwAR1IsGYbdPZVLCca_jXImESQn3rhhBOILyoaubHPqwk2bU_wEgWD87lizxl)

### August

A boat carrying 16 men was identified by the coastguard and taken ashore, while another 20 persons (17 men, 2 women and 1 child) were found wandering near Cape Greco after their boat reached the small fishing harbour in the same area. All were reportedly interrogated and then returned to Lebanon in the early morning hours of the following day.

[https://www.ant1live.com/koinonia/556749\\_epistrofi-36-metanaston-sto-libano](https://www.ant1live.com/koinonia/556749_epistrofi-36-metanaston-sto-libano)

## 2024

### February

A boat carrying some 116 persons was detected on 11 February and intercepted. The passengers were eventually returned to Lebanon on 13/2/ 2024. However, the Lebanese authorities did not accept to receive these passengers and they were all subsequently brought back to Cyprus.

<https://in-cyprus.philenews.com/local/lebanon-refuses-return-of-116-syrians/>

<https://www.famagusta-gazette.com/2024/02/13/lebanese-refuse-to-let-migrant-boat-return-from-cyprus/>

<https://www.newarab.com/news/lebanon-refuses-syrian-refugees-return-cyprus>