

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

MIGRATION MOVEMENTS: SHAPING THE MEDITERRANEAN REALM

The Egyptian Experience

Amina Fahmy, Migration Policy Researcher
December 2024



Migration Patterns & Egypt's Role: Egypt is increasingly a migrant destination, driven by socio-economic instability, politics, and regional conflicts. Its strategic location heightens its role in Mediterranean migration.



Internal Migration Pressures: Economic and political challenges complicate Egypt's migration management, as they balance domestic needs with international expectations.



Future Challenges: Egypt's dual role as a migrant source and destination may put pressure on its EU relations, especially as it struggles with socio-economic pressures. Balancing border control, economic stability, and EU demands will shape its migration policies and partnership with Europe.

Contents

1.	BACKGROUND OF EGYPT	5
1.1	Egypt's Geopolitical Significance.....	5
1.2	Historical Snapshot (2011–2024)	5
2.	PEOPLE	8
2.1	Mobility Trends and Shifts.....	8
2.2	Key Factors for Movement.....	11
3.	POLICIES	12
3.1	Domestic Preferences and Priorities	12
3.2	Partnerships with the EU and Other Key Partners	13
4.	SOCIETIES	16
4.1	Protection and Access to Rights.....	16
4.2	Developing Resilience and Capacity	16
5.	RECOMMENDATIONS	18
	LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	19

1

BACKGROUND OF EGYPT

1.1 EGYPT'S GEOPOLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Strategic Location and Influence

Egypt's geopolitical position has made it an important player in regional and international affairs. Perched on the Mediterranean and in close proximity to Europe, it is a crossroad and vital transit route and destination for migration from the African continent to the European Union (EU). This earmarks its pivotal role as a valuable partner to the EU in managing migration flows and by extension economic prospects and security concerns. Egypt's control of the Suez Canal, a maritime route connecting the Mediterranean Sea with the Red Sea provides it with vital strategic and economic benefits. The canal is integral to global trade as it is the shortest maritime path between Europe and Asia, handling around 12% of the world's shipping.¹

Role in Regional Politics

Egypt has long played a vital role in shaping regional politics, Cairo has been home to the Arab League for seventy-nine years. Its leadership, particularly under President Gamal Abdel Nasser, solidified its image as a champion of Arab nationalism and a key player in regional affairs. It continues to serve as a central hub for Arab diplomacy, acting as a mediator in the region among its neighbours: Libya, Sudan, and Palestine.

Egypt has been heavily involved in efforts to mediate ongoing conflict in its neighbouring countries. It has mitigated instability on its western border with Libya through supporting negotiations between rival governments, the Government of National Unity (GNU) in Tripoli and the Libyan National Army.² Furthermore, the Egyptian government has worked with multilateral actors in Sudan to mediate between Sudanese factions following the military coup in Sudan.³ Continuing this geopolitical pattern as a regional mediator, Egypt is

playing an important role on the negotiation table during the ongoing war in Palestine.

Beyond the Arab world, Egypt has strengthened its influence in African politics through its engagement with the African Union (AU). It pushed forward issues related to economic integration, counterterrorism, and conflict resolution. Most notably, its desire to integrate African economies and enhance trade is highlighted in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).⁴ Foreign policy has been geared towards efforts to assert itself as a regional power in Africa especially concerning water security as evidenced by their strong opposition to the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD).⁵

1.2 HISTORICAL SNAPSHOT (2011–2024)

The 2011 Uprising and Its Aftermath

The Arab uprisings in 2011 were caused by decades of economic, political, and social challenges in North Africa and the Middle East. The period before 2011 in Egypt was marked by the deterioration of economic and social conditions. In 2010, nearly 25% of Egyptians lived below the national poverty line with around 40% of the population living on less than \$2 a day.⁶ Unemployment soared, reaching 30% among youth, a critical number considering 60% of Egypt's population was under the age of 30.⁷ The protests that erupted in 2011 were driven by the grievances of a population facing rising living costs, low wages, and restricted political freedom. These conditions led to the nationwide protests that ousted the 30-year-old rule of former president Hosny Mubarak.

The aftermath of the Arab uprisings left an immediate impact on international migration in the Middle East and North

1 Suez Canal Authority. (n.d.). *The Green Canal*. Suez Canal Authority. <https://www.suezcanal.gov.eg/English/About/SuezCanal/Pages/greencanal.aspx>

2 State Information Service. (2018, September 30). *The Egyptian initiative to solve the Libyan crisis*. <https://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/135671/The-Egyptian-initiative-to-solve-the-Libyan-crisis?lang=en-us>

3 Lewis, A. (2023, July 13). Egypt to launch fresh Sudan mediation attempt during summit. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/egypt-launch-fresh-sudan-mediation-attempt-during-summit-2023-07-13/>

4 State Information Service. (2023, 18 March). Egypt and African Union. <https://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/178317/Egypt-and-African-Union?lang=en-us>

5 Yibeltal, K. (2024, 9 September). How rising water levels are changing lives across the world. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cp3d9x36gn5o>

6 World Bank. (2020, April). Poverty and Equity Brief: Arab Republic of Egypt. https://databankfiles.worldbank.org/public/ddpext_download/poverty/33EF03BB-9722-4AE2-ABC7-AA2972D68AFE/Global_POVEQ_EGY.pdf

7 International Labour Organization. (2020, 20 June). Employment for youth in Egypt: Eye working together in Qalyoubia and Menoufia. <https://www.ilo.org/projects-and-partnerships/projects/employment-youth-egypt-eye-working-together-qalyoubia-and-menoufia>

Africa, with an influx of returning Egyptian migrants. As of February 2011, migrants and Libyans started fleeing Libya, 46,700 people crossed the border, 81% of whom were Egyptians. By January 2012, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), in cooperation with the border authorities, recorded 263,554 persons including 173,873 Egyptians and 89,681 Third Country Nationals (TCN) crossing the Libyan Egyptian border.⁸

Political Shifts (2014–2024)

Egypt's first presidential elections post-2011 were won by Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Mohamed Morsi. However, his presidency was short-lived. After his removal by then Commander-in-Chief Abdel Fattah el-Sisi following mass protests, El-Sisi took over as president in a landslide 97% victory in 2014. He has remained president since then. El-Sisi's re-election in 2024 was for a six-year term following the 2019 amendment to the constitution extending the presidential term limit to six years instead of four. Amendments to the 2014 constitution, which reinforced the roles of state in Egypt's governance framework, are facilitated by the current political landscape under President El-Sisi. The majority of parliament is composed of representatives from the Nation's Future Party (NFP), who largely support El-Sisi's initiatives. Additionally, the Republican People's Party, the second largest party in parliament, includes former ministers and political figures from previous administrations, who align with El-Sisi's legislative agenda.⁹ This has enabled significant amendments to Egyptian law that enhance the powers of the state. Perpetually renewed, the Emergency Law suspended citizens' constitutional rights, granted police extended powers, permitted detention without trial, and prohibited street demonstration. Moreover, some of these provisions were made permanent through amendments to Egyptian Law in Parliament. Further restrictions are imposed on researchers and the media. This is mirrored by the regulation of civilian activity, including civilian organisation and local Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and independent media outlets. Egypt has indicated that the measures taken are considered a necessary trade-off for ensuring national security and countering political ideologies perceived as threats to stability.

The economic landscape is characterised by substantial state involvement and regulatory oversight, influencing various sectors and economic activities. Low on foreign currency reserves, Egypt is highly reliant on the International Monetary Fund (IMF) loans, the EU, United States (US) and Gulf countries for financial support. Egypt's main sources of national income is tourism, remittances and the Suez Canal. The COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating effect on the former two industries while the recent war in Palestine has slashed the

revenues of the canal in half.¹⁰ As a highly import dependent country, Egypt is incredibly vulnerable to external global factors as illustrated by the war in Ukraine, which has posed a major food security threat for Egypt and resulted in the withdrawal of \$20 billion in investments.¹¹ In 2014, launching the first of many mega-projects to come, El-Sisi inaugurated the New Suez Canal, the project cost 64 billion Egyptian Pounds (EGP) and was financed by Egyptian nationals. However, other successive mega-projects were not financed similarly and have left a large dent in Egypt's external debt.

El-Sisi's economic reforms in his first year of presidency led to notable economic changes. By lifting energy subsidies, fuel prices increased by 78% in 2014. As a result, the country's external debt dropped 13.5%, only to skyrocket 313% today, following successive loan agreements with the IMF.¹² Egypt's economic policy under El-Sisi began to take shape in 2016 when he secured a \$12 billion loan from the IMF. This agreement led to structural adjustments, including the floatation of the Egyptian pound and austerity measures such as cutting energy subsidies and raising taxes. The consequent currency devaluation caused the Egyptian pound to lose half its value, heavily increasing inflation. By 2017, inflation rose to 30%, significantly worsening the cost of living. The sharp inflation coupled with the austerity measures severely impacted the population, poverty increased from 27.8% in 2015 to more than 32% in 2018. Youth unemployment also increased, reaching 30%.¹³ In 2022, inflation reached a record high of 32.6%, with core inflation reaching almost 40% in March. At the beckoning of an economic crisis, Egypt's \$35 billion real estate development deal with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in Ras Al-Hekma was seen as a major bailout. The deal paved the way for the latest IMF cooperation. Continuing their economic modus operandi, Egypt secured an 8 billion loan from the IMF in March 2024, fuel prices were raised three times this year and are expected to rise gradually to the end of next year.¹⁴ The Egyptian pound, floated in March, confronted a 40% devaluation, and the inflation rate peaked at 35.7%.¹⁵ Currently the inflation rate has settled at 26% indicating some benefit from the drastic measures. However, the extreme rise in prices, and the ineq-

⁸ Aghazarm, C. Quesada, P. Tishler, A. (2012). Migrants caught in crisis: The IOM experience in Libya. International Organization for Migration. https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/migration-caughtincrisis_forweb.pdf

⁹ Essam El-Din, G. (2024, October 2). Egypt's Mostaqbal Watan Party dominates top posts in parliament's 25 committees. Ahram Online. <https://english.ahram.org.eg/News/477096.aspx>

¹⁰ El Wardany, S. (2024, February 4). Egypt's canal receipts fall by almost half after the Red Sea attacks. Bloomberg. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-02-04/egypt-s-canal-receipts-fall-by-almost-half-after-red-sea-attacks>

¹¹ Lewis, A. (2024, March 6). Egypt signs expanded \$8 billion loan deal with IMF. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/markets/egypt-signs-expanded-8-billion-loan-deal-with-imf-2024-03-06/>

¹² El Tablawy, T. El Wardany, S. (2014, July 6). El-Sisi says price rises to save Egypt from debt drowning. Bloomberg. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-07-06/el-sisi-says-price-rises-to-save-egypt-from-debt-drowning>

¹³ Mandour, M. (2020, September 23). Sisi's War on the Poor. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/2020/10/sisis-war-on-the-poor?lang=en>

¹⁴ Egypt: History of Lending Commitments as of February 28, 2021. (2021). International Monetary Fund. <https://www.imf.org/external/np/fin/tad/extarr2.aspx?memberKey1=275&date1key=2021-02-28>

¹⁵ Central Bank of Egypt. (n.d.). Inflation rates historical data. HYPERLINK "https://www.cbe.org.eg/en/economic-research/statistics/inflation-rates/historical-data" <https://www.cbe.org.eg/en/economic-research/statistics/inflation-rates/historical-data>

uitable distribution of apparent growth is threatening an increasingly discontented public.¹⁶ Extreme austerity measures like raising the price of subsidised bread by 300% will threaten Egypt's most vulnerable.¹⁷ A key term of this IMF agreement is the divestment of state assets and the boosting of the private sector, a much-needed remedy as Egypt's weak private sector is discouraging much needed Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs).¹⁸ It is unclear how Egypt will retain its promises amidst several state-led mega projects including a new administrative capital, a monorail, an extensive road network and multiple new cities.¹⁹ All these projects have exacerbated Egypt's debt which it heavily relied on for financing. The halting of projects currently providing millions of people with jobs in times of economic distress seems unlikely. The IMF deal has opened the door to more funding opportunities from the EU and World Bank. However, with a \$165 billion debt, Egypt's economic future is still uncertain.

March 2022 marked the highest number of Egyptian nationals applying for asylum in EU+ countries since at least 2014. Egyptians migrating abroad are influenced primarily by economic factors and employment search. The human rights situation in the country is also an influencing factor for many Egyptian migrants wanting to travel to the EU+. Economic and human rights are expected to remain a push factor influencing migration decisions.²⁰

¹⁶ Ali, I. (July 16, 2022). Income inequality, economic growth, and structural changes in Egypt: New insights from quantile cointegration approach. *Econ Change Restruct*, 56, 379–407. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10644-022-09429-w>

¹⁷ Abdallah, N. El Safty, S. (2024, May 29). Egypt to raise subsidized bread price by 300 piasters. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/egypt-raise-subsidized-bread-price-by-300-pm-says-2024-05-29/>

¹⁸ Colombo, M. (2023, March). Trading short-term gains for long-term costs: the Egyptian political economy under al-Sisi. Clingendael Institute. https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Policy_brief_the_Egyptian_political_economy_under_alSisi.pdf

¹⁹ Springborg, R. (2022, January 7). Follow the Money to the Truth About al-Sisi's Egypt. Middle East Democracy Center. <https://mideastdc.org/publication/snapshot-follow-the-money-to-the-truth-about-al-sisis-egypt/>

²⁰ European Union Agency for Asylum. (2022, July 29). Migration Drivers Report: Egypt as a Country of Origin. <https://euaa.europa.eu/news-events/egypt-country-origin-euaa-publishes-migration-drivers-report>

2

PEOPLE

1. MOBILITY TRENDS AND SHIFTS

1.1 General Trends

Migration flows from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region have surged in recent years, fuelled by economic pressures and instability. These flows include both regular and irregular migration, with many migrants viewing Egypt as a temporary transit destination while they reach destinations like the EU, US, or Canada. However, shifts in EU migration policies and heightened border restrictions have diverted traditional routes, leading many to attempt Mediterranean crossings. Egypt's migrant population, estimated at over six million, includes labour migrants, refugees, asylum seekers from conflict-affected countries like Syria and Sudan.²¹ Some migrants integrate into the local economy and social fabric, though many face limited job and educational access. With ongoing regional instability and challenging socio-economic conditions, the demand for policies that address both the causes and consequences of migration has become increasingly urgent.

1.2 Emigration from Egypt

1.2.1 Regular Labour Migration

The dynamics of Egyptian labour migration have undergone significant transformations in the wake of the Arab uprisings and the subsequent economic and political changes in the region. With an estimated 6.5 million Egyptians living abroad before 2011, traditional migration patterns favoured Gulf countries, which hosted around 2.2 million Egyptian migrants, accounting for one-third of the total Egyptian emigrant population. However, the shifting geopolitical landscape and Egypt's deteriorating economic conditions have prompted a reassessment of migration destinations.²² Increasingly, Egyptians are exploring both regular and irregular pathways to Europe, seeking stability amidst high inflation and currency devaluation.

Recent trends indicate a significant shift in Egyptian migration patterns toward the EU, driven by economic challenges

in Egypt and a desire for an improved quality of life. Skilled workers are increasingly attracted to countries like Germany, where favourable regulations and labour shortages create strong employment opportunities. Unlike migration to Gulf countries, which often involves returning to Egypt, EU migration typically reflects a long-term settlement intention, providing broader socio-economic benefits.

In Europe, structured migration pathways offer Egyptians opportunities to work in sectors experiencing labour shortages, such as agriculture, tourism, construction, and healthcare. Bilateral labour agreements with EU countries, notably with Italy and Greece, play a significant role in facilitating this movement. For instance, the Italy-Egypt 2005 Seasonal Workers Agreement, supports seasonal employment for Egyptians in agriculture and tourism, filling key labour gaps. A similar 2022 agreement with Greece allows up to 5,000 Egyptian seasonal workers to obtain work in agriculture. These agreements create legal migration frameworks, easing entry and re-entry processes while supporting both countries' labour needs.²³

Skill-matching initiatives enhance the employability of qualified Egyptian workers through training for better integration in Europe. Programs like the EU-funded, Towards a Holistic Approach to Labour Migration Governance and Mobility in North Africa (THAMM) focus on establishing structured labour mobility channels and improving migration management in the region. THAMM and similar EU-backed initiatives promote policy development, vocational training, and capacity building, providing Egyptians with more options for regular labour migration. Additionally, Germany's Skilled Immigration Act (2020) streamlines entry for non-EU skilled workers and offers residency pathways, highlighting Europe's growing attractiveness for Egyptian professionals²⁴. This alignment between EU labour demands and Egypt's expanding youth pop-

²¹ International Organization for Migration. (n.d.). IOM Strategy for Egypt: 2021- 2025. https://egypt.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11021/files/documents/iom-country-strategy_final.pdf

²² Zohry, A. (2013). Egypt's International Migration after the Revolution: Is There Any Change? *Confluences Méditerranée*, No 87(4), 47-54. <https://doi.org/10.3917/come.087.0047>.

²³ Egypt Today Staff. (2024, May 9). Egypt qualifies workers for employment in Italy, Greece. *Egypt Today*. <https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/1/132150/Egypt-qualifies-workers-for-employment-in-Italy-Greece>

²⁴ General information. (n.d.). <https://www.bmi.bund.de/EN/topics/migration/immigration/labour-migration/generell-information/general-information.html#:~:text=Job-search%20visa&text=With%20this%20visa%2C%20skilled%20workers,to%20support%20themselves%20without%20working>

ulation indicates an increasing trend in Egyptian migration to Europe, particularly via vocational training and skill-matching programs supported by both the EU and Egypt.

1.2.1.1 Egyptian Labour Migration in Libya

Among rising labour migration trends is the increase in Egyptians' labour migration to Libya. Historically, Egypt and Libya share strong migration ties, the 1971 Agreement on Freedom of Movement and Employment allowed for the free movement of people between the two countries after Libya's oil boom. Following the 2011 uprising in Libya and subsequent instability, the flow of Egyptian labour was severely disrupted. In 2017 talks resumed aimed at increasing the presence of Egyptian Labour in Libya and creating safe migration channels for them. Most recently Egypt and Libya signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2021 that facilitates Egyptian labour to Libya and includes provisions to protect Egyptian workers' rights, while also regularising and managing migration flows. The Egyptian government has continued to push for the emigration of Egyptian workers to increase the flow of remittances while reducing pressure on the labour market. According to IOM, there are a total of 144,543 migrants from Egypt in Libya representing 21% of the migrant population in Libya. 95% of respondents surveyed by IOM reported moving to Libya due to insufficient employment in Egypt. Egyptian entry to Libya is characterised by irregularity, two thirds of the respondents reported entering Libya through an unofficial entry point.²⁵ Recently, Libyan authorities have increasingly led mass deportations of irregular migrants. Thousands of Egyptian irregular migrants in Libya in June 2023, were deported to Egypt on foot across the land border.²⁶ These deportations are occurring considering increasing arrivals to Europe through Libya.

1.2.2 Irregular Labour Migration

Egyptian irregular labour migration to Europe has surged in recent years, fuelled by persistent economic challenges and scarce job opportunities. This trend is pronounced among young Egyptian men from rural areas, in pursuit of stable work and improved living conditions. By mid-2024, Egyptians were among the most represented nationalities in Greece and Italy, accounting for 12% of arrivals in Greece and 6% in Italy according to the Quarterly Mixed Migration Update Report.²⁷ The rise in Egyptian irregular labour migration is also fuelled by established migration networks in destination countries, particularly in Italy. As of 2023, there were 155,892 Egyptians legally residing in Italy, up 3% over the previous year. These

networks, often consisting of family members, serve as a strong pull factor for Egyptians, offering knowledge of the migration process. In 2022, family reunification accounted for 40.4% of all new permits issued for Egyptian nationals.²⁸

Additionally, informal employment in some EU countries contribute to irregular migration trends. Italy's informal economy has attracted many Egyptians seeking employment despite the precariousness of such jobs. This availability of informal work is a major factor behind the steady influx of irregular Egyptian migrants, as the prospect of earning in Europe often outweighs the uncertainties of irregular status.²⁹ This creates a cycle where both the lack of legal work opportunities in Egypt and the prevalence of informal jobs in Europe perpetuate irregular migration.³⁰

1.2.2.1 Increasing arrivals of Egyptians migrants to Europe

Egyptian migration to Europe has surged recently, with departures increasingly routed through Libya due to heightened Egyptian coastal border controls. In 2022, over 20,000 Egyptians reached Italy from Libya—nearly triple the previous year's count. In 2023, Egyptians were among the top nationalities arriving in the EU, recording a total of 8,895 arrivals. Many Egyptians are driven by economic hardship, as rising poverty impacted over 32 million people in 2018.³¹ Despite severe security and human rights concerns in Libya, crossings from Tobruk persist, reflecting the urgent pursuit of better prospects across the Mediterranean.

Additionally, migrant boats arriving on Greece's Crete and Gavdos islands this year indicate a shift in smuggling routes. By 2023, over 1,075 migrants from Egypt, Bangladesh, and Pakistan arrived via Libya, up from 860 in 2022, likely due to increased central Mediterranean enforcement pushing smugglers to explore alternative paths.³²

1.3 Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Egypt serves as a major migration hub in the MENA region, functioning as both a destination and transit country for migrants and asylum seekers from countries like Sudan, Syria and over 54 other nationalities. Political instability and armed conflicts in these countries have led to a diverse refugee pop-

²⁵ International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2022). Egyptian Migrant Workers in Libya: General overview and opportunities for the future. https://libya.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1931/files/documents/Egyptian%20Labour%20Migrants%20in%20Libya%20report_v5.pdf

²⁶ Reuters. (2023, June 4). Eastern Libya forces stage mass deportation of Egyptian migrants. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/eastern-libya-forces-stage-mass-deportation-egyptian-migrants-2023-06-04/>

²⁷ Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Eastern and Southern Africa: Egypt and Yemen. (2024, October 23). Mixed Migration Centre. <https://mixedmigration.org/resource/quarterly-mixed-migration-update-esa-q3-2024/>

²⁸ Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies (2023). The Egyptian community in Italy: Annual report on the presence of migrants. <https://www.lavoro.gov.it/documenti-e-norme/studi-e-statistiche/egyptian-community-2023#:~:text=As%20far%20as%20the%20Egyptian,for%203.8%25%20of%20the%20total>

²⁹ Ghoneim, A. F. (2010, April 15). Labour migration for decent work, economic growth and development in Egypt. International Labour Organization. <https://www.ilo.org/publications/labour-migration-decent-work-economic-growth-and-development-egypt>

³⁰ Ghoneim. 2010.

³¹ Armanious, D. M. (2021, January 31). Accelerating global actions for a world without poverty: Egypt experiences. https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2021/02/Final-World-without-poverty-Egypt_31-january-2021.pdf

³² Reuters. (2024, March 13). Greece's Crete and Gavdos islands see surge in migrant boats from Libya. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/greeces-crete-gavdos-islands-see-surge-migrant-boats-libya-2024-03-13/>

ulation within Egypt. Currently, over 800,000 refugees and asylum seekers are registered with UNHCR in Egypt.³³

Following the outbreak of conflict in Sudan in April 2023, a significant wave of Sudanese refugees arrived in Egypt, now the largest group of registered refugees in the country. As of October 2024, UNHCR data shows 519,000 Sudanese refugees in Egypt, with numbers expected to increase. Inadequate funding for new arrivals poses a challenge for Sudanese asylum seekers along with Egypt's economic situation. School-age children, in particular, struggle to enrol in school due to documentation barriers, 54% of newly arrived Sudanese children are reported to be out of school.³⁴ Supported by an existing Sudanese population of four million, asylum seekers are seeking to move "forward" and integrate in Egypt.³⁵ Furthermore, while initially Sudanese were allowed entry into Egypt without a visa, this has changed. New laws threaten Sudanese refugees by targeting their residential status and limiting their freedom of movement. One such law included a deadline of June 30th, by which all refugees who entered Egypt "illegally", including those who entered before visa requirement to pay a \$1,000 fine.³⁶ Deportations are frequent, this year 800 Sudanese were deported back to Sudan.³⁷ With a growing negative rhetoric about the increase of refugees in Egypt, there has been a noticeable shift in perceptions of refugees in Egypt, with racist campaigns on social media and reports of incidents of gender-based violence.³⁸ The Syrian refugee crisis created the world's largest displaced population, with over seven million internally displaced persons and more than six million Syrians spread across 128 countries.³⁹ In Egypt, Syrian refugees form the second-largest

refugee group, totalling approximately 159,000.⁴⁰ Driven by the Syrian civil war and economic hardships, many arrive in Egypt with families, and children make up a significant part of the population. While integrating well into Egyptian society, Syrians face challenges in employment and accessing education. Though healthcare is accessible, it remains strained due to limited resources. The UNHCR provides vital support for Syrians, including registration and access to services, complemented by Syrian-led community initiatives that create informal support networks. Despite cultural acceptance, the prospects for Syrian refugees in Egypt rely heavily on consistent Egyptian policies and international assistance to sustain resources and services.

Moreover, South Sudan and Eritrea comprise the largest two registered asylum seekers and refugee populations following Sudan and Syria, comprising 46,000 and 40,000 respectively.⁴¹ According to the latest figure provided by the Government of Egypt (GoE) in October, 67,067 non-Sudanese individuals have fled to Egypt from Sudan since the start of the conflict.⁴² For South Sudanese refugees, ongoing conflict, severe food insecurity, and limited access to healthcare and education have driven individuals to seek stability in neighbouring countries like Egypt. Similarly, Eritreans are fleeing political repression, indefinite military conscription, and restricted freedoms in their country, viewing Egypt as both a destination and a potential transit point to Europe. Eritreans face greater challenges in Egypt, reporting having minimal interaction with the host community. They attributed this to language barriers, ethnic and religious-based discrimination.⁴³

Furthermore, Egypt's shared border with Palestine, particularly through the Rafah crossing with Gaza, has positioned it as a critical entry point for Palestinians seeking refuge amid ongoing conflict. Considering recent escalations, Egypt has received approximately 100,000 Palestinians since last year.⁴⁴ This influx reflects both the close geographical proximity and longstanding social and cultural ties between Egypt and Palestine.

Egypt's role as a destination and transit country in the MENA region stems from its geographical proximity and historical ties to conflict-affected neighbours. The refugee and asylum-seeker population in Egypt is diverse, however, Egypt's strained economic resources, changing migration policies,

³³ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2024, October 9). UNHCR Egypt - Fact sheet. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/egy>

³⁴ UNICEF. (2024, April 17). Sudan emergency response update. <https://www.unhcr.org/eg/wp-content/uploads/sites/36/2024/04/UNHCR-Egypt-Sudan-Emergency-Update-27.pdf>

³⁵ Yokes, E. (2024, March 9). For Sudanese Refugees, Egypt is Barely a Refuge. Foreign Policy. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/03/09/sudan-refugees-war-africa-egypt-aid-international-community/>

³⁶ Osman, W. (2024, September 4). My people are stranded: Bearing witness to the struggle of Sudanese refugees in Egypt. Refugees International. <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/perspectives-and-commentaries/my-people-are-stranded-bearing-witness-to-the-struggle-of-sudanese-refugees-in-egypt/>

³⁷ Michaelson, R. (2024, June 19). EU-funded Egyptian forces 'rounding up and deporting Sudanese refugees.' The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/article/2024/jun/19/eu-funded-egyptian-forces-arresting-deporting-sudanese-refugees-amnesty>

³⁸ Hashem, M. (2024, July 3). Hamlat "taħrīdiyya" qidd al-lāj'īn fī Miṣr.. man yaqīf warā'ahā wa mā ta'tiruhā? Al Hurra. <https://www.alhurra.com/egypt/2024/07/03/%D8%AD%D9%85%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B6%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B6%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A6%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1-%D9%8A%D9%82%D9%81-%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A1%D9%87%D8%A7-%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D8%A3%D8%AB%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%9F>

³⁹ Abaunz, C. (2023, June). *The Syrian and Venezuelan refugee and migrant crises: A comparative analysis of the regional response to large-scale displacement*. The Center for Migration and Refugee Studies. (Issue No. 16). <https://aucegypt0.sharepoint.com/sites/documents/GAPP/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2Fdocuments%2FGAPP%2FCMR5%2Fissue%20no%2E%2016%2Epdf&parent=%2Fsites%2Fdocuments%2FGAPP%2FCMR5&p=true&ga=1>

⁴⁰ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2024, October 9). UNHCR Egypt - Fact sheet. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/egy>

⁴¹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2024, October 9).

⁴² UNHCR. (2024, October 25). Sudan Situation: UNHCR External Update #84 - 19 October 2024. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/112060>

⁴³ Hegazy, N. (2023, June 15). The Sidelined Front-liners: Eritrean CBOs in Greater Cairo, (Master's thesis, American University in Cairo) HYPERLINK "https://fount.aucegypt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3140&context=etds" <https://fount.aucegypt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3140&context=etds>

⁴⁴ Al-Mughrabi, N. Lewis, A. (2024, May 2). Palestinian Embassy Seeks Temporary Status for Gazans Who Entered Egypt During War. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/palestinian-embassy-seeks-temporary-status-gazans-who-entered-egypt-during-war-2024-05-02>

and shifting public sentiment pose significant challenges for these communities. There is an urgent need for sustainable integration policies, consistent international support, and adequate funding to enhance healthcare, education, and employment opportunities for asylum seekers and refugees, thereby strengthening Egypt's role in the region.

2. KEY FACTORS FOR MOVEMENT

Migration patterns in the Mediterranean have evolved with countries like Egypt, especially after the 2011 Arab uprisings, which led to increased return migration from Libya and Syria and a surge in irregular migration from Tunisia following the fall of Ben Ali.

Egypt's focus on national security has created both push factors for emigration and pull factors for regional migration and asylum-seeking. This emphasis attracts asylum seekers to Egypt, making it one of the most stable destinations in a conflict-ridden region and the second largest recipient of asylum seekers after the United States, as noted in the African Migration Report.⁴⁵

Following five devaluations over eight years, Egypt's currency has lost over 500% of its value, driving inflation to 32.6% in 2022 —coinciding with the highest asylum applications from Egyptians to EU+ countries since 2014. Economic challenges, including a \$20 billion divestment due to the Ukraine war, led Egypt, the world's largest wheat importer, to seek IMF loans, imposing austerity measures such as a 300% increase in subsidised bread prices and fuel price hikes.⁴⁶ These austerity steps, while stabilising aspects of the economy, exacerbate hardships for vulnerable Egyptians, driving emigration and threatening stability, echoing the social unrest of the 2011 protests and the 1977 bread riots, both sparked by IMF-mandated subsidy cuts.

Climate change poses a significant threat to food security in Egypt, where the agricultural sector supports 55% of the population and employs over 30% of the labour force, particularly impacting vulnerable rural and coastal regions. The Nile Delta, home to nearly 50 million people, is among the world's most at-risk areas, facing rising sea levels, increased temperatures, and disrupted agricultural practices, with farmers reporting severe changes in planting seasons and pest proliferation over the past five years. Additionally, state-led mega projects exacerbate these environmental challenges. Fishermen contend with intensifying storms, declining fish stocks due to pollution, and biodiversity loss, further jeopardising their livelihoods.⁴⁷

Political conflict and environmental degradation in the region are significant pull factors for asylum seekers to Egypt, which serves as both a transit and destination country, particularly as Sudan faces soaring displacement with 10.7 million people internally displaced and over 20,000 displaced by flooding since June. Additionally, the World Bank projects that climate-related challenges, including droughts and rising sea levels, will displace 150 million people globally over the next fifty years, further driving migration towards Europe and increasing pressures on Egypt's own food and water security.⁴⁸ Adding to these climate-related pressures, Egypt's water security is increasingly threatened by the construction of Ethiopia's Grand Renaissance Dam, with experts warning that a 2% reduction in Nile water flow could result in the loss of 200,000 acres of irrigated land, jeopardising agricultural productivity and heightening migration pressures.⁴⁹ Farmers, facing rising costs for agricultural inputs that have quadrupled since subsidies were lifted in 2014, are turning to migration as a viable adaptation strategy, with regions like the Nile Delta and the rural town of Tatoun seeing a significant portion of working-age residents migrate to European countries like Italy and Greece, where remittances play a vital role in sustaining families and local economies. In Tatoun, about one-fourth of residents work in Italy, earning it the nickname "Little Italy," and Italy's more lenient legal framework for unaccompanied minors further facilitates migration for young Egyptians, underscoring the urgent need for interventions to address the intertwined challenges of climate change and economic instability.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2024). Africa Migration Report (Second edition). <https://publications.iom.int/books/africa-migration-report-second-edition>

⁴⁶ Abdallah, N., & El Safty, S. (2024, May 29). Egypt to raise subsidized bread price by 300%, PM says. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/egypt-raise-subsidized-bread-price-by-300-pm-says-2024-05-29/>

⁴⁷ Bonnefoi, F. (2024, May 2). Sea-Level Rise in the Nile Delta: Promoting Adaptation Through Circular Migration. Baker Institute. <https://www.bakerinstitute.org/research/sea-level-rise-nile-delta-promoting-adaptation-through-circular-migration>

⁴⁸ Vidal, J. (2009, November 3). Global warming could create 150 million 'climate refugees' by 2050. The Guardian. [https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2009/nov/03/global-warming-climate-refugees#:~:text=Global%20warming%20could%20create%20150%20million%20climate%20refugees'%20by%202050,-This%20article%20is&text=Global%20warming%20will%20force%20up,Justice%20Foundation%20\(EJF\)%20warns.](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2009/nov/03/global-warming-climate-refugees#:~:text=Global%20warming%20could%20create%20150%20million%20climate%20refugees'%20by%202050,-This%20article%20is&text=Global%20warming%20will%20force%20up,Justice%20Foundation%20(EJF)%20warns.)

⁴⁹ BBC. (2023, September 13). Why is Egypt worried about Ethiopia's dam on the Nile? <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-66776733>

⁵⁰ Rabie, H. (2019, February 12.). Why Egyptian farmers' sons would rather migrate than work in fields. Al-Monitor. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2019/02/why-farmers-sons-do-not-want-to-end-in-the-field-in-egypt.html>

3

POLICIES

1. DOMESTIC PREFERENCES AND PRIORITIES

The economic and demographic factors influencing Egyptian labour migration to Europe reveal a complex relationship, with Egypt promoting labour migration to alleviate domestic unemployment and benefit from remittances, while the EU seeks to reduce international migration and encourage returns, yet both parties have established a mutually beneficial framework despite their differing objectives, making migration a significant element of Egypt's foreign policy toward the EU.⁵¹

Historically Egyptian regimes have positioned the country's migration policies to pursue wider political aims as well as engage with new partners. Under Nasser, Egypt followed a restricted labour migration policy which supported his Pan-Arabist agenda. However following his era, the 1971 Egyptian constitution provided for the right of Egyptians to temporary and permanent migration. Dealing with a growing population and labour force growth rate, the constitution and law sought external labour markets for Egyptian labour. Europe did not take the centre of Egyptian migration at the time.⁵² A new political economy of Egyptian migration started to take shape. During Mubarak's 30-year rule, the government viewed migration as a key driver for development. The Emigration and Sponsoring Egyptians Abroad Law No. 111 of 1983 was enacted, and migrant remittances became a vital source of Egypt's foreign exchange earnings.⁵³

1.1 Europe in Egyptian Migration

In the last decade, the Egyptian labour force suffered from unemployment and challenging working. The growth of the labour force is consistently higher than the employment growth. Between 2008 and 2011, the growth of the labour force reached 8.7% while employment growth reached only 4.8%. A look at the findings of a School-to-Work Transition Survey (SWTS) carried out in 2012 by the International La-

bour Office (ILO) showcased that 91.1% of young workers surveyed were informally employed, while one-quarter were below the average wage. Given these circumstances, many Egyptian workers are seeking opportunities for employment abroad.⁵⁴

Migration as a form of remittance has an important role to play in poverty alleviation. Migrant households spend large sums of money received from relatives abroad on daily household expenses.⁵⁵ Given the prevalent poverty rates in Egypt and weak formal social security, migration is the means to improve living standards and alleviate poverty. At a macro level, remittances provide Egypt with the foreign currency necessary to deal with the deficit in the balance of trade. In the 2010s and 2020s, remittances sent to Egypt by its migrant workers in all destinations significantly grew from \$12.5 billion in 2010, to \$25.5 billion in 2018 and to \$26.8 billion in 2019. In sum, from Egypt's perspective since the early 1970s, migration's economic benefits have been greatly significant.⁵⁶

In 2017, data from the Ministry of Interior indicated that 68.4% of Egyptian migrant workers were employed in Arab countries, while 31.6% worked in non-Arab nations, with 9.1% of those in the top seven European destinations. World Bank estimates for 2018 showed that remittances from these seven countries totalled \$1.8 billion, accounting for just 7% of Egypt's overall remittance inflow that year.⁵⁷ This suggests that migration to Europe has a limited impact on Egypt's labour market and economy.

Remittances have become a crucial source of foreign currency for Egypt, rivalling revenues from Suez Canal transit and

⁵¹ Awad, I. (2024). The political economy of Egyptian migration to Europe in the 2020s. In R. Zapata-Barrero & I. Awad (Eds.), *Migrations in the Mediterranean* (pp. 347-363). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-42264-5_20

⁵² Awad, I. (2024).

⁵³ Abdel Fattah, D. (2021, September 22). Egypt, the EU, and migration: An uncomfortable yet unavoidable partnership. German Council on Foreign Relations. <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/egypt-eu-and-migration>

⁵⁴ Awad, I. (2024). The political economy of Egyptian migration to Europe in the 2020s. In R. Zapata-Barrero & I. Awad (Eds.), *Migrations in the Mediterranean* (pp. 347-363). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-42264-5_20

⁵⁵ International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2010). A Study on Remittances and Investment Opportunities for Egyptian Migrants. <https://egypt.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11021/files/documents/Remittances%2520and%2520Investment%2520Opportunities%2520for%2520Egyptian%2520Migrants.pdf>

⁵⁶ Awad, I. (2024). The political economy of Egyptian migration to Europe in the 2020s. In R. Zapata-Barrero & I. Awad (Eds.), *Migrations in the Mediterranean* (pp. 347-363). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-42264-5_20

⁵⁷ Awad, I. (2023).

tourism. The country maintains labour agreements with Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, Jordan, and Qatar, which have evolved to meet labour market demands, migration trends, and worker protections. These agreements include provisions for legal migration, labour rights, and remittance flows. Egyptians in Arab and Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE, constitute nearly 70% of the Egyptian diaspora and contribute to about half of the remittances sent home.⁵⁸

However, dependence on these countries for foreign currency poses significant risks. For instance, the surge in oil revenues during the 1980s increased demand for temporary labour in the Gulf, while the gradual nationalisation of workforces in the 1990s reduced the demand for Egyptian labour and resulted in a notable decline in remittances. This reliance on Gulf states for financial support has rendered Egypt's labour market vulnerable to instability.

2. PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE EU AND OTHER KEY PARTNERS

2.1 The EU-Egypt Migration Policy Framework

Egypt's migration priorities toward Europe, as outlined in an informal document from the European Union Trust Fund (EUTF), emphasise development cooperation, vocational and technical education, and institutional capacity building and supporting efforts to host refugees. Egypt accepts that curbing irregular migration and the return of migrants be a priority in its migration cooperation with the EU. In this context, labour migration is absent in the identified thematic areas. This cooperation provides Egypt with essential funding for development projects and reinforces its legitimacy as a strategic partner for the EU in the MENA region, particularly following the political changes of 2013.⁵⁹

The Association Agreement with the EU in 2004 expanded its cooperation on shared challenges facing the EU and Egypt. The agreement dedicates four articles to cooperation for prevention and control of “illegal migration”.⁶⁰ Moreover, in the EU-Egypt Partnership Priorities 2017-2020 and 2021-2027 documents, migration and mobility are taken up under the heading “enhancing stability” as a subdivision along with good governance and security and terrorism. Hence, migration is seen as a security question to be addressed by governance. The priorities documents also commit to foster their cooperation in return, readmission, and the reintegration of irregular migrants. The EU pledges to support and strengthen

en Egyptian capacity to provide protection and to safeguard the rights of refugees, migrants and asylum-seekers, and their access to basic services, such as education and health. The priorities review emphasises combating irregular migration and preventing secondary migration, while legal migration is overshadowed.⁶¹

Egypt and the EU have elevated their relationship to a Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership in 2024. The Strategic Partnership outlines a comprehensive migration governance approach aimed at providing financial support to Egypt for migration-related programs, focusing on legal migration pathways and addressing the root causes of irregular migration. This support encompasses efforts to combat smuggling, human trafficking, and improve border management, while also ensuring return and reintegration for migrants. In addition, the EU will continue aiding Egypt's efforts in hosting refugees. The partnership proposes a 7.4 billion financial and investment support package, providing 600 million in grants including 200 million for migration management.⁶² The Egyptian State Information Service (SIS) has described the partnership as a testament to Egypt's crucial role in regional stability and security. It is promoted as a unique arrangement, with Egypt being the “only country” selected by the EU for enhanced relations.⁶³

The partnership highlights regular migration channels, emphasising cooperation in developing education, vocational, and technical training to boost Egyptians' skills and employment prospects, thereby facilitating migration to the EU—particularly within the framework of talent partnerships. This agreement brings a renewed focus on legal migration and labour mobility as part of a holistic migration management strategy. The shift underscores the growing importance of labour migration to support Egypt's economic development while fostering deeper collaboration between Egypt and the EU.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Abdel Fattah, D. (2021, September 22). Egypt, the EU, and migration: An uncomfortable yet unavoidable partnership. German Council on Foreign Relations. <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/egypt-eu-and-migration>

⁵⁹ Awad, I. (2024). The political economy of Egyptian migration to Europe in the 2020s. In R. Zapata-Barrero & I. Awad (Eds.), *Migrations in the Mediterranean* (pp. 347-363). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-42264-5_20

⁶⁰ Delegation of the European Union to Egypt. (2016, August 12). Euro-Mediterranean Agreement. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/egypt/euro-mediterranean-agreement_en

⁶¹ Association Council. (2017, June 16). EU-Egypt partnership priorities 2017-2020. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/23942/egypt.pdf>

⁶² Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations. (2024, March 17). Joint declaration on the strategic and comprehensive partnership between the Arab Republic of Egypt and the European Union. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/joint-declaration-strategic-and-comprehensive-partnership-between-arab-republic-egypt-and-european-2024-03-17_en

⁶³ State Information Service. (2024, March 17). Mi r wa al-Itti ād al-Ūrubbī... Sharāka Istrātijjiyya Shāmila [Egypt and the European Union: A Comprehensive Strategic Partnership]. <https://sis.gov.eg/Story/272051/%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A8%D9%89...-%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%83%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%B4%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%84%D8%A9?lang=ar>

⁶⁴ State Information Service. (2024, July 17). Al-Kharijia tastadif al-jawla al-rabi'a rafieat al-mustawa hawla al-hijra bayn Misr wal-Itti-had al-Urubi. <https://sis.gov.eg/Story/276653/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AC%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%AA%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%B6%D9%8A%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B9%D8%A9-%D8%B1%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%B9%D8%A9->

Under the strategic and comprehensive partnership between Egypt and the EU, two major initiatives have been launched. The first, a Joint UN Programme supported by a €12.2 million EU grant, involves UNHCR, IOM, UNICEF, and World Health Organization (WHO) under the Joint Platform for Migrants and Refugees. It aims to meet basic health and education needs and improve resilience and protection for vulnerable migrants, refugees, and host communities in Egypt.⁶⁵ Additionally, a protocol between CAPMAS and IOM, funded by the EU Delegation, launched the National Survey of International Migration. This survey addresses data gaps and analyses recent migration trends to enhance policymaking in line with Egypt's national statistics strategy.⁶⁶

Despite the GoE's support for the partnership, human rights organisations are urging the EU to ensure that financial assistance to Egypt leads to tangible human rights improvements. The organisations stress that economic measures should not worsen social rights or contribute to poverty, as addressing these issues is crucial for tackling Egypt's economic instability and migration pressures towards the EU.

2.2 Other Key Partnerships

Egypt maintains bilateral labour agreements (BLAs) with several European nations to manage labour migration effectively. Egypt's BLA with Bulgaria, dating back to 1972, is now largely outdated. Meanwhile, the 1981 agreement with Greece protects labour rights for each nation's workers and was followed in 2022 by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to bring 5,000 seasonal Egyptian agricultural workers to Greece. Although scheduled to occur in the summer of 2024, this agreement faced delays, reportedly awaiting further action from Greek authorities. No data is available regarding the BLA's implementation.⁶⁷ Italy's BLA with Egypt, signed in 2005 and followed by a

2009 protocol and a 2011 MoU, emphasises regulating labour supply while ensuring Egyptian workers do not pose a security risk to Italy. In contrast, a 2017 agreement with Germany focuses on addressing root causes of migration and facilitating repatriation, with Germany offering vocational training support rather than pathways for legal migration. In 2021, Egypt signed a letter of intent with the Netherlands to tackle irregular migration by providing information on legal pathways.⁶⁸

In addition, Egypt has a readmission agreement with Italy from 2007, which clarifies procedures for verifying nationality in cases of repatriation. Egypt is also part of the EU-Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative, or Khartoum Process, which centres on combating smuggling and human trafficking along key transit routes.⁶⁹

2.3 Implementation of the Policy Framework

The agreed policy framework in Egypt is implemented through projects funded by the North African window of the EU Emergency Trust Fund (EUTF) and EU member states. These projects, led by donor agencies, international organisations, and Egyptian institutions, focus on three main goals: strengthening migration management, tackling the root causes of irregular migration, and supporting host communities.

Under migration management, the "Enhancing Migration Management through Institutional Support" project aims to bolster Egypt's capacity to combat irregular migration and human trafficking. In addressing migration's root causes, EUTF funds four projects targeting migration-prone regions by improving employment opportunities, vocational training, and awareness programs to reduce the appeal of irregular migration.⁷⁰

In supporting host communities, two EUTF projects focus on capacity building in areas with high migrant populations, providing improved access to healthcare and employment services to deter secondary migration. However, these measures can appear at odds with Egypt's stance against long-term integration as a solution for refugees.⁷¹

The THAMM program, funded by EUTF's regional window for North Africa and Germany's Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, has created structured labour migration pathways, including the placement of 200 Egyptian

%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%89-%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87%D8%AC%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A8%D9%89?lang=ar

⁶⁵ With EU funding: Launch of the Joint UN Programme under the Joint Platform for Migrants and Refugees in Egypt. (2024, October 2). <https://south.eunighbours.eu/news/with-eu-funding-launch-of-the-joint-un-programme-under-the-joint-platform-for-migrants-and-refugees-in-egypt/>

⁶⁶ International Organization for Migration. (2024, October 14). Joint press release: CAPMAS and IOM sign protocol to implement the national survey of international migration in Egypt funded by EU in Egypt. <https://egypt.iom.int/news/joint-press-release-cap-mas-and-iom-sign-protocol-implement-national-survey-international-migration-egypt-funded-eu-egypt>

⁶⁷ Abu Bakr, M. (2024, October 14). Asbab Ta'khur Sa-far 5 Aalf Aamil Zira'i ila Al-Yunan li Akthar min 4 Ash-hur. Masrawy. https://www.masrawy.com/news/news_egypt/details/2024/10/14/2657868/%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%AA%D8%A3%D8%AE-%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D9%81%D8%B1-5-%D8%A2%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%81-%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9-%85%D9%84-%D8%B2%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%8A-%D8%A5%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84-%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%84%D8%A3%D9%83%D8%AB%D8%B1-%D9%85%D9%86-4-%D8%A3%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%B1

⁶⁸ Awad, I. (2024). The political economy of Egyptian migration to Europe in the 2020s. In R. Zapata-Barrero & I. Awad (Eds.), *Migrations in the Mediterranean* (pp. 347-363). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-42264-5_20

⁶⁹ Awad, I. (2024).

⁷⁰ Minister of Planning, Economic Development, and International Cooperation. (2024, October 14). Speech at the signing ceremony for the implementation protocol of the International Migration Survey Protocol in Egypt 2024/2025. <https://mped.gov.eg/single-news?id=5749&type=next&lang=en>

⁷¹ International Organization for Migration. (n.d.). IOM Strategy for Egypt: 2021- 2025. https://egypt.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11021/files/documents/iom-country-strategy_final.pdf

workers in Germany. This project facilitates skill recognition and enhances migration governance. Additionally, the Egyptian-German Centre for Jobs, Migration, and Reintegration (EGC) supports reintegrated Egyptians and job seekers within the Egyptian market, aligning skills with local demand.⁷²

Separately, EU member states support IOM projects focusing on stabilising and protecting migrants, reintegrating Egyptian returnees, and promoting local development, although they do not create direct legal migration channels. Egypt also enacted laws in 2010 and 2016 to combat human trafficking and migrant smuggling, operationalized through a national strategy and action plan under the National Coordinating Committee on Combating and Preventing Illegal Migration and Trafficking in Persons, heavily aligned with EU priorities. However, no similar measures target labour migration, underscoring Egypt's foreign policy motivations in its migration framework.⁷³

⁷² International Labour Organization. (n.d.). THAMM in Egypt. <https://www.ilo.org/thamm-egypt>

⁷³ *Legislative Framework*. (n.d.). The National Coordinating Committee for Combating and Preventing Illegal Migration and Trafficking in Persons. <https://www.nccpimandtip.gov.eg/en/Awareness/5>.

4

SOCIETIES

1. PROTECTION AND ACCESS TO RIGHTS

Egypt is a crucial transit and destination country for migrants from Africa and nearby conflict zones, playing a key role in managing migration flows to Europe. Its focus is on providing temporary protection for refugees, cooperating with international organisations, and avoiding pathways to permanent settlement. Economic instability limits access to basic services, with international bodies providing much of the support. The EU benefits from Egypt's efforts to stabilise migrant populations, reducing migration to Europe, while Egypt gains financial aid and strengthened ties with the EU.⁷⁴

1.1 Access to Health Care

The Egyptian legal system stipulates differentiated access to health between citizens and non-nationals, reserving full services for citizens and guaranteeing only emergency care for others. A new health insurance law and an agreement with the UNHCR aim to protect refugees from discrimination in healthcare, but implementation for non-citizens remains uncertain. For now, refugees can only access healthcare if employed or enrolled in school, though barriers to work permits and education limit these options, with hopes for gradual improvement as the Ministry collaborates with NGOs and includes non-citizens in government health projects.⁷⁵

Refugees in Egypt face significant barriers to healthcare due to inconsistent legal knowledge among officials, discrimination, language barriers, and poor hospital conditions, with reports of overcrowding, long waits, and misdiagnoses. These challenges, inherent to the Egyptian healthcare system combined with a gap between policy and practice, have led to widespread fear among refugees about their safety in public hospitals, including concerns about organ trafficking.⁷⁶

1.2 Access to Education

Refugees in Egypt are entitled to education, yet access varies widely, often depending on immigration status and nationality, which excludes many irregular migrants and certain na-

tionalities from public schools. Community schools provide an alternative but lack accreditation and stable funding, leading the UNHCR to advocate for improved access, government collaboration with community centres, and systemic improvements to benefit all students in Egypt.⁷⁷

1.3 Access to Employment

Egypt is obligated under the Refugee Convention to offer refugees equal treatment to nationals regarding work conditions, but it has reserved the right to decide on a case-by-case basis. High permit costs, and a cap on foreign workers limit their formal employment opportunities, pushing many into vulnerable, informal jobs. Easing work permit requirements, recognizing foreign qualifications, and establishing formal job-matching programs could help refugees secure sustainable livelihoods and reduce their dependence on aid.⁷⁸

2. DEVELOPING RESILIENCE AND CAPACITY

The EU supports Egypt with economic and technical assistance to help manage migration, aiming to improve conditions for migrants and locals alike to ease migration pressures on Europe. However, Egypt faces economic challenges, limited resources, and public resistance to migrants due to strained infrastructure and rising costs, leading to scepticism over its role as a primary host country. The challenges faced by Egypt's asylum-seekers and refugees' population create a strong barrier to overall integration, especially with no pathways to naturalization. However, recent shifts such as the approval of the Cabinet's bill for a new asylum law, marks the first step toward institutionalizing Egypt's international obligations in the asylum file. The draft law is set to offer refugees various basic rights for the first time, notable the right to apply for Egyptian citizenship. It also restricts many of the new gains, as well as eligibility for refugee status, by linking them to consideration of "national security" and "public order".⁷⁹ While cooperating with the EU on migration man-

⁷⁴ Hetaba, A. McNally, C. & Habersky, E. (2020). REFUGEE ENTITLEMENTS IN EGYPT. Cairo Studies on Migration and Refugees, https://fount.aucegypt.edu/faculty_journal_articles/4985

⁷⁵ Hetaba, A. McNally, C. & Habersky, E. (2020).

⁷⁶ Hetaba, A. McNally, C. & Habersky, E. (2020).

⁷⁷ Hetaba, A. McNally, C. & Habersky, E. (2020).

⁷⁸ Hetaba, A. McNally, C. & Habersky, E. (2020).

⁷⁹ Bakr, A., & Kassab, B. (2024, November 5). Egypt's 1st bill on asylum-seekers to balance rights against 'stability of Egyptian society'. Mada Masr. <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2024/11/05/feature/politics/egypts-1st-bill-on-asylum-seekers-to-balance-rights-against-stability-of-egyptian-society/>

agement, Egypt prioritises policies that align with national interests, including increased legal labour migration pathways to Europe, which benefit its economy and reduce irregular migration pressures, all while maintaining regional stability and safeguarding sovereignty.

5

RECOMMENDATIONS

Support Enhanced Data Collection on Migrants and Refugees in Egypt

Data collection is vital for informing evidence-based migration policymaking. Data produced by the UNHCR focuses on registered refugees, while data provided by the official statistics agency CAMPAS, focuses on Egyptian expatriates. This gap in data does not account for other migrants in Egypt hence providing a restricted understanding of current numbers. Financing data collection with a could play a key role in understanding migration flows and movements as well as building on existing initiatives. Similarly, policymakers should consider supporting research on irregular migration and secondary movement from Egypt to other countries in North Africa and Europe. Such data collection efforts would link well to recent African Union initiatives to enhance data and analysis regarding migration in Africa.⁸⁰

Rebalance the Partnership with Opportunities for Labor Migration

Currently the EU's partnership with Egypt is positioned more towards security objectives and prevention of the irregular flow in the mediterranean. Broadening the agenda by making labour migration a wider part of the partnership would

provide the EU with more leverage, given Egypt's challenges in its labour market. European countries, particularly Germany could build on labour migration projects such as under the Talent Partnership framework.

Enhancing Civil Society and Humanitarian Standards in Migration Management

Supporting civil society and community-based organizations (CBOs) is crucial for bridging gaps in migrant and refugee protection in Egypt. These organizations face financial and bureaucratic obstacles, limiting their capacity to deliver essential support and uphold humanitarian principles, which are critical in ensuring the humane treatment of migrants. Expanding financial support for civil society and fostering EU-Egypt collaboration could significantly improve conditions for migrants by advancing transparency and accountability. This approach not only enhances the protection of vulnerable groups but also promotes a more responsible, rights-based migration policy within Egypt's socio-political framework.

⁸⁰ Abdel Fattah, D. (2021, September). Egypt, the EU, and migration: An uncomfortable yet unavoidable partnership. <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/egypt-eu-and-migration>

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EU	European Union
GNU	Government of National Unity
AU	African Union
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
GERD	Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam
IOM	International Organization for Migration
TCN	Third Country National
NFP	Nation's Future Party
RPP	Republican People's Party
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
IMF	International Monetary Fund
US	United States
EGP	Egyptian Pound
UAE	United Arab Emirates
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (United Nations Refugee Agency)
GoE	Government of Egypt
SWTS	School-to-Work Transition Survey
MoMM	Ministry of Manpower and Migration
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoEEA	Ministry of State of Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates' Affairs
MoM	Ministry of Manpower
NCCIM & TIP	National Coordinating Committee on Combating and Preventing Illegal Migration and Trafficking in Persons
EUTF	European Union Trust Fund
SIS	State Information Service
WHO	World Health Organization
CAPMAS	Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics
BLA	Bilateral Labour Agreement
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
BMZ	German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
EGC	Egyptian German Center for Jobs, Migration and Reintegration
THAMM	Towards a Holistic Approach to Labour Migration Governance and Mobility in North Africa

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amina Fahmy is a consultant and political scientist based in Cairo, Egypt. Her research explores labor migration focusing on the intersection of migration policies, development strategies, and international relations. Amina has utilized her expertise in reputable national and international organizations such as Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung, the Agricultural Export Council and Voluntas. Her work includes designing and implementing research methodologies to study migration trends and facilitating international collaborations.

IMPRINT

Published by:

Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation | Competence Center MENA
Peace & Security
Cyprus Branch 20 Stasandrou, Apt. 401
1060 Nicosia
Cyprus
Email: peace.mena@fes.de

Responsible for content and editing:
Hubert Faustmann | Director

Contact/Order:

PRIO: Guido Bonino, Center Administrator
guido@prio.org

Issam Fares Institute: Yara Mourad, Assistant Director &
Refugees Program Manager
ym14@aub.edu.lb

ELIAMEP: Dr. Angeliki Dimitriadi
adimitriadi@eliamep.gr

FES Cyprus: Prof. Dr. Hubert Faustmann, Director
hubert.faustmann@fes.de

LAYOUT: Erifili Arapoglou - enArte

Commercial use of media published by the FES is not permitted without the consent of the FES. Publications by the FES may not be used for electioneering purposes.
©2025



MIGRATION MOVEMENTS: SHAPING THE MEDITERRANEAN REALM

THE EGYPTIAN EXPERIENCE

Egypt plays a central role in the Mediterranean migration landscape, transitioning from a transit hub to a more prominent destination for migrants, particularly within the Eastern Mediterranean route. The country faces increasing migration pressures, driven by socio-economic instability, political dynamics, and regional conflicts. Egypt's cooperation with the European Union, through labor migration agreements and the strategic compre-

hensive partnership, reflects its dual role as both a country of origin and destination. However, internal challenges such as economic instability complicate Egypt's ability to meet EU expectations. Balancing its role as a migration partner while managing domestic issues will be crucial for Egypt's future position in migration governance, potentially affecting both domestic and international relations.