

EGYPT - SNAPSHOT OF MIGRATION IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS

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December 2024



BACKGROUND

Egypt's migration policies have long been shaped by political, economic, and demographic factors. Egypt has increasingly positioned itself as a key partner for the EU, while balancing its own priorities of alleviating unemployment and securing remittances. While historically the majority of Egyptian migrants continue to seek opportunities in Arab countries, in March 2022, the number of Egyptian nationals applying for asylum in EU+ countries reached its highest levels since at least 2014. This trend has continued, highlighting the rising demand for migration pathways into Europe. Moreover, Egypt's role as a country of destination and transit in light of ongoing regional conflict continues to evolve. Nevertheless, the EU has recognized Egypt's strategic role in regional stability and has tailored its cooperation to reduce irregular migration while promoting legal migration pathways, fostering joint development initiatives, and enhancing Egypt's capacity to manage migration.

MIGRATION TO EGYPT: KEY DYNAMICS AND TRENDS

Egypt has become a central hub for migration within the MENA region, both as a destination and as a transit country, particularly for migrants from Sudan, Syria, and other parts of Africa. The country's proximity to Europe, combined with its historical and cultural ties to neighboring regions, has made it an important point of entry and temporary residence for those seeking asylum or looking to migrate further westward.

Migration flows have surged due to several factors, including ongoing instability and economic pressures in Egypt and its neighbouring countries. The refugee and asylum-seeker population in Egypt is diverse, with over 800,000 individuals currently registered with the UNHCR. This includes migrants from countries like Sudan and Syria, as well as others such as South Sudan, Eritrea, and Palestine. The outbreak of conflict in Sudan in 2023 led to a significant wave of Sudanese refugees, which has contributed to Egypt's current refugee population, now surpassing 519,000 Sudanese as of October 2024.

Egypt finds itself at a critical juncture where it must balance its role as a key migration hub with the pressures of its internal economic and political challenges. As migration continues to rise, both regular and irregular migration flows to and from Egypt will require sustainable integration policies, increased international cooperation, and strategic investment in addressing the root causes of migration, such as economic instability, climate change, and regional conflict.

EGYPT'S DOMESTIC MIGRATION PRIORITIES AND CHALLENGES

Egypt has long used migration as a tool to address its high unemployment rates and growing labor force. Over the decades, the Egyptian government has formalized labor migration policies through a series of constitutional amendments and laws, with particular attention paid to the economic potential of remittances. The most significant of these is the Emigration and Sponsoring Egyptians Abroad Law (1983), which facilitated Egypt's focus on foreign labor markets. Today, Egypt's migration priorities remain closely linked to economic concerns, notably unemployment and poverty. The labor force growth rate consistently outpaces employment growth. While labor migration to Gulf states remains dominant, the trend toward Europe has grown.

1 The policy brief is based on the information and sources provided in the Country Report of Egypt. Fahmy, A. (2024, December). Country Report: Egypt. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, PRIO Cyprus, ELIAMEP, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs. <https://mena.fes.de/topics/regional-peace-and-security-project.html> (FriSi)

POLICIES

The European Union has increasingly engaged with Egypt on migration, recognizing the country's pivotal role in regional migration flows. The EU-Egypt partnership has focused on managing migration, reducing irregular migration, and promoting economic stability. As part of the EU's broader migration policy, Egypt's role has evolved from a regional transit country to a partner for managing migration from Africa and the Middle East.

The EU has provided financial support to Egypt to enhance migration governance, strengthen border control mechanisms, and combat human trafficking. It has encouraged Egypt to address the root causes of migration by promoting economic development, vocational training, and educational opportunities for Egyptians. This is aligned with a growing emphasis on supporting legal migration channels, such as the Talent Partnership initiative, which facilitates the movement of skilled workers from Egypt to Europe. While migration management is a key priority, the EU has also emphasized the protection of refugees and migrants in Egypt, despite ongoing concerns about Egypt's human rights record, particularly regarding political freedoms and the marginalization of refugees and asylum-seekers. In 2024, the EU and Egypt formalized a Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership, with €7.4 billion in financial support, including €600 million dedicated to migration management. This partnership highlights Egypt's role as a crucial partner in managing migration flows to Europe while ensuring the protection of vulnerable groups.

SOCIETAL CHALLENGES

Egypt plays a critical role as a transit and destination country for migrants, however migrants face challenges accessing basic services like healthcare and education, particularly refugees. The legal framework guarantees some rights, but these are not always fully implemented, and migrants often face discrimination and barriers to accessing public services. Refugees in Egypt can access emergency healthcare, but their ability to secure ongoing medical treatment is limited. Similarly, while education is available, irregular migrants face significant obstacles to enrolling in public schools. While 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, Egypt historically has been reluctant to integrate refugees into its society, offering only temporary protection. The government's stance on maintaining control over the migration process, alongside its strained infrastructure and economic challenges, has hindered the development of long-term integration policies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Support Enhanced Data Collection on Migrants and Refugees:** There is a need for more comprehensive data on migration flows to inform better policymaking. This

includes improving coordination between UNHCR, CAPMAS, and other relevant agencies to bridge data gaps.

- **Rebalance the Partnership with Opportunities for Labor Migration:** The EU's focus on security and irregular migration should be balanced with greater attention to legal labour migration. Expanding the partnership to include more opportunities for legal migration would support Egypt's economic development while helping address the EU's existing concerns.
- **Enhancing Civil Society and Humanitarian Standards:** Support for civil society organizations is essential for improving migrant protection in Egypt. Financial and logistical support for these organizations would help ensure the humane treatment of migrants, foster transparency, and advance human rights standards.

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ISBN: 978-9925-8195-0-8