



Mixed
Migration
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PAPER

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Between Pledges and Practices: Egypt's complex mixed migration policy landscape

Executive summary

This research paper sheds light on the mixed migration landscape in Egypt, discussing trends, dynamics, and policy developments. Egypt occupies an important position along key mixed migration routes connecting East and the Horn of Africa to Europe, and is situated in an unstable geopolitical setting, with civil conflict in Sudan to the country's south, instability in Libya to the west, and Israel's war on Gaza to the east. These factors have shaped Egypt's prominent role in international migration dialogues and platforms, and its national policy developments, including in December 2024, the ratification of the country's first ever asylum law. From 2024-25, Egypt chaired the EU-Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative (Khartoum Process), and has been at the forefront of country contributions to the Global Compact for Migration and Global Compact on

Refugees. Furthermore, in March 2024, Egypt signed a 7.4 billion euro deal with the EU, which includes a focus on fostering legal migration pathways, border management, and curbing irregular migration to Europe. Based on key informant interviews with representatives from UN agencies, NGOs, and civil society in Egypt, and desk research, this paper traces the evolution of Egypt's migration policy, while also highlighting where domestic policies are either working in parallel, or have caused tensions, with international commitments made by Egypt to protecting the rights of migrants in the country. In so doing, it identifies where migrants have experienced obstacles to protection and explores the extent to which some have been driven to engage in onward movements to Libya in the hopes of reaching Europe.

Introduction

Egypt's migration policy landscape has been shaped by its location along key migration routes, and among fraught geopolitics. Both factors have and are contributing to Egypt's prominence in international migration dialogues and platforms, and to the country's shifting migration policies. First, Egypt is a key country of origin, transit, and destination along routes from East and North Africa to Europe. These routes are primarily defined by irregular sea crossings towards Italy and Greece, with most boats departing from Libya and some directly from Egypt. Situated along Egypt's western border, Libya remains a fractured state with two rival governments and a key hub for migrant smuggling and trafficking.¹ Second, the conflicts on two sides of Egypt's borders, in Sudan and Gaza, have put migration and asylum matters high on the national agenda, particularly as more than 1.5 million Sudanese and third-country nationals have crossed into Egypt from Sudan since the outbreak of war in April 2023.² These recent developments have spurred Egyptian authorities to implement an array of new policies, including Egypt's first-ever asylum law in December 2024.

On a global level, Egypt has played a prominent role in key migration and refugee dialogues over the last decade, and has made several pledges towards the objectives and commitments to these dialogues. From 2024-25, Egypt chaired the European Union – Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative (Khartoum Process), having first chaired in 2015, and has been at the forefront of country contributions to the Global Compact for Migration and Global Compact on Refugees. As such, Egypt appears ahead of its peers in the region in working towards international migration governance objectives. At the same time, not all of these pledges have found their way into Egypt's national policies and legislation, or implementation.

This briefing paper aims to examine the current migration and asylum policy climate in Egypt, and Egypt's pivotal role in shaping regional migration dynamics. It examines Egypt's migration profile as a country of origin, transit, and destination. This is followed by an analysis of key policy processes, events, and developments which have shaped the mixed migration landscape in Egypt. This paper argues that Egypt's position, or rather positioning, in international fora and dialogues should be considered in parallel with its domestic discourse and legislation.

1 US Department of State (2024). [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Libya](#).

2 This figure comprises regular entries recorded by the Government of Egypt.

Methodology

This paper is primarily based on desk research including academic literature, humanitarian situation overviews and reports, news media, op-ed's, and investigative journalism pieces. In addition, 12 in-depth key informant interviews were conducted with experts representing UN agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), refugee-led organisations (RLOs), and civil society

located in Cairo and Aswan to obtain key insights from actors on the ground.³ Finally, where relevant, references are made to MMC's 4Mi data collected with Egyptians and other nationalities on the move who have transited through Egypt (interviewed in Greece), or with migrants in Sudan who are intending to move to Egypt.

About 4Mi

4Mi is the Mixed Migration Centre's flagship primary data collection system, an innovative approach that helps fill knowledge gaps, and inform policy and response regarding the nature of mixed migration and the protection risks for people on the move. 4Mi field enumerators are currently collecting data through direct interviews with migrants in East and Southern Africa, North Africa, West Africa, Europe, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Note that the sampling approach means that the findings derived from the surveyed sample provide rich insights, but the figures cannot be used to make inferences about the total population. See more 4Mi analysis and details on methodology at www.mixedmigration.org/4mi

As stated, the aim of this paper is to present a concise overview of key shifts and trends in Egypt's migration and asylum policy landscape. In so doing, the objective is to serve as a key reference piece on policy dynamics. As such, reports, experiences, and implications shared

by key informants or gleaned from 4Mi data are intended to provide in-depth accounts and to shed light on the context, respectively, and are not representative of all migrant communities in Egypt, those intending to move to Egypt, or of Egyptians intending to move abroad.

Egypt as a country of origin, transit, and destination

Egyptians on the move

The emigration of Egyptians started to gain traction in the mid-1950s, with labour migration to the Gulf countries, followed by movements to Europe, the United States (US), Canada, and Australia. Particularly in the 1970s, largescale development in oil-producing Gulf countries increased the demand for Egyptian labour.⁴ Emigration went hand in hand with a population boom and economic difficulties in Egypt. By 1976, the number of Egyptian emigrants abroad was estimated at 1.6 million, making remittances an important asset of the economy.⁵ Egypt's reliance on remittances has continued until today, with the country being one of the largest remittance-receivers in the world. In 2023, the country received remittances

worth 19.5 billion US Dollars (USD), amounting to 5% of the economy.⁶

Over the last years, Egyptians have been among the top nationalities to arrive in Europe via irregular crossings of the Mediterranean Sea.⁷ In 2024, 4,368 Egyptians arrived in Italy on the Central Mediterranean Route, making them the fourth most common nationality, but representing just under 7% of all arrivals. Absolute numbers of Egyptian arrivals have markedly decreased since 2023, when 11,515 Egyptians arrived. Over the course of 2024, 6,647 Egyptians arrived in Greece on the Eastern Mediterranean Route, representing slightly

3 Due to the sensitive nature of migration issues in Egypt and based on direct requests from key informants, identities and affiliations have been omitted in this paper.

4 Zohry, A. (2013). Egypt's International Migration after the Revolution: Is There Any Change? *Confluences Méditerranée* 87, p. 47-54.

5 Zohry, A. (2003). The Place of Egypt in the regional migration system as a receiving country. *Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales* 19 (3), p. 129-149.

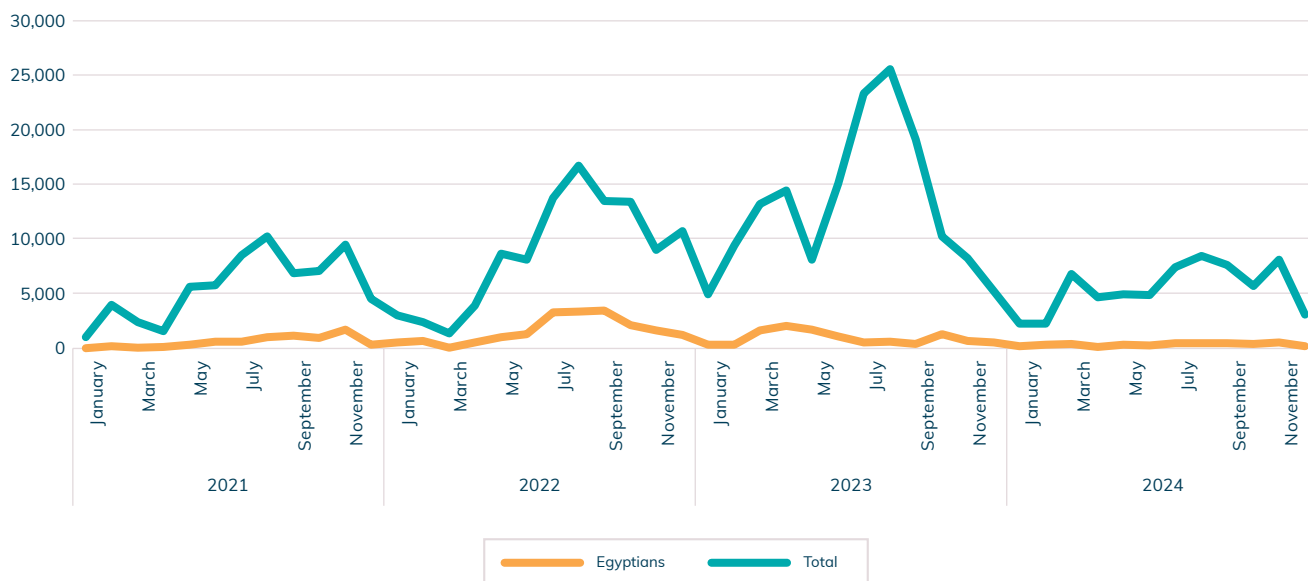
6 Ardic, O. (2024, 18 December). [The power of digital remittances in supporting women in Egypt](#). Worldbank Blogs.

7 Rizk, M. (2023, 6 October). [Egypt's cratering economy drives many to risky migrant route](#). Reuters.

over 12% of all arrivals.⁸ The higher number of Egyptians arriving in Greece, compared to Italy, reflects the increase in migrant boats appearing in Gavdos and Crete and departing from eastern Libya, starting from the end of 2023 into 2024, and may indicate that Egyptians (and third-country nationals transiting through Egypt and Libya) may no longer choose to first move to western Libya prior to crossing the Mediterranean. While a

majority of the boats arriving in Greece had departed from eastern Libya, a key informant shared that they knew of at least three boats directly departing from Egypt's north coast in 2024. In early 2025, Greek NGOs advocated that the loss of life and the number of missing migrants had significantly increased in the waters off Gavdos and Crete, amidst a sixfold increase in arrivals in 2024 compared to previous years.⁹

Figure 1. Egyptians and total number of arrivals in Italy on the Central Mediterranean Route in 2021-2024



Source: UNHCR

Asylum claims of Egyptians in Europe have been increasing since 2022, when in March that year the largest number of Egyptian applications was reported since at least 2014. One quarter of the applicants were granted temporary protection, which highlights the mixed drivers of Egyptian migration to Europe.¹⁰ The increasing trend in asylum applications, despite a decrease in arrivals in Italy, has since continued with approximately 25,000 Egyptians seeking asylum from November 2023-November 2024. In November 2024, the main countries receiving asylum applications were Italy (29%) and Greece (29%), followed by Spain (18%), and France (10%).¹¹

Media reports have argued that Egypt's struggling economy and high unemployment are the main factors driving Egyptians to engage in movements across the Mediterranean.¹² A snapshot of MMC's 4Mi data collected with 33 Egyptians in Greece in 2024 illustrates a more complex picture: a majority (24 out of 33) had, indeed, left Egypt due to economic reasons, however, this was closely followed by violence, insecurity, and conflict (21/33) and (a lack of) rights and freedoms (10/33). Most respondents (30/33) cited departing directly from Egypt to Greece, while two had transited through Libya, and one through Türkiye. All 33 noted that they had reached the end of their journey in Greece, although some had originally intended another European destination (3/33) or had no destination in mind at the time of departure (6/33).¹³

⁸ UNHCR (2025). [Europe Sea Arrivals Situation Overview](#).

⁹ Refugee Support Aegean (2025). [Crete – Gavdos: Sixfold increase in refugee arrivals in 2024 – Lack of organised first reception and accommodation infrastructure](#).

¹⁰ European Union Agency for Asylum (2022). Op Cit.

¹¹ European Union Agency for Asylum (2025). [Latest Asylum Trends](#).

¹² Batrawy, A. (2023). [Egypt's vanishing village men: Risking it all to get to Europe](#). NPR.

¹³ MMC (2025). [4Mi Snapshot: Chasing safety: destination selection and onward movement among recent arrivals in Greece](#).

Egypt as a migration crossroads

Egypt is also a country of transit for those possessing the resources to pay smugglers for onward journeys towards Europe, primarily to Italy and Greece.¹⁴ These irregular movements out of the country are perilous. Most of them involve transit through smuggling hubs in Libya, known to be sites where migrants risk extortionate detention, kidnapping for ransom, and a range of other abuses.¹⁵ Few boat departures have directly departed from Egypt's northwest coast since 2016, when a shipwreck incident led to an estimated 300 Egyptians and other nationalities losing their lives at sea.¹⁶ This spurred Egyptian authorities to dismantle smuggling networks in the weeks thereafter, setup increased patrolling, and eventually pass new anti-smuggling legislation.¹⁷ The legislation is complementary to a national anti-human trafficking law in place since 2010. Egypt has also acceded to the UN Palermo Protocol (to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children), and the Protocol against Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea, and Air.¹⁸ That being said, the US Department of State 2024 Trafficking in Persons report notes that Egypt, while it is making significant efforts, 'does not fully meet the standards for the elimination of trafficking'. Therefore, it recommends significantly improving efforts to identify trafficking victims, especially among vulnerable populations such as migrants, amongst others.¹⁹ Furthermore, civil society actors have noted that it is not clear what happens to migrants once they are arrested by police or border guards, noting that many may have disappeared (or deported).²⁰

Turning to smuggling into Egypt, human smuggling networks have for long had a presence at the Egypt-Sudan border. This has particularly increased since the outbreak of the war in Sudan, with visa restrictions leading to more and more Sudanese turning towards smugglers to cross into Egypt.²¹ Previously, smugglers were primarily dominant on smuggling migrants through the country, with relatively little time spent in transit in Egypt. In the late 2000s and early 2010s, a surge in activity occurred when East Africans were smuggled into Egypt while in transit to Israel.²² These smuggler-facilitated journeys

through Egypt were highly risky. Reports at the time citing how aggravated smuggling turned into trafficking, with primarily Eritreans being kidnapped and held for ransom in Sinai.²³ In response to the growing numbers of irregular arrivals, Israel built a fence at its border with Egypt and implemented other legislative and border security measures, which eventually led to this smuggling route drying up.²⁴

The (potential) volume of transit movements through Egypt, and North Africa in general, since the outbreak of war in Sudan in April 2023 has dominated international and particularly European narratives over the last years. In early 2024, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi warned about large numbers of 'criminals' lying in wait to 'help [refugees] move on at a cost' to European shores.²⁵ Around the same time, Italian Prime Minister Georgia Meloni spoke of "an influx of Sudanese refugees crossing the Mediterranean Sea."²⁶ As of early 2025, there (still) remains no evidence of such an 'influx'.

Over the whole of 2024, 2,143 Sudanese arrived in Italy, representing the eighth most common nationality to arrive out of a total of 66,617.²⁷ This number represented a decrease compared to 2023, when 5,887 Sudanese arrived, despite the war continuing to ravage the country. Furthermore in 2024, 1,575 Sudanese arrived in Greece (out of a total of 62,119 arrivals), followed by 168 in Spain, and eight in Cyprus.²⁸ As a basis of comparison, since the Sudan war broke out, as of February 2025, 8.85 million people have been internally displaced in Sudan and over 3.5 million have been displaced across borders to neighbouring countries.²⁹ Other East African nationalities transiting through Egypt and/or Libya prior to arriving in Italy also did not feature among the top nationalities to arrive in 2024, including 2,159 Eritreans, 1,289 Ethiopians, 648 Somalis, and 199 South Sudanese.

Longitudinal surveys collected by MMC in 2024 with refugees and migrants who were in Sudan when the war broke out shows that out of 231 respondents, just under

14 Haddon, H. (2016). [For Eritreans, Egypt is the new route to Europe](#). IRIN.

15 MMC (2020). [A Sharper Lens on Vulnerability \(North Africa\). A statistical analysis of the determinants of vulnerability to protection incidents among refugees and migrants in Libya](#).

16 Kingsley, P. (2016). [Death toll in migrant shipwreck off Egypt rises to 300](#). The Guardian.

17 Norman, K. P. (2024). Op cit.

18 Expertise France & RMMS (2017). [Egypt Country Statement. Addressing Migrant Smuggling and Human Trafficking](#).

19 US Department of State (2024). [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Egypt](#).

20 Refugees Platform Egypt (2024). [Statement on the UPR Pre-session on the Egypt of Refugees, Migrants and People on the Move rights](#).

21 ACAPS (2023). [Northern State: Pre-crisis and current situation](#).

22 Herbert, M. & Badi, E. (2024). [Sudan: Conflict Drives Refugee Movement and Fuels Human Smuggling](#). Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

23 Thomson, M. (2013, 6 March). [Sinai torture for Eritreans kidnapped by traffickers](#). BBC.

24 Expertise France & RMMS (2017). Op Cit.

25 Voice of Africa (2024). [UN Refugee Chief: Sudanese Refugees May Head to Europe if Aid Not Provided](#).

26 Arab News (2024). [Italian PM: Sudan war creating new migrant crisis](#).

27 UNHCR (2025). [Europe Sea Arrivals Situation Overview](#).

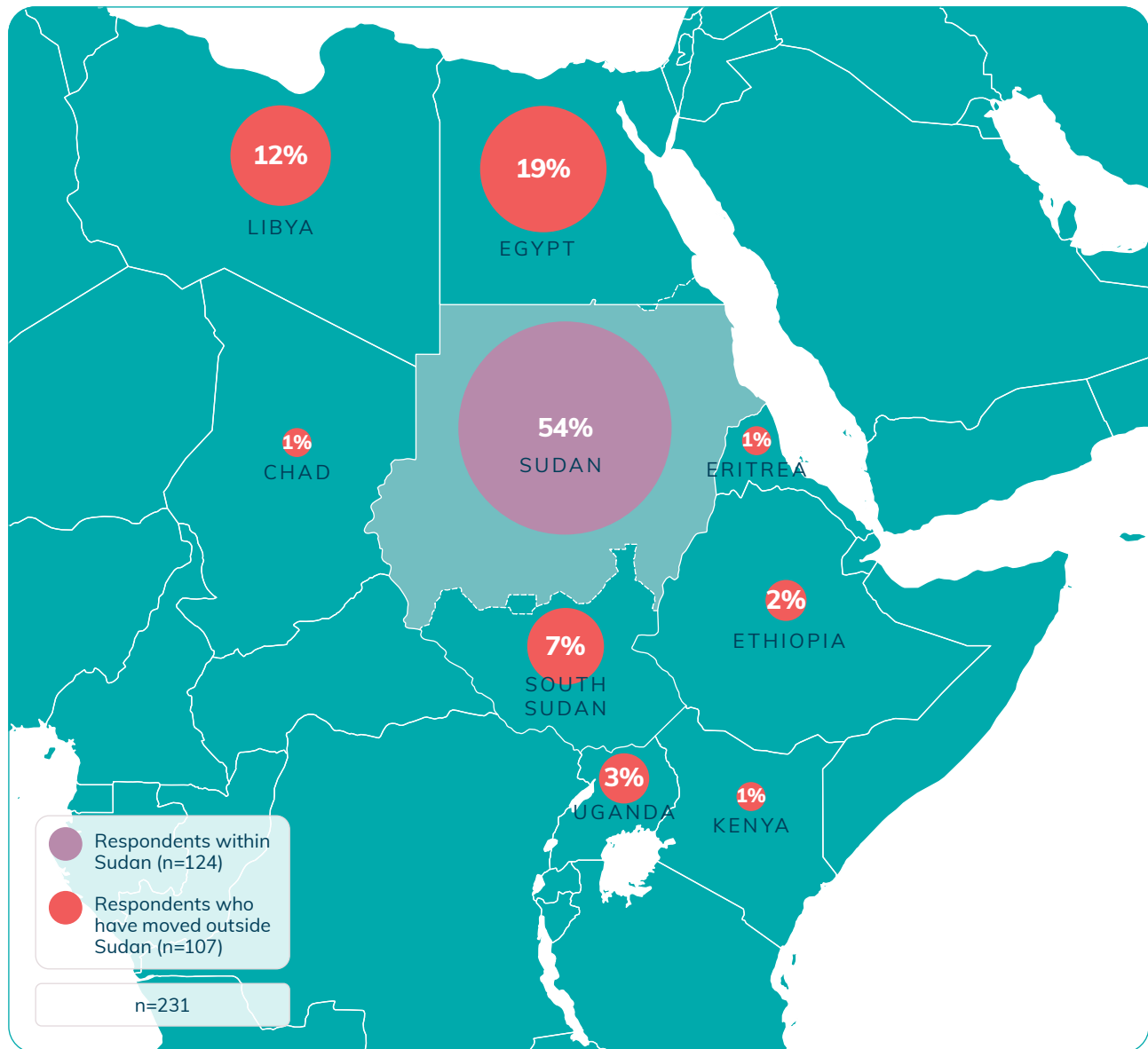
28 Ibid.

29 IOM DTM (2025). [DTM Sudan Mobility Update 15](#).

half (46%) had moved to another country, including 19% who moved to Egypt and 12% who moved to Libya, while the rest (54%) had remained in Sudan.³⁰ The 4Mi data align with the overall reporting on Sudanese and third-country nationals fleeing the conflict.³¹ Over half (56%) of respondents planned to move onward to another country within three months. Those who had remained in Sudan expressed the desire to move to neighbouring

countries, mainly to Egypt and Libya, whereas those who had already moved were aspiring to reach countries farther afield, largely in other parts of North Africa and Europe. Hence, while those displaced from Sudan will not move in large numbers across the Mediterranean, movements along this route will nevertheless continue until return is a safe and viable option.

Map 1. What country are you in right now?



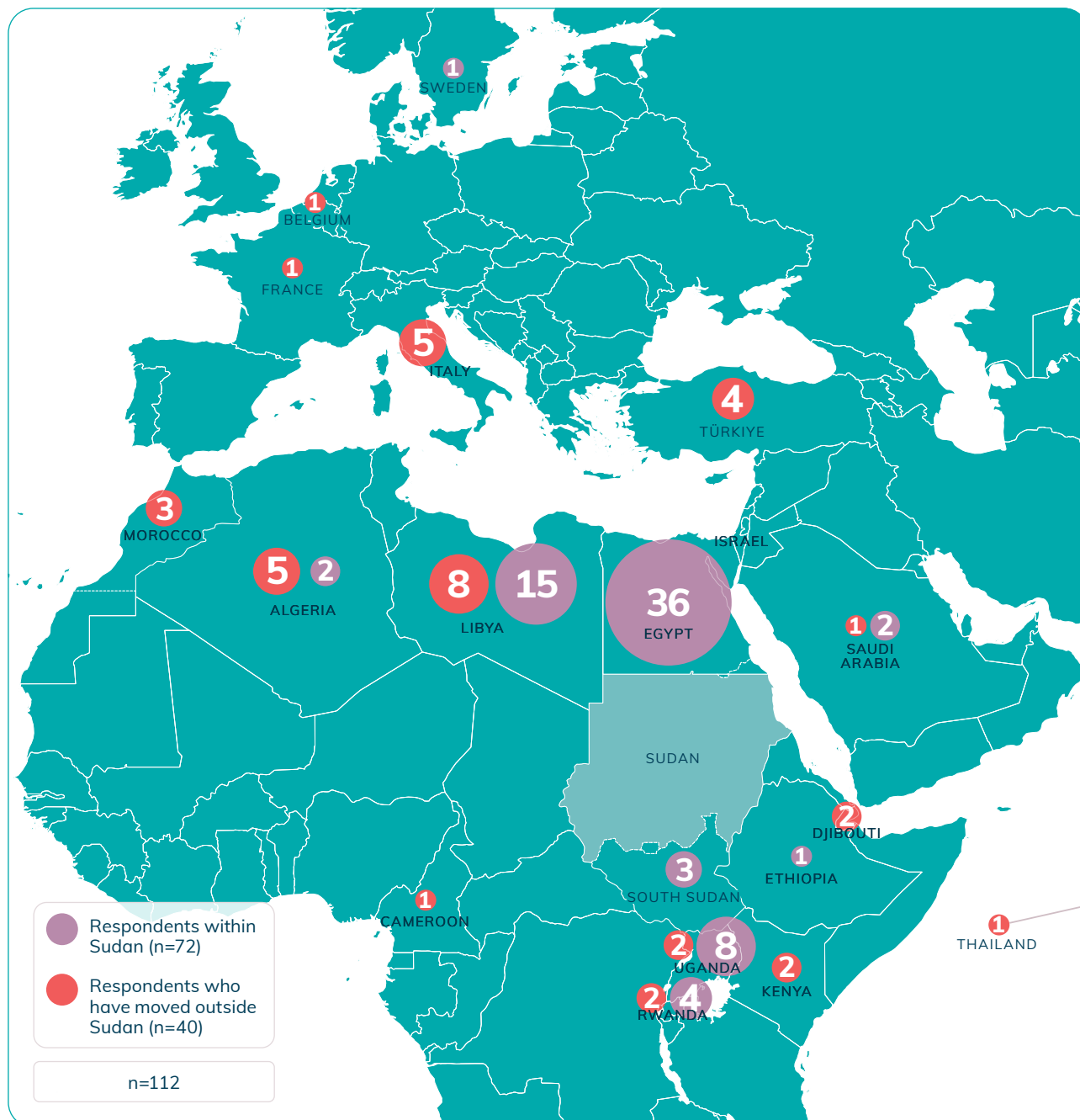
Source: MMC (2025). [4Mi Infographic: Protection concerns and movement intentions of refugees & migrants displaced by the Sudan conflict](#).

Disclaimer: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown, and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by MMC.

30 MMC (2025). [4Mi Infographic: Protection concerns and movement intentions of refugees & migrants displaced by the Sudan conflict](#).

31 UNHCR (2025). [Operational Data Portal - Sudan Situation](#).

Map 2. To which country do you plan to move in the next three months?



Source: MMC (2025). [4Mi Infographic: Protection concerns and movement intentions of refugees & migrants displaced by the Sudan conflict](#).

Disclaimer: This map is for illustration purposes only. The boundaries and names shown, and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by MMC.

A key informant similarly noted an increase in people engaging in (onward) movements from Egypt to Libya since the outbreak of war in Sudan, including of those who had registered with UNHCR in Egypt. Given that movements have not translated into higher arrival figures in Europe, as mentioned above, many are likely to be stranded in Libya. Testimonies published by the BBC in early 2025 highlight the onward movements of Sudanese families from Egypt to Libya, citing their unmet

expectations for life in Egypt, including challenges to access the labour market, as well as racism and violence, as a key part of their onward movement decision-making. Smugglers in Egyptian cities appear to prey on these sentiments, while promising a better life and omitting any information about the severe risks for migrants in Libya.³² A Sudanese woman detailed how she moved on to Libya with her husband and six children. After their arrival, they were kept, beaten, and extorted.

32 Mhadhbi, A. (2025). [‘A living hell’: Sudanese women face rape and abuse in Libya](#). BBC.

Upon their release, her husband disappeared, and her daughter was raped. Another woman described how she and her family were kept in a warehouse for months,

suffering from brutal forms of violence and mutilations, after payments previously made to Egyptian smugglers were never transferred to Libyan counterparts.

A country of refuge, and a country of destination

Egypt has a long history of serving as a country of refuge. In the first half of the twentieth century, the country received Armenians fleeing the Armenian Genocide of the 1910s.³³ From the mid-1930s, Palestinian refugees started arriving in Egypt, with arrivals increasing following the events of the 1947-49 Nakba, the 1967 Six-Day War, and during the First Intifada in the early 90s.³⁴ Figures from the early 2010s estimated that around 80,000 Palestinians were living in Egypt since their displacement decades earlier, while no official numbers were available.³⁵ Since the 1980s, and continuing until today, larger numbers of refugees arrived from East and the Horn of Africa, mainly Sudanese, Somalis, Eritreans, and Ethiopians displaced by conflict and insecurity. Moreover, in the 2000s and 2010s, the country began receiving arrivals from the Middle East and North Africa, first and primarily from Iraq, and then Libya, Syria, and Yemen, linked to conflict and political instability.

In 2022, before the outbreak of war in Sudan, IOM estimated the total number of migrants in Egypt at nine million, including authorised migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and those remaining in irregular and undocumented situations.³⁶ The majority of migrants live in Cairo, Giza, Alexandria, Damietta, and Dakhaleya. The main countries of origin included Sudan (4 million), Syria (1.5 million), Yemen (1 million), and Libya (1 million), reflecting the political crises marring the Middle East and North Africa. This estimate marked almost a doubling of an earlier 2016 estimate, when President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi announced that Egypt hosted five million migrants, including refugees. While the nine million estimate can be a helpful resource to make sense of the volume of migrants in Egypt, it should be interpreted carefully. Egypt does not allow for naturalisation of foreigners, including refugees, unless they are married to an Egyptian, have an Egyptian parent, or make significant investments in the country.³⁷ Therefore, the estimate likely includes several millions of highly integrated Sudanese who have been residing in Egypt for multiple generations.³⁸

Turning to figures on refugees and asylum seekers, in February 2025, UNHCR recorded 925,000 registered refugees and asylum-seekers, of which 655,000 were Sudanese and 142,000 were Syrians – an almost tenfold increase in the number of registered Sudanese since April 2023.³⁹ As of January 2025, the overall number of new arrivals from Sudan since April 2023 stood at 1.5 million according to the Government of Egypt.⁴⁰ This figure does not include many recent irregular arrivals from Sudan who have not yet been able to apply for residency or register with UNHCR. A key informant from civil society noted that irregular arrivals could well translate to over a 1,000 individuals per day as of the first quarter of 2025.

As of February 2025, there are 40,000 Eritreans refugees and asylum seekers registered with UNHCR in Egypt. However, it remains difficult to estimate to what extent this figure, not including Eritreans with other statuses, represents the total volume of the Eritrean population in-country.⁴¹ Many Eritreans have traditionally seen Egypt as a transit country while en route to either Israel or Libya (and then Europe), with the route to Israel being closed off in the early 2010s. Since 2016, with increased anti-smuggling operations along Egypt's northwest coast cutting off smuggling routes to Libya, more and more Eritreans find themselves remaining in Egypt, although many rely on money sent from relatives in Europe or North America to get by, as available jobs in the informal sector are exploitative and paid poorly.⁴² While the risks for Eritreans to return to Eritrea remain high, reports of detention and deportation of Eritreans in Egypt have continued to emerge over the years.⁴³ In 2022, a group of UN human rights experts issued a statement condemning the expulsion of Eritreans from Egypt, calling on the Egyptian authorities to immediately halt any further forced returns. The report furthermore noted that Eritreans may face enforced disappearance and torture upon their return, while held in incommunicado arbitrary detention.⁴⁴

33 Zohry, A. (2003). Op cit.

34 El-Abed, O. (2009). *Unprotected: Palestinians in Egypt since 1948*. Washington DC, USA: Institute for Palestine Studies and Ottawa, Canada: International Development Research Centre.

35 El-Abed, O. (2011). *The Invisible Community: Egypt's Palestinians*. Al Shabaka – The Palestinian Policy Network.

36 IOM (2022). *IOM Egypt estimates the current number of international migrants living in Egypt to 9 million people originating from 133 countries*.

37 Citizenship Rights in Africa Initiative (n.d.). *Egypt*.

38 Norman, K. P. (2024). Op Cit.

39 UNHCR (2025). *UNHCR Egypt Factsheet - February 2025*.

40 UNHCR (2025). *Egypt – Operational Overview*.

41 UNHCR (2025). *UNHCR Egypt Factsheet - February 2025*.

42 Reidy, E. (2017, 1 August). *'The Route is Shut': Eritreans Trapped by Egypt's Smuggling Crackdown*. The New Humanitarian.

43 Human Rights Watch (2024). *World Report 2024: Eritrea*.

44 OHCHR (2022, 13 April). *Egypt: UN experts condemn expulsions of Eritrean asylum seekers despite risks of torture, arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance*.

In terms of cross-border displacement following the events in Gaza since October 2023, Palestinian officials in Egypt have estimated the number of arrivals from Gaza to be over 120,000.⁴⁵ While the border has officially remained closed for Palestinians seeking refuge in Egypt, most of these arrivals were from medical evacuations, followed by those holding double nationalities who were able to leave through foreign embassies, and those able to pay brokers requesting astronomical fees of reportedly up to 10,000 USD per person.⁴⁶ Egypt has refused calls by the United States and Israel to more widely accept Palestinians through the Rafah border crossing, linking its refusal to its policy against supporting population transfer, as the ability of Palestinians to return to Gaza would be in question.⁴⁷ This position is in line with Egypt's support of a 1952 Arab League ruling to avoid jeopardising the identity and cause of Palestinians.⁴⁸ It is also consistent with other policies involving the Palestinian community already residing in Egypt, which include not extending citizenship or asylum to Palestinians. As such, the particular status of Palestinians in Egypt provides a key

challenge in recording and registering the volume of the community, making them eligible for assistance, defining their assistance needs, and planning for delivering assistance to them.⁴⁹ While Palestinians in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon are served by the Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Egypt has not authorised UNRWA to operate in-country nor mandated UNHCR to include Palestinians in their caseload. Since the outbreak of war in Gaza, UNHCR has provided ad-hoc assistance to displaced families in Egypt in collaboration with the Egyptian Red Crescent.⁵⁰

In the absence of largescale legal pathways out of Egypt, such as (voluntary) repatriation and resettlement, and owing to the protracted nature of many of the conflicts in neighbouring countries, the majority of new arrivals in Egypt have tended to remain in the country for years.⁵¹ Some researchers have therefore termed Egypt, as well as other North African countries such as Tunisia and Morocco in similar situations, as a “transit-turned-host” country.⁵²

Policy landscape in Egypt

Egyptian migration policy in three phases, 1990-2020

Several studies have been published on Egypt's shifting position on migration, and on how it has dealt with and shaped both domestic and international narratives on migration and refugee issues.⁵³ Researchers have characterised Egypt's policy shifts as occurring in three phases.⁵⁴ First, in the 1990s and 2000s, Egypt used a policy of 'strategic indifference'. During this period, the authorities strictly monitored the migrant population in-country, but they did not engage in direct assistance or services. Instead, they allowed UN agencies and (I)NGOs to carry out that work, while also catering towards the needs of host populations. These activities were tracked to ensure they would focus on service delivery and did not challenge state authority through, for example, advocating for rights and freedoms. Second, following the 2011 Egyptian revolution, the authorities' stance moved

towards a further 'securitised and repressive' approach. While the first period was already marked by monitoring and control, during this second period the authorities' discourse coupled migration with crime, terrorism, and other state security issues.⁵⁵

The year 2016 marked the start of a third phase when Egypt started to engage more openly in migration discourse, and when for the first time an estimate of migrants in-country was shared by Egyptian President al-Sisi.⁵⁶ A key informant noted this shift was informed by a series of events that year, and followed the European 'migrant crisis' of 2015 and the establishment of the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF).⁵⁷ First, the announcement of the EU-Turkey deal on migration in early 2016, being the first of its kind, can be perceived

45 El-Tabei, H. (2024). [Palestinians build new lives in Cairo's 'Little Gaza'](#). Al-Monitor.

46 Ahmed, K. & Michaelson, R. (2024, 8 January). [Palestinians desperate to flee Gaza pay thousands in bribes to 'brokers'](#). The Guardian.

47 Kayali, L. (2024). [Why Egypt refuses to open its border to Palestinians forcibly displaced from Gaza](#). The Conversation.

48 The 1952 Arab League's resolution 462 opposes granting Palestinians Egyptian nationality by argues that doing so would put their identity and cause in jeopardy. Also see: The New Arab (2023). [No recognition, no rights: The abject plight of Egypt's Palestinian refugees](#).

49 Ayoub, M. (2024). [Bridging Local and Global Assistance for Palestinian Refugees in Egypt](#). The Cairo Review of Global Affairs.

50 UNHCR (n.d.). [Global Focus - Egypt](#).

51 Abdelaaty, L.E. (2021). Discrimination and Delegation. Explaining State Responses to Refugees (p. 63-85). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

52 Norman, K.P. (2019). "Inclusion, Exclusion or Indifference? Redefining Migrant and Refugee Host State Engagement Options in Mediterranean 'Transit' Countries. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45 (1), p. 42-60.

53 See, for example: Norman, K. P. (2024). Op Cit.; Abdel Fattah, D. & Heggy, M. (2024). From Restricted to Permissive: Egypt Migration Policy Since 1952. *International Migration Review* 58 (3), p. 1489-1506.

54 Norman, K. P. (2024). Op Cit.

55 Ibid.

56 Middle East Monitor (2021, 24 December). [Refugees in Egypt: Sisi's political trump card](#).

57 Norman, K. P. (2024). Op Cit.

as a moment when Egypt started to view working on migration in international policy contexts and in cooperation with the EU as an 'opportunity'. Second, in September 2016, as mentioned above, a large shipwreck occurred off the coast of Egypt, taking the lives of hundreds, of whom the majority were Egyptians. Within weeks of the tragedy, Egypt announced the passing of national anti-smuggling legislation, and adopted a five-year strategy on trafficking in persons. Furthermore, proactive measures were undertaken for the police and coast guard to patrol and dismantle smuggling networks. This was followed by the initiation of several governmental bodies, including The National Coordinating Committee for Combating and Preventing Illegal Migration and Trafficking in Persons (2016), The Migration Data Analysis Unit (2017, within the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics - CAPMAS), and The Migration Affairs Inter-Ministerial Committee

(2019).⁵⁸ In parallel, from 2016 onwards, Egypt has also taken on a more active role in international migration and refugee dialogues, which will be discussed later on.

While the organisation of Egypt's migration policy landscape into phases is useful to contextualise key events, the characteristics of these different phases and types of policies are not mutually exclusive. As Egypt has taken on a more active international role, framing itself as a 'frontrunner' in international migration platforms and policy processes, this has not always been translated into domestic actions echoing the same kind of (progressive) change. An additional focus on border management, securitisation, and repression creates at times tension with commitments to the protection and inclusion of migrants. This has led to arrests, detention, and deportation, including, in some cases, of those seeking protection and asylum in Egypt.⁵⁹

Policy shifts linked to the war in Sudan

The large numbers of Sudanese arrivals in Egypt linked to the war in Sudan have impacted the governing of cross-border mobility in Egypt. Prior to the war, the Four Freedoms Agreement signed by Egypt and Sudan in 2004 guaranteed freedom of movement between the two countries, as well as residency, work, and property ownership for citizens of both countries. Yet, according to researchers, Egypt maintained a selective application of the agreement for years, with Sudanese men aged 18-50 years old still requiring a visa.⁶⁰ The agreement was ultimately discontinued after a series of policy shifts starting in 2023, outlined below.⁶¹

During the first months of war, thousands of Sudanese seeking to cross into Egypt gathered in Wadi Halfa to wait for visas or travel documents, as many fled from their homes in Khartoum without their identity documents and passports.⁶² In June 2023, the authorities announced they would require all Sudanese, irrespective of age and gender, arriving in Egypt to obtain an electronic visa prior to entering. This requirement followed other measures announced a month prior, including no longer accepting Sudanese passports with extended validity or temporary travel documents in lieu of passports for visa applications. Children who were added to their parents' passport and did not have their own passport, moreover,

were no longer granted access.⁶³ With the introduction of these new policies, waiting times to cross the border in Wadi Halfa increased to four to six months, leaving many unable to afford staying for such a long period, and resorting to use a smuggler to cross the border instead.⁶⁴ Reports on prices charged by smugglers for a border crossing have varied between 300 USD per person for a border crossing from Wadi Halfa, to 800 USD per person all the way from Omdurman and Khartoum.⁶⁵

In August 2023, the Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly issued a decree (Resolution No. 3326) requiring all foreigners without valid residency documentation to regularise their status before 15 March 2024.⁶⁶ This was later on extended through two grace periods until 30 June, and then 30 September 2024.⁶⁷ The new stipulations, furthermore, included that all individuals, apart from refugees and asylum seekers who benefit from a reduced rate, are required to pay 1,000 USD in administrative fees to process new permits. Several media sources noted at the time that the rules were established to enhance Egypt's reserve of foreign currency in an effort to support the struggling Egyptian economy.⁶⁸ While promoting the measures, the authorities explained the campaign intended to regularise all foreigners so that they could 'continue to enjoy full access to the services

58 IOM (2021). [IOM Strategy for Egypt: 2021-2025](#).

59 Tankar, I. (2025). [Egypt criticized over the treatment of Sudanese refugees](#). JURISTnews; Reuters (2024, June 19). [Egypt unlawfully deported Sudanese refugees, rights group says](#).

60 Dabanga Sudan (2023, 15 September). [Thousands await Egyptian visa for months in Sudan border town](#).

61 Mohyeldeen, S. (2021). [The Egypt-Sudan Border: A Story of Unfulfilled Promise](#). Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center.

62 ACAPS (2023). Op Cit.

63 MMC (2023). [Quarterly Mixed Migration Update Eastern and Southern Africa | Egypt and Yemen – Quarter 3 2023](#).

64 ACAPS (2023). Op Cit.

65 Osman, M. (2024, 28 February). [Escaping Sudan: 'My mother's body was left by smugglers in the desert'](#). BBC; Amin, M. (2024, 15 February). [Sudanese turn to smugglers to cross border into Egypt](#). Middle East Eye.

66 Ahram Online (2024, 11 September). [Egyptian cabinet extends grace period for unlawful foreigners to legalize status](#).

67 State Information Service (2024, 18 August). [Egypt Urges Foreign Residents to Regularize Their Status by September 30](#).

68 Sadek, G. (2023, 14 September). [Egypt: New Regulations on Residency Application Fees for Foreigners Introduced](#). Law Library of Congress.

provided by the country's administrative system'.⁶⁹ Yet, two key informants noted that the campaign has created backlogs in the system, alongside the simultaneous and sharp increase in arrivals from Sudan, without expanding the authorities' capacity to process applications. In fact, in March 2025 the average waiting time to receive a residence permit appointment stood at two years. With the permit having a validity of only six months, many migrants are at risk of interrupted access to education and health services which require a valid permit, while falling into continued application cycles. In April 2025, perhaps in response to these challenges, the Egyptian Ministry of Interior announced it would extend the validity of asylum-based residence permits from six months to one year, while additional capacity would be put in place to process residency applications, with the backlog expected to reduce over time.⁷⁰

One of the key informants detailed that the residency permit requirement has led to fatal instances when refugees were denied emergency medical care. With the administrative process remaining centralised and operating through one office in Abassiya, Greater Cairo, migrants who live outside the capital are forced to travel through the country for the appointment without any documentation, risking arrest and deportation.⁷¹ For example, in Aswan, a considerable number has not (yet) been able to regularise or renew their status, a key informant from civil society confirmed. While Egypt has in place a progressive 'no-camp' policy, which involves integrating refugees and migrants within Egyptian society, and allowing them to access the same primary services as nationals, a lack of accessible and timely registration and renewal has been a major obstacle to this vision of integration.⁷² The same key informant noted that, in Aswan, where individuals must present proof of regular entry alongside the residency card to access services, most Sudanese have been unable to access public health care and education. In 2024, a report emerged on Sudanese who sought treatment in hospitals in Aswan getting arrested upon their release.⁷³ A key informant noted that IOM supports mobile clinics in Aswan providing first line and emergency health services to Sudanese regardless of document status. At the end of March 2025, UNHCR announced it would have to suspend medical aid to refugees in Egypt following large budget cuts for its activities, limiting medical treatment

to emergency life-saving procedures only. The statement admitted that while many will not be able to access public or private healthcare themselves, the suspension will adversely affect the health of many and unavoidably cost lives.⁷⁴

Since mid-2024, media reports have emerged of security campaigns across Egypt aimed at rounding up foreign nationals, mainly Sudanese, who could not present a valid residency permit.⁷⁵ Investigative journalists have covered the deportations of thousands of Sudanese following their arrest and detention. Eritrean rights groups have also reported the deportation of Eritreans, citing the serious risks and concerns for opponents of the Eritrean government who are forcibly returned.⁷⁶ According to investigators from the New Humanitarian and the Refugees Platform in Egypt (RPE), deportation often takes place without the chance to claim asylum.⁷⁷ An interviewed key informant had also witnessed an increase in the arrest and deportation of refugee card holders. They ascertained that in these cases, the officer in charge did not accept the refugee card as proof of a person's right to remain in-country, despite such practices violating international refugee law. Another key informant furthermore noted that children are also at risk of arrest and may become separated from their parents or caregivers. Children are brought to the same detention facilities as adults, and have been known to share spaces with adults who are not their parents or caregivers. While relying on partial data from protection actors on detention and deportation, the Global Detention Project reported at least 9,000 detentions and 18,750 deportations since 2022 as of October 2024.⁷⁸

Egyptian entry requirements were further tightened in the second half of 2024, when authorities required new arrivals to obtain a 'prior security clearance' alongside a consular visa.⁷⁹ A key informant also noted that, from October onwards, access to visas became restricted to medical and educational purposes, and then limited to medical visas only. Local news media reported in November how Sudanese students who had already lodged their application, and had incurred direct and indirect fees of thousands of dollars, were left in limbo after the online application platform closed and the consulate in Wadi Halfa no longer accepted their applications.⁸⁰ According to the same key informant,

69 State Information Service (2024). Op Cit.

70 UNHCR (2025, 11 April). [UNHCR Commends Egyptian Government for Extending Refugee Residence Permits to One Year](#).

71 Also see: UNHCR (n.d.). [Residence Permit in Egypt](#).

72 UNHCR (2024). [Launch of the Joint UN Programme under the Joint Platform for Migrants and Refugees in Egypt](#).

73 Ayin Network (2024, 16 July). [Death and detention: the struggles of Sudanese migrants crossing into Egypt](#).

74 InfoMigrants (2025, 26 March). [UNHCR suspends nearly all programs in Egypt following budget cuts](#).

75 The New Arab (2024). ['Caught in the middle': Unregistered refugees in Egypt face risk of jail or deportation to war zones](#).

76 Human Rights Concern Eritrea (2025, 21 March). [Egypt Secretly Deporting Eritrean Refugees to Persecution and Death](#).

77 Creta, S. & Khalil, N. (2024). [EXCLUSIVE: Inside Egypt's secret scheme to detain and deport thousands of Sudanese refugees](#). The New Humanitarian.

78 Global Detention Project & Committee for Justice (2024, 5 December). [Urgent Appeal: Growing Threats to Refugees in Egypt](#).

79 The New Arab (2024). [Egypt hosts 1.2 million Sudanese, with 'hundreds' arriving daily; UN](#).

80 The other Egyptian consulate in Sudan for visa applications is in Port Sudan. Refer to: Hagag, M. (2024). [Sudanese students awaiting visas to study in Egypt protest weeks-long delay at Port Sudan consulate](#). MadaMasr.

many people remain stranded in Wadi Halfa, with the process of acquiring a medical visa becoming very expensive and, allegedly, 'very corrupt'.

As of early 2025, according to key informants, those who have medical reasons to come to Egypt can continue to apply for visas, although, in reality, these visas are only obtained by those who are able to afford hefty and reportedly unregulated fees between 1,500 to 2,500 USD per person.⁸¹ While smuggling dynamics to Egypt in the 2010s were marked by the smuggling and trafficking of Eritreans and Ethiopians,⁸² restrictions to legal pathways for Sudanese has led to a proliferation of smuggling activities between Sudan and Egypt, as migrants are more reliant on smugglers to enter the country. The imposition of a visa on Sudanese (and third-country nationals) displaced by the conflict contravenes the right to territory to apply for asylum according to the 1951 Refugee Convention to which Egypt is a signatory. Arrival by irregular entry by those who were unable to obtain or wait for a visa has severe implications for their stay, as it creates a burdensome and lengthy process to register as refugees and subsequently regularise their

status, while it puts them at risk of arrest, detention, and deportation in the meantime.

Refugee-led organisations (RLOs) in Egypt have traditionally played a large role in providing assistance to those in need as they are directly embedded within refugee and migrant communities. RLOs fill a critical gap in service delivery and/or may work alongside UNHCR and (I)NGOs in covering the needs of migrant and refugee populations.⁸³ In Cairo, an RLO key informant noted that, since 2024, there has been an uptick in surveillance by the authorities. These developments have had severe implications on the RLOs' ability to operate, and many have had to resort to contingency planning to lower their visibility. This primarily included downsizing their activities by capping the number of appointments per day to avoid a notable presence of beneficiaries queuing on the streets. Alongside the uptick in government surveillance, they noted that the significant increase in Sudanese has stretched the RLOs' resources, and more and more vulnerable new arrivals risk not having access to direct assistance.

New asylum law: from ratification to current transition period

In December 2024, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi signed Egypt's first draft asylum bill into law.⁸⁴ A key informant underlined the importance of this event: the asylum law represents the first of its kind in the North Africa region, and comes after years of discussions and a statement in June 2023 officially declaring the government's intention to promulgate an asylum law. They also noted that the current transitional period, in which the law is in force but has not yet been implemented, serves to further draft and formulate bylaws and establish a permanent Refugee Committee, up until a provisional deadline of June 2025. The full scope of the rights granted to refugees and asylum seekers, as well as their access to services, will greatly rely on the detailed bylaws.

As part of the transitional period, the new legislation involves a handover of refugee status determination (RSD) from UNHCR to the Egyptian authorities.⁸⁵ Until this is finalised, UNHCR remains responsible for processing asylum applications, while offering technical guidance and capacity building to the government. A key informant argued that as clear provisions on this

transition are not available, there is a lot of uncertainty on the fate of pending asylum claims. In a joint briefing, the Refugees Platform in Egypt (RPE) and the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) contend that the draft law "almost assumes an immediate and automatic implementation upon the issuance of the law", and could in fact lead to a transitional vacuum putting the rights of refugees and asylum seekers at risk.⁸⁶

The same key informant added that, on paper, the draft law includes some good provisions, while other elements appear to directly contravene existing Egyptian or international law. On this note, prior to its ratification in December, various actors shared their concerns with regards to several of the law's provisions. Human Rights Watch noted that the law could increase the risk of authorities arbitrarily denying or withdrawing asylum from those in need. Furthermore, they added that the draft law stipulates a mandate to revoke refugee status or carry out deportations in the case of refugees not respecting Egypt's laws, and the 'values and traditions of Egyptian society'. The law leaves undefined and

81 Osman, W. (2024). [My People are Stranded: Bearing Witness to the Struggle of Sudanese Refugees in Egypt](#). Refugees International.

82 See, for example: Human Rights Watch (2014). ["I Wanted to Lie Down and Die," Trafficking and Torture of Eritreans in Sudan and Egypt](#).

83 Al-Mahdi, A., Kun, B.P. & Adam, D. (2024). Refugees serving refugees: financing refugee-led organisations in Egypt. *Forced Migration Review* 74, p. 39-42.

84 Human Rights Watch (2024). [Egypt: Asylum Bill Threatens Refugee Rights](#).

85 UNHCR has been mandated by the Government of Egypt to determine RSD since 1954. Furthermore, according to a key informant, the Egyptian government has stated UNHCR will remain 'needed' after the law comes into full effect, yet it is not yet clear in which form UNHCR would then operate. Also refer to: UNHCR Egypt (n.d.). [Refugee Status Determination](#).

86 RPE & EIPR (2024). [A Regression on the Legal Status Quo: Bill undermines basic refugees' protections. A joint policy brief from RPE & EIPR on the government's asylum bill](#).

open for interpretation what these values and traditions are.⁸⁷ Amnesty International reported that the law's envisioned strict time limit on asylum applications, within 45 days of a person's arrival in country, would fail to take into consideration the protection of special cases, such as survivors of trafficking or torture, or individual circumstances where one may not be able to receive legal counseling or access to documentation or other evidence to support the claim.⁸⁸ Furthermore, it is unclear what level of screening there would be within the RSD process for possible victims of trafficking, although the draft law does mention prioritising survivors of human trafficking and abuse, as well as disabled persons, elderly, pregnant women, and unaccompanied children.⁸⁹

Furthermore, in a joint letter addressed to the government in December 2024, seven UN Special Mandate holders voiced concern on the law's intention to punish those who have entered Egypt irregularly with a longer waiting time of one year for asylum applications, as opposed to six months for those who have entered the country regularly. The letter notes that such a provision violates international law, is discriminatory, and criminalises many who may have entered Egypt irregularly as a last resort, and often without access to regular pathways. In so doing, it reiterates that the legislation would undermine the 1951 Refugee Convention, which requests States to

not impose penalties on individuals who are compelled to enter a country of asylum irregularly when they are fleeing persecution, violence, and other extreme hardships.⁹⁰

As of March 2025, UNHCR's mandate to carry out asylum seeker registrations remains restricted to Cairo and Alexandria. A key informant clarified that, although a request has been pending with the authorities to start registration in Aswan or other border governorates, this was not approved so far. For asylum seekers who have entered Egypt irregularly and who are residing outside the two cities, obtaining refugee status and subsequently a residency permit presents a complex and risky undertaking. Insights from local civil society organisations in Aswan reveal that many choose not to make the trip to Cairo because the journey by train or road poses considerable risk of getting arrested and detained. The key informant noted that proof of a scheduled registration appointment with UNHCR has offered protection from arrest in some cases, while it was not the case for others. While working towards full implementation of the national asylum system, it would be vital to start offering the necessary services, referral pathways, and registration options upon entry into the country, to avoid putting asylum seekers without documentation at risk of arrest.

Egypt's role in regional and international migration policy forums

2024 deal with the European Union

On 17 March 2024, Egypt entered into a multi-billion Euro agreement with the EU, dubbed as a 'strategic and comprehensive partnership'.⁹¹ The deal follows the Egypt-EU Migration Dialogue and several bilateral migration partnerships between Egypt and EU countries, and focuses on reducing irregular migration to Europe, increasing stability in North Africa, and stabilising Egypt's struggling economy. As a major host country for migrants in North Africa, and with the protracted war in Sudan, Egypt has become a vital partner in achieving the EU's migration management vision.⁹² The three-year 7.4

billion euro agreement was signed at a summit in Cairo, attended by the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, Prime Minister of Egypt Abdel Fatah al-Sisi and the Prime Ministers of Italy, Greece, Cyprus, Austria, and Belgium. According to Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, the deal was born out of months of negotiations, with particular support from Italy and Greece, as key countries of arrival along the Mediterranean. Von der Leyen noted that its political and economic weight underscores Egypt's pivotal role within the region.⁹³

87 Human Rights Watch (2024). Op Cit.

88 Amnesty International (2024). [Egypt: President al-Sisi must reject new asylum law which violates refugee rights](#).

89 Emam, A. (2024). [Deemed 'exclusionary' and 'harmful', new asylum seekers' law stirs up debate in Egypt](#). The New Arab.

90 Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants; the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief; the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls (2024, 17 December). [OL EGY 7/2024](#).

91 European Commission (2024). [Joint Declaration on the Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership between The Arab Republic Of Egypt and the European Union](#).

92 Van Moorsel, J. & Bonfiglio, A. (2024). [A conscious coupling: The EU-Egypt 'strategic and comprehensive partnership'](#). MMC.

93 O'Carroll, L. (2024). [EU seals €7.4bn deal with Egypt in effort to avert another migration crisis](#). The Guardian.

Experts have ascribed the ‘generosity’ of the large deal primarily to the ‘EU’s fear’ of a large number of Sudanese heading towards Europe via Egypt.⁹⁴ Yet, as mentioned earlier, this fear has largely been found unfounded, as Sudanese have not featured among the top nationalities to arrive in Europe in 2023 up until early 2025.

With 200 million euros of the Egypt agreement earmarked for reducing irregular migration to Europe, it zooms in on combating smuggling and trafficking; strengthening Egypt’s borders, particularly with Libya; enhancing regular migration pathways; and bolstering return and reintegration programming. Furthermore, the five billion in soft loans to support Egypt’s economy and the 1.8 billion to support business investment included in the agreement is directly aimed at increasing employment opportunities, serving as an indirect effort to reduce the number of Egyptians leaving for Europe. The deal echoes similar provisions within the 2023 agreement with Tunisia (of 105 million euro) on migration management. At the same time, the overall much larger size of the Egypt deal is striking when compared with the Tunisia deal, even though Egypt is obviously a bigger country than Tunisia. But one could argue that, when analysing and comparing the scale of transit migration and departures to Europe originating from Tunisia versus Egypt, including third-country nationals as well as Tunisians and Egyptians departing, Tunisia is a more important country for Europe to collaborate on migration governance.

In June 2024, in a response to the payment of a first tranche of one billion euros to Egypt, Amnesty International and 15 other Egyptian and international civil society organisations noted the need for adopting clear benchmarks on human rights reforms in Egypt, and presented a three-point guide for the European Commission and EU Member States to uphold international and EU law, including safeguarding the protection of refugees and migrants in Egypt.⁹⁵

In September 2024, the European Court of Auditors published an assessment of the EUTF, which expressed concerns on ‘potential human rights risks associated with multiple EUTF activities in Libya’.⁹⁶ Earlier in 2024, the EU Ombudsman for Human Rights, Emily O’Reilly, noted similar concerns with regards to guaranteeing respect for human rights in an inquiry outcome related to the EU-Tunisia deal.⁹⁷ Both statements have further contributed to growing doubts on how migration-related

activities in Egypt with a focus on border management and curbing movements towards Europe could ensure respect for human rights, particularly within the absence of an explicit migrant protection lens. In fact, experts are expecting they may delay the implementation of any migration-related activities falling under the 200 million euros.⁹⁸

In April 2025, Europol announced signing a ‘working arrangement’ with Egypt to enhance law enforcement cooperation, including on migrant smuggling.⁹⁹ Furthermore, the EU issued a list of ‘safe countries’ for migrant returns, including Egypt, alongside Tunisia and Morocco in the region.¹⁰⁰ No further official statements have yet come out on the progress of migration-related activities under the Egypt agreement. At the same time, reporting on the arbitrary detention and deportation of Sudanese in Egypt has increased over the course of 2024, and could foreshadow a similar trajectory of the partnership as the 2023 EU-Tunisia deal. Tunisia has seen a deterioration in the treatment of migrants since the signing of its deal, and an increase in racist and xenophobic narratives.¹⁰¹ It underscores that if human rights concerns and protection needs are not sufficiently addressed, the EU may be looking at a rise in cases of abuse and death in its immediate neighbourhood.

Moreover, aside from protection concerns, evidence has indicated that such deals may be ill-designed to achieve their main objective of bringing down the number of irregular departures to Europe in the long term. In recently published MMC research, findings focusing on the Central Mediterranean Route from Tunisia and Libya demonstrate that while the number of crossings indeed significantly decreased in 2024, numbers tend to fluctuate a lot over the years. In the long term, evidence tells that these numbers are likely to increase again while smugglers adapt to new realities and carve out (even) riskier routes to avoid getting caught. This cycle is particularly sustained by a remaining demand by migrants driven by continued insecurity, conflict, and poverty in origin countries, and who are not fully able to assert their rights to protection and assistance in transit countries in North Africa, where the policy focus (largely) remains on border and security management.¹⁰²

94 Jakob, C. & Malichudis, S. (2025). [Egypt: The EU's unexpected ally against migration](#). Heinrich Boell Stiftung.

95 Amnesty International (2024). [EU/Egypt: €7.4 billion of EU funds to Egypt must depend on human rights reforms](#).

96 European Court of Auditors (2024). [The EU trust fund for Africa. Despite new approaches, support remained unfocused](#). Special report 17.

97 European Ombudsman (2024). [Strategic initiative SI/5/2023/MHZ on how the European Commission intends to guarantee respect for human rights in the context of the EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding](#).

98 Jakob, C. & Malichudis, S. (2025). Op Cit.

99 European Commission (2025, 9 April). [Europol signs a working arrangement with Egypt](#).

100 Ismail, A. (2025, 16 April). [EU issues list of 'safe countries' for migrant returns that includes Egypt, Tunisia](#). Reuters.

101 El Amouri, I. & Sabchev, T. (2023). [EU deal will only worsen racist abuse of migrants in Tunisia](#). The New Humanitarian.

102 MMC (2025). [Beyond restrictions: how migration and smuggling adapt to changing policies across the Mediterranean, the Atlantic and the English Channel](#).

Global Compact on Refugees

Egypt has been an advocate for refugee inclusion in international dialogues,¹⁰³ and was one of the countries behind the 2023 UN Common Pledge 2.0 in the lead up to that year's Global Refugee Forum (GRF). The pledge consists of an overall commitment to refugee inclusion in national plans, budgets, datasets, and service delivery systems.¹⁰⁴ Prior to that, at the GRF in 2021, Egypt made two pledges towards the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) as a host country. The pledges entailed continuing to provide refugee children with access to education, and providing refugees with primary health care services.¹⁰⁵

The pledge on education is in line with Egypt's commitment in its Vision 2030, and linked to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, to provide education for migrants (including refugees) on equal footing with Egyptians.¹⁰⁶ Yet, at the end of 2024, Human Rights Watch noted that Egyptian education was accessible to a select list of Arabic-speaking nationalities, including Sudanese, South Sudanese, Syrians, and Yemenis, who have been able to 'exceptionally' enroll based on a ministerial directive from November 2023. The policy dictates that smaller communities of other nationalities including Eritreans, Ethiopians, and Somalis, for the time being, only have access to the costly private education system.¹⁰⁷ Despite a lack of details at the time of writing, the newly ratified asylum legislation commits to a positive development in opening up 'essential education' to all nationalities, which would translate to primary and lower secondary education in the Egyptian system.¹⁰⁸

Human Rights Watch has argued that thousands of children, including eligible nationalities, were not attending school as a result of a number of hurdles, not least of which is the residency requirement to access any government services. An NGO key informant noted they have seen the impact of the residency requirement on school enrollment and completion, with more and more migrant children dropping out as parents are not able to keep pace with the cycle and cost of residency renewal.¹⁰⁹ Accounts of discrimination have also served as a deterrent for migrant parents to enroll their children in public schools. An example cited by Human Rights Watch recounts how a public school in Cairo did not accept the refugee cards of Sudanese parents, requesting both passports and residency permits, while the school's principal actively engaged in blocking their registration, noting that the Sudanese children 'would not understand' the system.¹¹⁰

According to another NGO key informant, an estimated 5-10 percent of Sudanese children are enrolled in Egyptian public schools, while the rest are either out of school or have been attending (nonformal) community education.¹¹¹ In 2023, it was estimated there were at least 300 privately run Sudanese schools, alongside community schools ran by other nationalities. During their work to integrate all nationalities into the public school system, Egyptian authorities have noted the dependence of migrant communities on non-Egyptian community schools to continue the education of their children, particularly for those not eligible to access public schools.¹¹² From 2024 onwards, many of these schools have had to close down following new requirements from authorities on registration and licensing (see also next section).¹¹³

103 3RP – Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan (2024). [Egypt Country Chapter 2024](#).

104 Global Compact on Refugees (n.d.). [UN Common Pledge](#).

105 Global Compact on Refugees (2021). [Matching: GRF Host Country Pledge – Middle East and North Africa \(MENA\)](#).

106 Ministry of Education and Technical Education, Egypt (2023). [Education Sector Plan For Egypt 2023-2027](#).

107 Also see: United Nations Network on Migration (n.d.). [Egypt – Voluntary GCM Review for the IMRE](#).

108 Human Rights Watch (2024). [Egypt: Education Restricted for Refugees](#).

109 Ibid.

110 Ibid.

111 A 2024 assessment by UNICEF and the World Bank estimated that approximately 54% of newly arrived refugee children were out of school in Egypt. See: UNHCR (2024, 22 August). [Education Cannot Wait, UNHCR, UNICEF, Strategic Partners Call for Increased Resources for the Education Response in Egypt and Region](#).

112 Ministry of Education and Technical Education, Egypt (2023). Op Cit.

113 Cone, D. & Sullivan, D.P. (2025). Op Cit.

Global Compact for Migration, the Global Forum on Migration & Development, and the International Migration Review Forum

Following endorsement of the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) at the end of 2018, Egypt has contributed to several follow-up dialogues. It has also hosted a number of migration-related conferences, including the annual International Forum on Migration Statistics in January 2020.¹¹⁴ In July 2024, it hosted the second regional review conference of the GCM in the Arab region.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, Egypt has been one of the 25 GCM Champion Countries since June 2021, underlining the country's efforts to play an active role in advocating for the support and implementation of the compact.¹¹⁶ This followed the submission of a voluntary national report in April 2021 by the Egyptian government on the country's implementation of the GCM. The review highlights a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, and a status implementation update on all 23 GCM objectives. As next steps, the report notes key actions to be prioritised by the government, including 'envisioning a prioritisation of a more cohesive set of (international) policies for host countries of migrants, together with strengthening international support', with the objective to 'create a common ground for understanding differences between origin, transit, and destination countries'. The review also notes, forming one of the key topics of international advocacy for the Egyptian government, the importance of expanding regular migration pathways and labour migration schemes.¹¹⁷

In the context of the Global Forum on Migration & Development (GFMD), Egypt is part of several working groups and processes. For the 2022-23 GFMD, moreover, Egypt co-chaired together with Colombia a Government-

led Roundtable Team (GRT) on Rights and Migration.¹¹⁸ This led to the publication of a background paper which was written in consultation with all members of the GRT and the Mixed Migration Centre (as penholder).¹¹⁹ In the paper's annex representing a compendium of practices provided by members and other stakeholders of the GRT, Egypt reiterated, once again, its commitment to providing access to primary and secondary education to migrants (including refugees) on equal footing with Egyptian students.¹²⁰

Egypt was also a contributor to the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) 2022, which takes place once every four years to discuss the implementation of the GCM and submitted its own voluntary GCM review, summarising efforts carried out and commitments adhered to by the Egyptian government since the adoption of the GCM in 2018.¹²¹ While MMC has noted the results and outcomes of the IMRF were mixed at best, with several countries seeking to distance themselves from what they considered to be contentious parts of the GCM,¹²² the Egyptian authorities pledged for a whole-of-government approach on migration to combat 'policy silos', as a way, for example, to effectively work on the climate change and mobility nexus. Furthermore, together with Germany, Egypt proposed for COP27 to discuss anticipatory action for climate migration.¹²³ These statements appeared as highly strategic to promote Egypt's engagement and its capacity to lead on global migration, displacement, and climate-related dialogues and processes, as the COP27 was, in fact, hosted by Egypt that year and took place in Sharm-el-Sheikh several months after the IMRF.

EU-Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative (Khartoum Process)

The Khartoum Process was set up in 2014 as a platform for political cooperation along migration routes between the Horn of Africa and Europe. It aims, alongside the Rabat Process,¹²⁴ to monitor the implementation of the Joint Valletta Action Plan of 2015. Egypt is one of the Steering Committee members of the Khartoum Process and is the 2024-25 chair (until April 2025), following the

country's first chairmanship in 2015. In alignment with other pledging efforts made by Egypt in international platforms, Egypt's thematic priorities for its tenure as chair include addressing climate change's impact on displacement; integrating humanitarian, development and peacebuilding initiatives into migration debates; advocating for a comprehensive approach to migration;

114 United Nations Population Division (n.d.). [International Forum on Migration Statistics 2020](#).

115 UNESCO (2024). [Second regional review conference of the GCM in the Arab region](#).

116 United Nations Network on Migration (n.d.). [Champion countries](#).

117 United Nations Network on Migration (2021). [Egypt – GCM Voluntary National Review Report](#).

118 GFMD Civil Society (2022). [Global Forum on Migration and Development \(GFMD\) 2022-2023: Civil Society at the First Preparatory Meeting in Geneva](#).

119 The content of this cited paper does not necessarily reflect the views or official positions of the Mixed Migration Centre as penholder.

120 Global Forum on Migration & Development (2023). [Background Paper Round Table 2: Rights and Migration: working to ensure the health, safety, and rights of migrants](#).

121 United Nations Network on Migration (2021). [Egypt – GCM Voluntary National Review Report](#).

122 Rajah, C. & Frouws, B. (2024). [The Global Compact for Migration Six Years On: Time for a Shake-up?](#) Mixed Migration Centre.

123 Huckstep, S. & Dempster, H. (2022). [Climate Migration at the 2022 International Migration Review Forum](#). Mayors Migration Council.

124 Founded in 2006, the Rabat Process aims to be 'a framework for consultation and operationalisation for the countries of origin, transit, and destination concerned by the migration routes linking Central, West and Northern Africa with Europe' Rabat Process (2023) [Brochure](#).

combating human trafficking and smuggling; and establishing legal pathways for migration. These priorities reflect key elements of its 2024 deal with the EU.¹²⁵ The second ministerial meeting of the Khartoum Process under Egypt's tenure, held on 9 April 2025, ended with the adoption of the Cairo Ministerial Declaration

and Action Plan. The declaration and action plan should provide a new strategic framework for dialogue through adopting a renewed approach on migration issues, including focusing on the effects of climate change and conflict on migration.¹²⁶

Conclusion

Since the 2010s, Egypt has been a leader in the Middle East and North Africa in international migration policy dialogues and commitments. This includes spearheading advocacy for refugee inclusion within the context of the GCR, becoming one of the GCM Champion Countries, and chairing the Khartoum Process in 2024-25. At the same time, significant migration and asylum policy developments have taken place domestically, spurred by large numbers of new arrivals from Sudan following the outbreak of war in April 2023, impacting Egypt's reception and hosting of refugees. Pre-authorised visas were made obligatory for all Sudanese in June 2023, followed by visa restrictions over the course of 2024 and the country's first-ever asylum law was ratified in December 2024.

These international commitments and domestic developments, however, go along with some key challenges. Tens of thousands of Sudanese have become stranded for months in Wadi Halfa, in Sudan's Northern State, with many turning to smugglers when they could not obtain the visa or could no longer afford waiting for one. In turn, this has led to a proliferation of smuggling activities between Sudan and Egypt, with many taking perilous routes through the desert, and eventually arriving in Egypt irregularly to seek asylum and protection. The visa restrictions, likely intended to regulate and control the large number of incoming Sudanese, have gone against the spirit of the 1951 Refugee Convention, to which Egypt is a signatory, which requests States to grant access to their territory for those fleeing conflict and seeking asylum. This tension with international refugee rights is reinforced by provisions in the new asylum law, which foresees differentiating access to asylum according to mode of entry, with those having a regular entry permit being prioritised over those entering the country irregularly.

The arrival of large groups of Sudanese and other third-country nationals has also had a knock-on effect on residency for foreigners in-country, including holders of refugee cards, who, since 2023, had been required to obtain residency permits with a validity of six

months at a time. Yet, at the same time while the number of arrivals from Sudan increased, additional government capacity was initially not put in place to process permits. This created a backlog, with those seeking to obtain a permit as of early 2025 receiving appointments for 2027, and has left many in legal limbo, risking arrest and deportation. While Egypt boasts a progressive 'no-camp policy', allowing asylum seekers and refugees to integrate into Egyptian society and access key government services on equal footing with Egyptians, those who remain without (valid) residency permits lack access to such services, including primary health care and education. Taken together, Egypt's migration policies inadvertently undermine their international commitments towards granting migrant and refugee rights and access to services. Moreover, development of the new asylum law's bylaws, should focus on guaranteeing the capability of refugees and asylum seekers to assert their rights and meaningfully integrate and participate in Egyptian society. Failure to do so could spur onward movements, not in any large numbers, but nevertheless with grave consequences, given the abuses and hardships they face in Libya, and the dangers of crossing the Mediterranean. The announcement by the Egyptian authorities in April 2025 to extend the permit validity period for refugees to one year, and to increase processing capacity of applications indicates positive steps are being taken to address challenges.

While much attention and the majority of Egyptian's migration policies have been focused on its role as a country of transit and destination, **scant consideration has been given to Egypt's position as a country of origin.** Egyptians on the move are among the top nationalities to arrive in Italy and Greece through irregular boat crossings. Egypt has advocated for increased regular migration pathways to be included in its deal with the EU, and has also made the issue of legal pathways one of its priorities during its tenure as chair of the Khartoum Process. **It therefore is important to call attention to and support the needs of vulnerable Egyptian communities, and get a deeper understanding of the mixed drivers behind their departure.**

125 Khartoum Process (n.d.). [Steering Committee Meeting and Senior Officials' Meeting, Cairo, Egypt, 2024.](#)

126 InfoMigrants (11 April). [Migrants the focus of 'Khartoum Process' meeting in Cairo.](#)

Lastly, no independent and substantive monitoring of Egypt's ambitious international pledges, the migrant protection-related objectives under its EU deal, or the implementation of its new asylum law can take place without the ability to collect data and conduct research freely across the country. Indeed, research is crucial both to understand how to overcome challenges and to learn from cases of success. Yet, migration research in Egypt remains a sensitive topic of discussion. NGOs, including research organisations, have limited space to operate independently, and field research and public surveys require a long and arduous process of pre-government approval, and in many cases approval is not granted.¹²⁷ Now more so than ever, migration research in Egypt could support the government in providing evidence on where unintended consequences of policies may have taken effect and have led to gaps in rights and access to services. Furthermore, targeted research among migrant and vulnerable host community populations, including on their lives in Egypt and their migration decision-making and intentions, could support the government's work through prioritising an evidence-based approach to migration policy across all lines of its administration, and its commitments towards inclusion and integration for both citizens and migrants. **Opening up space for researchers to operate freely and independently, and to collect largescale quantitative survey data, will be a crucial ingredient to Egypt's fulfillment of its projected ambitions.**

127 See for example: Human Rights Watch (2023). [Egypt: End Stranglehold on Nongovernmental Groups](#).



MMC is a global network engaged in data collection, research, analysis, and policy and programmatic development on mixed migration, with regional hubs in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Latin America, and a global team based across Copenhagen, Geneva and Brussels.



MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise. MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based mixed migration responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.



MMC is part of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC).

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