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NOTE

From:	Presidency
To:	Working Party on External Aspects of Asylum and Migration (EMWP)
Subject:	Cooperation with Egypt as a priority third country

Introduction and overview of migration trends and developments in Egypt

Egypt is a key country of origin and transit into the EU, as well as a host country for millions of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, including many displaced by conflicts in Sudan and elsewhere. Egypt is an important partner for the EU and for Member States in managing migration flows towards Europe, most notably through the Mediterranean Route.

Migration to the EU from Egypt

In 2025, Egypt was the second largest country of origin for individuals entering Europe irregularly. According to Frontex data, between 2024 and 2025, the number of arrivals from Egypt to the EU increased by 108% on the Central Mediterranean route (from 4,396 to 9,154 individuals), mainly via Libya, and by 19% on the Eastern Mediterranean route (from 6,946 to 8,228 individuals), driven largely by increased activity along the sub-route from Eastern Libya (reportedly Tobruk) to Crete/Gavdos. The sub-route from Eastern Libya to Crete accounted for 40% of Egyptian irregular arrivals to the EU in 2025 (7,340 arrivals, an increase of 192% compared to 2024). Egyptians were also the fourth most common nationality detected along the Western Balkans Route in 2025¹ (1,123). In 2026 so far (1 January to 9 August), Egyptians remained the third most common nationality detected along the Western Balkans route (12% of detections), after Afghans (18%) and Turks (16%).

In total, 18,543 Egyptian nationals arrived irregularly in the EU in 2025, an increase of 56% compared to 2024 (11,922). In the first six months of 2026, arrivals of Egyptian nationals decreased significantly to around 2,635 individuals (a decrease of 67% compared to the same period in 2025), spread mainly across the Eastern Mediterranean (1,135), Central Mediterranean (917), and Western Balkans (555) routes, in a context of reportedly stricter Egyptian exit controls towards Libya. On the contrary, between January and June 2026, arrivals to Crete from Libya continued to increase (8,696 persons, an increase of 20% compared to the same period in 2025). The main nationalities arriving along the corridor in 2026 are Sudanese (42%) and Bangladeshi (37%) nationals, followed by Egyptians accounting for 12% of all arrivals from Eastern Libya to Crete.

¹ IOM, *Global Overview of Migration Routes: 2025*. April 2026.
<https://dtm.iom.int/reports/global-overview-migration-routes-2025>

Egypt also remains a significant transit country for third-country nationals – notably Bangladeshi and Pakistani nationals – who travel to Egypt by air, often legally or semi-legally, before moving onward (frequently via charter flights to Eastern Libya and subsequent sea crossings to the EU). Irregular departures of Bangladeshi nationals from Libya increased by 56% in 2025 (24,612 compared to 15,771 of 2024). The recent introduction by Egypt of a transit visa for Bangladeshi nationals is a welcome step, though its actual impact on flows remains to be assessed. Bangladeshi arrivals from Libya to Crete increased by 148% between January and June 2026 compared to the same period in 2025 (3,607 vs 1,0455), underlining the continued relevance of this transit corridor.

Regarding the demographics of Egyptian nationals arriving in the EU irregularly, children comprised more than 35% of those arriving, including many unaccompanied Egyptian adolescents. Almost all Egyptian migrants to Europe were male.² There were 22,720 applicants for international protection in EU+ Member States from individuals claiming to be nationals of Egypt. The majority of Egyptian applications were lodged in Italy (11,265 applications) and Greece (8,180 applications).³

The refugee and asylum seeker population in Egypt

Egypt has been exposed to the cumulative impact of multiple, overlapping regional crises, transforming the country into a major transit and destination country for refugees and asylum seekers. These regional developments resulted in Egypt receiving the second highest number of new asylum applications globally in 2025.⁴

² IOM, *Global Overview of Migration Routes: 2025*. April 2026.

<https://dtm.iom.int/reports/global-overview-migration-routes-2025>

³ Eurostat, *Asylum applicants by type, citizenship, age and sex – annual aggregated data*, last updated: 09/07/2026.

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr_asyappctza_custom_22324947/default/able

⁴ UNHCR, *Fact Sheet – Egypt*, May 2026. <https://www.unhcr.org/eg/media/unhcr-egypt-fact-sheet-may-2026>

As of 31 July 2026, the UNHCR (UN Refugee Agency) registered 1,097,875 refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt. The vast majority of Egypt’s refugee and asylum seeker population are Sudanese nationals (851,820 persons, amounting to 78% of all registered refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt), followed by Syrians (91,922 persons, amounting to 8% of all registered refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt). While Egypt prepares for a transition into a national asylum system, UNHCR continues the biggest registration and status determination operation worldwide. According to the UNHCR⁵, “large-scale arrivals linked to the Sudan crisis have overwhelmed already stretched systems and heightened protection risks”, with many refugees in Egypt facing “severe socioeconomic hardship due to the economic crisis and barriers to formal employment”⁶.

Egypt is part of the top ten countries in terms of resettlement according to the UNHCR Projected global resettlement needs 2027⁷. In Egypt, it is estimated that 105,000 refugees — including 66,000 Sudanese refugees — are projected to be in need of resettlement in 2027⁸ as compared to 33,000 in 2024 and with reduced available quotas for resettlement from Egypt.

⁵ UNHCR, Projected global resettlement needs 2027, <https://www.unhcr.org/media/projected-global-resettlement-needs-2027>

⁶ “According to the 2025 Egypt Vulnerability Assessment for Refugees (EVAR), around 65 per cent of refugees in Egypt are highly or extremely vulnerable, unable to meet basic needs due to limited livelihoods, food insecurity and inadequate living conditions”, UNHCR, Projected global resettlement needs 2027, <https://www.unhcr.org/media/projected-global-resettlement-needs-2027>

⁷ UNHCR, Projected global resettlement needs 2027, <https://www.unhcr.org/media/projected-global-resettlement-needs-2027>

⁸ UNHCR, Projected global resettlement needs 2027, <https://www.unhcr.org/media/projected-global-resettlement-needs-2027>

Beyond the registered population, it is estimated that Egypt hosts over 9 million migrants and refugees overall, amounting to around 9% of its total population, 80% of whom are Sudanese, Syrian, Yemeni and Libyan nationals. Since the outbreak of the war in Sudan in mid-April 2023, some 1.2 million Sudanese have fled to Egypt, making it the leading destination for those displaced by that conflict, and around 1.5 million migrants in Egypt are estimated to be in a vulnerable situation. Onward movement from Sudan to Egypt continues. According to UNHCR, migrant smuggling activities have resumed along the route from Sudan towards Libya and Egypt, with the river Nile emerging as a key transit axis, while refugee registration activities across Sudan have remained largely suspended since December 2025, contributing to refugees relying on smugglers and engaging in onward movements. Return movement patterns reflect diverse intentions and varying degrees of certainty regarding duration of stay, contributing to the continuous flows between the two countries.

Funding cuts for UNHCR and other UN agencies have had a severe impact. Between 2022 and May 2026, the total number of refugees and asylum-seekers in Egypt increased by 281%, rising from 288,500 to 1.1 million. Over the same period, per capita funds available for one refugee or asylum seeker per year fell by 72%. As of mid-2026, UNHCR Egypt's funding stood at approximately USD 34.9 million received out of the requested USD 133.5 million, leaving a massive 74% funding gap. Following funding reductions, two out of three UNHCR registration centres already closed in 2025 (monthly registration capacity dropped by 60%, from 25,000 to 10,000 individuals).

New asylum legislation in Egypt

Egypt enacted its first asylum law in December 2024, which will transfer the responsibility for refugee registration, documentation, and status determination from UNHCR to a newly created Permanent Committee for Refugee Affairs (PCRA) in Cairo, also tasked with handling the transition of asylum system from UNHCR to the Egyptian Government. At least 9 members of the PCRA have been confirmed, but the necessary staff still needs to be recruited. The long-awaited executive regulations (by-laws) were published in May 2026, and formally entered into force on 21 August. The main concern is the lack of government capacity, both in terms of dedicated financial and human resources to assume the responsibility for the largest asylum caseloads in the region from an international organisation to a national administration as well as clearly defined and coordinated transition to avoid disruption in documentation, registration, referral, and access to services for asylum seekers and refugees. The GoE has requested UNHCR to continue carrying out its core asylum functions under its mandate, including registration and refugee status determination, until the GoE's capacity to take over the system is in place.

In this respect, it is worth recalling that the EU has been supporting Egypt with capacity building since 2019, including through EUAA which currently implements a second cooperation roadmap (2024-2026) endorsed in October 2024 and aligned with the Common European Asylum System. Moreover, an ongoing EU action worth EUR 28 million supports Egypt in hosting vulnerable migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees, including Sudanese. This was also topped up with EUR 9 million last year (channelled through the UN Joint Platform). Besides the MENA funding EUR 8.1 million were signed in 2023 and EUR 15 million in March 2025 under the Regional Development and Protection Programme (RDPP, AMIF and IT funds) aiming at enhancing the protection of refugees and vulnerable migrants. The RDPP also contributed to nearly EUR 1 million to the EUR 20 million envelope announced by the HRVP to support Egypt mitigating the impact of the crisis in Sudan.

It should be noted that the legislation has been introduced within the context of a continuous economic hardship and rising anti-migrant sentiments, with authorities reportedly taking an increasingly strict line on the refugee population. The Egyptian authorities have continued arbitrary arrests, detention and deportation campaign against migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, with a sharp escalation of forced deportations being observed since January 2026⁹. The UNHCR estimated that 771,000 Sudanese nationals have returned to Sudan from Egypt since 2024, of which approximately 733,000 were between January 2025 and July 2026.

Migration Cooperation between Egypt and the EU

Egypt is a key regional actor whose stability has a direct impact on migration into the EU across the Mediterranean. In the current geopolitical setting given events in Sudan, Gaza, Lebanon, Iran, the Gulf States and the ongoing situation in Libya, Egypt provides relative stability and diplomacy, as well as being active in all the principal Arab-led and Euro-Mediterranean frameworks and taking a lead role in the Khartoum Process, including on matters such as counter-smuggling. Egypt is also one of the countries covered by the ‘Eastern Corridor’ initiative, which addresses the route originating in South Asia that ultimately leads to illegal departures to the EU from Libya (via the Gulf, Türkiye and/or Egypt) through a whole-of-route approach.

Egypt endorsed the Joint Declaration of the Global Alliance to counter migrant smuggling in December 2025, participated actively in the July 2026 Senior Officials Meeting in Vienna, and is one of the pilot countries for the EU-funded Global Alliance Rapid Response Initiatives (GARRI), which aims to provide rapid information and awareness-raising responses to irregular migration. Moreover, as the second-largest country of origin for irregular arrivals in the EU, and within the full application of the Asylum and Return Border Procedure as of 12 June 2026, cooperation on return and readmission is of particular importance under the Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership, within which dedicated exchanges on return and readmission take place.

⁹ UNHCR, Projected global resettlement needs 2027, <https://www.unhcr.org/media/projected-global-resettlement-needs-2027> “Refugees without valid residency permits face heightened risks of arrest, detention and deportation. 2025 and early 2026 saw a substantial rise in detentions linked to irregular movements and residency violations, especially among Sudanese, Eritreans and, most recently, Syrians.”.

At EU level, cooperation on return and readmission is generally assessed positively and has improved for some Member States. However, structural challenges persist for other Member States and returns remain low. In 2025, 11,060 return decisions were issued to Egyptian nationals and 1,945 effective returns (forced and voluntary) took place, with a 18% return rate (compared to 14% in 2024 and 12% in 2023).

Therefore, cooperation with Egypt is considered to be of strategic importance both to the EU and to the Member States. To this end, the EU-Egypt Partnership on Migration is part of the broader EU-Egypt Strategic and Comprehensive Partnership agreed on 17 March 2024. The joint declaration, signed by Presidents von der Leyen and al-Sissi, is built around six pillars: political relations; economic stability; investments and trade; migration and mobility; security; and demography and human capital. It was reconfirmed in the joint declaration adopted at the first EU-Egypt Leaders' Summit in October 2025 and at the June 2026 Association Council. The partnership aims to strengthen cooperation on migration management while supporting Egypt's development and overall regional stability. This includes financial investment to support Egypt's economy and encourage investment, as well as supporting migration-related activities. The financial and investment support package comprises two Macro-Financial Assistance operations totalling EUR 5 billion, of which EUR 1 billion was disbursed in December 2024 and a further EUR 1 billion, as the first instalment of the second operation, in January 2026, with an additional EUR 1.5 billion disbursement envisaged.

A dedicated envelope of EUR 200 million (2024-2027) supports cooperation on migration and mobility. Operational support already mobilised includes EUR 110 million for strengthening national operational capacities in border surveillance and search and rescue at sea and land borders, EUR 30 million to fight migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, and a EUR 28 million protection action supporting Egypt's efforts in hosting vulnerable migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, including Sudanese. Following Commissioner Šuica's visit to Egypt in July 2026 and in the context of the implementation of the Comprehensive and Strategic Partnership, EUR 100 million out of the EUR 200 million envelope for migration will be committed by the end of 2026.

On legal pathways, the EU-Egypt Talent Partnership, launched in 2023 with Germany, Italy and Greece as participating Member States and several observers, now represents one of the largest Talent Partnership portfolios, with almost EUR 80 million mobilised and targets of around 500 labour mobility opportunities to Member States and some 7,000 beneficiaries of training and skills development activities by 2028. However, the number of mobilities realised so far remains well below collective ambitions, and accelerating implementation, including through the monitoring system agreed at the second Roundtable and the “Europeanisation” of the German-Egyptian Centre on Jobs, Migration and Reintegration will be essential to the credibility of this strand. Over time, and should there be shared interest, this could pave the way towards a possible Legal Gateway Office in Egypt, announced at the Association Council in June 2026.

While the partnership and related activities represent a significant step forward in the EU’s relationship with Egypt, and Egypt’s efforts on migration are noted, challenges remain to be addressed to ensure that cooperation continues to be effective, responsive to Member States’ needs and reflective of joint values and shared priorities.

At the forthcoming External Migration Working Party meeting delegations are invited to share their views on the following questions:

- *How do Member States view the current levels of EU-Egypt cooperation and EU funding in relation to migration management? How can we better fulfil our commitment in relation to legal pathways (work, studies, research, family and protection) to give further credibility to our commitment under the agreement?*
- *How can the EU and the Member States effectively address concerns, e.g. those related to the protection space in Egypt within the framework of the strategic and comprehensive partnership?*
- *What further actions do you consider necessary or desirable to ensure the full implementation of the migration pillar of the comprehensive and strategic partnership with Egypt?*