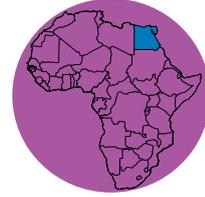


The migration partnership between Egypt and the EU has gathered new momentum as concerns over an increase of irregular arrivals put previous externalisation efforts to the test. How is the partnership put into practice? What impact does it have on migrants, refugees and the partner country?

**Brot für die Welt** and **Misereor** explore these questions in

**COUNTRY BRIEFS ON EU MIGRATION PARTNERSHIPS  
WITH THIRD COUNTRIES**

## EGYPT EU Support for “Fortress Egypt“



### 01 Migration in Egypt



Pier at the Port of Rosetta in Egypt after a boat carrying migrants capsized off the shore.

Egypt is both a country of destination and origin, but also a transit country for people from the Horn of Africa region. About 9.5 million migrants from 133 countries live in Egypt — at least 4.5 million of them from Sudan, 1.5 million from Syria and one million from Yemen. Other important countries of origin are Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Libya — all states that have recently witnessed serious violent conflicts.

Almost one in eight Egyptians lives abroad. Emigration is a key strategy for Egyptians to escape the prolonged economic crisis, the Egyptian government’s economic mismanagement and the explosive socioeconomic conditions in the country. Millions of Egyptians are dependent on remittances from relatives living abroad. The lack of jobs and the rise of living costs are further fueling the emigration of well-qualified workers, especially to the Gulf States and to Libya. The latter is both a country of destination and transit for Egyptians. Two thirds of all Egyptians registered abroad live and work in the Gulf. However, labour migration to the Gulf is becoming more difficult as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates are increasingly restricting immigration from Egypt. Since 2021, more Egyptians have been leaving for Europe again, mostly via Libya, a trend already recorded during Egypt’s 2015 economic crisis.

There are also political reasons for this development. Constitutionally, Egypt is a presidential republic, but de facto its regime is a blend of an authoritarian police state and a military dictatorship. The Egyptian army is an inside state, maintains a parallel budget that is not accountable to civil oversight and controls an economic empire, composed of factories, construction companies and import and export monopolies. After the 2011 revolution, Egypt witnessed a democratic transition, which was abruptly crushed by the bloody military coup in 2013. Ever since, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi and his regime are ruling the country with an iron fist. As the [EU Parliament pointed out](#) in 2022, the arbitrariness of public authorities, police violence, torture and ill-treatment in police custody and prisons and severe restrictions on civil liberties are part of everyday life — for Egyptians, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers alike.

#### Migratory Trends Egypt

- 105.9 million total population\*\*\*\*
- 14 million Egyptian migrants living abroad\*
- 9.5 million migrants living in Egypt\*\*\*\*
- 480.000 UNHCR-registered refugees/asylum seekers in Egypt\*\*\*\*
- 28.3 billion US-Dollar remittances in 2022 (6% of GDP)\*\*

\*2021 \*\*2022 \*\*\*2023 \*\*\*\*2024

## Everyday life and status of migrants

Little is known about the situation of people irregularly crossing Egypt's external borders. The country's border regions are restricted military zones and are subject to military jurisdiction. Between 2015 and 2021, Egypt's army confirmed an annual average of around 16.000 arrests of people entering Egypt irregularly. Those who make it into the country are **systematically forced into informality** as they are de facto barred from applying for residency or work permits. A **regularisation campaign**, launched in 2023, has changed little so far due to the high hurdles imposed.

Although Egypt has signed the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, it continuously violates its provisions (of particular note is Egypt's illegal detention and expulsion practice). Asylum recognition procedures have been entirely outsourced to the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR since 1954. As of early 2024, UNHCR's Egypt office had granted a refugee or asylum seeker status to **480.000 people** who were consequently entitled to receive support. However, UNHCR's registration process usually takes longer than a year and has blatant protection gaps. The number of unreported cases of people seeking protection in Egypt is likely to be much higher. At least **460.000 Sudanese** have fled to Egypt since the start of the war in Sudan in 2023.

Without UNHCR registration, asylum seekers in Egypt are at the state's mercy. They face imprisonment and deportation in the event of police controls. In the past, UNHCR, the



Refugees from Sudan at the Egyptian border near Wadi Halfa

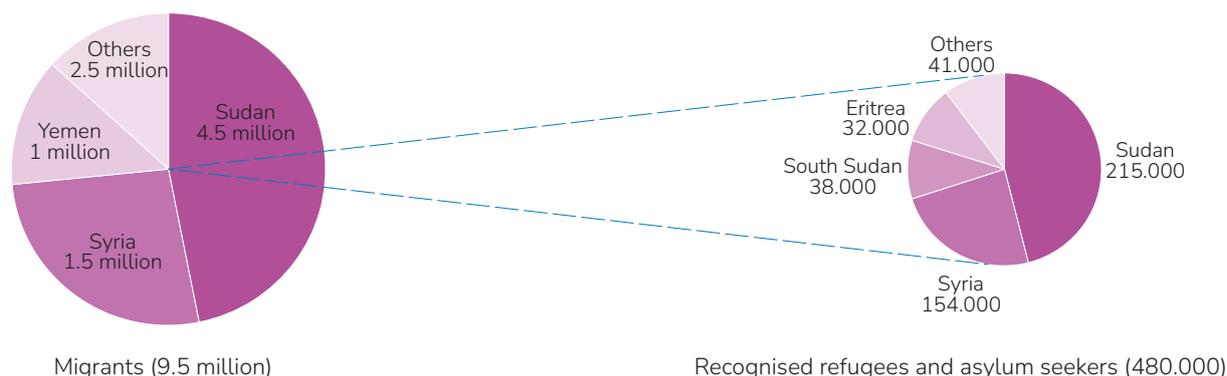
### Sinai: possible refuge for displaced people from Gaza?

Since the beginning of the war between Israel and the Palestinian Hamas on 7 October 2023, some Israeli officials have openly called for **the population of Gaza to be forcibly expelled** to Egypt or other Arab states. Although Egypt's government **categorically rejects** such mass expulsions of Palestinian refugees to North Sinai — which would clearly violate international law — it has already initiated emergency measures to accommodate displaced Palestinians in Egypt's North Sinai in case such a scenario were to materialise. Egypt, for its part, has already displaced up to 150.000 people and **demolished thousands of homes** in the immediate vicinity to the Gaza border between 2014 and 2021 under the premise of the Egyptian army's war against a radical Islamist militia. The Egyptian part of the divided city of Rafah, with its population of 75.000, was almost entirely demolished and had its population displaced to other parts of the country.

International Organization for Migration (IOM) and humanitarian organisations had partial access to people on the move detained across Egypt. Since the 2019 and 2020 refugee protests (see below), however, this access has been significantly restricted. Henceforth, the detention and expulsion practices of Egyptian authorities remain a **black box**. The National Security Agency (NSA), the regime's domestic intelligence service and its political police, systematically exerts pressure on detainees to accept "voluntary" deportation at their own expense. In 2021 and 2022, several collective deportations to **Eritrea** and **South Sudan** were recorded. Egyptian authorities also repeatedly cooperated with the governments of **China** and **Sudan** in tracking down and deporting dissidents from both states living in Egypt.

Time and again, refugees have staged protests against UNHCR's recognition practice, the lack of support, or racist attacks. The state's response to those protests has been unanimously repressive. However, the 2005 police crackdown of a refugee protest camp in front of UNHCR's Giza office, in which 23 people were killed, remains unrivalled in its brutality to this day. More recently, the police dispersed some major refugee protests in 2019 and 2020, arresting dozens of people.

## Total number of migrants compared to recognised refugees &amp; asylum seekers in Egypt (2024)



Only one in 20 migrants is recognised as refugee or asylum seeker in Egypt (source: UNHCR 2024, IOM 2022/2024).

## 02 EU and Germany's approach to migration in Egypt

The EU's migration policy towards Egypt is primarily aimed at preventing irregular migration from and through Egypt towards Europe — whether in the form of direct departures from Egypt's coast or in the form of transit migration via Libya. The EU considers Egypt as a key country along the migration route from the Horn of Africa to Europe, as Egypt's participation in the [Khartoum Process](#) (see chapter 3) indicates. Official EU documents also refer to the high migration potential from Egypt. This claim is based on the high number of migrants living in the country, the closure of the transit route towards Israel after the erection of a 240 kilometre border wall along the Israeli-Egyptian border, as well as increasing attempts of Egyptians themselves to leave the country.

Migration became a priority between Europe and Egypt in 2016 after a fishing trawler bound for Europe and carrying about 600 people capsized off the coast of the Egyptian city of Rashid. About 300 people, both Egyptians and migrants from East Africa, are believed to have drowned. Political repression and socioeconomic misery had previously increased irregular migration via Libya and fuelled a new business model for smugglers facilitating irregular sea crossings from Egypt's north coast to Europe.

In 2017, the EU's renewed focus on migration in its relations to Egypt materialised by launching the project *Enhancing the*

[Response to Migration Challenges in Egypt](#), funded by the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) with 60 million Euros. The EU also lists the topic of migration as a “[partnership priority](#)” in its relations with Egypt for the period 2021-2027. Since autumn 2023, the EU Commission negotiated an additional agreement with Egypt in which migration plays a key role. These efforts were prompted by the beginning of the Gaza war and fears that large number of Palestinians could flee from Israeli bombings of Gaza to Egypt and from there even to Europe. The [new agreement](#) includes a generous financial and investment package worth 7.4 billion Euros, with at least 200 million earmarked for migration.

The EU's close economic and security-related cooperation with Egypt should not be viewed as solely migration-driven. For Brussels, Egypt is generally “too big to fail” given its common borders with Israel and Palestine (Gaza), the economic importance of the Suez Canal and the vast natural gas reserves in the eastern Mediterranean. The EU has, hence, a clear interest in stabilising Egypt politically and economically. Therefore, European arms and security equipment supplies to the Cairo regime (between 2015 and 2022, [55% of all Egyptian arms imports came from Germany, Italy and France](#)) as well as loans and development aid are not only granted in the context of migration control.

## 03 The EU-Egypt Migration Partnership

European-Egyptian cooperation on migration mainly transpires in the areas of (1) police co-operation and border fortification, (2) legislative reforms, (3) informal coordination of migration policy, (4) support for people seeking protection and addressing root causes of migration and displacement, (5) deportations and readmission, as well as (6) legal pathways to the EU.

### 3.1 Police cooperation and border fortification

Until recently, equipment and training related to border control (usually referred to as "border management") were only granted to Egyptian security agencies by EU member states in the form of bilateral agreements. In 2000, Italy and Egypt signed a bilateral police agreement, under which training sessions for Egyptian security forces have been conducted in Italy since 2004. In 2007, Rome delivered two patrol vessels to Egypt, while Egyptian police authorities have since been extensively supplied with firearms and vehicles from Italy. France has also been supplying Egypt's police forces with equipment since the 2000s (media reports have exposed that French vehicles have been used [for the violent dispersal of protests in Egypt](#)). Germany only became a key partner for Egypt in this field after al-Sisi's 2013 coup and signed a security and police agreement with the Cairo regime in 2016. Ever since, the German Federal Police and the German Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) are conducting [trainings for Egypt's border police, the Egyptian General Intelligence Service and NSA](#), and are supplying Egypt with state-of-the-art technology for baggage and ID controls, fingerprint readers and ID scanners to upgrade control capacities at seaports, airports and land borders across Egypt.

However, since the launch of a border management project in 2022, the EU Commission has also been providing Egypt with security equipment directly ([at least 110 million Euros until 2024](#)). The acquisition of surveillance equipment (patrol vessels, thermal imaging cameras, satellite positioning systems) is supposed to help Egyptian authorities to prevent irregular migration by sea and [strengthen the surveillance of Egypt's land borders](#). The project is being implemented by IOM and the French state-owned CIVIPOL. Their subcontractors are initially providing three patrol vessels and training for the Egyptian coastguards. As of 2024, the EU also intends

to provide Egypt's Ministry of Interior and the military with [20 and 10 million Euros respectively to purchase additional surveillance equipment](#).

According to plans by EU Commission President [Ursula von der Leyen](#), police and judicial co-operation between Brussels and Cairo is to be further expanded with the involvement of the EU agencies Frontex, Europol and CEPOL (EU Agency for Law Enforcement Training). During the forth round of the [EU-Egypt Migration Dialogue in 2023](#), a working agreement between Frontex and Egypt is said to have been seriously discussed for the first time. Brussels aims at deploying a Frontex liaison officer to Cairo. A working agreement between Egypt and Europol is reportedly also on the table. The EU, additionally, is considering carrying out joint military manoeuvres with Egypt's navy under the umbrella of the EU's ATALANTA anti-piracy operation off Somalia.

#### The Cairo Policy Academy and the role of the UN

Germany's Federal Police and the BKA also conduct training sessions for Egyptian security forces at the Cairo Police Academy. The Academy is a police training body under the Egyptian Ministry of Interior and figures as a key institution for the police cooperation between Europe and Egypt. In 2017, Italy had set up a police training centre for migration-related matters within the academy, a project partly financed by funds from the *Khartoum Process*. Police officers from other African countries have also been trained at the [International Training Centre at the Egyptian Police Academy](#). In addition to Germany and Italy, UN authorities also use the academy for training projects. In 2021, Egypt established the [Egyptian Centre for Training on Peacekeeping Operations](#) at the academy, where police peacekeepers are trained for the UN Police Division and the African Union. UNODC and IOM have likewise offered trainings on migration to Egyptian officials from the judiciary, the prosecution as well as the police in the facility. In such projects, both UN bodies usually focus on combating organised crime and smuggling networks, and [have repeatedly supplied equipment to Egyptian authorities](#).



Egyptian riot Police on a French MIDS (Midlum Security and Public Order Vehicle) overlooking a protest in Cairo (April 2016)

### 3.2 Legislative Forms

Since 2016, the EU has provided direct assistance for two migration-related legislative reforms in Egypt by granting funds or advisory services: the 2016 law against human trafficking and smuggling and the asylum law, which is still in the midst of its drafting process.

The anti-smuggling law (Law 82/2016) was drafted by the [National Coordinating Committee for Combating and Preventing Illegal Migration](#), an Egyptian inter-ministerial authority charged with the coordination of migration policies. The EU provided financial support for the drafting process. The law itself stipulates severe penalties for smug-

glers whereas the [amendment to the law](#), ratified in 2022, not only significantly increases fines and prison sentences for smugglers, but also penalties for “aiding and abetting” irregular migration. The sections on the latter offense are so vaguely worded that abuse of the law’s stipulations seems inevitable.

As in Tunisia, the EU is also providing support for the drafting process of an asylum law in Egypt. However, the drafting process has stalled and lacks transparency. The EU Agency for Asylum (EUAA) deployed a project manager to Egypt in 2023. Yet, the EUAA’s role in the drafting process is similarly untransparent.



Main cities along migratory routes in Egypt

### 3.3 Informal coordination of migration policy

Information exchange, coordination and co-operation assistance between the EU and Egypt and other countries in the region also takes shape within the framework of informal dialogue forums such as the Khartoum Process. Since 2017, the EU-Egypt migration dialogue has also provided a forum for informal exchange between Cairo and Brussels. Egypt additionally participates in the informal exchange forum [Africa Frontex Intelligence Community \(AFIC\)](#) organised by Frontex. Egypt joined the [Global Alliance to Combat Migrant Smuggling](#), launched by the EU Commission in 2023 — yet another partnership framework that primarily provides EU-funded equipment and training for police and judicial authorities in Egypt (bilateral and multilateral) but also with the [UN Office on Drugs and Crime](#).

### 3.4 Supporting protection seekers & addressing root causes of displacement

EU development aid is designed to create prospects for potential Egyptian migrants to stay in their home country and support Egyptian host communities alike. Since 2016, the EUTF has granted almost 90 million Euros in projects to promote employment, protect children and support refugee families. Additionally, the EU has funded humanitarian aid for refugees in Egypt with almost 38 million Euros since 2015.

The German government also prioritises training and employment promotion in its development cooperation with Egypt. The aim of a project with Egypt's Ministry of Education, worth a total of 73 million Euros, is to strengthen training schemes and create job prospects, particularly for young people. Together with the EU, the German Ministry for Economic Co-operation (BMZ) is also supporting projects worth 23 million Euros for promoting equal opportunities and social development of young people in Egypt.

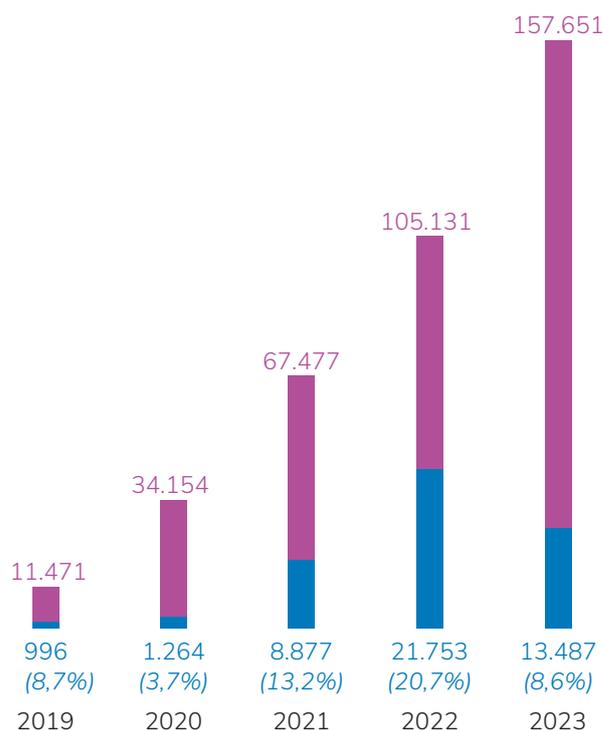
Another pillar of the migration-related development co-operation between Germany and Egypt is the establishment of a Egyptian-German Center for Jobs, Migration and Reintegration (EGC) by the German state-owned development agency GIZ in Cairo. On the one hand, this centre shall provide information and support for people who wish to migrate to Germany or the EU. On the other, it figures as a point of contact for (deported) Egyptian returnees.

### 3.5 Deportation and readmission

In the Association Agreement between Egypt and the EU from 2004, both parties committed to the mutual readmission of citizens obliged to leave the respective country. Italy had initially been the only EU state to sign a bilateral readmission agreement with Cairo (2007) and has regularly deported Egyptians to Egypt ever since. In 2018, for instance, 294 Egyptian nationals were repatriated from Italy. Following a 2017 bilateral dialogue between Germany and Egypt on deportation, readmission operations carried out by Frontex also started from Germany. However, only a relatively small number of deportations to Egypt have been confirmed so far (74 cases in 2021, 73 in 2022).

In addition, the EU is funding IOM's "voluntary return" project, which claims to facilitate the reintegration of Egyptians in their country of origin and repatriation of foreigners living in Egypt to their respective home countries. As of IOM data, 2.224 people have been repatriated within this project to date.

### Sea arrivals of Egyptian citizens in Italy 2019 to 2023



■ Total number of sea arrivals (all nationalities)  
 ■ Arrivals of Egyptian citizens in total numbers and as percentage of total arrivals

UNHCR 2024

### 3.6 Legal pathways to the EU

To date, the recruitment of well-trained Egyptian migrant workers has only played a minor role in the migration partnership with Egypt. This is exemplified by the EU-launched project *Supporting Regular Labour Migration and Mobility between North Africa and Europe (THAMM)* which aims to facilitate jobs for workers from Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia in Germany, Belgium and France. So far, only 278 people from all three countries combined have moved to Germany via this program, including 234 trainees and 44 migrant workers.

Figures for those refugees in Egypt who have been successfully resettled to a safe third country are also low. Between 2017 and 2023, UNHCR Egypt has granted such resettlement status to between 2.000 and 4.000 people every year. The number of people who were actually resettled is likely to be significantly lower. In contrast to other European countries, Germany has regularly resettled refugees from Egypt. According to UNHCR, a total of 737 people were admitted in 2021, only 94 in 2022 and 1.247 in 2023.

## 04 Effects of the migration partnership in Egypt

Egyptians were the top nationality in the 2022 statistics on irregular arrivals in Italy (20% of all irregular arrivals). In this context, the EU and its member states expanded their support for Egypt's police and military to levels never seen before. The declared goal is to prevent irregular migration towards Europe. However, Egypt's more systematic surveillance of its borders in recent years is not only the result of EU efforts to further integrate the country into the European border regime. Rather, the Cairo regime has been pursuing a restrictive border control and migration policy independently of EU interests since the 2000s and is self-confident in determining which forms of cooperation with the EU regarding migration are pursued and which are not.

### 4.1 Effects for migrants and people seeking protection

Despite the sometimes disparate prioritisation of migration policy goals, Brussels and Cairo are largely in line on one key issue: irregular migration is considered a security threat that must be countered primarily with security-related measures. Border controls along the borders with Sudan and Libya have been significantly expanded since 2016, forcing those seeking protection in Egypt to take more dangerous routes. Since Egypt has been detaining those irregularly entering the country immediately after they crossed the border, the authorities' deportation practices have become even more opaque. For those detained, it is increasingly difficult to draw attention to their cases or involve humanitarian organisations.

Asylum seekers are exposed to the arbitrariness and violence of Egyptian security

forces and authorities. The police equipment and trainings provided to Egyptian authorities by the EU and its member states favour Egypt's systematic violations of international human rights and refugee law. European officials repeatedly assure that the human rights standards taught in police trainings are intended to help reform Egypt's police authorities. However, the latter have so far proved immune to any reform and continue to consistently disregard international human rights and refugee law. Neither UNHCR nor humanitarian organisations were able to ensure the protection of refugees in Egypt in the past. The massive EU support for al-Sisi's regime de facto legitimises its migration and refugee policies, despite countless violations of international human rights conventions, and thus undermines any attempt to better protect refugees living in Egypt.

### 4.2 Effects on the political system

The financial and diplomatic support as well as arms supplies for Egypt's de facto military regime by the EU, its member states and other relevant actors (e.g. IOM and UNODC) comprehensively consolidate the rule of al-Sisi and his regime, based on repression, mass surveillance and population control. Co-operation with the Egyptian police or military helps the Cairo regime to maintain its power. Italy, Germany and France, in particular, have repeatedly supplied equipment or training to Egyptian security forces, which could be used for human rights crimes, spying on the opposition or dispersing protests. The close cooperation with the EU not only strengthens the Egyptian regime internally, but also enhances the regime's diplomatic standing internationally.



Egypt's President al-Sisi at a press conference with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin 2015

## 05 Lessons learned - Recommendations

### The current migration partnership with Egypt

- 01 *frames migration primarily as a security problem and makes the fight against irregular migration its primary objective;*
- 02 *strengthens the Egyptian police and security apparatus, which is verifiably involved in serious human rights violations;*
- 03 *provides insufficient protection and support for migrants and refugees in Egypt;*
- 04 *ignores the Egyptian border control authorities' detention and deportation practices which violate international human rights law;*
- 05 *contributes to the consolidation and stabilisation of Egypt's authoritarian government domestically and at the international level.*

### The future migration partnership with Egypt

- 01 *should be linked to a robust human rights monitoring mechanism;*
- 02 *should immediately stop training and arming the Egyptian security forces until concrete steps have been taken to reform them in line with human rights standards;*
- 03 *should push towards an end to the illegal deportation and detention practices of Egyptian border guards;*
- 04 *should strengthen the effective protection and rights of refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt through the establishment of a transparent and constitutional asylum system;*
- 05 *should significantly expand legal pathways for labour migration and increase resettlement places for those seeking international protection.*

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