THE REFUGEE INFLUX FROM SYRIA AND SUDAN IN CAIRO

An Analysis of the Dynamics of Resilience, Hospitality and Hostility

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List of Abbreviations

Community-based organizations (CBOs)

Central Agency for Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS)

Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA)

Egyptian Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP)

Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

Human Rights Watch (HRW)

International Organization of Migration (IOM)

Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

Refugee-Led Organization (RLO)

Refugee Status Determination (RSD)

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

World Health Organization (WHO)

Introduction

Conflict in the region has provoked a mounting influx of refugees into Egypt over the past decade. With millions displaced from Syria, Sudan, South Sudan, and Palestine, this number is set to continue rising. As the capital of a country with a lower-middle income economy, Cairo heaves under the pressures of hosting refugees while also coping with local challenges and the spread of nationalist discourses and policies that challenge integration. Key here is also Egypt's relation with the European Union and its role as a neighborhood guardian of European sea frontiers.

This report focuses on two refugee communities that are present in Cairo in significant numbers, the Syrian and the Sudanese, in order to analyze the dynamics of hospitality and hostility that they encounter on the ground. In particular, how are Syrians and the more recent Sudanese coping with the tensions of two conflicting trends in Cairo: local adjustments and the creation of spaces of welcome, challenged by the unwelcoming national policies and priorities that provoke anti-immigrant sentiments. By analyzing questions of displacement, practices of welcome, and national and regional policies, this report seeks to identify key socio-political challenges that have yet to be studied as they unfold in contemporary Egypt.

This report aims to identify and analyze the ways in which resilience, hospitality, and hostility intersect in the contexts faced by refugees from Syria and Sudan in Cairo. These two communities form only part of the larger refugee presence in the city, others being mostly from the Horn of Africa, Yemen, and Palestine. Nevertheless, the focus on Syrians, who have been present in large numbers for well over a decade, and Sudanese, many of whom arrived in the course of the past

year, will allow for a historical view of trends and dynamics as they evolve in line with changing political and economic situations in the region. The report will focus on strategies of resilience at the local level implemented by these communities in the face of the conflicted situation of Cairo's long history of welcome and mounting national and regional pressures and policies that propagate anti-immigrant positions of hostility.

The premise for this report is that as a nation bordering the Mediterranean, Egypt has long hosted refugees in its dual capacity as a host and transit nation. Going back to earlier centuries, Egypt has a rich history of immigration by Africans, Greeks, Romans, and Turks, etc. Hospitality and integration form part of the nation's history. In the face of an unexpected and sudden massive influx of displaced persons and also in the face of insufficient infrastructure in a country that has already been experiencing economic and social difficulties, anti-immigrant and nationalist discourse is rising. As regional dynamics shift in the Easter Mediterranean, Egypt has also partnered with the European Union, thus taking up a role to manage northward migration from Africa to Europe. Consequently, many asylum seekers find it hard, if not impossible, to access basic services, gain refugee status, and obtain the safety and security that they seek.

Executive Summary

This report aims to study the refugee influx to Egypt from Syria and Sudan while exploring and analyzing the dynamics of hospitality, hostility, and resilience that refugee communities have to navigate in Cairo. These dynamics are multi-faceted and must be considered within the larger

framework of a shifting policy landscape regarding asylum seekers and refugees in Egypt. Therefore, the report tracks recent changes in the Egyptian legislation system towards refugees and migrants across a spectrum of legal and social contexts, such as documentation, employment, health, education, and related issues. It also takes into account the new asylum law that the Egyptian government is formulating. A clarification of ongoing legislative changes is fundamental to understanding modes of coping and related questions of resilience. The report also examines the recent shifts in the discourse on migrants and refugees in Egypt in media and social media, contributing to an increase in hate speech and unwelcoming attitudes, especially analyzing the political rhetoric and its impact on public sentiment, while showcasing examples of the affect of these discourses in public interactions on social media and attitudes towards refugees and migrants. It additionally includes narratives from the Syrian and Sudanese refugees and migrants to get their insights on the changes taking place. Additionally, this report analyzed existing literature and testimonies on hospitality in Egypt.

The key findings reveal that despite the resilience mechanisms Syrian and Sudanese refugees and migrants exhibit, their ability to cope is increasingly challenged by the emerging unwelcoming environment shaped by economic pressures and negative rhetoric. The findings also show that the initial welcoming attitudes have shifted, leading to negative perceptions of refugees and migrants as burdens instead of assets. In a city like Cairo, these findings are manifested in the form of dynamics of adaptation and integration mixed with hostility and intolerance for various reasons and radical transformations that the city is experiencing while showing a significant ability to adapt and embrace different contributions and identities. The complexities of human interactions

monitored by the report's findings reflect rapidly changing contexts not only for refugees and migrants but also for Egyptians.

Based on these findings, the report offers some recommendations: to effectively address these challenges, it is recommended that the Egyptian government, civil society organizations, and the host community collaborate on several initiatives. This includes countering hate speech on social media, supporting refugee-led organizations, ensuring accurate data collection, and implementing joint integration programs. Awareness campaigns highlighting the contributions of refugees and ongoing research into their socio-economic status are critical to informing political decisions. Establishing formal channels to disseminate information and support community schools would enhance educational opportunities. Furthermore, proactive communication with vulnerable groups, mental health support, and dialogue between refugees and local populations are essential to building trust and understanding. Finally, strengthening cooperation between the Egyptian government and humanitarian organizations is vital for effective service delivery and advocacy for refugee rights.

Methodology

This report employed a qualitative methodology developed under the supervision of the Co-PIs: Dr. Parvati Nair, Professor of Hispanic, Cultural and Migration Studies at Queen Mary University of London, whose research focuses on cultural studies and visual representations of migration; Dr. Amira Ahmed, Assistant Professor at The American University in Cairo, specializing in migration, refugees, paid domestic work, and human trafficking; and Dr. Gerda Heck, Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology, Egyptology, and Anthropology at The American University in Cairo,

whose research centers on migration and urban studies, to investigate the experiences of Syrian and Sudanese refugees in Cairo. The report addresses specific objectives, namely exploring the dynamics of resilience, hospitality, and hostility within these communities. When selecting the Syrian and Sudanese communities for this research, several factors guided this decision, both in the induction phase of this project and throughout the design. These two communities represent the largest refugee and migrant populations in Cairo, which makes them essential for understanding the broader trends and aspects of the context of migration and refugee experiences. Additionally, these two communities have diverse backgrounds, reflecting how these experiences shape Egypt's migration and displacement landscapes. Furthermore, these communities' unique cultural contributions, along with the examination of their integration, can provide insights into the dynamics of resilience and hospitality within the host society.

Moreover, the host government's policies towards Syrian and Sudanese refugees and migrants differ, presenting an opportunity to examine the effectiveness of these policies and their implications on social dynamics. The link to social dynamics lies in how government policies influence the interactions between the Syrian and Sudanese communities and Egyptians. The Syrian and Sudanese communities have access to varying levels of resources and support systems, influencing their quality of life and integration in Cairo. Given the ongoing conflicts, studying these communities is timely and significant. Exploring their interactions with Egyptians could shed light on the tensions and hostility that may arise, enriching the understanding of refugee and migrant experiences in Cairo, a shifting policy landscape.

In this context, it is important to clarify the terminology used in this report. Researchers define "refugee" as individuals fleeing war zones of Syrians and Sudanese, but they also acknowledge that not all individuals from these countries fit this legal definition. Therefore, they use "migrant" to encompass a broader range of experiences, recognizing that not everyone who has fled conflict has applied for asylum or identifies as a refugee. This distinction is crucial for a comprehensive understanding.

A mixed sampling strategy combines probability and non-probability methods. The sample included a defined number of legal experts and NGO leaders (two from each community) and 21 community leaders and members from both populations, selected with the assistance of community NGO leaders. Additionally, participant observation and document analysis were incorporated to enhance contextual understanding.

The team utilized semi-structured and in-depth interviews, along with structured focus group discussions (FGDs). The rationale for using these methods lies in their complementary nature; the interviews allowed for deep individual insights, while focus group discussions fostered group dynamics and collective narratives. Thematic analysis was employed to ensure a rigorous analytic process, allowing for the identification of key themes and patterns within the data (Naeem et al. 2023) . Ethical considerations were paramount, and the team adhered to the ethical guidelines of Queen Mary University of London and the American University in Cairo. The team collected informed written consent from participants while ensuring their right to withdraw at any time. Anonymity and confidentiality were prioritized, with data stored securely. To safeguard

participants' emotional well-being, focus group discussions, and interviews were conducted in safe environments, with support mechanisms available.

Finally, the team recognized limitations, such as the rapid changes affecting Syrian refugees during the study time, along with a gender imbalance among Syrian respondents, with a higher number of female participants compared to male participants. This disparity is attributed to the long work shifts of many Syrian males, which restricted their availability to participate in the research. All participants preferred anonymity and were referred to as "participants, respondents, interviewees, contributors, informants, and community members." Reflexivity was practiced throughout the research process to acknowledge and mitigate the influence of researcher biases. The data collected solely reflect community members' lived experiences and encounters.

Situating Hospitality in the Context of Cairo

Hospitality is a complex notion, not limited to generosity alone, especially when it comes to refugees and migrants. According to Judith Still, in her *Derrida and Hospitality: Theory and Practice* (2010), unconditional hospitality is a philosophical ideal: one receives the "Other" without preconditions, testifying to an immense ethical stance. This concept has most recently been brought to life, having particular resonance for Egypt, which has been hosting many refugees and migrants, including major groups of Syrians and Sudanese. The ethical dimensions of hospitality are complex as they involve a tension between the ideal of open arms and the realities of limited resources. As Still emphasizes, while the moral imperative to welcome those in need is strong, local communities and the Egyptian government often struggle to balance humanitarian obligations with socio-economic challenges (Still, 2010). This creates a dynamic environment in

which the reception of refugees can vary considerably depending on the prevailing conditions, especially as the inflow of Syrian and Sudanese refugees has increased due to ongoing conflicts.

Further, Still (2010) discusses Jacques Derrida's work on hospitality, which articulates a critical framework for considering these dynamics. According to Derrida, hospitality is fundamentally paradoxical, often impossible, because true hospitality requires unconditional openness toward the other, which is most often curtailed by social fears and prejudices. Still, for instance, insists that the act of hospitality goes beyond just greeting and is a rather problematic ethical issue, particularly within contexts where the community receiving itself is struggling with self-definition and security. This has been very palpable in Egypt, where, even with local initiatives to assist the refugees, the wider framework of hostility makes authentic hospitality only a theoretical concept—a claim by Derrida regarding the act of welcoming in its contradictions and challenging one.

Therefore, Derrida considers that simplifying the concept of hospitality is a shortcoming to the aspects this notion holds as it goes beyond the understanding of inviting or welcoming someone into your house or country. Hospitality entails concepts of strangers, guests, or friends, as we observe specifically in the context of Egypt. These terms are used according to political gains or changes, and the history shared between Egyptians and Syrians shapes how these terms are emphasized at a certain time. For example, from 2011 to 2013, Syrians were depicted as siblings or friends whom Egyptians have so much in common with. The political collective rhetoric started referring to them and other refugees as "guests." Therefore, hospitality is not limited to language and interaction. Rather, it encompasses realms of attitudes and behaviors and includes the political, economic, and social domains. Additionally, hospitality is often affected by the perceived status

of the guest, which is often considered and preferred to be temporary. This is encapsulated in the saying that a guest should depart after three days (Still, 2010), suggesting that prolonged stays due to protracted conflicts can be problematic.

Derrida's account of the "Other" emphasizes the dual nature between acceptance and hostility that many migrants face in Egypt. With Egypt having been a confluence of different cultures throughout its history, this has served to influence contemporary attitudes toward refugees regarding community initiatives and governmental policies. Many local NGOs, like Mersal and Life Makers, take an active part in their support for Syrian, Sudanese, and other refugees and migrants, showing hospitality despite major challenges. However, economic pressures, political policies, and instability can heighten tensions between host communities and refugees, complicating the hospitality landscape. In economic terms, hospitality is often viewed as "potentially dangerous," as it implies the sharing of scarce resources. While refugees and migrants may contribute positively to the economy, the existing economic challenges can lead to resentment toward these "guests" (Still, 2010).

In her book *Reluctant Reception* (2020), Kelsey Norman developed her theory and coined "strategic indifference," which states that by permitting migrants and refugees to integrate into expansive informal economies while allowing organizations to deliver essential services, host countries gain international credibility while incurring only limited state expenditures. She gives an example of this theory that is not new: Egypt allows migrants and refugees to stay in the country while providing very little support, illustrating the principles of strategic indifference in practice.

This approach allows the host state to obtain reputational advantages and funding from international sources, spending little since civil society and international actors step in to provide services. In the meantime, migrants and refugees stay in the country with uncertain legal status, vulnerable to these sudden policy changes, as in the situation in Egypt. Fluctuating policies and lack of formal support expose refugees and migrants to the whims of a system that oscillates between hospitality and hostility, as seen in the evolving situation in Egypt. Thus, while the state benefits from an appearance of openness, migrants' lived experiences are often characterized by instability and insecurity, illustrating the complex dynamics of reception in contemporary contexts.

Egypt has opened its doors to those fleeing war and persecution, solidifying its reputation as "tolerant of refugees within its borders" (Ayoub et al. 2014). In his book, *Refugee Politics in the Middle East and North Africa: Human Rights, Safety, and Identity*, AKM Ahsan Ullah (2014) argues that the government bears ultimate responsibility for the protection of refugees, even when this role is delegated to the UNHCR. He emphasizes that the recognition of refugees' human rights must be integrated into national laws, and leadership should actively promote awareness among all Egyptians (and governmental entities) about their obligations under international conventions to provide hospitality to refugees (Harrell-Bond 2002). However, Ullah highlights that this remains a significant challenge in Egypt, where the state has placed numerous reservations on the 1951 Refugee Convention and lacks comprehensive domestic legislation regarding refugees. Although the new asylum law represents progress toward clearer regulations for refugees and migrants, critics contend that it could severely undermine refugee rights (Al-A'sar 2024).

The question of hospitality and the degree of welcome vary greatly concerning local integration and policies. The concept of hospitality becomes most relevant when governments are adopting inclusive policies, including legal residency and rights, to allow refugees to actively take part in their host society and find economic opportunities. However, most countries in the Middle East and Africa, including Egypt, make "temporary guests" out of refugees with various barriers to prevent their integration, while hospitality is extended to them (Dongen 2017). The mere reluctance to provide opportunities for their integration not only takes away a sense of security and belonging from the refugees but also reflects a broader ambivalence towards their contributions to society. For example, a system of no permanent residency and no employment rights for refugees shows that the government would rather they be transient, which in turn limits their economic potential and overall well-being. As a result, this makes many refugees view their integration as impossible, holding onto hope for resettlement (Al Sharmani 2004), further complicated by the prospect of trying to live a stable life in Egypt. Eventually, this deficiency of supportive policies makes many refugees in Egypt feel uninvited, reinforcing the idea that hospitality is a question of the political will of the host countries to embrace and empower newcomers with inclusive practices.

Despite the cultural disposition of Egyptians towards being hospitable, the reality faced by refugees in Egypt is fraught with challenges. Economic stressors such as high inflation and unemployment rates have contributed to bitterness among certain portions of the population, increasing tension between the refugees and host communities. The situation is even made worse by media narratives that paint refugees as "threats" - a word that includes four subcategories:

national security, cultural identity, economic factors, and health (McCann et al. 2023), which can provoke hostility and discrimination. Additionally, the lack of formal support systems for refugees, in addition to restrictive government policies, often leaves them vulnerable and marginalized. The perception that they are competing for limited resources undermines the spirit of hospitality as many Egyptians struggle to meet their own needs. Consequently, while the cultural narrative promotes welcoming attitudes; the economic and social challenges can create an environment where hospitality is conditional and fraught with tension.

Hospitality toward Sudanese Refugees and Migrants

Ahmed (2024) has highlighted the presence of Sudanese refugees in Egypt, beginning during President Nimeiri's era, and has pointed out that the largest influx occurred under the regime of the National Islamic Front in 1989. This was due to its oppressive policies, especially toward political opponents, which led the majority of displaced individuals to consist of opposition politicians, civil society activists, and political elites who fled to Cairo seeking protection from the regime. However, due to the shared historical ties between Sudan and Egypt, they were not officially granted refugee status until the 1990s.

With the escalation of the North-South civil war in 1993 between the National Islamic Front government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), as well as the outbreak of the Darfur conflict, the flow of refugees to Egypt increased significantly. This included individuals from various segments of Sudanese society, particularly those who suffered from discrimination by the Khartoum government after being internally displaced from conflict-affected regions.

Nonetheless, the Egyptian government adopted ambiguous policies toward these refugees, particularly after the 2005 ceasefire agreement. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) suspended refugee status determination (RSD) interviews for Sudanese asylum seekers, under the assumption that the peace agreement signaled a potential reevaluation of refugee cases and the encouragement of repatriation to Sudan. Refugees who had hoped for resettlement began to feel anxious as they observed the ongoing peace talks, fearing that their cases might be closed. Furthermore, the UNHCR's procrastination, as the sole entity responsible for addressing their needs, fueled a growing sense of hostility toward the organization.

Egypt's historical approach to refugees has been marked by a paradoxical stance, combining a willingness to host refugees with the imposition of restrictive domestic laws and conditions. These regulations often conflict with international asylum standards and, in many cases, actively undermine the rights and well-being of refugees. Egypt's historical role, as a host nation, has deep roots, providing sanctuary for individuals escaping conflict and oppression (Farid 2024). Since Biblical times, Egypt has served as a refuge for people fleeing persecution and natural disasters. This role continues to this day. Following the Armenian massacres in Türkiye during the 1920s and both World Wars, many sought safety in Egypt. During the 1960s, several African nationalist leaders and their families, including those of Kwame Nkrumah the was first Prime Minister and President of Ghana and Patrice Lumumba was the first democratically elected Prime Minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, found sanctuary in Egypt.) (Zohry 2011).

Egypt has reservations about certain provisions of the 1951 Refugee Convention, particularly those related to equal treatment between refugees and the host community, including access to free basic

education and employment rights (Articles 12, 20, 22, and 24). It also does not adopt policies that promote local integration. These policies are sometimes linked to economic considerations or challenges related to the government's capacity to accommodate additional numbers within public services. Meanwhile, refugees face some difficulties in accessing formal employment opportunities or enrolling their children in schools, which may affect their ability to adapt to Egyptian society. (Zohry, 2011, quoted in Ahmed, 2024).

According to Youssef (2015), the attempted assassination of President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa in 1995 represented a significant turning point in Egypt's migration policy toward Sudanese nationals, highlighting the strained relations between the two countries. The Egyptian government accused Sudan of harboring members of the Islamist group responsible for the assassination of President Anwar Sadat, an accusation that resurfaced following the attempt on Mubarak's life. As a result, for the first time in the history of Egyptian-Sudanese relations, Sudanese nationals were required to obtain entry visas to Egypt. These tensions were further exacerbated by Sudan's support for the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, a group consistently repressed by successive Egyptian regimes since Gamal Abdel Nasser's era.

Amid these tensions, he notes, many Sudanese political dissidents sought refuge in Cairo, where they were welcomed due to their opposition to the Sudanese regime and its ongoing conflicts with Egypt. These circumstances culminated in a tragedy in December 2005, when thousands of Sudanese refugees staged a peaceful sit-in at Mostafa Mahmoud Square near the UNHCR headquarters in Cairo. The protest was against the UNHCR's decision to cease granting refugee

status to Sudanese nationals following the 2004 peace agreements between Sudan and South Sudan.*(Youssef 2015)*.

As he explains, "On December 29-30, 2005, the UNHCR, unable to manage the protest, requested the intervention of Egyptian authorities while expressing concerns about the potential for violence. However, the security intervention was catastrophic, with reports estimating the death toll ranging from dozens to over 150 individuals, including children. Over 2,000 refugees were also arrested and detained in military camps and prisons. This incident not only drew international condemnation but also exposed the complex and strained relationship between the UNHCR and the Egyptian government."(Youssef 2015).

He also adds that "the precarious position of the UNHCR in Egypt stems from its reliance on a memorandum of understanding rather than a formal headquarters agreement, depriving it of diplomatic immunity and institutional safeguards. This situation is further complicated by the absence of a legal framework for asylum in Egyptian law, leaving the UNHCR solely responsible for managing refugee affairs without formal recognition or support from the Egyptian state."

Youssef concludes that "this situation underscores the paradox of Egypt's migration policy. While Egypt hosts a significant number of refugees over long periods, its official stance treats the country as a transit hub. By framing migration as isolated cases and excluding policies of permanent settlement, Egypt tolerates unofficial and often clandestine migration flows across its territory, particularly towards Europe or Israel. (Youssef 2015).

Hospitality toward Syrian Refugees and Migrants

Egypt and Syria have deep historical ties; they were once one nation during the United Arab Republic between 1958 until 1961, a fact that molded Egypt's friendly attitude toward Syrian refugees since 2011, among others from other countries. Public figures and media personalities have indeed contributed to this kind of hospitality, emphasizing also the contribution of Syrians in opening businesses and starting new lives in Egypt. Reem Hamoud, a Syrian journalist from Enab Baladi (2023), said Syrians also get an extremely warm reception, while Egyptian journalist Marwa Alaa El-Din says Egyptians welcome foreigners and take Syrians with respect because they are Arabs just like them. This affinity has been additionally influenced by media portrayals showing the self-sufficiency and professional skills of Syrian refugees.

Hamoud (2023) also notes the positive perceptions about Syrians living in Egypt. These have fostered a sense of brotherhood and have helped them be assimilated into Egyptian society. Many Egyptian social media influencers emphasize the great relationship between the two peoples, saying that Syrians and Egyptians are "one people."YouTuber Kareem Elsayed, in his "Syrians' Life in Egypt" (2021), documented how Syrians have actively participated in the Egyptian economy since 2011, enhancing trust and acceptance among Egyptians. This connection has increased Egyptians' willingness to engage with and hire Syrians.

As of 2011, Egypt became a very attractive market for Syrian businessmen and investors. Egypt hosts almost 30,000 business owners who employ hundreds of thousands of people among the Syrians (Daher 2023). This warm welcome has contributed much to bonding and strength among

Syrians, as they live mostly in the satellite cities: 6 October City, 10th of Ramadan City, Madinaty, and Al Rehab. 6 October City is normally referred to as "Little Damascus" because of its vibrant Syrian markets and foodstuffs (Hassan 2017). Moreover, NGOs established by Syrians themselves, such as DAMAS and Syria Al Ghad, also have community schools within their structure, which is very important in reinforcing communities through the process of sustaining their heritage.

Overview of the Egyptian Legislations and Recent Changes

Egypt's national legal framework affects refugees and migrants living in Cairo and beyond. While the analysis of legislation and policies in this section is nationally relevant, the main focus of the research is on the city of Cairo which has expanded in modern times to "Greater Cairo". Thus, also encompassing Giza province, a number of its suburbs and Shubra El-Kheima of Qalyubia province (Official Portal of Cairo Governorate, 2025). This mega-city is marked by a significant refugee population. According to UNHCR, as of February 2025, the number of refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt reached 925,263 out of which 730, 959 lived in Cairo (258,204) and Giza (472,755) governorates. Thus accounting for nearly 80% of the total refugee and asylum seekers population in Egypt. Their lives and access to services is greatly affected by the country's national policies and legislations which have witnessed great transformation over the past few years.

Egypt's legal framework pertaining to refugees and migrants is at a critical juncture after the enactment and issuance of the country's first asylum law in the Egyptian Gazette on the 16th of December 2025 (HRW, 2024b). The asylum law is a major shift in national policy that extends beyond the provision of services for refugees and encompasses refugee status determination

(RSD). This marks a notable deviation from the government's once-ambivalent policy towards refugees and migrants.

According to Norman (2017), the Egyptian government had adopted an ambivalent policy towards refugees and migrants, neither fully integrating them nor driving them out. While fully aware of their presence, the state relied on international organizations and NGOs for the provision of services. Resettlement and voluntary repatriation were perceived as the only viable options (Habersky, Hetaba-Sabry and McNally 2023). This policy is further proven by UNHCR's role as a surrogate state authority in Egypt since the latter ratified the refugee convention in 1981 and an MoU allowing UNHCR to conduct RSD on behalf of the state (Andrade, Sato and Hammad 2021; Kagan 2001; Habersky, Hetaba-Sabry and McNally 2023).

The present shift in Egypt's policy can be traced back to the launch of the EU-Egypt migration dialogue and 'EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa' (EUTF) in 2017. This cooperation was strengthened in 2023 with the provision of €100 million in relief aid to Egypt for border management and absorption of the influx of Sudanese refugees (Heck and Habersky 2024). Changes in the geopolitical landscape in the MENA region, as well as the dire economic situation in Egypt, strengthened areas of international cooperation, including the EUTF, which attempted to address the root causes of irregular migration as well as harness Egypt's ability to host refugees and migrants. In 2023, a press conference attended by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borell and Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry was held in reference to the receipt of 100 million euros under this framework. (Heck and Habersky 2024).

Given this shift in narrative, as well as the various legislative and policy changes, it is crucial to draw a comparative analysis between national policies driven by the state's former ambivalent approach versus the present approach of transforming Egypt into a host state.

Legislations pertaining to the rights of refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants are affected by Egypt's obligations under international agreements, regional treaties, bilateral agreements and domestic laws as mapped out in Annex [1] (Hetaba, McNally, and Habersky 2020). While Egypt is party to the UN 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Refugee Protocol, it imposed five reservations, namely on articles 12 (1) (Personal Status), 20 (Rationing), 33(1) (Public Education), 23(Public Relief) and 24 (Labour legislation and Social Security) (Andrade Sato and Hammad 2021; UNHCR 2005). Nevertheless, as a signatory of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESRC), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) as well as other international treaties, the prevention of refugees' access to these rights has been contested (Hetaba, McNally, and Habersky 2020; Sharafeldin 2020). Furthermore, the asylum law includes new provisions that even rebuke these reservations. Thus, a preliminary analysis of the new asylum law is presented in the following subsections. However, the actual implications and practical implementation of the asylum law cannot be fully determined until the issuance of its executive regulation . (Interview with asylum lawyer Mr. Ahmed Badawy, February 2025)

Refugee Status Determination (RSD) and documentation:

The right to seek asylum is stipulated in the Egyptian constitution (Art. 91), as Egypt "shall grant political asylum to any foreigner who has been persecuted for defending the interests of peoples,

human rights, peace or justice." However, there is no reference to refoulement, and despite the establishment of an RSD committee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), political asylum was granted mostly to toppled heads of states and political allies (Hetaba, McNally, and Habersky, 2020). As a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention, the 1967 Refugee Protocol, as well as the 1969 Organization of African Unity (OAU) Refugee Convention, Egypt has an obligation for the protection of refugees together with the prevention of refoulement. UNHCR has been conducting RSD as per an MoU ratified with Egypt, relying on the UN refugee conventions and occasionally on the OAU Refugee Convention, ensuring the protection of refugees against refoulement (Habersky, Hetaba-Sabry and McNally, 2023; Hetaba, McNally, and Habersky 2020).

The new asylum law provides a novel definition for refugees according to a study published by the Refugees Platform in Egypt (RPE) and the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR). The law encompasses refugees under the UNHCR and OAU conventions as well as stateless people. However, while the identification of refugee status is based on a "serious well-founded fear of persecution", the addition of the new term "serious", which is not included in the definition of the 1951 Convention nor international customary law, is legally difficult to prove (RPE and EIPR 2024). In addition to changes in the refugee definition, per the asylum law, a governmental "Permanent Committee for Refugee Affairs", which includes representatives from the Ministries of Interior, Justice, Foreign Affairs and Finance under the auspices of the Prime Minister's office, will be formed. The committee is responsible for conducting RSD and should cooperate with MoFA, UNHCR, and other organizations to provide services for refugees (Amnesty International 2024b; RPE 2024). There has been no mention of a transition period for training governmental

officials in this unit which raises speculations on the status of asylum seekers who are waiting for the RSD interview by UNHCR (RPE and EIPR 2024; Awad 2024). However, if the executive regulation determines the transition of the RSD function to this committee, there will be a transition period in order to transfer the RSD function from UNHCR to it. (Interview with Mr. Ahmed Badawy, February 2025)

The law stipulates a specific timeline for the committee to conduct RSD as a decision that must be reached within 6 months for those who enter regularly and one year for those who entered irregularly, thus making it unclear if the MoU and UNHCR's RSD function will be terminated (RPE 2024). The files of people with disabilities, the elderly, pregnant women, unaccompanied children and victims of human trafficking, torture and sexual violence have a priority to be examined first (Art. 7). Asylum seekers must transmit a demand within 45 days of arriving in Egypt. Those who arrive irregularly and fail to do so can be punished by detention and pay a fine (RPE and EIPR 2024). According to RPE and EIPR (2024), article (10) of the law allows the committee to take whatever measures deemed necessary towards refugees during times of combating terrorism, war and in exceptional circumstances, as well as for national security and public order. The asylum law does not provide a clear definition for any of these terms, leaving room for various interpretations (HRW 2024b; Amnesty International 2024b; RPE and EIPR 2024). However, according to article (10), the executive regulation will further determine these measures.

The law introduced two additional measures for denying refugee status or stripping it away from the refuges and risking their deportation as follows: 1) If an asylum seeker belongs to a group

deemed as a terrorist group by the state; and 2) If the person has committed an attack against national security or public order (RPE and EIPR 2024). Once an RSD demand is rejected, the failed asylum seeker must leave the territory immediately (Ibid). Although asylum seekers can refute the decision of the committee in the administrative court, there are no protection measures to ensure that they can remain within the country while they await the decision of the court (RPE and EIPR 2024). However, another legal opinion was that an appeal can be submitted to the State Court against the decision of the committee, but the procedures of the appeal will be determined by the executive regulation of the asylum law (Interview with Mr. Ahmed Badawy, February 2025). Newly adopted national policies also have an impact on the residency of migrants and refugees which is further explained in the following subsection.

Documentation:

As per Law No. 89 of 1960 Concerning the Entry, Residence, and Exit of Foreigners in the Territories of the Arab Republic of Egypt (amended by Law No. 173 of 2018), all non-citizens are treated equally as they must possess a valid passport and visa. Refugees, asylum-seekers, and failed asylum-seekers apply for temporary residence permits for a duration of six months (Hetaba, McNally and Habersky 2020; Sharafeldin 2020).

Irregular migrants including failed asylum seekers who have entered irregularly do not possess a valid residence permit or visa. This raises the risk of their deportation as they do not have a regular status. Furthermore, they are unable to access various documentation services including birth and marriage registration (Hetaba, McNally and Habersky 2020; Sharafeldin 2020).

In 2023, Ministerial Decrees No. 1777 and 3326 of 2023 and its two-grace period extension based on Ministerial Decree by Decree No. 4321 (2023) and Decree No. 1050 (2024) required irregular migrants to legitimize their stay on the condition of having an Egyptian sponsor and paying $1,000 in administrative fees. As for regular immigrants, the decree stipulates that they must provide an invoice for transferring the required fees, from US dollars or another hard currency to EGP from a registered Egyptian bank or exchange service (Library of Congress 2023; RPE 2023). Egypt has also issued a multiple-entry visa per Ministerial Decree No. 1105 of 2023, "a multiple-entry visa valid for five years, allowing its holder to stay for a period not exceeding ninety days per trip at a value of seven hundred US dollars, including the visa fee." (Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms 2024; Manshurat 2024).

Syrian and Sudanese communities used to enjoy special status pertaining to residency in Egypt. Under the Four- Freedoms agreement signed between the governments of Egypt and Sudan in 2004, mutual rights of movement, residence, work, and property ownership between the two countries were guaranteed. Accordingly, Sudanese nationals in Egypt are granted the right to own property, work, and reside in Egypt. Similarly, Egyptian nationals enjoyed the same rights in Sudan (Zohry 2011). Before April 2023, Sudanese nationals could enter Egypt with a valid passport or another agreed travel document and do not need a residence permit as long as the travel document is valid. (Ahmed 2024; Osman 2024; Hetaba, McNally, and Habersky 2020). In practice, Sudanese men aged 18–50 required an initial entry visa since 2017 (Hetaba, McNally and Habersky 2020). This remained the case for the first displaced groups that reached Egypt after the outbreak of the civil war in Sudan in April 2023. However, in June 2023, the government issued a

decision to suspend this practice and thus required all Sudanese nationals to obtain an entry visa. In addition, Sudanese nationals must also obtain security clearance before entering Egypt (Ahmed 2024; Osman 2024). One of the reasons behind this could be attributed to ensuring that those who enter Egypt are not part of any militias especially after certain militants entered Egypt and robbed banks (Interview with Mr. Ahmed Badawy, February 2025).

As for Syrian migrants, they used to renew a 6-month tourist visa indefinitely since 2011 after obtaining a security clearance. As of July 2024, this was no longer applicable as they now must leave and reenter Egypt, pay an entry visa fee ($25) and undergo the security clearance again (Baladi News 2024a; Syria Direct 2024a; Syria Direct 2024b). Furthermore, while Syrian migrants who possessed a valid visa previously used from (USA - UK - Canada - Australia - New Zealand-Schengen Area - Japan - valid residence in the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries) were exempted from the security clearance fee, they are now required to obtain a security clearance (MENA Monitor 2023). Many Syrians are now opting to apply for refugee status despite previously distancing themselves from it (Baladi news 2024a)

According to an MoU signed between the government of Egypt and UNHCR, refugees should be granted a travel document with a return visa from the authorities if they need to travel abroad; however, this has not been implemented in practice (Hetaba, Habersky and Mcknally, 2020). The new Asylum Law entitles refugees rights to apply for their travel documents, which is a positive advancement, and includes a provision for naturalization (Awad 2024). However, under certain conditions, including threat to national security or public order, refugees could be denied the right to obtain travel documents (Art. 12).

Health care:

While Egypt made a reservation on article 23 "Public Relief" of the Refugee Convention, as a signatory of the ICESCR and the CRC this reservation is contested. Therefore, Egypt must ensure that refugee and migrant communities have the highest level of attainable mental and physical health. Furthermore, migrant and refugee children must have access to health care facilities (Sharafeldin 2020).

Egypt's constitution grants emergency medical care to all individuals, including refugees, asylum-seekers, and irregular migrants. Free compulsory vaccinations, basic nutrition, and healthcare should be accessible to all children with special care for children with disabilities. All school-aged children have health insurance (Law No. 99 of 1992). Unsupported women, farmers and agrarian workers, children below school age should have health insurance on par with citizens. Medical insurance is available for employed regular migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers (Hetaba, McNally and Habersky 2020).

Together with the Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP), UNHCR ensures that refugees have access to healthcare services including access to public primary, secondary and emergency health care for refugees and asylum seekers per three MoUs signed with the Ministry (2014 and 2016 MoU). Furthermore, refugees are included in all health care campaigns including "100 Million Seha" (Sharafeldin 2020)

Per Ministerial Decree No. 601 (2012), Syrians have access to the public healthcare system and receive additional services. UNHCR and MoHP collaborate with agencies like the World Health

Organization (WHO) to ensure other nationalities, including Sudanese, have access to primary, secondary, and tertiary health services (Hetaba, McNally, and Habersky 2020). However, financial cost might affect refugees' access to healthcare services (Sharafeldin, 2020). A study by Fares and Puig-Junoy (2021) illustrated that Syrians with higher socioeconomic status were able to use healthcare services more than those with lower socioeconomic status.

Law No. 2 (2018) aims to overcome this by the establishment of a comprehensive national health insurance scheme over the next 14 years. The executive regulation extends healthcare coverage for refugees residing in Egypt, migrants as well as non-citizens holding a tourist visa or residency permit (Art.6) (Unified Health Insurance Authority 2024). Per Law no.87 (2024), the public-private partnerships introduced enables the private sector to establish new public health facilities and manage existing ones under MoHP (80% of public hospitals). The law does not put price caps which could potentially affect uninsured groups. However, it should exclude primary healthcare centers, curative and emergency services, disaster response, blood and plasma operations, and epidemic management (Amnesty International 2024a). Nevertheless, as refugees access healthcare services under the umbrella of UNHCR and its partners, it is unlikely that they would be affected (Interview with Mr. Ahmed Badawy, February 2025) Finally, the new asylum law stipulates refugees' access to health care services without referencing that it will be on par with citizens (RFE and EIPR 2024).

Employment:

Egypt imposed a reservation on Article 24 of the Refugee Convention and Protocol pertaining to the right of employment of refugees. Therefore, refugees access the labor market in Egypt based

on the same regulations as all non-citizens which necessitates having a work permit and receiving authorization of entry and residency for work purposes. Non-citizens are granted the right for just working conditions, protection from forced and child labor according to Egypt's obligations under other international treaties and domestic laws (Hetaba, McNally and Habersky 2020).

While some categories including stateless persons, political refugees and Palestinians were expected from the work permit requirements, the most recent Ministerial Decision No. 146/2019, does not illustrate if this exemption still applies or not (Andrade Sato and Hammad, 2021; Almasdar 2019). Certain nationalities, such as (Lebanon, Jordan, Greece, Libya and Tunisia) are reciprocally exempted from the work permit requirements and cost (Ibid). The decision also removes the requirement of providing an HIV clearance test to get a work permit for migrant workers; however, in practice it is still required (Andrade, Sato and Hammad, 2021).

In general, foreign employees cannot exceed 10% at any workplace and the work permit duration is one year. Furthermore, the workplace must prove that no other Egyptian is suitable to fulfill the job acquired by the non-national. Nevertheless, according to law no. 87 (2024), the percentage of foreign workers in healthcare facilities could reach 25% for facilities established by concessionaires (Amnesty International 2024a).

Sudanese also have the right to work in any profession and should access the labor market as Egyptians as per the Four Freedoms Agreement (Hetaba, McNally, and Habersky 2020; Norman 2017). The situation on the ground is quite difficult, as refugees face additional challenges. Since accessing the formal labor market is quite difficult, a huge proportion of Egyptians and refugees rely on securing jobs in the informal economy, which constitutes 40-68% of the Egyptian economy

(Soliman, Keles and Fottoh 2023). Refugees and migrants have resorted to obtaining jobs in the informal economy, including in the garment, food, industrial and domestic work sectors (Norman 2017). However, they are at risk of abuse and exploitation, and are not protected under the Labor law from discrimination in salaries or termination of contract due to discrimination, unlike migrants who engage in formal employment (Ibid).

Refugees and migrants employed in the private, public and informal sectors can form and join trade unions according to Law No. 213/2017. This right has been revoked in the new asylum law as refugees are prohibited from engaging in labor unions, despite stipulating the engagement of refugees in formal permanent employment (Mada Masr 2024; RFE and EIPR 2024).

Given the difficulty in securing jobs, refugees have used another resilience strategy through entrepreneurship and creating their own businesses (Soliman, Keles and Fottoh 2023). According to the World Bank, Egypt ranked 114 in the ease of doing business in 2020. Egyptians and migrants face institutional challenges in setting up their business including: 1) Regulatory voids i.e. complexity of setting up a new business; 2) Labor market voids i.e. mismatch between the requirement of the job and skills ; 3) Capital market i.e. financial capital (Soliman, Keles and Fottoh 2023).

These challenges are worsened for refugees; in addition to the timely and complex process of setting up business, they cannot register under their own name due to the refugee status (Soliman, Keles and Fottoh 2023). In addition, non-citizens must obtain a business license and security clearance, allowing them to apply for renewable residence if they are a founder, shareholder, partner, or business owner (Hetaba, McNally, and Habersky 2020).

Therefore, refugees resort to finding a trustworthy Egyptian partner to set up their business. In other instances, refugees want to set-up self-owned businesses from their own cultures, such as Syrian restaurants. However, due to the required percentage of migrant workers, they employ senior Syrian workers who manage Egyptian staff who learn the necessary skills through on-the-job training (Soliman, Keles and Fottoh 2023). Another important aspect of setting up their own business is integration with host communities (Ibid). For example, some Syrian doctors were able to set up their practices in Egyptian doctors' clinics, which illustrates the interactive relationship between hostility and integration (Ibid).

As for the inability to access finance from banks due to their refugee status, Syrian refugees raised necessary capital mainly from their own community, as the capital provided through UNHCR is usually less than the amount required (Soliman, Keles and Fottoh 2023). According to Carnegie Endowment (2024), out of the 1.5 million Syrians in Egypt, 200,000 have set up their own businesses and 800,000 work in family businesses. Furthermore, some Syrians reported that the Egyptian government had facilitated the process of setting up businesses for them and some did not even need to complete the complex paperwork (Scharrer and Suerbaum 2022).

As for Social insurance, it has been extended to new groups including foreign employees as per Law No. 148/2019, and its executive regulation issued in 2021. The law encompasses foreign nationals working regularly and removes the reciprocity conditions stipulated in Law No. 79/1975 in addition to encompassing public and private-sector employees, business owners, Egyptians working abroad, and informal-sector and irregular workers. While the law also covers domestic

workers, it does not state that it applies to non-national domestic workers (Andrade, Sato and Hammad 2021: Executive regulation 2021).

The extension of social protection schemes including Takafoul and Karama targeting the poorest Egyptian groups to refugees in dire situations is unlikely. Specifically, as Egypt had encouraged Egyptian labor emigration as an indirect social protection policy (Andrade, Sato and Hammad 2021). In addition to Egypt's reservation on Articles (20), (23), and (24) of the 1951 refugee convention pertaining to Rationing, Public Relief as well as Labour Legislation and Social Security respectively. Furthermore, by 2023 both programs covered 13.5% of the population, while the poverty rate in Egypt had reached 29.7% in 2019/2020, with the drastic rise inflation rate which surpassed 35% in 2023 driven by the continuous flotation policies due to the IMF loan, the percentage of poverty is likely to have surpassed 38% (EIPR 2024; UNESCWA 2023; Alternative Policy Solutions 2023). This imposes serious consequences on both the Egyptian and migrant population, especially those who are uninsured and have lower socioeconomic status.

Education:

Egypt imposed a reservation on Article 22 pertaining to access to public education of the Refugee Convention. However, article (20) of the new asylum law stipulates the provision of basic education to refugee children which is a major advancement. Furthermore, as a signatory of the CRC and under international law, Egypt is obliged to provide access to free and compulsory primary education to all children regardless of their nationality.

Domestic legislation is likely to be affected by the new asylum law pertaining to refugees' access to education as it contains contradictory provisions and in practice specific nationalities accessed public schools, yet they required proof of residency (Hetaba, McNally and Habersky 2020). Article 19 of the Egyptian Constitution stipulates, "Every citizen has the right to education to build the Egyptian character, maintaining national identity…". Similarly, Law No. 139 of 1981 Promulgating Education Law restricts access to free education to Egyptian nationals. However, Egypt's Law No. 12 of 1996 Promulgating the Child Law states that education is a right owed to all children (Hetaba, McNally and Habersky 2020).

Syrian students access public primary and secondary schools as nationals based on a 2018 Administrative Order from the Ministry of Education, renewed yearly. Sudanese students access public schools with a differentiated cost per Decree No. 284/2014 (Hetaba, McNally and Habersky 2020). Refugees who have access to public education face major challenges including the quality of education in these schools, outdated curriculum, overcrowding in the classrooms and bullying (Sharafeldin 2020).

Refugee and migrant communities have resorted to creating community schools, including Sudanese community schools to overcome these challenges, some of which operate in a grey legal area based on an understanding with the Sudanese Embassy in Egypt and teach Sudan's curriculum. (Bakr 2024) . While some schools cater to migrants only, and must take approval from the Sudanese embassy to teach Sudan's curriculum based on an agreement between the two countries to teach Sudan's curriculum in Egypt (Mohamed 2022). Community schools that cater to refugees only do not communicate with the Sudanese embassy and are thus informal (Ibid). The

Sudanese Ministry of Education provides accredited certification for refugees grades 8 and 11 who sit in for the Sudanese national exams (Mayoum 2021).

Various studies in literature have attempted to investigate the role of community schools. While community schools could have a positive effect, especially as a stronger bond is formed between the teachers and the students due to their shared context of displacement (Bonet 2021). Other studies indicate that there are some challenges facing community schools, including their operation out of sight of the Ministry of Education, and some do not meet the necessary requirements (Sharafeldin 2020). Furthermore, Law No. 139 of 1981 stipulates that the head of any private school must be an Egyptian national and that the school must operate under the MoE, which is one of the reasons that prevents the accreditation of community schools who have been formed by refugees (Mayoum 2021). A number of community schools face various challenges, including outdated and non-standardized curriculum, overcrowding and bullying within schools or when students are going to schools (Ibid).

The number of Sudanese schools has reached hundreds in Egypt, and only a few have received authorization. In 2024, the activity of community schools was frozen by the government on the basis that they do not meet the required regulations, including approvals from the Ministry of Education of Sudan as well as the Egyptian and Sudanese Ministries of Foreign Affairs (Bakr 2024; Alhurra 2024). However, the Sudanese Ambassador to Egypt has visited 37 community schools and discussed their accreditation with the Egyptian government (SudanAkhbar 2024). Following a meeting on the 27th of November 2024 between the Egyptian Minister of Education, the Sudanese Ministerr of Education and the Ambassador of Sudan to Egypt, the embassy of Sudan

announced the resumption of the activity of "Al Sadaka Sudanese School" and that the Sudanese High-School exams will be held in December 2024 (Ministry of Education and Technical Education 2024).

As for access to public schools, legislative changes per Decree no. 3326 of 2023 and end of the grace period per Decree no. 1050 of 2024 have left many students who lack residence permits unable to enroll in schools. Nevertheless, registered refugees with UNHCR obtain an exception until receiving the permit by submitting a copy of UNHCR registration card, document from the passport and immigration department indicating the date of residency receival and proof of available school placement for the child to the Ministry of Education (Alhurra 2024; Baladi news 2024b; UNHCR 2024) However, there is widespread fear among migrant communities who do not possess a refugee status and those who await a decision their RSD interviews. (Baladi news 2024a)

Reflections on the implications of Legal changes

Drawing from the interviews and focus group discussions, further analysis was conducted on the implications of the current legal frameworks on refugees' access to services and perspectives on the new Asylum law. Thus, three main challenges were identified, namely: 1) Documentation and Residence Status; 2) Access to services and the 3) New Asylum law. These are further explored below:

Documentation and Residence Status:

Firstly, the adoption of new policies towards visa issuance for Syrian and Sudanese migrants residing in Egypt has pushed multiple groups to apply for the RSD process at UNHCR. (Interview with Mr. Ahmed Badawy, February 2025). However, due to the enormous number of asylum seekers who applied for the RSD and as there are currently no appointments until 2027, many feel hopeless. (Interview with Mr. Ahmed Badawy, February 2025). It is the same for those applying for residency as all appointments are completely booked for the next two years (Ibid). While refugees and asylum seekers receive a letter with their appointment for the residence card in Egypt, this document is not considered as a legal one (Ibid). Thus, it fails to protect them from being deported (Interview with Mr. Ahmed Badawy, February 2025).Furthermore, with the decrease of provision of RSD services to Sudanese asylum seekers arriving in Egypt, they face attempts of defrauding at the borders by individuals who provide them with fake UNHCR cards (Ibid). Thus, an understanding of the perspectives of refugee and migrant communities on the new asylum law is crucial.

Reflections from the Sudanese Community

Discussions conducted during interviews and focus groups concluded that recent amendments to Egyptian laws have negatively impacted several key aspects of the lives of Sudanese refugees and migrants. These include education, employment, residency, and access to essential services.

Residency procedures have recently undergone significant changes after , further complicating the legal status of refugees and migrants. Obtaining a residency permit has become mandatory for all age groups, whereas it was previously required only for individuals over the age of 18. Additionally, residency fees and penalties for late renewal have been converted to US dollars

instead of the Egyptian pound, making compliance with these requirements more challenging. Furthermore, residency renewal appointments have been scheduled for extended periods, with some refugees being informed that their renewal dates will not be available until 2027. This has contributed to legal instability and increased the risks faced by refugees.

The recent amendments have also imposed strict restrictions on refugees' ability to move within Egypt. The UNHCR asylum card (the yellow card) is no longer recognized as sufficient proof of residency, and obtaining an official residency permit has become a prerequisite for mobility. Consequently, deportations of individuals without valid residency permits have increased. These changes have also affected essential services such as telecommunications as mobile phone services are suspended once a residency permit expires, further complicating the daily lives of refugees and migrants.

These legal changes present escalating challenges for Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt, limiting their access to education and employment, complicating residency procedures, restricting access to healthcare, and increasing difficulties in mobility. In light of these amendments, there is a pressing need to reassess policies to ensure the protection of refugees' and migrants' rights and to implement more comprehensive and sustainable solutions to address the challenges they face.

Sudanese Experiences with UNHCR in Egypt

Participants in the focus group discussions and interviews shared varied experiences regarding the asylum registration process with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

in Egypt. While some found the process relatively straightforward, others faced significant challenges.

A few participants noted that their registration experience was easy, particularly those who arrived before the large influx of Sudanese refugees following the outbreak of war. They felt reassured upon receiving the UNHCR card, as it provided them with a sense of safety and access to support. One participant explained that registering with UNHCR was a more viable option than obtaining a tourist residency, which involved complex procedures and high fees, especially for families with children.

However, many others encountered difficulties throughout the process. Several participants reported disorganization and long waiting times outside UNHCR premises, sometimes extending for hours. While the staff inside were generally cooperative and respectful, the conditions outside were chaotic, with incidents of assault, theft, and even looting by gangs. One participant described feeling frustrated by UNHCR's requirement for war-displaced individuals to provide official documents, despite the fact that many had lost their paperwork due to fire or destruction during the ongoing war in Sudan.

For some, the decision to register with UNHCR was driven by economic hardship, as residency fees were unaffordable given their unstable financial situation. One participant, a parent of four, emphasized that UNHCR was the only realistic option due to the financial burden of maintaining legal residency. Another participant, despite initially entering Egypt with a legal visa, opted to register with UNHCR because of high residency costs.

Despite being a means of legal recognition, the UNHCR card no longer provides the same level of protection it once did. One participant shared that she had been unable to go outside for months because she had not received her card, even after nine months of waiting. Another explained that in the past, registered refugees were treated as legal residents and protected from legal prosecution, but now, revealing their Sudanese identity often leads to vulnerability, exploitation, or daily threats.

Overall, the asylum registration process was marked by mixed experiences—while some participants found it manageable, many others faced logistical difficulties, security concerns, and systemic challenges that added to their struggles as refugees in Egypt.

Reflections from the Syrian Community

The discussions within the Syrian focus group discussion reflect the broader legislative shifts occurring in Egypt, revealing a complex landscape of sentiments regarding the legal status of Syrian refugees in Egypt. Informants noted significant challenges in obtaining residence permits, particularly following the abrupt cessation of tourist visa renewals in late June 2024. This change forced many to leave the country and re-enter through a costly security approval. Several participants mentioned there had been delays in the issuance of these approvals, especially with the new Syrian administration, emphasizing that having to navigate this every six months is unrealistic. For many Syrians in Egypt, tourist visas served as a legal means to regularize their stay in the country while accessing essential services. The situation worsened with the increase in student visa fees not through UNHCR, which now stands at $150 USD; participants expressed frustration over this, leading them to rely on UNHCR for residency permits, a process that takes

two years to apply for a residence permit and therefore restricts access to education while waiting. "Our student residence visas have expired. We are not renewing passports or applying for student residencies for the sake of dollar fees," a Syrian participant noted. This reflects the broader legislative tightening that complicates refugees' ability to manage their legal status in Egypt.

There is a distinct differentiation between Syrian migrants and refugees, with the increasing pressure on all individuals to apply for residence permits through UNHCR. Interviewees voiced their frustration with the lengthy process, noting that it takes up to two years to apply, during which time refugees remain without residence permits, thus lacking access to vital services such as education and healthcare. This precarious situation leaves them vulnerable to detention and deportation, as well as being unable to access police stations for assistance. Additionally, the introduction of retroactive fines for not renewing a residence permit was a sudden and unaffordable change for many, as these fines cover several years back and must be paid in dollars and curtail the return to Syria for many, as it is required to be paid in Egyptian airports. Another critical change affecting family reunification involves the cessation of entry for individuals holding Gulf, European, or American visas. Previously, such individuals could enter Egypt with a fee, but now they are required to obtain security clearance starting at $1,500. Residence permit changes have drastic repercussions on mobility, as refugees waiting for two years to apply for the residence permit are in constant fear. As a Syrian participant expressed, "Every time we leave our houses, we feel imprisoned and in fear waiting for a residence permit."

The discussions also revealed a pervasive expectation of responsibility and accountability from UNHCR, which many participants believe is lacking. For many Syrians, UNHCR has become their

sole resource, as they have no other alternatives. There is a prevalent sentiment within the Syrian community that UNHCR should act as a legal entity responsible for addressing legislative issues and resolving conflicts related to Egyptian policies. Contributors characterized UNHCR as a "surrogate state," pointing to its shortcomings in addressing matters tied to Egyptian policies and decisions. This perspective suggests that many feel more comfortable criticizing UNHCR than the host government. Amidst these discussions, a sense of uncertainty, hopelessness, and fear dominated the narrative, with participants expressing a strong desire to legalize their status in Egypt. However, they face a stark lack of clear and affordable alternatives, and for many, an immediate return to Syria is not a viable option.

Access to services:

Secondly, access to services has been differentiated for refugees based on nationality (Interview with Mr. Ahmed Badawy, February 2025). While this could be attributed to the earmarked funds that UNHCR receives, it is also attributed to the lack of ageneral legal framework governing refugees' and migrants' rights in Egypt which has resulted in that state assessing on a case by case basis. (Interview with Mr. Ahmed Badawy, February 2025). Furthermore, there is inequality in accessing support provided from organizations while some families might obtain different kinds of aid, including food rations, others might not even obtain any (Ibid). Organizations' limited budgets compared to the number of refugees and the budget cuts of international financial aid are expected to become more severe in light of Trump's shifting policies (Ibid). The new asylum law is expected to provide a general legal framework for all refugees regardless of nationality, shifting such access (Ibid). However, before analysing the impact of the new asylum law on communities'

access to services, it is important to understand the present landscape of such services from their perspectives.

❖ Healthcare:

Sudanese participants believed that the legal changes have affected refugees' ability to access healthcare services, as it remains unclear how they can obtain medical care during the transitional period following the transfer of some healthcare service partnerships from the UNHCR to local organizations. Despite these challenges, they saw an improvement in the availability of free medication for chronic illnesses such as hypertension and diabetes. Similarly, Syrian participants also noted disruptions in health services, particularly with the transition from Caritas to Mersal as UNHCR's health partner, which resulted in a period during which refugees were unable to access health aid until the arrangements were finalized.

It is also important to note that healthcare services for refugees only include specific medicines; however, severe operations such as kidney dialysis are actually only covered by charity organizations in Egypt, including those from mosques and churches (Interview with Mr. Ahmed Badawy, February 2025; Sudanese FGD). Furthermore, Egypt is rolling out a National Comprehensive Health Insurance scheme over 14 years per law no. 2 (2018). However, fraudulent activities have occurred, with individuals falsely claiming to be healthcare officials and targeting refugees to sell premium plans that cost up to 400 EGP (Interview with Mr. Ahmed Badawy, February 2025).

❖ Education:

As previously mentioned, the activities of a number of community schools were frozen due to the increase in their number as they operate without any formal arrangement with the Ministry of Education or their respective ministries of foreign affairs.(Interview with Mr. Ahmed Badawy, February 2025). Furthermore, some community schools were created for specific social class in the refugee community and were very high in cost as payment was required in dollars (Ibid). Nevertheless, there are currently negotiations with the Egyptian Ministry on the formalization of a number of community schools by with representatives from the Yemeni and Sudanese MoFAs (Ibid)).

Reflection of the Sudanese Community on Education:

The legal amendments have led to a decline in educational opportunities for refugees and migrants. The tuition discounts previously granted to Sudanese students at Egyptian universities have been revoked, and university fees are now required to be paid in US dollars instead of the Egyptian pound, significantly increasing the financial burden. As A noted, "some students, particularly in medical fields, found themselves required to pay fees of up to $7,000 per year, an amount that many families cannot afford.". Additionally, transitioning from Sudanese schools to Egyptian schools has become more complex, further restricting access to formal education.

Reflections from the Syrian Community on Education:

The discussions showed the recent difficulties faced by students and their families in accessing education. These issues stem from both residence permit issues and the exorbitant costs associated

with university and higher education, which are paid in dollars and vary according to the specializations, "an unaffordable price for many families, especially for those with multiple children." Although the Syrian community schools offer an alternative, they lack the necessary licenses to provide recognized certifications by the Egyptian government, and their operational stability is questionable as many have been forced to close. The process of enrolling in higher education has also become increasingly complex, with students required to pay high amounts in dollars. Additionally, some participants highlighted that when registering their children in public schools, they are often required by school administrations to supply necessary materials, purchase needed furniture, and cover other expenses. A Syrian NGO leader[1] noted that Syrians experience different treatment regarding university enrollment. They are required to pay fees in dollars to access and register for public universities, with tuition fees starting at $3000 and varying by specialization. Those enrolled in public universities are struggling to continue their education due to these prohibitive costs. Additionally, many students encounter challenges in accessing public schools, particularly those without a residence permit, as public schools require valid residence permits for enrollment, or those whose residence permit appointments through UNHCR are not recognized by the schools. According to the UNHCR Help platform (2025), those with a resident permit appointment are allowed to enroll their children in public schools. However, many Syrian community members who took part in the focus group discussions and interviews did not mention this option, indicating a gap in awareness or accessibility. This has led to a significant increase in dropout rates, with many students who once attended public schools unable to continue their

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[1] Syrian NGO Leader, interview by Alaa Saleh, Cairo, 2025.

education. Furthermore, pursuing postgraduate studies has become increasingly difficult, despite being crucial for certain medical specializations that require residency training to practice medicine in Egypt.

❖ **The New Asylum Law:**

The formulation of a national Asylum Law was perceived as crucial by legal experts(Interview with Mr. Ahmed Badawy, February 2025; Nouri 2025). Various reasons have led Egypt to adopt a national asylum law, including Egypt's domestic concerns and geopolitical role in the global refugee crisis (Bailey-Morley 2024). On one side, the EU called for Egypt to adopt its national asylum law (Heck and Habersky 2025). Another aspect included the influx of massive numbers of refugees, especially after the Arab Spring and, lately, the outbreak of the civil war in Sudan, which necessitated the adoption of a legal framework for them (Interview with Mr. Ahmed Badawy, February 2025; AUC Alternative Policy Solutions 2025). As of February 2025, there were 925,263 registered refugees and asylum-seekers with UNHCR (UNHCR Egypt, 2025). While the first waves received wide support as UNHCR opened an office in Aswan for recipients of refugees. This was curtailed with the outbreak of the "war" in Gaza, and most operations were reallocated to Sinai due to the shift of international attention from the situation in Sudan towards Gaza (Interview with Mr. Ahmed Badawy, February 2025).

This lack of coordination became more evident in light of the enactment of the asylum law as the transition period that preceded it included the issuance of multiple decrees as a step towards adopting a national legal asylum framework (Ibid). However, this ambiguity is expected to remain until the issuance of the executive regulation of the law, expected in March 2025, which will

explain the implementation of its clauses more precisely, followed by the issuance of its bylaws. (Interview with Mr. Ahmed Badawy, February 2025). Another aspect for the adoption of the asylum law is also the influx of massive numbers of refugees which necessitated the adoption of a legal framework for them (Ibid; Nouri 2024)

Sudanese Perspectives on the New Asylum Law

Sudanese RLO Leader[2] has expressed concerns about the new asylum law, emphasizing the uncertainty and anxiety it has created among refugee communities. One leader stated, "We are still trying to understand the new law, and we are in a state of tension while communities remain anxious."

In an attempt to seek clarity, they reached out to UNHCR with pressing questions: Will the judge also be the executioner? Will blue cardholders have their status determined in Egypt? Can staff in UNHCR's partner organizations maintain neutrality, given concerns about unfair treatment? And will all asylum cases be handled equally?

While acknowledging Egypt's sovereign right to regulate the presence of refugees, **the Sudanese RLO Leader**[3] highlighted both the positive and negative aspects of the law.

On the positive side**,** the law grants refugees the right to work and access education. Additionally, they will be able to obtain travel documents with the approval of the authorities.

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[2]Sudanese RLO Leader, Interview by Reem Hamid, Cairo, 2025.
[3] Sudanese RLO Leader, Interview by Reem Hamid, Cairo, 2025

On the negative side, the law imposes stricter conditions on asylum applications. Those who entered the country through official channels will have their applications considered only after six months, whereas those who arrived through irregular means will have to wait one year. Applicants may also face the risk of deportation. Furthermore, failing to submit an asylum application within a specified period after entering the country could lead to severe penalties, including imprisonment and deportation.

These concerns reflect the growing uncertainty surrounding the law's implementation and its potential impact on the refugee community in Egypt.

Syrian Perspectives on the New Asylum Law

The Syrian focus group discussions and interviews reflected that some of the participants and leaders heard about the new refugee law but were not informed about it in detail. This lack of clarity raised concerns about whether refugee cases will be reassessed again, and other concerns were related to how many articles in the law are open to interpretation. Syrian NGO leaders and a humanitarian legal worker emphasized the need for clear and inclusive laws regarding refugees, considering the new law as a positive step towards bridging "the disconnect between reality and the host government about refugees," a Syrian community leader noted[4]. However, they expressed concerns about the involvement of a governmental entity in determining statutes instead of "a separate and neutral" body as UNHCR. This fear stems from worries about delays in Refugee Status Determination (RSD), bureaucratic hurdles, lack of trust, and sensitive information

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[4] Syrian Community Leader, interview by Alaa Saleh, Cairo, 2025.

disclosed by asylum seekers about their refugee status. Consequently, individuals may feel uncomfortable sharing their stories with a governmental entity.

In their reflections on the law, Syrian focus group discussion participants noted the absence of consultations with expert humanitarian legal workers and entities in the field, which raises questions about the law's realistic and practical application. Some experts advocated for crucial amendments, highlighting that the law's application could lead to problems in the future if these amendments are not made. While the law acknowledges refugees' right to work, obtaining a work permit as a non-Egyptian is exceptionally challenging. The existing requirements in the current labor law do not facilitate easy processing for individuals unless there are subsequent amendments made to the referenced laws. Furthermore, concerns were raised about the law's reliance on Egyptian statutes; for example, while refugees may theoretically be allowed to practice certain professions, Egyptian law restricts Syrians from engaging in specific occupations or joining professional unions. This creates a paradox where the overarching laws hinder refugees' ability to work legally. Another concern is the documentation required to access services under the law, which many refugees, forced to flee their homes, cannot obtain. These reflections remain speculative as participants await the executive regulations and implementation of the law.

Shifts in Discourse on Migrants and Refugees

The socio-political topography in Egypt defines the intricate intersection between hospitality and hostility toward refugees and migrants. Egypt conventionally sees itself as a haven for conflict-displaced individuals, as evidenced by the number of Syrian, Sudanese, and other refugees and migrants who dwell therein. These groups have various roles to play within the Egyptian context.

These groups' economic roles and integration into the informal economy include the 37% of foreigners who have stable jobs and need no support (Hefzy 2024). Egypt's hospitality has been eclipsed by the country's growing nationalist sentiments and economic challenges that have led to rising hostility towards these populations. Politicians and media personalities often present refugees and migrants in a light synonymous with financial burdens, an aspect used in xenophobic narratives to insinuate that refugees are the cause of local economic challenges, causing public resentment and discrimination against them (Norman 2022) Such ambivalence is manifest in a policy of non-action, whereby the state fails to absorb refugees and simultaneously fails to expel them, leaving things in a laissez-faire state and many in a precarious existence that tread a line between support and suspicion (Ibid.)

Political Changes and Impact on Refugees and Migrants

The political discourse surrounding refugees and migrants in Egypt has evolved significantly since 2011, reflecting the country's changing political and economic landscape. Following the political shifts of July 2013, narratives about refugees and migrants have transformed multiple times. Notably, Egyptian politicians and media have long characterized refugees as "guests" (Ahram Online 2022), a portrayal influenced by various factors. This characterization helps maintain Egypt's political position to remain as a transit country (Halawa 2021) and is rooted in historical, political, and social ties with the nations from which refugees and migrants originate. Shifts in political relations with these countries significantly impact how refugees from specific nationalities are perceived and portrayed. For instance, the influx of Syrian refugees initially elicited a welcoming response (Kingsley 2013), largely due to shared cultural and historical

connections. However, refugees and migrants often face scrutiny and hostility, reflecting the broader societal attitudes and the prevailing political climate. This dynamic illustrates how the intersection of national identity, political relations, and economic conditions shapes the discourse on refugees and migrants in Egypt.

In their research article, "Syrian Refugees in Egypt: Challenges of a Politically Changing Environment," Ayoub and Khallaf (2014) examine the challenges faced by Syrian refugees in Egypt following the political changes that began in 2013 after the change in the regime. They highlight how "both government policies and media rhetoric turned against Syrian refugees," particularly after July 2013 as an association with the former regime emerged. This shift in state and public views from support in 2011 until July 2013 to hostility has adversely affected refugees' livelihoods, access to resources, and their day-to-day interactions with Egyptians. Ever since, the Syrian refugees and others in Egypt have stood under a very politicized situation, bound by fluctuations in the Egyptian political environment.

Fluctuations in the Egyptian political situation create consequences regarding their protection, livelihoods, and income-earning opportunities (Ayoub et al. 2014). Since 2011, Egypt had Syrians on an open-door policy and offered access to services as Egyptians, but this ceased after July 2013. Due to this, Syrians became associated with the former regime in Egypt and were depicted in the media as a threat to the country's stability (Kingsley 2013). From brothers and sisters who required help and support, Syrians became destabilizers and disruptors of the already unstable political

scene in Egypt and accused of interfering with it. During an interview with a Syrian RLO leader[5], which provided an extensive reflection on Syrians in Egypt from 2011 until today, the leader reported that:

> "The current phase of governance in Egypt, which we can discuss extensively, has lasted for about eleven years. This period has gone through various stages. Initially, there was a welcome from the previous government towards Syrians, which some considered was driven by certain political and idelogical agendas and resulted in viewing us with suspicion later, as if the former president had brought us to Egypt or as if his government supported us because of an agenda. Media and some Egyptians classified and associated Syrians with the former regime. [As community leaders], we clarified through media and with Egyptian officials that we had no ties to the previous regime, and our presence in Egypt was a direct result of the war in our country and the lack of safety, prompting us to seek refuge in Egypt, just as we did in Lebanon, Türkiye, and Jordan. We explained that the Syrian people are not organized or politically aligned; most are civilians without political affiliations. We come from a country that prevented us from having a political opinion."

Between July and August 2013, widely watched Egyptian TV presenters and media outlets accused Syrians of meddling in Egypt's politics by backing the former regime, which led to exacerbating the hate speech against Syrians, and some reported experiencing hostility from Egyptians (Ayoub et al. 2014). The talk show host, Tawfik Okasha, encouraged Egyptians to arrest Syrians on the street (Kingsley 2013). On July 8 of 2013, for security reasons, the Egyptian government announced that Syrians would have to obtain pre-arranged travel visas to enter the country (Wolf 2013) and a special security clearance, which costs between $1,050 and $1,500 each time, an expensive requirement that has restricted Syrian migration to Egypt, hindered numerous refugees from reuniting with family members abroad, and led to the emergence of a network of brokers (Mauvais and Alzoubi 2024). The link established between Syrian refugees and the Brotherhood impacted their safety and jeopardized their protection in Egypt (Marroushi 2013). After August

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[5] Syrian NGO Leader, interview by Alaa Saleh, Cairo, 2025.

2013 till 2015, the hate speech toward Syrians temporarily regressed, a Syrian NGO leader[6] confirmed this and stated: "This misunderstanding about Syrians association with the Brotherhood persisted for about a year or two, from 2013 to early 2015, until people began to accept that Syrians are positive contributors in Egypt and have no role in the country's politics."

According to Ahmed (2024), the relations between Sudan and Egypt have fluctuated significantly since Sudan's independence from the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium in 1956. These relations have been influenced by the political changes in both countries, with the situation swinging either way depending on the political climate in each nation. This dynamic has not only impacted Sudanese fleeing the current war but also those who have lived in Egypt for long periods. Subsequently, during the 1989 Islamist regime in Sudan, the relations between the two countries became antagonistic, and an influx of refugees occurred as people fled the regime's extremism. Sudanese in Cairo were often stereotyped as refugees, regardless of how long they had lived in Egypt. So the Sudanese diaspora in Egypt is diverse, and their legal status has become a critical factor in determining their socio-economic status and future options. Unfortunately, the April 2023 war introduced new challenges for all Sudanese in Egypt, regardless of their migration history or legal status. The most significant issue is the difficulty in obtaining regular residency, which threatens thousands of long-term Sudanese residents with deportation to a country they have never lived in or a return to a war-torn Sudan from which they fled seeking refuge.

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[6] Syrian NGO Leader, interview by Alaa Saleh, Cairo, 2025.

Current Refugee Statistics, Economic Context, and Border Control

Within the context of dire economic conditions that have adversely affected the living standards of its citizens, the Egyptian government has started to partially blame refugees for some of these problems. Regime-affiliated officials and media outlets have spread inaccurate narratives, exaggerating the number of refugees in the country and claiming that their presence costs the state billions of dollars in service costs (Al-A'sar 2024). In 2022, IOM estimated that there are about 9 million migrants and refugees from 133 countries, mainly Sudanese. Interestingly, out of the 4 million Sudanese in Egypt, only 3% are recognized as refugees. According to data obtained from embassies and studies conducted by IOM, more than one-third (37%) of migrants in Egypt have stable jobs, meaning that they contribute positively to the labor market and economic growth. Syrians represent 17% of the international migrant stock in Egypt and rank among the leading contributors (IOM 2022). Such investments are estimated to be close to $1 billion (Ibid) by the 30,000 Syrian investors who are registered, Daher 2023, which justifies the need to enhance the inclusion of refugees and migrants for the benefit of the host community.

The figure provided by the IOM includes migrants and refugees. However, the government of Egypt has used this number to show just refugees. The head of the CAPMAS said that Egypt hosts about 9 million refugees; among them are 4 million from Sudan and 1.5 million from Syria (Youm7 2023). During the World Economic Forum (WEF) meeting in April 2024, for example, Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly emphasized the costliness of the situation: "The annual cost of hosting 9 million refugees in Egypt exceeds 10 billion dollars, and we, as a government, bear this expense despite the economic difficulties Egypt is facing" (Ibid.)

The framing can thus be understood as part of the larger plan to attract global political support and funds for the Egyptian government. By highlighting the sensationalized number of refugees, Egypt emphasizes its position as an integral player in the global process of managing refugees and a significant influence in maintaining the maritime borders of Europe, all in the name of presumed humanitarian obligations. This approach perhaps works for the country to enhance its standing in the international community in its quest for financial aid. The discrepancy in the number of refugees between the Egyptian government and that from refugee organizations arises because Egypt classifies all immigrants as refugees. This approach blurs the line between refugees—whose numbers are precisely documented by UNHCR—mixed with migrants who may have not left due to conflicts. As a result, the government presents inflated numbers that exaggerate the true number of individuals fleeing persecution or conflict. At the same time, the UNHCR only counts those who are officially registered as refugees (Shehata 2024). This distinction underlines the complexities of reporting refugee and migrant data and the challenge of adequately addressing the needs of both groups in the region.

The Egyptian economy is currently facing a crisis significantly exacerbated by severe currency devaluation, foreign loans, the aftermath of COVID-19, and declines in tourism and exports (Abo Zaid 2024). Additionally, infrastructure development funded by debt-based financing places the country at risk of unrest, which is intertwined with domestic, economic, and foreign policy issues (ICG 2023). Inflation has been viewed as one of the major financial stresses working against Egyptians, given that the rate of increased inflation puts much pressure on households and

livelihoods. The rise in the prices of several commodities in Egypt, blamed on the prevailing economic crisis marked by a dollar shortage and high inflation rates, has sparked significant outrage on social media platforms in the country, with calls for the government to intervene and control prices as well as explain the reasons behind such (BBC 2023).

As a Syrian RLO leader stated[7]:

> "The economic crisis that Egypt faces led to numerous governmental decisions, including constructing a new capital and improving infrastructure. Many of these decisions resulted in Egypt borrowing substantial amounts from the International Monetary Fund and other countries, which placed significant financial burdens on the nation. As someone who studied business, I believe these decisions were methodical rather than random. However, an unexpected economic downturn occurred at the beginning of 2020 due to the COVID-19 crisis, which halted many ongoing projects intended to generate income and cover the loans, but the crisis led to a significant reduction in economic activity. The pandemic caused a global disruption, impacting Egypt's economy by decreasing resources and delaying debt repayments. The devaluation of the currency was exacerbated by the Russian-Ukrainian war, which affected global food supplies and complicated the situation further. The ongoing issues, including the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam conflict and its implications for Egypt's water security, added to the government's challenges. The situation in Gaza also had repercussions, particularly regarding energy and resources directed toward Sinai amidst Israeli pressures to restrict Palestinian movements. These circumstances placed Egypt in a challenging position, reflected in decreased revenues from the Suez Canal due to conflicts in the Red Sea, which hindered trade routes. The depreciation of the Egyptian pound placed the government in a difficult position regarding essential imports and subsidized services. The support provided by the government was significantly higher than the actual services rendered. For example, if a company was paying 10 for services, it might rise to 20, leading to a situation where subsidies became unsustainable."

This comprehensive statement was an attempt to illustrate the multifaceted economic pressures on Egypt, from governmental borrowing to global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical conflicts. The leader's analysis tried to emphasize the systematic nature of government

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[7] Syrian RLO Leader, Interview by Alaa Saleh, Cairo, 2025.

decisions while also acknowledging the unforeseen challenges that have arisen, which are crucial for understanding the current economic landscape in Egypt. This situation has made the Egyptian government seek financial support from international organizations while simultaneously changing the political rhetoric and public opinion to investigate all factors that can contribute to exacerbating this crisis.

Heck and Habersky (2024) highlight the EU's efforts to fortify its vision in border surveillance and control to externalize the EU's borders while reducing the flow of migrants heading toward it. They present how Egypt has approached cooperation with the EU to control migration and externalize borders with reluctance due to concerns over sovereignty and a desire to maintain its long-standing reputation as a transit country. However, given Egypt's ongoing economic and political challenges, and despite these concerns, since 2014, Egypt has become a more cooperative partner with the EU, presenting an opportunity for the Global North, particularly Europe, to advance its border control agendas and manage migration more effectively from Egypt to Europe. In this context, a Syrian NGO leader remarked, "Over the past year, there has been a regional and international push or pressure for the voluntary return of Syrian refugees to their homeland and for host countries to frame their refugee-related policies. Of course, no one is explicitly advocating for forced returns, but the pressure is mounting, primarily by restricting resources for refugees. This pressure is associated with specific motivations. There has been pressure over and from various countries, like Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Europe. In Northern Iraq, Syrians were unexpectedly granted six-month residency permits at once, but they were required to leave the country afterward. Even in Turkey, as there have been waves of refugees who have been stranded

for years." The recent EU multi-billion deal has a major role in reshaping the migration and asylum scenes in Egypt. The progress made by Egypt on its new asylum bill could be perceived in the light of the EU's deal in attempts to combat irregular migration from a transit country like Egypt (Baker and Kassab 2024), which could turn Egypt into a receiving or destination country as noted by Norman (2020), who refers to these as "transit-turned-host states."

Reflections on the Impact of Egypt's Economic Situation on Sudanese

Participants in the focus group discussions and interviews highlighted the significant impact of Egypt's economic situation on their daily lives as refugees and migrants. Many expressed that rising costs have forced them to abandon both luxuries and certain necessities. Some reported reducing their meals from three to two per day and foregoing morning tea, while others emphasized the financial strain caused by the high cost of education, which consumes a large portion of their limited income, making it difficult to meet other essential needs.

The economic challenges have also led to adjustments in lifestyle, with many cutting out entertainment and non-essential expenses, prioritizing only basic necessities. Several participants mentioned that the cost of housing has risen sharply, with rent increasing from 1,500 to 4,500 Egyptian pounds, further straining household budgets. Others pointed out that these financial pressures have affected not only their living conditions but also their overall well-being and family happiness.

Additionally, healthcare has become a major concern, as the increasing cost of medical services, alongside rising living expenses, has made it difficult for many to access necessary care. Across

the discussions, participants underscored that limited income, combined with the high cost of housing, healthcare, and daily necessities, has placed significant burdens on their ability to sustain a decent quality of life.

People have adapted to the changes by lowering their standard of living and cutting expenses. Instead of renting furnished apartments, they now rent empty ones. Instead of seeking treatment in private hospitals, they go to charitable clinics. And instead of enrolling their children in private schools, they have turned to community schools.

Shifting Narratives on Refugees and Migrants

The political discourse in Egypt fluctuates between describing refugees as a burden on the country's economy and calling for support to ease their conditions. This shifting narrative that fluctuates between supportive discourse welcoming refugees and describing them as guests of the state significantly influences public opinion across Egyptian society. Sudanese refugees and migrants often receive special consideration in political statements and decisions, in contrast to other nationalities, due to the longstanding ties between Egypt and Sudan. As stated by the Minister of the Interior (Mahmoud, 2024), new legislation (currently under review) to regulate the presence of foreign nationals will include specific provisions for Sudanese citizens.

In a country with strict government control over the media, official views on refugees often go unopposed and are amplified by mainstream media and public figures (Al-A'sar 2024). Media personalities have pointed out that refugees are a cause of economic problems, intensifying existing tensions. The arrival of refugees is frequently mentioned as a factor contributing to the

increasing prices of goods and services, but experts contend that such assertions are part of a larger narrative aimed at diverting focus from more significant economic challenges (Farid 2024). These remarks, which were linked to the nation's economic difficulties, have sparked debate and increased hate speech and prejudice against refugees. They are increasingly seen as a key component of Egypt's financial crisis, which is marked by deteriorating living conditions, growing service costs and acute shortages of necessities (Hefzy 2024). The anti-refugee rhetoric on social media has reached the point of calling for the deportation of refugees to their home countries. Some racist discourse, especially towards Sudanese refugees, has been active on platforms such as Twitter or X, with hashtags like (#Against_Refugees) and (#Deport_Refugees), On the other hand, some voices are calling for an end to hate speech and advocating for peaceful coexistence.

With 13 years of conflict in Syria, the political landscape in neighboring host countries, including Egypt, has changed significantly concerning refugees and migrants. Influenced by evolving political climates and policies prioritizing national stability, the public discourse has shifted as well. In Egypt, officials have transformed their rhetoric surrounding refugees and migrants, asserting that the numbers of displaced individuals are inflated. In light of the difficult economic situation in Egypt, such shifts in discourse are aimed at seeking global support in hosting displaced communities. Consequently, this narrative resonates with segments of the population, leading to a perception that refugees burden the struggling economy. Media figures have pointed to refugees as a cause of economic problems, exacerbating existing tensions. While the arrival of refugees is often cited as a factor in rising prices, experts argue that these assertions distract from more significant economic challenges.

As a result, community interactions have been strained, both online and offline. In an article by the former Sudanese Minister of Information (Faisal 2024), he mentioned that the discourse was described not as a widespread phenomenon but as a warning sign that needs attention. The author attributed the discomfort to the fact that Sudanese refugees have not integrated into society and have established their service centers and schools. Sudanese refugees are also seen as notadhering to the social norms of Egypt. The author placed responsibility on intellectuals and community and religious leaders from Egypt and Sudan to address the issue before it escalates. Sudanese refugees were advised to respect the host country's way of life and customs, emphasizing that they should behave as guests.

A growing sentiment of resentment has emerged against Syrians as some report that Egyptians have urged them to return to Syria, particularly amid the current challenging economic conditions. Since social media is a significant channel for expressing such public sentiments, it demonstrated the rising frustration among Egyptians regarding the Syrian presence, especially in economic contexts. Some Egyptians have begun calling for boycotts of Syrian businesses and restaurants. Platforms such as X and Facebook have amplified such campaigns, resurfacing year-old photos of

Syrian restaurant closures for health code violations in justification of the boycotts. Others contend that Syrian businesses hire only Syrians and are thus exclusionary.[8]

Khaled Al-Barmawi, an Egyptian expert in digital media, noted to the newspaper Asharq Al-Awsat that while such calls are not novel, they have gained unparalleled visibility without a clear motivation for their resurgence (Adly 2024). The rise of these social media campaigns could be attributed to political motives aiming to destabilize Egypt and undermine the economic activities of Syrians for personal gain. Likewise, Dr. Said Sadiq, a professor of political sociology, suggests that the sources of these campaigns are often ambiguous, indicating an intention to shift blame for existing economic crises onto Syrians (Adly 2024). Allegations have also surfaced that many inciting accounts are fake, described as "electronic flies" purportedly funded to provoke tensions against refugees. In contrast, many accounts actively defend Syrians and other refugees living in Egypt. Although many Egyptians still express empathy and support for refugees, the increase in online hate speech poses a significant risk of shaping public opinion, particularly among younger people (Al-A'sar 2024). The counter-narrative being amplified by refugees is that they are relying on their savings and resources from their home countries, asserting that they do

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[8] ***Post source:*** Tahiamasr. 2024. *Boycott or not.. The full story of calls to boycott Syrian shops in Egypt.* Cairo: Tahiamasr. https://www.tahiamasr.com/827816.

not pose a burden on anyone. However, this perception sometimes heightens tensions between Egyptians and refugees further.

The Egyptian political rhetoric combined with economic challenges is not the sole factor driving this rising hostility toward Syrians. The Syrian government has also contributed to the narrative that Syria is a "safe" country for return. The Arab League's recent decision to reinstate Syria's membership marks a consequential step toward normalizing relations with the Syrian government (Heydemann 2023). This shift is further complicated by misinformation and propaganda from the Syrian government, which promotes the notion of safety in the country. Influencers and vloggers are showcasing Syria in a similar light, backing this narrative.

Although most of these influencers are deemed apolitical, they are sponsored by Syria's politics while creating appealing and vibrant videos about how exciting it is to visit Syria for their audiences (Fullerton 2022), which has an impact on how the world and Egyptians in particular perceive Syria as a safe country to return to. As various nations express a desire to normalize ties with Syria, some European Union countries have begun revising their migration and refugee policies to encourage the voluntary return and repatriation of Syrians to areas deemed safe (De La Feld 2024), despite the lack of guaranteed safety. Human Rights Watch (2024a) has highlighted that Syrians escaping violence in Lebanon face risks of repression and persecution by the Syrian government upon return, including enforced disappearances, torture, and potential death while in detention.

The recent toppling of the Syrian regime has rapidly shifted the way political and media rhetoric in Egypt is linked to Syria, as it continues to change each day. Celebrations occurred among Syrians and Egyptians, particularly Syrians, reflecting a shared delight at the news. However, the Egyptian government handled the situation with caution in case there might be issues. This instigated random arrests against Syrians, and three were deported (MEE 2024). Soon after Assad was overthrown, Egypt imposed new travel conditions for Syrians holding Gulf, European, or American visas. They were accepted into Egypt with a payment but now need security clearance from Egyptian embassies. Even those already living in Egypt need approval to travel and come back. The media has focused on rumors of foreign conspiracy and anarchy, setting the tone for the narrative of the situation (Ezzidin 2025). Upon the Syrian victory conference where Ahmed Al Sharaa was appointed as the interim president for the transitional government, the Egyptian president, Al Sisi, congratulated Al Sharaa and later invited him to the emergency Arab League summit on developments in the Palestinian cause, scheduled for 4 March in Cairo (Ahram 2025).

During the Syrian FGDs and interviews, participants shared their feelings about these recent and continuous changes, expressing concerns about the scrutiny, detentions, and lack of recognition for the Syrian transitional government's decision so far. The latter issue impacts document issuance and perceptions of Syrians in Egypt (associating Syrians with islamists), particularly regarding the extension of passports issued by the Syrian embassy in Cairo, which the Egyptian government has yet to recognize.

On this topic, a participant noted, "We hope for facilitations, such as the recognition of extended passports and easing entry restrictions for those with foreign visas.[9]" A sentiment of fear and ambiguity prevailed with this absence of acknowledgment, which has affected many Syrians during this period of uncertainty, making it difficult to secure a legitimate status in Egypt and leaving them feeling vulnerable and hopeless. However, the relationship between the two countries is evolving rapidly each day, bringing the promise of greater stability and clarity. In addition to these rapid and uncertain situations, some participants worried about their refugee status with UNHCR, indicating that any revocation could jeopardize their residence permits.

Reflections on Shifts of Discourse on Sudanese Refugees and Migrants in Egypt

Most opinions expressed in focus groups and interviews—particularly by informants who had resided in Egypt before the war—indicated that Sudanese refugees and migrants were initially welcomed by Egyptian society. They reported having positive relationships with their neighbors and emphasized the long-standing historical ties between the two peoples. However, some participants noted that after the war, as large numbers of Sudanese arrived in Cairo, public discourse began to shift, with increasing expressions of frustration and resentment toward their presence. As E pointed out, this shift was reflected in the way Sudanese individuals were addressed; while they were previously referred to with honorifics such as *basha* and *bey*, they are now more commonly addressed as *Zoul* (a Sudanese colloquial term).

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[9] Syrians who hold Gulf, European, or American visas.

Some participants argued that this discourse shift is more prominent on social media than in everyday interactions, but they acknowledged its negative impact. One participant mentioned that much of the inflammatory rhetoric online is driven by social media trends and media sensationalism rather than reflecting widespread societal attitudes.

At the beginning of 2024, media discussions in Egypt increasingly focused on the presence of refugees, with some commentators suggesting that hosting them placed a strain on the national budget and that Egypt was not receiving sufficient international support. However, these discussions did not always mention the financial agreements Egypt was negotiating with the European Union to support its economy and manage irregular migration. This narrative was echoed across several television channels affiliated with or supportive of the government (Al-A'sar 2024). Others linked the growing frustration and changes in discourse directly to Egypt's economic crisis, noting that Sudanese migrants have been blamed for rising costs, particularly in the rental market in Cairo.

A female participant stated that "every action has a reaction," suggesting that the shift in discourse is a response to the behavior of some Sudanese individuals that Egyptians perceive as unacceptable.

Perspectives varied regarding changes in official media discourse. Some participants believed that the tone of official discourse remained unchanged and continued to portray Egypt as a welcoming host for refugees and migrants. However, S argued that "the discourse has placed us under scrutiny, making people focus more on our flaws." Others pointed out a disconnect between rhetoric and practice, asserting that while the discourse appears supportive of refugees, its implementation often

tells a different story. One participant noted, "There has been a change in the discourse; it has become more complicated and is now accompanied by regulations and difficulties**."**

Perspectives from Community Leaders

Sudanese RLO Leader(1) believes that "There is a hidden hand stirring up confusion against refugees among Egyptian citizens on the streets. Some people spread false information about refugees, and they are not held accountable. Sometimes, if a refugee complains, they get deported. There is also a popular TV program that disseminates misinformation. I went on TV to correct the false information, and after that,' I faced some harassment from the authorities"

Similarly, **Sudanese RLO Leader(2)** highlighted the dual nature of discourse, stating: "The media discourse is characterized by sharp hate speech, while the official discourse is more balanced, with a welcoming tone that describes refugees as guests of the state. Public discourse varies, with some expressing welcome and others showing frustration, but the welcoming speech tends to outweigh the frustrated one."

Reflections on Shifts of Discourse on Syrian Refugees and Migrants in Egypt

During the Syrian focus group discussions, several key themes emerged regarding the role of media and political figures in shaping perceptions of Syrians and refugees in Egypt. Community members expressed concern that media narratives and political rhetoric have increasingly portrayed refugees negatively. One participant noted, "Some people are saying that we don't want

refugees anymore as we take their job opportunities, and they call to attack our businesses. At a meeting I attended, there was a discussion that the EU chose Egypt to be a country of destination for refugees. While some are against such speech, politics and media are pushing to get us out, especially in the light of the new refugee law." Such community remarks reflected what they believe was a growing sentiment among certain population segments that view refugees as a burden. This perception has been exacerbated by political pressures, with remarks like, "Politics are pushing to get us out," suggesting that legislative measures are being enacted to restrict the presence of refugees.

Consequently, this environment has fostered a climate of hostility, where public figures play a significant role in influencing narratives about refugees. Furthermore, the treatment of Syrians, particularly during bureaucratic processes, has deteriorated. A participant shared, "When we go to apply for the residence permit, they treat us very badly," highlighting the negative experiences faced by refugees in their interactions with authorities. Participants noted that Sudanese refugees experience hate speech and public attacks more than Syrians. Despite these challenges, some community members acknowledged that Egypt has been relatively welcoming compared to other countries, stating, "Egypt has been the best country for Syrians other than other countries, and they welcomed us more." However, they emphasized that legislative barriers remain a significant hurdle, indicating ongoing pressure that complicates their situation.

With NGO and community leaders, their discussions emphasized the interconnectedness of media and politics. They shared how media is the mirror of the government, yet media is considered an

unofficial apparatus of the government, which highlights how media narratives often reflect governmental agendas. Before 2013, Syrians were generally perceived as similar to Egyptians, but certain political agendas complicated this perception and altered this narrative, leading to increased suspicion and hostility towards Syrians. The discourse has evolved to portray Syrians as a burden, driven by fears of economic pressures. In terms of media portrayal, interviewed Syrian leaders noted the impact of sensationalized reporting on public perception. A community member stated, "They started to project economic crises onto refugees," linking issues like the dollar crisis and rising rents to their presence. This sentiment was echoed by another leader who observed that "the media talks about refugees in an offensive way," associating them with housing crises and job competition. While some segments of society, particularly those with nationalist sentiments, express hostility toward refugees, many still offer support. As one leader concluded, "Before the past two years, the situation was better in the media and community," indicating that a shift has occurred, though acceptance remains among a significant portion of the population.

Hostility towards refugees was a recurring theme in the focus group discussions, particularly in light of the economic situation in Egypt. Participants shared experiences of discrimination and blame for the rising costs of rent and other commodities. This sentiment resonates with the desk research's assertion that media narratives often portray refugees as economic burdens, exacerbating public resentment. The discussions also highlighted specific incidents of hostility, especially over social media. Many indicated that hate speech and hostility are prominent in social media realms than real life, as there is no sense of accountability. Contributors recounted negative encounters with Egyptians. For instance, a participant noted, "I had a negative encounter with a taxi driver

who expressed hostility, saying Egyptians want us to leave and that Syrians are unwelcomed no more."

Some participants mentioned negative incidents of discrimination and hate they have encountered, whether in the street, at school, at university, at work, or through daily interactions. "Three years ago, I witnessed a disturbing incident involving a neighbor suspected of being involved with illegal activity. The police came to his house, and when my husband checked what was happening, the authorities came to our home, conducted an investigation, and confiscated our passports for six months. It was a stressful time, and therefore, I now have no interactions with anyone." While others mentioned that they had encountered discrimination and hostility towards them, only over social media, with no major real-life incidents to report. Most informants deal with such incidents with no personalization and try to self-restrain in order not to get into more trouble.

The Syrian NGO and community leaders' mentioned that the challenges faced by Egyptians have led to a growing sense of hostility that impacts Egyptian hospitality values. This hostility is influenced by economic conditions and media narratives that shape public perception. There are various types of Egyptians regarding their interactions with refugees. While some benefit from renting properties to refugees, others feel negatively impacted by their presence, particularly Syrians. Some have bad experiences with Syrians, or they are nationalists, "promoting neo-Pharaonism," as a Syrian community leader[10] asserted. Such nationalist discourse comes at the expense of Arabs and Africans and instigates a sense of racial nationalism (Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy 2023), which negatively affects social interactions with those perceived as

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[10] Syrian Community Leader, interview by Alaa Saleh, Cairo, 2025.

outsiders, resulting in heightened discrimination and xenophobia. However, discussions with Syrian leaders highlighted that, despite some hostility, many Egyptians still retain a hospitable attitude. However, negative sentiments are increasingly prevalent, especially among those who follow rumors that refugees receive thousands of dollars in the form of aid from UN agencies, those who are not well-informed about refugees, and those who are swayed by media portrayals of them.

The leaders consider that media plays a crucial role in fostering hostility. It has driven segments of the community to view refugees as the source of many issues facing Egypt. This perception inaccurately blames refugees for economic challenges rather than acknowledging broader economic factors. Economic tensions, cultural complexities, and lack of awareness further exacerbate hostility, as interviewed leaders emphasized. One observation was that the influx of Sudanese refugees, for example, coincided with economic downturns, leading many Egyptians to mistakenly associate rising living costs with their presence. This misattribution of blame creates an environment where hostility can flourish, as individuals become more likely to scapegoat refugees for their struggles. Overall, the interplay of media influence and economic hardship fosters a climate of hostility that undermines traditional values of hospitality in Egypt, as Syrian focus group and interview contributors reported. This aligns with the desk research's assertion that media narratives shape public sentiments towards refugees and contribute to rising hostility and discrimination against refugees.

Syrian Reflections on Hospitality, Social Interactions, and Hostility

The Paradox of Hospitality: Syrian Refugees in Egypt's Socio-Economic Landscape

Initially, Syrian refugees experienced a welcoming environment marked by empathy and minimal issues regarding residence permits. However, with different changes taking place and as economic challenges have intensified, this hospitality has become strained. Focus group discussion participants noted that while some Egyptians have embraced Syrians, others have shown reluctance or skepticism, reflecting broader societal ambivalence towards refugees. This duality indicates that although Egypt has a cultural predisposition to hospitality, economic pressures are increasingly complicating these dynamics, leading to a more conditional form of support.

Despite these challenges, the theme of hospitality remains prevalent in both focus group discussions and interviews. Many respondents shared positive experiences, particularly during their initial arrival in Egypt, where they received significant support from Egyptians and Egyptian institutions, such as mosques providing essential resources like clothing and housing assistance. However, over time, participants expressed concerns about shifting attitudes, with some feeling perceived as burdens rather than welcomed members of society. While initial empathy was strong, the diminishing enthusiasm for support highlights the complex interplay between cultural hospitality and economic realities, illustrating the varying degrees of assistance Syrians have received from their Egyptian hosts during their transition to life in Egypt.

Perspectives on hospitality differ from person to person. One community leader defined hospitality from his perspective as "to be treated as a part of the family, to rent me a house, to share food with

me, and Egyptians did all of that and beyond. Nowadays, Egyptians are the best in the area, as they welcomed Syrians, and we would have done the same for them. Egypt is hosting refugees more than other rich countries, and we should not ask them for more." While another community leader contested this, "I consider that Syrians and Sudanese's concepts of hospitality are very modest, as they consider hospitality as letting us in Egypt as a grand matter. This concept holds more beyond this notion. However, we hold dear gratitude towards Egyptians in general for their sense of hospitality despite certain difficulties we encounter. I consider that social interactions and exports are easy and welcoming between Egyptians and Syrians, along with renting a house to a Syrian being a priority, and hiring is a two-way street for both communities." A third community leader processed this notion in terms of the general sense of hospitality that Egyptians have towards all nationalities while attributing it to "personalities, experiences, and how people are."

Interviewed RLO and community leaders explained how this sentiment of hospitality does not go unnoticed and is echoed in various community initiatives, such as awareness and Ramadan campaigns, and thank-you campaigns organized by Syrians to express appreciation for their hosts. "We visit places for the elderly or a cancer hospital with volunteers and such, as an organization, and run thank-you campaigns for Egyptians, thanking them for hosting us, accepting us in their schools, accepting us in their universities." A Syrian leader explained.

The overarching themes of hospitality were prominent during the Syrian focus group discussions, as many participants expressed how the initial phase of their arrival and the support and empathy shown by Egyptians were significant, with individuals and institutions like the Islamic Association and mosques providing crucial assistance, especially for housing. This illustrates the deep-rooted

hospitality that many Egyptians extended to Syrians, offering not just material support but also emotional solidarity during a challenging time. However, as the situation prolonged, confusion arose among the host community about how to continue their support.

The timing of hospitality and how long it would last were themes prominent in the focus group discussions as the socio-economic and geopolitical situation changed for Egyptians and the protracted Syrian war faded away the initial warmth. Some community members indicated that hospitality emerges as a complex dynamic related to time and available resources. While many Egyptians have been welcoming, a participant noted that "Some Egyptians now say that they have given us all the support needed for the past 14 years, and this is enough. The challenge of education... the laws have become very difficult." This reflects the tension between the initial hospitality offered to refugees and the increasing restrictions they face, not only on the social level. A Syrian community leader highlighted that Egyptians often treat Syrians well, saying, "Egyptians are very hospitable people," yet the changing economic landscape has made this hospitality conditional in terms of legislation and policies.

Moreover, participants' personal experiences highlight the compassion and practical support offered by Egyptians. One individual noted, "Whether it's emotional or material, I worked with Egyptians with no experience, and they taught me everything I needed to deal with people and get a job." This demonstrates a willingness to share knowledge and skills, fostering a sense of community. One of the community members mentioned her family experience where an Egyptian businessman partnered with her father to establish a business and how helpful this was to the family

to rebuild their lives again. Another participant attributed this sense of hospitality to the "Egyptians love us because Syrian society is a society that has proven itself to have a positive impact. The Syrian community in Egypt works, opens shops, and takes the extra mile to excel, whether in food, industries, or products. Providing support was crucial for Syrians to integrate into Egypt and have a sense of home; as a Syrian participant mentioned, "The support I experienced from the Egyptian society strengthened me greatly. I experienced immense support and sympathy from people, including an older student who enriched my education and helped me learn a new language. Despite facing bias when it came to my salary, as I was paid less than my Egyptian colleagues, I faced only friendship and encouragement. This openness allowed me to focus on my studies and professional life, shaping my personality positively and helping me embrace a new culture while being respected for my Syrian background." Despite the challenges Syrians encounter, where accountability is often lacking, many Syrians found that generally they are treated as equals.

Social Interactions and Cultural Exchange

While discussing social interactions between Syrians and Egyptians, participants noted that Egyptians, in general, are open and welcoming to Syrians, whether in trade, housing, familial interactions, or marriage, as many got married from both communities. The cultural exchanges and social interactions strengthened understanding and acceptance for both communities. However, the discussions present a clear dichotomy between those who embraced the Syrians and those who did not, reflecting broader societal attitudes toward refugees. Some participants shared their experiences on cultural exchange, noting that integration has led to shared activities, such as

drinking coffee and enjoying Syrian traditional foods, which foster a sense of belonging. Personal relationships, including marriages and close friendships, further underscore the depth of this integration, indicating that the level of acceptance Egyptians show leads to significant connections. However, the discussions also acknowledge that not all interactions are positive.

Respondents also highlighted the subjective nature of acceptance, influenced by individual experiences and beliefs. Overall, the discussions expressed the intricate interplay of integration and resistance, offering insight into the lived experiences of both communities and emphasizing the importance of understanding diverse perspectives in discussions of hospitality. However, challenges remain, particularly regarding access to work permits and education. While social interactions are generally welcoming, the realities of fluctuating educational policies and job accessibility underline the complexities of this hospitality. Ultimately, the Egyptian sense of hospitality serves as a valuable lesson in community and resilience, offering a glimpse into the potential for cross-cultural integration despite existing challenges.

Sudanese Reflections on Hospitality, Social Interactions, and Hostility

Why Cairo? Instead of others? interviews and Foucs Group Discussions showed that some of the participants had arrived in Cairo before the war and settled there for reasons such as education, medical treatment, and economic opportunities.

As for those who arrived after the war, their reasons for choosing Egypt over other migration and asylum destinations varied. Participants mentioned factors such as geographical proximity, ease of access, and safety compared to other neighboring countries. They also highlighted the lower

cost of living compared to other countries where Sudanese refugees have fled, as well as to Sudanese states considered safe.

"Egypt is not a foreign country to us; we come here often," as MA stated. Some participants mentioned that their extended families had been residing in Cairo for a long time and had sufficient knowledge about the country. Others pointed to cultural and traditional closeness as reasons for choosing Egypt. Comment end

Hospitality:

The Definition of Hospitality for Sudanese Refugees in Egypt

Participants in the discussions defined hospitality for refugees and migrants in Egypt as the provision of shelter and residency for those fleeing conflict and persecution. Unlike other countries that enforce refugee camps, Egypt allows refugees to integrate into local communities and live freely. Additionally, participants highlighted the permission granted to establish community organizations that provide essential support to refugees.

Furthermore, participants emphasized that Egypt offers good services, particularly in the healthcare sector, which was noted as a key area of distinction. They also pointed out that Sudanese individuals, in particular, are not treated as foreigners but are often regarded in a manner similar to Egyptian citizens Due to the nature of the relationship between the two neighboring countries, unlike other states, this special status of Sudanese nationals can be attributed to it.

Is assistance and hospitality unconditional or subject to conditions?

Participants expressed varying perspectives regarding the treatment they receive when seeking support or assistance. Some noted that assistance is occasionally offered voluntarily and unconditionally, while others observed that it is often provided under specific conditions, particularly financial compensation. Additionally, responses to requests for help were reported to be inconsistent—support is sometimes extended, while in other instances, it is ignored.

Regional differences were also highlighted. As a Sudanese participant mentioned, "They act cooperatively based on my experience with them, especially in Alexandria. However, in Cairo, support is conditional on compensation." Some participants reported encountering unwelcoming behavior in certain situations, further reflecting the complexity of their experiences.

Social Solidarity and Community Support

In some areas, community associations do not differentiate between Sudanese and Egyptian beneficiaries, particularly in the distribution of Ramadan food baskets. While some participants acknowledged the existence of social solidarity, others argued that such solidarity is limited. Special care was noted for individuals with children with special needs, and initiatives such as Ramadan charity tables were mentioned as sources of support for those in need.

Several participants shared personal experiences of receiving assistance. One participant reported significant support from Egyptians, particularly in problem-solving situations. Another mentioned receiving financial aid from employees at a cleaning company to facilitate their family's relocation

to Egypt. Additionally, strong social ties were observed in certain neighborhoods, such as Faisal, where some participants had built meaningful connections within the local community.

Social Interactions and Demographic Changes in Cairo

In certain areas of Cairo, particularly Faisal and Ard El-Lewa, (which are densely populated areas, primarily inhabited by middle- and working-class individuals. Both areas face economic challenges and rely heavily on informal economic activities. They also contain many unlicensed buildings and have experienced rapid urban expansion due to the high demand for affordable housing, making them a destination for those seeking low-cost accommodation, including some refugees and migrants)

the demographic landscape there has undergone noticeable changes due to the increasing presence of Sudanese refugees. In Faisal, for instance, a street has been officially labeled as "Sudanese Products Street" on GPS, reflecting the significant concentration of Sudanese businesses in the area. Many landlords now prioritize renting apartments and commercial spaces to Sudanese tenants at rates higher than those charged to Egyptian residents, contributing to rising rental costs also the sudanese will more often than not pay these costs .

This demographic shift has led to mixed reactions from the local Egyptian population. On one hand, some property owners and traders have benefited economically from the growing Sudanese presence, as Sudanese-owned shops specializing in traditional Sudanese goods have become a common feature on almost every street in Ard El-Lewa and Faisal. On the other hand, there is

increasing frustration among Egyptians, particularly due to escalating living costs and rental prices.

Beyond economic concerns, social attitudes toward Sudanese refugees vary. While some reactions are expressed humorously—such as remarks suggesting that "there are no Egyptians here anymore"—there is also a noticeable lack of acceptance and growing resentment toward the increasing Sudanese population. This frustration, in some cases, has escalated into sentiments that border on hostility, reflecting broader tensions in host-refugee dynamics within these urban areas.

Hostility

The opinions of participants in the focus group discussions and interviews regarding hostility toward Sudanese people varied significantly. However, the majority expressed a growing sense of hostility and exposure to hate speech, particularly following the recent large influx of Sudanese refugees into Egypt. One FGD participant noted that since the outbreak of the war, he has faced increasing harassment over the past year, stating: "Since the outbreak of the war, I have faced increasing harassment over the past year. Previously, before the war, I had good relationships with my neighbors and those around me, but now the situation has changed, and I constantly face insults and harassment." Similarly, another participant shared his experience, saying: "I heard an insult that will last me an entire year."

On the other hand, some participants believe that hostility toward Sudanese people stems from misconceptions, pointing out that certain media campaigns contribute to reinforcing and amplifying this discourse for media attention. However, refugee-led organization (RLO) leaders interviewed provided a different perspective. One of them stated: "We are the ones who shape how others perceive us. Imposing our customs and traditions, such as frequent visits of sudanese to each others houses , can create discomfort about our presence." They also highlighted growing frustration over cultural differences, such as the Sudanese use of bakhor (incense) and dukhan (traditional Sudanese cosmetic practices), as well as dissatisfaction with the failure to adhere to expected norms in handling properties, such as rented apartments. One RLO leader added: "The lack of services leads to frustration and annoyance, which results in negative perceptions of the Sudanese presence, ultimately affecting the values of hospitality."

While some participants pointed out that social relations have changed due to economic and societal pressures, one stated: "I respect that Egyptians have hosted me, and I used to love Egyptians, but the level of hostility between us has increased, and we have become against each other." This reflects an increasing tension between refugees and the host community.

Overall, hostility toward Sudanese people in Egypt does not stem from a single factor but rather a combination of social, economic, media, and cultural influences. Some Sudanese participants believe that rising hostility is driven by shifting social and economic conditions, while others emphasize the role of cultural habits and practices in shaping how the host community perceives Sudanese refugees and migrants.

Placemaking and Sense of Home for Refugees and Migrants in Cairo

While refugees in Egypt risk detention and face challenges in setting up businesses, residence and documentation issues, employment, health, and education, or establishing a CBO, many refugees are managing to overcome these hurdles to make lives for themselves. In this report, we define resilience as the capacity of individuals or communities to withstand, adapt to, and recover from adverse events or conditions (Cutter et al. 2008). As resilience is influenced by various factors, including individual characteristics, social support, and access to resources (Masten & Obradović 2008), the acceptance and tolerance of Egyptians have played an undeniable role in fostering the resilience of refugee communities and their navigation for solutions to overcome the challenges they encounter.

The process of creating a sense of place and belonging is an important constituent of refugee resilience, as it concerns the creation of gathering spaces that allow for support and a sense of belonging. Whether it is in the venue of a café or any place of gathering or access to social networks, such spaces and networks catalyze adaptation and integration into Egyptian society and make functioning in this new setting much easier. As Turton (2005, 278) explains, "The experience of displacement is not only about the loss of a place and the pain and bereavement this entails. It is also, and inevitably, about the struggle to make a place in the world." Hence, placemaking and having a sense of home are an integral part of refugee resilience as it helps them find meaning and a place in this world, promoting well-being, asserting one's identity, and strengthening social connections with their community, which collectively contribute to better integration.

The concept of home for refugees and migrants involves both an abstract perspective and a tangible reality, as explained by Fabos and Brun (2015), who identify three basic elements: "home" as the daily practices of homemaking; "home" as a repository of values, customs, memories, and feelings; and "HOME" as the broader political and historical contexts that shape these experiences. This is a complex concept that evokes multi-dimensional meanings and serves as a cognitive base for those who migrate, hence providing a point of reference for identity and self-conception (Boccagni 2021). In this context, home becomes a place of comfort, familiarity, and intimate social relationships (Botticello 2007), emphasizing the importance of place-making in the experiences of refugees.

Within the placemaking process and building resilience, community-based organizations (CBOs) and community schools have emerged as key players in addressing some of the basic needs of displaced communities, providing a sense of belonging, transferring culture and heritage to the host community, which improves integration opportunities, and reducing some of the displaced communities' vulnerabilities, along with their role in supporting integration through joint activities and services. Such spaces help in recreating refugees and migrants' original homelands through cultural expressions like rituals, events, food, and various goods (Werbner 2018, quoted in Kim, and Smets 2020), where these spaces are adorned with photos and decorations related to home (Buitelaar and Stock 2010), making the spatial and temporal spaces more familiar. They serve as important communal spaces to nurture resilience through the community's access to social networks and sources of information relevant to coping with the Egyptian context, education, healthcare, shelter, and livelihood support, and promote marginalized group rights. Research has

indeed established that strategies devised by CBOs, initiated by refugees themselves, work in strengthening the resilience of communities at large and reducing vulnerability to various socio-economic shocks (El-Sholkamy 2016; Izumi & Shaw 2012).

Reflections on Resilience, Placemaking, Identity, and Return for Syrians

In the Syrian focus group discussions, while discussing strategies to overcome the challenges they encounter and their resilience, participants highlighted the main areas and resilience sources that help them build their lives in Cairo. These areas include legal, social, and psychological aspects, which intersect in various ways. In terms of navigating the legal challenges, community members resorted to any alternatives to legalize their status. When faced with challenges to get residence permits due to the legal changes and increase in residence permit fees, many Syrians are resorting to UNHCR to get a residence permit appointment, which some consider not an ideal alternative as it takes two years to apply for your residence permit, which means you live in constant fear.

The residence permit changes had an impact on the enrollment of international students, and with the current changes in treatment and fees of Syrian students, many participants highlighted the challenges with their children accessing education and the increase in the number of school dropouts. Informants mentioned that they resort to registering their children at Syrian community schools; this was the case before while simultaneously registering them with Egyptian public schools to study the Egyptian curriculum; however, these schools are not formally recognized, meaning that students have no records at the International Student Affairs, which means that they lack access to private schools too. "We resorted to self-study and online education and universities." One participant mentioned how Syrians tried to cope with the lack of access to education, while another reported, "I continue my education online to enhance my skills."

Participants also highlighted rent as a significant issue, noting the complications arising from landlords' refusal to notarize rent leases, a requirement for applying for residence permits. They also expressed frustration over unfair increases in rental costs. To cope, some have been forced to relocate from more expensive neighborhoods to less desirable areas that "weren't safe nor suitable for us, but we need to adapt." While rent leases suggest a maximum increase of 10%, landlords often raise rent arbitrarily, especially in the past two years.

Syrians have played a crucial role in transforming empty and lifeless areas into vibrant hubs. Participants noted that a key factor in their resilience is the decision to settle in newly established neighborhoods and launch businesses rather than remaining in overcrowded regions. This strategy not only facilitated their acceptance in these communities but also contributed to demographic diversification, making these areas more attractive and more lively. Another factor in their resilience is the Syrian community's support in their day-to-day lives. By creating a sense of familiarity bringing Syrian products and establishing businesses, medical and educational centers, along with CBOs, especially for those newcomers. These establishments also help in integration, as many of them offer their services to Egyptians and contribute to Egypt's economy and markets, "We significantly contributed to the Egyptian labor market, whether with the expertise and quality of work we brought, capital for investments, the variety of products, and even made some changes in the textile market and others," a Syrian community leader[11] noted. Syrian participants mention Syrian businessmen as a source of support, as many assist needy families with monthly support. Contributors also highlighted how sharing resources and information to navigate challenges

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[11] Syrian community leader, interview by Alaa Saleh, Cairo, 2025.

together was essential for them to start their lives in Cairo. Networking among Syrians has been vital for securing jobs and housing, as individuals rely on each other's experiences and advice. A community leader highlighted the importance of social media for the Syrian community for awareness-raising and information sharing: "We have a substantial role as RLOs and community leaders to clarify certain rumors or accurately present legal changes, as we have the proper channels to get to these clarifications and share them with the community and keep it informed. However, there is a lack of proper official channels regarding these changes and what they entail for refugees, which adds more work to our role."

While Syrian organizations offering legal assistance, educational, and psychosocial support are crucial, many noted that the demand often exceeds the available resources. Participants who work at RLOs and CBOs also shared their approach to leverage the connections they created with INGOs and other entities to advocate for their community and refer cases to these organizations. However, some mentioned how the Syrian community needs to be more involved in discussions related to them: "I find that being informed is very important, which is lacking for the Syrian community as many are not interested in getting involved in any discussions." Many participants highlighted the role of RLOs-CBOs and community centers in their daily lives, as Syrian organizations provide job training and educational opportunities, linking the community with services that enhance the community's well-being. Organizations like DAMAS, Syria Al-Ghad, FARD, Watan, and others provide Syrians with opportunities and projects that support their needs. They provide youth training and skill development. "My sister received a grant from Syria Al Ghad that supported her

project for four months," a participant exclaimed, while another agreed that Syrian NGOs have been "the most consistent source of support for me."

Another means of resilience that participants shared is concerning coping with a new job market that Egypt offers and adapting for those who were business owners to restart again as employees while others take the approach of working two jobs or more or having many family members working to address their needs, especially of women who were not accustomed to work in Syria. "My husband works two jobs, putting in more than 12 hours a day, but we barely cover our basic expenses. We struggle to enroll our children in school, and my youngest even had to join the labor market at an early age, which is dangerous—but we need to rely on ourselves," a participant explained. "My sons are the ones supporting us, and my youngest is now a part of the labor market," another mentioned.

On gender roles and involvement in workspaces, female participants generally indicated and shared their experiences. One of the community leaders talked about women's roles within the Syrian community and their resilience while sharing her experience and others in terms of getting involved in the Egyptian labor market. "In Syria, I worked as a luxury, not as a job that I was forced to work or needed, but in Egypt it became a need [for many women]. The Egyptian labor market is challenging, and many Syrian women are not used to working or confronting society, as our customs and traditions make the issue very problematic." Navigating the proposed challenges at the Egyptian labor market while defying social norms and relying on oneself for education and career development showed in another community leader's interview, "I resorted to self-learning

or looking for scholarships .. I depend on myself in terms of education; I am self-sufficient educationally. [having no access to work permits] I turned to the private sector and Syrian institutions concerned with refugee services. I worked with them for about five years. I worked so hard that I could save to pay for my residence permit and help my family, although they were not happy about this." Women's healthcare and prenatal care emerged as a key issue during one of the focus group discussions, as some female participants mentioned the challenges they face in accessing healthcare services and their means of resilience. Most of them recommend doctors to other Syrian women for free prenatal care and delivery services to support one another. Syrian social networks in Egypt have been "successful in many ways." This networking embodied itself after one of the focus group discussions where a participant shared with another pregnant participant who cannot afford birth expenses the numbers of recommended Syrian doctors who would help with that for a reduced fee or for free. Most of these doctors are related to registered Syrian NGO-associated clinics or have managed to obtain a special license to practice medicine in Egypt, which is very exceptional to have and work with Egyptian clinics, hospitals, and facilities.

The experiences of Syrian refugees in Egypt reveal a complex interplay between maintaining cultural identity and adapting to a new environment. Focus group discussions' participants highlighted the importance of traditional practices, such as preparing traditional food and utilizing community schools, as vital avenues for cultural preservation. As one participant remarked, "Since arriving, we've focused on our traditional food and products, importing what we need. Our cultural practices are now well-established here, especially in certain neighborhoods and cities within Cairo." Informants also discussed the significant role of community schools in fostering

connections, and teachers have played an important role in helping Syrians maintain a sense of belonging. Furthermore, the welcoming attitude and the Syrian culture of Egyptians have been crucial in supporting their integration, as expressed by participants. Additionally, the shared sense of empathy from Egyptians played a crucial role in Syrians' integration and placemaking, as they found the process of making a home, despite challenges, to be quite smooth. The community member expressed, "I saw myself as a person loved by them," highlighting the respectful and kind treatment they received from Egyptians. This positive reception underscores the importance of compassion in fostering connections between refugees and the host community, contributing significantly to the overall sense of belonging and acceptance in a new environment.

Others noted that their children integrate with Egyptians faster, while adults primarily rely on other means of integration, as noted by a participant: "Syrians have begun to build businesses that attract Egyptians, fostering mutual respect and a sense of integration." However, challenges persist, including frustrations related to Syrian-Palestininans and the pressure to downplay their Syrian identity, in addition to the complexities and challenges they face regarding their legal situation. As one participant reflected, "It's frustrating that my dual citizenship isn't recognized, and I often feel pressured not to mention my Syrian or Palestinian identity. Since coming to Egypt, it has become more complex for me to navigate identity-related thoughts and practices, mainly due to documentation issues." Overall, these narratives underscore the process of the Syrian community in navigating their identity while fostering connections in their new home. On another note, an NGO leader explained the practices and activities they implement to preserve culture and identity, especially to ease the reintegration of Syrian refugees when they return home. These practices and

activities have been present for years at the NGO and through its schools to ensure that a sense of familiarity, identity, and belonging is maintained for children and adults. These activities have also included Egyptians to ensure an understanding of the Syrian culture and plight, as the NGO leader stated, which creates a stronger sense of familiarity between the two communities.

On the topic of return, participants expressed that there would be no immediate return to Syria but rather a planned one, especially for families with children. Homes were destroyed in Syria, and people have built a life in Egypt; rebuilding a new life would be extremely difficult. "Like many Syrians, we are still uncertain about an immediate return. Those who are struggling economically and have properties in Syria are returning. Others, like my family, are waiting for the school year to end and monitoring the situation back home regarding politics, stability, and safety before considering a return." Other respondents echoed this sentiment, while adding that the country and its services are in poor condition, with significant issues in education, health, electricity, and other sectors. Therefore, many Syrians will not return until these problems are resolved.

Contributors also categorized Syrians in Egypt regarding their potential return as follows: those who fled due to military conscription are returning immediately, as it is no longer obligatory, and their salaries in Egypt are low with harsh working conditions. Many of their families remain in Syria. Another group consists of families that have built lives in Egypt and are waiting for the school year to end. They face challenges such as housing shortages back home, unaffordable rent, joblessness, and difficulties in paying fines due to delays in residence permits and plane tickets. Lastly, there are investors assessing the situation in Syria to decide whether to expand their established businesses in Egypt or move them to Syria.

Reflections on Resilience, Placemaking, Identity, and Return for Sudanese

Refugees and asylum seekers have adopted multiple resilience strategies. Support from organizations, including UNHCR's partner organizations such as Caritas, Care and WFP as well as community organizations and Sudanese community initiatives such as Isnad, Saints Church and Tafaoul was one of the main pillars for their resilience (Foucs Group Disscution 1 & 2). Community initiatives have played a key role in raising awareness on adapting to Egyptian laws and the provision of in-kind assistance, distribution of food and winter baskets as well as clothing. Furthermore, they provide access to education and have exempted students from school fees. As for employment, in addition to providing employment opportunities, refugee community initiatives also provide diplomas, courses, life-skills and skills development workshops, and craft initiatives such as making leather bags (FGD 1&2). Even in the absence of financial support from donors, community initiatives searched for other mechanisms and collected aid from charitable organizations (FGD 1). As for individual resilience strategies, refugees seek employment through complementary pathways through for example working in refugee initiatives, factories and crafts.

One of the main issues facing refugees was access to education, especially during the closure of community schools. To overcome this challenge, some operated online; however, this was not accessible to everyone. In other instances, private education was the only available option. Others saw that there were no solutions, thus, they resorted to homeschooling, and some individuals managed to enroll their children. Furthermore, refugees used other resilience strategies such as enrolling their children in Al-Azhar school As the participants mentioned, they find more

admission opportunities for their children in it compared to public schools under the Ministry of Education, and its fees are lower than those of private schools.

However, when these schools were located far away, they negotiated with them the possibility of homeschooling and only sending their children to attend the exams. This strategy was also used in other schools as well.

However, refugees are not only affected by their refugee status but also by the habitus and environment that surrounds them and the dire economic situation in Egypt affects them on a daily basis as well. While some were not able to bear the severity of the crisis and fled back to Sudan, others attempted to find resilience strategies. They adapted to the changes by lowering their standard of living and cutting expenses. Instead of renting furnished apartments, they now rent empty ones. Instead of seeking treatment in private hospitals, they go to charitable clinics. And instead of enrolling their children in private schools, they have turned to community schools. Some reduced the number of daily meals, prioritizing quantity over quality just to fill their stomachs and relied on meals provided for charity. As stated, food and drink became secondary concerns. There has also been support from the Egyptian community allowing them to navigate through as one of the participants mentioned that he received financial assistance from employees at the cleaning company he works in to bring his family to Egypt.

The protection of cultural identity is another resilience strategy that Sudanese communities use while integrating with the host community. In fact, preserving one's culture while adapting to new environments is another manifestation of resilience. Sudanese participants in the Foucs Group

Disscutionwere proud of their traditions and culture as well as of teaching Egyptians these new traditions. This could be as simple as one's dialect, as quoted

"Sudanese people speak in their dialect, and Egyptians speak theirs, I understand theirs and they should understand mine." Foucs Group Disscution1

Such a statement resembles Sudanese interest in learning about Egyptian culture but at the same time they are expecting the same. Thus, while the Sudanese are curious about Egyptian culture they are also proud of their own and are keen not to erase it but rather preserve and spread it. As stated, Sudanese culture has influenced Egyptian society in various ways, such as the practice of "turkin" (a Sudanese food) and the incorporation of Sudanese phrases like "Ya Zol" into Egyptian slang.

Sudanese celebrations, traditional clothing, and community gatherings play a role in maintaining cultural identity. However, Sudanese participants believed in the similarity rather than the contradictions between both cultures and the possibility of their integration, as stated:

"In terms of traditions, customs, and celebrations, there aren't major differences. Sudanese people often compare themselves to Upper Egyptians, as both communities have strong village bonds and social cohesion."

"....Sudanese and Egyptian henna traditions have blended naturally, showing an organic cultural fusion…"

Another important aspect for resilience is living close to one other to have a sense of security and belonging. Furthermore, participants highlighted that this was the same case for Egyptians living in Sudan.

The Role of Sudanese RLOs in Supporting Sudanese Refugees

Sudanese refugee-led organizations have played a crucial role in providing immediate and direct support to migrants and refugees, often responding swiftly without the bureaucratic constraints of larger organizations. Unlike international aid agencies, these organizations prioritize urgent needs, such as sheltering families found on the streets without requiring lengthy approvals. As a **Sudanese RLO leader (1)[12]** highlighted:

> "Reaching us is very easy. Since the outbreak of the Sudan war, we have closely monitored the situation from the earliest stages of overcrowding. We have provided essential supplies, including clothing and blankets, particularly for children and women. Additionally, we have conducted awareness workshops on coping with winter conditions in Cairo, offered medical assistance for chronic illnesses, and organized legal support workshops, especially concerning UNHCR regulations."

These organizations also have essential efforts toward promoting integration with the host community through hiring Egyptian teachers, as the same leader highlighted the impotence of education's role in fostering cultural exchange and social cohesion,"There are ongoing initiatives

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[12] Sudanese RLO Leader 1, interview by Reem Hamid, Cairo, 2025.

to promote integration. In our community school, which operates under the community association, Egyptian teachers are actively involved to encourage cultural acceptance and facilitate knowledge exchange. Additionally, training workshops are provided to equip Sudanese refugees with the necessary skills to integrate effectively into society." Beyond emergency relief, Sudanese community initiatives have also played a pivotal role in offering broader support. Another Sudanese **RLO leader 2)**[13] emphasized the significance of these initiatives in responding to the crisis:

> "After the war, these initiatives became essential in assisting affected communities—handling the preparation of the deceased, coordinating hospital care, and providing psychological support to those fleeing conflict. However, financial resources remain limited, and there is an ongoing effort to strengthen financial sustainability. These initiatives serve as a bridge between refugee communities and organizations collaborating with UNHCR. We are currently working to unify all initiatives under one umbrella to enhance refugee support efforts. In addition to basic aid, we focus on utilizing arts and drama as a means of psychological support, while also distributing food assistance in partnership with the Egyptian Union for Refugee Assistance and providing winter relief. Furthermore, we offer legal support in collaboration with the Egyptian Foundation for Refugee Support, the legal partner of UNHCR."

Looking ahead, initiatives are seeking to enhance their impact through collaborative cultural projects. As **Sudanse RLO (2** noted:

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[13] Sudanese RLO Leader 2, interview by Reem Hamid, Cairo, 2025.

"Currently, we are in the process of implementing a joint initiative with the Egyptian Union for Refugee Support. This project will feature an Egyptian-Sudanese musical band, which will conduct cultural exchange programs across the country."

In summary, Sudanese community initiatives and associations continue to fill critical gaps in refugee assistance, providing immediate relief, legal and psychological support, and fostering integration through education and cultural initiatives. However, sustainable funding remains a key challenge that requires further attention to ensure the continuity and expansion of their efforts.

The Possibility of Building a Home in Cairo: Diverse Perspectives from Participants

Cairo could be a place to settle if the discriminatory view toward Sudanese people disappears, some said in discussions. For others, Cairo is just a stepping stone to continue their education, as the lack of job opportunities makes it unsuitable for long-term settlement.

Economic and educational challenges pose obstacles to building a sustainable home; the high cost of living, bullying, and the financial targeting of Sudanese students make it difficult to stay. Some universities are even said to deliberately fail students to force them to pay for retakes in dollars.

Safety is a key factor in decisions to stay, as some participants stated they would settle anywhere that offers them a sense of security. Residency and work laws make life in Cairo unstable for many, as a tourist residency does not allow employment, and obtaining a work permit is extremely difficult.

Some believe that the increasing hostility affects the possibility of building a home in Cairo, making their stay temporary due to the educational and living challenges refugees face.

These perspectives reflect a cautious outlook on the possibility of building a home in Cairo, as it depends on improvements in legal, educational, and economic conditions, along with changes in societal attitudes toward Sudanese people.

Sudanese RLO Leaders' Perspectives on the Future of Refugees in Cairo

Sudanese RLO Leader (1) stated that : There is no clear vision yet, as it depends on understanding the new law and how it will be implemented. If the situation in Sudan does not improve, refugees will be forced to integrate into Egypt.

Regarding rights, the future of these rights cannot be determined due to the lack of executive regulations for refugee law. One community leader pointed out that there are very successful experiences that could be replicated in Cairo, such as the German, British, and French models, where refugees enjoy full rights. **AY** Sudanese (RLO Leader, Interview by Reem Hamid, Cairo, 2025.)

The discussion reflects uncertainty about the future of refugees in Cairo, as it largely depends on legal and political developments.

Reflections on maintaining Cultural Identity while Adapting to a New Environment for Sudanese community

Participants in the focus group discussions and interviews highlighted various ways in which they actively preserve their Sudanese identity. Language plays a crucial role, as many individuals deliberately use the Sudanese dialect within their households and communities, particularly emphasizing its transmission to children as a means of maintaining linguistic and cultural continuity. Similarly, the presence of Sudanese gatherings in specific areas, such as Faisal, has reinforced social cohesion and facilitated the visibility of Sudanese cultural traditions in everyday life. Engagement in cultural and social activities, including community events, bazaars, and training in traditional Sudanese handicrafts, serves as a significant mechanism for preserving their cultural heritage. Additionally, the continued use of Sudanese traditional dress, such as the *tobe*, alongside the preparation and consumption of Sudanese dishes as part of daily routines, reflects a strong commitment to maintaining cultural identity through material and culinary practices.

Recommendations

In light of the desk research, focus group discussions, interviews, findings, and the research roundtable discussion, it is recommended that the host government, organizations, academia, Egyptians, and refugees be involved in:

- Combating social media platforms that instigate hate speech towards migrants and refugees as it harms both refugees and the host community. Certain legal regulations should be in place to ensure that hate speech is minimized.

- Supporting existing RLOs and CBOs working with refugees, migrants, and Egyptians by enhancing their capacity to provide essential services, including legal aid, health care, and educational support. Funding these organizations is pivotal for addressing refugee needs.

- Ensuring accurate data collection and presentation in numbers, demographics, etc. about refugees and migrants.

- Implementing joint programs that assist in integration and raising awareness of the importance of coexistence between refugee communities and the host community.

- Conducting campaigns to raise awareness of the challenges faced by refugees and migrants, highlighting their contributions to society and the economy to counteract negative stereotypes.

- Encouraging further and updated research on the socio-economic status of refugees and migrants in Cairo to inform policy decisions and improve service delivery tailored to their needs. Additionally, presenting such research not only within academic circles but also to the public to increase awareness.

- Establishing official information channels to inform of changes related to policies, laws, and any news related to refugees and migrants in Egypt. These should be accurate sources of information. There should be reduction in misinformation and rumors and they should advocate for clearer communication from the government regarding policies affecting refugees, including residence permits and legal rights.

- Supporting community schools in terms of registration and funding, as they play an essential role in providing education.

- Ensuring fair fund distribution to assist the needs of refugees and host community members alike.

- Ensuring effective cooperation between the Egyptian Government and UNHCR on the one hand, as well as UNHCR and partner organizations on the other hand.

- Ensuring the effective transition from one organization to another includes ensuring that recipients of any support, including medical aid, are provided with the necessary support, i.e. medicine, until the transition phase is finalized.

- Exploring mechanisms for adopting humanitarian-development initiatives that develop the Egyptian economy or institutions while providing refugees with employment opportunities and access to services.

- Stressing the need for proactive outreach from civil society organizations to communities.

- Prioritizing in research and discussions the focus on women and vulnerable groups to address the specific challenges faced by women, individuals with disabilities, and unaccompanied minors.

- Including UNHCR, its partners, and other humanitarian organizations in the process of designing any services, laws, etc. regarding refugees and migrants.

- Addressing mental health crises among refugees, particularly for those impacted by deportation, through targeted support programs.

- Monitoring legal changes and keeping abreast of changes in the legal framework and advocating for refugee rights in collaboration with local and international organizations.

- Changing the narrative by encouraging refugees to share their stories, fostering understanding and empathy within the host community. Also, organizing dialogue sessions between refugees and local communities to address mutual concerns and build trust.

- Fostering collaboration among local NGOs, CBOs, and international organizations to strengthen support networks for refugees.

- Clarifying and communicating the evolving role of UNHCR and other organizations in supporting refugees, especially as responsibilities shift.

Conclusion

The intricate dynamics of the resilience, hospitality, and hostility of Syrian and Sudanese refugees in Cairo demonstrate a multifaceted reality heavily shaped by historical, political, social, and economic factors. This report provides a concise snapshot of the numerous challenges that these communities face and discloses a complicated interaction between their daily lives and the broader socio-political context in Egypt. The main conclusions are that while both communities show considerable resilience, their ability to cope is severely tested in a constantly changing context that is increasingly unwelcoming, which highlights the dual nature of hospitality in Egypt. While historical and cultural affinities initially fostered a welcoming environment for refugees, contemporary economic pressures and media narratives have increasingly framed them as burdens rather than assets. This shift not only affects the refugees' lived experiences but also the broader societal perceptions of migration and asylum. Additionally, the constant changes in policies also complicate their legal status, creating a climate of uncertainty and fear, and limited access to basic services exacerbates their vulnerable situation.

Cairo, an ever-changing metropolis, serves as a significant context for this analysis, serving as the stage in which intricate tensions between hostility and hospitality are manifested. The city, with its longstanding history of significant migration and urban expansion, exemplifies both adaptability and resilience by historically embracing a variety of populations. This vibrant

interplay has facilitated the establishment of a multifaceted cultural tapestry, which in turn fosters the development of novel venues that contribute to the city's distinctive identity. In this report, the experiences of the Syrian and Sudanese communities illustrate not only a level of understanding of their social interactions with Egyptians, whether in positive or negative ways, but also their contributions and placemaking practices along with their resilience but also that of Cairo in absorbing new identities. This report points to the need to cultivate an inclusive narrative and dialogue by involved stakeholders to ensure that it recognizes refugees' and migrants' challenges and contributions while addressing the fears and concerns of the host community.

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Annex(1): Legal framework:

   I.   **Documentation:**

International Instruments:
- Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees 1951.
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD).
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).
- International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (CMW).

- Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.
- Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea, and Air, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Organized Crime.

Bilateral Laws:

- Agreement on the Freedom of Movement, Residence, Work, and Property between the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt and the Government of the Republic of Sudan (Four Freedoms Agreement -2004).
- Memorandum of Understanding between the Egyptian Government and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Domestic Laws:
- Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt 2014 (amended in 2019).
- Law No. 164 of the year 2024 concerning issuance of the Asylum Law.
- Law No. 89 of the year 1960 concerning Entry and Residence of Aliens in the Territories of the United Arab Republic and their Departure therefrom.
- Law No. 173 of 2018 amending some provisions of Law No. 89 of 1960 concerning the entry and exit expatriates and their residence and Law No. 26 of 1975 concerning Egyptian nationality.
- Ministry of Interior Decree No. 31 of the year 1960.
- Ministry of Interior Decree No. 7067 of the year 1996 (special registration procedures for nationals from Israel, Somalia, Iraq, Sudan, Yemen, Palestine, Lebanon, Zaire, Chad, Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, Burundi, Eritrea, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Philippines, Bangladesh, India, Honduras, Belize, Barbados, Trinidad & Tobago, Iran, Bosnia, the Islamic countries gained independency from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia).
- Ministry of Interior Decree No. 180 of 1964, enforcing certain provisions of Law No. 89 of 1960, in Respect of Admittance and Residence of Foreigners in the Territories of the United Arab Republic and Exit therefrom (includes special fee exemption for Palestinian refugees).
- Ministry of Interior Decree No. 344 of the year 2017.
- Ministry of Interior Decree No. 8180 of the year 1996, Reorganizing Foreigners' Residence Inside the Arab Republic of Egypt.
- Ministry of Interior Decree No. 179 of the year 1964, in Respect of Travel Documents Which Are Issued to Certain Categories of Foreigners (Transit Cards).

- Ministry of Interior Decree No. 181 of the year 1964, on Travel Documents for Palestinian Refugees.
- Egyptian Civil Code.
- Law No. 143 of the year 1994, on Civil Status.
- Law No. 12 of the year 1996 promulgating the Child Law, as amended by Law No. 126 of the year 2008.
- Executive Regulation for the Law of the Child No. 12 of the year 1996, issued by Prime Minister Decree No. 2075 of the year 2010.
- Law No. 68 of the Year 1947, regarding documentation.
- Executive Regulation promulgated by Royal Order year 1948, on the Documentation Law No. 68 of the year 1947.
- Minister of Justice Decree No. 9200 of the year 2015, amending the Executive Regulation of Documentation Law No. 68 year 1947.
- Law No. 25 of the year 1929 regarding Personal Status matters.
- Law No. 1 of the year 2000, Regulating the Litigation Procedures in Personal Status Matters.
- Minister of Justice Decree on the Marriage Officiant Regulation promulgated in 1955.
- Decree of the Ministry of Interior No.1888 of the year 2023 concerning the entry and residence of Foreigners to the Arab Republic of Egypt and their exit. [14]
- Decree of the Prime Minister of Egypt No. 3326 of the year 2023 slightly amended by decree No. 4676 of the year 2023 and two grace period extensions based on Decree No. 4321 of the year 2023 and Decree No. 1050 of the year 2024.[15][16][17]
- Minister of Interior Decree No. 1777 of the year 2023 concerning the executive regulation Prime Minister Decree No. 3326 of the year 2023. [18]
- Minister of Interior Decree No. 1105 of the year 2023 was issued amending some provisions of Ministerial Resolution No. 31 of 1960 regarding visas.[19]

II. Education:
International Instruments:
- Convention relating to the Status of Refugees 1951.
- ICESCR.

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[14] https://www.almasdar.com/132456

[15] https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/r/natlex/fe/details?p3_isn=115520

[16] الجريدة الرسمية تنشر قرار بتعديل طفيف لدخول الأجانب وإقامتهم في مصر | الصفقة

[17] الجريدة الرسمية تنشر قرارًا جديدًا لرئيس مجلس الوزراء | المصري اليوم

[18] Law no. 1777 of the year 2023

[19] https://www.elbalad.news/5813777

- CRC.
- CEDAW.
- ICERD.
- CRP.
- CMW.
- ILO Convention concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment (C138)9 Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Form of Child Labour (C182).
- Convention against Discrimination in Education.

Regional Instruments:
- African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (African Charter).
- African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC).
- African Youth Charter (AYC).
- Charter on the Rights of the Arab Child (CRAC).

Domestic Laws:

- Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt (2014) (amended in 2019).
- Law No. 12 of 1996 Promulgating the Child Law (Child Law) .
- Law No. 139 of 1981 Promulgating Education Law (Education Law).
- Presidential Decree Promulgated by Law No. 49 of 1972 Concerning the Universities' Organization.
- Ministry of Education Decree No. 284 of 2014 concerning the Rules of Incoming Students to Egyptian Universities, Scholarships for Incoming Students, and Egyptian Students Studying in Egyptian Schools Abroad.
- Ministry of Education Decree No. 420 of 2014 concerning Private Education.
- Signed Administrative Order on Treating Syrian and Yemini Students as Egyptian for the Year 2018/2019.

III. **Employment:**

International Instruments:
- The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.
- ICESCR.
- ICCPR.

- ICERD.
- CEDAW.
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).
- CMW.
- CRC.
- Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Regional Instruments:
- African Charter on Human and People's Rights.
- AYC.
- ACRWC.

Bilateral Agreements:
- Agreement on the Freedom of Movement, Residence, Work, and Property between the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt and the Government of the Republic of Sudan (Four Freedoms Agreement).

Domestic laws:
- Egyptian Constitution 2014 (amended in 2019).
- Labor Code (Law No. 12 of 2003).
- Decree of the Ministry of Manpower and Migration No. 305 of the Year 2015 on the Rules and Implementing Measures Surrounding Work Permits for Foreigners.
- Ministry of Manpower and Migration Decree No. 485 of 2010 concerning Foreigners Work Licensing Rules and Executive Procedures.
- Law No.159 of the year 1981 on Joint Stock Companies, Partnerships Limited by Shares & Limited Liability Companies.
- Investor's Guide - Obtaining a Residence for Non-Egyptians.
- Investment Law No. 72 of 2017.
- Executive Regulation to the Investment Law.
- Trade Union Law No 213 of the year 2017.
- Penal Code Law No. 59 of the year 1937.
- No. 160/2019,
- Law No. 87 of 2024 to Regulate the Granting of Public Facilities' Commitment to Establish, Manage, Operate and Develop Health Facilities. [20]

IV.   Healthcare:

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[20] Law no. 87 of the year 2023

International instruments:
- Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees 1951.
- ICCPR.
- ICESCR.
- CEDAW.
- ICERD.
- Convention Against Torture (CAT).
- CRC.
- CRPD.
- CMW.
- ILO Convention 118 concerning Equality of Treatment of Nationals and Non Nationals in Social Security, 1962.

Regional Instruments:
- African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.
- ACRWC.
- AYC
- Charter on the Rights of the Arab Child (applicable only to Arab Children)

Domestic Laws:
- Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt 2014 (amended in 2019).
- Law Number 2 of the year 2018 on Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme Executive Regulation for Law No. 2 of 2018, issued by Prime Minister Decree Number 909 of the year 2018.
- Law Number 79 of the year 1975 promulgating the Social Insurance Law.
- Law Number 12 of the year 1996 promulgating the Child Law, as amended by Law Number 126 of the year 2008.
- Executive Regulation for the Law of the Child Number 12 of the year 1996, issued by Prime Minister Decree Number 2075 of the year 2010.
- Law Number 82 of the year 2016 issuing the Law on Combating Illegal Migration and Smuggling of Migrants.
- Law Number 64 of the year 2010 regarding Combating Human Trafficking.
- Law Number 23 of the year 2012, regarding Health Insurance System for Unsupported Women.
- Law No. 127 of 2014, regarding regulation Health Insurance System for Farmers and Agrarian Workers.

- Law No. 86 of 2012, regarding Health Insurance System for Pre-school Children161
  Law Number 99 of the year 1992, regarding the Health Insurance System for Students
- Ministry of Health and Population Decree Number 239 of the year 1997, promulgating the Basic Regulations for Hospitals and Medical Units belonging to Local Administrative Units.
- Ministerial Decree Number 674 of the year 2010, promulgating the Basic Regulations for Hospitals and Primary Health Care Centers and Family Health of the Local Administration Units (currently suspended).
- Ministry of Health and Population Decree Number 334 of the year 2011.
- Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Health Arab Republic of Egypt and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on Enhancing Access of Persons of Concern to UNHCR to Public Primary Health Care and Referral Curative Care Services (applicable to refugees, asylum-seekers).
- Ministry of Health Decree No. 601 (2012)
- Law No. 87 of 2024 to Regulate the Granting of Public Facilities' Commitment to Establish, Manage, Operate and Develop Health Facilities.[21]

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[21] Law no. 87 of the year 2023