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POLSKI INSTYTUT SPRAW MIĘDZYNARODOWYCH
THE POLISH INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

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NO. 14 (106), DECEMBER 2021 © PISM

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The Impact of EU Development Assistance on Egypt's Migration Policy

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The EU treats Egypt as an important partner in countering irregular migration. Development aid is one instrument used. However, funds allocated to addressing the root causes of migration are not sufficient to effect changes in Egyptian migration policy. The observed decline of migration to the EU is, however, not a result of the aid given to Egypt but of tightened control over its borders for its own purposes. Measures to strengthen the Egyptian economy and protect the rights of migrants are necessary, but more important are the political stabilisation of the region and increasing development assistance for Horn of Africa countries.

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Egypt and International Migration

Egypt plays three key roles in international migration, one as country of origin of migrants, a second as a destination, and a third as a transit state.

Egypt plays three key roles in international migration, one as country of origin of migrants, a second as a destination, and a third as a transit state. Egypt's overpopulation and low standard of living means it is a source of many emigrants. The country has more than 100 million people and 73% of them live below the poverty line, with 32.5% in extreme poverty. However, according to official data the unemployment rate is only 8%¹;

while hidden unemployment exists, it is difficult to estimate. The predominant monthly salary is around \$580.² These statistics, though, do not include the 60% of the professionally active population that works in the grey market, where salaries are much lower. The economic structure of the country hampers the creation of more and higher-quality jobs. Egypt has a highly negative foreign trade balance (\$46 billion in 2019), because it mainly exports natural resources and low-processed goods and imports highly processed goods and foodstuffs.³ Moreover, the country has a bad reputation among investors because of corruption and widespread non-compliance with contracts by Egyptians, among other factors. In the 2020 Doing Business ranking, Egypt was 114th out of 190 surveyed countries.⁴

All this is why the most efficient way for the country to reduce the scale of its socio-economic difficulties is emigration. Egyptian citizens actually are guaranteed it as a right in the constitution. Moreover, according to the Emigration and Sponsoring Egyptians Abroad Law no. 111 of 1983 the main goals of Egyptian migration policy are encouraging emigration as a factor contributing to the sustainability of the labour market, countering irregular migration, maximising the economic benefits of migration, guaranteeing prosperity for emigrants in their countries of residence, and meeting the demand for labour in countries that host Egyptian citizens. According to the law's Article 16, public sector employees who decide to emigrate have a right to unpaid leave for up to two years. If by the end of this period they decide to return to the country, their employer is obliged to accept them back in the same or similar position they held before leaving.

The main goals of Egyptian migration policy are encouraging emigration as a factor contributing to the sustainability of the labour market, countering irregular migration, maximising the economic benefits of migration, guaranteeing prosperity for emigrants in their countries of residence, and meeting the demand for labour in countries that host Egyptian citizens.

Emigration benefits the Egyptian economy as well, due to remittances from Egyptians living abroad. In 2020, total remittances were \$29.6 billion⁵, which is about 8% of the country's GDP. The main direction of Egyptian migration is the Persian Gulf countries (home to about 6 million Egyptian emigrants), mainly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and to a lesser extent the U.S. and the EU (more than 2 million across both). Egyptian migration was impacted by the Arab Spring and events that followed. Before 2011, Libya was a common direction of economic emigration. As a rich and sparsely populated country, it constantly needed an influx of foreign labour. It is estimated that the number of Egyptians working there was between 330,000 and 1.5 million.⁶ The outbreak of

¹ The Central Agency for public mobilisation and statistics (of Egypt), www.capmas.gov.eg/.

² For data about average salaries in various countries, including Egypt, in 2021, see: "Egypt, Average Salary Survey 2021," www.averagesalariesurvey.com/egypt.

³ For data about the Egyptian trade exchange in 2019, see The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC), <https://oec.world/en/profile/country/egy/>.

⁴ "2020 Doing Business—Egypt", The World Bank, www.doingbusiness.org/en/data/exploreconomies/egypt.

⁵ H. Mounir, "Egypt sees remittances grow to \$29.6 bn in 2020: CBE," *Daily News Egypt*, 16 March 2021, <https://dailynewsegypt.com>.

⁶ "Egyptian Migration to Libya," Report, IOM, 2012, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/99CDE2C6E952C93AC125785D0040635C-Full_Report.pdf.

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the Libyan civil war forced them to return home. Then, after Mohamed Morsi became president in 2012, some in the Coptic minority, fearing reprisals, emigrated to the U.S., Canada, and the EU. In turn, after Morsi's overthrow in 2013, Muslim Brotherhood members went into exile in Turkey and Qatar. Since at least 2014, there has been growing interest among Egyptians in migrating to the EU. In 2014-2019, the number of visa applications to Schengen countries increased from 157,000 to 203,000 per year. In the majority of cases, visas are issued. The countries consistently receiving applications from Egyptians are France (50,000-64,000 applications a year), Germany (27,000-40,000), Italy (15,000-22,000), Spain (11,000-15,000), and Holland (10,000-13,000).⁷

Egypt is a migration destination for African and Middle Eastern citizens fleeing civil war, persecution, crime, and poverty. The last estimate of the number of undocumented migrants was made in 2012 and amounted to between 500,000 and 4 million. The dominant group among them are the citizens of Sudan and South Sudan.

In turn, Egypt is a migration destination for African and Middle Eastern citizens fleeing civil war, persecution, crime, and poverty. According to UNHCR data, there are about 258,000 refugees and 66,000 asylum seekers in Egypt. The last estimate of the number of undocumented migrants was made in 2012 and amounted to between 500,000 and 4 million. Their actual number may be as high as 5-6 million. The dominant group among them are the citizens of Sudan and South Sudan who came to Egypt to escape a series of civil wars (1955-1972, 1983, and 2011-2020). Until 1995, they could travel to Egypt without a visa. They number between

750,000 and 4 million. During the Israeli-Arab wars of 1948, 1956, and 1967, Palestinians came en masse to Egypt. During political breakthroughs and the conflicts in 1977-1979, 1991-1992, and 1998-2000, there was an influx of Ethiopians and Eritreans. In 1991, many refugees from the civil war in Somalia arrived in Egypt, and in 2011-2013 the Muslim Brotherhood government massively welcomed refugees from Syria.

Foreign migrants in Egypt usually make a living from small-scale trade or occasional manual work such as cleaning, cooking, or childcare. Some women work as prostitutes. However, staying in Egypt means such migrants experience discrimination from the local population. Black people especially are victims of physical and psychological violence, including sexual abuse. Racist incidents occur both in the streets and workplaces.⁸ Women who work as domestic help and live with their employers are the most vulnerable to violence. There are regular cases of passport confiscation by an employer to prevent them from moving or talking to the police. They often work without rest periods or days off.⁹ South Sudanese media warn citizens they are exposed to rape, kidnapping, and forced organ donation in Egypt.¹⁰ Discrimination against migrants by lower-class Egyptians likely stems from the competition in the labour market. In the case of wealthy Egyptians who abuse their domestic helpers, it is a sense of superiority towards those they consider inferior to them.

The Egyptian state does not provide sufficient legal protection to refugees, let alone economic migrants, although it is obliged to do so under international law to which it is a party. Egypt is a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention on the Rights of

The Egyptian state does not provide sufficient legal protection to refugees, let alone economic migrants, although it is obliged to do so under international law to which it is a party.

⁷ For data about visas issued by Schengen countries in the period of 2014-2020, see: <https://statistics.schengenvisainfo.com>.

⁸ S. Sanderson, "Sub-Saharan migrants in Egypt subject to increasing abuse and violence," *InfoMigrants*, 02 January 2020, www.infomigrants.net.

⁹ "Egypt: Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families," NGO Alternative Report to the UN Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, April 2014, https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cmw/docs/eipr_fidh.pdf.

¹⁰ "Egypt denies stealing of South Sudanese human organs," *Hot in Juba*, 28 June 2019, <https://hotinjuba.com>; "S. Sudanese women are being kidnapped as sex slaves in Egypt," *Hot in Juba*, 18 November 2019, <https://hotinjuba.com>; "South Sudanese student allegedly kidnapped in Egypt," *Hot in Juba*, 17 December 2019, <https://hotinjuba.com>.

PISM STRATEGIC FILE

Refugees, the Convention's 1961 Protocol, and the 1967 Convention on Refugees of the Arab Unity Organisation.

The problem of racial violence against refugees and migrants is noticed and condemned by the authorities,¹¹ and since 2006 there is a formal prohibition on racial discrimination as well, but the country takes no action to enforce it, and some specific laws are even conducive to such abuse. For example, according to Article 4 of the 2003 Labour Law, the provisions of the law do not apply to persons working as domestic help. No written contracts are required or honoured, which naturally deprives the employee of state protection against abuses by an employer. Even if the employer wants to register the contract, the law requires obtaining the consent of the Ministry of Human Resources and Migration.¹² Egypt also has no legislation to regulate the situation of refugees, so it leaves this issue to the UNHCR.¹³ However, the agency's representatives are often not admitted to refugee detention centres.¹⁴ Tasks related to the social security of migrants are also carried out by the United Nations, and not by the Egyptian state. Since 1990, the national office, and since 1991, the regional office for the Middle East and North Africa of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has been operating in Cairo. The World Food Programme (WFP) plays an important role by, among others, making monthly direct cash transfers to migrant families of EGP 400 (about €22) per household member. Migrants are also supported by religious associations and NGOs.

Egypt is also a transit country for migrants wishing to reach the countries of the "global north". Some have had that goal since the beginning of their journey. However, many others decide to move farther north as a result of negative experiences in Egypt.

Egypt is also a transit country for migrants wishing to reach the countries of the "global north". Some have had that goal since the beginning of their journey. However, many others decide to move farther north as a result of negative experiences in Egypt. There are two important migration routes across the country, the northern one, also known as the Central Mediterranean, and the Sinai route, also known as the Eastern Mediterranean. The northern route begins in Somalia, runs through Ethiopia, Sudan, and Egypt, across the Mediterranean or through Libya and Tunisia, and ends in Italy and Malta. The Sinai route to the

EU begins in Somalia and Eritrea and runs through Sudan, Egypt, Israel, Syria, and Turkey, ending in Greece and Cyprus. Since 1977, migrants from the Horn of Africa have mainly tried to use the Sinai route from Egypt to Israel. However, when Hamas took power in the Gaza Strip in 2007, the Egyptian authorities sealed the border with Israel. Since then, the northern route has been dominant. Due to the civil war in Libya, Egypt is the last major country on this route able to control its territory. Its importance as a transit country is evidenced by the fact that during the migration-management crisis of 2015-2016, 130,700 people passed through Egypt to the EU. The number of Egyptians in this group was only 7,000. The fight against irregular migration undertaken by the Egyptian authorities after that period was mainly significant in that it restricted the transit of migrants from Horn of Africa countries (Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia) through its territory. As a result, in 2020, the EU recorded irregular border crossings of only 5,000 citizens of the above-mentioned countries and 1,500 Egyptians.¹⁵

¹¹S. Magdy, "Fleeing war, poverty, African migrants face racism in Egypt," *Egypt Independent*, 03 January 2020, <https://egyptindependent.com>.

¹²"Egypt: Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers ...," *op. cit.*

¹³A. Zohry, "Migration and development in Egypt," IMIS, Berlin 2007 http://policydialogue.org/files/events/Zohry_Migration_Development_Egypt.pdf.

¹⁴"Country Report Immigration Detention In Egypt: Military Tribunals, Human Rights Abuses, Abysmal Conditions, And Eu Partner," Global detention project, September 2018, www.globaldetentionproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Immigration-Detention-in-Egypt-September-2018.pdf.

¹⁵ Own study based on FRONTEX data.

PISM STRATEGIC FILE

EU-Egypt Cooperation in Countering Irregular Migration

Egypt has been an important partner for the EU since at least 2001 when the Association Agreement was signed. The country's role increased significantly after the 2015 migration-management crisis when more than 1.2 million migrants crossed the EU border and applied for international protection.

Egypt has been an important partner for the EU since at least 2001 when the Association Agreement was signed. The country's role increased significantly after the 2015 migration-management crisis when more than 1.2 million migrants crossed the EU border and applied for international protection.¹⁶ The anxiety of EU societies¹⁷ and the initial helplessness of the Member States in the face of this mostly uncontrolled, mass influx of migrants forced the EU institutions to seek common solutions to reduce it in the future. It seemed necessary to create a formula of cooperation with neighbouring countries of the EU. In

November 2015, the EU-Africa summit on migration was held in Valletta, Malta. There, among other actions, it was established, that under the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the partners would conduct activities to stem irregular migration and provide assistance to migrants where they are staying outside the EU, including in Egypt.¹⁸ Simultaneously, the EU Trust Fund for Africa, which undertakes development assistance for African countries (including Egypt) to help eliminate the causes that lead their citizens to emigrate, was established.¹⁹ Then, in June 2017, the EU-Egypt Association Council adopted a document entitled "EU-Egypt Partnership priorities for 2017-2020", which assumes cooperation in three areas that should lead to a reduction in migration to the EU— socio-economic development, democratisation of Egypt, and EU-Egypt partnership in foreign policy.²⁰ So far, two sessions of the EU-Egypt dialogue on migration have taken place, one in 2017 and the second in 2019. The goal has been to determine details of the cooperation. The sides discussed an improvement in access to the Egyptian labour market for migrants, facilitation of legal migration of Egyptians to the EU, coordination of the cooperation between the Egyptian border guards and FRONTEX, improvement of migrants' living conditions, support for voluntary returns of migrants to their countries of origin, and implementation of development assistance programmes.²¹

Egypt also has migration-related agreements with individual Member States. Even before 2015, Egypt was engaged in bilateral cooperation in this area with Italy, concerning, among other actions, returns of boats with migrants and their readmission. In 2015, it signed a tripartite agreement with Greece and Cyprus regulating similar issues. In 2016, Egypt and Germany signed an agreement on security cooperation.²² The crucial assumptions of these agreements included Egypt sealing its borders, training for the Egyptian security services, and exchange of know-how, information, and experience between the countries.²³ In August 2017, a German-Egyptian agreement on a bilateral dialogue on migration was signed that includes German support for Egypt in providing vocational

¹⁶ "Record number of over 1.2 million first time asylum seekers registered in 2015" (report about migration management crisis in 2015), Eurostat, 16 March 2016, <https://ec.europa.eu>

¹⁷ Eurobarometer, Spring 2016, https://ec.europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/trends/2016/spring_2016_standard_eurobarometer_strong_public_support_for_commission_s_political_priorities.pdf.

¹⁸ "EU Action Plan Against Migrant Smuggling," The European Economic and Social Committee, 23 September 2015, www.eesc.europa.eu.

¹⁹ *Valletta Summit Action Plan*, European Council, 11-12 November 2015, www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21839/action_plan_en.pdf.

²⁰ "EU-Egypt Partnership Priorities 2017-2020," European Council, 16 June 2017, www.consilium.europa.eu/media/23942/eu-egypt.pdf.

²¹ *Joint statements from the Second meeting of the Migration Dialogue between the European Union and Egypt*, The European Union Delegation to Egypt, Cairo, 11 July 2019, <https://eeas.europa.eu>.

²² "Security cooperation Agreement between Egypt and Germany," Egyptian Institute for Studies, 16 April 2016, <https://en.eipss-eg.org>.

²³ "Egypt, Germany sign security cooperation agreement on terrorism, illegal immigration," *Al Ahrām Online*, 12 July 2016, <https://englishnew.ahram.org.eg>.

PISM STRATEGIC FILE

training for young Egyptians, development of the education system, scholarships for Egyptian students in Germany, and awareness-raising campaigns about the dangers of irregular migration.²⁴

The Role of Development Assistance

According to OECD data, Egypt receives on average about \$3.15 billion annually in Official Development Assistance (ODA), which is less than 1% of the country's GDP.

Development assistance is one instrument of EU-Egypt cooperation. According to OECD data, Egypt receives on average about \$3.15 billion annually in Official Development Assistance (ODA), which is less than 1% of the country's GDP. Of these funds, 46% is dedicated to the development of education, healthcare and social infrastructure, and services; 24% supports the Egyptian economy; 16% is for programme assistance; 7% for humanitarian aid; and, 6% for other projects. Data on what part of the projects are strictly related to migration are not available. Two groups of

states and institutions dominate among the donors: Arab and European. Of the former, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and the Arab Fund provide Egypt with a total of about \$1.2 billion annually. EU Institutions (\$536 million), Germany (\$464 million), and France (\$171.8 million) jointly donate \$1.17 billion. Other important donors are Japan (\$326.2 million), the U.S. (\$191.2 million), and South Korea (\$70.9 million).²⁵ About 60% of this ODA is distributed through the Egyptian government, with the rest administered by UN or donor state agencies, private sector entities, or NGOs.

Most of the EU development projects implemented in Egypt in 2016-2020 were not directly related to the issue of migration. In line with the assumptions of the Valletta summit, the European Commission allocated grants in the amount of €432-528 million

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for the implementation in this period of projects in the areas of modernisation of the economy, energy and the environment, social development and social security, as well as management, and strengthening the stability and democratisation of the state. Only data on projects carried out by NGOs, UN agencies, or government agencies of the individual EU Member States are publicly available. Within this category of projects, EU sources allocated € 33.8 million to create and support small and medium-sized enterprises, €23.3 million for renewable energy investments, €15.3 million to improve the thermal efficiency of buildings, €2.4 million to support the reform of public finances, €2 million for the preparation of the National Water Resource Management Plan for 2017-2037, €1.5 million for the professional activation of women, and €1.3 million for the renovation of monuments. Moreover, due to the risk of regional conflict related to the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, the EU allocated €10 million to support a dialogue between the Nile Basin countries in 2020-2021.²⁶

Egypt was also entitled to use funds under the EUTFA Fund established in 2015. As part of it, on 30 October 2017, the EU concluded an agreement with Egypt on the implementation of the project "Enhancing the Response to Migration Challenges in Egypt" with a cost of €60 million.²⁷ Its assumptions are to strengthen migration management, tackle the causes of migration, and support Egyptian host communities.

²⁴ "Dialogue on migration – Germany and Egypt sign agreement," German Federal Foreign Office, 28 August 2017, www.auswaertiges-amt.de.

²⁵ For data about ODA for Egypt in the period 2017-2019, see the OECD website at: <https://public.tableau.com>.

²⁶ "EU Projects with Egypt," The European Union Delegation to Egypt, 10 August 2017, <https://eeas.europa.eu>.

²⁷ "EU and Egypt cooperation: towards a stronger partnership," The European Union Delegation to Egypt, 31 October 2017, <https://eeas.europa.eu>.

PISM STRATEGIC FILE

Egypt is also one of the countries covered by funding from MADAD (the EU Regional Trust Fund for Syria) since 2016 as part of regional projects with a total value of €13.77 million.²⁸ However, activities in Egypt account for less than 1% of those funds.²⁹ In addition to the projects under the above-mentioned funds, in the period 2016-2020, the EU allocated €3 million to establish and support the functioning of Egyptian institutions to help improve the legal situation of migrants through The National Council for Human Rights and the National Committee for Preventing Human Trafficking.³⁰ Moreover, €1 million was allocated to the implementation of social assistance programs for migrants staying in Egypt implemented by Caritas and IOM.³¹

The Egyptian government did not agree to approve most of the projects under the EU Trust Fund for Africa over the condition of implementation to respect human rights.

The Egyptian government did not agree to approve most of the projects under the EU Trust Fund for Africa over the condition of implementation to respect human rights.³² Moreover, given lengthy administrative procedures, only the €27 million³³ project “Addressing root causes of irregular migration through employability and labour-intensive works” has started so far. Its implementation in December 2019 was started by the Egyptian Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency

(MSMEDA). As part of it, investments are made in road and public utility infrastructure in 11 regions of Egypt with the lowest level of development.³⁴ So far, the construction of 1.12 km of road, a building for a youth centre and three rural clinics in the Al-Minya region have been completed. These works reportedly employed about 13,000 people.³⁵

The implementation of projects under MADAD began in 2017, but both the anticipated and actual scale of the activities is small. Projects from this fund enabled, for example, 25 people to access primary education, 70 people higher education, vocational training for 3,744 people, and training in health care for 59,500 people. Most of the project beneficiaries were Egyptians (79%) and the rest (21%) were refugees from Syria. These results represented more than 60% of the intended actions.³⁶ Moreover, in the period 2020-2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the funds provided trainings in anti-infection prophylaxis for 18,000 people, helped to purchased hygienic materials, and enabled medical assistance using Danish Red Cross ambulances.³⁷

The development assistance provided to Horn of Africa countries may have influenced a decrease of migration to the EU via Egypt. Total EU funds allocated for this purpose in 2016-2020 amounted to €1.808 billion.³⁸ In the countries for which Egypt is a traditional migration destination—Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan—71 projects totalling €895 million are being

²⁸ For data about contracts signed under the MADAD fund, see The European Commission website at: www.bing.com.

²⁹ *DRAFT REPORT on the implementation report of the EU Trust Funds and the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (2020/2045(INI))*, European Parliament, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CJ31-PR-680999_EN.pdf.

³⁰ “EU Projects with Egypt ...,” *op. cit.*, (sectoral) <https://eeas.europa.eu>.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

³² “EU-Egypt cooperation. Where are human rights,” EuroMed Rights Report, July 2019. <https://euromedrights.org>.

³³ “EU Trust Fund for Stability and Addressing the Root Causes of Irregular Migration and Displaced Persons in Africa, North of Africa Window, Third Monitoring Report, 1 December 2019 – 30 April 2020,” EUTF NOA Report 3.pdf (1).pdf.

³⁴ For data about the project “Addressing root causes of irregular migration through employability and labour intensive works,” see the European Commission website at: <https://eutf.akvoapp.org>.

³⁵ “EU Ambassador to Egypt visits new SMEs in Minya,” *Daily News Egypt*, 04 March 2021 <https://dailynewsegypt.com>.

³⁶ “7th report from the realisation of the MADAD fund projects,” European Commission, September 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/trustfund-syria-region/system/files/2020-09/7th_results_reporting_eutf_syria_sept2020.pdf.

³⁷ For the report on the realisation of the MADAD fund project during the COVID-19 pandemic, see: European Commission, March 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/trustfund-syria-region/system/files/2021-05/Covid-8th_RR%20EUTF%20Syria-FINAL.pdf.

³⁸ EC factsheet about the EU Trust Fund for Africa, January 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/sites/default/files/factsheet_eutf-for-africa_january_2021_0.pdf.

PISM STRATEGIC FILE

implemented. The sum of ODA obtained by these countries from all donors is almost \$11 billion, which ranges from 5% to 40% of their GDP.³⁹

The Effectiveness of Egyptian Migration Policy

Statistical data showing the flow of irregular migration from Egypt to Europe in recent years may suggest a certain effectiveness of the EU action.

Statistical data showing the flow of irregular migration from Egypt to Europe in recent years may suggest a certain effectiveness of the EU action. The number of migrants detained for illegally crossing the EU border via the Central Mediterranean and Eastern Mediterranean routes decreased from more than 1 million in 2015 to 83,000 in 2018. The number of migrants who most likely had to cross Egyptian territory on these routes decreased from 76,000 in 2015 to 7,000 in 2020.⁴⁰ This is in line with the overall slowing of irregular migration to the EU in recent years, driven by the Union's actions, such as tightening border controls and a change of attitude in major countries towards migration, and the efforts of transit countries (e.g., agreements with Turkey and Libya).

The actions of the Egyptian authorities played a decisive role in the decline in the number of migrants arriving to the EU via Egypt. The most important of these has patrolling of the Mediterranean coast by the Egyptian fleet, monitoring on the border (especially with Libya) by drones, and the dense network of military checkpoints and police stations. Arrival in the border zone requires special passes and staying on beaches along the Mediterranean after sunset is prohibited. These actions are possible because they are backed by 450,000 active soldiers.⁴¹ Many of them are assigned to the dense network of Watanya petrol stations, which additionally increases the possibilities of controlling the movement of people through the territory of Egypt. Expressions of appreciation for Egyptian policy on this matter has come from European politicians as different as then Chancellor of Austria Sebastian Kurz and Portugal's Prime Minister Antonio Costa. Former Italian Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini even stated that good relations with Egypt are more important than resolving the murder of Italian scientist Giulio Reggeni by the Egyptian secret services in 2016.

Countering irregular migration is achieved, however, at the expense of the rights of migrants and refugees. During the last 40 years, a state of emergency has been in force most of the time in Egypt, which has meant the constant presence of the army city streets. Moreover, since 2013, the country's anti-terrorism law has been applied to migrants as well as to critics of the government and civil society activists.

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Since 2013, the country's anti-terrorism law has been applied to migrants as well as to critics of the government and civil society activists. Egyptian authorities can detain migrants in cases of an attempt to cross the border without the consent of the authorities, staying in the country or leaving it without prior consent, to identify them, in order to prevent escape, for disregarding an order to leave the country, and even during the asylum process. Detained migrants are further punished by fines or imprisonment. They have no legal right to information about their detention, legal advice, or access to asylum procedures, nor to appeal against unlawful detention (this right was rescinded in 2011). There are no rules on the maximum length of pre-trial detention. There are also no reports detailing the average length of detention. Holding cells and other places of detention are mostly overcrowded. Moreover, according to the law, migrants face a trial in a military court.⁴² On 12 March 2021, the UN Human Rights Council issued

³⁹ For data about ODA for Egypt in the period 2017-2019, see: OECD, <https://public.tableau.com>.

⁴⁰ Own study based on FRONTEX data.

⁴¹ For data about the Egyptian army, see: Globalfirepower, www.globalfirepower.com.

⁴² "Country Report Immigration Detention ...," *op. cit.*

PISM STRATEGIC FILE

a declaration condemning violations of human rights in Egypt. The statement was supported by 31 countries, including 17 EU Member States, and notably by Germany and Italy, Egypt's main partners in countering irregular migration.⁴³ It was also supported by 20 NGOs.⁴⁴ Concern over human rights violations in Egypt was also expressed by a spokesman for the U.S. State Department.⁴⁵ However, because of the important role of Egypt in stabilising the region, these actions are more incidental than consistent pressure from the international community. This is evidenced by the fact that only two months after the official criticism was levelled, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres held talks with President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi about the situation in the Gaza Strip.⁴⁶

Egypt, in turn, may accuse the EU of being inconsistent in facilitating the legal migration of Egyptian citizens.

Egypt, in turn, may accuse the EU of being inconsistent in facilitating the legal migration of Egyptian citizens. The annual number of Egyptians who received positive visa decisions in 2015-2019 ranges from 140,000 to 160,000. But, the negative decision rate increased over the same period from 14% to 18% for the EU

as a whole. The increasing share of refusals is visible even in the case of countries that intensely cooperate with Egypt on migration issues, including Germany (refusals rose from 7% to 15%), Italy (from 14% to 18%), and Greece (from 12% to 14%).⁴⁷

Conclusions

So far, EU development assistance has had no impact on Egyptian migration policy, first because it's insignificant to the Egyptian economy, and second because the EU has strong competition in this

The Egyptian authorities also may fear that a less brutal and restrictive migration policy would be ineffective. The decline in the number of irregular migrants entering the EU via the Central Mediterranean and Eastern Mediterranean routes, including Egyptians and citizens of Horn of Africa countries, is the result of just such a policy.

area with the countries of the Arabian Peninsula. Support from the latter states is usually not conditioned on democratisation of the country or protection of human rights. That's why Egypt has for a long time resisted projects under the EU Trust Fund for Africa. Accepting the European conditions would mean admitting Egypt does not respect human rights despite official propaganda emphasising its hospitality and the rule of law. Reform also would make it difficult to repress critics of the regime who are perceived as a real or imagined threat to its stability. The Egyptian authorities also may fear that a less brutal and

restrictive migration policy would be ineffective. The decline in the number of irregular migrants entering the EU via the Central Mediterranean and Eastern Mediterranean routes, including Egyptians and citizens of Horn of Africa countries, is the result of just such a policy.

The internal problems of the country are also an obstacle in EU-Egyptian cooperation on development aid and include the extensive bureaucracy, corruption, and lack of transparency on the

⁴³ 46th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, "General Debate Item 4: Human Rights Situations that require the Council's attention, Joint Statement on Egypt," 12 March 2021, <https://cihrs.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/HRC46-JST-on-Egypt-item-4.pdf>.

⁴⁴ "Condemnation of Egypt's Abuses at UN Rights Body—the statement of 20 NGOs, Human Rights Watch, 12 March 2021, www.hrw.org.

⁴⁵ "US voices concerns about human rights situation in Egypt," *Egypt Independent*, 12 March 2021, <https://egyptindependent.com>.

⁴⁶ "Egypt's President Sisi discuss with UN Secretary-General Guterres developments in Palestine," *Egypt Today*, 20 May 2021, www.egypttoday.com.

⁴⁷ For data about issuing visa to Schengen countries in the period 2014-2020, see: <https://statistics.schengenvisainfo.com>.

PISM STRATEGIC FILE

part of the authorities. Accurate information on development aid projects channelled through the government of Egypt is difficult to obtain. The implementation of even uncontroversial projects, from the point of view of the authorities, takes years. The project “Addressing root causes of irregular migration through employability and labour-intensive works” is the best known example but the activities implemented under it have had little effect. They certainly improve the living standards of the communities covered by them, but not to such an extent as to discourage them from emigration.

Tackling irregular migration is a priority for the Egyptian government for two main reasons. First, the actions are associated with countering terrorist threats, and real or imagined, constitutes credibility for the state’s the restrictive security policy, both towards international and national public opinion. Second, it decreases the scale of migration to Egypt, thus limiting the level of the country’s socio-economic problems. Providing migrants with decent living conditions is an unjustified cost for Egypt, which is unable to solve the problem of poverty among its own citizens. For these reasons, Egypt will not give up on countering irregular migration, even without EU support. Besides, even if it decided to do so, any wave of migration from there would not be difficult to stop. The distance from Egypt to the EU’s border is much greater and more difficult to travel than in the case of Turkey or Morocco.

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Egypt wants to use its cooperation with the EU to obtain economic benefits in the form of funds for the implementation of investments, especially in infrastructure, and increasing the legal migration of Egyptians to the EU. The positive side of meeting these demands is that they would certainly lead to an increase in Egypt’s GDP, which could potentially contribute to a further reduction in the scale of irregular migration to points beyond Egypt. However, without proper oversight, these activities can have the opposite effect of increasing social stratification in the country and motivating more people to undertake irregular migration. Since President Sisi has been in power, the number of people living below the poverty line has increased, despite the country’s economic growth. Therefore, it is important that the largest possible share of development assistance be distributed by the agencies of the EU and UN and their member states. At the same time, it is in the EU’s interest to use legal migration to fill the gaps in its member’s labour markets. This concerns not only specialists with higher education (medical doctors, IT specialists), but also more often lesser educated but skilled workers. For this reason, the EU should consider, following Germany’s example, conducting vocational trainings in Egypt that would facilitate a visa for those that complete the courses.

The most important factor for the long-term reduction of irregular migration to the EU is to bring about political stabilisation in Egypt’s neighbourhood. Key here is the success of the peace process in Libya, where the civil war and disappearance of state structures has made people smuggling a major sector of the economy. Due to its prime location on the Central Mediterranean migration route, natural resources, and low population (only around 7 million inhabitants), this country is much more suitable as a destination country for migration than Egypt. Moreover, its post-war reconstruction

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may create jobs for hundreds of thousands of migrants who will not be perceived by the local population as competition in the labour market, but as a factor building the country’s economy. The key task is to make a common EU statement on this issue. It may be possible only by reconciling the interests of France and Italy, which supported opposing parties to the conflict, weakening the authority of the EU. The scale of migration through Egypt also could be reduced by an end to

the conflicts in Syria, in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, and the success of the peace process in South Sudan. While the EU’s influence on the course of the conflict in Syria is low, it may be significant in the case of Horn of Africa countries for which development assistance is an important source of income.

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The publication is prepared in the framework of initiative: Migration and Development: Sharing knowledge between Poland and Norway (MiDeShare). The Initiative is funded by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through the EEA Grants and Norway Grants.

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