



ماعت للسلام والتنمية وحقوق الإنسان
Maat For Peace, Development, and Human Rights

Features of The Egyptian Policies in Containing Refugees Flows In The Past 10 Years

Positive Actions Despite Obstacles

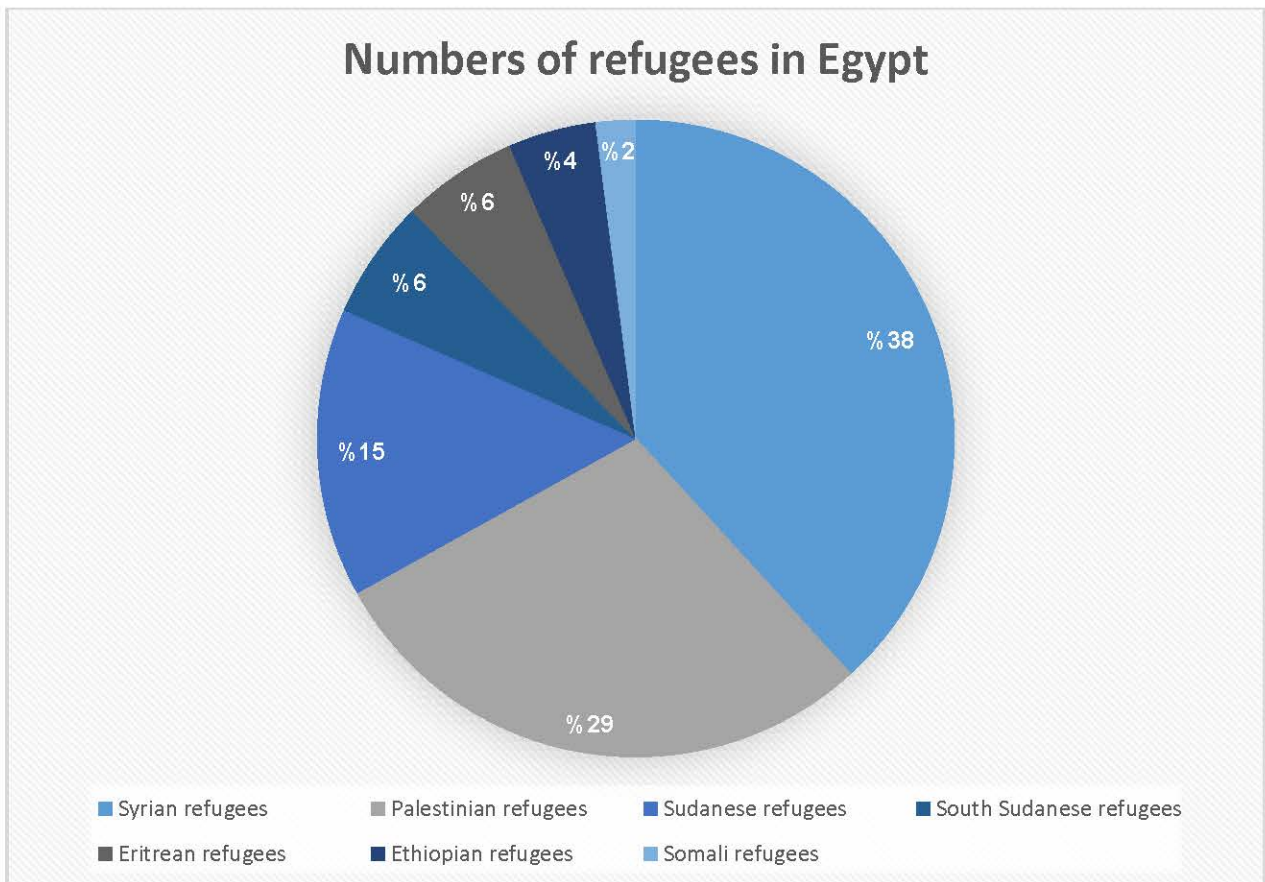


Summary of a Study

“The Features of the Egyptian Policies in Containing Migrant flows Over the Past Decade”

Dozens of different nationalities have been flocking into Egypt for many years and refugee rates have increased following the civil war and the political turmoil and crises in the Arab region and Africa that broke out in the past ten years, endangering the lives of the peoples and making Egypt the regional safe haven for them.

Egypt is among the countries in the Middle East and Africa with the largest number of refugees. According to statistics by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Egypt has received more than 133,000 Syrian refugees since the beginning of the Syrian crisis and approximately 100,000 Palestinian refugees. Moreover, Egypt hosts 51,000 Sudanese refugees, 21,000 from South Sudan, 20,500 Eritrean refugees, 15,500 Ethiopian refugees, 7,000 Somali refugees and about 2000 refugees from different nationalities.



The number of refugees registered by the UNHCR in July 2021 reached approximately 257,000 refugees in Egypt. Nevertheless, according to statistics by the Egyptian government, the actual number of refugees in Egypt, which hosts refugees and migrants of different nationalities, is more than 6 million refugees, registered and unregistered.

Egypt played a significant role in the drafting of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which was signed by Egypt on May 22, 1981. Notably, Egypt is the only country in Africa that contributed to its drafting. Egypt also signed the 1967 Additional Protocol to the Convention on May 22, 1981 as well as the OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee, ratified by it on June 12, 1980. In addition, Article 91 of the 2019 amended Constitution of Egypt provides for the right of political asylum.

With regard to refugee rights in accordance with the 1951 Convention, at the healthcare level, the former Egyptian government issued a ministerial decree granting Syrian refugees an equal access to public services in the area of primary healthcare at the same costs borne by Egyptians. In 2016, the government included refugees of different nationalities in a national presidential initiative named the “100 Million Healthy Lives Initiative” for Hepatitis C treatment. As for the government policies during the COVID-19 virus, the Ministry of Health also integrated refugees and asylum seekers into Egypt’s COVID-19 vaccination program in September 2021.

Moreover, the government has also launched several education initiatives and programs, such as integrating migrant children into the schools of the Ministry of Education and developing a regional strategy to respond to and support the Syrian refugees in Egypt 2019-2020. Regarding freelancing work, the current Egyptian government contributed in issuing the necessary permits for Syrian refugees to equally practice this business the same as Egyptians without discrimination.

Additionally, the Egyptian law grants refugees and foreigners the right to own real estate. One of the most significant prerogatives given to refugees is them being granted the Egyptian residence for a year if they own a registered real estate in Egypt. The law also grants non-Egyptian citizens the right of association, provided that they have permanent or temporary residence in Egypt, in addition to the right of accessing social insurance for foreigners, including refugees, under specific conditions.

Despite the progress made by the Egyptian government at different levels for the integration of refugees into Egyptian society, refugees continue to face economic challenges, such as the lack of access to education in Egyptian public school and universities and the prolonged proceedings for employment in the public sector, in addition to issues related to finding adequate housing.

Furthermore, African refugees face cultural challenges of discriminatory treatment against them by some Egyptians because of their skin color. There are also some legal challenges that include shortfalls and loopholes in the legislative environment with regard to the right to housing and employment, the compliance with and application of these rules on the ground and refugees' awareness of their rights, in addition to the lack of a national oversight institution to enforce such laws.

In light of the foregoing and against the background of the challenges faced by refugees in Egypt, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights presents a set of recommendations on the need for international donors, including organizations and states, to provide more support for Egypt in order to relief the burden on the Egyptian government and to cooperate with the civil society organizations concerned with the issue of refugees. This is in addition to the importance of drawing the attention of the Egyptian Parliament to the need to review and modernize the Egyptian laws and to ensure more rights for refugees.

Maat indicates the need for the establishment of an Egyptian national committee or body concerned with refugee status, while making the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1967 UN Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees and the Egyptian Constitution, particularly Article 91 on refugees, the legal references for such committee. Maat also emphasizes the need for the Egyptian Ministry of Education to have a greater role in this regard by developing more programs aimed at supporting the education of African children in particular.