



EGYPT

SUDAN SITUATION: COUNTRY SOCIOECONOMIC PROFILE

January 2025

Country Context

Egypt is one of the most urbanized countries in the world, with high population growth and informal urban expansion. Egypt has invested significantly in connectivity, transportation infrastructure and industry sectors. With most of the economic activities concentrated along the Nile Valley, Delta and Canal zone, challenges persist related to high population densities, development planning, and land management which place pressure on infrastructure and services. Environmental challenges and poverty (affecting 29.7% of the population, according to World Bank) remain priority areas for development. Additionally, climate change and the loss of agricultural land have contributed to concerns about food security. The Ministry of Local Development estimates that 15% of Egypt's population is living in informal areas (UN-Habitat). In areas where refugees are settling, demand for resources and services can exceed availability, heightening vulnerabilities to social tension and exploitation.

In 2023, the number of refugees and asylum-seekers in Egypt nearly tripled as a result of the war in Sudan. As of 20 January, 2025, Egypt hosted more than 890,000 registered refugees and asylum-seekers – almost 620,000 of whom are Sudanese living primarily in Greater Cairo, Alexandria and Aswan – making a total of 1,200,000 new arrivals, since April 2023, according to the Government of Egypt. UNHCR projects that more than 1 million refugees will register by April 2025. This adds significant pressure on Egypt's national capacity to accommodate the increasing refugee population, and for partners to respond to humanitarian and development needs. In addition, the government estimates that there are several million more Sudanese in Egypt, including those who were living and working in Egypt before the war started and others who have fled to Egypt post war, but have not sought asylum or registered as refugees.

At the same time, Egypt is navigating heightened economic challenges driven by multiple shocks, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ukraine conflict, and now the Gaza and Sudan crises. The continued war in Gaza has the potential to further impact the Egyptian economy, and the entire region. These challenges are affecting both refugees and vulnerable population groups as well as host communities in Egypt. Rising inflation, devaluation of the Egyptian pound, and substantial foreign debt have caused a sharp increase in the cost of living.

While Egypt has a longstanding tradition of welcoming refugees, the protection environment has faced increasing pressures since the Sudan conflict began. Egypt has not placed reservations on the substantive right to work for refugees; however, the legal framework governing their employment remains complex. Refugees encounter barriers such as costly and lengthy work permit processes. The changes following the revocation of the Four Freedoms Agreement in June 2023, including stricter entry procedures, have impacted access to Egyptian territory, leading to some irregular entries and associated protection risks. These dynamics have prompted some refugees to consider onward movement to Libya and Europe. Enhanced support is essential to assist the Sudanese population and other refugees in Egypt by ensuring access to State-based protection, improved health and education services, and opportunities for self-reliance. Strengthening these areas will also help reduce the risks associated with dangerous onward journeys.

UNHCR and partners of the Refugee Response Plan, under a Refugee Coordination Model approach, are engaging with the Egyptian government to explore inclusion of refugees in national services, while also mobilizing funds from humanitarian and development partners to support these efforts. This is crucial, as the new arrivals are straining existing national services, increasing the potential for tensions between refugees and host communities, especially given the shared high levels of economic hardship. UNHCR continues to pursue dialogue with interested donors and the World Bank on deepening socio-economic inclusion and funding for refugees and host-communities. This includes

work on data and analysis with national statistics and social protection pilots in support of greater employment and livelihoods opportunities.

Government policy supports refugee inclusion in national systems, but additional resources are needed to cope with the increased number of users of these services. Refugees have access to the national health care system but face challenges in obtaining secondary and tertiary care. Survivors of violence against women and girls struggle to gain access to medical services, particularly in border areas, and are referred to Cairo for treatment, which adds financial burden. Recent nutritional assessments and data from the Ministry of Health and Population show limited access to food, with high rates of malnutrition among refugees.

The Health Working Group, co-chaired by the World Health Organization and UNHCR, works in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Population to strengthen public health infrastructure by providing medical equipment, consumables, medication, vaccines, and staff training. Focus areas include mental health, reproductive healthcare, and GBV services. UNHCR also advocates for the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in broader development initiatives, for example through their inclusion in the universal health insurance scheme.

Improving access to health care through reinforcement of the public health system and renovation and refurbishment of public facilities offers benefits for Egyptians and refugees alike. Financed primarily by the World Bank, African Development Bank and JICA, Egypt's Universal Health Insurance Scheme (UHIS) has been introduced in four governorates to date and will be gradually expanded to the rest of the country by 2032. Health is among Egypt's Global Refugee Forum pledges; however, discussions on refugee inclusion in the UHIS are ongoing. The 2018 UHIS bylaws indicate that such inclusion is possible, though further clarification on implementation has yet to be provided. UNHCR and the Government are pursuing a pilot project in two locations in this respect - Port Said and Ismalia. Additional funding for health is provided by the Joint Platform for Migrants and Refugees, as well as PROSPECTS, which included an International Labour Organization feasibility study on refugee inclusion in UHIS conducted in 2021.

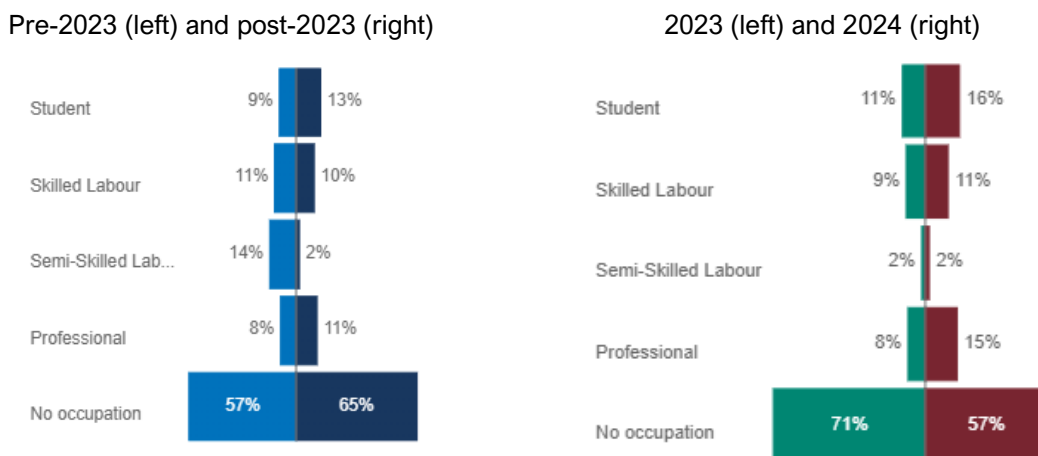
In the education sector, the government is working to simplify and clarify the procedures for refugee access to education. Currently, there are over 400,000 school age children registered with UNHCR. The greatest number of these are at the primary (66,408) and secondary (75,376) levels, of which a recent UNICEF/World Bank assessment showed that 54% of newly arriving Sudanese children are out of school (the report, based on 3 rounds of phone surveys, is pending release). On 20 November 2023, an official decree confirmed that out of the 60 refugee nationalities, only four nationalities (Syrian, Sudanese, Yemeni, and South Sudanese) have access to Egyptian public schools. Access to public education is contingent on holding a valid residence permit, while wait-times to obtain or renew asylum-based residency can take over 795 days. Sectoral challenges, such as overcrowded classrooms and strained infrastructure, have been compounded by limited resources, particularly in high refugee-concentrated areas, affecting student learning and protection outcomes. The Education Working Group, co-chaired by UNICEF and UNHCR, are exploring closely with the Ministry of Education ways to ensure school sustainability, which includes pathways for regularization, community-based learning expansion, and public-school inclusion. They have identified the need for school infrastructure, equipment and staff to strengthen the public education system's capacity to absorb the added number of refugee children. Teachers and other personnel of public and community schools hosting Sudanese refugee children also need training to better provide the needed education support. At the household level, education grants for refugee and asylum seeker students also help to cover enrolment and tuition fees. In 2023, education grants were provided to 50,000 students.

Socioeconomic Characteristics of Displacement

The Government commitments to sustain access to services for refugees and asylum seekers is being strained by perceived negative public opinion, macroeconomic challenges and the possible additional refugees and asylum seekers that will likely arrive from Sudan and Gaza. In April 2024, an [IMF assessment](#) found the Egyptian economy facing significant macroeconomic challenges that have become more complex to manage with the recent conflict in Gaza and Israel (IMF, April 2024). The strain is felt strongly in the informal sector. Real wages have declined, and unemployment and underemployment are on the rise. Connecting refugees to livelihood opportunities, both through self-employment and wage employment, is crucial. However, given the current economic situation, many seek diversified income sources rather than full-time jobs. Training programs that are short-term and directly linked to existing work opportunities offer benefits.

While the majority of registered refugees in Egypt have no listed occupation, among those that do the share of students (13%), professionals (11%) and skilled labourers (10%) have increased slightly from April 2023, compared to the existing refugee population. Semi-skilled labour saw a significant decrease from 14% to 2%, indicating a reduction in semi-skilled job opportunities post 15 April 2023, while the percentage of professionals increased from 8% to 11%. The percentage of people with no occupation rose from 57% to 65%, indicating a rise in unemployment which may be due to displacements increase or high competition in the market. Compared to those who arrived in 2023, Sudanese who arrived in 2024 were less likely to be unemployed, and about 50 percent more likely to be students (16%), professionals (15%) or skilled labourers (11%).

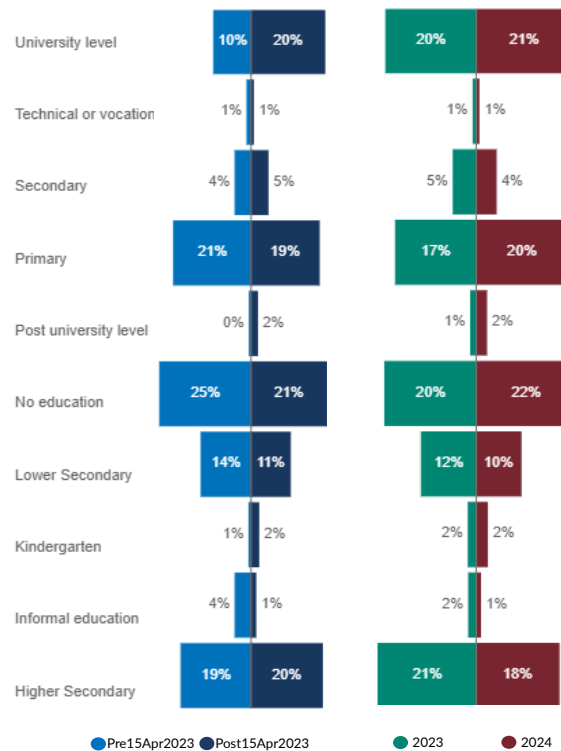
Figure 1: Occupation



Source: UNHCR registration data

The data on Sudanese refugees who fled to Egypt shows educational shifts before and after the 2023 crisis. Compared to refugee populations before crisis, today's refugees in Egypt are twice as likely to be university graduates (20% from 10%). They are also less likely to have no education (21% to 25%). This shift is less evident comparing the populations who arrived in 2023 to those who arrived in 2024. Along those fleeing the first wave of the crisis, over half (53%) had at least some secondary education, compared to 49% in the year 2024. Roughly equal shares had no education (22% in 2024, 20% in 2023) or primary education (20% in 2024, 17% in 2023). This could reflect the costly access to education within Sudan since the emergence of the armed conflict.

Figure 2: Education (pre-2023/post-2023, left; 2023/2024, right)



Source: UNHCR registration data

Labour Market Analysis

Egypt has gained valuable insights from hosting Syrian refugees, particularly through market systems analysis in the food service sector, where many refugees find employment. A recent [ILO analysis](#) highlights challenges such as documentation, access to digital resources, and trust in identifying employment and business opportunities, all of which will be relevant for the Sudanese refugee population moving forward (ILO, 2023). Yet, Syrians in Egypt continue to face significant challenges in accessing the labour market. Egypt passed its first asylum in December, enhancing refugees' access to education, health and work, and UNHCR will continue to engage in discussions with the Government on the bylaws ([ILO and American University in Cairo, 2022](#)). As Sudanese enter the labour market, particularly those with higher levels of education, this analysis will provide a useful basis for understanding their challenges and opportunities.

Inclusion of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Egyptian Universal Healthcare Scheme

The refugee and asylum seekers population in any country is highly vulnerable and often lacks any form social protection. As Egypt expands access to its national health insurance scheme, this [study by the International Labour Organization \(ILO\)](#) explores possibilities for including refugees and asylum seekers in this key pillar of social protection. In identifying opportunities and challenges, it proposes long-term strategies to ensure equal treatment of refugees and asylum seekers at par with Egyptians grounded in sound economic policy options. It also presents data for policymakers and international agencies to make well-informed policy decisions, calling for intensive advocacy efforts with the Government of Egypt and strategic implications for the health programme.