

# **Sudan Crisis** Coordination Unit

Publication # 4

## **Seeking Refuge in Egypt and its Southern Border**

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# SCCU publications

SCCU publications are concise and informative documents that provide an overview of Sudan's complex and evolving humanitarian situation. The SCCU publications also offer practical and evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and humanitarian responders on addressing Sudan's most pressing issues and needs.

## Acknowledgement

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## Disclaimer

This report is the result of the work of the Sudan Crisis Coordination Unit (SCCU). The opinions, findings and recommendations expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Shabaka or its partners.

# Summary

The situation of Sudanese refugees in Egypt is dire and complex. Since April 2023, more than 300,000 Sudanese have fled to Egypt to escape the conflict between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in Sudan (UNHCR, 2023). Many have fled from the ongoing military conflicts in their home country, especially the fierce street battles in central Khartoum that started in 2023.

However, their official status as refugees is highly disputed, and they face racial discrimination and police violence in Egypt. They also have to endure harsh conditions at the border crossing, where they wait for days in the open air with scarce food, water and sanitation facilities. Some are arbitrarily detained and subjected to forced labour and beatings by Egyptian security forces.

Policymakers should urgently address these challenges by providing temporary waivers for medical professionals who can assist the refugees and by seeking durable solutions that would allow them to resettle in safe third countries or return to Sudan when the situation improves. They should also recognise that the conflict has displaced third-country nationals and need protection and assistance.

These challenges seriously threaten the Sudanese refugees' safety, dignity, and well-being. They also undermine their prospects for finding durable solutions to their displacement.

## What can organisations do to address these challenges?

- Advocate for the Egyptian authorities to ease the entry requirements and speed up the visa process for Sudanese refugees at the border.
- Increased humanitarian assistance, such as food, water, shelter, health care, and education, to the refugees at the border and inside Egypt.
- Support local Egyptian and Sudanese organisations and groups helping the refugees with their basic needs and community services.
- Enhance the protection and legal assistance for the refugees, especially those vulnerable to violence, exploitation, or detention.
- Increase the capacity and efficiency of the registration, documentation, and resettlement processes for the refugees.
- Promote social cohesion and integration between the refugees and the host communities in Egypt.

## What can policymakers do?

- Provide temporary waivers for medical professionals who are Sudanese refugees to work in Egypt and serve their community.
- Increase humanitarian aid and funding for local, national and diaspora organisations that assist Sudanese refugees in Egypt.
- Advocate for respecting human rights and implementing the 1951 Refugee Convention and the OAU Refugee Convention by the Egyptian government.
- Support peace efforts and political dialogue in Sudan to end the conflict and create conditions for voluntary repatriation.

# Escaping to safety

Sudanese escaping the conflict in Egypt face many challenges at the border and inside Egypt, such as:

- Long waits, unsanitary conditions, entry restrictions, visa backlogs, and lack of services at the border crossing.
- Splitting of families due to different entry requirements for women, children, older men, and young men.
- Poor living conditions, limited job opportunities, rising prices, and discrimination in Egypt.
- Backlog in registration, documentation, and resettlement by UNHCR and the Egyptian government.

## Starting the journey from Sudan

- Disruption and lack of access to consistent transportation means during armed clashes and increased travel ticket costs.
- Shortages of fuel, which is needed to reach the Egyptian border or even leave the conflict areas.
- The majority of families who left had children, older people and people with medical conditions that would require special care.
- Difficulty and ruggedness of the road due to the war and many military checkpoints set by both sides of the conflict. This is apart from passengers experiencing security harassment by armed groups.
- Some passengers were subjected to looting on the way and lost their belongings to armed groups.
- The journey was very long to the Egyptian border, and most passengers had to sleep outside in the open and then enter the Sudanese crossing border in the morning of the following day. This caused significant discomfort for children, older people and those with medical conditions.
- Difficulty obtaining services on the way, such as toilet facilities, food, and drinks, which exposed vulnerable groups and those with medical conditions to complications. Some died on the way to the crossing border or after their arrival. Older adults of both genders account for the majority of deaths.

## At the borders

- The vast number of coaches parked along the way at the crossing border entrance meant it was difficult to have quick and smooth procedures. This led to procrastination, and people had to sleep outside again in poor humanitarian conditions without shelter or service facilities. Many were exposed to insect bites and scorpion stings.
- Slow procedures and lack of staff led passengers to form long queues, which were enlarged by the arrival of coaches from various states to continue their departure procedures. This caused many fainting episodes among women.
- Upon gaining entry to the Egyptian border, the procedures were characterised by being extremely slow, overcrowding, and lack of site readiness for this large number of travellers.

## The road to Cairo

- Admission without visa for women, elderly, and children into the Egyptian territory has been suspended since mid-June as of the end of July. An entry permit may take more than a month to obtain, and one will have to wait at the borders in conditions like the ones mentioned above. The alternative option for travellers would be to pay \$1400 to obtain what's been called (Security Clearance) to be granted entry. Travellers who did not have valid travel documents were sent back despite the current circumstances that initially forced them to leave without their original documents. This is apart from men stranded at the borders for weeks or longer.
- After completing the process and leaving the Egyptian borders, visa holders and those with paid- Security Clearances then headed to Cairo, while some headed towards the city of Aswan only to start a long 12-hour journey from the Southern city to Cairo as a train could not be made available on the same day.

# Being a refugee in Cairo

## Accommodation

- Most families have had to pay expensive rates for their rented accommodation. A sharp increase in housing prices has been attributed to landlords' actions and rising intermediaries. Rentals have more than doubled from before the war.
- Some families with limited capabilities moved to other areas that are less costly with fewer services. Still, some became street homeless shortly after, as they could not afford rent.

## Seeking refuge

- Some headed to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees office to make an appointment and apply for protection. This option also has challenges, as thousands gathered in long queues at the UNHCR under dire humanitarian conditions. Some families had to sleep in the streets in front of the UNHCR office to have an opportunity to apply to the Commission. Following their struggle and arguments with the UNHCR staff in a situation characterised by unjustified inflexibility and distress caused by the staff—some were given refugee ID cards, and others were denied depending on the status of individual asylum refugees.
- Most of those arriving in Egypt do not apply as refugees and are not interested in applying. Thus, they have been deprived of support allocated only to those who have applied, registered, and received a refugee ID card.
- One of the reasons that may prevent them from taking such a step is their fear of being unable to return home as their travel document would be cancelled, and they would have to be content with the UNHCR card as their only official document. This is in addition to the dreadful conditions that Sudanese refugees encounter in Egypt, considering that the waiting times for resettlement into another country have been extended to 4- 5 years or longer. They will also be without supporting services apart from limited financial assistance that is already difficult to access due to the lack of information, awareness, and clear instructions.

## Livelihoods

- Those who received their refugee ID cards went to UNHCR's partner organisations, hoping to receive financial and in-kind support from the partners of the UNHCR. Yet they were shocked by the complicated procedures and bureaucracy that prevented the majority of cardholders from accessing services designated for refugees and made many reluctant to accept assistance or support due to the hardship they faced while trying to access some.
- The number of people is noticeable at most organisations' headquarters, where refugees expect to receive support. People of various nationalities gather in places that are not prepared to serve new arrivals, and consequently, they are forced to queue in the sun for long hours without services, places to sit, or drinking water.



# Resources

## Key entities supporting refugees in Egypt

- IOM <https://help.unhcr.org/egypt/partners/iom-ar/>
- CARITAS <https://help.unhcr.org/egypt/partners/caritas/>
- SAVE THE CHILDREN <https://help.unhcr.org/egypt/partners/sci/>
- STARS <https://help.unhcr.org/egypt/partners/stars/>
- MSF <https://help.unhcr.org/egypt/partners/msf/>
- UL <https://help.unhcr.org/egypt/partners/ul/>
- TERRE DES HOMMES <https://help.unhcr.org/egypt/partners/tdh/>
- CARE <https://help.unhcr.org/egypt/partners/care/>
- ERC <https://help.unhcr.org/egypt/partners/erc/>
- CRS <https://help.unhcr.org/egypt/partners/crs/>
- RF <https://help.unhcr.org/egypt/partners/refugeegypt/>
- PSTIC <https://help.unhcr.org/egypt/partners/pstic/>
- WFP <https://www.facebook.com/groups/486412468738069/?ref=share>

# **Sudan Crisis** Coordination Unit

## **About the SCCU**

The Sudan Crisis Coordination Unit (SCCU) aims to facilitate the coordination of resources and efforts among various groups and networks, including diaspora organisations, humanitarian aid agencies, local civil society organisations, and government agencies.

For further details, please visit: <https://sudancecu.org>