

EGYPT'S WAR AGAINST ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION

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(www.rieas.gr) -Publication date: 28 January 2017**

Illegal immigration via Egyptian Mediterranean Sea shores rose over the past few years in attempts to reach Europe and flee civil wars and difficult economic .conditions

In a speech on September 5, 2016, during a session at the G20 Summit in China, President El-Sisi said that Egypt is hosting five million refugees and immigrants despite facing economic challenges.¹ El-Sisi highlighted that Egypt is actively participating in international forums to develop international frameworks on dealing ².with immigrants and refugees and their protection

A tragic example of the illegal immigration took place last year in Egypt. An Egyptian boat capsized and sank on September 21, 2016, off the Egyptian coastal town of Rosetta. Egyptian security sources said that the boat was heading for Italy. The boat was overcrowded with hundreds of migrants, but the exact number is not known, with estimates from officials ranging from 400 to 600. Most were believed to be Egyptians, ⁴.Sudanese, Eritrean and Somali migrants.³ Only 160 of those on board survived

¹The key to the 5 million number lies in the government's reference to refugees and immigrants. These figures in the millions have been around for decades, largely referring to .Sudanese immigrants

²Egypt hosting 5 million refugees despite economic challenges: Sisi at G20, Ahram Online, .September 5, 2016

³Maggie Michael, Toll from Egypt migrant boat sinking rises to more than 200, The .Washington Post, September 27, 2016

Toll from Egypt migrant boat sinking rises to more than 200, Al Arabiya, September 28, ⁴

Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi ordered the tightening of border security and told his top aides that those behind the tragedy be brought to justice. El-Sisi has also urged parliament and the government to work together to issue legislation combating⁵ illegal migration

In recent years, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants commonly use smuggling networks in Egypt to take them on boats to Europe or through Sinai to Israel

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees puts the total number of refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless people (“people of concern”) in the country at .Aside from Syria, refugees come from, among other countries, Iraq, .around 250,000 Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, and Eritrea. These numbers refer to registered⁶ refugees; actual numbers are generally higher

Thousands of Egyptians and foreign migrants have sought to cross the Mediterranean Sea from Egypt and via Libya - to European lands and thousands of immigrants from Sudan and Eritrea attempted to cross the border from Sinai into Israel in search of better and safer life and work opportunities. In addition to Egyptians, some Syrian refugees are trying to leave Egypt to Europe illegally as well

More than two hundred and fifty thousand migrants from various countries in the Middle East and around the world have sought to cross the Mediterranean Sea from .North African shores including Egypt - to European lands in 2015

The sea route from Egypt to Europe has become increasingly popular for migrants. This year, more than 12,000 migrants arrived in Italy from Egypt between January and September 2016, compared to 7,000 in the same period last year, according to the⁷ EU border agency Frontex

European governments have said they were overwhelmed by the magnitude of the migration wave, and have asked cooperation from North African countries including .Egypt to stem the tide

The UN refugee agency said in December 2015 that more than one million migrants and refugees reached Europe in 2015, including over 970,000 who made the

.2016

.Egypt moves to tighten borders after migrant ship tragedy, Al Arabiya, September 25, 2016⁵

Who are the 5 million refugees and immigrants in Egypt? Brookings, ⁶Omer Karasapan .October 4, 2016

⁷Maggie Michael, Toll from Egypt migrant boat sinking rises to more than 200, The .Washington Post, September 27, 2016

⁸.dangerous journey across the Mediterranean

Earlier in 2016, European countries unilaterally moved to shut the Balkan migration route, used by hundreds of thousands who aim to make it to Western Europe. Illegal immigration through the Egyptian and Libyan coasts has recently spiked, partially due ⁹.banning entry of migrants to Europe via the Balkans

Egyptian foreign minister said that the refugees enjoy all social services provided to .Egyptians, further straining the country's ailing economy

Egypt's policy to counter illegal immigration

The Ministry of Manpower and Immigration was separated into the Ministry of Manpower and the new Ministry of Immigration and Egyptian Expatriates Affairs. . This body has been introduced in Ismail's cabinet in 2015

Nabila Makram was appointed as minister of immigration and Egyptian expatriate affairs in 2015Makram served as Egypt's consulate general in Rome and deputy consulate general in Dubai. She holds a Bachelor in economics and political science ¹⁰.from Cairo University in 1991

According to the Minister of Immigration, Nabila Makram, the ministry coordinates communication between the government and expatriates and will work to “eliminate any hurdles” that Egyptians face abroad. Egyptian nationals’ migration to Europe draws resources away from Egypt at a time when the country is desperate for in terms of youth investment. Discussion of migration is in fact often framed migration and the lack of employment opportunities in Egypt. The Ministry is also being formed at a time when migration is of increasing concern and the need to reform the country’s migration policies.¹¹

The National Committee on Fighting and Preventing Illegal Immigration

Egypt formed The National Committee on Fighting and Preventing Illegal Immigration. The committee released a study on the phenomena based on in-field

⁸Egypt calls on EU to intensify efforts to curb illegal immigration, Ahram Online, September 1, .2016

⁹Ibid

¹⁰Three ‘beauties’ join Egypt’s new Cabinet, but still not enough? Al Arabiya, September 21, .2015

¹¹Elisa Miller, A Close Look at the Changes to Egypt's Ministries ,Atlantic council, October 1, .2015

researching in November 2015. Committee director Naela Gabr said this study will¹² improve the national strategy of fighting illegal immigration

Special court for illegal immigration and human trafficking crimes

Egyptian Minister of Justice Ahmed Al-Zind said on October 24, 2015, that Egypt¹³ will launch a special court for illegal immigration and human trafficking crimes

The law to combat illegal immigration

Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi approved in November 2016 a law aimed at curbing illegal immigration and cracking down on human smuggling. The law was¹⁴ passed by the Egyptian parliament in mid-October 2016

The law stipulates a penalty between LE50,000 (around \$6,000) and 200,000 (around \$25,000) or a prison sentence, without specifying the duration, to anyone who smuggles illegal immigrants, attempts to smuggle them, or mediates in the smuggling¹⁵ process

Another article stipulates hard labor sentences and a fine between LE200,000 (around \$25,000) and LE500,000 (around \$63,000) if suspects started, managed, held a position in or was a member of an organized group that aims to smuggle illegal immigrants

This penalty also applies to smugglers in possession of a weapon, or if the smuggler is a public employee, or had previous felonies

A life sentence is reserved to smugglers who aim to execute a terrorist attack by smuggling illegal immigrants, or if the smuggling caused the death of an illegal immigrant or resulted in a disability, or if women and children were among the immigrants, or if fake documentations were used to create new identities for the¹⁶ immigrants

Military operations

¹²Ahmed Abbass, Egypt is to launch special court for illegal immigration, Daily News Egypt, October 24, 2015

¹³Ibid

¹⁴Egypt's Sisi ratifies law to curb migrant smuggling, Ahram Online, November 8, 2017

¹⁵Egypt's cabinet approves draft illegal migration law against smugglers, Ahram Online, November 26, 2015

¹⁶Ibid

Egypt's army has repeatedly announced over the past years the thwarting of illegal immigration attempts from the Mediterranean coast to Europe. The Egyptian army said that the border guard forces prevented more than 12,000 people of various nationalities from illegally entering or leaving the country in a total of 434 cases of ¹⁷.illegal migration in 2016

In July 2015, Egyptian security authorities have arrested over 600 Egyptian and Sudanese migrants who were attempting to cross into Libya, which is considered a hot spot for illegal immigration to Europe.¹⁸ Egyptian authorities have deported the ¹⁹.Sudanese illegal immigrants to Sudan

Egypt's armed forces published a report in October 2015, detailing recent activities by Egyptian border guards, announcing the arrest of 2,215 illegal migrants of varying nationalities in September 2015. The Egyptian Army Spokesman Mohamed Samir also announced that border guards have seized 1067 smuggled weapons of ²⁰.various types and ammunition in September 2015

In November 2015, twenty Sudanese migrants were shot dead in separate incidents, along the Egyptian border as they tried to cross into Israel during shootouts between Egyptian forces and smugglers. Sinai is a major route for African migrants trying to ²¹.reach Israel

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said he was "deeply troubled" by the killings, and called on Egyptian authorities to open a full probe into the incidents and to ²²".ensure accountability

Egypt has expressed discontent with the remarks by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. The army spokesperson said that Egyptian border guards shot dead the African migrants in a gunfight near the Egypt-Israel border as they attempted to cross into

¹⁷Egypt's border guards stopped 12,000 from illegally migrating in 2016: Army, Ahran Online, January 12, 2017

¹⁸Egypt arrests 184 attempting illegal crossing to Libya, Ahran Online, July 16, 2015

Egypt deports 36 Sudanese after illegal migration attempt to Italy, Ahran Online, July 16, ¹⁹.2015

arrested for attempting 'illegal migration' in one month: Egypt's army, Ahran Online, 2,215 ²⁰.October 14, 2015

Sudanese migrants killed by Egyptian border guards at Israeli border, Ahran Online, ²¹5November 23, 2015

²²Egypt slams UN chief's remarks on death of Sudanese nationals near Israeli border, Ahran Online, November 24, 2015

Israel. He also said that the guards shot several warning shots at the “trespassers” who²³ in response opened fire at the security forces, injuring a soldier

The Sudanese Ministry of Foreign affairs demanded an explanation from its Egyptian counterpart regarding the death of Sudanese migrants near the Egyptian-Israeli borders in Sinai. The Sudanese embassy in Cairo issued two memos earlier in November to the Egyptian foreign ministry regarding the mistreatment and detention of its citizens

The Egyptian Ministry of Foreign affairs denied that there was systematic mistreatment of Sudanese citizens in Egypt

In June 2016 the army said border guards had detained 445 people before they could set sail for Europe

In July 2016, the navy detained 146 illegal migrants and seven crew members on the North Coast. The migrants were from Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, and Cameroon

A boat stopped by naval forces in mid-July was found to be carrying 143 illegal migrants from Egypt, Palestine, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, Eritrea, Somalia and Ethiopia

On August 18, 2016, the navy raided a fishing boat in Kafr Al-Sheikh and arrested 62 people of different nationalities who were attempting to travel to Italy illegally. Eight hours later border guards arrested 82 people on another fishing boat in Alexandria

On September 15, 2016, Egypt’s navy has foiled two irregular immigration attempts²⁴ of 440 people through the Mediterranean Sea during the Eid Al-Adha holiday

The navy stopped a fishing boat carrying 198 people from different nationalities in addition to its seven-member crew in the northern city of Burullus in Kafr Al-Sheikh governorate

The navy also stopped a fishing boat carrying 242 people from different nationalities and its five-members crew in the northern city Ras El-Hakima, Marsa Matrouh governorate

Both fishing boats were led to Abu-Kir naval base in Alexandria where the 440 people received medical care and were referred to prosecution

²³Ibid

²⁴Egypt’s navy foils irregular immigration attempt of 440 people, Ahram Online, September 15, 2016

Foreign Policy

In May 4, 2015, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Schteinmeier visited Cairo to address the illegal immigration crisis with President El-Sisi. Schteinmeier said Egypt urgently needed to protect and monitor its borders adding that Berlin provides²⁵.technical assistance to Egypt to achieve these goals

European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, has arrived in Egypt to meet President El-Sisi a day after the German Foreign Minister's visit in²⁶.Cairo to discuss the same issue

Egyptian minister of interior Magdy Abdel Ghafar signed a security cooperation agreement with his German counterpart Thomas de Maizière on July 12, 2016, in Berlin. The Egyptian interior ministry noted that the two governments signed the agreement that solidifies cooperation in preventing all types of crimes, including terrorism and corruption, as well reinforcing airport security and stemming illegal immigration. The agreement includes also the exchange of information, technical²⁷.training and expertise between Egypt and Germany

Egypt agreed in October 2016, with Cyprus and Greece to work on stopping the flow of irregular migrants during a tripartite summit held in Cairo between the leaders of the three countries. Egypt's President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi said in a press conference that the three leaders agreed on making the migration crisis a priority and that the²⁸.solution should not be limited to security measures and deportation

Egypt's Immigration Minister Nabila Makram discussed in December 2016, with Italian officials a number of issues related to the illegal immigration and security. Following the meetings, the Egyptian minister headed for Sicily island for a conference and to inquire after Egyptian migrants, especially minors. Makram expounded Egypt's efforts to face growing illegal migration during the conference²⁹.organized in Sicily and attended by representatives of the Italian Justice Ministry

Summary

²⁵Egypt plays pivotal role in the region: German FM, Ahram Online, May 4, 2015

²⁶EU commissioner meets Egypt's El-Sisi over migration crisis, Ahram Online, May 5, 2015

²⁷Egypt, Germany sign security cooperation agreement on terrorism, illegal immigration, .Ahram Online, July 12, 2016

²⁸Egypt, Cyprus and Greece join forces against 'illegal migration',Ahram Online, October 11, .2016

²⁹Egypt in talks with Italy over illegal immigration, Arab Today, December 17, 2016

Instability in the Middle East region since late 2010 has led to a huge increase in the number of refugees fleeing their countries and attempting to enter Egypt. Egypt is now home to 5 million refugees, including 500.000 Syrians who fled war at home

The Mediterranean Sea has become the preferred gateway to Europe for an increasing number of refugees from the Middle East and Africa who attempt to cross in large numbers on small, ill-equipped boats

Egypt offers the refugees access to public healthcare and education and all social services provided to Egyptians, but it has no procedures for offering asylum

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has welcomed Egypt government's proposed law : "Egypt is the first country in the Middle East and North Africa to issue an anti-smuggling law complying with the 'Smuggling Protocol' of the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, as well as its commitments under the Action Plan of the Valletta Summit on Migration," said the IOM

³⁰.statement

IOM remains committed to continue providing all the necessary support to the "government and all relevant stakeholders in ensuring that smugglers are brought to justice and migrants are not re-victimized, but protected under the provisions of ³¹"law

Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi said in a speech during a session at the G20 Summit in China that Egypt is hosting five million refugees and immigrants despite facing economic challenges. El-Sisi highlighted that Egypt is actively participating in international forums to develop international frameworks on dealing with immigrants and refugees and their protection. El-Sisi said in his speech that to resolve refugee crises, the root causes must be addressed, including resolving armed conflicts and poor economic situations by providing job opportunities. The G20 members, agreed at the summit that refugees of violent conflicts represent a global issue and that the

³².burden must be shared

³⁰Mohamed Abdel-Baky, Halting illegal migration, Al Ahram Weekly, Issue No.1309, August .25, 2016

³¹ibid

³²Egypt hosting 5 million refugees despite economic challenges: Sisi at G20, Ahram Online, .September 5, 2016