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# **Obstacles facing Sudanese refugees from leaving Sudan until obtaining a refugee status**



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## **Abstract:**

Refugees, often fleeing war and conflict, face immense challenges and hardships on their journeys to find safety and stability. Sudanese refugees, for example, face violence, and exploitation, as well as a lack of basic human needs. Upon reaching Egypt, they face further challenges, including registering as refugees, a complex process that requires limited resources and capacity within the Egyptian government and humanitarian agencies. Despite these challenges, Sudanese refugees demonstrate resilience and hope for a better future. Efforts by international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and local communities aim to provide essential support and protection to Sudanese refugees, This report focuses on shedding light on the journey of Sudanese refugees specifically the obstacles that face them from the moment they leave Sudan until they obtain refugee status. It is split into three sections, the first being the situation in Sudan then the journey and the struggles to reach Egypt, and finally the struggles in Egypt.

## **Introduction:**

The experience of refugees and their journey is an important and nuanced part of humanity. Millions of people have to flee from their homes in search of safety, stability, and an opportunity for a better future, one of the most common reasons is war. Refugees frequently travel long distances and face dangers and difficulties beyond their comprehension. As a result of a pressing need to survive and to make sure their loved ones survive, they must go on these travels.

The journey of Sudanese refugees fleeing their war-torn homeland in search of safety and stability is full of challenges and hardships. These individuals are facing numerous obstacles along the way, with the hope of finding refuge in neighboring countries like Egypt. However, even upon reaching Egypt, their struggles are far from over as they navigate through a complex process to register as refugees.

The ongoing conflicts and political instability in Sudan have forced countless individuals and families to flee their homes in search of safety. Many Sudanese refugees embark on dangerous and exhausting journeys, traveling vast distances and facing the constant threat of violence, exploitation, and trafficking, making their journey a harrowing ordeal. The lack of basic human needs, such as food, water, and shelter, adds to their physical and emotional hardships.

Upon reaching the borders of Egypt, Sudanese refugees often encounter further challenges. Egypt has been a significant destination for refugees escaping Sudan due to its geographical proximity and historical role as a host country for displaced individuals. However, the influx of refugees has put a strain on Egypt's resources and infrastructure, making the process of registering as a refugee a complex and demanding task.

Registering as a refugee is a crucial step in obtaining legal recognition and access to healthcare, education, and employment opportunities. However, the registration process can be lengthy. Limited capacity and resources within the Egyptian government and humanitarian agencies often result in delays and backlogs, leaving refugees in a state of uncertainty and vulnerability.

Despite the immense hardships they endure, Sudanese refugees demonstrate resilience, determination, and hope for a better future. They seek safety, stability, and opportunities to rebuild their lives. Efforts by international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and local communities aim to soften the struggles faced by Sudanese refugees and provide them with essential support and protection. So, this report aims to shed light on the journey and the difficulties faced by Sudanese refugees from their initial escape to their registration in Egypt.

## **The situation in Sudan:**

Five months have passed since the outbreak of war in Sudan between the Sudanese army forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), in order to depose tyrant Omar al-Bashir, who governed for thirty years prior to his overthrow, The two opposing groups had previously worked together as partners. Al-Bashir was succeeded by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan of the SAF. Burhan was assisted in 2021 in leading a second coup that overthrew Sudan's temporary government by RSF General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, also referred to as Hemedti. However, a drive to incorporate the RSF into the national army sparked a violent uprising from Hemedti in the middle of April 2023 under international pressure to make the transition to a civilian administration. While the battle for control of the capital, Khartoum, continues, the RSF has a large presence in Darfur and has taken control of towns all throughout the region. (Ferragamo, 2023)

And since then more and more Sudanese citizens and residents of Sudan have fled to neighboring countries, with almost 5.1 million people having been forced to flee Due to that unrest that started in mid-April.

By September 5th, a little over 4.1 million individuals had been internally displaced. This is almost twice as many as the 3.8 million previously displaced individuals that were scattered around the nation before the conflict. In total, 3,733 places in all 18 states are now home to people who have been uprooted from eight different states. The majority are in the River Nile, South, East, Northern, Sennar, and North Darfur states. Displaced people from Khartoum make up about 69% of the population. Moreover, as of September 6, 1,004,261 individuals have also left Sudan and entered nearby nations, including South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt, and Ethiopia. (OCHA, 2023)

Since April 15, Egypt has hosted around 272,000 Sudanese refugees. Moreover, since May of this year, Egypt has launched a strategic plan to respond to the number of refugees taking refuge across the southern borders, and that previously mentioned number is estimated to represent 77% of the projected capacity to host. (UNHCR, 2023)

People have been fleeing not only because they fear for their safety but also because medicine and food have been insecure since the war, so, people with chronic illnesses or people with elderly parents and relatives were forced to leave in order to have a chance at surviving, more than three hundred deaths due to this insecurity has been recorded in the period between mid-May and mid-July. (UNHCR, health conditions worsen as displacement from Sudan exceeds 4 million, 2023) Not only medications have been low but the overall health condition in Sudan has declined rapidly,

The states most impacted by the fighting between the SAF and RSF are Khartoum, Central Darfur, South Darfur, West Darfur, and South Kordofan, where over half of all Sudanese citizens experience extreme food insecurity. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification Phases 3 and 4 (Crisis and Emergency levels, respectively) are being experienced by almost 9.6 million individuals across these states. This includes 2.9 million individuals who are experiencing severe food insecurity at the Emergency level, which is just short of famine According to the most recent IPC update on Sudan, 20.3 million people nationwide experience severe food insecurity and will require food and livelihood support between July and September 2023. (OCHA, 2023)

Children and families are reportedly living in situations that are akin to being under assault in Kadugli, the capital of South Kordofan State, according to Save the Children employees who continue to work on the front lines. Roadblocks have made



it difficult to bring in further aid and commercial goods, and the town's emergency food supplies have run out. The town's medical services have come to a complete halt. As violence in Kadugli grew increasingly intense on August 14, more than 50,000 people including at least 30,000 children were evacuated from different sections of the town. The bulk of the Hajr Al-Maak community's inhabitants fled and took refuge at the schools nearby in Radaif with nothing more but the clothes on their shoulders. A second phase of relocation has now affected some of the households that moved from Khartoum to Kadugli. In Kadugli, there were reportedly 160,000 displaced people before the attacks, of whom 100,000 already need emergency aid. (SC, 2023) (OCHA, 2023)

Amid the war and the struggle, women are facing a more dire situation where safety threats, including sexual violence, harassment, abuse, and exploitation, are increasing as the battle rages on throughout the nation. The hazards of trafficking, sexual assault, domestic abuse, harassment, and maltreatment are enormous for women and girls. Given that even with the civil society's continuous efforts, not all protection service demands are being satisfied, and they are also are struggling with issues such as restricted access in conflict-affected nations, supply shortages, and limited availability of specialized services. (OCHA, 2023)

About 6,200 people have died in Sudan as a result of conflict-related illness epidemics and deteriorating health systems, among other things indirectly related to the war. severe malnutrition cases have increased by 30% in core regions of the states of Khartoum, Darfur, and Kordofan, according to the Health Cluster's most recent bulletin. Additionally, the prevalence of severe starvation has grown by 10%

nationwide and by 15% in areas hosting displaced individuals. Over 690,000 of the 3.4 million children living in Sudan between the ages of six and 59 months who suffer from severe malnutrition and are in need of treatment are also severely malnourished. Additionally, 1 million children and women who are pregnant or breastfeeding need care due to severe malnutrition. In addition to the disease outbreak that is happening across the country with diseases such as malaria.

The economic state as well has also been terrible and people are struggling to make ends meet and to just live a humane bare minimum of a life. Others have fled with their children to make sure that they have a chance to resume their education so that they will not be stranded with no education and no future and since Egypt is Sudan's northern border where it was a somewhat easy and welcoming border to cross and to seek safety there. since the war began in mid-April, a little over half of school-age children which is around 6.4 million kids have had to experience their education being interrupted that occurred two months before they even get the chance to finish the school year. Not to mention that schools are also allegedly acting as temporary shelters for displaced persons. (OCHA, Keeping Children Safe and Learning: Education in Crisis, 2023)



## **The journey to Egypt:**

The journey from Sudan to the Egyptian borders is long and exhausting, it usually takes several days via bus, but lately, even busses haven't been the most accessible method for Sudanese refugees due to how expensive it has become, because of the war, the currency devaluation, and the exploitation of people seeking refuge.

At some point, even people who could afford to take the bus have gotten off of it to walk to the borders since the roads have been blocked and the journey was taking even more time than was expected so, people preferred to continue on foot just to have the opportunity to enter Egypt. The roads have been blocked to a point where truck drivers on the route between Sudan and Egypt are stuck and are dying of heat strokes and dehydration according to rassad news.

The financial situation of Sudanese people trying to cross has become so dire, that individuals trying to acquire visas spend months trying, displaced from their homes and waiting on their visas with the shadow of war and the economic state that the country has been in, they are running out of money to progress into making the trip as well as just having a humane living condition until they get their hands on their visas

Numerous thousands of Sudanese are forced to live in improvised shelters or on the streets highlighted the horrific conditions in Port Sudan and Wadi Halfa. A mutual help group in Wadi Halfa claimed that the group is sheltering about 15,000 people. However, it was said that there are still a lot of people trapped, some of whom have been experiencing heat stroke due to a shortage of water. Not to mention that the town's pharmacies are running low on essential medical supplies like insulin and intravenous fluids.

Moreover, the World Food Program in Egypt said that it had established a humanitarian route from southern Egypt to Wadi Halfa and had provided food aid. However, many claimed that the little town's food options are still scarce. Meanwhile, refugees have complained about a lack of covered waiting places, unclean restrooms, and inadequate food and drink supplies at the Argeen border crossing, which is close to Wadi Halfa. (Guergues, 2023)

Moreover, one man whom the WHO organization interviewed has described the situation as a nightmare, saying that the journey from Khartoum till reaching Cairo has taken him and his family 17 days. He mentioned one incident where he was robbed on his journey, by a man who took his money at gunpoint. These dangers make the journey harder than it already is. (WHO, 2023)

In an interview with the Guardian, a young engineering student by the name of Rana Ameen, has described her journey to the borders. She described that only the fee to reach the borders of Egypt has been £475 per person for her and her five family members who were accompanying her. Not only that but they had to cross the capital amid the war just so they could reach the outskirts of Omdurman where the bus station was located, however, their struggles definitely didn't end by reaching the bus station, they lived at the borders for three days in the heat and without shelters to wait for their turn to cross the borders. A direct quote from her describing what she had to endure is "It was a deadly trip,"

The struggles do not disappear by just reaching the borders, once there, people face other series of struggles since they are not immediately rushed onto Egyptian soil, which starts with the lack of shelter and the hot weather, the living conditions on the borders are less than ideal. Women and children can be seen sleeping on the sides of the roads just waiting, with no medications and a struggle for water. With

how hot the weather is there; dehydration can be often seen as a general struggle. There are also no toilets which is a big hygiene and health concern, especially for the reproductive health of women. which can be seen through the rest of her quote, “At the border crossing, there was barely food, water and no bathrooms. Babies were crying as they lay on the ground. Women were very tired. Thousands of men were standing in very long lines to get visas.” And during the endurance of all that, to avoid dehydration, they were occasionally provided with water that was brought to them via a truck, however, she also said that the water wasn’t sufficient as there was a large amount of people also waiting.

Another interview was done with a Sudanese citizen, where the situation was described as “chaos at the border,” Due to the overwhelming number of people seeking refuge at the borders, just waiting to be admitted into the country, he personally stayed a day and a half at the borders which he explained that they were spent with no food, no water, and no sleep either. In his circumstances, he had to pay 200 for the bus ticket and referred to it as “only those who have money can leave the country.” (michaelson, 2023)

According to Caroline Dauber, which is a Country Manager in Egypt, the majority of the Sudanese refugees are in Aswan, they are mostly made up of women, children, and older persons. These individuals are sleeping in the streets and occupying schools since there is a growing shortage of accessible and cheap housing as well as the burden on the host community in Aswan is big, since they have sheltered the majority of refugees since the war as well as the prices just keep getting higher and higher. In addition to the fact that there are more refugees than ever before They don't have access to food, drink, or restrooms. People in Aswan also need access to food, water, medical care, and housing. More and more traumatized

individuals are there, they quarrel frequently, separated from family members when traveling, and endure a great deal of worry and anxiety. (OHCR, 2023)

Other refugees spent 10 days on their journey to Egypt, and with them escaping the horrors of war they were running with no means to support themselves, to the point where they were relying heavily on help from strangers, and surely that wasn't enough to keep them fed, hunger was an occasional feeling to the mother and her children, yet they preferred it to the situation in Sudan. Her main concern was her children, she has witnessed rape cases happening during the war and all she was concerned about was protecting her girls since she had 4 of them. (UNHCR, In Egypt, refugees tell UNHCR's Grandi 'terrible stories' of conflict in Sudan, 2023) In the beginning, when the war first erupted and Sudanese people were first fleeing, Egypt was granting women, children under 16, and men over 50, entry without a visa, which meant separation for some families in order to survive, and try to move forward looking for health care and resuming their children's education.

That is until the 10th of June when restrictions were imposed that anyone regardless of gender and age needs an Egyptian entry visa as well as full documents, This change in policy resulted in a decrease in the number of people at the border waiting for entry from the thousands that were there to just a couple of hundreds. (UNHCR, UNHCR EGYPT: Sudan Emergency Response Update, 15 June 2023 - Egypt, 2023) Although Sudanese people seeking refuge have complained about the sudden change in policy and have claimed that it is unfair, you have to take into consideration the security threats that Egypt might face with its borders wide open, just letting in all women, children, and old men, could very possibly threaten its national security and let in individuals affiliated with terrorist groups.

Yet, those struggles do not end the moment they cross the borders, since they cross from southern Egypt to Aswan and then to the capital, Cairo, which is in the northern parts.

The same struggles that they face outside of the borders they also face into the borders since Egypt rather follows a no-camp policy, people are allowed the freedom to work and travel about and refuses to establish refugee camps. which the country has been severely criticized for, but you also have to keep in mind while that is not ideal. The UNHCR strongly advises against a camp approach (UNHCR, Camp site planning minimum standards | UNHCR, 2022), which this can be solved with other methods such as a host-housing system, which will also struggle severely taking into consideration just the amount of people fleeing to Egypt.

## **In Egypt:**

### **UNHCR and registration:**

People have described in interviews the process of registration in UNHCR Egypt as better and easier than it is in other countries such as Turkey, which is fascinating seeing as UNHCR Egypt receives 41,846,689 dollars which is about 28% of the total required funds (UNHCR, Egypt Funding Update - 2023, 2023) while Turkey receives way more which is around 150,571,698 dollars and that is 30% (UNHCR, Türkiye Funding Update - 2023, 2023) of the required budget. Even though Egypt provides a better experience, refugees have described the process as “long” and “needs a lot of patience”, which can obviously be understood by the above percentage, for both countries, the UNHCR literally lacks about 70% of its required budget to perform at full capacity.

The 1954 Memorandum of Understanding between Egypt and UNHCR governs the registration, and documentation that UNHCR conducts in Egypt since UNHCR is the only organization responsible for the registration process in Egypt. UNHCR also supports "the access of refugees to health and education services and ensuring that vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers can meet their basic needs." As additional qualifying requirements for food assistance via cash transfers, the World Food Program (WFP) also considers information from the UNHCR's refugee registration database.

Once people cross the border, they have to make an appointment to start their registration process, said appointment is usually done via phone or SMS and then they are also contacted in the same way to be given their appointment information, it is to be noted that refugees waiting for the very first appointment have no place to

go, no jobs, no shelter, and no protection. So, any delay -which some refugees have expressed happens quite a lot- affects their lives.

A "Yellow Card," a renewable residency card, is given to an asylum applicant upon registration with UNHCR. An individual is shielded from detention and deportation by having it. For 18 months, the card is valid. The refugee is given a "Blue Card" once UNHCR has formally determined their status. For three years, this card is valid. For many refugees, however, it is quite challenging to schedule an appointment with UNHCR to renew it.

The lengthy process of determining their status was a source of intense aggravation for many Sudanese. Some claim that organizing interviews with UNHCR might take months, even after one has received the Yellow Card. To obtain a Blue Card, a person might wait up to two years. When there's a lack of documents the refugees are issued a white card until further investigating and determining their case.

Others spoke about the UNHCR's poor communication on the speed of registration and the entire asylum procedure. For instance, there are no clear justifications given when the status of refugees is rejected. "Results were published on public notice boards after a few weeks or months alongside anonymous case numbers. Rejected applicants did not get detailed explanations.

A significant amount of people decides without applying for refugee status at all. Even the most at-risk families may choose to stay in the nation as tourists and renew their residency visa every six months, similar to the majority of Sudanese who live in Egypt. The Sudanese refugee situation in Egypt is, in short, quite challenging



due to the paperwork and effort needed to register and receive refugee status, as well as a history of abuse by Egyptian security forces. (Halakhe, 2023)

However once registered, the UNHCR provides legal support for refugees in order to reach justice, public services, as well as aid. The UNHCR also partnered with several foundations to provide that service to their refugees such as the Egyptian Foundation for Refugee Rights- EFRR and the United Lawyers- UL (UNHCR, UNHCR Egypt Legal Aid (November 2022) - Egypt, 2022)

The UNHCR also provides a very helpful guide on their website which is a complaints handbook for Reporting fraud, corruption, and misconduct including sexual exploitation and abuse. (UNHCR, Reporting Fraud, Corruption and Misconduct Including Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, 2023)

It is also to be kept in mind that during the writing of this report, we have tried to get in touch with the UNHCR to collaborate directly with them in order to understand the process a little better and exactly how long the waiting time between every step in the registration process, but with no avail, our emails were left unanswered, this could be explained due to them being overwhelmed and underfunded but this also could point into the direction of how difficult it is to get into contact with them, which makes sense given that even refugees experience delays with contacting them.

It is a very tricky situation to asses, From one point of view the UNHCR is doing its best in trying to provide refugees with their best in light of the circumstances of it being severely underfunded, and overwhelmed with the number of refugees that are flooding in such a short period of time, but at the same time the process that we are analyzing here in this report, people's lives literally depend on it, basic human necessities such as medical care, education, food, and water literally

depend on whether they are lucky that the process is facilitated or not. The UNHCR doesn't even have half of the budget required to offer their full assistance.

### **Lack of information and harsh reality:**

There's a general lack of information among refugees that the help provided to them in Egypt would be somewhat limited, a lot of refugees are struggling to get by they have no jobs and no financial support, and unfortunately, there was this false idea that their suffering would immediately end with their registration being finalized which is truly a shame that the struggle doesn't seem to end. With the UNHCR being severely underfunded, cash grants are very limited to those in dire need. With the economic situation being not ideal the job market is also suffering for Egyptian citizens let alone refugees (Guergues, 2023) The average salary in Egypt is around 5,000 pounds which is not nearly enough to support a family through the economic crisis.

This brings us to the civil society in Egypt, there are several organizations such as Catholic Relief Services (CRS) which provide help with education and livelihood for refugees. Interestingly though, in a survey done to measure if refugees felt supported by civil society in Egypt, 97.2% of the respondents answered no.

Which means that even after entering Egypt, refugees still suffer to get by, especially since Egypt as mentioned previously follows a no-camp policy and refugees are self-settled.

However, with all these obstacles being said, the UNHCR with its budget restraints has helped economically empower people, They offered courses on how refugees can open up their own businesses and how to run them, and one girl from

Sudan has followed through and opened her own cosmetic business and named it “daughter of Sudan” (UN, 2023)

## **Conclusion:**

The situation facing refugees from the moment they decide to leave until they get their refugee status can only be described as “heartbreaking” as well as “harsh” The continuous struggles just do not stop. And there are parts that just cannot be avoided such as getting robbed on the way to the borders, there’s just nothing that can be done when Sudan is already at war and people are fleeing because of said war.

Also, the problems with the slow entry to Egypt and the separated families not only documentation just have to be checked because of national safety concerns but also going back to the fact that refugees in Egypt are self-settled since the economic hardships in Egypt have been dire accepting all refugees into the country without documentation and without restrictions in light of Egypt’s economic crisis would have a negative effect on the quality of life of Egyptian citizens, since for example rent prices skyrockets, especially since some families share apartments and split the rent, which makes it more affordable for them, but put a strain on the average Egyptian family.

But many other aspects can be further looked into just to provide refugees with a more humane experience. Such as children’s education and medical assistance, it is truly heartbreaking that some children, who their families fled the war to ensure that they would have a future might I add, are not getting proper education because the organizations tasked with providing them with and ensuring that they get that proper education are simply underfunded.

In addition, the fact there’s no one to blame because even with the very limited budget there’s clear efforts displayed, even when the UNHCR and the civil society are spread too thin there’s effort to be observed.

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