

# Chapter 20

## The Political Economy of Egyptian Migration to Europe in the 2020s



Ibrahim Awad

### 20.1 Introduction

Elements of neoclassical economics inform Egypt's and the European Union's (EU) perspectives on Egyptian migration to Europe. In these elements, migration results from the uneven geographical distribution of labor and capital. Economic and demographic factors are assumed to push workers to move from countries, where labour is abundant and wages low to labour-scarce countries, where wages are high (Massey et al., 1993). Egypt is one of the former countries, while the EU is in the latter category. Faced with high labour force growth rates, and low domestic employment growth rates, Egypt has sought to reduce pressures on its labour market in the international migration of its workers. International migration is also a source of precious financial remittances. In contrast, the EU has consistently sought to curb, if not to stop, fresh international migration and to encourage the migrants' return to their countries of origin. For the EU, exploiting the economic drivers in Egypt, criminal networks illegally smuggle fresh migrants to Europe. The theoretical foundation of this claim is signaled in Sect. 20.2.

Thus, Egypt and the EU look as having conflicting objectives. However, for this chapter in their actual handling of migration, the two parties reached understandings that seem to satisfy them both. In a neoclassical rationale, Egypt should have sought to promote migration to the EU. But this economic rationale was superseded by political considerations. Egypt accepted the EU's insistence on curbing and reversing migration, went along with it and sought to make gains in return. Rather than a labour market and economic issue, migration to the EU became a foreign policy one

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This chapter specifically takes up Egyptian labour migration to the EU.

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I. Awad (✉)

Center for Migration and Refugee Studies, School of Global Affairs and Public Policy,  
The American University in Cairo, New Cairo, Egypt

e-mail: [iawad@aucegypt.edu](mailto:iawad@aucegypt.edu)

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for Egypt. This acceptance of the EU's insistence may be considered as expressing the asymmetry of relations between the EU and its member states, and Egypt. The former are all OECD industrialized countries, including three members of the G7 and G20. They are sources of financial aid, technical assistance, and weapons to Egypt. In contrast, Egypt is a developing country with chronic budgetary and balance of trade deficits. Nevertheless, it is argued here that Egypt could balance this asymmetrical power relation. Balancing power asymmetry is done through the use of means other than material resources (Pfetsch, 2011). The mentioned EU fixation on irregular migration was used by Egypt as a nonmaterial resource that reinforced its bargaining power.

Egypt's attitude was to the liking of the EU which rewarded it for it. The institutional, policy and operationalization construct of the migration relations between the two parties served to put in practice the agreed exchange of benefits. The outcome was satisfaction with this exchange and an intensification of relations in other areas. Yet, loopholes exist. This chapter seeks to bring evidence in support of this proposition.

Therefore, after this introduction, Sect. 20.2 elaborates on the two parties' perspectives on Egyptian migration to Europe. Section 20.3 places Europe within the larger context of Egyptian international migration. It also reviews the Egyptian institutional structure of migration to Europe. Section 20.4 deals with the policy framework for migration to Europe, agreed by the EU, its member states and Egypt. Section 20.5 reviews the operationalization of the policy framework through EU- and member states-funded projects and other relations. It also reviews the outcomes of this operationalization, which reveal the two parties' satisfaction with their approach to migration and growth in their relations in other areas. But it equally uncovers loopholes in the outcomes of the agreed approach to migration. Conclusions will be finally drawn. The chapter draws on published research and accessible unpublished documents; it also benefits from a series of interviews conducted, as a triangulation method, with researchers and officials familiar with its subject.

## **20.2 Egyptian Migration to Europe: The Two Parties' Perspectives**

For the EU, Egypt is a country of origin, transit, and destination. The Egyptian jobseekers outflow from Egypt irregularly reaching Europe and engaging in informal employment there. In-transit migrants and refugees in Egypt, suffering poor living and working conditions, also wish to irregularly reach the European shores. Rings of smugglers and traffickers exploit the jobseekers, and through unauthorized crossings of the Mediterranean make them land on the shores of Southern European countries. These migrants should be protected from smugglers and traffickers. They should also be returned and Egyptians among them reintegrated in Egypt, which accepts the EU's smuggling and trafficking discourse. For the EU, the root causes of migration

from Egypt lie in a shortage of decent jobs in the Egyptian labour market. They should be remedied through promoting development, employment creation and better matching supply and demand in the Egyptian labour market. Depending on demand in the EU labour markets, in principle, legal migration opportunities could be available to Egyptian jobseekers. Migrants and refugees in Egypt should be protected and their livings and employment improved. This conceptualization of migration from Egypt is clear in the document adopted in 2022 by the EU heads of mission in Egypt (Delegation of the EU to Egypt, [Unpublished](#)). The issues it raises and the remedies it suggests are in line with the EU's Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM) adopted in 2005 and revisited in 2011 (EC, [2011](#)). Two observations should be highlighted in their respect. The remedies mostly emphasize denial of migration. Combating irregular migration, fighting smugglers and traffickers, return and reintegration, addressing root causes, and fixing migrants and refugees in Egypt are the essential conceptual foundations on which the EU attitude and policies rest. This may be explained by the second observation. As mentioned in the introduction, the EU, in its general approach to migration from Egypt is strictly attached to the neoclassical interpretation, which emphasizes countries of origin's excess labour supply that is attracted to and aims at taking advantage from the high wages and other benefits offered by its labour markets (Massey et al., [1993](#)). The neoclassical explanation is grafted with the networks theory so as to give foundation to combating smuggling and trafficking, considered as major conduits of irregular migration to Europe. In this theory, human smuggling is a criminal activity committed in well-organized networks with links to the trafficking of other goods and services, such as women, weapons or drugs. These networks' operations are supposed to involve a central command and control structure where a central 'smuggler' dishes out commands and enforces the rules in a social hierarchy (Baird, [2013](#)). The explanations provided by such perspectives as the dual labour market or world system theories are not drawn upon to interpret international migration. Demand for migrant labour generated by the Southern European countries' informal economies, for example in the agricultural and service sectors, is not referred to. Addressing informality in these labour markets is not considered as a means to reduce irregular migration.

In line with the neoclassical rationale, the 1971 constitution provided for the right of Egyptians to temporary and permanent migration<sup>1</sup> (ARE, [1971](#)). The 1983 migration law gave facilities and privileges to the Egyptians wishing to migrate permanently or temporarily (MEEEA, [n.d.](#)). Faced with high population and labour force growth rates, the constitution and the law considered external labour markets as outlets for the Egyptian jobseekers. But there was also a political rationale for the shift in migration policy relative to the 1960s. In 1971, the new president, Anwar Sadat, wanted to signify to Arab oil-exporting countries and to the Western traditional immigration countries that Egypt's antagonistic relations with them had been

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<sup>1</sup> Article 52.

abandoned. Europe did not figure in Egyptian migration at the time. A new political economy of Egyptian migration thus started to take shape.<sup>2</sup>

Egypt did not publish a conceptual document outlining its understanding of Egyptian migration to Europe, its causes, and the issues it raises. The Egyptian priorities can be gleaned from an informal document cited in minutes published by the European Union Trust Fund (EUTF). Four thematic areas are defined in the non-paper “Egypt Framework Paper on Cooperation with EU on Migration”, presented by Egypt to the EU in 2017 (EUTF, 2019). These are development cooperation; vocational and technical education; institutional capacity building in the field of migration; and supporting Egypt’s efforts to host refugees. Actually, all four thematic areas can be considered development cooperation. At the same time, as will be seen in Sects. 20.4 and 20.5, Egypt accepts that halting irregular migration and migrants’ return be the first priorities in its migration cooperation with the EU. Legal migration opportunities are absent from the thematic areas identified by Egypt.

In fact, Egypt places cooperation on migration within the larger framework of its system of relations with the EU and its member states. These had been critical of the political changes in Egypt in 2013, characterizing them as a “coup”. With time, these criticisms ceased, support by the EU and its member states in a variety of policy areas increased, and exchanged visits multiplied. The legitimacy of the 2013 changes is no longer in question. In its cooperation on migration with the EU, Egypt looks like having resorted, rather successfully for its purposes, to issue linking.<sup>3</sup> The EU’s heightened and reiterated concern with irregular migration, and its salience in its member states’ domestic politics, have provided Egypt with a resource with which it balanced the power disparity with its counterpart.<sup>4</sup> An interdependent relationship between the two parties emerged.

### 20.3 Europe in Egyptian Migration

The Sect. 20.3.1 below discusses the significance of migration to the Egyptian economy and Europe’s limited place in it. The Sect. 20.3.2, about its institutional framework, supports the contention that for Egypt migration to Europe is considered a foreign policy issue.

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<sup>2</sup>On the political economy of Egyptian migration in the 1960s, see Tsourapas, 2019. For a divergent perspective, see Awad, 2019.

<sup>3</sup>On issue linkage in managing migration, see Lavenex & Jurge, 2013; on issue linkage in international negotiations, see Tollison & Willett, 1979.

<sup>4</sup>On symmetry and asymmetry and balancing power disparities, see Pfetsch, 2011.

### ***20.3.1 Europe's Significance in Egyptian Migration***

In the last decades, the Egyptian labour force suffered from unemployment, under-employment and deficient terms and conditions of employment. Labour force growth was consistently above employment growth. For instance, between 2008 and 2011, the growth in labour force reached 8.7% whilst employment growth stood at 4.8% only (Awad, 2013). Low-quality and informal employment epitomize the state of the Egyptian labour market. An analysis of the findings of a school-to-work transition survey (SWTS) carried out in 2012 by the International Labour Office (ILO) was eloquent as to the quality of work available to youth in the domestic labour market (Barsoum et al., 2014). In 2012, a majority of young employees in Egypt (75.7%) had no contract. The corollary was that 91.1% of young workers surveyed were classified in informal employment. Beyond salary, access to benefits was quite limited. One quarter of wage and salaried young workers only had access to paid annual leave. The wages of a similar proportion were below the average wage. In these conditions, it is not surprising that Egyptian workers at all skill levels seek external employment.

Migration engenders financial remittances that reduce poverty of beneficiary families and contribute to meeting their needs. Remittances are spent on consumption, and on education and health, thus improving standards of living and helping build human capital (Farid & Elbatrawy, 2015). At the macro level, remittances inject Egypt's balance on current account with foreign exchange necessary to close the chronic deficit in its balance of trade. In the 2010s and 2020s, remittances sent to Egypt by its migrant workers in all destinations significantly grew from \$12.5 billion in 2010, to \$25.5 billion in 2018 and to \$26.8 billion in 2019 (World Bank, 2020). In sum, in Egypt's perspective since the early 1970s, migration's economic benefits are greatly significant.

Various estimates of the Egyptian migration volume exist. National estimates put it at 10.25 million in 2017. The United Nations estimated it at only 3.5 million in 2019. According to the work permits issued by the Ministry of Interior, 68.4% of Egyptian migrant workers were employed in Arab countries and 31.6% in non-Arab countries in 2017. Among these, only 9.1% were employed in the seven foremost European destinations (Zohry, 2020).<sup>5</sup> World Bank estimates for 2018 put remittances from these seven countries at US\$1.8 billion, representing 7% only of the total received by Egypt during that year (World Bank, 2019). Estimates for the distribution of migrants and the remittance origins reveal the modesty of migration to Europe for the Egyptian labour market and economy.

In this light, for Egypt, it is migration to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and other Arab countries that really releases pressures on its labour market and provides it with remittances. This migration is therefore tackled as a labour market issue. The

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<sup>5</sup>In order of importance of the volumes they hosted in this estimate, these were Italy, France, and far behind the United Kingdom, Germany, Austria, Greece and the Netherlands.

evidence is in its location in the Egyptian institutional structure, which differs from that of migration to Europe.

### ***20.3.2 Europe in the Institutional Structure of Migration in Egypt***

The Egyptian migration institutional structure traditionally included two ministries: the Ministry of Manpower and Migration (MOMM) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) (Awad & Hedayat, 2015). The migration sector in MOMM regained its autonomy, lost in the early 2000s, and was reconstituted as the Ministry of State of Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates' Affairs (MEEEA) in 2015. This separation did not cause any change in the labour migration functions of the now simply Ministry of Manpower (MOM). These include vetting and approving migrant workers' employment contracts and providing them with protection through its labour attachés who are also expected to promote demand for Egyptian labour. Egypt has two labour attachés in EU member states, Greece and Italy.

Until the early 2010s, the MFA, through its embassies and consulates in Europe, provided diplomatic protection to Egyptian migrants and dealt with local authorities on irregular migration. In 2011, the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in implementation of the 2005 Labour Agreement between Italy and Egypt, though contracted between the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies and the Egyptian MOMM was signed for Egypt by the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Governo Italiano, 2011). In the late 2010s, although the MOM maintained its representatives in Greece and Italy, the responsibility for migration to Europe shifted completely to the MFA. The Ministry of Manpower remain in charge of migration to Egypt's principal external labour markets in Arab countries.

Within the MFA, the location of the unit responsible for it confirms the high political significance Egypt gives to migration in the international system generally and towards Europe in particular. Migration, in the early 2010s still attached to consular affairs, was shifted to the multilateral affairs sector in the late 2010s. This is the sector in charge of international organizations, which also emphasizes the foreign policy perspective on migration when discussed in multilateral fora. The EU-Egypt Migration Dialogues, to which it will be reverted later, are launched by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the EU Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship (EU External Action, n.d.). The technical aspects of the Dialogues are addressed by EU senior officials, whose Egyptian counterparts were led in the past by either the assistant minister for multilateral or for European affairs. *Ad hoc* coordination meetings are held with other government ministries and agencies, but they are only convened by the MFA's migration unit, which also conducts negotiations with the EU and represents Egypt in concerned multilateral fora. Issue linkage in foreign policy may relegate migration concerns, or some of them, to a secondary rank of priorities.

MFA also hosts an inter-ministerial organ, the National Coordinating Committee on Combatting and Preventing Illegal Migration and Trafficking in Persons (NCCIM & TIP), established in 2016. The Committee's title perfectly coincides with the EU concerns. The NCCIM & TIP is managed by a former high-ranking ambassador.

The restored MEEEA chiefly deals with the last part of its title, Egyptian expatriates. Its resources are limited. However, it has made an incursion in Egypt's migration relations with the EU. For Egypt, it is responsible for the implementation of a regional labour migration project, funded by the EU and Germany. In the early 2020s, two successive Ministers and their adviser are active and former ambassadors.

## 20.4 The EU-Egypt Migration Policy Framework

In the EU-Egypt agreed policy framework, as it stands in the 2020s, fighting irregular migration, smuggling and trafficking, and migrants' return prevail over all objectives. Egypt's assumed interest in labour migration is not a priority. The reference to it is symbolic.

This section reviews the EU-Egypt 2002 Association Agreement, the EU-Egypt Partnership Priorities 2021–2027 and the press releases issued after two rounds of the Egypt-EU Migration Dialogue.<sup>6</sup> It also takes up Egypt's bilateral agreements and understandings on migration with a few member states.

The EU-Egypt Association Agreement takes up migration in two chapters and nine articles under Title IV. In Chap. 1, "Dialogue and cooperation in social matters", article 63 refers to conducting regular dialogue on social matters, including migration and "illegal" migration among five issues of discussion. The article refers to achieving progress in the movement of workers and equal treatment and social integration of each party's nationals legally residing in the territories of their host countries. It does not indicate creating or broadening channels of legal migration. In contrast, the agreement dedicates the four articles of Chap. 2 to cooperation for the prevention and control of "illegal migration" and other consular matters. The differential treatment of legal and "illegal" migration is expressive of the EU priorities and their acceptance by Egypt.

In the EU-Egypt Partnership Priorities 2017–2020 and 2021–2027 documents, the priorities are listed under three headings: Egypt's modern economy and social development; partnering in foreign policy; and enhancing stability. Migration and mobility are neither included under the Egyptian modern economy and social development nor foreign policy. This is striking given the EU 2016 Migration Policy Framework that announces the full integration of migration in the Union's foreign policy, on the one hand, and Egypt's institutional location of migration in its MFA, on the other (EC, n.d.). Migration and mobility are rather taken up under the

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<sup>6</sup>Full references are at the end of the chapter.

“enhancing stability” heading, as a further sub-division along with “good governance” and “security and terrorism”. Migration can thus be seen as a security question to be addressed chiefly by good governance. Lavenex and Jurge had already considered the EU migration policies were of the security type Lavenex and Jurge (2013). In the priorities document, both parties pledge to continue working together “to jointly address in an efficient and effective manner the challenges of irregular migration”. It is only in second place that “all other aspects of migration and mobility, including legal migration” are mentioned. Several issues for cooperation stand out. The EU pledges to support the strengthening of migration and asylum governance in Egypt and “its efforts to prevent and combat irregular migration, to strengthen border management, as well as to combat trafficking and smuggling of human beings”. Egypt thus accepts border externalization through border management.<sup>7</sup> The two parties also commit to foster their cooperation in return, readmission and the reintegration of irregular migrants. The EU pledges to seek to support and strengthen Egyptian capacity to provide protection and to safeguard the rights of refugees, migrants and asylum-seekers, and their access to basic services, such as education and health. Laudable as the refugees’, migrants’ and asylum-seekers’ protection and the safeguarding of their rights are, the intention is clearly to stabilize them in Egypt and to prevent their migration to Europe. In this way, the two parties extended their discussion of Egyptian migration as a priority to all migration from Egypt. The priorities review brings out the primacy given to combating irregular migration, and to keeping potential migrants from attempting to migrate. Legal migration is drowned among the priorities. No useful information can be drawn from the press releases issued after the Migration Dialogues (Delegation of the EU to Egypt, n.d., n.d.).

With EU member states, Egypt has bilateral labour agreements (BLAs) with Bulgaria, Greece and Italy.<sup>8</sup> Concluded in a long-gone era, the 1972 agreement with Bulgaria is outdated (Egypt: Al-Waqa’u al-Misriya, 1972). The 1981 agreement with Greece focuses on the employment rights of each party’s workers employed in the other’s labour market. The most recent is the agreement with Italy, adopted in 2005, and followed upon in 2009 with an implementation protocol and then the above-mentioned MOU in 2011 (Accordo, n.p, n.d.; Governo Italiano, 2011). The three instruments call on their parties to regulate migrant flows in accordance with demand and supply in their respective labour markets. The agreement provides that the state of origin ensures that its migrant workers are not a threat to the security and public order of the state of destination. This security perspective contrasts with the positive reference in the same agreement and in the protocol to opening up channels for legal migration for Egyptian workers.

Egypt signed in 2017 an agreement establishing a bilateral dialogue on migration with Germany (the German Federal Government, 2017). The dialogue seeks to tackle the root causes of migration and emphasizes repatriation of irregular migrants.

<sup>7</sup>On the externalization concept, see, for example, Stock et al., 2019.

<sup>8</sup>Full references at the end of the chapter.



Germany pledges investments in professional training, support to the Egyptian educational sector and scholarships for young Egyptians to study in its institutions. Legal migration is not addressed. The signature of the agreement by the two countries' foreign ministers signals its foreign policy perspective.

In 2021, Egypt and the Netherlands signed a letter of intent on cooperation on migration. The letter points out strengthening cooperation in tackling irregular migration and repatriation, and the parties' interest in minimizing irregular migration. For the letter, the only means to realize this end is to provide better information on legal migration possibilities (Government of the Netherlands, 2021).

Egypt has only one readmission agreement, with Italy, adopted along with its executive protocol in 2007. The agreement is about the return of nationals only and elaborates on the means to prove their nationality in case of doubt (The Rights Angle, 2014).

Reacting to the EU's concern with transit migration, Egypt is also party to the EU-Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative (the Khartoum process) that specifically focuses on fighting smuggling of migrants and human trafficking (EC, n.d.-a). Egypt hosted the first meeting of the Initiative's steering committee in April 2015 and co-chaired it throughout that year.

## 20.5 The Operationalization of the Policy Framework and Its Outcome

The EU, its member states and Egypt articulate the agreed policy framework in specific actions. These actions take the form of projects implemented in Egypt, funded by the North African window of the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), and by member states.<sup>9</sup> The implementation is carried out by donors' agencies, international organizations or Egyptian institutions. Egypt also takes action on its own, at times in cooperation with member states.

Section 20.5.1 signals a number of these projects, including all those EUTF-funded, sufficient to support its contentions.<sup>10</sup> It also refers to examples of specific Egyptian actions. Section 20.5.2 takes up the outcomes of the policy framework operationalization.

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<sup>9</sup>The European Union Trust Fund for stability and addressing the root causes for irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa was established following the Valetta Summit in 2015.

<sup>10</sup>None of the projects that are not taken up by the subsection refutes the chapter's contentions.

### ***20.5.1 The Operationalization of the Policy Framework***

In the early 2020s, the EUTF finances seven projects that give expression to the agreed policy framework. These projects seek to realize three specific objectives: to enhance Egypt's migration management; to address the root causes of irregular migration; and to support Egyptian communities hosting migrants and refugees (EUTF, 2017). The objectives of projects bilaterally funded by member states are no different. Legal migration opportunities do not figure among them.

To enhance Egypt's migration management, the first project "Enhancing migration management through institutional support" seeks to contribute to enhancing migration governance and management in Egypt through institutional strengthening and capacity building. The project supports "the objectives of the National Strategy for combating and preventing illegal migration, as well as human trafficking". These latter objectives coincide with the EU' Migration Policy Framework's aims, at a time the project corresponds to the institutional capacity-building in the field of migration thematic area defined by Egypt.

To address the root causes of irregular migration, the EUTF-financed action encompasses four projects that contribute to realizing the EU's Migration Partnership Framework aim of "preventing irregular migration and enhancing cooperation in return and readmission of irregular migrants". They are all implemented in regions that are sources of migrants. "Addressing root causes of irregular migration through employability and labour-intensive work" is a project designed to create short- to medium term-employment opportunities and to building the skills of youth. It corresponds to Egypt's development cooperation, and vocational and technical education thematic areas. The second project, "Addressing the economic drivers of irregular migration", should create enterprises and work opportunities for women and youth. It corresponds to Egypt's development cooperation thematic area. The third project, "Multi-educational Programme for Employment Promotion in Migration-affected Areas", seeks to facilitate the access of vulnerable populations to upgraded vocational and technical training. It also corresponds to Egypt's vocational and technical education thematic area. The fourth project is "Tackling the root causes of irregular migration and supporting integrated communities in Upper Egypt". Implemented in two high poverty rates governorates, the project seeks to create employment opportunities for vulnerable young women and men through enterprise creation and skill upgrading, and to raise awareness about the risks of irregular migration. This project is also in line with Egypt's development cooperation thematic area.

The last two projects serve the specific objective "Support the Egyptian communities hosting migrants and refugees". Their titles are "Capacity-building through urban infrastructure development in migration-affected urban areas" and "Supporting communities – Health for all", the latter seeking to improve the access of vulnerable migrant and refugee communities to primary and secondary health care services. By improving the employment prospects, living conditions and health services available to migrants and refugees hosted in Egypt, the two projects preempt

their secondary migration. They thus contribute to realizing the Migration Partnership's aim of preventing irregular migration. They both correspond to Egypt's "supporting efforts to host refugees" thematic area. However, in the absence of sufficient resettlement opportunities, they may also be seen as contradicting Egypt's long-standing rejection of local integration as a durable solution for refugees.

In addition, Egypt is a beneficiary of a project co-financed by the EUTF regional window for North Africa and the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) that also covers Morocco and Tunisia. This project, "Towards a holistic approach to labour migration governance and labour mobility in North Africa" (THAMM) exceptionally, but only symbolically, provides for the placement of 200 Egyptian workers in Germany. Apart from skill and qualification recognition activities, which may facilitate workers' mobility, the project is active in migration governance, statistics, and information systems (ILO and IOM, 2021). THAMM addresses the EUTF's objective of supporting migration management, which makes it fall in the institutional capacity-building area defined by Egypt.

At the bilateral level, the Egyptian German Centre for Jobs, Migration and Reintegration is part of the global Programme Migration for Development, Voluntary Return and Reintegration (MPD), financed by Germany and implemented in 12 countries. The center focuses on the reintegration of the repatriated Egyptians. Curiously, it performs functions of an employment service guiding jobseekers to training and matching them with demand in the Egyptian labour market. Interestingly, Egypt could keep the center from starting to function until its program included a component on legal migration. However, this component is only about assisting workers wishing to migrate in preparing their files, which it later sends to the German public employment service.

Still bilaterally, EU member states fund a large number of projects implemented by IOM. Ten projects are about the stabilization and protection of migrants in Egypt, cooperation in sustainable solutions, integration of Egyptian returnees, and local development. None is about legal migration opportunities (IOM, n.d.(a)).

On its part, to prevent unauthorized departures towards the EU, Egypt patrols its land borders and Mediterranean shores. To effectively do so, Egypt was reported to have bought border control devices from EU Member States. As examples, in 2020, an Egyptian source, citing the Italian Newspaper *La Repubblica*, referred to a mega defense project that included the sale by Italy of 20 patrol boats to Egypt (Egypt Defense Expo, 2020). In the same year, Germany approved the sale of naval equipment to Egypt, which included nine patrol boats and a coastal defense ship (The Middle East Monitor, 2020). IOM supports Egypt in training for border control.

Egypt adopted laws in 2010 on Combating Human Trafficking and in 2016 on Combating Illegal Migration and the Smuggling of Migrants (ARE, 2016; 2010). To put the two laws in practice, the NCCIM & TIP adopted a National Strategy for Combating and Preventing Illegal Migration 2016–2026 and a National Action Plan 2021–2023 for the same purpose. The two documents fall squarely within the EU priority concerns. It is noteworthy that neither a strategy nor an action plan exists for the promotion of labour migration and the welfare of Egyptian migrant workers. In

2018, Egypt also amended its law on foreigners' entry, exit and residence, imposing fines for its violation (ARE, 2018).

### **20.5.2 The Outcome**

The EU is satisfied with its cooperation on migration with Egypt. In 2018, after a visit by the president of the European Council and the rotating president of the Council of the Union, the EU praised Egypt and wished to deepen its relations with it. It was recalled that the Egyptian authorities had made the fight against smuggling and trafficking their priority and, hence, there had been no irregular departure from Egypt in 2017 (EU Observer, 2018). In 2019, half of the EU member states assessed the overall cooperation with Egypt as good to very good in the procedures of identifying irregular migrants ordered to return. This cooperation was considered average by five member States (EC, 2021).

By 2022, the situation praised by the EU in 2018 had not been altered. No sea departures from Egypt had been registered since 2016. In June 2022, in comments made in Cairo during the signing ceremony of the trilateral MOU on the trade and transport of natural gas between Egypt, Israel and the EU, the president of the European Commission expressed anew the Union's satisfaction with the Egyptian overall attitude (Egypt, EU, Israel, 2022). She said "we want to diversify to trustworthy suppliers, and Egypt is a trustworthy partner." (Haggag & El Nashar, 2022).

Against its recognized efforts for realizing the EU's interests, Egypt made benefits. It gained tens of millions of Euros in financial assistance from the EUTF and from the EU member states to fund projects in support of its policies and migration governance institutions.<sup>11</sup> At least some of these policies and institutions should have been funded by the state budget. It needs to be emphasized though that these funds only concerned fighting smuggling and trafficking, stabilization of potential migrants in Egypt, the creation of job opportunities, and migrants' return and reintegration. Cooperation on migration is part of the larger collaboration under the Association Agreement. Therefore, the bilateral assistance provided to Egypt under the latter, from the European Neighborhood Initiative (ENI), cannot be dissociated from the cooperation on migration. For the period 2014–2016, the committed EU's bilateral assistance to Egypt amounted to €320 million and increased in 2017–2020 to €432–528 million (Delegation of the European Union to Egypt, 2021).

Egypt contracted mega projects with EU companies. Starting in 2016 with an € 8 billion contract, it agreed on several power generation projects with the German Siemens until 2019 (Egypt Today, 2021). Weapon sales were signaled above. Between 2013 and 2020, France was the second largest weapons exporter to

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<sup>11</sup>The EUTF bilateral funding to projects in Egypt for 2017–2021 amounted to €60 million.

Egypt, right behind Russia. Germany, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands came in fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh positions (SIPRI, 2022).

In addition to those signaled above, EU member state president, prime ministers, ministers and the EU high representative for foreign affairs successively visited Egypt. Similarly, visits by top Egyptian officials, including the head of state, to the EU and EU member states multiplied. The critiques addressed to the 2013 events vanished.

The Egyptian and European parties are content with the exchanged benefits. Yet, failings exist in the outcomes of their cooperation. The total of Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) to Egypt from 2019 to mid-2022 amounted to 869 persons, including 454 from EU member states (IOM, n.d.(b)). Seen from the EU perspective, this is quite a modest volume relative to what it may have expected. Not departing from Egypt, but rather using the Central Mediterranean route, from January to end of June 2022, 4154 Egyptian migrants arrived on the Italian coasts. They represented 15% of total arrivals to Italy, right behind the Bangladeshis with 16%. (Panara, 2022). Until May, Egyptians had been the first national group to arrive irregularly to Italy. By the end of August, they were 10,902 representing 28.2% of arrivals through this route, ahead of Bangladeshis and right behind Tunisians (European Council, 2022). Besides, the agreed policy framework having not addressed it, Egyptian highly-skilled migration (HSM) proceeds without response. Docquier et al. stress that the loss of human capital, scarce in developing countries, creates shortages in specific occupations, such as medical doctors (Docquier et al., 2007). Egyptian doctors have been migrating in large numbers recently (ECES, 2021). According to the latest Health Workforce Migration updates, Germany is at the top of OECD and EU countries Egyptian doctors migrate to (OECD Statistics, 2021). It was pointed out under 3 above that Germany only included the facilitation of the migration process in the project it finances in Egypt under pressures from the Egyptian Government. Medical doctors migrate outside the scope of this project.

## 20.6 Conclusions

Egypt realized that the EU's deeply held concern in the migration area is to stop irregular flows and to return irregular migrants. It accepted this concern and cooperated in defusing it. The EU-Egypt cooperation is based on the shared neo-classical understanding that Egyptian migration is caused by the Egyptians' search for the employment and wages that their domestic labour market fails to generate. For the EU, uncontested by Egypt, criminal networks profit from this situation, smuggling migrants and trafficking in humans. The EU and Egypt agreed a policy framework that address these causes. The EU and its member states fund projects to operationalize it. Egypt takes measures of its own to put it into practice. The EU is satisfied with the cooperation shown by Egypt, irregular departures from its shores having ceased. In return, considering migration to Europe a foreign policy issue, Egypt also benefitted from its cooperation with the EU. Giving up on legal migration

to Europe, considered marginal anyway, it turned to its advantage the EU's emphasized concern with irregular migration. Linking issues, it benefitted from funds for its migration governance and for locally-focused development. The issue linking also exceeded the narrow migration field to reach other areas and the overall level of relations between the two parties. A causality link is difficult to establish between the joint approach to migration and the development in relations in other areas. However, a correlation between them is obvious and a mutual reinforcement may have been in operation.

The mutual benefits notwithstanding, irregular migration continues via third countries. The entire assistance Egypt receives from the EU, for migration purposes and under the association agreement, cannot quell the causes of migration in this over-100 million population country. HSM, likely to penalize Egypt's development if left unaddressed, also persists. For the loopholes in the outcomes of their cooperation not to widen, the two parties may be well advised to reconsider the causes of Egyptian migration at origin and destination. This should require going beyond neoclassical economic explanations.

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