

Safe on Paper, Unsafe in Reality:

Egypt and EU Return Policy

In 2025, the European Commission launched a major overhaul of the EU return framework, proposing an EU list of safe countries of origin, a revised safe third country concept, and a new regulation to accelerate returns.

Under these new rules, Egypt is considered a “safe” country of origin, could be treated as a “safe” third country, and may become a destination for forced returns through bilateral agreements.

But Egypt is NOT safe – not for Egyptians, nor asylum seekers, migrants, or refugees. Here's why:

What happens to Egyptian nationals?

- Egypt counts tens of thousands political prisoners, including journalists, human rights defenders, doctors, and academics
- Torture is widespread, involving beatings, electric shocks, sexual and psychological abuse; the use of death penalty is on the rise
- Enforced disappearance is a tool to silence dissidents, who are arrested without warrants, held in secret facilities, with no access to lawyers or family
- Unfair trials are common, e.g., defendants are denied lawyers, tried without access to case files, and sentenced based on State Security investigations alone
- Inhumane detention conditions include overcrowding, solitary confinement, denial of medicare care and visitation rights, and poor sanitation



**This is the reality for
Egyptian citizens –
not a “safe country.”**



Read the case of activist Alaa Abd el-Fattah – imprisoned for over a decade, now on hunger strike along with his mother to protest inhumane detention

What happens to people on the move in Egypt?



Criminalization, arbitrary detention, and erosion of protection

- People on the move are arbitrarily detained in inhumane conditions, including children, women, and people with medical needs — see what happens to Sudanese and Eritreans
- The new asylum law (2024) worsened the situation by transferring asylum decisions from UNHCR to Egyptian authorities, allowing the arbitrary detention of asylum seekers during processing, enabling deportation, and restricting freedoms and services



Voices are silenced and met with repression

- In 2023, Sudanese and Eritrean refugees held sit-ins in front of UNHCR offices, calling for protection and basic rights
- Protests were violently dispersed by police, and refugee activists were later targeted with threats, surveillance, and intimidation



Mass deportations keep rising, refoulement to countries at war continues

- April-September 2023: 5,000+ deportations, including 3,000 in September alone
- November 2023: 1,600 deportations, including recognized refugees
- March 2025: 21,000 deportations to Sudan



This is the reality for people on the move in Egypt — not a “safe country.”



Read what happens to many Sudanese refugees deported back despite the ongoing armed conflict — a clear violation of non-refoulement