

Global Response Platform Briefing: Egypt

December 2025

Summary

- Egypt hosts over one million refugees and asylum seekers, with large recent inflows from Sudan since the start of the civil war in 2023.
- Although access to education exists in policy, in practice it is highly uneven. Only a small proportion of refugees progress to tertiary education due to unpredictable fee policies, long waits for asylum, documentation and financial challenges.
- Opportunities for UK universities to engage include:
 - [A. Participate in a new project co-creating inclusive transnational education](#) for refugees, led by Mosaik, University of London, European Universities Egypt, and UNHCR, and funded by the British Council.
 - [B. Create scholarships at UK branch and partner campuses in Egypt](#) to enable local access for refugees in Egypt.
 - [C. Create scholarships for online UG/PG](#), delivered with community learning centres
 - [D. Connect to Mosaik's university access programmes](#) for refugee youth in Egypt.
- Activities will need to take into account evolving residency procedures, nationality-based entitlements, and the need for psychosocial support, foundational academic skills and English language teaching.

1. Context

- Egypt hosts one of the largest and youngest refugee populations in the Middle East and North Africa, with 33.5 percent aged between 3 and 17 years, underscoring the urgent need for expanded and equitable education services.¹

¹[UNHCR Egypt – Education Overview](#)

- The UN Refugee Agency Egypt reports registered refugees and asylum-seekers primarily from Sudan (≈673k) and Syria (≈139k), alongside South Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Yemen, Iraq and others totalling 1.04 million².
- According to the Egyptian government, 1.5 million Sudanese have fled to Egypt since the onset of the conflict in 2023³ – not all are registered as refugees.
- Tightening policies have shaped onward movement and protection dynamics; reporting highlights crackdowns and rising costs of regularisation leading to increased secondary movement towards Libya and Europe⁴.
- A new asylum law in 2024 shifted refugee status determination from UNHCR to the Egyptian Government Permanent Committee for Refugee Affairs. Analyses note implications for procedures and rights⁵. Asylum residency, which is required for access public education, has become extremely lengthy, with a wait period of over two years⁶. The full changes in policy from the new asylum law are not yet confirmed, but there is also potential for positive changes in refugee access to labour markets in Egypt.

2. Access to education for refugees in Egypt

- Egypt is party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol, with the right to education among minimum standards⁷.
- The Egyptian education system comprises early childhood education, six years of primary education, three years of preparatory education, and three to five years of secondary education. Secondary schooling is divided into general and technical tracks, and successful completion of the final year (Secondary 3) leads to the Thanawiyya Amma certificate and qualification for tertiary education. However, refugee students often present a range of non-Egyptian secondary diplomas from Sudan, Yemen, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and South Sudan.

² [UNHCR Egypt Fact Sheet, March 2025](#)

³ [UNHCR Egypt - Factsheet, June 2025](#)

⁴ [Reuters, Egypt's crackdown drives Sudanese refugees on new route to Libya and beyond, 2025](#)

⁵ [AIDA Country Report on Egypt, Asylum Legislation Shift 2025](#)

⁶ [UNHCR Egypt - Education Overview](#)

⁷ [UNHCR States Parties to the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol](#)

- Public school access parity currently covers Sudanese, South Sudanese, Yemeni, and Syrian learners, while other nationalities often depend on private or community options. Demand is concentrated in Greater Cairo and Alexandria, with community partners in districts such as Maadi, Nasr City, and 6th of October⁸. Many refugee families struggle with accessing schools due to challenges with residency permits and school overcrowding.

3. Tertiary education access for refugees in Egypt

- While Egypt hosts one of the region's largest refugee populations, access to tertiary education remains limited to a subset of nationalities and institutions⁹. Egypt does not have a coherent national policy on refugee access to tertiary education. Less than 5 percent of refugee youth transition into post-secondary education. Barriers to access include:
 - **Legal and policy barriers.** The Egyptian Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) determines which nationalities can access university education at the same tuition rates as Egyptians. Currently, only Palestinian, Syrian, Yemeni, and Sudanese students benefit from these arrangements, which are renewed annually¹⁰. Other nationalities, such as Ethiopians or Eritreans, are typically treated as international students and charged international fees. This ad-hoc system leaves other nationalities facing international fees, complex procedures, and documentation challenges. Students without valid residency permits must navigate multiple ministries for approval, often delaying or preventing enrolment. A lack of travel documents also blocks access to scholarships abroad.
 - **Economic barriers:** the costs of university (fees, housing, and study costs) are prohibitive for most refugee youth, including those with access to Egyptian rates. Unemployment and reliance on informal work further limits access. Initiatives such as the [DAFI programme](#) provides limited scholarships for undergraduate study in public universities – 135 students in 2024 – but demand far exceeds supply¹¹.

⁸ [UNHCR Egypt Q&A Help 2025](#)

⁹ [UNHCR Egypt 2024 Annual Results Report](#)

¹⁰ [UNHCR Help Egypt – Education](#)

¹¹ [UNHCR Egypt 2024 Annual Results Report](#)

- **Academic preparation, awareness and information gaps:** Despite the existence of scholarships and online learning options, awareness among refugee communities remains limited. This reinforces the importance of delivery through trusted intermediaries such as UNHCR, Mosaik and community organisations. Students will also require targeted academic skills and English language training to address gaps between refugee secondary and university requirements, particularly for francophone and African students who have not completed Egyptian-curriculum secondary schooling¹².
- **Psychological and wellbeing barriers.** Studies also document trauma, stress, and lack of psychosocial support as major deterrents to access and retention. Motivation of refugee youth in education has declined since COVID and the Sudan conflict. Bullying and insecurity, coupled with limited counselling services, undermine academic success¹³.
- **Sociocultural barriers.** A study at the American University in Cairo highlights entrenched inequality and discrimination within academic spaces¹⁴. Refugee students described social isolation, bullying, and an absence of institutional support, compounded by language barriers and lack of credential recognition.

4. Existing tertiary education access activities

Several initiatives provide formal and non-formal opportunities for refugees to continue learning. Together, these initiatives form a patchwork of opportunities that partially offsets structural exclusion but does not replace the need to broaden access.

- **Formal tertiary education scholarships.** The DAFI programme remains the primary mechanism for supporting refugee undergraduates at Egyptian public universities, covering tuition and partial living costs. In addition, **Catholic Relief Services (CRS)**, working with UNHCR, provides partial scholarships and living stipends for a small number of high-achieving students. Some Egyptian universities, such as American University of Cairo, also run their own

¹² [Human Rights Watch – Education Restricted for Refugees](#)

¹³ [Human Rights Watch – “Egypt: Education Restricted for Refugees and AUC Fount Repository – “Barriers to Higher Education for African Refugees in Egypt”](#)

¹⁴ [AUC Fount Repository – “Barriers to Higher Education for African Refugees in Egypt”](#)

scholarships for refugees, covering tuition, accommodation, and living stipends for refugees¹⁵. **The Mastercard Foundation** is also planning to expand their Scholars Program to Egypt in 2026.¹⁶

- **Mosaik Education’s Guidance Programme** has been running in Egypt since 2024, and delivered in partnership with community organisations and youth leaders¹⁷. The programme supports refugees to identify and apply to tertiary education.
- **Digital and blended learning opportunities.** Through the **Coursera for Refugees initiative**, **UNHCR** and **Terre des Hommes (TDH)** offer free online courses in business, IT, and language learning to 200 refugees and Egyptian youth aged 18–35¹⁸. Learners access these programmes via smartphones or attend community learning Centres in Maadi and Nasr City operated by TDH¹⁹. These hubs also deliver digital-literacy and employability training.
- **Co-creating Inclusive TNE for Refugees**, is a new project due to start in 2026 and led by Mosaik, University of London, European Universities Egypt, and UNHCR, and funded by the British Council Egypt. The project will generate stakeholder mapping, convene two practice–policy dialogues in Egypt, and publish a brief to guide an inclusion of refugees in TNE. The project will also pilot small cohorts of learners in foundational and micro-credentials.
- **Non-formal and alternative education pathways.** **CRS** Grants, financed by UNHCR, help refugee families keep children in school, indirectly supporting the pipeline to tertiary education²⁰. Community-based organisations provide English and preparatory courses that enable students to meet university entry criteria.
- The **‘PROSPECTS’ programme**, funded by the Government of the Netherlands and implemented by a consortium of UN agencies, focuses on market-relevant

¹⁵ <https://www.aucegypt.edu/admissions/fellowships/listings/refugees>

¹⁶

<https://mastercardfdn.org/en/what-we-do/our-programs/mastercard-foundation-scholars-program/>

¹⁷ <https://mosaik.ngo/programmes/>

¹⁸ [UNHCR Help Egypt – Education](#)

¹⁹ [Global Compact on Refugees – Connected Education in Egypt](#)

²⁰ [UNHCR Egypt – Education Overview](#)

skills, TVET, apprenticeships, freelancing, and digital skills development for refugees and host communities, creating potential opportunities for collaboration with tertiary education programmes.

5. Recommended activities for UK universities

A. Participate in the *Co-creating Inclusive TNE for Refugees* project

UK universities are encouraged to register their interest to participate in the project, which will co-create inclusive TNE for refugees in Egypt, led by Mosaik Education, the University of London, European Universities in Egypt, and UNHCR.

Possible institutional contributions

- Participate (and invite Egyptian partners) in stakeholder mapping and policy dialogues taking place in Egypt next year.
- Create pilot cohorts alongside to complement foundational and micro-credential programmes planned by University of London and European Universities Egypt.
- Contribute expertise and experience from other TNE contexts on the design of inclusive pathways.

B. Create scholarships at UK branch and partner campuses in Egypt

UK universities with existing branch or partner campuses in Egypt can expand equitable access by establishing in-country scholarships for refugees.

Possible institutional contributions

- Pilot a small number of fee-waiver scholarships at branch or partner campuses in Greater Cairo.

Key design considerations

- Inclusion of Egyptian (“host community members”) students alongside refugees in scholarship programmes.
- Travel and accommodation: depending on the location of the partner or branch campus, there may be long travel times from neighbourhoods with high numbers of refugees.
- Programmes should include English language support and digital skills modules.
- Consider partnering with existing scholarship providers (UNHCR DAFI, Mastercard) to explore opportunities for co-funding.

- Flexibility in recognition of prior learning may be needed for students with mixed or incomplete transcripts.
- The greatest bottleneck is at undergraduate level rather than postgraduate.

C. Create online scholarships for refugees in Egypt

Create dedicated online undergraduate/postgraduate, Level 4–5, and micro-credential scholarships for refugees living in Egypt, delivered in partnership with learning centres, which would allow access for refugees based outside of the Greater Cairo area.

Possible institutional contributions

- Pilot cohort on selected online programmes with strong labour-market relevance (e.g., IT, digital business, health management).
- Partner with community organisations to facilitate access to study spaces, devices, and learning support.

Key design considerations

- Courses should be credit-bearing or qualification-granting.
- Programmes should include English language support and digital skills modules.
- Flexible delivery to accommodate inconsistent connectivity or family responsibilities.
- Flexible recognition of prior learning may be needed for students with mixed or incomplete transcripts.
- Include counselling and mentoring to address psychological barriers, community pressure and low learner confidence.
- Consider aligning online provision with the programmes such as PROSPECTS to ensure connections to labour market opportunities.

D. Connect to Mosaik’s access programmes for refugee youth

UK universities could link scholarship or other foundational programme offers directly to Mosaik Education’s ongoing university access and guidance programmes in Egypt. This programme provides structured academic counselling, application support and outreach across refugee communities.

Possible institutional contributions

- Align pilots for options B and C with recruitment via the Mosaik Guidance Programme.

- Pilot a small cohort of online pre-sessional academic English and study-skills delivered alongside Mosaik's Guidance Programme. These can be co-designed alongside Mosaik's technical experts.

Key design considerations

- Flexible delivery is essential to accommodate inconsistent connectivity, documentation checks, or family responsibilities.
- Establish a collaborative working group between the university delivery team and the Mosaik programme to refine access and delivery models.