

The Forum for Development
and Human Rights Dialogue

*Egyptians Living
Abroad
Policy Paper*

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I. Background:

Egypt today is considered to be a source of both emigration and immigration, and labor migration is considered to be the most important dynamic factor in Egypt, where remittances flows are exceptionally important for the state's economic development.

Post 2011, Egypt witnessed several key changes in its state policies, including changes in Egypt's policies toward migration, migrants, and Egyptians living abroad. Since 2016, the Egyptian government has undertaken several decisions, implemented set of policies, and launched several campaigns as a part of its strategy towards engaging the Egyptian diaspora as part of its 2030 development agenda, through encouraging the diaspora's remittances, investments, and skills transfer for the development of the country.

For many years, the gap between the Egyptians living abroad and their homeland has been widely increasing, although many entities have been responsible for the affairs of the Egyptians abroad, whether through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or the Ministry of Immigration or the migration sector under the guise of the Ministry of Manpower,

During the 2011-2013 turmoil, a huge number of Egyptians migrated abroad as a result of the political tensed situation. The increased number of Egyptians migrating abroad whether legally or illegally has resulted in a number of 10 million Egyptians residing in different regions. The Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAMPAS) data reveals that the majority of Egyptians residing abroad are concentrated in Arab countries, followed by Americas and Europe. CAMPAS report in 2019 revealed that there are 10.247 million Egyptians living abroad, based on the Foreign Ministry estimates in 2017. However, the number of Egyptian expatriates has decreased to 9.5 million by the end of 2019 due to the outbreak of the pandemic. Ambassador Nabila Makram, Minister of Immigration and Egyptian Expatriates' Affairs, has confirmed in March 2021 that the registered number of Egyptians abroad in CAMPAS reflect only the number of registered Egyptians and does not reflect the accurate number.

The focus on Egyptians living abroad gained its momentum with the start of the 25th revolution. The outbreak of the 25th revolution has strengthened the Egyptians' living abroad trust with the Egyptian state. National groups and non-governmental organizations worked toward calling for the rights owed to Egyptians living abroad to politically participate in terms

of voting and candidacy, which began with the 2011 constitutional amendments, the administrative court declaration to approve the voting of Egyptians abroad and the subsequent electoral entitlements to the 2014 presidential elections. Article 88 of the 2014 constitution stipulated that “The state shall protect the interests of Egyptians living abroad, protect them, guarantee their rights and freedoms, enable them to perform their public duties towards the state and society, and engage them in the nation's development. The law shall regulate their participation in elections and referendums in a way consistent with their particular circumstances, without being restricted by the provisions on voting, counting of ballots and announcing of results set forth in this Constitution. This shall be done with the granting of guarantees that ensure the fairness and neutrality of the election and referendum process.”

The state also had interest to maximize its benefits from the role played by the Egyptians living abroad, in the sense of effective citizenship, which culminated in the decision to establish Ministry of State for Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates' Affairs on the 19th of September 2015. As the current government increases its efforts to communicate with Egyptian expatriates and integrate them in the Egyptian society, other important challenges remain dire for Egyptians living abroad and await solution from the authorities.

II. Government Efforts:

Egypt is currently investing a lot of resources and creating its own road map and strategy toward the Egyptians living abroad. The current government efforts to engage with the diaspora community are evident in the government decision to re-establish the Ministry of State for Immigration and Egyptian Expatriates' Affairs. This Ministry has been declared a standalone Ministry for a while during Mubarak era, and then remerged as a part of the Ministry of Manpower, until the government declaration as a separated Ministry in 2015. The Egyptian expatriates are currently perceived by the government as an indispensable interest for the state; the government focuses on the increasing contributions of migrant remittances to Egypt's economy, the Egyptians' abroad expertise and human capital that can be transferred and help in the development of the country.

The government interest in the Egyptian diaspora is clear in the policies and the initiatives that are being undertaken by the government aimed at engaging and interacting with the diaspora. Although the Ministry has been newly established in September 2015, it is quickly trying to gain ground with the Egyptian expatriates and effectively engage with them. The Ministry of State for Immigration and Egyptian Expatriates' Affairs showcase the Egyptian government's will to engage with the Egyptian diaspora community and reflects on the Egyptian government commitment to the importance of the diaspora's engagement.

Amid the pandemic, the Egyptian government has played a pivotal role in supporting Egyptians abroad, and bringing them back to their homeland, unlike many other countries that neglected such obligation. The Prime Minister created a committee of different ministries and agencies in order to return Egyptians stranded abroad due to global travel restrictions. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Civil Aviation, and the Ministry of Immigration and Expatriates' Affairs have all cooperated in this effort.

The Egyptian government has created an emergency hotline in order to communicate with Egyptians abroad worldwide who faces obstacles to work or to return to Egypt in light of the restrictive measures implemented by countries. The Egyptian government has conducted exceptional flights to return stranded Egyptian citizens from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Sudan, Morocco, Chad, Ukraine and Tunisia, in addition to Egyptian tourists in different countries like Maldives and Indonesia. The government has also organized flights to New York, Washington and London to Cairo.

Following the decision to halt airlines and exceptional flights to return the Egyptians abroad, the Ministry of Immigration launched an initiative entitled "Let us support each other" to help and support Egyptians abroad and to allow Egyptian expatriates to maintain contact with concerned authorities to solve humanitarian or health issues.

The government has also set up a specific email and number to receive complaints and inquiries through WhatsApp application, along with creating an online forum to receive data of Egyptian citizens stranded abroad as a result of the pandemic. The government has also collaborated and coordinated with a number of Ministries and diplomatic delegations to solve the stranded Egyptians' issues.

In December 2020, the Egyptian government has also issued a set of directives to intake the Egyptian workers, who got affected by the pandemic, to integrate them in the Egyptian labour market and national projects. The Ministry of Immigration, in cooperation with the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, launched “Welcome home” initiative in 2021, which aimed to create database with key information on Egyptian returnees, including their professions, work, specialization, and skills in order to offer them with job opportunities compatible with their skills.

In regards to the challenges that Egyptians living abroad experience, whether in the form of trafficking, forced labor or exploitation, the Egyptian government works to increase its efforts in protecting and supporting Egyptians’ abroad human rights. Since the establishment of the Ministry of Immigration and Egyptian Expatriates Affairs, the Minister of Immigration, Nabila Makram, highlighted the vitality of protecting Egyptians’ abroad human rights, and assured on the government efforts to meet their demands, needs, and rights on an ongoing basis.

Despite the initiatives, policies, and campaigns implemented by the Ministry of Immigration to link Egyptian expatriates to their homeland, and protect their human rights, the Ministry’s strategy did not yet achieve the demands of Egyptians living abroad and solved their problems.

III. Problems of Egyptians Abroad:

Egyptians abroad face a set of challenges and difficulties. Over the years, ill-treatment and exploitation against Egyptians, in particular, Egyptians employed overseas, have been reported by media outlets and human rights organizations. However, Egyptians’ difficulties abroad differ from one state to another, from region to region, for example, difficulties experienced by Egyptians workforce residing in Europe differs from those problems facing Egyptians residing in Gulf countries. Egyptians abroad in some cases do not receive proper treatment and are frequently subjected to aggression, racism, bullying and violence in deliberate ways. Some of the Egyptians refrain from complaining, especially the illegal migrants, in fear of being deported.

The following summary presents the main challenges experienced by Egyptians abroad:

1. Kafala System

The sponsorship system, mostly known as the Kafala system, is a legal framework that defines the relationship between migrant worker and their foreign employer. The word Kafala traces its origins back to the Islamic jurisprudence on legal guardianship; however, the system has emerged in the 1950's and 1960's to supply cheap labor and to control migration into Arab countries.

The Kafala system operates in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (Kuwait, Qatar, United Arab of Emirates, Oman), along with Jordan and Lebanon except the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain who abolished the system. However, the system has become increasingly controversial due to the lack of regulations and laws that protect migrant workers, often resulting in low wages, poor working conditions, and employees' abuse.

After being in force for more than 70 years, the kingdom of Saudi Arabia has finally abolished the Kafala system in March, 2021, which was preceded by Bahrain, as the first country to abolish the Kafala system in 2009. The United Arab of Emirates has also implemented a set of reforms over the past years to enhance labor mobility and protect migrant workers' rights, yet the Kafala system remains endorsed by the Emirati government and other GCC countries as well.

The system mechanisms constitutes a clear violation of human rights as it restricts the workers freedom of movement and threaten their right to privacy by keeping the employees' passports. It is regrettable that the system continues to be in force despite international criticism and human rights violations.

According to the Ministry of Immigration, Egyptian workers in the Gulf countries represent the largest mass of Egyptians abroad, yet most of the Egyptians workers in neighboring countries continue to suffer from Kafala system. The Kafala system arrangements limit the Egyptian worker ability to leave the employer, in some cases leads to human rights abuses and labor exploitation.

In 2015, IOM released a report in partnership with the Walk Free Foundation (WFF), which revealed the abuses that Egyptian migrants in neighboring countries experience. Egyptians are subjected to practices of forced labor, trafficking, deceitful recruitment, non-paid wages, threat of deportation and insufficient labor rights protection.

Over the years, Egyptian human rights organizations and news agencies reported on the abuse and exploitation and ill treatment that Egyptian workers experience in the Arab states and Europe. Among the other challenges resulted from Kafala system that Egyptian workforce abroad experience is not receiving their dues from their sponsors through responsible labor committees due to their inactive role. Reports reveal that in some cases, sponsors do not pay salaries for several months. Sponsors also sometimes delay in providing the employer's dues after submitting resignation, which prevents the contractor from staying in the country to gain his/her right, the sudden deportation of the employer without prior notice, changes the terms of contract upon the arrival to the country of the workplace are all among the challenges that the Egyptians suffer.

2. Trafficking in Persons

Among the problems faced by Egyptians abroad is trafficking. A lot of Egyptian migrants and expatriates are uneducated about human trafficking. Egyptians living abroad are subject to different forms of trafficking, which constitute a main threat for the Egyptians to live a dignified life. According to the United Nations office on Drugs and Crime, "human trafficking is the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them for profit".

Human trafficking became a global phenomenon with the number of victims increasing every year. Men, women, children of all ages from different backgrounds can be subject to trafficking of different forms. Traffickers use violence, coercions or fraud employment agencies to offer fake labor market opportunities to lure the victims and force them into labor or sexual exploitation. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region hosts a large number of highly vulnerable people to trafficking.

Egypt has been combating human trafficking by adopting a national strategy and several laws. Despite the significant efforts made by the Egyptian government and civil society actors to eliminate human trafficking, the efforts remain insufficient and human trafficking remains an obstacle for vulnerable groups. Over the past 5 years and till the contemporary moment, U.S. department of state reports reveal that Egyptian women and girls are sold for temporary marriages for persons from the Gulf countries for the purpose of commercial sex, including cases of sex trafficking, as well as forced labor. The marriage arrangements are often facilitated by the victim's family and marriage brokers.

Egyptian men in neighboring countries are also subject to a form of trafficking, forced labor in construction, and agriculture with low paid wages. Egyptian minors as well are subject to sexual exploitation and forced labor in European countries. It has been also reported by the U.S department of state that Egyptian children, primarily from Fayoum and Damietta governorates, are exploited in commercial sexual acts in Europe.

IV. Policy Recommendations

Egypt is currently on the right track of establishing policies for the Egyptians living abroad, while it is a significant and inspiring step initiated by the Egyptian government, it is important to note that the Egyptian government's implemented measures, initiatives and campaigns to integrate the Egyptians living abroad with their home country and to protect Egyptians expatriates' human rights need to be strengthened. The government efforts that have been implemented and its future actions will lead to greater success and will be vital for engaging the Egyptian expatriates in Egypt's development agenda and maintaining their human rights.

1. Address Challenges for Egyptians' Workforce Abroad

A clear strategy that targets Egyptians' workforce abroad is needed to further protect their rights and benefit the Egyptian citizens abroad. The strategy can be implemented through creating a profile or a body for the Egyptians travelling to work abroad, especially to the GCC and neighboring countries, in order to verify their qualifications, and skills for the applied job, their ability to work in the destination country and to increase their awareness of the

sponsorship system and its challenges, in order to refrain from severe issues and not to be exposed to violations by the sponsor.

The role of the Ministry of Insurance and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Immigration and Egyptian Expatriates should further increase their efforts in securing the rights and demands of Egyptians working abroad. The Ministries should conduct seminars on a regular basis for Egyptians travelling abroad to inform them about the new working environment and their rights and obligations of the destination country.

2. Counter-trafficking

The General Administration of Passports Immigration and Nationality in Egypt should create a profile that includes all the data of Egyptians traveling from Egypt to foreign countries, especially by tourism companies, to ensure their return upon the expiry date of the visa, in order to prevent the Egyptian citizens from being illegal migrants and involve in inhumane acts or work in an illegal manner.

Another profile should also be created to collect workers' data working on cruises and ships that cross the Egyptian borders in order to regularly check the availability of the staff and to ensure their return again to Egypt.

The Ministry of Immigration and Egyptian Expatriates' Affairs in cooperation with concerned bodies should cooperate to create awareness campaigns for the parents, especially in Upper Egypt governorates about the risks of illegal migration.

3. Promote Investment

There needs to be inclusion and communication with all Egyptian expatriates in the government engagement strategy by the Egyptian embassies and consulates in order to understand and determine the needs and the services required by Egyptians abroad.

Egyptian embassies and consulates abroad in cooperation with the Ministry of Immigration and Egyptian Expatriates' Affairs should create a file that includes the names and qualifications of all Egyptian' researchers, scientists, and students abroad to establish a mean

of communication to offer and provide them with similar opportunities' in their home country.

Cooperation of concerned bodies and authorities in the Egyptian government is necessary to establish a House of Expertise, which includes all researchers, scholars and scientists abroad. The House of Expertise will also be responsible for sharing the achievements of these Egyptians, their ideas and researches. The House of expertise should also be responsible to conduct studies about the labor market in Egypt and identify sectors that needs employment and expertise from Egyptians abroad.

A profile should also be created by the government for the Egyptians expatriates residing western countries in order to attract Egyptians with high educational profiles and expertise to invest in their home country and contribute to the state development.

4. Update Data

The report lacked a comprehensive data due to the limited information shared in regards to the Egyptians abroad and the limited data provided by the Ministry of State for Emigration and Egyptian Expatriates' Affairs website. Accordingly, the database should constantly be updated in order to raise awareness about the situation of Egyptians abroad.

In-depth information and adequate detailed data on the conditions, number, and characteristics of the Egyptians abroad needs to be augmented.

The Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), should issue an annual report in order to reveal the accurate statistics on the number of Egyptians abroad.

It is also necessary to categorize the database of all the registered Egyptians in the embassies and consulates abroad in the Egyptian government in order to employ the skills and capabilities of our citizens abroad, in order to benefit from their experience and also to attract them to invest in their homeland in their field of expertise.

5. Support and Protect Human Rights

A huge amount of attention is given by the Egyptian government to the issues experienced by the Egyptians abroad; yet, the ministry should increase its efforts in protecting the dignity and the human rights of the Egyptians abroad by cooperating with well-known media and news channels on a national and international level to showcase and prove the Egyptian efforts in supporting the Egyptians human rights abroad and to raise the Egyptians' awareness about the government actions.

Following up with Egyptians abroad' issues and concerns by the Egyptian embassies and consulates should be of great importance, especially in Western countries, in order to give a good impression of the significant value and importance of Egyptian citizens abroad to the Egyptian government.