

..... Overseas Partner Fact Sheet.....

Refuge Egypt

How it all started

Many African refugees, mainly from Sudan, come to Cairo to flee from persecution, war or disaster in their homelands. Often the women arrive without their husbands, because they have been separated by the civil war in their homeland. There are no refugee camps in Egypt and therefore these displaced people have to fend for themselves in an unfamiliar and, at times, hostile culture. There is little support or assistance for them aside from what the churches can offer.

One of the main problems that displaced people from Sudan face is that they are not legally recognised as refugees, as Egypt and Sudan have an open border. This means that they receive few benefits from the United Nations High Commissions for Refugees (UNHCR). Refuge Egypt provides care for refugees' first two years in Cairo, whilst their claims are being considered.

Over 28,000 people are registered with the programmes at Refuge Egypt, which is located in the compound of Cairo's Anglican Cathedral. The centre works closely with other local churches and organisations, including Saint Andrew's Refugee Services, another of BibleLands' Partners.

Key facts

Founded: 1985

Location: Cairo, Egypt

Grant from BibleLands:
£23,460 p.a.

Current Activities

The 5 aims of Refuge Egypt are to provide: a place of welcome; spiritual encouragement; advocacy; health care; and education.

A Place where displaced people can feel welcome and accepted, where they can find some respite from the trouble that they face and can meet with their friends. The centre's café is the only place in the whole of Cairo where the refugees can come and socialise. It offers Sudanese-style drinks and sandwiches. Popular events include the 'Africa Nights' – an evening of traditional African culture, including dancing, art, food, handicrafts and parades of traditional dress (see photo, left).

Spiritual Encouragement is provided in the form of leadership and lay training. There are many Christians among the displaced people and Sudanese make up more than half of the Cathedral's congregation. As well as running church services, Bible studies, and evangelistic events in Sudanese, the centre trains Sudanese volunteers as counsellors. These counsellors can then minister in a holistic matter to their own people, and up to 27,000 Sudanese take advantage of this particular service, which complements the other, more practical, work of the centre.



Advocacy is given on individual and international levels. Refuge Egypt advises those claiming asylum and assists those making applications to the UNHCR. This, often complicated, process can take up to two years, as the UNHCR is badly under-resourced. The centre provides a 'language and culture' training programme to those chosen for resettlement, to help them adjust to living in a Western culture. The centre also runs an Employment Office, helping the refugees to find jobs and protecting their rights, by ensuring that working conditions are acceptable and that contracts are in place.

Health Care is a critical need for the community. Many refugees arrive in Cairo with health problems, which are further compromised due to bad living conditions and poor nutrition. Refugees cannot access government medical services and cannot afford private treatment. Refuge Egypt offers ante-natal care, family planning, general medicine, AIDS testing, paediatric and TB clinics. It also gives emergency food and clothing parcels if necessary. All available space at the Cathedral is used, including the Bishop's vestry, which is used as an HIV testing clinic! In addition, the centre helps to run a primary healthcare clinic in a slum area on the edge of Cairo, where many refugees live.

Education is another critical need for the community. Refuge Egypt gives primary education to children and teenagers, including a breakfast to ensure that the children have at least one full meal a day, and also runs adult literacy classes.

The centre recently began a preschool in response to the number of children treated in the healthcare programme for rickets. These children were not allowed out of their homes all day due to the dangers of being a refugee on the streets, so the preschool allows parents to go to work knowing that their children are in a safe place, and can play outside.



Meet Samah and her twin boys, Ebzon and Morris, who were born 8 weeks premature. The family came to Refuge Egypt ten days after the twins were born, when they weighed just 1.2 and 1.3 kg. Samah had not been allowed to hold them for the first week of their short lives and she had been told to feed them formula, which she could not afford to buy.

The centre found emergency accommodation for the family and staff visited them twice a day. Fortunately, Samah was still able to breastfeed the boys and she and her husband, Nani, were taught how to care for their tiny sons' special needs. Within 2 months, Ebzon and Morris each weighed almost 4kg.

The centre writes: "It was special to see Nani sit with one of the boys and gently read to him from his Bible. For a father to be involved in the care of small babies is unusual in this culture, but he was very proud of the important role that he could play."

As well as the services offered at the main centre, Refuge Egypt runs a smaller medical clinic in a slum area of Cairo, in conjunction with the local Catholic and Orthodox churches. Because it is such a poor area, many refugees live here and the clinic is popular, seeing almost 4,000 people each year. Its focus is on primary healthcare, with antenatal and postnatal services on offer, as well as HIV and TB clinics, and health education programmes. There are also Well Baby and Well Child clinics, and food packages are given to those in need, thus improving the health of the most vulnerable groups in this community.

...Christian Love in Action in the Middle East...

By caring for the physical and spiritual needs of the Sudanese people and by enabling them to solve some of their problems, Refuge Egypt welcomes people into the community of the church and demonstrates God's love for all. Thank you for your support of the vital work of this organisation.

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