

The Corridor with No Exit

Shimaa Samy

Washington banned them first. London followed. Now the EU is watching.

The email arrived, as bad news often does, without ceremony.

"University of Manchester ID: 14485462. Dear..., I am writing with regard to the recent change in UK immigration policy relating to Student visas for nationals of Sudan..."

The young man who received it had spent five months preparing — not for rejection, but for the acceptance he had already earned. Five recommendation letters. A strong academic record. Eleven months waiting for Manchester's response. When it came, it confirmed what he already knew: he was qualified. The university wanted him. What it could no longer offer was a future inside its borders.

He is not alone.

A Corridor with No Exit

In a shared apartment in Cairo, a young Sudanese woman named Hiba — she asked that her surname not be used — has stopped checking her email. She is twenty-six. She holds a computer science degree from a Khartoum university that no longer functions. She fled Sudan in April 2023, when the fighting reached her street, crossing into Egypt with one laptop, one change of clothes, and a software portfolio she had been building since she was seventeen.

"I wasn't running from something," she says, sitting cross-legged on a mattress that doubles as her office chair. "I was running toward something. I want to build things." Now she waits — for what, she cannot say. Her Egyptian residence permit expires at the end of this year. She cannot return to Sudan. She cannot legally work in Egypt in her field. The American door closed. And now the British one too.

Washington First

On June 4, 2025, the Trump administration imposed a full travel ban on twelve countries [including Sudan](#) — tourist, student, work visas, everything. The official justification cited security screening deficiencies. For Sudanese nationals, the result was absolute: no American university, no American employer, no American visa of any category.

By December 2025, the ban had expanded to 39 countries. The template was set. What followed was not a coincidence — it was a sequence.

London Follows — and the Numbers Don't Add Up

On March 4, 2026, UK Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood announced what she called an ["emergency brake"](#) — the first of its kind in British immigration history.

From March 26, nationals of Afghanistan, Cameroon, Myanmar, and Sudan would be refused sponsored student visas. The stated justification: asylum claims from those nationalities had risen by over 470% between 2021 and 2025.

The numbers complicate the official narrative. Of the [750,000 international students in the UK](#), only 280 were Sudanese — less than 0.04% of the total.

Pakistan accounts for 40% of all student visa asylum claims. Nigeria ranks among the top three in asylum-supported accommodation. Neither country was banned.

A Shared Theory, not a Shared Dataset

What Washington and London share is not data. It is a theory — that the student who flees a bombed city with a laptop and a revised letter of intent is, in bureaucratic fact, exploiting someone's generosity. A migrant rights charity warned the bans may push more people toward dangerous crossings; student visas are often the only lawful route available from conflict zones. [\[The PIE News\]](#)

Sudan is currently home to the world's largest displacement crisis — over [13 million forcibly displaced](#). Against this backdrop, two governments have decided the primary emergency requiring response is the small number of Sudanese students in their universities. The EU has not yet moved. But Brussels is watching.

The Emergency That Wasn't Named

Hiba's documentation crisis runs on a separate clock. The earliest UNHCR appointment available is March 2027 — months after her papers expire. That gap is not merely administrative inconvenience. In Egypt, it is an exposure. Madad, a Cairo-based refugee initiative, reports that many of those deported in 2024 were carrying expired documentation through no fault of their own. They were not undocumented by choice. They were undocumented by queue. [\[EIPR\]](#)

"I have become," she says, with a flatness that is worse than bitterness, "a problem to be managed." She is looking at Ireland now. The application fee is €60. She has been staring at the form for three weeks.

The Train Runs on Time

She is not asking to be rescued. She is asking to be allowed to work — to write code, to build something in a country that will issue her a document permitting her to exist in it legally. That request has been refused, formally and procedurally, by the two most prominent English-speaking destinations in the world, within the same calendar year, under different governments who arrived at the same answer.

The train always runs on time. It is only the passengers who find themselves stranded on the platform, holding valid tickets to destinations that have quietly ceased to exist. Manchester ID: 14485462. File closed.

