**Women’s Human Rights**

**in the Changing World of Work in Egypt**

**Submitted to:** Working Group on discrimination against women and girls in law and practice

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# Introduction

In recent years, Egypt has made significant achievements on the ground in order to empower women and achieve gender equality, believing in the important role they can play in all fields. The Egyptian authorities have taken positive steps towards the establishment of women's citizenship and rights by promulgating the 2014 Constitution of Egypt, which included 21 articles that are fair to Egyptian women, the most important of which is article 11, which provides for the State guarantee to achieve equality between women and men in all civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights in accordance with the Constitution.

The President's proclamation of 2017 as the Year of Women is a positive gesture to take more decisions aimed at empowering and promoting women's rights. The Government of Egypt has adopted the National Strategy for the Empowerment of Egyptian Women 2030 to achieve more empowerment for women at the economic, social and political level, providing protection in the public and private sectors, as well as developing legislation aimed at improving their situation.

Women's economic empowerment policies have been based on encouraging them to enter the labor market by training them to set up small-scale and micro enterprises, supporting and helping working women perform their household chores through service centers and nurseries. The Strategy covers all Egypt's governorates, especially rural areas of Upper Egypt, where many women live in poor and marginalized economic conditions. The Strategy also focuses on supporting women economically by raising awareness of the importance of their work and community empowerment. This has been translated into awareness campaigns targeting school and university students, especially males, such as “Because I am a Man” to encourage men to defend women's rights. The Strategy aimed to reach 35% of women's participation in the labor market by 2030. Various bodies are now working to pass laws that are more equitable to women to empower them in all fields, not just economic ones.

# Egyptian Women and Access to Information Technology

In recent years, the gap between males and females in the use of technology in Egypt has been narrowed. For example, mobile phones use rates in Egypt are equal between males and females, according to the statistics of 2018/2019. This means that serious steps have been taken to increase the use of technology in Egypt without discrimination on the basis of gender. Technology plays a pivotal role in creating new opportunities for young people and girls alike, especially in the Egyptian context which is characterized by openness to the outside world and the emergence of major challenges in the business market in the last years.[[1]](#footnote-1)

For Egyptian women, the digital economy in general provides decent and permanent employment opportunities to achieve their aspirations in line with the nature of Egyptian society and its cultural heritage that may hinder women's movement and mobility, especially in rural areas. In this context, information technology can play a catalytic role in empowering women by providing economic opportunities through market access and creating new forms of income. It also promotes the care economy and helps women balance their role in family care and work. Technology also enables the most marginalized groups to integrate and have better access to training, learning and employment, especially for women heads of households in marginalized areas[[2]](#footnote-2)

In general, the number of females enrolled in computer science and technology colleges has risen in recent years. Deans of faculties of computer and information in six public universities are women. Three women have also assumed the executive chairmanship of three governmental organizations working in the field of information technology: “Information Technology Industry Development Agency, Information Technology Institute and National Telecommunications Institute."[[3]](#footnote-3)The inclusion and leadership of women in information technology refers to steps taken to improve the status of women and enable them to benefit from it in the labour market.

In the context of the steps taken to support women to benefit from technological advancement, the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT) pays particular attention to women and girls to enable them to use technology as part of the Ministry's plan to narrow the increasing gap between the labour force and skills required in the labour market. In 2017, which was proclaimed to be the Year of Women by the President, MCIT encouraged women to enter the ICT sector by announcing a competition for women's creativity in the field of ICT in support of Egyptian women. In line with Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals, the awards are presented to the best two individuals and the best two companies.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Since the beginning of this year, MCIT launched the initiative “Women and Information Technology.'' In March 2019, MCIT launched a program named "Digital Skills in Arabic" in cooperation with Google, which was attended by more than 100 students from the faculties of computer engineering and computers and information of the universities of Cairo and Ain Shams.[[5]](#footnote-5) In July it launched its first e-marketing training program targeting women who want to market their products via social media. The training program included several topics by which women can be able to develop a marketing plan for their products, including analysis of external and internal factors affecting products; the development of the objectives of the marketing plan and converting them into marketing and advertising material on social media such as Facebook, YouTube and Instagram; and the development of the plans of the advertising content for those channels. The Egyptian Post also participated in a panel discussion on financial inclusion and banking and the postal services it provides in support of women entrepreneurs.[[6]](#footnote-6)

# More Flexible Opportunities

The steps taken by the Government of Egypt to economically empower women can be divided into several points, including assisting them to enter the labour market by legally securing their rights, providing occupational and vocational training and facilitating the establishment of small-scale and micro enterprises. These steps have had a significant impact on women's experiences at work, with a large segment of female-headed households benefiting from facilities and training offered to small-scale and micro enterprises. The percentage of beneficiaries reached 68.8% last year, exceeding the target, 50% of targeted women, set to be achieved in the SDG plan.[[7]](#footnote-7)

* **Employment of women in Egypt’s labour law**

Within the framework of providing job security for working women, the provisions of the Labor Law concerning contractual work shall apply. Article 110 of the law stipulates that in case of termination of the contract, the employer shall rely on a legitimate and sufficient justification concerning the breach of the worker's core obligations and competence. A notification shall be given two months before the termination of the contract if the worker's uninterrupted period of service with the employer does not exceed ten years, and three months before termination if the period exceeds ten years, according to article 111.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The Labour Law affirms equality between women and men. Article 88 of the Law stipulates that all provisions governing the employment of workers shall apply without discrimination between them when their work conditions are the same. The Labor Law included a section for the employment of women, which regulates the number of hours of work commensurate with the nature of women. The employer, in case of employing five female workers or more, shall put up at the places of work or of the workers gathering a copy of the women employment system as enshrined in article 95. In the public and private sectors, women have the right to paid leave after childbirth for up to three months, and they shall not be required for work during the forty-five days following childbirth. Article 306 of the Penal Code No. 95 of 1995 stipulates that the penalty of imprisonment for a period of not less than two years and not more than five years and a fine of not less than twenty thousand and not more than fifty thousand Egyptian pounds shall be applied if the employer harasses one of his workers.

The employer also shall not discharge or terminate a female worker's service during her maternity leave. The Law has recognized her right to such leave twice throughout her employment. The law also recognizes the right of a nursing female worker to two rest periods of at least half an hour, in accordance with Article 93.[[9]](#footnote-9) The Government has presented a draft law to the Parliament that will be discussed in the coming session. It adds to the women employment system a provision stipulating her right to reduce the daily working hours in case of pregnancy, and she shall not work overtime from the sixth month of pregnancy. It also gives women the right to leave three times instead of twice in the current law.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Despite the legislation developed to guarantee the right of women to work in terms of care and job security, the Egyptian labour law still lacks provisions that guarantee a set of basic rights. For example, the law has not provided for the rights of workers in general and female workers in particular in the private sector, especially the agricultural sector, domestic work and on demand works. This weakens job security and subject them to dismissal at any time, especially pregnant and nursing women who are dismissed during maternity leave without receiving any entitlements or the right to litigation. Women in the private sectors may be subjected to jobs that are inappropriate for their nature without having the right to claim their rights.

* **Access to the Labour Market**

The percentage of women working in the public sector is 60% of the total working women in the Republic. The percentage of women enrolled in social insurance is 72% compared to 43.2% of men, which means that women are more concerned about job security.[[11]](#footnote-11) However, most of these percentages are based mainly in urban areas, where employment opportunities are largely equal for both genders. In order to support women’s access to the labour market in rural and marginalized areas, the Government has provided training and assistance in the field of entrepreneurship and the establishment of small-scale and micro enterprises targeting women heads of households, and women in rural areas where there is a culture that refuses to women’s work, or those who live far from urban areas, posing a difficulty to find work.

With fewer jobs in the public sector and a gap between the labour force and skills required in the labour market, the Government, represented in its ministries, universities and the National Council for Women, has focused on the areas of entrepreneurship and vocational training for women. Egypt’s new investment law No. 72 of 2017, which in its second article provided for gender equality in investment opportunities and the establishment of an office for women and businesswomen to facilitate the procedures.[[12]](#footnote-12) In this context, the Ministry of Social Solidarity has funded 61,500 micro-projects for women in rural and slums out of a total of 81,000 projects. It also provided 22,500 women with vocational and occupational training in the poorest areas of Egypt and 9,300 women in 430 productive family centers.

The Ministry is also helping women sell their products, with a number of productive family fairs their sales in March 2019 amounted to 33 million pounds.[[13]](#footnote-13) Nasser Social Bank provides soft loans to women with the aim of creating micro-projects to transform them from recipients of support to active women in society.[[14]](#footnote-14) In the same context, the National Council for Women is training women to establish small-scale projects through the Skills Development Center, which holds courses on marketing and management skills. The Council also provided programs to rehabilitate women with special needs to enter the labour market through the establishment of small-scale projects. In 2017, a group of women with disabilities were trained on planting on rooftops.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Despite the efforts exerted to encourage women to participate in the labour market, their participation rate is still very low compared to men, with about 24.1% only. This is due to several reasons related to the availability of work in different governorates and the extent to which employers accept the employment of women; most employers prefer to employ men. Culture, customs and traditions also play a role in dealing with women, as many husbands refuse to allow their wives to work, especially in rural areas. National legislation also lacks laws that protect women working in the private sector. With no jobs in the public sector, women may be reluctant to work permanently. More efforts are needed to contribute to changing the society's perception of women. Such efforts have been initiated by the National Council for Women through awareness campaigns such as “Because I am a Man” in schools and universities in order to highlight the positive models of men and their role in supporting women, emphasize the importance of achieving equality and changing the cultural ideas and legacies that hinder women's empowerment in all areas.[[16]](#footnote-16)

# Women in Demographics

In the context of adopting policies to empower women economically, the Government is funding “Two is Enough” campaign to reduce population growth, as the large number of children affects women's health and increases household responsibilities, which prevent them from working. Population control mechanisms focus on raising awareness of the importance of using family planning methods and providing them at low prices. In addition, family planning clinics are available in many areas, especially in rural areas where there is a culture of having large numbers of children which hinders development and hinders women from working. The campaign focuses on the female beneficiaries of the Takaful and Karama (solidarity and dignity) program in the age of 18 to 49 years in the ten poorest and highest fertile governorates (Beheira - Giza - Fayoum - Beni Suef - Minya - Assiut - Sohag - Qena - Luxor - Aswan).[[17]](#footnote-17) It is worth mentioning that the Takaful and Karama program is a cash transfer program launched by the Ministry of Social Solidarity under the umbrella of the development of social safety nets.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Government bodies provide support to working women by helping them to balance their work with their household chores. Article 96 Of the Labour Law requires an employer who employs a hundred or more female workers in one place to provide a nursery school or entrust a nursery school to care for workers’ children.[[19]](#footnote-19) The Ministry of Social Solidarity encourages entrepreneurs to establish nursery schools and develop the existing through the provision of funding from 20,000 to 500 thousand pounds, which will be repaid over four years without interest through loans from Nasser Social Bank. The Ministry provides 42 centers to serve working women by providing ready meal preparation services, laundry and ironing, elderly carers and babysitters. The number of beneficiaries of these services is 165,000 women in 22 governorates.[[20]](#footnote-20)

The Ministry of Social Solidarity has devoted particular attention to the care sector, launching its “Elderly Companion” program, which aims to provide care for the elderlies in their homes and provide an alternative to institutional care for elderlies so as to provide health, psychological, social and economic care to elderlies within their families. The program is implemented through the preparation and rehabilitation of elderly carers, and providing job opportunities within the framework of a legal organizational conception of the profession that guarantees the rights of elderlies at the same time. The training qualifies trainees, of both sexes, on how to deal professionally with elderlies accompanying them.[[21]](#footnote-21) The program created jobs for nearly 3,000 women and men and about 900 elderlies benefited from the program in 2018.[[22]](#footnote-22) Despite the importance of the steps taken by the Ministry to develop the elderly care sector and provide job opportunities for young people of both sexes, especially women due to the nature of work is attractive to women compared to men, but no legal framework has been established to regulate the work in this sector and ensure the job security of its workers.

# Women Situation in the Green Economy

The Egyptian agricultural sector employs about 30% of the total labour force. Women working in the agricultural sector in Egypt face several challenges related to the nature of the work itself and the societal legacies that may deprive them from acquiring agricultural land and thus their economic empowerment is negatively affected. Several government programs have been launched in support of rural women, especially those working in crop cultivation and harvesting. In this context, the National Council for Women has established the Rural Women Committee to improve the harvesting of the long-staple cotton crop, increase its productivity and export it. The National Council for Women also has provided various training for women working in the agricultural sector. A number of rural women leaders and farmers from Damietta and Kafr el-Sheikh governorates have been trained on improved cotton harvesting theoretically and practically due to the importance of long-staple Egyptian cotton, whose production faces many challenges as a result of malpractices in harvesting methods that lead to contamination.[[23]](#footnote-23)

In the Egyptian Labour Law, the women employment system excludes women working in the agricultural sector, which results in many abuses by employers. In addition to their lack of job security, most of them work for a daily wag, exposing women to cruel or forced labour. Therefore, the Egyptian state should ensure the rights of women workers in agriculture through the promulgating new legislation that preserves their rights and guarantees them social protection programs, especially since most workers in this sector are breadwinners and come from marginalized and poor backgrounds.

# Recommendations

* We call upon the Government of Egypt to continue efforts to combat violence against women, and to continue working to empower women economically, socially and politically.
* The Government of Egypt should accede to the Maternity Protection Convention No. 3 and the Convention on Domestic Workers No. 189.
* To promulgate laws providing social protection and job security for women working in the private sector.
* To promulgate laws for women domestic workers and farmers to determine the number of working hours, vacations and minimum wages, and to provide a social protection network by providing them with a designed insurance scheme for them.
* To activate the role of the Agricultural Takaful Fund, which was established in 2014 as a guarantee of the rights of workers in agriculture, including women, who are among the most vulnerable groups in society.
* To promulgate legislation guaranteeing the rights of workers in nursing homes.

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3. المرجع السابق، ص 13 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
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9. قانون العمل المصري رقم 12 لسنة 2003. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. مشروع قانون مقدم من الحكومة بإصدار قانون العمل، فبراير 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
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23. المجلس القومي للمرأة، تقرير، 2018، ص 49، <https://bit.ly/30kuFfx> [↑](#footnote-ref-23)