

**EGYPT**

**MENA Gender Equality Profile**

Status of Girls and Women in the  
Middle East and North Africa



Photo Credits  
Egypt: © UNICEF/EG0683/Noorani

The findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect the policies or views of UNICEF.

The designations employed in this publication and the presentation of the material do not imply on the part of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) the expression of any opinion whatsoever concerning the legal status of any country or territory, or of its authorities or the delimitations of its frontiers.

## 1. BACKGROUND

Demographics	Value	Year
Total population (000)	82,999	2009
Total adolescent (10-19) population (000)	16,603	2009
Total under-18 population (000)	31,695	2009
Total under-5 population (000)	9,559	2009
Population annual growth rate (%)	2.1	2000-2009
Total fertility rate (births per woman)	2.8	2009
Under-five mortality rate (per 1000 live births)	21	2009
Life expectancy at birth (years), male	69	2009
Life expectancy at birth (years), female	72	2009
Singulate mean age at marriage, male	28	1996
Singulate mean age at marriage, female	23	2005
<b>Economic indicators</b>		
GNI per capita (current US\$)	2,340	2010
% share of income held by lowest 20 %	9	2005
% share of income held by highest 20 %	42	2005
<b>Sources:</b> UNICEF, The State of the World's Children 2011. Life expectancy and economic indicators from The World Bank, Data Catalog, <a href="http://data.worldbank.org/">http://data.worldbank.org/</a> , [accessed in August 2011] Marriage data from UNPD, World Marriage Data 2008, <a href="http://www.un.org/esa/population/">www.un.org/esa/population/</a>		

<b>Gender Gap Index 2010</b>		
Rankings of MENA countries with available data	Score	Rank
United Arab Emirates	0.6397	103
Kuwait	0.6318	105
Tunisia	0.6266	107
Bahrain	0.6217	110
Lebanon	0.6084	116
Qatar	0.6059	117
Algeria	0.6052	119
Jordan	0.6048	120
Oman	0.5950	122
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	0.5933	123
Syrian Arab Republic	0.5926	124
<b>Egypt</b>	<b>0.5899</b>	125
Morocco	0.5767	127
Saudi Arabia	0.5713	129
Yemen	0.4603	134
<b>Source:</b> World Economic Forum, The Global Gender Gap Report 2010 (rankings of in total 134 countries)		

## 2. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

**Legal system.** Egyptian laws are primarily based on the French civil code and Islamic law (Shari'a). The personal status law that regulates matters such as marriage, divorce and child custody is governed by Shari'a. In most instances the worth of a woman's testimony will be equal to that of a man. Under the personal status law, however, discrimination exists and, in a family court, a woman's testimony is worth half of a man's testimony. For religious minorities (e.g. the Coptic Christian population which constitutes about 10 per cent of the total population) the communities' own religious standards are applied to personal status matters and there is no unified law that applies to all Egyptians.<sup>1</sup>

**Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.** Egypt ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1981 and maintains reservations to articles 2 (policy measures) and 16 (equality in marriage and family life), as well as 29 (2) (related to the administration of the convention; arbitration in the event of a dispute). In 2008 Egypt withdrew its reservation to CEDAW article 9 (2) which calls on states to grant women equal rights with men with respect to the nationality of their children.<sup>2</sup> The reservation to CEDAW article 16 (equality in marriage and family life) is maintained based on the provisions of Islamic and Egyptian law under which husband and wife have different rights and duties, which according to Egypt's combined sixth and seventh CEDAW report: "...while not identical, are equal." Further, the report states that "...implementing equality in the way stated in several paragraphs of article 16 would diminish the rights women currently enjoy."<sup>3</sup> The reservation to article 2 (policy measures) is a general one, indicating that Egypt is willing to comply with the article as long as it does not conflict with Shari'a. The provisions of articles 2 and 16 are considered to be central to the object and purpose of the convention, and the CEDAW Committee has indicated that: "...

<sup>1</sup> Freedom House, Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010 (report, online version, [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org))

<sup>2</sup> See United Nations Treaty Collection (<http://treaties.un.org>) for declarations and reservations made by State Parties

<sup>3</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Sixth and Seventh periodic report of Egypt, CEDAW/C/EGY/7, 2008

reservations to article 16, whether lodged for national, traditional, religious or cultural reasons, are incompatible with the Convention and therefore impermissible..."<sup>4</sup>

**Convention on the Rights of the Child.** Egypt ratified the CRC in 1990 with reservations to articles 20 and 21 (which relate to adoption), since Islamic law does not allow adoption. The reservations were withdrawn in 2003. Egypt acceded to the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography in 2002 and to the Optional Protocol to the CRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict in 2007, without reservations to either treaty.

**Nationality rights.** The lifting of the reservation to CEDAW article 9 (2) in 2008 followed an amendment of the nationality law in 2004. The amended law enables Egyptian women who are married to non-Egyptian men to pass on their nationality to their children, which was previously not permitted. Although Egyptian men married to foreign women can pass their Egyptian citizenship to their foreign spouse, Egyptian women cannot do so according to the amended law.<sup>5</sup>

**Divorce rights.** Egyptian women have the right to seek divorce; however, in order to receive financial compensation the woman must prove damage. Women can also seek divorce without the burden of evidence, but if they do they have to return their dowry and do not receive any alimony. If the husband initiates the divorce, the woman has the right to alimony.<sup>6</sup>

**Guardianship and custody rights.** The father is the guardian of the children and is responsible for the children's financial maintenance according to Egyptian law. In case of divorce, the mother may raise the children until they reach the age of 15, with child-support from the father.<sup>7</sup> Following a 2008 amendment of the law, women can now register children born to them out of wedlock in their name. Previously it was only the father who could register the child and children unclaimed by their fathers would not have an official identity and were denied citizenship rights.<sup>8</sup>

**Inheritance rights.** According to the inheritance law, which is applied to citizens of all religious faiths, women have the right to inherit but the share of the woman's inheritance will be half of the man's if there is one man and one woman with the same relationship to the deceased.<sup>9</sup>

**Freedom of movement.** According to the law, women and men have the same rights with regard to the movement of persons. Since 2000, women no longer need the permission of their husband or father to travel and obtain a passport.<sup>10</sup>

**Protection from child marriage.** In 2008, the minimum legal age of marriage was raised to 18 for both girls and boys (previously the minimum age of marriage for girls was 16).<sup>11</sup> According to the findings of the Egypt Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) conducted in 2008, child marriage is still common with 17 per cent of young women aged 20-24 married before the age of 18. Among the poorest 20 per cent, child marriage was as high as 37 per cent, while among the richest 20 per cent, it was 8 per cent. Polygyny is allowed under Islamic law. Information on the prevalence of polygyny was not collected in the DHS.

**Protection from gender-based violence.** "Honour killings" still occur in Egypt and despite reforms to eliminate discriminatory laws the penal code still allows lenient sentences to men convicted of crimes of "honour". There is currently no law that specifically prohibits domestic violence. Rape is a crime, but marital rape is not.<sup>12</sup>

4 Report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Session, A/53/38/Rev.1, 1998, p.49

5 Freedom House, Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010 (report, online version, [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org))

6 Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Sixth and Seventh periodic report of Egypt, CEDAW/C/EGY/7, 2008

7 Ibid.

8 Freedom House, Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010 (report, online version, [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org))

9 Ibid.

10 Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Sixth and Seventh periodic report of Egypt, CEDAW/C/EGY/7, 2008

11 Ibid.

12 Freedom House, Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010 and Freedom in the World 2011 Edition (reports, online versions, [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org)), and U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 2011 (report, online version <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/>) [accessed in August 2011]

The 2008 DHS collected data on attitudes towards domestic violence among ever-married women 15-49 years old reveal accepting attitudes towards wife beating among 39 per cent of the respondents, who agreed with a least one specified reason<sup>13</sup> justifying a husband to beat his wife. Among (ever-married) adolescent girls (aged 15-19), an even higher percentage agreed with a least one reason (50 per cent).

**Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting.** FGM/C is illegal in Egypt but it is still very common. The practice was first banned in 1997 although the law offered a loophole allowing FGM/C when it was deemed “medically necessary”. In 2008 a full ban was approved and carrying out FGM/C was criminalized, but no one has been convicted of violating the ban according to the Freedom House report Women’s Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010.<sup>14</sup>

The prevalence of FGM/C among women aged 15-49 is 91 per cent according to DHS 2008. Although urban women are less likely to be cut than rural women, the practice is widespread in both areas with a prevalence of 96 per cent in rural areas and 85 per cent in urban areas. Few women are circumcised after the age of 15 (the most common age of circumcision is 9 to 10 years of age), and when comparing FGM/C rates by age groups, lower rates are found in the 15-19 and 20-24 age groups (81 and 87 per cent, respectively) than among the 25-49 age groups (where 94-96 per cent of women have been cut). These results suggest a possible decline of the practice.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. INSTITUTIONS AND MECHANISMS

**Governmental response.** Following the 25 January 2011 Revolution, major reforms are underway in Egypt. The National Council for Women (NCW), is the government entity responsible for promoting women’s rights. The NCW has played an active role in reviewing legislation and recommending draft laws. NCW has cooperated with international organisations and governmental and non-governmental organisations under cooperation agreements and in pursuit of joint activities such as communication and education efforts. In 2001 an Ombudsman’s Office was set up within the NCW to receive and monitor complaints of gender-based discrimination from women.<sup>16</sup>

**Strategies and services responding to gender-based violence.** The state runs seven shelters for women who are victims of domestic violence and there are free telephone hotlines for victims of violence. There is also a national campaign against FGM/C.<sup>17</sup>

### 4. WOMEN’S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

**Political representation.** Egyptian women gained the right to vote and stand for election in 1956.<sup>18</sup> At the time of the January 25 Revolution in 2011, when the previous regime was ousted and the People’s Assembly (the lower house) was dissolved, women’s participation in national politics was limited: in 2007 only 2 per cent of the seats in the People’s Assembly were held by women.<sup>19</sup> In order to increase women’s political participation, legislation was passed in 2009 that establishes a quota system for women in the People’s Assembly.<sup>20</sup>

**Representation in the legal system.** Prior to 2007 women in Egypt were not allowed to become judges. Following decades of lobbying by women’s organisations such as the Alliance for Arab Women the ban was lifted and shortly after the reform, 30 female judges were appointed.<sup>21</sup> Female judges are mostly appointed in the family courts while the penal courts continue to be male dominated. In 2010 the State Council, Egypt’s highest administrative court, voted to ban women from serving as judges on the council. The decision was overturned by Egypt’s Constitutional Court, but women are still not represented on the State Council and are extremely underrepresented in the Egyptian judiciary.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>13</sup>The specified reasons were: if she goes out without telling him, if she neglects the children, if she argues with him, if she refuses to have sex with him, or if she burns the food.

<sup>14</sup> Freedom House, Women’s Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010 (report, online version, [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org))

<sup>15</sup> El-Zanaty, Fatma and Ann Way, 2009, Egypt Demographic and Health Survey 2008, Cairo, Egypt, Ministry of Health, El-Zanaty and Associates, and Macro International

<sup>16</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Sixth and Seventh periodic report of Egypt, CEDAW/C/EGY/7, 2008

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> UNDP, Human Development Report 2007/2008

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Freedom House, Women’s Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010 (report, online version, [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org))

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Human Rights Watch, World Report 2011: Egypt, 2011 (report, online version, <http://www.hrw.org/world-report-2011/egypt>)

**Civil society.** Egypt has an active women's rights movement and several shadow NGO reports have been submitted to the CEDAW Committee. For example, women's rights organisations address issues such as violence against women and sexual harassment, and advocate for reforms of discriminatory provisions of the personal status law.<sup>23</sup>

## 5. EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

**Education.** The youth literacy rate is 82 per cent among female youth and 88 per cent among male youth, according to data from 2006. The net enrolment ratios of girls and boys in primary school are roughly equal (92 and 95 per cent, respectively). In secondary education, net enrolment ratios are also quite similar for girls and boys with a net enrolment ratio of 64 per cent for girls and 66 per cent for boys.

**Access to financial credit.** Egyptian women have access to bank loans and other forms of financial credit and do not require the consent of their husband or guardian to apply for credit.<sup>24</sup>

**Participation in the labour market.** Egyptian women's economic participation is low. The labour force participation rate (that is, the proportion of the working-age population that actively engages in the labour market either by working or looking for work) among women aged 15 and above is only 22 per cent, while the corresponding percentage for men is 75 per cent. Globally, women's labour force participation rate is 52 per cent.<sup>25</sup> Some 20 per cent of female youth (aged 15-24) participate in the labour market, compared to 53 per cent of male youth. Youth unemployment is a concern, especially for young women, according to available data from 2007. Among female youth (aged 15-24) the unemployment rate is 48 per cent, while among male youth it is 17 per cent.

## 6. REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

**Maternal health.** Egypt is categorized as being "on track" towards improving maternal health (MDG5), according to analyses of the reduction of the Maternal Mortality Ratio conducted by the Maternal Mortality Estimation Inter-agency Group (MMEIG). Maternal mortality is estimated at 82 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births.<sup>26</sup> The overall antenatal care coverage is 74 per cent, with marked differences between the poorest 20 per cent and the richest 20 per cent (54 and 92 per cent coverage, respectively). The coverage in skilled attendance at delivery, which is one of the most critical interventions for safe motherhood, is 79 per cent. Here again there are marked disparities by wealth quintiles.

**Early childbearing.** According to DHS 2008 findings, 7 per cent of young women aged 20-24 gave birth before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. The adolescent birth rate is 50 births per 1,000 adolescent girls aged 15-19.

<sup>23</sup> Freedom House, Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010 (report, online version, [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org))

<sup>24</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Sixth and Seventh periodic report of Egypt, CEDAW/C/EGY/7, 2008

<sup>25</sup> United Nations, DESA, The World's Women 2010, p. 76

<sup>26</sup> WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA and The World Bank, 2010, Trends in Maternal Mortality: 1990-2008 (Countries with MMR  $\geq$  100 in 1990 are categorized as "on track" if there has been 5.5% decline or more annually, "making progress" if MMR has declined between 2% and 5.5%, making "insufficient progress" if MMR has declined less than 2% annually, and having "no progress" if there has been an annual increase in MMR. Countries with MMR < 100 in 1990 are not categorized)

## 7. KEY INDICATORS ON THE SITUATION OF GIRLS AND WOMEN

MATERNAL AND NEWBORN HEALTH	YEAR	TOTAL	URBAN	RURAL	POOREST 20%	RICHEST 20%	SOURCE
Contraceptive prevalence (%)	2008	60	64	58	55	65	DHS 2008
Antenatal care coverage at least once by skilled personnel (%)	2008	74	85	67	54	92	UNICEF global database/ DHS 2008
Skilled attendant at birth (doctor, nurse or midwife) (%)	2008	79	90	72	55	97	UNICEF global database/ DHS 2008
Adolescent birth rate (number of births per 1,000 girls aged 15–19)	2006	50					UNFPA, UNPD, MDG database <a href="http://unstats.un.org">http://unstats.un.org</a> [accessed in May 2011]
Maternal Mortality Ratio (adjusted) (maternal deaths per 100,000 live births)	2008	82					WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank, Maternal Mortality Estimation Inter-agency Group (MMEIG) / UNICEF global database
Lifetime risk of maternal death, 1 in:	2008	380					

EDUCATION	YEAR	MALE %	FEMALE %	GENDER PARITY INDEX (F/M)	SOURCE
Net enrolment ratio primary school (%)	2009	95	92	0.97	UIS, online database, <a href="http://stats.uis.unesco.org">http://stats.uis.unesco.org</a> [accessed in August 2011], UIS estimates
Net enrolment ratio secondary school (%)	2009	66	64	0.97	UIS, online database, <a href="http://stats.uis.unesco.org">http://stats.uis.unesco.org</a> [accessed in August 2011], UIS estimates
Youth (15-24) literacy rate (%)	2006	88	82		UIS, online database, <a href="http://stats.uis.unesco.org">http://stats.uis.unesco.org</a> [accessed in May 2011]
	YEAR	TOTAL			SOURCE
Share of females among teaching staff (%) in primary education	2007	56			UNESCO, Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2011, UIS estimate
Share of females among teaching staff (%) in secondary education	2007	42			UNESCO, Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2011, UIS estimate

CHILD PROTECTION	YEAR	TOTAL	URBAN	RURAL	POOREST 20%	RICHEST 20%	SOURCE
% of women aged 20-24 who were married/ in union before the age of 18	2008	17	9	22	37	8	UNICEF global database/ DHS 2008
Female genital mutilation/cutting among women 15-49 (%)	2008	91	85	96	95	78	UNICEF global database/ DHS 2008
	YEAR	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE			SOURCE
% of children aged 5-14 engaged in child labour	2005	7	8	5			UNICEF global database/ DHS 2005

ATTITUDES TOWARDS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE	YEAR	% WHO AGREE WITH AT LEAST ONE SPECIFIED REASON	SOURCE
Women (15-49) who think that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances (%)	2008	39	UNICEF global database/ DHS 2008
Adolescent girls (15-19) who think that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances (%)	2008	50	SOWC 2011/ DHS 2008

HIV/AIDS	YEAR	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE		SOURCE
HIV prevalence among young people (15-24)	2009	<0.1	<0.1	<0.1		UNICEF global database/ UNAIDS
% of young people (15-24) who have comprehensive knowledge of HIV	2008	-	18	5		UNICEF global database/ DHS 2008



USE OF ICT	YEAR	TOTAL		SOURCE
% of young women (15-24) who used a computer during the last 12 months				
% of young women (15-24) who used the internet during the last 12 months				

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION	YEAR	TOTAL		SOURCE
Number of women in parliament (single/ lower house)	2011	65		Inter-Parliamentary Union's global database ( <a href="http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm">http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm</a> ) Data as of 31 January 2011
% women in parliament	2011			
Legislated quotas for women for single/ lower house (yes/no)	*	Yes		The Quota Project, <a href="http://www.quotaproject.org">www.quotaproject.org</a> [accessed in May 2011*]
Quota type	*	Reserved seats		
Number of women in ministerial positions	2010	3		DAW/DESA, IPU, Women in Politics: 2010 (reflecting appointments up to 1 January 2010)
% women in ministerial positions	2010	9		

**Notes:**

The People's Assembly and the Shoura Assembly were dissolved by the Egypt Supreme Council of Armed Forces (ESCAF) on 13 February 2011 and therefore current information on Egyptian women's political participation in parliament is missing in Inter-Parliamentary Union's global database (<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>)

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION	YEAR	TOTAL		SOURCE
Labour force participation rate (%), male 15+	2009	75		ILO, Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM), 6th Edition <a href="http://kilm.ilo.org">http://kilm.ilo.org</a> Table 1a (ILO estimates), [accessed in May 2011]
Labour force participation rate (%), female 15+	2009	22		
Labour force participation rate (%), male 15-24	2009	53		
Labour force participation rate (%), female 15-24	2009	20		
Total unemployment rate (%), male 15+	2009	5		ILO, KILM, 6th Edition, Table 8a, [accessed in May 2011]
Total unemployment rate (%), female 15+	2009	23		
Youth (15-24) unemployment rate (%), male	2007	17		ILO, KILM, 6th Edition, Table 9, [accessed in May 2011]
Youth (15-24) unemployment rate (%), female	2007	48		

MATERNITY LEAVE	YEAR		SOURCE
Maternity leave duration	2004-2009	90 days	United Nations Statistics Division, <a href="http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/indwm/tab5g.htm#tech">http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/indwm/tab5g.htm#tech</a> , Table 5g, [accessed in May 2011]. Data compiled between 2004-2009.
% of wages paid in covered period	2004-2009	100	
Provider of benefit	2004-2009	Social security (75%), employer (25%)	

**Notes:**

DHS=Demographic and Health Survey

The UNICEF global databases are available on [www.childinfo.org](http://www.childinfo.org)

For indicator definitions and further information on data sources please see "Guide to MENA Gender Profiles"

n/a = not applicable

## 8. RATIFICATION OF TREATIES

TREATY	YEAR OF SIGNATURE	YEAR OF RATIFICATION, ACCESSION (A), SUCCESSION (S)	RESERVATIONS
Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1953)		1981 (a)	
Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages (1962)			
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)	1967	1982	
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)	1967	1982	
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979)	1980	1981	Articles 2, 16, 29 (2)
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1999)			
Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)	1990	1990	
Amendment to article 43 (2) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1995)	n/a	1998 Acceptance	
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (2000)		2007 (a)	
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (2000)		2002 (a)	
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006)	2007	2008	

n/a = not applicable

Source: United Nations Treaty Collection, <http://treaties.un.org> [accessed in May 2011]



