

Africa's Social Policy Trajectories since the Colonial Period

Implications of Path Dependency in Egypt



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ABSTRACT

This report presents a historical analysis of social policymaking in Egypt from the colonial era until the 21st century responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Focusing on education, employment, and social protection, the research traces policymaking incentives, processes, and effects along a path-dependent history in which social policies are largely motivated by political priorities. Conceptualising Egypt as an Ayubian ‘fierce’ state, the research highlights the authoritarianism of social contracts under different presidential eras and emphasises the need for a more democratic social contract moving beyond COVID-19. It also traces gender-based conceptions and considerations across the history of a highly patriarchal state and underlines the necessity of institutional reform to address structural inequalities along intersectional lines for a post-COVID future.

Introduction

Social policy is the area of social welfare, social services, and social protection (Spicker, 2012, p. 478). It covers state-sponsored welfare provisions that include basic consumer subsidies, labour legislation, free primary education, and free or subsidised higher education. It is a complex sphere involving formal and informal, as well as state and non-state, institutions and entities (Kemshall, 2001; Hall and Midgley, 2004). This research conceptualises social policies as sets of systematic interventions geared toward desirable social welfare, relations, and institutions (Kwon et al., 2009; Mkandawire, 2011). As such, social policies should build resilience and enable people to absorb shocks and crises. Furthermore, beyond their protective functions, social policies should increase citizens' productive potential, secure reproduction, and enable social cohesion. In other words, social policy should be transformative: multifunctional, universal and sustainable, guiding and growing through socioeconomic development.

As part of the Gender Equitable and Transformative Social Policy for Post-COVID-19 Africa (GETSPA), this country report focuses on the historical tracing of social policy in Egypt. Looking at the realities and outcomes of social policymaking in Egypt's history since its independence, a historical approach is used to understand the underlying ideational factors behind social policymaking, identify patterns, and drawing conclusions for the post-COVID-19 future. The historical analysis also captures the influence of political processes and priorities, including how they determine which social policies are in place and which get to be phased out and how.

This strong connection between the state and social policy across Egypt's recent history informs the organisation of historical analysis around presidencies. The first of the five distinct eras in this paper correspond to change in presidential terms: after the colonial era ended in the 1950s, the post-independence era corresponded to the presidential rule of Jamal Abdel Nasser (1954-1970), the economic crisis and adjustment era witnessed the consecutive terms of Anwar el-Sadat (1970-1981) and Mohamed Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011), who had the longest term and was the first to step down based on a national revolution. The immediate aftermath was politically characterised by frequent changes of administration until Abdel Fattah el-Sisi came to power in 2014. Analysing social policy changes through presidencies provides insights into the relationship between social policymaking priorities and political gains/capital. It also reveals an emergent path-dependent pattern that characterises Egypt's social policymaking and the authoritarian social contract across time.

Egypt

Formally known as the Arab Republic of Egypt, the country has the largest and most densely settled population in the Middle East and North Africa, currently surpassing 102 million people (CAPMAS 2021). Geographically, it connects Africa and Asia. The Suez Canal in Sinai connects the Mediterranean and Red Seas and has geopolitical significance in the region. While the country

spans an area of 1001,450 km², 98% of the people live on only 3% of the land, namely the Nile Delta; this geographic configuration exacerbates spatial inequalities. Administratively, Egypt is divided into 27 governorates, the largest being Cairo and Giza, considered the largest urban cities. Each governorate is further divided into hundreds of municipalities and smaller sub-municipal village districts. Egypt is considered a low-middle-income country, with an estimated 17% of the population suffering from food insecurity amid widespread malnutrition. Around 28% of the population lives below the poverty line, and around 75% of Egypt's poor live in rural areas. The Egyptian economy depends on weak and depletable natural resources, remittances, and some economic sectors, such as tourism, oil and gas, and agriculture. Water dependence presents potential problems because of climate change, increased urbanisation, overexploitation of the Nile Delta, inefficient water resource management, and, more recently, the building of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. Egypt remains heavily dependent on wheat imports despite the importance of the agriculture sector in achieving food/nutrition security, providing employment, reducing poverty, and enhancing the resilience of the rural population (FAO; Mohamed et al., 2019).

Report Structure

This research documents the development of social policies in Egypt in relation to wider political and socioeconomic realities and contexts. Following the introduction, the second section provides an analysis of the problem of social policy in Egypt, and the third section deals with the prominent literature and theoretical frameworks around social policy. The fourth section, representing the bulk of this research, maps the trajectories of social policies since the late colonial era to date. For each specific historical period, there are subsections that outline the main socio-economic contexts and contextual changes, as well as the relevant policies and realities concerning education, employment, and social protection. Gender is present across the periods and policy areas of focus, as the research team adopts a gender-equitable approach to the historical analysis. Finally, the fifth section summarises the main findings and provides recommendations for a gender-equitable and transformative post-COVID future.

The main findings of this work are:

- Egyptian policymaking is largely path-dependent.
- Where exceptions to path dependency exist, they are often reactive. Reactive social policymaking is based on economic stipulations (such as the social policy conditions of loan-granting entities) or policymakers' aspirations of increased political capital (by gaining public support).
- Significant changes in social policies are often the results of (or reactions to) large-scale riots or the threats thereof. This pattern spans the entirety of the historical period covered, commencing during the colonial era all the way up to the pre-COVID years.
- There *are* positive efforts across the three policy realms (education, employment, and social protection), primarily in legislation. However, the major obstacle here is

implementation: while some laws capture gender-equitable and transformative policymaking dimensions on paper, they are absent, or only partially implemented, on the ground.

- Dominant features of Egypt's social policymaking reality include stifled law-implementation capacities, arbitrary exercise of despotic power, structural violence, semi-coercive financial surplus extraction, and huge reliance on foreign aid. These features characterise the state theoretically as a *fierce* state from an Ayubian framework.

Section Two: The Problem of Social Policy in Egypt

As a developing, lower middle-income country, Egypt's social policy problems are multifaceted. To start with, most of the country's social policymaking history approached society and economy as two separate spheres, prioritising the economic side. When social policies lag behind economic ones in policymaking agendas, they are considered a way to correct the worst consequences of short-sighted economic policies ((Heintz and Ravazi, 2015). As such, social policy is practiced on an ad-hoc basis, which grounds it in traditional perspectives that focus on protecting the vulnerable. This is the case in Egypt (Sholkamy 2018). Transformative policymaking, as the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated, requires an ideological reconfiguration that acknowledges the inseparability of the social and the economic or the *centrality* of the social to the economic. This is not a novel realisation; writing in the aftermath of World War II, El Mallakh (1955) noticed this tendency to consider social policy a remedy to economic injustices and conditioned Egypt's real development on understanding economic problems as both economic and social. The inseparability of the economic and the social was also highlighted in the 1995 Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development resolution (Mkandawire, 2011a, p149). However, practically speaking, the realms do not dovetail – at least not effectively – in social policymaking.

Politics is integral to the social-economic debate in Egypt. The choice to prioritise one at the expense of the other is often a political decision that reflects policymakers' priorities. In fact, priorities of social policies cannot be separated from the distribution of political power; bias in the latter will yield biased social policy priorities. Where social spending is more than the state can afford, the appropriation of social provisioning distorts the macroeconomic profile and, in this sense, represents a crisis of power. As will be shown, Egypt is a case in point: politics trump economics and social policies are often announced, implemented, or halted to receive hefty loans, gain political capital, or ensure regime survival. For example, there was a struggle to convince the Egyptian state to borrow money from the World Bank in order to implement Takaful and Karama, its first (and largest) conditional cash transfer programme. The state was resistant and considered it improper policymaking until the IMF gave Egypt the loan that allowed the implementation of the programme (Hania Sholkamy, personal communication, Nov. 4, 2021). Looking back from a post-COVID-19 reality, the programme was essential for the survival and shock absorption of millions of people.

There are also institutional impediments to achieving social-policy-based justice in Egypt. First and foremost is the lack of coordination between responsible entities on the one hand and economic sectors on the other. In other words, Egypt lacks the institutional capacity to design and, more importantly, implement comprehensive reform programmes. Additionally, Egypt lacks the luxury of fiscal space; its debt burdens and decreasing government revenues limit the room for looser fiscal policy manoeuvres. Meanwhile, institutions have neither been able to adapt to changes resulting from reform schemes nor mitigate the negative spillover effects that resulted from economic policies (Alissa, 2007, pp. 20-21). A prominent example is the public-sector employment guarantee for all university graduates of the 1950s, which clearly reflected political incentives without the necessary foresight to absorb the overflowing graduates as a result of this

policy. Path dependency made this law survive on paper until the 21st century, despite the incapacity to continue its implementation well before that. This also draws another connected point: some legislative reforms are indeed progressive (and others even transformative), but the good-looking laws on paper are usually not implemented in reality, pointing to the obstacles of institutional and structural weaknesses. Part of the inherent institutional fragility is the absence of official data to enable academic research and pave the way forward for change.

As can be deduced, the problem of social policymaking in Egypt is multifold. Social policymaking in Egypt reflects discrepancies between law and practice, reactive thinking based on an authoritarian social contract, fierce state characteristics, and entrenched gendered hierarchies. Although Egypt is a long way from attaining gender equity or transformative mindsets, the COVID-19 pandemic might necessitate change at a faster rate.

Section Three: Theories, Concepts, and Methods

Theoretical Framework

The research at hand locates social policymaking in a socio-political context, highlighting the strong correlation between social policies and political capital (Sholkamy, 2018). For the purposes of this paper, therefore, we conceptualise the state as the ruling regime, including its personnel and institutions. Policies and allocations are analysed through consecutive presidencies to shed light on the role of the state in social policymaking and the effects of politics on policymaking ideologies.

We also borrow Nazih Ayubi's (1995) differentiation between 'fierce' and 'strong' states to evaluate Egypt's state-society dynamics. In Ayubi's analysis, strong states work *with* civic and civil societies through extractive and regulative capacities. In contrast, fierce states are violent *because* of their inherent structural weaknesses. By analysing the path-dependent trajectories of Egypt's social policymaking, we theorise Egypt as an Ayubian fierce state, with different levels of fierceness across the periods examined. This fierceness is apparent in the structural patterns of violence throughout different historical timeframes, coupled with the weak law-enforcing capabilities, arbitrary exercise of despotic state power, and expropriation of economic surplus by semi-cocoercive methods (internally) in addition to receipt of foreign aid (externally). Accordingly, policymaking is framed within an authoritarian social contract where the state makes provisions in exchange for regime loyalty. The historical analysis at hand demonstrates that instead of becoming stronger, Egypt has retained its path-dependent fierceness characterised by reactive policymaking. By reactive, we mean taking ad-hoc measures when prompted to do so (by international donor entities, mass revolts, etc.) or when threatened (by an ideological substratum for example). So, we acknowledge the recent positive measures taken in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, women empowerment, and so on; however, we contextualise them within global agendas and international trends toward transformative and gender-equitable approaches. Reactive as they are, we hope the ad-hoc measures lead to a less fierce state, and a more democratic social contract, in the future.

In terms of theoretical gaps, the literature on social protection in Egypt is prolific. However, it misses cultural, social, and historical dimensions of social policymaking, in addition to the state's modus operandi in social service provision. There is also a gap in understanding the ways in which social policies create and sustain both group subjectivities and power relations. By analysing the historical trajectories of social policymaking in Egypt, with an emphasis on the political state-making priorities, this paper contributes to the literature on path dependency, political economy, and development studies.

Conceptual Categories and Research Methodology

This research focuses on three symbiotic social policy sectors: education, employment, and protection, all of which are inseparable from the umbrella of social policy. Education is a

significant forward-looking social policy instrument that affects the present and future life phases, starting with social and intellectual child development. Education also enhances employable skillsets, enables social mobility, and has the potential to address inequalities and improve chances of female and minority labour participation (Di Stasio and Solga, 2017; Allmendinger and Leibfried, 2003). In this research, education spans schooling years, from pre-school to post-graduate studies.

Employment is also integral to social policy thinking and economic investment in human resources that allows for sustaining societies. It has direct macroeconomic indicators (e.g., gross domestic product) and feeds into the social welfare cycle by generating required revenues (e.g., through taxes) for supporting social policies. However, many aspects of employment are yet to be officially acknowledged by transformative policy design, including unpaid care work and the vulnerabilities experienced, for instance, by the disabled and elderly (Heintz and Razavi, 2015; Han and Kwon 2020).

Also integral to social policy is social protection, the mechanism or set of policies that primarily aim to reduce poverty and vulnerability while decreasing people's socioeconomic risk exposure and increasing their ability to maintain humane lifestyles. Biased towards the most vulnerable, social protection schemes are either contributory (e.g., social insurance) or non-contributory (e.g., food ration cards and cash transfers) and enable improved productivity, increased education and health investments, and boosted human capital for the most vulnerable.

Transformative policymaking accounts for inequalities based on gender, class, age, disability, and geography, among other cross-cutting spectrums. In a predominantly patriarchal society, however, intersectional-based inequalities are not deeply analysed or addressed, and gender is almost exclusively equated with women. The institutional lack of official data across the board further complicates any studies or assumptions made about intersectionality. In any case, the research uses the bits and pieces of data available to trace the effects of policies on gendered hierarchies, roles, and expectations.

Methodology

The research team relied on the historical analysis of primary and secondary literature, including newspaper archives, legislative articles, Egyptian constitutions, and the State Information System website, as well as policy documents and scholarly work in the form of journal articles, books, and publications. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven social and economic researchers, experts, and historians, alongside visits to socioeconomic research centres in Cairo.

It is also important to point out that entire libraries are dedicated to each social policy area in question and each historical era that this project discusses. In this regard, there are practical and temporal limitations to discussing *all* aspects of social policymaking throughout the past 80 years in a country that witnessed ten presidencies, more than three revolutions, and the birth of over 81 million people over the same timeframe. Therefore, this research is only indicative; by no means does it claim to be a comprehensive history of 1940-2020 Egypt.

Section Four: The Historical Trajectories of Social Policy in Egypt

1. The Late Colonial Era (the 1940s-1950s)

Egypt has a legacy of colonialism. With ancient empires dating to 4,000 B.C., Egypt's colonisers included the Hyksos, Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Saracens, Turks, French, and most recently, the British. The British colonisation of Egypt was related to the huge public debt that Egypt accumulated between 1862 and 1873, exceeding EGP 100 million (El Mallakh, 1955, p. 38). The country declared bankruptcy in 1875, and the British colonial era started in 1882.¹ At the time, Egypt was nominally an Ottoman province and, in 1914, became a British protectorate (Rose, 2021, p. 163; OECD, 2015, p.16). The British colonial rule was brought to a partial end in 1936 when an Anglo-Egyptian treaty between the United Kingdom and Egypt specified the withdrawal of British colonial troops from Egyptian territory with the exception of the Suez Canal area (Morsy, 1984).

The same era also witnessed World War II (1939-1945), which had political and socioeconomic implications. One major implication was the emphasised strategic importance of the Egyptian Suez Canal. As the nodal point in their defence plans, maintaining political and military power over Egypt, and the Suez Canal, in particular, was necessary to Britain (Morsy, 1989, p. 64). Due to the geopolitics of the time, the colonial state in Egypt utilised approaches across a spectrum, ranging from violence to benevolent acts to safeguard itself. The state's need for legitimisation necessitated a relationship with the colonised, and international influences of an increasingly democratic transformation explain some reactively decent reforms in social policy areas (Abi-Hamad, 2012, p. 1). In general, colonialism activated a civil society movement for national independence, and not civic freedoms per se. Therefore, the mutually-exclusive state-society relationship characterised a fierce state, and elements of the state-society divide continued into Egypt's path-dependent trajectories (Ayubi, 1995, pp. 442-443).

Education

It is considered that modern Egyptian education started in the 19th century when Ottoman rulers focused on creating a well-trained elite. Muhammad Ali, the founder of modern Egypt, expanded education by establishing engineering and medical schools but then realised there were competent students who lacked the necessary training to reach these schools. So, he initiated a change in primary education that created a dichotomy that remains to this day: he established formal primary schools [*madrasas*] for the education of elite servants or cadres and left the traditional Islamic schools [*kuttabs*] to continue to educate the general population, mostly the Muslim majority (Mohamed Saleh, personal communication, Nov 2, 2021; Faksh, 1980, p. 42).

¹ For details on Egypt's colonial history, see Tunçer (2015).

The British colonisers inherited this dual system of public education and met calls for reform with their own imperial agendas. Concerned that elaborate modern education would create a political elite that would threaten colonial rule – as had happened in India – less than 1% of the state budget was allocated to education in Egypt between 1882 and 1902 (Tignor, 2015). The colonial rulers continued the path-dependent dichotomy in education only to exacerbate it. The ‘reformed’ *kuttab* schools continued to teach in Arabic only, and so their graduates were unable to proceed to secondary school, where foreign language was a requirement. The *kuttab* system did not experience any qualitative change that would allow for active citizenship or critical thinking skills (El Mallakh, 1955, p. 328), and, ultimately, this meant a dead-end education for most Egyptians. On the other hand, ‘modernised’ model schools continued to provide education for the elite or ‘cultured aristocracy’ (Faksh 1980, p. 42), although their fees were raised and enrolment gradually decreased (Mohamed et al., 2019).

However, under a newly-established liberal monarchy at the turn of the 20th century, an emerging national movement called for reforming education with an emphasis on elementary education as a socioeconomic and cultural basis for preparing Egypt for its semi-independence (Yousef, 2012). The gradual policy shift in educational reform was guided by demands for reduced fees and increased state-school enrolment. As a reaction to these demands, several positive changes occurred: in 1908, the first university (present-day Cairo University) was established, and expenditure on education increased to above 3% (Shechter, 2019). Furthermore, fears of social unrest in the context of World War I triggered a serious take on educational reform. So, in 1917, the British rulers formed the Elementary Education Committee and Constitutional Committee that recommended ways of reform.

The most significant legal reform was the introduction of Article 19 of the 1923 Constitution, which stipulated compulsory elementary education for boys and girls. This was unprecedented. It embodied a promise of change in establishing a national mass education system as a tool for broader social reform and realised education as a potential for social mobility, especially in rural areas where child labour was widespread. Additionally, this radical article is gender-egalitarian in its verbatim emphasis on *girls’* education at a time when education was gender-biased towards males (Shechter, 2019). However, it was unrealistic, given existent socioeconomic conditions. Families, particularly those that were subject to intersectional disadvantage, were highly dependent on dominant child labour, which also meant that dead-end *kuttab* education was not considered an investment in children’s futures. Thus, like a myriad of official stipulations, the law remained a strong point on paper but much less so on the ground.

Employment

The British authorities were interested in maintaining their strategic and economic interests, with their labour policies being mainly reactive. By reactive, we mean the violent response to workers’ strikes. It is important to note that the modus operandi of British rule was maintaining stability and order, which is why the authorities favoured peaceful dispute resolution and did not interfere in

market relations (i.e., they subscribed to a free market ideology). However, the violent interventions to labour disputes were reactive in the sense that workers' demands became associated with, or embedded within, an emerging nationalist ideology.

Under colonial rule, labour activism posed a threat to Britain's political position, mainly because improving the socioeconomic conditions of workers was contextualised within a broader nationalist movement. This is evident in the early 20th century when the Nationalist Party established the Manual Trades Workers' Union (1908-1909) and encouraged workers' demands against the ruling authorities and even wrote news articles to encourage the public embrace of workers' demands. In return, the authorities used forceful police intervention in a number of strikes that demanded better working conditions, higher wages, and shorter working hours, because a successful workers' strike would be regarded as a political victory for the nationalists (Lockman, 1988, pp. 267-269).

The intertwining relationship between labour activism and the nationalist movement was at the root of what came to be known as the 1919 Revolution. Three days after prominent members of the nationalist party, Al Wafd, were arrested and deported to Malta, Cairo tram-way and railway workers started a massive strike and were later joined by other significant sectors. This was no coincidence. In fact, labourers arguably utilised this event to amplify their economic demands and argue against racist, unfair workplace policies. Simultaneously, workers presented a huge popular base – the kind of base necessary for the exertion of sufficient pressure on the authorities - so much so that the British promised to release the previously arrested nationalists in less than a month. It was only then that the strikes started ending. While the Al Wafd party was previously nonchalant about social demands (its leaders were mainly wealthy landowners), this turn of events underscored the importance of sustained labour capacity and the necessity of involving labourers in broad nationalist movements (Beinin, 2010, pp. 4-6).

Within the next decade, the working class expanded in number, weight, and organisational capacity. This growth and organisation triggered concerns among the authorities, forcing the British and their local allies to become more attentive to this newly-emerged social stratum and the grievances thereof (Lockman, 1988, pp. 267-268). In 1936, the Anglo-Egyptian treaty technically signalled the start of the end of British intervention in labour policies. Egyptians replaced British labour officials, and the Al Wafd wartime government began legally recognising labour unions and granting labour demands (Lockman, 1988, pp. 280-283). Law 85 of 1942 was the first instance of official recognition of trade unions (Beinin, 2010, pp. 8-9). While this is a significant milestone, it also meant the formal appropriation of the unions under extensive state regulation. So, for example, the prohibition of a national union federation could be interpreted as a reactive policymaking strategy with a recent memory of the threats such monopolisation could pose.

Among the most significant legislative efforts was Law 48 of 1933, which established (limited) protection for women and children, in line with the government's official acknowledgment that the country was too underdeveloped to allow for more comprehensive legislation (Beinin, 2010, pp. 7-8). The law prohibited the employment of women and minors in positions that endangered their physical health. It also stipulated a nine-hour workday for women, with two hours of overtime

and a week day of rest. Pregnant women were not to engage in work that might cause harm to them or their babies, and minors below the age of 12 were not allowed to work except under direct supervision. Minors between 12 and 16 years of age could work for eight hours a day, or nine if they were supporting adults. While this represented a positive acknowledgment of the state's responsibility to guarantee the welfare of women and children, it was not enforced – a tendency that continues to this day.

Social Protection

The colonial administration was not interested in providing social services in general, and social protection in particular, at least until the early 20th century, when World War I jeopardised subsistence (Schmitt, 2015, p. 333). By 1916, food shortages in Egypt affected the affordability of basic consumer goods, and supply shortages continued until 1918. The post-war period also witnessed spikes in wholesale and retail prices; food was so scarce that the sale of horsemeat was legalised (Rose, 2021, pp. 162-167). Meanwhile, the profit-driven ideologies of the authorities deteriorated the situation further. Locally planted wheat, which was of a higher quality than imported wheat, continued to be exported, while lower quality wheat was imported before the war. Despite imports plummeting during the war, the export of higher quality wheat continued. In fact, it was tariffed in the early period of the war. Farmers refused to adhere to the tariff rate, which meant they lost money, so government officials seized the crops by force. When Cairo bakers went on strike in 1916 because of the tariff-based financial losses, it was removed, only to be re-added later. However, imminent protest threats among bakers across the country, and a reported bread famine in Alexandria, Egypt's second-largest city, caused so much pressure that the tariff was then re-cancelled (Rose, 2021, pp. 167-169). This cycle of policy imposition followed by policy cancellation after unrest continued in Egypt's path-dependent future. In fact, a very similar situation, also regarding bread, happened six decades later.

To end the bread crisis in the colonial period, the Cairo governor suggested subsidisation of supply purchase for landowners, who would pay with incremental taxes. Citing the ultimate goal of making Egyptians content, the government established the Supplies Control Board to regulate the market and guarantee wheat prices through government subsidies (Rose, 2021, p. 172). This measure was successful in the sense that there was a sharp decline in inflation, and prices returned to their pre-war levels. It is also important to understand how it represented a shift in colonial thinking: rather than rely on the workings of a free and decentralised market, unrest drove the government to direct and immediate intervention.

With the growth of the labour movement (both quantitatively and qualitatively) in the 1930s-1940s, tackling social risks became an integral part of British policymaking as a way to bypass potential threats of activism (Schmitt, 2015, p. 333). In this sense, colonial interest in social protection (the most basic of which is subsistence) was reactive, motivated by the maintenance of a strong, stable base in Egypt with no threats of turmoil (Morsy, 1989, p. 72). Furthermore, Egypt's developmental aspirations were aligned with international trends, where the International Labour

Organization played a significant role. In 1944, ILO member states ratified a declaration of the universal right to social security and basic income, regardless of the country's state of independence. While they did not mandate that colonial administrations act in certain ways, they proposed, and to some extent legitimised, social policymaking strategies to highlight social protection (Schmitt, 2015, pp. 332-333).

Additionally, the establishment of the Ministry of Social Affairs in 1939 allowed for institutional state intervention in numerous social spheres, including family and child welfare. This intervention affected social constructs of acceptable motherhood roles and gendered care expectations (Dhenin, 2020, p. v). Furthermore, the institutionalisation of social provision set the path for a highly depoliticised civil society.

2. The Early Post-Independence Era (the 1950s-1960s)

The period immediately following the colonial era witnessed two main changes as a result of independence and 1952 Free Officers Revolution: (1) the drive towards a nationalist, socialist state ideology and (2) the establishment of the role of the state as provider. Representing a moment of break away from the colonial administration, the ideological priorities of this era were driven by nationalist and socialist slogans that emphasised social justice and integration; social justice was among the six guiding principles of this period (Elsayed, 2018, p. 3). This was not exclusive to Egypt; most newly-independent states had nationalist and socialist tendencies that were situated within larger global narratives that identified what is desirable (e.g., equality, independence) and what is intolerable (e.g., child labour, racial discrimination) (Hania Sholkamy, personal communication, Nov. 4, 2021). Also, without exception, postcolonial Arab states became authoritarian: they oppressed dissent, stifled opposition, centralised power, and nationalised social policy realms (Elsadda, 2019, p. 56). So, despite the state's appeal to social justice, it was still repressive, and repression was made possible through the centralisation of social institutions to the state, by virtue of its role as provider for the people.

The nationalist ideological premises explain the massive shift in policies favouring the public sphere, including the redistribution of wealth in more egalitarian terms. In 1956, the Suez Canal was nationalised, followed by several significant industries (banking, manufacturing, transportation, and foreign trade sectors). The 1962 National Charter officiated the state's socioeconomic development strategy, highlighting social justice and Arab unity (Kwon et al., 2009, p. 7; Ghandour, 2012). The Charter institutionalised state control of the economy, most of which was nationalised (Ragab, 1978, p. 24), and the public sector was considered the engine for growth, investment, and employment. The emphasis on the public sector, coupled with the state's financial control and socialist-nationalist ideology, increased expenditure on public infrastructure and social services.

Nationalisation came with power concentration in a centralised state. A kind of implicit socio-political contract arose, whereby the welfare-providing state expected the loyalty of those it provided for (Harrigan and El-Said, 2014, p. 101). National programmes were designed to enhance

the image of policymakers or increase their political capital, while guaranteeing support and political mobilisation around a common nationalist ideology (Ragab, 1978, p. 23; Waterbury, 1983, p. 45). To exercise control, a state bureaucratic body was established (Hania Sholkamy, personal communication, Nov. 4, 2021), perhaps in reflection of the regime's own work environment. After all, the officers behind the 1952 anti-colonial revolution were part of the military: one of the top bureaucratic entities premised on control, hierarchy, and specialisations (Ayubi, 1995 p. 99). The bureaucratisation extended to trade unions (Lockman, 1988, pp. 456-458), which also highlights the need to control the working classes within the state's reactive policymaking framework.

The nationalist-oriented state policies were, for the most part, reactive. Having witnessed the magnitude of working-class dissent, policies that favoured workers were implemented in a bid to win this group over. In fact, Jamal Abdel Nasser, the president during this era, sought the support of the working classes to derive legitimacy (The Solidarity Center, 2007, p. 10). Once in power, his regime became intolerant of the political participation of the educated elite in general (Faksh, 1980, pp. 50-51) and working-class rebellion in particular. Furthermore, the post-1952 state reflected a kind of rural morality under which the state was obligated to provide for its citizens, who were viewed as the state's *children* (Mohamed Saleh, personal communication, Nov. 2, 2021). As shown below, the patriarchal hue of the 'state as provider and controller' affected gender roles and expectations.

Education

The nationalist ideology of the newly-independent state, together with its centralised control, manifested in the education sector. The inherited educational system was elitist and fragmented, so it was reshaped and restructured during the 1950s and 1960s to remedy the injustices of the colonial era. On face value, the massive educational restructure aimed to educate broader segments of the nation and allow for social mobility; closer inspection from a reactive policymaking framework, however, proposes that the reforms were made to please, indoctrinate, and ultimately control the regime's social power base (Abdalla 2008, p. 101).

Nasser nationalised education and brought it under state control. Free school education, nationalisation of most foreign schools, expansion of vocational training, and interest in girls' primary education were among his educational reform measures. Other measures included the reduction of university tuition fees and the expansion of faculties (Abdalla, 2008, pp. 102-103; Mirshak, 2020, p. 45). Furthermore, new universities were established and between 1952 and 1976 the numbers doubled (Mohamed et al., 2019); and university tuition fees were reduced gradually until 1962 when presidential decree abolished tuition fees for higher education altogether (Faksh, 1980, p. 46; Abdalla, 2008, p. 107). These measures proved initially successful for the majority of middle-class citizens who would otherwise not have been able to pursue higher education nor achieved the social mobility that such education made possible. So, naturally, more students

enrolled at the university level: the number of university students quadrupled between 1952 and 1965 and then that number more than doubled between 1971 and 1976 (Abdel Ghafar, 2016, p. 2).

It is important to note, though, that given that no emphasis was placed on changing cultural attitudes to become more gender-sensitive, the vast majority of students who enrolled were male. While the number of primary school enrolment increased from 45% in 1952 to 65% in 1960, the scales tipped towards educating more boys than girls, by percentage increases of 80% and 50% respectively (Faksh, 1980 p. 45). A quick look at illiteracy rates shows an improvement, from 85.2% in 1937 to 70.3% in 1960, although further inspection reveals a gender-based disparity favouring men. Illiteracy among men decreased from 76.6% to 56.6%, whereas among women it fell from 93.9% to 83.8% over the same period (Faksh, 1980, p. 48). Additionally, a survey among students at top public universities (namely Cairo, Alexandria, and Assiut Universities) found that around 50% of male students and about 25% of female students do not approve of gender-based equality (Abdalla, 2008, p. 119).

The patriarchal culture was further cemented by the regime's industrial economic expansion vision, which established the need for trained specialists in technical fields (Abdel Ghafar, 2016, p. 3; Faksh, 1980, p. 45). Secondary education was restructured to focus on technical and vocational training, which were predominantly male fields (Abdalla, 2008, p. 103; Mirshak, 2020, p. 43). Enrolment in vocational secondary schools increased compared to general secondary schools, although the prospects of social mobility associated with a university degree meant families still preferred to send their children to general secondary schools, which were stepping stones to the university (Faksh, 1980, p. 45).

The state's control over education in this era was palpable in ideological and physical terms. With the wave of nationalisation, most foreign schools were obliged to change their curricula to conform with government curricula (Faksh, 1980, p. 47), which included a 'social curriculum' that was highly politicised and biased in favour of the regime. The curriculum was composed of three parts: Arab society, socialism, and revolution, and was obligatory to students across all schools (Abdalla, 2008, p. 116; Mirshak, 2020, p. 43). Memorising the curricula or government textbooks with no opportunity for discussion or debate was an integral part of exam-based success, which had broader implications in terms of the state's ideological indoctrination of citizens: to faithfully follow and never question (Mirshak, 2020, p. 43; Faksh, 1980, pp. 51-52).

Additional political and administrative control mechanisms were made to safeguard Nasser's state against mass uprisings. After all, student activism was an integral part of the pre-1952 revolts (Mirshak, 2020, p. 44). The appropriation of universities into the state apparatus was made possible by the establishment of a Supreme Council of Universities (Abdalla, 2008, pp. 117-118). Moreover, Article 87 of the University Ordinance prohibited all forms of political activity among students, with sanctions including expulsion. A legacy of on-campus state presence also began through the appointment of personnel (military figures were appointed as general secretaries of university administrations, and elected deans of faculties were replaced by state-appointed ones) and the on-campus presence of university guards or policemen who reported to the Ministry of

Interior Affairs (Abdalla, 2008, pp. 124-127).² State intervention also reached Al Azhar, where similar control of curricula, financial resources, and appointments rendered the academic institution, similar to all others, part of the state administration (Faksh, 1980, p. 45). To control dissent, Nasser fired the teaching staff at Alexandria University when they demanded he step down in 1954, denouncing them as enemies of the revolution. In this sense, students were more or less forced to either align with state ideology or withdraw from politics altogether (Mirshak, 2020, pp. 43-44; Abdalla, 2008, p. 127; Faksh, 1980, p. 51).

So, despite the overall quantitative improvements in terms of educational enrolment and investment, the nationalist agenda and assumed state-as-provider role had negative effects on life within academia. Beyond the improvement in numbers, eliminating illiteracy proved impossible given the war-drained economy and spiking population growth rates (Faksh, 1980, p. 47). The reliance on scant facilities and resources corresponded to a deterioration in the quality of higher education (Abdalla, 2008, p. 110), and the policies of this era proved uneven in intersectional terms. The middle class was the main source of students for the universities. A 1964 survey revealed that while 86.4% of middle-class parents expected that their children would pursue higher education, only 43% of parents in the lower class had that expectation (Abdalla, 2008, p. 109). Vocational schooling also became stigmatised with time, especially after the industrial era came to an end. Importantly, the state more or less succeeded in controlling and stifling student activism in reactive policymaking that considered students and workers as a potential source of unrest (Abdalla, 2008, pp. 119-120).

Employment

The labour movement that was once integral to ending colonial rule was portrayed differently after the 1952 change of government. After Nasser came to power, labour activism became a threat and was labelled as unpatriotic attempts to disrupt social peace and national economic development. This justified the state's interest in controlling the working classes and dissolving any potential unification of labour activism (Beinin, 1989, pp. 71-88). Meanwhile, to prevent potential worker dissent in the first place, the state had to live up to its social reform promises and actually improve working conditions (Lockman, 1988, p283). Therefore, reactive policymaking in the employment sphere was twofold: it was concerned with (a) improving working conditions and (b) repressing labour activism. Nevertheless, Nasser's employment policies had unintended gender-equitable implications that affected women's participation in the workforce.

Numerous jobs were created as a result of the nationalisation of foreign enterprises alongside large and medium-sized entities.³ Under nationalisation, workers became public employees whose living standards more or less improved. They received social benefits (e.g., healthcare), subsidised commodities and housing, pensions, autonomous electoral opportunities, and annual cash distributions of public-sector company profits. Furthermore, minimum wages rose while working

² Although the security presence was disbanded in 1972, it was replaced by the civilian Security Bureau (Abdalla 2008: 126-127).

³ While beyond the scope of this paper, it is integral to mention the agricultural land reforms of 1952, which redistributed lands from 'feudalist' landowners based on social justice considerations. The land reforms were also laden with symbolic significance to convince the public of the state's devotion to social justice and reform. Although framed as upholding social justice, the reforms were debatably made to diffuse the capital and power of large landowners. See Beinin (1989) for further details.

hours became shorter, and the multi-step bureaucratic system in place made it especially difficult to fire employees (The Solidarity Center, 2010, pp. 11-12). Meanwhile, Law 14 of 1964 guaranteed public employment for secondary school and university graduates. This resulted in higher education enrolments and an increase in public-sector employees in the short term, and a problematic surplus of educated but unemployable citizens in the long run. Population growth, increased number of graduates, prolonged waiting lists, and a lack of strategy to anticipate and absorb the graduates made the law impossible to sustain, and it stopped de facto in 1983 (Abdalla, 2008, p. 111; Mohamed Saleh, personal communication, Nov. 2, 2021; Abdel Ghafar, 2016, pp. 2-3).

While unintentional, the public employment guarantee had gender-based implications. Based on the non-discrimination clause in the 1956 constitution, and because the government was generally gender-neutral in recruiting public employees, the public sector employment guarantee actually incentivised women to join the labour market and reduced the gender gap in employment (Hendy, 2015, p. 2; Irene Selwaness, personal communication, Sep. 8, 2021). In comparison to the private sector, the public sector's shorter work hours and increased stability made public employment more suitable for women, as it allowed the time for domestic responsibilities and care work as per traditional gender roles. The subsequent decline in the public sector thus hindered women's participation in the labour force, as the share of private sector employment did not match the public sector decline, and the instability of informal employment was generally unfavourable to women (Hendy, 2015, p. 3).

Aside from the unintended gender consequences, Nasser's government was generally hostile to labour and activism. In 1957, he formed the Egyptian Trade Unions Federation to institutionalise the labour movement and integrate unions into the state apparatus, and bureaucratised the trade union leadership as a form of control (Lockman, 1988, pp. 457-458). Similar to what pertained on university campuses, state security agents supervised unions, and intellectuals were prohibited from voicing criticism against the state (Beinin, 1989, p. 87). The limitations imposed on unions were generally accepted by workers, who in return enjoyed better working conditions (The Solidarity Center, 2010, p. 12; Beinin, 1989, p. 88). However, the state was particularly fierce against those opposing it (Bier, 2020, pp. 178-179). Within a month of Nasser assuming power, two textile workers who protested to demand freely-elected labour unions were sentenced to death (Elsayed, 2018, pp. 2-3), and many unionists were imprisoned during the 1950s and 1960s (Lockman, 1988, p. 456). Furthermore, when Doria Shafik, a prominent feminist figure, went on hunger strike to protest against the Nasserite dictatorship in 1957, she was placed under house arrest and later committed suicide (Elsadda, 2019, p. 56).

Social Protection

Social welfare was integral to the early post-independence *socialist* state, as it represented the cornerstone of the social contract between the state and citizens. The 1950s and 1960s thus saw the foundations of social protection principles, which were carried over in the consequent path-

dependent eras. Nationalisation, socialist ideology, and the state-as-provider role materialised in generous social protection provisions during this era, including subsidies for basic goods, and utilities such as water and electricity. Since Nasser's economic development plans were based on income redistribution, helping the poor develop consumerist lifestyles was important to him and his public image (Lockman, 1988, p458). The provisions also included hefty social and health insurance programmes for public sector employees, who were insured against work-related injury, disability, unemployment, and death (Sieverding and Selwaness, 2012, p. 4; Elsayed, 2018, p. 3); these provisions and were regulated by the Ministry of Social Affairs, which was established in 1939 (Dhenin, 2020, p. v; Ragab, 1978, pp. 23-24). While these measures were indeed positive, the fact that most public sector employment was concentrated in the urban regions of the capital and large cities meant that there was spatial inequality in the distribution of social and health insurance schemes.⁴

This era also witnessed legislative changes that were favourable to women in the public sector. The 1956 constitution guaranteed non-discrimination on the basis of gender, race, religion, or language (Elsadda, 2019, p. 56), and thus allowed women the right to vote and encouraged them to join the workforce. Furthermore, labour laws were amended to provide workplace guarantees for working mothers, including 50-day maternity leave stipulations, the prohibition of firing of pregnant women, and the obligatory provision of day-care services at jobs that employed at least 100 women (Hatem, 1992, pp. 232-233).

Progressive as these legislations were, they do not necessarily reflect the state's gender-equitable ideals in general. In fact, the state maintained patriarchal views of women's roles and expectations in the private sphere as well as in political activism. Regarding the private sphere, the personal status laws of the 1920s and 1930s, which considered women too unstable to be trusted with the right to divorce, for example, were not amended. The laws thus considered women economically dependent on men and gave them no way out of a marriage without the husband's consent (except in cases of incurable illnesses or impotence). As such, women's subordination in the private sphere was maintained (Elsadda, 2019, p. 56; Hatem, 1992, pp. 232-233).

The state's crackdown on women's political involvement and activism also reflects its patriarchal views and expectations. Originally an independent feminist body, The Egyptian Feminist Union was founded in 1923 to advocate for socio-political issues during the colonial years. With Nasser's rise to power, not only was the union dissolved (in 1956), but it also underwent two significant changes. First, it was renamed 'the Association of Hoda Shaarawi', after its founder; this important lexical change attests to the potential threat of an outright 'feminist' organisation. The second was a change of scope: prohibited from engaging in political life, the association was to become a charity organisation concerned with the provision of social services (Elsadda, 2019, pp. 55-56). These changes say something about what the state considered to be the proper role of women in both the public and private spheres.

⁴ Studies of inequality around the rural-urban divide were concentrated around land redistribution issues; see Al-Shawarby (2014).

3. The Era of Crisis and Adjustments (the 1970s-1990s)

This era spanned two consecutive presidencies: Anwar el-Sadat⁵ (1970-1981) and Mohamed Hosni Mubarak⁶ (1981-2011). The era started with the adoption of a significantly different socioeconomic vision than that of Nasser's Arab socialism, namely economic liberalisation. Once installed by Sadat, Mubarak made no significant changes to it throughout his rule.

Sadat fundamentally changed the two tenets of Nasser's policymaking and socioeconomic visions. First, instead of widespread nationalism, Sadat prioritised privatisation and a free-market economy. Thus, his 1973-1974 open-door economic policy encouraged large-scale foreign investment in an effort to avert an imminent economic crisis (Hatem, 1992, p. 233; Ahmed, 2021, p. 52). This was a reactive measure to the failures of the socialist economic vision of Nasser, who had proved unable to maintain high levels of *both* consumption and investment (Lockman, 1988, p. 459). Second, instead of the established state-as-provider role, Sadat decentralised power and, therefore the responsibility to provide away from the state and towards the newly-emerging private sector (Abdel-Rahman and Fuller, 2014, pp. 7-8; Hatem, 1992, p. 233).

Sadat created favourable economic conditions for investors, including tax concessions and a free trade zone. As a result, consumerist lifestyles flourished by the exponential growth of imports and luxury items (Alissa, 2007, pp. 3-4). Simultaneously, spatial and class-based inequality increased as the income gap widened between the newly-created rich elite and the rest of society that experienced soaring inflation (Elsayed, 2018, p. 4). Overall, Sadat's liberalisation policy increased the annual average growth rate from 5% to 8% (Abdel-Rahman and Fuller, 2014, p8). Yet the need for macroeconomic assistance drove him towards the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Ahmed, 2021, p. 52), which had implications for the gradual withdrawal of the state as the driver of socioeconomic change.

When Mubarak took over in 1981, he did not make significant changes to social welfare. Mubarak chose to follow Sadat's rentier economic path, and his social policymaking was reactive to either external stimuli or the need for regime legitimisation. In other words, Mubarak preferred the maintenance of the status quo and did not make any changes unless he had to, whether to avert massive crises or safeguard his rule. Most prominently, it took the country to be on the verge of declaring bankruptcy in 1989 – with an inflation rate near 20% and a considerable debt of USD 11.4 billion – for Mubarak to adopt structural adjustment and stabilisation policies (Korayem, 1997, p. 1; Adly, 2012, p. 70). The Economic Reform and Structural Adjustment Programme of the early 1990s, supported by the World Bank and IMF among others, mainly aimed at restoring the country's creditworthiness and imbalances by transforming it into a market-based economy (Korayem, 1997, p. 1). It was more concerned with remedying macroeconomic imbalances than helping the country's growth, therefore left structural weaknesses unattended (Harrigan and El-Said, 2009). Following the path-dependent drive towards privatisation, the underlying assumption

⁵ Referred to hereafter as Sadat for easier readership, he was a senior member of the Free Officers and the vice president of Nasser. He therefore succeeded him after his death in 1970.

⁶ Referred to hereafter as Mubarak for easier readership, he succeeded Sadat in a similar trajectory: a military man by profession, he was appointed as Sadat's vice president, and succeeded him after his assassination in 1981.

behind the adjustment programme was the gradual emergence of the private sector following the introduction of market prices. In macroeconomic terms, the adjustments worked: annual growth rates increased, inflation rates dropped, and real per capita income improved (Arab Development Bank Group, 2000, pp. 1-2; Abdel Ghafar, 2016, p. 4). However, as a result of both the economic crisis and the adjustment policies (e.g., subsidy cuts), living standards declined while social inequality became highly visible (Hartmann, 2008, p. 17).

In political terms, Mubarak diverged from Sadat on the state-legitimising base. He derived legitimacy by seeking the support of the military, which Sadat had previously subordinated. Mubarak engaged the military in infrastructural development and economic projects and increased military spending and benefits in return for loyalty (Ryan, 2001, pp. 7-8). By bypassing Nasser's public sector bureaucratic body and Sadat's questionable private sector capitalists, Mubarak's dependence on the military (and the subsequent magnitude it gained) made the latter a considerable socio-political actor to this day.

Education

Sadat proceeded with some of Nasser's educational legacies, while he simultaneously had a fundamentally different ideology towards education. He continued Nasser's legacy of free education. Article 20 of the 1971 constitution guaranteed state-sponsored education and a presidential decree was made to lower admission criteria in the early 1970s. The result was further exponential increase in the number of university graduates and an overall decline in the quality of education (Abdel Ghafar, 2016, p. 3; Beattie and El-Meehy, 2001, p. 544). In line with Nasser, Sadat also established new universities across the country, including in rural and agricultural areas (El-Shamy, 2017). Generally, this is a positive move that rectified spatial inequalities in education. However, the privatisation direction and decline in the quality of public education further complicated the status of rural families with limited incomes, especially with the rise of the private tutoring culture. It is thus unsurprising that in 1976, 70% of the illiterate population resided in rural areas (Waterbury, 1983, pp. 43-44). It also made sense for Egypt to ratify the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights,⁷ whose stipulations on the universal right to education had already been in the Egyptian constitution for over a decade before 1982. The ratification of international treaties and conventions was also proper for a country seeking to attract lumpsum foreign investments.

As has been already hinted, Sadat had incompatible views with Nasser on certain aspects of education, particularly on the educational market and culture. Regarding the educational market, the shift to economic liberalisation resulted in a two-tier privatisation of education that continued even after Sadat's assassination. On the one hand, there was an increase in the number of private educational institutions at all levels, with education considered a safe investment for non-risk-taking investors (El Shamy, 2017). On the other hand, an informal market of private tutoring emerged to accommodate the large numbers of pupils, low quality of education, and teachers' need

⁷ Articles available [here](#).

for more income (Hartmann, 2008, p. 6). In a sense, the dichotomous educational system that was characteristic of the pre-independence state returned during Sadat's rule (Mohamed Saleh, personal communication, Nov. 2, 2021). The masses could only rely on the poorly-resourced public education system, whereas the elite enrolled their children in more prestigious (and expensive) private or language schools, where the acquisition of a foreign language was almost certain to guarantee them a decent private-sector job (Cochran, 1986, p. 54).

As for culture, Sadat had a right-wing orientation, evident through his alliance with the Islamic groups that Nasser had previously shunned. In a win-win social pact, the Islamists took over the social responsibilities that the state had withdrawn from, and they were thus allowed to expand their conservative cultural movement. This took shape in the advocacy for gender-based segregation on campuses and a change in the physical appearance and expectations of women (Mohamed Saleh, personal communication, Nov. 2, 2021). In the 1980s, the Islamic dress code phenomenon and veiling of women spread across public universities, and this emphasis on public piety associated modesty and religiosity with the suitability of women for marriage. Thus, education had a more prominent social role as a means of preparing women for marital roles. Perhaps it is unsurprising, then, that a segment of college women internalised such conservative views towards the proper roles of women (Hatem, 1992, p. 234).

Mubarak generally continued with Sadat's socioeconomic policy trajectories. He made some legislative decisions for educational advancements, including the extension of the years of compulsory schooling in 1981, the establishment of the General Authority for the Eradication of Illiteracy in 1991, and the increase of weekly study hours in basic education in 1994 (OECD, 2015, p35). Other than that, he expanded his predecessor's privatisation plans. Mubarak allowed the establishment of private higher education institutions, which increased from 1 to 16 between 1996 and 2006 (Mohamed et al., 2019, no page). Further privatisation across all educational levels was also encouraged by the neoliberal economic policies of the 1990s (Frag, 2006, p. 115; Hartmann, 2008, p. 22). The booming investments in private education emphasised the duality in the educational system even more, as in the public realm enrolments continued beyond the institutional capacity (OECD, 2015, p. 34). Furthermore, in the 1990s, Mubarak dovetailed the investment culture with the Islamic movement, establishing investment schools that had luxurious amenities (including swimming pools, computer labs, etc.) and curricula that was infused with Islamic principles to cater to the upper classes (Herrera and Torres, 2006, p. 35). So, Mubarak followed Sadat's path in the educational sector and made way for more privatisation.

Employment

Although Sadat did not legally end Nasser's public-sector employment guarantee (Alissa, 2007, p3), he hoped the private sector would absorb the increasing number of graduates, so he extended the waiting time between graduation and public-sector employment until, before his assassination, the class of 1979 had to wait three years to be employed (Elsayed, 2018, p. 4). The right to employment had been established in the 1971 constitution, and a new phenomenon occurred with

the 1973-1982 oil boom: the migration of over 3 million male workers to Arab oil-exporting countries (El Shimy, 2017). The remittances sent by migrant workers were among the largest sources of Egypt's hard currency (The Solidarity Center, 2010, p. 13).

Women were disadvantaged because of the Sadat employment directives. The public sector limitations were devastating, as it was the largest employer of women since Nasser's time (Hatem, 1992, p. 233). Its short working hours, safe work spaces, and benefits were favourable to women, who could have the time and energy for reproductive and household responsibilities (Irene Selwaness, personal communication, Sep 8., 2021). The state was more or less aligned with the conservative Islamist views on the non-necessity of women's employment, and so there were public debates on the desirability of women employees in the late 1970s. The state encouraged women workers to take leave without pay for their reproductive responsibilities or work on a part-time basis, while religious figures highlighted the negative effects of women's employment on their *real* responsibilities within the household. Furthermore, women were blamed for overcrowded public transportation and lower productivity, but eventually, the state tweaked its narrative to acknowledge the need for women's work as a necessary source of income for most families (Hatem, 1992, pp. 234-235).

The migration phenomenon also affected women's employment in different ways. Most women whose children were educated in Egypt remained in the country so as not to disrupt their children's education. Middle-class women who were the sole present parents left their jobs to care for their children, with the well-off women choosing not to work for low state-sector salaries (Zaalouk, 1985, p. 13). The choice not to work where financial situations did not dictate it represented a return to traditional values and stigma of women's work (Hatem, 1992, p. 236). Meanwhile, working-class women joined the labour force amidst rising inflation, with many resorting to the informal sector. Additionally, husband migration often meant working-class women (and their children) had to move to live with their families or their in-laws. This inevitably limited the freedom and autonomy of these women; there were even instances where husbands would send instructions to their male relatives, and not their wives, on how remittances were to be disbursed (Hatem, 1992, p. 237). In this sense, Sadat's employment policies and the migration phenomenon affected the public and private spheres, opportunities, and autonomy of Egyptian women.

By the time Mubarak came to power, a socioeconomic crisis was imminent, forcing him to take drastic measures with regard to employment. The inability of the public-sector to absorb even more graduates got worse, and the waiting time got longer until Mubarak had to officially phase the employment guarantee out. The class of 1985 had to wait ten years to be employed in the public sector (Elsayed, 2018, p. 4), and so Mubarak had no choice but to put an end to the Nasserite employment legacy in the early 1990s (OECD, 2015, p. 34; Abdel Ghafar, 2016, p. 4).

Additionally, the 1982 fall in oil prices led to a reduction in labour migration; the burdens of the failing economy and the short-term shocks of the adjustment policies led to several worker protests between 1984 and 1989 (The Solidarity Center, 2010, p. 13). In addition, the return of migrants strained the availability of jobs even further, and exacerbated the public-private sector disparities (Abdel-Rahman and Fuller, 2014, pp. 7-8). Private sector employment became even more unfavourable to women, as many newly established workplaces were far out, without safe or accessible transportation, and the prejudiced patriarchal views on women's employment, in

general, jeopardised the actual receipt of social security benefits, as stipulated by law (Irene Selwaness, personal communication, Sep. 8, 2021).

Social Protection

Sadat's economic liberalisation measures had deteriorated the living standards of the general populace while allowing wealth to parade the streets of Cairo (Tucker, 1978, p3). To safeguard his rule, he initiated a series of legislative reforms that aimed to enhance the social lives of people, especially in the context of a failing public sector. Law 79 of 1975 provided hefty insurance packages to public-sector employees: against old age, invalidity, injury, sickness, and death. Social insurance coverage was mandatory for all workers aged 18 and above in both public and private sectors.⁸ Law 108 of 1976 later extended mandatory social insurance to employers and the self-employed (Sieverding and Selwaness, 2012, pp8-11). Maternity coverage was also granted to public and private sector employees, who became entitled to three months of paid leave for up to three children, with benefits at 75% of the wages (Sieverding and Selwaness, 2012, p.11; Sourour, 2021, p. 40).

With the rise of international monetary agencies and the need for economic adjustment in Egypt, Sadat attempted to receive funds from the IMF and World Bank in the 1970s. Since economic austerity measures were a prerequisite for doing so, the state announced significant subsidy cuts of 25% to 50% on essential goods in 1977. Immediately, protests or 'bread riots' sparked around the country, and within two days, the military had intervened, and Sadat had revoked the subsidy cuts (Soliman, 2021, pp. 23-24; Alissa, 2007, p. 3). Faced with the reality of a regime in crisis, Sadat initiated a series of reactive legislative measures to over-assert his interest in social justice and protection, reminiscent of Nasser's populist welfare system.

Law 30 of 1977 extended coverage in the form of old-age, disability, and death pensions to employers, the self-employed, casual workers, and migrants (Elsayed, 2018, p. 4). Additionally, Law 50 of 1978 extended social insurance coverage to Egyptians working abroad⁹ and Law 112 of 1985 extended benefits to temporary and casual workers, including domestic labourers. This was an important step in combating the precarity of the ever-increasing informal sector, especially for women who were not previously offered legal recognition. However, the numerous obstacles women faced to access these pensions only confirm the legacy of laws that look good on paper as opposed to the realities on the ground (Sabry, 2005, p. 38; Bibars, 2001, p. 86).

To demonstrate the disparity between legislation on paper and implementation on the ground, social assistance receipt was contingent upon showing official documentation, which a significant portion of women, about 55%, did not have (Loewe, 2000, p. 4). The challenging, lengthy, and humiliating process of issuing official paperwork (Sabry, 2005, p. 38) excluded the vulnerable sectors from social and legal institutions (Assaad and Rouchdy, 1999, p. 32). Furthermore, widowed women who were entitled to 'chastity pensions' were required to undergo a physical

⁸ Workers aged 16 and above in the government were also included.

⁹ See ILO: https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=104909

examination and, along with the already cumbersome official documents, present a doctor's report that attested to their lack of sexual activity. Also, to ensure they were not dependent on men, the age of widows entitled to these pensions was set at 50 years, thereby lowering their chances of remarriage. Such was the case with divorced women, whose minimum age was set at 40¹⁰ (Bibars, 2001, p. 86).

An important aspect of the culture of social justice established under Sadat was the 'first lady' phenomenon, where the president's wife became the personification of social justice reforms. This materialised in the Jehan laws, named after Sadat's wife. Publicly framed as an attempt to convince a reluctant president of the importance of women's rights, Sadat approved personal status law reforms in 1979 to give more autonomy to women seeking divorce and set 30 parliamentary seats aside for women (Fowler, 2021). Other measures to advocate for gender-based justice and the advancement of women were directly attributed to the first lady, including leading the Egyptian delegation to the 1975 and 1980 UN International Women's Conferences. Her concern with disability justice also materialised in the establishment of an association for physically-disabled veterans and civilians (Bennett, 2021). With the visible aim of increasing the president's political and social capital, legitimacy, and public support, this culture had the subtle agenda of providing a role model for accomplished women: those who concern themselves with charity and non-political activism. The first lady culture continued in Mubarak's era and continued into the early 21st century, as elaborated in the next section.

Additionally, with the necessary economic adjustment programmes, Mubarak was forced to make the subsidy cuts that Sadat had only implemented gradually. In 1988, he publicly announced that subsidies had reached EGP 10 billion (Harik, 1992, p. 485) and cautiously removed them while psychologically driving people away from subsidy reliance. In 1980 about 20 consumer items were subsidised but by 1996-1997 the number had decreased to only four (Seif Eddin, 2021, no page). The subsidy on high-quality bread was removed in 1992, and a kind of rationing was established whereby the loaf of bread shrank from 150 to 130 grams (Seif Eddin, 2021, no page). To drive people away from reliance on state subsidies, Mubarak gave the public the option of receiving low quality items or nothing at all. As the quality of subsidised items deteriorated, people desired them less and less and eventually those who could afford to buy on the free market went ahead and did so (Harik, 1992, p. 497). This was not only the case with bread or subsidised, low-quality consumer items; it was also applied to education and housing (Hania Sholkamy, personal communication, Nov. 4, 2021). In general, the resort to the international financial institutions has had political ramifications on the trajectories of social policymaking since the 1980s-1990s, and this has continued to characterise Egypt's socioeconomic trajectory (Soliman, 2011; Haytham Mones, personal communication, March 11, 2022).

4. Beyond Adjustment (the late 1990s-2018)

¹⁰ While the 50-year mandate for widows was included in the requirements, the 40-year mandate for divorced women was not, although applicants younger than 40 years were rarely approved. For more details, see Bibars (2001).

Before the 2011 Revolution

The negative effects of Mubarak's economic adjustment programme trickled into the first decade of the 21st century. The state announced a series of devaluations of the Egyptian pound between 2000 and 2002 before free-floating it in early 2003 (Khorshid et al., 2011, pp. 12-13). Inflation, therefore, increased to 8.1% in 2003 (Khorshid et al., 2011, p. 23), and poverty increased to 19.6% in 2004-2005, 40% of which was in rural areas (Harrigan and El-Said, 2014, p. 107). Increasing unemployment, widening fiscal deficits, and growing domestic debts negatively affected the livelihoods of most people, leading to the January 25th, 2011, revolution that toppled Mubarak.

Education

Mubarak did not have an educational vision of his own; rather, he followed Sadat's path (Amin, 2011, p16) with more emphasis on appealing to the global trend of universal education. He engaged in a series of legislations and ratifications, and the official statistics improved, although the quality of education continued to deteriorate with profound effects on the vulnerable population.

Egypt participated in the 1990 World Summit for Children, ratifying the Convention on the Rights of a Child and committing to the Millennium Development Goals that included child educational attainments (Abuaita, 2018, pp. 1-2). Universal education and primary enrolments almost reached their targets in the following few years, as net primary education enrolment increased to 97% in 2000, and youth literacy rates reached 85% in 2005 (Abuaita, 2018, pp. 2-3). In 2004, Egypt published a poverty strategy with the World Bank that included education as one of its three pillars.¹¹ Mubarak established a national accreditation body¹² in 2007, a teacher's academy¹³ in 2008, and led a national conference to announce an education development strategy in 2008 (El-Badry, 2020).

Despite these efforts, the poor quality of education could not remain under the international radar: out of 134 Egypt ranked 129th in terms of quality of primary education in 2007-2008¹⁴ and 126th out of 139 countries in 2010-2011.¹⁵ The discrepancy between national statistics and world placements draws attention to the possibility that reported statistics were probably exaggerated (Abuaita, 2018, pp. 2-3).

Education in this era was highly inequitable. The private tutoring phenomenon mushroomed under Mubarak's rule and disincentivised school attendance while straining the already economically-burdened families of the lower and middle classes (Mohamed et al., 2019, no page). Thus, of 7-11 year old children not enrolled in school in the early 2000s, it was estimated that 50% were from the poorest quintile (El-Saharty et al., 2005, p. 20). Furthermore, the state shifted resources from higher education to basic education, built more schools, and launched campaigns to promote girls' enrolment, all leading to a decrease in the gender gap from 7% in 1996-1997 to 3.5% in 2001-

¹¹ See <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/15713>

¹² The National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Education (NAQAAE) was established to grant institutional accreditation to universities where at least 60% of faculties are accredited.

¹³ The Academy of Teachers was established by Decree 129 of 2008.

¹⁴ World Economic Forum Survey (2007-2008), available [here](#).

¹⁵ World Economic Forum Survey (2010-2011), available [here](#).

2002 (El Saharty et al., 2005, pp. 24-25). While commendable, the efforts did not account for spatial inequality: in rural areas, 19.4% of girls never attended school, compared to 8.6% of boys; and in rural Upper Egypt, 26.3% of girls never attended school, as compared to 10.4% of boys in 2000 (El-Zanaty and Way, 2001, p. 204). Additionally, the unstable status of important frameworks like the number of schooling years changed in a chain of back-and-forth policymaking by the four different ministers of education that were appointed in this era,¹⁶ further compounding the precarity that people experienced.

The decline in the quality of education, along with the economic hardships experienced at the turn of the century, provided an opportunity for public depoliticisation through the education system as a reactive policy orientation to maintain the status quo and safeguard the regime. Mubarak continued the Sadat legacy of infusing educational discourse with Islamic references to legitimise his rule, although he added global active citizenship discourses to endorse his neoliberal policies (Sobhy, 2015, p. 807). So, textbooks emphasised Mubarak's democratic endeavours and presented him in the light of Islamic ideals as pious, charitable, and entrepreneurial (Mirshak, 2020, p. 48). Nonetheless, the poor quality of education and inefficiencies of educational reform were among the factors behind the 2011 revolution (Kohstall, 2015, p.72).

Employment

The economic adjustments of the 1990s had negative consequences on employment. Labour protests and strikes intensified in 2004 following the downsizing of the public sector, and Mubarak's abolishment of the public sector employment guarantee (Ido, 2018, p. 1). Since it was already abolished in practice, public-sector employees feared this legislative change, alongside private sector encroachment, would bring about negative consequences or pave the way for mass layoffs or benefit reductions (The Solidarity Center, 2010, p. 55). Protests emerged from the textile industry (which had become heavily privatised) to span all industries by 2007, greatly undermining the legitimacy of Mubarak's regime (El Agati and El Sharkawy, 2021, pp. 3-4). Unemployment prevailed amidst a stagnating job market, eventually contributing to the 2011 revolution (Abdel Ghafar, 2016, p. 4).

Furthermore, the private sector proved to be a realm where legislation exists on paper, not in reality. Although private-sector employers were bound by law to provide the same benefits and insurance schemes as the public sector, law evasion and bribery were common (The Solidarity Center, 2010, p. 55). Additionally, private sector employers manoeuvred around laws that obliged them to provide for women. To evade the requirement to establish a day-care facility where 100 women or more are employed, many private sector firms hired fewer than 100 women or under reported the actual number of women employees in their books (Irene Selwaness, personal communication, Sep. 8, 2021). This is an instance when women-supportive legislation actually causes workplace discrimination, whether in the refusal to hire women or in their underrepresentation in official documents, which prevents their access to pensions and insurance

¹⁶ As an example of the inconsistent policymaking, Ahmed Fathy Sorour, who was also the First Minister of education appointed by Mubarak, cancelled the sixth year of primary school, and his successor, Hussein Bahaa El Din extended the high school diploma to two years instead of one. Yousri El Gamal succeeded him, bringing back the sixth year of primary school.

schemes. The contraction of the public sector, in addition to the unsuitability and precariousness of the private sector, explains the decreasing participation of women in the labour force (Hendy, 2015, p. 2; Assaad and El-Hamidi, 2009). It is also important to note that due to women's engagement in the informal and agriculture sectors, statistics are highly underreported (El-Saharty et al., 2005, pp. 25-26; Haytham Mones, personal communication, March 11, 2022). Additionally, the expansion of the private sector fostered spatial inequality since it mainly developed around metropolitan cities and centres, as opposed to rural regions. This geography of employment sectors determined, to a great extent, which social protection programmes people had access to. People received pensions/insurance if they lived in urban areas where they could easily work and receive employment benefits. Meanwhile, residents of rural areas who were not exposed to work-related benefits predominantly received cash assistance (Irene Selwaness, personal communication, Sep. 8, 2021).

Furthermore, in line with the global trends toward gender equality, Mubarak's era included face-value legislative advancements to enhance the status of women. The 2000 Maternity Protection Convention¹⁷ influenced favourable changes for working women and mothers in the 2003 labour law.¹⁸ These included reduced working hours for pregnant women,¹⁹ paid maternity leave with a guaranteed right to return to work,²⁰ unpaid childcare leave (UN Women and Economic Research Forum, 2020, pp. 88-89),²¹ and the right to daily nursing breaks or shortened work hours (Sieverding and Selwaness, 2012, p. 11). Although the law accommodated women's reproductive responsibilities, it only did so for formally-employed women, as informal women workers were not covered by the labour law stipulations. Additionally, it had unintended discriminatory consequences. Although difficult to measure, the maternity leave stipulation is expected to have disincentivised private-sector employers from hiring women in general. In fact, gender-based discrimination is constituted in the fact that employers are free to ask about family status in the job application process. And although women are guaranteed a return after their maternity leave, the law does not specify a return to an equally-rewarding position (Constant et al., 2020, pp. 16-19).

The state's gender approach was solely focused on women, without realising that gender is not a women-only arena or acknowledging the cross-gender effects of hegemonic masculinity. This is why, for example, even though the 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development was held with the aim of achieving *gender*-based equality, it was primarily concerned with changing the stereotyped image of *women* in media and society. It is also why, progressive as they were, legislations on childcare were only concerned with *women*; paternal leave or male family leave were not considered. Furthermore, referring to the law reforms as 'provisions for working mothers' reinforces the patriarchal culture where care roles are associated solely with women (Irene Selwaness, personal communication, Sep. 8, 2021).

¹⁷ All articles are available [here](#).

¹⁸ Law 12 of 2003.

¹⁹ Women were entitled to reduced workdays by at least an hour starting from the sixth month of pregnancy.

²⁰ Originally in the Child Law of 1996, later amended by Law 126 of 2008.

²¹ For establishments with more than 50 employees, mothers are entitled to two years in private sector and three years in public sector establishments.

Social Protection

One of the main areas of social protection was the food subsidy system. With the 1977 bread riots in recent mass memory, the food subsidy system was a politically-sensitive topic. By and large, food subsidies were (and continue to be) considered entitlements (World Bank, 2010, p. i) in an authoritarian social contract based on the state's food and service provision in return for political freedom (Harrigan and El-Said, 2014, p. 101). However, between 2004 and 2006, the state gradually started shrinking the ration card system by limiting the number of commodities and items it covered. In 2006, reforms to digitise the scheme materialised in the Smart Food Ration Card System,²² which aimed to enhance targeting and efficiency, thereby overcoming one of the main implementation obstacles (Ido, 2018, pp. 1-2). When the 2007-2008 global food crisis happened, price spikes in food and a peak in inflation (at 23.6%) added to the burdens of the daily lives of most Egyptians, especially for the most vulnerable families who spent a significant portion of their income on food (Ido, 2018, p. 11).

With Egypt being a significant importer of food, extreme poverty increased to 6.4% of the entire population between 2005 and 2009, representing nearly a 20% increase (Aboulenein et al., 2010, p. 11). To mitigate these effects, and in a wave of reactive policymaking, the state reversed its efforts to shrink the ration system. Instead, it actually expanded the existent system, which was the only distribution mechanism available to the government at the time (Ido, 2018, p. 12). Government expenditure on food and fuel subsidies spiraled from 7% in 2005 to 26% in 2006 and 28% in 2008 (Seif Eddin, 2021, no page). The food ration system was far from perfect; even after the smart card reforms, many fraudulent cards were used, beneficiaries' lack of knowledge was exploited by bakeries (Ido, 2018, pp. 18-19), resources to high-income households were leaked, and over half a million tons of subsidised flour was smuggled or sold in black markets (Aboulenein, 2010, pp. 9-10). However, despite its drawbacks, the ration system was the largest source of protection for people even after the 2011 revolution, covering 79% of households (Selwaness and Ehab, 2019, pp. 27-38).

In another social policy area, Mubarak followed Sadat's personification of women's rights advancements through the 'first lady' culture. Inspired by concurrent international developments on state roles in supporting women's rights agendas (Elsadda, 2019, pp. 56-57), the legislative advancements in advocating for women's rights were associated with Suzan Mubarak, the first lady during that time, so much that they were named after her. While unprecedented women's rights were acknowledged in this era, the first lady culture arguably had multifold negative consequences, causing a backlash in the women's rights movement after the 2011 revolution.

Mubarak established the National Council for Women by a presidential decree in 2000²³ and made his wife chair the council, granting her nearly full control of it (Dawoud, 2012, pp. 161-162). Although it was, ideally, meant to advocate women's empowerment, the first lady culture and direct institutionalisation associated the policies with the authoritarian state (Hatem, 2016). In fact, the entity itself is still considered a state institution with only face-value independence (Haytham Mones, personal communication, March 11, 2022). Important as it is, the council does not concern

²² <https://www.egyptsmartcards.com/>

²³ Presidential Decree 90 for the year 2000.

itself with civil society but only reflects women's rights priorities as seen by the state (Hoda Elsadda, personal communication, April 4, 2022). As demonstrated in the next section, this overt association with the state had negative impacts on the women's movement after the Mubarak regime was toppled.

On the legislative side, women could finally initiate divorce by the *khula* law of 2000, contingent upon relinquishing financial rights. The term *khula* was probably not the most intelligent to use, though. Translating to 'riddance,' its linguistic connotations were rather offensive to men in a predominantly patriarchal culture. Additionally, the children of Egyptian women married to foreigners were allowed Egyptian nationality in 2003. The same year also witnessed the first-ever appointment of a woman judge as vice president of the Supreme Constitutional Court.²⁴ Furthermore, the child custody law was amended to grant mothers custody of children until the age of 15, and instead of being in the father's custody afterward, the children were allowed to choose who to stay with (Dawoud, 2012, p. 161).

After the 2011 Revolution

In January 2011, protestors gathered in Egypt to demand "bread, freedom, and social justice." These demands reflected the failures of the existing social policy system and the extent to which Egyptians, particularly the younger generation, were frustrated by the social contract (Sieverding and Selwaness, 2012, p. 5). The widespread poverty, unemployment, and social stagnation spiraled into the discontent that drove people to the streets in a number of Arab countries, representing what came to be known as The Arab Spring. While the events of 2011 are usually linked to the 1990s economic adjustment programme, Harrigan and El-Said (2014) traced them even further, across four Arab Spring countries, to the early 1980s (pp. 100-101).²⁵

After an 11-day sit-in, the vice president announced Mubarak's resignation and the power handover to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. This makes Mubarak the first of three consecutive presidents whose rule ended by popular demand, not death or assassination. In June 2012, the council was replaced by Mohamed Morsi, a candidate of the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood, followed by interim president Adly Mansour (June 2013-June 2014). Finally, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi²⁶ succeeded Mansour and continues to rule over Egypt to this day. A former general himself, he appeals to Nasser's charismatic leadership and exercises similar oppression of Islamists, yet he goes beyond the fierceness and authoritarianism of Nasser's regime.

This was a turbulent era. Egypt's legacy of path dependence made it impossible for genuine reforms to be quick, tangible, and satisfactory. In fact, the negative socioeconomic effects of the turbulence that marked this era were unprecedented in recent history. The deep bureaucratisation of state institutions weighed against institutional reform; the prohibition of a centralised labour union resulted in fragmentation in organisation and demands; the first lady culture and direct association of the National Council for Women with Mubarak caused a backlash to women's rights gains; the military oppression of rightist wing groups created deeper divides among political

²⁴ Although it is widespread knowledge that Tahani El Gebali was the first woman judge in Egyptian history, Al Musawwer newspaper archive reveals that Ensaf El Borai was Egypt's first woman judge in 1958; see [Egyptian Streets](#) (2019).

²⁵ Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia.

²⁶ Referred to hereafter as Sisi for easier readership.

camps; the arrest, trial, and disappearance of protestors signified a steep end to any form of political freedom. The Egyptian state had become fiercer than ever before, and people's attempt at making a living had become more difficult.

Education

The post-Mubarak authoritarianism trickled down within educational institutions, which became, to a large extent, militarised. After the 2011 power transition, university presidents succumbed to student demands to remove security guards from campuses. However, with the 2013 change of power, university presidents were the ones to demand that on-campus security guards arrest students (Kohstall, 2015, p. 59). Considered matters of national security, Sisi declared in 2014 the appointment of university presidents and deans, mainly to guarantee the allegiance of university administrations (Kohstall, 2015, p. 73) to the government.

Since 2011, the number of degree-seeking Egyptian students pursuing their education abroad has increased exponentially, reaching more than 31,000 in 2017 (Mohamed et al., 2019, no page), as a result of political instability and disillusionment with the post-revolution phase. Among students who pursued studies domestically, there were over 1,500 protests in public universities between 2013 and 2014 alone, and hundreds were expelled, arrested, or both (Mohamed et al., 2019, no page). Furthermore, postgraduate degree holders did not find public-sector jobs, and they frequently protested at the Cabinet in 2014, 2015,²⁷ and 2016²⁸ and were met with violence (Abdel Ghafar, 2016). Government officials were implicated in the mutilation and murder of Italian student Giulio Regini in 2016. Although the state officially denied its involvement in his murder, the common practices/stances, including the arrest and forced disappearance of students, distrust in research, and suspicion of particular 'sensitive' research areas such as Regini's research topic (trade unions) all indicate otherwise (Michaelson, 2018).

In this context, it was unconventional for Sisi to declare 2019 the Year of Education while the educational system was in dire need of reform; the politics behind this was more geared towards economic advantages, as these reforms were to be partly funded by the World Bank at USD 2 billion (Mirshak, 2020, pp. 39-40). It was also anticlimactic for Sisi to announce partnerships with six international universities to open Cairo-based campuses in 2017. The grave human rights violations and attacks on academic freedom made the University of Liverpool retract its partnership plans (Quinn, 2018).

Meanwhile, views on education captured by the 2012 World Values Survey reflected patriarchal attitudes. More Egyptian parents agreed that university education is more important for a male than a female child, with the percentage rising from 16% in 2001 to 26% in 2012 (UNESCO, 2020, p. 58). However, a wave of change started in 2014, when the first on-campus unit to combat sexual harassment was formed in Cairo University. It was a civil society initiative and activities over the first few years included awareness creation and advocacy. The adoption of anti-harassment

²⁷ <https://egyptindependent.com/masters-graduates-demand-jobs-protests-outside-cabinet/>

²⁸ <https://egyptindependent.com/master-s-degree-phd-holders-protest-cabinet/>

policies in universities spread across the country, as a result (Hoda Elsadda, personal communication, April 4, 2022).

On a different note, official data and statistics around education reflected a continuing crisis. Efforts to reduce illiteracy rates were not yielding the expected results; figures reported by the state could not be trusted. For example, the 2014 Household Education Survey measured literacy among children (6-9 years old) at 83%, based on the appropriation of the UN literacy criteria of reading and writing one's own name and a short statement. In reality, while 83% of children read part of a sentence, only 61% were able to read the entire sentence. (Abuaita, 2018, pp. 3-4). With the overall deterioration of the quality of education for the young and academic freedom for the older students, Egypt ranked 134th out of 138 countries in terms of the quality of primary education in 2015.²⁹

Employment

The path-dependent trajectory affected employment negatively in this era, with multifold disadvantages to women in particular. In 2016, the overall unemployment rate was 12.8%, reaching 30% among the youth (Abdel Ghafar, 2016, p. 1) and 49.8% among women (Abdel Ghafar, 2016, p. 5). Women were increasingly disadvantaged in the employment sector, whose structural and geographical inequalities further disadvantaged rural women compared to urban women. After a slight increase between 1998 and 2006, female labour participation rates dropped to 23% in 2012 and 21% in 2018 – reaching the 1998 figure (Krafft et al., 2019, p. 21). Meanwhile, the unemployment rate for men increased from 4.7% in 2012 to 5.8% in 2018, when women's unemployment rates were four times greater in comparison (Krafft et al., 2019, p. 31).

The chart below shows the trend in women's labour force as a percentage of Egypt's total workforce as per the ILO Key Labour Market Indicators Database.³⁰ The most significant finding is that, despite some slight fluctuations, women's participation in the labour force did not exceed 24% throughout the past two decades.

²⁹ World Economic Survey (2015). Available [here](#). The 2019 Survey did not include the quality of primary education metric, only the teacher-pupil ratio, where Egypt [ranked](#) 89 out of 141 countries.

³⁰ A table with figures is available in the Annexes.

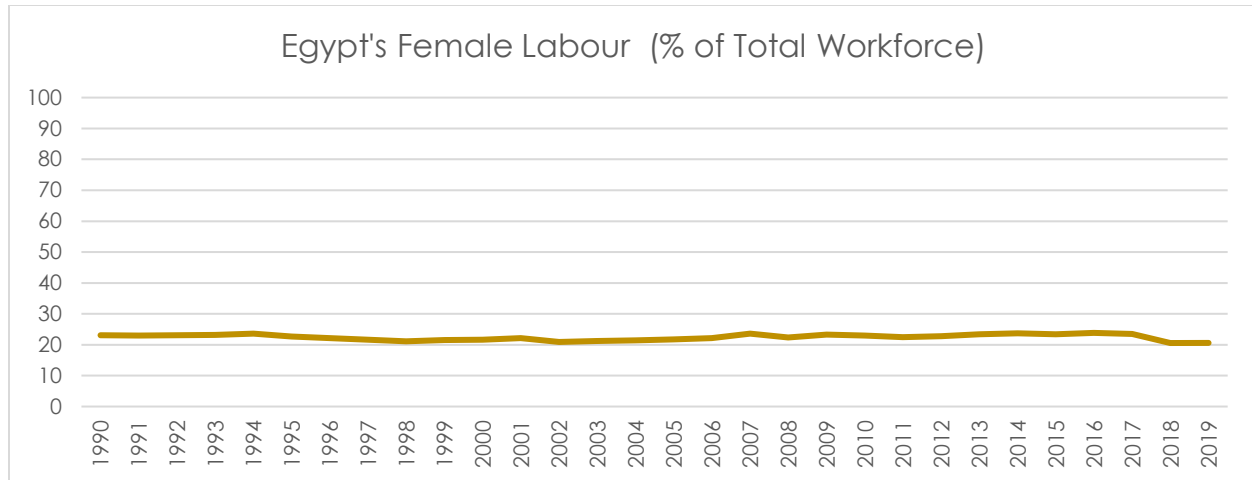


Figure 1: Trend in Egypt's Female Labour (1990-2019)

The expansion of the private sector was not convenient for women in general and not enough to compensate for the shrinking public sector. The private sector setup is unfavourable to women's responsibilities and preferences. The 40-hour week, with expectations of frequent extension beyond the official working hours, is not compatible with stereotypical domestic responsibilities that make women primary caregivers. More so, private sector employers consider hiring women risky, as, for example, there is no guarantee of their return to work after paid maternity leave, which increased to four months in 2016.³¹ The absence of market solutions for childcare provision also means that, at some point, married women and mothers are forced to leave their private-sector jobs (Irene Selwaness, personal communication, Sep. 8, 2021). This is because household and marital responsibilities change the opportunity cost of women's time, thereby affecting their employment decisions (Krafft et al., 2019, p. 27); the situation is further compounded by the significant private sector gender pay gap. Moreover, the costs of commute and general safety concerns, including traffic, harassment, and theft, were among the factor that are cited as obstacles to women's participation in the labour force (World Bank, 2018, p. 92).

The discriminatory private sector, along with its incompatibility with women's responsibilities, explains the increased discouragement among educated women in searching for jobs: labour force participation among women with university degrees decreased substantially from 73% in 1998 to 51% in 2018 (Krafft et al., 2019, p. 24). The public-private sector discrepancies also explain youth and women's continued preference for public-sector employment (Barsoum, 2015a, p. 340), which gives women room to attend to unpaid care work (Krafft et al., 2019, p. 30).

Meanwhile, the informal sector flourished at an unprecedented rate (Selwaness and Ehab, 2019, pp. 2-3). By definition, the absence of official documentation for informal workers makes any figures concerning the informal economy unreliable; although they indicate the magnitude of the sector, they are merely estimates (Mohamed El Komi, personal communication, Oct. 6, 2021). Informal sector workers do not have employee benefits, socioeconomic security, or pension schemes, all of which are contingent upon official acknowledgment of work (Barsoum, 2015b). Not having paperwork in the form of contracts between employers and women employees in

³¹ Law 81 of 2016 set maternity leaves at four months for three children (Al Ashry 2019: 37).

particular, is also highly precarious, especially for single mothers (World Bank, 2018, p. 92). This opens room for discussing the state's assumption of women's financial dependence on men in their lives. The patriarchal presumption of financial responsibility is not necessarily true, and it has limited women by and large to informal sector jobs that are available to them *because* they are undesirable to the rest of the population (Hania Sholkamy, personal communication, Nov. 4, 2021).

Social Protection

The period immediately following the revolution saw relative setbacks to societal acceptance of women's rights because of their direct association with Suzan Mubarak as part of the first lady culture (Dawoud, 2012, p. 165; Elsadda, 2019). The significant legislative reforms to the personal status law were so closely associated with Mrs. Mubarak that they were popularly referred to as the lady's laws (Hatem, 2016). Upset with the advancement of women's rights that were considered an infringement upon men's, several male-dominant organisations celebrated the ousting of the Mubarak regime as an opportunity to regain men's rights (Dawood, 2011). The negative effects of the first lady culture seem to have been acknowledged by the more conservative first ladies of the rest of the era, who most often stayed away from the media, and most definitely were not directly associated with any political activity (Hatem, 2016).

Meanwhile, as in earlier stages, the food ration card system was the mainstream social protection net for the majority of Egyptians. In 2014, the state expanded the system by removing the restriction on the number of household members.³² Beneficiaries were also able to use their bread consumption subsidy savings to purchase other basic consumer goods, thereby effectively merging two subsidy systems and cushioning the economic burdens and inflation shocks. As part of IMF requirements, the 2016 currency floating reduced the value of the Egyptian pound against the US dollar by almost 50% overnight.³³ Together with the subsidy cuts, the inflation rate reached an all-time peak of 29.5% in 2017, surpassing the effects of the 2008 food crisis (Ido, 2018, p. 11), when it was 18.3%.³⁴ By 2018, 79% of households had smart food ration cards, which cushioned the drastic socioeconomic shocks (Selwaness and Ehab, 2019, p. 38). The efficiency in targeting was reflected in the employment and educational attainment demographics: 86% of household-head beneficiaries had non-wage work, and 85% were uneducated (Selwaness and Ehab, 2019, p. 38).

In addition to the reactive food system policymaking to cushion adverse socioeconomic effects, the most significant social protection measure of this era was the launch of Egypt's first-ever conditional cash transfer programmes, Takaful and Karama, in 2015.³⁵ It enabled millions to survive the socioeconomic shocks of this era and also to subsist through the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it was also based on reactive policymaking and had implementation drawbacks.

Takaful is a family income-support scheme of (EGP 450) monthly cash transfers with an increment per child in school for a maximum of three children. On average, enrolled families received EGP 900 a month, most predominantly given to mothers. The fact that transfers were given to women

³² By decree 215 of 2014. Prior to that, the food ration system was limited to four members per household.

³³ See BBC: <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-37857468>

³⁴ World Bank inflation at consumer price index (available [here](#)).

³⁵ By Prime Minister Decree 540 of 2015.

advertised the scheme as a pro-women programme, upsetting the traditional male breadwinner model. Simultaneously, however, this is based on stereotypical assumptions that women generally make better or more responsible use of money towards their children's welfare, which risks reinforcing gendered roles (Sholkamy, 2017, p. 4) and further disincentivising fathers/husbands from assuming household responsibilities (Othman et al., 2021, p. 14). Geographically, targeting reflects awareness of spatial inequality, as the programme focuses on rural areas, where 18% of households in the poorest two quintiles receive Takaful transfers, compared to 9% of urban households in the same quintiles (Breisinger et al., 2018, p.3). As for implementation, although the transfers are theoretically conditioned on children's school attendance and clinic visits, the conditions have not been implemented on the ground.

Karama is an unconditional cash transfer programme for the most vulnerable, identified as the elderly, disabled, and orphans. It was launched in the poorest 19 districts of rural Upper Egypt, reflecting awareness of geographical inequality (Roushdy and Assaad, 2008, p5), and later expanded to include more beneficiaries than had been anticipated (Othman et al., 2021, pp. 12-13).

As for other social protection measures, a series of reforms to pensionable salaries started in 2012 (Sieverding and Selwaness, 2012, pp. 8-9), although social insurance decreased during the era, with only 30% of workers having coverage in 2018. The sense of vulnerability among workers increased, especially women workers whose options were limited to private or informal sector work (Selwaness and Ehab, 2019, p. 1; Haytham Mones, personal communication, March 11, 2022).

5. The Era of COVID-19 (2019--)

The first COVID-19 case in Egypt was identified on February 13th, 2020. Despite Egypt's prompt response to the pandemic, as will be shown below, the pandemic itself revealed the insufficiencies and inadequacies of responses to social vulnerability, in addition to the necessity of buttressing existing social protection programmes and approaching them from gender-equitable and transformative vantage points.

Within a few months, the state made financial initiatives to cushion the short-term effects of the pandemic. A financial incentive package worth EGP 100 billion was allocated as an immediate response, and by May 2020, more than half had been spent on supporting the health sector, social protection, and tax incentive provisions. Financial provisions also included decreased interest and deposit rates, increased credit access, and a six-month moratorium on existing credit debts. Also, a new loan application to the IMF was made in June 2020, given the unenviable status of the economy. These measures were proactive, yet the inherent structural weaknesses made them insufficient to address the pandemic-induced crises. So, despite the efforts, a 2020 CAMPAS survey recorded food insecurity in nearly 25% of households, where consumption rationing was made to cope with COVID-19 (CAPMAS, 2020, pp. 14-15; Othman et al., 2021, p. 5).

Education

Reforms to the education sector were made in the context of declaring 2019 the Year of Education, with a reform package worth USD 2 billion (Mirshak, 2020, pp. 39-40) and an 8% increase in public expenditure on education in 2018-2019 (Mohamed et al., 2019, no page).

For the first time, policymaking reflected an interest in preschool education. The 2019-2020 budget made allocations for the preschool stages, with plans to build kindergartens in rural areas – something that reflected an increased awareness of geospatial inequality. The 2020-2021 budget designated funds for improving the working conditions of kindergarten teachers, which is projected to have a spillover effect through increasing women's participation in the labour force, given the establishment of high-quality care facilities for children (UN Women and Economic Research Forum, 2020, p. 87).

With the onset of COVID-19, face-to-face classes were suspended for an initial two-week period and later extended to the end of the school year. Curricula were limited, and the legacy of final exams was replaced by research project submissions (Biltagy, 2021, p. 3). The shift to research projects is positive, in the sense of promoting a culture of academic inquiry instead of the indoctrination and memorisation stipulated by the final exams, which for decades determined which colleges students would be allowed to apply for. However, the sudden change of direction towards research without any proper preparation of both students and teachers proved problematic, especially for students in the final year of high school.

Furthermore, the pandemic slowed educational reform processes while the shift to online learning raised infrastructural limitations. The lack of adequate technological resources in schools, the lack of teacher and student training on the use of technology, and the lack of time to prepare during the emergency slowed down the transition and complicated it (Ewiss, 2020, pp. 45-48). Furthermore, the cosmetic change in the *mode* of learning (from paper-based to computer screens), instead of qualitative improvement of curricula and content of instruction, still kept grades at the forefront of student and teacher interest, rather than actual educational attainment. On an institutional level, while technology has promising potential for the post-COVID reality, the information technology sector remains institutionally weak. There is no national mechanism for digital transformation; in fact, the sector is centralised within a state-owned monopoly of all communication infrastructure (Abdel-Latif, 2020, p. 40).

Additionally, issues of access proved difficult in intersectional ways, as marginalised groups were unable to access the necessary tools for distance learning. UNICEF's 2020 report reflected particular concern about refugee children residing in Egypt and highlighted efforts that had been made to support the education of marginalised refugee children, including the provision of grants, textbooks, and digital-learning equipment (pp. 2-3). With a focus on egalitarian gender representation, UNICEF also focused on children in geographic margins and children with disabilities (2020, p. 5). In an effort to overcome accessibility issues, educational lessons were televised and broadcast on national channels, although it is difficult to measure the effect this had on marginalised communities (Wu, 2021, p. 146).

Employment

Many people lost their jobs because of the pandemic and lockdown measures. The official unemployment rate rose to 9.6% in the second quarter of 2020, representing a 1.9% increase from the previous quarter (UNICEF and J-PAL, 2020, p. 3). Between February and June 2020, the employment drops were higher among women (-10%) than men (-8%) and higher in urban areas (-9%) than rural areas (-7%) (ILO, 2021, p4). A CAPMAS survey reported more than 25% of respondents had lost their jobs between February and May 2020 alone (Beschel, 2021, p. 5). Furthermore, workers with low educational backgrounds involved in the informal sector experienced wage losses above 60% (ILO, 2021, p. 10), and domestic workers, who are predominantly women, experienced wage losses five times greater than other sectors (Mazen, 2022, p. 34). This aligns with the finding that on average, informal women workers earn half of what men who are informally employed earn, although women work for longer hours (UN Women, 2020a, p. 2).

To alleviate the immediate and short-term shocks of the pandemic, cash assistance to irregular workers was made as a one-time payment and then extended to the end of 2020 (Afifi, 2020). Cash assistance has been an effective way of supporting livelihoods in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic (Lawson-McDowall et al., 2021, pp. 216-218), which makes this policy a positive measure in helping people meet their basic needs. In perspective, however, the monthly assistance amounts were lower than the national poverty line set at EGP 857 per month (Sinha, 2021, p. 1).³⁶ Additionally, the first announced provision applied to the 300,000 registered irregular workers in the Ministry of Manpower database. Meanwhile, the minister himself was quoted to have reported over 10 million irregular workers (Lotfi, 2020, no page), representing a more realistic figure of the number of workers contributing to 70% of Egypt's economy (El-Battouty, 2020, p. 20). Therefore, requiring registration for social protection underrepresents the number of those in need of it, because of the associated difficulties of issuing paperwork or navigating technology – these must be addressed as institutional impediments to social provisions among the vulnerable populations.

Moreover, as with many other policies, implementation issues existed with the irregular worker assistance. A local study with 120 women in 2020 found that only 51% applied for the grant, and only 8% of those who did were accepted (Khalil and Megahed, 2021, p. 17). Women who did not apply simply did not think they were eligible because they considered the listed jobs on the grant website, such as plumbers, construction workers, and security staff, predominantly *male* jobs. Furthermore, the vice president of the trade union federation was quoted discussing on-the-ground implementation obstacles. His first-hand accounts include brokers' financial abuse of illiterate or technologically-uneasy workers to help them with online registration and confiscating their national IDs to demand part of the allowance when it came through (Ismail, 2020).

Additional measures in response to the pandemic aimed at improving micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), which employed more than 50% of Egypt's workforce and accounted

³⁶ Adjusted for purchasing power parity, the poverty line set at USD 3.80 per day (2011 PPP USD) corresponds to the 2017-2018 official poverty line of EGP 736 per capita per month (Sinha 2020: 1).

for 90% of the total economy (El-Battouty, 2020, p. 20). An important law was ratified³⁷ to clearly define the enterprises and offer incentives for both the enterprises and their lending institutions (Amer and Selwaness, 2021, p. 9). Furthermore, the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise Development Agency (MSMEDA) allocated EGP 5.4 billion to women-run MSMEs in 2020, with a geographic focus on rural Upper Egypt and governorates near the country's borders (Mounir, 2020, no page). Projections estimated the implementation of over 200,000 projects within a five-year period and the creation of 250,000 jobs (Wu, 2021, p. 145). While certainly a step in the right direction towards transformative social policymaking, we are yet to see whether the history of allocations repeats itself: previous studies described how women entrepreneurs were less likely to receive loans (Amer and Selwaness, 2021, p. 12).

The pandemic in general, and the experiences of vulnerable workers in particular, exposed the need for gathering data on the informal and formal sectors. Making knowledge-based decisions is only possible through having knowledge, which is tied to necessary institutional and infrastructural reforms for a transformative policymaking future.

Social Protection

COVID-19 has shown how deep institutional weaknesses are in every sector (Abdel-Latif, 2020, p. 38). In 2019, before the pandemic hit, 29.7% of Egyptians were below the poverty line (Sinha, 2021, p. 1). Once the pandemic hit, many Egyptians resorted to decreasing food consumption, borrowing money, or a combination of both (CAPMAS, 2020, pp. 14-15), thereby amplifying the fact that a considerable percentage of people had less money than they needed to survive. Of the people whose employment was negatively affected by the pandemic, 41% indicated they could not afford their living standards – a much higher figure than the 5.4% of households supported by the state interventions (Atallah, 2020, pp. 6-7).

Women were particularly affected by the lockdown and state interventions. Within a few months, a survey among 1,500 women found that 11% had experienced violence in the week before survey participation and that violence had increased in 19% of households (Arab, 2021, no page). To address gender-based violence, the state established public awareness initiatives on combating violence against women and provided a hotline for survivors in addition to psychological and legal assistance (Wu, 2021, p. 145). In the absence of official statistics, it is difficult to capture or properly assess the effects of these initiatives.

Moreover, women's care work responsibilities increased due to school closures and overloaded or inaccessible healthcare systems. The extra burden of care responsibilities during the pandemic caused many women to leave their jobs and strained the wellbeing of women in general (Dokhan, 2021).

In another direction, more than 300,000 new households were added to the Takaful and Karama programmes since March 2020, thus increasing the total number of beneficiary households to 3.2 million. To address spatial inequality, rural women leaders' monthly incomes increased from EGP

³⁷ Law 152 of the year 2020.

300 to EGP 900, and on a macro level, EGP 36 billion was allocated to support the healthcare, education, and social solidarity sectors.

From a macroeconomic perspective, the following chart reflects the trend in state budget expenditure on education and social protection between 2005 and 2021.³⁸ The overall increase in expenditure on both sectors is commendable (and quite natural given numerous factors, including population growth). While expenditure on education shows a linear growth, the 2016/2017 increase in social protection expenditure is attributable to the cash transfer programmes and the 2019/2020 increase to the COVID-19 pandemic. Across the board, social protection expenditure is higher than that on education. This expenditure pattern aligns with the authoritarian social contract principles and further attests to the historical tendency for leaders to make allocations in order to gain political capital (Sholkamy, 2018).

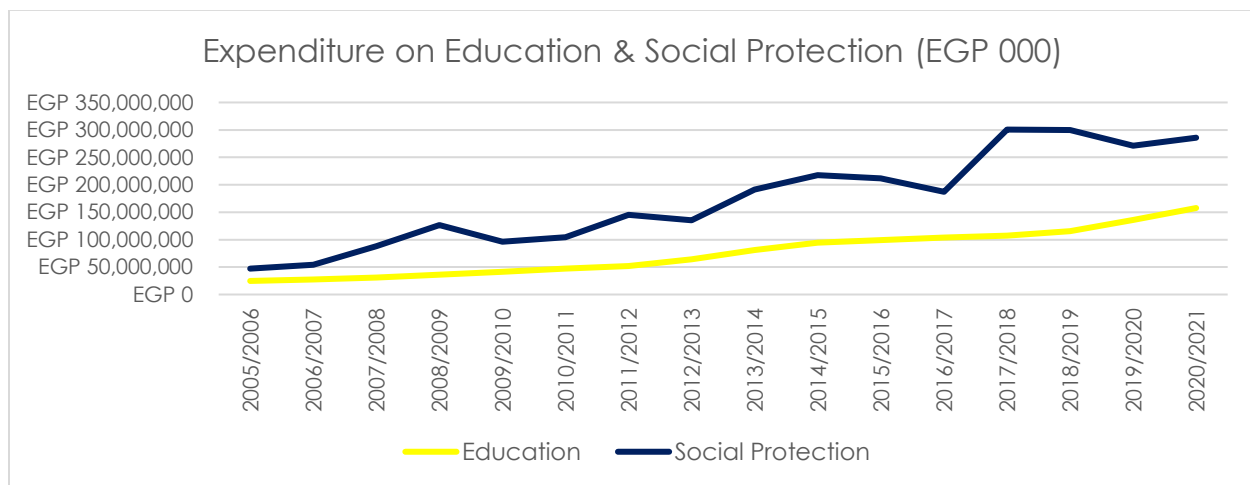


Figure 2: Egypt's Expenditure on Social Protection and Education

³⁸ Based on the authors' calculations of the Ministry of Finance data. A table with figures is available in the Annexes.

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This research has traced the history of social policymaking across the education, employment, and social protection sectors, locating them in the trajectories of a fierce state whose social policy priorities were tied to political and macroeconomic gains. At different intensities and to different degrees, consecutive presidencies in Egypt's recent history maintained an authoritarian social contract whereby the provision of social services implied and necessitated political loyalty. Policymaking across the different eras showed elements of reactivity that were tied to instituting and legitimising political power. By and large, the social service provision was path-dependent, and social policy schemes were largely shaped by economic conditions and conditionalities.

Moving towards transformative social policymaking requires learning from the drawbacks and failures of policymaking and possessing the flexibility to adapt to change. Doing so gives hope for Egypt's people and their socio-economic future, especially after everything that the pandemic has shed light on. Simply put, to quote El Mallakh, "the country cannot afford to keep repeating the same mistakes" (1995, p327).

The fundamental change towards more inclusive and transformative policymaking is a shift in the ideology of social provision: from catering to the deserving poor to a form of expenditure in building human capital without immediate returns. So, instead of considering social provisions as the last resort for the poor and vulnerable, social policymaking must resonate with transformative aspects of welfare and investment. This requires a reconfiguration of the perspectives on economy and society to recognise their interrelations and act accordingly. It further requires the creation of a new social contract that encourages people's participation, cooperation, and sense of belonging (El Mallakh, 1995, p339). After all, the real measure of social policy success is only if the people see them as such (Hania Sholkamy, personal communication, Nov. 4, 2021). Accordingly, it is important to include citizens in decision-making processes, which requires establishing a symbiotic contract between state and society (Haytham Mones, personal communication, March 11, 2022).

Beyond ideological and perspectival changes, the following recommendations are made based on the desk research and interviews conducted. The most salient recommendation is to work towards achieving gender-based equality. Recent efforts show favourable indications in this direction, including the National Council for Women's awareness-raising campaigns on women empowerment and value (Constant et al., 2020, pp. 23-24; World Bank, 2018, p. 88). By 2020, the campaigns were reported to have reached over 180 million people (ElAshmawy and Ferrara, 2021, no page). More efforts are necessary if a predominantly patriarchal society is to reach gender equity, including addressing discrimination and inequality in employment. Social policymakers must understand that in the face of few public-sector job opportunities, women resort to informal employment because of the flexibility and household reconcilability it offers. Accordingly, efforts should be made to address the threats or risks of this precarity-filled sector: for example, through the creation of pensions and insurance schemes. Furthermore, helping eradicate women's disproportionate struggles in the employment sector will actually enhance the country's economic stance (Consonant, 2020, p.12).

Achieving gender equity also includes destigmatising motherhood in the workplace. Rephrasing the “provisions for working *mothers*” in the labour law to read “provisions for working *parents*” might go a long way in the cultural acceptance of men’s care responsibilities. Legislating paternal leave also signals a transformative understanding of gender roles, which proved successful in Jordan, where it is becoming mainstream. Another inspirational measure in Jordan is the funding of employee leave (maternal leave included) through a payroll tax that *all* employees contribute to, making the private sector’s incurred ‘costs’ of maternity leave not related to the number of women employees (Consonant, 2020, p19). The wider ramifications include changed employer attitudes that consider women’s employment as unsustainable and costly. Furthermore, the improvement in work-family balance through flexible employment policymaking could encourage more women to pursue higher education (Bothwell, 2022, p. 9).

The provision of childcare services is also integral to gender-based equality, as it promotes women’s economic security and generally helps the nation grow. It has a dual effect: women who can leave their children in safe, high-quality day-care facilities have the chance to work; also, investment in day-care facilities creates jobs for women in the formal care sector (Arab, 2021). So, the availability of reliable and supportable market solutions reduces direct and indirect care, allowing women to work in both areas. This is not to mention the importance of day-care services for early childhood development. Recent years have witnessed unprecedented investment in preschool facilities, although it is important that the geographical distribution of new facilities addresses spatial and socioeconomic inequality (Constant et al., 2020, p. 19). Also, the subsidisation of childcare services would mean that women have more disposable income (El-Hadidi, 2021). The contributions that working women make to households also have long-term cultural implications, as the resultant improved living standards are associated with positive attitudes among children towards women working (World Bank, 2018, p. 98). The magnitude of women’s contribution to other care-related sectors (such as healthcare and elderly care) also points to the importance of investment to create formal jobs that are more secure for women, who are four times more likely to work in these sectors than men (UN Women, 2020b, p. 4). To further help with indirect care work and reduce opportunity costs, investments should be made in time-saving household appliances. These efforts would destigmatise care work by recognising, acknowledging, and compensating for women’s care work.

On a broader level, it is imperative that Egypt addresses (infra)structural challenges and improves its economic resilience. In recognition of the relationship between society and economy, transformative policymaking must first acknowledge the institutional root of Egypt’s socioeconomic problems so far (Abdel-Latif, 2020, p. 37). Then, policymaking must overcome structural impediments by reducing reliance on external sources, increasing domestic resource mobilisation and promoting non-traditional exports (Arab Development Bank Group, 2000, pp. 2-3). These were the recommendations of the 1991 economic adjustment programme and they are still valid today. Additionally, increasing economic resilience requires formal job creation and merging the new sectors with export-oriented firms, which would necessitate conversation between trade and investment policymakers (Atallah, 2020, p. 8). To generalise this, it is necessary that state institutions discuss, and agree on, social policy priorities and on-the-ground implementation. Such discussions would narrow the gap between positive legislative efforts on

paper and their absence on the ground. They would also overcome inefficiencies and leakage problems. One area to consider is the future of Takaful and Karama beneficiaries; the on-paper *conditional* transfer programme has not had its conditions implemented in reality, and it does not seem possible to start implementing conditionalities after several years of (unconditional) transfers. Furthermore, policymakers need to consider the post-graduation plans; although it has become a politically important programme (credited to the current president), there are no plans for programme graduation. Perhaps, like the phasing out of food ration cards, it will be gradually and silently phased out over the next few decades. On infrastructure, it is important for the state to invest in safe, reliable transportation networks (Constant et al., 2020, p. 20), especially since the cost and dangers of commuting to work are among the obstacles to women's employment.

Moreover, the state must foster a culture of data collection and digital transformation. Data is indispensable in the policy realm, and the research community in Egypt is highly stifled and restricted. Between bureaucratic impediments to access and threats of imprisonment, it is difficult to conduct studies and foster a research culture based on freedom of data access and collection. Websites continue to be blocked from within the country, surveys need prior state approval (which is difficult and lengthy to obtain, at best), and the National Library, which researchers need approval to access, grants very limited licenses to access data archives (Haytham Mones, personal communication, March 11, 2022). Alongside data and research culture, the state must also recognise the necessity of digital transformation infrastructure in the post-pandemic reality (Kamel, 2020, p.11).

Finally, social policymakers must be prepared for the effects of population growth. Demographics is a key challenge to the labour market, with an expected increase of 30% in the working-age population by 2040 (Auf, 2021, no page). In this sense, current expenditure on children should go beyond the traditional protection narrative to nurture healthy, well-educated citizens the future – ones who are raised on gender-equitable principles and transformative mindsets.

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Annexes

Annex One: Egypt's Expenditure on Social Protection and Education (Author Calculations Based on MOF Data)

Fiscal Year	Expenditure (EGP 000)	
	Social Protection	Education
2005/2006	EGP 24,718,945	EGP 47,163,997
2006/2007	EGP 27,442,668	EGP 54,318,364
2007/2008	EGP 30,958,696	EGP 87,958,660
2008/2009	EGP 35,896,742	EGP 126,445,559
2009/2010	EGP 41,683,336	EGP 96,113,023
2010/2011	EGP 47,053,658	EGP 104,145,777
2011/2012	EGP 51,770,756	EGP 145,002,811
2012/2013	EGP 64,034,500	EGP 135,068,017
2013/2014	EGP 80,859,662	EGP 191,550,839
2014/2015	EGP 94,354,600	EGP 217,315,776
2015/2016	EGP 99,262,879	EGP 211,660,533
2016/2017	EGP 103,962,160	EGP 187,367,796
2017/2018	EGP 107,075,396	EGP 300,579,678
2018/2019	EGP 115,667,469	EGP 299,936,921
2019/2020	EGP 136,038,473	EGP 270,942,120
2020/2021	EGP 157,579,868	EGP 285,968,561

Table 1: Trend in Egypt's Expenditure on Social Protection and Education

Annex Two: Egyptian Women's Participation in the Workforce (ILO Key Labour Market Indicators Database)

Year	Percentage
1990	23.05112
1991	23.01203
1992	23.10118
1993	23.18313
1994	23.55729
1995	22.69146
1996	22.13123
1997	21.59621
1998	21.08244
1999	21.49837
2000	21.665
2001	22.09632
2002	20.95086
2003	21.16449
2004	21.4278
2005	21.73435

Year	Percentage
2006	22.10845
2007	23.63742
2008	22.38003
2009	23.27982
2010	22.98054
2011	22.47579
2012	22.75865
2013	23.40609
2014	23.72009
2015	23.40142
2016	23.83808
2017	23.50044
2018	20.56124
2019	20.57403

Table 2: Egyptian Women's Participation in the Workforce