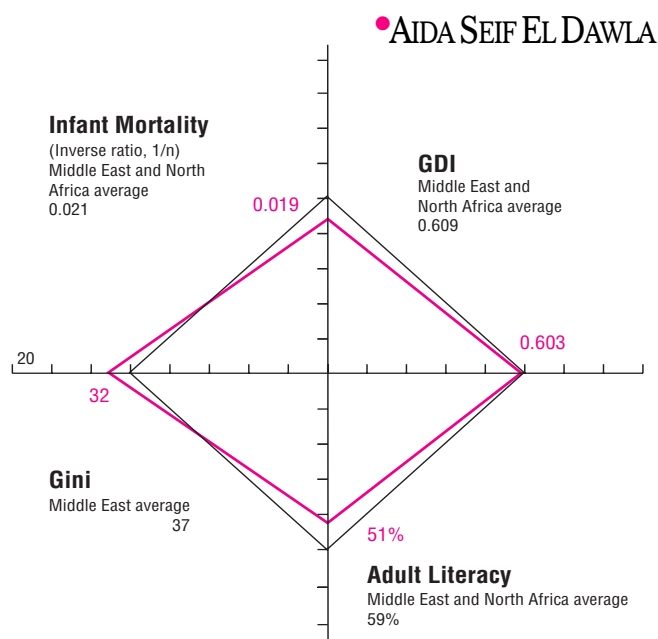


Egypt



The Equity Diamond: National values in terracotta compared to regional ones in blue.
 Source: **Infant mortality:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*, **Adult literacy:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*, **GDI** (Gender Development index): UNDP, *Human Development Report 1998*, **GINI:** World Bank, *World Development indicators 1998*. (The regional average for this indicator was calculated by *Social Watch*).

By official statistics, poverty rates declined in Egypt in the 1990s, but they are still among the highest in the Arab World. One-fourth of the population lives below the poverty line and another 20% are moderately poor.¹ Social disintegration is on the increase at the same time as the rights of civil society organisations are being curtailed.

TRAPS FOR DEMOCRACY

A 1990–1991 poverty survey showed 7.6% of the population receiving less than one dollar/day and 51.9% less than two.² An estimated 34% of Egyptians are capability poor (excluded from access to basic public services). In 1996, 7% of Egyptians lived in extreme poverty and 23% lived below the poverty line.

	EXTREMS POOR	POOR (INCLUDING THE EXTREME POOR)	MODERATELY POOR	TOTAL
1990/1991	10.9%	25%	14%	39%
1995/1996	7.4%	22.9%	2 a 5.1%	48%

Although poverty is not strongly associated with open unemployment in Egypt, it is intimately linked with access to productive employment (Asaad and Rushdy 1998).³

YEAR	1960	1976	1986	1995
UNEMPLOYMENT RATE	2.2%	7.7%	10.7%	11.3%

The estimated half million new jobs opening up every year do not meet labour's need. The high unemployment rate has forced increasing numbers into the informal sector.⁴ Most urban poor are absorbed by the this sector. In 1990, 27% of the total urban workforce (15 to 65 years) was in the informal sector (Labour

1 The moderately poor are defined as those who are just above the poverty line and at risk of falling below it. *Egypt Human Development Report, 1997/98*. Institute of National Planning.
 2 World Bank. *World Development Indicators, 1999*.
 3 Asaad R and Rouchdy M. *Poverty and Poverty Alleviation Studies in Egypt*. January, 1998.
 4 Khalil, MH (1999). «Reflections on the state of poverty in Egypt». Paper read at the Arab NGO Network for Development, Lebanon.

Force Sample Survey); in 1994, their number reached 1.9 million, i.e. 60% of the total private sector labour force.

High unemployment pits men against women for a decreasing number of public sector jobs. In the private sector, women's access to scarce labour opportunities is limited or they are forced to accept worsening working conditions. Even the smaller industries that recruit female labour provide jobs for limited periods at very low wages without any guarantee of rights.

STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT

The poor bear a disproportionately larger share of the costs of stabilisation and structural adjustment. Whereas 50% of those above the poverty line reported either no change or a worsening of their living conditions since the initiation of structural adjustment, the corresponding percentage for the poor was 76%.⁵

El Laithy and Osman⁶ show that the poorest 20% of the urban population had a share of 8.4% of total urban expenditure in 1981/82. Their share declined slightly to 8.2% in 1990/91 and continued to decline to 8.0% in 1995/1996. The richest 20% of the urban population had a share of 41.0% of total urban expenditure in 1981/82, with their share increasing to 43% in 1990/91 and to 43.5% in 1995/96. The share in expenditure of the top 10% of the population exceeds that of half the urban population and the lower 40% of the rural population.⁷

Female-headed households are more vulnerable to poverty than male-headed households. Official estimates place female-headed households at somewhere between 12–15% of all households. A 1997 survey found that female-headed households are 1.3 times as likely to be poor as male-headed households in urban areas and 1.2 times more likely to be poor in rural areas.

Since their beginning, Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) have been associated with reduction of public expenditure for basic services—a domain increasingly being taken up by the private and NGO sectors.

To counteract the adverse effects of SAPs on Egypt's poor, the government established the Social Fund for Development (SFD) in 1991. The project-based approach of SFD, however, excludes those who cannot work and those who are too poor to apply and wait for project funds. The SFD application procedures are far from accessible to deprived women and men. Public

awareness and use of this facility has been limited. Only 18% of surveyed households were aware of the fund and only 5% reported using it.

HEALTH

According to the 1996 Egyptian Human Development Report (EHDR),⁸ spending on health increased from 1% of public expenditures in 1990/91 to 1.5% in 1995/96, but it is still below the average value of 1.8% of the least developed countries.⁹ Fifty-five per cent of health spending comes from private sources.¹⁰ Despite its low quality of service and the lack of facilities, the publicly funded health sector remains the largest provider of services to the poor in Egypt. An estimated 75.9% of the population are unable to secure their costs.¹¹

Government subsidy of public sector health care has gradually been withdrawn and government medical facilities have been expanding cost recovery programmes since the early nineties. These factors, combined with government encouragement to set up private health enterprises, have led to higher fees for private health services. No more than an estimated 3% to 5% of patients have access to them.¹²

Poor women are least supported in the health care system. Despite major family planning and reproductive health rhetoric and programmes, the maternal mortality rate is still high at 174 per 100,000 live births, 22.1% of pregnant women and 25.3% of breast feeding women have anaemia, and more than two-thirds of deliveries are unattended by trained personnel.

EDUCATION

The lower a household's income, the less it spends on education. The high dropout rate (51%) in basic education is attributed to household poverty and to the poor educational services received.¹³ Another result of poverty and the poor quality of basic education is the increasing exclusion of girls from primary school. **It is estimated that about 600,000 girls aged 6–10 are excluded from primary education. Nearly 81% of these are in rural areas, the majority (56%) in Upper Egypt.**¹⁴

⁵ *Egypt Human Development Report, 1996*. Institute of National Planning.

⁶ El Laithy, H and Osman OM (1996). *Profile and Trend of Poverty and Economic Growth in Egypt*.

⁷ *Egypt Human Development Report, 1996*. op. cit.

⁸ El Laithy and Osman, *ibid*.

⁹ El Laithy and Osman, *ibid*.

¹⁰ LaTowsky, R.T. (1997). *PVO Health Care, Egypt PVO Sector Study*. The World Bank, Washington D.C.

¹¹ *Women's Health*, Newsletter of the NGO coalition for the follow up of the recommendations of Beijing. UNICEF, March 1999.

¹² LaTowsky, op.cit.

¹³ El Baradei, M. (1995). *Egyptian Children's Affordability to Education*.

¹⁴ Fergany N (1995). *Strategic Issues of Education and Employment in Egypt*. Al Mishkat Centre for Research and Training.

The cost of education is high for poor households. The average annual cost of education per child in families with an annual income of less than or equal to £E 3600 (USD 1,028) is an estimated £E 348 (USD 99) at the primary level and £E 452 (USD129) at the preparatory level.¹⁵ In contrast, the annual income of a working child –estimated at £E 534– constitutes about 14% of the poverty line in urban areas and 17% of the poverty line in rural areas. It is therefore easy to see why children of poor families drop out of school. The high dropout rate also contributes to the prevalence of early marriage for girls and the «street children» phenomenon, which has become a matter of national concern. **The number of working children aged 6–14 is estimated at 1.5 million representing an average of 12.5% of the labour force. The rate of working boys is 13% while that of girls is 12%.**¹⁶

CAMPAIGN AGAINST NGOS

With the increasing social disintegration in the country, the need for strong civil society organisations cannot be over-emphasised. The Egyptian government conditionally welcomes the role of NGOs in service provision. NGOs engaged in advocacy, however, have witnessed a narrowing of their freedom and an ongoing campaign of public slander in state-owned newspapers. In direct violation of the first commitment of the Social Summit, civil society has been subjected to further legal restrictions of its rights of association and expression.¹⁷

On May 26th 1999, the People's Assembly adopted a new Law on Civil Associations and Institutions (Law 153 of 1999). The law, which was ratified the same day by President Mubarak, severely restricts freedom of association, replaces an existing law, also restrictive, that had become out-dated, because of rapid growth of the NGOs sector.

The ratification followed two years of civil action to influence its provisions. During those two years, interaction between the Egyptian civil society organisations and the Ministry of Social Affairs, frequently referred to by the Egyptian government as dialogue and consultation, lacked the minimal requirements of a dialogue between partners. NGOs were never addressed directly by the government; drafts of the law were leaked rather than presented to them for consultation; and «consultations» were strictly controlled by the Minister of Social Affairs and her advisors. NGOs that took part in the drafting committee were appointed by her, not selected by the NGO community.

On May 12th 1999, to the surprise of civil society organisations and parliamentarians alike, a new version of the draft law was presented by the cabinet to the Committee for Social and Religious Affairs of the People's Assembly. This new version was more restrictive than previous drafts, among other things imposing a condition of prior consent from the Ministry of Social Affairs for the registration of associations.

The new draft ignored the recommendations of the drafting committee formed by the Ministry of Social Affairs, as well as the Minister's promises during meetings with activists in the Cairo, Alexandria and Minya governorates. Favourable provisions supported by the government at earlier meetings were undermined in the new draft. All positive differences between the new draft law and the existing law completely disappeared.

On May 19th 1999, 15 human rights and women's NGOs published a declaration opposing the new law. They said that their efforts of one and a half years had been in vain. From May 22nd to May 27th 1999, four women activists carried out a hunger strike to protest the restrictive measures. The protesters asked parliament to hold a public hearing on the new law, in accordance with a promise some members of parliament had made earlier to the Forum for the Promotion of Civil Society in Egypt (comprised of 105 NGOs from twelve governorates). On May 24th, 1999, the four NGO members in the drafting committee issued a statement saying that the draft submitted to the People's Assembly was not the one they had agreed upon.¹⁸

On May 25–26th, the new law was debated in the People's Assembly while NGOs demonstrated peacefully in front of the parliament building. During the general debate, the bill faced severe criticism from independent and opposition deputies who argued that it compromised civil rights and political freedoms. Members of the ruling National Democratic Party and government officials launched a counter-attack, saying that NGOs who threatened national interests should be banned altogether. The outcome was the adoption of new even more restrictive amendments.

The new law restricts the right of freedom of association as guaranteed under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which has been ratified by Egypt. It represents a step back for the promotion and protection of human rights within the framework of the Barcelona process and the Association Agreement between Egypt and the EU.¹⁹ It also violates Egypt's first commitment to the Social Summit.

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¹⁵ UDS 1 = £E 3.5

¹⁶ El Baradei, op. cit.

¹⁷ All statements and releases referred to in this section can be obtained from Gasser Abdel Razek (Hisham Mubarak Centre for Law, chrta@chrta.org).

¹⁸ Schade-Poulsen, Marc. Report from a human rights mission to Cairo, May 26-30, 1999.

¹⁹ Schade-Poulsen, op. cit.