



EGYPTIAN CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES  
INTERNATIONAL

THE LAUNCH OF  
THE NATIONAL  
STRATEGY FOR  
HUMAN RIGHTS  
2021-2026



إطلاق  
الاستراتيجية  
الوطنية  
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Analytical article

# Egypt's Comprehensive Approach to Human Rights

Hala Fouda

Researcher - Egyptian Center for Strategic Studies

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**H**uman Rights Day has been celebrated since 1950, when the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 423 (V), which urged all countries and international organizations to designate 10 December International Human Rights Day every year. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) outlines a broad range of fundamental freedoms and rights and ensures that everyone has access to them, regardless of location, gender, national or ethnic origin, religion, language, or any other status.

## Egypt's Contributions to the Global Human Rights Agenda

Over decades, Egypt has contributed to the development of international human rights law, by participating in the drafting of the UDHR and the two international treaties that shaped international human rights, namely the International Covenant

on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Egypt's contributions are evident in its ratification of the eight major international human rights treaties, its involvement in the development of international human rights mechanisms at the UN, including the Human Rights Council, of which it has held membership on multiple occasions, and the election of a sizable number of Egyptian experts to membership in human rights treaty bodies. Beyond this, Egypt has ratified a number of regional pacts within the framework of Arab and African human rights systems.

## Egypt's Constitutional Framework for Human Rights Protection

The Egyptian constitution safeguards fundamental

rights and liberties by upholding the concepts of citizenship, justice, and equality.

Article 53 of the Constitution stipulates that, "Citizens are equal before the law, possess equal rights and public duties, and may not be discriminated against on the basis of religion, belief, sex, origin, race, color, language, disability, social class, political or geographical affiliation, or for any other reason. Discrimination and incitement to hate are crimes punishable by law. The state shall take all necessary measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination, and the law shall regulate the establishment of an independent commission for this purpose."

Article 92 states that, "Rights and freedoms of individual citizens may not be suspended or reduced. No law that regulates the exercise of rights and freedoms may restrict them

in such a way as infringes upon their essence and foundation."

On the legal standing of treaties, the Egyptian Constitution included for the first time an article that obliges the state to comply with international human rights conventions, where Article 93 stipulated that, "the state is committed to the agreements, covenants, and international conventions of human rights that were ratified by Egypt. They have the force of law after publication in accordance with the specified circumstances."

As further proof of the robustness and integration of the institutional framework that supports human rights, the Supreme Standing Committee for Human Rights (SSCHR) was established at the end of 2018. In 2021, the integrated National Human Rights Strategy (NHRS) was also launched. According to the State Information

Service, the establishment of the NHRS reflects a national conviction about the importance of taking a comprehensive and serious approach to promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Egypt's Vision 2030 also aims to achieve comprehensive development by fostering an equitable society marked by equality and a just distribution of the fruits of development, achieving the highest levels of societal integration for all groups, and bolstering the fundamentals of governance.

### • Human Rights in the New Republic

Since 2014, Egypt has demonstrated a deep commitment to human rights as a holistic concept by instituting a system predicated on **“ensuring the achievement of justice and equality in providing basic needs for all without discrimination, with a focus on the most**

**vulnerable groups.”** This included the right to life and clean air as well as the right to safety, health, education, and social protection. Vulnerable groups were prioritized in Egypt's human rights agenda. In effect, Egypt is one of the first countries to sign international agreements related to protecting the rights of women, children, people with disabilities, and the elderly.

Through the introduction of a wide range of social protection programs backed by robust legal frameworks, Egypt has established sustainable strategies for achieving economic empowerment of the most vulnerable groups,

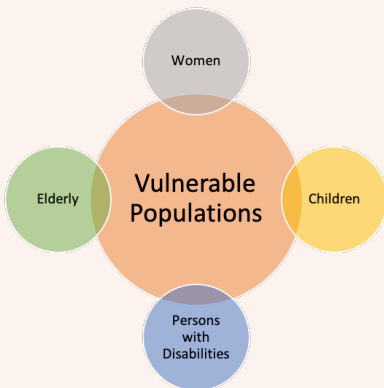
where poverty has been geographically targeted. According to the Ministry of Social Solidarity, the Takaful and Karama cash transfer program, for instance, provided services to 3.8 million families and 14 million individuals nationwide until October 2022. Since the program's inception in the middle of 2016, 20,000 street children have also received attention. Furthermore, the role of women and youth in dealing with community issues has been activated and their community engagement has been supported, particularly among Egyptian Red Crescent youth, to serve the community in the aftermath of the then-novel Covid-19.

#### Egypt's holistic approach to human rights



• **The Most Vulnerable Populations (Women, Children, People with Disabilities, and the Elderly)**

The most vulnerable groups



**Women:** Over the past eight years, women have gained access to previously unreachable new horizons, paving the way for their widespread participation in all areas of the economy, politics, society, and culture. This was an inevitable outcome of the approach taken by the political leadership under President Al-Sisi since he assumed office in 2014, an approach that was driven by the Egyptian state’s conviction that the level of political participation of women has a positive correlation with the achievement

of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and the importance of women’s empowerment in higher political positions as a component of a comprehensive social, political, and cultural reform agenda.

The 2014 constitution served as the starting point, which had nearly 21 articles directly addressing the status of women. Along with the Constitution, there were laws that played a significant role in triggering the empowerment process, including the Law on the Regulation of the Exercise of Political Rights (No. 45/2014), Law on the House of Representatives (No. 46/2014), law on Health Insurance System for Breadwinners, Female Debtors Law, law prohibiting underage marriage, the Inheritance Law, bill toughening penalties on FGM, and Law on the Confidentiality of Victims’ Data in harassment and rape cases,

much less the launch of several strategies, including primarily the National Strategy to Eliminate Violence Against Women.

There are also the 2019 constitutional amendments, which increased the representation of women in Parliament by allocating a representative quota equal to no less than 25% of the total number of seats in Parliament to women, let alone resolving the obstacles that prevented achieving equitable economic empowerment.

**Children:** Egyptian children have received special attention from the political leadership, with President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi repeatedly emphasizing the importance of investing in people and building a human well, whether physically, socially, or culturally. This was reflected in numerous child-focused programs and legislation, including:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launching the <b>Nabtat Misr</b> mobile app to offer reporting, support, and advice services, such as reporting cases of children in danger, children who have gone missing, and children who have been found, in addition to family support and counseling services for mothers and kids. These services are provided with complete confidentiality of callers and informants' data. In addition to these services, the app offers a package of health information, psychological counseling, legal advice, and positive parenting advice.</li> <li>• <b>Formation of the National Committee to Eradicate FGM in May 2019</b>, co-chaired by the National Council for Women and the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood,</li> </ul> | <p>with the purpose of coordinating the efforts of state institutions and civil society organizations to eradicate FGM.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Launching anti-child marriage campaigns</b>, primarily the “Not Before 18” campaign.</li> <li>• Amending provisions of the Child Law implementing regulations, most notably the introduction of the <b>Anti-Bullying Act.</b></li> </ul> <p><b>Persons with Disabilities:</b><br/>Given its extensive quality expertise and pioneering experiences in the field of care and rehabilitation of people with disabilities, Egypt is often cited as one of the first countries to be praised for its social work in this area. Significant efforts in this respect include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Establishing the National Council for Persons with Disabilities under</li> </ul> | <p>Presidential Decree No. 11 of 2019.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Issuance of Law No. 10 of 2018 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which marks the beginning of empowering and enabling them to obtain their rights.</li> <li>- Launching the <b>“Empowerment, Integration, and Participation”</b> campaign in 2016 to support and empower persons with disabilities, by adapting the communications and information technology sector to provide persons with disabilities with educational and health services and contribute to increasing their ability to enter the labor market, in addition to making government buildings fully accessible to them.</li> <li>- Increasing the number of <b>social rehabilitation offices</b> across Egypt, accommodate rehabilitation seekers of all ages and demographics,</li> </ul> |
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provide advice to disabled individuals and their families on how to apply for and receive benefits like disability pensions, monthly aid, one-time assistance, scholarships, and small business loans, and encourage young people with disabilities to participate in small projects, projects of successful families, and projects led by women.

- Applying “Accessibility Code” standards to help provide and facilitate the movement of traffic for people with disabilities.

**The Elderly:** The Egyptian Constitution guarantees the right to protect the elderly and provide them with a decent life. **Article 83** of the 2014 Constitution stipulates that, “The state shall guarantee the health, economic, social, cultural, and entertainment rights of the elderly, provide them with appropriate pensions to ensure them a decent standard of living, and empower them to

participate in public life. The state shall take into account the needs of the elderly while planning public utilities. It also encourages civil society organizations to participate in caring for the elderly.”

In planning public facilities, the state also took into account the needs of the elderly, and as required by law, it encourages civil society organizations to participate in the care of the elderly. The State Information Service lists the following as state initiatives in the area of elderly care:

- **Social Care:** Establishing senior care facilities, daycare centers, and offices that offer in-home care services, as well as training senior caregivers and opening physiotherapy clinics for the elderly.

**- Developmental Care:**

The Ministry of Social Solidarity provides security projects (non-refundable low-income grants) for the elderly, productive families’ projects (i.e., project loans), and rural women’s projects (i.e., loans provided to elderly rural women and breadwinner women to establish projects that help them raise their standard of living), in addition to training some of the elderly in certain trades and professions based on their skills.

**- Social Protection Services (Economic Care):**

This includes providing security pensions to the elderly who do not receive an “insurance pension” and have no source of income, single-payment aid, monthly assistance from the Takaful Charity Foundation to the elderly who are financially incapable, and loans at advantageous terms from productive families projects and Nasser Social Bank to launch small and micro

projects. The in-kind services entail providing ration cards to social security pensioners and their families.

- **Social Protection**

The Egyptian government recently adopted an ambitious economic reform plan that needs to be accompanied by social protection programs to counteract any potential negative effects on the poor and vulnerable classes. As a result, Egypt embarked on a large-scale program to redefine the social contract. One aspect of this program is reorienting assistance away from blanket programs and toward social protection networks that are both effective and specifically tailored to the needs of the most vulnerable members of society. Overall, the government has made strides in this area, as evidenced by the creation and regular updating of poverty maps used to direct the quantity and quality of social protection programs.

This made it easier to concentrate resources from the public, private, and civil society organizations on the beneficiaries, ultimately promoting the development of those communities.

- **The Right to Health**

The Egyptian health sector experienced significant momentum, as evidenced by the launch of more than 20 initiatives aimed at improving Egyptian citizens' health across the board. According to human rights reports, numerous health-related initiatives have significantly improved Egyptians' quality of life. Egypt had a ground-breaking experience in terms of the hepatitis C virus, which had one of the highest prevalence rates in the world. With the help of the National Campaign to Eradicate Hepatitis C, which was launched in 2014, it was possible to reduce the cost and duration of treatment, making it more accessible to everyone and raising

recovery rates by a sizable amount above 98 percent. This assisted in bringing down the virus' prevalence.

The 2021 Human Development Report highlighted the success of health programs and initiatives in improving the overall health of Egyptians as well as the smooth operation of the country's healthcare system as a whole. Egypt's average life expectancy at birth increased from 70.3 years in 2010 to approximately 71.8 years in 2018. Also, between 2010 and 2019, Egypt's under-five mortality rate fell from 28.8 to around 20.3 children per thousand live births.

- **The Right to Education**

According to detailed data on enrollment rates for boys and girls between 2010-2011 and 2019-2020, the 2021 Human Development Report noted an improvement in indicators of the accessibility of pre-

university education between 2010 and 2020 as student enrollment rates rose across all educational levels and the gender gap disappeared in pre-university education stages.

Human rights reports and data from the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) show that dropout rates for preparatory education have declined from 5.5 and 4.7 percent for boys and girls in 2010-2011 to 2.8 and 2.6 percent for boys and girls, respectively, in 2018-2019. Transition rates between the primary and preparatory stages, as well as between the preparatory and secondary stages (both general and technical), have also increased. The opening of numerous new private and cutting-edge universities with a focus on technology have also increased the higher education system's absorption capacity.

### • **The Right to Adequate Housing**

According to the Human Development Report 2021, Egypt is one of the world's leading countries to include the "right to housing" within its constitution. In this vein, Egypt worked to provide adequate housing for all through expanding programs to support social housing and urban development in order to provide decent housing for low-income groups and develop unplanned areas that lack services and increase coverage of drinking water and sanitation services.

Since 2014, the number of beneficiaries of the social housing program has reached nearly 312,000, with cash assistance from the Social Housing Fund totaling EGP 4.9 billion and real estate financing totaling EGP 30.8 billion.

### • **Political Rights**

According to the State Information Service, the

state has guaranteed the freedom to establish parties that express all tendencies and opinions, and Egypt now has more than 100 parties.

Furthermore, over an eight-year period, the state has fulfilled all of its constitutional duties, including holding two rounds of presidential and House of Representatives elections, amending the constitution in 2019, creating a second chamber of parliament (the Senate), and holding Senate elections. The Senate elections took place in the midst of fresh amendments to the applicable election laws, which led to the unprecedented representation of a large number of political parties as well as a significantly higher representation of women, youth, people with disabilities, workers, farmers, and Egyptians living abroad given the legal controls that ensure their representation. The state's commitment to the



freedom of civil society organizations is reflected in the Civil Associations Law and its implementing regulations, which, among other things, allow for the creation of new groups to serve their communities without fear of criminal prosecution and remove any restrictions on the use of the right to form organizations through public notice, let alone other provisions that help these organizations function and do their service work in the community.

## **The Presidential Initiative Haya Karima**

Haya Karima (Decent Life) initiative, also known as the National Project to Develop Rural Areas, is an integrated multi-faceted initiative that was introduced by President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi in 2019, with the aim of improving the living conditions and daily life of the Egyptian citizens,

within the framework of integration and unification of efforts between state institutions, private sector institutions, civil society, and development partners in Egypt. Additionally, Haya Karima seeks to offer a comprehensive set of services that cover a range of living, social, and health-related facets.

The Haya Karima initiative is, in fact, among the largest projects of its kind in Egypt and the Arab world. The United Nations Office for Sustainable Development reported on 25 February 2021 that the initiative helped lessen the impact of Covid-19 by improving the standard of living for the most vulnerable populations and pushing forward development objectives. According to the UN Sustainable Development Program, Egypt's pioneering role in achieving the goals of sustainable development in rural communities led to the inclusion of the

Haya Karima in the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

**In a nutshell**, Egypt has been very thorough and clear in its implementation of its unique strategy for human rights, allowing it to usher in a new phase that paves the way towards true democracy commensurate with the circumstances and constants of Egyptian society. Perhaps President Abdel-Fattah El-Sisi has repeatedly tried to drive home the point that every society has its own circumstances, components, and history, and that there is no experience suitable for all peoples and countries.