

Summary of the Shadow Report on Egypt's 18th–19th Periodic Reports (2019–2024) to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights



This is a summary of the Shadow Report on Egypt's 18th-19th Periodic Reports (2019-2024) submitted to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR). It provides an assessment of the Arab Republic of Egypt's 18th and 19th Combined Periodic Report covering the period of 2019–2024. The submission was prepared by a Coalition of Egyptian organizations, including the [Association of Egyptian Female Lawyers \(AEFL\)](#), [The Egyptian Foundation for Family Development \(EFFD\)](#), [The Farah Foundation for Development](#), [Tadwein for Gender Studies](#), [Equality Now](#). Despite Egypt's 2014 constitutional guarantee of gender equality and the government's initiatives such as the National Strategy for the Empowerment of Egyptian Women 2030 and tougher penalties for female genital mutilation (FGM), these efforts remain insufficiently comprehensive. Egypt has yet to sign or ratify the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), and discriminatory laws, weak enforcement, and structural barriers continue to undermine women's rights in law and practice.

Gaps in Realising Equality and Non-Discrimination

Although Egypt's Constitution guarantees gender equality, discriminatory provisions in personal status and inheritance laws persist. Men retain unilateral divorce rights, whereas women face long and costly judicial processes or must forgo their financial entitlements to secure a divorce. Guardianship over children remains vested in fathers or male relatives, even in cases where mothers are primary caregivers, and the absence of a unified family law subjects Christian women to dual discrimination in matters of marriage and custody. Women inherit only half the share of male heirs, perpetuating economic dependency. Women's representation in the House of Representatives increased to 28% and in the Cabinet to 25%,¹ Yet structural and societal barriers which include harassment, online abuse and shrinking civic space, continue to undermine their effective participation. The report elsewhere notes that women human rights defenders face intimidation and lack adequate protection², further constraining women's participation in public life. This shadow report calls on Egypt to urgently ratify and domesticate the Maputo Protocol, harmonise all discriminatory laws with constitutional equality guarantees, and expand access to state-funded, gender-sensitive legal aid to improve access to justice, as further detailed under Section 1(iii) of the main report³

The Reality of Violence Against Women and Girls

Violence against women and girls remains pervasive. Egypt lacks a comprehensive domestic violence law and does not criminalise marital rape. In practice, Article 60 of the Penal Code is interpreted as permitting "disciplinary" violence within marriage. Although penalties for FGM have been increased and GBV units have been set up in some hospitals, these services are under-resourced and mistrusted by survivors. Rates of femicide and intimate partner violence remain high, and survivors often refrain from reporting due to stigma, fear of retaliation, and weak protection. FGM continues to be practised in Egypt and remains particularly common in some rural areas and among refugee communities. More than half of Sudanese refugee girls in Egypt are at risk of undergoing FGM, while refugee and migrant women face compounded risks of sexual

¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union, 'Women in Parliament: Egypt Country Data' (2025) <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/EG/EG-LC01/>

² Association of Female Egyptian Lawyers (AEFL) et al, *Shadow Report on the Arab Republic of Egypt's 18th and 19th Combined Periodic Report, 2019-2024* (2025) Section on WHRDs.

³ Association of Female Egyptian Lawyers (AEFL) et al, *Shadow Report on the Arab Republic of Egypt's 18th and 19th Combined Periodic Report, 2019-2024* (2025) Section 1(iii).

violence, trafficking, and arbitrary detention. The shadow report urges Egypt to criminalise marital rape, adopt a survivor-centred comprehensive law on violence against women, improve the enforcement of FGM and anti-trafficking laws, and expand access to shelters, psychosocial support, and legal aid. According to a 2024 Equality Now and Tadwein study, FGM remains deeply entrenched among Sudanese refugees in Egypt, indicating a lack of state-targeted outreach or integration of refugee women in national anti-FGM strategies.

Issues Concerning Marriage and Family Life

“The legal minimum age for marriage in Egypt is 18, as stipulated under Law No. 126 of 2008 (Amending the Child Law) and Article 31-bis of the Civil Status Law. However, weak enforcement enables the continued prevalence of child marriage, often through informal or unregistered unions, particularly ‘urfi’ marriages that are later formally registered once the girl turns 18, creating a legal loophole, affecting an estimated 118,000 girls each year. Poverty, harmful traditional practices, and discriminatory legal provisions contribute to this trend, particularly in rural and refugee communities. Polygamy remains lawful, and women seeking to contest a polygamous marriage must prove “harm,” a burden that is difficult to meet. Obedience (referred to as *ṭā’a* in Arabic) provisions penalise women who leave the marital home, even in situations of abuse, by depriving them of maintenance, while divorced mothers risk losing custody of their children if they remarry. These provisions, which date back to 1929, reflect a conception of marriage as subordination rather than partnership. The shadow report calls for the effective enforcement of the minimum marriage age, the prohibition of polygamy, the repeal of obedience provisions, and the reform of guardianship, custody, and inheritance laws to ensure equal rights for women in accordance with the African Charter and CEDAW obligations.

Barriers to Accessing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

Access to sexual and reproductive health remains severely restricted. Abortion is criminalised except when the pregnant woman’s life is at risk, pursuant to Articles 260–264 of the Penal Code,⁴ denying survivors of rape or incest and women with serious health conditions access to safe abortion services, and further restricting health providers from providing the life saving medical services. Maternal mortality remains

⁴ and this legal framework also deters health providers from offering care due to fear of prosecution.

higher in rural and border areas due to weak infrastructure and limited emergency care, further noting that women with disabilities and refugee women face particular exclusion from SRHR and maternal health services. Adolescents and unmarried women face stigma, breaches of confidentiality, and barriers to SRHR services, while the absence of comprehensive sexuality education in schools leaves young people without crucial information and skills. It is also limited to biological content and omits topics such as consent, gender equality, and GBV prevention. The shadow report calls on Egypt to reform abortion laws in line with international standards, improve access to youth-friendly and inclusive SRHR and maternal health services, and integrate age-appropriate, rights-based sexuality education into schools.

Persistent Economic and Social Inequalities.

Women's labour-force participation in Egypt remains among the lowest globally at around 15 per cent, concentrated in low-paid, undervalued sectors such as education and healthcare, where weak enforcement of pay-equity laws entrenches wage gaps. The lack of affordable childcare, non-recognition of joint marital property, and discriminatory inheritance rules perpetuate women's economic dependence and poverty, particularly among rural women. A significant structural driver of women's economic inequality is the non-recognition of joint marital property, which prevents women from acquiring economic assets accumulated during marriage and was explicitly flagged in the report as a key area requiring reform. Customary practices often deprive women of inheritance and impede their access to land and productive resources. The shadow report urges the Government to enforce pay-equity laws, recognise joint marital property, expand affordable childcare, and strengthen gender-sensitive land and inheritance-rights enforcement.

Lack of Protection for Refugee Women and Other Marginalised Groups

Refugee and displaced women face barriers to accessing legal documentation, employment, healthcare, and legal protection, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking. The report attributes these barriers to the absence of a gender-sensitive asylum and refugee protection framework. Women with disabilities experience systemic discrimination in employment, education, and access to SRHR services, despite the protections under Law No. 10 of 2018, which remain poorly enforced. Elderly women and widows face inadequate social protection and limited pensions, while women in distress, such as survivors of violence, trafficking, or homelessness, often cannot access safe

shelters or reintegration services. Widows and elderly women in rural areas lack access to pensions due to informal labour and lack of documentation. The shadow report calls on Egypt to adopt a gender-sensitive refugee protection framework, expand state-run shelters and inclusive social protection measures, implement the Law No. 10 of 2018 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities effectively, and ensure equitable access to services and justice for all vulnerable women.

Purpose of the Shadow Report

The Shadow Report shows the significant gap between Egypt's constitutional and international commitments to gender equality and the lived realities of women and girls. It urges the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to issue strong concluding observations, compelling Egypt to ratify and domesticate the Maputo Protocol, adopt a comprehensive law on violence against women and girls, repeal discriminatory family laws, reform SRHR provisions, and put in place stronger protections for women human rights defenders.