



# The Egyptian Center for Women's Rights

The 2024 Annual Report on Women's Rights

## Outcomes 2024: Egyptian Women Between the Challenges of Reality and the Aspirations of the

*The Egyptian Center for Women's Rights is:*

- *An NGO with Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.*
- *Winner of the 2002 "Top 10 Worldwide Programs" selected by the Development Marketplace, World Bank.*
- *Author of the booklet "Rape: The Safe Crime," recognized as the Best Idea in the Middle East and North Africa in V-Day's 2001 competition.*
- *Recipient of the 2008 Adel Abo Zahra Award for efforts in the empowerment of Egyptian women.*

## **Introduction**

The year 2024 witnessed the continuation of challenges facing Egyptian women on various levels, despite the constitutional guarantees protecting women's rights. However, there remains a lack of mechanisms to protect women who report incidents, putting them at increased risk both in public and within the family. Women find themselves forced to refrain from filing complaints for fear of retaliation or lack of serious action on their cases.

Regarding family law, women and children continue to suffer under an outdated law dating back to 1920, with no new amendments issued despite the formation of a government committee for this purpose since 2022. This delay exacerbates family problems, as it pushes some women to continue marital relationships in which they experience violence and humiliation, as confirmed by statistics revealing that 31% of women are subjected to domestic violence.

Divorce rates have also witnessed a significant increase, with 265,606 cases recorded in 2023, underscoring the urgent need for legal reforms that ensure justice and protect women's rights.

Women also suffer from discriminatory practices in several areas, most notably sports, where a controversial decision was issued by the Egyptian Fencing Federation to exclude ten female players from international competitions, in a move that reflects discrimination and lack of transparency. In addition, the General Department of Passports, Immigration, and Nationality imposed restrictions on the travel of some women to Saudi Arabia, which is a clear violation of citizenship and equality rights guaranteed by the Constitution.

Economically, challenges continue to hinder women's empowerment, with the unemployment rate among women reaching 17.8% compared to 4.7% among men, according to data from the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics. Illiteracy also remains high among women, reaching 21% compared to 11.4% among men, reflecting the continuing educational gap and its impact on women's opportunities in the labor market and entrepreneurship. Economic challenges also extend to the lack of financial services available to female entrepreneurs, and the absence of adequate legislative and economic support to enable them to manage successful projects.

All of these factors have negatively affected Egypt's ranking in international gender equality indicators, with the country occupying 135th place out of 146 nations, according to the 2024 World Economic Forum report. Egypt's indicators also declined in both economic empowerment and political empowerment, reflecting the need for urgent reform policies.

This report aims to analyze the reality of Egyptian women during 2024, highlighting challenges and achievements, while providing practical recommendations aimed at improving the legal, economic, and social conditions, to ensure women's empowerment and strengthen their role in society.

## Section One: Civil and Political Rights

Political equality for women is a fundamental pillar of sustainable development and a guaranteed human right. However, Egyptian women continue to face significant challenges in accessing leadership positions and actively participating in politics, as customs, traditions, and structural discrimination hinder their progress.

As a result, Egypt's ranking in the Women's Political Empowerment Index declined in the 2024 Global Gender Gap Report, placing it at 90th compared to 85th in 2023. This reflects the slow progress in efforts to politically empower women. Additionally, Egypt ranked 81st globally out of 183 countries in terms of women's representation in parliament, according to data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

### Representation of Women in Executive Positions

- The cabinet reshuffle in July 2024 revealed the continuing gender gap in government positions. Only 4 out of 30 ministries included female ministers, representing only 13.3%. At the level of deputy ministers, 5 women were appointed out of 23 deputies, at a rate of 21.7%. As for governors, only one woman was appointed out of 27 governors, while women held 9 deputy governor positions out of 32, at a rate of 28.1%.
- The Minister of Interior issued a decision to appoint Major General Manal Atef as Assistant Minister of Interior for the Human Rights Sector, making her the first woman to hold this position. This reflects a limited advancement in women's empowerment within security institutions.

### Representation of Women in Parliament and Specialized Committees

Although women constitute 27.6% of parliament, their representation in leadership positions within parliamentary committees remains low, as reflected in the following figures:

- Women held 7.1% of committee chair positions (2 out of 28 committees).
- They occupied 14.1% of deputy positions (8 out of 56).
- Women accounted for 32.1% of secretary positions (9 out of 28).
- Additionally, the Arab Affairs Committee had no female parliamentarians at all.

### Representation of Women in the Judiciary

- The year 2024 marked a new development in the journey of women in the judiciary, as the President of the State Council issued a decision to appoint 3 female judges in the Technical Office of the Council President for the first time in the history of the State Council. This reflects a positive step towards enhancing the participation of women in senior judicial positions.

## **Representation of Women on Boards of Directors**

Women's representation on corporate boards made progress in 2023, as revealed by the annual report of the Egyptian Women on Boards Observatory, issued by the School of Business at the American University in Cairo. The report monitors women's representation on boards and in senior leadership positions across 1,000 companies and banks. The key findings were as follows:

- The women's representation index on boards increased to 23.3%, up from 19.7% in 2022, reflecting an 18% growth rate.
- The non-banking financial sector recorded the highest percentage of women on boards at 25.2%, followed by publicly listed companies at 21.7%, the banking sector at 18.7%, and finally, the public business sector at 12%.
- The number of women on the boards of directors of companies listed on the stock exchange increased from 324 to 425 women, with a growth rate of 31%.
- The banking sector witnessed an increase in the number of women on the board of directors from 54 to 59 women, while the public sector witnessed a slight decline in the number of women by only one woman.

## **Section Two: Economic and Social Rights**

The economic and social empowerment of women is a fundamental pillar in achieving sustainable development and promoting gender equality. According to the International Monetary Fund, women's economic empowerment contributes to higher economic growth, financial stability, and improved living standards.

Despite ongoing efforts in this field, Egyptian women continue to face significant challenges that limit their opportunities in the labor market and entrepreneurship, hindering the full utilization of their capabilities.

### **Women's Participation in the Labor Market**

Women's participation in the labor force remains limited. According to the 2023 statistics from the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, the employment rate for men stood at 84.2%, compared to just 15.8% for women. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate among women was 17.8%, significantly higher than the 4.7% recorded for men.

Additionally, women face wage gaps, unsafe working conditions, employment discrimination, and social barriers that hinder their access to leadership positions. According to the 2024 Global Gender Gap Report, Egypt ranked 140th out of 146 countries in the Women's Economic Participation Index, reflecting the ongoing challenges in this field.

## **Women Entrepreneurs:**

Women entrepreneurs in Egypt face several obstacles that hinder the success of their businesses, including:

- **Gaps in education and training:** Women do not have the same educational and training opportunities as men, limiting their ability to develop successful businesses.
- **Limited access to financing:** Female entrepreneurs face difficulty in obtaining loans and financial facilities due to a lack of collateral and poor credit history.
- **Lack of legal knowledge and property rights awareness:** This makes some women vulnerable to financial and administrative exploitation.
- **High business costs:** Increased operational costs reduce investment opportunities and hinder the growth of women-led businesses.

## **Educational Disparity and Its Impact on Economic Participation**

Egyptian women continue to face educational challenges that affect their opportunities in the labour market. The illiteracy rate among women stands at 21%, compared to 11.4% among men.

Although girls have high enrolment rates in general secondary education and community-based education, their representation declines in scientific colleges and technical specializations compared to men. This reflects the correlation between women's economic participation and their level of education, as the highest labour market participation rates are recorded among women with university degrees.

## **Social Challenges and Their Impact on Women's Rights**

A survey conducted by the Information and Decision Support Center revealed the persistence of social discrimination against women in several aspects. The findings showed that 92% of citizens believe that men should be prioritized for jobs when opportunities are scarce, while 41% think that women face difficulties in obtaining their right to inheritance.

Although 70% of citizens support women in leadership positions, cultural and social barriers continue to impose restrictions that hinder the realization of this progress.

## **Initiatives to Promote Women's Economic Empowerment**

Within the framework of efforts made to improve women's economic status, several key initiatives have been launched, including:

- The " Supporting Gender Mainstreaming in Work " Project, which trained 650 women from the most vulnerable groups in professional and vocational skills to enhance their economic opportunities.

- The "WE Finance Code" Initiative, aimed at facilitating women entrepreneurs' access to the financing needed to develop their businesses.
- The Women's Financial Inclusion Project, which has increased the number of women with bank accounts and digital wallets, contributing to their financial independence.

## Section Three: Violence Against Women

Violence against women in Egypt remains a worrying phenomenon, driven by discriminatory mindsets and behaviors toward women. Additionally, the weak protection mechanisms for female victims of violence contribute to the persistence of this issue. Many women refrain from reporting the violence they are subjected to, which lead to the aggravation of the problem without any real deterrent.

### The Escalation of Violence Against Women

In recent years, new forms of violence against women have emerged, most notably the murders of young women for rejecting marriage proposals. These crimes are increasingly being committed in public spaces such as universities and workplaces, highlighting the growing severity of violence against women and reflecting a deeper crisis related to the lack of social justice and gender equality.

Research indicates that several factors contribute to the prevalence of violence against women in Egypt, including:

- **Patriarchal society and male-dominated upbringing:** Men are raised to believe they are responsible for protecting and controlling women's behavior, reinforcing the notion of "male honor" based on suppressing women's freedom.
- **Cultural and social factors:** These include the stigma associated with divorce, fear of reporting crimes, and societal reluctance to intervene in cases of violence, all of which foster a culture of silence around these crimes.
- **Legal discrimination:** The Personal Status Law grants men broad rights in divorce compared to women, who face significant legal obstacles when attempting to end a marriage that violates their rights as wives.
- **Inadequate legal penalties, including:**
  - The absence of a clear definition of femicide as a distinct category in Egyptian law, with domestic violence often considered a private matter.
  - Article 17 of the Penal Code grants judges the authority to reduce sentences in so-called "honor crimes," allowing perpetrators to escape severe punishment.
  - Article 237 states that a husband who kills his wife in the act of adultery is charged with a misdemeanor rather than premeditated murder, reflecting clear legal discrimination against women.

## Recommendations

The report concluded with a set of recommendations aimed at enhancing the rights of Egyptian women across various sectors, with the goal of creating a more equitable environment that supports women's participation in public life.

### First: Legislative Reform and Combating Violence Against Women

- Enacting a new Family Law that reflects modern societal changes and emphasizes partnership between spouses in building a family.
- Issuing a law to combat domestic violence and child marriage to protect girls from exploitation.
- Abolishing the marriage registration book at the hands of the *Ma'azun* (authorized marriage officiant) to limit customary marriage (*Zawaj 'Urfi*), while setting a deadline for the official registration of previous marriages.
- Strengthening complaint mechanisms and legal prosecution by supporting the Women's Violence Unit within the Ministry of Interior and expanding its jurisdiction.
- Increasing the number of shelters for abused women and providing them with economic and social rehabilitation to create new opportunities for a life free from violence.

### Second: Women's Political Empowerment

- Allocating a quota of no less than 35% for women in leadership positions and decision-making roles.
- Launching intensive training programs to prepare women for leadership positions.
- Enhancing women's representation in local councils and political parties by:
  - Amending the Local Administration Law to ensure higher female representation in accordance with Article 180 of the Constitution.
  - Amending the Political Parties Law to mandate that parties allocate 30% of leadership positions to women.

### Third: Women's Economic Empowerment

- Increasing women's participation in the labor market to 30% by amending the Labor Law to require companies with 100 or more employees to provide childcare facilities.
- Improving women's access to financing by:
  - Allocating 35% of small and medium enterprise (SME) loans to women.
  - Organizing awareness sessions for women, particularly in rural areas, to introduce them to available financial services.
  - Providing technical support to empower women in launching their own businesses.
  - Strengthening collaboration with civil society organizations to raise awareness and offer ongoing support for women entrepreneurs.

#### **Fourth: Improving Women's Status in Education**

- Reviewing and revising curricula to eliminate any discrimination against women and improve their representation in educational materials.
- Expanding the role of women in curriculum development within the Ministry of Education to ensure a more balanced perspective.
- Implementing literacy programs for women and imposing fines on families that prevent girls from receiving an education.
- Integrating lessons on gender equality and women's rights into school curricula to promote awareness of gender equality.