

Profile on economic inclusion for people with disabilities and older workers: Egypt

Purpose and scope: This profile responds to the three pillars of the EBRD's *Economic Inclusion Strategy* (access to employment and skills, finance and entrepreneurship, and services) and aims to provide targeted support to the efforts of the EBRD and its partners to better understand the needs of people with disabilities (PWD) and older workers. It is not intended to be an exhaustive overview of all issues affecting people with disabilities and older workers in this country. It was prepared for the EBRD using publicly available sources.

Country context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population: Egypt's population reached 100 million in 2020 (World Bank, 2020), raising concerns about additional pressure on housing, jobs, sanitation, education and healthcare (<i>The New York Times</i>, 2020). More than 60 per cent of Egypt's population is under the age of 24, with 5 per cent aged 65 and over (UNFPA, 2020). Sunni Muslims account for around 90 per cent of the population, and Christians (majority Coptic Orthodox) the remainder (US DoS, 2020). • Economy: Egypt is classified as a lower middle-income country, with annual per capita income of around US\$ 3000. GDP grew by 5.6 per cent (US\$ 303 billion) in 2019 (World Bank, 2020). Services, tourism, oil and natural gas, construction and manufacturing are the main sectors driving GDP growth (World Bank, 2019). The labour market is characterised by chronic youth unemployment, low rates of labour force participation and a significant gender disparity in employment. Rates of informality are high (World Bank, 2019b). As of 2019, an estimated 24.7 per cent of Egypt's total employed population was working in the agriculture sector (World Bank, 2019c). In relation to Covid-19, it is estimated that a significant reduction in tourism, payments received from the Suez Canal, and remittances from Egyptians working abroad could alone reduce GDP by between 0.7 and 0.8 per cent (EGP 36 to 41 billion, approx. US\$ 2.29 to 2.6 billion) for each month the crisis continues (IFPRI, 2020). • Prevalence/responses to Covid-19: As of 18 October 2020, there had been 105,424 confirmed cases of Covid-19 and 6,120 deaths, with some restrictions in place but stopping short of an official "lockdown" (US Embassy in Egypt, 2020).
People with disabilities (PWD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to the 2017 census, 13.3 per cent of the population has some form of disability. In recognition of the challenges faced by this group, the Ministry of Social Solidarity launched the Strategy on the Protection, Rehabilitation and Empowerment of People with Disabilities in 2017, setting out goals related to: legislation and policy reform, improvements to data collection, programmes to generate income and increase standards of living (including access to vocational training), increased access to social security and public awareness-raising campaigns (especially in education). • Employment and skills: The 2018 Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (LRPD) enshrines non-discrimination of people with disabilities (PWD) in employment (Soliman, 2018). Nevertheless, in practice, PWD face significant challenges in accessing jobs, including discriminatory attitudes from employers, both during the recruitment process and in the workplace, as well as in education (Soliman, 2018; Equal Rights Trust, 2019). The LRPD imposes a legal obligation on private and public sector organisations with 20 or more employees to have an employment quota of 5 per cent to be allocated to persons with disabilities (Equal Rights Trust, 2018). Incentives for employers to hire PWD include tax exemptions and reductions, with benefits increasing with the number of PWD employed (Equal Rights Trust, 2018). • Finance and entrepreneurship: Recent government policy has been focused on supporting PWD in employment and education, as opposed to entrepreneurship. Consequently, legal provisions and targeted government finance and entrepreneurship programmes for PWD are limited, and civil society and international donors are the main providers of support. For example, the "Jobs and Skills for Persons with Disabilities" programme implemented by UNDP, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Egypt-ICT Trust Fund between 2014 and 2017 aimed to promote the concept of entrepreneurship and empower PWD to start their own businesses. • Services: PWD face significant obstacles to mobility and accessibility in part due to limited understanding and awareness on the part of policymakers. Widespread discrimination and

stigma are reportedly compounded by physical obstacles to mobility, such as roads, buildings and transport systems constructed without consideration of accessibility (McGrath, [2010](#); Equal Rights Trust, [2018](#)). Between 2013 and 2020, the Ministry of Information Technology and Communication (MCIT), in collaboration with regional governorates, the private sector and civil society, undertook a major programme to use ICT to “provide an enabling inclusive environment to support the inclusion of PWDs into mainstream projects to support social justice”. This includes the provision of more than 40,000 capacity-building grants to PWD to help them enter the labour force and measures to make community centres more accessible to PWD by equipping them with accessible ICT infrastructure (ITU, [n.d.](#); Kandil, [2018](#)).

- **Covid-19:** The economic impact on PWD has been severe: in a survey of 240 households including or headed by PWD in April 2020, 95 per cent of respondents stated that their overall income was negatively impacted as a result of the pandemic (SDD, [2020](#)). The main government support came through the [expansion](#) of the Karama cash transfer programme.

Older workers

- Many older people remain economically active, due to lack of access to adequate pensions or social assistance (Khadr, [2019](#)). More than [4.5 million Egyptians](#) aged 50-64 were employed as of 2015, largely in [agriculture](#). While the percentage of over 65s working reduced marginally from 12.5 per cent in 2000 to just over 10.0 per cent in 2015 (UNFPA, [2017](#)), 12.0 per cent of men aged 80 and over continued to work in 2017 (indicating a large disparity between employment rates of older men and women – as in the rest of the population) (UN, [2017](#)).
- **Employment and skills:** The legal and policy framework covering older workers’ access to employment and skills is limited. The [constitution](#) and other laws do not specifically protect against or regulate age discrimination, including with respect to employment (Shalakany, [2018](#)). The constitution provides general protection from discrimination, although age is not explicitly cited, and is instead covered by “any other reason”. Older workers may be disadvantaged by a policy focus on youth unemployment, in light of under-resourced employment services. High rates of illiteracy among older Egyptians may limit access to many jobs (Khadr, [2019](#)). There is little information available regarding access to training for older workers, as compared with other groups, which suggests that their training needs may be overlooked.
- **Finance and entrepreneurship:** There is limited information available on finance and entrepreneurship for older workers. Donor programmes targeting vulnerable groups tend not to focus on older workers – for example, an ILO programme running from 2017 to 2020 to promote financial literacy among vulnerable groups in Egypt targeted women and young people (ILO, [2020](#)). Other programmes – such as the government’s Nano Finance programme launched in 2020 – have focused on marginalised people broadly defined, without specific reference to older workers (Hammad, [2020](#)). However, according to ILO data, 29.6 per cent of Egyptians between the ages of 60 and 79 borrowed money from any source – including financial institutions – in 2015 (UNFPA, [2017](#)), suggesting that some financing is available to older people, even if not through programmes specifically targeting them.
- **Services:** Article 83 of the [constitution](#) stipulates that “the state shall take into account the needs of the elderly while planning public utilities” as well as to “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”. All over 60s (working and not) benefit from reductions in public transport fares, and government directives address mobility and accessibility within public premises. Nevertheless, there are constraints on access in practice: the congested metro in Cairo is reportedly off-putting to older passengers who fear for their safety (Tadamun, [n.d.](#)).
- **Covid-19:** The government expanded the Karama cash transfer programme in March 2020. There are reportedly concerns that Covid-19 is exacerbating the pre-existing ageism in Egyptian society in general.

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