






# YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN EGYPT

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## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- 
 Unemployment rate was at **19.7%** among youth aged 20-24, compared to an overall rate of **7.4%** for those aged 15-64.<sup>1</sup>
- 
 In 2021, highest unemployment rates for 15-64 years, were in **South Sinai (33.6%)** and **Port Said (25.2%)**, while the lowest unemployment rates were in **Qena (1.6%)** and **Dakahlia (2.5%)**.<sup>1</sup>
- 
 Holders of **secondary education or university and higher** were more likely to be unemployed<sup>1</sup>, showing a **mismatch between education and the labour market demands**.
- 
 Youth in the 20-24 age group represent only **11.69%** of total employed, compared to about **28%** for the 30-39 age group.<sup>1</sup>
- 
 The unemployment rate in 2021 for female youth aged 15-29 is consequently much higher than that of male youth, at **35.9%** and **10.8%**, respectively of the total unemployed population.<sup>1</sup>

## WHY FOCUS ON YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOUR FORCE?

Youth<sup>2</sup> have come to be recognised as essential agents of change in addressing present-day challenges and realising sustainable development goals. However, **youth aged 15-24 in Egypt are unemployed at a higher rate than adults over the age of 24**, in line with global unemployment trends.

In 2021, unemployment stood at **19.7% among youth aged 20-24**, compared to an overall rate of **7.4% for those aged 15-64**. **Youth in the 20-24 age group represent about 10% of the total employed compared to 28% for the 30-39 age group**.<sup>1</sup> This might suggest that one of the main factors affecting youth employment are the challenges of entering the labour market.



<sup>1</sup>Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) [Egypt] (2021). Annual Bulletin Labour Force Survey April 2022.

<sup>2</sup>The United Nations, for statistical purposes, defines 'youth', as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by Member States. (Source: <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>) (Consulted in August 2022).

## Unemployment<sup>3</sup> and underemployment<sup>4</sup> make youth vulnerable to poverty.

According to the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), the overall poverty rate in Egypt during the fiscal year 2019/2020 was 29.7%.<sup>5</sup> Poverty contributes to material deprivation whereby essential and commonplace goods and services become unaffordable, potentially leading to a deterioration of living standards and threatening the wellbeing of all those affected.

Furthermore, despite progress in educational attainment, where young Egyptians are two to three times more educated than the previous generations, they are more precarious and vulnerable to economic shocks such as the rise in energy prices, currency devaluation, and the erosion of public sector employment.<sup>6</sup>

## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE FACTORS IMPACTING YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOUR FORCE?

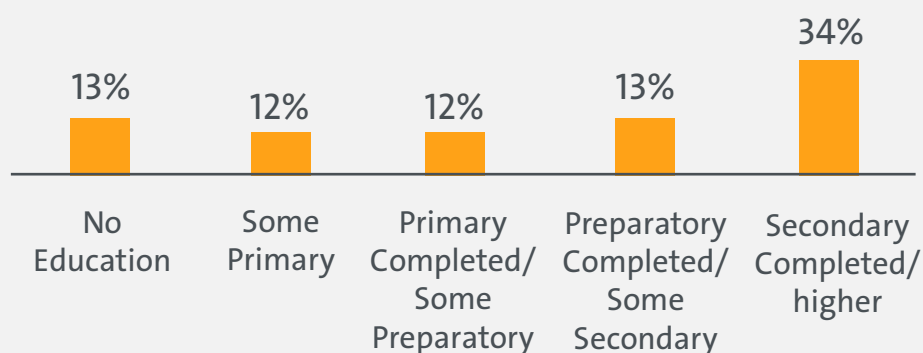
### Education

As shown in Figure 1, according to the **2018 Egypt Labour Market Panel Survey (ELMPS)**, youth unemployment is associated with education.

**34% of youth with secondary/higher education are unemployed, compared to only 13% among those who have never been to school.**

Youth who have completed secondary education or higher are about three times more likely to be unemployed. The increased levels of unemployment among educated youth could suggest that they are not satisfied with the available job opportunities; ones that do not match their aspirations or provide the returns they expected from educational investments.

**Figure 1: Youth Unemployment Rate by Education**



*Source: Special tabulation from ELMPS 2018*

Another reason for this could be the mismatch between the skills provided by the educational system and the skills that are demanded by the various sectors, **which leaves youth unequipped for the labour market.**<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup>An unemployed person is defined as someone who does not have a job but is actively seeking work. In order to qualify as unemployed for official and statistical measurement, the individual must be without employment, willing and able to work, of the officially designated 'working age' and actively searching for a position. (Source: <https://archive.unescwa.org/youth-unemployment>) (Consulted in August 2022).

<sup>4</sup>Labour that falls under the underemployment classification includes those workers that are highly skilled but working in low paying jobs, workers that are highly skilled but work in low skill jobs and part-time workers that would prefer to be full-time. This is different from unemployment in that the individual is working but is not working at their full capability. (Source: <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/u/underemployment.asp>) (Consulted in August 2022).

<sup>5</sup>Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) [Egypt] (2022). Poverty Indicator from Household Income, Expenditure, and Consumption Survey 2019/20. Cairo: CAPMAS.

<sup>6</sup>Danish Trade Union Development Agency (DTDA) (2020). Labour Market Profile Egypt 2020.2021. Copenhagen, Denmark: DTDA.

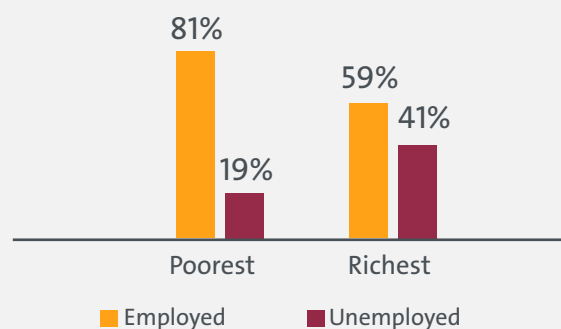
<sup>7</sup>Assaad, R. and Krafft, C. (2017). "Excluded generation: the growing challenges of labour market insertion for Egyptian youth", IZA, Institute of Labour Economics, Discussion Paper Series No. 10970.

## Economic status and social class

Employment among youth aged 15 to 24 is much higher for those in the lowest wealth quintiles and lowest in the highest wealth quintile, as illustrated in Figure 2. This could be due to the pressing need for youth from lower wealth quintiles to support their household financially, pushing them to accept low-paying jobs in the informal sector.

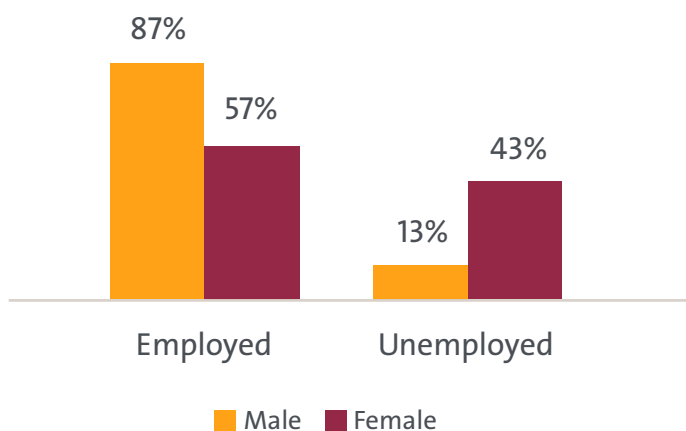
**Social class** also plays a crucial role in determining the success of the transition from school to work in the Egyptian labour market, given its role in limiting the opportunities available for youth and confining success to those with more family resources and privilege.

**Figure 2: Employment Status of Youth in Labour Force by Wealth Quintile**



Source: Special tabulation from ELMPS 2018

**Figure 3: Employment Status of Youth in Labour Force by Gender**



Source: Special tabulation from ELMPS 2018

## Gender

The gap between male and female youth participation in the labour market is high, as women face numerous hurdles that make it more challenging for them to join labour market. Less than one-fifth of the youth participating in the labour force are females (16%) compared to 84% in the case of male youth.

According to the Danish Trade Union Development Agency, 50% of the young women who are not in education, employed, or in training in Egypt are dissuaded from seeking employment due to societal norms that restrict women to domestic work and childcare or that add conditions (e.g., proximity to residence or limited working hours) that limit the quantity or quality of job opportunities available to women<sup>8</sup>.

Moreover, as shown in figure 3 the unemployment rate for female youth 15-24 years is much higher than that of male youth, at 43 % and 13%, respectively. A significant factor contributing to the high numbers of female youth unemployment is the decline in the probability of public sector employment; one of the preferred sectors for women as it provides ideal working conditions that accommodate their familial responsibilities.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Assaad, R., Krafft, C. and Rahman, W.K. (2019), "Introducing the Egypt labour market panel survey 2018", Economic Research Forum (ERF), Working Paper No. 1360, October 2019.

## WHAT ARE THE WORKING CONDITIONS FOR YOUTH IN EGYPT?

Low-paying jobs and informal employment are serious challenges facing working youth in Egypt. This is evident as less than half of the youth are employed in permanent jobs (45%). Thus, more than half of the youth remain vulnerable as they are either temporarily employed (22%), involved in seasonal work (6%), or casual work (25%).<sup>9</sup> Therefore, most youth work under insecure conditions as they are hired with oral contracts only and deprived of social security and protection.<sup>10</sup>

As for the working conditions, 41% of the youth aged 15 to 24 are working beyond limit set by the Labour Law (48 hours/week)<sup>9</sup>.

According to the youth aspiration phone-based survey implemented in 2021, around 83% of youth are satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their current employment.

Across employment sectors, freelancers are the most satisfied with their current employment (94.1%), followed by public sector workers (89.7%), the government sector (87.6%) and self-employed (87.3%).<sup>11</sup>

The expectations on the available work opportunities by the university graduates are lower than what the Egyptian labour market would provide. According to Youth Aspiration Survey 2021,<sup>11</sup> university post-graduates unemployment rate is the highest amongst education segments (66.2%), followed by the university graduates (19.3%). Consequently, there is a need to adjust the curriculum with labour market needs, introduce the graduates to the required market skills, and provide internships' opportunities through formal mechanisms between the universities and employers.

## CONCLUSION

### • Addressing the mismatch between education and employment

The high prevalence of unemployment among educated youth suggests a mismatch between the education received and labour market demands. It is paramount that this mismatch is addressed to provide better calibres among the youth. Involving employers in the mapping and identification of technical and soft skills needed in different economic sectors is essential to ensure that educational institutions are catering to the needs of the market.

### • Promoting and enhancing Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) for youth

In recent years, Egypt has launched several initiatives that focus on improving the quality of technical and vocational education in response to the rapidly changing market demands and on enhancing the productivity and efficiency of the labour force (e.g., Applied Technology Schools, Dual Education System). However, given the involvement of multiple stakeholders in such interventions, the governance of the technical and vocational education system still needs improvement.

- Raising awareness of the importance of TVE in contributing to economic and social development (**through media coverage and organizing visits to school**) would also be essential to promote TVE as an alternative path to productive and decent work.
- Providing teachers with **training on a regular basis** will help ensure their proficiency in their respective fields and their ability to deliver knowledge that is up-to-date and in line with market needs, thereby improving the employability of students.
- Additionally, **promoting online technical education** by utilizing the Ministry of Education and Technical Education's (MoETE) online platform, developed in response to COVID-19 challenges can lead to better inclusion (especially of young women and residents of rural and regional communities who cannot access TVE institutions).
- **Recognizing and supporting the traditional apprenticeship model**, which takes place entirely within the workplace and requires no classroom-based education. It is particularly suitable for those who have not progressed in formal education. Even though it is unregulated as there are no contracts, predetermined working hours, or social insurance, it is still one of the main mechanisms of vocational development in Egypt.

<sup>9</sup>Central Agency of Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) [Egypt] (2018). The Egypt Labour Market Survey (ELMPS). Cairo: CAPMAS.

<sup>10</sup>Barsoum, G., Ramadan, M., & Mostafa, M. (2014). Labor market transitions of young women and men in Egypt (Work4Youth Publication Series No. 1). Youth Employment Program Employment Policy Department. International Labor Organization.

<sup>11</sup>Baseera, UNICEF (2021), Youth Aspiration Survey 2021.

- **Providing youth with information about the labour market and career counselling to help guide them towards careers that are in strong demand**
- **Enhancing employment options and conditions for women**

Career counselling services within schools can help students avoid overcrowded professional sectors and guide them towards careers with more opportunities. Also, data platforms that offer information on the salaries and employability of different careers could provide the youth with a clear vision of the labour market conditions and help them choose careers that match their expectations. It can also reduce the information barriers that hinder job seekers, such as the geographic and financial constraints from job searching.

Incompatibility between work and the burden of domestic labour contributes to young women's preference for public sector employment, which is more accommodating of women's family roles, and a major factor in their unemployment. Adopting family-friendly policies in the private sector could help overcome the challenge of balancing work and family responsibilities which prevents women from employment.

This includes providing flexible working hours, work-from-home options, and improving the quality of childcare services at the workplace. Also, encouraging men to participate in domestic labour and promoting equal responsibilities in the household through advocating for expanding paternity leaves and working on transforming gender stereotypes through different approaches such as media campaigns, workshops, and community-based dialogues can help reduce the domestic labour burdens on women.

- **Improving the social protection of young workers through labour laws and enhancing occupational health standards**

The enforcement of labour laws, particularly those related to employment contracts, can help protect youth against undesirable shocks and job insecurity. Labour laws and sanctions are crucial to protect young workers who continue to work in low-paying and insecure jobs under precarious conditions.

Moreover, in light of COVID-19, we can see an urgent need to enhance occupational health and expand access to health insurance and paid leave for all workers without any discrimination based on gender.

## WHAT IS UNICEF DOING ABOUT IT?

UNICEF is working with multiple stakeholders to design and implement programs that cater to the needs of youth in Egypt. Putting youth at the forefront of designing and delivering youth and community development interventions and policies, we seek to address the aspirations of young people and to promote their participation in shaping the future of their communities.

### Shabab Balad (Generation Unlimited in Egypt)

'Shabab Balad', is the Global UN initiative 'Generation Unlimited' in Egypt that was launched by the United Nations as the world's first Public-Private- Youth Partnership (PPYP) aiming to skill and connect all of the world's **1.8 billion young people aged 10-24** to transition from the learning phase to the earning stage through providing required skilling and training, education entrepreneurship opportunities and engage in their society for **positive social impact by 2030**.

'Shabab Balad', anchored by UNICEF, was launched during the World Youth Forum held in Sharm El-Sheikh last January under the auspices of His Excellency President Abdel Fattah Sisi, President of Egypt. Shabab Balad equips young people in Egypt with required skills to prepare them to the labor market and be active agents in their communities. Shabab Balad coordinates all UN efforts on youth employment and their preparation to the marketplace.





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## Meshwary

The rollout of the Government's Egypt Vision 2030 has seen the increased political and institutional prioritization of the youth agenda. Since 2008 to date, Meshwary has represented a Government flagship programme designed to help young Egyptians and non-Egyptians acquire the skills they need to navigate the transition from learning to earning. The programme is implemented under the auspices of the Egyptian Cabinet and led by the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS), in partnership with UNICEF, civil society, development partners and private sector actors.

Operating mainly within youth centres of the MoYS, Meshwary offers young people the chance to develop employability, entrepreneurial and other soft skills of the kind required by the market, and to get practical guidance on career options.

Recently, Innovation Labs are being set where girls, migrants and refugees and young people with disabilities can work with trainers to develop their ideas and business plans. A prototype Innovation Lab has opened in Cairo and 8 more are to be established over the coming year.

Nearly 400,000 adolescents and youth 14 – 24 years old graduated from the Meshwary program since 2017. Furthermore, young people are increasingly becoming involved in delivering training modules to their peers. So far, around 1,000 youth ambassadors are working in 15 governorates.

## The National Girls Empowerment Initiative – Dawwie

Today Egypt is home for 14 million girls between the age of 10 and 24 years old. Egypt has successfully prioritized gender equality within its Sustainable Development Strategy (Egypt 2030), and the National Women Empowerment Strategy 2030 is paving the way for a more equitable society. While there are positive trends for women empowerment, girls in Egypt are less likely to achieve their full potential. For example, girls are 5 times more likely than boys to be unemployed or receive any kind of education or training.<sup>12</sup> Acknowledging the great untapped potential of girls in Egypt and its catalytic role to achieve Egypt's Vision 2030, UNICEF supported the Government of Egypt to launch 'Dawwie', the first National Girls' Empowerment Initiative in 2019 with intentional Gender Transformative Programming in mind. Dawwie is a multi-stakeholder's initiative to advocate for girls' empowerment through **enhanced access to quality services, skills development, and opportunities to participate and be heard**. Dawwie is designed as a journey of empowerment to build social acceptance -and support- for girls' and young women's leadership to inspire choice, agency, and participation. Using intentional gender transformative designed tools, Dawwie also works on strengthening essential transferable and digital skills including communication, negotiation, critical thinking, as well as the capability of adolescent girls and young women to participate in education and economic opportunities to transition into the labor market. Dawwie continues to gain momentum and in 2022, Dawwie was placed under the auspices of the First Lady of Egypt as a testament to political will in investing in the empowerment of girls for the future of Egypt.



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<sup>12</sup>NCCM (n.d.), Policy for action, GIRLS' EMPOWERMENT, UNICEF Egypt, Issue 3.

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