LEGAL RIGHTS PROTECTION BAROMETER
UPPER EGYPT
with focus on Assiut governorate
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INTRODUCTION

The Eparchial Development Office (EDO) in Assiut is implementing the "*EmpowerHerEgypt – Legal Protection and Awareness for Women Working in Agriculture in Rural Areas*," funded by the Slovenian Embassy in Cairo in collaboration with Microjustice. Given its mandate to "*ensure the realization of basic legal needs of people as the basis for being legally protected*", Microjustice (Microjustice4All), a Hague-based Dutch Foundation, was founded in the Netherlands in 1996 to protect the legal rights of marginalized people and disaster victims. To achieve this aim, Microjustice enables communities to exercise their fundamental legal rights and facilitates their access to legal aid through its Legal Rights Protection Program. Since 2018, Microjustice has developed the *Legal Rights Protection Barometer* of Civil Justice, which aims to map the justice gap from the perspective of ordinary people in society, and to identify how to set up a Digital Legal Aid Platform. So far, Barometer research has been undertaken in Serbia, Bolivia, Kenya, Egypt, Jordan, and Ukraine.

The *"EmpowerHerEgypt – Legal Protection and Awareness for Women Working in Agriculture in Rural Areas"* Project, funded by the Slovenian Embassy, aims to provide legal rights protection and awareness raising for women working in agriculture in rural areas by addressing the legal challenges they face; enhancing the capacities of lawyers; providing direct legal assistance; and increasing awareness through media and advocacy. Through using Microjustice's *Legal Rights Protection Barometer* method, the Project is conducting this study focusing on the situation of Legal Rights Protection in Upper Egypt, with particular focus on rural women in Assiut Governorate, and the challenges in the environment, pertaining to food security.

The Legal Rights Protection Barometer's aim is to map the justice gap to contribute to make progress on SDG 16: Access to Justice for All (SDG16.2) and effective and transparent Government institutions (SDG 16.3), resulting in inclusive societies (SDG 16.1), linked to the Empowerment of Women (SDG 5) in this project funded by the Slovenian Embassy.

The Barometer provides a tool to track and monitor progress on the elements of SDG 16, scanning the legal-administrative organization to see how effective it is in providing people with legal rights protection. In addition, the Barometer outlines the accessibility and affordability of legal assistance providers; it pinpoints the most vulnerable groups who lack the resources to be legally protected, given the accessibility of state system/institutions and of legal assistance services.

In Egypt, the *Legal Rights Protection Barometer research* was undertaken the first time in 2021-22. Based on consultations with lawyers, NGOs and state institutions, this qualitative study analyzed the legal situation for entire Egypt focusing on what the I) capacity of People is to have access to their legal rights. For this, the Barometer assessed their basic legal needs; II) State organization focusing on: a) the procedures, and b) enforcement; and III) accessibility of affordable legal aid. The Barometer method is based on the hypothesis that if people have the education and financial resources, and the procedures in their legal needs are easy and affordable, while they have access to quality legal aid, they will be legally protected.

Following the same method of the Barometer, this study is focused on the legal rights protection in Upper Egypt with particular focus on rural women in Assiut and the challenges in their physical environment in relation to food security. In its first section focusing on **"People"**, the study analyses the situation of the People and also of their natural environment. It provides a profile of the society's financial resources; economic activities and family situation, to identify the people who are at risk of legal exclusion. It described their challenges and legal issues, with focus on rural women in Upper Egypt, in relation to the environmental issues.

The second section focusing on the **"State Organization"**, addresses the challenges in legal procedures. It explains the legal procedures as per the Barometer's method and findings in the Egypt Report to confirm that the information is still valid and add new information based on new legislations that have been developed during the last two years. It also covers the issues and challenges for each of the procedures; legal documentation; and law enforcement. Whereas the general report for Egypt was focused on the procedures and practice in general all over Egypt, this study focuses on the real situation for rural women and their natural environment in Upper Egypt, particularly in Assiut. It questions whether the legal procedures are followed, and what customs and traditions prevail. As the focus is on rural areas, challenges with nature and its protection are very important to be identified and the enforcement of environmental law to protect the environment and address climate change.

The third section of the Barometer addressing **"Legal Aid"** covers the situation of legal aid and its organization in terms of accessibility and affordability to the People, with particular focus on women in rural Upper Egypt. On the basis of the results, the study identifies the justice gaps and action needed to support women in rural Upper Egypt.

The **Barometer study in Assiut assessed the current situation and attitudes toward women's issues in four districts of Assiut Governorate**, namely **Manfalout, Qusiyah, Abnoub, and Abu Tig.** A sample of **113 respondents (99** women and **14** men) were interviewed in **6** focus group discussions (FGDs) in the rural and urban communities, and **24** key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with a selected representation of expert lawyers; community leaders; and relevant official representatives from relevant ministries including the Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP), Ministry of Education (MoE), Ministry of Social Solidarity (MoSS); and national councils such as the National Council for Women, the National Council for Human Rights and the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA) office in Assiut to assess and understand their role in raising social awareness in marginalized and vulnerable communities and enforcing the law, including laws pertaining to the protection of the environment, solid waste management, and adaptation and mitigation efforts to combat climate change.

THE BAROMETER METHOD

The Legal Rights Protection Barometer research method is designed to define legally unprotected groups within a specific country or area and identify their legal inclusion issues in the area of Civil Justice, excluding criminal law. The core of the method involves developing indicators to analyze three interacting agents that determine whether people are legally protected:

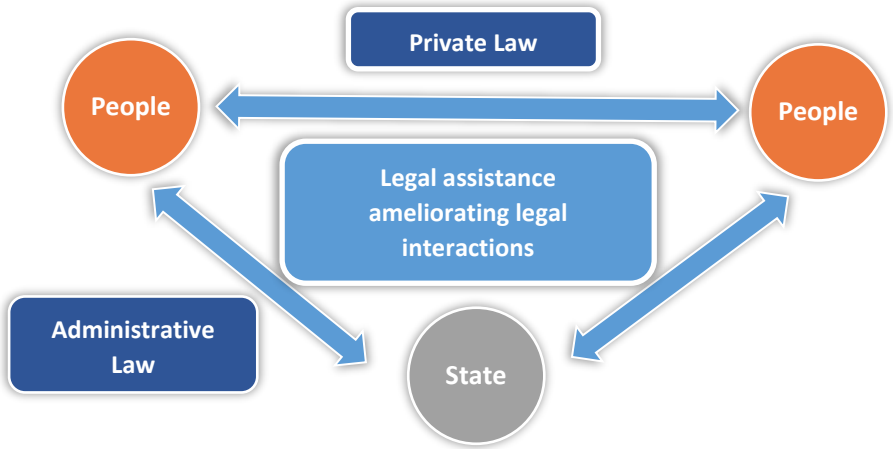
I. **People**: This indicator framework determines the ability of *'People'* to access and protect their rights. It assesses competence factors like education level and access to the internet, as well as economic and informality indicators, to identify and assess vulnerable groups. This analysis includes not only the poorest but also the large segment of the population—the "middle class"—who often lack the resources to afford quality legal protection and are consequently left legally unprotected.

II. **State Procedures** (Affordability and Accessibility of Procedures and Institutions): This section studies the way the *'State'* has organized procedures to obtain legal rights protection. It is divided into two main groups: the effectiveness of procedures (measured by cost, duration, number of steps) to secure basic legal needs, and the effective possibilities of enforcement

through the court system or alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms. The focus is mainly on whether these mechanisms are accessible, affordable, and fast from the perspective of the people seeking to enforce rights established on paper.

III. **Legal Assistance** (Legal Profession): This framework focuses on the accessibility, affordability, and quality of 'legal assistance'. It studies both the commercial legal market (including the organization of the legal profession, prices, and obstacles to the free market) and the efficiency and scope of the state-organized free legal aid system. The goal is to propose indicators, such as the liberalization of the lawyers' market, to measure 'equal access to justice for all'.

Through studying these three components, the Barometer method can figure out to what extent people are legally protected. The diagram below shows how these agents interrelate to ensure legal rights protection of all.



Legal Interactions in Civil Justice between 'People'/'People' and 'People'/'State', supported by 'Legal Assistance'

Integrating Environmental Analysis

Environmental and climate change risk analysis is integrated by recognizing Nature as an "excluded group" in need of legal protection. This inclusion is driven by the logic that the degradation of the natural environment and climate change exacerbates the vulnerability of excluded groups, and protecting nature and addressing environmental change through adaptation and mitigation mechanisms is key to the sustainability aspect of the SDGs. The Barometer mapping identifies specific natural environments and the impact of climate change to explore the level of vulnerability, applicable international and national legal frameworks, gaps in implementation, and legal needs—such as recognition of various statuses and papers related to legal personality and representation of nature—to achieve a "win-win situation" for both people and nature.

The Socio-Ecological Model

The current study of the status of rural women in Upper Egypt, with particular focus on Assiut Governorate, proposes the utilization of the socio-ecological model, as another conceptual framework to understand and analyze the relationship between the People, Institutions, the State, and the Environment, with emphasis on legal rights.

At the core of the socio-ecological model lies the **People**. Each person possesses inherent legal rights that empower him/her to advocate for both his/her interests and environmental protection. Understanding these rights is crucial; people must be educated about their entitlements, such as their civic rights, and the right to access information regarding environmental conditions and policies. This awareness fosters a sense of personal responsibility and agency, encouraging the people, particularly vulnerable groups, including women, to engage in sustainable practices and advocate for their rights and those of their communities. Empowered people can become catalysts for change, mobilizing others to address environmental challenges and influence institutional practices.

The **community** serves as a vital platform for collective action, where the people come together to address shared concerns regarding legal rights and environmental issues. Local organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a crucial role in this context by providing education, resources, and avenues for advocacy. Community education programs can raise awareness about legal rights related to civic status and environmental protection, helping people understand how to navigate legal frameworks and influence decision-making processes. Advocacy groups can amplify the voices of marginalized populations, ensuring that diverse perspectives are represented in discussions about environmental policies. This collaborative approach fosters solidarity and empowers communities to push for changes that uphold their legal rights, protect the environment and adapt to climate change.

At the **institutional** level, there are a range of entities, including legal frameworks, educational systems, and social services, all of which contribute to upholding legal rights and promoting environmental sustainability. Legal institutions are responsible for creating and enforcing laws that protect the rights of individuals and the environment. Educational institutions can offer programs that teach students about their rights and the importance of environmental stewardship. Additionally, healthcare and social services can address the health impacts of environmental degradation, linking individual well-being to environmental quality. Institutions must work collaboratively with communities to ensure that policies reflect the needs and rights of the people they serve, fostering a culture of accountability and sustainability.

The **State**, in this context, the Government of Egypt (GoE) plays a pivotal role in shaping the legal landscape that governs both individual rights and environmental protection. State policies and legislation establish the parameters within which individuals and institutions operate. It is essential for the state to enact laws that not only safeguard individual rights but also recognize the environment's legal rights. This includes regulations that prevent pollution, protect natural resources, and ensure public participation in environmental decision-making. The effectiveness of these laws relies on robust enforcement mechanisms that hold violators accountable.

The **Environmental** layer represents the ecosystems and natural resources that sustain life. It is increasingly recognized that the environment itself has legal rights, a concept often referred to as the rights of nature. This perspective emphasizes that ecosystems should be protected not just for their

utility to humans, but for their intrinsic value. Legal frameworks that recognize the rights of nature can empower communities to defend their ecosystems against exploitation and degradation. By integrating environmental rights into the legal system, more equitable relationship between people and nature, ensuring that both people's rights and ecological health are prioritized in access to their legal rights**.**

Please see Annex 1: Environmental Context.

THE PEOPLE

THE CAPACITY OF THE POPULATION TO ACCESS AND PROTECT THEIR RIGHTS

Upper Egypt – *Al-Sa'id* geographically stretches from south of Cairo to Aswan. This part of Egypt is culturally distinct from metropolitan Cairo, Lower Egypt and the Nile Delta. Upper Egypt is identified as the poorest region in the country, often referred to as a "developmental gap". While national poverty rates are around **30%**, rural Upper Egypt sees rates significantly higher, often exceeding **50%** in governorates like **Assiut, Sohag, and Qena**. The majority of the population lives in rural areas where access to basic services is rather limited compared to urban centres. Upper Egypt has the highest **fertility** rates in Egypt. Large family sizes can dilute household income and strain local resources.

Access to healthcare services is quite limited. The region suffers from a shortage of specialized medical centres. Local people often to travel to Assiut City, Cairo or Alexandria for major surgeries. New initiatives like the Universal Health Insurance System that rolled-out in Luxor and Aswan is beginning to improve access to medical services.

Educational indicators in Upper Egypt generally lag behind the national average, though gaps are closing due to recent interventions by the state, such as Hayah Karima, or Decent Life Initiative. Illiteracy remains a major hurdle, particularly among **rural elderly women and men** in small remote hamlets. The illiteracy rate in some Upper Egyptian governorates is significantly higher than the national average (which is around 25-27% generally, but lower in cities). While school enrollment has improved (most children now start school), **dropout rates** remain a concern, often driven by economic pressure to work. Schools often suffer from high density and a shortage of qualified teachers willing to work in remote rural areas.

The labour market in Upper Egypt is characterized by heavy reliance on traditional sectors and lack of industrial diversity. Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy absorbing a massive portion of the workforce. However, it is often subsistence-level farming with low productivity and low wages. Women's participation in the formal labour force is notoriously low. Cultural norms and lack of suitable local employment opportunities often keep women out of the formal workforce. In the informal sector, particularly in part-time seasonal jobs like crop harvesting, rural women are more likely to hold low-wage jobs in comparison to men who occupy more rewarding and higher skilled positions[1] .

Upper Egypt is naturally hotter and drier than the Delta. Rising global temperatures are leading to more frequent and intense **heatwaves**, which pose health risks to labourers and reduce labour productivity. The environmental context in Upper Egypt is, therefore, becoming increasingly fragile due to climate change. Moreover, the area is prone to a **water scarcity** risk. The region is entirely dependent on the River Nile. Any fluctuation in water availability (due to upstream dams or evaporation) directly threatens livelihoods, particularly rural women who work in subsistence agriculture.

[1] 8ITC ILO and UN Women (2016), *Thematic brief on Gender, Agriculture and Rural Development*, Resource package on Gender Mainstreaming in EU Cooperation

PROFILING ASSIUT GOVERNORATE

The total area of Assiut Governorate is 25,926 km², with 9.5% of the total area being arable. Assiut Governorate has 11 districts or administrative centres, namely Manfalout, Dayrout, Qusiyah, Al-Ghanayem, Abnoub, Sahel Selim, El-Fath, Badari, Abu Tig, and Sedfa.

Assiut District includes Assiut City and seven local units Containing 29 villages. Assiut Governorate has a total of **56** main rural local units**, 244** affiliated villages**, 1,400** hamlets**,** and a new urban community (New Assiut City)**.** Assiut city is divided into two sections (East of Assiut, and west of Assiut). The first section (East District): is divided into two northern and eastern separated by Al-Ibrahimiya Irrigation Canal, in the northern region Al-Walidiya and Al Hoqoqyeen. The Eastern region is confined between the Nile River east railway line (Cairo / Aswan) to the west. The Western region falls west of the railway line (Cairo/Aswan) south of the Al-Ibrahimiya Canal.

Socio-Economic Profile

The total population of Assiut is **5,249,755**, encompassing both rural and urban areas. The gender structure is quite balanced with approximately **48.6%** of the population being **women**. The **age-distribution** of the population shows that almost **36.7%** are less than **15** years old; while those between **15 and 45** years old represent about 59.6%. The percentage of urban population in Assiut is **26.7 %**.

Assiut is among other Upper Egyptian governorates known for its high poverty levels and food insecurity. Regarding access to basic services, poor and vulnerable communities and households, particularly in rural areas, often lack access to utility services. With regards to access to **electricity,** according to *Egypt Description by Information for Assiut Governorate*, **16.36%** of the energy consumed is used for industrial purposes and the rest for lighting and other household uses.

Access to clean potable water is about 98% for all households all over the governorate. Assiut ranks 21st among the governorates in the per capita share of the amount of drinking water consumed at a value of 43.27 m3/capita, and the percentage of total water loss reached 31.0%. Assiut has 6 sewage treatment plants with a design capacity of 210.00 thousand m3 per day, and its actual capacity 134.00 thousand m3 / day. The number of households connected to sanitation system is 1001.94 thousand households which is 100% of the households in Assiut (*Egypt Description by Information, 2021*).

Education

Education is one of the most important criteria for measuring the progress of people and their ability to advance and improve their standard of living. Assiut Governorate is considered one of the

governorates that enjoys proper education level in the different educational. In Assiut there are 31 research institutions, employing 5,708 researchers.

There is a total of **2,794** general pre-university education schools in Assiut, benefiting approximately **1,013,680** students. Classroom capacity in Assiut is 49.29 students/class, which is more than the classroom capacity of Egypt (47.16 students/class), and 91.41% of the total schools. There are 87 technical schools in Assiut, concentrated in industrial schools 39.08%, commercial schools 40.23%, and agricultural schools 17.24%, benefiting approximately 96,000 students. The average classroom capacity in technical education is 43.09 students/classroom. There are 30 Special Education schools in Assiut, benefiting 2,114 students. The average classroom capacity in Special education is 9.76 Student/ Classroom, with a total of 199 classrooms. Assiut has one large national university, with 34 colleges benefiting approximately 116,000 students. Three institutes in Assiut, two of them governmental, and one is private, benefiting more than 4,500 students, and the number of graduates reached 970 graduates.

Type of Education	Number of Schools (Urban)	Number of Schools (Rural)	Total Number of Schools	Number of Students (Males)	Number of Students (Females)	Total Number of Students	Number of Classes
Primary Education	701	236	937	349,351	329,912	679,263	12,079
Community Schooling	654	44	898	7,998	14,294	22,292	899
Preparatory/Intermediate Education	392	163	555	151,111	139,255	290,366	5,818
General Secondary	87	83	170	34,107	44,972	79,079	1,903
Industrial	6	29	35	26,151	7,968	34,119	724
General Commercial	20	23	43	13,948	26,867	40,815	916
Hotel/Tourism Commercial	0	3	3	314	56	397	18
Agricultural	8	7	15	16,387	3,967	20,354	333
Special Education	10	21	31	1,430	684	2,114	199

Pre-University Education Statistics in Assiut Governorate (2024 Annual Bulletin)

Challenges for Girls

Illiteracy rate (10 years and over) in Assiut is around **33%** which is more than the illiteracy rate in Egypt reaching approximately **24%**. Among some rural communities, some families prioritize boys' education over girls', believing education is not a priority for girls, particularly when schools are remote and inaccessible from where they live. Female illiteracy among those aged 10+ reached **19.9% in 2021**.

Dropout rates are higher among girls in preparatory education compared to boys. At the primary stage dropout numbers reached **3,182** (Boys: 2,147 – Girls: 1,035); while in the Preparatory stage dropout numbers reached **4,945** (Boys: 2,270 – Girls: 2,675). Distance to schools and early marriage (before 18) also hinder girls' access to education, which correlates with higher rates of divorce among girls under 18 in rural areas compared to urban areas.

From the above data and discussions during the fieldwork, the study team argues that **customs and traditions still influence girls' school attendance and type of education**. Community education is more prevalent in rural areas, enabling girls to access some educational opportunities. Girls, however, have limited access to industrial and technical education.

Internet Access and Cost

According to CAPMAS statistics, mobile internet users (June 2022) reached 68.5 million**, up 14.9% from 2021.** USB modem users: 2 million**, down 34.5%.** ADSL subscribers: 10.5 million**, up 10.7% from 2021;** and Mobile lines: 98.3 million**, down 0.3%**

Most government services are now provided **online or via electronic payment** (school fees, utility bills, public services). Recently, **VAT of 14%** was imposed on mobile packages, increasing family expenses. Digital services may not be fully accessible in all areas, forcing some women to pay cash with extra fees due to poor internet connectivity or lack of digital literacy.

Challenges for Women Regarding Digital Access

There is a digital gender gap that persists in Upper Egypt. Rural women in Upper Egypt, particularly in governorates like Assiut face a "triple barrier" to connectivity: economic constraints, lower digital literacy, and cultural norms that restrict independent device ownership. Many women rely on a "household phone" (usually belonging to the husband or eldest son). This limits their privacy and the amount of time they can spend online for educational or economic purposes. In addition, there is a notable gap in personal smartphone ownership. Men are often prioritized for device purchases as they are seen as the primary breadwinners or those with a "need" to navigate the outside world. Inequality in access increases marginalization, forcing some women to pay cash penalties due to lack of cards or poor network service.

Health

Health services spread nationwide, which vary between hospitals of the Ministry of Health, Rural and specialized private hospitals. The private sector also plays a significant role in this field. A large segment of the population in Assiut is covered by National Health Insurance Scheme. The New Medial Liability Law ratified in 2025 provides protection against medical malpractices. There are approximately 3,500 physicians working in Assiut, and the number of citizens per physician reached 1.34 thousand citizen/ physician, which is higher than the national average of (1.33). There are approximately 1,000 nursing staff members, and the number of citizens per nurse reached 0.47 thousand person/Nurse, which is better than the national average of (0.68).

Assiut hospitals have around 7,468 beds, 78.33% of which belong to government hospitals and the rest belong to the private sector, 629.07 population per bed in Assiut, which means more hospital beds are present in the governorate in comparison to the national average of (775.54). There are 2,631 public pharmacies in Assiut, and has 2600.12 thousand health insurance beneficiaries, representing 56.05% of the governorate's population. 248 family planning units, 15 mobile family planning clinics, and 156 pediatric intensive care units for children.

Interviews with representatives from the Directorate of Health indicated that Hepatitis A is prevalent in Assiut, particularly among children. FGDs with women noted that infectious diseases spread among children. The following table shows the most prevalent infectious diseases disaggregated by gender, according to CAPMAS statistics, 2021.

Disease	Typhoid		Hepatitis A		Hepatitis B		Hepatitis C		Viral Hepatitis	
Gender	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
No. of cases	3	4	18	9	243	27	356	44	1	0

Reported cases of infectious diseases (males-females) at the governorate level – CAPMAS 2021

Health Challenges

- The key health challenge for rural women in Assiut is related to low community awareness of diseases and healthy lifestyle.
- Weak administrative oversight and follow-up by local authorities.
- To access healthcare services, for adults an ID is needed. For children, mothers need to present the child's birth certificate, which is challenging in case the child is not registered.

The Economy and Working Conditions

Economic Activities

Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy in Assiut. Agriculture is concentrated around the Nile Valley, and in the surrounding habitats that are composed of mainly reclaimed agriculture lands and desert lands in the Eastern Desert. The land in Assiut is fertile characterized by good yield. The governorate is famous for its production of cotton, wheat, maize, and fava beans. Fruit production includes citrus fruits, pomegranates, mangoes, grapes, and bananas. There are 247 agricultural associations in the governorate, 192 demonstration fields, 1,046 farms (38.81% of which are for livestock, compared to 61.19% for poultry), 20 feed factories, in addition to 40 manual slaughterhouses for livestock. The governorate produces 14.96 thousand tons of red meat, 0.24 thousand tons of white meat, and 6.06 thousand tons of fish (Egypt Description by Information, 2021).

Agriculture suffers from immense problems resulting from the traditional nature of the sector in general and the disinterest in modernizing the sector nationally, which has led to reduced productivity. The sector also faces many constraints related to the competitiveness of agricultural products regionally and internationally, inefficient agricultural systems, inefficient water use, and substantial waste in food and value chains. Nearly 15% of crops are lost in harvesting, storage, and transport. All this means the sector is shedding labour (Ministry of Agriculture, 2019). Despite the generally traditional nature of the agricultural sector in Egypt, the challenge is bigger in rural Upper Egypt due to the lack of diversity in production and the region's inability to attract investments in other sectors. Small land holdings are the dominant form of possession in rural Egypt, with three-quarters of holdings covering less than 1 feddan. Average holdings are even smaller in rural Upper Egypt than in rural Lower Egypt. This affects women, in particular, as landownership is very minimal for women in Upper Egypt. Moreover, the rural south is tied to sugarcane agriculture, which is of low value and difficult to abandon for technical reasons (ESCWA, 2020)[2].

Regarding industrial activities, Assiut has 860 industrial facilities registered with an investment cost of EGP 15.31 billion, employing 20 thousand workers. There are also 8 industrial zones in the governorate, which contribute to large industries such as: fertilizers, medicines, cement and petroleum, and small industries, the most important of which are readymade garments, kilims, carpets, and wood inlaid with shells.

The industrial sector in readymade garments, carpets and other materials, includes a significant proportion of small workshops and home-based enterprises operating outside the formal economy. Informality results from low profit margins, and the prevalence of short-term contracts encourage

[2] https://aps.aucegypt.edu/en/articles/53/development-in-rural-upper-egypt-running-in-a-vicious-circle, accessed 18th December 2025.

businesses to remain informal. The sector's labour-intensive nature and reliance on seasonal and part-time workers further exacerbate informality. The sector is heavily impacted by global supply chain disruptions and increasing input costs. However, the demand for exports necessitates compliance with international standards, which could drive formalization efforts.

Informality in the food industry, where many Upper Egyptian women work, is widespread. These micro or small production units of food industries such as dairy products or packed vegetables, often operate with minimal regulation and oversight. The food industry is dominated by small-scale producers who prefer to remain informal due to the perceived complexity and cost of formalization. Additionally, the sector is characterized by high levels of underutilization of capacity. The rising cost of raw materials and the need for compliance with food safety standards are significant challenges. However, formalization could provide better access to markets, especially for businesses aiming to export their products. Informal business intentionally producing counterfeit products, on the other hand, represent a food safety problem that needs to be addressed differently[3].

Employment

The total labour force (above 15 years) in Assiut Governorate is estimated to be 94,830 Persons. The unemployment ratio is estimated at **6.4%** (the percentage of people in the labour force who are unemployed), which is lower than the average national unemployment rate of (7.9%). Women's unemployment rate is estimated at 25%, which is remarkably high compared to the national unemployment rate of (21.7%). Assiut ranks 13th among the highest governorates in terms of the women's unemployment rate (Egypt Description by Information, 2021).

Area	Gender	Housewife	Student	Retired	Others	% Total Out of Labour Force
Upper Egypt Urban	Male	0.00	16.38	5.27	4.61	26.27
	Female	53.43	16.94	3.59	4.69	78.66
Total		**26.02**	**16.66**	**4.46**	**4.65**	**51.78**
Upper Egypt Rural	Male	0.00	15.98	3.44	4.94	24.36
	Female	61.93	16.06	2.79	3.00	83.78
Total		**30.25**	**16.02**	**3.12**	**3.99**	**53.39**

CAPMAS, Labour Force Statistics, June 2025

Challenges for Women

Informality in the agriculture sector is nearly universal, with more than 97% of workers employed informally. These are mainly seasonal and daily-work labourers, the majority of whom are women. The sector is characterized by small-scale, subsistence farming where formalization is rare. The seasonal nature of agricultural work, low skill requirements, and the absence of regulatory enforcement contribute to the high levels of informality. Many workers prefer informal employment due to the flexibility it offers, despite the lack of social protection. The sector faces significant challenges, including limited access to modern technology and finance, which hampers productivity and the potential for formalization[4].

The Field study results show **discrimination and unequal opportunities** for women, especially in the **private sector, agriculture, and seasonal labour**, reflected in wage gaps of **EGP 800–2,000 per month**.

[3] https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/Informality%20EN.pdf, accessed 18th December 2025.
[4] https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/Informality%20EN.pdf, accessed 18th December 2025.

Some private companies refuse to hire girls who are married or engaged due to costs associated with leave, maternity, and inability to work late hours.

A higher percentage of women are devoted to household work compared to men, reflecting traditional gender roles. Furthermore, the Focus Group Discussions FGDs revealed that **household responsibilities and childcare** limit women's ability to access jobs matching their skills and capabilities. This also contributes to some forms of gendered violence, including intra-female pressure in household dynamics.

Rural women, therefore, face a triple burden of household chores responsibility; lack of childcare during work in the fields; and lack of social and health insurance in their seasonal work in farms. Furthermore, the impact of climate change disproportionately affects rural women who work in manual harvest jobs. Without access to health insurance, heatstroke or chronic fatigue leads to a total loss of income.

THE STATE – AFFORDABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

PROCEDURES AND INSTITUTIONS

Identity-Related Documentation

All identity-related documents are issued by the Civil Registry (Ministry of the Interior), which has its offices in police stations. These documents include: birth certificates, national identity cards (IDs), death certificates, marriage certificates, divorce certificates, and the Family Paper. The relevant laws in regard to these documents are: Personal Status Law, Child Law, and the implementation regulations of these laws.

The following findings, analysis and recommendations is based on the fieldwork conducted in Assiut governorate with women in FGDs and representatives of relevant local authorities.

BIRTH CERTIFICATE

Problematics:

Article 20 of the Civil Status Law No. 143 of 1993 specifies several persons responsible for reporting a birth (the child's father, the child's mother, hospital managers), practical application restricts registration procedures solely to the father. Consequently, the father's refusal to register his child leads to the child being deprived of a birth certificate and the associated health, educational, and legal rights. This may result in the newborn being registered with names that do not reflect reality or do not correspond with the mother's choice, thereby infringing upon the child's right to identity and legal protection.

Procedures:

To obtain a birth certificate for a newborn for the first time, the father, the child's grandfather, or the father's brother must proceed to the Health Office located within the scope of their residence. They must provide supporting documents, which are: the birth notification issued by the hospital; National ID cards for both parents; and the marriage certificate.

The law mandates recording the birth event within 15 days of its occurrence. If this period is exceeded, the event is considered a "late reporting," and a fine is imposed on the guardian (reaching up to EGP 200 after 30 days). Fines and procedures become more complex as the duration increases. If the delay exceeds one full year, a lawsuit may be required to prove birth and lineage. In cases of extreme delay, the guardian must go directly to the Civil Registry, submit any available documents proving the date and place of birth, and pay the prescribed fines.

Fieldwork Findings:

The findings from the Focus Group Discussions (FGD) reveal significant difficulties in obtaining birth certificates, particularly among married girls under the age of 18. As their marriages are informal, and not registered by the *Mazoun* until the mother turns 18, this hinders the timely registration of the newborn. Consequently, the child is deprived of health rights, such as vaccinations. Registration may be delayed for periods of up to two years until the marriage contract is documented.

One informant in the Abnoub women's FGD narrated the case of a girl who was divorced before the marriage was documented, which caused extreme difficulty in registering the newborn. In such cases a practical solution that is used is that the father of the underage woman registers the child as his, thus as a sibling of the mother. This to ensure the issuance of a birth certificate, enabling the child to access basic educational and health rights.

Vulnerable Groups:

- Women who cannot register their children
- Children of an underage mother or where there is no man to register the child
- Children born outside health facilities.
- Newborns of refugee families (who lack residency papers or refugee status cards).
- Children whose parents' marriage is not documented.

Source of Discrimination:

- **Religion**: Religion is recorded on the birth certificate.
- **Gender:** Women are not permitted to register the child although the law allows them to do so

Required Legal Aid:

- In the event the father fails to register the child, the mother needs to file a "Proof of Birth" lawsuit.
- Cases where the mother is divorced prior to marriage documentation.
- Late registrations
- Cases where the parents are refugees and do not hold official residency permits.

Practical Solutions:

- **The practical solution currently used and active:** The mother's father registers the child under his own name and that of his wife as the parents. In this way, the child officially becomes the mother's brother or sister.
- The child may register themselves later through late registration procedures.

Recommendations for Resolving Legal Issues:

- Automatically register children in hospitals, even if marriage documents are incomplete.
- Simplify registration procedures (documents): The notification and the mother’s ID should suffice, with the remaining paperwork to be completed later.
- Amend the interpretation of Article 20 of Law No. 143 of 1993 (Civil Status) to recognize the mother as an authorized reporter.
- Establish a legal pathway for birth registration in cases of undocumented marriage (marriage under 18, divorce before documentation, or the father's refusal to document the marriage).
- Establish legal aid units within Social Solidarity Directorates and social units to provide legal counseling.
- Impose penalties on fathers unwilling to register the child (especially in cases of early marriage).
- Activate the Case Management system in social administrations to track cases of children who have not received birth certificates until they are issued.

RECOGNITION OF CHILDREN

Problematics:

Recognition of children or (establishing paternity) is a crucial procedure but frequently does not occur due to procedural difficulties. Women face significant problems in cases where the father refuses to register the child, whether he is married to the mother or not, as men who have children out of wedlock tend to refuse registration.

Many mothers and children in Egypt struggle to establish paternity and obtain official documents if the father refuses to recognize the child or in the absence of an official marriage certificate. In such cases, the woman needs to prove the existence of the marriage by providing two witnesses to testify to the union.

Although Article 4 of the Egyptian Child Law No. 126 of 2008 states: *"The child has the right to be attributed to his legal parents and to enjoy their care. He has the right to prove his legal lineage to them using all means of proof, including legitimate scientific methods,"* and Egyptian law provides several methods to establish paternity (such as DNA analysis), the general rule is that a child is not recognized without legally registered marriage.

The legal status of DNA testing remains unclear, and court practice is inconsistent in this regard. The issue is compounded by the fact that the defendant is not legally compelled to undergo DNA testing. Furthermore, private analysis cannot be used in judicial proceedings without court ratification; the analysis is only considered legal if conducted in an accredited laboratory under official supervision. Since men are not obligated to take the test and the process is costly, this presents a significant barrier.

Vulnerable Groups:

- Children born from undocumented marriages.
- Women, particularly rural women and girls (specifically cases of child marriage under the age of 18).

Source of Discrimination:

- Gender.

Required Legal Aid:

- **Direct Legal Support:** Providing support to the mother to handle document preparation and lawsuits. This can be costly due to the price of DNA testing and potentially high attorney fees caused by the complexity of the procedures.
- **Consultancy Services to Avoid "Legal Exploitation":** For example, some families of girls may face pressure and demands for specific sums of money to be paid to the husband in exchange for recognizing the child and documenting the marriage, especially in cases where divorce occurs before official documentation.

Practical Solutions:

- **Leveraging Evidence**: If the father refuses to register the child, one solution is to threaten him with the potential initiation of paternity suits. The mother must collect evidence—such as the customary (*Urfi*) marriage document, witnesses who saw them together as a couple, conversations between the spouses, and all sources of proof of intimacy—and present this evidence to the father.
- **Reporting Mechanisms:** Activating child protection reporting mechanisms and tightening penalties for marriage under 18, especially in rural areas.

- Institutional Support: Approaching the National Council for Women (NCW) to request assistance with legal procedures.

Recommendations for Resolving Legal Issues:

- **Immediate Registration**: Establishing a mechanism for immediate child registration to grant the child a temporary birth certificate until disputes are settled.
- **Mandatory DNA:** Mandating DNA testing as a compulsory measure in cases of denial and reducing its cost.
- **Accountability:** Imposing legal accountability and fines on fathers who deliberately fail to register the child (for harming the child's best interests).
- **Legal Aid Units**: Establishing legal aid units within the Civil Registry and Family Courts to provide free support to marginalized cases.
- **Community Awareness**: Raising awareness regarding the role of the "Family House" (*Bayt Al-Aila*) and the "Reunion Unit" at Al-Azhar Al-Sharif and the services they provide.

ID CARDS/CITIZENSHIP

Problematics:

Obtaining an identification card ID card involves filling out a form and submitting documents related to the birth certificate, proof of residence, or proof of profession. Physical presence is mandatory, and fees must be paid at the Civil Registry. Despite the existence of a digital system, many community members face difficulties due to their inability to navigate it. Some cases incur fines for delays in issuance, renewal, or updating data.

Specific Issues:

- **"Unrecognized" Religious Denominations:** Religious groups not recognized by the Egyptian government (in practice: the Bahá'í community) have a dash (-) placed on their ID cards instead of a religion. No one holding an ID in this format is permitted to renew it, nor do they have the right to issue any other legal administrative document unless they convert to Islam. In reality, this affects a relatively small number of people. This situation does not exist in Assiut and has not been mentioned in any of the interviews or FGDs.
- **Digital Machines:** Recently, document issuance machines have been installed in some locations. The difficulty lies in their unavailability in many governorates (with the exception of the capital), as well as the general inability of the public to use digital machines.

Legal Framework:

Law No. 143 of 1994 on Civil Status, as per the latest amendment on November 3, 2022, states in **Article 48**: *"Every citizen of the Arab Republic of Egypt who reaches the age of fifteen must apply for a personal identification card from the Civil Registry section in whose jurisdiction they reside, within six months of reaching this age."* **Article 49** of the same law indicates that the Executive Regulations determine the form of the card, the data verified therein, and the documents and procedures for its issuance.

Practical Challenges (Field Findings):

Some women in the FGDs explained that they face difficulties in obtaining ID cards. They noted that ID forms are sometimes unavailable at the village Civil Registry, forcing them to travel to the main centre in Assiut City. In cases of delay—whether for first-time issuance, renewal, or data modification—a

financial fine is imposed. The FGDs indicated facing other difficulties related to the necessity of a **guarantor** (to verify profession) and **digital payment**, which presents a hurdle for some. This is specially a challenge for rural women who are not formally employed and do not have an employer, or anyone, to serve as a guarantor.

Furthermore, girls married under the legal age through informal customary marriage that is not registered, face an inability to update or change their data because the marriage is not officially documented, creating a significant obstacle for women.

Vulnerable Groups:

- Persons who cannot issue ID cards because they lack birth certificates (see "Birth Certificates" section above).
- Religious denominations not recognized by the state (Not applicable in Assiut).
- Persons without an address: The homeless and those living in extreme poverty.
- The elderly, especially those unable to physically attend to complete paperwork.
- Illiterate persons: Difficulty filling out forms or dealing with the internet.
- Workers in the informal sector: They require a guarantor.
- Women who need to update their data, particularly rural women in remote villages.

Source of Discrimination:

- **Religion:** A person's religion is recorded on their ID card. The Egyptian government only recognizes what it refers to as the three (Heavenly) or "recognized" religions: Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Egyptian citizens do not have the option to request a religious identity different from these, nor to identify as having no religion.
- **Conversion:** The government generally prevents Egyptians from changing their religious identity from Islam to Christianity (or another religion), though it recognizes religious pluralism within the three faiths.

Required Legal Aid:

People rarely need legal aid to issue an ID card; the only exception is the procedures required to correct recorded personal data.

The National Council for Women (NCW) exerts efforts in this regard by providing forms and organizing convoys to villages for ID issuance. However, the FGDs indicated that this issue is sometimes marred by inequity. Since the Council employs rural women community leaders (*Ra'edat*), cards are sometimes processed for their acquaintances and relatives; consequently, the service may not reach those most deserving effectively.

Recommendations for Resolving Legal Issues:

- Increase the number of registration offices in rural areas.
- Dispatch officials to villages to assist people with registration.
- Deploy mobile Civil Registry units to villages and hamlets so citizens do not have to travel to the main centre.

DEATH CERTIFICATE

Problematics:

Registering a death requires several steps and documents, such as a National ID card or birth certificate.

- **Initial Reporting:** In Egypt, the death is first reported to the Health Office to obtain a burial permit and a preliminary free death certificate. Burial cannot take place without an official permit.
- **Issuance:** The Health Office issues the certificate within a period of 21 days. Subsequently, an automated (computerized) certificate can be obtained electronically via the Ministry of Interior portal ("Digital Egypt" - Civil Status Sector) or manually from the Civil Registry.
- **Requirements:** The applicant must be a first-degree relative. They must present the National ID of the deceased, the ID of the reporter, documents proving the kinship, and pay the prescribed fees.
- **Purpose:** The digital death certificate allows the family to finalize legal procedures related to the household (inheritance, pensions, etc.).

Challenges and Issues:

- **Bribery and Cause of Death:** In some areas, bribery is used to alter the recorded cause of death to cover up crimes, as families often prefer to deny cases of suicide or homicide.
- **Pressure on Medical Staff**: Doctors frequently face pressure from the deceased's family to change the true cause of death. This is exacerbated if the necessary hospital is far from the location where the death is being registered.
- **Late Registration:** If a death certificate is needed after the legal period has expired, the family faces legal accountability and costs due to fines. First-degree relatives face significant problems if they fail to obtain the certificate. Furthermore, in cases of delayed issuance, the State often assumes that criminal activity was behind the death.
- **Correction of Errors**: Procedures for correcting errors (whether in the name or date) are complex. There is a need for court intervention to collect evidence and link personal data from the death certificate with the civil documents of family members to initiate correction procedures.

Vulnerable Groups:

- The destitute and the homeless.
- Religious denominations not recognized by the State.
- Migrants and asylum seekers.

Source of Discrimination:

- Religion.
- Social status.

Required Legal Aid:

The death certificate is a fundamental legal document that entails numerous legal, financial, and administrative consequences, such as inheritance, pension disbursement, and the termination of the deceased's legal obligations.

- **Support for Marginalized Groups:** obtaining the certificate in some cases requires providing legal support to families, especially marginalized groups, to ensure procedures are completed correctly and without rights violations.
- **Correction Support:** Individuals may need legal assistance to correct errors in the death certificate due to the complexity of the procedures (court involvement).

FAMILY-RELATED DOCUMENTATION

Introduction

Before getting into the specific family-law related procedures related to marriage, divorce, the custody, child support, alimentation to the mother/wife etc, we will explain some concepts that there typical to Egypt, and similar in some other moslim countries.

as an introduction we will explain:

- the family law according to ones religion: sharia for the muslims
- the role of the maz'un to implement the muslim family law – sharia
- the role of the family court in all those procedures

Personal Status Law:

- The source of family law is the Personal Status Law, which is based on *shari'a* or Islamic law. When there is a gap in the law, *shari'a* rules in line with the *Hanafi madhhab* school of Islamic jurisprudence are applicable. For Christians, the Personal Status Law and the Christian by-laws are applicable. This Barometer report refers to the various legal concepts, rules, and requirements in the Personal Status Law based on *shari'a,* unless the bylaws of Christian denominations are specifically mentioned**.**
- There is a proposed new Personal Status Law, drafted through a **multi-stakeholder legislative process** initiated by the Egyptian Presidency and executed by the Ministry of Justice, in coordination with religious and judicial institutions. This new draft Personal Status Law aims to modernize the existing law, prioritizing children's interests in custody and support matters, and balancing religious values with social needs aiming for a more cohesive family structure. In addition, the proposed legislation puts stricter penalties (jail time/fines) for withholding inheritance from rightful heirs, significantly impacting women. The impact of this new legislation on rural women is complex. While general empowerment efforts (like stricter inheritance laws) help, deep-rooted patriarchal traditions and economic dependence in rural areas often hinder women's access to justice, leaving them vulnerable despite legal advancements, especially regarding guardianship and enforcing financial rights after divorce.
- Furthermore, the law introduces procedural changes such as the establishment of a unified court system for family disputes and shorter timeframes for resolving lawsuits, which could benefit rural women navigating the Egyptian legal system. The new proposed law also aims to improve divorce documentation. The requirement to document verbal divorces within 15 days aims to protect spousal rights and provide clarity, which is beneficial for all spouses, including foreigners, by ensuring official records exist for legal claims such as the cases of alimony, or *nafaqa,* **see next section.**
- For foreigners married to Egyptian citizens, the new law is expected to largely maintain existing provisions regarding the application of law and the path to citizenship, while procedural improvements may offer more clarity and efficiency. The general principle remains that if one spouse is Muslim, Egyptian personal status law for Muslims applies to the couple's personal status matters. If both spouses are non-Muslim and belong to the same officially recognized community (e.g., Coptic Christian), their specific religious law may apply. The new law introduces a specific, unified personal status law for Christians, covering issues like divorce and inheritance, which aims to provide a more cohesive legal framework for Christian families, including foreign spouses of Egyptian Christians.

THE MA'ZOUN

In every district, there is one *Ma'zoun* (Marriage Official) responsible for conducting Islamic marriages. He plays a pivotal role in Egypt. He is the public official legally mandated to conclude and document marriage and divorce contracts in accordance with Islamic Sharia and Egyptian laws. He derives his authority from the State (Ministry of Justice) and the laws regulating his work. He has his own office and is not necessarily a cleric; he may be a graduate of the Faculty of Law. His role centres on verifying legal and religious requirements, documenting documents, providing counsel, and acting as a social mediator to preserve the rights of all parties. His primary duties are documenting marriage and divorce, verifying conditions, counseling, reconciliation, and issuing official marriage and divorce certificates. For Christians, there is also a Christian **Priest**, whose office is usually located within the church.

Field Findings:

Individual interviews indicated that a **female *Ma'zoun*** was recently appointed in Assiut, in the village of Beni Murr, as each Ma'zoun is responsible for his/her specific village. The Ma'zoun is tasked with verifying the validity of the marriage, particularly regarding the bride's age. He must refuse to conclude a marriage contract for a girl under 18 years of age. The same applies to the Church, where the priest refuses to perform the marriage until both spouses reach the age of 18 and pre-marital medical examination papers are completed.

THE FAMILY COURT

The Family Court was established following the issuance of **Law No. 10 of 2004**. The Family Law operates for the benefit of all. People require a lawyer to represent them in Family Court, and the court appoints specialized judges. However, legal practice is not always clear because, under Family Law, one may only appeal once before the Court of Appeal; cassation appeals before the Supreme Court are not permitted.

The Family Court handles all legal needs related to the family: Child recognition (proof of lineage/paternity), proof of official marriage, divorce, custody, and alimony. It proposes family remedies related to lineage and custody within the court framework. Civil and legal laws cover family obligations related to marital belongings or assets.

The law requires anyone wishing to file a personal status lawsuit (with the exception of lawsuits where reconciliation is not permitted, urgent lawsuits, execution disputes, and temporary orders) to begin by submitting a request to the **"Family Dispute Settlement Office."** This office is tasked with meeting the parties to the dispute, hearing their statements, and offering advice and guidance on the consequences of the dispute in an attempt to resolve it amicably. This office falls under the Ministry of Justice and consists of a sufficient number of legal, social, and psychological specialists.

Field Findings:

Individual interviews with lawyers indicated that a **Legal Aid Office** was introduced within the court to draft memos and lawsuits if the plaintiff does not have a lawyer. A Family Court employee drafts the claim. However, lawyers noted that this is insufficient, as the employee is often unqualified to draft the lawsuit with the specific details required by the women.

Settlement Office within the Family Court:

The case must first be presented to the Settlement Office fifteen days before filing the lawsuit in the Family Court. The Settlement Office attempts to resolve the issue with the concerned parties. The case may be presented to the Family Court only if reconciliation efforts fail. This office will also be subject to confirming the execution of **divorce by mutual consent**, allowing the divorce to be registered directly with the Ma'zoun thereafter.

THE FAMILY PAPER

Problematics:

The Family Paper—which includes the name of the head of the household (male), the names of his wives and children, and the personal data of all aforementioned family members—can be obtained from the Civil Registry. The husband (the male head of the household), his children, or his father (first-degree relatives) are permitted to request this document. However, the (future) wife is not permitted to request it. The Family Paper is primarily used by a man's sons to request exemption from military service. Wives/Fiancées: If a (future) wife has doubts regarding the personal status of her (future) husband, the Family paper serves as proof of his marital status and number of children.

Required Legal Aid:

Since the wife cannot request this document directly, legal aid is required to request a court permit authorizing the issuance of the Family paper from the Civil Registry for the wife.

Source of Discrimination:

- Gender.

Practical Solutions:

- The wife may ask her children to obtain the Family Paper on her behalf.
- Empowering individuals to navigate digital systems to request the Family Record online.

MARRIAGE

Problematics:

Under sharia the marriage concerns a contractual agreement - in contrast to the civil law tradition - registering the names of both spouses and their personal details in the marriage contract, along with the amount of the dowry (*Mahr*) and the name(s) of other wives, if any. In practice, however, men frequently agree with the *Ma'zoun* (marriage official) not to mention the names of other wives in the marriage contract.

Marriage is a covenant between spouses containing a straightforward contractual agreement, which is signed with the *ma'zoun* in the presence of two witnesses. With the registered marriage contract, the marriage certificate can be obtained at the Civil Registration offices (Ministry of the Interior).

Muslim men can marry a maximum of four wives, while women can only marry one man. Marriage is allowed between Muslims and Muslims, Christians and Christians, and Christian women and Muslim men, but not vice versa. These rules are not included in the Personal Status Law; they are *shari'a* rules that have been applied to fill a gap in the law.

All those who are considered members of religions other than the three religions referred to by the Egyptian Government as "heavenly" (*samawiya*) or "recognized" religions – Islam, Christianity, and Judaism – cannot conclude a marriage contract. There is no civil marriage, only religious marriage. Churches can prevent a marriage if one of the parties has any just cause or impediment why the marriage should not go ahead. The costs of organizing a marriage depend on the area one resides in and the value of the dowry.

As a consequence of marriage:

- The husband should pay for the housing, household, and the children, and if he does not do so, during marriage his wife may claim in court the various expenses related to the household, the house, and the custody of her children (see below under Prenuptial agreements and financial consequences of marriage).
- The wife must submit to the husband's matrimonial authority (*ta'at al-zawj* or obedience to the husband). She can only travel if he allows her to do so; the husband is allowed to prohibit his wife from travelling without his consent according to *shari'a* and a Hadith or Saying of the Prophet Muhammad, which translates as "Every man is responsible for his family." She is under his wardship (*al-qawama*), i.e. she cannot leave the house without his permission according to Article 25 of the Personal Status Law of 1920), but financially she remains completely autonomous (see below, financial consequences of marriage).

Marital status is included on the ID cards of each of the spouses, but in different ways for each.

- Men's ID cards only bear the word "Married"; a woman cannot know from an ID card if a man is still married, and to how many wives. A man can claim that he is divorced while his ID still bears the word "Married". The only way to find out is to check his personal/ marital status through his Family Paper (see above).
- In Muslim marriage, a wife generally keeps her own name. Her own name is recorded on her ID card, along with that of her husband.

Findings on Marriage

Regarding Personal Status, the total number of marriage contracts nationwide reached **936,739** in 2024. In Assiut Governorate, the number of marriage contracts in urban areas was **8,101**, compared to **30,205** in rural areas. The types of marriage contracts varied between new marriages, ratification of marriage (*Tasadoq*), and resumption of marital life (after revocable divorce). The number of divorce cases in the same year in the governorate was **1,692** in urban areas and **4,805** in rural areas.

District	Number of Contracts
First Assiut (Awal)	1,747
Second Assiut (Thani)	1,532
Assiut Centre	4,415
Abou Tig	201
Abou Tig Centre	2,665
Al-Ghanayem	1,108
Sedfa	1,338
Manfalout	4,923
Al-Qusiyah	4,470
Dayrout	5,888
Abnoub	3,312
Al-Fatih	2,771
Sahel Selim	1,375
Al-Badari	2,561
Total	**38,306**

Number of Marriage Contracts by District in Assiut (2024)

Area	<18	18-20	20-25	25-30	30-35	35-40	40-45	45-50	50-55	55-60	60-65	65-70	75+	Total
Urban	1,174	3,136	2,475	707	302	141	83	59	13	6	5	0	0	**8,101**
Rural	10,002	12,463	4,696	1,558	782	369	189	86	28	20	3	3	6	**30,205**

Number of Marriage Contracts by Wife's Age (Assiut Governorate)

Special Conditions in the Marriage Contract

It is permissible to include special conditions in the contract, provided they respect public order and align with Islamic Sharia. In practice, most people view the marriage contract as a formality and do not consider the possibility of including special conditions. People are often unaware of this possibility and frequently believe it is limited to the physical space available on the relevant page of the marriage contract, which provides only six lines for special conditions that the Ma'zoun adds by hand when signing. However, many more conditions than this space allows can be placed in an attachment to the marriage contract—a fact often unknown even to most lawyers. In the past, women required many pages of special conditions, which were often very specific. There are books written specifically about these special conditions.

As for foreigners marrying Egyptians, they register the marriage contract at the Real Estate Publicity Offices (*Shahr Aqari*). They can include as many conditions as they wish in the contract, provided they respect public order. There are many such offices throughout the country, which are part of the Real Estate Publicity Department under the Ministry of Justice.

Neither urban women in Assiut City, nor rural women from different districts in Assiut are fully aware of adding special conditions in their marriage contracts. The *Ma'zoun* often skips this section entirely to avoid "causing trouble." He usually draws a line through the empty space or writes "None" (*La Yugad*) without asking the bride, often dealing directly with the bride's father or male guardian. From a cultural perspective, it is considered a bad omen to predict, for example, that a man would marry another wife.

List of Furniture List (*Al-Qaema*)

Upon signing the marriage contract, the husband and the witnesses to the marriage sign an additional document called the *Qaema*. This documents the furniture, household appliances, the dowry, and the *Shabka* (jewelry). Disputes can arise regarding this matter due to differing opinions between the families of the spouses, especially since the financial aspects of marriage are usually agreed upon verbally. In the event of divorce, if the husband does not pay the total amount of all movables listed in the *Qaema* to the wife, the **Private Law** (Civil/Criminal)—not Family Law—applies. Failure to fulfill this financial obligation can lead to criminal prosecution.

The proposed new Personal Status Law aims to make the Furniture list as part of the marriage contract, subjecting all issues related to it to Family Law within the Family Court, and decriminalizing the non-payment of the list. In practice, the items included in the list can vary. Nowadays, the contents of the list may be divided between the spouses, and the woman may participate in providing items that are traditionally the man's responsibility. However, according to Islamic Sharia, law, and custom, furnishing the home is the man's responsibility. If a woman buys items and records them in the agreed-upon List as having been bought by her, he is obliged upon divorce to compensate her for these things.

Any marriage contract requires a specific dowry (*Sadaq*), including jewelry. If the wife does not receive the jewelry, it must be placed in the List, thereby becoming a financial obligation owed to the wife. In *Khul'* (where the woman divorces herself), the wife must return the dowry. However, the part of the

dowry included in the List must still be paid by the man to her (unless explicitly waived as part of the *Khul'* agreement), because all items in the *Qaema* are considered financial obligations (trusts).

Field Findings:

One participant in the FGD indicated that if the wife does not obtain the *Qaema*, she may be forced to litigate. Sometimes, the woman does not possess the funds for litigation and resorts to Customary Council (*Majlis Urfi).* The decision to approve often depends on the husband's family, as they are the ones who will pay.

Customary Marriage (*Urfi*)

Urfi marriage, or unofficial marriage, is a type of marriage that is unofficial and not registered by a *Ma'zoun* (in an official capacity), although he may in practice -illegally- perform it, and wait until the bride is eighteen to register it. In *Urfi* marriage, the wife does not have the same legal and financial rights as in an official marriage. There are special cases where people resort to Urfi marriage, as follows:

- **Rural Populations:** Traditional rural residents use *Urfi* marriage in cases where women are under the legal marriage age. Early marriage is still quite common in some rural parts of Upper Egypt, including Assiut. Early marriage is considered a form of forced marriage, since at least one of the parties do not enjoy its complete freedom of consent nor show explicit consent to marry and lacks the ability to determine the right partner for the obvious reasons. The inability to give consent may vary from one person to another for several factors. Physical, psychological, sexual and emotional growth rates are among those factors. Another important factor is lacking life experiences which normally guide any decision-making process. In most cases, young girls are more affected by the early marriage phenomenon, and in some families, marriages are imposed from birth, and the girl is immediately wed once she reaches child-bearing age. This type of marriage gives legitimacy to injustice, violence and all forms of abuse that will be practiced against girls in particular. As they grow to become ignorant mother that are is psychologically, physically, and socially disfigured, only to raises a more ignorant, and disfigured generation, thus, society becomes weak without hope for development or progress. Such marriage will entrap the families and the society at large in neverending cycles of poverty, disease, illiteracy, violence, and oppression that will negatively have its toll on countries' development, progress, and stability.
- **Urban Populations:** It is used by people living in urban environments—often city youth—living together.
- **Christians:** Christians use *Urfi* marriage if they cannot obtain a divorce and thus are not permitted to remarry, due to the strict and limited circumstances under which divorce is granted in the Personal Status Law for non-Muslims.
- **Pension Retention:** A woman may enter into an *Urfi* marriage if she wishes to continue receiving financial grants, wages, or the pension of her deceased father or husband. In the case of a deceased father's pension, the daughter(s) may continue to receive it. However, if the daughter marries, her right to the pension ceases. Therefore, some women resort to *Urfi* marriage because its unofficial nature means they are not "officially" married, allowing them to continue claiming the pension.

Field Findings:

Some women indicated in the FGDs that *Urfi* marriages are sometimes conducted at the hands of a Ma'zoun without official documentation in cases where the girl has not reached the legal age. Additionally, representatives of the "Egyptian Family House" raised concerns that the phenomenon of *Urfi* marriage has spread among certain groups to enable the wife to obtain/retain the deceased father's pension. This is illegal, and in both scenarios (underage and pension fraud), children are often

left unregistered, and official papers are not extracted to avoid cutting off the pension or incurring legal penalties.

Vulnerable Groups

- The destitute.
- Christian men and women.
- Women and girls, particularly in rural remote areas, under 18 years of age.

Source of Discrimination

- **Gender:** Men and women in general.
- **Religion**: (a) If a Christian woman marries a Muslim man, the couple's children are Muslim in the eyes of the law, and she may not obtain custody of them or inherit from him/them. (b) If a Christian man marries a Muslim woman, he must convert to Islam, and he is not permitted to return to Christianity.

Required Legal Aid

People need legal advice regarding the marriage contract and its consequences. It is a critically important contract regarding the protection of the legal rights of citizens in general, and women in particular. It is important to have a place where a woman can understand and fully review the marriage contract so that she can enjoy the protection of her legal rights.

Practical Solutions

If a Christian man and a Muslim woman wish to marry, they can (a) Marry abroad in a non-Islamic country, or (b) The Christian man can convert to Islam, which is a simple procedure.

Recommendations

- **Activate** "Ratification": This involves registering *Urfi* marriage that took place between spouses with the date of its actual occurrence, regardless of how long ago it was, so the wife acquires her rights.
- **Legislative Amendment**: Amend the Personal Status Laws for Muslims and Christians (which is currently happening).
- **Codification:** Include all Sharia rules applied in practice regarding marriage into the Islamic Personal Status Law.
- **Awareness:** Ensure women are aware of the marriage contract and the special conditions that they could add from the beginning to avoid any forthcoming issues in their marriages.
- **Contract Revision**: A thorough review of the Islamic marriage contract form is required. The Holy Quran urges this, stating that the marriage contract is a "*solemn covenant*" (Surah An-Nisa, Verse 21). Currently, the contract includes only six lines for special conditions, handwritten by the Ma'zoun. An unlimited number of lines would be needed in a digital version to encourage the use of special conditions. The Ma'zoun should only verify whether the conditions align with the basic rules of Islamic Sharia.

DIVORCE

Problematics:

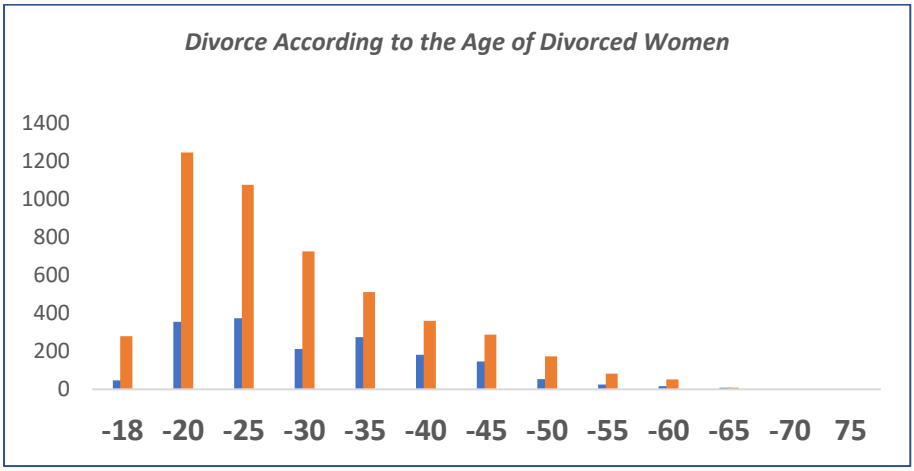
Divorce is the dissolution of the marriage contract, or the legal separation of husband and wife, granting both parties the right to remarry, either religiously, civilly, or both. Separation and divorce rates in Egypt are extremely high. The number of divorce cases at the national level reached **273,892** in **2024**, compared to **265,606** in **2023**, representing an increase of **3.1%** in divorce cases. In **Assiut Governorate**, the number of divorce cases during **2024 reached 6,498**. The types and numbers varied according to the districts (centres) of Assiut as follows:

District	Revocable Divorce *(Raj'i)*	Minor Irrevocable *(Baynuna Sughra)*	Major Irrevocable *(Baynuna Kubra)*	Not Stated	Total
First Assiut (Awal)	478	7	5	41	**531**
Second Assiut (Than)	346	9	0	49	**404**
Assiut Centre	764	11	0	55	**830**
Abou Tig	21	0	2	0	**23**
Abou Tig Centre	404	4	0	17	**425**
Al-Ghanayem	174	0	0	7	**181**
Sedfa	186	0	1	31	**218**
Manfalout	560	0	2	43	**605**
Al-Qusiyah	580	5	0	66	**651**
Dayrout	755	2	16	141	**914**
Abnoub	478	0	11	29	**518**
Al-Fatih	542	0	0	50	**592**
Sahel Selim	193	0	5	20	**218**
Al-Badari	339	1	4	44	**388**
Total	**5820**	**39**	**46**	**593**	**6,498**

Divorce Cases by Type and District in Assiut (2024)

Area	<18	18-20	20-25	25-30	30-35	35-40	40-45	45-50	50-55	55-60	60-65	65-70	75+	Total
Urban	47	355	374	212	274	181	146	54	25	16	8	0	0	**1,692**
Rural	280	1,246	1,076	725	512	360	287	173	83	52	9	2	0	**4,805**

Number of Divorce Certificates by Wife's Age Group (Assiut Governorate, 2024)



Graph developed based on the table above on the number of Divorce Certificates by Wife's Age Group (Assiut Governorate, 2024)

Analysis of Divorce Trends

It is evident that divorce rates are high in rural areas for girls **under 18 years old**. This results in numerous problems, as the marriage is not officially registered. Consequently, girls, in rural Upper Egypt, suffer when claiming their rights, especially if children are involved. Divorce rates in urban areas are also high in the age group between (20-25). This may be due to a lack of understanding, differing expectations between spouses, or economic pressures. The majority of women interviewed do not know about the different types of divorce. They refer to what is known as *"talaq 'ady"* or (Normal Divorce). These figures entail numerous problems related to personal status issues, particularly regarding children.

Classification of Divorce by Type in Sharia

There are different forms of divorce:

1) *Talaq 'ala al-ibra'* or divorce by agreement: (most usual and advisable for both parties).
2) Talaq or verbal divorce by the man/male-initiated repudiation: The husband unilaterally ends the marrying contract by repeating verbally 3 times that he divorces her; this form of divorce needs to be formalized in order for the wife to claim her legal rights.
3) Divorce in the absence of the woman by the man with the ma'zoun.
4) The wife ending the marriage contract: through Khul' or no-fault divorce carried out by the woman takes only a few months, while *talaq li-l-darar* or fault-based divorce may take many years. This takes place under limited circumstances, which is complicated; the woman retains all her legal rights. In addition, the wife may divorce if this is a clause in the marriage contract ('isma)

Christians

When Christians belonging to the same denomination want to divorce, the bylaw of their denomination is applicable. The Coptic Orthodox Church, by far the largest Christian denomination in Egypt, does not allow divorce. Only in a precisely defined set of exceptional circumstances the marriage can be dissolved. A practical solution is for one of the spouses to change his/her denomination, in which case the *shari'a*-based Personal Status Law for Egyptians in general becomes applicable, allowing the couple to divorce. Another option is for one of the spouses to convert to Islam. If the man converts to Islam, the Christian wife automatically loses the custody of her children and the right to inheritance.

Field Findings: Challenges Facing Women in Assiut and Upper Egypt

In this regard, the FGDs with women highlighted the suffering that women, particularly rural women, endure despite the improvements in the current Personal Status Laws. Many challenges persist, including: manipulation of proof regarding the husband's employment to minimize alimony; difficulty and length of procedures; financial burdens incurred by women to obtain the service; the necessity (and cost) of having a lawyer.

Divorce Clause for women in marriage contract

In practice, men rarely agree to include this condition (authorizing the wife to divorce herself) in the marriage contract. According to divorce statistics for 2024, the number of Isma cases in the Governorate reached only **one case**.

Talaq li-l-darar (judicial dissolution due to harm/fault-based divorce)

Divorce for harm is a right held by the wife to request a judicial separation if she suffers harm from her husband that renders the continuation of marital life impossible. Examples include violence, abandonment, failure to provide financial support, infidelity, addiction, or serious illness. This must

be proven via witnesses and evidence before the Family Court. If the harm is proven, the wife may secure her full financial rights. The ruling varies depending on whether the harm is caused entirely by the husband, is mutual, or cannot be proven. Harm is categorized into material (physical) harm and moral (psychological) harm.

The issue of divorce for harm is embodied in the legal and procedural inequality between men and women regarding the termination of the marital bond. A Muslim man possesses the right to effectuate divorce by his unilateral will merely by uttering it, without the obligation of prior judicial proceedings. In contrast, women bear the full burden of legal procedures to officially prove the divorce before the judiciary.

Failure to officially prove the divorce results in the woman being deprived of her right to remarry or to claim her Sharia-compliant and legal rights, placing her in a vulnerable legal position.

The issue is further complicated by the intervention of the Public Prosecution in certain divorce lawsuits and the actual influence it exercises over the course and outcomes of cases. Furthermore, the application of Muslim Personal Status Law in cases involving a Christian woman married to a Muslim man, or in cases of different Christian denominations between spouses, may detract from the privacy of belief and the right to religious organization.

This problem is exacerbated by the weakness or absence of legal aid for women and the placement of the burden of proof solely on them—especially in cases of divorce for harm—which limits their ability to access justice and diminishes their supposed legal protection.

Fieldwork Findings:

One woman in the FGD in Al-Qusiyah indicated that she suffers from domestic violence and constant beatings by her husband. However, she excuses him because he is mentally disabled, finding a justification for the beatings and insults. Another participant noted that wife-beating is widespread in the village. Additionally, some girls in the village suffer from forced marriage; they are coerced even if they do not consent.

Awareness Gap:

- Despite these efforts, women's groups indicated that they are not sufficiently aware of, nor do they know how to reach NCW or the services provided. This is due either to a lack of awareness or insufficient publicity for the Council within communities. Many women resort to waiving their rights due to financial inability or are exploited by some lawyers who agree on a certain percentage of the amounts obtained from the cases.

The FGDs pointed to the suffering of a number of women regarding their inability to obtain dues, whether regarding child support or otherwise.

- **Case 1:** A woman reported being divorced for 7 years. Her husband remarried, and she has not received her rights to this day. Due to her inability to afford continued litigation, she stopped pursuing the case until she can find assistance from a charity organization to appoint a volunteer lawyer.

- **Case 2:** Another woman from Manfalout reported that she was married 12 years ago as a second wife. The marriage was intended for procreation and lasted only 9 months—the duration of the pregnancy. As soon as she gave birth to her child, she was divorced and received no dues. Her suffering is compounded by the fact that she lives in her father's house,

which is subject to inheritance. She stated that her siblings want to sell the house and distribute the shares, leaving her homeless after the sale. She cannot afford legal expenses.

Official Perspective:

In the key informant interviews with decision-makers (government officials), the representative of NCW stated that they work on 12 branches of women's issues and personal status. Initially, women had to travel to the governorate's capital. To avoid this problem, a number of lawyers were trained and appointed in each district. Cases and lawsuits are referred to them, and the main centre follows up until the case is closed and the woman obtains her rights. NCW pays the lawyer's fees. Despite the existence of this service, many target groups in the communities in Assiut are unaware of it.

Commenting about the cases of divorce for harm, the NCW representative noted that a girl's marriage was annulled after she learned via social media that her marriage contract to her cousin was being concluded without her knowledge or consent. The girl immediately contacted the Women's Complaints Hotline (15115). Action was taken immediately against the guardian, the marriage contract was annulled, the *Ma'zoun* (official authorized to perform marriages) was held accountable, and a divorce for harm was ruled in her favor.

Required Legal Aid

- **Specialized Legal Consultation:** To explain available legal options (Divorce for harm – *Khul').*
- **Evidence Collection:** Assistance in gathering evidence such as witnesses, medical reports, official police records, and proof of income.
- **Legal Representation:** Representation before the Family Court to ensure procedural soundness and the legally correct drafting of the statement of claim.
- **Psychosocial Support:** Providing psychological and social support in parallel with legal support, especially in cases of domestic violence.
- **The Role of the Lawyer in These Cases** A lawyer specializing in family cases helps the wife to:
  - Gather strong evidence and present it legally.
  - Draft the petition (statement of claim) accurately.
  - Monitor hearings and safeguard the wife's financial and legal rights.
  - The presence of an experienced lawyer is the decisive factor in the success of any case. However, in many instances, the wife is unable to hire an experienced lawyer for such cases due to the high cost.

Recommendations

- **Legal Awareness**: Spread awareness about the different types of divorce and that a woman has the right to obtain divorce for harm and the available means of proof.
- **Simplify Procedures**: Simplify the process for proving moral harm and accept strong circumstantial evidence and psychological reports.
- **Dispute Settlement Offices**: Enhance the role of Family Dispute Settlement Offices while ensuring the wife is not coerced into reconciliation in cases of violence.
- **Financial Support:** Provide free or low-cost legal support for women unable to pay.
- **Protection Mechanisms**: Develop immediate protection mechanisms for aggrieved wives (protection orders, temporary enablement of the marital home).

ALIMONY (NAFAQA) CLAIMS DURING AND AFTER MARRIAGE FOR BOTH THE WIFE AND FOR THE CHILDREN

Alimony is an important concept in Family Law, defined as financial support from the husband to his wife during marriage and after. This concept includes all types of women's claims during marriage and after divorce related to the home, custody, and compensation for various damages.

Alimony is a legitimate (Sharia) and legal financial obligation on the husband (or father) to provide for the basic needs of his wife and children. It includes food, clothing, decent housing, medical treatment, and education. Estimates vary according to the husband's financial status and the beneficiaries' circumstances. A woman can claim it judicially if the husband stops spending, even before divorce. It is estimated at varying amounts according to local laws and family circumstances. Child support continues until the children reach the age of majority or are able to earn.

Law No. 6 of 2020 [2] amended Article 293 of the Penal Code to tighten penalties for those withholding spousal, custody, or housing alimony, among others. It raised the maximum fine to EGP 5,000 instead of EGP 500, while maintaining the penalty of imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year. The penalty is intensified to imprisonment without the option of a fine in case of recidivism.

The law introduced a new penalty: **suspending the convict from benefiting from certain government services** related to their professional activity until the due amounts are paid. It also allowed for reconciliation at any stage of the lawsuit, resulting in the expiration of the criminal case and the suspension of the sentence execution. However, the non-execution of the sentence continues if the frozen alimony is paid or an acceptable guarantor is provided. A decision by the Minister of Justice will determine the specific services and suspension rules.

Strategic Practices in Alimony Claims: There are practices of submitting **multiple requests** for alimony to convince the judge. It is considered better to file separate lawsuits to impose large financial sums on the husband because a **new investigation into the man's income** is conducted for each lawsuit. If it were a single lawsuit, it would often result in small alimony amounts.

Field Findings:

Results from the FGDs of women revealed the suffering women endure despite the evolution of Personal Status Laws. Many challenges persist, including **manipulation of proof regarding the husband's employment** to determine appropriate alimony, the difficulty and length of procedures, the financial burdens incurred by women to obtain the service, and the cost of having a lawyer.

A woman in the Manfalout FGD indicated that she has been suffering for **7 years** to obtain appropriate alimony. Only EGP **200** were allotted for her daughters, and she continues struggling to obtain her rights.

Recommendations:

These practices of submitting multiple alimony requests must be addressed to avoid overloading the Family Court. They are inefficient and lead to high legal fees. All claims should be consolidated in detail, based on specific needs, and included in **a single lawsuit**.

CUSTODY

Problematics

Custody is the guardianship of a child by raising him/her and managing his/her interests (education, medical treatment, food, clothing, and housing). The Personal Status Law of 2005 (pursuant to Article 25, Amendment No. 4) established the age of custody at **15 years** for both boys and girls. Once a child reaches this age, the judge gives the child the choice between the father or the mother to serve as their guardian. This legislation applies to all Egyptians of all religions.

The Custodial Home (*Maskan el-Hadana*) is the marital home where the divorced wife resides with her children (as the custodian) until the end of the legal custody age (usually 15 years for boys, and longer for girls depending on the law). It is the mother's right to facilitate the care of the children, provided she does not own another residence, does not reside with her family, and acknowledging the husband has rights to the original property. Obtaining it requires a judicial ruling (Empowerment Decision / *Tamkeen*). It is a temporary right that ends when the children reach the legal age, at which point the husband has the right to reclaim the dwelling.

In practice, women suffer in establishing their right to the home. Some families manipulate the situation by creating fictitious contracts for the home in the names of other people so that the woman is not granted the Empowerment Decision.

One woman in the FGD indicated that she was divorced with a child after only 9 months of marriage and was not granted any of her rights. She was living in her parents' house, but after their death, she is now suffering because her siblings wish to sell the house. She has no alternative and cannot afford a lawyer to litigate her case.

Educational Guardianship (*Wilaya Ta'limiya*). In Egyptian Personal Status Law, the default is that Educational Guardianship belongs to the **Father**, as he is the natural guardian, and he manages all matters related to the children's education. If the father travels, the right typically falls to the paternal grandfather or uncle to manage details regarding the children.

After divorce, the educational Guardianship transfers to the **Custodial Mother** by force of law following divorce to ensure the continuity of the child's education (Article 54 of the Child Law, added in 2008). The court has the final say in case of dispute, prioritizing the child's interest. Obtaining this usually requires a judicial order (Temporary Order) to allow the mother to handle official papers with the school.

The right to Educational Guardianship is generally attached to the custodian. If a dispute arises between the mother and father regarding matters like the type of education (local vs. foreign) or the location of the school, either party may resort to the Family Court for a judge to decide. The law considers Educational Guardianship to be subordinate to and linked with the right of Custody.

The father may request the restoration of Educational Guardianship if: a) custody ends due to the child reaching the legal age (15 years); b) It is proven that the custodian (mother or otherwise) is abusing the right regarding education or neglecting the child's education; c) the mother remarries (Note: Remarriage does not automatically drop custody; it makes it subject to transfer to the next eligible custodian *if* the rightful party—usually the father—requests it). The father files a "Recovery of Educational Guardianship" lawsuit if it is in the child's best interest.

Vulnerable Groups:

- **The Child:** The primary vulnerable party.
- **Remarriage:** A mother risks losing custody if she remarries.
- **Religion:** A Christian woman may not obtain custody if she was married to a Muslim man (specifically in cases where Christian men convert to Islam to divorce and deprive the former wife of custody).
- **Fathers:** Fathers are required to pay large sums for custody/maintenance but are only permitted to file one lawsuit to see their children for 1 or 2 days a week.

Sources of Discrimination:

Gender and Religion. For example, a Christian woman cannot file for custody of her children if her ex-husband is Muslim. (Many Christian men convert to Islam specifically to enable divorce and deprive the ex-wife of custody).

Required Legal Aid:

- **Pre-emptive Guardianship:** Women requesting the right to Educational Guardianship even in the absence of divorce or dispute (e.g., when the father travels abroad for work). Support is needed to prevent guardianship from transferring to the grandfather or uncle without a judicial decision, or ensuring a power of attorney/temporary guardianship is granted by the father.
- **Protection against Arbitrary Litigation:** Protecting the mother's rights against arbitrary lawsuits filed by the husband to drop custody in the event of her remarriage, ensuring the "Best Interest of the Child" is the basis of the judgment.

Recommendations

- **Legalizing Joint Educational Guardianship:** Making guardianship shared between father and mother even in separation.
  - *Core Decisions* (changing type of education, etc.) should require mutual consent or a court order.
  - *Daily Decisions* should belong to the custodian.
- **Urgent Status:** Classifying educational disputes as urgent matters for the sake of the child.
- **Family Mediation:** Activating mediation before resorting to the judiciary, utilizing bodies such as the Egyptian Family House, the Al-Azhar Reunion Unit, and Church Family Counseling Offices.

INHERITANCE

Problematics

Despite the development of laws and the introduction of articles guaranteeing the rights of marginalized groups, especially women, problematic issues remain regarding customs, traditions, and prevailing norms in society. This applies to all categories of women, regardless of educational or social levels. Among these thorny issues is the issue of inheritance and the eligibility of girls and women to receive it.

Many women, particularly rural women in Upper Egypt, refuse to resort to the Egyptian courts in respect of rural customs and traditions and blood ties. Another reason is that it takes a long time to

settle disputes through the judiciary system (described by an old Egyptian saying, as “its ropes are long”), and do not force the abstainers nor obligate them to distribute the inheritance. Women in Upper Egypt are aggrieved and are deprived of their legal inheritance for reasons related to customs, and traditions. Despite the violation of these norms of Egyptian law, the inheritance of women in Upper Egypt remained an absent duty. Official statistics from the Ministry of justice show that around 144,000 cases are filed annually by fathers, sons, and brothers against each other. In addition, 2,750 cases are filed to establish incapacity to dispose of property.

Women under sharia receive half the portion of what men receive (brothers, uncles). But in practice women do not even claim their (half) part. They are deprived of their inheritance or are granted symbolic "appeasements" (*Tar'diya*) that are unfair and do not represent the true value of the inheritance. This constitutes a severe injustice to women, especially in light of the high cost of living, rising prices, and inflation. Respondents in the FGDs discussed the fact that women are generally not given their inheritance. Women often do not claim their inheritance for fear of severing family ties and social bonds with family members. This is driven by the prevailing idea that family wealth (especially land) should not be taken by a "stranger" (the husband). Women suffer from a negative societal outlook if they demand their inheritance rights.

In the interview with one community leader (a representative of the **Egyptian Family House**) who participated in implementing the "Women's Right to Inheritance" project in Abu Tig district, he revealed significant insights. The project aimed to spread legal and religious awareness in cooperation with the NCW. Through advocacy, NCW contributed to the amendment of Law No. 219 of 2017. One success story in the project was through litigation when the project succeeded in recovering **32 feddans** of land for women and securing **EGP 72 million EGP** for the woman’s right.

Law No. 219 of 2017 is an amendment to Law No. 77 of 1943 regarding inheritance. It added a chapter on penalties to confront the deliberate withholding of a rightful heir's share or the concealment of documents proving said share. The law stipulates penalties of imprisonment and fines for anyone committing this crime, while allowing for reconciliation. **Key Provisions (Article 49): Penalty for Withholding Inheritance:** Punishable by imprisonment for a period of not less than **six months** and a fine of not less than **20,000 EGP** and not exceeding **100,000 EGP**.

Vulnerable Groups:

- Girls deprived of their fathers' inheritance.
- Widows who do not receive their share of inheritance and lack a source of income.
- Divorced women with no source of income.

Type of Assistance Required:

- Establishing offices to provide legal consultation regarding inheritance.
- Implementing community awareness campaigns about "Women's Right to Inheritance," similar to those implemented in 2016-2017 in cooperation with the "Egyptian Family House" (*Bayt Al-Aila*) and CARE Foundation – Egypt.
- Activating the role of Customary Councils (*Majalis Urfiya*) and the Family House in mediating between families.
- Simplifying legal procedures in cases where inheritance is claimed legally.
- Raising awareness among fathers and male sons regarding women's right to inheritance.

Recommendations:

- Establish legal guidance and counseling offices.

- Conduct awareness programs and campaigns in mosques and churches regarding women's right to inheritance.
- Build the capacity of lawyers working on a voluntary basis to support women in inheritance cases.
- Raise awareness about Microjustice Legal Aid Platform.

PROPERTY

Problematics with transfer of property

If a building is formally registered with the Property Register, the transfer of the property involves the same procedures as those required for an initial registration of a building, whereby all the documentation needs to be presented. However, the difference between a transfer of ownership and an initial registration is that with the latter it is much easier to gather all the required documentation.

If the building is not formally registered, the process is as follows:

- A customary sale/purchase contract is drafted by a lawyer.
- The court registers only the signatures, not the contract itself. This step, which is optional, is in order to ensure that one of the parties is unable to deny that they signed the contract of sale.
- The name of the person on the electricity bill for the property is changed to the name of the buyer (and as a consequence all other utility bills are also changed to the buyer's name). The power of attorney of the previous owner is needed to request this change. This may be complex if the electricity bill is not in his/her name, and for this reason, this change is very problematic in most cases.

A common source of confusion is the fact that al-*shahr al-'aqari* (which has a similar function as the public notary) offices are part of the Property Agency within the Ministry of Justice, and are in charge of: a) property registration, transfer of property, and registration of mortgages; b) the registration of rental agreements; c) the registration of wills; and d) the registration of power of attorney. Thus, many people confuse the power of attorney with the property documentation.

Another challenge in the transfer of property is that is the payment by the buyer of the real property. In Egypt there is no function of the notary (in many countries) that receives the money from the buyer on his third parties' account and only pays to seller once all paperwork has been put on name of buyer. Due to the lack of a neutral entity in-between seller and buyer there is always a moment, in which there is no security: when the owner transfers the property and the buyer has not yet paid, or vice versa the buying has paid but the transfer has not past yet. This limbo may take a few days.

Housing -Rental Agreements

The new rental Law aims to end the era of "Old Rent" (contracts signed before 1996), where tenants pay negligible amounts for properties now worth millions. The law stipulates that rents shall no longer be fixed. Rents shall increase gradually over a transitional period between 3-5 years. This timeframe shall allow tenants to adjust before the contract is either terminated or moves entirely to market value. Rents shall be raised immediately to a minimum multiplier based on location of the property ranging from a minimum of EGP 250 for low class areas to a minimum of EGP 1,000 for high level or posh areas. The law treats residential units (families) differently from Legal Entities (companies/government offices) and Commercial shops.

There are arguments for and against the new rental law. From a positive side, it realizes justice for the owners. The law restores property rights to landlords who have effectively been subsidized by tenants for decades, receiving pennies for valuable assets. It will enhance the economy in terms of supply and demand for property rental and sale. On the other hand, it may cause social unrest, as millions of families rely on cheap housing. A sudden hike in rent could lead to mass evictions or homelessness. The relationship between landlord and tenant is already hostile; legislative changes could trigger legal battles and social tensions.

Vulnerable Groups:

- **The Landlords,** namely Inheritors of Property**:** Grandchildren of original owners who inherited buildings but receive no income from them. They stand to gain significant asset value and monthly income.
- **The Tenants,** mainly Fixed-Income Pensioners**:** Elderly tenants living in older districts who survive on pensions and cannot afford market rates (e.g., moving from 5 EGP rent to 5,000 EGP); and **the "Closed Unit" Holders:** Tenants who keep apartments locked "just in case" because it costs them nothing. They will be forced to surrender the keys.
- **Commercial Tenants,** mainly Shop Owners**:** Many businesses in prime locations pay minimal rents for high-value commercial space. Their overhead costs will skyrocket, potentially forcing closures or price hikes for consumers.

Recommendations:

To mitigate the social shock of this law, the following measures are recommended:

- **Extended Transitional Period:** For residential units occupied by the elderly or vulnerable, the transition period should be longer (e.g., 7-10 years) compared to commercial units or closed apartments.
- **The "Social Housing" Swap:** The State must provide alternative "Social Housing" units for tenants who can prove they have no other shelter and cannot afford the new rent increases.
- **Support Fund:** Establish a "Family Support Fund" subsidized by a portion of the real estate tax, to help pay the difference in rent for the most vulnerable families during the transition.
- **Incentives for Voluntary Surrender:** Offer cash incentives (from the landlord to the tenant) for the immediate voluntary surrender of the apartment, codified by law (e.g., Tenant leaves now in exchange for 20% of the apartment's market value).

AGRICULTURAL LAND OWNERSHIP

Problematics

Agricultural land ownership in Egypt is characterized by extreme fragmentation. The vast majority of holdings in the "Old Lands" (Nile Valley) are small-scale (under 2 feddans). In Upper Egypt, this fragmentation is exacerbated by inheritance customs and high population density relative to arable land. Land tenure generally falls into three categories. In Upper Egypt, the distinction between "Ownership" and "Tenancy" is critical for social standing.

The first category is Freehold Ownership (*Melk Horr*). The most coveted form of tenure. It grants full rights to sell, inherit, and rent.

The second category is State/Waqf Tenancy (*Ijar*). Waqf Lands: Large swathes of land in Upper Egypt (especially in Assiut, Sohag and Qena) are owned by the Egyptian Endowments Authority (*Awqaf*) and rented to families for generations. In late 2025, a major dispute erupted due to the Authority raising rents from ~EGP 4,000/feddan to over **EGP 13,000–45,000/feddan**. This threatens to displace thousands of smallholder tenants who cannot afford the new rates.

The third category is "Hand-Claim" (*Wad' Yad*) Many farmers in the desert fringes of Upper Egypt (e.g., West Minya, Assiut desert road) have cultivated state land for decades without title deeds.

Legally, women inherit land according to Sharia (half the share of a male). In Upper Egypt, however, there is a strong customary ban on land "leaving the family." If a woman inherits land and marries an outsider, the land effectively transfers to the husband's family. To prevent this, women are often compensated in cash (often below market value) or given a "produce share" (*Radwa*) instead of the actual land title. Women who insist on registering land in their names face severe social ostracization.

Vulnerable Groups:

- Rural women, especially in inheritance, where their rights are denied.
- Poor rural farmers who rent lands and cannot pay high rental fees.

Source of Discrimination:

- Gender, for rural women, whose inheritance is denied.
- Socioeconomic level – vulnerable farmers

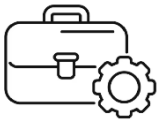
Recommendations:

- Raising awareness of Law No. 219 of 2017 (Inheritance Law), particularly Criminal Protection Article 49 stipulating that anyone who deliberately withholds an inheritance or hides documents proving an inheritance (like the *Hiyaza* card) faces imprisonment and a heavy fine.
- Enforcing Registration that is proved via a "Green Contract" (Registered Title) or, more commonly in rural areas, a *Sahha Tawqie* court verdict combined with a "*Hiyaza* Card" (Farmer's Holding Card) from the agricultural cooperative.
- The New Law (No. 168 of 2025): Passed in August 2025, this law allows citizens to "legalize" their encroachment on state land if it was cultivated before October 2023. This is a critical opportunity for Upper Egyptian farmers to gain formal title, but the high "legalization fees" (*taqneen*) remain a barrier for the poor.
- Raising awareness of all laws that ban building on agricultural lands and the penalties incurred and emphasizing that it is a "Crime of Moral Turpitude".
- For rural women, it is imperative that they claim their legal rights and prove their legal share (usually half of a man's share) and prevents male relatives from claiming that the woman is "not an heir." The following steps are recommended to be taken:

    - Step 1: Obtaining the "Inheritance Declaration" (*I'lam Wiratha*), as this document proves the legal share and prevents male relatives from claiming that the woman is not an heir.
    - Step 2: Securing the Agricultural Holding Card (*Hiyaza*) to ensure that the woman's name is added to the "*Hiyaza*" records as a partner in the land's produce and subsidies.
    - Step 3: Registration at the Real Estate Registry (*Shahr Aqari*) to have "Absolute Ownership" and prevent the land from being sold without the woman's consent, and register her share. Once registered, no one can sell the land or build on it without the woman's consent signature.

- Step 4: Managing Social Pressure & "Radwa" based on informed consent and knowledge about the real value of the land.
- Step 5: Invoking Law No. 219 of 2017 (Criminal Protection) stipulating that anyone who deliberately withholds an inheritance or hides documents proving an inheritance (like the *Hiyaza* card) faces: Minimum 6 months in prison, and a fine of EGP 20,000 to EGP 100,000.

LABOUR



Problematics

The New Labour Law No. 14 of 2025 has been highly praised as a progressive legislation in terms of organizing the relationship between employers and workers. It provides several rights for workers, particularly women, but it has several challenges as well.

Key Amendments in the new Labour Law

Worker Rights: Wages and Allowances:

- Minimum wage in the private sector raised to EGP 7,000 per month.
- Mandatory annual increase of no less than 3% of the insured wage to counter inflation.
- Abolition of "*Form 6*" and prohibition of arbitrary dismissal, enhancing job security.
- Employment contracts now default to indefinite terms, with fixed-term contracts allowed only when necessary; renewal agreements are permitted.
- Wage protection: Employers are prohibited from withholding any part of wages without legal justification; workers must receive full payment within 7 days of demand upon termination of employment.
- Regulation of modern work patterns: Includes remote work, digital platform work, part-time, flexible work, and job sharing.
- Protection of irregular and seasonal labourers (Articles 1, 8, 9).
- Employers must provide annual raises of at least 3% and any exceptional allowances decided by the state to help workers cope with living costs.

Promotions and Job Stability

- Article 17 stipulates promotions based on both merit and seniority.
- Arbitrary dismissal is prohibited except following legally prescribed procedures, ensuring additional protection.

Working Hours and Leave

- Maximum 8 hours per day or 48 hours per week, with exceptions for specific sectors.
- Annual leave of at least 21 days, increasing to 30 days after ten years of service.

Women and Youth in the Workforce

- Article 53: Women must receive equal pay for equal work. The Ministry of Labour, in consultation with the National Council for Women and the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood, determine prohibited work for women to ensure safety and maternal protection.
- Article 54: Female employees have a 4-month maternity leave, fully paid, allowed three times during service. Work hours reduced by one hour from the sixth month of pregnancy; overtime is prohibited during pregnancy and six months post-delivery.
- Article 55: Women returning from maternity leave have the right to their previous or equivalent position, with all benefits intact; termination during or after maternity leave is prohibited unless legally justified.

- Article 56: Women breastfeeding within two years of childbirth are entitled to two additional daily breaks of at least 30 minutes each, counted as working hours without wage reduction.
- Youth employment is facilitated through structured training and professional development contracts.

Employers

- Employers receive tax and legislative incentives for companies complying with the law and offering safe work environments, encouraging investment and economic growth.

Challenges in the New Labour Law:

Despite the amendments, the FGDs revealed that many women remain unaware of their rights, especially regarding minimum wage and registration for informal labour. Women fear registering for informal labour systems due to potential loss of social benefits (e.g., "Takaful and Karama" social protection cash payments), leaving them vulnerable, particularly in seasonal work without legal contracts.

For rural women in Upper Egypt including Assiut, the challenge is working in the informal sector. This means that there are no binding contracts or insurance for seasonal or part-time workers, mainly in the agricultural sector. Furthermore, transport to fields is often in unsafe pickup trucks, leading to frequent tragic accidents. Exposure to pesticides and lack of restrooms in fields are standard daily hazards.

It should be noted that Legal benefits (social insurance, emergency funds, and minimum wage) are contingent upon registration in a national database. For rural women, this process is obstructed by the high illiteracy rates among rural women, the lack of personal National ID cards, and the prohibitive cost of traveling to urban centers to navigate complex bureaucracies. Furthermore, it is very difficult for rural women to identify a legal employer to hold him accountable for wage theft, arbitrary dismissal, or safety violations.

While the law waives court fees and establishes specialized labour courts, the "hidden costs" of justice—including travel to provincial capitals, legal drafting fees, and the loss of daily wages—render the judicial system functionally inaccessible to women living at the subsistence level.

More importantly, the cultural norms in Upper Egypt often categorize rural women's work as "supplementary," leading to normalized wage gaps where women earn less than 40% of their male counterparts for identical labour, a practice the new law prohibits in text but fails to monitor in the field.

Recommendations:

- Raising awareness of rural women about the new Labour Law No. 14 of 2025, particularly articles pertaining to having formal contracts; social and medical insurance; maternity leave; childcare; and their protection from harassment and bullying.

EFFECTIVE WAYS TO ENFORCE ONE'S LEGAL RIGHTS

The Legal Framework is the cornerstone of building any state or institution. It is not merely a random collection of laws and regulations; rather, it provides a clear roadmap for legislators. In this regard, several services are provided by the Ministry of Justice. In Assiut governorate, the following courts are available: 2 Primary Courts (*Mahkama Kulliya*), 13 Secondary Courts (*Mahkama Juz'iya*), 5 Main Circuits (*Ma'mouriya Kulliya*), and one Economic Appeal Court.

COURTS

Problematics:

Constitutional provisions affirm the guarantee of the right to litigation, its gratuity, and the accessibility of courts to citizens. However, the practical reality of justice procedures in Egypt reveals a clear gap between the legal framework and actual application. On one hand, secondary courts are spread throughout administrative centres (*Marakaz*), and Primary Courts are in governorates, achieving relative geographical proximity. On the other hand, villages and rural areas still suffer from difficulties in actual access due to distance, complex procedures, high costs, and the length of litigation. Another issue arises regarding citizens' ability to represent themselves. While the law permits self-representation in some simple cases, it requires legal representation in others (such as felonies and appeals), placing an additional burden on low-income groups given the high cost of legal fees. Despite the trend toward digitizing some judicial procedures, implementation remains partial and non-uniform across courts, limiting its impact on facilitating access to justice.

Accessibility:

Responses from lawyers regarding court accessibility indicate that courts are largely geographically available to citizens across Egypt, with a relative disparity between cities and villages. This is evident in the spread of courts in governorates and centres, but the absence of courts inside villages imposes extra burdens on rural residents. The **Assiut Court Complex** in Assiut City is the central hub. Legally, the right to resort to the judiciary is guaranteed to all.

Representation before the Court:

Lawyer responses indicated the following:

- **Self-Representation:** The law allows litigants to represent themselves in simple cases, specifically in: certain Family Court lawsuits, such as alimony and some family disputes (where the Legal Aid Office in the court assists in drafting the memo, while the plaintiff attends hearings herself), and in some civil cases and simple misdemeanors before secondary Courts. Lawsuits such as "Signature Validity" (*Sahha Tawqie*).
- **Reasons for Self-Representation** inclue: financial inability to hire a lawyer; increased legal awareness through media and social networks; and simplicity of procedures in certain claims.

Cases Requiring Mandatory Legal Assistance:

The majority of responses confirmed that self-representation is not permitted in:

- **Felonies (*Janayat*):** The law requires a lawyer's presence with the accused. If absent, the court appoints a lawyer from the Bar Association.
- **Appeal Stage:** A lawyer must sign the statement of claim and attend before the court. The reason for this is the complexity of legal procedures and the importance of proper legal drafting to ensure a fair trial and protect the rights of the parties.

Digitization of Courts:

Responses from interviews with lawyers indicate that digitization is currently applied in some procedures. Case data, litigants, and lawyers are recorded electronically. However, some procedures are still managed manually. The Public Prosecution system has been linked electronically, as have Family Courts, Economic Courts, and some Appeal cases. Digital services are available in courts via employees for data and document extraction. Some services are available via the Ministry of Justice website, but this requires the lawyer to create an account. The "Orange Cash" service was activated for Public Prosecution services, but this represents an additional cost for the litigant, often burdening specific groups, especially women.

The main problem that the lawyers shared is that the digitalization of court decisions in family and criminal law is only accessible to the person her/himself and are not publicly accessible. Even the lawyer who runs the case has no automatic access to the court decisions but has to follow a cumbersome procedure to get a specific power of attorney for this. As a result, there is no transparency and unity in family law and no case law available.

Litigation Duration:

Litigation duration varies by case type and the competent court. There is no fixed timeframe; cases may take from one month to several years. Arguments from interviewed lawyers suggest the average duration is often **between three months and one year**. Personal Status (Family) cases and Urgent Matters are considered the fastest to resolve compared to Civil, Criminal, and Compensation cases, which typically take longer.

Court Fees:

Litigation costs are often considered high, especially with the continuous increase in fees and expenses, and the lack of a clear, specific price list for each case type, making accurate cost assessment difficult. While filing a lawsuit may be affordable for most, **execution procedures**—especially in civil and misdemeanor cases—represent the biggest burden due to numerous steps, multiple travel requirements, and repeated fees at every execution step, in addition to physical and financial burdens. This sometimes leads to the inability to execute judgments despite their issuance. Conversely, Family cases are relatively easier and faster to execute, despite the effort and routine involved. Some opinions assert the State observes the constitutional principle of free litigation and that fees are determined by the Judicial Fees Law (relative or fixed based on claim value). However, the prevailing view is that costs are high compared to average income, limiting actual access to justice, particularly during the execution phase.

Fieldwork Findings:

One woman noted in one FGD that lawyers sometimes agree to take a percentage of the financial dues awarded by the court (contingency fee). While this is unfair to the woman, she is often forced to agree due to a lack of resources to pay upfront fees.

Actual Reality of Court Operations: Interviewed lawyers argue that procedures vary by lawsuit type. The judicial system is subject to legal controls, including formal requirements that must be met before addressing the merits; otherwise, the case is dismissed. The system relies on judicial independence and the separation of powers, guaranteeing two degrees of litigation.

Process: Practically, a lawsuit begins with filing a complaint/report at the police station. The Prosecution examines/investigates it, deciding either to archive it or refer it to court. After hearing pleadings, witnesses, and reviewing documents, the judge issues a verdict.

Challenges: High costs, excessive paperwork, slow resolution, and varying judicial orientations.

Provisional Measures (Urgent Matters):

Provisional measures are temporary, urgent judicial orders issued by the court (or sometimes the Prosecution) before the final ruling. They aim to protect threatened rights/legal positions and prevent imminent or irreversible harm. These measures preserve the status quo or assets and drop automatically upon the issuance of the final judgment. Examples of provisional measures are the following:

- Temporary travel ban.
- Temporary alimony (for wife/children during litigation).
- Empowerment (*Tamkeen*) of the wife to the marital home or temporary visitation rights.
- Temporary suspension of an administrative decision.
- Provisional seizure (*Hajz Tahafuzi*) of debtor's funds.
- Appointment of a judicial receiver (*Haris Qada'i*).
- Proof of Condition (*Ithbat Hala* - e.g., photographing a damaged property).
- Orders on Petitions to prevent the dissipation of assets/documents.

Institutions Involved:

- **Issuing Bodies**: Judge of Urgent Matters, Competent Court, Constitutional Court (rarely, to stop unconstitutional rulings).
- **Executing Bodies**: Execution Administration, Police, Passport Control, Judgment Execution Forces.
- **Assisting Bodies**: Experts, Forensic Medicine, Notary Public (Shahr Aqari), Banks.

Duration and Challenges:

- **Duration:** Usually short/temporary until the final ruling or removal of harm. Some take weeks to a month. In urgent cases, they are immediate.
- **Problems**: Difficulty in notification (addresses/bailiff issues), bad faith use by some parties, lack of unified standards, and practical execution difficulties (e.g., lack of police force availability) leading to delays.

Cost and Digitization:

- **Cost:** Average minimum of EGP 1,000–1,500. Maximum up to EGP 10,000 depending on complexity.
- **Digitization**: Not fully digitized. Registration is electronic for tracking, but procedures are manual.
- **Discrimination:** The law is neutral, but differences exist based on the client's financial status. The law only recognizes the three Abrahamic religions and does not recognize transgender status.

Contract Enforcement

Problematics:

Contracts ensure rights and duties. However, breach of contract (non-performance or refusal to pay) necessitates legal action. A contract is the "law of the parties." Legal Recourse for Breach may include: Forced execution (Specific Performance); claiming compensation for damages; contract rescission (Termination); or claiming the Penalty Clause (if valid).

Procedures:

- **Legal Notice:** Send an official warning (*Inzar*) via a bailiff.
- **Lawsuit:** If non-compliance continues, file a suit for execution or compensation.
- **Institutions:** Courts, Notary Public, Police, Expert Committees.

- **Documents:** Contract/Invoice, ID of breaching party, official warning, proof of breach.
- **Timeline:** Varies by agreement/procedure (30 days to 10 months).
- **Cost:** Moderate (EGP 300 EGP for simple claims up to EGP 5,000+ for complex contracts).
- **Challenges:** Fraud, address changes, death/travel of a party, force majeure, delay of experts.
- **Digitization:** Partial. Official contracts may be recorded electronically; customary (*Urfi*) contracts are not.

Invoices (Debt Collection)

Problematics:
Invoices prove financial rights. Common issues include refusal to pay, denial of debt, or reliance on verbal trust-based agreements.

Procedures:
- Official warning by bailiff.
- Filing a lawsuit.
- Notification of the adversary.
- Court sessions -> Judgment -> Execution.
- **Institutions:** Lawyers, Bailiff Dept, Police (if fraud), Consumer Protection Agency.
- **Documents:** Original invoice/contract, receipts, ID.
- **Cost:** Between EGP 1,000 to 5,000.
- **Duration:** 2 to 8 months.
- **Challenges:** Difficulty of proof (if no written contract), slow procedures, procrastination in execution.
- **Correction:** Difficult after proceedings start.
- **Digitization:** Partial.

ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION (ADR)

Problematics:
With slow litigation, ADR is a practical option. The issue lies in the effectiveness, enforceability, and oversight of these methods compared to the official judiciary.

Types of ADR:
- **Customary Sessions (*Jalsat Urfiya*) / Reconciliation Committees:** Common in villages.
- **Mediation:** Neutral third party helping reach consensus.
- **Negotiation:** Direct friendly discussion.
- **Arbitration:** Binding decision by a neutral party.
- **Family Dispute Settlement Offices:** Within Family Courts.

Effectiveness & Enforceability:
- **Arbitration:** Binding and enforceable after judicial ratification.
- **Mediation/Amicable Settlement:** Enforceable only if officially notarized/documented.
- **Family Offices:** Recommendations are **not binding**; enforcement requires court ratification.
- **Customary Sessions:** Not legally binding (only social/customary enforcement).

CUSTOMARY LAW (*Urf*)

Problematics:

Upper Egypt has a very strong sense of community, tribal/family bonding known as *'Asabiya*, or cultural solidarity, which provides immense social security or a '*safety net'* to members of the society, including women and children. It gives members of the community a high sense of pride and group consciousness. Conflict resolution is often handled through customary reconciliation sessions (*Majalis 'urfi)* rather than formal courts. These customary sessions are managed by tribal or clan elders, who are highly respected and obeyed for their wisdom and neutrality. They are chosen by both sides of the dispute, and their verdict is final and must be obeyed by both conflicting parties. The verdict usually aims to restore social balance rather than strictly punishing the committed crime. Thus, disputes are resolved amicably in villages. It relies on social status rather than legal force.

It should be noted that these traditional authorities are exclusively men. In some cases, they might take a traditional stand, that reenforces the legal culture that discriminates women, who have to be under the authority of their husbands, do not possess land, and in practice have no right in the inheritance.

Key Features:

- **Nature:** Voluntary, not mandatory. Social pressure drives compliance.
- **Participants:** Sheikh al-Balad, Mayor (*Omda*), Religious scholars, family elders.
- **Process:** Summoning -> Hearing -> Negotiation -> Customary Verdict.
- **Cost:** Mostly free or low (hospitality costs).
- **Speed:** Very fast (1 day to 1 week).
- **Pros:** Accessible, cheap, fast, maintains social fabric.
- **Cons:** Non-binding legally, potential bias toward the stronger party, lack of documentation.

Enforceability:

Legally non-binding unless the agreement is taken to a Notary Public or Court to be formalized. In the FGDs, some women noted that in divorce cases, families sometimes prefer Customary Councils (*Majalis Urfiya*) over courts for speed. However, execution depends on the husband's family's willingness to pay. If they refuse, the wife is forced to return to the formal court system.

AFFORDABILITY, ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Introduction - general problematics

The bureaucracy that lawyers face at all steps and in all cases as they make their way through the system makes a lawyer's work extremely cumbersome and more expensive.

For any procedure a lawyer must get from his new client a power of attorney. It may take many hours to stand in line at the real estate registration offices to register the power of attorney to the lawyer. The procedure has been improved by offering now the possibility to book an appointment in advance for an additional fee through a special application. This modality is not activated in Assiut Governorate.

COMMERCIAL LEGAL ASSISTANCE

The legal profession in Egypt is regulated by the **Law of Lawyers No. 17 of 1983** and its amendments in Law No. 147 of 2019, in addition to the Bar Association, which oversees the profession. The regulation includes:

- **Enrollment Conditions:** Obtaining a Bachelor of Laws (LL.B.) from a recognized university, absence of any convictions for crimes involving moral turpitude, and full-time dedication to the profession (with some exceptions).
- **Professional Ethics:** Honesty, integrity, maintaining client confidentiality, and exerting the required effort in the client's interest.
- **Legal Compliance:** Adherence to laws and regulations governing the profession, with penalties for violators ranging from warnings to suspension from practice.

Enrollment conditions are subject to the Advocacy Law and Bar Association regulations, primarily the LL.B. degree and Bar registration. However, some lawyers view the recently imposed **Lawyers' Academy (Institute)** as a financial and moral burden without real practical return on professional practice.

According to the 2021 report by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), the number of registered Bar Association members in **Assiut Governorate** is **22,637**.

Prohibition of Dual Employment:

A lawyer may not combine the practice of law with other professions, primarily government jobs, Public Prosecution, Judiciary, Police, and certain senior public positions. If a lawyer joins a government or legal job within a specific entity, their registration is modified from a freelancer to a corporate/bank lawyer, or they are transferred to the non-practicing schedule. Combining law practice with any other trade is also prohibited.

Registration and Taxation:

Lawyers must register with the Egyptian Bar Association to practice. They are also required to register with the Tax Authority relevant to their office location and submit an annual report on revenues, liabilities, and net profit. Annual registration and adherence to regulations are prerequisites for continued practice.

Fee Structure:

There is no maximum or mandatory price cap. Costs vary by case type and lawyer experience. The Bar Association issues **guidance models** setting a minimum fee for each case type, but these are non-binding and do not rely on hourly billing. Fees are usually lump-sum based on the case and effort.

Client Acquisition:

Lawyers have the freedom to market themselves, including placing office signage, announcing specializations, and accepting cases via the Bar Association, charities, or government entities. Referrals via acquaintances and between lawyers are common, especially given different specializations where cases are referred to colleagues based on expertise.

Annual Fees:

Lawyers pay annual registration fees to practice. Fees vary by degree:

- **Primary:** Approximately EGP 200–300 /year.
- **Appeal:** Approximately EGP 300 EGP.
- **Cassation:** Approximately EGP 450 EGP.

Initial Registration Fees:

- **Bar File Extraction:** Approximately EGP 1,500.
- **Bar Enrollment:** Approximately EGP 5,500–7,000 (depending on age/experience).
- Additional fees for medical exams or the Lawyers' Academy.

Lawyers also pay **stamp duties** and tax fees on every lawsuit filed, independent of the optional subscription to the Health Treatment Project.

Affordability and Access to Legal Aid (For Clients)

Cost of Services: There is no unified pricing, leading to price disparity. This may affect equitable access for clients. Prices vary based on case type, enrollment degree, lawyer reputation, and geography (City vs. Village).

Average Costs:

- Contract Drafting: EGP 500 – 5,000
- Lawsuit Preparation: EGP 2,000 – 25,000
- Major cases may reach EGP 100,000 EGP, while Misdemeanors and Family cases are relatively lower.

Quality Assurance:

Courts and lawyers are widespread in cities but relatively weak in villages. There is no formal Quality Control system; reliance is placed on the lawyer's experience and reputation. While a regulatory framework exists (Bar Association oversight, discipline, disbarment), practical implementation faces challenges.

Legal Services Insurance

In Egypt, there is no comprehensive or active system for **Legal Expenses Insurance** (LEI) for clients, as law is a liberal profession not subject to direct insurance systems like health or vehicle insurance.

Existing Systems:

- Insurance/Pension system for lawyers themselves via the Bar Association (for practicing lawyers only).
- Very limited commercial insurance products for legal expenses/professional liability, mostly available to large multinational corporations, not individuals.
- The Lawyer-Client relationship is based on a fee agreement, not insurance.

Coverage: Since direct legal insurance is absent, services are generally uninsured. Limited existing products may cover legal consultation or representation in specific civil/commercial disputes but rarely cover comprehensive litigation fees or criminal/family cases.

Cost of Insurance: There is no fixed annual cost for legal service insurance. Current financial burdens are Bar subscriptions and stamp duties. Commercial insurance premiums (if available) are determined by insurance companies based on coverage scope, without unified pricing.

Digital Insurance: There is no integrated digital system for legal service insurance. Partial digitization exists in lawyer pension systems, but client-lawyer relationships do not occur via digital insurance platforms.

Ineffectiveness:

The system is ineffective due to:

- Lack of real insurance cover for the client.
- Independence of lawyers (not employees of insurance companies).
- Absence of a lawyer's insurance number linked to legal services.
- Legal fees are not subject to social insurance, but taxes are calculated based on the number of lawsuits filed annually.

Non-Lawyer Legal Aid Providers

While practicing law is restricted to Bar-registered lawyers, non-judicial legal assistance (administrative/guidance) is provided by:

- **Legal Aid Offices** in courts.
- **National Council for Women (NCW),**
- **National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM),** and Child Protection Committees, as per the Child Law.
- **NGOs** and Human Rights Organizations.
- **Paralegals** (Lawyer agents).
- **Customary Bodies** (Mayors, Sheikhs, Family Houses).

Role: Restricted to guidance, support, or settlement. They cannot plead in court. **Location:** Concentrated in courts, government complexes, and major cities (Cairo, Giza, Alexandria). NCW has branches in governorates, but presence is lower in rural areas. **Registration:** No unified registration system. Some formal entities require licensing.

Other Providers:

- Legal Affairs Depts in Government.
- Ministry of Justice Expert Offices.
- Dispute Settlement & Mediation Offices.
- Labour Court Legal Aid Offices.
- Refugee Support Institutions.

State-Organized Free Legal Aid System

There is no single comprehensive national system, but rather multiple integrative mechanisms:

- **Mandatory Appointment:** In Criminal/Felony cases via the Judiciary and Bar Association.
- **Court Legal Aid Offices:** Especially in Family Courts.
- **International Programs:** Supported by entities like UNDP.
- **Ministry of Justice Systems:** For Labour, NCW, and Child Helpline cases.

Beneficiaries:

- Those unable to afford fees.
- Vulnerable groups: Women, Children, Workers, Low-income individuals.
- Accused persons in criminal cases without a lawyer (Constitutional Right to Defense).
- Refugees and victims of trafficking (in specific programs).

Types of Cases:

- Criminal/Felonies: Mandatory appointment.
- Family: Alimony, Divorce, Custody, Inheritance.
- Labour Cases.
- Administrative**/**Civil: Limited coverage depending on the provider.

Co-Payment Policy:

- Felonies/NCW: Generally free.
- NGOs: Beneficiary may pay court fees only or a nominal amount based on financial status.
- No unified national policy.

Access and Reality:

- Service is provided via coordination between relevant entities and the Bar Association.
- Many receive aid until judgment (or acquittal) or debt settlement/release.
- **Family Cases:** Assistance often starts from the beginning, especially for widowed/uneducated women.
- **Actual Access:** Verified through government offices and civil society partnerships. Access is nearly guaranteed in criminal cases but depends on awareness and geography for Family/Civil cases.

Process:

- Submit a request proving financial inability.
- Referral to an appointed lawyer or legal aid officer.
- (In Felonies): Court appoints directly.

Supervision: Supervised by Ministry of Justice, Judiciary, Bar Association, and National Councils. No unified national quality measurement mechanism exists.
Digitization: Partial and incomplete. No comprehensive national platform for free legal aid.
Budget: The specific state budget allocation is **undisclosed**. UNDP reports indicate 1.14 million people received services (2008-2023) via supported programs.

Non-Governmental Free Legal Aid

Providers:

- **Individual Lawyers/Bar Association:** Pro bono services.
- **Civil Society/NGOs:** The backbone of aid for vulnerable groups, often project-funded.
- **International Organizations (UNHCR):** For refugees and asylum seekers conducting refugee status determination (RSD)
- **University Legal Clinics:** Experimental/limited scope.

Services:

- **In-Court:** Filing suits, attending hearings, execution of judgments (primary/appeal).
- **Out-of-Court:** Administrative procedures, refugee regularization, women empowerment, police representation, drafting complaints, mediation.

Role of NCW

The NCW plays a major role in addressing GBV and VAW in Egypt through policy research and formulation and advocacy. The council was established by presidential decree in 2000; the organization of its work was later codified through **Law No. 30 of 2018**. Today, the NCW is composed of 30 members drawn from government, academia, and civil society. The NCW plays a major role in policy formulation, in advocacy, and in monitoring and evaluation. To promote evidence-based decision-making, the NCW established the Egyptian Women's Observatory (ENOW) to gather, analyze, and disseminate information on the status of women and gender-related issues in Egypt, promoting awareness and advocacy at the national level.

On the response level, the NCW supports local CSOs and CBOs across Egypt for the design and implementation of awareness-raising events and the referral process regarding some services, such as

reporting cases of GBV. Additionally, NCW has an Ombudsman's Office that serves as a link between NCW and Egyptian women survivors of any form of GBV. The NCW's complaint office provides a wide range of services including: receiving complaints via telephone, **hotline 15115**, mail, and in-person meetings; providing legal and social counselling through specialists in those fields; referring women's complaints to the relevant authorities and following them up; assisting female complainants, if needed, to approach specialized attorneys, as well as attorneys working on pro bono basis with the Ombudsman's office; and conducting studies into issues raised by complaints received by the Office.

Interviews with government officials revealed a set of services available to women, such as support from NCW through the Women's Complaints Office. This includes providing a lawyer to support women in cases within the Family Court. NCW covers all expenses and legal fees.

- **Decentralization:** NCW has its offices in the governorate. To solve the challenge of women traveling from the districts to the city, a number of lawyers have been trained and affiliated with NCW within each district to support cases, cover expenses, and alleviate women's suffering.
- **Hotline:** There is a hotline **15115**.
- **Scope:** NCW works on various issues such as labour cases, violence, and cybercrime. During the current year 2025, NCW succeeded in obtaining a prison sentence for a perpetrator of electronic extortion who had made explicit threats to a girl.

Other support services are provided through the Family House (*Bayt Al-Aila*). Through its legal support office, they provide free legal services. The Preaching Zone (*Mantiqat Al-Wa'z*) affiliated to Ministry of Awqaf. It provides reunion and family support services. The Family court through its legal aid office provides advice and legal aid.

Role of NCCM

The National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) plays a pivotal role in ending child marriage issues in Egypt. One of its pertinent services is managing the documentation and reporting mechanism through the Child **Helpline 16000**, which is considered an effective system for receiving and recording child complaints since 2005. However, there is a lack of analysis for reported cases of child marriage and the effectiveness of the support services provided. NCCM can ensure that the Child Protection Committees (CPCs), as stipulated by the Child Law are functional and operational to protect the rights of children at the district and village level, particularly girls in rural areas. CPCs are composed of Local members of Parliament, heads of the various departments (health, education, social affairs, etc.), Village Council Presidents, police representative, social workers, teachers and members of NGOs. Additionally, the Family Counselling Offices (FCOs) provide support services for children and families, receiving complaints through the **helpline 16021.**

BAROMETER CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There are soft structural constraints, which refer to the non-physical or enabling environment that can inhibit **rural women's** development and access to legal rights in rural Upper Egypt. This includes informal constraints related to deeply inherited traditions and culture, use of overwhelming traditional business practices and manual transactions rather than automated financial services; or formal ones related to state regulations and bureaucracy. There are other limitations related to the infrastructure and availability of utilities such as water, sewer, electricity, telephone lines and even mobile networks. This is in addition to environmental pollution representing a major constraint affecting health and social relations between community members.

Despite the progress made in improving women's conditions in Egypt — in education, economic participation, and exercising civil and legal rights — challenges remain. Rural women in many communities, particularly in Upper Egypt, and mainly in Assiut, still face various forms of gender-based discrimination, manifested in: wage gaps between women and men; the influence of customs, traditions, and inherited norms on women's social and economic decisions. **The Legal Rights Protection Barometer** illustrates the intricate connections between individuals, communities, institutions, the state, and the environment, highlighting the importance of legal rights at each level. By fostering awareness and education about these rights, encouraging community engagement, ensuring responsive institutional practices, enacting protective state policies, and acknowledging the rights of the environment, we can create a comprehensive framework that supports both human well-being and ecological sustainability, with focus on rural vulnerable women. This holistic approach is essential for addressing the complex challenges posed by environmental degradation and ensuring a just and equitable future for all Egyptians, particularly rural women.

The justice gap for Assiut's rural women is not found in the courtroom alone; it begins in the polluted irrigation canal, the informal labor market, and the customary law that denies them their land. A just and equitable future for the rural women of Upper Egypt can only be achieved through targeted, multi-level interventions.

While courts are geographically accessible, th**e high cost of legal fees, complex procedures, and slow litigation effectively bar the poor, particularly non-literate rural women, from justice**. The execution procedures represent the biggest burden often rendering a favourable judgment useless due to high and repeated fees. The High costs of legal representation force rural women in Upper Egypt into unfair contingency fee arrangements (a percentage of the awarded dues) or to abandon their cases. Furthermore, the partial digitization of courts has not significantly eased the burden for rural citizens and can add costs and complexity for the digitally illiterate.

Despite the fact that customary law *urf* is faster and cheaper, it is not legally binding and is often biased against women.

While free legal aid exists, it is fragmented and poorly publicized, leaving most women unaware of the services available from the NCW and NGOs that provide pro bono legal aid.

Closing the justice gap requires a coordinated strategy that empowers the People, reforms State procedures, and expands affordable Legal Aid to create a holistic and sustainable solution for the protection of rural women in Upper Egypt. Based on the Barometer's method, recommendations are formulated based on the three components: People, State Procedures, and Legal Aid.

I. The People (Enhancing Knowledge and Access to Resources)

Rural women working in agriculture in the informal sector are most at risk of being legally unprotect. They do not enjoy any work-related rights; they work on small-hold farms, but do not own the land, and/or they work for others mainly as daily labor. Under the new labor law, they should be legally protected.

Underage marriage, that is illegal, still happens. Due to the fact that there is no formal marriage, the children she gets cannot be registered, and don't enjoy any rights.

(formal) marriage is a contract, in which she agrees to be under the authority of the husband. She has the custody over the children, but if she is Christian or if she remarries after divorce, she loses the custody. The educational mandate is however with the husband, which complicates things a lot, especially after divorce.

Divorce is often the only way out. While the husband has the right to an oral divorce, she has to go to court to divorce him, in case there is no agreement. She also has to go to court to proof his divorce to be able to change her legal papers and in to claim financial rights related to the marriage (nafaqa, pay out the furniture list etc.). The default base divorce is long and hard to proof. Thus, the only way out she really has is to do the *Kula*, a quick divorce by the wife in which she loses all her financial rights related to the marriage.

She also needs to go to court to claim nafaqa, financial support to her and her children during and also after marriage. For this she has to file many court procedures. But then, this is worth little if her husband is poor and has no money.

Another issue for women in rural areas in Upper Egypt is that conflict solution in the villages often done by the traditional authorities, the village elders. They are all member, and try to come to a solution between the families involved, implementing traditional values in which men have the authority over women.

In inheritance, she has right to half what the main inheritors get. But in reality, in rural areas in Upper Egypt, she does not receive any inheritance. Christians, and also the courts when the inheritance is between Christians, tend to follow the Islamic inheritance rules and practice, in which women are excluded from the inheritance. The philosophy behind this is that she marries into the family of her husband, and he will receive the inheritance of his family. Like this the land stays in the family. If she is not married, divorced or widower, the woman is under the authority of her brother, and he receives from his parents and will look after her.

II. State - Efficiency of State Procedures

These recommendations cover the different aspects related to State Procedures, as follows:

Birth Certificates:

- Automatically register children in hospitals, even if marriage documents are incomplete.
- Simplify registration procedures (documents): The notification and the mother's ID should suffice, with the remaining paperwork to be completed later.
- Amend the interpretation of Article 20 of Law No. 143 of 1993 (Civil Status) to recognize the mother as an authorized reporter.
- Establish a legal pathway for birth registration in cases of undocumented marriage (marriage under 18, divorce before documentation, or the father's refusal to document the marriage).

- Establish legal aid units within Social Solidarity Directorates and social units to provide legal counseling.
- Impose penalties on fathers unwilling to register the child (especially in cases of early marriage).
- Activate the Case Management system in social administrations to track cases of children who have not received birth certificates until they are issued.

Recognition of Children:

- Establishing a mechanism for immediate child registration to grant the child a temporary birth certificate until disputes are settled.
- Mandating DNA testing as a compulsory measure in cases of denial and reducing its cost.
- Imposing legal accountability and fines on fathers who deliberately fail to register the child (for harming the child's best interests).
- Establishing legal aid units within the Civil Registry and Family Courts to provide free support to marginalized cases.
- Raising awareness regarding the role of the "Family House" (Bayt Al-Aila) and the "Reunion Unit" at Al-Azhar Al-Sharif and the services they provide.

ID Cards/Citizenship:

- Increase the number of registration offices in rural areas.
- Dispatch officials to villages to assist people with registration.
- Deploy mobile Civil Registry units to villages and hamlets so citizens do not have to travel to the main centre.

Death Certificates

- Obtaining the death certificate in some cases requires providing legal support to families, especially marginalized groups, to ensure procedures are completed correctly and without rights violations.
- Individuals may need legal assistance to correct errors in the death certificate due to the complexity of the procedures (court involvement).

Personal Status Law (Marriage, divorce, Alimony, etc.)

- Activate "Ratification": This involves registering Urfi marriage that took place between spouses with the date of its actual occurrence, regardless of how long ago it was, so the wife acquires her rights.
- Legislative Amendment: Amend the Personal Status Laws for Muslims and Christians (which is currently happening).
- Codification: Include all Sharia rules applied in practice regarding marriage into the Islamic Personal Status Law.
- Awareness: Ensure women are aware of the marriage contract and the special conditions that they could add from the beginning to avoid any forthcoming issues in their marriages.
- Contract Revision: A thorough review of the Islamic marriage contract form is required. The Holy Quran urges this, stating that the marriage contract is a "solemn covenant" (Surah An-Nisa, Verse 21). Currently, the contract includes only six lines for special conditions, handwritten by the Ma'zoun. An unlimited number of lines would be needed in a digital version to encourage the use of special conditions. The Ma'zoun should only verify whether the conditions align with the basic rules of Islamic Shari'a.
- The practices of submitting multiple alimony requests must be addressed to avoid overloading the Family Court. They are inefficient and lead to high legal fees. All claims should be consolidated in detail, based on specific needs, and included in **a single lawsuit**.

In cases of divorce

- Simplify the process for proving moral harm and accept strong circumstantial evidence and psychological reports.
- Enhance the role of Family Dispute Settlement Offices while ensuring the wife is not coerced into reconciliation in cases of violence.
- Spread awareness regarding the wife's right to divorce for harm and the available means of proof.
- Provide free or low-cost legal support for women unable to pay.
- Develop immediate protection mechanisms for aggrieved wives (protection orders, temporary enablement of the marital home).
- Making guardianship shared between father and mother even in separation.
  - *Core Decisions* (changing type of education, etc.) should require mutual consent or a court order.
  - *Daily Decisions* should belong to the custodian.
- Classifying educational disputes as urgent matters for the sake of the child.
- Activating mediation before resorting to the judiciary, utilizing bodies such as the Egyptian Family House, the Al-Azhar Reunion Unit, and Church Family Counseling Offices.
- Establish legal guidance and counseling offices.
- Conduct awareness programs and campaigns in mosques and churches regarding women's right to inheritance.
- Build the capacity of lawyers working on a voluntary basis to support women in inheritance cases.

Property:

To mitigate the social shock of the new Rental Law, the following measures are recommended:

- For residential units occupied by the elderly or vulnerable, the transition period should be longer (e.g., 7-10 years) compared to commercial units or closed apartments.
- The State must provide alternative "Social Housing" units for tenants who can prove they have no other shelter and cannot afford the new rent increases.
- Establish a "Family Support Fund" subsidized by a portion of the real estate tax, to help pay the difference in rent for the most vulnerable families during the transition.
- Offer cash incentives (from the landlord to the tenant) for the immediate voluntary surrender of the apartment, codified by law (e.g., Tenant leaves now in exchange for 20% of the apartment's market value).

Agricultural Land:

- Raising awareness of Law No. 219 of 2017 (Inheritance Law), particularly Criminal Protection Article 49 stipulating that anyone who deliberately withholds an inheritance or hides documents proving an inheritance (like the *Hiyaza* card) faces imprisonment and a heavy fine.
- Enforcing Registration that is proved via a "Green Contract" (Registered Title) or, more commonly in rural areas, a *Sahha Tawqie* court verdict combined with a "*Hiyaza* Card" (Farmer's Holding Card) from the agricultural cooperative.
- The New Law (No. 168 of 2025): Passed in August 2025, this law allows citizens to "legalize" their encroachment on state land if it was cultivated before October 2023. This is a critical opportunity for Upper Egyptian farmers to gain formal title, but the high "legalization fees" (*taqneen*) remain a barrier for the poor.
- For rural women, it is imperative that they claim their legal rights and prove their legal share (usually half of a man's share) and prevents male relatives from claiming that the woman is "not an heir." The following steps are recommended to be taken:

- Step 1: Obtaining the "Inheritance Declaration" (*I'lam Wiratha*), as this document proves the legal share and prevents male relatives from claiming that the woman is not an heir.
- Step 2: Securing the Agricultural Holding Card (*Hiyaza*) to ensure that the woman's name is added to the "*Hiyaza*" records as a partner in the land's produce and subsidies.
- Step 3: Registration at the Real Estate Registry (*Shahr Aqari*) to have "Absolute Ownership" and prevent the land from being sold without the woman's consent, and register her share. Once registered, no one can sell the land or build on it without the woman's consent signature.
- Step 4: Managing Social Pressure & "Radwa" based on informed consent and knowledge about the real value of the land.
- Step 5: Invoking Law No. 219 of 2017 (Criminal Protection) stipulating that anyone who deliberately withholds an inheritance or hides documents proving an inheritance (like the *Hiyaza* card) faces: Minimum 6 months in prison, and a fine of EGP 20,000 to EGP 100,000.

Labour:

- Enhance awareness of the new Labour Law and rights pertaining to formalizing the informal sector and protection of seasonal workers, and wage labourers, particularly rural women. To realize this, rural women, working in agriculture, can apply for a social insurance number, and change their official occupation in their IDs instead of "housewife" to become "agricultural labourer". Furthermore, women can initiate their own agricultural production cooperatives to sustain their livelihoods.

- Ensure the enforcement of the New Labour law, particularly for informal workers to ensure their employment is formalized. With regards to rural women:
  - The Ministry of Labour should introduce a **"Licensed Agricultural Contractor"** permit.
  - Holding the *landowner* jointly liable. If a landowner hires an unlicensed Contractor, they are fined. This forces landowners to police the Contractor.
  - Register women for the **Irregular Workers Fund** on the spot (issuing ID cards instantly).
  - Conduct inspections to check for child labour and safety gear without immediate punitive measures, encouraging compliance.
  - Enforce Traffic checkpoints on agricultural roads in Upper Egypt to confiscate licenses of open pickups carrying workers, particularly women.
  - Offering tax breaks or subsidized loans for brokers/farms to purchase microbuses or safe transport vehicles of seasonal and daily workers, particularly women to protect them and ensure their safety.
  - In cases of injury, when a woman is injured, the Customary Council *majlis urfi* often awards her a small "consolation" sum. Legal compensation rates (e.g., full medical coverage + lost wages) should be enforced through the customary system, which is faster and more respected, particularly that there is no social or medical insurance for these daily or seasonal workers.

State: Enforcement

The digitization is an important way forward, but then the court decisions should be more easily accessible.

III. Legal Aid – Accessibility, Affordability and Quality

The problem with legal aid is that it is often not so efficient due to the obstacles in the courts system.

Some recommendations for making legal information and aid more easily accessible.

- Conducting legal outreach campaigns via the Bar Association in marginalized areas to raise awareness of women, particularly within the age range (19–35) about legal rights and procedures;
- The Bar Association in collaboration with NCW encourages members to handle free cases for farmers and women; promotion linked to volunteering;
- Enhance NGOs role in community legal awareness activities to raise women's legal knowledge.
- Conduct random surveys to evaluate services provided by NCW;
- Train Al-Azhar, Awqaf preachers in mosques and in churches to provide legal rights advice;
- Activate legal clinics at Assiut University Faculty of Law; and utilize Assiut University female graduates to conduct awareness programs.
- Network veterinary, agriculture, and NGOs to train women in modern farming for environmental protection;
- Establish mobile support units in front of courts to provide free legal knowledge;
- Conduct media campaigns on updated personal status laws;
- Design community maps in each government institution showing service locations and procedures;
- Build capacities of the Egyptian Association for Forensic Sciences members to assess legal aid effectiveness and promote women's rights.
- Train newly graduated lawyers to provide pro-bono and low-cost legal services to clients in need for legal aid through the **Microjustice Legal Aid Platform**.

Implementing these recommendations will not only fulfill Egypt's commitment to SDG 5 and 16 but will unlock the social and economic potential of rural women who constitute half the country's population.

NEEDED FOLLOW-UP ACTION IDENTFIED BY THE BAROMETER RESEARCH

1) DIGITAL LEGAL AID PLATFORM SET UP TO FORESEE IN THE NEED FOR LEGAL INFORMATION AND AFFORDABLE QUALITY LEGAL AID

Women in Upper Egypt have plenty of rights according to the law, but to claim those rights mostly they have to go to court. For this they needed to be well informed on how to claim their rights and to have easily access to a lawyer.

The Microjustice Digital Legal Aid Platform has just started to be implemented in Assiut, and should be structurally set in a sustainable way, involving all stakeholders in Assiut and the villages in the rural areas, where paralegals are trained to help women navigate the Platform, to find legal information on the problems they need to arrange and are being connected to a lawyer who can take on their case. The platform is a tool for the public, especially women and paralegals in the villages.

The Platform is also a tool for lawyers to be guided to provide quality services and to get clients and become a specialist in a field of law.

LINK TO THE PLATFORM: https://microjusticeegypt.org/

- Raise awareness about the **Microjustice Legal Aid Platform** presence and its services including data and information about environmental laws and enhance knowledge of climate justice.

2) To Enhance Judicial Reform

The Platform is also a tool for tracking the obstacles in the procedures and advocacy. It may also be used to provide transparency and unity in the court practice by sharing information and court rulings.

ANNEX I: NATURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

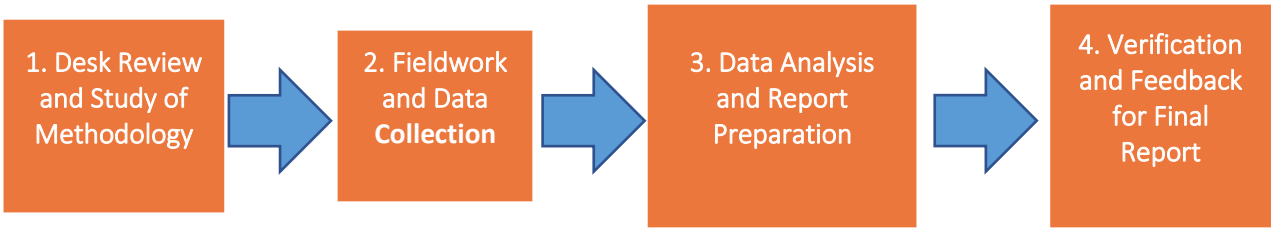
The Government has been issuing all types of legislation (see Part II State Procedures) to keep the building and industries out of this green strip. Nevertheless, one can witness a gradual change in the landscape: gradually more houses and small factories are built and every time less space is left for agriculture, that is still undertaken in an artisanal way, using donkeys, camels and handwork - traditional hand tools. Despite the strict regulation on waste, one can witness canals full of plastic waste while people throw chemical fluids in those canals as well. Women in the FGD complained about the agricultural waste burning and air pollution that is causing breathing problems.

Please review Annex I document.

ANNEX II: METHODOLOGY

This section covers the methodology of the Barometer research, phases of the study and description of the sample of respondents:

PHASES OF THE BAROMETER STUDY



Phases of Barometer Study

1. Preparation and Desk Review

During this stage, the study team carried out a set of preparatory activities for implementing the study. These activities included: finalizing agreements and contractual matters; clarifying the terms of reference; providing the necessary references for preparing the inception report and study tools; and selecting the data collection team.

This was followed by the desk review and study design. The team conducted a comprehensive review of the study tools and questionnaires, as well as the indicators and expected outputs, in coordination with the Eparchial Development Office (EDO) team. This phase also included selecting the implementation areas, defining target groups, and developing the study timeline.

2. Fieldwork and Data Collection

After approving all details, the study team moved to the field to collect data in the targeted governorate over a period of **four days**. The study team closely coordinated with the EDO project team to monitor any methodological adjustments and ensure the quality of the study tools and content.

3. Analysis and Draft Report Writing

Using the collected baseline data, the study team prepared a draft of the study report and submitted it to EDO for review, comments, and feedback. All procedures ensured that the study report complies with professional standards and meets both the study's objectives and the information needs of its intended users.

4. Verification, and Feedback

This phase covers review and discussions with Microjustice Expert to finalize the study report and provide the final translated report into English.

STUDY DESIGN

The study adopted a **mixed-methods approach**, ensuring multiple sources of evidence and enabling data triangulation.

Quantitative data: To obtain quantitative indicators of the current situation, the study relied on: Statistical bulletins and publications; Data from the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS); Population Health Survey; and Non-periodical bulletins covering key quantitative indicators,

Desk Review: Based on the study objectives, the desk review served as a secondary data source and included analysis and review of statistics and indicators related to: Women's employment; Education; status of violence against women; Drivers of poverty; and Women's access to services.

Qualitative Component: To generate qualitative insights, the study used **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)** with community-based female beneficiaries and **In-depth individual interviews** with decision-makers, community leaders, and lawyers.

Key Informant Interviews Targeted:

- Provincial-level officials
- Directors from the Health, Education, and Social Solidarity Directorates
- Civil society organizations

Focus Group Discussions Targeted:
Key population groups in the communities of: **Manfalut; Qusiya; Abnoub; and Abu Tig.** Please see Map of Assiut and Districts[5]:

The target participants in the FGDs were adult women aged **19–60 years**.

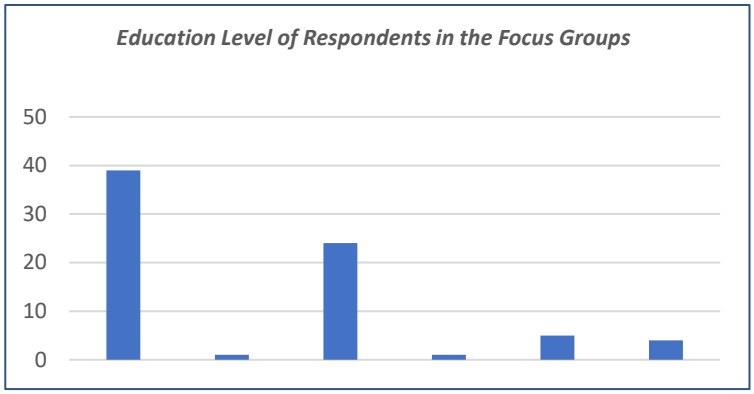
The following table presents the distribution of FGDs and interviews with key respondents:

[5] https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Map-of-Assiut-Governorate-Egypt-Sites-in-red-color-rep-resent-areas-of-mosquito_fig1_273144640

Centre	Village	Actual Sample Size per Group	Discussion	Number of Groups	Age Group	Gender
Manfalout	Manfalout City	15	1	1	20-45 20-45 20-45 20-45 19-55 25-60	Female - - - - -
Qusiya	Tanagha	15	1	1		
Abnoub	Kom Al-Mansoura	15	1	1		
Abutig -	Baqour	15	1	1		
	Al-Nakhila	15	1	1		
Assiut Centre	Assiut City	15	1	1		
Total		-	90	6	-	-
Assiut -	Assiut City -	4 -	2 -	2 -	25-45 -	Male Female Male - Male Female Male Female
Sadfa - -	Sadfa City	2 -	1 -	1 -	25-40 -	
	Al-Duwair					
	Kom Abu Hajar	3 -	1 -	1 -	25-45 -	
Assiut	Assiut					
Assiut	Assiut City	2 -	1 -	1 -	25-35 -	
Assiut Centre	Al-Shaghabah					
Total		**-**	**11**	**5**	**-**	**-**
Assiut - - - - - - - -	Assiut City - - - - - - - -	2	1	1	50-59	Male
		2 -	1 -	1 -	40-50 -	Male Female
		2	1	1	40-45	Female
		1	1	1	55	Male
		2 -	1 -	1 -	60-65 -	Male Female
		2	1	1	40-55	Female
		2	1	1	50-55	Male
Group Total		**-**	**13**	**7**	**-**	**-**

Education Level	Number
Higher Education	39
Post-Secondary Qualification	1
Secondary Education	24
Preparatory (Middle School)	1
Can Read and Write	5
Illiterate (Cannot Read or Write)	4

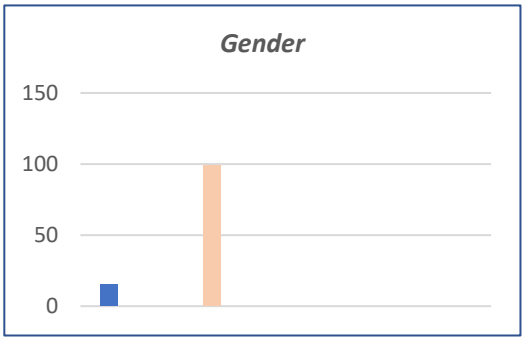
Education Level of Respondents in Focus Group Discussions



The sample included all educational levels and represented women from both **rural and urban areas**. Although the proportion of higher-educated women in the study sample was relatively high, this does **not imply the absence of gender-related issues**, including inheritance and other social challenges.

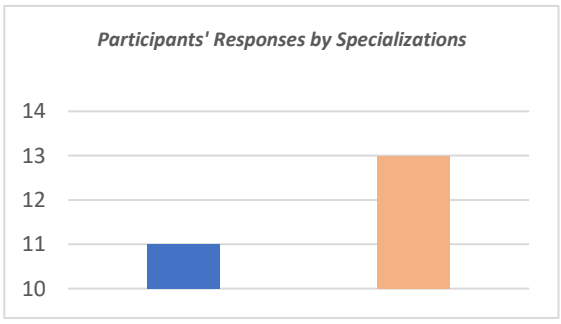
Gender	Number of Respondents
Male	15
Female	99
Total	**114**

Distribution of Participants by Gender



Specialization	Number of Respondents
Lawyers	11
Community & Government Leaders	13
Total	**24**

Distribution of Participants by Specialization (Community Leaders – Lawyers)



ANNEX III: LEGAL RIGHTS PROTECTION BAROMETER ASSIUT ILLUSTRATION

Legal Rights Protection Barometer Upper Egypt
With Focus on Assiut Governorate

MICROJUSTICE

Eparchial Development Office “EDO"
Prepared by Center for Development Services

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