

# Policy Paper

## Egyptian youth: National policies and international initiatives

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## Executive summary

This policy paper aims at presenting the current state of Egyptian youth by identifying the problems that the average young Egyptian faces, the policy responses at national level, and any deficiencies and recommendations that are still to be addressed. In addition, national and international initiatives targeting improvement in the current status of young people are also discussed.

The first section of the paper aims at identifying the problems faced by young people in Egypt by using the SAHWA youth survey conducted in the country.<sup>1</sup> The data show the current state of affairs with regard to issues of employment, education, political and civic participation, and gender differences. The paper also uses parts of the narrative interviews and life stories conducted as part of the SAHWA Project in 2014-2015. This policy paper also aims to highlight the policy responses to young people's problems at national level through discussing development initiatives targeting the youth in Egypt since the 1970s, which was beginning of the formalisation of youth movements and policies. Our narrative also gives examples of cooperation with international actors in the youth field in the country, focusing especially on employment opportunities and education managed mainly by the Social Development Fund (SDF). At the international level, the World Bank and GIZ have collaborated with individual ministries to implement development projects targeting the young. While these initiatives have indeed contributed positively to coping with some of the immediate problems facing the Egyptian youth, there is still a significant development distance ahead as regards the different social concerns of these young people in their daily lives. Existing European-funded projects still require more awareness and publicity at the local level as a staggering 99.24% of the SAHWA youth sample (representative weighed sample) are unaware of any European Union projects taking place in the country.

## I. Introduction

Officially, and at the highest level, Egyptian young people continue to be the centre of attention when it comes to creating or refurbishing existing national policies. After repeated declarations, on October 25<sup>th</sup>–27<sup>th</sup> 2016 the president convened a highly publicised national conference of 3000 young people in the Sinai city of Sharm el-Sheikh. This high level conference was to follow up on national policies designed to respond to contemporary problems faced by young people as well as different international initiatives implemented in the country to reduce youth problems. Young people account for about 60% of the Egyptian population (Ministry of International Cooperation), thus constituting the most important social stratum in Egyptian society at present and projections show that this will continue to be the case in the future.

The Ministry of International Cooperation acts as the official go-between with international organisations such as the World Bank and other European-led initiatives. Jointly with the Ministry of Youth and the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of International Cooperation supervises the implementation of these projects at a national level. The Ministry of International Cooperation reports that the sum of ongoing projects from different partners around the world stood at \$28.75bn in development aid coming from 26 different international development partners manifested in 339 different ongoing projects nationwide (Ministry of International Cooperation). The “Egypt Vision 2030” is the most recent initiative sponsored by affiliated local ministries with the cooperation of foreign partners and prioritises the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of development. The vision includes economic development, more efficient government institutions, educational enhancement and environmental and urban development (Egypt Vision 2030).

While international development initiatives implemented in cooperation with the state institutions seem to be promising at first glance, the problems the Egyptian youth face continue to persist. The turbulence that followed the 2011 “Arab Spring” increased the myriad challenges facing Egypt and other neighbouring countries. In some countries, sectors of the youth population – especially the protesting revolutionary ones – are negatively conceived, while young people’s

frustrations range, to varying degrees, from the lack of job opportunities and a good education to increasingly difficult economic circumstances.

## II. Problem definition: The current situation and problems of young people in Egypt

This section of the policy paper aims at identifying two major problems faced by the Egyptian youth of today: employment opportunities and accessibility, and gender equality. This section also draws the link between education and job opportunities.

### a) Young people in and out of the labour market

Youth unemployment is a serious problem in Egypt, as shown in Figure 1. As a general trend, it continues to be higher among females than males. This trend may be attributed to a number of social reasons. Moreover, it is important to take note of the large informal sector in Egypt whose statistics remain hidden and thus unaccounted for, as indicated in the figures below.

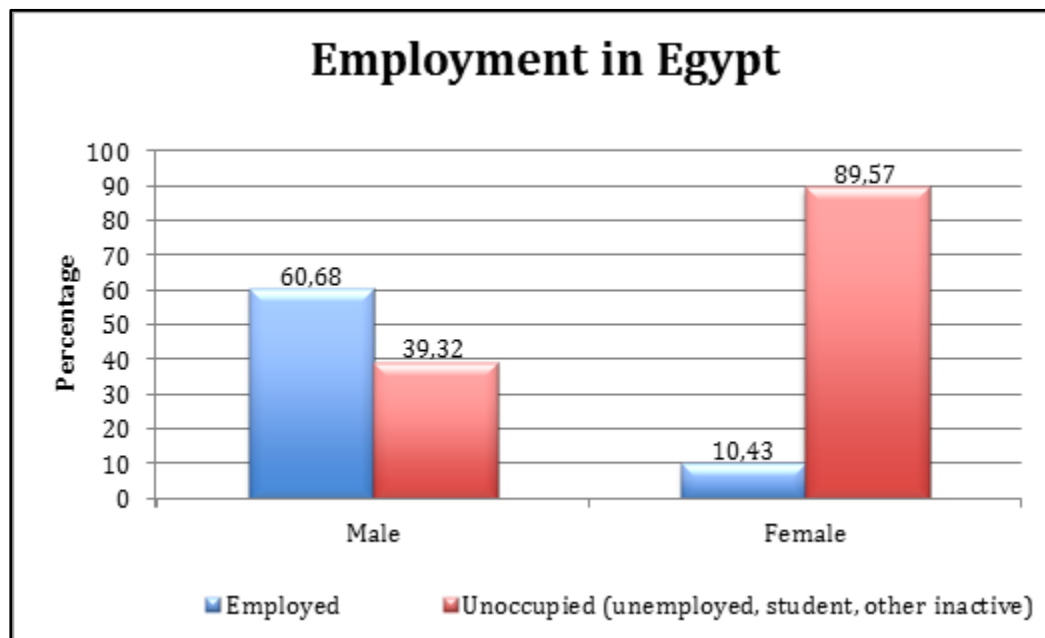


Figure 1 - - Source: SAHWA Youth Survey Data.

Socially, there has always been this trend (especially in the rural areas) in Upper Egypt where men do not approve of their wives working. This social tendency is built on the tradition that men are seen as the breadwinners and support the

family, while women are perceived to be more concerned with household activities. Figure 2 supports this assumption as it shows the female preponderance in the percentages of “opposition of parent or husband”, and the preference of “dedicating my time to my housework and my children”.

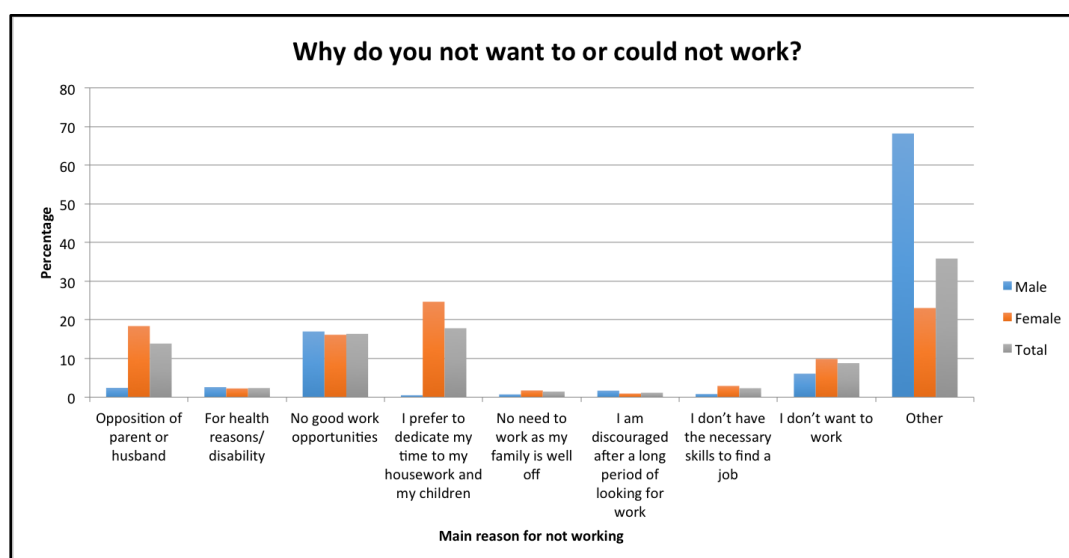


Figure 2 - - Source: SAHWA Youth Survey Data

In addition, the SAHWA Field Study insights show that young women in Egypt experience social norms that influence their employment opportunities negatively. For example, a young Egyptian girl had indeed opened up a small shop to sell clothes, was just one of the young women who had to reconsider her work preferences due to social norms.

“I couldn’t find a job for three months after I graduated, it was a very profitable shop that actually worked well and I made average profits of about 5,000LE per month. This however didn’t continue much after I got engaged. My fiancé refused to let me stand and work in the shop and be in direct contact with anyone coming into the shop on a daily basis, while I didn’t appreciate it much, I asked him if I could apply for work in “Bank Misr” a government owned bank, and he agreed because it was a public sector job that had specific working hours unlike the private sector” (EG\_NI\_3).

Moreover, there has also been a tendency amongst private sector employers to recruit more men over women to ensure consistency and avoid maternity leave absences. This uneven divide is represented in Figure 3 below where males are dominant in the private sector, while females are more present in the public sector.

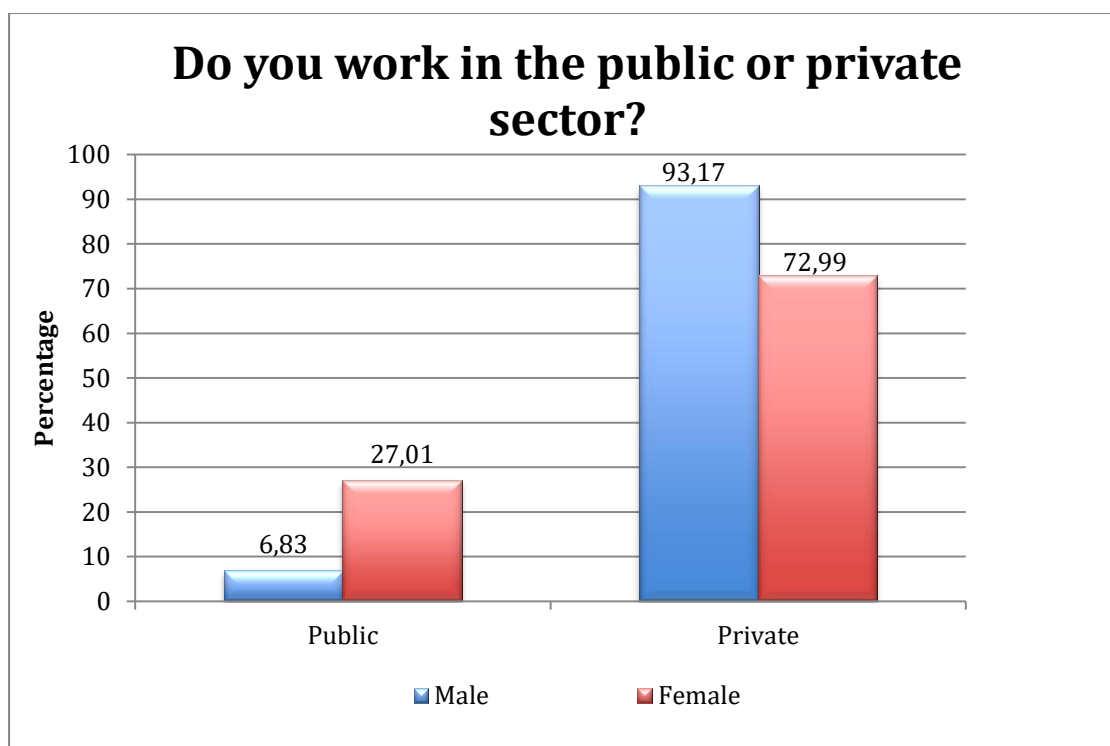


Figure 3 - Source: SAHWA Youth Survey Data.

Although young males are luckier to be employed in the private sector, they are still aware of the risks of the unstable employment conditions there. As a young Egyptian boy interviewed during the SAHWA Field Study said, the private sector provides many more job opportunities than the public sector. However, this is not necessarily considered to be an unreserved advantage, as he is aware of the fact that the private sector employer will impose all his rules and regulations upon the employee and any employee that works in the private sector does not enjoy permanence or stability of any kind, and may be fired for any minor mistake (EG\_NI\_4).

Figure 4 below suggests that young women find it more difficult to get a job, and are therefore more willing (than young men) to accept a job even if it is badly paid in an area that is different from their area of specialisation or beneath their skill level.

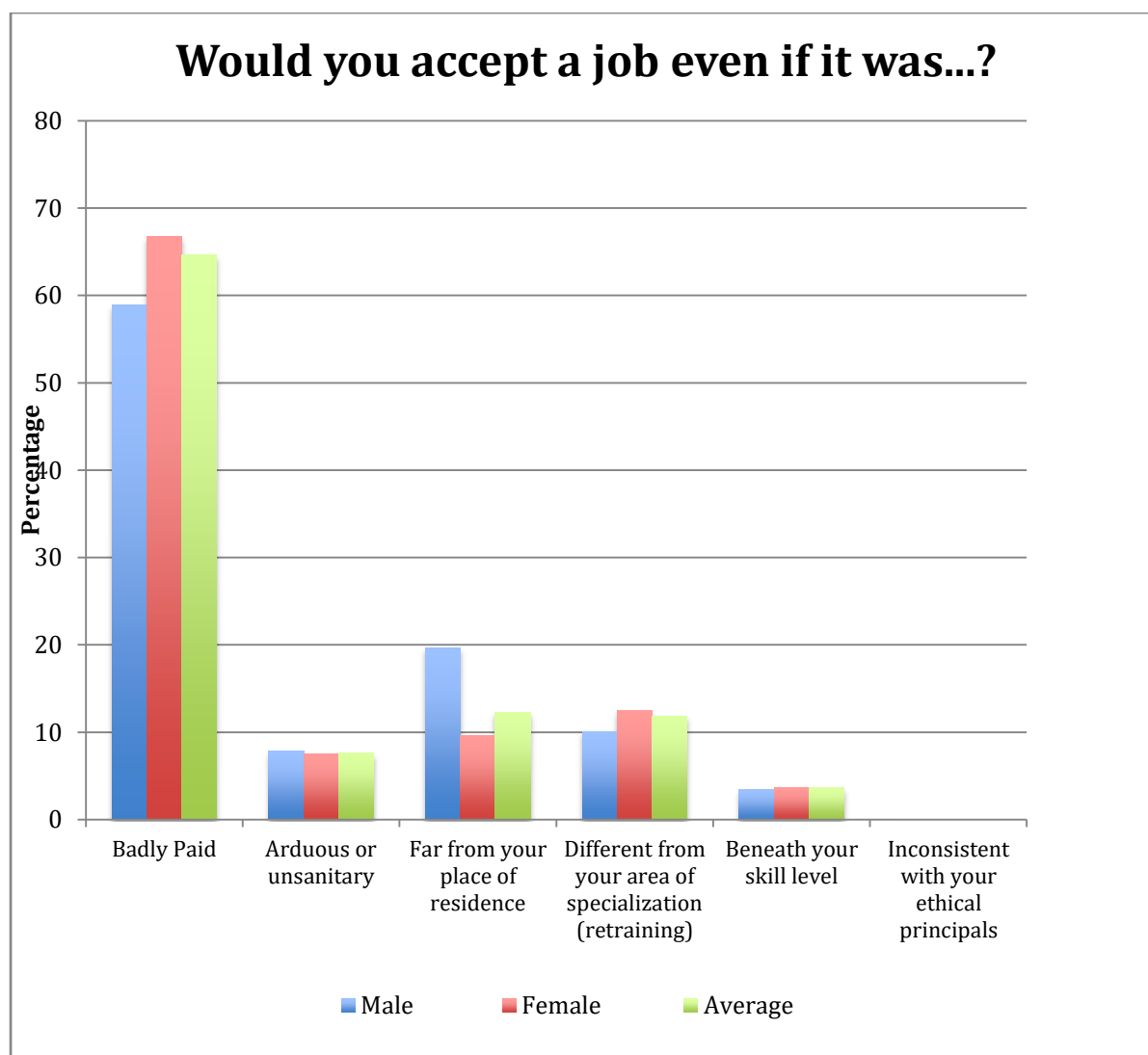


Figure 4 - - Source: SAHWA Youth Survey Data

## b) Education

Figure 5 shows the amount of people who are currently enrolled in an educational institution in Egypt, or have completed some type of education. The number of educated people from the sample stands at 94.85%. This high figure should not mislead us – the problem with education in Egypt lies more in the quality/type of education than the number of people educated.

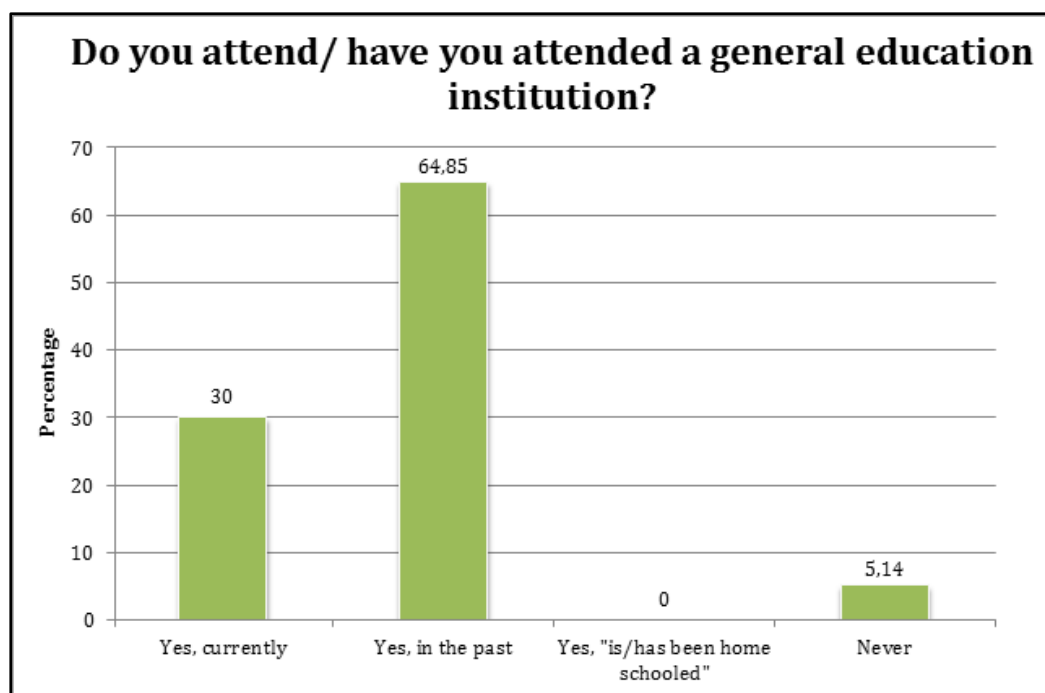


Figure 5- - Source: SAHWA Youth Survey Data

### III. Young people's perceptions of the problems and challenges in their lives

The young people who took part in the SAHWA Field Survey described a number of problems and challenges that they face in their lives. These can be categorised as a lack of job opportunities, evading finding a job, difficulty in starting up a private business, the education vs. qualification dilemma and the importance of education.

Regarding the lack of job opportunities, one young Egyptian interviewed , describes the minimal job opportunities available today. He also notes that most of the job opportunities available now are in one sense or the other commonplace, such as job openings in any sales department. Such a position does not necessarily require any experience and therefore does not meet the demand of those who have higher educational degrees. He states that people of higher-end degrees tend to require higher positions and will not accept such offers, which will contribute nothing to their future career. As for public sector jobs, they unfortunately tend to be readily available through family connections and suffer from inequality through nepotism (EG\_NI\_4).

Regarding the issue of evading finding a job, faced with difficulty in starting up a private business, the same interviewee was asked about the idea of opening up a



private business. He confirmed that he is currently running a shared business with one of his colleagues selling clothes and thus far it is working quite well. When he was asked about the types of problems he faced in the process of opening the business up, he first responds by reporting the problems in pricing. He claims that to open up and stock a collection requires between 15,000LE and 20,000LE. The problem he faces is that the initial price is usually expensive and it therefore becomes difficult for him to convince the end user that this is the normal price for the products. He complains that the business has become more difficult with the closure of the free trade zone in Port Said where they used to get their stocks (EG\_NI\_4).

The interviewees also described an education vs. qualification dilemma. Discussing the educational system in Egypt, a young boy was asked about the extent to which the certificate he received after completing his studies helped him find job opportunities and its contribution to getting him employed. His response was that his degree had helped him to a minimal extent, which he estimates to be around the 10% range. He added that a degree alone is useless, but serves as a base on which he can build and take different types of courses that will actually contribute to his overall development as a person and help him excel in his field of work. Despite not being able to do without it, the certificate alone does not contribute more than 10% of what he needs for work. In other words, it is necessary to have a certificate and appear qualified, while the actual qualifications required to work are taken from external sources after young people have completed their degree (EG\_LS\_1).

The importance of education was an issue for the young people in the SAHWA Field Study:

“Education is the key element that will allow me to achieve anything I have planned in life. In Europe today, education is the first priority, European countries have successfully taken older researches and invested in their development and transformation. Having education as the first priority has allowed for European transformation in achieving significant goals, while us here (Arabs) remain behind” (EG\_LS\_1).

#### **IV. Policy responses to the problems facing the youth of Egypt**

##### **a) National policies designed for young people**

The development of youth policies in Egypt has had its ups and downs throughout history. From the 1970s up until today young people have moved up and down the government's list of priorities, depending on a number of factors among which the political is one of the most important. Youth policies in Egypt can be traced back to the 1970s when the student unions in universities began their involvement after Sadat's attempt to liberalise the economy, which came with some efforts to open up political spheres. Thus, 1979 witnessed the establishment of the Council of Youth and Sports, which has been evolving back and forth until today. In 1981, Mubarak turned the council into a ministry. However, the 1980s and 90s "did not witness much youth contention; their activism was contained within closed university doors" (Sika, 2016). In the year 2000, with more power given to Gamal Mubarak, came the establishment of the Future Generation Foundation, which is closely affiliated with the former National Democratic Party (NDP), and aimed to work as a tool for young people to be included within the policymaking process. In an interview conducted in April 2015 with Dr Ali El-Din Hilal, sports and youth minister from 1999-2004, he described how in the mid-2000s the youth started to become politicised, with embryonic calls for social and political change. Dr Hilal also confirmed that the number one problem the youth faces today is unemployment. He added that unemployment is a catalyst for other social problems, and must be the number one priority for policymakers. Dr Hilal highlighted that unemployment creates "a deep sense of injustice leading to hatred towards the country leading to extremism in different means" (Ali El-Din Hilal, April 2015). The early 2000s generally witnessed a number of activist movements led by young people including the "Kefaya" and 6<sup>th</sup> of April movements.<sup>2</sup> However, they were contained by the regime by restraining liberal and containable young people and imprisoning the radical youth (Sika, 2016).

Currently, the Ministry of Youth and Sports remains in charge of youth policies through which it cooperates with a number of state institutions such as the Ministry of Education and Vocational Schools, the Ministry of Manpower and Migration and different youth councils. There was an attempt in 2003 by the dissolved National Democratic Party to set a National Youth Policy but it was never adopted.

The definition of youth in Egypt remains changeable, as well, depending on the context and the organisation or institution defining it. Generally speaking it can range from 15 up to 35 years old. According to a 2010 Euromed Report, the status of Egypt's national youth policy remained unclear but in 2010 a youth policy briefing was available.<sup>3</sup> However, the current status is ambiguous.

Moreover, the 2010 Egypt Human Development Report outlines a proposed National Policy for Youth in Egypt that was originally developed by the National Youth Council in 2009. The proposed policy covered 12 areas: employment, political participation, education, health, population, culture, mass media, social activities and volunteer work, social welfare, sports and recreation, the environment, and studies and research. However, there was no indication of adopting that national youth policy. In 2013, the then Minister of Youth, Osama Yassin, mentioned that “the ministry was discussing the development of a Youth Act and this is mentioned as a priority on the Ministry of State for Youth Affairs website” (youthpolicy.org, 2014). In an interview in 2015 the former minister of sports and youth, Dr Safi El-Din Kharboush, again highlighted the threats of unemployment and the need for an immediate formalisation of a “national youth policy”. Dr Kharboush stressed that the government should legally oblige other related ministries to cooperate in putting together and executing a continuous and effective youth policy (Safi El-Din Kharboush, April 2015).

It is probably because of this ambiguity and the oscillation of governmental policies that the youth feel marginalised and abstain from formal political mechanisms. Figures 6 and 7 below aim to show the state of political and civic participation in Egypt. In an analysis of the last national elections, more than 55% of the sample did not vote. Of that 55%, nearly half said they were “not interested” in participating. Non-interest can be attributed to exhaustion/disappointment from the recurring elections and instability that followed the events of the 2011 Arab Spring. While about 17% of people who did not vote were not of legal age, more than 20% were confident in saying that “voting has no effect” or that “the elections are neither fair nor transparent”.

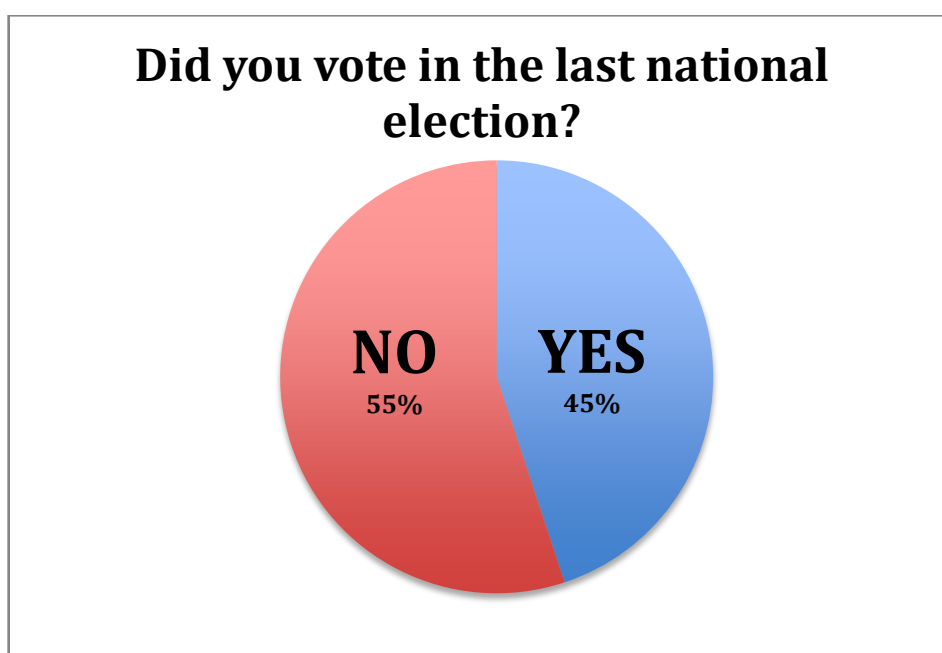


Figure 6 - - Source: SAHWA Youth Survey Data

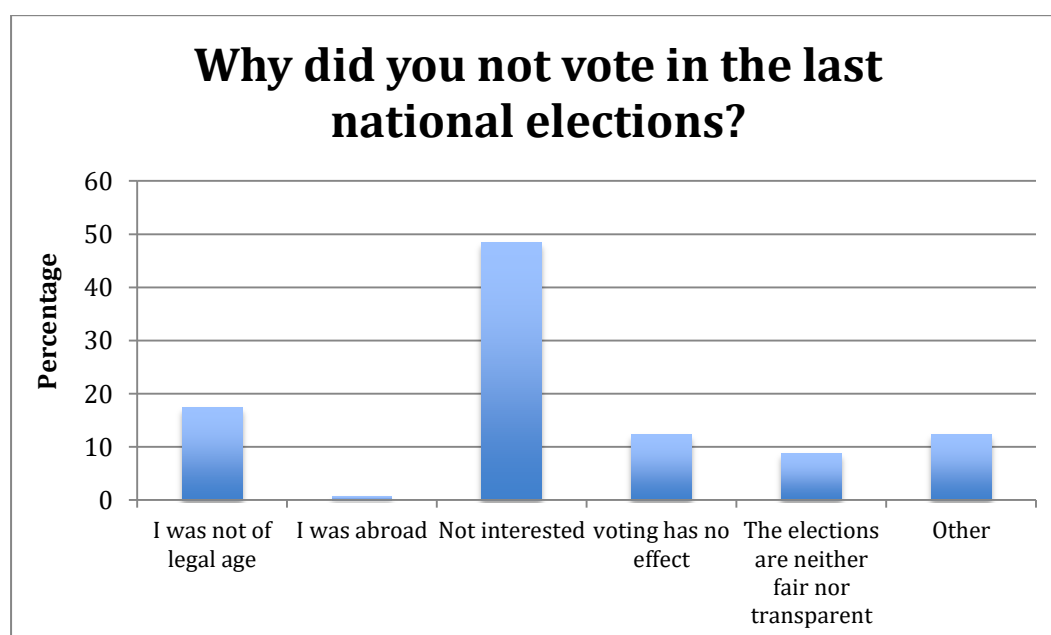


Figure 7 - - Source: SAHWA Youth Survey Data

## **b) Cooperation with international actors in the youth field in the country**

Cooperation with international actors in the youth field in Egypt takes place mainly in the employment and education sectors. There are various projects to enhance work opportunities and advertise results for youngsters in Egypt. Generally, a large portion of these projects are directed by the Social Fund for

Development (SFD), in which the part of the Ministry of Manpower and Migration has been extremely restricted. Some of the projects concentrate on supporting employment creation. These projects incorporate support for some small project endeavours, initiating microfinance, group advancement programmes (advances to families), and projects focusing on job creation in rural areas, for example, the Shorouk program. According to the Youth Employment Inventory project there are 182 employment interventions.<sup>4</sup> The projects extend from intercessions for enhancing the work database (directing, jobseeking abilities) to those aiming to build the interest in youth work (wage endowments and open works) and those concentrating on enhancing open doors for youthful business visionaries (giving money, preparing specialised help). Many of the donor projects are implemented in cooperation with the Social Fund for Development, which is an organisation with special status that is associated with the government. Below are some examples of the projects funded by institutions other than the government:

- With the focus on entrepreneurship and SMEs for young people, the World Bank and government foundations give comprehensive information on microfinance. There has been enthusiasm for new companies into which a tremendous vitality and venture have been poured, and a “start-up culture” seems, by all accounts, to be starting to boom. This new accentuation on new businesses is fascinating. For example, Endeavor Egypt, Flat 6 Labs, and Egyptian Junior Business are dynamic operators and provide some vital cases of new businesses and SMEs in Egypt.
- In 2014 the World Bank consented to an arrangement with the Egyptian SFD to update the Emergency Labor Intensive Investment Project in four years.<sup>5</sup> It covers two projects: (i) the Emergency Labor Intensive Investment Program (ELIP), with a \$200 million advance from the bank; and (ii) the Emergency Employment Investment Program (EEIP), with €70 million offered by the EU.
- Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), an international company that specialises in international development, is another organisation that funds and implements a number of education

projects in partnership with the Ministry of Education. One of the most prominent programmes is the Employment Promotion Program,<sup>6</sup> co-funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Australian Development Agency, and implemented by GIZ in cooperation with the Ministry of Education. An agreement was signed with the Egyptian government in 2011 and project implementation covers the period from 2012 to the end of 2015.

## **V. Conclusion and recommendations**

According to SAHWA's quantitative and qualitative data, employment tops the list of youth needs and national policy challenges. Consequently, we conclude by drawing attention to what is taking place at this level. The International Labor Organization (ILO) has been involved in implementing a project in collaboration with the Ministry of International Cooperation as well as other related ministries and entities. The project is titled "Decent Jobs for Egypt's Young People" and aims at enhancing job opportunities for young people and women (Ministry of International Cooperation). The first phase of the project was carried out between March 2011 and March 2016 in the southern region of Minya, the canal city of Port Said, and the Red Sea governorates. The project is believed to be a success, with over 40,000 young people benefitting from the job opportunities. In collaboration with the ILO, the minister of international cooperation, Dr Sahar Nasr, has extended the project's geographical scope to include the city of Luxor, and the duration to run through to March 2019.

The ILO example given in the previous section can be seen as a microcosm of future development projects at national level. Widening the scope is indeed a necessary step that will continue to benefit a number of marginalised young people, especially those that inhabit the more rural governorates and in particular the south of Egypt. Job opportunities, education and economic wellbeing remain the most challenging issues for the Egyptian youth. As the SAHWA youth survey data has shown, employment opportunities remain a challenge to young people, making them more likely to accept jobs that offer less favourable working conditions. Gender inequality is also present when it comes to

employment opportunities and decisions. It is the result of cultural traditions and social structures and can be targeted with further awareness.

While European initiatives appear to be active in engaging with formal channels of the government such as the Ministry of International Cooperation, these initiatives remain unknown to a majority of young people. Figure 8 below shows that over 99% of young people are unaware of any current EU projects taking place. To leave an impact, national policies and international initiatives in Egypt must expand horizontally to encompass more of the problems that young people face on a daily basis. However, in the short term it should expand vertically to extend development aid and awareness of already existing programmes.

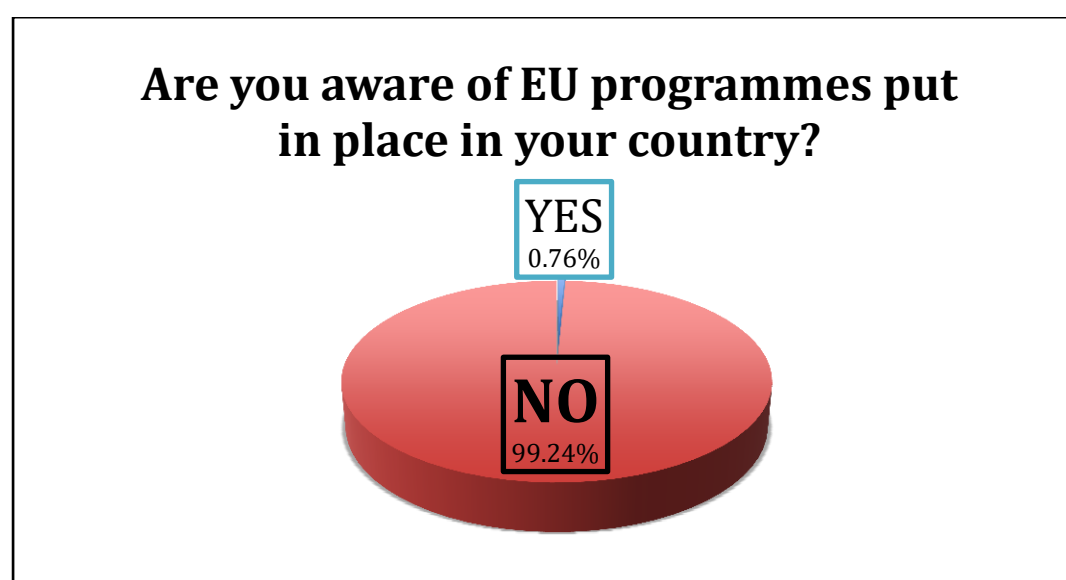


Figure 8 - - Source: SAHWA Youth Survey Data

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## Endnotes

1. The SAHWA Youth Survey includes principally the data collected in December 2015 and January 2016 through interviewing based on a random weighted sample of 2003 people.
2. See: Dr. Bahgat Korany's SAHWA Background Paper for a detailed account on youth movements. "Political Participation and International Cooperation: A Public Policy Analysis of Egypt and its Youth Groups", AUC Forum, SAHWA Background Paper (2014).
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6. Employment Promotion Program, (GIZ), Egypt. <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/16279.html>.



Researching  
Arab Mediterranean Youth:  
**Towards a New Social Contract**



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The SAHWA Project ("Researching Arab Mediterranean Youth: Towards a New Social Contract") is a FP-7 interdisciplinary cooperative research project led by the Barcelona Center for International Affairs (CIDOB) and funded by the European Commission. It brings together fifteen partners from Europe and Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries to research youth prospects and perspectives in a context of multiple social, economic and political transitions in five Arab countries (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt and Lebanon). The project expands over 2014-2016 and has a total budget of €3.1 million. The thematic axis around which the project will revolve are education, employment and social inclusion, political mobilisation and participation, culture and values, international migration and mobility, gender, comparative experiences in other transition contexts and public policies and international cooperation.

