

Government Policies and Programs to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The Government of Egypt has been a member of ILO-IPEC since 1996.¹⁴⁶⁹ In 2000, the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) launched the Second Decade of Protection and Welfare of Children action program that included a component to reintegrate working children into schools, their families, and the community.¹⁴⁷⁰ In 2002, the NCCM designed a National Program for the Progressive Elimination of Child Labor focusing on interventions to alleviate poverty, especially among female heads of households, and to provide psychosocial and educational services to children in four governorates.¹⁴⁷¹ The NCCM further coordinates policy dialogue between key ministries and local authorities. Among other child labor initiatives, the NCCM launched a pilot program designed to protect and improve the working conditions of child workers and provide them education and health services, as well as income generation activities for their families.¹⁴⁷² In 2003, the NCCM set up a hotline to receive calls from children in distress, particularly those who complain of working in unsafe or unhealthful conditions.¹⁴⁷³ Also in 2003 the NCCM organized workshops in four governorates with the highest rates of working children to create awareness of the social and economic problems created by child labor, especially its worst forms. It is anticipated that the reports of these and subsequent workshops on child labor will be used by policy-makers.¹⁴⁷⁴ In 2000, the government established a Child Labor Unit (CLU) within the Ministry of Manpower and Migration (MOMM) to coordinate investigations of reports of child labor violations and to ensure enforcement of the laws pertaining to child labor.¹⁴⁷⁵ In 2003 ILO Egypt worked with the NCCM, the MOMM, the Egyptian Trade Union Federation, and UNICEF to begin formulation of a comprehensive national strategy to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.¹⁴⁷⁶ In 2003, the CLU provided training to labor inspectors; worked to establish a database on working children; and organized a media campaign to increase public awareness of the issue.¹⁴⁷⁷

ILO-IPEC and the government have collaborated on several initiatives to combat child labor, at least five of which are ongoing.¹⁴⁷⁸ Current projects include a direct action program to contribute to the progressive elimination of child labor in leather tanneries, pottery kilns, and other hazardous industries,¹⁴⁷⁹ and a collaborative project with the U.S. Customs Service and the Arab Labor Organization to provide technical assistance to the CLU.¹⁴⁸⁰ Other ILO-IPEC programs involve public awareness raising, capacity building, and interventions, including a community

¹⁴⁶⁹ ILO-IPEC, *All About IPEC: Programme Countries*, ILO-IPEC, [online] [cited June 13 2003]; available from http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipecc/about/countries/t_country.htm.

¹⁴⁷⁰ The National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM), *NCCM*, [online] [cited June 10, 2003]; available from <http://www.nccm.org.eg/achievements.asp>.

¹⁴⁷¹ Ibid. See also Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt, *Government Initiatives and Responses to Child Labour*, USDOL, August 1, 2003, 6.

¹⁴⁷² The National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM), *NCCM Website*.

¹⁴⁷³ U.S. Embassy- Cairo, *unclassified telegram no. 6904*, Cairo, August 18, 2003, 2.

¹⁴⁷⁴ U.S. Department of State official, electronic communication to USDOL official, February 23, 2004.

¹⁴⁷⁵ U.S. Embassy- Cairo, *unclassified telegram no. 6904*, 2.

¹⁴⁷⁶ U.S. Department of State official, electronic communication, February 23, 2004.

¹⁴⁷⁷ U.S. Embassy- Cairo, *unclassified telegram no. 6904*, 2.

¹⁴⁷⁸ ILO-IPEC official, electronic communication from ILO-IPEC, Spreadsheet of ILO-IPEC Projects, to USDOL official, August 16, 2003.

¹⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸⁰ U.S. Embassy- Cairo, *unclassified telegram no. 8087*, December, 2001.

project that aims to withdraw children from hazardous work in auto repair workshops, and textile and plastics factories.¹⁴⁸¹ In 2003, USAID funded a collaborative project with international and local trade unions to train local child labor inspectors. The training was followed by the formation of community child labor committees (CLCs) in nine villages to survey child labor in those areas.¹⁴⁸²

The Government of Egypt is committed to battling illiteracy and bridging the gender gap in education.¹⁴⁸³ A National Taskforce for Girls' Education, comprising members of key ministries, authorities, UN agencies, and members of civil society, was formed in October 2001.¹⁴⁸⁴ To this end, a number of measures have been taken, including the establishment of one-room schools for girls, community schools for children ages 9 to 13 years old, and mainstreaming graduates of those schools into preparatory schools.¹⁴⁸⁵

The World Bank's Education Enhancement Program Project was developed to enhance the Ministry of Education's stated goals of ensuring universal access to basic education, with an emphasis on girls, and improving the quality of education.¹⁴⁸⁶ Egypt was the first country to officially join the UN Girls' Education Initiative.¹⁴⁸⁷ Since 1992, UNICEF has supported the Girl Child Initiative with the Community Schools Programme.¹⁴⁸⁸ USAID is funding a number of education projects, including the New Schools Program, which targets over 28,000 girls from ages 6 to 14 years, who have never attended school, or have dropped out. Another USAID project supports the Center for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA).¹⁴⁸⁹ These activities are intended to expand educational opportunities for girls not enrolled in formal education through scholarships and other incentives. In 2002, an initiative for boys was also launched.¹⁴⁹⁰ By building new schools within walking distance of homes, increasing the number of female teachers, and providing grants, uniforms, and meals to children at school, enrollment and attendance have improved.¹⁴⁹¹

¹⁴⁸¹ Ayse Sule Caglar, ILO-IPEC official, electronic communication with USDOL official, January 7, 2002. See also U.S. Embassy- Cairo, *unclassified telegram no. 6469*, Cairo, October 2001.

¹⁴⁸² The CLCs also organized village meetings to raise awareness of the nature and extent of the problem. See U.S. Embassy- Cairo, *unclassified telegram no. 6904, 2*.

¹⁴⁸³ *The Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt: Amendment Ratified on May 22, 1980*, (May 22), Article 21; available from <http://www.sis.gov.eg/egyptinf/politics/parlment/html/constit.htm>. See also Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Government Initiatives, 2.

¹⁴⁸⁴ The National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM), *NCCM Website*.

¹⁴⁸⁵ Arab Republic of Egypt, *Education Development: National Report of Arab Republic of Egypt from 1990 to 2000*, National Center for Educational Research and Development (NCERD), Cairo, 2001, 17; available from www.ibe.unesco.org/International/ICE/natrap/Egypt.pdf.

¹⁴⁸⁶ World Bank, *Egypt-Education Enhancement Program Project*, World Bank, [online] 1996 [cited June 13, 2003]; available from http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDServlet?pcont=details&eid=000009265_3970311113957. See also World Bank, *The Arab Republic of Egypt Education Enhancement Program*, staff appraisal report, 15750, World Bank, October 21, 1996, 1; available from http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/1996/10/21/000009265_3970311113957/Rendered/PDF/multi_page.pdf.

¹⁴⁸⁷ Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Government Initiatives.

¹⁴⁸⁸ UNICEF, *At a Glance: Egypt - The big picture*, UNICEF, [online] [cited October 7, 2003]; available from <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/egypt.html>.

¹⁴⁸⁹ USAID, *Education: Improving Basic Education to Meet Market Demand*, USAID, [online] [cited August 29, 2003]; available from <http://www.usaid-eg.org/detail.asp?id=9>.

¹⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹¹ The successes are a result of programs that address barriers to children's education. See Kristin Moehlmann, *Girl-friendly Schools Improve Egypt's Report Card*, UNICEF, [online] [cited June 16, 2003]; available from www.unicef.org/information/mdg/mdg07.htm.

Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

In 2001, the ILO estimated that 8.8 percent of children ages 10 to 14 years in Egypt were working.¹⁴⁹² Studies have suggested that rural children and children from poor households account for the overwhelming majority of working children.¹⁴⁹³ Rural children are largely found working in the agricultural sector¹⁴⁹⁴, particularly on cotton-farming cooperatives.¹⁴⁹⁵ Reports indicate a widespread practice of poor rural families making arrangements to send daughters to cities to work as domestic servants in the homes of wealthy citizens.¹⁴⁹⁶ Urban areas are also host to large numbers of street children who have left their homes in the country-side to find work, and often to flee hostile conditions at home.¹⁴⁹⁷ Street children work shining shoes, begging, cleaning and parking cars, and selling food and trinkets.¹⁴⁹⁸ Street children are particularly vulnerable to being forced into illicit activities, including stealing, smuggling, pornography, and prostitution.¹⁴⁹⁹ Children in urban areas also work in leather tanneries, pottery kilns,¹⁵⁰⁰ glassworks,¹⁵⁰¹ blacksmith, metal and copper workshops, battery and carpentry

¹⁴⁹² World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2003* [CD-ROM], Washington, D.C., 2003. It should be noted that children under the age of 15 years comprise approximately 38 percent of Egypt's total population. See Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics (CAPMAS), *Labour Force Survey*, in ILO LABORSTA, [database online] 1999 [cited October 10, 2003]; available from <http://laborsta.ilo.org/cgi-bin/brokerv8.exe>.

¹⁴⁹³ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2002: Egypt*, Washington, D.C., March 31, 2003, Section 6d; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2002/18274.htm>. See also El Daw A. Suliman and Safaa E. El-Kogali, "Why Are the Children Out of School? Factors Affecting Children's Education in Egypt" (paper presented at the ERF Ninth Annual Conference, American University in Sharja, United Arab Emirates, October 28, 2002), 20; available from <http://www.erf.org/9th%20annual%20conf/9th%20PDF%20Presented/Labor/L-P%20Suliman%20&%20Safaa.pdf>.

¹⁴⁹⁴ At the request of NCCM, the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) conducted a household survey on child labor in Egypt from 2001 to 2002. According to the survey, more than 70 percent of working children are in the agricultural sector. See Gihan Shahine, "Fighting Child Labour," *Al-Ahram Weekly* (Cairo), May 9-15, 2002; available from <http://weekly.ahram.org/2002/585/eg5.htm>. To date, the survey is being used by the NCCM for internal policy making. The survey is expected to be released following the Egyptian First Lady's launching of the national strategy on the elimination of the worst forms of child labor, perhaps in 2004. The figure released by the NCCM for the number of working children in 2001 was 2.4 million. See U.S. Department of State official, electronic communication, February 23, 2004.

¹⁴⁹⁵ As of 2001, over 1 million children ages 7 to 12 were working in cotton pest control. The work involves manually removing pests from cotton plants, extended exposure to highly hazardous pesticides, and rampant abuse by foremen. Under a 1965 decree by the Ministry of Agriculture, families were required to provide child workers to local cotton-farming cooperatives to control leafworm infestations between the months of May and July. See Human Rights Watch (HRW), *Underage and Unprotected: Child Labor in Egypt's Cotton Fields*, Vol. 13 No. 1 (E), Human Rights Watch, New York, January, 2001; available from http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/egypt/Egypt01.htm#P46_655. Responding to international pressure from organizations such as HRW and USAID, a new labor decree in June 2003 repealed the 1965 law and specifically prohibits the employment of children in cotton compressing or any work involving hazardous chemicals, including pesticides. See U.S. Embassy- Cairo, *unclassified telegram no. 6904*, 1.

¹⁴⁹⁶ As domestic workers, children are excluded from the protections of the labor code and are highly susceptible to domestic abuse and exploitation. See Karam Saber, "A Situational Analysis of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Egypt" (paper presented at the ECPAT International North Africa Regional Consultation on the Elimination of the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, Rabat, Morocco, June 13, 2003), 13; available from http://www.ecpat.net/eng/ecpat_inter/projects/monitoring/rabat/egypt.pdf. See also Dena Rashed, "Born an Adult," *Al-Ahram Weekly* (Cairo), June 19-25, 2003; available from <http://weekly.ahram.org/print/2003/643/fe2.htm>.

¹⁴⁹⁷ A 2002 survey of urban street children found that in almost every case, the children were living and working on the street because of severe family crises. Their experiences as street children are also plagued with trauma as Egyptian police routinely arrest and detain them, often subjecting them to extreme forms of abuse. For a more detailed discussion, see Clarisa Bencomo, *Charged with Being Children: Egyptian Police Abuse of Children in Need of Protection*, Vol. 15, No. 1, Human Rights Watch (HRW), New York, February 2003, 9; available from <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/egypt0203/egypt0203.pdf>.

¹⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹⁹ Due in part to the extremely taboo nature of discussion on any sexual issue in Egypt, particularly involving children, information on the extent of commercial sexual exploitation of children is limited. See Saber, "Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Egypt".

¹⁵⁰⁰ Caglar, electronic communication, January 7, 2002.

¹⁵⁰¹ United Nations, *Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties under Article 44 of the Convention: Addendum-Egypt*, CRC/C/65/Add.9, Committee on the Rights of the Child, November 11, 1999; available from [www.unhchr.ch/TBS/DOC.NSF/385c2add1632f4a8c12565a9004dc3111/8f1898b2a712708c802568b200501ed2/\\$FILE/G9945502.doc](http://www.unhchr.ch/TBS/DOC.NSF/385c2add1632f4a8c12565a9004dc3111/8f1898b2a712708c802568b200501ed2/$FILE/G9945502.doc).

shops,¹⁵⁰² auto repair workshops, and textile and plastics factories.¹⁵⁰³ While there are no official accounts of trafficking in the country,¹⁵⁰⁴ some reports indicate that Egypt is a country of transit for child trafficking.¹⁵⁰⁵

The Constitution guarantees free and compulsory basic education for children ages 6 to 15.¹⁵⁰⁶ In 2000, the gross primary enrollment rate was 99.6 percent, and the net primary enrollment rate was 92.6 percent.¹⁵⁰⁷ Girls' enrollment and attendance still lags behind that of boys.¹⁵⁰⁸ In 2000, the gross primary enrollment rate for girls was 96.1 percent, compared to 102.9 percent for boys. The net primary enrollment rate was 90.3 percent for girls, compared to 94.9 percent for boys.¹⁵⁰⁹ Primary school attendance rates are unavailable for Egypt. While enrollment rates indicate a level of commitment to education, they do not always reflect children's participation in school.¹⁵¹⁰ A 2000 national survey of children ages 6 to 15 found that 14 percent of girls were not currently attending school, compared to 8 percent of boys.¹⁵¹¹ Working and street children are predominantly school dropouts or have never been enrolled in school.¹⁵¹² In the past a number of NGOs have worked to provide literacy programs, medical care, shelter, meals and protection to working street children.¹⁵¹³ However, a law was passed in June 2002 that severely restricts the capacity of NGOs to continue work on this issue.¹⁵¹⁴

¹⁵⁰² This study was based on sample of 355 male workers ages 7 to 19 years. F. Curtale and et al., "Anaemia among Young Male Workers in Alexandria, Egypt," *Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal*, 6 5/6 (September–November 2000); available from www.emro.who.int/Publications/EMHJ/0605/20.htm.

¹⁵⁰³ U.S. Embassy– Cairo, *unclassified telegram no. 6469*.

¹⁵⁰⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2002: Egypt*.

¹⁵⁰⁵ Saber, "Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Egypt", 6. See also Dr. Mohamed Y. Mattar, "Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, in Countries of the Middle East," *Fordham International Law Journal* 26 721 (March 2003), 10, n133; available from <http://209.190.246.239/article.pdf>. See also The Protection Project, *Human Rights Report on Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children: A Country-by-Country Report on a Contemporary Form of Slavery*, Washington, D.C., 2002; available from <http://209.190.246.239/ver2/cr/Egypt.pdf>. See also U.S. Embassy– Cairo, electronic communication to USDOL official, February 26, 2004.

¹⁵⁰⁶ *Constitution of Egypt*, Articles 18 and 20. See also UNESCO, *Egypt National Report: Education For All 2000 Assessment*, prepared by National Centre for Educational Research and Development, pursuant to UN General Assembly Resolution 52/84, October 1999; available from <http://www2.unesco.org/wef/countryreports/egypt/contents.html#cont>. Despite the constitutional guarantees to universal education, in practice, education is not free, and parents are increasingly responsible for both the direct and indirect costs of education. In fact, Egyptian law allows for public schools to charge fees for services, insurance, and equipment. The 2000 Egypt Demographic Health Survey found median family expenditures per child among children ages 6 to 15 attending public schools were 133.9 LE for registration, tuition, uniforms, textbooks, supplies and other educational materials (approximately USD 36 at the time). See Bencomo, *Charged with Being Children*, 11. For currency conversion, see Oanda.com, *FXConverter*, in *FXConverter*, [online] [cited October 10, 2003]; available from <http://www.oanda.com/convert/classic>.

¹⁵⁰⁷ World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2003*. For a more detailed discussion on the relationship between education statistics and work, see the preface to this report. See also Ragui Assaad, Deborah Levison, and Nadia Zibani, "The Effect of Child Work on School Enrollment in Egypt" (paper presented at the ERF Eighth Annual Conference, Cairo, January 2002); available from http://www.erf.org.eg/html/Labor_8th/Theeffectofchild-Zibani&Assaad.pdf.

¹⁵⁰⁸ Twice as many girls as boys never attend school. See The American University in Cairo, *Egypt Demographic and Health Survey 2000 (EDHS)*, [online] 2000 [cited October 14, 2003]; available from http://www.aucegypt.edu/src/girlseducation/statistics_edhs2000.htm.

¹⁵⁰⁹ World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2003*.

¹⁵¹⁰ For a more detailed discussion on the relationship between education statistics and work, see the preface to this report.

¹⁵¹¹ Mothers of children who had dropped out or never attended school overwhelmingly cited cost as the reason, and more than half specifically cited a need for the child's labor. See Suliman and El-Kogali, "Why Are the Children Out of School?" 16–17. See also Bencomo, *Charged with Being Children*, 11–12.

¹⁵¹² UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Committee on the Rights of the Child - NGO Alternative Report*, CRC.26/Egypt, prepared by NGO Coalition on the Rights of the Child, pursuant to Article 44 on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, January 2001, 24; available from http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/CRC.26/egypt_ngo_report.pdf.

¹⁵¹³ Khalid Abdalla, "Take a Long Look: When is a Child Not a Child?," *Al-Ahram Weekly* (Cairo), November 11–17, 1999; available from <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/1999/455/feat2.htm>. See also, Bencomo, *Charged with Being Children*.

¹⁵¹⁴ Law 84/2002 grants the Minister of Social Affairs the authority to dissolve any NGO that the state determines to be "threatening national unity [or] violating public order or morals." NGOs are further prohibited from receiving funds from abroad, affiliating with international organizations, or from selecting board members, without the state's approval. The law further stipulates that NGOs may be dissolved at will, and any assets and property may be confiscated without a judicial order. The law establishes criminal penalties for unauthorized NGO activities, punishable by up to one year of imprisonment and substantial fines. Since the passage of the new law, a number of human rights organizations, including some working in the area of child labor, have been dissolved and leading NGO workers have been imprisoned. See (HRW) Human Rights Watch, *Egypt's New Chill on Rights Groups: NGOs Banned, Activist Harassed*, [press release] June 21 2003; available from <http://www.hrw.org/press/2003/06/egypt062103.htm>. See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2002: Egypt*, Section 4.

Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

The Government of Egypt ratified a new labor law in June 2003 prohibiting the employment of male and female juveniles below the age of 14. The new law also sets maximum hours for the employment of children in addition to employment conditions; the law does not apply, however, to children working in the agricultural sector. Ministerial decrees that complement the labor law compensate for this shortcoming, especially Decree No. 118 of 2003, which prohibits children below 16 from working in 44 hazardous professions, including agricultural activities.¹⁵¹⁵ The new labor law also stipulates penalties pertaining to the employment of children, which include fines that range from 500 to 1,000 Egyptian pounds (about USD 81 to 163) per employee.¹⁵¹⁶ The Children's Code and Labor Law of 1996 permits children ages 12 and older to participate in training for seasonal employment provided the work does not interfere with their health, growth, or school attendance.¹⁵¹⁷ The law also prohibits children from working over 6 hours per day or for more than 4 consecutive hours, at night, overtime, or during their weekly day off.¹⁵¹⁸ The Constitution does not specifically prohibit trafficking in persons; however, it does prohibit forced labor and prostitution.¹⁵¹⁹

The MOMM is the government agency responsible for enforcing child labor laws.¹⁵²⁰ The government's enforcement of child labor laws is inconsistent. In state-owned enterprises, enforcement is adequate while enforcement in the private and informal sectors is inadequate.¹⁵²¹

The Government of Egypt ratified ILO Convention 138 on June 9, 1999, and ratified ILO Convention 182 on May 6, 2002.¹⁵²²

¹⁵¹⁵ Occupations are defined as hazardous based on the definition of hazardous activities in ILO Convention 182. Decree 118 specifically prohibits employment in cotton compressing, leather tanning, and working in bars and auto repair shops or with explosives and chemicals (including pesticides). The decree identifies maximum allowable weights that male and female children are allowed to carry and stipulates that employers provide health care and meals for employed children and implement appropriate occupational health and safety measures in the work place. See U.S. Embassy- Cairo, *unclassified telegram no. 6904*, 1.

¹⁵¹⁶ Fines double if the violation is repeated. Violations of articles pertaining to occupational health and safety result in imprisonment for a period of at least 3 months and/or a fine of up to 10,000 pounds (USD 1,634). See *Ibid.* For the currency conversions, see XE.COM, *Universal Currency Converter*, XE.COM, [Currency Converter] [cited August 29, 2003]; available from <http://www.xe.com/ucc/convert.cgi>.

¹⁵¹⁷ United Nations, *Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties, Addendum: Egypt, CRC/C/65/Add.9*, Convention on the Rights of the Child, November 11, 1999, para. 48; available from [http://www.unhcr.ch/TBS/DOC.NSF/385c2add1632f4a8c12565a9004dc311/8f1898b2a712708c802568b200501ed2/\\$FILE/G9945502.doc](http://www.unhcr.ch/TBS/DOC.NSF/385c2add1632f4a8c12565a9004dc311/8f1898b2a712708c802568b200501ed2/$FILE/G9945502.doc).

¹⁵¹⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2002: Egypt*, Section 6d.

¹⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Section 6f.

¹⁵²⁰ U.S. Embassy- Cairo, *unclassified telegram no. 6904*.

¹⁵²¹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2002: Egypt*, Section 6d.

¹⁵²² ILO, *Ratifications by Country*, in ILOLEX, [online database] [cited June 16, 2003]; available from <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/newcountryframeE.htm>.