



Country fact sheet: Egypt

Egypt's National Strategy for Prevention of Early Marriage came about against the backdrop of proposals from conservative forces which may have reduced the age of marriage for girls to as low as nine years. The strategy, which prioritises early marriage as part of the national population and development agenda, aims to reduce the prevalence of early marriage by 50 percent within a five year time-frame. It is currently in the first stage of implementation.

Child marriage prevalence and context

- While child marriage has been on the decline in Egypt (from 27% in 1995 to 17% in 2008), it is still a widespread social phenomenon with over 17% of girls being married before they reach 18.¹
- Child marriage mainly affects girls living in poorer rural areas. It is on the rise in some locations, including Upper Egypt.
- The legal age of marriage in Egypt was increased to 18 following amendment of Egypt's Child Law in 2008, prohibiting the registration of child marriages but not criminalising it.
- After the Egyptian Revolution in 2011, proposals for draft legislation which would reduce the minimum age of marriage for girls from 18 to possibly as low as nine years old surfaced from conservative forces in the new government. Negative reaction ensued from the National Council for Women and others and the proposals weren't taken any further.

Background to the strategy development

- A national strategy to prevent child marriage was developed in Egypt between November 2013 and June 2014. Linked to the national population and development strategy, and the implementation of the ICPD Program of Action in Egypt, it recognised the need to prioritise child marriage as a health and population issue.
- The strategy emerged partially in response to the conservative forces at work at the time seeking to lower the legal age of marriage for girls.
- The National Population Council (NPC), under the leadership of Dr. Hala Youssef, former Secretary General of the Egyptian National Population Council, now Minister of Population, spearheaded the process and facilitated input from a range of different stakeholders.
- Pathfinder International, with support from the Ford Foundation, provided technical assistance for the development of the strategy.

Strategy Development Process

Egypt's strategy development process included the following components:

1. **A literature review** on the situation of child marriage and strategies for prevention, and validation of the findings by multi-sectoral experts.
2. **Establishment of a working group** to input into the development of the strategy. The working group was made up of over 126 individuals and 64 institutions from across sectors, including government representatives, the private sector, civil society, international organisations, UN agencies and religious leaders.

¹ Percentage of women aged 20-24 who were first married or in union before the age of 18, Demographic Health Survey Egypt, 2008

This large group was divided into **four technical groups** focusing on (i) legal challenges, (ii) technical challenges (sub-divided into thematic areas of health, education, economic development), (iii) financial challenges, and (iv) social and cultural (including religious) challenges. The working groups helped to build consensus on what needed to be done.

3. **Focus group discussions took place in six districts with high child marriage rates** to explore different strategy interventions. **Meetings were also held with the general public and religious leaders** to get their endorsement of the strategy development process.
4. Finally, the strategy was **launched at an inaugural conference in June 2014**. The Minister of Health requested the formulation of the National Coordinating Committee in order to oversee the implementation of the strategy.

Strategy Overview

- Egypt's strategy aims to **reduce early marriage by 50% by the end of the five-year plan**, focusing on areas with the highest rates or increasing trends of early marriage.
- The strategy adopted a **rights-based approach** that worked towards ensuring children's rights are upheld by religions, not just by the Constitution, and a **partnership approach** bringing together government, civil society and the private sector to work together.
- The strategy has **five operational directions**:
 1. Empowering girls (including economic empowerment);
 2. Support to girls who were married early to minimise the negative impacts on themselves, their children and families;
 3. Complete and updated legislation to ensure existing protection laws are working in favour of girls and women;
 4. Empower, educate and prepare young girls so they can tackle family and societal pressures; and
 5. Work with families and communities to ensure they understand the harmful consequences of child marriage.
- The execution of the national strategy is reliant on a results-based planning process, with outputs, outcomes and success indicators to support its implementation in concrete terms.

Next Steps

- The implementation of the strategy is planned in phases with a strong monitoring and learning framework attached.
- This year the Ministry of Population is pushing ahead with the first phase of the strategy, focusing on how best to coordinate and work in partnership, as well as establishing the finance mechanisms needed for implementation, and building human resource capacity.
- A key challenge in this preparatory phase is coordinating the implementation of different intervention models (adapted to different needs in different areas) across governorates.