



The Egyptian Cabinet
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IDSC
Policy Perspective



**Egypt's Efforts to Address Challenges
Facing Persons with Disabilities:
Enhancing Progress and Exploring Barriers**



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IDSC's Commentary

Egypt prioritizes supporting and empowering persons with disabilities (PWDs), ensuring their rights to live independently and fully participate in life, and facilitating their access and integration into society in a way that aligns with their needs, without discrimination or exclusion. This commitment has been reflected in adopting several initiatives, including the presidential initiative “Inclusion... Empowerment... Participation” in 2016 to support and empower PWDs and declaring 2018 as the “Year of Persons with Disabilities.” In addition, the State established the National Council for Persons with Disabilities in 2019 and created the Differently Abled Fund under Law No. 200 of 2020 to support PWDs.

The past ten years have witnessed numerous positive developments supporting the rights of persons with disabilities in Egypt across various constitutional, legal, political, social, and institutional levels. These advancements have established a comprehensive framework for adopting fair policies to empower them, in line with the provisions of the Egyptian Constitution, which ensures their rights and provides them with all necessary services.

In this context, the State's governmental and non-governmental entities are fully committed to providing a comprehensive range of services for persons with disabilities. These services and benefits span sectors such as education, healthcare, and rehabilitation, providing advantages in the workplace and transportation, thereby supporting PWDs in leading dignified lives.

Accordingly, this issue of the IDSC's Policy Perspective series, published by the Cabinet's Information and Decision Support Center, highlights the constitutional and legal framework governing the rights of persons with special needs in Egypt and the institutional framework ensuring the protection of their rights. It examines the rights and services the State provides, along with the strengths and challenges involved, which must be addressed to support their rights and ensure they have all essential needs for a dignified and decent life.

Egypt's Efforts to Address Challenges Facing Persons with Disabilities: Enhancing Progress and Exploring Barriers

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World Health Organization considers disability a multidimensional health, human rights, and development issue. Disability is a universal public health concern because individuals with disability, throughout their life course, face widespread barriers in accessing health and related services, such as rehabilitation, and have worse health outcomes than people without disability. In fact, some health problems may cause others, which are often poorly handled, functioning as a higher prevalence of obesity in persons with Down syndrome and a higher prevalence of diabetes or bowel cancer in people with schizophrenia.¹

On the other hand, disability is seen as a human rights issue, and this is closely linked to the way adults, adolescents, and children with disabilities are viewed in society. They are subject to discrimination and inequality, making them vulnerable to abuse, violence, and lack of appreciation and respect because of their disability. In this regard, it should be noted that disability is a development priority on the grounds of its higher widespread in lower-income states and because disability and poverty bolster up and maintain one another. Poverty escalates the likelihood of impairments through malnourishment, poor health care, and desperate living. Disability may lead to a lower standard of living and poverty through lack of access to good education, decent employment, and increased expenditure related to disability.²

The last decade of 2014-2024 has witnessed several positive developments concerning the rights of persons with disabilities in Egypt, particularly at the constitutional, legal, and institutional levels, which provided a holistic framework adopting equitable policies. These developments have been reflected in the educational, health, transportation, and social protection policies, which seek to improve their livelihoods by inserting fundamental transformations in their policies and interventions. However, there still are a lot of barriers that need to be dealt with.

This paper analyzes the constitutional, legal, and institutional transformations and their repercussions on the policies pursued toward persons with disabilities. It also attempts to trace the strengths and weaknesses of the areas that must be addressed.

The paper is divided into six parts:

- 1. Brief profile of persons with disabilities in Egypt.**
- 2. The constitutional and legal framework of the rights of persons with disabilities.**
- 3. The institutional framework of persons with disabilities.**
- 4. The rights and services provided for people with disabilities- opportunities and barriers.**
- 5. The reforms required to realize equity and ensure the integration of persons with disabilities.**
- 6. Conclusion and recommendations.**





1. Brief Profile of Persons with Disabilities in Egypt

The final results of Egypt's 2017 census identified disabilities among the population aged 5+ years with a rate of 10.67% based on the recommended shortlist of six questions of the UN Washington Group on Disability Statistics (WG). In reality, the WG short set of questions has addressed six domains: vision, hearing, mobility, remembering and concentrating,

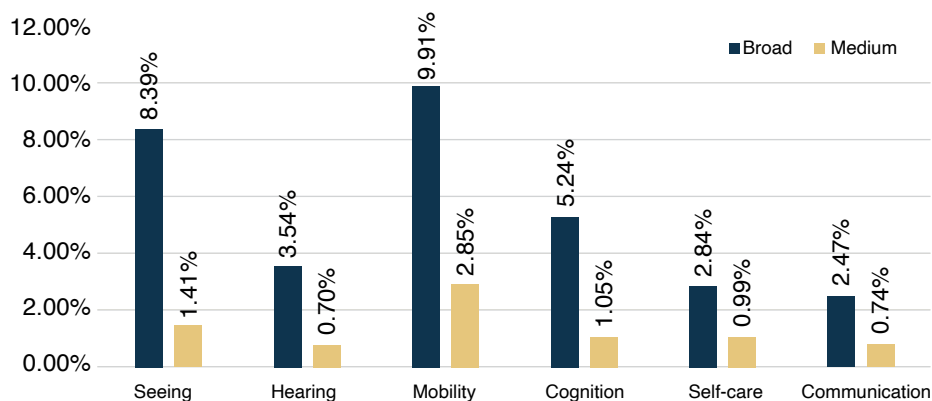
self-care, and communication. Each question's response categories are "no difficulty", "some difficulty", "a lot of difficulties", and "totally unable to do it". It is essential to mention that it is the first time in Egypt that a nationwide survey on persons with disabilities has been conducted using this approach. It covers the shortcomings of the simple question "Do you have a disability?" used in past surveys and censuses in Egypt.³ It is noteworthy to clarify that the estimations of persons with disabilities in the censuses before 2017 were very low; for example, the number of PWDs in 1996 was 284,702, which was only 0.48% of the population, while this estimation rose slightly in 2006 census to approaching 2,490,000 persons⁴.

The Economic Research Forum (ERF) executed an in-depth analysis of data from ELMPS 2018 in cooperation with the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) based on the WG disability measures. Such measures are composed of six questions designed mainly to address

different levels of difficulty in performing in six core functional domains, as mentioned above. Difficulties in six domains within an inappropriate environment may be correlated with a greater risk of participation limitations. Notably, this cluster of questions is currently the most used measure of disability worldwide. Following the WG (2020) guidance, three severity thresholds of disability are constructed. The first one is the “broad/any disability” threshold, in which any individual is considered disabled if he/she has at least a score of “some difficulty” in at least one of the six domains. The second measure is the “medium/severe disability” threshold, in which any individual is considered disabled if he/she has at least a score of “a lot of difficulty” in at least one of the six domains. Finally, the “narrow/complete disability” definition is the one in which any individual is considered to have a disability if he/she has a score of “cannot do it at all” in at least one of the six domains. According to these three severity levels, the spread rate of disability is 16.6%, 4.6%, and 0.9%, using the broad, medium, and narrow definitions, respectively.

Figure 1 displays the prevalence rates of disability according to the six disability domains alongside the severity thresholds. As the figure shows, disability pertaining to mobility is the most prevalent type (9.9% and 2.9%), followed by seeing (8.38% and 1.41%) and then cognition (5.24% and 1.05%), using both broad and medium definitions, respectively. Communication is the least stated domain by the broad definition (2.47%), while both hearing and communication are the least reported domains by the medium definition with very close rates (0.7% and 0.74%, respectively).

Figure 1. Prevalence rates of disability by domains and levels of severity



Source: Profile of people with disabilities in Egypt, ESCWA, 2018.

It is widely agreed that disability intersects with many other socioeconomic dimensions that deepen and aggravate its influence on the standard of life. Such dimensions may include gender, age, region of residence, wealth, and education.

The poverty-disability nexus is well established and confirmed throughout the literature. The analysis reveals that the rate of any and severe disabilities is the highest among individuals in the poorest quintile (Q1). Compared with this poorest group, being in the richest one significantly decreases the odds of having any severe disabilities by 27% and 48%, respectively. These high rates of disability among the poor are expected since both poverty and disability reinforce each other⁵. According to some statistics regarding disability and poverty in Egypt⁶:

It is widely agreed that disability intersects with many other socioeconomic dimensions that deepen and aggravate its influence on the quality of life. Such dimensions may include gender, age, region of residence, wealth, and education.

- Of the poorest 20% of Egyptians, around 18% have disabilities.
- About 22.9% of disabled persons considered themselves food insecure, versus 13.8% of non-disabled Egyptians.
- Illiteracy rates for children with disabilities are quite high 61% of disabled boys and 70% of disabled girls.

2. The Constitutional and Legal Framework of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities:

The Constitution of 2014 paid noticeable attention to the rights of persons with disabilities; according to article 81, “the State shall guarantee the health, economic, social, cultural, entertainment, sporting and educational rights of persons with disabilities and dwarves, strive to provide them with job opportunities, allocate a percentage of job opportunities to them, and adapt public facilities and their surrounding environment to their special needs. The State shall also ensure their exercise of all political rights and integration with other citizens in compliance with the principles of equality, justice, and equal opportunities”. Additionally, the Constitution guarantees the right to social security for every citizen who does not fall under the social security system because of their inability to work and support themselves and their dependents in a way that guarantees a decent life (Article 17). The State must ensure the rights of children with disabilities, their rehabilitation, and their engagement in the community. Finally, the Constitution also guarantees adequate representation for such persons in local councils and the House of Representatives⁷.

Inspired by the Constitution, Law No. 10 of 2018 was issued to organize the rights of PWDs in all spheres: political, educational, cultural, social, health-related, and sports-related. The law stipulates many privileges and forms of care and protection for them, particularly the principle of “accessibility,” which comprises the preparations and procedures necessary to establish an inclusive and compatible environment physically, socially, informationally, and financially for those persons, in addition to the provision of the necessary equipment, tools, and assistive means to ensure they exercise their rights and freedoms on an equal basis with others. The law

also stipulates the principle of “comprehensive integration,” or the usage by persons with disabilities of all services, activities, public facilities, and means of education on an equal basis with others in society without discrimination due to their disabilities in various aspects of life. This is achieved through different policies, plans, measures, programs, awareness-raising activities, and active participation⁸. In fact, the provisions of the law are consistent with the provisions of the “United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities”.

The actual move to adopt a right-based approach was in 2007 when Egypt signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. By ratifying the Convention, a new era began concerning the treatment of people with disabilities. It seeks to go beyond the medical approach towards recognizing their principal rights to live independently and be included in the community. In 2014, this change was reflected in the amendments to the Egyptian Constitution, which could carry new hopes for them. For the first time, people with disabilities are mentioned as equal citizens, ensuring their rights in all aspects of life and prohibiting disability-based discrimination. Furthermore, the core principles of the Sustainable Development Strategy, adopted in 2016, include the empowerment of people with disabilities. Egypt is committed to enhancing PWD rehabilitation, protection, inclusion, and participation in all aspects of life to achieve this goal. This commitment was highlighted in the president’s declaration of 2018 as the year of people with disabilities. It was also reflected in the Law No. 10 of 2018 on the rights of persons with disabilities, which replaced the Rehabilitation Law for PWDs of 1975. The new Disability Rights Law is currently the main national legal framework for the rights of PWDs, addressing the purpose and articles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Accordingly, this new law asserts the responsibility of the Egyptian Government towards the inclusion and social protection of PWDs.⁹

The current constitutional and legal framework represents a great step forward. PWDs had long been marginalized. Past legal frameworks and policies had been formulated around charity rather than a rights-based approach. The new constitutional and legal frameworks represent a radical transformation of the rights of PWDs.

3. The Institutional Framework of Persons with Disabilities:

Two entities are concerned with the rights of PWDs: the National Council for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD) and the Support Fund for Persons with Disabilities (SFPD). The first entity was established by Presidential Decree No. 11 / 2019. The Council aims at promoting, developing, and protecting the rights and dignity of PWDs. It is managed by a “Board of Directors” headed by the prime minister. It consists of 19 members, including six members from ministries of Social Solidarity, Health, Education, Housing, Planning, and Manpower. Other members are selected from PWDs and public figures concerned with their rights¹⁰.

It is known that the National Council for Persons with Disabilities has several competencies, such as:

1. Preparing an annual report on the status of PWDs and submitting it to the Presidency, the Egyptian Government, and the parliament.
2. Submitting the suggestions to policymakers to develop, integrate, and empower PWDs.
3. Contributing to the preparation of a national strategy with the aim of advancing PWDs in the fields of health, labor, and education.
4. Participating in maturing domestic policies and strategic plans, besides following up on their implementation.
5. Receiving complaints from PWDs, proposing appropriate solutions, and informing authorities about any violation of their rights¹¹.

The Support Fund for Persons with Disabilities intends to provide protection, care, and social development for PWDs and to support them in all economic, health, educational, and training fields, as well as disburses financial assistance, in particular scholarships to schools, institutes, and universities inside and outside the country.

The Support Fund for Persons with Disabilities was formed by Law No. 200 of 2020. It aims at providing protection, care, and social development for persons with disabilities and supporting them in all economic, health, educational, and training fields. It also pays out financial aid, especially in relation to scholarships, to schools, institutes, and universities inside and outside the country. Furthermore, the SFPD contributes to the expenditures of prosthetic devices and surgeries related to disabilities as well as contributing to covering the costs of accessibility by upgrading public facilities via the implementation of the “accessibility code”.¹²

4. The Rights and Services Provided for People with Disabilities - Opportunities and Barriers:

The most important transformation is that all national strategies and plans integrate the rights of persons with disabilities. Undoubtedly, mainstreaming the rights of disabled persons in all strategies and plans has remarkable momentum. Creating suitable conditions for them to enjoy the right to health, education, work, and mobility is the first step toward full citizenship.

The line ministries have taken a lot of measures to serve and protect PWDs as follows:

- The Ministry of Health and Population undertakes the early detection of disability, provides health and treatment services to persons with disabilities and medical examinations, and sets standards for treatment and rehabilitation based on their needs and type of disability¹³.
- The Ministry of Education also plays a role in implementing inclusive education for PWDs and providing them with educational opportunities through different technologies. However, the current context demonstrates a gap between what the policies aim to achieve and the feasibility of operationalizing them. Among these challenges are the perception and attitudes of teachers toward inclusion and the lack of resource rooms with trained special education needs teachers¹⁴.

- The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research facilitates the educational process. It works on improving learning and services provided to persons with disabilities by allocating them a quota in scientific and educational missions, instituting disability sciences as one of the scientific disciplines taught in universities, and incorporating the basic concepts of disability in all educational curricula¹⁵.
- Concerning employment, under the new law of PWDs, the Government must guarantee their right to acquire equal job opportunities without discrimination and in accordance with their capacities, academic credentials, and vocational training (Art. 20). Although the new law also imposes an employment quota of 5% as in the previous law, it applies to employers with at least 20 employees (Art. 22), rather than 50 employees under the prior law. The employer who does not comply with the quota under the new law is also subjected to a financial penalty of not less than EGP 10,000 and up to 30,000 and/or imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year (Art. 54). Additionally, the law considers the needs of such persons within the workplace. It provides a paid one-hour work time reduction daily for workers with disabilities and for relatives (up to the second degree) who take care of an employee with disabilities. Furthermore, the new law stipulates punishments related to discriminatory behavior, violence, and isolation in the workplace. It also encourages employers to hire PWDs by providing a 5% reduction on income taxes for the employment of every person with a disability above the legal quota (Art. 23)¹⁶.

The new law of PWDs considers the needs of persons with disabilities within the workplace. It provides a paid one-hour work time reduction daily for workers with disabilities and for relatives (up to the second degree) who take care of an employee with disabilities. particular scholarships to schools, institutes, and universities inside and outside the country.

- The integrated services card for persons with disabilities aims at providing health care, rehabilitation, financial empowerment, inclusion, access to equal educational opportunities, and the provision of prosthetic limbs for them. It is worth noting that the Ministry of Social Solidarity has started receiving requests to issue these cards since the launch of the second phase, noting that the first phase witnessed the issuance of more than 800,000 integrated service cards for PWDs. Currently, an integrated database is being developed between the Ministry of Social Solidarity and the relevant authorities, with the aim of establishing a huge service network to serve people with disabilities. One of the advantages of the integrated services card is that it is considered the sole method to prove the type of disability, which allows for the possibility of combining two pensions, appointment (employment) within the 5% quota, or exemption from taxes on cars and prosthetic devices, as well as exemption from taxes on the salaries of PWDs and those who care for them, in addition to free entry to all museums and archaeological areas, and discounts on transportation fees.¹⁷
- The social and economic policies supporting PWDs in the transportation sector focus on providing subsidies to make public transportation more affordable for them. For instance, Law 10/2018 stipulates discounts should be provided for PWDs on transportation tickets, as public transportation tickets would be 50% off for them and their companions. In addition, private transportation such as Mwasalat Misr has offered a 100% discount on tickets for PWDs. In parallel, the accessibility code has been developed to enable PWDs to use transport vehicles and stations, including ramps and elevators for wheelchair users, as well as visual and audible signs for persons with hearing and visual impairments. However, Egypt still needs more investment in the transportation sector to increase the accessibility of all related services, including bus stops, metro lines, and sidewalks.¹⁸

- The Egyptian Government supervises 778 rehabilitation bodies, including 79 internal residence institutions, 66 external care and rehabilitation institutions, 223 rehabilitation offices, 76 physiotherapy centers, 29 comprehensive rehabilitation centers, and 243 nurseries for children with disabilities. Various rehabilitation services were provided to 113,568 PWDs in these institutions.¹⁹. There is no doubt that rehabilitation services are of great importance to disabled persons, but the question remains about the quality of the services provided and the equitable geographical distribution of these services in agreement with the places where the people with disabilities are concentrated.

5. The Reforms Required to Achieve Equity and Ensure the Integration of Persons with Disabilities:

The constitutional and legal transformations that inspired the spirit of human rights charters of PWDs were undoubtedly important to ensure compatible policies. However, the main challenge remains the extent to which these policies can be implemented, which requires a careful understanding of the obstacles and barriers. On the other hand, cultural norms sometimes deprive them of the existing services and rights. Based on previous analysis, there is a need to conduct some reforms such as:

1. The long and complicated steps to issue Integrated Services Cards: There is an urgent need to face these barriers by reducing card issuance process and taking care of the critical cases that require special attention, like home visits to examine the case.

Under the new law of PWDs, the Government must guarantee their right to acquire equal job opportunities without discrimination, and in accordance with their capacities, academic credentials, and vocational training.

2. The relationship between availability and quality of health services, cultural norms, and causes of disabilities: Diseases during early childhood are likely to be maltreated because of the generally inadequate healthcare system. In poor zones, births sometimes pass off hospitals at the hands of non-professional midwives, and a deficiency of oxygen during delivery may result in blemished brain cells and, accordingly, physical or mental dysfunction. This barrier is closely related to the availability and quality of health services in remote areas on one hand and cultural norms on the other. It is important to pay more attention to these barriers by developing health institutions and training health service providers in remote and poor areas. Additionally, it is a must to organize awareness campaigns by using all media, whether traditional or digital.
3. In Egypt, families with lower incomes and education tend to hide their children with disabilities to avoid social stigma, fearing that this would affect the future of marriage in the family, especially with regard to healthy brothers and sisters. In fact, this deprives children with disabilities from going to school and integrating into society, and therefore, social awareness is of utmost importance in this regard.
4. Low-income families have another reason for hiding their disabled children. They want to avoid the costs of extended care, rehabilitation, and transportation to and from schools. In this context, they prefer to save money for their able-bodied siblings, who are usually seen as worthier and can be more useful to the family.
5. Employers perceive people with disabilities as incapable and unable to work efficiently. Therefore, there is an implicit refusal to rely on them for fear of reduced productivity, which eliminates opportunities for people with disabilities.

6. Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

- Availability and accuracy of data are the first steps to draw plans. Egypt has achieved major developments regarding the collection of data concerning PWDs. For the first time, the 2017 census covered the number of PWDs aged 5+ years and disaggregated data by the type and severity of disability, gender, and geographic location.
- Disability and poverty create a negative feedback loop that can seem inescapable. However, NGO advocacy and government policy can also work together to create a positive self-reinforcing cycle. There is a noticeable effort to change the stigma around disability in Egypt. Less stigma will make the Government's efforts more effective and efficient in improving the livelihoods of PWDs.
- It is necessary to elevate public awareness of disability, as recognized in Article 8 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Such awareness campaigns challenge negative stereotypes and seek to change societal attitudes about disability within society. These changes can be accomplished by improving the current curricula and educational textbooks of undergraduate students to include relevant education on disability and human rights principles. Furthermore, governmental bodies, NGOs, disabled persons' organizations, and other stakeholders should launch disability-based campaigns to raise awareness and programs targeting social attitudes. Media campaigns have a significant role in this regard as well.²⁰
- Policymakers should pursue a holistic approach to foster and advocate for the employment of persons with disabilities, unlock their potential, and improve their access to satisfactory work. The Government should work on enforcing and monitoring the recently enacted Egyptian domestic laws to ensure that public policies are harmonized and aligned with international conventions and policies.²¹

- International cooperation and technology transfer are needed to share cost-effective policies and practices, exchange information and experiences, and obtain technical assistance and training for people with disabilities. Such efforts may be accomplished through fostering partnerships with key international and regional stakeholders, including United Nations agencies, international NGOs, donors, and others²².

These recommendations and reforms are expected to pave the way towards greater inclusion and involvement of people with disabilities in Egyptian society.

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