



# مجلة بحوث الشرق الأوسط

مجلة علمية مُدكَّمة  
(مُعتمدة) شهرياً

العدد مائة وأربعة  
(أكتوبر 2024)

السنة الخمسون  
تأسست عام 1974

يصدرها  
مركز بحوث  
الشرق الأوسط

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# مجلة علمية مُدكَّمة متخصصة في شؤون الشرق الأوسط

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- تنشر الأعداد تبعاً على موقع دار المنظومة.



العدد مائة وأربعة أكتوبر 2024

تصدر شهرياً

السنة الخمسون - تأسست عام 1974



الأراء الواردة داخل المجلة تعبر عن وجهة نظر أصحابها وليست مسئولية مركز بحوث الشرق الأوسط والدراسات المستقبلية

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يصدرها مركز بحوث الشرق الأوسط  
والدراسات المستقبلية - جامعة عين شمس

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## الرؤية

السعي لتحقيق الريادة في النشر العلمي المتميز في المحتوى والمضمون والتأثير والمرجعية في مجالات منطقة الشرق الأوسط وأقطاره .

## الرسالة

نشر البحوث العلمية الأصيلة والرصينة والمبتكرة في مجالات الشرق الأوسط وأقطاره في مجالات اختصاص المجلة وفق المعايير والقواعد المهنية العالمية المعمول بها في المجالات المُحكَّمة دولياً.

## الأهداف

- نشر البحوث العلمية الأصيلة والرصينة والمبتكرة .
- إتاحة المجال أمام العلماء والباحثين في مجالات اختصاص المجلة في التاريخ والجغرافيا والسياسة والاقتصاد والاجتماع والقانون وعلم النفس واللغة العربية وآدابها واللغة الانجليزية وآدابها ، على المستوى المحلى والإقليمي والعالمي لنشر بحوثهم وإنتاجهم العلمي .
- نشر أبحاث كبار الأساتذة وأبحاث الترقية للسادة الأساتذة المساعدين والسادة المدرسين بمختلف الجامعات المصرية والعربية والأجنبية .
- تشجيع ونشر مختلف البحوث المتعلقة بالدراسات المستقبلية والشرق الأوسط وأقطاره .
- الإسهام في تنمية مجتمع المعرفة في مجالات اختصاص المجلة من خلال نشر البحوث العلمية الرصينة والتميزة .



## مجلة بحوث الشرق الأوسط

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## شروط النشر بالمجلة

- تُعنى المجلة بنشر البحوث المهمة بمجالات العلوم الإنسانية والأدبية ؛
- يعتمد النشر على رأي اثنين من المحكمين المتخصصين ويتم التحكيم إلكترونياً ؛
- تقبل البحوث باللغة العربية أو بإحدى اللغات الأجنبية، وترسل إلى موقع المجلة على بنك المعرفة المصري ويرفق مع البحث ملف بيانات الباحث يحتوي على عنوان البحث باللغتين العربية والإنجليزية واسم الباحث والتايتل والانتماء المؤسسي باللغتين العربية والإنجليزية، ورقم واتساب، وإيميل الباحث الذي تم التسجيل به على موقع المجلة ؛
- يشار إلى أن الهوامش والمراجع في نهاية البحث وليست أسفل الصفحة ؛
- يكتب الباحث ملخص باللغة العربية واللغة الإنجليزية للبحث صفحة واحدة فقط لكل ملخص ؛
- بالنسبة للبحث باللغة العربية يكتب على برنامج "word" ونمط الخط باللغة العربية "Simplified Arabic" وحجم الخط 14 ولا يزيد عدد الأسطر في الصفحة الواحدة عن 25 سطر والهوامش والمراجع خط Simplified Arabic حجم الخط 12 ؛
- بالنسبة للبحث باللغة الإنجليزية يكتب على برنامج word ونمط الخط Times New Roman وحجم الخط 13 ولا يزيد عدد الأسطر عن 25 سطر في الصفحة الواحدة والهوامش والمراجع خط Times New Roman حجم الخط 11 ؛
- (Paper) مقياس الورق (B5) 17.6 × 25 سم، (Margins) الهوامش 2.3 سم يمينًا ويسارًا، 2 سم أعلى وأسفل الصفحة، ليصبح مقياس البحث فعلي (الكلام) 21×13 سم. (Layout) والنسق: (Header) الرأس 1.25 سم، (Footer) تذييل 2.5 سم ؛
- مواصفات الفقرة للبحث: بداية الفقرة First Line = 1.27 سم، قبل النص = 0.00، بعد النص = 0.00، تباعد قبل الفقرة = 6pt (تباعد بعد الفقرة = 0pt)، تباعد الفقرات (مفرد single) ؛
- مواصفات الفقرة للهوامش والمراجع: يوضع الرقم بين قوسين هلاكي مثل: (1)، بداية الفقرة Hanging = 0.6 سم، قبل النص = 0.00، بعد النص = 0.00، تباعد قبل الفقرة = 0.00، تباعد بعد الفقرة = 0.00، تباعد الفقرات (مفرد single) ؛
- الجداول والأشكال: يتم وضع الجداول والأشكال إما في صفحات منفصلة أو وسط النص وفقًا لرؤية الباحث، على أن يكون عرض الجدول أو الشكل لا يزيد عن 13.5 سم بأي حال من الأحوال ؛
- يتم التحقق من صحة الإملاء على مسئولية الباحث لتفادي الأخطاء في المصطلحات الفنية ؛
- مدة التحكيم 15 يوم على الأكثر، مدة تعديل البحث بعد التحكيم 15 يوم على الأكثر ؛
- يخضع تسلسل نشر البحوث في أعداد المجلة حسب ما تراه هيئة التحرير من ضرورات علمية وفنية ؛
- المجلة غير ملزمة بإعادة البحوث إلى أصحابها سواء نشرت أم لم تنشر ؛
- تعتبر البحوث عن آراء أصحابها وليس عن رأي رئيس التحرير وهيئة التحرير ؛
- رسوم التحكيم للمصريين 650 جنيه، ولغير المصريين 155 دولار ؛
- رسوم النشر للصفحة الواحدة للمصريين 25 جنيه، وغير المصريين 12 دولار ؛
- الباحث المصري يسدد الرسوم بالجنيه المصري (بالفيزا) بمقر المركز (المقيم بالقاهرة)، أو على حساب حكومي رقم : (9/450/80772/8) بنك مصر (المقيم خارج القاهرة) ؛
- الباحث غير المصري يسدد الرسوم بالدولار على حساب حكومي رقم : (EG71000100010000004082175917) (البنك العربي الأفريقي) ؛
- استلام إفادة قبول نشر البحث في خلال 15 يوم من تاريخ سداد رسوم النشر مع ضرورة رفع إيصالات السداد على موقع المجلة ؛
- المراسلات : توجه المراسلات الخاصة بالمجلة إلى: merc.director@asu.edu.eg
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يسر مركز بحوث الشرق الأوسط والدراسات المستقبلية صدور العدد (104 - أكتوبر 2024) من مجلة المركز «مجلة بحوث الشرق الأوسط». هذه المجلة العربية التي مر على صدورها حوالي 50 عامًا في خدمة البحث العلمي، ويصدر هذا العدد وهو يحمل بين دافتيه عدة دراسات متخصصة: (دراسات قانونية، دراسات اللغة العربية، دراسات اجتماعية، دراسات جغرافية، دراسات المكتبات والمعلومات، دراسات سياسية، دراسات إعلامية، دراسات لغوية) ويعد البحث العلمي **Scientific Research** حجر الزاوية والركيزة الأساسية في الارتقاء بالمجتمعات لكي تكون في مصاف الدول المتقدمة.

ولذا تُعتبر الجامعات أن البحث العلمي من أهم أولوياتها لكي تقود مسيرة التطوير والتحديث عن طريق البحث العلمي في المجالات كافة.

ولذا تهدف مجلة بحوث الشرق الأوسط إلى نشر البحوث العلمية الرصينة والمبتكرة في مختلف مجالات الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية واللغات التي تخدم المعرفة الإنسانية. والمجلة تطبق معايير النشر العلمي المعتمدة من بنك المعرفة المصري وأكاديمية البحث العلمي، مما جعل الباحثين يتسابقون من كافة الجامعات المصرية ومن الجامعات العربية للنشر في المجلة.

وتحرص المجلة على انتقاء الأبحاث العلمية الجادة والرصينة والمبتكرة للنشر في المجلة كإضافة للمكتبة العلمية وتكون دائمًا في مقدمة المجالات العلمية المماثلة. ولذا نعد بالاستمرارية من أجل مزيد من الإبداع والتميز العلمي.

والله من وراء القصد

رئيس التحرير

د. حاتم العبد



الدراسات اللغوية

LINGUISTIC STUDIES



**Egypt's Shift From National to Global  
Framing of Child Labor Policy From  
the 1980s Until 2022**

التحول في مصر من الإطار الوطني إلى الإطار العالمي  
لسياسة عمالة الأطفال منذ ثمانينيات القرن العشرين وحتى  
عام 2022

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** Breaking with former President Mubarak's inward-looking approach, this paper examines how al-Sisi has differently formulated Egypt's child labor policy in compliance with the UN SDGs goals and objectives.

**Method:** Relying on a qualitative research method based on the analysis of Egyptian officials' speeches, statements, practices, and laws, this study borrows policy framing as an explanatory framework of the shift in Egypt's labor policy.

**Originality:** While the literature addressing child labor in Egypt has predominantly focused on the reasons behind child labor, its repercussions on children's wellbeing, and the government's efforts in curbing its proliferation, this study examines the shift in the government's framing of the cause and its impact on curbing the phenomenon from proliferation.

**Findings:** This paper argues that Egypt has changed its approach toward child labor policies under the rule of President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi by adopting a global framing toward child labor as an issue of national development.

**Keywords:** Policy Framing, SDGs, Laws and Programs, Child Labor, Egypt



## Introduction

In July 2022, the Ministry of Manpower declared its intention to curb child labor in compliance with the pillars addressing health, social equality, and education in Egypt's vision 2030 for sustainable development (Sayed, 2022). Mirroring the UN SDGs objectives, Egypt's vision 2030 has prompted the reconsideration of national legislations and the development of the necessary policies, programs, and plans in cooperation with the concerned entities. Doing so, the government launched the National Plan for Fighting the Worst Forms of Child Labor in Egypt and Supporting the Family (2018-2025), which defined strict timeframes and governmental roles for the concerned public agencies in line with the global efforts for ending child labor by 2025 (ILO, 2018). While Egypt has adopted extensive legislations combatting child labor since the 1980s in emphasis on its hazardous impact on children's wellbeing and national development, families continued to send their children to work in coordination with workshops' owners who managed to hide from the state inspectors and conceal their involvement in children's illegal recruitment for hazardous tasks.

Copious scholarly writings have addressed the reasons behind child labor's proliferation, its negative repercussions on children's wellbeing, and Egypt's future workforce, and have extensively elaborated on the government's legislations and their inefficiency in curbing the expansion of this phenomenon (Assaad, 2017; Ahmed, 2010; ElGazally, 2022; Radwan, 2018; Wahba, 2005; Fouad, 2022). Unlike the literature, this study examines the shift in the government's framing of child labor from a national to a global exigency in its statements, official declarations, practices, and policies. It utilizes policy framing as a conceptual framework for depicting the government's rationale and means of carrying out this shift since Egypt's adherence to the UN SDGs in 2015 (Edmond, 2014 and 2021). In this respect, this study answers the following question: How did both Mubarak and al-Sisi regimes differently frame the child labor policy and how did their framing impact the state's efficiency in fighting this phenomenon?



In order to answer this question, the study depicts the difference in Mubarak and al-Sisi regimes' framing of the child labor cause through the use of a qualitative research method based on the meticulous analysis of official statements, declarations, laws, practices, and policies. Doing so, it focuses on identifying the government's official position toward child labor in formulating policies, programs, and plans in the aim of curbing children's exploitation in compliance with the UN SDGs. It highlights officials' beliefs and values in defining their perception of child labor, its main causes, consequences, the means of fighting it, and the causal mechanisms that contributed to its selling as a public good under the rule of both regimes. In this vein, the author explores how the state has defined child labor as a public good, what narratives it used in selling it to the audience, what plots it involved and characterization of villains and victims. This study is structured as follows. The first part provides a general overview on child labor in Egypt while the second and third ones elaborate on the literature examining child labor in Egypt and the theoretical framework used in the study analysis. The fourth section focuses on examining the shift in child labor policy framing under the rule of the Mubarak and al-Sisi regimes, its dynamics, means of implementation, and impact on curbing this phenomenon.

Commented [MOU1]: Methodology

### Overview on Child Labor in Egypt

Few accurate statistics have traced the evolution of child labor in Egypt. In 2009, the International Labor organization (ILO), the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood, and the Central Agency for Public Mobilization (CAPMAS) stated that three million Egyptian children, mostly males from rural areas, among whom 10% were between 10 and 14 years old, work in industrial and agricultural sectors (Adel, 2018; ILO, 2009; CAPMAS, 2013). This information was previously highlighted in a 1988 CAPMAS national survey indicating that approximately 1.47 million children aged between 6 and 14 years old work (CAPMAS, 2013). Other sources confirmed that there were almost 1.5 million working children in Egypt in 1999, which constituted almost 9% of the Egyptian labor force (Data On Labor, 2020). These sources have asserted that child labor has been tightly related to poor

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families, constituting 65% of the population, who rely on their children as the main source of revenue.

There are currently 2.7 million children working in Egypt while the majority, up to 1 million between 7 and 12 years old, are hired each year to work in agricultural cooperatives. According to the ILO estimates, while 30% and 17% of working children have been recruited in the industrial and service sectors respectively, 63% of them were mainly in the agricultural sector (ILO, 2010). Cotton has been one of the main Egyptian strategic products whose producers recruit approximately one million children under the age of 12 years old in the cotton industry annually. The Ministry of Agriculture employed children for seasonal work, especially in summer, when schools were in recess, for pest management, removing, and destroying the infected parts of the cotton leaves (Krumah, 2008; Whitman, 2001).

Yet, children endured mediocre working conditions in the cotton industry for about 11 hours daily. Being exposed to high degrees of heat that reached 40 °C, they were abused by foremen and exposed to pesticides in return for 20 pounds daily (Human Rights Watch, 2001). Being exploited by producers in return for money, children are exposed to harsh and unsafe working conditions due to the absence of a close supervision during cotton picking, a dangerous process involving the use of dangerous tools and toxic pesticides, which exposed children to severe chronic diseases, such as poisoning, diarrhea, and disruptions in the nervous system and problems in the reproductive systems (ILO, 2011).

High poverty incited over than 16 million citizens who lived under the poverty line to undergo poor working conditions and send children to work in summer for two months from May to July in return for 270 EGP, which were spent on school supplies. Cotton plants' short height in summer, from May to July, reaching around 50-70 cm made children the best candidates for such kind of work (CRIN, 2010). Requiring limited qualifications, the cotton industry attracted children not only because of its simplicity but also the Ministry of Agriculture's decree in 1965 stating that each farming family has to contribute to the labor



force in the cotton industry by sending at least one of their children in the pest management process. Being a compulsory regulation, it encouraged children to early join the labor force in order to protect cotton fields from pest infection.

Yet, child labor triggered major human rights concerns related to child forced labor, health hazards, and safety violations that exposed children's lives to death, inhumane working conditions, inadequate payments, poor quality of shelter and food, sexual harassment, and limited access to clean drinking water, safe transportation means, and basic medical care. Not only did children suffer from health complications, such as breathing difficulties but were also deprived from pursuing their education at school as was indicated by the UNESCO statistical yearbook in 2007 stating that 37% of Egyptian children have not completed their basic education (UNESCO, 2007).

As a result, Human Rights Watch proposed some recommendations to regulate child labor in agricultural activities, which called for raising the minimum working age for seasonal agricultural, reducing working hours for children, ensuring children's health care, especially for those who work in leaf worm control operations (Human Rights Watch Report, 2001). Also, it recommended punishing employers for mistreating children, managing children's enrollment into agricultural activities by determining re-entry intervals related to pesticides' usage, educating farmers on spraying pesticides, and prohibiting highly hazardous pesticides.

ILO reports, UNICEF, and the Arab Council for Motherhood and Childhood indicated that there were 3 million working children in Egypt while half of them were exposed to hazardous working conditions (ILO, 2016; ILO and UNICEF, 2020). In light of the increasing numbers of working children despite of national efforts in curbing child labor, Egypt adhered to the UN Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, which declared 17 Sustainable Development Goals associated with 169 objectives and 230 indicators (UNSDGs, 2015). SDGs' targets 8.7 and 16.2 called for immediate actions to end child labor, violence, exploitation, slavery, and human trafficking, and the



worst forms of child labor and enrollment into wars by 2025. While progress has been slow in achieving these ends, the SDGs' objectives related to child labor aimed to entrench global commitment toward the adoption of legal norms forbidding child labor, social programs combatting poverty, quality education for all children, regulations ensuring decent work for youth, and the regular inspection of children's working conditions across different sectors.

### Scholarly Writings Addressing Child Labor in Egypt

Scholars have widely addressed child labor as a chronic issue that has been extensively widespread with negative repercussions on the Egyptian national economy and society (Assaad, 2017; Ghazally, 2022; Fouad, 2022). Doing so, they highlighted reasons behind its persistence, negative impact on the Egyptian economy, and the efficient means of curbing its proliferation. While scholarship emphasized the persistence of child labor as a chronic socioeconomic feature in Egypt, it overlooked changes in the state's framing of the issue and the necessity of addressing the increasing numbers of children's enrollment into hazardous and clandestine forms of labor that have negatively influenced their wellbeing.

In addressing the reasons behind child labor, scholarship underscored the relationship between the expansion of informal economy, constituting 50% of the Egyptian economy with a value up to 395 millions dollars, and children's recruitment in dangerous and mediocre forms of work (Ahmed, 2010). In line with this argument, scholars referred to parents' complicity in maintaining children's work invisible from the government's scope due to the increasing rates of poverty and recruiters' abstention from reporting the names and numbers of working children in their workshops (Radwan, 2018). In this vein, scholarly writings highlighted parents' educational background and upbringing in poor rural areas as one of the main factors standing behind the persistence of child labor since parents who have been working in their childhood and suffered from poverty tend to send their children to work before reaching their majority (Qaed, 1999; Assaad, 2017). Others referred to students' low enrollment to schools

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and the visible decrease in children's pursuit of basic education at schools as an additional reason behind their orientation toward work in order to financially support their families. The combination of these factors have been the focus of numerous studies, which argued that embedded poverty and illiteracy in rural areas have incited parents to send their children to work starting from a very young age to carry out hazardous jobs with devastating effects on their health (Ibrahim, 2019; Wahba, 2005).

Another scholarship has explored the extended socioeconomic repercussions of child labor on Egypt's national economy. Scholars underlined the growing numbers of children with chronic inflammatory and respiratory diseases due to their longtime exposure to dangerous chemicals, sharp equipment, and difficult tasks without equitable remuneration, regular inspections, health insurance, or periodical medical check-ups (Edmond, 2010). Others emphasized the manifestation of violent behavior among working children in comparison to their counterparts who have enrolled to school or joined the labor market at an older age (Khattab, 2019). In this perspective, they enumerated various forms of physical, sexual, and psychological abuses to which children have been permanently exposed at work, such as cars workshops, mines, steel factories, and construction sites, which is expected to severely affect their mental abilities and productivity on the long run.

An additional strand of scholarship went further in highlighting the state's limitations in curbing child labor due to legal and technical deficiencies. In this perspective, they contended that, in spite of the enactment of laws conforming with the dispositions of international and regional conventions calling for the protection of children's rights and wellbeing, child labor still persists as a chronic issue in the Egyptian society and labor market (Ali, 2008; Azer, 2009; Khair, 2010). They referred to the lack of sufficient inspectors in carrying out regular inspections on institutions that recruit children and the presence of legal exceptions allowing children to work. In addition, they indicated that children's recruitment in the informal sector, such as domestic work, private workshops in welding, carpentry, and agriculture, render them



invisible to the government since workshop owners have always been reluctant to report cases of working children due to the presence of wide ranges of abuses, such as the deprivation of adequate salaries, deploring working conditions, the lack of health insurance, and exposition to permanent injuries and physical deformation, which remained unnoticed and difficult to regulate by the state.

### **Policy Framing: Actors' Ideational Framework**

This study builds on policy framing in unraveling the state's framing of the child labor policy under the rule of President al-Sisi in compliance with the UN SDGs' guidelines since 2015 and depicting the differences it manifested in curbing child labor in comparison with the Mubarak regime's inward policy. In doing so, policy framing provides informative and flexible structures of decision-making by focusing on actors' perceptions and interactions in formulating policies and defining them. It argues that policy, as a purposive social initiative, involves the urgent action based on a strategic choice in order to solve a crisis under the pressure of public and daily demands (Downs, 1972; Hirschmann, 1982). Constituting a 'village community,' decision-makers internalize regulation, values, and commands, and evaluate their performance accordingly without applying direct coercion. They act based on informal norms and negotiated meanings, which dwell on decentralized alliances and networks of governance instead of a hierarchical authority in persuading stakeholders (Hart, 1961; Wildavsky, 1974; Castells, 2000; Hajer, 2003). Bureaucratic organizations and the Weberian paradigms of hierarchy turned into a soft bureaucracy where different actors produce norms under the auspices of the government's steering role in the promotion of a public good (Courpasson, 2000). In this perspective, command and control were abandoned to incentives, which incited competent and knowledgeable actors to act based on rules in formulating public policies and framing issues of interest as a public good without the intrusive intervention of public officials (Schultze, 1977; Bovens, 1990).

Building on leaders' perception as a creative output informed by jurisdictions and international organizations, policies are framed into





and out of perceived social problems in order to address issues in compliance with social values or tell new facts about them (Mills, 1959; Atkinson, 1996). As a process of value trade-off, policy alternatives are given different priorities in light of existing conflicts, goals, what constitutes a social good, and how we understand policies (Barry & Rae, 1975; Schon & Rein, 1994; Thatcher & Rein, 2004). Being value-based, goal-directed, future-oriented, policies are formulated to deal with conflicting ends by focusing on recycling values, addressing different institutions with distinct norms, involving past cases in suggesting a particular course of action, and assembling pieces and available options into a coherent pattern. In this vein, framing involves public forums to discuss problems within a civic discovery of what constitutes people's welfare where whoever defines the problem has control over the design (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). Problems are constructed through the interaction of political phenomena in terms of identifying what is at stake, locating political discourses, and determining value context, boundaries of interests, participants' empathy, and willingness to capture other perspectives and compromises. Policy framing reflects the notion of citizenship, the role of government and socially constructed targets in a positive or negative way, which implies the difficulty of implementing them without sufficient public support (Schneider & Ingram, 1997). Being a cause-effect and accommodative process, policy framing requires the identification of references, narratives, the situation of meanings, and the stabilization of the situation. Also, it incorporates the determination of interactions through inference from storytelling and the depiction of turning points and values, which are embedded into shared meanings, and bargaining, deliberation, and consensus-building processes (Steinberg, 1998).

### **Framing Child Labor Policy under the Mubarak and al-Sisi regimes**

This section examines the shift in framing the child labor policy under the Mubarak and al-Sisi regimes through the lens of leadership's perception and formulation of the problem and suggested solutions and strategies. Building on policy framing as an informative approach of the



regime's narrative, it distills the leadership's values, norms, goals, and networks of alliance underpinning their formulation of child labor and its related policies and programs.

Doing so, the study examines both the Mubarak and al-Sisi regimes' contexts, driving motives behind addressing child labor, definition of the issue, and the rationale behind the selected solutions. While the Mubarak regime has conceived child labor as an evident response to chronic and pressuring domestic problems, such as poverty, malnutrition, and illiteracy, al-Sisi aligned with the international community's legislations in addressing child labor as an impediment to national development. In this perspective, child labor policies manifested an inward/national outlook since the 1980s in light of the legal framework's recognition of exceptions in the formulation of the child labor law and the delegation of the fight of child labor to international NGOs in expression of the social-institutional tolerance toward the proliferation of the issue as an economic imperative and a parental strategy for survival in facing poverty.

Unlike Mubarak, al-Sisi coated the child labor issue into global idioms emphasizing the urgency of sustainable development through the reconsideration of national legislations, the formulation of comprehensive national plans, and implementation of nationwide policies and programs.

#### **A. Mubarak's National Outlook in Framing Child Labor Policy (1981-2011)**

Based on the meticulous examination of Mubarak and ministers' official statements, declarations and documents addressing child labor policies until the end of 2010s, this section argues that Mubarak adopted an inward looking approach in framing the child labor issue. The data resulting from official documents' analysis revealed that leaders manifested an institutional tolerance toward the issue, which has been manifested with legal exceptions providing a leeway for families to send their children to work and the delegation of the fight against child labor to international NGOs. The state's tolerance toward child labor has been concretized through legislations allowing exceptions, the light



punitive measures adopted toward violators and the reluctance in punishing them. Since the 1980s, the Mubarak regime adopted national legislations that approached child labor as an evil necessity in light of mediocre socioeconomic conditions (Edmond, 2021). In spite of the narrow institutional coordination with international organizations and the state adherence to global treaties fighting child labor, the government included exceptional provisions into legislation that allowed children to work. Being aware of the state inability to satisfy people's basic needs and the citizens' growing frustrations with the state's fight against a preliminary source of revenue for low-income families, the state manifested an institutional tolerance toward child labor by overlooking cases of working children, loosening inspections over recruiters, and alleviating punitive measures against violators (Maat, 2021).

The regime's implicit tolerance toward child labor has been inferred from the examination of legal documents regulating child labor underlining Egypt's adherence as a signatory part to a range of international and regional conventions for combatting child labor. In this respect, Egypt has recognized the ILO conventions number 129(1969) determining the inspection regulations on the agricultural sector, number 138(1973) defining the minimum age of working children, and no.182(1999) identifying the worst forms of child labor. It has also agreed on the ratification of the UN Convention of child rights in 1989, the UNCRC Operational Protocol on Armed Conflicts, the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography, Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons, and the Arab Labor Convention no 18 (1996) on child labor (Data On Labor, 2020).

While Egypt complied to these legal frameworks in the legislation of its national laws, the designed regulations incorporated some exceptions in tackling child labor, which allowed families to send their children to work within the framework of seasonal recruitment in the agricultural sector. The Egyptian law number 12(2003) has prohibited children under the age of 14 from working and limited the work duration for children from the age of 15 to 17 to six hours per day excluding holidays under the condition of a compulsory medical exam



before recruitment and the issuing of cards listing their names and the type of work they do (Maat, 2021). Article 66 of the same law has limited work duration to four consecutive hours with breaks in between and restricted children from working overtime or during night shifts from 8 pm. until 7 am. Articles 67–69 of the same law obliged employers to issue identification cards in children’s names stamped by the Ministry of Manpower and Migration. Yet, in 2008, the Minister of Manpower and Migration declared that children would be legally allowed to work in agricultural cooperatives starting from age 12 under the condition of issuing a health certificate, going through annual health check-ups, and benefiting from health insurance (NCCM, 2018). While the ministerial decrees number 12(1996) and 118 (2006) have prohibited the recruitment of children under the age of 15 in tasks involving hazardous working conditions, it limited the number of dangerous sectors enlisted in the ILO convention no. 182(1999) to 26 instead of 44. **In a similar vein, the child labor law no. 12 (2003) article 99 allowed children to undergo a professional training at the age of 12 in spite of its restriction of all forms of work for children under the age of 14 years old or who have not yet completed their basic education** (Data On Labor, 2020). Also, in April 2001, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture and Land Reclamation Affairs issued a ministerial decree no. 1454 prohibiting children below 14 years old from working in the agricultural sector as mentioned by the child labor law no. 12, which considered children under 18 years old as juveniles. Although it increased the minimum working age from 12 to 14 years old, it allowed children from 12 to 14 years old to work with the governor’s permission and approval of the Ministry of Education on the condition of enrollment into seasonal unarmful agricultural activities that would not prevent children from pursuing their studies.

In addition to legal loopholes sustaining child labor, the government has not strictly enforced legislations and assigned limited punitive measures against violators. The Ministry of Manpower and Migration enacted the decree number 117 establishing a specialized Child Labor Unit within the Labor Inspection Department under the supervision of



the ILO's International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC) and the Arab Labor Organization (ILO-IPEC, 2013). Whilst this decree trained and educated inspectors on the protection of working children in order to effectively carry out their tasks across Egyptian governorates, the Ministry was not able to enforce the child labor law on the informal sector, which constituted 50% of the Egyptian national economy and encompassed 16 thousand children working in mines in Upper Egypt among whom 28% were between 8 and 18 years old and 2% between 8 and 12 years old.

The Ministry of Manpower and Migration has been responsible for child labor inspections through 2,000 inspectors who were charged in 450 different offices in 26 governorates with investigating safety, health, and age violations among working children. The Ministry issued decree no. 117(2000) for establishing a specialized Child Labor Unit within the Labor Inspection Department to control three million children working children (Data On Labor, 2020). In 2006, the state initiated the Unit for the Prevention of Children Trafficking in the National Council on Childhood and Motherhood to advance anti-trafficking legislations and initiatives for victims' rehabilitation, carry out capacity building trainings for judges and prosecutors, and increase public awareness about the different forms of trafficking. Yet, enforcement has not been effectively carried out throughout Egypt since some offenders have been prosecuted while others were acquitted in return for paying small fines. Article 74 of child labor law imposed a fine around 10 to 200 EGP per illegal working child on employers, which would be subject to an increase in case of repeated violations and mentioned that governors would punish violators by preventing them from pursuing their work and withdrawing their work license. This article has also previewed punishment for parents who force their children to drop out of school for work with a fine ranging from 17 EGP and 175 EGP and imprisonment for up to one month. Although new regulations raised the minimum rate of fines for violations of child labor laws to 500 EGP, they were light punitive measures that did not intimidate violators. Despite efforts to implement and enforce the child labor law, child labor remained an uncontrolled issue. In 2009, UNICEF



reported several incidences of organ trafficking among homeless children, which were associated with illegal immigration and domestic workers (UNICEF, 2010). In 2010, Giza, Cairo, Helwan, and the 6th October governorates hired children between the age of 10 to 15 years old as janitors at shopping malls located on the ring road and Al Mehwar road (Egyptian Chronicle, 2010; Edmond, 2006 and 2007). Although labor trade unions have reported to the Ministry of Manpower and Migration cases of weak enforcement of labor laws in state-owned companies, the informal sector witnessed severe violations related to children's abuse, overwork, and exposition to hazardous conditions.

While the Mubarak regime took part in global treaties and conventions combatting child labor, it delegated the mission of combatting this issue to international NGOs, which took in charge the implementation of development initiatives. International organizations carried out initiatives in cooperation with civil societies to improve children's welfare and curb their enrollment into the working force. UNICEF addressed the main causes behind child labor, especially poverty and education's poor quality in partnership with local Egyptian NGOs in order to protect children from compulsory enrollment to work and improve the living and working conditions of legally working children (UNICEF, 2010). Since 1993, it provided poor families micro-credit schemes in urban slums and impoverished regions in rural areas under the condition that they will not take their children out of school or force them to work. Besides, starting from 1999, it worked on preventing children's enrollment into work by supporting poor communities and providing control mechanisms to protect children at risk in Cairo and Alexandria.

UNICEF assigned social workers and community leaders to detect and report violations at the community level to expert/advisory committees, which would intervene to stop violations (UNICEF, 2010). In partnership with the Egyptian Red Crescent Society at El-Nahda and West Helwan, UNICEF provided children basic education, health care, meals, and cultural and entertaining activities. These projects were inspired from previous experiences, which were previously carried out



since 1993 in Alexandria in cooperation with the Regional Maritime Scouts Association. Alexandria's initiative was basically designed to improve children's working conditions and develop their potentials, personal skills, and talents. It succeeded to help more than 2,500 working boys and girls in 2004 by extending micro-credit schemes in partnership with the Sidi Gaber Association to mothers in order to help children to recover from physical or psychological injuries and receive the adequate rehabilitation services from the Regional Maritime Scouts. These small loans enabled mothers to establish home-based businesses which encouraged them to send their children to school instead of forcing them to work. UNICEF worked with the Ministries of Education and Social Affairs in February 1996 to launch the Mubarak Program for Social Cooperation to reduce school fees and other costs related to school materials and school grants, which equaled to 4.4 and 4.8 % of gross national production from 1991 until 1995 (ILO, 2009). It consisted of building Community Schools, among which 300 were operating with a 70% attendance rates among girls and the initiation of the one classroom schools project in order to encourage children to attend schools instead of working. 8,500 new schools were built in poor and rural areas under the tutelage of this program close to children's houses so they can reach them easily. According to the UNESCO's Statistical Yearbook in 1997, 15% of the government total expenditures were allocated to education from 1990 until 1997 where the largest amount, estimated to be around 67%, was directed to primary schools from 1993 until 1997 (UNESCO, 1997).

### **B. Al-Sisi's Global Framing of Child Labor (2015-2025)**

With the increase of the number of working children to reach 4,1 million (CAPMAS, 2021), al-Sisi regime has framed child labor as a socioeconomic exigency for national development in Egypt vision 2030. In line with UN SDGs, Egypt ensured the harmonization of legislations with international and regional conventions combatting child labor, the initiation of social plans, programs, and policies addressing poverty, education, and mothers and children's nutrition.

In its strategic vision of Egypt 2030, the government identified the main pillar of its strategy for sustainable development, which echoed



the UN SDGs goals and objectives (mped, 2016). In its fifth, sixth, and seventh pillars on social justice, health, training and education, the government envisioned a more egalitarian society 'where everyone is included' in reflection of the UN SDGs's slogan 'nobody is left behind in education, social and professional opportunities, and health.' Egypt's vision 2030 emphasized the government's projected efforts of empowering all citizens without discrimination in terms of enabling their equal access to efficient services and resources, especially for the most vulnerable, such as women and children. In line with this national vision, the Egyptian Senate approved in February 2022 a legal package of 267 laws organizing a variety of issues related to work life including child labor as specified by articles 58 and 60 prohibiting children under the age of 18 to work (Sayed, 2022). In a similar vein, the government reviewed its legal framework toward the entrenchment of social justice and integration. It amended article 89 of the 2014 constitution in emphasis on its commitment toward protecting children from abuse, violence, mistreatment, and exposure to hazardous working conditions and opposition to children's enrollment into work and recruitment for dangerous tasks before finishing their basic education. In line with this rationale, it has revisited legislations addressing child labor by identifying 15 as the legal age of professional training in article 64 of the child labor law no. 39 and expanding the list of hazardous sectors for children's recruitment unless they reached 18 in the Ministry of Manpower's decree number 40 article 1 and article 291 of the penal code (Maat, 2021). As for articles 2 and 3 of the law on combating human trafficking number 39, 41, and 42, they underscored the prohibition of children's forced labor and trafficking. Also, articles 34, 39(7), and 65 of the child labor law and article 2 of the Ministry of Manpower's decrees number 39, 40, and 44 restricted children's involvement in narcotics, illicit activities, and military missions except for the state's compulsory and voluntary military recruitments at the age of 18 and 15 respectively (Data On Labor, 2021). These legal packages echoed Article 1 of the law on military and national service no. 45 and the Ministry of Defense guidelines on Youth Volunteers in the Armed Forces no. 46 respectively





In addition to the reconsideration of the national legal framework, the government took in charge the responsibility of initiating national plans, policies, and programs in support for the SDGs' objectives related to child labor, social protection, equal education, and health. By launching the National Plan of Action Against the Worst Forms of Child Labor and Supporting Families (2018-2025), the government aimed for combatting the worst forms of child labor by 2025 and identifying roles of government agencies in the axis of social protection and education (ILO, 2018). Agencies should help children's recruiters through the expansion of child labor knowledge base, the provision of capacity building programs for entities working on support and social protection, efforts for improving education, especially vocational education for children, advocacy and awareness raising.

Concerning the health axis, the government initiated the Third National Plan of Action Against Human Trafficking (2016–2021) in order to sustain the existing referral mechanisms, train officials specialized in law enforcement, and fight against the trafficking of street children (Data On Labor, 2021). While the National Coordination Committee on Preventing Illegal Migration and Combating Trafficking in Persons followed up with the national referral mechanism, governmental agencies provided human trafficking training to officials, and the Ministry of Social Solidarity provided services to thousands of street children. The National Coordinating Committee to Combat the Worst Forms of Child Labor coordinated efforts among the Ministries of Manpower, Justice, Social Solidarity, and the Interior, the Council for Human Rights, Childhood, and Motherhood, and the Council for Women in drafting a National Strategy to Combat the Worst Forms of Child Labor. The National Coordination Committee on Preventing Illegal Migration and Combating Trafficking in Persons, comprising 18 government entities, including the Ministries of the Interior and Manpower, coordinated efforts to combat trafficking in persons and provided training for reporters on human trafficking, victim protection, and ethical considerations related to human trafficking.



In support for Egypt vision 2030 pillars and the UN SDGs, the government has intensively addressed child labor through the launch of social programs covering education, health, and social protection. The first program ‘Children’s Access to Education and Fighting Child Labor (2014–2018)’ was jointly initiated with the EU with a budget of \$65 million to be implemented in 4 years in cooperation with the World Food Program (Data On Labor, 2021). It provided food security for up to 100,000 children who might be at risk of child labor, financial assistance to 400,000 family members in compensation for working children’s wages, and support for 50,000 households in income-generating activities to keep children at school. Under the auspices of the National School Feeding Program, this program has sustained in-kind and cash transfers for vulnerable families in order to ensure children’s enrollment to school.

Another program was initiated in cooperation with the EU, ‘Expanding Access to Education and Protection for Children at Risk in Egypt (2016–2021),’ with a budget of \$32 million and was implemented by UNICEF, the Ministry of Education, and the National Council of Childhood and Motherhood in order to enable 36,000 children, including 6,000 children with disabilities to have access to school and support 15 Child Protection Committees across 15 governorates (UNICEF-ILO, 2020). Similarly, ‘Solidarity and Dignity Initiative’ of the cash transfer program (2015– 2017) has secured a monthly income for 1.5 million poor families under the condition of keeping children at school except for the elderly and family members with disabilities. USAID has also contributed to national efforts in conciliation with SDGs goals with ‘Positive Life Alternatives for Egyptian Youth at-Risk of Irregular Migration Program (2015–2017),’ which was initiated with a \$3.2 million budget to be implemented on two years by the International Organization of Migration (USAID, 2017). This program aimed for raising awareness among children and youth on the negative effects of irregular migration and human trafficking and building the technical capacity of service providers for children who might be at risk of illegal recruitment to work. In line with this goal, The Ministry of Social Solidarity launched the Children



without Shelter program for operating shelters for children who were victims of human trafficking and forced labor. The Ministry of Solidarity has also created 17 mobile units, provided services to more than 4,000 street children, and reunited 400 street children with their families (Data On Labor, 2021). Within the framework of this program, The National Coordination Committee on Preventing Illegal Migration and Combating Trafficking in Persons has trained media professionals on how to identify and report cases of human trafficking. In collaboration with the National Council for Children Motherhood and national NGOs, it declared a program entitled, Dar as-Salam, to provide social services, psychological counseling and health services.

In resonance with the social protection pillar in Egypt 2030, the government has developed institutional mechanisms for enforcing laws and regulations in the fight against child labor. In this perspective, the Ministry of Manpower in cooperation with the Ministries of Justice, Interior, and Local Development has activated mechanisms for the reception and investigation of complaints related to child labor and reciprocal referral mechanisms between labor authorities and social service, sent inspectors to conduct routine inspections, and reported violations to the Prosecution. The Ministry of Social Solidarity created the Child Protection Committees to coordinate with subcommittees at police stations, child protection efforts in each governorate. The National Council for Childhood and Motherhood presented technical support and trainings about child labor to inspectors at the Ministry of Manpower about how to identify and supervise cases of children at-risk, established two 24-hour hotlines, received reports of child labor and child trafficking and launched 35 awareness campaigns about children's worst forms of labor, sexual exploitation, and forced unpaid labor that reached 1,740 students, educators, and migrants, and others (NCCM, 2021).



## Discussion and Conclusion

According to (CAPMAS, 2021) survey, the number of working children between 5 and 17 has declined from 7% in 2014 to 5.6%, border governorates reached 2.6% while it scored 3.6% in 2014, and rural upper Egypt recorded 8.4% compared to 10.4% in 2014. Yet, by examining the shift from the national outlook of Egypt's child labor policies under the Mubarak regime to a global framing under al-Sisi regime, working children, especially those exposed to hazardous conditions remains a persistent issue. Although the Ministries of Manpower, Social Solidarity, Agriculture, Family, Population, Education, and Health have worked together with the World Food Program to control sectors that recruit children, law enforcement constituted a visible deficiency in Egypt's fight against child labor. Egypt's child labor law seemed ineffective because of the government's inability to strictly impose it while poverty obliged families to take children out of schools for enrollment into workforce (ECWR, 2011). It is difficult to enforce child labor law since poor families sent their children to work in the informal sector as maids or street vendors, which is, unlike the public and private sectors where managers are held accountable, not easy to monitor. Although Egypt has initiated programs targeting child labor, they seemed insufficient to address the problem, especially with regard to children's commercial and sexual exploitation. Yet, children working in households or in the streets, can be reported by citizens whose awareness play a major role in supporting the government's efforts to curb child labor by enforcing laws and regulations.

Loopholes in Egypt's legal framework addressing children's protection from the worst forms of child labor, especially those prohibiting the commercial sexual exploitation of children are due to their vagueness in criminalizing children's recruitment. Also, the law prohibiting children's employment in hazardous sectors and occupations do not cover all possible dangerous tasks in which children may be recruited. While the law mentions quarrying, welding, tanning, pesticides, and heavy loads, it overlooked brick



production where children are exposed to the risk of getting a permanent disability or physical deformation.

In light of these deficiencies, the government would enhance its abilities in combating child labor by making sure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children in commercial sexual exploitation and other types of work that expose children under the age of 18 to hazardous conditions. Also, the government should reveal all official information about the agencies in charge of controlling sectors recruiting children, such as the Labor Inspectorate funding and the number of labor inspectors. It would empower the Labor Inspectorate by allowing inspectors to define the suitable penalties, providing trainings for criminal investigators, disclosing violations and violators, and holding public debates about inspections, penalties, investigations, prosecutions, and convictions of law violators. In addition, the government should make sure that all coordinating bodies combatting child labor, notably the police forces and the Prosecution, carry out their mandates effectively. It should also guarantee the equal access of all citizens, especially the vulnerable ones, such as children, orphans, street children, and refugees, to education, basic services, elementary resources by alleviating school fees and any other obstacles to education and extending cash transfer programs to a wider category of poor families.



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