

# ERF Policy Brief

## Access to Services among Youth in Informal Areas of Greater Cairo:

### Making Progress Towards Achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

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#### About the authors

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#### In a nutshell

- The Egyptian government aims to improve basic infrastructure and services throughout the country as part of its commitment towards achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.
- Despite the progress made in expanding access to services, Egypt has advanced primarily in terms of service quantity rather than quality. The country needs further efforts to improve the quality of healthcare, education, and infrastructure, as well as cultural and recreational services.
- Young people in informal areas suffer from multiple vulnerabilities when it comes to accessing services; either through ongoing difficulties in accessing services or the high cost of services when available.
- Some young people in informal areas suffer from unequal opportunities, and hence express a sense of exclusion, stigmatization, and marginalization due to living in these informal areas.
- Many girls and women in informal areas feel insecure and tend to face sexual harassment problems on their way to and from the service access points.

#### Background

The 2030 Agenda was formulated by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015, adopting the 17 global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals propose an urgent call for action by all states to take the necessary actions by 2030 to achieve economic development, social integration, and climate stability to protect planet Earth. The SDGs call for all low-, high-,

and middle-income countries to initiate steps towards development. Egypt announced its commitment to the SDGs in the UN General Assembly meetings in 2015, where it established a specialized committee to develop Egypt's Vision 2030 (Ministry of International Cooperation 2016).

Poverty eradication must go hand in hand with strategies that foster economic growth and lead to social progress. These strategies include the expansion of education,

health, social protection, and other essential services, meanwhile addressing environmental protection (United Nations n.d.). It is worth mentioning that Egypt has put cities at the forefront of the 2030 agenda, as is the case in many other countries. In fact, 43% of Egypt's population lives in 223 cities, with 56% of the urban population concentrated in the governorates of Greater Cairo and Alexandria (Arab Republic of Egypt 2016). The population of Greater Cairo reached 16 million in 2012, representing 19.5% of the total population of Egypt (General Organization for Physical Planning 2012). Although estimates vary greatly, over half of these residents may reside in unplanned, informal areas known as *ashwaiyyat* (Khalil et al. 2018). According to the Greater Cairo Urban Development Strategy, unplanned areas constitute about 40% of the residential areas of Greater Cairo, with a population density as high as 800 inhabitants per acre (General Organization for Physical Planning 2012).

The deficits in services in informal areas tend to affect young people's lives especially their human capital development, given the fact that young people comprise an important sub-group of residents of informal areas. Thus, this policy brief provides an overview of access to services among young people in informal areas of Greater Cairo, with the aim of informing appropriate policies to expand and improve these services in line with the needs of young people. The policy brief is based on data obtained from international and national reports related to the 2030 Agenda, as well as results from a number of quantitative surveys, in particular the Survey of Young People in Egypt – Informal Greater Cairo (SYPE-IGC) (Roushdy et al. 2016). We also draw on recent mixed-methods studies of youth access to services in informal areas of Greater Cairo (Khalil et al. 2018; Sieverding et al. 2019).

### *Youth and service access in informal Cairo*

Since such a large portion of Greater Cairo is considered informal, informal areas are quite diverse. The results of the Survey of Young People in Egypt – Informal Greater Cairo (SYPE-IGC) show that, on the aggregate, youth access to basic services such as water, sanitation, healthcare, and education is not necessarily worse than in formal urban areas (Roushdy et al. 2016). Rather, the gap between formal and informal areas lies in the quality of public facilities and young people's marginalization from higher-cost alternatives to these facilities. These dynamics can be clearly seen in sector-specific analyses of education, health, basic infrastructure, and cultural and recreational services.

### *Access to quality education*

Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education is the fourth SDG. Quality education is the foundation for improving human lives and achieving development (United Nations n.d.). Therefore, the Egyptian Vision 2030 emphasizes the importance of (1) a high-quality education and training system, (2) a sustainable and flexible institutional framework, and (3) the provision of necessary skills for students and trainees (Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform 2015). The studies indicate that Egypt has indeed made considerable progress in terms of the quantity of education, demonstrated by increasing enrollment rates. However, in terms of quality of education, Egypt's performance is still noticeably weak (Amin-Salem et al. 2018). The poor quality of education is reflected in Egypt's status in the 2017-2018 Global Competitiveness Report, which ranked Egypt 133rd in the quality of basic education, 124th in the quality of school administration, and 119th in connecting schools to the Internet. In the domain of higher education and training, Egypt ranked 100th out of 137 countries (Schwab 2017).

Meanwhile, young people in informal areas also consider the quality of their education as poor. The SYPE-IGC found that 12.3% of young people said that the poor performance of teachers is one of the most common problems within the educational system (Roushdy et al. 2016). Qualitative studies also stated that young people in informal areas complain of the poor quality of instruction, which includes unsatisfactory teaching competence, outdated curricula, and a greater reliance on memorization rather than critical thinking and understanding (Sieverding et al. 2019).

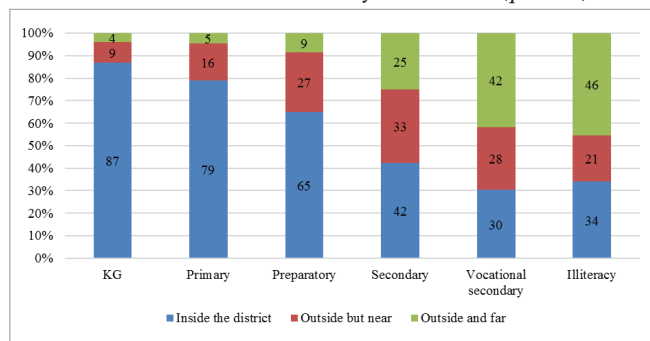
Although the state guarantees free public education, several studies also emphasize the high hidden cost of education in Egypt due to the spread of private tutoring. Across Egypt, 53% of students in elementary, preparatory, and secondary school receive private tutoring and 10% take school-based group tutoring, compared to only 24% of students who do not receive any kind of assistance (Assaad and Krafft 2015). Moreover, the prevalence of private tutoring increases in the school years that are considered transitional, indicating that school alone is inadequate for students to succeed in exams. Moreover, the prevalence of tutoring causes disparity in opportunities among students, where the need for private tutoring during final exams poses the risk of excluding students from less privileged families from success (Assaad and Krafft 2015).



Young people in informal areas reported that they face significant challenges with teachers pressuring them to take private lessons (Sieverding et al. 2019); a phenomenon that has also been noted throughout Cairo (Sieverding, Krafft, and Elbadawy 2019).

In addition to the challenges of quality and hidden costs faced by the educational system as a whole, young people in informal areas continue to suffer from gaps in geographic access to schools. Data from the SYPE-IGC indicate that the majority of young people confirmed the availability of kindergartens (87%), elementary schools (79%), and preparatory schools (65%) in their areas of residence. However, the presence of general secondary schools (42%), vocational secondary schools (30%), and literacy programs (34%) within the neighborhood was much lower (Figure 1). The distance to higher levels of schooling may be a barrier for young women in particular due to the prevalence of harassment in transportation. It was reported by many young women that they are at risk of sexual harassment whether inside, near, or on the way to schools; emphasizing the need to take appropriate measures to provide safe spaces for education for girls (Sieverding et al. 2019).

Figure 1: Youth perceptions of the availability of different types of schools and education services in informal areas (percent)



Source: Adapted from Sieverding et al. (2019)

Last but not least, young people in informal areas consider themselves to be less privileged in terms of receiving less educational attainment compared to their counterparts in formal areas. Young people stressed that they were suffering from general neglect in the education sector, particularly in public schools (Sieverding et al. 2019).

### Access to health services

One of the essential SDGs is 'Good Health and Wellbeing,' which calls for ensuring a healthy lifestyle and better

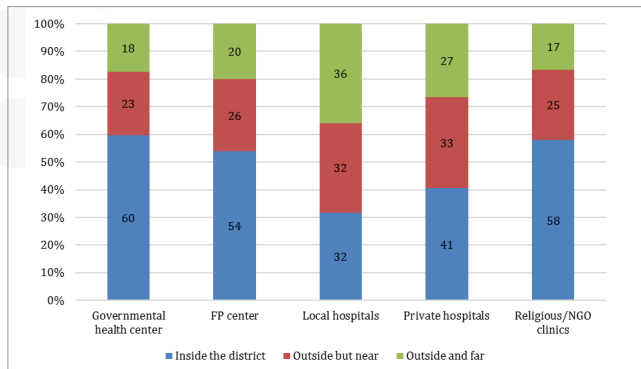
wellbeing for all people, at all ages (United Nations n.d.). This goal is well-considered within the Egypt Vision 2030 framework as it clearly stressed that all Egyptians should enjoy a healthy life that is safe, secure, and enabled by an integrated healthcare system that is available, accessible, and of high quality (Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform 2015). This system should be capable of providing universal health care to all without discrimination, thus protecting the most vulnerable and contributing to further economic and social development, prosperity, and welfare (Ministry of Planning, Monitoring, and Administrative Reform 2018).

Egypt has shown steady progress with respect to several health indicators at the national level (Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform 2015). However, there are still considerable gaps in the overall health situation, which are more evident among young people living in informal areas (Roushdy et al. 2016). According to the SYPE-IGC, a lower percentage of young people in informal areas perceived their health status as very good or excellent in comparison to their counterparts in formal areas in Greater Cairo, formal urban areas in other regions, or even rural areas (45%, 48%, 51%, and 49%, respectively) (Roushdy et al. 2016). Furthermore, there are gender-based differences between young women and men in informal areas, where young women were more likely to consider themselves to have worse health compared to their male counterparts (Roushdy et al. 2016). These geographic- and gender-based differences are reflected in the context of mental health and wellbeing as well (Roushdy et al. 2016).

Recent studies have examined the availability of health facilities in Greater Cairo, where there are thousands of health clinics and hundreds of primary healthcare units, medical centers, and hospitals. The majority are either public or private services, while the rest belong to faith-based charities or non-governmental organizations (Khalil et al. 2018). The SYPE-IGC data show that youth report public health centers and family planning units are more present in informal areas compared to private or public hospitals (Figure 2). However, this may indicate that emergency and more specialized services are less available in informal areas than primary healthcare.



Figure 2: Youth perceptions of the availability of different types of health facilities in informal areas (percent)



Source: Adapted from Sieverding et al. (2019)

Note: FP = Family planning

The results of qualitative research have shown that despite the availability of several medical centers and public hospitals near or inside their neighborhoods (informal areas), young people perceived the quality of services as basic and unsatisfactory (Sieverding et al. 2019). Furthermore, it was mentioned that hospitals outside informal areas were perceived as having better quality services. In fact, participants cited a wide array of reasons that negatively influenced the quality of the services provided by healthcare facilities in informal areas. These were due to overcrowding, long waiting times, insufficient testing or examination, short consultations ratio, and lack of adequate equipment, medications, and specialized or emergency services. Some youth also added that there were even situations where patients were mistreated by the staff nurses or physicians (Sieverding et al. 2019). Furthermore, although services were technically free, medications and perceived differences in the quality of care between providers' public and private practices were seen as hidden costs of healthcare (Sieverding et al. 2019). Surprisingly, according to SYPE-IGC 2016, four out of ten young people from the poorest quintiles who lived in informal urban areas reported that health expenses affected their household financial expenditures (Roushdy et al. 2016). The survey also demonstrated that private healthcare services were reported to be more accessible in wealthier informal areas (Sieverding et al. 2019).

The lack and high costs of quality health services may affect the health-seeking behavior of young people who may choose to rely on informal health services or pharmacists as an alternative to doctors. In addition, they may also consider them as their primary source of medical advice and treatments due to previous experiences and without consultation or prescriptions (Sieverding et al. 2019). There is some evidence that the need for health services may be one of the reasons for the increase in informal or unregistered clinics in informal areas, where

the costs are much less than those of private practices (Khalil et al. 2018). However, such services could be still lacking in terms of safety and quality.

Finally, there are some social issues that represent barriers to healthcare access for adolescent girls and young women living in informal areas. Many pointed to issues related to protection and safety, such as harassment, especially in the case of seeking health services during nighttime, which leads to a constant need for companions. Moreover, the long distance between residential areas and the place of receiving health care services acts as an additional barrier for young women, increasing their vulnerability and limiting their access to quality health services (Sieverding et al. 2019).

### Basic infrastructure

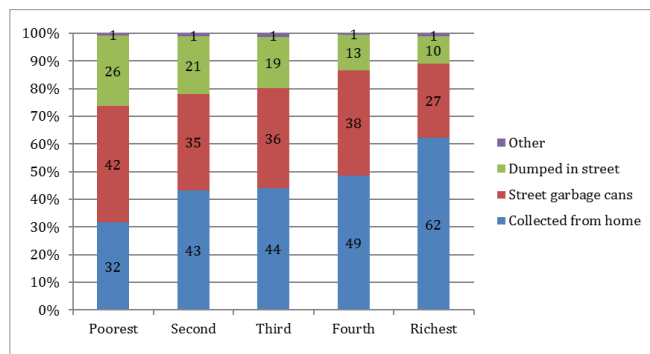
The environmental dimension of Egypt's Vision 2030 aims to achieve "...social justice while providing a clean, safe, and healthy environment for the Egyptian citizen" (Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform 2015). In response to that vision, the Egyptian government has developed new cities in all governorates to reduce population density, while also investing in the development of informal areas (Ministry of Planning, Monitoring, and Administrative Reform 2018). Coverage of piped water, sewage, and electricity connections is high in Cairo, including in informal areas, where official data (Khalil et al. 2018) and the recent SYPE-IGC (Roushdy et al. 2016) indicate that over 98% of households have piped water connections and over 95% are connected to the public sewage network. Nevertheless, informal areas still suffer from numerous infrastructural problems, particularly with respect to infrastructure quality.

In terms of water, some informal areas suffer from poor water quality, low water pressure, and frequent water cuts (Khalil et al. 2018). Data from the SYPE-IGC show that 18% of households with youth reported that their water is frequently cut (Roushdy et al. 2016). Lack of sewage connections in peripheral areas and poor maintenance of the network, leading to wastewater flooding, is also an issue in some informal areas (Khalil et al. 2018). Similarly, while electricity coverage is high, some informal areas suffer from frequent electricity cuts, and illegal electricity connections are common. Among the main barriers facing informal residents in obtaining official accessibility to these basic service is having the needed paperwork, including a building permit, because many informal buildings were constructed illegally on agricultural lands (Khalil et al. 2018).



Another aspect that represents a great challenge in informal areas is solid waste management. Given the fact that the challenge faced throughout Cairo with solid waste collection is an ongoing struggle, the situation in informal areas is even more worse due to the narrowness of the streets; making access for garbage collection trucks more difficult (Khalil et al. 2018). Whereas 57% of households with youth in formal Cairo get their garbage collected from their homes, this figure is 46% in informal areas. In informal areas, households are thus more likely to put their garbage in street cans than in formal areas (36% versus 31%) or to dump it on the street (17% vs. 11%). Within informal areas, solid waste management is also the service with the largest coverage gap by wealth quintile, in that the poorest households were considerably more likely to lack garbage collection from their homes (Figure 3). It is worth mentioning that garbage disposal was also the top environmental concern that young people in informal areas mentioned about their neighborhoods, with 81% in SYPE-IGC saying there was garbage in the streets and 64% stating that their area was located near a garbage dump (Roushdy et al. 2016).

Figure 3: Waste disposal method in informal areas of Greater Cairo, by household wealth quintile (percent)



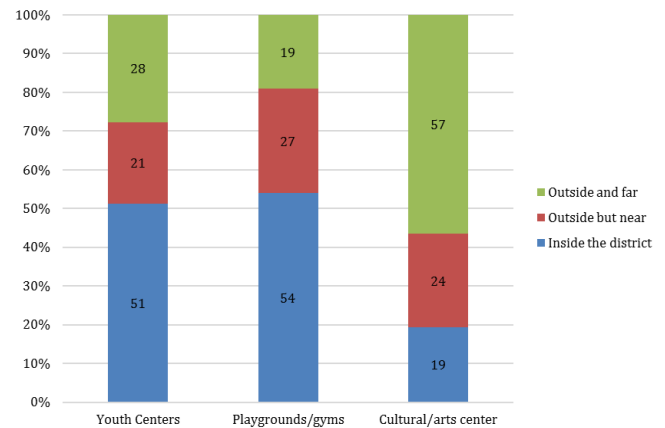
Source: SYPE-IGC (Roushdy et al., 2016)

### Cultural and recreational services

Egypt's Vision 2030 also maintains a clear vision for developing cultural and recreational services, where the strategic vision for culture is to "build a system of positive cultural values respecting diversity and differences, enabling citizens to access knowledge, and building their capacity to interact with modern developments..." (Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform 2015). Moreover, with the announcement of 2016 as the year of youth, the Egyptian government paid special attention to the improvement of some youth and sports services (Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform 2016). Nevertheless, cultural and recreational services are still sorely lacking in many urban areas of Cairo. Data from SYPE-IGC indicate that only 19%

of youth confirmed the presence of cultural centers within their residential areas, compared to 57% who stressed that such services are only available in neighborhoods far away. Youth also noted gaps in the availability of sports and recreational services within their areas (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Youth perceptions of the availability of different cultural and recreational services in informal areas (percent)



Source: Adapted from Sieverding et al. (2019)

Even when recreational services were available in informal neighborhoods, many young people were not interested in using them, stressing that the quality of services does not compare to that in formal areas of the city in terms of quality and cleanliness. In addition, some young people mentioned that the high cost of private recreational services is prohibitive, such as renting private spaces to play sports. Girls in informal areas also suffered from gender-based barriers to using recreational services due to the prevalent social norms that restrict them from using these spaces. As a result, many young women think that even public recreational services, such as youth centers that should be accessible to both genders, are for males only (Sieverding et al. 2019).

### Conclusion and recommendations

Investing in youth capacities and providing them with the opportunity to access basic services in health, education, recreation, and culture is a strategy that is likely to produce high returns. Developing comprehensive policies and programs to improve and provide services to young people in informal areas requires a better understanding of the challenges that young people face in accessing services and the inequalities that exist regarding accessibility to services across informal areas as well as different sub-populations of youth. In order to address the exclusion and marginalization of youth in informal areas and fill gaps in Egypt's strategy towards achieving the SDGs,



a multisectoral approach is needed. Strategies may include:

- Reaching an international and local agreement to establish a unified definition of what constitutes an informal area. Currently, studies confirm that there is no general agreement on what informal areas are, even between one government agency and another. For example, the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics' definition of informal settlements is different from that of the Ministry of Local Development or that of the Informal Settlements Development Fund (ISDF) (Roushdy et al., 2016). Agreeing on a unified definition helps determine the magnitude of the challenge of informal areas development.
- Correspondingly, including data and statistics related to informal areas in national statistics. By adopting a unified definition, informal settlements will be consistently defined, allowing for the establishment of common indicators of progress and regular monitoring.
- Achieving an integrated partnership between government agencies, the private sector, and civil society organizations. This strategy is fundamentally based on the first, where unifying the definition of informal areas helps concerned authorities develop a framework for working together with other stakeholders develop informal settlements and improve services.
- Involving youth in the development of their areas through specialized programs to fully integrate youth into the economic and social life of the community. Such programs help young people become leaders in their local communities and enjoy a healthy and productive life.
- Developing basic services in informal areas along with basic infrastructure, while emphasizing the fact that the quality of services is as important as the quantitative coverage of services.
- Creating safe areas for girls and women in informal areas. There are many frameworks of initiatives that target the creation of safe areas for girls, including a number of efforts within Egypt. However, safe spaces initiatives have so far operated separately and in multiple areas, which lead to the dispersion of efforts needed to achieve the goal of a safe city. Therefore, the state should take a leading role in adopting and implementing an integrated and sustainable model for safe areas.

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