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## Ministry of Planning and Economic Development: Reducing population growth rates is a top priority



Dr. Hala Al-Saeed, Minister of Planning and Economic Development, said that rapid population growth is one of the most important issues the state is making unremitting efforts to confront and stands as a top priority, with the aim of limiting its negative effects on equality for comprehensive development and population distribution, in line with Egypt's Vision 2030, which aims to improve the quality of life and consolidate the principles of social justice and integration.

## Our Views

At the outset, we would like to cite the provision of Article 41 of the Constitution: “The state is committed to implementing a population program aimed at achieving a balance between population growth rates and available resources, maximizing investment in human capital and improving its characteristics, within the framework of achieving sustainable development.”

Hence, the efforts of the Ministry of Planning to reduce population growth are desirable and necessary, and represent a step on the right path that must be supported and built upon. But despite the virtue of the goal, the Egyptian experience since the 1960s has proven that the state will not be able to make tangible progress towards the population issue without the confluence of four main elements: Political will, sound institutional framework, comprehensive population policy - and lastly - adequate funding.

Despite the availability of political will, the other elements suffer from acute and chronic problems that prevent translating this will into tangible progress on the ground, which we shall discuss in detail below:

### **1. Institutional framework**

The institutional structure governing the population issue in Egypt has suffered from instability and constant revision, which indicates the absence of a long-term vision and weak planning.

- The responsibility for the population issue shifted more than once between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of State for Family and Population, which was established and

abolished, as well as the National Population Council, whose reporting was transferred from the President to the Prime Minister, and then to the Ministry of Health since 2002.

- Lack of independence of the National Population Council and its affiliation to the Ministry of Health, one of the parties concerned with implementing population policies, deprives it of the ability to coordinate, follow up, and evaluate its efforts, and makes its decisions closer to recommendations than to binding policies on all ministries and stakeholders. In addition, the continuous change in the leadership of the Ministry, and subsequently the leadership of the Council, limits accountability.
- Since 2015, many ministries announced separate population initiatives, such as “**Two is Enough**,” “**You are the most Important**,” and “**Just Two Children**,” without clear coordination between these ministries, and without a serious assessment of the results of these initiatives on the ground.

## 2. Population policy

Like the institutional framework, the population policy has witnessed many weaknesses and shortcomings, most importantly:

- Successive governments deal with the population issue in a fragmented manner, reducing it to one pillar only, which is family planning, without focusing on the rest of the pillars, such as improving the characteristics of the population, distributing the population outside the Nile valley and the delta regions, raising living standards, and creating sustainable inclusive growth in all sectors. This partial

address to the demographic issue leads to weak results and a slowdown in progress on the ground.

- Despite the launch of the "National Population Strategy 2015-2030" in November 2014, the Minister of Health and Population announced in July 2017 the "Disciplined Population Strategy" without officially launching it, which raises questions about the sustainability of the efforts made in this issue as well as changes in leadership.
- There is weak executive planning and difficulty of following up or evaluating it due to absence of data on many reproductive and sexual health indicators on which the strategy is based. This is due to the failure to conduct a "population health survey" since 2014, which is the only source of such data.
- In the absence of follow-up and evaluation, the House Social Solidarity and Family Committee rejected the budget of the National Population Council for Fiscal Years: 2017/2018, 2018/2019, and 2020/2021, considering them a waste of public funds, issuing recommendations for the need to develop a specific and clear population plan with mechanisms for effective implementation that is monitored on an annual basis.<sup>1</sup>

### **3. Financing**

- As of the eighties, financing heavily relied on external funding, especially the US Agency for International Development, until the end of its program in Egypt in 2009. Since that time, not enough resources have been allocated to implement most of the activities of the national population strategy.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://bit.ly/3t9A36o>

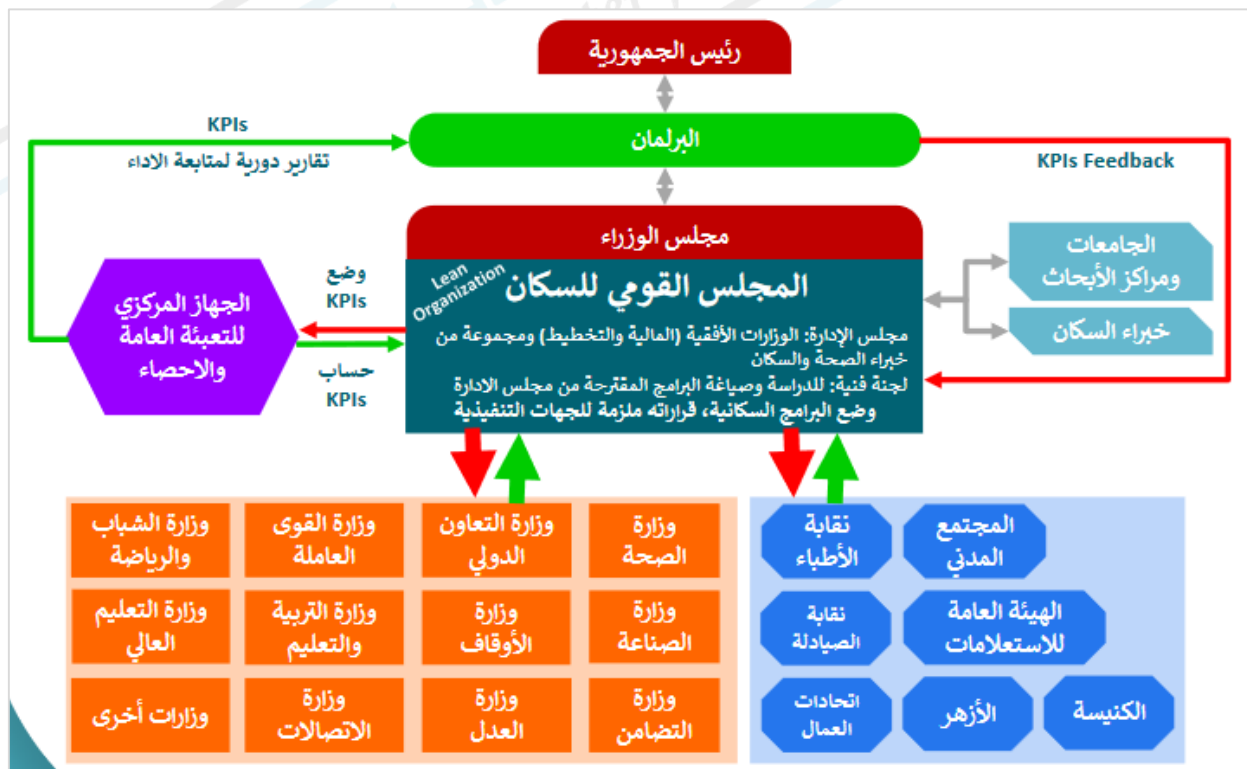


- For example, out of 23 population awareness activities in the executive plan, only three activities were sufficiently funded, representing 13% of the planned activities.

## Noteworthy:

**“Unsustainability”** is the dominant feature of demographic control efforts in Egypt since the 1960s, due to the continuous change in the institutional structure and population policy, as well as lack of continuity of political will or funding, as has been explained.

- **By controlling the institutional framework for the population issue and its governance, sustainability can be achieved** in all aspects of the issue, by taking all necessary measures to enable the National Population Council to perform its role effectively. The following figure illustrates the proposal of the Egyptian Center for Economic Studies for the proper institutional form for the governance of the population issue:



- **The necessity of complementing population policies with effective public policies**, whether at the sectoral or macro level, with the aim of creating sustainable, inclusive economic growth capable of assimilating all forms of employment, and thus raising the living standards of citizens and maximizing benefit from Egypt's human capital.

**The Egyptian Center for Economic Studies prepared two detailed studies on the demographic issue, entitled:**

- Population policy in Egypt: An analysis of the factors of success and optimal institutional setup.
- Impact of the pandemic on population growth and how to properly address it.

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