

Egypt:

Recruitment of children for military purposes

Observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Egypt
on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (June 2023)

Introduction

This submission has been prepared by the Child Rights International Network (CRIN) and Conscience and Peace Tax International in support of the Committee on the Rights of the Child's examination of Egypt's State Party Report.

The submission is focused on the recruitment of children by the State Party for military purposes.

Background

Following extensive ratification globally of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC) since 2002, approximately three-quarters of states worldwide now allow only adults aged 18 and above to be recruited into state armed forces.

The General Comment on adolescence on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence (2016) records the Committee's 'deep concern' that adolescent children continue to be recruited into state armed forces (para 81) and specifies that the minimum age for entry should be 18 (para 40).

In response to State Parties that continue to allow the military recruitment of children, as is the case with Egypt, the general practice of the Committee has been to include in its Concluding Observations a recommendation that the minimum age for entry into the armed forces be 18.

Country situation

Population (2021): 109 million.¹

Armed forces personnel (2019): 438,000.²

Composition of security forces: Central Security Forces (c. 325,000 including conscripts), National Guard (c. 60,000), and Border Guard (c. 12,000).³

The present reporting cycle is the Committee's first opportunity to review Egypt's progress under the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict since the State Party's initial OPAC report in 2011.

¹ World Bank, 'Population, total', 2023, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=EG>.

² Institute for Strategic Studies, *The military balance 2023*.

³ Ibid.

Issues arising

Low recruitment age

The State Party's statements to the Committee on the minimum age for military enlistment have been unclear:

- The Declaration made by the State Party on ratification of OPAC in 2007 gives 16 as the minimum age for military recruitment.
- At the examination of the OPAC initial report in 2011, the State Party's delegation reassured the Committee that Egyptian law prohibited all recruitment under the age of 18 and 'criminalizes the recruitment of persons under the age of 18 into the armed forces as well as by non-State armed groups'.⁴
- In the present reporting cycle, the State Party report reaffirms 16 as the minimum age for voluntary recruitment and implies that children are recruited in practice:

'the minimum age for conscription into the armed forces is 18 and the minimum age for voluntary recruitment is 16, in accordance with regulations set forth in the law.'
(para 250)

'The activities of [child recruits], in fact, are limited to the study of academic, cultural and behavioural subjects and to the acquisition of scientific and professional skills and to disciplinary training that will qualify them to enter military life once they are no longer children.'
(para 256)

- The State Party report provides no information on which laws and military regulations specify the minimum age of voluntary recruitment.

No data on extent of child recruitment

The Concluding Observations on Egypt's initial OPAC report recorded that the Committee 'regrets the lack of data and statistics on many areas covered under the Optional Protocol, in particular the number of persons under the age of 18 voluntarily recruited into the armed forces of the State party...' (para 13)

Since Egypt maintains large armed forces (>400,000), child recruitment may be extensive, but the State Party's report for the present reporting cycle again lacks information on the number of children involved.

Recruitment safeguards

Consent

The Concluding Observations on the initial OPAC report noted concern that the meaning of 'parental consent' was not specified in law and was not clearly made a compulsory requirement (paras 17-19).

In response, the original, Arabic version of the State Party report for the present reporting cycle insists that the father's (or guardian's) 'approval' is always required on pain of a fine or

⁴ See paragraphs 17 and 23 of the Concluding Observations, [CRC/C/OPAC/EGY/CO/1](#).

imprisonment, though not, by implication, the consent of the mother (para 251). The English translation of the same passage translates 'father' as 'parent', such that the mother's rights or lack thereof are unclear.

No details are given on whether the father's 'approval' amounts to fully informed consent, or on how it is communicated and verified; for example, whether it requires a signature on a form and how its genuineness is confirmed.

Age verification

In line with the Convention, Article 80 of the Egyptian Constitution clearly states: 'A child is considered to be anyone who has not reached 18 years of age.'⁵

While the Concluding Observations on the initial OPAC report noted that the age of potential recruits may not be consistently verifiable, the State Party report has responded that no child may be recruited without 'an official document (identity card or birth certificate)' (para 256).

Marketing

It is not clear whether the Egyptian armed forces use marketing to actively encourage children to join the armed forces.

Conscientious objection

The Concluding Observations on the State Party's report to the Human Rights Committee, March 2023 ([CCPR/C/EGY/CO/5](#), para 44d), recommends that the State party:

'Adopt legislation to recognise the right to conscientious objection to military service and allow conscientious objectors access to alternative civilian services of a non-discriminatory and non-punitive nature.'

It is unclear whether any armed forces personnel, including those aged under 18 years, have the right in law or practice to leave military service on grounds of conscientious objection.

Military schools

In its Concluding Observations on the initial OPAC report, the Committee expressed concern (paras 13, 19-20) that:

- Egypt operated some 30 military schools;
- No information was provided on how many children were enrolled;
- Children aged 11 years were admitted in some cases; and
- The State Party could not provide assurances that students had effective avenues to raise a complaint with an independent body.

While the State Party report clarifies that military schools are controlled by the education ministry, enrollment is voluntary on the same basis as civilian state schools and requires parental consent, and firearms are not used, the Committee's concerns listed above remain outstanding (para 258).

It remains unclear also whether coercive military training techniques are used in these schools.

⁵ Constitution of Egypt (2014), cited at The Constitution Project, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Egypt_2014.pdf.

Incorporation

Following a recommendation to the effect in the Concluding Observations to the initial OPAC report, the State Party reports in this cycle that OPAC was in fact incorporated in various laws soon after ratification, including by decree in 2002:

‘Republican Decree No. 105 of 2002 was issued approving Egypt’s accession to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which deals with the involvement of children in armed conflicts. It has become a law enforceable in Egypt with all its texts and provisions in accordance with the Constitution.’

Suggested questions for the List of Issues

In view of the limited nature of the information provided by the State Party to the Committee at its initial report under the Optional Protocol, we propose several questions of clarification:

1. What is the current minimum age for voluntary recruitment into each military branch of the Egyptian armed forces, including any government-controlled security forces distinct from the armed forces? Which law defines this age limit and what is the applicable wording?
2. How many recruits are aged under 18 years on entry to a) the national armed forces, and b) other security forces? Please disaggregate the data by age, gender, and military branch. What proportion of the annual intake is aged under 18?
3. What measures are taken to ensure that when recruiting persons aged under 18 years, priority is given to the oldest?
4. How is the age of all recruits to the national armed forces and other security forces verified in advance?
5. What steps are taken to ensure that volunteers aged under 18 years and their parents make a free choice, having been fully informed in advance of the risks and obligations of military service, and to verify the parental consent to such enlistment. In the State Party Report, reference is made to the consent of the father; why is that of the mother not required?
6. While aged under 18 years, do all armed forces personnel enjoy an unrestricted right to leave at will? If not, what restrictions apply? Do personnel under the age of 18 enjoy a right in law or practice to leave military service on grounds of conscientious objection?
7. Does the State Party intend to raise the minimum age for recruitment in all cases to 18 years? Please give details.
8. Please provide data on all schools operated or supported by the armed forces, including: a) the name and location of each establishment and b) the number of students in each, disaggregated by age and gender, c) whether weapons training forms part of the curriculum, and d) whether students are free to leave such schools at will. What action has been taken in response to each of the recommendations at paragraph 20 of its Concluding Observations on State Party’s initial report under the Optional Protocol ([CRC/C/OPAC/EGY/CO/1](#), para 20)?