



PRIVATE FREE ZONES

Private Free Zones in Egypt

An Establishment & Licensing Guide

How to incorporate a joint stock company or a limited liability company and establish a Private Free Zone in Egypt — the pre-conditions, the GAFI and Cabinet approval path, the documents required at each stage, and a practical roadmap from application to operation.

PREPARED FOR

Foreign manufacturers &
industrial investors

SCOPE

Company incorporation &
PFZ establishment

JURISDICTION

Arab Republic of Egypt

LAW AS AT

June 2026

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Overview — What a Private Free Zone Is

A Private Free Zone (a “PFZ”) is a specific area within Egypt's borders that remains subject to the State's administrative authority but operates under distinct customs, tax and monetary rules. PFZs are designed to encourage trade, investment and industry by offering economic incentives, simplified customs and tax treatment, and infrastructure facilities. In Egypt they are governed by the Investment Law No. 72 of 2017 and its Executive Regulations, with the General Authority for Investment and Free Zones (GAFI) supervising their implementation.

TWO TRACKS, ONE PROJECT

Establishment runs on two tracks in parallel

- Establish the private free zone (GAFI and Cabinet approval)
- Incorporate the operating company (a JSC or LLC)
- Complete post-incorporation and operational licensing

WHY A PFZ

The commercial rationale

- Customs and tax treatment distinct from the mainland
- Export-oriented manufacturing and industry
- A dedicated point of contact — GAFI

PFZs are managed by specialised authorities responsible for operations, licensing and regulatory compliance — ensuring that companies in the zone adhere to the rules while enjoying the incentives provided. This guide takes the process in turn: the pre-conditions, the PFZ Request, the incorporation of the company, the practical roadmap, and how GAFI assesses a proposed project.

A PRIVATE FREE ZONE AT A GLANCE

≥30%

LOCAL COMPONENT WITHIN
3 YEARS OF PRODUCTION

≥80%

OF PRODUCTION EXPORTED
ABROAD

6 mo

TO TAKE SERIOUS EXECUTIVE
ACTION AFTER APPROVAL

2–4 wk

INDICATIVE INCORPORATION
WINDOW (DOCUMENT-
DEPENDENT)

Governing framework. PFZs sit under the Investment Law No. 72 of 2017 and its Executive Regulations (Decree No. 2310 of 2017), with company formation governed by the Companies Law. GAFI is the supervising authority; the Cabinet grants the final authorisation to establish a PFZ.

The Legal Framework

This guide draws on the firm's on-ground experience with GAFI and the competent authorities, together with the legal framework set out in the following instruments:

01

Investment Law No. 72 of 2017

The primary statute governing investment and free zones.

02

Regulations No. 39 of 2019

The management system of free zones.

03

GAFI Guide (2019)

"Private Free Zones in Egypt" (issued in 2019 and now somewhat dated; current GAFI practice should be confirmed).

04

Companies Law No. 159 of 1981

And its Executive Regulations No. 96 of 1982 — company formation and governance.

Disclaimer. This guide reflects the position understood as at June 2026. Egyptian investment and free-zone rules are periodically amended, and several thresholds and timelines depend on case-by-case determinations by GAFI and the Cabinet. Specific figures and procedural steps should be re-confirmed against the current instruments before any application.

The Authorities Involved

Establishing a PFZ and incorporating the operating company brings several authorities into the process. Understanding who does what — and in what order — is the key to managing the timeline.

LEAD AUTHORITY

GAFI

The General Authority for Investment and Free Zones — receives the PFZ Request, assembles the assessment committee, and handles incorporation and post-incorporation procedures.

INITIAL APPROVAL

Minister of Investment and GAFI CEO

Grant the initial approval for the project's establishment on the basis of the committee's findings.

FINAL AUTHORISATION

The Cabinet

Issues the final authorisation to establish the PFZ.

VETTING

Security Services

Conduct the security clearance investigations on foreign shareholders, partners and directors; results drive the overall timeline.

CAPITAL AND AUDIT

Banks and Auditor

A licensed Egyptian bank certifies the capital deposit; a local auditor is appointed by the company and issues the required certificate.

REGISTERS

FRA and MCDR

For a JSC, the Financial Regulatory Authority and Misr for Central Clearing, Depository & Registry complete registration and share-coding formalities.

One project, two workstreams. The free-zone authorisation (GAFI → Minister/CEO → Cabinet) and the company incorporation (at GAFI) proceed in coordination.

— PART I

The Establishment Journey

From the PFZ Request through GAFI's assessment, initial approval, Cabinet authorisation, incorporation and operation — together with the pre-conditions every project must satisfy and the vehicle used to hold it.

The Journey, End-to-End

Establishing a PFZ is intricate and involves several authorities. It begins with a PFZ Request to the competent department at GAFI. A dedicated committee then assesses the proposed site against PFZ requirements. On its findings, the initial approval is granted by the Minister of Investment and GAFI's CEO, and is then forwarded to the Cabinet for the final authorisation. With that green light, the company can be incorporated and the post-incorporation procedures completed.



Two approvals, then build. Note the two distinct gates — an initial approval (Minister + GAFI CEO) and a final authorisation (Cabinet). Only after the Cabinet decree can incorporation and the post-incorporation procedures get finalised.

Pre-Conditions for a Private Free Zone

Before a PFZ can be established, the project must satisfy several conditions. Under the Executive Regulations of the Investment Law, the Cabinet may authorise the creation of a PFZ project on the recommendation of the relevant minister and following GAFI's evaluation, subject to the following terms:

CONDITION 1

Legal form

The project must take the form of a joint stock company or a limited liability company.

CONDITION 2

Local component $\geq 30\%$

A local-component percentage of at least 30%, achieved within a maximum of three years from the date production starts.

CONDITION 3

Export $\geq 80\%$

At least 80% of production exported abroad. Strategic projects of special importance may be exempted from this percentage.

CONDITION 4

Industrial security

Compliance with industrial-security, civil-defence and fire requirements under the Egyptian code, and securing the site and its borders (guard towers, surveillance cameras, and GAFI/ports-security guards) at the project's expense.

80% in law, 100% in practice. The 80% export ratio is the threshold set out in the Executive Regulations. In current GAFI practice, however, a private free zone project is generally expected to commit to exporting 100% of its production abroad — investors should plan their off-take and sales structure on the basis of full export.

The six-month rule. The final approval is withdrawn if the investor does not take serious executive action — commencing incorporation, submitting engineering drawings, obtaining the required approvals, and beginning the activity — within six months of being notified of the project approval decree. The period may be extended on justified grounds, as approved by the free zone's board of directors.

Cabinet exemptions. For considerations it assesses case-by-case, and on the competent minister's proposal and GAFI board approval, the Cabinet may exclude a project from one or more of these conditions. Export-oriented industrial projects committing to high local-content and export ratios typically align well with the 30% and 80% thresholds.

Choosing the Vehicle: The Joint Stock Company

A PFZ project is held through a company — most commonly a joint stock company (JSC), which GAFI prefers in practice; a limited liability company remains a viable option, subject to GAFI's assessment of the specific file. The key features of a JSC are set out below.

FEATURE	DESCRIPTION
Name	Must correspond to the company's objective and may include the name of one or more founders.
Scope	May carry out any lawful activity, subject to obtaining the required licences (if any).
Liability	Shareholders' liability is limited to their participation in capital; shareholders are not accountable for the company's debts beyond their shares.
Shareholders	Minimum of three shareholders, with no maximum.
Securities	May issue different types of securities, such as shares and bonds.
Management	Managed by a Board of Directors and a General Assembly (the shareholders), which holds ordinary and extraordinary meetings as provided by law.

JSC GOVERNANCE AT A GLANCE			
General Assembly		Board of Directors	
THE SHAREHOLDERS · ORDINARY AND EXTRAORDINARY MEETINGS		MINIMUM 3 MEMBERS, INCLUDING THE CHAIRMAN	
Composition		Term	
INDIVIDUALS OR ENTITIES, AS THE ARTICLES OF ASSOCIATION PROVIDE		RENEWABLE 3-YEAR TERM · THE FIRST BOARD MAY BE SET FOR UP TO 5 YEARS	

Foreign ownership. A JSC's shareholders and directors may all be foreign individuals or entities, with limited exceptions for activities that require Egyptian participation (for example, commercial agencies and companies operating within the Sinai Peninsula).

— PART II

Applying for the PFZ Request

The documents that make up the PFZ Request, the security-clearance pathway for foreign shareholders and directors, and the route the application travels from GAFI to the Cabinet.



Documents for the PFZ Request

To establish a PFZ, the company first files an application with GAFI accompanied by certain documents (the “PFZ Request”). The application is then transmitted to the Cabinet for its approval. The required documents are:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>01 Power of attorney from each shareholder / partner.</p> | <p>02 Identification documents of shareholders / partners and board members / managers.</p> |
| <p>03 Non-confusion certificate approving the company's name.</p> | <p>04 Security clearance forms for each foreign shareholder / partner and director, whether an individual or an entity.</p> |
| <p>05 Possession document for the site (delivery minutes or allocation contract).</p> | <p>06 Sketch drawing showing how the site will be used for the activity, and the reasons for choosing it.</p> |
| <p>07 Timetable for construction, site preparation, and commencement of operation.</p> | <p>08 Financial solvency of the stakeholders and their previous work, if any.</p> |
| <p>09 Economic feasibility study (business plan) addressing the five areas set out below.</p> | <p>10 Payment receipt of EGP 500 (initial approval fee for a new project).</p> |

WHAT THE FEASIBILITY STUDY MUST COVER

FIRST

Export indicators

Projected annual export value; annual import value; net foreign-currency (USD) proceeds; export-to-production ratio; target foreign markets; and contracts or letters of intent.

SECOND

Employment

Direct and indirect employment; employment across the implementation phases; the percentage of Egyptian labour; specialised roles; and average annual wages.

THIRD

Investment costs

Total investment cost of the project and the cost of each implementation phase (first, second and third).

FOURTH

Financing structure

The split between local financing and foreign financing transferred from abroad.

FIFTH

Value-added and supply chains

Local-component and value-added ratios; local procurement volume; number of local suppliers; and the project's import-substitution and local-manufacturing impact.

The Security-Clearance Pathway

Security clearance forms must be completed by each foreign shareholder / partner and director. GAFI transfers them to the competent security services, which carry out their investigations. The documents required differ for individuals and for legal entities, and the timeline depends on a case-by-case basis.

FOR INDIVIDUALS

- Security clearance form
- Copy of the individual's passport

FOR LEGAL ENTITIES

- Security clearance form for each foreign shareholder
- Consularised, notarised and legalised commercial registry, Articles of Association and shareholders' structure, with certified translation
- The entity's authorised representative's passport copy
- For Egyptian shareholders in the entity: national IDs, commercial registries, and the founders' representative's national ID per form, with the PoA

1

Complete the forms

Each foreign shareholder, partner and director completes a security clearance form with the supporting documents above.

2

GAFI transfers to the security services

GAFI forwards the forms to the competent security services to undertake their investigations.

3

Investigation and result

The expected timeline for results is difficult to foresee and is determined case-by-case.

The gating item. As confirmed in the firm's deliberations with GAFI's senior officials, the Cabinet's approval is generally pending on the security-clearance results, provided the other documents and conditions are met. Plan the overall timeline around this step.

Submission and Approval Flow

The PFZ Request is submitted by the company's representative to GAFI's Central Administration of Private Free Zones, on the form prepared for that purpose. From there it travels through a technical committee and on to the Cabinet.



— PART III

Incorporation and Post-Incorporation

Once the Cabinet's approval is in hand, the company gets incorporated at GAFI. This Part sets out the documents required, what happens on incorporation day, the deliverables that follow, and the rules on capital.



Documents for Incorporation

Incorporation takes place at the relevant authority — GAFI. The documents required for the incorporation process are:

- | | | | |
|----|---|----|--|
| 01 | Approval of the competent authority on the disposal of the project's site to the investment project. | 02 | A copy of the Cabinet decree approving the establishment of the PFZ (the PFZ Request approval). |
| 03 | Power of attorney from each shareholder / partner. | 04 | Auditor's certificate, the auditor to be appointed by the JSC. |
| 05 | Identification documents of representatives and directors / managers (IDs for nationals, passports for foreigners). | 06 | Bank certificate proving deposit of at least 10% of the issued capital (JSC). |
| 07 | Shares Coding Certificate (JSC). | 08 | Legal Advisor's Bar Card. |
| 09 | Non-confusion certificate. | 10 | Security-clearance documents for foreign shareholders / partners and foreign directors — already at GAFI from the PFZ Request. |

Incorporation Day and Deliverables

On the day of incorporation, all of the documents are assembled in a dedicated file and presented to the incorporation officer at GAFI. It is advisable to prepare tailored Articles of Association in advance to ease the issuance of the final official articles with GAFI's officer.

1

Prepare the file and a tailored AoA

Assemble the incorporation documents and prepare, in advance, tailored Articles of Association for the company.

2

Present to GAFI's incorporation officer

The file is presented to the relevant incorporation officer at GAFI, who issues the final official Articles of Association.

3

Receive the corporate documents

Obtain the official Articles of Association (AoA), the relevant issue of the Investment Gazette, the Commercial Register extract and, in the case of joint stock companies (JSCs), the certificate issued by the Financial Regulatory Authority (FRA), together with the initial registration certificate issued by Misr for Central Clearing, Depository and Registry (MCDR).

4

Tax card on operational licence

The tax card is pending on the company's operational licence; once that is obtained, the tax card can be issued from GAFI.

Indicative timeline. Incorporating a company under the PFZ regime takes roughly 2–4 weeks, depending on the availability of the required documents and any special essential approvals.

Capital Deposit and Timeline

For a JSC, a bank certificate proving the deposit of at least 10% of the required issued capital is needed for incorporation. That deposit must subsequently be increased — so it is often more efficient to deposit a higher proportion at the outset.

AT INCORPORATION

≥10%

Deposit at least 10% of the issued capital (JSC) and obtain the bank certificate.

AFTER 3 MONTHS

25%

The deposit must be increased to 25% of the issued capital.

PRACTICAL TIP

25%

Deposit 25% upfront to accelerate the corporate procedures.

Our recommendation. Because the 10% deposit must rise to 25% after three months, we advise depositing 25% of the issued capital at the outset to avoid a second round of bank formalities and to keep the incorporation moving.

Note. The bank certificate proving deposit of at least 10% of the issued capital is required in the incorporation process where the legal form is a JSC.

— PART IV

The Next-Steps Roadmap

A practical, item-by-item view of the documents required, what the investor handles, how Shehata & Partners can assist, and the practical insight and timeline for each.



Required Documents, Responsibilities and Timelines

#	REQUIRED DOCUMENT	INVESTOR'S RESPONSIBILITY	HOW S&P CAN ASSIST	PRACTICAL INSIGHT & TIMELINE
1	PoA from each shareholder	Each shareholder issues a PoA in favour of S&P, notarises and consularises it (before the Egyptian consulate), then sends it to S&P for legalisation. A corporate shareholder acts through its duly designated representative. Every page is stamped with notarisation and consularisation stamps.	Circulate a draft PoA on request.	Approval-cycle and consularisation timelines differ per country; legalisation itself is around 5 business days. Proceed swiftly with the PoAs.
2	Identification documents	Circulate softcopies of national IDs (Egyptian) and passports (non-Egyptian) for shareholders / partners and directors / managers.	—	—
3	Security clearance forms	—	Circulate the forms, assist with completing them, and proceed with translation upon receipt.	Around 1 week.
4	Notarised and consularised AoA, CR and shareholders' structure (corporate shareholders)	Issue a recent extract of the AoA, CR and shareholders' structure; notarise and consularise; deliver to S&P. This is to prove the signatory powers of the PoA issuer and the investor's information under the clearance forms.	Translate and legalise upon receipt.	Contingent on the extraction, notarisation and consularisation processes in the relevant country.
5	AoA for the new company	Assist in preparing the new company's Articles of Association.	Provide an AoA template to initiate drafting.	—
6	Non-confusion certificate (name)	Suggest the company name in English and Arabic.	Reserve the name for the prospective company.	The certificate expires 4 weeks after issuance and is renewed monthly.

CONTINUED ON THE NEXT PAGE →

Required Documents, Responsibilities and Timelines (continued)

#	REQUIRED DOCUMENT	INVESTOR'S RESPONSIBILITY	HOW S&P CAN ASSIST	PRACTICAL INSIGHT & TIMELINE
7	Bank certificate (capital deposit)	Begin the search for Egyptian banks licensed to hold corporate capital deposits.	Provide a list of suggested banks, if needed.	A 10% deposit must rise to 25% after 3 months; we advise depositing 25% upfront to accelerate the procedures (required for a JSC).
8	Auditor's certificate	Search to appoint a local auditor.	Provide a list of suggested auditors, if needed.	—
9	Lease / ownership of HQ premises	Provide the HQ premises address upon concluding the agreement.	—	—
10	Approval of disposal of the PFZ area	The investor and S&P collaborate to furnish and obtain these documents; further information is provided in due time.	—	—
11	Cabinet approval establishing the PFZ	As above — handled collaboratively as the file progresses.	—	—

— PART V

How Projects Are Assessed

GAFI applies its internal standards to decide whether to approve a new private free zone — together with the pre-condition that can disqualify a project outright.



How GAFI Assesses a Proposed Project

GAFI applies its internal standards to decide whether to approve a new private free zone. Those standards are internal to the authority, differ between industrial and service projects, and may change without notice — each file is assessed on its own merits. The firm walks clients through the current expectations at the outset of a project.

THE DISQUALIFIER

A project that aims to rely on less than 30% local component is rejected, in accordance with Article 76 of the Executive Regulations of Investment Law No. 72 of 2017.

CAPITAL AND INVESTMENT MATTER

In practice, the higher the project's capital and total investment cost, the greater its likelihood of being approved as a private free zone — substantial capital and investment commitments are viewed favourably by GAFI when a project is assessed.

Track Record — Free Zones, Land and Projects

Shehata & Partners advises Egyptian and international clients — including a substantial cohort of Chinese, Japanese and Korean manufacturers establishing private free zone enterprises — on free zones, project establishment, land acquisition and allocation, and cross-border project acquisitions in Egypt. A representative selection follows. Client names appear only where the firm has publicly disclosed the matter; other mandates are described by sector by reason of confidentiality.

Private Free Zone Projects

FREE ZONES

A multi-million-dollar private free zone project

YAZAKI EDS · JAPAN · AUTOMOTIVE WIRE-HARNESS

Acted as Egyptian counsel from incorporation through licensing and project launch — including multi-stage red-flag due diligence over the project land, governmental and licensing checks, site visits, and the full private-free-zone legal landscape, from land acquisition through licensing, employment and social-insurance set-up. This mandate became the firm's template for manufacturers establishing private free zone enterprises in Egypt.

Linen manufacturing and export — private free zone

KINGDOM LINEN HOLDINGS · CHINA · LINEN MANUFACTURING

Advised on a multi-million-dollar linen manufacturing and export project structured as a private free zone enterprise.

Digital-printing-ink manufacturing — private free zone

ZHEJIANG LANYU DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY · CHINA · DIGITAL-PRINTING INKS

Advised on a multi-million-dollar textile digital-printing-ink manufacturing and export project, providing full Egyptian-law implementation within the private free zone regime.

Digital-printing-ink manufacturing — private free zone

ZHEJIANG DEJUN NEW MATERIAL · CHINA · DIGITAL-PRINTING INKS

Advised on a textile digital-printing-ink manufacturing and export project — private free zone structuring, governance, labour, compliance and construction.

Knitting manufacturing — private free zone

ZHEJIANG HEPOLILO KNITTING · CHINA · KNITTING MANUFACTURING

Advised on a multi-million-dollar knitting manufacturing project — corporate set-up, regulatory and licensing within the private free zone regime.

Textile manufacturing and export — private free zone

SAE-GLOBAL GROUP · SOUTH KOREA · TEXTILE MANUFACTURING

Advised on a multi-million-dollar textile manufacturing and export private free zone project — formation, governance, labour, regulatory, construction and licensing.

Manufacturing operations in the SCZone

SUNREV · CHINA · SUEZ CANAL ECONOMIC ZONE

Advising on corporate, labour and employment matters in connection with the client's operations in the Suez Canal Economic Zone (SCZone).

A solar-energy company in the SCZone

CROSSBOUNDARY · SUEZ CANAL ECONOMIC ZONE

Advised on establishing a solar-energy company in the SCZone, including the corporate set-up, EgyptERA licensing, corporate governance, and labour and social-insurance matters.

Land Acquisition, Allocation and Real Estate

LAND

NREA renewable-energy land allocation

GIZ · LAND ALLOCATION · TENDER

Advised on the land-allocation process for New & Renewable Energy Authority (NREA) lands designated for renewable-energy projects, and subsequently on the NREA tender (2026).

Complex real-estate transactions

TATWEER MISR · REAL ESTATE

Advised on complex real-estate transactions across the developer's multiple projects in Egypt.

Project land / asset acquisition

ACWA POWER · POWER PROJECTS

Advised on a land / asset-acquisition matter connected to the client's Egyptian projects.

Project land due diligence and GAFI file inspection

BY SECTOR · CONFIDENTIAL

For a foreign project investor, conducted land-related due diligence on a prospective Egyptian site; and for a foreign-invested project company, advised on a GAFI file inspection of its investment file and project documentation.

Renewable Energy and Power Projects

ENERGY

Peer-to-peer (Wheeling Scheme) framework

EBRD · POLICY & PROJECTS

Advising on the peer-to-peer (Wheeling Scheme) legal framework for renewable energy in Egypt, with continuing project workstreams.

Nuclear power plant — corporate and labour

ROSATOM GROUP · POWER

Advised on the corporate and labour legal needs of the group in connection with the nuclear power plant being implemented in Egypt.

Selected further energy and projects mandates

GIZA SYSTEMS · KARMSOLAR · HASSAN ALLAM UTILITIES · ICM FOR SOLAR · TED SOLAR · PHELAN ENERGY · UNIDO

Advised across solar PPAs, O&M and EPC agreements, ESCO models, green-hydrogen market entry, and energy-efficiency templates for the Egyptian and African markets.

Project-Level and Cross-Border Acquisitions

M & A

Egypt counsel on a USD 1.2 billion acquisition

KINTETSU WORLD EXPRESS · CROSS-BORDER

Acted as Egypt counsel on the USD 1.2 billion acquisition of APL Logistics Egypt, including due diligence over the Egyptian subsidiary of the Singapore target and full advice on the Egyptian legal regime.

Acquisitions of Egyptian companies

MEDIATEK · BY SECTOR · CONFIDENTIAL

Advised on a multi-million-dollar acquisition of an Egyptian company; and, for a Taiwanese semiconductor company, on the multi-million-dollar acquisition of an Egyptian company, including the Share Purchase Agreement and all transaction issues across Egypt and the UAE.

Confidentiality and basis. Client names appear only where the firm has disclosed the matter publicly or holds the necessary consent on file; other mandates are described by sector by reason of confidentiality. Descriptions are of the firm's advisory role and do not state case outcomes. Rankings and awards are cited as awarded.

How Shehata & Partners Helps

Shehata & Partners is a full-service Egyptian law firm founded in 1996 and headquartered in New Cairo, combining civil-law and common-law training with more than 100 years of combined experience. The firm acts as Egypt counsel for multinationals, manufacturers, financial institutions and foreign investors, with dedicated Corporate & Commercial, Mergers & Acquisitions, Renewable Energy & Projects, Banking & Finance, Employment and Disputes practices. It is recognised in the Chambers & Partners 2025 Global Guide, the Legal 500 EMEA 2025, and as a finalist in the Thomson Reuters ALB Middle East Law Awards 2025.

WHERE WE HELP

- Private free zone establishment — PFZ Request, GAFI assessment and Cabinet approval
- JSC / LLC incorporation and post-incorporation procedures
- Land acquisition, allocation and site due diligence
- Factory and industrial licensing, including IDA operating licences
- PoA, security-clearance and translation management, with guidance on consularisation requirements
- Employment, social-insurance and operational set-up

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LAW FIRM · CAIRO · EGYPT

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