



**Australian Government**  
**Refugee Review Tribunal**

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# Country Advice

## Egypt

Egypt – EGY39516 – arranged marriage –  
relocation – state protection

28 November 2011

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- 1. Please provide background information in relation to Egyptian/Islamic norms relevant to arranged marriages, including information about a. the consequences of a man not complying with his family's request for an arranged marriage, and b. the consequences of a man living in a de facto relationship with a woman that his family have not chosen for him.**

### Arranged marriages in Egypt

Sources report that arranged marriages occur in Egypt, although Tadros, author of a report on women's rights in Egypt for Freedom House, states that the practice is not believed to be as common now as in the past.<sup>1</sup>

According to the 2010 *Egypt Human Development Report* by the Egyptian Institute of Planning, an „official' marriage is conducted as follows:

Although arranged marriages are frequent, the bride and her guardian must both agree on the marriage. Should either the guardian or the girl disagree on the marriage, it may not legally take place, although young women sometimes question a guardian's judgment. The marriage must officially take place in the presence of witnesses, after which it may be consummated.<sup>2</sup>

Further, the US State Department states that:

Traditionally, most families in Egypt use a marriage broker or arrange marriages themselves for their sons and daughters who have reached marrying age. These are often marriages between first cousins or other extended family members. A tradition that is widely practiced is the "gawwaz el-salonat" (living room marriage). This is where a man is brought to the family home and presented to the daughter. After this sitting, the daughter must decide if she wants to marry him or not. Marriage age for Egyptians tends to be late teens/early twenties for women and usually early to mid-twenties for men. Men are expected to pay the majority of the marriage costs, including the providing of a furnished home to the bride. Due to inflation and a rising cost-of-living, marriage in Egypt is becoming more and more expensive causing men to delay marriage until they are in their 30s or 40s when they have increased assets. Some couples decide to have extended engagements instead of marrying right away. Marriage in Egypt and in most of the Middle

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<sup>1</sup> US Department of State (undated), „Forced Marriage Information Flyer – Egypt' [http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/safety/safety\\_5484.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/safety/safety_5484.html) – Accessed 23 November 2011; Kholoussy, Hanah 2010, „Egypt: The Fiction (and Non-Fiction) of Egypt's Marriage Crisis', Middle East Research and Information Project website, December <http://www.merip.org/mero/interventions/fiction-non-fiction-egypts-marriage-crisis> – Accessed 23 November 2011; Tadros, Mariz 2010, *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010: Egypt*, Freedom House website, 3 March <http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=384&key=253&parent=24&report=86> (CISNET Egypt CX240622)

<sup>2</sup> Egyptian Institute of National Planning 2010, *Egypt Human Development Report*, ECOI Net website, p.94 [http://www.ecoi.net/file\\_upload/1788\\_1293012420\\_egypt-2010-en.pdf](http://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/1788_1293012420_egypt-2010-en.pdf) – Accessed 23 November 2011

East is an essential part of life. Marriage and children provide individuals with greater status in society.<sup>3</sup>

Kholoussy explains how male and female roles differ during the act of marriage in Egypt:

The strict division of gender roles is even reflected in the verbs used to describe the act of marriage in Egyptian dialect: A man marries (*yigawwiz*) while a woman is married off (*titgawwiz*).

In the typical Egyptian marriage, it is the prospective groom who actively pursues a potential bride. If he has not already found one on his own, then it is he, often with his mother, who visits his intended and her family (traditionally in their living room, which is why arranged marriage is referred to as *gawaz al-salonat*, or living-room marriage, in Egyptian argot). It is he who decides if she would make a suitable wife, and he who meets with her father (or male guardian) to negotiate the fiscal provisions of the match. The groom is the one who shoulders almost all of the financial burdens (though rarely without the help of his parents or other economic assistance). His future wife may or may not be present during these negotiations, and may or may not express her opinion about the decisions. But the legal institutions and socioeconomic structures that support marriage are set up in a way that reinforces this gendered arrangement across class divisions. Though many Egyptian women, especially among the upper classes, choose their own spouses or at least have much more say in whom they marry, few do so without their fathers' consent. Most brides' fathers (or, in their absence, uncles or brothers) sign their marriage contracts as proxies, further reinforcing the degree to which patriarchal norms govern the practice of marriage.<sup>4</sup>

### **Consequences of non-compliance with an arranged marriage and living in a de facto relationship**

No specific information was located on the consequences of an Egyptian Muslim man not complying with his family's request for an arranged marriage. However, family honour is very important in Egyptian society and a 'perceived violation of social norms', such as a son going against his family's wish for him to enter an arranged marriage and his cohabitation with a woman, could be perceived as bringing shame upon the family.<sup>5</sup> In terms of a family threatening to kill a son because he is living with a woman outside of wedlock, such a living situation may be perceived to be conducive to sexual relations outside of marriage, which are considered 'immoral' and a social crime in Egypt.<sup>6</sup> In practice, the consequences for damaging family honour are different for men and women and no reports were located where a man had been killed by his family, in a so-called 'honour crime', for non-compliance with an arranged marriage

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<sup>3</sup> US Department of State (undated), 'Forced Marriage Information Flyer – Egypt'

[http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/safety/safety\\_5484.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/safety/safety_5484.html) – Accessed 23 November 2011

<sup>4</sup> Kholoussy, Hanah 2010, 'Egypt: The Fiction (and Non-Fiction) of Egypt's Marriage Crisis', Middle East Research and Information Project website, December <http://www.merip.org/mero/interventions/fiction-non-fiction-egypts-marriage-crisis> – Accessed 23 November 2011

<sup>5</sup> Khatagy, Fatma 2005, 'Honour killing in Egypt', United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women website, May, p.3 [http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/vaw-gp-2005/docs/experts/khafagy\\_honorcrimes.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/vaw-gp-2005/docs/experts/khafagy_honorcrimes.pdf) – Accessed 24 November 2011; Slackman, Michael 2008, 'Stifled, Egypt's young turn to Islamic fervour', *The New York Times*, 17 February <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/17/world/middleeast/17youth.html?pagewanted=1> (CISNET Egypt CX195350); El Ahl, Amira and Steinyorth, Daniel 2006, 'Love, Lust and Passion: Sex and Taboos in the Islamic World', *De Spiegel*, 20 October <http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/0.1518.443678.00.html> – Accessed 24 November 2011

<sup>6</sup> DFAT 2011, 'Travel Advice: Egypt', 24 November <http://www.smarttraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Egypt> – Accessed 24 November 2011; Glassé, Cyril 2001, *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Stacey International, London, p.491.

or for cohabitating with a woman outside of wedlock.<sup>7</sup> The 2010 *Egypt Human Development Report* by the Egyptian Institute of Planning states that „prohibition of sexual freedom and the extreme punishment for it is...an Islamic tradition that equally treats both males and females’.<sup>8</sup> But Sonbol explains that in the context of shaming one’s family by engaging in „promiscuous’ behaviour, the consequences are different for Egyptian men and women:

Promiscuity is considered unacceptable behaviour for both genders within Egyptian culture. However, while men or boys may be reprimanded, women or girls may be severely punished, or in extreme cases, killed for “dishonourable” acts.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly:

Extramarital sex is just as prohibited for males as for females; however, the culture does not frown on male’s extramarital sex but considers the same action by a female often deserving of no less than death.<sup>10</sup>

Although no information was found on the consequences of a man living in a de facto relationship with a woman that his family have not chosen for him, it would be highly unusual for an unmarried Muslim couple to live together in Egypt – due to religious reasons, men and women tend to live with their parents until they are married.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, sexual relations outside of wedlock, known as *zinah* (also spelt zina), are „illicit in Islamic law, a sin and socially considered a crime’.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, it is likely that a conservative Egyptian Muslim male’s family would not approve of the woman he is living with as they would perceive her to be violating Islamic beliefs and practices.

**2. Are there any reports of family members such as brothers residing in Australia being “used” by their family in Egypt to carry out threats in Australia?**

No reports were found of family members, such as brothers, residing in Australia being used by their family in Egypt to carry out threats in Australia.

**3. Please provide information on relocation in Egypt. Would an Egyptian male and his Libyan de facto partner be able to live together, unmarried, in Egypt away from his home governorate of Gharbeya?**

No definitive sources were found on the feasibility of relocation in Egypt where sons fear harm from their family. The US State Department reports that „the law provides for freedom of movement within the country...and the government generally respected these rights in practice,

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<sup>7</sup> Khatagy, Fatma 2005, „Honour killing in Egypt’, United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women website, May, p.3 [http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/vaw-gp-2005/docs/experts/khafagy\\_honorcrimes.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/vaw-gp-2005/docs/experts/khafagy_honorcrimes.pdf) – Accessed 24 November 2011; Egyptian Institute of National Planning 2010, *Egypt Human Development Report*, ECOI Net website, p.95 [http://www.ecoi.net/file\\_upload/1788\\_1293012420\\_egypt-2010-en.pdf](http://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/1788_1293012420_egypt-2010-en.pdf) – Accessed 23 November 2011

<sup>8</sup> Egyptian Institute of National Planning 2010, *Egypt Human Development Report*, ECOI Net website, p.188 [http://www.ecoi.net/file\\_upload/1788\\_1293012420\\_egypt-2010-en.pdf](http://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/1788_1293012420_egypt-2010-en.pdf) – Accessed 23 November 2011

<sup>9</sup> Sonbol, Amira El-Azhary (undated), „Egypt’, Freedom House website <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=172> – Accessed 24 November 2011

<sup>10</sup> Egyptian Institute of National Planning 2010, *Egypt Human Development Report*, ECOI Net website, p.188 [http://www.ecoi.net/file\\_upload/1788\\_1293012420\\_egypt-2010-en.pdf](http://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/1788_1293012420_egypt-2010-en.pdf) – Accessed 23 November 2011

<sup>11</sup> Slackman, Michael 2008, „Stifled, Egypt’s young turn to Islamic fervour’, *The New York Times*, 17 February <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/17/world/middleeast/17youth.html?pagewanted=1> (CISNET Egypt CX195350)

<sup>12</sup> El Ahl, Amira and Steinyorth, Daniel 2006, „Love, Lust and Passion: Sex and Taboos in the Islamic World’, *De Spiegel*, 20 October <http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/0,1518,443678,00.html> – Accessed 24 November 2011; Glassé, Cyril 2001, *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Stacey International, London, p.491.

albeit with some notable exceptions'.<sup>13</sup> One report was found where a Christian Egyptian woman, Abeer Fakhry, claimed she had to relocate several times within Egypt because her family was „chasing’ her for converting to Islam and leaving her Christian husband.<sup>14</sup>

In terms of the second part of the question, as stated in Question One, it would be taboo for an unmarried Muslim couple to live together in Egypt given Egyptian society’s focus on the importance of marriage.<sup>15</sup> In particular, the couple’s cohabitation may be perceived to encourage premarital sex, which is considered to be *zinah*.<sup>16</sup>

**4. Is there state protection for such people, or are the authorities dysfunctional or unwilling to interfere in matters relating to honour or religious matters? Please provide information on state protection in such cases (specifically for men if possible).**

It is unclear how the Egyptian authorities would respond to a case in which a Muslim male was threatened with death for dishonouring his family. No reports were found where a Muslim male was provided with state protection because of a death threat from his family. Reports concerning domestic abuse and honour killings in Egypt focus on female victims. However, sources indicate that the Egyptian authorities consider matters that they perceive as relating to honour, such as domestic abuse, as private family issues that do not warrant interference.<sup>17</sup> In February 2010, Aida Nur Eddin, General Coordinator of the non-governmental organisation Hand in Hand to Fight Violence against Women and Children, told *The Egyptian Gazette* that “although domestic violence is punishable under Egyptian law, the police are reluctant to intervene in something that is considered a private matter”.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, a 2009 Human Rights Watch report states that „police are routinely unsympathetic to the concerns of battered women and girls’.<sup>19</sup> In terms of honour killings, reports state that such incidents do occur in Egypt in a variety of circumstances, although such incidents appear to be rare and there are no reliable statistics to determine any figures.<sup>20</sup> Sources state that Egyptian police are generally unwilling to intervene or even

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<sup>13</sup> US Department of State 2011, *2010 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Egypt*, 8 April [www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/nea/154460.htm](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/nea/154460.htm) – Accessed 24 November 2011

<sup>14</sup> Mekay, Emad 2011, „Egypt Hunts Down the Right to Love’, *Inter Press Service*, 17 May <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=55674> (CISNET Egypt CX265808)

<sup>15</sup> Sherif, Bahira 2001, „Egypt’ in *The International Encyclopedia of Sexuality*, (ed) Robert Francoeur, The Continuum Publishing Company, New York <http://www2.hu-berlin.de/sexology/IES/egypt.html> – Accessed 24 November 2011; Slackman, Michael 2008, „Stifled, Egypt’s young turn to Islamic fervour’, *The New York Times*, 17 February <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/17/world/middleeast/17youth.html?pagewanted=1> (CISNET Egypt CX195350)

<sup>16</sup> El Ahl, Amira and Steinyorth, Daniel 2006, „Love, Lust and Passion: Sex and Taboos in the Islamic World’, *De Spiegel*, 20 October <http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/0,1518,443678,00.html> – Accessed 24 November 2011; Egyptian Institute of National Planning 2010, *Egypt Human Development Report*, ECOI Net website, p.95 & p.188 [http://www.ecoi.net/file\\_upload/1788\\_1293012420\\_egypt-2010-en.pdf](http://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/1788_1293012420_egypt-2010-en.pdf) – Accessed 23 November 2011; Glassé, Cyril 2001, *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Stacey International, London, p.491.

<sup>17</sup> Sadek, Ashraf 2010, „Alex NGO vows to combat domestic violence’, *The Egyptian Gazette*, 26 February <http://213.158.162.45/~egyptian/?action=news&id=3847> – Accessed 24 November 2011; Human Rights Watch 2009, „UPR Submission: Egypt September 2009’, 16 February <http://www.hrw.org/news/2010/02/16/upr-submission-egypt-september-2009> – Accessed 25 November 2011

<sup>18</sup> Sadek, Ashraf 2010, „Alex NGO vows to combat domestic violence’, *The Egyptian Gazette*, 26 February <http://213.158.162.45/~egyptian/?action=news&id=3847> – Accessed 24 November 2011

<sup>19</sup> Human Rights Watch 2009, „UPR Submission: Egypt September 2009’, 16 February <http://www.hrw.org/news/2010/02/16/upr-submission-egypt-september-2009> – Accessed 25 November 2011

<sup>20</sup> US Department of State (undated), „Forced Marriage Information Flyer – Egypt’ [http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/safety/safety\\_5484.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/safety/safety_5484.html) – Accessed 23 November 2011; US Department of State 2011, *2010 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Egypt*, 8 April [www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/nea/154460.htm](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/nea/154460.htm) – Accessed 24 November 2011

acknowledge instances of honour killings.<sup>21</sup> However, as discussed in Question One, no reports were located where a man had been killed by his family, in a so-called „honour crime’, for non-compliance with an arranged marriage or for cohabitating with a woman outside of wedlock.

**5. Please provide brief background information on the consequences for a Libyan woman living in a relationship with a man in Libya against the approval of her family.**

Although it is unclear how the evolving political situation in Libya will impact on women’s rights and societal attitudes, reports suggest that a number of negative consequences could befall a Muslim Libyan woman for living in a de facto relationship with a man in Libya, with such consequences dependent on the specific circumstances of the individual.<sup>22</sup> Despite the reported efforts of the former Libyan government to promote the status of women in Libya, the country has „extremely conservative patriarchal traditions and tribal culture’ and sources indicate that it would be socially unacceptable, and potentially against the law, for a Muslim Libyan woman to live out of wedlock in a de facto relationship with a man in Libya.<sup>23</sup>

As in Egypt, Libyan society expects a Muslim woman to protect her honour, and that of her family, by complying with „social and moral norms’ and adhering to Muslim religious customs and practices.<sup>24</sup> One of the most important social and moral norms is marriage. In Libya, „marriage is often deemed to be of greater importance than education or employment’ as “marriage is the standard by whereby the success of a woman can be measured”.<sup>25</sup> The following excerpt from the US State Department *2010 Country Report on Human Rights Practices* can be used as a measure of the potential consequences for bringing dishonour upon one’s family by living with a man out of wedlock in Libya:

The law allowed for arbitrary punishments for dishonoring family, and women and girls suspected of violating moral codes such as walking with a man unrelated to them could be detained indefinitely without being convicted or after having served a sentence and without the right to challenge their detention before a court.<sup>26</sup>

A Muslim Libyan woman living in a de facto relationship with a male in Libya may also be subject to laws that prohibit sexual relations outside of marriage. In a special 2010 report for Freedom House, Pargeter states that:

Law No. 70 of 1973 criminalizes fornication, and both men and women may be prosecuted for engaging in sexual relations outside of marriage, the punishment for which

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<sup>21</sup> Sonbol, Amira El-Azhary (undated), „Egypt’, Freedom House website <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=172> – Accessed 24 November 2011; Fisk, Robert 2010, „The lie behind mass „suicides’ of Egypt’s young women’, *The Independent*, 9 September <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/fisk/robert-fisk-the-lie-behind-mass-suicides-of-egypts-young-women-2074229.html?service=Print> – Accessed 24 November 2011

<sup>22</sup> Pargeter, Alison 2010, *Women’s Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010: Libya*, 3 March <http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=384&key=259&parent=24&report=86> (CIS Libya CX240577); US Department of State 2011, *2010 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Libya*, 8 April [www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/nea/154467.htm](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/nea/154467.htm) – Accessed 24 November 2011

<sup>23</sup> Pargeter, Alison 2010, *Women’s Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010: Libya*, 3 March <http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=384&key=259&parent=24&report=86> (CIS Libya CX240577); US Department of State 2011, *2010 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Libya*, 8 April [www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/nea/154467.htm](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/nea/154467.htm) – Accessed 24 November 2011

<sup>24</sup> Pargeter, Alison 2010, *Women’s Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010: Libya*, 3 March <http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=384&key=259&parent=24&report=86> (CIS Libya CX240577)

<sup>25</sup> Pargeter, Alison 2010, *Women’s Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010: Libya*, 3 March <http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=384&key=259&parent=24&report=86> (CIS Libya CX240577)

<sup>26</sup> US Department of State 2011, *2010 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Libya*, 8 April [www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/nea/154467.htm](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/nea/154467.htm) – Accessed 24 November 2011

is flogging...Although few people are punished for fornication, women who are discovered to have engaged in illicit sexual relations often find themselves shunned by society and their families, and are deemed to have violated the family's honor.<sup>27</sup>

Freedom House reports that Libyan women who have been „cast out by their families are particularly vulnerable’.<sup>28</sup> If a Libyan woman is shunned by her family as a consequence of living out of wedlock with an unrelated male, she may also be restricted in her day-to-day freedom of movement. For example, Pargeter states that a woman walking „in public after dark is expected to be accompanied by a male relative or another female’.<sup>29</sup> This is because without such an escort, „she risks verbal harassment for what is considered the behaviour of a “loose” woman’.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Pargeter, Alison 2010, *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010: Libya*, 3 March <http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=384&key=259&parent=24&report=86> (CIS Libya CX240577)

<sup>28</sup> Freedom House 2011, *Freedom in the World 2011 – Libya*, 26 May [http://www.freedomhouse.org/inc/content/pubs/fiw/inc\\_country\\_detail.cfm?year=2011&country=8077&pf](http://www.freedomhouse.org/inc/content/pubs/fiw/inc_country_detail.cfm?year=2011&country=8077&pf) – Accessed 30 May 2011

<sup>29</sup> Pargeter, Alison 2010, *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010: Libya*, 3 March <http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=384&key=259&parent=24&report=86> (CIS Libya CX240577)

<sup>30</sup> Pargeter, Alison 2010, *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa 2010: Libya*, 3 March <http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=384&key=259&parent=24&report=86> (CIS Libya CX240577)

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US Department of State (undated), „Forced Marriage Information Flyer – Egypt’ [http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/safety/safety\\_5484.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/safety/safety_5484.html) – Accessed 23 November 2011

US Department of State 2011, *2010 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Egypt*, 8 April [www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/nea/154460.htm](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/nea/154460.htm) – Accessed 24 November 2011

US Department of State 2011, *2010 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Libya*, 8 April [www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/nea/154467.htm](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/nea/154467.htm) – Accessed 24 November 2011