



## Egypt

- Population: 83.4 million
- GDP per capita (in US dollars): 3,198
- Presidential regime
- Human development index (HDI): 0.690 (108<sup>th</sup> rank among 187 countries)
- Gender inequality index (GII): 0.573 (131<sup>st</sup> rank among 147 countries)
- Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI): Score of 36 on a scale from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean)
- Member of the African Union since 1963.
  
- No official national statistics on prostitution.
- Prostitution is illegal, both for the client and the victim. Victims of prostitution are often imprisoned.
- Under new 2014 law, sexual harassment is illegal and punishable by prison or fines.
- Temporary or summer marriages of young girls in exchange for payment are still common.
- Source, transit, and destination country for human trafficking, despite 2010 Law No. 64's prohibition of human trafficking.
- Eritrea is a major source country for victims of trafficking and torture in Egypt, including sexual assault.
- Egypt has taken steps to follow two National Plans of Action against Human Trafficking for the years 2011-2015.

Egypt is a source, transit, and destination country for victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Egypt has an estimated population of street children ranging from 200,000-1 million, a group that is particularly at risk of being trafficked, and this number is on the rise due to Egypt's economic instability. In addition to street children, refugees are another vulnerable group that often fall victim to prostitution and sexual exploitation in Egypt (*U.S. Department of State*, 2014).

Egypt has several laws that directly and indirectly relate to sexual exploitation. Law No. 126 of 2008, a relatively recent addition to Egyptian sexual exploitation law, raised the legal age of marriage for girls to 18. Two years later, in 2010, the passage of Law No. 64 specifically forbade the trafficking of persons for all types of exploitation, including sexual

and labor-based trafficking. This law demonstrates Egypt's resolve to uphold the Palermo Protocol, a United Nations Protocol that aims to combat human trafficking. However, despite Law 64's alignment with the Palermo Protocol<sup>1</sup>, obstacles remain. Joy Ngozi Ezeilo, the UN Special Reporter on human trafficking, especially of women and children, noted in her 2011 report that Egyptian prostitution law does not match the Protocol's standards. Egypt's Law No. 68 from 1951 and its amendment through Law No. 10 in 1961 make it illegal to "incite," "entice" or "facilitate" "debauchery or prostitution." Although the law punishes procurers and traffickers, it also encourages the prosecution of victims. The Palermo Protocol's definition of trafficking specifies that even if an individual consents to being prostituted, they are still considered a victim of exploitation if they were coerced into the decision (*Ngozi Ezeilo*, 2011). Therefore, in considering victims culpable for their actions and not acknowledging that they have been exploited, current Egyptian prostitution law contradicts the Palermo Protocol.

### **Temporary Child Marriage**

Despite Law No. 126's prohibition of marriage for girls under the age of 18, temporary marriage of children continues to be a significant problem in Egypt. Generally, the practice takes the form of summer marriages, in which wealthy tourists from Gulf States travel to Egypt and pay parents to marry their daughters as a form of disguised prostitution (*U.S. Department of State*, 2014). Temporary marriage provides buyers with means to avoid restrictions that stem from Islamic religious law on pre-marital sex, such as many hotels' refusal to rent rooms to unmarried couples. Because of Law No. 126's restriction of girls' marriage age, many temporary marriages are arranged through marriage "brokers" who are able to forge birth certificates and the other necessary documents to circumvent the law. In the wake of recent economic turmoil accompanying Egypt's changing government, many families have turned to temporary marriage as an added source of income. According to a survey conducted by the *National Council for Childhood and Motherhood* (NCCM), families can earn "dowry" money for temporary marriages anywhere from 115 US\$ (106 €) for a day to 2,800 US\$- 10,000 US\$ for seasonal/summer marriages. Typically the girls are between 11 and 18 years old, and a marriage can be as short as a few days or as long as several months or years. For longer marriages, girls are sometimes expected to go home with their purchaser and work domestically. Even when they return to their families, girls are often resold into more marriages. As a result of these temporary marriages, many victims suffer long-term psychological effects (*Inter Press Service*, August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013). In a positive development, Egypt's new 2014 Constitution contains a provision that increases the level of mandatory education to secondary school (*Egyptian Centre for Women's Rights*, 2014). Hopefully, this new requirement will delay the marriage of some young girls by prolonging their education.

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<sup>1</sup> Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against transnational organized crime, New York, 15 November 2000.

## Sexual Violence Against Female Activists

In recent years Egypt's tumultuous political climate has led to a high number of sexual assaults at protests. Upon Muhammad Hosni El Sayed Mubarak's fall from power in 2011, many women became victims of sexual brutality at the hands of security forces. When Mohamed Morsi became president, women's security remained inadequate. According to the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), from late 2012 to mid 2013 there were more than 250 instances of mob violence against women in the Tahrir Square area. Generally, these attacks took the form of groups of young men surrounding individual women, often removing their clothes, groping them, and pulling them in multiple directions at once.

As political change continued and M. Morsi was ousted from power in 2013, police presence was increased in Tahrir Square but assaults continued, especially those targeting women protesting in support of M. Morsi. In fact, in the wake of the military takeover in July 2013, reports of sexual harassment and violence against women by security officers increased (*Booth & El Hussein, 2014*). Women wearing the *niqab* or *khimar* were often assumed to be supporting Islamism and were thus targeted by military and law enforcement. Once taken into custody, the probability of sexual assault for women was "extremely high". Body searches and inspections were often used as opportunities for guards to humiliate and grope female detainees. As one anonymous member of an Egyptian human rights organization commented to FIDH, "*Sexual violence practised by law enforcement officers in Egypt has never stopped, it has never been condemned. What has changed is the scale of the arrests, which increases the number of cases of sexual assault*" (*Booth & El Hussein, 2014*).

Indeed, police brutality against women in Egypt is not a new phenomenon. During the 2011 revolution there was a public outcry against virginity tests performed on detained female protestors. Although virginity tests were declared illegal in Egypt in December 2011, women have recently reported that they are being used again. In the winter of 2014, four women who had been arrested for protesting against the military rule came forward to say that the police had forced them to undergo virginity tests (*CNN, February 21<sup>th</sup>, 2014*). The apparent return of virginity tests signals how much more progress remains to be made to protect women from sexual violence in Egypt.

The fight against sexual violence has been hindered by the fact that women are often discouraged from pursuing legal complaints against their attackers, and that adequate data is often not collected when they do so (*Booth & El Hussein, 2014*). One cause of the low rate of reported assaults is due to the little amount of protection given to survivors who file complaints. For example, a child detainee told FIDH that she filed a complaint against attackers who raped and injured her while in custody. While still recovering from the incident, her rapists came to the hospital and raped her again as a means of pressuring her to withdraw her complaint. She later reflected on the experience: "*If I had known that filing a complaint would have these consequences I would never have done it*" (*FIDH, 2015*).

Sometimes women are discouraged from filing complaints by their own lawyers, as was the case with one woman who was beaten and raped by a police officer in December 2013. According to FIDH, her lawyer eventually admitted that he "advised her not to file a complaint for fear of scandal". That same woman was later criticised by the deputy minister

for human rights in the Ministry of the Interior, Major Abu Bakr Abdel Karim, who claimed that she was “irrational” and trying “to turn public opinion against the police” (*FIDH*, 2015) . If government officials publicly shame victims of sexual violence and if law enforcement officers are often responsible for these crimes, victims have virtually no way of safely pursuing justice.

Recent developments indicate that there is hope for the fight against violence towards female detainees and activists in Egypt. In May 2015, the National Council for Women (NCW), in cooperation with the Ministries of Interior Justice, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UN Women, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and NGOs, began a national initiative to fight violence against women (*UNDP*, 2015). Concurrently, the Egyptian Police launched a new strategy also designed to reduce gender-based violence. As part of the police initiative, there will be a more rapid police response to reports of violence against women, and the number of female physicians has been increased to care for female victims of assault. Furthermore, the Egyptian Police Academy’s curriculum will feature a new section specifically focused on human rights and violence against women (*Egyptian Streets*, May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015).

Although the NCW has been criticized in the past for failing to prioritize women’s rights over its own organizational allegiance to the government, this initiative is an encouraging step towards reducing police brutality (*Booth & El Hussein*, 2014). It remains to be seen in the coming years whether or not sexual and other violence against women actually decrease as a result of the new national strategy.

Another hopeful development for female activists and for all women in Egypt was the passage of a new sexual harassment law in June 2014. The law criminalizes sexual harassment and makes it punishable under Egyptian law for the first time. Just a few days following the passage of the sexual harassment law, seven men were taken into custody when their group assault of a woman in Tahrir Square was caught on video (*Al Jazeera*, June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2014). In July 2014, the men were sentenced to life in prison (25 years). At the same time, two other men were sentenced to 20 years in prison for assaults committed in January 2013 (*Middle East Eye*, July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2014).

Punishing perpetrators for the common crime of mob sexual assault in Tahrir Square will perhaps dissuade others from participating in similar crimes, and is the first step towards making public spaces in Egypt safer for women. The sexual harassment law is also important because it aides not only female activists, but all Egyptians in their daily lives. According to a 2013 survey conducted by *UN Women* in Egypt, 99.3% of female respondents said that they had been the target of some form of harassment. Of those women, 49.2% said that they are harassed on a daily basis (*UN Women*, 2013). With such a frequent and nearly universal rate of harassment, the new sexual harassment law has the potential to impact a large portion of Egypt’s population if it is enforced.

## **Human Trafficking & Torture**

In addition to Egyptians, individuals of other nationalities are also victims of sexual exploitation in Egypt. In recent years a large number of Eritreans have been kidnapped and brought to the Sinai in Egypt where they are tortured in order to extort money from their

friends and family at home. According to a Human Rights Watch (HRW) report in February 2014, since mid-2010 many Eritrean refugees in eastern Sudan have been kidnapped, sold to Egyptian traffickers, and then tortured. Often the torture occurs while the victims are on the phone with their relatives, and the traffickers then demand a hefty ransom for each victim's release.

One 23-year old Eritrean male victim described his experience in Egypt to HRW: *“The first group of kidnappers said I had to pay \$3500... They threatened to remove our organs if we didn't pay. Even though my family paid, they didn't release me but instead sold me to a second group. The second kidnappers said we had to pay them \$33000 because they had bought us from the first group... They beat me with a metal rod. They dripped molten plastic onto my back... One person died after they hung him from the ceiling for 24 hours. We watched him die. Whenever I called my relatives to ask them to pay, they burnt me with a hot rod so I would scream on the phone. We could not protect the women in our room: they just took them out, raped them, and brought them back”* (HRW, 2014).

For female victims, rape and sexual assault seem to be a common occurrence. UNHCR staff who interviewed Eritrean trafficking survivors told HRW: *“11 of the 15 women that were interviewed claimed that they had been sexually assaulted. The abuse included insertion of objects, oral sex, and rape. A number of women and men described how women were also assaulted by Eritrean men held captive, who were forced to sexually abuse the women”* (HRW, 2014).

Eritrean survivors told HRW in 2012 that both Sudanese and Egyptian security forces cooperate with traffickers throughout the process. Furthermore, when Eritreans and other victims of trafficking manage to escape and run towards the border of Israel, they are often shot or imprisoned by Egyptian border police and denied the opportunity to claim refugee status since Egypt refuses to grant the UNHCR access to the Sinai. Instead of being treated as trafficking victims, Eritreans are often charged with offences related to illegal migration and detained for long periods of time in the Sinai without access to proper medical care (HRW, 2014).

## **Government Action Against Sexual Exploitation**

Over the past four years, Egypt has taken active steps to combat sexual exploitation and human trafficking in particular. In 2011, Egypt adopted a National Plan of Action against Human Trafficking, developed by the National Coordinating Committee for Combating and Preventing Human Trafficking (NCCPHT). The plan laid out goals and action steps for Egypt's fight against human trafficking for the years 2011-2013, and many of the plan's targets were met. For example, 70 impoverished families received micro-finance loans as part of the plan, a step that was taken with the goal of reducing the financial need for temporary marriage (NCCPHT, 2012).

The NCCPHT also led training sessions on human trafficking for 250 preparatory and secondary teachers and 18 hospital workers. Upon conclusion of the first National Plan of Action, a second plan was developed for the years 2013-2015 with similar goals and steps to reduce trafficking and sexual exploitation (NCCPHT, 2012).

As part of the Second National Plan of Action, in 2013, the NCCM wrote a guidebook on trafficking used to train judges and prosecutors. Additionally, in collaboration with NGOs and other government committees, the NCCM continued work on the government's trafficking victim identification and referral mechanism, an initiative that began in 2012. According to the 2014 U.S. Department of State Report on Trafficking in Persons, in 2013 the NCCM successfully identified and helped 173 victims of trafficking - a significant number, but still far fewer than the 277 victims they were able to help in 2012. The task of aiding victims in finding shelter and protection was made difficult by a shortage of staff within the NCCM. In coordination with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the NCCM ran a shelter that assisted 17 female trafficking victims of a variety of nationalities. However, many NGOs claim that such government facilities for women and children in Egypt are severely lacking and in need of more funding. Similarly, the NCCM's telephone hotline for victims of trafficking has been unable to accommodate numerous calls due to poor staffing (*U.S. Department of State*, 2014).

Despite Egypt's recent progress in combating sexual exploitation and harassment, the country has significant room for improvement. For example, the government still does not have a strong system of collecting and managing data about sexual exploitation and human trafficking (*U.S. Department of State*, 2014). Improving data collection is one of the continued goals of the National Coordinating Committee's Second National Action Plan, but due to shifts in government, it appears that the NCCPHT may have been replaced by a new committee established in 2014, the National Coordinating Committee for Combating and Preventing Illegal Migration (NCCPIM). This new committee's main objective is to develop legislation about illegal migration, and it is unclear whether or not they are continuing to follow the Second National Plan of Action about Human Trafficking (*IOM*, 2014). If the plan has indeed been abandoned, it would be a major step back in Egypt's fight against sexual exploitation. Perhaps the most grave issue in current Egyptian policy surrounding sexual exploitation, however, is that in 2013 the Egyptian government did not attempt to identify any women detained for prostitution as victims of trafficking. Therefore, victims of prostitution are still regarded as criminals and punished by the Egyptian government (*U.S. Department of State*, 2014). One can only hope that Egypt's expansion of women's education in the 2014 Constitution and its passage of the 2014 Sexual Harassment Law are signs that it will continue to progress in the fight against sexual exploitation.

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