

Issue #172

Collective for Research and Training on Development. Action  
Middle East & North Africa Gender And Development Electronic Brief

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## **Can new 'women's government' advance gender equality in Egypt?**



The Egyptian Women's Government, an initiative by the Heritage and Traditional Arts Association, meets in Cairo, July 14, 2016.

In a step aimed at promoting the role of women in Egyptian society, a “parallel” women’s government, the first of its kind, was announced in mid-July, dubbed the Egyptian Women’s Government.

A statement issued just before the official launch said that the new Cabinet includes only female independent ministers and will work as a research center to serve Egyptian society and support women’s intellectual paths of all stripes.

“Forming a government with only female ministers is unprecedented historically and geographically,” Ghad al-Wakil, the head of the newly formed women's government, told Al-Monitor.

Wakil said that she has been mulling over the idea for years now and started two months ago to form the parallel government under the umbrella of the Heritage and Traditional Arts Association.

Read more:  
<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/08/egypt-parallel-government-women-promote-equality.html#ixzz4IkCmahct>

## **How one initiative aims to help Egypt's most vulnerable women**

Nadia Zakhary, a member of Egypt’s National Council for Women and former minister of scientific research, launched an initiative last month called “Belonging to Egypt.” The project is aimed at using scientific research studies to develop slum areas and advance the status of women in slums, who are responsible for the upbringing of millions of Egyptian youths.

According to statements by former Minister of Urban Development Laila Iskander, as many as 40 million Egyptians live in slums.

Despite the importance of the efforts made by those involved in the initiative, the Egyptian government continues to bear the full responsibility of improving conditions in the slums, according to those interviewed by Al-Monitor.

Zakhary said the main goal of the initiative is “to take advantage of scientific research in order to safeguard health and the environment [in the slums], in addition to using sociological research to promote principles and ethics.” She told Al-Monitor that women and families are the primary target groups of “Belonging to Egypt.”

Regarding the areas the initiative is focusing on, Zakhary said they include “slums, low-income neighborhoods, public housing and remote areas in regions such as the Sinai Peninsula and Upper Egypt.”

The initiative was launched in Al-Asmarat, a public housing project in eastern Cairo that is set to include 11,000 residential units.

Read more:

<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/08/egypt-initiative-women-slums-healthcare-education.html#ixzz4IkDlvRZ9>

## Will Saudi women break chains of male guardianship?

Saudi women recently launched a hashtag calling for an end to male guardianship, which has been behind many of the physical and moral violations they face in Saudi society.

For three weeks now, the hashtag [#StopEnslavingSaudiWomen](#) has been active on social media. The newly established feminist association Saudi Women Against Marginalization, which took to Twitter in June, launched this hashtag. Meanwhile, the issue of ending male guardianship over women in Saudi Arabia remains highly controversial.

Saudi women are not just calling for the end of male guardianship in marriage contracts or the transfer of guardianship from one abusive husband or oppressive father to another better man who could be a brother or uncle, like it was for women a few years ago in some Saudi courts.

In fact, women are calling for dropping all forms of supervision and control from brothers, fathers or grandfathers as guardianship limits women's freedom and willpower.

Saudi blogger and writer Hams Sonosi is one of the main advocates of this cause. On Aug. 11, she tweeted that the campaign to end male guardianship has achieved huge success on social media, although it has not led to a change of laws. She asked Saudi women to hold on to this legal and social demand.

Subsequently, the opposing hashtag [#SaudiWomenProudofGuardianship](#) appeared. Academic Amerah Saeidi is one of the main opponents to ending male guardianship.

Read more:

<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/08/saudi-arabia-women-call-end-male-guardianship.html#ixzz4IkEdyn2M>

## Morocco's Islamic women preachers lead social revolution

It's hoped that female spiritual leaders can encourage a more tolerant Islam and improve the position of girls and women.

Girls are "like a timebomb ready to explode and ruin the family's reputation", the Moroccan jewellery trader tells his customer as she admires a display of necklaces.

The solution is to "get rid of this bomb" by marrying your daughters off as soon as you can, he explains.

His customer, Hannane, replies firmly that Islam does not advocate child marriage and that women can also play an important role outside the home.

Hannane is one of a new generation of female religious leaders, known as *morchidat* -- part of a quiet social revolution in the North African country.

Their groundbreaking work is the subject of a British film, "Casablanca Calling", which will be showcased on Tuesday night at an international conference on child marriage in Morocco's famous port city.

The *morchidat* were introduced in 2006, partly in an attempt to counter Islamist radicalism following suicide bombings that rocked Casablanca in 2003.

Read more:

<http://news.trust.org/item/20150519070108-q20uq/?source=spotlight>

## ***GENDER BASED VIOLENCE***

### **Egypt seeks tougher punishment for female genital mutilation**

More than nine in 10 women and girls aged 15 to 49 have undergone FGM in Egypt.

Women's rights activists hailed the Egyptian government on Monday for advocating increased prison sentences for perpetrators of female genital mutilation (FGM) but warned that a new law could shroud the practice in greater secrecy.

Egypt's cabinet on Sunday approved a bill, which must be passed by parliament to become law, imposing jail terms of up to seven years for people who perform FGM and up to three years for those who escort a girl or woman to undergo the practice.

It is currently punishable in Egypt by between three months and two years in prison under a 2008 law, which was enacted after an 11-year-old girl died following an FGM procedure.

The drive for tougher sentences follows the recent death of a 17-year-old girl of complications during an FGM operation in a private hospital in Suez province.

The Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), a Cairo-based rights group, welcomed the bill but said it may not deter people from performing FGM and could drive it further underground.

"It will also decrease the rate of reporting FGM cases, as imposing a punishment on whoever escorts a girl to have the operation will make families fear reporting cases," Dalia Abd El-Hameed of the EIPR told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Read more:

<http://news.trust.org/item/20160829144755-55827>

### **Boko Haram crisis could fuel rise in child marriages - activists**

Parents pull their daughters out of school following mass abductions by the militants.

The Boko Haram crisis in northern Nigeria could fuel child marriage as parents pull their daughters out of school following mass abductions by the militants, campaigners warned on Wednesday.

They said parents who had once seen boarding schools as a safe place for their daughters were now fearful of sending them away. Many local schools have also closed down because of the insurgency by the Islamist militants.

"We have communities where girls have not been to school for a year. We have parents withdrawing their girls from school. They do not see education as a safe alternative to marriage, which they did before," said Umma Iliyasu-Mohammed of Nigerian organisation Girl Child Concerns.

"Unfortunately when families pull their girls out of school they take them back home, and when girls are at home the next thing will be marriage," she added.

Boko Haram, whose name means "Western education is sinful", kidnapped more than 200 schoolgirls from a school in Chibok village a year ago causing international outrage.

Amnesty International says the militants, who want to carve out a caliphate in West Africa, have abducted around 2,000 women and children since early 2014, using many of them as sex slaves or human shields.

Read more:

<http://news.trust.org/item/20150520165201-zok4z/?source=spotlight>

## **Child marriage on the rise among Syrian refugees in Jordan**

The Syrian conflict has put pressure on refugee families to get their daughters married early, despite the health risks.

Nearly one in three marriages among Syrian refugees in Jordan involves a child under 18 and the proportion is rising for a second consecutive year, according to a report released on Wednesday.

Child marriage has long been an accepted practice among parts of the Syrian population, reaching 13 percent of all marriages in pre-war Syria, but the civil war has exacerbated factors believed to encourage early marriage.

In the first quarter of this year 32 percent of all Syrian refugee marriages registered in Jordan involved a child, the U.N. children's agency (UNICEF) said, in a report released ahead of an international summit to spur global action to end child marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting.

The first quarter figure has risen from 18 percent of such marriages in 2012 and 25 percent in 2013, but the real percentage is likely to be higher as those figures refer only to marriages certified by a specialized Jordanian court.

Factors that contribute to early marriage among Syrian refugees in Jordan are reducing poverty or the burden on a family with many daughters, providing protection for girls, cultural or family traditions or escaping abusive families.

Read more:

<http://news.trust.org/item/20140716121001-dz2rs/?source=spotlight>

## **Yemen minister pushes for child marriage ban**

Minister says early marriage is holding back national development in Yemen.

Yemen's human rights minister is pushing parliament to ban child marriage, an issue which hit the headlines last year after an eight-year-old girl reportedly died on her wedding night.

"I've asked parliament to look at it urgently. Child marriage is one of our top priorities in the ministry at the moment because it affects the most basic rights of children and women," Hooria Mashhour said.

The minister warned that early marriage not only jeopardised girls' health and education, but was holding back national development in Yemen – one of the world's poorest countries.

Yemen's failure to outlaw child marriage will be under scrutiny on Wednesday when the country comes up for its four-yearly review before the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva. Britain, Spain and Norway are among countries that have voiced their concerns on the issue ahead of the hearing.

Some 14 percent of girls in Yemen marry before their fifteenth birthday and 52 percent before they reach 18, according to U.N. and Yemeni government data from 2006.

Mashhour said child marriage deprived girls of schooling and opportunities and increased the risks of sexual violence, domestic abuse and death in childbirth.

Read more:

<http://news.trust.org/item/20140127180510-o4gcd/?source=spotlight>



## Female asylum seekers in Greece face sexual harassment and assault

"The Afghan guys like to harass the young women here. They don't care that I'm engaged or Muslim... when they bother us, there's nowhere for us to go. It's really scary."

When Warda left her hometown of Idlib in Syria, she knew she had a long, difficult journey ahead, but it never crossed her mind that she would face increased danger as a young woman.

For the past four months, the 18-year-old has been living in a makeshift refugee camp by Pireaus harbour in Athens with her fiancé and six relatives, who also made the perilous journey to Greece via Turkey.

Forced to share a tent with her parents and use a mixed bathroom, the lack of privacy is stifling.

The large numbers of young, single Syrian and Afghan men, many of whom sit in groups, commenting on the women they see, is also unnerving.

"It's hard for everyone here, but particularly for women," said Warda, who like many asylum seekers declined to give her full name.

"The Afghan guys like to harass the young women here. They don't care that I'm engaged or Muslim," the teenager told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "But when they bother us, there's nowhere for us to go. It's really scary."

Female asylum seekers are vulnerable to violence, exploitation and sexual harassment from the moment they leave Iraq and Syria to their arrival on European soil, Amnesty International says.

Read more:

<http://news.trust.org/item/20160805050122-ofgq2/>

## GENDER & HUMAN RIGHTS

### Burkini ban: French police continue to target women in Islamic clothing despite court ruling



Two women wearing hijabs told to leave Nice beach

Police have continued to target women wearing modest Islamic clothing on France's beaches, despite a court overturning the controversial burkini ban.

Two women wearing hijabs and hats were seen on a beach in Nice reportedly being told to leave by a policeman in a boat.

One woman was wearing a long dress and the other a loose trouser suit. The pair were with a young boy.

"The police boat swooped on the women and a male officer spoke to them," a witness said.

"The women then put all their things away and made their way off the beach. I don't think any fine was imposed, but they were certainly told to leave," they told *The Daily Mail*.

Several mayors of France's resort towns have vowed to go on imposing a ban on burkinis, despite the country's highest administrative court ruling the by-laws were "clearly illegal" and violated fundamental liberties.

Read more:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/burkini-ban-france-french-police-muslim-women-hijab-burka-latest-news-court-ruling-a7213856.html>

## **Anti-burkini law in France would worsen tension - interior minister**

A law banning the burkini "would be unconstitutional, ineffective and likely to create antagonism and irreparable tensions," said France's Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve.

A law banning the full-body "burkini" swimsuit in France would stoke tensions between communities and would be both unconstitutional and ineffective, Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve said in an interview published on Sunday.

France's highest administrative court, the Council of State, ruled on Friday against a decision to ban the burkini by the mayor of the resort town of Villeneuve-Loubet.

The ruling may set a precedent for the dozens of French towns that have also ordered burkini bans.

The issue has become politically charged at the start of party primaries ahead of next year's presidential election in France, with several leaders on the right and far-right calling for a law prohibiting the full-body swimming costume worn by some Muslim women.

Former President Nicolas Sarkozy who is staging a political comeback and is seeking the ticket of the conservative Les Republicains in primaries set for November, has called for a law allowing mayors to ban the burkini.

Read more:

<http://news.trust.org/item/20160828191522-4ktd0/>

## **France's Sarkozy says would change constitution to ban burkinis**

France's highest administrative court suspended on Friday a ban on burkinis.

Former French president Nicolas Sarkozy said on Monday he would change the country's constitution to ban full-body burkini swimsuits if he is re-elected to his former role in a vote next April.

Positioning himself as a defender of French values and tough on immigration, the conservative said last week that he would impose a nationwide ban on the swimwear that has divided the Socialist-led government and dominated French political debate through much of August.

France's highest administrative court suspended on Friday a ban on burkinis that had spread to a dozen French coastal cities on the grounds they violated fundamental liberties.

The burkini bans have exposed secular France's difficulties grappling with religious tolerance after Islamist militant attacks in a Normandy church and the Riviera city of Nice in July. Images of armed police apparently enforcing the ban on a woman on a beach in Nice have added to the controversy.

The bans had been justified on public order grounds, and Socialist Prime Minister Manuel Valls appeared to defend the town officials who imposed them.

After the court set the bans aside, however, Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve said a law against the garments would be ruled unconstitutional.

Read more:

<http://news.trust.org/item/20160829103903-856ck/>

## **Egypt's state TV under fire after suspending anchorwomen until they shed pounds**

Safaa Hegazy, the director of the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU), recently suspended eight female TV presenters. The decision wasn't based on technical reasons or poor work performance; rather, it was attributed to the women's weight. Hegazy gave the suspended presenters a deadline of one month to diet and achieve a "decent appearance."

Hegazy, a former presenter herself, was banned from appearing on the air in 2007 after a decision was issued by ERTU to ban overweight women from reading headline news. She had worked for 17 years as a newsreader for state TV.

The Aug. 9 decision was met by a fierce wave of criticism and condemnation from women's rights activists. Azza Soliman, the director of the Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance in Cairo, expressed her shock at the decision. She told Al-Monitor it demonstrates the extent of discrimination faced by women and highlights how they are restricted when society determines their value based on their appearance alone. According to Soliman, this results in women being viewed as commodities.

"We've yet to hear about a male presenter being relieved of his job for being overweight," said Soliman, adding that Egyptian women as a whole are subject to societal oppression by virtue of the fact that their appearance is judged using standards imposed by men. She stressed that men are not subject to such "degradation."

Read more:

<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/08/egypt-female-tv-presenters-suspended-overweight-controversy.html#ixzz4IkEBEo00>

## **Why some are accusing Rouhani of playing the woman card**

President Hassan Rouhani cited "lack of justice in the employment process" when he ordered the cancellation of the third Civil Service Examination on July 31. Over 2,800 job opportunities at 12 state bodies were up for grabs in the test, which was due to be held in September. Rouhani further tasked the Management and Planning Organization with ensuring "women's employment rights by amending the gender-related quotas and informing the Cabinet about the results."

The order was reportedly issued on the request of Vice President for Women and Family Affairs Shahindokht Molaverdi. On July 26, the semi-official news agency ISNA quoted her as saying that she had "sent a letter to Vice President Eshagh Jahangiri about gender discrimination at this year's exam."

Al-Monitor contacted Molaverdi for more insight into what prompted her to reportedly sound the alarm. She told Al-Monitor, "Based on the job titles and the number of positions allocated to women, we concluded that their share of the jobs has not been met."

Moreover, Molaverdi denied that Rouhani had acted upon her department's advice, saying, "We only monitored the public's and online community's reactions and reported them to the president. Thus, a decision was made to halt the exam until gender equality is fulfilled."

The vice president declined to further comment on the matter to Al-Monitor, saying that she "avoids creating controversy and prefers to have calm, expert-level discussion about it."

Read more:

<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/08/iran-civil-service-exam-rouhani-gender-discrimination.html#ixzz4IkGCBKz4>



*RESOURCES & CALLS*  
*BOOKS & REPORTS*

**The EU-Turkey Agreement Fails Refugee Women and Girls**



The closure of the Balkans route and the subsequent European Union-Turkey agreement to reduce the flow of refugees into Europe is nothing short of a protection and legal disaster for refugees, particularly women and girls.

Since the deal was passed, the situation for refugees in Greece has grown increasingly dire. In particular, women and girls, are vulnerable to alarming gaps in services and protection. They risk sexual assault, extortion, exploitation, and rights violations. Many experienced and ready-to-assist local and international aid groups on the ground have been sidelined.

In addition to poor living conditions, the absence of a clear and sufficiently-resourced and staffed legal protection system in Greece further compounds refugees' misery and anxiety.

Read more:

<http://reliefweb.int/report/turkey/eu-turkey-agreement-failing-refugee-women-and-girls>

For a direct link to report:

<http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/EU-Turkey-Refugee-Agreement-Failing.pdf>

**AWID 2016: Seed grant applications**

If you participated in the 13<sup>th</sup> AWID international Forum and it inspires you to develop a creative and bold idea to build collective power for rights and justice, we invite you to apply for a grant of USD \$5000 to support the transformation of your idea into action.

*Call for Seed Grant Applications from the 2016 AWID Forum Feminist Futures: Building Collective Power for Rights & Justice*

If the Forum inspires you to develop a creative and bold idea to build collective power for rights and justice, we invite you to apply for a grant of USD \$5000 to support the transformation of your idea into action.

**Eligibility**

Only participants who attended the Forum can apply.

Organisations or individuals that have previously been awarded an AWID seed grant will not be eligible.

Preference will be given to organizations with budgets under USD \$500,000.

**Criteria**

Your idea has to...

emerge from your experience at the 2016 AWID Forum

be directly related to the Forum theme, in particular, for mobilizing greater solidarity and collective power across diverse rights and justice movements

involve actors or organizations from at least two different movements

demonstrate the capacity to grow into something greater

be implemented between January - December 2017

Read more:

<http://www.awid.org/get-involved/seed-grant-applications>

## In solidarity with Nazra and Mozn



*Mozn Hassan, Executive Director of Nazra for Feminist Studies, is persecuted and under a travel ban in Egypt due to her women's rights activism.*

On June 27 2016, Mozn Hassan was banned from traveling by an order from the General Prosecutor in relation to Case No. 173 of 2011, commonly known as “the NGO Foreign Funding Case”. In 2011 the Egyptian government began to look into the foreign funding and registration of civil society organisations under Law 84, a draconian law which imposes unduly restrictions on civil society operations. Travel bans are not a new tactic but are routinely invoked by the government to suppress dissenting voices and attempt to silence the women's rights movement in Egypt, amongst others.

This documentary is prepared by Mozn's friends, who acknowledge and celebrate her meaningful contributions to advancing gender justice struggles in Egypt, the wider region and globally. Help us spread the word by signing the petition which calls for an end to the targeting and harassment of Mozn and other women human rights defenders in Egypt.

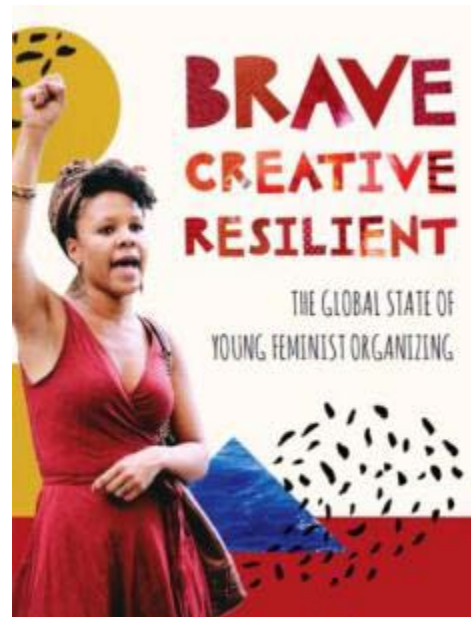
Link to documentary:

<http://www.awid.org/news-and-analysis/solidarity-nazra-and-mozn>

Link to petition:

[https://action.manifesta.net/petitions/insolidaritywithnazra-ngosnotcriminals?preferred\\_locale=en](https://action.manifesta.net/petitions/insolidaritywithnazra-ngosnotcriminals?preferred_locale=en)

## Brave, creative and resilient: The state of young feminist organizing



FRIDA the Young Feminist Fund launched at the 2016 AWID international Forum, an exclusive research that analyzed young feminist-led organizing from more than 1500 organizations around the world, over three years.

Over the past decade especially, young feminist-led organizations have garnered a reputation as outspoken, courageous, and creative movement-builders, pushing transformative change and social justice around the world. Until now, however, no comprehensive global study has been done to map key characteristics of young feminist organizing, including their current financial status. In 2014, FRIDA | The Young Feminist Fund and AWID's Young Feminist Activism Program embarked on a research effort to answer these very questions, and this report outlines key findings from this joint effort.

For a direct link to report:

<http://youngfeministfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/frida-awid-research-summary.pdf>

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