

# Legal Unit Annual Activities Report for 2024



القاهرة ٥٢

للأبحاث القانونية

CAIRO 52

LEGAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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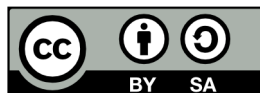
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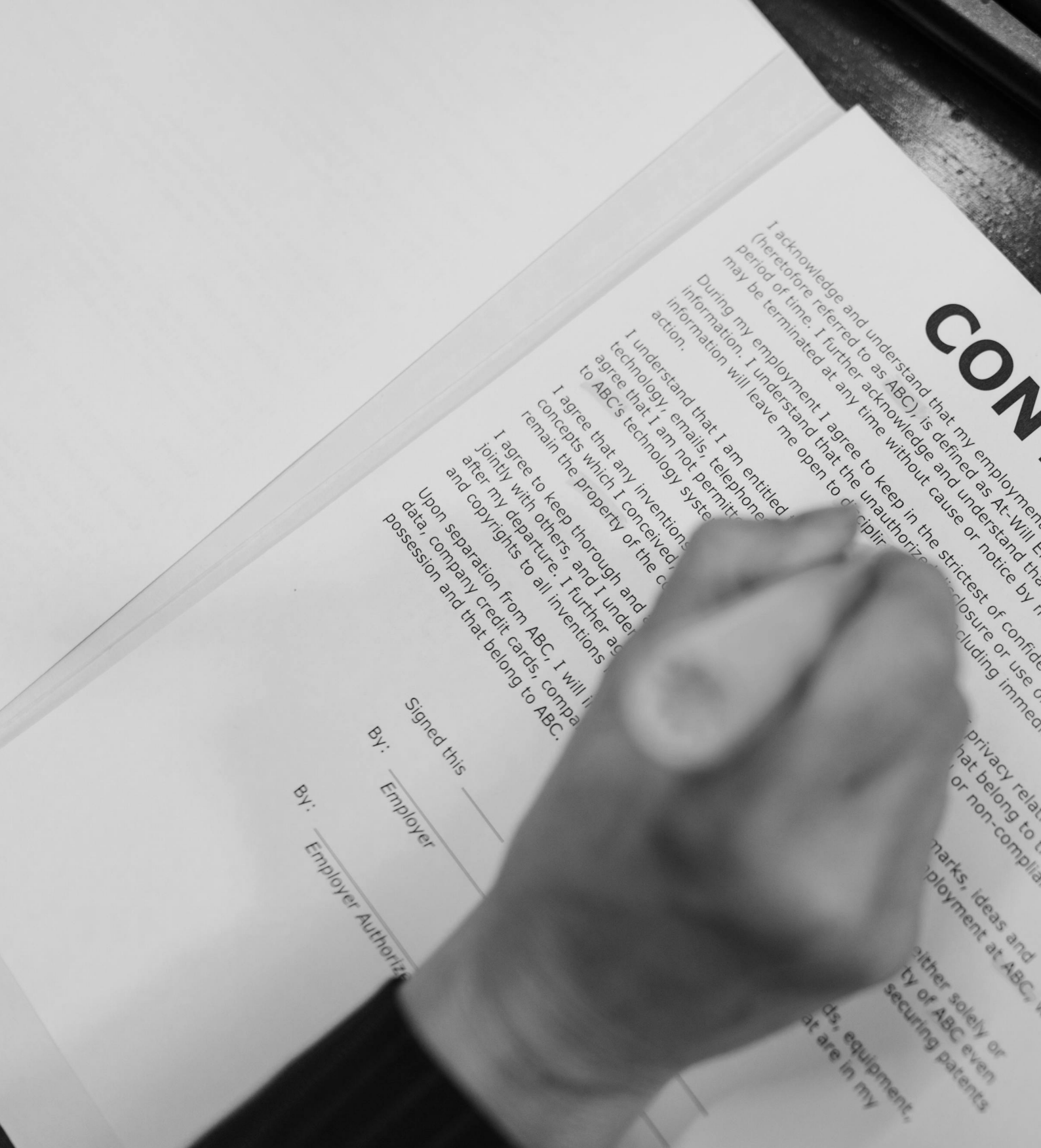
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# Executive Summary

Since 2020, the Cairo 52 Legal Research Institute has served as the sole provider of legal aid to individuals apprehended under Egypt's vice laws, employing an intersectional approach that acknowledges the discriminatory application of these laws against various demographic groups. This report encompasses the period from January to December 2024, during which 175 individuals availed themselves of the program's services. These services are categorized into two primary domains: pro bono legal representation for 60 individuals across 45 cases and pro bono legal consultation for 115 individuals.

The primary legal frameworks addressed in this context are the anti-sex work law (No. 10/1961) and the Cybercrime Law (No. 175/2018). These statutes impose penalties for alleged sex work and "digital immorality," targeting not only individuals but also third parties involved in facilitation. A significant discrepancy exists within the anti-sex work law, which categorizes arrested heterosexual men as witnesses rather than defendants.

## Pro Bono Legal Representation

In 2024, the program extended legal representation to 60 individuals, comprising queer men (27), cisgender women (25), heterosexual men (5), and transgender women (3). Arrests predominantly occurred in Alexandria and the Greater Cairo Metro Area, with the highest number of cases reported in January and March, each accounting for ten cases.

Key findings from the legal representation efforts include:

- **Arrest Methods:** Digital surveillance techniques, particularly the monitoring of social media and dating applications such as Grindr and Facebook, were the most prevalent, resulting in 28 cases. An intermediary method involving the use of phone numbers for entrapment accounted for 11 cases.
- **Charges and Penalties:** Charges have become increasingly standardized, with individuals frequently facing accusations of "habitual engagement in prostitution or debauchery" and "violating social and family values." The average prison sentence is approximately one year; however, the cybercrime law imposes substantial financial penalties, averaging 100,000 EGP (approximately US\$1,993.71).
- **Judicial System:** Cases involving solely anti-sex work charges are adjudicated in misdemeanor courts, whereas those with supplementary cybercrime charges are heard in economic courts, which possess enhanced access to digital forensic analysis.
- **Digital Forensic Analysis:** The use of forensic analysis has rendered digital evidence significantly more challenging for defendants to contest. This analysis authenticates evidence and accesses private communications on devices to substantiate claims of "habitual engagement," a practice legally permissible as judicial authorities may waive privacy protections in vice-related cases. Consequently, it becomes increasingly difficult to dispute the evidence, necessitating that defense strategies concentrate on procedural errors occurring during arrests rather than contesting the legitimacy of the charges.
- **Sentencing Outcomes:** The acquittal rate stood at 64%, with 29 out of the 45 cases resulting in acquittal. Nevertheless, severe penalties were also recorded, including a three-year prison sentence accompanied by a 300,000 EGP fine. A specific circuit within Alexandria's Economic Court was noted for issuing standardized, stringent judgments in "debauchery" cases, often relying on religious interpretations to justify convictions under the cybercrime law. On appeal, sentences were frequently reduced, with the most common outcome being six months' imprisonment and a 50,000 EGP fine.

## Pro Bono Legal Consultation

The institute received 115 requests for legal consultation regarding various issues:

- **Immigration and Asylum for Queer Egyptians:** This category represented the largest volume

of inquiries, with two workshops serving 30 individuals and an additional 20 receiving consultations via social media. The program also issued 5 support letters for asylum seekers.

- **Legal Gender Recognition:** Guidance was provided to 15 transgender individuals navigating Egypt's complex legal processes.
- **Gender-Affirming Healthcare:** 13 individuals sought counsel regarding access to healthcare services and legal options concerning medical negligence.
- **Military Service Exemption:** 12 individuals received legal advice on obtaining medical exemptions based on sexual orientation or gender identity.
- **Safety for Sex Workers:** A workshop for 10 sex workers was organized to disseminate information on legal rights and safety strategies.
- **Asylum-seeking in Egypt for Non-Egyptians:** 7 individuals, including queer refugees from Sudan and Gaza, sought assistance.
- **Pension for People Living with HIV:** 3 individuals inquired about the application process for the state pension.

The data and statistics compiled through these legal aid activities are leveraged in the institute's advocacy efforts, including submissions to United Nations human rights mechanisms. The program also participates in regional strategic litigation, although cases from 2023 are not encompassed within this report.



# Introduction

Since 2020, the Cairo 52 Legal Research Institute has served as the sole provider of legal aid for individuals arrested under vice laws in Egypt. While other legal aid programs in the country are identity-based—offering services exclusively to individuals who identify as transgender or queer—our legal aid initiative emphasizes the intersectionality of prosecution. This approach is grounded in the belief that vice laws have been utilized as tools of oppression against multiple demographic groups, and that such oppression is both multilayered and intersectional. For instance, when the vice police, the authorities responsible for enforcing vice laws, establish new patterns of arrest, these patterns affect all individuals targeted by these laws, rather than being confined to specific groups based on their identity. Similarly, when the courts develop new rationales or lines of argumentation for sentencing individuals under vice laws, the impacts are intersectional and extend beyond mere identity considerations.

In this report, vice laws primarily refer to two key components of the Egyptian legal system: the anti-sex work law No. 10/1961, which includes articles that directly penalize individuals allegedly engaged in sex work, such as habitual engagement and incitement of prostitution and debauchery, as well as articles that impose penalties on third parties, particularly those involved in facilitation and management. Notably, the law does not penalize heterosexual males who may be arrested under its provisions; instead, they are treated as witnesses rather than as accused individuals. Additionally, the Cybercrime Law No. 175/2018 was introduced with the intention of combating “digital prostitution” and “digital immorality.” This law includes articles that can penalize individuals allegedly engaged in sex work or immoral acts in the digital realm, encompassing violations of social and familial values and the creation of social media accounts with the intention of committing crimes. Like Law No. 10/1961, Law No. 175/2018 also contains provisions that can punish third parties, including charges related to the management of websites for illegal activities.

At Cairo 52’s legal aid program, we not only provide pro bono legal assistance but also engage in legal consultations with the communities we serve, including sex workers, individuals living with HIV, and members of the LGBTQ+ communities in Egypt. These consultations encompass guidance on the asylum process in Egypt, pension entitlements for individuals living with HIV, legal gender recognition for transgender individuals, safety protocols for women involved in sex work, and other related issues. From an advocacy perspective, the statistics and data derived from our legal aid initiatives undergo an analytical advocacy approach, which is subsequently utilized in our advocacy components, such as shadow submissions to the United Nations Human Rights mechanisms, including the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process.

The legal aid program also conducts strategic litigation as a key focus area and is currently engaged in multiple cases that originated in 2023 in Tunisia, Bahrain, and Egypt. This component of our legal aid programming is the only one operating on a regional scale. As these cases originated in 2023, they will not be covered in this report, which focuses solely on the 2024 period. The total number of beneficiaries during this period is 175 individuals, split among two key components: 60 recipients of pro bono legal representation and 115 recipients of pro bono legal counsel.



# **Pro Bono Legal Representation**

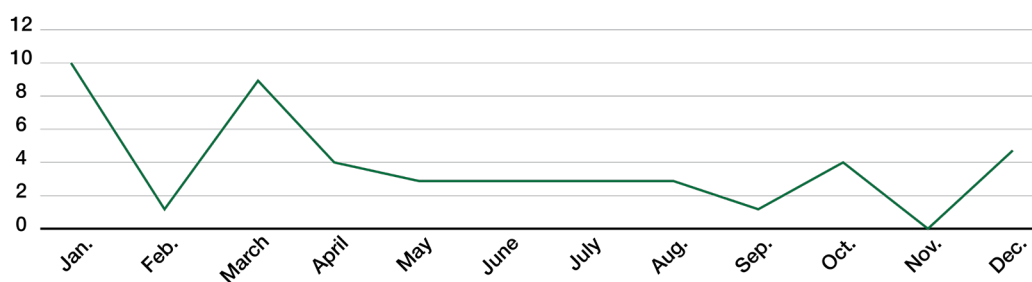
In 2025, the legal aid program provided pro bono legal representation for individuals arrested under vice laws, representing a total of sixty individuals across forty-five cases. The identities of these individuals, as identified by our legal team and police reports, include queer men, transgender women, heterosexual women, queer women, and heterosexual men (see Figure 1). Heterosexual men are frequently arrested as partners of women; the law does not criminalize men purchasing sex in heterosexual contexts but penalizes those who facilitate such transactions. Among the twenty-five cisgender women, approximately seven identified as queer; all but one have been arrested alongside criminal accusations, including allegations of offering pornographic lesbian videos and providing threesome services to men. Additionally, it is noteworthy that seven out of the sixty arrests involved non-Egyptians, all of whom were women, including two transgender women and five cisgender women. The nationalities of these non-Egyptians included two Sudanese, two Brazilians, one Turkish, one Kazakh, and one Colombian.

**Figure 1: Distribution of Arrests by Identities (N=60)**



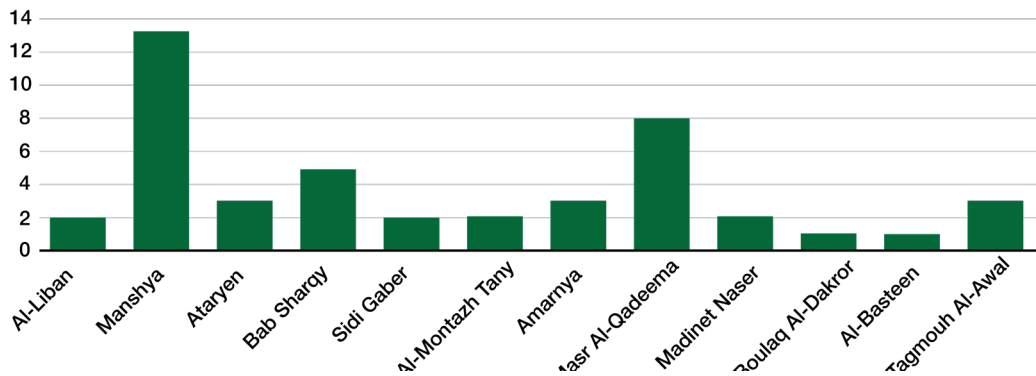
The frequency of arrests has fluctuated over the years, with the lowest incidence occurring in February, which recorded only one case, while both January and March reached a peak of ten cases each (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Frequency Throughout 2024 (N=45)**



The program's coverage is confined to two major urban areas in Egypt: Alexandria (N=27) and the Greater Cairo Metro Area (N=18), where all cases are documented. The police station reporting the highest number of cases is Manshya in Alexandria, which noted thirteen cases, followed by Masar Al-Qadeem in Cairo with eight cases (see Figure 3). Notably, within the Greater Cairo Metro Area, a new subdivision within the vice department has emerged as a significant entity in vice-related cases: the Women's Trafficking Division. Contrary to the expectation that this division would primarily focus on the protection and rescue of women from trafficking and forced sex work, it appears that, consistent with the prevailing practices of Egyptian authorities, the division's role is more oriented toward penalizing women perceived to be engaged in inappropriate sexual activities at the discretion of the arresting officer.

### Figure 3: Distribution of Cases per Jurisdiction (N=45)



Charges under Laws 10/1961 and 175/2018 have become standardized in these cases, as they are pre-determined by the public prosecutor's office. Individuals arrested singularly are frequently charged with «habitual engagement in prostitution or debauchery» and «inciting prostitution and debauchery» under the anti-sex work law 10/1961. Those apprehended in the digital realm also receive standardized charges under the cybercrime law 175/2018, including «establishing a social media account with the intention of committing illegal acts» and «violating social and family values.» In cases involving pairs, there is typically an additional charge for one individual of «facilitating prostitution or debauchery» and «operating a house with the intention of prostitution or debauchery.» Heterosexual men arrested are subject solely to these charges. However, queer men and women apprehended as pairs receive a combination of charges from both categories.

The prison sentences stipulated under both legislative frameworks exhibit notable similarity, averaging approximately one year in duration; however, the cybercrime legislation entails supplementary financial penalties, averaging 100,000 EGP (approximately US\$1,993.71). The modality and locale of arrest significantly influence not only the charges for which an individual will be prosecuted but also the judicial system designated to adjudicate the case. Individuals charged exclusively with offenses related to anti-sex work appear before misdemeanor courts, whereas those facing anti-sex work allegations in conjunction with cybercrime charges are presented before economic courts. Economic courts typically possess enhanced access to digital forensic analysis resources, which are instrumental in examining digital evidence at the time of arrest.

The prevalence of the digital domain as a favored venue for vice police operations may be ascribed to the relative ease of procuring evidence of alleged sex work through digital means, as opposed to traditional offline methods, in addition to the heightened financial penalties associated with convictions under this legal framework. Digital surveillance methods encompass the monitoring of social media platforms, predominantly Twitter and Facebook, for any inappropriate sexual conduct, as well as the scrutiny of dating applications, particularly Grindr, which is frequently utilized by queer individuals, and a more recent entrant in vice cases, an application known as Jodel, alongside less frequent usage of the app Top Escort.

Conversely, offline methods involve arrests conducted in hotel rooms and rented accommodations following tips regarding purported inappropriate sexual activities occurring within those premises. Notably, a novel intermediary method has also emerged, which involves the use of phone numbers. In this approach, the arresting officer asserts to have received intelligence from informants pertaining to a phone number associated with an individual purportedly offering inappropriate sexual services for remuneration. The informant subsequently entraps the individual linked to that phone number by orchestrating a meeting, culminating in an arrest. The public prosecution office has yet to delineate whether this method constitutes an offline or digital arrest technique, as it has been applied in certain

cases under the Cybercrime law and in others solely under the anti-sex work legislation (see Figure 4). Overall, digital methods account for twenty-eight instances, offline methods for five, and intermediary methods involving phone numbers for eleven.

## Figure 4: Distribution of Cases by Methods of Arrest (N=45)



Digital evidence has evolved significantly in cases reviewed by economic courts. In earlier instances, digital evidence could serve as a source of defense for plaintiffs; however, it has increasingly become difficult to contest. Previously, it was feasible for the defense to argue that digital evidence, such as photographs or screenshots, had been fabricated or manipulated by law enforcement. Additionally, the defense could assert that the mere possession of private nudes on an individual's phone did not constitute incitement or habitual engagement in debauchery or prostitution. Currently, most digital cases are referred for digital forensic analysis to assess the evidence presented. This analysis verifies the authenticity of videos, photographs, and screenshots used as evidence, conducts facial recognition for transgender and gender non-conforming individuals to establish their identity in the digital evidence, and, importantly, provides access to social media platforms, WhatsApp, Telegram, and other applications on the plaintiffs' phones, thereby assisting in proving the «habitual engagement» element through private conversations that indicate the individual has been offering sexual services or selling pornographic videos or nudes.

While Egyptian law and the constitution protect private conversations, such protections can be waived by judicial authorities in all cases, including those involving vice. Consequently, forensic analysis operates within legal parameters to examine phones that now serve as evidence in legal proceedings. As a result, defendants face greater challenges in disputing digital evidence and have increasingly relied on technicalities associated with the arrest to secure acquittals or reduced sentences. These technicalities primarily focus on due process rights that are often violated by arresting officers; the defense typically does not contest the validity of the vice or cybercrime charges per se but rather emphasizes the illegality of the arrest and the collection of evidence.

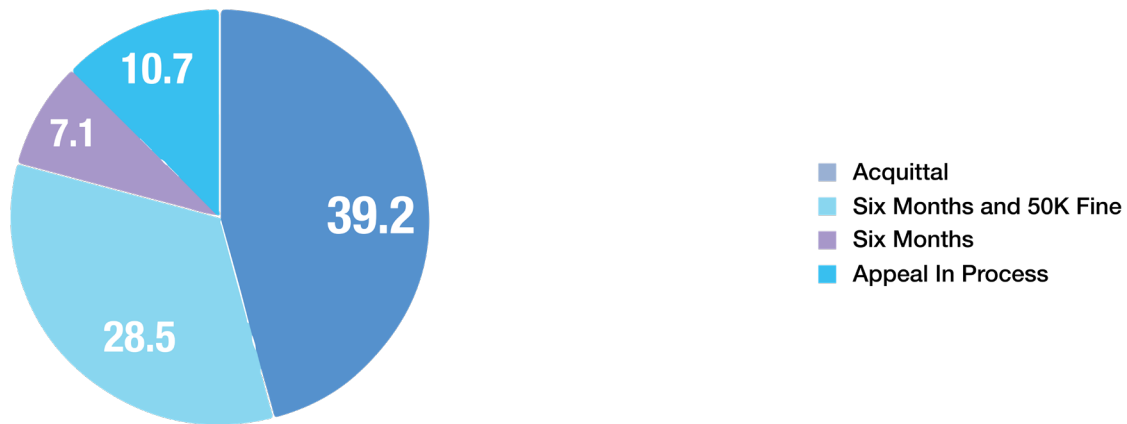
Of the sentencing outcomes analyzed, twenty-nine cases out of forty-five resulted in acquittals, yielding a 64% acquittal rate. Eighteen of these acquittals occurred at the first instance, while eleven were recorded at the appellate level. Among the most severe sentences documented is a three-year imprisonment term accompanied by a fine of 300,000 EGP (US\$5,981.14), affecting sixteen cases at the first instance. Another sentence of three years' imprisonment with a fine of 100,000 EGP (US\$1,993.71) pertains to three cases at the first instance (see Figure 5). Notably, almost all of these sentences originate exclusively from one circuit: Circuit Number Four Misdemeanor of Alexandria's Economic Court, which employs standardized judgment templates and sentencing procedures, particularly for debauchery cases. In these instances, a unique interpretation of the Qur'an and Hadith is utilized to justify the classification of acts of debauchery as criminalized under the cybercrime law, framed as violations of family and social values, even in cases where the necessary elements to substantiate sex work were absent.

**Figure 5: Distribution of First-Degree Sentencing (N=45)**



Such sentencing patterns complicate the prospects for acquittal upon appeal, as appellate courts exhibit less incentive to reduce sentences from three years to acquittals compared to reductions from one or two years to acquittals. Consequently, most sentences tend to be reduced rather than eliminated, with the most common appellate outcomes being six months imprisonment and a 50,000 EGP (US\$996.86) fine, which account for eight cases out of twenty-seven that reached the appeal process (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Distribution of Appeal Sentencing (N=28)**





# **Legal Consultation**

## Pro Bono Legal Consultation:

Our legal consultation services are available through our website and social media platforms, with plans to introduce phone assistance in the future. In 2024, we received 115 consultation requests, categorized as follows:

Requests for Military Service Exemption based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, for which we provided legal advice on how to approach the medical exemption achievable on the basis of SOGI from military service in Egypt to 12 individuals.

Requests for Legal Gender Recognition, given Egypt's complex legal framework regarding the provision of legal gender recognition for transgender individuals. As the situation remains arbitrary, vague, and at times inaccessible, we have experienced an increase in requests for guidance on obtaining legal gender recognition, amounting to 15 individuals in this cycle. While our team is dedicated to providing legal consultation, it is incumbent upon the individuals to submit their applications for legal gender recognition themselves; thus, our role is to support and guide them in accessing the process.

Gender-affirming healthcare is a critical issue for transgender individuals in Egypt, primarily occurring in clandestine settings due to restrictive medical policies against transgender people. We have received inquiries regarding access to these services, associated costs, risks involved, and legal recourse for medical negligence. The total number of requests related to this process is 13 individuals.

Immigration and asylum-seeking for queer Egyptians: There has been a marked increase in consultation requests pertaining to queer immigration for Egyptians, particularly concerning the asylum application process abroad. In response, we conducted two workshops to discuss immigration opportunities through education, employment, family reunification, and asylum-seeking within the European Union for queer individuals. A total of 30 individuals attended these workshops, with an additional 20 individuals seeking consultations through our social media platforms. Furthermore, we have observed a rising number of requests for documentation related to incidents of violence and state oppression, as well as requests for support letters for queer individuals who require such letters for asylum-seeking purposes. The total number of individuals requesting these support letters is 5.

Asylum-seeking in Egypt for non-Egyptians: With the outbreak of conflict in Sudan and Gaza, there has been an influx of refugees into Egypt, including queer individuals. A significant challenge for individuals from Gaza is the difficulty in obtaining official registration as asylum seekers with the UNHCR in Egypt, the authority responsible for such registrations. This is complicated by jurisdictional issues, as Palestinian refugees are technically expected to be registered in Jordan and Lebanon rather than Egypt. The situation remains partially unresolved, as we continue to receive reports from transgender individuals from Gaza experiencing difficulties with UNHCR registration in Egypt. The total number of people requesting legal consultation for asylum seeking in Egypt is 7.

Pension for People Living with HIV (PLHIV): Egypt offers a limited pension for PLHIV to assist with living expenses. Most inquiries we received pertained to the application process and the documentation required to obtain this pension. The total number of inquiries was 3.

Safety for Sex Workers: In response to an increasing number of inquiries from both queer and non-queer sex workers regarding the legalities surrounding their profession in Egypt, we have organized a workshop aimed at addressing these issues for both demographics. The workshop will cover pertinent topics, including the legal framework governing sex work in Egypt, reasons leading to arrests, legal rights in the event of arrest, strategies to avoid entrapment, and types of evidence that may be used against sex workers. The total number of attendees is limited to 10 individuals.



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