

Islamic Family Law Terms: English–Arabic Glossary

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77 terms for family matters involving Arabic-speaking clients: marriage (nikah), dower (mahr), divorce (talaq, khul', faskh), children, maintenance and inheritance. Alphabetical (A–Z) with transliteration, an interpreter's watch-list and the English family court terms most often confused with them. Arabic is Modern Standard Arabic. Published October 2026.

Terminology only. This is not legal advice and not expert evidence on Islamic law. The terms describe religious and legal concepts as they are used in the country concerned; their legal effect in England and Wales is a matter for the court. Prepared as a revision aid; check against current official sources and the speaker's own dialect before an assignment.

ENGLISH	العربية
A	
Adoption (tabanni) <i>tabanni</i> Creates a parent–child relationship and lineage. Not the same as kafala. Render the term; do not explain the law.	التبني
Annulment, judicial dissolution (faskh) <i>faskh</i> Ends the marriage contract. Not talaq.	فسخ النكاح
Arbitrators, the two (hakamayn) <i>hakamayn</i> One from each family, appointed to try to reconcile spouses in a dispute (shiqaq).	الحكمان
Arranged marriage Distinct from forced marriage. Do not use the same Arabic wording for both.	الزواج المرتب
B	
Betrothal, engagement (khitba) <i>khitba</i> A promise to marry. It is not a marriage contract.	الخطبة
C	
Child custody, physical care (hadana) <i>hadana</i> Day-to-day care of a young child. Not the same as guardianship (wilaya).	الحضانة
Child maintenance <i>nafaqat al-awlad</i>	نفقة الأولاد
Consolatory payment on divorce (mut'at al-talaq) <i>mut'at al-talaq</i> A payment to the divorced wife. Not temporary marriage (zawaj al-mut'a).	متعة الطلاق
Consummation <i>dukhul</i> Render neutrally and accurately. Do not soften it or add euphemism.	الدخول (بالزوجة)
Contact, visitation (ru'ya) <i>ru'ya</i> Scope varies by country. Render the term the speaker uses.	الرؤية

Contract of marriage ('aqd)

'aqd al-zawaj / 'aqd al-nikah

'Aqd means contract and is also used for the certificate. Check which document is meant.

عقد الزواج / عقد النكاح

Customary, unregistered marriage (zawaj 'urfi)

zawaj 'urfi

A marriage contract not registered with the authorities. Not a "common-law marriage".

الزواج العرفي

D**Deferred dower (mu'akhkhar)**

mu'akhkhar

The part of the dower payable later. Keep the amount and currency as spoken.

المؤخر (مؤخر الصداق)

Delegated right of divorce ('isma, tafwid)

'isma / tafwid

The right to pronounce talaq delegated to the wife, often written into the contract.

العصمة / تفويض الطلاق

Discord between spouses (shiqaq)

shiqaq

A ground for judicial intervention in some countries.

الشقاق

Dissolution for harm (darar)

tatliq lil-darar

Render "harm" literally. Scope varies by country.

التطليق للضرر

Divorce, approved and disapproved forms (talaq al-sunna, talaq al-bid'a)

talaq al-sunna / talaq al-bid'a

Describes how and when talaq was pronounced. Render both terms literally and leave the classification to the court.

طلاق السنة / طلاق البدعة

Divorce by mutual agreement (mubara'a)

mubara'a

Spouses agree to separate and release each other's claims. Compare khul'.

المباراة

Divorce, irrevocable (talaq ba'in)

talaq ba'in

The husband cannot take the wife back without a new contract. Not the English "final order".

الطلاق البائن

Divorce, judicial (tatliq)

tatliq

Divorce ordered by a judge, usually on the wife's petition.

التطليق (القضائي)

Divorce, revocable (talaq raj'i)

talaq raj'i

The husband may take the wife back during the iddah (raj'a).

الطلاق الرجعي

Divorce, triple (al-talaq al-thalath)

al-talaq al-thalath

Keep as spoken: once, three times, or in one sitting. Do not shorten to "divorced".

الطلاق الثلاث

Dower (mahr, sadaq)

mahr / sadaq

Given by the groom to the bride. Not a "dowry".

المهر / الصداق

ENGLISH	العربية
Dower, prompt (muqaddam) muqaddam The part of the dower paid at or before the marriage.	المقدم (مقدم الصداق)
Dower, proper (mahr al-mithl) mahr al-mithl Set by comparison with similar women when no amount was agreed.	مهر المثل
E	
Engagement gifts (shabka) shabka Jewellery given by the groom at engagement. Not the dower unless the speaker says so.	الشبكة
Equality of status in marriage (kafa'a) kafa'a Its weight differs between schools of law and between countries.	الكفاءة (في الزواج)
Estate of a deceased person (tarika) tarika	التركة
Expiation (kaffara) kaffara An act of atonement, for example after zihar.	الكفارة
F	
Fatwa fatwa A religious opinion, not a court judgment.	الفتوى
Fixed inheritance shares (fara'id) fara'id	الفرائض
Forced marriage A marriage without free consent. Do not confuse with arranged marriage.	الزواج القسري (الإكراه على الزواج)
G	
Guardian of the bride (wali) wali The marriage guardian, usually a male relative. Not a children's guardian in English proceedings.	الولي (في الزواج)
Guardianship (wilaya) wilaya Legal authority over a person or property. Not the same as hadana.	الولاية
H	
Heir warith	الوارث
I	
Iddah, waiting period after divorce 'iddat al-talaq The waiting period before the wife may remarry. Its length depends on the cause. Do not supply a figure.	عدة الطلاق
Iddah, waiting period after the husband's death 'iddat al-wafat	عدة الوفاة

ENGLISH	العربية
Inheritance mirath	الميراث (الإرث)
Interim maintenance al-nafaqa al-mu'qqata	النفقة المؤقتة
J	
Judge (qadi) qadi	القاضي
Judgment in absentia hukm ghiyabi	الحكم الغيابي
Judicial separation (tafriq qada'i) tafriq qada'i	التفريق القضائي
K	
Kafala (care of an orphan or foundling) kafala Care of a child without creating lineage. Not adoption. In Gulf usage kafala also means employer sponsorship.	الكفالة
Khul' (divorce at the wife's request) khul' The wife obtains a divorce by returning or waiving financial rights. Not talaq.	الخلع
L	
Li'an (sworn exchange between spouses) li'an A formal oath procedure after an accusation of adultery or a denial of paternity. Render precisely.	اللعان
Lineage, paternity (nasab) nasab	النسب
M	
Maintenance during iddah nafaqat al-'idda	نفقة العدة
Maintenance (nafaqa) nafaqa Scope varies by country and usually includes food, clothing and housing. Check what is claimed.	النفقة
Marriage by proxy zawaj bil-wakala	الزواج بالوكالة
Marriage ceremony, signing of the contract ('aqd al-qiran, katb al-kitab) 'aqd al-qiran / katb al-kitab	عقد القران / كتب الكتاب
Marriage certificate wathiqat al-zawaj / qasimat al-zawaj See 'aqd. Check whether the contract or the certificate is meant.	وثيقة الزواج / قسيمة الزواج
Marriage conditions written into the contract (shurut) shurut	الشروط في عقد الزواج

ENGLISH	العربية
Marriage, invalid or irregular (zawaj fasid) zawaj fasid Schools of law distinguish it from void marriage (batil). Render the term as spoken.	الزواج الفاسد
Marriage, misyar zawaj al-misyar A marriage in which the wife waives some rights, such as housing or maintenance. Known in Gulf usage.	زواج المسيار
Marriage (nikah, zawaj) nikah / zawaj Nikah is the marriage contract. The word alone does not say whether a civil ceremony or registration also took place.	النكاح / الزواج
Marriage officiant (ma'dhun) ma'dhun Authorised to conduct and record marriage contracts in some countries.	المأذون
Marriage, polygamous (ta'addud al-zawjat) ta'addud al-zawjat	تعدد الزوجات
Marriage registration tawthiq al-zawaj	توثيق الزواج
Marriage, temporary (zawaj al-mut'a) zawaj al-mut'a Recognised in Twelver Shi'a law, not in Sunni law. Not the same as mut'at al-talaq.	زواج المتعة
Marriage, void (zawaj batil) zawaj batil	الزواج الباطل
Missing spouse (mafqud) mafqud A spouse whose whereabouts are unknown. Not simply "absent".	المفقود
Mufti mufti Gives fatwas. Not a judge.	المفتي
N	
Nushuz (marital discord) nushuz Its range of meaning is contested. Keep the speaker's word and flag it rather than choosing a gloss.	النشوز
O	
Overnight contact (istidafa) istidafa Scope varies by country.	الاستضافة
P	
Personal status court mahkamat al-ahwal al-shakhsiyya	محكمة الأحوال الشخصية
Personal status law qanun al-ahwal al-shakhsiyya The family law of many Arab countries.	قانون الأحوال الشخصية

ENGLISH	العربية
Petition, claim (da'wa) da'wa	الدعوى
R	
Reconciliation (sulh) sulh	الصلح
Revocation of talaq (raj'a) raj'a Taking the wife back during the iddah of a revocable talaq.	الرجعة
S	
Sharia council (England and Wales) A community body that gives religious opinions, including religious divorces. Not part of the court system. Do not render it as "court".	الهيئة الشرعية / المجلس الشرعي
Sharia court mahkama shar'iyya A state court applying personal status law in some countries. Not the same as a sharia council.	المحكمة الشرعية
T	
Talaq (divorce pronounced by the husband) talaq Keep the exact words used and how many times. Not the same as khul', tatliq or faskh.	الطلاق
W	
Wakala (agency, power of attorney) wakala	الوكالة
Wife's maintenance (nafaqat al-zawja) nafaqat al-zawja	نفقة الزوجة
Will (wasiyya) wasiyya	الوصية
Witnesses to the marriage contract shahida al-'aql Arabic dual form: two witnesses.	شاهدا العقد
Z	
Zihar (likening the wife to a forbidden relative) zihar A husband's declaration. Followed by expiation (kaffara) in classical law.	الظهار

Interpreter's watch-list

English and Arabic words that change meaning in this setting. Check before rendering.

dowry	In English it often means a payment from the bride's family. Mahr (المهر / الصداق) is paid by the groom to the bride. The bride's household goods (الجهاز) are a different thing.
divorce	Talaq, khul', tatliq, mubara'a and faskh work differently. If the speaker says only طلاق, render it as such and do not add a mechanism. If they name one, keep it.
"I divorced her" / "he divorced me"	Keep the speaker's exact words, the verb used and how many times. Do not decide whether a valid talaq took place. That is for the court.

custody	Hadana (day-to-day care) and wilaya (guardianship) are different. Current English proceedings speak of child arrangements, not custody. Confirm which is meant before rendering.
guardian	Wali (marriage guardian), guardian of a child's property, and a children's guardian in English proceedings are three different roles. Render the role, not just the word.
adoption / kafala	Kafala is care of a child without lineage and is not adoption (tabanni). In the Gulf it can also mean employer sponsorship. Check the context.
mut'a	Two things share the name: temporary marriage (زواج المتعة) and the consolatory payment on divorce (متعة الطلاق). Do not merge them.
marriage, nikah	Nikah is the contract. It does not say whether the marriage was registered or whether a civil ceremony took place. Do not fill the gap.
'aqd	It means contract and is also used for the certificate. Check which document is meant.
iddah	The waiting period depends on the cause (divorce, death, pregnancy). Do not supply a length unless the speaker does.
sharia council / sharia court	A sharia council in England and Wales is a community body, not a court. A sharia court in some countries is a state court. Keep the two apart.
fatwa	A religious opinion given by a mufti. It is not a court judgment.
forced / arranged marriage	These are different and must not share one Arabic wording. Keep the speaker's own word.
Hijri dates	Marriage and divorce dates are often given in the Hijri calendar. Do not convert them on the spot. See the briefing on Hijri and Gregorian dates.
amounts and currency	Mahr is often stated in dinars, riyals, dirhams or gold. Keep the currency as spoken and do not convert.
spelling and pronunciation	In Yemeni and Gulf speech ق is often pronounced like g, so talaq can sound like "talag". Messages in Latin letters ("Arabizi") spell the same word several ways, for example talaq, tlag or 6alaq. Check the Arabic original before relying on a transcript.

UK family court terms often confused with these

Renderings follow the court glossary at mustafa-ahmed-interpreter.co.uk/resources/glossary.

conditional order	الأمر المشروط (بالطلاق)	Formerly "decree nisi".
final order	الأمر النهائي (بالطلاق)	Formerly "decree absolute". Not «طلاق بائن».
child arrangements order	أمر ترتيبات الطفل (الإقامة والتواصل)	Replaces "custody" and "access". Compare hadana, wilaya and ru'ya, which are not exact equivalents.
parental responsibility	المسؤولية الأبوية	An English legal status. Not identical to wilaya or hadana.
financial remedy	التسوية المالية	Separate from mahr and nafaqa.
adoption order	أمر التبني	Legal transfer of parenthood. It differs from kafala (الكفالة).
special guardianship order	أمر الوصاية الخاصة	Compare kafala. Not identical.

Arabic language support for family matters

Remote UK-wide, instructed directly. Yemeni Arabic is my mother tongue; I also work in Gulf (including Kuwaiti), Sudanese, Syrian, Iraqi and Modern Standard Arabic. NRPSI Full Registration No. 17911 · CTC Home Office registered. bookings@mustafa-ahmed-interpreter.co.uk · mustafa-ahmed-interpreter.co.uk. Language services only; no legal advice is given.