



**2025**

Research Report

# Human Rights 1

## The Question of Forced Marriage



Foundation

A THIMUN Affiliated Conference

# Background

In a forced marriage, one or both parties enter into wedlock without their complete and voluntary agreement, often due to coercion or pressure from relatives or community members. This is a worldwide problem, particularly common in areas like Africa, South Asia, the Middle East, and specific communities in Europe and North America. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by forced marriage, which is frequently associated with child marriage, cultural practices, and patriarchal systems.

The underlying factors include societal pressures to maintain family honour, poverty, and economic necessity, with families occasionally leveraging marriage to resolve conflicts or obtain financial advantages. In areas of conflict, the incidence of forced marriages rises as families look for security or stability.

Forced marriage infringes upon international human rights, especially the right to marry freely as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and often leads to gender-based violence. Although there are international agreements like CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) aimed at eradicating this issue, significant obstacles remain, including cultural resistance, inadequate enforcement, and the seclusion of victims.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Definition of Forced Marriage

A forced marriage is one where one or both people do not or cannot consent to the marriage, and pressure or abuse is used to force them into the marriage. This includes:

- Marriages where physical pressure like threats or violence is used
- Marriages involving emotional or psychological pressure
- Marriages where one party lacks the mental capacity to consent
- Any action taken to make someone marry before age of 18, even without pressure or abuse

### Key Points

- Forced marriage is illegal in the UK and considered a form of domestic abuse and human rights violation
- It differs from an arranged marriage, where both parties consent to family assistance in finding a spouse
- Forced marriage can involve people of any age, gender, ethnicity or religion<sup>5</sup>
- The pressure to marry can take many forms, including physical, emotional, psychological or financial coercion

## Related Concepts

**Consent:** For a marriage to be consensual, it must be entered into freely by both people. Some individuals with certain learning disabilities or severe mental health conditions may legally lack the capacity to consent to marriage.

**Child Marriage:** Any action to make someone marry before the age of 18 is considered forced marriage and is illegal, even without overt pressure.

**Marriage by Abduction:** Also known as bride kidnapping, this involves abducting a woman to marry her, often involving rape. It occurs in some cultures but is widely condemned.

## Overview of Current Issue

**Child marriage:** A significant portion of forced marriages involve minors, leading to long-term physical, psychological, and economic harm.

**Cultural and social norms:** In some communities, forced marriage is seen as a way to maintain family honour or resolve conflicts.

**Economic pressures:** Families may force marriages for financial security, dowries, or to alleviate economic burdens.

**Conflict and displacement:** Forced marriages often increase in conflict zones where families seek to protect children or stabilise their situations.

## Relevant Countries and Organisations

### 1. **United Nations (UN):**

- **UN Women:** Advocates for gender equality and works to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, including forced marriage.
- **UNICEF:** Focuses on protecting children's rights and has initiatives aimed at preventing child marriage, which often overlap with forced marriage.

### 2. **World Health Organization (WHO):**

- Addresses the health implications of forced and early marriages, advocating for the protection of girls' health and well-being.

### 3. **Human Rights Watch (HRW):**

- Conducts research and advocacy on human rights violations, including forced marriage, providing reports and recommendations to governments and international bodies.

### 4. **Amnesty International:**

- Campaigns against forced marriage and advocates for the rights of women and girls, calling for legal reforms and protection mechanisms.

### 5. **International Center for Research on Women (ICRW):**

- Researches the impact of early and forced marriage, providing data to inform policy and advocacy efforts.

### Countries Combating Forced Marriage

1. **Bangladesh:**

- Has made legislative efforts to combat child and forced marriage, including raising the legal age for marriage and launching awareness campaigns.

2. **Turkey:**

- Engaged in efforts to eliminate forced marriages and has legal frameworks in place, though enforcement remains a challenge.

3. **India:**

- While forced marriage is prevalent, the government has enacted laws against child marriage and various NGOs work to prevent forced marriages, especially in rural areas.

4. **United Kingdom:**

- Implemented the **Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007**, which provides legal protection for victims and raises awareness about forced marriage.

### Countries Where Forced Marriage is Prevalent

1. **Afghanistan:**

- Forced and child marriages are common due to cultural practices and ongoing conflict, with many girls married off at a young age.

2. **Pakistan:**

- Cultural norms support forced marriages, particularly in rural areas, with significant instances of early and coerced unions.

3. **Somalia:**

- Forced marriage is widespread, often justified by traditional practices and exacerbated by instability and poverty.

4. **Yemen:**

- High rates of child marriage and forced marriage due to cultural practices, poverty, and ongoing conflict.

5. **Sub-Saharan African countries (e.g., Niger, Chad):**

- Many countries in this region experience high rates of child and forced marriages, often linked to poverty and cultural practices.

## Possible Solutions

● **Strengthening Legal Frameworks:**

- **Criminalization:** Enact and enforce laws against forced marriage and child marriage, providing legal protections for victims.

● **Raising Awareness and Education:**

- **Public Campaigns:** Educate communities about the harms of forced marriage and the importance of consent.
- **School Programs:** Implement educational initiatives to teach children about their rights and healthy relationships.

- **Empowering Women and Girls:**
  - **Economic Opportunities:** Provide vocational training and economic support to reduce dependence on families.
  - **Access to Education:** Promote girls' education to help them avoid forced marriages.
- **Community Engagement:**
  - **Involve Leaders:** Engage community and religious leaders to promote the negative impacts of forced marriage.
  - **Support Local NGOs:** Fund organisations working to prevent forced marriage and support victims.
- **Support Services for Victims:**
  - **Shelters and Counseling:** Establish safe havens and counselling services for those fleeing forced marriages.
  - **Legal Aid:** Offer legal assistance to help victims navigate the legal system.
- **International Cooperation:**
  - **Cross-Border Initiatives:** Collaborate internationally to address forced marriage, especially in cross-border cases.
  - **Global Campaigns:** Participate in international efforts to combat forced marriage and child marriage.
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- **Monitoring and Data Collection:**
  - **Research:** Gather data on forced marriage prevalence to inform policies.
  - **Monitor Enforcement:** Establish mechanisms to track the effectiveness of laws and programs.

## Relevant Websites and Articles

### Welsh Women's aid

Explanation of forced marriage

<https://welshwomensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-forced-marriage/>

### United Nations

Child and forced marriage

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/women/child-and-forced-marriage-including-humanitarian-settings>

### Karmanirvana

What is forced marriage

<https://karmanirvana.org.uk/get-help/what-is-forced-marriage/>





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