

**Request for information pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 24/23
“Strengthening efforts to prevent and eliminate child, early and forced
marriage: challenges, achievements, best practices and implementation gaps”**

Contribution by the United Kingdom of Great Britain & Northern Ireland

The UK Government is committed to tackling and preventing forced marriage. Prevention is at the heart of our work and we want to safeguard and protect all those who may be at risk.

The Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) is the Government’s delivery arm for tackling cases of forced marriage. It provides direct assistance to victims and undertakes a full programme of outreach activity to practitioners and communities to ensure that people working with victims are fully informed of how to handle such cases. The FMU operates both inside the UK, where support is provided to any individual, and overseas, where consular assistance is provided to British nationals, including dual nationals.

The Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007 provides a specific civil remedy to prevent forced marriage and to assist victims where a marriage has already taken place – the Forced Marriage Protection Order (FMPO). The Government now plans to criminalise forced marriage and breach of an FMPO, and the parliamentary process for introducing new legislation is ongoing

As forced marriage still remains a hidden practice, it is difficult to ascertain the actual number of forced marriages in the UK. In 2012, the Forced Marriage Unit provided advice or support in almost 1500 cases. We know this does not reflect the full scale of the abuse, and many more cases are not reported. Research carried out by the then Department for Children, Schools and Families in 2009 estimated that a national prevalence of reported cases of forced marriage in England was between 5000 and 8000.

This note provides a summary of the UK response on forced marriage. It includes:

1. An overview of the UK response
2. Key facts on the criminalisation of forced marriage
3. Details of outreach activities
4. Forced Marriage Unit Statistics 2012

1. Overview of the UK response

The Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) is a joint Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and Home Office Unit which was set up in January 2005 to lead on the Government's forced marriage policy, outreach and casework. It operates both inside the UK, where support is provided to any individual, and overseas, where consular assistance is provided to British nationals, including dual nationals.

The FMU operates a public helpline to provide advice and support to victims of forced marriage as well as to professionals dealing with cases. The assistance provided ranges from simple safety advice, through to aiding a victim to prevent their unwanted spouse moving to the UK ('reluctant sponsor' cases), and, in extreme circumstances, to rescues of victims held against their will overseas.

The FMU undertake an extensive outreach and training programme of around 100 events a year, targeting both professionals and potential victims. The FMU also carry out media campaigns, such as 2012's 'right to choose' summer campaign, where the FCO commissioned three short films to raise awareness amongst young people at risk of being taken overseas for forced marriage.

The Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007 came into force on 25 November 2008, and offers civil remedies to protect victims or potential victims of forced marriage, and protecting those already in such marriages. Orders can include forbidding a person to be taken overseas, or ordering that they be returned to the UK.

The Government is committed to ending forced marriage – the Prime Minister announced in June 2012 that the act of forcing someone to marry will become a criminal offence. The parliamentary process for new legislation is ongoing. However, we know that legislation alone is not enough which is why we remain focused on prevention, support, and protection for victims and those at risk of becoming victims.

We are also criminalising the breach of Forced Marriage Protection Orders (FMPOs) to increase protection for victims and ensure perpetrators are properly punished.

2. Key facts on the criminalisation of forced marriage

The new law will protect victims of forced marriage from a practice which is a fundamental breach of basic human rights, and which is frequently accompanied by physical, psychological, financial, sexual and emotional abuse.

Benefits

- Ensure victims of forced marriage are protected against a practice which is a fundamental breach of basic human rights.
- Send a clear message that forcing a person to marry against their will is unacceptable.
- Provide greater clarity for frontline professionals and communities that the practice of forced marriage is totally unacceptable and will not be tolerated in the UK.
- Decrease the number of victims being forced into marriage.
- Deter offenders from actively seeking to force someone into marriage.

Main elements

- Criminalisation of forcing someone to marry against their will.
- Criminalises the luring of a person to a territory of a state for the purpose of forcing them to enter into marriage.
- Using deception with the intention of causing another person to leave the United Kingdom for the intention of forcing that person to marry.
- Criminalisation of a FMPO breach.

Penalties

Forced Marriage offence

- Maximum penalty on conviction on indictment will imprisonment for a term not exceeding seven years and/or a fine.
- Maximum penalty on summary conviction will be imprisonment for a term not exceeding twelve months imprisonment and/or a fine.

FMPO breach

- Maximum penalty on conviction on indictment will imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years and/or a fine.
- Maximum penalty on summary conviction will be imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months imprisonment and/or a fine.

3. Outreach activities

In 2013 the FMU delivered approximately 100 outreach events to a number of statutory agencies and other organisations across a range of sectors, including:

- Local Authority Safeguarding Teams across England and Wales
- Police Forces across England and Wales
- The UK Judiciary
- Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) across England and Wales
- Women's Aid
- Victim Support
- A variety of Charities and NGOs
- Children and Families across Borders
- Childline
- The Educational Show in Birmingham
- A number of secondary schools and colleges across England and Wales
- A number of Airport officials across the UK, including UKBA
- Presentations at British Embassies and High Commissions around the world
- Speeches or presentations at a variety of events including the Somali women's event in London, the Intergovernmental Consultations on Asylum, Migration and Refugees in Brussels and the International Conference on Forced Marriage and Honour-based Violence in Orebro.

We are also reaching out to communities through social media such as Facebook and our Twitter account @FMUnit

4. Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) Statistics - January to December 2012

In 2012, the FMU gave advice or support related to a possible forced marriage in 1485 cases¹.

Where the age was known, 13% involved victims² below 15 years, 22% involved victims aged 16-17, 30% involved victims aged 18-21, 19% involved victims aged 22-25, 8% involved victims aged 26-30, 8% involved victims aged 31+.

82% involved female victims and 18% involved male victims.

The FMU handled cases involving 60 different countries³.

Within the UK the regional distribution was: East Anglia 2%, East Midlands 3%, London 21%, North East 1%, North West 8%, Northern Ireland 0.2%, Scotland 1%, South East 11%, South West 2%, West Midlands 16%, Wales 1%, Yorkshire and Humberside 7%. The region was unknown in 27% of cases.

114 cases involved victims with disabilities.

22 involved victims who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT).

Research carried out by the then Department for Children, Schools and Families in 2009 estimated that a national prevalence of reported cases of forced marriage in England was between 5000 and 8000.

¹ Cases includes people or groups of people thought to be at potential risk of future forced marriage, those currently going through a forced marriage and those who have already been forced to marry. This statistic includes all initial contacts with the FMU via the helpline or by email relating to a new case.

² Victim includes people thought to be at potential risk of future forced marriage, those currently going through a forced marriage and those who have already been forced to marry.

³ This includes countries to which a victim is at risk of being taken or has already been taken to in connection with a forced marriage.