*Ljubljana, 30 October 2017*

**Report of the UN Secretary-General on child, early and forced marriage, pursuant to the resolution 71/175 of the UN General Assembly**

**Input by SLOVENIA**

In Slovenia marriage is regulated by the **Marriage and Family Relations Act,** which is based on the Article 53 [[1]](#footnote-2)of **the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia. The Marriage and Family Act** (Article 18) provides that marriage may not be conducted by persons below the age of eighteen. However, social work centre may, if there are well-founded reasons for this, allow the concluding of marriage by a person who is not yet 18 years of age (article 23). In such cases the social work centre must prior to allowing such marriage interview a young person, the person with whom they intend to conclude marriage, and the (young person's) parents or guardians (article 24). In 2017 the Family Code was adopted that will enter into force in 2019 and will transfer before mentioned powers from social work centres to courts.

In 2015 the Criminal Code (Official Gazette No. 54/2015) was amended by introducing **a new criminal offence under Article 132.a titled 'Forced Marriage or a Similar Union’[[2]](#footnote-3)**.

It should be noted that, in Slovenia, there are quite a few other statutory regulations that are related to the issue in question. The Family Violence Prevention Act, amended in 2016, imposes obligations to recognise and report family violence (including sexual violence, coercion to become pregnant, preventing the use of contraception, etc.).

Forced marriages, but also child and early marriages, are present in Slovenia in the Roma community. However, it should be noted that these are not formally concluded marriages before an empowered state authority, they are more in the form of cohabitation. In 2014 a **National study “Forced marriages of Roma girls”** was commissioned by the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairsand Equal Opportunities and prepared by The Social Protection Institute of the Republic of Slovenia to determine how widespread is the practice of early and forced marriage of Roma in Slovenia and what are the socialisation patterns among the Roma population.

In order to obtain a professional basis for further activities of responsible authorities and to improve the situation, the project “**Early Marriage Prevention Network**”, funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme of the European Union in 2016, started. The aim of the project, run by *Ljudska univerza Kočevje* (Slovenian partner) is to foster cooperation between child protection, health and education systems, justice and police to coordinate their activities related to combat the early marriage in Roma communities applying Child-Centred Approach; to raise awareness among different target groups in Roma communities in order to change their attitudes and behaviour regarding early marriage; and to increase the practice at European level in the area of applying Child-Centred Approach to protect children from harmful tradition of early marriage.

In 2016, an **Inter-governmental group for monitoring the implementation of the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention** was established. From 2016 onwards, members and alternates of the Inter-governmental group are working intensively on the issues that need clarification in order to implement Istanbul convention, including on the issues of early/ forced marriages. In 2017, the members of the group received trainings on standards and provisions of the Istanbul convention, including its monitoring. The training was organised in co-operation between the Equal Opportunities Department of the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and the Council of Europe.

The Istanbul Convention sets out the obligation to establish gender-sensitive approach when focusing on vulnerable groups, such as migrant women and men. In 2016 and 2017, Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, in cooperation with different NGOs, other ministries and experts from national and international organisations dealing with migration issues, implemented various activities focusing on gender aspect of migration policies. One of them was **special training on the issue of gender-based violence and violence against women**, with the aim toensure that persons working in accommodation centres and other authorities and organisations working with migrants receive adequate and gender sensitive informationon this issue. The training, which was organised by a Slovene NGO Slovene Philanthropy, was carried out by thewomen’s rights activist and human rights expert from IKWRO, one of the leading organisation in fighting against gender-based violence, in particular “honour” based violence, forced and child marriage, female genital mutilations, domestic violence and rape, focusing particularly upon Middle Eastern, North African and Afghan communities. The trainings aimed to create awareness and understanding of harmful practices amongst professionals so that they are able to identify and respond to effectivelyin order toensure safety of women and girls who have been and/or at risk of honour killings, forced marriages etc. To inform migrant men and women about the standards and values of gender equality in the Slovene society, **a special handbook** was issued in 2016. The handbook clearly states that any form of violence against women or harmful practice, including early/forced marriage, is not acceptable and tolerated in the society and will be punished accordingly.

In 2016, The Office for National Minorities also conducted a public tender for the co-financing of the programs of Roma community organisations in 2016 (JR-PRS2016). Among activities, the awareness of the Roma community **about the negative consequences of the premature marriages and forced marriages** was particularly highlighted.

**The project “Early Marriage – Culture or Abuse?”** was awarded an action grant under the call for proposal in the framework of the Specific Programme "Daphne III" (Action Grants 2013) of the European Commission (DG Justice). In compliance with one of the priorities of the call “violence linked to harmful practices” the main objectives of the project are focused on exploring the sociological aspect of the Roma view on early marriage, early detecting the problems in the Roma community as well as educating teachers, Roma representatives, experts in the field of social work, counselling and health care, NGO’s and the police on how to act as a mediator at the occurrence of early / forced marriage. Furthermore, education prevention program will be developed to raise awareness among schoolchildren on topics like reproductive health, cultural diversity, violence, peaceful resolution of conflicts.

In 2017 Republic of Slovenia adopted the **National Program of Action for Roma for the period 2017-2021 (NPUR 2017-2021)**. The objectives of the NPUR 2017-2021 are to improve the situation and promote social inclusion and reduce the social exclusion of women and men in all those areas for which is considered necessary. In the NPUR 2017-2021 targeted measures in the area of social protection are included to respond to issues and challenges to so called early and forced marriages or begging in harmful environments.

The objectives and **actions** in this area are three:

1. implementation of preventive programs for the training of professional staff at social work centres,
2. funding of Roma population advisory programs on the theme of premature and forced marriages and the consequences of such practices,
3. action by the competent institutions in the procedures for dealing with cases of extra-marital offences with minors

To further raise awareness among the professionals dealing with migrant issues, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities organised an **international conference “Care and integration of migrants: gender aspect”** in 2017, which focused on many issues,including the identification of good practices on how to fight against different forms of gender-based violence, including forced marriages.

The Ministry finances the **Slovenian Social Chamber** toorganise and carry out every year different seminars and educational modules for social workers and other experts, who work within public network (centres of social work) and NGOs. One of the modules that is carried out every year (2014, 2015, 2016) is named **Working with migrants and victims of human trafficking**. Within this module, also forced and early marriages are addressed.

Also in the area of health special attention is given to the consequences that forced and child marriages have for children/women are visible in: early drop outs from school, early pregnancies and the fact that women are secluded and excluded from society. Consequences can also be seen from the perspective of short-term and long-term women’s health (physical, social, psychological, and in particular reproductive). Furthermore, there are consequences for the short-term and long-term health of children who are born in such circumstances.

The issue of Roma girls and forced marriages has been discussed at multiple events organised by the Ministry of Health. For example, at the national conference titled “Roma Women – From Girlhood to Parenthood” in 2015 and at a national conference dealing with the socio-economic determinants of health in 2016.

In 2017 and 2018 there are several **healthcare programmes** focusing on the health of Roma adolescent girls, women, and children, in particular **on the issue of forced marriages, the protection and security of minor girls, and the prevention of (premature) early pregnancy**. These programmes, funded by the Ministry of health, are carried out by the National Institute of Public Health, the largest Roma the Roma Union of Slovenia, and the local Red Cross organisations.

The purpose of the programmes is:

* to approach Roma women and adolescent girls in Roma settlements across Slovenia and, through counseling, care, and programmes, teach them and inform them about the importance of their health, visiting a gynaecologist, safe sex, hygiene, contraception, about the risks of pregnancies and abortions among minors, of health, social, and legal rights of young Roma mothers and women, about common diseases mostly affecting women, the equality of Roma women and girls, and about the chronic respiratory diseases of children;
* health promotion and early discovery of diseases, and to prevent Roma women from becoming ill,
* to strengthen the capabilities of the Roma community in general and of Roma women as the target group.

The National Institute of Public health **addresses vulnerable groups of women in particular**. In its project titled Together Towards Health (Skupaj za zdravje), it warned of the need to approach specific vulnerabilities more actively. Particularly vulnerable groups also include women who are victims of violence, immigrant women, women with a lower educational level, poor women, and women who are potential victims of family violence. According to this proposal which refers to postnatal visits to mothers and babies, i.e. families after childbirth, community nurses should recognise these vulnerabilities and act accordingly; furthermore, they should also play a special role in relation to pregnant women who do not participate in the preparation for childbirth and parenthood for various reasons (disadvantage, illness, etc.).

In Slovenia, primary school attendance is mandatory, so parents are obliged to send their children to school. The school curriculum includes topics related to sex education, human rights, and women’s human rights.

**Official data on marriage** are collected and published by Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (SURS). SURS is publishing data on Marriages in the SI-STAT Database (<http://pxweb.stat.si/pxweb/Database/Demographics/05_population/34_Marriages/05_05M10_Marriages-SL/05_05M10_Marriages-SL.asp>). Published data are available in long time series by age of groom and bride, order of marriage, mean age at marriage, mean age at first marriage, month of marriage, territorial area etc. The Statistical office have also published First Release on data for marriages in 2016 <http://www.stat.si/StatWeb/en/News/Index/6656>.

1. The Article 53 of the Constitution reads:

   “Marriage is based on the equality of spouses. Marriages shall be solemnised before an empowered state authority. Marriage and the legal relations within it and the family, as well as those within an extramarital union, shall be regulated by law. The state shall protect the family, motherhood, fatherhood, children, and young people and shall create the necessary conditions for such protection.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. The Article 132.a reads:

   "(1) Whoever compels, by means of force or threat of force or through the abuse of a subordinate or dependent position, another person into marriage or a similar union that in terms of certain legal consequences is equivalent to marriage under the law shall be sentenced to imprisonment of up to three years.

   (2) Whoever commits the offence under paragraph 1 hereof against a minor or helpless person shall be sentenced to imprisonment of up to five years." [↑](#footnote-ref-3)