



New UNODC report reveals links between human trafficking and marriage

The new UNODC Issue Paper outlines different links between forced, abusive and exploitative marriage and human trafficking and shows the gendered nature of this underreported form of trafficking. Those women and girls who are affected by different forms of gender discrimination and harmful practices are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. Forced, child and sham marriages in certain cases were found to have links to all three elements of trafficking: act, means and purpose. However, few such cases come to the attention of the criminal justice authorities and even fewer lead to convictions.

The issue paper is a result of more than two years of research and collaboration between UNODC, HEUNI and national and international experts from around the world. HEUNI's Senior Programme Officer Anniina Jokinen and former researcher Minna Viuhko together with UNODC colleagues collected data from 9 countries (Germany, Thailand, Vietnam, Canada, South Africa, Malawi, Serbia, Kyrgyzstan, Jordan) and interviewed 150 experts on this complex topic. The research also explored the various modus operandi used for different forms of marriage trafficking, as well as the profile of the victims and the offenders.

“It became apparent early on that human trafficking in the context of marriage is a particularly complex and sensitive subject”, HEUNI’s Anniina Jokinen explains. The level of awareness on the topic varies in different countries and contexts. However, expert interviews and consultations helped shed light on the challenges involved and to identify some of the key characteristics of forced, abusive and exploitative marriages that may have links to human trafficking.

The victims have difficulties seeking help and few cases are reported to the police or investigated as trafficking. “It is important that the authorities are aware of this phenomenon and that the investigation is sensitive to the needs of the victims”, Anniina Jokinen notes. More attention should be paid to the extent and forms of exploitation, the different control measures imposed on the victim, the victim’s dependency, and their possibilities to leave the marriage, seek assistance and access justice.

Ultimately, multifaceted prevention efforts are needed to address the phenomenon in close cooperation with local communities and civil society organisations. The report also includes several concrete policy recommendations that countries can adopt to prevent cases of trafficking linked to marriage, to identify and protect the victims of this crime, and to prosecute the traffickers.

The publication is available [here](#).

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