



**International Day for the
Eradication of Forced Marriage
and Crimes in the Name of Honor**



**Valentes i
Acompanyades**

Dossier to substantiate the demand that the UN General Assembly declare an international day for the eradication of forced marriage and crimes in the name of honor, which are one of the cruelest manifestations of inequality and gender-based violence, punishing girls and young women around the world.

Summary:

Every two seconds a girl is married against her will - around the world: in countries on the five continents, next to home, at home. Forced Marriage -sometimes of children - is an immense and atrocious attack on basic human rights that nothing can justify. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) clearly states (goal 5, target 3) the urgent need to put an end to it and calls for commitment from governments, entities and civil society to make the necessary efforts. More than halfway through the agenda, the outlook is not encouraging: according to the UN special report 2023, at the current rate it will take 300 years to eradicate child marriage. This is time we do not have because its victims cannot afford it and because no SDG can be achieved if half of the planet's population is left behind. We need to do much more, with more awareness, resources and speed. This document has been prepared by the association Valentès i Acompanyades, which has been working since 2014 to prevent Forced Marriages in Catalonia. It explains the reason for the demand that the United Nations General Assembly declare an International Day for the Elimination of Forced Marriages and the Crimes in the Name of Honor. These crimes sometimes occur precisely when the young woman rebels against patriarchal norms (does not accept an imposed husband, for example), "dirtying" the "prestige" of the family and men feel entitled to "cleanse" – costing the woman's life. An International Day would make this violence more visible and contribute to the gathering consensus that we do not have to endure another 300 years of abuse, slavery and unbearable torment.

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01. Forced marriage in its context



A violence that is too invisible

Forced marriages -often also child marriages- **constitute a serious violation of human rights and women's rights (too often it is forgotten that they are also human rights); they are one of the most terrible, cruel and persistent manifestations of gender inequality and sexist violence that punish girls, adolescents and young women on all continents:** Among the neighbors that we meet on the street, on the bus, in the market, at the workplace, at the health center, at school, at University, there are those who have been already given to a man they neither knew nor wanted or who are being strongly pressured to accept this union. These are young women who are not allowed to choose their life plans or, generally, to continue their studies. **They are forced to have sexual relations, to carry out unwanted pregnancies, to be confined to the domestic sphere,** which destroys their physical and mental health and leads them to a state of dependence that fuels violence within a vicious circle. In some cases, if they resist, if they do not obey the family mandate, **they run the risk of becoming victims of femicide,** an extreme form of sexist punishment. These are the so-called "honor crimes". What honor is there in a crime?

This violence originates in the patriarchal control of the body and sexuality of women that nullifies their freedom and autonomy from childhood on, and that in many countries is "normalized" in the context of an atavistic tradition that resists disappearing. In others, where the practice is typified as a crime, it continues to go too unnoticed and hidden in the private sphere. That makes it difficult or impossible for victims to oppose it and develop as free beings.

We are facing not an episodic practice but a global problem of great dimensions: it is estimated that currently there could be around 800 million women married before they turn 18, half before they turn 15, without any possibility of having avoided it. And the efforts to reverse this trend are unlikely to be successful at the pace that would be necessary, especially after the pandemic. Frightening data that organizations such as UNICEF, or entities such as Plan International, Girls not Brides or Save the Children summarize in the fact that **every two seconds a girl is forced to marry.** According to UNICEF, the prevalence rate is 44% in South Asia, 18% in Sub-Saharan Africa, 12% in East Asia and the Pacific, 9% in Latin America and the Caribbean, 5% in the Middle East and the North Africa and 12% in other unspecified regions that probably include European countries and the USA. For its part, Amnesty International has also defined forced marriages as torture for victims subjected to cruel and degrading treatment. **This practice affects one in five girls in the world.**

What is a Forced Marriage?

It is the union between two people, whether of a civil, religious or ritual/traditional nature in which at least one of them, the woman in the vast majority of cases, has not given her full and free consent but has been coerced physically, sexually, emotionally and psychologically by the family and her environment. When the person forced to marry is a minor we refer to it as Child or Premature Marriage according to the definition of UNICEF: any formal or informal union between a minor under 18 years of age and an adult or between two minors. UNICEF considers FM **the most widespread form of sexual abuse and exploitation of minors. Along with child labor, human trafficking and the sexual exploitation of minors, Forced Marriage is also identified as a form of modern slavery.**

Research conducted by the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the Walk Free Foundation in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) revealed in 2016 that 40 mi-

llion people in the world remained trapped in some system of slavery, 29 million of whom were girls and women and some 15.4 million were subjected to forced marriage.

The foundations of the tradition

Forced Marriage is based on a powerful and well-structured ancestral tradition, with its own code and operating rules guided by the concept of identity in the different societies where it takes place. While they are not the basis, but rather instrumental factors, sometimes FM appears to be related to obtaining resources for survival or with businesses, monetary transactions and various compensations (where women are conceived as a currency of exchange). And in the current times of global migrations, it can be related to a question of administrative regularization via marriage and family reunification: in this sense, duly registered telematic marriages are proliferating in countries where legal requirements are low. Even so, we must not lose sight of the fact that **the meaning and raison d'être of these unions comes from a tradition that legitimizes them in the eyes of the community and that strives to remain above any other interest.**

Alliance between families

In community-based cultures where this practice occurs, each person is defined not so much by their individuality –generating their own rights– but by the role they have been socially assigned. In this context, **marriage is not conceived as a personal option, with free choice by the parties. In most cases, it is a social pact, an endogamous alliance that acts as a reinforcement of the patrilineal kinship system (filiality referred exclusively to the father), a bond of belonging to the group and an affirmation of identity based on lineage and on the uses and customs emanating from tradition.** This means that in some societies, precisely to seal these ties of kinship, when a child is born, he or she is already assigned the husband or wife that corresponds to him or her within their extended family (an uncle, a cousin, etc.), according to an unwritten, but scrupulously followed, rule.

Preservation of identity

In certain groups that have undergone the migratory process, the urge to protect one's own cultural traits is strongly promoted to ward off a possible assimilation to the values of the hegemonic culture in the country of residence. **To a large extent, marriage pacts also serve the purpose of maintaining the identity and cohesion of the group:** they act as a method to prevent daughters from built



ding free relationships with people of different origin and/or to “re-educate” them in case they adopt critical attitudes towards the behavioral patterns expected of them.

Regarding hierarchy

In the traditional value system, membership in the group involves unquestioning observance of the hierarchy defined by age, sex and social class. **Older people have authority over young people, men over women and the “superior” (or free) strata over the “inferior” (or slaves). Within this framework of power relations, women are absolutely subject to the dictates of the family: first the birth family and then the one they will integrate into once married.** Not deferring to decisions – rebelling against the imposition of a husband, for example – entails an implacable collective sanction that translates into different forms of coercion and physical/psychological violence such as contempt and isolation, abuse, deprivation of resources, emotional blackmail, or repudiation... to prevent the established model from being broken. If, despite everything, the young woman remains firm in her refusal, the “shame” falls on the family. The stigma spreads throughout the community as it is interpreted as an attack on its identity. That is why many young people who have faced a conflict of this nature are upset that their parents are more concerned with “looking good”, or “what they will say” than with what they think is best for their lives. Others end up compromising because they have not acquired sufficient empowerment or lack help to assume the personal cost that the break with their reference environment represents.

In another sense, **in ethnic groups where the memory of the old classes that conferred the status of “free” or “slave” on families survives, the union between people of different status is forbidden**, even though the contact and relationship may be intense in daily life. When these societies are also imbued with animist beliefs, there is an almost invincible fear that “improperly mixed blood” will summon evil spirits and all kinds of misfortune.

The woman's body

The strength of the patriarchal system has rested on its control of the woman's body since time immemorial. We cannot consider the practice completely overcome despite the struggle of the feminist movement for the liberation from such a nefarious “privilege”. **Thus, in the most traditional societies, the purity or virginity of a daughter before marriage certifies the family's reputation and culminates the educational process that she has received from the mother who is the primary person responsible for her behavior. The mother is also subject to strong reprisals if the young woman goes astray.** This explains the celebration of child or premature marriages with a view to guaranteeing the honor of the group. In European societies where there is a fear of the danger of contagion of foreign customs, the strategy of some families involves taking extreme measures of surveillance and control, conditioning their way of dressing, reinforcing their role as future wives and mothers through education and applying progressive social isolation: compulsory school attendance but prohibition of extracurricular activities; studying for a university degree but confinement



in the domestic sphere after school hours. The aim is that when the time comes, they will have adapted to these living conditions and will agree to the union; or if this is not the case, they will lack bonds of trust and external support to rebel.

Crimes in the name of honor

As the culmination of this patriarchal appropriation of the female body, in some areas of the planet feminicides are carried out, promoted by prevailing morality and covered up by governments despite being legally penalized. The situations that “provoke” and “justify” them in the eyes of the murderers are: marrying without the consent of the men in the family or refusing to enter into an arranged marriage, showing a willingness to maintain free relationships, trying to separate from an imposed husband while fleeing abuse, having been raped individually or collectively, being accused of adultery, dressing inappropriately and other behaviors that are understood to bring dishonor to the family. **In these cases, the men of the group (father, brother, husband, uncle, cousin, etc.) attribute to themselves the power to kill the woman who “belongs” to them and has transgressed their power - the worst “offense”.** In recent decades, violence has also intensified against human rights activists and women’s rights activists. The Neswia collective has released a chilling video in which a man whips his 12-year-old daughter for playing with children on the street while asking her if she knows what punishment awaits her and an uncle records the girl’s confession as legitimization of the crime. This terrible practice occurs in communities in many countries, although currently its main prevalence is in South Asia and the Middle East



Economic resources

The strengthening of kinship ties through marriage unions has also become a type of “basic solidarity” in impoverished areas where there is no social welfare and where extended families try to cover the basic needs of their members among themselves, especially for the elderly who are unable to support themselves. And in that sense, in very precarious households where a daughter represents one more mouth to feed, early marriage serves to lighten the “burden” and obtain economic resources for the rest of the family and consequently has a greater frequency. The needs for economic survival are another element in the traditional practice, which in any case occurs in environments of different levels of acquisition according to the tradition of the respective groups. In general, it can

be stated that **the improvement of living conditions, access to education which broadens one's own criteria, perspectives and opportunities for greater autonomy, help in the critical review and eradication of old atavisms.** In any case – and within the European context – there are families that, when it comes to convincing their daughters to accept a chosen husband raise issues of security and well-being as stimulating factors: “he is trustworthy”, “you will never lack for anything”, “he has a very big house”, “he will always take care of you”, “he is rich”, “he will get along well with you because we are relatives”, “if you marry him we will all be happy and you will never be alone”... Arguments that are turned around in the form of intimidation, rejection, indifference, isolation, loneliness, abuse if the daughter rebels. **To the extent that these young women feel more personally empowered and socially included, they have more strength to resist family pressures and carry out their own life project.**

The role of religion

Marriage pacts between clans and families are not recorded as a religious prescription. Another issue is that religion is used as an effective tactic to reinforce the subordinate role of women and their obligation to obey the dictates of the family, and most faiths have been and are accepting of this arrangement. Therefore, **in some cases the religious issue is not completely dissociated from forced marriages due to the influence it can exert on the victims to obtain their “free” consent.** The threat of being expelled from the community (of believers) and the feared final punishment (the Day of Judgment) if they deviate from the marked path are coercive factors with a strong emotional impact on some young women who have been strictly educated in these principles. Expressly referring to the Islamic faith, it is very important that the parties are recognized as “good Muslims” and if the relationship with someone outside is accepted it is because they have agreed to publicly follow the ritual of conversion. In recent years and due to the strong proselytism spreading through the networks by the Wabarist current (Saudi Arabia), some young people – boys and girls – are imbued with a very rigorous vision of Islam in contrast to all the “impure” values coming from the Western world. Religion is used as the main sign of identity reaffirmation and stones are thrown against any attempt at personal liberation from the impositions of the group.

Sang Chatti or marriage for compensation

It is another form of patriarchal violence that despite being prohibited by law continues to be practiced in some areas of Pakistan and which shows the extent to which **women are conceived as a mere object to repair the wrongs committed by others.** A case that was made public in 2013: The father of a 12-year-old girl kills a man in a fight and to pay off the debt, he hands her over to the victim's family, who have the right to use her in every way: humiliation, slave labor, rape, marriage, according to the practice of Sang Chatti or marriage for compensation. In this case, when the victim's family also claimed a 7-year-old sister, the father did not accept the deal and filed a complaint with the Supreme Court, which overturned the decisions made by the traditional authorities. The “jirgas” or parallel legal systems for resolving the most diverse conflicts are still in force in the rural areas of this Asian country and it is the girls and young women who suffer the harshest consequences.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Another form of sexist violence that in some cases is combined with Forced Marriage: **for certain groups, the “purification” of the woman (partial or total removal of her genitals) is an indispen-**

sable condition for sealing the marriage commitment. In this sense, and despite the prohibition by law and the prevention protocols in place in many parts of the world, young women who have not been mutilated during their childhood may be mutilated during their adolescence or youth before being married. It is important to note that **there are groups that maintain the tradition of Forced Marriage but do not practice FGM.** Therefore, there is a disparity in figures regarding these two harmful practices: according to the World Health Organization, more than 200 million girls and women have suffered mutilation; on the other hand, the prevalence of Forced Marriages is around 800 million.

Arranged? Forced? Free consent?

An arranged or contracted marriage is one that is celebrated with the agreement of both parties but where there is no emotional bond between them –or even prior knowledge sometimes– and is used as an instrument to obtain different economic or administrative benefits. It is obvious that all forced unions have been arranged by someone else without the will of those affected (especially the woman). But, what about the other way around? Can it be said that all arranged unions –for whatever reason– have the full consent of both parties? The line between the two concepts is often blurred. The Valentines i Acompanyades association focuses on the requirements that guarantee truly free consent and points out, in general terms, two factors that significantly condition the exercise of this right: First, an intensive patriarchal education that instills a sense of uncritical obedience and prepares girls from a young age to assume the role that belongs to them as wives and mothers. And secondly, the enormous physical and emotional pressure that families can deploy to impose their will on young women who, without external support, feel alone and find no other alternative than compliance.



02. Commitement at the highest level



In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – approved by the UN General Assembly on 25 September 2015 – **includes the elimination of forced marriage as one of the targets to be achieved within Goal 5 on gender equality and the empowerment of all girls and women on the planet.** It calls on states to commit to implementing active policies that make this possible.

In addition, on 23 April 2024, the European Parliament approved the first EU law against gender-based violence, which adds **forced marriage as a new crime of trafficking of human beings (update of the 2011 directive on the prevention of trafficking)** and **urges EU countries to adapt their legal systems to punish the crime.**

The truth is that from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) to the 2015/30 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), through CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, United Nations, 1979), the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (Dakar 1984), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN 1989), the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995), the Maputo Protocol (African Union 2003), the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe 2011)... among many others, an extensive journey can be traced through conventions, conferences, resolutions, letters, agreements, protocols and directives at the international and regional level that leads us to a progressive legal and social awareness of the need to eradicate Forced Marriages - which in many parts of the world include premature or child marriages.



The most defenseless on the planet

It is important to recognize that behind this movement there are generations of activist women, especially African and Asian who have publicly denounced this unjustifiable discrimination based on sex and have made demands to the public authorities to act accordingly, sometimes at the risk of their own lives. So much so that Desmond Tutu, South African archbishop and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, took up the challenge posed by the courageous defenders of human rights and in 2012 **declared child marriage as a practice as condemnable and as important to fight against as apartheid**. In his own words which many people who are unaware of Forced Marriages can surely comprehend:

“A few months ago in northern Ethiopia I met a group of young women who had been married between the ages of 10 and 12. Many had their first children at the ages of 13 and 14. I was shocked to realize that there are millions of girls around the world who suffer the same situation every year. Although I thought I had a fairly complete idea of the human rights landscape in this beautiful land we share, I must confess that I was unaware of the scale and real consequences of this practice on girls who **are invisible, who have no voice, which makes them the most defenseless and vulnerable people on the planet**. They are married without their consent to men who are much older than them, they almost always drop out of school to take care of household chores and when they become pregnant they face serious risks of injury and even death during pregnancy or childbirth. **Child marriage robs girls of their childhood, their basic rights to education, safety and health.**”

“It is not enough to say that their voices must be heard, that more money is needed for girls’ education and health services. This alone will not put an end to these marriages that in fact occur because men allow it. The parents, the leaders of the people, the religious leaders, the decision makers, are mainly men. For this harmful practice to disappear, we must have the support of all men who know that this is wrong and we must work together to persuade the rest.”

“Child marriage is not a religious issue, it is a tradition. There are very good traditions that unite communities, but traditions are not static. They evolve and those that are harmful must be confronted and eliminated as we did with apartheid, which some also “justified” for “cultural” reasons - a completely aberrant pretext. **That is why the magnitude of the harmful practice of Forced Marriages requires commitment at the highest level to put an end to it. It should not be treated as a “women’s problem” but as a humanity problem: Can you imagine how we would progress if all the girls of this generation went to school and had the opportunity to become teachers, doctors, businesswomen, politicians...?** As adults, we must ask ourselves: are we doing enough to fulfill our responsibility to young women who want to take charge of their own lives? The answer is no. And so we are all called upon to defend women’s rights, their dignity, equality and freedom”. (Desmond Tutu and the Mozambican activist Graça Machel signed an article in the Washington Post on July 21, 2012 entitled “Child Marriage Steals Children’s Opportunities” that strengthens the arguments outlined here).



Are we doing enough?

The struggle of many women in their communities and the involvement of people of great moral authority such as Graça Machel and Desmond Tutu, from different organizations and especially from UNICEF was decisive for Forced Marriage to enter the main door of international politics via the SDGs and this represented an important step forward in the fight against this form of gender violence. But as Tutu and Machel did at the time, let us ask ourselves – now that we have passed the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda – whether we are doing enough or are on track to achieve goal number 5 and specifically target number 3 regarding the eradication of forced marriages. The UN itself answers us in the special 2023 edition of the Sustainable Development Goals progress report, subtitled “for a rescue plan for people and the planet”. And its verdict is not positive: In general terms, more than half of the world is falling behind, progress on more than 50% of the proposed goals is weak and insufficient and on more than 30% they are stagnant or in decline, and this is especially punishing for developing countries because these are goals closely related to poverty, hunger, women’s rights, education, health and climate change. **If we do not act now, says United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, the 2030 Agenda could become the epitaph of the world that could have been.**

And regarding goal number 5, what interests us especially? According to the aforementioned report, only 15.4% of the indicators are well on track, 61.5% are moderately on track and 23.1% are far or very far from the targets proposed for 2030. The UN refers to minimal or too slow progress, so that at the current rate it is estimated that it would take 286 years to fill the gaps in legal protection and eliminate discriminatory laws; 140 years for women to be equally represented in positions of power and leadership in the workplace; 47 years for equal representation in national parliaments; and, aggravated by Covid 19 pandemic – with devastating effects on health, education, increased poverty and inequalities – **it would take 300 years to eliminate child marriages!** It is certain that vulnerable among the most vulnerable, many women pay the highest price in all crises.

It is very worrying and truly unacceptable data. Not enough is being done, and thinking of the future, much more can be done in different areas (global, regional, local). States and all of society must commit to effective measures in the face of this horror, this barbarity of giving a girl, a young woman into marriage against her will, frustrating her project of living in freedom.



It is not a women's problem

Desmond Tutu and Graça Machel said it 12 years ago and it is up to us to take up the challenge with greater firmness and commitment: We must empower women to defend their rights, sensitize young men so that they too do not accept marrying someone who is imposed on them, who cannot choose. Because it is certainly not a problem of women -even if they suffer the harshest repercussions- but of all of humanity that bears the brunt of this violence and the immense value of girls and the loss of young women forced to marry against their will and to abandon their studies. They are denied the opportunity to become the doctors, engineers, teachers, politicians, lawyers, entrepreneurs... that they want to be and that society needs.

It is undeniable that from a gender perspective, Forced Marriage is identified as both a cause and effect of inequality between men and women. It perpetuates a patriarchal system based on the subordinate position of women to the will of their father and husband according to the role attributed to them within the traditional power structure. Reduced to a domestic function and with a flagrant decrease in opportunities for training and obtaining their own resources, they see their life project frustrated and remain dependent on others as an eternal minor. This has a negative impact on their dignity, freedom, health and personal well-being but also on collective progress since the enormous benefit of female contributions in decision-making for change and social transformation is stolen. **And precisely because of this double aspect of unacceptable personal violence and an attack on the base of a development process that is just, inclusive and sustainable, Forced Marriage contradicts the essence and strategies of the SDGs and hinders their fulfillment. Let's look:**

Goal number 5: "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls". This goal is specifically related to harmful practices such as Forced Marriage and calls for its elimination (objective 3). If we review the rest of the objectives of this goal, it becomes clear that the MF hinders them all: It perpetuates discrimination, maintains gender violence and sexual exploitation (and in many cases human trafficking). It considers care work (of the family) as an exclusive obligation of women and not as a shared right. It prevents women from participating in decision-making and does not stimulate their training and leadership (a role dependent on and subject to male authority). And it blatantly attacks access to sexual and reproductive health since their bodies are conceived as the property of the father or husband who is responsible for surveillance, control and repression.

Goal number 1 and goal number 2: Eradicate poverty and hunger in the world". Despite not being its direct cause, poverty plays an important role in FM. It is found that in economically more vulnerable households, girls are more likely to be given up in marriage and, on the contrary, where there is an opportunity for a decent life, forced unions tend to be reduced. It is understandable: a change in mentality requires favorable conditions from an economic, political and social point of view to express itself and consolidate.

Goal number 3: "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for everyone at all ages". Especially when it refers to reducing the maternal mortality rate and ending preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age. And why? Because pregnancies in girls and young people under 18 carry a high risk for the life of the mother and the baby. The risk of the baby dying before reaching one year of age is 60% higher and if he lives, he has a greater chance of suffering from malnutrition, low weight and problems with physical and cognitive development (source: WHO and UNICEF).

Goal number 4: “Ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. In countries and societies with a high incidence of FM, a vicious circle occurs: with marriage, young girls’ studies are prematurely interrupted and at the same time this lack of training reduces their autonomy and capacity to oppose marriage. It is clear that impoverishment and educational deficits become adverse factors in eradicating Forced Marriage and, at the same time, Forced Marriage increases the conditions of impoverishment and educational deficits of the communities that practice it and of women in particular. “We want books, not husbands” is one of the very relevant slogans of activists against this practice.

Goal number 8: “Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all”. In its target number 7, it refers explicitly to adopting measures to eradicate forced labour and end modern forms of slavery, one of which is FM. In target 8, it urges protection of labour rights and promotion of a safe working environment for all workers, including migrants, in particular migrant women and people in precarious jobs. In this regard, all efforts made to guarantee greater labour and social inclusion – and consequently greater personal autonomy – are positive and necessary when it comes to putting an end to the harmful practice of FM.

Goal number 10: “Reduce inequality within and between countries”. Target 2 speaks of promoting and strengthening the social, economic and political inclusion of all people, regardless of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, economic situation or other condition. And target 3 of ensuring equal opportunities and reducing inequality of outcomes - including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and measures in this regard. When a young woman or adolescent faces the threat of FM (and we are now referring to the countries of the North) she does so in a context that often discriminates against her based on three key elements: 1) because of her origin 2) because she generally belongs to an economically disadvantaged segment, 3) because of her “condition” as a woman which everywhere carries a blatant mark of inequality. As this objective states, the elimination of FM also requires the successful social, economic and political inclusion of adolescents and young people at risk. And the presence of FM deepens the conditions of inequality.

Goal number 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies to achieve sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and develop effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”. In the first two targets, it commits to reducing all forms of violence for the population in general and for children. It is clear that FM - and even more so when it is precocious or child - is a great injustice, a manifestation of violence that as long as it remains alive, we cannot speak of “peaceful and inclusive societies”. Institutions must keep this in mind.

As for the rest of the economic and environmental objectives, the link with the SDGs takes place due to the undeniable equation between women’s empowerment and social progress, which has already been mentioned. If women do not play an active and valued role, there will be no sustainable management of water and sanitation. Nor will there be access to clean energy. Nor will there be progress in innovation, nor in making inclusive cities. Nor will there be adequate use of natural resources. Nor will the degradation of land and oceans be stopped. Nor will climate change be combated.



03. International day for the eradication of forced marriages and crimes in the name of honor



Valentès i
Acompanyades

So that we don't have to wait 300 years.

In line with the objectives of the 2030 Agenda that will continue beyond this date - Due to the unjustifiable violation of human rights that it entails. Due to the impact on gender equality and the dignity and health of a substantial number of girls and young people subjected to one of the cruelest forms of violence. Due to being a key factor in the backwardness of societies that practice it and the loss of women's contributions to collective progress. And given the fact that a firm, courageous and effective push is needed so that we do not have to wait 300 years to put an end to it: **It is proposed that the UN General Assembly declares an international day for the eradication of forced marriages and crimes in the name of honor that are deeply linked in many cases.** In order to promote greater awareness and to commit governments, entities, companies, schools, universities, security forces, legal professionals, the world of research and civil society in general to fight to the extent of their responsibilities and capabilities against an immense and painful wound that shames us as humanity. Together, we must **mobilize awareness and resources and especially focus on the younger generations who must have the possibility of rebelling against this harmful practice. We must give them the corresponding support and accompaniment.** And in this sense, it is of paramount importance for girls and young women to advance in their education and access the professional world that will allow them more autonomy to decide their life project.

When it comes to putting a date on the calendar, we think of the fatally truncated lives of three women who, through their activism and rebellion, highlighted the unacceptable violence that this practice represents. There are many other similar cases and it is just that the world does not forget them but rather recognizes their courage and in their "honor" does everything possible to put an end to forced marriages.

May 11, 2019. The 27-year-old Afghan journalist and activist Mina Mangal, who had made a name for herself for her persistent fight against Forced Marriages and for defending women's rights and the rights of girls to go to school, was shot in Kabul while waiting for the car that would take her to the Parliament where she worked as a cultural advisor. She had felt in danger for days and had reported threatening messages without obtaining due protection in a country that does not appreciate the presence of women in public space. Even before the return of the Taliban regime (August 2021) women who left home to go to work were in danger of being attacked: burned, raped, mutilated, stoned, murdered. Mina Mangal had been married by her parents at the age of 14, although the union had not been formalized until 2017. Shortly before her murder she had obtained a divorce from a husband who abused her and did not accept her practicing her profession.

May 20, 2022. The sisters Arooj and Aneesa Abass, aged 24 and 21 and residents of Terrassa were murdered in Mouza Nothia (Pakistan), where they had been transferred by deception two days earlier to force them to formalize their marriage with cousins, for having had relationships with young men freely chosen by them. Shortly before, at the beginning of 2022, both had left their parents' home because they could not bear the pressures and abuse. And it was then that the family hatched a plot (the alleged illness of the mother who had moved to Pakistan to celebrate the alleged wedding of a son) for them to travel to that country. Once there, they remained firm in not accepting the marriage and were strangled by their husbands, brothers and an uncle who conspired to practice what is known as a crime in the name of honor. The father of the young women has been accused by the prosecutor's office of being behind the plan to put an end to his daughters' "defiant" attitude and "cleanse" their "honor".

04. Testimonials



Forced Marriages occur all over the world where there are girls and young people who have no chance of changing their fate and others who have been able to escape it thanks to their courage and the support of NGOs that work in defense of human rights. We listen to their voices contributed by entities such as UNICEF, Plan International, Save the children, Girls not brides, Amnesty International, the Do Good program of La Roca Village and the Valentines i Acompanyades - an association that since 2014 has been working to eradicate forced marriages in Catalonia by providing comprehensive care to young women who are victims so that they can avoid this violence and move forward with their own life project.

You can lose your child and your life

I got pregnant when I was 15 and I was going to school. I had to leave my studies. I was very upset because my plan was not to get married at 15. I felt bad about myself for not going to school, continuing my education and having a better future. I felt very bad, I was not happy at all. Without education you will not be able to make your life or be useful in society. That is why I believe that education is the most important thing. We need to fight against child marriages and girl pregnancies. They are very dangerous, you can lose your child and you can lose your life. ([Lives in Sierra Leone](#))

I told my parents that I would report them

When I was 7 years old, a friend of mine told us that she was getting married and we were all happy because of the celebration and the dresses. We were too young to understand what was happening. Then she told us that her husband was beating her with an iron cord. When I turned 11, a taxi driver's marriage proposal came to our house and my family said yes because it was a very good proposal. I was lucky because my uncle helped me convince my family. He told me about the child marriage law and I told my parents that if they forced me to get married I would report them. Now my whole family supports me in what I do. ([Lives in Pakistan](#))

I was married at the age of 11

I had to leave school because my family is poor. I had nothing to do. Then the village headman asked me if I wanted to be his second wife. I was 11 when they forced me to get married. I got pregnant with my daughter who is now 4 years old. My husband physically abuses me. At least with the sanctions of the community law he has stopped hitting me as much as before. I am not happy. I felt very bad when I got pregnant, I had many physical complications. And despite the pain my husband forced me to continue going to the forest to find food. ([Lives in Kenya](#))



Slave of my mother and my husband

When I got married I was just 13 years old. We were in the living room wearing that ugly dress that my mother bought online, and she started telling us to have children and that's why I started having my first child at 15, I think it was a way for me to depend on her. I'm 26 now and have five children, two with my second husband. My ex was extremely abusive to me and I was a little girl and I was very confused because he was the only man I had ever been with. I felt like a slave, a slave to him and a slave to my mother, to what she wanted - for us all to be together and for me to have children at such a young age. That is why I still have this emotional burden of wanting to do something with my life, for myself. I'm always thinking about what I could have done, what I could have been. (Lives in the US)



Now that the moon smiles at me

The first time they tried to marry me I was 12, the second 16 and the third 18. In the darkest nights I implored the moon to help me change such an unfortunate fate. There is nothing good in isolation, in loneliness, in these older men, in anguish, rage, helplessness. They sent me to study in another city, to live with an aunt and uncle with whom they had arranged my marriage to their son. It was hard for me to make the decision to say 'enough'. I knew what I wanted and what I didn't want, but I was afraid of upsetting the family. I had the support of Valentes i Acompanyades and the University of Girona where I graduated as a psychologist and learned to value myself and move forward. Now that the moon is smiling on me, I know that I will never stop studying, learning and helping other women who suffer sexist violence, as I am doing professionally and through volunteering. (From Morocco, living in Catalonia)



I have honored myself

I have already married, I said "I do" to the man I love who gave me the strength to get out of the family prison where I suffered coercion to accept a forced marriage with a man I had never met from my parents country of origin. The man who is now my husband was threatened with death when he told them he wanted to marry me: we are not of the same culture, religion or social class. I was also threatened if I didn't give in. I was very scared because there are men who feel authorized to kill a woman if they feel she has dishonored them. I ran away from home, filed a complaint with the police and after a few days I went to live in one of the flats of the Valentes i Acompanyades association. Now I try to support other young people who need courage to dare to take the step. I have not dishonored anyone. On the contrary, I have honored myself and all women like me who have to pay a very high price for the right to freedom. (From Pakistan, living in Catalonia)

The watchful eyes of all men

We are a couple - former Muslim women raised in the country of petrodollars who have asked for asylum because the families discovered our relationship, tried to marry one and kill the other. With the support of an activist we hid in Cairo and got the Spanish embassy to grant us a visa. We no longer have the watchful eyes of all the parents, of all the brothers, of all men, on us. No one forces us to be silent and obey as women. We have left behind a childhood without tenderness or games, an adolescence with a veil and prohibitions, a youth with fear of the body. Now we can walk alone, ride a bike, study, work, live. The physical, psychological and symbolic violence of the patriarchy has not succeeded in “correcting” our sexual orientation. Let’s hope that a democratic state does not return us to certain death where human rights are meaningless even if financial interests pretend otherwise. (From Saudi Arabia and the Yemen)

Because of being a woman

My parents tried to marry me off, I came home from school and found a 40 year old man there. For me it was a shock, every day with the same story, constant abuse. I was not free, I could not study because I was a woman and did not accept that marriage. I called Valentes and Acompañadas to help me get out of there. They were just starting out then, they didn’t have flats yet. I stayed for a while in a hostel. I was able to study, I had emotional and psychological support They have always been by my side. Leaving home was very important because I was able to be myself. Over the years I have managed well and I have my partner and a child. There are many girls who have given in and married men they don’t love. It’s very sad. I realized that I could choose. We all, including women, have the right to do so. Now I’m very happy when other young people call me, I do my best to encourage them so they don’t feel alone. It is not easy to face the conflict with the family but it is worth it because it is up to us to make our own decisions. (From Pakistan living in Catalonia)

What will happen to my children?

My father brought me to Spain at the age of sixteen and betrothed me to a man from his village. He locked me in the house, he didn’t want me to learn the language or get along with anyone. He sent me to his country to be married. I got pregnant; they brought me back here to have my baby girl. He pressured me to formalize the marriage, I refused. They sent me back to the country - more rapes and another pregnancy, my boy was born here and they pressured me again to get the papers for the husband to come here. I don’t want this man who abuses me and the other women that he has there. My father made us live with him and his family. They beat me every day. With the help of a cousin I bought the tickets to return here and ask for help but my mother-in-law found out and they took the children from me at the airport. Now I am starting a new life with Valentes and Acompañadas but the sadness eats me: What will happen to my children? Can they help me recover them? (From Pakistan living in Catalonia)



They monitor my every move

Whenever I leave the house, my older brother or my stepmother accompanies me. I am in my first year of studying Economics and at the end of classes, my brother picks me up to prevent me from interacting with other people. He and my father have installed a tracker on my mobile phone to monitor my movements at every step. They do not allow me to make decisions about my life, I cannot act on my own. I have shared my situation with two colleagues and one of them put me in touch with a worker from the Valentes i Acompanyades association. She comes to the University to talk to me every week. It is the only time I feel a little free. In the end, I will have to leave my family to be myself, so as not to have to marry the man they have already found for me (originally from Morocco living in Catalonia).



We have equal rights

Among the main problems I have seen in my community are the language barrier (for indigenous peoples), child marriages and premature pregnancies. Women are not allowed to study because they think it is best for us to stay at home. But this idea must disappear from everyone's minds and women first, because we all have the same rights and we must demand that they be respected. (Lives in Guatemala)



They say we are useless

I am eighteen years old and I live in the Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan. I want the whole world to know that women can do many things, many more than we think we are capable of. I hear some boys say that we are useless, that we were created only to be at home, but it is not true, I know that women have the same rights in society. We have the right to work and education, to be protected from violence, to vote. And not to be married off by our families, to choose the partner we think is right, to live our own lives. (From Syria)



What have the girls done wrong?

It happened in 2013 when I was 11 years old. I had never met the boy who wanted to marry me. He saw me playing with other girls and thought I could be his wife. My parents said I would get married in three days, they tried to convince me by saying I would wear a very nice dress and that I would have a house for myself, but I didn't want to, I knew I was in danger, an aunt of mine had committed suicide because she couldn't stand the abuse from her husband and a sister had tried. I asked my uncle for help and had the idea to record a video that went viral and in which I said: "I ran away from my family, I can't live with them, I want to go live with my uncle. What happened to the innocence of childhood? What did we girls do wrong? Why do they marry us like this? I was able to solve my problems but many can't. Some have thrown themselves into the sea, they are dead, it's not normal, it's not right. My uncle helped me, I filed a complaint with the police against my mother, I told them I'm 11 years old and she wants to marry me off... I had no life without education, do they have no compassion? They threatened me with death if I went with my uncle but I would rather die than be with them... Go ahead, make me marry and I will kill myself... I will not live with them again, this is not life, this is not education, it is simply a crime. A culture that does not respect human rights is not a respectable culture" (from Yemen, lives in the United Kingdom).





Valentes i Acompanyades (Brave and Accompanied) is a non-profit organization that has been working to eradicate forced marriages in Catalonia since 2014. Comprehensive support is provided to young women at risk and they are provided with tools, resources and strategies for their empowerment and ability to defend their own decisions. An Individual Work Plan (ITP) is developed for each young woman served, which includes the following areas: economic, housing, emotional and psychological, training, employment, health, social and relational, and legal and administrative. The organization also gives talks, information sessions, qualified training for professionals, workshops and various programs for institutes, schools, community groups and agents in the territory with four main objectives: to make the reality of forced marriages visible, to weave alliances to put an end to them, to disseminate risk indicators for a more efficient detection of cases and to reach the maximum number of young people so that together we can accompany them towards the life, free from coercion and violence, that they want and have the right to live. In its ten years of history, the association has served almost 400 young women, the majority of whom reside in Catalonia, but also from other communities where there are no specialized support resources. It must be understood that this figure represents the minimum expression of the existing problem and that in 95% of the cases the young women had not previously passed through a police station, national police or local police precisely because it is very difficult for them to denounce their own parents.



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