Towards an EU external strategy against early and forced marriages - next steps

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The European Parliament adopted, by 556 votes to 63, with 61 abstentions, a resolution entitled ‘towards an EU external strategy against early and forced marriages - next steps’.

Child, early and forced marriages are a serious **violation of human rights** and, in particular, women’s rights and have an extremely negative impact on the physical and mental health and personal development of the individuals concerned. The Istanbul Convention classifies forced marriage as a form of violence against women, and calls for the acts of forcing a child to enter into a marriage and of luring a child abroad with the purpose of forcing her or him to enter into a marriage to be criminalised.

This problem exists not only in third countries, but in some Member States. Eliminating these practices is one of the priorities for the EU’s external action in the field of promoting women’s rights and human rights.

Minimum age for marriage: although some EU Member States allow marriage at 16 years with parental consent, Members called on legislators, both in the EU Member States and in third countries, to **set the minimum uniform age for marriage at 18 years** and to adopt necessary administrative, legal and financial measures to ensure effective implementation of this requirement, for example by promoting the registration of marriages and births and by ensuring that girls have access to institutional support mechanisms including psycho-social counselling.

Tackling the root causes: Members stressed the importance of tackling the multiple causes of child, early and forced marriages, including harmful traditions, endemic poverty, conflicts, customs, stereotypes, a lack of regard for gender equality and women’s and girls’ rights, the lack of appropriate educational opportunities, weak legal and policy responses with special attention to children from disadvantaged communities. They called, in that regard, for the EU and its Member States to meet the objectives of **the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda** to combat harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation, more effectively and to hold those responsible to account. They supported increased funding from the EU and its Member States via **development aid mechanisms** which promote gender equality and education, in order to improve access to education for girls and women and strengthen opportunities for them to participate in community development and in economic and political leadership, with a view to addressing the causes of child, early and forced marriages.

Banning: Member States which have not already done so are called on to include a **complete ban** on child, early and forced marriages in their domestic legislation and to enforce penal law and to ratify the Istanbul Convention. They stressed the importance of adequate and long-term support, for **shelters for women and refugees** and unaccompanied and displaced children, so that no-one is denied protection due to lack of resources.

Strategic Pact: Parliament has encouraged the European Union, in the context of its foreign and development cooperation policies, to offer a strategic pact to its partners and, to that end, require that:

- all partner countries prohibit child marriage, early marriage and forced marriage and develop comprehensive legal frameworks and action plans with clear milestones and timelines;
- the resources necessary to achieve this objective are mobilised and that the **level of public development aid allocation** to government authorities is made dependent on the recipient country’s

commitment to complying, in particular, with the requirements on human rights, including in the fight against child, early and forced marriage;

- the implementation of these programmes build on the relevant conventions and texts, as well as the specific goals and targets adopted by the UN General Assembly Resolution of 25 September 2015 in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular **Goal 3** ('Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages') and **Goal 5** of the SDGs ('Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'), including access to family planning and the full range of public and universal sexual and reproductive health rights, in particular modern contraception and safe and legal abortion for girls;
- issues relating to child, early, and forced marriages are raised in the **ongoing dialogue** between EU Special Representative for Human Rights and third countries.

Members called on the Commission to guarantee migrant women and girls an **autonomous residence permit** which is not dependent on the status of their spouse or partner, in particular for victims of physical and psychological violence.

Awareness raising: the Commission is called on to set up a European database, including information from third countries, to monitor forced marriage and to initiate a wide ranging awareness-raising campaign and to dedicate a European year to the fight against child, early and forced marriages.