



Analytical report – MATRIFOR

Forced marriage in Belgium: a qualitative research

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Project “*MATRIFOR - Approching forced marriages as a new form of trafficking in humans beings in Europa*”
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1. Introduction

This report presents the analysis of the qualitative research, i.e. interviews with professionals, performed as part of the multi-country MATRIFOR project, led by the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. The MATRIFOR project aims at studying forced marriages as a new form of trafficking in human beings in Europe. The main objectives of the study are:

- To study the characteristics of FM in the participation countries, in order to better understand the factors, victims' profile, and possible instruments to identify FM's cases.
- To study the main obstacles and difficulties in seeking legal redress in cases of FM in the participating countries.
- To propose specific legal mechanisms to address FM within context of the European Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/629/JHA.
- To analyze the way the participating countries are transposing into their national law the obligations imposed under the above cited EU Directive
- To develop training and awareness raising materials specifically addressed to target groups and beneficiaries.

The study started on November 16 2012 and will finish November 15 2015 (36 months).

There are 3 countries involved in the study: Belgium (project partner), Italy (project partner) and Spain (project coordinator). The institutions involved are: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (Barcelona, Spain), International Centre for Reproductive Health – Ghent University (Ghent, Belgium) and le Onde Onlus (Palermo, Italy).

The study is financed by the European Commission's programme "Prevention of and fight against crime" (DG Home Affairs).

2. Methodology

The methodology of the project consisted of qualitative research and combines in-depth interviews (fieldwork) with a legal analysis (desk study). Prior to the fieldwork, guidelines were developed to support the fieldwork in the 3 countries, and to make sure that the methodology in each country was similar. The main objectives of the fieldwork were:

- to study the characteristics of FM in the participating countries in order to better understand the factors, victims' profiles, and possible instruments to identify cases of forced marriage; and
- to study the main obstacles and difficulties in seeking legal redress in cases of FM in the participating countries.

Both professionals and (potential) victims of forced marriages were interviewed. The project stipulated that 20 face-to-face interviews with stakeholders (professionals) and 10 face-to-face interviews with (potential) victims of forced marriage in the local language of the country, should be

conducted. The interviews, were semi-structured. After conducting the fieldwork, the researchers drafted an analytical report to integrate the information collected during the interviews, following a format for the analytical report that was agreed upon by all partners. This report is the result of this.

Stakeholders were selected to include all sectors, as agreed by all partners at the beginning of the project. The professionals set forward to be included were: policy makers, lawyers, judges, prosecutors, police, health services, social services, school teachers, and NGO, specialized in the issue of forced marriages, violence against women, and migrant women's associations.

Based on prior experience gained during a project on forced marriage, a list of possible respondents was compiled. By using the snowballing technique, this list was updated with names that were suggested by the respondents. The recruiting of stakeholders and setting a date for the interview was slowed down, because the start date of the field work was situated at the beginning of the summer holiday period (July/august 2013). Moreover, recruiting victims proved to be difficult. Respondents were sought through the stakeholders-respondents that participated, by contacting NGOs working in the field, through the Platform Honour Based Violence (Platform of academics, NGOs and policy makers to discuss, coordinate and support work on honour violence, including forced marriages). NGOs and professionals expressed that they could not provide any names and/or phone numbers of (potential) victims for ethical reasons (non-disclosure of identity of clients). This was exacerbated by the fact that several studies have been conducted in the past on both honour violence and forced marriage. We therefore assume that there might be a "research-fatigue" among potential respondents. Given that Belgium consist of two distinct regions (Flanders and Wallonia), with two different realities in respect of policy and service delivery on health and social welfare aspects, we have therefore decided to increase the number of interviews of stakeholders, to 25 (instead of 20). In total, twenty eight (28) individuals were interviewed by March 15 2014, of which 3 with (potential) victims and 25 with stakeholders. The interviews were conducted in Dutch, English and French, by 4 interviewers (Johannes Decat, Els Leye, Emilomo Ogbe and Leonoor Van Gampelaere), between August 22 2013 and March 15 2014. Some interviews were in French (7), one in English and the majority in Dutch, but due to budget and time constraints, the French and English interviews were not translated to Dutch (native language), but coded and analysed in English directly. All interviews were tape recorded, transcribed and analysed [manually]. All respondents signed a letter of consent and agreed that the interviews were tape recorded.

All key informants were officially invited to collaborate in the study by e-mail. For this purpose, a contact/invitation letter was used when approaching the selected respondents (see annex). Ethical clearance for this study was provided by the ethical committee at Ghent University.

A clear explanation of the study was provided beforehand to the key informants, detailing the project's aims, methodology, equipment used, and how the interview was to be used in the future. We clarified the respondents' role in the study and their time commitment. Although the name of the respondents is not disclosed in this report, nor in the final publication of the study, we requested each respondent to sign an informed consent (annex).

Table 1: List of respondents (stakeholders and victims)

STAKEHOLDERS				
	Category	Function	Date	Language
1	Policy maker	Director, Violence against Women expert	August 22 2013	Dutch
2	Academic sector	Researcher, forced marriage expert	Sept 9 2013	Dutch 1 hour 18'
3	Social sector	Therapist/project officer	August 22 2013	Dutch 60'
4	Judicial sector	Judge	September 5 2013	French
5	Education sector	Retired teacher/Equal Opportunity teacher	October 17 2013	Dutch
6	Social sector	Youth advisor	September 4 2013	Dutch
7	Social service	Violence against women expert	August 18 2013	Dutch
8	NGO	Director, forced marriage expert	September 21 2013	French
9	Judicial sector	Police, expert forced marriage	November 7 2013	Dutch
10	Social service	Women's shelter, vaw expert	November 28 2013	Dutch
11	Social service	Women's shelter, vaw expert	November 28 2013	Dutch
12	Judicial sector	Retired/intercultural mediator	December 6 2013	Dutch
13	Social sector	Roma steward	December 13 2013	Dutch
14	Social sector	Roma steward	December 13 2013	Dutch
15	Social sector	Refugee fieldworker	December 13 2013	Dutch
16	Health sector	Psychotherapist	January 1 2014	Dutch
17	Judicial sector	General prosecutor	January 31 2014	Dutch
18	NGO	Programme officer, gender & diversity expert	February 4 2014	Dutch

19	Social sector	Programme officer, support team ethnic minorities	March 10 2014	Dutch
20	Policy maker	VAW expert	February 19 2014	French
21	Social sector	Programme officer, support team ethnic minorities	March 10 2014	Dutch
22	NGO	Director, migrant women's organization	February 25 2014	French
23	Judicial	Police, forced marriage expert	March 13 2014	French
24	NGO	Forced marriage expert	March 13 2014	French
25	Social sector	VAW expert	March 14 2014	Dutch

VICTIMS

26	Senegal	August 23 2013	French
27	Sudan	August 23 2013	English
28	Pakistan	March 6 2013	Dutch

This analytical report integrates the information collected in the interviews with stakeholders only, as well as other complementary information that is relevant to substantiate the analysis.

3. The magnitude of the problem of forced marriage in Belgium

This chapter discusses interview responses with regard to available data in Belgium on forced marriages, complemented by some figures provided in available studies on this subject.

There are no representative prevalence figures on forced marriages readily available in Belgium, as was confirmed by many of some respondents. In the past, some attempts were made to grasp the magnitude of the problem of FM in Belgium. These include (not exhaustive):

- 1991: survey among Turkish female population in Flanders and Brussels: 18% was victim of forced marriages¹
- 1999: interviews with Turkish and Moroccan women in Flanders and Brussels: 27% of women older than 40 years married by forced²
- 2004: survey among youngsters (15-18 yrs) in Brussels and Wallonia: 7% are confronted with FM in family, 16% with acquaintances and 73% confirmed it happens in Belgium³

¹ J. Surkyn, Het gezins- en waardenonderzoek bij Turkse en Marokkaanse vrouwen in Vlaanderen en Brussel, Working Paper Etnische Minderheden in België, VUB & UGent, 1991, nr. 3, 17.

² Mentioned in: Ratia E & Walter A., International exploration on forced marriages. A literature study on legal measures, policy and public debates in Belgium, France, Germany, United Kingdom and Switzerland. Wolf Legal Publishers, 2009

- 2006: interviews with Turkish, Moroccan, Albanian, Pakistani women: no percentages available⁴
- 2009: survey among male respondents from Moroccan, Turkish and Sikh community⁵
- 2012:survey among Moroccan and Turkish community in Brussels-Capital Region⁶ .

However, given that these studies have methodological shortcomings (different population groups, using different methods, etc), no conclusions can be made regarding the total number of victims, or potential victims, of forced marriage, and consequently trends over time that impossible to assess.

Given that forced marriages is recognized as a specific crime in the penal code since 2007, data on forced marriages *in the judicial system* should be registered⁷. However, one respondent said that the cases registered in the judicial system were few:

“Normally, reports to the police are in the database of the police. With respect to the public prosecutors, there is a database of the College of Prosecutors. That is for all penal issues, as forced marriage is in the penal code. So there are two different databases, they are not uniform. Normally, it should be quite easy to retrieve since 2007 (since the law on forced marriage was adopted), provided that they are coded appropriately. [...]It’s true that we did not have many cases, and it might be interesting to see why”.

A project in Mons, the “Honour related violence-forced marriage project”, a collaboration between the Victim’s assistance unit of the police and an NGO, has kept records of the cases of forced marriages, since its creation in 2011. They indicated that since 2011, they had 20 cases of forced marriage (of which 9 in 2013). A survey conducted in a school in Mons in 2007, equally showed that forced marriage is a reality for more than a quarter of the students:

“I have done a survey in school (school for nurses), on 260 students there were 27% who heard about forced marriage in the family or among friends. It’s was enormous.

Another NGO, working with migrant women in Brussels, stated that in 2013, she had ten cases of forced marriage that she followed up personally, while also providing advice and taking phone calls on forced marriage that are not registered. This respondent also indicated that many cases of FM are not registered as such, but are registered as partner violence or interfamilial violence:

“I receive a lot of telephone calls and a lot of requests for advice on this issue. Some are referred to other organisations, and some don’t go further, but I cannot follow up always on these situations [...]. Most probably, there are much more than what the figures show, as figures are mostly in terms

³ Mentioned in De Brabander A. De strafrechtelijke en criminologische dimensie van het gedwongen huwelijk. Master Thesis Faculty of Law, UGent, 2011-2012

⁴ Zemni S, Casier M, Peene N. Studie naar de factoren die de vrijheid van keuze van een echtgenoot beperken, bij bevolkingsgroepen van vreemde oorsprong van België, Gent/Brussel: UGent/Centrum voor gelijkheid van kansen en racismebestrijding, 2006.

⁵ Descheemaker L, Heyse P, Wets J, Clycq N, Timmerman C. Partnerkeuze en huwelijksluiting van Allochtone mannen. Een kwantitatieve en kwalitatieve analyse van het partnerkeuzep proces en het huwelijk van Marokkaanse, Turkse en sikhmannen. Instituut voor de Gelijkheid van Vrouwen en Mannen,2009, Brussel.

⁶ Rea A, Bensaïd N. Rapport relatif à l’étude portant sur les mariages forcés en région de Bruxelles-Capitale, Université Libre de Bruxelles, 2012

⁷ These figures have been requested but were not received yet.

of violence, and are always below the reality. What we also see, is that many young girls do not go all the way once they initiated something, they are too afraid. Some withdraw, some don't know, so we are also somewhat powerless. But what I see is that many cases of forced marriages are not registered as such, as they are often registered under something else; they decide to register as interfamilial violence and not as forced marriage”.

The Support Team for Refugees in one city indicated that they have five to ten cases a year, while one NGO (not first line) indicated that they had five calls regarding “dramatic forced marriage” situations in a period of four years.

Some respondents indicated that what is registered as forced marriages, is only the tip of the iceberg:

“Forced marriages, really those people who are effectively threatened and who come here, these clients we often have [...], but we do not have statistics. [...]. Weekly we have someone who is threatened to marry and who has to deal with partner violence as a consequence. [...]. I believe it is much more prevalent than we all think, but that is just the same way as with partner violence, it occurs much more than we know. [...]. I'm convinced we only see a minority of the victims in our service”.

In 2013, a shelter for abused women registered 45 women, of which 2 concerned child marriages, six an arranged marriage, one a forced marriage and one was threatened with forced marriage. In 2012, 26 of the 57 women were in an arranged marriage. Issues related to an arranged marriage seemed to be more common than forced marriage. This was also indicated by one respondent that stipulated forced marriage is not as important when looking at the magnitude as arranged marriage: ten cases of forced marriage per year while 30 cases of arranged marriages. Another respondent indicated that in their Centre for General Welfare, they encounter mostly arranged marriages:

“ I do not really have a percentage on the people we help with forced or arranged marriage. Arranged marriages are many, about 60%, but people have no problem with this, so service delivery is not necessary here”.

The common practice of arranged marriages was also confirmed by the 2006 study by Zemni et al.

A respondent working with the Roma community, indicated that most marriages concluded among Roma are arranged, and all are child marriages:

“ The most common form of marriage among the community I work with (Roma in a particular city) is arranged marriages. [...] and they are all child marriages”

This was confirmed by another respondent working with the same community in the same city, who also stipulated that of the 60 families they monitor, five families have a minor bride that was imported (respondent 14). Respondents confirmed that most of the child marriages in Roma are arranged marriages, and that forced marriage is rare:

Most marriages in Roma community in XX are arranged marriages. [...] In one year, I did not receive any requests to help people with forced marriages. But after they married, I heard that the spouses were not informed about the upcoming marriage”.

4. The problem with defining forced marriages, arranged marriages and the distinction between the two

This section shares insights of respondents with regard to defining and classifying FM and AM.

Not many respondents had a definition of FM that they can rely on when working with people affected by FM, except for those with a juridical background, working in juridical sector and policy makers, as they refer to the definition as stipulated in the law.

“Well, I’m employed by the police so I cannot but follow the law when it comes to the definition, and in the Penal Code, article 391 sexties, a specific criminalization was added in 2007 on forced marriages, which says [respondent cites the law literally]”.

Some respondents consider child marriages, concluded under 18 year, as forced because it is a child, while others believed that minors can consent to it. In case of child marriage, it is for some respondents more easy to intervene, from a legal point of view:

“In our family planning centre, you have to determine what it is based on the history, on what people tell you; if it is or is not problematic. If it is problematic, we intervene, if it is not, we do not intervene. And for marriage among minors, we have the law. The law says it is 18 years, be it in Belgium or in country of origin. So, a marriage concluded before 18, for us, it is an illegal marriage. So, we can intervene”.

However, in daily practice, defining what forced marriages are is problematic. Making a clear distinction between arranged marriages (not illegal) and forced marriages (illegal) is not always easy and is more complex than what is defined by the law.

“For me, it is difficult to draw the line between what is forced and what not, to put a finger on it, because the issue of loyalty is very strong and youngsters are very susceptible for this, but also adults. Sometimes people, at the beginning of the therapy, will tell me that they choose freely for their partner, but further on in the process of the therapy, people say that actually, they were promised as children to be married by their parents. It was a promise. So this comes up after half year of therapy, otherwise, no one would have known that the marriage was actually forced. This is sometimes difficult to discover”.

Those working with persons affected by FM stipulate that, in order to define the problem, the victim defines if it is a problematic situation, and that is taken as a point of departure for action:

“Definitions have their limitations. What is important for me is to listen to the person who is coming to us, to understand his/her demands. Maybe we will find ourselves in the strict interpretation of the law, or maybe not, but if for that person this is a burden[...] than we will try to see together what can be done”.

Another issue that was raised was the problem of determining if it is a marriage of convenience:

“Marriages of convenience are equally the subject of this penal code, but the categories are blur, and there is a problem with finding proof”.

Respondents referred to some of the characteristics that can assist in making the distinction between forced and arrange marriage. Elements that were mentioned as being important to define if a marriage is forced included:

- If one of the two persons was forced and put under pressure, be it physical or psychological (legal definition);
- If one of the two persons did not engage in the marriage freely;
- If persons have no own choice, are imported, have no social network and are isolated: *“For me, a forced marriage is when people are obliged to marry, if they have no own choice, who are often imported here, who have no social network whatsoever, and who have to live in the family of the partner with whom they are married. And they find themselves here totally isolated”*.
- If girls or boys are sold: *“[In order to define], I’m going to use a very ugly word, but it has to do with our experience, and that is that girls or boys are sold. Because boys are equally involved in a marriage. That is how we have phrased it often among teachers and colleagues. As a consequence, sometimes girls themselves admitted that they are sold. I dare to see it as a bargain that is concluded”*.
- If there is damage to the person who married: *“I work in a private practice, on my own. So I do not have an official definition. For me, I always look at it from the angle “what is the possible damage to that person?”. So for me, a forced marriage can already be when there is put pressure on a person; if they say “It’s time you get married”. For me that is already a forced marriage”*.

An important element that was mentioned by many respondents, was that arranged and forced marriages are situated in a spectrum of differing levels of consent, pressure, and negotiation space. This continuum can range from absolutely no freedom or choice whatsoever to refuse the proposed marriage partner (forced), to different possibilities to negotiate regarding suggested partners or marriage prospects ((strongly) arranged), to a marriage where both partners consent with the partner that is proposed to them (fully consented arranged marriage).

The question of arranged marriage is much more complicated. Because you can have strongly arranged marriages and consented marriages”.

“I see it as a spectrum, in my work (psychotherapist) I encounter the whole spectrum. In my experience, when there is a very high degree of compellingness, than the person has very little space to refuse and has little say in it. And then, stepping out is very difficult and the consequences to step out, once the marriage is concluded, are very severe”.

However, such arranged marriage are not necessarily perceived as problematic, as respondents mentioned that often youngsters agree with the choice made by parents (or others) as they trust the judgment of the parents on this.

“It’s a tin line and there is no guarantee that a marriage will succeed or not. I have met a lot of youngsters who were very grateful because their marriage was arranged, because, for them it meant that their family, father, mother, uncle, aunt were taking care of them. They feel supported in this, because they are often also vulnerable and think that they would not have taken any steps to find a partner, as this is very difficult for them”.

One respondent mentioned a particular form of arranged marriage, the “hasty marriage”, concluded during holidays, when migrants return for holidays to countries of origin:

“During holidays, when people with a migrant background return to the countries, to Turkey, to Morocco, where youngsters are presented to each other. Young boys that live over there, the young girl from here. Or the other way around. And this marriage is generally speaking concluded very quickly. During holiday, the meeting is set up, a party is organized. And then, the marriage is concluded and a young girl or young boy arrives in Brussels. This is not a forced marriage, it’s an arranged marriage. [...]. But it is a marriage that is not concluded on a solid basis, as the youngsters did not have the time to get to know each other, and the young boy or

girl does not know the life in Brussels. So this marriage become very often problematic afterwards. But initially, we cannot qualify it as forced marriage”.

Another striking finding from the interviews is that classifying marriage as forced or arranged by the victims can evolve over time, mostly it will evolve from arranged to forced. It might be that an individual has agreed to a marriage in order to be able to migrate, but once in Belgium, the marriage is not what they expected or does not turn out to be good (e.g. due to violence or the threat of violence in that marriage).

“Some will say, years later, and especially when the marriage is not very good, that they were actually not free, that they were forced but that they, at the moment of marrying, they did not feel it that way. So the perception on what is forced and what not changes over time due to positive and negative experiences of that person”.

One respondent mentioned that it can also evolve from forced to arranged:

In case of Roma families I work with, I have never encountered a marriage by free choice. In first instance, it will be forced but very quickly it will evolve to an arranged marriage as it is normal that the marriage partner is chosen by the parents”.

One respondent noted that there is a difference in defining FM between the two regions. In Wallonia, FM is more seen as a concept on its own, while in Flanders FM is more often defined as honour related violence.

It’s a bit difficult to distinguish between forced marriages and honour related violence. It’s true that at policy level, in Belgium, in Flanders, honour related violence is much more talked about, while in the francophone part, people talk mainly about forced marriages, and not so much about honour related violence, and it is strongly based on forced marriage. But anyway, the managing of the phenomena is a bit the same.”

Finally, it was stipulated that it is important not to stigmatize communities, when trying to define the problem, and that it should be taken into consideration that norms regarding marriage differ in other parts of the world:

“Violence should be punished but what do you do with definitions that are not OK? Or who threaten to exclude people or stigmatise them or criminalise them? It’s difficult [...] and I do not have an answer readily available”.

“Marriage in Europe, in the past, was also not for love. In the nineteenth century, the romantic love cam important. But we see that globally, this romantic love is not for everyone the norm”.

Responses differ among respondents when asked if forced marriage should be classified as a form of interpersonal violence or gender related violence. Some respondents saw it as a form of gender based violence, while other classified it as interpersonal violence, or believed it was both:

“It is not OR gender based violence OR interpersonal violence, it’s both. It is not purely gender related as boys and men are affected. But the interpersonal aspects , the expectations of the environment, and the responsibility for the education of children that is put on mothers, makes mothers encourage and discourage certain relations with someone”.

One respondent mentioned that forced marriage should be considered from differing angles, it is an issue of migration, as well as a gender issue and a socio-cultural issue, and suggested to use the intersectionality perspective:

“I consider FM as both gender violence and interpersonal violence, definitely when you look at it from an intersectionality perspective. [...]. In the so-called “white” women’s organisations,

gender is often prioritized. But gender touches migrant women differently than “white” women. It is very important to take into consideration the different ordering principles, and those principles will define the position of each on those axes⁸ differently”.

5. Characteristics of forced and arrange marriage practices

This section discusses the responses provided by the stakeholders with regard to the characteristics of forced and arranged marriages they encountered in their working environment.

5.1. Decision makers

In most cases, respondents mentioned that the family, and particular the parents, were the main “matchmakers”. One respondent mentioned that mothers play a key role in this.

“If your principal role in life is being a mother, and you have no job or some kind of career, you only have household chores and your responsibility is the education of the children, than this will be tightly linked with your own identity and your own wellbeing. And if you are judged on that by your community, [...], I think it is something very difficult, at psychological level, for mothers, it makes them very vulnerable”.

Another respondent assumed that within the second and third generation migrants the influence of parents as matchmakers has diminished.

“In the Roma community, parents still play a very important role. But there are cases that youngsters say that they do not agree. But the majority will resign. We had cases here of youngsters rebelling, who took steps through school or through the unit “society”, and who mentioned they were to be forcefully married, and then police and justice came in. [...]. The second generation will still try to choose a partner from their own ethnicity, because they hope to safeguard part of their culture. But the children who grow up here ...I think it's wishful thinking from the parents but the children are articulate enough, they know their way”.

One respondent mentioned that decision making is influenced by the internet and that victims are sometimes lured to Belgium.

“Most of the times, I think it's the parents who arrange the marriage between them, but it also happens that people, from Thailand for example, learn to know each other via internet and are lured to Belgium under false pretenses, and have to live a total different life here than they imagined, but they came here by free will”.

5.2. Pressure, control and freedom of choice

Pressure is an aspect that is key in the area of arranged and forced marriages. From the analysis of the interviews with stakeholders, some insights were shared on those who exert pressure and to whom it is targeted, how it is done, what the possible consequences might be, why the pressure is put on the youngsters and finally, why people accept it.

Respondents mentioned that pressure can come from the whole community, not only from the family. It might be that pressure also comes from the family in the country of origin. The freedom of choice to refuse a marriage candidate can depend on the characteristics of a family, i.e. whether the

⁸ Respondent refers here to two axes: gender ax and the ethnicity ax.

family is “open and modern” or rather “conservative”. Another respondent characterized it as “closed communities” that are more often putting pressure on people.

“Freedom of choice depends from one person to another. There are families who are very open and modern and where a decent dialogue is possible. But there are also families where it’s really a monologue. Where the father or mother says: this is the candidate and you will not find any better, this is with whom you have to cope. [...]. It has to do with family structure, regardless of the Turkish, Italian or Moroccan culture. And also what parents are used to. Are the parents educated in a way that they may choose themselves, than they will give their children more freedom. But if not...”

Pressure can be targeted towards individuals, but equally towards a family. Some respondents noted that care providers or key persons with whom they work, and who come from the same community as (potential) victims, might equally be under pressure.

“Care providers can be put under pressure, and are urged to stop in order not to blame their community (in case they have same community)”.

“An imam is also put under pressure. Their faith rules are somewhat the same as our catholic rules, have respect for your parents. So if parents decide with whom their daughter is to be married, and because these parents are forced by families in countries of origin, who also act based on the respect for the family as you are in a “closed” community structure, well, that imam would contradict himself if he would express himself against such a marriage, he would block himself”.

Pressure is to be situated on a continuum of freedom of choice, and is sometimes difficult to define whether are not it is a forced marriage.

“I also have the experience that some youngsters feel it coming and refuse to go on holiday, because they say, OK, there is no pressure but I simply do not like it that candidates are proposed every time. Is that pressure? Yes and no. No, because they have the choice to say yes or no, but they have to deal with it every day”.

The pressure experienced is mostly psychological, although also physical, and might be expressed by means of controlling a girl, by the community punishing a family (e.g. half of the community not showing up at a wedding of one of the children of a particular family that let their daughter marry someone not accepted by the community), or the knowledge that a girl or boy might to have to break with the family.

“There were a couple of girls who were taken from the families, but in the end it meant a pressure and those girls said “if I leave now, than I will no longer be a member of the family. Than I do not belong anymore, to the community. And then they go often back and succumb their faith, so to speak. Because that’s the way it should be and the parents have experienced it, the grandparents too”.

There was also pressure identified by the Belgian community:

“When you live in a society where Islamophobia is very big, than you create a countermovement. If we are not good enough for you, than you are not good enough for us. Those kind of elements of mutual racism and prejudices also play a role. [...] these are inclusion and exclusion mechanisms that play a role and have an influence on the behavior of people. And we saw also reversed racism, some young women who were not welcomed by the Flemish parents of their boyfriend”.

One of the reasons for keeping up/accepting (with) that pressure mentioned, was the fear of being expelled from the community and family and the fact that it is very hard to break with the safe environment of the family and hence, makes that youngsters are scared to act against the family and break with them. Examples of youngsters who have undergone this, serve as examples and as a deterrent.

"The fact that such things happen is an enormous deterrent for other youngsters to even think about starting something with someone from their class who is not Moroccan or Turkish".

"I think there are quite some youngsters who believe to have the power to break with the family, who do it, but who, after X weeks, break and prefer to return to the family cocoon, they need it too much. Who are very young, who are poor... To be independent from your family demands a lot of courage and power".

People also do not want to disappoint parents and scandalize the family's name. The aspect of loyalty is a vital element here.

"FM limits the freedom of choice. Pressure can be very subtle but can be very convincing. One of the main characteristics is loyalty to the family ties and the loyalty conflict. [...]. The majority of the cases of forced marriages/arranged marriages find their origin in being stuck between the partner and the family of origin. There is a conflict between the partner they did not choose themselves and the family that proposed the partner. To me it is obvious that this is a major source of conflict between man and woman, but also of internal psychological problems (anxiety, depressions). Persons are stuck between what parents want, what they want and what their partner wants".

5.3. Consequences of FM⁹

The professionals have mentioned various consequences of forced marriages, as well as arranged marriages. These include psychological problems, early pregnancy, school drop-out for both boys and girls, financial consequences, problems with integration in case of a migration marriage, intimate partner violence, extreme isolation, and repudiation from the community. These are discussed in more detail below.

Psychological problems are caused because victims find themselves in a marriage that does not work out, and when divorce is not an option. In other situations, people remain with the abusive partner as they do not want to lose their residence permit (marriage cannot be dissolved in first 3 years, has now changed to 5 years). This can lead to a range of problems, including depressions, damage to self-esteem, feelings of guilt and shame, problems with sexuality. The consequences of the pressure that is put on victims to accept marriage candidates, can have serious consequences, and can affect normal functioning in daily life, and eventually leading to victims breaking under that pressure. Psychological violence in relations can also lead to suicide, as one professional mentioned. When a marriage does not work out, this can lead to a break of the trust relation among family and friends. *"I had a case of forced marriage, of a man who was forced by his parents to marry a particular girl, but who was in love with another woman. Besides his marriage, he kept on seeing that woman, he dreamt of a life with her. But he had promised his parents to marry the woman of their choice, and wanted to keep that promise. At certain point in time, he got stuck in his loyalty to the different parties and he arrived in a situation of chronic suicidal tendency. The only way out that he saw was death".*

⁹ As mentioned earlier by respondents, it is difficult to draw the line between forced and arranged marriages, and it should rather be viewed as a continuum from limited pressure (eg marriage candidates that are proposed on a regular basis but refusal is possible) to no room at all to refuse or negotiate marriage candidates). As professionals working with people affected by these phenomena state, the point of departure is when the person indicates there is a problem. Hence why the following analyses do not distinguish clearly between AM or FM, but rather should be situated in this continuum.

A particular form of psychological problems that was mentioned concerned the isolation of the victims. These situations of (extreme) isolation were identified in women or men that migrated to Belgium for marriage, but live in isolation from society. Often, they are not prepared on the other life style and habits of the partner. This can result in isolation, and even violence. Isolation and loneliness was also noted after divorce, due to the lack of an own social network. The aspect of isolation was also mentioned in the provision of care, when there is no follow up once a girl is 18. These girls find themselves in total isolation as they have no network anymore in the community. *"We see more and more women who have never left their houses and who are, after several years, are out on the street. They come to the police station, e.g. we had a woman who was in Belgium for 3 years but who did not even know where she lived. All of a sudden she was thrown out of the house by her husband, sometimes with the children. She could not tell us the address where she lived"*.

Violence was one of the issues that was often mentioned as a consequence of forced and arranged marriages. Such marriages are often not concluded on a solid basis and the marriage becomes problematic leading to (threats of) violence, and intimate partner violence. Sometimes, partners are ignorant of the difficulties, relations or children from the past life of the partner in Belgium, which can lead to violence. Differences in education, norms and values regarding parenthood, on how to raise children, can cause difficulties in arranged marriages between a partner born and raised in Belgium and a partner coming from a home country. One professional stated that when there are migration problems, marriage problems certainly follow. Expectations and promises that were agreed upon are not met, which can equally lead to intimate partner violence. Moreover, partners from abroad are often in a much weaker position than the partner from Belgium, as the latter knows the language, already has a residence permit and knows his/her way in Belgian society. Violence was also noted among minor Roma girls, who enter in the family of the husband and who are abused, have to do all the hard and dirty work, have heavy duties, do not have the opportunity to use contraception and have to obey the elder women in the family.

"I had a case of an Afghan woman who had to marry at 16, with an Afghan man who lived here for many years. Apparently, the family of the man was very influential in Afghanistan. So, the woman came here at the age of 16, with false documents, her marriage certificate and birth certificate were falsified. In that marriage there was severe partner violence, and also child abuse. She had a number of miscarriages due to her husband. She sought help, and provided evidence, but she did not want to report to the police, because she and her family were threatened. The family of the woman in Afghanistan was severely threatened, even physically, i.e. the mother was stabbed with a knife. Her husband said that if ever someone told what happened in his house, he would make sure that her family in Afghanistan was going to be harmed. He also tries very hard to get her back to Afghanistan, but she knows that if she goes back she will be labeled as a very bad woman".

An extreme expression of violence included the threat of murder as well as being expelled from the community. Such threat of being killed was mentioned by a professional who worked with the Indian community. Being expelled by the community was mentioned more often. Especially when refusing a marriage, this brings a heavy emotional burden with it, as one is seen as dirty, less valued by the family and the community, and leads to expulsion from the community (this was a case in Roma community). One professional said that it was really difficult to take any juridical steps in cases of FM, as the victims are expelled from their community and they end up being very lonely.

"When asked what women would think if their daughters would come home with a non-Muslim, a lot of these women said they were not going to talk anymore with their daughter, and that they would break all contact for years, in order to avoid the shame of the community. Those are real dramas. We spoke to some of these women who were victim of such

disconnection with their family. In secret, they try to meet with their daughter sometimes. But those situations are extremely painful for the daughter and her partner”.

Marriages concluded between a partner that lives in Belgium and a partner that is migrating from a home country, can work out, but can equally cause problems due to issues related to migration and integration. The person migrating to Belgium can face racism and discrimination, a lack of job opportunities, poor labour conditions, which can cause disappointments and homesickness. It might also be that persons migrating to Belgium had different expectations of their life here that are not met, causing problems with integration.

School dropout was one of the problems mentioned in the Roma community. Marriages are concluded in a traditional way, at young age (before age of 15). Once married, girls, but also boys, drop out of school. The girls have 2 to four children, and they have to take care of the children and hence have no time to go to school. Girls also know this and do not see the added value of school. They do not see the point of attending school if they are to marry in two years’ time and will have the care for family and household on their shoulders. Boys equally drop out of school because as the man in the house, they have to provide money and have to work.

“With the Roma community it is a problem that when they marry, they do not go to school, girls are kept at home, and definitely those coming from abroad. Sometime girls who attended school for 8 or 9 years, and who get married, drop out of school. This is really not good for the future generation. It’s a waste of time. Everything we do in schools is a bit lost when girls remain at home after they marry”.

As a consequence of the above mentioned child marriages, early pregnancy was noted. Other cases of early pregnancy that were mentioned included minor brides arriving in Belgium, who get pregnant quickly in order to get residence permit more quickly (if they have a baby).

Finally, the financial burden of FM or arranged marriages was equally mentioned as a consequence. Especially when a bride price was paid (Roma), this can put a serious financial burden on partners to stay in a marriage. On the other hand, the bride price can be seen as part of solving financial problems in a family. Such financial issues can cause considerable stress.

“For example, in case of a man, he can contract a big loan in order to marry, because sometimes a bride price is paid, or gold has to be bought for the marriage, so thousands of Euros. Sometime, the family in rural areas has sold land for this, contracted loans. So the marriage was an investment of the whole family. On top of that, the man is not prepared to the life in Belgium. There is pressure to pay back that money as soon as possible, he has to find a job as soon as possible. So there is financial pressure, the expectations of the family, the obligations that it brings with it”.

5.4. Some characteristics of practicing communities

One question in the questionnaire for stakeholders involved requesting the ethnicities that they were confronted with, when it comes to issues related to forced marriages and arranged marriages. These communities are, in alphabetical order, Afghan, Albanese, Algerian, Armenian, Bangladeshi, Belgian, Bulgarian Turks, Chechnya, Chinese, Indian, Italian, Kosovar (Roma), Kurdish, Lebanese, Maghrebian, Moroccan, Pakistan, Roma, Russian, Sicilian, Thai, Tunisian, Turkish and Serbian ethnic minorities.

When it comes to gender, professionals mentioned that both boys and girls could be confronted with FM and AM, while others stated that only girls are forced into marriage. It was however

mentioned several times that boys have more opportunities to resist to the pressure to accept a marriage candidate, and that other rules apply for men than for women.

With regard to age, one respondent mentioned that sometimes girls are married at 16 or 17 in countries of origin, and are brought to Belgium once 18 in the framework of family reunification, or when certificates are falsified:

“I had some cases of child marriages, but often papers are falsified so that people appear to be adults when they come here, e.g. when the birth certificate has been changed, they were 16 or 14 when they married in countries of origin but come here under another data of birth”.

Marriage of minors was mentioned among Roma and Afghan communities. Concerning the early age of marriage among the Roma communities, one respondent detailed that within that communities, 18 is already old to get married. The “value” decreases with age; when 18 and not yet married, this means that the bride price will decrease, as one respondent stated. Another one mentioned that someone getting married at 18 is most often physically impaired or has a history of violence, or someone who could not find a partner easily. A respondent equally said that among Roma communities, engagement is done as young as 10 to 13 years, followed by marriage at 13 or 14. Roma are also said to be a very closed community, and those working with those communities will only know about a FM when it is already concluded. Roma also know how FM is viewed in Belgium and will not talk about it. Finally, one respondent mentioned that the characteristic open/close community is more decisive than the characteristic “ethnicity”.

5.5. Reasons for FM and AM¹⁰

Respondents mentioned a number of reasons for forced or arranged marriages. These reasons can be summarised as follows and are further detailed below: avoiding dishonour, “therapeutic” reasons, material or financial reasons, residence papers, to protect against exterior influences or to protect own culture and to care for elders.

Many respondents mentioned the aspect of honour. At the onset of puberty of a girl and when the first signs of femininity appear, having a girl married preserves the honour of the girl and family. Among Roma communities, it was mentioned that there is a high social pressure to marry young and to accept the proposed partner, in order not to dishonour the family. Sometimes, promises for marrying children are made between families when children are very young. Such promises cannot be broken. One respondent mentioned that a case of honour killing caused more forced marriages in the Indian community.

“We had periods where we had more cases of FM. For example, 3 years ago an Indian girl was killed here, and because of that killing, a lot of Indian girls were forced to marry because the families were afraid that their daughters were going to do the same (the girl that was killed fell in love with an Indian boy from a different caste). At that time we received a lot of questions on that issue”.

Dishonouring the family can also be caused by having an inter-ethnic relation that is not accepted by the parents, by having a too western attitude, when youngsters go against the family rules, in case of homosexuality or in case of “problematic” youngsters (drug abusers, problems at school, criminal

¹⁰ As mentioned earlier by respondents, it is difficult to draw the line between forced and arranged marriages, and it should rather be viewed as a continuum from limited pressure (e.g. marriage candidates that are propose don regular basis but refusal is possible to no room at all to refuse or negotiate marriage candidates). As professionals working with people affected by these phenomena state, the point of departure is when the person indicates there is a problem. Hence why the following analyses do not distinguish clearly between AM or FM, but rather should be situated in this continuum.

history, having had (multiple) relations prior to marriage). In such cases, a “therapeutic” marriage is proposed or imposed to “cure” the person and to bring him or her on the right track again.

“There is freedom of choice as long it’s a Muslim, in case the people are Muslim. Or if the person has the same ethnicity. But from the moment it’s an interethnic marriage, for example between an Italian and a Flemish, than it becomes more difficult. Then I notice than a lot of parents are interfering and that parents think it’s not good, because they want their grandchildren to have the same religion... and so they try to convince the youngsters”.

“The Turkish community is quite closed and relatively small. A girl has a boyfriend, and another one, and third time, and it does not work out either... in the end, her reputation in the community has already been damaged. And then it’s often the reality that those girls have to find a partner in Turkey because their reputation is less of an issue there. Or that she, because she has a visa or residence papers, is used as an intermediary to find someone over there. For me that is also a marriage with limited freedom of choice”.

Some respondent sometimes, boys and girls from home countries are perceived as better marriage candidates.

“We noticed a very negative perception of girls about boys from the same origin living in Belgium and vice versa. Especially among girls: the boys are losers, they do not finish school, they will not be able to support a family, they have no sense of responsibility, especially that: “when I look at my environment, those boys are not serious, they just hang around in gangs”. Actually, a lot of stereotypes about migrants were reflected that live in the perception among autochthons that was really remarkable and steered the choice for a partner in the country of origin. Sometimes there was the factor family, although that was not that strong”.

Marriages are equally concluded for financial and/or material reasons or for residence papers. This refers mainly to a marriage that is seen as a financial transaction, whereby parents “sell” girls, as one respondent put it. This has to do with financial difficulties that Roma families find themselves in, whereby parents do not see any other way out than a forced or arranged marriage. A bride price is then seen as a way out of this financial burden. Respondents cited amounts between 750 and 10.000 euro.

“A lot of families are in a position of financial difficulties and all the problems this brings with it. Traditional, in a Roma marriage, a bride price should be paid. And the marriage celebration costs a lot of money too, presents must be given, so I think for a family that has difficulties, marrying can be a serious financial burden, or vice versa, when you receive the bride price. I had a family with financial problems, and the grandmother saw the solution for their financial problems by selling her granddaughter”.

One respondent mentioned that, in order to increase the value of a Roma girl, a physical deficiency (eye) was operated on. One respondent mentioned that the Kurdish community is very clan-oriented and that marriages are concluded among the same clan in order to protect land and property. Marriages are equally concluded to obtain residence permits, and this causes several problems, as respondents pointed out. As it is increasingly difficult to enter Belgium, marriages to obtain residence permits are a reality. One respondent mentioned that this is the only way to get to Europe/Belgium for non-EU residents, as economic migration is not possible anymore. Marriage is then used deliberately to obtain residence papers. When partners are sought in the home countries, mainly because they are thought to be less emancipated (in case of girls) or being more able to care and provide for the family (in case of boys), youngsters with such marriage ambitions often doubt the intentions of someone of the home countries, finding it difficult to know whether or not the candidate only wants them for the “papers”.

And finally, such marriages are imposed to protect the own values and against foreign influences. The Belgian way of life is considered to be loose among Roma (having multiple relations when young, children that are educated to freely). Marriage among Roma is thus seen as protecting against the others, against a “hostile world outside”, as one respondent put it. Another one mentioned that such marriages were concluded to avoid that something would happen to their girls. This fear was inspired by the paedophilia cases and Catholic Church scandals in Belgium. Parents wanted to secure their expectations for their girls by arranging or forcing them to marry. One respondent mentioned that having to give up the daughter that you raised, once she’s married, to another family (of her husband), means that this experience of loss will be even bigger if the girl marries someone from another religion or even another socio-economic status. FM and AM within same ethnic communities are concluded to protect the own culture and values. Parents might have concerns that their frame of reference, values, and language will not be passed on to the next generations. In case of refugees, as one respondent mentioned, who have given up a lot, marrying their children to partners from their own community, even against their will, is a means of preserving their culture.

Finally, one respondent mentioned that FM and AM could also be linked to care for the elder. Migrants do not go to residence homes for the elder, as is common practice in Belgium. A bride is then sought to live with the family of the husband, who can take care of the elder, do the house chores. Such brides, the respondent said, are often abused and maltreated.

5.6. Ways of escaping a forced marriage and coping mechanisms

One way of resisting that pressure is e.g. refusing to go on holiday to countries of origin in order to avoid pressure to accept marriage candidates.

Divorce was the way out that was mostly proposed by respondents. However, there were several issues related to divorce that were put on the forefront. In case of Roma communities, divorce is not an option, as this is not done and aspects of honour and the bride price paid withhold people from divorcing. Another aspect that hampers a divorce is that people who entered Belgium in the framework of a marriage, must remain married to that partner for 3/5 years. This means they have to condone the situation before they can request a divorce. In case of an abusive marriage, this was considered as problematic.

“Most of the time, girls accept the situation, and accept a candidate, they try to condone the situation for 2 to 3 years after which they ask for a divorce. In that way, they have the advantages of living in a western society, the parents have been obeyed, the honour is saved, and the honour of the girl preserved. That’s what people tell these girls. But most of the times, by the time they can divorce, they have 3 children and the man is abusive. Getting out of such a marriage is not that simple. [...]. Moreover, after the divorce, the woman is going to be pointed a finger, as she’s the one who is divorced”.

One way of escaping the threat of a FM for Roma is abduction. Abduction is done by youngsters who want to have a relation, and the relationship is not accepted by parents/family. The girl is abducted by the boy and as the community/family assumes she is no longer a virgin, the youngsters can get married, as the girl’s value is damaged.

We had a Roma family where promises were made to marry off their children, but where children tried to stop it, through abduction. We hear that more often as of 15 years. In the Roma community here, a girl can be abducted by a boy, they have to try to stay away for a couple of days and then the family considers that the girl is no longer a virgin, and when she returns, the family permits the marriage to keep the name of the family pure”.

One respondent mentioned that a way of resisting a forced marriage could be to prolong school periods, so that a girl can mature and has more possibilities to position her towards her family. Failing for the exams was suggested as a means to prolong school periods.

One respondent mentioned that opportunities to escape are better for men than for women.

“As honour of the family passes through the woman, the woman has to walk straight, while the man accepts the marriage, when an marriage is arranged, but he has a double life next to that. [...]. So men complain less as they know they can have a life next to their marriage without this causing to much of a problem”.

Psychotherapy seems to offer a valuable alternative for those having psychological problems due to a AM or FM.

“It’s certainly advisable that people get psychotherapy in their mother tongue. In 90% of the cases in my practice, it’s related to marriage problems, not so much in cases of a future marriage, but more when people are married a couple of years ago, cases of arranged marriages and marriages with partners from home countries, and having problems due to difference in norms and values regarding education of children, difference in how they were raised. [...]. I have people who divorce and end up very lonely, when they arrived here due to migration, they have no own network, and once divorced they fall outside the community and have heavy psychological problems[...]. I also see a lot of single mothers who have difficulties because they are not re-married[...]. It’s remarkable to me to see that people find it amazing that there is a possibility to act with respect to the family but also with respect to themselves. It is really possible to find a way out”.

Finally, there is also the option to put a complaint to the police and being referred to a shelter, but several issues are related here that are discussed later in this report.

5.7. Trends

We have equally asked respondents whether they had any indications that FM or AM have changed over time. Both positive and negative trends were mentioned.

Positive changes

The most apparent change that was mentioned by many respondents was a notable change between first and second/third generation migrants, in terms of more space to negotiate, more freedom to choose the marriage partner and more openness to discuss the issue.

One respondent stated that the migration context and society have changed considerably over the last ten years, and that the social mobility of Turkish and Moroccan communities is much more advanced than that of the new migrant (Chechnya, Pakistan, Albania), hence why there is more openness to discuss these issues among Turkish and Moroccan communities. The Turkish and Moroccan migrants from the first generation were in many cases illiterate, while the second and third generation went to school, which makes there is more space for negotiation, also on inter-ethnic marriages. This was endorsed by another respondent, who added that the 2nd and 3rd generations not only have a higher education than their parents, but they are also higher on the social ladder, opt for a nuclear family and move to suburbs where they have more freedom. Another respondent also mentioned this evolution from a traditional family towards a nuclear family, which focuses on own needs and desires, and in which marriage partners are equal. 2nd and 3rd generation youngsters also prefer partners from an equal education level, with an equal socio-economic status in order to succeed better in life. In the case of Roma, one respondent mentioned that Roma born in

Belgium have some more freedom of choice, and that some girls keep on studying in secondary and get married at a later age.

A second important positive change that was mentioned is that there is more openness with regard to issues related to FM and AM. This was substantiated by the fact that one respondent saw an increase in requests for support and information; caused by the fact that FM and AM are more discussed nowadays. One respondent thought that because people are more open and have learned from the past regarding migration and marriage, there is more freedom of choice, youngsters oppose more and have more knowledge about what to do in such cases, e.g. going to the police. The fact that the reporting point 1712 exists was also mentioned as a factor that made psychological violence more visible, including related to FM and AM. Also at policy level, FM seems to be on the agenda, as one respondent referred to the specific chapter on FM in the National Action Plan, and the increasing number of initiatives taken. Sadly enough, since the death of Saida, public authorities and elected politicians are aware of the problem, said one respondent. Because of the increasing openness, among the Turkish community, more men come to psychotherapy with problems related to marriage, amongst others. The role of the media (Turkish media in Turkey) in breaking the taboo surrounding seeking help when having psychological problems, also for men, was mentioned as vital here.

Changes occur also in the characteristics of FM, as noted by several respondents. The age at which the marriages are concluded seem to increase a little bit among Roma, although FM remains common among this community, while there is a trend to have more arranged marriages rather than forced marriages among the Turkish community. Other changes in communities that were mentioned include the slow recognition that services and communities need to collaborate, and the fact that more and more, persons who are in an abusive relation, are supported by the family to leave the abusive husband. In some Roma communities, respondents saw a positive trend towards school related issues: more parents come to the contact moments organised by the school, and there is fewer absence of school.

When it comes to trends in numbers, not many respondents could address this. One respondent mentioned that there were less reports by schools about threats of FM of 17 year olds before school holidays, and that this might be due to more flexibility in ideas of the persons. In Brussels, since the opening of a special police unit on FM, 8 complaints were filed.

With regard to shelters, it's worthwhile mentioning that over time, the population in the shelters changed: the majority of the population is of ethnic origin, while a decade ago this was not the case, according to a respondent. In the shelters for abused women, more than half of the women choose to go back to the partner.

Finally, it was stated that the fact that parents were punished for marrying by force their children, provided a strong signal to the community, as they are afraid to end up in the same situation and that their children will be taken away. Example setting by punishing parents towards community, but also policy makers got more attention since the killing of Saida.

Negative trends

Negative trends were equally mentioned. The right wing discourse in Belgium, which is gaining more attention the past two years, has not helped to solve the problem, said one respondent. Contrary to what is said above, some respondents even saw an upward trend in the number of cases in the past ten years, as well as an increase of the pressure on youngsters.

"I have the impression that the issue of pressure on youngsters by families is increasing. At least in what they tell us. Often, when we provide a sensibilisation, there are 20 youngsters, between 15 and 18 year, and we ask them: if tomorrow you have to marry, will you be able to choose a partner you want or would you have to discuss with your parents? And there are many persons who tell us that they will have to discuss with their parents".

One respondent saw differences between 1st, 2nd and 3rd generations, when it comes to AM.

The 1st and 2nd generation belong to a closed community structure where respect for the family is vital, and marriages are concluded based on that respect. If there was a conflict between husband and wife, the voluntary aid was big to mediate between families to save the marriage. Many of these marriages were "collective", i.e. grandfather, grandmother, aunts and uncles all live together. ... But nowadays, in cases of marriages for migration, there is this "dream of Belgium" in countries of origin while here they have a "deepfreezer mentality", as if everyone over there still lives within that respect for the family and here all daughters are whores and all sons are trash, because they want their children to marry someone from home countries".

One respondent mentioned that the fact that The Kaitasi clan of the Roma marries within their own clan, causes an increasing trend of inbreed, resulting in children with mental disorders.

Finally, a negative trend was noted among services of civil state in municipalities. In earlier days these services were ignorant for the issues related to marriages for convenience; nowadays there is a trend towards non-recognition of any marriage, based on false or wrong assumptions that the marriage is suspicious.

"There is another aspect at civil state level which is very important, and which is very topical: it's the attitudes of the services of the civil state of municipalities, who did not deal with this issue in the past. Now it has become sometimes, total madness. In certain cases these services refuse to acknowledge a marriage in Belgium as they assess, be it wrong or right, that there are certain suspicions of a "white" marriage, in which two are involved, or that one is trying to get the other one over here".

6. How forced and arranged marriages are dealt with in Belgium: characteristics of the stakeholders' work

This section provides some insights in the work that the stakeholders we interviewed are doing. The section is divided in the areas of work that deal with prevention, protection, prosecution, provision of services, policymaking and research. Besides these, we also highlight 3 other aspects that appeared of particular importance, i.e. reporting of cases, the feelings and attitudes of stakeholders, as well as the importance of partnerships.

6.1. Prevention

Prevention of FM focuses on several aspects: sensibilisation, capacity building of professionals as well as victims, outreach, provision of advice and referral, mediation, financial measures, social networks, and consultation among cities. Each of these issues is discussed in more detail below.

One of the main activities organized to prevent FM is sensibilisation. This is done through the provision of information by means of posters, flyers, organization of colloquia, provision of websites, broadcasting documentaries (e.g. documentary made by Turkish community about people

who migrated to Belgium for marriage) and movies, theatre play, educational suitcase (“Marriage return ticket Brussels-Turkey”), brochures (e.g. Holiday Time, Marriage Time), etc.

“We have made a prevention theatre play that discussed AM in Belgian community, in the aristocracy. This is a phenomena where AM was done, as there was the issue of the family property, and that is why meetings were organized among youngsters of aristocratic families, balls were organized. ... We tried to broaden the debate and not to stigmatise by stating that it is always you, youngsters from migrant origin who are confronted with this. So it happened in our history too, and it still exists, so we wanted to stimulate the debate within communities with this play.”

Sensibilisation often focuses on target groups in schools, preferably given before school holidays. One example consists of sensibilisation on partner choice, on recognizing pressure and providing mechanisms to deal with it, in particular, this initiative wants to “fight the naivety of the youngsters that makes them follow blindfolded the will of their parents”, as one respondent put it. Another project consists of a sensibilisation entitled “marriage and migration”, that reflects on migration for marriage, communication, sexuality, etc. and is targeted towards youngsters, couples and individuals. Sensibilisation of youngsters by providing information is given both at schools as well as at private spaces so that they can talk freely, indicated a respondent. A particular project was organized in a school in a Flemish city for 11 to 12 year olds, in order to sensitise them on marriage, relations, and free choice in a relation. In that project, all stakeholders received training, support was provided and referrals were done when necessary. One respondent mentioned that the assimilation course provided to newly arrived migrants is necessary to provide information on organizations dealing with marriage issues. One respondent mentioned that they also provide information towards police and magistrates, to sensitise them on the issue of FM.

Capacity building targeted towards professionals as well as victims also exists. In one city in particular, capacity building consists of training on FM for police officers, and has been organized since two years. A training manual is developed to accompany the course. Capacity building for women consists of permanent education, consisting of accompanying women when they have questions related to FM. Another respondent mentioned that they try to provide a framework in which service providers can work:

“There is a right wing discourse around the issue of marriage and migration. ... We are astonished during meetings about the very right wing, extreme right way that civil servants and others discuss this. ... This is not really solving the problem. Of course abuse should be tackled, violence definitely. But the bottom line is left untouched. And that is what we try to do. We work with groups, with service providers, with empowering people. Trying to show them and to explain that these are the boundaries, the legal framework in which we have to live and work. And that is not easy as it is a private matter...”

Outreach, especially to the Roma communities was mentioned as a way of building trust with this community, with a family, which is much needed in order to be able to raise issues related to school attendance of Roma children. The respondent acknowledged that it is very hard to attend school once married and having children, but they try to motivate people to send their children to school (mainly girls), at least of a couple of weeks or on regular moments. They try to find alternatives to get them to school. The respondent mentioned that with regard to FM, the issue is not really taken up, while the focus is much more on trying to get them to school.

We are keeping us outside of this, at this moment, I think. It is really a family business. Personally, I think that marriage is not really a problem. Of course, I do not know the opinion of the girls. Our problem at our work is the fact that they do not attend the school. That is much more important to us... we try to pass the message that it is important to provide for a better future for their children

by letting them attending school, so that they have a choice to continue education, to find a job etc. But I think on that level, we have a long way to go.... If we are sitting with other organizations, everyone says, we have done so much in the past to diminish that problem (FM), without results, so maybe we need to focus more on small children. Everyone sees education as the key to the future”

Another way of dealing with the high school absence of Roma children was the withdrawal of study bursaries or other financial advantages. According to one respondent, this withdrawal of financial advantages did have an effect on non-authorized absences from school among Roma. However, having parents to pay back study bursaries is problematic as Roma families are often very big families and the money has already been spent. Another measure mentioned, although not often used said the respondent, is attaching conditions to support from the municipal social service department, saying that financial support will only be provided when children are sent to school.

Mediation is a strategy often used. It is done, for example by the police, by teachers (Equal Opportunity Teacher) or by cultural mediators, towards parents, or via the family, the imam or a person trusted by the victim. One respondent mentioned that mediation with the parents is seldom used, while with the family it is more often the case. The issue of mediation will be more extensively discussed when in chapter 9 when dealing with the gaps and obstacles in the work.

The green line and reporting point of violence 1712 is considered to be too young to draw any conclusions, as it is not yet well profiled, as one respondent mentioned. However, the respondent mentioned that more reports came from the Afghan community on this 1712 number, as it is low threshold. According to this respondent, migrants that are more integrated know the way to other services better than the Afghan community. However, another respondent thought that this green line, although having a low threshold, is not specialized in multicultural issues yet, but that they will be trained in the future.

When victims address services, advice, counseling and if necessary, further referrals are provided. Information is provided on the rights of the victim, the (dis) advantages and risks of each step that could be taken when considering refusing a marriage, and information on referral is equally provided.

6.2. Protection

With regard to protect victims of FM or AM, respondents believed police, shelters and teachers play a key role here. The police from a city in Wallonia (Mons) have extensive experience with dealing with FM, and pay particular attention to the real life threat when there is a case of FM:

“In case a girl comes to the police, the actions we will undertake are quite similar to those to victims in general and to victims of interfamilial violence or intimate partner violence, although we pay particular attention as we know there is really a life threatening situation. In other cases this is not so apparent. ... There is a specific procedure where we know that we need to activate the unit for assistance to victims, systematic in such cases. In cases of IFV or IPV or other situations, colleagues will wait to fax us a paper where they ask us to get in touch with people, while here they have to call the service immediately... This is the flow chart for police officers, and this means that even if a person calls 101 and has the dispatching on the phone, on the basis of key words that have been encoded in the information system, the operator can decode it and the procedure will appear on the screen so that we know what to do in this situations”.

Two respondents mentioned that such special police units equally exist in Antwerp, Gent and Brussels, where there are reference persons who received a special training on these issues.

Schools and teachers equally play a role in protecting victims and one respondent mentioned there is collaboration between schools and the police when it comes to issues of FM. Another respondent mentioned that there are signs to which one can be vigilant and that can be a warning sign, e.g. when the behaviour of the child changes, when a girl is more controlled and is not showing up at activities that she used to do, or when a woman is beaten up a lot but keeps going back to her husband, and if a woman is not going out and if there a lot of children. One respondent noted however, that before going to the police, victims seek protection from close relatives in first instance, be it from here or from the country of origin.

Shelters can equally provide protection, such as in the case of interfamilial violence when women are given a security plan if necessary, or where a tele-alarm system can be installed on their phone at home if certain criteria are met. Issues related to shelters will be more extensively discussed in chapter 9.

Protective measures that can be taken, mentioned by respondents, include protection measures for minors (putting in an institution) and referring to specialized organizations or shelters for abused women. One respondent mentioned that working with minors has the same characteristics as working with adults when it comes to FM: the issue is complex; there is a need to analyse case by case. However, in case of minors the need to take protective measures might occur even if there are no sufficient juridical elements to punish the parents.

One particular measure used by a respondent, included a code word that was agreed upon by the victim and service provider that can be used by the victim when abroad. When the victim calls the service provider and mentions the code word, the subsequent procedure is initiated by the service provider to protect the girl travelling or for siblings in Belgium.

With regard to the reporting of cases of FM and AM, such reports come from schools, police, social workers, teachers, family and friends, welfare departments, Centres for Pupils' Counseling, care providers and health services. Many respondents agreed that victims seldom report cases of FM. It is difficult for victims because, although they do not agree with parents, at the same time they remain loyal and this loyalty conflict makes it very hard for them to denounce and put a complaint against their parents or family. In Mons, 20 cases were reported in 2013: 5 directly to police, 4 by friend, 5 by school, 2 by the Social Service Department of municipality, 2 by other police departments.

6.3. Prosecution

In cases of FM, the juridical framework can be put in place. Victims can report to the police, although respondents mentioned that this is not often the case (see above). In case of reports of FM, an official report is made and the prosecutor is informed. Court cases might be initiated, and legal actions might include imprisonment or freedom under conditions. Providing evidence is often done on the basis of assault and battery, as this is much more easy to prove (see chapter 9) for a more extensive discussion on this issue). Depending on the situation, the judge might suggest a divorce or in cases of violent situations, the victim might demand recognition of that violence.

In Brussels there is a Special Unit Forced Marriage since 6 years. This unit, according to the respondent, deals with a very mixed ethnic population (150 nationalities) in a deprived area in Brussels. Knowledge building on the issue of FM in that unit is recent. According to this respondent, they are confronted with the most poignant situations. Also, once the police hears about FM, it is often too late to stop the marriage as the victim might be abroad and papers taken from her, the victim has no money, is isolated and controlled, terrified of the in-laws as well as her own family,

falls pregnant quickly and is often abused. XXX CASE Study . The special police unit equally provides support for organisations and other police departments, gives (telephone) advice to lawyers, victims and police officers, as well as organisations, provides information to schools and sensibilisation of prosecutors.

One respondent mentioned that they provide support for victims during the legal procedure, such as searching a lawyer and accompanying the victim to court.

6.4. Provision of care

When asked about the services provided, respondents shared insights on their work with victims, on shelters, mediation, referrals, reporting, training and sensibilisation.

Working with victims: One NGO mentioned that they were one of the rare organisations that are following the victim throughout, at long term. Their work consist of a long intake conversation to assess the situation, the needs of the victim, how the family is functioning, and to evaluate the risk and danger of a particular situation. A vital element in this work is the dialogue wit the victim, to discuss the situation, the options and consequences of each option (e.g. breaking with the family or not), to find a solution for the situation in dialogue with the victim. Psychological and social support is equally provided, e.g. support in dealing with financial difficulties, in the divorce process, with juridical issues, in finding a job, etc. When necessary, victims are referred to other services or shelters, or housing is provided. One respondent provided psychotherapy in the own language of the victims (Turkish), and in cases of marriage problems (the majority of patients), the therapy deals with treatment of the damage done by AM or FM, such as loss of self confidence, feelings of guilt and shame, how to face failures in life and its financial consequences, sexuality problems, etc. The fact that this therapy was provided in the mother tongue of the patients was very important, according to this respondent. The use of peers in working with victims and communities was suggested by one respondent as a strategy that has been successful in Gent: women who were former victims, are now experienced experts, that assist victims in taking a decision. These peers have a high credibility towards victims, are role models as they show that a stable life is possible even after choosing their own partner.

Mediation: This activity was used by many of the respondents that deal with victims. However, respondents use it with caution. Mediation will depend on the situation, and as a strategy it can work, even in cases of resistance by family to inter-ethnic marriages, as it is low threshold for persons who seek help. However, this respondent said that one must remain vigilant to not causing the opposite effect. Most of the times, as one respondent stated, youngsters do not ask for mediation, and it was considered paramount to always depart from the needs and requests of the victim, mediation is not done when the victim does not want it. Another respondent endorsed this and said that individuals should never be convinced to engage in mediation when they do not wish to, but options and consequences should be explored, framed in a human rights framework.

Shelters for abused women and their children receive victims of FM or AM. According to a respondent, the work is the same for all clients, regardless if they are victim of FM or not. Shelters provide support for a maximum of 3 months, according to one respondent. The services provided in shelters, as mentioned by respondents, include mediation, couple counselling, socio-psychological counselling, provision of a security plan for women and children, assisting in reintegration and working with children.

Training: this was mentioned by one respondent only, and regards training for schools, support services and municipal officials confronted with FM

Reintegration of victims: One respondent stated: *“Before we can reintegrate victims, victims need to be identified, and protected, and we need to reflect on how this can be done in the best way, with what budget and in what cases”*. Another stated that reintegration is not available in Belgium. Others identified reintegration initiatives such as referral to appropriate organisations or services (e.g. financial monitoring, housing under monitoring), follow up of a victim when she is referred to a shelter, stimulating victims to follow Dutch language classes and social orientation classes, and reintegration in the family through mediation and follow up.

6.5. Partnerships

Partnerships have been built when it comes to sharing knowledge and expertise, both at international and national level, but also among professionals when dealing with individual cases.

Experiences, successes and difficulties have been shared with organisations from abroad, including the special FM unit in the UK, the organisation Papaya in Berlin (shelter only for victims of FM/honour violence), families who receive victims of FM in France, as well as a colloquium that was organised by the “Reseau Mariage et Migration”, where information was shared with policy makers and issues related to FM were discussed. In Belgium, the special police unit in Brussels is also eager sharing its expertise and knowledge with others.

Working together when there are cases of FM creates links of trust and knowledge among professionals and other stakeholders involved, and will help to identify the objectives that have to be reached, according to a respondent. Another respondent mentioned the critical role of Equal Opportunity Teachers, who have regular meetings with other stakeholders, such as social workers, the school director and Centre for Pupils’ Counseling to discuss the cases of children not attending the schools and to decide whether home visits are necessary. These teachers equally collaborate with the police in case there are too many cases of children not attending school.

6.6. Research

Respondents mentioned a number of studies that were done in the past, on the subject of FM, including the study done in Brussels in 2013, the study by the federal service Justice on policies on honour violence, the 1999 study from Antwerp on FM in the Maghreb community, the 2005 UCL study done in Wallonia and Brussels, the 2006 study on freedom of partner choice among female Belgians of foreign origin by Zemni and the study on freedom of partner choice among male Belgian of foreign origin by Timmermans, from 2009.

Two respondents criticised the recent study on FM in the Brussels region, as “being not scientific, as they claimed there were no problems while we know there are problems”.

“I have said to her (the principal investigator of the study), that studies like that are not worthwhile to do, as we see very clearly that cases exist. She could ask us in advance, and we would have said that her study will not reveal anything because we know very well that victims do not report to the police, these people do not do that”.

An upcoming study was mentioned that would evaluate the law on FM, in particular to assess whether the specific law influences people’s decisions or not.

6.7. Policy making

Two respondents, involved in policy making, mentioned that with regard to policy making, the following activities took place in the area of FM: responding to parliamentary questions on FM (very few), implementation of the policy of the government (i.e. NAP), providing subsidies for local

sensibilisation projects, evaluating and testing of policy initiatives, and centralising all information. Again, one respondent stressed the different realities in Flanders and Wallonia when working with victims: in Flanders, contacting services is easy through the Centres for General Welfare while in Wallonia, it depends on the provincial coordinators.

One respondent mentioned the existence of an action plan in Brussels that deals with training programmes for professionals who interact with victims of FM and AM.

6.8. Feelings of stakeholders

Quite some professionals mentioned feelings of powerlessness, disappointment and fear when dealing with FM. They feel powerless, because in the end the choice remains with the victim to return to the family or husband or not. Disappointment appears when a girl is forced to marry despite the work they have done. Fear was mentioned also, as FM is dealing with life threatening situations:

“In such cases you are a bit powerless. That is the case with all forms of partner violence. It remains the choice of the one sitting in front of you, to follow you or not... We have to deal with questions such as should we report to the police or the prosecutor? Do we not jeopardise her security? In how far are we also responsible for an eventual death of someone else? That is really very hard to weigh to know what to do”.

One respondent, working with victims in Brussels, said that social professionals often do not act for fear of doing wrong, out of respect of culture or because they do not know what to do, as they lack confidence. Hence why victims feel neglected. Another respondent referred to the stereotypes among some professionals about other cultures that influence service provision.

Finally, one respondent mentioned that it is not easy to deal with FM as professional secrecy is involved and the relation of trust that is build with the victims are all elements that make acting difficult.

7. Risk factors increasing forced marriages

When asked if stakeholders could identify factors that increase or decrease the risk for a forced or arranged marriage, the answers could be summarized in factors associated with characteristics of communities and families, individual characteristics and some associated with service provision and the context. These are discussed in more detail below.

7.1. Associated with characteristics of the families and communities

Some respondents mentioned that ethnicity is a risk factor: some ethnic communities are more at risk than others: in the Indian community, one respondent stated, there is a huge community pressure and control, while in the Moroccan community, only the Berber-area is affected by this practice.

Some stakeholders identified financial difficulties in which families are, as a factor that can increase the risk for forced or arranged marriages. This was mentioned in the case that women are “sold” for the financial profit of parents or among communities where a bride price is common practice (e.g. Roma communities). Financial difficulties are thought to increase the willingness to marry girls in order to receive a bride price.

The lack of gender equality in some families and communities was equally considered a risk factor that increases FM and AM, in particular in communities where women and girls lack decision making power, cannot express their thoughts and where women and girls are seen as preservers of

culture. The education of girls and sexuality, according to one respondent, “are controlled with the aim to perpetuate traditions and values of the group”. Mothers are held accountable for the continuation of traditions, through the education of their girls. The aspect of honour is vital here.

“The Serbians and Chechnya’s and Afghans that we met, those are mothers that have been instituted to guarantee the tradition. They tell them: if your girl is not following tradition, it’s your fault. And these threats are backed by reprisals. They are also given by that way a certain power, while until then they did not receive any power”.

“There are parents for whom that the fact that their girl might see boys, and the fear that they might lose their girl, that she might lose her virginity, so the dishonor this brings, those are risk factors. But I cannot generalize, there are other families who are less concerned about this”.

The aspect of integration of a family or community was mentioned several times as a factor determining the increase or decrease of risk for these types of marriages. Aspects mentioned in this respect included: being a “traditional” family (e.g. families where grandparents live in the family and respect for the family is very important), families that live isolated from the rest of the population (some respondents called these “closed” families), families that recently arrived in Belgium, and families that maintain close ties with countries of origin.

The socio-economic status of a family and community was mentioned frequently, as being a determinant that increases or decreased the risk for a FM. This referred both to families in countries of origin (e.g. partners come from deprived families and have high expectations of a life in Belgium/Europe) as well as in Belgium.

The aspect of honour was mentioned in a few cases, and is linked to gender equality perceptions (see above).

7.2. Associated with characteristics of individuals

Some respondents mentioned the age of a girl as increasing the risk of a FM, especially when girl is arriving at the age of marriage or reaching puberty, when the first signs of femininity are visible.

Another aspect that was frequently mentioned was the level of dependency on the family. When youngsters depend strongly on the family, both emotionally and financially, and raised in a protective environment, makes it more difficult to withdraw from their expectations. At the same time, it was mentioned that girls who have a certain level of independency and express their opinions, might equally be at risk.

Characteristics of an individual, such as being gay, being naïve, having a lower education and/or learning difficulties, were all considered as increasing the risk for a FM. One respondent mentioned that perceptions of youngsters on marriage and gender roles are important:

“I think that the image youngsters have of marriage, and gender roles, etc, is quite vital with regard to their capacities to analyse and resist certain project that they might have against their will. I have always found that the number of girls that have a perception of themselves, as well as the others, totally “Barby doll”, quite staggering”.

One respondent also mentioned that being a first generation migrant might increase the risk, when there is less feeling with the norms and values that are predominant in Belgium, but equally being 2nd or 3rd generation migrant, returning to the values of the 1st generation.

Finally, one respondent mentioned that girls without document were a particular at risk group, especially in reference to certain Roma communities:

“Within some gipsy groups, I know there are parents who smuggle girls, of 13 to 14 years, into Belgium to marry them. They earn a lot of money with getting these girls over here. These girls are not registered in Belgium so no one know these girls are here, they do not attend school and they get pregnant very quickly”.

The lack of a social network of victims was equally mentioned by another respondent as a risk factor.

7.3. Associated with service provision

Some respondents thought that the high threshold of services could withhold persons from seeking help or to go to services, as they are afraid that this will trigger an escalation of the situation. It was also mentioned by one respondent that shelters do not belong to the normal living environment of Roma communities, and that this increases the risk of a FM. Finally, this respondent mentioned that scarcity of support mechanisms as increasing the risk for a FM.

7.4. Associated with context

Some respondents mentioned contextual factors as having a role in the perpetuation of FM. Two main aspects appeared from the interviews. The socio-economic status of migrant communities, in particular issues related to lower performance in education and higher rates of unemployment among migrant communities were mentioned. This does not diminish the importance of tradition and identity. Besides this, the strict migration laws in Belgium were also mentioned as a factor that increases forced marriages.

“I think that today, the only way, for a number of third country nationals outside de EU, to come to Belgium or Europe is marriage. Either you can ask for asylum, but that has become very, very strict. This is no possibility anymore to come here as economic migrant. So, marriage is the only way in. so that can put a pressure on a certain type of marriage. By saying, well, I live here, I can bring people from my family over here, so that is a factor. The more difficult it will become to enter the country, the more this way will be used. Second factor is integration in the reception country. I think that the more communities are integrated, will find work, have decent housing, and that their children are following the whole school trajectory that will advance them. If these conditions are met, I believe this will diminish the factors identity and tradition”.

8. Visions of the stakeholders on policies and laws

We have equally requested our respondents to reflect on the current policy (or absence thereof) in Belgium that deals with forced marriages. Respondents have shared their insights on the available legal framework (specific law on FM, law on marriage migration, law on partner violence, law on family reunification, law on fake marriages) and the national action plan. They equally shared some reflections on laws and policies in general.

One of the striking elements was that a number of respondents were not aware of the existing law on FM or the NAP, while others mentioned that communities might not know that forced marriages are forbidden in Belgium. Some respondents thought that policies have paid off in Belgium, as there are more cases of FM, and that the current policies and laws reflect the values and norms of Belgium and show that the Belgian authorities have taken up the issue of FM.

However, there were also some critical reflections on the policies and laws in Belgium. First of all, the lack of control on the implementation of policies and laws was mentioned. Secondly, when comparing to the Netherlands, one respondent mentioned that there is not much policy here, and moreover, that this lack of policy will lead to riots:

“There is not much policy, I believe. In the Netherlands, there is a protocol on forced marriages and honour violence. They have developed a roadmap, in cases of a threat where to refer, who is going to talk with parents, to assess if there is danger, what ‘s the role of the police, they have special shelters for those women. There’s a whole policy around this. [...] I do not really believe in national action plans, it’s all commitment declarations and intention declarations, [...] but there is no framework in which the issue of diversity is not non-committal and enforceable. [...]. If we do not take that step, we might have here, within ten tot twenty years, such situations as in the Paris’ suburbs”.

Another respondent reflected on the extreme right wing policies, i.e. the strict rules regarding migration for marriage, that is facilitating forced and arranged marriages that could increase these marriages, as well as fake marriages. As this respondent states: *“Policy and marriage choice are influencing each other”.*

With regard to the national action plan (NAP), some respondents were positive about this. It gave the opportunity to break the silence on this topic and to work together and forced different levels to take action. One respondent also mentioned that the NAP has two different dynamics, i.e. one in Flanders and one in Wallonia. While in Flanders, the issue of honour related violence is more on the forefront; in Wallonia it is more the concept of FM. Although this NAP was a good thing, one has to remain vigilant, according to this respondent:

“By putting emphasis on FM, one gives the impression, or it reinforces the idea that certain persons from other origins are violent with their women, and that here with us, all goes well, equality is there, there is no problem. On the other hand, it’s important to stress it, as there are specific elements that have to be put forward. [...], but in the national action plan I think it was a bit disproportionate. [...]. You have to be realistic, if you look at the victims of interfamilial in Belgium and the number of FM, the proportion must be taken into account, even if these are grave facts to which we must pay specific attention. But I often think that we have good global policies, we can cover several phenomena, rather than adding small specific elements for crimes” (ov2).

Opinions on the specific law on FM varied. Some respondents thought that a specific criminal law on FM was not necessary, as there are other laws that can deal with this, e.g. when concluded among minors, child marriages can be considered as rape, as sequestrations. It is often thought that such specific criminal laws have a dissuasive aspect and that it shows that a government finds the problem important; however, one respondent suggested that this should be evaluated. Moreover, a respondent raised the question whether the law on FM can deal with all the other forms of “forced” marriage in the spectrum, with all the different levels of pressure? Issues with regard to this specific law that were mentioned included the fact that the law is not an easy instrument for the victims, as the onus of proof is on the victim (presumption of innocence), i.e. she/he has to prove that there were threats of violence, that there was pressure, that no consent was given... According to a juridical respondent, it is difficult to define and proof a marriage as forced and only other crimes such as “assault and battery”, harassment, murder or attempted murder, are more easily to proof in this respect. To provide proof of extreme control of an individual, or psychological violence was considered as extremely difficult. Moreover, youngsters are supposed to put a complaint and launch a procedure against their family, husband, which is very difficult.

"I take the elements that make it an offence, you need to have a marriage, so that marriage must have been concluded. If not, it's only an attempt. Then, a marriage concluded under constraints, but not any constraint, it must be a constraint under physical or psychological violence. And then, when is a victim going to say she was forced to marry? Who is a victim going to accuse? Her parents? Of haven given her an education that led her to accept a marriage, while now, after having opened her eyes and looking at things in another context she considers that marriage as forced, as abusive?"

This led another respondent to conclude that the law on FM only has a symbolic value, and that (s)he did not have any faith in it, as it can never provide an indication of the magnitude of the problem and considered not the right way to tackle the problem as being too radical. This was endorsed by some other respondents that thought sanctions only, will not suffice.

One respondent mentioned that because of the murder on Saida Sheikh, the law on FM was established. With regard to the court case of Saida¹¹, convictions were made for FM and homicide. The gender dimension was considered an aggravating circumstance. One respondent mentioned that the sentences in this case were very low, when one looks at the consequence for the victim (death), or when considering that in other cases of FM, consequences are life long.

With regard to the law on marriage migration, respondents mentioned that this law has become more strict (since september 2013). Respondents equally mentioned that since 2011, there was equally a change in this law: Belgians in a third country should now prove that he/she has enough financial resources, housing and insurance to migrate or someone should cover him/her entirely. One respondent mentioned that the new migration law stipulates that a partner can only migrate to Belgium when he/she is 21, so that child marriages will be even more rare in Belgium. However, another stated that this law is abused by adapting birth certificates or other papers abroad. Such abuse of marriage to obtain papers was mentioned by others as well. What was even more worrying, is that one respondent mentioned that the fact that when a partner entered Belgium for a marriage, partners cannot divorce in the first 3 years, which gives a lot of power to the partner already living in Belgium and can lead to the partner who is still waiting for residence permit, has to cope with violence in such a relation, in order not to lose the residence permit. One respondent thought that the law on marriage migration together with the law on partner violence, could counter such situations. However, another respondent, working with victims, stated:

"The residence rights of newcomers, when victims of IFV, than the law says that you have to stay with your husband for a year and one day. Apparently there is a law that mentions there is an exception for victims of IFV. I have many files where the victims are married one and a half, two years, who are in Belgium, but whose residence permits are taken away. Even if there are 5, 6 official reports. There was also another case of a Moroccan man who reunified with 4 women from Morocco, although there were many complaints of IFV of these women. So, I wonder if the law is active or not? Is it only a law on paper? [...]."

Other effects of this law mentioned by respondents included the increase of the age of marriage, less import brides and better protection of youngsters who grow up here.

One respondent mentioned that the national laws are very well developed, as there is a new law on fake marriages that has increased the aggravating circumstances, and that in case some communities, such as Roma, marry on a traditional way, most of the times before the age of 18. The law on FM cannot do anything to these marriages.

¹¹ Saida Sheikh refused a forced marriage and had a relationship with a Belgian man. Her brother killed her with 3 bullets (October 2007).

9. Issues in service delivery

The questionnaire for stakeholders included some questions related to possible obstacles in services that professionals delivered, with regard to forced marriages, as well as a request if they could identify any gaps in providing support and care for (potential) victims of forced (and arranged) marriages. The list of barriers and gaps identified by professionals was, unfortunately, very long and is presented below. I have divided it in two sections: one on issues in the work that is currently put in place to deal with FM, and another section that discusses the gaps, i.e. the lack of services and other strategies to adequately tackle the problem of FM in Belgium.

9.1. Obstacles in working on the problem of forced marriages in Belgium

A particular area of concern was the issue of FM among the Roma communities in Belgium, and the problems encountered by those professionals that are confronted with this. These communities are affected by child marriages, forced and arranged marriages, as already discussed in previous sections of this report.

One of the most striking findings of this research is that services do not really act to deal with this problem. According to one respondent, working with Roma communities, most services acknowledge and know about the problem of child marriages among Roma communities, but do not act upon it (anymore).

Secondly, the poor economic situation and very high unemployment rates of Roma communities in home countries was mentioned as problematic.

And thirdly, the attitudes towards marriage related issues and services, as well as the deficient knowledge among these communities about services, were identified as obstacles in adequate service delivery on FM towards Roma communities in Belgium. With regard to the attitudes, respondents mentioned that Roma communities are very suspicious towards services, and do not know where to go in case of FM. Moreover, working with Roma communities is based on a trust relation, which can be severely jeopardised if it is known that a professional helped someone that wishes to escape a FM or AM. AM are seen as the norm and normal, and the subject of marriage, is sensitive and difficult to discuss between professionals and Roma communities. The same goes for discussing the fact that a girl's perspective and chances for the future are jeopardised if she drops out of school. Respondents stressed the fact that it will take time to change these attitudes and behaviours. Another concern was that discussions in class on human body and sexuality were problematic for Roma communities, hence why their children are not allowed to attend these classes. Finally, perceptions among Roma on Belgian services are deficient. For example, in case of teenage mothers that still need to attend school, day care for their children is not an option, as this system is viewed as very strange as their children are raised within the family. Moreover, Roma communities also do not know that finding a place in a day care centre needs to be done already early in pregnancy. The language is also seen as a barrier for Roma communities, especially when minor brides come from abroad.

Many respondents considered mediation as complex and problematic. It is often done with the best of intentions by e.g. teachers to discuss a forced marriage with parents, but not often recognised as being the cause of serious problems for the victim. It requires a case-by-case analysis, whereby the whole family system and the security plan must be carefully assessed. One respondent mentioned that mediation in cases of FM or AM can not be based on the same strategy as when dealing with problematic education of a child in a family. Mediation is difficult with parents, who are strongly attached to traditions and to social obligations in their community, as the position in a community is very valuable and necessary to survive. Mediation can then be very threatening for these persons. One respondent mentioned that parallel mediation is sometimes done, e.g. by services as well as by family members in order to solve the problem, and when the victim finally returns to the family,

service providers can find it frustrating. Identifying the right person for mediation is equally difficult. Using interpreters, imams or family members were recognised as having their issues. Family members, imams or members from the community can work as a deterrent for victims to step forward. Moreover, they also have loyalties towards families and/or communities. At the same time, it was acknowledged that family members might be the only ones that families are willing to listen to and dialogue with. Q

Many respondents shared their concerns with regard to the service delivery that is currently put in place. These concerns mainly deal with attitudes and feelings of professionals, attitudes and feelings of the communities and with strategies and activities of the services itself.

Feelings and attitudes of communities that hamper an adequate service delivery refer mainly to fears among communities to go to shelters and services, as well as to difference in values and norms concerning issue of FM and AM and services. Victims fear they blame the family and community, the risk of being killed and breaking with the family and the community when they take choosing their own way of life. Respondents stated that the fear of exposing family problems and putting more blame on the family is a barrier for seeking help towards services, indicating that services are under-used. It should also not be underestimated that taking the step to seek a shelter, for minors, is extremely difficult for victims who never lived outside a family setting or community. The threshold to go to services, including the police, was considered high. One respondent believed that for 2nd and 3rd generation of Turkish and Moroccan communities this might be more easy as they know services better, than for other communities, such as Pakistani, where FM is still a big taboo. Finally, one respondent mentioned that the perception among communities of existing services is not always adequate, due to prejudices or inadequate knowledge.

With regard to the feelings, attitudes and skills of professionals concerns related, the respondents expressed a number of concerns. Fears of stigmatising communities, stereotypes about other ethnic communities, cultural relativism and communication problems due to language barriers and/or difference in value systems, that are apparent among professionals, were mentioned as jeopardising adequate service delivery. For example, one respondent mentioned that they encountered difficulties in sensitising magistrates.

Another respondent mentioned that FM are not questioned by youth magistrates or other professionals due to a lack of arguments to counter them, and the fact that no legal argument is available, as one can marry as of 16 years.

Deficiencies in skills of professionals were equally noted. One respondent referred to the difficulties in assessing level of danger for a person, diagnosing the situation and taking appropriate action as problematic. Moreover, curricula of professionals show deficiencies to deal with diversity in our current society, according to a respondent. In this respect, another respondent mentioned that curricula of for example teachers or social workers, do not provide up to date and realistic theories, such as the intersectionality approach, and that traditional theories are still very common (e.g. the cultural perspective), which makes that professionals do not have all tools to act adequately in all situations. As for attitudes of communities, it also considered problematic that there are

Issues related to the activities and strategies by services relate to waiting lists of services, issues with shelters, divorce as solution to cope with FM, not reaching men and boys, no services for isolated populations and not reaching the target groups with sensibilisation materials and activities. Issues related to activities and services that are put in place, included the fact that boys and men are not attending services, and that services have long waiting lists, resulting in responding very slow to the, sometimes urgent, needs.

Some respondents mentioned that some sensibilisation activities, such as brochures or campaigns, were not well adapted to the target populations, and that such types of activities should not stigmatise populations.

Some respondent criticized the current approach of services, as being one-sided.

An important aspect of service delivery that was discussed by respondents concerned care of victims, including shelters. One respondent mentioned that the provision of shelters was “a disaster”, and is even worse for undocumented migrants.

Shelters were found to be too few, not being able to deal adequately with feelings of isolation and loneliness of victims of FM, having problems with counselling when language is a barrier (through an interpreter) and being a short term solution only as no long term follow up is put in place and reintegration of victims remains problematic. The lack of shelters, and especially the lack of specific care for victims of FM, results in placing victims “where there is a place available, which can lead to very distressing situations”, according to one respondent.

A specific concern, mentioned by many respondents, had to do with populations that were isolated, and thus, hard to reach. These include undocumented migrants (see example above), and newcomers. Newcomers arriving in Belgium through family reunification sometimes find them left alone, having no social contacts, not speaking the language, being abused by the partner. The right to residence that stipulates they have to remain with their spouse for 3 years in order not to lose their residence permit was considered problematic when the relation was abusive. Victims that have no knowledge about Belgian society, have been isolated from the society, and were totally dependent on the partner, do not find their way to services easily. Finding access to these individuals, as well as to communities that are “closed”, and providing sufficient solutions, will be very delicate and difficult, according to one respondent.

On a final note, the fact that divorce is sometimes proposed to victims as a way out of a FM or abusive marriage that was arranged, meets some problems.

And finally, one of the areas that deals with FM, and where issues were noted, was the development and implementation of policies and laws. With regard to policies, respondents found it problematic that a lot of definitions on FM are circulating. Moreover, distinguishing between FM and AM was found to be problematic when implementing policies and law into practice. This leads to not distinguishing between all types of marriages, or difficulties in proving that an AM has evolved to a FM. Another respondent noted that the non recognition of the complexity of the phenomenon of arranged marriages, forced marriages, the freedom of choice, posed a barrier to service delivery. Another one stipulated that *“everything is put under one container: fake marriages, forced marriages, arranged marriages, grey and white marriages, as it is all focused on stopping migration. There is a very right wing discourse that is used around migration and marriage”*.

One respondent mentioned that when there is no embedded and policy supported by a vision on diversity, it will define the provision of care, be it preventative or curative, and has a direct consequence on care and support that is provided to a victim.

“There is no steering or monitoring body, not only around FM but around everything which has to do with diversity and interculturality. It all depends on personal commitment of a counsellor or care provider. Most professionals approach diversity issues as with they do with the average Flemish family, resulting consequently in a trajectory filled with disasters. There is also no control mechanism, no charter, no commitment declaration and no minister to make diversity an issue”

Another respondent equally mentioned the extreme right wing migration policy as influencing the phenomena of marriage and migration, as the strict rules regarding migration for marriage facilitate FM and AM and could increase these marriages.

Involving communities in policy development is complex, as often communities where FM is common practice, consider such policies as stigmatising.

Policy implementation was equally hampered by the inadequate exchange of experiences and communication between different stakeholders. One respondent stated that the fact that FM is linked to honour related violence causes problems with professionals only dealing with FM, are with HRV only, and that they are not aware of each other's work. Moreover, the fact that at governmental level, migration is dealt with a regional level while migration at federal level, is not helpful; neither is the fact that municipalities decide freely on how strict they are on migration for marriage, making people shop between cities in order to be able to marry.

The lack of a specific COL on FM makes that other police zones assume that FM is not a problem in their area.

With regard to the laws that are put in place, the main issues mentioned here dealt with the difficulties in finding evidence to assess the validity of a marriage or to prove it's a FM, difficulties in reporting, issues related to professional secrecy provisions and the abusive use of existing laws.

- Reporting: One respondent mentioned the discrepancy between the registered cases in a specialised police unit in Brussels, and what people working in the field are noticing and experiencing, and found it problematic that a study on FM in Brussels did not reveal FM as a problem in that area. Another respondent stated that many cases are filed as intra-familial violence or fake marriages, because "it's the most easy thing to do". Finally, one noted that putting a complaint by a victim if there is no appropriate care for the girls afterwards, is highly problematic.
- Providing evidence: difficulties in finding proof and evidence is causing that the issue of FM is rarely treated by jurisdictions, according to respondents. For example, difficulties were mentioned in providing proof that there was a lack of consent or presence of threats to annul a marriage, that a marriage was concluded for residence papers only, or finding witnesses that are willing to testify against the community or family. Very often, respondents mentioned, this results in cases that are made based on other offences, such as abuse, whereby FM is only a side element in the case.
- Another issue mentioned is the abusive use of the law when it comes to fake marriages, and the provision of false documents (eg birth certificates) and the professional secrecy provisions that hinder exchange of vital information among professionals in case of FM. Sometimes, different services are involved in working with one family, but they do not know this or cannot exchange information due to this professional secrecy provision.

9.2. Gaps influencing service delivery for (potential) victims of FM

Respondents assessed several gaps that negatively affect an adequate provision of services for those affected by FM. These were noted with regard to knowledge among professionals, in the provision of information and instruments for professionals, in the range of services provided, in research, resources and coordination, and finally in sensitisation of communities. These are discussed in detail in this section.

Knowledge among professionals was considered to be insufficient regarding FM in particular, and regarding intercultural competencies in general, among a wide variety of professionals, including police officers, community based organisations, youth welfare services, teachers, social workers, prosecutors and magistrates. This deficient knowledge leads to feelings of doubt of the right action to take among professionals, to the non registration of cases of FM, results in “amateurish work”, in “no one really knowing what to do” and “dealing with everybody on the same basis, which does not work in a intercultural setting”, as respondents put it. In sum, it leads to inadequate actions or not taking action at all.

One respondent mentioned that organisations for youth welfare are afraid to deal with youngsters and parents on this issue, as *“they do not want to create any problems and rather remain satisfied with current way of working. Federations of community based organisations do not take up the issue either, although they can be the liaison here between services and communities, as they are intertwined with the communities and to not wish to exist their comfort zones or deal with certain sensitivities of their communities”*.

The lack of information and instruments for professionals might be one of the main reasons of this deficient knowledge, and consequently in deficiencies in service delivery. Information was, according to respondents, notably lacking with regard to recognising and acknowledging FM, regarding intervention protocols (on mediation, on possibilities to act, how to address the issue or where to refer to in case of life threatening situations), regarding the legal framework and the right of the victims, Professionals equally lack the skills to deal with intercultural issues and diversity. This was, according to one respondent, due to the lack of education and training on diversity:

“Interculturality is an option, something a student can choose to follow in his or her curriculum (if not enough students, it is even cancelled), which makes most professionals are not equipped to deal with such issues. For example psychologists, they are totally idle in the area of diversity, they are still strongly focussed on the individual, and then these people become coordinators and cannot be convinced to deal with diversity, it is very frustrating to work with “

The lack of monitoring and evaluation of actions provided by service providers was mentioned as an issue for appropriate service delivery, as well as the non-registration of cases of FM (due to the lack of codes for example)

The fact that no policies or intervention protocols exist leaves professionals to act on their own, as was considered as an element that decreases the quality of services provided.

Respondents noted several gaps in services. With regard to shelters and support for victims, some respondents noted the lack of shelters in general and the lack of specialised and secured shelters with a proper accompaniment for minors. As young girls do not always fit in regular shelters, among women who are victims of intimate partner violence or interfamilial violence. The lack of shelters makes that if for example a victim refuse to be put in a specific shelter because it is too close to home, she ends up at the bottom of the waiting list. The lack of initiatives for a long-term follow up and reintegration of victims were equally mentioned by several respondents.

The lack of any action on child marriage among Roma was quite worrying.

Another gap in service delivery was the lack of specific psychotherapy to victims as mostly they are dealt with using the same therapy as interfamilial violence, as well as prevention programs towards communities (school children, parents, communities).

On a final note, a notable gap is the service delivery for those who are “invisible”. As one respondent mentioned, the most serious cases do not come to the attention of the service provider, i.e. those that are locked up, who are used as house slaves, who are in serious violent situations”. The focus of services is also too much on the ones from Belgium, as they are embedded in the system (school, social networks, etc).

Some respondents mentioned the lack of research as an element that needs attention. For example, measuring the effectiveness of interventions of associations that act regarding FM or estimations of the prevalence is lacking. The latter might be due to the complexity of the issue, and the fact there is a “dark” number that is very hard to estimate, as well as to the non-registration of FM in existing services.

The lack of coordination at several levels was equally pointed out. This lack was noted between Flanders and Wallonia, who have differing visions on FM, differing ways of working and differing instruments that are used. However, one respondent stated that both regions could learn from each other as both ways of working are complementary, and suggested to more coordination is needed with regard to the provision of shelters. Services and professionals also do not coordinate their work, e.g. feedback that is not provided when different professionals work on one case, or coordination between various services involved, e.g. to follow up victims or families.

One gap in service delivery that was frequently mentioned was the lack of sufficient resources to provide adequate services. This was referred to with regard to long term follow up of victims, as well as short term (e.g. need for sufficient personnel for mediation as this takes time). The fact that respondents indicated that shelters are “full” or “have long waiting lists” indicate that there is indeed a lack of resources here to provide care for victims. One respondent mentioned that the financial crisis was hampering the work of the police and the cities with regard to FM.

Finally, deficiencies in knowledge among communities were mentioned. The lack of knowledge on laws on migration, marriage, FM in Belgium among people who enter Belgium was noted. This referred, amongst others, to the fact that one can lose the residence permit when divorcing within 5 years. Communities were also found to lack knowledge of services, e.g. how to report violence, or where to go for health care, or lack of knowledge and mistrust regarding shelters, etc. The lack of insights among youngsters in alternative options, when they face FM, should also be dealt with.

10. Link with human trafficking

Not many respondents established a link between forced marriages and human trafficking, when asked about this. More often, human trafficking was linked with arrange marriages or fake marriages, where money is involved (e.g. amounts of 10.000 to 15.000 euro were mentioned by a respondent). Trafficking was also seen when such marriages were concluded to obtain residence permits or for reasons of prostitution. One respondent mentioned that human trafficking for reasons of prostitution was sometimes linked to marriage, when marriage was necessary to be able to migrate and to obtain a residence permit here. Since this is not necessary anymore, for e.g. Romanian or Bulgarian women, but still is for African women. The phenomena of the lover-boys that force girls into prostitution were equally mentioned in this respect.

One respondent clearly established a link between trafficking and marriages:

"I believe there are links with the strict migration policy here which makes people be more creative to cross the borders. And which make that abuse is less visible, because it is punishable."

Some respondents stated that the link was there when victims are isolated and exploited, e.g. when they have to take care of the family, while all other things are dealt with by the partner, such as finances and the victim has no possibility to integrate.

One respondent mentioned a case, where she could establish a clear link between human trafficking and marriage:

"There was the case of a young Albanian girl. A centre for minors referred this girl to me; she had put a complaint to the police for violence. The police protected her and had put her in this centre. A short while after that, the centre contacted me as the girl was going to turn eighteen. The fear was that she was going to end up in a network of prostitution, as she was going to be sent to Germany. There had been an exchange of money between her father and a man in Germany, apparently to marry her to that man. But there were severe suspicions by the police; they thought she was in real danger. The girl has disappeared, we never had any news anymore".

Finally, one respondent was outspoken that girls who are forced into marry, are victims of human trafficking:

"The link is that the girl is an element of trade. Certainly in some cases there is a bride price, there is a merchandising at the beginning. The girl is an object; she is considered an object, not as a person [...]. They are people to whom no one asks their opinion, who are instruments in the hands of the parents and who are projects of the parents. [...]. If there is no bride price, than still there is the whole question of tradition and honour that has to pass through the girl, the woman. So here you are, she's an object through whom a whole series of values, traditions pass, and she is the instrument to that. She is not there as a person, so for me, this is human trafficking [...]. They are the hatches for parent's wishes".

11. Recommendations

The respondents have provided a wide range of recommendations to improve prevention, protection, prosecution, provision of services, coordination, etc.

One recommendation that repeatedly was mentioned is the need to integrate diversity in services, and in the "heads" of service providers and the public in general. Especially respondents working with affected communities were vocal in their call for building competencies to deal with diversity, including on diverse values and norms, image building of other cultures, intercultural communication skills, context and background of migration, etc). One respondent mentioned that there is a need for intercultural competencies in every educational curriculum, and diversity should be included as a transversal theme. Flemish professionals, but also community based organizations and federations need to leave their comfort zones and face intercultural issues and acknowledge the problems this brings with it. Every service (youth courts, integral youth support, all sectors and services) should be coached and trained in how to deal with diversity. Another suggestion made by this respondent is the development of a manual or quality criterion to subsidise a service, based on diversity: services need to proof they take into account diversity issues and how they deal with it, as there is a need for a "compelling framework" and " a minister who is committed to pushing for

integrating diversity in every service". There is a need for a framework, for which an authority can be held accountable for, that stipulates that diversity is not an option.

"Immigration is a structural reality in Belgium, and we need to integrate that and it has to be part of our work; we need to acknowledge this and recognize specific needs, without ethnicising the question too much".

With regard to policy making, respondents mentioned that there is a need for clear directives for magistrates. In this respect, a specific COL on FM was recommended, either a specific one or a complement to the COL3 (on IFV), that explains what FM is, what the mechanisms are behind it, what the different behaviours of perpetrators and victims are, what the warning signs are, the punishments, etc. In that way, another respondent mentioned, FM will become visible, it can be centralized, statistics will be available and the whole territory of Belgium will be included. At national level, one respondent suggested that we need a guideline or protocol at policy level itself, similar to that of the Netherlands.

With respect to the law on FM, one respondent mentioned that a law alone cannot stop this practice, and another supported this and stressed that legal actions should go hand in hand with respectful interventions towards families and communities. One respondent mentioned that the law on FM could be improved by a provision that the onus of proof should be on the perpetrator that he/she did not put any pressure of violence on the victim. In the case of child marriage, one respondent mentioned that child marriages should always be prosecuted, even when concluded abroad, and that these children should be withdrawn from parental authority. On a final note with regard to policy making, one respondent said that policy makers should be lobbied to make sure they take measures that can change the socio-economic situation of communities where FM take place.

A lot of recommendations were provided with regard to improving the reception of (potential) victims, which are summarized here. Respondents acknowledged that providing good and safe support to victims and perspective on the future is important, and service providers should be able to provide places for a time-out. The problem of sheltering victims was acknowledged (see above chapter 9), and respondents said that either special structure can be created or that existing structures can be adapted, as long as the victim receive proper accompaniment. For example, some extra beds can be put for these young victims. The social workers already have a vast experience that can be expanded to include FM. Respondents also suggested that we need to look abroad to learn how it is tackled there, and to assess whether it is possible to adapt to the Belgian context (e.g. in France it might be more easy to create safe havens as it has a huge territory, while in Belgium this might be difficult). Another respondent mentioned that those escaping FM and who leave their family sometimes need to learn how to deal with autonomy and freedom. In this respect, she referred to France, where victims live in families (others than their own), where they can learn how to deal with freedom, autonomy, and where they are well accompanied and framed and certain boundaries are set, without them being left alone to deal with their freedom, as is the case when they are in a shelter. As one respondent summarized it: "to reintegrate victims we need to develop structures, such as specialized centres, or reception families, or reference persons, or supervised apartments, but we should leave space to develop initiatives that are adapted to the local context.

With regard to sensibilisation, capacity building and training, the need to inform (on legal framework, consent, etc) and train prosecutors and magistrates, and other professionals that are likely to interact with FM (schools, police, prosecutors, health care, first line), was mentioned several times. FM should be included in the curricula of professionals, while another respondent stressed that diversity needs to be included as well in all educational curricula. Guidance should be provided to teaches and care providers to assess the risk, to assess whether there is space to negotiate, to determine which individuals can help in mediating. Sensibilisation among communities

was equally recognized as important. Such campaigns should be recognizable to communities. Sensibilisation can also be done through schools, by specialized organizations, and could focus on norms and values as one respondent mentioned. Another stipulated that information material on FM could also be displayed in medical doctors consultation rooms and in various organizations. Target groups mentioned by respondents included parents, children as of young age, youngsters and primo-arrivals in Belgium.

When it comes to working with the communities and victims, one respondent mentioned that before we can do that, the victims need to be identified and protected, and that we need to reflect on how this can be done in the best possible way, with what budget and in which cases action is required. In this respect, the suggestion to work from an intersectional approach is important to take into consideration.

“It’s important to frame certain phenomena in a particular context in a proper way and to analyse them in that way. Intersectionality is a very good framework to do this. It looks at gender norms, ethnicity, age etc, as different axes that are combined to analyse phenomena. This makes that the position of an individual will be different, depending on what axes you take”.

Frequently, respondents mentioned that dealing with FM is not rocket science, and that it can only be dealt with case by case. Each case needs to be analysed individually, every time, there is no routine treatment possible in cases of FM. Each situation needs a detailed analysis. Although working towards attitude change among Roma towards recognizing the importance and obligations for minor girls to attend school, even if they have children themselves, the respondent mentioned that within the Roma community, it is important to consider case by case and not to generalize, as not all Roma marry their children by force.

When working with victims, one respondent stressed the need to build the capacities towards more autonomy, taking responsibility and not to rely on others, but also on countering prejudices that exist among communities and neighbourhoods. (Potential) victims should be pointed out all possible options. The importance of an engagement period, prior to marriage, was also suggested to be included in the work towards communities. Another respondent thought it might be important to empower individuals regarding acting in the interest of an individual, rather than in the interest of a group, as is often the case with Turkish and Moroccan communities. The Quran was also suggested as a means of finding arguments to counter FM, and Islam could be referred to, according to one respondent, as a channel to help parents who are trying to find a way out of FM.

Parents should be empowered, e.g. mothers in standing up for their daughters, and men to share the responsibility for the education of their children. Parents should also be empowered on how to explain to their children all aspects involved when choosing a partner from a home country,

Another respondent suggested that small scale initiatives, with a low threshold, could be set up, such as discussion groups with parents, with members of the communities, on how to deal with the expectations and pressure from the environment regarding marriage, where personal feelings regarding marriage can be shared, where inter-ethnic marriages can be de-problematised, etc. A respondent suggested that parents should be aware and accept that children cannot be controlled entirely, as their personality is also shaped by school, friends, the environment, etc.

In working with victims, the necessity to find solutions at long term was expressed by many respondents. For example in Roma communities, traditions can be adjusted but it will take time, as one respondent said. Another respondent stated that changing behaviour takes several generations, hence the need for long term strategies. Also, when it comes to support systems, and monitoring and follow up of victims, this needs to be done at long term, and it should be acknowledged that this

is costly. The necessity to increase the resources was therefore frequently mentioned as well, in order to stop FM and provide appropriate care for victims.

Mediation, as a strategy to work with victims, was suggested to be tailor made, done not only at crisis moments, but on a regular basis. It was also suggested that such intercultural mediators should be included from the very beginning, when assessing the problem, and if they could help service providers in referring, the trajectory of a family could be shortened considerably and help would be much more efficient. Criteria for mediators were equally suggested, and include: respectful attitude towards communities, receive respect from communities, be known in the communities, have a wide network in the community, etc.

Finally, with regard to the work with communities, one respondent stressed the fact that prevention should be prioritized and establishes a link with current policy to close the Belgian borders for migrants:

"I think we should work here and not necessarily close our borders... Belgium increases the conditions to family reunification; the criteria are more and more demanding. I think that is a problem, a concrete problem related to finding solutions regarding marriage issues. I think we need to work on prevention, try to develop good actions for victims or potential victims. We need to work with parents, with families. Because mostly, they are in difficulties, and they only find this solution (FM) to deal with their problems. ... We need to invest in prevention. It is really our priority. We need to take care of victims, but we also need to build capacities of youngsters to negotiate with parents... Avoid stigmatization."

The need for better coordination was also expressed. This could be done by either develop new initiatives or by building on existing structures, as one respondent stated, and examples were mentioned of a reference person and a special coordination mechanism. Such a focal person could follow up a case throughout and be the liaison between all actors involved. One respondent stated that there is a need for better coordination between Flanders and Wallonia and that campaigns should be the same in both parts of the country. One suggestion to enhance coordination mentioned the design of one package, one framework:

"In the end, the ethnic minorities in Belgium are not new. There have been various suggestions done by Paula D'Hondt's report, a report that is old now. But we still do not have, at Flemish level for example, a framework in which you.. for example, in education and youth support services and so on, where you could say this is the supply of translators and interpreters, intercultural mediation, experts that are available to mail or call to discuss cases, intervention moments, and so on. And that all those things are in one package, in one training. Is that so difficult to organize. I do not think so. Does it cost that much money? I do not think so. ... I think this is really the challenge for the future, for the service provider. And I do not know when politicians will wake up or can be woken up..."

Some respondents mentioned that more should be done to detect and report cases of FM. Suggestions were made to create low threshold initiatives to report cases.

A non-judgmental attitude of professionals and volunteers when dealing cases of FM, was frequently mentioned. In order to tackle this, one respondent suggested to work on prejudices regarding migration for marriage, by explaining the meanings of this complex issue, so that these prejudices do not hamper adequate and early care.

More research is needed, according to two respondents, in order to evaluate mechanisms that are put in place, e.g. the special police units, and to provide figures. These figures will provide keys to a better understanding of the risk factors, will give evidence to negotiate with policy makers and

fundings, but is equally necessary to have a vision on FM and how to act, and to obtain knowledge on the effects of actions on the evolution of FM.

Socio-economic factors are key in emancipation and integration, said one respondent. Therefore, as some respondents stressed, enhancing education and labour market prospective for migrants is important, in order to avoid drastic measures (e.g. victims that need to flee to shelters, or removing children from parental authority). In the case of Roma communities, it was suggested that alternatives should be considered for those minor mothers to attend school. At the same time, as some respondents stressed, the issue of drop out of school among Roma should be addressed more strictly and laws should be applied.

Various experts mentioned sharing of knowledge and expertise, in Belgium, but also with neighbouring countries.

And finally, one respondent stated that the issue of FM should be dealt with from a human rights perspective, as every individual has the right to choose its partner freely.