



# RCD Women's News

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## Forced marriage: a new civil remedy

The Government recently confirmed that it would support Lord Lester's Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Bill. There is currently no specific criminal offence of forcing someone to marry but this bill could become law by the end of this year. This would mean that young people who were at risk would be able to apply for court orders to prevent them from being forced into marriage. For those who had already become victims, they would be able to sue for damages. Third parties would also be able to apply for court orders on behalf of those at risk, which would help those who are frightened to lodge a case on their own behalf.

According to the joint Home Office-Foreign Office Forced Marriage Unit (FMU)\*, a forced marriage is "a marriage conducted without the valid consent of both people, where pressure or abuse is used. Forced marriage is an abuse of human rights and cannot be justified on any religious or cultural basis." The FMU was set up in 2005 to prevent British Nationals being forced into marriage overseas. They deal with 250-300 cases a year, providing confidential advice and assistance to those at risk of being forced into marriage either in the UK or abroad. The majority of cases in the UK involve South Asian families, and a number of cases have arisen in the East Asian, Middle Eastern, European and African communities.

In 1999 the Southall Black Sisters (SBS)\*\*, a leading black women's organisation were involved in the Home Office Working Group on forced marriage and have been active ever since in developing policy initiatives to change cultural and institutional thinking on the issue of forced marriage. They are currently working very closely with Lord Lester on the Civil Protection Bill, which they think will strengthen the rights of those who are vulnerable to this type of abuse. Pragna Patel of Southall Black Sisters, said: "Many women and young children have been engaged in painful and often dramatic struggles against forced marriage but have until recently, received little or no state support due to ignorance, indifference or deference to community leaders who call for less state intervention in the cultural and religious affairs of minority communities."

Following a public consultation, the Government rejected plans to make forced marriage a criminal offence because of fears it would push the practice further 'underground'. Pragna Patel said: "Our experience teaches us that whilst all young people do not want to be coerced or deceived into marriage, few if any are willing to see their parents prosecuted." SBS supports Lord Lester's proposals because they believe it would lead to better protection for victims of forced marriage. They think that criminalising forced marriage would be impractical because children would be reluctant to come forward to see their parents prosecuted and probably convicted and imprisoned. They are happy that the Lord Lester's bill is approaching the issue from a different angle, which is more to do with protection and prevention.

The Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Bill is currently still in the House of Lords. To monitor its progress, go to [www.epolitix.com/EN/Legislation/](http://www.epolitix.com/EN/Legislation/) and search for Forced Marriage Bill.

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\*Find out more about the work of the FMU at [www.fco.gov.uk/forcedmarriage](http://www.fco.gov.uk/forcedmarriage) or call **020 7008 0151**

The FMU have recently published, a survivors handbook entitled: **A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step**, available at, [www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/Survivors%20Handbook.pdf](http://www.fco.gov.uk/Files/kfile/Survivors%20Handbook.pdf). The FMU worked with survivors of forced marriage to produce this practical guide on how to cope with life after a forced marriage.

\*\*SBS offers support and advice to black and ethnic minority women experiencing domestic abuse and forced marriage. Visit [www.southallblacksisters.org.uk](http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk) for more information or call **020 8571 9595**.

## Funding

**The Yapp Charitable Trust** is an independent grant making trust that gives grants of up to £3,000 per year for up to three years to sustain the work of charities that work with elderly people; children and young people aged 5-25; people with disabilities or mental health problems; people trying to overcome life-limiting problems of a social, rather than medical origin such as addiction, relationship difficulties, abuse, and a history of offending. Deadline for applications: **30 September 2007**.

For more information visit:  
[www.yappcharitabletrust.org.uk](http://www.yappcharitabletrust.org.uk) or call:  
**01484 683 403**.

### **Lankelly Chase Foundation: Special Programme - Refugees and Asylum Seekers:**

Provides grants to work which has a recognisable charitable purpose. Funding priorities include combating destitution faced by refused asylum seekers. Grants range from £5,000-£15,000 per year and may be available for 1-3 years.

For more information visit:  
[www.lankellychase.org.uk/bulletinboard](http://www.lankellychase.org.uk/bulletinboard)

**Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund** is planning to spend £10 million on refugee and asylum seeker initiative objectives over the next five years. It aims to raise awareness and highlight the needs and issues of young refugees and asylum seekers. Date to be confirmed for next grant round.

For more information visit:  
[www.theworkcontinues.org/what\\_grants.shtml](http://www.theworkcontinues.org/what_grants.shtml)

**Comic Relief: Red Nose Day Programme 2005-2008**, is providing up to £5,000 grants to support community based projects that work with young people, older people, people with mental health problems, refugees and asylum seekers, domestic violence and disadvantaged communities. No deadline for grants under £5,000.

For more information visit:  
[www.comicrelief.com/apply-for-a-grant/uk/](http://www.comicrelief.com/apply-for-a-grant/uk/)

## Training

**Ashiana Project** is delivering two training courses on:

- **Forced Marriage on 25 July 2007**. This training will cover the following areas: understanding forced and arranged marriage; information on marriage law; and knowledge of the cultural roots surrounding forced marriage.
- **Cultural and Religious Awareness on 9 August 2007**: This training aims to develop an understanding of domestic violence within a South Asian cultural context and will cover Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism.

For more information call **Sofia** on **020 8539 0427**

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**Refugee Women's Association** is delivering a training programme on **25 June 2007** for **Refugee women nurses and midwives**. The training will include workshops on: understanding the NHS; support in registering with the Nursing and Midwifery Council and interview skills.

Time: 10.30am – 2.30pm  
Venue: Leroy House, 436 Essex Road, London, N1 3OP

Call **Jasmina** on **020 7923 2412** or email:  
[jasmina@refugeewomen.org.uk](mailto:jasmina@refugeewomen.org.uk)

## New domestic violence leaflets

The Mayor of London has produced a: **Domestic violence friends and family leaflets** for those who want to help people who are experiencing domestic violence. For further information visit:  
[www.london.gov.uk/mayor/strategies/dom\\_violence/docs/friends-and-family.pdf](http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/strategies/dom_violence/docs/friends-and-family.pdf)

The NSPCC has produced two new leaflets on domestic violence targeted at children and adults:  
[www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/NewsAndEvents/InformNews/DV\\_ifna42482.html](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/NewsAndEvents/InformNews/DV_ifna42482.html)

To submit any articles about women's asylum issues, email [penny.mclean@refugeecouncil.org.uk](mailto:penny.mclean@refugeecouncil.org.uk)