



## MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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### New Paper Positions Forced Marriage as a Family Violence Issue

In a position paper released today, **inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence** has recommended that forced marriage be recognised nationally as a form of family violence.

The paper also includes a number of key recommendations to strengthen Victoria's response to this issue.

In the Criminal Code Act (1995), forced marriage is defined as marriage that lacks the consent of one or both parties in the marriage, and can happen under deception, force or coercion. Victims of forced marriage could be tricked into leaving their own country, often to find themselves being pressured into marriage on their arrival to Australia or agreeing to an arrangement based on false information about her living circumstances or the man she is marrying. Some can be forced or coerced by family to marry to alleviate poverty or lift the family's socioeconomic status.

Forced marriage is a major breach of human rights and is classified as a serious crime in Australia. It is common for victims of forced marriage to experience other forms of abuse, including human trafficking, family violence, domestic servitude, forced labour and sexual assault.

"We work with many clients who have experienced forced marriage," inTouch CEO, Michal Morris said. "However, it's not always easily identified. Many women don't know that it is a crime, or aren't aware that a forced marriage has occurred, especially if they have consented to the union as a result of deception or coercion. Even then, our clients can be reluctant to disclose the situation, because they fear the criminal and social repercussions on their families."

Due to this difficulty identifying the forced marriage itself, reporting and prosecution rates remain low. Additionally, the coercive and controlling nature that characterises these relationships, as well as cultural and language barriers, can deter victim-survivors in reporting their situation. Crucially, as inTouch's paper details, this response needs to be culturally responsive and led by the communities affected. Faith based and multicultural organisations are an essential part of recognising, addressing, and condemning forced marriage, and they must drive the development of training, education and prevention programs.

Furthermore, incorporating bicultural response workers with linguistically tailored support and information can create culturally safe spaces- identifying and addressing forced marriage far more quickly and effectively.

"Forced marriage is not a problem that can be solved with law enforcement alone," Ms Morris said. "Community and leadership need to be an ongoing part of the approach- it facilitates discussion and opens avenues for disclosure and support. It's time we recognised forced marriage as part of this broader discussion on family violence and equipped the sector accordingly."



**Issues covered in the position paper include:**

- Definitions and presentations of forced marriage
- Barriers to disclosure and prosecution
- The role of forced marriage in slavery, human trafficking and abuse
- Expansion of family violence provisions and definitions
- Protection and response strategy and legislation

**inTouch's position paper can be read [here](#).**

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## **About inTouch**

inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence (inTouch) provides person-centered, integrated and culturally responsive family violence services to migrant and refugee communities across Victoria.

We have assisted over 20,000 women and children experiencing family violence throughout our 36 years of operation, providing a holistic service that centers the experiences of victim-survivors in everything we do.

inTouch provides many services including court and community outreach, legal assistance, sector training and capacity building, prevention work and perpetrator intervention programs. For more information, visit [www.intouch.org.au](http://www.intouch.org.au)

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