



U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

Forced Marriage

Note: This material is intended to help you understand the dynamics of forced marriage generally and does not provide legal definitions or advice.

Forced marriage is a marriage that takes place without the consent of one or both people in the marriage. Consent means that you have given your full, free, and informed agreement to marry your intended spouse and to the timing of the marriage. Forced marriage may occur when family members or others use physical or emotional abuse, threats, or deception to force you to marry without your consent.

Victims of forced marriage may be girls, boys, women or men. Forced marriage can impact individuals of any race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, or national origin, and it impacts individuals from all economic and educational backgrounds.

The Difference between Forced Marriage and Arranged Marriage

Arranged marriage is a common tradition in many cultures and is **not the same** as forced marriage. In an arranged marriage, families may play a role in choosing the marriage partner, but both individuals are free to choose whether or not to marry and when to get married. A forced marriage happens when families or others both arrange the marriage *and* deny the individuals to be married the ultimate choice of whether, when, and whom to marry.

Some Signs That May Accompany a Forced Marriage

- You feel you do not or did not have a choice regarding whom to marry or when to marry
- You are experiencing or are being threatened with abandonment, isolation, or physical or emotional abuse if you do not marry or if you attempt to leave a marriage you did not consent to
- You are afraid of the consequences of saying “no” to a marriage, including suffering physical harm or being cut off from your family
- You are being closely monitored in an effort to prevent you from talking to others about the pressure you are facing
- You feel you cannot refuse to marry or leave a marriage you did not consent to because it would shame or harm you or your family
- You believe that you or people you care about would be hurt or even killed if you refuse to marry or attempt to leave a marriage you did not consent to
- You have had your travel documents, identification, communication devices, or money taken away from you and will not get them back unless you agree to marry or remain in a marriage you did not consent to

The U.S. Government’s View of Forced Marriage

The U.S. government is opposed to forced marriage and considers it to be a serious human rights abuse. If the victim of forced marriage is a child, forced marriage is also a form of child abuse.

The U.S. government is working in the United States and abroad to end the practice and to assist individuals who have been forced into marriage or are at risk of being forced into marriage.

In some U.S. states, forced marriage is a crime, and in all U.S. states, people who force someone to marry may be charged with violating state laws, including those against domestic violence, child abuse, rape, assault, kidnapping, threats of violence, stalking, or coercion. People who force someone to marry may also face significant immigration consequences, such as being inadmissible to or removable from the United States.

If you have been or are being forced into marriage, **you are not at fault and you have not violated any U.S. laws** by entering into the marriage.

If You Are In or At Risk of a Forced Marriage

If you believe you are in a forced marriage or are at risk of a forced marriage, you may be able to receive legal aid, social services, and safety planning (including emergency housing). You may also be able to obtain an order of protection, annulment, legal separation, divorce, or a child custody order granting you custody of any children resulting from the forced marriage.

If You Are in the United States

If you need help to prevent or leave a forced marriage or want more information about options and support for you or others facing a forced marriage in the United States or abroad, see the chart below for resources:

Your situation	Who to contact
If you are in immediate danger	Call 911 to receive emergency help from your local police.
If you need confidential help at any time of day or night	These hotlines are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) • National Human Trafficking Hotline: 1-888-373-7888

Disclaimer: The organizations listed above are not affiliated with USCIS.

If You Are Outside the United States

If you are a U.S. citizen outside of the United States and are being forced into a marriage, please contact the [nearest U.S. Embassy or consulate](#) for assistance.

Forced Marriage and U.S. Immigration Benefits

If you are a U.S. citizen being forced to sponsor your spouse or fiancé(e), or a lawful permanent resident being forced to sponsor a spouse for an immigration benefit, you may withdraw your petition at any time before a decision is issued by USCIS or, if approved, before the person is admitted or granted adjustment of status.

Withdrawing your petition may trigger certain automatic notifications that USCIS mails to the address on file. This means that your spouse or fiancé(e) may receive a notice from USCIS that you have withdrawn your petition. Therefore, before withdrawing your petition, you may want to talk with an organization or

immigration lawyer or accredited representative familiar with forced marriage situations to discuss your options and plan for your safety. To find authorized immigration service providers, visit the [Find Legal Services](#) page.

Additional Information and Resources

- Forced Marriage Information: [U.S. Department of State](#) and [United States Agency for International Development](#)
- Human Trafficking Information: [U.S. Department of Homeland Security Blue Campaign](#)
- [Resources for Victims of Human Trafficking & Other Crimes](#)
- [Questions and Answers: Victims of Human Trafficking, T Nonimmigrant Status](#)
- [Questions and Answers: Battered Spouses, Children and Parents Under the Violence Against Women Act \(VAWA\)](#)
- [Immigration and Customs Enforcement \(ICE\) Tip Line](#)

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