

English summary
of Fafo-rapport 2021:16

Dialogue and discord
NGOs' efforts to prevent
negative social control and
forced marriages

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Efforts to combat family practices involving coercion and violence to prevent individual family members from deciding whom they will marry and whether to stay in a marriage have been on the agenda in Norwegian integration policy for more than two decades. In recent years, attention has increasingly also been paid to so-called negative social control: parental and family practices that involve control, pressures and restrictions on the lives of young people. Since the first action plans against forced marriages were produced in the 1990s, NGOs have played a key role in preventing and combatting such practices. In this report, we present results from a study of the effect of a national grant scheme for awareness-raising work by NGOs in the area of forced marriages and negative social control. The grant scheme is administered by the Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi), and since 2019 also by 20 selected local authorities. We have investigated what kinds of organisations received grants in 2017, 2018 and 2019, what kinds of initiatives the grants have funded, and the groups that have been targeted by these initiatives. Furthermore, we have investigated the organisations' understanding of the problems to be rectified and what is needed to effect change, and finally the organisations' experiences with these initiatives and the grant scheme.

Data material

The study uses a number of different methodological approaches:

1. Review of policy documents in this area and some interviews with actors in the national administration of the scheme. The objective here was to describe the background to and the ambitions for the grant scheme.
2. Review of applications, letters of allocation and reports from organisations that have been granted funds for projects/activities. These documents cover the period 2017–19 and were made available by IMDi and the 20 local authorities that administered grants in this period. The objective was to describe the types of organisations that were granted support for specific initiatives, and for what types of target groups.
3. A survey distributed to the organisations that were granted support in 2017, 2018 and/or 2019, and case studies based on interviews with a selection (9) of these organisations. The latter data sources were used to gain access to con-

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ceptualisations of problems and solutions, as well as experiences with initiatives and the grant scheme.

What types of organisations are granted support?

IMDi granted support to approximately one-half of all the project applications that were processed in 2017–19. In line with previous studies of this grant scheme, we have categorised the organisations that were granted support as mainstream organisations, minority organisations and local immigrant organisations. *Local immigrant organisations* encompass those that have a basis in a specific group of countries or are so-called ‘interethnic’. *Minority organisations* have a wider social/geographic scope (not targeting country-specific groups), including faith-based communities. *Mainstream organisations* are often nationwide and recruit members from all segments of the population, and projects to combat forced marriages and negative social control constitute one of many areas of activity for these organisations.

These three categories of organisations were all included in IMDi’s grant scheme until 2019, when the organisations no longer could apply to IMDi for grants to local projects. At that time, the local immigrant organisations disappeared from IMDi’s list of grant recipients. However, many such organisations were granted support from the 20 local authorities in 2019.

Mainstream organisations constitute approximately one-half of the recipients of grants from IMDi. They also made up nearly one-half of the recipients of grants from the local authorities in 2019. However, our overview also shows that the local immigrant organisations have reoriented themselves towards the grant scheme in the local authorities. Thereby, this part of civil society is mobilised also after the transition to local management of grants to local projects. Minority organisations are also asserting themselves. They tend to apply for grants to cover multiple projects, which they continue to pursue over many years. The proportion of the total grant funding that they receive is also larger than the number of organisations receiving support would indicate.

The local immigrant organisations tend to have a traditional membership-based ‘bottom-up’ hierarchical form of organisation. They resemble the traditional membership organisations, with the exception that most of them appear to have no regional or national level. These organisations are largely based on volunteer work; few of them have any permanently employed staff. This also applies to some of the mainstream and minority organisations. Other mainstream organisations, and some minority organisations in particular, are professionalised to a greater extent. Many of the mainstream organisations and the most of the minority organisations have paid staff that establish and run projects, while additional voluntary workers help implement activities.

What types of initiatives have been granted funding?

The main impression is that the supported projects encompass a wide range of initiatives and approaches. We have categorised the various initiatives in three groups according to their approach: information-based, dialogue-based and conversation-based.

Information-based initiatives attack the problem by engaging in training and information work. This category includes lectures/seminars/conferences, teaching/training courses and information material. The method is to transfer knowledge and well-known approaches from those who possess such insight to those who need it. *Dialogue-based initiatives* for their part should ideally help create something new through open dialogue. This category includes only dialogue-based meetings, but the organisations that pursue such initiatives apply somewhat varying definitions of the term 'dialogue meeting'. *Conversation-based initiatives* also involve facilitation of meetings between groups or individuals, but compared to the dialogue-based approach, this does not require the same level of commitment among participants.

We find a correlation between the categories of organisations and the approaches to change work each of them apply. Many minority organisations take an information-based approach to their work. The local immigrant organisations often apply a dialogue-based or conversation-based approach to their projects, which frequently target their own networks or members. The mainstream organisations show a greater diversity in their approaches, which may be linked to the greater range of organisation forms in this category. The mainstream organisations nevertheless stand out in that they often apply the conversation-based approach. These projects tend to be resource-intensive, with regular activities that run over long periods of time. The critical point in their implementation appears to be recruitment, since the mainstream organisations do not draw participants from their own membership base.

Certain tendencies are reflected in the entire project portfolio, especially those that have been granted support by IMDi: the target groups for these projects primarily include young people, followed by their parents. Most of the projects thematise negative social control and forced marriages, with a lesser emphasis on female genital mutilation. Quite a lot of the projects take an information-based approach, but just as many combine the three different categories of initiatives. Since the restructuring in 2019, when 20 local authorities were put in charge of 60 per cent of the grant funding, the conversation-based and combined approaches seem to have been emphasised, while fewer of the projects that have been funded by the local authorities have applied a purely information-based approach.

Understanding the problem

How we understand a problem is important, because this guides our ideas about how to solve it. This often occurs without the authorities or organisations linking the two. It is therefore important not only to identify understandings of problems, but also to discuss them.

A clear descriptive finding that emerges from the survey in the organisations and the interviews in a sample of organisations is their unambiguous understanding of the problem: negative social control and forced marriages are regarded as a problem related to culture. The interview material highlights the understanding of this as 'imported' culture, meaning cultural norms and practices that individuals and families have brought with them from their countries of origin. We have referred to this as *the culture and tradition perspective*. In some contexts, it also comes to light that these norms and practices do not lose their importance through life in Norway, but rather the reverse – their importance is reinforced. We have referred to this as *the identity perspective*. The question of what culture means and in what ways is not problematised in detail in the interview material.

In addition, some organisations that have responded to the survey mention 'little education' as a crucial factor for understanding negative social control and forced marriages. This thereby points to social approaches to the ways of understandings the problem in addition to the cultural ones. Gender perspectives are only rarely brought up when representatives of organisations (in the interview material) discuss approaches to forced marriages and negative social control.

Understanding the solution

The qualitative interviews indicate that different understandings of the problem have a bearing on how the problem is confronted and what kind of solutions are considered relevant. Actors who tend to take a *confrontational* rather than a *consensus-driven* approach more often appear to interpret the problem in light of what we have referred to as the identity perspective. If we imagine that communities where negative social control occurs could also become more closed off from society at large, it would be natural to assume that a confrontation is needed to halt this process. However, if we imagine that negative social control is a result of norms and traditions held by people and communities, but that they will abandon these in the encounter with new information, new experiences and new norms, it would be more natural to choose a more open and consensus-driven approach. The title of this report, 'Dialogue and discord', summarises the organisations' *different* understandings of problems and solutions and the different approaches that are derived from them.

The organisations are in close contact with the users and communities, and this can make it easier for them than for the authorities to gain access to key target groups and get their message across. However, this requires the organisa-

tions to successfully build and maintain trust and legitimacy in the communities in question. In light of our data, it may appear that this type of trust-based initiative works best for organisations that take an open and non-confrontational approach. However, we can also see that some organisations consider their remit to extend beyond trust-based initiatives of this type. Some organisations believe that their mission includes highlighting problems and setting an agenda in both minority and majority communities. The more confrontational initiatives, which in some cases may trigger resistance and loss of legitimacy in parts of the minority communities, are especially seen as aimed at stirring controversy and helping raise awareness through public discourse.

The organisations' role and satisfaction with the initiatives

From the authorities' point of view, the organisations shall help prevent, and to some extent provide assistance to, persons who have been subjected to negative social control and forced marriage. In the interviews, IMDi staff also underscored that the NGOs should function as a corrective to the authorities, by providing input that can help improve the efforts to combat negative social control and forced marriages.

The findings in this project indicate, however, that the influence in the relationship between the authorities and the organisations is mutual: the approaches favoured by the authorities colour the discourse and framing of the problem in the organisations. The thematic areas to which funding is granted also tend to set the agenda for the organisations' work. This notwithstanding, some organisations harbour ambitions for setting their own agenda for the public discourse.

Most of the organisations are very satisfied with their own work and initiatives; this emerges both in the case study and in the survey. One of the clearest findings in the survey is that the organisations are convinced that they have achieved the goal of the initiative encompassed by the grant, and that they managed to reach the target group.

The grant scheme – benefits and frustrations

The organisations are very satisfied with this opportunity to receive grants. However, the survey and the qualitative interviews reveal a fairly large amount of discontent and frustration regarding the design of the grant scheme. It is seen as especially frustrating that the funds are allocated in spring and must be spent before the end of the year. Many organisations feel that this impairs their ability to make long-term plans for their work, which is especially detrimental to the efforts to build trust in communities over time. In addition, it means that a lot of time and effort needs to be spent on applying for renewed funding for activities. This is especially challenging for organisations that employ permanent staff but

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lack a robust financial situation that could provide stability over time. It is least challenging for the largest organisations, as well as for the small ones that rely exclusively on volunteer activity.

Recommendations

The grant scheme for NGOs' efforts to prevent negative social control and forced marriages should be continued. On the basis of this study, the following recommendations can be made:

1. The grant scheme should make provisions for long-term initiatives, for example by prioritising multi-year grants. This has also been a clear recommendation of previous research projects that have evaluated the structure of these grant schemes. Today, applications for multi-year projects are accepted, but in order for more applicants to view this as an opportunity, active encouragement and facilitation are required.
2. National authorities have a responsibility for ensuring exchanges of experiences and knowledge-building by making provisions for locally and nationally oriented organisations to meet and share and build knowledge. The organisations possess a wealth of knowledge and experience, and this should be made more widely accessible. Such platforms can also serve as key arenas for discussing various understandings of problems and solutions in a constructive manner.
3. National authorities should take the initiative to investigate experiences gained by the 20 local authorities that currently administer grants to locally oriented initiatives against negative social control and forced marriages (part C of the grant portfolio). An investigation should be made of how the local authorities approach the organisations, how this work is organised in the local authorities, how they make provisions for exchanges of knowledge and experience between the organisations, and between the organisations and the local authorities.