

E.ma European Master's Degree in Human Rights and Democratisation

**EARLY MARRIAGE IN THE EUROPEAN ROMANI COMMUNITY.
BEYOND THE CULTURAL APPROACH**

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Abstract

Conflicting claims often arise between the pursuit of gender equality and the protection of the rights of minority groups to a distinct cultural identity. Early marriage, which is identified under international human rights law as a human rights violation, has often been analysed as a culturally-based practice. Under this perspective, its discussion is faced with the apparent dilemma between cultural diversity and the universality of human rights.

This thesis will explore the practice of early marriage in the European Romani minority. While recognising that early marriage is rooted in a specific set of Romani cultural values and beliefs, the principal aim of this study is to go beyond the simplistic cultural approach by looking at the complexity of factors that determine its persistence in Romani communities. It will be argued that this practice cannot be fully and properly understood if not placed within the larger social and economic landscape in which Romani communities live and in which early marriages occur. The role played by others factors – such as economic marginalisation, social exclusion and racism – in reinforcing and perpetuating this practice will be discussed.

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