

# Article – Female genital mutilation: where, why and consequences



Female genital mutilation (FGM) refers to procedures involving the partial or complete removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genitals for non-medical reasons. Usually it is done by a traditional circumciser using a blade and without anaesthetic. Although internationally recognised as a human rights violation, about 68 million girls worldwide are at risk of it by 2030.

## **In which countries is female circumcision practiced?**

FGM is primarily practised in about 30 countries in Africa and the Middle East. It is also practiced in some countries in Asia and Latin America and among communities coming from these regions.

Although it is illegal in the EU and some member states prosecute even when it performed outside the country, it is estimated that about **600,000 women living in Europe** have been subjected to FGM and a further 180,000 girls are at a high risk in 13 European countries alone.

## **What are the reasons for female genital mutilation?**

FGM is mostly carried out on girls between infancy and 15. It goes back to a mix of cultural and social reasons, such as social pressure and convention, beliefs that FGM has religious support or ideas of beauty and purity. The

practice predates the rise of Christianity and Islam and reflects deep-rooted inequalities between the sexes.