

# Joint Statement on the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation

Ahead of the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation on 6 February 2019, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission **Federica Mogherini**, Commissioner European Neighbourhood Policy & Enlargement Negotiations **Johannes Hahn**, Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development **Neven Mimica** and Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality **Věra Jourová** reaffirmed the European Union's strong commitment to eradicate worldwide Female Genital Mutilation in the following statement.

*“Every girl and woman has the right to live a life free of violence and pain. And yet, more than 200 million women and girls across the world have been forced to undergo the painful and traumatic practice of Female Genital Mutilation, including 500,000 living in Europe. Millions more girls are at risk of being cut: 68 million girls in 25 countries by 2030.*

*Female Genital Mutilation is a severe violation of human rights and of women's physical integrity. It is a practice that amounts to torture and a degrading treatment that cannot be justified. Neither on the basis of custom, nor tradition, culture or religion.*

*It is a crime in all European Union Member States. We have recently seen the first convictions of persons that conducted female genital mutilation and we expect to see anyone committing these crimes in the European Union or organising them in a third country to be brought to justice. Eventhough many challenges remain, this an important first step towards justice for the victims.*

*The European Union is at the forefront of global efforts to end Female Genital Mutilation by 2030. We have supported partner countries in criminalising this harmful practice, and we are committed to do even more.*

*The EU and the UN have launched the global Spotlight Initiative, with the aim to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, including female genital mutilation, child marriages and other harmful practices against women. To promote sustainable social change, the EU will fund projects to combat gender-based violence at grassroots level. To end this practice, we will work hand-in-hand with actors at all levels: authorities, community leaders, parents, parliaments, the judiciary, civil society, youth and the media, and other relevant stakeholders.*

*We remain committed to do everything in our power to eliminate this criminal practice.”*

Background

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) comprises all procedures involving partial or total removal of the female external genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons, as defined by the World Health Organisation.

FGM is carried out for cultural, religious and/or social reasons on young girls between infancy and the age of 15. FGM constitutes a form of child abuse and violence against women and girls; it has severe short- and long-term physical and psychological consequences.

Female Genital Mutilation is a form of violence against women criminalised under the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention. The Convention is signed by all EU Member States, and 20 Member States so far have ratified it, an EU citizen can be prosecuted for conducting FGM/C abroad.

Over the past 10 years, the European Union has achieved important milestones on this topic. Thanks to the European Union, cooperation with UNICEF, UNFPA and civil society organisations, about 3.3 million women and girls have accessed protection and prevention services. More than 20,000 community groups in Africa have publicly called for the elimination of genital mutilation. Supported by a strong partnership between the European Union, the African Union and champion African states, 12 African countries have put in place national budget lines to end the practice. Regional and national networks of religious organisations are also in place in the Arab states to counteract the practice.

The European Union remains committed to the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which addresses female genital mutilation through its Goal number 5 on Gender Equality and specific target 5.3 on the elimination of harmful practices.

Many girls and women living within the European Union are also at risk or have suffered from FGM. The [European Institute for Gender Equality](#) has carried out research on the prevalence of female genital mutilation in the European Union and has recently published [a study on the prevalence of FGM in Belgium, Greece, France, Italy, Cyprus and Malta](#). This study provides more accurate qualitative and quantitative information on female genital mutilation and its risk among girls within the EU, taking into account new patterns of migration.

For more information

[Q&A – Female Genital Mutilation and EU action to eliminate this practice](#)

[EU-UN Spotlight initiative](#)

[Study on the risk of FGM in 6 EU countries](#) (Belgium, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy and Malta)