

Questions and Answers about Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C)

STATEMENT/18/601

What is Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C)?

Female genital mutilation consists of the intentional partial or complete removal of the external female genitalia, or other injuries to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. There are several types of procedures, including partial or complete removal of the clitoris, of the labia minora and majora, the narrowing of the vaginal opening through the creation of a covering seal, leaving only a small opening for urine and menstrual fluids, and any other non-medical injury such as scraping, incising, pricking or burning. Female genital mutilation causes pain, infection, sexual problems, urinary problems, problems with childbirth, and death.

It is estimated that at least 500,000 women in Europe have undergone FGM/C and 200 million women worldwide.

What does the EU do?

The European Union tackles FGM/C in various ways in its internal and external action, which includes better legal protection and improved access to support for victims, instilling social change and capacity building of practitioners. The actions are based on the focus areas of the [Communication](#) towards the elimination of female genital mutilation (2013), on fighting harmful practices such as FGM/C, as violence of any kind against women and girls, as well as on the [Gender Action Plan from 2016- 2020](#):

1. Prevention

Effective Prevention relies on sustainable societal change, as FGM/C is often rooted in communities' societal and social norms, causing social pressure on parents to have their daughters cut. Sometimes, it is claimed that undergoing FGM/C will be beneficial for the girl and preserves her honour.

Commissioner Věra Jourová dedicated 2017 to the fight against violence against women. The actions included the funding of [projects](#) that deal with FGM/C, as well as an awareness campaign, a dedicated website [NON.NO.NEIN – Say No, Stop Violence against Women](#) provide the main platform. This campaign is extended and intensified during 2018.

Through the Commission's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme, projects aimed at combating gender-based violence and supporting its victims are funded. This includes projects focusing specifically on combatting FGM/C and supporting its victims ([see for example](#)). Additionally, a specific call for transnational projects aiming to prevent, inform about and combat violence against women, young people and children, linked to harmful practices funded

[nine projects](#) (4.5 million euros).

In February 2017, a [web-based platform](#) on female genital mutilation was launched to train judges, nurses, asylum officers, doctors, teachers, police officers and other professionals who are in contact with girls at risk and women who have undergone FGM/C, and to better equip them to prevent it and support these women. The Commission also funds [projects to strengthen national child protection systems](#), for instance through the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme, including projects promoting integrated approaches to child victims, such as children's houses.

Further, training packages for health professionals were developed, to improve the quality of and access to health services for migrant and ethnic minorities. FGM/C is a specific topic in the online [training modules](#).

2. Prosecution

FGM/C is a crime in all EU Member States and in most of them, prosecution for conducting FGM/Cs abroad is possible, following the principle of extra-territoriality.

- Criminalisation of FGM/C is also required under the [Istanbul Convention](#) and its victims also fall under the scope of the Convention's prevention, support and protection measures, in those Member States that have ratified the Convention (the criminalisation of FGM/C is a Member State competence). On 13 June 2017, the Istanbul Convention was [co-signed](#) by the Commission and Council Presidency on behalf of the EU. The terms of the Conclusion and the related code of conduct on the respective roles of implementation of EU and Member States are currently negotiated in the Council of the EU.
- A correct and timely implementation of the [Victims' Rights Directive](#) ensures that victims of FGM/C are able to access free confidential specialist support services, including trauma support and counselling, as well as shelters in emergency situations. It also puts measures in place to protect victims against any physical or emotional threat during criminal investigations and trial. In addition, children will be subject to specific protection measures taking into account of their age and maturity. The Victims' Rights Directive applies to all victims of crimes without discrimination and regardless of their residence status, ensuring that it also applies to individuals such as undocumented migrants.
- The Commission also provides training materials on FGM/C to legal practitioners, through the [European e-Justice Portal](#). The e-learning course 'United against female genital mutilation' addresses the issue of FGM/C in the context of health and asylum services. It provides an introduction to understanding FGM/C as a human rights issue and as a specific form of gender based violence, and its implications in the area of asylum.
- An [analysis of European court cases](#) related to FGM/C was published in 2016, in an effort to identify what has allowed states to effectively prosecute.

3. Protection

Girls at risk of FGM and women who are victims need particular support when they arrive in the EU. EU legislation is in place: a woman or a girl at risk of suffering FGM is eligible for international protection and her specific needs should be taken into account.

- Under the recast Asylum Procedures Directive and the recast Reception Conditions Directive, Member States have an obligation to identify applicants with special procedural and reception needs, due to their gender or as consequence of serious forms of sexual violence. If such needs are identified, Member States need to provide adequate procedural and reception support to these vulnerable applicants.
- Relevant provisions of the Asylum Procedures Directive provide, for instance, that personal interviews shall be conducted by persons competent to take into account, among other things, the applicant's cultural origin, gender and vulnerabilities. In addition, Member States should, wherever possible, select an interviewer and interpreter of the same sex of the applicant if the latter requests it.
- The Reception Conditions Directive also provides that victims of female genital mutilation should receive the necessary medical and psychological treatment, and staff working with victims of female genital mutilation should have appropriate training.
- The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) has made available an online tool on the identification of persons with special needs which provides practical support and specific guidance on gender-related needs in the asylum and reception context. EASO is also providing trainings for asylum officers and other immigration officials on gender, gender identity and sexual orientation, including on the applicable legal framework. The first training took place in 2015 and since then 281 participants have completed this training module. A train-the-trainer session is scheduled for autumn 2018. □

The reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) put forward by the Commission in May and July 2016 aims to reinforce the protection safeguards available to persons with specific needs, including unaccompanied children seeking asylum in Europe. They mention that specific needs of female **applicants who have experienced gender-based harm** should be taken into account. This includes ensuring access, to medical care, legal support, appropriate trauma counselling and psycho-social care at different stages of the asylum procedure.

4. Knowledge

- Estimates show that there may be as many as 200 million victims of FGM/C worldwide, including at least 500,000 in the EU. There is however no official data available on the number of victims and girls at risk. Therefore, improving data collection has been a priority.
- In 2016, a [study](#) funded under the Commission's Daphne III programme, was carried out to develop a common definition and methodology on FGM/C

prevalence. It shows that over half a million first-generation immigrant women and girls in the EU, Norway and Switzerland had undergone FGM/C before their arrival. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) has developed a [common methodology and indicators](#) to estimate the number of girls at risk of FGM. This includes methodological recommendations for all EU Member States.

- On 6 February 2017 the Advisory Committee on equal opportunities for women and men has published [an opinion on combating FGM/C](#) and other harmful practices containing recommendations to the European Commission and to the Member States.

5. External actions

Fighting against harmful practices including FGM/C is a priority for EU external action, as recognised both under the [EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2015-2019](#), and the [Gender Action Plan II “Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of Girls and Women through EU External Relations 2016-2020”](#). The European Union has put women’s and girls’ rights at the core of its foreign policy and has consistently worked to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, as well as to attain their full empowerment, including their active and meaningful participation in all spheres of public and private life.

This commitment is reflected in the [EU guidelines on Violence against Women and Girls and combating all forms of discrimination against them](#), and the recently revised [EU Guidelines for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child](#).

The EU has increased its support for the elimination of FGM/C globally, including through its international cooperation. The issue is addressed in human rights and political dialogues with partner countries and in annual dialogues with civil society organisations.

In November 2017, the EU hosted in Brussels the yearly meeting of the Donor Working Group on FGM/C gathering key governmental and intergovernmental organisations and foundations committed to the abandonment of FGM/C, leading for the extension and sustainable momentum around abandoning FGM/C including contributing resources towards plans of action, policies and programmes at the local, national and international levels. Back-to-back the EU sponsored the European Forum to build bridges on FGM/C, organised by End FGM EU.

The EU also supported and participated to the inter-parliamentary consultation “Upholding the rights of the girls, ending Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage” organised by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development (EPF) in Morocco on 2-3 October 2017. The goal of the initiative was to foster a corps of Members of Parliaments from European, Arab and African countries dedicated to accelerate the ending of harmful practices.

In September 2017, the High Representative/Vice President Federica Mogherini and Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development Neven Mimica launched together with the United Nations the [“Spotlight Initiative”](#) to

eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. With an investment of €500 million, the Spotlight Initiative will be put into action in five regions of the world: Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America and the Pacific, working to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. FGM/C is one of the forms of violence against women and girls which will be addressed by the Spotlight Initiative.

The EU is currently supporting eight projects implemented by civil society organisations in non-EU countries (Uganda, Tanzania, Guinea-Bissau, Eritrea, Egypt, Gambia, Sudan and Ethiopia) to put an end to FGM/C. Moreover, the EU is one of the main contributors to UNICEF-UNFPA Joint Programmes on the Abandonment of FGM/C: accelerating change (€11M) which aims at:

- supporting the 17 programme countries to enact legal and policy frameworks with appropriate resources and implementation for eliminating FGM/C;
- providing timely, appropriate and quality services to girls and women at risk of or having experienced FGM/C in select districts in programme countries, and;
- supporting activities so that a majority of individuals, families and communities in programme areas accept the norm of keeping the girls intact.

Results of EU action against FGM/C

As first results achieved, 12 of the targeted countries have established national budget lines to put an end to the practice. Countries are incrementally strengthening and improving the implementation of legislation as an important step towards ending impunity for perpetrators. More than 1.5 million girls and women received services for protection and care related to FGM/C. The programme has also galvanised community movements towards social change through the encouragement of more than 3,000 communities representing 8.5 million individuals to make public declaration of abandonment. A strong partnership has been established with the African Union and the Pan African Parliament to champion the fight against FGM/C. Regional and national networks of faith-based organisations have been established in the Arab states to counter the practice. [Further information can be found online.](#)

EU efforts also include support towards the elimination of FGM/C in our southern Neighbourhood. In Egypt, a programme jointly implemented with the United Nations, from December 2011 to June 2017 with an EU contribution of €3.8 million, supported the Egyptian government's efforts towards abandoning FGM/C.

The EU's projects and strategies address the issue of FGM/C at all levels and in coordination with a variety of partners and stakeholders. Such action can contribute to the necessary change of attitudes: engaging with justice, health, religious and political authorities and practitioner – from communities at grassroots level to national level – and to change social norms by engaging with women, men, and girls and boys.

The European External Action Service provides specialised training on FGM/C

in cooperation with Amnesty International. The EU also works closely with the African Union and African group in the UN Human Rights Council to end the practice.

What happens next?

The Commission will continue implementation of measures set out in the Communication [Towards the elimination of female genital mutilation](#) and use appropriate instruments to eradicate FGM/C and build on this experience to tackle other harmful practices.

Under the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme T funding will continue for Member States' and civil society-led projects tackling gender-based violence, including FGM/C., The last call (circa €9.7 million) closed in November 2017, while a new call (around €10.6 million) will open on 8 March 2018.

The Commission will continue its [“No.Non.Nein. – Say no! Stop violence against women”](#) campaign throughout 2018 to ensure the spread of successful initiatives throughout the European Union, educate about gender-based violence, and keep this topic at the top of the political agenda.

For More Information

Website: [NON.NO.NEIN – Say No! Stop Violence against Women](#)

Website: [“Spotlight Initiative”](#)

Communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: [Towards the elimination of female genital mutilation](#)

Joint Communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: [Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy \(2015-2019\)](#)
[“Keeping human rights at the heart of the EU agenda”](#)

[Gender Action Plan II “Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of Girls and Women through EU External Relations 2016-2020”](#)

[EU guidelines on Violence against Women and Girls and combating all forms of discrimination against them](#)

[Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019](#)

[Istanbul Convention](#)