



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

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The EU has actively participated in international cooperation to promote the elimination of Female Genital Mutilation. Discussion on Female Genital Mutilation is included in human rights and political dialogues with partner countries and in annual dialogues with civil society organisations.

What is FGM/C?

Female genital mutilation consists of the (partial or complete) removal of the external female genitalia, and the infliction of other injuries to the female genitalia for no medical reasons. There are several variations, including partial or complete removal of the clitoris, of the labia minora and majora, the narrowing of the vaginal opening by joining the two sides of the wound, 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, problems with sexual intercourse, problems with urination, 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.

FGM is also defined by the Council of Europe's [Istanbul Convention](#), which requires its criminalisation. Its victims have to be protected in accordance with the Convention's support and protection measures in those Member States that have ratified the Convention. The European Commission has proposed the EU accession to the Istanbul Convention in March 2016 (see [press release](#)).

What does the EU do?

As an issue of great concern the European Union tackles FGM 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 from 25 November 2013, on fighting harmful practices such as FGM, as violence of any kind against women and girls, as well as on the [Gender Action Plan II](#), from 2015:

1. Knowledge

Estimates show that there may be as many as 200 million victims of female genital mutilation (FGM) worldwide, including at least 500,000 in the EU. These are estimates and there is no official data available on measuring the actual scale of the phenomenon.

It is difficult to estimate the number of victims and girls at risk, and there is little reliable information regarding how, by whom and where it is carried out. Therefore, improving data collection has been a priority.

In 2016, a [prevalence study](#) funded under the Commission's Daphne III programme, was carried out to develop a common definition and methodology on FGM prevalence. It shows that over half a million first-generation immigrant women and girls in the EU, Norway and Switzerland had undergone FGM 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.

2. Prevention

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

To change these social norms, the European Union funds grassroots activities focussing on health education, children's rights and laws prohibiting FGM. The aim is to help counter the belief that girls need to be cut and raise awareness among those in contact with victims of FGM and girls at risk of FGM.

On 3 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 undergone FGM, and to better equip them to prevent it and support these women. 4.5 million euros are currently dedicated to [nine transnational projects](#). Their aim is to prevent, inform about and combat violence against women, young people and children linked to harmful practices.

At the 9th European Forum on the rights of the child, **10 Principles for integrated child protection systems** were proposed. They aim to prevent and respond to violence against children, including gender-based violence, FGM and other harmful practices. The Commission 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.

In 2016, the [10th European Forum on the rights of the child](#) was dedicated to the protection of children in migration. Participants particularly focused on the risks of gender-based violence and harmful practices for children in migration. In order to support the preventive work of health professionals training packages were developed which address FGM as a specific topic in the training [modules](#) among the wider aim of improving the quality of and access to health services for migrant and ethnic minorities.

3. [Prosecution](#)

FGM is a crime in all EU Member States. In many EU countries it is also possible to prosecute for conducting FGMs abroad, following the principle of extra-territoriality. This prevents families from taking their daughters to their country of origin to have them mutilated there.

- Criminalisation of FGM is also required under the Istanbul Convention and its victims therefore 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 is a Member State competence).
- A correct and timely implementation of the [Victims' Rights Directive](#) ensures that victims of FGM are able to access free confidential specialist support services, including trauma support and counselling, as well as shelters in emergency situations. It also puts in place measures to protect victims against any threat of physical or emotional harm 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.
- A [Mutual Learning Seminar](#) for Member States and independent academic experts organised by the Commission in April 2016 examined and discussed good practices from the UK and Italy in tackling female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage and other harmful practices through legislation, improving the evidence base on FGM and the role of awareness raising and training.
- The Commission also disseminates training materials on FGM for legal practitioners, through the [European e-Justice Portal](#). The e-learning course 'United against female genital mutilation' addresses the issue of FGM in the context of health and asylum services. It is aimed at legal practitioners and provides an introduction to understanding FGM 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 was published in 2016, in an effort to identify what has allowed states to effectively prosecute.

4. [Protection](#)

Girls at risk of FGM and women who are victims need particular support when they arrive on the EU territory. 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.

- Because of the recast Asylum Procedures Directive and the recast Reception Conditions Directive, Member States have now 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 vulnerability. In addition, Member States should, wherever possible, select an interviewer and interpreter of the same sex of the applicant if the latter requests it.

- Relevant provisions of the Reception Conditions Directive also provide 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 have developed an online training platform for immigration and asylum officials in Member States on gender-specific issues related to asylum and the application of EU law in this area; first trainings will take place this year.
- 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.

5. External actions

In 2014, the EU adopted a rights-based approach to development cooperation, encompassing all Human Rights. 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 2008 EU [Guidelines](#) on Violence against Women and Girls and combating all forms of discrimination against them, clearly sets the fight against violence and discrimination against women as a key objective of the EU's external human rights policy. It provides guidance to EU delegations and the Embassies of the EU Member States in non-EU countries on actions they can carry out to address these issues.

The EU contributes to eliminating FGM/C globally. It has actively participated in international cooperation to promote the elimination of FGM/C and has included FGM/C in its human rights and political dialogues with partner countries, UN and regional organisations and in annual dialogues with civil society organisations.

Concrete pledges and a financial contribution by the EU were made at the 2014 Girl Summit in London. These include supporting actions to achieve gender equality and wellbeing of children, continued support of advocacy for improved national legislation on FGM where it is needed. The EU pledged around EUR 100 million for the next 7 years to gender equality and children's wellbeing under the EU Global Public Goods and Challenges programme.

The EU has supported and contributed to the resolutions of the World Health Assembly and the work of the World Health Organisation in this area, and also in the broader context of violence against women.

Last year the EU supported 17 projects combatting FGM/C in non-EU countries, with a total amount of approximately EUR 17 million. This includes an EUR 11 million EU contribution to the UNICEF-UNFPA Joint Programmes on the Abandonment of FGM/C which aims at:

- supporting the 17 programme countries to enact legal and policy frameworks with appropriate resources and implementation for eliminating FGM;
- providing timely, appropriate and quality services to girls and women at risk of or having experienced FGM 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.

It also includes the Commission's effort towards the elimination of the FGM practice in particular in the Southern Neighbourhood. There currently is a focus on Egypt with a project: "Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and Empowerment of Families' Joint Programme" that started in December 2011 and will run until June 2017. It will be followed by the new project on advancing women's rights, which has an entire component dedicated to supporting the Egyptian government's efforts towards abandoning FGM.

This experience has shown that projects and strategies should encompass a multi-level, multi-thematic and coordinated approach, paying specific attention to issues at the margins. Some pillars can contribute to a change of attitudes: engaging with justice, health, religious and political authorities and practitioners, from communities at grassroots level to national level, and to change social norms by engaging with women, men girls and boys.

The European External Action Service also provides specialised training on FGM/C in cooperation with Amnesty International as part of its training on human rights and gender. Participants are representatives of the External Action Service headquarters in Brussels and from the EU Delegations all over the world, as well as from the European Parliament, the European Commission and Member

States. The EU also works closely with the African Union and African group in the UN Human Rights Council and with the Council of Europe and the OSCE to end FGM/C.

What happens next?

On 02 February 2017, the Advisory Committee on equal opportunities for women and men has published an [opinion](#) on combating FGM/C and other harmful practices that contains recommendations to the European Commission and to the Member States.

Since 1981, the Advisory Committee on equal opportunities for women and men brings together representatives of EU countries, social partners at EU level and NGOs who assist the Commission in formulating and implementing activities aimed at promoting gender equality.

For More Information

[Joint-Statement](#)

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