

What can you do if you fear a girl is at risk of FGM?

- As a member of the public, if you are worried about a girl's safety or welfare but are not sure what to do, contact your local HSE Children and Family Services office. You'll find contact details on www.hse.ie/go/socialworkers. You can also phone the HSE on LoCall 1850 241 850.
- If you work with children and you are worried about a girl, talk to the Children First designated person in your workplace or contact the HSE Children and Family Services for advice.
- If you think a girl is in immediate danger and you cannot contact the HSE Children and Family Services, contact any Garda station.

"...I know I feel different, less.....
but it will never stop me from
fighting and making sure no one
goes through it ever again. Nobody
has a right to cut off parts of a
girl's body that she was born with!"
MEHRET YEMANE - FGM SURVIVOR

"Female genital mutilation is a gross
violation of the rights of women and
children. The new law gives Ireland
the means to comprehensively
protect girls and women from this
barbaric act. We look forward to
government department, agencies
and key stakeholders working
together on the implementation
of the FGM law."

SALOME MBUGUA, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, AKIDWA

This leaflet was produced by AkiDwa with support from the HSE National Social Inclusion Office. This is one of a number of collaborative actions aimed at raising awareness around FGM and supporting those who have undergone this procedure.

Support organisations



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CHILDREN'S
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Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and the Law in Ireland

An information leaflet for the public



AkiDwA has produced this leaflet to raise public awareness about female genital mutilation and to support women and girls who have undergone this procedure. The leaflet:

- explains female genital mutilation (FGM);
- outlines the law in Ireland about FGM; and
- tells you what to do if you are worried that a girl may be at risk of FGM.

About female genital mutilation

What is female genital mutilation (FGM)?

Female genital mutilation involves removing all or part of a girl's external genital organs including the area around her vagina and her clitoris. FGM is done for cultural reasons, not for medical reasons. It is illegal in Ireland under the Criminal Justice (Female Genital Mutilation) Act 2012.

Is FGM a religious practice?

No. The practice of FGM was around long before Christianity or Islam. It has existed in one form or another in almost all known civilisations throughout history and has not been confined to any one culture or religion.

Why do some people practice FGM?

The reasons vary across regions, countries and cultures. They include:

- tradition;
- rite of passage into womanhood;
- preservation of virginity until marriage;
- social acceptance, among peers as well as for marriage;
- cultural reasons relating to appearance and cleanliness.

What are the dangers of FGM?

FGM has no health benefits. It involves removing or damaging healthy body parts. This results in damage to a girl's or woman's reproductive organs.

Some of the immediate health consequences for FGM include:

- severe pain, shock and bleeding
- difficulty passing urine
- psychological trauma
- infection
- death as a result of the above.

Long-term complications include:

- chronic urinary and menstrual problems
- chronic pain
- pelvic inflammatory disease
- cysts
- increased risk of HIV transmission
- infertility
- serious problems for mother and baby during childbirth.

Does FGM violate human rights?

Yes. Various laws and international treaties give rights to women and girls, which include:

- the right to life and physical bodily integrity, including freedom from violence;
- the right to high standards of healthcare;
- the right to freedom from discrimination as women and girls;
- the right to special protection, in the case of girls under 18 years.

How big a problem is FGM?

FGM is practiced in at least 28 countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. The prevalence of FGM varies widely within countries and often depends on tribal and regional traditions and criteria for marriage (World Health Organization, 2008).

Globally, the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that between 100 million and 140 million women and girls have undergone FGM and more than 3 million girls are at risk of FGM every year in Africa (WHO, 2008).

The European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality estimates that about 500,000 girls and women living in Europe have undergone FGM.

AkiDwA estimates that 3,170 women living in Ireland have undergone FGM although the actual number may be higher. The prevalence of FGM in Ireland was estimated by obtaining 2006 census statistics (CSO). The figures were updated in 2010 by using population data obtained from the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner.

Who is at risk of undergoing FGM?

Every year, about 180,000 female migrants in Europe are in danger of undergoing FGM. European organisations that work on FGM believe that girls are often brought, during their school holidays, to other countries where this procedure can be accessed.

What is the law in Ireland?

The Criminal Justice (Female Genital Mutilation) Act 2012 was signed into law on 2 April 2012. This law has been effective since 20 September. It is now a criminal offence for someone resident in Ireland to perform FGM. The maximum penalty under all sections of this new law is a fine or imprisonment for up to **14 years or both**.

It is also a criminal offence for someone resident in Ireland to take a girl to another country to undergo FGM.

FGM and child protection

In most cases, FGM is performed on girls between birth and 15 years of age. This means it is considered to be child abuse and so comes under child protection regulations. FGM is identified as a form of abuse in Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2011.