

## USEFUL CONTACTS

### 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.

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

- If you feel that a girl is at risk of FGM, or if FGM has already taken place, please contact your local child protection social worker at Tusla, Children and Family Agency:  
Tel: (01) 635 2854 or info@tusla.ie
- If you think a girl is in immediate danger, please contact any Garda station or dial 999 or 112.
- For professionals working with children, it is your legal obligation under Children's First Guidelines (2011) to report to child protection services and/or the Gardaí if you feel a girl is at risk of FGM.

*"... 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 harmful cultural practice and a violation of the rights of women and children. It is a form of gender-based violence. We all need to work together to ensure the law in Ireland protects girls and women from this practice. We also need to ensure that the law is understood at community level and among relevant stakeholders to ensure its effective implementation."*

SALOME MBUGUA, FOUNDER & PRESIDENT, AKIDWA



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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.

## 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 30 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 Organisation, 2008).

- In 2016 UNICEF estimated that 200 million women and girls alive today have been subjected to FGM. 3 million undergo the procedure every year.

- The European Parliament 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 5,795 women living in Ireland have undergone FGM although the actual number may be higher. AkiDwA produced this estimate by synthesising Census 2016 data with global prevalence estimates from UNICEF 2016.
- According to EIGE 2015, about 1,600 girls aged 0-18 originating from countries where FGM is practiced (born in country of origin or Ireland) were likely to be at risk of FGM.

### 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.