

## Australia

### Intensification of global efforts for the elimination of female genital mutilation (A/RES/73/149)

#### **1. Measures for the elimination of female genital mutilation, as per resolution 73/149, including:**

Australia shares the United Nation's concerns about female genital mutilation (FGM). It is supportive of international efforts towards addressing FGM and achieving the highest attainable standard of health for all, including sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Australia is committed to ending gender-based violence (GBV) in all its forms, including harmful practices such as FGM. FGM is comprehensively criminalised under the laws of Australia's States and Territories. This includes the criminalisation of performing FGM overseas on a child that usually resides in Australia. In the international sphere, this commitment is supported: (1) through our bilateral development programs, particularly those that are target violence against women and girls (VAWG); (2) through our international advocacy efforts in various international fora; and (3) internal policies of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

#### *Development Assistance*

- In 2017-18, Australia funded a UNFPA-led research study on the practices of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) across 10 provinces in Indonesia. This research and its policy recommendations have been pivotal to UNFPA's continuing engagement with the Indonesian Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection and Ministry of Health on the socialisation of the harmful effects of FGM/C. The research has directly informed the Indonesian Government in its development of a Roadmap to eradicate FGM/C by 2030, in line with its commitments against the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- With support through the *Australia-Indonesia Partnership for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality (MAMPU)*, civil society partners have undertaken advocacy campaigns for the elimination of harmful practices towards women and girls in Indonesia, including on FGM/C and preventing child marriage. These campaigns have been promoted through the 16 Days of Activism against GBV and through local gender equality and SDG consultations across Indonesia in 2018 and 2019.
- The Australian Government also supports efforts to end FGM through the *Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP)*. During 2018-2020, the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) funded Australian NGOs to deliver two projects aimed at reducing FGM. Both projects engage with stakeholders to eliminate the practice of FGM, including with: traditional leaders; faith-based and religious institutions; families and communities; youth; men and boys; grassroots and women's organizations; as well as health sector workers, particularly their ability to prevent FGM, including medicalization, and manage FGM complications.
- Through Transform Aid International's *Elementaita Integrated Development Project* (2016-2021), the ANCP is supporting improved health outcomes in Kenya, including the elimination of FGM, through improving access to community health services and delivering health and

behavioural change activities. In 2018-19, 160 people and 240 young mothers took part in behavioural change programs, and 1,290 students were reached by behaviour change programs delivered in 10 schools.

- The ANCP is also supporting International Needs Australia's *Improving Maternal and Child Health Outcomes* program (2019-20) in Lemo District, Ethiopia to deliver community health activities to improve maternal, child and family health outcomes. The program seeks to tackle harmful traditional practices such as early marriage and FGM through these activities.
- Australia is continuing to provide core funding to the *United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)* of AU\$9.4 million in unrestricted core contributions. UNFPA's Strategic Plan (2018-2022) has three priority Transformative Results including Result 3 - ending gender based violence and all harmful practices, which includes FGM. UNFPA has estimated that in 2018, using pro rata attribution, Australia's core funding in that year saved 1,786 girls from FGM.

### *International Engagement and Advocacy Efforts*

Australia continues to be a strong advocate bilaterally, regionally and in multilateral fora for the protection and promotion of the rights of women and girls, including the elimination of FGM.

Recognising the life-long and severe negative impact FGM can have on bodily autonomy and the rights to physical and mental health, Australia has made recommendations against the practice of FGM at sessions of the Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review, including for the following countries: Djibouti, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Indonesia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Tanzania, Togo and Uganda.

Australia was pleased to co-sponsor the resolutions against FGM at the 38<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council in 2018. Australia also co-sponsored the resolution on intensifying global efforts for the elimination of female genital mutilation at the 73<sup>rd</sup> session UN General Assembly Third Committee in 2018.

### *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade internal policies*

The Australian Government takes seriously our responsibility to ensure women and children's protection from violence through the work we do in other countries. Our aid program maintains safeguards to address the risks of violence in all its forms towards women and children. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) does not tolerate sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment of any kind – both in its own organisation or those that it works with. In 2019, DFAT released its Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH) Policy to strengthen accountability and tackle impunity.

#### **a. Most recent data on FGM prevalence, including, if available, among immigrant and refugee populations, and information on root causes and factors contributing to the practice.**

On 6 February 2019, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) released [Towards estimating the prevalence of female genital mutilation/cutting in Australia](#). It estimated that in 2017, there were 53,000 girls and women (born elsewhere but now living in Australia) who had experienced FGM/C. The AIHW indicated this was a modelled estimate only (based on combining international survey data with Australian population estimates) due to the lack of available data; the analysis did

not include women/girls born in Indonesia, a country with high prevalence of FGM/C and relatively high migration to Australia, due to the lack of prevalence estimates for Indonesia.

On 26 August 2019, AIHW released a second report, [Discussion of female genital mutilation/cutting data in Australia](#), which focuses on describing existing data sources and their limitations, service contexts where data is (or could be) captured, and recommends strategies to improve data collection in future. The report found that the barriers and limitations inherent in collecting data on a sensitive and complex issue such as FGM/C limit the prospects for improving routinely collected data at a national level; however, there are some opportunities to enhance and develop data, particularly relating to service provision.

**b. Measures taken to protect women and girls from FGM, including when the practice occurs outside the country of residence.**

*National Education Toolkit for Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting Awareness*

The Australian Government has funded the [National Education Toolkit for Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting Awareness](#), delivered by the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health. The project aims to:

- Train health professionals to better support women who have experienced FGM/C.
- Raise awareness in affected communities about the health risks and the Australian Law related to FGM/C.
- Gather more information on FGM/C in Australia.

*The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*

The [Fourth Action Plan](#) of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022* includes a commitment to better equip the service system and communities to address complex forms of violence and harmful cultural practices, including FGM.

*Family Safety Pack*

A factsheet on FGM is included in the [Family Safety Pack](#) for men and women coming to Australia. The fact sheet provides information on FGM/C, including that it is illegal in Australia, and details of where to seek medical and other services and resources. A link to this information is included in the visa grant letters for all categories of visa.

*Program of Assistance for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (PASTT)*

The Australian Government has funded the PASTT since 1995, to provide specialist counselling and related support services to survivors of pre-migration torture and trauma who have settled in Australia.

- Eligibility to receive PASTT services is open to Humanitarian Settlement Program entrants permanently resettled in Australia and people on Temporary Substantive Visas.
- PASTT is delivered by a network of specialist rehabilitation agencies that work with survivors of torture and trauma. There is a PASTT agency in each state and territory of Australia.
- Clients can be referred through a wide range of sources including the Department of Home Affairs' Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP), other settlement services, general practitioners and other health services, education providers, legal services, community services, family/ friends/ community members and through self-referral.

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- The Australian Government has committed AU\$93.5 million for PASTT funding (2018-19 to 2020-21), which includes AU\$8.3 million of Social and Community Service funding.
- The Australian Government also funds a number of mental health services that offer translated resources and assistance, including [Beyond Blue](#) and Lifeline, where counsellors are able to assist callers through the Translation Interpretation Service without cost.

**2. Impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak in regards to FGM and measures undertaken to address those it in the short, medium and long-term, particularly in the following areas:**

Australia has been actively engaging in international statements and resolutions through the United Nations General Assembly on the protection of the rights of women during the COVID-19 pandemic. Australia firmly believes that the pandemic cannot be cited as a justification for the breach of the human rights of women and girls. Australia considers that any measures taken to address the COVID-19 pandemic should be holistically focused and aimed not only at ensuring essential public health functions and universal health coverage, but also at the protection of human rights of its people. Any short-term interference with these rights needs to be consistent with the principles of legality, necessity and proportionality in accordance with international obligations.