

Request for information from the Secretary-General relating to the implementation of the General Assembly resolution on intensifying global efforts for the elimination of female genital mutilation

Response of Ireland

June 2020

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Female genital mutilation is prohibited in Ireland under the Criminal Justice (Female Genital Mutilation) Act 2012. Under the Act it is a criminal offence for a person living in Ireland to perform female genital mutilation or to take a woman or girl to another country to undergo female genital mutilation. The maximum penalty is up to 14 years imprisonment and/or a fine; for a summary conviction, the penalty is a fine of up to €5,000 and/or imprisonment for up to 12 months.

There is a specific action within the *Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2016-2021* to raise awareness of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). This is carried out by An Garda Síochána (Ireland's police force) in collaboration with AkiDwA, a national network of migrant women living in Ireland and a leading NGO highlighting the issues faced by migrant women in Ireland.

This action is delivered through a training module twice a year to frontline personnel in An Garda Síochána on FGM, and the development and dissemination of an Information Guide on FGM for all members of An Garda Síochána

The Garda Síochána Victims Office have also held meetings with AkiDwA to inform the development of a Guidance Document for Garda members responding to incidents of Female Genital Mutilation, preparation of which is at an advanced stage. It is being developed with assistance from a number of internal stakeholders, including the Senior Investigator involved in the investigation of the first convicted FGM case in Ireland. Once complete, the Guidance Document will inform the development and delivery of a training program in this subject area.

Health Sector Response

The HSE is committed to progressing health related elements of FGM with specific reference to awareness-raising among communities, staff information and support, together with data collection. The HSE has funded and disseminated an FGM resource pack for health professionals and relevant staff in maternity and associated settings. The HSE also funds AkiDwA to raise awareness and provide information on FGM.

The *Second Intercultural Health Strategy 2018-2023*¹ was published by the HSE in 2018 and aims to provide an integrated approach to addressing the support needs experienced by service users of diverse ethnic and cultural and religious backgrounds nationally. The goals and strategic objectives of the Strategy include enhanced accessibility of services, and provision of high-quality, culturally responsive services to service users from diverse ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. FGM is included in the Strategy.

Treatment service

The Irish Family Planning Association (IFPA) provides free specialised medical and psychological care to women and girls in Ireland who have experienced FGM. The service is funded by the HSE and is based in the IFPA's Dublin city centre clinic. Clinic leaflets are available in English, French and Arabic and interpreting services are also provided to women, if requested.

The doctor can identify the type(s) of FGM a woman has experienced, provide information on pain and infection management as well as fertility and ante-natal advice. If surgical intervention is required, women can be referred to a designated gynaecologist in the Rotunda Hospital, located in Dublin city centre, who provides deinfibulation. Women can also speak with IFPA counsellors about FGM and any psychological difficulties they may experience as a result.

Women who attend the clinic can also avail of wider sexual and reproductive health services, such as cervical screening, contraception advice and menopause check-ups. Although client numbers are small (less than 50 clients in total), they have increased year on year since the inception of the service in 2014, and most clients attend the clinic multiple times. The IFPA engages in outreach activities to both affected communities and frontline service providers (such as GPs, midwives & obstetricians) in order to raise awareness about the service.

¹ <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/primarycare/socialinclusion/intercultural-health/intercultural-health-strategy.pdf>

Ireland's International Development Policy on FGM and Violence against Women

Ireland's commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment is a central pillar of its international engagement. In February 2019, the Government launched A Better World, Ireland's new policy for international development, which places gender equality as one of four policy priorities. As outlined in A Better World, the government has committed to intensifying its work on gender-based violence and Women, Peace and Security, including fully implementing the Ireland's *Third National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security*.²

Ireland played a central role at the United Nations brokering the Sustainable Development Goals, which asks all UN members to eliminate FGM by 2030. Ireland advocated strongly for the inclusion of this particular target on FGM, which is intended to provide much needed impetus to international action to end this appalling practice.

In tackling FGM, Ireland takes a multi-dimensional approach tackling root causes including poverty, gender inequality, and gender based violence, and is working to reduce the impact of FGM through increasing access to essential services, social supports, and opportunities for educational and economic advancement. In addition to supporting work at the EU and UN levels to end FGM, and with our civil society partners, Ireland has also supported work to end FGM at country level, including in Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Uganda and Kenya among other partner countries.

Tackling violence against women and girls is an important focus of Ireland's development aid programme, which we see as critical to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Through our support for multilateral organisations and NGOs, together with policy work at multiple levels, Irish official development assistance works towards the elimination of FGM, as well as towards tackling many of its root causes, including persistent poverty and gender inequality.

Ireland cooperates with United Nations agencies in a concerted effort to end the practice of female genital mutilation. Ireland is working closely with UN Women, which is prioritising the prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls, and provided €1.5 million to support the work of the Agency in 2018. We have also provided funding over a number of

² <https://www.dfa.ie/media/dfa/ourrolepolicies/womenpeaceandsecurity/Third-National-Action-Plan.pdf>

years to the United Nations Population Fund/United Nations Fund for Children Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting.

In addition to providing core funding to UN agencies most involved in addressing FGM (UNICEF and UNFPA), Ireland also supports those agencies' Joint Programme on Eliminating FGM: Accelerating Change. Since the Joint Programme was launched in 2007, Ireland has provided over €1 million in funding. The Programme now works in 17 countries³ and the programme takes a three-pronged approach – supporting the drafting and adoption of legislation outlawing FGM; funding community and media education initiatives on FGM; and training and equipping health care providers on the management of complications from FGM.

Ireland is a long-standing partner of the UN Trust Fund for Ending Violence Against Women, providing over €1,500,000 in funding since 2014. Through the Irish Consortium on Gender-based Violence, a consortium of Irish development, human rights and humanitarian organisations along with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Defence Forces, we aim to build our capacity to respond to all forms of gender-based violence in conflict, post-conflict and long-term development contexts.

³ Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Uganda, Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan, Somalia and Yemen.