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F A C T S H E E T

Background:

What is FGM?

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 varieties, 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 can lead to pain, infection, problems with sexual intercourse, problems with urination, problems with childbirth, and death.

Actions so far, based on the focus areas of the Communication:

1. Knowledge

Estimates show that there may be as many as 125 million victims worldwide and 500,000 victims in the EU alone. However, these are estimates and there are currently no data available on measuring the actual scale of the phenomenon.

A lack of data means there are only estimates about the size of the problem. It is difficult to estimate the number of victims and girls at risk, and we have very little reliable information about how, by whom and where it is carried out. Therefore, improving data collection is a priority:

- One of the actions of the Communication is for the European Commission to work together with the European Institute for Gender Equality to develop a common methodology and

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indicators to estimate risk of FGM. This includes methodological recommendations for risk estimation of FGM in all the EU Member States that is currently being finalized.

- A prevalence study headed by Ghent University is currently being funded under the Commission's Daphne III programme, to develop a common definition and methodology on FGM prevalence.
- This year, a study on the attitudes of migrants towards FGM will also be launched. It will be a qualitative survey on attitudes towards FGM in migrant communities in Europe, in order to explore the reasons behind continuing or abandoning the practice of FGM among migrants in the European Union and to devise effective strategies for ending the practice.

2. Prevention

The Communication also focuses on prevention, through sustainable social change. FGM is a deep-rooted social norm pressuring families to continue the tradition. It is often practised in the belief that it is beneficial for the girl.

The European Commission is funding, and will continue to fund awareness-raising and NGO activities. It believes that supporting work by NGOs at the grassroots level is essential to change attitudes and beliefs, engage FGM-practising communities and empower migrant women in the fight to end the practice. To this end, the following activities have been implemented:

- The Commission is currently funding 13 national awareness campaigns run by Member States, on all forms of violence against women, 4 of which also specifically target FGM.
- Protecting girls at risk and preventing FGM requires multi-disciplinary cooperation between professionals in multiple fields. The Commission launched a call for proposals (nearly 1 million euro) to develop a web-based platform on female genital mutilation for professionals who come into contact with girls at risk and victims. This can be nurses, judges, asylum officers, teachers, doctors, police officers et cetera.
- A new call for proposals (4.5 million euro) for transnational projects aiming to prevent, inform about and combat violence against women, young people and children, linked to harmful practices will be launched very shortly, through the Commission's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme.
- Through its HEALTH Programme, the Commission funds a project led by the Andalusian School of Public Health that develops training packages for health professionals, to improve the quality of and access to health services for migrant and ethnic minorities including the Roma. This project started in February 2014, and FGM is a specific topic in the training modules. The pilot training will take place this month.
- The Commission is working to include FGM in the development of guidance for EU Member States on integrated child protection systems, to ensure better coordination and cooperation across services, to be better equipped to deal with actual causes of child abuse, and risks of child abuse, including FGM.

3. Prosecution

FGM is a crime in all Member States, either through specific or more general legislation. A principle of extra-territoriality is often included, making it possible to prosecute FGM when it is committed abroad, as families often take their daughters to their country of origin to have them mutilated.

- The Victims Directive was adopted in October 2012, and its deadline for transposition is November 2015. Ahead of this deadline, the Commission has organised several workshops with Member States on the implementation of the Directive – the next one is today, on the 6th of February. A correct and timely implementation and application of the whole Directive is important and relevant for the victims of FGM. Apart from having easy access to well-functioning specialised support services, other most relevant areas include: ensuring that the Directive applies to all victims (in particular migrant victims independent of their legal status in the MS) and put in place measures to protect victims against any threat of physical or emotional harm during criminal investigations and trial. The Directive also puts in place, specific protection measures for child victims.
- The Commission is also disseminating training materials on FGM for legal practitioners, through its e-justice platform. 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.
- Finally, despite FGM being illegal in all Member States, FGM-related cases in courts are rare, not in the least part because victims are reluctant to file complaints against family members. Therefore, the European Commission will carry out a study on criminal laws and court cases related to FGM, in an attempt to identify what has allowed certain states to effectively prosecute.

4. Protection

Girls at risk of FGM and women who are victims need international protection and 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.
- Now it is up to Member States to transpose and effectively implement this legislation, by the end of 2015. The Commission is supporting the Member States, and analysing the timely transposition and correct implementation of this EU legislative framework on asylum.
- The European Asylum Support Office are developing 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.
- There is funding available via the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund to improve the way special reception and procedural needs are taken into account.

5. External actions.

The EU contributes to eliminating FGM globally. The EU has actively participated in international cooperation to promote the elimination of FGM. FGM is included in human rights and political dialogues with partner countries and in annual dialogues with civil society organisations.

The EU participated and announced concrete pledges, and made a financial contribution at the Girl Summit in London last summer. 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 100 million euro for the next 7 years to gender equality and children's wellbeing under the EU Global Public Goods and Challenges programme.

At the 26th session of the Human Rights Council in June 2014, the EU participated in the "High-level panel on the identification of good practices in combatting FGM", emphasizing the EU's commitment to fight FGM in the EU and at global level.

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. At this moment, at the Executive Board of the World Health Organisation, the follow up of these resolutions is being discussed.

The EU is currently supporting 15 projects in 10 non-EU countries, for a total amount of approximately 7 million euros, with an objective of putting an end to FGM. On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the 20th of November 2014, the EU and UNICEF partnered in third countries to organise a joint event and raise awareness on the rights of the child. This includes, where appropriate, traditional harmful practices.

Lessons learnt tells us that, in order to address FGM, projects strategies should encompass a multi-level, multi-thematic and coordinated approach, paying a specific attention to side-issues. Some pillars can contribute to a change of mind-set: engaging with justice, health, religious and political authorities and practitioners, from communities on grassroots level to national level, engaging with women and girls but also men and boys in order to shift social norms.

In the regular Human rights and gender training, the European External Action Service in cooperation with Amnesty International provides specialised training on FGM. Participants come from the External Action Service headquarters in Brussels and from the EU Delegations all over the world, 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 to end the practice.

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