

“FGM nowadays is no longer a problem of 3rd world countries but a worldwide problem”– Maali Boukadi

In 2022, 4.2 million girls worldwide were at risk of undergoing Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). [FGM](#) *“comprises all procedures that involve altering or injuring the female genitalia for non-medical reasons and is recognized internationally as a violation of the human rights, the health and the integrity of girls and women.”* Within this context, in 2012, the UN General Assembly designated the 6th of February as the **International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM**, aiming to amplify the efforts to eliminate this practice.

To commemorate this day, the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) interviewed Ms Maali Boukadi, who, during her 14 years of experience in healthcare as a qualified Staff Registered Nurse, came across many migrant women and girls who were victims of FGM.

Boukadi has also worked as a nurse in refugee camps, detention centres and open centres. She met young women and girls during her volunteering experiences in Ethiopia who had their lives gravely damaged because of the consequences of FGM. *“At that time in Malta, there was no knowledge about FGM because we started encountering girls and women with FGM when the migration flow increased.”*

In her work as a nurse, she encountered numerous medical and psychological problems due to FGM's ugly impact on these women. *“The plight of these women affected me a lot. Some girls were literally afraid to talk about what they have been through for fear or rejection, some never accepted pelvic or gynae examinations fearing the pain that they might feel. Some other women suffered in silence simply because they thought that the healthcare providers will fail to understand them. That was one of the main reasons that women never seek help or talk about this with medical personnel.”*

Additionally, Ms Maali Boukadi conducted a research study on FGM, which captured the experiences of four young migrant women from different East African countries living in Malta and having undergone FGM in their countries. *“FGM is seen by these women as a concept that*

exists, something to undergo, something that belonged to them in their childhood when each one of them were in their respective countries and mostly as an act of tradition that was never questioned or criticized in their childhood.”

All types of FGM are illegal under [Maltese law](#). A person found guilty of carrying out or assisting in the carrying out FGM for non-medical reasons is subject to imprisonment for a term from five to ten years. A person found guilty of performing FGM, which causes the victim's death, is subject to imprisonment for a term from six to twenty years. Any person who fails to avert FGM is liable to a fine of between €1,000 and €5,000.

Maali Boukadi said, *“unfortunately there is no specific data up to date about the actual number of women who had undergone FGM.”* However, in 2018, *“46% of young asylum seekers were at risk of FGM, but this is not specified whether it referred to getting an FGM or whether they already had it.”* She explained that it is challenging to have the actual number due to the strict medico-legal laws.

When asked what actions can be carried out to stop such a practice nationally and internationally, Boukadi mentioned that additional health education and counselling support for women with FGM are needed. This can be done by *“providing more transcultural health approaches, involvement of more cultural mediators and by organising FGM support groups for these women.”* Community-based empowerment programmes should also be considered as they are an effective way of addressing FGM. Increasing the level of knowledge about FGM within migrant communities coming from high-prevalence countries is also essential. This can be done through awareness-raising campaigns such as workshops and meetings.

Ms Boukadi stated that we must continue to fight FGM and raise the status of women and girls. *“FGM nowadays is no longer a problem of 3rd world countries but a worldwide problem. It is everywhere and has reached everywhere, especially in countries where mass migration occurred or where there are African diaspora settlements. We can no longer say that we are not aware of this. The world, the people united against this, the resources and tools we have can end this form of torture and mutilation against women.”*



National Commission for the Promotion of Equality

The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) can be contacted on: 2276 8200, equality@gov.mt or NCPE's social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter - NCPE.Malta)

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