

International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation

In 2020, there were 4.1 million girls worldwide at risk of undergoing Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). FGM comprises all procedures involving the performance of an operation or intervention for the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other permanent injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.¹

This procedure causes both short and long-term consequences for girls - both physically, such as infections and difficulties with passing urine; as well as sexual and reproductive health and their mental health.² For this reason, the United Nations (UN) has marked and dedicated the 6th February as the *'International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation'* as part of the UN's efforts to eradicate female genital mutilation.

Generally, FGM is practiced by an elder woman within a community who is tasked with carrying out this practice on a number of girls. The procedure itself is painful, traumatic and often unhygienic, as the tools utilized to carry out the procedure are not sterile. In some countries, FGM is carried out in clinics, and whilst in these cases the risk from poor hygiene is lower, all other risks associated with FGM remain.³ According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA),⁴ FGM is practiced for a number of sociological, cultural, religious, psychosexual, socio-economic, hygiene and aesthetic reasons.

Indeed, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has stated that FGM has no health benefits for girls and women⁵. Currently, 200 million women and girls around the world are living with the harmful consequences of FGM.⁶

At European level, the issue of FGM has been addressed by different institutions. In February 2020, the European Parliament has approved a new resolution calling for an EU strategy to end FGM and to provide care for survivors.⁷ This resolution calls on EU member states to encourage third countries to ban FGM and to deport convicted perpetrators.

¹ <https://www.un.org/en/observances/female-genital-mutilation-day>

² <https://www.who.int/news/item/06-02-2020-female-genital-mutilation-hurts-women-and-economies>

³ https://ncpe.gov.mt/en/Documents/Projects_and_Specific_Initiatives/Forms%20of%20Violence/FGM%20Leaflet_EN.pdf

⁴ <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/female-genital-mutilation-fgm-frequently-asked-questions#why>

⁵ <https://www.who.int/news/item/06-02-2020-female-genital-mutilation-hurts-women-and-economies>

⁶ <https://www.thejournal.ie/fgm-european-parliament-resolution-5005310-Feb2020/>

⁷ <https://www.thejournal.ie/fgm-european-parliament-resolution-5005310-Feb2020/>

In Malta, all types of FGM are illegal under Maltese law.⁸ A person found guilty of carrying out or assisting in the carrying out of FGM is subject to imprisonment, ranging between three to nine years. A person found guilty of performing FGM which causes the death of the victim is subject to imprisonment ranging between four to twenty years. Any person who fails to avert FGM is liable to a fine of between €1,000 and €5,000.

In order to look into and shed light on the needs of women who have already experienced FGM, alongside the needs of healthcare providers that work with these women, in 2015, the NCPE published a research study on FGM in Malta, as part of an EU co-funded project '*Forms of violence in Malta – a gender perspective*'.⁹ This research helped in the development of tools which cater for different forms of violence against women. Particularly the publishing of two leaflets, one for healthcare professionals and the other for migrant women. The leaflets contain general information on FGM such as the risks that come with such a procedure, where it is most likely to be carried out and the legislation in Malta vis-à-vis FGM.

Additionally, the leaflets also include actions that can be carried out to stop such a practice in Malta, such as: reporting any known cases of FGM, and referring girls and women who have undergone the procedure, or are at risk of experiencing it, to the authorities. The latter leaflet was published in Maltese and English, Arabic, Somali, and Tigrinian to cater for a larger multicultural audience.

FGM is pure violation of the human rights of girls and women. The NCPE is committed to continue raising further awareness on different forms of violence on women and girls. Moreover, one may contact the NCPE to seek further information about adequate support services available.

The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) can be contacted on: 2295 7850 or equality@gov.mt or our Facebook page.

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⁸ <https://justice.gov.mt/en/pcac/Documents/Criminal%20code.pdf>

⁹ https://ncpe.gov.mt/en/Documents/Projects_and_Specific_Initiatives/Forms%20of%20Violence/Report%20-%20FGM.PDF