

Girls in Cyprus are at risk of female genital mutilation



Female genital mutilation is against the law in Cyprus but this does not mean that girls are safe. Between 12 % and 17 % of girls living in Cyprus from FGM-practising countries are at risk of female genital mutilation. These are the findings released today by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE).

“Female genital mutilation is a problem for the EU and we cannot close our eyes to it. A major risk factor is girls returning to the home country because social pressure from relatives to have the practice done is still strong, particularly in rural areas. Strong laws, combined with a tough approach towards prosecution, even when the crime is committed abroad are powerful deterrent factors,” said Virginija Langbakk, EIGE’s Director.

Cyprus was one of the six countries where EIGE estimated the risk of female genital mutilation. The other countries include Belgium, Greece, France, Italy and Malta. Numbers of girls at risk range from 44,106 in France to 132 in Cyprus. These figures reflect the latest number of first and second-generation girls from FGM-practising countries, such as Egypt, Guinea and Somalia, who are living in the EU Member States. Although levels of risk have slightly decreased since 2011, the number of girls at risk of female genital mutilation is on the rise in Belgium and France, due to a growing number of second-generation girls.

“It is unacceptable that in the 21st century there are a number of girls in Cyprus who are at risk of female genital mutilation. The government has applied the principle of extraterritoriality to ensure that if female genital mutilation is done to girls when they go back to the home country, the crime will be prosecuted here. In line with the Istanbul Convention, we are drafting new laws to better protect girls at risk and provide more specialised support services”, said Iosifina Antoniou, Commissioner for Gender Equality.

Despite a number of girls at risk, the research shows that communities are starting to turn away from the practice because of integration efforts and laws. In Cyprus, both women and men from FGM-practising countries reported that their attitudes towards the practice changed after they migrated to Europe. They gained new information about the practice, such as the laws against it and the damaging effects on sexual and reproductive health.

With migration to the EU from FGM-practising countries ongoing, it is crucial that Member States deal with new arrivals in a gender-sensitive way. In 2017, Cyprus identified 63 irregular girl migrants (aged 0-19) from FGM-practising countries, including Somalia, Iraq, Egypt and Cameroon. Governments are recommended to implement gender-specific asylum procedures, even if they introduce fast-track border procedures for arrivals. Such provisions can help prevent female genital mutilation. For example, protecting victims at entry points and reception centres, ensuring gender-sensitive risk assessment upon arrival and onward specialised referral and care.

EIGE aims to increase knowledge and data on female genital mutilation in the EU. These results complement EIGE’s previous risk estimations of female genital mutilation in Ireland, Portugal and Sweden.

Further information

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