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Estimation of the number of girls at risk of female genital mutilation in the EU

Engaging with communities and actors on female genital mutilation: exchange of challenges and good practice





The importance of engaging with communities and ensuring cooperation amongst actors

Kate Regan, Project Coordinator, ICF

The importance of engaging with communities

- ‘Community-led’ approaches to tackling FGM recognise the **influence of social norms** in the **continuation of the practice** (*Mackie, 2000; UNICEF 2010*).
- Allows for **community knowledge and resources to be capitalised on** to improve intervention effectiveness.
- Promotes a **sense of ownership of the intervention by community** members, allowing them to work to determine the most appropriate way to address the problem.
- Can **reduce community resistance** and **enhance long-term sustainability**. (*Barrett, H.R. et al 2015*)



The importance of ensuring collaboration amongst actors

- A response to FGM that is **strategic, enhanced and multi-agency should involve:**
 - Safeguarding teams, police; community-based groups; FGM champions; local decision-makers; frontline professionals; asylum administrative staff, and more.
- **Combination of approaches** can enable change in attitudes among affected communities:
 - enhanced government intervention; better legal protections; improved community engagement and awareness (*The Tackling Female Genital Mutilation Initiative, 2016*)

Improving outreach to and engagement of communities – findings from this study

- The need for **holistic and on-going support services** for women and girls at risk of FGM.
- The **importance of training professionals**, particularly in the health care sector, **to effectively engage with women and girls at risk of FGM** and to bridge the gaps between institutions and ‘hard-to-reach’ communities.
- **Awareness raising initiatives that illustrate the dangers of FGM, the legal consequences of engaging in the practice, and existing support services**, help build trust between stakeholders and affected communities.
- ***Austria:** holistic long-term support; relationships of trust; training of professionals*
- ***Denmark:** sex education in affected communities; bridging gaps in social services; mutual training*
- ***Spain:** inter-regional outreach; discourses on violence; limits of legislation*
- ***Luxembourg:** migrant education; training of professionals*

Cooperation with actors – findings from this study

- The **dangers of working in ‘silos’** at the national level, and the need for platforms for mutual dialogue and experience sharing.
- The **importance of establishing a harmonised approach** to combat FGM at the national level, that can be effectively implemented at the regional and local levels.
- The need to **develop joint activities to combat social and political discourses** that contribute to the marginalisation of migrant communities.
- **Austria:** *enhancing reception conditions; lack of efficient cooperation; sustainable financing*
- **Denmark:** *national policies and legislation; cultural attitudes*
- **Spain:** *responsibilities of actors; discourses of migration*
- **Luxembourg:** *resource mobilisation; EU and national framework; supporting asylum seekers*



Challenges to engaging with communities and ensuring cooperation amongst actors

Isma Benboulabah,
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End FGM European Network

Tackling FGM in Europe - Strategies for Effective Community Engagement

- **Engagement:** *“the process of getting communities fully involved in the decisions that affect them”*
 - *Involving communities in every step of the process*
 - *Actively and meaningfully collaborating with them*
 - *Shaping key programmes and policies not “for” communities but **WITH** communities*
- **“Affected communities”**
 - *Not a homogeneous group – addressing complexities to ensure a tailored and effective community engagement*
 - *Settled migrants ≠ Newly migrants*
 - *Empowering communities*
 - *Gender and age-sensitive*

Engaging with FGM-affected communities

- **Sanitary Challenges – COVID 19**
 - Ensuring that the participants feel safe and willing to participate
 - Clarifying the objectives of the FGs with potential participants
 - Ensuring social distancing – access to hand gel and masks
 - Potential phone interviews
- **Challenges in engaging with communities**
 - Hard to reach communities or hard to reach organisations?
 - Language and cultural barrier
 - The taboo of talking about FGM – FGM is not an easy topic to discussion for community members
 - FGM-affected communities are “small” in Europe – ensuring anonymity is our priority
 - Ensuring anonymity and protecting the participants adaptation regarding the national legislation



7 Principles for effective and meaningful community engagement

1. Understand community context & needs
2. Engage & communicate appropriately
3. Ensure inclusive collaboration
4. Empower & develop leadership
5. Do no harm
6. Be accountable & transparent
7. Involve communities in monitoring & evaluation

Recommendations

- Structured mechanisms to meaningfully engage FGM-affected communities
- FGM-affected communities at the heart of the activities
- Be aware and acknowledge the current hostile political climate against PoC/migrant/Muslim communities in Europe
- Promote a positive, non-discriminatory and non-stigmatising narrative to ensure participation and trust-based relationship
- Systematically engage and empower FGM-affected communities FGM-affected communities at the heart of the activities
- Refer to our [**POSITION STATEMENT – Tackling FGM in Europe - Strategies for Effective Community Engagement**](#) on our website

Initiatives to improve outreach to communities and cooperation between actors to protect girls at risk of female genital mutilation

Good practice example:
FEM Süd

Umyma Eljelede, FEM Süd, Austria



FEM Süd (The Institute for Women's and Men's Health; Women's Health Centre FEM Süd)



Aims and objectives

- ***Raising and promoting awareness of FGM/C among women and men in the practicing community***
- ***Provide appropriate health and psychosocial consultation and medical surgical care for women and girls who have been subjected to FGM/C in Mother Languages***
- ***Protect women and girls at risk***
- ***Sensitisation, training and educating professionals (across health sector: midwives, gynaecologists, nursing school, paediatricians maternity care etc...; different social sectors and educational fields: Children and youth welfare, refugee service etc..***
- ***Developing a community-based educational dialogue to highlight and explore knowledge of attitudes toward and practice of FGM/C in the at-risk communities***
- ***Change the behaviour of practising communities residing in the Austria to NO MORE FGM/C TABOOS***

FEM Süd (The Institute for Women's and Men's Health; Women's Health Centre FEM Süd)



- **Whose involved?**
 - *Women's Health Centre FEM Süd*
 - *City women's service "MA 57"*
 - *Austrian Foreign Ministry "BMEIA"*
 - *Federal Ministry for Women, Families and Youth*
 - *The Austrian Integration Fund "ÖIF"*
 - *Women's Health programme of City of Vienna*
 - *Austria platform, Stop FGM*
- **Since when?**
 - *September 2007*

FEM Süd (The Institute for Women's and Men's Health; Women's Health Centre FEM Süd)



- As a result of 13 years of working in FGM/C field, FEM Süd has led to:
 - *Increased interest in women's health issues and FGM/C of health and educational staff and refugee services;*
 - *Provision of psychosocial counselling and crisis intervention services to 100 + women and girls who have had gone or at risk of FGM/C (from more than 21 countries annually)*
 - *Extensive work and contact with different FGM/C practicing communities in Austria – leading to a **better acceptance of services and increased demand from communities***
 - *More than **50 lectures** on health topics related to FGM/C with more than 475 participants annually*

FEM Süd (The Institute for Women's and Men's Health; Women's Health Centre FEM Süd)



- **Overview of achievements:**

- **2009:** International conference on FGM “*State of the art of medical treatment and prevention*”
- **2009 – 2018:** Established three FGM/C out patients clinics in three main Hospitals in Vienna
- **2018:** “*INTACT - peers*” project “*Education, awareness raising and training key persons from risk communities*” - training of 24 women from 7 practicing communities in Austria to work in health and social awareness in their communities. More than 60 in the relevant communities
- **2018:** 2 new women's health centers join the board
- **2019:** “*INTACT – MEN project*” - 18 men from 5 practicing communities trained to spread awareness on FGM/C in their communities
- **2019:** “*INTACT - Expert*” - project offering professional consulting and teachings program across Austria
- **2007-2019:** Several multilingual booklet about FGM/C for local practicing communities
- **2020:** FGM e-learning for professionals
- ***Working in developing and implementing guidelines on FGM/C for Austria***

