

**KNOW THE FACTS:  
WHAT IS FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM)?**

**Female genital mutilation and cutting (FGM) is violence, a human rights violation and a harmful practice that involves the removal of part or all of the female genitalia.** It is most often carried out on girls between infancy and age 15, though adult women are also at risk.

**FGM has zero health benefits** and involves removing and damaging healthy and normal female genital tissue, thereby interfering with the natural functions of girls' and women's bodies. The [World Health Organization has classified FGM into four categories](#):

- **Clitoridectomy:** partial or total removal of the clitoris and/or the prepuce;
- **Excision:** partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora, with or without excision of the labia majora;
- **Infibulation:** the most extreme form, the removal of all external genitalia and the stitching together of the two sides of the vulva;
- **Other:** all other harmful procedures done to the female genitalia for nonmedical purposes, for example, pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterizing.

**FGM can have short and lifelong health consequences**, including:

- Chronic infection
- Complications during childbirth
- Death
- Psychological trauma
- Hemorrhage
- Increased risk of newborn deaths
- Severe pain during urination, menstruation, and sexual intercourse

While cases of death as a direct or indirect result of FGM are reported, there is currently no statistical data on how many women and girls die from the procedure. More and better data on FGM is urgently needed.

The reasons underlying its practice are numerous and varied and ultimately serve to control women and girls' sexuality. There are no religious texts that require FGM. The practice is often carried out by traditional circumcisers, who often play other central roles in communities, such as attending childbirths. However, according to a [2010 World Health Organization study](#) of existing data, **the medicalization of FGM is increasing**. More than **18% of all girls and women** who have been subjected to FGM had the procedure performed on them by a health-care provider; in some countries **the rate is as high as 74%**.

FGM is a global issue. In 2016, UNICEF reported that **over 200 million girls and women** have undergone FGM, and **30 million are at risk** over the next decade. In 2015, 193 countries agreed to include a target in the Sustainable Development Goals to eliminate FGM by 2030.

**FGM is recognized internationally as a human rights violation**, constituting torture and an extreme form of violence and discrimination against women and girls. FGM violates various human rights under international and national law, including women and girls' rights to:

- Equality
- Security of the person
- Education
- Freedom from discrimination
- Life
- Dignity
- Freedom from torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment

### **International Community's Response**

- **October 2015:** the UN General Assembly adopted the [Sustainable Development Goals](#), a roadmap whose "goals and targets will stimulate action over the next 15 years in areas of critical importance for humanity and the planet." Covering 17 goals and 169 targets, "Agenda 2030" addresses many issues ranging from poverty to HIV/AIDS to climate change. **For the first time, the gender equality goal includes** targets aimed at ending violence and discrimination against women and girls, including **a specific target on eliminating FGM** and child, early and forced marriage (CEFM), measuring efforts to eliminate FGM in ALL countries.
- **December 2012:** the [UN General Assembly adopted a resolution \(Res L21 revision 1\)](#) calling on States to implement laws eliminating FGM among several other recommendations. This was **the first time the General Assembly included the elimination of FGM on its agenda.**
- **2003:** [The Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa \(Maputo Protocol\)](#) **banned FGM** (Article 5)

Treaty monitoring bodies overseeing the following human rights treaties have all interpreted **FGM as a human rights violation** in breach of these treaties, with some including medicalization:

- [Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#)
- [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#)
- [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)
- [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#)
- [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#)
- [Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa \(Maputo Protocol\)](#)

In countries and regions where FGM has been reduced or abandoned altogether, evidence shows that the decline resulted when the human rights of women and girls were reinforced and legally protected, and a comprehensive strategy was used. Such an approach fully engages families, community leaders, educators, law makers and enforcers, health care, child protection and social service providers to play an active role.