

## **STOP FGM ACT: 2022 Annual Report of the Attorney General**

### **I. Background**

The Department of Justice (DOJ) submits this annual report to the United States Congress pursuant to Section 4 of the *Strengthening the Opposition to Female Genital Mutilation Act of 2020* or the *STOP FGM Act of 2020*, P.L. 116-309 (codified at 34 U.S.C. § 41312). Section 4 of the Act states:

*Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act [January 5, 2021], and annually thereafter, the Attorney General, in consultation with the Secretary of Homeland Security, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, and the Secretary of Education, shall submit to Congress a report that includes—*

- (1) an estimate of the number of women and girls in the United States at risk of or who have been subjected to female genital mutilation;*
- (2) the protections available and actions taken, if any, by Federal, State, and local agencies to protect such women and girls; and*
- (3) the actions taken by Federal agencies to educate and assist communities and key stakeholders about female genital mutilation.*

### **II. Required Reporting**

In preparing this report, DOJ consulted with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Department of State (DOS), the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the Department of Education (ED).

#### **1. An estimate of the number of women and girls in the United States at risk of or who have been subjected to female genital mutilation**

- [In 2016, authors from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) published a study](#) comparing prevalence rates from countries where FGM is practiced with the number of immigrant women from those countries living in the United States. Using those prevalence rates as a guide, the study estimated that as many as 513,000 women and girls living in the U.S. may have experienced FGM in their countries of origin or may potentially undergo the practice in the future. However, the authors recognized several key limits of this number, their analysis and resulting estimates. First, persons likely most at-risk for experiencing FGM in the U.S. are first-generation girls under the age of 18, which the authors note was only one-third of this larger number. The remaining two-thirds are either second-generation girls under the age of 18, whose families are less likely to engage in the practice, or first-generation immigrant women between the age of 25-49, who may have experienced FGM in their country of origin but are at low risk for experiencing it in the United States. Second, using prevalence rates from other countries to predict prevalence among immigrant groups in the United States does not account for attitudinal differences between in-country and immigrant populations with

respect to FGM. The authors note that this approach does not provide scientifically valid information on the extent to which FGM is practiced in the United States. They conclude that culturally specific and reliable data at the community and individual level are needed to guide prevention and response efforts.

- In 2020-2021, the CDC Division of Reproductive Health, with funding from DOJ's National Institute of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), and HHS's Office on Women's Health, led the Women's Health Needs Study (WHNS) to expand understanding of women's health needs, experiences, and attitudes related to FGM who have experienced or have potentially been at risk for FGM. WHNS is a community-based, cross-sectional study of women aged 18-49 in the United States who were born or whose mothers were born in a country where FGM is common. <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/womensrh/female-genital-mutilation.html>.
- 1,132 participants completed the survey. Most of the participants (87%) were first generation (moved to the US at age 13 or older) from diverse countries of origin (both west and east African countries). Approximately one-third of participants were aged 18-29.
- More than half of women in the study reported experiencing some form of FGM.
- Participants who experienced FGM reported more reproductive health problems (problems with childbirth, menstruation, urogenital issues, and pain/bleeding during sex). While 3 in 5 of the participants who experienced FGM reported that they would feel comfortable discussing their FGM with their health care provider, only one-third reported they had discussed it with a health care provider. Of all the participants surveyed, most reported that they thought FGM should be stopped, and that it could cause health problems later in life.
- CDC has analyzed the data, drafted an infographic, and reports/manuscripts will be issued in the near future. CDC has also been working with community partners to develop a dissemination plan for the findings.

## **2. The protections available and actions taken, if any, by Federal, State, and local agencies to protect such women and girls**

During 2022, Federal, State, and local agencies have engaged in a variety of initiatives aimed at protecting women and girls in the United States who have been subjected to, or who may be at risk of, FGM. Examples of those efforts include:

- A Houston, Texas woman who was indicted in 2021 for taking a minor out of the United States for the purpose of subjecting her to FGM in a foreign country will be tried in Federal District Court in Houston in May 2023. This will mark the first prosecution under the provision of the portion of the FGM statute that prohibits taking a girl out of the United States for the purpose of FGM. The case is being prosecuted by DOJ with investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and support from the Human

Rights Violators and War Crimes Center. [Texas Woman Indicted for Transporting Minor for Female Genital Mutilation | OPA | Department of Justice.](#)

- Federal law enforcement authorities actively investigate allegations of FGM within the United States and, if a United States citizen is involved, abroad. DHS's U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Homeland Security Investigations (ICE/HSI) and the FBI, with support from DOJ, attempt to identify, locate, and interview girls who are at-risk for FGM and/or may be traveling for the purpose of FGM. These agencies have taken steps to help protect girls who may be at risk of FGM, including collecting tips and leads from the public and partnering with non-governmental organizations that will relay information if they suspect a child is in imminent danger of being subjected to FGM or taken out of the country for purposes of FGM.
- A grant program administered by DOJ's Office of Victims of Crime (OVC), "Addressing Female Genital Mutilation and Cutting," awarded over \$5 million in three-year grants in FY2020 and FY2021 to support community projects around the country designed to increase direct services, education, and community partner engagement to stop the victimization of women and girls through FGM. Targeted technical assistance is provided to inform front-line providers on how to identify and serve FGM survivors and persons at risk of FGM. [DOJ announces nearly \\$3 million to address female genital mutilation and cutting \(ojp.gov\).](#)
- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) adjudicates various forms of immigration relief that may be available to women and girls who have experienced FGM, U nonimmigrant status (U visa), refugee status, and asylum, and also conducts pre-screenings based on persecution and torture for individuals subject to administrative removal through the credible fear and reasonable fear processes.
- The reauthorized Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) includes enhancements to efforts to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, including new statutory provisions addressing Female Genital Mutilation and Cutting. In particular, the Act includes a definition of FGM; a clarification that VAWA-funded victim services and legal assistance include assistance to victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking who are also victims of FGM; and new statutory purpose areas which will permit grantees from three VAWA grant programs to provide culturally specific services and responses to FGM. DOJ's Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) administers the federal grant funding authorized under the VAWA to communities around the country.
- The Colorado Department of Human Services, Refugee Services, with a grant from DOJ's OVC, is engaged in efforts to combat FGM through community and clinical partnership and education, including by documenting community knowledge beliefs and practices around FGM, enhancing referral mechanisms and procedures for FGM-related care and resources, and creating and delivering standardized FGM training to health

professionals including by providing training in clitoral reconstruction.

- The Minnesota Female Genital Mutilation Prevention and Outreach Project, with a grant funding from DOJ's OVC, brings together diverse stakeholders to recommend, inform and coordinate FGM prevention and community engagement efforts, including by offering grants to organizations working in impacted communities.

### **3. The actions taken by Federal agencies to educate and assist communities and key stakeholders about female genital mutilation**

In addition to the initiatives described above, during 2022 Federal agencies engaged in an array of outreach and education about FGM for communities and key stakeholders. Examples of those efforts include:

- DOJ's OVC began developing an outreach campaign to foster community-based prevention of FGM, identify at-risk individuals, and respond to FGM survivors and situations in impactful, safe, and culturally appropriate ways. Slated for release in 2023, the outreach campaign aims to reach law enforcement, public health/social service professionals and educators. This grant program also includes a community engagement component. Listening sessions were held with survivors to inform the development of these trainings.
- The CDC offers domestic screening guidance to educate providers who may be unfamiliar with FGM as well as those who treat immigrants and refugees in their clinical practice. CDC's guidance also encourages clinicians to inform newcomers that FGM is considered child abuse, and that it is illegal to perform FGM on a child in the United States or to take a child out of the country to undergo the procedure. [Sexual and Reproductive Health Screening during the Domestic Medical Examination for Newly Arrived Refugees | Immigrant and Refugee Health | CDC.](#)
- The FBI now includes information on FGM in the annual mandatory child abuse training required of all FBI employees in hopes of further educating the workforce. The FBI's International Human Rights Unit released educational reports on FGM for pediatricians and for educators.
- DHS' Blue Campaign and the Council on Combatting Gender-Based Violence (CCGBV) released a [Gender-Based Violence Awareness Course | Homeland Security \(dhs.gov\)](#), which includes education on FGM. This course was designed to help aviation industry staff identify various forms of gender-based violence, including FGM, and describes ways to support GBV victims and survivors. CCGBV also published a [Gender-Based Violence Pamphlet](#) that defines various forms of GBV, including FGM, and explains how and where to seek help.
- In September and October 2022, DHS hosted two listening sessions with community and national stakeholder groups to gather input about how DHS can most effectively engage in FGM outreach efforts and partner with communities that are impacted.
- In 2022, ICE HSI and ICE Office of Principal Legal Advisor conducted 23 training events for a variety of stakeholders including USCIS, U.S. Customs and Border

Protection, and international law enforcement partners such as the International Law Enforcement Academy Botswana. ICE trained over 1,100 participants on the definition of FGM, the variations in each practicing community, applicable U.S. laws, and the need for continued education and partnership to respond and to prevent FGM.

- In June 2022, ICE/HSI conducted its annual [Operation Limelight USA](#) training at Los Angeles International Airport to ensure that agents and other volunteers are educated on FGM using appropriate and culturally sensitive language and demeanor before they interact with international travelers in an effort to educate them about FGM. Operation Limelight USA has been conducted at airports across the nation including Atlanta, Los Angeles, New York, Newark, Boston, Minneapolis, Seattle, San Diego, San Francisco, Dallas, Houston, Phoenix, and Philadelphia. ICE/HSI Victim Assistance Program (VAP) personnel consisting of Forensic Interview Specialists and Victim Assistance Specialists participate in this operation every year, providing support and training on an array of VAP related topics to HSI personnel.
- New asylum officers and refugee officers from the USCIS Refugee, Asylum, and International Operations Directorate are required to review multiple lesson plans which contain content about FGM in the context of refugee and asylum as part of officer training curriculum.
- In March 2022, USCIS's Asylum Division released a mandatory training for its adjudication staff about particular social groups, which included a section dedicated to analyzing FGM cases. USCIS asylum field offices conduct FGM trainings locally as needed, for example, when FGM asylum claims present as a common caseload or when there is a significant increase in new asylum applications based on FGM claims.
- In May 2022, ED's Office of Safe and Supportive Schools (OSSS) published a blog post -*What Can States Do to Address Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in the U.S.?* The blog was developed through the National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSE), a technical assistance center supported by OSSS. In Spring 2022, OSSS conducted seven trainings with State and local educational agency grantees to raise awareness of the STOP FGM Act and to highlight FGM resources available from the Federal government. In February 2022, in recognition of International Day of Zero Tolerance of FGM, NCSSE used their social media account to inform stakeholders about FGM and highlight the [FGM Educator Factsheet](#) to help educators and other school staff support girls who have experienced FGM.
- In August 2022, USCIS deployed digital awareness signs directed to potential FGM victims, which are displayed in public areas of USCIS field offices throughout the U.S. The signs are geared towards victims and potential victims of FGM and includes basic information about FGM, information for how to contact the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline, and a QR code that directs individuals to the USCIS FGM brochure.
- Since 2013, a U.S. Government interagency group has met regularly to share information about outreach, education, and enforcement efforts and discuss a whole-of-government approach to dealing with FGM in the United States and

abroad. Members include DOJ, HHS, DHS, ED, DOS, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). One coordinated outreach effort in 2022 was the issuance of statements by DOJ, DHS, and the Department of State to raise awareness about FGM and to mark the International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM on February 6, 2022. [Justice Department, ICE and the FBI Recognize International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation | OPA | Department of Justice](#); [USCIS Statement on the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation | USCIS](#); [Observance of the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation - United States Department of State](#).

### **III. Global Initiatives**

Although the reporting mandated by the STOP FGM Act pertains to domestic initiatives, the Act also notes that FGM is a global problem which requires cooperation among nations:

*Female genital mutilation is recognized internationally as a human rights violation and a form of child abuse, gender discrimination, and violence against women and girls. Female genital mutilation is a global problem whose eradication requires international cooperation and enforcement at the national level. The United States should demonstrate its commitment to the rights of women and girls by leading the way in the international community in banning this abhorrent practice.*

Accordingly, we note that the United States has been engaged in the following global initiatives:

- U.S. global policy and program efforts in 2022 focused on raising awareness about the harmful impacts of FGM, utilizing a survivor-centered and human rights-based approach, encouraging the enforcement of laws against FGM where they exist, and passage of laws in places where legal frameworks are weak or nonexistent, and raising the awareness and ability of medical providers, community and faith leaders, and other relevant stakeholders to identify and care for survivors of FGM. Wherever possible, the U.S. supports community-led and -implemented programs and looks for opportunities to engage local community and religious leaders. For example, through the gender-based violence (GBV) emergency assistance program, survivors of FGM as well as women and girls who are in immediate danger of FGM are supported with life-saving assistance, including urgent needs such as medical and financial assistance.
- The Department of State contributes \$5 million annually to UNICEF to support the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation. In December 2022, the Department of State attended the 2022 annual Donor Working Group Meeting on FGM/C, co-hosted this year by UNICEF and the Government of Luxembourg. The meeting focused on using innovative financing to

meet global FGM elimination goals and included participation from multilateral organizations and other donor countries.

- In December 2022, the U.S. launched its 2022 update to the [\*U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally\*](#), which reflects the U.S. Government's efforts to improve its capacity to prevent and respond to all forms of gender-based violence globally, including FGM. The Global GBV Strategy also includes a dedicated section on girls and young women and the most prevalent forms of GBV they experience, including FGM.
- USAID updated its publicly available online [FGM course](#) designed to provide public health practitioners in low and middle income countries with an overview of FGM and provide effective and promising approaches to encourage the abandonment of the practice. The course defines FGM, provides global prevalence data, describes socio-economic factors contributing to FGM, and identifies successful country-led initiatives and case studies to define the critical programmatic elements that encourage abandonment of FGM.
- USAID released [interactive data maps on child, early, and forced marriage \(CEFM\) and FGM](#) and a corresponding [how-to note](#) which display the prevalence and co-occurrence of CEFM and FGM and related indicators in countries where these harmful practices occur.