

STOP FGM ACT: 2023 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.*

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).

II. Required Reporting

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 female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) 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 United States may have experienced FGM/C in their countries of origin or may potentially undergo the practice in the future.
- The authors recognized several limitations of their analysis and resulting estimates. In particular, using prevalence rates from other countries to predict prevalence among immigrant groups in the United States does not account for behavioral differences between in-country and immigrant populations with respect to FGM/C based on, *inter alia*, differences in attitude, education, socioeconomic characteristics, as well as laws. The authors concluded that culturally specific and reliable data at the community and individual level were needed to guide prevention and response efforts.

- Towards that end, 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 the health needs, experiences, and attitudes about FGM/C among those who have experienced or have potentially been at risk for FGM/C.
- WHNS was 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/C is common. Data collection was conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago. 1,132 participants completed the survey. Most of the participants were first generation (moved to the United States at age 13 or older) from diverse countries of origin. Approximately one-third of participants were aged 18-29. More than half of women in the study reported experiencing FGM/C.

Participants who experienced FGM/C reported more reproductive health problems than women who had not experienced FGM/C. While 3 in 5 of the participants who experienced FGM/C reported that they would feel comfortable discussing their FGM/C with their health care provider, only one-third of the participants reported they had done so. Most participants reported that they thought FGM/C should be stopped, and that it could cause health problems. [Women's Health Needs Study \(WHNS\) \(norc.org\)](#); [A Study of Women's Health Needs in the U.S. | NORC at the University of Chicago](#).

- The CDC has been working with NORC and community partners to disseminate the findings of the WHNS. Examples of the efforts undertaken in 2023 include community conversations for FGM/C survivors in New York City and Minnesota; a social media campaign to combat misinformation regarding FGM/C; workshops and webinars explaining the findings of the WHNS, and a presentation on the study at the American Public Health Association annual conference.
- In October, building on the methodologies used by the CDC, the Ayaan Hirsi Ali (AHA) Foundation published a study of FGM/C prevalence in the United States from 2015 – 2019. [AHA-FGM C-Report-final.pdf \(theahafoundation.org\)](#). The report advances the understanding of FGM/C practices in the United States by factoring in the effects of migration and providing a state-by-state breakdown of prevalence and at-risk populations. [State by State and DC Fact Sheets - AHA Foundation \(theahafoundation.org\)](#). The report estimates that 53,000 girls were cut after they arrived in the United States, and that an additional 31,000 girls were at risk of being cut. One-half of the at-risk girls lived in six states: Minnesota, California, New York, Texas, Washington, and Virginia. The report also estimates that 385,000 women or girls in the United States were likely survivors of FGM/C.

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

During 2023, Federal, State, and local agencies 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/C. Examples of those efforts include:

- Federal law enforcement authorities investigate allegations of FGM/C within the United States and abroad. DHS's U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), with support from DOJ, attempt to identify, locate, and interview girls who are at-risk for FGM/C and/or may be traveling for the purpose of FGM/C. These agencies have taken steps to help protect girls who may be at risk of FGM/C, 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 or taken out of the country for purposes of FGM/C.
- 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/C, such as U nonimmigrant status (U visa), Special Immigrant Juvenile classification, immigrant petitions under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), refugee status, and asylum status. Through the credible fear and reasonable fear processes, USCIS also conducts pre-screenings on persecution or torture.
- The FBI's International Human Rights Unit (IHRU) conducts trainings designed to educate the FBI workforce on FGM/C. In 2023, IHRU provided virtual trainings to field offices and community partners around the country and in-person trainings to FBI's Victim Services Division. IHRU's FGM/C brochure, available in French, Arabic, Somali, Amharic, and Malay, are now available online: [Female Genital Mutilation \(FGM\) — FBI](#).
- DOJ's Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) administers federal funding authorized under the Violence Against Women Act to prevent and address sexual assault, domestic violence, and stalking. With funding from OVW, the George Washington University School of Public Health and partners are working to develop training for OVW grantees, subgrantees, and potential grantees on the prevention and response to FGM/C, including by providing training on the intersectionality of FGM/C with other forms of gender-based violence (GBV) and by developing online resources for victim service organizations, criminal justice professionals, health care providers, and educators.
- The Minnesota Female Genital Mutilation Prevention and Outreach Project, with grant funding from DOJ's OVC, brings together diverse stakeholders to recommend, inform and coordinate FGM/C prevention and community engagement efforts.

- In April 2023, Washington State became the 41st state to criminalize FGM/C. The law bans the practice of FGM/C on any person in Washington under the age of 18 and imposes a prison term of up to 10 years and a fine of up to \$10,000. The Seattle region has the United States' fifth largest population of women and girls at risk of or who have undergone FGM/C.

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 2023 Federal agencies engaged in an array of outreach and education about FGM/C for communities and key stakeholders. Examples of those efforts include:

- Grantees of DOJ's OVC grant program, "Addressing FGM/C," are working to foster community-based prevention of FGM/C, identify at-risk individuals, and respond to FGM/C survivors and situations in impactful, safe, and culturally appropriate ways. These efforts aim to reach law enforcement, public health/social service professionals, and educators. Examples include: FGM/C Care and Competencies for Maternal Healthcare Providers; FGM/C 101 for Social Workers and Systems Change to Address FGM/C: Perspectives from State and Municipal Coalitions.
- ICE/HSI and ICE Office of the Principal Legal Advisor educate Federal law enforcement officers, child protective services professionals, local law enforcement, medical professionals, and others at outreach events around the country. In 2023, HSI conducted 14 events and trained approximately 800 individuals. As a result of these events, local and Federal law enforcement partners were able to form professional relationships and, in some instances, have created working groups to address FGM/C issues specific to their community.
- Since 2017, ICE/HSI has continued to educate the traveling public through Operation Limelight USA, an outreach and education program where specially trained HSI special agents, victim assistance specialists, forensic interviewers, U.S. Customs and Border Protection Officers, and others engage travelers and speak with them about FGM/C. Informational flyers are handed out to facilitate education, give information for reporting, and provide contacts for survivor assistance. [Operation Limelight USA | ICE](#). In 2023, Operation Limelight USA was conducted at airports in Miami, New Orleans, Baltimore, Los Angeles, Seattle, Philadelphia, and Minneapolis/St Paul.
- The [Office of Family Violence Prevention and Services](#), within HHS's Administration for Children and Families, administers the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA), which funds resource centers that train and partner with health and social service providers to address needs of survivors of violence, trauma and abuse, including FGM/C. FVPSA includes funding for support and resources for family violence, dating violence, and domestic violence, which in some cases may include FGM.
- The CDC offers domestic screening guidance to educate providers who may be unfamiliar with FGM/C as well as those who treat immigrants and refugees in their

clinical practice. CDC's guidance encourages clinicians to inform newcomers that FGM/C is considered child abuse, and that it is illegal to perform FGM/C on a child in the United States, or to take a child out of the country to undergo the procedure. The guidance also encourages clinicians to document FGM/C in the medical record of newcomers soon after U.S. arrival to help protect against future suspicions of abuse. [Sexual and Reproductive Health Screening during the Domestic Medical Examination for Newly Arrived Refugees | Immigrant and Refugee Health CDC.](#)

- DHS established of a GBV information hub on [Combating Gender-Based Violence | Homeland Security \(dhs.gov\)](#) which includes information about FGM/C.
- In February 2023, ED's Office of Safe and Supportive Schools hosted a webinar for educators: "Understanding Female Genital Mutilation and Cutting and How Educators Can Help." [Lessons from the Field - Understanding Female Genital Mutilation and Cutting and How Educators Can Help | National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments \(NCSSE\).](#)
- USCIS assisted in the development and publication of a poster about GBV (including FGM/C) in 10 languages. The USCIS FGM/C working group meets periodically to ensure that its public awareness materials, including a digital brochure and digital awareness displays in USCIS field office waiting rooms, remain up to date. USCIS also maintains a website on FGM/C to provide information and resources to the public: [Female Genital Mutilation or Cutting \(FGM/C\) | USCIS.](#) New USCIS asylum and refugee officers continue to receive training on FGM/C as part of standard training curricula.
- 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/C in the United States and abroad. Members include DOJ, HHS, DHS, ED, DOS, and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The group meets periodically with the US END FGM/C Network and its members to facilitate information sharing and partnerships. One coordinated outreach effort in 2023 was the issuance of statements by DOJ, DHS, and DOS to raise awareness about FGM/C and to mark the International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM/C on February 6. [Office of Public Affairs | Justice Department and Federal Partners Recognize Zero Tolerance Day for Female Genital Mutilation | United States Department of Justice; 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/C 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 U.S. global policy and program efforts in 2023 focused on raising awareness about the harmful impacts of FGM/C; utilizing a survivor-centered and human rights-based approach for prevention and response; encouraging the enforcement of laws against FGM/C where they exist; identifying the need for the passage and implementation of laws in places where legal frameworks are weak or nonexistent; and raising the awareness and ability of medical providers, local communities, and other relevant stakeholders to identify and care for survivors of FGM/C. Specific examples include:

- In Nigeria, DOS's Office of Global Women's Issues is supporting programming to address and challenge harmful social norms, including FGM/C. In partnership with CARE, an international aid organization, the project supported community stakeholders and women civil society leaders in Yobe state as they advocated for the passage and implementation of a new law on preventing and responding to GBV. USAID supported health worker trainings on the management of FGM/C complications, resulting in a marked increase in the number of pregnant women reached with counseling on FGM/C. In the first quarter of 2023, the facilities reached approximately 38,600 pregnant women.
- In Liberia, in February 2023, the United States joined a [statement](#) in support of a ban on FGM/C by the National Council of Chiefs and Elders.
- The Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues visited Kenya in July, where she met with civil society, government, and multilateral partners on prevention and response to GBV including FGM/C. She participated in a site visit of the UNICEF-UNFPA Joint Programme on the Elimination of FGM/C, where she met local women leaders and program participants.
- At the Women Deliver 2023 conference in Rwanda, the DOS engaged in a pre-conference session on ending FGM/C globally and joined a media fireside chat about U.S. foreign policy on ending FGM/C.
- The DOS engaged in regular meetings of the Steering Committee for the UNICEF-UNFPA Joint Programme on the Elimination of FGM/C, to which the DOS is a donor, providing \$5 million to UNICEF in support of this effort (2017-2023).
- In November 2023, the DOS organized a social media campaign in celebration of the "16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence," including videos, statements, and other media on efforts to end FGM/C. In line with the *U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally*, many posts highlighted the Department's commitment to addressing all forms of GBV, including FGM/C.
- Survivors and girls at immediate risk of FGM/C have received life-saving medical services, legal support, and other forms of protection through the DOS Bureau of

Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor “Voices Against Violence” Initiative.

- The DOS provided 12 million dollars to UN Women, which works to end GBV, including by taking action on regional and national laws and policies regarding FGM/C, advocating for increased resources on the issue, supporting efforts of local anti-FGM/C activists and organizations, and strengthening engagement with adolescents and collaboration across initiatives.
- In 2023, USAID launched an updated version of its publicly available [FGM/C course](#), designed to provide public health practitioners in low-and middle-income countries with an overview of FGM/C as well as effective approaches to encourage the elimination of the practice. To date, 909 learners across 54 countries have completed the course, including clinical, academic and programmatic professionals and students.
- USAID continues to scale up evidence-based interventions to eliminate FGM/C, as reflected in the issuance of its [CARE CEFM and FGM/C mapping tool](#) and [how-to note](#).
- USAID released its [Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Policy](#) which provides a vision for addressing GBV, including FGM/C. USAID also developed an implementation plan for the 2022 “U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally,” which includes commitments for eliminating FGM/C by increasing investments in prevention and response services and prioritizing evidence-based interventions in countries with the highest prevalence rates.