

Ending female genital cutting central to G7 gender equality goals

Our calls to the G7

- Make a clear financial commitment in the final G7 communiqué to provide additional financial resources to programmes focused on ending FGC globally, particularly community-level abandonment programmes. Existing global dedicated funding streams are the UNFPA/UNICEF Joint Programme on FGM/C and the EU/UN Spotlight Initiative
- Improve and expand research and data collection across practising countries globally, including in Asia and the Middle East, to strengthen the evidence base on effective approaches to end FGC
- Meaningfully engage affected communities and survivors in policy and decision-making on FGC
- Ensure that efforts to end FGC are prioritised in the scheduled G7 meetings with African leaders. Support for community-led initiatives and fully-funded National Action Plans¹ is vital, alongside legislative approaches

G7 a key actor in global momentum for change

In February 2019 the Gender Equality Advisory Council for the French G7 Presidency met for the first time and announced that ending female genital cutting (FGC) would be a key priority.² This follows on from the strong emphasis which has been placed on gender equality and tackling violence against women by the French G7 Presidency.

This is an extremely welcome and much-needed development - a critical step towards placing this often devastating form of violence against women and girls, which affects over 200 million worldwide, at the top of the agenda of world leaders. Ending FGC is key to tackling gender inequality.

G7 countries have played a leading role in getting us to this stage by championing and supporting efforts to end FGC. For example, G7 members such as Canada – who chaired the last G7, the EU, Germany, Italy, the UK and the US have allocated dedicated resources, supported programmes on the ground, and provided essential support to the UNFPA/UNICEF Joint Programme on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting.³ The EU/UN Spotlight Initiative⁴ to end violence against all women and girls, to which the EU has pledged €500 million, has been another very significant investment. It includes an focus on harmful practices and sexual and gender-based violence, including FGC, in African countries.

These developments need to be backed up by a strong resource commitment in the G7 communiqué to accelerate ending FGC by 2030, in line with the Sustainable Development Goal Target 5.3.⁵

¹ According to the UNFPA/UNICEF Joint Programme on FGM/C by 2017, 16 out of 17 countries supported by the Joint Programme had national coordination and action plans in place and 13 had line items in their national budgets specifically to eliminate FGM: https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA-UNICEF-Phase2Performance_2018_web_0.pdf

² <https://www.egalite-femmes-hommes.gouv.fr/presidence-francaise-du-g7-le-conseil-consultatif-fer-de-lance-de-legalite-entre-les-femmes-et-les-hommes/>

³ <https://www.unfpa.org/unfpa-unicef-joint-programme-eliminate-female-genital-mutilation>

⁴ <http://www.un.org/en/spotlight-initiative/index.shtml>

⁵ Sustainable Development Goal Target 5.3 calls for the elimination of harmful practices such as FGC and child, early and forced marriage: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg5>

Why work to end female genital cutting?

FGC is a violation of the human rights of women and girls and is recognised as such in international human rights law. It involves the forcible removal of a girl's external genitals, and in half of the countries that practice FGC, the majority of girls are cut before their fifth birthday.⁶

It is a global problem. UNICEF collates data from 30 countries that report nationally on FGC prevalence rates across three continents; 27 countries in Africa as well as Indonesia, Yemen and Iraq. Evidence also shows the practice occurs in at least a further 15 countries, as well as within the global diaspora.

At least 200 million women worldwide are living with the impacts of FGC and every year a further 3.9 million girls are at risk of being cut. Alarming, if current levels continue, 68 million girls will have been subjected to FGC between 2015 and 2030 due to population growth in practising countries.⁷ Yet 2030 is also the date by which all governments have pledged to end FGC. The time to rapidly scale up our joint efforts is now.

FGC has severe impacts on the health, education and economic empowerment of women and girls. It is underpinned by and reinforces gender inequality. Investing in evidence-based interventions to tackle FGC will make a critical and significant contribution to achieving the gender equality, education and economic development goals of the G7.

Impact of FGC on our leaders of tomorrow

The French G7 Presidency has highlighted that on gender equality it is seeking outcomes that enable the protection of women from violence, advance girls' education, and promote women's entrepreneurship. At Orchid Project we know that FGC presents an enormous barrier to enabling these outcomes:

- **Perinatal, neonatal and maternal mortality** - FGC increases the risk of complications such as prolonged or obstructed labour, and can increase the risk of post-partum haemorrhage by 70%.⁸
- **Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM)** - FGC is often practiced as a precursor to CEFM as it is often believed that FGC will ensure a girl's virginity and readiness for marriage.
- **Education** - there can be increased school absence and drop out due to the physical and psychological health impacts of FGC, particularly with the onset of menstruation.
- **Economic empowerment** - gaps in education also hinder a woman's opportunity for economic empowerment, as a lack of qualifications may prevent her from accessing employment. Ongoing health complications may result in frequent absence or an inability to work. FGC thus exacerbates economic vulnerability.
- **Migration and humanitarian emergencies** - Girls and women will be particularly affected by a lack of health infrastructure if they are living with the negative health consequences of FGC.

Change is happening on the ground but support is needed

FGC is held in place by powerful social norms, but community dialogue and human rights-based approaches on the ground are having an impact. At Orchid Project, our theory of change is grounded in

⁶ https://www.unicef.org/evaluation/files/FGM-report_11_14_2013_Vol-I.pdf

⁷ <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/bending-curve-fgm-trends-we-aim-change>

⁸ <https://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2006/pr30/en/>

a non-judgemental, rights-based approach working through open community dialogue to enable collective declarations of abandonment.

In February, this community dialogue approach resulted in 3,000 Maasai gathering to publicly declare abandonment of FGC following a three-year programme of work with our partner, SAFE Maa, whom we have supported for the past few years.⁹

These actions need to be supported by strong political leadership at global and national levels, dedicated policy frameworks - such as funded national action plans, and key actors such as cultural and religious leaders. All are important to creating an enabling environment for change. Legislation has a role to play in this, but as part of “set of interventions by governments to support a social movement towards its elimination”.¹⁰

⁹ <http://news.trust.org/item/20190214201249-ws95o/>

¹⁰ See page 9: https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/FGMC_Brochure_Lo_res_1613.pdf