

End FGM EU's reaction to the first EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child 2021-2024

The End FGM European Network welcomes the first EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child that was recently launched by the European Commission.

FGM is usually practiced on girls between 0-15 years, and it is internationally recognised as a violation of children's rights, particularly freedom from discrimination, right to be protected from all forms of mental and physical violence and maltreatment, the right to the highest attainable standard of health and freedom from torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

This is why the End FGM European Network is very pleased to see that **preventing harmful practices**, among which **female genital mutilation** (FGM) is prioritised when looking at protecting children from violence within the European Union. Europe is home to over 600,000 women and girls are living with the consequences of FGM, while a further 190,000 girls and women are at risk of undergoing the harmful practice in 17 European countries alone. Much more has to be done to ensure that girls affected or at risk of FGM are protected throughout Europe regardless of the country they live in.

1/ We welcome the reference made in the Child Rights Strategy to the development of an EU legal framework around gender-based violence (GBV), including a Recommendation on Harmful Practices specifically mentioning FGM, to be tabled by the end of 2021, while still supporting the EU accession to the Istanbul Convention. We take this as a strong commitment to ensure that such instruments will also have a focus on children's rights, including girls' rights.

- We stand ready to support the Commission in drafting these instruments, particularly to ensure that **FGM is tackled in its specificities** and that, although in an instrument gathering several very different harmful practices, there will still be concrete, effective and tailored actions particularly tackling FGM.
- Moreover, we call upon the Commission and the Member States, once adopted, to establish a strong and systematic **monitoring and evaluation framework** facilitated by an **expert group** including civil society with specific expertise on the different harmful practices, as well as through periodical **experience sharing moments among Member States**.

2/ In this sense, we also welcome the Commission's proposal to launch an **EU Network for Children's Rights** by the end of 2021. The network will comprise of Member States, and will include in some activities non-governmental organisations and children among others.

- We call for a systematic and meaningful inclusion of civil society and children in this new mechanism, ensuring an intersectional representation, including from child-led and youth-led movements, as well as from grassroots and migrant background.
- As a European Network, we will be happy to put our expertise and the one of our Youth Ambassadors at the service of such new mechanism and cooperate with other partners in an intersectional way on this important issue.

3/ The End FGM European Network is pleased to see that the European Commission intends to present an initiative aimed at supporting the development and strengthening of **integrated child protection systems**, which will encourage all relevant authorities and services to better work together in a system that puts the child at the centre.

- We stand ready to support the Commission in drafting this initiative, particularly to ensure that **girls affected or at risk of FGM are adequately protected and supported**. We published a few years ago a [briefing](#) specifically looking at framing the 10 principles for integrated child protection systems in the context of FGM, which will be useful in this regard.

4/ Furthermore, the End FGM European Network welcomes the Commission's invitation towards Member States to invest in capacity building and awareness raising on prevention, protection and support towards children who experienced violence, including specifically ensuring children in most vulnerable situations are adequately reached out to. We urge all EU Member States to ensure **systematic training of professionals**, specifically in GBV, including FGM, as well as on gender-, age-, culturally-sensitive and non-discriminatory treatment for girls affected.

5/ The End FGM European Network is happy to see that FGM will also be tackled among other harmful practices in the external dimension of the Strategy, specifically in line with the Human Rights & Democracy Action Plan 2020-2024. Particularly, we are encouraged to see that the EU also intends to place an emphasis on **child protection within humanitarian crises, addressing all types of violence against children** as well as providing mental health and psychosocial support. This is particularly important since two out of three of the top 15 countries with the highest FGM prevalence worldwide are humanitarian and emergency contexts, where FGM is hugely deprioritised.

- End FGM European Network stands ready to support the European Commission in doing so by putting our [expertise](#) at the service of such renewed commitment to focus on all types of violence within humanitarian settings;
- We would urge the EU to recognise that FGM is among the forms of GBV that increase during emergencies and need to be addressed with a multi-sectorial approach throughout the humanitarian cycle. To this aim, increased funding to programmes ensuring girls' protection from FGM in emergencies is paramount.

6/ It will be important also to closely follow up on the intersections that the Strategy on the Rights of the Child will have with other instruments (the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion and the EU strategic frameworks on Gender Equality, LGBTI+, Anti-Racism, Disability and Roma Inclusion) to ensure they are integrated to provide a **comprehensive European framework addressing all intersecting forms of discriminations against children**. In particular, the End FGM European Network will pay specific attention to the concrete implementation of intersectionality, to ensure that the European Union leaves no girl behind, specifically those within the context of migration and asylum in extremely precarious and vulnerable situations.

7/ Finally, we want to reiterate the importance to prepare a parallel **accountability framework** to ensure the correct monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of this strategy. It should contain clear and defined actions, indications for the responsible stakeholders, a concrete timeline and measurable indicators of success.

We thank the European Commission for having presented the Strategy on the Rights of the Child that will guide the European Union's action for the next five years and we stand ready to support and monitor its implementation.

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