



European
Commission



“WE NEED TO END THE SILENCE SURROUNDING FGM”

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Ambassador programme aims to increase understanding of FGM through sharing of personal stories, to empower and foster the mobilisation of communities' representatives in Europe, contribute to advocating for the rights of those affected by FGM at the EU level, and support the End FGM European Network's work on building bridges between FGM-practising communities in Europe and countries of origin. The End FGM European network (END FGM) is a European umbrella network of 18 organisations working to ensure sustainable European action to end FGM.

PAIN, SHOCK, INFECTIONS, INJURY, AND SOMETIMES EVEN DEATH – ALL THESE CAN BE CONSEQUENCES OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM).

It is hard to believe, but despite its negative physical, sexual and psychological effects, FGM is still being practiced today. It is estimated that at least 200 million girls and women have been cut in 30 countries worldwide; around 20,000 women and girls seek asylum in the EU every year from countries in which the practice is common.

“Apart from being an extremely traumatic experience, FGM violates fundamental children's rights, as the majority of the women undergo FGM when they are very little - at an age that precludes any possibility of conscious consent”, says Lisa O'Leary, Communications Officer at the End FGM Network, which is a European umbrella organisation for eighteen national NGOs working to end female genital mutilation. The organisation is involved in many different activities to achieve its goal: it produces a variety of materials that focus on raising awareness about FGM, it has developed an

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#SayNoStopVAW

“We support doctors, teachers and lawyers on how to protect women and girls at risk of FGM.”

Liuska Sanna, Director, End FGM Network

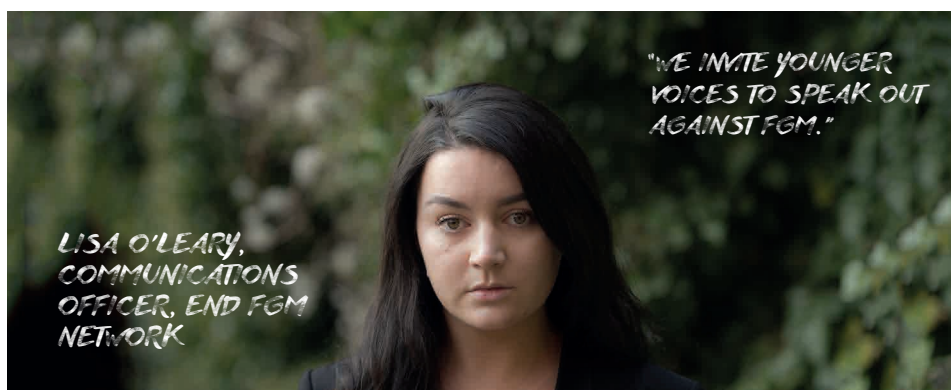
e-learning course for professionals on how to prevent and address FGM, and it works directly with affected communities to challenge attitudes towards FGM.

One of the recent projects that End FGM launched is an Ambassador Programme. “FGM is a very intimate issue, but we need to speak about it,” Lisa continued. “Women who have undergone it find it difficult to share their experiences with a stranger who does not know how it feels. Ambassadors are the people who know how it feels either through personal experiences or through the experiences of their relatives and friends.” By sharing their stories within the FGM-practising communities in Europe, Ambassadors try to convince women that FGM can only have negative effects on women’s health and well-being. The project only started in December 2016, and with the help of 12 Ambassadors, the End FGM Network is reaching out to affected communities through organised conferences, workshops and events.

When asked about the individuals who take part in the Ambassador programme, Lisa says: “They are amazing people. One of the Ambassadors is Sister Fa, who was an activist against FGM long before she joined us. She made a decision quite early in her life that she will not let her own experience victimise her, but instead take action on the issue.

She is now a well-known musician and she uses her music to reach out to young people. Another Ambassador is Fatima, a 22-year-old woman, who also works with younger communities. The most inspiring thing about her is that she became an activist when she was around 15-16 years old and now she studies human rights law. It’s encouraging to know that one day our activists will become lawyers working to eradicate FGM.”

During the talks with the practicing communities, the Ambassadors are open and sincere: they create a safe environment for the women to share their concerns and experiences and explain in detail how FGM influences women’s health. “Some of the women were infants when they were cut and they did not realise that they were FGM survivors for years,” says Djenbabou Diall, one of the Ambassadors of the programme. “Today I am an Ambassador because I want to speak about it and I want to end it. As a human being and as a woman I want to protect the women at risk as well as future generations from this practice. FGM is a cultural phenomenon and to fight it we need to understand that we cannot change culture and traditions overnight – there is a long way to go. End FGM Network and the Ambassador programme empower me to contribute to this change and I am ready to stand up as long as needed to end this practice once and for all.”



MORE INFORMATION ON THE PROJECT

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