

## PRESS RELEASE

### Ending female genital mutilation: amplifying community voices

11<sup>th</sup> of February, 2020

This 12<sup>th</sup> of February, the European Parliament will vote on a new resolution about Female Genital Mutilation. The 6<sup>th</sup> of February marked the International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM. On the occasion of the Let's Change project event, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from different political groups have joined forces to prioritise the fight against this harmful traditional practice.

600.000 women and girls living in Europe are Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) survivors. "It is important and necessary to provide accurate and comprehensive information about the dangers of FGM, both physically and psychologically. It is crucial that we, as politicians, engage directly with members of the FGM-affected communities and listen to their expertise", MEP Pierrette Herzberger-Fofana (Greens/EFA).

The 'Let's Change' project is based on the principle that to truly end FGM, the change must come from within the affected communities themselves. *"The prevention of and work for abandonment of FGM requires long-term commitment and efforts. Because social change takes time to be brought about. FGM is a deeply-rooted traditional practice, that hence requires long-term sensitisation work to trigger sustainable behaviour change"*, Marly Bah, gynaecologist based in France.

The prevention work carried out by communities' members sometimes comes at a high personal price. Change agents raising awareness about the practice of FGM can face retaliation, harassment, isolation, rejection from other community members because they are talking against what is considered as an identity issue. *"We are all volunteers, acting for change within our respective communities. We are not getting paid for that, but we do it because we believe women's rights should be protected, for everyone's sake. Our objective of eradicating FGM altogether should be pursued on the long run, with sustainable projects, in which our Change Agents and Change Trainers empower their communities"*, Khalid Ali, journalist and anti-FGM activist.

"It is thanks to you, activists and organisations, that we can bring change. To end Female Genital Mutilation, we must engage with people from the communities to educate teachers and childcare professionals to prevent this practice. That is why we will be voting a new resolution on FGM next week in the European Parliament as a proof of our commitment in ending it for good", MEP Hilde Vautmans (Renew Europe).

The event called on EU institutions, national governments and professionals to prioritise and invest resources in prevention work at community level. In addition, any funding must take into account the operational realities of Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and allocate resources in a sustainable, flexible and accessible way

*"Ending FGM is a gradual process, which does not happen overnight. Thus, we need financial - and moral support - to be able to execute the projects we are implementing. The European institutions and national governments should make prevention work a priority and invest in this with a collaborative, long-term vision"*, Youssif Ouro-Akondo, activist based in the Netherlands.

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*“Female Genital Mutilation needs to be at the very top of the gender equality agenda. To achieve this, we must share the information properly, we must educate at local, national and European levels. As European parliamentarians, I want to ensure our door is open for conversation with on-the-ground change makers. Our objective is clear: zero tolerance for FGM!”, Frances Fitzgerald (EPP).*

It is time to show real political commitment in fighting FGM but also in countering the current hostile political climate towards migrants and to instead promote a positive non-discriminatory and non-stigmatising narrative to ensure that members of FGM-affected diaspora communities can equally participate in society.

*“It is indeed essential that we all come together to continue creating strategies that will end this practice not only in the countries where it is most practiced, but also in countries where migrant communities from these countries are located. Female genital mutilation is a complex reality that deserves full attention in the fight for its eradication“ Marisa Matias, MEP (GUE/NGL).*

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### What is FGM?

Over 600.000 women living in the EU have undergone the harmful practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) and close to 180,000 young women are at risk from it every year.

Female Genital Mutilation comprises all procedures involving the removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. On average girls are subjected to FGM between birth and age 15. FGM is not prescribed by any religion and has no health benefits. On the contrary the practice can cause life-lasting physical and psychological trauma. 200 million girls and women alive today have undergone FGM. At current rates, an additional estimated 68 million girls face being cut by 2030.

### Who are we?

The Let's Change project is coordinated by TERRE DES FEMMES (Germany), in collaboration with the partners FSAN (Netherlands), EquiPop (France), Plan Germany and the End FGM European Network.

[Click here](#) to know more about the Let's Change project.

The [End FGM European Network](#) is the European focal-point of ending FGM, representing 27 members.

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