



End FGM European Network: Statement on the proposal to repeal the Women (Amendment) Act 2015 banning female genital mutilation (FGM) in The Gambia

June 2024

Position statement by End FGM European Network (End FGM EU) in response to the recent developments regarding FGM in The Gambia.

As the National Assembly of The Gambia will soon enter the second ordinary session of the year to discuss, among other things, the alarming repeal of the ban on FGM, End FGM EU is deeply worried about the potential reversal of the ban and its dreadful consequences on the lives of millions of individuals in The Gambia and the world. This would result in severe violence against the rights of women and girls, depriving them of the layer of protection that the ban on FGM offers and will have a significant impact on the global movement to end FGM. Given this worrying development, End FGM EU produces this statement to call on the National Assembly to stand firm in their commitment to women and girls' rights and uphold the ban on FGM. We also call on the European Union and EU member states to condemn the actions on The Gambia and progress the global effort in ending FGM.

In March 2024, members of the National Assembly of The Gambia voted 42 (in favour) to 4 (against) to advance the reversal of the Women (Amendment) Act 2015 that prohibits FGM. This practice is internationally recognised as a gross violation of human rights, a form of violence against women and girls and a manifestation of gender inequality. FGM is a deeply rooted practice that exists on all continents and has no religious grounds. Moreover, FGM has no health benefits, on the contrary, survivors of FGM are facing a high risk of chronic pain, infections of the reproductive system, post-traumatic stress disorder and sometimes death. For the practice to be abandoned it requires societal change that can take many years, hence the support from Governmental institutions is key. According to recent data provided by UNICEF, over [230 million women and girls worldwide](#) have undergone FGM signifying that this harmful practice remains a threat to the health and bodily integrity of women and girls everywhere. It is estimated that in Gambia [73% of girls and women aged 15 to 49 years have undergone FGM](#). Given that Gambia is a country of high FGM prevalence, the ban of the practice was a significant milestone, and sustained efforts are required in order to ensure the eradication of this practice.

The reversal of the current long-standing ban would undo the many years of work achieved by grassroots organisations, civil society, and activists in tackling this harmful practice and would be a huge setback for the global efforts made in eliminating FGM. Gambia would be the first ever country to roll-back on the criminalisation of FGM and, if



passed, could set a dangerous precedent for other countries to follow. Pro-FGM campaigns have been seen in other countries, such as Kenya and Sierra Leone, where the [right to consent](#) is being used as a means to challenge the criminalisation of FGM. These developments are a stark reminder that harmful gender norms remain embedded in our society. The reversal of this ban sends a worrying message to women and girls everywhere, and we must take action to push back against the rise of the pro-FGM movement now to end this harmful practice for future generations.

However, the situation transpiring in The Gambia does not reflect the attitudes of those grassroots organisations, civil society actors, and activists working tirelessly on the ground to push back against the rise of the pro-FGM movement. We stand in solidarity with anti-FGM activists and civil society organisations in The Gambia and across the world who continue to advocate against this harmful practice worldwide and in particular in The Gambia. We welcome the statement made by the international institutions including the European Union¹ UNICEF and UNFPA² and the United Nations in The Gambia³ pointing out the disastrous consequences of lifting the ban on FGM and calling for urgent measures to abandon the repeal of the Women (Amendment) Act 2015.

While we await the final vote, we urge the National Assembly of The Gambia

To maintain and protect the ban on FGM and all forms of harmful practices contained in the Women (Amendment) Act 2015 and to prioritise the effective application of the existing legal framework. The Gambia must uphold the ban and strongly consider the far-reaching and detrimental impact the reversal of the ban on FGM will have on the lives of women and girls in all their diversity;

To stand firm in their commitments to international human rights instruments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women⁴, Article 5 of the Maputo Protocol⁵ and the Samoa Agreement⁶;

To support civil society, grassroots organisations and feminist activists advocating to end this harmful practice as well as organisations providing services to survivors and persons at risk. Including, by providing political, financial and technical

¹ [MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION on the proposed repeal of the law banning female genital mutilation in The Gambia | B9-0243/2024 | European Parliament \(europa.eu\)](#)

² [UNICEF and UNFPA alarmed by proposed repeal of law banning FGM in The Gambia](#)

³ [A Statement by The United Nations in The Gambia on Protecting the Rights of Girls and Women from Female Genital Mutilation \(FGM\) | United Nations in The Gambia](#)

⁴ [Text of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(un.org\)](#)

⁵ [Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa | African Union \(au.int\)](#)

⁶ [Samoa agreement - Consilium \(europa.eu\)](#)



support to initiatives raising awareness about the impact of FGM and other initiatives aiming at empowering all women and girls in all their diversity;

To fund and implement comprehensive national strategies to prevent and eradicate FGM, including easing access to safe and accessible services for FGM survivors and persons at risk. Also implementing educational and awareness raising campaigns targeting FGM root causes and drivers in coordination with religious and community leaders.

While we welcome the recent adoption by the European Parliament of a resolution on the proposed repeal of the law banning FGM in The Gambia as well as the statement made by the EU's High Representative, we encourage the EU

To condemn the proposed repeal of the Women (Amendment) Act 2015 and recognise that the lifting of the ban on FGM represents a step back that will lead to disastrous consequences in the life of Gambian women and girls by denying their basic human rights such as their right to bodily integrity⁷, sexual and reproductive health and rights and freedom from torture⁸;

To stand with Gambian and international anti-FGM activists advocating tirelessly to end this harmful practice including supporting them financially by making available urgent funds to help activists on the field continue their vital activities. Protect all women and girls in all their diversity from all forms of gender-based violence and harmful practices and advocate for the full enjoyment for all women and girls of their basic human rights;

To scale up external funding for the promotion and full enjoyment of sexual and reproductive health and rights, the elimination of harmful practices and gender-based violence, including FGM, in third countries;

To lead by example and strengthen its efforts toward ending FGM by finalising the current legislative files in progress. In particular, through the implementation of the Directive on Combating Violence Against Women, the Victims' Rights Directive Recast

⁷ Article 4 of the African charter on human and people's rights: 'Human beings are inviolable. Every human being shall be entitled to respect for his life and the integrity of his person. No one may be arbitrarily deprived of this right.'

⁸ Article 4 of the African charter on human and people's rights: 'Every individual shall have the right to the respect of the dignity inherent in a human being and to the recognition of his legal status. All forms of exploitation and degradation of man particularly slavery, slave trade, torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment and treatment shall be prohibited.'



as well as the finalisation of the long-awaited recommendations on how to effectively combat and prevent harmful practices.

We encourage Member States to

Condemn the repealing of the Women (Amendment) Act 2015 in The Gambia and to regularly raise in international fora and in particular when in dialogues with The Gambia the need to ban all forms of gender-based violence including FGM;

Lead by example and effectively and promptly transpose the Directive on Combating Violence Against Women and the Victims' Rights Directive Recast;

Ensure sustainable funding for civil society and grassroots organisations, in particular feminist organisations, working with affected women and communities to combat the drivers of FGM on the ground. In particular, make available funds for the Gambian civil society to help them deliver vital and sustainable services and keep advocating to end the practice in The Gambia;

Include specialised holistic and multidisciplinary support services in the public health systems for those affected by FGM to ensure that survivors of FGM can have full enjoyment of their rights, in particular, their SRHR;

Provide systematic and homogenous training on gender-based discrimination and violence, including FGM, to all professionals who could come in touch with FGM-affected women and girls.

Once again we would like to stress End FGM EU's deep concern about the reversal of the ban on FGM in The Gambia. We call on the National Assembly of The Gambia to uphold the Women (Amendment) Act 2015 in order to avoid the devastating consequences the repeal of this ban could have on all women and girls in their diversity in The Gambia and the world. The repeal of the Women's Amendment Act 2015 if voted will be a major setback to the global efforts to combat this harmful practice. We firmly stand behind all those activists, survivors, and grassroots and civil society organisations working tirelessly to push back against this reversal to ensure women and girls in their diversity can live in a world where their basic human rights are respected, a world where they can thrive, a world where they are free from violence. The decision of The Gambia will be a pivotal moment in the road toward ending FGM, and we strongly hope that the rights of women and girls will persevere in this worrying time.



About End FGM EU

The End FGM European Network (End FGM EU) is an umbrella network of 39 national organisations working in 16 European countries who are expert on female genital mutilation (FGM). End FGM EU operates as a meeting ground for communities, civil society organisations, decision-makers and other relevant actors at European level to interact, cooperate and join forces to end all forms of FGM in Europe and beyond. We put at the heart of our work grassroots voices to influence European governments and policy-makers to work towards the elimination of FGM. We build our members' capacity, offer spaces to share expertise and develop partnerships.

While dedicated to being the driving force of the European movement to end FGM, we are equally committed to build bridges and cooperation with all relevant actors in the field of FGM both in Europe and globally. In this sense, we actively promote and foster cooperation between the European movement and movements in other regions of the world.

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