



Celebrating a Decade of Action: End FGM European Network's 10th Anniversary Event

On November 6, 2024, We celebrated a remarkable milestone—10 years of advocacy, action, and progress in the fight to eliminate Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) across Europe and beyond. The event, titled "A Decade of Action - Shaping a Future Without FGM," took place at the European Parliament in Brussels, co-hosted by Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) **Lina Gálvez** (S&D, Spain) and **Evin Incir** (S&D, Sweden). The celebration not only marked the network's significant achievements but also served as a platform to reflect on the past, discuss future opportunities and challenges, and chart the way forward in the fight against FGM.



Group picture with The End FGM EU Network including the Team, Members, Ambassadors, Speakers

Reflecting on Ten Years of Progress

The event brought together key stakeholders, including MEPs, ambassadors, and community advocates, to acknowledge the growth and impact of End FGM EU over the past decade. The network has expanded to include 39 member organizations in 16 European countries, fostering a broad coalition that has mobilized both public support and policy action to address FGM. In her opening remarks, our Interim Director, **Marianne Nguena**, highlighted the network's evolution from a coalition into a powerful movement, calling for continued and enhanced efforts to eliminate FGM:

“ *In ten years, we have shaped European policies to better prevent, protect, and support women and girls affected by FGM. Together, we have reaffirmed that FGM is a violation of human rights* ”



Our Interim Director Marianne Nguena Kana

Co-President of the Network, **Aminata Sidibé**, in her remarks, underscored the continued commitment needed to end this harmful practice:

“ *Our work is not just about ending FGM; it's about changing mindsets and empowering communities to protect women and girls. This is a long-term commitment, and we must ensure that our efforts continue to be supported at every level—local, national, and European. The fight against FGM is a fight for justice, equality, and human dignity.* ”





Co-President of End FGM EU Aminata Sidibe

Belgium's commitment to ending FGM was also reinforced by Ms. **Hafida Bachir**, the Gender Policy Advisor to the Belgian Secretary of State for Gender Equality. She outlined Belgium's progress through the National Action Plan (NAP) 2021-2025, and emphasized the crucial role of civil society organizations in shaping effective policies. Belgium has made strides in gender-based violence (GBV) policies, including:

- Strengthening coordination in line with the Istanbul Convention.
- Increasing civil society cooperation and funding.
- Enhancing focus on various forms of GBV, including FGM.

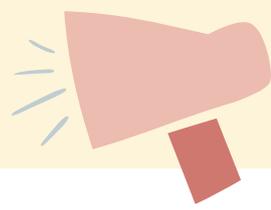
“ *The fight against FGM is now fully integrated into Belgium's national approach to gender-based violence. [...] Women's rights organizations like GAMS Be have played a vital role in shaping policies that address the realities of women and girls affected by FGM. [...] The Belgian government's support for GAMS Be has helped create care protocols for FGM survivors, ensuring consistent support in high-prevalence regions.* ”



Hafida Bachir, the Gender Policy Advisor to the Belgian Secretary of State



A Decade of Progress and Advocacy



As part of our 10th-anniversary celebrations, we are proud to share a special video featuring heartfelt testimonies from some of our members. In this video, they reflect on a decade of action, celebrating the achievements we've collectively made and sharing their vision for the next decade. These powerful stories from across the Network not only highlight the journey we have taken together but also reinforce the importance of continued collaboration and determination to achieve our shared goals. The video offers a unique opportunity to hear directly from our members—individuals who have been on the frontlines, working tirelessly to eradicate FGM. Their reflections are a testament to the power of collective action and a reminder of the impact we have had over the past ten years, as well as the importance of carrying forward this work into the next decade.

Watch the testimonials: [Looking back: A Decade in Review with our Members](#)



Aminata Bah's Powerful Speech: A Decade of Collective Action

During the event, Senior Ambassador **Aminata Bah** delivered an inspiring speech that captured the heart of the celebration. She reflected on the journey of The Network, saying:



We gather here today, 10 years from when the End FGM European Network (known as End FGM EU) was born, in 2014, following a successful campaign led by Amnesty International focusing on FGM as a European issue. People say, 'We are what we leave behind!' This diction resonates with me as I believe it fits in well with the aims, aspirations, and shared values of END FGM EU Network.



She continued by reflecting on the growth and impact of the network, emphasizing the power of collective action:



People say, 'There is power in numbers!' Over the past 10 years, End FGM EU has grown from 15 members in 13 EU member states to 39 members in 16 European countries. The network has experienced the synergies it has created across sectors, countries, and regions, to speak with one voice against FGM and advocate for its eradication.





Aminata Bah , Senior Ambassador End FGM EU

Aminata also highlighted the power of community and the collective strength behind the movement:

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Let us not forget how far we have come together, all we have accomplished drawing strength and resilience from one another, uplifting ourselves while showing up for one another. Let us celebrate our collective achievements and everlasting effects on the overall struggle against FGM [...] From the Istanbul Convention officially acknowledging FGM as a form of violence against women and girls, to the EU Directive on Combatting Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), End FGM EU has been successfully pushing for stronger legislation in Europe and beyond to address the issue of FGM.

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Aminata shared a powerful metaphor to describe the network's growth:

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If End FGM EU was a girl, she would be 10 this year! She would be entering adolescence, puberty! If she was a girl from an FGM-affected community, she would be highly likely not to undergo FGM. This is because her growth, health, and overall wellbeing are entrusted to the community we have become. A community strong in numbers, experience, knowledge, and understanding of the harmful practice that FGM is.

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She concluded her speech with a hopeful message for the future:

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"The future is full of opportunities to continue this journey, for instance, with the implementation of the new VAWG Directive, our forthcoming Global Report on FGM, and our plans to use the Kigali Declaration. These initiatives will ensure that we remain on track, focused on the mission—creating a world where every girl child is free from FGM."

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Read the full speech [here](#).

Fireside Chats: Opportunities, Challenges, and Best Practices

The anniversary event featured a series of Fireside Chats, offering a platform for experts and advocates to explore critical topics in the ongoing fight against FGM.

1. Policy and Legislative Opportunities

Maria Mollica from DG JUST and **Pille Tsopp-Pagan** from GREVIO discussed key legislative opportunities, including the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention and the EU Directive to combat violence against women. These frameworks are crucial in driving forward the EU's commitment to eliminate FGM.



Clara Caldera from AIDOS, Pille Tsopp-Pagan from GREVIO, Maria Mollica from DG JUST

Maria Mollica emphasized the transformative potential of the Directive. "The implementation of the Directive on Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence presents unprecedented opportunities to address FGM across the entire European Union," she explains. The directive not only guarantees robust support for FGM survivors, but also ensures that the law will soon include comprehensive national frameworks in less than three years. This means stronger protective measures, better access to justice, and the enforcement of severe penalties for FGM offenses. Moreover, the directive mandates that EU member states gather crucial data on FGM, improving the reliability of information and reinforcing prevention strategies. The new legal framework also introduces key provisions, such as harsher penalties for committing FGM on children or in cases involving extreme violence or family members. For example, the limitations for prosecution will only start once the victim turns 18, thus giving survivors more time to come forward.





Pille Tsopp-Pagan from GREVIO



This legal evolution marks a significant milestone, but challenges persist. **Phile**, from GREVIO (Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence), points out that while many states have enacted FGM laws, their implementation remains uneven. "The challenge lies in the implementation of these laws, which is frequently inadequate in practice," Phile notes.

Furthermore, civil society organizations continue to face barriers, particularly with regard to securing the necessary funding to raise awareness and advocate for legislative change. As Phile advises, organizations must focus on data collection and ensure that Member States meet their legal obligations through effective consultation and guidance on the ground.

2.Challenges

In this session, **Nejma Sayeh**, Policy and Advocacy Officer at End FGM EU, addressed the need for sustained financial support. "Ending FGM requires long-term commitment, and we need sustainable funding to ensure the implementation of crucial EU obligations like the Istanbul Convention," she explained.



Elena Kasko from UNFPA Brussels & Nejma Sayeh, Policy and Advocacy Officer at End FGM EU

At the same time, experts agree that diversifying funding sources—whether through European countries, private entities, or international organizations—is essential. **Elena Kasko** from UNFPA Brussels, which collaborates on global efforts to eliminate FGM, underscores this point:

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Diversifying funding sources is crucial. We must focus on scaling up funding and exploring multi-year funding options. Long-term, uninterrupted funding is necessary to ensure the continuity and effectiveness of FGM elimination programs.

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This call for long-term, uninterrupted financial support is echoed across the board, from grassroots organizations to international bodies. By diversifying funding, integrating FGM into broader humanitarian responses, and pushing back against legislative setbacks, the global community can continue to move toward the goal of ending FGM by 2030.

For civil society organizations, which have been crucial in providing services to survivors and advocating for legislative changes, securing stable funding is a persistent challenge. **Clara Caldera**, the President and Program Officer of AIDOS, one of our members, outlined: "Base funding and funding for core operations are critical because they enable us to implement long-term projects and assess their impact over time," Clara explains. Without sustained financial support, many organizations struggle to implement meaningful, transformative change.



Clara Caldera, AIDOS President and Program Officer

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Having access to long-term, multi-functional funding allows organizations to plan effectively, build robust structures, and operate sustainably. For instance, funds that cover salaries are essential. We often struggle to secure such funds, but they are crucial. Salaries represent the backbone of our organizations—they allow us to employ skilled staff who are committed, motivated, and passionate. However, passion alone is not enough; we need professionals with the right expertise and experience to deliver quality services. Investing in people, in their skills and resources, is essential for the long-term success of any organization.

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3. Best Practices

The third Fireside Chat focused on best practices, **Wedad Almizori**, Senior Ambassador at End FGM EU, shared insights from the Netherlands' successful efforts to stop FGM.

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The Netherlands is often highlighted as a good practice due to its formal system for engaging with affected communities in the fight against FGM. This system plays a crucial role in building sustainable innovation to eliminate FGM

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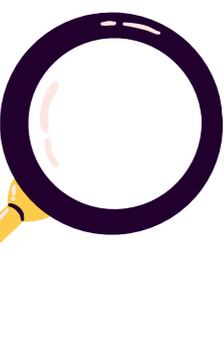
Wedad Almizori, Senior Ambassador End FGM EU, Elena Kasko UNFPA Brussels



Furthermore, **Fabienne Richard**, another valued member of our organization and Director of GAMS Belgium, spoke about Belgium's comprehensive approach, which includes two multidisciplinary centers in Brussels and Ghent. These centers provide long-term support for FGM survivors, with a focus on psychological, sexological, and medical care.



Fabienne Richard, Director of GAMS Belgium



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The Belgian model emphasizes the importance of a multidisciplinary approach, where women are not only treated physically but also receive support for their mental health and sexual well-being," Richard explained. "Ultimately, the Belgian approach is based on empowerment and self-determination. It's not just about reconstructing the body, but about helping women regain control over their lives.

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Both Wedad and Fabienne highlighted the need for collaboration to maximize impact. Wedad referenced a Kurdish proverb that underscores the power of collaboration in creating meaningful change:

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"With one hand, you cannot clap, but with two hands, you can make a sound."

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Wedad Almizori, Senior Ambassador End FGM EU



Queralt Perarnau, Senior Project Officer of The Network, joined the discussion presenting one of our latest projects: the End FGM E-Campus. This innovative online platform provides professionals with vital tools to support FGM survivors and prevent future cases.

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By centralizing culturally sensitive resources, the End FGM E-Campus empowers a unified, cross-border approach to ending FGM.

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Queralt Perarnau, Senior Project Officer End FGM EU, Marly Bah Board Member End FGM EU

These best practices, gathered from our members on the platform and highlighted during the discussion, showcase the significant progress made in addressing FGM, blending both preventative and restorative approaches while promoting cross-border cooperation and community engagement.

4. Shape The Future

The final Fireside Chat explored the role of youth in the movement to end FGM. Our ambassadors **Sherifat Adeniyi**, **Rafiu Olayinka Awolola**, and **Bassmala Elbushary** stressed the importance of involving young people in policy creation and decision-making processes.



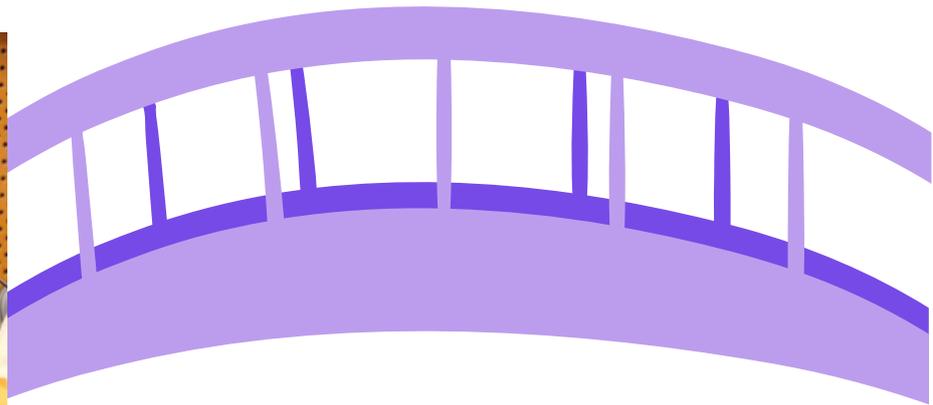
Youth must be part of the solution if we are to create a future free from FGM



Bassmala emphasized the power of partnership, stating, **“One person building a bridge alone would take forever, but with more people, organizations, and youth joining in, we can achieve much more.”** She also highlighted the importance of cultural sensitivity and amplifying the voices of survivors and affected communities in shaping the movement.



Sherifat Adeniyi, Youth Ambassador End FGM EU



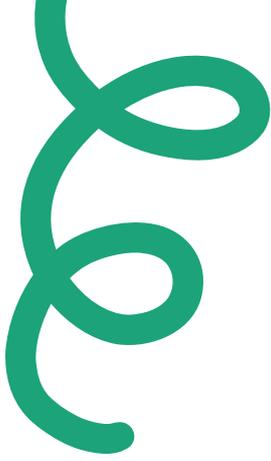
Sherifat focused on youth empowerment, stressing, “Young people must have the space to express themselves and know their voices matter.” She advocated for creating safe spaces and promoting intergenerational dialogue to support youth leadership and engagement.

Raphiu underscored the critical role of men in the movement, stating, **“Men hold significant decision-making power... when they speak out against FGM, they can influence societal change.”** He emphasized that men’s support is key to empowering women and dismantling harmful practices.



Rafiu Olayinka Awolola, Senior Ambassador End FGM EU

These insights from our ambassadors demonstrate the collective effort needed—across generations, genders, and sectors—to accelerate the global movement to end FGM.



As the 10th Anniversary event came to a close, our ally **Lydia Mutyebele Ngoi**, Deputy Mayor of Brussels, shared powerful closing remarks, emphasizing the vital role of civil society in the fight to end FGM.

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Civil society is crucial to the work we are doing[...] During my mandate, I ensured that female genital mutilation was on the agenda and advocated for additional financial resources to support civil society organizations.

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Lydia Mutyebele Ngoi, Deputy Mayor of Brussels

We are deeply grateful for Lydia's dedication, not only for prioritizing FGM during her mandate but also for her continued advocacy in securing the necessary support to tackle this harmful practice. Her closing words reinforced the importance of collaboration and sustained funding in driving meaningful change. We thank Lydia for her unwavering commitment and for closing the session on such a powerful note.



Celebrating Milestones and Looking Ahead



As we celebrate the 10th anniversary of End FGM EU, we reflect with pride on the incredible progress made over the past decade. From strengthening laws and policies to raising awareness through impactful campaigns like #MyVoiceMatters, #FGMisPatriarchy, and #FGMIsMyIssueToo, our collective efforts have made significant strides in the fight against FGM. The development of the End FGM EU Interactive Map, which helps track progress and identify areas in need of attention, and projects like the End FGM E-Campus and the Purple Chair Podcast have further amplified our reach and mobilised action across Europe. We are deeply grateful for the dedication and passion of all our partners, ambassadors, MEPs, and allies who have supported us throughout these ten years and have been integral to these achievements. Your unwavering commitment to this cause has been invaluable, and together, we have made a real difference. We are incredibly proud of the collective impact we've achieved, but we know that the journey is far from over.

[Download our 10 years infographic to learn more.](#)

Join the Movement – Shaping A Future Free From FGM

The future calls for continued collaboration and action to ensure every woman and girl is free from the threat of FGM. We invite all stakeholders—policymakers, civil society, and individuals across Europe and beyond—to join us in this mission. Let us continue to drive change, implement new policies, and work towards a world where FGM is no longer a reality ([Read our recommendations for EU decision-makers](#)). Together, we can build a future free from this harmful practice, where every girl has the opportunity to live her life free from violence. Stay engaged, stay committed, and let's continue the fight for a world where FGM is a thing of the past.

