

**Intensifying global efforts for the elimination of female genital mutilation:
Report of the Secretary-General (A/RES/77/195)
Information provided by Austria**

Most recent data on female genital mutilation prevalence, including data on immigrant populations, if available.

- For Austria, there are estimates (2021) that 12 to 18 percent of girls from Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C)-practicing countries are at risk of female genital mutilation, which corresponds to a total number of approximately 735 to 1.083 girls aged 0 to 18 years. Due to the lack of reliable data on the prevalence of FGM/C among migrant populations in Austria, the Federal Chancellery commissioned an empirical study in 2023, which is currently being conducted by the Medical University of Vienna in collaboration with the Women's Health Centre FEM Süd. The results of this study should be available in summer/fall 2024.

Information on root causes and factors contributing to the practice of female genital mutilation.

- The practice FGM/C is influenced by a variety of social, cultural, religious, and economic factors. Cultural traditions play a crucial role, as FGM/C is often seen as a longstanding cultural practice passed down through generations. In some communities, the performance of FGM/C is considered a requirement for the marriageability of girls, increasing the pressure to continue the practice.
- Social acceptance and peer pressure are additional driving factors, as in some societies FGM/C is perceived as necessary for social acceptance and recognition. The pressure to conform to social norms can lead girls and women to accept and perpetuate the practice.
- Control of female sexuality is also a significant aspect. In some cultures, FGM/C is viewed as a means of controlling female sexuality to ensure fidelity in marriage or to reduce sexual desire. Widespread health myths and misconceptions, particularly regarding hygiene, fertility, or beauty, also contribute to the continuation of the practice.
- Gender inequalities are closely linked to FGM/C, as control over the female body and sexuality is used as a tool for the suppression of women and girls. Understanding these complex causes and factors is essential for developing effective prevention measures and supporting affected communities in ending this harmful practice.

Information on progress made to date to eliminate female genital mutilation, including:

- Measures and approaches undertaken to ban female genital mutilation and/or enforce existing legislation criminalizing the practice;

- Article 85 (1 (2a)) of the Austrian Penal Code (bodily harm with serious long-term adverse effects) specifically addresses genital mutilation.
 - There are differing penalties for FGM/C, depending on whether it was committed with intention or deliberately and depending on the outcome.
 - Under Article 85 (1 (2a)) in connection with (2), injuring a person and thereby causing, even negligently, a permanent or long-lasting harm, such as a mutilation or other injury to the genitals that is likely to cause lasting impairment of sexual sensation, is punishable by imprisonment for one to ten years.
- Measures undertaken to introduce policies and/or action plans to address and prevent female genital mutilation;
 - The National Action Plan on the protection of women from violence for 2014-2016¹, included one measure explicitly concerned with FGM/C, namely the sensitisation of the support system at schools (school psychologists, counselling teachers, school doctors) on the topics of "early marriage, forced marriage, FGM/C and domestic violence."
 - Establishment of a Coordination Center for Female Genital Mutilation (FGM/C) on September 15, 2021, as a central point of contact for affected individuals and institutions providing support to women and girls nationwide. This Center was set up at the Women's Health Center FEM Süd and is funded by the Federal Chancellery.
 - The focus on education and prevention work is considered a key goal of the Coordination Center – successful efforts in this area will help protect the next generation. This creates a multiplier effect that provides long-term protection for girls and women.
 - Nationwide prevention workshops targeting boys and young men from honour-based cultural backgrounds are being conducted.
 - Results of a scientific study examining FGM/C in Austria, including the number and attitudes of those affected, as well as medical approaches and available services, are expected in summer/fall 2024.
 - Delivery of essential support services for survivors and women and girls at risk of undergoing female genital mutilation;
 - The Austria-wide FGM/C Coordination Center² provides essential support services for survivors of female genital mutilation (FGM/C) and women and girls at risk, including medical care, psychosocial support, legal assistance,

¹ https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/dam/jcr:7f34910e-353d-471f-a22a-3f3d1530d393/NAP_2014-2016_Umsetzungsbericht_Maerz_2018.pdf.

² See <https://fgm-koordinationsstelle.at/>

education and awareness, community support, as well as networks and resources. The aim is to be a point of contact for people seeking help, experts, professionals and communities and to network all stakeholders

- The National Coordination Point for Women's and Gender Health³, which was established to accelerate the implementation of the National Action Plan on Women's Health, addresses FGM/C-related violence and plays an awareness-raising role in this regard.
- The interdisciplinary FGM/C advisory board of the City of Vienna meets regularly under the direction of the Vienna Programme for Women's Health. It is comprised of experts from the fields of medicine, obstetrics and women's health as well as representatives from various areas of the city administration. The FGM/C advisory board carries out structural work in prevention and provides important impetus for the medical care of those affected in Vienna.⁴
- The Federal Ministry for Social Affairs drafts the Women's Health Report 2022 and the Menstrual Health report (not published yet), which both include references to FGM/C. The Women's Health Report 2022 includes information on best practice examples against FGM/C, whereas the menstrual health report addresses FGM/C in connection with menstruation.
- Under the leadership of the Vienna Programme for Women's Health under the City of Vienna and as part of the FGM/C advisory board in Vienna, experts in gynaecology, women's health, psychology and paediatrics, representatives of the Vienna Medical Association, the Austrian Board of Midwives and relevant departments of the city administration such as child and youth welfare, health, women, integration, children's and human rights, meet regularly. The advisory board carries out structural work in prevention and, as an interdisciplinary advisory board, can provide important impetus in the medical care of those affected.
- The Vienna Programme for Women's Health offer a one-hour e-learning programme for professionals to learn about the dangers of FGM/C.⁵ It has also produced multilingual folders to educate parents and relatives of girls from countries where FGM/C is widespread.
- Other examples of good practice examples include the INTACT project, implemented by the women's health NGO FEM Süd⁶ and Women CARE. The

³ See https://goeg.at/frauen_gender

⁴ <https://www.wien.gv.at/gesundheit/beratung-vorsorge/frauen/frauengesundheit/schwerpunkte/gewalt/fgm.html#:~:text=FGM%20%2DBeirat%20der%20Stadt%20Wien,verschiedenen%20Bereichen%20der%20Stadtverwaltung%20an>

⁵ See: <https://www.wien.gv.at/gesundheit/beratung-vorsorge/frauen/frauengesundheit/schwerpunkte/gewalt/fgm.html>

⁶ See <https://femsued.at/arbeitsbereiche/intact/>

INTACT project trains FGM/C peers in counselling, support and awareness-raising so that those affected are treated sensitively and empathetically. Women CARE is a free service provided by the Austrian Red Cross for immigrant girls and women affected by violence.

- Engaging men and boys, including traditional and faith-based leaders, women's rights organizations/survivors' groups, and health care workers as part of strategic movement building and social norm change;
 - Engaging men is seen as a crucial action in order to fight FGM/C in Austria. MEN, the Men's Health Center, is an institution that has specialized in advising and informing men and boys on all health-related matters since its founding in 2002. Therefore, MEN in cooperation with the FGM/C Coordination Center hosts specialised workshops.
 - The Center implements health promotion projects and takes into account the diverse and specific needs of men and boys. MEN focuses on training male peers and conducting workshops with relevant male target groups. These workshops also include male-specific measures on the topic of FGM/C. The work of MEN plays an important role in involving men and boys in the fight against female genital mutilation, as they provide a safe space for men to discuss and engage in health issues. MEN aims to contribute to the cessation of FGM/C and other forms of violence against women and girls through male-specific educational efforts.

- Measures and approaches undertaken to protect women and girls from female genital mutilation, including when the practice occurs outside the country of residence.
 - The Austrian Criminal Code extends criminal liability under certain circumstances to performing FGM/C abroad. Therefore, if the offender or the victim is an Austrian citizen or has his/her habitual residence in Austria performing FGM/C abroad is punishable under Austrian Law. Furthermore, parents who arrange FGM/C or do not prevent it, are also liable to criminal offences as accomplices in Austria.

- Measures and approaches undertaken to address female genital mutilation in complex emergencies and protracted crises.
 - The FGM/C Coordination Center is the responsible key player in this regard for all forms and cases of female genital mutilation, including complex emergencies and protracted crises.

Information on challenges to eliminating the practice of female genital mutilation.

- The eradication of FGM/C faces various challenges, such as deeply rooted cultural practices, lack of awareness, social pressure, inadequate legal enforcement, limited access to healthcare services, and resistance to change. A comprehensive and coordinated strategy is necessary to advance the elimination of FGM/C. Patriarchal structures and gender inequality further complicate the eradication of FGM/C. These structures can lead to women and girls lacking autonomy over their own bodies and being oppressed. Dealing with these structures requires a holistic approach that also includes empowering women and promoting gender equality. The increasing migration to Austria from countries where FGM/C is more widespread is also leading to increased case numbers and challenges in women's health work in Austria.

Information on financing made available, including to survivor-led movements, to address and prevent female genital mutilation, if available.

- The Directorate-General for Integration, Office of Religious Affairs and Ethnic Groups and the Directorate General for Women and Equality located in the Austrian Federal Chancellery are currently funding specialised counselling facilities for women affected by FGM/C:
 - FGM/C Coordination Centre which was established in October 2021 as the central contact point for those affected as well as institutions
 - FEM Süd - Women's Health Centre (Vienna) - FGM/C among other topics
 - African Women's Organisation (Vienna) - Bright Future counselling centre with a focus on FGM/C
 - Orient Express (Vienna) - focus on forced marriage and honour-based violence, also FGM/C
 - Divan (Graz) - focus on forced marriage and honour-based violence, also FGM/C
- The Federal Ministry of Social Affairs in cooperation with the African Women's Organisation has supported the prevention and elimination of female genital mutilation in Austria through counselling and support for African women and girls since 2009, i.a. within the framework of the National Action Plan for the protection of women from violence for the years 2014-2016. These measures continue to be implemented. For the period 1st July 2023 to 30th June 2024, the Federal Ministry for Social Affairs funds the African Women's Organisation with € 40,000 for their work on the prevention and elimination of FGM/C in Austria.

- The Austrian Development Agency (ADA) has funded five civil society projects with around EUR 5.54 Mio. to support the fight against FGM/C in Burkina Faso and Ethiopia during the reporting period. In addition, ADA supported the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme to Eliminate FGM/C with EUR 2.5 million up until December 2023. Through these interventions, ADA can report that around 100.000 people indicated a change of attitude due to awareness raising/information/advocacy for avoidance of FGM/C. In addition, over 100,000 girls and women received medical treatment and counselling as part of the projects.