

STOP FGM Act
2021 Annual Report of the Attorney General

I. Background

The Department of Justice (DOJ) submits this annual report to the United States Congress pursuant to Section 4 of the *Strengthening the Opposition to Female Genital Mutilation Act of 2020* or the *STOP FGM Act of 2020*, P.L. 116-309 (codified at 34 U.S.C. § 41312). Section 4 of the Act states:

Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act [January 5, 2021], and annually thereafter, the Attorney General, in consultation with the Secretary of Homeland Security, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, and the Secretary of Education, shall submit to Congress a report that includes—

- (1) an estimate of the number of women and girls in the United States at risk of or who have been subjected to female genital mutilation;*
- (2) the protections available and actions taken, if any, by Federal, State, and local agencies to protect such women and girls; and*
- (3) the actions taken by Federal agencies to educate and assist communities and key stakeholders about female genital mutilation.*

II. Required Reporting

In preparing this report, DOJ consulted with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Department of State (DOS), the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the Department of Education (ED).

1. An estimate of the number of women and girls in the United States at risk of or who have been subjected to female genital mutilation

In 2016, authors from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [published indirect estimates](#) that indicated that in 2012 as many as 513,000 girls and women in the United States could have experienced FGM or be at risk of experiencing it in the future.

In 2020-2021, the CDC Division of Reproductive Health, with funding from DOJ's National Institute of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), and HHS's Office on Women's Health, led the Women's Health Needs Study (WHNS) to expand understanding of the population of women in the United States who have experienced or have potentially been at risk for FGM. WHNS is a community-based, cross-sectional study of women aged 18-49 who reside in the United States and who were born or whose mothers were born in a country where FGM is common. It complements previous research by implementing a standardized questionnaire to a sample of women from multiple high-prevalence countries who reside in four major United States metropolitan areas. WHNS includes information on the participants'

background characteristics, FGM experiences, health outcomes potentially associated with FGM, attitudes, and beliefs about FGM, contraceptive use, childbearing experiences, and access to/use of preventive health care services. [Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting \(FGM/C\) | CDC](#). The WHNS data collection has ended, and CDC has begun to analyze the data with reports/manuscripts to follow.

2. The protections available and actions taken, if any, by Federal, State, and local agencies to protect such women and girls

During 2021, Federal, State, and local agencies have engaged in a variety of initiatives aimed at protecting women and girls in the United States who have been subjected to, or who may be at risk of, FGM. Examples of those efforts include:

- In January 2021, a federal grand jury in Houston, Texas indicted a woman for taking a minor out of the United States for the purpose of subjecting her to FGM in a foreign country. This marked the first time that charges were brought under the provision of the federal statute that prohibits taking a girl out of the United States for the purpose of FGM. The case is being prosecuted by DOJ with investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and support from the Human Rights Violators and War Crimes Center. [Texas Woman Indicted for Transporting Minor for Female Genital Mutilation | OPA | Department of Justice](#).
- Federal law enforcement authorities actively investigate allegations of FGM within the United States and, if a United States citizen is involved, abroad. DHS's U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Homeland Security Investigations (ICE/HSI) and the FBI, with support from DOJ, attempt to identify, locate, and interview girls who are at-risk for FGM and/or may be travelling for the purpose of FGM. These agencies have taken steps to help protect girls who may be at risk of FGM, including collecting tips and leads from the public and partnering with non-governmental organizations that will relay information if they suspect a child is in imminent danger of being subjected to FGM or taken out of the country for purposes of FGM.
- DOJ's OVC awarded over \$5 million in three-year grants to support community projects around the country designed to increase direct services, education, and community partner engagement to stop the victimization of women and girls through FGM. These Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 and FY 2021 grants provide services to victims and survivors of FGM and targeted technical assistance to inform front-line providers on how to identify and serve FGM victims and persons at risk of being victimized. [DOJ announces nearly \\$3 million to address female genital mutilation and cutting \(ojp.gov\)](#).
- The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) adjudicates various forms of immigration relief that may be available to women and children who have experienced FGM, including T nonimmigrant visas (T visa), U nonimmigrant visas (U visa), and asylum.
- The Colorado Department of Human Services, Refugee Services, with a grant from DOJ's OVC, is engaging in efforts to combat FGM through community and clinical partnership and education, including by documenting community knowledge,

- beliefs and practices around FGM, enhancing referral mechanisms and procedures for FGM-related care and resources, and creating and delivering standardized FGM training to health professionals including by providing training in clitoral reconstruction.
- The Minnesota Female Genital Mutilation Prevention and Outreach Project, with a grant funding from DOJ's OVC, brings together diverse stakeholders to recommend, inform and coordinate FGM prevention and community engagement efforts, including by offering grants to organizations working in impacted communities.

3. The actions taken by Federal agencies to educate and assist communities and key stakeholders about female genital mutilation

In addition to the initiatives described above, during 2021, Federal agencies engaged in an array of outreach and education about FGM for communities and key stakeholders. Examples of those efforts include:

- ICE/HSI's "Operation Limelight USA" is a public engagement and education program aimed at educating the traveling public on FGM. This program provides information for survivors and reporting information for potential victims and is conducted at international airports across the United States, during times when there is a higher likelihood that children are being transported from the United States to countries where FGM is practiced. Operation Limelight USA was created and implemented by ICE/HSI with participation from DOJ.
- ICE/HSI and FBI have robust training programs designed to educate new and existing staff across the country about investigating and responding to allegations of FGM. These outreach programs provide field officer personnel, including special agents, intelligence analysts, and community outreach specialists, with introductory information about FGM and federal laws restricting such practices. In 2021, DHS held a virtual training open to all employees interested in learning about FGM and DHS initiatives to combat this practice.
- DOJ and DHS conducted a variety of trainings for local, state, and federal law enforcement (prosecutors, local and state police, child protective services professionals, and others) to raise awareness about the applicability of federal and state laws barring FGM, best practices for interactions with FGM survivors, and where to find support services. Similar trainings and meetings were also held for educators, immigrant and refugee service providers, and medical professionals. In FY 2021, ICE/HSI conducted 16 events and trained nearly 1,800 individuals; the FBI conducted 18 events.
- The United States released the first-ever U.S. National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality, which includes a focus on eliminating gender-based violence. The Gender Strategy notes FGM alongside child, early and forced marriage as a form of gender-based violence that undermines security and human rights in the United States and globally. [National-Strategy-on-Gender-Equity-and-Equality.pdf \(whitehouse.gov\)](#).
- DOJ's National Institute of Justice released an article titled "[Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: An Incomplete Picture of a Pressing Global Problem](#)," which provides

an overview of FGM, its roots in cultural traditions and beliefs, and the health risks it poses.

- ED's Office of Safe and Supportive Schools (OSSS) developed an [FGM/C in the United States and How Educators Can Help Fact Sheet](#) to raise domestic awareness of FGM in schools and communities.
- The CDC offers domestic screening guidance to inform providers who may be unfamiliar with FGM as well as those who treat newcomers in their clinical practice. CDC's guidance also encourages clinicians to inform newcomers that FGM is considered child abuse, and that it is illegal to perform FGM on a child in the United States or to take a child out of the country to undergo the procedure. <https://www.cdc.gov/immigrantrefugeehealth/guidelines/domestic/sexually-transmitted-diseases/index.html>.
- DOJ's OVC grant program is funding the development of an outreach campaign that will include sectoral-specific strategies to foster community-based prevention of FGM, identify at-risk individuals, and respond to FGM survivors and situations in impactful, safe, and culturally appropriate ways.
- Since 2013, a U.S. Government interagency group has met regularly to share information about outreach, education, and enforcement efforts and discuss a whole-of-government approach to dealing with FGM in the United States and abroad. Members include DOJ, HHS, DHS, ED, DOS, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). One coordinated outreach effort in 2021 was the issuance of statements by DOJ, DHS, and the Department of State to raise awareness about FGM and to mark the International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM on February 6, 2021. [DOJ, ICE Recognize International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting | OPA | Department of Justice; Observance of the International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting - United States Department of State](#); Joint Message on International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation – U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties.

III. Global Initiatives

Although the reporting mandated by the STOP FGM Act pertains to domestic initiatives, the Act also notes that FGM is a global problem which requires cooperation among nations:

Female genital mutilation is recognized internationally as a human rights violation and a form of child abuse, gender discrimination, and violence against women and girls. Female genital mutilation is a global problem whose eradication requires international cooperation and enforcement at the national level. The United States should demonstrate its commitment to the rights of women and girls by leading the way in the international community in banning this abhorrent practice.

Accordingly, we note that the United States has been engaged in the following global initiatives during 2021:

- Led by DOS and USAID, the U.S. Government virtually co-hosted the 2021 Annual “Donor Working Group” Meeting on FGM with UNICEF. Since 2001, the Donor Working Group on FGM has brought together key governmental and intergovernmental organizations and foundations committed to the global goal of eliminating FGM. The meeting focused on using innovative financing to meet global FGM elimination goals and included participation from multilateral organizations and donor countries.
- DOS contributed \$5 million to UNICEF to support the United Nations Population Fund-UNICEF Joint Program to End Female Genital Mutilation.
- U.S. global policy and program efforts focused on raising awareness about the harmful impacts of FGM, incorporating a focus on human rights as part of education and awareness-raising efforts, encouraging the enforcement of laws against FGM where they exist and passage in places where laws are weak or nonexistent, and raising the awareness and ability of medical providers of how to best identify and care for survivors of FGM. The United States supports targeted community-led and community-implemented programs and thoughtfully considers opportunities to engage local community and religious leaders.
- DOS hosted a Strategic Dialogue with Egypt that included a session on human rights where FGM was raised, with participation from DOJ, USAID and the Department of Defense.
- DOS, in coordination with USAID and the White House, held several consultations with civil society to inform the 2022 update of the *U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally*. One consultation focused specifically on girls and included a focus on FGM and child, early and forced marriage.