

# REPLACE 2

A new approach to  
end FGM



## Issue 8: International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation

6<sup>th</sup> of February 2015

### Policy developments on FGM in Europe

#### Italy

On 6th of February, Italian Chamber of Deputies is hosting a press conference called "Female Genital Mutilation in Europe: the Istanbul Convention to contrast the phenomenon", where Pia Locatelli, parliamentary and coordinator of the "Women's sexual health and right" group, Elly Schlein, member of the European Parliament, and representatives of AIDOS organisation will discuss about Italian and other countries policy progresses and actions after ratification of the Convention.

In 2006 Italy approved a law that bans FGM and a toll free number is ready to support victims and prevent the practice in our country. In 2013 the Government ratified Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). However violence against women is hardly denounced in Italy. Moreover, the nature of FGM is even more complicated by the fact that immigration is a relatively new issue, so members from FGM practising communities are often recently arrived only, therefore prevention and behaviour change policies and programmes are difficult to be implemented and assessed.

Indeed, there haven't been any FGM prosecutions in Italy, nor recent programmes of support. A part from the very well-known public commitment of other politicians and

## Las news on FGM behaviour change interventions with REPLACE 2

Following the work already done in UK and The Netherlands, intervention workshops with FGM affected communities are starting in Spain, Portugal and Italy. Those interventions have been tailored according to the results of previous community-based research in each city involved, by identifying behaviours that keep FGM as a risk of being practiced. Interventions will include sessions on topics such as sexual and reproductive health, gender equality or leadership and communication skills development, and will target community members motivated to end FGM in Barcelona and surroundings, Lisbon and Palermo.

#### UK

The first ever prosecution for FGM in the UK is currently being heard in court and has attracted great interest from the media. The verdict of the case will be critically analysed from multiple perspectives, including policy makers. There is now an increased interest by UK policy makers to show leadership to end the practice of FGM which has been illegal since 1985.

The Prime Minister hosted the Girls Summit in July 2014, an international event which resulted in numerous commitments at the international level but also the launch of a number of national policies on FGM. This included a school awareness programme; £1.4 FGM prevention programme by the Department of Health to improve the health response to FGM, as well as mandatory data collection on FGM and a new cross government FGM Unit. The government has also consulted widely on mandatory reporting on FGM for professionals which has resulted in many professionals questioning the merits of making reporting procedures for FGM different from other forms of abuse. At the same time the Communities Minister announced £270,000 for community projects on FGM.

Despite these policy gains on FGM in the UK, there are no targets and strategies for measuring these policies. UK clearly needs to develop a comprehensive national action plan on FGM that addresses prevention action with communities, protection of all girls at risk, effective prosecution and the provision of specialist support and care for those affected. Istanbul Convention which came into force in August 2014 clearly provides the needed framework for all of Europe, including the UK.

#### *Forward, UK*

parliamentarians such as Emma Bonino and Mara Carfagna (former Minister of Equal Opportunities), it doesn't seem to be a main priority for current Italian government lead by Matteo Renzi. As an example, Ministry for Equal Opportunities is now only a Department which shows a minor focus on gender issues.

Different public petitions have been addressed to raise awareness towards FGM. As an example, Plan Italia is leading a petition aiming at making that Government undertake pressure actions to other countries for the development of legislation or implementation of prosecutions where it is foreseen, support to health programmes for victims and dissemination of good practices among communities. Even if the current legislation is against the practice and programmes have been developed in the past, more emphasis should be put in order to support the identification of risk situations and to prevent the extension of the practice in Italy and other countries, through tailored programmes for practising communities.

#### **CESIE, Italy**

#### **Portugal**

Portugal has a National Action Programme that is now on its third edition (2014-2017) which contributes to a grown awareness and intervention and prevention actions surrounding FGM. To this also contributes the Working Group, coordinated by the High Commission of Gender Equality that gathers the contribution from several state institutions (education, health, justice, foreign affairs, child protection services, police forces, etc.), NGO's and Community Based Organizations.

Excellent examples of this work are the several actions that happened last year on the celebration of the Zero Tolerance to FGM Day, on the 6th of February or the 25th of November on the International Day to



*Anti-FGM campaign in UK*

#### **"We cut our girls to protect them": The protection motive of FGM practice in Europe**

Most individuals, especially in western countries, are puzzled by FGM. They are often intrigued by why a parent would subject their girl to such 'abuse'. At the same time, those who practice FGM are likely to be surprised that others cannot appreciate the 'value' of the practice. They are likely to retort: "we don't abuse them [our girls] when we cut them, we are simply protecting them". Such remarks are in no doubt intriguing and need to be unpicked to fully understand some of the motives behind the practice of FGM in Europe.

As part of the REPLACE 2 project, a community based research was undertaken involving migrant communities in three EU countries (Italy, Spain and Portugal) in order to facilitate an understanding of the motives for FGM practice in Europe and also help design bespoke interventions for tackling the practice. The study findings, which will be published around spring of 2015, made interesting revelations on the drivers of FGM. The most striking of these among the Senegalese, Gambian and Bissau Guinean communities was the idea that FGM instils discipline and cultural values in girls which help them achieve their aspirations in future.

In many societies, the practice of FGM entails excision and educational rituals. Both of these aspects were perceived by some respondents to contribute to bringing up children in a proper manner. Many parents perceive that one of the reasons why girls become disobedient is due to excessive sexual drive during adolescence, and therefore FGM was necessary to curb such sexual drive and instil discipline in girls. Our findings show that migrant parents generally have high expectations for their girls and aspired for them to be well educated and eventually marry a 'proper man' - i.e. an educated man from the same ethnic group, country and religion. It was widely perceived that FGM will enable girls to achieve these dual aspirations as the circumcision will tame their sexual desire and make them to concentrate on their education while the initiation rites will better equip them with the appropriate demeanour to attract a 'proper man'.

Moreover, many parents were mistrustful and cynical about western parenting style which they argued affords children with too much protection and freedom. They perceived the child protection laws in their respective host countries as undermining their ability to bring up children in the proper "African way". As such they often feared that their children would become



Eliminate Every Kind of Violence Against Women, where several NGO's and community based organisations gathered to raise more awareness to FGM.

During the last and also during this year several important things happened and will happen: the Portuguese Health System has now a way to identify and provide data about cases of FGM (almost 50 were identified until now); specific orientations were produced to professionals of police and also to child protection services; a Portuguese prevalence study will come out during 2015; the 2nd and 3rd edition of a post graduated course on FGM to health professionals will happen in 2015; a new legislation with a specification of FGM as autonomous crime will come out soon. There's still a long way to make, but fortunately in Portugal we have really solid steps given which contributes to the recognition of Portuguese actions as good practices among Europe.

**Associação para o Planeamento da Família - APF, Portugal**

### Spain

In Spain, there is a scarce knowledge about the FGM, both considering its prevalence among the populations belonging to countries or ethnic groups where it is practised and the efficacy of the legal, political or social policies and measures so far implemented to eradicate it.

Nevertheless, it seems clear enough that the new Spanish Act ("Ley Orgánica 3/2005 de 8 de julio, de la Jefatura de Estado"), which modified the previous 6/1985 Organic Law in order to pursue this crime even when committed abroad provided that the perpetrators and the victims were in Spain, has meant a step forward towards the definite eradication of this practice.

From then on, a number of preventive and cautionary actions have been designed and implemented in order to avoid that, as this practice is prohibited in Spain, there are persons and families going to Africa in order to circumcise their daughters there. In this regard, a

delinquent and go astray as a result. Some parents were particularly concerned about their girls being exposed to a highly sexualised culture in their current environment, which was feared, could lead them to become sexually promiscuous. Thus, FGM was perceived as a partial solution for controlling girls and preventing them from engaging in sexual promiscuity.

In the practicing communities, it was a typical practice for children born in the diaspora to be sent to the home country to undergo 'cultural training', which for many girls mostly involved being subjected to FGM. It was widely believed that the initiation rites associated with FGM help girls to learn their position in society and to behave in a socially acceptable manner. Particularly, girls are believed to learn rules of etiquette around inter-gender and intergenerational communication and behaviour. Some parents were weary of their children assimilating into western culture, and the threat of their children abandoning their traditional culture. Thus, they found FGM as a way of countering the influence western values on their children and preserving their original traditional culture and identity.

These insights on the motives of the practice of FGM suggests that interventions that seek tackle FGM in the European context may need to nurture the trust and confidence of immigrants in the practicing communities on European values and ways of bringing up children. Parents need to be made to understand that there are many other ways of inculcating good cultural values and discipline in children at the household level than subjecting them to FGM.

**Dr Yussif Nagumse, Coventry University, UK**




*Community members participating in a training as part of FGM behaviour change intervention in The Netherlands.*

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number of Autonomous governs like those of Aragón, Catalonia and Navarra have an action protocol that gathers the preventative actions that must be carried out. These protocols are generally positively assessed. Unfortunately, in Spain at large, we do not have enough information or data regarding the actions carried out for us to be able to evaluate to what extent these actions are effectively contributing to the eradication of this practice.

***Gabinet d'Estudis Socials, SCCL***

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