

Katja's Welcome Remarks + Video Link

FGM Conference | Wed 5th February 2025 | 09:00

Good morning and thank you all for being here today, and indeed to the organisers for bringing us all together around this critical women's health issue that is jeopardizing so many lives. According to the United Nations Population Fund, "Today, over 230 million girls and women worldwide are FGM survivors. An estimated 27 million additional girls are at risk of undergoing Female Genital Mutilation in the next five years. In 2025 alone, nearly 4.4 million girls are projected to be at risk."

Those who manage to escape may seek asylum in new parts of the world, including here in Cyprus. These refugee women and girls need specialised support in their countries of asylum. Due to the long-lasting consequences and complications that can arise following FGM, survivors often need a lifetime of support with their physical and psychological health, and to become empowered to overcome the social and economic impacts they are likely to face. According to the WHO: "the treatment of the health complications of FGM is estimated to cost health systems US\$ 1.4 billion per year. Unless the practice is urgently brought to an end, these numbers are expected to rise."

It is internationally recognised that the practice of FGM violates a range of human rights of girls and women. Harmful practices in breach of international human rights law and standards cannot be justified on the basis of historical, traditional, religious or cultural grounds. FGM is considered a criminal act in all EU Member States. A girl or woman may seek asylum because she has been forced to undergo, or is likely to be subjected to, FGM and can qualify for refugee status under the 1951 Refugee Convention.

In 2015, FGM was included under the Sustainable Development Goals. Specifically, Goal Number 5 calls for "the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls, the end of all forms of gender-based discrimination, and the elimination of harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation." As such, the global community has committed to ending female genital mutilation by 2030.

The interagency Joint Programme between the UNFPA and UNICEF, leads the largest global programme to accelerate the elimination of FGM in 18 countries in Africa and Asia. This year's theme, "Stepping up the pace: Strengthening alliances and building movements to end FGM," underscores the critical need for collaboration.

Bringing an end to FGM is only possible through collective efforts. Building alliances and taking collaborative actions must involve civil society, governments, and non-governmental actors from grassroots to global levels. All relevant sectors – social, educational, health, religious, economic and political – must be engaged. The only way we can bring about positive change and bring an end to this harmful practice is together. That's why it is so important that we are all here today.

Let us now watch a short video about Ifrah Ahmed, an activist working to end FGM. Ifrah is a former refugee from Somalia and now a citizen of Ireland. She has been supporting UNHCR since 2014 and collaborating with the End FGM EU Network.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5dRp4ITiX10>