

CHAT Plus – Steering Group

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Authors

Associação para o Planeamento da Família (APF): [APF](#) has been promoting sexual health, choices, and rights based on gender equality in Portugal since 1967. Its mission is to "help people make free and responsible choices in their sexual and reproductive life." APF began working on female genital mutilation (FGM) in 2000, focusing on advocacy for women's and children's rights, sexual and reproductive health, and cooperation and development in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund, other UN agencies, research institutes, and European NGOs from several countries. *APF* is the Portuguese member of the End FGM European Network. Additionally, APF is one of the members in the technical monitoring

committee of the intersectoral working group on FGM, coordinated by the Comissão para a Cidadania e a Igualdade de Género (CIG).

Mara Alves Carvalho: A healthcare professional with extensive experience working on FGM-related issues, Mara Alves Carvalho is a specialist in Family Medicine at USF Arco Íris in Almada, one of the areas with a high prevalence of FGM cases in the Lisbon region.

Catarina Frade Moreira: A researcher whose work focuses on the abandonment of female genital mutilation, child marriage and early and forced marriages. Her contributions have centered on these critical issues in the context of her academic and fieldwork.

Alexandra Alves Luís: Co-founder of Mulheres sem Fronteiras has actively contributed to various initiatives, including the research project “Female Genital Mutilation in Portugal: Prevalence, Sociocultural Dynamics, and Recommendations for Its Elimination.” She has been involved in numerous prevention and support projects for girls and women who are survivors of FGM, promoting gender equality and preventing gender-based violence.

Fátima Amina Rafael: A religious teacher and representative of the Islamic Community of Palmela. Fátima Rafael has been actively engaged in awareness-raising and activism against female genital mutilation within her community organization.

Kadiatou Diallo and Aicha Darame: Two young agents of change who joined the discussion and reflection group on actions to combat FGM. They are representatives of the youth group involved in the CHAT Plus project.

Introduction

The discussion process for the preparation of this report was structured to ensure the representativeness and active participation of all involved. We held three in-person meetings, each lasting one hour, at the Instituto Português do Desporto e Juventude (IPDJ) on Saturdays to accommodate the availability of the members of the steering group.

To initiate the discussions, the recent work of APF in collaboration with the END FGM European Network was presented. This report aims to highlight the situation of Female Genital Mutilation in Portugal and provide concrete recommendations to combat it. It also seeks to frame FGM within the broader context of gender-based violence against women and girls, [using the Istanbul Convention as a tool to end female genital mutilation](#) (produced in coordination

between the Amnesty International End FGM European Campaign (the predecessor of End FGM EU) and the Council of Europe), to promote prevention, protection, prosecution and integrated policies.

During the process, the discussions initially focused on the proposals already presented. Additionally, contributions from the two young agents of change were incorporated and discussed to further proposals. These young agents also proposed that the whole group involved in the project should be heard. At the final meeting with the YCMs, was asked their insights about concrete actions to be implemented to end FGM in Portugal (see Annex 1).

In summary, the current situation and the proposals put forward by the steering group reflect the outcomes of our discussions. The first and second parts of the report are structured in accordance with the principles outlined in the Istanbul Convention. The third part incorporates feedback and insights from all involved parties, especially the contributions from the YCM, which are presented as an annex to this report.

Part I: Changes in comprehensive and co-ordinated policies, funding and data collection in the area of violence against women and domestic violence

Article 7: Comprehensive and coordinated policies

From 2009 to 2017 there were 3 specific National Action Plans (NAP) on FGM. All three FGM programmes have been systematically internally and externally evaluated and overviewed by the Intersectoral Working Group, with stakeholders from Ministries and NGOs. Therefore, the Secretary of State for Gender Equality concentrated all NAPs into a global strategy divided into 3 main areas: 1. Equality between women and men; 2. Violence against women (VAW), specifically domestic violence; 3. LGBTI. Reportedly, only the NAP on trafficking of human beings remains as a separate programme. In this new framework, FGM is inserted into the second area on VAW, under a subsection on “harmful practices”. This also entails that the Intersectoral Working Group will be dismissed because its mandate will become void. One extra attempt was made to implement a similar monitoring group in 2019, but only one meeting has been organised since 2019.

The disappearance of the Working Group – coordinating actions on FGM among government departments, international and national NGOs, and community-led organisations – represents a backslide. We observe that this is not sufficient to ensure meaningful civil society scrutiny over the government programmes, due to the necessity of having a very broad expertise on all the issues included in the NAP. Which consequently leads to less effective campaigns and poor funding quality (see below).

- **We recommend that the Portuguese government maintain an intersectoral coordinated body comprising governmental departments, civil society and communities to implement actions aimed at addressing FGM.**

Article 8: Funding

Portugal put in place a specific funding opportunity - *Apoio Técnico e Financeiro ao desenvolvimento de medidas, projetos ou ações de Prevenção e Combate à Mutilação Genital Feminina* - ‘within the scope of supporting immigrant associations and Non-Governmental Organizations, in the development of projects aimed at empowering women in communities affected by FGM and preventing and combating traditional Harmful Practices’¹. It was first launched in 2018 for projects lasting 12 to 18 months with a maximum funding of €10,000. The last call opened in 2023 with a total funding of €80,000.

While this initiative is commendable for providing smaller grassroots organizations and NGOs with accessible and flexible funding opportunities, we have observed some drawbacks. Specifically, the analysis and selection process for recipients has become less rigorous over time, leading to potential misuse of funds. Consequently, only a small portion of the budget allocated for this fund is effectively reaching grassroots organizations that are actively working on sensitive issues like FGM.

- **Applications for this fund should be more rigorously evaluated, with new funding criteria introduced. This will help ensure the fund effectively achieves its primary objective: providing sustainable support to community-based NGOs and other NGOs working to end FGM.**

Article 11: Data collection and research

When it comes to FGM there is a stark lack of data on the prevalence of persons at risk of undergoing FGM. The latest data available “[Mutilação Genital Feminina: prevalências, dinâmicas socioculturais e recomendações para a sua eliminação](#)” was presented in March 2015, based on the results of a census held in 2011, hence these numbers are more than 10 years old and are now too outdated to be trusted and used. Having up-to-date and accurate data is key to understanding the extent of the state of FGM in Portugal and will ultimately lead to better-targeted and more efficient actions, including when adopting action plans and budgeting for it.

- **We recommend that the Portuguese government undertake a new data collection campaign using an updated and improved methodology to gather accurate, current figures on FGM survivors and girls and young women at risk. Having up-to-date and reliable data is crucial for understanding the extent of FGM in Portugal and will enable more targeted and effective actions, particularly when developing action plans and allocating budgets.**

Part II: Information on the implementation of selected provisions in priority areas in the field of prevention, protection and prosecution

Article 12: General obligations

Portuguese government put in place a national campaign on [FGM](#), “*Cada Mutilação Genital Feminina rasga um futuro*”, launched in February 2024 which could be translated into “Every Female Genital Mutilation rips apart a future”

While the campaign's intention is to draw urgent attention to the severe impacts of FGM, it can be criticised for its lack of cultural sensitivity and potential to retraumatise survivors. By using strong and graphic language, the campaign risks alienating the very communities it aims to help. It might inadvertently reinforce feelings of shame and guilt among survivors, who may already be struggling with their experiences. Furthermore, such messaging can further stigmatise certain cultures, portraying them as barbaric without acknowledging the complex socio-cultural factors that perpetuate FGM. This approach can lead to resistance rather than cooperation from the communities where FGM is practiced, as they may feel attacked or misunderstood. To raise awareness about this practice, we regret that this campaign was not created and developed in collaboration with NGOs and CSOs specifically working on FGM. As a result, the campaign overlooks many critical aspects of FGM and employs language and a general approach that are highly detrimental and retraumatising for survivors, people at risk, and affected communities, undoing years of advocacy work by the civil society sector.

For a more effective and compassionate approach, the campaign could focus on empowering survivors and communities through education and support and by emphasising positive narratives of change and resilience. Engaging with local leaders, respecting cultural contexts, and highlighting successful efforts to end FGM from within those communities can foster a more inclusive and supportive environment. This approach not only respects the dignity of survivors but also promotes sustainable change by building on existing cultural strengths.

- **We urge the Portuguese government, in line with its obligations under the Istanbul Convention, to collaborate with NGOs and CSOs, especially those specialized in FGM, to develop effective, meaningful and targeted awareness-raising campaigns.**
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Article 15: Training of professionals

In order to tackle FGM and be able to support those affected, it is critical to engage all professionals who may encounter survivors or people at risk to make sure they can support them with a culturally and gender-sensitive approach. In order to offer adequate services to Survivors and people at risk it is crucial to put in place continuous training for professionals to enhance their capacity to provide effective and appropriate support which will lead to sustainable and long-term impact in ending FGM and its consequences. In particular, in Portugal there is a

severe lack of training for professionals and educators in the law enforcement sector despite them being frontline workers and often in touch with affected people. According to Portuguese legislation, reporting a crime to law enforcement and judicial authorities is compulsory for professionals, particularly when the victim is a minor. However, this legal obligation is often not complied with since, among other reasons, professionals (especially educators) are not aware of this obligation and fail to register the cases.

- **We encourage the Portuguese government to implement ongoing training for law enforcement officials and all professionals working with survivors, at-risk girls and affected communities, ensuring it is culturally and gender sensitive. Additionally, FGM education should be integrated into school curricula on gender equality and sexuality, alongside the establishment of a comprehensive national training program for teachers and child educators.**

Article 22 – Specialist support services

Currently, there is a significant gap in the provision of specialized healthcare for women and girls who have survived FGM. This issue manifests in the absence of healthcare professionals trained to treat the physical and psychological complications associated with the procedure, including infections, chronic pain, childbirth problems, and psychological trauma. Additionally, the lack of healthcare facilities equipped to offer surgical repair interventions and psychosocial support further exacerbates the long-term impact of FGM on survivors. This absence perpetuates a cycle of neglect and exclusion, undermining these women’s fundamental rights to health and well-being.

- **The Portuguese government should establish multi-disciplinary healthcare services for FGM survivors, particularly in the areas with the highest prevalence (such as the Lisbon Region), through the National Health Service.**

Part III: Empowering Communities and Strengthening Multi-Sector Collaboration

Awareness-Raising and Community Involvement

Efforts to raise awareness about Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Portugal have often been inadequate, primarily due to their implementation by external organizations without meaningful involvement from members of the affected communities. The absence of local voices in these campaigns significantly reduces their effectiveness, as the messages lack cultural relevance and credibility within the target groups. Community members, particularly those directly impacted by FGM, are vital agents of change. Their in-depth understanding of cultural and social dynamics enables them to address harmful practices more effectively. However, the lack of

programs aimed at empowering these individuals to take the lead in such initiatives perpetuates myths, harmful practices, and resistance to adopting human rights-based approaches.

- **Awareness-raising initiatives and workshops for both professionals and the general public should be led by individuals with lived experience or those possessing culturally sensitive knowledge.**

Strengthening Interaction Between Services and Communities

The connection between social services, healthcare systems, and the education sector with communities affected by FGM is currently weak or non-existent. This lack of integration obstructs the identification of at-risk individuals, the support of survivors and the prevention of further cases. For example, healthcare professionals and educators often lack the necessary training to recognize signs of FGM or address the issue in a culturally sensitive manner. Similarly, social services face difficulties in engaging with isolated or marginalized communities, leaving survivors and those at risk without adequate protection and support. This disconnect allows FGM to persist unchecked, without appropriate intervention.

- **Train community mediators who are available to provide culturally sensitive intervention between services and affected communities. Create partnerships with schools and/or community centers as reference points for accessing services and disseminating information.**

CONCLUSION

The findings and recommendations presented in this report underscore the urgency of addressing FGM in Portugal through a holistic, culturally sensitive and collaborative approach.

Despite some commendable efforts, such as funding initiatives and national campaigns, significant gaps remain in policy coordination, funding allocation, data collection, professional training and community engagement.

To effectively combat FGM, it is essential to re-establish an intersectoral body to ensure sustained collaboration among government departments, civil society organizations (CSOs) and affected communities. Adequate funding mechanisms must be put in place to support grassroots organizations while ensuring rigorous evaluation to maximize impact. Furthermore, updated and accurate data on FGM prevalence is critical to inform targeted interventions.

The success of initiatives like awareness campaigns and professional training relies heavily on their cultural sensitivity and inclusivity. Survivors and community members must be

empowered as agents of change, with their voices shaping campaigns and interventions. Likewise, integrating culturally competent training across sectors, particularly healthcare, education and law enforcement, is vital to supporting survivors and preventing further cases.

Ultimately, a multi-disciplinary approach that centers on the lived experiences of survivors and prioritizes collaboration between services and communities will pave the way for meaningful progress. By adopting the recommendations outlined in this report, Portugal can strengthen its commitment to eradicating FGM and safeguarding the rights and well-being of women and girls.

Annex 1 – Considerations of the youth project participants

Education about FGM for children and adolescents;

Cooperation between services, communities, and the government;

Raising awareness through media, promoting more sensitive communication;

Follow-up care in the National Health Service (NHS) for women and girls from affected communities by community representatives;

Training healthcare professionals in positive communication and cultural sensitivity;

Greater involvement of young people;

Building bridges of dialogue between different structures.



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Folha de Presenças Steering Group

Data: 16/11/2024 Horário: 11H às 12H

Local da Atividade: IPDJ

	NOME	ASSINATURA
1	Fátima Amira Ribeiro	
2	Marek Plus Górczko	Marek Plus Górczko
3	Kadiatou Diallo	
4	Aicha Daramé	Aicha
5	Ana Soares	
6	Eliabete Fernandes	EF
7	Sónia Duarte Lopes	Sónia Duarte Lopes
8		
9		
10		



ASSOCIAÇÃO
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DA FAMÍLIA



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Folha de Presenças Steering Group

Data: 23/11/2024 Horário: 10H às 11H

Local da Atividade: IPD3

	NOME	ASSINATURA
1	Mano Dias Gonsalves	Mano Dias Gonsalves
2	Kadiatou Diallo	Kadiatou Diallo
3	Fihma Amine Fdau	Fihma Amine Fdau
4	Aicha Ousmane	Aicha Ousmane
5	Elisabete Fernandes	EF
6	Ana Soares	Ana Soares
7	Sonia Duarte Lopes	Sonia Duarte Lopes
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ASSOCIAÇÃO
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Folha de Presenças Steering Group

Data: 30/11/2024 Horário: 11 H às 12 H

Local da Atividade: IPDJ

	NOME	ASSINATURA
1	CATARINA FRADE MOREIRA	Catarina Frade Moreira
2	Marco Alves Garello	Marco Alves Garello
3	Alexandra Alves Luis	A. Luis
4	Estima Amine Rafael	Estima Rafael
5	Kadiatou Diallo	Kadiatou
6	Aicha Dalame	Aicha
7	Ana SOARES	Ana Soares
8	Elisabete Fernandes	EF
9	Soruz Duarte Lopes	<u>Soruz Duarte Lopes</u>
10		