

# FORWARD

*Safeguarding rights & dignity*

## Female Genital Mutilation



## Information Services & Support Guide



*For young people in the UK  
Stand Up! Speak Out!*



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## About FORWARD

**FORWARD** (Foundation for Women's Health, Research and Development) is an African Diaspora women-led campaign and support charity. **FORWARD** is dedicated to advancing and safeguarding the health and rights of African girls and women. **FORWARD** was founded in 1985 and operates mainly in the UK and Africa. We focus on tackling female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage. We have a vision where women and girls live in dignity, are healthy, have choices and equal opportunities. Our programme strategies include campaign and policy work; public education and training, advice and support, information and research; and community engagement.

### Young People Speak Out

*Young People Speak Out* is a project within **FORWARD's** Youth Programme. It trains young people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities to become campaigners and peer-educators on violence against women and girls, including FGM. The programme provides a safe space for young women and men aged 16-24 years, to develop their ideas, gain skills and explore ways to support themselves and those at risk. The programme uses youth-friendly and culturally sensitive methods including participatory training, workshops, film screenings and creative and interactive events to raise awareness.

For more information about this programme please contact the Youth Programme team on 020 8960 4000 or email: [youth@forwarduk.org.uk](mailto:youth@forwarduk.org.uk)

**FORWARD**  
*Safeguarding rights & dignity*

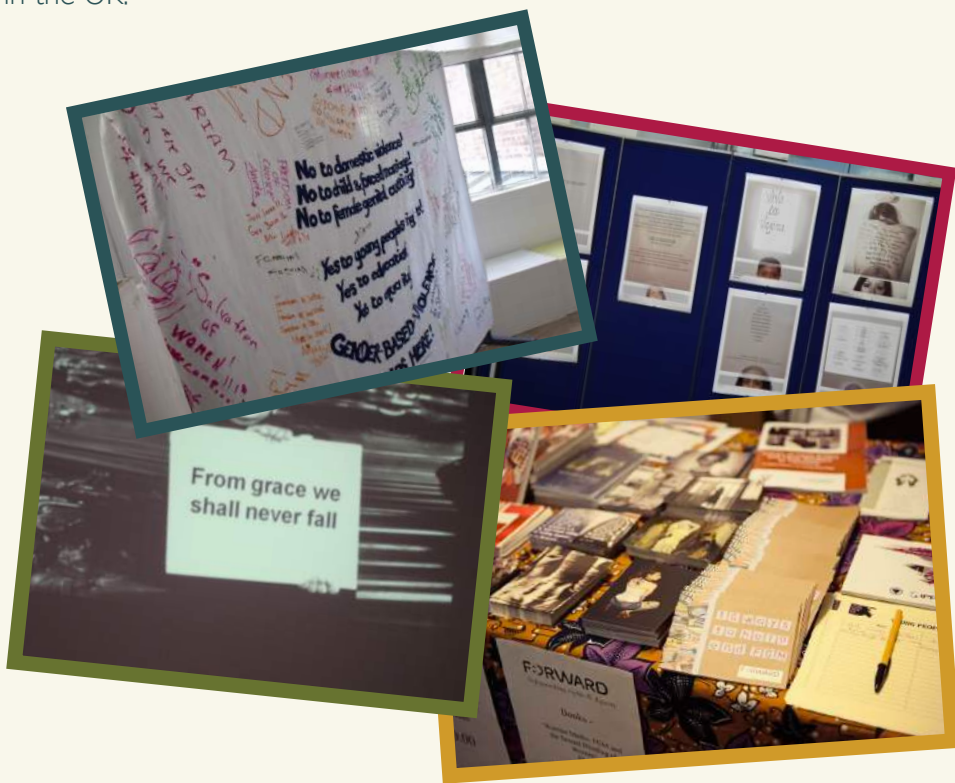
# Purpose of the ISS Guide for Young People

This guide has been developed as a youth friendly FGM resource for use in youth settings, including schools. It targets young people between 12 and 18 years old and forms part of **FORWARD's** schools resource pack.

The first section provides basic information on FGM and related health and social issues. It aims to increase awareness of the UK law and child protection issues.

The second section provides information for those who require specialist health and support services.

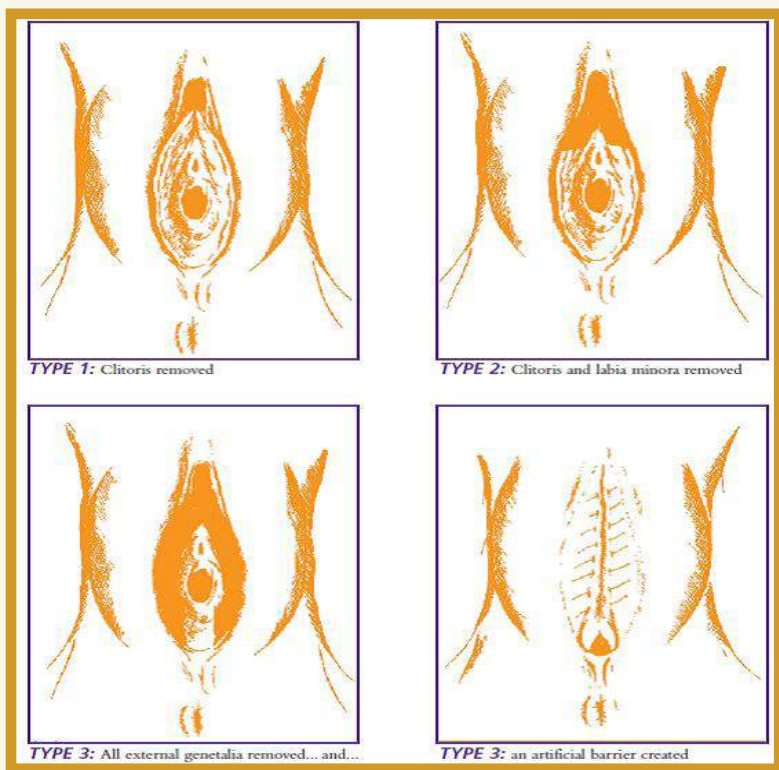
The final section provides information on **FORWARD's** campaign to end FGM in the UK.



# What is Female Genital Mutilation?

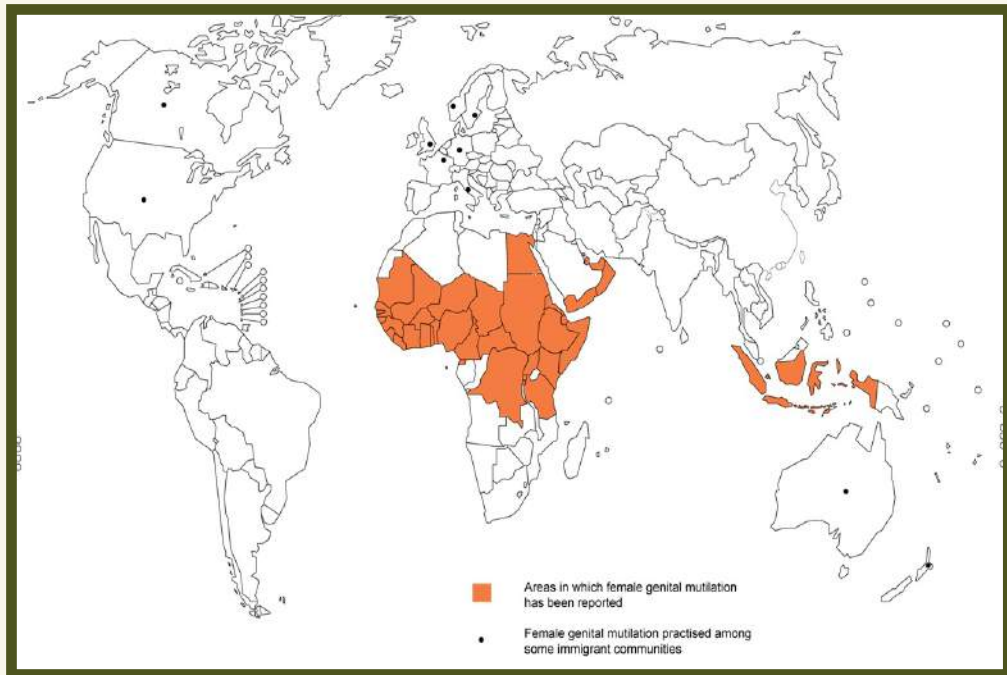
Female genital mutilation, or FGM as it is commonly called, is a practice that involves the removal of a girl's external genitals. FGM can take place when the girl is still a baby, during childhood, adolescence or at the time of marriage. FGM is sometimes called female genital cutting (FGC) or female circumcision (FC), although it bears no resemblance to male circumcision.

There are different types of FGM, based on the extent of the cut made. This includes Type 1, Type 2, Type 3 or Type 4. The type practiced may depend on the community's tradition and reason for the practice.



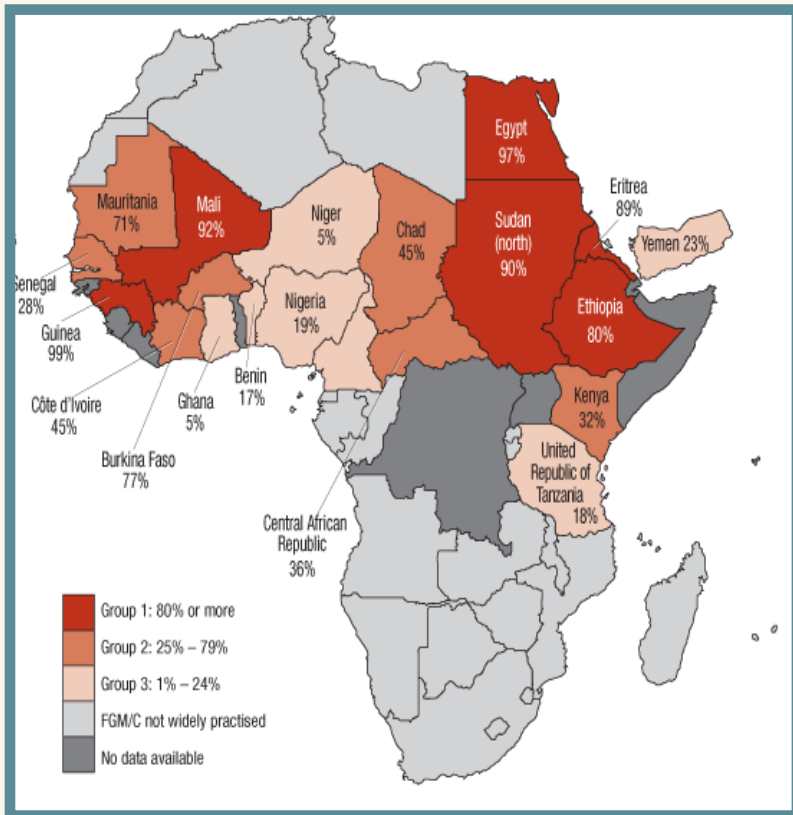
# Where is FGM practised?

FGM is practised in at least 28 African countries, in some communities in the Middle East and Asia, and increasingly among migrant communities in Europe, New Zealand, Australia, the United States, and Canada.



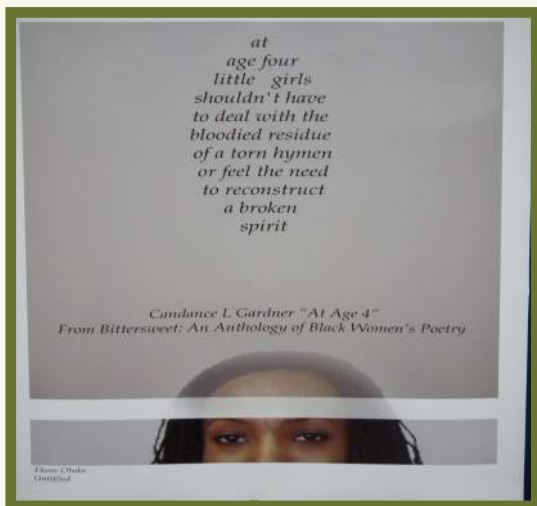
Between **100 and 140 million** women and girls worldwide have undergone FGM according to the World Health Organisation.

Each year about **three million girls** are at risk of FGM in Africa alone. This is because Africa is the continent most affected by FGM.



## What is the origin of FGM?

FGM is a cultural practice that pre-dates Christianity and Islam. Nobody knows the real origins of FGM. Some people say that it began in the days of the Pharaohs in ancient Egypt. What we know today: FGM is a cultural practice that causes harm, is unnecessary and is a violation of a girl's right to have control over her body.



### Did you know?

A form of FGM was performed on women in England until the 19th century. It was considered a good way of preventing women from sleeping with lots of men. Some doctors even used Type I FGM to try to 'cure' women of lesbianism.

## Who is at risk of FGM?

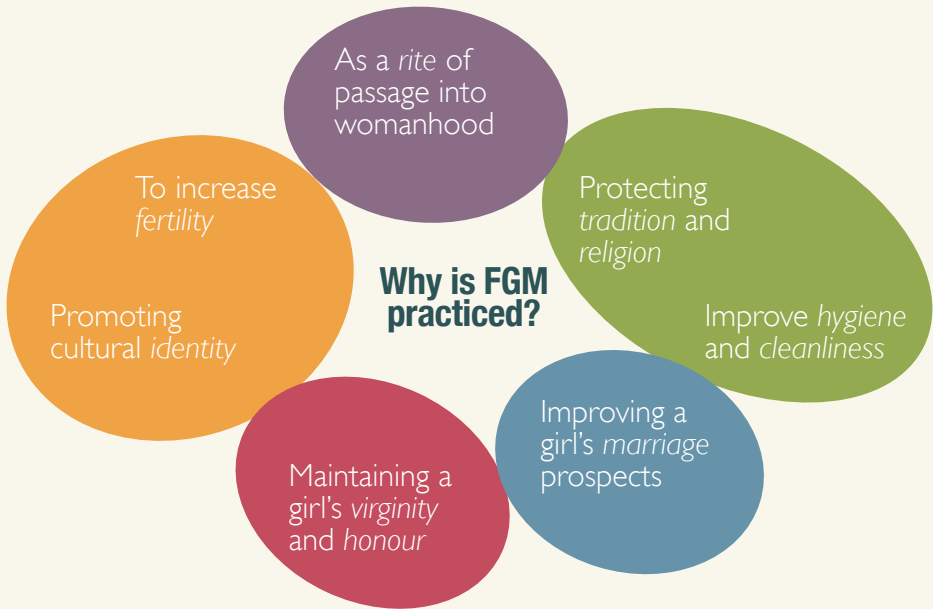
Some girls who come from FGM affected communities may be at risk of FGM, even if they live in the UK. If the mother or older sisters have already undergone FGM, then it is highly likely that the younger girl will be at risk. As FGM is illegal in the UK, girls may be taken abroad especially during summer holidays, for FGM to be performed.

Not all girls from FGM affected countries have undergone FGM. There is growing awareness about stopping FGM in many countries in Africa and Europe. Many communities living in the UK are now stopping FGM; however people are reluctant to say so.



# Why is FGM practised?

Many reasons have been given for the practice of FGM. They include the following:



In reality, there is often more than one reason given by communities for FGM. The majority of these reasons are based on myths and misinformation. Communities also put pressure on individuals to practice FGM. Many songs, proverbs and poems help to justify the reasons.

**Families think FGM is in the girl's interests.**

**Many girls are brought up to believe that FGM is acceptable.**

**FGM is NOT acceptable or beneficial.**

## What are some of the myths that support FGM?

In most FGM-affected communities, there are myths that support the practice and tend to influence people's attitudes about FGM. Here are ways to respond to these myths:

<b>Myth:</b>	<b>Fact:</b>
An uncut woman will become promiscuous and have an huge sexual appetite.	FGM makes no difference to a woman's sexual appetite but may stop her from enjoying sex. Sexual appetite mainly arises from hormones secreted by glands in the brain.
If the clitoris is not cut, it will continue to grow.	The clitoris stops growing after puberty and is still small at the final stage of growth.
If the clitoris is not cut, it will harm her husband during intercourse.	The clitoris gives a woman sexual pleasure and does not cause any harm to her or her husband.
If the clitoris is not cut, it will harm the baby during delivery.	The clitoris causes no harm to the foetus, the child or the mother, whereas FGM may cause serious complications during childbirth.
If a woman does not undergo FGM, she will become infertile.	FGM has nothing to do with fertility; and FGM may actually cause infertility because of infections.
If a woman does not undergo FGM, her genitals will smell.	FGM will not make the vagina any more hygienic. In fact, Type 3 FGM can make the vagina less hygienic.

## What's religion got to do with FGM?

Some people think FGM is an important part of their religion. There is no evidence to suggest that FGM is required by Islam, Christianity, Judaism or any other traditional religion.

Many Islamic scholars around the world have condemned the practice of FGM and are clear that FGM is not an Islamic requirement. Islamic scholars and clerics have stressed that Islam forbids people from inflicting harm on others, and that those putting their daughters through FGM, are going against the teachings of Islam. However some scholars argue that FGM is an Islamic obligation.

FGM is not only practised by Muslims but is also common among Christians, particularly Coptic Christians in Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia. There is no evidence in the Bible to suggest that FGM is required by Christianity.

FGM also takes place among some Bedouin Jews and Falashas (Ethiopian Jews). Although Judaism considers circumcision essential for males, it does not require the practice for females.



'FGM is a harmful practice and a clear case of child abuse. It is a form of reverse racism not to protect these girls from harmful practices that take from their God-given right to an intact natural body.'

*Dr Yunes Teinaz, Islamic Cultural Centre*

'FGM is a clear violation of the human rights of the woman... FGM has neither been mentioned in the Quran nor in Sunnah, the two main sources of Islamic law; Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) did not circumcise his four daughters; FGM is not an Islamic requirement.'

*Prof. Gamal Solaiman, The Muslim College, London*

# FGM in the UK

In 2007 it was estimated that **over 24,000 girls under the age of 15 could be at high risk** of FGM Type 3 in England and Wales. However, the exact numbers of girls and women affected by FGM is not known, because this information is not collected in the UK. The lack of data collected makes it difficult for professionals to know the true extent of the problem of FGM.

## The UK Law – FGM Act 2003

Practising FGM is a criminal offence in the UK. **The offence can result in 14 years in prison or a fine – or both.**

## Who is protected by the FGM law?

The FGM law protects girls and women who are either British nationals or UK permanent residents and prevents their parents or guardians from taking them outside of the UK for FGM.

The Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 makes it illegal to help, support or arrange for FGM to be performed on a girl in the UK. It also forbids taking a girl outside the UK to have FGM.

**ALL** girls, however, no matter their immigration status, are protected while they reside in the UK from FGM and all other forms of child abuse through the UK Child Protection laws and the FGM Act of 2003.

Local Authorities may use their powers under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 if they believe that any child is at risk of, or has already undergone FGM. Local Authorities can also prevent a girl from being taken abroad for FGM if they consider the child to be at risk.

UK guidance on FGM which came out in 2011 provides information for professionals to identify and support girls at risk of FGM. For more information on the guidance visit: [www.fco.gov.uk/fgm](http://www.fco.gov.uk/fgm)

**FGM is a human rights violation** and can harm girls and women. Additionally, FGM can affect the education of girls and ultimately impair their health, development and well-being.

## What are the health effects of FGM?

FGM is traditionally carried out by women who are often not medically trained. FGM is also now being practised by trained medical personnel including midwives, nurses or doctors. No matter the method or who is performing FGM, the practice could still lead to serious health consequences.

FGM can result in physical and emotional problems, and sometimes death. These can be short-term or long-term. Examples of health problems include:

- severe loss of blood;
- severe pain or shock;
- difficulties in passing urine or menstruating;
- urinary tract infections;
- increased risk of HIV infection;
- complications in pregnancy or childbirth;
- difficult or painful sex; problems with sexuality;
- mental health problems, e.g. post-traumatic stress disorder or anxiety disorder, related to the trauma of FGM.

Not all girls and women who have undergone FGM experience health problems. Others may not be aware of these problems, or may not perceive them to be unusual or related to FGM, especially if they occur many years after the procedure.

In the same way, not all health practitioners may link these health problems to FGM, especially if they do not know that the patient has undergone FGM.

**It is very important that if you have undergone FGM that you tell your nurse or GP if you are having any problems, infections or pain, so that you can get the right help and support.**

## Where can you find specialist FGM services?

Girls and women who have had FGM and experience health complications can access specialist health services that meet their specific needs. In the UK, health providers are increasingly becoming aware of FGM, but this may not be the case in all areas.

### GP

Your GP, or health care professional, such as a midwife or health visitor, has a role to help with any health problems, including those associated with FGM. Make an appointment with them if you need any health advice. You can also ask them to refer you to an FGM specialist service.

### Specialist FGM health clinics

Some hospitals and clinics also provide specialist FGM services. These free specialist services provide a wide range of medical support, advice and information to girls or women that have undergone FGM. Many of these clinics have health care experts, including:

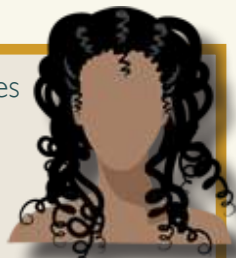
- specialist nurses or midwives
- consultants
- counsellors
- outreach workers from BME communities

Staff at the specialist clinics have extensive experience in dealing with FGM and understand the cultural reasons behind the practice. They are not there to judge you, but are there to help.

Some specialist clinics are able to provide a simple operation called de-infibulation. This opens up the closed form of Type 3 FGM and helps to restore the natural vaginal opening.

**Remember, you may not always need a referral** from your GP to access services available at some of the specialist clinics.

Some clinics have restrictions about who they can see; you can find more information about the clinics by calling **FORWARD**.



"I sometimes find coping with FGM difficult and found it hard to talk to my mother about the health difficulties and pain I was experiencing. Nevertheless, after getting de-infibulated in London, I have found that I have become a stronger and more confident person."

*Salimata*

# What if you are worried that someone is at risk of FGM?

If you are worried that you, your friend, or your sister is at risk of FGM here in the UK or of being taken abroad for FGM, it is very important that you do something to stop FGM from taking place.

Remember, FGM is against the law and is harmful to girls. Sometimes the warning signs may only be rumours, but it may be worth telling someone to be on the safe side. You will only be seen to be helping in the long run.

**Take immediate action:** You can get help and advice. Do not stay silent.

- Talk to a trusted adult about the situation – a teacher, school nurse, GP, family friend or close relative
- Call the contact numbers at the back of this information guide
- Contact Children and Young People's Services at your local council
- Speak to the Police Child Protection Team
- If the girl is at immediate risk, call the police on 999
- If you are abroad you can still contact the nearest British Consulate, Embassy, or High Commission for help.



"I had a friend who was circumcised at a much older age, she was about 13 years old and it was strange for her as she was aware of what was going on although she made them believe that she didn't understand. She was forced to go to the room and got bombarded by four women who pinned her down to the floor. This happened to her when she went on holiday; they cut her with no sewing."

*UK Young Woman*

# What will happen when you report FGM to professionals?

If you tell a teacher or school nurse about your concerns that someone is at risk of FGM this will be treated confidentially. This case will be referred for specialist care or to the child protection officer in the school.

- You will be trusted, listened to and taken seriously
- You may be asked more detailed questions
- The teacher will not usually make any assumptions
- This will be dealt with in confidence

Professionals are required to treat any reported case of FGM as a child protection issue and start a child protection referral. This means that Children's Services will treat this as a serious concern and organise a meeting to assess the case. This investigation will also try to find out if other siblings in the family are at risk. Parents may be part of this meeting to discuss the concern.

A girl will not automatically be taken away from her home. This will ONLY happen in rare cases when the parents fail to guarantee that they will not cut their daughter. Many professionals will be involved in a child protection case. They include teachers, nurses, children's services, the police and voluntary organisations. They all have a duty to help stop FGM in the UK.



"I didn't want to talk about it [FGM]... but when I found out the information I found more confidence to go out there and tell people. You can't be shy about it because you know you're stopping a bad thing and you might save your little sister. Now I know the information I'm more confident to speak out."

*Young Somali Male*



# Support services

\*\* Please note that the following information was accurate on June 2013\*\*

Acton African Well Women Centre, Acton Health Centre	35-61 Church Road Acton, West London, W3 8QE	020 8383 8761 020 8383 8712
African Women's Clinic, University College Hospital	Clinic 3, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Wing, NW1 2BU	0845 155 5000 ext. 2531
African Women's Clinic Women & Health	4 Carol Street Camden, London, NW1 OHU	0207 482 2786
African Well Women's Clinic, Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital	8th Floor – c/o Antenatal Clinic Lambeth Palace Road, London SE1 7EH	020 7188 6872 07956 542 576
African Well Women's Clinic, Whittington Hospital	Level 5 Highgate Hill, London N19 5NF	020 7288 3482 ext. 5954 079566257992
St. Mary's Hospital, Gynaecology & Midwifery Department	Praed St. London, W1 1NY	0203 312 6135
African Well Women's Clinic, Central Middlesex Hospital	Antenatal Clinic Acton Lane, London, NW10 7NS	020 8963 7177 020 8965 5733
Woodfield Medical Centre Antenatal Clinic	7e Woodfield Road W9 3XZ	020 7266 8822
Women's and Young People's Services, Sylvia Pankhurst Health Centre, Mile End Hospital	3rd Floor Bancroft Road, London, E1 4DG	020 7377 7870 020 7377 7898 020 8223 8322
West London African Women's Hospital Clinic	Gynaecology and Antenatal Clinics Chelsea and Westminster Hospital 369 Fulham Road, SW10 9NH	020 3315 3344
Nottingham University Hospitals City Campus, Labour Ward	Hucknall Road Nottingham, NG5 1PB	0115 969 1169 ext. 55124
Multi-Cultural Antenatal Clinic Liverpool Women's Hospital	Crown Street Liverpool, L8 7SS	0151 702 4085
Minority Ethnic Women's and Girls Clinic, Charlotte Keel Health Centre	Seymour Road Easton, Bristol BS5 0UA	0117 902 7111 (direct line) 0117 902 7100 (switchboard)
Birmingham Heartlands Hospital, Princess of Wales Women's Unit Labour Ward	Bordesley Green East Birmingham B9 5SS	0121 424 0730

## What is FORWARD doing to address FGM in the UK?

**FORWARD** (Foundation for Women's Health, Research and Development) is a leading African Diaspora women's campaign and support charity dedicated to advancing and safeguarding the sexual and reproductive health, rights and dignity of African girls and women. **FORWARD** works through strategic partnerships in Africa, Europe and UK.

We provide specialist advice and undertake innovative programmes and projects on the issues of FGM, child marriage and other related health and rights issues affecting African women and girls. **FORWARD** also campaigns for effective policies and resources to support women and girls affected by FGM and child marriage. **FORWARD** is a strong Diaspora voice in policy development, working through networks and strategic action in the UK, Europe and Africa.

**FORWARD** works directly with women and girls to raise their voices, articulate their needs and exercise their rights. We help develop leadership and skills of women and girls to support change. We also promote public awareness and equip professionals with skills and tools to support change and safeguard girls at risk.

"If you are worried about someone who is at risk of FGM or has had FGM, you must share this information with social care or the police. It is their responsibility to investigate and safeguard and protect any girls or women involved. Other professionals should not attempt to investigate cases themselves" – *UK Multi-Agency Practice Guidelines (2011)*

**Young People Speak Out (YPSO!)** is a program that empowers young people (aged 16 -24) from FGM affected countries with the skills to advocate within their local communities against FGM and child marriages. There are currently four areas in which the YPSO program functions: London, Birmingham, Bristol and Rochdale. YPSO organises training for young people on leadership, campaigning, advocacy and gender based violence skills with the aim of empowering young people to create positive changes in their community.

YPSO facilitates a number of activities that include: training young people, public awareness campaigns and events, youth friendly FGM resources and offering advice and support to those affected by FGM. Youth Advocates within YPSO facilitate and organise sessions in the community by working as peer educators and peer mentors.

The youth programme believes that youth advocacy is about passion in the face of adversity; about challenging the status quo; about challenging the expectation that young people are unable or unwilling to stand up and make a change. It is challenging the concept that youth are apathetic, that their voices are too timid, too quiet, too distanced, too inexperienced, too ignorant to have any impact! YPSO offers young people the chance to gain some skills and help create a change in their communities. Together we can help end FGM.

## Other FGM support organisations

### Organisation Contact Details:

Africa Advocacy Foundation Catford Office	76 Elmer Road, Catford, London, SE6 2ER	0208 698 4473
Black Women's Health and Family Support	82 Russia Lane London, E2 9LU	0208 980 3503 www.bwhafs.com
British Somali Community Starhouse	104-108 Grafton Road London, NW5 4BD	020 7485 2963 info@britishsomali.org
Concordia Community Enterprise Centre	Railway Arches 420-421 Burdett Road, Tower Hamlets, London, E3 4AA	020 7987 5833 info@oceansomali.org.uk
Manor Gardens Advocacy Project	London	020 7281 7694
Southall Community Alliance	Southall Town Hall, 1 High Street, Southall, Middlesex, UB1 3HA	020 8574 8855
Birmingham & Solihull Women's Aid	Birmingham	0121 685 8687 Option 0 or extn: 233
Black Association of Women Step Out BASWO Cardiff - Head Office	9 Cathedral Road, Cardiff, CF11 9HA	029 20644 633 info@baswo.org.uk
Somali Development Services	39 Abingdon Road, Leicester, LE2 1HA	0116 285 5888 extn: 204
Granby Somali Women's Group	12 Beaconsfield Street, Liverpool, L8 2UU	0151 727 1008
Waltham Forest Somali Women's Association	London	020 8503 7121
Iranian Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO)	London	020 7920 6460 info@ikwro.org.uk

## Additional Contacts

**Women's Aid** – National charity working to end domestic violence against women and children. Provides domestic abuse directory and national helpline. [www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk)

**National Domestic Violence Helpline:** 0808 2000 247 (24-hour free helpline)

**NSPCC** – National charity working in child protection and the prevention of cruelty to children. [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

**NSPCC FGM Helpline for Professionals:** 0800 028 3550 (24-Hr)

**Child Protection Helpline:** 0808 800 5000 (advice for adults worried about a child)

**Childline** ([www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)): 0800 1111 (24-hour free helpline for children)

**FPA** – The UK's leading sexual health charity. [www.fpa.org.uk](http://www.fpa.org.uk). FPA Helpline: 0845 122 8687 (Mon-Fri 9-6)

**Rights of Women** – National charity working to attain justice and equality by informing, educating and empowering women about their legal rights. [www.rightsofwomen.org.uk](http://www.rightsofwomen.org.uk)

**Family Law Advice line:** 020 7251 6577 (Mon 11-1; Tues/Wed 2-4; Thurs 7-9pm; Fri 12-2pm)

**Southall Black Sisters** – A resource centre in West London offering a service to women experiencing violence and abuse. [www.southallblacksisters.org.uk](http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk)  
Helpline: 0208 571 0800 (Mon-Fri 10-5; closed on Wednesday)

**Brook** – Free and confidential sexual health advice and contraception for young people up to the age of 25. [www.brook.org.uk](http://www.brook.org.uk)  
Brook Helpline: 0808 802 1234 (Mon-Fri 9-7)

\*Opening times accurate as at June 2013

## Other FGM-related terms and definitions:

<p><b>FGM:</b> Female Genital Mutilation; <b>FC:</b> Female Circumcision; <b>FGC:</b> Female Genital Cutting</p>	<p>Female genital mutilation is the removal of a girl's external genitalia for non-medical reasons</p>
<p><b>Excision</b></p>	<p>removal of the clitoral hood, with or without removal of part or all of the clitoris</p>
<p><b>Clitoridectomy</b></p>	<p>excision of the clitoris</p>
<p><b>Infibulation</b></p>	<p>(also known as <b>pharaonic circumcision</b>). Type 3 FGM; the most extensive form of FGM</p>
<p><b>De-infibulation</b></p>	<p>(also known as defibulation or <b>FGM reversal</b>): the surgical procedure to open up the closed vagina resulting from Type 3 FGM</p>
<p><b>Re-infibulation</b></p>	<p>(also known as <b>re-suturing</b>): the re-stitching of Type 3 FGM to re-close the vagina after childbirth (illegal in the UK)</p>
<p><b>Sunna</b></p>	<p>The traditional name for a form of FGM that involves the removal of the prepuce of the clitoris only. The word 'sunna' refers to the 'ways or customs' of the prophet Mohammed, (PBUH) considered (wrongly in the case of FGM) to be a religious obligation. However, the term 'sunna' is often used in FGM-practicing communities to refer to all forms of FGM.</p>

## Traditional terms for FGM:

Language	Term for FGM
Amharic	Megrez
Arabic	Khifad Khitan Tahoor Tahara
Harrari	Absum
Igbo	Ibi Ugwu
Kriolu	Fanadu di Mindjer
Limba	Bondo
Mandigo	Sunna Bondo
Mandinka	Kuyango
Musolula	Karoola Niaka
Mendee	Bondo Sonde
Somali	Gudiniin Halalays Qodiin
Soussou	Sunna
Swahili	Kutairi Kutari was ichana
Temenee	Bondo
Tigregna	Mekhnishab

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The second edition of the ISS Guide was redeveloped and reworked by Naomi Reid, **FORWARD's** Events and Special Projects Coordinator; Julie Christie-Webb, **FORWARD's** Former Head of UK programmes and Saria Khalifa, **FORWARD's** Youth Programme Lead. Support, advice and guidance was provided by Naana Otoo-Oyortey, **FORWARD's** Executive Director.

We are also grateful for all the young women who have volunteered on the Youth Programme and given their time and youth perspective on the ISS guide. We are particularly grateful to the numerous individuals, partners and statutory bodies and friends of **FORWARD** who commented on and contributed to the development of the guide at various stages.

Finally we would like to thank Youth Friendly the company who designed the revamped ISS Guide.



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