

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

Summary of Policy Brief

Islamic Relief is working to end the harmful practice of female genital mutilation/cutting by raising awareness of gender justice from an Islamic human rights perspective.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) affects 133 million females, with a further two million at risk of being cut every year. It is a cultural practice that varies in its severity and violates the rights of women and girls to live free from harm, violence and discrimination. FGM/C can cause gratuitous suffering, immediate and long-term health risks, complications in childbirth and a denial of sexual pleasure.

FGM/C is not a religious practice but our efforts to end it are guided by Islamic principles on the sanctity of life and the human body, gender equality, the protection of children and the right to live free from fear and harm.

Key policy positions:

- We take an Islamic human rights and community-based approach to ending FGM/C, and our interventions are based on the principle of 'do no harm.'
- We use faith as part of the solution by raising awareness of how FGM/C violates Islamic principles and by providing an alternative religiously-robust narrative. We also train and mobilise local scholars, religious bodies and other influential agents to publicly de-link FGM/C from Islam and support research to help develop policy positions and fatwas that will help end the practice.
- We take a multi-faceted approach to eradicating FGM/C by working with stakeholders at all levels. Our advocacy and field teams work strategically with governments to ensure FGM/C is criminalised, that legislation is enforced and that it has a real, lasting impact.
- We work sensitively and respectfully with local communities, understanding their traditions, encouraging debate, tackling the root causes of FGM/C and ensuring communities take ownership of programmes aimed at ending the practice.

An Islamic human rights perspective

FGM/C is usually driven by a complex mix of culture, tradition, religion and social pressure. Islamic Relief's approach is based on evidence of two major gaps in FGM/C interventions: failure to adequately consider the social challenges and cultural context of communities where FGM/C is practiced, and a lack of understanding of how to de-link FGM/C from Islam where religion is a significant reason for the practice.

Islamic Relief, as one of the world's largest independent Muslim NGOs, is playing a critical role in not only challenging the supposedly 'religious' justification for FGM/C but making a religiously sanctioned case against it.

Our key faith positions on FGM/C include:

- The right to life and physical integrity in Islam is violated by FGM/C as it causes physical harm and even loss of life in childbirth.
- FGM/C violates the right to health, which in Islam includes normal bodily functions such as menstruation, sexual pleasure and childbirth, without complication.
- There is no Qur'anic reference to FGM/C, nor was it endorsed by the Prophet

Muhammad (peace be upon him), whilst the prohibition against inflicting harm is clear.

- There is an obligation on all Muslims to obey the laws of the lands they live in, many of which prohibit FGM/C.

Recommendations

Islamic Relief recommends that all interventions to end FGM/C by governments, civil society organisations, local leaders and community members:

- Are based on an extensive understanding of how and why FGM/C is practiced in the target community. This will allow appropriate, tailored interventions that challenge FGM/C in a culturally sensitive, effective and sustainable way.
- Identify key players at all levels and form alliances with them to become community educators and agents for change.
- Involve the community as implementers of programmes to ensure interventions target all stakeholders including religious scholars, women, youth, teachers, health workers, law enforcement agencies and the relevant government departments.
- Ensure that where religion is used to justify the practice, local scholars and religious bodies are adequately engaged to de-link the practice from faith.

Calling for an end to FGM/C is part of Islamic Relief's Gender Justice Strategy that includes fighting all forms of gender-based violence including domestic violence and early and forced marriage. For the full version of our FGM/C Policy, Islamic Declaration on Gender Justice and other gender justice policies visit www.islamic-relief.org/gender-justice