

STATEMENT FROM BARNABAS FUND**September 2019****TREATMENT OF WOMEN & GIRLS UNDER THREAT OF F.G.M.**

Female genital mutilation (FGM), sometimes known as 'female circumcision' or 'female genital cutting', is illegal in most if not all OSCE countries.

FGM can occur within OSCE states themselves, or girls may be sent abroad to countries where FGM is routinely practiced in order to have the operation e.g. while on holiday from school.

In the UK, it has been illegal since 1985 and since 2005 it is also illegal to take abroad a British national or permanent resident for FGM, or to help someone trying to do this.

Despite the law and general public support for zero tolerance of what can be regarded as gender abuse and child abuse, in the UK there have been almost **no convictions** despite an estimated figure of 150-170,000 residents in the UK having undergone one or other of the various procedures. The annual incidence rate is estimated at around 5,500 people¹.

In September 2016 the House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee² said that it was a national scandal that there had been no successful prosecutions for FGM despite it having been illegal for more than 30 years. There had been one unsuccessful prosecution.

In February 2019 the first conviction was recorded at the Old Bailey in London.

In contrast, France has a much more robust policy against FGM, having recorded more than 100 successful convictions. France relies heavily on the medical evidence, and it is a duty of doctors, medical staff or others, such as social workers, to report mutilation committed on a minor. Prevalence of new cases of FGM in France has been reduced, as the criminal sanctions are now well known and the penalties are appropriately serious.

Few other OSCE countries have an approach to FGM as robust as France's.

¹ <https://www.politico.eu/article/female-genital-mutilation-cases-rise-in-uk-but-no-prosecutions/>

² <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-37364079>

Recognising the fact that FGM is not always addressed very robustly in many OSCE states, despite its clear violation of human rights, gender issues and specifically rights of the child, Barnabas Fund requests OSCE countries to:

1. Take FGM and the threat of FGM to female citizens and residents more seriously
2. Improve intelligence in the field to understand the prevalence of FGM in the population and to better identify girls at risk.
3. Improve education on FGM for children in schools and assist teachers to better understand FGM and the damage it causes.
4. Improve requirements on reporting FGM by doctors and other medical practitioners, and social workers.
5. Increase resources available to police and prosecutors, to ensure that FGM is seen as a crime which is taken seriously by the authorities and will result in prosecutions where appropriate.