



Home Office

Jess Phillips MP
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Sarah Owen MP
Chair, Women and Equalities Committee
House of Commons
Palace of Westminster
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5 March 2025

Dear Sarah,

Thank you for your correspondence of 19 February 2025 on behalf of the Women and Equalities Committee regarding the upcoming hearing on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

As you know, this Government has made an unprecedented commitment to halve violence against women in a decade. Tackling Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a key part of achieving this ambition. FGM is child abuse and can cause lifelong physical and psychological suffering to women and girls. Our focus is on preventing FGM from happening, protecting survivors and those at risk, and bringing perpetrators to justice. These objectives align with the in-development VAWG strategy, which will include action on the strategic goals of: prevention; early intervention; the response to perpetrators; and support for victims of VAWG. The Home Office has lead responsibility for tackling VAWG, including FGM. The Government has a range of measures in place to tackle FGM, including to raise awareness in impacted communities, ensure frontline professionals have the skills and expertise to respond effectively, facilitate multi-agency working, ensure victims and survivors have specialist support, and to see perpetrators of this abhorrent crime brought to justice.

You have requested information on: what the Home Office is doing to tackle FGM, including at the border; the prevalence of FGM; what work is taking place across forces; and what support is available for survivors. You also requested information from the Department of Health and Social Care, Department for Education and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, to understand these departments' respective actions to tackle FGM. They will each respond directly regarding the details of their specific activities.

The Home Office has work under way to raise awareness about FGM, including national campaigns and targeted community engagement. To tackle FGM it is essential that we engage directly with impacted communities and with those in positions to identify or support victims of FGM. To raise awareness about FGM and wider forms of 'honour'-based abuse (HBA), the Home Office recently delivered a national HBA campaign. This involved recruiting community advocates who delivered events on HBA topics, including FGM, in impacted communities across England and Wales. This campaign was bolstered by a paid social media campaign, comprising of videos, podcasts, and other multimedia content. This content was delivered in partnership with specialist community and volunteer organisations that support victims of FGM, and reached hundreds of thousands of people. To mark the International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM on 6 February 2025, we hosted an event at the Home Office in partnership with the National Centre for FGM.

Multiple community sector organisations, other Government departments, and key agencies (including the police) attended the event, which focused on empowering young voices in the fight against FGM.

Frontline professionals and agencies with safeguarding responsibilities are crucial to protecting survivors and those at risk of FGM. To equip these key actors with the knowledge to address FGM, we have issued a range of materials, including statutory multi-agency guidance as well as free e-learning for frontline professionals, including in healthcare, the police, Border Force, and children's social care. In addition, the College of Policing has published Authorised Professional Practice, which sets out actions the police should take as well as encouraging multi-agency join-up to increase awareness raising and to better safeguard individuals at risk. We know there is more to do to improve the police response to violence against women and girls, including FGM. That is why we recently confirmed £13.1 million funding for a new Centre for VAWG and Public Protection which will help drive consistency in the police response to these crime types nationally.

Given the complexity of FGM cases, it is essential that we adopt ways of effective multi-agency working. There are several strong examples of this in action. For instance, the police and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) have in place a joint investigation and prosecution protocol. The CPS are also able to provide early investigative advice to the police in FGM cases, and the police and CPS work together to learn from recent cases.

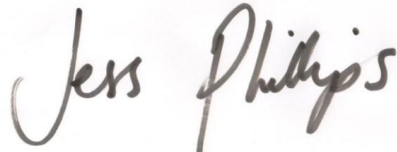
FGM is a crime which crosses borders, and we have measures in place at the border in recognition of this. This includes Operation Limelight, a joint Border Force and police operation which takes place at airports, seaports, and international rail stations around school holiday periods. Officers target inbound and outbound traffic to and from countries with a high prevalence of FGM, to raise awareness about the crime.

The Government has indicators for the scale of FGM, but its hidden nature makes it challenging to reliably quantify. A prevalence study for FGM and forced marriage, part-funded by the Home Office, was conducted in 2015 by Equality Now. It used studies measuring prevalence rates of FGM in countries of origin and then applied this to census data of the number of people from the associated diaspora communities to generate a prevalence estimate. While this provided some useful information, there were some limitations and the statistics it provided are now out of date. To ensure we have a more up-to-date prevalence estimate of FGM in England and Wales, the Home Office commissioned a feasibility study in 2023 (which concluded in 2024) to examine whether it is possible to produce robust prevalence estimates for FGM, as well as forced marriage. The study proposed an approach, and we are considering next steps. More generally, while not accurate indicators of prevalence, we monitor data on police recorded crime, the NHS FGM reporting data base, and MoJ data on FGM Protection Orders issue. Of the 2,755 HBA offences recorded by the police in the latest year (ending March 2024), 111 were FGM.

Supporting victims and survivors of FGM is a priority for this Government. The health system plays a key role, and FGM clinics are now mainstreamed within the NHS. These are community-based clinics that provide basic healthcare services, and emotional and psychological support. The Government also provided £165,000 of funding to Karma Nirvana to operate the National HBA Helpline during FY 23/24 and increased this funding to £215,000 for FY24/25. This Helpline is available to victims and survivors of HBA, including of FGM, and can offer guidance to professionals to improve awareness and identification. Additionally, the joint Home Office-FCDO Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) assists British nationals (including dual nationals) through FGM centres, providing consular assistance to victims and potential victims of FGM. The FMU also undertake outreach work within diaspora communities in the UK to raise awareness and improve FGM prevention.

We continue to do everything we can to prevent FGM from happening, to support survivors and those at risk, and to bring perpetrators to justice. We are seeing signs of progress. For example, in September 2024, for the first time in England and Wales, an individual was prosecuted for conspiracy to commit FGM. However, we also recognise that there is more to be done if we are to eliminate FGM. We are working closely across Government and with specialist sector organisations to continually improve our approach and to scale up our efforts. I hosted an HBA-focused roundtable with key experts on the 6 February 2025 and that discussion, alongside wider engagement, will help inform the development of the new cross-Government VAWG Strategy to be published later this year.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jess Phillips". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jess Phillips MP
Minister for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls