

Demographic Perspectives on Female Genital Mutilation



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Foreword

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is the practice of partially or totally removing the external genital organs for non-medical reasons. It violates the human rights of girls and women, and causes serious and, in some cases, life-threatening health complications.

In 2012, the United Nations General Assembly passed resolution 67/146 on intensifying global efforts for the elimination of female genital mutilations, reaffirmed by resolution 69/150 in 2014. The Human Rights Council in 2014 passed resolution 27/22 on intensifying global efforts and sharing good practices to effectively eliminate female genital mutilations. These commitments by United Nations Member States reflect an unprecedented awareness of the practice and growing efforts to stop it. Global consensus is clear; FGM must end.

Accurate and current data are essential for policy makers and advocates to build on current momentum, develop successful interventions and achieve commitments made by UN Member States.

Data on current prevalence levels and projections of FGM trends are imperative, as is accurate and up-to-date information on population changes, including urbanization and resulting shifts in practising populations. Tracking rates of reduction and progress of change is necessary to inform ongoing and future interventions, and to identify what has been successful and where.

This report, the first such published by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), looks at FGM through the lens of population dynamics and the demographic dividend, based on current evidence and data. It offers quantitative information that both supports evidence-based programming, and frames financial implications for Member States and international donors. Evidence to define the size of the target population and orient actions around areas of greatest impact is of high value in developing interventions and formulating policies.

UNFPA remains strongly committed to engaging with Member States, civil society, UN agencies and all other stakeholders to accelerate the elimination of FGM worldwide. Protecting girls upholds their sexual and reproductive health and rights, and enables them to realize their full potential.



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Introduction

FGM has been internationally recognized as an extreme form of violation of the rights, health and integrity of women and girls. In 2012, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the first-ever resolution against FGM (67/146), calling for intensified global efforts to eliminate it.

The resolution reaffirms that FGM is “a harmful practice that constitutes a serious threat to the health of women and girls, including their psychological, sexual and reproductive health, which can increase their vulnerability to HIV and may have adverse obstetric and prenatal outcomes as well as fatal consequences for the mother and the newborn, and that the abandonment of this harmful practice can be achieved as a result of a comprehensive movement that involves all public and private stakeholders in society, including girls and boys, women and men.”¹

The resolution demonstrates deep concerns about the persistence of FGM, indicating increasing international commitment to abandonment of the practice. But so far, a funding shortfall has limited the scope and pace of programmes to achieve elimination.

FGM is a deeply ingrained cultural practice with devastating medical, social, emotional, legal and economic repercussions for young girls and women. It refers to all procedures involving partial or total removal of the female external genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for cultural or other non-medical reasons.² Although primarily concentrated in 29 countries in Africa and the Middle East, FGM is a universal problem. It is practiced in some countries in Asia, including India, Indonesia, Iraq and Pakistan,³ as well as in Latin America, and among immigrant populations in Western Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. The European Parliament estimated that, in 2009, about 500,000 women lived with the consequences of FGM in the European Union, and approximately 180,000 additional women and girls are at risk of undergoing it each year.⁴

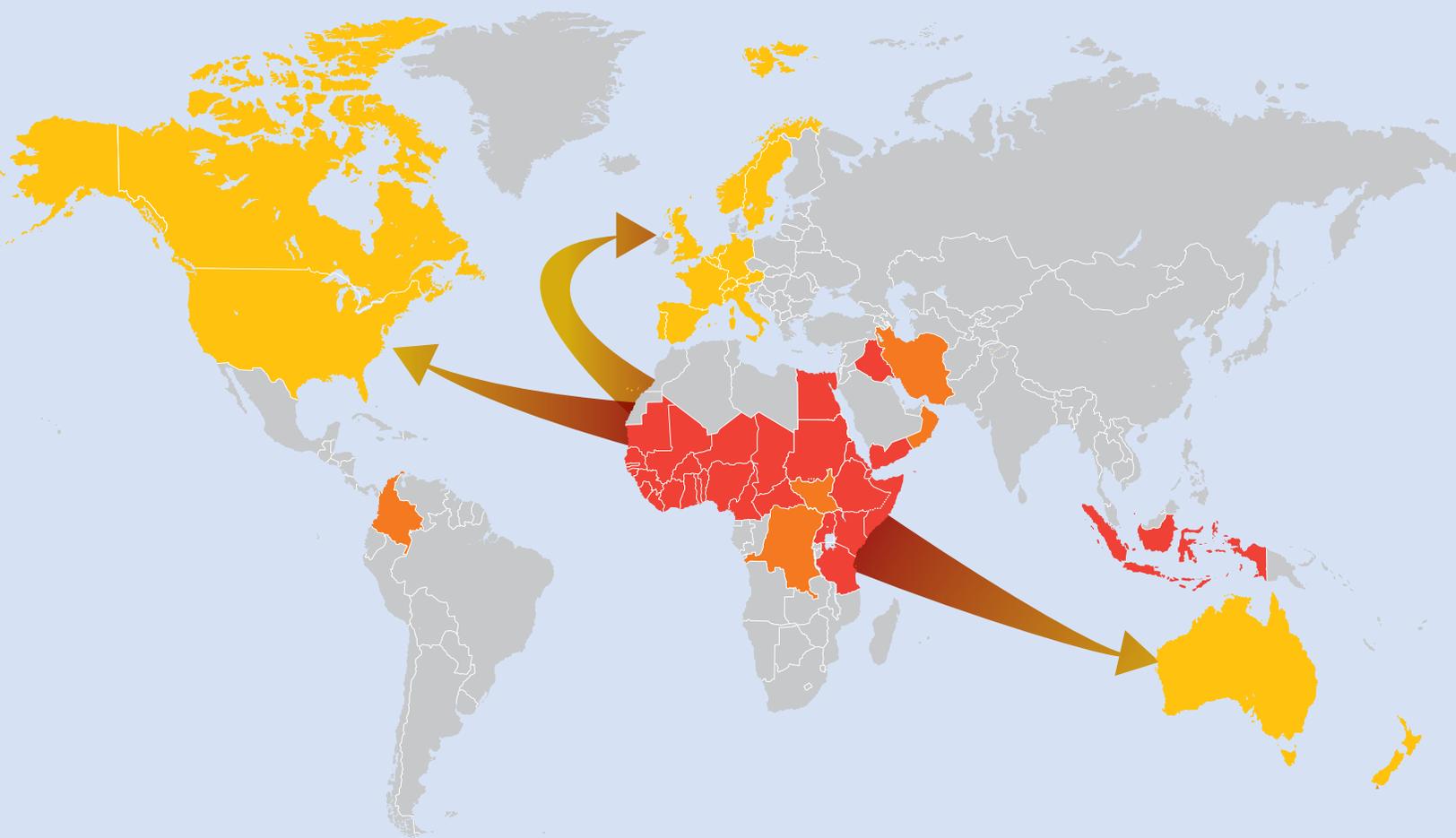
¹ UN General Assembly resolution 67/146 on intensifying global efforts for the elimination of female genital mutilations. 5 March 2013. See: www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/67/146 (accessed 24 April 2014).

² “Female Genital Mutilation: A joint WHO/UNICEF/UNFPA statement.” 1997, reiterated in 2008. Geneva: World Health Organization (WHO).

³ “Ending Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: Lessons from a decade of progress.” 2013. Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau.

⁴ European Parliament resolution of 24 March 2009 on combating female genital mutilation in the European Union.

FGM can be found around the world



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