

Response to 'Call for Views' on Stage 2 of Female Genital Mutilation (Protection and Guidance) Bill - August 2019

To: Scottish Parliament Equalities and Human Rights Committee

From: Scottish Youth Parliament Equalities and Human Rights Committee 2019-20



'There should be more after-care support and protection for survivors of sexual violence and abuse, female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage, human trafficking, and domestic abuse.'

Lead the Way manifesto commitment passed with 85% agreement of 72,744 responses from young people all over Scotland on 12th March 2016.

Question 2) What more could the Scottish Government and public services do to strengthen FGM prevention and protection

- Our Committee believes there should be a greater awareness raising of FGM; emphasising it is a form of child abuse, who specifically is at risk and the traumatic physical and mental repercussions.
- A 'Safe Reporting' system should be created that ensures victims will be treated without prejudice and any reports are *confidential*. Systems like this should be national and local. They should co-operate and consult with young people to ensure quality.
- Our Committee believes that anyone that has a duty of care to young people, such as teachers, health workers and social workers, should be trained in FGM awareness and intervention. Doctors should have to report any suspicions of FGM.
- An SYP Committee member referred to France's annual mandatory genital checks for females until age 6. The member believed this to be too invasive, and not appropriate in the UK.
- There should be more media coverage of FGM cases when they occur to make the public aware and tackle stigma victims face.
- Raise awareness of FGM within schools so young people can look out for and recognise signs that a friend or family member may be at risk.
- Get to the heart of the communities that FGM affects and communicate directly with them. Many families still conduct FGM due to fear of being ostracized as well as keeping females 'pure'. The aim is to tackle the stigma of not having FGM within communities.
- Educate women and girls on the right to decide what happens to their bodies.

Question 3) How will the Bill impact on you, your community or organisation?

- Although it may seem that FGM would not affect Scotland's young people, it still very much exists here with African, Middle Eastern, Asian minority populations in this country. Just because they are in the UK does not mean young females from these communities are not affected by FGM.
- This Bill impacts these communities as it will:

- Change attitudes on FGM
- Make FGM an accessible topic for people who have undergone these procedures and hopefully encourage more to come forward.
- Due to FGM occurring to make females 'pure', the Bill will provide a conversation on sexism in modern day society and hopefully a more positive viewpoint of female sexuality too.
- Highlight intersectional feminism: bringing light to issues that not only affect women but also women of BAME communities.
- Help to tackle harmful stereotypes.
- One of our Committee members as the MSYP for LGBT Youth Scotland highlighted the importance this Bill will have for LGBT young women.

Question 4) Please highlight any relevant equalities and human rights issues you would like the Committee to consider, in particular any potential barriers to accessing the provisions of the Bill or any rights which might be advanced or adversely impacted.

- A potential human rights issue is the right to privacy and information sharing; doctors reporting cases of FGM to the police, since this could involve sharing deeply personal medical details with the police.
- The Bill will positively impact many UNCRC rights:
 - The Right to Health (Article 24)
 - The Right to Protection from Violence, Abuse and Neglect (Article 19)
 - The Right to Protection from Sexual Abuse (Article 34).
- Our Committee believes that it is extremely important to consider the fact that FGM is a practice often done in secret, so it's hard to know exactly how many people are affected by it, and where it is being carried out.
- It is essential to find ways to reach as many people as possible to ensure that everyone is able to access the support, to help those who have already experienced it and those who are at risk. When considering the Traveller community, it may be hard to reach them.
- Given that FGM is often due to religious and cultural beliefs, it is important to consider the risk of these communities being ostracized and feel their right to religious freedom is being compromised. It is important to be clear that it is not in any way shape or form targeting communities and those working on the bill should be careful by respecting faiths and cultures.
- The Scottish Parliament's Equalities and Human Rights Committee should consider that the Bill should be adapted to include trans people, non-binary identities and intersex people, so that the Bill does not exclude anyone.
- The Committee should also consider how to encourage men to advocate for changes to FGM prevention and protection (inspired by UN Women's #HeForShe campaign).