

DELIVERING AND SUSTAINING IN THE **NEW NORMAL**



2021 Annual Report and Overall Phase III Performance Analysis



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UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme
on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation:
Accelerating Change



Acknowledgements

On behalf of UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, and UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, the Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation: Accelerating Change wishes to acknowledge the support and collaboration of its various stakeholders in the successful implementation of its work.

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We also express our gratitude to members of the Joint Programme's Steering Committee for their continued assistance and technical guidance. We recognize the commitment and leadership of the national and subnational governments in all 17 countries as well as civil society organizations, regional institutions and other partners. They sustained their commitment despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. As the world grapples with the impact of COVID-19 and various humanitarian crises, we will continue to count on our partners and other stakeholders to sustain momentum in eliminating FGM by 2030.

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Acronyms

CSO	Civil society organization
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
FGM	Female genital mutilation
GBV	Gender-based violence
ICPD+25	Twenty-fifth anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SRHR	Sexual and reproductive health and rights
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

Foreword

“There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside you,” said Zora Neale Hurston, the novelist, folklorist and anthropologist. Stories are meant to be told, especially where telling them constitutes an act of courage. The practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) is harrowing and has been a source of injustice for many girls and women; their stories must be heard.

FGM presents a major challenge in several countries around the globe. It is internationally recognized as a harmful practice and a form of gender-based violence (GBV) that endangers the lives of millions of girls and women. It violates the foundational tenets of human rights reflected in various international conventions, resolutions and declarations.

To accelerate efforts to eliminate FGM, UNFPA and UNICEF in 2008 established the Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation: Accelerating Change. Since then, it has gone through several phases, with Phase III concluding in 2021. Over the last decade, the Joint Programme has scaled up gender-responsive and social norms approaches focused on the prevention of medicalization and cross-border FGM across the 17 countries where it is implemented. It has driven national action through stronger coordination mechanisms, legislative frameworks, service delivery and domestic resource allocation. Most countries supported by the Joint Programme now have a law banning FGM while the number of community leaders who publicly denounce FGM has radically increased. The Joint Programme has further strengthened partnerships with various governments and bolstered accountability mechanisms, particularly through close collaboration and work with the African Union and the Saleema Initiative on Eliminating FGM in Africa.

Phase IV of the Joint Programme has already come into place, with a vision to create a world where every girl and woman has a voice, choice

and agency. The main objective is to eliminate FGM by 2030 through accelerated and collective efforts that mobilize actors at the regional, national and international levels.

In this context, we are delighted to present the *2021 Annual Report on the Joint Programme*. It outlines the challenges and opportunities in the efforts led by UNFPA and UNICEF to eliminate FGM. It showcases the programme’s commitment to shifting approaches, creating positive impacts and contributing to the 2022-2025 strategic plans for both organizations. The report focuses on measures empowering girls and women to claim their right to be free of FGM as well as a community-centred, interpersonal and group-based approach that encourages gender and social norms change. It details the state of existing policy and legal frameworks in countries with Joint Programme support along with the comprehensive coverage of essential health and associated FGM services in 2021.

The Joint Programme has efficiently adapted to challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and navigated development at the grass-roots level. Its objective of ushering in gender-transformative approaches by disrupting gender discriminatory norms and practices remains an important aspiration for the coming years. The global effort to eliminate FGM will require support from different corners, however, not just technical but also financial inputs to sustain continuous momentum to eliminate FGM. As the world witnesses various humanitarian crises and competition for resources, the focus on FGM must not diminish.

This brings us back to Zora Neale Hurston. It is crucial that girls and women affected by FGM tell their stories in their voices. The Joint Programme, through its initiatives and a community of partners on the ground, aims to bring voice, choice and agency to many more in the coming years.

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Introduction

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were already off track, including SDG 5, on gender equality and women and girls' empowerment, and target 5.3, the elimination of FGM by 2030. As evidence of the detrimental impact of COVID-19 on FGM prevalence continues to emerge, the global community is likely to face setbacks in eliminating the practice, as predicted by a UNFPA study in 2020.¹ While COVID-19 has upended global systems and structures, threatening to reverse progress on hard-won gains in gender equality and the elimination of FGM, recovery from the pandemic also presents an opportunity and an imperative for transformative change. This includes prioritizing FGM within the global development agenda and in humanitarian action. Although FGM is largely neglected in

emergencies, girls' increased vulnerability to FGM during the pandemic was globally recognized.²

The UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of FGM: Accelerating Change has introduced innovations and adaptations to ensure the continuity of prevention and response programmes. These include effective and sustainable risk communication and community engagement strategies for FGM prevention; community-led surveillance and the use of digital platforms for monitoring and protecting girls at risk of FGM; and digital spaces for adolescents and youth to engage in anti-FGM advocacy campaigns and calls for social accountability so that governments meet their commitments to FGM prevention and elimination.



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ACHIEVEMENTS in 2021

3.46 million people made public declarations to eliminate FGM in 4,475 communities

3,813 communities established surveillance systems to protect girls from being subjected to FGM

216,853 girls were saved from being subjected to FGM

17.6 million people were engaged through social media promoting FGM elimination

198,437 girls completed capacity development packages empowering them as change agents

14 countries now have a costing national action plans to end FGM

422,700 girls and women received health services

76,882 girls and women received social services

16,106 girls and women received legal services

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