About Equality Now

Equality Now (EN) is an international non-governmental organization. We work with 133 partners across 36 countries, campaigning for legal and systemic change to address harmful practices, violence, and discrimination against women and girls worldwide.

Equality Now and its partners have been working towards ending female genital mutilation or cutting, also known as FGM/C globally, since its founding in 1992. We are not doing this alone. Equality Now is an active member of the Asia Network to End FGM/C (coordinated by the Orchid Project and Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women, ARROW).

This presentation was prepared by Nawmi Naz Chowdhury (Global Legal Advisor) and Julie Thekkadan (South Asia Consultant), with oversight and review provided by Divya Srinivasan (Global Lead on Ending Harmful Practices) for the side event on Rights-based approaches as the foundation to achieving just and sustainable development in Asia and the Pacific during the 7th Asian and Pacific Population Conference (APPC) on November 17, 2023.

UNTIL EVERY WOMAN AND GIRL LIVES - SAFE, FEARLESS, AND FREE
Objective

Through this side event, we bring to your attention the issue of FGM/C in Asia.

There are at least ten countries in South and Southeast Asia where there is evidence that FGM/C is taking place, affecting the health, lives, and rights of millions of women and girls in the region.
FGM/C-A Global Overview

Data from UNICEF from 2016 tells us that based on national-level prevalence data on the practice, there are 200 million women and girls globally who are survivors of FGM/C. Interestingly, in 2015, the estimated figure was 125 million. Does this mean 75 million girls were cut in just one year between 2015 and 2016? Actually, that was not the case. A large portion of the increase (from 125 million to 200 million) was due to the addition of Indonesia to UNICEF’s estimates. The 2013 household survey of Indonesia revealed that a significant number of women and girls had undergone FGM/C, and that contributed to the global data on FGM/C.
Indonesia and the Maldives are the only Asian states that provide national-level prevalence data. Other countries don’t have any official data on it, but there is evidence - in the form of academic reports and reports of civil society organizations, media reports, and anecdotal studies based on interviews with survivors - that FGM/C is practiced in other countries in Asia. This includes Brunei, India, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Thailand. What this essentially means is that the actual figures of women and girls affected by this harmful practice globally are actually much higher than current estimates.
Ending FGM/C - A State Obligation

FGM/C in Asia has been somewhat addressed through international human rights mechanisms. In the last few years, recommendations to countries in Asia to address FGM/C and to pass specific laws prohibiting the practice have been issued during the UPR processes and by treaty bodies. Countries receiving such recommendations include India, Sri Lanka, Singapore, the Maldives, and others. The Malaysian government, in a submission to the CEDAW Committee, had estimated that around 85% of Muslim baby girls had undergone the practice in medical clinics.

However, across the region, most Asian governments have so far demonstrated a lack of political will towards addressing the issue of FGM/C within their countries. For example, in Singapore, the practice is known to occur in medical clinics, but the government has so far failed to take any concrete action to prevent or address the issue.
FGM/C in Asia - Funding constraints

FGM/C is also widely understood to be practiced largely in Africa. As a result, the lack of attention to the critical issue of FGM/C in Asia makes it more difficult to secure funding to support the work. Unlike in other regions, we have very little resources dedicated to supporting grassroots activities and to preventing FGM/C in Asia. There is no also little to no large-scale programming or government programmes towards community education and awareness in most countries in the region.
FGM/C in Asia - Funding constraints

The dearth of reliable government data, lack of funding, lack of awareness, and political will makes it harder to instigate action, design and implement policies, and hold governments and other duty-bearers to account, particularly in advocating for the introduction and effective implementation of legislative measures against FGM/C. Currently, none of the countries in Asia have a law banning FGM/C.

But ending FGM/C is addressed in the ICPD Programme of Action and in the Sustainable Development Goal 5.3. If we are to implement these global commitments toward ending harmful practices against women and girls … then Asia can no longer be ignored in efforts to address FGM/C. In fact, it needs to be one of the priority regions for global efforts towards addressing FGM/C.
Prioritise ending FGM/C in Asia

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Ending FGM/C in Asia through collective action

• As we are working on ending this harmful practice, we must think about how to strengthen the advocacy and work collaboratively with relevant stakeholders on the issue.

• Collective action, such as those being led by the Asia Network to End FGM/C, are vital as they shine a much-needed spotlight and galvanize collaboration.

• To achieve the SDG 5.3 target of ending FGM throughout the world by 2030, the governments in Asia ought to act quickly in adopting a zero-tolerance approach incorporating full criminalization, data collection, and the implementation of a coordinated multi-sectoral approach. Without this, countless women and girls across the region will continue to suffer this grave human rights violation, and the ambition to end FGM globally will remain unobtainable.
For more information

- Asia Network on Ending FGM/C - https://endfgmcasia.org/
- Equality Now’s page on ending FGM/C https://www.equalitynow.org/fgm_in_the_asia_pacific_region/