



## FORWARD Statement for International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM 2026

### Long-term Investment and Community-Led Action to End FGM by 2030

On the International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM, FORWARD, alongside partners and community allies, reaffirms a simple truth: ending FGM is achievable, but only with long-term commitment, long-term investment, and the leadership of the grassroots organisations that hold trust within affected communities.

Today, more than 230 million women and girls worldwide live with the consequences of FGM, a rise of around 15% in recent years. This stark reality is not a statistic to be quoted once a year, but a call to renew urgency, accelerate action, and invest in sustainable change. This cannot become reality without communities, survivors, young people, and community champions leading the way. As global crises, displacement, and austerity deepen inequalities, the risks facing girls increase, making holistic, adequately funded prevention and protection more important than ever.

As the UK's leading organisation working to end FGM and other forms of violence against women, girls and minoritised communities, FORWARD brings over three decades of experience in community engagement, safeguarding, youth leadership, research and advocacy. Our approach is rooted in co-creation rather than top-down delivery. We believe change should be built with communities, not for them, because short-term programmes cannot replace trust, cultural competence and survivor leadership.

*"The support from FORWARD was life-changing. It was professional, yes, but more importantly, it was filled with empathy and genuine care."*

*Community champion supported through FORWARD's services*

*"From the first moment, the team at FORWARD listened to me with care and understanding. They supported me emotionally and helped me feel stronger."*

*Community champion supported through FORWARD's services*

This work is part of the wider effort to end gender-based violence, since FGM does not exist in isolation. This harmful practice intersects with harmful gender norms, coercion, stigma and unequal power. That is why we work across systems, including health, education, social care, safeguarding and local government and across generations, from community champions to youth advocates, to shift norms, strengthen services and protect rights.

Yet the reality is evident: current funding models are not fit for purpose. Short project cycles and piecemeal grants undermine continuity, burn out frontline workers and leave gaps in support. Grassroots and civil society organisations should not be expected to work with minimal capacity or to

do more with less. If the world is serious about meeting the 2030 target, sustainable, multi-year, core funding for the community-based organisations that turn policy into practice and commitments into protection is imperative.

This year, FORWARD completed a UK-wide public awareness survey on FGM to inform our advocacy and programme design. While the full report will be released as part of our awareness-raising month, early findings are notable: 34% of respondents do not know how to access FGM specialist services for women and girls affected by FGM in the UK. This gap in awareness can translate into delayed care, missed safeguarding, preventable harm and an upsurge in demands for services. It underscores the urgency of clear pathways, culturally competent services and targeted public information, delivered in partnership with trusted community organisations.

*“Changing people’s minds and attitudes requires long-term commitments. With such long-term commitments, working at the community level, and with key stakeholders, it’s going to be possible to end FGM.”*

*Naana Otoo-Oyortey, Executive Director, FORWARD*

In recognition of the 2026 International Day of Zero Tolerance to FGM, FORWARD calls for:

- Investment for impact: Prioritise long-term, flexible funding for grassroots, survivor-centred organisations.
- Improved coordination: Align health, education, safeguarding and local government responses to provide holistic support.
- Prioritising communities: Embed co-creation with affected communities and youth leadership across all programmes.
- Accountability at the centre: Governments, donors and institutions must renew commitments to end FGM by 2030 and back them with resources and political will.
- Awareness gap to be closed: Ensure clear, accessible information on specialist services reaches those who need it most. Guarantee mandatory, long-term and continuous training on FGM for all key health professionals and frontline staff with safeguarding and care responsibilities.

Ending FGM is not only possible, but within reach. But progress will stall without long-term commitment and investment, especially to grassroots organisations. FORWARD is committed to contributing to an equal society and a world without any form of gender-based violence, including FGM. With communities, champions and survivors at the centre, we can protect the health, rights and dignity of every woman and girl.

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