FORWARD

The State of FGM in the UK

Summary Report



Executive summary

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a form of violence against women and girls (VAWG). The World Health Organization defines FGM as all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs, for non-medical reasons.

FGM remains a serious human rights violation, safeguarding concern, and public health issue in the UK. Over the past decade, progress has been made through strengthened legislation, safeguarding measures, increased professional awareness, and the development of specialist services. Affected communities, survivors, civil society organisations, practitioners, and policymakers have all played an important role in advancing efforts to prevent FGM and support those affected.

Despite this progress, important challenges remain for the UK in meeting the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal targets. This report finds that while the UK has one of the most comprehensive legal and policy frameworks on FGM internationally, gaps persist in implementation, accountability, service provision, and long-term investment. Access to specialist healthcare and support remains uneven, data and evidence are not consistently used to inform policy and practice, and community-based organisations continue to face funding pressures despite their central role in prevention and survivor support.

Over a decade has passed since the UK's package of FGM reforms came into force: the mandatory reporting duty, FGM Protection Orders (FGMPOs), and the extended criminal offences introduced through the Serious Crime Act 2015. Ten years on from those reforms, FORWARD has produced this evidence report to examine what the UK's response to FGM actually looks like, drawing on published data, Freedom of Information requests, international comparisons, and our direct experience working with affected communities.

The report underscores the need for stronger national leadership, improved coordination across sectors, and greater investment in community-based and survivor-centred approaches. It also identifies opportunities to strengthen safeguarding responses, improve access to healthcare, learn from international practice, and make better use of available data and evidence.

Ending FGM requires a coordinated, long-term approach that places women, girls, and affected communities at the centre of policy and practice. By implementing the recommendations set out in this report, the UK can build on the progress made to date and strengthen efforts to prevent FGM, support survivors, and advance lasting social change.

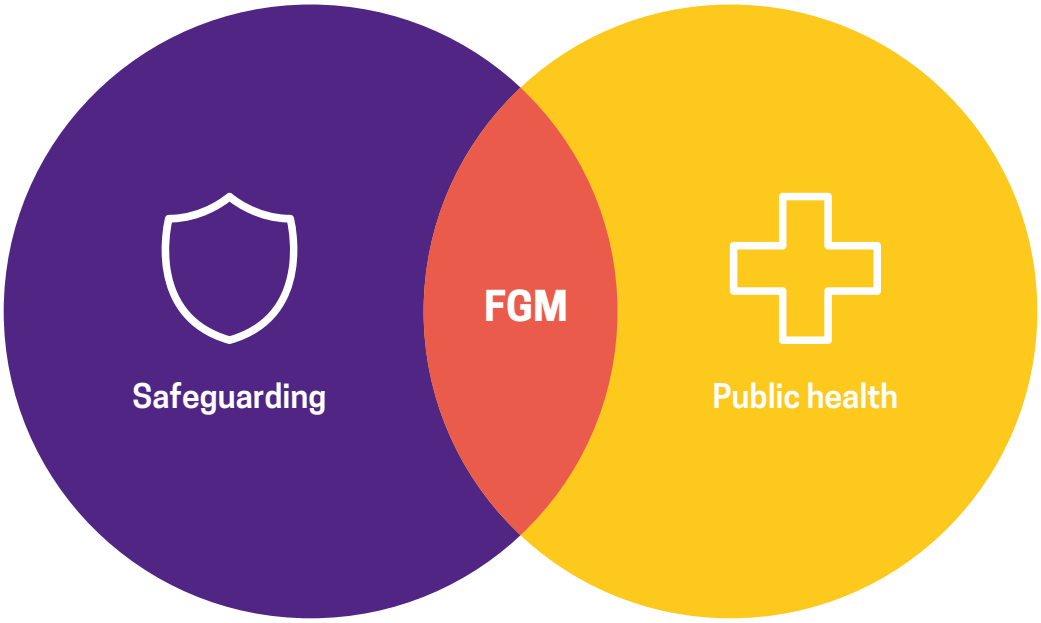
> **"Ending FGM requires a coordinated, long-term approach that places women, girls, and affected communities at the centre of policy and practice."**




FORWARD
Naana Otoo-Oyortey

What we highlight in the report

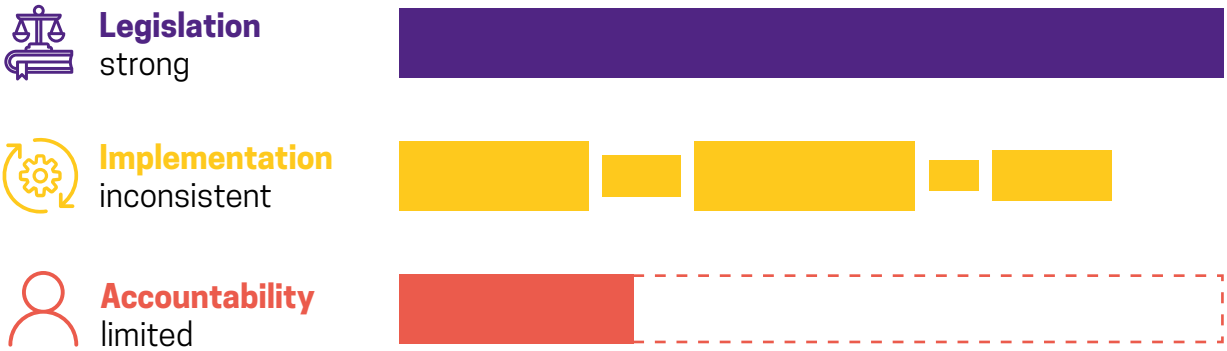
1 FGM remains a serious safeguarding and public health issue in the UK.



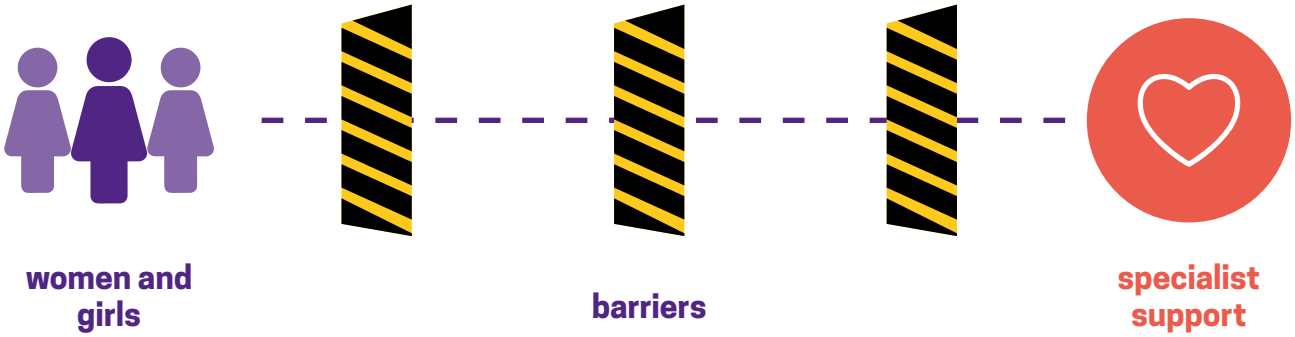


in the UK

2 Strong legislation exists, but implementation remains inconsistent and accountability limited.



3 Many women and girls continue to face barriers to accessing specialist support.



4 Survey respondents overwhelmingly recognised the harm caused by FGM and supported its abandonment.



5 Community-based organisations remain at the forefront of prevention, advocacy, and survivor support.





Key messages

The UK has one of the most comprehensive legal and policy frameworks on FGM internationally.

Significant progress has been made in recognising FGM as a safeguarding, health, and human rights issue.

Important gaps remain in implementation, accountability, and access to services.

Community-based organisations continue to play a critical role in prevention and support.

Ending FGM requires coordinated action across government, health systems, safeguarding agencies, and communities.

Our Priorities

1. Develop and implement a national FGM delivery plan.
2. Strengthen safeguarding & accountability mechanisms.
3. Improve access to specialist support and healthcare services.
4. Make better use of existing data and evidence.
5. Sustain investment in community-based and survivor-led organisations.
6. Align the UK's approach with international best practice and emerging standards.

01 Legal and policy landscape in the UK

The UK has made considerable progress over the past decade in strengthening protections for women and girls affected by FGM. Legislative reforms, safeguarding procedures, and professional guidance have helped raise awareness and improve responses across sectors. However, progress is uneven. There remain significant differences in awareness, service provision, and accountability across the country.

There is currently no overarching national delivery plan bringing together the different strands of prevention, protection, and survivor support.

From an evidence and accountability perspective, the UK's legal framework is extensive, but gaps remain in delivery, oversight, and strategic direction.

"There is currently no overarching national delivery plan bringing together the different strands of prevention, protection, and survivor support."



FORWARD recommends the following:

Q2 2027	Publish a standalone, time-bound national FGM delivery plan by Q2 2027, aligned with the VAWG strategy, with clear objectives, milestones, named leads, and annual public reporting.
+	Ensure the delivery plan includes a national prevention strategy focused on social-norm change, co-developed with affected communities, addressing harmful gender norms, religious misconceptions, and community-level drivers.
2027	Commission a full independent review of the UK's legal and policy framework on FGM by 2027, covering the Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003, the Serious Crime Act 2015 provisions, FGMPOs, and safeguarding practice, with a focus on survivor outcomes, unintended consequences, and accountability.
Q4 2026	Appoint a named ministerial lead and a senior responsible officer by Q4 2026 for cross-government accountability.
Q4 2026	Ensure the Home Office FGM Working Group is operational by Q4 2026, with clear outputs, regular meetings, and community representation.

02 The mandatory reporting duty in practice

The mandatory reporting duty was introduced to strengthen safeguarding responses to FGM and ensure that known cases involving girls under 18 are reported to the police. The duty was intended to play an important role in increasing awareness of FGM among professionals and reinforcing the responsibility to identify and respond to safeguarding concerns.

However, evidence on the effectiveness and impact of the duty remains limited. To date, no comprehensive independent review has assessed whether the duty is achieving its intended objectives, what outcomes result from reports being made, or how the duty affects relationships between affected communities and statutory services. Practitioners and affected communities continue to raise concerns about professional confidence, inconsistencies in implementation, and the potential unintended consequences for trust and engagement.

As the UK seeks to strengthen safeguarding responses, further evaluation is needed to ensure that reporting mechanisms are effective, proportionate, and survivor-centred. Closing the evidence gap and strengthening safeguarding responses under the mandatory reporting duty require action from Government, the police, and other agencies.

To date, no comprehensive independent review has assessed:

- **? whether the duty is achieving its intended objectives**
- **? what outcomes result from reports being made**
- **? how the duty affects relationships between affected communities and statutory services**

FORWARD recommends the following:

Government should:	Carry out a formal review of the mandatory reporting duty and update the statutory multi-agency guidance on FGM accordingly.	Ensure standardised, mandatory, trauma-informed training on FGM for all professionals in health, education, social care, and policing is in place by 2027, co-designed with survivor-led and community-based organisations.
Police should:	Strengthen the link between mandatory reporting and safeguarding action, including mandatory consideration and recording of FGMPOs in all relevant cases. Contribute to the routine publication of mandatory reporting outcome data, including safeguarding actions and justice outcomes.	Embed survivor-centred support throughout FGM investigations, recognising the distinct harms, stigma, and long-term impact of FGM, and ensuring continuity of specialist support throughout criminal justice processes.
Local authorities should:	Strengthen multi-agency pathways between education, health, social care, police, and the courts, so that identification of FGM leads to coordinated protection, support, and follow-up rather than fragmented or discretionary responses.	

03 Funding and commissioning

Specialist organisations have played a critical role in driving progress on FGM in the UK. They provide survivor support, community engagement, prevention programmes, professional training, and advocacy. However, many still operate within short-term, inconsistent funding cycles, limiting their ability to plan strategically, retain experienced staff, and sustain long-term impact.

Current commissioning arrangements often prioritise short-term outputs rather than recognise the long-term nature of social change, prevention, and trust-building within communities. This creates instability for specialist organisations despite their proven expertise and central role in delivering prevention and support services.

The report finds that, without sustainable investment and more strategic commissioning approaches, there is a significant risk that progress made over the past decade will be undermined. Long-term funding is essential to maintaining specialist expertise, supporting survivors, and ensuring prevention efforts continue to reach affected communities. Sustainable, ring-fenced, multi-year funding for specialist and community-based FGM work is essential to the UK's response.

a minimum of

£2 million

a year in Home Office FGM funding



FORWARD recommends the following:

Government should:

- Commit to a minimum of £2 million a year in Home Office FGM funding from 2026 onwards, through multi-year funding cycles, in line with the Women and Equalities Committee's recommendation.
- Ensure commissioning frameworks prioritise culturally safe, specialist FGM services, rather than absorb FGM provision into generic VAWG or health pathways.
- Require Integrated Care Boards to publish annual FGM-specific spending data by 2027.
- Recognise and fund community-based organisations as core system partners, including support for workforce wellbeing and sustainability.

Local authorities should:

- Commission culturally safe, community-based FGM support services as core safeguarding and prevention provision, including partnerships with community-based organisations.

04 The NHS service offer

Over the past decade, the NHS has made important progress in recognising FGM as a health issue and developing specialist responses for women and girls affected by the practice. This includes specialist clinics, enhanced data collection, and improved guidance for healthcare professionals.

However, access to specialist services remains inconsistent across England. Women's experiences of care continue to vary depending on where they live, and many report difficulties navigating referral pathways or accessing specialist support. Provision of psychological support is particularly uneven, while reconstructive surgery is not available on the NHS and long-term holistic care remains limited.

The report highlights the need for a more consistent and survivor-centred NHS response that addresses the full range of physical, psychological, and emotional needs experienced by women affected by FGM. The NHS service offer for women and girls living with FGM requires structural investment and strategic direction to meet survivors' needs.

Psychological support is particularly uneven

Reconstructive surgery is not available on the NHS

Long-term holistic care remains limited

FORWARD recommends the following:

Government should:

1. Ensure equitable national coverage of specialist FGM services by 2028.
2. Ensure that all specialist FGM services allow self-referral alongside professional referral, and that these pathways are clearly publicised to affected communities.
3. Take urgent action to ensure publicly available information on FGM services is accurate and kept up to date, including regular review of the NHS national clinic listing and trust-level web pages.
4. Assess and implement a national pathway for reconstructive surgery and long-term care by 2028.
5. Work with the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists to review and update Green-top Guideline No. 53, published in 2015, so that it reflects the WHO's 2025 guideline and sets out the place of reconstructive surgery within specialist FGM care.
6. Ensure that specialist counselling and long-term psychological support are a core commissioned component of specialist FGM services.
7. Guarantee access to healthcare and support in the best interests of the child, so that a girl or woman is never deterred from seeking care because she fears it will lead to a police report.



05 International comparisons and lessons

International evidence demonstrates that legislation alone is rarely sufficient to end FGM. Countries that have made progress have generally combined legal frameworks with long-term prevention programmes, coordinated national action plans, investment in community-based initiatives, and meaningful survivor participation.

The report highlights examples of international practice where governments have adopted comprehensive and coordinated approaches, bringing together health systems, education, safeguarding, civil society organisations, and affected communities. These approaches have helped promote social-norm change while strengthening support for women and girls.

The UK's legal and safeguarding policy framework is among the most comprehensive internationally. However, countries that have invested in long-term prevention strategies, coordinated national leadership, and survivor-centred approaches offer crucial insights. The UK can learn from international comparators and should align its approach with emerging European standards.

legal frameworks +

- **long-term prevention programmes**
- **coordinated national action plans**
- **investment in community-based initiatives**
- **meaningful survivor participation**

FORWARD recommends the following:

Government should:

Adopt integrated, survivor-centred FGM pathways drawing on international best practice, including the standards set out in Directive (EU) 2024/1385 on combating violence against women and domestic violence, and ensure the UK's approach to FGM support is aligned with emerging European standards.

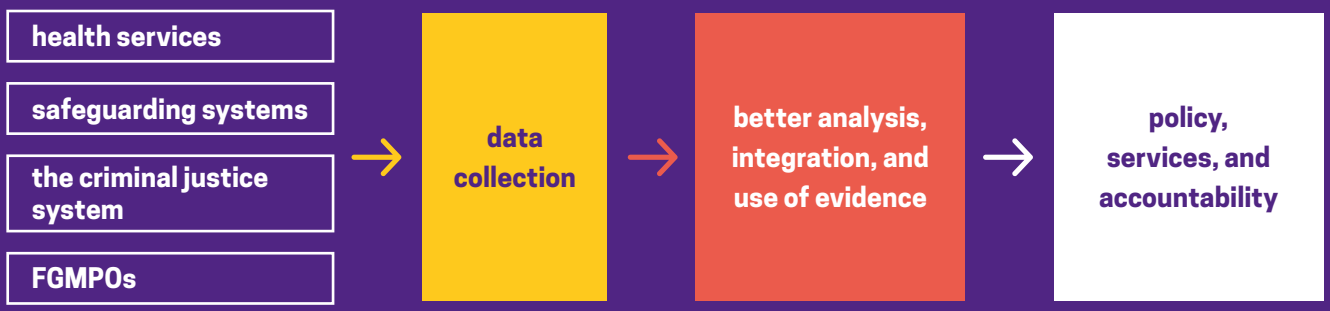
06 What does the data on FGM say?

The UK now has access to more FGM-related data than at any point in its history. Information collected through health services, safeguarding systems, the criminal justice system, and FGMPOs provides valuable insight into the response to FGM and the support needs of affected women and girls.

However, substantial evidence gaps remain. Existing datasets are often fragmented, making it difficult to understand pathways through services, identify long-term outcomes, and assess the effectiveness of interventions. There is also limited publicly available information on what happens following referrals, safeguarding actions, or criminal justice interventions.

The report highlights that data on FGM must become a tool for action, not just a record of activity. There is a need to move beyond data collection towards better analysis, integration, and use of evidence to improve policy, services, and accountability.

"...data on FGM must become a tool for action, not just a record of activity."



FORWARD recommends the following:

Government should:	Include an FGM data strategy in the FGM delivery plan by Q2 2027, including a monitoring framework and measurable indicators.	Ensure data is used as an active tool for prevention, commissioning, and safeguarding, not solely for reporting.
Police should:	Work with the Crown Prosecution Service to publish consistent annual data on FGM referrals, charging decisions, and prosecution outcomes, enabling meaningful public scrutiny and accountability.	
Local authorities should:	Support the implementation of a national FGM delivery plan, ensuring consistent identification, recording, and use of data in safeguarding practice.	

07 FORWARD's perspective: the community's experience of the 'State of FGM in the UK'

Community perspectives are central to understanding both the progress that has been made and the challenges that remain. Survey findings show overwhelming opposition to FGM and strong support for continued efforts to protect women and girls. Participants recognised the important role that communities themselves have played in challenging harmful norms, supporting survivors, and driving social change.

At the same time, respondents highlighted concerns about uneven access to services, lack of awareness about available support, inconsistent responses from professionals, and ongoing stigma surrounding FGM.

Many participants emphasised the need for greater trust between communities and statutory agencies, as well as stronger investment in community-based approaches.

The report finds that effective action on FGM must place affected communities at the centre of policy development, service design, and prevention efforts. Community-based and survivor-led organisations are essential to an effective UK response to FGM. Sustainable change is most likely when communities are recognised as partners in the response rather than passive recipients of interventions.

Respondents highlighted concerns about

- **uneven access to services**
- **lack of awareness about available support**
- **inconsistent responses from professionals**
- **ongoing stigma surrounding FGM**

"Sustainable change is most likely when communities are recognised as partners in the response rather than passive recipients of interventions."

FORWARD recommends the following:

NGOs and civil society to:

- Continue collective advocacy for sustainable, long-term funding, reflecting the specialist expertise, trust, and access held by community-based and survivor-led organisations.
- Maintain and strengthen prevention, awareness-raising, and social-norm change work within communities.
- Support those at risk, survivors, and affected women and their families to navigate health, safeguarding, and justice systems safely, while advocating for system reform where current pathways cause harm or exclusion.
- Contribute expertise to the design, delivery, and evaluation of professional training, policy reform, and service development, ensuring lived experience and community insight inform system-level change.



About FORWARD

FORWARD (Foundation for Women's Health Research and Development) is the leading African women's organisation working to end violence against women and girls and advance the health, rights, and wellbeing of African women and girls in the UK and across Africa.

For more than four decades, FORWARD has worked alongside women, girls, communities, policymakers, and practitioners to tackle female genital mutilation (FGM), child marriage, and other forms of gender-based violence through advocacy, research, capacity strengthening, and community-led action.



This summary report provides an overview of the key findings and recommendations from the full report, The State of FGM in the UK. Those interested are encouraged to read the full report, available on our website, for a detailed analysis of the evidence, findings, and recommendations.

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