Female genital mutilation (FGM) refers to “all procedures involving partial or total removal of the female external genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.”

While the exact number of girls and women worldwide who have undergone FGM remains unknown, at least 200 million girls and women have been cut in 31 countries with representative data on prevalence. FGM is a violation of girls’ and women's human rights and is condemned by many international treaties and conventions, as well as by national legislation in many countries. Yet, where it is practised FGM is performed in line with tradition and social norms to ensure that girls are socially accepted and marriageable, and to uphold their status and honour and that of the entire family. UNICEF works with government and civil society partners towards the elimination of FGM in countries where it is still practised.

WHEN AND HOW IS FGM PERFORMED?

All girls are cut by traditional practitioners, and one in seven have undergone the most severe form of the practice.
WHAT ARE THE PREVAILING ATTITUDES TOWARDS FGM?

Nearly all people in Niger think the practice of FGM should stop

IS THE PRACTICE OF FGM CHANGING?

The practice of FGM has been systematically very low throughout the years

Percentage of girls and women aged 15 to 49 years who have undergone FGM, by current age

Percentage of girls and women aged 15 to 49 years who have heard about FGM and think the practice should continue, by household wealth quintile, education and age

Percentage of girls and women aged 15 to 49 years and boys and men aged 15 to 49 years who have heard of FGM and believe the practice is required by religion
Notes: In Liberia, girls and women who have heard of the Sande society were asked whether they were members; this provides indirect information on FGM since it is performed during initiation into the society. An older source is used to report the percentage of support for FGM in Uganda (DHS 2011) since the latest source did not collect these data. MICS data for Ghana (2011) could not be used to report on attitudes towards FGM due to the fact that information is missing for girls and women with no living daughters; data from MICS 2006 are used instead. EDSF/PAPFAM data for Djibouti (2012) could not be used for attitudes towards FGM since the question is different from the standard; data from MICS 2006 are used instead. In Liberia, only cut girls and women were asked about their attitudes towards FGM; since girls and women from practicing communities are more likely to support the practice, the level of support in this country as captured by DHS 2013 is higher than would be expected had all girls and women been asked their opinion. In Egypt and Somalia, the support for FGM was calculated among all girls and women, since respondents were not first asked whether they had heard of the practice. Prevalence data for girls and women aged 15 to 49 years and data on attitudes towards FGM are not available for Indonesia.

Updated January 2020