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## Female Genital Mutilation

**Interview with Ms Marika Podda Connor on Female Genital Mutilation – Ms Podda Connor is a Transcultural Practice Nurse who works at the Migrant Liaison Office within the Primary Health Care. (interview carried out by Ms Anna Catania, MT EMN Officer)**

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is internationally recognized as a violation of the human rights of girls and women and a gender-based violence. FGM comprises all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons (WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, 1997).

“As health professionals we are duty bound to report cases of FGM” says Marika Podda Connor, a Transcultural Practice Nurse who works at the Migrant Liaison Office within the Primary Health Care.

Ms Podda Connor, who holds a Masters degree in Transcultural Health, gives lectures on the topic of FGM to university students from the Faculty of Health Science, Transcultural Counselling, and health professionals who come across migrant women in their work. “All health professionals are obliged to report cases of FGM where a girl or a young female divulges that she has had FGM, if physical signs indicate that FGM has taken place or if a parent discloses that the girl has had FGM. After giving birth it is forbidden to re-stitch a mother’s genital area if she had suffered with type 3 FGM prior to giving birth to her child”.

“Should a mother say that she intends to have FGM performed on her daughter the case is discussed with the social worker and the mother is given full information about the harmful and legal consequences for allowing her daughter to go through this unnecessary traumatic and illegal procedure. The information about this case will be shared with the consultant and other professionals and treated as a potential risk. The intention of carrying out FGM is said to be a criminal act and should be reported” said Ms Podda Connor. Educational sessions on the topic of FGM are also organized for teachers who are made aware to be on the look-out if a migrant girl coming from a FGM prevalent country for example says that she is going on holiday. This should be enough for the teacher to think that the girl could be at risk of FGM. A teacher may

also notice that a girl returning to school after a long absence is walking in a strange way or has suddenly become withdrawn. One should enquire whether the girl has undergone the trauma of FGM.

These sessions have also been delivered by Ms. Podda Connor to social workers and newly recruited law enforcement officers in 2017. Public officers coming in contact with migrants coming from FGM prevalent countries have the duty to educate, prevent, protect and support girls/women at risk and/or victims of FGM.

The legislation enacted in Malta in 2014 stipulates that whoever fails to report through a formal complaint or through another

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manner is liable to a fine of up to €5,000 or even to imprisonment for a term of six months up to two years, or even both, fine and imprisonment. It also stipulates that whosoever, for non-medical reasons, performs an operation or carries out any intervention on a woman's genital area that damages the genitalia or inflicts upon them permanent changes, shall be guilty of enforced female genital mutilation and shall be liable to the punishment of imprisonment for a term of five to ten years. If death shall ensue as a result of a supervening accidental cause and not solely as a result of the nature or the natural consequences of the operation or intervention, the offender shall, on conviction, be liable to imprisonment for a term of six to twelve years.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) also known as female circumcision is usually performed at a very young age (between 3 and 15 years). It is the female family members who strongly encourage this practice. In some countries where poverty is prevalent, the only guarantee that the daughter will be accepted by her in-laws is marrying off a circumcised daughter. In such countries marriage is the only social status a girl can hope to have. By such a practice the girl is believed to be clean and pure and depending on the culture and tribe, a married woman who has not been

circumcised could be marginalised by her in-laws and the whole community. The practice of FGM is done by a highly esteemed unskilled traditional practitioner who has no knowledge of human anatomy. Pieces of broken glass, sharp stones, rusty razors or used blades are used as a cutting tool. FGM is performed without the use of anaesthesia. In some affluent societies the girl is taken to a private clinic and FGM is performed as a medicalised procedure with anaesthesia, however this is still considered illegal as it is a form of abuse with short and long term health consequences on the girl.

Female genital mutilation is classified into four types with Type 3 being the most painful and harmful. FGM is performed on girls mainly coming from Sub-Saharan countries: Somali, Ethiopia, Eritrea and also from some of the West African and Asian countries. FGM presents a challenge to health professionals within the Maltese health system who face the issue of FGM among Sub-Saharan African women in their work.

The Malta FGM fact sheet (2012) drawn up by the European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE) stated that between 2003 and 2007 there were 566 births in Malta by mothers of African nationality; 170 of

these mothers came from Sub-Saharan and Sahel regions. Until 2009, an estimated 242 migrant women from countries where FGM is practised were living in Malta.

Today, in Malta, most migrant women coming from Sub-Saharan countries live in the community. The most prominent nationalities in the open centres at present are Somali, Eritrean, Syrian, and Ethiopian. The Migrant Health Liaison Office regularly organises Health Education sessions at the Open Centres. Sessions on FGM aim to educate migrant women on the harmful health consequences of FGM and to make them aware that the practice is illegal in Malta. These sessions are also held in the community within the LEAP Centres.

The Migrant Health Liaison Office also developed a Health Orientation Programme for resettled migrants to Malta. This programme helps the migrants to familiarise themselves with the Maltese health system and to learn to use the available services appropriately.

The role of the Migrant Health Liaison Office includes but is not limited to education sessions to migrants, for instance the delivery of the training programme: 'Cultural mediators in Health Care'.



DR ROBERTA BUHAGIAR Migration Coordinator, Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security

## Fostering Dialogue with Migrant Communities

Over the last few months, since the beginning of 2018, the Ministry for Home Affairs and National Security has embarked on a new initiative to strengthen dialogue with civil society organisations and migrant communities in Malta. A series of meetings are being organised with relevant NGOs, as well as representatives and leaders of migrant communities, with the aim of creating a space for frank discussion. Through these meetings the Ministry hopes

to better understand the issues and challenges which affect the lives of migrants and beneficiaries of international protection. Importance is being given to bilateral meetings, as the Ministry believes that getting to know each community and the specific challenges affecting it goes a long way towards building trust and fostering constructive dialogue on substantive issues.

So far, the feedback received from the migrant communities and NGOs

regarding this new initiative is very positive, with this new approach being particularly welcomed by the migrant communities. During the meetings, community representatives are bringing to the fore well-known issues as well as emerging concerns regarding the situation of migrants and beneficiaries of protection living in Malta. However, the key message emerging from these meetings is that there is an unprecedented willingness and a sense of commitment towards integrating into Maltese society.

# EMN 10th Anniversary



To celebrate the EMN 10<sup>th</sup> Year Anniversary the Belgian National Contact Point (NCP) prepared a captivating video. For the compilation of this video NCPs were asked to send articles on migration featured on national newspapers. Other NCPs were interviewed with the aim of sharing their experience in EMN work. The short video has **three aims**: to acknowledge what the EMN has achieved over the last years, to look ahead to future challenges and the network's capacity to respond to them, and to congratulate all those who contributed to the work of the EMN.

The 10-year video may be viewed in English voice-over with English subtitles, English voice-over with Bulgarian subtitles, English voice-over with German subtitles and English voice-over with French/Dutch subtitles. The video may also be viewed on <https://homeaffairs.gov.mt/en/MHAS-Information/EMN/Pages/EMN-10-year-Anniversary.aspx>

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## EMN 10th Year Anniversary Conference

Understanding Migration in the EU: past, present, future Insights from the EMN Network 2008 – 2018



On the 15<sup>th</sup> May 2018, a one-day conference was organized in Brussels, to commemorate the 10-year anniversary from the creation of the European Migration Network. It was a very well attended high profile event, with speakers and participants from a very wide spectrum of entities. It brought together almost 200 policy makers, researchers and practitioners from the EU, and from national governments, academic institutions, international organisations and civil society.

EU Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris Avramopoulos delivered a very interesting opening speech, focusing on two areas – the unprecedented high number of arrivals and the unseen challenges that come with that as well as the huge response that we have made, collectively as a Union – legally, operationally and financially. Speaking about the European Migration Network, EU Commissioner Avramopoulos described it as a tool that has been pivotal in this collective response. He highlighted how the extensive work carried out by the European Migration Network, such as the many comparative studies, the ad-hoc queries on the various topics linked to the various aspects of migration, has proved to be crucial in the policy-making process at EU level. Furthermore, he spoke about how EMN work helped particularly in the reform of the Common European Asylum System, and in the area of return and readmission.

Various questions were discussed during this conference, such as, “Why Migration Can Only

Be Managed by Working Together?”, “Building Stronger Partnerships with Third Countries on Migration”, “Public Opinion and Trust in EU Migration Policy”, with a final salient topic focusing on “The Next 10 Years in European Migration Policy: Seizing Opportunities and Avoiding Pitfalls.”

Another highlight of this 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference was the launch of a video demonstrating what the European Migration Network is all about, what it stands for, and the importance of its role within research and policy-making.

The key conclusions reached during the EMN 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference were that: migration cannot be managed by individual countries, since it is a global and sustainable issue and must be managed for the common good. In fact, a multilateral and holistic approach is required, looking at all aspects of migration, including cooperation and partnership with third countries. Another key conclusion was that public emotions and sentiments towards migration are very much divided both in Europe and elsewhere. Another key conclusion pointed at the need of a more long-term vision on migration policies focusing on better contingency planning and a balance between solidarity and responsibility. A final key conclusion underlined that migration policies must be opened to the outside world for the benefit of all, with the EU being engaged in the negotiation of a Global Compact for Migration.

Moreover, important EMN-related conclusions were reached, focusing on the way forward for EMN.

The first conclusion remarked the importance of the EMN and its ‘moral duty’ to remain what it is – a trusted source of impartial information on asylum and migration issues, while maintaining its commitment to inform policy-makers, practitioners and the wider public through evidence-based information.

Another conclusion highlighted the importance of the role of the EMN in reinforcing a culture of working together and sharing information across the EU Member States. This fact was acknowledged through the EU-wide studies and reports as well as through day-to-day working tools, such as the EMN ad-hoc query mechanism.

A third and final conclusion was that it is time for the EMN to open itself to the outside world, and to embrace relevant third countries as partners in the network.

The above-mentioned conclusions from 10th anniversary conference were gathered in the launch of a report titled “*Understanding Migration in the European Union – Insights from the European Migration Network 2008-2018*” which can be found in the European Migration Network website, Latest Publications section - [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european\\_migration\\_network\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network_en)

# Home Affairs Council

5th June 2018

The EU Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, Dimitris Avramopoulos, made a few doorstep remarks at the start of the Home Affairs session of the Justice and Home Affairs Council of Ministers which was held on the 5th June 2018 in Luxembourg. Commissioner Avramopoulos stated that this Home Affairs Council would be taking stock of what Europe has achieved so far, in order to find new ways to address migration in the future. He highlighted the progress carried out during the past 3 years, stressing that the EU and its Member States were now in a better position to manage migration and had improved the management of borders. However, he also emphasised that there was much that still needed to be done.

With regard to the current migration situation, he highlighted the significantly fewer arrivals as well as the significant decreases in the number of asylum requests. He stated that the EU's external

borders are better managed and better protected, thanks to the European Borders and Coastguard, which should be strengthened further through the next EU Budget. EU Commissioner Avramopoulos highlighted the fact that good progress was registered in the EU's cooperation with third countries on return. However, he stated that, the situation remains fragile because there was still pressure on some of the migratory routes. He mentioned the situation in Greece and in the Western Balkans, while emphasising the importance of continuing monitoring very closely the situation in the Central Mediterranean. The EU Commissioner underlined that it was also important for the EU to uphold its duty to offer protection to those in need and to people fleeing war and persecution. However, he also emphasised that to uphold this duty a truly effective Common European Asylum System was required.

The EU Commissioner informed the press that leaders have given a mandate to the Council to find a solution by the end of June, which however might be extended by a few weeks. Negotiations with the European Parliament on the new EU Asylum Agency have been concluded, pending the provisions linked with the rest of the legislative package. Negotiations with the European Parliament on the recast Reception Conditions Directive, the Qualification Regulation and the Resettlement Regulation are advancing, and the Presidency aims to reach a political agreement with the Parliament by the end of June. On the Eurodac Regulation negotiations, with the European

Parliament have also progressed. On the Asylum Procedure Regulation and the Dublin system, discussions have continued at technical level within the Council.

Although most legislative proposals are drawing to a close, there is still a lack of consensus between EU member states on the Dublin system. So the deadline for a consensus in this regard might very well be extended. The proposed Dublin recast seeks to provide for a fair system for determining the member state responsible for examining asylum applications. The major amendments primarily aim at three issues:

- The criteria for determining responsibility.
- The rules and time limits relevant to asylum application and to readmission procedures.
- Introduction of a corrective allocation mechanism in order to ensure a fair sharing of responsibility between member states.

During the final press conference at the end of the meeting of Home Affairs Ministers, Commissioner Avramopoulos stated that Europol and the European Borders and Coast Guard were fully ready to deploy their personnel aboard Operation Sophia. He concluded by saying that it was important to remember that this was not the time to slow down on comprehensive efforts being undertaken by the EU, whether on migration, borders management or security. Finally, he thanked the outgoing Bulgarian EU Presidency, for their excellent work of over the last six months on migration and asylum policy.