



COI QUERY

Country of Origin	Sierra Leone
Title	Information on female genital mutilation (FGM) for married women; possibility to refuse FGM for married women and consequences of refusal; availability of state protection in case of refusal and access to support services in Freetown
Reference period	January 2020 to 09 November 2023
Topic(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">FGM for married womenPossibility to refuse FGM and consequences for refusalAvailability of state protection in case of refusal and access to support services in Freetown
Date of completion	10 November 2023
Query Code	Q58-2023
Contributing EU+ COI units (if applicable)	N/A



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All sources used are referenced and cited in the bibliography section. A quality review has been performed in line with the above mentioned COI methodology. This document does not claim to be exhaustive or conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to international protection. If a certain event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

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COI QUERY RESPONSE – Sierra Leone

Information on female genital mutilation (FGM) for married women; possibility to refuse FGM for married women and consequences of refusal; availability of state protection in case of refusal and access to support services in Freetown

1. FGM for married women

Information specifically related to FGM for married women could not be found among the sources consulted by the EUAA within the time constraints of this query. However, the following information may be relevant.

FGM in Sierra Leone is ‘prevalent’¹ and ‘widespread’². The law does not prohibit FGM.³ Furthermore, Equality Now reported in February 2022 that ‘there have been no known prosecutions relating to FGM’.⁴ However, Amnesty International (AI) reported that in July 2022, an FGM practitioner in Moriba town was charged with manslaughter after a 21-year-old woman died a day after her FGM procedure.⁵

The 2022 AI report on Sierra Leone, using statistics from the United Nations Children’s Fund, further described that 83% of girls and women (aged 15-49 years) had undergone FGM.⁶ The 2022 US Department of State (USDOS) report, citing external sources, stated that the procedure was most common between ages 10 and 14. The same report illustrated that ‘71 percent of women and girls ages 15 to 49 had undergone FGM/C before age 15’ and ‘61 percent of women and girls ages 15 to 19 had undergone FGM/C compared with 95 percent of women ages 45 to 49’.⁷

A 2023 BBC news article, described that Sierra Leone has one of the highest rates of FGM in Africa and one of the main reasons for FGM is to ‘tame a women’s sexual desire’.⁸ The organization 28 Too Many, illustrated that FGM has been closely linked with the ‘Bondo’ secret society, in which FGM is part of an ‘initiation ritual for women and girls into the society’.⁹ The 2021 USDOS report also stated that FGM was performed in initiations into ‘traditional secret societies’ and was considered a ‘rite of passage into womanhood’ by these societies.¹⁰

¹ Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI, Country Report for 2022 – Sierra Leone, 23 February 2022, [url](#), p. 23

² Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 – Sierra Leone, 2023, [url](#)

³ Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2023 – Sierra Leone, 2023, [url](#); USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices – Sierra Leone, 20 March 2023, [url](#), pp. 14-15

⁴ Equality Now, Following Another Death From FGM In Sierra Leone, 130 Women’s Rights Groups Around The World Call On The Government To Criminalize FGM, 1 February 2022, [url](#)

⁵ AI, Amnesty International Report 2022/2023 - Sierra Leone, 27 March 2023, [url](#)

⁶ AI, Amnesty International Report 2022/2023 - Sierra Leone, 27 March 2023, [url](#)

⁷ USDOS, 2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices – Sierra Leone, 20 March 2023, [url](#), p. 15

⁸ BBC News, FGM in Sierra Leone: I believe my girlfriend died because her genitals were cut, 1 May 2023, [url](#)

⁹ 28 Too Many, FGM in Sierra Leone: Key Findings, September 2021, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁰ USDOS, 2021 Country Report on Human Rights Practices – Sierra Leone, 12 April 2022, [url](#), p. 16



Moreover, the Borgen Project described that FGM was viewed as a ‘symbol of status and honor to families, making it a social norm that girls have no choice but to abide by’.¹¹

A 2020 survey by the Sierra Leone’s Ministry of Health and Sanitation, covering 2019, portrayed that ‘Muslim women (87 %) are more likely to be circumcised than Christian women (69 %)', while the percentage of women having been circumcised is higher in rural than urban areas (89 % and 76 %, respectively). According to the same survey the prevalence of FGM by district is highest in Karene (98 %) and lowest in Bo (65 %). The district, Western Area Urban, where the capital of Freetown is located, has a rate of 74 %.¹² Moreover, the survey demonstrated that traditional circumcisers carry out most of the procedures, at 95 % for girls and 96 % for women.¹³

2. Possibility to refuse FGM and consequences for refusal

Information on the possibility to refuse FGM and consequences for refusal was scarce among the sources consulted by the EUAA within the time constraints of this query. Nevertheless, the following information may be relevant.

According to a 2022 news article by the Irish Times, refusing ‘Bondo’, an initiation for young women involving FGM, ‘comes at great social cost’. Furthermore, the same source indicated that women who have not received the initiation are ‘not permitted to marry; to represent their communities in religious or cultural events; to participate in celebrations or funerals; or to serve as chief or in parliament’. The article described a specific woman who was abandoned by her family at the age of 18 and cut off financially, due to refusing the initiation, leaving her unable to further her education or marry. The article also illustrated that a ‘growing numbers of girls and young women’ are ‘refusing to participate in initiation, telling their mothers and grandmothers, they will not join Bondo’.¹⁴

A 2021 news article by Deutsche Welle (DW) portrayed that a woman from Sierra Leone who refused the ‘Bondo’ initiation, due to the involvement of FGM, faced ‘enormous teasing’ from her school peers and community.¹⁵

3. Availability of state protection in case of refusal and access to support services in Freetown

Information on the availability of state protection or access to support services for women could not be found among the sources consulted by the EUAA within the time constraints of this query.

¹¹ Borgen Project (The), Tackling FGM in Sierra Leone, 29 January 2021, [url](#)

¹² Sierra Leone, Ministry of Health and Sanitation, Demographic and Health Survey 2019, October 2020, [url](#), pp. 330-331

¹³ Sierra Leone, Ministry of Health and Sanitation, Demographic and Health Survey 2019, October 2020, [url](#), p. 332

¹⁴ Irish Times (The), The girls and women risking everything by refusing female genital mutilation, 20 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵ DW, The woman fighting Sierra Leone's FGM tradition, 1 March 2021, [url](#)



For additional information on this topic until August 2021, see the EUAA COI query response on [FGM in Sierra Leone, dated 13 August 2021](#).



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ADDITIONAL SOURCES CONSULTED

Africa News; Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD); Asylum Research Center (ARC); Canada - Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB); ECOLnet; European Union – EUAA COI Portal; Refworld; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)