

POLICY OUTREACH, EDUCATION, & ADVOCACY PROGRAM OVERVIEW 2015 - 2023

Needs Statement

Female genital cutting (FGC) is considered a social norm in practicing communities, and [laws against FGC may help to prevent the practice](#) by acting as a mechanism to shape a community or individual's behavior. Laws can be a catalyst for changing social norms and, in particular, harmful social norms like FGC. With the help of laws, communities can recognize that harmful practices, even those rooted in culture and/or religion, should not be continued. Policies can be educational tools, deterrents, influencers for social and behavioral change, and prevention mechanisms. [Research](#) indicates that to be more effective in achieving FGC abandonment, policies should adopt a comprehensive approach. This entails incorporating elements such as community education and outreach initiatives, as well as civil remedies for survivors rather than only including criminal sanctions.

Program Goals

- Educate frontline professionals (i.e. healthcare providers, social workers, child care professionals, etc.), lawmakers, and constituents, engaging them to support policies addressing FGC.
- Unite diverse stakeholders and establish shared concerns and connections related to FGC, fostering a collective impact and the creation of state-level coalitions dedicated to advocating for policy-level changes to address FGC.
- Uplift and include the voices of survivors in educating policy-makers.
- Increase individual civic engagement in the policy process and ensure that impacted communities have a voice in the creation of policies to prevent and support survivors.

Program Activities

Building Coalitions

- engaging a variety of stakeholders (including survivors, impacted communities, civil society organizations, government, cultural organizations, frontline professionals, and grassroots representatives, among others) to collaborate and inform policy solutions on FGC through coalition meetings, roundtables, trainings, listening sessions, and more.

Encouraging Education and Outreach

- providing information on FGC to inform constituents and build support for systemic change through legislative solutions.

Empowering Survivor Voices

- empowering community members through learning to navigate the policy-making system and have a voice in the legislative process via providing testimony, meeting with legislators and state bodies, and organizing and facilitating legislative advocacy efforts.
- Providing Resources - drafting and disseminating petitions, creating educational resources and factsheets, and drafting language for bills and policies.

At the global level, communities are in different stages of abandonment or continuation of the practice; yet collaborative work can help build momentum to end FGC. The [Global Platform for Action to End FGM/C](#), of which Sahiyo is a founding member, is a consortium of civil society organizations, champions, survivors, and grassroots representatives united in a singular mission: to advocate and support policies and collaborations that encourage the abandonment and prevention of FGC.

At the national level, Sahiyo has supported advocacy in the U.S. and other countries, including India. Sahiyo also makes space for FGC-impacted communities to reflect on the political situations surrounding FGC laws and/or lack of laws in specific country contexts. Building spaces collectively that are safe to engage in these topics can provide community-wide healing for those impacted by FGC, and can also be vital to continuing civil advocacy on such topics.

Within the U.S., 41 states have some form of legislation against FGC as of November 2023. Yet, many states focus solely on making FGC illegal by criminalizing the act, without recognizing the need for education and outreach to FGC-impacted communities (holistic legislation). Additionally, the creation of state-level legislation on FGC must address training gaps in education, law enforcement systems, and other state-level systems.

State-specific activities are below. Additional information can be found on [Sahiyo's website](#):

New York City

After a citywide ordinance on FGC passed in 2022, an advisory council was created to provide recommendations on how to move forward and support efforts to end FGC. Sahiyo's co-founder, Mariya Taher, is a member of this council.

Washington

In 2023, Sahiyo supported the formation of the Washington Coalition to End FGM/C. The Coalition consists of survivors, advocates, and community-based organizations in the state and across the U.S., and is headed by [Voices to End FGM/C](#) program participant, Absa Samba. Sahiyo led the development of a public webinar in partnership with the Coalition, The U.S. End FGM/C Network, Children's Alliance, and Mother Africa to educate constituents and stakeholders about the proposed legislation. The holistic legislation on FGC, of which the Coalition was a fundamental actor, was passed on April 20, 2023.

Connecticut

Sahiyo initiated the [Connecticut Coalition to End FGM/C in 2020](#). In September 2022, Sahiyo hosted a webinar with this Coalition and The Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity to garner public support for legislation on FGC. Sahiyo also assisted in educational outreach presentations for the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights, Connecticut Women's Consortium, and others. The [Connecticut Governor and Lieutenant Governor officially recognize International Day of Zero Tolerance of FGM/C](#).

Massachusetts

Sahiyo worked for five years to help Massachusetts pass a law on FGC, [which it finally did in August 2020](#). During that time, Sahiyo's activities to help move this legislation forward consisted of the following: hosting a roundtable, educational outreach presentations, a Voices to End FGM/C screening, a Change.org petition delivery event, and various other advocacy events. Sahiyo currently is working towards ensuring the implementation of the law, including the implementation of public education and outreach to impacted communities within the state.

Michigan

Sahiyo collaborated with the Michigan Department of Children and Families after a doctor was charged with performing FGC in 2018. [A roundtable event](#) to gather state officials was organized to determine policies, including how to work with FGC-impacted families.

Program Impact by the Numbers

2016-2023

3

state coalitions were formed

58

educational meetings with legislators were held

2

states passed new legislation on FGC

1

website was created for the Connecticut Coalition to End FGM/C

19

educational outreach webinars were hosted

2

Facebook pages were created for Washington Coalition & Connecticut Coalition

42

policy blogs were published

2

action alerts created in partnership with **UNICEF USA & Equality Now**

In addition to the aforementioned data points, Sahiyo also created original educational resources such as fact sheets, brochures, and letters of support.

Looking Forward

Sahiyo will continue to participate in policy education and outreach through advocacy in the years to come and hopes to expand our policy-building in a variety of ways, including:

- Working towards creating comprehensive legislation addressing FGC across all states, prioritizing survivor support, cultural sensitivity, and community education, as well as reporting mechanisms for those at risk.
- Increasing opportunities for survivors to access federal and state-based victims' services and compensation (i.e. civil remedies).
- Supporting federal and state-level systems to become more culturally inclusive and sensitive to efforts to end FGC through education and outreach.
- Increasing opportunities for citizens to learn about FGC legislation in their area and providing them with resources to contact their legislators.
- Supporting international efforts to educate policymakers about FGC, encouraging favorable support for legislation against FGC.
- Continuing to work as a member of The Global Platform to End FGM/C and put forth international advocacy efforts towards increasing funding, programming, and action on FGC at both private and public levels.
- Creating advocacy opportunities at high-level events with a call to action to UNICEF-UNFPA and other international bodies to invest further in anti-FGC efforts globally beyond the 32 restricted countries currently in UNICEF's data collection.
- Expanding our Policy Internship program to increase the capacity for our work in this programmatic area.