



## On the 11th anniversary of the International Day of the Girl Child: Joining forces for the effective protection of girls in Yemen

### Justice4Yemen Pact

### Yemen

11 Oct 2023

On the International Day of the Girl Child, [the Justice4Yemen Pact](#) continues to closely monitor and strongly condemn human rights violations and the alarming situation of girls in Yemen, including intimidation, displacement and violation of their rights due to war and armed conflict. The Pact condemns all harmful practices against Yemeni girls and the lack of protection they enjoy, especially in the context of various customs, traditions and practices such as widespread child marriage in rural areas.

In recent years, Yemen has witnessed a growing and dangerous social phenomenon: child marriage. This can be attributed to various inherited and emerging factors resulting from the country's difficult economic conditions due to political conflicts. In addition, the lack of awareness of the risks of early marriage plays an important role.

On November 4, 2022, the main court of Dhamar decided to annul the marriage contract of a 10-year-old girl named Noha. J [last name withheld in report], who was married to a man in his fifties. The girl was returned to her mother, and legal action was taken against the father, husband, and best man, according to the Sputnik newspaper, under the headline "[Yemen: Child marriage, a slave trade in times of war](#)" reports

Child marriage is a violation of basic human rights and has a profound impact on all aspects of a girl's life. It deprives them of their childhood, disrupts their education, limits their opportunities, increases the risk of violence and abuse, and endangers their health. As a result, it is a critical barrier to achieving nearly all of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Young girls in Yemen, sometimes as young as 8 years old, are frequently affected by child marriage. A recent survey by the National social protection monitoring survey found that 13% of girls under the age of 18 are married and about half of women aged 20-49 were married before the age of 18.

In addition, female genital mutilation (FGM) is also widespread. It is disturbing that more than 8 in 10 girls undergo FGM performed by traditional practitioners. About 87% of FGM procedures in Yemen are performed within the first week of life of female infants, and 9% take place in the first year of life.



These practices of child marriage and female genital mutilation have serious consequences for the lives of girls in Yemen. They perpetuate the cycle of gender inequality, deprive girls of their rights, and hinder their overall development and well-being. Efforts must be made to raise awareness, enforce legal protections, and provide support to combat these harmful practices and ensure the rights and well-being of Yemeni girls.

The results of a survey conducted in October 2020, published on Gulf Aden's website under the title "The Hidden and Destructive Violence Against Females," reveal alarming statistics about the situation of girls in Yemen. The survey covered 12 governorates where these practices are widespread. According to the survey, the percentage of girls undergoing FGM has increased in the governorates of Hudaydah, Hadramawt and Taiz. Shockingly, 19.4% of those who perform FGM procedures are doctors, nurses, and medical personnel employed in both government and private health centers. The remaining percentage is distributed among traditional birth attendants, i.e. women who practice midwifery and FGM, and cases where a family member performs the procedure.

The survey also found that 10.6% of FGM procedures are performed in government health centers, 13.7% in private clinics, while the majority, 75.7%, take place in the operator's or victim's home. The study highlights the various harms of FGM, ranging from death and severe bleeding to chronic urinary tract infections, fatty cyst formation, and other health complications. The Justice4Yemen Pact emphasizes that the practice of female genital mutilation and the disfigurement of girls' reproductive organs violate their rights to health, physical integrity, and safety. Furthermore, their right to life is violated when the victim dies, and their right to the highest attainable standard of health is undermined when the genitals are damaged by this practice without medical necessity.

An opinion survey conducted by [Together4Her Network](#) (Part of the Justice4Yemen Pact) shed light on the harmful practices used against girls in Yemen. According to the survey, 10% of respondents ranked virginity testing of girls as the sixth most harmful practice. In this context, the Justice4Yemen Pact continues to work with women's health professionals to collect testimonies about the practice of virginity testing. A gynecologist at Al-Mukalla Maternity and Children's Hospital explained that girls suffer severe pain, and their psychological condition deteriorates when they undergo virginity tests at the hospital. There is no special room for conducting these tests and they are usually conducted in the women's clinic or delivery room. Most cases referred to the hospital come from police centers. The gynecologist recalled a six-year-old girl who was cruelly sexually assaulted by a man in his forties and taken for virginity testing. The girl was traumatized by the assault and her mental state was severely impaired. She was overwhelmed by fear and screaming, and the virginity test felt like a second psychological assault for her. Many other similar cases were mentioned in which the girls' mental state deteriorated as they walked through the corridors of the delivery room department to the examination bed and burst into tears when they were asked to begin the examination.



The Justice for Yemen Alliance is concerned about the high number of girls dropping out of school, according to a recent report from UNICEF. Currently, two million girls and boys of school age do not attend school for a variety of reasons, including poverty, conflict, and lack of opportunities. The dropout rate for girls in secondary education in rural areas has reached 50% <https://news.un.org/ar/story/2021/07/1079132>.

On the occasion of the 11th anniversary of International Day of the Girl Child, which is celebrated on October 11, the Justice4Yemen Yemen Pact is calling for effective protection measures for girls, and their voices to be heard more, raising awareness of the issues that affect them and shedding light on their needs and challenges. The Pact aims to empower girls and ensure the realization of their human rights. It calls on all parties to the conflict in Yemen and international actors to address urgent humanitarian issues, including the protection of girls, and prioritize them in peace talks.

The Justice4Yemen Pact recommends addressing various forms of social discrimination against girls in Yemen and calls for attention to be paid to girls at all times through the expansion of specialized services for them, especially in crisis management and reconstruction. It stresses the importance of empowering girls to bring about change, raise their voices, and fulfill their demands for protection, education, and a peaceful life free from discrimination.

### **Justice4Yemen Pact**

October 11, 2023

1. Abductees' Mothers Association (AMA)
2. Al-Amal Women's and Sociocultural Foundation (AWSF)
3. Center for Strategic Studies to Support Women and Children (CSWC)
4. Free Media Center for Investigative Journalism
5. Marib Dam Foundation for Social Development (MDF)
6. Musaala Organization
7. SAM Organization for Rights and Liberties
8. Studies and Economic Media Center (SEMC)
9. Watch for Human Rights
10. Yemeni Coalition to Monitor Human Rights Violations (YCMHRV)