



## The Protective Responsibility Quadrant:

**An Integrated Framework for Safeguarding Children from Violence and Exploitation in Yemen**

Working Paper presented at the roundtable discussion: *Children between the Risk of Abuse and Gaps in Protection – A Legal, Media, and Security Approach to Confronting Crimes of Child Abuse in Yemen*

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## Introduction

The SEYAJ Organization for Childhood Protection reveals alarming and recent statistics on the escalation of violence, exploitation, and abuse against children in Yemen as a result of armed conflict, climate change, and other aggravating factors. For instance, field estimates by SEYAJ indicate that child marriage in rural areas has reached a shocking level of nearly 80% over the past five years. Millions of children have been subjected to recruitment in so-called “summer centers,” with disclosures by Houthi officials confirming that approximately 10,000 children have been forced into combat. This occurs within a collapsed protection environment that threatens more than 21.5 million boys and girls.

Recent UN human rights indicators underscore the gravity of the protection crisis: one in four children of basic education age is now outside the schooling system, while 47% of internally displaced children lack official birth certificates. This deprives them of fundamental rights to education and health care, and exposes them to heightened risks of recruitment, exploitation, trafficking, including sexual exploitation, and the worst forms of child labor.

Houthi authorities have publicly announced the enrollment of 1.5 million students in summer centers across more than 9,100 schools and facilities, with “special batches” graduating (such as 4,000 children in Taiz). However, local and international human rights reports—including those of the Yemeni Rights and Freedoms Network, the Rasd Coalition, Mwatana Organization, and the UN Group of Eminent Experts—have documented that these centers have become environments of forced recruitment, sexual exploitation, and torture, amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Violations are not confined to Houthi-controlled areas. In the interim capital Aden, organizations such as SEYAJ, Wasam, and the Aden Sons Platform have exposed the involvement of influential security actors in crimes of sexual exploitation and extortion of children, including filming victims and using recordings as instruments of coercion. The Public Prosecutor has issued arrest warrants and travel bans against implicated officers.

## I. The Family – First Line of Defense

The family constitutes the natural environment and primary duty-bearer for the child’s protection, care, and sound upbringing. Its role as the first line of defense rests on preventive education and includes:

- **Preventive awareness:** instilling respect for bodily integrity, privacy, and personal safety boundaries from early childhood.
- **Active vigilance and care:** attentive monitoring of children’s behavior and identifying psychological or physical changes as early warning indicators.



- **Digital safeguarding:** responsible supervision of children’s use of technology and guidance against cyber risks.
- **Safe environment and psychosocial support:** fostering dialogue and trust, providing emotional containment, and ensuring specialized support to overcome trauma.
- **Institutional partnership and response:** immediate reporting of violations and full cooperation with formal protection mechanisms and civil society organizations.

## II. Government Institutions – Primary Responsibility and Legal Mandate

The State bears the foremost legal and moral responsibility to establish legislative and executive frameworks ensuring a safe environment for children. Its obligations include:

1. **Protective legislative harmonization:** updating national child laws in line with international conventions, ensuring strict penalties and comprehensive provisions.
2. **Institutionalized monitoring and response:** activating a unified national system for early warning and reporting (e.g., toll-free hotlines), and deploying specialized child-friendly police and medical units.
3. **Capacity-building:** mandatory and sustainable training programs for law enforcement, medical, and educational personnel to ensure sensitive, rapid, and accurate handling of child protection cases.
4. **Aftercare and rehabilitation:** establishing advanced state-run centers providing psychosocial, social, and medical support to victims, ensuring reintegration.

Beyond these core duties, the State must confront systematic violations documented internationally, including sexual assaults in Houthi detention centers (e.g., Sana’a Central Prison, Al-Saleh Prison in Taiz), and exploitation of underage girls in “Zainabiyat” formations. This requires harmonization of national legislation with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and UN Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict (e.g., Resolution 1612), and prosecution of perpetrators before national and international courts.

## III. Civil Society Organizations – Bridging Actor and Development Partner

Civil society organizations are vital partners, bridging communities with formal institutions and complementing the roles of families and government. Their responsibilities include:



1. **Community awareness and prevention:** leading innovative national campaigns to break silence, combat stigma, and promote child protection culture.
2. **Rapid intervention and direct protection:** providing safe shelters, legal aid, and free judicial representation for child victims and their families.
3. **Advocacy and independent oversight:** monitoring executive performance, demanding policy reforms, and closing procedural gaps.

Human rights organizations also bear the responsibility of documenting grave violations, including sexual exploitation of recruited children, and exposing the “dark figure” of abuse far exceeding official statistics. This independent oversight strengthens civil society credibility and positions it as a key partner in pressing national and international authorities to include such violations in UN Security Council reports.

## IV. The National Private Sector – From Traditional Charity to Strategic Responsibility

The role of Yemen’s private sector remains limited to traditional charitable activities (e.g., orphan sponsorship, mosque construction, Ramadan food distribution), with minimal engagement in child protection. To transform it into an active protection partner, its responsibilities should include:

- **Community investment in protection:** shifting corporate social responsibility from seasonal donations to sustainable financing of child rights programs, addressing economic and cultural drivers of violence and exploitation, and recognizing child protection as an investment in stability.
- **Institutionalized trust funds:** establishing independent funds managed by civil society, financed by businesses, to cover costs of litigation, field monitoring, and legal representation, shielding companies from direct political or social repercussions.
- **Support for protective and digital innovation:** directing telecom and technology contributions to infrastructure for hotlines, safe reporting apps, and early warning systems.
- **Economic empowerment of families:** providing employment and vocational training for vulnerable households and child survivors, addressing root economic causes of abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

## Violations in Liberated Areas – Case of Aden

- **Entrapment and coercive filming:** perpetrators exploit children by recording them to enforce compliance.
- **Involvement of powerful actors:** reports confirm security officers’ complicity in sexual violence and extortion.



- **Weak protection mechanisms:** absence of specialized psychosocial and legal support centers for child victims.

While SEYAJ commends the Presidential Leadership Council, government, and Public Prosecutor for swift responses, urgent and systemic remedies are required to address root causes.

## Final Recommendations

Based on the above analysis, this paper concludes with the following strategic recommendations:

- **Legislative and financial institutionalization:** expedite adoption of a comprehensive national child protection law, linked to the state budget to ensure sustainable funding for rehabilitation centers, reducing reliance on inconsistent external aid.
- **Family knowledge empowerment:** launch a national strategy to build family capacities in preventive parenting, early risk detection, and primary psychosocial support.
- **Institutionalized four-pillar partnership:** activate an integrated framework linking government, civil society, national private sector (domestic and diaspora), and families.
- **National coordination platform:** establish a unified official mechanism (council or high committee) including government, civil society, and donors to direct funding efficiently and ensure sustainability of protection projects.
- **Protective investment policies:** create an enabling legislative environment with incentives and partial tax exemptions for businesses financing child protection initiatives.
- **Independent trust funds for justice and protection:** establish a civil society-managed financial umbrella funded by the private sector to sustain legal support and shield businesses from direct confrontation with conflict actors.
- **Forum on corporate responsibility and child rights:** mandate chambers of commerce and industry to partner with civil society in regular forums, raising awareness among business leaders about sustainable social responsibility focused on child protection.
- **International criminal accountability:** include documented violations in the UN Secretary-General's reports on children and armed conflict, urging the Security Council to impose sanctions on implicated leaders.
- **Strengthening national protection mechanisms:** establish confidential psychosocial and legal support centers for child victims of sexual violence in Sana'a and Aden.
- **Protection of underage girls:** develop gender-sensitive programs to counter recruitment and exploitation.



- **UN and national coordination:** call upon the United Nations and donors to allocate resources to combat sexual exploitation of children in the Yemeni conflict.

Kindly accept our sincere thanks and highest regards.

#### Methodological Note

This working paper has drawn upon **comparative analytical methods** and the application of **artificial intelligence techniques** in policy modeling, the formulation of specialized terminology, and the alignment of national child protection frameworks with **contemporary international protection standards**. The methodology reflects a rights-based approach consistent with **UN child protection reporting practices**.

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