

THE LAW AND FGM/C

Saudi Arabia

2026



About Orchid Project

Orchid Project is a UK- and Kenya-based non-governmental organisation catalysing the global movement to end female genital cutting (FGC). Orchid Project's strategy for 2023 to 2028 focuses on three objectives:

1. To undertake research, generate evidence and curate knowledge to better equip those working to end FGM/C
2. To catalyse, support and strengthen regional networks to actively participate in the movement to end FGM/C
3. To influence global and regional policies, actions and funding to end FGM/C.

Orchid Project's aim to expedite the building of a knowledge base for researchers and activists is being fulfilled in the [FGM/C Research Initiative](#).

About Wadi

Founded in 1992, Wadi's mission is rooted in the fundamental belief that true development only occurs when individuals possess the power to decide their own futures. We don't provide aid—we support communities to find local resilient solutions rooted in our fundamental beliefs in human rights and equality. Our strategy remains consistent: we provide the platform, but the community provides the voice.

Wadi pioneered the fight against FGM/C in Iraqi Kurdistan through grassroots action, media campaigns, and lobbying at a local and international level. This work has never stopped, only evolved to include the myriads of other forms of gender issues in the area and we continue to work to empower women through literacy, education, vocational education, women's health access in order to combat the systemic roots of gender-based violence.

Authors: Caroline Pinder, Ozan Yücel (ed.)

Acknowledgements: Hogan Lovells International LLP

Recommended citation: Orchid Project (2026) *The Law and FGM/C: Saudi Arabia*. Available at <https://www.fgmcri.org/country/saudiarabia>

For more information, please contact Orchid Project at research@orchidproject.org.



WORKING TOGETHER TO END
FEMALE GENITAL CUTTING

Overview of Domestic Legal Framework

Overview of Domestic Legal Framework in Saudi Arabia	
<i>The Constitution explicitly prohibits:</i>	
x	Violence against women and girls
x	Harmful practices
x	Female genital mutilation (FGM/C)
<i>National legislation:</i>	
x	Provides a clear definition of FGM/C
✓	Criminalises the performance of FGM/C (if the Child Protection and Protection from Abuse Acts are applied to FGM/C)
✓	Criminalises the procurement, arrangement and/or assistance of acts of FGM/C (if Child Protection and Protection from Abuse Acts apply to FGM/C)
✓	Criminalises the failure to report incidents of FGM/C (if Child Protection and Protection from Abuse Acts apply to FGM/C)
x	Criminalises the participation of medical professionals in acts of FGM/C
x	Criminalises the practice of cross-border FGM/C
x	Government has a strategy in place to end FGM/C

Introduction



Figure 1: Map of Saudi Arabia(1)

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy with borders touching seven countries, as well as the Persian Gulf and Red Sea. It has a population of 34,736,430, 92% of which live in urban areas (2). The country is divided into 13 regions (3). 90% of the population are Arabs, the remaining 10% are of Afro-Asian ethnicity. Islam is the official religion of the country: 85-90% are Sunni and 10-12% Shia (4). In 2013, expatriates constituted about one-third (approximately 32%) of Saudi Arabia's population (5). Public religious practice other than Islam is controlled and restricted, and non-Muslim houses of worship are not permitted; while some non-Muslim expatriates may worship privately, such practice occurs without official legal protection. Under Saudi law, non-Muslims are not allowed to hold Saudi citizenship (6).

Note on Terminology

In Middle Eastern countries female circumcision is sometimes referred to as *khatana* or *sunat*. In most reports about the practice in Saudi Arabia the term FGM/C is used (or sometimes female circumcision). However, for consistency across Orchid's law reports the term FGM/C has been used throughout.

Female genital cutting is classified into four major types by the World Health Organization (WHO):

Type 1: This is the partial or total removal of the clitoral glans (the external and visible part of the clitoris, which is a sensitive part of the female genitals), and/or the prepuce/clitoral hood (the fold of skin surrounding the clitoral glans).

Type 2: This is the partial or total removal of the clitoral glans and the labia minora (the inner folds of the vulva), with or without removal of the labia majora (the outer folds of skin of the vulva).

Type 3: Also known as infibulation, this is the narrowing of the vaginal opening through the creation of a covering seal. The seal is formed by cutting and repositioning the labia minora, or labia majora, sometimes through stitching, with or without removal of the clitoral prepuce/clitoral hood and glans.

Type 4: This includes all other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, e.g., pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterizing the genital area (7).

Prevalence of FGM/C

Gauging prevalence of FGM/C in Saudi Arabia is difficult due to limited up to date data, and the inclusion in some studies of participants from other countries, without indicating whether they underwent FGM/C in their originating country or in Saudi Arabia. There is wide variance in estimated prevalence between studies, ranging from 18.2% in a study of patients attending obstetrics and gynaecology clinics in the main hospital in Jeddah, to 80.3% among households in a governorate in the west of the country. News articles have referred to '1 in 5 women in Saudi subject to FGM.'

Further information about FGM/C in Saudi Arabia is available at:

<https://www.fgmc.org/country/saudi-arabia>

National Legal Framework

Saudi Arabia's legal system is based primarily on Islamic law (Sharia), supplemented by royal decrees and statutory regulations, with limited influence from customary practices (8).

The country's **highest courts** are the High Courts (which consist of the court chief, organised into circuits with 3-judge panels, except for the criminal circuit, which has a 5-judge panel for cases involving major punishments).

Subordinate courts include Court of Appeals; Specialized Criminal Court, first-degree courts composed of general, criminal, personal status, and commercial courts; Labour Court; and various administrative courts.

The current **Constitution of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia** was issued by royal decree in March 1992, revised in 2013 (9). Article 1 describes the Kingdom as a sovereign Arab Islamic State. The form of government is an absolute monarchy, in which Islam is the official religion. There is nothing in the Constitution regarding individuals' rights that would support prosecution for performance of FGM/C (for example, breach of an individual's right to physical integrity).

Applicable general laws

There is no specific law relating to criminalisation of those who perform FGM/C.

Saudi Arabia does not have a codified penal code, although a draft is underway that is expected to be published in the next 1 – 2 years. As a result, the police and judges are left with wide discretion to prosecute and punish criminal offences.

Under Islamic law, however, crimes pertaining to bodily harm are punishable by 'qisas' (retaliatory retribution) or 'diyat' (financial compensation).

Certain provisions of other legislation can be read as addressing and prohibiting FGM/C, discussed below.

Child Protection Law (2024) (10)

This is intended to protect children (defined as any individual under the age of 18) from abuse of any kind, defined at Article 1 as including physical harm or injury to the child:

Article 1 (2): Abuse: *Any form of abuse, exploitation, or threat to a child, including:*

- *Physical Abuse: Infliction of harm or physical injury to the child.*
- *Emotional Abuse: Exposure of the child to mistreatment that may cause psychological or health-related harm.*

- *Sexual Abuse: Exposure of the child to any form of sexual assault, harm, or exploitation.*
- *Neglect: Failure to provide the child's basic needs or shortcomings in doing so, which includes physical, health, emotional, psychological, educational, intellectual, social, cultural, and safety needs.*

In addition to this very clear statement criminalising physical injury to a child and exposure of a child to a health-related harm, both of which would apply to FGM/C, **Article 3 (14)** goes on to state that 'abuse or neglect of a child is considered to occur when the child experiences any of the following [...] (14) any actions that threaten the child's physical or mental health and safety.'

The Law of Protection from Abuse (2013)

This law is intended to 'ensure protection from all forms of abuse' (Article 2). **Article 1** defines 'abuse' as:

Any form of exploitation; physical, psychological, or sexual mistreatment, or the threat thereof committed by an individual against another exceeding the limits of the powers and responsibilities derived from guardianship, dependency, sponsorship, trusteeship, or livelihood relationships. The term 'abuse' shall include the omission or negligence of an individual in the performance of his duties or responsibilities in providing basic needs for a family member or an individual for whom he is legally responsible.

Article 3 (14) states that: *abuse or neglect of a child is considered to occur when the child experiences any of the following [...] (14) any actions that threaten the child's physical or mental health and safety.*

The law goes on to set out penalties for causing abuse, which range from imprisonment for one month up to one year, plus a substantial fine. Penalties are discussed further below.

Procuring, aiding and abetting FGM/C

Under the **Child Protection Act**:

Article 23(1) gives the Public Prosecution Authorities wide discretion to 'investigate violations of the provisions of this law and file charges before the competent court.'

Article 23(2) gives the competent court discretion to apply applicable penalties, subject to:

Article 23(bis), which provides 'that a prison sentence of max. 2 years and/or a fine of 100,000 SAR shall be applied. **The same penalty shall be applied to anyone that has assisted or incited the commission of such offence.**'

This could apply to those who arrange/procure/incite FGM/C, and those who assist in the performance of FGM/C.

Neither the Child Protection Act nor the Law of Protection from Abuse make specific reference to those who provide premises, tools or equipment that is used in performance of FGM/C. Given the wide discretion allowed to the Public Prosecution Authorities (**Article 23(1)**), however, provision of premises, tools or equipment could be read as assisting the commission of an offence against a child.

Failure to report

This is covered under **Article 21 of the Child Protection Act**, which states that:

- Anyone who becomes aware of a case of abuse or neglect shall report it to the relevant authorities immediately.
- The relevant authorities shall facilitate the reporting procedures for cases of abuse and neglect, especially reports made by the child.

Under the Law of Protection from Abuse, **Article 3 (1)** states that: 'Anyone who becomes aware of a case of abuse must report it immediately,'

Article 6 of the Child Protection Act states 'The child shall have the right to protection from all forms of abuse or neglect.'

This order to protect is required of 'the child's parents, either one of them or their caregiver, shall be responsible, within their financial means and capabilities, for raising the child, ensuring his rights, providing care, and protecting him from abuse and neglect.' (Article 15.1), and **Article 15.2** states that: 'The relevant authorities shall take the necessary measures to ensure that the child's parents, or his caregiver, fulfil their responsibilities towards him, uphold his rights, and protect him from abuse and neglect.'

Under the Law of Protection from Abuse:

Article 7 requires the Ministry to 'immediately, upon receipt of a case of abuse and upon ascertaining the report and assessing the case, take any of the following measures:'

- Take necessary measures which ensure the provision of necessary health care to victims of abuse, and perform a medical evaluation of the case, if needed. (Article 7.1)
- Take necessary measures to prevent the continuation or recurrence of abuse.

There is no specific reference to protection of witnesses to an act of FGM/C under either the Child Protection or Protection from Abuse Acts.

Medicalised FGM/C

The extent to which FGM/C is carried out by medical professionals within clinics and hospitals, or elsewhere, is not known. While performing FGM/C in hospitals and clinics across the country is banned, several surveys of women living in Saudi Arabia, who have experienced FGM/C reported they had been cut by the hands of doctors (91.4%) or nurses (5.7%) (11).

It is worth noting that under the **Law of Protection from Abuse Article 3 (2)**

[...] any public servant, civilian or military, as well as any employee in the private sector who becomes aware of a case of abuse, by virtue of his work, must immediately report such case to his employer, who in turn must immediately report it to the Ministry or the police.

This could require any doctor, nurse or other medical professional to report any incident of FGM/C (coming within the definition of 'abuse') that they find to be taking place in hospitals, clinics and all other medical facilities, even if it is occurring in a private medical facility.

Cross-Border FGM/C

Neither the Child Protection Law nor the Law of Protection from Abuse define their jurisdiction or territorial effect. Results of the limited surveys that have been conducted on women living in Saudi Arabia who have experienced FGM/C suggest most of these were immigrants originating from countries where FGM/C is known to be practised, including Yemen, Sudan, Egypt, Somalia and Ethiopia.

It should also be noted that results of the surveys conducted in Saudi Arabia showed the practice to be more prevalent in southern parts of the country, where Saudi Arabia shares a long border with Yemen, and it is possible, therefore, that practitioners from Yemen go into Saudi Arabia to perform FGM/C and/or that girls from communities in Saudi Arabia that practice FGM/C are taken over the border to Yemen for the procedure.

Penalties

Child Protection Act

Article 23 (bis) provides for a prison sentence of up to 2 years and/or a fine of 100,000 SAR for the crime of inflicting harm or abuse or physical injury to a child. The same penalty will be applied to anyone who assists or incites the commission of such an offence.

Law of Protection from Abuse

Article 13 provides for a prison sentence of between one month and one year (maximum) and / or a fine of 5,000 – 50,000 SAR.

Implementation of the law

There have been no criminal prosecutions in Saudi Arabia against perpetrators of FGM/C under either the Child Protection Act or the Law of Protection from Abuse.

Role of the state

While there is no direct link between early marriage of girls and performance of FGM/C, it is an indication of the overall legal standing of girls, and the cultural environment in which FGM/C occurs. Although there is limited information on child marriage in Saudi Arabia, studies have found 3% of women aged 20-24 were married before 18 years. Early marriage is reportedly more common among Syrian, Egyptian and Yemeni girls living in the country and, according to Girls Not Brides, some senior religious leaders have said girls as young as 10 can marry (12).

In February 2021 (13), the Ministry of Justice announced that an amendment would be made to the Personal Status Law to raise the minimum legal age of marriage to 18 for both girls and boys. To approve a marriage contract for girls and boys under the age of 18, several conditions must be met, such as a psycho-social development assessment and confirmation of consent by both parties (12).

Although Saudi Arabia signed up to **CEDAW** in September 2000, it did so with the restriction that the Kingdom will not observe any term of the Convention that contradicts the norms of Islamic law.

FGM/C has not been raised as an issue in the periodic reviews conducted by CEDAW, either in State Reports to the Commission, or by the Commission in its response to State Reports. The most recent 5th Periodic Report was conducted 2023/2024, and the only harmful practice raised by the Commission was that of early marriage, with a recommendation that 'the minimum age of marriage for women and men should be 18 years without exceptions, and [...] in accordance with joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2019), as revised, on harmful practices (14).'

Convention on Rights of the Child (CRC) Periodic Reviews

Similarly, the issue of FGM/C has never been raised in Saudi Arabia's periodic reviews by the CRC, the last one of which was the country's 3rd and 4th combined review, concluding in 2016 (15). Concluding Observations on Saudi Arabia's 3rd and 4th Combined Periodic Review in 2016 made only one reference relevant to violence against children that could be said to include FGM/C, in para 55 (g):

The Family Safety Programme and the Human Rights Association organized the Ghosoun Mercy campaign in collaboration with the National Commission for Childhood and the Ministry of Education to educate the community about the harmfulness of domestic violence and violence against children.

The Law of Protection from Abuse

Besides including Articles that can be applied to criminalisation of FGM/C, Article 15 of this law relates to the State's responsibility to protect children from physical harm:

Article 15: *The Ministry shall take, in cooperation with the relevant authorities, all appropriate preventive measures for the protection from abuse. To this end, it may, without limitation, do the following:*

- 1. Raise awareness of the concept of abuse, its seriousness, and adverse effects on an individual's personality as well as the stability and solidarity of the community.*
- 2. Take necessary action to address undesirable social behaviour conducive to creating an environment that promotes the occurrence of abuse.*
- 3. Provide authenticated statistical data on abuse cases to be utilized in devising treatment mechanisms and the conduct of scientific research and studies.*
- 4. Promote awareness and educational programs that aim to curb abuse through media and other means.*
- 5. Organize specialized training programs for all persons involved in dealing with abuse cases, including judges, detecting and recording officers, investigation officers, physicians, specialists, and others.*
- 6. Raise the awareness of members of the community, particularly segments most vulnerable to abuse, of their rights under Sharia or law.*
- 7. Intensify family counselling programs.*
- 8. Support and conduct scientific research and studies relating to protection from abuse.*

Whether or not FGM/C is required under Islamic law is widely debated, but it is worth looking at statements made by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation of which Saudi Arabia has been a member since 1969.

Organisation of Islamic Cooperation

Saudi Arabia has been a member of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) This OIC IPHRC's statement since 1969. Saudi Arabia has not signed the Cairo Declaration on the Elimination of FGM (in June 2003); it has not been signed by any of the Gulf States or Middle Eastern countries as it was seen as only relevant to African members of OIC. However, in February 2025, the OIC's Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC) issued a statement on behalf of its membership on the occasion of the 'International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation 2025', in which it made an emphatic call for an end to all forms of violence against women, including Female Genital Mutilation in accordance with international human rights standards. This statement is reproduced at Annex 4 (16).

The OIC IPHRC's statement calls on member states to take 'urgent and coordinated action to eliminate FGM' by: a) enacting and enforcing legislation to eliminate FGM/C and other harmful practices, b) implementing effective measures to protect women and girls from harmful practices, and c) conducting widespread awareness and advocacy campaigns about the dangers of FGM/C and to dispel misconceptions regarding its religious basis.

Reference to ending harmful practices is also made in the OIC's Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW) which was adopted by OIC's Sixth Session of the Ministerial Conference on the Role of Women in the Development of OIC Member States held in Istanbul in November 2016 (17). The following statements reference this commitment:

Objective No 6: *Protection of Women from Violence: Combating all forms of gender-based violence, human trafficking and other harmful traditional practices against women and girls. Combating different forms of violence against women and girls including deprivation of opportunities and full enjoyment of their rights through preventive measures and provisions of rehabilitation to victims and punishment of perpetrators.*

Section 6 (g): *Contributing to eradication of all harmful practices, in particular, female genital mutilation through strong political support and involvement of religious and community leaders.*

And in the matrices setting out the Mechanisms for Implementation:

- *Contributing to eradication of all harmful practices, in particular, female genital mutilation through strong political support and involvement of religious and community leaders (17 p.9).*
- *Combating gender-based violence in all its manifestations, including domestic violence, human trafficking, fighting harmful traditional practices and violence against displaced women (17 p.36).*
- *Integrate sexual and gender-based violence response, including child violence in all humanitarian policies and develop channels of communication to denounce these harmful practices and provide necessary assistance to victims (17 p.40).*

Civil Society Observations

Civil Society organisations and NGOs are limited in number and permission to campaign or advocate for change.

Saudi Arabia's absolute monarchy restricts almost all political rights and civil liberties. A legal framework for the registration, operation, and supervision of civil society organizations came into effect in 2016. In August 2023, the state-affiliated National Centre for the Development of the Non-Profit Sector announced updated regulations, reportedly with the aim of maximising the sector's effectiveness and impact (18,19).

While the monarchy has undertaken some social reforms in recent years, women and members of minority groups continue to face discrimination, and working conditions for the large migrant labour force are often exploitative (18,19). Women's groups do exist in Saudi Arabia but their activities are hugely restricted and women's rights activists have been subjected to harassment and detention for criticising the discriminatory laws. Academic freedom is also limited, and studies undertaken generally need to be in line with the state-affiliated National Centre for Social Studies and Research's programme of priorities (20).

Stop FGM Middle East (21) has a page about Saudi Arabia referring to the lack of data on FGM/C and the need for a survey to be carried out. It also points out that there is a lack of freedom for women to speak out on women's rights, and those who seek to raise issues related to women's and girls' empowerment may face prison sentences.

Conclusions

There are no legislative provisions dealing directly with FGM/C in the KSA. Nor is there a written criminal code containing provisions that may be read as relevant to FGM/C, although Sharia law may be applicable to FGM/C as 'bodily harm'. However, there are several pieces of legislation that may be read as being relevant to FGM/C:

Child Protection Act (2024): this prohibits the 'infliction of harm or physical injury' to any individual under the age of 18. An offence under this Act is punishable by a prison sentence of maximum two years and/or a fine of 100,000 SAR.

Law of Protection from Abuse (2013): this prohibits the 'physical, psychological, or sexual mistreatment, or the threat thereof committed by an individual against another exceeding the limits of the powers and responsibilities derived from guardianship, dependency, sponsorship, trusteeship, or livelihood relationships.' An offence under this Law is punishable by imprisonment of a minimum of one month and a maximum of one year, and/or a fine of 5,000 to 50,000 SAR.

Recommendations

Research demonstrates that while important, legislation against FGM/C should be part of a holistic, multi-sectoral approach to effectively work toward elimination of the practice. Enforcement of the law without a holistic approach can lead to fear and pushing the practice underground.

The following recommendations, therefore, should be considered alongside holistic and multi-sectoral approaches to ending the practice.

1. Introduce a law that explicitly prohibits and criminalises FGM/C in Saudi Arabia. This law should cover perpetrators; procuring, aiding and abetting FGM/C; providing tools and premises for the purposes of FGM/C; and failure to report a planned or past incident of FGM/C.

OR

Amend the Child Protection Act and/or the Law of Protection from Abuse to define and make specific reference to FGM/C as a criminal offence.

Guidance on the features that should be included in a law against FGM/C are set out in Orchid Project's Model Law report, which is available [here](#).

2. Develop Ministry of Health guidelines on the dangers of FGM/C for all professional medical, health and welfare staff working in Saudi Arabia's hospitals and clinics, including midwives, doctors and nurses, and forbid the practice from being undertaken in public and private health facilities, with penalties for doing so that include withdrawal of their licence to practise medicine.
3. Strengthen border controls, to deter perpetrators from FGM/C originating countries from entering Saudi Arabia with the intention of undertaking FGM/C within Saudi Arabia.
4. Undertake a national statistical and disaggregated survey of Saudi Arabia to reliably determine prevalence and features of the practice of FGM/C, including surveying those who have already undergone FGM/C or are at risk of undergoing FGM/C, assessment of the extent to which medicalisation of the practice is taking place, and how much FGM/C is affecting local Saudi women close to borders with countries, or living in communities of migrants, where FGM/C is more prevalent.

Appendix 1: International and Regional Treaties

Treaty	Signed	Ratified	Acceded	Reservations on reporting?
Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979) (CEDAW)		Sept 2000		'1. In case of contradiction between any term of the Convention and the norms of Islamic law, the Kingdom is not under obligation to observe the contradictory terms of the Convention. 2. The Kingdom does not consider itself bound by paragraph 2 of article 9 of the Convention and paragraph 1 of article 29 of the Convention.'
Organisation of Islamic Co-operation (OIC) – Cairo Declaration on the Elimination of FGM (CDEFGM) (2003)				N/A
Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) (CRC)			26 Jan 1996	'[The Government of Saudi Arabia enters] reservations with respect to all such articles as are in conflict with the provisions of Islamic law.'

'Signed': a treaty is signed by countries following negotiation and agreement of its contents.

'Ratified': once signed, most treaties and conventions must be ratified (i.e. approved through the standard national legislative procedure) to be legally effective in that country.

'Acceded': when a country ratifies a treaty that has already been negotiated by other states.

Annex 2: CEDAW General Recommendation No. 14: Female Circumcision

FGM/C – UN CEDAW Committee General Recommendation No. 14 UN CEDAW COMMITTEE General Recommendation No. 14 (ninth session, 1990) Female circumcision

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Concerned about the continuation of the practice of female circumcision and other traditional practices harmful to the health of women,

Noting with satisfaction that Governments, where such practices exist, national women's organizations, non-governmental organizations, and bodies of the United Nations system, such as the World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund, as well as the Commission on Human Rights and its Sub- Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, remain seized of the issue having particularly recognized that such traditional practices as female circumcision have serious health and other consequences for women and children,

Taking note with interest the study of the Special Rapporteur on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children, and of the study of the Special Working Group on Traditional Practices,

Recognizing that women are taking important action themselves to identify and to combat practices that are prejudicial to the health and well-being of women and children,

Convinced that the important action that is being taken by women and by all interested groups needs to be supported and encouraged by Governments,

Noting with grave concern that there are continuing cultural, traditional and economic pressures which help to perpetuate harmful practices, such as female circumcision,

Recommends that States parties:

- Take appropriate and effective measures with a view to eradicating the practice of female circumcision. Such measures could include :
 - The collection and dissemination by universities, medical or nursing associations, national women's organizations or other bodies of basic data about such traditional practices;

- The support of women's organizations at the national and local levels working for the elimination of female circumcision and other practices harmful to women;
- The encouragement of politicians, professionals, religious and community leaders at all levels, including the media and the arts, to co-operate in influencing attitudes towards the eradication of female circumcision;

The introduction of appropriate educational and training programmes and seminars based on research findings about the problems arising from female circumcision;

- Include in their national health policies appropriate strategies aimed at eradicating female circumcision in public health care. Such strategies could include the special responsibility of health personnel, including traditional birth attendants, to explain the harmful effects of female circumcision;

Invite assistance, information and advice from the appropriate organizations of the United Nations system to support and assist efforts being deployed to eliminate harmful traditional practices;

- Include in their reports to the Committee under articles 10 and 12 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women information about measures taken to eliminate female circumcision.

Annex 3: Role of the State (UN: CEDAW/C/GC/31/Rev.1CRC/C/GC/18/Rev.1)

In 2019 the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and Committee on the Rights of the Child issued Joint General Recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/General Comment, and No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2019), on harmful practices.

Available at: [g1913442.pdf](#) or [www.documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g19/134/42/pdf/g1913442.pdf](#)

The objective of this Joint General Recommendation/General Comment is to clarify the obligations of States party to the Conventions by providing authoritative guidance on legislative, policy and other appropriate measures that must be taken to ensure full compliance with their obligations under the Conventions to eliminate harmful practices.

This Joint Recommendation/General Comment sets out a framework that States should follow in order to eliminate harmful practices. Of particular note are the recommendations as set out below:

Article 39. The Committees recommend that the States parties to the Conventions:

- (a) Accord priority to the regular collection, analysis, dissemination and use of quantitative and qualitative data on harmful practices disaggregated by sex, age, geographical location, socioeconomic status, education level and other key factors, and ensure that such activities are adequately resourced. Regular data collection systems should be established and/or maintained in the health-care and social services, education and judicial and law enforcement sectors on protection-related issues;
- (b) Collect data through the use of national demographic and indicator surveys and censuses, which may be supplemented by data from nationally representative household surveys. Qualitative research should be conducted through focus group discussions, in-depth key informant interviews with a wide variety of stakeholders, structured observations, social mapping and other appropriate methodologies.

Article 55. The Committees recommend that the States parties to the Conventions adopt or amend legislation with a view to effectively addressing and eliminating harmful practices. In doing so, they should ensure:

- (a) That the process of drafting legislation is fully inclusive and participatory. For that purpose, they should conduct targeted advocacy and awareness-raising and use social mobilization measures to generate broad public knowledge of and support for the drafting, adoption, dissemination and implementation of the legislation;
- (b) That the legislation is in full compliance with the relevant obligations outlined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international human rights standards that prohibit harmful practices and that it takes precedence over customary, traditional or religious laws that allow, condone or prescribe any harmful practice, especially in countries with plural legal systems;
- (c) That they repeal without further delay all legislation that condones, allows or leads to harmful practices, including traditional, customary or religious laws and any legislation that accepts the defence of honour as a defence or mitigating factor in the commission of crimes in the name of so-called honour;
- (d) That the legislation is consistent and comprehensive and provides detailed guidance on prevention, protection, support and follow-up services and assistance for victims, including towards their physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration, and is complemented by adequate civil and/or administrative legislative provisions;
- (e) That the legislation adequately addresses, including by providing the basis for the adoption of temporary special measures, the root causes of harmful practices, including discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, age and other intersecting factors, focuses on the human rights and needs of the victims and fully takes into account the best interests of children and women;
- (f) That a minimum legal age of marriage for girls and boys, with or without parental consent, is established at 18 years;
- (g) That a legal requirement of marriage registration is established and effective implementation is provided through awareness-raising, education and the existence of adequate infrastructure to make registration accessible to all persons within their jurisdiction;
- (h) That a national system of compulsory, accessible and free birth registration is established in order to effectively prevent harmful practices, including child marriage;
- (i) That national human rights institutions are mandated to consider individual complaints and petitions and carry out investigations, including those submitted on behalf of or directly by women and children, in a confidential, gender sensitive and child-friendly manner;

- (j) That it is made mandatory by law for professionals and institutions working for and with children and women to report actual incidents or the risk of such incidents if they have reasonable grounds to believe that a harmful practice has occurred or may occur. Mandatory reporting responsibilities should ensure the protection of the privacy and confidentiality of those who report;
- (k) That all initiatives to draft and amend criminal laws must be coupled with protection measures and services for victims and those who are at risk of being subjected to harmful practices;
- (l) That legislation establishes jurisdiction over offences of harmful practices that applies to nationals of the State party and habitual residents even when they are committed in a State in which they are not criminalized;
- (m) That legislation and policies relating to immigration and asylum recognize the risk of being subjected to harmful practices or being persecuted as a result of such practices as a ground for granting asylum. Consideration should also be given, on a case-by-case basis, to providing protection to a relative who may be accompanying the girl or woman;
- (n) That the legislation includes provisions on regular evaluation and monitoring, including in relation to implementation, enforcement and follow-up;
- (o) That women and children subjected to harmful practices have equal access to justice, including by addressing legal and practical barriers to initiating legal proceedings, such as the limitation period, and that the perpetrators and those who aid or condone such practices are held accountable;
- (p) That the legislation includes mandatory restraining or protection orders to safeguard those at risk of harmful practices and provides for their safety and measures to protect victims from retribution;
- (q) That victims of violations have equal access to legal remedies and appropriate reparations in practice.

Article 69. The Committees recommend that the States parties to the Conventions:

- (a) Provide universal, free and compulsory primary education that is girl friendly, including in remote and rural areas, consider making secondary education mandatory while also providing economic incentives for pregnant girls and adolescent mothers to complete secondary school and establish non-discriminatory return policies;
- (b) Provide girls and women with educational and economic opportunities in a safe and enabling environment where they can develop their self-esteem, awareness of their rights and communication, negotiation and problem-solving skills;

- (c) Include in the educational curriculum information on human rights, including those of women and children, gender equality and self-awareness and contribute to eliminating gender stereotypes and fostering an environment of non-discrimination;
- (d) Ensure that schools provide age-appropriate information on sexual and reproductive health and rights, including in relation to gender relations and responsible sexual behaviour, HIV prevention, nutrition and protection from violence and harmful practices; (
- e) Ensure access to non-formal education programmes for girls who have dropped out of regular schooling, or who have never enrolled and are illiterate, and monitor the quality of those programmes;
- (f) Engage men and boys in creating an enabling environment that supports the empowerment of women and girls.

Article 73: The Committees recommend that the States parties to the Conventions:

- (a) Provide all relevant front-line professionals with information on harmful practices and applicable human rights norms and standards and ensure that they are adequately trained to prevent, identify and respond to incidents of harmful practices, including mitigating negative effects for victims and helping them to gain access to remedies and appropriate services;
- (b) Provide training to individuals involved in alternative dispute resolution and traditional justice systems to appropriately apply key human rights principles, especially the best interests of the child and the participation of children in administrative and judicial proceedings;
- (c) Provide training to all law enforcement personnel, including the judiciary, on new and existing legislation prohibiting harmful practices and ensure that they are aware of the rights of women and children and of their role in prosecuting perpetrators and protecting victims of harmful practices;
- (d) Conduct specialized awareness and training programmes for health-care providers working with immigrant communities to address the unique health-care needs of children and women who have undergone female genital mutilation or other harmful practices and provide specialized training also for professionals within child welfare services and services focused on the rights of women and the education and police and justice sectors, politicians and media personnel working with migrant girls and women.

Article 81. The Committees recommend that the States parties to the Conventions:

- (a) Develop and adopt comprehensive awareness-raising programmes to challenge and change cultural and social attitudes, traditions and customs that underlie forms of behaviour that perpetuate harmful practices;
- (b) Ensure that awareness-raising programmes provide accurate information and clear and unified messages from trusted sources about the negative impact of harmful practices on women, children, in particular girls, their families and society at large. Such programmes should include social media, the Internet and community communication and dissemination tools;
- (c) Take all appropriate measures to ensure that stigma and discrimination are not perpetuated against the victims and/or practising immigrant or minority communities;
- (d) Ensure that awareness-raising programmes targeting State structures engage decision makers and all relevant programmatic staff and key professionals working within local and national government and government agencies;
- (e) Ensure that personnel of national human rights institutions are fully aware and sensitized to the human rights implications of harmful practices within the State party and that they receive support to promote the elimination of those practices;
- (f) Initiate public discussions to prevent and promote the elimination of harmful practices, by engaging all relevant stakeholders in the preparation and implementation of the measures, including local leaders, practitioners, grass-roots organizations and religious communities. The activities should affirm the positive cultural principles of a community that are consistent with human rights and include information on experiences of successful elimination by formerly practising communities with similar backgrounds;
- (g) Build or reinforce effective partnerships with the mainstream media to support the implementation of awareness-raising programmes and promote public discussions and encourage the creation and observance of self-regulatory mechanisms that respect the privacy of individuals.

Article 87. The Committees recommend that the States parties to the Conventions:

- (a) Ensure that protection services are mandated and adequately resourced to provide all necessary prevention and protection services to children and women who are, or are at high risk of becoming, victims of harmful practices; (
- b) Establish a free, 24-hour hotline that is staffed by trained counsellors, to enable victims to report instances when a harmful practice is likely to occur or has occurred, and provide referral to needed services and accurate information about harmful practices;

- (c) Develop and implement capacity-building programmes on their role in protection for judicial officers, including judges, lawyers, prosecutors and all relevant stakeholders, on legislation prohibiting discrimination and on applying laws in a gender-sensitive and age-sensitive manner in conformity with the Conventions;
- (d) Ensure that children participating in legal processes have access to appropriate child-sensitive services to safeguard their rights and safety and to limit the possible negative impacts of the proceedings. Protective action may include limiting the number of times that a victim is required to give a statement and not requiring that individual to face the perpetrator or perpetrators. Other steps may include appointing a guardian ad litem (especially where the perpetrator is a parent or legal guardian) and ensuring that child victims have access to adequate child sensitive information about the process and fully understand what to expect;
- (e) Ensure that migrant women and children have equal access to services, regardless of their legal status.

Annex 4: OIC statement dated 2 Feb 2025 (16)

OIC-IPHRC, on the occasion of the 'International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation 2025', made an emphatic call for an end to all forms of violence against women, including Female Genital Mutilation in accordance with the international human rights standards.

Jeddah, 6th February 2025: The Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC) of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) joins the international community in commemorating the 'International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) 2025' and strongly condemns all forms of violence against women and girls, including the harmful practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). The Commission reaffirms that FGM is a deeply entrenched traditional practice with no religious justification and stands in clear violation of human rights.

The Commission emphasizes that Islam upholds the dignity and rights of women and categorically rejects practices that cause physical, psychological, or emotional harm. It is estimated that over 230 million girls and women worldwide have suffered the effects of FGM and that an estimated 27 million additional girls are at risk of undergoing FGM by 2030 unless action is accelerated¹. FGM violates several human rights outlined under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The practice of FGM is recognized internationally as a violation of the human rights of girls and women. It is mainly carried out on minors and is a violation of the rights of the girl child. The practice also violates a person's right to health, security, and physical integrity; the right to be free from torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment; and the right to life in instances when the procedure results in death.

The Commission acknowledges and appreciates efforts being taken by the Member States against this practice that endangers the physical and psychological health of women and girls. It was concluded at the Second Islamic Conference of Ministers in charge of Childhood held in Khartoum in 2009² that FGM is a violation of the human rights of girls and women. OIC has adopted 'The Cairo Declaration of the OIC on Human Rights, in which specific sections are included on 'Human Rights of Women,' which calls for the protection of women against all forms of discrimination, violence, abuse, and harmful traditional practices. Also, OIC welcomed the UN General Assembly resolution 67/146, entitled, 'Intensifying global efforts for the elimination of female genital mutilations' and resolution 67/144, entitled, 'Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women', both of which were adopted without a vote. Human Rights Council adopted resolution 44/16 on the

elimination of FGM to speed up efforts to reach zero tolerance for FGM by 2030 and to restate the global ban on the harmful practice as it constitutes a serious violation of women rights. Goal 5 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development⁷ calls for eliminating FGM. The International Islamic Fiqh Academy, in its Resolution No. 220 (4/23), categorically stated that female genital mutilation is prohibited in Islam. Accordingly, the OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW) and its comprehensive implementation mechanism, while supporting international efforts, calls for the eradication of all harmful practices, in particular, FGM.

The Commission calls for collective efforts to empower women and girls through education, healthcare, and legal protection. It calls upon governments, civil society organizations, and the media to take urgent and coordinated action to eliminate FGM. Human rights-based approaches to eradication include, but are not limited to, the enforcement of laws, education programs focused on empowerment, and campaigns to recruit change agents from within communities. Accordingly, the Commission urges governments to: (a) enact and enforce legislation to eliminate FGM and other harmful practices; (b) implement effective administrative measures to protect women and girls from harmful practices and violence and ensure accountability; (c) conduct widespread awareness and advocacy campaigns to educate the public on the dangers of FGM and dispel misconceptions regarding its religious basis. In this regard, the Commission, while respecting cultural sensitivities and national laws, affirmed its readiness to work together with all relevant OIC institutions and Member States to bring an end to all forms of violence, bias, and discrimination against women.

References

1. Nations Online Project [Internet]. [cited 2026 Feb 26]. Political Map of Saudi Arabia. Available from: <https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/saudi-arabia-map.htm>
2. Worldometer [Internet]. [cited 2026 Feb 26]. Saudi Arabia Population (2026). Available from: <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/saudi-arabia-population/>
3. Saudipedia [Internet]. 2025 [cited 2026 Feb 26]. Provinces of Saudi Arabia. Available from: <https://saudipedia.com/en/provinces-of-saudi-arabia>
4. Infoplease. Saudi Arabia | Facts & Information [Internet]. [cited 2026 Feb 26]. Available from: <https://www.infoplease.com/countries/saudi-arabia>
5. De Bel-Air F. Demography, Migration and Labour Market in Saudi Arabia [Internet]. European University Institute and Gulf Research Center; 2013 [cited 226 AD Feb 26]. Report Explanatory Note No. 1/2014 (GLMM – EN – No. 1/2014). Available from: https://gulfmigration.grc.net/media/pubs/exno/GLMM_EN_2014_01.pdf
6. United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. Saudi Arabia [Internet]. Washington, DC: United States Commission on International Religious Freedom; 2013 [cited 2026 Feb 26]. (USCIRF Annual Report). Available from: <https://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/resources/Saudi%20Arabia%202013.pdf>
7. World Health Organization. World Health Organization [Internet]. 2025 [cited 2026 Feb 1]. Female Genital Mutilation. Available from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/female-genital-mutilation>
8. Basic Law of Governance [Internet]. 1992 Mar 1. Available from: <https://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/legislation/details/7973>
9. Basic Law of Governance (Saudi Arabia, 2013) [Internet]. 1992 Mar 1. Available from: https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Saudi_Arabia_2013
10. Child Protection Law (Saudi Arabia) [Internet]. 2014 Nov 25. Available from: <https://www.hrsd.gov.sa/sites/default/files/2024-10/Child%20Protection%20Law.pdf>
11. Milaat WA, Ibrahim NK, Albar HM. Reproductive health profile and circumcision of females in the Hali semi-urban region, Saudi Arabia: a community-based cross-sectional survey. Vol. 38. 2018 Apr 5;38(2):81–9. doi:10.5144/0256-4947.2018.81
12. Girls Not Brides [Internet]. 2015 [cited 2026 May 13]. Saudi Arabia. Available from: <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/en/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/saudi-arabia/>
13. Jack McGinn. The New Saudi Personal Status Law: An Opportunity for Meaningful Gender Reform? Middle East Centre - [Internet]. 2021 Feb 15 [cited 2026 May 13]. Available from: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2021/02/15/the-new-saudi-personal-status-law-an-opportunity-for-gender-reform/>

14. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. CEDAW/C/SAU/CO/5: Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Saudi Arabia [Internet]. United Nations; 2024 Oct [cited 2026 Feb 26]. Report CEDAW/C/SAU/CO/5. Available from: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/concluding-observations/cedawcsauco5-concluding-observations-fifth-periodic-report-saudi>
15. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [Internet]. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; [cited 2026 Feb 26]. Saudi Arabia. Available from: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/countries/saudi-arabia>
16. Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC), Organization of Islamic Cooperation. IPHRC press statement on female genital mutilation (FGM) (International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation 2025 [Internet]. Jeddah: OIC-IPHRC; 2025 Feb [cited 2026 Jan 19]. Available from: https://oic-iphrc.org/2025/1/2114523-06022025IPHRC_Press_Statement_on_FGM_2025_EV.pdf
17. Organization of Islamic Cooperation. OIC Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (OPAAW) [Plan of Action] [Internet]. Istanbul, Turkey: Organization of Islamic Cooperation; 2016 Nov [cited 2026 Jan 25]. Available from: https://oic-iphrc.org/docs/en/legal_instruments/OIC_HRRIT/38864.pdf
18. Freedom House [Internet]. [cited 2026 May 13]. Saudi Arabia: Country Profile. Available from: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/saudi-arabia>
19. Tanya Jain. Saudi Arabia: Updated Civil Associations and Organisations Regulations in Force. LexisNexis Middle East [Internet]. [cited 2026 May 13]. Available from: <https://www.lexis.ae/2023/08/09/saudi-arabia-updated-civil-associations-and-organisations-regulations-in-force/>
20. National Center for Social Studies and Research [Internet]. Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; 2026 [cited 2026 May 13]. Establishment. Available from: <https://ncss.gov.sa/en/node/43>
21. Stop FGM Middle East & Asia [Internet]. [cited 2026 Feb 26]. Saudi Arabia. Available from: <http://www.stopfgmmideast.org/countries/saudi-arabia/>

Disclaimer

This report analyses and discusses the application of national (criminal) laws to the commission of FGM/C and any possible related crimes. It also explores other legal factors deemed relevant, such as legal obligations to report the commission or likely upcoming commission of FGM/C, available legal protective measures for girls and women at risk of FGM/C, and any obligations of national governments in relation to FGM/C.

The initial research conducted for this report consisted of a questionnaire prepared by Hogan Lovells International LLP with input from certain local law firms, local non-governmental organisations and/or other information providers (together, the Information Providers). The information contained in the responses to that questionnaire was then reviewed by Orchid Project, updated and used as the basis of further research from relevant sources.

The underlying information for this report was gathered by the Information Providers through desk-based research and is provided for general information purposes only. Nothing contained in this report is intended to provide legal or other professional advice, and specific legal advice should be obtained in relation to any specific situation.

It should be noted that in many countries there is a lack of legal precedent for the penalties laid out in the law, meaning that, in practice, lesser penalties may be applied. The information contained in the report is provided as at the date of this report or as otherwise noted in the report. Neither the Information Providers nor Orchid Project are under any obligation to update this report subsequent to its date.

Hyperlinks to websites operated by others in this report are provided for reader convenience only. The Information Providers do not endorse nor are they responsible for the contents of websites operated by others that are accessible from this report.

Neither the Information Providers nor Orchid Project:

- accepts any responsibility or liability for any loss which may arise from reliance on information contained in this report, or any inaccuracies, including changes in the law since the research was completed in October 2025;
- is responsible or liable for any matter relating to any third parties accessing or using the report or its contents; or
- endorses or is responsible for any revision, amendment or addition to the report made by a third party without the consent of all the Information Providers.

ORCHID PROJECT

wadi

*This publication is licensed under a **CC BY-NC 4.0** licence. Extracts from it may be freely reproduced, provided that due acknowledgement is given to the source and Orchid Project.*

Orchid Project seeks updates on the data and invites comments on the content and suggestions as to how this report can be improved. For more information, please contact Orchid Project at research@orchidproject.org.

© Orchid Project 2026

This work is licensed under a CC BY-NC 4.0 licence

research@orchidproject.org