



PODA Pakistan Commends Historic Legislation Against Child Marriages in Punjab

Thursday, 12 February, 2026: Sameena Nazir, Executive Director of Potohar Organization for Development Advocacy (PODA) warmly welcomes and commends the Government of Punjab for its historic legislation to raise the minimum legal age of marriage for girls from 16 to 18 years in province of Punjab. This progressive reform marks a defining milestone in the protection of women’s and girls’ rights in the province.

PODA extends its sincere appreciation to the Honorable Mr. Saleem Haider, Governor of Punjab and Ms. Maryam Nawaz Sharif, Chief Minister of Punjab, whose visionary leadership and unwavering commitment to gender equality have made this transformative step possible. The provincial government’s proactive approach reflects a deep understanding of the urgent need to safeguard young girls from the adverse health, social, and economic consequences of early marriage.

For decades, Punjab operated under the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929, which set the minimum age of marriage at 16 for girls and 18 for boys—an evident disparity that exposed young girls to early pregnancies, disrupted education, and systemic inequality. By amending the law to equalize the age at 18 for both girls and boys, Punjab has taken a bold and commendable stand for justice and equality.

With this reform, Punjab joins Sindh, Islamabad Capital Territory, and Balochistan in establishing a unified legal standard of adulthood at 18 years, reinforcing Pakistan’s broader commitment to protecting the rights and dignity of its youth.

PODA is proud to have contributed to this significant achievement through its project, “Reduce Early Marriages to Enhance Gender Equality” with the support of Royal Norwegian Embassy. The organization has worked tirelessly over the years by:

Engaging in legislative advocacy and submitting draft amendments to the Punjab Law Minister and women Members of the Provincial Assembly.

Conducting large-scale community trainings for Nikah Registrars to ensure strict verification of CNICs and prevent underage marriages.

Partnering with District Bar Associations to raise legal awareness, particularly regarding the 2023 Federal Shariat Court ruling affirming that setting the marriage age at 18 by the government is not against Islamic injunctions.

These collaborative efforts, combined with the strong political will demonstrated by the Punjab Government, have culminated in this landmark reform.

On behalf of PODA, Ms. Sameena Nazir expresses profound gratitude to the Government of Punjab and Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif for prioritizing women’s rights and for taking concrete steps to eliminate child marriage. This legislation sends a powerful message that the province stands firmly for equality, dignity, and the future of its girls.

PODA remains committed to working alongside the provincial government and all stakeholders to ensure that this law is not only celebrated but also strictly implemented across Punjab, so that every girl can exercise her right to education, health, and a secure future.

For more information, please contact <info@poda.org.pk>