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THE INTERNATIONAL LEGAL ARCHITECTURE OF JUVENILE DELINQUENCY PREVENTION: A SYSTEM OF STANDARDS, IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISMS, AND INSTITUTIONAL MODELS

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Article information:

Manuscript received: 14 January 2026; **Accepted:** 01 February 2026; **Published:** 14 February 2026

Abstract: The article substantiates the necessity of rethinking the prevention of juvenile delinquency in the context of globalization and digital transformation as a priority area of state policy. It is shown that purely punitive approaches do not always ensure a sustainable effect of general and special deterrence, and in some cases increase the risks of stigmatization and re-offending. International standards are examined through the logic of three interconnected pillars: normative, institutional, and technological. The interaction between “hard law” (the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) and “soft law” (the Beijing, Riyadh, Havana, and Tokyo Rules) is systematized, defining the principles of “deprivation of liberty as a measure of last resort,” diversion, reintegration, and guarantees of child-friendly justice. Special attention is paid to the multi-agent architecture of prevention (education, healthcare, social protection, community, law enforcement agencies) and the specifics of procedural protection for child victims and witnesses. In the digital sphere, the opportunities and risks associated with the application of AI and big data are analyzed, including personal data protection, algorithmic discrimination, transparency and accountability. A conceptual approach to the implementation of preventive innovations while observing legal guarantees and digital security is formulated.

Keywords: Juvenile delinquency; prevention; juvenile justice; international standards; Convention on the Rights of the Child

1. Introduction

In the rapidly advancing 21st century marked by globalization and digital transformation, the prevention of juvenile delinquency is becoming one of the most complex and multifaceted areas of state policy. Practice and scientific meta-analyses indicate that purely punitive approaches relying solely on punishment do not always ensure the effect of “general and special deterrence”; on the contrary, in some cases, the institutional environment itself can increase the risk of recidivism through stigmatization and “criminogenic contamination.” Therefore, modern international law and criminology are reinterpreting prevention not as a post-punishment reaction, but as a system of early intervention built on the logic of human rights, social justice, rehabilitation, and evidence-based governance.

Within the scope of this paragraph, the international standards for the prevention of juvenile delinquency are systematically analyzed through three interconnected pillars. The first is the normative foundation! This foundation, viewed as “hard law,” is the UN

Convention on the Rights of the Child, which defines the best interests of the child, protection from torture and cruel treatment, and special guarantees for justice for minors, serving as the legal “constitution” for prevention and juvenile justice. The “soft law” block, which translates the Convention’s norms into practice, forms the minimal standards for juvenile justice and prevention. Specifically, the Beijing Rules (Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice), the Riyadh Guidelines (Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency), and the Havana Rules (Standard Minimum Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of Their Liberty) link the preventive policy with the principle of “deprivation of liberty as a measure of last resort,” diversion, reintegration with community participation, and child-friendly procedural guarantees. As a logical continuation of these standards, the Tokyo Rules advocate for expanding alternative mechanisms to detention in criminal justice measures, promoting humane models of supervision and rehabilitation.

The second is the institutional structures! These structures view prevention, according to international standards, not as the task of a single agency, but as a “multi-agent” architecture involving education, healthcare, social protection, the local community, and law enforcement agencies. In this context, a special protection and cautious procedural regime is required within the justice system even when a child is a victim or a witness. The third is technological approaches! This approach suggests that prevention in the digital environment can expand opportunities for early detection and targeted intervention through artificial intelligence, big data, and digital monitoring, but simultaneously introduces high risks such as privacy infringement, data protection, algorithmic discrimination, transparency, and accountability. From this perspective, interpretations by international bodies concerning children’s rights regarding the digital environment, and requirements for child-oriented AI, necessitate “building in” preventive innovations with legal guarantees. Furthermore, at a broader level, global AI ethics and trustworthy AI principles serve as a normative guideline for harmonizing the digital components of prevention with legal and ethical standards. Consequently, the integration of this triad (normative–institutional–technological) serves as the methodological foundation for shaping a conceptual model in Uzbekistan that ensures a balance between legal guarantees, effectiveness, and digital security in improving the prevention of juvenile delinquency.

It should be specially emphasized that today the international normative foundations of juvenile delinquency prevention are not a collection of uniformly “frozen” rules, but rather a legal system that is constantly being renewed under the influence of social development, criminological knowledge, and the expansion of the human rights concept. Specifically, while in the first half of the 20th century “paternalistic” (child-saving) approaches prevailed towards children, where the child was interpreted more as an object of supervision and educational influence, in the subsequent stage, the principle of the child’s legal subjectivity, dignity, and the primacy of their interests acquired institutional form in international law. This evolution, particularly through UN documents, served to shift the prevention policy from a reactive model based solely on punishment to a logic of early intervention, rehabilitation, and “evidence-based” governance.

Furthermore, the 1990 United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (the “Riyadh Guidelines”) are considered one of the most important conceptual documents in the field of prevention. It defines prevention not as limited to the authority of law enforcement agencies, but as a broad social process. This means that prevention is defined as a broad social process, not limited to the authority of law enforcement agencies. The central idea of these guidelines is the “child-centered approach.” It emphasizes the necessity of coordinated action between the media and state institutions. The central idea of these guidelines is the “child-centered orientation” and encouraging the child’s participation in decision-making processes. This approach requires viewing the child in preventive policy not as an “object of control,” but as an

active subject and partner who assumes social responsibility. On this basis, the “Ar-Riyadh” guidelines conceptualize prevention at two levels. The first is primary prevention, i.e., universal social measures aimed at all segments of the population (especially children): quality education, healthcare, leisure infrastructure, support for the family environment, and expanding the scope of social services. The second is secondary prevention, i.e., mechanisms for providing targeted but non-stigmatizing assistance to children in difficult life situations who fall into the “social risk” group.

Here, a key position of the international standard is that labeling a child with categories such as “deviant,” “delinquent,” or “prone to crime” can intensify social stigmatization and negatively affect their subsequent behavioral trajectory; This situation is also explained in criminology by the concept of labeling . Thus, prevention should not be about “control and punishment,” but rather achieve its goals through early support and the mobilization of rehabilitative resources. Another important direction for guidelines is the issue of decriminalization. Specifically, “status offenses” that do not seriously harm a child's mental and physical development and are often linked to adolescent crises or social deprivation (e.g., truancy, running away from home, etc.) should be met with psychological, pedagogical, and social support rather than punishment. This approach helps reduce the consequences of “pushing” a child into the criminal justice system at an early stage.

It should also be noted that if the “Riyadh” guidelines define the broad social foundations of prevention, The United Nations Minimum Standards for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (the “Beijing Rules”), adopted in 1985, reinforce the minimum standards of preventive mechanisms within the criminal justice system . In this document, the most important institutional tool from a prevention standpoint is the institution of diversion: in appropriate cases, it provides for resolving a child's case by the competent authorities without bringing it to formal court proceedings, while safeguarding the child's interests . The purpose of diversion is to protect the child from the negative socializing effects of the criminal justice system, including the risk of prisonization . From this perspective, measures such as warnings, apologies, restitution, and community service serve to “re-socialize” the child rather than “punish” them. At the same time, the Beijing Rules reinforce the principle of proportionality. In this regard, the response applied to the child must be proportionate not only to the gravity of the offense but also to the child's personal circumstances, developmental level, family environment, and rehabilitation needs . This principle signifies a shift from a “punishment fit to the crime” to a “legal and social response tailored to the child's needs.”

It is important to emphasize that the most advanced and comprehensive interpretation of prevention standards today is expressed in General Comment No. 24, adopted in 2019 by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child . This document notes that overreliance on formal criminal proceedings in juvenile justice does not yield sustainable results and, on the contrary, in some cases may not reduce the risk of subsequent offending, and diversion, prioritizes rehabilitation in the community and the principle of detention as a “last resort.” It also, in General Comment No. 24, identifies as the institutional core of prevention: a) early intervention; b) multidisciplinary cooperation (integration of education, health care, social protection, and law enforcement); and c) the expansion of restorative justice programs. In this context, the restorative approach is evaluated as a humane, practical model of prevention, as it is aimed at resolving conflicts with the participation of the victim, the offender, and the community, making amends, and restoring social relationships . At the same time, modern neuropsychological research on adolescent development shows that a child or adolescent's impulse control, decision-making, and ability to anticipate consequences may develop later; which supports the need to scientifically strengthen rehabilitation and educational interventions in juvenile justice, rather than punitive measures .

Furthermore, in the European legal sphere, the concept of “child-friendly justice” aimed at protecting the interests of minors has been established as an institutional standard. Its content has been consolidated at the pan-European level as a single normative-axiological standard through the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe's “Guidelines on Child-Friendly Justice” (2010), encompassing the child's legal subjectivity, integrates requirements such as adapting the process to child psychology, facilitating participation, and strengthening legal guarantees into the practice of juvenile justice. Therefore, this concept serves as a normative and methodological foundation that ensures the humane, protective, and preventive orientation of justice in juvenile matters.

Also, these guidelines universally establish procedural guarantees such as the child's right to participate, receive understandable information, have cases handled expeditiously, and limit confidentiality and stigmatization in criminal, administrative and civil proceedings in a universal manner, creating a legal framework for the child's rehabilitation and reintegration. As a result, the “Riyadh Guidelines” (social prevention), the “Beijing Rules” (diversion and proportionality in the justice system), General Comment No. 24 (evidence-based paradigm and rehabilitation priority) and the Council of Europe guidelines (“child-friendly justice”) unite the normative-legal architecture of youth or juvenile prevention into a single, coherent framework. This serves to prioritize youth rights → minimize entry into the formal system → multidisciplinary prevention → restorative justice and rehabilitation → and eliminate confidentiality and stigmatization.

Indeed, no matter how perfect the regulatory framework is today, without effective institutional mechanisms to implement it, the desired results cannot be achieved. International experience shows that preventing youth crime is more effective when carried out by integrated, specialized structures rather than through the fragmented efforts of separate agencies (police, schools, courts).

At this point, let's take a look at the comparative table analysis of the main international standards on youth crime prevention highlighted above!

International Instrument	Primary Focus (Goal)	Preventive Mechanisms	Implications for Uzbekistan
Riyadh Guidelines (1990)	Primary social prevention	<i>“Child-centered” approach, decriminalization, abolition of status offenses.</i>	Strengthening social programs at the school and community level, and abandoning the “difficult-to-educate” label.
Beijing Rules (1985)	Criminal justice process and procedures	Diversion (out-of-court resolution), proportionality, specialized police and courts.	Redirecting the authority of interdepartmental commissions on juvenile affairs to diversion programs.
CRC General Comment No. 24 (2019)	Evidence-based legal defense	Raising the minimum age (14+), early intervention, restorative justice.	Revisit the age of criminal responsibility in the Criminal Code and introduce neuropsychological expert assessments.
EC Friendly Justice for the Child (2010)	Process adaptation	Information provision, protection, specialized settings, multidisciplinary approach.	Make the participation of an attorney and psychologist mandatory in investigative and judicial proceedings, and create specialized interrogation rooms.

A comparative legal analysis of the international standards analyzed above shows that to create an effective model for the prevention of juvenile delinquency in the New Uzbekistan, it is necessary to introduce the following conceptual innovations into national legislation:

First, the UN “Minimum Standards for the Administration of Juvenile Justice” (“The Beijing Rules,”

Rule 11) and the “Diversion” institution proposed in General Comment No. 24 of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Criminological research confirms that fully involving young people (18-30 years old) in the formal system of adjudication and punishment for their first-time, low-level social offenses can lead to the formation of “secondary deviance” and sharply increase the risk of falling under the influence of a criminal subculture. “secondary deviance” and sharply increases the risk of falling under the influence of a criminal subculture.

Therefore, it is proposed to introduce the institution of “conditional termination of criminal proceedings against minors (diversion)” as a new Article 586¹ in the Criminal Procedure Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Article 586¹. Conditional termination of criminal proceedings (diversion) against minors

The court, the prosecutor, and also the investigator or investigator with the prosecutor's consent, with respect to a person up to thirty years of age who has committed a crime for the first time that is not of great social danger or is not particularly serious, if it

is determined that his or her reformation is possible without the application of criminal penalties, the court is entitled to issue a decision to terminate the criminal case conditionally.

When a criminal case is conditionally terminated, the following obligations (diversion measures) may be imposed on the suspect, defendant, or convicted person:

- Repairing the material and moral damage caused;
- participate in specialized socio-legal rehabilitation programs or vocational training courses;
- perform unpaid community service.

If the person fulfills these obligations during the specified probationary period, they will be exempt from criminal liability, and a conviction will not be recorded against them. In the event the obligations are not fulfilled, the criminal proceedings will be reinstated on general grounds."

The introduction of this proposal into legislation will yield the following scientific and practical results:

1. Increases the effectiveness of re-socialization: Instead of punishing a young offender, the state has the opportunity to re-educate them without isolating them from society by imposing specific obligations (restitution, training).
2. Prevents stigmatization: It prevents a "convicted" mark from appearing on the young person's record, which does not hinder their future employment and integration into society.
3. Reduces the burden on the judicial system: Cases with low social risk are resolved through alternative measures without reaching trial, which allows resources to be directed toward solving serious crimes.

Secondly, in line with the "multidisciplinary" nature of prevention as defined in the "Riyadh Guidelines," national practice requires overcoming the fragmentation between law enforcement agencies and civil society institutions. The current institutional approach (the inspector—only a legal measure, youth leader—only an event, psychologist—only within the school) does not allow for the comprehensive elimination of the root factors that are causing a young person to commit a crime.

In this regard, with the aim of introducing the "Case Management" (social accompaniment) technology into the prevention system and creating its legal foundation, It is proposed to supplement Article 3 of the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On the Prevention of Offenses," titled "Basic Concepts," with a new paragraph of the following content:

"Early prevention among youth — a set of measures aimed at the early identification and elimination of factors that contribute to the formation of antisocial behavior in minors and young people;"

The inclusion of this proposal in the legislation will fill the following scientific and practical gaps in the field:

1. Terminological Clarity and Scope Definition: In current legislation, the concept of "prevention" is general in nature and does not fully encompass the specific characteristics of adolescent psychology and social circumstances. The introduction of the new concept scientifically clarifies the object of prevention and shifts the focus not to post-offense measures, but to the stage of "formation of antisocial behavior" (early prevention).
2. A new model of inter-agency cooperation (Multidisciplinary approach): The proposed norm unifies the activities of various agencies (the Internal Affairs Ministry, the Youth Agency, education, and healthcare) around a single goal: "early detection and elimination." This creates a legal basis for transitioning from fragmented actions to a unified "case management" system.

3. Mechanism for influencing social determinants: The legal codification of the “early prevention” concept imposes an obligation in law enforcement practice not only to punish but also to address the root causes of juvenile delinquency (unemployment, domestic violence, and mental health crises). This aligns national legislation with international standards, particularly the UN Principles for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency.

Third, the technological modernization of the prevention system during the digital transformation must be compatible with human rights guarantees, particularly the digital privacy of young people. Modern research shows that in prevention practices, artificial intelligence and The use of “Big Data” technologies creates the risk of profiling and stigmatizing young people as “potential criminals” without justification. Current legislation lacks legal mechanisms to protect young people from the potential errors of digital algorithms.

In this regard, with the aim of ensuring the legal protection of young people in the digital space, It is proposed to introduce a new Article 20¹ entitled “Guarantees of Young People's Rights in the Digital Environment” into the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On State Youth Policy.” It is advisable that this provision be worded as follows:

Article 20¹. Guarantees of Young People's Rights in the Digital Environment

The state guarantees the safety of young people when using digital technologies, as well as the privacy of their personal data.

The results of profiling young people's behavior through artificial intelligence and automated systems may only give rise to legal consequences after being reviewed under human supervision.

Digital algorithms may not be used to discriminate against young people, to unjustifiably classify them as a high-risk group, or to stigmatize them.”

The introduction of this proposal into legislation will contribute to achieving the following scientific and practical results:

1. It establishes a new “Digital Rights” institution in national legislation and adapts youth policy to the requirements of the modern information society;
2. Legally establishes the “Human-in-the-loop” principle for decision-making in the prevention system. This prevents the fate of young people from becoming solely dependent on technical algorithms;
3. serves as a “legal shield” protecting young people from social stigmatization and helps preserve their trust in society.

Fourth, based on the UN “Tokyo Rules” and modern penitentiary policy trends, deprivation of liberty for young people should be used only as an “ultima ratio” (the very last resort). Taking into account the psychological and social developmental characteristics of young people, the penal system should be based on the model of “restorative justice.”

For this purpose, with the aim of limiting the use of administrative detention among young people and expanding alternative rehabilitation measures instead, It is proposed to introduce a new third paragraph of the following content into Article 29 of the Code of Administrative Liability of the Republic of Uzbekistan, entitled “Administrative Detention”:

“Administrative detention for young people shall be imposed only as an exception, when it is not possible to apply other types of administrative penalties. The court, taking into account the offender's individual circumstances, may apply measures such as compulsory psychological assistance or participation in paid community service instead of administrative detention.”

In connection with this amendment, the third paragraph is considered the fourth paragraph.

The introduction of this proposal into legislation fills the following scientific and practical gaps:

1. Humanization of the penal system and introduction of the “ultima ratio” principle: This provision legally establishes that the purpose of punishment is not only to inflict suffering or isolation, but also to rehabilitate. Protecting a young person from the prison environment (the influence of “prison subculture”) is the most effective criminological tool for preventing them from committing future crimes of recidivism.

2. Transition to a “Restorative Justice” Model: The proposed change shifts the focus of the penal system from “punishing acts against the state” to “restoring an individual's psyche and behavior.” Introducing psychological rehabilitation as an alternative measure allows for addressing the root causes of wrongdoing (aggression, psychological stress, unconsciousness).

3. Accelerates the process of resocialization and reintegration into society: While administrative detention isolates young people from society, socially useful labor and psychological support reintegrate them into society. This is a scientifically grounded approach that allows for reducing prison costs in the state budget and effectively utilizing young people's labor potential.

Fifth, one of the main principles of the “Riyadh Guidelines” (Guidelines on the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly — is the systematic nature of preventive measures and the existence of coordination between agencies. In international practice, there is a requirement for “evidence-based policy,” which stipulates that any preventive decision must be based on clear and comprehensive data. However, in national practice, the databases of competent authorities (the police, the Youth Agency, schools) remain fragmented, which hinders the full implementation of the international obligations ratified by Uzbekistan.

In this regard, with the aim of introducing modern mechanisms for information exchange in accordance with international standards, It is proposed to supplement paragraph 16 of Article 9 of the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On the Prevention of Offenses” with a new section of the following content:

“Prevention entities shall use a single, inter-agency electronic cooperation system that complies with international standards for the purpose of preventing violations, and while protecting the rights and freedoms of minors, ensure the real-time mutual exchange of information on persons in risk groups.”

The inclusion of this proposal in the legislation will fill the following scientific and practical gaps:

1. Ensures the implementation of the “Riyadh Guidelines”: As emphasized in UN recommendations, crime prevention is not just the work of law enforcement, but a collective responsibility. The creation of a single electronic system transforms the fragmented efforts of various institutions into a unified, internationally compliant preventive mechanism.

2. Establishes a “pro-active” approach to the protection of children's rights: In the experience of developed countries (for example, the UK's Youth Offending Teams model), the rapid exchange of information is the key to preventing a child from reoffending. The new norm abandons the practice of delayed response, enabling the problem to be identified at an early stage.

3. Statistical transparency and positive impact on international rankings: To improve Uzbekistan's position in international law and order indices, the crime statistics and preventive registration system must be transparent. A single digitized database will bring the status of work with at-risk youth to a level that is understandable and assessable by international experts and monitoring groups.

Research findings indicate that to effectively organize the system for preventing juvenile delinquency in Uzbekistan, it is necessary to reform the legislation conceptually, institutionally, and procedurally. An analysis of the existing legal framework reveals fragmented cooperation among prevention stakeholders, a lack of legal guarantees in the digital space, and the predominance of repressive methods in penal practices. In this regard, it is proposed to introduce the following comprehensive amendments and additions to the national legislation:

First, to clarify the conceptual framework of prevention and ensure its targeted approach, the concept of “early prevention among youth” should be introduced into Article 3 of the Law on the Prevention of Offenses. This provision will legally codify a set of measures aimed at the early identification and elimination of factors that contribute to the formation of antisocial behavior in minors.

Secondly, it is appropriate to impose on prevention entities the obligation to use the “single electronic cooperation system” under Article 9 of this Law in order to digitize inter-agency cooperation and establish rapid information exchange. This change eliminates data fragmentation and creates the technical and legal foundation for implementing the “case management” technology.

Third, protecting the rights of young people is of paramount importance during the digital transformation of the prevention system. To prevent potential stigmatization and algorithmic errors that may arise from the use of artificial intelligence and Big Data technologies, it is proposed to introduce a new Article 20¹ “Guarantees of the Rights of Young People in the Digital Environment” into the Law on State Youth Policy. This provision will serve as a “digital legal shield” by ensuring a human-in-the-loop element in decision-making.

Fourth, it is necessary to humanize the policy of criminal and administrative prosecution against young people and to introduce the principles of “restorative justice.” To this end:

- Introducing the institution of “Diversion” (conditional termination of a criminal case) as a new Article 586¹ into the Criminal Procedure Code;
- It is necessary to introduce amendments to Article 29 of the Code on Administrative Liability that would restrict the application of administrative detention for young people and instead establish mandatory psychological rehabilitation measures.

The implementation of these proposals will contribute to shifting the prevention of juvenile delinquency in Uzbekistan from a punitive model to a socially supportive one, reduce recidivism, and raise the level of legal protection for young people to international standards.

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