



PROTECTION OF CHILDREN’S RIGHTS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Khilola Anvarovna Khaydarova

Lecturer at the Department of International Law and

Human Rights Tashkent State University of Law

khaydarovakhilola7@gmail.com

Abstract

The article examines the protection of children’s rights in the context of the rapid development of digital technologies and the expansion of the digital environment. It analyzes the transformation of the legal nature and mechanisms of safeguarding children’s rights under conditions of digitalization, taking into account contemporary technological risks. Particular attention is paid to the application of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the digital sphere, including the interpretation provided by General Comment No. 25 (2021) of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

The study identifies key digital threats affecting children, such as violations of privacy and personal data protection, cyberbullying, grooming, exposure to harmful content, and algorithmic manipulation. The role of international and regional legal instruments, as well as soft law standards developed by international organizations, is assessed. The article substantiates the necessity of strengthening the responsibility of digital platforms, implementing the principle of the best interests of the child in technological design, and developing preventive measures through digital and legal literacy. It is concluded that effective protection of children’s rights in the digital age requires a comprehensive approach combining legal regulation, institutional cooperation, platform accountability, and international collaboration.

Keywords: Children’s rights; digital environment; digitalization; privacy; personal data protection; cyberbullying; artificial intelligence; best interests of the child; international legal protection; digital literacy.



Introduction

In the context of the rapid development of digital technologies and the expansion of the digital space, the protection of children's rights has acquired particular relevance. From an early age, children become active participants in digital communication, using the Internet, social networks, online platforms, and digital services for educational, informational, and recreational purposes. While offering undeniable advantages, the digital environment also generates new challenges and risks for the realization and protection of children's rights, including threats to the right to privacy, personal data protection, information security, and the free development of the individual [8].

The international legal foundations for the protection of children's rights are enshrined in the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the United Nations, which obliges States to take all appropriate measures to protect children from all forms of violence, exploitation, and abuse. However, the provisions of the Convention were formulated prior to the large-scale digitalization of social relations, which necessitates their contemporary interpretation and adaptation to the conditions of the digital age [1]. In this regard, both international and national legal doctrine increasingly raise the issue of transforming mechanisms for the protection of children's rights in light of the specific features of the digital environment.

Particular significance attaches to ensuring a proper balance between the child's right of access to information and digital technologies and the need to safeguard his or her legitimate interests on the Internet. International organizations, including UNICEF and the Council of Europe, emphasize the necessity of a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach that combines legal regulation, enhancement of digital literacy, parental involvement, and the accountability of digital platforms [9]. In this context, scholarly reflection on legal mechanisms for the protection of children's rights in the digital age is essential for the development of effective legal solutions and the improvement of existing legislation.

Children's rights in the digital age constitute a set of rights and freedoms enshrined in international and national legal instruments, the exercise of which is carried out through the use of information and communication technologies or is affected by the digital environment. Such rights include the right to access information, freedom of expression, the right to education, the right to privacy,



the protection of personal data, as well as the right to protection from violence and exploitation in any form [4].

The digital environment significantly transforms the ways these rights are exercised, simultaneously expanding children's opportunities while increasing their vulnerability. For instance, access to the Internet promotes the development of educational and communication skills; however, in the absence of appropriate safeguards, it may lead to violations of the right to safety, psychological well-being, and personal dignity. Scholarly literature emphasizes that children in the digital environment are not only objects of protection but also autonomous subjects of digital rights, which necessitates taking into account their age-related, psychological, and social characteristics in legal regulation [5].

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, in General Comment No. 25 (2021), specifically emphasized that the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child are fully applicable in the digital environment without any exceptions, and that states are obliged to ensure their implementation with due consideration of digital risks [6]. This document marked an important step in the development of international standards for the protection of children's rights in the context of digitalization.

The contemporary digital environment is characterized by a range of threats capable of negatively affecting the realization of children's rights. One of the most widespread issues is the violation of the right to privacy and the protection of personal data. Children often do not fully understand the consequences of sharing personal information online, which makes them vulnerable to the unlawful collection, processing, and use of their data [7].

Serious threats also arise from phenomena such as cyberbullying, grooming, the involvement of children in illegal activities, and the dissemination of harmful or prohibited content. These forms of digital abuse negatively affect children's psychological and emotional development and may result in long-term social consequences. Reports by international organizations underline that the impact of digital violence is comparable to that of traditional forms of violence and requires adequate legal measures for effective response [2].

Moreover, the use of algorithms and artificial intelligence systems on digital platforms can lead to discrimination against children, manipulation of their behavior, and limitations on their freedom of choice. In this regard, the issue of



the responsibility of digital platforms and the necessity of implementing the “best interests of the child” principle in the development and application of digital technologies becomes particularly relevant [3].

International legal protection of children’s rights in the digital age is based on universal and regional legal instruments, as well as “soft law” documents. In addition to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, important roles are played by the Council of Europe recommendations, European Union acts on personal data protection, and UNICEF documents aimed at creating a safe digital environment for children.

At the national level, states develop specific strategies and laws regulating issues of child protection online, digital security, and personal data processing. At the same time, analysis of national legislation shows that legal regulation is often fragmented and does not always account for the complex nature of digital threats. This underscores the need to improve legislation and strengthen coordination between government agencies, educational institutions, and the private sector [8]. Effective protection of children’s rights in the digital environment is impossible without preventive measures, including enhancing digital literacy among children and parents, developing self-regulation mechanisms for digital platforms, and promoting international cooperation. Scholarly literature emphasizes that a comprehensive approach is precisely what ensures sustainable and long-term protection of children’s rights in the context of digitalization [12].

Contemporary challenges of the digital environment necessitate the further development of legal mechanisms for the protection of children’s rights, taking into account the dynamics of technological progress. One of the priority areas is the development and implementation of specific norms directly regulating children’s participation in digital interactions, including the use of social networks, online platforms, and artificial intelligence systems. Such norms must be grounded in the principle of the best interests of the child and take into account their age-specific and psychological characteristics [6].

Strengthening the accountability of digital platforms for upholding children’s rights is of particular importance. Scholarly literature rightly emphasizes the need to impose on digital service providers the obligation to ensure a child-centred design, encompassing high standards of privacy, algorithmic transparency, and effective mechanisms for addressing violations [9]. The implementation of this



approach would contribute to reducing digital risks and enhancing the protection of minor users.

Equally significant is the development of digital and legal literacy as a protective measure. Educational programs aimed at equipping children with skills for safe online behavior, along with raising awareness among parents and educators, are considered key preventive tools. International experience shows that the combination of legal regulation and educational initiatives constitutes the most effective model for safeguarding children's rights in the digital age [5].

Furthermore, special attention should be given to the development of international cooperation, as the digital environment is inherently transboundary. Harmonization of national legislation, the exchange of best practices, and participation in international initiatives enable the formulation of coordinated approaches to protecting children's rights and enhance the effectiveness of law enforcement [11]. The digital age has significantly transformed the conditions for exercising children's rights, expanding opportunities for their development and participation in social life, while simultaneously increasing the risks of violations of their legitimate interests. Analysis of international and national legal instruments indicates that existing mechanisms for the protection of children's rights require adaptation to new digital realities and consideration of the specific nature of contemporary technological threats.

Effective protection of children's rights in the digital environment is only possible through a comprehensive approach that combines legal regulation, accountability of digital platforms, enhancement of digital literacy, and international cooperation. Particular emphasis must be placed on the implementation of the principle of the best interests of the child as a fundamental guideline for legal policy in the context of digitalization. As information technologies continue to advance, the scholarly analysis and improvement of legal mechanisms for protecting children's rights remain a priority task of modern law.

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