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Juvenile Delinquency Through The Prism Of The United Nations Documents GABEROV Marjan¹				
Abstract			Recieved: 16 April 2026 Accepted: 22 June 2026	
Juvenile delinquency is a significant social and legal issue that requires effective prevention measures and appropriate treatment of juvenile offenders. The United Nations has played an important role in establishing international standards aimed at protecting children's rights and promoting a humane approach to juvenile justice. This paper analyzes the United Nations' approach to juvenile delinquency, focusing on the principles of prevention, protection of children's rights, and reintegration of juveniles into society. The analysis highlights the importance of international standards in shaping national policies and practices related to juvenile justice. It concludes that the United Nations' approach is centered on the best interests of the child, prevention of delinquent behavior, and the successful social reintegration of juveniles. Keywords: Juvenile delinquency, juvenile justice, United Nations, children's rights, prevention.			2955-1900 © 2026 by Authors Published by International Vision University Press This is an open access article under the CC BY license UDK: 343.91-053.6:[341.24:341.123] 342.726.037-053.6:341.123	

¹ Assoc. Prof. Dr.sc, Faculty of Law, European University, Skopje, N. Macedonia. marjan.gabarov@eurm.edu.mk, 0009-0004-7130-3567

Introduction

Juvenile delinquency represents a complex social, legal, and security phenomenon that has attracted significant attention at both national and international levels. The growing need for child protection and for ensuring proper conditions for their development has led to the establishment of special mechanisms and standards aimed at preventing delinquent behavior and ensuring appropriate treatment of juveniles in conflict with the law. Modern juvenile justice systems are based on the principles of protecting children's rights, respecting their dignity, and ensuring successful resocialization and reintegration into society.

In this regard, the United Nations plays a key role in the development of international standards related to child protection and the prevention of juvenile delinquency. Through the adoption of numerous international legal instruments, the UN establishes a normative framework that serves as a basis for the development and improvement of national legislation and policies in the field of juvenile justice. These instruments contain principles and guidelines that contribute to ensuring special protection for children, the promotion of their rights, and the development of systems based on prevention, education, and rehabilitation (Declaration of the Rights the Child, 1924).

The subject of this paper is the analysis of the United Nations' approach to juvenile delinquency through the examination of relevant international documents and the standards they establish. The aim is to identify their significance in the development of the modern juvenile justice system, as well as their influence on national legal systems and practices. Through this analysis, the contribution of the United Nations to the development of universal principles for child protection and the creation of more effective mechanisms for addressing juvenile delinquency will be assessed.

Documents of the United Nations Organization on Juvenile Delinquency

The child justice system represents a universal system, which means that the issue of child protection is given special attention at the global level. At the current stage of social development, it can be concluded that in almost all countries there is a highly expressed awareness of the need to establish special measures for the protection of children, that is, the establishment of a special system for the prevention of juvenile delinquency. Among the series of serious issues addressed by the international community is also the problem of juvenile delinquency.

On a global and international level, there are numerous legal documents through which children's rights are directly or indirectly protected (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). The protection of children's rights is an integral part of these numerous international instruments that are relevant to this issue. In the overall consideration of the instruments used for the protection of children's rights, one can distinguish between international documents of a universal character dealing with this issue, international documents related to specific areas concerning children's rights, as well as other supplementary international acts regulating this matter.

In order to properly analyze these instruments of international legal nature, they are classified according to the criterion of the international institution that adopted them. Thus, in this regard, one can speak of documents on juvenile delinquency of the United Nations, documents of the Council of Europe on juvenile delinquency, and documents on juvenile delinquency of the European Union.

In the following section, the documents adopted by the United Nations are presented, which directly or indirectly relate to the protection of children, that is, to juvenile delinquency (Gaberov, 2023). These are the following international legal instruments:

- Declaration of the Rights of the Child, also known as the Geneva Declaration of 1924,
- Declaration on Social and Legal Principles relating to the Protection and Welfare of Children, with special reference to foster placement and adoption (1986),
- United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (the Beijing Rules),
- Annex to the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice,
- Convention on the Rights of the Child,
- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict,
- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography,
- United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (the Riyadh Guidelines),
- United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty (the Havana Rules),
- Annex to the United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty,
- United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for Non-custodial Measures (the Tokyo Rules),
- Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children,
- Guidelines for Action on Children in the Criminal Justice System, recommended in Economic and Social Council Resolution 1997/30,
- Implementation of mediation and restorative justice measures in criminal justice, Economic and Social Council Resolution 1999/26,
- United Nations Resolution 2002: The Rights of the Child,
- General Comment No. 10: The Right of the Child to be Heard,
- Declaration of Basic Principles on the Use of Restorative Justice Programmes in Criminal Matters (2002),
- Annex to the Basic Principles on the Use of Restorative Justice Programmes in Criminal Matters,
- Protection of Witnesses and Victims – EKO SOS Guidelines: Resolution 2004/27 – Guidelines on justice matters involving child victims and witnesses of crime.

As can be observed, the normative activity of the United Nations in the field of child protection, particularly in relation to juvenile delinquency, is extensive, a fact confirmed by the numerous

adopted instruments. All of the aforementioned documents are significant for the development of the child protection system and the juvenile justice system. The following section provides an analysis of some of these international instruments adopted by the United Nations, in order to examine the normative solutions contained therein.

In this regard, it is necessary to analyze the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989. The Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989 and entered into force one year later, in 1990.

By its legal nature and characteristics, the Convention represents a fundamental international legal instrument that guarantees the protection of children on a universal level. Several core principles and postulates are proclaimed and emphasized in its normative framework, such as the prohibition of discrimination against children on any grounds, the right to life as a fundamental human right of the child, the principle of the best interests of the child, the right to development, as well as respect for the views of the child. The provisions of this Convention do not directly address the issue of domestic violence; however, they play an important indirect role in relation to the impact of domestic violence on children as its victims (Hammarberg, 2011). Through this Convention, principles and standards for children are defined at a global and international level, which have a universal character and are applicable within all societies (Pirkovska–Zmijanac, 1999). As Draskic points out, the Convention on the Rights of the Child should ensure, for this vulnerable category of persons, peace, human dignity, a high level of tolerance, the exercise of freedom without any restrictions, a high degree of respect for the principle of equality, as well as solidarity with other members of society (Drakšić, 1997).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child contains a set of rights through which minimum protection and minimum standards for the proper development of children are ensured, which are to be guaranteed by the States. This protection of children should be provided within the healthcare system, the education system, legal relations, as well as within social services for children.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 is structurally composed of a preamble, which represents the introductory part of the Convention, and a total of 54 articles in which all children's rights are established, through which maximum protection of this vulnerable category of persons is expected to be achieved on a universal level.

According to Ortakovski, the rights provided within the Convention, from the perspective of the circumstances to which they relate, can be categorized into five separate groups. The first group refers to children's economic rights, the second group covers social and cultural rights, the third group includes civil and political rights, the fourth group concerns rights within the scope of juvenile justice, and the fifth and final group consists of humanitarian rights (Ortakovski, 1999).

Article 1 of the Convention defines the term “child”, stating that, according to the normative text of the Convention, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years. From this general rule that all persons under the age of 18 are considered children, there is an exception allowing, under national legislation, for majority to be attained earlier, such as in cases of the emancipation of a minor’s capacity to marry, subject to prior parental consent and a medical opinion.

Article 2 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child concerns the prohibition of discrimination in the implementation and enjoyment of all rights provided under the Convention, regardless of race, sex, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth status, or any other status or circumstance of the child or of the child’s parents or legal guardians.

This article essentially emphasizes the State’s active obligation to prevent discrimination against children, as well as the need to establish measures that include revising legal regulations to improve conditions, strategic planning, continuous monitoring of processes, raising public awareness about the importance of protecting and realizing children’s rights, improving the education system, conducting awareness campaigns aimed at achieving the best interests of the child, and evaluating implemented measures and activities (Davitkovski, 2010).

In line with the realization of the best interests of the child and the maximum protection and respect of children’s rights is Article 3 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, according to which the best interests of the child constitute a primary consideration for all actors in society, whether social authorities, public authorities, private institutions, administrative bodies, or legislative bodies.

Pursuant to Article 16 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is explicitly stated that no child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home, or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his or her honour and reputation.

Article 16 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child can be read in conjunction with Article 19 of the same Convention, according to which States Parties undertake to take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social, and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of mental, physical, and sexual violence. Each of these forms of violence against the child may result in harm, abuse, neglect, negligent treatment, maltreatment, or exploitation of the child, whether while in the care of parents, legal guardians, or any other person entrusted with the child’s care.

This article also emphasizes that protective measures for children must include social welfare programs for children, as well as the provision of support within the overall system of child protection.

The main text of the Convention on the Rights of the Child also includes two Optional Protocols, namely: the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2000 and in force since 2002, as well as the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, also adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2000 and in force since 2002.

States Parties to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, encouraged by the strong support for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, demonstrate the widespread commitment to the promotion and protection of children's rights. Reaffirming that children's rights require special protection, they call for the continuous improvement of the situation of children everywhere, as well as for their development and education in conditions of peace and security.

Deeply concerned about the harmful and lasting impact that armed conflicts have on children and the long-term consequences they have on peace, security, and development, they condemn situations in which children are targeted during armed conflict and direct attacks are carried out on objects protected under international law, including places where large numbers of children are commonly present, such as schools and hospitals. It is noted that the adoption of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court recognizes, as a war crime, the recruitment or use of children under the age of 15 in armed forces or armed groups, as well as their participation in hostilities in both international and non-international armed conflicts.

States Parties to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, taking into account the need to further strengthen the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly Articles 1, 11, 21, 32, 33, 34, 35, and 36, emphasize the necessity of expanding measures that States Parties should adopt in order to ensure protection of children from sale, prostitution, and pornography. They also take into consideration that the Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from any work that may be hazardous or interfere with the child's education, or be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social development.

They express serious concern about the significant and increasing international trafficking in children for the purposes of sale, child prostitution, and child pornography. They are also deeply concerned about the widespread and persistent practice of sex tourism, to which children are particularly vulnerable, as it contributes to the exploitation of children through sale, prostitution, and pornography.

In a historical context, it is also worth mentioning the Declaration of the Rights of the Child of 1924, also known as the Geneva Declaration. This international instrument confirms the interest

of the international community in the special protection of children. As early as 1924, the League of Nations made efforts to establish legal mechanisms for the protection of children. According to this declaration, the child must have the following rights:

- The child has the right to appropriate material and spiritual conditions for proper development;
- A hungry child must be fed, a sick child must receive medical care, a backward child must be helped, a delinquent child must be rehabilitated, and orphans and homeless children must receive care and protection;
- The child shall have priority in receiving assistance in times of crisis;
- The child must be provided with maintenance and protection from all forms of exploitation;
- The child must be brought up in the awareness that his or her abilities should serve others.

The analysis of several documents adopted by the United Nations should not lead to the conclusion that other instruments are less important in the development of the child protection system. On the contrary, the child protection system and juvenile justice system require the implementation of normative solutions into national legislation, as contained in all the aforementioned international legal instruments.

The Importance and Role of the United Nations in Combating Juvenile Delinquency

The United Nations represents a central international institution in the development of contemporary standards for the protection of human rights, with particular emphasis on policies and instruments related to the protection of children and the prevention of juvenile delinquency. Its role is not limited only to the adoption of legal documents and recommendations, but also extends to a broader influence on shaping national juvenile justice systems, their reform, and their harmonization with international standards.

In contemporary conditions, juvenile delinquency is treated as a complex social phenomenon that cannot be explained solely through the legal dimension of punishment, but rather requires a multidisciplinary approach encompassing sociological, psychological, economic, and educational factors. In this regard, the United Nations plays a significant role in promoting the understanding that juvenile delinquency is often the result of broader social circumstances, such as poverty, social inequality, inadequate family care, marginalization, and limited access to education and social services. This creates a foundation for the development of policies focused on prevention rather than exclusively on punishment.

One of the key contributions of the United Nations is the development of the concept of preventive juvenile justice, which implies the early identification of risk factors and the creation of conditions for their elimination before delinquent behavior occurs. This approach encourages states to invest

in educational programs, social support for families, youth policies, and local communities, in order to reduce the risk of deviant behavior among young people.

In addition to the preventive dimension, the United Nations also plays an important role in promoting a humane and fair approach to juveniles in conflict with the law. In this context, it is emphasized that every juvenile must be treated with special care, taking into account their age, maturity, and potential for resocialization. Instead of repressive measures, educational, protective, and rehabilitative measures are promoted, aimed at integrating juveniles into society and preventing recidivism.

A particularly important contribution of the United Nations is the development and promotion of the concept of restorative justice. This concept represents a modern approach in criminal justice that focuses on repairing the harm caused by delinquent behavior rather than punishment itself. Within this framework, dialogue between the victim and the offender is encouraged, as well as active participation of the community in resolving conflicts. In this way, greater social cohesion is achieved and the risk of stigmatization of juveniles is reduced.

The United Nations also plays a significant role in strengthening international cooperation in the field of juvenile justice. Given that modern forms of crime increasingly have a transnational character, coordination between states, exchange of information, and harmonization of legal standards are necessary. In this sense, the United Nations functions as a platform that enables joint action and policy alignment aimed at protecting children at a global level.

Furthermore, its role in raising awareness of children's rights and their protection across all social spheres is highly significant. Through various programs, campaigns, and research activities, a culture of respect for children's rights is promoted, as well as an understanding of the importance of preventing juvenile delinquency as a social priority.

In conclusion, the role of the United Nations in combating juvenile delinquency is multidimensional and includes normative, preventive, educational, and coordination functions. Its influence is reflected not only in the creation of international standards, but also in the development of a modern approach to juvenile justice based on humanity, resocialization, prevention, and the protection of the best interests of the child

Conclusion

The analysis of the role of the United Nations in addressing juvenile delinquency demonstrates that the protection of children and the prevention of delinquent behavior represent a central priority within the international legal and institutional framework. The United Nations, through its normative activity and strategic influence, has established a comprehensive system of principles and standards that guide states in developing effective and humane juvenile justice systems.

It is evident that juvenile delinquency is not merely a legal issue, but a complex social phenomenon influenced by a range of interconnected factors, including economic hardship, social exclusion, family instability, and insufficient access to education and social support. In this regard, the international approach promoted by the United Nations emphasizes prevention as the most effective response, focusing on early intervention and the elimination of risk factors that may lead to deviant behavior among minors.

A key contribution of the United Nations lies in its promotion of a child-centred approach, which prioritizes the best interests of the child in all actions and decisions affecting minors. This approach rejects purely punitive models and instead supports educational, protective, and rehabilitative measures aimed at the social reintegration of juveniles and the prevention of recidivism.

Furthermore, the development of restorative justice as a guiding principle highlights the importance of repairing harm, encouraging dialogue between victims and offenders, and involving the community in the resolution of conflicts. Such an approach contributes to reconciliation, social cohesion, and the long-term prevention of future offenses.

The United Nations also plays a crucial role in strengthening international cooperation, ensuring that states work together in addressing transnational forms of crime affecting children, while harmonizing their legal systems with universally accepted standards of child protection.

In conclusion, the contribution of the United Nations to the field of juvenile justice is both extensive and multidimensional. It extends beyond legal regulation to include prevention, education, rehabilitation, and international coordination. Ultimately, the United Nations promotes a modern, humane, and rights-based approach that seeks not only to address juvenile delinquency but also to ensure the full protection, development, and social inclusion of every child.

Based on the analysis of the role of the United Nations and the international framework for combating juvenile delinquency, several key recommendations can be formulated for future development of policies and practice in this field.

First, states should further strengthen preventive mechanisms aimed at early identification of risk factors that contribute to juvenile delinquency. This includes investing in education, social protection systems, and family support programs, with particular attention to vulnerable groups of children who are exposed to poverty, neglect, or social exclusion. Early intervention is essential in reducing the likelihood of delinquent behavior and ensuring long-term social stability.

Second, it is necessary to continue the reform of juvenile justice systems in the direction of greater humanization and individualization of measures. Instead of focusing on punitive responses, priority should be given to educational, corrective, and rehabilitative measures that support the reintegration of minors into society. Special attention should be paid to avoiding stigmatization, which can contribute to recidivism and social marginalization.

Third, the concept of restorative justice should be further promoted and practically implemented in national legal systems. Encouraging dialogue between victims and offenders, mediation processes, and community involvement can significantly contribute to repairing harm and strengthening social cohesion. This approach should be systematically integrated into juvenile justice procedures as an effective alternative to traditional court processes.

Fourth, international cooperation should be further enhanced, particularly in relation to transnational forms of crime involving minors. States should improve mechanisms for information exchange, joint training of professionals, and harmonization of legal standards in order to ensure a more coordinated global response to juvenile delinquency.

Finally, greater attention should be given to raising awareness among the general public, institutions, and professionals about the importance of children's rights and the specific needs of juveniles in conflict with the law. Continuous education and professional training of judges, prosecutors, social workers, and educators is essential for the effective implementation of international standards.

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