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WAYS TO COMBAT CORRUPTION IN PROTECTING THE INTERESTS OF MINORS

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Abstract: Protecting the rights and best interests of minors has become one of the top priorities for modern democratic states and international organizations. Nevertheless, corruption remains one of the key factors hindering children's equal access to justice, social protection, education, healthcare, guardianship and foster care, and other public services. Corruption within institutions responsible for protecting children undermines the rule of law, erodes public trust in state bodies, and increases the risk of violations of children's fundamental rights.

This article provides a comprehensive legal and institutional analysis of the interrelationship between the child protection system and corruption. It examines international legal standards, the advanced practices of certain states, and anti-corruption mechanisms currently applied within child protection systems. The study pays particular attention to corruption risks arising in guardianship and foster care relations, juvenile justice, child social protection services, education, healthcare, and social assistance programs.

The study employs comparative legal analysis, doctrinal research, institutional analysis, and comparative methods of public administration, identifying shortcomings in the current legal system and proposing innovative solutions to address them. Drawing on advanced international practice, the article puts forward original author concepts such as the **"Child Integrity Index" (CII)**, an **artificial-intelligence-based corruption risk assessment model**, and an **integrated digital compliance system for child protection institutions**.

The findings of the study show that effective protection of the rights of minors cannot be limited solely to strengthening criminal liability for corruption offenses. This requires implementing preventive institutional reforms, digitalizing public administration, ensuring transparency of administrative processes, strengthening public accountability, and introducing a system of continuous integrity monitoring. The proposed recommendations may serve to improve anti-corruption policy in Uzbekistan and bring the protection of children's rights closer to international standards.

Keywords: minors; protection of children's rights; anti-corruption policy; juvenile justice; transparency; digital governance; integrity; compliance; public administration.

Introduction

Protecting the rights and legitimate interests of minors is one of the most important constitutional obligations of any democratic state founded on the rule of law. Because children are physically, mentally, and socially dependent on adults and state institutions, they constitute the

most vulnerable segment of society. Consequently, any shortcoming in the activities of state bodies directly and negatively affects their safety, comprehensive development, and access to justice.

Over recent decades, the international community has substantially strengthened the legal guarantees aimed at protecting children's rights. In particular, the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)** establishes that the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all decisions and actions concerning children. Likewise, the **United Nations Convention against Corruption (2003)** requires States Parties to build transparent, accountable, and corruption-resistant state institutions capable of protecting fundamental human rights.

Despite extensive legislative reforms carried out in many countries, corruption continues to seriously hinder the effective functioning of child protection systems. Instances of corruption can occur at almost every stage of public administration relating to minors — birth registration, education, healthcare, adoption, guardianship and foster care, social services, juvenile justice, disability determination, and the distribution of social benefits. Such practices particularly harm children from socially vulnerable families, limiting their equal access to essential public services and deepening social inequality.

Corruption within institutions responsible for protecting children stands apart from corruption in other spheres because of its consequences. Its harm is not limited to economic losses alone. On the contrary, it leads to irreparable violations of children's rights, psychological trauma, unequal treatment, delays in justice, and a decline in public trust toward state bodies. Moreover, corruption also weakens the effectiveness of mechanisms for the timely identification and protection of children facing violence, exploitation, human trafficking, neglect, and other dangerous situations.

The accelerating digitalization of public administration is creating new opportunities to increase transparency and accountability. Electronic public services, digital case-management systems, artificial intelligence technologies, Big Data analytics, and automated risk-assessment mechanisms are helping to reduce officials' excessive discretionary decision-making powers and to narrow the opportunities available for corruption. However, digitalization alone cannot fully eliminate corruption. This requires comprehensive institutional reforms, high ethical standards in public service, effective compliance systems, and strong public oversight.

In recent years, Uzbekistan has been carrying out extensive reforms in combating corruption and protecting children's rights. Improving legislation, reforming state institutions, establishing specialized anti-corruption bodies, broadly introducing electronic public services, and modernizing the judicial system are all contributing to greater transparency in public administration. Nevertheless, corruption risks persist in certain areas — particularly those where administrative bodies have been granted broad discretionary powers and internal control mechanisms remain insufficiently developed.

While most existing scholarly research has examined corruption or children's rights as separate fields, their interrelationship has not been sufficiently studied from a comprehensive legal and institutional perspective. Most academic works analyze anti-corruption governance or the protection of children's rights independently, without paying adequate attention to corruption-prevention mechanisms specifically tailored to the child protection system.

The main purpose of this article is to develop a comprehensive legal model for combating corruption within the child protection system. Unlike previous studies, this work proposes legal regulation, institutional reforms, digital governance, compliance mechanisms, and an artificial-intelligence-based corruption risk assessment system as a single, integrated model.

This study pursues the following four main objectives:

— identifying the principal corruption risks within the system for protecting the rights of minors;

— analyzing international legal standards and advanced foreign practice on preventing corruption in child protection institutions;

— assessing Uzbekistan's current legal and institutional framework from the standpoint of corruption prevention;

— developing innovative legal and institutional proposals aimed at strengthening integrity and transparency within the child protection system.

The scientific novelty of the study is reflected in the development of three concepts.

First, a **"Child Integrity Index" (CII)** is proposed, enabling the assessment of the institutional integrity level of state bodies responsible for protecting children.

Second, an **artificial-intelligence-based corruption risk assessment model** is developed, designed to identify high-risk administrative decisions before corruption occurs.

Third, an **integrated digital compliance system** is proposed, combining electronic monitoring, internal compliance controls, public accountability, and predictive analytics into a single system.

The central scientific hypothesis of this study is that corruption in the sphere of protecting the rights of minors cannot be eliminated solely by strengthening criminal-liability measures. Achieving sustainable results requires a preventive governance model that incorporates transparency, digitalization, institutional accountability, principles of integrity in public service, and continuous monitoring of corruption risks. Such an approach not only significantly reduces opportunities for corruption but also serves the effective realization of children's rights in accordance with international legal standards.

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