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# SPECIALIZED INSTITUTIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

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## Abstract

In today's era of globalization, the protection of children's rights is considered one of the most important tasks facing humanity. A child is the future of society, and ensuring their healthy development, education, and protection of rights is one of the fundamental factors of sustainable development. Therefore, at the international level, a number of mechanisms have been created to safeguard the interests of children and to ensure their life, health, education, and social protection.

The United Nations (UN) has established specialized institutions for the protection of children's rights for this very purpose. These institutions play an important role in ensuring children's rights and freedoms based on international standards. Through these institutions, efforts are made to combat discrimination, violence, poverty, and deprivation of education affecting children. This article analyzes the UN's specialized institutions for the protection of children's rights, their activities, and their role in the international arena.

The United Nations has a number of specialized agencies dedicated to the protection of children's rights, including the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The UN specialized agencies are international organizations affiliated with the United Nations and operate in various fields such as the economy, social development, education, science, culture, and others. They are independent



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institutions that cooperate closely with the UN on the basis of international agreements.

### **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)**

In 1946, the United Nations Special Commission and the International Emergency Fund for Children (UNICEF) were established to provide assistance to children.

UNICEF was established after the Second World War with the aim of meeting the most essential daily needs of children living in Europe and China, such as food, medicine, and clothing. In 1950, the UN General Assembly officially defined that the main activities of the Fund would focus on implementing programs aimed at protecting the interests of children in developing countries. UNICEF carries out its activities on the basis of the principles and action plans set out in the Universal Declaration aimed at saving children's lives, protecting them, and ensuring their comprehensive development. It views the child as a person whose full range of rights must be realized and who has individual needs for survival and development. In order to ensure equal opportunities for every child, special attention is given to the most vulnerable children.

### **Child Protection**

UNICEF supports states in establishing effective and inclusive child protection systems in order to prevent and combat exploitation, violence, neglect, harmful practices, and abuse against children.

Its goal is to ensure a supportive family environment for every child, access to justice, and protection from violence.

The Fund's activities in the field of child protection focus on expanding scientifically grounded, population-level prevention approaches with clear accountability for achieving results. These include universal access to justice, family and parental support, safe schools, online safety, and the promotion of positive norms and values.



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### **Child Health**

UNICEF strives to support the provision of equitable, evidence-based, high-quality, and gender-responsive social services for all girls and boys, including children with disabilities, those growing up in low-income families, and those living in underdeveloped regions. In addition, the organization provides practical assistance to ensure the health and proper nutrition of newborns, children, and adolescents.

### **Education**

UNICEF promotes quality and inclusive education at both preschool and school levels. It strives to ensure access to education for children in difficult circumstances, those living in rural areas, children with disabilities, as well as girls and boys who are not attending educational institutions. Within the framework of the Global Partnership for Education, UNICEF serves as a coordinating agency for the education sector.

Alongside its efforts to ensure quality education, supporting adolescents and young people aged 10–24 in their development and participation in today's rapidly changing world is another priority area of its activities. UNICEF works in cooperation with governments, civil society organizations, adolescents, and parents to provide young people—especially the most vulnerable and marginalized—with the support they need to fully realize their potential.

### **Social Protection**

UNICEF supports ensuring a decent start in life for every child, reducing child poverty, improving the efficiency of managing public financial resources directed toward children's needs, and promoting the development of child- and youth-friendly local governance<sup>1</sup>.

### **World Health Organization (WHO)**

Due to recurrent epidemics and pandemics, the earliest forms of international cooperation in the field of medicine and public health emerged as early as the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/uzbekistan/uz/bizning-faoliyatimiz>



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14th century. The first body engaged in international cooperation on health matters was the Supreme Council of Health of Constantinople, established in 1839. Its main responsibilities included the inspection of foreign ships in ports and the implementation of anti-epidemic measures to prevent the spread of plague and cholera.

At the beginning of the 20th century, two more intergovernmental health organizations were established: The Pan American Sanitary Bureau (Washington, USA, 1902) and the Office International d'Hygiène Publique (Paris, France, 1907). Their main function was to disseminate information on general medical issues, particularly infectious diseases.

After the First World War, the Health Organization of the League of Nations began its work in 1923 in Geneva, Switzerland. Following the end of the Second World War, in July 1946, the International Health Conference in New York decided to establish the World Health Organization (WHO). The WHO Constitution was ratified on 7 April 1948, and since then, 7 April has been celebrated as World Health Day. Currently, the WHO has 194 Member States. The WHO provides assistance to countries in three main areas related to the protection of children's health:

- by proposing scientifically grounded approaches to adolescent health;
- by supporting health systems and their impact on education and social protection;
- by planning actions aimed at reducing inequalities in adolescents' health and development both within and between countries<sup>2</sup>.

### **International Labour Organization (ILO)**

The Constitution of the International Labour Organization (ILO)<sup>3</sup> is the principal legal instrument forming the foundation of the Organization. It defines its objectives, structure, operating procedures, and the obligations of its members. The Constitution was first adopted in 1919, following the First World War, as an

<sup>2</sup> Kulina S. N. Mejdunarodnaya pravovaya zashita detey v oblasti zdorovesberejeniya: Istoriya i sovremenost. Rossiya, gorod Norilsk. "Mirovaya nauka" №11(32) 2019. science-j.com. S. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Constitution of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) <https://www.refworld.org/legal/agreements/ilo/1919/en/47521>



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annex to the Treaty of Versailles, and was further developed through the Declaration of Philadelphia in 1944.

The main objective of the Constitution is to improve working conditions, protect workers' rights, and ensure social justice. It also provides mechanisms for the development, implementation, and supervision of international labour standards. Furthermore, the Preamble emphasizes the necessity of social protection for children, adolescents, and women, as well as the protection of their labour rights. According to the 1944 Declaration of Philadelphia, adopted as an annex to the ILO Constitution, the Conference affirmed that one of the Organization's key responsibilities is the implementation of programs aimed at expanding social protection measures among the peoples of the world, ensuring a basic income and comprehensive medical care for those in need, creating the necessary conditions to protect child welfare and maternity, and securing adequate nutrition, housing, leisure, and cultural opportunities.

After the Second World War, changes in the global political balance led to the expansion of the ILO's objectives, and in 1946 the ILO became the first specialized agency associated with the United Nations.

The "World Day Against Child Labour" was first observed in 2002 by the International Labour Organization. Its purpose is to draw attention to this problem and to the necessity of measures aimed at its eradication.

### **Child Labour**

At the time of the establishment of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1919, one of its primary objectives was the abolition of child labour. The ILO sought to achieve this goal by adopting labour standards that embodied the concept of a minimum age for employment or work and by exercising supervision over their implementation. Since 1919, the ILO has traditionally maintained in its standard-setting activities that minimum age standards should be linked to compulsory school education<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.un.org/ru/observances/world-day-against-child-labour/background>



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In pursuit of this objective, the ILO adopted a number of conventions, including:

1. Convention concerning the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment in Industry (1919);
2. Convention concerning the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment at Sea (1920);
3. Convention concerning the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment in Agriculture (1921);
4. Convention concerning the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment as Trimmers and Stokers on Board Ship (1921);
5. Convention concerning the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment in Non-Industrial Occupations (1932);
6. Convention concerning the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment at Sea (Revised), 1936;
7. Convention concerning the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment in Industry (Revised), 1937;
8. Convention concerning the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment in Non-Industrial Occupations (Revised), 1937;
9. Convention concerning the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment as Fishermen (1959);
10. Convention concerning the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment Underground Work (1965).

in particular<sup>5</sup>, the Convention concerning Minimum Age (Convention No. 138), adopted on 26 June 1973, also embodies the principle that the minimum age for admission to employment shall not be lower than the minimum age for completion of compulsory schooling. In addition, the Convention establishes a number of other important provisions.

In particular, the following provisions are established:

- Each Member of the International Labour Organization undertakes, from the date on which this Convention comes into force for that Member, to pursue a national policy designed to ensure the effective abolition of child labour and to raise progressively the minimum age for admission to employment or work to a

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<sup>5</sup> Minimum Age Convention. <https://lex.uz/docs/2756292>



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level consistent with the fullest physical and mental development of young persons (Article 1).

- The minimum age for admission to employment or work shall not be less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling and, in any case, shall not be less than fifteen years. However, a Member whose economy and educational facilities are insufficiently developed may, after consultation with the organizations of employers and workers concerned, where such exist, initially specify a minimum age of fourteen years. Each Member which has specified a minimum age of fourteen years shall, in its reports on the application of this Convention submitted in accordance with Article 22 of the Constitution of the International Labour Organization, state:

(a) that the reasons for which it avails itself of the exception still subsist; or  
(b) that it renounces the right to avail itself of the exception as from a stated date (Article 2).

- The minimum age for admission to any type of employment or work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to jeopardize the health, safety, or morals of young persons shall not be less than eighteen years. Nevertheless, national laws or regulations or the competent authority may, after consultation with the organizations of employers and workers concerned, where such exist, authorize employment or work as from the age of sixteen years, on condition that the health, safety, and morals of the young persons concerned are fully protected and that they have received adequate specific instruction or vocational training (Article 3).

According to national legal norms, children aged thirteen to fifteen may be permitted to perform only light work or be employed in such work. In this case, such activity:

- a) must not have a negative impact on the child's health or physical and mental development;
- b) must not interfere with the child's education, that is, it must not hinder regular attendance at school, participation in vocational guidance or vocational training programs approved by the competent authorities, or the effective use of the knowledge and skills acquired during the period of study (Article 7).



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The main principles of Convention No. 138 concerning the minimum age in the field of employment and labour activity may be classified as follows:

### **Hazardous Work**

Any form of work which is likely to harm the physical, mental, or moral health of children, or endanger their safety or morals, must not be performed by persons under the age of 18.

### **Basic Minimum Age**

The minimum age for starting work must not be lower than the age of completion of compulsory schooling, which is generally 15 years.

### **Light Work**

Children aged 13 to 15 may perform light work, provided that it does not threaten their health or safety and does not interfere with their education, vocational guidance, or training.

Thus, one of the most effective ways to prevent young children from being engaged in heavy or dangerous work is to establish age-related restrictions, under which children may lawfully work and offer their services on the labour market.

ILO Convention No. 182, adopted in 1999, strengthened the global consensus on the elimination of child labour. This Convention calls for the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including slavery, forced labour, and the use of children in armed conflict, pornography, drug production, and hazardous work.

The Convention defines the worst forms of child labour as:

all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, forced labour, including the compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;

engaging a child in prostitution, selling or offering a child for such purposes, as well as producing pornographic materials involving children or using a child in pornographic performances and shows;



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using, procuring, or offering a child for illegal activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of narcotic drugs;

work which, by its nature or the conditions in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the child's physical condition, endanger the child's life and safety, or negatively affect the child's moral and ethical values.

Not every type of activity performed by children should be classified as child labour that must be eliminated. Participation of children or adolescents in work that does not affect their health and development or interfere with their schooling is generally regarded as positive. Such activities include helping parents with household chores, assisting in a family business, or earning pocket money outside school hours and during school holidays. These activities contribute to children's development and to the well-being of their families. They also provide children with skills and experience and help prepare them to become productive members of society in adulthood.

Child labour condemned by the international community may be divided into three categories:

- unquestionably the worst forms of child labour, such as slavery at the international level, trafficking in children, debt bondage and other forms of forced labour, the compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict, prostitution and pornography, as well as other illegal activities;
- work performed by a child who has not reached the minimum age established for that type of work (in accordance with national legislation and accepted international standards), thereby potentially hindering the child's education and overall development;
- work which, by its nature or the conditions in which it is carried out, is likely to jeopardize the child's physical, mental, or moral well-being and development, and is therefore regarded as "hazardous and harmful work".

New global estimates and trends are presented according to three categories: economically active children, children in child labour, and children engaged in hazardous and harmful work.

Thus, the emerging global picture appears quite encouraging. That is, both the overall level of child labour and the number of children engaged in hazardous forms of work are gradually declining.



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The best conceptual understanding of the problem of child labour has at the same time provided a better understanding of its nature and the causes that give rise to it. According to the 2002 global report, the majority of child labour cases (70 per cent) occur in the agricultural sector, and compared with other sectors of the economy, the informal sector accounts for the largest share of child labour.

Undoubtedly, poverty and economic shocks play an important, even decisive, role in shaping the child labour market. In turn, child labour contributes to the persistence of poverty. For example, according to the latest empirical studies conducted by the World Bank in Brazil, early entry into the labour market reduces lifetime earnings by approximately 13–20 per cent, which significantly increases the likelihood of remaining poor in later stages of life. Moreover, it increases the probability of remaining in the manual labour market, which, as noted above, contributes to the continuation of poverty.

However, poverty alone does not provide a sufficient explanation for child labour and certainly cannot explain its worst forms. The approach must be based on a human rights perspective. In other words, it must focus on issues of discrimination and social exclusion, as these are factors that contribute to the phenomenon. The most vulnerable groups exposed to child labour are often population groups that face various forms of discrimination and social exclusion. These include girls, ethnic minorities, indigenous and tribal peoples, persons belonging to lower social strata or castes, persons with disabilities, displaced persons, and populations living in remote areas.

In 2002, at the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on Children, a mainstreaming approach was unanimously endorsed. According to this approach, the issue of child labour should be incorporated into the development agenda. This implies the setting of new major objectives for the global movement against child labour. From a political perspective, this means placing the issue of child labour on the agendas of ministries of finance and planning, since the global movement against child labour must ultimately persuade governments to take measures to restrict child labour. The elimination of child labour is no longer a technocratic exercise but is becoming a set of political policy choices.



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According to the 2020 report<sup>6</sup>, 160 million children worldwide (one in every ten children) are engaged in labour, of whom 79 million are involved in work that is dangerous to life and health. Since 2000, the ILO has been analysing data and publishing global reports on this issue every four years. The 2020 study examined the involvement of children aged 5–17 in labour based on surveys conducted in more than 100 countries<sup>7</sup>. Developing appropriate guidelines on the basis of monitoring results is one of the main areas of activity of the ILO.

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<sup>7</sup> Child labour Global estimates 2020 trends and the road forward. © International Labour Organization and United Nations Children's Fund 2021. [https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40ed\\_norm/%40jpec/documents/publication/wcms\\_797515.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40ed_norm/%40jpec/documents/publication/wcms_797515.pdf)