

TSUL LEGAL REPORT

INTERNATIONAL ELECTRONIC
SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL

VOLUME 7
ISSUE 2
JUNE 2026



JOURNAL DOI: 10.51788/tsul.lr.
ISSUE DOI: 10.51788/tsul.lr.7.2.
E-ISSN: 2181-1024



Founder: Tashkent State University of Law



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T L R

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«TSUL Legal Report» international electronic scientific journal was registered by the Press and Information Agency of Uzbekistan on April 21, 2020, with certificate number 1342. The journal is included in the list of journals of the Higher Attestation Commission under the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovations of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

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Publishing license

№ 174625, 29.11.2023.

E-ISSN: 2181-1024

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TSUL LEGAL REPORT

Journal home page: www.legalreport.tsul.uz



Received: 10.05.2026

Accepted: 15.06.2026

Published: 30.06.2026

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.51788/tsul.lr.7.2./IDQX2783>

PROSPECTS OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN IN COMBATING CYBERCRIME AGAINST CHILDREN

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Abstract. *This article examines the organizational and legal mechanisms for strengthening international cooperation in combating cybercrimes committed against children. The research focuses on the interaction between Uzbekistan's national legal framework and international standards on children's rights, cybercrime, digital evidence and cross-border cooperation. The study applies normative-legal, comparative-legal, systematic and empirical methods. An expert-oriented survey of 47 respondents conducted through Google Forms in November 2025 is used to assess practical perceptions of existing legal gaps. The findings show that most respondents consider the current national framework insufficient for addressing cybercrimes against children, especially because of the lack of precise legal definitions, difficulties in collecting digital evidence, limited cooperation with foreign technology platforms and the absence of specialized procedural tools. The article argues that criminalization alone is not enough: Uzbekistan needs an integrated model combining substantive criminal law reform, a 24/7 contact point, faster preservation of electronic evidence, binding cooperation duties for technology companies and preventive measures in schools and families. The conclusions may be used in legislative drafting, law-enforcement practice and child protection policy.*

Keywords: *international cooperation, cybercrime, child rights, digital evidence, online grooming, sextortion, technology platforms*

Introduction

The digital environment has become a new space for the implementation of Child Rights. The right to use the internet extends the child's access to education, information seeking, feedback, and social interaction. At the same time, the same environment exposes the child to complex threats such as cyberbullying, sextortion, illegal collection of

personal data, child-related sexual abuse materials created through artificial intelligence, and cross-border exploitation. The committee on the rights of the child's 25th general review specifically states that states should take legislative, policy and institutional measures to fully implement the convention on the rights of the child even in the digital environment (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2021).

A unique feature of cybercrimes against children is that the perpetrator, victim, server, payment instrument, and digital footprints can be located in different jurisdictions. Therefore, such crimes are addressed not only within the framework of national criminal law, but also through international legal assistance, rapid preservation of electronic evidence, obtaining information from foreign providers, and mandatory cooperation mechanisms with international platforms. INTERPOL emphasizes the international dimension of crimes against children and notes that images of child sexual abuse on the Internet are not “virtual” but real crimes involving real children (INTERPOL, n.d.).

In the Republic of Uzbekistan, there are a number of constitutional and sectoral frameworks that ensure the safety of children in the digital environment. The new version of article 33 of the Constitution establishes the obligation to create conditions for the use of the Internet, and article 78 establishes the duty of the State to protect the rights, freedoms and legitimate interests of the child and create the necessary conditions for the full development of the child (Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2023). Complementing these constitutional guarantees are key sectoral laws, including the Law “On Guarantees of the Rights of the Child” (LRU-139, 2008), the Law “On the Protection of Children from Information Harmful to Their Health” (LRU-444, 2017), and the Law “On the Protection of Children from All Forms of Violence” (LRU-996, 2024).

However, the main problem with the existing regulation is that it is not sufficiently adapted to active and cross-border crimes in cyberspace. Although the Law “On the Protection of Children from Information Harmful to Their Health” (LRU-444, 2017) is aimed at classifying malicious information products by age and restricting content, it does not fully regulate issues such as cybercrime, real-time exploits, blackmail committed by foreign messengers, obtaining evidence from platforms, and preserving digital traces. The Law “On the Protection of Children from All Forms of Violence” (LRU-996, 2024) strengthens interagency cooperation in the field of protection from violence, but does not define specific procedural tools specific to cyberspace as a separate system. In this regard, the scientific problem of the article is posed as follows: How can international legal and organizational mechanisms for combating cybercrimes against children be improved in Uzbekistan?

The purpose of this article is to assess international cooperation mechanisms in combating cybercrime against children, identify gaps in national legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and develop practical proposals. The study employs a three-stage methodological approach: first, it analyzes the relationship between international standards and Uzbek legislation; second, it systematizes practical problems based on the results of a sociological survey; and third, it develops proposals based on the establishment of a 24/7 contact point, technology company obligations, the preservation of digital evidence, and the introduction of special crime units.

An analysis of the literature shows that in international studies, sexual exploitation on the Internet and grooming of children are studied as separate and rapidly changing phenomena. Ringenberg & others (2022) note that the advent of the Internet has increased the number of forms of grooming, allowing criminals to communicate with children through strictly online-to-online or via blended online-to-offline pathways (Ringenberg et al., 2022). Alvarez-Guerrero et al. show from a systematic review that

online sexual exploitation also poses a high risk for children and adolescents with disabilities (Alvarez-Guerrero et al., 2024). UNICEF claims that materials about child sexual abuse created using artificial intelligence tools are fundamentally changing the digital risk landscape (UNICEF, 2026).

The United Nations Convention against Cybercrime was adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 24, 2024 and opened for signature on October 25, 2025, marking the transition of the global agenda to combat cybercrime to a new level (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2025). In accordance with article 35 of the Convention, it provides a rapid response mechanism in situations where electronic evidence may be quickly lost. The fact that the UN Convention on Combating Cybercrime was adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 24, 2024 and opened for signature on October 25, 2025, marks the transition of the global agenda to combat cybercrime to a new level (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2025).

Methods

The study used normative-legal, comparative-legal, systemic-structural, formal-legal and sociological methods. Using the normative legal method, the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Law “On Guarantees of the Rights of the Child,” the Law “On the Protection of Children from Information Harmful to Their Health”, the Law “On the Protection of Children from all Forms of Violence”, the Criminal Code and the content of international documents were analyzed. The comparative legal method was used to compare national legal approaches with the Budapest Convention, the UN Convention against cybercrime, the Committee on the Rights of the Child’s General Comment No. 25, and the WeProtect Global Alliance model.

The survey targeted legal professionals, including lawyers, prosecutors, and representatives of the judicial system and relevant authorities. The questionnaire focused on several key areas: the adequacy of current national legislation, the practical effectiveness of the Law of Republic of Uzbekistan No. LRU-996 (2024), the necessity of introducing specialized articles into the Criminal Code, mechanisms for cross-border cooperation, the responsibilities of foreign technology platforms, and the overall impact of existing preventive measures.

The survey is of an expert nature and is aimed not at a statistically representative reflection of the opinion of the whole society, but at identifying practical aspects of the problem based on the opinions of experts in the field of law enforcement, education and legal practice. In some questions, the amount of interest may exceed 100 percent because the respondent chooses more than one option. Multiple choice percentages were calculated based on the total number of respondents — 47 respondents; In some questions, the percentage amount may exceed 100 percent, since the respondent chooses more than one option.

Table 1

Survey respondent profile

Indicators	Numbers	Percentage
Number of respondents	47 people	100%
Legal practitioner	13 people	27.7%
Employee of an educational institution / pedagogical psychologist	12 people	25.5%
Student	6 people	12.8%
advocate	3 people	6.4%

Prosecutor	3 people	6.4%
Judges	2 people	4.3%
Representative of the judiciary	4 people	8.5%
Other or not specified	4 people	8.5%
1–5 years of work experience	25 people	53.2%
5–10 years of work experience	16 people	34.0%

Results

These legislative frameworks establish vital foundations for the preventive protection of children from harmful cyberspace content. Specifically, Law No. LRU-444 defines all online materials, including web content, computer games, and audiovisual products, as ‘information products,’ thereby establishing clear boundaries for restricted distribution. Furthermore, Law No. LRU-996 formalizes essential safeguards, such as the identification of child victims, the establishment of a dedicated hotline, and the implementation of interdepartmental cooperation measures. Despite these advancements, however, the results indicate that current legislation fails to sufficiently address complex modern challenges, such as the procedural intricacies of active cybercrimes, the demands of cross-border evidence exchange, and the necessity for rapid, mandatory cooperation from technology companies.

The survey results confirm the normative analysis. 70.2% of respondents believe that the current national legislation does not adequately regulate the fight against crimes against children in cyberspace. 25.5% of respondents expressed the opinion that the legislation is only partially sufficient. Only 4.3% of respondents assessed the existing standards as fully sufficient. This result shows that there is a high socio-professional need to improve legislation.

Table 2

Main results of the survey

Position by question	Numbers	Percentage
The current national legislation is insufficient	33	70.2%
The national legislation is partially sufficient	12	25.5%
The national legislation is fully sufficient	2	4.3%
The definition of bullying in the Law No. 996 is partially effective in covering actions in cyberspace	22	46.8%
This approach is fully effective	13	27.7%
This approach is ineffective	11	23.4%
There should definitely be separate articles in the Criminal Code	25	53.2%
I believe that there should be separate articles in the Criminal Code	18	38.3%
The law should clearly define the obligation of parents to protect children from cyber risks	40	85.1%
There are difficulties in cooperating with foreign technology platforms	42	89.4%

The questions asked on the most important issues showed that the respondents' main attention was focused on legal definitions and institutional and procedural mechanisms. 63.8% of respondents cited the lack of clear legal definitions of concepts such as cyberbullying, cybergrooming, sextortion, etc. as the main problem in legislation. 42.6% of respondents chose the absence of mechanisms for holding international platforms accountable. Opportunities for cross-border cooperation were noted in 44.7% of cases. 42.6% of respondents chose the absence of mechanisms for holding international platforms accountable.

The highest figure for special articles that should be included in the Criminal Code was recorded for cybercrime: 35 respondents, or 74.5 percent, considered it necessary to establish separate responsibility for this act. 61.7% of respondents supported responsibility for sextorting, 59.6% of respondents supported responsibility for child pornography created using artificial intelligence, and 48.9% of respondents supported responsibility for the illegal collection of children's personal data. This situation indicates the need to update criminal legislation, taking into account the modern nomenclature of cyber threats.

Table 3**Important problems and suggestions on criminal law**

Tendency	Number	Percentage
Lack of clear definitions in legislation	30	63.8%
Lack of special personnel	21	44.7%
Barriers to cross-border cooperation	21	44.7%
Lack of mechanisms for collecting digital evidence	21	44.7%
Lack of accountability mechanisms for international platforms	20	42.6%
Special responsibility for cyberbullying	35	74.5%
Special responsibility for Sextortion	29	61.7%
Liability for child sexual abuse material created using artificial intelligence	28	59.6%
Liability for illegally collecting children's personal information	23	48.9%

The most sought-after offer was a 24-hour hotline on mechanisms for combating cross-border crime. 74.5% of respondents consider it important to introduce a permanent point of contact on the model of the Budapest Convention. 51.1% of respondents named the instant information exchange system, 38.3% of respondents named the mechanism for directly requesting information from foreign providers, and 31.9% of respondents named the procedure for joint investigative teams. These indicators show that the speed and safety of evidence are crucial in criminal procedural cooperation.

On the responsibility of technology companies, 61.7% of respondents supported the obligation to remove harmful content within 24 hours, 53.2% supported the obligation to respond to law enforcement within 72 hours, and 51.1% supported the obligation to open representation in Uzbekistan. These results demonstrate the need for clear, time-bound, and accountability-based procedures in the relationship between national law enforcement agencies and global digital platforms.

As for preventive measures, 70.2% of respondents rated conducting cybersecurity courses in schools as one of the most effective areas. The introduction of the "report" button on each Internet platform was supported by 59.6% of respondents, the development of a hotline and online support platforms – 57.4%, and parent education

– 38.3%. 31.9% of respondents chose strengthening international cooperation as the highest priority area for improvement, 25.5% of respondents chose increasing attention to preventive mechanisms, and 17% of respondents chose mechanisms for holding technology companies accountable.

Table 4**Priority proposals for international cooperation, platforms and prevention**

Proposal	Number	Percentage
24/7 point of contact	35	74.5%
The system of rapid information exchange	24	51.1%
Direct request for information from foreign suppliers	18	38.3%
The procedure for conducting joint investigative teams	15	31.9%
Removing malicious content within 24 hours	29	61.7%
Response to law enforcement agencies within 72 hours	25	53.2%
Commitment to open a representative office in Uzbekistan	24	51.1%
Cybersecurity courses in schools	33	70.2%
“Notification” button on platforms	28	59.6%
Hotline and online support platforms	27	57.4%

Discussion

The obtained results indicate the need to form a three-level model of protecting children from crimes in cyberspace. The first level is substantive criminal law. At the same time, the National Criminal Code should clearly cover such acts as cybercrime against a child, sextortion, creation, storage, dissemination of materials about sexual abuse of children, including through the use of artificial intelligence, as well as the illegal collection of personal data of children for the purpose of exploitation. The lack of a clear definition in criminal law is also important from the point of view of the principle of legality, since the criminality of an act and its punishability are determined only by law (Criminal Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 1994).

The second stage is the mechanisms of procedural and international cooperation. Evidence of cybercrimes is not stored permanently and locally, as in traditional crimes. IP addresses, account information, chat conversations, cloud storage files, and transaction records can be deleted, encrypted, or moved to another jurisdiction within a short period of time. Therefore, a 24-hour point of contact, a rapid exchange of information, an immediate order to preserve evidence, and legally sound communication with foreign suppliers are of strategic importance to the national system. The 24/7 network, established in accordance with Article 35 of the Budapest Convention, was created as a response to this problem (Council of Europe, n.d.).

The UN Convention on Cybercrime also aims to strengthen international cooperation, technical assistance and capacity-building at the global level. The adoption of this convention demonstrates that the fight against cybercrime is a separate, rapidly developing area of international law. For Uzbekistan, this process is important in two directions: firstly, bringing national legislation in line with international standards; secondly, increasing the capacity of law enforcement agencies to work with foreign partners and platforms.

The third level is platforms and preventive responsibility. According to NCMEC cybercrime data for 2024, there were 20.5 million reports of alleged sexual exploitation of children in 2024, while an adjusted estimate recorded 29.2 million individual cases (National Center for Missing and Injured Children, 2025). Such a volume of information flow cannot be effectively controlled without a clear division of responsibilities between government agencies, Internet providers, social networks, messengers, schools and parents. Therefore, removing malicious content on time, responding promptly to legitimate requests from law enforcement agencies, maintaining contacts on child safety issues, and implementing user-friendly complaint mechanisms should become mandatory standards for platforms.

At the same time, the responsibility of platforms should not become a tool for restricting human rights. The protection of the rights of the child gives a sustainable result only in combination with the principles of the rule of law, legality, necessity, proportionality, judicial or prosecutorial supervision, confidentiality and effective guarantees of appeal. The protection of the rights of the child gives a sustainable result only in combination with the principles of the rule of law.

The survey results also point to preventive cybersecurity training as a priority. Cybersecurity courses in schools should not be limited to technical security alone, but should provide children with the skills to recognize the risks of online communication, protect personal information, recognize signs of grooming, seek help in cases of sextortion, report malicious content, and preserve evidence. And parental trainings should form a culture of trusting communication with children, providing assistance in a dangerous situation without accusations and contacting a specialist, rather than control and prohibitions.

A cautious but firm approach is needed to include special articles in the Criminal Code. It is not enough to create one general article “cybercrime,” since cybercrimes against children infringe on various objects: sexual integrity, confidentiality, data protection, honor and dignity, psychological security, property interests and social development. Therefore, it is advisable to regulate cyberbullying, sexual extortion, materials of sexual abuse of children, materials created with the help of AI, and the use of children’s information for the purpose of exploitation using certain elements in legislation.

As for the national center or a special institute, it is important not only to create a new organization, but also to combine existing powers into a single coordination system. The tasks of such a center may include statistical monitoring, communication with platforms, technical support for international surveys, psychological and legal support for affected children, development of preventive materials, methodological recommendations for the school and district systems, as well as analysis of cyber threat indicators. This approach adapts the interagency cooperation provided for by Law No. 996 of 2024 to the digital environment.

When comparing research results with other scientific approaches, international sources also point to legal definitions, collaboration with platforms, rapid storage of evidence, and prevention as important areas. The WePROTECT Global Alliance notes that the scale and methods of sexual exploitation and violence against children on the Internet are becoming increasingly sophisticated and evidence-based and multisectoral responses are needed (WePROTECT Global Alliance, 2023). The UNICEF Global Guidance on Legislation Relevant to the Digital Age also calls on states to clearly criminalize crimes related to the sexual exploitation of children on the Internet and strengthen mechanisms for cooperation with platforms (UNICEF, 2022).

Conclusion

The study shows that an important regulatory framework has been formed in the Republic of Uzbekistan to protect children from harmful information and violence in cyberspace. The survey results also confirm this conclusion: the overwhelming majority of respondents assessed national legislation as insufficient or partially sufficient, supported the inclusion of special articles in the Criminal Code and increased international cooperation. The survey results also confirm this conclusion: the overwhelming majority of respondents assessed national legislation as insufficient or partially sufficient, supported the inclusion of special articles in the Criminal Code and increased international cooperation.

First suggestion: Legislation should include clear legal definitions of concepts such as cyberbullying, sextortion, online assault, child sexual harassment materials, sexual materials about children created with the help of AI, as well as the use of children's personal information for exploitative purposes. These definitions should be consistent with the spirit of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 25, the Budapest Convention and the UN Convention on Cybercrime.

The second suggestion is that the Criminal Code should develop norms providing for special responsibility for the creation or dissemination of materials about sexual harassment of children using cybercrimes, sexting, AI, the use of children's personal information and the involvement of minors in sexual or other exploitation on the Internet. At the same time, the organized group, cross-border nature, repeatability, age of the victim, use of artificial intelligence and consequences leading to suicide should be taken into account as aggravating circumstances.

The third suggestion: It is advisable to create a 24-hour point of contact in Uzbekistan to combat cybercrimes against children and integrate it into the system of international cooperation. This point of contact should have fast algorithms for storing electronic evidence, contacting foreign competent authorities, emergency communication with platforms, and eliminating the risk of a child victim.

Fourth suggestion: the Criminal Procedure Legislation should establish mechanisms for online storage of electronic evidence, data freezing, obtaining information about traffic and subscribers in accordance with the procedure established by law, requesting information from foreign providers and speeding up requests for international legal assistance in a separate manner for cybercrimes against children. These mechanisms should be developed taking into account guarantees of judicial or prosecutorial oversight, privacy and proportionality.

Fifth, a legal mechanism should be developed for technology companies to remove malicious content within 24 hours, respond to legitimate requests from law enforcement agencies within 72 hours, establish a local or regional point of contact for child safety, introduce a "report" button, and take administrative and financial responsibility for repeated violations.

Sixth suggestion: The prevention system should include regular courses on cybersecurity and digital legal culture in schools, practical trainings for parents, a single hotline, an anonymous online help platform, and mandatory professional development programs for professionals working with children. These measures should be considered as the most important stage of protection before punishment.

In general, an effective model for combating cybercrimes against children should be based on a combination of substantive criminal law, procedural powers, international cooperation, platform responsibility, and preventive education. Only in this case, Uzbekistan will be able to form a national system for the protection of children's digital rights that meets international standards, is based on human rights and works in practice.

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TSUL LEGAL REPORT

INTERNATIONAL ELECTRONIC
SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL

VOLUME 7
ISSUE 2
JUNE 2026