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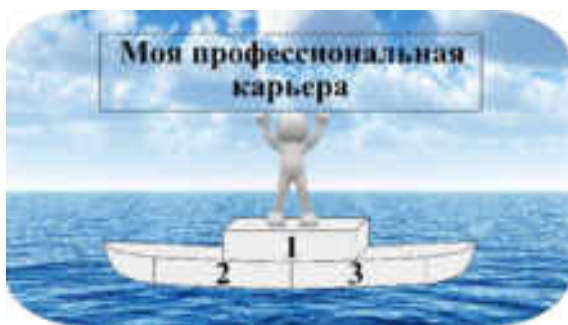


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**Международный научно-образовательный электронный журнал
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Название публикации: «INTERNATIONAL LEGAL PROTECTION OF YOUTH RIGHTS: THE RIGHT OF YOUNG PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES)»

Annotation: *The protection of youth rights and the promotion of young people's participation in decision-making processes are important components of contemporary international human rights law. Young people represent a significant part of the global population and play an essential role in the social, economic, political, and cultural development of their societies. However, their ability to influence decisions that affect their lives remains limited in many countries due to legal, institutional, economic, and social barriers. International legal instruments establish fundamental principles concerning equality, non-discrimination, freedom of expression, access to education, and participation in public affairs. This article examines the international legal framework governing the protection of youth rights, analyzes the principal mechanisms through which young people can participate in decision-making processes, and explores the challenges associated with the practical implementation of their participation rights. Particular attention is given to the role of the United Nations, international human rights treaties, regional organizations, and national institutions in promoting meaningful youth engagement.*

Keywords: *Youth rights, international law, human rights protection, youth participation, decision-making processes, United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child, political participation, civic engagement, sustainable development.*

Introduction

The protection of human rights is one of the fundamental principles of the contemporary international legal system. Within this framework, the rights and interests of young people occupy an increasingly important position because of their influence on social development, democratic governance, economic progress, and the long-term stability of societies. Young people constitute a diverse social group whose experiences and needs vary according to age, education, economic circumstances, cultural background, gender, disability, and geographical location. Despite these differences, they share a common interest in having their rights respected and in being given meaningful opportunities to contribute to decisions that shape their present and future lives.

The concept of youth participation extends beyond the exercise of voting rights or membership in political organizations. It includes the ability to express opinions freely, access relevant information, participate in public consultations, contribute to the development of legislation and public policies, engage in civil society activities, and influence decisions within educational institutions and local communities. Meaningful participation also requires public authorities to consider the views expressed by young people and provide appropriate feedback on how those views have affected the final decision. Without such opportunities, participation may become a formal procedure that creates the appearance of consultation without producing a genuine influence on public policy.

The purpose of this article is to examine the international legal protection of youth rights and analyze the legal, institutional, and practical conditions necessary for meaningful youth participation in decision-making processes. The article is structured around three principal topics: the international legal framework for the protection of youth rights; the legal principles and institutional mechanisms governing youth

participation in decision-making; and the challenges and prospects for strengthening the implementation of youth participation rights. This approach makes it possible to connect the formal recognition of rights under international law with the practical measures required to ensure that young people can exercise those rights effectively.

International Legal Framework for the Protection of Youth Rights

The international legal protection of youth rights is based on the general principles of human dignity, equality, non-discrimination, freedom, and participation. Although international law does not provide a single comprehensive treaty devoted exclusively to all the rights of young people, their protection is ensured through a combination of universal human rights instruments, specialized conventions, international declarations, and policy frameworks. These instruments establish obligations for states and provide standards for the development of national legislation and institutional practices. The international framework is particularly important because young people may experience forms of exclusion that are not always adequately addressed through general legal guarantees, including restrictions based on age, limited political representation, and insufficient opportunities to participate in public affairs.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, represents one of the fundamental documents underlying the international protection of youth rights. Although the Declaration does not establish a separate category of rights for young people, its provisions apply to all individuals without discrimination. Article 1 recognizes that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, while Article 2 establishes the principle of non-discrimination. Article 19 protects freedom of opinion and expression, and Article 21 recognizes the right of everyone to take part in the government of their country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. These principles are directly relevant to youth participation because they establish that age alone should not be used to deny young people the fundamental freedoms and opportunities guaranteed by international human rights standards.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted in 1966, provides a legally binding framework for the protection of civil and political rights in states that are parties to it. Article 25 is particularly significant because it recognizes the right of every citizen to take part in the conduct of public affairs, to vote and be elected in genuine periodic elections, and to have access to public service on general terms of equality. This provision creates an important legal basis for youth participation in political and public life. However, the exercise of electoral rights is subject to legitimate eligibility requirements established by national law, including minimum voting ages. Consequently, the right to participate in public affairs should not be understood as establishing an unrestricted right to vote at every age. Rather, it requires states to respect the applicable rights of eligible young citizens and to protect other forms of lawful civic and political engagement.

Other provisions of the Covenant are equally important. Article 19 protects freedom of expression, Article 21 recognizes the right of peaceful assembly, and Article 22 protects freedom of association. Together, these rights enable young people to establish organizations, participate in peaceful demonstrations, discuss public issues, communicate their opinions, and advocate for changes in public policy. These freedoms are essential to the development of an active civil society. Youth organizations, student associations, professional networks, and community groups can provide opportunities for young people to express shared interests and communicate their concerns to public authorities. Restrictions on these freedoms must comply with the applicable requirements of international law and should not be used arbitrarily to prevent young people from participating in public affairs.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989, is one of the most significant international instruments concerning the participation rights of younger members of society. It applies to every human being below the age of 18, unless majority is attained earlier under the applicable law. Article 12 establishes the right of children capable of forming their own views to express those views freely in all matters affecting them. It also requires that their views receive due weight in accordance with their age and maturity. This provision represents a fundamental shift in the legal

understanding of children, recognizing them not only as individuals requiring protection but also as rights-holders capable of expressing opinions and contributing to decisions.

The significance of Article 12 extends to several areas of public and private life. In education, children should have appropriate opportunities to express their views concerning school policies, learning environments, and disciplinary procedures. In healthcare, their opinions should be considered in decisions affecting their treatment, subject to applicable legal and ethical standards. In judicial and administrative proceedings, children must have opportunities to be heard in accordance with the Convention and relevant procedural guarantees. The precise form of participation may vary according to the child's age, maturity, circumstances, and the nature of the decision. Nevertheless, the underlying principle remains that children should not be excluded from decisions merely because they are under 18.

The Convention also establishes other guarantees that support meaningful participation. Article 13 protects freedom of expression, Article 15 recognizes the rights to freedom of association and peaceful assembly, and Article 17 concerns access to information from a diversity of national and international sources. Article 2 requires states to respect and ensure the rights set forth in the Convention without discrimination, while Article 3 requires the best interests of the child to be a primary consideration in actions concerning children. These provisions should be interpreted together. Protection and participation are not contradictory objectives; rather, appropriate safeguards can enable children to participate in ways that respect their dignity, evolving capacities, and individual circumstances.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights also contributes to the protection of youth rights. Its provisions concerning education, work, health, social security, and cultural participation address conditions that strongly influence the ability of young people to exercise their civil and political freedoms. Article 13 recognizes the right to education, while Article 12 recognizes the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. Article 6 addresses the right to work, including opportunities to gain a living through freely chosen or accepted

work. These guarantees are particularly relevant because participation cannot be fully effective when young people lack access to education, reliable information, economic opportunities, or basic social services.

Education has a particularly important relationship with youth participation. Through formal education and civic learning, young people can develop an understanding of legal rights, democratic institutions, public administration, and the responsibilities associated with citizenship. Educational institutions can also provide practical opportunities to exercise participation rights through student councils, debates, consultations, and collaborative decision-making. However, the educational environment should not be the only place where young people can influence decisions. Participation should extend to the wider community and to public institutions responsible for employment, environmental protection, healthcare, housing, technology, and economic development.

The Right of Young People to Participate in Decision-Making Processes: Principles, Forms, and Institutional Mechanisms

The right of young people to participate in decision-making processes is closely connected with the broader principles of democracy, accountability, equality, and good governance. Participation enables individuals to express their interests, communicate their experiences, and contribute to decisions that affect their communities. For young people, this right has particular significance because many public decisions have long-term consequences for their education, employment, environment, access to technology, and future economic opportunities. When young people are excluded from such decisions, public policies may fail to reflect their needs or adequately consider the consequences for younger and future generations.

Meaningful participation should be distinguished from the simple presence of young people at meetings or public events. A person may be invited to attend a consultation without receiving sufficient information, having an opportunity to express an independent opinion, or being able to influence the final outcome. Genuine participation requires a process in which young people can contribute at an appropriate

stage, communicate their views freely, and receive information about how their contributions have been considered. The United Nations Youth Office emphasizes inclusive partnerships, intergenerational collaboration, sustained engagement, accountability, and feedback as important elements of meaningful participation. These principles help distinguish substantive engagement from arrangements that are primarily symbolic.

The principle of inclusion is central to the exercise of youth participation rights. Young people are not a homogeneous group, and their ability to participate differs according to social and economic circumstances. Students in urban areas may have access to educational institutions, digital technologies, and established youth organizations, while young people in rural communities may face geographical isolation and limited access to information. Young people with disabilities may encounter inaccessible buildings, communication barriers, or consultation procedures that do not accommodate their needs. Young women, ethnic and linguistic minorities, economically disadvantaged individuals, and young people in vulnerable situations may experience additional obstacles.

An inclusive approach therefore requires more than opening participation mechanisms to everyone in principle. Public authorities must identify and address the practical barriers that prevent certain groups from taking part. This may involve providing accessible venues, offering interpretation, ensuring digital accessibility, organizing consultations outside major urban centers, and using communication methods suited to different communities. It may also require targeted outreach to groups that are frequently underrepresented. The objective is to ensure that participation mechanisms reflect the diversity of young people rather than primarily representing those who already have access to institutional networks.

Youth participation can take place through several complementary channels. The first is direct participation in public consultations, hearings, and policy-development processes. Governments and public institutions may invite young people to provide comments on draft legislation, education reforms, employment strategies, environmental policies, or digital development programmes. Such consultations can

provide decision-makers with information about the practical effects of proposed measures. For consultations to be meaningful, however, participants should receive relevant documents in accessible language, have sufficient time to prepare their contributions, and be informed about the outcome of the process.

A second channel is participation through representative institutions, including youth councils, student councils, youth parliaments, and advisory committees. These bodies can provide a structured connection between young people and public authorities. Youth councils may identify community priorities, develop recommendations, organize consultations, and communicate proposals to local or national governments. Student councils can provide a mechanism for learners to contribute to decisions concerning educational institutions. Youth parliaments can introduce participants to legislative procedures, public debate, and the responsibilities associated with representative government.

The effectiveness of these institutions depends on their design and authority. A youth council that meets regularly but has no access to relevant officials may have limited influence. Similarly, a youth parliament that operates only as a ceremonial exercise may provide educational benefits without creating a meaningful channel for public participation. To strengthen their role, such institutions should have clearly defined mandates, transparent selection procedures, adequate resources, and regular opportunities to communicate with decision-makers. Public authorities should also establish procedures for responding to recommendations and explaining whether proposed measures have been accepted, modified, or rejected.

A third channel is participation through civil society organizations. Youth-led organizations can represent the interests of their members, conduct research, organize community initiatives, and advocate for changes in public policy. They can also provide opportunities for young people to develop leadership, communication, project management, and organizational skills. Through these activities, young people can contribute to discussions concerning human rights, education, public health, environmental protection, social inclusion, and economic development.

The protection of civil society participation requires respect for freedom of association, freedom of expression, and peaceful assembly. Young people should be able to establish organizations and participate in lawful civic activities without arbitrary interference. Where restrictions are imposed, they must comply with applicable international human rights obligations. Access to funding, meeting spaces, information, and communication channels can also influence whether youth organizations are able to operate effectively. Appropriate support from public institutions can strengthen youth-led initiatives, provided that such support does not compromise their independence or restrict their ability to express critical opinions.

Challenges, Implementation Mechanisms, and Prospects for Strengthening Youth Participation Rights

Despite the development of international legal standards, the practical realization of youth participation rights remains uneven. One of the principal challenges is the gap between formal recognition and effective implementation. A state may recognize freedom of expression, association, and participation in its legislation while providing few practical opportunities for young people to influence public decisions. This gap can arise when laws do not establish clear participation procedures, when public institutions lack the necessary resources, or when existing mechanisms have limited authority. Consequently, evaluating the protection of youth rights requires attention not only to the legal provisions themselves but also to the institutional arrangements through which those provisions are implemented.

A major obstacle is the persistence of age-based stereotypes. In some institutional and social environments, young people may be regarded as lacking the experience or knowledge required to contribute to important decisions. Their opinions may be dismissed as immature, unrealistic, or insufficiently informed, even when they concern issues directly affecting their lives. Such attitudes can reduce young people's willingness to participate and discourage public institutions from taking their contributions seriously. Addressing this problem requires recognition that age does not determine an individual's capacity to express a relevant opinion. Participation

procedures should be designed to consider the substance of contributions while providing appropriate support for individuals who require assistance.

Another challenge concerns the limited influence of existing youth participation bodies. Youth councils, advisory committees, and youth parliaments may provide valuable opportunities for discussion, but their practical impact depends on their relationship with decision-making institutions. If their recommendations are not considered, their meetings are irregular, or their membership is selected without transparent procedures, they may fail to represent the broader youth population. In such circumstances, participation can become a symbolic activity that satisfies formal expectations without creating meaningful influence.

Institutional independence and transparency are therefore important. Youth representatives should be selected through procedures that are understandable and accessible to the communities they are intended to represent. The composition of representative bodies should take account of differences in age, gender, geographical location, disability, socioeconomic background, and other relevant circumstances. Clear mandates should define the responsibilities of youth bodies, their access to public officials, and the procedures for submitting recommendations. Regular communication with the wider youth population can help prevent representative institutions from becoming disconnected from the individuals whose interests they are expected to express.

Economic inequality also affects the ability of young people to participate. Attending consultations, joining organizations, travelling to meetings, or participating in public campaigns may involve costs that are difficult for some individuals to afford. Young people who must work to support themselves or their families may have limited time for unpaid civic activities. Those living in rural or remote areas may face additional transportation and communication costs. These barriers can produce unequal participation, with opportunities concentrated among young people who have greater financial resources and more flexible schedules.

Public institutions can address these barriers by providing reasonable financial and logistical support. Depending on the nature of the activity, this may include

reimbursement of travel expenses, accessible meeting locations, interpretation, childcare support where appropriate, and compensation for substantial participation-related costs. Consultations should be scheduled in ways that account for educational and employment responsibilities. Financial support should be administered transparently and should not be used to influence participants' opinions or restrict the independence of youth organizations.

Access to information is another necessary condition for meaningful participation. Young people cannot contribute effectively to decisions if they do not understand the issues under consideration, the available policy options, or the likely consequences of proposed measures. Public institutions should therefore provide accurate, timely, and accessible information before consultations take place. Complex legal and technical documents may need to be accompanied by plain-language explanations, summaries, or educational materials. Providing information after a decision has already been made does not offer the same opportunity for influence as providing it while alternatives are still being considered.

Civic education can strengthen young people's ability to exercise participation rights. Knowledge of constitutional principles, human rights, public administration, electoral systems, and legislative procedures helps individuals understand how decisions are made and which institutions are responsible for particular issues. Practical learning activities, including debates, student governance, community projects, and simulations of parliamentary procedures, can help translate theoretical knowledge into experience. However, civic education should encourage independent judgment and critical thinking rather than simply transmitting official information. The objective is to equip young people with the knowledge and skills needed to participate autonomously.

The protection of young people who participate in public affairs is equally important. Individuals who express critical views, engage in peaceful advocacy, or investigate issues of public concern may face intimidation, harassment, discrimination, or other forms of pressure. Young activists and representatives may also encounter online abuse or threats directed at them because of their participation. These risks can discourage engagement and undermine the freedom necessary for meaningful public debate. States

have obligations under applicable international human rights law to respect and protect relevant rights, including freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and association. Appropriate protection mechanisms should be available to participants who experience unlawful threats or reprisals.

In the context of Turkmenistan and other countries pursuing economic modernization and digital transformation, youth participation is relevant to the development of public services, education, technological innovation, and employment policy. Young people studying and working in science, engineering, information technology, and other emerging fields may contribute practical perspectives on digital infrastructure, skills development, entrepreneurship, and the accessibility of public services. Mechanisms such as university-based consultations, student representative bodies, youth innovation programmes, and structured dialogue with public institutions can provide channels for these contributions. Their effectiveness depends on clear procedures, access to decision-makers, and a genuine willingness to consider proposals.

Digital transformation creates both opportunities and responsibilities for governments. Online consultations and electronic public services can reduce some barriers to participation, but their design should account for accessibility, privacy, cybersecurity, and unequal access to technology. Young people can contribute to the design and evaluation of digital public services because they may have relevant experience with emerging technologies and digital communication. Nevertheless, public institutions should not assume that all young people possess the same digital skills or access to reliable technology. Inclusive digital governance requires a combination of technological solutions, public education, and accessible non-digital alternatives.

The United Nations' recent emphasis on meaningful youth participation reflects the growing importance of institutional accountability and sustained engagement. The Core Principles for Meaningful Youth Participation provide guidance for strengthening youth involvement in international processes, while the Pact for the Future establishes commitments concerning national and international participation. Their practical

significance will depend on how states and institutions translate these commitments into procedures, resources, and measurable outcomes. The continued development of international guidance can support this process, but effective implementation remains dependent on the actions of governments and other responsible institutions.

Conclusion

The international legal protection of youth rights and the recognition of young people's right to participate in decision-making processes constitute important elements of the contemporary human rights system. International treaties, declarations, resolutions, and policy frameworks establish principles that support the dignity, equality, freedom, and participation of young people. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child provide essential legal foundations. Additional initiatives, including the World Programme of Action for Youth, Security Council Resolution 2250, and the Pact for the Future, contribute to the development of international standards and practical approaches to youth engagement.

The analysis demonstrates that youth participation is broader than electoral activity. It encompasses freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, access to information, participation in public consultations, representation through youth organizations, engagement in local governance, and involvement in national and international policymaking. These forms of participation allow young people to communicate their needs, contribute to public policy, and exercise their rights as active members of society. For participation to be meaningful, young people must have opportunities to contribute at appropriate stages of decision-making, receive relevant information, and understand how their views have been considered.

In conclusion, young people should be recognized as rights-holders and partners in decision-making rather than merely as beneficiaries of government programmes. The effective protection of their rights requires a transition from formal recognition to practical implementation. By establishing inclusive, safe, and accountable participation mechanisms, states can strengthen the realization of human rights, improve the

responsiveness of public institutions, and create conditions in which young people can contribute meaningfully to social, economic, political, and cultural development.

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