

Unaccompanied migrant children in Portugal: legal and criminological approaches

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Unaccompanied migrant children are among the most vulnerable groups in need of legal protection. Reflecting the European commitment to democratic values, fundamental rights, and social justice, these children are entitled to specific rights designed to provide them with enhanced protection and support. However, significant disparities persist among member states regarding the implementation of these measures. Thus, the current study aims to describe and critically analyze the Portuguese legal framework, policies, and practices directed at unaccompanied migrant children. Specifically, the current study focuses primarily on the analysis of Portuguese data and figures on this subject, outlining the scope, trends, and developments of this issue in recent years. Furthermore, it seeks to examine the current Portuguese legal framework applicable to unaccompanied migrant children, considering how migration and asylum laws intersect child protection laws and how they are implemented, and highlighting the system's operational strengths and limitations. This legal analysis is complemented with a criminological perspective, focusing on the adverse experiences unaccompanied migrant children often face (e.g., secondary victimization, exposure to violence), and the potential long-term effects of these adversities on the children's development and social integration. Ultimately, this study seeks to critically reflect on ongoing legislative developments, particularly the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, and to offer a forward-looking discussion of how anticipated changes could address the challenges identified and improve outcomes for unaccompanied migrant children.



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