

Empowering Prevention: The Role of Universities in Addressing Juvenile Delinquency Among Unaccompanied Minors Through a Child Rights Framework

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Abstract

Unaccompanied minors (UAMs), youth who navigate life without parental or legal guardianship, face significant adversity, often resulting in heightened vulnerability to juvenile delinquency. These behaviors are frequently symptomatic of deeper structural neglect, trauma, and marginalization. This paper argues that universities, as vital institutions of social development and value formation, are uniquely positioned to intervene by promoting a child rights-based approach to prevention. In line with their broader societal mandate, universities can play a transformative role in reshaping how unaccompanied minors are perceived and supported.

This study explores the root causes of delinquent behavior in unaccompanied minors and critiques current institutional responses, which too often prioritize punitive over preventive measures. Additionally, it is aiming towards understanding the challenges UAMs face and how this assessment seeks to address the gaps in care and prevention mechanisms. We propose a multidisciplinary intervention model rooted in the principles of child rights, social justice, and democratic participation. Our model calls for universities to act as key drivers of change by engaging in integrated activities, education, training, research, and community partnership, that embed a culture of child protection and advocacy within and beyond the academic setting.

By fostering trauma-informed pedagogies, facilitating youth participation, and influencing public policy through evidence-based research, higher education institutions can generate lasting social value. Moreover, by socializing future professionals across disciplines with a rights-based lens, universities contribute to systemic shifts that safeguard unaccompanied minors from criminalization and promote their full integration into society. Ultimately, while highlighting the unique challenges unaccompanied minors face in Greece, such as language barriers, social isolation, and vulnerability to exploitation, this paper also emphasizes the multiplier effect of academic engagement in child rights, asserting that meaningful change begins with the commitment of universities to lead with compassion, equity, and responsibility

Presentation language: Greek

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