

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/new-vera-report-on-how-unaccompanied-children-navigate-the-complex-u-s-immigration-system>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Vera has just released a new report, "[The flow of unaccompanied children through the immigration system: a resource for practitioners, policy makers, and researchers](#)." This publication explores the path that several thousand unaccompanied children those younger than 18 without lawful immigration status and with no parent or legal guardian in the country available to provide care and custody follow through the U.S. immigration system each year.

A child's journey through this maze begins with apprehension by federal authorities. While typically this occurs at a border or other port of entry, sometimes children living in the U.S. most of their lives become enmeshed in the system after an arrest by state or local law enforcement. Once identified as an unaccompanied child, a child is placed into the custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement, while the Department of Homeland Security simultaneously initiates removal proceedings. Though some children qualify for legal relief and may eventually obtain lawful immigration status, others are removed from the United States and returned to their home countries. The entire process, from apprehension to case completion, may take several years, span across multiple jurisdictions, and occur in the absence of a lawyer.

For the past six years, Vera's Center on Immigration and Justice has administered a federally funded program to improve access to legal services for unaccompanied children nationwide. Drawing on insight gained through this work, and an analysis of recent federal data, this publication provides a detailed outline of the complex, multi-actor immigration system encountered by unaccompanied children in the United States.

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