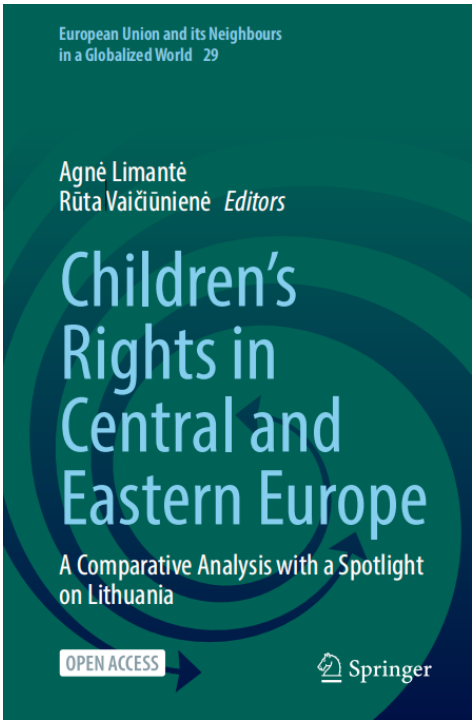
Children's Rights in Central and Eastern Europe: A Comparative Analysis with a Spotlight on Lithuania: Book Review

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INTRODUCTION



The book Children's Rights in Central and Eastern Europe: A Comparative Analysis with a Spotlight on Lithuania written by Limantė and Vaičiūnienė (2025) discusses the development of child rights protection in Central and Eastern European countries following the social and political transformations that have occurred since the 1990s. In general, the book highlights how countries in the region have implemented legal reforms, social policies, and institutional strengthening efforts to align child protection standards with international principles, particularly the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and European Union regulations. Using a comparative approach, the book provides an overview of the challenges and achievements of various countries in ensuring children's rights, including the rights to education, healthcare, protection from violence, and access to more inclusive social welfare systems

In addition to presenting a broad analysis of child rights conditions across Central and Eastern Europe, the book places Lithuania as the primary focus to illustrate how child protection policies are implemented within a national context. Through this examination, readers are encouraged to understand that the fulfillment of children's rights depends not only on legal frameworks but also on economic conditions, cultural factors, and the institutional capacity of states to effectively enforce child protection policies. Therefore, this book serves as a relevant academic resource for understanding the dynamics of children's rights protection from legal, public policy, and human rights perspectives at both regional and national levels. Furthermore, this book is significant because it not only presents descriptive information but also encourages critical reflection on the effectiveness of child protection systems in responding to contemporary social challenges. Issues such as child poverty, migration, inequality in access to public services, and social vulnerability are discussed within broader legal and policy frameworks to demonstrate the complexity of protecting children's rights in transitional societies. By combining comparative analysis with a country-specific case study, the book provides readers with a deeper understanding of how child rights policies are formulated,

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implemented, and evaluated, making it a valuable reference for students and researchers in law, social policy, human rights, and childhood studies

Chapter 1 provides a broad discussion on the development of children's rights in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries by highlighting legal transformations, child protection challenges, child-friendly justice systems, inclusive education, children's digital rights, as well as migration and health-related issues. It explains how CEE countries have attempted to align their legal systems with international standards through various instruments such as the *Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)*, European Union regulations, and modern child protection policies. The discussion is further expanded to cover contemporary issues, including child poverty, mental health, digital exploitation, juvenile justice, minority education rights, and challenges related to children's personal data protection in the digital era. Despite its broad scope and strong academic ambition, the book tends to be overly descriptive and often focuses more on presenting regulations, statistical information, and normative frameworks rather than providing deeper critical analysis of the effectiveness of policy implementation across CEE countries. Many sections merely describe legal developments and policy progress without critically examining state failures in ensuring meaningful child rights protection in practice. Discussions on challenges such as child poverty, mental health, justice systems, and digital exploitation are also insufficiently supported by concrete case studies or empirical evaluations demonstrating how policies affect children's lives directly. Furthermore, the book's extensive coverage sometimes results in important issues being discussed only superficially, making parts of the analysis appear broad, repetitive, and lacking analytical depth. Although the book emphasizes the importance of harmonizing international standards, it does not critically engage enough with political barriers, economic limitations, and institutional capacity problems that often hinder effective child rights protection within the region. Consequently, the book is more successful as a conceptual mapping and documentation of legal developments than as a rigorous and critical analytical work examining the realities and shortcomings of child rights protection in Central and Eastern Europe.

Chapter 2 seeks to connect theoretical discussions about child protection within migration situations to real-world applications by showcasing the FAMIMOVE project, a Europe-wide effort aimed at enhancing collaboration between migration entities and family law organizations. Despite the relevance of the subject and the ambitious goals outlined in the project, the quality of the analysis exposes several notable flaws. A considerable portion of the chapter is predominantly descriptive, behaving more like a project advertisement than an impartial and critical academic review. The authors prioritize discussing the aims, framework, and possible results of the project over conducting a detailed assessment of its genuine effectiveness in real-world scenarios. Consequently, the discourse seems skewed, emphasizing expected successes without adequately addressing the difficulties, obstacles, and constraints tied to the project. Additionally, the arguments lose strength due to a lack of empirical evidence, including data, case studies, or specific examples that illustrate the project's influence on decision-making or enhancements to child protection strategies. The chapter also inadequately tackles several crucial factors that could influence the project's success, such as variations in institutional capabilities among European Union nations, insufficient data, and challenges to international cooperation. These flaws diminish the practical significance of the analysis, which ideally should have been one of the chapter's key advantages. Furthermore, the minimal exploration of the project's methodological shortcomings, the omission of reflections on possible failures in implementation, and the lack of comparative evaluations with other similar efforts make the analysis seem a bit unbalanced and reduce its overall analytical value. A critical point is that the authors could have delivered a more comprehensive and thorough assessment by integrating more robust empirical data, investigating implementation obstacles in greater detail, and judging the feasibility of the project's goals in actual practice. Thus, while

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this chapter outlines an essential and promising initiative intended to link migration systems with family law institutions, its examination feels incomplete as it leans more towards discussing the project's ideal goals and potential advantages rather than providing a thorough critical analysis of its practical aspects, challenges, and hurdles in implementation.

Chapter 3 explores how the Brussels IIter Regulation influences international parental responsibility matters and emphasizes its role in safeguarding children's rights within cross-border family situations. Nevertheless, despite the significance of this subject, the chapter reveals several notable deficiencies that undermine its overall scholarly importance. The analysis leans heavily on descriptive and normative narratives, making it appear more as a recapitulation of legal rules than as a thorough critique of the Regulation's performance in real-life applications. The authors focus extensively on the aims, principles, and expected advantages of the Regulation, especially ideas such as proximity and mutual confidence, yet they offer minimal insight into the practical challenges commonly faced during its implementation. Significant issues, like administrative hold-ups, variations in judicial capacity among European Union nations, budget restrictions, and hurdles in cross-border collaboration, are not adequately discussed, leading to a skewed evaluation that depicts the Regulation more as an ideal legal system than as a policy tool constrained by practical realities. Moreover, critical topics such as establishing habitual residence, resolving conflicts between family law and immigration policies, and addressing intricate cases with conflicting interests are not sufficiently examined, which diminishes the chapter's practical applicability. Another notable flaw is the absence of empirical data and specific case analyses that could illustrate whether the Brussels IIter Regulation truly honors the principle of prioritizing the child's best interests in practice. As a result, readers encounter plenty of theoretical discussions but find a lack of critical evaluation of the Regulation's achievements, failures, and challenges in implementation. In this critique, the authors ought to have taken a more nuanced and analytical stance by including empirical findings, analysis of case law, comparative viewpoints, and a more in-depth look at the Regulation's shortcomings and practical constraints. Overall, although Chapter 3 tackles a vital topic and offers a structured summary of the Brussels IIter Regulation, it ultimately does not succeed as a critical academic critique because it focuses more on legal exposition and theoretical goals than on a thorough assessment of the Regulation's effectiveness, limitations, and its genuine influence on child protection in international family conflicts.

Chapter 4, authored by Franzina, endeavors to clarify how the rules governing jurisdiction in the European Union apply the principle of prioritizing the child's best interests in matters of parental responsibility. While the analysis is structured in a systematic manner and backed by a robust normative framework, it still reveals numerous significant shortcomings. This chapter primarily concentrates on detailing how legal guidelines aim to safeguard children's welfare rather than critically assessing their practical effectiveness. Consequently, the discourse comes off as excessively normative and optimistic, depicting the EU legal framework as operating smoothly while insufficiently addressing the diverse issues that often occur in actual situations. Complicated challenges encountered by migrant children, such as ambiguity regarding their habitual residence, mobility across borders, varying institutional capacities among Member States, and inadequate collaboration between migration agencies and family law entities, receive minimal focus, which diminishes the practical aspects that ought to have been a key strength of the analysis. Moreover, the sparse utilization of empirical data and specific case examples implies that readers receive a better grasp of the intended functioning of the legal system rather than its true effectiveness in safeguarding children's rights. Additionally, the chapter does not adequately address structural challenges, such as variations in legal processes across nations, barriers to data sharing, and possible clashes between migration strategies and child protection goals. As a result, the analytical value

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of the chapter is diminished since it leans more towards the ideal legal structure instead of a critical evaluation of its achievements and shortcomings. It is suggested that the author enhance the discussion by including empirical research, comparative studies across borders, and a more in-depth exploration of implementation issues and systemic flaws. An approach that is more critical and focused on practical aspects would offer readers a richer and more nuanced perspective on the efficacy of protecting migrant children within intricate transnational legal situations.

Chapter 5 embarks on a bold endeavor to integrate the concept of prioritizing children's best interests within the larger context of European Union law by connecting the EU Charter to various regulations and directives related to child protection and migration. Nonetheless, as a chapter within a book, its overall impact is not as persuasive as one might hope. The analysis predominantly depends on normative and descriptive discussions of legal tools, while providing minimal critical evaluation of how these systems operate in real-life scenarios. Instead of scrutinizing whether the legal frameworks genuinely safeguard children in actual migration situations, the authors concentrate mainly on clarifying the intended goals and consistency of the EU legal structure. This methodology results in an overly optimistic representation of child protection in the EU, leaving significant practical obstacles inadequately explored. Critical matters such as fragmented regulations, varying interpretations among Member States, insufficient institutional collaboration, and conflicts between migration enforcement measures and child-focused safeguards receive merely cursory attention despite their substantial effects on execution. The chapter's efficacy is further diminished by its scant reliance on empirical data and specific case studies, which complicates the ability of readers to gauge the true effectiveness of the mentioned legal frameworks. Consequently, the chapter serves more as an outline of the system's design rather than a critical review of its achievements and failures. A more significant contribution could have been made by integrating empirical studies, comparative case evaluations, and a more detailed inquiry into implementation challenges, institutional hurdles, and opportunities for legal reform. A deeper engagement with the actual conditions confronted by migrant children would have enhanced the chapter's analytical richness and resulted in a more comprehensive and trustworthy evaluation of the workings of EU child protection systems within the context of cross-border migration.

Chapter 6 discusses the relationship between child migration and cross-border parental responsibility disputes, a topic that is highly relevant and significant in contemporary child protection studies. However, from a critical book review perspective, the chapter falls short of providing a sufficiently comprehensive and analytical discussion of the complexities involved. Although the authors successfully outline the conceptual relationship between migration law and family law, the discussion relies too heavily on normative explanations and legal principles while offering limited critical evaluation of how these frameworks operate in practice. As a result, the chapter appears overly theoretical and idealistic, emphasizing how legal systems are intended to function rather than examining the numerous challenges that arise during implementation. Important issues such as conflicting national legal standards, jurisdictional disputes, delays in legal proceedings, unequal institutional capacities among states, and the legal uncertainties faced by migrant children receive only superficial attention despite being central to the effectiveness of child protection mechanisms. Furthermore, the limited use of empirical evidence and real-life case studies weakens the chapter's analytical depth and makes it difficult for readers to assess the actual impact of these legal frameworks on children's lives. The discussion also lacks substantial engagement with institutional shortcomings, including weak cross-border cooperation, inadequate child-sensitive procedures within migration systems, and the ways in which differing immigration statuses may intensify family conflicts and further jeopardize children's welfare. Consequently, the chapter functions more as a descriptive overview of the ideal interaction between migration law and family law than as a

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rigorous evaluation of the practical realities surrounding migrant child protection. To strengthen its contribution, the chapter would benefit from incorporating empirical research, comparative case studies, and a more critical examination of implementation failures, institutional barriers, and potential legal reforms. Such additions would provide a more balanced, evidence-based, and insightful analysis capable of addressing the real challenges faced by migrant children in cross-border parental responsibility disputes.

Chapter 7 to be valuable in highlighting the significant challenges surrounding age assessment procedures for unaccompanied children in the European Union, particularly issues such as inconsistent practices, the use of intrusive medical examinations, and the risk of misclassifying children as adults. However, despite addressing an important topic, the chapter falls short of providing a sufficiently critical and comprehensive analysis. Much of the discussion is devoted to describing the weaknesses of existing procedures rather than examining the underlying causes of these problems or evaluating the effectiveness of current legal and institutional responses. As a result, the chapter often feels descriptive rather than analytical. The limited use of empirical evidence, case studies, and comparative examples from countries that have implemented more child-centered approaches further weakens the persuasiveness of the arguments presented. In addition, the discussion pays insufficient attention to psychological, cultural, and trauma-related factors that can significantly affect a child's participation in age assessment procedures, even though these elements are essential to ensuring the genuine application of the best interests of the child principle. The chapter also provides only brief discussion of possible reforms, leaving readers with a clear understanding of the problems but few practical solutions. Consequently, the chapter functions more as an overview of deficiencies within the current EU age assessment system than as a rigorous evaluation of how children's rights can be better protected. To strengthen its contribution, the authors should incorporate more empirical research, comparative case studies, and critical analysis of policy implementation, while also offering clearer recommendations regarding procedural harmonization, multidisciplinary assessment methods, and stronger legal safeguards for children. Such improvements would provide a more balanced, evidence-based, and policy-relevant discussion capable of contributing meaningfully to ongoing debates on child protection within the European migration framework.

The final chapter serves an important purpose by attempting to demonstrate the relationship between European Union child protection norms and various international legal instruments, including the CRC (Convention on the Rights of the Child), the UN Committee's General Comments, and humanitarian standards related to migration issues. The chapter succeeds in providing a general overview of the normative foundations underlying the application of the best interests of the child principle within the European Union framework. However, as an academic contribution, the discussion remains relatively weak because it relies too heavily on conceptual and normative explanations without being supported by sufficient critical analysis of how these principles operate in practice. The authors focus more on highlighting the compatibility between international law and EU legal frameworks than on examining the significant obstacles that frequently hinder effective implementation, such as domestic political pressures, institutional capacity limitations, inconsistencies among Member States, and the persistent gap between legal commitments and practical outcomes in the protection of migrant children. Moreover, the limited use of empirical evidence, case studies, and concrete examples makes the arguments appear abstract and less capable of illustrating how child protection principles are applied when they conflict with migration control objectives or national interests. Consequently, the chapter functions more as a description of how the legal framework is intended to operate rather than as a rigorous evaluation of its actual achievements and shortcomings. To strengthen its academic contribution, the authors should incorporate more empirical research, comparative analyses across Member States, and critical

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assessments of implementation challenges. In addition, providing more concrete policy recommendations regarding procedural harmonization, stronger monitoring mechanisms, and improved safeguards for migrant children would make the discussion more balanced, insightful, and relevant to both scholarly debates and policy development in the field of child protection and migration.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Children's Rights in Central and Eastern Europe: A Comparative Analysis with a Spotlight on Lithuania provides a broad and informative overview of the development of child rights protection in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly within the context of legal reforms, migration, and cross-border child protection. The book successfully demonstrates the growing importance of international and European legal frameworks in shaping child protection policies and highlights many contemporary challenges faced by children in the region. Its comparative approach and focus on Lithuania offer valuable insights into both regional trends and national experiences, making the book a useful introductory resource for students, researchers, and policymakers interested in child rights, migration, and family law.

Despite these strengths, the book's overall analytical contribution is limited by its strong reliance on descriptive and normative discussions. Across most chapters, the authors focus primarily on explaining legal frameworks, institutional arrangements, and policy objectives while providing insufficient critical evaluation of their practical effectiveness. The limited use of empirical evidence, case studies, and comparative implementation analyses weakens the persuasiveness of many arguments and prevents a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by children in real-life situations. Important issues such as institutional weaknesses, political constraints, inconsistencies among Member States, and barriers to policy implementation are frequently acknowledged but not examined in sufficient depth. As a result, the book often presents an idealized picture of child protection systems rather than a rigorous assessment of their achievements, shortcomings, and practical limitations.

To enhance its academic value, future editions should incorporate more empirical research, comparative case studies, and critical discussions of implementation challenges across different national contexts. Greater attention should also be given to policy failures, institutional barriers, and the lived experiences of children affected by migration and cross-border legal disputes. Furthermore, the inclusion of more concrete reform recommendations would strengthen the book's relevance for both academic debate and policymaking. Overall, while the book makes a meaningful contribution by mapping the legal and policy landscape of children's rights in Central and Eastern Europe, it is ultimately more successful as a descriptive reference work than as a comprehensive and critical analysis of the effectiveness of child rights protection in practice.

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